“A people who have not the pride to record their own 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

Happy Birthday - Hanover Steinbach - 1874-1999
125 Years Old

Congratulations to Hanover Steinbach on the occasion of its 125th birthday, August 1, 1999, originnally founded as the East Reserve in 1874. The first ship load of settlers arrived in Winnipeg (Fort Garry) on July 31, 1874, with 10 Old Kolony (OK) and 55 Kleine Gemeinde (KG) families on board. Within several weeks they were joined by a large Bergthaler contingent of 165 families so that by the end of August, 1874, all three founding denominations of the Mennonite community in Manitoba had arrived.

After purchasing supplies the settlers returned to the landing site at the confluence of the Red and Rat River. From here they made their way to the immigration shelters south of present-day Niverville. Over the next few weeks they braved adversity such as prairie fires, selected their homesteads, and soon the foundations of close to 60 Strassendorf villages were laid. By the following year the community had grown to 4,000, approximately 20 per cent of Manitoba’s population. The extended Hanover Steinbach community today numbers 25,000 with a diaspora in the range of 75,000.

The celebration of anniversaries is a drudgery for many people, a useless diversion from their day-to-day pursuits—the rat race, making more money or whatever. And yet, the celebration of anniversaries is one thing which inexorably separates us from animals, defining a state of civilization, and elevating homo sapiens as a nobler race, showing that human beings, for all their failings, cruelty and imperfections are still capable of focusing their intelligence to matters beyond immediate needs and gratification, to explore the reasons for being, and, through a commemoration of the past to better understand the future.

The anniversary of settlement in 1874 has been celebrated numerous times over the years. A record is noted in the journal of Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908), Blumenort, Sunday, September 15, 1889, “15 years in America” with worship services in Grünfeld. More typical anniversary celebrations were held by the East Reserve community in 1924, 1934, 1949, and more recently, the centennial celebrations in 1974. The history of these celebrations and those involved would in itself fill an issue of Preservings. The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society and Preservings is proud to promote the activities of our 125th anniversary. May 1999 be a time of prayerful reflection and appreciation for those who have gone before.

Congratulations Hanover Steinbach: 125 Years, 1874 to 1999. Let us join together to “celebrate our heritage.”

Editor D. Plett Q.C.

In the August 1, 1934, issue of the Steinbach Post, the editor Gerhard G. Kornelsen, Steinbach, chose the photo of the S.S. International docking at the Forks in Winnipeg, August 1, 1874, as the featured page one photograph. This is also the image appearing on the masthead of each issue of Preservings. After some consideration I decided to follow in Kornelsen’s footsteps and feature the photo again notwithstanding that it has already been reprinted in Preservings, No. 10, Part Two, page 32, and East Reserve 125, page 11. The photograph has great historical significance being the first visual image of the Mennonite experience in Manitoba. Delegate David Klassen and wife Aganetha Brandt Klassen, are visible on the upper deck, right hand side. The event will be celebrated by a worship service at the Forks organized by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society on August 1, 1999. (See page 2 for details.)
**Preservings**

**Feature Story - The Pioneer Church**

The focus for the June and December 1999 issues of *Preservings* will be the pioneer era of our history in Manitoba commencing in 1874. This will follow the theme of the 125th anniversary celebrations of the settlement of the East Reserve, Hanover Steinbach area, taking place throughout the summer of 1999.

In 1886 Peter D. Zacharias, Gretna, wrote a biography of Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Rosengart, founding Aeltester of the Reinlander Gemeinde, also known as the Old Kolony (OK) Church. This paper was first presented at a symposium of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in Altona, October 23, 1986. It is republished here in order to make the reader better acquainted with Wiebe, undoubtedly one of the most important Mennonite leaders of the 19th century. With some 100,000 adherents and descendants scattered across North and South America, the Old Kolony Gemeinde (OKG) is one of the largest and most significant denominations of Russian Mennonite origin. It is one of the few which still attempts to live out the orthodox Anabaptist-Mennonite faith as practiced by the pioneers in Manitoba.

Too often Mennonites have blindly followed leaders wishing to adopt alien forms of religious culture without even listening to the vision of those committed to preserving the constructs of the past. In his 1986 presentation, Zacharias noted how a particular Mennonite Encyclopedia article referred to one denomination in southern Manitoba as "ultra-conservative" as if this was the basis to ignore and disparage any further contribution which this group might have made to the kingdom of God. Zacharias stated that we should at least see Aeltester Wiebe as "he saw himself." "Wiebe did not see himself as a conservative, rather believed himself to be a reformer, seeking to restore again the New Testament vision of the Church...where all of life was to come under the Lordship of the Gospels" (see Menn. Post, Feb. 6, 1987 report).

Henry Schapansky, world expert on the Prussian Gemeindebücher, provides a paper, "From Prussia to Russia" setting forth an Old Kolony (OK) interpretation of Russian Mennonite history, a valuable counterpart to the "Molotschna triumphalist" school which has dominated the historiography for the past century. The 1872 letter by Johann Nickel, Hamberg, Molotschna, pro-vides a birds-eye view of the infant emigration movement in Russia. It counters the Pietist/Triumphalism which later historians used to ingratiate themselves to Russian Government authorities, seeking to marginalize those who left as the "uneducated and lawless," the opposite of actual reality.

The recollections of Peter P. Epp, Morden, Manitoba, and the immigration record of Johann R. Dueck (1863-1937), Rosenhof, Manitoba, add an element of dramatic realism to the undertaking. The 1875 and 1876 letters of Franz Dyck, Friedrichsthal, Berghal, Imperial Russia, to Rev. David Stoesz (1842-1903), Berghal, E.R., Manitoba, provide a poignant farewell look at the old homeland. The "Gleanings from the Bishop's desk" of Aeltester David Stoesz, illustrate the extensive duties and obligations of pioneer leaders, who set out to conquer the wilds of nature and establish European civilization in the East Reserve.

The articles in this issue will provide enlightenment of the pioneer community in Manitoba, truly a heritage all should be proud of.

Editor D. Plett, Q.C.

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**Calling all artists - Art Contest.**

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society announces an art contest. Artists are asked to reproduce historical scenes from the history of the East Reserve, Hanover Steinbach. The reproduction can be by sketching, paint, woodcutting, etc. and can be of a landscape, a farm-yard or village scene, or a depiction of a dramatic historical event. Each art work must be historical based to some degree, representing the artist’s depiction. The winning painting will be featured on the cover of the December *Preservings* and artist recognized and a $50.00 prize awarded. Send a copy of the artwork to be submitted to the editor, HSHS, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0. A committee will select the art pieces which will be accepted as eligible for the contest.

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**Feature Story - The Pyioneer Church**

1874 Reenactment

To celebrate the 125th anniversary of Russian Mennonites coming to western Canada, a number of events are being planned this year. The first will take place at the Forks (junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers), on August 1, 1999, exactly 125 years and one day after Mennonites first landed at the Forks.

The event will begin as those in attendance will gather in the port area. At 8:00 AM the Paddlewheel Queen will enter the port and dock. A group of period dressed (1874) Mennonites will step ashore. A number of them will briefly tell their story of why they have left Russia and why they have chosen to come to Canada. After a number of stories have been told a minister will lead them in a prayer and they will break into song. Later another minister will give a brief meditation. The one hour worship service will end with group singing.

Immediately after the service descendants of 1870s immigrants will be able to board the Paddlewheel and have a group picture taken. This picture will replicate (125 years later) the photograph taken on July 31, 1874 as the Mennonites stepped off the International steamship at the Forks port.

In addition to the worship service and group photograph, the Forks is providing space in their main building for a display on Mennonites coming to Canada. Breakfast will be available from local vendors before 8:00 AM and following the service. It is also encouraged that people in attendance participate in the festivities planned later in the morning and afternoon at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach.

This event is sponsored by the MMHS.

Ken Reddig, Director; Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4, Telephone (204)-888-6781, Fax (204)-831-5673; e-mail: kreddig@confinemo.ca

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An interesting visual image of the pioneer days, wolves beset a settler’s Semlin, a sod dug-out. Courtesy 60-Jahriges Jubiläum, page 36/37. The sketch labeled 1865 is reminiscent of the anecdote about delegate Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908), who in 1863 built a semlin after moving to the new Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Markusland, Imperial Russia where "... it occurred that wolves ascended upon the roof of our miserable dwelling place whereupon they taunted us with their howling and growling. Presently father [Cornelius P. Toews] and...[and cousin Cornelius P. Goossen] armed themselves with pitchforks and carefully stepped outside in order to chase them away"--as recalled by son Johann F. Toews (1858-1931), grandfather of Earl and Norman Toews, Steinbach, published in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 157.

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Fighting the prairie fire, August, 1874. Johann W. Dueck (1865-1932), Grinfield later Rosenort, Manitoba, writes about fighting a raging prairie fire while they were at the immigration shelter, south of present-day Niverville. By valiant efforts and powing a fire guard with oxen, the settlers managed to fight off the wall of fire. History and Events, page 111. This drawing is courtesy of They Seek a Country, page 88, artist unknown.
Introduction.

David Harder, one of the most respected school teachers among the Mennonites in Mexico, first in the Manitoba colony in Chihuahua and later in Durango, wrote in his “Erinnerungen” of Johann Wiebe, a short tribute to the elder he loved and revered:


Translation: “In the year 1875 a number of like-minded people gathered around him and he led them out of Russia’s fertile steppes, our beloved home, in unshakeable confidence in God’s gracious help and protection, to Manitoba’s blessed prairies. And he, the faithful leader, has now arrived at his destination, in the heavenly Canaan to be with his Lord and Master in whose service here, his hair had grown gray. Now the icy hand of death has closed his faithful eyes. His mouth is now silent, who always had a friendly word of love and comfort for everyone, who so often, when at the holy place, called out, ‘Repent!’ to his congregation."

When I was doing research for the Reinline book in the mid-Seventies, I often ran across or deliberately looked for the name of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. It could not be otherwise because, whether one liked him or not, whether one agreed with his views or not, he was a most influential early West Reserve leader and his teachings, or what people interpreted to be his teachings, still affect thousands of people today (probably myself included) in Canada, in Mexico and Belize, in Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina.

But it was not research that first introduced me to Aeltester Johann Wiebe. In long winter evenings when as a teenage boy who had already had the opportunity to read Smith’s “Story of the Mennonites” and a lot of Steinbach Post, when in those evenings I sat in the warm Väituis of my grand-mother who knew the catechism and it seemed even the “Glaubensartikeln” from memory - that is where the history of the “Reinlineer Mennoniten Gemeinde” or the Old Colony history - that is where that history was translated into flesh and blood.

When my grandmother told stories so vividly and recalled the Aeltester, whom she revered as David Harder did, that is when I discovered Aeltester Johann Wiebe, the Johannes Wiebe whose name stood in my catechism right under the introduction to the articles of faith. That is where I first began to sense the impact of this man, this servant of God, the impact that he had not only on the thinking of many people, but also on their hearts.

Of course, he also evoked a lot of opposition. People with strong convictions always evoked lots of opposition. Ironically, it was at Reinline, the centre of the Reinlineer Mennoniten Gemeinde in the pioneer years, a village in which the Aeltester found love and support, that he also experienced some of the strongest opposition, not necessarily to him personally but to the way and to the direction in which he sought to point his people.

The Wiebe Family.

Who was Aeltester Johannes Wiebe?

Aeltester Johannes Wiebe came from a pioneering family. His great-grandfather Jakob Wiebe (1723-88) was a landowner in Prussia, listed in Mierau, 1776 Konsignation (census). Johann’s grandfather Jakob Wiebe (1760-1804) was a settler in Neuendorf, Chortitz or Old Colony (Alt- Kolonie) in 1789 at age 29 with his wife, nee Anna Fast and two children, where he was one of the more successful Vollwirthen with 9 horses, 13 cattle, 8 pigs, 55 sheep, 1 plow and 2 wagons (Abraham Wiebe, Family Book).

One of the children born to Jakob Wiebe (1760-1804) in what was then Imperial Russia (today part of the Ukraine) was Bernhard (1796-1852) who married Helena Wiebe. This couple became Johannes Wiebe’s parents. They, too, became pioneers settling in the new village of Neuhorst in 1823. In fact, Bernhard Wiebe served as Schult or mayor of Neuhorst until 1847. For the intricacies of the Wiebe family connections to Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde and to Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau, Molotschna, fourth Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, see Henry Schapansky, “The Bergthaler Wiebes, in Preservings, No. 13, pages 60-61.

I want to mention just three of eight children of Bernhard and Helena Wiebe.

1. The eldest child, Peter Wiebe (1818-81), became a deacon in the Bergthal Colony in Russia.

2. Abraham Wiebe (1831-1900) pioneered in Olgafeld in the new colony of Fürstenland. Only a few months after Fürstenland was founded, he was elected as a minister there. He later came to Canada and preached many sermons in the Reinline worship house. His son David was a long serving Ohm in the Manitoba Colony in Mexico (see Preservings, No. 13, 128-9, for a review of the Abraham Wiebe family book.)

3. But I want to focus on the second youngest child, Johann, the seventh child of eight, who became Aeltester Johannes Wiebe and who also settled in Olgafeld, Fürstenland.

Johann Wiebe was born on March 23, 1837, the year in which Queen Victoria began the longest reign in British history. He died on February 21, 1906, at the age of 68, just a few years after Queen Victoria had died. So that was the time in which he lived. His wife’s name was Judith Wall (see Preservings, No. 11, page 81).

Johann Wiebe was baptized by Aeltester Gerhard Dyck of the Chortitzer Gemeinde, i.e. the Old-Colony Gemeinde in Russia.

At the age of 28 Johann Wiebe was elected to the ministry. At 33 he was elected Aeltester of the Mennonite Church in Fürstenland, the young daughter colony of mother Chortitza. This far reaching event took place in Peter Loewpky’s implementation in the village of Georgsthala in the afternoon of September 13, 1870. Johann Wiebe was only 38 when he led the Fürstenland emigration to America.

Historical Interpretation.

History has not always treated Aeltester Johannes Wiebe and other pioneer church leaders...
of western Canada very kindly. They have sometimes been dismissed as simply narrow-minded, obstinate, tradition-bound vis-a-vis the so-called "progressive" Mennonites.

In history we cannot simply dismiss each other. We need to listen to each other's stories with respect and with an attempt to understand why others think and act the way they do and why we think and act the way we do. And we need to understand also what we have done to each other - both the good and the bad.

If we look back into our own histories, no matter of what particular background we are, I think it will cause us to realize that we have all hurt each other - sometimes grievously. Only when we acknowledge this and come to each other openly and freely can there by any healing in history. Otherwise getting together is futile.

One Mennonite encyclopedia article refers to "the extremely conservative Old Colony Mennonites led by Johann Wiebe". Now I do not consider "conservative" a bad word. Probably many people would consider me conservative and that's their privilege. But what do we mean by the word? By definition, it refers to keeping the status quo, to keeping things the way they are, to the tendency to adhere to the existing order and therefore to oppose changes conservative: to conserve. The least we can do is to attempt to see Aeltester Johann Wiebe as he saw himself.

**Johann Wiebe, the Reformer.**

First of all, Johann Wiebe did not consider himself as a conservative. He saw himself much more as a reformer who sought to recover the New Testament vision of the church. The Aeltester, in a penetrating sermon entitled "Die Auswanderung von Russland nach Kanada 1875", preached probably in the very early 1880s, seeks to take his congregation's memory back to the migration movement and to examine its reasons.

The sermon's message is not: Let's keep it the way we have it.

Instead, Wiebe is saying in effect: Dear brothers and sisters: Things have got to change. We have gone wrong. And we must get back on track. We have gone wrong in Russia. We no longer confronted each other in love as brothers and sisters should. We no longer practised brotherly discipline. Instead we went the way of the flesh. We took disciplinary action that belonged to the state alone and used it against fellow believers. Wrong-doers, said Wiebe, were known to be whipped, jailed, put on a bread and water diet, fined, sentenced to wood chopping or ditch digging, but they remained in good standing in the church. The Scriptural three-fold admonition had gradually been abandoned, Wiebe felt. According to this the transgressors would first be confronted privately and secondly before one or two witnesses, and thirdly, before the congregation. The ban would follow, if necessary, but the ban would be applied in love, and following repentance, there would be a complete restoration, not just externally, but spiritually as well.

Now that may sound idealistic and in practise it, too, was subject to human abuse like all things are, but that does not distract from the Aeltester's motives. Johann Wiebe himself wrote:

"I must add that the ministers themselves could not grasp all these things when the conflict grew so intense, because this was to be an entirely different order from the one they were accustomed to in Russia. To deal with everything according to the Gospel was strange to some. Some said that we were introducing a new teaching when it was only the teaching of Christ which the apostles had received from the Lord more than 1800 years ago."

**The Emigration.**

Aeltester Wiebe's intentions were not to preserve the status quo, not to keep things the way they were. His intentions were to restore the New Testament Church as he understood that church. The receipt of assurances from the Russian government that arrangements for a forestry service could be made, albeit in uniform, in lieu of service in the military, placated many Russian Mennonite church leaders - they accepted it - but those assurances did not satisfy Aeltester Johann Wiebe. He saw that acceptance as but another sign of how far the church had drifted from its moorings in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before those government assurances the church in mother Chortitza, the Old Colony, too, had met to consider emigration. One contemporary source even states that a decision was made to send delegates to America. Be that as it may, an Old Colony delegation was never sent.

Johann Wiebe, who had looked so much to Chortitza for leadership before making the decision to emigrate, was disappointed. He made one final visit to Aeltester Gerhard Dyck, but to Wiebe's profound disappointment, Dyck's interest in the migration had waned. In fact, Dyck urged acceptance of alternative service as a reasonable compromise.

Personally, I've wondered about that last painful encounter between the two Aeltesters, the older experienced Gerhard Dyck, already 66 years old, accepting the principle of alternative service and counselling against emigration, and Aeltester Johann Wiebe, only 38, who in spite of the older man's advice, was to insist on going to America. Did the older consider his younger colleague, whom he had baptized and ordained, as rash and radical? I don't know, but probably not. Probably Aeltester Dyck took the middle more benevolent attitude.

Niemand verachte deine Jugend. (Let no one despise your youth...) - 1 Timothy 4:12

Even in its beginnings in the Anabaptist period of the 1520s and 1530s to which the Mennonite Church traces its beginnings, even then, practically all of its leaders were young. Menno Simons was about 40 when he finally left the Catholic Church to join the Anabaptists and he was one of the older ones. Many early Anabaptist leaders died in their '20s and '30s (and when I read about these persons I am suddenly struck by the fact that they were a lot younger than I am now).

But be that as it may, Johann Wiebe was deeply disappointed in his old leader. His whole trip from Chortitza back to Fürstenland, he writes, was spent in anguish of soul and in prayer. And the agony continued at home in the presence of his family.

**Preservings**

Call for Donors: The HSHS requires community minded donors who may wish to assist in funding some of the activities celebrating the 125th anniversary taking place in 1999. If interested, please contact the President of the society or the editor of Preservings. Leave a legacy for your children and grandchildren. "Let us celebrate together."
until he finally found peace.

Aeltester Wiebe gathered the brethren at the Alexanderthal church, he writes (he probably meant the school since Alexanderthal did not have a separate church building), and eventually the emigration plans fell into place. Wiebe found it especially hard to say farewell (his farewell sermon reminds one of Paul saying farewell to the Ephesians). He found it hard to say farewell to those in the congregation who did not understand him and would not join him in the emigration. And especially, he found it hard to say farewell to theAmtsbrüder, to those in the Lehrdienst, his fellow ministers, who did not share his conviction about the necessity to emigrate. Not many members of the Lehrdienst of the Old Colony came to America. Not many - just some. And from Fürstenland - not many.

Organizing the Pioneer Gemeinde.

On June 3, 1875, Aeltester Wiebe and his family and a large portion of Fürstenland’s families cast eyes on their home and villages for the last time and set out on their journey across land and sea. Some days after their arrival at Fort Dufferin, Wiebe held a Bruderschaft (already referred to earlier) where he was confirmed as Aeltester of the church that was so different from the one he had served in Russia. The new Gemeinde now included a large number of people, not only from his own Fürstenland colony, but also from the Old Colony. In fact the Reichländer Mennoniten Gemeinde, as this church came to be called, eventually was referred to as the Alt-Kolonier or the “Old Colony Church” by many people.

Aeltester Wiebe considered it imperative that a Bruderschaft be held at the Fort Dufferin immigration houses before the move onto the prairies was made. There on the banks of the Red River, near the present site of Emerson, he gathered the diverse group.

There were unifying forces, of course. The immigrants were:
1. generally opposed to alternative service;
2. generally opposed to “Russification”;
3. generally wished to settle in villages (hamlet privilege);
4. favoured en bloc settlement;
5. desired freedom to have their own schools (this would put them in a collision course with the provincial government in later years);
6. wanted a total military exemption (loosely connected to the first point).

But Aeltester Johann Wiebe saw several reasons for the need to meet before settlement. Among the reasons were these:
1. should they be one church? - this was not a foregone conclusion; the fact that many came from Aeltester Gerhard Dyck’s congregation was to become an ongoing problem for the new congregation;
2. would they be under one eldership?

At the Fort Dufferin meeting Aeltester Wiebe

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No. 14, June, 1999

Worship House, 1876.

Aeltester Johann Wiebe, his wife Judith, and their family settled in Rosengart, a mile north of the United States border. During the winter of 1876 work was begun on the church building, the house of worship. The building will be 123 years old this year.

I wish that I could have attended the dedication of the house of worship on September 17, 1876.

“A unity, however short-lived, was established, an important factor in the formative years.”

Its dedication was a time of rejoicing for the young colony, for the young congregation and for the Aeltester.

People came from far and wide on horse-drawn vehicles and on foot.

The Aeltester, the ministers, the deacons and the Vorsänger gathered at the door. The Vorsänger announced the song: ‘Walt’s Gott in Jesu Christi Namen (Gesangbuch, number 89). The Vorsänger began the song and the congregation joined in until the swelling notes filled the air.

The first verse was sung, then the second, and then the third:

“Sücklez auf, Jerusalem, die Thore und lass dein Volk zum Tempel ein, damit wir singen in dem Chore, denn dieser Ort soll heilig sein. Ach höret! hier ist Gottes Haus, d’rum zicht die Sündenschuhe aus.”

As the singing of the third verse began, the Aeltester opened the door of the thatched roof pioneer meeting house and entered. He was followed by the aged Jacob Wiens, born in Prussia, Gerhard Paetkau, Abraham Wiebe, the Aeltester’s brother, Johann Friesen of Neuenburg, Cornelius Peters and the deacons Peter Klassen and Johann Enns. As the singing continued the whole congregation filed into the church.

The Aeltester preached the dedicating message; he spoke the blessing. The feeling of gratitude that prevailed was genuine.

Problems in the Gemeinde.

But problems loomed. The church and its Aeltester were challenged on several fronts. One major conflict swirled around the issue of hymn tunes. Some in the congregation wanted to return to the use of the old tunes used in Russia, but which were not necessarily even known to segments coming out of the Old Colony. Oral tradition (the “Volksmund”) indicates that Johann Wiebe did not want to return to the old hymn tunes, but was under pressure to do so. However, many of the congregation had already adopted the Choral tunes of Heinrich Franz before coming to Canada.

So two seemingly intransigent positions became a deeply divisive issue. Another tough issue was the application of the ban. Should the ban be

Rev. John D. Peters of the Sommerfelder Church stands behind the oldest Mennonite pulpit in Western Canada, the Reiländer worship house. Peter D. Zacharias, Reinland: An Experience in Community (Altona, 1974), page 214. It is tragic that D. Zacharias, editor Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, Phone 1(204)-326-6454, business and 1(204)326-9022, residence. The publication of the magazine/journal is funded in part by the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc. We are always looking for more individuals who may want to contribute articles and/or photographs. Please send manuscripts, articles and/or photographs to SHHS c/o Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0. Annual subscription/membership fee is $20.00, individual issues $10.00 each. American, European, and Latin American memberships and/or subscriptions are payable in U.S. currency to cover the higher mailing costs. The editorial viewpoint of Preserves is conservative and orthodox with respect to the founding peoples of the Hanover Steinbach area, originally the East Reserve. The views and opinions expressed in the editorial and various articles and letters do not necessarily reflect those of the SHHS and/or its board of directors. Copyright remains with the writers and artists. Registration #1524399

Johann Wiebe...consider[ed] himself...a reformer who sought to recover the New Testament vision of the church.”
used sparsely in cases of severe infractions? Should the ban be used to enforce social control as it related, for example, to the maintenance of the village settlement pattern?

The Bruderschaft of October 5, 1880, left the West Reserve more deeply divided. It hurt Aeltester Johann Wiebe to see this disintegration. His vision was, after all: one church, one colony, one colony administration, based on the village settlement pattern.

The vision was threatened by the influx of the Bergthaler from the East Reserve, who now provided an alternative pattern and by deep division within Aeltester Wiebe’s own congregation.

We may question the social control exercised by the Reiniänder Mennoniten Gemeinde. But consider Aeltester Wiebe’s concerns from his own vantage point. Was it not a most egalitarian concept? No Chutors as in Russia! No huge estates! Belonging to the congregation meant living in the village. It meant: sharing the good land, sharing the poor land, sharing in the community pasture. It meant taking seriously the word of the prophet: Woe to you who add house to house and field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. Isaiah 5:8 (NIV) (Look at the farm scene on the West Reserve today! Did Johann Wiebe so completely miss the point!?)

Conclusion.

We may question the attitude to schools, the resistance to the Anglicization and secularization of the school system.

Can we also see the integrity of Aeltester Wiebe’s position? The education of our children, throughout centuries of Anabaptist educational history had never been the business of the government. This was the responsibility and prerogative of the parents and the community of faith. The church school: reinforced the values of the society and the milieu in which the church’s children were living; prepared young people to live healthy, productive, socially well adjusted lives within that society; planted the roots of faith in firm soil; was successful by its own standards.

Ohm Johannes Wiebe! A man of uncompromising principle! A man who agonized over decisions, but who, once he had made them swerved neither to the left nor to the right. Johann Wiebe was one who believed in the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the leading of the Holy Spirit. A man whose expectation of the church was high and who was often thwarted by the shortcomings of fallible human beings, and who included himself among the fallible.

Johann Wiebe lived to see the school controversy begin in earnest in the West Reserve. He lived to see the payment of the Brotschuld, a $100,000 government loan to early settlers and he wrote a letter of thanks to the government.

Aeltester Wiebe saw land getting scarce so that young couples could no longer have 160 acres each. The land in the West Reserve was taken up and so he saw the beginning of Mennonite settlement in Saskatchewan. His son Abraham became bishop at Swift Current; his son Peter became bishop in Manitoba. It was the Saskatchewan Aeltester Jacob Wiens who officiated at his funeral service in the village of Reinland.

I want to close with a letter of condolence, a short letter that was sent to Jacob Wiebe, Aeltester Johann Wiebe’s son, in Rosengart, by William Hespeler after the Aeltester’s passing.

“With sadness of heart I receive the painful news that your father who was so close to me had gone to his Creator. Please accept my deepest sympathy and also express my condolences to the church he left behind on its irreplaceable loss. He was a faithful shepherd and spent his energy, indeed, his whole life, for the welfare of his flock and as its example. I will always remember him as a personal friend and as the father of the Reiniänder Mennoniten Church. I also express my sympathy to his own family and to those who lent assistance and support in his good works and I hope that his good spirit will remain an example to them.”

“William Hespeler” Winnipeg

[Wiebe’s]... vision was, after all: one church, one colony, one colony administration, based on the village settlement pattern.”

“Belonging to the congregation meant living in the village. It meant: sharing the good land, sharing the poor land, sharing in the community pasture.”

About the Author:

Peter D. Zacharias is one of the pioneers of Manitoba Mennonite historiography. In 1976 when the Separatist-Pietist/Molotschna triumphalism school of interpretation reigned supreme and without question, he wrote the ground breaking Reiniänder: An Experience in Community (Altona, 1976), 350 pages. This was the first work by a Mennonite to consider the founding of the Old Kolony (OK) settlement in the West Reserve with understanding and thorough historical research and analysis. We have to remember this was a time when to write anything positive about the OK church required considerable courage as most Mennonites at the time were enslaved to Anglo-conformity, articulated by modernization typology and small “l” liberalism which saw the communitarian-renaissance spiritual ethos of conservative Mennonites as suspicious at best, and evil, at worst.

In 1984 Peter completed Footprints of a Pilgrim People (Altona, 1984), 291 pages, another pioneering work, bringing the standard for church congregational histories to new heights. The publication of Peter’s brief but insightful biography of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Rosengart, founder of the OK denomination is an invaluable starting point for a reexamination of his contribution to the Mennonite story in Manitoba, from a Renaissance/communitarian perspective.

We are grateful to Peter D. Zacharias for allowing us to share his historical work with the Preservings readership.

Editor D. Plett Q.C.
The Family of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905)

Introduction.

Only little is known about the personal life of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1906) and his family. Johann Wiebe, his cousin Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), and Aeltester Peter Toews (1841-1902) of the Kleine Gemeinde, were among the three most important Russian Mennonite leaders of the 19th century. I suggest that those willing to pursue actual down and dirty research, collecting primary sources and interviewing of descendants will reap an abundant harvest of information detailing a rich and inspiring history.

Background.

Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) came from a patrician family within the Mennonite community. As already stated in the preceding article by Peter D. Zacharias, Johann Wiebe was the son of Bernhard (1796-1852) and Helena Wiebe (b. 1798), of Neuhorst, Chortitz Colony, where Bernhard also served as the village Schulz.

Bernhard’s father, Jakob Wiebe (1760-1804), was among the first immigrants to Russia in 1788. Jakob settled in Neuendorf. With 60 Wirtschaften it was one of the largest and most prosperous villages in the Old Colony (OK). Neuendorf was the ancestral home of many families with the financial capability and entrepreneurial vision to take advantage of the farming opportunities represented by relocating to Berghthal and/or Fürstenland including Peter Friesen (b. 1751), great-great grandfather of Dyan Cannon Friesen, the famous American movie actress.

Jakob Wiebe is listed in the village lists of 1793 and 1795. The Revision of 1802, in particular, reveals that Jakob was a wealthy farmer with 9 horses, 13 cattle, 55 sheep, 8 swine, a plow, 2 wagons and 3 spinning wheels. Living with the family is Abraham Dueck, age 18, possibly a servant (Unruh, page 255). Jakob died in 1804 and his wife married for the second time to Isaak Born (b. 1778). That Jakob Wiebe and sons had done well on his Wirtschaft is shown by the 1808 Revision which shows that his family owned 8 horses, 28 head of cattle, 25 sheep, 13 swine, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 1 wagon, 1 spinning wheel (Unruh, page 270).

Helena Wiebe (b. 1798), also came from a patrician background. Her father Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1746), Blumenort, Prussia, emigrated to the Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, and settled in the village of Blumenort, named for his village of origin in Prussia, usually a sign of some influence and the respect of the other settlers. Several of Heinrich’s children married in the Molotschna, including daughter Maria Wiebe (1784-1845) who married Cornelius Enns (1782-1834), Fischau, parents of Heinrich Enns (1807-81), later the fourth Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde.

By 1816 Heinrich Wiebe had relocated to Einlage, Chortitz Colony. Among Heinrich’s large family was Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58), Einlage, whose son Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) became the second Aeltester of the Berghthal Colony.

Johann Wiebe married Helena Wall (1836-1901), daughter of Johann and Gertruda Wall, RGB 70-1. As mentioned in the article by Peter D. Zacharias, a number of Bernhard Wiebe’s children moved to the Fürstenlandt Colony, where they became involved in the ministry serving with distinction. In 1875 the Johann Wiebe family immigrated to Manitoba, settling in the village of Rosengart, a mile-and-a-half south of Reinland, where the central worship house of the OK denomination was constructed in 1876. Johann now had responsibility as the leader and spiritual overseer of the largest Mennonite community in Canada prior to WWI, 4,000 souls.

Johann Wiebe settled on Wirtschaft 2 in the village, staking a homestead on SE1-1-4E. According to the 1881 tax records, Johann had 54 acres cultivated land, 4 horses, 4 cows, 7 heifers, 4 hogs, 2 wagons, 1 plow and a grain mower. At 685 Johann’s assessment was the second highest in the village.

Of the 21 Wirtschaften in Rosengart, eight were owned by Walls and five by Wiebes. The Wiebes in the village included Johann’s brother Heinrich and his son Bernhard, as well as Johann’s own sons Jakob and Peter. Two of Johann’s sisters lived in the village—Aganetha and Maria both married to Walls, and, of course, Johann’s wife was a Wall. As such the demographics of the village represented normal patterns of matrilocality and matriarchal strategies.

Johann and Helena Wall had 10 children of whom two died in infancy and two—Johann (1859-90) and Bernhard (1867-93)—were handicapped and never married.

Johann Wiebe had a prestigious career as a minister of the Gospel preaching 1544 times, baptised 2228, and officiated at 294 weddings and 660 funerals.

Johann Wiebe was a literate and articulate man. A collection of some 50 of his letters to church leaders in Saskatchewan are extant and in need of translation and further study. At least two of his sermons are extant: “Eine Abscheids Predigt” (“A Sermon in farewell”), presumably written in 1875, and “Eine Reisebericht von Russland nach America anno 1875” (“The Emigration from Russia to America in 1875”), written some years later and published in German by the OK church in Mexico. Presumably a further collection of Johann Wiebe’s sermons are still extant in Mexico, and constitute a rich body of evangelical teachings not yet explored by modern scholars and churchmen.

Children:

5 Jakob Wiebe (1857-1921).
   Son Jakob Wiebe married Katharina Wiebe (1854-1901) and for the second time to Maria Krahn (1872-1942), RGB 66-1. Jakob settled in the village of Rosengart on Lot 23, on the west side, across the road from his father. He took out a homestead quarter section on NW18-2-3W.

In 1906 Jakob and Katharina moved to the village of Springfels, Swift Current, Saskatchewan, homesteading the NW4-14-13W3. Jakob Wiebe died in 1921. Many of Jakob’s descendants still live in the Swift Current/Wymark area. Among his descendants is Leonard Wiebe (b.1941), Professor of Biounionics and Radiopharmacy, University of Alberta, 1983.
5 Peter Wiebe (1861-1913).

Peter Wiebe married Anna Ginter and for the second time to Katharina Loewen, RGB 73-2. He established a village farm in Rosengart, Lot 24, on the west side of the village street. Peter was elected as a minister of the Old Colony (OK) church in 1888. In 1902 Peter was elected to replace his father as Aeltester of the OK Gemeinde in Manitoba.

An interesting anecdote is related by one of Abraham’s grandsons. At some point Peter suffered the destruction of his farm buildings by fire. The sermons which had been handed down from his father were in the corner cabinet (Eck Schaup), and only rescued after a heroic effort. The sermons had been somewhat damaged, beingcharred around the edges. These sermons were later taken along to Mexico where many young ministers copied them.

Peter D. Zacharias has characterized Peter Wiebe’s Aeltestership as follows: “His tenure, 1906-1913, was a period of relative calm. The conflicts of the pioneer years were largely over, the church had been established, there was general prosperity and the war had not yet come. Peter Wiebe was a conservative elder and seems to have held a pro-status quo position. Wiebe was a strong supporter of church [confessional] schools.

Aeltester Peter Wiebe “…passed away suddenly in 1913,” Reindl, page 197. A description of Peter Wiebe’s death was appended to the published edition of “Ein Reisebericht”. …” by his father, Johann, pages 30-32.

6 Bernhard Wiebe (1911-98).

Son Bernhard Wiebe (1911-98) was the grandson of Johann Wiebe and son of Peter Wiebe RGB 73-2. Bernhard Wiebe married Maria Neufeld in 1943. He was elected Aeltester in the Manitoba Colony, Mexico, and then continued as leader of the Buenos Aires Colony, near Muelo Casa Grandes, Mexico. In later years Bernhard shared his disappointment with relative Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, “in never locating the sermon books written by his ancestors.”

5 Helena Wiebe (1863-1941).

Daughter Helena Wiebe married Jakob Dueck, RGB 71-2. The family moved to Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and later to the Swift Colony, Cuauthemoc, Mexico.

Sources:
Elaine Wiebe, Don and Gladys Wiebe, Discovering our Wiebe Heritage Peter Wiebe 1861-1920 (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1998), 370 pages.

Johann Wiebe, Eine Reisebericht von Rutzland nach America anno 1875 (Cuauthemoc, Mexico), 40 pages.

Patchwork of Memories (Wymark, Saskatchewan, 1985), 1088 pages.
Aeltester Bernhard Wiebe obituary, courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, Winkler.

Notice to Subscribers.
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From Prussia to Russia

“The Emigrations from Prussia to Russia, towards a Revisionist (Chortitza/ Old Colony) Interpretation of Mennonite History”, by Henry Schapansky, 914 Chiliwack Street, New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5.

Introduction.

My father’s cousin, Uncle Jake, once told me a story. It seems he was asked to say grace at a church function. When he had finished, an elderly and rather deaf lady said, in what she supposed to be a whisper, but which was heard across the hall, “von ein Schapaunskje haft ‘et nie ein Predja jeifejt”.

This story has stayed with me for several reasons. Firstly, it is an absolutely true fact. In all my researches and readings, I have never come across a Schapansky who was a “Predja”. Of course, this story has disturbing significance, because I realize there may be genetic reasons why we Schapanskys are reluctant to speak in public. Perhaps we are better listeners than speakers. But there is also a deeper reason this story has remained in my memory. Often, people who have lived in a Mennonite environment for some time have an intuitive and spontaneous feeling for what belongs in the natural order of things in the Mennonite culture, at all levels of detail. Behind these feelings lies an order and cohesiveness that spans centuries, and which no amount of classification and analysis can destroy.

I want to emphasize this unity of Mennonite beliefs and culture, as I go back to the period of the late 1700s, at the beginning of the major immigrations of the Mennonites to Russia. Even though I will talk about the differences between various groups of Mennonites at that time, it should not be forgotten that there was an underlying unity in Mennonite society, and that the various differences are less important that the common characteristics of the various groups.

Gemeinde.

Two of the unifying elements of Mennonite society, then as now, were the family and the Gemeinde. I use the word Gemeinde, in preference to an English word, because there really is no equivalent. In this, I follow other current historians such as J. B. Toews. Words such as congregation or parish simply do not describe the sense of community that the word Gemeinde does. We can describe a Gemeinde as a separate community of Christians who share a common set of beliefs based on the scriptures and which are the basis for daily living. The model for the Gemeinde was taken from an idea of what the early Christian church when he described the household head, there is evidence that men and women held equal although different positions in the family. The inheritance rules applied equally to men and women, and on death of a spouse, one-half of the wealth accumulated during the marriage went to the surviving spouse, one-half to the children of the marriage in equal portions. This rule existed before the Russian period, while in Prussia, and was later codified in the Waisenamt rules, the orphans’ trust. Age and gender played no part in the dividing of the family assets.

In marriages, there were almost as many young men who married widows, as there were widowers who married young ladies. How did people get married in those days? We do hear of people playing the role of “Umbriter”, or matchmaker, in the Mennonite community, as we find in many other rural societies. But my impression is that family and friends had a lot to do with match making. We do have several accounts of how people got married in the late 1700s. Aeltester Dirk Thiessen says that he re-married “durch die Fügung Gottes und guter Freunde Rat”, that is, with the direction of God and the council of good friends. David Mandtler (b. 1757) tells us that as a young man in his twenties, not thinking of marriage, he was approached by friends of a widow who told him the widow rather liked him. He didn’t pay too much attention to this, but a couple of weeks later he was asked why he hadn’t given a response. He then decided to get married.

When problems in a family relationship became evident, the Gemeinde stepped in. Divorce was a last alternative and usually counselling by the ministers of the church avoided a marriage breakup. There is documentary evidence of such situations recorded in the church books of Danzig and Königsberg in the early 1800s. Divorce, Mennonite style, was rather restrictive. One couldn’t remarry while the other spouse was alive—those who did were expelled, so that a divorce was really a separation only.

Family relationships were often quite extended and children were sometimes, when older, sent to live and work with other family members, such as aunts and uncles, particularly to learn a trade. This might happen at age 15 or so. In general, people were quite conscious of family ties, and probably had, as some people do today, several generations of genealogy in their memories.

The Ordnung/ Protocol.

The key event in the Gemeinde, and in a person’s life, was probably the baptismal event. It was both an entry into the Gemeinde, and a coming of age.

Admission to the Gemeinde was free to all persons who fully accepted the scripturally based beliefs of the community. Of course, a fluency in either High or Low German was also necessary from a practical point of view. Admission was through baptism, probably the most important event in the church year. Unlike weddings and funerals, baptisms were only conducted by the Aeltester of the Gemeinde. And it is not just a coincidence, I think, that the best preserved of all West Prussian church records are the baptismal registers. Some of these go back to the 1600s. It is natural too, that the form of this event would, at various times in history, be a matter of controversy in Mennonite Gemeinden.

It was the Gemeinde, which by common vote, decided on the suitability of persons for membership, when to reprimand or expel members, and when to re-admit them.

Within each Gemeinde were defined and undefined rules of conduct which were considered acceptable within a Christian community. In so far as they were firmly based on scriptural authority, they were common to all of the various Gemeinden. Mutual self-help, avoidance of violence, and simplicity in daily life were universally agreed upon norms.

Worldly behaviour was generally not accepted. Differences between members were settled within the Gemeinde. It was unacceptable to use the local legal system to settle disputes. One minister, a certain Jacob Bartsch, in the late 1700s, did once take a matter to court, but he was severely criticized by the Gemeinde for this. We do not know if he was expelled, or whether he left of his own accord, but he did leave the Gemeinde.

In addition, the holding of public office was generally not accepted, although this changed in the mid 1800s. Serving in community affairs, such as working in the dyke maintenance system in the Vistula Delta, was however, common and accepted.

In more specific aspects of life, for which no detailed scriptural references could be found, the Gemeinden adopted sometimes differing views on correctness. Looking back today, we may not think they are important, but they were certainly important at that time, and maybe even so today.

Issues regarding dress, for example. There
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were differences in opinion as to whether wearing buttons instead of hooks constituted worldly behaviour. In the early 1700s, some Gemeinden took stands for or against the wearing of wigs (The city Gemeinden and the Orloffefelde Gemeinde permitted the wigs). Later, the wearing of ties became an issue, and in later times, harmony singing (generally four-part).

The matter of multi-part singing does not, for example, appear to be a big issue. Most of us believe that such singing is more melodious than simple singing. And yet it was a cause for a major division within the Canadian Mennonite community. (Incidentally, it was also a big issue at one time within the Catholic church at the time of Palestrina).

I am reminded of the issue, which we could call “harmonious preaching” which broke up the Danzig city Gemeinde in the 1820s. It seems a wealthy lady, originally from the Friesian church, didn’t like the simple sermons of the unpaid local ministers. She thought a paid, professional minister would deliver more beautiful sermons and left a large amount of money to the Gemeinde, so that this could be done. Was this a real issue? It was in Canada until recent memory.

The Ban.

One of the biggest issues that arose in the Prussian period and very early in the history of the church, was the issue of the ban, the strictness with which it was applied, and the procedure for readmission. It is not a coincidence that this is the very issue that caused major divisions in the early Christian church at the time of the Emperor Constantine.

It was the Flemish Gemeinden which adopted the stricter interpretations, and the Friesian Gemeinden the more liberal position. This major division continued for two or three hundred years.

Something which has not been emphasized enough by historians, is the relatively democratic nature of the Gemeinde in those days. All major decisions affecting Gemeinde life were voted on by the Gemeinde. Ministers and Aeltesten held their positions for a lifetime. Any male member had to be ready to serve as minister on short notice. In some elections, at least one minister was chosen by lot from the list of candidates. To refuse service was originally unheard of, although by the 1700s documented evidence is available of such refusals in the Danzig City Gemeinde (this may also have contributed to the issue of the paid ministry already talked about). Service in the ministry was originally a natural duty of being a Gemeinde member, and payment for such service was not in question.

The position of women in the Gemeinde as to voting is not clear to me. Women did certainly hold positions of importance in the Flemish Gemeinden at least. There is evidence from the Danzig city church records that more than one woman held the position of deaconess in the early 1700s.

Flemish and Friesians.

Having mentioned briefly the democratic nature of the Gemeinde, it is natural that differences in opinion would appear, both in respect of the interpretation of the scriptures, and in respect of the proper Christian life style. Because in the Gemeinde, the scriptures were taken as a basis for daily life, and not just the basis for the Sunday sermon.

And so, at various times, many different Gemeinde groups have existed. One chronicler described the various groups in 1603 as the following: “die harten Friesen, die Hauskauffer, die Klörischen, die Montauer, die Bekämerten, die Wasserländer, und die Abgetaulten”. By the time of the immigration to Russia, only two major divisions officially existed: the Friesians and the Flemish.

The designation Friesian and Flemish does not necessarily reflect on the ethnic origin of the original members. The term Flemish originated however, because some of the group’s members did originally come from the Flemish Lowlands, some from urban centres, and some were well educated. When they fled the Lowlands during the persecutions of the 1500s, they came to the area known as the Dreier Friesland (the three Frieslands). Here they mixed with local Friesian Mennonites. Some of these Flemish Mennonites tended to stress more detailed aspects of doctrine and behaviour. They also had better clothes, because many of them were tailors and weavers. Because of both their clothes and their thinking, they became known as the “Feine” Mennonites (that is, more detailed), while the others became known as the “Gröbe” Mennonites (that is less detailed).

The Dreierfriesland was, for a while, a melting pot. Mennonites from all over the Germanic world, including those from the south German states and Switzerland, came there. Many Flemish Mennonites joined the Friesian Gemeinde, and many Friesian Mennonites joined the Flemish Gemeinde. The others joined one or the other of these groups.

At the time of the immigration to Russia, the Flemish Gemeinden in West Prussia were still more conservative and traditional than their Friesian counterparts.

Valley and Delta Mennonites.

There are still other distinctions that should be made. One is the difference between Delta and Valley Mennonites. By Delta, I mean the Vistula River Delta, a large triangular area at the points of which are found the cities of Danzig in the West, Elbing in the east, and Marienburg in the south. The valley itself runs from Marienburg up to Waraw, as far as we are concerned, in terms of Mennonite settlement.

The other distinction that needs to be made is between country and city Mennonites. At the time of the immigration to Russia, there was already a feeling among country Mennonites that the city Mennonites had lost touch with their roots. The cities in which Mennonites lived included Danzig, Elbing, Marienburg, already mentioned, Königsberg in Prussia, and other cities such as Graudenz and Külpm.

Briefly, we can classify the various major groups as follows: City Flemish, Delta Flemish, City Friesian, Delta Friesian, and Valley Friesian. I should remark that there were Mennonites in all the possible groupings, but the ones mentioned are the significant ones. There were actually not too many Mennonites in valley cities such as Külpm or Graudenz. Also, there were not too many Flemish Mennonites in the valley. Here I should, however, say that I am counting the Alt-Fleminger or Gröninger Gemeinde in the valley at Prezchowko as for all purposes, a Friesian church, despite the official name.

The difference between Delta and Valley Mennonites was mainly cultural. A higher percentage of persons of south German background lived in the valley, and the church language of the Valley Mennonites seems to have been High German for a very long time. The Delta Mennonites, at least the city members, used a form of Dutch as the church language up to the mid 1700s. The everyday language of all the West Prussian Mennonites was Plautdietsch, and this was probably the main Mennonite language even back in the Dreier Friesland period. Another important cultural difference is that the Delta Mennonites lived in areas dominated by German (Plautdietsch) speaking Lutherans, whereas the valley was dominated by Dutch and Polish speaking Catholics.

We need to consider two apparent exceptions to the classification described above. As mentioned, the Gemeinde at Prezchowko remained distinct from the other Friesian Gemeinden in the valley. However, culturally and ethnically there is almost no difference between the Prezchowko Gemeinde and the other Friesian Gemeinde. The Neumark group, later Gemeinde, was a branch of the Prezchowko Gemeinde which moved to the Neumark in Prussia at a time when all of West Prussia was still Polish.

Another exception is the Lithuanian Gemeinde. Again this was formed by members of the Friesian Valley Gemeinde at Montau. They moved to Prussian territory in the Memelland in the early 1700s. Most of these came back to the valley, forming the Tragehaimersweide Gemeinde.

So both of these groups can be considered in the same light as the Valley Mennonites.

I have discussed these various groups and the Gemeinden at some length because of the direct and important relationship of these classifications to the Russian immigrations.

Historical Interpretations.

When I began my study on the immigrations, I read some histories which insisted the main reason for the immigration was the availability of free land. These histories were usually written by Prussian or German historians, and we can call their ideas the “Lebensraum” theory. Their assumption is that there was no good reason to leave Prussia, except free land and “Lebensraum”.

Another set of histories, usually written by Russian Mennonite historians of the late 1800s, claim that poverty was the main motivation for the first immigrations. Some writers even claim that some of the early settlers were essentially from the dregs of Mennonite society. They then also claim that it was only through the benevolent dictatorship of the Tzarist government, and minor dictators such as Johann Cornies, that the Mennonite community in Russia ever flourished. I refer to this interpretation as the “poverty theory”--also known as “Molotschna triumphalism”.

This theory is also reinforced by a theme in
some family histories which begin along the lines of “we were so poor that...” I take these stories from family histories with a grain of salt. I am probably not the only person who has Mennonite acquaintances who are, “so poor that...” and yet in reality are probably very well off. Such stories often contain other inaccuracies which may lead to the conclusion that there is a great deal of legend and not too much history present.

Emigration Typology.
In my researches on the various waves of immigration to Russia, I concentrated on accumulating data on the individuals involved, where they were from, their ages, occupations, economic status, and connections to other families. The more data and factual information I uncovered, the clearer the picture of the immigration became, and some conclusions forced themselves upon me.

Two conclusions emerge from the data. The first is that the immigrations can be divided into “before the war” and “after the war” periods. By the war, I mean what was known as the Great European War, or the Napoleonic Wars, which ran from 1804 to 1814. The second conclusion is that the “before the war” immigrants were all, with very few exceptions, Delta Flemish Mennonites. The Molotschna immigrants, who left Prussia in 1803 and 1804 are considered as part of the pre-war immigration. (The war itself only reached West Prussia in 1806.) Very few Mennonites came to Russia between 1806 and 1816.

When we talk about before and after the war, many people will think of the First World War, and the immigrations to North America that occurred before and after the war. Is there any similarity? I think there is, and a very strong one at that.

Democracy.
At this point, I would like to step into the arena of controversy and say I believe the Delta Flemish were the strongest believers in the idea of the Gemeinde, the strictest in adhering to communitarian beliefs, and were at the same time the most democratic both in the structure of the Gemeinde and their total outlook on life. And perhaps they were more opposed to the Prussian government which took over their homelands in 1772 and 1793.

How do we know that Delta Flemish were more democratic in outlook? This is mostly based on circumstantial evidence. As mentioned previously, we know that women were serving in important Gemeinde positions in the city church at Danzig in the early 1700s. Even further back, and continuously to the immigration, the Danzig church records make consistent reference to a woman’s married and maiden name, and this practice is frequently followed in the other Flemish church books.

The Flemish Mennonites also appear to have had a more consistent practice of accepting outsiders. If we look at the list of surnames (as in the 1776 census), we find far greater numbers of names considered to be of native West Prussian origin, than in the Friesian church. These names include names such as Tiliitsky, Rogalsky, Dolesky, Sawatsky, Letkemman, Lempyk and so on, not to mention such names as Harder, Plett or Reimer.

Another point of circumstantial evidence is that the Flemish church records are generally better maintained and updated than the Friesian church records, so that church records seem to have been more important to the Flemish.

Then there is the position of marriages with Catholics or Lutherans. This seems to have been a big issue in the Friesian Gemeinde, resulting in the emergence of the Rosenkrantzer group, and the splitting away of the Markushoff Gemeinde. These events took place in the late 1700s. In the Flemish Gemeinden, there is more than one entry in the church books indicating that a spouse of a member was baptised into the church after marriage, which indicates that members remained in good standing even if they married Lutherans or Catholics. The conclusion one would draw from this is that the Flemish Gemeinden placed more emphasis on an individual’s religious convictions and less on family background.

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Another point of circumstantial evidence is that the Flemish church records are generally better maintained and updated than the Friesian church records, so that church records seem to have been more important to the Flemish.

Then there is the position of marriages with Catholics or Lutherans. This seems to have been a big issue in the Friesian Gemeinde, resulting in the emergence of the Rosenkrantzer group, and the splitting away of the Markushoff Gemeinde. These events took place in the late 1700s. In the Flemish Gemeinden, there is more than one entry in the church books indicating that a spouse of a member was baptised into the church after marriage, which indicates that members remained in good standing even if they married Lutherans or Catholics. The conclusion one would draw from this is that the Flemish Gemeinden placed more emphasis on an individual’s religious convictions and less on family background.

How do we know that Delta Flemish were more democratic in outlook? This is mostly based on circumstantial evidence. As mentioned previously, we know that women were serving in important Gemeinde positions in the city church at Danzig in the early 1700s. Even further back, and continuously to the immigration, the Danzig church records make consistent reference to a woman’s married and maiden name, and this practice is frequently followed in the other Flemish church books.

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“Women did certainly hold positions of importance in the Flemish Gemeinden at least,... more than one woman held the position of deaconess in the early 1700s.”

more rural than today. All of the city Gemeinden, except Königsberg, had a large rural section, living in the suburbs.

But over the years in the 1700s, the rural Mennonites had begun to feel the city members were becoming too worldly, too concerned with wealth and status, and not concerned with Gemeinde life and norms. We have a record of this in Mannhardt’s “pro-city” history of the Danzig Gemeinde. But we also have other eye-witness accounts of the struggle between city and country members, most notably Klaas Reimer (a son-in-law of Peter Epp, the Aeltester), later Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. Even before the immigration, the Danzig Gemeinde had split in two sections, the city Gemeinde proper, and the Danzig “land” Gemeinde, also known as the Neun-Huben Gemeinde.

Later, the conflict between the city and “land” groups heated up even more. In the 1820s, the Neun-Huben Gemeinde broke off and joined the Fürstenwerder Gemeinde. In Elbing, the “land” Gemeinde prevailed, but the “city” members later joined the Königsberg Gemeinde. Later most of the “land” Gemeinden totally broke all contacts with the Königsberg Gemeinde.

For all purposes then, the Neun-Huben group were Delta Flemish, and most of the immigrants who appear to be Danzig “city” Mennonites, are actually Neun-Huben members. In addition, because the Russian authorities were trying to stop the immigration, many Delta Flemish found necessary to obtain Danzig residency, and to immigrate from Danzig, still Polish territory until 1793.

The Friesians.

What about the Friesian group? There was indeed such a group, and I have published data on this group in various papers as well. Most of this group were either direct Lithuanian Mennonites, relatives or first or second generation descendants. Now these Lithuanian Mennonites could not possibly have had any great wealth to bring with them to Russia, as claimed by some historians. The history of these Lithuanians is colourful and interesting. Soon after they arrived in the Memelland, they were expelled, lost most of what they had and received help from as far away as Amsterdam and Hamburg. Some went back to Lithuania, some went to the Netherlands but they came back, and some founded the

Tragheimsweide Gemeinde. Just before the immigration, a small group became embroiled in a controversy over marriages with non-Mennonites and the senior Friesian Gemeinde leaders met to resolve the conflict.

Several families in the minority and more liberal group lived at Rosenkranz, and the minority group became known as the “Rosenkranzers”. Most of these Rosenkranzers, of the Tragheimsweide Gemeinde, had Lithuanian connections, and also went to Russia as well.

So that what we have is a relatively small group of Lithuanian Friesians who went to Russia before the war. A further point to be made is that the number of Friesian immigrants after 1795 and before the war is very small indeed. Most of the Friesian group were already in Russia by 1795.

Why then do we read in most of the histories that a large group of Friesians came to Russia between 1796 and 1798 and brought with them the wealth and know-how? Quite possibly they did have some know-how? Quite possibly they did have some

The only published eye-witness account of the first period of settlement in Russia we have was written by Peter Hildebrandt. It is useful to know something about Peter Hildebrandt before reading his account. Firstly, he was a Lutheran, and grew up in a Lutheran environment. He later worked for the deputy Jacob Höppner and then became his son-in-law. It is Peter Hildebrandt’s account that is responsible for the claim regarding the Friesians. Was Hildebrandt an objective reporter?

Many of you have probably heard of the Höppner affair. Briefly, it seems Höppner was expelled from the Gemeinde in Russia, because of allegations of improper financial dealings. We know that Jacob Höppner had many Russian friends in the area, and know too that many Russian officials were corrupt.

When state councillor Samuel Kontenius heard of these allegations, he ordered a trial, involving Jacob and Peter Höppner and a certain Peter Rempel. We do not know the nature of the charges or whether they received a fair trial. Samuel Kontenius was considered to be fair, honest and a hard-working person, and the Molotschna Mennonites later named a village Konteniusfeld in his honour. At any rate, the Höppners were found guilty and were pardoned in the general amnesty for minor criminals which followed the ascension of Tsar Alexander I to the throne. Later, both Jacob Höppner and Peter Hildebrandt joined the Kronswede or Friesian Gemeinde in Russia.

When we read Peter Hildebrandt’s account of the immigration, it is reasonable to suppose that we are reading a one-sided account. I don’t think his account is intentionally misleading, but that it is biased. I wonder if Peter Hildebrandt really knew who was a Friesian Mennonite or not.

1796/8 Emigration.

It is certain that there were a large number of immigrants to Russia between 1796 and 1798. Almost all of these were Flemish Delta Mennonites. Some were related to the earlier immigrants and some were immigrants who couldn’t leave with the first groups.

Were these the ones who brought wealth and know-how? Quite possibly they did have some funds. I would guess that those who were closely related to the first group (I mean sons, daughters, fathers, etc.) were bringing funds from the sale of property in West Prussia with them which the early ones left behind.

Some of the others may have had more real property to dispose of, and therefore couldn’t leave
with the first groups.

Having said that the great majority of Pre-War immigrants were Flemish Delta Mennonites, we can ask, why did none of the various other groups immigrate? The new Prussian land owning restrictions would have affected all farming Mennonites and particularly land-owners. And a great many farmers and land-owners were Friesian Mennonites. In fact there was probably a higher percentage of farmers and land-owners in Friesian Gemeinden than in Flemish Gemeinden. If land-owning restrictions and shortage of farm land were the main reason for immigrating, as claimed by the “Lebensraum” historians, why then did almost none of the Friesians leave until after the war?

Democracy vs. Autocracy.

I believe the Friesians were less concerned with the preservation of the Gemeinde, and may have even been sympathetic to the Lutheran Prussian government.

Other circumstantial evidence for the democratic nature of the Gemeinde relates to the early Russian period. In the early years, most important community decisions were made in the Gemeinde. The Gemeinde leaders were elected by all members. In contrast, the Schultebut or village council was made up only of land-owners, originally the Vollwirthen. The Vollwirthen were the chief taxpayers, so this was in keeping with the principle of those times that the taxpayers should decide how taxes would be spent. There was no income tax in those days, and property (land) tax was the main tax, aside from some poll taxes and some excise and sale taxes.

At any rate, the Gemeinde rather than the Schultebut was the main governing institution in the early years. Later, in the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, all of Russia came under a very autocratic and anti-democratic government. How did the Gemeinde survive? The Old Colony and the Bergthaler Colony managed to avoid conflict with the civil authorities because the idea of the Gemeinde was deeply entrenched.

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“...the Delta Flemish Mennonites had a greater dislike of the new Lutheran Prussian government than the other...”

Johann Cornies (1789-1848), Ohlloff, Molotschina. Was he the saviour of the Russian Mennonites, or the herald of their doom? Was Cornies the apostle of progress or the harbinger of Russo-conformity and later Anglo-conformity?

Photo courtesy of Goertz, Johann Cornies, page xxii/Saints and Sinners, page 45.

Tragheimsweide Gemeinde came in 1819. In Russia, they became the Alexanderwol and Rudnerweide Gemeinden. Later in 1834, the Neumark Mennonites came, under the leadership of Wilhelm Lange, originally a Lutheran. The Neumark Mennonites had lived under Prussian rule since 1765. And in 1836, the Waldheimers came from Volynia Province in the west of Russia.

An early issue that arose in the Molotschina was the involvement in the Petersburg Bible Society. Most Gemeinde members felt, quite correctly in my opinion, that the real issue was not Bibles but government involvement in Gemeinde life. There is a great deal more to be said on the Bible Society issue than has been published in Mennonite histories. Tsar Alexander I himself was a very curious personage in the history of Russia. It seems he regarded himself as the leader of the Christian world. To some extent, the perception of Russia as the last haven or refuge of Christians was due to the thinking of Alexander I. The Bible Society, supported by Alexander I was then also a political as well as a religious group. A later historian (J.I. Hildebrandt, p 12-13) describes the involvement of the Bible Society in the attempted Decembrist coup d’etat of 1825. After the revolt failed, the society was disbanded. However, at the time of Alexander I, the Bible Society issue divided the Molotschina Mennonites into two groups—those who favoured preservation of the Gemeinde, and those who wished to adhere more closely to Tsarist culture and politics.

In 1821, the Molotschina Gemeinde split into two, the Grosse Gemeinde and the Ohlloff Gemeinde. The Ohlloff Gemeinde under Aeltester Bernhard Fast generally supported the Tsarist government policies. Fast even wrote patriotic poems praising the Tzar. About three-quarter of the settlers stayed with the traditionalist Gemeinde.

Later Johann Cornies and Russian officials, with the help of Aeltesten Bernhard Fast, of Ohlloff, Ratzlaff of Rudnerweide, and Peter Wedel of Alexanderwol, arranged to have the Grosse Gemeinde split into three, and to have Aeltester Jacob Warkentin removed. Later Aeltester Heinrich Wiens was also removed by the government and officially exiled.

Autocrats.

I want to mention three rather autocratic personalities who exemplified the spirit of the times under Tsar Nicolas I, and their relationship to the Old Colony.

Firstly, there is Heinrich Heese, again a Lutheran Prussian who fled Prussia during the war to escape conscription by the French. Since much of what we know about him is written by himself, it is difficult again to get a full picture. He doesn’t seem to have shared many Mennonite beliefs, and judging by his Crimean war poems, was not a pacifist. Although he was employed as a Gebietschreiber in the Old Colony for a while, there was considerable opposition to some of his plans and he left of his own accord. Apparently, he had no use for democrats, writing “Ich möchte doch wissen war eure spitzigen Demokraten in der Stadt zu meinen Versen sagen werden.”

Heese and Oberschultz Jacob Bartsch had serious differences of views on the nature of the Gemeinde. Heese felt there was too much free-
What is interesting is that they are considered namely a Friesian or Lutheran connection, or both, because there is a similarity for these three, against the Aeltester of the Chortitza Gemeinde.

Flemish Molotschna Gemeinde, and remove two their best to break up the Gemeinde as it was people. What is clear however to me, is that they were undoubtably very gifted and determined Tzar Nicholas I.

They were also mention Johann Cornies. His family too was probably from a Friesian Gemeinde, probably the Orlofferfelde Gemeinde. The Cornies family moved around a lot, possibly to escape creditors, so that the young Johann Cornies did not really experience life in a single Gemeinde. Cornies is, of course, well remembered for his dictatorial rule through the agricultural commission and was widely disliked by most Mennonites. It would be interesting to research his exact connections with the Russian government. He was very much a man of his time, someone able to work with the officials of Tzar Nicholas I.

All of these, and other similar personalities were undoubtedly very gifted and determined people. What is clear however to me, is that they didn’t fit into Gemeinde life, and if anything, did their best to break up the Gemeinde as it was then. As I have mentioned, Johann Cornies and Bernhard Fast did in fact breakup the majority Flemish Molotschna Gemeinde, and remove two Aeltesten. Heinrich Heese made similar threats against the Aeltester of the Chortitza Gemeinde. I have gone into a bit of their background because there is a similarity for these three, namely a Friesian or Lutheran connection, or both. What is interesting is that they are considered exemplary and great men by the Russian Mennonite historians, and this tradition is carried forward into modern times. Perhaps this is because the later writers valued economic prosperity more than traditional values. Perhaps too, it is because the only persons who wrote anything historical had an axe to grind or a hobby horse to ride, to mix up my metaphors. So that, in traditional Russian histories, we only get a one-sided view of the entire picture, and often only that particular view that the writer intends. Therefore, it is useful to know something about the writer as well, as we probably will learn more about the writer’s attitudes than we will about what actually happened.

Conclusion.

When I look at the existing literature on the reasons for the immigration to Russia, I am reminded about what we read, not only about the immigration from Russia to North America, but also about the immigration from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s and 40s. In all cases, there is a before and after the war emigration. So that for each major war, the Great European War, World War I and World War II, we have a before and after war emigration.

In studying the motivations and people in the immigrations to Russia, I have come to the conclusion that it may be more useful to study the Canadian and Paraguayan immigrations, than it is to read the Prussian and Russian historians. And indeed, today a lot of writing about the Mexican, Paraguayan and Bolivian Mennonites reminds me very much of the condescending and negative attitudes of the Russian and Prussian writers who stayed behind.

Well of course, time has proven the traditionalists and those who have held strongly to the idea of the Gemeinde to be correct. We know that those who left Prussia, and then Russia, were right, and yet somehow we can’t believe it.

Selected Bibliography

West Prussian Church Records: various including microfilms at the M.H.C. in Winnipeg.

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About the Author:

Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C., is the world expert on the Prussian Gemeindebücher and Old Colony genealogy. He has written numerous articles and is currently compiling his research into a study of the emigrations of Mennonites from Prussia to Russia, and the interconnections and Prussian roots of the various families.

Editor’s Note: The article “From Prussia to Russia” is based largely on a talk by Henry Schapansky sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, January 30, 1998. Henry Schapansky is considered the leading expert on the Prussian Gemeindebücher and Russian genealogy of the Russian Mennonites.

Many earlier historical works regarding the Russian Mennonites including Peter M. Friesen, Franz Isaak, H. Goertz, and Frank Epp, were written from the “Molotschna Triumphalist” school of interpretation, lauding the individualistic socio-economic and religious characteristics which had developed prior to the Revolution of 1917 and denigrating the communitarian ethos characteristic of 18th century life in Prussia and adhered to more closely in the Chortitza/Old Kolony and their descendants in Canada, Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

The focus of the two diverging streams in the Russian Mennonite story revolve around Laissez Faire philosophy vs. orthodox/conservative faith purified in the blood bath of the Reformation, and the individualism of Separatist-Pietism-Revivalist-Fundamentalist religious culture vs. the communitarianism of the Renaissance thinkers. The two interpretations are articulated by small “I” 19th century liberalism, Russo-and later-Anglo-conformity and modernization typology, on the one hand, versus modern, more inclusive neo-conservatism, on the other.

Schapansky’s article provides an analytical framework, useful in understanding the socio-economic and religious forces at work.

“Cornies is, of course, well remembered for his dictatorial rule through the agricultural commission and was widely disliked by most Mennonites.”

“....they are considered exemplary and great men by the Russian Mennonite historians..... Perhaps this is because the later writers valued economic prosperity more than traditional values.”

Coming in the next issue:
An article by Henry Schapansky, on the Old Kolony (OK) and Berghaler Hildebrandts.
Hamburg
Nov. 28, 1872

You have requested from me a detailed report as to how things stand regarding our matters here. This I shall gladly do as best as I can.

The Czar and his entourage have again spent their time in the Crimea this summer. In response to an invitation of the Lord Governor, and the hope he held out of an audience with the Czar, a number of deputies [including Aeltesten Friesen and Toews from the Kleine Gemeinde and Aelteter Wiebe and Oberschulz Peters from Berghal] and Friesen from Berdjansk travelled to Kretsch.

Here they were in fact warmly received at the orders of the Governor and were also allowed to take up the next adjacent places at the arrival of the Czar, but who did not allow himself the time to grant any audiences. Only Friesen was allowed to speak briefly with the Governor in our regards but was not given any hope of freedom from bearing arms from him. In fact, he had advised that we ourselves should select a mode of service, and suggested the guarding of prisoners, for he had no hope that we would be released without some form of personal service.

Subsequently a delegation travelled to St. Petersburg in September with the hope that they could petition for the requested freedom from the Government Council which was assembled there. But whatever was known by those gentlemen remained unexpressed. They only gave their personal opinions and directed the delegates to the Czar. They have returned from there without any results.

In the meantime a telegram (dispatch) came from the government, that the Czar would like to see a delegation come to his residence in Yalta, in order to speak with them in person and to receive our petitions. We again seized hope, but it was in vain. The Governor reported sick and therefore he was not able to present the delegates before the Czar and to arrange an audience for them [Ed. Note: The Czar or his emissary did seek out Berghal Aeltester Wiebe to hold an audience with him, offering him landed estates if he would abandon his people and the emigration]. They did talk to the Governor who spoke to them suggestively of a meeting of the heads of state in Berlin where the wish was expressed to completely terminate the waging of war.

But at no time did the deputies manage to come before the Czar with their petitions and also returned again from there without any results. Your fellow minister Goertz, I believe, travelled there as well.

The way I believe, there is no other option for us but to take up some form of personal service.

The deputation received the request to make a submission to the government. We wish to give God what is God’s and the Czar that which is the Czar’s, but for that the government does not agree. They do not wish to receive protection money, we are to come ourselves, and if we do not want to do so, we shall have to emigrate.

It is being talked about here that we will be free for another 60 years, but I can hardly imagine why such a large part of ours [people] are not nearly satisfied. [Abraham F.] Thiessen from my family to emigrate as soon as possible.

The news which you have received from the Crimea is true. This fall I had driven there to Friedenstein where our brother Peter Funk is living. He together with his neighbours have sold their Wirtschaften (village farmsteads) to Crimea (karaimische?) purchasers from Feodossia, the land for 7 ruble per desjati. He had approximately 237 desjatien. 19 families will emigrate from there as early as possible next spring. Peter Funk’s children are presently here [in the Molotschna] taking their farewells. He himself will also come here to take farewell and for the emigration passes.

I was there for an entire week. I read the many letters from our brethren in the faith from America within which we definitely find that we can expect good prospects and freedom of conscience. Our major preoccupation during this time is only about emigration. He and his wife very much wish that we would also come to a similar decision. Cornelius Funk and his family, including Jakob Funk, his own, are also quite willing to emigrate. The latter has already sold his Wirtschaft and if possible will already emigrate this summer. In accordance with her wishes and in peace with God, his wife has gone home this fall after a three-week long sickness, which friend Janzen, Berdjansk, has already written you.

The times which extend before us make us become better acquainted with our co-confesshions from the distance. This summer we had guests from Poland, a minister by the name of Unruh, and an Aelteter from Switzerland who is supposed to have moved to Poland but whose name I do not know. They have preached in many churches and seriously admonished to live a life of discipleship to the Lord.

But they did not encounter such a definitive discipleship everywhere here, regarding which they lamented. Nonetheless, the Lord remains gracious and here and there a grace-seeking soul is awakened, and He also allows the awakened ones to feel His mercy. We have full confidence in Him that He will also guide us in the future.

Many ministerial conferences have been held in Alexanderwohleb, whereby it has become evident that not all ministers are united to emigrate. Therefore it has come to pass that the Berdjanskers, the Alexanderwohler, the Krimmer Anafelder Gemeinde, as well as members from other Gemeinden have joined those that now want to emigrate.

That which you have heard regarding our reception in Canada is correct. The English Council in Berdjansk has informed his government that some 2000 families from amongst us appar-
ently wish to emigrate. Pursuant to this, an agent from Canada came here in the summer, in order to invite the emigrants there, but did not really find such a great enthusiasm here. Now in fall, he has again been sent here by his government for the same reason. I have heard that he did not come here (Molotschna) because he did not trust the Russian authorities regarding his person and for that reason invited to come to Odessa. Both the ministers Buhler and Ediger from Berdiansk did drive there. He had offered them that the Government of Canada would pay for all traveling expenses for two delegates and also provide one of its officials there as a tour guide. And if there would be 100 families here who would want to immigrate there, they would send the ship into the Black Sea, for $30 per person and $15 for a half, transportation costs.

There was a brotherhood meeting in Alexanderwohl lasting eight days, where this proposal was taken into consideration. Each Gemeinde herein mentioned, designated a person; they accompanied by the agent shall travel there in the New Year in order to investigate the land, select a place, and to complete a contract [treaty] with the government there, a difficult commission for them. We are deeply concerned about this decision but hope that our trustworthy God will stand by us with true counsel. We have been promised 160 acres per family there. One becomes very anxious when thinking of such an emigration as the great ocean we could receive a letter from him. With this hope, I also extend my heartfelt greeting.

Now beloved brother Ewert, can we also talk a little. I was at your brother Ewert’s in Rosenort. I had hoped to hear something about you there, but they also knew nothing. We talked much about you there; it was already mentioned that you would probably come to the decision to remain there. But I do not quite agree with this, I do not understand it that way from your writings. Certainly it will be difficult for you to remain bonded in one mind, as we are so few from the family circle and Gemeinde. I trust that you will consider all of this in trust in God. Do also include us in your prayers before the Lord, for we shall be much in need of strength and optimism, to leave behind all the conveniences, indeed, it may well be a real proving for us. By all appearances the Wirtschaften may be difficult to sell, and yet, remaining here does not seem good at all.

It is being told here that when the title deeds will be available, which is to happen soon, that Russians will also be able to settle among us, which will certainly not fail to happen. In Gnadental a Russian has already been entered [as owner] by order of the government. We have to expect that in the future we shall have to live in and among the Russians, which we just simply cannot favour as these people do not have much respect for order. Even now we Germans are often robbed by the Russians, every night one anxiously greets the coming night and does not know if horse and wagon will still be there in the morning.

Even if the matter of freedom from military service was not an issue, we no longer feel at home here because of the Russification program. I reckon that we have earned all of this with our sins. The Lord disciplines us for which we are deeply endebted to Him, that He allows us to see His correcting hand. Oh, that we might earnestly do penance and become truly converted to Him with our entire heart, for then He will always be gracious unto us. We wish to persevere as disciples of Jesus and call out to Him, and also earnestly repent and shun our sin, for then He will also accept us, and surely lead us to a place, where we can live out our faith.

May God in grace help us for this.

A writing has been published here by an unnamed Mennonite—Title: "Nonresistance and Sanitation Service". The publisher wishes to come to the aid of the misguided hearts (that is what they are called in the writing) and seek to explain that a Christian, according to the witness of the Holy Scripture, is obligated to perform this service. Another writing, also with an unnamed publisher, takes the opposing view, and demonstrates from the Holy Scriptures, that it would be a sin. But so many of our people are already so uninformed that they prove neither one nor the other.

The summer has been dry here, and we have received only a modest harvest; the prices are high.

I and my family are well. We greet you and wish you health, happiness and blessing from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your friend and brother, "Joh. Nickel"

Editor’s Note:

The 1872 letter by Johann Nickel, Hamburg, Molotschna, provides a birdseye view of the infant emigration movement in Russia. It counters the Pietist/Triumphalism which later historians used to ingratiate themselves to Russian Government authorities, seeking to marginalize those who left as the “uneducated and landless.” In my 20 years of research I have found that the facts typically support the opposite of that which was propounded as truth by the Pietist/Molotschna triumphalist historians.

The reader is endebted to Dr. James Urry, University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, for drawing this article to my attention.

In 1873 Peter and Jakob Funk emigrated to America where they settled northwest of Hillsboro, Kansas. See Raymond Wiebe, Hillsboro, pages 27-29.

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, two issues annually, over 100 pages each.
From My Memory


Introduction.

The author of the following article does not include specific dates because the events he describes are based on his memory not on notes that were made at the time the events occurred.

Peter P. Epp was born in the Bergthal Colony in Russia on December 6, 1864. His parents were Peter and Maria (Derkosen) Epp, BGB B253. In 1874 when Peter was nine years old his family emigrated to Canada. They crossed the Atlantic on the Nova Scotian arriving in Quebec on Oct. 22, 1874. They spent the first four years on the East Reserve and then settled in the village of Schönthal on the West Reserve.

Peter P. Epp became a Bergthaler minister in Altona. In 1924 moved to Morden where he served as the leading minister until 1935 when he moved to British Columbia, and became the founder of the Abbotsford Mennonite Church (Henry J. Gerbrandt, Adventure in Faith, pages 183-188).

Emigration.

During the early part of the 1870s, a wave of unrest became evident among the Mennonites in Russia. Universal conscription was to be introduced, and the Mennonites who had been exempted from military service were now included. I was a small boy when I heard about this and did not fully understand all the ramifications of such a law. Soon the older men were talking about emigration to another country. They talked about various countries where they might find refuge. They finally decided on Canada and several men were sent there to study the land, the climate, the government and particularly the conscription laws. These men must have returned with favorable reports for soon preparations for emigrating were underway.

Emigration commenced in the early summer of 1874 when a large group destined for Canada departed from the Bergthal Colony. As a young boy I only got a general impression of what was happening and did not comprehend the motives of such an event. I did not know how much anguish, planning and prayer were needed to bring a plan of such magnitude to fruition. However, I did learn from discussions that I overheard that at the core of all this turmoil was the desire to save our young men from military service.

Late in the summer of the same year a smaller group departed from the Bergthal Colony. My family was in that group also. I have only a few vague memories of that trip. We had to wait for three days in Hamburg, Germany before we could board the ship that took us across the North Sea to England. The North Sea was very rough and most of our people got seasick. We arrived in Hall, England towards evening. I saw pigs dangling from a sling around their back legs as they were being unloaded by crane from our ship. After we had disembarked from our ship we were standing on the platform with our baggage. I, as well as the other children, had to carry my share of the luggage too. Then a man came along and called in a loud voice, “Anyone who wants to go to Spiro follow me.” We all followed him, young and old, mothers with babies in their arms, grandmothers and grandfathers. We must have gone to the train station because as far as I remember we drove across England to Liverpool during that same night. In Liverpool, we had to wait three days till we could board the ship that would take us across the ocean. We almost had an accident there. Johann Schroeder, an old blind man, who was led up a plank by his son Jacob, slipped from the ramp and almost dragging his son with him, fell into the water. One or two sailors jumped into the ocean and rescued the poor man. Schroeder was soaked but otherwise unharmed.

Journey.

When all was ready, we set sail for the New World. We crossed the Atlantic in about fourteen days. Was that a voyage! Those who participated in it will not forget! We experienced a terrible storm. The relentless waves crashed over the deck as the ship was tossed back and forth. At one point a few of the lifeboats were ripped out of their moorings. Several times the storm let up slightly during the day, so that my friends and I could play on the deck. We amused ourselves by sitting on the iron platform that surrounded the chimney. On one such occasion I was almost swept into the ocean. I sat on the platform again when the ship suddenly pitched to the side. I began to slide and was swept over the deck. Fortunately I got stuck under the railing. Thank God I could struggle my way back to the platform. I was not the only person or object that was tossed about on the ship that day. The same thing happened to everything that was not secured properly. At the third class level the cabins were along the sides of the ship and the dining rooms were in the middle. The tables were secured at right angles to the length of the ship. Since the ship usually swayed sideways, it frequently happened that the china and cutlery would slide first to one end and then to the other end of the table.

It will be sixty years this summer since we made that voyage. When I now think back to that time I must say, “Thank God for having protected us, and that we could cross the ocean safely without the loss of a single life.” Yes, we managed to cross the ocean. At last we heard someone shout in a loud voice, “Land in sight.” That was the shore of America, and soon we were in Quebec. From there we went by train to Ontario where we wanted to spend the first winter.

We disembarked from the train in Kitchener, which was called Berlin at that time. Fifty years later, when I saw the immigrants that came in the 1920s at the railway station, I was reminded of my own experiences half a century earlier.

While we were waiting on the platform by the station, some walked around, some sat on benches and some lay on the floor. The people from the community came to take us to their homes. They walked back and forth on the platform looking over the group that had just arrived. There was a wide spectrum of humanity. There were older couples with grown up children, young couples with young children and several couples had brought aged grandparents.

We had brought our grandmother also. One family had a mentally handicapped son. We were looked over carefully, but in the end everyone was accepted into a home for the winter. The people were very good to us. They not only provide for us that winter. They also gave us provisions for our journey to Manitoba the following spring. All these years I have wanted to visit those kind people, but the dear Lord did not direct my path in that way.

There we were in a foreign country, among people we did not know and who spoke a language we did not understand. They spoke Pennsylvania Dutch and we spoke Low German. I attended school during the time that we stayed with the Mennonites in Ontario. I remember how much fun we had playing baseball and various other games on the schoolyard. During the spring thaw we went skating on frozen puddles. I remember going into the forest to collect sap from maple trees, for making sugar and molasses. I also remember my teachers Joe Bingmann and Moses Dipolt. They must have passed away by now.

As soon as it was possible in spring, we continued our journey to Manitoba. Our hosts urged us to stay in Ontario. They said it was too cold in Manitoba. We embarked on our journey before the lakes were navigable so that we had to travel by train through the United States to Moorhead, Minnesota. From there we went by boat along the Red River. We disembarked and were taken in on cots to our land by immigrants from Bergthal who had arrived the previous summer.

Manitoba.

The immigrants from Bergthal who had spent a winter on the East Reserve, informed us of the hardships they had endured. The weather had been very cold. They said it had been – 40 degrees Reamur. The makeshift dwellings they had built were bad. Their food had been scarce and their clothing was inadequate for such a severe climate. Because of these circumstances diseases had broken out. Many of the immigrants had spent a major part of the winter in bed because of some type of rheumatism. They experienced stiffness of the limbs and suffered great pain. Others developed problems with their vision; they called the condition “chicken blindness.” I will not describe this disease because I
have not seen people with this condition myself. However, the first winter was a thing of the past. The stragglers from Ontario had arrived, and they had to think about seeding. How could that be done? Farm implements, draft animals and seed-grain were very scarce and expensive.

However, hard times necessitate inventive-ness and adaptation. That was our experience too. There were a few families that owned a team of oxen. Some families had only one ox, while still others had no draft animals at all. People had to share and help each other out. Almost all families managed to get at least some seed into the ground. They made harrows from wood. The teeth were made from wood also. Understandably the wooden teeth did not remain sharp very long. The pioneers learned how to cope with that also. They wove willow branches and brush over the frame of the harrow section creating a small platform, and weighted it down with stones or earth. This added weight forced the wooden teeth to penetrate the soil and thus cover the seed.

The small patches of land that were seeded sprouted and grew quite well. Then came hordes of grasshoppers and destroyed the entire crop. Consequently the hope of eating bread from the wheat they had grown was gone. Now the pioneers became very discouraged, and many of them would have moved back to Russia if they had had the means to do so. They had come to this country and now they had to make the best of their situation. The struggle to survive had to continue. They built their first temporary homes mostly from tree trunks. During the mean time more immigrants arrived and the number of people needing to be fed increased.

If I think back to that time and try to visualize the situation they found themselves in, I cannot help but think how concerned and anxious our parents must have been. How could they make any progress, and how could they improve their situation? There was no simple answer to that problem. They had to continue their work and strengthen their faith in God. Children had to help with the pioneer work also. Even though the food and clothing were inadequate, children did not endure the same anguish as the parents. In their own way they enjoyed life even under those conditions.

I remember that my father once bought a piece of pork that may have weighed about five pounds. That had to be sufficient for six people for the winter. Fortunately we had a good cow that provided us with milk. That was a great help. We must remember that there were some families that had no meat and no cow. Our neighbors across the street were in such a situation. To make matters worse the mother of the house was sick. I heard that on one occasion sympathetic neighbors had given her a small piece of meat. The poor woman saved the skin from that piece of meat. Later when their starved bodies craved meat she would get this piece of skin and scrape it over their teeth and thus they experienced at least the taste of meat.

The government provided us with flour, beans and peas. Apparently they also provided

R. M. of Hespeler Hanover Decisions January 20, 1884

“A certificate by Secretary-treasurer Cornelius Epp (b. 1838), Schöntal, January 28, 1884, certifying the following decision of the Municipality of Hespeler Hanover:
1) Decided in the Municipal assembly in Schöntal that the school districts shall be divided, a quarter township for each school district;
2) Decided that the farmers who have settled among us from other confessions can also be accepted by the Brandordnung (mutual fire insurance) but excepting the city of Niverville;
3) Decided for the Brodschulder (bread debt debtors) without property only one per cent of each dollar shall be paid into the treasury.”

From the letter collection of Aeltester David Stoesz (1842-1903), courtesy of Mel and Nettie Unger, Niverville, Manitoba.
asked to teach a few months of the year. At first classes were conducted in homes. One room in the house was arranged in such a way that it could double up as a classroom. That’s what our schools were like.

I also had the privilege of attending such a school. I was fortunate to have a teacher for one year who had attended the Zentralschule in Chortitz and therefore was more informed than the average teacher. If we had employed this teacher for a longer period of time and if we had allowed him to gain some experience we could have benefited from his knowledge. We always heard the expression “Je gelehrter, je verkehrter.”(The more education a person has, the more mixed up his thinking will become.) That officially or unofficially expressed their philosophy of education. The attitude in general was, “Don’t learn too much”. This attitude played a major role in the school problem that will be discussed later.

**West Reserve.**

The land on which we had settled was very level with the occasional small ridge or valley, and covered with a growth of bushes and forests. The soil was sandy and there were numerous larger stones. Since we had wet summers the low-lying land was usually covered with water. There were no ditches, no roads and no railway. The first railway that was built in Manitoba was the line on the East Side of the Red River from Emerson to Winnipeg. Some Mennonites were employed in the construction of that line.

The poor soil, the abundance of stones, brush and forest covered land, too much rain and the poor drainage caused the pioneers from the Bergthal Colony to look for a more suitable place to settle. There was a larger reserve on the West Side of the Red River. When they were told that the land there was better than the land on the East Reserve, they did not need much time to make up their minds. Soon a substantial number of people made preparations to relocate. The first families moved across the river to the West Reserve in 1879, and many more families followed them the following year. They settled in about twenty villages in the West Reserve. The western part of that reserve had already been settled by immigrants from the Old Colony, who had come from Russia about the same time we had.

When they were settled on the new land, they found new courage to proceed with the task at hand. The land was more suitable for growing grain, and that was their goal in the first place. The draft animals at that time were still the oxen. It would have been better if they had kept on using oxen for a longer period of time, but the ox was too slow for the progressive minded people. They were growing grain now and the grain had to be delivered to Emerson. A round trip with a team of oxen required two or three days. As a result many of the oxen were traded for horses that had to be brought here from Ontario. Some of the horses were old and not conditioned to our cold climate. As a result many of them died. A number of settlers went into debt when they purchased horses. It also happened that a few settlers got into closer acquaintance with the Sheriff because of complications that had evolved as they traded and purchased horses.

At first we seeded all our grain by hand. I learned to do that also. As a matter of fact, I thought I was one of the best at spreading the seed evenly. During the early years we cut the grain with a scythe. Then the reaper, a machine that cut the grain and placed it in bundles, which then had to be bound manually, was introduced.

Next we had a machine similar to the reaper but had a platform where two men tied the sheaves. Then a machine that bound the sheaves with wire became available. Finally we got the binder which we still use to this day.

The church had to be organized here too. Several ministers from the Bergthal Colony had moved to the West Reserve also. Church organization on the West Reserve was very slow. Everybody, including the ministers, was totally occupied with making a living. Understandably, very little time could be devoted to church work.

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**Appointment of Guardian - Abraham Doerksen**


From the letter collection of Waisenman Jakob W. Stoesz (1872-1939), courtesy of Mel and Nettie Unger, Niverville, Manitoba.
Even then the church did not remain completely dormant.

Churches were organized as circumstances permitted. Elder Gerhard Wiebe from the East Reserve came here several times during the first few years to help organize the church. Several new ministers and elders were elected, and the church on the West Reserve could function independently. They were also called the Bergthal Church.

The organization of schools here as in the East Reserve was very slow. Perhaps I should say, “It did not progress at all.” I do not want to go into great details, but our Elder realized that things could not continue in this way. He promoted district schools because then the newly organized Douglas Municipality could collect the necessary taxes to operate the schools. The government was very considerate of us. They allowed anybody who knew even a little bit about teaching to keep his position. I don’t know of one person who lost his job. Elder Johann Funk and a few of his coworkers realized that this situation could not continue. They needed qualified teachers and they would have to train those teachers themselves in their own schools. If not, their schools would be staffed by non-Mennonite teachers. At this point he ran into serious opposition from the church.

Now their attitude to higher education surfaced. They were convinced that the more education a person had the more confused his thinking would become. One young man explained his feelings about higher education to me in the following words, “Children will go crazy if they have to sit in school such a long time. All that education is unnecessary. When I sell my grain the merchant calculates how much I should pay. And when I want to write a letter I come to you. Another man said, that he was afraid he would not be able to keep his sons at home if they knew the English language. As if knowing the English language would eradicate all the values they had been taught. I have included these anecdotes to show how shallow the prevailing attitude towards higher education was at that time.

Elder Johann Funk did not let his opponents dissuade him from his goal. When he realized that the church could not be convinced that they needed a school for training teachers, he organized a school society to carry out that plan. In this way our school for higher education was founded. Gretna was the only feasible place at that time where such a school could be built. William Rempel was asked to serve as the first teacher. After one year of teaching Rempel resigned from his position because he thought that the school needed a teacher with more training. Now what should they do? They did not want to close the school and at the same time they did not have anyone better qualified to operate the school. In their desperation they turned for help to the Mennonites in the United States. The churches in the United States recommended Heinrich Ewert for that position. Ewert was contacted and subsequently hired to serve in the newly founded teachers’ training school in Gretna. Unfortunately a majority of the members of the Bergthal Church on the West Reserve disagreed with this move. They separated themselves from the group that supported the school in Gretna and formed the Sommerfelder Church. The new church got that name because their first Elder, Abraham Doerksen, lived in the village of Sommerfeld.

Translated by William Schroeder, 434 Sutton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R2G 0T3.

Editor’s Note: Peter P. Epp (b. 1864) has provided another interesting account of the Bergthaler emigration from Imperial Russia of 1874-6. Of course, as with all historical documents, care must be taken in their interpretation, one must always be mindful of the writer’s life experience and purpose. In Peter P. Epp’s “From My Memory,” he is reconstructing events years after the fact, and after an official “party line” interpretation was well established by Johann Funk (1836-1917) BGB B156 Alt-Bergfeld, West Reserve, the Bergthaler Aeltester for the West Reserve, and his small band of adherents who made a corporate decision to forsake their faith and heritage in favour of adopting American Revivalists religious culture and Anglo-conformist social constructs. This view, of course, grossly misrepresented the efficacy of the Bergthaler educational system. Epp’s comments about the attention of the Bergthaler ministers about educational and spiritual matters are patently false and spoke more the religious culture which the secessionists had adopted than the one they abandoned.

Nevertheless, Peter P. Epp has provided an interesting and vivid account of the emigration and pioneer period which deserves to be recognized as an important contribution to the literature of the Bergthaler/Chortitzer/Sommerfelder people.

Peter P. Epp (b. 1864), son of Peter Epp (b. 1841), appears to be the nephew of Cornelius Epp (b. 1838), Schöntal, East Reserve, BGB A 43, who served as the second Secretary-Treasurer of the R. M. of Hanover, from 1884-95 (Hanover 100 Years, page 178). The Bergthaler Epps, brothers Peter and Cornelius, represented royalty as Mennonite bloodlines go, their father Kornelius Epp (1802-61), being the nephew of David Epp (1750-1802), co-Aeltester of the Gemeinde at Chortitz (Old Colony), Imperial Russia, from 1792 until his death.

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.
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. Commemorate the 125 at your next family gathering. Designate someone in your family, church, office or community to gather your history as a way of celebrating. Most important, tell your children about “125 East Reserve” and explain the significance of the anniversary to them.
Before I begin with my proposed emigration report, I want to mention briefly two somewhat particular travel incidents.

When we drove from Borosenko to the grandparents' [Peter Rempe, Lichtfelde, Molotschna], more than a day's travel distant, we had to cross the Dnieper and also the Molotschna River.

One time we also drove over a long floating bridge suspended completely on pontoons constructed in short sections on the sides. It can well be imagined that the bridge was extremely unstable. It occurred that the section where the wagon and horses were moving forward dropped many inches under water at exactly that moment. It was to be expected that this was not very suitable for anxious dispositions.

At another place there was a sand road approximately a quarter mile in length. A road bed made of wood had been built over top which could be used by those paying a toll. Father [Abraham L. Dueck (1841-99), later Aeltester of the E. Reserve Kleine Gemeinde] apparently could not come to terms with the Russians and drove on the sand. I was sorry for this on account of the horses. Our traveling companions who had paid the toll, passed by us on the wooden roadway.

Presently the immigration year 1874 came to be. Since the land of the village of Annafeld was leasehold, only the buildings and other movable property could be sold. The latter were sold at a huge community auction which lasted for many days, and [the goods] were brought together from the entire village. As the Colonists (German Lutherans) who had bought Annafeld and Steinbach wanted to take possession of the buildings before seedtime, we had to live elsewhere for a few months as things were not yet ready with the emigration passes.

The first groups had departed somewhere around the end of May but ours [group] set out on the distant journey only towards the end of July. Early one morning we embarked in Nikopol on a river steamer to travel downstream along the Dnieper. Late that evening we arrived in Cherson. We had to wait here until early the next morning. We passed the time among the baggage and freight belongings before seedtime, which resulted in a stop with much pushing and pulling. One or the other got stuck in shallow places. The water level in the river was also low, which made the crossing possibly 10 by 16 feet in size which was locked at half height with strong doors, apparently they could be opened for loading freight.

On one day a severe storm arose so that the waves crashed hard and somewhat sideways against the ship. Indeed by midnight they hit with such force that the large door previously mentioned and an office were knocked in and shattered to pieces so that part of the water poured into the ship and flooded a number of cabins. Although only few will have been sleeping during the storm, it must still have been a great shock to hear the crash and to see the water streaming in spouts, as if the ship was sinking. Later I heard some talk about the great cry which had been heard at the time.

Personally I did not become aware of much of this at the time: we youths had made ourselves places of refuge at or on a large pile of clay bags midships and slept well until morning. But what a sight when we awoke? Out of necessity the doors had been nailed shut, but the cabins were a frightful sight! wet and in disorder. Dry clothes were dug out of the balls of clothes and the others hung out to dry. The wind had largely calmed by morning. And so this stormy night on Lake Superior also came to an end and we also landed that same day in Duluth where we soon boarded the train and travelled on to Moorhead which was the end of the railway at that time.

Now the journey was to proceed again by water and in fact several hundred miles along the Red River. But the kind of ship always became cruder and more simple. The previous had been no better that a freighter, even though passengers traveled on it. And now we actually had to step into a barge. These were about 40 feet long, half as wide, and approximately seven or eight feet high, but curved in such a way that those who had their quarters on the outside could not really stand upright. In the middle the windows were built in or furnished with a canvas roof. Two such shallow flat-bottomed boats were attached and taken in tow by our small river steamer. And so it also came to pass that one or the other got stuck in shallow places which resulted in a stop with much pushing forwards and backwards. Even though the journey went downstream, it still took three or four days. The water level in the river was also low at the time.

While we were on the ship we usually had our baggage with us, whereas it sometimes stayed behind when we were traveling by train.

The boiler of the steamer was heated by wood, which was stock piled along the river banks. The banks for most of the way were forested with hardwoods, at places for a mile onto the land although the area traversed by the river was known to an extent as a treeless plain and is. The river makes many sharp bends, sometimes directly to the south even though the general direction is northward.

Now I will conclude my imperfect writing.

About the Writer: Johann R. Dueck (1863-1937). Johann R. Dueck was born in Gnadenfeld, Molotschna, in 1863. He came to Canada with his parents in 1874. The family settled in Grünfeld, E. Reserve. In 1887 Johann moved to Rosenhof where he taught school for several years. In 1890 he married Maria K. Friesen, daughter of Johann F. Friesen, Neukirch, third Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester.

Johann R. Dueck served for 30 years as a deacon. A lengthy report of the first pioneer years in Grünfeld was published in 60 Jahrrige Jubiläum, pages 17-24. The report was translated by his nephew Ben B. Dueck, Steinbach, and published in Profile 1874, pages 203-207.
Friedrichsthal - April 23, 1875

To my beloved neighbour, David Stoesz:

Firstly a heartfelt greeting to you my worthy friend. We have received your writing, and someone has borrowed the letter from me. I do not currently know where it is, and therefore I cannot say on which date it was written. The letter found all of us Friedrichsthaler in joy and health. Indeed, in reflecting upon our circumstances many tears have emanated from our eyes. Currently matters with us are as they were with you in spring, even more pressing. The Friedrichsthaler Dorfgemeinde [village society] is planning to go with the second transport and two families will come with the first, David Harder and Jakob Harder.

It is Monday today. Last Wednesday the remainder were gathered together in the school house in Bergthal and allowed themselves to be persuaded for the second transport - only a few families now remain. They have the expectation, however, to come as soon as they can. The petitions and the Gemeindesprüche [Community Deeds] were completed by all of ours [people], Ohm Gerhard and Jakob Peters have gone with the papers for those going on the first transport. We do not yet have news as to when they will return with the passes. When these are done then we will have news as to when they will return with the first transport and also the other expenses, of which you think (village farms) the expenses must be counted, approximately 45 desjatein. And from the Wirtschaften land, behind the woods here, 40 desjatein, and it seems will not see you there; he does not have the expectation.

There are changes [also] in our family, our Johann has wedded himself with Katherina Falk, who was at Jakob Braun’s. They live at our place, they are healthy and satisfied and send you greetings.

The prices for selling cattle are good, and for that reason much has been sold. Some have already sold their cattle so that they can hardly manage now. Especially the horses, there are many who have none [now]. I still have a vehicle but it is not such as you are used to from me. It is quite unsuitable for hauling away the grain. It seems that the teamsters are quite expensive and the grain prices somewhat lower than they have already been many times. One hears of wheat [selling] for eight rubel, barley 4 rubel, 80 kopek, oats 3 rubel 50 kopek. Some have also already received slightly more for the oats, but since [grain is] being transported, the price is falling, and we are concerned that once the plowing is complete, the others will fall as well.

But we are in the hope that the Lord will direct matters that everything will be possible. Indeed, with the cattle it seemed truly miraculous. In the beginning it was not so clear, but whoever now has cows for sale, receives good prices which, however, will fall when the last [ones] are sold. Yes of expensive furniture, benches, tables and chairs, that are good [quality] quite a lot has been sold. There are rooms which are almost empty, but ____ [Tan?] and the like is only little to leave.

If God wishes to carry out the best in our circumstances, the way it has gone for those (which in our mind would be very suitable for us) that we have sold, then we can all together have it better. Yet, do not understand that we are only praying for the good, for sometimes it seems that is all we pray for. Fear also directs us along other paths, which also articulates our prayers.

In these times one wishes for so and so, but God leads and directs; indeed, He wishes to grant us and you love and peace in our hearts, whereby we shall be able to rea with joy on that [final] day.

Now, beloved friend: I have written everything for this time which I know. It is my heartfelt wish that this [letter] might find all of our friends there in good health. I bid that you might be so good [regarding] this imperfect writing and extend my heartfelt greetings to all my former neighbours that are from Friedrichsthal. I cannot write down all their names – I say all friends and acquaintances that remember us in love: here we speak of one and soon of the other, etc.

When one speaks of writing, greetings are extended, and therefore, receive this as if many greetings from here were directed upon you there, and [reflect on] the great joy we shall experience on the day of our arrival, when many tears will flow at our welcome. Receive a heartful greeting from us and our children, towards you [and] your children, indeed, all friends, from Johan and Maria Abrams.

Yes, I believe you will allow the hand of writing to come to us and I bid that you continue steadfast in love. I do not recall if I directed a greeting toward you at the time, but have the hope that you will have received one, for in my writing I said, “All.” And thus, with the consent of Abrams, I have allowed myself to share something with you about my wife and family. Thanks be to God, we in our family are in good health, and since the time of your departure from here our family has been strengthened by two sons whom we gave the names Isaak and Jacob on February 15.

Surely you will remember [from your own experience] what great joy we have had in [anticipation] for this journey. Yet we are decided to come on the second transport. Indeed [we pray] that you and all the others will have love for us, and prayers on our behalf, and not to become discouraged, for then we shall overcome.

May God grant us all peace in our hearts. Receive a heartful greeting from “Franz and Maria Dücke”

The contracts from Hamburg for which Weibe was sent are here in Bergthal, as are ours as well.

Letter January 16, 1876, by Ohm Franz Dyck, Bergthal, Friedrichsthal, Imperial Russia, to Ohm David Stoesz, Bergthal, Manitoba, Canada.

Beloved brother in ministerial office, David Stoesz! In Romans 13, 8, the Apostle Paul says, “Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” Therefore, since you have become one of my brothers, of which I have long borne testimony to you in the Chortitzer Gemeinde from 1915 until the present day...
after I had been home from the worship service for about an hour, which was totally unexpected and for which I was hardly prepared and for which, for sometime already, I had almost let the hope fade. Now, however, this downcast disposition has again been fully dispelled because the beloved Dyck emigrated in 1876 and for the first time in my life, during which time I have experienced good and evil days, but all of which have had to serve for my betterment.

In particular, if has pleased the Lord, since the time of the departure from here of our beloved Aeltester and all the emigrants were gone from here the preceeding summer, to take me through noteworthy trials, and during which my path for most of the time was as if I must needs go through the darkness of night, during which a star only rarely shone through the darkness, and the clear sunshine shone even more seldom. In such an environment of darkness and light I have alternatively had to further my pilgrim journey in the spiritual realm since that time, and during which I dispaired of [finding] comfort, so that often the prayers only wanted to flow forth sparingly.

Finally, God be thanked, I conquered in the foundation, and even though there is no lack of dark and troubled days even now, I have enjoyed more courage and strength of the spirit for some time already. But I have had the experience in the school of Christ, that new testings of the Cross follow the longed-for comfort, and I am ready each day in this expectation. At the same time, I must confess that the beloved God has dealt with me very gently and with great forbearance and has guided me by the reins of His love. The Lord be thanked many times in the name of Jesus Christ, that He has carried such an almost limitless patience for such a lowly, contrite—yes, almost worthless, downcast [person] as I, that I was once received by Jesus and still am, so that I must say with the lamentations of Jeremiah, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.”

Now beloved brethren, after I have written something about myself and the inwardly guidance of God, I will also record something which shall be worthy to help you yourselves there in America. When I consider the imminent qualities which all of you have laid against the day of your calling, and compare my lowness with same, nontheless, I have had to go through certain experiences in one area which have remained unknown to you until the present, namely, in this case, I have remained here to stand alone with approximately a fifth of our Gemeinde, completely forsaken by all my fellow ministerial, and this also in such a difficult time period, where all previously standing regulations of the Gemeinde, have been spurred by a number of lukewarm Gemeinde brethren, who consciously choose their own ways, and govern themselves only according to the laws of the world, and who want to know nothing more of the laws of Christ.

I can hardly express the burdens that this can bring and this has also contributed a great deal to my lack of courage, for so dearly I wanted to keep everything upright, but which I did not always accomplish. Then my thoughts often flew to my beloved fellows ministers in the far distant west, and always thought, how do you even know if any of the beloved brethren from America will write anymore? Would I have to experience the fulfillment of the previously long held apprehension, that when the beloved Aeltester would finally be there in your midst, that I would not hear anything again from any of you?

Alas, how often from one time to the next have I not hoped for and believed, that finally a letter of support in my discouragement would arrive from one of you. But always in vain, so that a long time ago already I saw that I had disappointed myself in my hope. I had also disposed myself to be quiet and remain silent, until finally on January 11, your beloved letter [was] brought to me.

Naturally, the time of my silence, towards you beloved brethren, has been terminated, and with joy and inwardly love I have replied to your letter, which [reply] otherwise contains little of interest, other than that it is mainly from the depths of my heart. If you should wish to experience something of the news from the old homeland, you might want to read the letter I sent to Ohm Gerhard, which I wrote only a few days ago, but which may well leave here at the same time.

Now I wish you good health, a contented and peaceful heart, firmly rooted upon faith in God. Of brother Johann Stoesz, I can report that he was in the church on January 11, the preceeding Sunday, as it was known that a letter from the Aeltester was to be read. In so far as I know, he and his family are in good health.

Now, beloved friend, I will soon have to close, as the paper is running out. When I review my own writing, I am not satisfied this time with my work. But I will send it the way it turned out. I have tried to keep it childlike, which is somewhat my style in writing, that when I finally submit myself, I submit totally, that is to say, in the way of trusting [the recipient].

I ask that you receive my lowly writing in this sense, for the dimly glowing embers of love from my side have been fanned and nursed back into life. Now I wish you also the protecting all-mighty hand of God, on your side. And be greeted again from me, lowly one, with a brotherly greeting, together with your wife and children. I bid you also to greet the beloved Aeltester. I remain your loving fellow brother throughout, “Franz Dyck”

Acknowledgement: From the letter collection of Aeltester David Stoesz (1842-1903), courtesy of Mel and Nettie Unger, Niverville, Manitoba. Translated by D. Plett, editor.

About the writer: Franz Dyck (1822-87) was an important leader of the Bergthal people. He served as the school teacher in Schönthal in 1848. In 1854 he was elected to the ministry. It appears that Franz Dyck was appointed Vice-Aeltester in 1875 when Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) left for America. Dyck emigrated in 1876 and settled in Schönsee, northeast of Grünthal. Perhaps his most significant contribution to the church of Christ was his meticulous work in organizing the early church registers, composing a new edition of the Waisenamt regulations in 1880, and signing the new Brandordning protocols in 1883. As can be seen from the foregoing letters, Franz Dyck was a gifted and capable writer. A fine product of the Chortitzer Old Kolony (OK) school system. Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe said of him that he had “God-given talents.”

The arrangements at the Grainery Agricultores Unidos de Cuautemoc, close to Campo 1B, Neudendorf, just east of the city, is very convenient for those selling corn. A large trailer can be emptied in a short time as the lift raises the entire tractor-trailer, as can be seen in this photo from January 16. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, 20 Januar 1999, page 7.
Introduction.

It is difficult to imagine from the modern perspective, the immense work load and responsibility of the Bishop (generally known as the Aeltester) of the pioneer Gemeinde. Men like Peter Toews (1841-1922), Grinfeld, of the Kleine Gemeinde, Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Rosengart, W.R., of the Reinlander (Old Kolony), and, of course Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Chortitz, E.R., Manitoba, Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde (later the Chortitzer in the East Reserve) were responsible not only to conquer the wilds of nature and to establish European civilization in previously desolate prairie and shrub land, but also for the governance of communities of several thousand souls, including the elderly, infants, the infirm and handicapped.

The Aeltester was responsibly to establish not only schools but an entire confessional school system with a curriculum, teaching facilities, teachers and a recruiting and training system for teachers. Another branch of the Gemeinde administration in previously desolate prairie and shrubland, but also for the governance of communities of several thousand souls, including the elderly, infants, the infirm and handicapped.

The Bishop sat at the pinnacle of a system of governance which included some 50 village councils, pasture societies, road bosses, and, indeed, the municipal council. Other administrative branches administered estates, mutual fire insurance, and a lending society. In the process there were countless personality matters to deal with, not to speak of the pastoral care and counseling dispensed to parishioners who looked up to their Aeltester as the final arbiter of justice, theology and moral virtue.

In the course of all these duties the Aeltester also conducted extensive correspondence with outside agencies, fellow ministers and local leaders, as well as satellite congregations at Mountain Lake, Fargo, the West Reserve, and in the North West Territories (Saskatchewan). To date none of the letter collections of the early Aeltesten has come to light with the exception of Peter Toews of the Kleine Gemeinde (later Holdeman) and, of course Gerhard Wiebe. David Stoesz is particularly well-known for his journal covering the years 1872 until 1896, translated and published in Historical Sketches, pages 410-455. Another article by Catharina Friesen, focusing on David Stoesz’ personal life and family was published in Preservings, No. 11, pages 90-91.

The material in the Stoesz collection provides an exciting new bird’s eye look at the work of a pioneer bishop. Of course, these documents are only the letters and correspondence which David Stoesz received from others and not the letters and materials that he wrote. Nonetheless one can extrapolate a great deal about the sort of matters the Aeltester dealt with on behalf of his people.

About half of the collection consists of correspondence received by David Stoesz and the rest is material received by his son Jakob W. Stoesz (1872-1939), Reinland, north of Niverville, who served as Waisenman. The letters to David Stoesz Sr. include some 20 items from Abraham Klassen, minister at the Fargo settlement, and some from Minnesota, including several from David’s brother Johann. Numerous letters were received by both David Sr. and son Jakob from son David M. Stoesz (b. 1870), who moved to Gnadenfeld, W. R., as a teacher.

The items featured in this article are a few of the shorter pieces which provide glimpses and snippets of David Stoesz’ work and personality.

Letter One:

Honourable Church Aeltester, David Stoesz;

As the it has been the leading of the All-wise Shepherd, that the young man Joh. Wiebe and Helena Toews, daughter of the Honourable Julius Toews have entered into a holy marriage betrothal, the aforementioned engaged couple request their marriage bans to be announced in the church in Chortitz. Together with a greeting to you both, from Bergfeld, your friend “Jacob Wiebe”

The note is signed by Jakob Wiebe (1835-1914), long-time school teacher in Alt-Bergfeld, E. R., and father of Abr. H. Wiebe (1892-1979), see article elsewhere in this issue. His “Rechnehbuch” was described in an article by John Dyck, Preservings, No. 8, Part One, page 10-11.
Letter Two:

To the ministerial in the West Reserve;

We hereby attest that the person A. H., the son of Jakob Hiebert, Schanzsaberg, in so far as we know, is a member of the Gemeinde in good standing, and in that respect, to be served with the marriage vows. The bride also was added to our Gemeinde by baptism this spring, and therefore, nothing from our part, stands in the way of completing their union as a couple.

With greeting, “David Stoesz” Aeltester of the Gemeinde at Chortitz, written in the church, November 29, 1885

Letter Three:

Worthy Aeltester

Yesterday I had driven to Grünthal, to see how far they were with the work on the church, but found no workers present anymore as it is brought as far as planned for the time being, with the exception that hinges still need to be made for the doors. And as I understood from Joh. Rempels, they, namely, Peter Toews and David Falk, want to come there on Monday to paint the benches. They also want to make the doors usable. Accordingly I feel that plans can be made for using it this month, but the builders still need to be asked whether they can hand it over for the suggested day. For which reason I again want to travel there on Monday, if God will and health permits, and if they think likewise I will send further word, and will pursue the matter to its conclusion.

Whereunto I attest with a brotherly greeting, as a lowly fellow servant of the Gospel, “Franz Dyck” Schönsee, April 3, 1886

Letter Four:

Beloved Aeltester David Stoesz,

On Sunday I forgot to declare myself regarding the brethren, that with the current disorder manifested by Peter Sawatzky, I can no longer serve my office. When an individual disavows his debt and it is not enforceable amongst us that he must appear before the Waisenamt, in order that the Waisenamt can persuade him by reference to the former journals, from whence the debt arose, that he duly owes the debt, matters cannot function this way.

For which reason I petition the ministers and brethren, that they might wish to reconsider the matter, that the Ordnung in this respect and with the help of God be upheld. For this Gemeinde is still too weak that this office can be allowed to dissolve [for it sees to it] that everyone receives that which is due to them, and the heirs would [otherwise] lose their inheritance, which would surely be a great sin for us.

My beloved friend. Take from my imperfect writing that which you consider worthwhile and present it to the Gemeinde.

Together with a greeting--respectfully in love, “Cornelius Friesen” Osterwick, February 2, 1886

Letter Five:

Beloved friend David Stoesz,

I only received your letter of Dec. 22 today. I rejoiced to see therein that you are all well which I, thank God, can also report about ourselves, and generally the situation regarding health is good.

I am indeed saddened that you cannot pay this year, or at this time, yet, what one cannot do must remain undone and one must have patience.

The harvest here was excellent but the prices are also low, wheat 75 to 80 cents a bushel, oats 30 to 35.

The weather is not that cold, but alternately snow and much rain. Yesterday it was cold with some snow.

May the Lord bless us and you and envelop us with the greeting of love without which no one can please the Lord, is my wish.

Together with [a] greeting to all, “Jakob Y. Schantz”

Berlin, Jan 6, 1886
Letter Six:  
Osterwick, December 27, 1890

Beloved friend David Stoesz,

Since I have heard that our people are able to transfer their land [Deeds] with Ab. Friesein, Steinbach, without having to produce a certificate from the Municipal office, that they have paid the tax. He asks them about it and if they say they have paid it, he says he believes them.

Consequently if this is how the circumstances are for our poor Gemeinde, I am concerned whether our Gemeinde is not going completely to ruination, with the payment of our Brotschuld (Bread debt) and Waisenschuld (Orphan’s debt).

Therefore my advise would be that you and [Reeve] Peter Toews would go to Friesein and to inquire of him, whether it would not be possible that he would not disburse the money to anyone, without the requirement that they produce a certificate from the Waisenamt regarding their debts.

I expect, my beloved, that you will know my meaning. Please consider what can be done in this regard.

Together with a greeting, your friend “Cornelius Friesein”

Letter Seven:  
Gretna, Man Dec. 18,1890

Mr. Rev. David Stoesz,

Worthy friend,

We, the friends of the school in Gretna are planning to have a meeting here in Gretna on the 27th of this month in order to discuss the school situation here among us Germans. We would dearly love to have you in our midst for this opportunity.

We have a visitor here, namely, Pred. Hein. Ewert from Kansas, who is here with the plans to work [among] the schools. It was his intention together with Aelt. Joh. Funk to visit you beforehand. But because his time is so limited this will, however, not be possible.

And so I bid you once again, to be here at the designated time. Together with a greeting, your friend, “Ernstmann Penner”

Letter Eight:  
Hochfeld, 23 February, 1892

To the Church Aelttesten David Stoesz,

Beloved Aeltester. I have a request to make of you. Because there are so many poor people there in Russia who also want to come here and do not have sufficient means of their own, I therefore petition you, perhaps the Gemeinde would be so benevolent and assist so that the poor in Russia could come here.

For there are a number that have written to me, whether I might possibly know how, that they could come here, and I know no other advice but to direct myself to you since I myself have only immigrated from Russia three months ago. There is also Klaus Peters, he has advice, but he also says, without the Gemeinde it cannot be done. But I hope to God that you and the Gemeinde will not decline [our request], that is my plea.

With a heartfelt greeting from your friend, “Johann Andres”

Letter Nine:  
P.O. Yorlton, Assiniboia, Canada  
April 14, 1892

To our beloved brother Heinrich Doerksen,

Firstly, from us to you, a truly heartfelt greeting together with our wish that our writing might find you in truly good health.

Now, our beloved brother. Of our health we are unable to report much good at this time and even a great impoverishment.

And we undersigned brethren have heard through our neighbour Andreas Lüge, that perhaps it might be possible among you to share something with us poor and sick [people]; there is truly a great privation amongst us.

Our dear beloved brother Doerksen, may the beloved God soften the hearts of you and your Gemeinde towards us poor and sick [ones], and that you might help us out with a little charity, for here in our new homeland we are extremely poor. Even though the winter is already past, the need is always getting greater.

And for that purpose we, the undersigned brethren, petition you that out of compassion you would not forget us, for the loving God will reward you and your Gemeinde a hundred fold if you will grace [again] our poverty. Amen.

We, the undersigned brethren, are the ones of whom Andreas Lüge has spoken about with you. We sign hereunder as follows:

“Jakob A. Würz, Michael Würz, Paul Tschetter, Christain Lange, Andreas Lange”

Letter Ten:  
Bruderheim, Alta, 27 Aug. 95

Beloved brother Stoesz,

In answer to you beloved letter regarding the Power of Attorney for the cattle, I can report much good in my writing in reply. 1. We wish to allow the matter with the livestock to remain the way it has been until now. The year for many is not for surplus. 2. You and also all the beloved brethren need not be concerned, for I surely believe, that when the time will come, the debts will be paid. Up until now, no one has even thought of it, that they would not want to pay. Do not alarm yourself, for your love toward me and your trust unto all shall not be repaid with dark thoughts or murmuring. The beloved God will not allow things to go that far.

We here are currently in the wheat harvest. The weather is mucky but not rainy. As you have heard, the hail has done much damage here, including me also. We are all well. A heartfelt greeting to all, “A. Lüge”

Letter Eleven:  
P.O. Yorlton, Assa, Canada  
July 23, 1892

To our beloved brother David Stoesz,

Grace, well-being, blessing, peace, and compassion, we wish unto you and ourselves, from our hearts, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Beloved Geschwister, we have received your beloved letter with the $10 and for which we are a thousand times thankful to you, it was essential for us and for which God will reward you.

Much beloved brethren, you will undoubtedly be curious regarding our harvest. If God will protect it, it will possibly yield something, which is most essential here in our new homeland.

Health wise, we are quite [well], which we also wish you from our hearts. Beloved brother. I have a petition for you, I hope you will not decline me. If you can, please be so good, and send me a Sermon Book and also a small booklet for when a small child dies, please send same to me.

Now I wish to conclude my insignificant writing, with a heartfelt greeting from our small Gemeinde.

Your fellow brethren in faith, “Michael Würz, Paul Tschetter, Jakob A. Würz, Christian Lange”

If you are sending us a Sermon Book, please send it to Michael Würz.

Letter Twelve:  
Schönthal, May 29, 1897

Honourable Aeltester David Stoesz, Bergthal

Firstly, a friendly greeting!

As a reminder of that which I wrote you before the New Year, regarding the property of the deceased Cor. Epp and his heirs, which you promised in as far as possible to bring into order, and, as I later allowed you to be reminded through H. Doerksen and requested a certification regarding the matter, and in spite of which nothing has been done to date. Consequently we are almost out of patience as we would dearly love to conclude the matter.

And so we bid you again, to at least report to us as to how far you have concerned, for I surely believe, that when the time will come, the debts will be paid. Do not alarm yourself, for your love toward me and your trust unto all shall not be repaid with dark thoughts or murmuring. The beloved God will not allow things to go that far.

We hope, therefore, for an answer and advice.

With a reiterated friendly greeting, “Peter Epp” and “Jakob Braun”,

Vormünder
The time for our summer issue of *Preservings* to go to press has again arrived. The society has been active with publishing, and encouraging research of our local and related history. We are anticipating adding some new members to our board in October. At the moment we are concerned with the deteriorating health of our researcher Mr. John Dyck.

Delbert has been busy with representing the society on the 125th Anniversary celebrations steering committee. His knowledge of our local history is proving invaluable to the committee.

By the time you read this we here in the East Reserve will be getting under way with our celebrations of 125 years of settlement of this area. Upon reflection I think all of us will have to admit that the changes in infrastructure, school church, worship and institutions over these 125 years have been dramatic. To these changes one must add the influences by way of culture, religion, and practise of all the various groups that have decided to make the Hanover-Steinbach area their home. My two trips to Ukraine allowed me to see where our forefathers came from, some of the structure that is remaining and how it relates to the Country and the immediate area.

This immediately raises the question for me of how they must have felt when they saw their new surroundings in light of what they were used to. As a result of my visit to Paraguay last year I think I have a better perspective of what life must have been like in pre-Soviet south Russia and also here in southern Manitoba until about 1920. Like a semi-autonomous state within a state.

To these perspectives a new one was added last July when by chance I met the Johann Worms’ family of Bielefeld, Germany. It was while at the Museum on steam club business that I met a young girl wearing a name tag that said she was from Germany. I struck up a conversation and within half a minute six more of her friends surrounded us.

When I discovered that these people were “Aussiedler” from the Orenburg settlement, I was really hooked. I invited them to come to our house for night. We sat around the fire that evening and talked far into the night about Russia. The Orenburg settlement was one of the few that was left intact during WW II, but Johann and his father spent 10 years in a labour camp. He described how the forced collectivization, the “Norms”, and “requisitions” left the settlement in a state of dreary poverty so that at times the young children were forced to seek nourishment by eating caragana blossoms.

For me this was very touching especially when while sitting around the fire the Worms family with Anna Harder leading, sang Russian and German songs. The picture of the Worms family and friend Anna Harder is set in a sunflower field for a special reason because Johann told me of his experience as brigade leader on the “kolkhoz” in charge of planting sunflowers.

When I asked why they moved to Germany 18 years ago, Johann said it was because in the Soviet Union their future as Mennonites was uncertain but added that in the USSR they were branded as German but now in Germany they were often called Russians. Now I hear that there is the start of a move by some of the “Aussiedler” to southern Manitoba.

It is amazing that the English-Scottish of the Clesrspring Settlement, the Mennonites of the 1870s, 1920s, 1948, the Lutheran Germans of Friedensfeld, the Ukrainians of Sarto-Pansy and the French and Metis who settled around the periphery all get along so well. There are places in the world today where this is not so. Together we have lived in peace and prospered and provided a place of refuge for many people.

I would encourage all to involve yourselves in the 125 anniversary celebrations and celebrate our heritage and accomplishments.

Orlando Hiebert, HSHS President
Editorial

Jeb Vas

“Jeb Vas!”
Absolutely!

What Mennonite in southern Manitoba has not heard this expression?

I was surprised when a Russian general in a pulp suspense-thriller novel, *Assassination*, I was reading on the beach in Mazatlan in February, repeatedly used the expression with the same meaning.

Jeb Vas!
Absolutely!

I checked with a Russian language expert when I returned home and sure enough, Jeb Vas, is a Russian expression. The phrase was obviously adopted by our people during their sojourn in the Zaporozhe area, now part of Ukraine, formerly Imperial Russia.

There are other Russian words which have been adopted into the Plaut-Dietsch lingua-fauna: Rabusz (watermelon), Verernijhe (Perogies), Helopsjhe (cabbage rolls), Bułhjche (bread), Schtappe (Steppe or prairie). How about the word, “Chutur”. I very well remember the yard where I grew up in Blumenort being called the “Platt ’e Chut ’a”, in recognition of the large family industrial village founded by my grandparents.


Shoo-Fly Dyck.

Some books one knows right away will be significant. *Shoo-Fly Dyck* by John Janzen Kooistra is one of these. The story about a Jethro Clamptett (Beverly Hillbillies) type Mennonite farm boy from Virgil, Ontario, who becomes the star pitcher for the Toronto Blue Jays and pitches them to victory in the World Series has all the markings of a best seller.

Kooistra cleverly uses some Low German and more High German to sprinkle the story with local colour. What Armin Wiebe and *The Salvation of Yash Siemens* are to rural Mennonites in southern Manitoba, *Shoo-Fly Dyck* will be to street-smart urban Mennonites. See book review by Armin Wiebe in book review section.

In a telephone interview with Kooistra on March 23, 1999, I asked how he managed to pick up and reconvoy the subtle cultural nuances found in “Shoo-Fly”. John explained that although he grew up in a Dutch Calvinist home in Southern Ontario, most of his playmates were Mennonite. He married Lorraine Janzen, of Mennonite background, and eventually attended a Mennonite church.

Centennial Celebrations, 1974.

I recently had the privilege of watching the video, “Mennonite Pioneers, the Mennonite Centennial, 1874-1974,” made by Mennonite film maker Otto Klassen, Winnipeg, the producer of other historical works such as “The Great Trek”, the Mexican Mennonite videos, etc. The video was evidently commissioned by the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach. See Preservings, No. 12, pages 103-4.

It was amazing, first of all, to see how many of the people involved in the centennial celebrations of 1974 have already passed on to their heavenly rewards.

I was astounded at the variety and range of events held for the centennial, a full day in the Winnipeg Arena, several nights at the Concert Hall, a paddle wheel boat cruise from the Forks to the landing site near Niverville, and of course, numerous activities at the Museum. Back in 1974 I was only beginning to get interested in “our” history and I guess I hadn’t paid all that much attention. I wish to acknowledge the work of all those involved in the 1974 Centennial celebrations and the contribution they made to our faith and culture.

I would encourage the Village Museum to acquire the distribution rights from Otto Klassen and give the video the public exposure it deserves. I would even be so bold as to suggest that the Museum arrange to have the 1974 Centennial video shown on public access T.V. in Steinbach and elsewhere. This would be an excellent way for the village Museum to pursue the objective of being the premier Mennonite cultural institution in Western Canada, a Mecca for those in search of their heritage and spiritual roots.

Oaknames.

One of the features of Mennonite culture was the abundance of “be nomasz” or aliases, also known as Eikcjhe Nomasz–literally oak names, found in the paradigm of village, family and Gemeinde. Like other conservative communities, the East Reserve, reverberated with the vibrancy and dynamism of a people that knew how to laugh and enjoy themselves, as well as worship and be pious.

In this issue we have finally an article on one of the greatest raconteurs of them all, “Berliner” Kehler, who took the Kehler trait for folklore and ribald comedy to new heights as a long forgotten artform. The story, fortunately, is told by his grandson, Dr. Al Reimer, Winnipeg, who, as many of our readers know only too well, is more than capable of carrying on his grandfather’s rich tradition of linguistic prowess and dramatic genius. By the way, where is that novel at Al? The one set in Steinbach (and quite a bit in Ebenfeld too we hope).

Speaking of names or aliases, I recently heard, probably, the world record most descriptive oakname, “Zipper” Goertzen (the names have been changed to protect the innocent and some not so innocent). As the story goes, young Goertzen was courting his girlfriend in her parents’ upstairs parlour. As the amusing activities gained momentum, her father decided to come stomping up the stairs. In a panic to restore his apparel, the unfortunate gentleman zipped his pants too hastily, catching a delicate part of the anatomy. It bled so badly, he suffered the indignity of having the girl’s father take him to the hospital. He also incurred the additional humilia-

Debate and Research.

In the tradition of our ancient Old Kolony (OK), Berghal (BG) and Kleine Gemeinde (KG) forebears who debated all matters endlessly and vigorously in the democratic forum of the brotherhood, Schultebut and other assemblies, *Preservings* fosters and promotes informed discussion, vigorous dialogue, and intense examination of issues pertaining to our heritage and culture.

The editorial takes a hard look at various aspects of so-called Evangelical religious culture with respect to various of its rites, rituals and protocols, as well as its self-professed fantasy of world domination.

To enhance the debate we have included an article by Rodney Sawatzky, President of Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, who takes a positive view of the interaction with Evangelical religious culture and its impact on the Mennonite faith.

These are the two most significant religious traditions within the Hanover Steinbach area making this discussion relevant to our every day lives. Are the two religious cultures combatable or are they inherently incompatible and in conflict with each other?

This issue of *Preservings* also has the usual crop of letters, some angry, some informative and even a few complementary. This feedback is important to our work, a way of dialogue with our readers.

We are proud of another series of excellent and thought provoking feature articles, focusing on the pioneer church and leaders of our community. We regret that we do not have more biographies of our women pioneers who played such a leading and important role in orthodox conservative Mennonite culture. May this be a challenge to our readers, to document and record the stories of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers which still abound so richly in our oral tradition and folklore.

And of course, what we do best, what *Preservings* has become known for, we are again blessed with a rich selection of biographies and historical sketches in the “Articles” section. I am particularly pleased with the article on “Gnadendorf” by Ernest Braun which proves that with concerted effort, intellectual genius and the tenacity of a police detective, the details of settlement of *Strassendorf* villages such as Gnadendorf, can still be teased out of the darkness of the past.

Enjoy.

D. Plett Q.C., Editor
tion of attracting the appellation “Zipper” Goertzen.

In Rosengard they had the “Upper” Jakob Dycks and the “Lower” Jakob Dycks. Who can explain that one?

Who has other “oakname” stories?

**Drug Smugglers.**

Whenever someone of Mexican Mennonite background is caught with drugs or for drug smuggling, the Canadian media portrays the Mexican Mennonites as a race and people of drug smugglers. It is not unusual for Mennonite media to join the refrain, which has its roots in a racist concept known as Anglo-conformity.

On October 2, 1998, for example, the editor of the *Mennonitische Post*, laments regarding this issue saying, “If we published all the stories which we heard about Mennonites and drug smuggling, the Post would be very thick” (page 4).

Before we go into some mass orgiastic indictment of the Mexican Mennonites, let us remember that it is the Canadian consumers of drugs who are at the root of the problems. We either continue to tie up half our police force chasing after marijuana users and build more jails where we can incarcerate and criminalize more of these young people, or we acknowledge that marijuana use is no worse than alcohol or the prescription drugs that most people use regularly, and legalize it.

I understand that even the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs has endorsed such a move.

It seems that all the laws against marijuana use are doing is creating a powerful criminal sub-culture just like prohibition did in the 1920s, another equally unsuccessful attempt to legislate morality at taxpayers expense.

In any case, in 1998 the Steinbach area was the site of several busts of marijuana grow operations, including I believe, one that was the largest in Canada. We have also had drug busts in our local schools and it is said that drugs are available in most schools in Manitoba.

I presume that over the next year or so Mennonite and secular media will characterize Steinbachers as a lower racial and cultural group because of these drug busts.

Or is the wide brush categorization a special treatment which only Mexican Mennonites qualify for?

We will wait and see!

**Abe Hiebert 1937-97.**

In February 1998 a Mennonite farmer in the jungles of Belize asked me if the plea of self-defense was not a little far-fetched as an excuse for police officers who killed a 60-year-old half blind and deaf man in his home on Dufferin Avenue, Winnipeg.

On December, 1997, Abram Hiebert was shot to death by a squad of eight Winnipeg police who had decided to execute a search warrant after having attended “…a Christmas party where alcohol was served.”

When Hiebert refused to open his door, the police stormed in, Gestapo style. Hiebert apparenly accosted them with a baseball bat and pepper spray as would most other normal citizens in the circumstances.

On April 16, 1999, Winnipeg police chief Jack Ewatzki announced that “an internal investigation had cleared the shooter, the officer who actually fired the fatal shot, of wrong doing.”

The police have alleged that “Hiebert was involved in drug dealing. Presumably the mafia crime syndicates have implemented an equal opportunity employment program and are now hiring the physically handicapped and elderly to carry out their sinister operations.

Only the officer who shot the agreed to a blood test, with no trace of alcohol being found. The other officers all refused to be tested. The investigation is continuing. Source: *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 17, 1999, A3.

The question posed in Belize remains, how many Winnipeg police officers does it take to kill one half-blind, half-deaf old Mennonite armed for self protection against a home invasion with pepper spray and a baseball bat. By the way, where do you buy the stuff? I need some too.

**Old Colony in Ontario.**

Notwithstanding years of proselytization and “sheep stealing” by various predator religious denominations, the OK church in Ontario still has 3555 members and 4263 children in 1998. Source *Mennonite Post*, Feb. 5, 1999. The OK church in Manitoba has 1076 members and 1069 children.

**Bergthal Colony, Paraguay.**

Another statistic of direct interest to the Hanover Steinbach area is a population report from Colony Bergthal, Paraguay, published in the *Mennonitische Post*, May 7, 1999. As of the beginning of 1999, Bergthal had a population of 2097 souls of which 867 were members of the Gemeinde. In 1948 750 Chortitzers from the R. M. of Hanover established the Colony, which has since become one of the most prosperous in Paraguay. In addition to its current population, several thousand people have left Bergthal, some returning to Canada, and others settling elsewhere in Paraguay or Bolivia.

**The Great Commission.**

In an article “Mission in Transition: An African Conversation”, *Canadian Mennonite*, March 15, 1999, Vol. 3, No. 6, pages 6-8, editor Ron Rempel interviewed Laurents Magea, Parish Priest and theologian, from Tanzania. Part of the discussion alluded to the fact that the “Missionary Movement” of the 19th century was often more about Rule Britannia, the “white mans’ burden”, the Manifest Destiny, and the expansion of colonial and religious empires, than about spreading the Gospel.

Local (African) religion and culture was ridiculed and suppressed. “Missionaries tried to wipe away African religiosity, saying that Africans have no culture, no concept of God. But that doesn’t work with human beings... if you take that away, you take away their whole personality...the missionaries succeeded enough to make Africans unsure of themselves.”

Father Magesa reflected on the human damage and tragedy often left in the wake of early missionary endeavours, in reality, little more than the exploitation of North American and Western European culture and mores.

Such discussions are important so that future generations of missionaries can avoid the mistakes of the past and work to bring about reconciliation, and to restore to wholeness those whose culture they have raped and plundered.

The discussion, of course, is very germane to Mennonites who have been the target of missionary endeavours and thus know first hand the terrible consequences of having families and communities fractured and destroyed. Because of their pacifist beliefs, conservative Mennonites are particularly vulnerable to predator denominations seeking to increase their religious empires.

In the 19th century German Separatist P'ists attacked Mennonites in Russia, causing immense suffering and grieving. In the 20th century American Fundamentalist attacked conservative Mennonites in southern Manitoba, “giving no quarter and taking no prisoners.”

Unfortunately such activities are still continuing in the present. There is one church in particular, the Rudnerweider or E.M.M.C. which openly targets conservative Mennonite churches in Latin America in a desperate attempt to increase its religious empire.

Maybe they have misread the Bible. Jesus commanded His disciples to “go forth and preach the Gospel”, Jesus didn’t say anywhere, “Go ye forth and tear apart other Christian communities just so you can expand you own.” That’s the *modus operandi* of street gangs, the law of the jungle, not of civilized people.

Such predator actions, by one so-called Christian church against another, are fundamentally inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 18:6. If these aggressors were truly genuine in their intentions and felt another group was lacking in some respect, surely they would go as neighbours and fellow Christians, and work together with the victim group and help them build their community instead of tearing people away by seducing alienated youth and marginalized adults.

The process is particularly distasteful when perpetrator denominations use a superior knowledge of North American marketing strategy and Wall Street advertising gimmicks to subvert communities less sophisticated in these areas.

It seems to me that something must be done to stop this practice. In the international community aggressors are shunned and sanctioned by other nations, bringing pressure to bear so that they would act in a more civilized fashion. Presumably, as is the case with international predators, a few ambitious leaders are typically the cause of the problem, not the rank and file of a particular country or predator church.

Perhaps the much vaunted MCC Peacemaker Teams could go into action, and stand in the way of such aggression, separating perpetrators from victims.

The situation is near to my heart. My aunt Margaret was torn from her family and baptized by an American Fundamentalist denomination.
against the express wishes and tearful entreaties of my grandmother on Sept. 11, 1938, as a 14-year-old girl. In fact, this event and the subsequent tail spin of my aunt’s life inspired me to write the novel Sarah’s Prairie.

I assume that the perpetrators returned to their church in Steinbach that day full of pride and bragged about the trophy they had brought back, a symbol of their manliness and prowess in the “Kingdom of God.” I don’t imagine they wasted any time thinking of my grandmother, lying awake, crying night after night, over her daughter, turned against the faith, alienated from her family and affirmed in a lifetime of rebellion, a life which did not turn out great.

MCC.

Speaking of “Peacemaker Teams” I have sometimes wondered why they are never deployed when aggressors such as Mulosovic and Hussain are on the move. The situation with the Serbs and Kossovo being a good example.

A few of the cynics at the coffee shop were counting the days: sure enough on day 16 of NATO bombing, the standard pronouncement by MCC came over “Knaakzou” radio (CHSM) decrying the U.S. of A. and its allies as “bombs never solve any problems” according to Mary Fry.

But where were MCC humanitarian concerns during all those months of Serb ethnic cleansing, when Mulosovic and his boys were raping and pillaging their way through Kosovo. Since Mennonites experienced some of the same treatment in Manitoba (although not to the same degree, of course) during the 1920s, we of all people should be sympathetic to those being crushed and alienated in their own country.

The same type of pronouncements issued forth from MCC when the U.S.A went into Grenada some 10 years ago to remove the local despot. Later another flurry of protests were issued when U.S. marines failed to provide sufficient law and order in a particular region of Grenada.

Unfortunately these types of press releases do little more than depreciate MCC credibility with government when they actually have a real issue where they can do some good.

It also alienates MCC from the majority of conservative Mennonites whose theology holds that governments are instituted of God and ordained to do these kinds of things. If the government asks believers to do that which is contrary to their conscience, the individual and church community must give precedence to the paradigm of the heavenly kingdom.

Perhaps MCC would do better by sticking to providing relief, rather thanprotesting to advise governments great and small how to stop despots. Part of the problem seems to be the lack of accountability to its constituency. It sometimes seems that MCC is run by a small group of professionals whose value systems apparently evolved out of the leftist protests of the ‘60s. Perhaps it is time for democratization, with memberships and a direct vote on policy issues.

Another option would be to hive off the straight relief work, in the manner of MDS or MEDA, to a new organization run by conservative Mennonites along the model of Christian Aid Ministries C.A.M., an Old Mennonite relief organization from the States. MCC could then continue to function as the voice for liberal, ethnic and reformed Mennonites, at least for those who have not yet sold out to alien religious cultures.

I know here go my chances of a nice cushy retirement job with MCC, but what the “Hay”!

Mennon-Conformity.

Under a social phenomenon known as “Menno-conformity”, a Mennonite version of Anglo-conformity, some Canadian Mennonites consider Mexican Mennonites to be inferior, ignorant and heathen.

To their eternal credit Mexican Mennonites bear such attitudes stoically and with a sense of humour. But they are probably too tolerant for if they do not respond to these lies, their children will start to believe them. As Goebbels said, if a lie is repeated often enough, the people will start to believe it.

Thank God there is also a counter tradition in Mexico focusing on the stupidity of some of the missionaries who come to “save” and “uplift” their co-religionists from the darkness.

In Mexico when someone sneezes they say, “Salud”, where we would say, “Gesundheit” or “God-bless you”.

The story is told about the MCC worker who came to Mexico. At the first “Disko” he went to, he had to sneeze.

“Salud!” said a nearby Old Kolonier (OK-er).

A short while latter, the MCC-er had to sneeze again.

“Salud!” said the OK-er, a little more emphatically this time.

“Well,” demonstrated the MCC-er getting somewhat irritated, “I did it as quietly as I could.”

The story “It don’t burn twice” is told of a Canadian visiting relatives in Mexico. For dinner a hot meal of Mexico nacos and borritos was served. The guest was not used to hot food. His mouth burned unbearably.

“No problem,” said the kind and sympathetic hostess, “have some ice cream for desert, it will alleviate the burning.”

The next morning the guest went to the washroom with a terrible burning sensation during his morning bowel movement. Family members in the vicinity apparently reported hearing him mutter over and over, “ice cream come, ice cream come.”

Apparently a bus load of teen age Evangelicals out to convert the “Dumb” Mexicans wandered onto a movie set of a “wild west” village in Durango. In their naive enthusiasm, they believed the set to be an actual real life village. The teenagers descended upon the village and commenced making a nuisance of themselves, handing out “Gospel” tracts and upbraiding and confronting the ersatz villagers.

When the movie director realized what was going on he went ballistic. Needless to say, he promptly banished the “trespassers” from the set.

In another popular story, a Canadian missionary, Jasch Wiens (probably a Rudnerweider), fresh out of missionary school, drove through the villages, hunting for his first conversion. As he passed by the home of the local Sommerfelder Ohm, he could taste the blood of his first trophy in his mouth.

Wiens noticed the Ohm plowing in the field with his two-banger steel-wheeled tractor. The sight incensed Wiens. According to the courses in missionary school, these were the indica and evidence of an unsaved heathen.

In a cloud of dust Wiens brought his suburban van to a stop at the end of the field. Jumping out, he strode across the rich, sandy loam, stopping in the path of the tractor to insure his victim would not escape.

The Ohm stopped the tractor. He had no choice, a weasely looking man was blocking the tractor.

Preservings

A Mennonite with his horse and buggy in the City of Nuevo Ideal, Durango, Mexico. Will “horse and buggy” Mennonites have to buy Buick Eldorados and adopt North American “pop” religious culture if they want to get to heaven? Are the Old Kolony (OK) Mennonites “backward” for humbly tilling the fields of God’s creation together with their families, living according to their needs? Or are so-called North American Evangelicals “backward” for their excessive materialism, aggressive individualism, and superficial religious culture? Photo by D. Plett, February, 1999.
“Guen-dach,” he said with a friendly nod. Wiens had no time for pleasantries.

“Have you found the Saviour already?” he demanded, in his loudest firm voice.

The Ohm thought quietly for moment.

“Oh. You know, I didn’t even know he was lost,” he replied gently, pulling off his hat to scratch his forehead.

Any reader offended by these stories is asked to bear in mind that they are mild and benign when compared with those regularly told by some Canadian Mennonites about their Mexican co-religionists.

Humour has empowered many people to survive persecution and endure harassment. Do you have any Menno-conformity stories to share? If so, please submit them to the editor.

This is also one of the reasons for publishing individual photographs of Mexican and other conservative Mennonite and Hutterite Anabaptists. It will be difficult for so-called Evangelical leaders to demonize these people if their parishioners see them in everyday real life, as the sensitive, wholesome, soteriologic human beings they are--just like you and me (well, I’m not so sure of myself,...but anyway).


For Richer or Poorer.

Adherents of Menno-conformity might do well to watch a Hollywood production “For Richer or Poorer,” starring the ever vivacious Kirstie Alley, and the popular “Tool time” Taylor a.k.a. Tim Allen [Dick]. It joins an earlier cinematic depiction, “The Witness” starring Harrison Ford, in telling us what the “world” (defined as over-stressed unfulfilled North American Yuppies) want to see in an alternative lifestyle.

“For Richer or Poorer” contrasts the shallow life of a wealthy New York socialite/developer with that of, guess what, “horse and buggy” Mennonites, living in isolation not far from New York city.

With their marriage on the skids, their bank accounts frozen by the IRS, Kirstie Alley and Tim Allen go on the lamb, finding refuge in a Old Mennonite settlement. Here the heroine’s bitchiness and the hero’s flare for self-promotion (He unveils a new development at the couple’s 10th anniversary party) are melted into a new affection and love by hard work, family values, and genuine spirituality.

In one of my favourite scenes, Tim Allen [Dick], a.k.a. Jakob Yoder, and his rock steady host Samuel Yoder, are out walking a field of corn shoots breaking through the rich fertile soil.

Samuel, “I too never tire of the miracle, you plan it, you plant it, and it grows....”

“The English, they view us as backward, as hiding from reality. But this is reality. This is the process of life. We sow humbly, we reap a great harvest. It is not we who are hiding, it is those English, always hiding.”

Presumably, if the “English” (the world) stopped to smell the roses, they would be happier.

A comedy filled with laughs. Recommended viewing for those who cannot see past the end of their noses when it comes to black-clad pacifists.

The Clinton Scandal.

Phew! The Clinton impeachment scandal is finally history.

We’re not quite sure at the moment which was worse: President Clinton, for besmirching the integrity of his office with his shameful conduct, or the Republicans and their Religious Right task masters for shamelessly making it into an bipartisan power grab and under-handed vendetta to advance their political agenda.

The American people to their credit retained their wits, even if their elected officials in Washington seemingly entered some intergalactic time warp. According to polls, sixty per cent were ready to forgive and move on with life--more than can be said for the gurus of the religious right.

So here’s a bit of unsolicited advice: Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts and other Patriarchs of the south--have another look at your Bibles during your morning ablutions, particulary the verses on forgiveness.

Or better yet, why not actually read the Gospels, and the Sermon on the Mount, instead of just postponing the applicability of these teachings to a future age? You might actually learn a thing or two.

Jack von Impe

Watching TV on January 30, 1999, I noted Jack von Impe stating he recognized Catholics and Greek Orthodox as Christians. This is astounding, considering that Fundamentalists/ Evangelicals were traditionally known for their categorial spirit. Not only were they assertively certain that only they and they alone were “saved”, they fought ferociously amongst themselves, accusing each other of failing to meet exacting threshold requirements for admittance among the elect, or “saved”.

Little more than a decade ago some Evangelical organization was publishing “quaint” news releases in our local Carillon News with statements like “only four per cent of Quebecers were saved” (hint, hint, chuckle, chuckle), the obvious conclusion being, Catholics were not among the elect. Traditional Mennonites for sure were among the condemned and in need of proselytization.

We applaud Evangelical religious culture and its adherents for moving along with the times--greater tolerance and respect for other peoples and confessions.

No sooner had these thoughts crossed my mind than Van Impe and the lady doing the “dumb blond” routine were onto their particular version of millennial eschatology. This continues to place them firmly among the “crazies” in “pop” religious culture.

Anti-Christ

The following news item appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press, January 16, 1999. Headling, “The Anti-Christ lives? Williamsburg, VA (AP)--Rev. Jerry Falwell said the Antichrist is probably alive today and is a male Jew. He also believes the second coming of Christ will be within 10 years.”

Falwell is quoted as saying, “The Bible says the Antichrist will spread universal evil before the end of the world but will be finally conquered at the second coming of Christ.”

I was a bit amazed at this headline as I had assumed that the Evangelical movement had cleaned up its act, and tried to tone down the Anti-semetic rhetoric. Couldn’t the Anti-Christ just as easily be an Anglo-American who makes a grab for world power following the agenda of Calvinist triumphalism for world hegemony?

In any case, why do so-called Evangelical TV preachers in their giant cathedrals always demonize non-Anglo-Americans? What’s the deal?

**Tele-Evangelists.**

Speaking of Evangelists, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 12, 1999, Pages A 1 and 2, published the fascinating account of the Reverend Willard Thiessen, of Trinity Television, Winnipeg, who is into miracle healing these days. Apparently the incident resulted from a fit of enthusiasm brought on by a visit with Mary Glazier (not glacier), an Alaskan Evangelist. Glazier evidently expounded on the latest fad in “T.V. Evangelist” miracle healing, namely, people all over are sprouting gold teeth.

Seriously, before you jump to conclusions that this is shades of *Elmer Gantry*, by Sinclair Lewis, I’m not making this up; at least not that Thiessen and Glazier actually claim that God would manifest and interact with creation in these “signifcant” ways in a world where three billion people still hover on or below the poverty line.

“When the broadcaster later looked in the mirror, he saw a miracle,” the *Free Press* article stated. Allegedly Thiessen saw a gold tooth among his sparkling ivories and immediately believed he too had been blessed by a divine manifestation.

“In the midst of expectations, you can see things,” Thiessen is quoted.

Sometime later his brother from B. C. apparently phoned and said, “If you want to give God credit for my work, that’s fine with me, but I put that gold in 12 years ago.” Willard’s brother is a dentist.

This raises the question, why would God pick on dentists? By doing their work for them and for free. It would be a good deal for our overburdened Medicare system. But tough competition, a hard act to follow, even for dentists.

Thiessen later said he would be “a little more careful next time before claiming a miracle.”

Looking at the bright side, tele-evangelists will no longer need to hit up lonely old widows for donations, their followers can now harvest the gold teeth and sell them as needed to raise money. Duh! Why didn’t I think of that?

The entire anecdote makes me mindful of another golden tooth, the proverbial “Gold ne Tain” of Mennonite folklore. When mothers told their infant children their bedtime stories, possibly a Bible reading, by candle light or coal oil lamp, “... its blue-tipped flame reflecting in the window from the darkness outside; the golden tooth withered and arched, this way and that, like a dancing cobra. It was time for little children to be tucked into the safety of their beds,” *Sarah’s Prairie*, page 7.

**Providence College.**

Another interesting statistic caught my eye. According to the “EYE Witness” newsletter, as quoted in our church newsletter *Echoes* (February, 1999, page 9), “at least one-third of this year’s Providence College Student body have listed their denominational affiliation as Mennonite.” I understand that another third of the Providence student body consists of what we would call “ethnic” Mennonites, those from Mennonite background, but attending churches of other confessions, such as Evangelical, Baptist, or what have you. No doubt a good part of the funding of Providence College also originates right here in southeastern Manitoba.

This made me think back to the ‘30s and ‘40s when Mennonite students attending bible schools were often brainwashed with the latest millennial fantasies of C. I. Scofield and other gurus of Fundamentalist religious culture. For example, one pastor I spoke to claimed his professor in Bible School had outright disparaged the teaching of nonresistance, teaching his students there was no Biblical ground for such a belief.

I have heard from some students who were traumatized by having their own faith, heritage and culture openly ridiculed by professors.

Needless to say some students will fall prey to such misrepresentations. When these “scholars” returned to their home communities some of them tried to propagate their “new” teachings, often causing considerable factionalism. No wonder some conservative Mennonite churches developed a negative view of “higher education”.

One would hope that a modern-day institution such as Providence College would show social sensitivity and accountability to their student body. For example, one would expect that a third of their professors would be Mennonites with a sound understanding of Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and practice, and a genuine commitment to teach same in a meaningful way. I would expect also that a third of their board of governance would consist of local individuals committed to the same cause, who would insure that some of the funding originating from our area would be used to carry out these objectives. This would insure equal and respectful interaction between two religious cultures.

A sound balanced education should inform students about their own faith and heritage. Another challenge for Providence. I’m sure they’re equal to the task.

**Keeping Me Honest.**

In an editorial headlined “Keeping Me Honest”, *Messenger* editor Terry M. Smith (Vol. 37, No. 4, Feb. 24, 1999) makes the statement that “The Bible and our Christian faith undergoes intense critical scrutiny today, and it has, in many circles, for centuries. The KG/EMC has seemed relatively sheltered from this critical scrutiny of the Bible until quite recently.”

I applaud editor Smith for pointing out that
mentalists did, they chose the less glamorous path of faithful discipleship and genuine Biblicalism.

Smith goes on to make the statement that, “... the KG/EMC faced various challenges - among them, a return to assurance of salvation and then all to missions.” The statement about a return to “assurance of salvation” is less valid since such a teaching was unknown in Reformation times and certainly not taught by the seminal leaders of the Mennonite faith, such as Menno Simons. As everyone will know, the “assurance of salvation doctrine” was an invention of American Revivalists, a form of religious exercise for those did not teach the Gospels and practice discipleship, nonresistance, socio-economic morality, etc.

In view of the foregoing it appears that the KG was wise to avoid getting drawn into the “critical scrutiny” of the Bible as editor Smith calls it, as the exegesis of their own religious culture was consistently more genuine, at least from today’s perspective.

The current issue regarding women’s leadership in the E.M.C. is a good example. The so-called Evangelical movement is opposed to same because it interprets the Bible largely through the Pauline Epistles. Conservative Mennonites, on the other hand, see the Bible as living history with Christ and the Gospels as the cornerstone. The writings of the Apostle Paul contain “put-downs” of women whereas Jesus tended to elevate women.

Consequently conservative Mennonites would have little reason to restrict the role of women in the church. This also explains why women in orthodox/conservative Mennonite culture in past centuries were significantly more empowered than women in many other cultures. See Saints and Sinners, page 185-218.

We thank Terry Smith for “keeping us honest” and encourage him as he continues his valuable work with the Messenger.

Rhubarb.

Congratulations are in order to the revived Mennonite Literary Society, which has now produced its first and second issues of its new magazine, “Rhubarb” under the editorship of Victor Jerrett Enns. Anyone interested in subscribing may write to the Mennonite Literary Society, 200 Lenore Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3G 2C5.

“Rhubarb” replaces the “Mennonite Mirror” which was published for twenty years, writing about the Mennonite experience, mainly from the perspective of small “i” liberalism. In that respect the “Mirror” was of limited value to those of the orthodox and conservative persuasion, whose spiritual ethos is premised on renaissance communitarianism.

The conservative viewpoint is currently represented by “Preservings” and therefore “Rhubarb” will provide reformed and ethnic Mennonites with a literary voice, and thus it is a welcome addition to the current mix of magazines and journals.

For the uninitiated, reformed and ethnic Mennonites are those who have abandoned or rejected traditional/conservative teachings, sometimes in favour of alien religious cultures, while retaining certain ethnic Mennonite cultural traits.

I was pleased to see that the second issue of “Rhubarb” also included a number of historical articles. Too often this type of writing has been arbitrarily excluded as an acceptable artform. I particularly enjoyed the poems by “cousin” Pat Friesen. Congratulations!

Menno Bote.

Readers may wish to note another important Mennonite publication, the Menno Bote, published eight times a year in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, editor Gustav Friesen. Those interested in news about our wonderful Christian brothers and sisters in Christ in Bolivia can write to Menno Bote, Casilla 213, Calle Puerto Suarez #28, Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Annual subscription $20.00 U.S.

Heritage Postings.

Congratulations are also due to the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society on their new revised newsletter, to be called “Heritage Postings”. It is now to be published quarterly with a special emphasis on the 125 anniversary celebrations during 1999 and 2000. Judging by the first issue, it will provide a tremendous contribution to the task of documenting and telling our story with particular emphasis on the West Reserve and the Winnipeg chapters.

I would also like to complement the MMHS (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, for those uninitiated) for their wonderful “Historical Workshop and Tour” held in Gretna, April 24, 1999. Conrad Stoets delivered a paper on the Post Road, Lawrence Kloppenstein spoke on the history of West Lynn, the landing point of the Old Colony (OK) Mennonites in 1875, and Sally Harms and Henry Unger spoke about delegate Klaas Hyde who made four journeys to Mexico between 1919 and 1922.

The tour later was most enjoyable especially considering the beautiful spring day the committee had ordered to mark the occasion. For many farmers it was their first day out on their fields. It was special to meet so many old friends and make new ones. It was also sad to realize that regulars such as William (Bill) Harms and John Dyck, who often organized these meetings in years past were no longer with us.

The tour helped me also to realize how the Old Colony (OK) church chose to settle near West Lynn, at that time projected to be the future capital of Manitoba. Later historians in ignorance have propagated the mythology that the OK church purposely chose to settle far from Winnipeg for isolation purposes. The OK-ers also selected some of the best farmland in Manitoba in the face of official government policy that the open land of the prairies was not suitable for large-scale commercial agricultural settlement.

Anglo-Conformity.

We often talk of Anglo-conformity within the context of ethnic cleansing measures of the Provincial Government in 1916-27. However as we drove along the Post Road, during the MMHS tour April 24, 1999, I noted a typically modern-day manifestation of Anglo-conformity. The Post Road was marked by beautifully printed placards as being the route of the North West Mounted Police, who rode along the route once in 1874 on their way westward to establish law and order.

The Post Road was built on the orders of Oberschulz Isaac Mueller, shortly thereafter, marked by posts dug into the ground at regular intervals, a technique the settlers had brought with them from the steppes of Imperial Russia. The Post Road served as a life-line for thousands of cotton picking machines are at work in the south. Although they have taken the formation of the wandering geese, they are picking cotton in the El Valle Colony, Mexico. At the height of the picking season someone got the idea to invite all the owners of picking machines. All the machines which were not too far distant were brought together. Several machines have four row pickers and the most only two. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, 2 December 1998, page 28.

Tim Allen Dick.

Most of our readers will already know that Tim “Tool Time” Taylor, a.k.a. Tim Allen was born Tim Allen Dick in Denver, Colorado, in 1953, one of seven brothers. At age 13, he and his family moved to Detroit. After serving time for drug dealing, he started his comedy gig in 1979. The rest is history.

Preservings is interested in doing a story on Tim Allen’s family roots. I hereby appeal to our vast network, reckoned to exceed that of the F.B.I., for information. The name “Dick” of course is generic and need not necessarily be Mennonite. But, according to some Mennonite media, the drug dealing charge might indicate otherwise. Any information would be appreciated.
of travellers who would otherwise have perished in the fierce blizzards which hit on the open prairie.

The Mounties, of course, did not only enforce law and order, they also enforced the will of the Anglo-Canadian majority against the natives, Metis, French, and Mennonites.

Under the philosophy of Anglo-conformity in Canada, the Mounties who rode along the route once, are recognized along the Post Road. The Mennonites who opened the west for commercialized farming and built the economy of southern Manitoba, and whose work in building and maintaining the Post Road saved thousands of lives over half-a-century, are not.

Speaking about Anglo-conformity, I noted the following reference in the President's Message in MHS Keywords, Vol. 31, No 4, April/May 1999, page 1, "that the MHS [Manitoba Historical Society] would have a great deal to offer anyone with an interest in Manitoba's history."

This is a statement that I take issue with as it is not accurate. The statement should read, "the MHS has a great deal to offer to anyone interested in Anglo-Manitoba history."

I personally have been a member of the Manitoba Historical Society off-and-on over the years and could probably count on my hands the number of articles written about Mennonites, Icelanders, Ukrainians and Jews, groups which have been in Manitoba longer that most Anglo-Canadians.

This same bias is reflected in some of our cultural institutions which, however, are funded by all of our taxes, yours and mine. In a "full" democracy the holdings and displays of cultural institutions such as "Museum of Man and Nature" would reflect the demographics of its citizens. e.g. Since 1874 the Mennonite population of Manitoba has been between 6 and 10 per cent of the total, a reality which should be reflected by all our public institutions.

The reality is different. The official Manitoba history by W. L. Morton, for example, has 20 references to Jews, Ukrainians and Mennonites, in an index with 3,000 entries. This is the material which our children are being taught in our Universities. Not a very good testimony to a culture that likes to pride itself for its fairness, inclusiveness and respect for minority groups.

Polish Cemeteries.

I applaud "The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association" for their work in restoring ancient Mennonite cemeteries in what is today Poland, formerly Prussia, where our Mennonite ancestors lived for two or three centuries. I have visited the Vistula delta area three times and can attest personally to the sad state of affairs which exists there as well as in Ukraine with regards to former Mennonite cemeteries.

Some of these cemeteries are 10 acres and more, imagine how many people get buried in a village over several centuries. Tiegshagen, for example, the heartland of the Kleine Gemeinde, was founded in the 13th century. Many of the trees growing in these cemeteries are a hundred and more years old, measuring three and four feet in diameter.

In most cemeteries the majority of the stones have been looted, often by some Soviet party boss anxious to complete some Kulkusz building project. But that is in the past. I have seen some graveyards, in the Ukraine, for example, where local people are burying their dead right over the Mennonite graves.

Thus I was delighted to read in the January 1999 newsletter of the Mennonite Polish Friendship Association that the Dutch, in particular, are taking an active role in restoring some of the Mennonite cemeteries in the Vistula Werders.

Work is being done in Heuboden, a cemetery still in relatively original condition.

I must again applaud the work of Dr. Arkadiusz Rybak, my friend, who, although he himself is not a Mennonite, has personally taken out scythe and lawn clippers to cut grass and restore damaged headstones.

Gifts may be designated for preserving evidence of the Mennonite heritage in Poland, and can be sent to care of Peter J. Klassen, 1838 S. Bundy, Fresno, California, 93727.

Presumably if Mennonites did not throw away so much money feeding the mullahs of American "pop" religious culture and their ravenous publicity machines, there would be money for such important work. It seems rather perverted that wealthy North American Mennonites do not have enough respect for themselves as a people, that a retired Polish civil servant has to donate his time and sweat labour to do that work for them.

Errata

We welcome and encourage readers to draw mistakes to our attention. This can be done by a letter to the editor or else a phone call to myself, 1(204-326-6454). If you want to write and do not want your letter published, please so indicate. We will try to publish as many letters as we can. We really appreciate your assistance.

1) Correction submitted by Jake Bartel, Barkman East, Steinbach. In the 125 booklet, page 60, the man listed as Jakob Bartel is really Gerhard de Veer, a Holdeman minister from Crooked Creek, Alberta. He served as chaplain at the C.O. camp, Seebe, Alberta.

2) In the emigration photograph on page 61 in the "125 East Reserve" booklet, the man holding the umbrella for Rev. Peter F. Wiebe, is "Fieh Dokta" Johann S. Kehler. I am indebted to son Glenn Kehler, Oakbank, for drawing this to my attention. Now we only need to identify the man standing to the left of Rev. Wiebe in the photo and the man to his right. Can anyone help?

3) Abe G. Kehler writes that in the "East Reserve 125" booklet, page 62, "...Rear, middle, 6th from right & left, is my father, Franz K. Kehler of Blumengart. He was a cousin to Mrs. Peters."

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**Preservations**

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WE SPECIALIZE IN ALL TYPES OF TRAVEL
Cultural Pride

Why is it that Mennonites have so little pride in their own faith and culture? We have a heritage most people would give their right arms for, and yet we do so little to instill pride in our young people. We seem to go to great pains to make sure that they don’t have pride in their own background, as if stealing from them their heritage is somehow a noble thing.

It seems to me that every Mennonite school child should be able to recite the names of at least 20 martyrs who died for the faith in Russia during the Soviet inferno and know the stories of their suffering.

If you are depending on school or church to inoculate your children with a sense of cultural and historical identity, don’t hold your breath. Some schools and churches are seemingly infected with the idea that there is something inherently wrong or sinful about teaching children about their culture and faith.

How many times have you as a parent or grandparent sat down with your children and grandchildren to instill in them something of the values of their faith and history of their culture? Have you taken the time to view movies like “The Witness”, “For richer or poorer”, and “And when they shall ask?” together with your children explaining to them the issues involved? How many times as a parent have you sat down with your children and read them a history or story book about their heritage, or told them about the history of your family?

It is your responsibility to pass on your heritage and culture and socialize your children so that they have some understanding of who they are.

Young people with a poor understanding of their background or a negative attitude about their heritage and culture will probably also grow up with a negative attitude about themselves and their life environment. They will also have a poor self-image, never able to achieve their full potential.

Psalm 78, 2-7: “I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from our children....so that they shall set their hopes in God.”

The matriarch rests after a day’s labours amidst the accoutrements of her power, the kjist, sewing machine, the Kjleada Schap, billowy pillows, and wall clock. The traditional power of the matriarchs faded rapidly after the Provincial Government broke the backs of the conservative Gemeinden in Manitoba in 1916-27. Photo courtesy of Mennonites in Canada: A Pictorial Records, page 97.
Mennonites and Evangelicals

By Rodney J. Sawatzky, President, Messiah College, Grantham, PA, June 2, 1998, and published as a special guest editorial essay.

Mennonites have a “love/hate” relationship with modern day Evangelicals. Some much prefer to be known as Evangelical rather than as Mennonite and often drop the name Mennonite from their churches, others much prefer any other label rather than Evangelical because of all the negative connotations they attach to the term, and most are confused. This confused majority would like to think that it is possible to be both a good Mennonite and a good evangelical, and aren’t quite sure why it is so difficult to be both. Unfortunately most of our Mennonite historians and theologians have not been much help in resolving this confusion.

All three parties have very good historical and contemporary reasons for their positions. Sometime soon I hope to discuss these in a longer work, but here a few paragraphs of consolation to the confused will have to do. But first, a little more confusion: I too believe most Mennonites are solidly evangelical, with a small “e,” although the uncertain relationship between Mennonites and Evangelicalism, with a capital “E,” should probably remain. Let me explain!

The original Mennonites, the people Harold S. Bender and other historians called the “evangelical Anabaptists,” were arguably the most evangelical of the Protestant Reformers. Evangel means “good news,” and these 16th century students of the Biblical evange truly believe they had re-discovered good news. The Scriptures were the authoritative word to them, and they took the words and example of Jesus more literally than most anyone. Love your neighbour as yourself meant precisely what it said, even if such love meant persecution and even crucifixion. It was better to die than to kill for your faith!

Contrary to most other Reformers, the early Mennonites did not formulate all kinds of excuses which allowed the responsibility of Christians to the state to over-ride the ethics of Christ and the church - the body of Christ. They believed it was possible to follow the way of Jesus because God’s grace not only saved them from sin, but also empowered them to discipleship and holiness. They even insisted on the separation of the church and the state, on religious toleration, and on the right of everyone to choose their own faith, much to the chagrin of Luther and Calvin, although these ideas several centuries later became the hallmarks of modern democracies.

The church, the Anabaptists argued, is a disciplined community of believers voluntarily baptized as adults, rather than a territorial entity entered by automatic baptism as infants. Hence, they were the first Protestants to champion missions and evangelism, for how else will people know about the choice to become a disciple of Jesus? We can legitimately claim that the Anabaptists were the most consistent Bible-believing, Christ-following, outreach-oriented Reformation evangelicals.

But in the next three centuries the Mennonites did not retain their evangelical leadership. Their experience of persecution, often at the hands of Lutheran and Reformed evangelicals, and their emphasis upon separation from the world, caused Mennonites to withdraw into sectarian and ethnic ghettos, even as they migrated from country to country. In the process they soon lost their evangelistic zeal and their church life often succumbed to formalism and legalism. Nevertheless, Christian faith remained very important to all Mennonite communities and, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, a series of revitalization movements reawakened a majority of North American Mennonites to their evangelical roots.

The influence of various “outside” evangelical traditions was vital to these Mennonite evangelical reawakenings. Baptists in Russia and Methodists in America were especially important influences in the 19th century. In the 20th century, as the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy heated up, and as many Mennonites felt compelled to take the side of the Fundamentalists, they soon found themselves drawn towards the new Fundamentalist Bible schools, mission boards, para-church and nondenominational organizations. The innumerable new Mennonite institutions, structures and organizations created as a result of these reawakenings often borrowed heavily from these outside influences.

In the 1940s a group of moderate Fundamentalists, who decried some of the excesses of Fundamentalism, inaugurated a new Evangelicalism with a capital “E,” and founded the National Association of Evangelicals as its primary vehicle and Christianity Today as its basic voice. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada followed some years later. Some Mennonite groups like the Mennonite Brethren joined the NAE and EFC, although others did not. The MB’s have never been completely comfortable in the NAE because of their strong commitment to Anabaptism. The EFC, by contrast, has been a more welcome forum, not least because Canadian and American Evangelicalism are quite different - but that is another story!

Those Mennonites who remain seriously Anabaptist in theology frequently experience tension with new Evangelicalism because this movement is so overwhelming Reformed in theology. Most Mennonites are unaware that Wesleyan Holiness, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Anglican, Black evangelical, and many other smaller denominations have had their own deep conflicts with the Reformed “imperialism” of Evangelicalism. We are not alone in this tension, and we would do well to learn from our compatriots here, but perhaps Mennonites have been especially alienated over the years by the periodic nationalistic and even militaristic tendencies of the NAE and similar Evangelical expressions. By now, much of the establishment Evangelicalism is so closely identified with a particular American political agenda that large numbers of younger Evangelicals believe their fathers and grandfathers have confused and compromised evangelical theology with conservative politics.

The younger generation of Evangelicals are raising many questions about the so-called new Evangelicalism they inherited. Many of them are excellently trained in history, theology and philosophy and are teaching in the best Christian Colleges, such as the one for which I am responsible. They are discovering, not least, the profundity of Anabaptist and other evangelical traditions and challenging the Reformed hegemony of Evangelicalism. The wonderful pluralism of evangelicalism with all its diverse riches is being reclaimed. Thankfully this exciting movement today remains deeply evangelical, even while it is raising questions about the validity of Evangelicalism as defined by a previous generation.

Mennonites should celebrate this new situation. We can once again be comfortably Mennonite and evangelical at the same time. Unfortunately over the past decades many of us, for understandable reasons, were co-opted by Fundamentalism and/or Evangelicalism to such a degree that we sold out our Anabaptist birthright. We are now no-name brand Americanized Evangelicals. Equally unfortunate, others of us are so alienated by Evangelicalism that we have turned our backs and distanced our churches from many other evangelical churches with whom we should have much in common. Paradoxically, these more liberal Mennonites are today often rather sectarian and unecumenical, especially in relation to evangelicalism.

It may be a confusing time, but it is also a very hopeful time for those of us who want to be both Mennonite and evangelical. Our best strategy to be truly evangelical in our day is to be true to our Anabaptist heritage, for in the process we will also contribute our unique and special gifts as Mennonites to the total body of Christ, with which we wish to be united and help to unite.
Dear Editor:

East Reserve 125

I appreciate your publications very much. Some of the articles contain family records of a number of distant relatives that link into our family genealogy. Also, since Steinbach is the place belonging to the Steinbach Elementary School from Grades One to Five. The article on page 54 of East Reserve 125 helped me understand something that had puzzled me ever since I was a six-year-old child in Grade One.

One morning, during my first few days at school in Steinbach, I found myself standing alone against the window-side wall of our Grade One classroom, while the rest of the pupils stood facing me and jeeringly yelling, "Russian! Russian!" at me.

I was stunned. I didn’t understand why they were picking on me or why they were calling me "Russian." I was happy to be attending school, and wanted to be my classmates’ friend.

After lunchtime, one girl returned to school with information that silenced all the other classmates: "I asked my mother about it, and she said Agatha is not Russian."

I now understand that this attack against me was because the Steinbach community consisted primarily of people whose ancestors had migrated from Russia to Canada in the 1870s, while my parents were of the group that had migrated in the 1920s. Whether or not my parents were aware that a distinction existed between the two groups, I don’t know. I don’t remember ever hearing them mention it.

I don’t know which child initiated the attack, and I don’t know which girl it was who ended the attack. But whoever the last one was, I have always been grateful for her kindness.

Although both my parents had been born in Russia, my father of Dutch origin and my mother, Polish, we spoke the German language in our home, and I was born in Canada. I was not Russian, I was Canadian. In fact, when I discovered that my parents had received their Canadian citizenship exactly nine months before I was born, I realized that I had been conceived in the atmosphere of joy in being Canadian. I am Canadian at the very core of my existence.

Even if I were Russian, that would not have justified the assault I had experienced. Millions of Canadians have either come here as immigrants or are the descendants of immigrants. I believe none of us has the right to regard ourselves as being superior because of ethnic or national background.

The way to overcome prejudice is to make room for another’s distinct cultural differences, and allow for the fact that individuals within a group are distinct themselves. Just as within a family no two children are exactly alike, so also within a cultural group no two people are exactly alike. Each person is an individual.

During the years I attended the Steinbach school, I developed good friendships with several classmates who were descendants of earlier arrivals in Canada. After my family moved to British Columbia in 1944, I corresponded with several of these friends for a while; and eventually with only one of them. That friendship is still alive today. Even though we have been separated geographically since we were both in the fifth grade at school, we have remained in close touch with each other. Our friendship has greatly enriched my life over the years.

After reading the article, "Russländer, 1923-29," in East Reserve 125, I understand why my classmates were prejudiced against me. But I still don’t understand why the descendants of the earlier arrivals referred to themselves as "Canadian," and to those who were descendants of the later arrivals as "Russian." We all came from common roots in Russia and are all descendants of immigrants from Russia to Canada. We are all Canadians.

In good faith, Sincerely, "Agatha Enns Ratziuff"

Editor’s Note: I appreciate your letter. Most people will agree that children can be extremely cruel, and that such actions frequently reflect and speak for attitudes found among the parents. The modern-day equivalent is Mennonite children from Mexico and Paraguay being teased and harrassed by their Canadian counterparts. I agree with you that "none of us has the right to regard ourselves as being superior because of ethnic or national background." Nevertheless these attitudes still persist among modern-day Mennonites, some of whom look down on conservative Mennonites because of ignorance of that culture, and lack of respect for people who believe and live differently. Ironically the term "Kandler"—the group in which I proudly claim membership—became a pejorative term, used by some Mennonites to describe the descendants of the 10,000 Mennonites exiled from Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 1922-27. These attitudes extend all the way to Mennonite clergymen and even at the highest levels in para-church organizations such as MCC. (I recently had to correct a local minister who made a thoughtless statement about Mexican Mennonites in a sermon, "that their leaders had no vision").

It is probably almost time that those who are conscious of this problem band together to form an organization to address it. Maybe it is time to start publicly exposing those who make bigoted and racist statements about Mexican and/or Paraguayan Mennonites. Please send names and details.

In good faith, Sincerely, William Schroeder

Editor’s Note: I would recommend a basic block of reference books including James Urry’s, None but Saints, William Schroeder’s, Bergthal Colony, all three volumes in the East Reserve Historical Series, although Volume Two, the Bergthal Gemeinde Buch is more or less our of print. Copies of family books have to purchased privately although copies will be available for researchers at the various Mennonite Archives.
To whom it may concern,

Yesterday we received yet another one of your unwanted publications. As with the others, it got filed in the garbage can, not even in the recycle bin.

We have not in the past, present or probably the future been remotely interested in Mennonite history.

Take our name off your mailing list. We have no subscription to any magazine, and for sure not one of Mennonite history.

Most organizations of repute have the courtesy to put the return address on their mailing, yours didn’t even have that.

“D. Rempel”

Jan. 8th, 1999

Dear Delbert,

A long overdue congratulatory note to tell you how much your “Preservings” are appreciated by your readers. The trouble is, readers so seldom take the time to express their appreciation.

I am always amazed at the mass of information that you glean somehow, somewhere, sometime--it is a gigantic accomplishment. Then putting it into good literary english is another gigantic test which you have so far taken care of in a way that seems natural--for me that is always the mark of good writing.

Thank you so much for your fine contribution to our Mennonite heritage. Your journals will be there, fresh and alive, and used by posterity, when many of us have been long gone.

With my compliments and good wishes, “Elisabeth Peters”

Jerry & Margery Barkman
137 NW Reed Lane
Dallas, Oregon 97338
January 3, 1999

Dear Delbert,

Just received the December issue of Preservings. Thank you for all of the hard work that you have done producing such a fine periodical. I have several questions for you.

1. On page 7 of the “East Reserve 125,” you have published a picture of the Wirtschaft of Martin J. Barkman. I was excited to see the picture since this is the (and oldest) picture in our family history. Martin J. Barkman was the father of my great-grandfather, Peter M. Barkman. I note that this picture was first published by M.B. Fast. Is the original still in existence? I would very much like to get a good copy of the picture. Please let me know.

2. My maternal grandfather was David S. Jost. His grandfather was Peter Jost, married to Adelgundu Suderman. In her history of the Suderman-Wiens families, Carolyn Zeissel says that Peter Jost and his family “aligned themselves with the KG and immigrated to Canada, arriving in 1874.” She also indicates that they found the southern Manitoba climate unsuitable and moved to Hillsboro, Kansas in 1875. Do you have access to any further records about the Peter Jost family? They apparently were not members of the Kleine Gemeinde and did in fact join the Gnadenau KMB church upon arriving in Hillsboro. I would appreciate any help which you might be able to provide. We are planning a David S. Jost family reunion for August, 1999, in Hillsboro as part of the 125th founding of Gnadenau. I am working on a family book and would like to include such information if possible.

Thank you again for the fine work you are doing, Delbert. I am amazed at the tremendous amount of writing that you do and am thankful for your efforts in helping us to understand our histories. Please let me know when your new book on the Kleine Gemeinde will be published so I can get in time for a copy.

Yours “Jerry Barkman”

Editor’s Note: Peter Jost settled in the Scratching River settlement (now known as Rosenort), Manitoba, in 1874. See Shantz lists as published in Hiebert, Brothers in Deed, page 107. M.B. Fast is the only source I am aware of for the photo of the Martin J. Barkman Wirtschaft. It is indeed a historic photo for the Kleine Gemeinde. It has actually been reproduced in a number of Russian Mennonite history books, but without the appropriate identification. Good luck in your 125th celebrations.

Theodore (Ted) Friesen
Box 720, Altona, Manitoba
January 7, 1999

Delbert, you’ve done it again. Your latest publication of Preservings simply amazes and astounds me. I could hardly put down the magazine for the variety of interesting and informative articles.

Of particular interest to me were: Mennonites in Manitoba Video, pages 29/30, 136; Heather Robertson, pages 31-32; Our Paraguayan trip, pages 53-56; Victor Peters, page 58; Arnold Dyck, pages 89-93; Peter Klippenstein-East Reserve, pages 109-111; Peter Klippenstein-Neubergthal, pages 114-116; Peter & Maria Friesen, pages 130-131; Grigorievka, pages 132-133.

These were some of the articles most interesting. You and I were both involved in the video. I appreciated your editorial comments. We didn’t have a perfect video, but in view of the fact that the producer and some of the other principals were entirely ignorant about Mennonites, I believe they did (perhaps with our help) very well.

Our Paraguayan trip was well set up. The Arnold Dyck article by Al Reimer had many new things in it that I hadn’t read before. Since I am an Arnold Dyck fan, it was most interesting. And as you know, I have done quite a bit of genealogical work on the Klippensteins so both the Peter Klippenstein articles on pages 109-111 and 114-116 were very interesting. And finally, Peter Pauls wrote a kind and, I thought, perceptive article on Grigorievka.

Right now our Society is planning the sponsorship of a writing book on “Mennonite Women in Canada.” We hope that the funding for that will materialize.

Delbert, the very best wishes to you on your continued writing and research on Mennonites in Manitoba and the best wishes for a Blessed New Year.

Sincerely, “T.E. Friesen”

Jan 12, 1999

Dear Delbert,

My aunt would like a copy of Preservings #13, Dec 98 and also East Reserve 125. I will pay you and she’ll pay me, even tho I live in Mb. and she lives in Ab.

I was reading about Lord Dufferin’s visit in 1877 and then I remembered something from long ago. About 30 years ago we went to a Baerg visit in Linden, Ab. (I was new in the family) and one item on the program I can’t forget. It was a group of about 18-year old girls singing the song “O Beulah Land”.

It was because grandmother Baerg, nee Margaret Loewen, had been with the group that had sung this song at the program at Lord Dufferin’s visit. I notice there is no mention made of this song.

“Ruth Wohlgemuth”

Editor’s Note: According to son Johann W. Dueck, Grünewald, E.R., school teacher Peter L. Dueck also composed a song for the occasion using the melody “Grosser Gott, wir loben Dich,” which he and his school class sang for the Vice-regal entourage: see Johann W. Dueck, Prairie Pilgrims, page 34.
Dear Mr. Plett,

Regarding the article “Clearsprings Pioneers: 1874-79” in Preservings No. 13, December, 1998, which was submitted to you by Ed & Alice Laing. My grandfather, Mr. William Mooney, never officially joined the Holdeman Church. Apparently Mr. Mooney had a beautiful flowing white beard which fascinated the young lad. Since Mr. Wiebe was born in 1905 I assume this would date back to 1912 or so. I had always assumed that Mr. Mooney was among a number of Clearsprings settlers who joined the Holdeman movement, as was related to me on several occasions. When I received your letter I did a little digging, just to see if my memory and sources were really that deficient. In the Messenger of Truth, Vol. 19, Nov. 2, 1920. No. 22, I found the following report: “The aged father and friend Wm. Mooney, Giroux, Man., passed away Oct. 25th after his illness of 9 days at his ripe age of 89 years 10 months and 1 day; leaving 5 children, 10 grandchildren with a host of friends to mourn their loss. The funeral took place Oct. 28, in our Steinbach meeting house. Brother I. N. Mastre of Grafton, N. Dak., came by request of the children and preached the sermon from text Heb. 9:27, with closing remarks by Rev. Roland, pastor of the church of England. The funeral was well attended and the remains were laid to rest in the Clear Springs cemetery.”

However, there appears to be no evidence that Wm. Mooney Sr. ever officially joined the Holdeman church. Accordingly an apology is in order, and I hereby apologize. The photo caption should have read, “Wm. William became closely associated with the Holdeman church and his children became members. We are genuinely grateful to Francis Mooney Barkman for drawing this discrepancy to our attention. This is part of the process of making our historiography as accurate as possible. Thank-you.

Sandra Morris
32046 Scott Ave.
Sardis, B.C., V2R 1C2
January 21, 1999

Dear Sir:

I am pleased to be requesting membership in your society. For decades my family has believed that information about our heritage was lost forever with the death of our ancestors. The Berghthal Gemeinde Buch has answers that we thought we would never find.... Thank you for your assistance, and for the valuable work of your society.

Sincerely yours, “Sandra Morris”

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No. 14, June 1999

46039 Higginson Road
Sardis, B.C., V2R 2A7
16 January, 1999

HSHS

Re: Membership & receipt of Preservings

Dear Del,

Thank you so much for the magazine “Preservings”. I found it most informative. I have to confess that the article on page 57 - Berghthal and Friedrichsthall Census, 1858 was of major interest as Peter Hapner son of Jakob was listed. Also the Buhrs - this family has married into the Heppner family several times and in different generations.

Dear Sir or Madame or Whoever,

Enclosed is a cheque for $10.00 to cover the cost of “Preservings - Special 125th Anniversary Issue”. I have many ancestors who are probably listed there - my father Julius J. Toews (1905-97) was born at Barkfeld, Man. His grandfather Peter H. Toews (1854-1937) came to Canada in 1875 on the S.S. Moravian. There are numerous Wiebes and Harders in my father’s family.

My mother was Edna Nickel - her mother was Elizabeth Sawatzky (1882-1948) whose mother had been Elizabeth Hoeppner - granddaughter of Jakob Hoeppner Sr (the delegate) and Anna Brandt. I have used the “[Berghal] Gemeindebuch” to track some of my ancestors but my cousin Myrna Stone said the publication would have information of interest to me.

Thank-you in advance, “Vivian La Bar”

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Editor’s Note: Please forward a one or two page ancestor chart and we will try to direct you to any available sources. This is simpler than reviewing each item you mention.

4535I Haig Drive
Sardis, B.C., V2R 1K3
HSHS

Dear Del,

Thank you so much for the magazine “Preservings”. I found it most informative. I have to confess that the article on page 57 - Berghthal and Friedrichsthall Census, 1858 was of major interest as Peter Hapner son of Jakob was listed. Also the Buhrs - this family has married into the Heppner family several times and in different generations.

Richard D. Herren
45351 Haig Drive
Sardis, B.C., V2R 1K3
HSHS

Editor’s Note: If a reader might be willing to part with their’s for a fee?

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Editor’s Note: The information on the family of Anna Brandt is found in the “Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern” by Peter P. Isaac, translated, endnoted and published in Storm and Triumph, pages 179-224.

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I certainly appreciate the effort that is going into making Preservings such a fine publication and can only say congratulations to all involved. I look forward with great anticipation to each edition of Preservings. I believe that possibly my membership renewal was taken as a new subscription rather than a renewal....As you will notice my address has changed.

Thank you, “Duane Goertson”

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Editor’s Note: The book should still be available from “Mennonite Post”, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, or Mennonite Books, see address elsewhere in this newsletter.

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Do you have a copy of the book, “Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America” (Steinbach, 1981), 73 pages. I am a granddaughter of Rev. Peter F. Wiebe. Thank-you, “Sylvia Knox”

---

Editor’s Note: The book should still be available from “Mennonite Post”, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, or Mennonite Books, see address elsewhere in this newsletter.

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Editor’s Note: The information on the family of Anna Brandt is found in the “Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern” by Peter P. Isaac, translated, endnoted and published in Storm and Triumph, pages 179-224.

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Sincerely

Vivian La Bar

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Sincerely Yours,

Duane Goertson

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Dear Sirs! Editor.

I enjoyed your magazine very much. There are stories of a lot of my relatives in it. Some one ordered it for me. No. 11 is the first one I have-- #11 & 12 & 13 and East Reserve. I would like to keep on getting it longer. My Dad was even mentioned in #11. Keep it up. Enclosed find cheque for $______.

Sincerely, “Joe K. Toews” Box 4, Site 5, RR1, Spirit River, Alberta, T0H 3G0

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6501 Springhill Dr. N.W.
Albany, OR., 97321

I enclose my cheque for $20.00 for the recently arrived two heritage issues.

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Sincerely your's

Duane Goertson

Dear Sir/Madame

I understand that you people publish a periodical paper that deals with Mennonite history as such. I wish to subscribe to this paper, could you please give further information as to how often this paper is published/cost per year. Would it be possible to get a copy of your latest edition. 

Reason: A friend of mine informed me that in one of your latest articles in that issue they referred to a Dr. Schwartz. There is supposed to have been a Dr. Schwartz among my ancestor's. Thank-you

Sincerely yours, “W. R. Braun”

Del Plett

Thanks so much for your help with information and especially “Preservings”. Enclosed is my donation and membership fee for 1999. I am part of a committee that is in the process of making a Doerksen history book. We are kin to the Doerksen brothers who drowned in the Rat River in 1879. Your work is absolutely wonderfully put together. I was especially excited to find out that he was related to John Denver the Strange. My mother is a Harms and my husband was especially excited to find out that he was related to Leonard Dueck just below Delbert Plett. I noticed that they had no mention of the “Beginnings” and Family Ancestry. Thank you so much for your help with information and “Preservings”.

Sincerely, “Len & Evelyn Martens”

Gary B. Buhler
145 Blenheim Ave.
Winnipeg, R2M 0T1

Dear Delbert Plett,

...Your references in Preservings (Issue 13, page 7) are to a Johann Buhler in Friedrichschal in the Bergthal Colony in Russia. This is in a ....1858 census (Revision). .... What I would dearly like to know, is this the same person....Hoping to correspond further. “Gary B. Buhler”

Editor’s note: Making a definite identification of someone in any source always requires a great deal of care. In the case of the 1858 census for Bergthal this is made simpler by the fact that the Bergthal Gemeindebuch identifies all individuals living in the colony, and given that the name Buhler is relatively rare--compared to Wiebe, say, or Dueck or Friesen, it should not be that difficult. As to your other questions, when did a particular family emigrate, where did they settle, etc. the Bergthal Gemeindebuch, Reinlander Gemeindebuch and West Reserve Settlement Registers, include ship and village records, census records for 1881, etc. will answer these questions. See also the Brot Schult registers published in Preservings, No. 8.

Jan 24, 1999
Box 1092, Altona
Man., R0G 0B0
Received Jan. 27, 1999

Dear Mr. Delbert Plett

I am enjoying the “Preservings” tremendously. In the Dec., 1998, No. 13, issue, pages 98-101, there is a short writing of the Isaac & Katharina (Dueck) Unrau Family. These Unraus were my wife’s grandparents. I noticed that they had no wife’s name for Diedrich Unrau who was born in 1902. He was married to a Margaret Kehler, born in 1902 (page 100).

I am sending a picture of Isaac Unrau’s parents: Johann Unrau (1847-1925) and Anna Dyck (b. 1846) BGB B307... Came to Canada on the S.S. Nova Scotian in July 1874.

Heinrich Sawatzky (1845-1902) was my great-grandfather. His wife was Maria Martens (1842-1914). Their monument is along the Post Road on the south side when going through Halbstadt. Yours truly, “Herman Sawatzky”

Editor’s Note: There is no doubt that Helena Thiessen (1811-48) and Peter Toews (1806-86) BGB 129, Alt-Bergfeld, East Reserve, founded an important Bergthaler dynasty.

Oldest daughter Helena Toews (b. 1830) was a Hebaume or midwife and her husband Johann Hiebert (b. 1829) BGB B82 served as Waisenvorsteher on the West Reserve and had also served as a school teacher in Heuboden, Bergthal Colony, Russia. Their son Cornelius became an Alberta MLA in 1905. Grandson Paul Hiebert was the author of Sarah Binks.

Son Julius Toews (b. 1831) BGB B106 had a son Julius (b. 1857) who moved to Laird, Saskatchewan, and served as a Bergthaler minister in Rosthern. Julius (b. 1831) had another son Peter Toews (b. 1854), whose daughter Katharina Toews (b. 1835) married Johann S. Martens (1888-1983), son of Jakob Martens (1856-1936), see article by Ben Martens, elsewhere in this issue.

Daughter Anna Toews (b. 1834) married Cornelius B. Friesen (1833-1909), BGB B136, who became Vorsteher of the Bergthaler Waisenamt just before the emigration from Russia. His son Cornelius T. Friesen (1860-1929) followed in his footsteps being elected as Waisenman of the Chortitzer Waisenamt in 1905. His grandson Peter H. Friesen is the founder of Eastman Feeds, Steinbach. See Preservings, No. 8, Part Two, pages 36-40.

Daughter Katharina Toews married David Falk BGB B123, settling in Alt-Bergfeld. In 1895 sons Peter and Jakob T. Falk donated a team of three-year-old oxen for the impoverished Lilge’s Gemeinde in Alberta. Peter’s daughter Katharina...

Jan 24, 1999
Box 86, Loreburn
Sask., S0H 2S0

Dear Sir:

I am enjoying the “Preservings” and the “East Reserve 125”. I noticed a picture of the Cornelius T. Friesen family, 1911. The picture of his second wife, Gertrude Dueck Wiebe looks exactly like the photo of my great-grandmother, Agatha Friesen Toews.

I thought I’d send you a laser copy which I had in my possession. Who knows—these ladies may even be related. Julius Toews (b. 1857) lived in Bergfeld and Osterwick. Moved to Laird and was a Bergthaler minister at Rosthern for a few years. Am very curious where the Anna Toews family lived at Bergeld (b. 1839), Katharina Toews (b. 1835) and Maria Toews (b. 1837) families are. We know David Falk lived at Bergfeld, so did Julius Toews (b. 1831). Enjoy your projects for 1999.

Sincerely, “Myrna Stone”

Johann Unrau (1847-1925) and Anna Dyck (b. 1846) BGB B307. Photo courtesy of Herman Sawatzky.
Falk Braun (1890-1927) became the first victim of the Anglo-conformity movement in the Roblin government in Manitoba when she passed away in Puerto Casado, Paraguay in 1927.

Maria Toews (b. 1837) married Jakob Giesbrecht (b. 1832), BGB B130. The family moved to the West Reserve and were living in Neu-Hoffnung at the time of the 1881 census.

Son Kornelius Toews (1841), settled in Alt-Bergfeld, his son Cornelius C. F. Toews (1867-1928) moved to Strassberg near Niverville where he served for many years as the village teacher.

Son Peter Toews (1846-1915), Alt-Bergfeld, was elected Aeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde in 1903. His great-grandson Albert Toews, is President of Kensington Homes, Winnipeg.

The primary connection among this group of rather successful pioneers was matrilineal. The study of extended family clans and the matrilineal culture which fostered them is relatively new within the Bergthaler tradition. Certainly the Peter and Helena Toews family is worthy of further study as are numerous other dynasties within the Bergthaler/Sommerfelder/Chortitzer tradition.

Julius Toews (b. 1857), son of Julius Toews (b. 1831), with his first wife. Photo courtesy of Myna Stone.

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Ken Braun.
Box 257, Altona
Man., R0G 0B0
January 10, 1999

HSHS

Dear Delbert,

As one who lives on Dit Sied (West Reserve), I have some interest in the East Reserve, especially when I peruse your vast newsletter, Preservings. I am also aware of our linkage with the E.R. when I trace my Bergthaler-Sommerfelder background.

To the point of this letter. When I read that you were looking for information on the Mapleton, North Dakota, chapter in Mennonite immigration to Manitoba, I literally jumped out of my easy chair. The story still has a number of living connections in the Altona area.

Just mention the name “Fargo John” and parts of this story can be pieced together. In 1990 I wrote a biographical sketch of my paternal grandparents, Abram Braun and Anna (Falk) Braun (1860-1938) as follows:

“Grandpa’s family did not come to Canada with the other Mennonites when they arrived in Moorhead in 1875, but moved to “Lucky John Erickson’s farm” five miles north of Fargo, North Dakota. According to the Moorhead newspaper of that time (Note One) and the diary of their step-father, Johann Sawatzky, they took 50 acres on the John Erickson farm from a 385 acre parcel of land that Jacob Sawatzky Sr. had bought for $5,000 on July 21, 1875 (Note Two).

Grandpa related to my Dad: George A. Braun, born 1908, and living in the Ebenezer Home, Altona, how he had carried bags of wheat up into a granary when they came to this farm.

Johann Sawatzky stated in his diary that on June 10, 1875, he and his wife, Helena (Kauenhowen), Grandpa’s mother, together with six of their children--Johann, Abraham, my grandfather, Susanna (step-children) of Johann, and Catarina, Heinrich, and Bernhart Sawatzky, left Felsenbach, a village close to Bergthal, and began their journey to America (Note Three).

This story is a complete account of that trip through Russia to Germany, across the North Sea to England, then leaving Liverpool to cross the ocean to Quebec in 13 days. Five hours before arriving in Quebec the ship hit a rock (iceberg?) and was badly damaged. Fortunately it remained afloat. The second accident happened at Brainerd, Minnesota, “where the bridge had been destroyed and the whole train crashed into the Mississippi. Six men were killed” (Note Four). On the following day, Saturday, July 19th at 6 p.m. they arrived in Moorhead and on Monday, July 21st, Jacob Sawatzky Sr. bought those 385 acres from “Lucky” John Erickson.

The Johann Sawatzky family lived on their 50 acres until the spring of 1876. They harvested their third wife, age 18, and 17 children, according to the Red River Star of Moorhead.

The Johann Sawatzky family then moved to Maple River, now Mapleton, west of Fargo. An agreement was made with the owner whereby they would receive half the crop after breaking and preparing the virgin land. The owner supplied the seed.

They lived here for one year. On April 18, 1875, Johann Sawatzky passed away and the decision was made to move to Canada. William P. Braun’s father Johann Braun tells the story of his father Johann and Abram, our grandfa-
more in-depth information regarding his term in office and/or his family?

He and several of his children are buried in the graveyard on Highway #12. I don’t know if there is more than one graveyard (I hope not). I would like to visit the gravesite in the near future and was wondering if there is somewhere or someone that I can contact that might give me the location of his gravesite.

Thank you very much for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely, Margaret Semple/Dave Berry

Editor’s Note: We would certainly be interested in publishing a biography of Adolph Mueller, and his interpretation of the issue which resulted in publishing a biography of Adolph Mueller, “Editor of Life.” He and several of his children are buried in the graveyard on Highway #12. I don’t know if there is more than one graveyard (I hope not). I would like to visit the gravesite in the near future and was wondering if there is somewhere or someone that I can contact that might give me the location of his gravesite.

In turn am amazed by the number of Mennos I know who know certain facets of Mennonite history, especially family history, extremely well, but who seem to have an instinctive aversion to theological history and the kinds of intellectual or philosophical debate that might lead to rifts. The Kleine Gemeinde—the little that I know of it—has always struck me as a reinvocation of the deepest Mennonite roots.

Anyway, the reason I gave my mother-in-law all that material was that I got it while in the midst of my end-term maelstrom of marking, teaching, etc. I’ll get back to you with further comments in a few weeks.

Cheers, “John J. Kooistra”
P.S. I’ve also enclosed a copy of my children’s story, “Wonderbaby and the Flying Bathroom.” In part its a fundraiser for MCC. Hope you know a child who might be interested in it.

I haven’t read your novel yet, but my mother-in-law, Irma Janzen of St. Catherines, and my Aunt Louise Epp of St. Catherines, (sisters, and daughters of Altester Koop of Vineland, Ontario) have. Both, I am pleased to say, liked it very much. My mother-in-law is also reading through the historical material you sent me. All in all, she says she is amazed by what she doesn’t know about the Kleine Gemeinde.

The Kleine Gemeinde—the little that I know of it—has always struck me as a reinvocation of the deepest Mennonite roots.

Attention - Writers of Family History

The HSHS is exploring the possibility of offering either a one-day workshop or a series of workshops on writing your family history. If you are interested in attending a writer’s workshop early in the New Year, please contact Lynette Plett, HSHS Corporate Secretary, at (204) 772-0224 or e-mail Lynettel@escape.ca

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society

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.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society
Box 1960, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0

Enclosed is a cheque/cash in the amount of $________ for:

Donation to society for which please issue a receipt $________

TOTAL $________

Name ___________________________

Address ___________________________

Postal Code ___________________________
News

East Reserve 125th Anniversary 1874-1999
Celebrating our Heritage

By Karen Peters, Chair 125th Anniversary Committee

As I sit at my computer in the quiet, early morning hours, I reflect on what it would have been like to be a wife and mother 125 years ago. I think about what I might have been doing, and how different things are today. In the traditional Mennonite culture, Frau Willie Peters would have been responsible for the household economy, dairy, poultry, and garden. My family would have consisted of numerous children, and quite possibly I would have been involved in some of the field work. I would have worked from the grey morning hours until dark, probably nursing a baby while I attended to the needs of my family. My knowledge of the big outside world would have been very limited, and I certainly would not have had the mobility I am privileged to enjoy today.

Now I sit at my computer, writing an article for Preservings. I have had my warm “wake up” shower and taken last night’s messages from my answering machine. I sit at my desk, knowing the toaster and an array of cereal boxes wait silently in the cupboard, while the refrigerator houses the cold milk. When my husband steps in the back door from his dairy chores, it will take me a few minutes to whisk breakfast on the table. The three children each have their own alarm clock, and Karen has time to pursue her creative interests.

One can certainly see advantages to life both then and now, though we are currently in the enviable position of being able to compare. What will our readers think about us in 125 years? Will they respect our efforts to create homes and families? Will they care to celebrate our existence and contributions to life in the East Reserve? Compared to one and a quarter centuries ago, we are descendants basking in the prosperity produced by the sweat, tears and faith of our forefathers and “foremothers”. Yet we too look to the future, striving to create improved opportunities for our children and grandchildren, doing our best to better our environment and our community.

It has been a privilege as well as a difficult task to be a part of the EAST RESERVE 125 STEERING COMMITTEE. The privilege portion of it stems from the fact that when one contributes to anything, it is the participant that gains the most. Each one of the nine committee members has contributed much to their portfolio - planning, organizing and donating countless hours. The modern convenience of the computer, fax, e-mail, Internet, cordless/cell phone, copier, microwave and coffeemaker have allowed us to expend endless hours planning, researching and implementing. The difficulties arise from the fact that there are an endless number of ideas that could be engaged.

Each monthly meeting brings new enthusiasm and decisions. One thing that has not changed in 125 years is that we are still human. We think, act and operate differently, and therein lies the challenge. What some committee members feel is vital to this celebration may be viewed by others as

The 125 committee poses with the mural painted by Pat Hildebrand and her students from “Preforming Art” on the Steinbach Hatchery building at the corner of Main Street and Friesen. The beautiful work of art features various scenes from our local heritage, including the arrival of the SS International, July 31, 1874, a pioneer couple - Mr and Mrs. Jakob T. Barkman, ox cart and automobile - the early and modern forms of transportation; a pioneer church service, and house barn. Members of the 125 Anniversary Committee pose with the mural: l-r: D. Plett, Verna Wiens, Henry Kasper, Helen Penner, H. K. Friesen, Hildegarde Toews, Edna Vogt, Norm Plett, and chair Karen Peters. Photo courtesy of Doris Penner/Carillon News.
insignificant. We resolved from the beginning to leave a thorough paper trail, that those who follow us may sift through our efforts and glean what is valuable.

The Mennonite East Reserve, now mainly referred to as the Rural Municipality of Hanover, was first settled in the 1870s, shortly after the Canadian government and Metis people established the province of Manitoba. The East Reserve became a distinct cultural and geographical community, enhanced by the settlement of the English, Scottish and Irish at Clearsprings; the German Lutherans at Friedensfeld, and the Ukrainians at Sarto, Pansy and Trentham. The Mennonite culture was a rich mixture of the Low German language, Ukrainian foods and Dutch architecture.

On August 1, 1874, the S.S. International riverboat brought the first 65 Mennonite families to the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers. From here they moved inland to establish more than 60 villages. Between 1874 and 1879, 7,000 Mennonites arrived in Manitoba, thankful for the military exemption promised by the Canadian government. Fifty years later, from 1923 to 1929, another Mennonite immigration movement was under-way. Some 20,000 survivors of World War I, revolution and famine in Russia came to Canada. From 1947 to 1951, European Mennonites not able to immigrate in the previous period arrived. Most of these 8,000 Mennonites had fled from the Soviet Union to Germany during World War II. They lived in a homeless state until they managed to come to Canada, bringing the customs of Germany with them. A fourth immigration, concentrated in the 1970s and 1980s, brought Mexican and Paraguayan Mennonites to the East Reserve. They were the descendants of people who had left Manitoba in the 1920s to protect their German private schools.

Today we “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past…” Deuteronomy 32:7a. We solicit the assistance of fifteen COMMUNITY CONTACTS that are encouraging their local district to make this anniversary the theme of their annual fair/festival in 1999. Together with representatives from the Mennonite Heritage Village and the Steinbach Ministerial Association, we are planning a large ecumenical worship service for Sunday, August 1, beginning at 10:30 a.m. at the Mennonite Heritage Village. We are still awaiting a reply to our invitation from the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Jean Chretien. The reason for choosing this date is because August 1, 1874 was the exact day that the first shipload of settlers arrived at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers.

In honour of the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of this event, the Steering Committee has instigated a number of projects in the last year or two. A number have been added since the last issue of Preservings:

- We have received financial support from the Rural Municipality of Hanover and the City of Steinbach. Several grants were applied for, and to date, some funding has come through.
- A competition was held, and a suitable design was developed incorporating the logos and slogan (CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE) chosen by the committee. It includes an outline of the East Reserve map, as well as symbols of pioneer life surrounding a large cross.
- Mementos sporting the anniversary logo are available: T-shirts and sweatshirts, coffee mugs, spoons, lapel pins, canvas bags and a custom Afghan Tapestry that includes the names of all past and present communities.
- Two large banners and six signs have been ordered.
- A cross-stitched wall hanging created by Hildegard Adrian is presently on display at the Mennonite Heritage Village.
- A booklet entitled East Reserve 125 has been written by Delbert Plett, and is being used in the Hanover School Division with the assistance of HART (Hanover Association of Retired Teachers). HART also created a display depicting education in the East Reserve for the past 125 years.
- A group of three Low German plays, specifically written for this anniversary by Wilmer Penner and Anne Funk, will be performed in some East Reserve communities.
- A number of murals in Steinbach, one of which was commissioned by this anniversary committee, depict pioneer life in the East Reserve.
- An anniversary video is being considered, dependent on sponsorship. Otto Klassen has offered to donate his time for this project.
- We are currently working on creating a “Web Page”.
- A 125th anniversary float for East Reserve fairs/festivals is being assembled.
- Some ribbons suitable for bookmarks are being printed at the Mennonite Heritage Village, with the assistance of Derksen Printers Ltd.

A weekly newspaper column entitled “East Reserve Reflections” in The Carillon features past and present villages.

In 1999, we are refreshing our memories of the hardships our ancestors endured in Russia and the struggles they encountered in their resettlement in Manitoba’s East Reserve. 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).

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**Schedule**

**Community Events, 1999**

**125 Anniversary**

by Edna Vogt

Every community will be advertising their fair schedule in the *Carillon* prior to their fair dates. Check *Carillon* starting the first week in June.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Details</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niverville - June 4-6</td>
<td>388-4195</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blumenort - June 4-6</td>
<td>326-1665</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landmark - June 12-13</td>
<td>355-4003</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Bothwell - June 25-27</td>
<td>388-4573</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mitchell - July 18</td>
<td>326-1951</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosenort - July 24-25</td>
<td>746-8491</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steinbach - July 30-Aug 2</td>
<td>326-3868</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forks, 1874 reenactment Aug 1</td>
<td>888-6781</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clearsprings - Aug 1 Open House 12-4</td>
<td>326-9972</td>
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<tr>
<td>Randolph (Chortitz)</td>
<td>377-4409</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grunthal - Aug 13-15</td>
<td>434-6238</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kleefeld - Aug 21-22</td>
<td>377-4242</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pansy - Aug 28-29</td>
<td>434-6767</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trail Ride, 1874 reenactment Sept 11-12</td>
<td>326-3051</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friedensfeld Fall Supper Sep 12-326-3836 1874 Symposium, Oct 1-2, Chair of Men. Studies, U. of W. 786-9391 Friedensfeld Octoberfest Oct 2 326-3836</td>
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Every community has special plans for the East Reserve Celebration. The phone number provided would give you added information about these events.

Many local churches are also planning special events to commemorate the 125th anniversary. Check with your local pastor or church secretary for details.

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**East Reserve Reflections**

Enjoy the “East Reserve Reflections” published in each issue of the *Carillon News* during 1999. Also listen to the “East Reserve Reflections” radio spots on AM 1250 radio, broadcast weekly Monday 7:53 a.m., Wednesday 5:21 p.m., and Saturday 12:55 p.m.

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**Preservings**

Karen Peters, Chair 125 Committee. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 13, page 44.
The Southeast Draft Horse Association has taken up “The 1874 reenactment, trail ride” as their 125 anniversary project. They well reenact the journey of the 1874 Steinbach pioneers from the landing site, at the Red and Rat Rivers, to Steinbach, a distance of some 28 miles. It is expected that some 20 to 30 horse-drawn wagons as well as outriders on horseback will take part. Many of the vehicles will caring family members, babies as well as matriarchs, to authenticate the original 1874 journey as closely as possible.

The Steinbach settlers were the last to emigrate from Imperial Russia in 1874, arriving at the landing site in early September. They travelled the eight miles to the Shantz immigration sheds from where they were picked up by friends and relatives in Blumenort and Grünfeld (Kleefeld) who had come earlier that summer.

The trail ride reenactment, however, will start off at the landing site, and travel first to Niverville where they will parade as a wagon train down the Main Street. From there they will proceed a mile-and-a-half south to the site of the former Shantz sheds and take a break for watering and feeding horses.

From the Shantz Sheds the wagon train will head east through New Bothwell, formerly Kronsthal, and the “Gateway to the East Reserve” being the point where the famous “Winnipeg road” entered the Hanover Steinbach community. Somewhere around New Bothwell, the caravan will bivouac for the night.

After breakfast the next morning, the caravan will proceed to Chortitz (known as Randolph to some). Here the weary “travellers” will eat and rest for the final push, through Mitchell and on to Steinbach.

The teamsters and their families will dress in period costumes in order to make the wagon ride as authentic as possible.

The trail ride, 1874 reenactment has been endorsed as a 125th Anniversary project by the Council of the R.M. of Hanover by resolution on June 9, 1999, and by the East Reserve 125 Steering Committee on June 14, 1999, and by the Council of the City of Steinbach on June 15, 1999.

All horse lovers and history buffs, whether descendant from the Steinbach settlers or of any of the other 60 villages in the East Reserve, or anyone else of whatever background, is invited to take part. Come and take part in this fun event, which may well be the 125 anniversary event which young kids and some not so young will always remember.

Anyone interested in taking part in the trail ride or wanting to come and watch and enjoy the camaraderie at the various trail stops, please call Trail Boss Gordon Heckert, 326-3051. All are welcome to join us.
A. G. M. Jan. 17, 1999: A Smashing Success


Banquet.


After a brief business session at which the contributions of President Orlando Hiebert and Preservings editor Delbert Plett were recognized, the meeting expanded into its full glory of Mennonite soul food (verenijki and farmer sausage, catered by the Museum Auxiliary), a thought-provoking historical overview of “Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno” given by Dr. Harvey Dyck, and a spirited performance by the ever-comedic yet melodic Heischraitje & Willa Honich.

Unprecedented numbers attended for the evening’s program, at least 250 souls, some a little disgruntled because of having to be placed in the overflow area, but it is wonderful that there is such interest. What is it that we hunger for? The food? The connection to our past? The immersion in our language? The stories exchanged with those beside or across from us at the banquet table? Maybe all of these.

The Gemeinschaft, for example: Next to me sat Peter Klassen of the C. U. (“Telephone”) Klassen family, accompanied by his wife Luella and some of her (Ben Reimer) family--Peter, a Steinbach native son, spoke enthusiastically of returning to the city after many years in urban centres all over Canada. He assailed me with a more sophisticated Plautdietsch than I could muster in return, but he has the advantage, after all, of actually being able to use the language every day.

The Reimers remembered my parents, of course, and even my grandfather, from the old days.

At break time I sauntered over to a neighbouring table where my old friend and German professor, Herr Dr. Jack Thiessen sat with his brother and others. Jack, now of New Bothwell (and, incidentally, a greater authority on Plautdietsch than anyone else, as far as I know) reported he had sold his last wild boar. I did not know whether this was good news or bad. Jokes of questionable taste were exchanged by those who can remember punch lines, and we sat down again.

The Soviet Inferno.

Harvey Dyck spoke compellingly of the Mennonite experience in the Soviet Union, mainly at the time of the Russian Revolution and the decades that followed, particularly the 1920s.

Almost one-third of the Mennonites living in the Soviet Union--30,000--died in the “Soviet inferno.” Mennonites suffered as much as any other group at that place and time. Dr. Dyck spoke of the way in which those times had been talked of in his own home by his parents, Russian immigrants to Canada in the 1920s. He recited a chilling vocabulary of German words used to describe the suffering, beginning with the prefix “ver”. verfolgt (pursued), verhaftet (arrested), verbannt (exiled), verhungert (starved), verworron (dazed), and--whispered in a way suggesting the unspeakable--vergewaltigt (raped).

Today, Dr. Dyck visits the Russian archives and he was surprised to find there was so much material; the volume indicates that the Bolsheviks had a disproportionate interest in the Mennonites, born out of phobia. The Mennonites, because of their strong faith and excellent organizational skills, were the most difficult of all minorities in the Soviet Union to form into a mold, and so they represented a special problem to the Soviets. At first negotiation was attempted, but when the desired results were not achieved, the revolution was forced on these “problem children,” and devastation followed.

Dr. Dyck’s question of how we shall remember those who suffered and died remained hang-
Suzanne Schroeder and Delbert Plett look after the registration desk at the A.G.M. held at the Mennonite Village Museum January 28, 1999. Jake and Elsie Kliewer are registering for the evening’s events. Photo courtesy of HSHS board member Henry Fast.

Attendance was good at the business meeting which preceded the banquet. The attendees included City of Steinbach Councillor Elbert Toews, former Messenger editor Dave K. Schellenberg, former HSHS board member Rev. Cornie Martens, and Bergthaler historian Wm. Schroeder. Photo courtesy of HSHS board member Henry Fast.

Sources:
Readers interested in the topic are also referred to the feature story by Dr. Harvey Dyck, as well as historical articles by Collin Neufeldt and Peter Letkeman, and four accounts of survivors of the Soviet Inferno, published in Preservings, Issue 13, pages 1-24, and 47-48.

Heischraitje & Willa Honich
Heischraitje & Willa Honich then took the stage and regaled the audience with their familiar comedic mix of tunes and anecdotes rendered in the Muttersprache. I do not remember the name of the song, but was mightily impressed by Dennis Reimer’s rendering of a blues number about a “preenet Schemmel.” Combining Plautdietsch lyrics with traditional blues melody creates a sensation of dissonant wonder, as might occur if one saw a wild boar in a tux, dining at the Dutch Connection.

At evening’s end, the audience spilled out into the January night, already curious about what combination of serious history and entertainment delights the organizing committee might devise for next year.

The “Heischraitje” are definitely the piece de resistance with any Mennonite gathering. As alway, they enthralled their listeners with their zany but inspired ribald classics as well as several new serious Low German songs written by a woman who had suffered in the Siberian Gulag. Photo courtesy of Orlando Hiebert.

City of Steinbach Councillor Art Rempel again graciously came to provide dinner music with his accordion. Art’s German and Mennonite folk songs provided a pleasant ambience for the traditional menu of ham, farmer sausage, fried potatoes, etc. Photo courtesy of HSHS board member Henry Fast.

Sacanne Schroeder and Delbert Plett look after the registration desk at the A.G.M. held at the Mennonite Village Museum January 28, 1999. Jake and Elsie Kliewer are registering for the evening’s events. Photo courtesy of HSHS board member Henry Fast.

Another view of the dinner crowd. Dr. Jack Thiessen and brother Peter hold court, front left. Photo courtesy of Orlando Hiebert.
Preservings

Family History Day March 6, 1999

Box 1070, Steinbach, Manitoba, and photographs by Henry and Helen Fast, Box 337, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Displays.
Some 300 people took advantage of beautiful March weather to visit the Genealogy and Family History Day put on by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society at the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, March 6, 1999.
The main features were the various displays in the auditorium and the four featured speakers speaking on different aspects of genealogical research as well as a hands-on demonstration of computer technology.
In all there were some 12 to 15 displays in the auditorium displaying family histories, historical records, journals, and old artifacts. Among the displays were those of Mennonite Genealogy, Bill Schroeder, Hilton Friesen, Henry Fast, and more.

Speakers.
Historian Bill Schroeder related of his quest to find the original location of the Bergthal Colony in the Ukraine, formerly Imperial Russia. His diligent search ended in success when he was able to procure a map (for a large sum of money) showing the Bergthal site. Later he visited the place in the Ukraine twice.
Giving information on the 1858 Bergthal census was Orlando Hiebert, HSHS President.

Alf Redekopp.
Alf Redekopp’s talk focused on Russian archives. The first one was the Odessa Regional State Archives (Ukraine). In this repository are a number of collections (or fonds) of interest to Mennonite family historians. The first fonds is the one which we have come to know as the Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archives 1803-1920 begun in 1917 fol-

Bob Strong (Schellenberg), explains his research on the Paul Schellenberg family line.

Loren Kohler talks with Dave Funk. Loren demonstrated a web page.

Helen Fast stops to chat with Edith Friesen, sharing a display with Rudy Friesen, author of the book on Russian Mennonite architecture, Into the Past, a must read for all who are contemplating a trip to the old homelands in former Imperial Russia. Edith has started a business called “Living Legacy Communications”, helping people compile and write memoirs, histories and biographies. Rudy is also involved with the annual Heritage Cruises along the Dnieper River, visiting the various former-Mennonite settlements. To the left rear of the photograph are HSHS President Orlando Hiebert visiting with Research Director John Dyck. John’s health has been failing again and our thoughts and prayers are with him and his family at this time.
following a Mennonite conference. This entire fonds can be studied in microfilm at the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Another fonds, the South Russian Foreign Settlements’ Guardian Committee, consists of 15,000 files described in eight inventory lists. Because of the magnitude of this collection, one inventory list has been examined in detail and a translation made of those file titles which mention Mennonites. The result is a document describing some 3000 archival files for the period 1847-1852. Alf described how the detail in the file descriptions are of interest to the family historian.

In addition Alf spoke on the Russian State Historical Archives, St. Petersburg, as well as the State Archive of Dniepropetrovsk Region. The latter holds that census (Revisions) of 1795, 1802, 1808, 1814, for the Chortitza Colony.

Alf also explained the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Genealogy Project which will be translating a Russian manuscript pertaining to the founding of the first Mennonite communities in Russia (1789-1828) and publishing this work by the end of 1999.

Richard Thiessen.

Richard Thiessen illustrated on the computer what to do with all the information a genealogist collects. He used the “Brother’s Keeper” software program, with detailed instructions on how to use it.

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Introduction.

My good friend and neighbour Ben Funk, Steinbach, was planning a trip to Bolivia to get information from relatives there for a family history book. Unable to contact his family there he touched base with the MCC office for help. Here he found out that my nephew Ron Banman was stationed with MCC.

Ben suggested I join him.

I said “sure” and before I knew it, the tickets were ready.

His wife Helen (Southeast Travel) then upgraded my trip by insisting I visit Paraguay and another $300 was gone.

We left March 19, 1999, and were asked to help Helena Wiebe, another client of Southeast Travel due to language difficulty. The U.S. custom ladies found it strange that two men, no relation to the woman would want to help her; also this woman spoke no Spanish (23 years in Mexico and 17 years in Bolivia), no English and no German (only Plautdietsch).

Anyway, we missed our flight.

We eventually got to Bolivia and had a great time; Helena was picked up by her brother, Ben eventually found his nephew and I stayed at the MCC centre in Santa Cruz.

My first impressions of Bolivia are quite good. You have the opportunity to live more relaxed if you like or be as aggressive as in North America. Some Mennos were running around with cell phones and doing business while they had lunch or walking down the street.

The Mennos in the Chaco, Paraguay seemed somewhat more aggressive; they had huge houses, two vehicles, large shopping malls and factories for milk and cheese products as well as furniture and other products. Hopefully I will find the time and money to spend some more time there to get a fuller complete picture of life as it is.

I will now let the pictures tell the story.

About the Author:

Frank Froese lives in Steinbach, Manitoba. He serves on the board of directors of Mennonite Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach, and is editor of their newsletter, Preserving Our Heritage, published quarterly at Steinbach.
Helena Wiebe, Frank Froese and Ben Fink in Toronto after customs delayed them.

Ron Banman MCC is being asked for advice and help by Abram Penner and Franz Wiebe of the Riva Palasia Colony. Behind the men is the MCC office sign, Santa Cruz.

Jules, Heinrich and Dave Friesen on their way to the field at Colony Swift, Bolivia.

The open market in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

An attractive looking couple on “Menno” Street as it was called, Santa Cruz.

Colony Neuland, Paraguay, has an impressive Co-op Store and administrative offices.

Frank posing with two employees at the Abram Klassen general store in Riva Palacia. Die Mennonitische Post was always a great treat when it arrived. (I was coerced into taking two HUGE containers of “Posts” with me.)

The Elim Church in Loma Plata (Menno Colony), Paraguay. It had seating outside, both sides and the choir loft was also filled up by the congregation. I was surprised so many people came out to see me but was told this was their regular attendance and had nothing to do with my being there.
The Petershagen Church, Ukraine

The Mennonite church in Kutuzovka (Petershagen), Molotschna, Ukraine, was built in 1892 and has now been given back to the Mennonite Church which is registered with the Government in the Ukraine.

The group of 50 has requested that Frank Dyck be their pastor and has been meeting in an unheated clubhouse until December 1998. They are eagerly awaiting for the repair of the above church. But the repairs will require money and manpower.

The project should be of considerable interest to those of Kleine Gemeinde and Evangelical Mennonite Conference background as Petershagen was the village where founder Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) settled in 1805. Petershagen was the home of the powerful Janzen/Epp clan which gave birth to the infant reform movement in the Molotschna, a group of upper middle class Vollwirthen who shared a vision of the restitution of the New Testament church.

It was here that the Kleine Gemeinde reformers first started meeting for worship services and Bible study in 1812. Undoubtedly Reimer preached on occasion in the original worship house in Petershagen built in 1810. It is presumed that Klaas Reimer was buried in the Petershagen cemetery (see *Saints and Sinners*, for the full story of the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde in Petershagen.)

We hope and pray that God will stir “the spirit of all the remnant of the people…” and that they will come and worship. If you would like to contribute to this project either by giving or by going, please contact either Jake Siemens (204) 269-7101, Arnold Reimer (204) 661-6427, or Bill Schroeder (204) 477-4433.

New Director Appointed

New Director, Ernest Braun, Niverville, Appointed to HSHS Board May 4, 1999.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society is pleased to announce the appointment of Ernest Braun, Niverville, to the board of directors effective May 4, 1999.

Ernest grew up in the Grunthal area attending the old Woolwich (Bergfeld) school. After his father’s tragic death in an accident, the family moved to Steinbach in 1957. Ernest attended the University of Manitoba where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English. Ernest entered the teaching profession and has taught English and language arts in the Hanover School Division since 1970, taking three years off in 1972 to work with MCC in Bolivia.

Ernest is married to Doreen Kühl and they have three children. They are members of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Niverville.

Ernest has always been interested in the history of Hanover Steinbach. He has been actively involved in compiling the history of the Braun family and has written a number of historical articles published in *Preservings*. Ernest is currently working on a study of his ancestral village Gnadenfeld; see article elsewhere in this newsletter.

Director Resigns

We regret to advise that Randy Kehler has resigned his position on the HSHS board of directors. Randy is leaving Steinbach to pursue further education at the University of Manitoba.

Randy has made an immense contribution to the historiography of Hanover Steinbach. Two major projects have occupied much of his time, a family book *Kehler 1808-1997*, the history of the Gerhard Kehler (1808-77) family, Blumengard, and a CD-ROM, currently sold out, of the Chortitzer Church registers. In addition, Randy has written a number of articles for *Preservings*.

We wish Randy well as he moves to new fields in his career. On behalf of the members of our community we thank-you for all the work you have done. May God bless you.
**Matt Groening “The Simpsons”**

Matt Groening “The Simpsons”: by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

**Introduction.**

Watching TV over the past year I have frequently vacillated between frustration and boredom watching Washington politicians fall all over each other desperately seeking to garner some advantage from President Clinton’s sex scandal.

But just when all 25 channels seemed to be clogged with spin doctors on spin doctors on spin doctors, I started flicking over to a cartoon show, an animated comic strip. Imagine that, cartoons at age 50.

But this is a comic strip with a difference. The show is called simply “The Simpsons,” “The Simpsons” as a family are abhorred by some who feel, quite correctly, that it doesn’t reflect appropriate role models.

Certainly the Simpson episodes have many layers to their story. The one I find hilarious at times and invariably provocative, is the one subliminally written for adults. The social commentary is always insightful, the satire sharp and controversial, and the humour, witty and piercing. Oftentimes the points made are disconcerting, too close to truth for comfort, too controversial to air on a syndicated prime time TV program that repeatedly tops the ratings.

**Matt Groening.**

The key originator of “The Simpsons” and one of the show’s producers is Matt Groening—full legal name, Matthew Abram Groening.

My interest in the show was lightened when friend and cousin (5th or 6th) archivist Kevin Enns Rempel, Fresno, informed me that Matt Groening was not only of Mennonite background but had K.M.B. roots. For the uninformed that’s K.M.B. as in “Kinner Mennonite Brethren” Church, which broke away from the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) in the Crimea in 1869.

Matthew Abram Groening was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1954. His father was Homer Philip Groening born in Main Centre, Saskatchewan, in 1919. Matt’s mother was Margaret Ruth Wiggum born in Everett, Washington, in the same year.

Readers will already notice the similarity of the names used in “The Simpsons”—Homer being Bart’s father and Marge, or Margaret Wiggum, his mother. Matt had a sister Elizabeth, “Lisa” and Margaret, “Maggie”.

Matthew was also named for his grandfather, Abram A. Groening (b.1894), who taught at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas, from 1914 until 1930 and belonged to the K.M.B. church. Abraham Groening has significant Kleine Gemeinde (KG) roots. His great-grandfather, Abram Klassen (1828-1906), of the KG story, married for the second time to Anna Wiens (1810-76). Anna Wiens, one of the heroines of Jakob Wiebe (1805-53), becoming the mother of Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), KG Aeltester, Rosenort. By the next spring, however, both families were discouraged and undertook a secondary migration to Kansas. They settled in Alexanderfeld, two miles southwest of Hillsboro. Alexanderfeld has sometimes been referred to as a KG village, although it never had anything other than a Holdeman congregation. In Kansas, Abraham Klassen joined the KMB although, according to local historian Ray Wiebe, Klassen was quite conservative and preached also in the Holdeman church.

**Kleine Gemeinde Roots.**

Abraham Klassen (1828-1906) was the son of Johann Klassen (1785-1841), Tiegerwiede, Molotschna, who served as Oberschulz of the Molotschna Colony from 1827 to 1833, when he was succeeded by his brother-in-law Johann Regier (1802-42), Schönsee, see Storm and Triumph, pages 300-328.

Abraham’s mother Aganetha Epp Regier (1793-1863), was the daughter of Catharina Epp (b. 1764) and Hans Regier of Kronsergarten.

Abraham Klassen (1813-1900), deciding to settle in the Scratching River settlement, Rosenort. By the next spring, however, both families were discouraged and undertook a secondary migration to Kansas. They settled in Alexanderfeld, two miles southwest of Hillsboro. Alexanderfeld has sometimes been referred to as a KG village, although it never had anything other than a Holdeman congregation. In Kansas, Abraham Klassen joined the KMB although, according to local historian Ray Wiebe, Klassen was quite conservative and preached also in the Holdeman church.

**Abraham Groening (1866-1949) and Aganetha Klassen Groening (1868-1944) and children, 1910. Photo courtesy of C.M.B.S., Tabor College, Peggy Goertzen, Hillsboro, Kansas.**

Abraham Klassen immigrated in 1874 to Steinbach in 1874. Also in the group was Peter Joost, Prangenau.

The Joosts and Klassens joined delegate David Klassen (1813-1900), deciding to settle in the Scratching River settlement, Rosenort. By the next spring, however, both families were discouraged and undertook a secondary migration to Kansas. They settled in Alexanderfeld, two miles southwest of Hillsboro. Alexanderfeld has sometimes been referred to as a KG village, although it never had anything other than a Holdeman congregation. In Kansas, Abraham Klassen joined the KMB although, according to local historian Ray Wiebe, Klassen was quite conservative and preached also in the Holdeman church.

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**Abraham Groening (1866-1949) and Aganetha Klassen Groening (1868-1944) and children, 1910. Photo courtesy of C.M.B.S., Tabor College, Peggy Goertzen, Hillsboro, Kansas.**

Presumably this is where Bart’s grandfather in the TV production “Abe” gets his name.

**Abraham Klassen (1828-1906), Prangenau.**

Matt Groening has significant Kleine Gemeinde (KG) roots. His great-grandfather Abraham Groening (1866-1949) was the grandson of another Abraham Groening (1808-34), Hallstadt, the first husband of Anna Wiens (1810-76). Anna Wiens, one of the heroines of the KG story, married for the second time to Jakob Wiebe (1805-53), becoming the mother of Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), KG Aeltester in the Crimea and founder of the K.M.B.

But the KG connections are much stronger on the Klassen side. Matt’s great-grandfather, Abraham Groening (1866-1949) married Aganetha Klassen (1868-1944), daughter of Abraham Klassen (1828-1906), Prangenau, Molotschna, KG minister. A half-dozen of Klassen’s letters were published in Storm and Triumph pages 25, 29, 37, 53, 65, 66, and 70. When I read Abraham Klassen’s letters I can certainly see where some of Matt Groening’s creative genius comes from.

Rev. Abraham Klassen immigrated in 1874 traveling in the company of what has sometimes been referred to as the “Steinbach group” including the influential Reimer contingent, co-founders of Steinbach in 1874. Also in the group was Peter Joost, Prangenau.

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Preservings

Catharina Epp was the daughter of Peter Epp (1725-89), Neunhuben, Prussia, Aelteste of the Danzig Gemeinde and promoter of the emigration to Russia in 1788-89. Aganetha’s sister Maria Epp (1760-1806), was the first wife of Peter A. Klaassen family moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan, in 1918 where they settled east of the Turnhill school, 31-18-11. Peter A. Klaassen was the great-uncle to Matt Groening’s grandfather. Photo courtesy of Elcelsior Echoes (Rush Lake, Saskatchewan, 1982), page 839.

Social Commentary.

Unbeknownst to Matt Groening himself, pieces of his Kleine Gemeinde heritage clearly come through from time to time, as when he spoofs some mysterious cult, joined by Homer, whose charismatic leader could well have stepped out of the pages of the “PTL” Club.

Some of the satire about big industry greedy for money, tobacco companies, the lazy union worker (Homer), or racist attitudes towards Pakistani immigrants and others of “different” racial background relegated to working for Cuba, after they go on the lamb. Of late, many of the Simpsons episodes have closed with a positive moral message, be it the dangers of kids mimicking TV stunt men, or about kids feeling good about who they are instead of being arrogant, mimicking TV stunt men, or perhaps unbeknownst to him, Matt Groening has brought forth some of the best characteristics of his KG forebears, including the willingness to deal with sensitive issues no matter how unpopular they may be, and to bring forth that which he thinks is right, no matter the cost.

Sources:

Kevin Ens-Rempel, faximile of July 27, 1998, and attached printout from the Grandma CD ROM.
Peggy Goertzen, Archivist Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas.
Time, January 11, 1999, pages 5 and 74-76.
Mennonites in Politics

“Mennonites in Politics” James Urry, February 23, 1999, report by D. Plett

Introduction.


Dr. Urry challenged another myth about Mennonites, namely, that Mennonites traditionally were not involved in politics. Urry explained that Mennonites were always political as they used and exercised the ballot. Once you decide issues by voting you are involved politically. Mennonites were acquainted with the political process and how it could be used. In Imperial Russia they used this knowledge mainly internally, in running their quasi-autonomous state, the “Mennonite Commonwealth”.

There was an inherent tension between the power of the Gemeinde and Gebietsamt. Under Johann Cornies, the government intervened forcefully to suppress the power of the church.

East Reserve, Manitoba.

In Russia, Mennonites related to government in a feudal manner, namely, as a community by petition, as subjects and not as citizens. When the Mennonites settled in America in 1874 they settled in a society already democratic at least to a degree. Mennonites were quick to adapt to this new, more individualistic, way of doing things.

The Mennonites in the East Reserve simply transplanted their political system, the Gebietsamt into their new environment. When the Provincial Government “finally caught up with the Mennonites and implemented the Municipal Act and created Municipalities” in 1884, the East Reserve Mennonites simply superimposed their Gebietsamt structure onto the Municipal government system.

Politics on the East Reserve “worked well”. The Berghalthers were used to running their own affairs in Russia. The Kleine Gemeinde elected ward representatives but did not stand for election as Reeve. The system broke down once, when the emigration to Paraguay decimated the ranks of the Chortitzer. Suddenly no one was available to run as Reeve. At that time Adolph Mueller, the first non-Menno- nite, became Reeve of Hanover.

In the 1930s a group of Steinbach businessmen decided to get involved in the political process. Instead of nominating one of their own as a Reeve candidate, they put up N. S. Campbell, a local Scottish lawyer.

West Reserve.

Politics in the West Reserve was a different matter. Urry explained, as there were several groups of Mennonites who did not necessarily cooperate with each other. The Old Colony still wanted to retain the Gebietsamt but the Berghalter wanted the Municipal system.

Dr. James Urry, visits the E.M.C. Archives to do some research. Here James relaxes with Dave Schellenberg E.M.C. Archivist, February 1999. Photo courtesy of E.M.C. Archives pamphlet.

The first record of a Mennonite letting their name stand for Provincial politics was Erdmann Penner, the millionaire grain merchant from Gretna, in 1892. He was followed by Cornelius Bergmann in 1907. The election committees of both Conservative and Liberal parties during these years was typically made up of Mennonites who had learned to use the political system for their own benefit. These individuals had realized the value of patronage which fueled the political system in those years. Some of them were “return men” who went back to the “old” country to promote emigration. They were businessmen and merchants who realized the advantages of networking with a democratic political system. Typically they had one foot in and one foot out of the Mennonite community.

The Anglo-Canadian jingoism which surrounded the flag issue of 1907 scared most the Mennonites away from the political system. At that time, to be a Canadian citizen meant to be an Orangeman British Imperialist. This was obviously not an attractive prospect to people of Mennonite, Ukrainian or Jewish background.

Dr. Cornelius W. Wiebe became the first Mennonite to win election to the Manitoba Legislative Assembly in 1932.

Russlander.

In North Kildonan, politics among the “Russlander” was a much different affair. Many supported the “Deutscher-Bund” and celebrated with brass bands marching up and down. The defeat of Germany in 1945, finally turned the attention of Russlander to establishing a new life in Canada, as the dream of a revival of their paradise lost in Russia went up in smoke.

Conclusion.

Urry’s presentation was ground breaking and provocative. It is to be a chapter in his new book on “Mennonites and Politics”. As an academic from outside the Mennonite tradition—and indeed, from outside the country—Dr. Urry has again put Canadian Mennonite historians to shame, by spending time in the archives. This is a process which invariably brings forth new discoveries. We are indebted to Dr. Urry for his continued contribution to our historiography and for leading the way to new ways of seeing ourselves.

William (Bill) Harms 1921-98

We are saddened to report the passing of William (Bill) Harms 1921-98, Altona, Manitoba. Bill was an active member of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

Bill Harms passed away December 16, 1998. The funeral services were held in the Blumenorter Mennonite Church at Rosetown (Rosenort, near Gretna) on Sunday, December 20, 1998. He is survived by wife Trudy, and family.

Bill Harms made an important contribution to the historiography of Hanover Steinbach and Manitoba. His “East Reserve Atlas” compiled in collaboration with John Rempel was published in 1988. Bill assisted in the translation of David Stoeszs’ diary, published in Historical Sketches, Volume Three of the East Reserve Historical Series. He contributed to a number of other important projects: Reiniänder Gemeindebuch (1994); and 1880 West Reserve Settlement Registers (1998), Volume Two of the West Reserve Historica Series.

At the MMHS History Workshop in Gretna on April 23, 1999, Adolf Enz paid tribute to the work done by Bill in organizing the local history committee meetings in the West Reserve for so many years.

We are grateful.

The 1999 Mexican Mennonite tour is now history. The apostolic dozen, 12 people on the tour, including me, met in El Paso, on February 3, 1999. Here we were received by Cuauthemoc travel broker, David Friesen. We crossed to Juarez, a city of a million, and the largest in the State of Chihuahua, where we boarded our tour bus and were on our way.

It was a late night by the time we got to Chihuahua City, but worth it. The next morning we were all rested, bright and eager to start our tour of Chihuahua, a city of 700,000.

Aztex people are demonized. Over the centuries, many priests have stood up for their parishioners and dispossessed. Aztex leader and hero and Cortez and his Conquistors have frequently stood up as the advocate of the poor and dispossessed.

One of the array of murals displayed in the Parliament buildings in Chihuahua, depicting the horrors of Mexican history, much of which took place in the parliament buildings and elsewhere in Chihuahua. The Catholic church in Mexico has frequently stood up as the advocate of the poor and dispossessed.

In contrast to American and Canadian culture, Mexican history gives an honoured role to the nation that this was a trait of Mexican culture, a Mexican would never eat something without offering first to his neighbours or companions.

Upon arrival on February 4, I did a Low German interview with Bram Siemens on the local radio station talking about Mennonite historiography and Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), hero of the faith.

On Friday, February 5, we toured the Manitoba Colony. The Mennonites around Cuauthemoc are organized into six Colonies or administrative districts: the Manitoba, Swift, Ojo de la Yegua, Santa Rita, Santa Clara, and Los Jagueyes Colonies. Each colony has its own history and traditions, somewhat like the East and West Reserves in Manitoba, Canada. The total Mennonite population of the area is around 30,000, roughly equivalent to all rural Mennonites in Manitoba.

The Manitoba Colony was the first to be settled in 1922 and is the largest of the six with 56 villages. It was settled by Old Colony families (herein referred to as the “OK”) who came from the Winkler area in Manitoba, hence the name. The settlers from the village of Blumenort, near Gretna, settled Blumenort and Blumenau and those from Gnadenfeld settled Gnadenfeld and Gnadenthal, Manitoba Plan, and so on. For sim-
One of my overarching impressions, is amazement at how strong and vibrant the OK (Old Colony) Mennonite church and culture is on the Manitoba Plan, considering the amount of harassment and petty persecutions these people have experienced, often at the hands of so-called co-religionists. The Manitoba Plan is the heartland of OK life in Mexico.

Hospitality.

Our tour started with the cheese factory in Gnadenfeld (2b). We were accompanied by John Friesen, son of David, as our guide. Some people have asked, “how were you received?” My reply, “We were received everywhere with the warmest hospitality.”

I conclude that the trait of the Mexican people to share what they have is practised by local Mennonites as well.

It is important to note, however, that reformed and ethnic Mennonites have a 200-year-tradition of harassing conservative Mennonites and attempting to convert them to foreign and alien religious cultures. I am told that such activities do diminish the desire for spiritual and neighbourly fellowship, something which most of us can identify with.

Just like when I travel in Russia and Ukraine, once people realize that one is there to learn, to fellowship with mutual respect for their culture and beliefs, the welcome is unqualified and unbelievable.

Cheese Factory.

Dairy and cheese production has been the mainstay of many Mennonite settlements over the years. It is one of the three cornerstones of agriculture and economic life in the Cuauthemoc area, the others being corn and apple production.

Traditionally much of the economic activity was geared toward sustenance level activities since the OK church taught against the evils of big business and enterprise, much like the Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia once did. With NAFTA, Mexican farmers almost overnight became subject to the harsh realities of the international free market economy where profit is the only God. Farming strategies will now have to incorporate the new reality instead of focusing on lifestyle and family togetherness.

Although the Cuauthemoc area alone produces 30 per cent of Manitoba’s total milk production, major improvements can still be made in production, scientific breeding programs and herd management. Later that afternoon, MCC worker Abe Martens, explained the programs to our group and some of the exciting work in progress.

The first visit on Friday was to the cheese factory in Gnadenfeld. The plant pasteurizes milk and also produces cheese. It is owned by Heinrich Wiebe, also an active member of the Mexican Mennonite Historical Society, and son Peter. Peter gave us a warm welcome and a guided tour.

Schools.

Our next stop was the OK school in Blumenort. We got there at about 11:30 and were disappointed to find that the school closed for lunch at 11:00 a.m. Within a few minutes teacher Abraham Wolfe emerged from the attached teacherage and greeted us warmly.

Soon some of the students started returning from their noon meals at home and teacher Wolfe was kind enough to convene the students to sing a few songs for us. They demonstrated the two styles of singing, the church melodies, and the school melodies. The church melodies are the old traditional Gesangbuch songs written by our martyr ancestors as they awaited execution.

Since I was brought up largely in a Pentecostal/ Evangelical religious culture, I was robbed of growing up with this ancient medieval singing tradition. I am told that the minute inflections and off-notes of the long note singing style are far more complicated and intricate to learn than any four part harmony. The children also learn the other more contemporary singing style.

Teacher Wolfe impressed us in the way that the students related to him, respectful, but not fearful. It was evident that he maintained a good relationship with his students, as a friend as well as an instructor. He has taught in this school for 27 years and his father was a teacher before him.

It was exciting for me to see a traditional Mennonite school, seemingly functioning very smoothly. Teacher Wolfe showed us his “Rechnenbuch” compiled according to Mennonite traditions dating back to the 17th century. What
always amazes me are the incredible number of businessmen, ministers, Ph.D.s, and successful matriarchs which have graduated from schools like the one in Blumenort.

The OK school system in the Manitoba Colony has 2551 students being instructed in 58 schools at a cost of 270,565 pesos per month with additional non-monetary benefits for teachers, such as a teacherage, etc. In addition, the Kleine Gemeinde school in Gnadenthal has over 130 students and the General Conference school in Blumenau has 100. By comparison, the Hanover School Division in Manitoba has some 5000 students.

I read recently an editorial in the Mennonitische Post (Jan 2/99), quoting Art Defehr that he would not build a factory in the Mennonite Colonies “because he was not satisfied with the education in the school system and with the leadership there.”

The Mexican Mennonites should certainly take it as no shame that they do not train their children to be servile auto-robots just so some multi-millionaire can eke out a few more pennies per hour on their sweat and labour. Secondly, the statement rings hypocritical as Mr. DeFehr seemingly has no qualms about hiring the same people after they have come to Canada.

Isn’t it time we all learned to respect the ancient cultures and especially those people who found ways to live that are not predicated solely on grasping every last dollar? where family and spiritual values still play a role in shaping the lives of the everyday?

Industry.

After a wonderful lunch at the “Travellers Restaurant”, we went to Strassburgo Plaza, to visit George Reimer’s bookstore. Reimer, the editor and publisher of the Mennonitische Blatt was not home. We also saw the Old Folks Home, a large modern facility. The “Altenheim” is a joint project of the Colonies in the Cuauthemoc area, something which all should be proud of.

At the restaurant Abraham Wiebe, Campo 102 1/2 introduced himself. He had heard my interview on the radio and that I was looking for more information about Aeltester Johann Wiebe, founder of the OK Church. He is a great-grandson of the Aeltester. I look forward to meeting him again to learn more about this history.

We tour the General Conference school at Blumenau. Friday, February 5 is a national holiday in Mexico and the students are not in school. But the principal was and showed us their fine facilities including the computer lab. Blumenau is the heart of the General Conference territory in Mexico with roots going back to the arrival of Russlander families in 1926.

We had wanted to see some of the booming industrial/manufacturing sector in Cuauthemoc. Our next stop is Solmatic, a firm manufacturing gas stoves owned by Jake Heide and Jacob Enns. We are impressed again with the ingenuity of the OK people. My father always said of them, “they were gifted artisans and manufacturers.” I believe this is a tradition going back to the founding of the Old Chortitza Colony in Russia in 1789.

After some searching we located the Kleine Gemeinde school in Gnadenthal, but by the time we
got there they were already closed for the day. Our final stop was at Casa Siemens, on the four lane highway No. 65 (I have dubbed it “the golden strip”), adjacent to the new Kleine Gemeinde school with 13 classrooms still under construction.

At Casa Siemens we were received by Bram Siemens himself. He shows the group the sound studio and books for sale, etc. We do not meet his dog, but from the sound emanating forth from its pen in the back, I would strike Casa Siemens off my list of places to rob if I were a local thief.

After supper back at the “Tarra Humara Hotel” our bus took the entire group back to the “Restaurant Y Neveria”, on the “Golden Strip”. At the invitation of the Mexican Mennonite Historical Society I did a presentation on “The Anabaptist-Vision and Johann Wiebe, founding Aeltester of the Old Colony (OK) Gemeinde;” I enjoyed visiting with those in attendance, including several prominent members of the local historical society. The restaurant is owned by Franz Giesbrecht, also a member.

Restaurants.

I must say how impressed I was with the restaurants which we patronized in the Cuauthemoc area. They were invariably clean, service was prompt and courteous, and the food was fabulous and cheap, a Mennonite’s paradise. The restaurants revealed at least one strong commonality to places like Steinbach, Altona, Winkler and East Kildonan. Since we don’t encourage gatherings with drinking and dancing like many other cultures do, much of this energy has been channelled into meeting for meals in restaurants.

The other wonderful thing, especially for Mexican food lovers is that the Mennonites in Cuauthemoc have adopted much of Mexican cuisine and made it their own, not to replace more traditional meals such as verenicjhe and kjieljche, but as a wonderful additional to the menu. What wonderful Burritos, tacos and tortillas we enjoyed during those days.

Highway 65.

Saturday, February 6, 1999, we tour the Jagueyes Colony, formerly known as Quellen Colony, settled by the Kleine Gemeinde and Sommerfelder in 1948. The Kleine Gemeinde story in Mexico dates back to 1926 when six or eight families of the denomination from Kansas settled the so-called “Kaumsasdarpa”.

As we were travelling north along “the golden strip”, four-lane Highway 65 to Rubio, David Friesen related the story how the construction of the highway in 1963 was one of the factors in ending the paradigm of steel wheel tractors in the Cuauthemoc area. The machines destroyed the asphalt blacktop when they crossed from one side of the highway to the other. The tracks were easy to follow and the police laid charges against the offenders.

The Ohms offered the government that they would build special concrete crossings which would not be damaged by the steel-wheeled machines. But the government remained adamant, so that many farmers felt they had no choice but to switch to rubber tire tractors.

Schmeidehaus.

David Friesen also shared with the tour group the experiences of the OK settlers when they arrived at San Antonio de los Arenales (later renamed Cuauthemoc) in the Bustillos Valley in 1922. David referred us to the book *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott*, pages 113-119, by Walter Schmeidehaus, the German Counsel in Cuauthemoc. Schmeidehaus witnessed the arrival of the OK-ers, describing the scene as follows:

“When we think of immigration, there comes to mind that dramatic picture we might time and again have witnessed in the great harbour cities of Europe..., pale, poverty marked and fear-filled people amid the bundles of their pitiful possessions...Privation-worn women upon whose faces the tears of farewell from the homeland are not yet dry...the flight for Lebensraum, from pov-

Beautiful faces. Five young girls, faces profiled by the morning sunshine streaming through the window, exude intelligence and piety. The traditional Mennonite school system using Bible as curriculum is used by the OK church. One of the criticisms I have of the OK school system is that children are indoctrinated so thoroughly with the Christian faith and values that some of its students are vulnerable to being used and taken advantage of by other so-called Christians already well-versed in the art of separating faith and piety, profession and actions.

One of the special events at Jagueyes was a tour of a co-operative dairy farm, “Granja La Caruchera” milking, I believe, some 50 to 60 cows.
property or persecution, the stride into the unknown, into adventure, the great gamble of the homeless, the homeseeker..."

"...the Auswanderung of the Mennonites from Canada to Mexico is altogether different. A closed colony of several thousand undertakes a journey... through half a continent. They are... well-to-do, self-assured farmers, come as a solidaristic group with documented privileges, to take possession of...[their]lands"

"...And then they were standing about in groups, speaking amongst themselves as at home, by the hundreds, out there in the wild prairie under a lowering Mexican moon—Plattdeutsch! With the first light began the unloading. Holstein cows and great Belgian horses, chickens and geese, grain tanks and bundle wagons, farm implements and great heaving tractors, coils of barbed wire, roofing and corrugated iron, furniture, bedding...By noon all was ready, and the long caravan of horse--and tractor-drawn wagons snaked down the hill of San Antonio, out on the valley floor, where the new villages were to rise."

What Schmeidehaus does not mention is that the immigrants were also victims of ethnic cleansing measures in their former Homeland, Canada; measures implemented by racist Orangemen in control of the Provincial Legislatures in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, while the Dominion Government cynically stood by. Much like in Ireland, these Anglo-conformists could not countenance the co-existence of any culture other than their own. According to Adolf Ens, Subjects or Citizens, there were 2000 prosecutions by the RCMP in Manitoba in 1922 alone, mainly against OK-ers—ministers thrown in jail, writs of execution levied, etc. At one point, apparently, as many as six Mennonite clergymen were imprisoned in Winnipeg. Their crime? Advising their parishioners to abide by the civil rights guaranteed by the Dominion Government in writing in 1873.

This was the same government which imprisoned Ukrainians as enemy aliens in WWI and Japanese in WWII. Jews suffered severely from anti-Semitism and the French, Natives and Metis, were denigrated and oppressed. Citizenship in Canada in the 1920s meant being an Anglo-Canadian and nothing else, all others were relegated as second class citizens, a fact not acknowledged in Canadian history books.

Jagueyes.

A few kilometers northeast of Rubio are the so-called “Kaunsasdarpa” settled by the Kleine Gemeinde from Kansas under Rev. Martin Doerksen in 1926. I was amazed at how much these villages are reminiscent of Kansas even today. It seems that each farmyard still sports a windmill even though all this land is now owned by OK farmers. Like the land in the Swift Colony, the land here is heavier, a serious drawback in the early years. But the heavier soil responds well to modern irrigation, a big factor in the relative prosperity of the Swift Colony today.

Arriving in Jagueyes we stop at the “Prips Restaurant” owned by Eddie and Frank Plett (children of cousin Albert). After lunch we tour the Centro Escular, a major focus of the Colony. In addition to a small printing press, they produce German language curriculum materials for schools all over North and South America. Even our friends at the Crystal Springs Hutterite Colony in Manitoba are using some of this material. Since the Kleine Gemeinde was the first publisher of books among all the Mennonites in Russia in the 19th century this activity should not be a surprise.

We tour all five of the Kleine Gemeinde villages, stopping in at the homes of cousins Albert...
Plett, Cornie Plett, and Elmer Plett.

For supper the Colony hosted a “Disko” for us. No this is not a disco like we have in Canada, but a buffet style meal, put on for the tour group by the Quaillen Colony community at the Ebenfeld church. The food and fellowship was great. Many thanks to those who came to visit and especially to those who prepared and hosted the meal.

Worship Services.

The next day, February 7, 1999, was Sunday, and David Friesen had arranged for the group to attend the OK worship services in Gnadenfeld. We were all looking forward to the privilege. We got up early as the worship service started before 8 a.m., presumably to beat the heat of the mid-morning Mexican sun.

The landscape of Manitoba Colony is actually quite pastoral and pristine even in February, their equivalent of our winter. The air is fresh and clean, the altitude is 7500 feet above sea level.

The worship service has already started by the time we arrive. The men and women each enter through their own door. We file in reverently and take the places reserved for us.

The Vorsänger entone the words of the ancient Gesangbuch martyr songs, and the worshippers follow in cue, everyone knows their part. Their voices blend and resonate as they sing the ancient dirges, and become as one in the house of God. OK Vorsänger elections are obviously not popularity contests as the two leading the singing that morning had magnificent voices, they could have done justice to a concert hall.

How wonderful to experience the singing from the ancient “Gesangbuch” as my grandparents would have sang. Songs written by those baptized in blood, who actually knew what it was like to give their lives for their faith and people. As I reflect, I feel sorry for many worshippers in Canada who are singing beer hall choruses and kindergarten ditties, with words flashed on the wall by a projector. How sad! Especially for those who have rejected such a great music tradition.

Then the Ohms come in, parading in via the “Ohms Stube”. When I described such a scene in my novel Sarah’s Prairie, I interviewed people and sought out historical sources. I was amazed how close my literary description was to the actual event.

The Ohm took their places on the podium. The OK Churches still follow the traditional format used in Prussia and Russia where the podium is along the long side of the church. It is interesting that many new church buildings follow the same format now that architects are designing many churches.

Franz Kroeker, the new Aeltester of this OK congregation, presented the sermon. It was a wonderful sermon filled with the particulars of salvation, repentance, the sanctified life and a call to follow Christ. The hour long sermon contained more solid Gospel than any delivered in Steinbach on any given Sunday. The sermon was written out in Low German and delivered in a contrite and moving way.

Some ethnic Mennonites, particularly, Rudnerweiders (EMMC), who are attempting to proselytize these people, claim that the OK Church does not preach the gospel.

Well, I and the other members of the tour can give testimony that such statement are lies and the truth in not in those people who make such false statements.

By 9:30 a.m. the worship service is over. I have a chance to meet Ohm Franz and thank him for the inspiring sermon and the opportunity to attend the worship service.

After discussion the group decided to also attend the Kleine Gemeinde worship service in Lowe Farm and off we are. The service was already in process, in fact, the sermon had already started. This worship house, just like the one in Gnadenfeld is packed, corner to corner. The ushers gamely offer to make room for us and we appreciate the opportunity.

I have attended a number of Kleine Gemeinde services and so the experience is not quite so new. In the words of John Voth, one of the tour members, the service is reminiscent of a Sommerfelder worship service in Manitoba, which I take as a big complement.

After church we visit outside, much like we did
Preservings

The children in the Kleine Gemeinde school in Durango sing for us. Standing at the rear is school principal Reynolds Friesen, an experienced school teacher from Jagueyes.

in Manitoba 30 and 40 years ago. Like the OK church, the Kleine Gemeinde worship houses always share a yard with a school house.

Another group decision. We will attend a third worship service, the General Conference church in Blumenau. Someone in the tour group chuckles that this will be some kind of a world record for me and was probably quite right. Another great service and another round of visiting outside. I chat again with friend Peter Rempel, who introduces Abraham Olbert, one of the local movers and shakers.

We head over to “Restaurant Y Nevertia” owned by Francisco Giesbrecht Enns for lunch, or dinner has we used to say. A magnificent meal. The bus heads back for the hotel. Most of the tour members will take advantage of a free afternoon and evening to visit with relatives and friends.

A few of us hardy ones, Peter and Mary Wiebe and Ben P. Penner head back 60 kilometres to Jagueyes where my cousins are hosting another disko “cousin party”. As we walk in the door we are greeted by cousin David and Bertha Plett, Ben L. and Mary Dueck and others. I also have a quick meeting with the four members of the local Historical Society, Ardin Dueck, Leslie Plett, Eddie Plett and Myron Loewen. That evening I give a talk on the topic “The Kleine Gemeinde and the Anabaptist Vision” in the Ebenfeld church. I estimate that 300 people attended.

Copper Canyon.
The Tarra Humara were the native people who lived in northern Mexico since ancient times. When the Spaniards consolidated their conquest of Mexico they captured and enslaved the Tarra Humara, forcing many to do hard labour in damp underground mines where thousands died from unbelievably cruel and inhuman conditions.

Some of the Tarra Humara escaped the brutal treatment by the European invaders by migrating into the Sierra Madres Mountains, an area known as the Copper Canyon. Although comparable in some respects to the Grand Canyon, the Copper Canyon is much bigger, several miles wide at places.

The canyon still provides a home to the Tarra Humara Indians who live in the bottom flats of the canyon, coming up the walls to sell their handiwork to tourists, an 11 hour climb.

Copper Canyon is accessible by road, a good modern highway only recently finished, about a five hour drive west of Cuauthemoc. Our group opted for the more traditional train trip, also five hours. It was quaint to travel by train, a rarity for North Americans other than perhaps urban commuters.

In Copper Canyon we also met Peter Loewens from Jagueyes, Mex. and Peter Penners from Steinbach, Can. As often happens when friends meet far from home, we had a good visit.

Mexican Mennonite Historical Society.
Tuesday night we were back in Cuauthemoc where I was invited to sit in on a meeting of the “Mexican Mennonite Historical Society” at the Tarra Humara Inn. We discussed a number of topics including the misleading reporting about Mexican Mennonites appearing in some Canadian and Mennonite media. It appears that further action will be necessary to put a stop to such writing.

Some of this writing and reporting is outright bigoted and racist. One example, an article entitled “New life for an ‘Old World’, The Gospel Message. 1998, Issue 4, pages 2-5, would do credit to the propagandists of Nazi Germany or the Klu Klux Klan in America. See Editorial Section “The Great Commission”.

Durango.
Wednesday morning we were off to the Hague settlement in Durango. A full day’s drive. The roads were basically good and the landscape varied from level to mountainous. Hollywood “wild west” movies are often made in the Durango, and a complete
The next morning we head out to visit the Mennonite settlement at Neuvo Ideal, a honest to goodness “horse and buggy” community of 10,000. It is fortunate for these people that they live some 1000 kilometers from the U.S. border, otherwise they would be besieged by millions of tourists.

We tour the OK school in the village of Grunfeld. David Friesen was quite pleased with the teacher’s proficiency and good relationship with his students. In Grunthal we also meet my cousin David Plett and wife Bertha who changed their plans so that they would be in Neuvo Ideal on Thursday so we could spend a little more time together.

The Durango Colony has been suffering from drought for several years and David Plett is one of those hauling feed from the Cuauthemoc area which is distributed among all the farmers in Durango.

The feed assistance program in run by a “Hilfs-Kommittee” made up of all the Mennonite Colonies in Cuauthemoc. It is good to see the different Mennonite groups here cooperating in this fashion, something not always possible back home in Canada.

We tour the Kleine Gemeinde school in Durango where we are warmly welcomed by principal Reynold Friesen. We enjoy an impromptu lunch at the local general store, some of the cheapest prices for food and snacks I have seen.

In spite of the drought, dry land in the Durango Colony is selling for $300 per acre U.S. compared to $700 per acre in the Cuauthemoc area. Irrigated land in Cuauthemoc is several times that amount.

My general impression of the Durango settlement is very positive: the villages are well laid out, the Wirtschaften well built, and yards neat and tidy. The people are intelligent, persevering and exuding the eternal optimism which has been the salvation of our Mennonite people over the centuries. David Friesen explains that one of the delegates David P. Wall settled in Durango, a gifted and charismatic man. Wall’s leadership contributed much to the early well-being of the Colony.

Unfortunately, farmers in Mexico cannot run to the government for a multi-billion dollar aid package, the way our farmers in Western Canada do. In Mexico the farmers have to solve their own problems. If their farming strategies are totally destroyed by NAFTA, that’s just too bad. They don’t get decades of tariff protection to phase in a new agricultural paradigm. Nor do our farmers get told they are stupid just because the bottom falls out of world hog prices.

Water in this settlement is abundantly available, as shallow as 80 and even 40 feet. There is a movement afoot to bring in hydro to power irrigation pumps, contrary to the customs and protocols of the OK church in this area. I was wondering as we were driving around, wouldn’t it be simpler to set up windmills to drive the pumps? Wind, a renewable resource. The ingenious OK-ers manufacture windmills right on the Colony.

Questions are raised. Will members of the OK church in this “Horse and buggy” settlement get to heaven even if they don’t drive Buick Eldorados and/or have electric power as Rudnerweider missionaries would have them believe? Will all their problems be solved if they convert to North American “pop” religious culture? Are “horse and buggy” Mennonites backward as one local businessman tried to tell me recently in a Steinbach coffee shop? or are they a century or two ahead of us in terms of stewardship over God’s creation?

In my view there will be more OK-ers in heaven than Rudnerweiders.

Mazatlan.

After one more night at the Governado Hotel in Durango, we are off to our final destination, Mazatlan. Although we had been anxious about it, the trip west through the Sierra Madres Mountains was fun and relaxing. We are thankful for our courteous bus drivers who make good time, but continually reassure us with their professional driving abilities.

We enjoy five wonderful nights in Mazatlan and then pack up, heading north along the coast. We stop for lunch in Los Moches, the western terminus of the railway line which goes from Cuauthemoc to Copper Canyon. We continue northward, traversing beautiful irrigated farm land, comparable to the grape growing areas around Reedley, California. With abundant water and millions of acres of vacant land, Mexico is still a land of opportunity for those with money to invest.

It is after nightfall by the time we arrive in Hermosillo, our last night in Mexico. The next morning we get underway and soon arrive in Nogales, the border crossing. Here we disembark and say good-bye to our bus drivers who have been with us for over two weeks. The border crossing amounts to carrying our baggage and walking through some turnstiles.

On the American side we meet up with our transports which take us to our hotel in Tucson, about 60 miles. Back in “the good ole U.S.A.” The next morning we board our flight and by late evening we’re back home in Winnipeg. It was a good trip, all the connections worked well.
Mennonite University finds Home


MANITOBA’S newest post-secondary education institution officially found a home today as the Manitoba government and the Mennonite College Federation (MCF) signed a $3.5 million deal transforming the former Manitoba School for the Deaf into the Mennonite University campus.

Premier Gary Filmon and Education and Training Minister Jim McCrae presided at the signing ceremony on the 23.6-acre site at the corner of Grant Avenue and Shaftesbury Boulevard in Winnipeg.

“This is a very positive move for both the Mennonite community and the province as a whole,” Filmon said. “It provides a new lease on life for a valued local heritage building and enables the Mennonite educational system to expand its services to all Manitobans.”

The former Manitoba School for the Deaf was vacated in 1996 when its educational programs were moved to the renovated Alexander Ross School at 242 Stradbrook. The 110,000-sq-ft Shaftesbury facility includes a four storey school building built in 1920 and a gymnasium built in 1983. The site is currently occupied by the Pan Am Games Organizing Committee until September 1999.

“Manitoba’s post-secondary education system is one of the finest in Canada,” McCrae said. “Given the excellent scholastic standards of the three federation members, the creation of the Mennonite University can only enhance education options for our students.”

Three existing colleges, Menno Simons College, the Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Concord College, will be combining their strengths to create the new university. It will offer degrees, diplomas and certificates in a number of subject areas including religious studies, music, conflict resolution, Third World economic development and a variety of social sciences. The province will provide an annual operating grant of $2.64 million to the school for the first three years of operation.

Art DeFehr, representing the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba, noted by combining the efforts of the three colleges, the federation will be best positioned to build a stronger facility that allows for improved services for students.

“This is a significant investment by both the province and the Mennonite community, paving the way for an even stronger Mennonite education system that has a clear emphasis on the values and heritage of our community,” DeFehr said.

“Historically, our colleges attracted a number of Mennonite and other students from across Canada. Today’s announcement provides us with a means of building on that and attracting many more students nationally and internationally.”

-Manitoba Gov’t. News Service

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**Khortitza Conference, May 26-30, 1999**


**Introduction.**

Some 100 presenters, participants and observers took part in “Khortitza ’99”, an international conference on the “Mennonites in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union” held May 26 to 30, 1999, in Zaporozhe, Ukraine (formerly Alexandrowsk). One of the most important scholarly conferences in recent decades, it brought together academics and researchers from five nations: Ukraine, Russia, Germany, Canada and the United States. Missing was Latin America with one of the largest groups of Russian Mennonite descendants.

Khortitza ’99 was important for several reasons: 1) it served to show the flag in a region once dominated by Mennonites. First settled in 1789, by 1914 there were some 500 villages with a population of 100,000 scattered across the area north of the Black Sea. This thriving culture was exterminated by Stalin and Sovietization, one-third were to die unnatural deaths in the decades following, most were exiled to the Siberian Gulag. Not only were the Mennonites exterminated, the collective memory of their two century-old civilization in Ukraine and Russia was likewise extinguished.

The Conference and the associated events brought the story alive for many in the Zaporozhe region and elsewhere in Ukraine, through local T.V. and press coverage. Regional officials who spoke at the dedication ceremonies scrambled to find background information about the Mennonites and their significance to the region. In a society searching for new ways to understand its past, as well as charting new courses for the future, the Conference provided an example of progress through cooperation and mutual assistance among indigenous cultures.

2) “Khortitza ’99” brought together scholars from different traditions and perspectives, introducing them to each other and to their work and methodology. For example, the academics from Canada and U.S.A. were, by-and-large, professors and teachers at public universities and confessional colleges but of Mennonite background. The scholars from Russia and Ukraine were exclusively with state universities but, with two exceptions, not of Mennonite background, none were practising Mennonites. They approached their topics from the perspective of scientific inquiry, thereby adding not only abundant new sources to the study, but a fresh perspective.

The presenters from Germany, by comparison, were mostly those who fled the Soviet Union in WWII and later the Aussiedler. Their work was still quite formative, with some, particularly the Aussiedler, grappling with establishing their own identity as Mennonites, unsure of how to relate to other religious cultures such as Baptists, Orthodox, etc.

**The Exhibit.**

The official opening of the Exhibition, “Mennonites in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union,” held May 26, 1999, in the Zaporozhe Regional Museum was timed to coincide with the opening of the international conference, “Khortitza ’99”. Attending the opening was Canadian Ambassador to Ukraine, Derek Fraser.

The Ambassador commented, “The departure of the Mennonites from
Ukraine was a great tragedy...It has been a great blessing for Canada. Very few minorities in Canada have had such an influence beyond their numbers, as have the Mennonites....They have left a mark in all areas of Canadian life. They have retained a fond memory of the Ukraine.

Claus Bümmer, speaking for the German ambassador, “applauded the opening of the museum exhibition” in this region “home of 100,000 Deutsche prior to WW II....The exhibition will work to further improve relations between Germany and Ukraine.”

Designed by Paul Epp, Toronto, the Exhibition was intended to be a permanent and visual expression of the Mennonite experience and culture. The exhibition was circular in design but with an avenue to the centre. The centrepiece was a model of the village of Neuendorf (today known as “Shirokoe”), once among the largest and most prosperous in the Old Khortitza Colony.

The exhibition included paintings by Cornelius Hildebrandt, Heinrich Pauls and Agatha Schmidt. Pieces of furniture from the distinctive Mennonite tradition were on display. There were pendulum clocks made by Mennonite clockmakers as well as agricultural implements, sculpture and traditional clothing.

The bulk of the exhibition consisted of 1,000 photographs, telling the Mennonite story. The material was arranged thematically, with subjects ranging from religion and pacifism, to building and musical traditions, to the poignant story of destruction and recovery.

Public Session.

One of the more interesting events of the conference was the public session held at the Zaporozhe State University. It was chaired by Professor Viacheslav Tolak, Rector of the University. He opened his remarks with the salutation, “Tsvarich,” or “Conrad”, an expression seldom heard anymore.

The large lecture hall of the University was almost filled to capacity, some 5-600 students and local academics. One of the keynote speakers was Professor Orest Subtelny, York University, Toronto, author of one of the “new” textbooks on Ukrainian history now universally used throughout the nation. He suggested that Ukrainians see themselves as part of a multicultural history, which defines time and space, and those who inhabited it over the centuries, and “...to include the story of the frontier.”

The keynote address was by Professor Harvey Dyck, organizer of the Conference. The presentation was similar to that made at the A.G.M. of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society on January 27, 1999 (see report by Ralph Friesen, elsewhere in this newsletter).

Monument Dedication.

The most moving event of the conference was the dedication of a monument to the victims of the Soviet Inferno, in the village cemetery at
Nieder Khortitza (Lower or Nizhnyaya Khortitza) on Saturday afternoon.

Again, the event was planned not only as a Mennonite event, but one which included government authorities and local dignitaries. The dedication ceremony was chaired by Boris Letkeman, chair of the Zaporozhe Mennonite Church Council with scripture reading by long-time local pastor Frank Dyck.

Boris Letkeman opened the ceremony and commented that, “through this event, you can see with your own eyes the beauty of this land....It shows that different people can come together...but they must come in peace.”

Professor Fedor Turchenko, Dean of History, Zaporozhe State University, provided some historical context, stating that “The Mennonites were expelled against their will.” Turchenko referred to “their high moral values.” He concluded, “may the monument be a symbol of unity, of love and mutual understanding.”

Perhaps most poignant were the words of Father Vassili, the Orthodox priest of Nieder Khortitza. Father Vassili referred to the multi-cultural nature of the territory, and that “many peoples have come here over the past 1000 years...They came to conquer and to lay waste...others have come to work this land and develop it....the Mennonites were those people....they made the land even more beautiful. I am coming to know how industrious they were, a peaceful people....a horrible fate befell them, although they did not deserve it....For the Mennonites [this] is also their Motherland, they should [be welcome to] come back....all Christian people should work together.”

Conclusion.

“The story of two centuries of Mennonite life in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union is experiencing a rebirth. This arises in part from the opening of archives and new-won free-

One of the important functions of any conference are the opportunities for collegiality. Laughter and jokes before supper: l.-r., Irina Cherkas'ianova, St. Petersburg, Russia, Natalia Ostasheva, Dnipropetrovsk University, Peter Viebe, Director, Omsk Historical Museum, Russia, and Alexsandr Tedeef, Director, Zaporozhe State Archives.

Professor Orest Subtelny, York University, Toronto, author of one of the standard textbooks on Ukrainian history. Subtelny has become somewhat of a cultural icon, his popular history of the Ukraine was completed in 1991 just as perestroika and independence created a void, the need for a historical identity. Just entering the dinning hall, visible behind Professor Subtelny, is Svetlana Bobyleva, Director, Center for German-Ukrainian Studies, Dnipropetrovsk State University.

The Conference in working session, in the hall of the Intourist “Zaporozhe” Hotel. 11th floor. Visible at bottom middle, are Professor Anatoli Karagodin, Professor Zaporozhe State University, and his daughter, a graduate student. Professor Karagodin is the author of a new history of the Zaporozhe region which was included in the book launch held at the Kazatskaia Korchma Restaurant on scenic Khortitza Island, Saturday night after the monument dedication.

Session Five, May 28, a typical session. Doctoral Candidate, Oksana Beznosca, Dnipropetrovsk University, presentation on “Mennonite Brethren and the Spread of Protestant Sectarianism Among Orthodox of the Southern Ukraine, 1860-1900”. The session chair is Walter Unger, Toronto, and Commentator, Dr. Peter Klassen, Fresno, USA.
Preservations

doms. But an important part of this rebirth is the desire of Ukrainian and Russian specialists, in cooperation with foreign scholars, to fill in the blank pages of the Ukrainian and Russian past once occupied by national minorities."

"Although Mennonites were one of the best-known minorities in Tsarist times, they have almost disappeared from the collective memory of modern Ukraine and Russia. But their heritage lingers on in rich Ukrainian and Russian archives, in artifacts of one-time Mennonite villages, in religious influences, as a model of development, and in a large diaspora in North and South America and Germany."

The working sessions continue: l.-r., Tatania Plokhotniuk, Stavropol State University; Olga Kononova, Odessa State University; Irina Cherkas’ianova, St. Petersburg, Russia (her mother was a Janzen), listen to the presentation. Left rear, Sarah Kratzes, U.S.A.

After the conference session, Saturday, May 29, the participants enjoyed a cruise along the banks of the Dneiper River from the docks at the north end of Zaparozhe, near the dam, along the east bank of the fabled Chortitza Island, to Nieder Chortitza, at the south end, west bank. The guests are welcomed ashore with the traditional Ukrainian bread. The hostesses offer Irina Cherkas’ianova, a piece. In the rear, left side, is Olga Shmakina, tour guide. To her left, Walter Unger, conference organizer.

Dignatories prepare to unveil the monument. In the middle is Zaporozhe Mennonite Church Council Chair Boris Letkeman, second from his right is the Deputy of the Raion Council, speaking on behalf of the local government jurisdiction. Second from Letkeman’s left is interpreter, Alexander Prusin, originally from Poltave, Western Ukraine, now Toronto. Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, to his right. To the left is the choir of the Zaporozhe Mennonite church which sang several songs for the event.

Father Vassilii, the Orthodox priest of Nieder Khortitza who won the hearts of all present with his loving words and demeanour. Here Father Vassileee speaks with Viktor and Lydia Fast, Frankenthal, Germany. It is tragic that Mennonite ministers abandoned their Prediger’s rock and other traditional vestments.

The Petershagen Church as it appeared May 31, 1999, during a tour of the Molotschna organized by the conference (see article regarding the church restoration page 52). In the photo l.-r. Dr. George Schroeder, Paul Epp, Frank Dyck, Dr. Harvey Dyck (rear), Dr. John Staples, University of Toronto, Conference Secretary, Dr. Peter Klassen, Fresno, unidentified, and Viktor Fast, Frankenthal, Germany. By Tuesday, June 1, the new roof of the church was completed.

A view of the cemetery after the unveiling of the monument. The older original part of the cemetery with the Mennonite graves is located in the area behind the photographer. In the foreground, right, are visible pastor Frank Dyck, and Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein. Front middle (with backs to camera), Dr. Gerhard and Julia Hildebrand, Goettingen, Germany. Dr. Hildebrandt and his family fled for their lives from the Molotschna in 1943.

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Gnadenfeld - The Esau Matriarchy
Gnadenfeld, East Reserve, the Study of Two Families: Part One - The Esau Matriarchy,
by Ernest Braun, Box 595, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0.

Preamble
The village of Gnadenfeld (East Reserve) has always loomed large in my memory and imagination. It was at the outskirts of Gnadenfeld on what at that time was the Hamm farm that, as a three-year-old, I experienced for the first time the green chill of a near-tornado turned electrical storm. Ever since that day, the creek running diagonally through this property became the boundary to an eerie, sinister domain, where nature and fear met. In my child’s mind the very landscape turned alien at the western edge of the yard, and an ominous power threatened the knoll that served as an island for the yard, forbidding entrance to the regions beyond called “Gnodefelt”, a name for which I had no antecedent. This impression stayed with me for forty years, partly because I was at an impressionable age, and partly because for some reason as a family we never actually crossed the boundary into that unknown in those days.

What follows is an attempt to move past the flaming sword to re-enter a territory that my extended family left irrevocably in 1926, and that remained inviolate for many decades as a new people made the village their own.

I have not been able to determine the exact placement of the original village farmsteads in all cases, nor is it clear to me yet at what point the cluster of houses in the original village thinned out as the open field system broke down and individual homesteaders moved to their own land. This is a preliminary study: I would appreciate any other corrections, family and building photos and anecdotal material that pertains to this village.

In order to keep this study within containable limits, I am assuming some understanding on the part of the reader about the Section/Township/Range system, the meaning of “East Reserve”, the open field system of farming, village place names and some Mennonite history in general.

Gnadenfeld
The village of Gnadenfeld, East Reserve, was located somewhat at an angle along the line between Sections 30 and 19 of Township 5 - Range 5 East, about two miles slightly northwest of Grunthal (see map). The western boundary of the village coincided with the point where “a curtain of pancakes closes off the (Mennonite) world” as my mother would say. The village street probably followed the south side of Sarto Creek. Although all that remains of the village is one barn and a road sign, in its day it rivalled Chortitz as the fifth largest village in the East Reserve. Rempel and Harms report that the original village included the south half of section 30, all of sections 19 and 20, and the west half and south-east quarter of section 18, although all census lists and J. H. Warkentin’s maps include a larger area, usually adding the south half of section 31.

Map of Gnadenfeld in the early years, showing the trails connecting to “Ridge Road” and the pioneer village farmsteads as well as the farmyards started by the Russlander families who acquired the land after the exodus of 1922-27. Map by Ernest Braun, Niverville.
Preservings

Why anyone would choose this land when stone free land was found right around the Schanzenberg sheds near Niverville has probably been discussed at some length. One interesting remark made by one of the pioneers of that time, Bernhard J. Friesen in Der Mitarbeiter, May 1907, was that the forefathers of the Mennonites believed that any soil that could produce three to four-foot high grasses was also capable of growing excellent wheat, and low-lying land was preferable to table land, for in their experience in the Prussian “Niederungen”, the swamp land had been very fertile.

In fact he reports that disagreements broke out between settlers about who would have rights to the lowest land. Since 1874 was an unusually dry year, it was not until 1877 that the pioneers began to realize that their assumption did not hold true here, for much of the land was under water so long in spring that crops could not be planted in time, and there was so much rain in fall that two-thirds of the crop rotted in the field that year. The average precipitation was almost twice that of the steppe in Bergthal they were accustomed to. Moreover, the shallow soil with its cargo of stones could not be equated with the profound Prussian lowlands.

Although a remark that grows out of hindsight does not do justice to the complex motivations that guided the early pioneers, it does throw some light on the mind set of the settlers, and helps us understand the choices they made. Other factors entered into the decision making as well: to pioneer on open prairie (such as available on the West Reserve) required money for purchasing and transporting building materials and fuel, whereas the East Reserve had both at hand in abundance. However, although common wisdom indicated that bush land was the poor man’s best chance at survival, but it also guaranteed, as Warkentin pointed out, that he stayed poor, for until the advent of large-scale mechanized farming, the poor soil and poor drainage in this area prevented the commercial grain farming that characterized the West Reserve during these same years. The last 30 years, of course, with marketing boards and a factory approach to livestock and poultry farming, have given this assessment the lie.

Settlement, 1875.

The date of settlement can be determined within a day or two, probably August 10 or 11, 1875, for the Township General Register (Manitoba Provincial Archives) indicates that every homestead in this area except two was either entered or pre-empted on that date. The Franz Ennsz family filed here on August 11, 1875, as did brothers-in-law Peter Giesbrecht, Jacob Pries and Wilhelm Hiebert. Another cluster of families, Jacob Harder, Abram and Jacob Funk, and David Klassen, also registered their intentions on the same day. Only SE and NE 20


Gnadenfeld today. A road named in honour of the pioneer village were our ancestors once toiled. We are fortunate to have a Municipal Council which has been visionary and farsighted, endeavouring to retain some of our heritage by road namings, etc. Photo by Ernest Braun.

The only photograph in existence of the original village street of Gnadenfeld, view to the east. The photo was taken circa 1929 from on top of the windmill on the Abraham Giesbrecht yard. The farmyard in the foreground is the Abraham E. Giesbrecht farmyard. According to the fire insurance records the windmill was apparently built in about 1910. The Abraham E. Giesbrecht farm was acquired by Johann Wiens in the mid-20s. The first farmyard behind the Giesbrecht buildings belonged to Jakob Braun Jr.; the barn is the only pre-1900 building still standing. Behind this yard, slightly to the left, can be seen the outlines of the Wirtschaft of Jakob Braun Scand owned by his son Abraham F. Braun by the time this photograph was taken. Photo courtesy of Helena Krahn, Bergthal Colony, East Paraguay.
remained clear that year.

In 1876 the rest of the settlers arrived. The Peter Funks filed a homestead application on NE 20 on June 20, 1876 and a preemption on SE 20 at the same time. Jacob Harder, who had filed a preemption on SW 18, relinquished it to the Jacob Brauns who homesteaded there on August 8, 1876 after wintering in Schoensee. Various settlers gave up their preemptions to others such as Peter Hiebert, Jacob Klassen, Jacob Peters and Johann Krahm, who then filed fresh homestead applications on those quarter sections, so that within a year or so, the contingent of Gnadenfeld pioneers was complete.

No information has survived about the exact placement of the original dwelling places of the village. It can reasonably be assumed that the seven families that filed for patents in 1875 wintered in some temporary shelter on site, and built the more substantial buildings a few years later.

In the following material I will follow each pioneering family from the earliest record to the dispersion in 1926, providing if possible a photograph of both the people and the buildings, and then briefly recounting the fate of the individual farms.

The Pioneers.

There are several lists extant that one could use to determine who settled in Gnadenfeld: the 1876 Brotschuld records (see below), the 1881 Federal Census, the 1882-3 village Seelenliste, and the Assessment Rolls of Hespeler 1881, and the Berghal/Chortitzer Brandordnung 1879 records (fire/storm insurance). Since the earliest list is that given in the Brotschuld (a list of villagers who accepted assistance from the loan the Federal government extended to the immigrants in 1876), I have used that as my point of departure, although there is a possibility that others could have lived there temporarily without being listed:

Jacob Pries, Peter Giesbrecht, Franz Ensz (Grosse), Jacob Peters, Peter S. Funk, Fransz Ens (Kleine), Jacob S. Funk, Peter Hiebert Jr., Fransz Ensz (Peter.), Jacob Braun Sr., Peter Hiebert Sr., Abraham S. Funk, Jacob Braun Jr., Peter Harder, Johann S. Funk, Jacob Harder, Johann Krahm, Widow Jacob Klassen, Jacob Klassen, Wilhelm Hiebert.

Three of these probably did not have a separate residence in 1876: Jacob Braun Jr. (still single at this time), Peter Hiebert Sr. (at no point is there any residence listed for him in the insurance records - probably stayed with Peter Hiebert Jr. with whom he travelled from Russia), and widow Klassen (who later has a separate dwelling but may well have stayed with son Jacob or son David the first winter or so).

Fransz Enz (Peter) is listed on an otherwise blank page and a line drawn through the name, and he does not appear again in any of the Gnadenfeld lists, having relocated to Kromsgrad. David Klassen, brother to Jacob, homesteaded in 1875 but is not listed in the Brotschuld list, although he is included in every other one of the early records. It seems likely that the widow Klassen entry doubled for her son David as well. That leaves a village of 17 residences, some of which certainly extended in a line parallel to the Sarto Creek (a tributary of Joubert creek), yet existing yards and memories of older yards account for only about four. Partly this may be explained by the exodus to the West Reserve in the early 1880s when houses may well have been dismantled here as they were in other villages of the East Reserve and carted to the treeless prairie as the only asset acquired from five years of pioneering.

Secondly, the community eventually extended to include the later Johann Krahm homesteaded at the east side of SE 20, and there may well have been other farmsteads between the main village and the Krahm place. It is interesting to note that the strips of village land (koagels) drawn on Warkentin’s map of Gnadenfeld are drawn lying east-west which suggests that the village street ran east west, for the narrow strips used for cereal crops were normally placed parallel to the street, so that everybody could access their land from one central cross trail (Warkentin p. 59).

According to J. H. Warkentin’s Ph.D dissertation on the Mennonite villages, the original government surveyors of 1873 described township 5 - 5 perhaps more generously than later experience proved it to be (p. 16). Gnadenfeld, namely, sections 18, 19, 20, 30 and the south half of 31, coincide exactly with the best that this township had to offer, but that best was described as “limited arable culture - limited productivity” (p. 18). A contemporary description by surveyor William Burke characterizes it as of a “sandy gravelly, stony nature, which must render its successful cultivation a matter of some difficulty” (Warkentin p. 14). Warkentin concludes that the East Reserve Mennonites in general were “given a Reserve.... generally unfit for settlement” (p. 16).

Village System.

The village itself lay on the south side of the small then unnamed creek that once had enough water in it to tempt young boys to shoot jack fish with a .22 calibre rifle. In the early days of settlement, most villages followed some natural feature of the landscape, usually a creek or a ridge to become a street with houses on only one side, in this case the north. It is reasonable to assume that Gnadenfeld like all the other Mennonite villages was planned according to the open-field model brought from Russia. The pattern, according to Warkentin, usually was to run the village street parallel to the creek leaving a lot length of three to five hundred feet and allowing approximately two hundred feet per lot. The housebarns were usually placed at right angles to the street, with the house part facing it.

Between the street and the house was a flower garden and maybe the orchard, whereas the back was reserved for the vegetable garden and farmyard. The creek at the back facilitated the watering of livestock. The village of 15 - 20 families would be about one kilometre or less in

Aerial view of Gnadenfeld in 1994, Gnadenfeld Road, facing east. The farm in the foreground, is now owned by Jake Bestwater, Grunthal. The old derelict barn originally belonged to Jakob Braun Sr. The next farmyard originally belonged to Jakob Braun Sr., village patriarch, acquired by Wilhelm Sawatzky in the 1920s. The next farmyard was the Peter K. Toews farmyard, now owned by Frank N. Wiens. Farmyard at very top of photo was the Bruno Hamm place, also now owned by the Wiens family. Photo courtesy of Ernest Braun.
length. The crop land was arranged in strips several hundred feet wide on both sides and parallel to the street with one cross road for access. The strips were carefully chosen to represent a cross-section of soil and terrain so that each farmer had approximately the same quality of land. Usually the boundaries between the narrow strips became lines of rocks and weeds which quickly became windbreaks, accumulating topsoil as the wind swept it off the fields.

These characteristic ridges (called “reine” in Low German), running 40 paces apart in a north-south pattern, are still evident on NE 18 which is now overgrown with scrub poplar. However, this one quarter belonged to the village of Bergfeld, who harvested their last crop off this land in 1924. Subsequent owners were large livestock operators who ran sheep and cattle in the huge Bergfeld tract, and allowed this quarter to revert to the parkland it was when the Mennonites arrived. It may be one of the few places in southern Manitoba where human habitation has disturbed both the flora and topography so little that entering the preserve is like going back in time. No topographical evidence of these type of ridges has survived in territory belonging to Gnadenfeld.

Most of the settlers arrived in 1875 and, as far as can be determined, wintered in whatever quarters they could erect between August and freeze-up. There is an obscure reference in the insurance files about the cancelation of a “serai” under the name of Jacob Braun in the mid 1880s, and that may have been the kind of shelter used that first winter by the eight families that filed for homesteads that year. One family, at least, lived in a semlin that first winter (see below).

In 1876, Gnadenfeld most likely consisted of a straggly collection of hastily built huts along a street that was nothing more than a cart track through standing scrub poplar. By 1879 there were more substantial buildings, some valued at 400 to 640 dollars (belonging to pioneers who stayed in the community), while others remained at a nominal 50 dollars or even 35 dollars (belonging to those who moved away in a few years).

By 1879, there were twenty-two heads of households listed in the (Bergthal/Chortitz Brandordnung) fire insurance records for Gnadenfeld. It is puzzling that widow Jacob Klassen was included in that list until 1882 when in fact she had died four years earlier on October 12, 1878, unless the separate entry for her son David Klassen (which has the same values of insurance) is really a continuation of the same policy under his name. Such an interpretation would reduce the number of households to twenty-one. Peter Hiebert Sr. has also died in the meantime (May 6, 1877) but that did not affect the number of households since he presumably lived with either his son Wilhelm or Peter.

However, by 1879-80 several more family names have appeared: Gerhard Wiebe, Johan Ginter, and Jacob Martens who insure only furniture and in one case personal effects, and young marrieds Johan Braun and Peter K. Funk who each insure a house at minimum value. It is not known whether the three households that register no insurance for a dwelling were renting from those that had built a new house for themselves (eg. Jacob Pries) or whether they did not consider their houses worth insuring. Despite the temporary infusion of new households represented by the above transients and the married children of the pioneers, by the end of 1883, only thirteen remained, all of them directly related to two central families who themselves never even settled there.

**Founding families**

One of these families was that of Wilhelm and Elisabeth (Defehr) Esau. Wilhelm Esau, born in Neunhuben, West Prussia on Oct 12, 1808, was almost certainly the son of Aron Esau of Neunhuben, and brother to Karl Esau (1803) of the West Reserve. Later as a 32-year-old single (or widowed) man he emigrated to the Molotschna in 1841 (Unruh p. 383) from Schönsee, West Prussia. This information is further supported by the 1891 Federal Census which lists him as born in “Germany”.

Unruh lists him as a carpenter by profession. Less than a year later he appears in the Old Colony, where on January 7, 1842 he married Elisabeth Defehr (1823-1908), daughter of Jacob Defehr of Neuendorf, Chortitz (GRANDMA vol. 2). According to The Peter Hiebert Genealogy by Abe Dyck, et al, fourteen children are born to them in Russia, one of whom, Wilhelm Jr., is known to have been born in Osterwick in 1851 (The 1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve (p. 177). The family probably lived in Osterwick most of their married life, for in December 1873 when Elisabeth (Defehr) Esau was accepted into the Kleine Gemeinde in Borosenko, she was identified as “widow Esau from Osterwick” (Profiles KG p. 164). The date of Wilhelm Esau’s death is given by Dyck as Mar 7, 1874 which
may be a misreading of 1871, for the matter of Peter Loewen’s marrying his wife’s sister, Elisabeth (Defehr) Esau, was already an issue in late 1871 according to Peter Toews’ diary (Profiles KG p. 151). Of the fourteen children, four died as infants, two as young children, and eight grew to adulthood.

Elisabeth and her second husband Peter Loewen emigrated to Canada aboard the “S. S. Austrian”, arriving in Quebec on August 31, 1874 with two of the Loewen and three Esau children [ Jacob (born 1865), Justina (1864) and Aaron (born 1854) ] and settled in Gnadenort (Hochstadt), a Kleine Gemeinde preserve. Almost a year later on July 6, 1875 the remaining five Esau children arrived with their spouses aboard the “S. S. Sarmatian”, and with one exception (Wilhelm Jr.), all settled in Gnadenfeld (East Reserve), just a few miles south of their mother. Four of the spouses filed on homesteads on August 11, 1875, just two weeks after arriving in Manitoba.

Elisabeth and Peter Loewen continued to farm in Hochstadt until he died on August 26, 1887. Some time later Elisabeth married widower Gerhard Wiebe, the man who as Aeltester shepherded the Berghal Colony to North America. Gerhard Wiebe died in 1900 at which point, presumably, Elisabeth moved to her son-in-law, Jacob Pries in Gnadenfeld, for when she died on November 11, 1908 she was buried in the garden north of the old barn on what is now the Wiebe’s yard, NW 30-5-5.

The four oldest Esau sisters all settled in Gnadenfeld: Maria (born Sept 17, 1842) married to Franz Ensz, Elisabeth (born May 11, 1844) married to Jacob Pries, Anna (born July 1, 1846) married to Peter Giesbrecht, and Katherina (born May 24, 1849) married to Wilhelm Hiebert. The fact that four sisters settled in the same village to form a core group is a remarkable instance of matrilocality in itself, but it is all the more remarkable an instance of such a settlement pattern when one considers that they were the only Old Colony families in the village, having chosen to settle where all the other families were exclusively of Berghal origin.

There were several other siblings in the Esau family: Wilhelm Esau Jr. (born July 1, 1851) settled in Reinland on the West Reserve with his wife Barbara nee Wiens of Kronshah. Here and later in Gretna he ran a store in partnership with Peter Abrams. The Esau family became members of the Berghal Colony in Manitoba. Aaron Esau (born Feb. 13, 1854) arrived with his mother in 1874 and presumably lived in Gnadenort (Hochstadt) with the Loewens in the early part of the 20th century, Aaron and Sarah moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan where both Aaron and one son drowned accidentally in 1909. Justina Esau born Sept. 2, 1864 married Jacob T. Regehr of Hochstadt who was both a farmer and a store keeper. He specialized in cheese and butter making and marketed these under the family name (see Preservings No. 11, p. 54). Jacob, the youngest son, born Dec. 2, 1865 lived with the Loewens in Gnadenort in 1881 according to the Federal Census, but resided in Nebraska in 1896 according to Delbert Plett in Profiles (p. 20).

Franz and Maria (Esau) Ensz

The 1878 Chortitzer church records indicate that Franz F. Ensz and Maria Esau were married on November 14, 1864, just two weeks after her sister Elisabeth. According to an inscription on back of a photograph, Franz F. Ensz was born on October 13, 1844 in Osterwick, Khortitz Colony, although both of his parents were born in Prussia (1891 Federal Census summarized in 1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve p. 460). The Ensz family arrived with their children in July 1875 on the “S. S. Sarmatian” and on August 11, 1875 applied for a homestead on the SE corner of section 31, land characterized by particularly shallow soil and unusually many stones. John W. Enns of Niverville recounts that his grandfather (Franz Ensz) told him that the family lived in a sod hut (semlin) for the first winter (’75’ - ’76) and that during that first winter food got to be very scarce, so scarce that the family was reduced to eating whatever was available, palatable or not. It is reasonable to assume that the Ensz semlin was not the only primitive structure in the village of Gnadenfeld nor that this family was the only one suffering want during that first winter.

On the Application for Homestead Patent form (accessible through the Homestead Files - Manitoba Provincial Archives), Franz noted that on March 21, 1883 he had “resided in the village of Gnadenfeld of which my homestead forms a portion”, and that improvements made were a house 20 by 30 and a stable 26 by 30. Insurance records show that the house was insured for $100 and the barn for $25. No record of where in the village those buildings were located has survived; however, I believe that at no time did this family ever reside on their “home” quarter section.

Franz Ensz also took out a pre-emption on SW 31, one that he relinquished to Jacob Klassen on May 20, 1880, and from that point on these two quarters became intertwined with each other, for when Ensz left for the West Reserve in 1882, he simply left the land without evidence of a sale, but by the late 1880’s Hanover Assessment Rolls list Jacob Klassen as the owner of this quarter as well as his own.

In those first four years the villagers most likely practised a communal open field system as they were accustomed to do in Russia and lived together in a row in the village. Apparently from the start Franz was unhappy with the land here, despite the fact that he had 24 acres under cultivation, and began making regular trips to the West Reserve on foot, presumably to acquaint himself with the prospects there. Nevertheless, it was not until April 1882 that he finally cancelled his fire insurance in Gnadenfeld, saying he couldn’t make his living upon these stones here (“top dize steena”--Wilhelm Enns, Kleefeld). This comment has survived within the family to the present day, and creates a certain irony, for had he stayed another five years and been compelled to work...
only his own quarter his comment would have been doubly true, for the Ensz quarter is particularly stony, so much so that little of it has been cultivated to this day, over a hundred years later.

According to Pioneer Portrait #23 of the Red River Valley Echo the Ensz family moved to Neu-Reinland, in what was later called the Meath School District, some miles southeast of Winkler on the West Reserve, where they bought eighty acres and resumed farming, as did many of their sons. In Neu-Reinland Franz and Maria Ensz built an outstanding example of a house barn. Franz was remembered as having a special love for finely matched driving horses.

Maria (Esau) Ensz died on October 1, 1914, and Franz married his sister-in-law, Elisabeth (Esau) Pries in December 1915. She died in 1927 and is buried in the Neu Reinland cemetery. Franz married a widow, Aganetha (Janzen) Born on July 22, 1928. Near the end of his life, he retired to live with his son, Wilhelm, in Greenfarm where he died on December 24, 1933 and is buried in the old cemetery southwest of Plum Coulee.

The Ensz family ran high to sons, many of whom farmed in the Altona, and Winkler (Greenfarm) areas. One son, Johan, was killed by a horse in 1929. In many cases the grandsons continued to farm, although there are some notable exceptions. John W. Enns owned Enns Garage in Niverville for decades, and a son and son-in-law are medical doctors (Niverville, page 96). One of the three founding partners of “Triple E” of Winkler, Peter W. Enns, is also a descendant of Franz and Maria Ensz. Another grandson, Jacob Enns, became a school teacher in 1930 and set new records in longevity in that field while farming on the side.

The sequel to the story of the homestead SE 31-5-5 is more fully given under Jacob Klassen below.

Jacob and Elisabeth (Esau) Pries.

The Peter Hiebert Genealogy (Abe Dyck et al.) records the marriage of Jacob Pries and Elisabeth Esau as taking place on October 28, 1864, just two weeks before that of her older sister Maria. Jacob (born Feb. 14, 1840) almost certainly comes from the Khoritz/Rosenthal

Jacob Pries became the village schultze, responsible for the affairs of the village and quarterly reports to the Brandordnung (mutual insurance company). He was also the village blacksmith. By 1884 he was cultivating 24 acres; in March of the same year, he obtained his naturalization papers. In 1889 he built another new house, this time on his own quarter (NW 30). In 1894 a barn is insured for the first time but in 1898 he added a large barn and hay shed to produce the buildings that survived into living memory. The new barn constructed of heavy timbers pegged in the traditional way was attached to the new house, and the old house became available for son Jacob who had married Helena Hiebert (see below) in 1888, and who is listed as having insured only furniture and personal effects until 1890.

By 1912 when the farm is deeded over to Gerhard E. Pries, the farmyard is much like it is remembered now: a house barn valued at $700, and various outbuildings of unknown ages with a garden to the north of the barn, a garden that included a family cemetery. It was with this family that matriarch Elisabeth Esau now Wiebe chose to live after the death of her third husband, and it is on the yard located on NW 30 that she was buried. Jacob Pries died on September 10, 1912, leaving the farm in the hands of his son Gerhard, a transaction confirmed by the insurance policy transfer to his name on December 19, 1912.

Widow Pries (nee Esau) married her brother-in-law Franz Ensz of the West Reserve, and moved to Neu Reinland where she died in 1927. At the death of Gerhard E. Pries on February 10, 1922, the farm devolved to the hands of his widow, Maria (nee Wiebe).

By 1922 emigration fever had already gripped the village and by 1926 Maria Pries had sold the land so that she and her family could emigrate to Paraguay with the fifth group in April 1927.

The land was acquired from National Trust by Johann Enns who arrived from Schöinfeld,
Russia some time in the middle 1920s with foster sons David M. Epp and Jacob Neufeld. After some time David Epp took over the management and ownership of the farm until he retired. In 1947 a new house was built and the old house still attached to the barn relegated to a grain bin. By 1966 when the land was purchased by Horst Wiebe, the house barn was still intact and the yard crowded with old trees. The house part was dismantled in 1974 and the barn in 1982, when a new barn was built on the same site. Only one small original building, perhaps the old summer kitchen, remains on the farmstead. The farm is still in the hands of the Wiebe family.

Son Peter E. Pries was a school teacher in Schoensee and later in Paraguay, as well as a partner in a threshing outfit with Jacob Braun Jr. and Peter Giesbrecht. He seems to have spent only one year in Gnadenfeld as an independent householder, from December 18, 1901 to December 11, 1902, insuring only machinery and furniture/personal effects.

Jacob E. Pries married Helena Hiebert, the sister of former Gnadenfeld pioneers Wilhelm and Peter Hiebert Jr., and appears in the Gnadenfeld 1886 insurance register as owning only furniture and clothing. Hanover Assessment Rolls indicate that in 1889 Jacob E. Pries moved to Kronsgard where in September of 1890 he insured a new house for $250, indicating a permanent move outside Gnadenfeld although the insurance records continue to place him under Gnadenfeld till 1910.

Wilhelm E. Pries married Agatha Funk in 1898, and lived in Kronsgard.

Peter and Anna (Esau) Giesbrecht

The Chortitzer Church Records show that Peter Giesbrecht and Anna Esau were married on December 2, 1867, presumably in Osterwick, South Russia. The fact that Peter (born Dec. 25, 1845) is also not listed in the BGB indicates that he probably comes from the Old Colony (Khortitz), but I have been unable to find the name of the village.

The Giesbrecht family arrived in Canada in 1875 as did the other siblings, and filed on a homestead on SW 30-5-5 at the west end of the community of Gnadenfeld, building their first dwelling at the southeast corner of the property, and planting the medicinal herbs they had brought from Russia, like “leppstock” (loveage) and “camomile” (camomile) in their garden. On the 23 of October, 1877 Peter was called to be a Minister of the church, a position he held till his death.

The homestead file on this family has been lost or misplaced, so it is difficult to confirm what buildings Peter erected prior to the ones still remembered as standing at the west end of the village. Certainly, by 1880 he had built the usual house barn in the traditional way, with heavy broad-axed timbers and pegged joints, and insured the building for $250. Since this family’s village lot and homestead coincided, there is no question of relocation, for this is one of the four farmsteads that remained in the village proper to be acquired by the Mennonite immigrants in the 1920s. Throughout the years from 1880 to 1920 no new barn was constructed, so the housebarn dismantled in 1995-6 was the set of buildings referred to above.

In September of 1890 they built a new house valued at $350, the same one that Abram E. Giesbrecht, who in the meantime in 1904 had married his neighbour’s daughter, Maria Braun, and taken over the farm, occupied when they emigrated in 1926. On July 25, 1910, the insurance policies issued in Peter Giesbrecht’s name were cancelled and all the assets insured under son Abram’s name as of that date. According to Johan F. Krahm, the Peter Giesbrechts moved to Grunthal after son Abram took over the farm. By 1912 Abram could cancel the insurance on his old threshing machine and insure a brand new one for $1000, making him one of the great entrepreneurs of the village.

On November 25, 1922 Anna (Esau) Giesbrecht died, and on September 7 (9?), 1924, Peter married his widowed sister-in-law Katherina Wiens (nee Esau), and moved to the West Reserve, south of Plum Coulee (NW 17-2-2 west). After 1926, he never saw his son Abram and his family again, for here he died on February 16, 1934.

With the eruption of the school question and the unrest fostered by the mandatory registration of all Mennonites near the end of WWI, Abram and Maria along with many other villagers became convinced that the only recourse was to emigrate. Abram regularly paid the fines imposed on him for not sending his children to the District school and even made a trip to Saskatchewan with another spokesman to communicate with the Mennonites there about emigration possibilities.

Due to the abrupt recession that hit North America in 1922-3, it was several years before the Intercontinental Company and the Corporacion Paraguaya were created to facilitate the land exchange. However, in 1926, he sold the family farm to the Company in exchange for land in South America, and he and his family emigrated to Paraguay with the first group on November 24, 1926. This family settled in Reinland, Menno Colony and played an important role in the colony life, for Abram served as a minister of the church all his life, his son Abram followed his footsteps in the ministry and later became the secretary of the colony, and son Johann became the dentist for the entire colony, and later a resource person for the Otto Klassen archival films.

The Giesbrecht homestead was acquired from National Trust by Johan H. Wiens, who had recently arrived from Schoenfeld, South Russia, and the farm is now owned by his descendants.

Wilhelm and Katherina (Esau) Hiebert

According to the Hiebert book, Katherina married Wilhelm Hiebert on June 29, 1869. Wilhelm Hiebert (born November 9, 1847) was the son of Peter Hiebert Sr. of the village of Schoenfeld, Berghal Colony (Oberschulze Jakob Peters, p. 134), who also pioneered in Gnadenfeld as a widower in 1875 (see below). The BGB notes that the village of his origin was Kortitz. The Hieberts came to Canada in 1875 as did the above, and filed for SW 19-5-5 and took a preemption on NW 19 as well.

Unfortunately, the Homestead File on this family has been lost or misplaced, so there is no information before 1880. Presumably the family built up a farmstead in the village as did his brothers-in-law, and it is likely those buildings (a house insured for $90 and barn for $25) that he insured up to March 21, 1881 when he cancelled his fire insurance in Gnadenfeld and moved to Chortitz, East Reserve. Here he was installed as Postmaster on August 1, 1884, his
Johan Braun insured his first residence for $100 in the early though it is likely that he did, for like Hiebert he Hiebert house in the village is unknown, al- farmed the land until he purchased the store in 1940.

Katherina married her brother-in-law, Peter Giesbrecht, of Gnadenfeld in 1924. At this point Peter Giesbrecht moved to the West Reserve where he died on February 16, 1934 (??). Katherina (Esau) Giesbrecht lived to be well over ninety-one years of age, dying August 25, 1940.

The original Hiebert homestead patent for SW 19 was obtained by Wilhelm Hiebert on May 10, 1882 who sold it to newly married Johan Braun of the Gnadenfeld Brauns, who farmed the land until he purchased the store in Grunthal. Whether Johan Braun lived in the Hiebert house in the village is unknown, al- through it is likely that he did, for like Hiebert he insured his first residence for $100 in the early 1880’s until he moved to Grunthal in 1892. (See Grunthal History, p. 34 for the story of Johan Braun, the entrepreneur of Grunthal at the turn of the century.)

The property continues to be listed under Johan Braun’s name until his eldest son Jacob A. Braun (who married his cousin Aganetha Braun in 1907) established a new farm on SW 19, building a barn and a separate house. On December 20, 1911 Jacob A. Braun insured a new house for $400, and a barn for $200 as well as miscellaneous outbuildings. This seems to mark the creation of the new farm on this quarter.

In August of 1917 Jacob built a large new barn in the traditional post and beam style and insured it for $1000, making it the most impres- sive structure in the community to date. Jacob farmed here until 1921 when he died suddenly of fever (typhus); his widow, Aganetha (Braun) Braun and five daughters continued to farm there by themselves until October 1926, when she married widower Peter Harder of Berghal. Three months later, in January 1927 they emi- grated to Paraguay. (In 1928 the Harders re- turned to Canada and purchased land in the Lister West School District south of Grunthal.)

In 1926 Heinrich Enns acquired the farm- stead, but he died shortly thereafter of a farm accident and the farm was purchased by Peter Thiessen (originally from Einlage, Khoritzt Colony) who had arrived from Russia in 1928. Mrs. Thiessen was the sister to Wilhelm Sawatzky (from Steinfield) who purchased a neighbouring farm. One notable scion of the Thiessen family is Dr. Jack Thiessen, former Professor of German at the University of Winnipeg and compiler of a comprehensive Low German dictionary. The farm remained in the family for many years until they sold it to Peter Klassen. The present owner Fritz Reutter ac-

quired the land from the Klassens.

Peter Hiebert Sr.: A short note needs to be added for Peter Hiebert Sr., the father of Wilhelm Hiebert. John Dyck mentions him briefly in Oberschutz Jakob Peter, as the man who wrote a document saying they were preparing to leave Russia, thinking that he would not be able to go, maybe because his wife, Sarah Kauenhowen, had just died in 1874, leaving him with two small children. However, as it turned out, he was able to go, perhaps because arrangements were made to place the two children in homes of relatives. The Peter Hiebert Genealogy states that 10-year-old Abram Hiebert was “adopted” by Peter and Anna Giesbrecht of Gnadenfeld, and 8-year-old Hel- ena by Johan and Aganetha Krahm, also of Gnadenfeld.

Peter Hiebert Sr., who is described in the Broschult records as the “alte Schullehrer” (sic), German for “former school teacher”, seems to have lived with his son Peter Hiebert Jr. who also homesteaded in Gnadenfeld. An unsigned Broschult record indicates a debt still owed by Peter Hiebert Sr. in 1878, although the family tree book records his death as occurring in 1877. This debt seems to have occasioned some grief for Peter Hiebert Jr. because of the confusion of names (see below). Besides the other siblings who came to Canada, namely, Johan who settled in Berghal, and Jacob who eventually moved to North Dakota, one other brother, Bernhard, remained in Russia.

An interesting connection between this man and the area he chose to settle is through his late wife, Sarah Kauenhauen, who was the sister to the Grunthal Kauenhautens.

Peter and Helena (Gerbrand) Hiebert

Peter and Helena arrived in Quebec aboard the “S. Peruvian” on July 13, 1875 with their one-year-old daughter and with 8-year-old Hel- ena, Peter’s youngest sister, as well as his fa- ther, Peter Hiebert Sr. The connection to the village seems clearly to be through his brother Wilhelm (see above). Although the Broschult records place them in Gnadenfeld in 1876, it was only on May 20, 1880, that the young fam- ily filed on NW 19-5-5, which his brother Wilhelm relinquished to him. Since that quarter section constituted part of the village proper, it is likely that the buildings mentioned in the Homestead Files were constructed on the home quarter.

By 1881? Peter was cultivating 22 acres of land, and had built a house (16 by 25 - insured for $35 - the lowest in the village) and a barn (14 by 16 - not insured). He stated that they had been resident on his homestead since July 30, 1879. In March of 1881 the Hieberts cancelled their insurance and moved away. On Novem- ber 14, 1882 he became a naturalized Canadian citizen, but ran into difficulties in 1883 when the Department of the Interior demanded that he “show just cause why the entry to the home- stead should not be cancelled”. A letter solved the problem and the initial letter was recalled in March 1883. When Peter Jr. applied for his patent in 1885, the Department of the Interior informed him that because he owed money to the “Waterloo society” a patent could not be granted. Since a receipt from Jacob Dyck of Chortitz satisfied the government and the patent was duly issued, the debt referred to may well have been that of his late father. The patent was issued on November 18, 1885.

This type of correspondence must have taxed the officials at the government offices, for every- thing had to be translated from German into English. A revealing note from R. Rauscher, a translator, expresses the hope that he will be paid for all this translation “if not here -- in the next world!!” (Homestead Files).

Peter Hiebert Jr. (born February 4, 1850) and his wife, Helena Gerbrand (born Dec. 24, 1852), cancelled their insurance on March 21, 1881 as did his brother Wilhelm and two other families. I have not been able to find where Peter and Helena Hiebert went, although it is possible that they moved to North Dakota where his brother Jakob settled in 1897.

Hanover tax records remain silent on this quarter section for a few years until about 1889 when Jacob Braun Sr. acquired it, probably for his newly married son, Abram Braun in whose name the title is later invested. There is no record of a residence such a Peter Hiebert must have built. By 1920 all evidence of such a yard had disappeared. However, in 1924-5 Abram’s son-in-law, Peter A. Falk, having sold his farm in Holfungnfeld to Peter Sawatzky, built a small house, barn and chicken coop here on his father-in-law’s land while he and the family waited to emigrate to Paraguay.

The buildings were located in a natural clear- ing towards the west part of the quarter. The yard at least was later sold to Jacob Kasper (and son Julius) when the Falks left in December 1926 for South America. Still later the place became something of an immigrant house for Mennonites coming from Russia, housing the Peter Thiessens for about a year before they purchased the Peter Harder place on SW 19-5- 5. For a short time Wilhelm Bergens lived here before they moved to Ontario, and then the place went into the hands of Jean Garand (known as a hunter). The last name that relates clearly to this place is the family name Rougeau. Today all that is left is a small basement with cracked walls at the edge of a clearing.

End of Part I.

Author’s Note: The other founding family will be discussed in the No. 15, December issue, of Preservings. Any updates and corrections of the above are welcome, as are any photographs of the pioneers or their homesteads.

Preservings

Coming in the next issue: Gnadenfeld, Part Two: The Funk Family, by Ernest Braun, Niverville, Manitoba.
Peter Heinrichs & Barbara Dyck Heinrichs

Peter Heinrichs (1832-1913) & Barbara Dyck Heinrichs (1833-1913), Heuboden, Berghal, Imperial Russia to Chortitz, Manitoba,
by Linda Buhler, Box 2895. Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.
Several years ago I was looking for photographs for my research on Mennonite burial customs and was shown a number of pictures of the Heinrichs and Penners of Halbstadt, West Reserve. At the time, this meant little, if anything, to me but then it became clear that the Penners and Heinrichs families had originated in the Rosengard and Chortitz, E. Reserve, areas. My husband’s grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Funk (Preservings, No. 10, Part Two, page 40) was still living at the time and so was able to confirm that indeed these photographs were of her grandparents and great-grandparents.

What a treasure to have come across! These photographs had been taken after these families had moved to the West Reserve and therefore had remained in the possession of family members there. However, Mrs. Katharine Penner, now Fernwood Place, had inherited these photographs from her parents, thereby bringing these historic pictures back to the area of these families’ Canadian roots. This article is a summary of the information I have found on the Peter Heinrichs family as well as the Abraham Penners.

Peter’s Parents.
Peter Heinrichs was born on September 28, 1832 to Peter Heinrichs (1804-49) and Maria Janzen (1810-52). His parents were married in 1828 and lived in Schönwiese, Chortitz Colonial before moving to Prangenau, Molotschna. According to Henry Schapansky, the Heinrichs family may have originated in Lithuania prior to settlement in Russia.

Peter’s mother, Maria Janzen was the daughter of Jacob Janzen (1783-1851) and Margaretha Eitzen (1789-1840). Both of Maria’s grandfathers were involved in holding church offices. Her paternal grandfather, Heinrich Janzen (1752-1824) came from Rosenkranz, Prussia to become the Elder of the Frisian Church in Schönwiese in 1797. Her maternal grandfather, Daniel Eitzen (b. 1759) became a deacon in the Kronsweide Church in 1790. A37.

Peter and Maria (Janzen) Heinrichs had 12 children which included two sets of twins. According to a great-granddaughter, Peter and Maria’s son Abraham (b. 1849) died enroute from Russia to Canada and was buried at sea. All except one emigrated to Canada. Son Kornelius (b. 1847) is said to have remained in Russia.

Barbara’s Parents.
Barbara was born on August 7, 1833, the daughter of Derk Dyck (1786-1850) and Sara Penner (1787-1847) BGB A107. Married on January 1, 1819, Derk and Sara lived in the village of Heuboden in the Berghal Colony. They had four children together before Sara died in 1847. Their daughter Elisabeth (b. 1828) married Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) (see Preservings No. 6, feature article).

Derk remarried in 1849 to Elizabeth Dyck (b. 1819), widow of Abraham Dyck. Elizabeth brought two sons, Johann and Abraham Dyck, into this marriage but little Abraham died in 1851. BGB A107a. Together, Derk and his new wife Elisabeth had another daughter, Helena who was born just two weeks before Derk himself died at the age of 64, leaving Elizabeth a widow just a year after their marriage.

Elisabeth having been over thirty years younger than Derk, remarried the following year to Abraham Flaming, a young man six years her junior, BGB A148. As little daughter Helena died in 1852, only her son Johann (from her first marriage) was brought up in this household. Together, Elisabeth and Abraham Flaming had another nine children (including one set of twins). They came to Canada in July 1874 on the S. S. Nova Scotian and went to North Dakota.

Peter and Barbara Heinrichs.
Baptized on the same day as his betrothed, May 28, 1851. Peter married Barbara Dyck on June 22, 1852. They emigrated to Canada, arriving in Quebec on the S. S. Manitoban in July 1875. Peter and Barbara arrived in Canada with six of their eight children as two children had died in Russia BGB B194. Two more sons were born after their settlement in Canada but both died in infancy.

It would appear that upon arrival in Canada, Peter Heinrichs first settled in Schönweng as their name appears under that village in the Brot Schult Registers (see Preservings No. 8, Pt. 11, p. 41). Homestead records show Peter Heinrichs having applied for the SE12-6-5E on September 7, 1875. This land, although in the Schönweng “district”, was actually closer to the village of Rosengart which was situated on the north half of this same section. One wonders where in Schönweng their three sons (Jacob, age 20, Derk 10, and newborn infant Diedrich) are buried as they all died within one month in the spring of 1877.

The Heinrichs family is again included for Schönweng in the 1881 Federal Census (where Peter’s name is incorrectly recorded as Heinrich 77

Peter Heinrichs & Barbara Dyck Heinrichs (b. 1833). Peter) but they are shown on the Seeelenliste for 1882/83 as residing in Chortitz, East Reserve. The family had other relatives that were residing in Chortitz as well. They were Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe who had been married to Barbara’s sister Elizabeth (Elizabeth had died in 1876, just a year following their immigration) and Peter’s sister Anna Heinrichs who was married to Peter Loewen.

The R.M. of Hanover Tax Records 1883/84 show Peter and Barbara as having 25 acres of land under cultivation in Chortitz as well as 134 acres pasture land. The assessment on their buildings was $100 which represented half of the appraised value. Among other items listed, their livestock consisted of 4 oxen, 3 cows, 3 yearlings, 3 calves and 3 swine. The Fire Insurance Records for Chortitz show that Peter Heinrichs owned a half of a threshing machine, presum-
ably with son-in-law Abram Penner who also had his half insured for $200.

Peter and Barbara moved to Blumenthal, West Reserve which was located north of Halbstadt. Peter’s sister Maria Heinrichs (1831-1904) who was married to Abram Friesen (1823-1903) had moved from Hochfeld, E.R., to Halbstadt, W.R. in 1881 BGB A166. They were the great-grandparents to science fiction writer, Alfred van Vogt (see Preservings, No. 10, Pt. 11, p. 66). Peter’s brother Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1829) and wife Maria nee Falk (b.1832) also lived in Halbstadt where Maria was called upon for her midwifery services. (Another Halbstadt family was Heinrich and Maria (Heinrichs) Abrams but at the time of writing, no connection has been made between these two families. See Preservings, No. 11, p.76.)

It is interesting to note that Maria (Falk) Heinrichs’ widowed father Wilhelm (b. 1797) had remarried to Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe’s widowed mother Agatha Dyck (b.1804) making Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe a step-brother-in-law to Peter Heinrichs and a brother-in-law to Peter Heinrichs BGB A28.

Barbara (Dyck) Heinrichs suffered from voozicht (dropsy) in her old age and became a considerable size due to water retention. She died on March 31, 1913 and her husband Peter passed away some six months later on October 3. Both were buried on their homestead in Blumenthal.

Maria Heinrichs Penner (1860-1941). Maria Heinrichs married Abram Penner (b. 1859), son of Abram Penner (1835-97) and his first wife Anna Froese (1832-74). Abram had come to Canada with his father and new step-mother (Anna Loewen), arriving on the S. S. Sarmation in July 1875. This family is shown as residents of Grünthal, E.R., in the 1881 census.

Following Abram and Maria’s marriage on March 16, 1879, they presumably resided with Maria’s parents in Schönenberg/Rosengart area as fire insurance records for that period show that Abram Penner had only furniture insured for the value of $50.00. Both they and Maria’s parents cancelled their fire insurance in Schönenberg on June 10, 1882 when both families moved to the village of Chortitz. Here, Abram bought a threshing machine with his father-in-law and insured his half for $200 in December 1883. On December 28, 1884 he insured a new house for $100 and a new barn for $100 which would indicate that they were no longer living with his parents-in-law as they did not have a dwelling insured up until this time.

Abram and Maria moved from Chortitz, E. Reserve to Blumenthal, W. R. (Halbstadt area) where the Heinrichs family also settled. The exact year of their move is not known but their son Johann was born there in 1887. Abram died quite suddenly on July 25, 1898 (church records state July 28) at the age of 39. Oral history has two conflicting stories about his death. One story states that he felt sick while attending church and died that same afternoon of what they thought was a heart attack, while the other version says that he travelled (by foot?) to Winnipeg on an extremely hot July day and died when he stopped at a beer parlour and drank an ice-cold beer too quickly.

Left a widow with a family to raise, Maria remarried on May 21, 1899 to widower Peter Neufeld (b.1854). It is possible that Maria and Peter had known each other while they both resided on the East Reserve as Maria had lived in Schönenberg and Peter in neighbouring Rosengart. Peter’s parents were Jacob Neufeldt (b.1818) and Katarina Dyck (b.1817). Peter’s sister Maria married Jakob Dueck, Rosengart pioneer (see article in Preservings, No. 13, page 98). Peter’s first wife Anna Unrau (1861-98) had died following childbirth and was buried on NW13-1-1E in the Halbstadt area. She was the daughter of Rosengart pioneers Wilhelm Unrau (b. 1829) and Katarina Dyck (b.1836) BGB B193. Katarina was a sister to the aforementioned Jakob Dueck.

Although they had no children together, Maria and Peter Neufeld now had a combined family of 21 children, twelve of these being ten years of age or under. Peter’s two youngest children however did not grow up in this combined household. Peter’s newborn daughter Helena had been given at birth to a Friesen family in nearby Edenthal and raised there until she married. His daughter

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<td>Apr 6,1857</td>
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<td>Jul 29,1860</td>
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<td>Feb 4,1863</td>
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<td>Jun 27,1869</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johann Heinrichs</td>
<td>Nov 5,1865</td>
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<td>Derk Heinrichs</td>
<td>Sep 14,1867</td>
<td>May 27,1877</td>
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<td>Peter Heinrichs</td>
<td>Jul 28,1870</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Heinrichs</td>
<td>Nov 17,1872</td>
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<td>m. Abram Neufeld</td>
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<td>Diedrich Heinrichs</td>
<td>Apr 19,1877</td>
<td>Apr 30,1877</td>
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<td>Heinrich Heinrichs</td>
<td>Jul 5,1878</td>
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<td>1878</td>
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Preservings

Elizabeth (Heinrichs) Neufeld holding foster daughter Elisabeth and husband Abram Neufeld holding the hand of Elizabeth’s son Peter Heinrichs, Sara (Dyck) Heinrichs, Peter Heinrichs, Maria (Heinrichs) Neufeld and second husband Peter Neufeld, Anna (nee Penner-daughter of Maria Heinrichs Neufeld) and husband Abram Neufeld. Photo taken at Blumenthal, W. Reserve, 1899 or 1900. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Katharina Penner, Steinbach.
Elisabeth (b. 1896) was given to foster parents Abram and Elizabeth (Heinrichs) Neufeld. Little Elisabeth’s foster mother was a sister to her father’s new wife, Maria while her foster father was her father’s first cousin.

Peter Neufeld died on April 16, 1912 at the age of 57, presumably of a ruptured appendix. Thereafter, Maria’s three sons helped her farm the homestead. However, the Penner family was strongly affected when the flu epidemic spread across the West Reserve. Bernard died on November 11, 1918, followed the next day by his brother Jacob and two days later, on the day of their funeral, their brother Anton. (See photo in Preservings, No.10, Pt. 11, p. 80).

After the death of her three sons, Maria had no one to help her on the farm, causing her to sell the homestead and move to Altona. She died on June 30, 1941 and is buried in an unmarked cemetery on the old homestead where her parents, first husband Abram Penner, her five children and some seven other family members are buried. This graveyard is located on the SW/NW 23-1-1E. Although Peter Neufeld is not recorded as being buried there, some family members suggest that he was interred there as well.

Maria’s Children.

The children of Maria and her first husband, Abram Penner, are as follows:

Barbara (b. Feb. 8, 1880) married Johann W. Sawatzky who was ordained as a minister in the Chortitzer Church. They lived in Kronsagt, E. R., where Barbara died in 1925 (see Preservings, No. 10, Pt. 11, p.40; No. 11, p. 83). Descendants include my husband, Ron Buhrer of Hanks’s Upholstery, Audrey Goertzen of Town Square Stationary, and Frank Funk, a local realtor; Anna (b. 1881) married Abram Neufeld, son of Jakob and Helena (Penner) Neufeld. They moved to Lost River, Saskatchewan in 1913.


Abram (b. 1883) married his step-sister Anna Neufeld and moved from Halbstadt, W.R. to Gouldtown, Saskatchewan in 1912. Anna died on January 16, 1960 of liver cancer and her husband passed away the next day of pneumonia.

Peter (b. 1885) married Susanna Wiebe, daughter of William and Nettie (Dyck) Wiebe and lived in Melford, Saskatchewan area. Melvin Rush of Steinbach is a descendant.

Johann (b. 1887) married Maria W. Sawatzky of Kronsagt (a sister to Johann Sawatzky married to Barbara). They moved from the W. Reserve to Saskatchewan around 1910 and then left for Paraguay in the 1920s. Maria lived to be a 100 years and 8 months of age. Descendants include Erdmann Penner of Steinbach and Peter Enns of New Tribes Mission.

Bernhard (b. 1888) died of the flu in 1918.

Jakob (b. 1892) married Aganetha Hildebrand, daughter of Johann and Aganetha (Wiebe) Hildebrand. Jakob died in the flu epidemic in Nov. 1918 and she remarried to Jakob’s brother Kornelius. Descendants include daughter Mrs. Katherine Penner, Fernwood Place, Steinbach and granddaughter Lydia Penner, author of Hanover 100 Years.

Diedrich (b. 1894) married Margaretha Wiebe, daughter of Rev. Peter P. and Katharina T. (Funk) Wiebe from Barkfeld. E. R. Diedrich was a teacher at the Spencer School in Kronsagt from 1922-23.

Gerhard (1896-1906) was killed accidentally at the age of 10;

Kornelius (b.1897) married Maria Heinrichs in June 1918 but was left a widower when she died of the flu some six months later. He then remarried his brother Jacob’s widow, Aganetha; Anton (b. 1898) died of the flu in 1918.

Elisabeth Heinrichs Neufeld (b.1872).

Elisabeth Heinrichs (b. 1872) married Abram Neufeld (b.1871), son of Kornelius Neufeld (b.1818) and his third wife Elizabeth Neufeld (b.1837) BGB A83. Abram’s mother Elisabeth was a sister to the above mentioned Peter Neufeld’s father, Jacob. They were siblings of well-known centenarian Peter Neufeld of Kleeef No. 1 (see Preservings, No. 11, p. 64).

Elisabeth married Abram on June 17, 1895, bringing with her a son Peter Heinrichs (b.1895) born out of wedlock. Together Elisabeth and Abram became foster parents to little Elisabeth Neufeld, daughter of Peter Neufeld who had just married Elisabeth’s sister Maria.

Elisabeth and Abram moved to Didsbury, Alberta with their ready made family. Little Elisabeth lived there with them until she was about fourteen years old, at which time she moved back to her parental home.

Maria Penner, nee Heinrichs (b. 1860). Photo courtesy of Ben & Lena Neufeld, Codette, Saskatchewan.


The only existing photo of Abram Penner (b. 1859). Photo courtesy of Ben and Lena Neufeld, Codette, Saskatchewan.

Tragedy and Illness in the Penner Family.

Abram and Maria’s two daughters, Barbara and Maria died of a blood disorder now identified as “macrocytic, hyperchromic, megaloblastic anemia”, otherwise known as pernicious anemia which proved to be fatal until the mid-to later 1920s. This ailment has shown itself in subsequent generations but is now treatable.

Their son Gerhard died as a young lad of ten while fencing on the farm. He fell off his horse but got his foot caught in the stirrups and was dragged to his death.

As already mentioned, three of Abram and Maria (Heinrichs) Penner’s sons and one daughter-in-law died within a month of each other during the flu epidemic of 1918. But tragedy struck many times within the next generation. Of their grandchildren, one was killed by a train while trying to get the horse-drawn wagon across the train tracks, another drowned as a child, one died of gas poisoning and at least four died in traffic accidents.

Sources:


1878 Chortitzer Church Records, A135.

Sommerfelder Church Records p. 209, 341, 365


Telephone Interviews: Miss Sara Heinrichs, Winnipeg and Mrs. Barbara Rommel, Nipawin, Sask.
Family Background.
Agatha Wiebe’s maternal grandparents were Kornelius Wiebe (1821-96) and Agata Kroeker (1823-58) BGB A176, see family 7 in Berghthaler Wiebe article by Henry Schapansky, Preservations, No. 13, page 67. Together with their respective families, they moved from the Old Colony to begin life in one of the villages in the Bergthal Colony.

Kornelius and Agata married in 1845. When the village of Friedrichsthal was established in 1852, they moved there together with children Gerhard, Kornelius and Justina (Note One).

In 1858 Agata died, leaving five motherless children in Kornelius’ care.

In 1837 Johann Wiens married Susanna Dueck, daughter of Jacob and Helena Wall Dueck. Johann passed away in January, 1858 (Note Two). On April 27, 1858, three weeks after his first wife died, Kornelius Wiebe married the widow Helena Klassen Wiens. She gave birth to 12 children in 16 years, six of which grew to adulthood.

Emigration 1875.
In 1875 Kornelius and Helena Wiebe emigrated to Canada arriving in Quebec July 27, 1875, together with eight children (Note Three). They settled on the East Reserve in Manitoba in Schönsee, near Grunthal.

Daughter Maria was married to Johann Peters. They made their home in Weidenfeld on the north bank of Beaver Creek near Altona opposite the home of my grandparents, Peter B. and Anna Wiebe. Maria and Anna (my Grandma) were half-sisters. Some of Maria’s recollections of the pioneer days were later published (Note Four).

Kornelius and Helena Wiebe lived at Schönsee near Grünthal. Kornelius died in 1896. Helena was only 66 at the time. The time of her death is unknown.

Two of Kornelius Wiebe’s grandchildren grew up to be well-known figures in the medical field—Agatha, the subject of this story, and grandson, Cornelius, who became a family physician in Winkler and Manitoba’s first Mennonite M.L.A., and appointed to the Order of Canada in 1999.

They were the children of Anna, daughter of Kornelius Wiebe and Agata Kroeker. Anna married Peter B. Wiebe, son of Bernhard and Cornelia Wiebe, who settled in Weidenfeld in the West Reserve.

Peter B. and Anna Wiebe lived in Weidenfeld, near Rosenfeld, Manitoba, where Agatha was born in 1887. She had three older sisters, Cornelia 8, Anna, 4 and Helena one and-a-half years old.

Agatha recorded some memories of her childhood: “When I was six months old, two sisters, the oldest and the third died of diphtheria. My mother claimed my sister Anna had it too, but somehow or other she survived.... When I was two my sister Maria was born. She was small and a very happy child. She talked real soon and walked sooner than me. She was light and very quick. I was clumsy, fat and slow.”

After Maria’s birth, Peter and Anna had four sons. The three girls, older than the boys, were sent to Rosenfeld until they got a school closer to home in 1898. Later all of the Wiebe children attended MEI except Peter, my father, who preferred farming to sitting in school benches. Peter B. Wiebe was involved in establishing the MCI in Gretna which must have influenced Agatha in her educational interests.

Of her school days she writes as follows: “My school days I spent in Rosenfeld, since that was the only public school in our area. The school year was from November till March, according to the weather. When I was nine we got a public school in Weidenfeld and at age eleven my school days were over since my help was needed at home.”

Agatha remained on the farm till she was 17. Because of ill health the doctor recommended that she refrain from hard work but that she might go to school. In 1904 she registered at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute where she finished her Grade XI.

Nurse’s Training.
Agatha entered nurse’s training at the Evangelical Deaconess Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1911 at age 24. Her father, Peter B. took her down there and told her she would have to stay till she was finished for they could not afford to have her come home for a visit in between. She spent three years in training and graduated with an R.N. certificate in 1914.

Because her U.S. standing was not recognized in Canada she took a postgraduate course in communicable diseases at the King George Hospital in Winnipeg and then wrote her Canadian R.N. exams, thus receiving her Canadian standing. She served seven years as nurse in the TB Sanatorium in Ninette, Manitoba, ending up as head nurse in her last years there. Agatha may well have been one of the first Mennonite woman to graduate as a registered nurse.

Marriage, 1927.
In January 30, 1927 at the age of 40 she married 45-year old Frank F. Thiessen, a widower with eleven children. This gentleman was my mother’s oldest brother. Frank had lost his second wife Helena Peters (1884-1925), Agatha’s cousin, in childbirth. His baby son died three days later. The remaining children were between the ages of 21 and 3. This was a big job for a woman who had never had a family of her own. As head nurse at the Ninette Sanatorium she had had experience in organization and dealing with people. However, being a stepmother to a bunch of teenagers as well as young children turning out to be quite different. The older girls had already grown accustomed to managing the household on their own. It was a difficult adjustment for everyone concerned.

Three years after Agatha married, on January 28, 1930, she gave birth to a son and named him Ben. A year and nine months later on October 17, 1931, she had a second son whom they named Otto.

Since Frank and Agatha Thiessen were related to me from both sides of the family, we got together with them a fair bit. My impression of my aunt was that she had inner strength and fortitude, with a positive Christian spirit. There was not much that daunted her. This was evident in her life when one observes that she blazed a trail by going to St. Louis for her U.S., training at the Evan-
Editor’s Note: Readers are reminded that in conservative/orthodox Mennonite culture, women were considered the primary providers of medical services, acting as midwives, nurses, chiropractors and even doctors. The most widely known example is the famous Dr. Bergensche, nee Justina Loewen (1828-1905), Mountain Lake, Minnesota, who attended at 11,000 childbirths in her career spanning two continents and two centuries. Women such as Agatha Wiebe and Agnes Fast (1883-1977), the Florence Nightingale of Steinbach, were among the first to transfer this caregiver tradition into the fledgling public health system. The first permanent doctor’s office in Steinbach was opened by Dr. Graham in 1895, where the P. B. Reimer store later stood. See Preservings, No. 10, Part One, page 6, and East Reserve 125, page 38.

In 1997 the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, Manitoba, had a display in their front foyer of some memorabilia of Agatha Wiebe’s nursing education and career. Standing beside the display from left to right: Agatha’s son, Otto Thiessen, her step-daughter, Anne Thiessen Reimer and Marjorie Wiebe- Hildebrand, her niece.

Inoculations in the school at Kane. She was always very willing to lend a hand whenever assistance was needed.

Retirement, 1958.
When they retired in 1950, they moved to Home Street in Steinbach. After Agatha was widowed in May 1959, she married Jacob J. Klassen, also of Steinbach, in August of that year. He died in 1961, leaving her a widow for the second time.

Her last eight years were spent in the Salem Personal Care Home in Winkler. Even though physically she was not very active, her mind was keen almost till the end. She spent much of her time crocheting and fabric painting. She suffered her first of several strokes in April, 1979 and died on December 6, 1979 at the age of 92.

Endnotes:
Note Four: Toews and Klippenstein, Manitoba Mennonite Memories, page 95, and republished in Preservings, No. 8, Part One, page 42.
Johann P. Thiessen (1852-1920): State Legislator

Johann P. Thiessen (1852-1920), Jansen, Nebraska, businessman and State legislator, by Delbert F. Plett. Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, from the Abraham von Riesen Family History, publication forthcoming.

Johann P. Thiessen (1852-1920) was the son of Kleine Gemeinde (KG) minister Peter F. Thiessen (1808-73), Schönau, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, where they owned Wirtschaft 3 (1835 census). Johann’s mother was Margaretha W. Friesen (1810-77), daughter of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (von Riesen) (1782-1849), Ohrloff, the great KG expositor, church statesman, and associate of neighbour and friend, Johann Cornies.

Johann P. Thiessen married Aganetha Heidebrecht (1852-1933), daughter of Peter Heidebrecht (1815-96), Blumstein, a wealthy KG Vollwirt. In 1869 the family moved to Borosenko where Peter purchased 400 desjatien of land (1100 acres). In 1874 the Heidebrecht family emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska, with the Heubodner Gemeinde where Peter acquired 1280 acres. By 1880 he had 300 acres cultivated, farm property worth $11,000, 67 head of cattle and 26 head sold, valued at an additional $2250.

Johann P. Thiessen emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska, in 1874 with the Heubodner Gemeinde under Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, his cousin. The group had sold their farms and pooled the money amounting to $80,000. Thiessen was one of three men appointed holder of the company purse. While waiting to embark, one of the three, another cousin Peter L. Friesen (Note One) died leaving Johann and J. J. Fast in charge.

D. Paul Miller has written that “Thiessen was responsible for securing passports, looking after their welfare on the voyage and assuming leadership after arrival in the new land. He bought considerable land in addition to that which Peter Jansen (a second cousin) had arranged for and later resold it to the settlers at cost, ranging from three to five dollars per acre.”

Johann P. Thiessen settled along Russian Lane on the north side in the village of Rosenhof. He was a successful farmer with 290 acres cultivated land and a farm property worth $10,000 in 1880. Miller has written “At first Thiessen lived on a farm near Jansen. Later he set up a hardware and implement business in Fairbury and when the Town of Jansen was founded he started the first store in town, another hardware and implement store. The post office was also located in his store and he was the first postmaster. He carried on his business in Jansen until his death in 1920.”

“He was a prominent member of the business community in Jansen, Nebraska, and also served for a time in the State House of Representatives” (Note Two).

Johann P. Thiessen was a sound-minded man and maintained a sense of humour relating to all the Revivalist groups swarming around the KG in Jansen, Nebraska, each one claiming possession of ultimate truth and attempting to break apart their families and communities. Thiessen served for a time in the State House of Representatives in Jansen, Nebraska, and also served as a member of the State Legislature from 1907 to 1911.

Johann P. Thiessen (1852-1920), successful Jansen, Nebraska, business man. He was also active in various community enterprises serving as President of the Jansen State Bank, of which he was the founder. He also served two terms in the Nebraska State Legislature, one of the first Russian Mennonites to enter politics in North America. Johann was a brother to Abraham F. Thiessen (1832-89), the famous Russian Mennonite revolutionary: see Preservings, No. 12, page 13. In their community work, publications, and personal business endeavours, both Johann and Abraham reflected the social consciousness philosophy of their famous Bishop grandfather, Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, a philosophy taken up almost a century later by modern-day organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee.

Johann P. Thiessen served as the second Brandaeltester of the Jansen community. In 1910 he wrote a lengthy report regarding the affairs of the mutual insurance company which he headed (Note Three).

Endnotes:
Note One: Peter L. Friesen was the great-grandfather of Dwight Reimer, Councilor, City of Steinbach.
Note Two: Paul Miller, A Case Study of Jansen, Nebraska, 125-128, for additional information regarding Johann Thiessen.
Note Three: Gerhard T. Thiessen, page 53.

Susi Heide de Thiessen and husband Mark Thiessen and children Karia and Itali. They are sitting in a very special grainery. The wood for this grainery was brought along from Canada by Susi’s great-grandfather Klaus Heide, one of the original delegates to Mexico, 1919-22. Susi compiled the “Our Yard and Home” column for the Rundschau for 2 1/2 years. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, 17 February 1999, page 3.
Introduction, by the Editor.

Over the past century-and-a-quarter hundreds of families have left the Hanover Steinbach area for distant distinctions, for a variety of reasons whether in search of new opportunities, religious freedom, and possibly even adventure. The story of Abraham I. Friesen is about such a family and illustrates the experience of these immigrants. Born in Imperial Russia (presumably in Kleefeld, Molotschna), Abraham came to Canada with his parents as a 12 year-old lad, settling in Blumenort, where his father served as mayor.

At age 24, Abraham married Maria Wiebe, daughter of Steinbach pioneer Johann Wiebe (1841-1909). The wedding took place not in the local Kleine Gemeinde worship house but in Chortitz, the church which the Wiebe family had joined because of various differences. In 1889 the young couple was living in Gretna where Abram was going to school.

The young couple settled on her father’s Wirtschaft 14 opening a machinery dealership across the street where Steinbach Lumber Yards was later located. Friesen became the dealer for “Peterson Machinery Co”. On September 2, 1896, Abraham’s brothers Isaac and Klaas came to help him move a barn across the street.

In 1905 the Friesens joined the Wiebes and a small group of Kleine Gemeinde associated families from Steinbach and Blumenort, moving to the Herbert area, Saskatchewan.

In the meantime, two of Abraham’s brothers and their families followed him to Steinbach where they became well-known. The oldest, Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941), was a partner in the Steinbach flour mill and grandson, Frank F. Reimer became the founder of Reimer Express. Younger brother Klaas I. Friesen (1868-1927), was a teamster and owned a livery barn in Steinbach for many years. His son-in-law C. T. Loewen, was the founder of Loewen Millwork, see Preservings, No 8, June 1996, Part One, pages 54-55, and No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, pages 55-56, for additional information regarding the Klaas I. Friesen family.

There is a further Steinbach connection in that Abraham I. Friesen’s daughter Maria (1888-1958) married George Starfield, a one-time barber in Steinbach, and possibly remembered by a few old-timers.

The descendants of those who left the East Reserve, Hanover Steinbach, for greener pastures over the past century and a quarter, must number in excess of 30,000. The Abraham I. Friesen family is part of that diaspora and its experience speaks for many of those moving forth to new lands and places—Editor’s Note.

“The Abraham I. Friesen Story” by Lydia Schroeder.


Four of their children were born in the Steinbach area. They seemed to move frequently from Steinbach to Giroux to Winkler. It was in Winkler where Abram I. Friesen had a cobbler’s shop. Also his youngest son Henry was born here in 1906.

Some time after this, perhaps 1908-1909 the family moved to the Herbert-Rush Lake area. During the next four years, the father, Abram I. Friesen, and three of his sons, namely Abram W. Friesen, Peter W. Friesen, and John W. Friesen, took up homesteads. Municipal records show that Abram I. Friesen had NE 13-16-11; Abram W. Friesen had SE 18-16-10; Peter W. Friesen had NW 21-16-10, and John W. Friesen had the NE 18-15-10.

While proving up their homesteads, the boys took other jobs. Peter W. Friesen worked in the printing office in Herbert. John W. Friesen and Abram W. Friesen had clerking jobs.

Abram W. Friesen.

Abram W. Friesen - hereinafter named as A.W. as he was always called - would walk to Herbert, a distance of 12 miles to clerk in Kroeker’s Store - and home again at night. He married Helena Friesen in 1917 and they continued farming, purchasing more land from homesteaders who wished to sell. A.W. started farming with oxen, then progressed to horses. About 1924 they rented out their farm and left to build a store at Neidpath, Saskatchewan.

At this point, Mrs. A.W. became very ill. They travelled far and wide - as far as the Mayo Clinic in Rochester to get medical help but none was available. Doctors couldn’t even diagnose the disease at that time. Today we know it as Multiple Sclerosis. So the store in Neidpath was sold and they moved to Herbert, where A.W. had a machine agency and a coal and wood shop. He also operated the Lake of the Woods elevator and sold gas and oil for Imperial Oil. During this time he did his utmost to provide adequate care for his bedridden wife and two daughters.

It was during this time that his interest in flying developed and he, along with three other men, bought an airplane.

In 1936 - the middle of the Dirty Thirties, when everyone was poor and penniless, it was impossible to make a living operating a business in town. Every sale was on credit. So the A.W. Friesen family moved back to their original farm. This was a drastic change for their children who now had to poison gophers and help to stack Russian thistles for cattle feed - in the blowing dust.

They continued farming until 1950 when A.W. retired to Herbert. He never lost his interest in flying and bought his own Luscombe airplane which he flew until age 70.

Mrs. A.W. Friesen passed away after 27 years of illness in 1954 and A.W. passed away in 1967.

Two daughters were born to this union but since there was no son - the family name will not be carried on.

Ruth married Frank Wall and they had four children - two daughters and two sons. Lydia married Abe Schroeder and they had six children - four daughters and two sons. The children from both these families are grown up and married now with families of their own.

John W. Friesen.

John W. Friesen sold his homestead and got a job on the CPR railroad. At some point a mishap occurred for which he was blamed - but later exonerated. Nevertheless due to the accident and the blame, he was given so many demerit points that he had to be fired from his job. His boss, however, liked him and his work ethic and told him to change his name and re-
Peter W. Friesen. Third son of Abram I. Friesen took up a homestead in the Herbert-Rush Lake area in 1913. He was conscripted into the army in 1916 - at age 21. Some of his letters to A.W. indicated that he had a girlfriend in France. In one of his letters he also mentioned that when they came out of the trenches - dirty, hungry and tired - that the Salvation Army was there, ready to help them, whether they had money or not. They got a bath, clean clothes, food and a bed. This was apparently not the case with other organizations on the spot. If you had money they helped, if you didn’t they didn’t.

Peter W. Friesen made the supreme sacrifice for his country on November 11, 1917. He was buried in Flanders Fields.

Since he had no offspring, the family name could not be carried on through him.

Maria W. Friesen.

Now to Abram I. and Maria Friesen’s only daughter, and their first-born child.

Maria W. Friesen married George Starfield, a barber, in Herbert in 1912. He died in 1924 of the terrible flu epidemic which swept the prairies. To this union three children were born - two daughters and one son. Carl Starfield also made the supreme sacrifice - giving his life in World War II. He was killed in 1944.

After her husband died, Maria W. Friesen (Starfield) moved in with her parents, Abram I. and Maria Friesen. Moved in, with, and moved around - even to Dallas, Oregon. The parents vacillated between Canada and Oregon, USA frequently. Abram I. Friesen’s moved to Dallas for the first time in about 1923 with their youngest son, Henry W. Friesen.

Henry W. Friesen.

Henry W. Friesen found work in the USA doing every sort of job he could find. In time he was employed by the Southern Pacific Railroad. When his parents moved back to Canada, he, of course stayed in the USA. There he married Annette Carpenter in 1929. By this time he had become the conductor on the Southern Pacific Railroad. He retired from this job after 35 years of service. He died in Salem, Oregon in July 1990 at age 84. To this union one son was born.

Hooray!

Finally a son - named Theodore William Friesen. But alas, he never married - thus no offspring. So when he passes away, the Abram I. Friesen family name is gone. Wiped off the map. Annette, Mrs. Henry W. Friesen died in Salem, Oregon in July 1995 at age 91.

Finally back to Abram I. and Maria Friesen. They came back from the USA in 1933 and lived with their daughter, Maria W. Starfield at Riverhurst, Saskatchewan. From there they moved to Dundurn, Saskatchewan. Here, Abram I. Friesen died in September 1938 and is buried in the Hillside Cemetery in Dundurn.

After his death Mrs. Abram I. (Maria) and her daughter, Maria W. Starfield moved to Alberta. They lived at Lethbridge, Coaldale, and Calgary. After Maria Starfield died in 1958, Mrs. Abram I. Friesen was put into a Personal Care Home in Coaldale, Alberta where she passed away in 1964 at the age of 97.

Abram I. Friesen story by Lydia Schroeder, Box 426 Wawanesa, Manitoba, R0K 2G0.

Sources:

- History Book Committee, Excelsior Echos (Rush Lake, Saskatchewan, 1984), page 675-76.

See article about son “Peter W. Friesen: Steinbach War Hero” in Preservings, No. 13, page 49.

Considerable information about Abraham I. Friesen can be found in the journals of his father, Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908), Blumenort, Manitoba.
Maria Dueck Ginter (1909-90): Chiropractor

Maria Dueck Ginter (1909-90), Chiropractor.”A special woman with a special gift,”
by granddaughter Karen Bergen, Box 2293, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.
Maria Dueck Ginter was “a special woman with a special gift.”

Maria lived her entire life in Rosengard, but she made an impact in many people’s lives with her gift of chiropractering that reached far beyond the area.

Maria was born on October 1, 1909 to Diedrich N. (Derk) and Agatha Dueck—see article by Linda Buhler, “Jakob and Maria Neufeldt Dueck, Rosengard,” in Preservations, No. 13, pages 98-101. She was the second of seven children. The old house in which she was born is still standing, today on SW18-6-6E, just west of the Rosengard church. Her first years were spent in that house with her family as well as her dad’s brother Jacob Dueck’s family, until such a time that a house was built just a little east on the same section of land.

Marriage, 1927.
Maria married Peter G. Friesen (son of John P. and Maria Friesen) from Schönfeld (Kleefeld area) on April 3, 1927. They had discussed their wedding plans ‘up pleasch’ behind a haystack and then his parents had come visiting to decide on marriage plans for them. They got married at Johann Friesen’s and lived in a old house on the same yard as his parents.

There was no church set up at the time and neighbours got together in their homes. If someone wanted to get married, they did so that Sunday and whoever was there then stayed for lunch. Sometimes a roof was attached to the house quickly beforehand with slabs and hay put over to provide a place out of the sun for guests. The neighbours joined in to celebrate and wish the new couple well.

Not long after their marriage Maria and her husband moved back to SW18-6-6E to set up a homestead just north of her parents’ place. They used four-foot logs filled with clay to construct their small home. Later, Peter with his father-in-law operated a sawmill on their yard. This important service was used by many residents in the area. They would bring trees which they would help cut into boards, etc. for building projects.

At age 29 Maria’s husband, Peter G. Friesen died of typhoid fever, leaving her with three young children: Maria age 10, Anna age three, and Peter seven months. Only her strong determination in raising her children and her Christian faith kept her going through a very rough time. Peter’s brother and sister also died from this disease and his infant son Peter was hospitalized at this time.

Peter G. Friesen’s funeral preparations/service were held on his parents’ yard. A neighbour, Mr. Block built the coffin.

Another neighbour, Anne Toews kindly sewed dresses for Maria’s two daughters to wear to the funeral. Once again the residents in this small community shared and helped carry each others’ burdens.

At that time when news needed to be relayed there was a chosen fence post on the “Huechriegje” (“high ridge road, later PR. 303”) that people could nail their messages onto. This means of communication was used to convey news of community events such as a funeral.

In her marriage with J. S. Ginter, Maria had a daughter Agatha (1945) and a daughter Tina who died on her birthdate in November, 1951. Losing Tina was very difficult.

Widowhood.
Welfare at this time we believe gave her $45.00 a month. A representative from welfare came and asked Maria at first to sell her only white horse (called Jinn) and only cow so that they would not need to give her as much. She explained that she needed the horse for transportation and the cow for milking. They allowed her to keep them.

Once upon returning to their small home after being at her parents (Derk Duecks’) they smelled smoke. Upon investigating, a fire was found in the clothes cupboard. Maria quickly used the standing wash water. It appears a mouse had chewed on some matches and it had ignited the clothes.

Second Marriage.
Four years later she remarried to Jacob S. Ginter, son of D.D. Ginter and Maria Ginter. They moved the house (with horses) a mile south of High Ridge Road to 80 acres of bush where there was not even a clearing large enough to set up a table. They added a lean-to the house. Later in their marriage they moved on a two-storey house from Steinbach.

The road past their property was sometimes impassable, even for horses. A couple of times a horse died after being sucked in by the mud, making it impossible to get out. A hard loss for any farmer.

The morning of November 16, Maria was not getting out of bed. Daughter Agatha could not understand why mother wasn’t making her breakfast. Her father had gone to call the doctor from a neighbour’s phone.

Agatha was taken to her Ginter grandparents. She still remembers being told later that she had a sister but that she was gone to be an angel. When she returned home she saw her on the “schlopenk” in her parents’ bedroom.

A neighbour, Abram Dueck built Tina’s coffin. Agatha gave one of her doll pillows to put under her head.

Maria bore her grief silently and never got to use the baby clothes that she had ready. She used to worry when her daughters and granddaughters would make preparations during their pregnancies because she had experienced this loss.

Chiropractory, 1961.

It was only in her fifties that Maria began to become known as “Trachtmoaka Ginterasche”. She started helping others in 1961 through chiropractering with the help of her father, Derk N. Dueck, who was also a chiropractor, as well as an auctioneer, dentist and trapper. Before her father died in 1963 he had guided and helped her along by sharing his knowledge and encouraging her. She could never have imagined how much in demand and how well known she would become. As a young mother, Maria herself was helped by his chiropractic treatments. She suffered severe pain and could not even turn herself over. Her husband at that time. Peter G. Friesen would come in from the saw mill and fed her. He then instructed his oldest daughter Mary to take care of Anne while he went back outside. Her father helped make her mobile again with using rubbing ointment on her. Bear fat (sun melted) was one commonly used remedy.

When you came to Maria Dueck Ginter’s house the smells of liniment, wonder oil, or Schlag wasser, were very common. There were many nights when the living room was filled with people, waiting sometimes for hours for her welcome touch.

Maria looked on this gift as a mission God had entrusted to her to use for the betterment of the lives of many people. She always took time for everyone and never made you feel that you shouldn’t be there bothering her. She accepted whatever token people wanted to give her with complete humility, for you see, she was not permitted to charge a fee for she was not “licensed”.

She was known to relax her patients with her vibrating chair or hand held vibrators before she would work on their problem. I remember one incident which occurred while I was visiting her. A car drove up and a man came to the door and
asked my grandma to come look at his wife’s leg. She had stayed in the car, so of course I went outside too, and listened as my grandma instructed her to go straight to the hospital for her leg was badly broken. I was amazed that they would come to see her in such great pain before going to the doctors.

I have heard accounts of young women who could not conceive, coming to Maria Ginter’s to have their wombs turned so that they could bear children. Another time, one woman had been in an accident and her ribs were overlapping. She was told to accept that for the rest of her life but she came to Maria Ginter’s and grandma had many sessions with her until her rib cage was put back to normal.

Being available and making housecalls if the patients could not come in sometimes meant going out at night with someone she had never met to help their family member in pain.

One young lad (about 12 years-old) was brought to her place by his father. He had not walked in two years and was carried into the house. Maria rubbed liniment on his legs and back. She worked on him for over an hour. She was going to do everything possible to give this boy a chance to walk again. When she was done, she helped support him on her arm and encouraged him to take a few steps. The father was so grateful that Maria had helped his son to walk again that his tears flowed.

A couple of licensed chiropractors in the surrounding area were not pleased with Maria’s success. She was sent a government letter saying she could not charge a fee for her services. A policeman, nun and a nurse helped her to continue by helping her understand that it would be okay as long as her clients just put whatever payment they wanted to give her on the liniment dresser. Some clients did not give anything, others brought meat or vegetables or clothing, it was always accepted. Some doctors even sent her clients at this time. She became so well known, it was necessary for her to set aside one or two nights a week, otherwise the phone calls and steady stream of vehicles were too much.

Family Life.

Maria Dueck Ginter loved people and enjoyed getting company. Children always got a treat from her candy jar on the dresser. She made you feel welcome and only called it a visit if you stayed for something to eat. She would say “blief nonh bat langa, wee muta isght vot ata. (Stay a little longer, we must first eat a little).”

Maria was always ready to share whatever she had and although she did not think it was much, we enjoyed her hospitality and felt she had had too much variety! She never used a recipe book for baking or canning. She always felt the molasses and cream cookies should be iced for company.

At one point in her life, they had a large patch of beans that they planted and picked. They then brought the beans to a factory in St. Boniface for much needed cash. Gardening at that time was not a hobby, but a needed food supply for your family. One incident that is remembered was when Maria’s husband’s grandma Ginter came to visit. Maria watched in astonishment when she saw her go and cut off a chokecherry stick and start whipping her cucumber plants! She thought the old lady was ruining her garden but she came in and calmly said, now you’ll get cucumbers because there were too many blooms and the plants were not bearing. She was right, next week she had lots of cucumbers.

One day, when they came home, they discovered a family of nine filling their pockets with peas and carrots. Many of the plants had been pulled out by the children but the parents just said we are here for supper. Maria didn’t say nothing but went ahead and served them many pans of fried potatoes. They went away before helping wash dishes and without knowing that Maria had hidden her tears and disappointment from them.

After her parents died, Maria and her sister Anna took turns having their brother Abram live with them. She appreciated his organ playing. Abram was missed when he died four years later (1969) after a struggle with cancer.

Christmas.

Christmas was always a special time of getting together as families. Derk Dueck would always ask the grandchildren questions about the reason for Christmas. A tradition they had was leaving a enamel bowl at their place on the table on Christmas Eve. When awakening on Christmas morning they would usually find an orange, a couple of candies, peanuts, and a homemade gift, mitts or socks. This tradition is still kept in her daughter Agatha’s (Fehr) family today. Her children remember how overjoyed their mother was one Christmas when she got a 100 pound bag of flour from her parents.

A New Years’ Eve traditional meal at Derk Dueck’s was enjoyed by their children and grandchildren many of those years. Cabbage borscht, farmer sausage, and “portzeljhe” was served. Then close to the New Year, the women would go and stand behind their man’s chair and give them a New Year’s kiss.

On December 12, 1972. Mama and Jacob S. Ginter lost their two-storey home completely to a chimney fire. They were home at the time but were unable to stop it and saved very little of their belongings. They both suffered from smoke inhalation. Our gathering was held at their son Pete’s place that Christmas and we sure noticed that the grandparents were finding it hard to have to start all over again. Grandma insisted on replacing the burnt childrens’ gifts, although she could not really see how everything was going to work out.
They were overwhelmed with the generosity shown them by the Rosengard church members who bought them a house to move onto the property. The $1500 insurance went towards a basement. Later, with many more grandchildren to enjoy gathering for Christmas, we always had 100% turnout for it was an important time for family togetherness.

Maria took a keen interest in all her children’s and grandchildren’s lives. She always made sure we all had enough to eat and enjoyed the Christmas carols sung. She always handed out silver dollars and gifts to everyone. Halvah was only one of many types of candy there.

Death 1990.

In January of 1990, Maria suffered a heart attack and that coupled with asthma made it hard for her to be as active as she had been. It was a shock to all of us when she died early one Monday morning after an asthma attack in July of 1990.

“De Fiey Dokta”

“De Fiey Dokta”: Johann Schultz Kehler 1894-1962 and Annie Unger Wieler 1901-1991, by son Glen Kehler, Box 280, Oakbank, Manitoba, R0E 1J0.

Introduction.

Johann S. Kehler was the fourth of Jacob K (Berliner) Kehler’s eight sons. He filled an essential service in and around the Steinbach area from about 1937 to 1959. Since the southeast of Manitoba was a fast growing agricultural area, the need for a Veterinarian was very apparent to John, who as a young man, had taken a keen interest in animal health.

During the early 1930s John contracted typhoid fever and having survived the dreaded illness, he was further bedridden with severe arthritis and sciatica, which affected his legs. This was an opportunity to study veterinary medicine, and he went about procuring many books on the subject. John soon struck up an acquaintance with two Doctors of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Manitoba. Dr. Savage is the only name I recall, but both were very helpful and encouraging and furthered John’s career with good books and advice.

This relationship continued for many years. When John was in doubt or stumped with a new problem he would load the animal into his car and take a run to the U. of M. and they would perform an autopsy. If the animal was too large a load to take along in the car, he would take the diseased body part along for a thorough diagnosis in order to have a remedy to prevent or cure the problem.

Veterinarian Problems.

Every farmer worked at improving their beef and/or dairy herd by introducing better and larger bulls. But this compounded the calving problems which were a large part of John’s workload. This was often a very strenuous task. In winter he worked in cold drafty barns where he would have to strip down to his waist for the work at hand. This took it’s toll on his health, but there was no thought of asking the farmer to bring the animal to him...

John was quite innovative and made the most of his harnesses and devises to perform the difficult tasks, some of which were in rather confined space.

Hogs were a rather easy animal to raise until the advent of feed additives to enhance growth. These were made by the feed companies some of whom added harmful fillers to the concentrate, which after an autopsy revealed that it had burned the lining of the stomach. John was a strong advocate against these harmful concentrates, and eventually the feed companies had to clean up their act.

Around 1938 a very serious outbreak of Equine Encephalitis, commonly known as sleeping sickness in horses, ravaged southeastern Manitoba. Since every farmer had a barn full of horses, which played a large role in the operation of most farms, this was devastating. There was no known cure for this illness, and horses were dying everywhere.

It did not take long for John to come to the rescue. He knew that it was an inflammation of the brain, and if he could get the fever under control and eliminate the bodily waste manually, he could save the animal...and it worked.

Word spread about his success. This kept him going day and night throughout the summer. He would phone home for messages and go from farm to farm. In between John made pickups at C. T. Loewen’s ice house for ice packs for the horses’ heads. This, more than anything else, gave John’s career the boost it needed. In short order, John knew everyone within a 30 mile radius and all the farmers knew him, and they also knew he was only a phone call away day or night. He often said that he knew every rabbit trail and could follow them all with his 1929 Ford Model A. Since many roads were no more than wagon ruts through the bush, John got through even if he had to put the Fort in gear and get out to push. During the winter he would equip the Model A with “Knobby” tires and a set of chains if needed.

After some of the memorable snowstorms, John had to resort to hiring the local “snow plane” in emergency cases, but only as a last resort.

Tuberculosis.

Over the years Tuberculosis was a silent and ever present problem for the cattle farmers which had to be addressed. The farmers were shipping their milk to the Winnipeg creameries and their beef to the packers. If it was discovered that the animals were not fit for human consumption, the farmers would not be compensated. No one could afford that.

The Provincial and the Federal Governments joined forces to eradicate the disease once and for all. In about 1944 John teamed up with Dr. Edmond Gariepy who had opened a clinic in St. Pierre. Dr. Gariepy was a graduate of Veterinary Medicine from a Quebec university. They would travel together two days a week and test every animal in the southeast district. The animals that tested positive had to be shipped to the packers in Winnipeg. The farmer was paid market price for the edible part of the animal, which went into KLIK, and the contaminated parts went as animal food, for which the Government reimbursed the farmer.

Once the diseased animals were culled, the farmer had to sanitize the barn to John’s satisfaction. After the T. B. testing was completed, Dr. Gariepy eventually went back to Quebec and John resumed his practice as before.

John had a small office where he had his library and his various medications. In many cases he would mix it as a liquid and/or fill capsules which he would dispense and sell to the farmers or administer to the animal himself. He also had jars of horse teeth which he had pulled over the years. This was an impor-
tart part of his work. If horses had tooth problems they would not eat and would be useless as a work animal. Horses’ teeth had to be filed if they grew uneven and extracted if loose.

Horse dentistry required a full set of tools, which included files of various abrasiveness, various sizes of long-handled extractors, large and small cutters and, most importantly, the hold-open device to keep the animal’s jaw wide open allowing John to work safely in the horse’s mouth.

Memorable Cases.

During the late 1930s there was a farmer living east of Steinbach, who had a violent temper and also a drinking problem, and would abuse his wife and horses. It seemed that nothing could be done to stop this cruelty, until this man’s brother-in-law asked John and the R.C.M.P. officer to accompany him to this man’s farm and check the horses. John deemed the animals near death due to starvation and beatings.

This was enough to send the man to jail for six month and 10 lashes. The man was cured completely, but it was the cruelty to the animals that finally put a stop to the abuse. When he was released from jail he sold his farm and moved to another town, got a job and had a good life with his family.

During his years attending to sick animals, John ran across many birth defects, and deformed animals including extra legs. One of the memorable cases was the delivery of a two-headed calf, which lived for only a few minutes. The calf was beautifully formed with a short neck and two heads.

John was not to keen on working on small animals, but would not let them suffer. I remember occasions when people would bring in their dogs that had attacked a porcupine. The poor animals who’s mouths and paws were full of quills cried in agony when John had to remove them. This was very painful for the animal as well as for me when I had to help.

And there were the sad times when people, usually from Winnipeg, brought their faithful pets in for humane euthanasia. Oh, the tears that were shed when the owners would pick up their much loved pets for burial.

During the war years the gasoline and tires were rationed. Because a Veterinarian was deemed an essential service, John was issued extra ration books and was able to carry on as before. The tires were poorly made from synthetic rubber so a good jack and tire-patching kit was also an essential part of John’s travel kit.

Humour.

John had a trait in finding humor in most situations. I recall many humorous stories he told us and many were also told about him.

One dark spring night, he received an urgent phone call from a farmer east of La Broquerie. The farmer could only speak a few words of English, and said “John come quick, my cow she has milk fever!” He gave his name, and that was all John needed. He quickly got dressed and jumped into his Model A. He left the yard almost on two wheels, as milk fever is a fatal illness if not treated within a short time of onslaught. He drove as fast as the rough roads allowed, finally turning into the driveway and jumping out of the car with satchel in hand while the car was still rolling, running into the barn.

There he saw the cow dead laying in the aisleway with the farmer holding up a lantern, standing over the cow with tears in his eyes because this was the best cow in his barn. He stood there silently.

Finally the farmer turned to John and said in broken English, “Funny ting she never die before”.

On another occasion he was called to a farm south of Steinbach, and upon arrival, the farmer’s wife came out to greet John, and pointing to the pig barn said “Jake is in the pig barn go on in. You’ll recognize him, he’s the one with the cap on.”

On yet another occasion he was called to a widow’s farm near Kleefeld. He was greeted by a young lad about 10 years old, who acted as if he was the man in charge, and asked if he could help? and John assured him he most certainly could.

They walked into the barn and the young lad pointed out the sick cow, and asked what he could do? John told him to stand behind the cow and he would go to the front of the cow. He then told the lad to lift the cows tail, which he did. John asked “Can you see me?” The boy said “no.” and John said “Just as I thought Faschtuped - constipated.” The young boy told me this story after he grew up, and thought it very humorous, and was not offended.

Retirement.

John enjoyed his work and never refused anyone his services and in many cases was never paid for his work. In many instances the poorer farmers just could not come up with the few dollar fee he asked for. In some instances he accepted payment in moose or deer meat, which was a pleasant change from our steady diet of pork. John never kept a record of debts owed, possibly not a good business practice.

John retired at age 65 when his health slowed him down. But he enjoyed telling us stories about his years as a Veterinarian, especially the humorous ones. He left us with a life time of good memories.
Growing Up.

When she was a student in Home Economics at the University of Manitoba from 1939 to 1942, some of Esther Goossen’s classmates wrote “personality ratings” for her. Esther was praised for her tidy hair, industry, energy, and loyalty to her friends, but criticized for a too-loud laugh and jerky speech: “She talks too fast especially when excited or flustered, and runs her words together.”

At the age of 20, Esther burned brightly: she loved the social life at the university but also worked hard, determined to make her mark. As one classmate said, she had “a real zest for life.”

Esther was born on July 19, 1920, in Steinbach, the third of five children born to John D. and Elizabeth (nee Friesen) Goossen. From the beginning she was smart and curious about the world and people around her, and willing to assert herself. At the age of nine she wrote Santa Claus telling him decisively that “I wish to see you before Christmas,” signing herself as “your true loving friend, Esther E. Goossen.”

Growing up, she was close to her three brothers and one sister, and often played with them on the snow slides their father would make in the winter time.

It was soon apparent that Esther was different from most other young people in the insular Mennonite village, that she wanted more from life than she believed Steinbach could offer. Her character sketch in the Steinbach Collegiate year book for 1937, when she was in Grade 11, read: “To rival Einstein is her open ambition. She believes to have accomplished this by continually heading the class.” “Esta’s secret ambition,” the writer added, “is to remain 16 all her life.” As things turned out, there was a sense in which she accomplished both of these goals.

University.

The following year she graduated and then went to Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, for a year, as her older brother Abe had done before her. In 1939 she became a student at the University of Manitoba, living in residence in Winnipeg. Although she majored in the sciences she had a flair for the written word, scoring an A+ on a second-year English paper: “Milton in Paradise Lost.” She was the only Mennonite student in a graduating class of 55 when she got her Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics in 1942.

Teaching.

Although the Goossens were not poor, they did have to come up with money to pay for their children’s education, unlike most Steinbachers who thought a few years of high school were plenty. In 1941 Esther had to take some time off from her studies to earn money for university, teaching at a remote one-room school in Ashern, Manitoba. She wrote her parents with a jovial description of the rural life of an attractive young teacher: “We ‘pioneers of Canada’s last frontier’ over here learn all the latest music hits from Wilf Carter and his cowboys over the gramophones at home— in case you’re behind times with the latest stuff, the most recent ‘hit’ here is Red River Valley. You know the mosquitoes, fleas, mud, lakes, sloughs, trails, woodsmen, and cowboy songs are really having an effect on me—no kidding—‘I’ll be a cowgirl for sure before the end of the month.’”

In Ashern, Esther found the beliefs she had been taught at home challenged by her neighbours, the Ebbers, a couple from Holland. She openly shared her thoughts on the subject with her parents, even though religion was a sensitive subject. She was anxious, however, that they not embarrass her with any missionary efforts: “They make fun of (and Mrs. Ebbers in fact hates) the Mennonite religion, so I’ve been pretty quiet about my religion here, in order to keep the peace, since Mrs. Ebbers is surely a hotheaded, ill-tempered woman who would be the very last person I’d even think of displeasing. So if you should come and get me, please (for my sake as a teacher) try to remain ‘mum’ about my religion. I’m not afraid, however, to stand up and fight (argue) for what I believe to be true and what I’ve been taught to be right and the Truth” (Note One).

Career.

A variety of males, young and old, came calling on the pretty, vivacious 5' 4" teacher. Their visits amused and entertained her, but she was not really interested: she had plans for her life. They were probably not plans that her devout parents would have liked. After graduation from the University of Manitoba she got a job with Defence Industries Ltd. in Nitro, Quebec, as a chemist analysing gunpowder and conducting ballistic tests of small arms ammunition.

She led a hectic social life in Nitro, where she played tennis, swam, went to dances and attracted several young men in the armed forces. One of them, a sincere and well-spoken Irishman, fell in love with her. He had rivals, however, and Esther, obviously enjoying all this male attention, could not make up her mind.

In 1943 her father wrote praising her as “the best letter writer I know” because she described events so vividly, “just as if you were talking to us.” He also cautioned her to “stay within bounds” while having fun (Note Two).

Esther Goossen: A Real Zest For Life

Esther Goossen: A Real Zest For life, by Peter Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Avenue, Winnipeg, R3L 1T4.
From late 1946 to 1947 Esther worked for the Canadian Red Cross in Toronto and Vancouver. This was followed by a two-year stint as research assistant at Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha, Nebraska. From that point on, she lived in the U. S., becoming a graduate student at the University of California Berkeley in 1949.

Barely scraping by financially and following a rigorous study schedule, she nevertheless took the time to do some exploring: “Yes, I’ve seen quite a bit of California & have done a lot of things & been to a lot of places—all by bumbling rides, sleeping on the ground & cooking meals over a smoky camp fire instead of over a stove!!!” (Note Three).

Although she had very little time for anything other than studying, which included having to learn French, Esther still had to fend off the attentions of males, who were unfortunately never quite satisfactory: “A couple of young punks have been giving me somewhat of a chase lately—O me, O my, children or sugar-daddies all love me: They’re either too young or too old; they’re either too grey or too grassy green!!” Tenaciously, she stuck with her studies: “Believe me, many is the time I’ve wished that I were either a moron or a genius (and I don’t even have a preference!)—in either case I wouldn’t have to beat my brains out so hard & I’d still be happy” (Note Four).

She had to miss a semester at university when her father died in March, 1951 because she went home for the funeral. Many years later she wrote her siblings: “I had a helluva time getting back into the groove to finish the requirements for my Ph.D. At the time of Dad’s death I told mother that I had to stop my graduate education at a Master’s level and she told me that Dad would not have wanted that but that he would have liked me to reach for the top degree....She seemed to be the only one in our family who cared & she gave me encouragement ‘in Dad’s name’ to go on. I was so pleased, that someone cared, even tho’ Mother said she did it for Dad’s sake” (Note Five).

At last, in 1954, she was awarded a Ph.D. in biochemistry, the first woman from Hanover Steinbach to achieve that distinction. The title of her thesis: “The Influence of the Level of Dietary Fat on the Oxidation of Injected Acetate-2-C (to the power of 14) on the Synthesis of Liver Fatty Acids and Cholesterol in the Intact Rat.”

Marriage, 1954.

That same year she married a professional man named James C. Brice. She also did post-doctoral work in the Department of Pharmacology, Washington School of Medicine, St. Louis. The marriage did not work out and Esther and Brice were divorced in May, 1957. Apparently she kept this information from her family, for in November of 1960, when she was about to remarry, her sister Mary wrote: “You never told us you were divorced from Jim—when did this occur?”

Her mother must have written expressing disapproval of the divorce, prompting a fierce reply from Esther: “I do not believe in divorces as such....But I do believe that God has to approve of a marriage that cannot be ‘torn asunder!’ God couldn’t have possibly approved of my marriage....which left me a ‘nothing’, of no benefit to God, society, human creativeness, etc. My very soul & being was at stake... I have nothing but disgust & disrespect for anyone (no matter what religion) remaining in such a union because of sheer bigotry & social ostracism....I am not making any excuses for being divorced—I’m proud of it! I finally had the guts to do it!” (Note Six).

Difficult as her marriage might have been, Esther became a United States citizen in 1955, confirming that she had no intention of returning home. She worked briefly as a biochemist for the U. S. Army Medical Nutrition Laboratory at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver, Colorado, and then returned to California to work at the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory in San Francisco.

Remarriage.

Around this time she met Toribio Joseph (Cas) Castanera, and they were married on November 24, 1960 at Berkeley, by a Unitarian minister. Esther was 41. Unfortunately she had been in a car accident in April, 1959, and her injuries and a kidney infection led to high medical bills.

Esther was able to return to work not long after. For the next 10 years she was a research chemist at Berkeley and with the Department of Public Health. Joseph Castanera died of leukemia on January 31, 1971. They had no children. After retirement Esther indulged her love for travel, going to the Olympics in Calgary in 1988. Esther’s sight and health gradually failed, and by the time of her death in 1997 she was in a nursing home, legally blind.

Notes:
Note One: Letter from Esther to her parents, June 8, 1941.
Note Two: Letter from John D. Goossen to Esther, Jan. 10, 1943.
Note Three: Letter from Esther to her mother, Feb. 10, 1951.
Note Four: Letter from Esther to her parents, July 2, 1951.
Note Five: Letter from Esther to her siblings, 1967.
One of the most remarkable individuals to come out of the southern Manitoba Mennonite community is undoubtedly Abraham H. Wiebe. In the past 50 years his work has taken him far from his early Mennonite home and few Mennonites have heard of him. He is now [1973] 81 years of age and lives in retirement in Knoxville, Tennessee, but he has many memories of his early life in southern Manitoba. His life is a dramatic example of how the human horizon can be stretched by a determined and courageous person.

Abraham Wiebe was born and grew up in Bergfeld, about five miles south-west of Grunthal, one of the original Mennonite villages in the East Reserve (the outlines of Bergfeld are remarkably well preserved and will be featured in our centennial issue in January). By 1892, the year of Abraham’s birth, the village was well established with about 15 homesteads and a population of 100. For 20 years Abraham lived and worked there, picking up a simple elementary education in the German language which would be adequate for his life as a village farmer. However, during those years it became apparent that the farming potential of Bergfeld, was quite limited and this, combined with Abraham’s growing curiosity about life beyond his community, resulted in his departure from the village.

In 1912, at the age of 20, Abraham Wiebe walked barefoot from Bergfeld to Steinbach to look for a job in this growing commercial center. Although he spoke no English and did not try to hide his very limited schooling he soon found work as a clerk in K. Reimer’s Son’s store. Abraham’s sister Susanna was the wife of Jacob W. Reimer (Roy Vogt’s grandparents), one of the owners of the store.

Abraham quickly discovered that the horizon extended even beyond Steinbach. After working as a clerk for a short time he resolved to improve his education and was accepted as a student at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna. There

Abraham H. Wiebe was born and grew up in Bergfeld, about five miles south-west of Grunthal, one of the original Mennonite villages in the East Reserve (the outlines of Bergfeld are remarkably well preserved and will be featured in our centennial issue in January). By 1892, the year of Abraham’s birth, the village was well established with about 15 homesteads and a population of 100. For 20 years Abraham lived and worked there, picking up a simple elementary education in the German language which would be adequate for his life as a village farmer. However, during those years it became apparent that the farming potential of Bergfeld, was quite limited and this, combined with Abraham’s growing curiosity about life beyond his community, resulted in his departure from the village.

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his ability and hard work soon gained the attention and encouragement of Gretna’s well-known principal, H.H. Ewert. Working practically day and night he was able to complete his junior high school in only a few years. The same kind of perseverance produced similar results in high school and he was able to graduate with a High School diploma in 1916-1917. Wiebe returned to Steinbach for a year as principal of the Steinbach Public School (1917-1918). He then enrolled at Bluffton College, the Mennonite college in Ohio, from which he graduated a few years later with a B.A. degree. He subsequently obtained his doctor’s degree in biology and zoology from the University of Wisconsin. From there he eventually assumed an important position in the Tennessee Valley Authority, gaining wide recognition for his work.

Dr. Wiebe paid a return visit to his home community in southern Manitoba in 1951 and but now lives in retirement, with his wife, in Knoxville, close to his last place of work: an unusual scholar who has made a significant contribution to this society.

“Former Students Plan Do For Dr. Friesen” reprinted from the Carillon News, June 27, 1952.

Former students of Dr. A. P. Friesen to Hold Get-to-gether on Friday.

A distinguished guest in Steinbach this week is Dr. A. P. Friesen, educator and physicist who is at present head of the physics department of Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas. Dr. and Mrs. Friesen, their daughter and son-in-law, Prof. G. A. Ediger are on their first visit to Manitoba in 29 years. Their agenda includes visiting Dr. Friesen’s sisters and their families, namely, Mrs. G. W. Reimer, Mrs. A. A. Reimer, Mrs. P. B. Reimer, and Mrs. Elisabeth Friesen. Once a flour mill apprentice and later night miller at Steinbach Flour Mills (1900-1904) Dr. Friesen was listed in “Who’s Who of America” last year. He was reared in Blumenort, 7 miles north of Steinbach, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Johann Friesen. While working to help his pioneering parents, he spent spare moments in study. In 1906 he taught his first rural class; in 1909 he was teacher of mathematics and physical sciences at the M.C.I. in Gretna.

He taught in Steinbach from 1911 to 1923, but his quest for higher learning took him to the U.S.A.

In 1924 Dr. Friesen received his B.A. degree at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas; his M.A. at the U. of Colorado in 1928; his Ph.D. at the U. of Kansas in 1935. To pay tribute to their former teacher and principal, a group of Dr. Friesen’s former students have arranged a get-to-gether for Friday evening, June 27, at 8 p.m. at school No. 3. All students of the years 1912, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20 and 21 are invited to attend, as well as the teachers who taught here in the same period.

Editor’s Note: In a note attached to the clipping of the article is the comment that Dr. Friesen began the Steinbach High School. In the 75 Gedenkfeier, pages 91 John C. Reimer has written that the Steinbach High School was started in 1914 with Abram P. Friesen as teacher and John R. Barkman, Gerhard K. Reimer, Amy Smith, A. T. Loewen, Nikolai Janz, Joh. G. Kornelsen, and Corin. F. Giesbrecht, as students.

See also Warkentin, Reflections, pages 99-100, for the fascinating story of Dr. Friesen’s brother John (b. 1892) who became a New York banker, where he “supervised the issue of loans for about $20,000,000 a day.”
Some years ago I discovered among my step-grandmother’s effects a copy of her husband’s passport. This was my Grandfather, Jacob J. Braun (1887-1950), born in Alt-Bergfeld southern Russia, who moved to Canada in 1875 and settled on the East Reserve in 1876; see Ernest Braun, “The House of Jakobs 1787-1997,” in Preservings, No. 11, pages 61-63.

My Grandfather farmed in the Grunthal area and married Katerina Falk in 1911. She bore him eight children, two of whom died in infancy. According to later tradition it was more the concern of his wife and her family which encouraged Jacob to join the emigration to Paraguay in 1926. The entire Jacob J. Braun family, his own father and some of his brothers and sisters, along with the Falks, joined the exodus. Katerina had suffered a hernia before the family left for Paraguay and shortly after they arrived she died of intestinal complications on March 23rd, 1929. Jacob was left alone with the children. With his wife’s death the link with the Falk family weakened, but Jacob did not immediately remarry. It appears that some of his family began to have second thoughts about settling in the Chaco. In June 1929 Jacob’s father gathered his family in the village of Reindel and came to a decision to return to Canada. They visited with others who were to stay as they felt this would be the last opportunity for social contact. Plans were then made for the long and difficult trip home.

First though Jacob needed a passport. Whether he needed this because his earlier one had expired, or whether the emigrants had travelled to Paraguay on a group passport, is unclear. Whatever the case in August 1929 Jacob went to the capital, Asuncion to apply for a passport to return to Canada.

At this period Canada’s foreign affairs were largely handled by British officials and he needed a British passport as he was a British Subject of Canada by birth. So Jacob went to the British Consulate in Asuncion where the Acting Consul, Mr. Bird, issued him and his six children with a “British Passport” representing the “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland” for the cost of seven shillings and six pence.

On page 2 Jacob is described as a farmer by profession, five foot nine inches in height with blue eyes, brown hair and his place of birth is given as “Grunthal, Manitoba”. The six children are then listed: Anna 2.3.1914 female [my mother]; Jacob 24.9.1915 male [the father of Ernie Braun of Niverville]; Peter 16.6.1917 [a bachelor all his life]; David 14.9.1918 male [father of Werner Braun formally of Green Valley Feeds, Grunthal]; Maria 10.10.1921 female [single all her life]; Johann 10.12.24; male [married Anna Penner from the West Reserve].

On the opposite page 3 is Jacob’s photo and his signature, surrounded and overstamped by official seals of the Consulate. His eyes stare upwards, strangely pale as if seeking out a lost homeland.

On page 5 under a heading “Observations” is the following statement: “Braun is returning to Canada from the Mennonite Colony in the Chaco together with his children. Birth certificates No. 38576, 38583-38588 issued by the Provincial Board of Health at Hanover, Manitoba on the 5th of June 1925 have been presented to me.” It appears that the certificates of health issued probably by the Municipality or a health official prior to emigration acted as proof that Jacob and his children had been born in Canada and were British subjects.

On the same day that he received his new passport Jacob must have gone to the American Consulate as on page 7 under “visas” is a Transit Certificate issued by the Vice Consul in Charge, John B. Faust which stated that the “bearer of this passport according to satisfactory evidence produced to me is about to pass through territory of the United States in transit for Canada” via the port of New York “on or about the September 24th 1929” and to depart at the “Canadian border” on or about September the 28th.

This indicates that Jacob must have already arranged his tickets for the voyage home as on page 9 another visa, issued in New York is dated September 24th.

How Jacob had arranged the rest of his journey is unclear. The American visa allowed four days of transit which may indicate a rail journey to the Canadian border, or even a stay in New York to await a ship to Canada. All that is known is that the family arrived at Carey, to be picked up by relatives.

Jacob and his family returned home to the Grunthal area but his old farm was now in the possession of new settlers, Russlander. So they moved to stay with his sister Agnetha’s family, the Harders, until he could reestablish himself not too far away on a farm on land far poorer than he had once possessed before emigration. But at least he was home again. Less than a year after his return, in early August 1930, he remarried. His wife, Maria Klassen, was a 42-year-old spinster who had been a maid for others, and after their marriage she raised the younger children, but had none of her own.

This single passport, which I found in her effects after she passed away in 1964, is all that remains in my possession of this episode of my family’s history. Like many documents, it has a complex story to tell.
Preservings

Cornelius F. Unger 1873-1951, Blumenhof

“Cornelius F. Unger (1873-1951) and Aganetha Klassen Unger (1879-1963), Blumenhof, Manitoba,” by daughter-in-law Helen Unger, 104-2487 Countess St., Abbotsford, B.C., V2T 5L9.

Family Background.

Cornelius F. Unger (1873-1951) and Aganetha Klassen Unger (1879-1963) were married on March 28, 1897. Cornelius was the son of Peter H. Unger (1841-96) and Justina Friesen (1836-1905), daughter of veteran school teacher Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-92), Blumenort, Manitoba. Aganetha was the sister to the late well-known chiropractor, Gertrude Klassen, Kleefeld. They were the daughters of Peter B. Klassen (1852-1930), son of delegate David Klassen (1813-1900) and Katharina B. Koop (1857-1947), daughter of Johann Koop (1831-97), Neuanlage (Twin creek).

The Farm.

Cornelius and Aganetha made their home in Blumenhof, Manitoba, four miles north of Steinbach, farming 240 acres of land on the SE25-7-6E and the E1/2 SW25-7-6E. Cornelius worked the land with four horses and later with a Fordson tractor and threshing outfit.

Later on dad built two chicken barns. They delivered the eggs to the Steinbach Hatchery. Washing cases full of eggs by hand every weekday was a full time job. They also had a lot of ducks and geese to pluck their feathers every fall. The goose feathers made the best of pillows.

In their former years dad also sold gravel from their gravel pit. When there were no gravel roads yet, there was mire and deep mud everywhere after a heavy rain. There were times when they with a team of horses hitched to a double box wagon had to go to church or a funeral. Even in later years they had to cross the fields with a car, to get to the No. 12 Highway, which had a gravel top by then. Up until hydro came in (about in 1940) the men would go into the bush every winter with a team of horses to cut firewood. After they got it home the logs were being cut with a swede saw about into sixteen inch lengths so they would fit into the wood stove. In later years they graduated to a motorized saw rig which was also being used in dad’s family. Son Peter operated it, also sawing wood for other farmers in the area.

The parents’ old three bedroom house was shingled on the outside. The big barn had one partition for hay joining the hay loft and a woodshed attached at the other end. We had to pump the water for inside use, and it was overflowing at the lower level for the cattle and horses. They had about twelve head of cattle and four horses, several litters of pigs and some sheep.

The Garden.

Just down the slope of the well-known Cornelius F. Unger farm buildings lay a huge garden and some fruit trees, surrounded by tall trees, a parklike setting. There in the shade of the trees, mother had her ten-gallon crock of her good recipe of pickled cucumbers which we loved to munch on.

Mother Aganetha Klassen Unger. After she was in the Altenheim, she expressed a desire to see my garden again. After I took her back she from then on felt completely at ease to the end.

Mother Aganetha Klassen Unger. After she was in the Altenheim, she expressed a desire to see my garden again. After I took her back she from then on felt completely at ease to the end.

The C. F. Unger house, SE25-7-6E, built by his brother Johann F. Unger who originally owned this farm. C. F. Unger bought the farm in 1905 when Johann bought the farm of their uncle Gottlieb Jankke, NW23-7-6E.

Cornelius F. Unger, ready to leave on a jaunt into town. “Hey, want to go to town? I’m ready to leave.”
big summer kitchen for the winter months to sell. Sometimes they were called, “cumst ungash” or gravel ungash”, literally, “Cabbage Ungers” or “Gravel Ungers.”

**Mother Unger.**

I always admired mother for the great energy she had even at her age. She would never walk to the wellhouse to get butter, milk or cream or a small pail of water or into the garden, she would always run. Sometimes I couldn’t believe my eyes when I watched her.

Dad had never in his life been admitted to the hospital, although his golter had been bothering him for years. The specialists refused to operate on him as it was too late to do it.

Dad just loved to take mother and his family members to Steinbach shopping, about once a week. Dad loved to go into the F.B. Reimer store to have his pepsi. After we were finished shopping we joined dad at the counter for something to snack and happily went home again. Money was scarce in those days but we were all satisfied with what we had. God had richly blessed us through the years.

**Social Life.**

My memory goes back to when we used to have our Blumenhof Schwester-Krentzen. We would take turns hosting it in our homes. I only joined when I became a part of the Unger family. They had it going for many years already. The Unger clan was also involved: the Johann F. Unger ladies, the Peter F. Unger ladies and the Cornelius F. Unger ladies plus many many more.

They used to have many enjoyable times together. The young people in those days also had birthday parties.

In the evenings the family close by would come to the parents’ house and they would tell stories. Usually Dad would tell about the olden days, and everyone would be eating sunflower seeds, a real treat.

A coal oil lamp stood on the table and collie watched through the screen door, hoping he would be invited in also.

**Retirement.**

In 1948 the parents moved into our three-room house and we into theirs.

Dad died in 1951 peacefully at his home. Mother moved to her daughter Nettie’s place, the Henry T. Wienses.

A few years later mother was moved to the Kleine Gemeinde Senior Citizen’s Home in Steinbach. Mother passed away in 1963 at the St. Boniface hospital.

**Sources:**

Rev. Peter F. Wiebe (1890-1966), Niverville

Rev. Peter F. Wiebe (1890-1966), Chortitz/Niverville, Manitoba: “Pioneer Minister”, by granddaughter Esther Hiebert Giesbrecht, Box 555, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0.

Introduction.
My Grandfather, Peter F. Wiebe (1890-1966), was born in Chortitz, Manitoba, son of Jacob D. Wiebe (1865-1938) and Helena Funk (1867-1954); see Helen Unger, Preservings, No. 6, June 1995, pages 9-11. Peter F. Wiebe was the grandson of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900): see “Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe - A Father of Manitoba,” Preservings, No. 6, pages 1-8.

Teaching Career.
Peter F. Wiebe’s first years of schooling were at Chortitz, then he attended school at Gretna, 1905-1906. A son said he thought his teacher was Benjamin Evert. Peter’s oldest and youngest brothers also attended the teacher training school in Gretna.
Peter was about 17 years of age when he started to teach school in Reindland (now Prefontaine). All of his brothers except one taught school. It was while teaching school at Reindland that he met his future wife.

Anecdote.
An incident from his single days is somewhat humorous. One night Grandpa was travelling alone by horse and buggy. He met up with some ruffians on the road. Although they could not see each other very well, Peter knew who they were. He was scared that he would get beat up and so he thought of what he could do. In those days buggies had a little trunk in the back with a spring-loaded lid. When he got close to the boys he reached back and lifted the lid with one hand. “Boys I’ll shoot,” he said.

“Bang!” it sounded like a gun shot, as he let the lid drop (it had a strong spring).
The boys took off.
But they had known who he was. The next day the preachers came to see him about his shooting at them! They had reported him to the police.

Marriage.

The Store.
After Peter and Helena got married they lived at her parents, the Schultzs’. Meanwhile they built the store at Chortitz (now Randolph). They moved to the store after about 6 or 7 months, when it was finished. It was a hardware and grocery store. Business was good because people came from all around to shop. With horse and buggy as the means of travel you didn’t go far away to shop. They also had a few cows. My mom also remembers a stile (steps over the fence) going to the place next to them.

Peter owned a truck with solid rubber tires. He bought all his groceries and hardware in Winnipeg for his store and would bring them home on his truck. One day coming home from Winnipeg the sky looked pretty dark, like a storm was brewing. Peter was in a hurry to get home. When he got home he said he had slowed down at the corners, otherwise he had been going up to 20 miles an hour!
Peter’s brother Jacob was the postmaster in Niverville for many years. His brother John was a carpenter. In Chortitz his brother Gerhard had the post office: see Helen Unger, “Gerhard F. Wiebe,” in Preservings, No. 12, pages 54-56. [Gerhard also wrote an excellent history of economic life in the East Reserve, published in the 75 Gedenkfeier, pages 106-22, later translated and published in Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 225-34.] Later on, brother Heinrich F. Wiebe bought his store.

Peter was the manager of the store and received top wages at $5.00 a day! As manager he also hauled all the groceries etc. for the store from Winnipeg.

In the meantime a new bank opened up in Steinbach and they were paying more interest than any other bank. Grandpa then decided to deposit all his money, the $4,000.00 from selling his store into that bank. But within a couple of years there was trouble. Grandpa and a Mr. Funk went to the bank to withdraw their money but they were too late. There was quite an uproar at the bank. Someone had a revolver and threatened to shoot the bank manager. Then Grandpa and Mr. Funk left, they were glad to get out of there alive! An investigation took place and consequently a court hearing was held. An angry group of investors were at the hearing and so things weren’t going too well for the accused. Finally the police sneaked the accused out the back door. Grandpa was devastated at losing his own money. But Peter felt
even worse about having persuaded other people to invest their money in this bank and now having lost everything, even more than he had! Later Grandpa visited the bank manager in prison. The bank manager told him he had gambled and lost, then he had used the bank money and planned to give it all back, which didn’t happen.

The Farm.

Later on because of stomach troubles the doctor advised him to leave the store and move into the country so he would be out in the fresh air more.

In the spring of 1926 they moved to the farm at Niverville, SE3-8-4E presently owned by Walter Schroeder.

Peter and Helena moved from an almost new house into an old house. The floors were not level and the living room floor was painted orange. Helena was almost ready to move back. But Peter promised her that if she would not be able to adjust to the farm within a year, then they would move back. After a year she was able to adjust and they stayed.

After moving to the farm one of the children said, “Where do we walk, there are no sidewalks here.”

When the children heard a hen cackle they all raced to the hen house to be the first to get there.

They had cattle, horses, pigs, chickens and ducks (which Grandpa would sell to the city). They had a big windmill built from wood. Some of the wood got rotten and it cracked up and came down. A horse standing close by saw it coming down and was so frightened, he just fell over but didn’t get hurt. Later they got a new windmill.

Flowers.

Peter and Helena had a beautiful yard. Helena kept a big garden, also some fruit trees. She had lots of flowers.

There were hundreds of hollyhocks in a patch thick like a jungle. At times one of the family and his nephews or friends would play in the hollyhock patch. Sometimes they got lost and then would scream for help. An older sister said she would have to help look for them.

When strangers or business men came to their place they asked if they could tour the yard. They said it looked like a park. One time a man that came from Winnipeg said, “You don’t need to go the park you have it right at home”.

Farming.

When the family would go shopping to Winnipeg they would always eat at a Chinese restaurant where you could have a full meal for 15 cents! My Mom said she would sometimes ask for the money instead so she could use it for shopping.

They had crops like beans, beets, wheat and flax. One year they threshed flax the day before Christmas, it was very nice out. Earlier they had not been able to thresh because it was very wet due to rainy weather.

Peter had terrible asthma problems. He was working with hay in the barn hayloft when he experienced his first attack. Later he used medication for his asthma.

In 1944 they tore down the old house and built a new one at the same location. Meanwhile they made bedrooms in the granary for sleeping and cooked and ate in the summer kitchen.

A grandson remembered one time when Grandpa was working on the field with the tractor and it quit working. He determined the spark plugs needed replacing, so he went to town, picked up new spark plugs and replaced them but the engine still wouldn’t start. It was then discovered he was out of gas!

A granddaughter remembers as a young girl going to Grandpa and Grandmas for summer holidays. She really enjoyed it there. There was always a lot of activity going on. They had beets and she helped hoe them. She thought they received $2.00 a row. The rows looked endless when they started. Another time when she was there Grandma threw water at some of those who were hoeing beets. A number of years later her husband remembered the incident since he had been one of those hoeing beets.

Grandpa was a very efficient bookkeeper and businessman. Even on the farm he kept a record of everything.

The Ministry.

Peter F. Wiebe was elected to the ministry on December 21, 1926. He was ordained in 1927 at the worship house in Chortitz (Randolph).

The Chortitzer Gemeinde followed the circuit rotation for preaching at the seven or eight churches in the East Reserve. Accordingly Peter F. Wiebe would take his turn preaching in the different worship houses like Weidenfeld, Chortitz, Reinland, Grunthal and Steinbach. He would need to get an early start if it was his turn to preach away from home, for example at Chortitz.

Since this was the central worship house for the entire Gemeinde, the ministers would frequently have a meeting following the morning worship service. All this added to the length of the morning for the children who accompanied their father on these preaching excursions.

The setting contributed to the impatience on the part of the children. Imagine for a moment, a simple white building standing in the midst of an empty church yard, adjacent to a cemetery surrounded by high grass, no trees, and a lonely howling prairie wind sweeping though the quiet picturesque village. By the time Father and his children left, it was way past dinner time. Not only were the children hungry, but the sad wind of the church yard left them feeling melancholy as well.

During the wintertime when Peter had to preach further away, like at Weidenfeld, he would leave Saturday morning on the sleigh and come back Sunday night. He would have a footwarmer and blankets to keep warm.

During the war years, Rev. Peter F. Wiebe would drive up to Clear Lake to minister to the C. O. boys working in the camp. The automobile is a 1930 Dodge six cylinder.
Preservings

Pastoral Career.
Peter F. Wiebe went to the C.O. camp at Clear Lake in 1940 where they held services in the camp everyday. The preachers took turns to minister at the camp.

In 1948 Peter F. Wiebe was chosen to speak at the farewell of the emigrants leaving for Paraguay. This was one of the biggest events in the Chortitzer Gemeinde during those years. My parents moved to MacGregor in 1950 and had church services in their house in the early years there. Grandpa and other ministers took turns going out there to preach, in the home of his daughter and her husband, Helen and Peter D. Hiebert.

Peter F. Wiebe conducted a Saturday school in German at Niverville. He taught the children to sing out of the old hymnbook, the one without notes. One of his nieces didn’t want to go, was not at all interested, so to be sure that she would be there he picked her up. He always took time for her. He was a very special Uncle to her. When she got baptized he gave her a Gesangbuch (hymnbook). They he said to her, “You’re not just getting baptized to get married are you?” Then she answered “no”. She was puzzled why he asked and then he said, “that was good”. A daughter remembers he would do his farm work in the daytime, then at night would sit up till 2:00 in the morning to prepare his sermon.

Retirement, 1960.
They retired to Niverville late spring of 1960. They bought a lot for $125.00 and had a ready-built house moved here. He found it hard to give up the farm.

Following retirement Peter F. Wiebe was only asked to preach on rare occasions. One such occasion was the Christmas morning worship service in Steinbach sometime in the 1960s. Knowing that the Christmas morning service was usually poorly attended and mostly by the elderly, Peter made a point of specifically praying that not only the older people would attend but the young people also.

And sure enough, that Christmas morning the church in Steinbach was full including many young people. The very obvious answer to prayer raised his spirits to a level of boldness that he tried something out of the ordinary that morning. Instead of reading his sermon in High German as was the custom at the time, he put aside his written sermon, and preached a message on salvation, extemporaneously, in Low German. Not only did he have a very attentive audience that morning, he surprised himself at what could be done in the strength of the Lord.

Peter F. Wiebe was concerned for his grandchildren’s salvation. A granddaughter remembers when her and a cousin were visiting Grandma and Grandpa in town. They were sitting at the table and he asked if they were ready to go to heaven.

Peter F. Wiebe had preached the Sunday before he died. Just before he passed away he said to the Dr. while he was checking him, “Last Sunday I preached but next Sunday I won’t”.

One of Peter’s sons figured those were the last words he said.

Peter F. Wiebe died March 29, 1966.

The funeral service was held in the Niverville Chortitzer Church. The M.B. Church was also used because the Chortitzer did not have room for everyone.

Helena Schulz Wiebe died on May 11, 1987 at the Grunthal Menno Home.

Children.
They had a family of ten. From oldest to youngest they are: Son Pete married Ann Tiffenbach of Niverville (both deceased), Son Jake married Marge Giesbrecht. They live in Portage la Prairie. Daughter Margaret married Abe Thiessen (he’s deceased), she lives in Steinbach. Daughter Helen married Peter D. Hiebert (he’s deceased), she lives in Niverville. Daughter Mary lives in Niverville. Daughter Susan married Victor Hiebert, they live in Steinbach. Daughter Elsie married Abe Hiebert, they live in Niverville. Daughter Tina married Frank Neufeld (he’s deceased), she lives in Niverville. Son Aron lives at Kleefield. Son David lives in Niverville.

Reminiscences.
One Sunday evening the girls were taking the iron to the window, which had a very thick layer of frost. They wanted to clear it so they could see when the Silberfeld guys were coming. Meanwhile Grandma was so excited that Grandpa was coming home that when the girls were in the other room she would take the iron to the window so she could see when Grandpa would come on the yard!

Their children can not remember Grandpa and Grandma ever quarrelling. They respected each other.

One Saturday on his way to Chortitz to preach his horses ran away and to stop them he drove into a telephone pole. This happened not far from the Abram Schroeders, the deacon of the church. The Schroeders had a number of boys and they helped to fix the sleigh and then he was on his way again.

When he would leave on a Saturday morning to preach at a distance away, he would make house visitations along the way.
Katharina Schierling Friesen 1823-1912

“Katharina Schierling Friesen 1823-1912,” by Harvey Bartel, Box 260, R.R.1, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Family Background.

Katharina Schierling (1823-1912) was the daughter of Durk Jakob Schierling (b. 1785), listed as owner of Wirtschaft 7, village of Marienthal, Molotschna Colony, 1835 census.

In 1846 she married Jakob K. Friesen (1822-75) who was born in Ohrloff, Molotschna, son of Johann von Riesen (1789-1840). Johann and his family lived in Ohrloff where he had taken over his father’s (Abraham von Riesen) Wirtschaft No. 11.

Johann von Riesen lived in Ohrloff and, therefore, the family was referred to as the “Ohrloff” Friesens. Johann von Riesen was the brother to Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), second Kleine Gemeinde (KG) Bishop, and Helena (1787-1846) who married KG founder Klaas Reimer: see Preservings, June 1996, No. 8, Part 1, pages 49-51.

The Jakob K. Friesen family lived in various Molotschna villages: Marienthal, Alexanderkron and Klippenfeld. By 1870 the family was resident in Nikolaithal, Kherson Province, just west of Borosenko.

Emigration.

In 1874 the Jakob K. Friesen family emigrated to Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba. She was badly injured by some boxes which fell on her while on board the S.S. Austrian during their Atlantic crossing. She “accidentally got crushed on the ship injuring her leg and lower body, when five men unawares, pushed some boxes against her, causing her to scream in pain. She thought she had some bones injured, but it proved not to be that bad, and she soon improved enough to lay aside her crutches that she used in the beginning and started to use a cane”: Pioneers and Pilgrims, page 39; see also Johann W. Dueck, Prairie Pilgrims, page 30, for a reference to this accident.

Jakob’s older brother and former school teacher, Johann K. Friesen and family settled in Harvey County, Kansas. His younger half-brother Cornelius H. Friesen emigrated to Rosenort, Manitoba, in 1874, and was the great-grandfather of David K. Friesen, former Steinbach Bible College Administrator. The rest of Jakob’s nine siblings remained in Russia where all contact with them was lost after the 1917 Soviet takeover.

Widowhood.

On June 3, 1875, Jakob together with Steinbach minister Jakob M. Barkman drowned while crossing the Red River on their way to Winnipeg: see Pres, No. 9, Part Two, page 8, for a poem describing this tragic event. Johann W. Dueck, Prairie Pilgrims, pages 29-30, provides an otherwise previously unavailable source describing this event in greater detail, based on the recollections of son Jakob S. Friesen.

As a young widow Katharina moved to Steinbach where all nine of her children lived at one time or another over the years. In her later years, she stayed with her youngest daughter Susanna, Mrs. Aron W. Reimer, who lived on the former Dr. Isaac L. Warkentin farm, SE24-7-6E. Katharina’s family became rather prominent in Steinbach, her son-in-law Johann G. Barkman served a record 25 years as mayor of the community: see Preservings, No. 12, pages 50-53. Another son-in-law Wilhelm F. Giesbrecht was the minister of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. Son Dietrich was a school teacher who maintained a diary. Son Johann S. Friesen was known as “Asel” Friesen because he kept donkeys.

Katharina died in 1912 and is buried in the Blumenhof community cemetery on SW 25-7-6E. “At the time her death, Katharina had a sister alive in Kansas and a brother still living in Russia.”

Sources:

Family Background.
Cornelius W. Toews was born to Johann H. Toews and Anna Warkentin Toews on June 17, 1871. His parents lived in the village of Alexanderkrone, where they farmed till 1864 when they sold the farm for 2600 ruble silver. The family moved to the village of Friedrichsthal, Markuslandt. Approximately three years later they moved again, to Grünfeld north of Borosenko.

On May 29, 1874 they emigrated from Russia and settled in Grünfeld (later Kleefeld), Manitoba. Additional family history is found in Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874, by Delbert Plett.

Aganetha was born to Martin and Aganetha (Toews) Penner on November 9, 1877 at Blumenort. Her parents came from Rosenfeld, Russia. On June 18, 1874 they emigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba. Her parents moved to Greenland in 1891. Their life story was told in an article by John G. Penner, Preservings, Issue 11, December 1997, pages 85-87.

Marriage, 1896.

On February 16, 1896 Cornelius W. Toews and Aganetha Penner were united in marriage, officiated by her father, Martin Penner in the Greenland church.

Cornelius and Aganetha moved to a farm 1 1/2 miles west and 1/2 mile south of the Greenland church, SW6-8-6E which Aganetha had inherited from her parents, Martin Penners, who lived next door on the SE6-8-6E.

Daughter Anna was born in 1897. The parents enjoyed their family. They did not practice harsh punishment, and their son Harry could not recall ever having received a spanking.

The Farmyard.
There was a log house on this farm, originally owned by Heinrich W. Bartel. Cornelius and Aganetha moved the log house further east close to the property line, in order that they could be closer to her parents. Later some of their children wondered if this had been a mistake as it meant that the Toews’ also had a half mile of driveway to contend with during snow storms and rainy weather.

Cornelius and Aganetha made their first home in the two-room log house 20 by 24 feet, with a lean-to. Sometime around 1900 the parents built a new two-storey house, 24 by 30 feet, and 20 by 18, with the main entrance on the east side. Later a lean-to addition was added to the back of the house (north side) and the front of the house (south side).

Through the years Cornelius and Aganeta built up a beautiful farm, with lots of trees. Cornelius had built a barn when they acquired the property. Mounted on the barn was a windmill used for grinding feed, pumping water and sawing wood. One day it was very windy and the windmill was blown over.

Agatha also enjoyed flowers. She would have rows and rows of hollyhocks in her flower garden.

Farming.
In 1922 the old barn was replaced with a large barn, 50 by 40 feet, and hay mow 30 by 20. Son Frank was the building supervisor. They usually had eight to ten cows, some pigs, chickens and usually about eight horses.

By 1916 Cornelius and Aganetha had a telephone. Their number was line 5, ring 2 long and 4 short. There were 21 subscribers on line 5.

Cornelius purchased his first tractor, a Mogul, from J. R. Friesen, Steinbach, in 1919 or 1920. At about the same time he bought his first car, a Model T, also from J. R. Friesen.

There was a story that when grandfather started his one cylinder Mogul it could be heard for miles. It would have been early in the morning.

Cornelius and Aganetha were successful farmers raising 14 children on their farm. He had acquired the NE6-8-6E, as well as an 80 acre parcel two miles north of the Greenland church and another 80 acres half mile west of the church, a total acreage of 480 acres.

This is a painting (artist unknown) that better portrays our grandfather, Cornelius Warkentin Toews, than any photograph. We grandchildren knew him as one that loved us and was interested in us. A loaf of bread, a bowl of soup and the Bible, satisfied him: see Saints and Sinners, page 260.

Grandparents' first car, Model T. Ford 1921. This was known as a “Top” koa (car) or a convertible in today’s parlance, as opposed to the newer Glaus koa (car) which had a hard top, with glass windows that rolled up.

Agatha and Cornelius W. Toews in their garden, circa 1932. All photographs for this article are courtesy of son Harry Toews, Transcona, Manitoba.

The twins Harry and Emil Toews with their father Cornelius W. Toews circa 1915. The twins later lived in Transcona and are retired. Emil died in 1998.
Kansas, 1927.

Aganeta had severe asthma problems, so they moved to Satanta in Western Kansas in 1927, where two of their daughters lived, Anna, Mrs. George P. Doerksen, and Lisa, Mrs. Cornelius P. Doerksen. Before they left Greenland, Cornelius and Aganetha had an auction sale where they sold their livestock and farm machinery. The auctioneer was Heinrich L. Fast, Kleefeld, who was a chum of Cornelius from when they were young. In preparation for moving to Kansas, Cornelius bought a different car, a 1925 Star, built by Durant Motors, purchased from Jakob E. Regehr, Steinbach.

In October 1927, they travelled to Kansas, the parents and five children in the car. Cornelius had purchased a small house in Satanta from a Doerksen who had moved from Mexico. The building had served as the original school house for the settlement. They lived across the road from Rev. Cornelius L. Plett, the Kleine Gemeinde minister in Satanta.

But the change in climate did not give Aganetha the hoped for relief and Cornelius was having trouble getting papers. Consequently the Toews family returned to Greenland, Manitoba, after only nine months.

Sons Martin, William and George stayed at home on the farm in Greenland. Living with them for a short time was David R. Plett, who had married their cousin, Tien, daughter of Heinrich (“Schok”) Toews.

In Kansas Cornelius W. Toews and sons Adolf and Harry worked out for wages. In June and July of 1928 they worked in the wheat harvest to finance the trip back to Canada.

Toews Bjaenjels.

Some of the Toews boys did not always have a good reputation in Greenland. The old Mrs. Wohlgemuth (nee Katherina L. Plett) and her daughter Anna came to church in Greenland with her horse and buggy. They came from Blumenhof where she lived on the ridge crossing the NW26-
7-6E. When they came to church the Toews boys were usually still hanging around outside, and so they unhitched the horse for her and put it in the barn. Later Mrs. Wohlgemuth had complemented the Toews boys that they had performed this act of kindness for her.

On one occasion Emile felt the call to ride his horse across the church porch with his horse while the worship was in session. Later the story was exaggerated that he had ridden the horse into the worship service which was false.

The Cornelius Toews boys were also involved with the Lone Scout movement and also the Boy Scouts. They learned to camp and went camping, etc. The stories about the Cornelius Toews boys were sometimes exaggerated over the years.

Emil liked to go skating at recess time. But the teacher, George K. Reimer, said no, and so Emil was expelled from school.

Over the years as the Cornelius Toews boys grew up, got married and settled down, they had soon earned a good reputation in the community.

Greenland, 1928.

In July 1928, Cornelius and Aganetha and their children returned to the home farm in Greenland. They again bought dairy cattle and started shipping cream and later they shipped milk to the cheese factory. Aganetha’s brother Cornelius M. Penner, who had purchased the original Martin Penner farm, served as President of the Landmark Cheese factory for many years.

Three of sons Harry, Emil and Adolf were still working at home at this time running the farm. The depression hit soon after Cornelius and Aganetha returned from Kansas and because they had lost so much in the auction and the moving, things went tougher for them financially.

In about 1936 Cornelius sold the NE6-8-6E to his brother-in-laws Aron and Jakob M. Penner which helped to relieve some of the debts. In 1939 sons Harry and Emil bought the farm for about $15 per acre, and the parents retired.

Retirement, 1940.

In 1940 Cornelius and Aganetha built a retirement home on the yard of their second oldest daughter Netta, Mrs. Peter R. Wiebe, were they lived until they died.

Aganetha did a lot of knitting, and the grandchildren were well supplied with wool mitts and socks. She was of medium build and used Green Valley Asthma compound, to treat her asthma. She was a friendly women, enjoyed visiting. Cornelius was a quieter person. Aganetha also maintained journals, collections

Grandparents’ house, circa 1942. View to the west. The house was built in 1900.

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The sons of Agatha and Cornelius W. Toews, with the names of their spouses: l.-r, Emil Toews (Elisabeth Dueck); Harry Toews (Margaret Dueck); Adolph Toews (Helen Koop and second marriage to May Allen), Linden, Alberta; George Toews (Lena Giesbrecht), Greenland; Abe Toews (Maria Warkentin and second Lydia Klassen), Linden; Frank Toews (Emma Goossen), Steinbach; Martin Toews (Elizabeth Wiebe), Ste. Anne; Aron Toews (Maria Goossen and second Martha de Veer), Linden. Missing is Bill Toews (Mary Allen), Nanooze Bay, B.C. who is taking the photograph.

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C. W. Toews, Ste. Anne, Mb. Written circa 1940.

— Translated by John G. Penner

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Doerksen lived in Steinbach on Ellice Avenue for many decades. Sons Emil and Harry lived in Winnipeg for many years. Son Adolf moved to Linden, and Bill moved to Vancouver Island.

The grandchildren had fond memories of their Toews uncles and aunts. One grandchild recalls the time when uncles Harry and Emil were still living upstairs in their grandparents’ house. The grandchildren loved to go upstairs to their uncles’ room. The uncles had all kinds of neat things and, of course, were not inclined to have inquisitive grandchildren rummage through all their private and special belongings. Harry and Emile devised a strategy to control such activities. They had a radio, which, of course, the grandchildren, were totally unfamiliar with. The uncles told their nephews and nieces that if they misbehaved in their room the man in the radio would come out and punish them.

**Source:** Interview by D. Plett with Harry Toews, April 22, 1999.

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**Exodus of Manitoba Mennonites, 1922**

An interesting item regarding the exodus of Manitoba Mennonites is found in a newspaper from the St. Paul/Minneapolis area dated October 3, 1922. The article is labeled “Mennonites in St. Paul on their way to Mexico.”

With typical newspaper hyperbole, the article exclaims as follows:

“Leader of Caravan in perhaps greatest relocation since Moses led Jews out of Egypt—vanguard to 20,000 Mennonites moving from Canada to Mexico.”

“Recently the Canadian Government and the religious sect [came] to blows—the high priests and bishops of the Mennonites ordered followers to sell their thousands of acres in the richest farming districts of Manitoba and to settle homesteads in Chihuahua, Mexico.”

“The Mennonite farmers sold their lands at a sacrifice to comply [with] the church edict that which under normal conditions brought from $90 to $150 an acre going a-begging for $10 to $30.”

“The migration follows as a result of the Mennonites refusal to bear arms during the World War.”

“Moving in special trains, carrying people, livestock, farm implements and household effects, the first of the 20,000 are now on their way to Mexico.”

**Photo Caption:** “Abraham Wolf, leader of the large caravan and his three daughters and son. Note the severe garb of the women.”

**Editor’s Note:** The foregoing newspaper items contains several factual errors, and yet, provides an interesting view of the “exile” of Mennonites from Manitoba as seen by an outside party. Can any of our brothers and sisters in Mexico inform us as to the identity of the Abraham Wolf family? Unfortunately the person sending me the article did not include their name. I would appreciate if the contributor could contact me, for proper accreditation.
In August 1922 the Kleine Gemeinde church in Manitoba and Kansas sent a delegation to Mexico to investigate settlement opportunities in that country. To date no journal records nor published accounts of this exciting chapter in the Kleine Gemeinde have appeared.

While doing research for the *Plett Picture Book* in 1979 my uncle Ed P. Friesen, Mitchell, showed me the box of photographs collected by his in-laws, Klaus P. Reimers, who lived in the Garden City area in Kansas from 1916 to 1938. The collection also included two photos of a group of men, one of whom was my great-grandfather Cornelius L. Plett (1844-1935).

Perplexed I took the photos to my mentor Peter A. Plett (1898-1990), Landmark, a man knowledgeable in all matters relating to Kleine Gemeinde history. Upon examining the photos he advised they were of a Kleine Gemeinde delegation to Mexico in 1922. He also identified his uncle Cornelius L. Plett as well as Landmark preacher Heinrich R. Reimer (1876-1959) and Grünfeld/Kleefeld Ohm Heinrich R. Dueck (1873-1944). Cornelius L. Plett had moved to Satanta, Kansas, in 1915 and was the pastor of the KG congregation there. Reimer and Dueck presumably represented the KG in Manitoba.

One of the photographs featured the group of Kleine Gemeinde Ohms standing on the steps of a government building in Mexico, possibly Chihuahua. The second photo showed the same group standing in what appears to a park. Based on the clothes the men are wearing I have always assumed that both photos were taken on the same day.

As far as I know, all three of the Ohms from Manitoba were literate men who maintained journals and so hopefully a detailed account of the delegation and its itinerary is still forthcoming.

But one ongoing puzzle over the past 20 years has been the identity of the other men in the picture, presumably also KG Ohms.

Finally, a few weeks ago, at least a part of the puzzle was solved. Friend Merle Loewen, Ellinwood, Kansas, a retired educator, found among his mother’s papers, a copy of the park picture, with, praise be, the names of the men recorded on the back.

One of them happened to be Heinrich K. Friesen (1875-1942), son of Heinrich L. Friesen (1851-1910), Rosenhof, Manitoba, and nephew to Abraham L. Friesen, Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde in Jansen, Nebraska and later Meade, Kansas. Heinrich K. Friesen and his family had moved from Rosenort, Manitoba, to Meade in 1916. They had a real interest in migration to Mexico and moved to the so-called “Kaunsasarpa”, Cuauhthemoec, Mexico, in 1926 with a group of six or seven other families. Descendants in the Steinbach area include Dorothy Schinkel, wife of realtor Bob, and the Petkau brothers from PBX, Blumenort.

One of the men was identified as “Jakob J. Reimer”. In looking through my materials on Meade, Kansas, I found a Jakob J. Reimer (1889-1970) married to Margaretha Doerksen, granddaughter to Cornelius L. Plett. Reimer would have been 33 years old at the time the photo was taken which would look about right. Obviously now that we have a name, various families can be contacted to verify the connection and identify the picture.

Jakob J. Reimer was the son of Anna Barkman (1860-1948) and Jakob F. Reimer (1854-1937) who became a KG deacon in Jansen, Nebraska, in 1900. In 1924 the family moved to Cuauhthemoec, Mexico. The Jakob F. Reimer family corresponded extensively with his sister Katharina, married for the second time to Ohm Cornelius L. Plett.

Another of the men identified was Cornelius J. Classen, presumably Cornelius J. Classen (1863-1931), son of Jakob Classen (1832-98) and Katharina S. Janzen (1838-90), Jansen, Nebraska. Cornelius J. Classen moved to Meade, Kansas in 1906 where he became a small but well-to-do farmer. He was elected as a minister in 1911.

But part of the puzzle continues: on the “steps” photo, are four unidentified men not included in the “park” photo. Are they perhaps the missing Meade Ohms, including the famous (infamous) Martin Doerksen (1862-1935)? Were they reluctant to have their photo taken? I remember Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort, deceased, telling the story that his grandfather Cornelius L. Plett has initially refused to be in photograph but had

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*Kleine Gemeinde 1922, the park photo.* The photo is believed to be taken in Chihuahua, Mexico, during a land searching delegation. L.-r., Heinrich K. Reimer, unknown - presumably one of the hosts or realtors, Heinrich R. Reimer, Cornelius J. Classen, Rev. Cornelius L. Plett, Rev. Heinrich R. Dueck, and Jakob J. Reimer. I wonder, did they meet Poncho Villa? A man is standing in the rear left side, as if he has just pulled back from the group so as not to be in the photograph. He is one of the four men in the hotel steps photo who remains unidentified. Photo identification courtesy of Merle Loewen, Ellinwood, Kansas.

*Kleine Gemeinde 1922, the steps photo.* L.-r., Unidentified, Jakob J. Reimer, Heinrich R. Reimer, Heinrich K. Friesen, Cornelius J. Classen, unidentified, Cornelius L. Plett, Heinrich R. Dueck, Jacob F. Issac and Peter F. Issac, and two hosts or realtors. Three of the unidentified Ohms are wearing straw, would this have been common in Meade? Any ideas or suggestions regarding further identification would be appreciated. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 53.
acquiesced when one of the other Ohms encouraged him with the words that he should cooperate for their hosts who wanted to take the picture "and that no one back home would ever see it anyway?"

The mystery is somewhat unravelled by a third photograph, this one of the group of KG Ohms standing in front of what appears to be another government building, a patio of some sort, henceforth referred to as the "patio" photograph. Again Merle’s mother, Mrs. William W. Loewen, nee Margaret J. Isaac (1903-91), Meade, has identified the men, by recording their names on the back. Two men are on the patio photograph that are not in the park photo. She identifies them as her father Aeltester Jakob F. Isaac (1883-1970) and his brother Peter F. Isaac (1881-1956).

Armed with this knowledge, these two men can now also be identified on the steps photo. Jakob F. Isaac appears to be the man standing immediately to the left of Heinrich R. Dueck. The coat is buttoned the same way, the hat the same, it is tipped up in a debonair air. Possibly still some doubt about that one, but there can is little doubt about Peter F. Isaac being the man standing at the top of the steps, right hand side. Again the hat is the same, brim slightly turned down, the cut of the coat and pants seem the same.

This now leaves only two men unidentified. The heavy set man standing at the bottom left of the stairs, who must be one of the other Meade Ohms, and the man at the top of the stairs, left hand side. One of them, more than likely, is Martin Doersken, who ultimately became the leader of the six or eight families who actually moved to the “Kaunsasdarpa”, Cuauthemoc, Mexico.

A fourth photograph showed up in the collection of Klaas P. L. Reimer (1890-1964), Garden City, Kansas, and later Blumenort, Manitoba, showing the building upon the steps of which the group of delegates had earlier posed. Perhaps someone among our Mexican friends can recognize the building and tell us where it is, etc.

We are indebted to Margaret Isaac Loewen (1903-91), Meade, Kansas, for identifying these individuals in the photograph and to her son Merle Loewen for spotting and passing on the information. Margaret Isaac Loewen was the daughter of Aeltester Jakob F. Isaac (1883-1970) and Katharina Friesen (1880-1936). Katharina was the daughter of KG minister Cornelius L. Friesen (1841-1923), brother of the Aeltester.

Sources:
Henry Fast, “The Kleine Gemeinde in Meade, Kansas,” in Profile 1874, pages 132-139.
Telephone interviews with Merle Loewen, 205 Craig, P.O. Box 56, Ellinwood, Kansas, 67526-0056, USA.
Profile of Jacob and Katharina Martens

“Profile of Jacob Martens (1856-1936) and Katharina Martens,” submitted by grandson Ben Martens, 630 Campbell Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3N 1C3.

Introduction.

Our Grandfather Jakob Martens (1856-1936) was born in Neuenburg, Chortitza, Russia in 1856. He was the son of Jacob Martens (b.1795) and Maria Harder (b. 1816) his father’s second wife. His father is described in the Berghthaler Gemeinde Buch as being the father of all Berghthaler Martens, BGB A13. Our grandfather was the youngest in a family of 12, four of whom died in infancy.

Jakob Martens Sr. (b. 1795) was the son of Peter (b. 1769) and Katharina Martens who were married in 1792. His grandparents were Gerhardt and Katharina Martens who lived in Halbstadt, Prussia, in 1776 and emigrated to Russia in 1797.

Grandmother Katharina Martens (b. 1808) was the daughter of Peter Sawatzky (b. 1806) and Katharina Harder (b. 1835), BGB C6. She came to Canada with her parents, her father’s second wife and her siblings in 1875 on the S.S. Peruvian (BGB 267). Katharina was 13 at the time. Her paternal grandparents were Cornelius (b. 1806) and Katharina (b. 1808) Sawatsky.

Marriage.

Our grandparents were married in about 1878 and lived in Gnadenfeld for the first years of their married life. Application to homestead was made on May 20, 1880, for the SW2-5-5E. This was the farm they occupied their entire married life. A land ownership map shows that they had acquired the NW1-5-5E, by 1910. This was the originally the homestead quarter of Peter Harder.

In the 1881 census they were listed as living with his parents in Kronsgardt with their infant son Jacob. The 1883 “Seelenliste” shows that Jakob and Katharina Martens are living in Gnadenfeld.

The Berghthaler/Chortitzer insurance (“Brandordnung”) records the insurance of Jakob Martens Sr. in Kronsgart for furniture $40 was cancelled April 21, 1882. A house $50, furniture $100, and wagon $5, belonging to “Jakob Martens” was cancelled the same date. At the same time, a Jakob Marten was insured for $100 house and $100 furniture.

According to the 1883 Municipal assessment for Kronsgardt, Jakob and Katharina had the following property: 160 acres, 10 acres cultivated, house and furniture valued at $100 each, 2 oxen, 1 cow, 2 yearlings, 2 calves, 7 sheep, 2 pigs, grain cleaner, wagon, a plow and harrow; for a total assessment of 344, pretty much average for the village of Kronsgart. The village of Gnadenfeld, by comparison, had a considerably higher assessments.

Kronsgardt.

The Martens homestead lay at the extreme south end of the village of Kronsgardt, abutting the cemetery where most of the original settlers were to be interred. The Joubert Creek entered the property at the southeast corner and wound its way the full length of the homestead exiting at the north end close to the cemetery. The farm was insured for $100 house and $100 furniture. They had six sons, the first Jacob (tooscha Mautis) nick-named for his inclination to trade. Peter who farmed about three miles north of the village. Cornelius farmed in Saskatchewan. John farmed across the road to the west on Section 3. Henry lived in the grandparent’s yard, but was summarily evicted for non-compliance to his parents will in the early forties. George, the youngest, farmed a few miles south of Kronsgardt. Their daughters were Katharina (Mrs. Wiens). She died as a young mother, a victim of a typhoid epidemic.

Margaret married a widower, John Funk. They moved to South America where her husband was a minister. They were the parents of John M. Funk, a notable missionary to the Indians in the Chaco, Maria was the “stay at home matron”, hostess to many relatives and visitors of our grandparents and their faithful caregiver and nurse to their ultimate departure. Aganetha was the youngest of our aunts. She married Henry H. Wiebe, a private school teacher. They also emigrated to Paraguay.

Reflections.

Myself the author of this article, am the youngest son of John G. Martens (Borscht Mautis II). I was only eight years of age when grandfather died. Yet being close in proximity to their farm, half a mile as the crow flies, and being a close buddy to Eddy, the adopted son of Uncle Henry and Aunt Justina, my visits were frequent. My impressions, therefore, were that of a fairly young lad. The erosion of time has rendered some recollections faint, others remain indelible. Most of my information is hearsay from my older siblings and some humorous anecdotes from acquaintances. Bear in mind that to embellish the virtues or inflate the vile are human temptation and my sources are not an exception.

Our grandparents home was always a haven of warmth and friendliness. The constant good matured banter between the two senior combatants and the pleasant congeniality of the ever present Aunt Mary (Mitchimum) was contagious, enhancing the atmosphere. The “Grote Stove” living room which also served as the master bedroom was the arena where the socializing took place. The odor of leafy tobacco mixed with the smell of chewing tobacco residue, emanating from grandfather’s spittso permeated the air. Frequently a refreshing aroma of heated borscht drifted in from the adjacent kitchen-dining room. Visitors seldom left with-
out faspa and a bowl of hot kumpst borscht.

Community Service.

Jakob and Katharina Martens are remembered as being a combatable two-some. They were individuals in their own right, each contributing to their neighbours and community as their innate talents would dictate. Grandmother was a practicing mid-wife and with a new arrival to the average family almost annually, her craft was in great demand. Grandfather was the village dentist, immunizer for Small Pox, and reliever of high blood pressure victims by severing blood veins with a spring loaded lance. Many of these cases required making house calls as far as horse drawn vehicles would take them. These acts of kindness and mercy enabled them to befriend a host of villagers and beyond--friendships they learned to cherish in their golden years when visitors were most appreciated.

Jakob Martens, Kronsgart, served as a Councillor for the Municipality of Hanover, starting in 1908, when his predecessor and personal friend, Johann Braun, Grunthal, moved over to become Reeve. Martens must have been a well-liked and capable politician, as he held the post throughout the difficult war years, when Anglo-conformity was aggressively being imposed upon the East Reserve. Martens served until 1921, when he was replaced by Abram A. Braun, Grunthal.

Infant Diseases.

They were fortunate in raising their family without being afflicted by disease and infantile deaths. Unlike grandmother’s brother Peter (Schlori) Sawatsky who with his wife had 18 children, 11 of which perished as infants. One exception was our Aunt Katharine who died as a young mother during a typhoid epidemic. The rest of the family lived a normal life span. This was indeed a rare blessing in an age when medical care givers were mere unlettered backwoods technicians, such as bone setters, midwives, etc. Much of this good fortune can be attributed to our grandparents good genetics, frontier hardiness, tempered with a positive outlook on life and a volume of home remedies that grandmother applied to her family as well as sharing it with the community.

Pioneering.

Jacob and Katharina Martens along with their parents arrived in Manitoba as landowning farmers--household producers. Jakob Martens Sr., was 71 years old at the time. Some sources indicate that he was a blacksmith in the old country. But in spite of their short-comings combined with the difficult soil conditions they were able to erect the necessary farm buildings, including a fair-sized house, besides raising a family of 10 and growing crops to keep food on the table. Opening up their home to the less fortunate and availing their service to others in the community was the spontaneous response to dire needs. As a modern scribe so aptly put it, “Just to live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to men,” seemed to be their inherent passion.

Klaas W. Reimer (1861-1944) and Maria Brandt (1863-1901), Steinbach

Too often one hears of valuable historical materials, photographs, journals, artifacts, going lost. Occasionally the reverse also happens in that a document or photograph one assumes has long disappeared shows up.

It was a pleasant surprise when going through his parents' photo collection with Mr. P. K. Reimer, Steinbach, to come across an original of a rare photo dating from 1895.

Klaas W. Reimer (1861-1944) and Maria Brandt (1863-1901), were a prominent Steinbach family. Klaas was one of the pioneers of the cheese factory industry, at one time owning three cheese factories. Their descendants include Bev, Mrs. Jim Penner, Steinbach, Noreen, Mrs. Delbert Reimer, Winnipeg, and Lillian, Mrs. Edwin G. Plett, Landmark.

Mr. and Mrs. Klaas W. Reimer pose in the photo with their children Maria (1885-1938), Mrs. J. R. Friesen, Steinbach, Anna, Mrs. John R. Toews, Blumenhof (b. 1887), and son Henry B. Reimer (1894-1961). The photograph has previously been published but only from a poor quality reproduction in the Steinbach Post. See Preservings, No. 9, Part One, page 8/Saints and Sinners, page 249. Photo courtesy of Klaas P. L. Reimer estate/Peter K. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba. Mrs. Klaas P. L. Reimer, née Anna B. Reimer, was a niece of Maria Brandt (1863-1901) which explains why she had the photo. Maybe now that they have found such a nice studio photograph, the family will decide to compile a biography of their grandparents for publication in Preservings.
Pioneer charity.

Just recently I met a man whom I had not seen since our childhood during the depression. He was of a large family, a distant relative, living in Neu-Bergfeld. We remember this family as they were frequent visitors to the John S. Martens household and desperately poor. He recounted how when they were destitute and hungry they would go to the grandparents where they were always assured a square meal.

But this family was not an exception; we remember another family of 16 who paid frequent visits to the Martens families in Kronsgardt, their only income was the meagre earnings from digging seneca roots during the summer. Today elderly men and women, well to do, pass by the old cemetery; pause to read the inscriptions, and in their minds eye see a gregarious old man, a quaint old lady and a friendly matron sharing a bowl of borscht with them when their life was at its lowest ebb. Some of these people, like the man mentioned, by his mere account acknowledge a deed that was unselfish, uncontrived and free of the encumbrances of repayment. Unequal to, yet not unlike an eternal gift, our grandparents generosity required no repayment and carried no debt.

Character.

We remember our grandfather of being of medium height and build, sporting a full beard which complimented his physique and ruddy facial complexion. The impish glint in his eyes and wry smile unmasked his innate mischievous nature. Being in his declining years he was playful, hooking our ankles with his cane hoping for a response.

In late summer he would take us down the lane to the garden, behind the hedge to the melon patch where he also grew his tobacco plants. The excursions to raid the melon patch were secretly done, because grandmother might not approve. This boyish naughtiness although frustrating to our parents endeared us to him.

Grandfather had an odd sense of humour, some called it the “hoadesh necki” referring to his mother being Maria Harder. Over the years he had amassed a host of friends, but there was an abrasiveness about his person that invited controversy. His comments were often laced with a measure of sarcasm. At times he could be rude, like when he placed a missile from his trusty Buck Rogers dart gun in the nape of Kleine Sawatsky or Vorsänger Sawatsky’s neck as he departed. Mr. Sawatsky was a distant relative and an irksome visitor at best. But usually grandfather would reveal his sentiments by inserting some caustic dig during a friendly exchange. His differences with others never blossomed to an open conflict, it was simply a verbal rivalry at which he was master in the art of give and take.

Then there was the rumour circulating that grandfather would wilfully extract the wrong tooth on some of his patients that were not to speak on his Christmas list. This tale originated when he did pull a healthy tooth, the unfortunate victim was his own son. Failing eyesight was the probable cause. But the story grew to include others who were not of his liking. It is possible, given his odd disposition, that he derived a measure of satisfaction by inflicting pain that normally accompanies this procedure on some of his detractors, but to wreak revenge on a patient while he had him at his mercy flies in the face of grandfather’s demonstration of compassion in the community.

One group of people that were viewed with some resentment by the residents of the southeast were the Jantseedah (West Reservers). They were former immigrants to the East Reserve and once friends, relatives and neighbours in the local villages. But after a few years of almost futile attempt to till the rocky soil, they left their homesteads and moved to the West Reserve where the soil was more fertile and void of stones. All villages lost some residents, but some were totally abandoned. It soon became common knowledge on the East Reserve that their former neighbours were faring well financially in their new situation. Their good fortune was confirmed by the many visitors that passed through to Neu-Bergfeld. Understandably this evoked a degree of envy among their former compatriots on the East Reserve.

Sadly a number of these same settlers returned to the East Reserve during the depression in the thirties. Financially bankrupt and profoundly humiliated, they had to be content to settle on, at that time a total waste-land a few miles southwest of Kronsgardt, named “Chaco” after some returnees from the Chaco of South America, who had also sought refuge in the area. In spite of the poor soil and infestation of rock and brush, the land was affordable, with a good supply of drinking water and lots of fire wood waiting to be cut. Most of these returnees lived in small hovels and survived on a meagre living allowance of $15.00 monthly from the municipality. In lieu of repayment they were required to cut cordwood on neighbours’ woodlots. Therefore their designation was altered from those “rich Jantseedah” to the infamous “Chaco Lied”.

How the affluence of the Jantseedah affected the affable “Borsch” Martens can best be illustrated by a story told to this writer by the late Abe Bergen. As a young man Mr. Bergen was on a trek to Neu-Bergfeld to harvest some timber for construction proposes. It was winter time and he was travelling with sleigh and team of horse. As the route took him through Alt-Bergfeld and Kronsgardt, he decided to stop for an overnight at the Martens whose hospitality and lively camaraderie was well known to travellers. Grandfather received him warmly and showed him where to tie his horses in the barn and where to find the hay. “But to water the horses you’ll have to take them down to the creek where we have chopped a hole in the ice. But be careful it’s very slippery around the hole”, adding wryly “there are already a number of Jantseedah buried underneath the ice.”

Preservings

Circa 1931, Jakob Martens and Katharina Sawatzky Martens, with son Heinrich and daughter-in-law Justina Toews Marten. Standing in front is their adopted son Eddy, part oriental and part Irish.

West Reserve.

One of the groups of people that were viewed with some resentment by the residents of the southeast were the Jantseedah (West Reservers). They were former immigrants to the East Reserve and once friends, relatives and neighbours in the local villages. But after a few years of almost futile attempt to till the rocky soil, they left their homesteads and moved to the West Reserve where the soil was more fertile and void of stones. All villages lost some residents, but some were totally abandoned. It soon became common knowledge on the East Reserve that their former neighbours were faring well financially in their new situation. Their good fortune was confirmed by the many visitors that passed through to Neu-Bergfeld. Understandably this evoked a degree of envy among their former compatriots on the East Reserve.

Peter T. Funk.

Not surprisingly there were those who could never take Jakob Martens quite seriously. Peter T. Funk who farmed barely a quarter mile north of the Martens was one. On a cold winter morning when every household was firing up their stoves to warm up their houses, Jakob noticed that the Funk’s chimney was on fire. He phoned Funk, they had phone service in the area in the early ’30s. Instead of telling him that his chimney was ablaze, he told him what he had initially noticed, that the “Funki” (sparks) were flying out of his chimney.

Funk being unaware that his chimney was on fire, retorted, “and at your house the Martens are
about the pain in her legs. She used to sit on the porch of a new house that Aunt Mary had built on the property, feeding a squirrel that she had befriended with morsels of leftovers from the table. 

Cousin Eddy and myself in our youthful mindlessness could not resist taking pot shots at the playful creature with our sling shots and sadly one day we succeeded and killed it. Today my pangs of remorse erase any memory of reprimand we richly deserved.

One Sunday morning, myself and brother Henry went to visit grandmother. Also there visiting was a distant relative of ours, a lady quite a bit older than us. Not surprisingly grandmother asked us to sing for her accompanied by this woman who happened to have a screechy voice that sounded like a drill was hitting a rusty nail when she reached the upper octave. Showing some reluctance we were promised a dime each. For myself having the prospect of facing my older siblings and their relentless teasing during the supper hour during the next week, convinced me, and I refused.

But brother Henry, four years older than myself, and being an enterprising young lad, consented. So after a half hour of so during which the house plants trembled, and the bird on the overhanging branches observed a short period of silence, the serenity of the Sunday morning finally returned. With my ears ringing we left for home. Henry with his dime in his pocket made me swear never to tell anyone about him singing with this lady. Being at the end of the pecking order and knowing Henry’s history as an enforcer, I hastily concurred. But as always word flying out of the chimney”.

Grandfather would irritate some people by the mere choice of words rather than by the substance of his remarks. This baiting and harangue was a sport he excelled in. If he had any enemies he would always assert that he might be next. He never lost his sense of humour though. When they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary shortly before he died, he suggested that his old friend, Johann Braun, not grandmother’s favourite, substitute for him. This was meant to evoke a response from grandmother rather than being a serious request of his old friend.

Rev. William Heinrichs, a newly arrived immigrant from Jantseed had a number of counselling sessions with grandfather in preparation for his final departure. Jakob Martens was laid to rest in the Kronsgardt cemetery, the place of burial of most of his relatives and neighbours.

Grandmother.

Grandmother outlived grandfather by a number of years, much of the time being bedridden. She was rheumatic and suffered discomfort and extreme pain at times. While playing a short distance from the house I can recall her moanings out, the source of the lead was probably grandmother. So brother Henry got more than a dimes worth of ribbing from his siblings.

Grandmother was laid to rest beside her life partner in the local cemetery. She had been a gracious mother and grandmother to all of us.

Conclusion.

As I stroll down the road that leads to our grandparents’ former homestead on a hot summer afternoon, in full view to my right in the valley flows the Joubert Creek, unhurriedly, flanked by the dark stalks that were once proud elm trees. To my left a lush alfalfa field waving in the light summer’s breeze. Behind it in the background a stand of tall hybrid corn. Again to my right down in the valley a strawberry patch peacefully nestled in the refuge of the creek and trees flanking the river.

As I raise my gaze over and across the slumbering valley the skyline is suddenly broken by the phallic structure of a silo poised menacingly as it visibly quakes and shimmers in the heat of the summer sun. Rounding the bend in the road with the former P.F. Funk farm on my left, the cairn on the Kronsgardt cemetery comes into full view. In a moment of sober reflection, the realization that I have arrived in the heart of what once was Kronsgardt, with the cairn as the lonely sentinel holding vigil over the remains of our pioneering forbearers, leaves me with a sense of enlightenment. A path hewn in humility and ignorance evolved proudly into prosperity and enlightenment.

Descendants.

The descendants of Jakob and Katharina Martens are still well-known in the Grunthal and Steinbach area. They include, grandson George T. Martens, dairy farmer, Grunthal; great-grandson Willie Friesen, service station owner, Grunthal, great-granddaughter Marie, Mrs. Bill Sawatzky, Re-Max Realty; great-grandson Vern Froese, candidate in the 1996 Federal election for Provencher; great-grandson Rev. John M. Wiebe, Steinbach; great-grandson Jake Wiens, dairy farmer, Pansy, recently passed away; and grandson Jakob T. Martens used to be the correspondent for the Steinbach Post for Weidenfeld.

The Jakob and Katharina Martens farm on SE2-5-5E is currently owned by great-grandson Peter Wiebe, son of Peter M. Wiebe, Steinbach Hatchery. Peter Jr. is married Shirley Froese, daughter of Herman and Annie Froese, who is a granddaughter of Jakob and Katharina Martens.

Sources:


Grunthal History (Grunthal, 1974), pages 64-67.

Ben Martens and Jessic Froese, A Genealogy of John S. Martens and Katharina Martens (Grunthal, 1990), 120 pages.
Introduction.

I never knew my maternal grandfather Jacob K. Kehler, who died four years before I was born. And yet I’ve often felt that he knew me, that he has lived inside me all these years, inspiring my love for language, firing my bursts of imagination, shaping my temperament and slyly stimulating my fondness for verbal acrobatics and the telling of tall tales.

Why do I make this somewhat bizarre claim? Because the older I get the more strongly I can feel my immediate begetters, my parents and grandparents, wrapping themselves ever more tightly around my own identity—like those Russian dolls that fit so snugly inside each other. And the more I think and learn about those begetters, the more intimate that feeling becomes. And the more richly satisfying the process of self-exploration becomes.

Accomplishments.

By all accounts, “Berliner” Kehler, as he was known far and wide, was a colorful, dynamic man who lived life at full throttle until he was struck down by cancer in his late fifties. Although a life-long farmer, this gifted man also had a fascinating range of other interests. He was active in politics and served as a councilor for Hanover municipality. Jakob Kehler is listed a Municipal Councilor for 1906, replacing Jakob Harder, Berghal. Jakob Kehler served in 1907 but was replaced by neighbour Jakob B. Peters in 1908.

Jakob Kehler was also a government weed inspector, and for years served as a kind of male nurse who vaccinated children in the community against small pox.

As an accomplished linguist fluent in Russian, Ukrainian, English, German and Yiddish (he even spoke a little French), he was much in demand as an interpreter for political candidates. In fact, according to his son, Peter S. Kehler, he was a kind of political handyman who arranged political meetings from Sarto in the south to Lac du Bonnet in the north.

On the spiritual side, Berliner Kehler served as a Vorsänger in the Chortitzer church and liked to write poetry when he had the time. Having received a sound basic education in Russia as a boy, he even tried teaching briefly as a young man but didn’t like it because it cooped him up inside too much. Above every-thing, his local fame stemmed from his charismatic personality. He was a ready wit and a brilliant raconteur who kept everybody around him royally entertained. He loved people and they in turn were equally drawn to him.

Family Background.

The Gerhard L. Kehler family had come to Manitoba from Russia in the summer of 1875, settling in the new village of Hochfeld, eight miles northwest of Steinbach. While the family brought with them adequate personal possessions they had little by way of ready cash.

There were 11 children in the family with Jacob, 12 at the time, ninth in line. According to the later reminiscences of Jacob’s older brother Gerhard, the family went through particularly trying times in the early years. Although free of debt, the Gerhard Kehlers came along with the other settlers, lost almost their entire crop, a meagre one to begin with. Normally a strong, optimistic man, father Gerhard sank into a mood of despair. It got so bad that he sat down one-day and wept over the entire thing we need will be given to us. And so it was. The one thing the family did have in abundance was a supply of warm clothing, including fur coats, which the parents had the foresight to bring with them to what they knew would be a severe climate. In the early spring of 1876, however, there was a fire in the Hiebert house and the Kehlers lost everything except the clothes on their backs. The modest insurance money (Brandgeld) was enough to purchase a span of oxen and a wagon, but not enough to replace the much-needed warm clothes they had lost in the fire. But they were able to build their own house that summer, and the crowded family situation was further alleviated when three of the Kehler daughters got married that first year with a fourth following soon thereafter.

During one of the early years there was a terrible infestation of grasshoppers and the Kehlers, along with the other settlers, lost almost their entire crop, a meagre one to begin with. Normally a strong, optimistic man, father Gerhard sank into a mood of despair. It got so bad that he sat down one-day and wept over the hopelessness of it all.

His wife, who was made of sterner stuff, asked him why he was crying. In Russia, Gerhard replied, they had everything they needed but here in Canada they didn’t even get to eat the potato peels because they needed to plant new crops.

Well, his wife wondered, don’t you remember why we came here to Canada? For the sake of the boys, of course, said Gerhard. They would have had to go into military service in Russia. All right, then, his wife pointed out, what we have to do is trust in God and everything we need will be given to us. And so it was; the next year there was a good crop and things got a little better.

Pioneering.

Lacking a house of their own, Gerhard and his sons helped a Hiebert family finish their new house that fall, in return for the use of a room in the house for the winter. The family of 13 had to adapt themselves to living in a sixteen-square-foot room. The parents slept on a roughly carpentered bed while the 11 children slept on the floor. The only other furniture was a table so small that the family members had to eat their spartan meals in shifts.

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Youth.

By this time, though, the Kehlers were in debt and three of the sons, including the future “Berliner”, now 13, were obliged to find jobs to help pay off the debts. Young Jacob began working for Dr. Isaac L. Warkentin (1845-1929) (a popular lay doctor) in Blumenhof. There the young man with the sparkling personality and gift of the gab quickly became a family favorite.

In later years, Mrs. Abram Giesbrecht, who as a young girl was also working for the Warkentins at the time, remembered that Jacob’s eloquence so impressed his employer that he believed everything he said no matter how exaggerated or extravagantly expressed.

She also described a personal grievance that arose from Jacob’s love for practical jokes. One of their jobs was to fetch sheaves from the field with a hayrack and oxen and bring them home to the village. Normally, Jacob would drive sitting in front behind the oxen, but when they got to the village street he would ostentatiously seat himself beside her on top of the load, much to the girl’s embarrassment. As soon as they left the street he would again resume his usual seat. Since Blumenhof was a very strict Kleine Gemeinde village where even the most casual contact between the sexes was frowned upon, the girl became so upset by Jacob’s brazen behavior that she finally complained to Warkentin. Their employer, however, was so completely under his spell that he curtly told the girl: “Jacob would never do such a thing,” leaving her more frustrated than ever.

Jacob also worked for seven years for a Mager family in Winnipeg near the Red (Presumably these were the Magers that owned the public house and stables where most Mennonites overnighted when travelling to Winnipeg to sell their produce). There Jakob learned fluent English he made such good use of in his later political activities.

Jakob still liked to play practical jokes but one of them almost ended in tragedy. As he related the incident later, he and a friend were crossing the Red one day in a small boat. Jacob, who was a good swimmer, decided to play a joke on his friend by tipping over the boat. He assumed, of course, that his friend could swim but discovered to his horror that he couldn’t. Fortunately, the friend, presumably with Jacob’s help, was able to make it to shore. By his own admission, the lesson Jacob learned that day was that you can’t fool around with death.

Marriage.

In April, 1884, when Jacob was 21, he married Elisabeth Schultz, who was 18 at the time. Berliner liked to say that all he had to do to find a bride was look over the garden gate, as the Kehlers and Schultzes lived next door to each other in Hochfeld. The connection between these two families goes back to Russia and is an interesting story in itself. Whether aware of it or not, my grandfather Berliner and my grandmother were descended from the same ancestors, namely Michael Kehler and his wife Elisabeth Loewen Kehler. That made them the grandparents of Berliner Kehler and the great-grandparents of Elisabeth Schultz Kehler. The genealogy shows that the Kehlers and the Schultzes had been intermarrying since at least 1826. So it was a natural marriage for the boy and girl next door to each other if there ever was one!”

“Berliner” Kehler.

The young couple took the unusual step of not only moving off the family farm but moving out of the village altogether and setting up house on a vacant school lot half a mile east where there was no village at all. It was a bold move considering that Jacob at the time of his marriage possessed the grand sum of seven dollars. Their house was small and cramped and Jacob still had no land of his own. He was not a farmer by nature anyway, but in those days farming was the accepted way of life for Mennonites and few departed from that norm no matter what other interests they had.

Both Jacob and Elisabeth were warm, outgoing people and already had many friends. Not long after establishing their home, a departing friend asked Jacob what the place they
were living at was called. Jacob, remembering that he had passed through the great city of Berlin, Germany, on his way to Canada, jocularly replied that it was called “Berlin.” And that was how the most widely known nickname in the East Reserve came about. In fact, the nickname was so exclusively applied to him that many people didn’t even know his given name. Even the members of his own family always referred to him as Berliner.

**Ebenfeld.**

In 1891, Berliner purchased a farm at Ebenfeld, three and a half miles west of Steinbach (just north of the present town of Mitchell), SE6-7-6E, currently the main townsite of the village of Mitchell. Here he was able to farm on his own at last. By this time the young couple had five children and were desperately in need of more living space and an enlarged income. The farm required a lot of work in the early years, as the land was stony and cluttered with brush.

A strong, energetic man, Berliner struggled to get ahead while waiting for his older sons to grow up into helpers. All the lumber he needed for his house, barn and other buildings he himself cut and sawed in the bush. He built a large barn because he kept a lot of stock, especially horses, of which he was very fond. He liked to buy young bronchos and break them himself. One such animal, a bay mare with crooked forefeet, an almost hairless tail and no front teeth, turned out to be a trotter which ran like the wind when hitched to the family sulky, and apparently scared grandmother half to death whenever they used it to go visiting.

To augment his income for his growing family, Berliner took outside jobs wherever he could. In winter he worked at a sawmill in the bush and continued to do so when his sons were old enough to join him. In the early years he also worked for Jewish cattle dealers who bought cattle in the district which had to be rounded up and driven to Winnipeg. Berliner made many such trips with a dozen or more cows and calves tied to his wagon. On one such trip, an ill-tempered young cow knocked him down unexpectedly and kept him pinned helplessly to the ground. Every time he tried to move away he received another vicious butt. Finally, his oldest son Jacob, who was along on the trip, threw him a hammer, but it fell beyond his reach. He did finally reach the hammer and managed to fight off the crazed animal.

**Accidents.**

Son Peter points out in his memoirs that Berliner, while blessed with good health and a robust physique, was peculiarly accident prone and cites a long list of such accidents. As a bold, utterly fearless man he probably put himself at risk in potentially dangerous situations as a matter of course. Once he was kicked in the head by a cow, but although shaken up came away without serious injury. On another
occasion he was helping at a barn-raising when a six by six supporting timber slipped and hit him on the head.

That time he was less lucky and was taken home half dead. Another time he was knocked cold when his son John inadvertently hit him in the head with a fifteen-foot long board they were trying to lay across a haystack. And Peter once knocked his father down with a piece of firewood while they were sawing wood. Again, Berliner had to take to his bed for several days. While repairing a telephone line he was almost killed when a car hit the wire that was lying across the road, throwing him across the wagon standing between him and the road and almost cutting off his ear. Another time, while doing some blacksmithing, he had the red-hot bolt he was handling fly from his tongs into his overalls and burn through his pantleg at the knee. He was so badly burned, especially his hands when he tried to smother the fire, that he was confined to bed for weeks.

As if the accidents weren’t enough, Berliner contracted typhoid fever during an epidemic and almost died. He lay in bed for a long time before he recovered. In his delirious state he referred to his socks as “Bock and Breit,” the names of his oxen. His unquenchable spirit enabled him to overcome these various setbacks and with a never-flagging energy and enthusiasm he threw himself into various activities which helped to relieve the tedium of farming.

With a long line of eight sons growing up, he could in later years delegate most of the farm work to them and free himself for his political activities and other interests. Berliner liked to move with the times and in 1914 bought his first car, a Model T Ford for which he invented a device which allowed him to use the car to power his feed-cutter.

**Hospitality.**

As already mentioned, both Berliner and his wife were gregarious by nature and their hospitality was boundless. Even with a houseful of children, the Kehlers were constantly entertaining guests--friends and strangers alike. From politicians and prosperous businessmen to Jewish peddlars and outright beggars, all were welcome to stay for a meal and for the night, if necessary. At times up to 20 guests stayed at the Kehlers’ overnight, making their home in Ebenfeld seem more like an old-fashioned country inn than a private home. Friends and neighbors also dropped in at all hours. And of course Berliner was the perfect host enjoying a ready-made audience for his hilarious anecdotes and witty sallies.

They could make the local welkin ring the Low German air turn blue for miles around with their crackling salvos of comic gusto. They needed no wine or beer or schnapps to lubricate their verbal bearings. Peanuts, sunflower seeds and strong black coffee mechanized their jaws and greased their vocal chords.

While Berliner himself was no longer present at these boisterous gatherings, in retrospect I know that his jovial spirit must have hovered over them approvingly as his sons...

**Kehler Humour.**

Of the Kehlers’ fourteen children, eleven--eight sons and three daughters--lived to adulthood. They were Maria (who died at the early age of 24), Jacob, Gerhard, Aaron, John, Peter, Susanna (Saun), David, Henry, Elisabeth (my mother) and Cornelius (Neil). And virtually all of them inherited Berliner’s gift of the gab and his skill at telling jokes and tall tales. To hear them all talking at once and laughing uproariously at each other’s wisecracks and Schnetete (tall tales) when the whole family met at our house on festive occasions, was an unforgettable experience.

I once tried to capture the amazing spectacle of my Kehler uncles in full cry in a poem, part of which reads:

> They could make the local welkin ring...

> These boisterous gatherings...

> The whole family met at our house on festive occasions...

> They needed no wine or beer or schnapps to lubricate their verbal bearings.

> Peanuts, sunflower seeds and strong black coffee mechanized their jaws and greased their vocal chords.

> While Berliner himself was no longer present...

> In retrospect I know...

> As his sons...

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1. 1923. Jakob “Berliner” Kehler’s funeral. Grandma Elisabeth Schulz Kehler grieving by her husband’s coffin. The man at the left side of the photo, with hat brim slightly turned down, may be son Johann S. Kehler.
2. 1923. Six sons of Jakob “Berliner” Kehler carry their father to his last resting place in the Hochfeld cemetery. The pallbearers on the photographer’s side of the coffin, l.-r., are: Jakob, Aron and George. John is the pallbearer in the middle on the other side.
Perservings

and daughters and their children indulged themselves in endless bursts of wit and merriment. It was a family saying that “You should never bury a Kehler until you’re sure his mouth is dead too.”

Poetry.

In his late fifties Berliner was stricken with cancer. In 1920 he underwent an operation that removed one of his kidneys and part of his liver. It was a trying time for him and he suffered a great deal of pain, but his lively nature and buoyant spirit remained undimmed. During his lengthy recuperation from the operation he turned to the writing of poetry as a way of communicating with his legion of friends and acquaintances.

His long narrative poems in rhyming couplets describing his illness, operation and recuperation are remarkable and were published periodically in the Steinbach Post. “Ein Lied aus der Erfahrung” (A Song from Experience), published in the Post March 2, 1921, captures Berliner’s inimitable personality and witty optimism perfectly. In flexible and well-turned couplets, he describes his operation and recovery in vivid detail. Nor is his customary wit lacking as he tells in one stanza how the doctor informs him that “money can provide a remedy.” And so they put him on an operating table and “cut [him] open like a fish.”

Berliner followed up with another poem in the May 4, 1921, edition of the Post. Here he reports on how his six month recuperation has gone, again with his customary verbal flair. The Post kept issuing regular bulletins on Berliner’s protracted illness.

Death.

When he died in June, 1923, the Post reports that it was a very large funeral with a funeral procession of some 80 cars following Berliner’s casket for burial in the Hochfeld cemetery. Around 500 people paid their last respects at this immensely popular man’s funeral.

But the Berliner Kehler story does not quite end with his death. There was one last twist, which occurred when his widow Elisabeth died in Steinbach in 1943. Grandmother had requested that she be buried beside her husband in the Hochfeld cemetery.

It was February and a severe snowstorm had left the cemetery deeply buried in snow. After considerable searching the grave diggers were able to find Jacob Kehler’s grave and grandmother Kehler was buried beside him. That spring, after the snow melted, it was discovered that she had been buried beside the wrong Jacob Kehler, a man who had died in 1898 and who had, in fact, been her brother-in-law. Berliner’s grave was some distance away, and to this day the graves of the couple remain separated.

Berliner himself would no doubt have had some witty things to say about this weird mistake. He might have said that he found his wife by looking over the garden gate and lost her again in the cemetery. But then again, if his gravestone had identified him as “Berliner” Kehler, the mistake would probably not have happened in the first place.

Editor’s Note:

In 1921 Berliner wrote a 14 stanza poem commemorating the 100th birthday of his neighbour, Peter Neufeld (1821-1922), Ebenfeld—Perservings, No. 11, pages 64-68. The poem is reproduced by Linda Buhler, “Ebenfeld,” in John Dyck, ed., Historical Sketches, pages 119-120. Son Peter S. Kehler collected some of his father’s poems and published them together with a selection of his own poetry.

The Gerhard L. Kehler family was unique in that they had Old Colony origins, one of only a few in the E. Reserve; how this impacted on the subsequent history of the clan has not yet been discussed. According to son Gerhard K. Kehler, he was born in 1861 in the village of Hochfeld, Alexandrowsker Kries, Jekatherinoslav. Since there was no village of Hochfeld in the Old Colony itself, this meant that Gerhard L. Kehler had already moved out of the Old Colony, possibly to the Zazykovo Colony founded in 1869. A group of Old Colony families had settled in Chortitz, E. R., in August of 1874 but soon moved on to the West Reserve.

The fact that the name “Hochfeld” was chosen as the name of the new village in the East Reserve demonstrates the influence of Gerhard L. Kehler.

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All the photographs for this article were taken by son Peter S. Kehler, Ebenfeld, who was an avid photographer. Later he became a minister of the Chortitz church.

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Introduction.

(Much of the information in this article I learned during my 1996 visit in Colony Bergthal, Paraguay, from my Aunts Helena (Braun) Giesbrecht; (Katerina has since passed away) and from subsequent letters and my return visit in 1998. The stories and anecdotes are related by my aunts and cousins who remember Grandmother well and with great fondness. “Grossmutjacjhi”, as she was known, died on January 10th, 1981, in Colony Bergthal, but her strong personality as matriarch of her family is still felt today.

Grandmother Aganetha Braun Harder took part in the immigration of 1926 to the Chaco, and the 1948 Auswanderung to East Paraguay. Though I never met her, her story is a story of courage, tenacity and endurance in the winds of change that swept across the Mennonite experience of those post-war years. She was certainly a woman of strength; who was comfortable with her femininity, and fully aware of her worth as a leader of her family.

Marriage.

My Grandmother, Aganetha (Braun) Braun Harder, was born on December 15, 1888, in Gnadenfeld Manitoba. She was the seventh child of Jacob F. and Maria (Funk) Braun, Mennonites from Imperial Russia, who came to Canada as young people, married and farmed in the community of Gnadenfeld, northeast of present-day Grunthal, BGB A181.

Grandmother married her sweetheart and first cousin, Jacob A Braun in 1907. During their marriage of 14 years, five daughters were born to them. The middle daughter, and Grandmother’s namesake, Aganetha, was my mother.

Jacob A. Braun was 35 years old when he died, and Grandmother remained a widow for five years. Her oldest child, Maria, was only 13, and the baby, Anna, was just past two years. The length of her widowhood, in a time when many women remarried quickly for economic and social reasons, bespeaks how deeply she mourned the loss of her husband. She is reported to have said that she would give up everything she possessed to have her beloved Jacob again.

Remarriage.

In 1926 she married Peter B. Harder, another cousin, and a widower, 16 years her senior with whom she had two sons. The oldest Peter, was born in Paraguay in 1927. (The previous year Grandmother, her new husband, immediately slaughtered and eaten. Water, salt, and flour crumbs would often constitute a sort of soup for supper. And yet according to my aunt Helena, who related these stories, my Great-grandparents did not consider themselves to be the worst off.

The Brauns were generationally a close-knit family unit. My aunt Helena says that she learned to know both her grandparents and her great-grandparents well. She will still today write to me about incidents that happened in her childhood; stories of how she, my Mother, and her other sisters played in the snow and made tracks in the winter to the river that ran through the field behind their home in Gnadenfeld. “Where have those good times gone.” She writes from her present home, Paraguay, a land without snow. “I so often think of your dear Mother and the time we were altogether as children in that faraway place.” (Aganetha (Braun) Wiebe Wiebe, my mother, Helena’s sister, died in 1954 in Canada. The two sisters parted never to meet again, in Paraguay in 1949 when my parents returned to Manitoba.)

The Brauns were, often also closely related genealogically. Grandmother both times married a first cousin; her parents were cousins; her daughters Helena and Katerina married cousins. Helena, with a chuckle in her voice once told me: “We were quite Biblical in our marriages; like Jacob and Isaac in the Old Testament, we too married relatives!”

Paraguay.

The reasons for the immigration of 1926 of Grandmother and her immediate and extended families, had its roots in the rescinding of certain rights and privileges that Mennonites had been promised by the Dominion Government in 1873. Perhaps the foremost motive for Grandmother and her family’s move to Paraguay was when the right to church confessional education was revoked.

My Aunt Helena recalls that Grandmother’s brother-in-law, always paid fines rather than send his children to English schools! Grandmother’s father, Jacob was also a staunch advocate of the German language, and deeply disapproved of English in schools. It is said that he so protested an English hymn sung by a quartet of relatives at a family gathering, that he walked away! (Although this incident must...
have occurred quite some time prior to 1941, my Aunt Katerina at age 80 in 1996, still remembered the song that was sung: ‘What Will You Give In Exchange For Your Soul.’

And even during my visit in 1996, my aunt Helena lamented the loss of the ‘plautdietsch’ of her relatives in Canada, though she mentioned an awareness that a renaissance of sorts is occurring here amongst Mennonites, a renewed interest in both language and culture. “We are German, it is our language” she said more than once.

The trip by ship across the Atlantic in 1926 was eventful in that it involved a burial at sea, which my aunt described vividly. A three-year-old child of one of the immigrant families died. The body was enshrouded in canvas and wrapped round and round with rope, weighted down on a plank of wood and committed to the deep. My aunt was 16 at the time but the impression was still fresh in her mind, 71 years later.

Return to Canada.

They arrived in Puerto Casado the end of February, 1926. They were not the first to arrive; other immigrants, friends and relatives had already come earlier. The weather was dreadfully hot. Helena says: “One could not walk on the ground without shoes, and those who had proceeded us were tanned almost black from the sun”. It was not only the weather that debilitated; a fever killed many, young and old; including Grandmother’s brother Jacob’s wife, Katherina (Falk) Braun—see Ernest Braun, “My Grandmother’s Song,” *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, pages 43-46.

Grandmother returned to Canada with most of her immediate family in October of ’28; leaving behind one daughter, Helena, who had married Peter Krahn just one month before the return. Helena relates that she journeyed to Puerto Casado from her home in the Chaco to say farewell, but she arrived too late; the family was already gone.

In 1929 my great-grandfather, Jakob Braun, and his sons returned to Canada as well. This immigration had been a costly venture, in lives that were lost and family separation; a daughter, Maria and her family remained behind.

In 1936 my aunt Helena returned to Canada with her husband and three small children; one child was born just prior to departure. The trip was made on a freighter, and since they were the only family on board, they were invited to eat at the Captain’s table.

Helena relates that one day while doing laundry on deck she was singing and the Captain, astonished, asked: “Where did you learn that song?” The song was: *God Save the King*. The freighter was manned by British seamen.

It was the customary 30 day ocean trip, made memorable by an incident that began in Rio. The ship’s hold was loaded with Brazil nuts so that it settled 1 1/2 meters into the water. Two weeks later, two stowaways were discovered amongst the nuts, a father and his son. They had kept alive by eating the nuts. They were given a place to sleep on deck. My aunt asked the Captain what would become of them, and was told they would be incarcerated in New York, and returned to Brazil on the next ship. Helena said she had felt very sorry for them, as they had seemed so sad.

Return to Paraguay.

Grandmother and her family remained in Canada until 1948. Life was very much the same for them as for the many other Mennonites living in southern Manitoba during the ’30s and ’40s. Political events and world affairs sat on the periphery of births and deaths, weddings and everyday happenings that made
up community living. Grandmother’s daughters left home to begin families of their own; Grandmother buried her second husband, Peter Harder in 1937; her mother, Maria (Funk) Braun in 1930, and her father, Jacob F. Braun in 1941.

By this time World War II was raging in Europe and, according to my father’s (Ben S. Wiebe) journal of that time, conscription of Mennonite youth became the primary concern for leaving Canada and seeking a country where freedom from military service could be sought.

In June 1948 at the age of 60 years Grandmother retraced the steps of immigration once again. She, her sons, Peter and Frank, and her daughters Maria, Helena, Katerina, and Aganetha and their families made the Auswanderung from Canada to East Paraguay. Once again, the family faced separation: Grandmother’s youngest daughter, Anna and her family chose to remain in Canada. In his diary my father recounts how excruciatingly painful were the farewells of such separations.

The immigration to East Paraguay was somewhat easier for Grandmother’s family in that the beginning in Colony Bergthal was not such a hard scrabble start as the one in the Chaco in ’26. The climate was more moderate, and the soil more productive. “Though each beginning has its own great difficulties,” said my aunt Katerina to me during my Paraguayan visit in 1996.

Characteristics.

From what others have told me, my Grandmother lived very simply in Colony Bergthal. Her home was void of amenities but she had a quality that drew everyone to her. She was a warm, loving, generous woman. Already in Canada she had made her reputation of caring for others; during the winter of ’29 her widowed brother Jacob and his children returning from Paraguay moved in with “Grottmutta”, who had just returned herself the previous year.

Grandchildren of my generation speak of her generous pieces of chocolate cake that she dispensed at every visit. No one left her home without having something to eat!

My father told me a story about Grottmuttachji’s generosity that happened to him personally when he was still living in Paraguay. Grandmother had asked my father to bring her some tobacco one day. Thinking it was for her own use, Father brought home a tin and gave it to her. She in turn gave it back to him.

She had discovered that Father could not afford to buy tobacco and she knew he would not accept it if she told him her intention beforehand. (Grandmother smoked well into her later years. Whenever she went to the Chaco to visit a certain relative would always confront her about her habit! ‘Nah, Net, schmeaks noch emma?’ he would ask. One day she looked him straight in the eye: “Nah oba, nay, Mensch, Ich hab up-geheiat!”

What she did not tell him was that she had quit that very day, throwing her tobacco into the river enroute to his home, so that she could honestly say she no longer smoked! And she never did again.

Recollections.

During both my visits to Paraguay I became aware of this pioneer woman who was my Grandmother. Stories of humour, stories of virtue, stories of a loving heart gave flesh and bone to Aganetha (Braun) Braun Harder. Her personality and her impact on her family and the times she lived in, became very real. This woman of whom it is said even today that she, was always ‘tuh-freid’, always content.

My aunt Helena reflects a philosophy of life that was most likely handed down to her from Grottmuttachje: “We must all go from this world one day, one way or another. The important thing is to leave a good example (einen guten Spoor) for others to follow.”

Death.

She died in Colony Bergthal, East Paraguay, on January 10, 1981 at the age of 92, beloved of all, full of years and leaving to cherish her memory a large “no-koamenschaft” (many descendants).


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**Treasures of Antiquity, 1934**


Introduction, by Delbert Plett Q.C.

In January 1999, Dr. James Urry was my house guest for several days while conducting research for his up-coming study of Manitoba Mennonites and politics. During the course of our visits he drew my attention to a series of articles around August 1, 1934, appearing in the Steinbach Post relating to the 60th anniversary of the settlement of the Mennonites in Manitoba, and particularly the Hanover Steinbach area, then known as the East Reserve.

One of these articles was a list of articles of antiquities collected for display at the August 1 celebrations. It provides a fascinating look into the minds of our forebears and their sense of historical consciousness. It also documents for posterity an immensely rich corpus of historical antiquities in existence as of that date.

I trust that upon reading this list, many descendents will initiate a search for the items listed. Others, I hope, still have enough the historical consciousness and cultural sensitivity to knash their teeth in grief as they realize that the historical treasure once owned by their grandmother or grandfather has been destroyed, sold or simply discarded.

We may have to be somewhat forgiving with some of our parents and grandparents, as their lack of interest was articulated by a series of events: (1) Because of draconian Anglo-conformity measures implemented by the Provincial Government in the aftermath of WWI, closure of schools and withdrawal of civil rights guaranteed in 1873, literacy and cultural sophistication within the local community plummeted, resulting in two generations literate in neither English nor German, relegated to being second class citizens in the country they had built; (2) in other cases, priceless antiquities were discarded by those adopting American Fundamentalist religious culture, articulating a naive but catagorical drive to be rid of the “old”, seeing it as a threat to new demands for unquestioned loyalty; (3) some of the first generation of Mennonite scholars became ultra Anglo-conformists, joining in the condemnation of their own culture and heritage in instead of researching and documenting the same.

For these reasons the 1934 list of Antiquities is a benchmark, those contributing artifacts typically being of the last generation to even understand the significance. Therefore, each item listed provides precious biographical data not only of the donor but the previous owners of the artifact, writer, artist, etc. as the following comments will illustrate.

The first 10 items are books, mainly from the canon of Mennonite devotional literature (the Kleine Gemeinde were almost exclusively the only publishers of such material among the Russian Mennonites) during the 19th century. The list establishes the relatively widespread ownership of such materials among the 1870s pioneers. One would have to examine the actual books (those which are still extant), for record of their previous owners, in order to extract the fascinating story of migrations, changes of owner and changes of venue, experienced by each thome, their passage through time and space.

The picture provided by C. F. Broesky of an old steam engine may well be the photo in the “125 East Reserve” booklet, page 25, which must then date from the 1890s. I believe that the photograph of delegate Cornelius P. Toews is the one published in the 60 Jahre Gedenkfeier, page 32/33. The information in the list of antiquities would date the picture in 1873 which means that he probably had it taken somewhere during the delegation journey to North America, an interesting biographical nugget.

The 1843 journal in the possession of widow Gerhard E. Kornelsen (formerly Mrs. Martin Barkman) is a good example. If still extant it would be among the oldest treasures of women’s writing among the Russian Mennonites, if not the oldest. It would certainly demonstrate that the mass of women’s writing commencing in the 1890s and later, did not come about by accident. Did the 1843 journal originate from the Lichtenau Kornelsen clan, the Ruckena Barkmans, or Anna’s own Fischau Doerksens? Or was it even written by a woman? If the original is lost, we will never know.

The writing exercises of Jakob Wiens would provide invaluable insight into the 18th century school system of the Prussian Mennonites, about which almost nothing is known. The funeral letter of Abr. F. Kehler, 1855 would identify the village of residence of the 20 or so families typically listed, and a comparison with the 1858 census, to verify reliability, etc.

The Rechnenbuch of Peter Braun is another interesting biographical nugget. John D. Goossen is probably the one owned by his grandfather Abraham F. Friesen (1807-91) Neukirch, Molotschna and later Jansen, Nebraska. This Martyrwy Spiegel is now in the safekeeping of the Mennonite Village Museum.

The Dutch Martyrwy Spiegel 1685 owned by Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-94), Lichtenau, Molotschna, and later Lichtenau/Steinbach, Manitoba, might well be the oldest book in the corpus of Mennonite devotional literature in Western Canada. Gerhard S. may well have acquired the book from his parents, and thus an examination of the original could unlock many further secrets. Gerhard, incidently, was the composer of the regulations for the Kleine Gemeinde school system in Manitoba in the 1870s and founder of a four generation teaching dynasty. At one time our region’s largest school was named “Kornelsen School” in their honour, although most people including his own family had already forgotten about Gerhard S., the most gifted and accomplished of the lot. When the school was demolished in the 1960s, the name was quietly dropped; evidently Anglo-conformists had decided the name sounded too parochial and not Anglo enough. The reasoning seems to have been, why honour the local four century pedagogical tradition when the name could easily be replaced with meaningless innocuous generic words like Woodlawn, Southwood, Elmdale, etc.

The Peter F. Sawatzky journal started in Russia in 1835 would be exceedingly interesting. If this is Peter F. Sawatzky (b. 1862), which I believe it is, the reference must mean that the starting entry in his journal dates back to 1835. However, I am not sure of this, and hopefully members of the Sawatzky family are in a better position to make a positive verification. Certainly the number of Berghalter items belies the negative portrayal of the Berghthal school system provided by historians of the Molotschna triumphalist school.

The Rechnenbuch of Peter Braun is another sample to add to those of Abraham Rempel and Peter Klippenstein (see East Reserve 125, pages 30-31. Hopefully it can be found.

The calligraphy book by Peter Rempel 1809 is critically important for the same reasons. The pro-Cornies, Molotschna triumphalists paint the pioneer school system as fundamentally deficient. Although Peter Rempel only came to the Molotschna after the Napoleonic Wars, a calligraphy book of this vintage could be critical in providing a glimpse into the workings of a Prussian school of this era. So far all documentation which has come to light regarding schools has directly contradicted the negative portrayal of the Molotschna triumphalists.

In the same exhibit was a wooden chain carved by Abraham F. “Fuela” Reimer (1808-92). When my former law partner Ernest Goossen was dying in 1984 he showed me a wooden chain which he had inherited from his parents and if I recall correctly, Ernie said it was carved by his great-grandfather, one of whom was Fuela Reimer. After Ernie’s death I made numerous inquiries of family assuming he would have given this wooden chain which had been carved out of one piece of wood to someone. But no one even recalled ever having seen the wooden chain. To this day, no one has
come forth. But here in this 1934 list of antiquities is proof that such a chain once existed. Maybe someone reading this knows what happened to the chain, last seen in 1985.

The existence of the chain tells a poignant story of Abraham’s busy Aeltest father, Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the Klein Gemeinde, at various times under threat of being exiled to Siberia, taking the time to pass on to his son the art of woodcarving.

The Gesangbuch of old Franz Kroeker (1827-1905), one of Steinbach’s original pioneers, could well have some memorials written into the flyleaf and cover pages, which might help to document the story of this family. Although the names of Franz’s parents and grandparents have recently been identified, the story of the Gesangbuch might well add to what is known.

The oldest book mentioned, Erlebnisse der Propheten, printed in 1588, in the possession of Mrs. Peter Klassen, would be a real treasure. If she was the Mrs. Peter Klassen from Neuanlage, the book might have belonged to her father, David Klassen (1813-1900), Rosenhof, the delegate, or to her father-in-law Johann Koop (1831-97), Neuanlage, again important biographical nuggets. On the other hand, there were also two Berghalser Peter Klassens and two Old Kolony Peter Klassens. Unless the actual book is located, we may simply never know.

An interesting item, a yardstick which Jakob J. Barkman (1794-1875) brought along from Prussia to Russia in 1816 and then to Canada in 1874. What about the dinner ware and cutlery items submitted by Mrs. Peter K. Friesen, mother of Helen, Mrs. Eugene Derksen. They originate back to the days of the Berghal Colony in Russia. Would they not provide us with a wonderful visual impression of life during the 1840s and ’50s.

How about the old oxen yoke once owned by the old Jakob Hiebert, Hochfeld. A quick look at the article on Hochfeld (Working Papers, page 62) by Peter Peters reveals a Jakob Hiebert (1854-1939). Are any of his family still around who could research this?

Peter K. Doerksen, called “Merjhale Derkerse” or girl Doerksen, because they had eight girls and only three boys, submitted a copper kettle and hatchet brought over by his father Johann F. Doerksen (b. 1845), Berghal.

The items listed are treasures of a culture which has almost been forsaken. It is desperately important that each item on the list be located and identified, something which only each family can do. Once the item has been found, the oral tradition such as remain should be gathered, the item photographed, and the information compiled for publication in Preservings or whatever other venue the family would select. In this way the all important story of the artifact is documented for posterity.

A study of all the anniversary activities of Hanover Steinbach over the past century-and-a-quarter would provide an enlightening view of our community and those who worked tirelessly to build up its foundations.

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**Preservings**

**Treasuries of Antiquity - the List**


Carl Fuchs d., Old Bible; Jakob T. Barkman d., Regalses Gesangbuch; Mrs. Klaas I. Friesen, Gesangbuch, 1859 edition; Joh. B. Reimer, Holländische Bible; Jakob B. Toews d., Holländischer Märtyrsiegel (Martyrs Mirror); C. F. Barkman, Holländischer Konkordanz; Mrs. Peter Klassen d., Biblische Reisen; Jakob T. Giesbrecht, Ges. Buch, Katechismus and Testament; Joh. B. Reimer, Bible 1653 edition, Cathechismus 1743 edition, Wandelne Seele 1756 edition; Isaak W. Reimer, Ges. Buch 1767 edition; Aunt H. E. Kornelsen d., two old wool combs; Peter G. Toews, casting mold for tin spoons; Anna Fast d., by Jak. F. Reimer, sewing clamps; Joh. B. Toews, three copies of Arndtz’s iber Christentum; K. J. B. Reimer, Cornies book; C. F. Broesky, Threshing machine and seed catalogue, and in addition a picture of an old threshing steam engine from the ’90s; Peter T. Barkman, a Red River ferry ticket (from Corn. Dück, earlier Eigengrund, East R., later Altona); C. F. Toews, portrait of his father, the deputy, Ohm Cornelius Toews, circa 1873; Widow G. E. Kornelsen d., (formerly widow Martin Barkman), a ledger with wish page [Fraktur?] dating circa 1843; Funeral Letter from Abr. F. Kehler, Gretna, circa 1855; Produced by P. J. A. Braun, a Homestead Certificate of the aged Ohm Kauenhoven d., formerly Grünsthal; Jakob A. Kroeker d., Winkler, a journal with written exercises by Jakob Wiens, dating to 1787; Herold der Wahrheit printed in Elkhart, Indiana, in the 1870s, submitted by G. G. Kornelsen; Two old post cards from the ’80s and ’90s from G.G.K.; German Bible, from P. Redekopp, Burwalde, 1710 edition; A copied sermon written by a serving minister of the then recently founded Kleingemeinde, dating circa 1823, submitted by K. J. B. Reimer; Jakob E. Regehr (submitted by P. J. A. Braun) an assortment of Farmers Advokaten, bound, from the year 1885. This was a leading magazine for grain farmers in those years; From Dr. Shilstra, a Bible from the Netherlands, in the Dutch language; From Mrs. John D. Goossen, Märtyrsiegel, first edition 1748, 2. edition

*Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908), photographed in 1873 during his delegation journey to North America. Photo courtesy of 60 Jahrige Gedenkfeier, page 32/33/Saints and Sinners, page 317.*
1780:
Geschichte Palästinas submitted by Joh. D. Goossen from the legacy of the deceased Abr. S. Friesen, Rosenfeld, Russia;
Gesangbuch, 1844 edition, from widow Kl. I. Friesen from the legacy of the deceased Abr. M. Friesen (Vorsänger); a Peter Peters book printed by Steinkopf, Stuttgart, 1865 edition, three Menno Simons books from the same source;
Joh. G. Barkman d., Russian Testament;
Joh. B. Toews (at that time from Ste. Annes) three books: Arndt’s wahres Christentum, 1845; Lebensgeschichte Jesus, 1824; and Menno Simons book, 1753. All three books were from the legacy of the former father-in-law of Joh. B. Toews;
G. A. Elias, Winkler, Testament, 1765 edition, also a booklet regarding baptism as well as a very old pair of glasses;
A Dutch Märtyrsiegel submitted by Jak. B. Toews d., Alberta, printed in Amsterdam, Holland, 1685, graciously rendered to us for 1934, which originates from the legacy of our deceased grandfather G. S. Kornelsen, in his time village school teacher in Lichtenau, Russia (G.G.K.);
Peter F. Sawatzky d., Grünthal, a journal started in Russia on 4 April 1835, also a German Bible, Königsberg 1832 edition. Mrs Sawatzky (later widow P. F. S.) received aforementioned Bible as a child from her mother;
Diary from the 1880s by G. E. Kornelsen;
Rechenbuch, submitted by the widow Abraham Giesbrecht, Lowe Farm, compiled by a Peter Braun in Russia in 1847;
Travelogue in the form of a poem by Jakob Wiebe, Gretna, 1874;
Submitted by Ernest Reimer, an atlas, 1855 edition, brought along by his great-grandfather Jak. Barkman in the 1870s immigration;
The following three articles submitted by the widow A. W. Reimer, a calligraphy book by a Peter Rempel written in Russia, circa 1809; a wooden chain carved by the aged grandfather Abraham Reimer in Blumenort, East Reserve, and a Gesangbuch mit Psalmen, 1785 edition;
Old Funk’s Familienkalender, for the years 1879 to 1899, inclusive, submitted by H. D. Fast, Kleefeld, Man.;
Jakob G. Toews, Ste. Anne: Gesangbuch mit Psalmen, purchased by his forbears, circa 1779;
Isaak W. Reimer, Gesangbuch mit Psalmen, Königsberger edition 1767, from the legacy of the old Franz Kroeker;
Widow Peter Klassen, Erlebnisse der Propheten und biblische Reisebilder, Magdeburg edition 1588;
Key for pulling teeth, by Jakob Martens, Könsgart/Grünthal;
Boots used by pioneer storeman Grönig, Schönfeld, submitted by D. N. Dück; and a drinking beaker used over 100 years ago by his grandfather David Dück;
K. J. B. Reimer, the footstool of his grandmother A. Reimer, from Blumenort, East Reserve, in the pioneer years;
A. L. Friesen, Gretna, brush from the pioneer years bought from E. Penner and Hieberts’ store in Tannau. Briefcase of his father, Aron Friesen, from Russia. A kerchief, a wedding gift for his bride, Dec. 1, 1869. Bedspread from Russia, made by mother Aron Friesen;
Two kerchiefs from the legacy of her parents, the old Peter Penners, Greenland, submitted by the widow Hein. Giesbrecht;
Crocheted kerchief by Mrs. (now widow) Gerhard W. Brandt, originating in the year 1833;
Guckkasten zum Austrecken similar to a
The gold watch given to Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84), for the honourable service of the Bergthaler people during the Crimean War 1853-56. Such items are immensely valuable treasures of material culture. Three such gold watches were awarded by the Czar to Bergthalers, the recipients were Jakob Peters (Heuboden), Peter Unger (Bergthal) and Abraham Hiebert (Schöntal).

Mass choir of school children who sang after dinner at the 75th anniversary of the Mennonite settlement in Manitoba, celebrated in Steinbach, Manitoba, on August 1, 1949. Photo courtesy of 75 Gedenkfeier, 66. See also East Reserve 125, page 61, for another photo of this event.

The 75th anniversary of the Mennonite settlement in Manitoba was also celebrated by the event organizers and some others at the Landing Site at the Rat and Red Rivers. Photo courtesy of 75 Gedenkfeier, 165.

August 1, 1949. A group of pioneers who came to Manitoba by ship in the original immigration 1874 and 75 and who were born in Russia: Peter B. Friesen 82, Kleefeld; D. Schellenberg 88, Grettau; Gerhard Rempel 85, Myrtle; Mrs. Franz H. Schroeder 77, and Franz H. Schroeder 77, Ile des Chenes; Heinrich L. Fast 84, Kleefeld; Peter P. Hiebert 82, New Bothwell; Bernhard D. Doerksen 78, Satanta, Kansas; David L. Plett 86, Givous; Isaac F. Friesen 76, Steinbach; Johann B. Toews 84, Steinbach; Wilhelm Vogt 81, Steinbach; Jakob Loewen 83, Winkler; Bernhard E. Loewen 81, Winkler; Erdmann Nickel 75, Plum Coulee; Jakob Stoess 83, Plum Coulee; Mrs. Bernhard Doerksen, nee Plett, 74, Satanta, Kansas; widow C. B. Loewen 75, Steinbach; Isaac R. Loewen 75, Winkler; J. D. R. Loewen, Sunnyslope, Alberta; Mrs. Martin Hiebert 75, Horndean; A. D. Loewen 85, Morris (Rosenort); Mrs. P. F. Funk 76, Alt-Bergfeld, Alberta; Mrs. Anna Schroeder, 71, Lowe Farm; Mrs. Jac. Blatz 78, Lowe Farm; Mrs. Joh. Funk 83, Blumengard; Mrs. Gerh. Giesbrecht 84, Ste. Anne (Greenland), Manitoba; Mrs. H. R. Giesbrecht 76, Ste. Anne.
Hoof irons for oxen, used for icy conditions to protect them from falling. Submitted by Joh. S. Friesen d.;

Tongs and candle holder submitted by Diedrich Unger, Felsenton. Brought over from Russia; Blacksmith hammer brought along from Russia by Gerhard Unger, Felsenton. Brass dish, teaspoon, towel [Tuch] and milk screen, the latter dating from 1840, everything being from the legacy of the old parents Neufelds from Russia; a chair built during the first settlement years;

A light kerchief submitted by Mrs. Jak. H. W. Reimer, brought along from Russia by her grandparents the aged Cornelius Loewens;

Yard stick submitted by Jak. T. Barkman brought along by his grandfather Jakob Barkman from Prussia to Russia and then to Canada;

“Flett” for bloodletting submitted by Jakob Martens, Kronsart. A kerchief given as a wedding present 87 years ago;

“Samovar or tea maker, brought along from Russia by the aged pioneer Joh. Janzen, Blumenhof, E. Reserve. Submitted by Joh. Janzen’s children;

Submitted by H. L. Fast, Kleefeld, a slate board, knife and handkerchief. Fast and his siblings have used this slate board in school in Russia; the knife was carried by H. L. Fast himself on the journey to America; the kerchief belonged to grandmother Ger. Schellenberg, and dates to 1840;

Pencil box, submitted by Cornelius L. Fast d., Winkler. Very artistically carved with a knife by a boy herding cattle, circa 1771, evidently still in Prussia;

Two Mexican pesos, by Joh. W. Wiebe, Horndean;

Submitted by the widow Is. de Fehr, handwork by her mother P. Toews, born Aganetha Barkman, dating to 1843 (Mrs. Kl. F. Friesen in the village [of Steinbach] may have further information. G.G.K.);

Pan submitted by David Unger, Felsenton, apparently originating (?) from the Plett family;

The wool comb of the deceased Mrs. H. E. Kornelsen, which was over 100 years old, and which was used by “Mitchmum”, Burwalde, Ost. Reserve;

A-B-C kerchief by Mrs. Martin F. Barkman, nee Toews. From the legacy of her deceased grandmother Peter Toews, Greenland; Snowshoes by Jakob D. Barkman, made by his grandfather in Russia over 100 years ago;

Fork and knife by Joh. G. Barkman. A gift from his uncle Martin Barkman in Kansas. They are supposed to be (1934) over 75 years old;

Apron [Schalleetuch] and spice dispenser [struer] of green glass by widow Corn. Toews, Strassberg-Niverville. Both items are over 120 years old;

Two sealing wax seals, by Joh. W. Reimer from the possession of her grandparents Peter Penners, and apparently 80 years old in 1934;

Two kerchiefs from Mrs. P.P. Penner. A remembrance of her mother Mrs. Joh. Dück, nee Thielmann, from Russia;

A handsaw for board cutting and a kerosene lantern as used in the pioneer years, submitted by David Langill d., Giroux;

Copper kettle, drinking beakers, tin spoon, kerosene lantern, as used in the pioneer years;

Two sealing wax seals, “Petschaft”, one used by G. S. Kornelsen in 1840, and the other by Jakob Janzen, father of Joh. F. Janzen, well-known in Grunthal, deceased in B. C., brought along from Prussia to Russia in 1804;

Brass pail, Erdmann Penners, Niverville, in the possession of the parental family. P. Penners, currently (1934), over 70 years old;

Plate -- Jak. R. Schellenberg, from the household of their deceased grandparents G. Schellenberg, Rosenfeld, E. Reserve;

Dark blue kerchief, submitted by Anganetha Schellenberg. It was a wedding gift to her deceased mother, G. E. Kornelsen, circa 1878.

We have reused the list of the heritage (antiquity) items collection of 1934 to provide the readers with an overview as to the types of items submitted for that celebration. The items were received on a loan basis. They can also be left in Steinbach with barber Joh. R. Unger, who can provide a receipt.

Editor’s Note: We are indebted to Dr. James Urry, University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, who spotted this item in the Steinbach Post while in Steinbach, Manitoba, January 25-27, 1999, doing research for his new book on Mennonites and the political process.
Simons featured the story of Franz Froese and his Menno (1826-1917), pioneer and mill owner in Steinbach beyond this. The account of Peter K. Barkman of the faith among Russia Mennonites went far actively publishing and distributing the canon of KG was practically the only group in Russia ing chapter to this story.

It was understandable that they took this rather leaders such as Menno Simons and Dirk Phillips, the reform group was the restitution of the New Testament times and a collection of 4000 martyrs' stories which was republished by the KG in 1863 under the leadership of Heinrich Enns (1801-81), Fischau, who became Aeltester of the “reform” branch of the KG after the 1866 division.

However, the KG was still dependant on a very limited supply of old and antiquated Martyr’s Mirrors for their access to the invaluable source of history and spiritual inspiration found in the larger unabridged editions. One example, the 1746 edition of the Martyrs’ Mirror owned by KG minister Abraham F. Friesen (1807-91), Neukirch, Molotschna, a behe moth of a book approximately 14 inches by 20: see Carillon News, May 14, 1986, pages 2A.

Johann F. Funk, Elkhart.

By 1872 Peter P. Toews (1841-1922), B l u m e n h o f f , Borosenko, Imperial Russia, Aeltester of the larger Blumenhoff Gemeinde had entered into a letter correspondence with Johann F. Funk (1835-1930), Elkhart, Indiana. In a number of ways both men shared many val ues and thus began a friendship which would last for a lifetime.

In his letter to Funk of August 25, 1872, Toews explained their interest in the seminal writings of the faith and particulary the Martyr’s Mirror: “But just as the physical body cannot subsist without food and nourishment, even less can, we withdraw the nourishment from the spiritual body which may be able to provide us with further strengthening for the eternal life. Thus, for example, the history of the martyrs may serve for the encouragement and strengthening of our faith, and particulary, that of our beloved youth so that they can perceive their end and for the practice of their faith, for through our faith we have received the promises. Consequently that the passions would not astonish them so that they might not be misled by anything foreign. As the Apostle says, we have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin”—Storm and Triumph, page 287.

On Sunday, August 6, 1872, Peter Toews ordered 24 copies of the unabridged Martyrs’ Mirror from Funk for members of his Gemeinde. Only two years later these same books were carefully packed into trunks and “Kjisten” and taken along to America in the immigration of 1874-5.

The story of Peter K. Barkman, Steinbach

Peter K. Barkman (1826-1917), in his retirement years, circa 1915. This picture is obviously cropped out of a group setting of some kind. Does anyone have the original? It would date to 1910 or so and would be an extremely rare and historically valuable photograph which we would like to see published. It is also important that the other people on the photograph are properly identified while there a still people alive able to do so. Photo courtesy of Genealogy of Peter K. Barkman 1826-1977 (Steinbach, 1977), page 1.
entrepreneur and promoter and part owner of the area’s first steam powered flour mill, has already been told in Preservings, No. 9, Part One, December 1996, pages 40-46. He was born in Rückenau, Molotschna, and later lived in Margenau, Molotschna, and Rosenfeld, Borosenko. In 1874 Peter and his family emigrated to Manitoba, where he joined 17 other families to establish the modern-day City of Steinbach in 1874.

But Peter did not acquire his Martyrs’ Mirror while in Russia, buying his copy only in 1890. He may have bought it from a neighbour who had brought a copy along from Russia, or it may have come from Elkhart through local book seller Johann W. Dueck. In any case, it revealed Peter had an interest in the teachings and history of his faith. By 1890 Peter had started to slow down in his business endeavours, seemingly he retired around 1892 when the original flour mill burned down. Presumably he wanted to take more time to read up on the history and teachings of his faith.

Peter K. Barkman died on January 5, 1917, and four days later, January 9, his family held an auction sale of his effects. At this time the Martyr’s Mirror was bought by Jakob D. Barkman, husband of granddaughter Anna, daughter of youngest son Johann. Jakob evidently kept the Martyr’s Mirror as a treasured heirloom. After his death, it was donated to the Mennonite Village Museum by his heirs where it is currently held among its book collection.

Descendants.
The descendants of Peter K. Barkman included son Peter T. Barkman, whose grandsons include Peter L. Barkman of Barkman Concrete, and Mr. Justice Gordon J. Barkman, see article by Cathy Barkman, Preservings, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part Two, pages 32-36; see also article on son Jakob T. Barkman in Pres., No. 13, pages 68-70.

Sources.
Robert Friedmann, Mennonite Piety through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature (Sugarcreek, Ohio, 1980), 285 pages.
Jakob Wiebe 1829-1901 - Martyrs’ Mirror

Jakob Wiebe (1829-1901), Schönau, Molotschna, Imperial Russia, to Blumenort, Manitoba - “Martyrs’ Mirror”, by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Family Background.

Jakob P. Wiebe (1829-1901) was the son of Jakob Wiebe (1799-1856), whose father Peter Wiebe (1754-1829) had come from Stadfeld, Prussia, in 1803, and settled on Wirtschaft 21 on Schönau, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, in 1804. Another son Heinrich Wiebe (1794-1834), married the widow of Heinrich Brandt (1780-1819), Tiege, and became a Kleine Gemeinde (KG) minister circa 1826. Jakob’s father and step-mother both died of the typhoid epidemic spread throughout Russia because of the Crimean War. “This Jakob Wiebe was a big strong man.”

Russia.

Jakob Wiebe Jr. was baptised by Aeltester Johann Friesen on May 15, 1849. On May 13, 1856, Jakob married Anna P. Isaac, daughter of Johann Isaac (1809-64) and Anna S. Plett (1813-87) also of Schönau. Wiebe’s parents lived in Schönau, directly across the street from the Isaacs. Brother-in-law Peter P. Isaac described the Wiebe family as follows: “When the Jacob Wiebes (sister Anna) were married they lived for some time with his parents and worked for them, which is not possible here in America. What remuneration they received for their labours I do not know.”

Before his death, Jakob Wiebe Sr. assisted his son in the purchase of a treadmill and an Anwohner house in the village of Prangenau, about 20 miles east of Schönau, where Anna and Jakob established their first home. In 1863 they sold this property and moved to Markuslandt, a leasehold settlement some 20 verst east of Einlage in the Old Colony, where a large number of other KG families were settling. Jakob and Anna took the treadmill with them which they operated in conjunction with farming. After several years they sold the mill and moved to the village of Analfeld in the Borosenko settlement about 30 miles north-west of Nikopol. They again settled on rented land which was then available in that section of Russia at a reasonable price, because the noblemen had to release their serfs to make an end of serfdom.

Manitoba, 1874.

In 1874 they immigrated to Canada arriving in Quebec City on August 27, 1874. They took out a homestead quarter on NW32-7-6E but settled in the village of Blumenort, Manitoba. Their Wirtschaft was located on the south side of the street, almost directly across from the village church and cemetery. Here they lived the remainder of their lives. According to a map drawn by Martin K. Friesen their housebarn was built with a straight roof line. “It was hard work to begin with, but in their latter years it was somewhat easier.” Here they lived and prospered.

Jakob Wiebe was a progressive farmer. Historian Roy Loewen has written that as early as 1878 he had “purchased a threshing machine powered by Peter W. Toews’ upright Watrus steam engine” (Blumenort, page 106).

Abraham F. Reimer Journal.

Neighbour Abraham F. Reimer has recorded numerous details about the life of Jakob and Anna Wiebe in his journal. The following are a few of these tidbits: Saturday, August 7, 1880 + 14 to 26. Yesterday and today, Jak. Wiebe, Pet. Penner Sr., Martin Penner and Cor. Penner were threshing. J. Wiebe has 72 bushels from three acres. The next day Jakob and brother Peter Wiebe went to Rosenfeld.


On October 18, 1882, Schanzen from Ontario visited at the home of Jakob Wiebes.

The Holdeman Schism, 1882.

The Holdeman schism did not leave the Wiebe family untouched. On Monday, Johann, son of Jakob, was baptised in the Holdeman church. But on Friday, the 17th Johann attended the KG baptismal services in Steinbach and, in fact, was baptised there on the 27th. It seems that young Johann I. Wiebe had developed a romantic interest in Anna, daughter of Ohm Peter Baerg of Grünfeld, which may have had a bearing on his decision. Ohm Peter Barrog was a valiant stalwart of the faith—not one to be swayed by Evangelists from the States, no matter how fiery they might be.

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<th>Gen</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Death</th>
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<td>Anna P. Isaak</td>
<td>May 10, 1832</td>
<td>Jan 15, 1896</td>
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<td>Johann I. Wiebe</td>
<td>May 7, 1862</td>
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<td>Aug 18, 1859</td>
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<td>Anna I. Wiebe</td>
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<td>Peter B. Friesen</td>
<td>Nov 27, 1867</td>
<td>Mar 12, 1933</td>
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<td>Peter I. Wiebe</td>
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<td>5m</td>
<td>Margaret Friesen</td>
<td>Nov 1877</td>
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<td>Susanna Harder</td>
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<td>Elizabeth I. Wiebe</td>
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<td>5m</td>
<td>Jacob R. Reimer</td>
<td>Apr 25, 1874</td>
<td>Aug 18, 1900</td>
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Uncle Peter P. Isaac wrote about Johann I. Wiebe, “I still have compassion when I think of him, since his father at times was too hard on him in his sickness. I have been told that his father in his last days had repented of his impatience and anger. May we be forgivable and not hold anything against him” (page 191). According to the journal of uncle Abraham M. Friesen, Johann died “instantly after dinner on April 19, 1884. He was buried on Thursday with 22nd, with a considerable attendance.”

**Assessment Records.**

According the 1883 tax records Jakob Wiebe was a moderately successful farmer with a double farm, 320 acres of which 44 acres were cultivated, buildings assessed at $300, furniture $125, 3 horses, 2 oxen, 4 cows, and owned one of the two threshing outfits in the village. His an assessment of 967 was the third highest in the village for 1883, next only to Peter Penner at 1426, and Peter W. Toews at 1095. By the next year he had sold his threshing machine and his assessment had fallen to 816.

In 1888 Jakob P. Wiebe purchased a binder which cut and bundled the grain in one operation replacing the earlier reapers (Blumenort, page 106). In 1889 Jakob Wiebe’s assessment was the fourth highest in the village.

**Journal of Abr. M. Friesen, 1893.**

The journal of neighbour and brother-in-law Abraham M. Friesen provides additional information regarding the Jakob Wiebe family:

June 4, 1884, Johann Isaacs with mother were at J. Wiebes. January 29, 1886, “[Abraham M. Friesens] went along with Jakob Wiebes to the Senior Pletts, Blumenhof.” Plett was the uncle to the two women.

An interesting even occurred on Monday, August 23, 1886, when “a bear had bit a calf during the night at Jakob Wiebes.”

Peter B. Friesen (1867-1933), son-in-law of Jakob Wiebe. Photo courtesy of daughter-in-law Elizabeth Friesen, Box 217, Blumenort, Manitoba. R0A 0C0. Peter B. Friesen was the great-grandson of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, Imperial Russia, second Aeltester of the Klein Gemeinde, famous Bible expositor and senior church statesman. Mrs. Peter B. Friesen was staunchly traditional and refused to allow herself to be photographed.

In February 1889 Abraham M. Friesen repaired some shoes for Jakob Wiebe. Sept 28, Thursday, 1893. Franz Isaacs and Jakob Wiebes were visiting at P. Penners. Nov. 7, 1893, Abraham M. Friesen helped slaughter hogs at Jakob Wiebes. Dec. 21, Thursday, Abr. M. Friesen helped slaughter oxen at Jakob Wiebes. The next day, son Peter must have gone to Winnipeg, as Friesen gave a quarter of beef along with him to sell.

**Death.**

Anna, Mrs. Wiebe, died on January 15, 1896. According to the journal of neighbour Abraham M. Friesen, the Wiebes held an auction sale of their goods on February 13, 1897. By 1898 at the age of 68 Jakob had retired, keeping only two horses. By this time son Peter I. Wiebe was already farming in the village in a substantial way.

Jacob Wiebe died on February 19, 1901, at his home in Blumenort. “Jakob Wiebe is remembered as a tall, strong man who loved to tell stories.”

**Martyrs’ Mirror.**

Among the holdings of the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, is a 1870 Johann F. Funk edition of the Martyrs’ Mirror which Jakob Wiebe acquired in 1883 for $6.50. Wiebe’s ownership of this hefty volume speaks to the fact that in addition to being successful in his financial affairs, he also recognized the importance of the spiritual sustinance.

**Descendants.**

Son Johann I. Wiebe died in 1884, after which his widow remarried to school teacher Cornelius Fast. Johann I. Wiebe had one son Jakob who had three children, Dora, Mrs. Peter I. Bartel, Albert and Frank. Dora’s son Harry Bartel was well known as a minister of a Steinbach Pentecostal church.

Son Peter I. Wiebe was a successful farmer near Hochfeld west of Blumenort, farming the E 1/2 of Section 29-7-6E. Jim Wiebe, Blumenort, accountant, and Roland Wiebe, truck repair, are their grandsons. A granddaughter Anna Wiebe (Mrs. Bill R. Hiebert) lives in Steinbach.

Daughter Anna I. Wiebe married Peter B. Friesen, Neuanlage (Twincreek). They were the parents of the “W” Friesens, Isaac (b. 1905) who still lives in Jagueyes, Mexico, Jakob (1892-81), Kllefeld, deceased, folk historian, and Peter W. Friesen (1909-95), Steinbach, to name a few. Many of the Friesen descendants lived in Heuboden and moved to Mexico in 1948, from where some have since returned to Manitoba.

**Sources.**


This is perhaps Delbert Plett’s most significant contribution to Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite history since the publication of two mammoth works, *Golden Years* and *Storm and Triumph* a decade ago. The significance is threefold: 1) this is a synthesis, a pulling together of Plett’s discoveries and interpretations published in more than 3000 pages, six history books and two novels; 2) it is a readable work, clearly geared for the general reader interested in Russian Mennonite history; 3) it includes Plett’s newest work, including that in material culture and family history.

The corner stone of this work is Plett’s view that the Kleine Gemeinde was an expression of ‘conservative’ reformation. It was the clearest articulation in 19th century Russia of what Harold S. Bender called the ‘Anabaptist Vision’ and Robert Friedmann the ‘Kingdom of Peace.’ Sixteenth century Anabaptists, argued Bender and Friedmann, had made their mark as ‘Nachfolger Christi,’ that is, followers of Jesus and hence restorers of the apostolic church. The result was an ethically concerned Christianity, linked to non-conformity to the ‘Kingdom of Evil,’ to regenerated and disciplined discipleship, to a peoplehood-based and community-oriented church, or Gemeinde, and to an amillenialist view of the end times.

Plett traces this ‘true’ commitment from the apostolic church, through to medieval reform movements, and to the Anabaptists or Radical Reformers. He traces the lineage on to the committed Hard Frisians in the Netherlands, the Old Flemish in Danzig, and even to a proto-Kleine Gemeinde found in Tiegenhagen, Prussia.

This theme of apostolic faithfulness is interwoven throughout the book. As Plett argues, the Kleine Gemeinde was characterized by this commitment from the time of its founding in 1812 to the date of its departure for North America in 1874. The establishment of a separate church in 1812 thus was not reactionary, void of grace and imbued with petty jealousy, as some historians have suggested. Rather it was the result of a deeply profound commitment to discipleship, especially to the ethic of love and non-resistance. Founder Klaas Reimer would not endorse the idea that Mennonites could contribute to Russia’s war with the French invader, Napoleon, or that true Christians could assist a temporal Mennonite authority in imprisoning and whipping colony offenders.

In the 62 years following 1812 the Kleine Gemeinde energetically pursued an agenda of reformation. Led by talented men like Klaus Reimer, the theologian Heinrich Balzer and the ‘evangelical missionary’ Abraham Friesen, the Kleine Gemeinde moved into its ‘golden years,’ an unheralded flowering of the faith.” [83] It practiced internal discipline, admonishing a peaceful and simple life, devoted to the poor and ill, and opposed to those who resorted to violence or gave in to greed. The small church was also willing to confront and minister to the wider Mennonite community on the Molotschna Colony.

Undergirding the book is Plett’s interpretation that the Kleine Gemeinde stood between two extremes. On the one hand were the ‘cultural’ Mennonites who were cold to spiritual truth and increasingly relied on ethnicity as a common bond, and on the other, the ‘separatist-pietist’ Mennonites who had ostensibly set aside ethical concern, and focussed solely on an emotion-laden, fear-based religion. Plett energetically plies this history with stories that illustrate his view that the Kleine Gemeinde represented normative Anabaptism, caught between two great ‘errors.’ The Kleine Gemeinde heatedly debated the pietists, they opposed their unjust actions, and they suffer their indignations. But the Kleine Gemeinde also battled the culturally conservative forces which advocated coercive practice, opposed the publication of Menno Simons’ works and worked to humiliate Kleine Gemeinde ministers.

Unlike most congregational histories Plett adds a rich social analysis to his history. Almost half of the book is devoted to this documentation. Well established already is Plett’s point that the Kleine Gemeinde were not on the social margins of the Molotschna Colony. He emphasizes that they were of above average wealth, and that they strengthened their social influence through intermarriage. He notes, too, how they earned the respect of economic reformer Johann Comries and were on the forefront of seeking new land sources for young families. Having personally visited Borosenko Colony, Plett is even able to comment on the quality of the fertile land and write with authority on the family farm economy of that settlement.

What is especially new in the book is Plett’s emphasis on cultural life. He notes the amazing literary record of the Kleine Gemeinde; not only did it publish Anabaptist writers, its members wrote poetry, copied ‘morality literature,’ maintained a wide correspondence and kept journals. Plett pays special tribute to the personal diary of Abraham F. Reimer, which he argues was ‘by far the most significant record of social and cultural life among landowning Russian Mennonites in the 19th century.’ [140] Plett also notes the keen eye that the Kleine Gemeinde had for material culture, especially fine pottery, exquisite calligraphy, wood carving and solid furniture. Although representative of ‘plain people,’ they had ‘distinctive ideas of beauty,’ especially exemplified in Frakturmaalen, that is, colourful hand drawn paper-cut art, and in calligraphy, penmanship. And Plett writes of the folkculture of the Kleine Gemeinde, a people who discouraged frivolity, but venerated storytelling complete with ‘earthly folklore and ribald humour.’

Finally, Plett celebrates the life of groups that

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have been overlooked in most other denominational histories, women and the elderly. Although he speaks of the hard work performed by maid- and young mothers, he emphasizes the status-filled roles that Kleine Gemeinde women held as a result of the Mennonite practice of equal inheritance of boys and girls, the use of the mother’s surname as everyone’s middle name, the tradition of settling in the village of the bride, the severe penalties for wife or maid beating, the strong sense that Kleine Gemeinde members had of their matrilineal line, the commonness of the women as health care providers, and the natural respect that communitarian folk had for the elderly, including the grandmothers, the elderly Meums.

And his longest chapter, Meums and Ohms, is a fascinating set of biographical sketches of 21 elderly members of the Kleine Gemeinde; they include deacons and the deceased, men and women, well-to-do widows and village intellectuals. Using his knowledge of genealogy and his access to sources of everyday life, Plett weaves a story of real, blood and flesh, members; they are ‘quiet’ men who were ‘hard-working, sober-thinking and humble’ [236] and they were ‘reflective’ women of ‘talent and intelligence.’[251].

The book’s greatest strength may be in its accessibility to the general reader. It is a text in regular sized print, mostly written without jars and in short, crisp sentences. The cover is attractive and vibrantly coloured. The book, as with all of Plett’s works comes with a highly useful index. Unlike his other books, however, there is little reference to sources. But this was a good choice, as the book is meant to be a popular history and highly useful ‘further reading’ sections complete each chapter. And despite the early setting of this story, the text has been enlivened by a surprising number of illustrations, including sketches, maps and photographs.

By making the story more accessible to the general reader, Plett has also made the story of the Kleine Gemeinde rightfully relevant to the widest possible Mennonite readership.

Roy Loewen, Chair Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg

Prairie Pilgrims (John W. Dueck Book Committee, 1999; plasticized cover, detailed Table of Contents for easy reference; updated genealogy), 255 pages. $18.95.

Let me introduce you to the three main Pilgrims whose writings (ably translated from the Gothic German by Levi Dueck), make up about two-thirds of the content of this sequel to Prairie Pioneer (Dueck Committee, 1995): see Preservings, No. 7, page 53, for a review.

Peter Loewen Dueck (1842-87), teacher, farmer, book-dealer, was born in Russia and immigrated to the East Reserve with his young family in 1874. His first marriage to Justina Friesen Wiebe, resulted in two sons: John and Peter. His second marriage to Susanna Loewen, brought him five daughters: Susanna (m. Abram R. Penner), Helena (m. Rev. H. R. Reimer), Elizabeth (m. Rev. Peter B. Kroeker), Anna (m. Cornelius W. Brandt) and Margaretha (m. Aron R. Reimer). By all accounts, great-grandfather Dueck was a prolific letter-writer who sometimes wrote a letter a day, “home to Russia” and elsewhere. He is rumoured to have left behind 32 books of letters which are mostly “lost”. Fortunately, however, several of those very fascinating letters, beginning in 1875 and ending in 1884, have recently been found. They are published here for the first time, along with some “new” poems and biblical reflections as well as business-related correspondence. Together, they give an intriguing glimpse into the economic, family and faith practices of a particular family, but are surely also representative of many other such Kleine Gemeinde families during that first challenging decade in Manitoba and therefore of interest to the broader community.

Johann Wiebe Dueck (1865-1932), was nine years old at the time of the immigration to Canada. He married Maria Klassen Kroeker in 1893. They had eleven children whose names are noted in the attached genealogy. Like his father before him, he too, was a teacher, farmer and bookseller as well as a store-keeper, auctioneer, song leader, avid reader and a gifted writer, whose massive writings in Prairie Pioneer and in History and Events (Delbert Plett-1982), have already captured the hearts (including mine!) of many readers.

In this book, there are several new letters, diaries and other very interesting writings by Johanna, but his main contribution is a series of articles published in the Volks-Bote (fore-runner of Die Steinbach Post) in 1914, entitled “Reminiscing About the Pioneer Years 1873-77”. The articles add fresh insights and new details (see comments on how the coming of the white man has not been a blessing to the “natives” because it has taken their land away p. 25), he goes on to retell the familiar story of the Kleine Gemeinde’s painful decision to leave Russia in the early 1870s (largely because they feared that the churches’ position on non-resistance might be under threat) in favour of an unknown, but peaceful, promised land in North America... Again, this story has the power not only to inspire readers from a particularly religious and/or ethnic tradition, but can be an inspiration to all who face challenging choices connected with their faith.

Maria Klassen Kroeker Dueck, (1875-1939), was born in Canada, the daughter of Bishop Jacob M. and Maria Klassen Kroeker, and grand-daughter of delegate David Klassen. As already noted, she married Johann W. Dueck and together, they brought up a large family. She is a fine writer whose personal diaries, written during the years 1899, 1907-09 and 1923-27, along with a number of quite exceptional personal letters (1952-37), give us a rare opportunity to view the world through the eyes of a turn-of-the-century Kleine Gemeinde woman.
For me personally, grandmother’s diaries, and especially her letters, are the highlight of this book. Their cumulative effect is to bring to life a woman who died before I was born; a woman who had always been a mystic figure for me, somewhat obscured by the stories of my more outgoing and gregarious grand-father. But after reading her writings as well as the reminiscings of those who knew her best, she has emerged from the shadows, revealing not only a “gentle”, somewhat sickly woman, given to heart palpitations, but also a woman who loves deeply and is loved in return: by her family, her husband (her letters after his death suggest a “true love” story), and especially her daughter-in-laws, who, even after she left home for several years after their marriage, still considered her to be verging on saintliness!

Her diaries, while not “intensely personal or revelatory of her inner nature”, do quite often, go beyond simple comments on “weather patterns” and “what we had for dinner” (See Royden Loewen, “Chortitzer Journals,” Preservings, No. 12, June, 1998). And, like her husband’s writings, they help us to “enter into the past” as they gradually reveal a woman who loved the world she lived in and who delighted in the usual “womanly”, “earthy” things around her: planting flower and vegetable gardens, setting brooding hens on duck and chicken eggs, cooking, baking, sewing and socializing (quite often they had 40 to 50 people over at a time!); a woman who had a special love for studying “home remedies” and sometimes worried whether the local midwife and “nurses” were prescribing the right treatments for her family.

In addition, her fine letters reveal a complex and intelligent woman who at times, mourned her lack of education, and at first, felt ‘inadequate when her beloved husband died and she was left behind as the only parent of a colourful family. But, who nevertheless, continued on as a woman in her own right: a woman who very gently, but quite readily, expressed her own thoughts and opinions.

But best of all, she was a woman whose writings, like those of her husband and father-in-law, simply “breathed out” the Christian/Anabaptist faith.

Truly, grandmother, as well as grandfather and great-grandfather Dueck, was a worthy pilgrim whose writings can enrich the lives, not only of her immediate descendants, but of all those who pick up this book and read as we celebrate the 125th Anniversary year of the Mennonite immigration to Manitoba.

Reviewed by Leona Dueck Penner, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Stanley M. Harder, From Prussia to Russia to North America: 300 Years Peter S. Harder & Mary G. Quiring (3137 E Wescott Dr, Phoenix, Arizona, 85024), 151 pages, available from the author, call 1(602)569-3406.

In our June issue 12 of Preservings, we had a letter to the editor from Stan M. Harder, requesting information about his Harder relatives who had immigrated to Manitoba in 1874-5. I hope he received some response.

Now we already have a family book by Stan referred to me by friend Ralph Friesen. The book is of interest to our readership as several of the family lines he traces and documents in the book are of Berghalter origin who, however, settled in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. This seems to include all the family lines on Stan’s father’s side, whereas his mother’s family, the Quirings were of Molotschna origin.

The Harder book is a real cornucopia of historical and family information. Stan faced a problem commonly encountered by those doing histories of Russian Mennonites emigrating to the United States in 1874; many of these families are two and three generations ahead in terms of assimilation, resulting in a lower level of general background knowledge.

Stan has responded to this dilemma by including a great deal of history and attempting to tell the entire story from the founding of the Mennonite movement in the Reformation, etc., including even a section explaining Indo-European languages and the relative origins of Plautdeutsch—based on the work of Ruben Epp. In the course of documenting this history Stan obviously became very moved and influenced by what he found, writing “This is a story of real people, people who made mistakes, but a people that time and time again reaffirmed the choice to serve the Lord God as their conscience directed, in the face of intense persecution at times, as well as in times of prosperity” (page 6).

Moving on, Stan has written quite a solid introduction to the story of Mennonites “In the Ukraine”, although in the 19th century it was part of Imperial Russia and properly referred to as such.

In a short section entitled “Views on Salva-
tion” I detected the influence of Peter M. Friesen, repeated *ad nauseam* by others, alleging that to conservative religious leaders “…the idea that a person could be assured of salvation through a conversion experience bordered on heresy. All one could do was live a disciplined life in hope of salvation.”

I wonder how long the Mennonite community will be bedeviled by such lies. The truth was that conservative Mennonite leaders believed in a Gospel articulated faith, salvation was discipleship within the bosom of the Gemeinde. The resulting existential faith had no need for any artificial doctrines of assurance of salvation and/or conversion experience (Dr. Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Theology*). Such a doctrine was only for Calvinists who never had quite completed the Reformation and consequently they were never quite sure whether they had salvation or not.

The section on Berghthal is based too much on dated scholarship, such as that the first settlers were all Flemish, not necessarily the case. Although all settlers did join the Flemish-based Gemeinde in Berghthal, some of them such as Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84), had roots in Kronsgarten, a Frisian village.

Stan writes that “many of the settlers were poor” again a misnomer, as most of the settlers came from homes affluent enough to seize an opportunity to settle one or more of their children on land on their own, something nigh to impossible in the mother colonies. This was verified by the fact that each of the families moving to Berghthal was allowed five wagon loads of goods plus horses and livestock, something not indicative of “Anwohner” people.

Stan writes that Berghthal “…was no paradise.” While this is true in the same sense that Hillsboro, Kansas, is not paradise, it belies the fact that the deep river valleys in which three of the Berghthal villages were nestled were highly picturesque, revealing nostalgia for the physical landscape of the “old” Chortitza Colony. With the Kamayana Moglia mountains, many “gorgany” (Sylvania burial mounds), several rivers and streams and the proximity of the Sea of Azov some 20 miles south, it was as scenic a setting as could be found anywhere in the region, and well positioned to partake of the financial boom sweeping the area when local seaports such as Mariupol gained access to world markets in the 1830s.

Much to his credit, Stan does not join in the condemnation of Berghthal schools typically found in books written by the uninformed and/or those who have adopted foreign religious cultures and wishing to denigrate their ancestors. To his credit, Stan writes that Bergthal, Russia, as they have for the Kleine Gemeinde, as diaries can provide invaluable biographical data.

Overall, however, I found the story well-told and balanced. Stan has done a great job of collecting biographical information from the post 1874, American period. The book is richly illustrated with a wealth of photos, maps, quotations, newspaper clippings, and family charts. It is what I call a “Henry Armstrong” book, the pages are photocopied not printed, spiral-bound, a good choice for those who do not want to, or are unable to, cough up the doe for a more expensively bound book. Nonetheless, the quality of the photo reproductions and print is reasonably good. The book closes with a number of appendices, a time chart, a genealogical listing of the direct ancestors of the family patriarch and matriarch, and a good subject index.

All in all, this is a sound family book, well produced and written, something which Stan M. Harder and the Harder family can be proud of for generations to come. Book review by D. Plett

**West Reserve Berghthal**

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in family history books. This holds true also for Berghthal families who emigrated from Imperial Russia to Manitoba in 1874-76, settling in the East and then moving on to the West Reserve around Altona, 1878-81 where the majority were called Sommerfelder.

The stories of these families are of interest to Hanover Steinbach, in part, because they invariably add to what we know about our history, especially of the early pioneering years. These books are also important as in some cases their descendants have found their way back to live and work here where their ancestors once toiled.

All three of the following family books--Gerbrandt, Hiebert and Hildebrandt--are significant undertakings and the authors, compilers and editors deserve our thanks, and the thanks of each family, for the important work they have done.

*Book Notes by D. Plett*

**John J. Gerbrandt, Destination California,** describes the Historical Trip by the Jakob D. Gerbrandt Family from Rosenfeld, Manitoba, Canada, to Reedley, California, S.S.A.: 30 days trip October 28 to November 28, 1922 (Fresno, California, n.d.), 18 pages. As indicated by the title this book is a brief but well written and interesting account of the journey of the Gerbrandt family to sunny California. The author, John J. Gerbrandt, is a brother to Peter J. Gerbrandt, former minister of the Immanuel Evangelical Free Church in Steinbach. The two brothers were the sons of Jakob D. Gerbrandt (1871-1953) and Justina Brandt (1875-1947).

Unfortunately the author says little about the history of the Gerbrandt family, only that they emigrated from Russia in 1902, moved to Saskatchewan and eventually to California, the story told in the book. With the help of friend Kevin Ens-Rempel, Centre for M.B. Studies, Fresno, and the “GRANDMA CD ROM”, I was able to retrieve a few additional pieces of the story.

It appears that Jakob and parents Dietrich Gerbrandt (b. 1838) and Margaretha Harder (b. 1837) BGB C8, opted to remain in Russia when the grandparents Peter Gerbrandt (b. 1814) and third wife Eva Fries, together with a number of his children, decided to emigrate from Berghthal, Imperial Russia, to Manitoba in 1876, BGB B31, following brothers Johann (1817-91) and Jakob

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*No. 14, June, 1999*
Peter Gerbrandt (b. 1823) who had already immigrated. It is not always easy to identify the East Reserve village of settlement in 1874-76. The Brot Schult Registers provide some help listing a Johann Gerbrandt (son of Peter) resident in Friedrichthal/Kronsart in 1876. The registers also list Peter’s brother Johann Gerbrandt (1817-89) who settled in Blumengard west of Blumenort in 1874; see Irene Kroeker, “Blumengard”, in Historical Sketches, pages 91-93. Johann’s son Jakob Gerbrandt (1853-1932), later settled in Lichtenfeld near Altona. Henry J. Gerbrandt, author of the history of the Bergthaler Church, Adventure in Faith, is his grandson. Brother Jakob Gerbrandt (b. 1823) is listed in Rosengard, south of present day Mitchell. It appears that the Bergthaler/Somerfelder/Chortitzer Gerbrandts were all related.

In any event, by the time of the 1881 census, Peter Gerbrandt and wife Eva were resident in the West Reserve, village of Lichtenfeld, with brother Johann living in the nearby village of Neu-Hoffnung. The challenge for the historians in the Gerbrandt family now will be to fill in the gaps and to extricate the storey of why son Dietrich remained in Russia instead of immigrating together with his aged father.

The second challenge will be to assess carefully information which has been gathered, such as in the “GRANDMA CD ROM” which records Jakob D. Gerbrandt’s place of birth as Heuboden, Borosenko. This appears to be incorrect as Heuboden in Borosenko was a Kleine Gemeinde village. It would be much more logical that the place of birth was Heuboden in the Bergthal settlement, the family home.

In short, the materials currently available regarding the families of both Johann and Peter Gerbrandt should raise enough questions to wet the appetite of most family historians, and the fruits of such research will surely be equally rewarding.


This family books lists the descendants of Martin Hiebert (1858-1944) and Helena Sawatzky (1867-1952), both from well known and prominent Bergthaler families. Martin was the son of Abraham Hiebert (1823- ) and Katharina Friesen (1825-99), BGB B48, who settled in Schönfeld, southwest of modern-day Mitchell, in 1875. Thus it is possible that some of the bones recently discovered at the old Schönfeld village cemetery may belong to members of the Hiebert family, see Preservings, No. 8, Part One, page 30, see also Carillon News, May 3 and May 31, 1995.

Abraham’s wife Katharina Friesen was the sister to Johann Friesen (b. 1833) whose grandson D. W. Friesen, founded the national printing firm of Altona, BGB A15. A historical sketch and portrait of the Abraham Hiebert family, published in the Red River Valley Echo, June 12, 1974, has been reprinted by the authors thus providing some historical information.

But new research might well have brought forth some fresh details. For example, an Abraham Hiebert served as Beisitzer or Deputy District Mayor of the Bergthal Colony during the 1850s. Was this perhaps Abraham Hiebert (b. 1823)? or even his father, Abraham Hiebert (b. 1801) BGB A49?

This book has benefited from a careful analysis of the information in the Bergthal Gemeinde Buch assisted by historian William Schroeder. The book contains photographs of Martin and Helena Hiebert and of each of the children and a listing of their descendants.

However, it does not provide any historical information other than the vital statistics, date of birth, death and marriage. A perusal of the book reveals that the family included well-known residents of our community including Shirley, Mrs. John Bestvater, Eldon Stoesz, Jean Eidse, Mrs. Gladwin Plett, Sophie Hiebert, Mrs. Geordie Braun, and sons Gilbert and Gary, and of course, daughter Maria Hiebert, Mrs. Peter J. Gerbrandt, former minister of the Immanuel Free Church, Steinbach.

Family histories and identities take years to develop. The work and effort represented by this book has established a good foundation for future family historians to build on as they tease out the events of the past and make them part of an on-going and growing family tradition.

Katherine Schroeder, Karl Hildebrandt: Family Tree (Winnipeg, 1982), 190 pages.


It is not often one gets the opportunity to review two family books, a first and second edition, in the same venue. I realized only after examining both books for a few moments that they are written as volumes one and two, each containing substantially different information, photographs, etc. Presumably the material available in 1982 was used for the first volume and new material added for the second volume.

The books deal with the family of Karl Hildebrandt (1858-1943) and Anna Dueck (1865-1944). Karl was the great-grandson of Peter Hildebrandt (1762-1852) one of the founders of the village of Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony. Peter was a well-to-do farmer with 7 horses, 23 cattle, etc. in 1808. His son Jakob Hildebrand (1802-47) emigrated to Bergthal, settling in the village of Schönthal, BGB A72. Son Peter Hildebrand (1831-1902) emigrated to Manitoba in 1874 where he and son Karl are listed in the village of Kronsthal, later known as New Bothwell, in the 1881 census. Shortly thereafter the family moved on to the vilage of Sommerfeld near Altona. Also listed in Kronsthal in 1881 is Isaak Hildebrand (1838-1929), Peter’s younger brother. But Isaak’s family stayed in Kronsthal (now New Bothwell) and from them is descended Bill Hildebrand, recently deceased Aeltester of the Chortitzer Conference, see Heritage Collections: New Bothwell, pages 277-290.

Both of the Karl Hildebrand books include numerous photographs and a listing of descendants. Volume Two includes an updated genealogy, many current photographs, and some short historical sketches, material so important to maintain an on-going family tradition.

Among the Hildebrandt descendants known in our area are Les Schroeder, former Councillor of R. M. of Hanover, John Loewen, Stuartburn, and among the Bergthaler the Dahms family.

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Watch for More Details
and Peter Bergen, author of the history book of the village of Sommerfeld, near Altona. The family includes many descendants in Paraguay.


I was pleasantly surprised when Abram W. Hiebert’s son Erdmann, Blumenort, Manitoba, brought me a copy of this book.

The Hiebert family traces its roots back to Kornelius Hiebert (b. 1758) from Lithuania who settled in the village of Kronswede, Chortitz Colony, in 1793, where son Heinrich Hiebert (1791-1851), age 23, is listed as a young Vollwirth in the 1814 census, with 3 horses, 4 cattle, 1 sheep, 2 pigs, a plow, harrow, wagon, etc. indicating that he may have taken over his father’s Wirtschaft.

This again refutes the false information which has found its way into some history books that the Berghthal settlers were landless. Detailed family studies have revealed time and time again that the parents of Berghthal settlers were from the landowning Vollwirth class. The efforts by historians such as Frank H. Epp (Men. in Can., Vol 1, page 195) to recast history to prove that the “Kanadier” were a lower racial species, speak more about their own culture than any historical facts.

In any case, Heinrich Huebert BGB A14 re-located to the Berghthal Colony, a well-defined strategy to provide land for his nine children. Hiebert is not listed in the census for Heuboden and Friedrichshal, therefore, he must have lived in one of the three older Berghthal villages, and may well have been one of the original pioneers. A Hiebert is listed as Beisitzer in Schönfeld in the 1848 Gemeindeberichte, but no first name is given. Presumably once the rest of the 1858 census for Berghthal is available it will be easy to decipher details such as village of residence.

Heinrich’s son Peter Hiebert (1818-68) BGB B7 also died in Berghthal. Heinrich’s widow, nee Sara Sawatzky (b. 1821) remarried to Abraham Hiebert (1806-74) BGB A159 and came to Canada with her two unmarried daughters Margaretha age 11 and Helena 16 in 1875. According to the Brotschult Registers, Sarah settled in the village of Berghthal.

Heinrich’s son Peter P.Huebert (1841-1902) BGB C 13 came to Canada with the first group of Berghthal German immigrants in 1874 travelling on the same ship that carried the great-grandparents of famous movie actress Dyan Cannon. The Peter Hiebert family settled in the village of Berghthal, three miles north of modern-day Mitchell.

Abraham F. Hiebert (1869-1939), from Peter’s second marriage, married Sarah Friesen, emigrated to Paraguay, fleeing the fascist Anglo-conformity measures of the Provincial Government.

Abraham and Sarah are the couple whose descendants are listed in the book. The book is rather skimpy on historical material, but does provide photographs of many of the families. It needs to be noted also that the book is compiled as a supplement or continuation of the Peter P. Hiebert Family Tree 1841-1984, page 97.


Well, I should come clean and say up front that this Shoo-fly Dyck book buttered me up in three ways right off the bat: (1) John Janzen Kooistra mentions my name on the dedication page; (2) John Janzen Kooistra tells “Yasch” with a “Y”; and (3) John Janzen Kooistra uses the word “gribble” which I once time long ago made up from the Flat German word “yrebble”. (I spell it with a “Y” to nerf Al Reimer and all those other highly-learned orthologists who laid down the law too late to catch me.)

Now from what the biographical notes say and what I learned from Kooistra himself at the Menno-Lit conference at Conrad Grebel in 1990, John Kooistra has a Dutch Calvinist background and came to the Mennonite faith through marriage. So he brings an outsider’s inside view to his writing about one Richard Dyck, a Virgil, Ontario, fruit farmer who through no fault of his own becomes a star pitcher for the Toronto Blue Jays. Richard’s nickname is Shoo-fly, as is his father’s. His father has a passion for shoo-fly pie; Richard hates this nickname and shoo-fly pie.

Richard loves the farm and hasn’t played baseball since elementary school. But one day, a friend challenges him to pitch a ball at a target circle drawn on the side of the barn. Richard not only hits the target, the ball breaks right through the siding and lands in the pig pen inside. His friend drags him off to play ball for the Niagara Falls Mariners. One thing leads to another and suddenly Shoo-fly Dyck is throwing 105 mph pitches at SkyDome.

Now I think it’s good to have a Mennonite sports hero, even though I myself would sooner watch Jimmy Swaggert on TV than a baseball game. I mean, I like to play baseball, but I’ve never found watching baseball on TV to be edifying for my soul. And I do think it’s high time we had a Mennonite sports hero; why should we just produce Bank of Canada chairs, politicians, opera singers, newspaper publishers, and CBC big wigs?

Shoo-fly Dyck is a very funny novel; the characters are funny, the incidents are funny, the language is funny. Richard Dyck, the main character, is a perfect Mennonite—in the sense that he finds himself in the world, but always manages not to be quite of the world. Kooistra throws his hero into the world, throws him into situations and temptations Richard would rather not have to deal with, and some readers may object to the graphic nature of some of the scenes, but Richard “Shoofly” Dyck is so honest, so pure and innocent, that he manages to spark theological discussions among busloads of harddrinking, womanizing ball players in such a way that the reader is actually convinced that this would happen. Shoo-fly is not Danny Orlls.

In Shoo-fly Dyck John Janzen Kooistra has created a fast moving novel with a lovable character who will make readers laugh and cry and revel in this glorious human condition we know as life. I would say it’s more inventive than W.P. Kinsella’s “if you build it he will come” Shoeless Joe (Field of Dreams) for those who go to the showhall but don’t read books; it is just as literary and for sure, a whole lot funnier. I think Sam Snoozie would have liked Shoo-fly Dyck.

Reviewed by Armin Wiebe, Winnipeg

Margaretha Hiebert Froese (b. 1862), youngest sister to Peter P. Hiebert (1841-1902). A face reflecting intelligence, beauty, grace, and inner peace. Can any reader provide information as to whom she married and where she lived? This might provide a valuable clue as to what happened to the siblings’ mother, nee Sarah Sawatzky. Photo courtesy of Peter P. Hiebert Family Tree 1841-1984, page 97.

The creation of a historical tradition for a family is not easy. In Germany the saying goes, “The first generation has the death, the second, the adversity, and the third, the bread.” This proverb also holds true for the ethnic German Colonists who settled the area south of Steinbach, known as Friedensfeld. Since most of these settlers came as individual families, in many cases first working for local Mennonites before able to set up on their own homesteads, they did not bring a united historical ethos with them, as did their hosts who had emigrated as entire communities or Gemeinden, several decades earlier.

For these and other reasons it is all the more memorable and important for the Friedensfelder Germans and their descendants to collect, record and document their history (*Preservings* will be delighted to publish these historical accounts).

Thus I was delighted when friend Art Krentz brought me a copy of the second edition of the “Michael Krentz Book” an updated and much expanded companion to the first edition published back in 1985. The story of Gottlieb and Karolina Krentz was also published in *Preservings*, No. 12, pages 78-9.

The new edition is professionally typeset, with a biography and one or two photographs from each of the five children of the matriarch and patriarch.

The Krentz family has prospered and become rather prominent in the Hanover Steinbach area: from the hockey players—Ralph, Ken and Dale, the Mehlings brothers, cattle barons—Bobby and Gordon, machinery dealer Reg, the Fenders—Emanuel and Alvin, and others too numerous to mention.

The Krentz family has made an immense contribution to our community. As such their families are the heirs of a proud family tradition. The Krentz family books, and hopefully numerous future expanded editions will enshrine this tradition in the written word, serving their descendants as a beacon to inspire future generations.

Reviewed by D. Plett, Q.C.


Walter Braun’s testimonial to his parents, Peter and Lena Braun, is a slim book, modestly bound with a parchment cover over letter-sized two-column pages. It contains a brief sketch of Mennonite history, approximately 60 pages chronicling the lives of Peter Braun (born 1890) and his wife, Lena Friesen Braun (born 1893), a complete list of descendants, and an ancestor chart. Other memorabilia is included as well: an original poem written by one of Peter and Lena Braun’s daughters, favourite hymns, and a photocopy of the document signed by Lena’s adoptive parents, Abraham and Cornelia Friesen in 1896. The book is different from others in its genre in that it provides no photographs.

The subheadings in the detailed table of contents suggest that the first part of the book is based largely on oral tradition and personal memories of the writer, whereas the material from about 1953 to 1971 (the year of Peter Braun’s death) is organized by the year, with summaries and quotations drawn without much comment from the diary that Peter kept most of his adult life. The story line then turns to Lena Braun, giving a short life history from her point of view and describing her last years as a widow, her death and her obituary.

Although parents, and fathers in particular, are getting bad press from Mennonite writers nowadays, this volume is an exception to that trend. Walter Braun depicts a father (and to some extent a husband) throughout all the seasons of life with implicit respect, and maybe a touch of wonder.

Strictly speaking, the book, the title notwithstanding, is less a “biography”, and perhaps more of a “life story” in that it makes little attempt to treat the material with scholarly detachment, nor to assess the measure of this man’s impact on the larger society. Nevertheless, it is the life story of a significant, even unusual man that many of the readers of this magazine will still remember vividly.

Peter Braun, who grew up as the son of one of the most prominent businessmen in the Southeast, Johann Braun of *Braun and Krahn* of Grunthal, became in his time an entrepreneur on a scale noteworthy even among Mennonites of southern Manitoba. The life story recounted by son Walter Braun reveals the man behind the hectic activity and numerous business endeavours, a man with a magnetism that attracted people to him regardless of circumstances. As the details of the life story emerge, Peter is convincingly portrayed as a man who took all the world as his preserve, and yet in many ways remained profoundly unworldly.

The story of Lena Friesen Braun is no less fascinating. She was adopted into a Mennonite family as a very young child, and grew up as the daughter of one of the itinerant private German school teachers, Abraham Friesen (see *Pres/*, No. 10, Part Two, pages 25-27). Lena married Peter Braun, supporting his dreams for almost exactly 60 years, and lived to be over 98 years of age despite the hardships of a raising a large family in a labour-intensive era.

A book like this is priceless to any member of a family fortunate enough to have a writer willing to undertake the task of producing it, but any larger audience demands more than mere reminiscence. Walter Braun’s book offers that additional dimension; namely, a wealth of information about, and primary documentation of, the Southeast and its inhabitants. And beyond that, it is a tribute to a man who would be extraordinary in any place or any time.

A large part of the life story is based on a diary that Peter Braun kept over the decades, a resource that local historians may want to access. The entries, from which Walter Braun quotes liberally, reveal an aware and articulate man with a sense of humour, and a marvellous sense of family. Despite the amount of material dedicated to health matters and frequent moves from place to place, perhaps the strongest impression one gets is of a person whose insatiable curiosity expressed itself in an eager exploration of every aspect of life available to him, and in a compulsion to record.

The diary, and therefore this book, is one of incredible detail. Peter Braun had a penchant for recording everything: temperatures, exact times of day of every event, names of people he encountered, statistics of every kind, trivia, and data that now in retrospect has documentary value. Walter Braun conveys this dimension of his father’s life through the enumeration of the exact details of the travels, business ventures, and domestic routine as his father recorded them.

Peter Braun, Mennonite extraordinaire, seems to have spent the first half of his life acquiring a wealth of experience in business, several trades, agriculture, human relations, trades, travel, and management. And then spent the last half of his life serving as a resource for family and neighbours in all these areas, for the variety of work that he was called upon to do in the years when other people retire gives the impression of a fullness of life rarely experienced by men even in their prime.

A story about the life of one’s parents cannot fail also to be the story of the entire family, and that story in this case is one of anomalies. The book depicts a family that moved far more frequently than most other families I know, yet was always surrounded by friends and guests, seemingly becoming a fellowship resource wherever they went. Then, too, in a time when most people in the southeast barely left their own township over an entire lifetime, this family moved across the country and travelled over most of the North American continent. Peter Braun homesteaded in Montana and the Peace River area of Alberta, farmed for years in Manitoba, and even tried the bush country of Ontario, and yet, ironically, the land itself was not what attracted him. Again, this family was trucking when most Mennonites were committed to horses.

The family belonged to a conservative church,
the Church of God in Christ, and yet the theological concerns that surface in the diary are strikingly contemporary. Although a man of action at heart and always busy at several things at once, it was Peter Braun who began tracing the family history of his clan, and published two family tree books. The man portrayed here has his own anomalies, although Walter Braun does not address them directly, nor seek to interpret the man to his readers in any systematic way.

The book is eminently readable, even chatty. However, that colloquial tone with which the writer endears himself to readers who know him may also be something of a drawback for the larger public, although the book was probably never intended for an audience beyond the family. The style is somewhat idiosyncratic, making it colourful and at times slightly enigmatic. There are some inadvertent inaccuracies in the Mennonite history page, but in general that part provides an adequate back-drop for the story that follows. The quotations from the diary are sometimes in German with no translation; and the content is occasionally overwhelming in its detail, and, yet maybe that itself speaks to the sheer fullness of the lives it describes. In view of the story’s larger significance, these are indeed minor stylistic and journalistic considerations.

The book is still available from H.J. Braun in Steinbach, or the author in Sinclair, Manitoba.

In many ways, this book is an attempt to “ Honour thy father and thy mother...” by preserving for posterity the memory of an unusual man and an unusual woman. Yet this volume is not a catalogue of Peter Braun’s achievements. Nor is it a roster of his failures. It is simply the story of a man and an unusual woman. Yet this volume is serving for posterity the memory of an unusual man and woman.

Reviewed by Ernst Braun, Niverville, Manitoba.


We welcome another important book into the Anabaptist-Mennonite ensemble of profitable historical-theological reading. The author of Keeping Salvation Ethical is well qualified to write this book on theology, historically and practically discerned. Why the book? As is quite usual in presenting theses, Weaver has a principal purpose as well as interlinked subsidiary purposes in writing the book. We must give brief consideration to his secondary purposes. Weaver proposes the following necessity to maintain the New Testament/Anabaptist—although not using this designation: “The peace churches should develop a systematic theology specific to peace-church assumptions rather than attempting to build on formulas that reflect one of versions of ‘mainstream’ theology” (27). The author’s book is an endeavour in that direction. This proposal is interlinked with his criticism of the direction Mennonite theology was moving in the latter part of the previous century and the first half of the twentieth century. He takes Harold S. Bender and John C. Wenger, with their theological kin, to task for so espousing mainstream conservative evangelicalism that Anabaptist-Mennonite distinctives such as nonresistance, discipleship, etc., may be perceived as not being intrinsic to the gospel, at least by implication.

Consequently, it is Weaver’s intention to contribute to making an attempt toward a systematic theology “which is shaped by the assumptions that Jesus’ rejection of the sword is intrinsic to the gospel...” (26).

The central thesis of Keeping Salvation Ethical, then, is “that nineteenth-century Mennonite atonement theology contains a latent threat to the peace theology and to the peace practice of succeeding Mennonite generations,” (27) and that there is a theory of the atonement which “reflects a commitment to live within the story of Jesus’ work of Christ as a cosmic battle between Christ and Satan” (235). Weaver then articulates that this latter theory best suited to preserve the ethical dimension of the gospel and therefore the nonresistant position of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is the Christus Victor motif. In contrast, it is the penal, substitutionary, satisfaction pattern of thinking which “contains a latent threat to the peace theology.”

To accomplish his task, Weaver has chosen to analyse the writings of eight Mennonite and Amish church leaders and their theologies to investigate whether, and in how far, the developments of their atonement theology has been a threat in retaining a peace position. Weaver is persuaded that there is a danger of separating ethics from their basic Anabaptist-Mennonite theology. As would be expected, the author also proposes a view of the atonement, which in his estimation is conducive to keep the gospel ethical and retain the peace theology as intrinsic in the gospel.

The first two leaders mentioned are David Beiler (1786-1871) and Heinrich (Henry) Egly (1824-1890). They were Amish. The following four, John M. Brennan (1816-1895), John Holdeman (1832-1900), Johannes Moser (1826-1908), Jacob W. Stauffer (1811-1855), were “Mennonites of some kind” (28). The final two, Cornelius H. Wedel (1860-1910), and Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1904) were Church leaders in the Russian Mennonites emigrants to America which began in 1734. All of these were ordained men.

It is both interesting and helpful to note the following details: Wedel was General Conference, and surely the most educated among the leaders selected. He was the first president of Bethel College (Kansas). He came from the more progressive Molotschna colony. Gerhard Wiebe was from the more conservative Bergthal colony. He, with some of his followers, settled in Chortitz, Manitoba. From the name of the village, this group finally got its name, the Chortitzer Mennonite Church. Heinrich Egly led a group from the Amish to become the Defenceless Mennonite Church, and finally The Evangelical Mennonite Church of the USA. John Holdeman left the Mennonite Church and founded The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, often known as the Holdeman Church. John Stauffer was instrumental in organizing the Stauffer Mennonite Church. Moser and his congregation joined the “relatively new General Conference Mennonite Church” in 1893 (108).

As essential for the development of his thesis, Weaver describes three views of the atonement. There is the Christus Victor view. It is also called the dynamic view and classic theory of the atonement. This theory was the pattern of atonement thinking in the Church of the first centuries. More recently, this atonement idea has been revived and refined by Gustav Auln, the late Swedish Lutheran bishop and theologian. This theory, essentially, understands the work of Christ as a cosmic battle between Christ and Satan in appearance, Satan won the battle when he succeeded to have Christ crucified. The resurrection of Christ, however, unanticipated by Satan, was God’s means of total victory over Satan.

Weaver, using this concept of the atonement and adapting it, sees it as best corresponding with the narrative of Jesus’ life and work in the New Testament. The life of Jesus was a continuing confrontation with Satan. The crucifixion was the lowest point in this struggle, while the resurrection was the complete defeat of the enemy and the decisive victory of God. But the victor was the nonresistant Christ who conquered by submission and death, not by brute violence. It is this atonement imagery which is now reduplicated by the Christian community, in terms of the continuing battle between the demonic forces, its nonresistant stance and its seeming defeat, culminating in ultimate and unprecedented victory. This is presented by Weaver as the true view of the atonement. It is only with this theory of the atonement, according to Weaver, that the gospel can be preserved as intrinsically ethical. The wording of this description is largely that of this reviewer.

The theories of the atonement which Weaver sees as inimical to Biblical teaching and the thesis he advocates are the moral influence theory,
devised by Peter Abelard, and the satisfaction theory originating with Anselm of Canterbury. Both come to us from the eleventh century. We need not busy ourselves with the Abelard theory, also known as the love of God theory, because Weaver gives scant attention to it. It is the satisfaction concept of the atonement—characterised as the penal and substitutionary theory—which the author of the book sees as unfriendly to the ethical essence of the true meaning of the gospel.

What is the satisfaction, penal theory of the atonement, and how is it related to a Christian’s understanding of the gospel and his life in Christ? First, as Weaver sees it, the earthly life of our Lord does not fundamentally affect this theory. Second, Jesus suffered God’s wrath for sin, personally, and this wrath had to be propitiated, that is, satisfied. Having propitiated the anger of God, the sinner’s sins are expiated, that is, erased. Third, this means that Christ took the sinner’s place, and thus was a substitute sin bearer. This description is too brief, but must be sufficient for the purpose of this review. The readers of Weaver’s book will notice that we have gone outside of the confines of his book to elaborate and define.

As has been clearly indicated, Weaver is convinced that the satisfaction explanation of the atonement undermines the faith, particularly the practical ethical aspect of it. He writes, “Anselm’s satisfaction theory does not make inherently necessary any specific or particular knowledge of the way Jesus was human or divine, nor does it require any particular knowledge of Jesus teaching. Neither does the resurrection of Jesus figure as an integral dimension in Anselm’s understanding of atonement” (45).

Moreover, neither does this understanding of the atonement, “defined in terms of a legal paradigm… make use of what is learned about Jesus from the story-shaped and story-based Christology,” which Weaver espouses (45). The book could have brought in Paul’s explicit and conjunctive assertion, recorded in Romans 5:10, to bolster the understanding of the involvement of Jesus’ life in the redeeming process: “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

The greater part of the book is now devoted to the analysis of the writings of the eight, North American Mennonite leaders. This analysis, in keeping with the Weaver’s thesis, focuses on their understanding of the meaning of the atonement, its relation to the gospel and its impact on the radical ethically practices within the Anabaptist-Mennonite community of faith. Painstakingly, and with much patience, Weaver surveys his materials. What were his findings with reference to the two questions: One, what motif of the atonement did his eight subjects embrace? Two, how did their acceptance of an atonement view affect their commitment to the radical ethics, which Mennonites have traditionally accepted as being the teaching of the New Testament and have been perfectly demonstrated in the Jesus’ life? In an interim deduction, Weaver informs us that all eight leaders shared a generally common understanding of “…the satisfaction or substitutionary atonement. They all assumed that the focus on the atonement alone was an incomplete understanding of salvation, and that individuals who properly seized upon the atoning work of Christ went on to manifest it in the way they lived” (155).

Weaver continues later, “One overarching presupposition shared by all was the belief that commitment to Christ—being Christian—would inevitably and of necessity manifest itself in the way an individual lives. That lived expression of Christian faith was modelled on the life and teaching of Jesus” (224).

In how far these theologically committed men identified themselves and their flocks with those who “relegated the commitment to nonresistance and nonviolence to the periphery of the gospel and what it means to be Christian” (230), is not stated. However, Weaver does warn that “to assert that one has full Christian identity with those who do not espouse pacifism is in effect to place the questions about the rejection of violence, nonresistance, and nonviolence outside of the central core of Christian beliefs.” If we understand Weaver correctly, this policy of identification places the radical ethical Anabaptist-Mennonite commitment in the position of possible ultimate loss of this commitment.

Weaver’s task is well done. We owe Weaver a debt. We trust that more historical-theological productions, of a similar caliber, will be forthcoming. Would it have been possible to condense the volume without any loss to it? Only as a matter of sentiment, would it not have been advisable to include the German article, das, whenever reference is made Das wahre Christentum in the text of the book?

We are not sure whether Weaver is surprised about the rather solid commitment of the eight ministers to a satisfaction and penal theory of atonement. Be that as it may, however much they were influenced by the theological thinking of their social and religious milieu, they naturally had two other sources for their atonement thought. First, there is their historic background in the sixteenth century. The early Anabaptists were not, as a whole, given to theologising in depth. Yet, Menno Simons, too, used language of the atonement which was not quite kosher in terms of the classical theory of the atonement. For example (Complete Writings, p. 1057), he writes, “[Sin]. . .is all forgiven through the death of Christ; it is paid by His blood. . . .” Or, again, “He paid for our sins with His blood…” (p. 391). He also seems to accept the penal, satisfaction theory, when he states, (p. 145) that the “Lamb… [on] the cross was sacrificed for us as an eternal propitiation for us.”

Dirk Philips, in The Writings of Dirk Philips, trans. and edited, Cornelius Dyck, et al.: Scottsdale: Herald Press, (p. 165), writes “…that we must consider both the righteousness and the love of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and must remember that the righteousness because of sin on account of which such a glorious person, the only ‘son of the living God, had to be so severely rebuked and punished…. ’ Again, (p. 162) it is interesting to note that in one brief paragraph, Philips refers to the atonement as a satisfaction, a penal suffering, a victory and as substitutionary. We notice his words: “Should this sin now be paid… the righteousness of God be satisfied. . . . And through his death and blood triumph against the devil, sin, death, and hell. . . . That is, as the apostle himself declares. . . that God made the one who knew no sin… to be sin for us,. . . that we in him might become the righteousness which avails before God.”

The second source is the Scripture itself. It seems to us that it is difficult to read the Scriptures and not become aware of threads of thought which present, to a greater or less degree, materials for the Christus Victor, the penal, satisfaction, substitutionary, and the moral influence theories. Is it, therefore, permissible to take up Weaver’s hinted challenge (235) “to look for better ways to express the theology of the atonement, Christology, ethics, and the nature of the church.” If this reviewer’s assessment of atonement materials in the Scriptures is correct, then no one theory would annihilate the others. Taking these materials seriously in writing an atonement theology would result in what we could call a complementary theory of the atonement. It would seem that such effort would have a greater prospect be true to the Biblical revelation. Furthermore, it would be grounded in the life, and death and the resurrection of the Lord. This reviewer is also confident that such complementary tenet of Christ’s atoning work would lack nothing in terms of Biblical ethics. This would include the affirming of the gospel intrinsically proclaiming the message of nonresistance, love and peace, for of such is the Kingdom of God.

Book review by Dr. Archie Penner, Kola, Manitoba


This is an attractive well-written book with an index. It will be of interest to many of the

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION

Dit Sied-Yant Sied: Johann & Susana Lepki/Loeppky, 1831-1998

This is a 400 page family history and genealogy book about the Lepki/Loeppky clan that settled in the Strassberg, Manitoba area, first in the East Reserve and later in the West Reserve.

The book marks the 125th anniversary of the first members of the clan to arrive in Canada from the Berghal Colony in southern Russia. The stories of the descendants provide an amazing journey of faith and practice.

You may place your order for this book with Clara Keehler, Box 946, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0. The cost is $35.00 plus $5.00 shipping charge.
Kleine Gemeinde Kornelsen clan in Manitoba, including not only the descendants of Gerhard’s uncle Abraham E. Kornelsen (1845-93), Heuboden, but also those of Abraham’s uncle Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-94), Lichtenau, veteran educator in Imperial Russia, translator, and organizer of the Kleine Gemeinde confessional school system in Manitoba.

The author William Johnson was married to Georgina Kornelsen, formerly archivist at Tabor College, Hillsboro. Georgina was interested in Mennonite history and collected material regarding her own family. When she passed away in 1994 her husband compiled these materials which resulted in this book.

Of particular interest is a biography of Abraham S. Kornelsen (1806-92), born in Lichtenau, Molotschna Colony, who immigrated from Imperial Russia to the U.S.A. in 1874 and settled in Gnadenau village, two miles southeast of Hillsboro.


Mennonites today seem to be fascinated by their past. Mennonite genealogy web sites abound, historical societies thrive, museums and archives are bulging with artifacts and manuscripts. Scores of family histories are coming out, even our slowly dying mother tongue, Low German, is making something of a comeback in the form of Plautdietsch Omants. We seem to be looking for something, back there, that we can’t find in the techno-brightness of the present day. It is curious that this renewed interest in Mennonite history flourishes also in Steinbach, the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on the very Automobile City which, in a ritual destruction of its heritage, razed the house-barn on

The EMB, known at first as the Conference of United Defenseless Mennonite Brethren, had its beginnings in the 1880s in Nebraska and Minnesota, under the leadership of Isaac Peters and Aron Wall. Peters and Wall, like many before them, were struck by the need for spiritual renewal among their constituency. They openly showed their convictions, however, in the priority they gave to saving souls. At that point they still held to fundamental Anabaptist tenets such as non-resistance and the importance of discipleship, and at first they did not speak English, so their missionary efforts were of necessity confined to their fellow Mennonites.

The success of this early evangelizing is evident, for example, in the story of my own family. Great-grandfather Abraham S. Friesen, the first song leader in the Steinbach Kleine Gemeinde and himself the son of a KG elder, joined the Bruderthalter in 1913 when he got married for the second time. One of his sons observed the old man at testimony and prayer meetings and noted, “er bewegt sich frei”—he openly showed his feelings. All but one of his sons and daughters (my grandfather was the exception) also left the Kleine Gemeinde to join this more “progressive” church. Great-grandfather’s nephew, Abraham F. Friesen, actually came from Nebraska to become the first minister of the Bruderthalter in Steinbach in 1898. (Redekop, incidentally, makes no mention of Friesen’s Kleine Gemeinde origins, and wrongly identifies him as Abraham A. Friesen.) Today, many of my relatives are still EMB members.

In the passage of time, the EMB became dissatisfied with the limitations of this mission field of their own faith and blood community, and moved progressively away from practices and beliefs that would identify it as Mennonite. Being Mennonite, it was thought, posed an obstacle to doing effective evangelism and mission work. Redekop says that the theology behind this position was never really well-articulated. In any case, the incompatibility of Mennonite ethnicity and theology with evangelism was taken as a given, and the EMB, accordingly, busily threw overboard all cargo labelled “Mennonite,” until today only a handful of churches remain with that appellation including the one in Steinbach.

Growing up in Steinbach in the 1950s amidst revival meetings, returned missionary slide shows, hymn-singing in front of the beer parlour, random witnessing and tract-distribution, Bible camps, daily vacation Bible schools, Sunday schools, and mid-week prayer meetings, I had no idea that all these activities were not intrinsically Mennonite. One of the strengths of Leaving Anabaptism is its thorough documentation of the way in which such evangelism-based activities gradually pushed earlier Anabaptist premises, such as non-resistance and discipleship, out of the church’s nest. He does not document the extent of the influence of the new evangelicism on the Kleine Gemeinde.

Later, when my interest in ethnicity and cultural history began to develop, I saw that the evangelistic phenomenon was in fact at odds with the past. It is not an accident that evangelical Christianity flourishes in North America, home of immigrants eager for a new start, as nowhere else. The evangelical emphasis is on the new birth, and one of its flagship Scripture passages is 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Whatever Paul may actually have meant by this, it, along with a selection of other texts, has been used to propound the idea that the past is inconsequential, or even, an unfortunate encumbrance for humanity. For the pure evangelical, your personal history, your family history, your community history, your ethnicity, your culture—all are unimportant details. The past, with all its baggage of tradition and habit, is the enemy. All else pales beside the importance of the state of your soul, and the past is completely irrelevant to that.

Redekop concludes that the EMB has not, in fact, been particularly successful in evangelism and mission work, and, further, that its attempts to detach itself from the Mennonite story are even a form of self-hatred. He clearly believes that the anxious fervour to disengage from history and ethnicity is wrong-headed. He does not, however, address some larger issues that lie under the surface of his argument.

What kind of evangelism, if any, would be consonant with Redekop’s beliefs about Anabaptism and its theology and culture? If the EMB has made a great mistake by rejecting its birthright, what could it have done differently?

In his emphasis on the emotional experience of conversion, what was Wall looking for? Redekop does not acknowledge that, in the Mennonite life of the late 19th century, as perhaps still today, there existed a poverty of emotional expression. This emotional restraint had served our ancestors well in certain ways, and was a key component of the discipline needed to achieve the phenomenal agricultural and organizational success they enjoyed in South Russia. Yet this non-dancing, drably dressed, prudent people must have longed for a freer emotional life. Hence the popularity, even as early as the 1820s, of Pietist, revivalist influences in South Russia.

Tune into any TV evangelist today and you will witness an emotional display—tears, laughter, and a variety of physical gestures sometimes verging on the acrobatic. People watch these shows not once, but repeatedly. They need constant emotional re-charging, a little like one “soul” I remember from Steinbach, who got “saved” at every revival meeting.

It is my contention that the isolated revival-meeting induced conversion experience does not result in the authentic emotional life for which the Mennonites hungered. I also have a fundamental disagreement with the posture of evangelism, which, essentially, says that the evangelical possesses an absolute truth, not only for himself, but for everyone else, and has a duty to persuade others of it. This is religious imperialism, however well meant, and an implicit insult to unevangelized humanity, “souls” sitting out there like so many missile targets. Redekop might have done well to include testimonies from the individuals who did not happily receive the powerful pressure to be “saved,” and were permanently alienated from the church as a result. In their
Congratulations, 125th Anniversary

Congratulations to all North and South Americans of Russian Mennonite descent from the HSHS board of directors: President Orlando Hiebert, Corporate Secretary Lynette Plett, directors Royden Loewen, Lois Loeppky, Ralph Friesen, Paul Loewen, Ernest Braun, Delbert Plett, Jake Doerksen, Henry Fast, Hilton Friesen, Ken Rempel, and John Dyck HSHS Research Director.

1999 is the 125th anniversary of the settlement of 17,000 Anabaptist Mennonite and Hutterites in Manitoba, Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. The original 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 400,000 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 brief 80 page history of the East Reserve, Hanover Steinbach was written especially for the 125 anniversary and 4600 copies of this booklet have been printed and distributed. A complimentary copy of “Celebrating our heritage” was enclosed with our December 1998 Issue No. 13 of Preservings. We hope you have enjoyed the booklet and that it has given you a better understanding and appreciation of our history.

anxiety to collect air miles for eternity, some of the evangelicals resorted to methods of persuasion not unfamiliar to the KGB, which is what happens when true believers become convinced that the means justifies the ends.

How did the word “soul” get co-opted in this way, to mean something disembodied, impersonal, a statistic? The church newspaper for the EMB, Grace Tidings, reported in March 1947 that the “number saved” through the practical work department of Grace Bible Institute was 213. There is even a statistic for “backsliders restored.” The “scientific” recording of these numbers reveals that brand of evangelism for what it really was, and still is, i.e., a quantified religion that fails to recognize the value of the free human being who is, you might say, the envelope for the soul.

It is even more disheartening to read that the solidarity of Mennonite families was injured through the downgrading of the traditional Anabaptist view of redemption, in which children were considered members of the kingdom of God until they consciously rejected God’s love as adults: “the increasing emphasis on evangelism and missions unintentionally undermined the family foundation of the congregations by considering their own children as mission objects.” It is not, however, within Redekop’s purview to discuss at length the splits within families and the alienation from other ethnocultural groups to which the evangelistic enthusiasm contributed.

The old Kleine Gemeinde, unevangelical as they were, insisted that no one could know that he was saved, and that salvation was not a one-off emotional experience but a process, achieved through discipleship and in community. That was wisdom; it prevented the self-pride that so easily permeates the personality of the true believer. But it still left the problem of living an authentic emotional life of having the kind of joy in creation which, it seems to me, is best symbolized not as the trudge down the sawdust trail, but as the dance of life.

I believe that the Bruderthalier were looking for joy, and that they tried to escape the heaviness and sobriety of their history. Too much was left behind, Redekop would say. And not enough was embraced, I would add.

Regrettably, I have not done justice to Leaving Anabaptism. Some of its themes were close to my heart, and I felt led, as they say, to speak to these. Unlike this review, the book is balanced, scholarly and fair. Everyone who has an interest in the combination of “evangelical” and “Mennonite” should read it.

Ralph Friesen, Winnipeg