

Preservings

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"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 Story: Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno.

The feature article "Reform without class war" by Professor Harvey Dyck, University of Toronto, provides a glimpse into the experience of Mennonites in Soviet Russia during the 1920s and an up-date on the archival legacy of Mennonites in the Ukraine and Russia. This article is an extract from a chapter of the forthcoming book, *Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno*, to be published in early 1999, co-edited by Harvey Dyck and Anne Conrad.

The material advanced by Dr. Dyck is fresh and new and based on extensive research and sleuthing in Soviet and KGB archives departing from most writings about this period that have appeared in various journals and academic papers. Dyck argues that the Mennonite people were targeted by a systemic program for eradication because of their singular defiance of the Soviet regime and Sovietization.

Peter Letkeman is continuing the work of George Epp in documenting the totality of the Mennonite experience. His paper provides an overview of their suffering from 1917 to 1941. Colin Neufeldt focuses on the "collectivization" of 1928 to 1932.

The unfolding story of Mennonite suffering in the Soviet inferno in the 1930s and 40s, including Stalin's "Great Terror" of 1937 and 1938, is told with gripping intensity through the personal accounts of actual survivors. Mennonites in Soviet Russia went through some of the most vicious persecution and oppression in the human experience. 55,000 were forcibly relocated to labour camps, arrested or exiled. Some 30,000 out of a total population of 100,000 died

violent or unnatural deaths.

35,000 Mennonites were able to escape the clutches of the Soviet terror in the "great trek" of 1944 escaping to the west behind the retreating German Army. Of these 23,000 were forcibly repatriated by the Western Allies, shipped in box cars to labour camps in the Siberian Gulag. 8,000 were able to find a new home in Canada. Another 4,000 went to Paraguay.

The Mennonite experience in the Soviet inferno is of interest to residents of the Hanover Steinbach area because they were co-religionists, many of them related. It is also of interest because some of these refugees chose to settle in our community where they are now among our most outstanding citizens.

Editor D. Plett Q.C.



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Mennonite minister being executed by NKVD in basement of the Gebietsamt (Municipal) office in Halbstadt. Hundreds of Mennonite men, including pastors and other leaders, were taken here during the "Great Terror" of 1937 and 1938 for execution. Typically their hands were tied behind their backs with wire and they were executed with a bullet to the back of the head. The bodies were buried in secret mass graves at night. Drawing by Ron Kroeker, Rosenort, (Box 17, R.R.1, Morris, Manitoba, R0G 1K0).

“Reform Without Class War”

“Reform Without Class War”: Mennonite-Bolshevik Dialogue and Conflict in the 1920s, by Harvey L. Dyck, Professor of History, Room 2074, 100 St. George St., University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 3G3.

Introduction.

The 1920s constitutes a unique chapter in the story of Mennonite suffering during Soviet times. Earlier, from 1917 to 1921, and later, from 1928 until the mid-1950s and beyond, Mennonites were reduced to bystanders and victims in repeated Soviet-era upheavals that were among the deadliest in world history. As a small ethno-religious minority, Mennonites became objects of ethnic, religious and class hatreds and violence involving, at various times, Imperial German armies, nationalist Ukrainians, peasant anarchists, Nazi occupiers and especially radical Bolshevik rulers.

Yet the five or six years after the end of the Civil War in 1921, called NEP in Soviet history (New Economic Policy), were quite different. This was a period in which Bolsheviks kept a tight grip on power while allowing for greater personal freedoms and reduced coercion in national life. The commercial marketplace was partly restored as a motor of the economy and Mennonites returned briefly to the historical stage as actors. They mourned their dead from the Civil War and famine and tried to rebuild their shattered multi-village agrarian settlements. To ensure for themselves a future, they also sought to adapt their collective life to the new and strangely unfamiliar Soviet world.

“...Mennonites became objects of ethnic, religious and class hatreds and violence...”

Looking ahead, Mennonites were anxious about two main issues. First, they feared more trouble with peasant neighbours--mainly Turkic Bashkirs, Russians, Ukrainians--whose hatreds, inflamed by years of war, revolution and civil strife, had exploded in anarchist and nationalist terror and thievery in Ukraine, which hit Mennonites, colonist Germans and Jews especially hard, and in banditry and land seizures in Russian areas. Mennonites shuddered at the thought of peasant radicalism, sharpened by ethnic hatreds, guiding Bolshevik agrarian policy or, should Soviet rule collapse, resulting in a replay of Civil War-like horrors.

Mennonites were equally anxious about working out relations with the revolutionary Bolsheviks. Mutual suspicions lingered on from the Civil War. At that time, as violence closed in around them, Mennonites had stood by helpless and neutral on the sidelines, but with natural sympathies for Imperial German and White Army forces who opposed anarchists and Bolsheviks. Mennonite leaders equally feared religious persecution and a return of Bolshevik terror. Not unreasonably they assumed that while Bolsheviks might disagree over immediate aims, once economic recovery set in they would forcibly reimpose radical anti-religious, economic

and social changes on Russia, as attempted during the Civil War. Organized Mennonite life would unlikely survive such repression.

NEP 1921.

In the early 1920s, while urban-based Bolsheviks struggled over leadership and policies, limited Mennonite-Bolshevik cooperation developed around the goal of economic recovery. Bolsheviks also tried to win over suspicious villagers, including Mennonites, or to neutralize them as opponents.

In 1921, at the start of NEP, the human and economic emergency confronting Mennonites



Dr. Harvey L. Dyck.

was extreme. As discussed earlier, the Mennonite losses from peasant pogroms, civil strife and Civil War-related diseases were among the worst experienced by any group in Russia. The scene in Ukraine, as pictured by a Soviet school inspector, was particularly grave:

“[After the Civil War] the [German and Mennonite] colonies of the Zaporozhe region recovered very slowly from the unbelievable ruin into which they had been plunged as a result of Makhnovite raids [the largest peasant bandit and anarchist group in Ukraine]. Many villages ... were levelled to the ground and the others suffered as a result of robberies, murder and arson.”

“In six smaller villages with a population of around 1,200, there were 410 surviving orphans. Property was dragged away and what remained were blank walls without windows and doors and villagers without cattle and furniture. In 1921 there were villages without a single horse. The famine simply magnified the woe.”

Revival.

To spearhead Mennonite recovery, a new generation of lay and religious leaders emerged. Many were relatively young and impoverished former teachers and teacher/preachers who were both steeped in the life and values of their community and familiar with the wider world. Fluent in German and Russian (many also knew Ukrainian), they were surprisingly adept in bringing their post-revolutionary society together and steering a way through the tricky currents and cross-currents of early Soviet times. The four or five years of active Bolshevik-Mennonite interplay that followed saw a last flowering of Russian Mennonite life. It was a time when dialogue, rivalry and conflict with the regime were present in roughly equal parts.

With the grudging consent of a struggling state, Mennonites were allowed to breathe life back into their small and seriously damaged world. They organized mutual aid and foreign relief, songfests, church meetings and cultural events. They also gave support to tottering, nationalized onetime Mennonite schools and welfare institutions, and revived village and community structures. For a time they even managed to run a Bible school for church workers and to publish a pint-sized German-language newsheet, *Unser Blatt*, and distribute it across the Soviet Mennonite world. Still partially self-contained in some two dozen settlements with 400 villages, that world stretched from southern Ukraine

“The regime typecast Mennonites as ... [those who] rejected the anti-religious, anti-clerical and social outcasting facets of Sovietization more effectively than any other.”

and the Crimea to the North-Caucasus, Trans-Volgan and Western Siberian areas.

Many Mennonites were also convinced they were living through a tragic watershed in human and Mennonite affairs and put pen to paper in diaries, letters, reports, stories, sketches and studies that comprise an exceptionally rich in-group record of that revolutionary age.

At the same time, Mennonite lay leaders used the opportunities of NEP to bargain with Bolshevik officials and focus communities around tasks of relief, rebuilding and reform. Defending Mennonite interests, they struck deals and discreetly exploited economic and landholding opportunities that arose. But gloomy about finding a lasting accommodation with Bolshevism, they are remembered best for strategizing the emigration to Canada of a fifth to a quarter of all Soviet Mennonites. Given the tragedies experienced by those who remained in the USSR, this was remembered as a daring, prescient rescue undertaken against huge odds. (It

was also the largest Mennonite migration on record until then and the largest emigration of any agrarian community from the USSR in the 1920s.)

But the most characteristic initiative of the period, a defining token, was a plea to government for firm guarantees of religious liberty. Made repeatedly in 1924-1925 on behalf of all Mennonite religious groups, the effort failed, however, and drew down upon the Mennonite world the censure and hostility of official circles. During NEP, the regime might be undecided regarding some policies, but it was one in its resolve to root out religious survivals in Soviet life. (Means and timing were naturally adjusted to circumstances.) This was as true of Bolshevik leaders at the centre as of Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, German, Latvian and other rank-and-file Communist Party workers posted at regional levels or to Mennonite settlements in the provinces.

“What finally brought Soviet antipathy to a boil, was the ...mass flight of Mennonites to Moscow in 1929.”

Oppression.

From the early 1920s onward the regime therefore flooded village reading halls, schools, youth and other circles with atheist, anti-religious curriculum, programs, and propoganda, staged crude parodies of religious ceremonies (often on religious holidays) and demanded the active support of teachers, cultural leaders and administrators. Villagers were offended and full of fear, as surviving letters show, and soon felt the results. By the mid-1920s officials were routinely sacking Mennonite teachers who would not tow the line. They increasingly rejected applications from Mennonite inductees for conscientious objector status and alternative service. Religious teaching of children and youth was proscribed and religious functions sharply curtailed. Public scorn, as well as legal and economic disabilities, were heaped on preachers, deacons, choir leaders and Sunday school teachers who made up the large Mennonite lay ministry.

“Mennonites will oppose the regime as long as it opposes religion,” was a not startling reply of many in the Mennonite community, themselves caught up in thorough-going spiritual renewal. There were other pressing issues needing attention, of course: near-confiscatory taxes; the state disposition of nationalized one-time Mennonite lands; the needs of landless families; and the gnawing fears of a large Mennonite minority made outcasts through disenfranchisement in

village affairs.

Starting in 1926, and more quickly in 1927 and 1928, the increasingly Stalinist regime ended NEP. It tightened central controls, demanded strict conformity and imposed a policy of forced collectivization and militant atheism with great cruelty, including terror in the villages. But it should be noted that already in 1924-1925, during the heyday of NEP, and with greater harshness in 1926 and 1927, the regime crippled and destroyed Mennonite regional and national organizations it had chartered only a few years earlier. By the late 1920s the lay and religious structures and leaders that had sheltered local Mennonite communities were gone. (Other communities were naturally hit as well.)

Resistance.

The final end of regular Mennonite community life, that had revived briefly during NEP, loomed by the fall of 1929. With Mennonite leaders isolated or under arrest, institutional umbrellas in tatters and terror at the doorstep, droves of Mennonite families from across the USSR fled their villages, streaming into Moscow by train. Their goal was emigration to Canada through mediation by the German government, at that time friendly with the USSR. Over several months, at least ten percent of all Soviet Mennonites reached the Soviet capital, a large fraction of them village poor. The period ended with many of the rest, including entire

“With the unexpected collapse of the USSR in 1991, archive doors were thrown open and out tumbled the documents.”

villages, on trains en route to Moscow or packing their bags to follow. This story of massive Mennonite resistance to collectivization fits into the larger subject of village opposition to rural Stalinism. Yet it bore distinctive marks in its magnitude, form and repercussions.

The flight from the countryside to Moscow was halted at village exits and train stations by local officials, regular and secret police (NKVD). Of the refugees, a lucky minority found safety abroad, the rest repression at home. But what outlived the cataclysmic denouement and the ups and downs of Mennonite-Bolshevik relations were sharp images on both sides. The regime typecast Mennonites as the Ukrainian minority that had rejected the anti-religious, anti-clerical and social outcasting facets of Sovietization more effectively than any other. As thorns on its path, it tagged them as a group riddled with “kulaks and counter-revolutionaries”--potential candidates for special treatment.

Solidarity.

What troubled officials most was that Mennonites had somehow managed to preserve their solidarity against determined efforts to break it through class war in the villages. Officials had been stymied in their class strategy: to discredit Mennonite religious and lay elites by denying them legal rights, official outcasting, and then transferring rural power to a network of Bolshevik organisations--local Party committees; village administrative councils (soviets); committees of the poor; Communist youth and women’s groups; and so on.

In short, during NEP Mennonites became the toughest nut of all to crack. Archival records make clear that they were perceived by the regime, at least in Ukraine, as being at the extreme end of a spectrum of non-resistant opposition rooted mainly, though not exclusively, in religious conviction. In a state campaign that picked up steam in the mid-1920s, Mennonites were accordingly defamed as people whose solidarity rested on conspiratorial foundations--inspired by kulak leadership backed by clergy, cemented by religious fanaticism, insistent pacifism and with the help and inspiration of friends, relatives and co-religionists from the hostile capi-

“Aleksandr Tedeev...Archive Director... I thought you’d know. Mennonites didn’t join the Party or the mass organizations, except a few.”

talist world: Canada, Germany and the U.S.A.

What finally brought Soviet antipathy to a boil, was the above-mentioned mass flight of Mennonites to Moscow in 1929. As the largest public and most dramatic act of passive defiance to collectivization by any Soviet group, the Moscow story was headline news worldwide for months in late 1929 and early 1930. For the Stalinist regime the Mennonite flight to Moscow became a huge headache and international humiliation that it would not soon forget nor pardon.

Soviet Mennonites in the 1930s and 1940s, on the other hand, by then suffering in the Gulag, to where they had been dispatched, or carrying on shell-shocked in collectivized villages, treasured memories of their 1920s communities as standing almost unitedly in defense of their faith and leaders. They also took comfort from thinking that as participants in a world-historical drama of good against evil, as they believed, Mennonites had “not bent their knees to Baal.” With relatively few exceptions, they had, as letters from the Gulag affirmed,

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The Municipal (Gebietsamt) offices in Halbstadt, Molotschnaya, Ukraine, where hundreds of Mennonite men were taken by the NKVD for execution during the Stalin purges of 1937 and 1938. Elma Harder and Elma Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba, stand by the door leading to the basement where the victims were dragged one by one and shot with a bullet to the back of the head. Photo May 8, 1998, by Leah and Walter F. Reimer. Box 45, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

remained “faithful to the end.”

The Emigres.

How well do we know the 1920s Soviet Mennonite story? How rich, diverse and clear-eyed are the records? Certainly there has long existed, as mentioned, a matchless body of emigre Mennonite sources in the West—printed, privately collected or archivally-stored diaries, newspapers, letters, memoirs, documents and studies. Yet some scholars questioned whether they offered a sufficiently rounded portrait of Mennonite life. Did they perhaps reveal only one side of the reality, a kind of caricature close to the hearts of Mennonite establishment emigre memoirists and writers who had turned their backs on the USSR in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s?

Was it possible that the larger, eighty percent, majority of Soviet Mennonites who had remained in Russia, with sharply contrasting experiences and perhaps political preferences, had developed other, broader views? Historians wondered, for example, how many leftist Mennonite “friends” of the Bolshevik regime had existed in the 1920s, “sympathizers,” “activists,” even Communist Party members. Surely their untold stories were needed to flesh out the narrative. And what of Mennonite village society? Had it remained basically united at the time, as emigre accounts suggested, or become fragmented in an unreported internal class struggle rooted in Tsarist Mennonite history?

There were other questions regarding the Mennonite-Bolshevik dialogue. Were the surviving documents and reflections of prominent

Mennonite leaders like B.B. Janz, Dietrich Epp, C.F. Klassen and Abraham Kroeker balanced and accurate? In particular, had senior Bolshevik leaders really become as deeply engrossed in the “Mennonite question” as these men, and others, suggested? Also, might strategic compromises with the regime have materialized to forestall later atrocities, if Mennonite leaders in the 1920s had been more willing to compromise? Only the elusive, then still-secret, Bolshevik side of the story could provide answers to these and similar questions.

Archives 1991.

With the unexpected collapse of the USSR in 1991, archive doors were thrown open and out tumbled the documents. A few years ago I immersed myself in part of this record in the State Archive of the Zaporozhe Region. On the Dnieper River, encompassing one time Old Colony villages, Zaporozhe lies at the centre of southern Ukraine where about two-thirds of Soviet Mennonites had lived in over 200 vil-

“...the Bolshevik preoccupation with Mennonites, which put them under relentless microscopic scrutiny, seemed close to a fixation.”

lages, clustered in a dozen settlements. The Archive’s collection of sources on Soviet Mennonite life is likely the most ample of any regional archive in the Former Soviet Union. The incomplete holdings include surviving official village, district and regional state and commu-

nist party records relating to the oldest and largest one-time Mennonite settlements in Ukraine—Khortitsa and Molochnaia. (Ukrainian secret police records are not yet ordinarily open to scholars.) There are also records of the Isakovo settlement and many touching on general Soviet policy.

As I dug through the files I was amazed at what I found. Organizing and digesting the documentary record has only begun, and will long occupy historians, but the implications of early findings are already clear. Despite great World

“Strange as it may seem in light of later developments, in the mid-1920s Bolshevik strategists felt outflanked in Mennonite settlements...”

War II losses, the number of surviving documents in Zaporozhe about Mennonites is huge, a veritable mountain: more than a hundred collections, tens of thousands of files, hundreds of thousands of pages—in German and Ukrainian, but mostly in Russian. Yet more astonishing than numbers is their tone and content and what this suggests.

Mennonites and Sovietization.

I discovered that membership lists of local Khortitsa and Molochnaia Communist Party organizations rarely contained a Mennonite name. The handful of Mennonite Communists seemed almost isolated exceptions. “Why are you surprised?” Aleksandr Tedeev, the lead archivist, now Archive Director, asked me, somewhat baffled, as I shared my findings. “I thought you’d know. Mennonites didn’t join the Party or the mass organizations, except a few. Quite different, say from the Ukrainians, or the minorities. That goes for colonist Germans too.”

I also had wrongly assumed that Soviet officials at the national, republican, regional and village levels would have applied policies to Mennonites routinely, as with other national and religious minorities, mentioning them by name incidentally, if at all. The Mennonite story told in the margins of Soviet history, this I expected to find.

Yet the opposite proved to be true. From 1923 to at least 1928, top state and Communist leaders, especially in Ukraine, wrestled constantly with “the Mennonite question.” The regime sent out scores of public and secret commissions to investigate Mennonite villages, settlements and organizations. Their reports were analyzed and discussed in lengthy meetings at the highest party and state levels in Kharkov and Moscow. In brief, the Bolshevik preoccupation with Mennonites, which put them under relentless microscopic scrutiny, seemed close to a fixation. The records further showed that as part of this seeming mania in the mid-1920s, the regime diverted considerable human and financial resources from other groups to “Sovietizing” what it stereotyped as these “stubborn Mennonite religionists,” “sectarians,” these “kulak and clergy-domi-

nated" people who needed to be brought quickly to heel, integrated into state administrative and economic networks and assimilated in their basic values.

Comparable attention had not, at that time, gone into any of the larger ethnic minorities in Ukraine, including Bulgarians, colonist Germans, Jews, Poles or Russians. Details of this untold, rivetting story are preserved in bulging state and Party archival files tagged "secret" and "top secret". For example, in the mid-1920s, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party, the locus of authority in Ukraine, kept a file on Mennonites that was reportedly more than a thousand pages long and growing.

Without going deeply into the story at this point, it should be noted that the government's preoccupation with the tiny Mennonite group reflected a simple but serious apprehension. By 1925 it believed that, more than any comparable group in Ukraine, Mennonites had dangerously exploited opportunities in NEP, literally to the hilt. By this view, Mennonites were engaged in carving out an autonomous or semi-autonomous economic, religious and cultural space for themselves across more than two dozen multi-village settlements. This was the bedrock of official concern.

Where might this end? In Bolshevik eyes, Mennonite leaders--"former people" (*byvshie luidi*), as publicly denigrated--had taken control of their own internal life. Their lay and clerical organizations had defended Mennonite economic interests, social unity, and religious values and worldview with such skill and assiduity as to establish "extra-territorial" direction over the entire Mennonite world from Ukraine to Siberia. Such was the astonishing conclusion.

The Bolshevik fear based on this premise was that other, larger minorities like religious Jews, Orthodox Bulgarians, Catholic and Prot-

estant colonist Germans and Catholic Poles might draw inspiration from their example and emulate their success. There were also Ukrainian and Russian Baptists to consider, who, growing in numbers and religiously close to the pietist wing of Mennonite society, often joined with them in common worship and missionizing, as well as the restive Orthodox and Greek Catholic majority in Ukraine. Decisive measures were needed, Bolshevik leaders decided, to head off this threat.

Conclusion.

Strange as it may seem in light of later developments, in the mid-1920s Bolshevik strategists felt outflanked in Mennonite settlements by local lay and religious organizations which had flickered to life during NEP. Though these organizations felt weak themselves and believed their survival hung by the thread of grudging official sufferance, the conspiratorial Bolshevik view of the internal and external worlds puffed them up into intrepid rivals modelling a contagious, semi-autonomous group development. This had to be stopped in its tracks.

Trends in Mennonite life were deemed dangerous because they were seen as leading to ethno-religious, communitarian goals outside of, and in sharp conflict with, Communist control. In any case, from at least 1924 onwards, such doctrinal and political reckonings gave strategic direction to increasingly militant Bolshevik attitudes toward Mennonites. Later, these calculations, and accompanying resentments against Mennonites of local Communists (whose importance should not be discounted), combined with the sharp turn toward repression in general Soviet policy, fueled the terrible tragedy that, after NEP, in the 1930s and 1940s, befell the Mennonite world.

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Purpose and Membership

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc. (HSHS) was organized in 1988 to research and write the history and heritage of the Hanover and Steinbach area, originally known as the "East Reserve". The emphasis is on the period 1874-1910. Through public meetings, writings and publications the HSHS seeks to foster an understanding and respect for the rich heritage of the community.

Many volunteers from this community have contributed information, collected old diaries and letters, written articles, entered data on computer, proofread data, and helped in other ways to compile material for books. The financial support of the R.M. of Hanover, the Department of Heritage and Culture, together with donations from private individuals has made it possible for the society to publish three books. Two more are in stages of completion.

These efforts have rewarded participants with a greater appreciation for their heritage. Perhaps you would like to show your support for the work of the society by donating family records, old correspondence or diaries to the society. Any of our board members or John Dyck at the office would be glad to talk to you.

The society also requires your support financially in order to continue the above activities. Your donations will help to keep the society strong. All contributions of \$20 or more will be acknowledged with a charitable donation receipt for income tax purposes. We are presently levying for an annual membership fee of \$20 per annum but will appreciate you giving an additional amount of \$20 or \$40 to support the work of the society. Thank you for your participation.

Mennonites In The Soviet Inferno

Harvey L. Dyck and Anne J. Konrad, editors,

A multi-authored book serving as a tribute to the Mennonite victims of the suffering and death in the Soviet Union. The volume is part of an international remembrance scheduled for 1998, the 60th anniversary of the worst year of the Soviet terror, 1938. The book is pioneering in its scholarship, comprehensively telling the story of individual, family and community suffering in a narrative history addressed to a popular audience. Events are set carefully within their larger international and Soviet contexts.

Chapters by: Harvey L. Dyck, Marlene Epp, Terry Martin, Colin Neufeldt, Peter Letkemann, John B. Toews, Walter Sawatsky.

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Cleansing the Countryside:

“Cleansing the Countryside: The Dekulakization of the Soviet Mennonite Community (1928-1933),” by Colin Neufeldt, 11620-32nd A. Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, T6J 3G8, an abridgement of the article, “Through the Fires of Hell: The Dekulakization and Collectivization of the Soviet Mennonite Community (1928-1933),” *The Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 16 (1998), pages 9-32.

Introduction.

What wars and revolutions had failed to achieve -- the destruction of the Russian Mennonite world, its institutions, schools, churches, businesses, and entire way of life -- happened after Stalin came to power and implemented his policies of collectivization and dekulakization. Between 1928 and 1934, the new Soviet dictator forcibly implemented programs to collectivize and industrialize the USSR with the aim of creating the first modern socialist state. In striving to achieve this goal, Stalin's regime employed brutal policies that not only destroyed many of the economic, political, religious, and social ties that had previously held the Mennonite community together, but also resulted in the torture and premature death of thousands of Soviet Mennonites. Nothing in their past experiences of random terror could prepare the members of the Mennonite community for being participants in the greatest experiment in terror-enforced social and human change in world history.

Dekulakization, 1928-29.

The Soviet government's decision to collectivize the Soviet countryside -- that is, forcibly create collective farms and state farms from land held by peasants -- was made in 1928-29 and implemented in 1929-30. Central to the government's strategy for collectivizing the countryside was the use of terror. On December 29, 1929 Stalin announced that the more prosperous elements of the peasantry (the so-called “kulaks”) would have to be eliminated in order to rid the countryside of those who previously exploited the labour of poorer peasants and sabotaged earlier attempts to collectivize Soviet agriculture. The government called for a class war against the kulaks and subsequently issued injunctions to local village officials to implement whatever measures were necessary to “dekulakize” *en masse* those peasants considered to be kulaks -- that is, to dispossess them of their property and to eliminate them.

When all was said and done, the dekulakization rates in most Russian and Ukrainian villages ranged between five and fifteen percent and a staggering twenty to twenty-five percent in many Mennonite settlements.

To ratify lists of kulaks, local authorities called meetings of village council members who, terrified that their own names would appear on kulak lists if they demurred, raised their hands in unison. Sometimes, in the absence of such meetings, only poorer villagers were invited to give formal approval to the lists of those to be dispossessed, evicted, ar-

rested, exiled or even executed. Personal vendettas against neighbours and relatives were not infrequently the result. In describing this process, one Mennonite pleaded to his relatives in North America:

“Help! Help! To proceed according to the law more people are disenfranchised only for the purpose of increasing the kulak class.... The newspapers write that special measures must be employed to exile these people to the North, to the forests in Siberia to cut lumber. Yesterday in our local newspaper there was a telegrammed order that the kulak class was to be cleaned out and quickly. Things are proceeding in such a way that the mind can not

“....dekulakization rates in most Russian and Ukrainian villages ranged between five and fifteen percent and a staggering twenty to twenty-five percent in many Mennonite settlements.”

keep up.... What they intend to do [with the kulaks] is quite clear: give them a walking stick and drive them off of their property. Whoever does not go into the collective is treated like a kulak and is also driven out.... Save us!....”

A household designated as kulak was immediately targeted with inflated grain quotas and a barrage of taxes, frequently based on hugely inflated estimates of income. People were often ordered to pay more in taxes than they were able to earn and to deliver more grain than they could harvest during a bumper crop year. In short, grain quotas and income taxes were used to strangle the kulaks, ensuring that the vast majority of their farms would be “voluntarily” surrendered to the state.

Mennonite preachers and kulaks who did not pay their taxes were disenfranchised, dispossessed of their property, and evicted from their homes. With disenfranchisement came the loss of any status or voting privileges. Their property, including everything from milk cows to milk pails, was confiscated and auctioned off at fire-sale prices. In describing the plight of the disenfranchised, a Mennonite eyewitness reported:

“...I am ‘disenfranchised’ because I preach. To be disenfranchised means that one is without rights....[The disenfranchised] are not permitted to vote, say anything at community meetings or even attend them, and must always pay twice as much in taxes as others and often much more. They are entirely at the mercy of the lower authorities....In the stores, they are not allowed to buy the necessary

foodstuffs for their families...If the head of the family is disenfranchised, then so is the entire family. These are the conditions in the ideal workers' state....”

The expropriated homes of dekulakized Mennonites were also used for social planning purposes. Poorer peasants in many villages, including Khortitsa, Neu-Halbstadt (Zagradovka) and Gnadenfeld (Molochnaia), moved into the houses vacated by Mennonite kulaks. In other villages former kulak residences and churches were surrendered to collective farms that subsequently converted the homes into multi-family dwellings, club-houses, workrooms, kindergartens, schools, livestock stalls, chicken coops, or granaries.

Mennonites did everything they could to avoid being labelled as enemies of the state. Some believed that by hiding their surplus grain, slaughtering their livestock, and damaging their farm implements and homes they would appear to be poverty-stricken peasants rather than candidates for dekulakization. This tactic often backfired, however, and Mennonites caught committing these self-liquidation measures were fined and often exiled or imprisoned. Other Mennonites packed their belongings and moved to nearby cities or even distant regions -- such as the Caucasus, Siberia, and the Amur Region -- in order to avoid possible arrest.

Flight to Moscow, 1929.

In the fall of 1929 thousands of Mennonites also made a last-ditch attempt to emigrate from the USSR to avoid the terror. Although more than 17,000 Mennonites were allowed to emigrate between 1923 and 1927, Soviet officials restricted the number of emigration visas for Mennonites to less than 1,250 between 1927 and the early fall of 1929.

What sparked new interest in the emigration option was the news that the government had allowed twenty-nine Mennonite families from Siberia to emigrate to Germany after they travelled to Moscow and obtained visas in the late summer of 1929. By the late fall of 1929, more than 10,000 Mennonites from across USSR had packed their belongings and travelled to the Soviet capital with the hope of obtaining exit visas. Soviet officials were

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furious over this display of resistance and initially refused to grant any more visas to the Mennonites refugees. Only the diplomatic efforts of the German government and the behind-the-scenes relief work of B. H. Unruh in Germany persuaded the Soviet government to allow more than 3,480 Soviet Mennonites to travel to Germany in December 1929.

Retaliation.

For the 7,000 or so Mennonites who did not receive visas, however, their fate was sealed. Soviet officials rounded them up, imprisoned or executed the ringleaders, and transported the rest to their home villages or to exile settlements across the USSR. In observing this deportation spectacle, a Crimean Mennonite wrote: “[The GPU (Secret Police)]... came into the living quarters, loaded the families into trucks and drove them to the railroad station. Women whose husbands were jailed bravely resisted this manoeuvre, for they did not want to go without their husbands. Four women suffered a tragic death through these tactics of the GPU. One of these women threw herself out of the truck three times. She would not go without her beloved husband. As punishment she was given three lashes across her back with a sword by a GPU

“...dispossessed ministers were hounded by local officials, and exiled, imprisoned, or shot...”

soldier. With that she went along on the truck with the others. We, too, were loaded by force into a car and taken into the station. Very soon thereafter the freight cars were pulled into the station and we were pushed into them. There were 42 persons who crowded into this freight car. And on the platform of the station there was an immense crowd of people! An incredible spectacle unfolded before our eyes: children were crying, old people were moaning and groaning and weeping. The distress and the disaster which befell us could not possibly be described in human language.”

There was little welcome at home for the Mennonite refugees returning from Moscow. Most local authorities interpreted Stalin's announcement to liquidate the kulak as a license to attack anyone who opposed government policies, including those who had tried to emigrate. Often the personal whims of local officials, rather than government policies, determined which and how many Mennonites lost their citizenship rights and property.

Collaboration.

Who were the local officials who carried out the dekulakization and collectivization programs in Mennonite settlements? Many were Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, and Germans. There were also officials of Mennonite background. Some Mennonites worked for the state because of fear, intimidation, and coercion,

believing government propaganda that those who did not support the state would be eliminated. Other Mennonites joined the government ranks because they wanted to improve their standard of living, were promised exemption from dekulakization, were disillusioned with their religious tradition, or agreed ideologically with the policies of the Soviet state.

The majority of Mennonites who worked for the regime did so within the village councils, the lowest administrative bodies in the Soviet state hierarchy. Although the tasks of these village councils were many and varied -

“Prisoners were forced to remain standing in one place literally for weeks, had needles shoved under their fingernails...”

- including such diverse activities as dissolving Mennonite religious and economic associations, organizing local collectives, and implementing grain expropriation campaigns -- the job of ridding the countryside of kulaks was paramount. Often under threats of punishment from regional councils and local activists, Mennonite members of village councils such as Burwalde (Khortitsa), Schoeneberg (Khortitsa), Rosenort (Molochnaia), and Muensterberg (Molochnaia) were ordered to decide which local Mennonite families would be dekulakized. To accomplish this, they prepared “characterizations” (economic and social profiles) of each household in their area, identifying those who were hostile and non-hostile kulaks.

In both the Khortitsa and Molochnaia colonies the protocols of Communist Party meetings occasionally included the names of Mennonites. As party members and candidates for party membership, they helped to organize anti-religious associations in Mennonite settlements, monitored the activities of suspected kulaks, and spread propaganda about the virtues of communism among Mennonite youth. In 1932-33, there were at least four Mennonites in Gnadenfeld (Molochnaia) who were party members, four in Rückenau (Molochnaia), and seven in Lichtenau (Molochnaia). Of the 387 members and candidates of the Halbstadt (Molochnaia) Communist Party Organization in 1932, ninety were of German-speaking background, some of whom were Mennonite.

Perhaps the one agency in which Mennonites exerted the most influence in administering the government's dekulakization campaign was the Executive Committee of the District Council of People's Deputies (hereafter referred to as the “DCPD”). In some of the larger Mennonite communities, such as Khortitsa and Molochnaia, Mennonite members on the DCPD executive committees finalized the lists of local kulaks to be imprisoned, exiled, or executed. The DCPD issued weekly, and in some cases daily, directives to

village councils on how to identify kulaks and when to expropriate the property of those who failed to meet the exorbitant tax levies and grain quotas. In return, village councils provided the DCPD with resolutions listing which Mennonites were to be deported.

After reviewing the resolutions, DCPD officials signed the final orders that dekulakized, and in many cases ultimately led to the exile of Mennonite families. In the Khortitsa region, for instance, many of these orders (which called for the exile or execution of Mennonite kulaks and pastors) were signed by Mennonite executive members of the local DCPD. After the individual orders were signed, the Chortitsa DCPD routinely prepared long summaries of dekulakized Mennonites to be exiled; a single list often contained twenty to forty, and sometimes over fifty Mennonite names from a particular settlement.

Membership in a village council, communist party cell, or the DCPD did not, however, guarantee immunity from dekulakization. Mennonite officials who were accused of being kulak sympathizers were summarily expelled from their positions and dekulakized.

“The largest Mennonite-bearing train on record from southern Ukraine had ninety-eight cattle cars...”

This happened to Mennonite members of the Burwalde (Khortitsa) Committee of the Poor and the Münsterberg (Molochnaia) village council who were expelled from their posts and dekulakized after they were accused of being too lenient with kulaks and members of the local Mennonite church.

Resettlement 1930.

The number of Mennonite kulaks and ministers evicted from their homes varied significantly from village to village. Some local authorities were so zealous in carrying out the dekulakization measures that it was not uncommon for a large number of Mennonites in a particular district to be dispossessed and evicted in the space of a few days. In Osterwick (Khortitsa), for example, eight Mennonite families were driven out of their homes in mid-February of 1930.

Around the same time, seventeen Mennonite families from Pavlovka (Khortitsa) were evicted from their homes, many of whom were subsequently exiled. Several weeks later, seventeen families in the village of Mykolaipol (Khortitsa), twenty-two families in Varvarovka (Alexandrovka), and over 230 families in the Molochnaia colony were ordered to leave their homes. A number of villages had so many evictions that few of the original Mennonite inhabitants still resided in the villages by the end of 1933.

Once evicted from their homes, Mennonite kulaks who were not immediately arrested, exiled, or executed faced a dismal future. With

little if any money or personal possessions, the displaced individuals now faced the difficult task of finding shelter and food for their families. The more fortunate received food packages sent by friends or relatives in the West. Desperate letters from Ukraine and the Crimea moved Mennonite relief agencies and individuals in North America and Europe to send food parcels and money to their Soviet coreligionists. Soviet officials, however, routinely used the relief parcels as a means of extorting additional funds (as much as 500 rubles for a single package) from dekulakized households.

Mennonite clergymen were also the objects of derision in village newspapers. Caricaturing religious leaders as political criminals, newspapers warned their communities of the wicked influence of church leaders and explained why they should be disenfranchised, forbidden to send their children to school, prevented from joining collectives, and prohibited from working in the ministry or any other type of employment.

Pressured to give up their calling, dispossessed ministers were hounded by local officials, and exiled, imprisoned, or shot for their religious convictions. Some resisted: despite repeated interrogation by officials, a Mennonite minister in Khortitsa continued to preach, organize Bible studies, and baptize new converts until he was exiled in 1934. Other ministers, however, succumbed to the pressure and renounced their faith. A Mennonite preacher from Kleefeld (Molochnaia) signed a statement stating that he resigned from his position in order to help build socialism. Officials immediately printed the statement in the newspapers, hoping to scandalize the local church.

The disenfranchised, dispossessed, and publicly humiliated kulaks and clergy were

“...a Mennonite exile was compelled to continue his work after guards had maliciously cut his infected foot...”

then forcibly resettled, imprisoned, exiled, or executed. In the first months of 1930, the Soviet regime forcibly moved thousands of less-threatening Mennonite kulaks to specially designated settlements across the Soviet Union, but usually near their home villages on the least productive lands. Three of the best known kulak settlements in the Molochnaia region were Neuhof, Oktoberfeld, and Krasnopil; in the Memrik area, Dolynovka and Novokalynove; and in the Khortitsa area near the villages of Neuenberg, Blumengart, Burwalde, Osterwick, and Eichenfeld.

Local resettlement was essentially an internal exile of extreme toil and grinding poverty.

Mennonite kulaks who were classified as dangerous enemies of the state, on the other

hand, were usually first imprisoned and then executed or exiled to work camps in the northern USSR. Between 1928 and 1933 thousands of Mennonites were thrown into overcrowded, rat-infested holding tanks for “non-payment of grain and tax assessments,” spreading of “anti-Bolshevik propaganda,” “resistance to the state,” “possession of letters from the capitalist world,” or “participation in religious activities.”

As the number of arrests soared, warehouses, factories, barns, and even homes were converted into makeshift lock-ups. A case in point was the conversion of the Hildebrand farm implements factory in the village of Khortitsa into a prison in the spring of 1931. Between 400 and 600 prisoners -- the majority of whom were Mennonite -- awaited deportation in the former factory.

The overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and spartan food rations (typically a thin green salt soup and a half to three quarters of a pound of bread daily) had calamitous results. In the above-mentioned Hildebrand factory cadavers soon littered the one-time factory floors and were carted to Einlage for burial.

Torture too became an everyday experience. Prisoners were forced to remain standing in one place literally for weeks, had needles shoved under their fingernails, or were placed in tight spaces lined with light bulbs that burned them at the slightest movement.

Deportation.

To invest individual deportation decisions with a mantle of legitimacy, officials went to extreme lengths to orchestrate the appearance of community endorsement. A Molochnaia eye-witness letter dated April 3, 1930 described one such process: “Already at the beginning of March authorities from the district administration began dekulakizing kulaks. The village assembly (to which only the poor belong) stated that it was opposed to this. Then only the poor from the five villages belonging to our local council were called to a meeting. Since they were threatened, the poor from our village did not vote (even though they were against this); however, there were a few degenerates from other villages who voted in favour. They then went to the so-called kulaks and said to them, “According to a resolution of the citizens of your village you will be dekulakized.” They made a list of their property and took almost all of it away.”

“Some time later, on the morning of March 31, the men were arrested. The women were told to have everything packed within ten hours. No family was allowed to take more than thirty-five poods. On the morning of April 1, the wagons appeared. The women and children were loaded up, the men were taken out of custody, and under close supervision, as if they were terrible criminals, they were transported to the railway station. The military escorted them. The possessions and the people were quickly unloaded....The women then flocked together and later pushed

toward the cattle cars into which their men had been loaded. Forty-five people were squeezed together in each car and they were not let out for an entire day. The doors were also locked. Inside there was stench, heat, misery, and crying.”

The Trains.

The gulag-bound trains of locked cattle cars -- nicknamed “red wagons” -- held from forty-five to seventy-seven exiles per car, and were often very long. On April 1, 1930 more than 2,000 jam-packed deportees (a quarter of whom were Mennonite or German speaking) left on a single train from the Mennonite Molochnaia village of Lichtenau. The largest Mennonite-bearing train on record from southern Ukraine had ninety-eight cattle cars, with about forty-five people per car. Such trains were a common sight until well into 1933.

The overcrowded cattle cars were unlit and unventilated. Soldier guards kept the doors locked, nailed shut the windows and ventilation openings, and often provided only a small bucket to serve as a toilet. Drinking water ran out frequently. During one two-week train ride to camps in Western Siberia, a Mennonite deportee received soup only four times and bread even less frequently. Many deportees, especially young children, died en route of dehydration and starvation. Bodies were pitched out onto sidings along the main railway lines piercing the Soviet north.

“...trust in God... recollection of the lives of Christian martyrs provided spiritual consolation in a world which to them was on the verge of its apocalyptic end.”

The Camps.

Surviving Mennonite exiles disembarked into sparsely inhabited forests, marshlands, and mountain regions across the vast gulag of the Soviet Union at Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, the Solovki Islands, Narian Mar, Kotlas, Vologda, Perm, Bogoslavskii, Chelyabinsk, Kalchim, Lunevka, Melkoe, Sverdlovsk, Ust-Kulom, Omsk, Narym, Novosibirsk, Tiazhin, Tomsk, Karaganda, Turkestan, Tashkent, Irkutsk, and the Amur River region. Exiles sentenced to hard labour were placed in local prisons, where many died. Most of the rest were consigned to new remote penal settlements that were sometimes located in excess of 100 kilometres from a railhead. The exiles’ forced trek from railheads, carrying children and belongings across snowbound forests or through swampy marshlands in knee-deep snow, mud, or muskeg often took weeks and again resulted in deaths from exposure, fatigue, or hunger.

At the camp sites, guards routinely confiscated what food arriving exiles still possessed, often refused them fresh rations, and

quarantined them in unheated holding cells for a week or more ostensibly to prevent the spread of disease. In more remote camps, exiles had to construct temporary shelters such as lean-tos of branches and dirt. At a camp near Omsk, the exiles slept outdoors in minus fifty degree Celsius cold. Disoriented and unaccustomed to the harsh conditions, some went mad, wandering off into the deep woods where they perished. Those who endured helped in the construction of barracks that housed from 200 to 2,000 people in overcrowded, bedbug- and lice-infested squalor.

Mennonite exiles banished to settlements in remote, densely forested regions of the Soviet taiga, worked as woodcutters -- obligatory for men between sixteen and sixty and women between sixteen and fifty-five. Older children and the elderly prepared the meals, looked after the younger children, collected firewood, and housekept for camp officials. Up early, the deportees walked long distances to work sites where they cut and stacked trees amidst swarms of mosquitoes or in bonechilling cold.

In winter, with temperatures plummeting to minus forty or fifty degrees Celsius, deportees worked in deep snow without adequate winter clothing or boots, their only foot covering being tree bark and sackcloth. The results were frost-bitten noses, hands and feet, often leading to death. The spring-time transformation of much of the Soviet taiga into muddy bogs necessitated work in knee-deep mud, resulting again in numerous mishaps with serious, even fatal, injuries.

Prisoners were seen as expendable slave labour and forced to work even with hunger-swollen feet, bruised shoulders from hauling heavy logs, and injured hands from tree-chopping. In one typical case, a Mennonite exile was compelled to continue his work after guards had maliciously cut his infected foot and forced him to walk barefoot in the snow. At a camp near the White Sea a Mennonite was stopped from rescuing a seriously maimed fellow exile, ensuring his death from starvation or exposure.

Punishments were severe for even minor infractions, such as failing to meet daily work quotas. Penalties included ludicrous tasks. In one instance, Mennonites who had failed to meet their work norms were required to stand motionless on a tree stump for several hours. Those who moved or fell were forced to carry heavy loads of bricks, often until they dropped from fatigue. For major offences, exiles might be put in prison cells, tortured, and made to do long terms of especially hard labour. There were also cases of execution.

At camps throughout Siberia and the Amur region, Mennonites also mined coal, copper, and gold, with primitive tools and under hazardous conditions. They worked as carpenters, brick layers, in quarries and in the building of shipping canals. Others became farm labourers, cattle herders, grave and well diggers, fire fighters, pulp and paper mill

labourers, blacksmiths, locksmiths, cooks, bakers, security guards, bookkeepers, hospital orderlies, and even school teachers.

Certain jobs were almost exclusively reserved for women, including nursing in camp clinics and hospitals. There are reports of Mennonite women in camps near Arkhangelsk, Tomsk, and along the Ural Mountains washing floors, cooking, and working in factories in nearby villages. Mennonite women were also coerced into providing sex to camp officials and guards.

Religious Faith.

What enabled many deportees to survive this hell on earth was their religious faith. Their trust in God, obedience to Christ's teachings, and recollection of the lives of Christian martyrs provided spiritual consolation in a world which to them was on the verge of its apocalyptic end. Their torment and torture reminded them of images from the Book of Revelation where the Apostle John foresaw the persecution of God-fearing believers and the destruction of the earth before Christ's return.

In camps where the rules against participation in religious practices were not strictly enforced, Mennonites did their best to keep their faith intact, holding religious services in the nearby forests or in the barracks on Sundays and holidays. At other camps, however, officials enforced every letter of the law and required deportees to work on Sundays and religious holidays to prevent believers from meeting. To get around this Mennonites, held secret nocturnal religious services in nearby forests, often under the penalty of execution, to fellowship and share in each other's tribulations and hopes.

Fatal disease, starvation, suicide, and execution snuffed out the lives of most of those who did not escape or were never released from the camps. Perennial shortages of food, extreme exhaustion, and inhospitable living conditions contributed to major outbreaks of diseases -- typhus, scurvy, grippe, tuberculosis, dysentery, edema, scarlet fever, and pneumonia -- and decimated the camp population. There were 1,200 deaths in a three-month period in a 3,000-person barrack in the Solovki Islands, and at a camp in the Ural mountains a Mennonite exile reported that "of the approximately 7000 people who came there, there were already 2,000 dead." By all accounts, the government's program to liquidate the kulak was a resounding success.

Conclusion.

In summary, the apocalypse of 1928-1933 had innumerable consequences for the Soviet Mennonite community, but several stand out in particular. First, the government's dekulakization programs resulted in the long-term oppression, suffering, and premature death of thousands of members of the Soviet Mennonite community. As victims of the government's dekulakization campaign, thousands of Mennonites lost everything that they

had -- including their property, their family members, and in many cases their own lives -- in the name of a political cause that demanded the imprisonment, exile, and death of millions of Soviet peasants.

Not every Mennonite during this time of persecution was a martyr, however. Whether they were members of the village council, the Communist Party, or the DCPD, Mennonites were actively involved in the political and administrative hierarchy of a regime that murdered millions of people. While the signatures of Mennonites on countless documents relating to dekulakization are proof positive that Mennonites betrayed their relatives and friends to the Soviet state, it is not at all clear how many Mennonites were motivated to collude with the Stalinist regime because they had pistols pointed at their heads or because they were inspired by Soviet ideology and propaganda.

Finally, dekulakization resulted in the Mennonite community's loss of control over its own economic, social, religious, and political destiny. By destroying many of the economic, cultural and religious institutions that formerly united the Mennonite community, the Soviet government successfully severed the ties that had previously linked Soviet Mennonites to their identity, their sense of peoplehood, and their past. Unable to determine its own destiny, the Soviet Mennonite community after 1933 became fractured, dislocated groups of individuals who no longer shared a common future, but only memories of a common past.

Editor's Note:

In the interest of conserving space, endnotes have been deleted from this article. Those interested in the specific references will find them cited in the Journal of Mennonite Studies article referenced at the beginning of this article.



Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno, 1917 - 1956

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Introduction.

Sparked by the work of Harvey Dyck and an international team of scholars, Mennonites in many parts of the world have chosen 1998 to commemorate the victims of terror and repression in the former Soviet Union. My contribution to this commemoration has been the compilation of a comprehensive name-list of victims, a continuation of the work begun some twenty years ago by George K. Epp. To date I have gathered well over 15,000 names, together with countless personal stories, letters, poems and photographs. I hope to have this material ready for publication by the end of next year.

Here I can offer only a brief summary of my findings to date. The following table provides a summary of the number of Mennonite victims during the years 1917 - 56:

Murdered	1,230		
Disease (Typhus)	1,450		
Famine	<u>800</u>	=	3,500
Exiled, 1929-33			10,000
Arrested, 1929-41		<u>10,000</u>	= 23,500
Deported, 1941			25,000
Repatriated, 1945-46			23,000

I. 1917 - 1923

My research to date has identified a total of 3,189 victims for the 6-year period from 1917 to 1923: 1,230 [39%] were brutally murdered or executed; 1,452 [45%] died in the typhus epidemic of 1919-20; and 507 [16%] are known to have starved to death in the famine of 1921-22. These figures represent about three percent of the 1917 Mennonite population. The deaths were not evenly distributed geographically: 96 percent of the victims [3,055] were from Ukraine - with 69 percent from villages west of the Dnieper River [including the settlements of Khortitsa, Yazykovo, Zagradovka, Borozenko, Baratov, etc.] and 27 percent from villages east of the Dnieper [including Molochnaia, Memrik, Ignatyev, Schönfeld, etc.]. Only four percent of the victims [134 persons] came from the Russian Federation [RSFSR], which included Mennonites in the Crimea, Caucasus, Volga, Don and Ural regions, as well as in Siberia.

a) Of the 1,230 murder victims, 1,148 are known by name; only the names of 82 [out of a total of 129] persons murdered in the villages of Ebenfeld and Steinbach [Borozenko Settlement] in early December 1919 have not been found.

The first known murder victims were three men from the village of Marianovka in the Terek Settlement, shot by bandits on 16 October 1917. By mid-February 1918 another six men were dead; the fifteen Terek villages were abandoned as residents fled to the Kuban and Molochnaia in the wake of attacks from the surrounding

Muslim mountain tribes.

In 1918 a total of 156 murders and executions are reported. Most of the victims were residents on estates and private farms, or travelers. The scattered settlements in the Schönfeld-Brasol region were especially hard hit. A total of 96 persons from this region were murdered before residents finally abandoned their farms and estates by the Fall of 1919. Other Mennonite villages in Ukraine were relatively untouched during 1918, with the exception of Halbstadt, where six men were executed by the Bolsheviks in February 1918.

Over 67 percent of all murder victims [827] were killed in 1919, the vast majority during the six-week period from 26 October to 5 December, when Makhno's anarchist army overran Mennonite villages throughout Ukraine. Brutal massacres occurred in Blumenort [Molochnaia],

Eichenfeld [Yazykovo], Münsterberg [Zagradovka], and Ebenfeld and Steinbach [Borozenko]. Makhno's men occupied the villages of the Khortitsa and Yazykovo region until late December, when they were finally driven out by Bolshevik forces, and left a terrible legacy of disease and rape. No contemporary reporter ever attempted a tabulation of rape victims or a count of how many unwanted pregnancies (or abortions) occurred as a result of such violations.

As the Bolsheviks consolidated their control of Ukraine, the number of murders decreased dramatically: in 1920 there were only 43 reported deaths, in 1921 only 35 [including eleven Mennonites executed by the Bolsheviks after an unsuccessful peasant uprising in the settlement Am Trakt].

The list of those killed in 1918-19 includes eight men who died while serving in the short-lived Mennonite *Selbstschutz*, and another 45 men who died while in the service of the White Army - some as soldiers, some as medics, others as drivers conscripted to provide transport for the White forces. It is known that some Mennonite men also died while serving in the Red Army during this time, but I have found no names of casualties.

b) Of the 1,452 known typhus victims over 85 percent were from the Khortitsa region alone. The number of 1,258 victims [426 known by name] in the Khortitsa region, however, is based on reports from only nine out of fourteen villages. In the Yazykovo villages only 36 names

are known, in the Molochnaia settlement only 44 typhoid victims have been identified, and in Zagradovka only three. Given the scope of the epidemic, it is quite likely that there were many more victims than those that have been identified to date.

c) Of the 507 famine deaths reported during the years 1921-22, at least 387 [76%] were from the Molochnaia villages, compared with only 77 from villages west of the Dnieper River [48 from the Khortitsa Settlement, 16 from



Dr. Peter Letkeman

Zagradovka, 12 from Gnadental and 1 from Friedensfeld], and 40 from the Orenburg Settlement. None of the Molochnaia victims are known by name. In the Khortitsa region, the village of Nieder Khortitsa was especially hard hit, with 33 deaths reported. The total number of famine-related deaths was relatively low, compared to the population as a whole, thanks to the timely arrival of aid from North American and European Mennonites.

II. 1929 - 1941

The number of Mennonites who starved during the great terror-famine of 1932-33 was relatively small, compared to the millions of victims in the Ukraine and Volga region, thanks again in part to the assistance provided by North American and European Mennonites. In the Mennonite villages west of the Dnieper, for example, only 265 victims have been reported. Losses in other Mennonite villages also seem to have been minimal, although the degree of suffering should not be minimized.

The majority of victims during the 12-year period from Fall 1929 to June 1941 fall into two categories: those who were dekulakized [*entkulakisiert*] and those who were arrested [*verhaftet*].

a) Stalin's first Five-Year Plan [1928-1933]

called for the elimination of private land holdings and the formation of large collective farms. Strong peasant resistance to the collectivization policy was blamed on "kulaks," and in December 1929 Stalin proclaimed the "liquidation of kulaks as a class." Government directives called for the "dekulakization" of 3 to 5 percent of all peasant households. In Mennonite settlement, however, the number of households affected ranged up to 25 percent in some villages.

Families selected for "dekulakization" were disenfranchised [deprived of the right to vote], dispossessed [robbed of their livestock, machinery and household possessions], and evicted from their homes. Some were allowed to remain in village, living with family or friends, or in make-shift hovels on the outskirts of the village. Others were banished from the village, but allowed to remain in the region; many were sent to newly established "kulak" settlements, such as Okto-berfeld and Neuhof in the Molochnaia region.

Some families [including that of my grandfather], realizing the fate that awaited them, choose to flee their village before they could be exiled. Many sought refuge in large industrial towns such as Zaporozhie or Stalino [now Donetsk], or in the Caucasus.

The majority of the dekulakized families were loaded into crowded, unheated cattle cars, shipped into the forest of northern Russia (Vologda or Arkhangelsk) and Siberia, or into the barren steppes of Central Asia. Many died en route. Those who survived the trip often died within the first year from cold, disease or starvation.

The number of persons "dekulakized" per village varied from region to region. In the Ukraine and Crimea, between 10 and 20 percent of all Mennonite families were "dekulakized."

In the settlement of Alexandertal (Alt-Samara) 55 families [331 persons], representing 25 per cent of the population, were exiled during the years 1930-31. The first 36 families [233 persons] were taken on 30 March 1930: shipped in cattle cars 837 km north of Moscow, to the settlement of Kholmoleyevo, where all able-bodied men and women, even young boys and girls of 16, were required to work in the forests. Statistics for Kholmoleyevo are appalling: 49 persons [21 percent] died within the first year, 81 persons [30 percent] were subsequently arrested and shipped to prisons or other labour camps.

In the Trakt Settlement, 41 families [199 persons], or about 15% of the population, were exiled to Karaganda in the summer of 1931.

In total, I would estimate that between 1,500 and 2,000 Mennonite families - or about 10,000 persons - were "dekulakized" during the years 1930-32. I have been able to identify less than a quarter of them.

b) Individual arrests began in the late 1920s and escalated during the course of the 1930s. Several hundred men and women were arrested in Moscow in 1929 while attempting to emigrate; some died in prison, but most were released after several weeks and sent into exile in northern Russia or Siberia, together with their

families.

Comparatively few Mennonites were arrested or exiled during the years from 1933 - 1935. In the villages west of the Dnieper, for example, there were a total of only seventy arrests: 27 in 1933 [ten of these in Einlage], 19 arrests in 1934, and 24 arrests in 1935. Since few Mennonites were members of the Communist Party, few were affected by Stalin's purge of the Party, which began early in 1933 and ended officially on December 26 1935.

Among those arrested during these years were the remaining Mennonite religious leaders, including men such as Aeltester Heinrich Winter and Aaron P. Toews, who had somehow escaped arrest during the earlier "dekulakization" campaign of 1929-32. These arrests were part of Stalin's ongoing assault against traditional religious and moral values. By the end of 1936 most churches had been closed, the buildings confiscated by the state, and turned into club-houses, theatres or warehouses.

During the Great Terror, which began in the Fall of 1936 and ended in late-1938, some 8,000 to 9,000 Mennonite men (and a small number of women) were arrested. The majority were taken between June 1937 and August 1938.

Fairly complete lists are available for some forty-nine Mennonite villages in Ukraine, west of the Dnieper River - including villages in the settlements of Khortitsa, Yazykovo, Zagradovka, Nepluievka, Borozenko and Shliakhtin-Baratov. These lists show a total of more than 1,800 arrests (8.2 percent) in an estimated 1937 population of 22,000 persons. Figures for the Molochnaia villages also show about 1,800 arrests during this period, in a population of 20,000 persons.

The ratio of arrests varied considerably from one village to another. For example, in the village of Blumenfeld (Nepluievka) 37 men (14 percent) of an estimated 250 inhabitants were arrested during the 'Great Terror'; in the village of Bahndorf (Orlovo) in the Memrik settlement, 26 men (8.6 percent) from a population of 300 persons were arrested between May 1937 and February 1938. In the village of Kondratievka (Borissovo Settlement) the ratio was even higher: 75 men (18 percent), including both fathers and their sons, from an estimated population of 400 persons were arrested during the years 1937-38.

On the other hand, in Alexanderkrone (Zagradovka) only two of its 170 inhabitants were arrested. The village of Rosengart (Khortitsa) also suffered relatively few arrests from 1936-38, only ten men (3.3 percent) out of a population of over 300 persons were arrested. The reason cited in contemporary sources for this "lenient treatment" was that Soviet officials used Rosengart as a model collective farm to display to the many foreign visitors who came to view the nearby Dnieprostroi hydro-electric dam.

In total, an estimated 10,000 Mennonites [from a population of 100,000] were arrested in the years 1933-41. This number seems small, even insignificant, when compared with the 'millions' of arrest victims in the Soviet Union as a

whole; but statistically, the arrest ratio among Mennonites was at least four times higher than the national average, as revealed in recent KGB statistics.

III. 1941 - 1956

Within days of the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, thousands of Mennonite men and women were mobilized into work battalions to dig trenches, repair roads, even build air strips. Mennonites, and other Soviet-Germans, serving in the Red Army were initially sent to the front lines, where casualties were high; but as suspicion of potential espionage set in, they were all dismissed from the ranks of the Army and sent to work in the labour camps of the 'Trudarmia.'

Beginning in July, men aged 16-60 were also taken from their villages to slave labour in the 'Trudarmia.' Hundreds of young men and women were also enlisted to evacuate livestock and machinery to the east, away from the advancing German forces.

In August, Mennonite and German residents of the Crimea were the first to be deported from their homes to the east "for their safety." In reality, it was merely the final step in a process of ethnic cleansing [the removal of all Soviet Germans from European Russia] which had begun with the "dekulakization" and arrests of the 1930s.

By October, hundreds of thousands of Germans - including an estimated 25,000 Mennonites - had been forcibly deported from their homes in the Crimea, Ukraine, Caucasus, and Volga regions to Siberia or Kazakhstan. Hundreds perished along the way - especially children [only a handful of names have been recorded]. Within weeks after their arrival in Siberia or Kazakhstan, thousands of men and women were again taken from their families and conscripted for slave labour in the camps of the 'Trudarmia.' Most were not released until after Stalin's death in 1953.

The final tragedy in this chronology of suffering was the forced repatriation of some 23,000 Mennonites to the USSR (often with Allied assistance!) after the end of World War II. The cattle cars were called into duty one last time to transport thousands of tired and frightened refugees from Germany and Poland to the forests of Siberia or the barren steppes of Kazakhstan. Again, hundreds died of cold, disease or starvation [including my own grandmother]. Those who survived were forced to labour in mines or forests, virtual prisoners until 1956, when the 'Kommandatura' came to an end.

No government has ever offered an apology; and no officials have ever stood trial for their crimes against humanity. Yet none of the individuals whom I interviewed called for revenge. All seemed to be prepared to forgive.

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“Glimpses of a Fleeing Family”

“Glimpses of a Fleeing Family: The Chronicle of the Anna and Jakob Kroeker Family in World War Two,” by Lori Klassen, 173
Aubrey Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 2H9.

I kiss my sleeping children. They are safe and warm, like they are every night. Not so the children of Jakob (b. 1904 Neuendorf, USSR) and Anna Kroeker (nee Wiebe b. 1913 in Neuendorf, USSR).

Anna was a young, pregnant mother of five children when she and Jakob found herself fleeing the advance of Russian soldiers during the Second World War. Soldiers with very real guns and very evil intentions. It was beyond Anna and Jakob to provide a safe haven for their little ones. The five children, Jascha, Anna, Issak, Katya, and Mika, lived in daily turmoil; never knowing where the next meal would come from and surrounded by incessant talk about the advance of the Russian front with the constant threat of being shot or dragged to a work camp in Siberia.



Anna Wiebe Kroeker with her children. In Poland while Father was away in German service. 1944. L.-r: Jascha, Katya, Mika, Anna and Isaak.

The threat was very real. As Anna walked in front of the wagon with her eldest son, Jascha (Jake), she reminded him, “If we should ever get separated and you are taken back to Russia always remember who you are, and all that I have taught you” (Not exactly the kind of conversation to inspire a feeling of childhood safety).

In Poland Father was taken into the German service and the family spent some time there in German territory. It wasn't long however when they received word that the Russians were coming and they had to flee ever more westward. With no time to contact her husband, Anna and her family joined the other escapees (cousins, aunts, uncles, parents) and left. There was much heartache in this but no choice.

Little Katya (Katie) asked, “Mama, if I pray

very hard will papa come back?”

And Mama's reply, “We don't know that but praying always helps.”

Then miraculously there he was! Unexpectedly he had found them in the European woods near Volksberg after deserting his post. It was an emotional reunion with wife and children.

Little Katya (Katie) asked,
“Mama, if I pray very hard will papa
come back?”

One of the first things he did was to unload their cart, which included Anna's sewing machine and said, “There now we are leaving all this behind and the children will be allowed to ride instead of walking so much.”

Six year-old Issak - feet swollen and bleeding was loaded onto the cart along with his tired siblings and the journey continued, slightly more hopeful now that Dad was with them, but the fear and hunger continued. Many times on this terrifying journey Anna wished her children dead.

Dead!

Death would bring them such sweet release such peaceful repose, a more promising alternative to being dragged back to Russia and tortured. A rest from the constant pains of hunger. So also she wished her little unborn one dead. Wished it so much that she uttered it aloud.

When the time came to birth her child, Anna was in a house in Seifersdorf, Czechoslovakia

where midwives attended her. The baby was born.

Anxiously Anna asked, “is it dead?”

“No, it is not dead, it is a healthy baby boy”.

Miraculously, in spite of Anna's poor nourishment and constant death wishes she had birthed a large healthy boy. Anna did not look upon him. She turned her face to the wall and refused to look.

The next morning two aristocratic ladies strode into Anna's room. They looked into the little cot where the newborn slept,

“My what a beautiful baby”, said the one.

Death would bring them such
sweet release.... a more promising
alternative to being dragged back
to Russia and tortured.

“Yes,” said the other, “and look how big, he looks about two months old.” Anna turned to look at her visitors. My what fine ladies were these. One wore a luxurious fox fur around her shoulders. This one approached Anna's bed and said..

“My good woman, we have come for your baby. We will gladly raise him for you.”

“Take my baby?,” asked Anna, in shocked tone. “I am not giving away my baby.”

“What a funny woman you are,” said the visitor, “We know you wished your baby dead.”

“Dead, yes,” answered Anna, “I wish all my children dead - but give them away? Not one.”



Jakob, Anna and their children, 1947. Wearing cloths thankfully received from North America. Isaak, Heinie, Anna, Katya, Mika, and Jascha. Photographs for this article are courtesy of Lori Klassen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.



The Wiebe home in Neuendorf, Chortitz Colony, still standing today. The home that Anna Wiebe Kroeker and Isaak Wiebe, deceased, Steinbach, grew up in. Photo taken in 1995. Neuendorf was the ancestral home of many Bergthaler including notables such as Dyan Friesen Cannon.

“But we are large landowners,” protested the lady, “and we don’t have a son. Your son will inherit everything. He will be a wealthy man.”

....there was always the constant tension...the constant thud in the gut...the Russian front was ever advancing.

Anna stared, astounded at the naive ignorance of this woman. She seemed to have no inkling of what Anna had already lived through and what lay ahead for herself. The Russians were coming--there would be no land in these parts for any one to inherit.

And so it was, all the landowners lost their land and Baby Heinie (Henry) never even lay in Miss Fox Fur’s arms. He joined his parents and five older siblings on the perilous journey to freedom.

While fleeing they were often passing by dead bodies in the street, gawking at soldiers lying with loaded weapons in ditches

Jakob and Anna had left their horse-drawn wagon in Poland, it had belonged to a Polish man. But while the family was laid over in Czechoslovakia they managed to procure a children’s wagon. Anna pulled little Mika (Mary) and Baby Heinie in the wagon.

The only problem being that Mika kept falling out and hitting her head. Finally they managed to tie her securely to the wagon and progress could be made. (This has provided the adult Mary with a ready excuse to the inexplicable silly behaviour we all display at times... “Well I can’t help it. When I was little I kept falling out

of the wagon and banging my head on the ground.)

Katya was sick and so Father carried her while the other three children walked alongside their parents.

When the frightened and malnourished family finally reached a German refugee camp they were given some much appreciated food yet here too, there was much to be frightened of. The Allies repeated bombing of German held land sent them scurrying to bomb shelters in the middle of the night (how’s that for nightmares). So there was always the constant tension ... the constant thud in the gut. As the Allies bombed, the Russian front was ever advancing.

Anna, Jakob and their children endured many

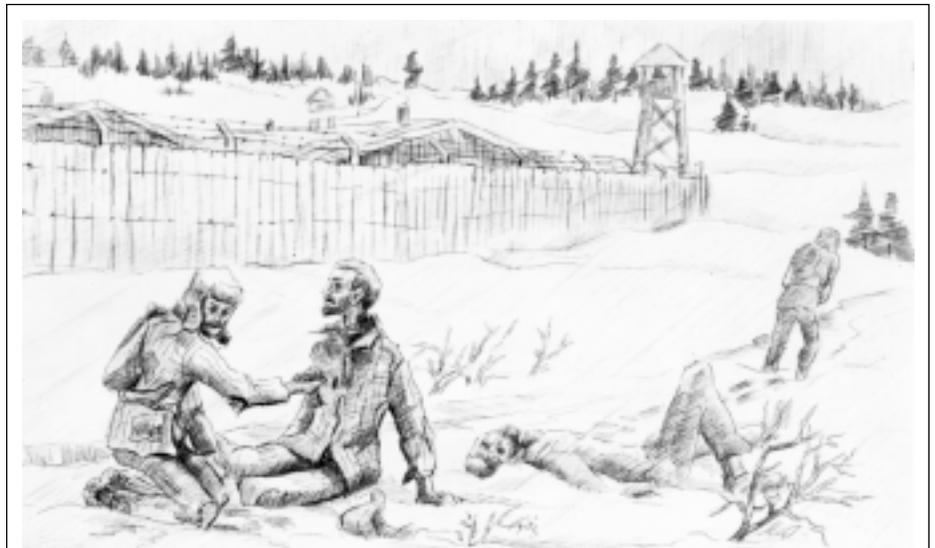
horrible things during their homeless years. Some had their feet frozen into solid blocks so that amputation was discussed. While fleeing they were often passing by dead bodies in the street, gawking at soldiers lying with loaded weapons in ditches, experiencing terrible hunger pangs, and always there was the insecurity of knowing you could be separated from your parents at any moment.

At War’s end there was little feeling for jubilation. Homeless, malnourished, and psychologically exhausted they waited in Germany until they were granted passage to Canada: a voyage remembered for the horrible sea sickness that affected all of them.

Slowly they came to the horrible realization that only a minority of Mennonites had succeeded in escaping from the Russians’ grasp. (It has been documented now that of the 30,000 Mennonites who fled Russia in WWII 20,000 were killed, died fleeing, or were sent back.)

A child psychologist could predict horrible outcomes for the six Kroeker children, and the psychologist would be wrong. Despite not being tucked warm and safe under Mickey Mouse blankets, Anna’s children are all productive members of society and, like most refugees, display a strong work ethic. Clearly they have benefited from the freedoms Canada offered to them and the strong ties to family and friends in the Mennonite community.

As I gaze down at my sleeping children I think of Anna and how she was forced to parent under terrifying circumstances. I think of the miracle that she made it to Canada at all. I leave my children to their sweet dreams and realize that being a parent in the nineties is not so hard after all.



The death of Reverend Johann Warkentin from Podolsk. In 1937 he was banished to the frozen north near Workuta. The Soviets “liberated” him in that they took the emaciated man by hands and feet and threw him into the snow outside the fence of the labour camp where he soon died. This scene shows how a fellow prisoner offered him a piece of bread. Drawing by Ernst Dyck, Neuwied (1976). Photo courtesy Horst Gerlach, Zur Geschichte der Mennoniten (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 94.

Susanna Kroeker Wiebe: Neuendorf

Susanna Kroeker Wiebe (b. 1911), from Neuendorf, Soviet Russia, to Steinbach, Canada: The story of one woman's recollection of her life from 1911 to the present, as told to (and written by) her daughter-in-law, Margaret Daley-Wiebe and son John K. Wiebe, Box 2671, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Early Years 1911-32.

I, Susanna Kroeker Wiebe, was born on May 25, 1911, in the village of Neuendorf, the district of Zaporozhe, Ukraine. It was a large village of 2000 people. My parents' names were Nikolai and Helene Kroeker. I was the second youngest of nine children. My siblings were (in order of birth, oldest to youngest) Anna, Abram, Tina, Gerhard, Jakob, Nikolai (died as a baby), Nikolai, and Heinrich, and an adopted sister Tina.

I began school at age six. The school was divided into three classes - lower (grades 1 and 2), middle (grades 3 and 4) and upper (grades 5 and 6). We were taught one hour of Russian every week, otherwise all teaching was done in the German language. In the summer we walked home for lunch, in the winter we brought our lunch which consisted of a

“The revolutionaries were coarse, mean characters who often raped the younger women and demanded food and shelter.”

piece of farmer sausage, a bun and a bottle of milk.

All the ingredients of our lunches came from home, not from a store. Father had three cows, three pigs, six horses, some chickens, turkeys, sheep and geese. We made the butter, milked the cows and butchered animals for meat. The flour for the bread came from the grain in our fields. The fruit and vegetables we ate came from our fields as well (We had 30 or 36 acres).

The months from May to August were summer vacation. I remember the four months off were very busy ones. The children were all expected to work in the fields with their father. We weeded the corn, the sunflowers, the watermelon patches and the potatoes. I remember the watermelons. My father had many melons, which we would eat until Christmas. He would store them in the grain barn, under the grain. Small ones would be stored in barrels, covered with salt and water. These were very good to eat. My father also made syrup from the watermelons. I remember having to crawl in the bins to get the small melons out for him.

My mom did knitting for other people and taught the local women how to sew. She did this because she wanted to help bring money into the household. It was important for my mother to know that she could contribute financially to her family. All the clothes that our family wore were made by our mother. Wool socks were also knit by our mother. The wool came from the few sheep our dad had;



Family photo in happier times, early 1900s. Nikolai Kroeker and Katharina Braun Kroeker, and two oldest children, Abram and Anna Kroeker.

the wool was spun on our mother's spinning wheel. We truly lived off the land.

We grew up in a house that was the fashion at that time. It was a very large building. The rooms all had names: the large room, the corner room, the small room, the summer room, the pantry and the kitchen. The small room is where I slept with my sisters; the beds were wooden benches that opened up to become a bed for two. The boys slept in the summer room, which also housed an extra stove. Our parents slept in the corner room; they had a “real” bed.

Cooking was done in a brick oven, which was heated by straw. Wood, which was in short supply was used sparingly and only for occasions when a fire was needed to last longer; such as for cooking borscht.

In the winter, the house was heated with blocks of “mest” (a Low German word for dung). These blocks were made by the family. Our father would spread manure in the field in the fall. The horses would tramp it to make it a smooth material. The children's job was to go into the field barefoot, and pack the manure. Once it dried, we would cut it into bricks and put them into the barn for storage (the barn was attached to the house).

Our family attended the only church in Neuendorf - it was simply the “Mennonite Church”. Sunday school was something that happened in the afternoons in various homes of the community. I attended the one next door to our house with approximately 10 other children.

In 1920 our lives were drastically changed.



Three sisters, circa 1914. Tina, Susanna and Anna Kroeker.

Typhoid fever began to take its toll on the village. Many, many people died. People were so involved in the sickness and deaths in their own households that they failed to notice deaths in their neighbourhoods.

My mother was one of the victims of this fever; she died at home at the age of 45. She left behind seven children. Life became very empty in the Kroeker household. Mother had been a very sociable, gregarious lady and brought life into our household. My second

oldest sister (Tina) became the “mother” in the home. I prayed hard for a new mother while my one brother prayed for things to remain the same - he wanted to remain sleeping with Pa. My father remarried to Maria Neudorf.

The Revolution began in the 1917. This brought more change o the household. One never knew when the Reds would knock on the door looking for young women. The revolutionaries were coarse, mean characters who often raped the younger women and demanded food and shelter. Women and young girls were always terrified. When a knock would sound, my sisters would run and hide; I would want to join them but their answer always was “you’re young, they won’t take you.” My sisters would run from house to house, looking for the safest place. This period of time was also known to the people in the village as “the hunger years.” The army would take all the grain from the Mennonite farmers. Many families were starving, but our household always managed to have enough food.

The collective farms came into existence in 1931. At this time, all children and adults worked for the farms (governed by the Russians). At first they worked six days a week, later it was changed to seven. You were given a share of grain or food for your work. No one was a private landowner, the government owned everything, including the animals.

My household 1933-1943.

Isaac Wiebe and I were married on March 26, 1933 in Neuendorf. I wore a black dress and Isaac gave me a simple ring. We lived with my parents for the first year after we were married. Once we had enough money we bought a house with my brother Nikolai. Isaac worked for the collective farms.



Susanna Kroeker and brother Jakob Kroeker, circa 1929.



Susanna Wiebe and friends, 1929. Left to right: Anna Wiebe Penner, Margarete Kroeker Penner, Margarethe Wiebe, Elisabeth Froese Wiebe, Susanna Kroeker Wiebe and Agnes Thiessen Schmidt.

Our first child was born in our first year of marriage, her name was Susanna.

Issak, our next child only lived to the age of one year. He developed pneumonia and then an infection spread into his brain and within

“At night we could hear cars driving up to different homes in the morning we would find out that the father and sons had been taken...”

10 days he was gone. Jakob was born next. He was a very special child. Many doctors looked at him, the prognosis was always the same, nothing can be done. No one knew for sure what the “name” of his disease was; he was deaf, he never spoke, he could not sit or stand, he never grew bigger than a two-year-old and we think he was blind. In 1941, we had a healthy baby girl, Maria.

Times were very unsettling. One had to always be careful of what you said and who you said it to. At night we could hear cars driving up to different homes in the morning we would find out that the father and sons had been taken by the Russians. (Note: Communists were a paranoid people; they arrested anyone that they thought might be against them or anyone who had “different” thoughts than they).

We wouldn’t sleep at night after we had seen the cars come into the village. “Immer angst” (always scared) are two words that describe our life in these times This continued for many years, many families started to leave. Finally my father-in-law said it was time to take our families and flee from the Russians.

We could never have imagined what path our lives would take in the next few years. Words like despair, hunger, cold, fear became

part of our lives. We could not have imagined how major a role God would play in our lives.

Our flight to Poland/Germany 1943-1948.

On October 12, 1943 we left our home in Neuendorf. “We” refers to a large group of Isaac’s family. The group included - Isaac and Katharina Wiebe (Isaac’s parents), Anna (his sister) and Jakob Kroeker and five children, Katharina (his sister), Peter (his brother) and Aganetha and three children, Susanna (his sister) and Johann Thiessen and four children.

Our children were age two, five and 11. Our first leg of the journey was going to be by train. The train station was in Kanserovka.

My children, my husband and I were almost on the train, when we were stopped by an SS soldier, accompanied by a nurse.

“Give me the boy!”

“NO!” I said.

“Give me the boy, now. He may not go

“...we were stopped by an SS soldier.”

“Give me the boy!” he barked.

“NO!” I said.

with you! Put him in the ambulance.”

I was frantic. Where would they take him, what would they do to him, would he be fed?

We had no idea where they were taking him, so Isaac accompanied the ambulance. At the hospital Isaac was told to get out and return to his family. A doctor told him that he would not be able to get his son back.

Realizing that the train would be leaving the station at any minute, Isaac now had to run so as not to lose his family on the train. I was still frantic, now I didn’t know where my son or my husband was. Would Isaac be left behind too?



The church in Neuendorf. The focal point of the village. See also Rudy Friesen, Into the Past, page 90.



The Kroeker home in Neuendorf. Photo taken after 1980. This may be the same house depicted, but unidentified, in Rudy Friesen, Into the Past, page 97.

The SS soldier came back to me and asked, "Are there more children like your son on board?"

I turned my back on him and got on the train. There were other sickly children on board, but they were not taken that day. The train started to pull out of the station and Isaac had still not returned. Finally he returned. He jumped on board the moving train. What relief.

A person cannot imagine the feelings and emotions that we were all having at that moment. I knew I would never see my five-year-old son again. (Note: we found out many years later, that the children in that hospital had all been starved to death). We knew that we had to leave our son with the "enemy" or the rest

of our families lives would be in danger.

We were leaving our homes for good. When one flees a country there are many circumstances that arise, that you have no control over. One cannot always choose, who stays and who gets to leave. One thing I did learn, on my own strength I could not have made it through that day. God was my strength. I may have not realized it at the time, but He was there beside me, all the way.

The train that transported us would stop at various places so we could get out and bathe. At one such stop, Dolginsevo, the Russian planes flew over top and bombed the area, but fortunately only one soldier was killed and the rest of us were spared.

On October 18, our train arrived in Kulm,

on the Vistula River (Poland). We lived here for the next nine months. The authorities told us we would be given a place to live. We were informed that we should go see the Burgermeister (mayor). The Burgermeister ordered a Polish lady to vacate her house and he gave it to us. It was not a well-built house, the cracks in the wall were so large that you could see through them. However, we were thankful for any shelter we received. My husband was sent to work in a nearby village. I did not want to live alone, so the children and I moved in with my in-laws.

"Isaac shot the gun straight into the air - suddenly horses and wagons appeared from everywhere."

On July 8, 1944 our group continued on to Dieter-Warthegeau, to a village called Gall.

One month after we arrived our son Heinrich was born. I now had a new baby, a three-year-old and an 11-year-old. We lived in this village for six months. At this time Isaac was "mustered" (conscripted) into the German army. These men were called "Volksturm" -these were untrained civilians that had been forced into the army. Isaac was given a uniform and a rifle. Their role in the army was to be cannon fodder for the retreating German front.

One day Isaac and several others were working in Krakow when word came that the Russians were surrounding the village. Isaac and the men deserted the army at this time. They managed to slip through the Russian line and return to their families.

One of our nephews saw the men returning with their rifles and wanted Uncle Isaac to shoot his gun. Isaac shot the gun straight into the air - suddenly horses and wagons appeared from everywhere. The Polish people were scared and thought Isaac was a German. With the wagons and horses we received, we fled the village. One learns to take advantage of all opportunities that come your way in war time. The day was January 19, 1945. We were on the run again.

"Suddenly, a man approached us... There was a fence we would have to crawl under. He showed us where it was. I realized years later that this man had been an instrument of God."

This trek, by horse and wagon took us to Czechoslovakia, to a village called Seifersdorf. We were given places to stay in an inn. We remained in the village for three months.

Our only thought was to stay ahead of the Russians; once again they were approaching quickly. The NSV (National Socialist Welfare) put us on the train which took us to Seestadel.

We stayed here for three weeks.

On May 8, 1945 the German army capitulated. The Russians were coming closer. Word came that we must leave immediately, for fear that we would now be forced back to Russia. (Some of our brothers and sisters were repatriated back to Russia.)

Our greatest fear and greatest motivation was the Russians! We were NOT going to return to our homeland. My father-in-law gave us the order, get out!

Isaac and our eldest daughter had gone to the store. What was I to do? Home alone with two young children that had the measles. How could I leave immediately? I left the children with a neighbour and ran to the store to find some bread... I managed to buy two loaves. My sister-in-law said, we can't leave without 'baby wagons'. We ran to the store, it was locked. We encountered a policeman who opened the store for us and sold us two carriages.

When I got home, Isaac and Susanna had returned. Isaac put Maria (5) on his shoulders, I put Heinrich (1) in the carriage with the two loaves of bread and Susanna (12) walked. With nothing but the clothes on our back we were fleeing our home, again. We didn't know our destination but we walked west, away from the Russians. We walked for five days, many of us with young children. At each town, the children would be sent out to beg for whatever scraps we could get. The adults would knock on doors, asking for handouts. At one place I saw five bins full of potatoes--the woman gave me one. We slept in barns or in schools, wherever people would allow us to stop. The German army had given orders to all bakeries, "...every one must be given bread."

We were near starvation for most of this trek. We found that people like us, refugees, were the most generous. Our children were dirty and hungry. As mothers we sometimes had to eat the little food we had, so that we could take care of our babies. Imagine, as a mother, taking food before you feed your children. My father-in-law told us, "Eat, so that you may look after your babies. If you starve what good will you be to them."

We met some American soldiers on the road who warned us that it was unsafe to continue. They offered to take our children in their vehicles, but we refused to part with them. We kept on walking. Day after day, night after night.

We finally arrived in the village of Asch, which was on the border of Czech/Germany. We stayed in a school, which served as a refugee camp. To leave here we needed papers from the authorities. We were told it wouldn't take long. People all around us were getting their papers, but Isaac wasn't getting ours. Finally, he had had enough, he went to the commander's office. There were two Czech guards on either side of the door. They told Isaac that he could not go in, he ran right past

them, up the stairs to the commander's office.

He ran up to the secretary's desk and demanded his papers.

"My papers are in your bottom drawer," he demanded. "Take them out and give them to the commander."

The secretary did as Isaac directed her. He took the papers to the commander and watched



Sister-in-law Anna Wiebe, Mrs. Jakob Kroeker. Photo courtesy of Lori Klassen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

as he stamped the papers. We could leave!

Our "leader", Isaac's father, was now at the point of exhaustion. He had got his family so far, but now he was tired of running. He wanted to quit. One of his sons said no! We've come so far, we have nothing, what more can we lose. Let's keep on going.

When we reached the border into Germany, we found it was closed. Our papers couldn't get us through. We could return or we could try and find another way. The night was dark and it was raining.

Suddenly, a man approached us, seemingly out of nowhere, and told us of a way to cross the border to an American camp. There was a fence we would have to crawl under. He showed us where it was. I realized years later that this man had been an instrument of God. He had us in His hands, guiding us and keeping us safe. We crossed into Germany safely.

We found shelter in an old barn for the rest of the night. The men went into the neighbouring fields and stole straw for our children's beds.

On our first day in Germany we reached a place called Hof. We were given ration cards for food. Baby Heinrich needed milk. I went to a wealthy lady's dairy farm. I asked for some milk for my baby. She refused. I refused to move from her doorstep until she relented and gave me some milk.

The next day as I was standing on the street waiting for my husband, a lady approached me and asked "has your baby had milk today?". I replied that we didn't have any. She beckoned me to follow her to her house. Her house was bare, I realized that she was a refugee just like me. She had one loaf of bread on the table and one bottle of milk. She gave me everything she had. This woman reminded me of the poor widow in the Bible that gave her last penny to charity. The other woman who had plenty gave unwillingly while this woman, who had little, gave everything.

We were still walking. Our destination ...to get as far away as possible from the Russians.

In Unterneuses, a district of Bamberg, our group found shelter with some peasants. We lived here for seven months. We left here in March of 1946. Finally, we ended up in Brakel, in the district of Hoxter, Westfalia. My husband was given a job by a farmer as the "futteneister"- manager of the feed. There were 30 workers on this farm. It was a place where we lived well. The owner gave us land for a garden, milk from the cows, meat and extra ration cards for food.

In November of 1947 Johann was born, in the nearby village of Hoxter. We lived in Germany until September 17, 1948.

Our flight out of Russia into Germany was full of many examples of God's guiding hand leading us to safety. As we walked westward away from the Russian front we tried to find shelter in the villages we passed through. On one occasion we camped outside a village and the men went into the village to scout for shelter. When the men returned they had an uneasy feeling about the village and so we skirted the village and continued on to the next. The next day as we were walking we met others who told us that the previous night the Russians had occupied the village that we had considered staying in. To us this was a sure sign that God was with us.

Our trek out of Russia to our final destination of Steinbach, Manitoba, was fraught with fear, uncertainty and often indecision. However, the hardships we endured and the people we met who were often as desolate as we were, taught us a reliance on God and proved to be the best school that we could have attended. We learned to know God in a very personal way that I believe I wouldn't have been able to if we had not had such difficult times.

Conclusion.

In Hoxter we contacted the MCC and let them know that we wanted to emigrate to Paraguay. We felt that Paraguay was our best chance of staying out of the hands of the Russians. We were still concerned with the thought

that we might be sent back to Russia. At this time my sister, who lived in Friedensfeld, wrote that we shouldn't go to Paraguay but come to Canada instead. My sister's family was poor and they couldn't sponsor our journey to Canada but they found a Mr. Jacob Loewen who would sponsor us.

In 1948 we arrived in Canada and we moved to "Plattenhof", Blumenort, Manitoba, a community owned by Jacob R. Plett and his brother George. My husband worked in the box factory and in the blacksmith shop. We rented a house for \$10 a month until we were able to buy our own house several years later.

The trip from Germany to Canada had cost us \$800 and we repayed it by working during the day and during summer evenings we worked

in the beet fields as well. After our debt for the journey was paid for we found sponsors for my husband's brother Peter and his family.

In Canada we have had a good life and have been able to live with others of the Mennonite culture. Our flight taught us many things including a strong belief in God and in helping others because we received so much help along the way. When we arrived in Canada a doctor, on hearing about some of our experiences told me that it would take 40 years before I would be able to forget some of the horrible things I had endured, the terror I had felt, the feelings of despair, the emotional traumas I had gone through.

God has always been with me and I know He is beside me now and has helped to heal the scars.

The Red Cow

"The Red Cow", excerpt from J. B. Toews, *Perilous Journeys* (see book review section), pages 14-15.

One of the most horrible aspects of the Mennonite experience in Soviet Russia were the cattle trains in which deportees and prisoners were transported to their places of exile and imprisonment behind the Urals. At some point almost all of the 100,000 Mennonites in Soviet Russia made such a journey. In his book, *Perilous Journeys* by J. B. Toews, writes about this experience:

"First the imprisonment, the interrogation, the sentence and the final journey into exile. Then came the transfer from prison to the 'red cows'. The prisoner was stripped, clothing and suitcases were searched for valuables or possible escape conveyances, then he joined the others in the prison courtyard. Under cover of darkness the prisoner and perhaps a thousand compatriots marched through deserted city streets to the waiting cars. They were now part of a convoy, accompanied by callous guards with rifles, machine guns and dogs. Already the continuous crowding, the prodding, the inhumane shouting began.

"The red cow, which would be the prisoner's new home for weeks or even months, offered little refuge from the prevailing brutality. Thieves and criminals in the same car meant the best bunks were spoken for and the best food appropriated. It meant sitting far from the warm stove and the inevitable loss of good clothing or other valuables. Even Berg, who inadvertently established a "most favored relationship" with the thieves in his car parted with the money his sister had sewn into his coat. "Anti-Christ" was cordial and even jovial about the fact that they (the thieves) simply needed his money for tobacco. These were the unwritten laws which governed life in the "Red Cow".

"Prison car existence was further brutalized by the utter disregard convoy guards demonstrated in matters pertaining to prisoner comfort. The wooden box which housed them offered little protection against the summer heat or the winter cold. An overwhelming de-



"The Red Cow." The cattle cars were painted red, hence the name. Most of the 100,000 Mennonites in Soviet Russia at some point experienced the sub-human cattle car trains shipping deportees and prisoners to the far East. Of the 35,000 that survived the "Great Trek", 23,000 were repatriated by the Allies to the Soviets and shipped away to the east. This photo shows a more fortunate group leaving for the west in 1921/22. Photo courtesy Horst Gerlad, *Zur Geschichte der Mennoniten* (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 85.

mand for prison cars meant that some were improperly sealed or lacked a stove and bunks. At best toilets consisted of a hole cut into the floor or the presence of a foul smelling pot in the corner. Crowded conditions meant any kind of privacy was out of the question. Water or regular meals were often not viewed as an absolute necessity...."

"The red trains had no known destination, at least for the prisoners. Only the changing landscape suggested the direction of travel. When the train finally stopped another often more grueling world emerged. Sometimes it meant a transfer to the freight barges of Russia's massive rivers, whose journey northward was the last one before freeze-up. Their holds, reminiscent of

the slave ships of old, were even more confining and claustrophobic than the railway cars. Other shocks awaited the prisoner upon reaching the camp destination: the existing buildings could not house all the prisoners; the facility was only partially constructed; the barracks were yet to be built; the camp was located a great distance from the station and so the inadequately clothed and shoed prisoners were forced to march through snow covered woods in sub-zero temperatures. Some sat around bonfires under the open sky, some lived in tents, others occupied buildings devoid of cooking and eating facilities as well as bunks. Now, the day to day struggle for long-term survival began."

Suse and Hans Wiens

The story of Suse and Hans Wiens, Steinbach, Manitoba, and their flight to freedom 1939 to 1947, as told by Pastor Paul Dyck in the Steinbach Mennonite Church, Loewen Blvd., Steinbach, Manitoba, October 11, 1998.

Hans: We share our story as a testimony of God's grace to us. We share it as a way of giving God honor and praise for how wonderfully we were led and protected through very difficult years. We did not deserve to survive or be spared any more than others, many of whom didn't survive and weren't spared.

But by God's grace we are here; and we thank God for it, with all our heart.

Suse: We were married on September 12, 1939, in my home in Gnadenfeld in the Ukraine. We were young and in love, and very happy with each other, but we knew we lived in difficult and dangerous times.

“Four women and four children in the midst of a brutal war.”

The churches had been closed for six years already. Many of the men had been taken by then, including both of our fathers. Later in 1940 my brother was also taken away. We never heard from them again.

Our honeymoon was going together on one bicycle to the train station 18 km away, with our few belongings. The train took us to Hans' home in Chortitza where we would live with his mother and three other families in the house. We shared one kitchen and got along very well. My mother-in-law was very good to me.

Hans: In May of 1941 I got drafted into the Russian work army, or construction army. We

were taken about 1,000 miles away, close to the Polish (German) border, to build an airport. There were 2,000 from the work army plus 2000 other laborers building this airport. We were living and working in difficult conditions and a few of our Mennonite young men talked about wanting to escape and then find their way back home. I was against that idea. I felt God was keeping us safe here and it would be wrong for us to leave. We all stayed and we all survived.

Suse: It was so very hard to be apart. One day a man showed up in town. He had also been drafted into the work army but escaped and came back home. I began to wish Hans would do that too; but then after a few days this man was gone, and I was so glad it wasn't Hans. The war started about one month after Hans was drafted on June 21, 1941. After that I didn't get any letters from Hans. It was very difficult but I did not give up on seeing him again, even though it often seemed there was little hope. God was with me. When I think back, I just have to praise God who was with me and gave me the strength.

The war was coming closer and closer to our home. Soon the Russians began evacuating the German people like us, to Siberia. We were scheduled/ordered to leave on Monday August 19. Some of the Russian soldiers retreating through our town told us to just sit tight if we could, the Germans would soon be here.

On Sunday, August 18, one day before we would be forced to leave, the Germans cap-

tured Chortitza. For the next few weeks we lived in a neighbor's cellar with a few other families while the battle raged across the Dnieper River. One night, Aunt Mary's cousin was killed by shrapnel flying through the window. After the Germans drove the Russians further back, life settled down. We were allowed to reopen the churches that the Communists had closed in 1933. We were very happy to go to church on Sunday, but I had no idea where my Hans was.

Hans: Our airport never got finished. We were pushed back as soon as the war started. Our



August 28, 1944. Suse and Hans Wiens with daughter Erika and Suse's mother, Anna Janzen. Erika died November 21, 1944, during "the trek".

job then was to dig defensive positions. They didn't really get used either; the Russian retreat was so fast. Then one day we were surrounded by the Germans. I quickly hid. I knew my group leader had it in for me because I was German. He called for me. He told others how he would shoot me in front of them before we were captured. God kept me safe.

After we were captured I become an interpreter. I wasn't good enough for headquarters staff so they assigned me to a Junior officer, on the kitchen staff. I moved into his room. Naively assuming that all Germans were Christians, I thought we would pray together. That first night, I said so to him. He said he hadn't



1944. Refugees in camp in Eastern Germany, near the city of Prussisch Stangard, west of Danzig (now Gdansk). "Oma" Mrs. Anna Janzen is baking pancakes: see "x" at middle right hand side of photograph. Photos for this article are courtesy of Suse and Hans Wiens, Box 14, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

prayed since being a boy. I knelt by the bed and prayed alone. I was treated well, and eventually was trusted. One of the officers even called me, "my son Hans."

I had no idea where Susie was, and what the war had done to her and our families. After some time I got enough courage to ask to be released to go home.

Thankfully I was given permission to leave. I began the long walk home; not knowing what would greet me when I got there. I walked in hope.

Only at the outskirts of my home town, when I met someone familiar, did I hear that Suse was safe and still there. Then I had to wait till evening to see her because she was at a teacher's conference. Imagine the joy of our reunion. We had been separated for seven months.

Suse: Some time later they brought two orphan girls to our town. One was about two years-old and many were willing to care for her. The other was six years-old and we were asked if we would adopt her. She had seen and suffered much, she was very withdrawn. We think she may have been Jewish. We thought about it, and the next day accepted her as our daughter.

We named her Erika and loved her very much.

Hans: The tide of the war changed. The Germans were being pushed back toward us. On October 3, 1943 they evacuated us to go to Germany. 2,000 of us were loaded onto a freight train and headed west. It was a two-week trip, sometimes we were shot at by guerrillas, but we all made it. There we lived in barracks, 24 to a room, blankets served as walls between neighbors. Meals were served a few blocks

"We hid from soldiers who were raping women."

away; there were always line-ups. I was sent to work in another city and only came home twice a month. In the summer of 1944 we were transferred to Poland, and Suse and I could be together again, but only for a short while.

Suse: On August 28, 1944, they took Hans into the German army, and our greatest and most difficult experiences began. We were separated for two years. Most of the time Erika and I were together with my mother, my sister-in-law whose name is also Suse, and her mother (my mother-in-law). My sister-in-law had two children, and before they took her husband into the army she was expecting another child.

Four women and four children in the midst of a brutal war. God helped us through. During (and later after) the war, our great goal was always to get away from the Russians and toward the safety and freedom of the west. Many times it seemed we wouldn't make it. Many times others discouraged us saying it was hopeless. But God was gracious to us.

All along I had no idea what was happening



To safety in Canada, 1947, November 15. Welcome on McDermot Avenue, Winnipeg, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jakob Friesen. Rear: l. to r.: Jakob Friesen and Peter Thiessen; middle: unidentified and Mrs. Sarah Friesen who died October 1, 1998, at the Concordia Hospital; front row: Hans Wiens and Suse Wiens with daughter Elfrieda, mother Mrs. Anna Janzen, and Mrs. Tina Thiessen. Mr. and Mrs. Thiessen were the parents of Winnipeg lawyer Walter Thiessen, Steinbach funeral director John Thiessen, and insurance broker Peter Thiessen, Winnipeg.

to Hans. In January 1945, I got an appendix attack. We were trying to flee further west, but I needed an emergency operation. When I woke up after the operation, I heard bombs falling. I saw no Doctor but my mother and sister-in-law came to see me and said good-bye; they had to flee; the Russians were very close. Some hours later the hospital was evacuated, I was loaded in an ambulance, then waited outside on a stretcher in the bitter January cold to be put on a train.

After three days on the train we got to another hospital. I had fever and infection, but could recover there for two weeks, but then the front was close again and we had to move again.

This time they released me from the hospital and told me to go to the refugee camp to leave on the train with the other refugees. When I got to the camp all the people were already gone, now I was really completely alone. A little boy helped me carry my little suitcase to the train station. It was just two weeks since my operation and hard for me to walk on the snow and ice.

Once we got to the station, we saw the train was ready to leave. But it was packed. I went from one train car to the next but couldn't get on. There was no room for me anywhere. Finally one woman saw how exhausted I was. She reached her arm to me, and took me up into that loaded train car. She was an angel to me.

Six weeks later I was able to find my mom and the others, they ended up being not far from where I was brought to.

At the end of the war we were in a forest in what became Czechoslovakia.

German soldiers were fleeing past us. In a few hours the Russians were there. Shortly after we heard the Russians had occupied the city and the war was over - May 8, 1945.

Here we were in the Russian zone, two woman with our mothers and children, and my sister-in-law was expecting another child in a couple of months. And God was with us too. It took us seven months to get to the English zone.

We went by train and we walked. We stopped to work and gain strength and then traveled on. We stopped and waited for the baby to be born (he is now an electrical engi-

"We got separated on trains, we found each other again,..."

neer in Saskatoon), and traveled on.

We hid from soldiers who were raping women. We slept on floors, in railway stations, under a bridge, in bombed out buildings, in refugee stations, with those who would take us in.

We stood in line for days and through the night, we traded with our cigarette ration cards, we prayed and we kept on.

We got separated on trains, we found each other again, we almost left my four year-old niece behind at one train station, but the conductor heard our screams and managed to toss her in just as the train was leaving (she lives in Winnipeg now).

And we lost our Erika. She died of meningitis. She had accepted Jesus before she became sick. She died in a hospital 6 km away from where we were staying. I prayed and I cried. She was with the Lord. When in danger she often quoted Psalm 118:6, "The Lord is with me. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me."

I hired a German priest, and we had a little funeral.

We had very difficult times. No one can

understand it unless they have been in a similar situation. But we also made it out to the west. Finally we got tickets for what they told us was the last train to the border. After the train let us off we walked the last few kilometers to the actual border crossing. The gate was open; my mother-in-law with one of the children made it through the checkpoint.

But when it was our turn in line the gate went down. We protested, said that was our mother and child that had gone to the other side. But the guard just said, they all say that. We should go to a Russian camp and come back tomorrow. We knew that would be dangerous for us. My sister-in-law took off her watch and gave it to the guard. He let us through. This journey took us seven months. We had a most wonderful welcome on the other side.

The English soldiers loaded us onto trucks and brought us to the camp at Friesland. There were thousands of people there. They gave us bread and raw hamburger meat. We spread the meat on our bread and ate it. It was a most wonderful meal. We were so happy and thankful. But we had no place to go; no home no address to go to in Germany, and I had no clue at all about what had happened to Hans.

One day there was an announcement at the

“My sister-in-law took off her watch and gave it to the guard. He let us through.”

camp. All those who had no place to go should report to a certain place at camp. We went, and got sent to a good place to stay. We began to work and search for our husbands.

We searched for any Mennonites, searched through refugee books and searched with the Red Cross. In our searching we made connections with a Dr. Benjamin Unruh. He was a man who had connections.

Hans: The end of the war found me in a prisoner of war camp in France; thousands of us surrounded by barbed wire. We lived off of one cup of food per day. When the Doctor saw me he thought I must be about 45 years old. I told him I was only 27. He checked my teeth to see if I might be telling the truth. Eventually I got into the prison wood-working shop, and became supervisor of 50 other wood workers.

Then I even got to work, and eat outside of the prison camp, even though I was still a prisoner. That was very good for me and I gained back my weight and strength. Our prison camp conditions got better when Eisenhower became President.

One day another prisoner came to look me up. He was the prison's tent inspector, he saw my name on a list somewhere and he came to find me. His name was Wiens as well. I didn't know him, but I recognized the name, and then realized I had heard about him back home. I asked him if any other Mennonites survived the war. He assured me they had. He even had connections on the outside. He had a father

living in Munich, and was also in touch with others including a Dr. Benjamin Unruh.

Finally the day for my release from prison approached. 2,000 were to be released; arrangements had been made for me to be released to my friend Wiens' father in Munich. Two days before my release from prison I got a letter from Susie telling me where she and the others were.

The connection had been made through Dr. Unruh. Can you imagine my excitement? I fanagled a ticket change to my new destination. And on August 28, 1946, at about 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon, I found myself on the doorstep of the house where my Suse was living.

It was two years to the day, and to the hour, since we had seen each other. It would take us another year to get to Canada. Before that year was over our first born daughter,

Elfrieda was born to us.

On November 15, 1947 we came to Canada; to this country that has been such a wonderful home for us, for our family.

God has been so gracious to us. I have often been humbled by that generous grace given us. Why were we spared and saved and others not. It has made me think that God has a purpose for me and my life. That purpose is to serve God, to follow Christ, to build in the Kingdom of God.

That's why I share this story as my testimony. It is to share my faith and to give thanks to our Almighty God for the abounding love mercy and grace he has blessed us with.

We are also grateful to the Peter Thiessen family for sponsoring us, by making it possible for us to come to Canada. That was an act of love to us.



Life in the concentration camp. A work brigade usually consisted of 30 men or women. Many perished during their imprisonment. Here a work brigade is being marched off to work in the forest. Photo courtesy Horst Gerlach, Zur Geschichte der Mennoniten (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 163.



Mennonites in the Gulag had to worship in secret in fear of severe punishment and even death if discovered. This scene shows a group of Mennonite men meeting for Bible study in a labour camp. The guard is checking at the door. Drawing by Ernst Dyck, Neuwied (1976). Photo courtesy Horst Gerlach, Zur Geschichte der Mennoniten (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 94.

Frank Dyck and the Zaporozhe Church

“The Day of My Father’s Execution and the Mennonite Church in Zaphorozhe,” by Frank Dyck, 330032 Ukraine, Zaporozhye, St. Medvedeva 5-26.

Introduction.

When Delbert Plett led a group of Mennonites in May, 1998, I met him for the first time. I had talked with him by phone and had read “Preservings”. It was our (Nettie’s and mine) privilege to go along with the group and learn from D. Plett some new things about Mennonites in Ukraine.

During our brief acquaintance Delbert asked us to write up my story for “Preservings”. Even though time is at a premium here, I promised I would really try. So here it is.

Birth, 1927.

July 11, 1927, was the day when I appeared in Felsenbach, Dnepropetrowskaja Oblast. My childhood up to 10 years of age was happy if I discount the hard times economically in the early thirties. The garden made up for the dirt road, etc. I had friends; I enjoyed school.

Mother was my greatest and best teacher though. She started early. When we had planted the garden in spring, she would say: “All this is in vain if God does not give his blessing”. Before I started school mother said: “Children read the Bible and then compare what your teachers say with what the Bible says”. I have found that a good recipe for life. I read the Bible and found amazing things in it.

One day I prayed: “Lord, if I go to those hills and you give me a rabbit I’ll sacrifice that to you”.

At 10 years I made a New Year’s resolution to read through the Bible so I would find out where God was. Many stories like the story of Abraham intrigued me. About 2 kms from the end of our village were three hills. We’d go there at times. Since there were no trees in the area only rabbits and small rodents lived there.

One day I prayed: “Lord, if I go to those hills and you give me a rabbit I’ll sacrifice that to you”. As I read on I learned about Jesus our sacrifice--the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. I appropriated that for me personally at the age of 10.

Father’s Execution, 1937.

About that time my father was taken one unforgettable night never to come home again. As father was feeding horses at the time he and five other men were standing around a pile of green feed. I stood close by as the sun was setting.

At midnight there was a knock at our window.

Father asked in Russian, “who is there?”

The answer came, “Your own, open the door!”

He did.

The NKVD came and searched the house.



Anna and Isaak Dyck family photograph, 1926. L. to r.: mother Anna Sawatzky Dyck (1901-81), born Felsenbach, Borosenko, Imperial Russia, died Espelkamp, Germany; Heinz Dyck born 1925; Jakob Dyck, born 1924, and father Isaak Dyck born 1898 in Felsenbach and died 1938, executed by the Soviets. Father was elected as a minister on February 8, 1928, in Felsenbach and ordained in 1929 by Aeltester Jakob Rempel.

They took father’s Bible, fly poison and a piece of Blau-stein.

In the morning I learned that all those other men standing around the green feed were missing. It shocked me. My cousin in the Ukraine tells me that our fathers were taken the same night--hers in Felsenbach and mine in Nikolaithal. Both were shot to death.

The Trek.

In fall of 1943, we were asked or told to get ready and leave all but what we could take along and go West. The never-to-be forgotten trek West--on foot, horse back and/or hayrack lasted from October 23, 1943 till Christmas where we had a break.

Cutting fire wood with a box saw, I hurt one of my fingers. The wound was long in healing so the bandages had to be changed frequently.

My 13 year-old sister went to wash the bandages on the lake where there was a hole in the ice. She slipped into the hole and there was no one in sight. By the time she managed to get out on her own and to where we lived, she was so chilled through that she contracted pneumonia and never recovered.

Just this week, on our way to Cherkassie, I saw the road sign of Medvedewka and recalled



Anna Sawatzky Dyck, heroine of World War Two. Anna and millions of women like her suffered the brutal consequences of war. This photograph was taken on “the trek” in Hillarkhof in Warthegau, Germany, on the occasion of Anna’s 43rd birthday. The bouquet of flowers, left, was a gift from her friend Line Kl.



1945. The Dyck family was repatriated to Siberia by the Allies. L. to r: Anna Sawatzky Dyck (1901-81), Peter Dyck (b. 1932), Abram Dyck (b. 1929), Dietrich Dyck (b. 1935) and Gerhard Dyck (b. 1937). It was a 6,000 mile journey in boxcars. Photographs for this article are courtesy of son Jakob Dyck, 504-1850 Henderson Hwy, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2G 1P2. He is the father of Paul Dyck, pastor of the Steinbach Mennonite Church.

that sad experience. The stretch from Medvedewka to Jarochin, Poland, we rode in a cattle box car. It was in Jarochin where my sister died after a brief hospital stay.

In Jarochin I had to join the RAD and did not meet my mother again until she came to Canada in 1975. We, the oldest three, had found each other in Western Germany and had gone to Canada.

The younger four brothers with mother were talked into going back to Russia. Instead of being taken to our village as promised, they were taken to the Taiga in Ivanowskaja Oblast where they had to work in the forest. Once they could move around, they moved to Karaganda and then to Estland and from there to Germany where they still are except for mother who died in 1981.

At midnight there was a knock at our window. Father asked in Russian, "who is there?"

The answer came, "Your own, open the door!"

Canada, 1948.

I, together with my oldest brother, was fortunate enough to go to Canada as a farm hand in 1948. Heinz, the second oldest, followed six months later. After I had worked for one year on the farm, I moved to Rosemary and from there in three months to Coaldale where I attended Bible school. From there I went to Three Hills Bible School where I felt the urge to go back to the country of my birth. However, it didn't happen at the time.

So I married Nettie Rempel from Coaldale

and went to Winnipeg Bible College and then to Tabor College. Having finished both, I started to pastor two churches in northern Saskatchewan, went to Edmonton for my teacher's certificate and started to teach in southern Alberta. Soon I was both teaching school and pastoring the local Church of Christ congregation.

Soon I transferred to Lethbridge and then to Calgary where our seventh child was born. I finished my M.Ed. and taught until I had age and service equals 85. By this time all seven of our children were married.

[Lithuania] A tense night and day followed. We were asked to pack and leave in the morning.

Germany.

Nettie and I had talked over the years about doing our own thing after the children were all raised and married. The Lord led us in our thinking and shaped circumstances so that we left as early-retirees with MBM/S for western Germany. Having finished a three year term and together with another young couple started a church, we wanted to go back after our furlough but were asked to go to Lithuania for six months instead. We started English services with teachers of English and their students. It was no less exciting than Germany had been.

When we were still in Germany, we witnessed the Berlin Wall fall. To be there when this happened without bloodshed was special. After we had left for Lithuania, a friend of mine has said to our son David, "Your Dad got the Berlin Wall down and now he'll remove the Iron

Curtain".

Interestingly enough, I had said I would not leave Germany until the Wall was down. It actually happened without my efforts but not without my prayers.

Lithuania.

However, we had just been in Lithuania for a week when the Gorbachev Putsch occurred. We were in our hotel room unpacking, oblivious to what had happened, until one of the teachers came into our room and asked how we were doing. She was flustered and broke the news to us.

A tense night and day followed. We were asked to pack and leave in the morning. Then the instructions changed. However, Nettie and I agreed we believed God wanted us in Lithuania and we would stay.

How happy we were for that decision after the brief crisis was over. We had proved to the people we loved them more than our lives and we had won their confidence. For many we were the first Westerners they had ever seen and met. We were welcomed at universities, in schools, even at the T.V. station. I was asked to pray over T.V. for Lithuanian youth. When we left 10 months later, there were over 60 in our English Sunday morning services with a goodly number having made a decision for Christ.

In 1996, on our brief visit to Panevezys, the university professor who was asked to introduce me at the Sunday morning service said, "What shall I say, Frank and Nettie are the beginning of our church!" and sat down.



Frank and Nettie Dyck, Zaporozhe, May 12, 1998. They are the pastoral couple of the Zaporozhe Mennonite Church. Photo by Martha Penner, R.R.1, Box 7, Grp 2, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.



Anna Sawatzky Dyck (1901-81) with her family in Espelkamp, Germany, Christmas, 1981. L. to r: Peter and Leni Dyck, Franz and Netti Dyck, Abram and Maria Dyck, mother Anna Sawatzky Dyck, Gerhard and Lydia Dyck, Dietrich and Tina Dyck, and Jakob and Margaret Dyck. Mother died on February 24, 1981, in Espelkamp.

Zaporozhye, 1993.

In February of 1993, we left for Zaporozhye with ECM.

Before we left I had briefly told in one of our churches in Calgary about my childhood dream of going to the hills and offering a a rabbit and said, "When we get there I want to go to those hills and tell the Lord: "I know you don't want an animal sacrifice like sheep or rabbits. I have

[Zaporozhye] Nettie and I went up the big hill and bowed...."Lord, it is me you want, not the deer or the rabbit, I have come to do whatever you want..."

come to do your will gladly, O my God".

When we got to the hills there was now a shelter belt passing those hills which was new to me. We drove up to the hills and walked through the shelter belt only to see a big deer skipping from the biggest hill and a big rabbit from the middle sized hill. Nettie and I went up the big hill and bowed in prayer saying, "Lord, it is me you want, not the deer or the rabbit and I have come to do whatever you want me to".

There has never been a want of something to do: teaching in school, preaching, visiting churches and all the schools in the Oblast (918 all together) with Bibles and N.T. (distributing over 100,000), and being part of starting a Bible college and a church.

The Chairman of the Weidergeburt Gesellschaft in Zaporozhye asked me to help the Mennonites start a service.

I asked, "how can I help?"

He said, "You get ready for the Sunday service next Sunday and I'll get the people there."

August 7, 1994 was our first service, with

34 present, held in the centre (scantuary) of the Association. We have had continuous services until we left in 1995 in December. The doctor had told us to stay for a while when we come home next time.

We had asked COM for a permanent worker, for that reason I had refused to baptize those who were saved, except for three, one of which wanted to be baptized before she died.

The Kehlers and Rempels filled in for us. In March of 1997 we returned to Zaporozhye as COM affiliates--not by our request.

In 1997, 25 accepted baptism and joined the church. It was a privilege to introduce them to Christ and see them join the church.

During 1996 we visited Palestine, our points in Europe where we had been and spent four months in Omsk.

Already in 1995 we had officially asked the government to return the old Chortitza Mennonite Church which more than likely has additions on three sides. It seems to be a building that could be made into a multi-purpose centre for Mennonites worldwide. The second request has also been refused. In the meantime we are having our Sunday services in a school auditorium. With Canadian visitors we were 83 on August 9, 1998.

Another interesting development has come about with the visit of Dr. George Schroeder, formerly of Steinbach. As he came to the abandoned old Mennonite church building in Kutuzowka, he wept. It was the church in which his grandfather had preached and where his parents had been married. Now it is unused and deteriorating.

We visited the government officials at all levels. They have told us that they are willing to return that church if a local group registers and requests the return of that building for the use of its original design. We have held regular meetings on Sunday afternoons since early July in

the club house, and have had up to 120.

On August 21, 1998, we were officially registered. I was told that within the month of September we could get the documents of the returned Mennonite church building. The Zaporozhye church council has asked us to stay with it until we leave in December even though the Unrau's are to arrive on the 10th of September. They have come for a four or five year term.

We plan to return to Zaporozhye in January and work with the churches in Kutuzowka as well as in Bible college etc. We hope to restore the old Mennonite church building and find called out ones to worship in that building.

Quite a challenge!

Money is being gathered in Canada and USA for the renovations. Donations can be sent for tax deductible receipts to ECM Inc. 226, 1077-56 St. Delta, BC, Canada, V4L 2A2 or ECM E.O. Box 1006 Pt.Roberts, WA, USA, 98281.

[Zaporozhye] We hope to restore the old Mennonite church building and find called out ones to worship in that building.

The Challenge.

I think now if we get that church indeed, get it nicely restored and get a group of believers to use it, I will be ready to retire. If you can and are willing to help with the project please write us: 330032 Ukraine, Zaporozhye, St. Medvedeva 5-26

Editor's Note: The story of Frank Dyck and the execution of his father is of particular interest as it takes place in Borosenko, a settlement founded by the Kleine Gemeinde in 1865. The Kleine Gemeinde settled 10 villages in the area while Old Colony settlers from Chortitza settled the villages of Eichengrund, Rosenthal, Nikolaithal, Schöndorf and Ebenfeld. When the Kleine Gemeinde emigrated to North America in 1874-75, most of their villages, except Annafeld (Felsenbach?) and possibly Rosenfeld (?). were sold to Old Colony people.

Notice to Subscribers

The annual HSHS membership/subscription fee for *Preservings* has been increased to \$20.00 effective January 1, 1998. This increase is made with the intention of bringing the subscription/membership fee into line with printing, production and mailing costs of our news-magazine.

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society **Annual Meeting- Jan. 23, 1999**

Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) and Banquet of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

DATE: Saturday, January 23, 1999

PLACE: Mennonite Village Museum, Hwy 12 North, Steinbach

5:00 p.m. BUSINESS MEETING - The H.S.H.S. will hold its Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) membership and business meeting, election of directors, President's report, financial statement, etc. Attendance at the A.G.M. is free. All members are encouraged to attend.

Banquet and Entertainment

6:00 p.m. RECEPTION - Come early. Enjoy the punch and get acquainted!

6:30 p.m. BANQUET - Enjoy a traditional Mennonite meal of ham, farmer sausage, Verenike, fried potatoes, catered by the Museum Auxiliary. Supper will be served in the Museum "Exhibition Hall."

7:45 p.m. SPEAKER - Dr. Harvey L. Dyck, University of Toronto, will present a paper, "The Gates of Hell - Apocalypse Now!" Dr. Dyck will speak about recent discoveries in NKVD archives of Soviet Russia. Were Mennonites targeted for extinction?

8:30 Break

8:45 ENTERTAINMENT: The fabulous "Heischraitje & Willa Honich" have entertained 10s of 1000s across North America with their lively country blue-grass stylings and "Flat German" humour. The "Heischraitje" are among the best entertainers in Manitoba. Come and hear them perform. Entertainment at it best.



Dr. Harvey L. Dyck, speaks about Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno.



The fabulous "Heischraitje & Willa Honich". Left to right: Gerald and Dennis ("Deeno") Reimer, Grant Plett, Ray and Pat Plett. Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 20.

Tickets \$20.00

\$20.00 per ticket includes banquet and entertainment. Come out, meet your friends, and enjoy a fabulous evening. The entertainment deal of the year!

President's Report

Recently I had the opportunity to attend a memorial service commemorating the memory of those who died or went missing during the years of what Dr Harvey Dyck calls the Soviet Inferno (1917 - 1956). As someone with a fairly keen interest in Mennonite history I thought I had a good grasp of what happened to our people during the Russian-Soviet periods.

Dr. Dyck had divided the intense suffering and terror into six time periods giving an overview of the number arrested, executed, or exiled to the north.

What really struck me was when two letters of relatives of people I knew were read, giving a first hand account of what happened in a certain

village to certain persons on a particular day. I was very touched by the reading of the 120 names of a brother, sister, father, mother, aunt, uncle, grandfather, grandmother, husband or wife of someone in this congregation who was arrested and never heard from again, or was executed.

I think that for most of us many events take on more meaning when brought down to a personal level. It is the aim of the Hanover-Steinbach Historical Society to seek out and publish letters, diaries and writings that will help us to better understand our Mennonite mosaic. For this we depend on you our readers to come forward with information and documents.



*Orlando Hiebert,
President of
the Hanover
Steinbach
Historical
Society*

Editorial

D. Plett, Editor

The Soviet Inferno.

In this issue we feature an article Professor Harvey L. Dyck, University of Toronto, about the Mennonite experience within the Soviet inferno. Like Indiana Jones and his "Raiders of the Lost Ark" Dr. Dyck has travelled to the FSU (Former Soviet Union), including Russia and Ukraine, some 18 times scouring archives in Petersburg, Moscow, Zaporozhe and elsewhere in search of primary source material documenting the unspeakable suffering of Mennonites, mainly because of their faith.

By his dedicated research, Dr. Dyck has performed a great service for his community. For all these reasons, it is important that we recognize and encourage the research of Dr. Harvey Dyck, Dr. Harry Loewen, Colin Neufeldt, Peter Letkeman and others like them.

Even though their work may sometimes be controversial, they have dedicated their lives to a noble task, the preservation of the story of a people, our people. Unlike poetry condemning Canadian ethnic groups, such work does not qualify for Canada Council Grants and must invariably be undertaken by someone willing to donate their own time and expertise, which these individuals have done without reservation and for this we should all be thankful.

The story of the Mennonites in the Soviet inferno should be particularly gripping to descendants of the 1874 pioneers, whose 125th anniversary we are celebrating in 1999. Certainly many of the "48-ers", "Aussiedlers" and other survivors of the Soviet Inferno, were much closer to the "Kanadier" in terms of their spiritual ethos than the "Russländer" ever were--a commonality and dynamic in need of further study and analysis.

Cultural Pride.

The opposite of cultural pride is cultural suicide. The New Testament church quickly

developed a particular religious culture and language. For Mennonites as with any religious confession more than a decade old, faith and culture are inseparably intertwined. Those who deny this fact, either have "ostrich" syndrome, or ulterior motives in the sense that they are probably attempting to import their own religious culture of choice by denigrating Mennonite religious culture, a strategy commonly used by American Fundamentalists in the 1940s and 50s.

It is unfortunate when church memorial and anniversary services start with an apologetic "We should not become proud of our heritage...which is a sin" and then go on to describe the event being memorialized. Every anniversary or memorial event should start with the unequivocal words, "We are proud of our heritage,...as mandated by scripture" for it represents the unfolding of Divine Will working in our lives (through our ancestors) and speaking through our history.

And please, don't assume I am advocating we are better than others, only that we should be proud of who we are. "I am's who I am," Pop-eye used to say. We are who we are, birthed into our particular place in the universe at a particular point in time.

It's the only history and heritage we'll ever have, so why not be proud of it? You can go through life with a negative attitude or positive, it's all for the same price.

It is unfortunate that our churches are so reticence to inform their parishioners and particularly young people about their history, faith and culture. Instead, some of our Sunday Schools feed their students a steady diet of so-called Evangelical religious culture, largely based on Calvinist triumphalism.

What would be so horrible about examples from our own history and faith being used in worship services, instead of drawing on the "pop" religious culture and its "sun-belt" gurus for inspiration?

Do our people not deserve to know about Pieter Pieters, P. J. Twisck, Georg Hansen, Hans von Steen, Gerhard Wiebe, Klaas Reimer, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, Maria Stoesz Klassen, and thousands of others?

In a sermon preached at the Mennonite Heritage Village Sunday, August 2, 1998, Conrad Stoesz stated, "To deny our history is to deny God's presence in our lives." See special guest editorial essay in this issue.

It is important that we have an historical sense of who we are and our own history. But it is equally important to have a sense of the history of our people, which should not be limited to our own particular place in the world. If our relatives and co-religionists in the Soviet Union experienced tragedy and devastation we should all weep with them. At the same time, those who came from Russia later--in the '20s and '40s, should also take personal pride in something like the 125th anniversary of Mennonites in Manitoba. These differences in our historical journeys make us richer and more interesting as a people. We draw strengths and good points from the various groups, each contributing a vital part to the whole.

Separation.

It seems to be standard advice for those experiencing the trauma of death, divorce and/or separation, to seek out and rediscover old comfortable experiences and friends. After 23 years of marriage, I too am in this situation and so, took it as sound advice, when good friend Jonathan Maendel, Baker Colony, MacGregor, Manitoba, suggested I attend the Hutterian Brethren worship service at Crystal Springs Sunday morning, July 26, 1998.

I enjoyed the sermon on Galatians written in the 16th century and eloquently delivered by Rev. Edward Kleinsasser. I enjoyed the spiritual fellowship at the dinner table and a brisk discussion on Hutterian and Mennonite

history with writer Leo MacAdam and school principal David Kleinsasser.

The Hutterian Brethren are the one conservative Anabaptist group who have successfully applied a communitarian ethos to articulate one of the most impressive growth rates of any modern church group. They have also shown significant leadership among conservative Anabaptist groups in terms of education, adopting the use of computers, live video hook-ups, and university trained teachers.

The issue of education within Anabaptist Mennonite and Hutterian communities has often been controversial. Over the past two centuries, self-styled reformers have typically attempted to hijack the educational system as a tool for importing alien religious culture and language into conservative communities.

In 1821 Johann Cornies founded the Ohrloff Verrein Schule in Russia complete with a teacher who was a fanatical advocate of Separatist Pietism and chiliastic fantasies who taught his students that the faith of their parents was invalid and of the devil. In 1891 Heinrich Ewert (1855-1934) was put in charge of Manitoba Mennonite schools and used the position as a vehicle to advance the cause of secularization and favoured Separatist Pietism, a religious culture not recognized as Biblical by his constituents. During the 1930s and 40s many Mennonites attended Bibles Schools which were advancing the culture of American Fundamentalism and obsessed with massive endtimes chronologies and the Biblical interpretations of Scofield, proven false by the effluxion of time.

Understandably many conservative



A choir of Hutterian young thrilled a standing room only audience at the village church at the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, on Pioneer Day Sunday, August 2, 1998. The young female director explained, "We want to be a light to the world." The 10:30 service was again filled to capacity. The Hutterite choir repeated their splendid performance following which historian Conrad Stoesz inspired everyone with his sermon, "History and Faith": see editorial essay. Photo by Frank Froese, courtesy of Preserving our Heritage, October 1998, page 7.

communities went into a bunker mode regarding education whereby they could protect at least some of their spiritual ethos rather than to be consumed by such foolishness.

Slowly conservative Mennonites are starting to switch from a "retreat and retrench" mode into a proactive stance whereby education is restored to its proper role as a great tool for socializing children and educating them in the faith and social constructs of the community. This also makes young people less vulnerable to proselytizers who seek to turn young people and marginalized adults against their community and families.

I salute our Hutterian brethren and sisters for their courage and foresight in their achievements in this field. Many conservative Mennonite communities throughout North and South America could do well to look at their program and activities as a model.

Vancouver, Oct. 21-26, 1998.

On October 21 to 26, 1998, I visited Vancouver for the first time. I want to thank Henry and Nathalie Schapansky for inviting me into their home and their gracious hospitality. I also thank Harry and Gertrude Loewen, Kelowna, for a lovely supper and Vic and Margaret Doerksen for having me as their night guest. I enjoyed my visit and really learned a lot about B.C. Thanks!

Millennialism.

In *Preservings*, Issue No. 12, June 1998, page 11, I mentioned the possibility of doing a future feature issue focusing on "Millennialism". I was reminded of the topic the other night while browsing "cable TV".

I could not help but notice a program on the religious network run by a certain Jack

van Impe. I had noticed the program several years ago but assumed it was a spoof of TV preachers. Both Mr. van Impe and the lady doing the "dumb blond" routine, seem like characters out of Armin Wiebe's latest novel, *The Second Coming of Yeat Spenst*.

But someone straightened me out. "No", these people were not doing a parody, they were the "real" thing. If that is true they are certainly the phoniest looking TV "Evangelists", making even Manitoba's own Willard Thiessen look genuine.

Evangelicals and Fundamentalists are always whining about a negative image in the media, but with programming like this, how can they expect to be taken seriously? Of course it doesn't help to have hangars full of people lying on the floor in Voodoo-like convulsions, reminiscent of heathen sun worshippers, as seen on the Religious Channel in the so-called Toronto/airport/vineyard "revival" or whatever its called.

Watching Mr. van Impe's program for the 15 seconds it takes to flip by, was enough to catch the glint in his eyes, as he rattled off one seemingly unrelated scripture after another, proving the startling "endtimes" scenario unfolding that particular week. The "blond" crooned in periodically to assure listeners that the great honourable guru was sharing unequivocal proofs of Biblical truth. Van Impe's proof texting of Scriptures was so self-contradictory I could hardly imagine anyone with more than a Grade Four education being taken in.

On July 18, 1998, Mr. van Impe was working the topic of how the European Common Market which at one point had 10 members, was sending soldiers to Yugoslavia. Somehow, to Mr. van Impe's overheated imagination, this



David Kleinsasser, school principal at Crystal Springs Colony, south of Niverville. Photo courtesy of Carillon News, August 24, 1998, Hanover School Division ad. The Crystal Springs school is now operated as part of Hanover School Division.

is tied in with his message of endtimes doom, Deuteronomy 18,20-22.

I am mentioning this, not only because I would encourage people to try to watch this program for at least a few minutes, to see religious broadcasting at its worst, but also because so many Mennonites over the centuries have fallen prey to this type of silliness.

I imagine that Mr. van Impe's endtimes "prophecies" are probably comparable to the fables of Heinrich June-Stilling who prophesied that the Second Coming would occur in Russia in 1833, later revised to 1881. Jung-Stilling's prophecies caught the imagination of many Mennonites during the 19th century and influenced thousands to remain in Russia in 1874 when the opportunity to emigrate presented itself. This demonstrated the foolhardiness of those falling all over themselves to adopt "pop" religious culture, just to be "in" with the "in crowd."

Index.

In Issue 10, I mentioned in my editorial the growing need for an index to the material published in *Preservings* since 1993, almost 1000 pages of material by now. Well, July 17, 1998, I received an answer to prayer. That afternoon Linda Buhler dropped off a copy of the index she had compiled for her own use as each issue was coming out. What a lot of work! We are most thankful that she has decided to share this with us and the readers. Her index will be an invaluable aid to accessing the material in *Preservings* allowing must greater in-depth use, especially for the average reader, lay people and students.

The "Linda Buhler" index will be published as a separate booklet and distributed with the June 1999, Issue 14 of *Preservings*. The index will be suitable for binding with the first 10 issues of *Preservings*. We will repeat the citations for Issues 11 and 12 in the next index we publish--if we can be so presumptuous as to assume that we will manage to complete that many more issues. In that way, Issues 11 to 20 can be bound as a second volume of *Preservings*.

Belize.

I have enjoyed reading the reports of the 40th anniversary celebrations of Spanish Lookout, Belize, held on March 14-15, 1998, as contained in the *Mennonitische Post*, July 3 and 17, 1998. Hopefully these reports will be published in book form to make them available and more accessible to future generations. Congratulations, Kleine Gemeinde of Belize.

Mexico.

The Kleine Gemeinde in Mexico have also celebrated the 50th anniversary of the settlement of Quellen Colony, now known as Jagueyes. The first Kleine Gemeinde settlement in Mexico actually took place with the settlement of two villages, Hoffnungsau and Heuboden, in the Manitoba Plan in 1926.

The July 15, 1998, issue of the *Mexicanische Rundschau* already had several articles about the anniversary events which took place Au-

gust 6-8, 1998. One of these articles seemed worthy of republishing. It was a short statement written by Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949), Neuanlage (Twin creek), Manitoba, on August 5, 1946, endorsing the idea of emigrating to Mexico:

"...In my view the reasons for the move are that pursuant to the law of the land, our former freedom regarding the education of our children had been revoked and that without exception we must now have teachers in these schools who have achieved a certain prescribed standing, a normal certificate and there must be 10 months of school per year. Here our beloved children shall then be taught from age seven to 14 in accordance with the regulations of the government instead of the former freedom granted by our Privilegium whereby we had full autonomy respecting our schools, and where school was to be held for five months of the year and from ages seven to 12. This provided sufficient time, so that in addition to learning reading, writing and arithmetic, the teachings of the Gospel could also be instilled in the children in accordance with our ancient ways. Nor was there any provision [in the Privilegium] whereby our young men were required to provide government service in camps or elsewhere nor to contribute considerable sums in order to pay for the war expenses. Should these privileges again be granted unto us by the Mexican Government, similar to what the Sommerfelder and Old-Colony Mennonites there have already received in writing, I then commit myself with this writing, that I would be in favour of also emigrating there, for the sake of our children and grandchildren, in order that we might again be able to preserve and practice our faith. I trust that God will be able to bless such an undertaking." Signed P. P. Reimer.

We congratulate the Kleine Gemeinde of Jagueyes on their 50th anniversary as well as their splendid picture book, *Quellen Kolony* (Coahuila, Mexico, 1998), 302 pages, commemorating the event, see book review section.

125th Anniversary.

Plans for the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area are progressing well. Enclosed with this mailing the readers will find a booklet, outlining the history of our region, hopefully something that will be of interest to many.

One of the commitments made by the Historical Society was to provide another double issue of *Preservings* in honour of the 125th anniversary. Instead of doing one double issue, issues no. 13 and 14 will be bigger, juicier and larger, 100 to 120 pages instead of what we hope will eventually be a standard 50 to 60 pages. It is hoped that the history booklet can be rewritten and substantially enlarged in the next year or two, to become a solid, footnoted reference work on the history of the Hanover Steinbach area that is so desperately needed. Readers who have pho-

tographs, documents, journals, letters, relevant to our history are asked to contact the editor. Sometimes people are upset or frustrated that the experiences of their family and/or ancestors have not been included in the community history. But if the material is not available it can not be included.

I know also that there are always some people that have one or two important items of primary source material which they will never part with because then they would lose that sense of power of controlling that material. Unfortunately they are thereby selling short their ancestors because their story will not get told.

So please, please, please. We want to make the historical record of the East Reserve as inclusive as possible. I am especially concerned that we obtain more information regarding the Chortitzer Bergthaler families who settled here in 1874-75. We always seem to have more material on the Kleine Gemeinde, partially because that is my background. Naturally I am more familiar with the various Kleine Gemeinde family lines and the names of people interested in that particular history.

The diaspora of Hanover Steinbach, the totality of those people who had once lived here and then moved elsewhere, including all their descendants is estimated to be in the 50,000 range, including practically all the descendants of the Bergthaler Gemeinde. In the course of the various emigrations out of Hanover Steinbach many documents of interest to our history were taken along. We also encourage these people, wherever they might be, to check their private archives for such material.

No family is too unimportant or too insignificant. Please help me and the historical society tell your story.

Please take a few moments, gather your material and call: 1(204)-326-6454, fax 1(204)326-6917.

The Forks, August 1, 1999.

August 1, 1999, is the 125th anniversary to the day, when the first ship load of 65 Mennonite families arrived in Winnipeg, having completed their arduous six week journey from Russia. The contingent was made up of 55 Kleine Gemeinde and 10 Old Colony families, whose descendants included the famed science fiction writer Alfred van Vogt.

The pioneers spent the first day, August 1, in Winnipeg purchasing supplies spending \$20,000 to the delight of local merchants.

Within two weeks the first contingents of Bergthaler arrived, 158 families in total. They came in two groups: the first with 100 families was under the leadership of Rev. Cornelius

Henry Fehr, Steinbach, is binding loose issues of *Preservings* at a cost of \$35.29. Anyone interested may call Henry at 1(204)-326-3775 or write Box 248, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Friesen, and, the second, consisting of 58 families, was under the leadership of Rev. Heinrich Wiebe. According to contemporary records the Bergthaler contingent carried \$38,000.

After a day or two purchasing equipment and supplies in Winnipeg, the immigrants went back up river to the landing site at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers where they disembarked.

Thus all three denominations which came to Manitoba in the 1870s (Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Coloniers) and the two mother colonies (Chortitza and Molotschna) were represented among the first settlers to arrive on August 1, 1874 and shortly thereafter.

Wouldn't it be glorious to hold a morning memorial service at the Forks on Sunday, August 1, 1874, to commemorate this event? Ken Reddig, Winnipeg, advises that the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, will organize such an event. Let's give them our encouragement and support.

There is also talk of an evening with classical singers, folk music, readings and drama at the Concert Hall in Winnipeg, or in some other suitable venue, on Saturday night, July 31. This is the exact anniversary of the arrival of the first group of Mennonites in Winnipeg. Who is interested in helping plan and organize such an event?

Religious Culture.

Every so often media articles relative to culture, history and religion catch my eye as did "125 Years: Celebrate and Reflect" by Terry Smith, editor of *The Messenger*, the magazine of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (Vol. 36, Number 19, Nov. 4, 1998, page 2).

He writes that "The DG [Dutch German] Mennonite Church did not live in Russia to evangelize; battered by persecution it promised the government not to seek converts from the Orthodox faith--an unusual move for Anabaptists."

The statement is incorrect. The Mennonite emigration was articulated by a desire to escape the clutches of a militaristic regime, Prussia. All countries in the 18th century had laws restricting proselytization. The same reasoning could be applied to most other religious groups coming to North America, like the Puritans.

Smith goes on to say, "Except in God's sovereignty, our conference did not enter Manitoba in 1874 because of the great commission."

First of all, this would have been difficult, as the idea of "the great commission" of a world hegemony as we know it today, was only born in Calvinist triumphalist religious culture in the late 19th century. Mr. Smith should not imply that the Kleine Gemeinde was in any way lessor or inferior to other groups, all of which--including Methodists and Revivalists, would be found wanting by this technique of applying religious concepts retroactively to earlier historical periods.

Furthermore, Mr. Smith does not give the

Kleine Gemeinde sufficient credit in making the statements he does. A number of German Colonists (Catholics) did join the Kleine Gemeinde including Michael Makovsky, who suffered imprisonment for his decision in 1827; one of their children died in prison. These people made their decision, not because the KG ran around like fanatical Fundamentalists, but because they lived a genuinely Christian life and piety. As Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Peter Toews once said, "When deeds are speaking, words fall silent."

No doubt Mr. Smith is well aware that no religious denomination in the 19th century came to North America "because of the great commission." In the 17th and 18th century, sea captains, some of whom came from the Calvinist religious tradition, brought millions of slaves to the southern States. Would Mr. Smith also deprecate them and trivialize their experience by saying, "They did not come because of the great commission?"

Mr. Smith further states that "The Kleine Gemeinde was content to carry on the faith of its forefathers interpreted to include a pattern of isolation and inward focus." The same statement could be made about literally every religious group in 19th century North America.

Of course, the Kleine Gemeinde were content to continue the faith of their forefathers. It was a faith baptized in the blood shed of the Reformation and continued through persecution and adversity for four centuries. They came to North America because of their faith, to find a place where they could practice it in peace. The unfolding of history has shown that their faith was more Biblical and as thoroughly Christian as most any other denomination at the time.

Why would Mr. Smith want to imply that they were somehow deficient or inferior for practicing the faith of their forebears?

In fact, if the Kleine Gemeinde can be accused that they were too focused on being the Church of Christ and too preoccupied with living out the precepts of the New Testament church, surely the Fundamentalist/Evangelical religious culture which some people like to promote as superior, can likewise be accused of being too ready and only too happy to compromise truth and twisting of facts, merely to advance its world hegemony agenda.

I for one am deeply offended at the insinuation that my great-grandparents, who left a life of prosperity and security in Russia, for the privations of pioneer life in primitive isolated Manitoba in 1874, were in some way lessor Christians.

Perhaps Mr. Smith might read the articles in this issue about the suffering of Christians in Soviet Russia, and then breath a prayer of thanks together with the descendants of these pioneers. Surely they were led by God to immigrate when they did, and I say this without in any way minimizing or detracting from the story of those suffering in "the Soviet inferno".

We descendants should be grateful for the leading of God in the lives of all Christians, including our ancestors.

In implying that our pioneer forbears were lessor Christians, Mr. Smith seems to be forgetting that in the years just prior to the immigration in 1874, southern Baptist Christians, from whom much of modern-day Fundamentalist/Evangelical religious culture has evolved, were fighting the civil war to protect the institution of slavery. He also seems to be forgetting the spiritual terror often used by Fundamentalist Christians to win adherents to its agenda of world hegemony, which had its roots squarely in the intolerance and bigotry of the Salem witch trials.

I am very uncomfortable with Mr. Smith's idea that the Kleine Gemeinde were practicing a religious culture, and that the Fundamentalist/Evangelical religion which some people are promoting is somehow not a religious culture. Or is he implying that the Kleine Gemeinde or Mennonite religious culture was an inferior religious culture?

I certainly agree with Mr. Smith's concluding comment, "...let's celebrate the church's arrival here. Let us share openly and widely what it means for us to be a church today."

Mennonites in Manitoba, Video.

The video "Mennonites in Manitoba" produced by Prairie Public Television is finally complete. After premiering in Steinbach, Altona and Winnipeg, it was shown on Public T.V. Channel 3, on October 3 and 6th, 1998, with an audience in the thousands. Most viewers that I talked with were quite pleased with the results, with comments like "professionally done", "it made me proud to be a Mennonite."

Of course, everyone will have their pet areas that should have been included. The video did not include much coverage about conservative Mennonites, none of their singing, and too little footage of the geographical enclaves of Mennonites in Manitoba, such as the physical landscape of the R.M.s of Stanley, Reinland and Hanover, the life world of Manitoba Mennonites for the past 125 years. The omission of Neu-Bergthal near Altona, in particular, with eight or so "housebarns" still intact and in use and now declared a national historical site is hardly forgivable. Such footage could have enlivened the presentation, providing visual stimulation and context during some of the longer monologues.

The video made only passing reference to the school question of 1916-27, and hardly mentioned the resulting "exile" of 10,000 Mennonites to Latin America. Nor did it mention our present institutions of higher education.

I agree with our reviewer, John H. Peters, that the inherent problem of the video is that it tried to do two things. It tried to tell the history of the Manitoba Mennonites in a meaningful and interesting way, and also explore some contemporary social issues relevant to the Manitoba Mennonites, like urbanization, feminism, and attitudes towards capital punishment. Quite frankly, as part of the committee securing funding for the project I understood the video was to be a history, and was surprised when it

came out with over half of its content devoted to social issues.

In any case, the video suffers from the results of trying to jam two important projects into a one hour program.

The information regarding womens' roles in traditional Mennonite culture was actually misleading. The interview with Irmgard Baerg, for example, started with the premise that her experience represented that of women in traditional Mennonite society. This is incorrect. Conservative Mennonite women who came to Manitoba in the 1870s were relatively empowered by virtue of managing the household economy, equal inheritance rights, and the safety net of the Gemeinde protecting them from abusive conduct, etc. Many women in these denominations in the 19th century already had maids who did the domestic chores while they managed the dairy, poultry and garden operations.

Irmgard Baerg, in fact, speaks for a later generation during the 1930s and 40s which had earlier been disenfranchised by a variety of factors, such as the fracturing of the conservative Gemeinden, assimilation, etc. This is not to argue that traditional Mennonite women were equal with men, as they had only limited access to the public domain, but that was the condition of women in all European cultures. The video leaves the impression that conditions as described by Baerg were a peculiarity of Mennonites culture. This is not the case, the situation was common to all cultures.

This also illustrates the dangers of the journalism method of telling history. Although an individual experience is always valid to a particular person at a particular point in time, it cannot be assumed to represent an entire culture in the absence of critical analysis and interpretation, which almost always requires some research. Even more important, such individual experience cannot be projected back in time, with the assumption that it speaks for an earlier historical period. This does not work in European or Canadian history, nor is it valid in Mennonite history. Each time period has its own dynamics, its own social, economic and cultural realities. This is particularly so in Mennonite history, where they change continents and/or countries as well as centuries.

You cannot say, a woman in Horndean in 1930 was treated so and so, or experienced so and so, therefore all Mennonite women in Russia in 1830 or all Mennonite women in Prussia in 1730 were treated so and so. Valid interpretation and analysis and understanding of the past, requires a certain amount of research and study--sorry, but there is no easy, painless way of getting around it. It must be remembered "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there"--L. P. Hartley.

A major boner is the opening statement in the video by John Longhurst, that "I can't become Greek, I can't become Norwegian, but I can become Mennonite." Hardly! If you want to become Greek, move to Greece, learn the language, blend in with the natives, and presto, you'll be Greek, or Catholic or United, or whatever it is you want to be.

Mennonites are hardly unique for the fact that others can join the group. All major churches have huge contingents of Africans, East Indians, etc. This reflects the realities of the post colonial world more than being anything peculiar to Mennonites, certainly not to Manitoba Mennonites. I know several Mennonites whose family member became Jewish. Thousands of Manitoba Mennonites have joined the American Fundamentalists. So what!

As an aside I wonder how proud Albert DeFehr will be of the statement "that he pursues success in business in order to have people accept his authority and leadership in the church?" I can hardly see that this reflects his true character.

And Altona, of course, does not mean "pleasant pasture", it means "old meadow."

There are other points over which one could quibble. But the goal of Prairie Public was to make a video which would hold the attention of audiences across North America for an hour. Had I made the video, it would undoubtedly have had more historical information, but it would not have appealed to the wider audience.

Overall the video was reasonably factual. It correctly portrayed the original Mennonite settlers in Manitoba as an accomplished farming people. It did not get into the "Kanadier" "Russländer" controversy, nor into the reformed (assimilationists) versus conservative (preservers) debate. It did not get into the unsavory aspects of intra-Mennonite proselytation carried on by some denominations nor into the so-called "Menno-conformity", and for that we should all be grateful.

The fact remains also that if this video had not been produced by Prairie Public Television it would not have happened. It was the credibility of Prairie Public in making such documentaries that opened wallets in Steinbach, Altona and Winnipeg, to collect the \$100,000 required from the Mennonite community.

Video is an important medium which needs to be utilized as a tool in telling our story. In the days of the Internet, computers, and integrated communications systems, paper copy such as books and magazines are losing more and more ground in the competition for the attention of the general public especially the young.

The video "Mennonites in Manitoba" will be a useful tool to convey information about our culture and community.

Firstly, it will be used to inform the North American public about Manitoba Mennonites. Secondly, it will be an important vehicle to teach our young people about their own heritage. Parents can use it to give their children a snapshot of their background. Thirdly, it will be useful for businesses, Municipalities and Towns, wishing to tell outside investors or potential immigrants something about their communities. Simply send them a copy of the video. Similarly those with friends from far away, who know nothing about Mennonites, now have an convenient tool to convey that information.

I hope Prairie Public can earn a return on this project. Perhaps that would have them coming back to do the two hour version.

I thank director George Siamandos, President John Condra and producer, Bob Dombach, and Prairie Public Television, for taking on the production of this topic. I applaud them for their good work and patience in weaving their way through the complexities of the Mennonite story and coming up with a program which is highly informative and interesting. A job well done! Thanks.

Anyone interested in ordering the video may call, 1-800-359-6900. The cost of the video is \$30.00 plus postage.

Historical Society Endowment Fund.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society has established a "Foundation Fund" managed by the Mennonite Foundation of Canada. There are many people in our community who have a deep interest in their heritage and culture. It is an honour to invite people to consider the HSHS Foundation for a bequest in their will. Even a small bequest can be very significant for an organization such as the historical society which is completely dependant on gifts of some kind for its operations, programs, books, etc.

In this regard I am mindful of the story of a very successful man who made a lot of money in his community but gave all his money to various Fundamentalist religious organizations in the southern United States, apparently because he disliked the culture and faith of the people from whom he had amassed his fortune.

What a tragedy!

For someone to work so hard and then to throw their money away like that! What would be so wrong with leaving at least a little of his wealth to some local organizations which promote and foster the well-being of his own community? It seems a sad legacy for an otherwise stellar career.

Why not consider a testamentary bequest or a charitable tax deductible donation to the HSHS and/or to the HSHS Foundation Fund.

For those wishing to be a bit more innovative and/or higher profile, there are all manner of prizes, scholarships and awards for historical research and writing regarding our region which need to be endowed. Why not put 20 or even \$100,000 into our endowment fund and have 70 per cent of the interest annually benefit and fund some project of your choice, something near and dear to your heart? Why not experience the joy of watching your hard earned dollars at work and the satisfaction of seeing the results while you are still alive?

Why not invest some of your charity dollars and put them to work on something which was foundational to your very being, life and happiness. If not for yourself, then do it for the sake of your children and grandchildren.

Dyan Cannon.

On September 2, 1998, I received a telephone call from Nancy Brackett, Raymond, Washington, see letters section. It turned out that her mother was a cousin to Ben Friesen, father of Dyan Cannon. This was the type of response I was hoping for when I wrote the story of Ben's father Jakob Friesen (1875-1941), Preservings,

No. 12, June 1998, pages 30-33.

Jakob Friesen had older sisters, Maria (b. 1860) and Katharina (b. 1862), BGB B96. HSHS research director John Dyck is of the view that it was Katharina (b. 1862) who married Abraham Klassen.

In any case, the information on another line of this family provides many new avenues of research on this family. The Abraham Klassen family apparently followed the same route as Jakob Friesen, living in Fargo (Mapleton), then Plum Coulee, where daughter Dorothy was born in 1900, and then Lanigin, and Vancouver.

It also makes me all the more curious about the mysterious Bergthaler settlement at Fargo. Why is so little known about it?

Heather Robertson.

Nancy Brackett also sent me her copy of *Grass Roots* (Toronto, 1973), 370 pages, the expose of prairie communities by journalist Heather Robertson. When I saw the book, I vaguely remembered that the section on Winkler had created something of a scandal when it was published in 1973.

Now-a-days we understand that these type of books are written from an Anglo-conformity perspective, where any failure to model ourselves exactly on Anglo-Canadian approved cultural norms and rituals is a sure sign of heathendom, and lessor racial status.

I reread the article on Winkler and marvelled at the naivete of its writer as she circles her way though the complexities of Winkler's web of Mennonite, Evangelical and Jewish social dynamics.

“Now-a-days we understand that these type of books are written from an Anglo-conformity perspective...”

Robertson's opening scenario of the “moon-light” sales in Winkler says it all, “The sale is joyless. Women paw desultorily through piles of cheap saffron scarves and odd shoes and, frowning, burrow among bruised tomatoes and wilted lettuce. There is no shoving or pushing, no screaming or snatching or clawing,” (page 167) etc. The sentence would be a useful sample in a primary creative writing class, demonstrating the use of adjectives to create mood, ambience and context, i.e. how to manipulate your reader and denigrate your subject without being too obvious. I was waiting for Robertson to add the statement that there no incest and public sex visible in the aisles, but I guess she felt her point was made.

But that's just for openers.

Robertson's next grabber, “Winkler is ugly, a low rambling mud hole” (page 168) is Neanderthalian in the insight it reveals, mostly about herself, not the town.

Robertson relies on superficial secondary sources when she states: “The immigrants were what the Mennonites called *Die Anwohner*, the landless people, the excess population of the Russian colonies who, since all the land had been taken up, made a meagre living labouring for

Mennonite landlords (page 172).”

Such ignorance is deplorable. It has been established over and over and over again that the 1870s Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba were average to above average in terms of socio-economic status. If another writer ever makes such an obviously shallow interpretative error, I'm sorry, but I'll barf all over them.

“[Robertson's]... writing [is a]...journalistic version of bigoted cultural slam-dunking, and racist ethnic put-downs.

The inherent evil of Mennonite culture (and I suppose this must be where Di Brandt and Pat Friesen get it from) is proven again and again, at least in Robertson's mind, as she describes the functioning of pioneer society: “These men were often able to manipulate the rules of the colony to their advantage and to place poorer farmers in their debt by lending them money or paying them wages for village chores” (page 177).

I suppose this grand bit of wisdom makes sense, assuming that Robertson's Anglo-Canadian idols, the poor Scottish tenant farmers/serfs didn't get paid at all, and their chances of getting a loan from the Lord of Manor were about as good as a snow ball's flight in hell.

It is my impression that Robertson button-holed somebody coming out of the pub (schenk) in Winkler, some stumble-down drunk, from whom she got her supply of quotes. One of her real brainers is found on page 177-78, “They were always pursuing money but on Sunday morning they'd sit there in church...it was almost a self-justification to steal a little bit around the edges....they were the real shysters, they'd steal land off old widows...the elders in the church.” How's that for pure bunk!

Robertson did catch the fact that Mennonite women were equal co-workers with the men (page 181) something unknown in British culture where women were relegated to the kitchen as domestics a century before it became common among Mennonites. It would be too much to expect Robertson to know the difference between peasants and freeholding household producers, but to her credit she did recognize the managerial tradition among Mennonite women, “Most farm women supported their families on

“Robertson button-holed ... some stumble-down drunk, from whom she got her supply of quotes....”

the weekly cream cheque” (page 221).

I loved the part about the Jewish pedlars and their Mennonite customers. Perhaps she didn't dare slam-dunk them for fear of a libel suit, since a few too many of Winnipeg's top lawyers are descendants of these early entrepreneurs. The Jews at least have some self-respect as a people and wouldn't put up with the misrepresentations and lies that Mennonites seem to enjoy

having written about themselves. Maybe its something which came with Menno yet from the cloister.

On page 192 Robertson turns her attention back to the Mennonites and reverts to invective and misrepresentations with the following statement: “In the German lowlands and in Russia, Mennonite survival had been based on absolute isolation from the surrounding society.”

What nonsense! All three denomination which settled in Manitoba in the 1870s, the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Fürstenlander (Old Colony) had resettled out of the mother colonies in the decades prior, and were exceedingly exposed to numerous outside cultures of which the majority Russian and Ukrainian were only the most obvious. The Bergthalers for example had Russians to the west, German Catholics to the north, Greeks to the east, Cossacks to the south, the sea port of Mariupol 20 kilometers to the south. To top it off, the Bergthalers travelled constantly back and forth to the Old Colony, visiting relatives. Not really too much hint of isolationism here, is there?

“Robertson's description of Valley Rehab centre was evidently tailored to close the section on Winkler with an image of a Nazi concentration camp...”

In fact, the one commonality of the three denominations which came to Manitoba in the 1870s was that they had all lived outside the large mother colonies and had witnessed, first hand, the unspeakable cruelty and socio-economic injustices of Imperial Russia, something fundamentally contrary to the ethos of conservative Mennonites.

Robertson mentions that “Within 45 years of their arrival, the Mennonites found that all their guarantees had been whittled away.” But she seemingly missed out on the little detail that there was a massive Anglo-Canadian ethnic cleansing program during and after WWI. There were over 2000 “illegal” prosecutions against Mennonites in Manitoba alone in 1922, with “illegal” property seizures, imprisonments, etc. resulting in the exile of 10,000, including many of our best farmers, a brainless measure costing the Canadian G.N.P. an estimated 3 billion annually in lost revenue.

Robertson croons out standard Anglo-conformity invective in her description of anyone who looks different. Of Mennonite women she writes: “Stout peasant women in ankle-length Potter's print skirts and cardigan sweaters buttoned up tight across their ample sagging bosoms waddle down Main Street with big paper shopping bags” (page 199) and on page 205, “...except of course they were all fourteen axe handles across the beam.” See photograph of Shirley Klassen Neufeld in Book Review Section. I guess Robertson was so blinded by her Anglo-conformist fury that she missed this part of Winkler.

Her descriptions of Winkler's two leading

Wiebes--Henry, mayor and Credit Union manager, and Nick, undertaker, are interesting.

“[Robertson’s descriptions and views]...basically demonstrate all the subtlety of a sow in heat...”

Just as the story is getting dull, Robertson’s ability to trivialize and deprecate comes to her rescue in her description of a funeral, “Word of the deceased’s arrival crackles through the congregation.” Again she makes good use of creative writing 120 to colour what she describes, “the hymns are droned...”

Robertson’s description of Valley Rehab centre was evidently tailored to close the section on Winkler with the image of a Nazi concentration camp, “...the anxious howls and bellows of the workers as they mill about the room, their grotesquely misshapen bodies contorted into futile gestures of uncomprehending helpfulness. Dressed all alike in blue-grey work cloths, heads shaved close to the skull, they stand and stare...” (page 223). These quotations and many more like them basically demonstrate all the subtlety of a sow in heat, so anxious is Robertson to produce a book which will please her intended audience.

As her actual closer, Robertson quotes some

miscued statistics about how Winkler farmers are poorer than Miami farmers and that the “Winkler economy is geared to depriving the rural people of their meagre resources as efficiently as possible.” In keeping with her Anglo-conformist views, Robertson tries hard to convince herself that Winkler is poor not only financially but also spiritually. “Winkler is troubled by a sense of spiritual desolation, an awareness of hollowness and loss,” Robertson concludes.

Just to get a sense of comparison, I read Robertson’s article about Miami, a small WASP hamlet, just north of Morden. Nowhere does she deprecate, malign and demonize these people, the way she does the good burghers of Winkler. I don’t know what Winklerites ever did to her, but they really got her goat. Or maybe she just assumed that these people wouldn’t retaliate in any way, giving her a safe target to vent her Anglo-conformist fury.

Even the Hutterites, who in Robertson’s words are “universally slandered, persecuted discriminated against...rural people talk about them as if they were about to take over the west” (page 163), are treated relatively benignly. She even gives them a compliment of sorts, “The Hutterites wealth is as obvious as is their contempt for it. They are a living reproof to the independant farmer who, unwilling to admit that

a Hutterite may be richer than he is, gnashes his teeth with rage and spits viterperation.”

But Robertson’s work regarding Winkler also speaks for the culture she represents, standing as a monument to racist attitudes and crappy put-down journalism. It has obviously become a model of sorts for some writers of Mennonite background, the only criteria being what it takes to sell to a gullible Anglo-Canadian readership, always eagerly anxious to read something negative and racist about anyone who’s a little different, religious minorities and “unofficial” cultures, and too lazy to actually do some down and dirty research in the archives and on the street.

I thank Nancy Brackett for mailing me the book. I enjoyed reading the section on Winkler. It was good for a laugh. Too bad Nancy had to suffer under its demonization and lies for all these years.

Notice to Members.

If you have not paid your 1998 or 1999 membership fee, this may be the last issue you will receive. To avoid being taken off our membership list, send your membership fee of \$20.00 to HSHS, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0. Members outside of Canada should pay in U. S. funds to cover the higher mailing costs. Please note that the membership/subscription fee was increased to \$20.00 effective January 1, 1998.

125th Anniversary.

Readers are reminded that 1999 is the 125th anniversary of the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area. Please be sure to celebrate this important milestone of our community in some way, possibly with a special church service, or an event in your school. Businesses could purchase the 125 t-shirts for their staff and declare a certain day, as 125th anniversary day for which everyone would wear their t-shirts. Prepare a float for your local fair and parade. Designate someone in your family or committee to gather your family history as a way of celebrating. Most important, tell your children about “125 East Reserve” and explain the significance of the anniversary to them.

Biblical Feminism.

The spiritual ethos of traditional Mennonite Gemeinden (communities) was based on a radical new interpretation of the Bible discovered during the Reformation by the seminal leaders of the faith such as Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and others. Where Protestant reformers such as Calvin took a Pauline view of the New Testament, Menno put Christ squarely at the centre, accepting the Gospels as the cornerstone of Biblical faith.

The result was a theology radically different from that propounded by Calvin. They found no excuses or intellectual devices to circumvent the commandment of Christ not to kill and discipleship within the community of saints became the primary focus of salvation and religious exercise.

Another result of this hermeneutics was Biblical feminism practised among conservative Mennonites since the time of the Reformation, centuries before feminism became a household concept in Western Europe. Based on their revolutionary Biblical exegesis, conservative leaders such as Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, Imperial Russia, defended the important role of women within Mennonite society, not only as heirs to salvation but also equal in their legal status such as inheritance rights, property ownership, etc.

Within the 19th century conservative Mennonite communities in Imperial Russia, women were traditionally the managers of the household economy, taking charge of dairy, poultry and garden production, and, exercising the power that came with financial management. They were protected from abuse by the most severe punishments, including separation and shunning of the offender.

The Ordnung (Protocol) gave Mennonite women equal inheritances rights, something unheard of in other European cultures in the 18th and 19th century, when primogeniture was the norm. Mennonites widows received one-half of their husband’s estate, protection given to other prairie women only with the enactment of the Dower Act of 1918, but even then only a third.

Equal property rights, management of the household economy and protection from abuse within the Gemeinde, made traditional Mennonite women more empowered than women in most other cultures.

Biblical feminism among Manitoba Mennonites declined in the aftermath of the forced anglo-conformity measures of 1916 to 1927 which resulted in emigration (“exile”) and fracturing of the traditional Gemeinden. This was followed by a drastic decline in literacy during the 1920s and 30s and rapid assimilation. The commercialization of agriculture in the 1940s relegated many Mennonite women to the kitchen.

By the 1970s and 80s the tide had turned again as women sought and received greater equality and empowerment within the home, workplace and society in general.

by D. Plett Q.C.

Guest Essay: "History and Faith"

"History and Faith", a sermon presented at Pioneer Days, Sunday, August 2, 1998, Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba, by Conrad Stoesz, 44 Rampart Bay, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 0N3, and published as a special guest editorial essay.

Isaiah 51:1-2 "Listen to me, you which pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many."

History, old stuff, why do we need it? What good is it, and to whom. My house is full of things that I may never use. I have kept all my school notes from the beginning of grade school and through Bible college and University. I continue, for some reason, to keep collecting things, especially if they are old. Our communities and churches are writing history books like never before. Our museums keep growing, why? Why do we put so much effort into keeping things from the past?

I think there are a few reasons. Number one we keep things because some day we may need it again. And then you finally throw it out. thinking that you will never use it. As it usually happens to me, the next day you find a use for it. Number two I think we keep things for the sake of nostalgia. It brings back memories. The third reason is because it helps explain our lives and God's actions in it. All three are good reasons. However, the greatest reason for holding on to history is to be able to catch a glimpse of the divine.

Isaiah 51:1-2 "... Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn;

The divine can be seen in history so we can say that for the church, history is theology. Another way of saying this is that for the church, history is the study of God. The people of faith believe that God is always present. At times we have personal encounters with God and other times we need to look back to see God's hand at work. If we deny history, we deny God's presence in our lives. The old expression "hind sight is 20/20" has truth to it. In hind sight we can see God at work, it is difficult to see it in the present. The Bible itself can be seen as a history book showing God and people's interaction with Him. The first verse of our Scripture text shows that Isaiah also believed that the works of God could be found in History. He says "Listen to me you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn."

With the capability to see the past and understand how God has played a part in it, we are able to understand the present and have direction for the future. Because we can learn and see God at work in our ancestors we can begin to understand why things are the way they are now and that will give us guidance for the future.

For an example, in our Mennonite tradition, helping one another was very important. Treating your neighbour as yourself was not only a biblical principle, people strove to make it their principle. In Prussia the church began to organize itself to help widows and orphans. In 1792, this practise became institutionalized in Russia with the first Waisenamt. It was designed as an aid organization focusing on widows and orphans. The people took God's word seriously about helping others in need.

This principle was carried to Canada. One year in the 1950s my grandfather became ill. He was hospitalized for a lengthy period of time which put the whole year's crop in jeopardy, because no one was there to harvest. The boys of the family were too young to take this on



Conrad Stoesz speaks to a full house at the Mennonite Village Museum, Pioneer Days, August 2, 1998. Photo by Frank Froese, courtesy of Perserving our Heritage, October 1998, page 7.

alone so the neighbours of the area helped them out. They harvested the grain for my grandfather and his family. God worked through these people to help them.

This principle of helping others in need is still strong among the Mennonite people. Individually and through organizations like MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) and MDS (Mennonite Disaster Service) we continue to uphold this value. For the future we need to remember that this is important and continue to be good neighbours individually and corporately.

Another example of learning from the past comes from the Second World War. The United States dropped the world's first atomic bombs on Japan. There was immense suffering to that nation that continues to be felt around the world. The world recognized the danger of this tech-

nology and strove to contain it. This experience explains why the world stands on end when nations have nuclear capabilities. For the future we need to continue and heighten our controls of this technology.

While history can give us guidance about our future a second characteristic is that it can

The divine can be seen in history so we can say that for the church, history is theology.

also give us strength for the present. In our text, Isaiah recognized this quality when he called the people of Israel to reach into their past to examine why God has been faithful through the generations. The Israelites were disheartened because they were in exile in Babylon. They felt God had abandoned them and continued to turn away from Him. Isaiah calls the people to remember Abraham and Sarah.

The text of Isaiah 51:1-2 is the transition point in Isaiah's call to remember. In chapter 50 he rebukes the people saying "don't you trust God", has He not proven Himself? In Chapter 51 Isaiah says to the people to look at their own history to see that God is faithful, that He is trustworthy and will defend His people. Isaiah tried to give courage in their current situation by recalling the faith and God's actions in Abraham and Sarah.

Our tradition has also learned this quality of history's ability to strengthen people for the present. Many times when the Mennonite community has faced difficult times, the book *Martyrs' Mirror* has been republished. This book was originally published in 1660. It tells the story of fifteen centuries of Christian martyrdom from the time of Christ to 1660. From these heroes of faith, strength can be drawn for the present situations.

The third quality history has is the ability to teach lessons without the experience. We can

While history can give us guidance about our future ...it can also give us strength for the present.

learn from others experiences and be shaped by them. In order to be properly shaped, we must tell truthful history. I believe that Isaiah would agree with me. While he called the people to look to Abraham and Sarah, they both had their accomplishments and failures. We can learn from both.

I saw an interesting bumper sticker that gives an explanation of why we should learn from others. It said "Learn from others' mistakes, life is too short to make them all yourself." This has

some merit to it. God gives us His word along with other people's experience to lead us in the right direction. I do not believe that God wants us to learn everything by trial and error.

Trial and error is the hard way, and Abraham learned at least one lesson that way. In Genesis chapter 12: 10-20 we find the story of how Abraham and Sarah entered Egypt because of a famine. Sarah was a beautiful woman and Abraham was scared that he would be killed if people found out that Sarah was his wife. He arranged with Sarah that he would pose as her brother. The Egyptians believed the lie and Abraham even became rich because of it. Eventually their secret was found out and they were thrown out of Egypt.

Abraham had committed the classic sin of not trusting God and taking matters into his own hands. This sin can be seen time and time again in the Bible and in history and probably in our own lives.

Many similar stories could be told from our own history of not trusting God and taking

"Learn from others' mistakes, life is too short to make them all your-self."

things into our own hands. One such example takes place in Russia during the Russian revolution of 1918-1919. The book "The Mennonite Story" tells of how some people could no longer bear the level of terror in their communities and homes. When faced with merciless killings and abuse of their loved ones they took matters into their own hands and organized armed self defence units. Much debate took place in the Mennonite communities, with some calling for everyone to follow their tradition, and the biblical teachings of pacifism. In the end the choice was left up to the individual, the corporate peace stance was set aside.

At first it appeared as through the armed units were working in warding off invaders. However they soon became associated with the White army, and the whole community was seen as counter revolutionary. In the village of Blumenort, the Self-defence unit attacked a small group of invaders. Two bandits managed to escape and the next day returned with armed troops to punish the village. Pleas of innocence went ignored and any villager in sight was executed. In the end the self defence units were not able to provide protection and often inspired further violence and revenge.

These examples of lessons learned through mistakes are important to remember, however we would be wrong to think that was the whole story. I think the first thoughts that would have entered an Israelite's mind when Isaiah tells them to remember Abraham and Sarah, are stories of their great faith and of their great God. Isaiah hints already at two such examples in the last part of verse two where he says "when I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many".

Contained in this verse is the story of the calling of Abraham, and the promise to make

him a great nation. Abraham lived with his extended family in Chaldea. But the Lord called him to leave. We do not read of Abraham saying, "well tell me first where we are going and then I will decide if I will follow". No! He was called to simply follow. Hebrews 11:8 states that

"....for the people of God, history is the study of God."

Abraham "obeyed and went even though he did not know where he was going." He was willing to put aside his own will and follow God's. God promised to be with and protect Abraham if he decided to do God's will. The rest of the story continues with Abraham and Sarah entering Egypt due to a famine, the separation of Abraham and Lot, and the rescue of Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah. God kept His promise to make him a great nation with the birth of Isaac who continues to carry the promise of great nationhood.

Our Mennonite people have also attempted to follow God's will and that at times has meant sacrificing things for their faith and the faith of their children. In the 1870s the Russian government wanted to introduce new laws in regards to education and military service. Some Mennonites believed that this would compromise their faith and so set out to emigrate even at protest of the Russian government and the scoffing of others. In 1874 they left their world behind, in search of new freedoms and new opportunities. Because of this step, they were spared the atrocities that other Mennonites faced in Russia during the Russian Revolution and World Wars.

The journey was not easy, getting rid of their possessions, sailing on a crowded ship, and then arriving in a strange new country. Some of the first immigrants settled in the Steinbach area, others in the Winkler, Altona area. They came to a strange country with very little and settled on unbroken land teaming with mosquitos. They built shelters for the winter and at times two families of seventeen people lived in one two-room house.

Here they toiled and worked hard amid difficult circumstances for their living. Life was not only difficult physically, but some divisions began to creep in to the communities, straining relationships and the unity of the churches. In one extreme instance, a church became so divided that they even cut the church building into two halves and moved their respective portions to other locations. By the turn of the century the people showed that they not only survived but prospered. They have left us a rich history, one full of God's work as well as displeasure, time will continue to tell if their sacrifices and experiences of God will be remembered and learned from.

History is a valuable thing that money cannot buy. It can give guidance, strength, and lessons. Our histories, whatever they are, are important to preserve because God has acted in them. Our task is to be aware that God is involved with shaping events and preserving them for ourselves and future generations. What are your children going to say after you are gone. Have you been watching and recording God's actions in history? Think about it, and then do something about it because for the people of God, history is the study of God. Amen.

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done...which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commandments," Excerpts from Psalm 78.

Congratulations, 125th Anniversary

Congratulations are due to all North and South Americans of Russian Mennonite descent. 1999 is the 125th anniversary of the settlement of 18,000 Russian Mennonites in Manitoba, Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas. The original 18,000 settlers who arrived in 1874 to 1875 have been joined by several other immigrations from Russia and their descendants in Bolivia, Paraguay, Mexico, U.S.A, Canada, and elsewhere in the western hemisphere now number in the 250,000 to 300,000 range.

The East Reserve, Hanover Steinbach, was only one small but important part of this settlement. All descendants of the Russian Mennonites in the Americas should be proud of their ancestors and their accomplishments.

A complimentary copy of our historical booklet, "Celebrating our heritage" is enclosed with this issue of *Preservings*. We hope you enjoy it.

May 1999 be a time of thanksgiving, reflection and "celebrating our heritage."

Letters

We welcome letters to the editor and appreciate feedback from our readers and suggestions as to how we can fulfil our function better. We welcome criticism of articles and editorial commentary. Contrary to those who decry vigorous debate which has characterized the Mennonite community since the Reformation, we celebrate and applaud the same as evidence of true grass-roots democracy. We will assume that all letters can be published, unless a contrary intention is indicated. We reserve the right not to publish any particular letter and/or not to respond to a letter, particularly if it refers to an issue already previously dealt with. Please keep all letters short (under 300 words) and to the point. We reserve the right to return, discard, edit and/or shorten letters as deemed necessary.

Harry Loewen, Ph.D.
4835 Parkridge Drive,
Kelowna, B.C, V1W 3A1
May 18, 1998

Delbert F. Plett
Box 1960, Steinbach
Manitoba, ROA 2A0

Dear Delbert,

I have read your manuscript, "Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde 1812-1875," with great interest. There is little doubt that this popular history will be appreciated not only by the descendants of the KG but also by many other readers of Mennonite history. There is much in your history that even historians don't know. Your previous work on the KG, much of which I have read, and now this introduction to its history and life, leaves no doubt in my mind that you deserve the title "historian of the KG *par excellence*." Your historical sweep and depth, as well as your focus on and summary of individuals and events, make the story not only interesting but also most helpful for readers who wish to understand what made and makes the KG tick.

Your "biblical feminism," including the portraits of KG matriarchs, will be quite an eye-opener for many readers. Modern feminists will want to dismiss your treatment of the subject as another attempt by a male historian to discredit their "just cause," but the fact is that the women you describe were anything but timid, oppressed, abused and submissive victims of male dominance. The section on women is an important part in your story and a substantial contribution to Mennonite historiography.

By now, thanks to your work, some Mennonite historians agree that the KG was the first renewal movement among Russian Mennonites, seeking to call their co-religionists back to the faith and life of early Anabaptism. C. J. Dyck in an *MQR* essay some time ago, "1525 Revisited," credited erroneously the Mennonite Brethren with that distinction. The KG with their Anabaptist consciousness, and their reading, translating and publishing of Anabaptist sources, expressed Anabaptism as no other Mennonite group at that time. The Mennonite Brethren, on the other hand, almost ceased to be "Mennonite" altogether and to this day they are ambivalent about their Anabaptist heritage and identity.

Your criticism of what you call "separatist-pietist" historians is generally valid. For too long Mennonite historians have dismissed the KG, treating its leaders and group as a mere footnote in their writing and even distorting them as spiri-

tually narrow and culturally backward. P.M. Friesen (my relative through my grandmother Helene Friesen Loewen) was certainly blind to the many positive contributions of the KG and thus needed to be corrected, which you have done here and elsewhere. It seems to me, however, that your criticism could be more balanced, pointing out that while Friesen was critical, even unfair, toward Klaas Reimer and the KG, he nevertheless recognized and welcomed the positive contribution of the KG toward the spiritual and moral life of the larger Mennonite community. (See P.M.F. pp. 127-135) Friesen also appreciated the support the KG gave to the emerging Mennonite Brethren. Your references to Friesen in your MS p.61 bottom and p.91 are, in my opinion, somewhat harsh and unfair. Friesen did not believe in, nor did he advocate, "fabled endtimes." In fact, he was most critical of the Klaas Epps, the *Heimweh* illusions and the "endtime fantasies" of some Mennonites. For the sake of historical balance and accuracy you may want to consider modifying the above references.

Your story at the end of how you came to research and write the KG historical series is excellent. In it you bare your heart and show your deep love for and commitment to the KG and your task.

While the manuscript is generally well written and "clean," there are typos and other errors that require correction. I began noting the errors on a separate sheet (included herewith), but then decided to send you the pages where the mistakes appear. I hope that is acceptable. You will no doubt have someone read the MS once again before it goes to press.

Thanks for asking me to read your MS. I look forward to its appearance in published form. I wish you well and much joy and energy as you continue to do your important historical work, a task no one else has thus far taken up to such an extent. Cordially yours, "Harry Loewen" Encl.

Editor's Note: I appreciate your kind comments as well as your critique which will help me as I do the final massaging to prepare the manuscript for publication.

received July 17, 1998

Hanover Steinbach Hist. Society
Box 1960, Steinbach
MB, ROA 2A0

I have no idea how my name got on your list to receive "Preservings", your twice a year newsletter/magazine.

But I'm so glad it did. I just received my second copy and am again enjoying the reading immensely. Please keep on sending them.

Just to make sure you do, I'm sending \$20.00 which I understand is your current membership subscription fee,

Sincerely, "Reg Reimer", Box 1989, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Gerhard Ens
67 Reay Crescent
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2K 4G6
July 16, 1998

The Editor
Preservings
Steinbach, Manitoba

Dear Delbert,

Your lengthy editorial essay on P. M. Friesen is intriguing and not without a number of legitimate points. However your judgment on Friesen's alleged negative evaluation of Menno Simons is, in my opinion, quite misleading.

After sketching a very positive image of Menno on pages 3 - 17 of his *magnum opus*, the first German edition of the *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft der Mennoniten in Rusland*, P. M. Friesen closes this section with a brief (about half a page) and very light criticism of:

- 1) Menno's excessive severity in the practice of the ban (which Menno himself regretted later);
- 2) Menno's faulty interpretation of the Incarnation (admitted by virtually all students of Menno); and
- 3) Menno's excessively (by our standards) pejorative polemics in some of his arguments (quite in the spirit of the time and mild when compared to Luther's), which indeed sometimes make today's readers cringe.

By confining P. M. Friesen's evaluation of Menno to one single critical quote (out of context, at that) you have not only done a great injustice to Friesen (and Menno), but most of all you have undermined your own thesis. Overstating an argument usually results only in weakening it.

"Gerhard Ens" Winnipeg, Manitoba

Editor's Note: We are honoured indeed to receive a letter from the widely-known Gerhard Ens. We appreciate the views he has brought forward.

Respecting your point no. one, I believe most conservatives would continue to see the policing of recalcitrant members as a basic function

of any social entity, I am not an expert on Menno and his writings, but the idea that he himself later regretted his earlier views on the ban, seems an invention of later-day scholars to sanitize (pietize?) Menno, so that his teachings could be made palatable to small "I" liberal" articulated reformed Mennonites. There is always the tendency to interpret the Christian past from the perspective of one's current beliefs. This is not to say that their view is not valid, etc. but only to point out that P. M. Friesen's view of Menno was not shared by conservative and/or orthodox Mennonites who were aware of the painful contortions he went through to come up with a Menno he could read without wincing.

234 Carroll Road
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3K 1H6
July 20, 1998

Delbert F. Plett, Editor
Hanover Steinbach Historical Society
Box 1960
Steinbach, Manitoba
ROA 2A0

Dear Delbert,

The object described in "Dish of the Centuries" (*Preservings* No.12, pp. 98-99) provides several pieces of physical evidence which are at variance with its traditional history. Firstly, the firm of Johnson Bros. did not start their business until 1883. Secondly, use of the designation "England" did not begin until 1891, as a result of the American McKinley Tariff Act which required that all goods imported into the U.S.A. had to be marked with their country of origin. There is a further indication that printed marks, such as found on the plate in question, were not being used prior to approximately 1913. Hence, the plate could not have been made prior to 1891 and may well have been made some time in the twentieth century. This information is taken from the standard reference on English ceramic marks (Geoffrey A. Godden, *Encyclopedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks*, 1964). Copies of relevant pages are also enclosed.

Sincerely, "Peter J. Priess"

Editor's Note: Mr. Priess is a widely renowned archaeologist with Heritage Canada. We appreciate him taking the time to write *Preservings*. We have sent this material on to Les Plett, the author of the article in question. I am sure it will stimulate further research and study. Thanks.

Received July 21, 1998
1790 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB

Dear Mr. Plett:

I've been slow to write you, sorry. I want to thank you again for giving me your notes after you spoke on "Ethnic Cleansing on the Prairies" in April [7, 1998] at a Manitoba Historical Society dinner meeting. I am somewhat hard of hearing and did not understand everything clearly.

So with your notes I was able to get full benefit of all you said, and found it immensely interesting. I shared your notes with my cousin Lloyd Ratzlaff in Linden, Alberta. He said he's had correspondence with you. Lloyd's mother, Margaret (nee Loewen) was my father's youngest sister.

My great-grandparents on both sides of my family came from Russia to settle in the East Reserve in 1874. My grandfather Abraham (Thiessen) Loewen married Helen Isaak and they eventually moved to Alberta to homestead. My father John (Isaak) Loewen came back from Alberta to Steinbach to marry Agnes (Toews) Friesen.

In 1924 my parents moved to Winnipeg. We had no relatives here, there was no Mennonite community - not even a Mennonite church. So as a family we were quickly absorbed into English society. It's sad but none of my siblings ever look back to their heritage and seemingly have no desire to make any connection.

After my husband died I moved back to Winnipeg from Portage la Prairie. As it happened I lived about 1 block from a Mennonite Brethren Church, where I've attended ever since. My "Loewen" relatives are mostly in Alberta but we keep in touch. I have more cousins on the Friesen side living in Manitoba and one aunt, my mother's youngest sister, Mrs. Gertrude Friesen, who lives in Steinbach. You have communicated with her. Her father, my grandfather, was "Drekka" Friesen.

I hope you find this a little interesting.

Yours, "Anne Hopcraft"

Box 65, Altona
Manitoba, R0G 0B0
July 15, 1998

Hanover Steinbach Historical Soc.
Box 1960, Steinbach
Manitoba, ROA 2A0

Att: Del Plett

Am enjoying this "Preservings" tremendously. Am especially pleased with hearing arguments for the other side. This in reference to the book reviews by Ralph F., Doug R., and your rebuttal. Right on! It's time somebody spoke out regarding the rather one-sided feminist and politically correct views of some of our "thinkers". "Jack Klassen"

Paisley Ave. South
Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 1V1
22 July 1998

The Editor
Preservings
Box 1960
Steinbach, MB ROA 2A0

Dear Sir,

I have to wonder myself sometimes what you Kleadels are really trying to do with your news magazine. What I mean is what the will Hund your editorial look-out really is. Sometimes I see these groote words, "restitutionist"

and "orthodox Mennonite" and such like, but you really seem most Stolt about other things. You know, like the big spread with even some good outhouse pictures of Dyan Canon Friesen with the lighting and no nose jobs. Somehow she with her one piddy Carie Grant offspring is supposed to platslijch increase the genetic shareholder value of all orthodox Mennonite stock in the eyes of the world? I should maybe say that I'm part Friesen too and I've always been told I have a Friesen nose.

And then this big shot Reimer down in the States. I'm also part Reimer and I must confess sometimes I feel like going to war too and I've always suspected that came from the Reimer side. But I never thought I should brag about that too much. I suppose maybe that could come from going to that Separatist Pietist Bible college in Winnipeg where some of my professors (like Abe Dueck, who I always thought was orthodox and open-minded) taught us not to brag about such things--even though they weren't always in the good books of their Jemeent who would have liked a little more worldly bragging (and eventually they got it too, when it was too late).

Anyhow, I'm just writing to say put me on the list anyway, even though I doubt that Delbert (I'm part Plett too) will rear himself to come out here to Steeltown and take pictures of my Friesen nose.

Yours, "P.Travis Kroeker", B.A., B.R.S., M.A., Ph.D.

P.S. I'm related to "alphabet Reimer" too, and he wrote a pious anniversary history book where he noted my great-grandfather Peter (guess what my 'P' stands for) Kroeker who was made a Pradia never did anything important. My test question (see editorial look-out)--is that good or bad?

Editor's Note: Dyan Cannon being a Friesen and a Berghal/Chortitzer is part of our history whether we like it or not. Although we can ignore it, we can't change it. I loved your letter, sarcasm, wit and all, and hope you will favour us with more droppings from your reflective musings.

July 20, 1998
127 NW Reed Lane
Dallas, Oregon
97338

Delbert Plett
Preservings

Dear Delbert,

I just received the June issue of *Preservings* and want to thank you for again stimulating my thought. Thanks also for the quotes from our second issue of "The Barkman Letter." I am encouraged by your positive response to our efforts. I believe that I neglected to send you a copy of our third issue. I am sending a copy to you in the event that I forgot. I am working on the fourth issue and should have it ready to mail in August. This role of being an editor has instilled in me a respect for newspaper editors

who can do this kind of thing day after day!

I noted with some interest the pictures you included with your story on Dyan Cannon. No doubt you will receive some letters from readers who might find at least one of them offensive. I am glad that I could help in the search for her Mennonite heritage.

I am enclosing a check in the amount of \$100.00 for a complete set of your books on the Kleine Gemeinde. The first set I purchased are now in the archives of the Oregon Mennonite Historical and Genealogical Society in Salem, Oregon. If the current price is higher, please let me know and I'll send more.

I would like to share some thoughts with you about my pilgrimage as a Mennonite. I was very much surprised when I learned of the roots of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. No one, during my growing up years, ever mentioned that Peter M. Barkman's father and uncle were members of the KG. In addition, the controversy between Elder Jacob A. Wiebe and the KG was never discussed. David V. Wiebe, grandson of Elder Wiebe says nothing about the KMB-KG relationship in his two books. C.F. Plett, author of "The Story of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church" does discuss it briefly but places much more stress on Elder Wiebe's personal conversion story. It appears to me that the direction Elder Wiebe took the KMB Church was away from the KG towards the Mennonite Brethren and it now is no surprise to me that the two churches would merge in the 1950s.

In my early years, I spent time with grandfather, Jacob G. Barkman, and heard from him the story of the founding of the Gnadenu Village. I heard very little about his father, Peter M. Barkman and now wish that I could have the opportunity to question grandfather about his family experience. Grandfather had a strong faith and was always singing and reading his Bible. Although I have not had a chance to read his sermons (I understand a few still exist), I have heard that he had concerns for the integrity of the community and deeply regretted the move away from the German to the English. At the 75th anniversary of the church, he reflects on the future of the church with some questions as to how it will survive. I have also heard that he could be very blunt, especially when confronting the young men who were seeking wives in other Mennonite communities.

Throughout your writings, you have stated that the Gemeinde has remained true to its Anabaptist roots and has carried forward into our century the Anabaptist vision. In particular, you have held the spotlight on the Kleine Gemeinde as the group in which that vision has been most clearly seen.

I have also read with great interest the movement of the Kleine Gemeinde from Russia to Canada. Especially interesting to me has been the subsequent movement from Manitoba to Mexico, Paraguay, and Belize. If I understand the events correctly, their migrations were an attempt to find a place where they could practice their religion and culture in peace without the kind of "ethnic cleansing" which occurred in

Manitoba in this century.

And that brings me to the crux of my problem or concern. If I understand the Anabaptist origins, it was an attempt to restore the church to its New Testament antecedents. Later additions such as the mass with its belief in transubstantiation, child baptism, and links to the secular powers were rejected as being unbiblical. The Anabaptists wanted to be true to scripture and to live as God's people. Menno Simons clearly follows this set of beliefs and pastored the church that later carried his name. Yet, the Kleine Gemeinde, who you assert are the best examples of Anabaptists in our world today are the very ones who have sought to preserve a particular language-cultural tradition. When they felt that they could not preserve that, then they have moved on.

What help can these Kleine Gemeinde Anabaptists be to me, an English speaking American Mennonite raised in the KMB/MB tradition, as I struggle to maintain an Anabaptist vision in my life and in my community? For while they have held biblical belief up as their guiding light, they have also enshrined a language and a culture along side it. How is that different from what the Catholics did with the Mass and Infant Baptism? How can that German cultured religion bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Chinese, the Indians, and the Africans? Must they also become German speaking Mennonites? My experience in Africa tells me that it isn't necessary. Southern Africa has numerous churches filled with Christians who, although they might not know the word, are truly trying to be Anabaptists.

Where is the Anabaptist vision in our Mennonite communities today. What help can we gain from our forefathers on the issues facing us as wealthy, acculturated Americans? I believe that it is important to know the history of our people and to teach that history to our children. But, we also need to train a critical eye to our family and church history, so that we may be able to discern their vision for our times. We need to ask how well they carried out their vision and if that means that we need to be negative, than we should be. I thank my God for my personal family and church history and the sacrifices my greatgrandfather and family made to come to America, but I still struggle much with putting flesh on the Anabaptist vision for my time in Western Oregon.

I want to encourage you to continue to be provocative and outspoken. I have sensed that you are still able to maintain relationships with those who disagree with you. That is good, for it enables us to grow together in our faith. Sincerely "Jerry Barkman"

Editor's Note: First of all, it is too bad that reformed Mennonites disregard and disrespect their "pre" reform history, as if all truth started with whatever outside religious spirit they adopted and imported. They and their descendants are losing out on a rich and abundant heritage and culture.

The KG were probably the only group among the Russian Mennonites whose *raison*

d'etre was the restitution of the Anabaptist vision. Other renewal groups such as the Brüdergemeinde, Templars, Breadbreakers, etc., and to a lesser extent, also the "Kirchliche," gained their spiritual inspiration from outside religious cultures such as Separatist-Pietism.

You can say that the "Kleine Gemeinde have sought to preserve a particular language cultural tradition" but you can just as easily say that other denominations such as the Brüdergemeinde have adopted "and sought to preserve" the culture and language tradition of other religions, namely, Separatist-Pietism in Russia, and Revivalism, Fundamentalism and later Evangelicalism in North America. The Anabaptist vision is obviously more than language and culture although those practicing it (or seeking to practice it) will develop and articulate a religious culture and language, as did the New Testament church. The Anabaptist vision called disciples to be a faithful community something which all believers could and should strive for in whatever culture and language they may be.

The language shift in Danzig from Dutch to Plaut-Dietsch and High German took 200 years and the shift to Russian was well advanced after only a century. Mennonites such as the Kleine Gemeinde in Belize and Mexico are well on the way with another language shift; although Plaut-Dietsch continues as the main vernacular "house" language, English, Spanish and German are now taught in their school systems.

As far as speaking to other religious cultures is concerned, there are two approaches: one, by "thrompling" all over the world telling people everywhere that everything they believe is wrong, breaking up families and communities in the process, and exporting North American social and political values to boot.

The second option is for a community to actually practice the New Testament teachings, not just talk about them, and if something valid is genuinely present, people will come from all over to see and hear about the community. A startling concept. The latter has been practised most successfully by the Amish who probably introduce more North Americans to the Gospel than all the so-called Evangelicals combined.

July 21, 1998
9725 S. 95th E. Ave.,
Tulsa, Ok., 74133-6138

I was so excited to receive my first issue of "Preservings"! What an awesome magazine! I just can't quit reading it. Makes me want to go on the tour now, more than ever! I wanted to let you know that, somehow, I'm down twice on your address list--I received double the pleasure! I'm attaching the address labels below for your convenience. I'll share the extra copy with someone who will enjoy and perhaps subscribe to "Preservings" in the near future.

Keep up the great work! "Carol" [Friesen]

July 29, 98
Box 38, Kola

ROM 1B0
Preservings:

Dear Sir:

Thank-you very much for a very interesting and informative paper. Fascinating!

My late mother-in-law, Annie Brandt Rempel (1909-95) was a sister to Jack Brandt of Brandt Construction (Re: Heinrich R. Brandt (1838-1909), Pioneer Farmer"). Annie & Jack (as well as 8 others) were the children of Peter F. Brandt (1878-1961) son of Klaas R. Brandt (1845-1901). Thus making Jack a grandson to Klaas R. Brandt. Sincerely "Mrs. Agatha Rempel"

Newton, Ks
67117-8004
Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen
7/24/98

Dear Delbert,

Thank you for the June 1998 issue of Preservings. You did a lovely job throughout and with my small contribution - and you are quite the flatterer.

We are enjoying the rich and diverse materials in this issue - where do you find the time and energy to do all that travel, research, writing and publication!? With best wishes for the continued success of Preservings. "Reinhild"

Aug 10, 1998

Dear Editor:

I was surprised that my brief letter (*Preservings*, June, 1998, p. 16) elicited such a lengthy response. Your letter raises a number of issues which in turn call for a detailed response. At this point however, I will restrict myself to brief comments on several issues.

First let me assure you that I do not regard P. M. Friesen as the final authority on the Kleine Gemeinde or on the Mennonite Brethren movement. The story of MB beginnings is constantly being rewritten and much remains to be done.

With regard to the epithet "separatist-pietist" it may have a place as a descriptive label for a number of groups. But the context made it abundantly clear that the intent was to use it in a definitive and judgmental way. Sometimes labels are used descriptively as a short-hand way to communicate; at other times they are used to dismiss people and ideas without having to provide evidence. The intent was clearly, in my view, to pass judgment without substantiation.

A closely related issue is that concerning broad generalizations. Not all those who are labeled "separatist-pietists" were the same, whether they were Lutherans, Mennonites, or others. Philip Jacob Spener, August Hermann Francke, John and Charles Wesley, Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, Claas Epp, etc., do not all deserve to be lumped together.

As far as separatism is concerned, most or all Anabaptists and Mennonites were separatists in a fundamental sense. As far as pietism is

concerned, Robert Friedmann should not have the last word. There are significant scholarly studies that shed a much more nuanced light on the character of pietism (see e.g., F. Ernest Stoeffler, *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* and his *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*, and Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism* [Eerdmans's, 1978]).

Pietism should not all be equally dismissed as having had a destructive impact on modern Christianity. The negative stereotypes and caricatures abound. Brown states that "Pietism has been one of the least understood movements in Judeo-Christian history" (p.9). He then lists some of the negative assessments of pietism which include "emotionalism, mysticism, rationalism, subjectivism, asceticism, quietism, synergism, chiliasm, moralism, legalism, separatism, individualism and otherworldliness." On the positive side, pietism has been credited for values such as integrity, goodness, holistic approach to life, regeneration, sanctification, freedom, charity, tolerance, ecumenism and mission (p. 10). At the very least, such contrary evaluations suggest a more careful discernment of issues.

Pietism offered much more than merely "a more spiritualized, inward and emotional religion" (*Preservings*, p. 12). Neither was the issue simply one of "Nachfolge" (discipleship) as embodied in Anabaptism vs. "legalistic ritual[s]" in pietism.

Premillennialism, especially the chialistic variety, was not as central to reformed (MB) Mennonitism as Plett suggests. Claas Epp was not necessarily the logical culmination of the reform movement inspired by the core of pietism anymore than Muenster was the necessary and logical culmination of sixteenth century Anabaptism, Luther and others notwithstanding. To state that P.M. Friesen's spiritual movement was premised on the belief that "the Second coming would occur in Russia in 1881 and that the Russian Czar would be the Saviour of the church in the end times" is to move far beyond the evidence. The article suggests that there is little distinction between the fanaticism of Friesen and that of Epp.

The comments about being "straight forward" about one's background are highly speculative forays into constructing psychological portraits. Silence does not always speak what one supposes!

Where do we go from here? Maybe a public apology by MBs is in order, although the initial piece could hardly be construed as invitational. I regret much of what Friesen stated. But how much do most of us know about him other than what is in his history volume? How many have read "Ein Mennonitischer Schaecher" or know about the many times he risked his life for the sake of his persecuted Russian Christian brothers and sisters?

I hope that we do not need to conclude too quickly that Mr. Plett and I "will have to agree to disagree." There has not been very much dialogue between our two groups on the issues raised. I appreciate the very positive and affirming statement at the end of the article and trust that dialogue can continue without pre-

suming that positions are thoroughly entrenched. "Abe Dueck", Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies

23387-103 A Ave.,
Surrey, B.C., V3T 1S6

Dear Sir or Madame;

Does this membership fee for '99 also include to go into the Fair ground? [No. The HSHS is an entirely separate organization].

With regard to the papers that we have received over the years, is there anything about the Unraus that landed in Manitoba in 1874. We have a book called "East Reserve Village Histories". This William Unrau was born in 1829, his wife's name was Katharina Dueck. He is found on page 139 [actually its page 141]. He had a son born in 1865, also a Wilhelm Unruh and first married to Elisabeth Kehler, born Feb. 26th, 1867. This William Unrau is my wife's father by his second marriage. We would like to find out where his first wife is buried. The Unraus in later years moved to the West Reserve. When the mother passed away, the first child was adopted to a Bernhard Wiebe family. His wife was a Elisabeth K. Kehler, born Feb. 11, 1851.

Is it possible to get any information about his first wife?.....

Thanks again. "Peter Ratzlaff"

Editor's Note: You will find Wilhelm Unrau (b. 1829) at B193 in the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch* available from the HSHS. Evidently he homesteaded in Rosengard, NE7-6-6E, where he is listed in the 1881 census, published in the same book. Wilhelm was the wealthiest farmer in the village and in 1884 added a threshing machine to his holdings. Tracking the marriages of son Wilhelm would likely involve reviewing the information in the Chortitzer and Sommerfelder church books. According to the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch*, the descendants of another son Dietrich are found in a genealogy by Henry Unrau, Box 626, Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, R1N 3B9.

4920 Westridge Drive
Kelowna, B.C. V1W 4A1
vgd@bc.sympatico.ca
August 2, 1998

Dear Delbert,

I have appreciated receiving your *Preservings* and continue to marvel at your energy and single-mindedness regarding the history particularly of the Kleine Gemeinde church. There can be no doubt that you have contributed to a revision of an area of Mennonite history heretofore dominated by other Mennonite groups and their historiographies.

May I offer a critical comment concerning your choice of the term "Separatist-Pietist"? It seems to me that the two words that make up your term are already loaded to the brim by their historical context -- as well as being somewhat contradictory -- and do not serve you, or

your historiography, well. Classical Pietism developed within the German Lutheran Church in the eighteenth century and was characterized by a central concern to work **within the church**.

It is true that certain groups, particularly in southern Germany, developed their own brand of Pietism, which in time was influenced by English Methodism and the so-called *Erweckungsbewegung* (Revivalism), a nineteenth century phenomenon quite different from Pietism per se. These are well described in a book by Max Geiger, *Aufklärung und Erweckung* (1963). As I pointed out in a talk several years ago (see endnote), this later and different movement should not be confused with Pietism, which continued and continues to be an element in our religiosity.

Just as we cannot be Anabaptists today, though we may be more or less Anabaptist, so the term Separatist-Pietist might properly and historically be applied to a few small groups in Swabia who toward the end of the eighteenth century objected to the "rationalist" hymns in a new hymnal and formed their own separate fellowship. These were later swept up by the revival movements of Hofacker and Wüst, though even Hofacker advocated change within the church. Wüst was more radical and became pastor of a separated Lutheran congregation.

It is true that classical Pietism put a renewed emphasis on conversion (as Menno had done), but the eschatological preoccupation was the work of Jung-Stilling and the new international Awakening, furthered by the Basel Christentumsgesellschaft and the British and Foreign Bible Society, etc. Mission schools fed the religious imaginations of the likes of Christoff Hoffmann, founder of the Temple Society (to which many Mennonites fell prey).

This is a large topic and one that could be carried on at length (and perhaps should be). When you or I try to summarize matters of this complexity we are too easily bound to leave the hard ground of historical reality. Perhaps you and I could agree that in our history our people have been subjected to a succession of influences not all of which have been helpful. Certain fixations, like the pseudo-mystical hymns of Zinzendorf or the flights of fancy of Jung-Stilling have had an inordinate influence and we should see them in their context and then put them behind us (see 1 Thessalonians 5, 19: Do not stifle inspiration, and do not despise prophetic utterances, but bring them all to the test and then keep what is good in them and avoid the bad of whatever kind [NEB]).

I do want to encourage you in your work. Having just read Albert Keim's biography of Harold S. Bender, I am aware of how difficult many of our judgments of complex people and situations can be. I think Keim has done a masterful, even-handed job. Our work as historians is challenging and one of the chief temptations is over-simplification. I for example found much to criticize in Eduard Wüst when I first dealt with him some years ago, but I find that as I have looked more closely at the situation in which he found himself and the manner in which he carried himself I have grown to admire the man

and his work, with all its failings.

Perhaps you thought when you published your last number, that it might be like throwing some raw meat into a pack of Mennonite wolves, and I wonder what you imagine as you wait for the incoming mail. Anyway, your treatment of Di Brandt and the Mennonite literati will no doubt also bring some response. I will pass on that for this time.

With brotherly greetings, "Vic Doerksen" Endnote: "Pietism, Revivalism, and the Early Mennonite Brethren" in *The Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety*. Ed. Stephen L. Longenecker. Penobscot Press, 1997, 69-84.

Editor's Note: I think we essentially agree on the appropriate use of the term "Separatist-Pietist". No one so far has suggested a better alternative. I think all religious people who propagate millennial prophecies which turn out to be false run the risk of being considered fanatical. It's an occupational hazard for prophets. Deuteronomy 18:20-22 was often quoted by Kleine Gemeinde leaders with reference to such.

The situation in Russia during the 1870s is illustrated by the following story related by Martin B. Fast: "When the [Ohrloff] Gemeinde Aeltester J.[ohann] H.[arder, Blumstein] died [in 1875] minister Abr. Goertz was elected in his place. During the service in Halbstadt when he was ordained into his office, I was also present as a youth. By the time the ordination was completed it was somewhat late. 31 ministers and Aeltester were in attendance. Then Ohm Berend [Bernhard Harder, Russian Mennonite evangelist], presented his sermon. Aelt. Toews, who had conducted the ceremonies, pointed to his watch. But Ohm Berend was not fearful, went to the pulpit and took advantage of the opportunity and read out his understanding of the millennium, the 1000 year reign of peace. The people started to shuffle their feet, and after some time, they started walking out. By the time he was finished more than half of those in attendance had walked out. I remained until the very last word. My uncle sat close to me. Then

someone asked, "Mr. Fast, what is the meaning of this?" My uncle answered, "Its called baiting the lion in his den"--M. B. Fast, *Mitteilungen*, pages 8-9.

The story in my mind tells a lot about how deeply the false teachings of millennialism had permeated into the Russian Mennonite psyche, even as early as 1870s. It also shows the great disrespect and total disdain that adherents of such fanatical teachings typically have for their conservative and/or orthodox brethren and sisters in Christ. Little did the famous Bernhard Harder realize that the fanciful teachings he propagated that day would be revealed as lies by the effluxion of time, i.e. the prophecies by which he offended half of the Ohrloff church community that day, turned out to be false, Deuteronomy 18:20-22. The incident also shows the good sense of the average Mennonite in the Molotschna. Notwithstanding the oratory of the best speaker in the Molotschna, half the congregation still had the guts to show their disdain by walking out. They were "saved" literally by abiding by their traditional understanding of Revelations 20 as taught by their former Aeltester Johann Harder (1811-75), Blumstein, who had joined his cousin Peter P. Toews, Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, to publish the booklet by P. J. Twisk outlining the true evangelical teaching.

RR3 Whiting Way
Ladysmith, BC VOR 2E0
Aug 3, 1998

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society
Box 1960, Steinbach
Manitoba, ROA 2A0

Dear Editor:

Two years ago I acquired the enclosed picture from my aunt. The lady on the left is well known. She is my Great Grandmother, Catherina Hiebert, born 28 May 1855, wife of Jacob Hiebert born 22 Oct 1833. They homesteaded south of Niverville. (For a biography see



Photo Caption: Katharina Hiebert (1855-1910), and her sister Anna Heinrichs?

Preservings, No. 10, Pt. Two, pages 14-16.)

I am hoping someone will be able to help me with the identity of the other lady, on the right of the picture. My Uncle Bill (William Hiebert) apparently told my mother that the lady was my other Great Grandmother, Anna Hiebert Heinrichs, younger sister of Catherina. If this is true, it is the only picture I have seen of her. Unfortunately, my Uncle Bill was very sick and passed away before I was able to confirm this.

The picture is copied from a newspaper clipping captioned "This photo is of my great grandmother Mrs. J. Hiebert. She is the lady on your left, and was always referred to as Dr. Hiebert because of the many babies she delivered and the homemade remedies she dispensed from her kitchen. I hope there was something cooler for her to wear during the summer when she made her rounds." There was no name of the contributor or date when the newspaper was published, or even which newspaper. The contributor was apparently someone of my generation, also a great grandchild of Catherina Hiebert.

Anna Hiebert Heinrichs born, 22 Feb 1873, was married at the age of 18, to Jobann Heinrichs born 3 Mar 1870. They lived near Gretna on the West Reserve. She gave birth to two daughters Maria and Katherina. Maria became my grandmother, Mrs. Peter Hiebert of Niverville. Katherina became Mrs (Tina) Henry Harms of Dominion City. Anna died in her 22nd year, as the result of a fall, on 12 Jan 1894. Johann Heinrichs remarried, to Katherina Voth, and they had six children together.

If this picture is of Anna H. Heinrichs, it may well be the only one in existence. I would greatly appreciate any assistance, either from your group or from your reading audience.

I have pictures of most of Catherina's siblings, including Abram (m. Anna Drieder), Jacob (m. Helena Giesbrecht), Peter (m. Susanna Kliever), Cornelius (m. Helena Orns), and David (m. Aganetha Giesbrecht).

Thank you. "Evangeline Harris."

Theodore (Ted) E. Friesen
Box 720, Altona
Manitoba, Canada, ROG OBO
Email: yearbooks@friesens.com
August 12, 1998
Delbert Plett, Q.C.
P. O. Box 1960
Steinbach MB ROA 2A0

Dear Del:

Thanks very much for your telephone call the other day. It's always good talking to you.

I want to commend you again for a very fine issue of "Preservings". I was very much interested in your editorial, especially on the "ethnic cleansing" talk that you gave to the Manitoba Historical Society. You have said something that should have been said more often in the past to correct the inequities of ethnic minorities at the mercy of a larger and dominant society. Another very good example of this is detailed by Leo Driedger in the article, "E. K. Francis Search for Utopia A Tribute", page 89, "Journal of

Mennonite Studies", Volume 13, 1995. I was part of this story.

As I mentioned to you on the phone, my wife Linie and I did a tour of Brazil and Paraguay in May and June of this year. I have said you might want to consider publishing a part of this in the coming "Preservings". Attached is the article. You may want to leave out the first half of page 1 which is a report to a friend in Brazil, and not part of the Mennonite colonies tour. Attached also are five pictures that relate to the Paraguay tour.

Keep up the good work, Delbert. Sincerely,
"T. E. Friesen"

The Harder Family Review
Dux 3E3, North Newton,
August 12, 1998
Delbert Plett
Steinbach, MB

Dear Del:

Thank you for coming to the Harder Reunion for my presentation on Thursday evening. I regret that the group missed your remarks at the Heritage Centre on Saturday morning and that time did not permit a personal conversation there. My wife, who needs my assistance, was waiting for me out on the grounds.

Preservings #12 was another opus of historical gleanings. As we left the reunion, Bertha and I and my three sisters enjoyed reading various pieces as we traveled on to the Canadian Rockies, especially the article on Dyan Friesen, Bergthaler, another fascinating account of acculturation and secularization.

I appreciate your willingness to publish the letters from Ed Brandt and Helen Johnson, but I'm wondering whether you're really hearing their critiques, given some biases on their side as well. A truly objective while appreciating analysis of the KGs and KMBs remains to be done by all of us. We can celebrate their distinctive contributions while moving on to the renewal and rediscovery of an ecumenical Mennonite church in faithful response to John 17.

I am praying for you, Del, as you move into your own uncertain future. Continued best wishes!

In Christian love, "Leland Harder"

Editor's Note: I was honoured to be able to attend at least one session of the "Harder Reunion" a family in which I also proudly claim membership--see book review section.

With respect to a perceived bias, the editorial policy of *Preservings* views Mennonite history and that of the Hanover Steinbach area from the conservative and/or orthodox standpoint, something we are proud of. This might explain what may appear as bias to some. I believe *Preservings* is the only magazine/journal publishing from this perspective. This also proves that conservatives have been negligent in their obligations to document and publicise their history and theological development. At the same time, truth is inlanced by listening to the voices of those who have different views.

Box 3, Herbert
Sask, S0H 2A0
Aug. 15, 1998

Dear Mr. Plett,

At a Janhke reunion (Gers. & Sadie Wiens) siblings, Ernie and Evelyn Friesen of Steinbach looked in. In our visiting Ernie and I got on the subject of (what else?), but Plautdietsch, Mennonites--and bits of history related thereto.

In the course of our conversation he mentioned *Preservings* a time or two. On my asking he explained it is a newsheet put out by your Menn. Historical Society and that you are a prime mover in that "Bewegung".

This, my letter, with the humble request that you send me a copy at some time when it is convenient--or better yet--deliver it here to Herbert when you're through this part of the country. By the way, we are in the "Mennonite You Way" directory, should that interest you.

Hope to see you or hear from you, sincerely,
"Art Janhke"

Editor's Note: Mr. Janhke was advised that much history of his great-grandfather Gottlieb (b. 18540 is found in the *Blumenort* book by Dr. Royden Loewen. His great-grandmother, Helena Janhke, wrote an interesting history of the Friesen family which was published in *Profile*, pages 209-212, that of Cornelius Friesen (1810-92), a experienced teacher from the Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia. Friesen founded a teaching dynasty, including daughter Maria Friesen Redinzel (1844-1925), the first Mennonite woman school teacher in Manitoba, etc, etc, *Preservings*, No. 8, Part One, page 9. An exciting family history if ever there was one.

Oct. 26/98
Steinbach Historical Society

Greetings Mr. Plett;- Thanks for the June issue of *Preservings* and its many interesting articles. I was surprised with another issue. Please accept my donation enclosed. I did not expect a return of the stamp.

I am not acquainted with the authors, or their literary works, referred to in the review, beginning on page 114. Because of the emphasis on history and "tradition" let me share part of an article I have treasured. It expresses some of my feelings--find enclosed. "C. Buerge" Albany, Oregon

"Something is to be said about learning from the past. As James McBride Dabbs says, "The past is a powerful source of strength to those who have accepted and conquered it: to those who have not it is a heavy burden."

"While few things are more meaningless than words or postures which have long since lost their true authority, nothing is more pitiful than a shallow cry to be contemporary which regards all past findings as useless. Particularly at the present time of rapid change and crisis we ought to be reading history carefully and taking ex-

amples for our learning.”

“Our fathers in the faith do speak to us. Tradition is not the dead hand of the past pressing down upon the living present, but that which our fathers have left us as their testimony as to how Christians should live and think and do. It is difficult to imagine the vacuum we would experience if we had not the fellowship and insight which transcends the time barriers of the generations. Without the planting of those who have gone before we would starve without food. It is our task not only to pick the fruit of their planting but also to sow the seeds which will rid the future of its sorrows and sin and give sustenance for a better life in every respect to those who follow. - D.”

Sept 11/1998
Editor
Preservings

Dear Sir:

I read with interest the articles regarding the Russian Mennonite Literary tradition, *Preservings*, No. 12, June 1998, pages 110-116.

On Sunday morning, August 30, 1998, I heard an interview with Di Brandt, on CBC-Radio regarding the upcoming “World Next Door Concert” where she and Pat Friesen were doing readings. Brandt dropped the comment that she could not be a Mennonite anymore. As intended this immediately caught the attention of the interviewer, who asked for an explanation. Her answer was that Mennonite culture was merely oral and that to become written she had to abandon being a Mennonite.

How long do we have to suffer the misinfor-



Di Brandt, 1990. Reader accuses Di Brandt of overlooking hundreds of thousands of pages of primary source material in her condemnation of traditional Mennonite society as “non-literate”. Photo from *Preservings*, No. 12, June 1998, page 116. Photo credit, Di Brandt, Agness in the sky (Winnipeg, 1990), rear cover.

mation these two keep spreading about Mennonites. The Mennonite culture has always been literate and written, starting with the martyrs in Reformation times and continuing to the present. Even the early pioneers in Manitoba took the time to maintain journals, village records, letter correspondence and poetry. The statements made by Di Brandt and others who apparently are willing to do anything for their proverbial 16 seconds of fame, even to disparaging and maligning their own culture, merely prove; a) their own ignorance, or b) their intentional avoidance of hundreds of thousands of pages of primary source material overflowing our various archives.

Yours truly, “Peter Klassen” Box 3925, Steinbach, Manitoba

August 16, 1998
173 Aubrey St.
Wpg, R3G 2H9

Editor *Preservings*;

I enjoy your magazine very much. I am getting somewhat of a kick at the many fights you seem to be picking with the Feminists and others but worry you may be going too far. I must say I bristle everytime you speak of “ethnic cleansing” when it comes to the southern Manitoba experience since I feel it may cheapen the experience of people who have lived through recent violent ethnic cleansings. Yet, it wouldn't hurt for modern Mennonites to reflect on how their British mindset (Shakespeare, Chaucer, etc) has led them away from their true heritage (Goethe, perhaps).

As a child growing up in the middle of the prairies I always wondered why we sang so many sea-faring songs in school. (Blow the man down, Jack the Sailor, and best of all why was a good Mennonite girl singing “What shall we do with a Drunken Sailor”).

At all times when reading “*Preservings*” I am in awe of your prolific writing and research. I am so grateful that you are doing all of this and I can just sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labour.

In the last issue you asked for submissions. I am including a piece written about my father's family who are, as you call them, “48'ers”. It is only a glimpse into their experience; to make a true account of it would be a 4-part mini-series....

Thanks again for all your hard and good work. I hope you will keep it up for many years to come. Sincerely, “Lori Klassen”

3867 Hunt Clubb Rd.
Raymond, WA 98577
September 2, 1998

Mr. Delbert F. Plett--

I am responding to an article and articles in *Preservings*. After many years of searching, perhaps a dream will come true.

Ben Friesen sent me his copy of *Preservings*, No 12, June 1998, with the article about Dyan

Friesen Cannon.

What I share with you is **not** documented.

My mother's name was Dorothy Grace Klassen (Clausen). Her dad Abraham Klassen, mother Katherine Mary Friesen. Our family migrated from the Ukraine (Bergthaler) to the States (Minneapolis) and into the Plum Coulee area where, I am told, Dorothy (mother) was born, the third to the youngest into a family of 13. She is 98. Years earlier she shared that her grandfather was a minister and that her mother Mary Katherine Friesen was a sister to Ben Friesen's dad Jacob. One of Ben's brothers was a good friend of my mother. Somehow contact with the Friesen family faded.

Mother lived in Plum Coulee area - Lanighan, and finally Vancouver, B.C.

We met Ben and Bill's sister in July of last year. His sister was so like my mother - looks, talking - walking. She was best friends with my Aunt Sadie. The story goes on!

For me the mystery continues. How to tie this together?

Also, tradition - Grandfather Klassen was related to Ben's mother. Both were Klassen's. How??

The oldest Klassen in my grandparent's family was born in the 1870s.

I'd like to join the Historical Society and get a copy of *Preservings*. Enclosed \$25.00. Also, who can help me in putting my search together?

We'll be out of the country for a month, and then I'll continue.

Thank you for your wonderful magazine. I've read and read! I must return it to Ben.

I do have a photo of my grandparents. That is it. Mother can no longer share - maybe a German hymn. Mother was not one to share her life with us so it made finding information so difficult. Said she was **Dutch**. (She didn't wish to be German!). Abraham Klassen (Clausen) born Ukraine or Germany; Mary K. Friesen (d. 1937); Dorothy Grace Klassen (born 1900 Plum Coulee area); Nancy A. Brackett (1930).

Call collect if you wish to speak to me. Sincerely, “Nancy A. Brackett”

Sept 3, 1998

Enclosed please find a photo of my grandparents, Mary Katherine (or was it Maria Friesen?) and Abraham Klassen (Clausen) born in the Ukraine. Came to the States and somehow arrived in Plum Coulee area I've been told. My grandparents were married this side of the Atlantic, no

Notice to Subscribers.

The annual HSHS membership/subscription fee for *Preservings* has been increased to \$20.00 effective January 1, 1998. This increase is made with the intention of bringing the subscription/membership fee into line with printing, production and mailing costs of our newsmagazine, two issues annually, over 100 pages each.



C. 1887. Abraham Klassen and Maria Friesen Klassen, with the two oldest children Maria (1883-1962) and Peter (1886-1915?), circa 1887. Photo courtesy of Nancy Brackett, Raymond, Washington.

documentation. Grandfather was a well-to-do farmer (Langham) etc. But hit the bottle, the family scattered. The children in the photo would possibly be the oldest daughter, I've heard Abraham died early one. Also Peter lies in Flanders Fields (How did he serve in the military?)

I hope this helps. I'll search for the death certificate and hopefully get more information from Bert Neibergall (son of the youngest daughter Gertrude--Truda). They seemed to interchange names. Sorry for the rush and thank-you. Sincerely "Nancy Brackett"
Sept. 25, 1998

"...[My mother] said her mother wore a prayer cap, her father was a minister, also that grandfather Klassen was a double cousin to Maria Friesen, wife of Jakob....again my sincere thanks, "Nancy and Jim Brackett"

Editor's Note:

It appears that the Abraham Klassen (1836-96) and Peter Friesen (b. 1829) families settled in the Mapleton settlement in 1874-78, about 20 miles west of Fargo, North Dakota. Many of these settlers moved to the Winkler Altona area in Manitoba, Canada, in the 1890s.

HSBS research director John Dyck, Winnipeg, is of the view that Nancy's grandparents were Abraham Klassen (b. 1859) and Katharina Friesen (b. 1862) who are listed in the Sommerfelder church registers until 1902, when they may well have moved west. Five of Abraham's siblings were also listed in the Sommerfelder church registers, but all transferred out between 1900 to 1965. The records also confirm that her grandmother was Katharina Friesen and not Maria Friesen.

Abraham's father, Abraham Klassen (b. 1836-96) married Dorothea Penner (1837-67), sister to Erdmann Penner (1837-1907), Mennonite grain trading tycoon of Tannenau, E.R. and later

Gretna. Her mother, Anna Buhr Penner (b. 1813) "later lived in Mountain Lake, Mn., but died in the Fargo settlement." This scenario would affirm that Dorothy Klassen (b. 1900) and Ben Friesen are double first cousins. It is interesting also that Dorothy was apparently named after her long-ago deceased grandmother Dorothea Buhr Penner (1838-67) BGB A76.

Box 176, Grunthal
Manitoba, R0A 0R0
September 19, 1998

Dear Mr. Plett;

My father-in-law Mr. Frank B. Doerksen of Grunthal gave me a gift copy of the June issue of *Preservings*. I have enjoyed reading the contents. Having looked through father-in-law's earlier issues I believe *Preservings* is well edited, informative, covering a wide swath of Mennonite life, and represents considerable variety of writer's input with good research. Thanks for good work.

I want to order my own subscription. Enclosed is thirty dollars for my subscription of *Preservings*. Sincerely "John Wiebe"

Wm. Schroeder
832 Wocklow St.
Winnipeg, Man.
R3T 0H7
Sept. 24/98

Editor Plett, *Preservings*

Re: Your article "Separatist Pietism", #12, June 1998.

I will leave it to better qualified historians to respond to its main thesis, the revisionist interpretation of P.M. Friesen and "Reformed Mennonites". But I venture to submit several comments.

1. It must be conceded that Mennonite Brethren, especially in the past have accepted some of Friesen's pronouncements too uncritically. And your articles provides some balance. But it too appears one-sided in the opposite direction.

Beside the many negative quotations on Friesen's alleged intolerance toward dissenters you ignore the other variety, e.g. "respectfully and lovingly tolerating" the positions of others, and "we must allow everyone who claims to be a Christian (whether a good or bad Mennonite in terms of the early Anabaptists) to stand under the banner, 'It is God who judges me'." And he cites 1 Cor.4:3 (Page 311, English translation, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*).

2. In the same paragraph Friesen tolerantly cites opposing millennial views. Your article seems to imply, or perhaps even assume, that Friesen embraced the dispensational premillennialism of the Pietists. That is uncertain. I remember reading long ago Friesen's questioning, perhaps even deploring, the extent to which MBs were adopting this position. Unfortunately I cannot now find my source, although I cite Friesen among others in old lecture notes for a course on eschatology.

3. In your article you describe the "conservative" Mennonites as "victims" of the reformed ones. I do not dispute that perception, in the broad scope. But here too there is another side. While growing up in a Russlander MB home in Hanover in the 1930s and 40s and during two years in High School in Steinbach, I frequently regarded myself as the victim. Graphic illustrations could be provided. This was long before I read P.M. Friesen. I touch upon the issue of the "two solitudes" at the everyday, unlearned level in an article on the history of Rosengard, written recently at the instigation of John Dyck, editor of the pending Volume IV of the series on the East Reserve.

4. On page 15 of your article you want "reformed" Mennonites to "stop using terms like 'unsaved', 'heathen', 'of the devil'", etc. of their conservative and orthodox sisters and brothers. My impression was that they had stopped, by and large. If you know otherwise, shouldn't you name your present sources? As it is, you seem to ascribe to Mennonites of today epithets written a century ago. That would appear like a tactic as unfair as the very attitudes of the past that the article rightly criticizes.

5. Notwithstanding the above, I appreciate *Preservings*.

Sincerely, "Wm. Schroeder"

Pioneers in Democracy.

The ancient Mennonite Gemeinden broke new ground in the 16th century by adopting a democratic form of governance based on the sovereignty of the membership, 400 years before such concepts became popular in Western Europe. From the earliest times, the most significant decisions of any community, the acceptance of new members, were made by entire Gemeinde, including women.

The constant debate within conservative Mennonite communities (Gemeinden) since Reformation times evidences a genuine grass-roots democracy. This was necessary in groups such as the Bergthaler, Kleine Gemeinde and Old Coloniers who attracted intellectual contemplative people, not the sort running around throwing themselves after every new religious fancy and fanatical whims floating around. The conservatives were articulated by a consistent vision of being the people of God and had much better things to do: communities to build and matriarchies to nurture, etc.

The individual intellectual expression found in conservative groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde, Chortitzer, Sommerfelder and Old Coloniers will not be evident to those who have not done any research or reading in the massive *Schriftentum* of these communities, nor to those looking for superficial blemishes to use in disparaging their own culture.

By D. Plett Q.C.

Editor's Note: My article probably appears one-sided only to those not used to having P. M. Friesen challenged. I believe it reflects correctly the view of the East Reserve pioneers.

Regarding your third point, it is no secret that there was sometimes considerable friction between Russländer refugees and the Kanadier hosts. Given the views expressed by P. M. Friesen and echoed by some Russländer, friction was to be expected. But it was never an excuse for mistreatment such as you describe. This is a separate topic altogether which needs to be addressed, getting into the whole area of the cultural differences which had developed between the Russländer and Kanadier. Russländer historians have had their revenge in spades by attempting to write the Kanadier, constituting over half of Canadian Mennonites, out of the official historical record. e.g. *Mennonites in Canada, Volumes One to Three*.

Children are sometimes very cruel to classmates of different backgrounds. This type of treatment is still occurring today with the children of those returning from Mexico and Paraguay, probably encouraged by the religious views of their parents and certain Mennonite denominations, the so-called "Menno conformity".

Regarding your No. 4, reformed Mennonites are still calling conservative Mennonites "unsaved", etc. I will give you a home assignment. Take a straw poll of any 20 GC, MB, EMMC or EMC pastors, ask them for a written statement, whether "Old Coloniers" are "saved" or not. Report back for the next issue of *Preservings*.

311 Quill Crescent
Sask., Sask. S7K 4V3
Sep. 18, 1998

Delbert Plett
P. O. Box 1960
Steinbach, Man.
ROA 2A0

Dear Mr. Plett:

Thank you very much for the No. 12 June 1998 issue of *Preservings*, which I received yesterday. I first briefly scanned the magazine, and was immediately fascinated by the variety of informative articles contained in just one issue. I then settled down to a thorough reading, page by page. Anyone who has even just begun to discover their Mennonite history will find many questions answered, and will be given food for thought on issues previously assumed to have only one interpretation.

My interest in Mennonite history began a few years ago with the preparation of a Family Tree for display at the Penner Family Reunion, which included the descendants of Peter O. Penner (Dec. 2, 1832 - Jan. 8, 1910) and his wife Margaretha (Friesen) Penner (Dec. 26, 1832 - Dec. 15, 1891), my paternal great-grandparents. They are listed in the Bergthal Gemeinde Buch BGB B121.

Peter O. Penner and his family arrived at Quebec City on July 1, 1875, aboard the S. S.

Moravian. They spent the winter of 1875-76 in Ontario, and arrived in Manitoba on May 10, 1876. We then lose track of them until they appear in the 1881 Census in the village of Heuboden in the West Reserve, where Peter homesteaded SW 18-2-2W. This was possibly his second homestead, after giving up a homestead in the East Reserve.

We feel quite sure they lived in the East Reserve for the first few years, but we have not been able to discover in which village they lived. If you can be of any help in this regard we would be very appreciative.

I am enclosing a cheque for membership in the HSHS. As I see from a note in the "Letter" section that no back copies of *Preservings* are available, I am wondering if these issues are available through library loan. It is so exciting to see that you are preserving Mennonite history, to be shared by us all.

Thank you! "Gladys (Penner) Wiebe"

Editor's Note:

You raise an interesting point, sometimes overlooked in family histories.

The resources available to answer this question include the "Brot Schuld Registers" as published by Irene Kroeker, *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 40-44. These records list six

Peter Penners, but four can be eliminated by the fact that Peter Penner (1832-91), was the son of Johann. This leaves a Peter Penner in Rosengard and one in Kronsthal. Often the Brot Schuld Registers will be enough to identify where a particular family lived in the East Reserve between 1874 and 1881. Unfortunately Peter Penner was a very common name.

The "Homestead Cancellations" are sometimes helpful, but again because Peter Penner is such a common name, there are 12 of whom four can be eliminated as Kleine Gemeinders. It is always worthwhile to check the fire insurance records published in *Working Papers* and the 1881 assessment roll published in *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten*, pages 44-49, in 1983. Of course, always check all private family documents and records. A birth certificate for any children born between 1876 and 1881 might list the village of birth.

Peter Penner (1846-1922) BGB C65 has been identified in Schöneberg, two miles south of Rosengard, which might eliminate one of the two Peter Penners, leaving your Peter Penner as the one in Kronsthal. I would regard this only as a supposition at this point, a thesis to be proven or disproven by sifting through all the evidence time and time again, until unequivocal confirmation is found. Good luck!

The Mennonite Literary Tradition.

"Mennonites have a strongly cultivated literary tradition that dates to the 16th century"-
-Dr. Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg.

Mennonite religious culture was predicated upon a systematic regime of study and writing modelled upon the Gospels and epistles of the Apostles. The core of the tradition was canonized with the publication of the *Martyrs' Mirror* by Thielmann Janz von Brought (1625-64), Dortrecht, Netherlands. The *Martyr's Mirror* consisted of first hand accounts of 4,000 martyrs many written by women and men as they languished in prisons awaiting torture and execution.

The tradition was carried along with persecuted refugees as they fled to places like Danzig (Gdansk) on the Baltic Sea. Here it was codified by the compilation and publication in German of the *Gesangbuch* by Hans von Steen (1705-81), a collection of martyr songs and poetic dirges.

The Mennonite literary tradition had five facets--journal keeping, correspondance, poetry, and print culture, and religious writing such as sermons.

There was an active correspondance between the Mennonite churches in Netherlands and Prussia in the 16th and 17th century. A similar exchange of letters occurred between Prussia and Russia in the 19th century. After the emigration of 1874 letters were written between relatives and friends in America, Russia and Germany. These epistles today provide an exciting bird's eye view of the life world of our ancestors.

The poetry tradition represented by the *Martyrs' Mirror* and *Gesangbuch* is still practiced by many conservative Mennonites to this very day. See article in the material culture section of this magazine.

Mennonite ministers, elected from the congregations, typically prepared and wrote out their own sermons. Many of these sermons, dating back to the 18th and 19th century and more, are still extant. These sermons are studded with jewels of Biblical allegory and exposition of scripture, as relevant today as when they were written.

Some of the earliest journals of Mennonite men and women were collected and published in the *Martyrs' Mirror*. Notable journals in Prussia include that of Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96), Ellerwald, an ancestor of many in the East Reserve. Abraham F. ("Fula") Reimer (1808-92), Steinbach, Borosenko, and Jakob Epp (1820-90), Judenplan, were noted journalists in Imperial Russia.

Journal keeping was a necessity for land-owning household producers such as the Mennonites, their only record of crops, yields and weather. By the end of the 19th century journal keeping had become primarily a function of the matriarchy within Mennonite culture, as it was the women who managed the household economy.

By D. Plett Q.C.

News

East Reserve 125th Anniversary 1874 - 1991 Celebrating Our Heritage

by Karen Peters, Chair 125th Anniversary Committee.

"...In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them....." taken from Joshua 4:6,7. Historical guideposts are not a recent invention. In 1974, southeastern Manitoba marked one hundred years of settlement in the East Reserve, the area now mainly referred to as the Rural Municipality of Hanover.

Numerous events and memorials celebrated the establishment of about 66 East Reserve villages and hamlets. The Rural Municipality of Hanover initiated a meeting in early 1997 to plan celebrations for the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the East Reserve Mennonites, appointing **Norman Plett** (326-3805; Box 8, Group 7, R. R. #1 Steinbach ROA 2A0) as their representative/secretary.

A Steering Committee was established at the January 19, 1998 meeting, with representatives of some key players included in the list of nine people. Each member is responsible for a specific portfolio, and reports to the committee at its monthly meeting.

A Mission Statement defining our purpose is the focal point of all discussions: *The East Reserve 125 Steering Committee exists to raise awareness of the 1874 settlement of the Hanover area, known as the East Reserve, and to promote and celebrate the 125th anniversary of this historical event in 1999.* The committee values the support received from the City of Steinbach as well as the Mennonite Heritage Village. Their representative, **Henry K. Friesen** (326-3868; Box 1352 Steinbach ROA 2A0), acts as a liaison. Treasurer **Verna Wiens** (434-6129-, Box

541 Grunthal ROA ORO) keeps us posted on our current financial status, while **Henry Kasper** (326-2332; Box 1619 Steinbach ROA 2A0) is working at fund-raising.

Fourteen Community Contacts serve as a vital link to the many former and current East Reserve communities. Please feel free to contact your representative to volunteer support and assistance.

It is the privilege of the author to serve as the Chairperson of this Steering Committee. As it is with many things, some projects are falling into place easily, and others need more prodding. The committee feels they are beginning to raise awareness of the anniversary, but require the assistance of individuals and organizations to fulfil this mandate.

You can assist this effort by spreading the word! One concrete avenue toward this end is to purchase mementos that are now available. Sport the anniversary logo on a t-shirt, sweatshirt, coffee mug, or lapel pin, and be prepared to respond to the questioning looks you will encounter. Many of the items are very suitable for Christmas gifts, including spoons and canvas shopping bags. As you peruse your lists for Christmas, birthdays, and special occasions,

consider presenting a gift that reminds people of their heritage.



Karen Peters, chair 125th Anniversary Steering Committee.

125 Anniversary Community Contacts

Blumenort, Mel Penner	326-1665;
Also Blumenhof, Friedenshoff and Hochfeld,	
Clearspring, Ed and Alice Laing	326-9972;
Friedensfeld, Alvin Fender	326-3156;
Hamburg, Neuenburg, Burwalde and Felsenton,	
Grunthal, Peter Froese,	434-6473;
Schoenhorst, Gnadefeld, Bergfeld, Schoendorf, Hoffnungsfeld, Neuoffnung, Krongart,	
Weidenfeld, Sommerfeld, Schoenberg and Schoensee,	
Kleefeld, Lorne Peters	377-4242;
Grunfeld, Schoenau, Blumenfeld, Rosenfeld, Eigengrund, Schoenfeld, Friedrichsthal,	
Blumstein, Steinreich, Rosengard, Hochstadt and Gnadentort,	
Landmark, Stan Penner	355-4003;
Halbstadt, Blumengart, and Silberfeld,	
Mitchell, Elmer Martens	326-1951;
Vollwerk, Reichenbach, Eigenhof, Ebenfeld, Rosenthal, Kleefeld (No. 1), and Neuendorf,	
New Bothwell, Edna Vogt 388-4573;	
Kronsthal, Oserwick, Schoenthal, and Bergthal,	
Pansy, Carla Gresiuk	434-6767;
Landskron and Neuberghfeld,	
Chortitz/Randolph, Karen Peters	377-4409;
Tannenau, Schoenwiese and Reinfeld,	
Ridgewood, Wally Doerksen	326-9444;
Neuanlage and Eigenfeld,	
Sarto, Myron Smuk	434-6531;
Steinbach, Henry Friesen	326-3868;
Lichtenau and Eigenfeld,	
Hespeler/Niverville, Orlando Hiebert	388-4195.
Tourond, Heuboden, Grossweide, Strassberg, Pastwa, Altona, Schantzenberg and Reinland.	



Logo of the 125th East Reserve Anniversary Celebrations. "Celebrating Our Heritage".

We all know folks who "have everything" -- well, here is the perfect solution! We invite employers to purchase mementos as gifts for their workers. Businesses are encouraged to purchase t-shirts/sweatshirts for their staff to wear on a designated day, honouring the pioneers of the East Reserve.

Helen Penner (377-4960; Box 2246 Steinbach ROA 2A0) is in charge of the mementos, and would be pleased to take your order. We have already experienced critical media support, and will continue to explore ways of increasing awareness.

The latter part of the Mission Statement continues to loom before us. We are counting on our communities and their contacts to incorporate this theme into existing 1999 events and annual celebrations. The East Reserve 125 Steering Committee is capable of organizing a number of events, but is relying on interested folk to create their own.

We would like to assist you in the promotion of these events, and encourage you to contact **Edna Vogt** (388-4573; Box 1090 New Bothwell ROA ICO) to add your information to the line-up. We would also be pleased to supply mementos for you to sell.

Why don't you adopt the theme *Celebrating Our Heritage* for your community's picnic/fair in 1999? What about creating a float for your local parade as well as your surrounding communities? Why not unfold some relevant history about a village that is no longer in existence, and submit a vignette for inclusion in the historical sketches for local newspapers and radio in 1999? I encourage you to uncover some of the stories of our communities and families. **Hildegard Toews** (434-6214), Box 317 Grunthal ROA ORO) is our link with the media, and she would certainly appreciate your contributions!

All of these components should stimulate us to reflect on the values the pioneers brought to the East Reserve!

Be sure to note **Sunday, August 1, 1999** on your calendar as a day reserved for a number of commemorative events! A morning worship service is in the planning stages, and tentative plans include an ecumenical service at the Mennonite Heritage Village. We are still awaiting a reply to the invitation extended to the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Jean Chretien. He was invited to join us at the Mennonite Heritage Village on August 1 to mark the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Mennonite settlement in southern Manitoba.

The significance of this date is that the first shipload of 65 families arrived at the East Reserve on August 1, 1874. A total of seven thousand Russian Mennonites emigrated to Canada from 1874 to 1878. The descendants of these pioneers and other Mennonites who immigrated later now total 60,000 in Manitoba. A Prime Ministerial visit would recognize the contributions our ancestors made to Canadian commercial, social and cultural life.

The 1870s East Reserve settlement included people with a variety of ethnic backgrounds and origins. We acknowledge the integration process

begun by first-generation and second-generation Mennonite immigrants of the East Reserve. During the 125th anniversary of this event, we wish to recognize the valuable contributions of **all groups** that established themselves on the east side of the Red River. One of the underlying purposes of the recognition of this special anniversary is to promote thankfulness, peace and goodwill to all people in our region.

If you have not already seen the mural on the side of *Steinbach Hatchery & Feed Ltd.*, it is certainly "worth the trip"! Upon careful observation, one will find many details and authentic

pictorial information incorporated into this collage. One can also find the names of the artists and the selected 125th anniversary logo embodied in the design. Watch for more murals before the end of 1999! I encourage other communities to select a visible wall (with the permission of the owner, of course), and contact Pat Hildebrandt at *Presenting... Art* (326-1740; 395 Main Street, Steinbach) for more information.

We are delighted that a variety of individuals, families and groups have expressed interest in the acknowledgement of this anniversary. One such group is HART (Hanover Association of



Mementos out for 125th Anniversary.

Members of the East Reserve 125 Steering Committee, Helen Penner and Karen Peters (chair) display mementos for the celebration of settlement in the East Reserve taking place next year. Photo courtesy of Carillon News, page 9A, October 5, 1998

East Reserve 125 Steering Committee, by Hildegard Toews, Box 317, Grunthal, Manitoba, R0A 0R0. Mementos out for birthday

Mementos to commemorate the 125th anniversary of settlement in southeastern Manitoba next year are ready for sale.

"We wanted to get them out this fall - in time for Christmas gift-buying," says Hildegard Toews, a member of the East Reserve 125 Steering Committee planning the celebrations.

The mementos include sweatshirts, t-shirts, mugs, collectors spoons and pins, and book bags, all bearing a logo created specifically for the celebration.

The logo incorporates a bold cross, set against a map of Hanover and Steinbach (originally known as East Reserve) and surrounded by the tools of the pioneers - the scythe, axe and shovel. These elements symbolize the faith and hard work of the early settlers.

The words "Celebrating Our Heritage" and "East Reserve" frame the symbols.

The anniversary souvenirs are available in Steinbach at the Mennonite Heritage Village gift shop, Clearspring Village information booth and Towne Square Stationery. They will also be sold at community events throughout 1999. Article courtesy of *Carillon News*, page 9A, October 5, 1998

Henry E. Plett Memorial Awards

Retired Teachers). Its members have expressed their willingness to participate in the celebration of the 125th year of education in Manitoba. They are pleased to be guests within Hanover classrooms that are teaching about "schools of the past" or about the school system. We encourage more groups to plug into the anniversary's theme in their particular area of interest!

At the time of writing, the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society representative, **Delbert Plett** (326-9022; Box 1960 Steinbach ROA 2A0), is putting the finishing touches to a history booklet written in honour of this anniversary. You, the reader of Issue No. 13 of *Preservings*, are fortunate to be among the first to set your eyes on this brief introduction to the history of the East Reserve. May the reading of this circular serve as an appetizer for the 125th anniversary menu to follow in 1999!

Just as the Mennonite immigrants stepped into the doorway of Canada, we are about to enter the portal of a new millennium! May the door be made of glass to enable us to glance back occasionally and remember how it is that we came to live in this rich province and country! J. B. Toews put it very aptly when he said "He who does not know his past does not understand his present and has no direction for the future."

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

Submitted by Karen S. Peters, Steering Committee Chairperson and Hanover School Division Representative (377-4409, Box 29, Randolph ROA ILO).

Andreas Rutkauskas and Steven Gregg, graduates this year from Westgate Mennonite Collegiate tied for first place in the 1998 Henry E. Plett "Memorial Award" for Family Histories. The students' papers, which were presented to and critiqued by their classmates in the Senior 4 Mennonite History Course, were highly readable narratives which rejected hagiography to provide honest explorations of their family's history. This is the second year that Westgate students have won the award. Their teacher was Janis Thiessen.

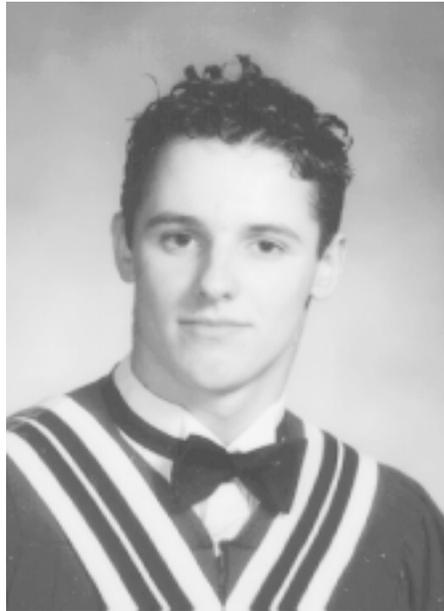
Laurie Penner and Adrienne Reimer, from Steinbach Christian High School, shared the sec-

ond prize in the annually awarded Henry E. Plett Memorial Awards as selected by the Genealogy Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

Laurie's essay "Why Laurie is the Way she is" traced the history of the Penner clan. Adrienne Reimer selected the Sawatzky family with her essay "My Sawatzky Heritage".

The first prize winners shared the first prize money of \$250, and the second prize winners shared the second prize of \$100. Their teacher was James Kornelsen.

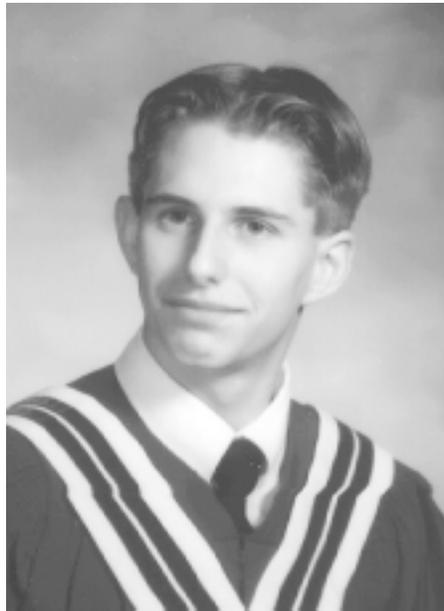
These awards are sponsored by the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.



Andreas Rutkauskas



Laurie Penner



Steven Gregg. Photos of Steven Gregg and Andreas Rutkauskas, courtesy of teacher Janis Thiessen, 86 Westgate, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 2E1.



Adrienne Reimer. Photos of Adrienne Reimer and Laurie Penner are courtesy of teacher Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Schedule

Community Events, 1999 125 Anniversary

Niverville - June 4-6

Blumenort - dates unavailable

Landmark - June 12-13

New Bothwell - June 25-27

Mitchell - July 24

Steinbach - July 30-August 2

Grunthal - August 13-15

Kleefeld - August 21-22

Many local churches are also planning special events to commemorate the 125th anniversary. Check with your local pastor or church secretary for details.

50 Year Freedom Jubilee Celebration

Submitted by Wanda Friesen Andres and Nettie Loewen Dueck, Winnipeg, Manitoba, for the 50 Year Freedom Jubilee Committee.

In August 1998, post- World War Two Mennonite Refugees in Canada invited the Canadian Mennonite community to participate in commemorating Fifty Years of freedom, opportunity, and safety in Canada. No insignificant event for former D.P.s (displaced persons) to celebrate, and celebrate we did!

The 50 year Freedom Jubilee Celebration was a wonderful two day event of remembering, praising God and thanking Canada, MCC and the Mennonite Community, especially our sponsors for their generous help fifty years ago. The events on Saturday, August 15, 1998 took place at the Heritage Village in Steinbach, consisting of the sharing of experiences, speeches, film, drama and, of course, music and singing of hymns, a vital part of the Mennonite people, by the "Gittarenchor" led by Peter Reimer, and the "Jubilee Strings" by Abe Loewen. Sunday, August 16 at the Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall, was a more formal afternoon of praise, worship and story telling. Dr. John Martens led the Jubilee Singers in several selections, and also had the audience join them in a sing-a-long of favourite hymns. Our Master of Ceremony, Jake Harms, was able to guide a four hour program in three hours very aptly.

The idea of gathering together post World War Two Mennonite refugees from across Canada in a 50 Year Freedom Jubilee Celebration, was conceived by two Committee members, Jake R. Wiebe and Henry Bergen. They had been part of a successful, smaller celebration of Mennonite refugees who had arrived in Canada on the ship, "General Heinzelman" in 1947. This event sparked the interest of many former post World War Two refugees.

After much prayer and encouragement from friends and acquaintances a committee of former refugees was formed and we plunged into the task of planning this historic event. The last time such a "Dankfest fuer Mennonitschen Neueinwanderer" was held in Winnipeg was in 1958 for those arriving in Canada between 1943 - 1958, so perhaps it was time for another celebration. An amazing coincidence was that the same motto was selected at our celebration as then: "Praise the Lord oh my soul, and forget not all His benefits," Psalm 103:2. We feel that this motto was reflected in all aspects of the celebration.

After approximately nine months and 5000 hours of volunteer time from committee members and supporters and especially by the Grace of God, the Fifty Year Freedom Jubilee became a reality. The strong support given by individuals, organizations, and businesses of the Mennonite community provided encouragement and made the task feasible.

World War Two created severe hardships for Mennonites living in Eastern Europe and many made the difficult trek westward with



50 Year Jubilee Committee: L. to r, Standing John Klassen, Jakob R. Wiebe, Henry Bergen, John Funk, Abe Reimer, Frank Froese and Nettie Dueck. Seated: Wanda Andres and George Teichroeb. All photos for this article are courtesy of Frank Froese, Steinbach, Manitoba.



Under the tent. Audience at Freedom 50 celebrations, August 15, 1998, Heritage Museum, Steinbach. Village Museum August 15, 1998.

the retreating German army. Large numbers were forcibly returned to the Soviet Union and exiled to remote regions of the Soviet Union where they experienced great hardship and death. With the help of the Canadian government, the Mennonite Central Committee and Canadian sponsors, however, approximately 10,000 "Heimatlose" Mennonites were able to find a new "Heimat" in Canada. between 1947 and 1951, some via Paraguay.

The refugee story was recalled through speakers, sharing of memories, film, drama, music, and, of course, through the Mennonite



Poster for "Freedom 50 Jubilee."



Anna Regehr describing the arrest of her husband by the NKVD in 1937.

tradition of food.

Dr. Peter Dyck and his wife Elfrieda were MCC workers in Germany at that time and were instrumental in locating and contacting relatives in Canada and relocating the refugees. In his usual direct and compelling way, Dr. Dyck put into perspective the immense task of gathering together the great number of Mennonite refugees, helping them survive, finding countries willing to accept the large number of displaced people with a German background, and preventing the repatriation to the Soviet Union. He reminded the listeners of God's continued guidance. Repatriation was a constant threat to the Mennonite refugees. Dr. Dyck related how on one

occasion a train of refugees expecting to go West discovered, to their horror, that the train was going East. One brave woman demanded of the soldiers that either she and her child be let off immediately or they could just shoot her on the spot, since she would not return to the Soviet Union. Some years later, when relating this incident, a man in the congregation stood up and said that the woman had been his mother who was now sitting at the back of the room. Another illustration of God's continued guidance related by Dr. Dyck was the difficult, but successful passage of a train loaded with Mennonite Russian born refugees through Soviet controlled territory to a ship waiting for them.

Dr. Marline Epp reminded us that the refugee story was to a large extent the story of women without men. Women, although often referred to as "die schwachen" (the weak), demonstrated great strength and courage. Through interviews with many women of that time she gleaned a little of the women's suffering, their faith and the strength it took to make a new beginning in this country.

Gerhard Ens, who has had a close and longstanding involvement with the Mennonite Community, related in a touching and humorous way of how the Canadian Mennonites planned the help and reception of these new refugees. He said "the old ones argued but the young intermarried" and so integration took place.

"Blott'n Bultji" was a play especially written for this celebration by Wilmer Penner as a testament to the courage and faith of the immigrants. The drama is set in Steinbach today, that is, this day of the Jubiläum, where Peeta and Marie Rampel are preparing to attend the celebration but their young son has other plans. By relating their experiences of the war they are able to convince him that their story has also meaning for him. The drama is based on real life experiences.

Otto Klassen's documentary "The Great

Trek" is a powerful visual chronical of the refugee exodus from the USSR. The film is a collage of commentary and original German News Service film footage. It was a vivid reminder of God's goodness in spite of the hardships of the war.

Poignant first person accounts were given by Mrs. Anna Regehr and Dr. Harry Loewen. Mrs. Regehr at 90 years-of-age vividly described the dark night in December of 1937, when her husband was arrested by the men in the black truck, never to be reunited again. The last Christmas gifts they exchanged was a piece of Christmas sausage she sent along with him and his best suit which he left for her to barter for food. Especially heart wrenching was hearing of the parting from their small daughter.

Dr. Harry Loewen made the trek to Germany with his Mother and Grandmother as a thirteen-year-old in 1943. He related his teenage dream of attending Bible College and his grandmothers response "you poor immigrant boy! what will become of you?" But as with so many young immigrants of that time, his dream did come true. He obtained a Ph.D., and taught at various Mennonite Institutions, and has many publications to his credit.

Dr. Johannes Reimer, currently a visiting lecturer at Concord College, a more recent immigrant out of Russia, concluded the Sunday's Celebration by reminding us that a Biblical Jubilee meant renewal, not the resting on past achievements; forgiveness not expressions of anger and revenge. The prevailing spirit of the Freedom Jubilee Celebration seemed to be just that. People remembered and cried, but also were awed with God's leading, and expressed their thankfulness by their contributions to the MCC Ukrainian Project.

The goal of this gathering was not only to celebrate, but also to show our gratitude in tangible ways. Apart from meeting our financial obligations we were able to realize our goal of raising \$40,000 for a MCC Ukrainian Project. The money will be used 1) to support a new children's home, 2) in a revolving loan program in Zaporozhye, 3) theological and social work education, and 4) restoring an early Mennonite church building in Zaporozhye formerly Chortitza. Otto Klassen has produced a Souvenir video commemorating the event (it can be obtained free with a donation of \$50.00 or more to our MCC project). A committee has been formed to produce a book, *Road to Freedom*, to be edited by Harry Loewen, telling the stories of the Mennonites who came to Canada as refugees following the Second World War.

Freedom Jubilee 50 was truly a memorable event for the 2200 participants. God blessed us with wonderful weather and protection from accidents. There was not a spirit of heaviness or bitterness, but one of thankfulness, gratitude and awe at God's leading. Based on the many comments the committee members have received, we feel that God has been glorified and the participants were blessed through this celebration.



Audience singing "Gott Mit Euch Bis Wie Uns Wieder Sehn," at "Blott 'N Bultje" Drama, Mennonite

From Steinbach to Flanders Fields

Peter Wiebe Friesen (1895-1917), from Steinbach to Flanders Fields: A Steinbach War Hero! by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, from a book/article on the Abraham and Margaretha von Riesen family, publication forthcoming. This article was originally published in the *Carillon News*, November 9, 1998, page 6B.

Peter W. Friesen (1895-1917).

Peter Wiebe Friesen was born in Steinbach, Manitoba, on April 15, 1895, see article "The Abraham I. Friesen Family," by Lydia Schroeder, coming in Issue No. 14.

Peter's father Abraham I. Friesen (1862-1938) started one of the first machinery dealerships in Steinbach during the late 1880s. The Friesens were different than most of their neighbours as they belonged to the Chortitzer Church. The Abraham I. Friesen family moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan, in 1905. Father and his four sons all took out homesteads in the newly opened land in Rush Lake.

In 1913 Peter took out a homestead on NW21-16-10. He also worked as a printer in Herbert.

Peter joined the Canadian Army in 1916. According to an article by niece Lydia Schroeder, he was conscripted at age 21. Some of his letters back home indicated he had a girlfriend in France. He served in the trenches and when the regiment was relieved and the men came out, they were usually dirty, hungry and tired.

Enlistment, 1916.

Peter's military records, obtained from the National Archives, Ottawa, RG 150, 1992-93/166, 3315, provide some information about his military service. His regimental number was 253,133. He enlisted August 13, 1916, at Camp Hughs, Manitoba.

Peter's enlistment papers show he was a large man, six feet, one and a half inches tall, his chest, fully expanded was 37 inches. He had a large knife scar on the front of his left wrist and a face tattooed on the front right forearm. His hair were listed as dark brown and his complexion as dark. He gave his religion as "Methodist".

Military Service 1916-17.

Peter served in 209th Overseas Battalion, and held the rank of private, the lowest rank in the army.

He embarked on the troopship S.S. Caromia, in Halifax, bound for England on October 31, 1916. He arrived in England on December 5, 1916. On the same date he was transferred to 9th Res. Batt. St. Martens Plain, Pt. 2 Orders #254.

Two days later, Peter was taken on strength with 9th Reserve Batt. St. Martins Plain. In December, 1916, Peter was hospitalized in

Shorncliffe for diarrhoea. On January 19, 1917, he was hospitalized for typhoid.

On May 3, 1917, he was shipped overseas for service with the 10th Bz, Bramscott. He arrived at C.B.D. the next day. He was sent to join his unit on May 21 arriving on May 23.

Peter's military career seems to have taken a bit of a turn when he was confined to the field hospital, Boulogne, on June 6, 1917, where he was treated for syphilis. A notation in his army records states that it was not contracted in the army. On June 29, he was returned to service,

Steinbach. Uncle Johann I. Friesen was shareholder and manager of Steinbach Flour Mills. Johann's children included Helena Friesen, wife of Peter B. Reimer, local merchant, and mother of Frank F. Reimer, founder of "Reimer Express" a national trucking firm.

Uncle Klaas I. Friesen was a teamster and owner of a livery barn in Steinbach from 1907 to 1920 where the "Jolly Miller" restaurant is located now. His daughter Helena Friesen, married Cornelius T. Loewen, founder of "Loewen Millwork", a well-known enterprise.



Peter W. Friesen "Steinbach's War Hero"

Peter W. Friesen April 15, 1895, to November 11, 1917. Buried in Flanders Fields. "May he rest in Peace." Photo courtesy of niece Lydia Schroeder, Box 426, Wawanesa, Manitoba, R0K 2G0 and Excelsior Municipal History Book.

with the first Infantry Battalion.

On August 11, 1917, Peter was reassigned to the 10th Battalion where he served until November 11, when he was reported missing after action.

On February 14, 1918, Peter's status was changed to "killed in action", November 11, 1917. Evidently it took some time before the exact details of his demise could be verified.

Friesen Relatives.

The story of Peter W. Friesen is of some significance to the Hanover Steinbach area. He was born here and spent the first ten years of his life here. Peter's Friesen relatives were prominent in Steinbach for years to come.

Two of Peter's uncles joined his father Abraham in the move from Blumenort to

Conclusion.

When Peter enlisted in the army it was a major break with tradition in the Friesen family. In 1803 his great-grandfather Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) had immigrated from Kalteherberg, West Prussia, rather than allow his grandchildren to fall into the claws of a militaristic regime, Prussia. 70 years later grandson Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908), made a similar sacrifice, leaving Imperial Russia, for the same reasons. This background certainly makes Peter's decision all the more significant.

Peter W. Friesen's death on November 11, 1917, falls on the anniversary of Remembrance Day. I am hopeful his home community, the City of Steinbach, Manitoba, can celebrate his memory in some way as part of its annual Remembrance Day celebrations. It is proper to commemorate and honour those who have served, and those who gave their lives.

In this spirit we remember our fallen cousin and fellow citizen, Peter W. Friesen, Steinbach's war hero. He made the ultimate sacrifice exactly on Remembrance Day, 1917.

Peter W. Friesen is buried in Flanders Fields, "Where poppies grow, row on row".

Sources:

Telephone interview with niece Lydia Schroeder, Box 426, Wawanesa, Manitoba, R0K 2G0.

History Book Committee, *Excelsior Echoes* (Rush Lake, Saskatchewan, 1984), page 445.

Coming in the Next Issue:

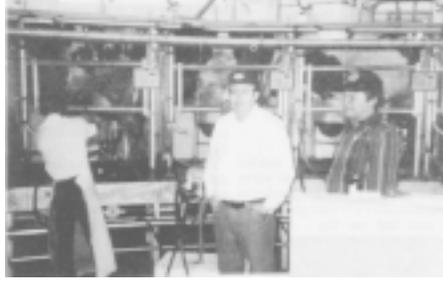
Article on the Abraham I. Friesen family, from Steinbach to Rush Lake, by niece Lydia Schroeder, Box 426, Wawanesa, Manitoba, R0K 2G0, coming in Issue 14, *Preservings*.

Braun Dairy Farm, Zacatecas, Mexico

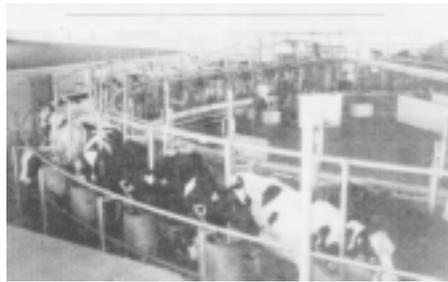
The commercialization of agriculture is occurring everywhere and the Mennonites in Mexico are no exception. Today about 315,000 litres of milk are processed daily in the Cuauthemoc area alone, about 30 per cent of Manitoba's total production.

But the Cuauthemoc area only includes half of the Mennonites in Mexico. Some 35 years ago Johann Braun started a dairy farm in La Honda, State of Zacatecas, Mexico. Zacatecas is 800 kilometres east of Durango and about 1000 kilometres south of Cuauthemoc.

Johann Braun died several years ago, but the farm has been continued by his sons. They are now milking 570 cows and are planning to increase to over a 1,000. All the milking equipment for their new barn was purchased direct from Germany, and represents the latest in computerized technology. They employ about 20



Johann Braun (middle) inspects the milking parlour. In the background an employee attaches the milking machine to a cow. A clock is attached for each cow and connected to a computer. The computer compiles various data, including the amount of milk production. Many cows give over 48 litres milk per day.



The modern milking facilities on the "Braun Dairy Farm" in La Honda, Zacatecas. The rotating milking parlour accommodates 48 cows. They are fed as they are being milked. Photos for this article are courtesy of Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau, October 7 1998, 7 Jahrgang, Number 17, pages 7-8



In order to feed their cattle, the Brauns have divided them into pens, based on how long they have been "freshmilk." The areas between the pens are made of cement to provide a good road and a good base for the feed.



The Brauns in La Honda have their own feed making facilities. The feed is mixed according to the exact requirements of their cattle. Here a large round bale is being load into the feed crusher by a front end loader.

workers full time, milking 24 hours a day.

This story is based on the article by Bram Siemens, "Braun's Melkerei in Vollbetrieb," in *Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau*, October 7 1998, 7 Jahrgang, Number 17, pages 7-8.



Village Cowherd greets Children

The cattle are trained so that they go home from the pasture by themselves without any herding, so that the herdsman for the village of Gnadenthal, Antonio Arrevalo, has enough time to greet the neighbours in the village. Here he is at Jakob Froeses' place. Froeses' grandchildren, Maria Froese, Cornelius Froese and Lisa Fehr, are very pleased when the herdsman stops to greet them. Such peace and tranquillity provides a heritage of which city folks can only dream of. From the *Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau*, 5 August 1998, 7 Jahrgang, page 3.

Menno-conformity.

Anglo-conformity is the social premise whereby all ethnic and minority groups in Canada were judged by how quickly and diligently they adopt Anglo-Canadian culture, values and mores. The racist philosophy was based on writings such as *Strangers at Our Gates*, published in 1909 by social-gospeller J. S. Woodsworth. Menno-conformity is the social premise whereby Canadian Mennonites judge other Mennonites in terms of how exactly they mirror their own, deprecating those who differ.

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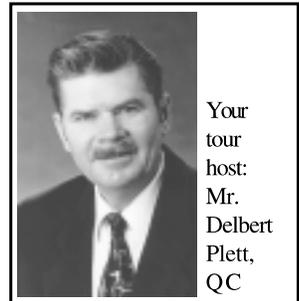
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Hurricane 'Mitch': In the Eye of the Storm

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

Hurricane "Mitch" hit Honduras and Nicaragua October 29 and 30, 1998. It savaged the region leaving as many as 10,000 dead, tens of thousands were left injured and homeless, with the landscape described as "barren as the dark side of the moon."

A Time article (Nov 16, 1998), stated there was \$3 billion in damages, more than the entire gross domestic product of the two countries combined. Two-thirds of the infrastructure in the two nations has been destroyed or crippled. TV footage of the disaster area shows mud-covered river flats with partially submerged bodies and flotsam from washed away homes and bridges.

Tuesday, October 27, 1998, "Mitch" was coming west across the Caribbean, headed straight towards Belize. The hurricane appeared to be on a course which would take it right across central Belize, passing directly over Spanish Lookout, a small Mennonite community of 1200 in the Cayo/St. Ignacio district, founded in 1958.

On Spanish Lookout frenzied activities were underway as homes and barns were boarded up and cattle moved to higher ground. Food was being prepared and stored to be available for relief efforts if worst came to worst.

Memories of hurricane "Haiti" in 1960 were still all too vivid in their minds. "Haiti" had flooded Belize City leaving thousands homeless. The small Kleine Gemeinde community originating in northern Mexico but before that in Steinbach and Rosenort, Manitoba, had been hard hit. Would Belize be the victim again?

On the morning of October 28, 1998, community leaders in Spanish Lookout were watching the skies anxiously. They hoped and prayed, they might be spared.

A miracle happened.

"Mitch" stopped! It sat sedentary for 24 hours as if deciding whom it should devour. It's 300 kilometers-an-hour gale force winds subsided to 160 kilometers.

On October 29, 1998, the hurricane started moving again, but it moved south into Honduras and Nicaragua. On October 30 it turned west through central Honduras. October 31 Mitch continued northwesterly into Guatemala, by now dissipating in strength, reaching the south west corner of Mexico on November 2.

From October 28 to November 2, "Mitch" had made a semi-circle to the south around Belize.

In Spanish Lookout the damage was minimal, some trees blown down and a lot of strong wind. There has been almost constant rain since the hurricane, so that planting of beans may not be possible.

Preparation were immediately made to assist the thousands of refugees fleeing the Belizean coast for shelter inland. Many refugees came to Cayo, a small City about 50 kilometres from Spanish Lookout. Hot food was prepared and sent to Cayo, feeding 700 refugees on October 28. This was before the residents even knew

that the hurricane had turned away from Belize and headed for Honduras.

Within days news started to reach Spanish Lookout of the devastation in Honduras and Nicaragua. Plans were immediately made to provide substantial relief and material aid.

On Wednesday, November 4, local lumber dealer Frank Plett and brother George left for Honduras on an inspection tour. Their mission was to see where the energy and resources of Spanish Lookout could be used most effectively. A boat was chartered in Placencia, a seaport in southern Belize. They crossed the open Gulf of Honduras. They stayed until Sunday, November 8.

While distributing corn and clean water along the Honduran coast, the men were accompanied by two armed Honduran soldiers, otherwise their boat would have been swamped by the rush of people desperate for supplies. Within days enough food had been distributed to feed 14,000 people.

"We couldn't stop at all the places where

people were hollering," said organizer Frank Plett. "Once they saw there was a boat with food there were hundreds of people just swarming the boat."

On November 4, a U.S. military plane landed in Belize City and took a load of relief supplies. Klaas B. Reimer and Klaas L. Friesen from Spanish Lookout accompanied the flight to Honduras. The Spanish Lookout ladies had been asked to bake buns and cookies which went on this load.

On November 11, Frank Plett headed out again. This time he was accompanied by Peter Hein. They drove to Placencia, but were unable to get the bigger boat they chartered the previous trip. Two smaller boats were all that was available. The men loaded the rice and beans which they were taking along.

Shortly after departure the winds picked up and the waves in the Gulf of Honduras mounted. The boats were heavy in the water with their cargoes. The motor of the larger boats coughed and stopped. By now the waves were 20 feet high. The small boat took the larger in tow but



Map of Central America, showing the path of "Mitch" relative to Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua Guatemala, and Mexico.



A typical scene from the devastated area in Honduras. The cleanup will not be pretty. Photo courtesy of Deutsch Mexikanische Rundschau, 4 November, 1998, page 28. The Kleine Gemeinde relief effort will focus on "leading, encouraging and organizing the clean-up and rebuilding effort."

almost stalled on the crest of the waves. The men despaired for their lives. Finally they spotted an island and managed to make it there safely. The bags of rice and beans were unloaded and the boats made it back to Placentia.

Never daunted, the next morning, Plett and Hein chartered the bigger boat they had taken on the first trip. They returned to the island, picked up their load of rice and beans and finally made it to Honduras. Frank Plett stayed in Honduras to prepare for aid workers to follow. The Honduran army accompanied each boatload.

On November 15, Spanish Lookout *Vorsteher* Denver Plett, accompanied by nephew George Plett, left for Honduras. ("Vorsteher" is a position similar to Municipal Reeve in Manitoba.) Their goal was to complete arrangements for lodging for the cleanup crews which were being organized and which would soon be ready to leave Spanish Lookout.

The organizers already knew that they would have to be careful that all aid sent to the devastated area be distributed directly to the people for whom it was intended, the thousands of homeless and injured. Otherwise it happens that such supplies are seized by the military, placed in warehouses, or sometimes even used for someone's personal profit.

Later Little Belize and Shipyard, two Old Colony settlements in Northern Belize, also provided relief supplies which were shipped to Honduras via Spanish Lookout.

November 18, Otto Reimers and several others were leaving for Honduras. A suitable house has been obtained some distance east of San Pedro Sula, which will served as the headquarters and operating base of the Kleine Gemeinde relief effort. According to Spanish Lookout farmer Almon Plett, "the main thrust will be to lead, encourage and organize the cleanup and rebuilding effort." It is expected that six to ten men at a time will go for two-week stints to work in Honduras.

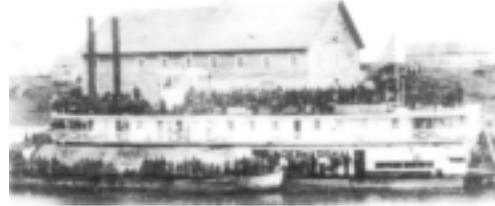
The Spanish Lookout Colony tries to help others where it can. Four month ago, 1000 bags of corn (five truck loads) were delivered to an area southwest of Flores, Guatemala, which had been devastated by a flood.

Within a week of "Mitch", C.A.M. (Christian Aid Ministries), an "Old Order" Mennonites relief organization from the U.S., had donated over \$14,000 to be used in the relief effort. The Spanish Lookout Colony is collecting 80 more tonnes of food for the relief effort.

Readers who wish to assist can send cheques to "Mennonite Settlement of Spanish Lookout", Box 427, Belize City, Belize, Central America, Attention: Aron P. Friesen. It is suggested that donations be transmitted through your local church in order that you can obtain a Canadian or U. S. tax deductible receipt, if required.

Source: Telephone interview with Almon and Tina Wolf Plett, Spanish Lookout, Belize, November 18 and 22, 1998. This article was first published in *The Carillon*, November 30, 1998, page 13C. Another news report regarding the Spanish Lookout relief effort was published in *The Canadian Mennonite*, Nov. 23, Vol. 2, No. 23, page 22.

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Brazil - Paraguay

Our Trip to Brazil and Paraguay May 21 to June 9, 1998, by Linie and Ted Friesen, Box 720, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0.

San Paulo, Brazil.

The purpose of this trip was to visit friends and relatives in Brazil and Paraguay. And to view at first hand the colonies established by the Mennonites there.

We started our tour by a visit to good friends, Eckhart and Katharina von Sass. They live in the vicinity of Sao Paulo. He was a former German University exchange student at Friesens, and is now an executive with Mercedes-Benz in Brazil. They have two children: Sven & Karoline. They took us on a tour of their town Valinhos, and the lovely private school where the children attend. Instruction is in Portuguese and German.

On Saturday we did a tour of the centre of Sao Paulo, a megacity of around 14 million people. The city is a cosmopolitan mix with the original African and Portuguese peoples, and Japanese and Italian who came later. As in many large cities, the growth has been so rapid that planning and infrastructure have simply not kept pace. We visited the Edificio Italia, tallest building in South America, located at the highest point in the city. From here one views a sea of skyscrapers as far as eye can see. We had mixed feelings about living in a megapolis of this size. We had a lovely lunch here, selecting from a smorgasboard of delicacies.

From here we went to an artist's colony, Embu. There were hundreds of shops, each featuring a specialty line, such as ceramics, paintings, wood sculptures, very representative, we were told, of Brazilian art.

On Sunday our hosts had arranged a ride on an old steam train. We went through the countryside, and got a good feel of the rural scene, and how people live. Coffee plantations, bamboo hedges, bright floral bushes and trees, and ranches made for an interesting countryside.

We went to a delightful country restaurant for lunch. Our table was set beside a rushing stream with huge stones. The ladies had Huehnchen, and the men, salmon. Delicious!

Eckhart and Katharina live in a condominium complex. Their house is spacious, designed for that particular climate, artistically built. It is situated on several hectares of land, well landscaped with flowering shrubs and trees, in vivid colours. And they have a swimming pool. The family is well integrated into the Brazilian culture. Yet we sense that at some point they will be returning to Germany, and that this is a temporary assignment.

Curitiba and Witmarsum

This is the location of the Mennonite settlements. Russian Mennonites came here in the early 1930s, most from the Ukraine, via Germany. Others came as refugees via Harbin in China. Many wanted to go to Canada, but at that time the doors were closed. We visited two settlements, Boqueron, which is now a suburb of the city of Curitiba, and Witmarsum, about

an hour's drive to the west.

Our hosts were Lene and Henrique Ens. He is a retired educational administrator, who has been and still is, an influential leader of the Mennonites in Brazil.

Curitiba has been described as a "model city of the future". Much of the planning was done by a former mayor, Jaime Lerner. He was able to build infrastructure along with growth. Public transportation and garbage removal are two features of this planning, and they work. The city is a livable one where people can breathe and work.

Our first visit was to the Catholic university, where Henrique worked. We saw the university church, and the library, both fine architectural examples. Of particular interest in the library were the stained glass windows, around the atrium in the centre, depicting scenes of world civilizations, past and present.

Our next visit was to the Nucleo Terapeutico Menno Simons, a mental health facility that has been built up by the Mennonites, with support from Eden Mental Health, Winkler, Manitoba. It is an outpatient facility serving the community. We had the impression that they are doing significant work in their field.

Other visits in the city were to Radio Station HCJB, a satellite of the main station in Quito, Ecuador. Their main programing is religious, and much of it is directed to rural and outlying areas.

We visited a day school, a ministry to street children, who are both taught, and given a meal at noon. There is also vocational training in this school. There are five such schools in the city,

completely staffed and funded by the Mennonite community. There is a fine private school in Boqueirao, with an enrollment of over 1200, and with a large sport complex. This school promotes biblical and Mennonite values in faith and ethics and encourages an openness to contemporary issues.

We also visited the Bethania Home for the Aged, the offices of "Bibel and Pflug", the journal for inspiration and news, with a subscription list of 720.

Another visit was to the Parana State College, the primary site for the Ninth Mennonite World Conference, held in July 1972.

Mennonites in Curitiba are active in the professions, as well as in business. We visited the Ens plywood factory, a large enterprise, where wood of various kinds are fused and treated for ultimate use in furniture manufacturing.

The Ens's also drove with us to the coastal city of Paranagua on the Atlantic Ocean. The road is through a beautiful forest region, with many flowering plants and fruit trees. Many Mennonites have summer homes on the coast.

Witmarsum Colony

Consists of five villages. The buildings of the original owner of the ranch became the centre of colony activities. A creamery, shopping centre, hospital, school, administration offices, silos, feed factories and other necessary institutions were established. The settlement is operated as a producer-consumer co-operative, employing 350 people. The Fritz Kliever school includes students from kindergarten to grade 11.



L.to r: Ted Friesen, Maria Friesen, Loma Plata, and Peter P. Klassen, Filadelfia, Kolonie Fernheim, noted author and historian.

General education, agricultural and teacher training and music are instructed. Witmarsum has made significant economic progress. The dairy industry has been modernized with pedigreed livestock. Wheat, soybeans, corn and barley are cultivated. Milk production exceeds 5 million gallons. Paved road, electricity, telephone and plumbing help to make the settlement progressive and modern. (From info. M.E., Vol. 5)

Our hosts here were Manfred and Rosi Epp, dairy farmers.

At the present time the colony is suffering from over-extension, e.g. the hospital was three-quarter unoccupied. Also the South American free trade treaty has made an impact with lower priced agricultural product imports.

The Mennonites in Brazil are a vibrant community who have made tremendous progress. They feel themselves integrated into Brazilian society, aware of their responsibilities, economically, socially and culturally. The Anabaptist witness is present in 10 states of the nation.

(Hen. Ens, M.E. Vol. 5)

Paraguay.

In 1927 a group of Mennonites emigrated from Manitoba to settle in the Gran Chaco of Paraguay, South America. Included was a cousin, Helena (Klippenstein) Braun. The cause for this movement was the fear that they were going to lose their private schools to public schools and consequently the autonomy that they thought was granted to all Mennonites by the Canadian government in 1874.

Their story is one of heroic courage and steady faith. They were enroute for two years, before they could settle on the land that they had purchased. Hundreds died on the journey. Conditions of land and environment were inhospitable, even hostile. It meant incredible hard work, staying power and faith as a community to survive. In moving there, they were establishing a homeland that later became habitation for Mennonite refugee groups from Russia, who

came following World War 1 & 11.

We had a lot of contact with relatives and friends there. In December 1990 we had planned to go there. Then, in short order, two of Ted's brothers passed away. It wasn't the right time. Last year we decided that 1998 would be the time for us to go. We began corresponding with friends and relatives, and were heartily encouraged to come. So this was a primary reason for our trip.

We left Curitiba on May 28, for Asuncion. There we were met by Cornelius Sawatzky, the former Governor of Bouquaran state, and wife Lene. Spent the night at the Menno Heim, a hotel primarily for Mennonites staying and passing through the city. Early in the morning we left for Menno Colony. Just outside the city we crossed the Paraguay river, and were immediately in the Chaco.

The Chaco is a vast plain of dense bush and intermittent grasslands called campos. The vegetation is green but a dry mixture of small thorny bushes and cacti. The campo, a delightful savanna type area, consists of several types of grasses and intermittent trees. Here we saw cattle grazing. The topography is uniformly flat, reminding somewhat of the Canadian prairies. The campo soils are a sandy loam. While the bush soils are loam and clay. We saw no planted crops.

The climate consists of extreme variations in temperature, from the low forties in January to a pleasant 20 degrees in July (winter). Water has been always scarce. That created a challenge to the Mennonites who dug wells and built huge water holes. The wealth of flora and fauna is truly amazing in light of the above factors. The luscious growth after a heavy rain is almost unbelievable. Banana trees and date palms are interspersed with cactus plants. It is a bird lovers paradise. (Data: C. Redekop: 'Strangers Become Neighbours'.)

This was the scene that unfolded before us as we drove along the Trans Chaco highway, a two lane asphalt road. This is the lifeline between the colonies and the capital.

In Loma Plata, the 'capital' of Menno Colony, we were warmly welcomed by our hostess: Maria Friesen. She is single, a member of one of the leading families. It was her grandfather, Martin C., that was the elder and leader of the emigration movement. Her father, Martin W., worked indefatigably to raise the spiritual, cultural and educational level in the settlement. Her brothers and in-laws hold leading and responsible positions in the colony and in the country. Maria is an art teacher in the school system.

After a delicious dinner, we rested. Then she told us of her plans for the week ahead. She had prepared a detailed program of events and visits. It began with a visit to the Friesen Printery. We knew the owner, Isbrand Friesen, and his nephew, Norman Sawatzky, who had spent a week in our printery in Altona. They produce quality printed products, of various kinds.

From there a visit to Martin W. Friesen, an old friend. Besides his accomplishments listed above, he is the historian of Menno Colony. His books included "New Home in the Chaco Wilderness", a graphic and moving description of



Mennonite Church - Neu-Halbstadt - Kolonie Neuland. Seating capacity is 1200.



Choir practice: Mennonite Church, Loma Plata.

the early history of the settlement, printed by Friesens in Aftona, and recently reprinted in Loma Plata. "Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis", a 50-year history of the Menno settlement. Friesen has a large library of Mennonite books in German and English. His broad interests for the international Mennonite people are evidenced by his attendance at the Mennonite World Conferences in Strasbourg, France (1984), and Winnipeg (1990), both occasions where we met together.

On Saturday, May 30, we started the day by visiting the Colegio Loma Plata, the school where Maria teaches arts and crafts. This school also has four satellites, with over 500 pupils and 60 teachers. We were greeted by several teachers, and given a lovely leather runner with a burnt panorama depicting the arrival of the Mennonites in the Chaco. This was given in thanks for book donations made.

For lunch and the afternoon we spent at the Brauns, Hein. & Maria. He is the oldest son of Hein and Helena, our cousin. They have a family of 13, several living in Canada. We have learned to know most of them. Hein is an avid talker, and personally recollects the whole history of Menno Colony. Maria is the daughter of Elder Martin C. Friesen. This was the first of a number of visits to Braun relatives.

For dinner we were guests of Norman and Esther Sawatzky. Both are educated, talented, and represent the new generation of Mennonites in Paraguay.

May 31st was Pentecost Sunday. We attended First Mennonite church, where the Friesens and Brauns are members. What a delightful surprise to see a large adult and a children's choir directed by George Wiebe and accompanied by wife Esther, both of Winnipeg. They are spending a year in Loma Plata teaching, conducting, and choir directing. During intermission, Esther and a visiting violin teacher from Brandon, Manitoba played sonatas by J. S. Bach. It was a most moving and impressive service.

The rest of the day was spent visiting. First a Braun gathering at Gerhard and Martha Harder, then a Friesen gathering at Jacob & Helen, with most of the family, including the father, present. The evening we spent with George and Esther Wiebe.

June 1st was Pentecost Monday, a religious holiday. Maria, her friend Nettie Giesbrecht and I, visited the other two colonies: Neuland and Fernheim. Linie stayed at home not feeling well. In Neu-Halbstadt, the capital village of Neuland, we attended the morning service. A large brass orchestra, conducted by an instructor from Germany, performed the musical part of the service. Later the minister and his wife gave us a tour of the village, including the museum and the large G.C. church with a seating capacity of 1200. We also dropped in on Judith Klassen from Altona, who is currently teaching violin in both colonies.

Neuland was settled after World War II, by Mennonite refugees who came from Russia via Germany, with the help of MCC. In 1987 there were 21 villages with a population of 1325 persons. It has the same administrative setup, agri-

cultural and educational systems as the other two colonies.

From there we drove to Philadelphia, the capital village of Fernheim Colony. This was settled in early 1930s, by refugees from Russia. They came here because Canada would not accept them. We visited first, Rudolf Kaethler and his wife. He is a former Oberschulz (administrator) of the colony, and a brother of Marianne Braun of Altona, from whom we brought greetings.

Then to Peter P. Klassen, the noted educator, editor and author. He is perhaps the most prolific author of both history and fiction of life in the Paraguayan Chaco.

Currently there are 23 villages in Fernheim with a total population of 3,241 (1987). Again, it has the same administrative setup as the other colonies.

Wednesday we had a tour of the industrial complex in Loma Plata. Abram Wiebe, an offi-



Industrial complex - Loma Plata. On the left Abram Wiebe, an official with the Tourist and information centre, with Ted Friesen.



L.tor: Maria Friesen, her father : Martin W. Friesen, Loma Plata, with Linie, Mrs. Ted Friesen.

Paraguay Elections May 15, 1998

From the Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau, 3 Juni 1998, 7 Jahrgang, page 8.

General elections were held in Paraguay on May 10, 1998. A number of Mennonite candidates were running for various offices and many were elected. A Mennonite was elected as Governor of the State of Boqueron. This time it was Orlando Penner. Previously it was Cornelius Sawatzky: see "Governor visits Steinbach," *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec. 1997, page 18. Sawatzky has been elected as a Deputy in the Federal Parliament. Both men belong to the opposition party, "Alliance".

Cornelius Sawatzky, the previous Governor, left behind a reputation as a skilled administrator. Many ratepayers believed that his funding always accomplished more than in other States.

cial with the Tourist Agency and Information Centre, was our guide. He began with a video, and then conducted us through the various buildings that house industry and stores. This included supermarket (a general store), hardware, bank, post office. Then to the industrial area. The largest source of income is the dairy industry. The milk processing plant produces 63 million litre, both pasteurized, irradiated, and various milk products such as cheese, yogurt and ice cream. Most of this is sold to Asuncion, and transported by colony trucks. Menno Colony alone has 330,000 head of cattle. Main crops are not grain, but cotton, peanuts and sorghum (for feed). In 1996 12 1/2 million kilograms of feed for cattle was produced.

There is a cotton processing plant. All of this is serviced by a large experimental farm for the raising of purebred cattle, and the training of veterinarians and agronomists. Environmental concerns are the responsibility of this organization. We visited with Norman and Esther Sawatzky. Norman's father, David, is the administrator.

The ownership is a vast co-operative enterprise, whose members are the inhabitants of Menno Colony. The colony administration is responsible for all economic and social affairs, and is the legal agency for all issues. The administration is responsible for schools, hospital, road maintenance, insurance and the producer-consumer co-operative, for industrial and agricultural development, and financial affairs of the colony (M.E. V. MWF). This helps to make the colony to a degree an autonomous commonwealth within Paraguay. The other major colonies are modelled on this system.

Other families visited were: David & Trudy Sawatzky, Wilie & Mathilda Sawatzky, Martin & Susie Braun.

The visit to Loma Plata was an astounding one. We had heard of the progress, but to be aware of its difficult beginnings, and the present state of development in every aspect: spiritual, economic, social and educational, astonished us. The green hell of the Chaco has been transformed into a flourishing and prosperous land, thanks to the faith, vision, hard work, industry and co-operative effort of the Mennonite people there.

There are at the present time 21 colonies and settlements in Paraguay. Menno, being the first, settled in 1927, made it possible for the other groups to come here. Their model settlement facilitated respect and regard by the government to permit the immigration of Mennonites from various parts of the world. All colonies owe a debt of gratitude to Menno.

On June 5th we left the Chaco, and were driven to Asuncion by Martin Braun, accompanied by Maria Friesen. She led us on a walking tour of the inner city. We looked in on craft shops featuring Paraguayan workmanship, particularly leather goods which is a specialty.

That evening we were invited to Ronald and Delma Braun. They had a farewell for their sister, Hannah, who was returning to Canada. All the Braun siblings in the city, friends and ourselves were treated to a beef barbecue. Here we met several new members of the Braun family:

Mada and husband Hans Dyck; Martin's daughter, Nancy and husband John Hildebrand; Pauline.

Next morning Ronald took us on a tour of his business establishments. They consist of a chain of auto parts stores named "Ruta", owned by Ronald and an associate. There are five in Asuncion, and a number outside.

That afternoon we started on our journey to Iguazu Falls, located on the border of Paraguay and Brazil. Our hosts were Johnny and Nancy Hildebrand. We stopped for the night at his parents, Albert Hildebrands, living in Colonia Sommerfeld. Albert farms about 3000 hectares, and is an industrialist, owning a sawmill and several other enterprises. We were graciously hosted there. We also had a quick tour of several villages in Sommerfeld Colony, established in 1947 by Mennonites from Manitoba. It is a flourishing community.

The next morning we left for the falls. This is one of the most spectacular natural wonders in the world. The Brazilian Park services have built a nearly perfect system of catwalks to view the falls from the best angles. The churning waters on the Iguazu River have cut deep channels through the red sandstone venting a horseshoe of 275 falls, twice as wide as Niagara. Eleanor Roosevelt commented that these falls make Niagara look like a kitchen faucet. The falls are about two miles across. Airborne on spray, rainbows dance 100 feet into the sky. A new catwalk takes us right into the centre of the river below one of the largest falls. We were drenched with spray.

Asuncion,

Monday was our last day before we left for home. With Ingrid Fast as guide we visited the Mennonite complex of: Senior Citizens' home, the church shared by both GC and MB congregations, and the private school, Concordia. A great thrill here was meeting Linie's uncle, David Isaak, who resides in the seniors' home. They had not seen each other since the late 1920s.

Our cousin, Cornelius Hiebert, picked us up there, and took us to his home for lunch, and then to the airport, where we departed for home, first to Sao Paulo, then Toronto and Winnipeg. A memorable trip!



New School in Gnadenthal, Mexico

The Lowe Farm Kleine Gemeinde is building a new school in Gnadenthal (Campo 2A). Two members of the building committee, Jakob Giesbrecht (right) and Bernhard Penner (third from left), observe as the construction superintendent for the concrete work, Isaak Enns, shoots the final levels. (The school will be next door to Casa Siemens). The existing school of the Kleine Gemeinde in Gnadenthal was too small. They had 130 students but had already turned away a number of students because of insufficient room. The new school will have 13 classrooms with a total of 18904 square feet. It is supposed to be big enough so that a shortage of space will not immediately reoccur. The building will also have other rooms in addition to the classrooms, including a meeting room. From the *Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau*, 5 August 1998, 7 Jahrgang, page 24.



New School Brings Joy

Travellers along the big four-lane highway north of Cuauhtemoc, driving through Lowe Farm, Campo 6 1/2, often stop at Casa Siemens to ask, "What is big building being constructed nearby?" The answer, "A school." The Lowe Farm Kleine Gemeinde has a school in the village of Gnadenthal, which has become too small. The school committee is raising some of the money and some is also being contributed by the Lowe Farm Kleine Gemeinde. In this photo, some of the teachers in Gnadenthal inspect the building under construction. They are hoping the school will be ready to move in with their students by Christmas. Left to right: Trudi Thiessen, Lena Wolf, Eva Giesbrecht, Eva Friesen, Justina Unger, Susi Wolf, David Wiebe, Franz Janzen and Jake Thiessen. From the *Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau*, 23 September 1998, 7 Jahrgang, Number 17, page 5.

Mennonite Books?

Are you looking for Mennonite Books? If you do not live near a large centre with a Mennonite Book Store, this can be a challenge. Solution: contact Gilbert G. Brandt at "Mennonite Books", 844-K Mcleod Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R2G 2T7. They offer a book club service with a **FREE** semi-annual catalogue mail-out listing many books currently available. This is also a good way of keeping up with new publications. Phone 204-668-7475; fax 203-661-8530; e-mail: mennonitebooks@brandtfamily.com

Bergthal and Friedricthsthal Census, 1858

Introduction to the Bergthal and Friedricthsthal Census, 1858, by D. Plett Q.C.

Introduction.

On May 10, 1998, I met with Aleksandr Tedeev, Archive Director, Zaphorozhe, at the In-Tourist Hotel, Zaphorozhe, Ukraine. At this time, he handed me a computer disk containing the 1858 census (or Revision, as it was originally called) for the Bergthal villages of Heuboden and Friedricthsthal as well as records listing dates and origins of individual settlers arriving in the five Bergthal villages. In an article published in *Preservings*, No. 8, Part One, page 58, Aleksandr has already provided details regarding the various Revisions carried out by the Czarist government.

The records which Aleksandr has made available will be of immense significance. First of all, it bears to be noted that the Bergthaler (or better said, those of Bergthaler background constitute possibly 20% of Canadian Mennonites and possibly the same percentage of Latin American Mennonites, a total of some 50,000 people.

The transfer of the census data for Heuboden and Friedricthsthal on May 8, 1998, completed something that had been discussed between myself and Aleksandr ever since he told me about the records during my visit to the archives in April 1996. Hopefully, the Revision for the other three villages, Schönthal, Schönfeld and Bergthal, in the repository in the Donets archives, can soon be obtained as well.

The 1858 Revision, once the other three files are obtained and translated, will provide, for the first time, a snapshot of Bergthal as of a particular point in time, listing all the families in a reliable source. This information has already been available for some time with respect to the Molotschna Colony with the 1835 census, which has enabled the furtherance of much detailed research for groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde. The biggest thing sometimes is that the census enables one to coordinate different sources and interpret them more specifically.

In the meantime, the 1858 census for Heuboden and Friedricthsthal will be of assistance to the many families with roots in those villages. The census provides the name of the father of the family head and the age in 1858, as well as date of arrival. These facts should allow family historians to connect the excellent data in other sources such as the Bergthal Gemeindebuch and Waisenamt records, to a specific village at a particular point in time.

On behalf of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, I wish to thank Aleksandr Tedeev for his kindness in making this information available. He can be assured that it will be of great significance to the descendants of the Bergthaler and to many others as they continue research into their heritage.

We hope to publish the complete census data in Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series.

Family Heads Colony Bergthal 1850 census (based on archival documents) (not all are necessarily family heads)

	age	at arr.	at census
Schoenfeld:			
Abram Friesen, son of Johann	11	26	
Jakob Shwart, son of Johann	10	25	
Jakob Dik, son of Philip	10	25	
Peter Buhr, son of Erdmann	17	32	
Johann Abrahams, son of Peter	48	53	
Heuboden:			
Franz Janzen, son of Franz (son)		22	
Heinrich Blatz, son of Heinrich	27	35	
Bernd Wiebe, son of Heinrich	13	28	
Heinrich Wiens, son of Heinrich	20	35	
Bergthal:			
Jakob Harder, son of Jakob,	20	28	
Johann Schreder, son of Johann	27	42	
Abraham Friesen, son of Abraham		34	
Johann Löwen, son of Johann	18	33	
David Janzen, son of Abraham	8	23	
Schönthal:			
Johann Funk, son of Johann	37	52	
David Hiebert, son of Abraham	16	31	
Johann Kehler, son of Michael	16	31	
Heinrich Bergen, son of Peter	30	45	
Kornelius Buhr, son of Erdman	37	52	
Friedrichstal:			
Abraham Hamm, son of Peter	31	46	
Johann Berg, son of Jakob	20	35	
Johann Buhler, son of Jakob	8	23	
Heinrich Dik, son of Johann	17	32	
Daniel Blatz, son of Daniel	17	32	
Erfried Wall, son of Peter	25	42	
Klass Peters, son of Klas	14	29	
Johann Bergmann, son of Johann	(1843)	24	
Jakob Wiens, son of Peter	(1842)	34	
Johann Peters, son of Peter	17	32	

Family Heads in Col. Bergthal 1858 census (based on archival documents) (not all are necessarily family heads)

	age	at arr.	at census
Heuboden:			
Peter Ens, son of Kornelius	42	(d.1852)	
Kornelius Peters, son of Paul(?)	33	41	
Jakob Peters, son of Peter	35	43	
Peter Schmant, son of Heinrich	47	55	
Peter Krause, son of Peter	33	41	
Abraham Giesbrecht, son of Wilhelm	46	54	
Peter Töws, son of Julius	43	51	
Julius Töws, son of Peter	17	25	
Bernhard Dik, son of Franz	16	24	
Heinrich Wiebe, son of Heinrich	44	52	

Abraham Klassen, son of Abraham	41	49
Abraham Klassen, son of Abraham	16	24
Peter Klassen, son of Abraham	39	47
Dirk Gerbrant, son of Thomas	61	d.
Peter Gerbrant, son of Dirk	36	44
Johann Gerbrant, son of Dirk	32	40
Jakob Gerbrant, son of Dirk	26	34
Johann Dik, son of Heinrich	36	44
Peter Klippenstein, son of Bernhard	30	38
Peter Dik, son of Philip	44	d.1853
Peter Rempel, son of Johann	41	d.1836
Johann Rempel, son of Peter	20	28
Franz Rempel, son of Peter	8	16
Peter Elias, son of Peter	52	60
Peter Elias, son of Peter	29	37
Franz Banman, son of Kornelius	39	47
Johann Reimer, son of Peter	35	43
Abraham Bergen, son of Abraham	35	43
Heinrich Penner, son of Heinrich	39	47
Wilhelm Giesbrecht, son of Wilhelm	49	57
Johann Funk, son of Kornelius	36	d.1851
Jakob Klassen, son of Erhard	40	48
Franz Giesbrecht, son of Wilhelm	58	66
Franz Giesbrecht, son of Franz	23	31
Erhard Dik, son of Erhard	3	moved'53
Peter Dik, son of Erhard	30	m.1853
Jakob Giesbrecht, son of Wilhelm	39	47
Jakob Giesbrecht, son of Jakob	17	25
Wilhelm Giesbrecht, son of Jakob	16	24
Dirk Dik, son of Philip	63	d.1850
Jakob Bückert, son of son of Jakob	41	d.1853
Johann Peter, son of Abram	17	25
Heinrich Wiens, son of Heinrich		43
Heinrich Wiens, son of Heinrich		22
Bernd Wiebe, son of Heinrich		36
Abraham Flaming, son of Johann		32
Franz Janzen, son of Franz		30
Andreas Flaming, son of Johann		29

Friedrichstal:

Jakob Derksen, son of Jakob		30
Peter Hapner, son of Jakob		31
Thomas Sawatzki, son of Peter		40
Jakob Rempel, son of Wilhelm		30
Franz Harder, son of Peter		34
Franz Dik, son of Jakob		35
Daniel Blatz, son of Daniel		40
Wilhelm Thissen, son of Jakob,		38
Johann Buller, son of Jakob		32
Jakob Wiens, son of Peter		41
Klas Peters, son of Klas		38
Johann Peters, son of Peter		40
Friedrich Wall, son of Peter		50
Heinrich Dik, son of Johann		40
Johann Berg, son of Jakob		43
Abram Hamm, son of Peter	d.1853	
Johann Bergman, son of David		33

Translated from the Russian by Victor Janzen, Box 1509, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Victor Peters (1915-98)

Victor Peters (1915-98), by Wilmer Penner, Box 1305, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Victor Peters was born on July 27, 1915, in Petersdorf, Old Colony, South Russia, in Tsarist times, and died in Michigan on his way from his home in Winnipeg to visit the Stratford Festival in Ontario on September 9, 1998. With his passing our Mennonite community has lost one of its premier historians. I will leave the summary of his academic achievement to the many other notices that have appeared, to focus on his brief time in



Victor Peters (1915-98). Photo courtesy of G. Lohrenz, *Damit es Nicht Vergessen Werde*, page 177.

our East Reserve.

Victor Peters came to the East Reserve as a teacher just before the start of the War. His first post was in Barkfield near Grunthal; then he came to Landmark, where he ‘boarded’ at our home for three years.

He had lived through the horrors of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, where he witnessed the murder of his grandfather and his father by Machnow bandits. In spite of the need to help support his widowed mother after their arrival in Winkler, his hard work and academic excellence helped him become a certified teacher.

The last Russian years had been bitter, but as with so many Russian Mennonites, he had a glowing memory of the golden years of Mennonite community life in South Russia. The German culture it had fostered became very dear to him. When the *Wehrmacht* seemed to open a way to return to the land of his childhood, we would notice a conflict of loyalties between the Old and the New World. No schoolboy would dare scrawl the Churchillian symbol of victory (Morse Code dot-dot-dot-dash) on the school premises!

His living in our home highlighted the contrast between the lives of “kanadja” and

“Russlenda” Mennonites. Our *Kleingemeinde* teaching was that worldliness was to be shunned at all costs; yet in our family we were able to hear the shortwave speeches of Hitler and Churchill on his radio. With his white shirt (my mother marvelled how he kept it unblemished for a week at a time!) came a necktie—our first, but for him a sign of professionalism.

But it was in education that the contrast was most notable. In our rustic community, boys tried hard to get into farm-work before their statutory school-leaving age of fourteen. Victor Peters was the epitome of the *Herr Lehrer*, with a strong mandate to keep order among these restless Grade VIIIs.

Much later—Mr. Peters confided to me that a trustee had come at Christmas to ask: “Are you a *Russlenda*?”

“Oh, please don’t tell the others, because we passed a resolution not to hire more, because the earlier ones used the rod too much.”

It never became an issue again because when he left for *Jantsied*, the whole community felt we had lost our best teacher ever. The irony is that all my teachers in Landmark were *Russlenda*. Consider the range of accomplishment: Dr. Peters, international historian; his wife, Dr. Elizabeth Peters, professor at UM; Anne Ediger, later missionary to India and director for all Christian radio there;

Frank Neufeld, inspector of schools. How different our Manitoba Mennonite community would have been had history not routed these *Russlenda* from the Ukraine to our Canadian prairies!

Perhaps most of all we will remember Dr. Peters as a master raconteur. He looked at life around him with a twinkle in his eye, and then had us smile at ourselves.

Two examples:

i) In Chicago, they brag about their big skyscrapers; *enn Prairie Rose puch wie ons mett onse groote Blott-scrapers*.

ii) the teenage Mennonite C.O. candidate is standing before the dreaded Judge Adamson in the Ste. Annes court house to justify his claims of conscience.

Judge: “You can actually stand there and tell me to my face that God loves that evil man Adolf Hitler?”

“Oh yes, Judge Adamson, God loves even you!” came the reply.

Many notables gathered at his funeral (entirely in German) to honour this life that arched from the last years of the Tsarist Russian Empire into the post-Soviet period we have come to. Perhaps the clearest sign of how his work had changed lives was the presence there of Hutterite folk, whose life he had pictured so sympathetically in *All Things Common*.

We are all poorer for his passing.

Research Memo

Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Petershagen.

Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C., world expert on the Prussian Mennonite Church Records (“Gemeinderbücher”), has made a new discovery regarding Aganetha Epp, mother of Kleine Gemeinde founder Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Petershagen, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia.

Henry has concluded that Klaas Reimer’s mother was the same person as the Aganetha Epp (b. 1745), who married for the second time to Abraham Janzen (1747-1822), Petershagen. They emigrated to Russia in 1804 and settled in Petershagen together with her son Klaas Reimer.

Aganetha was the daughter of Klaas Epp, Petershagen, 1776, 4 sons, 2 daughters. He had died prior to 1789.

Aganetha married Heinrich Reimer, and then for the second time to Abraham Janzen. Abraham Janzen was listed at Petershagen, West Prussia, in the 1776 census (Konsignation), 1 son and 1 daughter. The son would have been step-son Klaas Reimer, named after his paternal grandfather. Aganetha Epp, of course, was not related to Peter Epp, Aeltester of the Danzig Gemeinde, and Klaas Reimer’s father-in-law.

Courtesy of a letter of Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack Street, New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5, October 28, 1998. Thanks Henry!

According to the “Gemeindeberichte” published by Woltner, “...all the others in the village were indebted to [Abraham Janzen]... and [the] village was given the name Petershagen at his request in memory of a previous place in the former fatherland where many of the villagers had once lived.” The fact that Abraham Janzen was Klaas Reimer’s step-father, affirms the profile of the early Kleine Gemeinde reformers as a group of upper-middle class Vollwirthen, determined to retain and implement their vision of the New Testament church.

Now if only we could break the research log-jam on the ancestors of Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) and Margaretha Wiebe (1752-1810), Tiegenhagen, Prussia, and later Ohrloff, Imperial Russia. by D. Plett Q.C.

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society

Genealogy and Family History Day - March 6, 1999

The Annual Genealogy and Family History Day sponsored by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society will again be held at the Heritage Mennonite Village on March 6, 1999.

DATE: Saturday, March 6, 1999
PLACE: Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach

Agenda

10:00 a.m.: Opening remarks and welcome, HSHS President Orlando Hiebert.

Twenty Exhibitors display their research and new findings in the historical "Exhibition Hall". Exhibitors include Marianne Janzen, Rudy Friesen, Alfred Wohlgemuth, Mennonite Books, Jake and Hildegard Adrian, Ernest and Henry Braun, M. B. Archives, Heritage Centre Archives, Ralph and Hilton Friesen, Delbert Plett, "Kleine Gemeinde journals," and others , , , , .

12:00 a.m.: - A traditional Mennonite lunch of soup and pastries will be served by the Auxilary.

1:00 p. m.: **SYMPOSIUM** - Papers to be presented: Richard Thiessen, "Computer technology and genealogy," Alf Redekopp, "Russian archives" and "Internet and family history."

4:00 p.m. - The exhibition closes.

ADMISSION \$2.00. Admission entitles guests to visit "Genealogy Day" exhibits and symposium as well as all museum displays and the feature display in the gallery.

EVERYONE WELCOME. Lunch: soup \$2, pastries \$2 and coffee or tea \$1. Prices subject to change.



A view of one of the display tables from March 8, 1997. HSHS research director John Dyck explains his display.



Alfred Redekopp talks to a full house about "Surfing the Net for cousins from California to Khazakistan," March 8, 1997. Photos from Preservings, No. 10, Part One, page 33.

Articles

The Bergthaler Wiebes

The Bergthaler/Chortitzer/Sommerfelder Wiebes, by Henry Schapansky,
914 Chilliwack Street, New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5.

0. Introduction

The name Wiebe, like other names in a similar class, is derived from a unique Friesian first name (Dr. Horst Penner). Other similar Friesian names include Wiens, Epp, Ens and possibly Löwen. As late as 1717 we find the marriage of Wiebe Wölcke (Wiebe being definitely the first name, although Wölcke is also derived from a first name) to Anna Dunkel in the Danzig church records. I use the word Friesian in the geographic and cultural sense, because like the other names mentioned, their names occur almost exclusively in Flemish churches, in West Prussia, that is, in the ideological sense. These names demonstrate the wide cross-over that occurred between ethnic Friesians and Flemish Mennonites, when the main ideological divisions into Friesian and Flemish sections occurred in the late 1500s.

By the time of the West Prussian census of 1776, the Wiebes could be found throughout the Grosses Werder, although a majority of Wiebes were localized in lands traditionally held by the city of Elbing. So that a large number of Wiebes were living in the areas of the Elbing-Ellerwald, Rosenort, Tiegenhagen and Heubuden Gemeinden. This is somewhat unfortunate from our point of view, since many of the records, particularly for Rosenort and Elbing-Ellerwald have been lost.

The purpose of this article is, like my previous article on the Friesens, to describe the movement of a group of Wiebe families over time, using the 1776 West Prussian census and the Manitoba 1881 census as endpoints, where possible. For convenience, I have concentrated on the families headed by a Wiebe as listed in the index to the Bergthaler Gemeinde Buch (BGB) (I have excluded the entry C53 since this does not appear to be a Wiebe family).

Again it is difficult to make generalizations based on this data, which appears to reduce to about six or seven Wiebe families in 1776. What it does demonstrate in part is the overwhelming Delta Flemish component of the immigrations to Russia prior to 1815, and the close family connections of Molotschna and Old Colony families up to this point.

1. Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1746), Blumenort, Prussia.

1. Heinrich Wiebe of Blumenort Heinrich Wiebe b. 1746 was listed in the 1776 census at Blumenort (Blumenort 1776: 2 sons, 3 daughters), a village whose members mostly belonged to the Rosenort Gemeinde. At that time he was a labourer and rented some property. He may have been a son of Peter Wiebe listed as a landowner at Blumenort in 1772. Later Heinrich Wiebe moved to Zeyerkamp. In 1802 it seems

he moved to Russia with many of his children (BHU p 345 No 184). BHU states that Heinrich Wiebe moved to Blumenort, Molotschna, but he is not found there in the 1808 list. The fact that the village was named after Heinrich Wiebe's village of origin in Prussia is certainly significant. It is possible however that the Judith who was the second wife of Jacob Driedger of Blumenort was his daughter. Heinrich moved to Einlage, Old Colony by 1816 according to BHU. Heinrich Wiebe's first wife was Judith Dyck, possibly a daughter of Johann Dyck of Elbing. His second wife was Maria Dyck, possibly the niece of Judith Dyck, born 23.1.1776.

Heinrich Wiebe's children include the following.

1.1. Katherina Wiebe (23.11.1763-4.11.1794) m. 1784 Franz Kröcker (2.2.1731-12.2.1796). This family moved to Weisshoff/Danzig.

1.2. Heinrich (b. 6.1.1765) m. 1788 Katherina Bourmeister (b. 8.3.1771). This Heinrich moved to Neuendorf near Danzig where he was elected Lehrer (1816) of the Danzig Land Gemeinde. He resigned in 1820.

1.3. Johann (1769-1825) m. 18.11.1798 Margaretha Peters (b. 1770). This family came to Russia in 1803 and settled at Lindenau, Molotschna, where they are found in the list of 1808. BHU, p 312 No 18. I should note that in my *Mennonite Family History* article on Rosenthal, I indicated this Johann could have been the father of a number of apparent Wiebe orphans in Neuendorf, Old Colony. It now appears to me that the father of these Wiebe children was a Johann Wiebe, but not the above Johann Wiebe. Part of the problem relates to the old and unclarified statement that Fürsterländer Altester Johann Wiebe and Bergthaler Gerhard Wiebe were cousins. See 1.9 below.

1.4. Peter (b. 1779) m. Helena Penner (b. 1765). Peter moved to Münsterberg, Molotschna, where he is found in the lists of 1808 and 1835. They apparently had no surviving children. B.H.U. p 316 No 7.

1.5. Judith Wiebe (b. 1780) (?). Possibly the Judith listed as the second wife of Jacob Driedger (1772-1832) of Blumenort, Mol. (listed in 1808).

1.6. Klaas Wiebe (b. 1781). He moved to Tiege, Molotschna, where he is found in the lists of 1808 and 1835. His wife was an Anna, surname unknown at present, b. 1786. B.H.U. p 325 No 2.

1.7. Maria Wiebe (1784-1845) m. 1805 Kornelius Ens (1782-1834) of Fischau, Molotschna. This family belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde, mentioned in the works of Delbert Plett, *Profile 1874*, pages 247-252; B.H.U. p 310 No 13. Maria Wiebe was the mother of Heinrich Enns (1801-81), Fischau, fourth

Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. Maria had five daughters: Catrina married Abram Isaac, Anna married Abraham Eidse, Maria married Gerhard S. Kornelsen, Lichtenau, Susanna married Peter W. Loewen, Grünfeld (for a photo of three of their daughters see article by Hulda Plett, "Heinrich R. Reimer home," in the Material Culture section of this newsletter), and Justina married to Heinrich Warkentin, Rosenort, Manitoba. Other than Catarina whose family stayed in Russia, all of these were prominent families in the Steinbach or Rosenort areas and their descendants include notables such as



1948 passport photo. Heinrich E. Plett (1870-1953), Fischau, Mol. to Blumenort, Manitoba, was a grandson of Aeltester Heinrich Enns (1801-81). Heinrich E. Plett founded a dynasty with over 2,000 descendants living in Manitoba, Oklahoma, Mexico and Belize. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, 57. The Henry E. Plett Memorial Awards awarded annually to High School students in Manitoba are named in his honour.

Steinbach mayor A. D. Penner, pioneer teacher Gerhard E. Kornelsen, former Bible College President Ben Eidse, and former Bible College administrator David K. Friesen.

1.8. Jacob (b.1796). He later moved to Tiege, Molotschna, from the Old Colony where he is found in the 1835 list. His wife was Maria (b. 1803), family name currently unknown.

1.9. Helena Wiebe (b. 1798) married 1819 Bernhard Wiebe (21.3.1796-13.1.1852), see Section 5.1.5. Bernhard Wiebe was a son of Jacob Wiebe (1760-1804) of Neuendorf, Russia, and the father of Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Aeltester of the Fürstenländer Gemeinde in Russia and later Aeltester of the Reinland Gemeinde in Canada. Aeltesten Gerhard Wiebe and Johann Wiebe were therefore cousins, as has often been

stated but nowhere explained.

A great deal of information on the family of Gerhard Wiebe has been gathered by Bruce Wiebe of Winkler, Manitoba, and I am indebted to my friend for a long interchange of information on this and other subjects. See also *The Descendants of Ohm Abraham Wiebe 1831-1991* (Winkler, 1991, Wiebe family Book Committee). My analysis of this section is based simply on the observation that the name Anna and Lena (Helena) often look similar in some of the old handwritings. Noteworthy examples can be found in, for instance, the Ladekop church book. On page 345 No 184, B.H.U. has simply misread Lena as Anna.

1.10 Gerhard Wiebe 1800-58, Einlage.

1.10. Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58) came to Russia in 1803, it seems, with his father Heinrich (BHU 345 No 184). Heinrich apparently lived at Einlage, Old Colony in 1816. Gerhard married Agatha Dyck (b. 1804), daughter of Peter Dyck who came to Russia in 1817 and settled in the Old Colony. Gerhard Wiebe later moved to Bergthal, BGB A 48. His widow later married Wilhelm Falk (1797-1872). Gerhard Wiebe's children include:

1.10.1. Gerhard (1827-1900) BGB B66 lived in the village of Heuboden, Bergthal. He was the second Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde serving from 1866 to 1882. He was a leading advocate of the immigration to Manitoba. A detailed article on his life can be found on the feature story in the June 1995 issue of *Preservings* and also in *Historical Sketches*, pages 313-21. He married Eliesabeth Dyck (1828-76), daughter of Dirk Dyck (1786-1850), and later Eliesabeth Fehr (1823-1908), widow of Wilhelm Esau and Peter Löwen. In the 1881 Manitoba census, he is found at Chortitz, East Reserve. His descendants are listed in the book by Helen Wiebe Unger, *Gerhard Wiebe Family Tree 1800-1858* (Rosenort, 1973), 62 pages. His children include:

1.10.1.1. Gerhard (1849-49);

1.10.1.2. Agatha (1850-52);

1.10.1.3. Johann (1853-1909) BGB C57. He married Barbara Peters and later Margaretha Sawatsky. Chortitz, Manitoba 1881 census. Son Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970), Aeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde from 1931 to 1961;

1.10.1.4. Gerhard (1854-76) married Maria Peters;

1.10.1.5. Isebrandt (1857-76);

1.10.1.6. Heinrich (1859-1908) married Maria Peters, widow of his brother Gerhard, later Gertruda Dyck. Chortitz, Manitoba 1881 census. Abraham W. Hiebert, Chortitzer Waisenamt Komitee Menno Colony, Paraguay is a grandson of Heinrich D. Wiebe;

1.10.1.7. Agatha (1862-76);

1.10.1.8. Peter (b.1865) married Eliesabeth Pries. Later in 1926 this family moved to Paraguay;

1.10.1.9. Jacob (1865-1938) married Helena Fleming, later Helena Funk. Son Gerhard F. Wiebe was an intelligent articulate man, who wrote an excellent article on "Economic Development of the East Reserve," published in *75 Gedenkfeier* (Steinbach, 1949), pages 106-119,



1909 Jakob D. Wiebe (1865-1938) and wife Helena Funk Wiebe with daughter Agatha (b. 1905), later Mrs. Cornelius Peters, Reichenbach. Photo courtesy of John and Mary Steingart, Niverville, Manitoba, 1995. Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, page 10.

translated and published in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 225-234; see Helen Unger Wiebe, "Inside a Writer's Private Life," *Preservings*, No. 12, pages 54-56. Eldon Unger, land developer in Chilliwack, B.C. is a grandson of Gerhard F. Wiebe.

1.10.1.10. Dirk (1868-1930) married Margaretha Klassen, then Katherina Pries. This family moved to Paraguay in 1927. Dietrich was a minister in the Chortitz Gemeinde. He was the grandfather of Dick Wiebe, former insurance agent, Greenland.

1.10.2 Johann Wiebe (b. 1829).

1.10.2. Johann Wiebe (b. 1829) BGB B 110. He married Anna Penner (b. 1834) in 1853, later coming to Canada with the Bergthalers. He settled at Edenburg, West Reserve, where he is found in the 1881 Manitoba census. His children include:

1.10.2.1. Anna Wiebe (1854-54);

1.10.2.2. Johann (b. 1855). He married Katherina Löppky in 1870. Edenburg, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census.

1.10.2.3. Peter (b. 1860). He married Aganetha Klassen in 1880. Weidenfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census.

1.10.2.4. Heinrich (b. 1863);

1.10.2.5. Jacob (b. 1868);

1.10.2.6. Wilhelm (b. 1868);

1.10.2.7. Aganetha (b. 1871);

1.10.2.8. Anna (b. 1873);

1.10.3. Aganetha (1833-73) married Bernhard Dyck (b. 1830);

1.10.4. Agatha Wiebe (1838-39);

1.10.5. Heinrich Wiebe (1839-97) BGB B190. Heinrich Wiebe was one of the two Bergthaler delegates who travelled to North America in

1873 to research settlement possibilities. He was also a minister in the Bergthaler Gemeinde. In 1859 he married Margaretha Falk. After they came to Canada this family moved to the West Reserve, Edenburg, Manitoba 1881 census.

His children include:

1.10.5.1. Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1860) married Helena Friesen (b. 1855) in 1880. Edenburg, Manitoba 1881 census.

1.10.5.2. Agatha (b. 1863);

1.10.5.3. Susanna (1864-76);

1.10.5.4. Gerhard (b. 1867);

1.10.5.5. Wilhelm (1869-1876);

1.10.5.6. Johann (b. 1872);

1.10.5.7. Margaretha (b. 1876);

1.10.6. Agatha Wiebe (b. 1843) married Wilhelm Krahn (b. 1841). They are listed at Weidenfeld, Manitoba 1881 census, with Agatha's nephew Peter Wiebe.

2. Heinrich Wiebe, Altendorf, Prussia.

2. Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1744), Altendorf, Altendorf 1776: 1 son, 1 daughter, was one of the first immigrants to the Old (Chortitz) Colony. We do not know the names of all his children, but B.H.U. (p 297 No 111) states that he had one son and three daughters when he left West Prussia. He may have been a son of Klaas Wiebe of Stobbendorf. His wife was a certain Helena (b. 1744), family name currently unknown. Originally he lived at Einlage, Old Colony, from 1795 to 1803 (B.H.U. p 239 No 30), but by 1808 he moved to Rosenthal (B.H.U. p 264 No 21). Heinrich Wiebe was a wealthy farmer with 7 horses, 15 cattle, 2 sheep, 9 pigs, 1/2 plow and 1 wagon. Undoubtedly, he was related to some of the Rosenthal families. His children include:



Cornelius W. Stoesz (1869-1925) and wife Anna nee Giesbrecht (1873-96). Photo circa, 1890. Cornelius was the son of Cornelius Stoesz (1836-90). The Cornelius W. Stoesz and Anna Stoesz were the grandparents of Cornelius C. Stoesz, formerly Chortitz, Manitoba, E.R. Photo courtesy of Our Stoesz Heritage, page 131.

2.1. Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1782) married Anna Dyck ? (b. 1783). She may have been the daughter of Peter Dyck of Neuendorf. The connection is paragraph 2.1 is a most likely scenario, not certain, and is based on the information that Bernard Wiebe used the initial "D".

We do not yet know all of the children but they likely include:

2.1.1. Heinrich Wiebe (1806-65) married Aganetha Thiessen (b. 1813). He moved to Bergthal BGB A 119. Aganetha Thiessen was a daughter of Heinrich Thiessen who came to Russia in 1818 and settled at Rosenthal. Their children include:

2.1.1.1. Heinrich Wiebe (1834-66);

2.1.1.2. Anna (1836-1922) married Jacob Stoez, later of Blumstein, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

2.1.1.3. Peter (b. 1838) BGB 228 married Katherina Dyck, later Eliesabeth Unrau, and Anna Hildebrandt. Schönthal, West Reserve, 1881 census;

2.1.1.4. Aganetha (1840-1914) married Kornelius Stoez (1836-90). Blumstein, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. [Conrad Stoesz has written a biography of Rev. Kornelius Stoesz, to be published in Vol. 4, East Reserve Historical Series;

2.1.1.5. Maria (b. 1842) married David Stoez (1842-1903), Bergthal, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. David Stoez was Aeltester of the Chortitz Gemeinde from 1882 to 1903, succeeding Gerhard Wiebe.

2.1.1.6. Dirk Wiebe (b.1844) BGB B 292. Married Katherina Braun, Sommerfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census.

2.1.1.7. Katherina Wiebe (1846-67) married Jacob Peters (1844-1922), son of Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84). The Peters family lived

in Vollwerk (Mitchell);

2.1.1.8. Helena (b. 1848) married Peter Peters (1846-1913): see article on Jakob W. Peters elsewhere in this newsletter;

2.1.1.9. Bernhard Wiebe (b. 1852) BGB B 353 married Agatha Schwartz. [They immigrated to Manitoba in 1874 and settled near present-day Mitchell, Manitoba.] They were listed in Weidenfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. [They were the parents of Heinrich "Watchmaker" B. Wiebe (*Furrows in the Valley*, page 597), who were the parents of Rev. Jake Wiebe, Blumenort, and grandparents of Rod Siemens, retired Dept. of Agriculture, Steinbach.]

2.1.1.10. Margaretha Wiebe (1854-1945) married Peter Penner;

2.1.1.11. Abraham (b. 1857) married Helena Kähler, Sommerfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census.

2.1.2. Dirk Wiebe (1814-55) BGB A98. This is my analysis, for which primary documentation is lacking. He married Eliesabeth Friesen (b. 1814), and his widow later married Peter Unger (b. 1832). Bergfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. Their children include:

2.1.2.1. Eliesabeth Wiebe (b. 1836) married Peter Schmidt, later Peter Fröse;

2.1.2.2. Johann (1837-41);

2.1.2.3. Anna (1840-55);

2.1.2.4. Heinrich (1842-45);

2.1.2.5. Johann (1844-49);

2.1.2.6. Peter (1845-47);

2.1.2.7. Sara (b. 1848) married Johann Sawatsky;

2.1.2.8. Dirk (b. 1850) married Katherina Martens, later Margaretha Friesen. Bergfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

2.1.2.9. Heinrich (1852-52);

2.1.2.10. Maria (b. 1853) married Johann Wiehler;

2.1.2.11. Heinrich (1855-57);

2.1.3. ? Bernhard Wiebe (1821-96) married Kornelia Wiebe (1824-95). Again this is my analysis for which primary documentation is currently not available. See Anne Funk, "Auswanderung 1948," *Preservings*, No. 11, page 60, and 6.2.2.2 of this article for more details of this family.

3. Abraham Wiebe of Krebsfeld (b. 1752)

Abraham Wiebe (b. 1752) was, in my view, a son of Martin Wiebe of Rückenau, later Krebsfeld. Martin Wiebe was likely deceased before the 1776 census and his children are listed in the 1776 census with either a step-father or other families. Abraham was likely already married in 1776, and should have been listed in the 1776 census as well, but he could have either been living in non-Prussian territory in 1776, or his family counted in with another family. We do not know the name of his first wife, his second wife was a certain Helena (b. 1772). Abraham Wiebe came to Russia in 1788 and settled at Neuendorf, Old Colony. BHU p 241 No 11. After his death, prior to 1802, his widow married Johann Peters of Neuendorf.

Abraham Wiebe's children include:

3.1. Maria (b. 1774);

3.2. Aganetha (1780-1848) married 1805 the widower Jacob Niebuhr (1766-1825) of Kronsthal, Russia;

3.3. Agatha (b. 1785);

3.4. Abraham (1794-1851) married Anna Janzen (1797-1852), a daughter of Kornelius Janzen, also of Neuendorf. They later moved to Bergthal. BGB A60. Their children include;

3.4.1. Abraham Wiebe (1819-78) married Susanna Koop, later Maria Klassen, then Aganetha Dyck (b. 1831) BGB B 29. Eigenfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. His children include:

3.4.1.1. Kornelius (b. 1840) married Helena Peters. BGB C11. Neu Hoffnung, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

3.4.1.2. Anna (b. 1841) married Abraham Buckert;

3.4.1.3. Abraham (b. 1843) stayed in Russia;

3.4.1.4. Peter (b. 1844) stayed in Russia;

3.4.1.5. Maria (1846-46);

3.4.1.6. Martin (b. 1847) married Eliesabeth Hildebrandt. BGB C38;

3.4.1.7. Wilhelm (b. 1850) married Aganetha Dyck. BGB C50. Neuendorf, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

3.4.1.8. Maria (b. 1853) married Abraham Kaenhowen;

3.4.1.9. David (1854-54);

3.4.1.10. David (b. 1855);

3.4.1.11. Johann (1856-61);

3.4.1.12. Jacob (b. 1858) married Susanna Fröse;

3.4.1.13. Heinrich (1859-61);

3.4.1.14. Aganetha (b. 1861) married Abraham Unger;

3.4.1.15. Eliesabeth (1862-1946) married Kornelius Unger (1860-1933), [son of Peter Unger (b. 1812), Felsenton, NW23-6-6E. They were the grandparents of Abe J. Unger, formerly Councillor of the R. M. of Ste. Anne, Tony Unger, Steinbach, Ben Unger, Friedensfeld, and



Elisabeth Wiebe (1862-1946) grieving beside the coffin of her husband Kornelius Unger, 1931. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Pauline Penner, Box 157, Blumenort.

Rev. Ben Unger, Rosengard];

3.4.1.16. Helena (b. 1864) married Abraham Fröse;

3.4.1.17. Johann (1866-1924) married Aganetha Peters [and homesteaded on NW7-3-2W north-east of Plum Coulee. They were the great-great grandparents of nationally-renowned poet Audrey Poetker;



Audrey Wiebe Poetker, photo credit Dancing all the night through, rear cover.

3.4.1.18. Heinrich (b. 1868);

3.4.1.19. Gerhard (b. 1870) married Aganetha Schultz, then Helena Hiebert;

3.4.1.20. Bernhard (1872-1925) married Margaretha Redekop [The Bernhard Wiebe family lived north of Horndean in the Melba district and then moved to Grossweide. His grandson Art Wiebe was a teacher in Blumenort and Steinbach, Manitoba];

3.4.2. Peter Wiebe (b. 1822) m. Katherina Bergen BGB B37. Eigenfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. Their children include:

3.4.2.1. Heinrich (1844-62);

3.4.2.2. Anna (1845-63)

3.4.2.3. Susanna (1847-47);

3.4.2.4. Abraham (1848-Oct 26, 1910) married Margaretha Krahn (d. 1909). Eigenfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census: see Peter D. Wiebe, "The Wiebes of Eigenfeld," *Preservings*, No. 5, Jan. 1995, page 6, Great-grandson Dick Wiebe is still farming on the family homestead on SW33-6-6E just north of present-day Homestead Crescent, Steinbach;

3.4.2.5. Katherina (b. 1850) married Johann Klassen, then David Dirksen;

3.4.2.6. Susanna (b. 1852) married Peter Krahn;

3.4.2.7. Margaretha (1854-61);

3.4.2.8. Helena (1856-56);

3.4.2.9. Peter (1858-62);

3.4.2.10. Kornelius (1861-61);

3.4.2.11. Peter (1864-67);

3.4.3. Kornelius Wiebe (b. 1826) married Agatha Unger. BGB B78. Eigenfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. Their children include:

3.4.3.1. Kornelius Wiebe (1853-1929) married Susanna Dyck (b. 1856). Eigenfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. [In 1900 Kornelius Wiebe and his family moved to Lowe Farm, where he eventually acquired all of Section 23-4-1W and half of Section 24. The family prospered and in 1915 they purchased a 30/60 Rumley tractor. Son Kornelius Wiebe (1881-1968) farmed in Lowe Farm and retired in Morris. His son Henry T. Wiebe moved to Blumenhof, north of Steinbach in 1953--see *Furrows in the Valley*, pages 605-606. Daughter Susanna (1878-1967) married Abraham T. Funk (1875-1944), Barkfield, Manitoba: see *The House of Funks*, 96 pages, and book note, *Preservings*, No. 10, Part Two, page 81. Their grandson Peter W. Funk is the owner of "Funk's Toyota", Steinbach];

3.4.3.2. Abraham (b. 1855) married Katherina Friesen. Chortitz, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

3.4.3.3. Peter (b. 1856) married Anna Neufeld. Rosengart, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. Several members of this family went to Paraguay in the 1920s;

3.4.3.4. Jacob (1858-1922) married Aganetha Dirksen. [They lived in Hoechrieghe (Bristol), E.R. They were the grandparents of Rev. Harry Wiebe, who sings with the group, "Heaven Bound" often seen on local cable TV.];

3.4.3.5. Agatha (b. 1860) [married Jakob G. Gerbrandt (b. 1858), son of Jakob Gerbrand (1823-73) BGB B49 whose widow appears to be the one listed in Rosengard in the Brot Schuld Registers. Agatha's son Dietrich W. Gerbrandt (1899-1933) lived on a farm in Rosengard from where they emigrated to Paraguay in 1926; see Maria Giesbrecht, *ein Stamm Baum von Dietrich W. Gerbrandt 1899 - 1933* (Niverville), 32 pages.];

3.4.3.6. Anna (b. 1862) married Abraham Dyck;

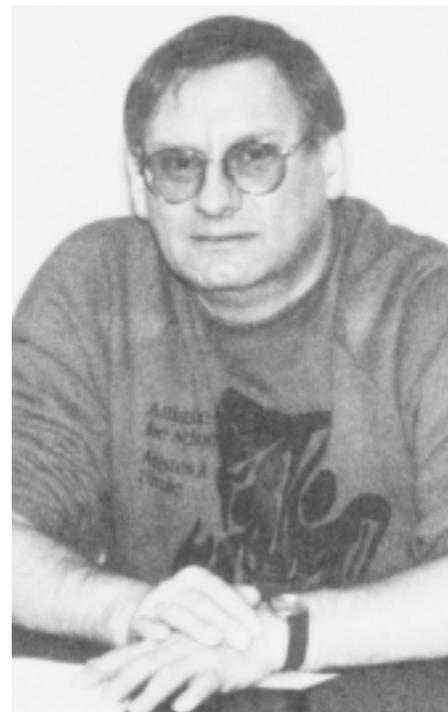
3.4.3.7. Katherina (1864-96) married Jacob Thiessen (1861-1953) and lived in Neuenberg



Susanna Dyck (b. 1856) and Cornelius Wiebe (b. 1853). Photo courtesy of House of Funks, page 3. See also *Furrows in the Valley*, page 606.

and Bürwalde, E.R. Their daughter Katharina (1885-1978) married Peter P. Friesen (1878-1969), Grünthal; see Helene Friesen, *A Genealogy of Peter P. and Agatha Friesen 1770-1978* (Grunthal, 1978), 85 pages;

3.4.3.8. Heinrich (b. 1866) married Katherina Penner. [In 1901 the family moved to the Lowe Farm area. They were the great-grandparents of novelist Armin Wiebe. See "Armin Wiebe ancestry", *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, page 48.];



Armin Wiebe, descendant from the Eigenfeld Wiebes, photo credit The Second Coming of Yeat Shpanst, rear flyleaf.

3.4.3.9. Martin (b. 1868);

3.4.3.10. Justina (1869-69);

3.4.3.11. Maria (b. 1871) married Dirk Penner;

3.4.4. Martin (1830-48);



Johann Wiebe (1831-1917) and Margaretha Funk Wiebe (1838-1918), with their grandson Abram Dyck. The photo was taken in their little house on the farmyard of daughter Katherina and her husband Jakob Dyck (1872-1953), just west of the Grossweide Sommerfelder Church near Plum Coulee. Their grandson Art Dyck served as mayor of Altona for many years. Photo courtesy of Wm. Schroeder, 434 Sutton Ave., Winnipeg.

3.4.5. Maria (1833-40);

3.4.6. Anna (1837-65).

3.5. Martin (b. 1797) married Agatha Friesen.

4. Johann Wiebe of Schwartzdam, Prussia.

This Johann Wiebe was recorded in the 1776 census at Schwartzdam, listed with 3 sons and 3 daughters. He died circa 1781, and was the brother of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96) of the Elbing-Ellerwald Gemeinde [well-known for his journals and the 20 article Confession of Faith he authored]. Johann's wife was an Aganetha Penner who later married in 1787 Peter Ens (1733-1801) of Schönsee (Ladepkop Gemeinde) and later Jacob Hiebert, also of Schönsee. The

Jacob Hieberts apparently immigrated to Russia circa 1803 (BHU p 341 No 98). Most of Johann Wiebe's children immigrated to Russia at various times and most settled in the Old Colony.

The children include:

4.1. Isebrandt Wiebe (b. 1761). This Isebrandt appears to have come to the village of Chortitza, Old Colony, circa 1793, where he is found in the lists from 1793 to 1803 (BHU p 237 No 12). It seems his second wife was an Anna Isaac whom he married in 1792 while still in Prussia. It seems he received the second homestead of his brother Johann Wiebe circa 1793.

4.2. Agatha (b. circa 1763) married 1789 Jacob

v Kampen (176-1810). This family is somewhat difficult to locate, except for a reference in BHU that Jacob v Kampen may have settled at Einlage and then moved to Chortitza by 1793. There does not seem to be a reference to this family in the lists from 1795 to 1808.

4.3. Johann (1766-1823) married Agatha v Kampen (b. 1768), Chortitza 1793, 1795, 1802, 1803 (BHU p 237). It seems that Agatha was a sister of the above Jacob v Kampen, and that Johann Wiebe received the v Kampen homestead. This he gave to his brother Isebrandt. Johann Wiebe was Aeltester of the Chortitza Gemeinde from 1791 to 1823;

4.4. Anna (b. circa 1768) married Peter Penner (b. 1765), Chortitza 1793, 1795 (BHU p 238 No 28). Peter Penner later married a certain Maria (b. 1772).

4.5. Gerhard (b. 1772) He came to Russia circa 1794 with his sister Katherina (b. 1781) and is listed at Chortitza in 1795, 1802, 1803. Gerhard married Sara Penner, daughter of Heinrich Penner who came to Russia between 1796 and 1798. Although listed in 1795 it seems he did not have his own homestead, as he received his father-in-law's homestead after the latter's death circa 1799. Gerhard Wiebe's children include:

4.5.1. Johann (1804-40) married Katherina Hooze (b. 1811). She later married Jacob Harder (1810-60). This family moved to Bergthal. BGB A11. Johann Wiebe was a minister of the Bergthal Gemeinde; see John Dyck, "Alt-Bergfeld," in *Historical Sketches*, pages 28-32. Johann and Katherina's children include:

4.5.1.1. Johann Wiebe (1831-1917) married Margaretha Funk. BGB B135. Bergfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census [Their son Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1867) was the great-grandfather of Rev. John M. Wiebe, Steinbach, and Peter D. Wiebe, owner of Steinbach Hatchery. Another son Abraham Wiebe (1864-1948) married Katharina Dyck and their daughter Gertrude married William Schroeder, and they are the parents of Wm. Schroeder, author of *The Bergthal Colony*, and John Schroeder, deceased, formerly "Assiniboine Travel"];

4.5.1.2. Gerhard (1832-53);

4.5.1.3. Jacob Wiebe (1835-1914) married Katherina Penner, then Katherina Hiebert; BGB B 158. Bergfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census [see John Dyck, "Jakob Wiebe (1835-1914), Rechenbuch," *Pres.*, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, pages 10-11; Jakob had many prominent descendants, too numerous to mention.] His oldest son Jacob (1858-1909) married Eliesabeth Harder and lived at Kronsgart, East Reserve, Manitoba, where they are listed in the 1881 census [see Linda Buhler, "Kronsgart and Neu-Hoffnung," in *Historical Sketches*, pages 157-158. Jakob's son Abraham H. Wiebe (1892-1979), received his Ph.D. in 1929 from the University of Wisconsin, the first from southeastern Manitoba. Jakob's son Johann P. Wiebe (1862-1922) was a school teacher, see Cathy Barkman, "Johann P. Wiebe (1862-1922)," in *Pres.*, No. 8, June 1995, Part One, pages 12-13. Johann had many prominent descendants, including the Honourable Mr. Jus-



Pres., No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 49-51.]

4.5.1.4. Anna (b. 1838);
4.5.1.5. Peter Wiebe (1841-1917) married Judith Penner, then Susanna Harder. Peter Wiebe was apparently married five times in total. BGB C36A. Edenburg, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census, BGB page 373;

Heinrich and Katharina Wiebe Doerksen with parents Mr. and Mrs. Jakob Wiebe Sr. sitting between them. Photo courtesy of Wm. Schroeder, 434 Sutton Ave, Winnipeg, and Altona Echo, article No. 83.

...tice Gordon J. Barkman, and Earl Klassen, KD Construction. Jakob's daughter Anna (1866-1932) married Heinrich W. Reimer and they were for many years the leading citizens of Steinbach, see Elisabeth Reimer Bartel, "A Legacy-A Memoir," in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 37-43. Another

daughter Susanna (1879-1926) was the grandmother of Dr. Roy Vogt (1934-97), long-time editor of the *Mennonite Mirror*. Another daughter Helena Wiebe (1875-1966) married Gerhard R. Schellenberg, see Audrey Toews, "Helena Wiebe Fast Schellenberg Reimer,"



Alfred van Vogt, world famous science fiction writer was another great-grandson of Peter Wiebe (1841-1917). Photo courtesy of *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, page 66.



Jakob P. Wiebe (1858-1909), photograph circa 1898. The portrait was beautifully displayed in an oval metal frame, 30 inches high and bordered with elaborate metalwork, a true work of art. Photo courtesy of grandson Peter Wiebe, Fernwood Apartments, Steinbach.



In 1927, Jakob P. Wiebe's second oldest son, Heinrich F. Wiebe, and his family emigrated to Paraguay. In 1969, Wilf Wiebe was born in Paraguay, a great-grandson of Heinrich. Wilf came to Steinbach with his parents, John and Eva Wiebe in 1980. He was always fascinated with airplanes and flying and worked his way through pilot's training. Today he is flying a 747 as Second Officer for Cathay Airways of Hong Kong. Obviously the genius of some of the family patriarchs such as Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96) Ellerwald or Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1766-1823), Chortitza Colony, has not yet dissipated completely. See story in *Carillon News*, August 17, 1998, page 2A.

4.5.2. Gerhard Wiebe (1808-63) married Anna Redekop. This family lived in Novo Witibsk in the Judenplan. [Gerhard Wiebe was the grandfather of Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984), author of *Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse in Kanada und Paraguay* (Steinbach, 1960), 83 pages, see John J. Friesen, "Maria Wiebe Toews: Mennonite Pioneer," in *Pres.*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 64-65. Prominent grandchildren include Harry Fehr, Quarry Oaks Golf Course, and Sue Nickel, Holiday Travel, Steinbach]. Gerhard Wiebe had another son Isaac (b. 1851), who was the great-grandfather of HSHS Research Director John Dyck;

4.6. Aganetha Wiebe (1773-1820) married Johann v Riesen of Schönsee (G.W.) in 1792 and came to Russia in 1803 as a widow. She married Gerhard Braun of Rosenthal in 1804. BHU p 264 No 29.

4.7. Katherina Wiebe (b. 1781) She was a sister of the Gerhard Wiebe mentioned above.

Note: I am deeply grateful to John Dyck of Winnipeg for numerous comments, ideas and information. Most of the reliable and key information on this family has its origins in the Predigt and Amstagsbuch of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96) cited by John Dyck and others including Hans-Otto Fieguth (Familien Buch, Wiebe, Oldenburg, No Date).



Wilhelm Heinrichs (1871-1938) and Maria H. Wiebe (1879-1920), daughter of Peter Wiebe (1841-1917). Photo courtesy of granddaughter Katherine Martins, *All in a Row: The Klassens of Homewood (Altona, 1988)*, page 83.

5. Jacob Wiebe of Mierau.

The following account is speculative and key primary documentation on this family is not currently available. However, it is my view the most probable account. Jacob Wiebe (1723-6.8.1788) was a landowner at Mierau, listed in the 1776 census with one son and one daughter. His wife was a Maria Esau (d. 2.4.1809) who later married a Hermann Born (1764-1806). Jacob Wiebe's children could have included:

5.1. Jacob (4.1760-1.3.1804) married Anna Fast (18.6.1756-20.6.1835). Anna seems to have been a daughter of Bernhard Fast of Gr. Mausdorf (1776-possibly listed as Gerhard, no children, 2 males, 2 females). Anna later married Isaac Born (b. 1778). The Jacob Wiebe family came to Russia circa 1788 and settled at Neuendorf, Old Colony, where the family is found in the lists of 1795, 1802, 1803 and 1808 (BHU p 341 No 15, p 270 No 29). Jakob Wiebe was a wealthy Vollwirt owning 9 horses, 13 cattle, 55 sheep, 8 pigs, 1 plow and 2 wagons. It is noteworthy how frequently the name of the village of Neuendorf surfaces in the story of the Berghthaler and Old Colony Mennonites. Neuendorf was also the ancestral village of Dyan Friesen Cannon, famous American movie ac-

triss.

Jacob Wiebe's children include:

5.1.1. Maria (18.1.1783-5.4.1852) married 1804 Jacob Buhler (9.10.1774-27.12.1857), Neuendorf;

5.1.2. Susanna (1786-1854) married Peter Dyck (b. 1786), Neuendorf.

5.1.3. Jacob (b. 1791)

5.1.4. Abraham (b. 1793)

5.1.5. Bernhard (21.3.1796-13.1.1852) married 1817 Helena Wiebe (b. 1798). This Helena Wiebe was a daughter of Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1746) mentioned above in Section 1. In 1823 the Bernhard Wiebe family moved to the newly established village of Neuhorst, where Bernhard served as the village Schulz or mayor until his death in 1852. The Bernhard Wiebe family was very prominent and influential in the Fürstenlandt Colony and later in the Reinlander Gemeinde in Manitoba. Their children include:

5.1.5.1. Peter (1818-81) who married Katherina Dyck, Susanna Höppner and Sara Sawatsky. This family moved to Bergthal. BGB A151. Peter Wiebe became a deacon in 1861. Later the Peter Wiebe family moved to Canada settling at Neuhorst, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. Peter Wiebe's children include:

5.1.5.1.1. Bernhard (b. 1847) married Eliesabeth Kähler. BGB C25b. Hochfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

5.1.5.1.2. Peter Wiebe (b. 1848) married Susanna Löwen. BGB B349. Hochfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census [The family was known in Hochfeld as "Die Lustige Wieb'e." Their son Johann L. Wiebe (1890-1954) had a livery barn and store in Giroux during the 1930s and 40s. His son Peter Wiebe (1912-44) was killed in action in Italy]. On February 28, 1938, Johann's daughter Helen, Mrs. Peter Funk, gave birth to Elma, Mrs. Dennis Reimer, and Eileen, Mrs. Abe Klassen, who became known as the snowplane twins because they were born in a snowplane during a daring sortie made out to Giroux by garageman Ben Loewen during a fearful blizzard to take their mother to the hospital in Steinbach];

5.1.5.1.3. Anna (1850-52);

5.1.5.1.4. Helena (b. 1852) married Johann Kähler;

5.1.5.1.5. Johann (b. 1854) married Judith Peters, then Helena Bergen;

5.1.5.1.6. Katherina (b. 1857);

5.1.5.1.7. Anna (1859-95) married Klaas Wall;

5.1.5.1.8. Jacob (b. 1862);

5.1.5.2. Jacob (1820-70) married Susanna Thiessen. [His son Jakob Wiebe was the father of David Wiebe (1877-1937) who lived in the West Reserve and later in Stuartburn. He was the grandfather of Grunthal area hog farmer David Wiebe];

5.1.5.3. Bernhard (1828-97) married Sara Dyck, then Helena Breuil, Eliesabeth Thiessen and Katherina Janzen;

5.1.5.4. Heinrich (1830-99) married Aganetha Penner, then Maria Thiessen. Heinrich and his family moved to the Fürstenlandt settlement in 1864. In 1875 they emigrated to Canada and settled in Rosengart, W. R. [His family moved to Saskatchewan. The descendants of their son Peter Wiebe (1861-1920) are listed in a family book by Elaine Wiebe and Gladys Wiebe, *Discovering our Wiebe Heritage: Peter Wiebe 1861-1920* (Saskatchewan, 1998), 370 pages. Neil Wiebe, long-time school teacher in the Steinbach area is his grandson. John P. Wiebe, large-scale farmer, McGregor, and George P. Wiebe, Altona trailer sales, are Peter's sons;

5.1.5.5. Abraham (1831-1900) married Maria Koop, then Katherina Braun. Abraham was elected as a minister in 1864. [The descendants of Ohm Abraham Wiebe (1831-1900) are listed in *The Descendants of Ohm Abraham Wiebe 1831-1991*, (Winkler 1991: Wiebe Family Book), 304 pages, see book review section];

5.1.5.6. Maria (1833-1912) married Kornelius Wall. Rosengart, W.E., 1881;

5.1.5.7. Johann Wiebe (1837-1906) married Judith Wall (1836-1910). Johann Wiebe was Aeltster of the Fürstenländer Gemeinde in Russia and later of the Reinland Gemeinde in Manitoba. Rosengart 1881. [See John Dyck, "Franz Dyck," *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec 1997, page 81-82 regarding the Wall connection. Like most conservative Mennonites Johann Wiebe was a literate and articulate person. Some 50

letters by him to church leaders in Saskatchewan are extant and in need of further study. Two sermons by Aeltester Johann Wiebe are published in the *Discovering our Wiebe Heritage* book referred to above.]

5.1.5.8. Aganetha (1840-1914) married Peter Wall (1840-87), Rosengart, 1881;

5.1.6. Peter (26.11.1798-29.10.1865) married Gertruda Wall, then Agatha Fast;

5.2. Maria (1774-16.4.1799) She married Johann Töws (1768-1816) later of Prangenau, G.W. This family stayed in West Prussia.

Note: I am deeply grateful to my friend Bruce Wiebe of Winkler, Manitoba, for sharing the extensive information he has gathered on this family with me--see also *The Descendants of Ohm Abraham Wiebe 1831-1991* noted above.

6. Gerhard Wiebe of Klein Wickenau.

The following account is based on circumstantial rather than primary evidence, but appears to be a most probable account. Gerhard Wiebe (15.9.1719-12.1792) was listed in the 1776 census at Klein Wickerau with 3 sons and 1 daughter. He was also the brother-in-law of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96) of the Elbing-Ellerwald Gemeinde, his sister Maria having married Aeltester Wiebe. His children may have included the following:

6.1. Gerhard (No dates currently available)

6.2. Johann (died before 1792) This Johann married Kristina Wiebe on 1.7.1779. She may have been a daughter of a Jacob Wiebe who lived in the Danzig area. His second wife was an Anna (b. 1747). The Johann Wiebe family immigrated to Russia in 1788 and settled at Neuendorf. Johann Wiebe was elected deacon in the Chortitza Gemeinde in 1791. By 1795, Johann had died and his widow had remarried Peter Albrecht (junior, b. 1770), BHU p 240 No 6, whose father Peter Albrecht (b. 1741) was listed at Schwartzdam in 1776: 1 son, 2 daughters, Ellerwald Gemeinde. Peter Albrecht Sr. had also come to Russia at the same time and settled at Neuendorf as well. Johann Wiebe's children include:

6.2.1. Kristina (b. 1782) She married the widower Abraham Dirksen (b. 1770). He had previously married the widow of Peter Albrecht, senior.

6.2.2. Jacob Wiebe (b. 1784) married Maria (Rempel?) (b. 1788). They lived at Neuendorf in 1808, BHU p 273 No 12. His wife could have been Maria Rempel, daughter of Peter Rempel of Schönhorst, later Osterwick. Jacob Wiebe could have had the following children (based on circumstantial evidence), however this is not certain.

6.2.2.1. Peter Wiebe (31.8.1818-9.8.1899) married Katherina Töws (24.8.1821-30.10.1903). This family later lived at Kronsthal, Old Colony--see also "Descendants of Jacob Dyck and Elisabeth Jäger", Jacob Dyck Family History Book Committee, Winkler, 1992.

6.2.2.2. Kornelia Wiebe (1824-95) married Bernhard Wiebe (1821-96) mentioned under 2.1.3. This family moved to Bergthal. BGB A 137. Later, they came to Canada and settled at Weidenfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 cen-

sus. Their children include:

6.2.2.2.1. Maria (b. 1846) married Abraham Bergen;

6.2.2.2.2. Kornelia (b. 1847) married Peter Funk;

6.2.2.2.3. Jacob Wiebe (b. 1849) married Sara Krahn, then Helena Wiebe (daughter of Kornelius Wiebe (see section 7). BGB B 355. Schönthal, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

6.2.2.2.4. Heinrich (b. 1852) married Helena Dyck, then Katherina Friesen, widow of his brother Bernhard. BGB B 366. Lichtenfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

6.2.2.2.5. Bernhard Wiebe (1854-1916) married Katherina Friesen (b.1857), Gnadefeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. Some members of this family immigrated to Paraguay in 1926 but later returned. Bernhard's son, Peter F. Wiebe (1900-51) lived in Rosenfeld and later Blumenort, Manitoba, where sons, Peter and Henry married the daughters of A. K. Penner, Blumenort. The Bernhard Wiebe descendants are listed by Ben Rempel and Herman Rempel, *Bernhard Wiebe Descendants* (Winkler, c.1985), 107 pages. See also Anne Funk, "Auswanderung 1948," *Preservings*, No. 11, page 60.

6.2.2.2.6. Peter B. Wiebe (1857-1924) married Anna Wiebe, daughter of Kornelius Wiebe, see Section 7. Weidenfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. These are the parents of C.W. Wiebe, M.D. and later M.L.A. and Agatha Wiebe, Registered Nurse (see article coming in Issue 14, *Preservings*.) Larry Wiebe with the Steinbach Assessment Branch is a great-nephew to Dr. Wiebe;



Dr. Cornelius W. Wiebe's official portrait as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. In 1932 he became the first Mennonite to sit in the Legislature. Photo courtesy of Mavis Reimer, Cornelius W. Wiebe: Beloved Physician (Hyperian Press 1983), page 76.

6.2.2.2.7. Anna (1860-1942) married Heinrich Klassen;

6.2.2.2.8. Helena Wiebe (b.1862) married Peter K. Funk (another Peter Funk, not the same as in 6.2.2.2.2.), see Al Hamm, "Peter K. Funk: Itinerant Pioneer," in *Pres.*, No. 12, June 1998, pages 84-86;

6.2.2.2.9. Phillip (1864-67);

6.2.2.2.10. Dirk (b. 1866) married Anna Falk;

6.2.3. Johann (b. 8.1787) He was living with his sister and brother-in-law, Abraham Dirksen, Neuendorf 1808. BHU p. 270 No 35.

6.3. Katherina (b. circa 1766) married 11.11.1787 the widower Isaac Westerwick.

6.4. Franz (b. circa 1767) married 18.10.1792 Helena v. Riesen

7. Kornelius Wiebe (1821-96) of Bergthal

This Kornelius Wiebe is possibly a son of Jacob Wiebe (b. 1791) of Neuendorf, listed as 5.1.3. It is however, difficult to attach a degree of probability to this conjecture, and for this reason, I have listed this family under a separate section. His first wife Agatha Kröcker (1823-58) was probably a daughter of Gerhard Kröcker (b. 1770) of Neuendorf, Old Colony. BHU p 268 No 17. This Gerhard Kröcker came to Russia in 1803. The second wife of Kornelius Wiebe, Helena Klassen (b. 1832), widow of Johann Wiens, was a daughter of Martin Klassen, of Neuendorf, later Bergthal A 178a. Kornelius Wiebe moved to Bergthal A 176, and later came to Canada, settling at Schönsee, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. The children of Kornelius Wiebe include:

7.1. Gerhard (b. 1846) married Katherina Rempel. BGB B 370. Bergfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census;

7.2. Kornelius (1848-1904) BGB B 362, married Helena Wiens (1853-1938), Schönsee, East Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census [Their son Cornelius Wiebe (1877-1974) lived in Rosenfeld, West Reserve, NW8-4-1W--see Albert Warkentin, editor, *Cornelius Wiebe 1877* (Morden, 1996), for a history and genealogy of this family. John Warkentin, loans officer, Steinbach Credit Union, is a descendant of this family];

7.3. Justina (b. 1850) married Peter Wiens, then Franz Dyck;

7.4. Jacob (1852-53);

7.5. Agatha (b. 1855) married Johann Winter;

7.6. Anna (b. 1858) married Peter B. Wiebe (b. 1857), son of Bernhard Wiebe, see section 6; [see also Marjory Hildebrandt, *House of Oak* (Steinbach, 1995), 85 pages;

7.7. Helena (b. 1859) married Peter Peters, then Jacob Wiebe (b. 1849), son of Bernhard Wiebe, see section 6;

7.8. Katherina (b. 1860) married Peter Töws, son of Julius Toews, Alt-Bergfeld, 1881;

7.9. Maria (1862-62);

7.10. Maria (1863-67);

7.11. Abraham (1866-66);

7.12. Elisabeth (1866-66);

7.13. Abraham (b. 1867) married Susanna Töws;

7.14. Maria (b. 1869) married Johann Peters;

7.15. Jacob (b. 1870);

7.16. Martin (b. 1872-72);

7.17. Johann (b. 1873);

7.18. Elisabeth (1875-76);

7.19. Johann (b. 1876).

Jacob T. Barkman (1848-1935), Heuboden

Jacob T. Barkman (1848-1935), Heuboden: Pioneer Merchant and Farmer, compiled by Elizabeth Reimer Friesen, Box 21,562, Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1B3, and Dr. Roydon K. Loewen, Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Introduction.

Jacob T. Barkman was the eldest child of Peter K. Barkman and Anna Toews: see *Pres.*, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part One, pages 46. He was born in Rückenau, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, in 1848, just 10 months after his parent's marriage. He married Aganetha Giesbrecht in 1869, a sister to Wilhelm Giesbrecht, later Holdeman minister in Steinach.

Jakob and Aganetha Barkan made their home in Rosenfeld, Borosenko Colony. On Feb. 4, 1873, Aganetha wrote a letter to her mother Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht, living in Prangenu, Mol, writing, "Receive a sincere greeting beloved mother...you are often in my thoughts, especially when I am alone with the children..."--see *Pres.*, No. 9, 1996, Part One, pages 21-22.

When they were both age 26, in June 1874, Jakob and Aganetha and their infant son Jacob joined the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) migration to Canada, travelling on the S.S. Austrian. On July 17 they arrived in Quebec City and on August 1 in Manitoba, settling initially at Grünfeld.

Shortly after they arrived in Manitoba their baby son Jacob died and the couple was childless for the next two years when Peter was born. Over the next 18 years another six children were born. In total six reached adulthood. They include: Peter G. Barkman (Hochstadt), Jacob G. Barkman (Blumenort), Aganetha (Mrs. John B. Koop - Hochstadt), John G. Barkman (Satanta, Kansas and Blumenort), Margaretha (Mrs. Jacob R. E. Reimer - Heuboden and Quellen Kolonie, Mexico) Elisabeth (Mrs. David Klassen - Heuboden, Ekron, Ridgewood and Blumenort).

Pioneering, 1874.

It is said that from Grünfeld Jacob heard the whistle of the river boat that carried the Steinbach settlers in September. He thus came to pick up his parent's family with an ox-driven cart and travelled to Steinbach to assist his brother and father in building "semlins". Klaas J. B. Reimer has written "that when his father chose Steinbach as his place of settlement, he quickly decided to locate there as well." A few weeks later, Jakob and his family joined the Barkman clan in Steinbach. They settled in the southern part of the village on Lot no. 6, just north of his father Peter K. Barkman's place who had settled on no. 5.

"Klaas J. B. Reimer has written that "Two children had been born to them in Russia, of which the oldest daughter soon died. A son Peter died here [in Steinbach] in October, 1874, possibly the first child to be buried here."

In Steinbach Jacob took out a homestead, built a farm on the east side of main street and farmed in a small way. Gerhard G. Kornelsen has written that Jakob was the first shopkeeper in the village: "Even before the financial situation had reached normality, oil, cheese, etc. were added to the wares and sold."



1910, Jakob T. Barkman family: l. to r: rear Johann G. Barkman with daughter Maria, Peter G. Barkman, Margaret Barkman (Mrs. Jakob R. Reimer), and Elisabeth Barkman (Mrs. David Klassen). Front, Aganetha Giesbrecht Barkman and Jakob T. Barkman. Photos for this article are courtesy of Elisabeth Reimer Friesen, Steinbach, Manitoba. Jakob T. Barkman was a storekeeper in Steinbach, and later flour mill owner, machinery dealer, and farmer.



1910, The Jakob T. Barkman house. The man standing in front of the house is believed to be Johann G. Barkman holding daughter Maria (later Mrs. Ben P. Doerksen), next is Elisabeth (later Mrs. David Klassen), and Margaret (later Mrs. Jakob R. Reimer). The house was later moved about 1/2 miles north to the Jakob R. Reimer farm, Heuboden (later Seaton, S.D.). School was held here in the front end of the house, (second window to the right). The first window to the left was where the grain was stored and we had salted hams buried in the grain for storage. For two years we had German school here with C. R. Reimer as the teacher; then English school with teacher Ernest Reimer. The author, Elizabeth Friesen attended both. Ernest Reimer had a room upstairs.

In 1884 Jacob although owning 2 horses and 2 oxen, farmed only 8 cultivated acres and had a tax assessment of only \$292, the third lowest in the village.

Gerhard Kornelsen wrote in 1916 that Jacob was always interested in merchandising and soon opened a small store that sold everything from

cheese to oil. "Later farm tools, machines and fence wire were added." Klaas J. B. Reimer has written that Jakob T. Barkman was a partner in the flour mill built by his father and originally owned a one-eighth share, "In addition he went into business with John Deere plows and Maxwell farm machinery."

Other sources indicate that Jacob also worked in the steam-powered flourmill that his father, Peter K. Barkman, the noted millwright, and merchant Klaas Reimer constructed.

Aganetha's mother was very proud of her family. In a letter to Russia of March 12, 1889, she wrote that "We have heard that the Barkmanchse is sick, she has been blessed with a small daughter, maybe Elisabeth. They now have two sons and three daughters alive--two Jakobs have died for them hear....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.....Wilhelm Giesbrecht was also very sick. Jakob Friesens' small child was also very sick, but they were not there at Barkmans."

Heuboden, 1890.

In 1890 the family moved to a farm near Heuboden, just to the northwest of the junction of the present highways 52 and 216, for what Gerhard Kornelsen noted was a venture at cattle raising. The house and farm yard in Steinbach was sold to brother-in-law Abraham W. Reimer, who had earlier already bought a half share in the Wirtschaft. Evidently some some German Lutheran immigrants resided in the house. The share in "Steinbach Flour Mills" was sold to younger brother Peter.

The 1906 tax records indicate some measure of success here; although Jacob at age 57 was cultivating only 25 acres of land, he owned six horses, and 28 head of cattle, one bull, 17 cows and 12 head of young cattle. Over the years he built up a small farm here, although he also did some custom milling and continued selling oil products. And as other small farmers, he too, worked as a teamster for merchant Klaas Reimer of Steinbach. On March 11, 1895 for example he took a load of 200 dozen eggs, plus butter and one calf to Winnipeg for Merchant Reimer, returning with more than \$40 in sales.

Memories of the Grandchildren

The memories of grandchildren interviewed, although vague are still vivid. What follows are the recollections of some of the grandchildren, mostly now in their 80s. They agree that they were usually either intrigued or amused by their grandfather.

Grandpa was a jovial, fun-loving person. His round face, marked by a white beard, was always smiling, often teasingly. He kept his weight up there, in fact he was quite round. One of the vivid recollections is Grandpa heartily enjoying "Broki Malk" before bed time, that is hot milk poured into a bowl over buns. He ate this dish, but not without offering a ladle full to each of the peering grandchildren. This was also a delectable dish for guests.

Grandchildren remember grandpa as "round" and "gracious". Even his once-white, but greyed, cloth money purse was always bulging; and so, too, his pet dog which is described below. It was all a sign that what he did he did whole heartedly,



These five gentlemen must have had an important meeting in order to have their pictures taken. L. to r: Peter Doerksen, formerly Hochfeld, Heinrich Neufeld, formerly west of Steinbach, Kornelius Fast, formerly Fischau near Steinbach (brother to Heinrich L. Fast, Kleeefeld), Johann S. Friesen, who lived for a long time in Hochstadt in a stone house, and, on the right is Jakob T. Barkman. Photo caption courtesy of 75 Gedenkfeier, page 96. Photo courtesy of Carillon News, June 8, 1985.

usually enjoying whatever pursuit he followed.

Animal Lover.

Jakob T. Barkman loved animals and especially horses. He had a team of beautiful ponies and diligently cared for them. They were always nicely manicured and when he had driven a distance they had to be covered with colourful blankets. He would hitch the ponies to his buggy and travel around selling a particularly tasty type of cheese. At least one cousin knows this for certain, as she secretly helped herself to some of the cheese that her sister Mary had bought from Grandpa for her wedding.

Another grandchild recalls how impressive grandfather was, driving the team, holding the reigns with bare hands even in the coldest weather, and upon coming to the gate leading to the farm, whistling for the grandchildren to come running to open the gate for him.

Another grandchild recalls accompanying Grandpa as he drove his cutter pulled by the ponies to the local store or to visit Peter Penner, Mrs A.W. Kornelsen's father. Even though Grandpa was a widower at the time, this grandchild recalls how Grandpa would chat and laugh as they drove on. Thus her recollection of Grandpa's engagement party to Maria Fast, held at her brother Heinrich Fast's place in Kleeefeld, was not a happy time, for it spelled the end of having Grandpa close by and she missed him dearly. (Jakob was Mrs. Maria Fast's fourth husband: see Audrey Toews, "Maria Fast Harms Klassen Barkman, Pres. No. 10, June 1997, Part One, page 47-48).

Grandpa's love for animals never left him; as an old man he especially enjoyed the company of a sporty little dog. He would play with this dog as he sat by the side of the house on his favourite chair or a bench. Many of the cousins remember this small white and reddish, frisky little dog, that was as round as his owner. The two were



The Jakob T. Barkman house as it looked in 1992. It was torn down sometime in 1998. In later times the house served as the Seaton School and later as a garage/workshop for Jakob R. Reimer and finally as a cattle shelter for a more recent owner: see Orlando Hiebert, "Heuboden-Seaton," in Preservings, No. 8, Part One, pages 20-21.

always together. In winter they were together in the living room and in summer they played by the side of the house. Grandpa had a stick which he would throw and the dog would scamper to retrieve it. Then the dog would wait for his master to throw it again and again. Grandpa would amuse and terrify the grandchildren, by allowing the little dog to chew lightly on his fingers. There was no doubt in his grandchildren's view that this dog was loved dearly. He would also play with other people's dogs, and in his special way, he would calm even the snappy dogs, managing never to get bitten.

Activities.

Even as a widower Grandpa kept himself busy and others amused. In those days he had a room built for himself at the home of his daughter, Elisabeth, the wife of David Klassen. Later he converted this room into a store. From here he would sell flour that he ground from his own wheat. When people came to buy this and other products, and if his son John was around, he



Johann Esau's trunk. Johann Esau lived with the Jakob T. Barkman family during his last years, and gave his trunk to the family in appreciation--see "Fraktur, 1836 New Year's Wish," in Pres., No. 12, June 1998, page 104, for additional information regarding Johann Esau. A copy of his Russian Passport was published by Dr. Harvey Plett, Seeking to be faithful, page 81.

would call on him to sing for the customers. He took great pride in John's singing talent. In earlier days, he even phoned his neighbours, summoning them to the party line, to let them hear John and his sisters sing.

Sometimes Jacob's activities resulted in consternation of those around him. One of his favourite pastimes, for example, was to listen in to the party-line telephone system and enjoy hearing friends and neighbours sharing with each other. He was thus always up on the latest, even sensitive news.

His inquisitiveness could get the better of him, but it was as quickly redeemed by his unrelenting sense of humour. It is said that his love for horses meant that he knew from the very sight of a horse at a distance who it was that was coming down the road. Yet it seems that his inquisitiveness compelled him to walk to the road just to verify who it was that was passing by.

One winter day when a neighbour, driving a sleigh, approached the Barkman farm, the neighbour thought he would humour the ever inquisitive Barkman. As the sleigh neared the farm, sure enough, Barkman came walking briskly to the road, and the neighbour moved to hide his identity by crawling underneath the sleigh and sitting on one of the runners. Barkman however was not confused. When he saw the apparently driverless sleigh he knew at once where the driver was: he leaned down, identified the neighbour underneath the sleigh, and said dryly in Low German, "well I had to come over and see what kind of strange person it is [who drives his sleigh from under it]."

Care and Consideration.

He was a curious man, but he was also always gentle and clearly loved his grandchildren dearly. One of his sons later recounted that soon after he had begun attending school, he had discovered in one corner of the school house a pile of wheat. He was thrilled to think how his pigeons would like a treat of wheat. That day he took some of the wheat home in his lunch bucket.

When his mother saw what he had brought home and considered it to be stolen, she told father, "now you will have to spank him." The little boy was shocked, of course, for his intentions had only been to provide for his pets. Grandpa understood this and instead of a spanking, he offered a reprimand, and even wiped away a tear from his own eyes.

On another occasion one of the granddaughters accompanied a friend further than an established boundary. Neighbourhood boys jeered at the little girl, saying that she would surely be spanked for having gone so far from home. The girl remembers Grandpa coming to fetch her back home, but recalls no punishment. Later, when he was an old man, confined to a rocking chair, he used his cane on his grandchildren. But it was not a threatening cane; it was used as a "hook" to draw grandchildren close to him. One of the grandchildren remembers especially how grandpa would gather children around him and amuse them. She remembers specifically enjoying just sitting with him on the bench outside by the side of the house, feeling free just to chatter away.

Grandma Barkman.

Less is known about grandma, Aganetha Giesbrecht, but she too is remembered as a soft-hearted woman. One of the granddaughters recalls doing things that would usually have resulted in the use of the "malk stock," the stick commonly used not only to stir milk once it had been poured into basins for cooling, but as a tool of punishment. As the granddaughter recalls, a good cry would usually melt grandma's heart and the milk stick was spared.

Grandchildren recall Grandma's close association with the garden close to the house. The unmarried aunts - Aganetha, Margaretha and Elisabeth - would tend the garden further away by the bush, but the colourful one, bordered by purple flowering vegetables - onions or leeks - was the domain of Grandma.

Grandma also energetically took care of what really was an extended family. In 1909 the young wives of two of the three boys, Johann (who remarried in 1913) and Peter, (who remarried in 1911) died within a relatively short time, about four months apart. Johann and Peter returned home, John with a three year-old daughter, Maria, and Peter with four children ages nine to three. As one grandchild recalled, "grandparents then took care of five grandchildren."

In 1911 while sons John and Peter were still at home with their small children, the second wife of the 85 year-old great-grandfather Peter K. Barkman died and he thus also came to live with Jacob and Aganetha Barkman. At the same time a certain Mr. Esau also lived there. One grandchild recalls that while John and Peter slept in the "ovised", a leanto attachment to the house, old Mr. Barkman had his place of rest behind a simple blanket, hung up to partition a room.

Grandmother Aganetha died in 1919 during the flu time. It is said that she was apprehensive when she heard there was a flu epidemic. The *Steinbach Post* noted that she had been "ailing for several years and was confined to her bed every

now and then and [then] was attacked by the flu which she was too weak to withstand." She became ill on November 14, 1918, and died less than two weeks later on November 26. It is said that she was uncomplaining and died in an upstairs room (the downstairs floor had been painted), having turned her face to the wall and quietly passed away. What made her death especially difficult was that her husband too was ill and expected to die; he was unable to attend her funeral. He did regain his health after an American doctor tended to him. "I remember that the doctor had a cloth over his mouth and nose, presumably as a mask as he tended the sick."

The *Steinbach Post* noted that her death "is causing a great loss to her bereaved husband and family and is severely felt by the host of her relatives and friends."

Remarriage.

After Aganetha died, Jacob was a widower for two-and-a-half years, living with his daughter Elisabeth and her husband David Klassen. In 1921 he married widow Maria Fast and moved to her village, Kleefeld, the village originally known as Grünfeld where he himself has once started to establish himself. (For a biography of Maria Fast Barkman (1851-1937) by great-granddaughter Audrey Toews and a number of photographs, see *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 47-48.

Klaas J. B. Reimer has written that "that even in his older years he [Jakob T. Barkman] drove with a team of fiery broncos and during the winter he only wore thin gloves on his hands. Evidently the older generation in general was not quite as sensitive as the present one."

Jacob Barkman died in 1935 at the age of 86, possessing good health until a month before his death of heart failure. It is said that he had a clear mind until the end, and that he spoke fervently of his great love for all his acquaintances. His obituary reads that his survivors "firmly trust that he abides righteously in the Lord." He was buried in the Kleefeld Holdeman Church cemetery.

Sources:

- The Barkman Cousins.
- Gerhard G. Kornselsen, "Steinbach: Then and Now," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 256.
- Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Neunzig Jahre Steinbach in der Ostreserve," in *Steinbach Post*, May 4, 1965, page 6.
- Obituary of Jakob T. Barkman in *Steinbach Post*, August 1935 and obituary of Maria Fast Barkman, April 1937.

"The new cairn at the Pioneer Cemetery in Steinbach has both Jakob T. Barkman and Aganetha Giesbrecht Barkman and his parents Peter K. Barkman and Anna Toews Barkman listed among the 18 pioneer families of Steinbach."

Johann and Sarah Baerg Koop: Neuanlage Pioneers

Johann B. Koop (1863-1935) and Sarah Baerg Koop (1864-1941): Neuanlage (Twincreek) Pioneers:
compiled by granddaughter Elizabeth Koop and Peter S. Koop, Box 781, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction by D. Plett.

Like his younger siblings, Johann Barkman Koop was born in Marienthal, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, his parents being Johann Koop (1831-97) and Katharina K. Barkman (1832-1923), later of Neuanlage (Twincreek), Manitoba: see articles regarding brothers Jakob B. Koop, Peter B. Koop and sister Maria Koop Plett (1868-1918) in *Preservings*, Issue 11, Dec. 1997, pages 43-50 and article regarding mother Katharina Barkman Koop in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, pages 31-32. Johann B. Koop was a first cousin to Jakob T. Barkman (1848-1935), see article elsewhere in this newsletter.

Johann Jr. came to Manitoba with his parents with the first contingent of Mennonites who arrived at the confluence of the Rat and Red Rivers on August 1, 1874. In 1883 Johann married Sarah, daughter of Peter Baerg (1817-1901). Baerg was a stalwart defender of the faith and one of the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde who served faithfully during three schisms and whose perseverance and courage assured the survival of the Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde, from which the modern-day Evangelical Mennonite Conference has sprung--see *Leaders*, pages 647-672, for a biography and selected writings of Ohm Baerg.

In 1884 the Koops were shown in the assessment rolls of the R. M. of Hanover for the first time with 30 acres of cultivated land, 1 horse and 5 cattle.

Johann and Sarah established their own farm on SE17-7-6E. Royden Loewen has written as follows about their farming operations: "Neighbours remember that the Koops kept the most beautiful garden in the district. The garden, covered with flowers and lined with tall trees, was dubbed "Paradise". Their farm also had a large windmill. In 1918 the Koops sold their farm to their children, the Peter F. Pletts, and became one of the very first settlers to farm in the Prairie Rose district" *Blumenort*, page 285.

Reminisces.

The remainder of this article is a compilation of reminisces collected by granddaughter Elizabeth Koop and Peter S. Koop, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Grandson Henry B. Koop.

Now concerning my grandparents Johann and Sara Baerg Koop.

I remember the rocking chair that grandpa fixed. It had a new unfinished leg and was identical to the other one. Now, how he could duplicate it I don't know. I'm quite sure he has no lathe. But grandpa was a real carpenter. He had built the china cupboards as well. His two wall clocks were always working. And Grandma al-



Johann B. and Sarah Baerg Koop Family, 1897. L. to r: Sarah (Mrs. Peter F. Plett), father Johann B. Koop, son Johann, Peter - later moved to Mission, B.C., daughter Katharina (Mrs. Peter G. Barkman), son Jakob - later Koop's Nursery in Kleefeld, and mother; Mrs. Sarah Koop, nee Baerg, holding son Abram. The child by the chair is Susanna (Mrs. Peter G. Barkman). The photograph was taken in 1897 by a traveling photographer at the Johann B. Koop residence in Neuanlage. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Elizabeth Koop, Steinbach, Manitoba.

ways had candies and peanuts at Christmas and one Christmas she gave me a remembrance book and had written in a verse that quoted Matthew 7:12 - "Whatever you want men to do to you do also to them." What a challenge. Oh, that I had recognized it all my life. It would have saved me and others a lot of heartaches.

This short article was written by Henry B. Koop, son of Johann Baerg Koop, a cousin to Mrs. Anna Heal who is the daughter of Peter Baerg Koop.

January 14, 1998

Granddaughter Anna Koop Heal.

Our Grandparents, Sarah Baerg Koop and Johann B. Koop, were hard working people. They kept their fields and garden in good shape. I remember the times us kids would be "hired" to go through the wheat fields and pull up the wild mustard. Our pay would be from 5 to 15 cents a day. The wages weren't as high then as they are now.

Grandpa also kept the garden in good shape. I remember my dad saying "grandfather's potatoes are in a perfect row -- no plants missing and the plants are all the same height". I remember when going through the garden with grandfather he would always carry the hoe over his shoulder and any unwanted weed would meet its doom. After grandfather died -- people passing by their place would remark about the change. The garden did not get the same care.

Grandfather was also faithful on Sunday. I don't think he was ever late for church. He had his own special place where he always sat. It was at the end of the pew -- right under the clock on the wall. In order to make sure of his place, they would be in church at least 20 minutes early. Grandfather was a caring person. We read about that in the Koop Register when he, his brother, Jakob, and two brothers-in-law, Abraham L. Plett and David L. Plett, made that trip into Saskatchewan to visit his ailing brother. When they had that accident on the road which shortened all their lives.

Grandmother worked along side with grandfather. She was lonely when grandfather died, shortly after that car accident. She was left alone with Aunt Anna. A few years later Aunt Anna decided to get married, this left grandmother all alone in her later years. Between cousin Anna Plett and myself, we spent the nights with grandmother. I stayed one winter with her. In the evenings when it was too dark to see for work and too early to light the coal oil lamp, grandmother would sit in her rocking chair and tell stories all about coming to Canada, braving their first winter in make shift homes -- sod homes, not very homey, but warm.

P.S. I just remembered another interesting thing -- maybe you too can remember the two wall clocks grandparents had in their combined bedroom and living room. These two clocks were ancient -- had a face with a pendulum. It



1925 Johann B. Koop and Mrs. Koop, nee Sarah Baerg. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Mrs. Anne Heal, Box 217, Buffalo Narrows, Saskatchewan.

was interesting to watch these clocks. Their tick-tock was very loud and they didn't always harmonize, it could be nerve grating. I think grandfather took great pride in keeping these clocks going. They had to be wound daily by pulling up the chains. Grandparents never had electricity -- they had wood heat, coal oil lamps and lanterns.

Their water was hand pumped -- no electricity or running water. I think in later years they had an artesian well.

Our grandparents were hard-working people. They moved to Prairie Rose around 1920. They lived in a small shack at their son Peter's place while their new home was being built. The home was built in the old-fashioned style where the house joined the barn. The barn and house were joined by a workshop. It was nice in winter, no going outdoors, all was under one roof so to speak.

In those days there was no electricity. The water had to be hand pumped for the cattle. And the barn lantern had to be carried wherever light was needed. The house was the same. No electric lights, only coal oil lamps which were carried to rooms as needed. The master bedroom also served as the guest room. The bed was nicely made for Sundays with a white spread and embroidered pillow cases.

One of the Mennonite habits was the "spits". It seemed everybody grew enough sunflower seeds to last all winter. On cold winter days you would see grandfather in his favourite rocking chair, reading the *Steinbach Post* and chewing Spits. With no vacuum cleaner it must have been a job to keep the house in order.

Grandmother was always busy with her knitting needles and thread. She was always ready to help where there was a need. And grandmother was also called on when a new baby was

to be born. For many years their travelling was done by horse and buggy. But when the Model A Ford came out Grandfather changed from horse and buggy to a car, a faster way of travel. My uncle got behind the wheel and he boasted of what the car could do. He said, "I opened her up and went 20 miles an hour!" I guess it was faster than horse and buggy!

Grandparents like many others would raise turkeys for sale. This gave them extra cash for special needs. Since there were no deep freezes and coolers, the birds had to be butchered and sold the same day. To do that a party was called. Neighbors and friends would gather in the wee hours of the morning, killing and plucking birds and by breakfast time the birds were ready for market. They were taken to Winnipeg.

Another big event was butchering pigs for the winter. That was another occasion for a party. Several families were invited to help. They started around 6 o'clock in the morning and lasted all day. The pigs were butchered, usually two or three. They had to be scalded and scraped. Next they were cleaned out and cut up. The meat was cut up for spare ribs, sausages, hams, and whatever. The fat was ground up and rendered into lard. Since we had no deep freezes the meat was laid out to freeze - and after it was frozen it was put in bags and buried in the grain bins where it kept well for the winter.

The most praiseworthy thing we learnt from our grandparents was, that when we stayed over night and a thunderstorm was coming, we all had to sit up, when the storm came closer, they took out the Gesangbuch and we sang praise songs while the storm went by.

One thing grandpa was good at was taking the farmers market to Winnipeg. They had a big

garden, chickens, eggs, cream, etc. which he took to Winnipeg one day a week (through the summer). He bought a 1924 or 1925 Model T Touring Car, his son Peter was the chauffeur, since he was also the closest neighbour. They made a fairly good living by it.

Then came the time to pull out all the mustard seed plants out of the grain field. Grandpa took a wagon to the field where he could sit while we pulled the weeds, and in the meanwhile, he counted each child's plants, so he could pay them accordingly.

Christmas gatherings were always a great highlight for us all as grandchildren, and more so when our grandmother would invite us all into the summer kitchen to teach us a new game. We all had to sit in a circle on the floor, except one, who had to have their eyes closed with a scarf or hankie, then had to sit down on someone's lap, then the person on who's lap he or she sat, must say "Ek huk. Ek huk. Op wot do hukst? Op Mensche Fleisch, wo het dot dann?" If he or she guessed the right person, that person had to guess the next round.

- Written by a granddaughter of Johann B. Koop.

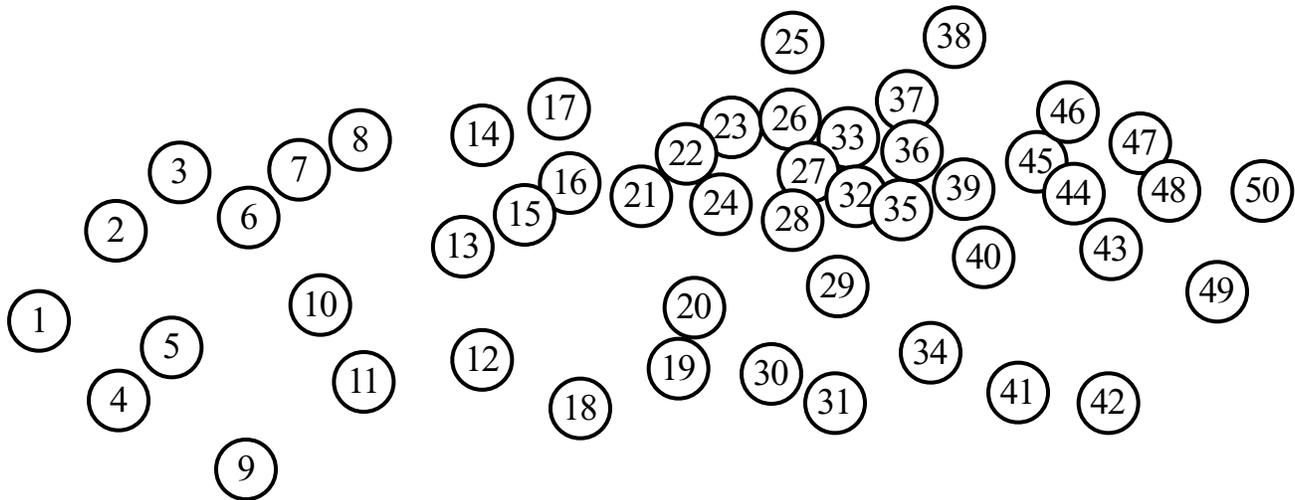
For further reading:

Plett, "Johann M. Koop (1831-97) and Katharina Barkman Koop (1832-1923), Neuanlage, Imperial Russia, to Neuanlage, Manitoba," unpublished paper, 1998, 14 pages, in Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series, publication forthcoming.

125th Steering Committee Mission Statement - "The East Reserve 125 Steering Committee exists to raise awareness of the 1874 settlement of the Hanover area, known as the East Reserve, and to promote and celebrate the 125th anniversary of this historical event in 1999."

- ATTENTION - Family Historians and Genealogists:

There is still room for a few more exhibitors at the 1999 "Genealogy and Family History Day." Take advantage of this opportunity to exhibit your research, family books and records. Many people have made exciting new discoveries from visitors to their exhibits and have established valuable genealogical connections. If you are interested or need more information, please contact HSHS President Orlando Hiebert, Box 8, Tourond, Manitoba, R0A 2G0



Johann Barkman Koop Christmas family gathering picture (about 1929-1930): (1) Katherine Koop, (2) John P. Plett, (3) Jacob B. Koop, (4) Oscar Friesen (teacher's son), (5) Helen Koop Thiessen, (6) Peter Martens, (7) Peter Koop Plett, (8) Jacob Friesen (teacher), (9) Ernest Friesen (teacher's son), (10) Mary Plett Plett, (11) Bernie Koop, (12) John Schellenberg Koop, (13) Mrs. Johann B. Koop, (14) Peter F. Plett, (15) Sara Koop Plett P.F., (16) Aganetha Barkman Koop, (17) Henry B. Koop, (18) Peter B. Koop, B.C., (19) ???, (20) Gerhard Schellenberg Koop, (21) Johann B. Koop, (22) Katherine Barkman Reimer, (23) Mrs. Jacob Friesen (teacher's wife), (24) Anna Koop Penner, (25) Johann J.B. Koop, (26) Anna Plett Plett, (27) Sara Koop Barkman, (28) Elizabeth Koop Koop, (29) Johann Koop Plett, (30) Margaret Plett Newman, (31) Olga Koop Dueck, (32) Agnes Koop Reimer, (33) Sara Koop Barkman, (34) Helen Plett Plett, (35) Ann Koop Heal, (36) Margaret Barkman Koop, (37) Sara Plett Plett, (38) Peter Baerg Koop, (39) Susie Koop Plett, (40) Willie Barkman Koop, (41) Frank Koop Plett, (42) Ellie Friesen (teacher's daughter), (43) Frank Schellenberg Koop, (44) Helen Koop Martens, (45) Sara Koop Doerksen, (46) Anna Schellenberg Koop, (47) Katherine Koop Loewen, (48) Margaret Martens Koop, B.C., (49) Peter Barkman Koop, (50) Katherine Plett Kroeker. Photo identification is courtesy of granddaughters Elisabeth Koop and Katharine Kroeker, Steinbach.

The photograph is taken in front of the Koop farmyard and barn on SE13-8-5E. This farm is presently owned by Alfred Bartel. The vehicles in the background are owned by members of the Koop family. The vehicle on the left is a 490 Chev Touring. The vehicle in the middle with a roof is a model T owned by Johann B. Koop Jr. The vehicle at the far right is a 1928 Chev owned by Jakob B. Koop, the nursery owner in Kleefeld.

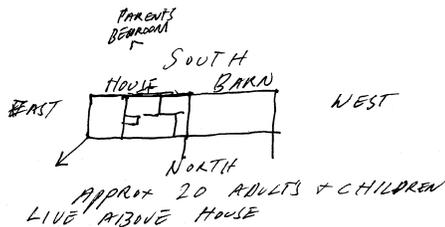
Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936), Vollwerk

Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936) and Helena Doerksen Peters (1879-1937), Vollwerk, Manitoba, by son Erdmann D. Peters, Box 117, Vineland, Ontario, L0R 2C0, and grandson Harry P. Peters, Box 10, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.
Compiled by Editor Delbert F. Plett Q.C., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A.

Family Background.

Jakob W. Peters was the grandson of the famous "Oberschulz Peters", the Reeve or District Mayor of the Bergthal Colony in Russia, BGB A111. In 1874-76 the Oberschulz led the immigration of the entire Bergthal settlement to Manitoba. In 1875 sons Jakob (1844-1922) and Peter (1846-1913), and their families came to Canada, followed a year later by the Oberschulz with the last contingent of Bergthaler families in 1876. The Peters family settled on Section 31-6-6E, a hamlet they named Vollwerk, literally meaning estate or chutor.

Jakob and Peter F. Peters, sons of the Oberschulz, were married to Wiebe sisters, namely, Katerina and Helena, daughters of Heinrich Wiebe (1806-65), BGB A119. Sisters Anna, Aganetha and Maria Wiebe were married to brothers Stoesz--Jakob, Kornelius and David, who served as Brandaeltester, minister and Aeltester of the Bergthaler/Chortitzer Gemeinde, respectively--see Henry Schapansky, Wiebe article elsewhere in this newsletter. The marriage connections of Jakob and Peter Peters



Sketch of the original house barn built by Peter F. Peters in 1886. Drawing by grandson Erdmann D. Peters, Vineland, Ontario, October, 1997.



Barn built in 1886 on NW31-6-6E by Peter F. Peters, two years after the death of the Oberschulz. It is still standing today at the corner of Reichenbach Road and P. T. H. 52 and is presently one of the oldest structures in the Hanover Steinbach area. The NW31-6-6E is currently owned by Jake "Post" Peters, son of Peter W. Peters who purchased the farm from his father's estate. Evidently the original housebarn built in 1875 or 76 was located on the same spot, and this barn replaced the original barn in 1886. The original house was later torn down when a new house was built somewhat further toward the east. Photo courtesy of Jake Peters and Oberschulz book, page 100.

within the Bergthaler revealed the influence and power of the family within the pioneer community.

Vollwerk, Manitoba, 1875.

Upon arrival in Manitoba in 1875, Peter F. Peters settled on the NW31-6-6E, on the west side of the modern-day Reichenbach Road, filing for a homestead on May 3, 1877. Older brother, Jakob, settled on the NE31-6-6E where Oakenwald Crescent is located today, filing for a Homestead May 3, 1877. On May 20, 1880, Oberschulz Peters filed for a Homestead on SE36-6-5E, immediately to the west of son Peters property. This quarter section lay west of the modern-day Blatz Road. On Dec. 20, 1882, Peter and Jakob Peters Jr. also purchased jointly the SE1-7-5E as a preemption quarter.

Church records show that in addition to the



The Peters memorial cemetery located off Reichenbach Road, just behind the house and garden on NW31-6-6E, originally owned by Peter Peters. This is where Oberschulz Peters, his two sons, and many grandchildren, including Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936) are buried. A total of over 30 graves are located at this important memorial site.

"Verstossene Kind", the Oberschulz had also adopted foster-son Bernhard Sawatzky (b. 1865), which again showed his heart of compassion for the less fortunate.

The Oberschulz and his two sons are listed as part of the village of Reichenbach in the "Brotschuld Registers", a listing of church loans and credits to members of the Bergthaler community in 1874-78. Jakob and Peter are not listed on the second set of loan registers, a sign that they possibly did not require the assistance and/or that they had moved to establish themselves as their own family-based village.

The insurance records of the Bergthaler/Chortitzer Brandordnung reveal that the Peters family had substantial assets with cover-

age as follows: Jakob Peters Sr. -clothing and furniture 150, threshing machine 275, grass mower 60, fanning mill 15, total 500; Jakob Peters Jr. - house 400, furniture 500, barn 20, wagon 40, increases Sept 1, 1883, house 100, furniture and clothing 80, 1/2 threshing machine 100, grass mower 35, total 1780; Peter Peters - house 100, furniture 500, barn 200, shed 100, house from A. Schmidt 50, wagon 40, plow 10, house from A. Schmidt 400, second house 75, plow 15, horse rake 20, increases furniture 80, increased furniture 100, 1/2 threshing machine 100, fanning mill 15, shed 35, total 1475.

The tax assessment records of the R. M. of Hanover shed additional light on the early farming activities of the Peters family. The 1883 assessments list the following: Oberschulz Jakob Peters - land 160 acres, 15 cultivated, furniture 150, 2 oxen, 14 sheep, threshing machine, fanning mill, total \$334; Jakob Peters Jr. - 320 acres land, 25 cultivated, building 850, furniture 520, 4 horses, 3 oxen, 9 cows, 3 yearlings, 4 calves, 3 sheep, 3 hogs, 1/2 feed crusher, 1/2 mower, 1/2 hay rake, 2 wagons, 1 plow, 2 harrows and 2 sleighs, total \$1444.50; Peter Peters - 160 acres land, 25 cult., bldgs 475, furn. 500, 2 horses, 9 cows, 8 yearlings, 4 calves, 3 sheep, 3 hogs, 1/2 feed crusher, 1/2 mower, 1/2 hay rake, 1 wagon, 1 plow, 2 harrows and 1 sleighs, total \$996.50.



Oberschulz Jakob Peters is buried in a family plot in the "Peters Memorial Cemetery" presumably started when died in 1884. The plot is located in the garden of his son Peter F. Peters, with whom the Oberschulz lived during his last years.

The 1884 assessment records list the following: Jakob Peters Jr. - 320 acres land, 33 cultivated, buildings 850, furniture 595, 4 horses, 2 oxen, 10 cows, 3 yearlings, 7 calves, 8 sheep, 1 hogs, 1/2 threshing machine, 1/2 feed crusher, 1/2 mower, 1/2 hay rake, 1/2 fanning mill, 2 wagons, 1 plow, 1 harrows and 2 sleighs, total

\$1576; Peter Peters - 320 acres land, 25 cult., bldgs 475, furn. 500, 2 horses, 3 oxen, 9 cows, 3 yearlings, 9 calves, 6 sheep, 1 hogs, 1/2 feed crusher, 1/2 mower, 1/2 hay rake, 1/2 fanning mill, 2 wagon, 1 plow, 1 harrows and 2 sleighs, total \$1269.

Notwithstanding that Oberschulz Peters and brother Cornelius, had generously given of their own personal property to assist the poor in the Bergthaler Gemeinde at every fork in the road, the insurance records reveal that the family was well-situated financially. Upon arrival in the E. Reserve in 1876 the Oberschulz lived with his younger son, Peter. The insurance records show that Peter added a second residence to his farmyard and presumably the Oberschulz lived in his own house on Peter's yard.

The assessment records show that Oberschulz Peters and son Peter shared a certain draught animals and equipment as did the two brothers, Jakob and Peter. After the Oberschulz's death in 1884 his estate, including the threshing machine and fanning mill, was divided between the two boys. Peter Peters acted as administrator and in that capacity took title to the entire NW36-6-5E. Later he transferred the east half to his brother Jakob who transferred it to his son Jakob B. Peters in 1913. The west half was transferred from Peter to his widow, Helena, as administratrix, and then to son Peter W. Peters. Jakob H. Peters purchased the entire quarter section in 1943.

Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936).

Jakob W. Peters was born in Bergthal, Russia in 1869 and came to Canada in 1875 with his



A map found among the Peters family papers shows the outlines of the land complex for what must be the villages of Vollwerk and Reichenbach, or was it the outline of the Mitchell school district? As the reader can see, this includes all of the area of the present-day hamlet of Mitchell located on Section 6-7-6E, as well as some additional lands. Given the rate of growth of this community, one of the fastest in Manitoba, it may not be long until the limits of the 1880s villages are again attained.

parents, Peter F. Peters and Helena Wiebe, who had a total of 13 children, only four of whom grew to adulthood and married.

Young Jakob grew up in his parents home on NW31-6-6E, on the northeast corner where the "Peters" graveyard is located on Reichenbach Road. Being the oldest son he had many responsibilities and learned the ethic of hardwork and dedication.

In 1899, Jakob W. Peters, age 30, married Helena Doerksen, 10 years his junior. She was a sister to Peter K. ("Will'e/Meryjal'e") Doerksen and had one sister, Mrs. Abraham Giesbrecht, Tourond (Strassburg), who later moved to Paraguay.

Peter F. Peters died in Jan. 18, 1913, at a relatively young age. The farming operation was taken over by the oldest sons, Jakob and Peter



Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936), Vollwerk, Manitoba. Circa 1890. Photo courtesy of Katherina Peters (Mrs. Jakob D. Peters), Steinbach, Manitoba.

W. Peters. Both were already married and each had a number of children, so that a total of some 20 souls, adults and children, lived in the housebarn which their father had built, see sketch.

The farm, SW6-7-6E.

The buildings on NW31-6-6E were obviously too small for so many people and so it was decided that Jakob, the oldest son, would establish his own home on SW6-7-6E, north across the road allowance. According to Homestead records, this quarter section was purchased by Peter F. Peters from the Crown on January 21, 1896, for \$190, under Patent 186046. In 1926 title was transferred to Helena Peters, as executrix of Peter Peters for \$2075. Helena Wiebe Peters was the widow of Peter F. Peters who died in 1913. Helena in turn transferred title to the property to Jakob W. Peters.

A new house was built here in 1920 by Jakob W. Peters. The fir for the construction of the house was shipped in from British Columbia.

The barn was built a year later.

The house was a splendid, square two-storey structure, with an attic and fully developed basement. It stood for many years as a landmark for people travelling the Piney Highway between Tourond and Steinbach. While the old saying went, "as handy as in Chortitz", Jakob W. Peter's house and farm almost changed that to "as handy as in Vollwerk". See photo of Jakob W. Peters', later David D. Peters' house and yard attached.

The house was unique having the kitchen and eating facilities in the basement level, south-



Helena Doerksen Peters and Jakob W. Peters, circa 1932. The photo is taken at the east side of the house, view towards the west. Photo courtesy of Ed D. Peters, Vineland, Ontario.

east corner. All cooking, eating and a lot of the visiting was done downstairs. If the boys had company, they would usually visit in the basement, guest room, but the parents and their company would visit in the guest room, "Gaust Schtoave", on the main floor.

The house had a broiler, water heating system, heated by a coal stove, although usually wood was used. The boys bedroom was located on the second story of the house right at the top of the stairwell, in the northeast corner. Four boys slept in two double beds in this room. The girls' bedroom was located in the southwest corner of the house, and so the girls had to pass through the boys' bedroom to get to their's.

In the southwest corner of the second floor was another visiting room, or "Gaust Schtoave". There was a third bedroom in the northwest corner. A hallway went around the south side of the stair rail, to the second floor veranda, located on the west side of the house, and the stairs to the attic.

The parent's bedroom was located on the northwest corner of the main floor from where they had a good view of everything happening on the yard. The bedroom was later changed to the kitchen by son David.

Farmlife.

Jakob W. Peters was a large-scale farmer with 20 dairy cows, 8 horses, 4 hogs, 40 hens and 20 sheep. Jakob W. Peters himself fed the hogs and chickens. The garden was plowed with a hand plow pulled by two horses.

Jakob W. Peters had a family of seven sons and four daughters, although one of the boys died in infancy. On Sundays the family filled two buggies when they went to worship services in Chortitz three miles away.

In October and November, Jakob and Elisabeth enjoyed helping their neighbours with

hog slaughtering bees and one of Jakob's favourite tasks was gutting the pigs.

Jakob also had his own blacksmith shop. The farm had three cutters or sleighs used by the family for travelling in winter which Jakob had built himself. Jakob also did a lot of carpentry work.

Business and Investing.

Jakob W. Peters did his business at the H. W. Reimer's Ltd. store in Steinbach. On October 27, 1930, he purchased a #345 Letz Mix Feed grinder (presumably a hammer mill) for \$350

which he paid for in cash. The original Bill of Sale and John Deere guarantee are still in the possession of the Peters family.

Jakob W. Peters also maintained a credit charge account at the "H. W. Reimer" store. A purchase receipt dated Feb. 8, 1933, showed that his balance was 8.97, and that he purchased a "Pnap" for .05, and 1 bag salt (coarse) .75, increasing the balance to \$9.77.

Through a combination of inheritance, hard work and careful management, Jakob W. Peters was well-established financially as a young married man. The 1931 assessment records of the



A group of Vollwerk young people and friends, circa 1900. One of the older group photos extant from the East Reserve. The photograph shows the Chortitzer people as self-confident and prosperous, optimistically moving into the future. It is representative of their taste and styles in clothing and personal appearance. These second and third generation Canadians had no way of knowing that within two decades their citizenship would be arbitrarily revoked and they would face the onslaught of forced anglo-conformity measures, resulting in the "exile" many of their numbers, fracturing their social constructs and diminishing literacy and learning among the remainder.

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

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

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

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

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

R. M. of Hanover show that he owned the SW6-7-6E, 84 acres, and NW 6-7-6E, 106 acres, assessed at a total of \$1160.

Jakob W. Peter's tax bills for 1934 are as follows: NE 20-6-6E--assessment 960; SW6-7-6E--assess. 420; NW 6-7-6E--assess. 640; S1/2 SE1-7-5E--assess. 330; and SE 25-6-5E--assess. 400, a total acreage of 575 acres. Receipts signed by Mintie Reimer showed taxes paid. Jakob W. Peters also owned the SE25-6-5E, two miles southwest of Vollwerk, adjacent to the so-called "Otterburne" line.

Jakob W. Peters had sufficient resources and energy to consider investment opportunities elsewhere. By 1919 he had acquired two building lots in the R. M. of Sherwood, Saskatchewan, namely, Lots 34-35, Block 109. Presumably these were investment properties in or near the City of Regina. These properties were still owned by Jakob W. Peters in 1928.

Jakob W. Peters also invested money by lending to Steinbach business people. A promissory note undated showed that he had received \$88.53 in interest paid by Klaas W. Brandt, on a note for \$400 by Steinbach blacksmith and inventor Klaas R. Friesen.

Helena Doerksen Peters (1879-1937).

Mother, Helena Doerksen Peters was a friendly woman but quite traditional. She always wore her "haube" on Sunday, of which she had two. She would train her children by scolding without physical discipline. Father handled the serious discipline matters. Strappings were rare, usually discipline was accomplished by a serious talk.

The daughters helped mother with the housework. Washing was done with the "Stuk" ma-



Jakob W. Peters, circa 1934, standing at the west side of the house, in front of the west veranda. The veranda was closed in by Jakob W. Peters prior to his death in 1936. Photo courtesy of Ed D. Peters, Vineland, Ontario.



Airplane photo of the Jakob W. Peters farmyard probably taken around 1952. The photo shows the house built in 1920, a marvel of technical and modern conveniences at the time. The present-day "Peters Lane" is located pretty well exactly where the driveway from P.T.H.12 (Piney Highway) was located and corresponding somewhat with a fence line through the pasture and bush behind (north) of the buildings. Photo courtesy of great-grandson Dwayne Peters, Kleefeld, Manitoba.

chine, or "stuk ruble".

Mother did a lot of spinning and knitting, but only in winter. She produced enough socks and mittens for her own family.

Characteristics.

Jakob was approximately 200 pounds and about 5'6" in height.

He had lost three toes in an accident when he was younger. He was walking around a horse-powered motor running the threshing machine, holding the reins of the horses. As he was walking around his foot got caught in the gear or driveshaft of the motor and his three big toes were torn out. As a result he always walked with a limp.

Jakob W. Peters had a lot of friends and enjoyed visiting with them. He would often talk with them for up to an hour on the phone.

The children were always well looked after and had lots to eat.

Jakob W. Peters never owned a car. Various car dealers would come down to demonstrate automobiles from time to time but he never purchased one. He was a well-to-do farmer and could easily have afforded to buy a car, but chose not to do so.

In the winter, Jakob W. Peters maintained a skating rink at the back of the farmyard, and neighbourhood boys as well as the fellows from Steinbach and other surrounding communities would come there and play hockey, including the C. T. Loewen boys, "Hotel" Peter's sons,

and others.

Jakob W. Peters was interested in family and friends who had chosen "exile" to Paraguay over accommodation to the Canadian government's betrayal of its solemn guarantees of cultural and religious freedoms given in 1873. A package among the family papers was addressed to "G. K. Doerksen Sen., Paraguay, Sued Amerika, Coloni Meno. Another undated package addressed to "G. K. Doerksen, Gnadenfeld, Paraguay, Suedamerika, Coloni Meno," contained a pack of tracts from "St. Johannes=Druckerie, Dinglingen, (Baden), and seemingly somewhat pietistical in nature. No indication is given as to why none of the Peters family chose the path of emigration in 1926-7.

Although he did not serve in any known public office, Jakob W. Peters did involve himself with other people. On July 8, 1933, Steinbach attorney, N. S. Campbell wrote Peters and asked him to intercede with the Chortitzer Waisenamt, the church trust office which administered estates and managed the money of orphans and widows. The letter was written regarding the Peter Doerksen estate and his widow, with respect to claim for her services in caring for her daughter for which Mr. Doerksen had made provision in his estate.

Another letter of June 8, 1936, by Wiebe Agencies of Herbert, Saskatchewan, inquired about a vehicle of Abram W. Janzen which was allegedly left in the care of Jakob W. Peters. Janzen claimed \$35 for new tires and a battery



Another photograph of the Peters yard in Vollwerk (Mitchell) taken June 1959 by son Erdmann Peters, The machine shed that always stood at the front of the yard, west side, has been moved to the back. Vineland, Ontario. View to the east.

which had been removed from the car. Jakob's side of the story is not ascertainable at this time.

Spiritual Matters.

Jakob W. Peters had an interest in spiritual matters and read and saved various devotional writings. One of these, a poem entitled "Trost" or "Comfort" by Chortitzer minister and neighbour in Ebenfeld, Johann Schroeder, and dated Dec. 12, 1934, was printed as a tract and saved among the papers of Jakob W. Peters.

Jakob and Maria Peters were vitally interested in the upbringing of their children. Among the collection of family papers still extant are several Christmas wishes ("Wunschen") of their children.

One of these wishes by son David was a "New Year's Wish" for 1914 and opens with the stanza, "Der Herr hat alles wohl gedacht, hat alles, alles recht gemacht." Translation, "The

Lord has planned all for good, He has made everything, everything, right." The phrase exuded complete trust in the providence of God reflecting a confident element in Chortitzer theology, a faith much deeper and stronger than that of certain other confessions who needed to repeat their religious mantras continually, as if to persuade themselves that what they were saying was really true and that they really believed it.

The Peters family papers also include various loose pages from a Bible, including an extract from the Gospel of Matthew and a longer extract from the Psalms, chapters 87-107. A package of a dozen photographs addressed to Jakob W. Peters, show various scenes of relief and mission work in India, indicating that he shared the wide interest in Hanover Steinbach for information from different countries and cultures.

Death.

Jakob W. Peters was a smoker. He smoked roll-your-own cigarettes, which he smoked almost until he died. He died of asthma on October 6, 1936.

Elisabeth Peters, fell sick shortly after her husband's death and spent three months in the Concordia Hospital, Winnipeg. She died November 22, 1937, having been a widow for 13 months.

The Peters Bjangels.

The Peters boys were hospitable and had many friends. When sons David, John and Erdman were still all at home they would have an annual birthday party on the last two days of January. Some 30 young people were invited some such as Franz Schroeder and the Doerksen boys from as far away as Reinland, north of Niverville. There was fiddle playing and dancing in the second floor "Guast Schtoave" and lots of good food and visiting in the basement kitchen and "Guast Schtoave".

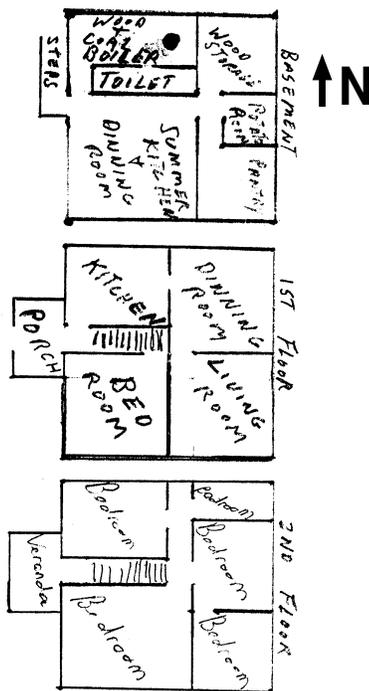
In summer the boys would have an annual barn dance, just before the hay harvest, when the barn loft was empty. The hay loft in the barn had a solid hardwood floor. The loft would be cleaned out and people came from miles around to enjoy an evening of dancing, fiddle music and lots of visiting. (So now we know where great-grandson Dwayne Peters gets it from).

Son David D. Peters had his entire wedding service in the barn loft and all the guest enjoyed the beautiful yard, eating the wedding meal outside, followed by a dance. Son Ed and brother-in-law Erdmann H. Hiebert, held their weddings in the machine shop originally located closer to the road, in front of the barn (See editor's note).

David D. Peters (1904-62).

Son David D. Peters (1904-62) acquired the family farm after his father died and continued farming. There were still four sons and two daughters at home, but David was the one interested and bought the farm. The farm at this point consisted of the SE6-7-6E, where Peters Lane is located today, and 65 acres on the SE1-7-5E, west across the road allowance. Later David D. Peters also purchased the balance of the SE1-7-5E.

For many years Lies Peters, daughter of "Schtruck/Bajel" Peters, worked for David D. Peters as the family maid. Peters' Lies was a somewhat stern woman, but with a heart of gold, looking after the Peters household, children and



Drawing of interior three floors of the Jakob W. Peters house by Harry Peters, Box 10, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.



Wedding photograph of David D. Peters and Helen H. Penner, 1933. Photo courtesy of Tina Reimer Plett, Spanish Lookout, Belize, February 1998.

grandchildren. She passed away only some 10 years ago.

In the 1950s David D. Peters and sons went into beef farming in a substantial way. Because of health problems brought on by a nervous condition, David D. Peters passed away at a relatively young age in 1959. Eventually son Jake Peters (1935-89) took over the farm. In more recent years the property is being developed by grandson Dwayne Peters, with the main street called "Peters Lane" in honour of the family which had contributed so much to the community. The former village of Vollwerk is now known by the name "Mitchell" imposed by the Provincial Government in 1919.

Erdman D. Peters.

Most of the information for this article came from Erdmann D. Peters (b. 1916), one of the younger sons. In 1941 he married Mary Sawatzky and moved to New Bothwell, 1 miles south and 3/4 mile east. In 1948 when the Chortitzer moved to Paraguay he bought 120 acres of land from George Giesbrecht and established a farm. They bought the shingles and rough lumber from "Plettville."

In 1955 Erdmann and his family moved to Jordan, Ontario. He had gone there for a visit and enjoyed it so much he decided to move there. Erdman is the only child of Jakob W. Peters alive at this time.

Descendants.

The descendants of Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936) and Helena Doerksen Peters (1879-1937) include grandsons, Professor Jake Peters, Department of Sociology, University of Winnipeg, George Peters, Steinbach, Bill Peters, Steinbach, and granddaughter Helen, Mrs. Harry Kehler, A. & H. Diary, and great-granddaughter Cheryl Dueck, Steinbach, G&E Homes.

Sources:

Interview Harry Peters with Erdmann D. Peters, Victoria Avenue 3866, Box 117, Vineland, Ontario, L0R 2C0, October 1, 1997;

Telephone interview D. Plett with Erdmann Peters, August 12, 1998.

John Dyck, *Oberschulz Jakob Peters 1813-1883: Manitoba Pioneer Leaders*, 138 pages.

"Homestead maps", "Brandordnung records", 1883 tax assessment records, in John Dyck, ed., *Working Papers*, 229 pages.

Jakob W. Peters, tax records and documents, currently in the possession of the author.

About the Author:

Harry Peters is the son of David D. Peters who took over the family farm on SW6-7-6E after his father's death in 1936. Harry was active for many years in the car business in Steinbach, owning "Peters AMC" and later the Mazda dealership. Harry is currently semi-retired, dividing his time between winter travelling in the southern States and managing his investment portfolio in Steinbach, Manitoba, during the summers.



Horses and mower purchased by son Erdmann D. Peters at auction sale of Jakob W. Peters estate in 1941. Standing behind the mower, l. to r., George and Helen Toews, and besides them to the right, Erdmann and Mary Peters. Photo courtesy of Erdmann Peters, Vineland, Ontario.



Erdmann Peters setting up a seven foot binder he purchased for \$125.00 in 1942 from Wm. Giesbrecht & Peters, John Deere dealers in Steinbach. Mrs. Peters is looking on to make sure he is doing everything right.

Editor's Note: The Bergthaler/Chortitzer had an holistic approach to life, incorporating events like barn dances as an acceptable and desirable part of every day community and family life. It was in 1964/65 that my buddy Jake Peters (1935-89) took me into his small "Country Band" giving me the privilege of experiencing these events.

According to the stories told me by my mother, even the youths of the ascetic Kleine Gemeinde held barn dances but these were typically somewhat illicit. Many a later minister and pious matron, and I won't name names, enjoyed a good "culungj" at these events. For E.M.C. teenagers during the 1960s such activities had to be conducted in secret and often wound up as silly male drinking contests and/or bush parties.

For the Chortitzer during the first half of the 20th century, barn dances were considered a wholesome part of life to be enjoyed as a community and family, where parents appreciated having fun together with their children and their friends, enjoying good food, fellowship, and music. Children were socialized in the traditional Mennonite way that alcohol was to be used only in moderation.

Many couples had a barn dance after their wedding and it was not unusual for some of the ministers and wives to attend--see Helene Friesen, "The Wedding Day, July 7, 1903," in *A Genealogy of Peter P. and Agatha Friesen 1770-1978* (Grunthal, 1978), pages 23-25, for a somewhat fictionalized account of an after wedding dance; see also Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Altona*, page 34.

Ironically, much of Fundamentalist (now Evangelical) religious culture, which once prohibited dancing on pain of excommunication and shunning, has now adopted dancing as part of its religious ritual, although they may call it choreography or some other euphemism.

Editor D. F. Plett, Q.C.

Ernest Ralph Goossen (1924-85): 1954 Letter

“Ernest Ralph Goossen (1924-85) - 1954 letter to Esther Goossen”; by Peter Ralph Friesen,
306 Montgomery Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1T4.

Introduction.

Ernest Ralph Goossen, or “Ernie” as he was popularly known, was a busy lawyer in Steinbach after the Second World War, handling the legal affairs of many of the town’s leading citizens. He started his practice in 1949, when he was 25, and carried on until his death of a heart attack at the age of 61. The first home-grown lawyer in Steinbach, he followed in the steps of his father, John D. Goossen, and maternal grandfather, Abraham S. Friesen, both of whom conducted extensive land conveyancing businesses and served as notaries public.

Both his father, who came from a Holdeman family but who joined the Bruderthaler (Evangelical Mennonite Brethren) church, and his Kleine Gemeinde grandfather occasionally found themselves in hot water with elders because of their involvements with the “world,” but both men stayed within and held positions of responsibility in their respective churches.

Ernest was not a church member, a fact which set him apart in the community. Then as now, Steinbach society had its sub-groups, each of which found something in the others of which to disapprove. There were degrees of belonging: the highest degree was achieved by being a member in good standing of a Mennonite church, the next by being a member of another Protestant denomination. If you were an adult Mennonite and not a member of a church at all, you were perceived as a bad example: probably a drinking, smoking, card-playing member of the Legion who associated with the “English” or the Ukrainians. In a fundamental way, such a person could not be considered as fully belonging to the community.

Ernest should have belonged. His mother was a devout woman who disciplined her children and read the Bible and Christian stories to them. His father, less orthodox, susceptible to the allure of alcohol, and (unlike most of his fellow Mennonites at that time) a firm believer in the value of higher education, was nevertheless a sincere, church-going Christian. Ernest, like his siblings, went to Sunday School and church. As a 20-year-old he joined the Navy, which would certainly not have met with his parents’ approval. When he returned from his Navy stint, he went to Winnipeg and got his law degree, came back to Steinbach, and helped take care of his mother after his father’s death.

Important as Ernest was to the town, he was also an outsider. This gave him the freedom to enjoy openly the pleasures and entertainments offered by the world which church members avoided, or, sometimes, indulged in secretly. His education and intelligence accentuated his natural wit and powers of observation. These powers are displayed

in full flight in a remarkable letter found among the papers of his late sister Esther—herself an extraordinary person, the first woman from Steinbach to earn a Ph.D. In the letter, written in 1954 when Ernest was 30 and had recently separated from his first wife, he abandons the rather stiff legalese characteristic of some of his correspondence with his siblings, and cuts loose with the irreverent, zany humour of a stand-up comic:

Letter 1954.
Steinbach, Manitoba
October 30, 1954

Dear Esther:

I am indeed happy to hear all went well after leaving Winnipeg. [Apparently Esther had visited.] I cancelled my proposed trip to Texas. Fletcher Walkin, whom I was going to pick up at Dallas had no time for accompanying me on a tour. Thus, if I would have gone, it would have been a matter of roaring down

took a post as missionary in Madagascar. Harvey [his younger brother] wrote me a letter about this time, and I went to Calgary. Saw him and Simpson Etux. Went to Edmonton with the latter two, met their folks. Harvey is the proud owner (together with a finance company) of an M. G. sports car. You know the unstreamlined English cars that are no higher than one’s left knee. We folded ourselves into this thing, raced about town. On one occasion, we went to Banff, looked at the golf course, the mountains, and Harvey waved at some girls. Also, we went horseback riding. Had I known we were taking to horses, I would have worn a different pair of shorts, something a little tighter.

From Calgary, I went South, cut over a bit to the East to avoid mountains, and then South again for Denver. From there I intended to see the Dam, Pikes Peak, then turn East to St. Louis. On my radio (I have a new Ford) while driving, I heard that President “Ike” [Eisenhower] was around Denver on vacation,



April 17, 1938. 12-year-old Ernie Goossen with his younger brother Harvey and sister Esther.

there and roaring back. That is too much roaring for a holiday. I tried it to California with Simpson in 1952.

Then I made tentative arrangements to go to Chicago, but cancelled that also. Bruno Derksen, of Steinbach, was to go with me, but he phoned me from Minot, North Dakota two days before departure date advising a change of mind—However, he made compensation on his return to Steinbach in the form of Schmirnoff’s vodka. When Fletcher passed through Winnipeg, he did likewise.

At this point it looked as though I would go nowhere unless I enrolled at Omaha School for Enthusiastic Folk from Steinbach, (sometimes referred to as the O.S.E.F.S.), or else

and felt that he would steal my thunder there anyway. Just North of Wyoming border, I got tired of it, turned around and came directly back here. Now I am sorry. Should I find a fabulous pot of gold someplace soon, I shall go to Arizona and New Mexico, and on that occasion will pass through St. Louis, Mo.

In your letter you mentioned the 5 C [\$500] and the question of remittance in dribbles from time to time or all in one lump later (Note One). I think this should be at your convenience, but suggest that instalments of \$100.00 each would be in order. I managed to scrape up enough money to make the final payment on the mortgage on the block [the building which had been owned by his father].



June 1945. After serving in the navy in World War Two, with active duty in the Caribbean and the North Atlantic, Ernest R. Goossen returned to Steinbach to visit family. Here he poses with his parents, sister Mary and and brother Abe. Ernie is standing in the middle with arms resting confidently on the shoulders of his mother and sister.

It is now clear. The only liabilities from the estate will now be to mother's maintenance and support.

This idea of Jim's: "To wrap [it] up with sterilized surgical gauze and Calomel Lotion for safekeeping," is good but futile. The question is: "Will it safekeep?" They say some of the functions expire anyway. [Jim Brice was Esther's husband.]

Big John's energy is not abating one bit. He is continually on the go from one thing into or unto another. I don't know where he gets it. Certainly not from his lazy father. [John was Ernest's son, a year old at the time.]

We have new parking signs in town: "Horizontal Parking Only."

Ernie

Commentary.

Ernest's ambitious travel itinerary may seem modern, but in fact he grew up in a travelling family-the Goossens not only had been on trips to both the west and east coasts of the North American continent, they had also been to England on one occasion. They had even been to Pike's Peak, for which Ernest seems to have had a nostalgic attraction. A generation earlier, Ernest's grandfather A. S. Friesen had already established himself as an adventurous traveller with train trips to Texas, California and the midwestern States.

Like his grandson, Friesen did not like "roaring" back and forth on these journeys, and made a leisurely time of it, visiting relatives all along the way. Ernest confines his contacts to near kin: his youngest brother Harvey [the only surviving member of the Goossen family today, a retired engineer now living in Oakland, California] and, by intention if not in actuality, his sister. Apparently

he did not see himself as fitting into the vast kinship network that his grandfather had taken advantage of in the early years of the century.

Ernest's reference to receiving vodka in compensation for having been forced to adjust his trip plans by Bruno Derksen's change of mind would have been considered scandalous by most of his relatives and the people of Steinbach. By the mid-1950s, a teetotaling, fundamentalist type of Christianity had already made a great impact on Manitoba Mennonites. In 1945, for example, my father, a minister in the Steinbach Kleine Gemeinde, attended evangelism school in Indiana with fellow ministers Ben D. Reimer and Archie Penner.

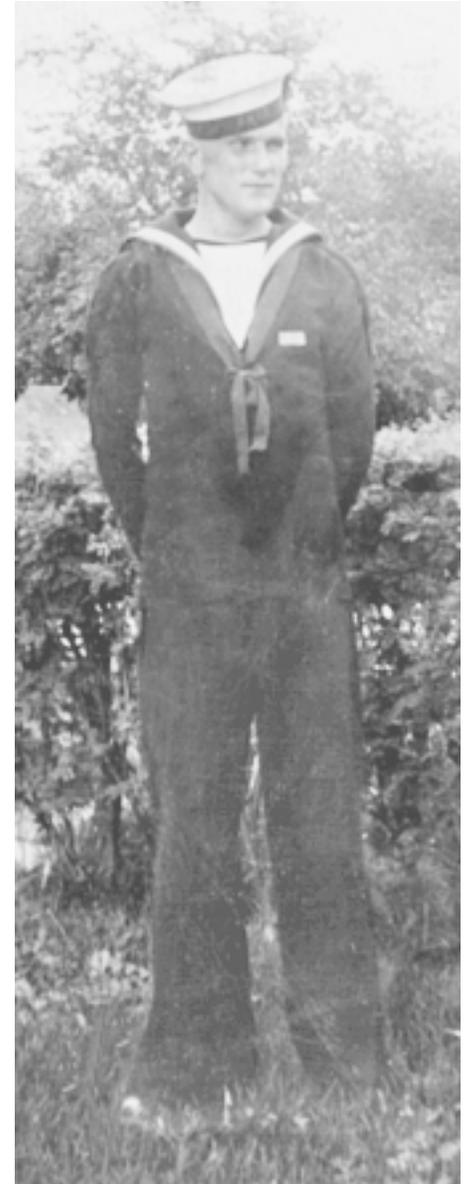
Even earlier, in 1937, my grandfather (Ernest's uncle) Klaas R. Friesen had unsuccessfully opposed a licencing application for a beer parlor in Steinbach. But total abstinence was not the historic position of Ernest's ancestors. The pioneers from South Russia, though they did not tolerate drunkenness, had no qualms about taking a drink. It was common practice for the men to have wine at hog-slaughtering time, and Abraham F. Reimer, a great-grandfather to Ernest, mentions the availability of schnapps on the occasion of the births of babies. Even Ernest's mother made chokecherry wine each summer, though she did not drink it herself.

By the time of Ernest's letter, drinking of any kind had evolved into a serious sin, and his cavalier flaunting of the gift of "Schmirnoff's" would have been judged by most as a lamentable failure to take seriously the fate of his eternal soul.

That the Mennonites, who had always been fearful of the loss of personal inhibitions and social controls, made alcohol into a taboo is not really surprising. They could accept it as

medicine, however, and it was a substantial ingredient in such traditional cure-alls as "Apfelkreuter." Alcohol, of course, has a long history of being used as medication, not just for the body, but even more for the soul, to blunt the pain of life itself. And Ernest, who had displeased his parents by joining the Navy instead of the church, who had done the unthinkable by separating from his wife, would certainly have needed something to ease his psychic suffering.

The "Omaha School for Enthusiastic Folk from Steinbach" was, in reality, Grace College of the Bible, established in Omaha in 1943 with six Mennonite conferences on the board



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

of directors. Ernest neatly exposes the part that such institutions played in the lives of some of his fellow Steinbachers: they were places where emotional expression was encouraged (as long as such expression was confined to evangelical joy) and they were also safe travel destinations, where one might experience the adventure of being away from home while avoiding exposure to the dangers of the world. Ernest is being sarcastic, of course, but in his skepticism unwittingly reflects the historic faith position of his Kleine Gemeinde ancestors, who opposed enthusiastic outpourings of religious faith. They also would not have dreamed of being missionaries, to Madagascar or anywhere else.

The Low German, like the High German, term for such mockery is "Spott," which goes beyond good-natured fun, shading into satire and derision. The mockery of a Bible school would have made many Steinbachers uneasy, even angry. Ridicule of religious authority, however lighthearted, was considered a serious offence.

Even in South Russia, Gemeinde members had been disciplined for such inappropriate joviality, which was taken as a sign of disrespect of God's institutions, and possibly of God himself. Neither the God of the traditional Kleine Gemeinde nor the God of the fundamentalists had much of a sense of humour. To be irreverent about a Bible school, or missionary efforts, which were seen as the highest expression of Christian life at that time, was to risk God's wrath. "God is not mocked" would have been the applicable Biblical text.

Today, perhaps, there is enough distance from such attitudes to give Ernest his due, and concur with his recognition that human motives are always mixed, and never as lofty as the most righteous among us would have the world believe. Ernest liked to puncture holes in pretense and did not play favourites. Even his brother gets a by-the-way shot: "Harvey is the proud owner (together with a finance company) of an M.G. sports car." Ever the realist, Ernest refused to believe in illusions of freedom.

There is something over-sophisticated, perhaps, in the cool detachment of the young men who only looked at the golf course and mountains, without venturing into them. Their one foray into physical exertion, horse riding, is rendered absurd by Ernest's comment that he should have worn tighter shorts. Such oblique references to male physical equipment might have been considered acceptable in the banter of men among men, but rather shocking in correspondence to one's sister, especially when dictated to a secretary--although one imagines that "S. B." must have been used to this kind of stuff.

Esther herself was certainly not above a bit of ribaldry, as she was the one who opened the discussion on "safekeeping" with "sterilized surgical gauze and Calomel Lotion." Whatever the exact meaning of this rather mysterious reference, it sounds suspiciously like a forbidden subject. That would explain its attraction for the Goossen siblings, who took delight in break-

ing the taboos of their strict upbringing.

In sum, Ernest's letter shows the "unofficial" face of Steinbach in the mid-50s, a town where alcohol was consumed, where young people did not always have only high ideals when they set out for Bible school or the mission fields, where irreverence, including sexual innuendo, was occasionally expressed. All of this rendered with a dry, incisive wit that, with its unexpected turns, may bring a smile, if not outright howls of laughter, to the lips of even the most righteous reader.

The letter is a small masterpiece of satire, an art form that flourishes in direct proportion to how seriously the authorities of the day are taking themselves. It contains its sadness, as well, conveyed by the writer's distance from the society he is making fun of. He makes fun of himself, too, with the comic self-aggrandizement of his excuse for not getting to Denver because he did not want the President to steal his thunder, and with his self-deprecating remark about being a "lazy father." He was, after all, humble, in the ways of his orthodox ancestors.

Commentary by Ralph Friesen

Endnote:

Note One: Ernest was executor of his father's

estate, and all the children were required to pay back the loans, usually to help them with their education, their father had given.



Snow in Mexico, Feb. 15, 1998

Even Mexico has snow drifts. After Halbstadt (No. 55) (Cuauhtemoc) received 8 to 9 inches of snow, the wind whipped it into dunes or snow drifts. Johann Wiebe took a photograph of his wife Susi Stoesz de Wiebe and the children Mariana and Jimmy. The dry spring has already taken care of all the moisture. From the Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau, 3 Juni 1998, 7 Jahrgang, page 28.

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Peter A. Braun 1890-1971

Peter A. Braun (1890-1971), Gnadenfeld to Reston, Manitoba, by son Walter F. Braun, Box 51, Sinclair, Manitoba, R0M 2A0.

Family Background.

My father, Peter Abrams Braun, was the sixth of 11 children born to his parents, John F. Braun and Lena Abrams Braun, April 16th, 1890 in the village of Gnadenfeld, two miles west of present-day Grunthal. He was two years old when he moved with his parents to the village of Grünthal (later Grunthal).

My father was a normal child with a desire to learn. He began to attend the German private school in Gruenthal at the age of five. Being of an inquisitive nature, he learned rapidly so that by the age of eight he mastered the reading of the Old and New Testament. As was customary in those days, children attended school from five to six months of the year; the rest of the time they had to help at home with the work on the farm.

The Studies, or Curriculum, in those days consisted of learning to read the "Fibel" the first level; writing and memorizing the "Catechism" the second level, followed by more writing, arithmetic and reading of the "New Testament", the third level. The last, or fourth level, was more of writing, arithmetic and reading, mostly the "Old Testament".

The Catechism was memorized in its entirety the last three years and recited by all in turn. Some teachers also taught geography and singing. Throughout the school years penmanship and calligraphy (Schönschreiben) was rigorously stressed. Father's school years officially ended by age 12, which was the required tenure for boys. At 16 years of age, he taught two school terms in the school he had attended as a lad.

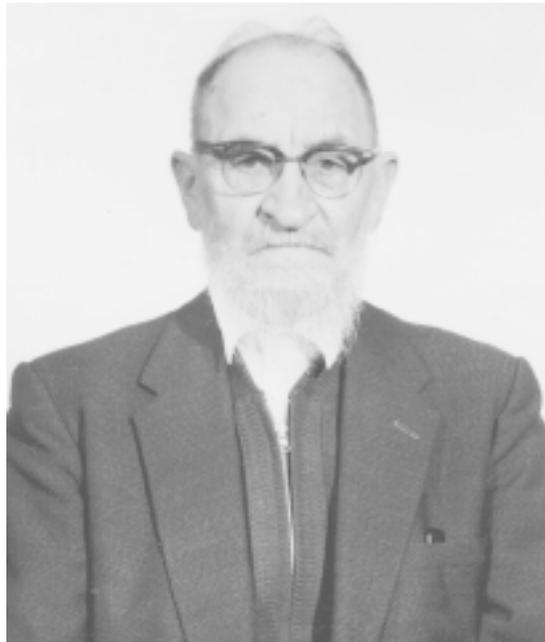
Growing up.

As a young lad, father had had a strong desire to attend a public school for a term, in order to learn some English and also a change of venue. His father allowed him to attend a school in Winnipeg when he was about 18 years old. While rooming and boarding with the Margolises, a Jewish family, he took a few subjects in grade eight. Some time later he had asked his father, "Why wouldn't you allow me to attend the public school sooner?" upon which the reply had been, "I did not want to get into trouble with 'The Ohms!'"

Concerning my father's growing up years and early youth, we have heard many stories. However, we shall not dwell at any length on them and shall let one instance suffice. Since his parents, who also had the first Post Office in Gruenthal, were situated just off the main street, father got to be in on most of the activities around him. Once he saved the lives of two small children when the team they were driving took a notion to bolt and gallop down the main street. Upon seeing their dilemma, father ran toward the oncoming horses - and getting a hold of the

wagon-tongue, hoisted himself up, and grabbing the reins, brought the rig to a stop.

Father had the opportunity to mingle with the many young men and boys that came along with their fathers to Grünthal when doing business with my grandfather Johann F. Braun. Although he had much to do with his many cousins and in particular his first cousin, Jakob J. Braun, there was however, one exceptional young boy, Peter Trylinski, with whom father spent a fair measure of time, establishing a life-long relationship.



Peter A. Braun, Passport photograph.

Peter was a Ukrainian lad, and since both Peters were keenly interested in getting to know and speak each other's language, they in time got to be very good at both. Even in later years when there would be a word that either Mr. Trylinski or father would want some more clarity on, they would talk first in the one and then in the other's language.

We really enjoyed these dialogues! Being able to speak Ukrainian enabled father to converse with many of these friendly neighbors east of Grünthal. In later years, those that could neither read, nor write, would come to father, who then would help them out with legal and other matters, just as his father before him had done.

We shall cite a few revealing instances of father's nature, or temperament. At one point he had been rather excited and had also voiced his annoyance. His father had gently reminded him not to let his hasty temper get the best of him. To this father had remarked, "I didn't select my nature," - upon which his father rejoined gently, "No, however, you are to control the same."

Another instance was when he was going to

come to his father's aid. His father had had dealings with a person who sold him a carload of apples. Having already once paid for the carload, this man continued to try to make it appear as though he hadn't received payment. Seeing tears in his father's eyes, my father was in the process of telling the other party to back down, when his father told him, "Peter, you just leave now, this is my business, I'll attend to it."

Alberta, 1910.

In 1910 father and Peter Trylinski took a trip west to work in the harvest fields of sunny Alberta. When they arrived in Edmonton, Peter T. said to father that there was a girl from Sarto working as a waitress in one of the cafes, and he had a greeting along for her from her folks.

Father asked Peter, "Do you have an address?"

Peter said, "No, she was working in one of the cafes."

So father said, "But, Peter, there are hundreds of cafes in this city."

Peter seemed undaunted. So they went to one cafe and after looking around Peter said, "She's not here."

They went to another cafe, looking around somewhat. Suddenly, Peter exclaimed, "There she is!"

Fortunately, these young men had been led to the right spot!

Father took a train to Acme, the closest station to where he hoped to find work. He hired himself out to George H. Friesen of Sunnyslope, who was to become his brother-in-law. Father just loved the great open spaces of Alberta, it was so vastly different from stony Grünthal.

Marriage, 1911.

A year later my father married Lena Friesen, daughter of Abram and Cornelia Friesen on December 19th, 1911 at Sunnyslope, Alberta. See article by Walter Braun, "Cornelia Harms Friesen (1853-1938)," in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, pages 25-27.

Abraham T. Friesen had been father's school-teacher in Grünthal for one season. They lived in the Sunnyslope and Swalwell area for about eight years. During this time my father worked for the different farmers in the district. He even gave German lessons to some of his neighbor children. Father observed, quite minutely, the spiritual as well as the material affairs of the people he had to do with during his stay in Alberta.

During their stay in Alberta, father tried homesteading twice, once in Montana in 1914 and once in the Peace River region in 1918. However, both of these ventures were destined to an early demise!

Grünthal, 1919.

In the spring of 1919 father and mother and their family of four children moved to Grünthal, Manitoba. Father's parents and also his grandparents were in need of extra help since there was sickness and old age to contend with. Upon his father's request, my parents came to help out in taking care of them. In the next two years both of his grandparents, his mother, and his 27 day-old daughter, Rosalia, born on September 22, 1920, passed on to their reward.

His wife Lena, who took a strong exception to smoking, was very sick with pneumonia. Father was a slave to the habit, and while taking care of mother, would vigorously wash himself and would try to be as free of any smell as possible. However, when he would come into mother's room she would say to him, "you have been smoking, again."

All this weighed down heavily upon father, for he knew he must get the victory over this obnoxious habit. However, his victory came only after he had a change of heart and fully yielded to the tender embrace of his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Life.

Having grown up in a home where, as father said, not much was spoken of spiritual things, he craved for a people that taught and practised the entire teachings of God and the Bible as it related to the Christian way of life. Having observed the different practises of religious groups, he wrote in one of his diaries - "the people called Holdemans although not perfect, lived the closest to the Word of God."

Since father and mother were lovers of song, they frequently visited the singing family of the Cornelius F. Toews in Alberta. After the folks moved to Manitoba they would often visit the Johann I. Penners of Kleefeld. Mrs. Penner was a daughter of the singing Toews of Swalwell, Alberta.

There were to be some evangelistic meetings in the Kleefeld Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (the true name of the Holdeman Church). Now father's brother--in-law, Jacob D. R. Loewen, who was visiting in the area, encouraged my parents to attend. They did so as often as was possible in those 'horse-n-buggy' days. One sermon, especially, had dealt with "The Sermon On The Mount." The verse which deeply impressed my father was, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." He then confines in his diary of 1921, "Oh, that God would create such a hunger and thirst in me, and that I would then be truly satisfied."

Father then experienced the New Birth and was baptized into the fold of God, which he never regretted. His diary contains many references to revival meetings and other spiritual functions. He used to tell of how he had appreciated listening to the late Minister Abraham Isaak when he would expound the Scriptures. The old servant of God would, as it were, take a ladle and dip it deeply into the kettle of the Word of God and then lift it up, for all to see, and slowly and graciously let the contents of

the Word flow, in the meantime expounding its depths, benefiting the rapt listeners.

The Creamery, 1922.

In 1922 he purchased a parcel of land from Mr. Peter F. Krahn of Grünthal, SE7-6-5E (east-erly 60 acres). This farm was close to Friedrichsthal, a village which existed briefly from 1874 to 1884 (?) or so. Father purchased a house in Grünthal and moved it within a short distance of where his mother's parents, the Johann Abrams, had resided for a short time before moving to the Altona area. My parents moved to Hochstadt in July of 1922. Staying there a little better than a year, they next moved to a little farm just a half mile east of the Hochstadt school. Due to the winters being very harsh, poor quality feed and barns not too well built, they lost quite a bit of livestock.

While in the Hochstadt area, there were farmers who in order to ship their cream to Winnipeg, would have to take it to the C.P.R. station at Carey (Ste. Pierre). Father got some of these cream shippers interested to send cream along to the city with him. Thus in 1923 he began his trucking business with a little Model "T" Ford car, transformed into a pickup. Later he, with the help of his father, purchased a 1919 or 1920 one-ton Ford. As the business progressed, both new and used vehicles were added. He moved back to Grünthal in April of 1925, and began trucking in a larger way, eventually acquiring the farm they had left in 1922.

He now purchased a new 1925 Chevrolet one-ton from Loewen Garage Steinbach. The day of the "Selfstarter" had come, now there would be no more cranking the motor into life. Bidding farewell to the killer-crank was not hard to do. Father has told us that at times, after trying to start the Model "T"s, he felt as if his right arm would fall, uselessly, away from its socket. Besides trucking, he now was a farmer like the other neighbours around him.

"The City Dairy" where father had been delivering cream to for some time, were interested in acquiring a place in the country to establish a creamery. So in 1928, after much consultation among the top brass of the Company, they decided on purchasing the buildings and site of the old Grünthal Milling Company and transform it into a creamery.

This was a major undertaking. All the many storage bins had to be ripped out and the lower wooden floor replaced with a cement floor plus a fair-sized holding room (Cooler) was built in the lower northeast part of the building to store the butter and cream before it was taken to Winnipeg.

There were expert men hired to get the building operational. Mr. Bob Mitchell, an engineering expert from Winnipeg, got the steam engine (which had been standing idle for about 10 years) in perfect running order. The famous well-driller, Mr. C. K. Friesen of Steinbach, sank a well about 250 feet deep. Once all the machinery consisting of pasteurizing vats, churn, scales, ice making machine, etc. was installed, Mr. John Bjarnason was hired as the first manager of this much needed facility. The firm known as "The

City Dairy Ltd." was now in business. Many farmers, not only of Grünthal but also those of an extensive area reaching all the way to Ridgeville, were now able to dispose of their cream closer to home.

Trucking.

Father's trucking firm, now going under the name of "Grunthal Transfer" hauled all the butter and cream of the creamery, as well as cream from the Ste. Pierre and Otterburne creameries to Winnipeg. In winter when roads to Winnipeg were impassible, the cream from Grünthal was taken to the C.P.R. station in Carey with a team of horses and sleigh. The other two creameries looked after freighting their cream themselves during the winter months. Besides this father's trucking service hauled livestock to Winnipeg and returned with groceries for the Co-op and a store owned by Mr. Ben Gerstein of the old village of Grünthal.

In the springtime and also after a heavy rain roads were, at times, next to impossible to navigate, for at that time there were no drainage ditches in the area. My father had a traumatic experience while coming home from Winnipeg one evening. There was a stretch of road about a mile from the Grünthal turnoff which had been made passable by the creation of a corduroy road. Since some of the poplar poles had been strewn in zigzag manner, one of the poles pierced through the floor-boards of the truck. Noticing this, father tried frantically to stop the truck, and managed to do so, just as the pole touched his abdomen. What a miracle this!

Among other businesses, father took over the International Harvester agency. This necessitated a building to house parts for the various machines that were sold.

Intercontinental Trust.

Early in 1926 father was hired by the Intercontinental Trust Company. He served as an agent in their Colonization Board, helping settle the newly arrived Russländer on farms they would select, which would become available. The former owners, having sold their farms to the Intercontinental Company, would shortly be leaving this country to make "The Chaco", Paraguay, their future homes.

Father was furnished with a Chevrolet 1926 model and would leave early in the morning for Winnipeg, where he would pick up a load of

The first edition of the CD-ROM "Chortitzer Church Records" compiled by HSHS board member Randy Kehler is sold out. A limited number of additional copies may be made available on request at \$100.00 a copy plus postage and handling. If interested, contact the editor at Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0 or phone (204-326-6454).

four men and set out to espy the land, taking his cargo back in the evening. He really enjoyed doing this! He once told of an incident that while taking some of these folk around to view the farms, they had been discussing their preferences of the day's excursion in Russian, a language that closely resembled the Ukrainian which father was conversant with. (Even later some of the immigrants would resort to Russian which they had been accustomed to while in Russia.) Father, who understood most of what was being discussed, posed a question in the same language.

Well! from then on they left him in the dust as they switched over to "high Russian" which father couldn't decipher.

Some of these folks established lasting friendships with father. Many of them would come out and visit my parents wherever they resided.

Grunthal Transfer, 1925 to 1927.

It seems that when the economy was at a low ebb father's endeavours seemed to flourish; however as better times returned his ship would founder.

He was talented in organizing various businesses. When moving to Grunthal in 1925, along with his trucking business, he built a store. After running it for three years, he sold it to the newly organized Grunthal Co-operative, of which he was the President for some time. (While father ran the store no tobacco or cigarettes were sold, however, when the Co-op took over, the desire of those who loved the habit was catered to. Later he was instrumental in starting up a Cheesery southeast of Grunthal, however, this project was short lived.

Other Activities.

Father worked for the Steinbach Hatchery as a bookkeeper for some time. During this time he was troubled with a severe case of skin cancer located on the upper part of his right temple, just in front of the ear. There was a friend of father's, (George K. Barkman), who offered father to remove this cancer for \$25.00. George's mother had shared a home remedy with him which would heal this type of cancer.

This remedy had been a secret formula handed down from a gypsy lady. It actually worked wonders! After applying this remedy for nine days (which was the time Mr. Barkman had claimed it needed to be treated), the cancer was gone, for which father was very grateful.

Father often visited his uncle, Mr. Jacob F. Braun, who spent his last years, after returning from Paraguay, alternately with his children. See Ernest Braun, "House of Jakobs 1787-1997," in *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec. 1997, pages 61-63.

Father had the Grunthal-Gnadenfeld Telephone Exchange for many years, and later when he lived in Kleefeld, he also ran the Kleefeld Telephone Exchange, with his daughters Nellie, Lydia and Ruby helping him.

Here is a choice bit of information that very few people alive today know about, that father was one of the five personages that spearheaded the Mennonite Museum presently north of the

Clearspring Mall, Steinbach. The original five, as father has told me, were set on keeping this institution low key, however one of the prime movers said if they ever wanted it to get off the launching pad they would need to get men of means involved in the project. We, again, see that this momentous project had a small beginning!

Bardal, 1953.

After having lived in Kleefeld for fifteen years, he sold his Kleefeld holdings to Mr. Mans Kroeze in the spring of 1953. He settled in the Bardal district five miles north of Sinclair and erected a "wee hoos among the heather" as he would say it. While here, he did some book-keeping for Gordon Pickett, a blacksmith in Sinclair, as well as filing Income Tax papers for local farmers.

Fraser Valley, 1956.

Father's desire, for years, had been to get away from the cold Manitoba winters and settle down in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia, although mother was loathe to move again. However, in late fall of 1955, after the wedding of Glen and Leona Braun, my parents spent Christmas holidays at Sunnyslope and Calgary and settled in British Columbia in February of 1956. Finally, father's long-desired objective was realized, hopefully, no more cold winters!

Here Father spent the last fifteen years of his earthly sojourn. He was an avid observer of worldwide and current events. He was a faithful news reporter for "Die Post" for many years. His contacts with the many friends scattered all over, north, east, west and south, provided him with a rich source of news items.

Having suffered a heart attack in the spring of 1950, he had not let this stand in his way of keeping up his cherished correspondence with folks of all walks of life. While in British Columbia he worked for various people in helping them with either their Income Tax papers, or tasks like building small sheds, etc. A friend of his, Peter J.F. Braun, said of father that here was a man who wouldn't be kept down, for whenever he was down and out, he'd rise again. It didn't seem to matter where father resided, people would seek him out and visit him and ask his opinion on matters pertaining to all phases of life. Of him it could have been said that he had a charisma that many envied. Therefore, whatever the quality of his domicile, the world beat a path to his door!

Writing.

Father was very happy to realize a desire of long standing when he and his son John Braun of Calgary, Alberta, took a flight to Paraguay in 1966. While there he visited many of his relatives and friends, especially his brother Abram A. Braun, who had come over to visit the folks a few times prior to 1966. They really made the most of father's visit to the south.

Father, together with his brother Abram, undertook to create *The Jacob Braun Family Tree* book which was a large task, as anyone who has attempted such a work can testify to.

After finishing this task, they set out to produce another book, viz. *The Johan Abrams Family Tree* book. These projects entailed much correspondence, and father being the main scribe, drove himself relentlessly. Having already had a few more attacks on his old worn-out heart, we think he could have been a little less demanding on himself, however, he was bent on finishing the work they had set out to do. And he nearly did too, for there was only a little left to do, which his brother Abram and I undertook to finish.

The End.

In May of 1971 the parents took their last excursion together when they came to Sinclair in order to celebrate their Diamond Wedding anniversary. The proper date would have been on December 19th, however, health conditions were such that the earlier date was chosen. Although Sinclair was an out of the way place, folks arrived from all over the western provinces to wish them well. A program in honour of the parents was rendered and liberty given them to make comments. Among other comments, father even recited the song out of the *Altes Gesangbuch*, which he'd memorized as a lad, "Wenn ich O, Schoepfer! deine Macht, die Weisheit deiner Wege, die Liebe, die fuer alle wacht, anbetend ueberlege, so weisz ich, von Bewund'rung voll, nicht, wie ich Dich erheben soll, mein Gott, mein Herr, mein Vater!"

Father's voice which used to be fairly strong had now lost its timbre. Just six weeks after their celebration which was held in the local church, father's heart gave out. He passed away in the Reston Hospital on August 14, 1971.

On August 18th many of the friends, who just a short while ago attend the Diamond Wedding celebration, were back to pay their last respects to one whom they had held in high esteem. Friede seinem Andenken!

Sources.

Walter F. Braun, *A Biography of Peter A. 1890-1971 & Lena 1893-1991* (Box 51, Sinclair, Manitoba, R0M 2A0, 1991), 82 pages. See book review section.



Clearsprings Pioneers: 1874-79

The Clearsprings Pioneers, the Second Five Years 1874 - 1879, by Ed & Alice Laing, Box 1088, Steinbach, ROA 2A0, Clearsprings "History Buffs."

Introduction.

How would the Clearsprings Pioneers of 1874-1879 react if they could see how agri-business is maturing in Clearsprings today?

The Clearsprings Community as it used to exist is hard for today's citizen to picture. To appreciate the progress let us review a little of the history back before Clearsprings joined the Municipality of Hanover in 1890.

Let us go back to the second five years of the development of Clearsprings. From 1874 to 1879 another 24 families arrived in this beautiful agricultural land with the clear running springs already known as Clearsprings. Most Clearsprings pioneers migrated from Ontario either by Red River or by Dawson Trail.

New names in the community from 1874 to 1879 included Borland, Dykes, Ferguson, Matthews, McIntyre, Tomlinson, West, Lund,



First Clearsprings church and school house built in 1879 on NE12-7-6E. The church was Presbyterian.



Old house on the McCaskill farm that housed the original Clearsprings Post Office situated on SW13-7-6E. The building was believed to have been built in 1870 by John Mack. The farm was later owned by John D. Bartel. Photo courtesy of Alex and Ed Laing, see also Reflections on our Heritage, page 311.

Mooney, Reiach, Binnie, McCaskill, Simpson and Cloke. Clearsprings was now settled with a total of 41 families. By 1879 the earlier English speaking-arrivals along with a large group of Mennonite families who had arrived in 1874 had become neighbours and were now well established. All written reports have it that the English and Mennonite settlers mixed and got along well with each other.



Tom Borland (1825-1908) and Mary (Peck) Borland (1829-1901). Photo courtesy of Carillon News, December 23, 1949.

Church and School.

Bible study was important, church services were held in homes and children were being taught their A B C's mostly by their mothers and older siblings. The need for a church and a school was becoming more evident. Meetings were held, and in 1878 plans were made and a log building was erected on NE12-7-6 in 1879. This log building was used both for Presbyterian Church services and for day school. The first school teacher was Miss Abigail McKibbon with 27 students listed. The first minister was Rev. Samuel Polson.

Post Office.

Another hardship for the early pioneers was getting their mail. They had to go to the Hudson Bay Company Store in St Anne. This was a time consuming but important task. Finally, the time had come for a Post Office in the district. Imagine the excitement among the neighbours in 1879 when William Borland was appointed Mail Carrier to carry mail from Ste. Annes Hudson's Bay Company to Clearsprings. He carried the first mail in his vest pocket.

Alexander McCaskill was appointed Postmaster for Clearsprings. Mr. McCaskill purchased a safe to store important documents and money that went through the Post Office which operated out of his home SW13-7-6.

The safe purchased by Alexander McCaskill was passed down through the generations, eventually it was in the hands of Meryl (McCaskill) Sinclair, grand-daughter of Alexander McCaskill. Recently Meryl donated the safe to the Steinbach

Mennonite Heritage Museum.

Thomas and Mary Borland.

Many stories could be told, however at this time we will touch on only a couple of the new families who came between 1874 and 1879.

The first pioneer family we wish to high-



Francis Acres Mooney (1838-86) wife of William Mooney (1830-1920). William Mooney became a member of the Holdeman Church. Photo courtesy of Carillon News, December 23, 1949.



Safe used in the Clearsprings Post Office by Alex and Christy McCaskill until 1917. The safe was recently donated to the Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach.



The Hudson's Bay store in Ste. Annes which served as a mail distribution point in the early years. See also Reflections on our Heritage, page 16.

light is Thomas and Mary Borland who left North County, Ontario and came to Clearsprings in the spring of 1875. The Borlands homesteaded on NW18-7-7 and began farming with son Alex. The only descendant of the Borlands living in this area today is great-grandson, Cecil Cohoe who makes his home in Fernwood Place.

Mary Borland was the first midwife in the district and was in very much demand as there was no hospital or doctor in Clearsprings. Tom Borland was the first trustee of the above mentioned log school and church built in 1879. After the death of Tom and Mary Borland, both buried in Clearsprings Cemetery, son Alex and wife Elizabeth continued to farm the Borland homestead until they moved to Winnipeg in 1912. At this time they sold the farm to Peter P. Penner (see book review section), who has many descendants living in the area today.

Wm. and Francis Mooney.

Another family worthy of mention is William and Francis (Acres) Mooney who still have descendants living in this area. William Mooney born in Carleton County, Ontario in 1830 came to Clearsprings in 1878 leaving his wife and family of five children behind to follow later. Mr. Mooney took a great interest in public affairs and was also on the Clearsprings school board acting as secretary treasure along with trustees Thomas Rankin and John Langill. Mr. Mooney

was first councillor for Ward Two of Ste. Anne Municipality. William Mooney Sr. died in 1920.

Descendants of William and Francis Mooney and still living in the area to day are Mary (Giesbrecht) Mooney, Francis (Mooney) Barkman, daughter Margaret and son Lloyd. Still in Clearsprings is Gladys (Mooney) Barkman and husband Dan. Tom M. Wiebe former International dealer and auctioneer was another grandson.

Lloyd Barkman who is Area Retail Representative for the Postal Department and wife Jane are proud to say they have moved back to Clearsprings, the area of their ancestors, better known today as Georgetown.

Conclusion.

So now you have a brief story of the first Church, School, Post Office and a couple of early notable settlers who settled before 1879 in Clearsprings.

Sources: William A. Cohoe, "Pioneers of Clearsprings," in *Carillon News*, December 23, 1949.

Nikolaital (Gruschewka), Imperial Russia

Nikolaital (Gruschewka), Imperial Russia, by Henry N. Fast, Box 387, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

The 1914 *Christlicher Familienkalender* documents four villages named Nikolaital in its list of addresses of over one thousand German villages in Russia in that year. Of special interest is the village by this name in the Vollost of Gruschewka in the government district of Kherson since a number of families from here came to East Reserve in 1874. Among these were the Heinrich Fast and Jacob Friesen families who travelled in company with the immigrants from Steinbach, Borosenko colony, and also took up residence in Steinbach Manitoba

Nikolaital.

Nikolaital, together with the villages of Simonfeld and Marienheim (Note One), was situated just northwest of the junction of the Bazavluk and Dnieper rivers near the Russian village of Gruschewka.

A number of letters to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* (Note Two) by former residents refer to Nikolaital as being *Pachtland* or rented land and use the designation *Fürstenland* to identify their village.

Jacob D. Epp refers to Nikolaital as being a "Grossfürstlich settlement" (Note Three). To the modern reader this caused some confusion since all Mennonite historians use the name *Fürstenland* to identify six villages south of the Dnieper river in the government district of Taurien, which were settled by colonists from the Chortitz colony. These colonists rented their land from grandduke Michael Nikolaevitch, son of Czar Nicholas. It is possible that the Molotschna colonists who settled in Nikolaital also rented from this grandduke. However, it is equally probable that this land belonged to

Michael's brother, grandduke Nicholas I, and hence the name Nikolaital.

According to a letter (Note Four) by Jacob Friesen of Kansas, son-in-law of Heinrich Fast, the family had lived in Nikolaital for ten years prior to their emigration to America in 1874. This indicates the date of settlement as 1864 and corresponds closely with the dates of settlement at Markusland by the Kleine Gemeinde and that of the Chortitzer settlement south of the Dnieper river known as *Fürstenland*.

These lands became available for rent or sale after 1861 when Czar Alexander II introduced reforms which proclaimed freedom to the serfs of Russia. As a consequence many Russian noblemen lost the use of free labour to work their remaining, yet substantial land holdings. As a result many German-speaking colonists moved from the mother colonies to these newly available lands. Among these was a group of approximately twenty families from the Molotschna colony who made a rental agreement with the grandduke.

It is interesting that no contemporary historian of the day saw the departure of at least twenty families as newsworthy. Even historian P.M.Friesen gives only vague reference to some families having moved to rented land in the district of Kherson

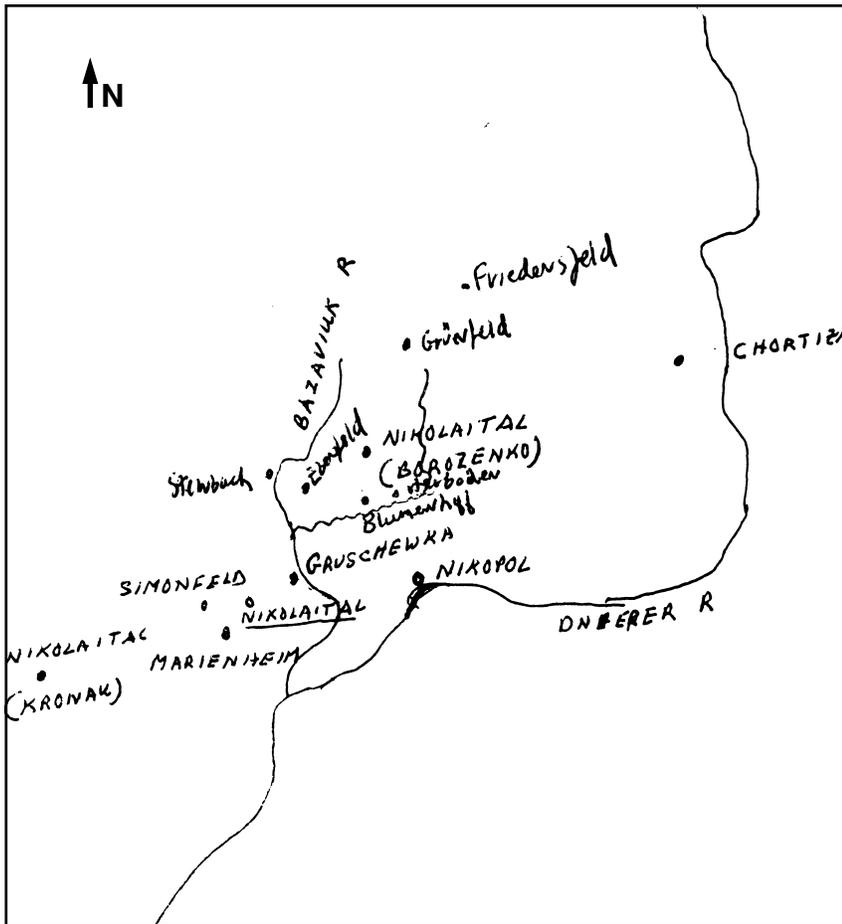
Wedding Invitation, 1873.

A wedding invitation dated December 1, 1873 lists the following families who lived in or near Nikolaital (Note Five): Franz Schroeder, Honourable Peter Enns, Kornelius Loewen, Jacob Peters, Jacob Warkentin, Jacob Friesen, Peter Klassen, Honourable Gerhard Kliewer, Peter Wall, widow Bolt, Gerhard Fast, Johann



Heinrich L. Fast (1865-1963) was born in Fürstenland, Nikolaital (Gruschewka), Imperial Russia. Heinrich L. Fast was the grandfather of Henry Fast, the author, and forefather of all the Kleefeld Fasts. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 36.

Wiens, Peter Klassen, Heinrich Klassen, Johann Pankratz, Honourable Jacob Bolt, Heinrich Janzen, Klaas Wiebe, David Flaming, Peter Friesen, Peter Adrian, Bernard Warkentin, widow Kroeker, Johann Friesen, Heinrich Wiebe, Heinrich Kasdorf, and Jacob Janzen. The prefix, Honourable, suggests that these families were spiritual or civil leaders within the community.



Map of the Nikolaithal (Gruschewka), Imperial Russia, area by Henry N. Fast, Box 387, Steinbach, Manitoba, ROA 2A0.

Pioneers.

The *Mennonitische Rundschau* provided more information on some of these families:

In 1895, Gerhard Schroeder, son of Franz Schroeder and Heinrich Doerksen, stepson of Bernard Warkentin are residing in Sagradofka (Note Six).

The son of Kornelius Loewen wrote in February 17, 1904, from Dalton, South Dakota, that his father had lived in Pordenau prior to moving to Nikolaithal.

In a letter of December 21, 1910, Maria Klassen, daughter of Heinrich Fasts, wrote that her parents had also lived in Pordenau. The Fasts migrated to Steinbach, Manitoba in 1874 (see Henry Fast, "Heinrich and Charlotte Fast," in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part Two, page 37-39).

In 1874 the *MR* of January 12, 1910 reported the death of Johann Wiens whose second wife was Maria Flaming of *Fürstenland*. Wiens settled among the Kleine Gemeinde in Jefferson County in 1875 but joined the K.M.B. in 1880.

David Flaming also moved to Jefferson County in 1875 as a widower, where in the same year he married the widow Jacob Bartel (nee Agatha Fast). David had previously lived in Rudnerweide, Molotschna.

Johann Friesen (1812-84) was born in Ohrloff, taught school in Marienthal, Pordenau and Elizabeththal, moved to Nikolaithal in 1864

and to Kansas in 1874. Peter Klassen (1847-95) was his son-in-law.

Jakob Friesen (1822-1875), brother to Johann, migrated to Manitoba in 1874. He is thought to have settled in the village of Grünfeld during the first winter. He drowned in the Red River in the spring of 1875.

Churches.

The villagers of Nikolaithal were somewhat diverse in their religious leanings. At least three families belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde, a group sometimes derided as being rather narrow in their expression of spirituality, yet admired for their honesty.

More exuberant were a number of families that had joined "the Baptist church" (Brüdergemeinde). Reverend Gerhard Kliever complained to Jakob D. Epp (Note Seven) that a number from his congregation had joined this group and were actively proselytizing and causing him much heartache. The *Mennonitische Rundschau* also reports that Jakob Friesen (1854-1909), son of Johann Friesen (1812-84) was baptized by Reverend Lenzmann in 1873, just prior to his marriage to Elizabeth Fast, daughter of the Heinrich Fasts. This may suggest a third church group in the colony.

Gerhard P. Goossen (1832-72).

An interesting view of Nikolaithal

(Gruschewka) is provided in a letter by Gerhard P. Goossen (1832-72) of January 10, 1870, written to Rev. Abraham Klassen, Prangenu, Molotschna. Goossen was a Kleine Gemeinde minister who lived in Grünfeld, approximately 20 kilometres north of the Borosenko Colony.

Evidently Goossen made regular visits to Nikolaithal to preach not only to the handful of Kleine Gemeinde families there but also to the members of the Chortitza Gemeinde led by Rev. Kliever.

In the letter Goossen described an incident when a Mr. Kroecker (son of "large" Kroecker from Fürstenwerder) apparently freaked out as a result of the preaching of Separatist Pietist proselytizers, obsessing on "...some strange interpretations of many passages of Scripture.... For example, he allows his wife and children to starve in order that they should receive the Holy Ghost, and more of the like....[His] entire disposition [made it clear] that he was gripped by the fear of Hell and that Satan had overpowered him..." evidently the result of the suggestive preaching on the part of the proselytizers (*Leaders*, pages 738-740).

The incident illustrated that there was considerable disagreement in Nikolaithal regarding religious piety and the appropriate manifestations of spiritual influences.

1874-80.

Sometime between 1874 and 1914 the village of Nikolaithal became a Catholic community. Probably half the families migrated to Canada and the U. S.A. in 1874 to 1875. That some families temporarily remained in Nikolaithal is suggested in a letter (Sept. 22, 1874) by Bishop Peter Toews to his brother Cornelius in Manitoba. He writes that he has received 180 R each for Jacob Friesen and Heinrich Fast from Peters of Nikolaithal. Both Friesen and Fast had already left for Manitoba and will have directed Toews to collect the money from the sale of their buildings. Since I have not found any letters in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* that originated from this village I believe it reasonable to assume that the Mennonites vacated this *Pachtland* in the early 1880s.

Endnotes:

Note One: Simonfeld and Marienheim are not mentioned in the 1914 list of German villages. They may have been sold to Russians and given new names.

Note Two: There are many letters in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* that refer to this village. See, May 29, 1895; Oct 9, 1889; April 24, 1895; Sept 8, 1909.

Note Three: Harvey L. Dyck, editor, *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jakob D. Epp 1851 - 1880* (Toronto, 1991), page 284.

Note Four: *MR*, Oct. 8, 1884.

Note Five: Courtesy of Audrey Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Note Six: *MR*, April 24, 1895.

Note Seven: Dyck, page 284.

Note Eight: *MR*, Sept 8, 1909.

Arnold Dyck and Steinbach 1923-47

Printer, Publisher and Creative Writer: Arnold Dyck's Career in Steinbach 1923-1947
by Al Reimer, 115 Wordsworth Way, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3K 0J6.

Introduction.

Arnold (Abram Bernhard) Dyck (1889-1970) was the most accomplished and important Canadian-Mennonite writer, editor, publisher and cultural entrepreneur of his generation. Not only did he become a major writer during his over two decades in Steinbach, but he spearheaded a literary movement in German which for the first time gave Canadian Mennonites a real literary image of themselves. Sad to say, most Steinbachers, indeed most Mennonites, probably did not realize or fully appreciate what a cultural treasure they had in their midst at the time. Arnold Dyck and Steinbach were, after all, not exactly made for each other, and he never really felt at home there. On the other hand, had Dyck not moved to Steinbach he might never have become a literary man, or might have become a very different kind of writer elsewhere.

In fact, it was Dyck's very alienation, his cultural separation from the community, which probably was the making of him as a writer. In a more compatible, more sophisticated environment, Dyck might never have felt driven to create the literary world he did create. As a gifted young Russian Mennonite he had been trained as an artist before coming to Canada, and so he must have found the isolated Canadian-Mennonite village he settled down in narrow in outlook and culturally barren.

Dyck's early "Koop enn Bua" dialogues in the *Steinbach Post* provide ample evidence that he found Steinbachers politically uninformed, too commercial-minded and overly pious. After the terrible events he had experienced in revolutionary Russia, the self-satisfied insularity of Canadian Mennonites must have bothered him more than somewhat. Then again, the local setting gave him for the first time in years a safe, quiet haven in which to raise his young family and develop his considerable talents in a new career. As he would say later, he chose to settle down in Steinbach mainly because it was still an exclusively "Mennonite" community and because it was not too far from the urban centre of Winnipeg (Note One).

Background.

Dyck had the rare opportunity to acquire professional training as an artist in Stuttgart, Munich and St. Petersburg until the outbreak of World War I forced him to return home. He did wartime service in the same Red Cross office in Ekaterinoslav as Gerhard S. Derksen (the founder of Derksen Printers), where the two men became close friends. After the war Derksen, by then principal of the "Zentralschule" in Nikolaipol (Yazykovo), hired Dyck as an art instructor. Unfortunately, this promising position lasted for only two school years before the Communists took over the school system.

In 1923 both Dyck and Derksen, accompanied by their families, were among the first groups

to leave Ukraine for a new life in Canada. Dyck had married Katherina Vogt in 1918 and by this time the young couple had three children. The Derksens landed in Herbert, Saskatchewan where the erstwhile school principal tried his hand at farming. The Dycks, as part of the large Vogt family, arrived in Winnipeg on August 20, 1923.

paint portraits of "rich Canadian Mennonites" (Note Three), a plan he soon realized was naive and completely at odds with the reality he found himself in. A more practical way to make use of his training was to secure a position as an art instructor in a city high school, but his lack of English closed that door also. He faced the same



Katharine Vogt (1894-1966) and Arnold Dyck (1889-1970) on their engagement in 1918. Photo courtesy of Roy Vogt, ed., *A Vogt Family History* (Winnipeg, 1994), page 100.

From there the new arrivals were assigned to various Mennonite homes in southern Manitoba.

Arnold Dyck and his family were lodged with the Peter Funk family on a farm near Grunthal. It was harvest time and the next morning Dyck, having purchased a pair of second-hand overalls from his host for \$1.50 (which, as he says in his memoirs, reduced by a quarter the capital of \$6.00 he had brought with him from the old country), became a harvester. But not for long. The young artist had not come to Canada to do "Rippenarbeit", as he puts it in his memoirs. "For what purpose had I studied for seventeen years, exactly half my life?" he queried himself (Note Two).

He had come to this country with high hopes that he would be able to utilize his professional training.

Dyck was looking for a career as a portrait painter. His plan before coming to Canada was to

problem when he tried to land a job at a commercial art firm in Winnipeg. It seemed that all his efforts to make a living as an artist were turning out to be naive pipe dreams. After one last effort to find employment with either the *Memmonitische Rundschau* or the *Nordwesten*, the two German newspapers in Winnipeg, failed, Dyck gave up on the city. In the meantime he had moved his family to Steinbach, where most of the Vogts were already establishing themselves.

Steinbach Post, 1923.

And it was in Steinbach that Dyck finally hit pay dirt. Jakob S. Friesen, the owner of a small printery and publisher of the ten-year-old *Steinbach Post*, wanted to retire and was putting his business up for sale (Note Four).

Journalism had interested Dyck even in Russia and he now saw a golden opportunity: he would buy Friesen's operation and turn the *Post*

into a paper designed specifically for the thousands of Russian-Mennonite immigrants who were flocking into Western Canada. With his brother-in-law Peter Vogt as a silent partner, Dyck purchased Friesen's business for one dollar down and, after serving a two-month apprenticeship, took over the operation in March, 1924. The small printery was situated on Lot 9 on Main Street (it would later become George D. Goossen's barber shop and pool room and is the site where Steinbach Dry Cleaners stands today).

Dyck's plan, however, for establishing a paper for immigrants came too late. A group of Russian-Mennonite immigrants were already establishing a new German immigrant paper in Rosthern, Saskatchewan--*Der Immigrantenbote*, later shortened to *Der Bote*--under the editorship of Dietrich H. Epp, Dyck's former teacher and friend in Russia. All that was left for Dyck was to continue publishing his little German paper in Steinbach.

Arnold Dyck proved to be resourceful in his new venture. Swallowing his disappointment, he set out to enlarge and improve his paper as best he could. His first step was to move his operation to a larger building on Lot 15 farther south on Main Street, where Derksen Printers still stands today. Not only was the new printery much larger, it also provided under the same roof adequate living quarters for his growing family. Dyck made another important change by purchasing a linotype machine so that type no longer had to be set exclusively by hand. He also installed a flatbed press to replace the old job press (a small rotary press) and was thus able to increase the size and format of the *Post*. And he began to recruit new writers so as to provide a more diversified and sophisticated reading experience for his subscribers.

Nevertheless, those early years were not easy for the ambitious young editor and publisher. As he records in his memoirs, he was required to make monthly payments totalling \$65.00 on his plant and building (Note Five). In addition, he was under pressure to repay a sizable travel debt. And with the birth of Siegfried, his fourth child, in 1927, he had another mouth to feed. He also helped his sister-in-law "Tante Anna" Vogt, an experienced kindergarten teacher who had lived with the Dycks for years, set up a kindergarten as early as October 1923 in a small abandoned building that had been a Chinese restaurant. Finally, there was the stagnant general economy which would soon slide into the Great Depression of the thirties.

Undaunted, Dyck forged ahead. Where Jakob Friesen's tiny, hand-set, eight-page paper had contained little beyond local news items, correspondence, a serialized story and some advertising, Dyck's expanded *Post* carried more general social and political news items, which led to expanded reader forums on various issues.

And Dyck's own considerable creative talents now came to the fore. As he described it later, he "simply felt the urge to tell my readers stories of my own." (Note Six). He realized also that the first language of most of his readers was Plautdietsch and that he needed to speak to them in their own language. So in 1932 he began his

"Belauschte Gespräche," the comic "overheard conversations" of "Koop enn Bua" and their friends. Dealing with everyday Mennonite life as lived by drawn-from-life characters, the series ranged from side-splitting comedy and farce to mild satire, but it also dealt--surprisingly often--with serious political, moral and social issues. During its two year run from 1932-34, the series was the most popular feature in the *Post*. Dyck records wryly that some readers wrote to tell him they had "laughed themselves healthy", while others had "laughed themselves to death" (Note Seven).

As Dyck's writing and editorial skills developed, he began to raise his literary sights. He knew from his own experience with the *Post* and from reading the *Bote*, that there was a pool of



Anna Vogt (1883-1975) and sister Maria Vogt (1881-1961) in Russia. Photo courtesy of Roy Vogt, ed., *A Vogt Family History* (Winnipeg, 1994), page 65.

talented Russian-Mennonite amateur writers from which he could readily draw. A newspaper was fine, but it was after all a transient medium. Dyck saw the need for a more lasting form of Mennonite writing that could be preserved in book form and reread as part of a family library (Note Eight). Not only would such a project allow him to pursue a genuine literary career, but he would be able to make an important contribution to his beloved Mennonite "Völklein."

Gerhard S. Derksen, 1932.

Far from being an idle dreamer, Arnold Dyck had his practical side and was a careful planner. He knew he could not establish a periodical press and keep running the *Post* and his printing operation by himself. He needed to find an able, dependable assistant or partner. His business partner Peter Vogt had tried working in the printery but had not taken to the business and Dyck had bought him out. He would have to look else-

where. By 1932 his financial situation had improved to the point where he was able to purchase his first new car, a Ford sedan. That fall Dyck and his wife set out for Saskatchewan to visit his friend and former colleague Gerhard S. Derksen.

Whether Dyck made the trip with the express intention of offering Derksen a job in his printery is not entirely clear. Dyck himself, in his tribute to Derksen after the latter's death, states that he did not get the idea of hiring his former principal until he returned home from the visit (Note Nine). Derksen's son Eugene remembered it differently. According to his account, Dyck and Derksen stayed up all night talking that first night and by morning Derksen had accepted the offer to come to Steinbach to work for Dyck (Note Ten). Whatever the case, Derksen was struggling as a farmer and the job offer came at exactly the right time.

The hiring of G.S. Derksen was the best career move either he or Dyck ever made. After a suitable apprenticeship, Derksen knew he had found a compatible career and, having taken over the editorial reins of the *Post* in 1934, he completed the takeover two years later by purchasing the paper and the printing plant from his friend.

Mennonistische Post 1935.

Dyck was now free to fulfill his dream of founding a Mennonite literary and historical journal. The first four issues of *Mennonitische Warte* (later shortened to *Warte*) came out in 1935 and the quarterly continued through 1938, at which time Dyck was forced to suspend it for lack of funds.

As far as its literary standards and contents were concerned, the *Warte* was a brilliant success. No Mennonite periodical in German had ever contained so much good writing on important subjects. But even though Dyck found the writers he needed and proved to be a tireless and innovative editor, he simply could not find enough subscribers to make the project pay. He records in his memoirs that his total income from his 600 subscribers was a meagre \$600 and after paying printing costs and honorariums to his contributors, there was virtually nothing left over for him as editor and publisher (Note Eleven). Not even his own considerable writing contributions under three different pseudonyms--"Fritz Walden" for High German material, "Hans Ennen" for the "plautdietsche" pieces and "Onkel Peter" for the childrens' "story club"--could make the *Warte* financially viable.

Separation.

As Dyck's financial situation worsened, he turned his attention more and more back to Europe, specifically to Germany. With their strong German cultural orientation he and his wife had come to Canada with long-range plans to eventually resettle in Germany. Dyck was following the political developments in Germany with keen interest but also with some anxiety. By the late thirties he saw unmistakable signs of serious trouble brewing in Europe and the possibility of another major war lent urgency to his intention of returning to Germany.

Sadly, Dyck also had to cope with a growing personal problem. His marriage had begun to founder in Steinbach and got worse with the passing years. Daughter Hedi Knoop, a fine writer herself, has recorded this distressing story with courageous candour and rare sensitivity in *Wenn die Erde bebzt*, her very slightly fictionalized reminiscences of her growing-up years in Steinbach (Note Twelve).

Apparently, there were two main reasons for the Dycks' failing relationship. Katherina Dyck, who had been a dedicated teacher in Russia, was bitterly disappointed that her lack of English made it impossible for her to resume her career in Canada. Even worse, with her artistic temperament and refined tastes, she felt culturally alienated in Steinbach and increasingly resented being confined to the prosaic role of housewife and mother. With her devotion to German language and culture, she longed to return to Europe and live in Germany (Note Thirteen).

The other major problem arose from the continued presence of Mrs. Dyck's older sister Tante Anna as a member of the family circle. Envious of Anna's opportunity to resume her profession as a German kindergarten teacher, Katherina found herself with four children to nurture and no other outlet for her own teaching talents. What vexed her even more was her husband's close friendship with her older sister. Tante Anna worked in the printery in the afternoons and probably saw more of Dyck than his wife did. The domestic atmosphere became so strained that Anna finally moved out of the Dyck home, although she continued teaching kindergarten on the Dyck premises and working in the printery (Note Fourteen). In 1937, however, Tante Anna left Steinbach and moved to North Kildonan, where she continued her German kindergarten for many more years.

The Dycks' marital situation continued to deteriorate. Dyck himself, as recorded by his daughter, withdrew more and more from the family circle and eventually set up a primitive form of housekeeping in his office in the printery (Note Fifteen).

By now he and Katherina were agreed only in their strong desire to move to Germany. Their plan was set in motion in 1937, when they sent Hedi, who was a promising voice and piano student, to Germany to study music. The following year Mrs. Dyck and the other three children also emigrated to Germany. Apparently, Dyck's intention was to join his family there as soon as he had wound up his business affairs in Steinbach. Before he could do so, however, the war broke out and he found himself stranded in Steinbach and separated from his family for the duration.

Writing.

Arnold Dyck was not a man to brood or bemoan his fate. Having given up his comparatively safe career as a journalist and editor, he now took the risky step of becoming a full-time creative writer and publisher. The result was that the remaining eight years of his stay in Steinbach, while hardly rewarding financially, were creatively among the most productive of his career. With his family gone, Dyck moved into a small white bungalow a little farther south on Main Street (it became the Barkman and later the Plett, Goossen law offices), where he lived by himself until he moved to North Kildonan in 1947.

His prolific writing during the war years had a good deal to do with his personal situation. Bereft of family and with few close friends, Dyck was a lonely, driven man deeply concerned with the massive tragedy unfolding in Europe and especially in Germany, and may well have immersed himself in creative writing as a form of therapeutic escapism.



Heidi Dyck Knopp, Katharine Vogt Dyck and Arnold Dyck in Germany, 1965. Photo courtesy of Roy Vogt, ed., *A Vogt Family History* (Winnipeg, 1994), page 101.

The Koop enn Bua dialogues had been so popular in the *Post* that Dyck continued the series in the '35 and '36 issues of the *Warte*. In the '37 *Warte*, however, he replaced Koop enn Bua with four Low German stories about the Russian "Forstei" (forestry service) in which Dyck had served just before World War I. The four installments were clearly autobiographical and replete with Dyck's dry wit and sly irony. He must have seen them as a welcome change from his steady diet of Koop enn Bua.

Apparently his readers thought otherwise, and in the '38 edition of the *Warte* Dyck dropped the "Forstei" series and brought back his inimitable Musdarp farmers. In all, there were 46 Koop enn Bua dialogues before Dyck decided to take his popular characters "on the road" in the three "opp Reise" books, each of which was published in two parts. He began with *Koop enn Bua opp Reise* (their hilarious "Weltreis" to Saskatchewan), published in 1942-43, continued with *Koop enn Bua foare no Toronto* (1948-49), and concluded with *Koop enn Bua enn Dietschlaund* (1960-61).

The Koop enn Bua dialogues, in addition to

the wonderful comic entertainment they provide, give us a good insight into Dyck's views on Mennonitism and on his somewhat ambivalent attitude towards Steinbach. Writing about Koop enn Bua in a local setting gave him a way of gaining a perspective on his own local experience and his mixed feelings towards the community. Creating Koop enn Bua as hicks from the bushland was a clever ploy which enabled Dyck to poke fun at their naive foibles and ignorance of the world while allowing Steinbach readers to feel superior to them. In other words, he could satirize his fellow townspeople indirectly and without arousing their ire.

Satire and Social Commentary.

Some of the Koop enn Bua dialogues deal with contemporary political issues which reveal Dyck's own bias in favour of Germany and the National Socialists (Nazis). His mouthpiece is young "Lehra Waul", who is tall, blond and blue-eyed as befitting the Aryan ideal then in vogue. Waul is earnest and patient with Koop enn Bua as he tries to "educate" them about international politics, although he draws a rather misleading picture of the new Germany as it was developing at the time. Waul, for example, denies that the Nazis want to kill the Jews: all they want to do is "slap their hands a bit" (Note Sixteen).

By and large, however, Dyck proceeds cautiously in these politically motivated dialogues, probably aware that he is skating on thin ice. It's as though he is trying to find out how far he can go with his opinions without alienating his more conservative readers in the community.

In fact, Dyck is clever at covering his tracks in these dialogues by always getting back to local issues and situations where he is on safer ground. For example, in between Waul's controversial appearances, there is a bizarre dialogue (No.14) in which Dyck presents a savage parody of dictatorial power at the local municipal level. It comes in the form of a nightmare suffered by Bua after he has overeaten at one of his beloved "Schwienskjaste" (hog-killings). In it a new reeve enters the hall mounted on an enormous grey horse and, in a towering rage, takes over the meeting. At first glance, Bua takes the new reeve to be Koop, then realizes he also looks like Hitler and acts like both.

Koop-Hitler angrily issues orders to close the local beer parlour, the hospital and half of the four churches. Also, the high school is to be closed down immediately, as well as the phone central, the kindergarten and [M.M]Penner's hall (where plays and movies were periodically presented). All these measures are ostensibly to be taken in the interests of efficiency and cost-cutting, but in reality out of sheer spite. The cowed councillors

sit there helplessly and submit completely to the wild Reeve.

What was Dyck trying to say with this amazing parody of dictatorial power? Was he trying to show the negative side of fascism disguised as wild comedy, thus making fun of his own political views? Or, more likely, was he warning his readers their democratic system should not be abused even during the depths of a depression by eliminating basic public services and indispensable social facilities? Doing so would certainly reflect Koop's miserly, essentially selfish approach to things. Or was he simply trying to entertain his readers by making fun of the political forces let loose in the grim world of the thirties?

Surprisingly, while the Steinbach atmosphere is pervasive in the Koop enn Bua series, Dyck depicts virtually no Steinbach characters as such. A striking exception is "Klose" the car dealer, who appears in one of the last dialogues (No. 44) and vividly represents the Steinbach businessman of the day. In the sketch, Bua, driving through the bushland in his beat-up Model-T Ford with Koop one fine spring day, fantasizes that he has come into a pile of money and is on his way to Steinbach to buy a big new car at "Klose siene Garrasch."

It takes a phone call to the bank to convince Klose that Bua's account does indeed hold more than enough to cover the \$2000 needed for a new Lincoln, whereupon Klose instantly drops his cold business manner and becomes very friendly and ingratiating towards Bua. While the character of Klose does not bring a specific Steinbach car dealer to mind, he is immediately recognizable as a type to readers who remember J.R. Friesen, the Ford dealer, or P.T. Loewen, the Chevrolet dealer in the Steinbach of the late thirties.

Characters.

As for Koop enn Bua themselves, Dyck did not have to look far to find real-life models for them either. The Vogt Brothers general store (soon to become Peter Vogt's Economy Store) next door to the printery, had a circle of regulars who met there almost daily to swap stories, talk about local events and crack endless jokes "opp Plautdietsch" as they sipped their Wynola drinks, chewed sunflower seeds and turned the air blue with Ogden's Fine-Cut roll-your-owns. They were men like Aaron Janzen, a farmer from south of town known as "Bosch Jaunze," "Schrooda" Enns, who worked in the mill across the street, "Nickel" Wiebe (all three were Russlenda), my uncle Henry Wieler, a carpenter and a "Barjchtola," and "Oola" Staerk, who wasn't even a proper Mennonite but rather a walrus-mustached "Preis."

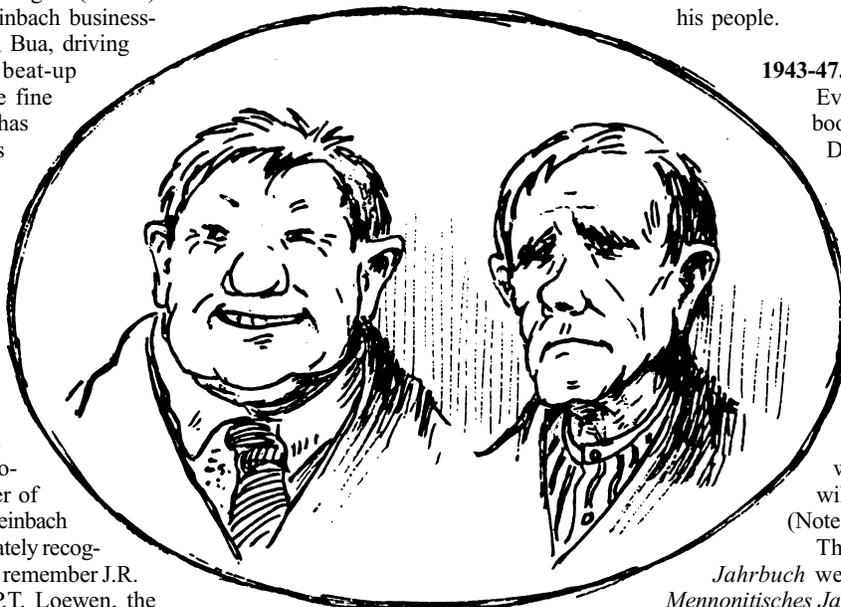
Peter K. Derksen, a farmer from out of town known as "Willa Derkse" because he was perpetually excited and gesticulated wildly as he

talked, often joined the group as well. Apparently it was he, along with Bosch Jaunze, who had a sharp tongue and a satiric eye for the foibles of Steinbachers, who served as originals for the garrulous and irrepressible Bua. Another store regular, the thin and somewhat dour Peter N. Koop (who lived across the street from us on Hanover), an ultra-conservative man who was unbelievably strict with his children, was almost certainly the model for Dyck's Koop.

The important thing to note about all these men is that they were in one way or another outsiders who were not members of Steinbach's business establishment and who, from all reports, were shrewd, irreverent observers of the local scene. They often talked sarcastically about the business elite on Main Street and about other Steinbach insiders and their doings. Dyck frequently joined the circle in the evenings, listening intently, saying very little himself, while storing

ence in Steinbach, although they had their own thriving communities a few miles northwest of town.

In creating Koop enn Bua as characters, Dyck either was not aware of or chose to ignore some of these local denominational differences. On the surface, Koop enn Bua seem to come from Kleinegemeinde stock, subject as they are to strict church rules which do not permit drinking (except for a drink or two at a "Schwienstjast", smoking or card-playing--Koop in particular is piously opposed to all these "sinful" practises. Teews, the former weed inspector, smokes a pipe and shows other signs of tolerance, which indicates that he comes from a "Barjchtola" background. These differences, however, are superficial and there more for the sake of the comedy than to underline serious denominational characteristics. In fact, Arnold Dyck never had much to say about the Mennonite faith or its churches, although he esteemed the moral and ethical value system of his people.



The lovable "Koop and Bua" characters created by Arnold Dyck. Dyck was a good artist and illustrated his books with his own sketches. Collected Works, Vol. II.

up material for his Koop enn Bua series. And he would have appreciated the outsider's views he was getting from these men, views that helped him gain a perspective on this strange Canadian-Mennonite community to which he had come.

There were by this time four different Mennonite denominations in Steinbach, two of which, the Holdeman and the Bruderthaler (EMB), had separated earlier from the Kleinegemeinde, the original church in the community. The fourth denomination was the more recently established MB church, made up mostly of Russlenda.

In social terms, most of Steinbach's business elite belonged to the "fashionable" EMB church, with a few sticking to the Kleinegemeinde church. The other two churches, while containing a few prominent families, were on the whole less dominant in the town establishment.

The other pioneer group--the Chortitzer (originally the Bergthalers)--had as yet very little pres-

1943-47.

Even while working on his first book, *Koop enn Bua opp Reise*, Dyck was still planning to revive his *Warte* journal. It was a project he could not relinquish, it seemed. In 1943 and again in '44 he brought out the *Warte-Jahrbuch*, a collection of articles on the economic, social and cultural developments of Canadian Mennonitism. Again, as he states in his memoirs, he readily found writing colleagues who were willing and qualified to help him (Note Seventeen).

The two issues of the *Warte-Jahrbuch* were similar in format to the *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* which had been published in Russia in the decade before the First World War. Dyck was able to solicit contributions from Mennonite writers like J.H. Janzen, Peter J. Klassen, Hans (Johannes) Harder, Gerhard Loewen and Heinrich Goerz. Both issues also contained creative writing in the form of stories and poems in addition to factual and historical articles on the Mennonite community.

Like its predecessor the *Warte*, this worthy project came to an abrupt end because it simply did not secure enough subscribers. The *Warte-Jahrbuch* attracted the same 600 "intellectual elite" who had been with him from the beginning (Note Eighteen).

But that was not enough. Dyck again found himself in a Catch-22 situation from which he could not escape. He dared not charge his subscribers more than a dollar per issue for fear of losing some of them. On the other hand, that meant after paying his contributors and his printing costs there was virtually nothing left over for him. He had the same problem with all his books over the years and had to keep them down to 100 pages each in order to cover his costs at least (Note Nineteen).

Echo-Verlag, 1944.

In 1944, however, Dyck was instrumental in initiating a long-range publishing project which finally made him some money. At the centennial conference of the Chortitza "Zentralschule", his old alma mater in Russia, Dyck suggested that the alumni of the school publish a series of books on the history and culture of the Russian Mennonites. The idea met with enthusiastic response and Dyck's former teacher, D.H. Epp, the editor of the *Bote*, was appointed honorary president of the new *Echo Verlag*, while Dyck was given the mandate to carry out this ambitious publishing venture from his base in Steinbach.

For once Dyck had sufficient funds, as the 300 members each paid an annual fee of one dollar and pledged themselves to cover the additional costs that successive volumes might incur. There was no shortage of historical subjects or writers to provide the manuscripts. The first volume in the Echo-Verlag series--C.P. Toews' *Die Tereker Ansiedlung*--came out in 1945 and was followed at irregular intervals by a dozen more up to 1957, at which time Dyck retired from the project without having found a suitable editor to succeed him. The books sold well over the years with several selling out completely and most of them remaining in print for many years (Note Twenty).

Meanwhile, Dyck was equally busy as a writer of fiction. After publishing the two *Koop enn Bua opp Reise* booklets in 1942-43, he began writing an autobiographical novel in High German about his boyhood years in the Russian-Mennonite village of Hochfeld in the colony of Jazykovo. *Verloren in der Steppe* eventually ran to five 100-page booklets, of which the first three were written and published in Steinbach (1944-46), with volume four almost certainly written in Steinbach before Dyck moved away in 1947.

In all, Dyck's literary output during his time in Steinbach came to three volumes of the *Warte*, two of the *Warte-Jahrbuch*, two volumes of *Koop enn Bua opp Reise*, and volumes 1-3 of *Verloren in der Steppe*, a total of ten volumes in a dozen years, in addition to all the other editorial work he had done during that time. It seems safe to say that not only was Arnold Dyck the first full-time creative writer ever resident in Steinbach, but that his career there remains unique and unmatched both in quality and quantity to this day.

Conclusion.

Dyck left Steinbach in 1947 and continued his writing career in Winnipeg. To try and assess at this distance the impact--if any--he made on Steinbachers while he lived there may be a trifle presumptuous. He was referred to locally as "Dretja" Dyck, just as his predecessor had been known as "Dretja" Friesen. To most Steinbachers he would have been just that, a small businessman who operated a printery and put out a German newspaper everybody read. Later, when he began writing books, he must have become somewhat of an enigma to Steinbachers, who would have wondered what this man was up to and why he would choose such a precarious way of making a living. And when he sent his family to Germany and failed to follow them before war

broke out there were ugly rumours and even more questions about this strange man who held himself aloof, making no attempt to become a real Steinbacher while maintaining an air of cultural superiority which was alien to the town.

As a polished man of the world Dyck was probably not too concerned about what the local rumour mill had to say about him. And it is unlikely that he made any close friends during his 23 years in Steinbach. He had his old friend G. S. Derksen, of course, and he saw a lot of his brother-in-law Peter Vogt next door. Dyck may also have had friends and connections in Winnipeg who were ardent German patriots; certainly he ran full-page ads for the "Deutsche Tage" which were held annually in Winnipeg during the thirties.

Basically, however, Dyck was a complex, withdrawn man who, like most true intellectuals, preferred to live in his own mental world enriched by the books he read. We know from his daughter Hedi that he loved music, especially opera, and that for him German culture was the only authentic culture for a Mennonite. He deeply deplored the growing encroachment of what he considered to be a vulgar, inferior Anglo-American culture spread through a language he feared would eventually kill "das deutsche Buch" and the Mennonite ethnic culture he valued so highly.

My personal memories of Arnold Dyck in Steinbach go back to my adolescent years during the war when he was a frequent Sunday "Faspa" guest at the Peter Vogts (and I an even more frequent one). He was at that time a handsome, middle-aged man with close-cropped, curly, greying hair and a neat mustache. He had a dignified bearing, his manners were refined and he spoke in a quietly cadenced bass voice, always choosing his words carefully. He was anything but a talkative man. When he was at the Vogt table on Sunday afternoons, chatting amiably about music or politics or business with his host and brother-in-law (in both High and Low German), I found myself listening to him rather than to the conversation of my friends at the other side of the table.

I knew that this distinguished-looking man was a writer--although only in Plautdietsch and German--and my dream was to become a writer too, but of course an "English" one. I was already in rebellion against my background and couldn't wait to make my escape to the outside world. Dyck, I sensed, was also an "outsider" like me who did not fit the approved Steinbach model. When I listened to this urbane, obviously well-

read man with his dry wit and precise observations, I felt a kinship with him, although I'm sure he was hardly aware of my existence. And I couldn't help taking a secret pride in sharing a cultural heritage with him, no matter how modest and "unEnglish" it was.

It was not until many years later, however, that I began to realize more fully just how important a literary artist and man-of-letters Arnold Dyck had been for his generation of Canadian Mennonites. That Steinbach served as the unwitting incubator for this man's remarkable creative talent is one of those fortuitous twists of history which in retrospect seems entirely natural and indeed inevitable.

Endnotes:

Note One: Arnold Dyck, "Ich hatt" einen Kameraden..." in *Collected Works*, Vol IV, eds., George K. Epp and Elizabeth Peters (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1990), pages 415-16.

Note Two: Arnold Dyck, "Aus Meinem Leben," in *Collected Works*, Vol IV, eds., Victor G. Doerksen and Harry Loewen (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1985), page 419.

Note Three: *Ibid.*

Note Four: For Friesen's career in Steinbach see Jeannie L. Hiebert, "Jakob S. Friesen (1862-1931): 'Drekjha Friese,'" *Preservings*, No. 9, December 1996, Part Two, pages 10-13.

Note Five: Dyck, "Aus Meinem Leben," page 501.

Note Six: *Ibid.*, page 502.

Note Seven: *Ibid.*

Note Eight: *Ibid.*, page 503.

Note Nine: *Ibid.*, IV, page 418.

Note Ten: Eugene Derksen, "Current Comment," *Carillon News*, August 6, 1988.

Note Eleven: *Collected Works*, I, page 505.

Note Twelve: Hedi Knoop, *Wenn die Erde beb't: Erlebnisse eines Aussiedlerkindes* (Uchte, Germany: Sonnentau Verlag, 1990).

Note Thirteen: *Ibid.*, page 113.

Note Fourteen: *Ibid.*, pages 77-78.

Note Fifteen: *Ibid.*, page 84.

Note Sixteen: Arnold Dyck, *Collected Works*, Vol III, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1988), ed. Al Reimer, page 423.

Note Seventeen: Dyck, vol I, page 506.

Note Eighteen: *Ibid.*, page 508.

Note Nineteen: *Ibid.*

Note Twenty: This series is in the process of being translated into English by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

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Johann Friesen 1857-1944

The story of Martin Friesen (1820-59), Bergthal, Imperial Russia, and son Johann Friesen (1857-1944), Lobethal, Saskatchewan, by Cathy Friesen Barkman, Box 3284, Steinbach, MB, ROA 2A0.

Introduction.

Some Mennonite surnames appear to be more common than others are. The name Friesen is obviously one of those. You have to match dates very carefully to be sure that your "Johann Friesen" is the correct choice out of the hundreds recorded. I have chosen to write about Martin Friesen and his son Johann Friesen. Articles are more interesting when they include stories which have been passed down through the generations. How frustrating it is to know that my "Grosspapa", Abram A. Friesen, a son to Johann Friesen who passed away 11 years ago, possessed the wealth of information that a person seeks for an article such as this. However, because of the German/English language barrier and the fact that my interest in genealogy was then in its initial stages, I never asked the questions that I should have asked.

With the information "grosspappa" and other descendants did pass along, with census lists, church records and with other sources, here is the story of Martin Friesen, his son Johann Friesen and their families. (P.S. If you know of additional information or find errors which need correcting please feel free to contact me.)

Martin Friesen (1820-59).

Martin Friesen was born in 1820. His exact date of birth is not given. He was named after his grandfather Martin Friesen (born 1766) whose occupation was that of a fairly well off farmer and tailor. He was the second oldest child in a family of 11.

Martin's parents were Jacob Bruhnin Friesen (1793-1843) and Maria Rempel (1793-1827). In 1795, Jacob, who was born in Prussia, made the trek from the Elbingschen Kreise area in Prussia to Russia with his parents. He grew up in the Chortitza Colony close to Rosenthal (1802) and later Burwalde (1808) where his father was a moderately well-to-do Vollwirt. For more information about the family of Jakob and Maria Friesen, see Henry Schapansky, "Bergthaler Friesens," in *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec. 1997, pages 33-34.

Martin Friesen married Maria Rempel. They settled in the Bergthal Colony.

Martin married three times. He was 23 when he married his first wife, Helena Hiebert (1816-53) who was four years his senior. The Bergthal Gemeinde Buch, family 12A, recorded a Huebert with no dates and Katarina (1793-1863) as the parents of Helena Hiebert. Martin and Helena had four children. Helena passed away 23 days after the birth of their fourth child.

Children:

Jacob was born on July 15, 1845 in Russia. No additional information is known about him.

He may have died as a child or married and remained in Russia.

Catarina was born on Feb 13, 1849. She died in Russia on March 15, 1857 at the age of eight.

Helena was born on May 1, 1853. On January 28, 1873 she married Johann Gerbrand (1847-1925) who was the son of Johann Gerbrand (born 1817) and Anna Dyck (1818-60). Johann and Helena, along with their one year old son, Johann, came to Canada in July of 1874 on the SS Nova Scotian. They settled in the Hochstadt area on the West Reserve. According to the Sommerfelder Church

Martin who was 14 years her senior. Her parents were Aron Suderman (1792-1848) and Anna Lemki (1796-1851). Four children were born to this union. After five years of marriage Susanna died leaving Martin with six children to care for.

Children:

Abraham was born on June 6, 1854. He will have come to Canada as a single man, however, he is not readily found in the ship lists. After coming to Canada, he married Katarina Striemer who at the age of 18 had come to Canada on the S.S. Nova Scotian in July of 1874 along with her parents Heinrich Striemer



1910, Johann and Maria Friesen with six of their younger children. Gertrude Doerksen helped me identify seven of the eight people in the picture. The top row from left to right: Anna (Mrs. Peter Schulz); Elisabeth (Mrs. Bernhard Penner); Jakob; and Abram. Bottom row, left to right: Eva (Mrs. Peter Schulz), Maria (Abrams). Sarah (Mrs. Aron Schulz), and John Friesen. This picture appears to have been taken in Saskatchewan. All photos for this article except as indicated are courtesy of Cathy Barkman.

Records, nine children were born to Johann and Helena: Johann (born 1873); Helena, born 1879 who married Heinrich Letkeman; Anna (1881-93); Jakob, born 1882, married Maria Falk; Derk, born 1885, married Margaretha Peters; Klaas (1888-1905); Margaretha, born 1891, married Johann Wiebe; Heinrich was born in 1894 and Abraham, born 1887, married widow Johann Janiasche. Helena died on August 27, 1925 at the age of 73.

Second Marriage.

Martin was no doubt anxious to find someone to look after his young family and so less than four months after the death of Helena, Martin married for a second time. Susanna Suderman was 19 years old when she married

(born 1817) and Anna Neufeld (1826-62). Abraham and Katarina married on November 14, 1875. The Sommerfelder Church records twelve children born to them between 1878 and 1896. The Abraham Friesen family moved to Didsbury, Alberta. Abraham died on July 5, 1921.

Susanna was born in 1856 and appears to have died as an infant.

Johann was born on January 25, 1857 in South Russia.

Third Marriage.

It is not surprising that after one month Martin remarried for a third time to Widow Franz Siemens, nee Sara Funk. Sara had four children from her previous marriage who were

all teenagers by this time. An additional child was born to Martin and Sara just several months before Martin died.

Martin was born on September 26, 1959 in the Bergthal Colony and two months later his father died. His mother, Sara Funk, remarried and thus he was raised in the home of his stepfather, Heinrich Striemer. On September 21, 1879 Martin married Maria Enz (1860-1913), daughter of Klas Enz (1822-60) and Maria Wall (born 1831). Maria came from Friedrichsthal, a small village in the Bergthal Colony. It appears that Martin and Maria lived in the Kronsart area on the East Reserve during the early years of their married life. Eventually they moved to the West Reserve where they settled on a homestead 3 1/2 miles southwest of Plum Coulee.

They had twelve children: Martin (born 1881) married Elisabeth Gerbrandt; Sara (1881-83); Maria (born 1886) married Franz Braun; Heinrich (born 1884) who moved to Herbert; Jacob (born 1889) married Maria Doell; Anna (1893-98); Klaas (1897-1905); Franz (born 1900); Helena (born 1902) married Cornelius H. Friesen; Klaas (1895-1896); Abraham (born 1905) married Helena Stoesz; Katharina (born 1906).

Martin's wife Maria died on January 15, 1913. On March 1, 1917, he married for a second time to widow Diedrich Dueck, nee Helena Friesen (1859-1937). Martin passed away on August 2, 1929.

Martin Friesen (born 1820) died on the 24th of November in 1859. His widow, Sara Funk then married Heinrich Striemer in 1862. Martin was only 39 years old when he died. Yet in his short lifetime he had three wives and seven children. Unlike many of our forefathers, he was denied the adventure of immigrating to Canada because of his premature death. However, many of his descendants did make the journey in the 1870s and have carried on his family name in North America.

Johann Friesen (1857-1944).

The remainder of this article will focus on Johann, second youngest son of Martin Friesen (1820-59). Johann was born January 25, 1857 in Southern Russia. He was less than a year old when his mother died on December 7, 1858. At two years of age he lost his father as well. Johann was raised by Bernhard (1805-75) and Anganetha (Berg) (1810-84) Dyck whose ten children were born between 1830-1853.

It appears that Johann came to Canada with the Bernhard Dyck family on the S.S. Quebec, which arrived in Quebec on July 20, 1875. The ship lists note Johann as a 17-year-old labourer and one would easily presume that Johann could have been a son to Bernhard Dyck. However, looking at the Hamburg Ship lists he is recorded as Johann Friesen age 17 travelling on the Sprite July 3, 1875. Bernhard never made it to Manitoba. It is reported that he died in Duluth, Minnesota on July 17, 1875 on his way up to Manitoba. Anganetha did not marry again but rather lived with her children, the Gerhard Kehler's, near Altona. She died on

November 12, 1883.

Johann Friesen stayed in Manitoba long enough to get married and begin a family. On July 26, 1877 he was baptized into the Chortitzer Church. He was 22 years old when he married Maria Abrams on November 30, 1879. Maria was born April 15, 1860, daughter of Heinrich Abrams (1832-1910) and Maria Heinrichs (1836-1909) who came to Canada from Puchtin, Russia settling in the Schantzenberg area of the East Reserve.



1916 Wedding picture. Son Abraham A. Friesen (1894-1987) and wife Agatha (Schulz) who were my grandparents. Photo taken in Saskatchewan shortly after their marriage in 1916.

According to the 1881 census Johann and Maria, along with their first child Maria, made their home for a short time in the Neuanlage area also on the West Reserve. At some point and time they must have moved to the West Reserve because they as they are recorded in the West Reserve Sommerfelder Church Records. For more information about the Abrams family, see article "Heinrich Abrams (1832-1910) and Family," in *Preservings*, No. 12, Dec. 1997, pages 76-77.

Lobethal/Main Centre, Sask.

By 1906 Johann and his family left Manitoba to take up a homestead in the R.M. of Excelsior in the district of Lobethal. Their farm was located on SE 34-19-10. In 1905 a school district had been incorporated and Johann and Maria's children attended the Lobethal School where along with the children of other Sommerfelder families they learned to sing, play and study.

The Friesen family attended the Lobethal Sommerfelder Church which was built in 1908. Prior to this time services were held in the homes of the members. On Sunday mornings, members would gather for morning worship which

began at 10:00 a. m. Services were held in the German language. There was no Sunday School. There was no choir and so song leaders led the congregation in singing. Johann and Maria's son Abraham was a "vesinga" (chorister) in the Lobethal Church.

Children:

Johann and Maria had 14 children. They all lived to adulthood and had families of their own.

1. Maria (Dec.3. 1880-May 19, 1961) was born in Herbert. She married Jacob Krahn (1879-1942) on July 26, 1903. Jacob was the son of Jacob Krahn (1841-1914) and Anna Klassen (1846-1917). Both Maria and Jacob were baptized and married in the Chortitzer Church in Manitoba. Four children were born to this union: Jacob (1907-77) married Maria Dyck (1910-63) and secondly Elizabeth (Unrau) Dyck (1904-88); Maria (1909-88) married John Klassen (1907-75); Anna (1911-62) married George Dyck (born 1912) and John (1917-88) who married Elizabeth Derksen (born 1925). After Mr. Krahn passed away Maria married for a second time to Abe Reimer. Mrs. Linda (Cliff) Unger of Steinbach is a descendant of Maria and Jacob's line.

2. **Aganetha** (February 8, 1882-November 17, 1952) married Peter Krahn (1867-1947) on July 7, 1901. Peter was the son of Johann Krahn (born 1836) and Anganeta Funk (1836-1921) from the Gnadenfeld area on the East Reserve. Peter and Aganetha had five children: Aganeta (1902-1982) who married Jacob D. Klassen (1896-1966), Maria (1905-1927) who died in South America just three years after her marriage to Gerhard D. Klassen (1900-67); Peter (1908-94) who married Barbara Sawatsky (born 1903); John (born 1911) who married Margaret Martens (born 1910) and Abram (born 1914) who married Tena Martens (born 1918) who lived in Grunthal for most of their married life. Peter and Anganetha and their family went to South America on November 24, 1926. They returned to Canada in 1930. After they returned to Canada they lived near Gretna on the West Reserve, close to Aganetha's family. Shortly after they bought a farm in Schönsee (south of Grunthal) on the East Reserve. In 1937 they moved to Grunthal. They lived in a house on the Chortitzer Church yard and looked after cleaning the church and general upkeep. Johnny (Edna) Krahn of the Grunthal area is a descendant of this line.

3. **Heinrich** (March 11, 1883-March 31, 1933) married Sarah Penner (1889-1972). Sarah was the daughter of Derk Penner (born 1855) and Sara Goertzen (born 1856) who are listed in the 1881 census as living in the Schoenwiese area on the East Reserve. Derk Penner was a descendant of Heinrich Penner from Eigenhof on the East Reserve. Sarah was a sister to Bernard, husband of child #10 and Diedrich, husband of child #8.

Heinrich and Sarah moved to Mexico with their family. Dick and Evelyn Friesen visited with one of their daughters, Agatha, on a trip to Mexico in the winter of 1997. After some

discussion about the family's move to Mexico Agatha told them, "My father said to my mother, 'If you feel like I do we don't need to stir the soil here. We could go right back' but they didn't." The family settled north of Cuauhtemoc in the village of Weidenfeld in the Santa Clara Colony. Agatha said, "They lived a simple way of life. It was felt that for what they did, they didn't need a high education." Although Heinrich has passed away some of his children continue to live in Mexico. A granddaughter, Martha (Mrs. Peter Sawatzky) lives in Austin, Manitoba.

4. **Katharina** (July 20, 1884-October 14, 1963) married Heinrich Friesen. They lived in the Herbert, Saskatchewan area. After Heinrich passed away she married for a second time to Abram K. Friesen (died 1968).

5. **Susanna** (born October 18, 1885) married Abraham P. Friesen (1884-1969) who was the son of Abraham Friesen (born 1853) and Anna Penner (born 1860) - Sl B-1 61. Eleven children were born to Abraham and Susanna Friesen. This family farmed at Carman at one time. Eventually they sold the farm and moved to Morden where Abraham worked on housing construction.

6. **Johann** (March 1, 1887-July 23, 1968) married Susanna Funk on July 26, 1909. They homesteaded north of Gouldtown, Saskatchewan. They lived at several places before they moved to the NW30-1-9 which they rented from 1923-1945. They then lived in the Lobethal School District for a very short time.

In the fall of 1945 they bought a quarter of land at Arden, Manitoba. In 1948 they joined the migration to Paraguay, South America and upon their return in September of 1949, they moved to the Morden area where they were employed on a farm at Rosenfeld, Manitoba.

They had eight children: Mary who married Peter H. Thiessen of Carman, Manitoba; Susie who married Johan A. Klassen of Altona; Katharine married Henry Giesbrecht of Morden; son John was sick during many of his younger years. It was in one of his stays in the Portage La Prairie Hospital that he met his future wife Anna Heinrichs. John and Anna moved to Paraguay where their children continue to live today; Justina married Diedrich Penner of Swift Current; Anna married Diedrich S. Penner of Steinbach. Tony Penner of Tony's Shoe Repair in Steinbach is a son of Anna and Diedrich Penner; Abram (deceased) married Olga Schulz and they settled in Austin, Manitoba; and Jacob who married Hilda Stoesz lived in New Bergthal, east of Altona.

7. **Justina** (November 26, 1888 - November 1959) married Rev. Heinrich Funk (born January 18, 1888) on July 14, 1907. Mrs. Helen Dueck, a daughter, writes in the *Gouldtown History Book* that her parents began their married life in a one room house on a quarter of land which they purchased for \$10.00. Their first barn was made of sods.

Justina liked working outdoors and at harvest time she enjoyed taking her children to the fields and working alongside her husband stacking the hay at haying time. In July of 1936

Heinrich Funk became an ordained minister at the Sommerfelder Church. Justina was often called upon to prepare a body for burial.

During the winter of 1948 Heinrich and Justina and most of their family moved to Asuncion, Paraguay. Some travelled by bus or airplane and others boarded a train and then transferred to a ship. Paraguay was not all they had thought it would be and so in the spring of 1949 the family came back to Canada. After they returned from Paraguay, Justina and Heinrich were very poor and fortunately they could move in



Circa 1920. Son Jakob Friesen (1896-1972) and wife Anna nee Schulz. Gertrude Doerksen thinks that the baby was their first son John.

with Abe and Mary Harder. Approximately a year later they bought a house on Abe P. Friesen's yard where they lived until June 1953.

Dick Friesen, remembers that his uncle, Heinrich Funk, didn't have a car for most of his life, however, he came to visit in Manitoba and there bought a car. He didn't want to drive it to Saskatchewan so he asked Dick to drive it there for him. Eventually Heinrich and Justina moved Gouldtown where they lived until Heinrich, who had dropsy, passed away on October 19, 1957. Justina married for a second time to Peter Teichroeb in September of 1958 and they lived in the Swift Current Lodge.

Justina died of diabetes on November 19, 1959.

Mrs. Helen Dueck gives the following information regarding the children of Heinrich and Justina Funk: Mary married John Schulz and they settled in Steinbach; John married Helen Schulz and they lived in Herbert, Sask.; Jake married Henrietta Schellenberg and they settled at Gull Lake; Katherine married Dave Dueck and they live presently in Swift Current; Abe who is married to Gertrude Schulz farms at MacGregor, Manitoba; Justine mar-

ried Johnny Zacharias and they farmed at Morse, Sask.; Helen married John Dueck and they farm at Gouldtown.

8. **Helena** (March 26, 1890-July 21, 1972) married Diedrich G. Penner (1887-1973) who was a son to Derk Penner (born 1855) and Sara Goertzen (born 1856) making him a sister to Sara Penner, wife of child #3 and brother to Bernard Penner, husband of child #10. This family moved to Mexico and remained there.

9. **Anna** (November 27, 1891-July 7, 1971) married Peter F. Schulz (1891-1968) who was the son of Johann Schulz (1861-1946) and Helena Friesen (1864-1945). They moved from Herbert to Carrot River in Sask. and then to Grunthal in Manitoba. They had 14 children and today their descendants are scattered all over Canada.

10. **Elizabeth** (February 14, 1893-November 10, 1918) married Bernard Penner, also a son to Derk Penner (born 1855) and Sara Gertzen (born 1856). Bernard is a brother to Diedrich Penner, husband of child #8 and a sister to Sara Penner, wife of child #3. This family also moved to Mexico and remained there. Dick Friesen, remembers this family coming to Manitoba to visit his parents. They thought it much too worldly and refused to stay at their house because they had an indoor washroom and wall to wall carpet.

11. **Abram** (October 18, 1894-October 29, 1987) married Agatha Friesen Schulz on August 17, 1916. Agatha was the daughter of Minister Johan Schulz (1861-1946) and Helena Friesen (1864-1945). Abram eventually rented the family farm at Lobethal. They had a two-storey house with a large lean-to kitchen and two bedrooms upstairs. They had chickens, cows, sheep and horses.

All of Abram and Agatha's nine children were born at home in the same house in Main Centre (Lobethal), Sask. Two of the well-known midwives in the area at the time were Mrs. Frank Dyck and Mrs. David Doerksen.

In 1945 Abram sold his dad's farm and they moved to Arden, Manitoba where they stayed for three years. While living in Arden, Mrs. Gertrude Derksen who was the eldest daughter, remembers that they had a 1927 Model T.

After three years all of the Mennonite people in the Arden area had moved to Paraguay. Abram secured all the passports and prepared to take his family to Paraguay as well. He had even purchased a quarter of land. Two of his boys, John and Abe, said that they were staying in Manitoba. Abram said that if they didn't all go then none of them would go.

By this time the church was gone and Dick Friesen remembers worshipping with the Hutterites for approximately half of a year. In 1948 the family left Arden and moved to rural Steinbach. As the children grew up and got married they each received a blanket, two pillows and a cow for a wedding present. Children of this family who continue to make the Steinbach area their home are Mrs. Gertrude Derksen of Fernwood, Dick Friesen who is employed at Reimer Farm Supplies, Tom Friesen who works at Loewen Millwork, and

Helen Friesen who is married to Peter Friesen and together are retired from dairy farming in the Grunthal area.

Grandchildren and great-grandchildren include Henry Doerksen who sells real estate for ReMax, Luella Friesen who is employed at Steinbach Dry Cleaners, Mrs. Vi Kehler who works at Shoppers Drug Mart, Mrs. Dora Sobering who is retired after working for MTS for many years, Mrs. Cindy Blatz who is the secretary of Grace Mennonite Church, Rod Kehler who teaches at Elmdale School and myself.

12. **Jacob** was born on June 24, 1896 at Strassburg on the East Reserve in Manitoba. On July 12, 1917 he married Anna Schulz (1896-1977), daughter of Peter Schulz (born 1868) and Anna Banman (born 1869) and a sister to Peter Schulz, husband of child #13. Jacob and Anna lived in Herbert, Sask., then joined the migration to Mexico, returned to Canada after one year, lived in Rosengard, Manitoba and eventually retired in Grunthal. Jacob died on August 30, 1972 at the Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach. Hattie, Mrs. Jake Wieler from Mitchell, is a daughter to Jacob and Anna, Eva (Mrs. Peter Dueck), John (deceased) who was from Tolstoi, Peter (deceased) from Calgary, Dave from Comox, BC and Jake from Brandon and then Winnipeg.

13. **Eva** (May 3, 1899-September 1, 1958) married Peter Schulz (1893-1968) in June of 1918. Peter was the son of Peter Schulz (born 1868) and Anna Banman (born 1869) as well as a brother to Anna, wife of child #12. Mrs. Henry P. Schulz writes in the *Gouldtown History Book* that Eva and Peter had a son Fred that died at the age of one. Their son Henry was born November 1, 1919 and married Gertrude Schulz on October 29, 1940. Their daughter Ida married Bill Gerbrandt on June 8, 1948. They also had a foster daughter, Jessie Funk who married Harvey Heidebrecht. Dick Friesen remembers that Peter Schulz farmed with a old army jeep while others were still using horses.

14. **Sarah** (February 24, 1901 -January 21, 1972) married Aron Schulz (1897-1984). He appears to be the son of David Schulz (born 1870) and Helena Kehier (died 1899). Aron was a twin to Susanna who died when she was two months old. This family had 6 children. Aron got a job at Red Deer, Alberta and so the family lived there. After Sarah passed away Aaron remarried and together with his new wife moved to Kelowna.

Second Marriage:

Johann and Maria raised their children in the Main Centre/Lobethal, Saskatchewan area where Maria died on April 28, 1925. After her death Johann moved back to Manitoba and lived near Gretna on the West Reserve. He married a second time to Maria's sister, Anganetha, born on March 15, 1863. Anganetha married Peter Buhr (1862-1914) in June 17, 1883. The Buhrs' had 10 children between the years of 1884 and 1903. Peter died on January 18, 1914.

Anganetha married widower Johann Friesen on January 21, 1926. By this time Johann and Anganetha had both reached their retirement

years. I was told that Anganetha kept a very close watch on their finances, making sure that they saved money wherever possible. Johann was ordered to hang the potato plants over the fence to dry to be used for fuel to heat the house in the winter. What a great saving that must have been.

Granddaughter, Mrs. Anna Penner, remembers Johann as a very short man who worked as a farmer all his life. In his later years he had very sore eyes. His eyelashes grew into his



Circa 1920. Daughter Aganetha Friesen (1882-1952) and husband, Peter Krahn. The boy is their son Abe. Pictures for this article are courtesy of Martha Friesen, Vancouver Island, B.C.

eyes and had to be pulled out with a pair of tweezers. She remembers that her grandmother Maria, always wore a black dress with an apron over it. Under the apron was a pocket where she kept mints for the children.

Johann's death.

Johann Friesen died on August 15, 1944. He was survived by his wife, Anganetha who lived for another six years passing away on February 28, 1950. *Die Steinbach Post* - December 27, 1944 printed the obituary for Johann Friesen (1857-1944) as written by one of his sons. It reads as follows:

"Father Johann Friesen was born in 1857 on Jan. 28 in South Russia. As a young child he lost his first mother and as he was about 3 years old, he lost his father also - he died. He grew-up at Bernard Dueck's. On 1874 they immigrated to America as he was 17 years of age. On 1877 he became a member in the church and has stayed a member there too.

"In 1879 on December 7, he married Maria Abrams. On 1925 on the 28th day of May his wife died which was very hard for him. Her sickness was gallstones and was very often very sick. So we often had to be by her bedside. She was also blind for seven years and

often wished to be with Christ. Our parents lived together for 46 years. in this marriage 10 daughters and 4 sons were born. Grandfather over 116 children, where 22 died, great-grandfather over 88 where 4 died. He was Father overall over 218 souls.

"In 1926 he married for the second time with widow Peter Buhr and they lived together for 18 years and 6 months. Father got sick on August 3 and on the 15th of August he passed away at 7:00 o'clock in the evening. He reached the age of 87 years and 6 months and 2 days. Songs were sung out of the Old gesangbuch - No. 247, 707, 698, 499, 392 and 505. Aeltester Peter Toews officiated at the funeral. He is buried at Eigenhof Graveyard at the Rudnerweide church. Grandfather Johan Friesen, born 1857, Jan. 25, baptized 1879 passed away August 15, 1944 at the age of 87 years, 6 months, 21 days has been sick for 12 days. "Grandmother Mrs. Johan Friesen, nee Maria Abrams born 1860 April 27, baptized 1879 passed away April 28, 1925 at the age of 65 years."

Conclusion:

In 1998, the family of Martin Friesen (1820-59) is large and far reaching. My own roots can be traced more recently to the Johan Friesen family. At times I think I know so little of the Friesen family. After writing an article such as this I realize I know far more than many others know about their families.

However, there is still lots to learn about the Friesen's as many stories still have not been told or recorded. I encourage you to pass your stories on to your children and grandchildren and to write them down so they can be read by future generations. Only then can we be assured that the story of Martin Friesen and his descendants will carry on in the years to come.

Sources:

Excelsior Echoes, page 686.
Gouldtown History Book (1973).
 Pat Fuller, *The Friesen and Schulz Families Heritage Volume* (1967).
 Mrs. Gertrude Doerksen, Fernwood Place, Steinbach.
 Mrs. Katherine Krahn, Niverville.
 Dick Friesen, Steinbach.

HSHS has a private donor/foundation wishing to provide some funding or grant money for a research project leading up to publication of a book length biography of a local pioneer/entrepreneur. This project would be suitable for a Master's or Doctoral Thesis. Some credentials of actual historical writing experience would be helpful. If interested, please contact the editor at Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0 or phone (204-326-6454).

Jakob and Maria Neufeldt Dueck, Rosengart

Jakob Dueck (1846-1928) and Maria (Neufeldt) Dueck (1846-1940): Rosengart Pioneers,
by Linda Buhler, Box 2895, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Jakob Dueck's Parents:

Jakob Dyck (later spelled Dueck) was born on May 19, 1846 to Dirk Dyk (b. 1813) and Anna Unrau (b. 1813), BGB B285. Jakob's parents arrived in Canada on the S. S. Peruvian in July 1874 and the 1881 Census shows them as residents in the Steinbach area, BGB 343-103.

Maria Neufeldt's Parents:

Maria was born on September 9, 1846. Her parents, Jacob Neufeldt (1818-1913) and Katarina Dyck (1817-1907), were married on January 16, 1840, BGB B199. They came to Canada in 1876 arriving on the S. S. Sardinian. Jacob was the oldest son of Jacob Neufeld (1792-1870) and Maria Derksen (1798-1877), BGB A 66.

The Bergthal Church records show that Jakob was baptized outside of the Colony in Russia but that he returned to Bergthal in 1859. His wife Katarina Dyck was from Neuhorst, Chortitza Colony, and all of their children were born prior to April 1859 so we assume that the family in its entirety moved from Chortitza to Bergthal.

Maria's paternal uncle Peter Neufeldt (1821-1922) was the well-known centenarian who lived in Kleefeld No. 1 (see *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec. 1997, pp 64-68).

The 1882 Seelenliste shows Jakob & Katarina as well as their children, Maria (Mrs. Jacob Dyck/Dueck), Elizabeth (Mrs. Isaak Doerksen), Peter, and Anna (Mrs. Peter U. Wiebe) as residents of Rosengart. Son Peter Neufeldt (b. 1854) and wife Anna Unrau (b. 1861) settled in Rosengart but relocated to Halbstadt, West Reserve. (For further information on Peter, see article on Peter Heinrichs elsewhere in this paper.) According to notations made in the 1887 Chortitzer Church Records, Jakob & Katarina's daughter Helena remained in Russia, son Jacob stayed in Russia but followed later, and daughter Katarina married in Russia to Peter Blatz. Another son, Bernd (b. 1841) moved out of the Bergthal Colony but did come to Canada with his wife although he does not appear on the East Reserve Census records.

Jakob & Maria (Neufeldt) Dueck.

Jakob and Maria were married on October 7, 1866 and came to Canada in July 1874 on the S. S. Nova Scotian. They settled in the village of



Jakob Dueck (May 6, 1846) and wife Maria Neufeldt (August 17, 1846) with son Diedrich. Rosengard pioneers. They lived on the Rosengard ridge close to where Peter and Mary Dueck live now, who live on the former Jakob Dueck place, his grandparents', the son of Jakob Dueck Sr. above. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Elizabeth Friesen.

Rosengard, on the Rosengard ridge (the "Huechriegje") where their children grew up. After the village had dissolved they lived on SW18-6-6E just west of where the Rosengard Chortitzer Church and cemetery are presently

located on "Ridge Road" (formerly PR 303). Son Jacob N. Dueck later lived on this homestead, passing it on to his son, the current owner, Peter D. Dueck.

The original two-room log house had a thatched roof and still stands today although the roof was shingled in later years, see photo. The northwest corner of the roof of the old house was lifted (but not removed) by a tornado that passed through the area around 1930. Travelling toward the northeast, it cleared trees and brush along the way as well as relocating buildings, some of which were never again found. The wooden granary on the Peter T. Friesen property was lifted and carried about one hundred feet from its foundation. During this storm, the straw stack on Jacob and Maria's yard was set ablaze by lightning.

It would almost appear that this property lay in a storm path because in 1942 when their son Jacob N. Dueck was already residing there, lightning struck the house, coming in through the telephone line. It followed along a row of five guns that were hanging on the wall, melting the front gun sights of them all. In 1944 lightning struck the summer kitchen.

It is said that Jakob served as Councillor for the area for a ten year period just prior to the turn of the century.

Jakob died on October 26, 1928 at the age of 82 years. His widow, Maria, lived with the daughter, Katharina Kehler until her death on August 12, 1940, just one month short of her 94th birthday. Both Jakob and Maria are buried in the Rosengart Cemetery.

Jakob and Maria's Children:

<u>Gen Name</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Marriage</u>	<u>Death</u>
Jakob Dueck	May 19,1846	Oct 7,1866	Oct. 26,1928
m Maria Neufeldt	Sep 9,1846		Aug 12,1940
Children:			
Anna Dueck	Nov 25,1868		Sept 26,1955
Katarina Dueck	Mar 28,1871		Aug 7,1945
Maria Dueck	Mar 2,1875		In Paraguay
Diedrich Dueck	Jan 17,1878		Feb 20,1878
Elizabeth Dueck	May 7,1879		Nov 25,1894
Helena Dueck	Jun 28,1882		Feb 16,1886
Jacob Dueck	Jul 21,1884		Apr 24,1968
Diedrich Dueck	Oct 23,1886		Oct 11,1963

A great-granddaughter Helen Dyck still remembers Maria Dueck, "I remember the old house yet. It was a two room house. My sister Tina Dueck lived in there for a few years. It was an old log house. I also remember a little about my great-grandmother. I was 10 years old when she died. To me she was a small lady."

Jakob and Maria's Children:

Daughter **Anna Dueck** (1868-1955) married Jacob Ginter (1868-1931) on July 29, 1888.

Jacob was the son of Peter Ginter (b. 1827) and Helena Dyck (b.1827). Jacob Dueck Ginter was born in Schönthal, South Russia, June 23, 1868. He came to Canada in 1875 as a seven-year-old boy with his parents, who also settled in the Rosengard area. As poor as they were

with a large family, they struggled through it all. On March 6, 1876, brother Peter, 13 years older, died. Then his brother Johann had to take the work on himself. Later when Jacob was 15 years-old he and his sisters had to take over the hard work and run the farm. On July 21, 1888, Jacob was baptized by Bishop David Stoesz and taken up into the Chortitzer Church.

Jacob was known as "Loma Ginter" (lame Ginter) as he had a stiff knee following two operations on his knee and a third operation about 40 days before he died. He had a silver nail through his knee. He had been sick for five months prior to his death at the age of 62. He was also buried in Rosengard. Jakob and Anna had nine children.

Anna was widowed for only six months and

then married Jacob Thiessen on November 19, 1931. They continued to live on the same property on the north side of the "high ridge" on 20-6-6E. Jacob Thiessen passed away on March 10, 1953 at the age of 91.

The last while, Anna lived with Susie Hiebert in Steinbach who cared for her until she died on September 26, 1955. She too was buried in Rosengard.

Children of Anna and Jacob Ginter: Helena (1889-1894), Jacob (b.1890); Peter (b.1894), Cornelius (b.1896); Johann (1897-99). Diedrich (b.1900) married Maria Siemens from nearby Schönfeld; Maria (b.1901) married Peter Unger; Anna (b.1903); and Katharina (b.1907).

Son Diedrich Ginter wrote the familiar column, *Hochruecken Neuigkeiten*, in the Steinbach



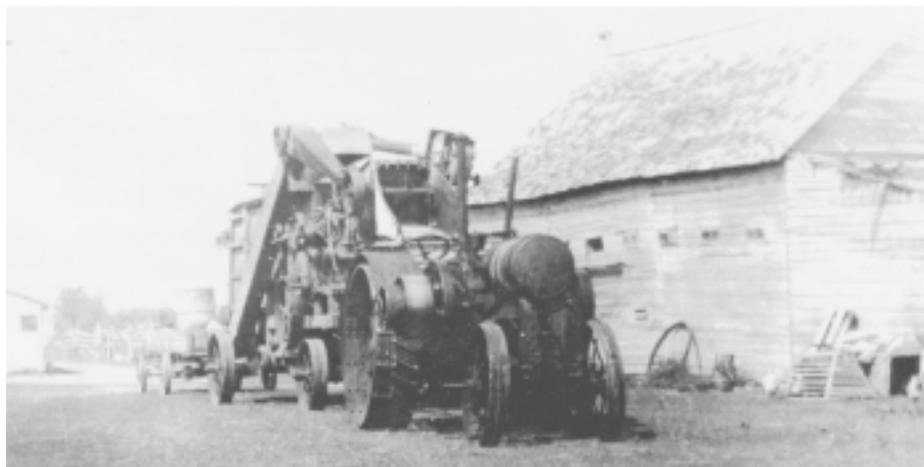
Brothers Diedrich (left) and Jakob N. Dueck (right), sons of Jakob & Maria (Neufeldt) Dueck. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Elizabeth Friesen.



Family of Isaak and Katharina (Dueck) Unrau, Rosengart. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Elizabeth Friesen.



Wedding photo of Jakob N. Dueck and Elizabeth Doerksen, daughter of Isaac Doerksen (b.1849) and Elisabeth Neufeldt (b.1852) of Rosengart, July 9, 1904. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Elizabeth Friesen.



Rumely oil pull tractor and 28" McCormick Deering threshing machine standing on farmyard of Jakob N. Dueck situated on SW 18-6-6E. Photo taken facing west-northwest, circa 1940. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Maria Dueck.



Agatha and Diedrich N. Dueck. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Maria Dueck,

Post for nearly forty years, beginning around 1927. His wife, Maria, was called upon for her services as midwife in the Rosengart area. They lived on the SW19-6-5E. (See "Kornelius Siemens (b. 1819), Schoenfeld" by Helen Dyck, *Preservings*, December 1996, No. 10, Part 11, p.24). Diedrich's son Jacob S. Ginter married the widow Mrs. Maria Friesen (nee Dueck) who was a first cousin to his father Diedrich Ginter (Maria's father was Diedrich N. Dueck.) Maria was known far and wide as *Trachtmoaka Gintashe*: see article appearing in Issue No. 14.

Daughter **Katarina Dueck** (1871-1945) married Isaak Unrau (1868-1906) with whom she had ten children. Following Isaak's death, she remarried in September 1909 to widower Jacob Gerbrand (b. 1858), son of Jacob Gerbrand



Jakob Ginter and Anna Dueck. Jakob Ginter was called "lame" Ginter because he had a stiff leg. Photograph courtesy of Helen Dyck, Box 21192, Steinbach, ROA 2T1.



House built circa 1884 by Jakob Dueck, Rosengart. Left to Right: Jacob N. Dueck, Diedrich N. Dueck, Jakob Dueck (b. 1846), grandson Jacob Ginter (son of Jacob Ginter & Anna Dueck), and Maria (Neufeldt) Dueck (b. 1846). This house still stands on SW18-6-6E. Photo taken facing northwest, circa 1895. Courtesy of Mrs. Elizabeth Friesen.

(b.1823) and Katarina Ginter (b.1825).

Katharina remained a widow for only two months after Gerbrand's death before marrying again in November, 1926, to Gerhard Kehler, a widower from the Chortitz area. Katharina was a midwife. It was with Katharina that her mother, Maria Dueck, spent her last years.

Katharina and Isaak Unrau's children: Johann (Sept. 2, 1890), married his step-sister Helena Gerbrand; Jacob (b.1892) married Katharina Ginter; Isaak (b. 1893) married Elisabeth Klassen; Wilhelm (b.1895) married Helena Dueck; Katharina (b. 1897) married Heinrich Unger; Maria (1899-1910); Anna (1900-01); Diedrich (b.1902); Anna (b. 1904) married Abram P. Sawatzky; and Elisabeth (1906-10).

Daughter **Maria Dueck** b.1875 - ??) married Peter Krahn (b.1870). They joined the mass move to Paraguay in April, 1927, taking along their adopted daughter, Maria Kehler (b.1921). (Maria's mother, Mrs. Abram U. Kehler, nee Susanna Peters, had died five days after giving birth to Maria.) Peter and Maria Krahn both died in Paraguay.

Son **Diedrich N. Dueck** (1878-78).

Daughter **Elizabeth Dueck** (1879-94).

Daughter **Helena Dueck** (1882-86).

Son **Jacob N. Dueck** (1884-1968) married his first cousin Elizabeth Doerksen (1882-1968) on July 9, 1904. Elizabeth and Jacob's mothers were sisters. Jacob and Elizabeth had a family of ten children which included two sets of twins, both named Isaac and Maria. Of these four, only Isaac (b. 1912) lived to adulthood and married Tina Ginter, the daughter of his cousin Diedrich Ginter. The other Dueck children included: Jacob (1906-84) married Agatha T. Friesen; Elizabeth (b.1909) married Peter T. Friesen, brother to the aforementioned Agatha Friesen, both being children of *Schmedt F'riese* (Peter P.); Diedrich (b.1915); Maria (b.1918) married Cornelius Warkentin (their son Neil is currently a councilor for the R. M. of Hanover); Anna (b.1920) married Abraham Broesky; and Peter (b.1922) married Maria Friesen, daughter of *Trachtmoaka Gintashe*, and currently live on the original homestead.

Diedrich Dueck (b. 1915), mentioned above, remained single and lived at his parents' home

from which he operated a little store for almost twenty years, selling everything from Kool-aid and gum to cigarettes. He began this enterprise after Julius Block's store in Rosengart closed in the late 1930s. Diedrich's brother Jacob Dueck bought and moved the Block store building onto his own property and converted it into a residence.

Until the end of the 1930s, church was held in the home of Jacob N. Dueck alternating with the Peter Unger home in Rosengart as well as the Johann P. Friesen home in Schönfeld. Later, the original Rosengart Church was located on the Peter T. Friesen property situated on SE13-6-5E.

Jacob did custom threshing in the area that extended from behind Sarto to beyond Reichenbach and served as veterinarian at times. It is believed that he had the first car in the area.

Diedrich N. Dueck (1886-1963) married Agatha Dueck (1883-1965) daughter of Abram and Anna (Wiebe) Dueck. They lived on SW18-6-6E on which land the current Rosengart Church



Maria (Neufeldt) Dueck. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Helen Dyck.

now stands. Diedrich was a man of many talents and interests. He was a fisherman and hunter, helped out by performing constabulary duties at functions such as sports days and fairs, and served as dentist, auctioneer, very well-known chiropractor, and was also called upon for bloodletting.

Their children were: Jacob (1907-68) first married to Agatha Friesen and then to Katharine (Broesky) Janzen; Maria (1909-90) who was known as *Trachmoaka Gintasche*, first married Peter G. Friesen and then to Jacob S. Ginter; Anna (b.1912) married John G. Friesen (a brother to the above mentioned Agatha Friesen and Pe-

ter G. Friesen) and lived in the old Rosengard church which was moved in 1958 to its present location just west of the existing church and converted to a house; Abram (1914-69) was mentally handicapped but was very musically inclined, playing both organ and accordian; Cornelius (1917-infancy); Diedrich (1918-54) was mentally handicapped but like his brother Abram, was gifted in music and made a fiddle which he played; and Cornelius (1922-infancy).

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Helene Friesen, *A Genealogy of Peter P and Agatha Friesen 1770-1978* (Self-published, 1978).

Interviews with Mrs. Helen (Willie L.) Dyck, Mrs. Elisabeth (Peter T.) Friesen, Mrs. Mary (Peter D.) Dueck, Mrs. Maria (Comie) Warkentin.

Rosengard Church Photographs

Rosengard Church Photographs, submitted by Linda Buhler, Box 2895, Steinbach, Manitoba., R0A 2A0.



The first Chortitzer Church in Rosengard. This church was moved from Blumengart to Rosengard in 1946 where it was originally situated on the SE 13-6-5E. This parcel of land was purchased from Peter T. Friesen who lived on that same quarter section. Prior to the purchase of this building, church services were held in several homes in the area, alternating from week to week. The church was used until 1958 at which time it was sold to Johan F. Friesen. Friesen moved the building onto the SW 18-6-6E which belonged to his father-in-law, Diedrich N. Dueck, and converted the church into a residence. Photo taken in spring of 1948, facing west. The people in the 1926 Chevrolet are Peter and Mary (Friesen) Dueck. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Mary Dueck, Box 28, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.



Recent photo of the original Chortitzer Church at its current location. Photo taken facing north-northwest. Photo courtesy of Helen Penner (Mrs. Jake Penner).



The second Rosengard Chortitzer Church building was bought in 1958 and moved from Niverville to Rosengard where it stood on the SE 18-6-6E, slightly northwest of the present day church. It was sold in 1981 and moved to the Richer area where it was converted into a house. Photo taken facing east. Photo courtesy of Ben Unger.



Recent photo of the Rosengard CMC with the first church building to its left. On the left stands the original church that had been converted to a residence and moved from its original location. Photo courtesy of Ben Unger. Photo taken facing east. Photo courtesy of Helen Penner (Mrs. Jake).

Material Culture

Poetry: A Great Mennonite Tradition

Poetry: A Great Mennonite Tradition: by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Reformation Origin.

The conservative and orthodox Mennonite culture of the 1874 East Reserve pioneers had a very significant literary tradition, the envy of other pioneering peoples. Since the days of the Reformation literacy was emphasized as their spiritual ethos was evangelically grounded and basic reading and writing skills were necessary to study the Bible and learn its profound truths. This literary tradition included not only religious and inspirational writing but diaries, journals and letter correspondence as well.

Poetry was one genre of this literary tradition going back to Reformation times when 8000 martyrs shed their blood for the faith in Holland and elsewhere. Many of these accounts were written by or about women. The martyrs recorded their faith stories in verse and/or others would write poetic elegies for them. These epic poems were sung by fellow believers and eventually compiled into the first Dutch-language "Gesangbuch".

Prussia.

By 1550 Mennonites had migrated to Danzig and other locations, fleeing persecution. After two centuries they adopted the German language. Gradually their Dutch and Low German martyr songs were translated into and/or written in the Danziger High German and the local Prussian Plaut-Dietsch. The latter had replaced Lower Saxon/Frisian Low German as their vernacular "house" language.

In the mid-18th century Bishop Hans von Steen (1705-81) in Danzig, Prussia, compiled a collection of these songs into a German "Gesangbuch" still in use by thousands of orthodox and conservative Mennonites in Latin America. The "Gesangbuch" became an early benchmark and model for the Mennonite poetry tradition.

Consider the following verse 9 from song 138 in the *Gesangbuch*, under the Section on "Brotherly love". Read the words and feel the stirring message of the rhythm;

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

Translation:

In yonder world, how blessed and joyous we'll be,
our peoplehood united, the Saviour will see,
in the fire of the Spirit, and zeal of the bless't,
we'll all taste together, God's grace and sweet



Hans von Steen (1705-81), hero of the faith. Hans von Steen served as Aeltester of the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde from 1754-81. He played a critical role in the development of the canon of Mennonite devotional literature, by translating the martyr songs and poems from Dutch to German and by compiling the Gesangbuch, which has served the conservative Mennonite churches to the present-day. The Gesangbuch is a marvel of martyr songs and poems many of which were written by women. Photo courtesy of Mannhardt, Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde, page102/103.

rest,

so unite now our hearts and lift up our hands,
we pray, Zion's help soon as He'll send,
for true love knows, neither beginning nor end.

These literary works articulated the spiritual life of generations of conservative Mennonites from the Reformation to the present.

Russia, a Continuing Tradition.

Poems were routinely written to celebrate and commemorate various occasions from weddings and births, to funerals. Poetry was also used as a vehicle to record and document history. In the collections of old Kleine Gemeinde documents are poems telling of ancient Bishops in Prussia and Holland who devoted their lives in the service of God's church. Heinrich Reimer's

"Familienbuch", is the best example of this genre of journal: see *Preservings*, No. 1, Jan. 1993, page 6.

Some of this poetry was brilliant and moving. Any reader doubting this statement should read, for example, the epic poems of Rev. Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), renown KG theologian, some of whose poetry was published in *The Golden Years*, pages 215-233, and in *Leaders*, pages 305-314. To experience the power of the lyrics the reader must feel the meter and rhythm; consider that this epic poem and many others like it were 50 and more stanzas long.

The following verses from Heinrich Balzer's "Poem in Farewell" written in 1833 when he left the pietistical Ohrloff Gemeinde to join the Kleine Gemeinde, serve as a sample:

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

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

Balzer's poetry was read by several generations of KG-ers as inspirational literature and as part of the canon of devotional writings. Finally it too found its way into the dust bins of history when a large segment of the KG adopted American Fundamentalist religious culture and language in the 1940s and 50s.

Manitoba, 1874.

The poetry tradition referred to above was an important part of pioneer life when the Mennonite settlers arrived in Manitoba in 1874. Traditional/orthodox Mennonites loved poetry and enjoyed readings at family and community gatherings. In almost every household or family group, someone collected various poems, usually inspirational in nature, transcribing copies into a journal in longhand, and later by clipping items from newspapers and pasting them into a scrapbook.

Ministers regularly used the inspirational poem-songs in the "Gesangbuch" to enhance their sermons. This is illustrated by almost every sermon written by a conservative Chortitzer or Kleine Gemeinde ministers prior to 1920.

Each village and each family clan, seemingly, had one or two individuals who wrote poetry,

often for special occasions such as funerals, weddings and anniversaries. Much of the poetry, of course, was mundane, but it always told a story and conveyed genuine moral and spiritual values.

Others simply wrote poetry because they enjoyed it or as a means of spiritual introspection and edification. Even those who did not write poetry enjoyed reading and listening to readings of poetry at various family and community functions.

Jakob L. Plett (1864-1931), Blumenhof, Manitoba, was a gifted poet and his great-grandson Patrick Friesen has become something of a Canadian national icon, for his award winning production "The Shunning". One of Jakob's poems was translated by Margaret Penner Toews in 1981 and published in Royden Loewen's *Blumenort* book, pages 190-191. Another poem by Jakob L. Plett, in its Danziger German original, "Ein Bruchlied aus Pruszen", was published in *The Golden Years*, page 160. The poem exudes the ancient Hollander culture and Low German Plaut already well established in the Werders east of Danzig by mid-16th century:

"Ein Bruchlied aus Prueszen"

1. Ach Gott wie groesze herzeleid,
Begegnet uns suz Winterzeit,
Ein Grausam Flut und Eis,
Schikt Gott das uns der Dam zerreiszt.

5. Am Freitag war um Sechsuhr,
da kamen alle Leut hervor,
Mit haender ringen angst geschrei,
Ach was es fuer ein jammer sie.

10. Da braust das Wasser grusam sehr,
Wie ich auch jetzt noch melden werd,
Fuenf Heuser nahm er mit sich fort,
Und bracht sie hin am andern Ort.

13. O weh des Feorster Werder Land,
Das ist verschommen und versand,
Gedenken wird es Kindes Kind,
Wie Grausam unser Land verrint.

Translation.

The poetry genre of literature has been overlooked in Mennonite studies, in part because of the difficulty in translating the ancient Danziger German vernacular to English so that modern-day descendants can read and understand it. The poetry was of the meter and rhyme variety being written so that the metre and rhythm became part of the poetry--part of the message, so to speak, sort of the antitheses of some modern-day poetry where the lack of punctuation or sentences becomes part of what the poet is attempting to say.

The difficulty is to find someone who can translate the meaning of the poetry and then put it together in English with some kind of meter and rhythm at least approximating to some extent the original.

One person who has this ability is Margaret Penner Toews, Neilsberg, Saskatchewan. She is

a renown poet in her own right having written and published four poetry books each having sold in excess of 10,000 copies. Margaret's poetry is imbued with a positive message and tone, full of uplifting and inspirational themes, and conveying traditional family and moral values.

Margaret is the daughter of John M. Penner, formerly of Greenland, who will be well-known to older readers. Her husband Milton Toews is the grandson of Peter Toews, the Bishop of the KG who led them to Manitoba in 1874-75 and, so, they are well-familiar with our story.

During a recent trip to Ukraine, Russia and Poland, Margaret wrote several poems about the experience. These poems stand in the Mennonite poetry tradition and provide a modern example of the artform both in terms of the medium and content. The following is one of these poems, "Gravestones under Polish Skies"

"Gravestones under Polish Skies"

Written by Margaret Penner Toews for a worship service held Sunday, May 17, 1998, in the graveyard of the former village of Tiegenhagen, Prussia, now Poland, established in 1300, the heartland of the Kleine Gemeinde.

I stumble through weeds and grasses
in search of a legible stone
'Neath the sun-dappled vines by a towering oak,
and I find one, lying prone,
And suddenly note on the mottled rock
a name quite a bit like my own.
And I wonder, did she love starlight?
and delight in the baking of bread?
Was she kind to her "kinder", or testy
...too tired to think what she'd said?
Did she faithfully teach them to pray,
the young ones who clung to her skirt,
And when they were older hugged them
to help them to deal with their hurt?
Was she fearful? or was she trusting,
aware that the Lord was her stay?
A century's gone since her spirit took flight,
and I wonder about that day.
Though time and weather and wars have worn
the stone that reveals her name
She is living Somewhere this moment,
as alive as the day she came.
As I study this stone in the graveyard
It suddenly shouts to exhort
In a sermon, loud and compelling,
"Life is so short ... so short...
Only a little flicker,
a brief small spark in the night
Till all of us lie underneath a stone
that marks each our comet's flight.
It's too short to waste in resentment,
or hug an elusive fame,
For honor is an illusion,
(so soon forgotten our name!)
Too short to withhold forgiveness,
or indulge in a lust for stuff
Which becomes a fettering millstone...
(there is never, never enough);
Too short to leave Jesus standing
outside of a heart's barred door;
Too short to turn from His mercy

into darkness forever more.
Lord, help me remember the sermon
preached by an eloquent stone
Under Poland's skies as I pause awhile
on my journey Home.

Conclusion.

What community on earth with a five hundred year tradition of poetry exuding the spirituality of martyrs, and the courage and loyalty of the ancient matriarchs, would obscure, hide, deprecate, and denigrate that tradition? Probably none.

It seems to me that every school child of Mennonite background, whether in Germany, Mexico, Manitoba, Kansas, or Paraguay, should be familiar with the great Mennonite poetry tradition. But where are our scholars and religious leaders who should be translating, publishing and researching the history of these works and writing about the tradition itself?

Modern secularized Mennonites have largely departed from this tradition and certainly they are the poorer for it.

Among conservative Mennonites there are still little enclaves here and there that practice the old ways. Where there's life, there's hope.

The poetry may not all be good enough to apply for Canada Council Grants, but then, it stands in a tradition which predates Canada by several centuries, and which may well outlast it also.



Correction on caption for Siemens Family Photo: (*Preservings*, No. 8, December 1996, Part Two, page 24): L. to r. should read: Elizabeth (b.1911), Katharina (b.1902), Maria (b. 1897), mother Helena Siemens (b.1877) with son Diedrich (b. 1922), standing in front, Margaretha (b.1919), father Johann D. Siemens (b.1871), Peter (b.1904), Johann (b.1908), and Heinrich (b.1915). Photo circa 1924.

Johann F. Reimer (1860-1941): Boyhood Sketches

Johann F. Reimer (1860-1941), Boyhood Sketches, Jansen, Nebraska, to Blumenort, Manitoba,
by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Family Background.

Johann F. Reimer was born in Tiege, Molotschna Colony, South Russia, in 1860, son of Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74) and grandson of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) in 1812. It is believed that it was young Klaas who invented the self-propelled carriage, or bicycle, in the early 1830s which cause his Aeltester Father so much embarrassment. In time young Klaas' inventive genius gained so much notoriety it became known as the "Tiegische Kunst".

In 1836 Klaas F. Reimer married (1817-64), Katharina W. Friesen, daughter of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, the second Aeltester of the KG and senior church statesman. Klaas Jr. was a well-to-do Vollwirt in Tiege, Molotschna, who was able to assist others with loans. Klaas F. Reimer was elected as deacon of the KG in 1840. He served in this position until 1852 when he was removed from the position by the Lehrdienst because of "accounting irregularities". The family is listed in the school registers for Tiege with children Katharina 12, Helena 11 and Jakob 7, attending school in 1861/2.

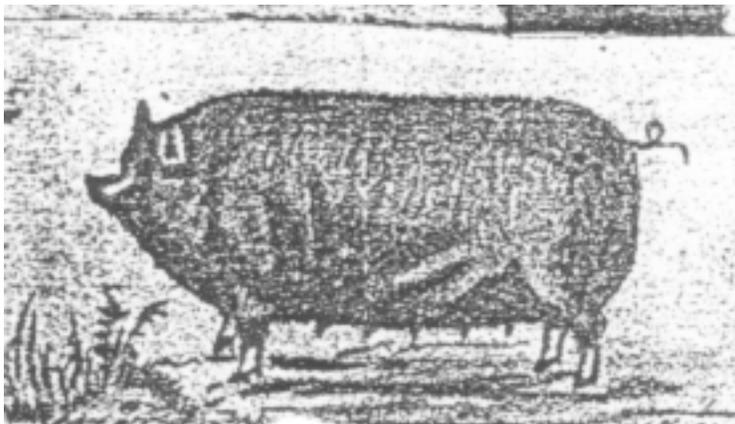
In 1865 Klaas married for the second time to Maria Bartel (1843-1921), daughter of Peter Bartel. An interesting story regarding this marriage is related by Daniel J. Classen, Meade, Kansas, that Klaas Reimer had originally spoken for the woman for his son, and then decided to take her for himself. As a result the son had committed suicide (Note One). The story if true might refer to Johann's brother Klaas Jr. who died two years later on Dec. 9, 1867. The story must be taken with a grain of salt as it was recounted by those who had converted to the religious culture and language of American Fundamentalism generally fanatical biased against any traditional religious groups such as the KG.

By 1871 the family had moved to Heuboden, Borosenko colony, northwest of Nikolopol. On October 15, 1874 Klaas F. Reimer died. He had prospered materially and at his death, after disposing of all properties in a depressed market and sending two sons to Berlin for medical treatment, his estate still consisted of 4,000 ruble cash. In 1875, his widow Maria Bartel Reimer, together with her step-children, including Johann, moved to Jansen, Nebraska. This was a big disappointment to her sisters, Katharina, and Anna, Mrs. Cornelius P.

Toews, the delegate, and her mother, who had immigrated to Manitoba in 1874.

Boyhood.

Notwithstanding these financial resources, the Reimer sons had to work out for others at an early age. Johann F. Reimer did a lot of sheep herding for Peter Jansen on the Jansen Ranch located several miles northeast of the town of Jansen, Nebraska. Johann was listed as a servant for Peter Jansen in the 1880 cen-



Drawing of a sow. 1878, drawn while herding sheep.

sus.

It was during this time that he did the sketches featured in this article. The four drawings which are extant indicate that Johann loved to sketch animals. He may often have fantasized about owning a large farm or ranch himself with prize-winning cattle and a Percheron stallion. His work shows considerable talent, consistent with the artistic tradition in the Reimer family as seen in the elegant wood carvings of his grandfather, Klaas Reimer--see *Preservings*, No. 7, Dec. 1995, page 46.

In 1880 Johann was baptised upon the confession of his faith by his cousin's son, Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, Jansen, Nebraska.

Abraham F. Reimer Journal, 1882-87.

In 1883 Johann travelled to Manitoba for the funeral of his sister Helena. Here he met Elisabeth R. Reimer, daughter of cousin, Abraham R. Reimer, and the couple fell in love. Johann's uncle Abraham F. "Fuella" Reimer (1808-92) in Blumenort, Manitoba maintained detailed journals and occasionally referred to his nephew: June 2, 1882. "Johann, son of Kl. Reimer, Nebraska, was here yesterday for dinner. For night Johann was at P. Reimers." October 19, 1885. "At 4:30 Joh., son of Kl. Reimer, came home from Nebraska, to A. Reimers to ask for their Elisabeth. He went home at 9:30. Sunday, June 14th, yes-

terday, the engagement of Elisabeth and Joh., son of Kl. Reimer from Nebraska was held."

Johann came to Blumenort to visit again in 1885. October 19 uncle Abraham F. Reimer recorded that "Johann from Nebraska came at 2 p.m. He was here for two hours, then he went to A. Penners."

Elisabeth R. Reimer (1867-1936).

Elisabeth R. Reimer was born in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, Imperial Russia, in 1867. Her father Abraham R. Reimer was the grandson of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) founder of the KG. Elisabeth's grandfather was Abraham F. "Feula" Reimer, renown for his detailed journals. Elisabeth's grandmother was Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, famous midwife and seamstress, Elisabeth's mother was Maria F. Reimer (1847-1916), a niece to Johann Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, the third KG Bishop.

Abraham R. Reimer had started as a blacksmith in Kleefeld, Molotschna, moved to Friedrichsthal, Markuslandt in 1864 and a few years later to Blumenhoff, Borosenko.

When Elisabeth's parents prepared to move to Canada she as a 6 year-old ran to the garden and filled her apron with carrots to take along. Whether she could take them along we don't know. When in Canada already she and her older brother were cutting brush. She held it down and accidentally he cut her wrist. He wrapped her apron around the wrist and sent her home. She could have bled to death. She took the scar along to the grave.

Elisabeth was baptized on the confession of her faith by Rev. Jacob Kroeker in 1885.

In Blumenort, Abraham R. Reimer became a large-scale farmer with sufficient resources to assist his neighbours and even the Clearsprings settlers with loans. In the aftermath of the Holdeman schism of 1882 Abraham was elected as deacon and his younger brother Peter as minister.

Marriage, 1886.

On March 21, 1886 Johann married Elisabeth Reimer, daughter of Abraham R. Reimer, deacon and large-scale farmer and blacksmith. Johann and Elisabeth lived in Blumenort for the first several months of their marriage doing normal things typically enjoyed by young couples like visiting her grandparents and uncles and aunts. October 19, Monday, 1886, uncle Abraham F. Reimer recorded as follows: "Joh. Reimers were here for an

hour or two. For lunch we were at A. Reimers.” On August 19, Grandparents, Abraham F. Reimers visited Joh. and Elisabeth Reimer “for dinner.”

Johann’s abilities as a carpenter and furniture maker were already in demand: On August 30, 1886, Abraham F. Reimer recorded that “A. Penner’s Katarina died, 19 weeks and five days....Joh. Reimer had made the coffin.” On October 30, 1886, “At 7 p.m. Joh. Reimer from here came from Steinbach. He had been building.”

Nebraska, 1886.

In fall of 1886 Johann and Elisabeth decided to move to Jansen, Nebraska, where his siblings lived. They left Blumenort on November 9th and settled in Jansen. They were homesick for Manitoba and wrote a number of letters to friends and relatives back home. Abraham F. Reimer made reference to them in his journal: May 29, 1887. Sunday, Pentecost, “Yesterday a letter came from Joh. Reimers. She wrote that at the earliest they would be home would be the last of June, as they first wanted their three young people to be baptised and that A. Friesen (Reimer?) should first come home from Omaha from his eye treatments. June 25, 1886. Last week Sunday, two letters arrived in Steinbach from Nebraska, one from Joh. Reimer, and one from his wife and Joh. Friesen.”

According to Mary Hiebert the Johann and Elisabeth were very lonely in Jansen, Nebraska, and “the doctor advised grandfather that they move back to Canada after only about a year or so there” (*Abraham Reimer Family Book*, page 83).

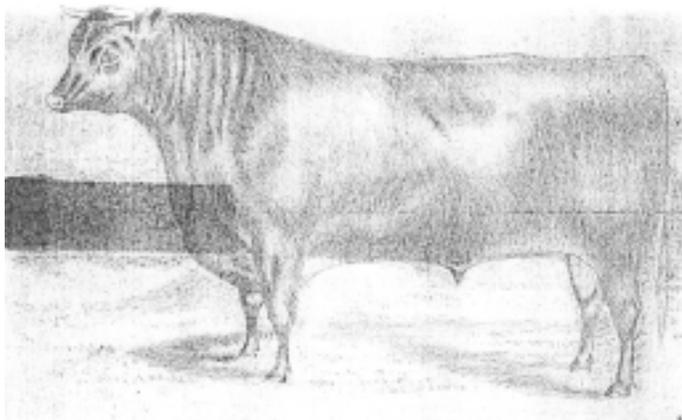
Blumenort, 1887.

In 1887 Johann and Elisabeth moved to Blumenort, Manitoba. Friday, July 15, 1887, Abraham F. Reimer recorded that “Johann Reimers and the aged Joh. Thiessen returned from Nebraska to Niverville....On July 18th he returned to Niverville to pick up the rest of their belongings and also the 100 dollars cash”

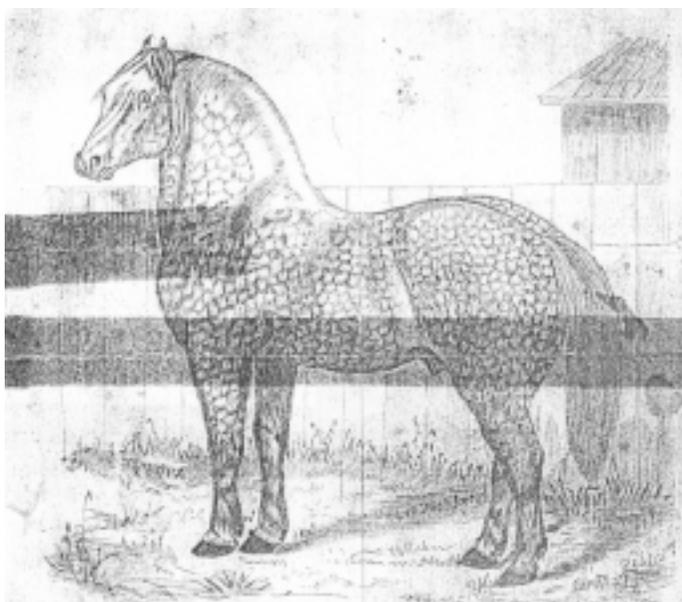
The following year Johann and Elisabeth purchased a house in Blumenhof and moved it to Blumenort where they established their home. Abraham F. Reimer recorded that “20 oxen and four horses were hitched together to form 12 teams. They in turn, were hitched to six wagons on which the house was put” (*Blumenort*, page 117).

Carpentry.

Johann was a carpenter and cabinet maker by trade. According to historian Royden Loewen, Blumenort and Steinbach were in the midst of a building boom at this time, as people replaced the crude structures of the pioneer years with more substantial woodframe buildings. This building boom fuelled a demand for



Drawing of a bull. Drawn in 1877 while Johann F. Reimer was herding sheep. Drawings of Johann F. Reimer, are courtesy of grandson David K. Reimer, Spanish Lookout, Belize, and Seymour, Texas.



Drawing of a stallion. Drawn 1878 while shepherding sheep. Of the four pieces extant, this is the finest example of Johann F Reimer’s sketching. The title at the bottom of the sketch indicates that Johann may have used a photo or painting as his model. “Imp. Norman Stallion, Duke of Percheron.”

Johann’s services. Abraham F. Reimer has recorded some of the details of Johann’s career: July 23rd, 1887, “Joh. Reimer made a made a scraper and a saw jig.” July 26, 1887, Joh. Reimer came here after breakfast with young Kl. Reimer from Steinbach and a box of tools to do some building in the steam mill.” August 25, 1887, “Joh. Reimer again went to Steinbach to work in the steam mill.”

In 1888 Johann Reimer built the new Blumenort house of worship. On Tuesday May 22, 1888, Abraham F. Reimer recorded

that “Joh. Reimer and young P. Thiessen from Nebraska, began to build the new school.”

Family life.

Johann and Elisabeth’s life was made complete with the birth of son, Abraham, on September 8, 1888. Their first born Abraham, born September 9, 1887, had died only a little more than a month previous on July 25, 1888.

According to the “Journal” of Jakob J. Classen, the Johann F. Reimers visited their siblings and friends in Jansen, Nebraska, in July of 1894.

Municipal assessment records for 1898 show that Johann F. Reimer had a relatively low assessment of \$472 and no land base. This indicates that he was making his living primarily from carpentry work and building construction.

The Farm, 1900;

In 1900 Johann F. Reimer and Peter I. Wiebe purchased the school land Section 29-7-6E on the old Winnipeg Road west of Blumenort which the Provincial Government out up for sale in that year. Historian Royden Loewen has reported that this caused considerable controversy with the Hochfeld villagers situated on the adjacent Section 30-7-6E. The Hochfelders, apparently had rented the land cheaply for a number of years and were upset that it was sold to the neighbouring Blumenorters. Wiebe moved out to his quarter, SE29-7-6E in 1900 but Reimer waited until 1902 until he relocated his buildings to the SW29-7-6E. He also leased the NW29-7-6E which he finally purchased in 1908 (*Blumenort*, page 254).

At this time the Reimers went more into farming possibly to provide work for a growing family which consisted of five sons and two daughters.

By 1906 municipal assessment records show that Johann F. Reimer had 240 acres of land, 60

acres cultivated, four horses, a large dairy with 15 cows, 12 heifers, and 18 pigs. Although he lived in Hochfeld, two miles west, Reimer was still assessed with the Blumenort villagers with a total assessment of 1645, more or less in the median range.

Johann and Elisabeth always kept their yard and buildings in perfect order as was everything else on the farm. Johann also had a blacksmith shop where he built a number of mechanical devices as well as doing some repair work. “By his relatives this skill was



Another sketch of a horse, titled "Success". Drawn in 1878 while shepherding sheep. Note that the neck of the horse is proportionately too large and its mane has not been clipped. Copies of Johann F. Reimer sketches are courtesy of grandson David K. Reimer, machinery dealer and businessman, Belize, C.A. and Seymour, Texas.

considered as belonging to their kin coming from Tiede, in Russia" Familienregister...Reimer, page 359.

On December 19, 1919, the Reimer family experienced a tragedy when their 15 year-old daughter Katharina died after a six month illness.

On November 7, 1923, Johann's brother Heinrich F. Reimer died in Meade, Kansas, and Johann went to attend the funeral which took place on November 10.

The Faith.

Johann F. Reimer was a diligent reader of the Bible and spent much time studying scripture. Johann F. Reimer was a conservative who often spoke out at brotherhood meetings in support of the faith once received debating passionately with others, including brother-in-law Heinrich R. Reimer, who favoured the adoption of more Revivalist religious culture.

Johann and Elisabeth believed in the sanctity of the family, "When their daughter Marie died June 13, 1916 grandparents took in the 16 day-old baby Maria who was left motherless. She remained as one of the family. Grandmother loved, and we grandchildren remember how she would remind us to love one another."

Johann and Elisabeth also had a heart of compassion to assist others in need. In 1925 Johann wrote that a number of Russländer families were still arriving in the community from time to time and that they were planning to take in a family that winter.

During this time the Reimers also provided a home to the aged widow Isaak Plett. She required assistance in dressing and getting around but ate only little. On one occasion, after looking through her old letters from 1865 and 1868 from back in Russia, he likened those agitating for change to Aeltester Jakob Wiebe who had seceded from the KG with a small group and led them astray to join an alien religious culture.

I recall great-uncle Peter A. Plett telling me, how Johann F. Reimer and his brother-in-law Heinrich R. Reimer frequently locked horns in debate at brotherhood meetings regarding faith issues during the 1920s. Johann was invariably on the conservative side, favouring preservation of the teachings of the past, and Heinrich was typically on the side of change, of adopting new ways.

It bears noting, as well, that Johann was probably one of the last of his generation who really understood the philosophical grounds for many of the old teachings. It was far more than simply an issue of simplicity and humility as the enemies of the conservatives have tried to make out. For example, four-part singing was opposed because of the alien religious language contained in the songs which the progressives wanted to import from Revivalist and Fundamentalist religious culture.

Similarly with Sunday School, men of Johann's stature would have opposed Sunday School because it meant adopting part of Revivalist and/or Fundamentalist religious culture. The idea of a Sunday School must have sounded cynical and hypocritical to Christians of Johann and Elisabeth's generation who believed that the entire elementary education of children should consist of Bible study and catechism, namely, Bible school, moral and ethical training five days a week. Unfortunately North America was entering a time when there was little respect for tradition and preservation of the vision of the past.

Conservative Mennonites typically believed that it was wrong to take pictures. As a result there are no photographs of Johann and Elisabeth.

Mexico, 1924.

Johann's siblings represented a wide spectrum of religious views but a number of them held firmly to the faith once received. After the forced anglo-conformity measures implemented in both Canada and the United States during World War One, there was strong interest among conservatives to emigrate. In 1922 8000 Old Coloniers and Sommerfelders moved to northern Mexico settling in the Cuauthemoc area. A small contingent of KG from Meade, Kansas, joined this movement and settled two villages, Hoffnungsau and Heuboden, known as to this day as the "Kaunsasdarpa". Two of Johann's siblings also emigrated, brother Jakob F. Reimer and sister Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob J. Friesen (son of minister Cornelius L. Friesen). Her husband was a minister and brother Jakob served as deacon. Also emigrating was Johann's nephew, Cornelius E. Reimer. Since the Reimers and Friesens came from a strong literary tradition there was considerable correspondence between these families.

In a letter of May 29, 1925, to Rev. C. L. Plett, Satanta, Kansas, Johann referred to the interest in a move to Quebec, noting his view "...that it would be better to go where the freedom to practice our faith was guaranteed, namely to Mexico, as my siblings have written to me."

Other KG families moving to Mexico in 1924 included Rev. Martin T. Doerksen, Henry D. Friesens, A. E. Friesens, and the Heinrich K. Friesen family from Rosenort, Manitoba, who had moved to Meade in 1916 and joined the Mexico move from there. Johann's sister Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob J. Friesen died in Mexico on August 28, 1932.



Photo of Johann F. Reimer house and yard on SW29-7-6E, circa 1935. View to the east. There must be some kind of family gathering in process as there are four model As on the yard. Note the veranda on the second floor as well as main floor. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Friesen, Box 21562, Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1B3.

Anyone interested in an up-to-date list of descendants of Johann F. and Elisabeth Reimer may contact grandson Peter K. Reimer, Box 205, Kleefeld, Manitoba, R0A 0V0.

Stroke, 1933.

“On December 8, 1933 while visiting in Steinbach grandmother had a stroke. She was

taken home on the big sleigh. Her left side was paralysed and she spent three months in bed. She recovered slowly and was later able to



Johann F. Reimer (back to camera) in front of his work shop. The shop was always meticulously clean and in order. Everything had its place and he could even find his bolts in the dark. The shop was kept locked so that grandchildren couldn't play in there. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Elisabeth Friesen, Steinbach.



Son Abraham R. E. Reimer (1890-1949), moved to Mexico in 1949 and died there of a heart attack. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 122.

Correspondence, 1924-28

In 1914 Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935), Friedensfeld (formerly Blumenhof), Manitoba, moved to Kansas where he married the widow Peter Heidebrecht, nee Katharina F. Reimer, Johann's sister. It was natural that correspondence would be exchanged between the families as both were literate and articulate men. The letters received by C. L. Plett were preserved by his family and include eight letters written by Johann F. and Elisabeth Reimer between 1924 and 1928. The following letter dated December 1, 1924, is typically of these writings:

December 1, 1924

Dearly beloved siblings, Kor. Pletts! It has been so long since I have written to you, and the love inspires me to visit you with an insignificant but yet well meant writing. Firstly, I wish you the best of health, both physically as well as spiritually, as a brotherly greeting. Amen.

Well, since your children are visiting around here in our midst, and we ourselves initially visited with them at your children Hein Pletts, we became aware that physically matters are not that well with you. We understand that your arm is not as one would wish because of arthritis or other sickness which is probably also aggravated by old age, the days of which we say, they are not to our liking. Both of you have also experienced much, but our path of woe is not yet ended, but it draws ever nearer.

For you have not invested your God-given talents lightly and have thereby gained other talents and souls...[a line missing at the bottom of page] so that many might yet come to a true knowledge of faith. He allows us to remain alive for this reason so that His

Word would increasingly be practised and according to which we shall live our lives, to the honour of God the Father, praise and glory unto Him from eternity to eternity. Amen.

Indeed, during these times the word of God is taught and preached in manifold interpretations, but the simplicity in Christ always seems to diminish more and more for the signs are often lacking within our hearts. It seems that we are not convicted, bowed and humble of heart; instead the preaching consists of human wisdom and the self-elevation of the world with earthly language.

But all the more we listeners must remain standing on the ramparts, in order that we might not be beguiled away from the simplicity in Christ, the way Paul writes in Acts chapter 20, verse 21, “Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day.”

Being mindful of this, it must have lain heavily and sorely on your heart to correctly exposit the unadulterated Word of God and to preach the same in the simplicity in Christ. Indeed, the enemy is a cunning deceiver seeking to ensnare us in the subterranean quagmires of this world, with crafty admonishment.

Menno in his forward of his letter to the Aeltesten of the Gemeinde, in Volume One of his complete works, page 371, also writes about such matters as follows; Guard yourselves against all new innovations and teachings, which are not manifested in the Words of Christ or His Apostles, and not being in accordance with the same. At all times, direct only to Christ and His Word. Everyone seeking to institute something else, other than Christ and His teachings, such shall you shun.

And further, on page 91, Volume One, he [Menno] writes, “In case they teach some-

thing inconsistent with Scripture and our faith, such we are to avoid.

I also report that the [widow] Isaak Plett has been living in our care since September 21. It is going quit well, she is fairly healthy, except for a little coughing. But her mental capacities are weak and she forgets quickly. She eats only very little, but does require some assistance as she can no longer dress and undress by herself.

Your sister, Mrs. Peter Reimer, is somewhat healthier in general. We were there to visit her recently. It is worth so much to her when someone comes to visit her and likewise when she receives letters.

We are, thanks be to God, well, other than colds which occasionally arise.

Now, it is again time that I must go to get Maria from school, which is also my daily job, to drive to the school twice a day, which is 2 1/2 miles. The way we have heard, things are improving somewhat with David Pletts' Gertruda, but nonetheless, she remains largely in bed. Aeltester Jakob Duecks are both very sickly and often confined to bed. We may drive there tomorrow.

The weather is quite fine according to our expectations, but we have already had up to 18 degrees frost and some snow, so that I drive Maria largely with the sleigh. Mrs. Plett requests very much that we pass on a greeting to you and also wishes for a letter from you, as do we also. She is also curious what her brother Peter Brandt is doing?

Now in closing, a heartfelt greeting to you and to all whose ears come to hear this. We ask you to give us the joy of a letter. As we have heard the Cor. Reimersche came home sick, is this so? Greet her. “Joh. F. and Elisabeth Reimer”



Daughter Elisabeth R. E. Reimer (1895-1976) 1952 passport picture. Elisabeth was married for the first time to Jakob F. Giesbrecht (1882-1948) and for the second time to Abraham M. Penner (1883-1953). Photo courtesy Elizabeth Friesen, Box 21562, Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1B3.

walk with help of a cane. Not being able to knit she busied herself sewing patches. In summer we'd bring a chair into the garden for her and she would pick gooseberries and other fruit."

"In January 1936 she began to suffer again. In April and May she was very sick and went to be with the Lord on May 22, 1936. She reached the age of 68 years, 7 months, 9 days. Her kidney trouble or cancer caused her a lot of pain."

"She loved her grandchildren a lot and would often request to see them, or to sing for her when the pain was more severe, sometimes even in the middle of the night. She wished all the grandchildren would memorize No. 211 Gesangbuch, 'Ringe recht wonn Gottes Gnade.'"

"Grandparents had visited the sick and poor a lot and had many friends. Records show that while grandmother was ill they got many visitors--an average of three couples a day" (*Abraham Reimer Family Book*, page 83).

Johann F. Reimer was a widower for the last five years of his life, (*Familienregister...Reimer*, 358-9). He died in 1941.

Nicknames.

In traditional Mennonite communities there was so many individuals with the same name and even the same middle initials that almost everyone received some kind of a nickname or "Eakche nome". If someone had a big maple tree in their front yard, they would be sure to called "Mapletree" Reimer to distinguish them from a host of relatives and neighbours. There were obviously many Johann Reimers in the Steinbach and Blumenort area, and most of them were also related. e.g. Johann F. Reimer had a brother-in-law Johann R. Reimer but his wife also had

an uncle by the same name. His wife's uncle Klaas R. Reimer, pioneer merchant in Steinbach had a son called Johann, known as "Busch" Reimer. Elisabeth's uncle Peter also had a son Johann P. Reimer who somehow managed to escape the nickname mania, perhaps because he was a quiet well-mannered preacher's son.

Because Johann F. Reimer had grown up in Nebraska, he always talked with a bit of an accent, which came out like a bit of a "schlore" or drag; it could also sound a bit like someone whining. Consequently Johann F. Reimer received the appellation, "Gjnou" Reimer, literally "complaining" Reimer. The other nickname Johann received was "Auplemous" Reimer, or literally "apple fruit pudding" Reimer. Apparently the family frequently enjoyed apple fruit moos and hence the name.

Conclusion.

The sketches of Johann F. Reimer carried on a significant artistic tradition in the family commencing with the wood carvings by grandfather Klaas Reimer, and continuing with the inventive talent, the "Tiegische Kunst", of father Klaas Jr. Johann also continued a significant literary tradition as is evident from the letters referred to above.

Johann's sketches consist of clean bold lines and slightly magnified shapes. They speak to the power of beauty based on simplicity, not cluttered, straightforward and not sophisticated, the KG aesthetic ideal.

Johann and Elisabeth were not only interested in preserving the faith of the fathers but also preserved and passed on various items of material cultural of critical interest to the Hanover Steinbach area including his grandfather's cane, and an ancient "kjist"--see *Preservings*, No. 12, June 1998, pages 92-94.

These values were evident in the lives of Johann F. and Elisabeth Reimer, manifested by the cleanliness and orderliness of their farming operations, their charity and hospitality to others, and, last but not least, their simple and abiding faith. Through their lives and example, their words and deeds, they have left a living legacy not only to a host of descendants but also to the entire Hanover Steinbach community.

Descendants.

Johann F. Reimer and Elisabeth R. Reimer were the parents of Cornelius R. E. Reimer (1902-59) who served as the Aeltester of the Kleingemeinde in Mexico from 1949 until his death. Another son Abraham R. E. Reimer (1890-1949) became the first adult to die in Mexico after the Kleingemeinde emigration of 1948. Abraham's grandson Wilbert Friesen is the owner of "Racka Roofing", Steinbach, and granddaughter Wilma Friesen is married to Bruce Barkman, Barkman Gravel, Kleefeld. Son Jakob R. E. Reimer (1891-1954), was the father of former Steinbach building moved Peter B. Reimer. Son Peter R. E. Reimer (1907-1968) was the father of bus driver Peter K.

Reimer, Kleefeld, machinery dealer David K. Reimer, Seymour, Texas, and grandfather of John Reimer, Credit Manager, Penner Chev. Son John R. E. Reimer (1890-1968) was the grandfather of Dorothy Schinkel, Steinbach.

Endnotes:

Note One: Daniel J. Classen, "The Kleine Gemeinde of Meade, Kansas," research paper, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, 1979, page 7.

Sources:

John C. Reimer, ed., *Familienregister...Klaas und Helena Reimer* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 404 pages.

Abram C. Reimer, *Abraham R. Reimer Family Book* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1987), 308 pages.

Royden Loewen, *Blumenort* (Blumenort, 1983), 669 pages.

Cornelius L. Plett, Letter collection 1914-35, copy in the possession of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives, 440 Main Street, Steinbach, Manitoba. This letter collection also includes some 50 letters from various Reimer relatives in Mexico written between 1924 and 1934 and would form the basis for a history of the first Kleine Gemeinde settlement in Mexico in 1926.

75 Jahre Mennonite in Mexico, pages 90-95, includes 21 photographs from the "Kansasdorfer".

See material culture section for article on the Heinrich R. Reimer house, Landmark, by Hulda Plett.

Thank-you, Tina and Denver.

I don't typically do biographies for families like the one on Johann F. Reimer (1860-1941). But I decided to do the biography of Johann and Elisabeth Reimer as my way of saying thank-you to Tina and Denver Plett, Spanish Lookout, Belize, for their kind hospitality, for hosting us in their home for five nights last February. So this is for you, and your children and your children's children. I hope you and you siblings and cousins, enjoy the article.

Much more could be written, more letters and writings gathered, and reminiscences collected, which I will leave for the family to do. But the article as written should give an idea of Johann and Elisabeth Reimer, who they were and what their aims and dreams were. Good luck!

Peter Klippenstein 1819-85, Municipal Secretary

Peter Klippenstein (1819-85), Heuboden, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, to Chortitz, Manitoba: community leader and Municipal Secretary, by Delbert Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Family Background.

Peter Klippenstein (1819-85) was the son of Bernhard Klippenstein (1781-1841), born in Krebsfelde, Prussia, 1781. Bernhard immigrated to the Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia, in 1804, where he married Katharina Penner (1785-1865), the following year. The Klippensteins had 12 children of whom five survived to adulthood and founded families.

Bernhard and Katharina Klippenstein lived in the village of Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, where they were listed in the Revision of 1814 with the following property: 5 horses, 9 cattle, 2 sheep, 3 swine, 1 plow, 1 wagon and a spinning wheel. Later they moved to the village of Chortitz on the west bank of the Dneiper River where they resided until his death in 1841. The cause of Bernhard's death was stated as "a sickness of 3 1/2 day duration, small pox [Blätter] on the left side." The funeral services for Bernhard Klippenstein were conducted by minister David Epp, Chortitz, on August 6, 1841. The text of the sermon was Hebrews 13:14. His wife died on May 17, 1841.

Son Peter Klippenstein (1819-85), his older brother Johann (1809-77) BGB A26, and sister Katharina (1811-92), Mrs. Johann Neufeld BGB A63, moved to the Bergthal Colony and took part in the emigration to Manitoba in 1874-6. Katharina married for the second time to Bernhard Friesen A 39, and for the third time to Heinrich Friesen BGB A75. Siblings Heinrich (1806-73), Aganeta (1814-39) and Bernhard (1827-1902), lived in Chortitza and remained in Russia. Brother Heinrich was a school teacher in the Chortitz Colony.

From brother Johann Klippenstein (1809-77) are descended the other line of Bergthaler Klippensteins, who settled in Neu-Bergthal near Altona. Their descendants include Ted Friesen, D. W. Friesen, Altona, and archivist Laurence Klippenstein. The information regarding the family of Bernhard Klippenstein is courtesy of Ted Friesen, "Johann Klippenstein book".

Life in Bergthal.

On November 8, 1838, Peter Klippenstein married Aganetha Enns (1816-1901) BGB A114. She was the daughter of Isaak Enns (1794-1839).

By 1858 the Peter Klippenstein family lived in the village of Heuboden, Bergthal Colony, where he served as the village mayor (*Oberschulz*, page 22). While resident in Heuboden, Peter Klippenstein compiled a small journal with the birth, death and marriage dates of his family, including wife Anganeta, and chil-

dren. This journal was continued by son Heinrich, passed on to grandson David and is presently in the possession of great-grandson John D. Klippenstein, Steinbach.

The journal stands as a testimony to the heartaches experienced by the Klippenstein family as six of their children died in infancy from a variety of diseases and ailments between 1841 and 1863. Especially noteworthy are the three little daughters, Helena, Susanna and Margaretha, who died within five days of each other, August 26 to September 1, 1863. Another three children died in early adulthood, between 1869 and 1872, including son Peter who was survived by a daughter Anganetha who was taken in and

Klippenstein, 57 labourer, Anganetha 59 wife, Aganetha 7 child, Helena 16 spinster, Johann 15 labourer, Heinrich 25 labourer, Anganetha 2 child, Catherine 21 spinster, Catherine 1 child."

The family travelled with the last contingent to leave Bergthal. As an experienced village mayor Peter served as one of the leaders of the travelling contingent (*Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, page 257). The group included important community leaders who had stayed behind in Bergthal to conclude the Colony's business affairs, including Oberschulz Jakob Peters, Cornelius B. Friesen, Waisenman, and Vice-Aeltester Franz Dueck. Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe has referred to Peter Klippenstein writing that "...the older *Oberschulz* who together with the senior Klippenstein and the minister Franz Dueck had had to carry the last heavy struggle in Russia..." (pages 49 and 54).

Chortitz, Manitoba.

The Peter Klippenstein family settled in the village of Chortitz where a number of farmyards were left vacant when several families, the Groenings, Vogts and Klassens, decided to move on the West Reserve. Here they also joined daughter Katherina and her husband Jakob Giesbrecht who had immigrated a year earlier.

On February 10, 1877, Peter filed for a homestead on NE22-5-7E. a property previously homesteaded by Johann Neudorf. On November 11, 1877, son Heinrich filed for a homesteaded on SE3-7-5E. According to the Seelenlisten of 1882, Peter and Anna Klippenstein had taken in a foster daughter, Aganetha Klippenstein, presumably their son Peter's daughter born December 6, 1868. Granddaughter Anganeta Klippenstein age 12 and a certain Johann, are listed with the family in the 1881 census.

In 1880 Peter Klippenstein became the first Secretary-Treasurer of the Rural Municipality of Hanover, serving from the beginning of May, 1880, until the end of 1883. See minutes of meetings 1880 to 1884 in article following. Apparently Klippenstein made this his full time work as according to the tax records of 1883 and 1884, his farming activities were negligible. The Bergthaler

Brandordnung shows that Peter Klippenstein was moderately well-off with a house assessed in 1881 at \$300, furniture \$300, and a variety of farm equipment. The tornado of 1881 did heavy damage at the home of son (cousin?) Heinrich Klippenstein in Schönthal (David Stoesz, Journal, page ____).

Son Heinrich also settled in Chortitz taking out homesteads on NW18-7-5E on March 5,



1897. Son Heinrich Klippenstein (1850-1915), standing, with his wife Katharina Klippenstein, nee Goertzen, seated to the left, holding son Bernhard Klippenstein (b. 1895), and mother Aganetha Klippenstein, nee Enns, seated to the right. Photo courtesy of John Klippenstein, Steinbach.

raised by her grandparents. Daughter Anganetha (Mrs. Jakob Rempel) was survived by a son, Peter K. Rempel.

Emigration, 1876.

Peter Klippenstein and son Heinrich and families emigrated from Russia in 1875 crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the S.S. Sardinian arriving in Quebec City on July 30, 1876: "Peter



Page one of Peter Klippenstein's "Familienbuch"

1879. Daughter Katharina and son-in-law Jakob Giesbrecht filed for a homestead on NE12-7-5E on May 20, 1880. Son-in-law Jakob was a successful farmer, farming two quarters of land, with 54 acres cultivated in 1883, the second highest in Chortitz, next only to Heinrich Goertzen. By 1884 Giesbrechts assessment had increased to 1010, still second in Chortitz.

Journals 1880-81.

References to the work of Peter Klippenstein as Municipal Secretary are found in several local journals. Abraham F. (Fuella) Reimer July 27, 1880: "I rip the fur cap of Klippenstein from Chortitz." Reimer's wife ran a home business manufacturing various clothes and must have taken on the job of making Klippenstein a new "Schilt metse". On Wednesday, October 6,



A page from the 1880 Rural Municipality of Hanover Council minutes.

1880, "The Colony assistant, Klippenstein from Chortitz was yesterday and until today at Abr. Reimers over night." Johann L. Dueck was the Schulz (mayor) of Grünfeld (Kleeefeld) for many years. On October 8, 1881, he recorded: "Treasurer Klippenstein evaluated our properties on the 6th."

Conclusion.

Peter Klippenstein died at 2:30 a.m. on March 30, 1885, after a severe three months illness. His wife Anna Enns remained a widow for 16 years. She passed away December 10, 1901, at 4 p.m., having been sick for six months. She was the grandmother of 27 children and the great-grandmother over 51 children.

Thus ended the lives of an important pioneer couple who had greatly influenced the Bergthaler people, firstly, as community lead-

ers, with Peter serving firstly as village mayor in Russia and, later, as first Secretary of the Rural Municipality of Hanover 1880-82. Peter and Anna Klippenstein established a tradition of community service continued to this day by many of their descendants in the Hanover Steinbach area.

Descendants.

Peter and Anna Klippenstein were survived by two children.

Son **Heinrich Klippenstein** married for the second time to Katharina Goertzen, daughter of Abraham Goertzen also of Chortitz. Their descendants include John D. Klippenstein, Klippenstein Accounting. Another descendant is Stan Toews, currently Councillor of the R. M. of Hanover for the New Bothwell (Kronsthal-Osterwick) area.

Daughter **Katharina Klippenstein** married Jakob Giesbrecht (b. 1841) BGB B246. Their descendants include Levi Goertzen, former accountant Penner Dodge, and John Giesbrecht, former owner of "Giesbrecht Appliances", Steinbach, and Marvin Giesbrecht, a Winnipeg lawyer.

Sources.

Peter Klippenstein, "Verzeichniz Ueber die Gebornen und Gestorbenen in die Familie des Peter Klippenstein, Heuboden," unpublished journal, 12 pages, courtesy of great-grandson John D. Klippenstein, Box 2258, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Ted Friesen, *The History and Genealogy of Johann (1845-1925) & Agatha (1845-1927) Klippenstein* (Altona, Manitoba, 1993), 140 pages.



Heinrich G. Klippenstein (1883-1964) was the son of Heinrich E. Klippenstein (1850-1915). Heinrich Jr. was married to Maria Rempel Klippenstein (1884-1950), Chortitz. Mrs. Klippenstein was the daughter of Johann S. Rempel (1853-1928). The Klippenstein family lived on NE22-7-5E where George and Marie Rempel now live (see Pres. No. 7, page 7). In 1948 the Klippenstein family moved to Paraguay. Photo courtesy of Heritage Collections, page 307.

Gen	Name	Birth	Marriage	Death
3	Peter Klippenstein	Jan 14,1819	Nov 8,1838	Mar 30,1885
	m Anganeta Enns	Apr 4,1816		Dec 10,1901
4	Peter Klippenstein	Aug 6,1838		Mar 27,1841
4	Katarina Klippenstein	Oct 22,1840	Aug 18,1863	
m	Jakob Giesbrecht	Jul 13,1841		
4	Maria Klippenstein	Aug 16,1842		Mar 16,1843
4	Peter Klippenstein	Jan 18,1844		Mar 22,1872
4	Aganeta Klippenstein	Dec 6,1845	May 23,1865	Apr 31,1869
m	Jakob Rempel	Jul 19,1844		
4	Maria Klippenstein	Oct 26,1847		
4	Heinrich Klippenstein	Apr 8,1850		May 26,1915
m	Catarina Mueller	Jan 20,1854	Jun 5,1872	
2m	Katharina Goertzen			
4	Boernd Klippenstein	Jun 13,1854		Nov 2,1872
4	Marareta Klippenstein	Feb 26,1857		Mar 4,1857
4	Helena Klippenstein	Nov 21,1858		Sep 1,1863
4	Susanna Klippenstein	Sep 21,1860		Aug 26,1863
4	Margaretha Klippenstein	Apr 2,1862		Aug 28,1863

Gerhard Kliever, Passport and Reisebericht

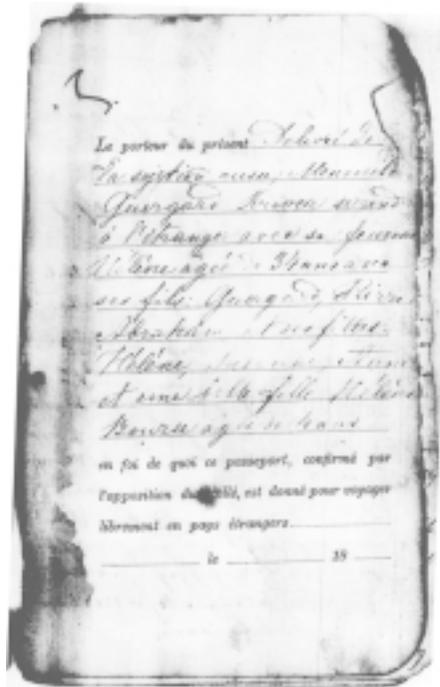
“Gerhard Kliever, Passport and Reisebericht” by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Biography.

Gerhard Kliever (1836-96) was the son of Peter and Susanna Kliever, Rudnerweide (Wirtschaft 35, 1835 census), Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia. In 1861 he married Helena Buhr from the Bergthal Colony where they made their home BGB A 203a. In 1875 they immigrated to Manitoba settling one mile south of the present-day community of Niverville, in a village called Schantzenfeld, established by Helena's parents a year earlier.



Gerhard Kliever (1836-96), first Reeve of the R. M. of Hanover. Photo courtesy of Lydia Penner, Hanover 100 Years, page 163. Photo from *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec 1997, page 92.



In German and French, the passport states as follows: “Released from Russian obligations (citizenship?), [the] Mennonite Gerhard Kriewer, travelling to foreign destinations, with his wife Helena and sons Gerhard, Peter, Abraham and daughters Helena, Susanna, Anna, and his (in-law) foster daughter, Helena Buhr, 4 years old.”

In 1881 Gerhard Kliever became the first Reeve of the Rural Municipality of Hanover, serving a two year term, with Peter Klippenstein, Chortitz, serving as the first Secretary-Treasurer. See minutes of Rural Municipality of Hanover Council Meetings following.

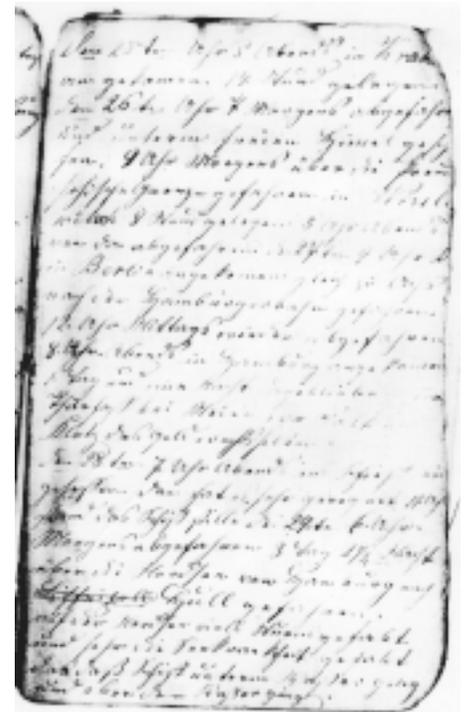
Passport and Reisebericht.

In *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 66-67, Nettie Neufeld told the story of Gerhard Kliever's, “Sermon Book”, and in *Preservings*, Issue 11, pages 92-93, she added the story of his emigration account, which we assumed came from one of his journals. In one of those amazing twists of fate, the original of this account turned up in May of 1998, being inscribed inside his original Russian passport.

Acknowledgements.

The numerous descendants of Gerhard Kliever still living in the Hanover Steinbach area and elsewhere are indebted to Gus Dueck, Mitchell, whose keen eye for historical material immediately spotted the passport and who was kind enough to pass it on to *Preservings*. Gerhard Kliever was one of the most important leaders in the early history of the area and any memorabilia like this is of great importance both as historical artifact and for the information it provides about the pioneer years.

We are also grateful to the Ann Doerksen,



Page one of the account of the six week immigration odyssey from Imperial Russia to Manitoba, the English translation of which was published in *Preservings*, Issue 11, page 93.

Mrs. Jake Doerksen, Toround, who preserved the box full of old “Rundschau” for all these years which contained the passport. As soon as this issue of *Preservings* has been published, the passport will be delivered to the local Heritage Village Museum, where it will be preserved as the immensely important artifact it is.

Death.

“Gerhard Kliever was the first Reeve of the Rural Municipality of Hanover and served in that capacity from 1880 to 1882. He also supplied lumber for the first school in Niverville.In 1896 they build a large new frame house without a basement. They had lots of trees around their house.”

“Mr. Kliever died in 1896 when the new house was built. His widow Helen (nee Buhr) was a spunky woman. Her children were all married except the youngest two, Cornelius and Katherina. Mrs. Kliever died 13 years later in 1909 at the age of 73. She died in Gretna while visiting her daughter Susan Hiebert. Her body was brought to Niverville on a democrat drawn by two horses, a trip of 12 hours” from Regina Doerksen Neufeld, “Schantzenurg,” in *Working Papers*, page 100.



Gerhard Kliever's Imperial Russian passport dated May 31, 1875. Note the official Russian stamps.

R.M. of Hanover Council Minutes 1880-1884

Translated from the German original minute books in the possession of the Rural Municipality of Hanover
by Rev. Ben Hoepfner, Valhalla Dr., Winnipeg, Manitoba, and edited by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Book One - May, 1880 - Jan., 1896, 91 pages.
(Page 1).

May 8, 1880.

The first sitting of the Municipality was held here in Chortitz on May 8, 1880. It was decided that the remuneration for these meetings be set at \$2.00 per day and travelling expenses at 10 cents per mile. The Secretary was hired for \$60.00 until the end of the year. It was decided that the meetings are to convene at the premises of Peter Klippenstein, the next meeting shall be held on May 18.

The second sitting was held May 18. All seven members of the municipality were present. It was decided as follows: firstly, the roads from one colony to another shall be brought into order and fit for travelling by the use of statutory labour; secondly, that the mayors (Schulzen) shall be directed in writing that livestock shall not be allowed to wander loose. The cattle must either be in the care of a herdsman or shall be kept in a paddock; thirdly, the chairman, Gerhard Kliewer was authorized to accept the sum of \$400, written as Four Hundred, as a contribution from the government for the improvement of roads and bridges.

The third sitting was held on June 24. All members of the Municipality were present. It was decided as follows: firstly, that the levies in kind (Zechen) be abolished and that money shall be paid instead: a) when papers (notices) are delivered, 5 cents a mile; b) for driving to a meeting or when money is being collected, 10 cents a mile, c) for work on bridges and dams (roads), 75 cents per person. Whoever does not work shall pay the equivalent; d) for a pair of horses or oxen 60 cents a day, for a wagon 15 cents a day, a plow 15 cents a day, the statute labour (Kormallen) are fixed as follows: two days are required of every landowner according to how much land, and two days also of every male over 18, the beginning (Note One).

At a meeting with all the Schulzen (mayors) present it was agreed that the workers are not to be under 16 years old.

(Page 2) The following decisions were made at the sitting held September 23, 1880. Firstly, the assessments were set: cultivated land \$1.00 per acre; 2) the community pasture land 50 cents, 3) a horse and heifer \$30.00, 4) oxen 3 years and over \$20.00 a piece; 5) cows and 2-year old oxen \$12.00 a piece; 6) a one-year old ox or cow \$6.00; 7) calves \$3.00 a piece; 8) sheep \$2.00 a piece; 9) lambs \$1.00 a piece; 10) hogs 50 cents a piece.

Also, it has been decided that no one shall be allowed to start a prairie fire without the prior approval of the village assembly as has sometimes been the case previously, by the young people out of mischief. Violation of this will merit legal punishment (Page 2).

(Page 3) **1881**

The first sitting was held on January 7, 1881.

All eight persons were present. Firstly it was proposed that the Secretary was to receive 50 dollars per year for the secretarial work of the municipality, and \$30 for looking after the accounts of the "bread debts" (Brotschulden), in total \$80.00.

Secondly, everyone should provide their labour regarding the community work [statute labour] with respect to bridges, roads, Kormallen [?] and shall also provide the draught animals necessary for that purpose. Everyone is to do his part in building bridges and roads and corrals and provide the animal power for that purpose. Those who refuse to provide such service must pay a worker \$1.50 per day. Teachers, however, are completely exempted from the performance of such statutory labour (Reichendienst).

The second sitting was held on March 28. All of the council members were present. The Kormallen and a number of different items were discussed.

The third sitting took place on June 7. It was decided with the Schulzen [the village mayors] to commence with the Korallen on June 13th and the last group to be finished on July 8. The workers were divided into seven groups.

The fourth sitting on July 7 was held together with the Schulzen at which time the Schulzen submitted the lists with the number of workers. The assistant [Gehulfe] Abram Reimer was absent.

The fifth sitting was held on September 17. A decision was made regarding assessments: cultivated land per acre \$1.00, community pasture 50 cents per acre, a horse per head \$30.00, oxen 3 years and over \$20.00 a piece, cows \$12.00 a piece, a one-year old ox and cow \$6.00, calves \$3.00; dwellings and furniture to be assessed at one-half the amount that each property is entered for in the Brandordnungen.

The sixth sitting was held on the 15th of November.

(Page 5) **1882**

1882. The first sitting January 14 and all members were present. The Secretary Peter Klippenstein was hired again for a year, the remuneration he is to receive is \$60.00 for the municipal work and \$30 for looking after the "bread debts". It was discussed that each member was to take responsibility to earnestly demand the payment of the bread debt in his township. The bread debt is to be liquidated as far as possible.

The second sitting was held on March 23. All eight members were present, except Peter Toews, Bergfeld, because of bad roads.

The third sitting was held on April 12 together with the Schulzen [village mayors], Peter Wiebe not present (Note Two). Firstly it was decided regarding the bridges that they shall be improved where necessary at our own expense. The "Kormallen" were again discussed and that

in two places the villages have been divided, at David Ungers' and Gerhard Klassens'. Also hired those who so desired, the wages were \$1.50 per day. It was also decided that each male person from 18-60 years must work two days for the land and two days for every soul. Also the information as to births, deaths and marriages shall be submitted by June 25.

The fourth meeting was held on May 30 with the Schulzen present. Peter Wiebe was not present (Note Two). It was decided to begin with the Kormallen on the 12th of June and to work on them until the 24th. Bergfeld, Kronsgard, Grünthal and Gnadenfeld have rejected the Kormallen.

The fifth sitting was held on August 19. Peter Wiebe was not present. It was decided that anyone who threshes with a steam engine must place the grain straw a hundred yards from any buildings, and that tobacco smoking is strongly prohibited during threshing as well as near other machinery while threshing and in other similar places.

The sixth sitting was held on September 30. The following decisions were made regarding the

Directive:

To the assembled Schulzen [mayors] of Chortitz, Schönweise, Reinfeld, Schönthal, Osterw., Schanzenburg, Strasberg and Pastwa.

The same are ordered to read the following to their residents and to publicize to the same: firstly, anyone intending to thresh with a steam machine must bring the grain together at least a 100 yards from the dwellings. Anyone who starts a fire thereby causing damage shall not hope to receive any fire insurance money. It is also strictly forbidden to smoke tobacco near the threshing machine, steam engine or near any other machines, as well as near hay stacks and other similar places, as is frequently the practice. Those who do not give heed to these regulations will be punished according to the laws.

Similarly it is hereby ordered that the head of every household shall take heed that he and his children and servants do not start any prairie fires, as was the case in previous years, on account of which many lost their hay crop through fire, and whereby the land was also seriously damaged because much land was thereby burned over. For this reason everybody shall pay punctual attention when the time comes, that preventative fire guards are burned or plowed around villages or farms in order that fire does not burn out of control causing damage to others.

Chortitz, August 21, 1882

Gerhard Kliewer, Chairman

Peter Neufeld, member

Peter Toews, "

Abram Dyck, "

Peter Toews, "

Franz Dyck, "

assessments: cultivated land \$1.00 per acre, unbroken land 50 cents per acre, dwellings and furniture to be assessed at half of the fire insurance valuation, horses 40 dol. a piece, oxen 25 dol., cows and 2-year old oxen 15 dol., yearlings 8 dol., calves 5 dol., sheep 3 dollars, lambs 1 dollar, and hogs 1 dollar, and 3/4 cent to be paid for each dollar.

(Page 7)
1883

The first sitting was held on the 13th of January. Except for the Kleine Gemeinder all members were present. The annual budget was presented. Also the Secretary of the municipality was hired for \$60.00 per year. It was also decided that two are to be elected to audit the accounts. And the Waisenamt shall hold elections to be in charge of the bread debt and treasury, and other matters more.

The second sitting was held March 20. Franz Dyck was absent. A number of matters regarding the ministerial and church affairs were discussed, regarding working on roads, payment of the bread debts, also to conclude the "Hepetelk", the debtors and more of the like.

The third sitting was held on May 26. All members were present. It was decided that every man from 18 to 60 years shall work two days on the roads, namely, those who turned 18 or 60 prior to the New Year.

The fourth sitting was held June 2. All members were assembled, including John Peter[son] an Englishman. A petition or community representation was prepared with regard to the road to Winnipeg, directed to the government that they should make the same passable and affirm the same.

The fifth sitting was held June 30th and all members were present. It was decided that on July 18 we would begin with the road work and on the 25th with the "korallen". The daily remuneration shall be \$1.50 per day per man, \$1.50 for a team of draught animals, a wagon 30 cents, and for a plow 50 cents per day.

The sixth meeting was held on September 22 and all members were together. It was decided to keep the assessments as formerly: _____ [appears to be a line missing at the bottom of the page] cultivated land \$1.00 per acre, unbroken land 50 cents per acre, dwellings and furniture according to half of the fire insurance valuations.

The seventh sitting was held on November 17. All officials were in attendance. The tax rate was established, half a cent for every dollar. Also dealt with the roads and the mail service, also _____[?].

On November 26 a meeting was held regarding the bread debt, which everyone allowed themselves to be _____[?] in the house of prayer.

The Council was together on December 1 to discuss the bridges. Only three persons.

On December 3rd the Council again [gathered] regarding the bridges and to discuss the petition. Only three persons.

(Page 9)1884 [Note Three]

The first sitting was held January 12, 1884. The entire Council was gathered together as well

as many others. It was decided that the bridges were to be completed.

1) Abr. Friesen, Steinbach, has agreed to build the bridge across the "Rohr" Creek (Note Four). It is to be 40 feet long and 12 feet wide and contracted for 220 dollars and received \$50.00 as a down payment.

2) Abr. Friesen, Steinbach, also agreed to provide the lumber for the bridge in Rosengart for \$75.00. The bridge is to be 30 feet long and 12 feet wide.

3) Isaac Penner, Blumenort, has agreed to build the bridge in Neuanlage for 29 dollars and received 10 dollars as down payment. It is to be 10 feet long and 12 wide.

4) The bridge between Gnadenfeld and Grünthal was contracted by Jacob Funk and Jacob Pries, Gnadenfeld, for 60.00 dollars. It is to be 20 feet long and 12 feet wide. They received \$20 dollars as a down payment.

Council was together on March 1, 1884. The petition to the Minister of Agriculture was completed requesting approval of a Bylaw regarding the election of Municipal officials. There was also discussion regarding many other current matters, also the budget for the bread debt was presented.

The third sitting was held on April 5th, 1884. It was decided that every male person between ages of 18 to 60 shall be required to provide two days of labour for the roads, and one day of labour is to be provided for every homestead. It was also decided that Peter Unger be brought to the mental institute in Winnipeg.

The fourth sitting was held on June 3rd, 1884. All Council members were present. It was decided that on June 9th work on the roads would continue from where it was left off the previous year, except the villages of Schönwiese, Schönthal, Kronsthal, Osterwick, Scharenberg [Schantzenberg] and Strassburg would build the grade for the dam at the bridge across the "Rohr" Creek.

The fifth sitting was held on June 14th, 1884. It was decided that the dikes [Ufer] on the canal along the southeastern boundary of Township 7, Range 4 were to be rebuilt, where they had subsided and to hire workmen for money, manual labourers to receive \$1.50 per day. Only three council members and the Reeve were present.

The sixth sitting was held on June 24th, 1884. A by-law was enacted regarding the election of the council members of the municipality for 1885. Three councillors and the Reeve were present. Many other items were also discussed.

The seventh sitting was held on September 8th. It was decided regarding the misdemeanour of the son of Jacob Hübert that he shall _____[?] Saturday regarding the damage occasioned by him to the Municipal Office [?].

(Page 11)

The eighth sitting was held on September 13th, 1884. It was decided that Jacob Hübert, Kronsgart, pay to Franz Sawatsky, also of Kronsgart, the sum of 10 dollars for the horse which Abram (Hübert's son) had taken out of the barn during the night and ridden it. The terms of the penalty is to be payable by June 1, 1885. As additional

punishment, Abram shall perform two days of earth work on the bridge in Grünthal.

The ninth sitting was held on October 4th, 1884. All five members were present. It was decided that in order to meet the forthcoming expenditures, the appropriate assessments were to be set as follows: cultivated land 1.00 dollar per acre, unbroken land 75 cents, a horse 90 dollars, an ox 30 dollars, a cow 15 dollars, 2-year old oxen 15 dollar, 1-year old heifers 8 dollars, calves 5 dollars, a sheep 2 dollars, a hog 1 dollar. The buildings and furniture are to be assessed at one-half of the fire insurance valuations.

The tenth sitting was held on December 9th. All five Council members were present. The ones who still owe bread debt were together and everyone had to state how much they can pay by the end of 1885.

The eleventh sitting was held on December 27th, 1884. All six were together. The electoral lists were submitted.

Endnotes:

Note One: The term "kormallen" has me puzzled. From the context it must refer to some form of "Scharwerk" or statute labour, which the Mennonite had adopted already in 18th century Prussia.

Note Two: Peter P. Wiebe served as Schulz for Blumenort for 1884-86. Although the connection here is only an inference from the statement made later in the minutes that "all were present, only the Kleine Gemeinder not). The Kleine Gemeinde traditionally did not participate in local government administration, although this was not the case during the 1840s to 60s when even Jakob W. Friesen, Blumstein, Molotschna, and son of Abraham (1782-1849) served as a village mayor. Johann Klassen and Johann Regehr, KG-associated individuals, served as Oberschulz of the Molotschna Colony during the 1830s and 40s.

Note Three: It is evident that a new Secretary has taken over as of the beginning of 1884 as the minutes are clearly in a different handwriting and slightly different style. The new Secretary-Treasurer was Cornelius Epp, Schönthal, serving until 1895.

Note Four: "Rohr" creek presumably got the name because in fall it would be overgrown with a tall grass (or reeds) suitable for roofing material. The grass had a long hollow stem and hence the term "rohr" or pipe. The creek just west of Steinbach was apparently called "rohr" creek in the early years being the source of roofing material for the village. Similar circumstances prevailed in other villages and according to the council minutes of June 3, 1884, there was also a "rohr" creek somewhere south of present-day Niverville.

On June 24, 1880, the R. M. of Hanover Council enacted a policy prohibiting the hiring of workmen under 16 years of age, probably one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to implement child labour laws.

Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904), Fraktur Artist

Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904), Bergthal, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, to Neu-Bergthal, Manitoba: Fraktur artist and teacher, by Delbert Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Family Background.

Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904) was the son of Johann Klippenstein (1809-77), son of Bernhard Klippenstein (1781-1841), of Osterwick and later the village of Chortitz in the Chortitz Colony; see preceding article regarding his uncle Peter Klippenstein.

Johann Klippenstein (1809-77) BGB A26, immigrated to the Bergthal Colony together with younger siblings Peter (1819-85) and Katharina (1811-92). Katharina later married a Johann Neufeld BGB A63, and took part in the emigration to Manitoba in 1874-6. She married for the second time to Bernhard Friesen A 39, and for the third time to Heinrich Friesen BGB A75.

Johann Klippenstein served as a deacon in the Bergthal Gemeinde. Their village of residence in the Bergthal Colony is not known. The Klippenstein family was quite prominent and in 1874 son Bernhard together with Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) accompanied the second group of Bergthal emigrants to the seaport in Hamburg, Germany, to see them on their journey (*Causes and History*, page 42, see also Klaas Peters, page 20).

Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904).

Commencing in 1846 Peter Klippenstein served as the teacher in the village of Bergthal, Bergthal Colony. He was only 15 when he started, quite young to be a teacher, but not unusual.

It was during this time that he compiled an



Helena Hamm Klippenstein and husband Bernhard Klippenstein (1869-1950) of Neu-Bergthal, near Altona. Bernhard was the son of Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904), pioneer teacher and Fraktur artist. Bernhard and Helena are sitting in front of the housebarn built by Bernhard's father Peter in Bergthal, north of Mitchell in the late 1870s. Photo courtesy of great-grandson Edwin Klippenstein, Steinbach, Manitoba.

arithmetic problem book and teacher's manual known as a "Rechnungbuch". At the beginning of each section he drew and coloured some of the finest *Fraktur* art extant today. The last section Peter completed is dated in 1849.

The "Rechnungbuch" of Peter Klippenstein is one of the most magnificent examples of the genre and joins the Abraham Rempel "Rechnenbuch" 1858 as important manifestations of the Bergthaler educational tradition: see E. Abraham, *Frakturmalerei*, page 122.

In 1854 son Peter Klippenstein married Anna Klassen (1834-1910), BGB B112. Anna was the daughter of Martin Klassen (1795-1872), BGB A 23. Marriage may have ended Peter's teaching career as there is no record of him teaching after that date. See attached sidebar stories regarding *Fraktur* art and Bergthal schools.

Manitoba, 1875.

The Johann Klippenstein family emigrated to Manitoba the next year travelling on the S.S. Samatian arriving in Quebec City on July 6, 1875 with Johann serving as co-leader of the group. Traveling in the same company were Johann's children, sons Peter, Bernhard, Johann, and Heinrich, and daughters Katharina, Mrs. Heinrich Klassen, and Margaretha, Mrs. Martin Friesen.

Upon arrival in Manitoba, the Klippenstein family settled in the villages of Bergthal, Chortitz and Rosenthal, East Reserve. According to the "Brot Schuld" Registers, Johann Sr. settled in



Fraktur work found in the *Rechnung Buch* arithmetic teacher's manual of Peter Klippenstein, Bergthal, which he compiled for his use as a teacher between the years 1846 and 1849. As was customary, a Fraktur piece was done as the title page for each unit of work in the arithmetic manual. In 1985 the *Rechnungbuch* was in the possession of Mrs. J. B. Klippenstein. This is a photo of the title page.

Chortitz together with son Heinrich Klippenstein, where he was joined by younger brother Peter in 1876, while sons Bernhard and Peter are listed in Bergthal and Johann in Rosenthal. In Bergthal, Peter and Bernhard were neighbours to David Stoesz (1842-1903), who mentioned Bernhard several times in his journal.

Peter and Bernhard filed for homesteads on the S 1/2 of Section 13-7-5E on March 5 and 9th, 1877, respectively. Bernhard had previously taken out a homestead and preemption quarter on S 1/2 Section 33-7-5E on September 22, 1875, but apparently abandoned the land when better land became available in the village of Bergthal, previously filed for by Jakob Rempel on September 1,



The title page to the section of multiplication features an interesting scene, possibly a nearby Russian village or town.



The scene changes to a walled City, Mariupol, perhaps?

1874. Peter, Bernhard and Heinrich are listed in the Chortitzer Brandordnung in Bergthal. Bernhard, in particular, must have been relatively well-to-do as he already had a house insured for \$600 and furniture for \$325. Brother Peter was not far behind with a house insured for \$500 and furniture at \$300. Both Peter and Bernhard cancelled their insurance in 1881 indicating that they had moved to the West Reserve.

Brother Heinrich filed for a homestead on March 5, 1879 on the NW24-7-5E, a property previously owned by Johann Hamm. The "Seelenliste" of 1882/3 list him as resident in Bergthal. One of the 31 Chortitzer teachers certified by the Department of Education in 1879 and one of 22 certified for 1880 was a Heinrich Klippenstein, who may well have been the Heinrich Klippenstein living in Bergthal. Heinrich continued his insurance coverage with the Brandordnung with a full line of farm equipment, adding a one-third share in a threshing machine in 1883. According to John Dyck this family moved to Alt-Bergthal in the West Reserve in 1891.

Brother Johann filed for a homestead on May 3, 1877 for the NE6-7-6E in the village of Rosenthal located just to the north of the present-day community of Mitchell. An interesting side bar to the Klippenstein story on the East Reserve is revealed by the Homestead cancellations which show that the Johann Klippenstein sons had acquired a considerable block of land in the southern part of the Municipality, in the village of Schöonneberg northeast of Grunthal. Son Peter purchased the NW 25-5-5E, Heinrich acquired the NE and SE quarters of Section 35-5-5E, and Johann the NW and SW quarters of the same section, all on October 19, 1875.

According to the family book by Ted Friesen, Johann Jr.'s son Peter Klippenstein (1878-1948) and twin Katharina (1878-1937) were born in Rosenthal near Steinbach in 1878.

Neu-Bergthal, 1881.

Sometime in 1881 Peter Klippenstein and brother Bernhard decided to move to the West Reserve where they settled in the village of Neu-Bergthal, four miles southeast of present-day Altona. Peter marked all the woodbeans in his house

barn in Bergthal, near Mitchell, with Roman numerals and then took the building apart and moved it piece by piece, and reassembled it in Neu-Bergthal.

Peter and Anna Klippenstein lived in Neu-

Bergthal until their deaths in 1904 and 1910, respectively. They were both buried in the Neu-Bergthal cemetery and their burial plots are still identifiable in the village cemetery.



Peter Klippenstein housebarn circa 1975. The frame of the barn was moved from the village of Bergthal north of Mitchell to Neu-Bergthal, four miles southeast of Altona. First all the timbers were numbered with Roman numerals and then it was dismantled in moved in pieces and reassembled on the new site where it is still standing to the present day, one of the oldest examples of Mennonite architecture in Manitoba. The siding of the structure in its original location west of Steinbach would have been cedar shakes, which the Mennonites manufactured themselves. Photo courtesy of great-grandson Edwin Klippenstein, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Fraktur Art.

Fraktur was a traditional artform originating in Holland and Northern Germany. It had roots in the handwriting flourishes of medieval monks as they transcribed manuscripts and arising from the natural desire to beautify them. From this came the form of "illumination" developing into the beautiful artwork which decorated many manuscripts in the middle ages. Erasmus (1466-1536), the Renaissance scholar, "emphasized the need for correct proportion, spacing and arrangement." With the invention of the printing press, calligraphy books such as Mercator's first Dutch handwriting manual in 1540 became common.

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

Fraktur and *Schönschrieben* were taught in the Mennonite schools in Prussia and brought to Russia during the emigrations of 1788-89 and 1803-04. Ethel Ewert Abrahams has written that the most sophisticated examples of the artform were dated between 1780 and 1845. The decline in the artform after 1845 coincides with the period when Johann Cornies assumed control over schools in the Molotschna and prohibited *Fraktur* on the grounds that it was sissified. Although they generally cooperated eagerly with Cornies in most of his reforms, KG associated teachers such as Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), later Blumenort, Manitoba, and Jakob Isaac (1815-66), Tiege, continued to practice and teach the artform. See *Preservings*, No 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 55-56, featuring the *Fraktur* art of Blumenort teacher Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99) and an "Irrgarten" as well as cutwork which he used to teach geometrical principles, artistic design, etc.

A Splendid Harvest, by Michael Bird and Terry Kobyashi, another work in this category, deals with the Germanic folk and decorative arts in Canada, with Russian Mennonite decorative culture as one section. It is complementary to that of Elizabeth Abrahams as it included analysis and historical background, providing some information regarding the origins and evolution of *Fraktur* as an art form. It is helpful as a general reference covering a wider range of material culture including architecture, furniture, textiles, gravemarkers, even, possibly, mundane items such as cookie dusters, hinges, trinket boxes, etc.

D. Plett, Q.C.



Edwin Klippenstein and Preservings secretary Naomi Doerksen inspect the Peter Klippenstein "Rechnungsbuch", one of the finest examples of the genre.

Conclusion.

Peter Klippenstein was the second member in a Bergthaler teaching tradition which commenced with his uncle Heinrich in the Old Colony and continued with his brother (or possibly cousin) Heinrich Klippenstein in Chortitz (or Bergthal ?), E.R., Manitoba.

Peter and Anna Klassen Klippenstein were an important pioneer couple who positively influenced the Bergthaler people, firstly, as a teacher in the village of Bergthal, and secondly, through the beautiful *Fraktur* work in his Rechnung buch, through which all descendants of the Bergthaler people and indeed, all Russian Mennonites, can enjoy an artistic tradition whose roots go back a thousand years and more.

It is noteworthy that the Klippenstein family came from the village of Bergthal in the Bergthal

Colony, Imperial Russia, took the name with them to Canada, where they reestablished the village four miles north of Mitchell, Manitoba, in 1874-75, from whence they again took the name to the West Reserve, establishing a new village called "Neu-Bergthal", four miles southeast of Altona. By reconstructing their home and stables in the new village in 1881 the Klippensteins carried forward with them a significant part of their material culture heritage, reflecting nostalgia and respect for a past which directed them confidently into the future, preserving their heritage as a beacon of inspiration for their descendants and future generations to come.

Descendants.

The descendants of Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904) and Anna Klassen (1834-1910) include great-

grandson Edwin Klippenstein, currently a pastor at the Bergthaler Church in Grunthal, Manitoba.

Sources.

Jake Peters, *Mennonite Private Schools In Manitoba and Saskatchewan 1874-1925* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1985), pages 16-19.

Peter Klippenstein, "Rechnungbuch," Bergthal, Imperial Russia, unpublished journal, unpaginated, currently in the possession of great-grandson Edwin Klippenstein, Box 2998, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Ted Friesen, *Genealogy of Peter Klippenstein 1831-1904* (Box 720, Altona, R0G 0B0, 1986), 85 pages.

Ethel Ewert Abrahams, *Frakturmalen und Schönschrieben* (North Newton, Kansas, 1980), 158 pages.

Bergthal Schools 1836-76

Each village in Bergthal had its own centrally located school house. The teachers were often local individuals who had a gift and interest in teaching the young, but were also hired from the Molotschna and Chortitz Colonies. Teaching methods followed those standard at the time.

The teachers in the Bergthal Colony in 1848 were as follows: Bergthal - Heinrich Wiens (Gerhard Dueck); Schönfeld - Abraham Friesen (Abraham Enns); Schönthal - Franz Dyck (Corn. Neufeld); Heuboden - Abraham Wiebe (Johann Hiebert); and Friedrichsthal - (Johann Buhler)--*Oberschulz*, page 121. The second name listed in brackets may have been a substitute or teacher trainee. The teachers in 1857 were: Bergthal - Gerhard Dueck; Schönfeld - Abraham Ens; Schönthal - Cornelius Neufeld; and Heuboden - Johann Hiebert--*Oberschulz*, page 22.

The Bergthal teachers were genuinely interested in the well-being and spiritual growth of their students. In some cases among conservative Mennonites teaching was a stepping stone to leadership in the Gemeinde. This also held true among the Bergthaler as with David Stoesz, who taught in Friedrichsthal and later became Aeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde in 1882.

The philosophy of education of conservative Mennonites was that schools should instill children with "Genuine faith ... before the forces of reason take hold and prevent a true understanding of 'simplicity in Christ'." The purpose of the school system was not necessarily to excel in the mechanics of learning, but rather "to prepare the youth to live an existential Christian life of piety and reverence for God based on simplicity and love for fellowman. A good education opened a child's heart to allow a knowledge of Christ to take root."

Whatever belonged to higher education was seen as leading to "sophistry, unbelief, and corruption of the church, for knowledge puffeth up. 1 Cor. 8:1" Heinrich Balzer, "Faith and Reason".

The truth of this statement was observed in many from among the Russian Mennonites such as historian Peter M. Friesen who attended Separatist-Pietist Bible Schools in Europe and elsewhere and returned to their home communities

filled with disdain for their traditional faith and whose religious culture commenced fervent proselytising for all manner of "fabled" endtimes teachings based on the novels of Jung Stilling who believed that the Second Coming would occur in the east and that the Imperial Czar would be the saviour of the Church in the end-times (Urry, *None but Saints*, page 227). It was fortunate for these people that they preached extemporaneously as had they carefully composed and written out their sermons as conservative ministers did, their descendants would be extremely embarrassed at the teachings they propagated so fanatically which were proven totally false by the effluxion of time.

James Urry, the leading Russian Mennonite historian, refers to "an account of a Bergthal village school in the 1850s..." noting that it "...presents a more benevolent picture of schooling than is suggested by later accounts" (page 158). The later accounts referred to were typically written by assimilationists and usually based on the negative caricature prepared by Johann Cornies to justify his draconian reform measures. The educational system in Bergthal has been unfairly criticized by most writers who appear to be committed to modernization typology and/or by those whose religious disposition and imperialistic agenda made it necessary for them to denigrate conservative and/or orthodox Mennonites.

It is true that Bergthal was not directly affected by the reforms of Johann Cornies in the sense that the schools were never put under his control. But this was probably more of a blessing than a disadvantage. Bergthal received many of the benefits indirectly through the various emigrants arriving in the new settlement as late as 1853 and by teachers hired from the outside, from the Molotschna as well as the Old Colony. e.g. Jakob Warkentin (b. 1836), Tiede, Mol., *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 187, and Johann Abrams (1794-1856), BGB A 58, from Pastwa, Mol., teacher in Schönfeld 1843.

Advocates of the Cornies reforms conveniently forget that these measures caused immense social disruption and disputation when they were implemented in the Molotschna and Old Colonies, alienating the majority of the population. In setting rigid standards Cornies inhibited the creativity of

the best of the old-school teachers and prohibited traditional Mennonite art forms such as *Schönschrieben* and *Fraktur* which he regarded as sissified. The fact that so little *Fraktur* art has surfaced from among the descendants of the Bergthaler may evidence that the Cornies reforms had more impact on the settlement than has previously been believed.

These advocates also ignore some of the negative aspects of the post-Cornies pedagogy: they were known as frightfully strict and almost abusive disciplinarians, many of their students became vulnerable to a fawning Russian nationalism and/or pan-Germanism, many fell victims to the fanciful teachings of German Separatist-Pietism, and, worst of all, they disdained the Plaut-dietsch language and Low German culture which had once dominated commerce and socio-economic life in Northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea during medieval times.

Those who have denounced the Bergthal schools so completely and thoroughly have obviously never studied the writings of Bergthal/Chortitzer leaders and even ordinary lay-people. The sermons of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) are studded with jewels of Biblical allegory and reveal a sound exegesis and a truly inspired faith as enduring today as when they were written in the 1860s and are far beyond anything ever conceived by his enemies. The journals of Chortitzer Aeltester David Stoesz and ministers Heinrich Friesen, Heinrich Doerksen, and Johann Schroeder, and patriarchs Maria Stoesz Klassen and Judit Klassen Neufeld, are concrete proof that the Bergthal school system turned out graduates who were not only imbued with a love of Christ, but also competent writers and gifted thinkers.

D. Plett Q. C.

Sources:

James Urry, *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia* (Winnipeg, 1989), 322 pages.

D. Plett, "Education in the East Reserve 1874-1930," in *Preservings*, No. 8, Part One, June 1996, pages 1-29.

The Helena and Heinrich R. Reimer Home

“Memories of the Helena Dueck Reimer (1878-1950) and Heinrich R. Reimer (1876-1959) Home, Landmark, Manitoba,” written by granddaughter Adina Kornelsen as told by granddaughter Hulda Plett, Box 54, Landmark, Manitoba, R0A 0X0.

Introduction.

I am thankful that I had the privilege of getting to know my grandparents, Heinrich and Helena Reimer. They were my maternal grandparents and I spent a lot of time with them since they lived just across the road from our place. I was already well into adulthood when they died and thus I got to know them very well.

Helena Dueck Reimer was born on February 16, 1879 in the village of Grünfeld, Manitoba now known as Kleefeld where she lived till she was 14 and then together with her mother and step-father moved to Blumenort, Manitoba.

Here she met Heinrich R. Reimer and they were married on October 18, 1896. They were married for 53 years and had 13 children, seven sons and six daughters.

Henry Reimer was born on July 26, 1876 in the village of Blumenort, Manitoba. Here he was raised and educated. He was a school teacher for 26 years teaching in Neuanlage, Blumenort, and Prairie Rose, and a minister for almost 42 years.

They were one of the first pioneers to settle in the Prairie Rose community. Their house in Landmark was built in 1919 and they moved into it the following spring with their 11 children. Their oldest daughter, Susanna, (Mrs. C.K. Plett), my mother, was already married and the youngest, Elsie, was born after they moved into the house. In 1940 one of their sons, Ben D. Reimer bought the farm and moved in together with his family. The grandparents lived with them till 1941 when they built a small house in their garden.

Another change of ownership took place in 1949 when their youngest daughter, with her husband, John and Elsie Hildebrand purchased the farm. Their youngest son Roy, together with his young wife, Lynn, now own the house since 1977. The farmland has been developed for the townsite and sold as lots as the small village has

grown to become a fair sized town. The original house and lot remain. Roy and Lynn have renovated the whole house, the solid frame structure was well worth restoring. The gleaming hardwood floors, the garage replacing the summer kitchen, the dingy attic transformed into a spacious family room with the added feature of a domed sky-light, have made this house into quite the masterpiece. However the house as you see it from the outside has kept much of its original appearance and sits there as dignified and stately as ever.

Memories.

I loved going to my grandparents house and I have many fond memories, some not so fond, that go back to my young childhood. In that house lived not only my grandparents but a host of uncles and aunts. I received a lot of special attention since I was the second oldest grandchild although my youngest aunt was only four years older than I was. I looked up to her as a much older aunt at the time but that age difference doesn't seem as great now and we have been good friends for many years now.

The memories are not recorded in any particular order since I don't remember my exact age when these events took place. It's kind of a hodge-podge of mixed remembrances but each holds a lot of feeling and vivid images that are somewhat difficult to put into words. As I think about these things I feel the warmth, the love, the acceptance of the people that lived there, I see the cookstove and smell the tantalizing aroma that exudes from it, I can almost taste the mouthwatering, home-baked cookies, buns, and pies, I see the people as they looked at that time, I experience the life that was lived there and words are a poor substitute.

The House.

Firstly I will attempt to give a detailed description of the house as I remember it. Each nook and cranny holds some nostalgia for me and thus worth recording. As a child my grandparent's house seemed like a great mansion, particularly if I compared it to my parent's two bedroom house which was home for me. It was a big, square, three-storey building and in total had nine spacious rooms, a full basement and an attic.

A large summer kitchen where most of the cooking took place was attached to the side of the house. The main house measured thirty eight feet by forty feet and there were all told 39 steps connecting the different floors together and 25 windows which made for an airy, bright interior. On the main floor there were basically four rooms, a large dining room, a kitchen, one bedroom, and a livingroom, one walk-in closet, and a large walk-in pantry, a hallway with connecting stairs to the second floor and an outside door leading onto the verandah.

There was a divider between the kitchen and dining room, the upper half from the dining room side was a china cupboard displaying blue trimmed dishes, beautiful to look at but meant for every day practical use. On the kitchen side this same cupboard held a large variety of pots and pans and baking sheets and several drawers for winter mitts, scarves, caps, and mufflers. All these rooms were connected with doors making a perfect “round robin” for chasing each other as kids. What greatly intrigued me as a child was a boxlike structure that protruded from the ceiling in the dining room. I had visions of precious treasures hidden away in this huge treasure chest as it appeared to me. How dissappointed I was when I found out it held no such mysteries as that but was simply a boxed in cold air pipe.



The house, 1930. View from the east. All photographs for this article are courtesy of Hulda Plett, Box 54, Landmark, Manitoba, R0A 0X0.



The house as it looks today. It is presently owned by Roy and Lynn Hildebrand, grandchildren of Heinrich and Helena Reimer.



Heinrich and Helena Reimer, circa. 1950

The Second Floor.

As a child that stairway to the second floor was massive, and very long with lots of stairs, and led to a long hallway with lots of doors leading to four bedrooms, a parlor, one closet, and one door opening onto the stairs to the attic, and an outside door which led to the verandah. What fascination all these doors held for me as a little child! What hidden mysteries lay behind these doors? That illusion was quickly broken as I opened the doors and peeked in—except for the parlour and the attic, they continued to hold a lot of intrigue for me. The two verandahs, one on the upper level and one on the lower level gave this house an old style country look. The spacious verandah on main floor surrounded two sides of the house, front and side.

The verandahs, both bottom and top were covered with lush, green ivy vines giving the house an appearance of warm hospitality and cozy family living which, of course, was exactly how it was. In fall these vines were covered with little, blue berries which were good to look at but not good to eat.

However as young people we found another purpose for these berries. I remember at aunt Tina's (Mrs. Walter Penner) wedding in fall they were having a program outside on the lawn and a group of young people were gathered on the upstairs verandah where the view, of course was the best. Here we spied these juicy, fat berries and we began picking them. What could we possibly do with these berries that were no good to eat! The temptation was just to great! We began throwing them at the people standing on the lawn below us and as if that wasn't bad enough we particularly targeted the minister's head. To this day he must be wondering why the sudden "rain" of blueberries! (He has long passed on by now and I've never made my confessions.)

Games.

Our grandparent's house was the perfect set-up for hilarious games of hide and seek and what fun we as cousins had doing this! I don't know how grandmother endured the noise and busyness of many feet running hither and yon. Maybe we did this while she was visiting in the living room with one or the other of the married children that would visit regularly. Hiding spots in that huge house were not hard to find. The spooky dark basement which had just a few tiny windows and of course no electric lights in those days, was the most favorite spot of all. There were several bins for the many different vegetables stored there for winter use. There were cobwebby, dark corners galore. What a haven for us to hide and squeal and squirm in our treasured hiding spots.

Another wonderful pastime were the exhilarating rides down that long stairway from the upstairs hallway to the main floor. The wooden stairs were brightly polished with black rubber treads on each step which probably softened the bumps somewhat. What fun we had as we literally flew down, supposedly in turns but sometimes several of us landing on a heap at the bottom and none the worse for it. A great wonder there were no broken bones never mind broken necks. The most exciting for me was to lie on my stomach and go down head first. I cringe when I think of it now but at the time the slogan that prevailed was "the more daring the more fun." This was probably as exciting for us then as skiing is for the young folks today.

Probably after some reprimands we found ourselves a hideaway far removed from the downstairs living room and that was the most fascinating room in the whole house, the attic. There was only one window out front in this attic and so in the semi-darkness we explored all kinds of treasures. Lots of junk was stored up here, to us these were treasures, old furniture, cast off clothing, books, and boxes of different shapes and sizes. It was a feast for our young imaginative minds. The carton boxes became castles and palaces. The old clothing became elaborate gowns for the queen. The books stimulated stories about ghosts and goblins. For one brief hour we lived in the fantasy of a make believe world.

The Pantry.

The walk-in pantry simply compelled me to walk in. The smells I can still fantasize over as I think back to the mouth watering aroma coming from those shelves. Grandma, in her generosity, always had lots of goodies for us and this is where they came from. I can still see the huge containers sitting on those shelves out of which came an assortment of cookies, large, soft, white cookies, dark brown molasses cookies, spicy current buns (pepanate), cocoa (chocolate) cookies and much more.

One day for some reason I found myself alone in this pantry. I probably was simply following where my "aroma detectors" were leading me. My parents had left me in the care of my aunts and I must have been approximately three or four years old. There I stood surveying

all this good stuff when I spied a large pail of syrup sitting there in the middle of the floor. Taking a large wooden spoon I began to stir it.

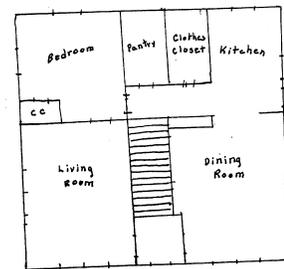
Being a resourceful, little girl I decided it would be much more interesting if I could mix something into it and, of course this is something I had seen countless times, different ingredients get mixed together when you work with a wooden spoon. As I was deliberating this my eyes caught sight of a large box of fine sawdust and promptly I began to mix the two together. With much gusto and enthusiasm I worked away at it. I can only imagine the syrup and sawdust all over myself and all over the floor. What a sticky, slimy mess but most enjoyable! I have no memories what happened when I was found out.

Whatever happened I was not too deeply impacted by it so there couldn't have been harsh words, harsh scolding or a spanking, a reprimand probably but nothing too severe. Someone there must have had a good understanding of children and probably also a good sense of humour.

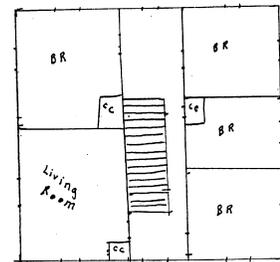
Dancing.

Another time I was left with my grandparents for the weekend. Grandmother and grand-

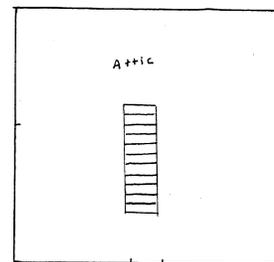
Main floor



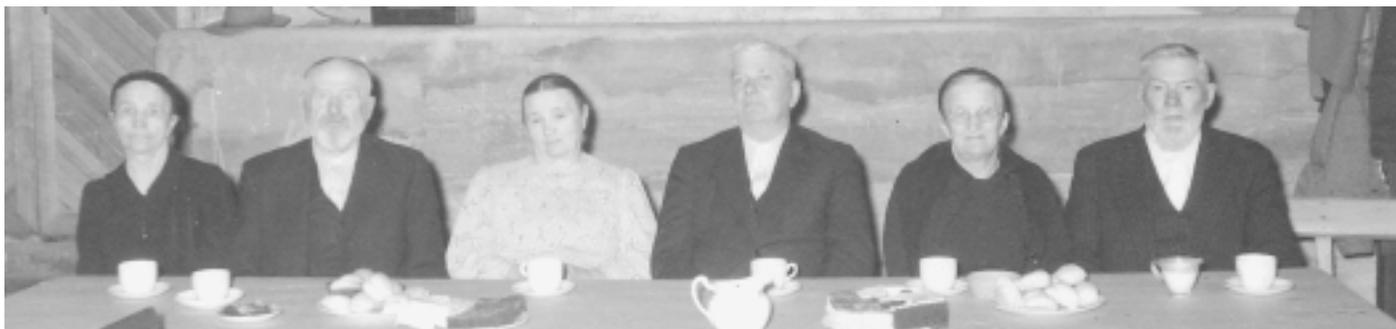
Second Floor



attic



The floor plan. Three diagrams show the floor plan for the main floor, second floor and attic. Drawing by granddaughter Hulda Plett.



Three sisters 1948. Mrs. Susanna Dueck Penner and Abram R. Penner, Mrs. Elisabeth Dueck Kroeker and Peter B. Kroeker, and Helena Dueck Reimer and Heinrich R. Reimer. They are the parents and grandparents of many citizens of the Hanover Steinbach area.

father must have been away for the evening and I was in the care of my aunties again. Many young people were over that evening and the old record player, the kind with a crank, was playing records such as the Carter Family, Wilf Carter and other modern hits of the day.

In the midst of this one of my aunties came to me and asked me to go with her and she took me to the bedroom. She carefully explained to me that I could play here by myself, that they were busy with their friends and she would like me to stay here. I was not very happy with this arrangement but I agreed to it. I became very unhappy there all by myself and started crying and when my aunt came to check on me and saw my unhappiness she gave me permission to go with one condition that I would quietly sit on a chair and be no trouble to them. I quickly agreed to this.

The melodious sounds of Hawaiian waltzes were coming from the gramophone now, the huge dining room table and all the chairs had been pushed aside and my aunts and uncles with their friends were engaged in a lively dance. I sat there in amazement, stunned, I took it all in. Never in my life had I seen anything like this before. No problem with me being any trouble, I was entirely entertained and too engrossed to even think of moving. The next morning I innocently, maybe not so innocently, told my grandmother all about it, after all this was exciting news that needed sharing. One of my aunts overheard this and she quietly drew me aside and told me in no uncertain terms, "If we wanted Grandma to know about this we would have told her ourselves." To this day I appreciate Hawaiian music and enjoy listening to it and I need to thank my aunties for this. However I never did take up dancing.

Gatherings.

I remember many family gatherings where the adults, probably the men, were visiting in the downstairs living room, the women probably nursing their babies in the bedroom or making dinner or faspas or cleaning up dishes from all the food that was cooked and consumed there at those times. Although the meals were not fancy there was always a lot of whatever was served, plumi moos, fried potatoes, fried ham, zwieback, preserves, chokecherry jelly, among the most staple foods as I remember them. Us younger folks were in the upstairs parlour, unsupervised, and we probably got into things we

shouldn't have. We opened drawers that were none of our business.

One time we found our aunts' makeup and what fun we had with it as we played dress up, tried it out and consequently got carried away with fits of laughter. When things got too noisy up there grandfather would tap the stove pipe which came through the ceiling from the downstairs living room to the upstairs parlour (this served as their heating system). What an effective way of quieting us down. We had much respect for those tappings and it never occurred to us to not respond to it. However sometimes they were quickly forgotten which meant repeated tappings. On second thought I don't know how we ever dared look into any of these personal drawers and closets because we firmly believed, as we had been told that "Yale Tane" (an ogre) lived in them and that this scary, mysterious creature would jump at us and attack us if we as much as touched these drawers or closets. Maybe this came as a result of what happened that day and so the visions of this unearthly, violent, monster kept me from ever snooping in my aunties drawers and closets ever again.

There was always singing at these family gatherings. What a choir this family made as hymn after hymn was sung in four-part harmony. These songs were usually in German and I sang along most gustily although I didn't really understand the meaning of the words too well since we spoke the Low German and these songs were sung in the High German. Songs like "Grosser Gott Wer Loben Dich" and "Lob Gott Ihre Christen Alzugleich" and many more. These powerful, ageless songs hold special meaning for me now and the meaningful messages in them continue to be personally uplifting.

There was also a lot of laughter among the adults at these times and I remember grandfather admonishing his own sons when the boisterousness and joking became too loud according to his standards.

Grandmother.

My grandparents were committed to live what they believed. They taught me by example what it means to love my neighbour. Grandmother was a generous, self-sacrificing woman. She had a sense of humour which I remember so well and often would laugh at her timely wit. She was a hospitable woman, entertaining people regularly and to add another few plates to an already full

table was no problem at all. Generosity was second nature to her as she gave to those in need.

Her own ideas were original and she didn't hesitate to share her opinions. When grandfather was elected as a minister she was known to have said when people criticized them about owning a telephone, which in those days was considered questionable, "They have elected us with the telephone and they will have to accept us with the telephone now."

Nursing homes and senior citizen homes were not in existence in those days and thus older, dependent, sickly people were cared for in the home. I remember my grandparents taking in an older, sickly woman and taking care of her. She needed a lot of care and I felt very honored that I could be of assistance here at times. When grandmother went out to do the milking or gardening she would very carefully instruct me to stay with this woman and feed her a few teaspoons of water as was needed.

Our grandparents taught us that Christmas was a deeply religious holiday. I can now better understand grandfather's shocked behaviour when he came to our house one time close to Christmas. As he entered the house we jokingly called out to him, "Here comes Santa Clause, Here comes Santa Clause." With his white hair and white beard he seemed of it the picture so well. He was not appreciative of this at all. He sat us down and very seriously admonished us saying, "Please, never call me Santa Clause again, Santa Clause is not a good thing."

Grandfather.

In his strict pursuit of holiness grandfather must have found it incredibly frivolous to spend time looking at an Eaton's catalogue. However when the catalogue arrived there was a sense of excitement in the household. In those days ordering from the catalogue was a common occurrence and hence looking for new fashions in dresses, shoes and hats was interesting and time consuming. Grandfather's standard once more prevailed as he told his daughters that to spend more time looking at the Eaton's catalogue then reading the Bible was sinful.

For further reading: see article by Doris Penner, "Heinrich R. Reimer's Schriedevsch," in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 57-59.

I remember the devotions we had around that huge dining room table. It is heartwarming for me to recall sitting there at that table surrounded by adults listening to grandfather as he shared the morning reading with us. Everyone quietly and respectfully listened to what he had to say. Unfortunately, I don't remember any of the content, but he did speak at a level that I could

understand and I remember appreciating that.

A picture of my grandfather that is most vivid and has stuck with me through the years is a picture of him sitting at his writing desk doing what he found challenging and interesting, and that was writing about what was meaningful to him in this life. Many are the sermons he has written, many are the diary and journal entries

he has made, and many are the "Familien Freund" articles he has composed. Many of these "writings" I still have in my possession and I treasure them very much.

These memories continue to hold meaning for me and I am thankful for them. They have enriched my life and have influenced me to become the person I am today.

The Kjist and the Prush

The "Kjist" and the "Prush" of Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99) and Agatha Klassen Friesen (1848-1902), Blumenhoff, Imperial Russia, to Blumenort, Manitoba, by Glenn Kehler, Box 280. Oakbank, Manitoba, R0E 1J0.

Introduction.

Cornelius P. Friesen was born in Rosenort, Molotschna, Imperial Russia. His father Rev. Klaas Friesen (1793-1870) had moved from Altona to Rosenort after his marriage to Karolina Plett Friesen (1823-87) the previous year. Cornelius and his brothers received a good education, something which in the Friesen family extended to include *Fraktur* art and furniture making. (See *Preservings* No. 8, Part Two, page



The Cornelius P. Friesen Kjist, showing the intricate hardware, the handles and lock. The five pedestal stand on which the Kjist traditionally stood has been removed at some point and replaced with wheeled rollers. Perhaps this too can be restored?

55-58, for an article regarding Cornelius P. Friesen's teaching career and samples of his artwork.)

The Cornelius P. Friesen family lived in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, Imperial Russia, from where they emigrated to Canada in 1874. They were among the first group of 65 Mennonite families to arrive in Manitoba on August 1, 1874.

The "Kjist."

The "kjist" pictured here was crafted by Cornelius Plett Friesen (1844-99) prior to emigrating to Canada in 1874.

Cornelius was a teacher as well as a gifted craftsman, who enjoyed carpentry. We have only two items he created, a wooden chest and crib, but from these works it is apparent that he was very meticulous.

The kjist measures 51" x 26" x 19" high. Cornelius must have picked his materials very carefully as the wood he used is a clear, knot-free fir, similar to the fir that grows in British Columbia.

The ends and sides are of one piece, 7/8" thick by 18" wide. The top and bottom are made up of three 8 1/2" pieces, 1 1/8" thick. The corners are beautifully dove-tailed to a perfect fit. The bottom is fastened to the sides with 3/8" diameter dowels, placed at a 45 degree angle, and possibly glued in place.

Inside the chest, Cornelius made a small box with a lid along one side. I'm sure this was for where all of the small valuables were placed for the voyage to Canada.

The hardware was another very practical part of the kjist. The drop handles and the lock were factory items. A sturdy brass flush lock, with a rather large key provided a sense of security. The rounded drop handles have a very intricate design, which became evident only when all of the layers of paint were removed. The hinges,



Erna Friesen Thiessen poses with the Kjist with lid open. The inside of the lid cover shows evidence that various pictures were displayed inside the Kjist at some point. They may have been removed by someone who did not realize the prominent role they played in the 500 year old Mennonite furniture tradition. Traditionally the Kjist was an acceptable place where conservative Mennonites could display colourful photographs, drawings or artwork, sometimes a picture of the Czar, or other royalty. Note the "till" at the end a standard component in the Mennonite furniture tradition. It was a place where valuables could be stored.

bolts and nuts were all made in the local blacksmith shop. For the long strap hinges, black strap iron was heated, bent and shaped to fit and the exposed bolts were covered with brass domes.

One can only imagine which of the treasured belongings were contained in the kjist, as most household items would have been left behind,



The Prush, side view. Granddaughter Erna Friesen Thiessen and her daughter Kathie Thiessen Kehler pose with the Prush. All photos for this article are courtesy of Glenn and Kathie Kehler, Box 280. Oakbank, Manitoba, R0E 1J0.

either sold or given to relatives.

The Kjist was carried by horse-drawn wagon and then by rail to the steamship that brought the family across the Atlantic. After landing in North America, the kjist travelled again by rail, boat and wagon until reaching the family's final homestead in Blumenort, as part of the first group of Mennonite families to arrive in Manitoba on August 1, 1874.

The Kjist was passed down to the oldest son, Cornelius Klassen Friesen (founder of Friesen Drillers). "C.K." remained a bachelor until the age of 33 and lived with his parents until they both passed on. The Kjist stayed with Cornelius upon his marriage to Katharine Penner Friesen, the oldest of the Klaas I. Friesens

girls (see *Pres*, No. 10, Part Two, page 55-56).

The Kjist passed down to their oldest daughter Erna Friesen Thiessen, who then gave it to her oldest child, Katherine Thiessen Kehler, the present keeper of the chest.

Kathie spent much of her spare time one winter lovingly removing layer after layer of paint to reveal what we all consider a beautiful memory of her great grandfather. After 125 years, it is evident that Cornelius had good reason for his design and choice of wood, because there is not one crack nor any sign of warping evident.

Prush.

One of the first items of furniture in every Mennonite home was a "Prush" or crib. The "Waiej" or cradle was used for babies and the Prush or crib for infants. In most Mennonite families a child was born every year or two and the parents would have the youngest two with them in their bedroom, the baby in the cradle and the toddler in the Prush. Since the Prush was not listed by Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen as part of the Mennonite furniture tradition it may have been incorporated into the canon later: see *Preservings*, No. 12, pages 87-92..

This example of a prush was crafted by Cornelius Plett Friesen (1844-99). The average prush was usually used by eight to 12 children and became a permanent fixture in the parents' bedroom for close to twenty years.

Cornelius built this Prush for his children and it has past the test of time.

The Prush is 43" 23" x 22" high. This size would allow the child enough time to merge in with the older children, away from the parents until they were displaced by a younger sibling.

The design is very simple, but the construction is quite intricate. The sides and ends are mortised into the four corner posts, not one mortise but a double mortise and tenon, all done by chisel and hammer, to a perfect fit. This was then held together with wooden dowels - no nails or screws.

All of his children; Aganetha, Anna, Margaretha, Cornelius, Johan, Martin and Klaas slept in the Prush. It was then given to their neighbour and nephew, Klaas I. Friesen, who then used it for all of their children; Katharina (Mrs. C. K. Friesen), Helen (Mrs. C. T. Loewen), Margaretha (Mrs. J. T. Loewen), Frank, Anna (Mrs. J. R. Barkman), Paul, Maria (Mrs. P. D. Reimer), Pauline (Mrs. H. D. Reimer) and Alfred.

The prush was then taken back to the Cornelius P. Friesen home by his son Cornelius K. Friesen, who later took Katharine, the oldest daughter of Klaas. I. Friesen as his bride. The prush was once again put to good use by their children - Erna (Mrs. John P. Thiessen), Albert, Margaretha (Mrs. Isaac P. Penner), Walter, Anna (Mrs. Henry P. Unger), John, Tony and Virginia (Mrs. James Woodard).

The Prush then went to C. K. Friesen's oldest daughter, Erna F. Thiessen, whose daughter Kathie also slept in it.

Since then it has been used by numerous other great-grandchildren. The prush is still us-

able and is in the care of Kathie Kehler, who is considering removing the many layers of paint that have accumulated.

Comments.

Cornelius P. Friesen was a conservative intellectual in the best sense of the word. It was recorded that his funeral was held in the traditional format, "No preaching, and only a few songs were sung, Hans von Steen was quoted."

Friesen was a man with a respect for tradi-

tion, concerned not only to preserve the Reformation faith of his forbears, but also the furniture tradition of his people which had its roots in the Renaissance.

Kathie would be pleased to show the chest to any interested descendants.

Source:

Granddaughter Mrs. Erna Friesen Thiessen.



1910. Cornelius K. Friesen (1877-1953) and bride Katharina Friesen (1890-1971), daughter of his cousin Klaas I. Friesen (1868-1927), Steinbach livery barn owner. Although the oldest of his three brothers, Johann, Klaas and Martin, Cornelius was the last to get married. He was the founder of "Friesen Drillers." In this wedding photo Cornelius and Katharina pose in a Reo car, identical to the car which Cornelius owned at the time. Photo courtesy of daughter Erna Friesen Thiessen, 206-Box 3730, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.



Cornelius K. Friesen Family Photograph, 1940. L-r: John, Walter, Albert, Dad, Mother, Erna, Margaret and Anne. Tony and Virginia are standing in front. Photo courtesy of daughter Erna Friesen Thiessen, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Niverville Area Cemeteries

Niverville Area Cemeteries (Registered and Unregistered) by John Friesen, Box 303, Niverville, Manitoba, ROA IEO.

Introduction.

A few years ago I wrote an article about the Friesen Cemetery situated on the homestead of my grandparents Aron Schwartz Friesen and Anna Loeppky Friesen. see *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part 2, pages 51 and 52. It is on this homestead where my genesis began.

Thinking back to my childhood years on the farm where I was born, I remembered several more homesteads in our Strassberg area with burial plots, some smaller and some on a larger scale as the one just mentioned. After a thorough search and being in conversation with friends, relatives and former neighbors, I have been able to locate 18 burial plots over an area of 15 square miles, being the west half of Township 7, Range 4E.

The location of these burial plots is marked on the accompanying map. I have recorded as many names, dates of birth and burial and other pertinent information as was available to me. COULD THERE BE MORE?

Background.

Starting in 1874 many Mennonite families



D - Edwin Heinrichs farmyard, SE8-7-4E, formerly David H. Hiebert. View to the northeast.

migrated from the Bergthal Colony, a daughter colony of the Chortitza settlement in Imperial Russia, and made their debut in southern Manitoba. This influx of Mennonites continued for several years until thousands had made Manitoba their new home.

History indicates that immigration brings with it not only joy but also sorrow. Many loved ones passed away accidentally or due to typhoid and influenza epidemics during the first years in Manitoba. It was during this time that burial plots evolved in the early villages and later on many homesteads. One of these plots is registered in the name of Hiebert Heritage Cemetery Inc. [see K on map] and is still in use today, while the others remain unregistered.

These plots did not always receive the necessary maintenance they deserved. Often when original markers on these plots deteriorated no attention was given to replace or restore them. A few remain visible as cairns have been erected by descendants to honor these first pioneers. However many plots remain invisible and unmarked. The exact locations would be hard to find. I hope my efforts will help to keep your interest alive in this facet of our history.

Here now follows the data I gathered. Please refer to the above map as to each location. The dots signify the location of graves.

A "Strassberg-Friesen Cemetery." Access to this site is a half mile driveway from the north side of NW5-7-4E unto the farmer's yard. From here you can walk several hundred feet south to the Friesen Cemetery situated on SW5-7-4E. See *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part 2, pages 51 and 52. A cairn was erected in 1985 with a dedication service held on the 6th. of October of the same year. Names and dates of those interred are engraved on the memorial.

B Access along driveway unto farmyard from the north on NE5-7-4E. The graves are located along a high ridge southeast of the yard. According to family records five of 12 children of par-

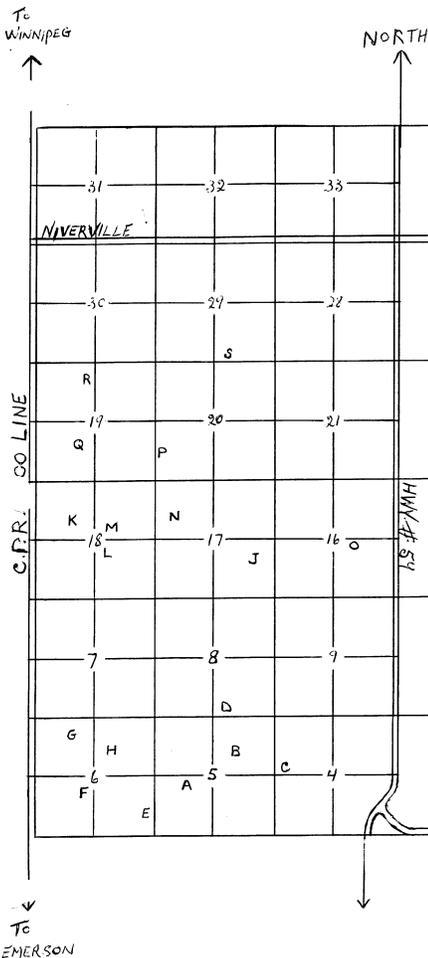
ents Cornelius Friesen (May 17, 1864 to April 15, 1928) and Maria Penner Friesen (May 22, 1868 to October 18, 1952), died and are buried at this location. They are: Aganetha, February 1, 1896 to July 22, 1916; Helena, March 3, 1898 to April 30, 1899; Abraham, June 15, 1906 to June 15, 1906; Erdman, April 17, 1907 to April 17, 1907; Abraham, March 22, 1911 to August 22, 1920. The plot is under cultivation.

C These graves are situated towards the southwest corner of NW4-7-4E. Buried at this location are Peter S. Friesen, July 14, 1858 to ? 1899, who was married to Helena Klassen, September 5, 1860 to ? and their 16 year-old son. The plot is under cultivation.

D These graves are situated in the garden southwest of the house on SE8-7-4E. Names are: Mrs. David [Helena Friesen] Hiebert, first wife, March 2, 1883 to June 7, 1909; two of their daughters, Tina Hiebert, January 28, 1907 to ? 1913; Helena Hiebert, May 12, 1908 to August 13, 1908; Mrs. David [Anna Klassen] Hiebert, second wife, January 24, 1893 to May 14, 1916; Their daughter, Anna Hiebert, May 11, 1914 to May 11, 1914.5 Mr. David Hiebert, January 15, 1883 to August 8, 1946 married for the third time to Margaretha Wiebe March 11, 1887 to March 28, 1954, Their son Heinrich Hiebert, June 17, 1929 to June 17, 1929; Their daughter, stillborn, no dates available. Mr. David Hiebert and Mrs. David [Margaretha Wiebe] Hiebert are both buried at the Hiebert Heritage Cemetery mentioned in this article below.

E This site is on a high ridge towards the southeast corner of SE6-7-4E accessible by a dirt road. It seems accurate to say that this is the burial plot of six children of the Henry T. Loeppky family. No names available.

F This site is close to the road, south of the driveway going west to the farm yard on SW6-7-4E. Buried here are Johann T. Loeppky's first



Map of Niverville area, west half of Township 7, Range 4E.. Prepared by John Friesen, Box 303, Niverville, Manitoba, ROA IEO.

wife Helena Hiebert Loeppky and infant daughter. Both died during childbirth in 1881. Also, Henry T. Loeppky, son of Johann G. Loeppky.

G You go west along a driveway towards an abandoned farm yard on NW6-7-4E. The site is situated on the north side of the yard. This is known as the Loeppky Cemetery: see *Preservings*, No. 7, page 35. Buried here are; Johann G. Loeppky, January 23, 1831 to September 25, 1912; Susana Toews Loeppky, February 10, 1835 to December 23, 1900; Anna T. Kliever, September 13, 1873 to July 28, 1902; Johann T Loeppky, March 24, 1857 to December 15, 1913; Anna Dyck Loeppky, June 1, 1861 to August 27, 1947. Abram D. Loeppky, November 19, 1892 to December 18, 1900; Helena D. Loeppky, March 27, 1900 to July 28, 1902; Peter D Loeppky, April 3, 1894 to July 20, 1962; Elizabeth D. Loeppky, May 16, 1897 to January 27, 1991; Johann H. Loeppky, September 24, 1878 to June 30, 1932; Sara Kliever Loeppky, October 17, 1881 to August 9, 1926; Jacob K. Loeppky, April 2, 1905 to February 17, 1906; Peter K. Loeppky, February 14, 1912 to February 22, 1920. Most graves are marked.

H You go east along a driveway to a farm house on NE6-7-4E. The site is to the south or south-east side of the house. I have been told that two children of the John J. Wade family are buried here.

J You go west along a driveway unto a farm yard on SE17-7-4E. Nobody seems to know the exact burial spot. Buried here are four children of the John Harrison family. They are; Jane, Hannah, William J. and Mark E. Harrison.

K You follow along the driveway from the east to the farmyard on NW18-7-4E. The cemetery is south of the dwelling. This is a registered cemetery in the name of Hiebert Heritage Cemetery Inc.. A cairn was erected on September 3, 1995 (see *Preservings* No. 9, December 1996, Part 2, page 50 for further details).

L You go along a short driveway from the west unto the farm yard on SE18-7-4E. The site is located southeast of the dwelling. A cairn has been set up with names and dates of the burials; Katherina Penner Leppky, February 24, 1870 to March 8, 1904; Elizabeth Giesbrecht Leppky, April 27, 1883 to May 2, 1910; Abraham P. Leppky, July 9, 1901 to January 6, 1903; Elisabeth G. Leppky, December 23, 1906 to May 7, 1907; Jacob L. Friesen, February 6, 1929 to February 6, 1929.

M You take a long driveway from the west to the farm yard on NE18-7-4-E. The site is situated near the chicken barn and machine shed. The exact location is uncertain. The names are; Maria Kehler, July 29, 1894 to June 9, 1909; Margaretha Kehler, April 7, 1896 to October 14, 1900; Helena Kehler, February 11, 1898 to October 22, 1900; Susanna Kehler, March 17, 1899 to October 8, 1900. The above four women are daughters of Peter Kehler, February 26, 1871



E - SE6-7-4E, 2 1/2 miles west of the junction of Highways 52 and 59, 1/4 miles north. Formerly Henry D. Loeppky farm. View to the north.



H - Situated 4 1/4 miles south of Niverville on the east side of the road on NE6-7-4E. Formerly Neil Loeppky farm, Peter F. Funk and Peter C. Neufeld. Loeppky Bros. now own the farmland. View to the east.



J - Situated 2 miles east from the railroad tracks in Niverville and 2 1/2 miles south on the west side of the road on SE17-7-4E. Formerly Kemila farm, and before that it was owned by members of the Dr. John Harrison family. View to the west.



L - Situated 2 1/2 miles south of Niverville on the east side of the road, on SE18-7-4E. The old Abram Leppky place. View to the east.

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to January 12, 1942 and Helena Neufeld Kehler, September 22, 1871 to March 27, 1939 (see *Kehler 1808-1997* (Steinbach, 1998) compiled and published by Randy Kehler).

N You follow along the driveway from the west to the farmyard on NW17-7-4E. The site is east of the dwelling. The only burial is Maria Kehler, September 10, 1913 to May 19, 1915.

O You take a long driveway from the east to the farm yard on NE16-7-4E. The site however is located south of the yard on SE16-7-4E. Only one date of death is available of the first six people. The names are: Peter Penner, Anna Sawatzky Penner; Gerhard Sawatzky who died in 1916; baby George Sawatzky; twin girls Katherine and Agatha Sawatzky; Mrs Martin [Helena Sawatzky] Friesen, first wife, January 26, 1866 to May 18, 1887. Mrs Martin [Maria Sawatzky] Friesen, second wife, April 4, 1870 to September 12, 1934; Mr. Martin Friesen, December 16, 1862 to September 12, 1938. The next six names are children from Martin Friesen's second marriage: Martin Friesen, July 27, 1889 to January 22, 1890; Helena Friesen, July 12, 1891 to April 12, 1910; Franz Friesen, December 12, 1892 to March 18, 1910; Anna Friesen, September 26, 1894 to February 21, 1910; Margaretha Friesen, March 12, 1896 to February 24, 1910; Martin Friesen, April 16, 1897 to February 26, 1910; infant son of Jacob and Maria Penner, no date; Baby Wheeler no date. Babies Jacob Sawatzky, 1924 and Minnie Sawatzky, 1928-- children of Gerhard Sawatzky Jr.

P Situated on a high ridge this site is north of the present farm yard on SW20-7-4E. The graves accumulated during the first years that the Mennonites arrived in Manitoba. See *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part 1, page 36, Landing Site Burials 1874 listing the death of a little boy on August 13, 1874, namely, Heinrich L. Dueck under two years of age who was buried at this site. See *Working Papers of the East Reserve Village Histories 1874 - 1910*, pages 86, where the burial of two little daughters of Jacob P. and Margaretha Friesen are mentioned. There can be as many as 30 burials at this site. The Schantz immigration sheds stood approximately one quarter mile south of this site on NW17-7-4E.

Q You take a long driveway from the east to the farm yard on SW19-7-4E. The site is south of the old granary. Buried here are, Franz Dick, May 25, 1835 to ? 1907 and his 10 year-old son John Dick.

R This site is one mile south of Niverville on the west side of the road on NW19-7-4E. Names and dates are; Gerhard Kliewer, May 1, 1836 to September 9, 1896. He was the first Reeve of the Municipality of Hanover. His wife Helena Buhr Kliewer, November 11, 1840 to June 13, 1909; Three of their children who died at a young age: Abram Kliewer, December 23, 1875 to December 16, 1880; Aganetta Kliewer, November 10, 1877 to July 8, 1883; Katerina Kliewer, December 16, 1879 to January 6, 1881; Another



M - Situated 2 1/2 miles south of Niverville on the east side of the road on NE18-7-4E. Formerly Peter Kehler place and later Jakob K. Friesen, now Rick Friesen. View to the east.



N - Situated 2 miles south, 1/2 mile east and 1/2 miles south of Niverville on the east side of the road, on NW17-7-4E. Former Ben Kehler place, where Peter F. Kehler (Pete's Inn) and George F. Kehler (CHSM) grew up. View to the east.



O - Situated 2 1/2 miles south of Niverville corner on Highway 59, then west to the farmyard on NE16-7-4E with actual location on SE16-7-4E. Picture was taken 1/2 mile west of the farm, facing east. Former Jean and John J. Neufeld farm.



P - Situated 2 miles south and 1/2 mile east of Niverville, just north of the farmyard on SW20-7-4E. South of the farmyard, across the road on NW17-7-4E was the location of the Schantz immigration sheds. View to the south. Dot on the left hand side shows where the people were buried who died while staying at the Schantz Immigration Sheds. Buildings in the rear belonged to Peter S. Friesen, later Peter K. Friesen. View to the north.



Q - Situated 1 1/2 miles south of Niverville on the west side of the road, on SW19-7-4E. Formerly Jakob Dueck place, where Alvin Wiebe, Niverville Credit Union lives today. View to the west.



R - Situated 1 miles south of Niverville on the west side of the road on NW19-7-4E. Recently purchased by the Niverville Funeral Aid to be developed as a memorial by the year 2000. The old farmyard belonged to Gerhard Kliewer (1836-96), first Reeve of the Rural Municipality of Hanover in 1880.

son, Gerhard Kliewer, December 30, 1867 to November 24, 1933; His wife, Anna Loepky Kliewer, December 1, 1882 to February 7, 1970; Their two young children-Anna Kliewer, January 25, 1909 to February 25, 1909; and Henry Kliewer, July 12, 1926 to July 13, 1926.

The Niverville Funeral Aid has purchased five acres of land adjoining this plot. It should be developed by the year 2000.

S This site is situated on the yard, close to the house next to the road on SE29-7-4E. The exact spot is unknown. A child of the Herman Uhle family is buried here.

Conclusion.

Reference should be made to the registered cemetery on the north side of Main Street in Niverville. In 1953 when Highway No. 59 was reconstructed seven graves from the Little Village Inn area were exhumed and transferred to the Niverville Cemetery. In 1974 approximately 50 to 55 graves were moved into this cemetery

from the Luthern cemetery south of the junction of Highways No. 59 and No. 311. The total number of burials is around 750 plots.

Let us not forget the two burials at the confluence of the Rat and Red rivers; see *Preservings* No. 10, June 1997, Part One, page 36, Landing Site Burials. The names are: Gerhard H. Giesbrecht, April 4, 1874 to August 9, 1874; and Margaretha K. Esau who died August 3, 1874. She was probably the first Mennonite immigrant to be buried on Manitoba soil.

Can we, should we not keep these sacred burial places visible so we do not lose the respect our ancestors, our Mennonite pioneers deserve? I read with interest a "Letter to the Editor" of the *Carillon News* dated July 20, 1998 by John Klassen, Steinbach, Manitoba. I can readily identify with some comments in his letter as printed.

Thank you to the many people I contacted and who graciously supplied me with information of names, dates and how to get to these grave sites. I do not lay claim as to accuracy of

names and dates. When in doubt I used dates as written into family records assuming they were correct over other data available.

Acknowledgements:

I want to thank, Delbert Plett - Editor of *Preservings*, Lawrence Klippenstein - Mennonite Heritage Centre and John Dyck - Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc. for the encouragement I received from them to write this article.

Article "Chortitzer Cemeteries 1874-1996," by Jake Klassen, Box 73, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part Two, pages 49-50, listing 17 registered cemeteries and 29 unregistered cemeteries.

All photographs for this article are by the author.

Sources:

Committee, *Heritage Collections: Histories from New Bothwell and district* (Steinbach, 1994), contains the names of many burials in the east half of Township 7, Range 4E.



S - Entrance to the cemetery on the north side of Main Street, in Niverville.

**"Friday, July 29, 1880, + 19, later 24. Wind south, nearly calm. Bishop Gerhard Wiebe, Chortitz, of the Bergthaler brought today fresh barley to Steinbach to the mill."
From Abr. F. Reimer, Diary.**

Book Reviews

Please forward review copies of books of relevance to the history and culture of the Hanover Steinbach area to the Editor, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, phone Steinbach 1(204)-326-06454 or Winnipeg 1(204) 474-5031. It is customary for publishers to provide a free copy of a book to the publication, this copy is provided to the person selected to do the review as a reward for doing the work.

John B. Toews, *Mennonite Stories of Faith and Survival in Stalinist Russia*. Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1998, 226 pages, softcover.

This book is John B. Toews' latest contribution to the unraveling the history of Mennonites in twentieth century Russia. A collection of four personal accounts of individuals who survived the terrors of the Stalinist years, the book is a profoundly moving portrayal of unbearable suffering, as well as amazing strength.

Toews begins the book with an overview of Mennonite life and experience in the context of Soviet Russia, taking the reader very quickly from the pre-World War One "golden age", through the enormous destruction and upheaval of revolution and civil war, to the systematic devastation of Mennonite communities through collectivization, arrests and disappearances, restrictions on language and worship, and finally, massive deportation. This introduction is a most helpful to provide the setting for the unfolding of the four stories.

The four accounts are those of Anna Kroeker, Justina Martens, Abram Baerg, and Aaron Warkentin - four amazing survivors of the Stalinist era who recorded their experiences. Unfortunately, we are told very little about how the four stories came into Toews' possession. Another omission is the lack of a map which would help to make some geographic sense of the four "journeys."

Anna's is the story a woman widowed by the Stalinist purge, left alone to support her children, and eventually too being exiled into forced labour. Justina, a single woman, describes her experience of the Soviet expulsion and deportation of Mennonites from the Ukraine to Asiatic Russia in 1941. Abram is a gifted young scientist who is arrested and exiled to the Siberian Gulag. His tale begins with the massacre of 20 people, including his father, in his home village of Blumenort, Molotschna. Aron's story is that of a disenfranchised minister who spends many years in hiding, and who endures two lengthy periods of imprisonment.

Despite the uniqueness of each story, there are many common themes that bind these four testimonies. Perhaps the most striking is the tremendous suffering that these individuals and their families are forced to undergo. The separation from family and loved ones, particularly where there is no assurance of a future reunion, clearly causes the deepest grief. Each of the story-tellers is forcibly separated from persons very dear to them: a spouse, children, parents, siblings and others. Anna's husband is arrested only four months after their marriage; she never sees him again. Her father is arrested at about the same time; he also dies in exile. Later Anna herself is drafted into a work camp and torn away from her stepchildren and young son. She

writes: "I can scarcely describe the shock of being rounded up. Our children were screaming and we could not believe how cruel the Russian army drafters could be to take mothers from their crying children.... My heart felt as if it would break and I did not know what to do. How could I leave my children?..."

The physical suffering that the storytellers experience is also graphically portrayed by each of the writers. Justina describes how she and a niece and nephew struggle to stay alive through the agonizing Siberian winter. Living in a small earthen hovel where they have been forcibly relocated, they cook only a thin soup of water, flour and a few small potatoes. A small stove with only straw for fuel ensures that the frost never leaves their room. There is no water for washing or bathing. The children hover near death.

At times the physical suffering is so great, that the effort to ward off death becomes all-consuming. "I did not know if any of our relatives were still alive," writes Justina. "Actually, we no longer cared about others. Our only concern was survival and that meant enough food."

Frequently the writers express their outrage over a system that makes a mockery of justice and human decency and that reduces individuals to "walking corpses." Aron, a man of deep honesty and integrity, initially feels that his arrest must be in error, and that he will surely be released soon. He eventually realizes, however, that the system does not care about individuals like him and he becomes rather cynical. "Two contradictory forces were at work," he writes. "One wanted to build up the nation and did everything in its power to accomplish this. The other, the true enemy of the people and the state, only sought to destroy. These types, and there were many of them, harmed the nation and killed innocent people."

But even while the writers express their despair over the hard-heartedness of the Soviet system, they also learn to celebrate the small gestures of caring and kindness extended to them by persons who are a part of that system: supervisors who show compassion, guards who provide extra morsels of food, officials who allow for transfers to less difficult work. These individuals, and their acts of generosity, help keep the writers from losing faith in humanity.

Faith in God plays a very important role in the experience of the writers, especially Anna, Justina and Aron. Each of them, in moments of deepest despair, rage against a God who allows such devastating human suffering to occur. At other times, they lament God's seeming absence and abandonment. But they also, ultimately, recognize the hand of God in the blessings which they experience in the midst of their anguish - a

new cow, some potatoes, a lost kerchief that is found. All except Aron also attribute their survival to God's loving grace and protection.

For this reviewer, the deep faith expressed by Anna, Justina and Aron is deeply moving. At the same time, I struggled to understand how God acts in the midst of the evil in the world. If one chooses to see the hand of God in the fact that one's own life is spared, what does this say about the person whose life is senselessly taken? Do we infer that God has chosen not to protect or intervene on behalf of this other person? If Anna, Justina and Aron are kept from death by God's providence, what about the thousands who aren't? Surely, God cares no less for them. Obviously, this book cannot answer this age-old question. But for me, the great mystery of the existence of God amidst the reality of evil is raised anew by this reading.

Of the four storytellers, Abram does not use the language of faith, and we do not know the reasons for this. Is it possible that the "religious attrition" which John B. Toews outlines in his introduction is borne out in the life of Abram? In any case, Abram is clearly a person with a deep sense of justice and compassion. He concludes his recollections with the following thoughts: "When I think back over my long years in the Karaganda camp I can still visualize the thousands of work slaves who endured hunger, cold, terror, ridicule, humiliation and performed the most difficult work without any time off. Yet, amid the criminality of all this terrible evil, there were always noble persons who clearly understood the injustices of such mass oppression. Wherever possible they tried to ease the fate of these disenfranchised and suffering people."

In his comments, author John B. Toews draws attention to the differences between the writings of the women and those of the men. He highlights the sense of immediacy and the heartfelt emotions expressed by Justina and Anna, while the recollections of Abram and Aron are more distant and detached. This is most evident where Abram recalls his father's death: "Twenty people were murdered, including my father. My mother and I were eyewitnesses to the murder." There is no mention at all as to what a devastating impact this terrible event must have had on the young Abram. The inclusion of the differing experiences and perspectives of women and men is one of this book's real strengths.

In Journeys, John B. Toews has brought together an amazing collection of stories about a tragic time and place, of which the historic record is only now becoming known. Thus, the book is a very important addition to understanding the Mennonite experience in Russia during the Stalinist era. But, if you are like me, the reading of this collection will be more than simply his-

torically "enlightening." You may find it a profoundly spiritual experience.

Reviewed by Esther Epp-Tiessen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Sarah Dyck, *The Silence Echoes: Memoirs of Trauma and Tears* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1997), Paperback, 234 pp., Maps.

The fiftieth anniversary of the postwar Mennonite migration to Canada has given pause for reflection on the stories of Mennonites who stayed behind in Russia after the migrations of the 1870s and 1920s. In this volume, Sarah Dyck has collected a sample of the stories of Mennonites who experienced the "Soviet Inferno" as the time has come to be called.

In late 19th and early 20th century Russia, rising nationalism and the fact that Germany was the enemy during World War I changed the isolated and privileged position German-speaking subjects of the Tsar had enjoyed. Beginning in World War I, Germans in Russia faced language restrictions, the loss of the German language press and threats of confiscation of their land. The losses of the Russian armies that culminated in the civil war of the 1920s escalated the turmoil and a period of trauma and tragedy for Mennonites, and other German-speaking settlers began.

During the Civil War, the anarchist Machno wreaked havoc on many Mennonite settlements and the succeeding waves of repression that accompanied collectivization in 1929 and the Great Purges of the late 1930s brought sorrow and turmoil to most Mennonite families. World War II saw some Mennonites dispersed to the East ahead of the advance of the German armies. Others became part of what was to be the vanguard of German superiority in the newly acquired expanse of the German-occupied East. When the fortunes of the German armies were reversed, Mennonites and other Germans were resettled in Poland, and with further German losses most Mennonites were caught by the Soviet armies and sent to join their fellow ethnic Germans in the Gulags of the North. Others were handed over to the Soviets by Allied forces as part of the Yalta agreement to return Soviet citizens to Stalin. These unfortunate souls were also doomed to hard labour in the frozen expanse of Northern Siberia.

The collection of stories in Sarah Dyck's anthology give us glimpses into the personal lives and experiences of people who lived through these turbulent years in the Russian Mennonite experience.

Most of the thirty-three stories in this anthology have been published before in the German language and the author's skilful translations bring the poignant stories of this era to a wider audience. The stories include memoirs of people whose experiences ranged from the terror of the Machno bandits in the 1920s to the rehabilitation of Soviet Germans in the 1950s. Some of the stories are written by well-known writers such as Peter Epp, the author of *Ob Tausend Fallen*, others are anonymous memoirs retold by others such as Karl and Grete Fast

who worked among the Aussiedler in Germany.

As Sarah Dyck points out in her introduction, the stories vary from the literary to simple accounts of ordinary people. In some stories the peculiarities of the native German expression shines through the translation--a feature that English readers may find perplexing. In other stories the beauty of the original is recreated in its English translation. Most of the stories are intensely personal and recount feelings and experiences that plumb the depths of human emotion--loss, fear, hunger, death and survival.

The memoirs in this collection share common themes that characterized the experience of Mennonite men and women under the Communist regime in the former Soviet Union. Identification with Germany and being German is a dominant theme in many of the stories. While Mennonites had considered themselves German for more than a century by this time, their sense of 'Germanness' was embodied in language, literature and culture. Because of World War I, Mennonites and other Soviet Germans were labelled as Germans in a way that connected them to a national German state.

The stories told in this book help explain this increased attachment to being German that Mennonites in the former Soviet Union seemingly all shared. An example is Dietrich Rempel's story of the many deaths in exile where he concludes with the epitaph, "they died without guilt, just because they were Germans" (page 223). The belief that some of their suffering was inflicted upon them because they were German threads its way through the stories and helps to explain the desire to emigrate to Germany as soon as they could after their official rehabilitation by the Soviet regime in the 1950s.

The theme of loss is also pervasive in the stories in this anthology. The reader is overwhelmed with the litany of fathers who were taken, children who starved, mothers who succumbed to illness, and brothers who were separated from their siblings and never heard from again. The stories leave the reader with a sense that those that quietly slipped away into the hereafter were in many cases the fortunate ones. Those that survived to tell the story suffered immeasurably more.

Loss has also changed the nature of the stories. So much of history is the story of men, but because of the large numbers of men who just disappeared, or were less able to devise the necessary physical and emotional strategies to survive, the stories of this period are dominated by the experiences of women. Although there are more male authors than female in this collection, the primacy of women's experience clearly emerges.

The memoirs are also a stark accounting of failure and faithfulness. Sarah Dyck's skilful editing produces a collection of stories that offers examples of those in the community unable to withstand the pressures of the day and as a result cast their lot with the oppressors. There are also, however, marvellous stories of the preservation of faith through the most horrible tests imaginable. It is remarkable how the briefest encounter as a small child with 'faith-making'

experiences provided references in later life that provided a framework that was able to find the hope and strength to survive. With no formal church, few religious leaders, and no Bibles the people in these stories were reduced to relying on their inner faith for the strength to carry on.

The one failing of the book is the rather brief historical overview in the book's preface. The memoirs throughout the remainder of the book often cry out for context to make them more understandable for the reader unfamiliar with the complexities of Soviet history. It must also be noted that it has been tempting for this period of Mennonite history to be cast only as a horrible tragedy perpetrated on an innocent people by a vindictive regime. In the author's introduction and in some of the stories this tendency rises to the surface. On balance, however, the writers of the stories paint pictures of both human strength and failing, of both the indescribable cruelty of party functionaries but also of those who exhibited human decency while believing in, and working within, a regime that placed little value on human life.

The Silence Echoes permits a wider audience to share the stories of the difficult Soviet experience of Mennonites and other Germans. The stories are richly textured and told in a variety of styles and engaging ways. With the recent influx of Soviet Germans in Germany, many Mennonites in Canada have greatly increased possibilities of interacting with relatives who lived through these events. This collection will help us to better understand their culture and worldview.

Hans P. Werner, Winkler, Manitoba.

Stella Penner, compiler, *Peter P. Penner Family Reunion July 23, 1987* (Rosenort, Manitoba, 1987), 72 pages.

This modest looking volume contains all the characteristics which have come to be associated with Holdeman family books: good quality writing and family reminiscences, genealogy and family trees and, of course, no photographs.

The family patriarch Peter P. Penner (1875-1949) was the son of Peter H. Penner (1839-1916), and related to all the Blumenort and Greenland Penners. The family matriarch Margaretha Dueck (1878-1955) was the daughter of Johann L. Dueck (1833-94), Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba, and related to all the Kleine Gemeinde Duecks of Muntau, Molotschna.

The special parts of the books are the reminiscing by family members and the anecdotes which they have preserved. Also included is a wonderful poem "The Penner Poem" by Margaret Penner Toews which recounts the family history. Of the numerous fascinating reminiscences contained in the book, I will allow the following extract from "The Penner Poem" to speak for itself:

"I see Grandpa, round and jolly, always apt to testify, Who'd go to 'Hungah-Veah-Dee' and his gifts of love apply, Bringing flour to the needy, bringing food and clothes and cheer, to the poor of 'hinga Steinbach', a true deacon year on year. And I've always thought the tribute

that spoke loudest of his good, Were the many horse-drawn wagons that at his funeral stood.”

Descendants of Peter P. and Margaretha Dueck Penner included sons Ben D. Penner, former Steinbach machinery dealer, and George D. Penner, and his sons Earl, Ralph and Roy. Menno Penner, a grandson of Peter P. Penner, lives in Swan River. Book note by Delbert Plett.

For 1948 passport pictures of Margaretha Dueck Penner (1878-1955) and Peter P. Penner (1875-1955), see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part One, page 29.

Frieda Thiessen, *Descendants of Klaas F. Penner and Maria Penner* (Eden, Manitoba, 19980, 99 pages.

This book is comparable to the Peter P. Penner family book, and indeed, the family patriarchs were related, Peter being the nephew of Klaas, although both were born in the same year, 1875. The books are also similar physically, 99 pages for the latter compared with 72 pages for the former, no pictures. Both include the history of the patriarch and patriarch as well as reminiscences by and of their children which will provide priceless memories for future generations.

The Klaas F. Penner book, for example, provided additional information about Peter Penner (1816-84), Margenau, Molotschna, and later Blumenort, Manitoba, the common patriarch, that I had not been previously aware of. Peter Penner Sr. was known as “five wives and two lives Penner”.

The nickname arose from an accident when Penner was crossing a bridge with a team of horses, “the bridge broke and he fell into the ‘abyss’. He was carried home a dead man--or so everybody thought. After the body had been washed it was laid on a bench. Before the last person left the room, he noticed Peter’s head wasn’t in the right position. The most important part of the story is what Peter said later. He said that from the time he was falling until the time he landed was long enough to become a Christian. He went down unconverted and opened his eyes a Christian” (page 1). The story is further clarified by Gerhard S. Koop (*Mennonitische Post*, July 17, 1998, page 22), who added the detail that Peter was a 18 year-old man at the time. According to his version, Peter Penner fell off a horse.

Kl. F. Penner was born of the fourth wife and was the second youngest in the family. His real mother died young and so his step-mother, (Peter’s fifth wife), a Mrs. Heinrich Friesen, nee Katharina Schellenberg (1824-1901), was his real mother. When the Holdeman schism occurred in 1882, she held true to the “faith once received” and supported her son “in this social upheaval”. The result was that Klaas F. Penner remained in the Kleine Gemeinde and did not join the Holdeman movement as did most of his siblings and nephews and nieces.

In 1896 Klaas married Maria R. Reimer, daughter of Kleine Gemeinde deacon Abraham R. Reimer, Blumenort. They raised a large family and lived for many years at the west end of

the old Blumenort village where John L. Pletts live today. “They had 15 children of whom 3 died in infancy.” In addition to an up-to-day genealogy the book provides a brief biography of each branch of the family.

Klaas F. Penner descendants in the area include Elmer Penner (1937-89), “Elmer Penner Trucking”, deceased, Abe Penner, Okno Manufacturing, Justina Penner (Mrs. John K. Barkman), Kleefeld, Helena Penner (Mrs. Elmer Reimer), Landmark, Martha Penner (Mrs. Daniel D. Plett), Nova Scotia. The Penner family is also prominent in Spanish Lookout, Belize, with many ministers and other church leaders: see *Preservings*, No. 12, June 1998, pages 92-4.

The family owes a great debt to Frieda Thiessen, a great-granddaughter, for compiling this valuable family heritage.

Book note by Delbert Plett

John Wall, compiler, Bruce Wiebe, Margaret Wiebe, Hans Werner, etc., *The Descendants of OHM Abraham Wiebe (1831-1991)* (Winkler, Manitoba, 1991), 304 pages.

Although this family settled in the West Reserve, living at Hochfeld, Reinfeld and Blumenhof, I and many others have a personal interest in the family of Ohm Abraham Wiebe (1831-1900), as he apparently was a second cousin to Aeltester Heinrich Wiebe Enns (1801-81), Rosenort, my great-great grandfather, and his four sisters who left large descendancies in the Steinbach and Rosenort areas, namely, Anna married to Abraham Eidse, Maria married to Gerhard S. Kornelsen, Lichtenau, Susanna married to Peter W. Loewen, Grünfeld, and Justina married to Heinrich Warkentin, Rosenort,



David Wiebe Sr. (1895-1960) with first wife Judith Wiebe and son David (page 127). The family were part of the 1922 exile from Manitoba to Mexico where David Wiebe Sr. served his community as a minister (page 128).



David Wiebe Sr. was a minister of the Old Colony Gemeinde, Cuauthemoc, Mexico, where serving God and Gemeinde still required a willingness to be identified with the mores and protocol of the community even though they were different from the “pop” religious culture of the day. Note the “prediger’s ruck”, peaked cap and knee-high boots (page 129).

Manitoba.

The family is of further importance as Ohm Abraham was the brother of Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Aeltester who led his Fürstenländer congregation to Manitoba in 1875-6, where he formed the Reinländer Gemeinde (later also known as the “old Coloniers”). Another cousin Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) was the Aeltester of the Bergthaler Gemeinde, and so the Wiebe family was represented prominently in all three of the Mennonite denominations coming to Canada in the 1870s.

The “Ohm Abraham Wiebe” family book is



In 1991 Abraham Letkeman (b. 1966), great-grandson of Ohm David Wiebe Sr. (1895-1960), married Lillian Lagarda, Cuauthemoc, Mexico, showing acculturation at work in Mexico (page 134).



Shirley Neufeld, nee Klassen, Winkler, holding a trophy she received in 1992 (page 293). Shirley is married to Rick Neufeld, a descendant of Abraham Wiebe (1856-1919) (page 39). Acculturation at work in Manitoba.

sound production. The brief but concise historical background written by Hans Werner is well-written and balanced in its presentation of the Mennonite story. The "early ancestral data" compiled by Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, reflects his decades-long research into his family roots. The biography of Ohm Abraham has drawn on all the standard sources available for pioneers of his generation, including tax, assessment, homestead, land titles records, as well as private diaries and Waisenamt records.

Unfortunately no information is included about the wives of Ohm Abraham, but this may merely reflect the fact that no information was available. I do find it amazing, however, how often at least a few stories and anecdotes can be gleaned out from the darkness of the past by canvassing an entire descendancy, although it can be an incredible amount of work or fun, depending on one's attitude.

Sometimes even a few items of seemingly insignificant material culture, such as a dinner plate, cream pitcher, kjist or an "old" Bible can add to a family's understanding of their ancestors. If I had one quibble with the book, I would have suggested that each section be more carefully marked as to its authorship and origin.

Ohm Abraham and his wife Maria Koop had four children who left families and the remainder of the book is devoted to their stories which are well-done and detailed providing an important legacy. The book contains valuable photographs of many of the families which will greatly enhance its value for future generations.

One of the things making this book particularly interesting is the wide diversity among the family, with some descendants living in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, still holding true to traditional ways, and others, in Canada and the United States, who have adopted the most modern ways and in some cases, even "popular" religious culture.

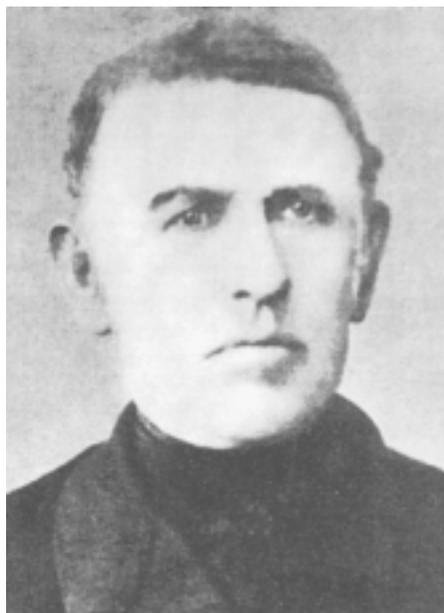
I also enjoyed the photograph sections for each family at the end of the book. The publishers are to be applauded for including an index, something too often omitted with family books, although I must say I found it difficult to use, being essentially a listing of names in the order appearing in the book and not a true alphabetical index.

The descendants of this family include the prominent Abe Wiebe, Winkler, minister of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde in Winkler (page 124-5), As I was paging through the book I realized that it even included the family of Susie Harder who married my cousin Peter P. Plett, Arborg (page 82) formerly of Belize.

Book note by Delbert Plett

Leland D. Harder and Samuel W. Harder, *The Blumstein Legacy: A Six Generation Family Saga* (North Newton, Kansas, 67117, 1998), 273 pages.

Some 15 years ago, Leland Harder wrote me a letter in which he referred to the prominent Kleine Gemeinde/Holdeman folk historian Peter P. Isaac (1846-1925), with the following words, "Peter Isaac demonstrated a profound capacity to record for posterity those matters and facts which would be of vital interest to genealogists and social historians a century later." When I look at this new Harder family book as well as the incredible amount of work Leland has done over the years, putting out the "Harder Family Reviews", I could think of no better accolade for Leland himself. With these works, he has performed a magnificent service not only for the Harder clan but the Mennonite community at large.



Johann Harder (1811-75), Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde, Molotschna Colony, 1860-75. Photo courtesy of "Blumstein Legacy," page 26. Johann Harder had a dozen or more Plett first cousin's on the East Reserve including the "L" Pletts in Blumenhof, and the "P" Isaacs in Kleefeld, Cornelius P. Goossen, Steinbach, and cousins Henry P. Enns, Jakob P. Enns, in Rosenort.



Bernhard Harder (1832-84), the great Russian Mennonite evangelist. Photo courtesy of "Blumstein Legacy," page 17. Bernhard Harder had several Harder cousins in the E. Reserve including Johann H. Toews (1826-95), Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Anna Regehr (1832-93), nee Toews, Grünfeld. Sisters Margaretha (1819-60) (Mrs. Jakob Friesen) and Elisabeth (1821-53) (Mrs. Martin Klassen), had already died in Russia but left large descendancies in the E. Reserve and/or Rosenort.

The Harder book, entitled "The Blumstein Legacy", traces the descendants of Johann Harder (1764-1827), who come from the Marienberg area of West Prussia, immigrating to Imperial Russia in 1803 where they settled in the village of Blumstein, Molotschna Colony, the following year.

The family was rather prominent with descendans including Bernhard Harder (1832-84), the famous Russian Mennonite evangelist/poet, and Johann Harder (1811-75), Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde, to name two. The members of the Harder family were found in almost all branches of the Mennonite church in Russia, including the Brüdergemeinde. The family of daughter Elisabeth Harder (1800-34) married to Johann Toews (1793-1873), Fischau, Molotschna Colony, belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde, and were rather prominent in the East Reserve, including Milton Penner, Penner International, and Elaine Beckett, McDonalds, H. K. Friesen, City of Steinbach Councillor, Pat Friesen, poet, and "C.K." Friesen, founder of "Friesen Drillers", see article, "Kjist and Prush", material culture section.

Leland has produced some extremely competent historical interpretation and compilation

Harder Family Reunions.

The Harder family also has an active ongoing relationship through tri-annual family gatherings to which all descendants of Johann Harder (1764-1827) are invited. Anyone interested may obtain further information by writing Leland Harder, Box 367, North Newton, Kansas, 67117. I believe the next gathering is to be held in California and I for one plan to be there, God willing.



Abraham T. Friesen (1854-1908) was a grandson of Elisabeth Harder Toews (1800-34). Friesen was the first school teacher in Steinbach in 1875-76. He was an intelligent, articulate man. In 1891 he forwarded Heinrich Balzer's treatise "Faith and Reason" to "Die Gemeinde Unterm Kreuz" for publication in serial format. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 10, Part Two, page 26. Steinbach City Councillor Henry K. Friesen is Abraham's great-nephew.

with his introductory chapters on the Harders, Isaacs, Pletts and Fasts (some of this is to be found in the Harder Family Review). But his real genius and love is for the people and their stories, which comes out most clearly in the later portions of the family history, say post 1900, where he has gathered and published hundreds of new family histories and translated letters. The most poignant, of course, are those who did not escape from Soviet Russia in the 1920s and who went through the raging inferno of the Mennonite holocaust which claimed 30,000 lives.

Pages 178 to 245 contain a genealogical listing of Johann Harder (1764-1827), by co-author Samuel W. Harder although the family of youngest child, Elisabeth Harder (Johann Toews) is only mentioned, notwithstanding that it is probably the best documented branch of the family. Elisabeth had seven children who married, four of whom left large families in the East Reserve and/or Rosenort, Manitoba; see "Cornelius Toews Genealogy," in *Profile 1874*, pages 217-231. Peter W. "Schmedt" Toews (1871-1946), an aggressive blacksmith and horse trader in Steinbach around the turn-of-the-century, for example, was the son of her only son Johann H. Toews (1826-95). See also article on Cornelius W. Toews in Issue No. 14, forth coming.

The book itself is very inclusive in the sense of treating female and male lines equally. Apparently the omission of the name "Harder" in the title was also intentional on the part of the publishers to reflect this inclusiveness.

To my knowledge, Leland's work--and I refer here to the "Harder Family Review" as well as "The Blumstein Legacy"--is among the most extensive gathering of historical material of an extended clan for a Russian Mennonite family. The book is well researched and written, and will be an inspiration not only to the Harder family but also the entire Mennonite community for generations to come.

Book note by Delbert Plett

John Raulston Saul, *Reflections of Siamese Twins* (Penguin Books, Toronto, 1997), 546 pages.

In his book *Reflections of Siamese Twins*, John Raulston-Saul presents some new and some not-so-new, but nevertheless intriguing ways of looking at Canadian history. He argues that Canada has a unique historical ethos, based not on the idealized homogenized European nation-state but upon a loose triangular alliance between Natives, French and English that was formed in earliest Colonial times. Raulston-Saul sees the Orange and Ultramontane movements in the 19th century as attempting to import the "force of monolithic, conquering European nationalism" into the Canadian reality. But the problem is that this reality had already existed for three centuries based not on some kind of monolithic nationalism but "... on a positive acceptance of place and society as expressions of complexity" (page 108).

In this way, Raulston-Saul attempts to persuade Canadians--Francophones, Anglophones and natives, that there is common ground for an historical ethos shared by all three groups.

We are well-familiar with the concept of Anglo-normality in Canadian historiography. In 1909 J.S. Wordsworth published the book *Strangers at our Gate*, propounding the startling view that supposedly racially inferior people such as Mennonites, French, Ukrainians, Icelanders, etc., could be remade into "little" Englishmen, i.e. into what he regarded as civilized useful citizens almost equal--but never quite--to the Anglo-majority. This view, known as Anglo-conformity, expressed the racial thinking of many English-speaking Canadians and reflected the policies of many governments after the turn of the century.

In a way, the objective for proponents of Anglo-conformity was the same as that of Raulston-Saul, namely, the development of a common historical ethos. But where Raulston-Saul is seeking to extrapolate a triangular understanding of Canadian history, proponents of Anglo-conformity sought to impose their historical tradition, namely, Anglo-Saxon culture, upon all others. For that reason, Anglo-conformity was foundationally in conflict with the views expressed by Raulston-Saul. The end result of Anglo-conformity, I would suggest, was a form of ethnic cleansing, defined in its most generic way, as the eradication of undesirable (in today's language we would say "unofficial") cultures by means other than agreement or consensus freely given.

In *Reflections of Siamese Twins*, Raulston-Saul provides a valuable new perspective on Canadian history which has great relevance to the solution of current problems such as Quebec separation, etc.

Unfortunately, his work ignores another Canadian reality, a fourth estate, so to speak, meaning those who have immigrated to Canada but are neither French nor English, who now make up 40 per cent of the population. Some of these immigrant groups such as Mennonites, Jews and

Ukrainians have been in the country longer than most Anglophones. It is unfortunate that Raulston-Saul did not accommodate the historical ethos of these groups into his analysis.

Anglo-conformity is not only racist in its fundamental conception, but has reflected politically correct thinking in Canada far too long. The work of Raulston-Saul demonstrates a remarkable effort to move beyond the clutches of Anglo-conformity as the sole ideal of Canadian virtue and culture.

Reviewed by D. Plett Q.C.

Ernest P. Toews, *Peter R. Toews 1872-1953* (Box 75, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, 1998), 44 pages, soft cover, private edition.

Ernest P. Toews, frequent contributor to *Preservings*, has completed an important project, a biography of his father Peter R. Toews (1872-1953).

He has reprinted some previously published materials from *Preservings*, including the biography of his grandmother, Elisabeth Reimer Toews (1843-1918)--*Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 12-14.

The biography of Peter R. Toews is well written and draws on Mr. Toews' extensive knowledge of local history and folklore. Although some of the interpretations expressed are somewhat coloured by Mr. Toews' Fundamentalist/Evangelical interpretation of church history, he is to be congratulated for an important contribution to Steinbach's history.

Peter R. Toews was the grandfather of Jake Epp, former Federal Cabinet minister.

Abe Friesen editor, *Peter Friesen and Maria Rempel Descendants 1828-1994* (Rosenort, Manitoba, 1994), 360 pages, hardcover 8" by 11".

This is a big beautiful book tracing the descendants of Peter Friesen (1828-1903) and Maria Rempel 1833-1908) who moved to the Bergthal village of Friedrichsthal by 1856. By 1868 the family had moved to the village of Rosenbach, Fürstenlandt settlement. In 1875 they immigrated to Canada with the Fürstenlandt group and settled in the Halbstadt area in Manitoba, West Reserve.

Peter appears to have been a school teacher at some point and kept a journal in which he recorded various details of family and farm life, including wages paid to employees, etc. He was also did "fine work in writing" and in 1856 he



Peter and Maria Friesen 1900. Courtesy of Peter Friesen and Maria Rempel book page 5.

Heidi Harms Friesen, "May The Circle Be Unbroken": A Family History of Peter D. Harms and Maria Friesen (Rosenort, 1998), 73 pages.

The title of the book caught my attention right away. It is a unique title for a family history book. This book is the life story of Peter D Harms and Maria W Friesen. When I started reading the book I found out that the name of the book is Maria Friesen's favorite song. This book is compiled by Peter and Maria's youngest granddaughter. It starts with a family tree dating back to the 1700s, then two letters written by Maria Friesen to her children.

Peter D Harms was born May 19, 1889 and Maria W. Friesen was born Aug. 22, 1895. They were married Dec. 13, 1914. They lived with

Maria's parents for the first while, then moved to a little house in Rosenhoff. They had 12 children born to them. Throughout the story there are memories from the children of Peter and Maria, typed in boxes so they are set apart from the rest of the story.

Times were very hard for the family as there was little or no money. Maria was a real "prayer warrior" and taught her children about heaven and the Lord. Peter was a giving person. He was always willing to share with his family any treat he had, even though there wasn't much. Maria was often sick and when she died Sept. 28, 1948 it was very hard on the family and especially Peter. Many times the youngest two children had to stay alone because their dad was working. Peter learned to pray out loud after his wife's death, which was very hard for him. Peter died Dec. 18, 1956. Through all the trials the family triumphed through their faith in the Lord. Some parts of the story could have used a bit more explanation for one to understand why that particular thing happened.

There were many wonderful pictures throughout the story to allow us to visualize what it was like back then. I really enjoyed the epilogue where a description was given on each of the 12 children and why they have become the person they are today. The family genealogy in the back includes a few pictures of the families today. It would have been nice to have names under each picture to identify the people in them. This is a very nice keepsake for the family.

Reviewed by Beverly Lynn Penner, Box 20,989, Steinbach, R0A 2T2.

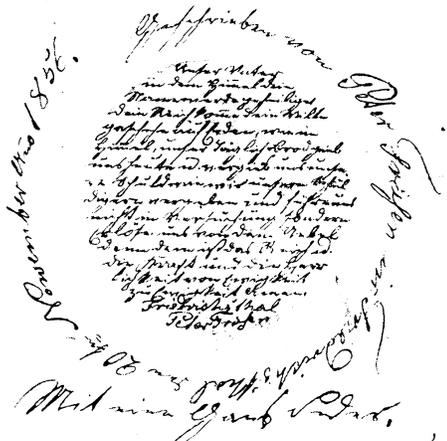
Family Book Committee, *Froese Family Tree 1871-1998, celebrating 50 years in Canada: Froese Jakob 1871-1919 and Maria 1875-1943* (Steinbach, 1998), 194 pages. Hardcover.

1998 marks the year of many family 50 year celebrations of freedom in Canada, a land that offered peace, hope and a future to Mennonite refugees fleeing war-torn Russia. The Froese family was one of these.

They converged on Steinbach Bible College August 7 through 9, coming from as far west as British Columbia, from Virginia, Ontario, and points in between to share their stories, renew acquaintances, laugh, play, sing, eat and worship together.

The highlight of their coming together was to launch the "Froese Family Tree" book that told their stories and traced their ancestry from old Einlage in Russia to present-day North America.

Jacob Froese (1871-1919) with his wife Maria (1875-1943) and their eleven children had their lives interrupted by the turmoil in their homeland - turmoil of revolution, war, disaster and early deaths. Five of their children were able to emigrate to Canada after World War II, Franz and family to Steinbach, Maria, Anna, Gerhard and their families to Ontario, and two daughter-in-laws with families to Winnipeg and British Columbia. These six family lines form the basis of the book, telling their stories in picture and script of small beginnings, struggles and hard-



Lord's Prayer written out by Peter Friesen, Friedrichsthal 1856.

wrote out the "Lord's Prayer" which is a sample of his work.

The descendants of Peter Friesen and Maria Rempel were among those "exiled" to Mexico by the Provincial Government of Manitoba in 1922 for the "crime" of wishing to educate their children using the Bible as textbook. By this time the grandparents of relative Dyan Friesen Cannon had moved to British Columbia, thus escaping the fascist operations of the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Governments in 1916-19. Over the years some members of the Peter Friesen family have returned to Manitoba.

This is an exceptionally well-done family book with photos and brief biographies of most of the descendants many of whom are still living in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

Book Note by D. Plett



Dyan Friesen Cannon (left) and Amanda Rose Friesen (right). It turns out that Peter Friesen (1828-1903) was the grandson of Peter Friesen (b. 1751) who settled in Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony in 1788-89. Peter Friesen Sr. had another son, Kornelius (1790-1868) whose son Peter Friesen (born 1829) was the great-grandfather of Dyan Friesen Cannon, see Preservings, No. 12, June 1998, pages 30-33. This would make Peter Friesen's (1828-1903) great-great-great granddaughter Amanda Rose Friesen (Mrs. Keith Klassen), Blumenort, Manitoba, a sixth cousin to Jennifer, daughter of Dyan Friesen Cannon and Carie Grant. From studying the photographs in the Friesen book it seems that the flat somewhat wider nose is a Friesen characteristic.



Isaak F. Harms (1859-1916) father of Peter D. Harms, who served as Postmaster in Rosenort. Isaak F. Harms was the son of Isaac Harms (1837-66), and the grandson of Isaak Harms (1811-91), Lindenau, Molotschna, where he owned a "fine Wirtschaft". Isaak Harms Sr. was the leading proponent of buying land for the landless within the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia during the early 1860s, a program enabling many young Kleine Gemeinde families to get started on their own. What Abraham F. Thiessen, (1832-89) did for the landless Mennonites in the Molotschna Colony, Isaak Harms Sr. did for the landless in the Kleine Gemeinde. Even years later pioneer merchant Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) acknowledged Harms, "I am often mindful of a man such as the aged Isaak Harms and how he frequently put his entire property at stake for us poorer brethren." Isaak Harms Sr. who lies buried in the Steinbach Pioneer Cemetery, never did get the credit for giving voice to the Kleine Gemeinde ethos of community morality and social obligation to the less fortunate, a philosophy later adopted and promoted by modern organizations such as MCC, MEDA and MDS. Photo courtesy Dave Harms, Box 2368, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0. The photo is also reproduced in L. Klippenstein, Mennonites in Manitoba: Their Background and Early Settlement (Winnipeg, 1976), page 22.

ships to family growth, business expansions and embracing the Canadian way of life.

To add to the stories, immigration routes, maps and a detailed genealogy commencing in 1754 flesh out this readable book.

"The book is not perfect. Books of this nature rarely are. It is impossible to verify every detail that got printed. The book is a book of memories and memories are just that - what we think we know, not necessarily the way things were when we were young."

reviewed by Helga Froese, Steinbach, Manitoba

Arnold Dyck, *Hochfeld: Ein Steppendorf im Bürgerkrieg-Ukraine 1918-19-* (Uchte, Germany: Sonnentau Verlag, 1998), 128 pages.

Back in the 1980s, when the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society was publishing a definitive four-volume edition of Arnold Dyck's complete works, the Editorial Committee was unable to track down this novel manuscript, which was known to exist, so as to make Dyck's body of published work complete. The manuscript was supposed to be a kind of sequel to Dyck's popular autobiographical novel *Verloren in der Steppe*.

Now, praise be, the novel has finally been published in Germany by Dyck's children. However, although interesting and for the most part entertainingly written, *Hochfeld* is not quite the masterpiece which devotees of Dyck's writing might have hoped for. Apparently, Dyck left behind a badly fragmented manuscript which required extensive fitting together with transitional bridges in order to shape it into a coherent whole. And we are told in a postscript that the concluding chapters taking the story up to the time of the Russian-Mennonite emigration in the early twenties have been lost entirely.

What remains, once again shows Dyck's skill at evoking the past and creating believable characters by the most economical narrative means. The story, although fictionalized, follows quite closely what we know of Dyck's own life at this stage and that of his family. The protagonist is once again Hans Toews, grown up now, who appeared so memorably in *Verloren in der Steppe*. The events take us through the tragic time of the Civil War, particularly the violent period of Makhno terrorism. Those who have read other novels and personal memoirs of this tragic era will be familiar with the sequence of events depicted here. The novel begins with a rather pedestrian historical sketch of Hochfeld village and its inhabitants. This reader, at least, would have preferred a plot that started *in medias res*, in the middle of the action. As it is, the novel begins slowly but gathers dramatic tension as it moves along.

The main events, grim and fateful as they are, begin with the Makhno occupation of the Old Colony, including Jazykovo and the village of Hochfeld, in the closing months of 1919. Hans Toews, along with other young Hochfelders, is commandeered to drive a supply wagon to Ekaterinoslav for Makhno's "army." He survives that ordeal only to arrive home just after

the savage massacre at Eichenfeld (over 70 males slaughtered) and other mass killings in surrounding villages, including 18 in Hochfeld.

Toews is asked to serve as secretary for the newly formed village soviet just in time to endure, along with his fellow villagers, six weeks of brutal occupation by Makhno's men.

When Makhno's forces are finally chased out of the area by the Whites, another catastrophe strikes in the form of a typhus epidemic. Toews, his young wife and his brother Berend survive the dreaded disease, but scores of villagers die, including his father. Although the terrorists have taken most of their horses and consumed most of their food, the villagers retain feeble feelings of hope that they will be able to carry on now that spring has come.

What one misses in this rather truncated novel is the delicately ironic tone used by the narrator in Dyck's earlier fiction. But then a story as grim as this one does not allow for much irony. And yet in its quieter moments Dyck does show flashes of his ironic wit. The language in this book is closer to standard High German than the Plautdietsch-influenced High German of *Verloren in der Steppe*, say, but the "Mennonite" High German of the earlier novel is part of its charm. The style in *Hochfeld* is more formal and in places becomes so dense that it seems at odds with Dyck's customary clear, simple style.

These reservations aside, this is a gripping story vividly evoked, and the Dyck family is to be congratulated for making it available to Dyck's readers.

Reviewed by Dr. Al Reimer

Ted Friesen and Elisabeth Peters, editors, *Memories of Grigorievka* (CMBC Publications, Winnipeg, MB, 1998), 295 pages, \$25.00

As a descendant of immigrants who came to Manitoba from Grigorievka, a small Mennonite village in South Russia (Ukraine), I had heard many stories about this place. I was therefore intrigued, to say the least, when Ted Friesen announced that he wished to write a book commemorating the place from which my parents, paternal grandparents and many of my uncles and aunts fled in 1926, just in time to escape the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. The book does not disappoint -- it not only includes many of the stories and descriptions with which I was already familiar, but it also adds a good number I had not previously heard. The stories in this book are like the stories told by my parents in that they are characterized by ambivalence. Grigorievka was a place from which former inhabitants were happy to escape, and yet it was at the same time a place they would always remember nostalgically. There is considerable evidence in this book that Grigorievka, partly because it was virtually obliterated by a revolution and two world wars, is as much a mythical place as an actual site, past or present.

The purpose of the book, as Ted Friesen puts it in his introduction, is to record the story/stories of this village "for the people of Grigorievka and their descendants, for the Men-

nonite people and larger society, and especially for present young people and future generations." No doubt the book will be of particular interest to the immediate descendants. Future generations and the "larger society" may find some of these stories too detailed and too far removed from their experience, but social historians may come to regard the book in general as useful resource material.

Friesen is quite right when he states that "Grigorievka in many ways was a microcosm of the Russian-Mennonite world." However, both the village and the book must be considered a small albeit an interesting window on the larger Russian Mennonite scene. Its brief existence (1889-1926) in itself suggests that this is part of a much larger story. Readers would do well to see the story of this small village, an offshoot of the larger, older Russian Mennonite Colonies (Chortitza and Molotschna), as an illustration of a problem peculiar to the Russian Mennonite colonial model from the very outset, namely, the inevitable scarcity of land. This necessitated constant expansion and eventually brought about conflict with Russian authorities. Furthermore, villages like Grigorievka were developed following the principles laid down by Johann Cornies whereby Mennonite villages were to serve as examples for the indigenous population.

With the onset of the revolution in 1917 such villages became targets for marauding bands, as some of the accounts in this book point out, and the inhabitants became known as kulaks, or oppressors of the common people. Nevertheless, Grigorievka, situated as it was among Russian villages, was spared some of the worst atrocities suffered by the larger, older settlements.

The book begins with a brief history of the village by George F. Loewen, *Memories of the Village of Grigorievka 1889-1926*, originally published in German and translated for this publication by John Dyck. This is followed by a chapter that describes the social customs of the

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village, written by Elisabeth Peters, and another chapter that recounts stories recorded by some of the teachers in the community. This introductory material is then augmented by two accounts of visits to the village, one in 1977 and another in the 1996. The rest of the book consists of family stories (recollections and reminiscences) by former residents. In many instances descendants were called upon to supply these stories second hand. Fortunately, a number of the residents had left written or in some cases audio-taped anecdotes and even some detailed narratives. The publication of this book was timely in that the editors were still able to contact a good number of the former residents in order to confirm dates and other facts.

This book does not include genealogies. As Ted Friesen points out in his introduction, "it was felt that readers could go to individual family histories to pursue this information." However, most families do provide substantial genealogical information. Many, for example, give the names of the ancestors as well as the children of the Grigorievka families featured in this book. Perhaps the book will encourage some of the descendants to use the background information offered here to write their own family histories. *Memories of Grigorievka* contains much seminal material necessary for such undertakings. The numerous family photographs are especially valuable in this regard. These pictures should be of special interest to present and even future descendants.

Memories of Grigorievka was an ambitious undertaking and not without risk as it depended so heavily on the voluntary submissions from many contributors. Then, too, the responses were so varied, some lengthy, some very brief, some in fact mere jottings without much elaboration. Elisabeth (Dyck) Peters, who spent the first ten years of her life in Grigorievka, expanded many of the briefer contributions and in fact researched and wrote some of the family stories that would otherwise have been missed. Peters adds considerable charm to the book with her poetic, nostalgic descriptions. Her memories of the village are part and parcel of her childhood and so she still views the place and its people with innocent eyes. Remarkably, many of the contributors in their own descriptions confirm her enthusiastic tributes to the inhabitants and her charming portrayal of village life.

Reviewed by Peter Pauls, University of Winnipeg

Bernard Toews, *Reise-Tagebuch. Mennonitische Chaco-Expedition 1921* (Published by Schulverwaltung der Kolonie Menno, 1997), pages 108.

This diary was written by Bernhard Toews during his trip in 1921 with a delegation of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to find new land in Latin America. Toews and his fellow travellers represented the Sommerfelder and Chortitzer Mennonite Churches in Manitoba, and the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan.

These delegates were looking for suitable

settlement land for their church members because of their conflicts with the Manitoba and Saskatchewan provincial governments over control of schools. The provincial governments had closed, or were threatening to close, the Mennonite private schools, and forcing Mennonite school children to attend government schools on pain of fines and imprisonment for the parents. These three Mennonite churches had concluded they could no longer practice their faith in Canada, and would have to find a new country which would hopefully give them the freedom to exercise their faith and control their schools as they believed was right.

Toews left Altona, Manitoba on February 11, 1921 by train. He arrived in Winnipeg, and met the other Mennonite delegates. Because his papers had not arrived, the other delegates left before he did. On February 18 he departed from Winnipeg, arriving in Minneapolis the next day. Mr. Alvin Solberg met him, and Toews stayed at his home while in Minneapolis.

Next day Toews took the train over Chicago to New York, arriving on Feb. 21. At the office of Samuel McRoberts he was reunited with the Mennonite delegates who had gone on before him. McRoberts had land for sale in the Chaco, Paraguay, and it was his land that they wanted to inspect. The whole delegation was hosted at McRoberts' house for dinner. In his diary Toews gave no hint what they discussed with McRoberts. He did, however, include a detailed description of a trip to a museum the next day.

On February 23 the whole delegation departed by ship, the *Vauban*, from New York. Toews did not list who the delegates were. From later references, it appears that the other delegates were. J.J. Priesz, Isaak Funk, Johann Friesen, Jacob Neufeld, and Doerksen. They were accompanied by Fred Engen, an agent for McRoberts. Aron Zacharias, a bishop from Saskatchewan, returned home from New York and did not accompany the delegation to the Chaco.

From New York Toews and the delegates travelled to Buenos Aires, with stops in Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo. Toews was fastidious about recording temperature, his health, and the exact longitude and latitude. In each city, the delegates rented an automobile, and took a city tour.

From Buenos Aires they travelled by ship to Asuncion, where they met the President. Toews notes that they gave him a letter and discussed the Privilegium. No word though about the response by the President.

The delegates were in Paraguay two months. Thirty days were spent travelling in the Chaco (April 29-May30), inspecting the land which McRoberts was offering them. For every day in the Chaco (as well as for all other days on their trip) Toews recorded the barometric pressure, and the temperatures at morning, noon, and evening. Upon their return to the capital, they met the President of Paraguay again and discussed "the Indian question, and other things."

The delegation departed from Asuncion on June 9, and arrived back in New York on July 24. Here they met Bishop Aron Zacharias.

Toews notes that they again spoke with McRoberts, without giving any hint of the content of their discussion. The Saskatchewan delegates, Aron Zacharias, Johann Friesen, and Jacob Neufeld, departed for home. Toews and the other delegates (Funk, Doerksen, and Priesz) together with Alvin Solberg, departed for Mexico to check out settlement possibilities.

The group visited Mexico from August 3 to 27. During this time they visited the areas around Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Bustillos, and Durango. They were accompanied by a number of Old Colony Mennonites who had already received a Privilegium from the Mexican government, and were negotiating land purchases. Toews and the delegation made their way to Mexico City to see the President Alvaro Orregon. The President gave them 15 minutes, during which time they discussed a number of points. They wanted a Privilegium like the Old Colony Mennonites had received and were concerned about the "Indian" problem. Toews provided no indication what the President said regarding each of these points.

On the way home, Toews stopped at Mountain Lake, MN, to visit his parents, and to give a report about his trips to Paraguay and Mexico. Toews arrived back in Manitoba on September 2, 1921 about seven months since he had left. On September 10 he travelled to Winnipeg where he received from Fred Engen the Privilegium proclaimed by the Paraguayan government. Toews gave no indication of the content of the Privilegium, nor his response to it.

In October and November, Toews visited churches in Manitoba and Saskatchewan reporting about his trip. McRoberts, who was worried that the Mennonites would move to Mexico instead of to Paraguay, came to Manitoba in November, together with Fred Engen and Alvin Solberg, to shore up Mennonite resolve to buy his land. Toews was an ardent supporter of the Paraguay option, reassuring McRoberts that his group of Mennonites had no interest in emigrating to Mexico.

Toews' diary is fascinating both for what it includes and what it omits. His eye for detail about weather, his health, museums, ships,

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ports, and cities is remarkable. Yet, about the crucial discussions with the Presidents of Paraguay and Mexico, he only records the topics they discussed, but provides no details of what the Mennonites requested, nor what the Presidents responded.

This diary provides us with a valuable glimpse into the mind of one of the delegates who helped to make the decision that more than 1,700 Mennonites from Saskatchewan and Manitoba moved to Paraguay. It is somewhat ironic that in the end, Toews himself did not emigrate to Paraguay.

Reviewed by John J. Friesen, Academic Dean, Professor of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 800 Shafesbury Blvd., Winnipeg.

David H. Elias, *Crossing the Line* (Orca Book Publishers, Victoria, B. C., 1992), 147 pages.

David H. Elias, *Places of Grace* (Coteau Books, Regina, Saskatchewan, 1998), 185 pages.

David Elias's two books of short stories tell of a young man by the name of Steven who grows up in a rather remote part of the Pembina Hill region of southern Manitoba. The place Steven grows up in may be out of the way, but his personality and adventures seem anything but remote from the Mennonite reader's experiences.

In "Not Even the Moon," Steven finds himself hurrying to town to hang out with his new girlfriend, Marie. We know from the start that she cares less for him than the other way around. Small details, well drawn, cleverly provided, tell us that this young man lacks the dazzle which such a little beauty requires if she is to remain a kept woman. His ineptness comes home to us in the scene where he finally makes it, by dint of great effort--hitchhiking, biking and so on, since his father refuses him the use of the truck--to the diner where Marie works, only to find her dallying with the town dandy and eyeing Steven with distaste: "He sat down, leaving an empty stool between himself and the others. Nobody said anything. Marie kept staring at his shirt. He looked down at the white material and saw that it was soaked through with sweat in several places, but worse than that, the wet patches were a dirty gray colour. Maybe it was dust from the road. Or maybe he'd washed in too much of a hurry. Either way, it looked pretty awful" (*Crossing the Line*, page 105).

Unexpectedly, what follows this little scene, where we think we'll get a common reproduction of the theme of the sassy town girl who spurns the naively hopeful country bumpkin, we get instead a much darker picture of Marie in a car with Jerry heading past Steven. This car with his coy girlfriend in it occurs in his imagination, only as he walks the many disappointed miles home from town.

We sense that Steven might soon suffer some sort of mental collapse, or that he must find some resolution through art for such disconnection's from reality. We get a disturbing magical imagination instead of a predictably "re-

alistic" one. This dark imagination is one of the most persuasive reasons for reading Elias's books. Though the stories disturb our expectations for the real and predictable, they never threaten us, however, nor bite from behind like dogs that we expect to be friendly.

In "The Laughter of the Devil," the first piece in the first book, Steven and his sister Trudy visit the zoo where they see a hyena relentlessly pacing back and forth in a cramped cage. Steven draws a sobering comparison between Trudy and the caged animal. He feels tremendous sympathy for his sister, crippled at a young age by polio, unable to participate fully with the other children who speedily move from one zoo-sight to another.

Trudy, quiet and reticent, sits watching the hyena. She breaks the silence, finally, saying that God chose to make her an invalid to test her and that if she believes fully enough He will eventually heal her. Steven drives a wedge between himself and his sister when he asks Trudy if possibly God wanted for her to plead with Him for healing without ever intending for her to get better. In the end, however, Trudy finds the means to bind them together again, drawing strength now not from a solution to the question of the reason for her deformity, but from their difference from other people: "Trudy placed her tiny hand in Steven's. 'We're not like the others, are we?' she said" (*Crossing the Line*, page 11).

This story, moving to the reader as an account of intense family love, also indicates the importance of the idea of the artist to Elias's work. Trudy, herself rejected, understands the difficulty of the artist's separation from others within his community for the artist sees too much, sees too differently, to belong.

In "Crossing the Line," Steven and Bill foolishly go rafting in the ice, swollen Pembina River. What happens in this "crossing," sudden, swift and unexpected, changes Steven's life forever. It haunts him and drives his artistic vision. The special effect of this story is its indefiniteness about what happened. The narrator, unwilling to divulge all, tells us in so many words that this event acted as a muse for him. Too important to him, too damaging to his sense of place and purpose to tell completely, it succeeds in making him a writer.

In "Egg Shells and Dragon Skin," Steven and Trudy come to know a mentally challenged vagrant named Sonny who has crossed the States line one misty morning. They put him up in their tree house for a few days and provide for him, bringing him food and water. He eventually shows them, in an act of tender acceptance, the prized possessions he carries in a little pouch. A few days later he disappears, only to reappear in the most unexpected way.

Happily, David Elias's two books of short stories unsettled me. I have to admit, I expected works less biting, less incisive, possibly because, in my estimation, the strength of most engaging short stories derives from their non didactic curiosity about human life in context familiar to the author. In my experience, Mennonites tend in our age to look neither carefully nor closely at

their surroundings and their relationships, unless preparing a sermon, and we know the object of their gaze then.

Elias's books, un prudish and un preachy, focus on the imaginary world of the developing Mennonite artist. Steven, the central character in both *Crossing the Line* and *Place of Grace* delights us with his curiosity about human life. His perceptions declare everywhere his eccentricity, his dislike of dogma, his pleasure in pleasure, and his joy with words, with love, with freedom, with independence, and so on. Sensitive, he loves his enemies, with the exception of his father who appreciates nothing except work: work to be done, and work well done, long hours of it. Open to experiences of various kinds, biblical but in a fresh way, imaginative and adventurous, hardly interested in money as his father is, and in many ways such an attractive character, Steven nevertheless hates his father with as much passion as his father loves money, penury and hard work.

Steven straight up despises his father's narrow views on things. He despises the quality of Mennonite thoughtlessness about anything except the practical; Mennonite lack of imagination. Steven, the artist with a sensitive nature and mind, dislikes the quality his people most live by: austerity. The story "The Jude," combines all these disliked qualities. A fruit-selling Jew arrives every year at the Steven's parents' farmyard. Each year the sounds, sights and smells of the truck carrying its fruit draw the young boy hungrily from the house.

"The first thing I'd do when I got to the back of the truck was take a long, deep breath. This would carry the amazing mixture of fragrances that spilt out of the dark interior into my lungs--the smell of bananas and oranges, apples and pears. These sultry aromas acted like a potion that shook me out of my winter doldrums into life" (*Places of Grace*, page 23).

Every year, though, as regular as clockwork, his father gets into an argument over price. The upshot of these disagreements is that, as often is not, no fruit gets bought or eaten at all and the disappointment is so great that Steven cannot forgive his father.

And that sums up most of Steven's life's experiences in his village: penury, hard people, people who cannot appreciate pleasures and joys. Another example of this latter fact appears especially clearly in the story, "How I Crossed Over." In it Steven learns some Negro gospel songs from an old Southern African, songs the boy instinctively knows he had been waiting to learn since the day of his birth, so alive, so joyful, they make him feel. He and his friend Bill belt out one of the bluesy tunes in Miss Enns's Sunday School class one day and are severely strapped for it by the preacher.

"The preacher got very red, then, and looked over at the others. 'This is the work of the devil,' he said, 'when boys quote scripture to twist their way out of trouble.' He turned to Miss Enns and the others. 'You're excused,' he said. 'I'll handle it from here.'" (*Places of Grace*, page 68).

Every thing fun is the devil in the Mennonite

evangelical backwoods of Elias's tales. The stories themselves, however, by way of contrast, speak of a strange birth from such austerity and frigidity. All in all, despite their subject of cultural anality, they hold out tantalizing narrative pleasures to us like "the Jude" held out oranges and apples.

I must admit, I expected pap, gush and common realism before, but instead got sting, wit and the fantastic, all wonderful gifts. What I got too little of, though, I have to say, and which I wish Mennonite writers would roll themselves in occasionally, is freedom with the body. Mennonite authors notoriously shun sex and sexuality, thinking of it as sin and bad. That, or if they speak of bodily spragnations at all, they do so under the general rubric of "the flesh" (see Di Brandt's and Pat Friesen's poetry), that ethereal and unpalpable alternative for the entity which sweats, secretes various obvious fluids (puss, snot, lumph juices, and that other juices we mustn't speak of), hungers suddenly and unaccountably for a quickie, and so on.

They typically avoid representing the pleasuring body. Or they put sex and the body's various affects and causes of sweatiness in the wings, so to speak, off stage, out of view, where they can pen away about it as if it happened without having to show it in its details. I mean, we know what the cute teacher, with her hair rumpled and the top buttons of her dress undone has been doing in the woods in "The Handshake" when Steven bumps into her there. Why not show it? In its entirety? We know what Bill saw in the same story, peeping through the pretty teacher's window, but we don't get to see it, left inevitably unsatisfied and arrested in our pleasures, like the man and maid on Keat's Grecian urn. Maybe, David, the next book can show what you're made of in that quarter? In those quarters? The hind quarters? "I'll show you, if you show me," as the saying goes, remember?

Reviewed by Dr. Doug Reimer, St. John's College, University of Manitoba.

Myron P. Loewen, Arden M. Dueck, Leslie L. Plett and Eddy K. Plett, compilers, *Quellen Kolonie* (Impresora Colorama, Coahuila, Mexico, 1998), 302 pages, hardcover, \$75.00.

Quellen Kolonie is a handsome book in the model of M.C.C.'s 1987 *Gäste und Fremdlinge* and the Mexican Mennonite Historical Society's 1997 *75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexico*. Picture books relate to the average person, "oh, there's a picture of granddad!" But historical or history books are read largely by what sociologists call opinion leaders, and so it takes a generation before ideas at that level filter down to the lay person, the man on the street, as it were. The secret was discovered by Walter Quiring and Gerhard Lohrenz in the 1960s, picture books sell, historical works don't.

If that was the paradigm, *Quellen Kolonie* is certainly a smashing success. No expense has been spared to make this book outstanding in every respect. The paper is a heavy weight with

a glossy finish, paper that will last and last, making these books almost permanent mementos.

Before going further it should be mentioned that all the writing in the book is in German. This is somewhat surprising as Jagueyes officially is trilingual as I understand it, the three languages being German, English and Spanish. But with Free Trade and NAFTA, the natural orbit for the Mennonite Colonies in northern Mexico, it seems to me, will be to drift more and more to English.

The glossy white cover is attractive. The front has two pictures displaying the everyday landscape of Jagueyes, the scenes which form the physical life world of local residents.

One is a photo of the view towards the west, dried brown prairie interspersed with green bluffs of oaks, the "Tetillas" mountains, framed by blue sky (page 44). Imagine the beauty of the brass Mexican sun as it sets behind these craggy but eroded escarpments. The second photo explains the name of the colony and the theme of the book, the springs which dot the area. This photo shows one of the largest and strongest springs in Springstein on the farm of Leslie Plett, one of the authors (page 47). Both photographs are tastefully displayed in a golden border.

The back cover of the book has five smaller photographs displaying the large church at Ebenfeld, the Evangelical educational centre, swathing and my favourite, a landscape shot showing clouds laden with rain coming in from the west. Nothing is so dark and ominous looking as rain clouds in northern Mexico, and yet, mostly they are welcome, bringing life renewing rains to the waiting crops and pasture.

The 8 by 11 inch format continues to be the best vehicle to display photographs. And photographs there are by the hundreds. Each of the 303 pages has six and even more pictures, a total somewhere around 1500 perhaps?

If I had one complaint, which I mention with reservations because it is such an excellent production, some of the photographs are too light and hard to make out. Some of the photographs, possibly should not have been included because of their poor quality. But in fairness this is to be



The front cover of *Quellen Kolonie* display two photographs which symbolize life in the *Quellen* Colony. One is a photo of the view towards the west, dried brown prairie interspersed with green bluffs of oaks, the "Tetillas" mountains, framed by blue sky (page 44). Imagine the beauty of the brass Mexican sun as it sets behind these craggy but eroded escarpments.



The second photo explains the name of the colony and the theme of the book, the springs of living water which dot the area. This photo shows one of the largest and strongest springs in Springstein on the farm of Leslie Plett, one of the authors (page 47).

a populist book, a book of the people, and so I can sympathize with the editors' decisions.

I must admit I am quite biased. Of the hundred founding families of Jagueyes, eight were my uncles and aunts, and another similar number, were some of my older cousins, young marrieds at the time. The founding Aeltester of the Colony Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949), was my Dad's oldest uncle.

It stands to reason that hundreds of the photographs in the book are of my relatives, photographs that I would never have seen otherwise. There was even a picture of my grandfather, Heinrich E. Plett, which I had never seen before (page 28).

Thematically the book is well organized, with a brief section on "Our Heritage" two pages, covering the Reformation and emigration to Manitoba. Although it does not mention the name "Mennonite", Menno Simons is quoted in the introduction as well as the Dortrecht confession. The next section moves quickly to the pre-emigration era, the Kleine Gemeinde interest in emigration in 1922-26, with photographs of a 1922 delegations to Mexico. The delegation included my great-grandfather Rev. Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935). But the second section does not mention the earlier 1926 Kleine Gemeinde settlement in Mexico, the Kaunsasdorfer--Hoffnungsau and Heuboden. Perhaps this is left

The Mennonites of Manitoba

A video production written and produced

by George Siamandas for Prairie Public Broadcasting, Inc. ©1998.

for a future study.

The C.O. experience during the W.W.II is covered in comparative detail indicating it was an important part of the final decision to leave Manitoba for some. The same chapter covers the various delegations to Mexico, the actual move, photos of all the pioneers, a chapter on each of the six villages, and then various topical treatments, administration, Vorsteher, ministers, offices, social life, education, etc.

Incidentally I wondered at the use of the word "Kleingemeinde" throughout the book, which is slang, as opposed to the proper name "Kleine Gemeinde". The name "Kleingemeinde" was used in 1910 by historians such as Peter M. Friesen as a putdown of the denomination, comparable to calling modern M.B.s "Huepfer" or "jumpers" as they were known in the 1860s. Which goes to prove that if you repeat a lie often enough somebody, somewhere, will believe it.

The name "Kleingemeinde" is even found in official publications of the Kleine Gemeinde such as the magazine "Der Leserfreund" from Spanish Lookout, Belize, and so I don't fault the editors for this misnomer.

But this does not detract at all from a magnificent production. Congratulations are due to Myron, Arden, Leslie and Eddy for a job well done.

What is most heartening is to see such good history being produced by relatively young people--in their '30s. What is even better is that all of them are integrally involved in the day-to-day life and governance of their community. Hopefully they will be joined by a few young women writers for the next volume, from among the teachers of the community, for example, of whom I understand over half are women.

In the introduction the editors state as their goal, "To shortly bring forward another book which will set forth the story in written format and more completely."

If the present work is any indication all residents, former citizens and descendants of Quellen Colony can look forward to the next book, which will articulate the Kleine Gemeinde story as it unfolded in Jagueyes, a story which very much needs to be told by those who were part of that story and from their own perspective.

The editors have demonstrated that they are more than capable for the task. But first, take a little break and enjoy "Quellen Kolonie" together with your family, neighbours and friends. Perusing its pages will occupy many a pleasant evening or Sunday afternoon, as family, neighbours, and friends gather to recount the days of old.

Gesangbuch No. 450, "Oh, come let us sing together, of how blessed we once were, when with the saints together, we walked through pain and woe. So many now, long since gone, unto eternal blessedness, where at the feet of Christ our Lord, they sing the heavenly victor's song."

Reviewed by D. Plett Q. C.

Mr. Siamandas has taken on the formidable task of documenting both the history and present circumstance of Mennonites living in the province of Manitoba and then condensing this information into a video presentation under one hour in length. He is only partially successful in this endeavour.

If this video has been produced for an audience completely unfamiliar with the Mennonite story it will likely cause some to be puzzled. They might even ask a few questions: Are Mennonites quaint "back to the landers" who live the simple life and strive to follow the teachings of Jesus? Are they entrepreneurs who have become wealthy, vital and dynamic members of the Manitoba corporate and business community? Are they rigid puritanical people who have a somewhat joyless existence with their limited and narrow view of the world? Are they people with an intense social conscience willing to do everything they can to help those less fortunate? Are they a people who are unsure of who they really are?

After viewing this video, one might have to answer yes to all of the above. The continual juxtaposition of images of the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum with those of modern industries and commercial enterprises plus the many static images of solemn worshippers in various churches (and the facades of many other churches) leaves the viewer with an unclear and jagged image of whom the Mennonites are and what they really believe.

In the video, Dr. Royden Loewen suggests that urban Mennonites have reinvented what it means to be Mennonite and have chosen to direct their efforts to social issues and causes in order to define who they are as a people. There are some lengthy segments in the video where individuals express their views on women's issues, service issues and other social issues, views which may or may not be generally held by many who consider themselves to be Mennonites. A Mennonite living in rural Manitoba might find it irritating to be considered merely a lover of the land and the simple life while his urban brothers and sisters in the Faith would have the more modern and socially acceptable notions of how best to live out one's belief and faith.

This is not to say that this video lacks quality or value. The first part of the video does a fine job of capsulating the history of the Mennonite people in Manitoba. Using images from old prints, newsreels and some interesting antique film footage, Mr. Siamandas succeeds in telling this part of the story with considerable skill. In fact, the first 30 minutes or so would be a valuable resource for any student of Mennonite history.

Dr. Royden Loewen's insightful comments and obvious knowledge of history lend an air of authenticity and accuracy to the story. It could even be argued that this discussion on the history of Mennonites in Manitoba should have been expanded upon and that the whole debate of what it means to be a Mennonite today should have been

left for another time or for another documentary.

While doing the research for this video, Mr. Siamandas must have been startled by the number of opinions that he heard when he asked people what it means to be a Mennonite? It is probable that he got as many different opinions on that topic as the number of people he talked to. Some of the comments on the video, like those about capital punishment, may make some viewers squirm knowing that there are indeed people who call themselves Mennonites who would have just those sorts of opinions.

Mr. Art Defehr's thoughtful comments about the respect that Mennonite people have for successful businessmen (and the potential good that can come from that) and Michelle Redekopp's candid ones about some of the contradictions that she observed as a Mennonite and Christian while dealing with certain of her clients were refreshing.

Mennonites may indeed, as Mr. Loewen suggests, have reinvented themselves. The question remains, is this invention consistent with what our ancestors believed or is it even necessary that it should be? Is it possible that we, as a people, have a fluid and changeable belief structure that allows us to move to new places, to become assimilated and which then enables us to prosper as a group? Perhaps the underlying (though probably unintended) message of this production is that we don't really know who we are and what we believe in.

Trying to tell the Manitoba Mennonite story in one hour is a daunting task. Mr. Siamandas, to his credit, made an honourable attempt. There are some beautiful images, there appears to have been diligent and in-depth research, and there are thought-provoking insights. Whether it will be a video that will be viewed more than once by anyone but the most serious student of Mennonite history remains to be seen.

Reviewed by John H. Peters, Assistant-Superintendent, Hanover School Division and President, Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.



Copy of the Video "Mennonites in Manitoba". Anyone interested in ordering the video may call, 1-800-359-6900. The cost of the video is \$30.00 plus postage.