

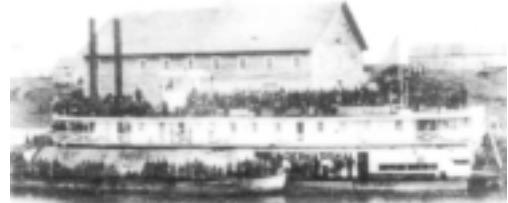
# Preservings

-being the Magazine/Journal of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc.

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No. 16, June, 2000

"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 - West Reserve - 1875-2000 125 Years Old

Congratulations to our neighbours in the West Reserve, Altona Winkler area, as they are celebrating their 125th anniversary this summer.

We particularly congratulate the members and

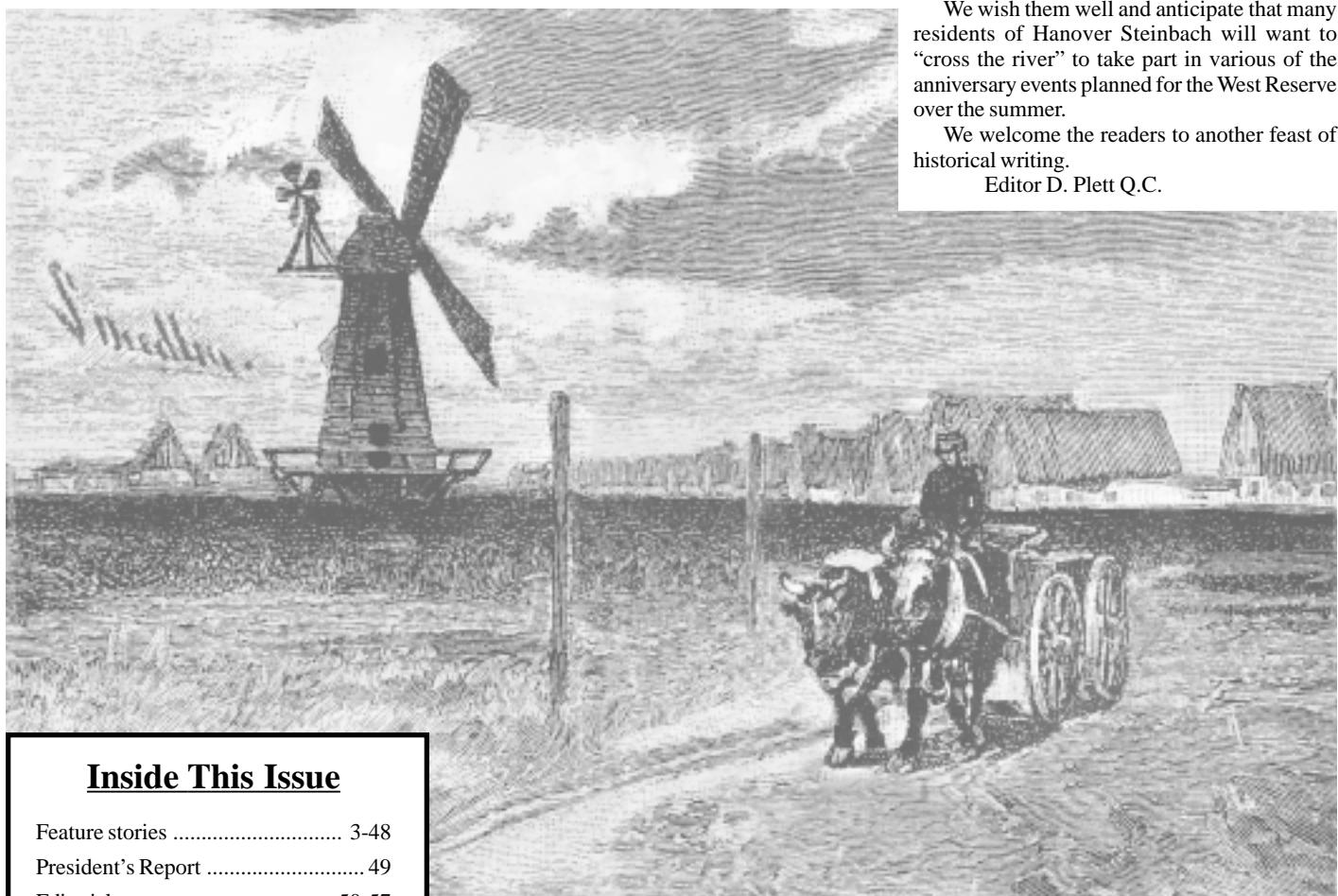
descendants of the Old Kolony (OK) congregations of Manitoba, and indeed across Canada, the U. S.A., and Latin American, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the founding of their

Gemeinde by Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart, W. R., Manitoba, in 1875. By 1900 the OK community in Altona Winkler was considered one of the wealthiest in Manitoba.

We wish them well and anticipate that many residents of Hanover Steinbach will want to "cross the river" to take part in various of the anniversary events planned for the West Reserve over the summer.

We welcome the readers to another feast of historical writing.

Editor D. Plett Q.C.



### Inside This Issue

Feature stories .....	3-48
President's Report .....	49
Editorial .....	50-57
Letters .....	58-62
News .....	63-78
Articles .....	79-119
Material Culture .....	120-132
Book Reviews .....	133-144

*Sketch of the central Old Kolony (OK) village of Reinland, West Reserve, founded in 1875. The drawing by W. T. Smedley dates to the early 1880s and was published in Picturesque Canada. The windmill matches that of the photograph of the windmill in Reinland, verifying the identification of the Village. The Hollander-style windmill has become one of the icons of Mennonite culture. One of the villagers is off to market with ox team and wagon loaded with wheat. See Jake Doerksen, "Wood engravings, East Reserve 1877," in Preservings, No. 12, page 37, for the explanation of these drawings. The post, front centre in the sketch, also points to the identity of the village as Reinland, it being located along the "Post Road".*

# Introduction to Issue 16

## Feature Story - The Old Kolony Church, 1875-2000

In honour of the settlement of the West Reserve in 1875 by the Old Kolony (OK) people and the formation of the Reinländer Gemeinde by Aeltester Johann Wiebe, we feature this community as our contribution to the 125 anniversary celebrations taking place this year in the Altona Winkler area.

The OK Gemeinde is one of the largest denominations in Canada tracing its roots to the 1870s Mennonite immigration to Manitoba.

As a special tribute to the Old Kolony (OK) church and the wonderful testimony it has been to genuine Christianity, we offer a series of articles featuring this community, which has often been misunderstood and denigrated by American Revivalist and so-called Evangelical missionaries.

The lead article by Dr. Adolf Ens, Professor of History and Theology, Winnipeg, "A Second Look at the Rejected Conservative", surveys the story of the Old Kolony people, their settlement in Manitoba, their faith and practice, and the expulsion of the majority of this group by the provincial governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 1922. Dr. Ens evaluates the view which many reformed and/or assimilated Mennonites hold of their conservative co-religionists, suggesting that "conservatives" are worth a second look. The article was originally published as part of a special centennial issue of the *Mennonite Reporter* in 1974, but the topic remains as cogent today as it was a quarter century ago.

Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) was a 16 year-old youth when his family departed from Kronthal, "Old" Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia, for Manitoba, America. Young Jakob's letters and other writings describe the heartbreaking farewells, the ocean journey and the early days in Manitoba, and speaks for a religious culture which was literate to its very core.

Three articles continue the story of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1838-1905), Rosengart, W. R., Manitoba, already begun with the biography of Johann Wiebe, by Peter D. Zacharias, published in *Preservings*, No. 14, pages 3-8, and six documents written by Johann Wiebe and published in *Preservings*, No. 15, pages 17-24.

"Wrestling Satan" is the heart wrenching account of how Johann Wiebe was empowered by the Holy Spirit to withstand the might of Satan to subvert the Gemeinde and to lead it from its Gospel-centric moorings. The Reinland village book, 1889, demonstrates that the OK Gemeinde had a clear vision of the New Testament teachings as it provided charitable aid to others in desperate poverty, notwithstanding that it was under attack and beset by alien religious cultures. The 1904 "Epistle to the Gemeinden" by Aeltester Johann Wiebe is an appropriate parting look at this great man of God in the evening of his life and at the close of his God-given mission.

Bernhard Toews (1863-1927), was another

young Old Colony lad who maintained a journal describing the ocean journey in 1875. He was educated in the "Central Schule" in the "Old Kolony". He married the daughter of Bergthaler Aeltester Johann Funk, who departed from the Gospel-centric teachings of his faith to adopt American Revivalist religious culture.

Bernhard Toews remained true to the faith once received and served as a school teacher during the turbulent years after 1900 when Anglo-conformity hysteria swept across Manitoba and Saskatchewan. He was imprisoned for his faith and his conviction that the Dominion Government should abide by the rights it had granted the 1874 immigrants to induce them to come to Canada. Bernhard Toews' journal is the only first hand account I am aware of to date, describing the prison experience of those suffering for their faith.

Rev. Abram E. Rempel, Winkler, Manitoba, has written a short survey of the Old Kolony church in Manitoba, and its struggle to reorganize in the aftermath of the "exile" of two-thirds of its membership from Canada in 1922-26.

Dr. Wes Berg, Professor of Music, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, has written an evocative exposition of the Old Kolony (OK) singing tradition. Certain alien religious cultures which are seeking to deprecate and tear apart conservative Mennonite communities in particular disparage the Old Kolony singing tradition. The analysis of Dr. Berg reveals that Old Kolony singing is a genuine form of music "which provides important insight into the way human beings make music."

Every community is entitled as a basic human right to have its history told from its own perspective. Hopefully these articles will serve as an encouragement to the many writers among the Old Kolony people themselves--and there are many, to advance the monumental task of documenting and writing their own exciting history.

The lead piece in our articles section is another valuable piece of research by expert genealogist Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B. C. The significance of such family sketches is again proven as the article reveals for example, that between his wife's family and his own, Bergthaler Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Chortitz, E.R., was closely related on three sides to some of the more prominent Chortitzer/Old Kolony families in Imperial Russia--Oberschulz, Aeltesten, and industrialist. This is directly contrary to the picture of conservative Mennonites which their enemies have sometimes tried to paint, that they and their leaders came from the fringes of society.

For some ten years, Lori Scharfenberg, Rosenort, has been compiling historical material regarding her ancestor David Klassen (1813-1900), 1873 delegate to America for the Heubodner Kleine Gemeinde and founder of the village of Rosenhof, now Riverside. *Preservings*

is proud to be able to share this excellent piece of historical writing with the readers.

It is necessary to start publishing biographies and historical writings for the more contemporary period commencing in the 1920s. Otherwise we will be in the same gird-lock in 20 years as we were when we started the process of documenting our first pioneers. Every detail had to be painfully extracted from archival or oral sources. It is important that we write these stories while people are still alive to provide the information.

It is especially important to document the story of those amongst us who were cultural preservers, working to improve and benefit their communities. *Preservings* has carried several articles of this nature including the stories of Eugene Derksen, Gerhard F. Wiebe, Rev. Peter F. Wiebe, Abram P. Dueck, and others. In this issue we proudly present the story of John C. Reimer, founder of the Steinbach Mennonite Heritage Museum. Son Arnold Reimer has done a magnificent job of giving us a sense of the determination and enduring faith of his father.

Jake Peters' fascinating account of the windmill tradition of conservative Mennonites is the lead article in the material culture section.

William Schroeder's account of portrait artist Balthasar Denner (1685-1749), is the sequel to his earlier article on Balthasar's father, Rev. Jakob Denner, conservative Mennonite writer and Bible expositor.

Of interest to this special anniversary issue is the article about the table built by Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), founder of the Reinländer Gemeinde in 1875. It is amazing that in addition to his pastoral and farming work, he had an expertise in the Mennonite furniture making tradition which hails from Reformation times. Like Joseph in Bible times, Johann Wiebe found solace and quietude in creating a work of utility and simple beauty with his hands, presumably a way of resting from the stress of his office.

Articles such as this make it more difficult for so-called Evangelical missionaries to disparage the man and his denomination. How can you write-off someone completely who is capable of such precision craftsmanship? The article affirms the importance of material culture artifacts in understanding conservative Mennonite faith and culture. Hopefully it will encourage others to seek out and document such treasures.

During the printing of the last issue, we were informed that because of the physical limitations of our format, *Preservings* would henceforth be capped at a maximum 140 pages. One of the casualties will be the creative writing section announced in the last issue. Nonetheless we hope to publish the piece already commissioned by John Janzen Kooistra in some future issue.

— *The Editor*

# A Second Look at the Rejected Conservatives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To check that kind of attitude on our part, it is sometimes helpful to try to interpret the history of

"...we, the "enlightened" Mennonites have tended to look down....at those of our brethren...we could dismiss by calling them 'conservative.'"

these "conservatives" from the inside: to see their past as they themselves tend to see it, and to see the rest of society, the world, as they tend to see it--and us.

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

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

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

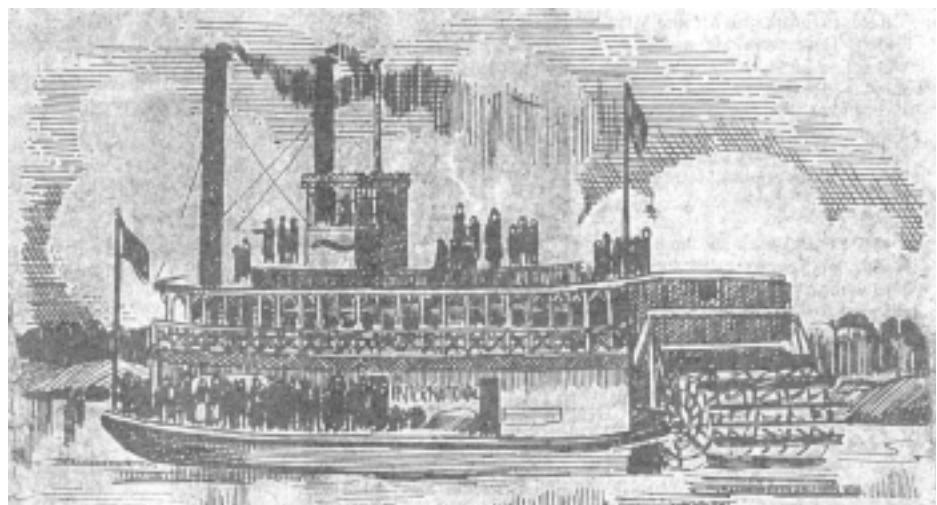
He points out that in all of these migrations we never once had a closed resettlement of the entire

Mennonite population of a given area. Always only a portion of the Mennonites packed up and left. And then Schmiedehaus makes this thought-provoking observation.

"Zum Wanderstab in der grossen hier behandelten Bewegung griffen immer nur diejenigen, die man wohl als die Glaubensstärksten und Kompromiss-losesten unter den Mennoniten

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

The Biblical sense of pilgrimhood, so forcefully portrayed by the writer to the Hebrews, was a



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

anzusehen hat."

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

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

The "conservative" Old Colonists, according to Schmiedehaus, have always been "the spearhead of the wandering pioneers of the faith."

Physically, geographically they--the conserva-

"When they returned from Mexico to Manitoba, we call them... 'Oh dee, dee tjemt von süden von Fargo.'"

tives--have always led the way in Mennonite migrations, sometimes by 50 years. And being physically in the vanguard of migrations has produced in these people or perhaps maintained is the more correct word, the sense of being pilgrims and wanderers on the earth.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called

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

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

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

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

Years later Ohm Isaak (Bishop Isaak Dyck of Manitoba colony in Mexico) found his text in the verse of the hymn which reads:



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

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

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

When the Old Colony Mennonites of Manitoba

Quebec and to Mexico, the *Manitoba Free Press* did not take these efforts very seriously. As late as August 1920 it doubted "whether any substantial number even of the Old Colony Mennonites are prepared to join the exodus from the pleasant and fruitful lands of Manitoba."

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

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

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

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

began to look for settlement possibilities elsewhere in 1919 and 1920, and sent delegations to Argentina and Brazil, to Mississippi and Alabama, to

**"Not the term "conservative" describes the key characteristic of those who are most ready to migrate, but rather the term 'Glaubensstark'--faithful."**

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look at our rejected conservatives is in order.

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

The *Manitoba School Act* of 1890, which stirred up such a bitter and prolonged controversy extending far beyond the borders of the province, was itself the result of agitation from the outside. The Orange Order of Ontario, stirred to vigorous activity by the passage of the Jesuits' Estates Bill in Quebec, carried its anti-Catholic campaign into Manitoba.

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

The French Catholics fought this change in the courts and in the legislatures. The Mennonites seem to have protested less; the one group because it had



Another W. T. Smedley sketch, presumably also of the village of Reinland, W. R., but from a greater distance. The scene focuses on a young Old Kolony woman herding the village cattle with the windmill visible in the background. Photo courtesy of Reflections on our Heritage, page 181. These drawings by W. T. Smedley may well be among the earliest images of the Reinland Winkler area.

never received government support for its schools in any case, or was ready at moment's notice to revert to private school status; the other group maybe because the obliging new Department of Education, under the new "non-denominational" system, provided them with a Mennonite inspector and a Mennonite normal school (while at the same time taking away the French Catholic inspectors and normal school).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The debate between the conservative Mennonites and the government and press did not get into full swing until 1918-20 when the new laws began to be enforced, partly as a result of pressure by the returning soldiers. It is amazing to read this debate, to note the contrast between the carefully and calmly stated Mennonite position and the far from objective response by the "liberals" both in the press and in the government. Consider these points:

#### a) Who has responsibility for the education of children?

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

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

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

When Ontario first introduced public education in the 1840s, it was careful to point out that in doing so the state was acting "*in loco parentis*": it did not presume that the state had a fundamental right or duty to educate the children. But now the *Free*

*Press* asserted as one of the "state's prime functions that of seeing that children are suitably educated to discharge the duties of citizenship. This is a point upon which the modern democratic state cannot compromise."

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

#### (b) What about the Language of instruction?

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

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

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

There was reason for fear. Sir Rodmond Roblin, whose Conservative government had earlier decreed that all schools must fly the Union Jack, had said in the legislature: "What we need is to get the youth filled with the traditions of the British flag and then, when they are men...they will be able to defend it."

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

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

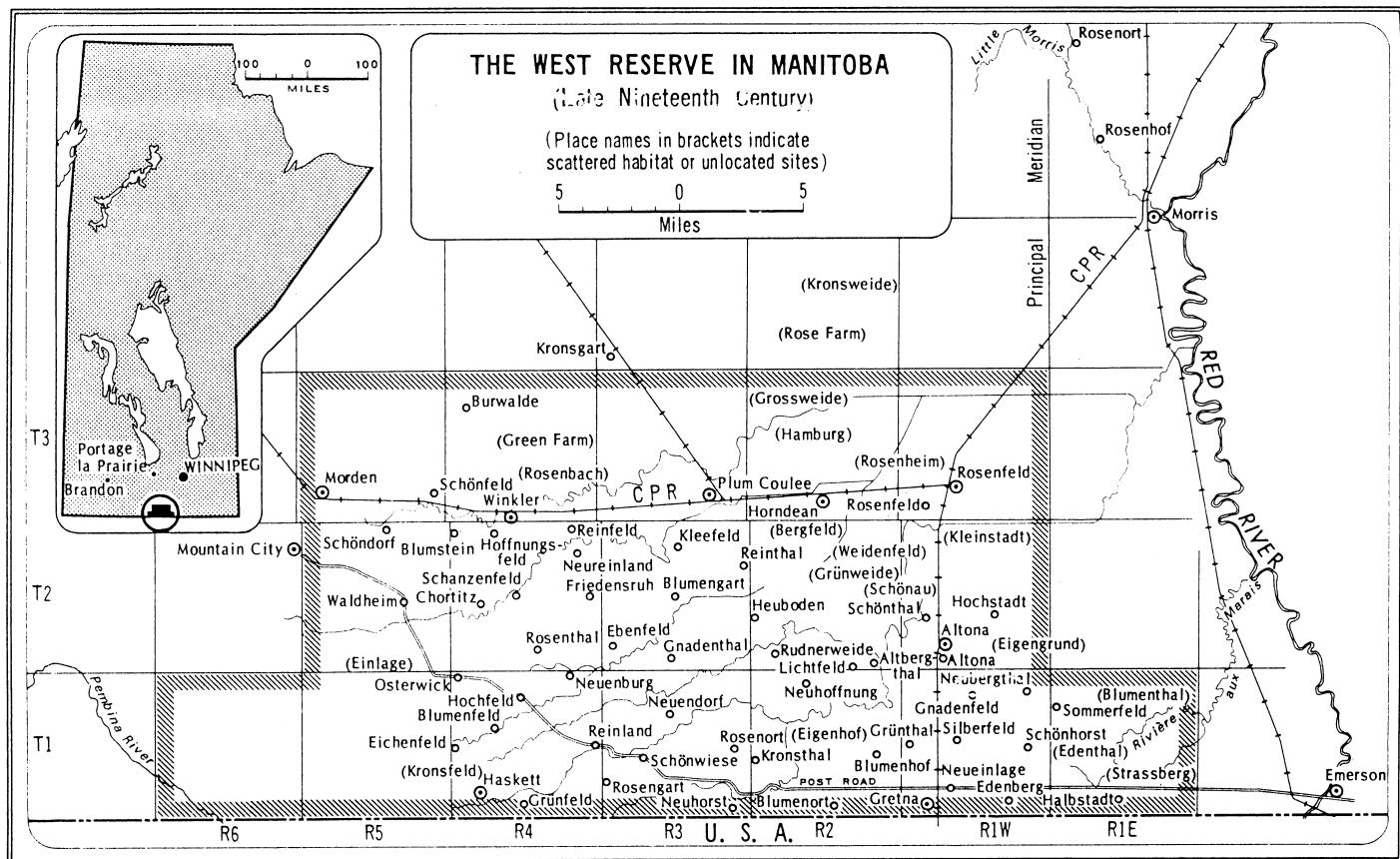
"Ein König, ein Gott, eine Flotte, eine Flagge, ein allbritisches Reich. Simpatie, Selbst-aufopferung fürs Vaterland."

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

"One King, One Flag, One Fleet, One Empire. For God! For duty! For Empire!"

We would be inclined to share the Old Colonists' hesitation as to whether the cultivation of that kind of patriotism was a proper function of the schools.

(c) Content of curriculum. The *Free Press* stoutly defended the right of the government to insist not only on English as the language of instruction, but also on the content of the secular cur-



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

## Panorama - Fürstenlandt Villages,



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

**Der  
Nebraska Ansiedler,**  
den Interessen der deutschen Bevölkerung des Westens gewidmet.

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

Karte.

Nachweis wie viel Dörfer, Wirths, Sesten, übergebrochenes Land, Maschinen, Wagen, Pflüge, und viel gernitet in 1879.

No.	Name des Dorfes.	Gemeinde	Größe	Einwohner	Wirths	Sesten	Über-	gebroch-	ne	Masch.	Wagen	Wirths	Hafer	Reis.	Kast.	Uhr.	Übergebrochene Länd.	Summe 14,826 Wdh.	
<b>Alte Dörfer.</b>																			
1	Steinland	21	71	73	77	12	49	55	2	1	19	31	22	6112	2892	4816	97	1393	709
2	Steuerburg	14	44	50	9	36	29	18	6	16	17	50	11	1535	3687	1393	61	72	718 Süd \$ 43060.00
3	Stummendorf	14	33	34	2	26	20	23	—	—	6	7	1578	309	65	92	365	233	
4	Stumpendorf	20	70	53	21	24	30	42	1	12	17	12	3552	2162	1265	191	1160	502	
5	Stangenfeld	24	80	64	34	25	42	46	1	11	26	11	6740	191	2955	158	1355	722 Jung-Birb 1047 "	
6	Cornish	32	55	63	30	51	53	48	1	10	24	16	5974	1631	2015	165	1021	120000.00	
7	Blumenthal	28	65	64	30	51	53	48	1	10	24	16	5933	2755	2371	78	1245	607 Dampfmärsch 12 "	
8	Blumenthal	24	64	54	24	42	35	44	—	8	19	8	4815	1762	874	811	1145	565 Dampfmärsch 7 "	
9	Blumenthal	20	56	52	20	21	22	25	—	4	13	4	3620	658	404	19	1179	316 Deutscher 213 "	
10	Blumenthal	29	54	49	2	34	18	13	—	1	7	4	1150	2	25	231	395	143 Präge 492 "	
11	Burndorf	17	53	50	31	26	35	30	1	—	10	17	607	1708	4250	25	1676	567 " 9550.00	
12	Burndorf	21	53	50	19	26	35	30	1	—	16	14	2615	620	678	108	982	391 " Ortskarte in der Kol. 13400.00	
13	Burndorf	24	65	60	19	23	31	20	—	3	18	18	4000	667	420	131	1021	422 Dampfmärsch 1 550.00	
14	Burndorf	21	68	65	27	32	37	44	1	6	19	14	3295	834	1571	237	790	536 Blumenthal 1 1500.00	
15	Burndorf	24	71	63	32	33	39	41	1	10	25	23	8305	1828	2163	308	1220	816 Blumenthal 1 600.00	
16	Burndorf	20	67	63	32	37	42	42	1	10	21	18	5747	724	1129	267	809	600 Südt. Oettels zusammen 13433.80	
17	Burndorf	24	58	55	20	52	46	46	1	13	21	18	5532	1276	1317	37	1893	456 Wld. im Weste in Sum. \$450,345.80	
18	Burndorf	29	60	59	18	31	26	27	1	7	16	16	3511	507	333	601	435	435 Deutscher 200.00	
19	Burndorf	31	97	75	61	65	68	53	1	13	31	28	7632	1195	4176	233	1715	838 Deutscher 200.00	
20	Burndorf	10	22	24	6	10	11	12	—	1	6	6	1892	136	250	47	570	169 lant unkennt Wissen und Weisheit	
21	Burndorf	20	68	45	35	20	25	24	—	1	8	18	3353	517	2410	29	663	471 ist befürblich und befürblich gewesen als	
22	Burndorf	17	53	50	31	26	35	30	1	—	10	14	3353	1914	2712	29	663	612 vom Geister in ganz Thiel verlaufen.	
23	Burndorf	24	60	63	20	29	45	60	—	8	21	19	5553	3580	2163	109	1603	533 Geister sind noch zwei mit 34 Wirt-	
24	Burndorf	24	56	55	40	22	35	28	1	2	8	21	22	6473	1987	2266	—	1691	205 them und 37 unzähligen und 7 weiblichen Geistern, welche noch angewöhnen sind.
25	Burndorf	12	23	18	4	18	15	11	—	2	3	9	7	61	722	378	136	293 In Gangen, 38 Dörfer mit 753 Wirt-	
26	Burndorf	23	57	55	29	24	25	25	—	2	17	20	1662	303	161	193	303	293 Geister, welche noch angewöhnen sind.	
27	Burndorf	28	59	55	29	24	25	25	—	1	3	10	2013	1178	15	480	293 Im Gangen, 38 Dörfer mit 753 Wirt-		
28	Burndorf	13	31	33	16	20	20	21	—	1	3	10	3300	176	1178	15	480	304 then, und 1917 mindestens und 1617 Geister in Gangen, im Gangen 3334 Geiste-	
29	Grönfeld	8	10	12	3	10	4	1	—	—	3	2	—	—	—	—	105	23 Geister, den Geistern nach Dörfer zum An-	
30	Grönfeld	8	12	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	23 sielen als Knechte, den Geistern, Re-	
31	Ginting	12	12	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	334	—	—	—	—	—	—	97 sieden als Knechte, den Geistern, Re-	
32	Münchel	10	32	20	—	12	14	5	—	2	4	3	240	23	207	149	130	37 sieden als Knechte, den Geistern, Re-	
33	Ötterfeld	11	31	22	2	19	10	5	—	2	2	6	200	—	100	100	20	37 sieden als Knechte, den Geistern, Re-	
34	Habicht	21	21	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
35	Ara Gollib	16	25	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
36	Reinthal	16	25	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	

riculum. In this, it maintained, "there is no attempt to interfere with the Mennonites in the exercise of their religion."

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

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

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

"It was no more a question of educational stan-

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

dards which prompted the authorities to destroy the private schools once and for all," wrote E.K. Francis, "It was part of a consistent national policy aimed at the assimilation of ethnics to safeguard national unity and cultural uniformity."

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

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

## 20 km. Southwest of Nikopol, Ukraine.

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

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

The government refused to accept any such practical criterion and insisted that its academic curriculum was the only acceptable test of whether or not a school was satisfactory.

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

Two decades later Robert England, who had earlier been one of the teachers sent into non-English districts to help Canadianize those communities, wrote: "Thoughtful students are now beginning to realize that the herding of children into the classrooms and the making of a gap between the

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

so-called practical knowledge the child gains in his environment of farm and community and the literary education he receives in the classroom is a sin against the true spirit of culture."

Measured by this criterion, the Department of Education in 1916 was a greater sinner against culture and civilization and eduction than were the conservative Old Colonists whom it was trying to convert from the error of their ways.

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

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

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

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

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

The almost total refusal of Old Colonists to participate in government (they did not even vote in municipal or school board elections) has been inter-

preted as such an extreme separation of church and state as to be impracticable in modern democracy. Yet three points may be briefly noted:

1. The Old Colonists were very clear in their conviction that government was of God and therefore to be prayed for, supported, and obeyed as far as was conscientiously possible. Their faith was not in the person of the Minister or in the party in power but in government as such (a position certainly closer to the ideal of the Canadian constitution than was the actual practice of the political parties at the time!).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Looking up at them he asked, "You say the Lord told you this morning to not to register?" "Yes."

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

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

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

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

#### About the Author:

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



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

# Jakob Fehr (1809-77), Steinbach Pioneer

**Jakob Fehr (1809-77), Kronthal, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia, to Steinbach, E. R. 1874, and Reinland, W. R., 1875,  
by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.**

## Introduction.

In a series of letters to his sister, Katharina Loeppky, Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) described the experience of the tearful departure from the village of Kronthal, Old Colony in the "old" Homeland in Imperial Russia, the ocean journey and the first few weeks spent at Fort Dufferin along the banks of the Red River. See article following.

## Jakob Fehr (1809-77).

The writer, Jakob Fehr, was the grandson of another Jakob Fehr (1809-77).

Genealogist Henry Schapansky, has written that Jakob Fehr (1809-77) "...appears to be the son of Isaac de Fehr (1763-1857), of Nieder-Chortitza, Chortitza Colony. Isaac de Fehr came to Russia circa 1796-98 after his father, Benjamin De Fehr (b. 1734) who immigrated in 1788-89 [among the first Mennonitepioneers in Imperial Russia]."

Henry Schapansky adds, "Jakob Fehr (1809-77) married Helena Fehr (1823-98) who appears to be his cousin and daughter of Jakob De Fehr (b. 1780) (who married Maria Peters (b. 1791). Helena Fehr and the Elisabeth Fehr (1823-1908) who married Wilhelm Esau, Peter Loewen and Aelt. Gerhard Wiebe were sisters" (Note One).

Benjamin De Fehr (b. 1734) was listed on a Wirtschaft in the village of Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony in the 1795 Revision, "Family 8, Benjamin Defer, age 56, wife Anna 52, son Jakob 15, Cornelius 12, daughter Maria 18" (Unruh, page 240).

The village of Neuendorf was one of the largest and wealthiest farming village in the Old Colony. This raises again the interesting speculation as to why there were so many families from Neuendorf relocating to

"It seems that the roots of...the 1870s emigrants...trace back to the Vollwirt class....in Imperial Russia."

Berthal in the 1830s and also emigrating to America, Manitoba, in the 1870s. Were there any pre-select groups dating back to Prussia or was this simply a function of being a wealthier village where people had the means and entrepreneurial skills to organize such endeavours?

Benjamin De Fehr was a Vollwirt listed as owner of Wirtschaft 32 in Neuendorf in the 1802 census as "Benjamin Decker age 67, wife Anna 61, son Cornelius 18; Property: 5 horses, 6 cows, 13 sheep, 3 swine, 1/2 a plow, 1 wagon and 1 spinning wheel" (Unruh, page 255). It seems that the roots of many of the 1870s emigrants invariably trace back to the Vollwirt class



1974 photo of the Henry W. Penner building in Reinland, oldest building still in use in the village as of 1976. Built by Jakob Fehrs in 1877 it was sold to windmill builder Johann Bergmann that same year. The structure originally had a thatched roof. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: An Experience in Community (Altona, 19760, page 35).

in the early years of the Mennonite settlement in Imperial Russia.

## Jakob Fehr (1809-77).

According to great-granddaughter Helena Fehr, Winkler, Jakob Fehr (1809-77), was supposedly born in Schöneberg, Chortitza Colony. Later he lived in Osterwick, where son Jakob was born in 1837. At the time of the

immigration they lived in the village of Kronthal in the Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia.

Further study will presumably be necessary to verify the places of residence of the Fehr family. They may have been living in Kronthal by 1871 when Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Peter Toews and Abraham Reimer visited their "sister in the faith Helena

## Jakob Fehr, Death Date.

An undated note by Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), grandson of Jakob Fehr (1809-77), states as follows: "I must also make note that my grandfather died in the summer of 1877 and not '76 as I had written in the letter. He had to die in the ground in the semlin where he was very confined and the air very bad, for he had a very grievous illness, namely, bladder disease ("Blasenkrankheit"). The house which they were building above ground was also almost finished to the point that they could move into it at the time that he died. The funeral was already held in the new house" (Note Two).

I had always had a problem with the death year of 1876 for Jakob Fehr. Daughter Helena Fehr and her husband Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), Steinbach, Manitoba, were summoned to her father's death bed after which they moved to the West Reserve. A death year of 1876 simply did not seem to resonate with other sources which indicated that the Fasts lived in Steinbach until 1877. Wilhelm Giesbrecht, later Holdeman Evangelist, is only entered on Fast's Wirtschaft in the Brandordnung in 1878, see the Cornelius Fast Chapter in *Dynasties of the Kleine Gemeinde* (Steinbach, 2000), page 179, where I review the available evidence. Furthermore, Peter Zacharias, *Reinland*, page 34, has the information that Jakob Fehr Sr. completed his new housebarn in 1877, something that would have been impossible had he died in 1876.

Jakob Fehr's granddaughter Aganetha F. Fast (1883-1977) has been characterized as the "FlorenceNightingale of Steinbach" for her heroic battle against the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918 at great risk to her personal safety. Aganetha's sister Margaretha F. Fast (1889-1984), played an important role in the history of Hanover Steinbach as the wife and help-mate of Aeltester Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949), one of the most important leaders of the community during the Depression and troubled 1940s. For photographs of these important women, see Book Review Section cf.



1927. Brothers David Fehr (b. 1871) and Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), right, taken at Jakob Loeppkys, Schönfeld, Swift Current, P.O. Wymark, Saskatchewan. The brothers were neighbours in Eichenfeld area, Winkler. Jakob Fehr was the author of the travelogue account published in this article. Photo courtesy of Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba.

Defehr...to summon her here for Holy Communion," (*Profile*, page 151.)

February 16, 1873, daughter Helena married Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), a KG school teacher from Steinbach, Borosenko, some 50 kilometers west of the Old Colony. In 1874 the Fehrs were among the first 12 to 15 OK families immigrating to Manitoba, Canada, where they settled in the East Reserve. They had a KG connection through their son-in-law Cornelius Fast, and associated themselves with the Steinbachers who departed from Borosenko on July 18 and 21, 1874 (Julien calendar).

"Jakob Fehr Sr. and family were among the 18 families who founded....[Steinbach]....in September 1874."

#### Steinbach Pioneer, 1874.

The Steinbach immigrants travelled on the S. S. Hiberian. The group included the important Reimer clan--brothers Johann, Klaas, son-

in-laws Abraham Friesen and Peter Toews and parents Abraham Reimer, Klaas Brandt, Peter Friesens, Gerhard Siemens, Peter Buhlers, Cornelius Fasts and Bernhard Bergens and their parents Jakob and Helena Fehr.

This was the last contingent of Mennonite immigrants out of Russia in 1874, arriving in Quebec City, August 31, and reaching the site of their new village of Steinbach in the southeast corner of the East Reserve around September 15. Incidentally on the same ship was KG minister Abraham Klassen whose great-great grandson Matt Groening would later produce the "Simpsons" TV cartoon show.

Not all of the Steinbachers on the S. S. Hiberian opted to settle in the new pioneer village of Steinbach, Manitoba, but Jakob Fehr Sr. and family were among the 18 families who founded the village in September 1874. They were entered as the first owner of Wirtschaft Seven, village of Steinbach, in the Kleine Gemeinde "Brandordnung" records of Brandaeltester Johann Esau.

On August 21, 1875, the insurance coverage was transferred to Dietrich S. Friesen (1849-1901), *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One,



Isaac Fehr family, Reinland, Manitoba. Isaac (1878-1924) was the son of Jakob Fehr (1837-1916). Katharina Fehr, nee Driedger, and Isaac Fehr, with children, Katharina, sitting on the "bangscjhe", Anna (standing in middle) and Jakob, standing at the right. Photo courtesy of daughter Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba.

page 25, and on April 26, 1879, it was transferred to Dietrich's brother Jakob S. Friesen. Jakob has traditionally been credited as being the first pioneer on this Wirtschaft, but the evidence and facts supporting this assertion were always somewhat vague. The information in the Johann Esau, "Brandbuch," finally clears up this conundrum.

Presumably son-in-law Bernhard Bergen and sons Dietrich and Johann, and the parents Jakob and Helena Fehr all lived together in one dwelling during that first winter of 1874

**"Jakob Fehr Sr. was 'the first Reinland family to arrive in Canada.'"**

to 1875. (See Jakob Fehr, letter of Sept. 25, 1951, following.)

#### Reinland Pioneer, 1875.

In summer of 1875 the Jakob Fehrs, with daughter and son-in-law Bernhard Bergen moved to the West Reserve to join their sons David Fehr (b. 1844), Isaac (b. 1842) and Jakob

Fischerei Dienstleistung für Jaff 1876

Wir haben auf dem Wasserbau und Landwirtschaft vertraglich einen Vertrag mit dem Herrn Jakob Fehr zu schließen. Dieser hat uns Wasserrechte in seinem Gewässer zu schenken. Er ist der Sohn von Jakob Fehr, der im Jahre 1876 verstorben ist. Peter Harms ist ein Bruder seines Vaters und wir haben ihn ebenfalls geschickt. Seine Tochter ist eine Tochter des Herrn Jakob Fehr, der im Jahre 1876 verstorben ist. Und sein Sohn Jakob Fehr ist ein Sohn des Herrn Jakob Fehr, der im Jahre 1876 verstorben ist.

Isak Fehr

Peter Harms

Peter Harms

In 1876 Jakob Fehr (1837-1916) took over the contract to provide herdsman services for the village. The actual contract between Jakob Fehr, Isaak Fehr and Peter Harms, presumably on behalf of the village, has been preserved. It provides a marvellous example of the all pervasive writing culture which permeated the communities of the conservatives in the 19th century. Courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 155.

(b. 1837), and their families who had arrived on the S. S. Sarmatian in July of 1875 to join Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905). Their son Jakob (b. 1837) was the father of Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), the journalist.

Jakob Fehr Sr. and son Jakob (b. 1837) were among the first settlers of the village of Reinland, W. R. Historian Peter Zacharias has

**"Jakob Fehr (1837-1916)... maintained a substantial journal... reflecting a three-generational writing tradition...[it] contains transcriptions of various letters by Aeltester Gerhard Dyck in Chortitz, Imperial Russia,..."**

written that Jakob Fehr Sr. was "the first Reinland family to arrive in Canada." He adds that "In 1875 the Fehrs came to Reinland and built their first crude shelter for the winter. In 1877 they built the house standing just west of the Penner's store today (1976), the present residence of Henry W. Penners."

Peter Zacharias adds, "Before the building was quite finished, Mr. Fehr passed away at the age of 68."

Sometime before 1880 Mrs. Fehr moved to Hoffnungsfeld, W. R., together with her son Diedrich where they are listed in the 1880 West Reserve village census.

#### **Jakob Fehr (1837-1916).**

Jakob Fehr's son Jakob Fehr was born in

Osterwick, Chortitz Colony, in 1837. Jakob Jr. married Maria Wiens, from Insel-Chortitz, and the couple lived in Kronthal, where they had a fine Wirtschaft.

They had many fine fruit trees, where son Jakob helped till the ground and planting vegetables. In the "house garden" adjacent to the street, they had a "kruesche" (pear) tree whose branches were so large they reached half way over the street.

In 1875 the Jakob Fehr family immigrated to Canada settling in Manitoba, where they were pioneers in the village of Reinland. According to Peter Zacharias, Jakob Fehr (1837-1916) was the first Schulz or mayor of the village. They farmed in Reinland all their days.

Youngest son Isaac J. Fehr took over the Wirtschaft in 1903 after which the parents moved into a little retirement house, diagonally across the street.

Jakob Fehr died in Reinland in 1916 and

**"The account of the death of young Franz Wiens, in particular, is evocative and speaks for the simple Biblical faith of the OK-ers."**

was buried in the village cemetery. His widow Maria Wiens Fehr moved back in with her children Isaac Fehrs living in the original Wirtschaft.

When son Isaac Fehr died in 1924, Mrs. Maria Fehr moved in with son Jakob Fehr, the writer, in Eichenfeld, near Haskett. Jakob's

wife, Matilda Hemming, was a midwife.

Youngest daughter Mrs. Jakob Loeppky, nee Katharina Fehr, had moved to Schönfeld, near Wymark, Saskatchewan. In 1927 Maria Wiens Fehr moved to Wymark to live with her daughter. She died here the following year and was buried in Schönfeld, Saskatchewan.

Some of the earliest photographs found among the Russian Mennonites were taken by Old Colonists. But Mrs. Jakob Fehr, nee Maria Wiens, did not wish to have her picture taken. As result there is no picture extant, even though son-in-law Jakob Loeppky, dearly wanted to photograph her.

Jakob Fehr (1837-1916) also maintained a substantial journal which may have been originally started by his father thus reflecting a three-generational writing tradition in this family. The journal contains transcriptions of various letters by Aeltester Gerhard Dyck in Chortitz, Imperial Russia, as well as a brief family chronicle.

#### **Jakob Fehr (1859-1952).**

Jakob Fehr had a son Jakob born in 1859 who was the author of the descriptive travelogue account. Jakob Jr. lived and farmed in Eichenfeld, near Haskett, Manitoba.

Jakob Fehr was an articulate person and a good writer. He wrote many letters to sister Katharina Fehr Loeppky in Schönfeld, Saskatchewan.

In a series of five letters dated January 30, February 7, February 17 and March 18, 1942, and September 25, 1951, he described the emigration experience of 1875 and the settlement of the Reinland community. It was these letters which historian Peter Zacharias used to compile the composite description of the journey from Russia to America which he published in his groundbreaking *Reinland* book in 1975.

These letters reflect a writing genius and eloquently speak for the pioneering experience on the West Reserve. The account of the death of young Franz Wiens, in particular, is evocative and speaks for the simple Biblical faith of the OK-ers.

Katharina Fehr Loeppky later turned these letters over to her daughter Mrs. Wilhelm Neustadter, nee Katharina Loeppky, who in turn passed them on to her cousin Helena Fehr, daughter of Isaac who had owned the original Fehr Wirtschaft in Reinland. Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba, is presently in possession of these marvellous writings.

#### **Endnote:**

Note One: Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B. C. V3L 4V5, letter to the author April 7, 2000.

Note Two: Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), document collection, courtesy of niece Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba.

#### **Sources:**

Telephone interviews with granddaughter Helena Fehr, Pembina Ave., Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 2T1.

Peter Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Altona, 1976), pages 34-46.

# Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) Journal

**Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), Journal, as translated and published in Peter Zacharias,  
Reinland: Experience in Community (Altona, Man., 1976), pages 34-46.**

## The “old” Homeland.

I would like to tell something of times past, of that which I have experienced, especially of the departure from Russia, because this often comes to my memory.

And so I will begin from the day before we left our former home--how I walked in the garden before evening, how I criss-crossed it in various directions. I remember how often I had hoed it and cleaned it of weeds.

I observed the fruit trees and how promising they looked and what a blessing they could bring forth, without our being able to enjoy it. The May cherries were almost ripe. The other sweet cherries were less advanced. The plums were greener still; one plum variety when it ripened became white as snow and was to have an unusually excellent taste. I have not tasted them because the trees were still young--they were to show forth their art for the first time and were now heavily-laden with fruit.

I remember how so often I had worked in the garden with my mother. She showed me where the beds were and I dug them up. Thereupon she seeded them. Father had bought me a light metal spade that I could easily handle, for at the time I still was a school child.

When I had observed all these things and reflected on them, I walked out of the garden and closed the gate. I remained standing at the gate and looked at the garden once more and said to myself, “I will never again enjoy your fruit.” My eyes filled with tears.

Thereupon I left the garden, walked across the yard, and entered the house and the room where they were busily packing different articles that were to be taken along to America. Finally they also packed roasted buns into bags. These were to be taken along for the trip as something to eat at times when meals would be irregular. And while all this was being prepared for the departure, evening came and we lay down for the night’s rest.

## Farewell.

Next morning when we had risen and finished our breakfast, women began gathering in the house and in the yard--they came for the farewell. Mother’s brother, Uncle Johann

“I remember how so often I had worked in the garden with my mother.”

Wiens, too, came with his vehicle. He had been asked to drive us to the boat which lay at anchor in the river at Neu-Chortitz. Then we packed onto the wagon what we wanted to take along. When all was done and we were ready to board the wagon, farewells were taken of all who had gathered on the yard. These farewells were ac-



S. S. Sarmatian crossing the Atlantic Ocean in 1878. This was the ship which carried young Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) and 118 Old Kolony and Bergthal families from Liverpool arriving in Quebec City on July 6, 1875. They were followed a week later by Aeltester Johann Wiebe and his group who crossed the ocean on the S. S. Peruvian. Photo courtesy of L. Klippenstein, David Klassen and the Mennonites (Agincourt, 1982), page 12. The names of all the Mennonites on board these ships have been published in John Dyck, ed., Bergthal Gemeindebuch (Steinbach, 1992), pages 255-333, now unfortunately out of print.

panied by many tears. Then we climbed onto the wagon and the vehicle was set in motion. And we drove off the yard towards the road.

For some time while we were on the road, which gradually rose--we were going uphill now--we could always look back and see the village, we could continue to see it from quite far. Often we turned around to see the home we had left and were reminded of the many good things we had enjoyed there. One could also

“When they began to sing there arose a mighty sound along the river and along the hill--its echoes spread out far and wide.”

notice the many people gathered at the fences along the street. Finally, as we covered more and more distance, the crowd resembled only a black line until at last we reached the top of the hill.

Then we had a flat prairie before our eyes, and our village and home, where we had lived so long, were taken from our sight. For some distance now we drove through grain fields which looked dreary because rain was needed.

At last we had traversed the level prairie. The road began to drop downhill. Then we caught sight of the village of Neu-Chortitz and beside it the river in which our boat lay anchored. As we approached we noticed that the hill was covered with vehicles and people. The boat, too, was filled with people. It was almost impossible to get close to the boat with the wagon for the purpose of unloading. The boat had a

gangplank, approximately 10 feet wide, connecting the boat and the shore. The people were walking back and forth over it. They would be seen with tear-stained cheeks and handkerchiefs in their hands. Kisses and handshakes were general, indicating that a painful parting was taking place.

On the ship’s bridge, which was generally reserved for the captain, the Vorsänger gathered to announce the songs that were to be sung in farewell. When they began to sing there arose a mighty sound along the river and along the hill--its echoes spread out far and wide. I had never seen a gathering of people as large as this one. It was a leave-taking with no hope of again seeing each other in this world. Parents parted from their children and children from their parents. It was a heart-rending day. There was much weeping and crying among the people--a memorable day which I will never forget. In the meantime the singing had ended. Suddenly a shrill whistle, with a penetrating tone came from the boat.

## Departure.

When the captain had taken his place on the bridge he called out at the top of his voice that those who wanted to go with the ship should come to the ship and those who wanted to stay should leave the ship. The walls of separation were drawn for a final time.

Then a machine pulled the drawbridge onto the deck and the ship began to move. The farewell call sounded through the air in full tones. Caps were waved in the air from both sides and the women did the same with their handkerchiefs. The ship had gone for a considerable distance and still we saw the repetition of this act of farewell until there was a bend in the

river. Now all was separated.

Our ship sailed along towards the south. Our departure from the village of Nieder-Chortitz took place at two p.m. At about seven o'clock in the evening we reached the large city of Nikopol. During this stretch that we had sailed we had seen so many beautiful fruit orchards and vineyards, which had been planted along the river, and beautiful estates. Oh, the beautiful region and climate we had to leave!

During our landing at this city we met the Fürstenländer, who also constituted a Mennonite church, and who also originated from our "Old" Kolony. A number of these, too, wanted to migrate and joined our party and we emigrated together. Among them was also their Aeltester [Johann Wiebe]. Later the church became known as the Old Colony Church.

#### Narrative--Peter Zacharias.

On the second day the boat continued down the Dneiper and arrived at Kherson. There the travellers changed to a larger vessel--they had to cross a part of the Black Sea on the way to Odessa. At Odessa a larger camp was set up on a rise not far from shore and near a forest. The men camped in a circle surrounding the women and children in the middle. Next morning the roasted buns which they had brought with them and water or coffee were served as breakfast. Fehr was impressed with the luxury of the train that they now boarded. His account continues.

#### The Journey.

So we had a wonderful trip up to the border of the Russian Empire, where we had to transfer to a different train. From there we crossed a corner of the Austrian Empire to Germany and continued to the port of Hamburg. We stayed there for almost a week.

We also had a worship service here for there was a minister with us, Ohm Jacob Wiens, whom I knew, because he, too, was from our

**"Among them were many Mennonite brethren who lived in Kansas."**

village of Kronthal. Soon, however, the time came that we should leave here, too. Now we were to board a large ship which was to take us across the North Sea to England. How long we sailed this sea, I have forgotten, but that we were heavily struck with seasickness, I will not forget. It is a severe sickness with constant vomiting. When we got across we landed at the port of Hull.

There we were prevented from immediately leaving the ship because of a woman in child-birth. But because she could not give birth successfully, she had to give up her spirit. Oh, how hard it was for her husband--wringing his hands in agony. He had to leave his wife in a strange land and continue travelling into the unknown.

From there we travelled across England by rail to the harbour of Liverpool. There our ship was ready to receive us. It was a mighty liner



*The Red River steamer Dakota at the Fort Dufferin landing around 1872 to 1874. The 1873 Mennonite delegates travelled on this boat on the return trip from Winnipeg to Moorehead. It is highly probable that this boat also carried Mennonite immigrants in 1874 to 1876 like the S. S. International. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: Experience in Community (Altona, 1976), page 40.*

which was to take us across the Atlantic Ocean. Late in the evening the ship began moving. When we had risen in the morning we found that the ship had landed at the Island of Ireland.

It was Sunday. In the night the ship left the place. Next morning, when we were on deck (we had to go on deck every morning for fresh air) we saw water mirrored all around us as far as our eyes could see.

The quiet lasted for two days and two nights. On the evening of the second day a wind began blowing and soon the water appeared black and because of the whirling winds its surface underwent a transformation. Thereupon it got dark and we went for our rest.

But our rest changed to the greatest unrest. The ship began moving rapidly. It did not take long until the chamber pots were thrown in all directions. One could not walk around without leaning on solid objects or holding on with hands for support. In the morning we could not go on deck for the waves were rolling over the ship and were washing everything they could reach off the deck and into the sea.

This weather lasted up to three days. There were sounds of rumbling and crashing. We thought we were in danger of death. Those who had not yet learned to pray learned now.

Even the captain requested prayer that our Creator might have mercy upon us and help us. We were also struck by seasickness.

All became better again; the storm and the waves calmed down. The sea became friendly

and smooth as before.

The small children lay ill.

#### Quebec City.

On the eighth day of our voyage the captain announced that he could see America through the telescope. Then joyous hope streamed into our hearts. At two in the afternoon we could see with our naked eyes a small black line which gradually came nearer.

Everyone rejoiced in the hope of setting foot on solid ground again. Soon we could differentiate between the mountains. Then white dots were discovered and it was thought that these were white stones. When we neared they turned

**"When we arrived in Reinland after a nearly three days trip.....we pitched our tent,..."**

out to be large buildings. We entered a gulf that was locked in by high mountains on both sides. At first the mountains were far away. The gulf got narrower and narrower and the mountains gradually came closer and closer together. We met some fishing boats going about their business.

Dusk began falling--it got dark. Electric lights sent their streaming beams towards the ships from both sides. Soon we caught sight of innumerable lights, a world of stars, by which we

knew that we had reached the port of Quebec. Three times the ship sent a flare skyward. It sailed into harbour. Thereupon the gates were opened for disembarking. We saw an almost uncountable crowd of people, there to welcome those leaving the ship. Then we were received as Canadian immigrants. The Queen had seen to this for us, as non-resident Christians. We were then served a wonderful evening meal.

#### Duluth.

Here we had to wait until noon for the train. We travelled across these two provinces changing back and forth from train to boat. Because the border between Canada and the United States then takes a turn we had to travel through the U.S.A. for a stretch and finally arrived at a city called Duluth.

Here it was recommended that we buy tools, cook stoves and cooking utensils in this city for "where you are now going there is no trade nor traffic. Nor can you obtain anything there for it is an absolute wilderness." ("...denn da wo ihr jetzt hingeht ist kein Handel noch Wandel. Da konnt ihr auch nichts anschaffen denn das is eine reine Wildnis.")

So purchases were made and packed into the freight car. We spent one or two days there. I still remember that cutlery was prepared for usage, stoves were erected and fired and food was prepared, a large yard with much room was placed at our disposal.

From there we continued by rail and came to a small town. It had only recently been founded and construction was in progress. It was called Fishers Landing.

#### Kansas Brethren.

When we got there we were received by a large crowd of people. Among them were many Mennonite brethren who lived in Kansas. During the time when our forefathers moved from Germany to Russia they had moved to America. They came and tried to persuade us not to go to Manitoba. They said that two settlements had been made there before and these settlers had to turn back. They could not survive there because of the cold, raw, long winter.

They insisted that we come to Kansas. The climate was much milder there. Many allowed themselves to be persuaded and went with them to the south.

But our leadership remained firm. It had once negotiated our freedoms with the Queen. The contract was in writing. We could fully enjoy those freedoms within the framework of our confession of faith according to the teachings of the Apostles and if we would hold on to those teachings no law would touch us. Our leaders and Aeltester did not want to break this solemn promise. They held true to it. The majority remained on our side.

After the two parties had taken leave of each other, we, who wanted to stay with Canada, boarded the boat which brought us to Emerson in three days.

#### Fort Dufferin.

There still was not much to see of the town.



*The Fort Dufferin landing site looking south toward Emerson. Note the cairn in the foreground beside the former Highway 14 and also the old clearing. The Red River is on the left Pembina, North Dakota, would be in the upper right and corner. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: Experience in Community (Altona, 1976), page 42.*



*The Fort Dufferin landing site as it looked in 1976. The picture shows the Red River approach from Winnipeg. The site is marked by a cairn, see arrow. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: Experience in Community (Altona, 1976), page 42.*

"There was still a yearning for the true friends which had to be left behind, for the beautiful "Heimat" with its precious orchards."

Then I remembered the verse in Psalm 137: "By the river of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."

We spent six weeks at this place of mourning till we could finally start out and set our foot upon our new land.

At the immigration houses my smallest brother died.

The delegates decided to strike out west of Emerson.

#### Reinland, Ho, by Peter Zacharias.

The farmer had planted an orchard of wild cherry trees. Fehr, who so vividly recollected the fruit orchards in his native Russia, comments: "Es waren Pungels aber doch anders als die Wein Trauben" ("The fruit was in clusters and yet different than wine grapes.")

Since the fruit was now ripe one after another undertook to taste it and one after another drew his face into contortions and spit out the cherries. The general opinion was that this fruit could not be eaten. The immigrants had made their first encounter with chokecherries.

The group was warmly received at the farm. The cooking utensils were taken from the wagon and a meal was prepared. Fresh potatoes were purchased here at a price of 80 cents per pail.

Fehr then describes the arrival at Reinland.

Because we could travel only with oxen, everything was slow. At last we came to the land. The land had been surveyed few days before and numbered and had also received names. Our lot was the name of Reinland. After a three day journey we arrived at Reinland and pitched our tent. The government had ordered these tents for the immigrants at a very small cost to us.

That was Reinland, summer, 1875--a village of tents and campfires.

## Letter of February 17, 1942, pages 4-5.

Our stay at the immigration houses [Fort Dufferin] lasted six weeks....The reason we stayed so long at the immigration houses was because our delegates were not able to make a decision to which place they should commit themselves, in order to take up land for a settlement. They did not really want to be too far from the city, because the business intercourse with the world could not be completely done without.

But at that time the land adjacent to the river was too uneven for cultivation and interspersed with swales, and in most cases the lower places were swampy, although otherwise, the indications were of good quality and rich growth of grass. Further towards the west the land was generally dryer and more suitable for laying out a colony. Further toward the north, the indications were similar: too uneven and the low spots had many water pot holes.

Since there was a great need for wood, which is a great necessity to sustain human life, we found the westerly portion the most suitably located. After they had finished with this they returned and presented their plans, which were willingly accepted.

The largest part of the group really pushed that we should move onto the land as soon as possible. In the meantime a man also came to us who knew the region well. He said to us that it was time that we got ready for winter since it could happen that we already had snow by the beginning of October. This gave us added incentive that we hurried even more to get onto the land.



*The sturdy precision construction of the Old KOLONIER pioneers, a testimony to a strong tradition of artisans and craftsmen found in the Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. By the end of the 19th century, the factories of Chortitza were a major economic factor in the economy of southern Russia, something already being replicated in Winkler and surrounding area in the present day.*  
Photo courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 60.

But since it only went with oxen, everything went very slowly. Horses for not available which was also suitable for us since there was not sufficient feed for them. If an ox has good grass or enough hay it can work slowly. Finally, after a slow journey we came to the land. The land had already been surveyed out a few days earlier and the village plan numbered with the names attached. Our lot was the name Reinland.

When we arrived in Reinland after a nearly three days trip with our young oxen, we pitched our tent, which nearly everyone else did as well. The government had arranged for the tents, and I think they were quite cheap to buy. When we had finished with that, our dwelling place for

**"Our father immediately left this refuge....[so] that he could visit the settlement in Steinbach where his parents were."**

the next while was ready. Now came the frantic business, to get ourselves ready for winter.

Father instructed me to dig a hole in the ground, to make a dwelling place out of it for ourselves. Father together with Johan drove to the forest in order to get wood for burning so that food could be prepared. At the same time they provided [beams] for a frame which would later be placed in the hole which I was supposed to dig about four feet deep and which were then to be sheathed with boards.

This was then to be our residence, and also at the same time for our few head of livestock, two oxen, two cows and one small horse. In this manner we completed our home as much as we could. At the same time grass was mowed for feed for the livestock for winter.

But our highest priority was for our winter quarters. In the meantime Fall had come and we were not yet ready for winter. Then the weather came the way the man had already told us, on October 3, some eight inches of snow fell. The hay was still lying on the field but it had already been gathered into small piles. Many hearts now became anxious and fearful.

But after a few days it became warm almost like in summer and the snow quickly disappeared. The hearts were again quickened and we worked forward with joyful optimism. This then gave us a good opportunity so that by the 25th of October we were more or less ready with everything for winter.

But on the date last mentioned, the 25th, the fierce winter fell upon us with snow, wind and frost. During this time we had also already moved into our earth dwelling. It was an exceptionally warm residence. We used it for two years until we were able to build ourselves a new home above the ground. During the second winter, 1876, in the month of February, our sister Maria was born while we were still living in the earth.



*Reinland pioneers Abraham and Anna (Dueck) Dyck with their children Peter and Anna. The Dycks returned to Russia for some years for the sake of their children's education. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 47.*

## Letter of September 25, 1951, pages 5-6.

I will refer back to the time when we had just occupied the immigration houses. Our father immediately left this refuge and embarked upon the next following ship in order that he could visit the settlement in Steinbach where his parents were.

They had already immigrated there from Russia the previous year, 1874. But there was only little prairie land there, rather there was mainly bush and where there was no bush it was mainly swampy. For this reason the government had decided to criss-cross the area to the north and west adjacent to the small city of Emerson to seek out a place where a settlement could be established.

The reason that my father's parents had immigrated together with the Kleine Gemeinde was due to the fact that they had children among them.....And also for another reason, many of our brethren in the Gemeinde went with them to their new settlement [Borosenko] in order to establish an improved Gemeinde and more according to the pure teaching of the Apostles and also in order to avoid and to reflect upon certain afflictions which were abundant in the Old Kolony. The most serious reason was because of the great disorder there among the youths; secondly, the smoking of tobacco; thirdly, playing and dancing; fourthly, the extreme pride; and, fifthly, drunkenness....

It frequently happened that much interaction existed between the two Gemeinden because they worked for friendship between each other. And so it came to pass one day that a widower entered my grandparents' dwelling, undoubtedly sent there by someone, and since there was a young lady there who was ready for marriage, to marry her--which was also accomplished. Thereafter they also had a connection with that Gemeinde.



*Jakob Zacharias family, a great uncle to Peter the historian. This photograph may well date to Imperial Russia. Some of the earliest photographs among the Russian Mennonites are found among the Old Kolony community. Courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 47.*

Since the emigration was already decided, and the Kleine Gemeinde was the first to make a beginning with the emigration, and their son-in-law—who also belonged to the Gemeinde—was going with the Gemeinde, consequently the grandparents joined themselves to them and emigrated together with them to America in 1874.

The grandparents, as well as one set of children whom they had taken along with them, did not take out any homestead there. Rather they preferred to wait one year until we followed them, at which time they wanted to settle with us together wherever our Gemeinde located itself. (You will probably already have heard at some point about Bernhard Bergens and Cornelius Fasts, who were also grandparent's children.)

This was the reason why our father left our company a few days after we arrived at the immigration houses, and embarked on another vessel, shipping northwards in order to visit his parents and siblings there and, if possible, to return immediately together with them to the place where the Gemeinde to which they belonged had decided to lay out its domicile, namely, the Old Kolony Gemeinde.

## **Letter of March 18, 1942. pages 3-6.**

Firstly, I will mention something about the food which sustains the body and which costs us three times as much today as it did in comparison with the past. I am referring here among Christian people. It is astounding the difference between rich and poor, which has also always been the case.

We, or my parents, were not of the very poorest. I have witnessed (that means in Russia), that the poorest help themselves with rye bread and barley “prips”, for coffee, to which they then add bread, salt and onions. This was the breakfast menu.

For the midday meal there was usually barley porridge, cooked with water--whoever had milk, added milk to it--whoever did not have it,

had to be satisfied as it was. People made this porridge themselves from the barley.

A block of oak wood was hollowed out, and the barley heated with hot water and poured into the hollowed-out block. It was pounded with a wooden wedge until it had shelled itself. In the meantime it was passed through the wind, so that the shells were separated. This was repeated until the shelling was complete. Now it was ready for cooking.

Water soup was also often cooked for the evening meal (if no porridge was available), out of hard wheat flour (“semel”)—we say, “white wheat). Small semele were made and poured into the brew, salted a little, and if bacon is available, small slivers are cut, fried somewhat in a pan on the fire, and spread out over the brew.

They eat this with rye bread and onions. If they had something available, they also spread something on the bread. If they didn't have, they did without.

This is how things were among the poorest people in Russia and the same conditions also applied to the poorest here in America. And the poor were not only a few, which the Gemeinde had taken along from Russia to here. Many had also become indebted to the Gemeinde for the trip, they had to work it off here to the Gemeinde.

Since the Gemeinde itself was only poor and could not support the poor any longer, and since they had to live longer, and, in addition, the long winter was at the door, provision also had to be made for them, that they had nourishment and clothing. Accordingly the Gemeinde saw it as necessary to borrow money to use it for them, so that they could keep everyone alive. In order to become united in this regard, it required a deeply considered brotherly love in order to bring this to pass.

**“But we had an Aeltester who had totally committed himself to his Shepherd,...”**

But we had an Aeltester who had totally committed himself to his Shepherd, with the complete confidence in the One who had helped us over the great and stormy ocean with our lives, would not forsake us either in this barren land, if we would not forsake Him. But God was with him and empowered him that he could be a true light to the Gemeinde, to be able to exposit the Word of God clearly and understandably, so that the Gemeinde became willing to do everything necessary, that the entire Gemeinde was to be brought through the winter as a commu-

**“But God was with him and empowered him...[to] be a true light...so that the Gemeinde became willing to do everything necessary,...The poor were also to be helped...”**

nity.

The poor were also to be helped so that they could work their land in the approaching spring. The Gemeinde had to set about and borrow money for this purpose. The Gemeinde had to obligate itself for these loans. In so far as I can recall, the Gemeinde borrowed or loaned 30,000 dollars two times in a row. Once from the government and one time from the Ontario Mennonite Gemeinde.

It was a difficult beginning to look after the future life, for the land was a barren wilderness, everything had to be broken from sod. Our father did not need to receive help from the Gemeinde. He had enough of his own that he could purchase one pair of young oxen, two cows, and a pony, as well as an old buggy.

We had brought one freight wagon along from Russia with which we were able to transport ourselves as necessary. One of the great advantages here was that there was sufficient woods so that one had fire wood and building material, to the fullest. Father had purchased a iron board saw with which we cut the trees for building material in order to build a house.

For two winters we lived in the earth [semelin]. By the third winter we had a dwelling house above the ground. That was the house were you have also yet lived inside and so you can well think that it is quite old. And since we had started with sawing the wood, the people almost hauled our yard full, for they wanted their wood cut as well for building houses.

During the second winter we started, father and I sawed the wood for the house. We were also able to saw some for others and earn something so that we could purchase flour. For the harvest that following summer that we were already here in America was only meagre since we had only broken nine acres with the two young oxen, six for wheat and three for oats. I

Attention Readers: The Jakob Fehr immigration account compiled by Rev. Peter Zacharias was also published in German in the *Mennonite Post*, January 22, 1988, and February 5, 1988.

“Several factors in their Russian experience suited these immigrants [the Old Koloniers] for the ‘big Plain’. They had lived on the open steppes before. They had learned how to make fuel in the absence of wood (though they were to make much use of wood from the Pembina Hills right from the beginning.) They had learned to plant trees. They had struck living water on level ground before. Their open field system of land-holding did not require wooden fences. The historian of Manitoba Mennonites, Dr. E. K. Francis, sums it up this way “Thus the West Reserve, laid out between Emerson and Mountain City at a depth of 18 miles north of the United States boundary, was really the first permanent agricultural settlement ever established on the open prairie of Western Canada without direct access to a major body or current of water.” Peter Zacharias, *Reinland*:

think that we beat it out with the threshing stick. The yield was only small as it was seeded on sod which had only been broken in spring.

In the second year father took on the herding of cattle so that he could earn himself something, and then your two sisters had to herd the cattle and I and Johan sawed wood. We had a lot of work and then we earned enough that we could finish the house and get it ready for occupancy. This was the third winter. During this time we had a lot of work sawing wood.

In the meantime, the land cultivation, wherever possible, became more and more prominent; the land, of course, varied, but on the average it yielded well. On the average the weather was fruitful for the benefit of the grain farming economy. During the beginning years, threshing the grain from the straw was done with a threshing stone since no threshing machines were available. These threshing stones were pulled by a team of horses, which was then rolled around on the spread out sheaves, which lay spread out beside each other in a circular area.

This is how the grain was threshed out in the early years until with time, the change was made to threshing machines which were priced to sell. They were small threshing boxes which were manually fed the sheaves which had been cut into small pieces. The box was only small, it had only a small cylinder, in the form which you have seen on the large threshing boxes.

This machine was powered by five teams, whether oxen or horses. For this, a motor was set up with drive wheels whereby the machine was kept in motion. There were five poles attached to this motor, to each of which a team was hitched and on which they had to pull in order to keep it in motion. From this motor a coupled iron bar went to the threshing box, where it was similarly coupled to a drive wheel in order to keep the entire substance of the machine in motion. Although the machine was only small, nevertheless, it still separated the kernels and chaff from the straw. The straw was taken away by two workers or by a team of livestock.

Now to close, I want to come to your question. Our grandparents lived in Reinland on the old Barkman's [Bergmann] place. I believe only two or three years after which they sold and moved to Hoffnungsfeld. But the grandmother moved there as a widow, the grandfather had already died in Reinland. The grandfather died still in Reinland in the second year [later corrected to read, the third year]....

When I think back to the time that our grandfather died and at the same time that our sister Maria was born. I think both occurred in the first winter in 1876, which really does not seem very long ago to me. She was born while we were living in the earth [in the semlin]. I had to dig this hole the first summer that we were in America, which I have already mentioned in my previous writing.

This dwelling was built with spars above the earth which were to serve as the roof. They were then covered with grass instead of straw. Grandfather finished the roof himself. I mowed the grass with a hand scythe which we had

brought along from Russia. Tall grass was growing along the creek ("ritch") and the two sisters tied it into bundles for the roof which were then fastened with the same grass to the poles which were fastened to the spars with nails.

I also cut the seeded grain with this hand scythe which we had sown by hand. Father taught me how to seed since it was too a hard for him to drag around the loose soil with the bag ("pingel"). He was quite weak because of his pneumonia by which he had been afflicted in Russia because of his hard work.

I believe we farmed in this manner for two years with seeding and moving until father bought a mower, called by the name of "Ripper". It had four rakes which functioned in a circular manner when the machine was being pulled. The machine had a platform from which three rakes threw off the grain which had been cut off.

When it had been thrown off, the rakes turned themselves on the side, lifted themselves up, and came by in the upright position moving towards the front passing close by the drivers side. The four rakes shoved the gathered grain off the platform, each clump becoming a sheaf which, however, had to be bound by the hand.

Father sat on the machine and drove which was powered by a team of horses, and I, Johann and Justina bound the sheaves. Peter was still too small at the time, but he was also on the field. He dragged the sheaves together as good as he could. This saved us a lot of time in setting the shocks as it spared us from having to run after the individual sheaves and carrying them together nearby.

In those days we had a time of cooperative effort for the field was richly appointed with workers since everything had to be bound by hand. But the influence of lowliness, humbleness and communal love made everything light.

After the harvesting was done, the sheaves were hauled together and piled in stacks. When this was completed, then came the threshing time. It did get somewhat late in Fall before everything was completed and winter set in.

I often remember from those days, one day while we were working on the field and we were working adjacent to our neighbours [working on their field]. The driver suddenly stopped adjacent to me, if was my companion and comrade, Wiens' Franz, the minister's son. He jumped from the mover and rushed towards me.

He complained and said, "I do not know why I feel so bad today. All my limbs are aching and hurt me. I will soon not be able to contain my pain, sitting on the machine."

We visited regarding a number of things, after which each one returned to his work. The following days he was not on the field. We understood from his family that he lay sick in bed. That evening I went over to see how things were going for him. He was very sick, the "nerve fever" [typhus] had gotten a hold of him and after a five week illness he was a corpse.

His sickness was difficult: he was almost always mentally deranged. One could not talk much with him. Towards the end of his illness he got better, he came back to consciousness.

His eyes were transported while he was dying, from the ascertainable to the unascertainable. He did not see those standing around his bed.

"....intermittently he saw his bed surrounded by radiant angels."

But intermittently he saw his bed surrounded by radiant angels. One observed this from his gentle breaths which broke into quiet whispers from his weak spirit, in that his eyes soon turned here or directed themselves there as long as his breathing continued.

Then my precious comrade was torn from my side with whom I had so often stood together by the boundary fence discussing many different things, often times about spiritual matters. I really missed this company for a long time.

Not long thereafter, I had a dream that I went outside on the yard. In the middle there I saw two white clad streams, standing on the ground, their ends reaching up into the heavens. While I stood there nearby and gazed up into heaven, I noticed to my great joy that Wiens' Franz, the deceased sufferer, came down on one of them from heaven descending to the earth.

I rejoiced to be able to see him again but we

"I have come to tell you that one of these streams is also equally yours and upon it you too will some time ascend into heaven."

did not speak much with each other. He was otherwise friendly to me and said, "I have come to tell you that one of these streams is also equally yours and upon it you too will some time ascend into heaven."

Whereupon he again ascended into heaven. After this admonition I thought that I would soon die, but am still alive today. I have been afflicted by many a trial for which I have not been able to sustain the required resistance....

Alas, where is the precious time. Alas, where are the beloved people, who formerly lived in humility and meekness, in love and unity and in love for one another. They are all buried and together with them the humility and meekness.

A completely different generation has arisen

"Alas, where are the beloved people, who formerly lived in humility and meekness, in love and unity and in love for one another."

in their place, which shouts out its pride and arrogance, and because of this affliction, the fruits of God are dying out, together with the love of fellowman. Because man does not love God nor heed His Word, shallowness takes root in the soul whereby all manner of apostasy rises up in the heart. Your siblings, "J. and Elisb. Fehr"

# Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Publisher, 1881

**Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Publisher, 1881, Confession of Faith, by Delbert Plett.**

## Publications, 1881.

The range of duties of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) was enormous. As the spiritual shepherd of the largest Mennonite denomination in western Canada, he was seized of jurisdiction regarding a host of matters going far beyond the responsibilities of the modern-day minister. One of these responsibilities was the provision of devotional writings for his parishioners.

A recent find by historian Leonard Doell, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, places Johann Wiebe and his Reinländer into the forefront of the whole area of books and publications.

Leonard Doell found a tear sheet from a Confession of Faith, pages 3 to 4, neatly placed within the pages of a Catechism he was examining.

It is a forward to a Confession of Faith published in 1881. This publication does not seem to be mentioned in Springer and Klassen, *Mennonite Bibliography 1631-1961* (Scottdale, Pa., 1977), Volumes One and Two, nor does it seem to be mentioned in any of the histories of Mennonites in Manitoba.

Based on the research I did for an article in 1994, "Print Culture of the East Reserve 1874-1930," published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, October 1994 pages 524-550, and also in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve* (Steinbach, 1994), pages 686-715, it was among the first, if not the very first publication among the Mennonites in Western Canada.

The discovery of the 1881 Confession of Faith by Leonard Doell will probably result in the identification of other devotional and institutional writings as originating with Aeltester Johann Wiebe and his Reinlanders.

Rev. Peter Zacharias, Gretna, Manitoba, advises that the Confession of Faith, as printed by Aeltester Wiebe is still being used today by the Old Colony Church in Manitoba as well as elsewhere in North and South America. Peter still has a copy of the 1881 original.

What a legacy Johann Wiebe has left for the Church of God.

## Translation.

The following is a translation of the "foreward" to the Confession of Faith, 1881, the portion available to the writer at the present time.

"In the following pages I commit unto the Gemeinde our Confession of Faith, as we annually present it to our youth in the articles during the baptismal instruction.

"For a long time already the necessity [of such a publication] became manifest to certain of our members, that our confession of faith, whereupon we receive baptism, should not only be heard a number of times during the year in our worship services, rather to have it for one's self in order to read and compare it with the Word of God wherefrom it has been compiled. By so doing we will be able to become more firmly grounded [in our faith] and that we should at all times be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks for a basis for the faith which is within us, 1 Peter 3,15.

"In order to satisfy this need and also to contribute in a small way to the building up of our Gemeinde, I feel convicted regarding the publication of this written Confession of Faith, which will constitute a desirable addition to our Catechism. Together with the same it offers our youth, who are preparing themselves for baptism, the opportunity that they can be-troth themselves ever more deeply within the godly truth, at home when they are alone, which is presented to them in the house of God,

"May the Saviour, Jesus Christ, bless the use of these pages unto many hearts, that they would not merely more and more spread the knowledge of the truth among us, rather that the same much more might also become a God-given empowerment for the eternal life which it manifests in word and deed.

"Grant this, oh God, through your grace.

"Johannes Wiebe"  
Aeltester der Gemeinde at  
Reinland, in Manitoba,  
Rosengart, on the 27th day  
of June 1881."

## Vorwort.

In nachfolgenden Blättern übergebe ich der Gemeinde unjer Glaubensbekenntnis, wie wir es jährlich in Artikeln beim Taufunterrichte der Jugend vortragen. Schon lange machte sich in unserer Gemeinde bei einigen Gliedern das Bedürfnis fühlbar, unser Glaubensbekenntnis, auf welches wir die heilige Taufe empfangen, nicht bloß in der gottesdienstlichen Versammlung einige Male im Jahr zu hören, sondern es auch selbst zu haben, um es lesen und mit dem Worte Gottes, aus dem es geschöpft ist, vergleichen zu können, damit wir in demselben immer fester gegründet werden und wir allezeit bereit seien zur Verantwortung gegen jedermann, der Grund fordert der Hoffnung, die in uns ist. 1. Petri 3, 15. Um nun diesem Bedürfnis abzuhelfen und in einem geringen Teile auch hierdurch zur Erbauung unserer Gemeinde beizutragen, fühle ich mich zur Herausgabe dieser Bekenntnisschrift veranlaßt, die einen gewünschten Anhang zu unserem Katechismus bildet und mit diesem zusammen unserer Jugend, die sich zur heiligen Taufe vorbereitet, die Gelegenheit darbietet, sich auch zu Hause, wenn sie allein ist, immer näher mit der göttlichen Wahrheit vertraut zu machen, die ihr im Gotteshause verkündigt wird. Der Heiland Jesus Christus wolle den Gebrauch dieser Blätter an vie-

4

len Herzen dergestalt segnen, daß sie nicht bloß die Erkenntnis der Wahrheit unter uns immer mehr verbreiten, sondern daß dieselbe vielmehr in den Herzen auch eine Gotteskraft zum ewigen Leben werde, die sich in Wort und Wandel offenbart. Das gebe Gottes Gnade. Amen.

Johannes Wiebe,  
Aeltester der Gemeinde zu Reinland, in Manitoba.

Rosengart, am 27. Juni 1881.



# Wrestling Satan, ca. 1885

**“Wrestling Satan: A Number of Ancient Events from Canada, Manitoba,” [Circa 1885, Author Unknown, see Endnote]**

## **Editor’s Introduction.**

In the novel *Sarah’s Prairie* (page 102), Franz Friese, the inimitable village story teller, enjoys regaling his nephew Martien Koep with his own version of Mennonite history. In one scene where the two are neighbouring together as Franz hauls a load of pigs to market, he relates how the conservative Mennonites gave away their beautiful Wirtschaften in Russia to their Separatist Pietist neighbours, who disdained their faith and traditions.

Then he says, “We pioneered for a decade, building a new land. We worked with little more than bare bleeding hands and torn fingernails....No sooner was the hard work all done, then we once more had these snot nosed schwears on our backs. Again they tried to tell us that everything we believed in and did was wrong.”

While the character Franz Friese was known for his hyperbole and penchant to overstate, his version of truth does provide an appropriate backdrop to the account of Johann Wiebe, “Wrestling Satan, circa 1885.”

By the early 1880s the Old Koloniers, by virtue of hard work and astuteness in selecting the best land in Manitoba, had reestablished themselves materially. Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and leading hand of God, Aeltester Johann Wiebe had been successful in calling forth some 4000 souls, who came from many different villages and communities in the old homeland, and organizing them as the Reinländer Gemeinde in 1875.

There were, of course, among the Old Koloniers those who had associated themselves with Johann Wiebe’s group solely in order to be able to take part in the immigration effort. No sooner were the foundation stones laid when missionaries/preachers from the United States beset the pioneer community seeking to divert them away from their Gospel-centric faith and to “convert” them to Separatist-Pietist and/or American Revivalist religious culture, both of which rejected the Gospels by virtue of a bizarre teaching known as “Dispensationalism.”

Such apostasy had little appeal to Johann Wiebe and his denomination as their teachings, by comparison, were firmly grounded on the Gospels. Satan must have realized that he would have little chance to subvert the Old Koloniers by such an obvious strategy. So he devised another plan to mount an attack from the inside. He was able to seduce several members from within the Reinländer Gemeinde itself, to fall for these false teachings and to propagate the same internally.

The spirit of these interlopers is clear from their references that the members of the Reinländer Gemeinde should “convert” themselves. This is unequivocal evidence that they

did not accept and/or recognize the genuine Gospel-based conversions of conservative Mennonitism, and instead, advocated the adoption of American Revivalist religious culture which held the legalistic belief that a person could not be saved unless they had undergone a radical, climatic and emotional conversion experience.

Because they did not believe in a genuine Gospel-articulated conversion, Revivalists/Fundamentalists were evidently forever unsure of their salvation. As a result they needed another artificial doctrine, namely, the doctrine of “assurance of salvation”. This doctrine held that adherents should continually repeat and announce that they were “saved” presumably as a psychological mechanism to help them overcome their lack of confidence that they were a part of the kingdom of God, caused by their circumvention of the teachings of the Gospel.

“Wrestling Satan” is the intriguing account of what happened and how God empowered Johann Wiebe to see through the sinister scheme.

The story is heart wrenching. Johann Wiebe was shaken to the depths of his innermost being as he was almost seduced by Satan’s masterful strategy, how he grappled with Satan.

He felt as if God had forsaken him.

“My God, why hast Thou forsake me?” was his anguished cry.

He struggled for days, convicted unto the core of his being by this onslaught. He aged by several years in the course of a week, as if he had undergone a grievous illness.

But victory came and the attack was repulsed. The Gemeinde was firmly reestablished on the sure and secure foundation of the apostolic order.

The attack is reminiscent of a similar endeavour against the Kleine Gemeinde in the Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, in 1828-9. Here too Satan subverted several members to a form of radical Separatist-Pietism known as “False-humility pietism.” The insurrectionists in the KG also prophesied and spoke convincingly that the end-times were at hand.

Satan’s attack here was so strong that Aeltester Klaas Reimer was actually suspended from office. What we know about the KG insurrection is based on Aeltester Reimer’s own autobiography, “Ein Kleines Aufsatz”:

“Satan obviously realized that he was unable to lead us to the others by erring ministers and also that he could not turn us completely from God through the confusions of Babel. Satan now came in amongst us as an angel of light, as a false spirit, and presented himself as a true brother. This occurred in the manner of which Menno Simons says that the angel of light locates himself in the midst of the saints, so that he partakes of the communion with them

## **Wrestling Satan, ca. 1885.**

“A number of ancient events from Manitoba, Canada, which took place in the 1880s.

The following writing is transcribed, which is founded upon the truth, about an important Gemeinde matter which occurred in Manitoba.

Many have perceived it as good if this would be put into print, and wanted to see this done. It is our wish that we would not offend anyone thereby, but only to remind ourselves how strong the enemy already was in that time--[strong enough] to bring the Gemeinde into confusion.

The following writing is transcribed from an old letter (which is established on the truth) regarding a serious Gemeinde matter that occurred in its own time in Manitoba, Canada, and should be considered as instructive even today. Because in the present time we are again propelled much further into the danger of the tempter, so that he had not only identified the best of the flock, but knew how to initiate a schism among the church leaders, or it was allowed to happen while all of us were not watching, as it is written: “Watch and pray, so that you do not come into the time of trial” [Mt.26:41].

Indeed, how much closer are we now to the end of the world, and thereby also have drawn nearer to the desolation, so that for many it might well bring fruitful results to think back into the bygone times in order to compare how much gain that same spirit has found and still finds daily in the Gemeinde in our time and continues to find every day. For they had all fallen asleep, the ten virgins, but only five had oil! If only we could be found to be as the five wise virgins.

and washes the feet of the saints, and is an earnest and productive spirit in all his deeds. This danger was far more frightful than the first” (*Leaders*, page 139).

But here too, truth and order was eventually restored “Whereupon God performed mighty wonders amongst us. [and] The foolish hearts were smitten so mightily that they were compelled to confess their great shame” (See Plett, *Saints and Sinners* (Steinbach, 1999), pages 78-9).

Although it appears on the surface that the evil plan of Satan circa 1885 to subvert the Reinländer Gemeinde was foiled, he probably still chalked it up as a victory. By getting one group of Christians to attack another, he weakened their resources, forcing those who still followed the Saviour to defend themselves instead of helping others in need.

What a tragedy it would have been for the Church of God in Manitoba had Johann Wiebe and his Reinländer Gemeinde succumbed and fallen victim to this insidious attack.

Introduction to “Wrestling Satan, circa 1885,” by editor Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

### The Anti-Christ.

So then, this writing was occasioned in its time under the long-ago deceased Aeltester Johann Wiebe in Rosengart, Manitoba, Canada, because the anti-Christ had set about to prove the poor Gemeinde [1], and foremostly the beloved Aeltester, who was, however, able to ward off [the evil one] by means of earnest prayer and fasting, and whereby the sun of grace allowed itself to appear once again.

For which we should be saying praises and thanksgiving until the present day, and concurrently to pray that our own eyes might be opened in order to see how we find ourselves with our youth and ourselves in this our own time. According to your beloved letter which we have received, I perceive that you would gladly learn to know about the important events which have taken place in our Gemeinde in the times gone by.

So I will inform you about them in as much as I have still retained many things in my memory from my beloved parents, who spoke

“...Satan took it upon himself to....tear away several men...as an angel of God in order to raise them up as God’s prophets.”

of them. Still I cannot report the exact year. To describe everything exactly would make too long a letter. It might possibly also be of benefit for the future generations in the world to follow if they had knowledge of it, at least those who are interested in observing the changes of times, for the times are changeable especially in these [last] days, when everything is readying itself and rushing with winged speed toward the end.

### Angel of Light.

Now I wish to begin to report on the significant events which came to pass in those days, according to my own knowledge. It happened in the time of the previous century, apparently during the eighties, after it had been allowed him, that Satan took it upon himself to prepare [fashion] or tear away several men to whom he revealed himself as an angel of God in order to raise them up as God’s prophets. These men then came forward publicly in the name of God before the Gemeinde assemblies in the house of prayer in Reinland.

With unsuitable gesticulations and also with shrieking they called out to congregation: “Repent, make amends and give God the glory, and convert yourselves, because the end of the world has drawn near, do not delay, [2] hurry therefore, for you have only a little time left.”

Indeed, they repeated this clamour with shouting voices until the assembly became afraid and anxious. Many became fearful and anguished, awoken thereby from their sinful slumber and converted.

Even the Aeltester Johann Wiebe was deeply shaken into the innermost conceptions of his heart by this emergence, whereby he himself in the beginning came to the sense that they were

true prophets who were to urgently admonish the community to repent, to make amends and to arouse themselves from their sinful slumber, and ready themselves and set out to meet the Saviour, that they might be made worthy to stand before the Son of Man when He would burst forth for the judgement of the world.

The Aeltester pointed many into that direction that they should pay heed to these men and see how urgently they were preaching. Indeed they were gifted with talents and wisdom, so that a normal preacher would never have been able to emulate them.

### Ohm Funk, Neuenburg.

But their essence constituted itself in a fleshly form, indeed, to such a degree of excess, until they presumed to grasp at the Aeltester [by usurping] his office. In order to carry this out, Ohm Funk from Neuenburg, who was most advantaged of the three, consented to direct this matter, and thus it happened that he came into conflict with his brother to such a degree that there were hard feelings between them, on account of an exchange of words and perhaps because of other dealings as well. (I have this by hear-say only.)

Funk now notified this Friesen, that in that case he stood in a full ban, and that he should not take it upon himself to enter the church in Reinland. Indeed, if he did so he would immediately fall down instantly dead.

These words struck Friesen’s heart so deeply he set his entire trust in them. This was a difficult situation for the beloved man that he was so rigorously constrained. As I have understood, Mr. Funk had instructed him so strictly that he was not even to leave his house to go to the neighbours for anything. [3] This was doubly hard for Friesen. He would gladly have driven after the Aeltester, but could not risk it, because he had been told so strictly that he was not to leave his house.

But the neighbours took note, for the entire situation did seem very suspicious to them, because they had never yet heard of such severity. They began to go over to his house to visit him. He, however, wanted to hide himself from them, since it was also forbidden to him to have communication with anybody. But they addressed him verbally until the point that they could enter into a conversation with him and he himself could realize it was not quite that dangerous, as he did not experience anything untoward [on account of it].

Finally they suggested to him that he should go to see the Aeltester. However he was afraid to contravene the order by leaving his house. As I have understood it, [some] neighbours persuaded him and drove with him to the Aeltester. This was, by Funk’s evaluation, a daring endeavour. Of necessity he [Friesen] had overstepped [his ban], and yet, nothing bad happened to him, and this gave him more courage.

### The Aeltester.

When they came to the Aeltester and presented the whole situation to him, the Aeltester was deeply struck, since he knew of little to say

about it.

He may well have thought, “Am I now discarded of God? Has He selected another instead of me and appointed him into the office?”

They had come to receive judgement and clarity on this difficult matter, but he could not give them or tell them any clear pronouncement. He allowed the same to stand untouched, just as Funk had made judgement on Friesen. Consequently they had to return home with disappointed and uncontented hearts.

It is hardly imaginable how devastated the beloved Aeltester must have been. Now he stood as before a mountain he could not climb, nor could he see a detour to circumvent it nor even a trail by which he could climb over it; [like standing before] a deep valley where one perceives only darkness, and nowhere a light [4] to be found which could bring some hope for him, [which] had become weak in him on account of his having directed the people towards these men, to listen to their teachings. He had taken false steps through this and had occasioned an injury to others. He had thereby strayed from his path, and had stepped off to the side. Since he was now overcast by a dark cloud, he was almost driven mad, [with] fear and anguish of his soul.

Notwithstanding that a number of men now came to him and said they [Funk and colleagues] were false prophets, this work of testing was not yet lifted, since their faith, works, and teachings, or [I should say] their works, were so powerful they held sway over preachers and the Aeltester. Indeed this undertaking needed to be eradicated out by the Holy Spirit, whereby a clear position could be established, striking Satan a mortal blow in order to bring him to silence.

### Battling Satan.

This would cost a wrestling and struggling in light and darkness, from out of the spirit of God and against Satan’s spirit, which goes far above and beyond all human reason and wisdom. This also struck deeply in the beloved Aeltester’s heart. Near confusion and fear permeated his soul.

“This would cost a wrestling and struggling in light and darkness, from out of the spirit of God and against Satan’s spirit,...”

He began to battle and to pray. Satan contended against him with all his power. It appeared as if God had withdrawn His spirit from him, and [as if] for the proving of his faith, God had forsaken him in this cosmic struggle for a few moments, and he had to grapple with Satan alone entirely without Divine support.

The struggle grew severe in that when he was kneeling and lay on the ground, the devil would lift him up from the ground with his might, as if he wanted to shatter him.

At that he also began to cry out insistently in his soul’s fear and peril, “My God, why have

you forsaken me?" This reminded him of the soul's distress of our Saviour while He was hanging on the cross and called out the same words in great terror.

Thus he struggled day and night with praying and wrestling in bewildered hope, as I [5] have heard from my beloved father, who visited him often.

One night between Saturday and Sunday, the fighting was at its most severe. Indeed at that time the devil manifested himself free and openly in his terrifying form, and when he drew near unto him with widely-stretched jaws and talons, the fear in his heart was unimaginable.

"...the devil manifested himself free and openly....with widely-stretched jaws and talons, the fear in his heart was unimaginable."

He could no longer see any hope or alternative whereby to escape and flee from Satan. The thought came to him, "Now God has yielded me up unto Satan, he is taking me alive, along with him into the abyss."

### **Victory.**

Then Funk's countenance instantaneously mirrored a lightning-speed change. And before the devil could grasp him, this confused struggle disappeared from him, he was lifted up therefrom, and the spirit of comfort was again imparted unto his heart, whereby it was rejuvenated from the grievous battle he had withstood. The work of these three men was now determined, whose spirits it was by which they were governed.

The Aeltester had been weakened to such an extent by the struggle that he, with much diminished strength, had almost lost the ability to walk alone.

The following day was Sunday, when the Gemeinde congregated in the Reinland church or house of prayer to attend the worship service.

The Aeltester was also present. I can well imagine about this, that there must have been traces visible on his countenance as evidence of his very deep suffering. He had been significantly changed within one week, so that one would have to believe that he had been through a severe illness. He could not preach the Word because he was too weak.

### **Restoration.**

The three men were also present again, [in order to] take up their mission and work again at the end of the service, and admonish the assembly to repentance.

When they got up to speak, the Aeltester stood up and stationed himself at the podium and warned them that they could not come up and present with all their ritual as previously. He notified them that the entire foundation, of that which they had been doing until now, was ruled by a false spirit. [6] It had presented itself to them as an angel of light, but it had been sent

out by Satan. With that, the Aeltester had, by the power of God, struck Satan at the core and destroyed his work, that he could not complete what he had had in mind, namely, to lead the Gemeinde astray, and to direct it onto false paths, and finally to ruination.

When the men heard these words, it gave them such a jolt, that they almost lost their senses. According to God's word, they were rightly deserving that the ban be imposed by the Gemeinde, but they had already barred [placed] themselves [under the ban]. They confessed freely [and] openly with painful pangs of conscience that they were not worthy of their feet even walking the ground.

Just as previously they had cried out to the people that they should repent and, where it was needed, to make amends and convert themselves to God, now they were crying out for themselves, for grace and mercy. Yes, they had sunk so fully and deeply in bewildered self-denigration, that they did not feel worthy of anyone even praying for them.

Oh, man! Take note of the profound degradation. They went out upon the fields and did not know the distinction between inside and out, nor where to stay. [Thoughts of] working and eating forsook them because of the pain in their souls and burdensome temptations. They could not comprehend how Satan had been able to present himself to them in such a manner, enchanting them like an angel of light, to lead them off the right way in order to blind their eyes without their noticing.

"The Aeltester had been weakened to such an extent by the struggle that he, ....had almost lost the ability to walk alone."

They could now see all of this clearly, how they had gone beyond their station that they had stepped into those footsteps and had attacked him [Wiebe] in his office, having thereby pushed him aside when theythemselves had begun to reign as rulers. Of this mainly Ohm Funk was primarily guilty, who had been drawn along by the devil in his power into this nominally holy work.

### **Conclusion.**

Now I will end [my comments] in this regard, and add some remarks about this difficult circumstance, that are worth giving some attention.

Firstly, I have to note what Aeltester Ohm Johann Wiebe has spoken concerning these men, namely, it is of great importance to observe the same and measure it with the heart, since they were wake-up calls, which find relevance to the near future.

Indeed he himself at his own departure said he was leaving the world: light and darkness are drawn into a cosmic battle with each other. Should the light be victorious, Christendom can endure for a short while longer. But if the darkness gains the victory, Christendom will quickly

crumble. Since it is apparent that Christianity has sunk into a spiritual sleep, it is also apparent that Christianity is enveloped by a cloud of darkness, and by that measure the end of the world must follow.

He also said that presently Satan has come as a roaring lion, but in the future he will come in such a form that he will work almost without being noticeable.

There would be much more to write about the spiritual slumber or the enveloping darkness that has encompassed Christianity. But I will conclude with this, in that I will convey it to you, and if it should later come into question, then let it be sufficient to serve for many as a reminder and to inspire an awakening regarding themselves. Indeed, that would be my sincere wish.

This has been written down by the long-ago deceased Aeltester's friends and family, already sometime later. Nonetheless, it remains a richly instructive subject even today for those of whom it speaks. How much more has not the dragon raised himself up much more formidably in our day--in the sense [that he purports to speak] in the name of Christ?

How many of our own today do not stand in that posture and claim that they are more righteous than anyone has ever been previously. They want to overrule regulations, protocol, or even the worship service? [They] meet together secretly with an outlook that is threaded with the spirit of destruction, but has the outside appearance of a will blessed of God, but will not be able to persist in it for long. Because there is a judge who perceives all such things, and will make it as nothing at the day of his coming.[8]

**Endnote:** Rev. Peter Zacharias, Gretna, Manitoba, has recalled that the booklet "Ancient Events" describing the insurrection in the Old Kolony Gemeinde in the mid-1880s, was written by an Ohm Friesen from the Hague-Osler area. Any reader that can shed further light on the authorship of this booklet is asked to contact the editor at Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, 1(204)326-6465.

### **Editor's Note "Wrestling Satan"**

The German title of this account of the Church of God and its victory over Satan, ca. 1885, was "Einige Alte Begegnungen von Canada, Manitoba." The booklet was sent to me courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, R.R. 1, Box 79, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, R6W 4A1, descendant and long-time friend of the OK Church.

The title "Wrestling Satan" and section headings and paragraph breaks have been added by the editor. Primary translation by Julia Zacharias, M. A., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The German booklet itself dates this event in the Reinländer Gemeinde simply as taking place "sometime in the 1880s." Consequently the date is referred to as "circa 1885", being the mid-point in the 1880s.

# Reinland Village Book, 1889

"Village Account Book for the Village of Reinland, 1889: Dorfs Buch der Dorfschaft Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba, 1889."

## Editor's Foreword.

Unlike many other cultures, conservative Mennonite society was fundamentally literate in nature and character. Such a culture informed by the belief that all adherents should read and study Scripture. There was also the necessity of record keeping within a centuries old tradition of land-owning agrarianism, known as the "household economy".

One of the most specialized aspects of this written culture was found in the "Strassendorf" villages which Mennonites adopted as their own from medieval usages in northern Europe. The functioning of these simple-looking "street" villages required a staggering amount of documentation and record keeping. The village governance imposed a wide array of duties and also reimbursed its residents for numerous tasks carried out for the village society or "Dorfs Gemeindeschafft".

The village system was adopted by Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) as a paradigm which resonated harmoniously with scriptural mandates regarding "community of sharing" whereby the members of the Church of Christ were to "look unto the necessities of the saints," Romans 12:13 (See *Saints and Sinners*, pages 267-270).

The village was part of Johann Wiebe's vision of a church community articulated by the teachings of the Gospels and conformed in accordance therewith. It was a vehicle whereby believers could participate in the earthly kingdom of God.

The implementation and continuation of the village system probably was the single most important reason for the rapid material progress of the Reinländer community prior to WWI. According to G. F. Galbraith (*Mennonites in Manitoba* (Morden, 1900), pages 29 and 42), "that about 1885 the Mennonite community began to show up as one of the wealthiest in the Province, and continued to hold a leading position from that time forward." This prosperity was no doubt something which infuriated jealous neighbours and added to the paranoia of the Anglo-conformity hysteria which swept the Prairie Provinces only a decade later.

The conservative Mennonite writing regime as it related to the "street" village culture was manifested by account books which were maintained in each village. No doubt thousands of these ledger/journal books have gone lost. Fortunately at least part of the record for the capital village of Reinland is still extant and in the possession of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The extracts which follow here provide some interesting examples of how sophisticated the village paradigm had become by the

1880s.

The first document (page 10) is a transcription of a mandate of the Obervorsteher, head of the civil administration. The position was somewhat similar to that of Reeve in the Municipal system in Manitoba, but with a much wider jurisdiction. In Hutterian and conservative Mennonite religious culture, the civil administration was always servant to that of the spiritual governance. The mandate or directive illustrates the fundamentally democratic nature of all aspects of conservative Mennonite culture.

The second document from the Reinland village book (page 11) is an edict by Aeltester Johann Wiebe, calling for the support of an impoverished community in Assiniboia. It vividly demonstrates that a community founded on the teachings of the Gospels will always seek to aid those in need. It explains why I personally would rather have car trouble at the driveway of an Old Colonier than practically any other denomination of Mennonites.

Johann Wiebe's 1889 exhortation to his Gemeinde provides an interesting view of conservative Mennonite culture at its best, their willingness to assist others in need without trying to impose their own religious ethos as a condition of that aid, a mark of genuine Christian piety.

According to the book by Gerhard P. Bassler, *The German-Canadians 1750-1937* (St. John's, 1986), page 228, the Ebenezer Gemeinde was founded north of Yorkton in 1887 mainly by German Baptists from Russia (Volhynia, Volga district). By 1889 there were about 100 families. In 1893 they established the adjoining Langenau community, north of the Whitesand River. Later the Ebenezer community prospered and became known for its prosperity.

Wiebe's 1889 exhortation to assist the poverty stricken Ebenezers is also heart wrenching considering that at the same time they are helping the German Baptists, the Reinländer people themselves were beset by a hodge-podge of missionaries attempting to seduce them away from their Gospel-centric teachings. Had Aeltester Johann Wiebe not been genuinely led by the Holy Spirit and firmly grounded on the Gospel it would have been easy for him to spurn all outsiders and concentrate his community's resources on defending itself against alien religious cultures.

Interesting also is the speculation that the process of providing aid to the Ebenezers may have heralded the availability of land in the area, leading to the establishment of the highly successful Hague-Osler Reserve shortly thereafter by the astute Old Coloniers.

## Reinland December, 1889.

"The village Vorsteher (mayors) are hereby instructed in writing that in the villages where there are vacancies in Vorsteher or Beisitzer (executive community members), an election shall be held and the electoral list is to be submitted to my office by the 21st of this month.

"The term of the Colony accountant Jakob Wiebe has expired. Therefore one shall be elected for a two year term. The electors list shall be submitted by the 21st of this month.

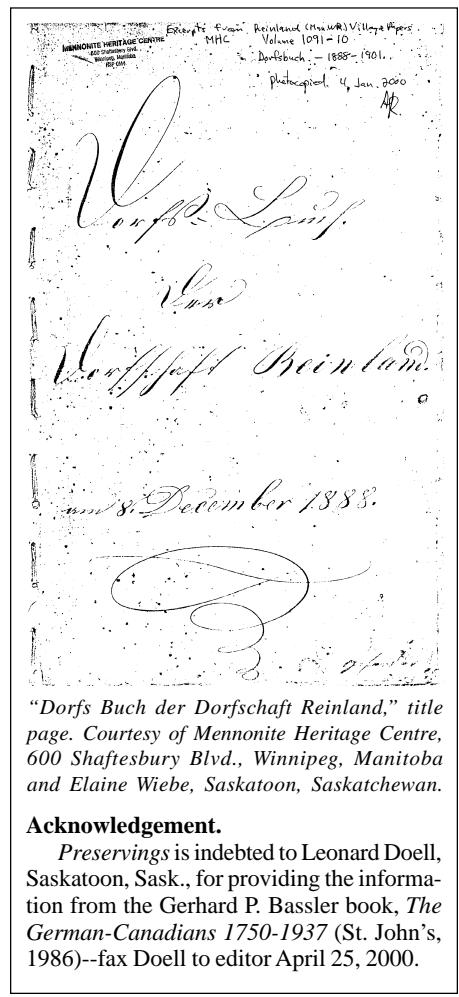
"Upon the receipt of this [mandate], the village books shall promptly be brought to me, in order that everything will be entered therein.

"The Vorsteher shall communicate with the debtors to pay their debt. They shall also collect the \$5.00 from the farms which are outside of the village, and bring the same to my office by the 21st of this month."

"Vorsteher Franz Froese"

## Directive.

The grace of our compassionate God and the love of Jesus Christ is firstly wished unto all of you from me, weak and humble servant, through Jesus Christ. Amen. Beloved and redeemed



"Dorfs Buch der Dorfschaft Reinland," title page. Courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba and Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

## Acknowledgement.

*Preservings* is indebted to Leonard Doell, Saskatoon, Sask., for providing the information from the Gerhard P. Bassler book, *The German-Canadians 1750-1937* (St. John's, 1986)--fax Doell to editor April 25, 2000.



Franz Froese (1877-1937) served as Obervorsteher of the Reinländer community from 1919-1925. He was the son of Franz Froese (1845-1913), Obervorsteher from 1887-1908, being the author of the 1889 instruction. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland, page 40. Franz Froese Sr. is credited with organizing "the successful founding of the new 'colonies' in the West by negotiating with Ottawa the land grants and settlement condition for the Hague-Osler Reserve in 1894 and the Swift Current Reserve in 1904," John Dyck, editor, 1880 Village Census, page 394-5.

through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Two persons from the Ebenezer Colony, Assiniboia, Fr. Golling and Wilhelm Grunert, have expressed themselves to me and brother Franz Froese, in writing and well as verbally. They have declared their miserable circumstances and need and that they are there 17 families in their settlement who are severely impoverished. They are in need of bread and have only very little to eat. If help does not arrive soon it will not be very long before they will have to suffer from hunger.

They have earnestly beseeched us to present their lamentable circumstance to the members of our Gemeinde and to come to their aid with help and advise so that they would not have to suffer hunger or might actually even freeze.

Whosoever helps the poor, is loved of the Lord. If we come to the aid of the poor, the beloved God will help us again also. Be compassionate just as our Lord in heaven is compassionate. God loves a willing heart and a cheerful giver.

And since all goodness comes from God and through Him, how then can a Christian heart refrain from coming to the aid of suffering people in need, as one who is merely placed as a steward thereof, and does not wish to be so commanded by God, rather to do so as a poor anguished, repentant and through the blood of Jesus redeemed sinner, who wishes to be obedient in all things which are pleasing unto God and to manifest the same willingly, to hope for eternal salva-



The Wirtschaft of Obervorsteher Franz Froese in the village of Reinland. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland, page 19.

tion through the propitiation of Jesus.

Oh my beloved brethren, I say, let us truly reflect on this. From your beloved brother, "Johan Wiebe, Rosengart, the 24 December, 1889, Aeltester of the Gemeinde at Reinland."

Our best consideration is that whoever is possessed of a sympathetic heart, and has wheat or money to give, should bring it to the village Vorsteher as soon as possible. The wheat shall be sold and the money brought to the Obervorsteher, who will send it to them immediately upon receipt.

For which [I] have subscribed,  
"Obervorsteher Franz Froese"

#### Directive:

The village councils are hereby informed that they can pick up the village books immediately upon the receipt of this notice. They shall check to ensure that everything is entered correctly. Where an error is found, they shall bring in the book so that it can be corrected.

Secondly, the Colony has engaged a colonist for four months to look after the aged Peter Wiens in Reinland. His remuneration is \$10.00 which the Gemeinde shall pay to him for looking after Wiens during the night.

The Vorsteher are to make a free will inquiry for money, how much each one wishes to contribute for this purpose, and to bring the gathered money to me in order that I can pay the man his wages.

Thirdly, since the term of service of the Waisenvorsteher Gerhard Neufeld has expired, and wishes to be released from this office, and also writes that he is no longer able to serve the office, and his family suffers thereby, unless he would receive double the [normal] compensation.

*Preservings* is indebted to Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, who obtained copies of pages 10 and 11 of the "Reinland village book" from the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg. The first three items in this article are from this source. These directives were translated by D. Plett, Steinbach.

The directives dated September 4, 1899, and September 14, 1900, are courtesy of and translated by historian Leonard Doell, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

tion. He also opines that there are many who are capable of serving the office and that it is not necessary that double remuneration be paid by the Gemeinde. Also to be elected for the years 1890-1891-1892.

#### Directive: Reinland Sept. 4, 1899.

The village leaders are notified to see to it that the fire guards will be made and kept in good order. Also threshing is not to be done too close to the village or to the fire guards.

2) Franz Gunter, Schonwiese, and Aron Schroeder, Gnadenthal, want to sell their farms. Those interested can go and see them.

A woman's coat has been found. The owner can come and get it.

"Franz Froese" [Vorsteher]

The peace of God and the love of Jesus Christ be with you all of whom we have everything good. To him be honour, glory and praise and thanksgiving forever. Amen. Beloved brethren in the Lord. Since I have received a letter from the west, from brother Peter Klassen who is asking the whole church for help to build a meeting house or house of prayer in order to teach and to instruct everyone according to God's word, and because they do not have money and this had to be paid for and the people are mostly poor and

#### Editor's Note:

##### Johann Wiebe - Death Date.

The issue of the correct death date of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) has now been resolved.

The death information recorded at the R. M. of Reinland shows that Johann Wiebe died February 21, 1905, at the age of 67 years, 10 months and 28 days. The death was due to cancer from which he had suffered for four months. The name of the attending physician was Dr. McKenly, and the person reporting the death was Rev. Jakob Wiens, Rosengart, March 15, 1905. The information from the R. M. of Reinland, death records, is courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, Manitoba.

This information in the death records is also consistent with the death date of February 21, 1905, recorded in the obituary attached to the booklet, "1904, von Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengart, Manitoba," published by Rev. Heinrich A. Dyck, 1958.



*Waisenvorsteher Peter Neufeld. Photo courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 40. The Waisenverordnung provided regulation for the administration of estates and the management of trust funds for widows, orphans and the handicapped. It provided safeguards protecting the rights of the dispossessed and the underprivileged. The Waisenvorsteher managed and supervised a sophisticated system which attempted nothing less than to implement the principles of the Gospels in the everyday lives of the community members.*

the harvest was poor, as they write, damaged by frost and disease.

Therefore we ask all of you, dear brothers, on our part, be charitable and compassionate and open your hands and give gladly for much has been given to us again this year by our merciful God and Father, albeit it varied but to our best.

Therefore God likes to have cheerful givers and God loves cheerful givers. Cor. 9,7. And who would not want to be loved by God. Therefore it is said: Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. Luke 6,7. Therefore, dear



*The interior of the worship house at Gnadenfeld, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Conservative Mennonites believed that aesthetics which reflected simplicity manifested the greater beauty and honoured their Saviour born in a humble stable. The construction of the Gnadenfeld worship house was similar to that of the one in Reinland, built in 1876, the first Mennonite worship house in western Canada. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 102.*

brothers, I ask you, those who sow plentifully shall reap plentifully, for if someone is willing, that is pleasing, according to what he has, not what he has not, 2 Cho. 8:12. And if God loves cheerful givers who give to those who are needy, will he then not love cheerful givers who give for a house of prayer where his name, his honour, his kingdom is proclaimed and a house is built for his honour?

Therefore remember the word of the Lord Jesus when he said: It is more blessed to give than to receive, Acts 20:35. And if giving is more blessed than to receive, should we be slow to give? O God, lead our hearts and make them willing to give. I am asking all village leaders to make this known to everyone and to bring the donations to our Vorsteher F. Froese as soon as possible.

They plan a building 30 feet wide and 60 feet long. And if there are more donations than needed for the building, we would like to see it used for our last two houses of prayer. About three hundred dollars are still owing.

Please be willing to give. We command you to God and his word. Grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

This is requested and wished by your very

feeble and lowly brother Johann Wiebe, and Aeltester of the Reinland Mennonite Church. Rosengart, September 28, 1899 (1894?)

#### Directive – Rosengart, Sept. 14, 1900

May God give you much grace, mercy and peace and love. Jude 1:2.

Dearly beloved brethren! Our beloved Saviour Jesus Christ who loves his own so much and wantsthem to walk in truth and to follow him in meekness and humility, said to his disciples when he walked with them on earth: Great is the harvest but few are the labourers. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers. Matth. 9:37, 38.

And because the harvest or church is large and there are few workers or teachers, therefore the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to ask the Lord of harvest to send workers. And because I have consulted with the teachers, we are agreed, if the church is of the same view, to have an election of teachers and to elect three teachers from our church.

Therefore we all need to pray and ask the Lord to give us such men as teachers who will serve the church with his word and will seek with all their strength to live according to his commandments. May God grant to us poor sinners to give us this grace or the teachers. Lord, may your holy will be done. Amen.

We invite all dear brethren to come to the day which we have chosen, Oct. 2, in the Reinland church at 9 o'clock in the morning, in order to have the election, through prayer and pleading, according to God's holy will and pleasure, as Jesus is telling us. Pray to the Lord of harvest to send workers, teachers, into his harvest. To God be glory and majesty and power and might now and forever. Amen.

I ask you make this known to all brethren and to do this on that day, God willing. Grace and love from Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Aeltester of the Reinland Mennonite Church and very humble brother Johann Wiebe. Sept. 17, 1900.

Isaak Klassen wants to sell two farms. Reinland, This is to let the village leaders know that Gerhard Goertzen, Chortitz, wants to sell on the 29<sup>th</sup> of this month through the Waisenamt.



*The village street in Gnadenfeld, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, in the 1940s. This is probably similar to what the village of Reinland must have looked like in the 1880s. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 103.*

# Epistle to the Gemeinden, 1904

**"Pastoral Letter to the Gemeinden, July 9, 1904," by Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905),  
Rosengart, West Reserve, Manitoba, to the Reinländer Gemeinden at Reinland, Manitoba, and Hague Osler, Saskatchewan.**

## Editor's Foreword.

In 1904 Aeltester Johann Wiebe was 67 years of age, his body ravaged by time, disease and the strenuous demands of his office. For some 30 years he had successfully shepherded a community of some 4000 souls, the largest Mennonite denomination in western Canada.

During the time of his leadership the Reinländer people had quickly become wealthy, some say they were the wealthiest community in Manitoba.

Almost daily during his three decades of leadership, his neighbours in Rosengart had heard the sounds of Wiebe clicking and gently calling to his horses as he drove off his driveway, in his cutter or buggy, be it in the middle of a January blizzard, or during a hailstorm in summer. He might well be on the way to the furthest reaches of his Reserve to commiserate with a grieving widow, or to listen to a distraught jilted husband, or to reconcile two neighbours in a dispute, or he might be on the way to meet with the Obervorsteher to discuss the many issues which affected his people.

The neighbours were equally used to seeing a steady stream of horse-drawn vehicles and even people by foot who came to the Wiebe home in Rosengart to petition the Aeltester for various needs, be it personal, financial, or spiritual. Sometimes groups from far away such as the Ebenezer in Assiniboia, north of Yorkton, came to the Wiebe home to petition for material aid and assistance.

Indeed, it is astounding to reflect that in the 125 year history of the Old Kolony Church, Johann Wiebe had served as the Aeltester for over 30. This record of service is not matched by very many.

By way of comparison, the Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917), Jansen, Nebraska, comes to mind, who served for 46 years. But then, Friesen's Gemeinde would not survive the onslaughts of Fundamentalist missionaries seeking to subvert his parishioners away from their Gospel-centric faith.

The OK Gemeinde, much to Wiebe's credit, would survive such attacks, even though it was embattled and beleaguered by alien religious cultures during much of its history.

The 1904 "Epistle to the Gemeinden," is reminiscent of the "Closing admonition, 1849" of another great conservative, KG Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, Imperial Russia (*Leaders*, pages 241-3). The writing of such epistles by conservative Mennonite leaders, was of itself a genuine act of emulating the apostles in New Testament times.

How refreshing to read the epistles of these great men of God as they write about discipling and growing deeper in the Godly virtues. What

## Epistle to the Gemeinden, 1904.

The following is a letter written by Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengart, the 9th of July, 1904.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love, be with all of you, [2 John 1:3]. Amen.

Before I write further, I will say with the poet:[1]

"Ensure, O Lord, if I must part

Gieb O herr wenn ich soll Scheiden

a wonderful contrast to the shallow and superficial emphasis of other religious cultures such as American Revivalism on being born again and the continual enjoyment thereof, the concerns of novices in the kingdom of God. It is clear that Johann Wiebe and his Reinländer Gemeinde were a quantum leap beyond such juvenile pursuits.

Ravaged by cancer, the highly esteemed Aeltester endured great pain as he carried out the last duties of his office.

One can well imagine a July morning in 1904.

Johann Wiebe sitting by his writing desk in the Rosengart home, a table he himself had built with his own hands (see Johann Wiebe table article, Material Culture Section). He was composing what would be his last address to his beloved Gemeinde, the bride of Christ.

The sun was shinning through the window, its golden rays splashed across his face. His countenance was framed with its luminous light.

The aged and weary Aeltester reflected on the thoughts he wished to leave with his parishioners.

He exhorted them to follow the way of the Cross; to glorify God with their life and thoughts: "The fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace and patience, gentleness and purity."

He encouraged his parishioners to conform their lives and community to the word of God. "Punish them strictly so that they might be healthy in faith." The Saviour's teaching of peace must permeate all endeavours. He admonished them to disown the world with all its fleshly lusts and to walk worthily as it pleases the Lord.

Johann Wiebe's closing sentiment to his Gemeinde was: "I say once more with John: 'I have no greater joy than this, that I hear or behold our brothers and sisters in the Gemeinde walking in the truth,'" [3 Jn 1:4].

What a touching closing view of one of the most charismatic leaders in Mennonite history. Johann Wiebe's career in the service of the Church of God is inspiring and uplifting.

What a testimony to the leading hand of God in history and to the redemptive power of the resurrection.

From the earth according to your word

Von der Erd nach deinem Wort,

That I might, indeed with joy,

Das ich moege recht mit Freuden,

Enter through the gate of life.

Eingehn durch die lebenspfot.

Jesus, you yourself are the door,

Jesus du bist selbst die Thuer,

Beloved, direct me through yourself.

Liebster, mich durch dich einfuehr.

But Lord, should I still live

Aber Herr soll ich noch leben,

For a while on the earth,

Einer Zeit auf dieser Erd,

Do not let me separate from you,

Lasz mich doch von dir nichts scheiden,

And more than that--with the small flock

Vielmehr mit der kleinen Herd

Be patient, pray, struggle, wrestle

Dulden, Beten, Kaempfen, Ringen,

And in this way propel [them] toward heaven.

Und also zum Himmel dringen.

Finally, Lord, if I must part

Endlich Herr wenn ich soll scheiden,

From the earth, [at a] determined time,

Von der Erd Bestimmte zeit,

Let it happen with joy

Lasz es doch geschehn mit Freuden,

And direct me into blessedness,

Und fuehr mich zur seeligkeit.

Where I can take up your praising

Wo ich mag dein Lob vermehren,

With the sweetest angel choirs. Amen.

Mit den Liebsten Engelchoeren: Amen.

## Pastoral Epistle.

I come to you as a guest, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, with this writing. John says unto his own--those who were entrusted unto him, those whom he had taught so much, and to those who were so near unto his heart: "I have no greater joy than this, that I hear that my chil-

"Allow me, O my God,...to see  
and hear my children, the  
Gemeinde entrusted unto me, walk  
in the truth, and to love, revere,  
and praise you our God above all  
else..."

dren are walking in truth." 3 John 1:4. Amen, you beloved God and father.

That is indeed a joy above all joys. Allow me, O my God, to also become a partaker in this precious happiness, and to see and hear my children, the Gemeinde entrusted unto me, walk in the truth, and to love, revere, and praise you our God above all else; and to the contrary, disowning the [2] world with all its fleshly lusts. For the love of the Father is not in the one who loves the world, 1 John 2:15. Therefore, let us



*Building the first Old Kolony school in the village of Blumenort on the West Reserve. The village was one of the very first to be built in that area in 1875. Photo and caption courtesy of Man. Men. Memories 1874 1974 (Altona, 1974), page 26.*

love him, for he first loved us, 1 John 4:19, and gave his life for us as a sacrifice, and redeemed us from this present evil world, in accordance with the will of God our Father.

Therefore with God's help, [may we, you there] in the west, as well as us here, all together want to walk worthily as it pleases the Lord, and to live, appreciate and meditate upon this time which God has granted unto us to live, as to why God has allowed us to be born into this earth; [certainly] not in order to become rich, lordly, or to be acclaimed in this world.

Oh no! Rather [we are] to work out our eternal salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. 2:12, and to seek firstly the kingdom of God. Indeed, consider it rightly my beloved brothers and sisters, man is not so much created for the short life in this world, but much more for the eternal life to come.

On account of the sin he has committed, man came into this world. However, because Adam heard about the promised serpent-destroyer or Saviour, he rejoiced through that same one, namely Jesus Christ, to be freed again, and to again be brought unto eternal rest and joy after this life. Yes, beloved friends, this serpent-destroyer and Saviour promised of God came into this wearying world when the time was fulfilled for us poor sinners [3] in order to make reconciliation for us from sin, indeed, from eternal death, and to again make us co-inheritors of eternal life.

My beloved friends, if we wish to be partakers of this Saviour so lovingly given to us by God, this Deliverer, we must also strive in all things to walk in His ways and according to His commandments. Just as he himself says, "Whosoever would be my servant will deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me," Luke 9:23[nLB]. "And where I am, there my servant should also be," John 12:16 [should read 12:26].

To deny oneself, however, does not mean to love oneself or the world, or to be conformed to the world, but to break one's own will, and not to live any longer according to the flesh, rather according to the spirit, Romans 8:4. And verse 6 states similarly, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, and to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace." Paul explains it even more clearly

and says,[nLB] "To set the mind on the flesh is to be at enmity with God, since that mind is not subject to God's spirit--of course, it cannot be. For if you live by the flesh you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live," [from Rom. 8].

So understand my beloved ones, if by the spirit we put to death the flesh, [4] then we shall live. So being conformed to the world and being a friend of the world must be resisted and denied, if it is not to be the eternal death. James straightforwardly calls these "adulterers," James 4:4 and Romans 12:2.

Behold, this deliverer Jesus Christ, who was given to us by God as a highly expensive gift, left the throne of His splendour out of free and pure love for us, and came to us in this wearying world, in order to reconcile us again with His heavenly Father, indeed, even to give His blood and life for us and to become an offering for sin, and to satisfy God, His heavenly Father, and to reconcile the fallen humanity with God, yes, to make them children and fellow inheritors of eternal life.

**"Behold, this deliverer Jesus Christ,...came to us in this wearying world, in order to reconcile us again with His heavenly Father,..."**

Behold and comprehend, dear brothers and sisters, how much indeed Christ has done for us. He did not give gold or silver for us nor some otherwise large possession. Oh no, fallen humanity could not have been helped by that or atoned for by it. Instead Jesus had to give His blood and life for man, so that he could be helped. Behold, that is how our beloved Saviour made our purchase, dearly and at great cost, 1 Corinthians 6:20.

For this reason, we should glorify God with our body and spirit, which are God's. And if we should praise God with body and spirit, and He, who, acting in lowliness and [5] humility, has said, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls," [Mt.11:29]. How can we then be conformed to

the world and adorn ourselves splendidly contrary to his teaching and commandments? After all, Christ says: "Would you like to see a person in soft clothes? Look, those that live in soft clothing and luxury are in kingly courts," [nLB] Luke 7:25. He does not say here "among his disciples."

Consider it carefully my dear friends--after our release-purchase, and after we have surrendered ourselves unto God, we no longer belong to ourselves, rather to the one who bought us, namely Jesus, to whom we belong through the redemption in order that we would not anew, like Eve, allow ourselves be led astray by the lying enemy, but that we consider the one that says that everything comes out of the heart: divorce, prostitution, murder, robbery, villainy, blasphemy, arrogance, and foolishness, Mark 7:21[22][nLB].

For beyond that, there is no other sacrifice available for our sins. Nor is there salvation in any other, nor is there any other salvation, nor is there any other name given unto humanity by which they might be saved, but only through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear ones, aged and young, do allow [6] following Christ and obedience to be for you a truly earnest [pursuit]. Because He himself says that not everyone who says unto him "Lord, Lord," will enter into the kingdom of God, but rather those who do the will of His father in heaven, Matt. 7:21.

These will be recognizable by their fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and patience, gentleness and purity. Those who belong to Christ crucify their flesh along with its lusts and desires, Gal.5:22 [,24]. Those who do not belong to Christ, they do it not--for they are still enemies of those who do. Or those who, as watchkeepers, are responsible to warn such people; in addition they must bear and endure their mockery for so doing.

Consider, my beloved ones, there are after all only two paths through this world, of which the Lord Jesus says, "The gate is broad, and the path is wide which leadeth unto condemnation, and there are many who walk in it, but the gate is small, and the path is narrow that leadeth unto life, and those that find it are few," Matt. 7:13,14 [not LB]. Oh, how different, indeed, are these two paths, the one unto the eternal life and eter-



The first Old Kolony homes in the village of Blumenort, West Reserve, west of Gretna, Manitoba. A typical "Strassendorf" scene in the West Reserve, 1875-80. The OK-ers astutely selected the drier lands to the west of a line running north from Gretna, north-northwesterly towards Horndean. Photo courtesy of Men. Memories: Settling in Western Canada (Winnipeg, 1977), page 68.

nal joy, but the other unto eternal death and [7] eternal condemnation. "Depart from me, ye evildoers," Matt. 7:23 and 25:41.

Nor do we read even once that those who are conformed to the world, or are a friend of the world, or live by the flesh, all the while continuing to say, "Lord, Lord," can become saved while they continue in that manner. Oh no! Instead Jesus speaks and praises only the poor in heart as saved and says, "for the kingdom of heaven is yours." Likewise [He blesses] those who are suffering, the meek, those that hunger for truth and forgiveness of sins, the merciful, those with a pure heart, and the peacemakers who seek and love peace, and not those who are the enemies of the teachers who have been sent of God to counsel them to forsake the wide road.

"Likewise [He blesses] those who are suffering, the meek, those that hunger for truth and forgiveness of sins..."

Yes, those who are hated and persecuted for righteousness sake, and of whom are spoken all manner of evil by means of lies, be joyful and content. You will be richly recompensed in heaven. For in like manner, they persecuted the prophets before you [nLB], says Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 5 in his Sermon on the Mount. He spoke also to his disciples, "You are the salt of the world. If the salt has lost its flavour, what should one salt with? It has become useless from that point on, other than to pour out and let people trample on it. You are the light of the world."

When Jesus says that the disciples and true followers are the light of the world, [8] how can they then be conformed to the world with extravagant clothing, with games and drinking, with driving and going on about with contrivance and airs, with misguided sitting and standing and walking, with embellishments on houses, inside and out, and so on? And sometimes they actually remain lying drunk, so that

even the world must wonder about it. Can these, according to the word of God, remain standing in the community regardless? Jesus and the apostle speak about how to deal with such people if the Gemeinde does not wish to appropriate the damage to itself or be spoiled thereby, Matt. 18:[15-]17; 1 Cor. 5:22; 2 Thess. 3:6 and Titus 3:10, and so on.

Should we not then earnestly strive not to err from the correct path? For how many detours are found even today, especially by those who would lead us from the right road! Indeed, even our own body and blood is walking unwillingly along this narrow heavenly path, being always inherently predisposed toward walking with the world on the path of pleasure making, and does not wish to live constrained, but much rather to be held in high esteem and honour. Indeed, the devil himself watches intently to see if he cannot lead us astray anew. Even if we have already made a good start, he stalks us just as he did Eve, seeking to seduce us with a crafty lie, to see if he cannot entice us toward a love of the world, being the lust of the eye, lust of the flesh, arrogant living, indeed, [9] [he] still speaks just as he did to Eve.

Should God have said, "This and that desire or pleasure, should you not be able to partake of it and still be saved?" Or, God will not take this one quite so seriously, it will not harm you. These [statements] are perfectly compatible to our corrupted flesh, which it would gladly hear. In this regard, it is predisposed, just like Eve, to

"....there also remains so much work in our present time, because so many churches have acquiesced to this freedom..."

enjoy or partake in the forbidden desire.

Wherefore, there also remains so much work in our present time, because so many churches have acquiesced to this freedom and have treated the command, "Do not be conformed to this world," [Rom.12:2] with disdain, or doubtfully,

or even make the comparison: if the person's appearance is decorated and decked with all manner of adornment, it provides an image of how beautiful and glorious it will be in heaven, meanwhile thereby forgetting completely about the rich man who lived all his days in splendour and with joy, and had also dressed himself in precious linen, but ended up in hell, and poor Lazarus on the other hand, went to heaven. Oh, read it for yourselves in Luke 16:17ff.

Why is it that the luxurious life and clothing in particular, yes, extravagant clothing, are cited if there is nothing wrong with it? For in other respects there is no sinful or immoral life intimated or mentioned. Oh do not allow yourself to err. God will not be mocked. What a person sows, that shall he also reap, Gal.6:7 [nLB]. [10]

Being watchful and praying are essential for this, that indeed the loving God shall stand by us in all temptation, and will equip us with the power of His Holy Spirit, since we all would like to have victory and triumph over our enemies, yes even over our own corrupt body and blood, or the sins that are within us. As Christ says, "Watch and pray, so that ye fall not into temptation." And yet again [he says], "Now be watchful always and pray that you might become worthy to withstand everything which might needs come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man," Luke 21:31 [nLB].

And indeed, our Gemeinde must not also concede to this freedom, but much rather to punish: I say, if all teaching, and all warning does not help, and [the people] walk and conduct themselves against God and God's Word, and no longer cling unto the word that is sure and which can instruct because He is mighty to admonish through the salvation-yielding teachings, and to discipline the recalcitrant ones.

And further it says, "Punish them strictly, so that they might be healthy in faith. They say that they know God, but in their deeds they deny it," Titus 1:[13,]16. And since our eternal welfare or woe hangs on this, whether we live in the spirit or the flesh, I say once more with John: "I have no greater joy than this, that I hear or behold our brothers and sisters in the Gemeinde

walking in the truth,” [3 Jn 1:4][nLB]. And what more could one wish, than that we would all walk [11] in the truth. May God grant this through grace. Amen.

As great as the joy may be over the one that walks in the truth, that even the angels in heaven rejoice over it, it is equally as distressing with regards to those who claim to be disciples of Christ and have committed themselves to be faithful and to remain so until their death, but live by the flesh, sinfully, and conform themselves to the world, and are become enemies of the word of God and His followers, and do not want to live by the evangelical and apostolic ordinances.

The root of pride and the desire for honour and greed for money are very evil roots. And yet these roots, however, are so deeply fixed among us, as if almost no teaching would help against it, and before they would give up pride, they would first leave the church and the divine ordinances. One believes, one hopes that it would decrease, that it would be exterminated and destroyed, but with some, with some there is little fruit to be seen, because out of the bad root is growing a bad tree, and on the bad tree, again bad fruit. And so it is manifestly evident, by the fruit shall ye know the tree, according to Jesus’ words, Matthew 7:16.

Oh God, it is a deplorable state which has arisen amongst us, that a number of people intentionally push the love away from themselves, and therewith also God’s holy Word. In this way, the faithful Saviour, whom we have covenanted to follow, becomes [12] crucified anew--[He] Who surely meant so well by us, and still means well. Many do not pay any heed unto him.

But He still allows us to call upon Him, His few watchkeepers and God-seeking souls. Yes, one can indeed say few, and those few because we have received from the most gracious government the freedom [to live] according to our evangelical faith. [We] also want to live out that very faith according to the word of God, and want to cling firmly thereto. [There are] those that are our enemies, who would gladly cause difficulties for us with our most gracious government, [and would have done so] if the government had not had sympathy with us. But God be praised and thanks unto the government many times over, which has allowed us to live out our faith, when we actually practice it.

For that reason, some were so difficult toward the watchkeepers sent by God, because the beloved God directed them so grievously unto His word, to abide by the same as a governing standard and law upon danger of losing their salvation, and as a good many of their fellow Gemeinde members have provided assistance as well, and because the watchkeepers were not afraid to bring the truth to light, even though in fear and trembling.

“....the beloved God directed them so grievously unto His word, to abide by the same as a governing standard and law...”

[The light] which had already grown quite dim, and could only produce a small glimmer of light, and only with great difficulty--difficulty--could shine through, and only then in those who were willing and had prayed much unto God, yes, that God might wish or want to give [us] His grace for that end, that we might be able to teach according to [God’s] holy Word [13] and will. [This was] no longer given very much attention in Russia in the Gemeinde, and we ourselves were not free from this situation, that we oppressed and afflicted each other, and exercised force. And for those for whom this was not enough, there was slander, and reviling, mockery, and scolding.

Instead this violence--about which Jesus says, it should not be thus among you, Mk.10:42 [43]--was so deeply ingrained in the Gemeinde in Russia that on account of it men taught by God were discharged from their village offices, among whom was also my father, now resting in God. And not that alone, but three teachers [ministers], Jacob Dyck, who was yet to become Aeltester, and Jacob Wiens, and Franz Wiens--who are all resting in eternity, and hopefully in the blessed eternity--in the Chortitzer Gemeinde had to do penance labour in the forest because they did not paint their houses and fences.

And all this came about through men from the Gemeinde who had been given offices according to the worldly fashion, or put another way, these were brothers from the Gemeinde that exercised this power. And further, among the Molotschna Gemeinden, an Aeltester was dismissed, and another was actually exiled from the country. Should this not move us and make us alert to be vigilant in God’s holy Word, and to strive to live in accordance thereto with all our might? And not to allow this paradigm to have the mastery amongst us [14] but to ward off all injustice with God’s Word, and with all in earnestness to teach and exhort, and to [set them] out of our midst when it is necessary to do so.

Or as Jesus teaches and says, “If they absolutely refuse to follow or listen from one or two, consider them to be as Gentiles and tax-collectors,” Matt. 18:17 [paraphrase]. Indeed it is a command of Jesus and His apostles, and Jesus reproached the Pharisees a great deal over this, saying: “You hypocrites! You leave out the most difficult part of the law.”

“You hypocrites! You leave out the most difficult part of the law.”....Jesus calls it justice, mercy, and faith.”

What is the most difficult? Jesus calls it justice, mercy, and faith. These things one should do without omitting the other, Matt. 23:23. Luke calls it the love of God, Luke 11:42. The world, however, calls it a hateful thing.

I bid you my beloved brothers in the ministry and sisters, forgive me that this is written, instead of being spoken orally in person. But it has been done so for no other reason than to make us all well aware of what we have al-

ready--or I, as an aged man, have already--experienced, and that which we may yet experience, and what a Gemeinde can experience if they transgress the covenant and do not remain constant in the teachings of Christ: they become like the children of Israel, who could not stand up to their enemies, Josh. 7:11, 12.

[15] We have ourselves experienced in our own churches that which we are taught by [the example of] Israel. “For how can a house stand, that is divided against itself?” says Jesus, Mk. 3:25.

Ah! May God grant us the power to withstand all wrong doing, to walk in the truth, and to forsake all unrighteousness. My soul has often been more fearful and anxious than I can say. And indeed for the reason that we were all so weak, and yet in weakness could still see by the grace of God that the house of God had to endure many severe blows, not only from the outside, but also from the inside.

Oh brothers, brothers, arm yourselves, since the words of Paul are true, that to practice the word or the ministry of the New Testament is not a service to the letter, but a service to the spirit, 2 Cor. 3:6.

“....the word or the ministry of the New Testament is not a service to the letter, but a service to the spirit, 2 Cor. 3:6.”

With that, I would like to come to a close, and have answered both of your letters, namely, Johann Wall and Julius Wiebe, and rather than in person, have shared my opinions and reasons with you by writing, since I am very weak right now and need to lie down.

Good bye, [I] commit you unto God, [from] your weakly and frail Aeltester, Johann Wiebe.

With greetings to all. May the grace and love of Jesus be with you all. Amen. [16]

#### For the Honourable Aeltester Johann Wiebe:

Shepherd, are you leaving the lambs,

Hirte, Gehst du von den Laemmern,

You, the father of the children?

Vater von den Kindern Du?

Is it time for the night to dim around you?

Soll di nacht dich nun Umdaemern?

Into the deep grave’s rest?

In der tiefen Grabes Ruh?

Yes, the Lord has spoken,

Ja der Herr hat es Gesprochen

And now your heart is broken.

Und dein Herz ist nun Gebrochen.

Beloved, descend in peace

Liebster Sinke hin in Frieden

After the harsh pilgrim’s journey,

Nach dem Herben Pilgerlauf,

Arise, undivided from the Saviour,

Steh vom Heiland ungeschieden

Finally at the day of grace.

Einst am Tag der Gnaden Auf.

And then call out with a sweet cry,

Und dann Ruf mit Sueszem Schalle,

Here are all your lambs.  
Hier sind deine Laemmer Alle.

On February 21, 1905, at 5 a.m. the Aeltester of the Reinland Mennonite Church, the Honourable Johann Wiebe, went to his final rest. What had been long feared and anticipated had now occurred. The large Gemeinde was deprived of its shepherd, who had cared for it with such great faithfulness. And as the paled one was delivered into the cool lap of mother earth on the following Saturday, the countless guests, arriving from near and far, made best manifest what the deceased one had showed his congregation.

His brother in ministry the Honourable Jacob Wiens from Saskatchewan spoke the funeral sermon on behalf of the deceased. Blessed are the dead who have died in the Lord from henceforth, indeed, for the spirit affirms that they are resting from their labours, [17] since their deeds survive them.

A tired pilgrim, weary and worn from the tiring struggles of life has laid down his walking stick, at the call of his Lord and master. [He has] left the work in the vineyard of the Lord, in order to bring praise and honour to his Creator in the sanctuary above for all eternity. He who possessed constant love toward all, and who welcomed all with friendly love, is now gone into a better world by means of death.

But concerning those of us crying here, yes, bitterly crying, [we ought to know that] he is not to be pitied, because eternal blessedness, and heavenly happiness are the reward of all that go home by faith. [This] is now also his reward. We would gladly wish for him the rest and also the peace that he, friend of all and father through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, has entered.

More than 29 years ago now, people of a similar mindset gathered around him, and he guided them in full faith in God's gracious assistance and protection out of Russia's fruitful steppes, the fondly-enjoyed home, and over into Manitoba's blessed meadows. We, though pioneers of the endless prairie, have gained well-being and wealth here, thanks to the goodness of heaven. Now he has arrived at the goal, at the Canaan above with the Lord and master, in whose service he grew aged.[18]

The icy hand of death has closed the faithful eye; the mouth is now shut that had a friendly word of love and of comfort for each one, and that so, so often called out to his congregation as a holy representative, "Make amends." Now may it also be for him that the teachers will shine like the light of heaven, and those that have guided so many in righteousness, appear like stars always and forever. May his work and conviction live on among us for a long time, and become our source of strength for struggling mightily against sin and eagerly emulating everything good.

Indeed it is by active love that the master will one day recognize love, and [determine]

who can become a part of his reign, and who is allowed the authority to participate by grace, to sit as a guest at the great table of the eternal and perfect hall.

Begin the last journey  
Tritt an die Letzte Reise,  
You death-weary dust.  
Du Todesmueder Staub.  
Because of your praise of God  
Zu deines Gottes Preise  
You will rob the grave;  
Wirst du des Grabs Raub;  
There you will rest eternally  
Dort Wirst du Ewig Ruhen,  
Through the sovereignty of God,  
Durch Gottes Meisterschaft,  
There your heart will shine  
Da wird dein Herz ergluehen  
In unending power of love.  
In Ewiger Liebeskraft.

Put into print by Prediger Heinrich A. Dyck, 1953.[19]

#### Poetic Eulogy by Wm. Hespeler.

By Mr. Hespeler.  
To Bishop Johan Wiebe, Rosengart, Manitoba.  
With reverence to him:

On this copperplate  
Aus diesem Kupferblat  
You can indeed see better,  
Kanst du Zwar besser sehen,  
of what sort of appearance  
Von was fuer Angesicht,  
Menno would have been.  
Der Menno sei gewesen,  
But because you would like  
Dafern du aber willst  
to see his spiritual gifts,  
Seins Geistes gaben sehen,  
you must without bias,  
So must do Unparteisch,  
go to his writings.  
In seinen Schriften gehen.  
There you will doubtless  
Da wirst du Zweifelfrei  
notice the finger of God,  
Den Finger gottes Merken,  
who loved this worthy man,  
Der diesen werten Mann  
in order to strengthen [him]  
Beliebet so zu Staerken  
and mightily support [him].  
Und Kraeftig beizustehn.  
He was a faithful servant  
Er war ein Treuer Knecht,  
of his Lord's work  
Am werke seines Herrn  
and lived truly and rightly.:  
Und Lebte Schlecht und Recht.:

## Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Purpose and Membership

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

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

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

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 \_\_\_\_\_

The foregoing writing was originally published as "1904 Von Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengart, Manitoba," by Rev. Heinrich A. Dyck, 1958. The booklet was received by *Preservings* courtesy of Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, November 22, 1999. Elaine Wiebe received it from Mrs. Mary (Wiebe) Thiessen, Warman, Saskatchewan, the great-granddaughter of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. Primary translation by Julia Zacharias, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

# Bernhard Toews (1863-1927), 1921 Delegate

Bernhard Toews (1863-1927), Sommerfelder Delegate, a Brief Sketch by Delbert F. Plett Q.C., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0.

## Introduction.

The name of Bernhard Toews (1863-1927) one of the Sommerfelder delegates to Paraguay and Mexico in 1921 first came to my attention when friend Abraham W. Hiebert, Asuncion, Paraguay, sent me a copy of his recently published journal covering the delegation expedition--see Dr. John J. Friesen, *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 133-134, for a review of this publication.

I did some cursory research in an effort to track his genealogical roots to get a sense of who he was, but to no avail. As I talked to some of Bernhard Toews' descendants in the Steinbach and Winnipeg area I got a sense of the enigmatic person that Bernhard Toews was and my interest was tweaked. About all I got from his grandchildren was that the Bernhard Toews family had lived in the village of Weidenfeld, W.R.

## Background.

The name of Bernhard Toews was not to be found in either the "Bergthaler Gemeindebuch", the ship lists or the 1881 census, as published in the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch*, the standard reference for anyone of Bergthaler/Sommerfelder background.

This, of course, did not make sense, as Bernhard Toews had acted as the delegate of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde. I called John Wall, Morden, Manitoba, expert on the "Old KOLONIER" and "Sommerfelder" Gemeindebicher. John did some digging and came up with the information that Bernhard's mother was Anna Wiebe, widow of "Jakob Toews of Chortitza".

Anna Wiebe was born June 3, 1822, and married to Jakob Toews of Chortitza, Imperial Russia. They had two sons Bernhard and Heinrich. After the death of her first husband, Anna married for the second time to Johann Bergmann (b. 1825), Heuboden, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, BGB A 165/S1A 252.

Bergmann was a well respected man who had "supervised the entire sale" of the properties in the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia--Klaas Peters, *The Bergthaler Mennonites*, page 90. In 1877 the Bergmann family emigrated travelling on the S.S. Sarmatian, BGB page 325. They settled in Reinland W.R. where he was one of "early Reinland's wealthiest citizens." Bergmann was the first owner of the Holland-style windmill in Reinland (Peter Zacharias, *Reinland*, page 129).

## Toews Ancestry.

Bernhard Toews and brother Heinrich were listed in the 1881 census with the family of Johann



*Bernhard Toews (1863-1927) and his first wife Katarina Funk Toews (1865-1903). Mrs. Toews was the daughter of Bishop Johann F. Funk, Alt-Bergthal, W.R., Manitoba. The Toews family pioneered in Gnadenfeld, W.R. in 1886. Photo courtesy of John J. Friesen, "Gnadenfeld 1880-1924," in J.P. Redekopp, Chair, Gnadenfeld 1880-1980 (Altona, 1982), page 8.*

Bergmann in the village of Reinland, BGB 386-114. Bernhard Toews was baptized on June 2, 1884.

Genealogist Henry Schapansky has written that the matter of Bernhard Toews' ancestry "... is a tough one. The Jakob Toews who married Anna Wiebe, could be the Jakob Toews (1819-72) of Chortitz. His line goes like this: Abraham Toews (1747-87), Tiegenhagen 1776; 4 sons. Son Isaak Toews (1774-1831), second marriage to Maria Klassen (1795-1830). Son Jakob (1819-72). Isaak (1774-1831) came to Russia circa 1795 and settled at Chortitz. His first wife was Anna Klassen (1766-1814), widow of Abraham Bühler."

In his journal [page 17], Bernhard Toews refers to a trip to Niverville on February 12, 1921, and that "my uncle Cornelius Friesen also just happened to be in Niverville and took us along to his place." This raises some fascinating questions. Was Jakob Toews possibly related to Peter Toews (1806-86), patriarch of the Alt-Bergfeld, E.R., Toews' (see Editor's Note, *Preservings*, No. 14,

page 40), or is he referring to someone other than Waisenmann Cornelius Toews Friesen (1860-1929), Osterwick, E. R., or is the reference merely a generic expression of respect?

## Marriage 1885.

Bernhard Toews was married on January 8, 1885 to Katharina Funk (1865-1903), daughter of Johann Funk (1836-1917) and Susanna Rempel ((b. 1842), BGB 156. Susann was the granddaughter of Jakob Braun (1791-1868), first Aeltester of the Bergthal Colony. Thus the traditions of community service in this family ran deep.

The marriage also represented a crossing of Old Kolony and Bergthal families, not that unusual at the time. Although Bernhard Toews had been brought up as an Old KOLONIER, he was introduced to the Bergthal community when his mother married the prominent Johann Bergmann.

Katharina's father Johann Funk was the elected as the Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde in 1882. As is well known, Funk was determined to move towards the adoption of American Revivalist religious culture, a trend which the majority of his parishioners were smart to see as an abandonment of their cherished faith. This resulted in most of the Bergthaler leaving Funk's church and reorganizing on "the tried and true" as the "Sommerfelder Gemeinde" so named for the village of residence of their charismatic new leader Abraham

Doerksen.

Of interest to the story of Bernhard Toews is that he together with his bride decided to remain with those who rejected her father's autocratic push towards American Revivalist religious culture opting instead to remain with the traditional Gospel-centric faith. It must have been a heart-wrenching decision for Bernhard and Katharina, which speaks of a deep and abiding faith in the truths of the Gospels.

In 1886, one year after their marriage, Bernhard and Katharina settled in Gnadenfeld, a village which has been referred to by historian Dr. John J. Friesen as the "Wiebnot" village as it was settled in 1880 primarily by young unmarried men (Friesen, *Gnadenfeld*, page 7.)

In 1900 the Bernhard Toews family moved to Wiedefeld.

## Heinrich's Death, 1902.

In 1902, Bernhard's brother Heinrich, a school teacher in Altona, gained notoriety when he shot



Annie and Helen Kehler shortly before they were shot by their teacher Heinrich Toews in 1902. Helena survived but died the morning following the incident. Photo and caption courtesy of Esther Epp-Thiessen, Altona, page 47-48.

three of his students as well as three trustees, and one of the young girls died from her wounds. Heinrich died shortly after from self-inflicted wounds (Esther Epp-Thiessen, *Altona*, page 47-48).

#### **Remarriage.**

After the death of his first wife in 1903, Bernhard remarried to Aganetha P. Harder of Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

Shortly after this, April 28, 1904, Bernhard's mother died.



Isaak Mueller home in Neuhorst, W.R. Isaak Muller (b. 1824) served as the Obervorsteher of the Old Kolony Gemeinde in Fürstenland, Imperial Russia. He was elected as Obervorsteher for the Old Kolony Gemeinde in the West Reserve in 1875. He was nick-named "Kaiser Mueller" for his strong organization abilities and genius for leadership. Next to Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Mueller stands as one of the architects of Old Kolony culture and faith as it was redefined after the settlement in Manitoba. Mueller's thatched roof house stood in Neuhorst until 1959. Photo by Elma Kehler, courtesy of Gerhard John Ens, R. M. of Reinland, page 28. Many other prominent leaders and gifted people have come out of the Old Kolonier culture including Alfred van Vogt (whose science fiction books sold in the millions) and Jakob Penner, Steinbach, founder of Penner Foods.

#### **Teaching, 1909-20.**

Bernhard Toews received a good education in the "old" homeland where he attended the "Central School" (a secondary school) in Chortitz, Imperial Russia. He was a literate and articulate man. He maintained a journal which demonstrates his keen observation of life around him and his ear for picking up what people were saying.

His "Central School" education uniquely qualified Bernhard Toews as a school teacher, this being more education than most district school teachers had. From the comments he makes in his journal, it is manifest that he had a love for his students and an ability to inspire in them a love for the Christian faith.

#### **Imprisonment.**

Prosecutions against Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan who relied on the guarantees given by the Dominion Government in 1873 ran into the thousands in 1920 to 1926. Ministers and teachers were imprisoned for their faith.

On January 2, 1920, Bernhard Toews was imprisoned in Winnipeg by the Manitoba Government as part of its campaign to eradicate Plaut-Dietsch/Mennonite culture and Gospel-centric faith from southern Manitoba.

Rather than fight or start an insurrection as most cultures would have when their guaranteed rights are arbitrarily suppressed, most of the conservative Mennonites decided to immigrate where they often faced hardship and even death to survive in their harsh new environments. As a result very few of the victims of this cultural oppression have written about their experience.

Bernhard Toews' journal is the only first hand account of the prison experience of these martyrs currently available. As such it is an extremely important document, establishing the veracity of that

which conservative Mennonites in Manitoba have often only been able to whisper about.

Hopefully the publication of Bernhard Toews' account will encourage others who are aware of such documents or who have oral traditions about their family's experiences to bring them forward so they can be added to the historical record.

#### **Delegation, 1921.**

In 1921 Bernhard Toews served as a delegate for the Sommerfelder Gemeinde to South America. The portions of his journal covering the expedition to South America and Mexico were recently (1997) published in a third edition by the "Schulverwaltung der Kolonie Menno, Paraguay." A review of this publication by Dr. John Friesen, C.M.B.C., Winnipeg, was published in *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 133-134.

#### **Death.**

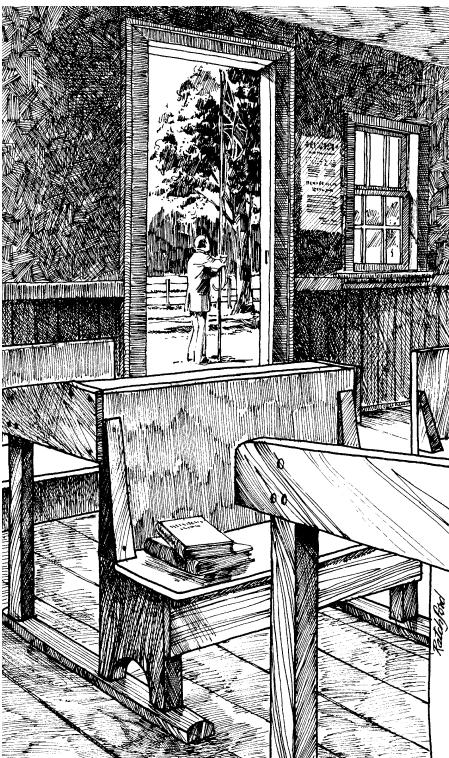
In 1926 and 1927 the Sommerfelder emigration to Paraguay was finally coming to pass.

The Bernhard Toews family was all packed and ready to depart when Bernhard fell sick. He needed to have a bladder and kidney operation. He died on November 12, 1927, followed only six weeks later by his second wife who died on December 16, 1927.

Apparently there may be additional journals and/or parts of journals by Bernhard Toews (which have not yet been published nor made available to archives and researchers). Anyone with information regarding such journals is asked to contact Delbert F. Plett Q.C., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, phone 1(204)326-6454.



Aeltester Johann Funk (1836-1917), Alt-Bergthal, W. R., father-in-law of Bernhard Toews. Funk's autocratic drive towards American Revivalist religious culture alienated the majority of his parishioners who remained true to their Gospel-centric faith resulting in the formation of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde in 1892. Photo courtesy of Thiessen, Altona, page 36.



The sketch entitled "flag-raising for an empty school" speak for the harsh oppression implemented by the Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments in 1919-1926. While citizens were being stripped of their property rights and ministers and teachers were jailed, public schools--often much inferior in qualify--were being imposed on the people in direct contravention of the rights granted by the Dominion Government in 1873. Often these schools stood empty at taxpayers expense, i.e. the same people whose own legitimate schools were forcibly being shut down. Drawing courtesy of Frank H. Epp, Men. in Can, page 332.

#### Descendants.

Five of the Bernhard Toews children had already left for Paraguay--Johann, Heinrich, Jakob, Abraham and Kornelius--the rest stayed in Canada. Son Heinrich B. Toews was married to Maria Wiebe (1889-1984), who described her experiences moving to Paraguay in a book form, see Dr. John J. Friesen, "Maria Wiebe Toews, Mennonite Pioneer," in *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, pages 64-65.

Bernhard Toews has many great-grandchildren well-known in the Steinbach area including Harry Fehr, manager of Quarry Oaks Golf Course, Sue Nickel, Manager of Holiday Travel, Ben Toews, Steinbach realter, Esther Matz and brother Otto Toews, Winnipeg teachers, to name a few.

#### Legacy.

Bernhard Toews made a great contribution to his faith and culture. Although he was brought up as an Old Kolonier, he was directed towards the Bergthaler by the marriage of his mother and his own. Because of his unwaivering conviction in the validity of the Gospel-centric faith of the forebears. Bernhard Toews suffered harassment and imprisonment.

It is evident from his journal that he remained near to his Old Kolonier brothers and sisters in Christ, serving as a link between the two traditions which helped Sommerfelder and Old Koloniers to work together during this critical time in their history.

Bernhard Toews' journal is one of the more important examples of the writing regime of the conservative Mennonite culture.

In the end, like Moses, he was denied the opportunity to see the promised land here on earth, but was welcomed by his Lord into the heavenly paradise.

Bernhard Toews deserves to be recognized as one of the heroes of the conservative Mennonite community.

#### Sources:

Old Kolony and Sommerfelder Gemeindebücher, courtesy of John Wall, Morden, Manitoba.

Henry Schapansky, letter to D. Plett, Nov 26, 1999.

Mary Dueck Jeffrey, *Aeltester Johann Funk: A Family Tree with notes on his life and Work* (Winnipeg, 1980), 229 pages. The family of Katharina and Bernhard Toews is listed at pages 81-152 almost a third of the entire family book.

Bernhard Toews, "Mennonitische Chaco - Expedition 1921, Reise - Tagebuch" (Schulverwaltung der Kolonie Menno, Paraguay, 3. Auflage, Oktober 1997). 108 pages.

Bernhard Toews, "Lebens und Reiserinnerungen von meinem Vater Bernhard Toews," unpublished journal, 145 pages, courtesy of great-granddaughter Sue Nikkel, Steinbach, Manitoba. A copy of this journal has been deposited with the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, by the editor.

### Attention Readers:

Delegate Bernhard Toews' daughter-in-law, Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984), Paraguay and later Steinbach, Manitoba, was one of the pioneers of Canadian Mennonite writing and literature.

Her introspective account of the emigration to Paraguay in 1926 and pioneering experiences there were published in 1960 under the title, *Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse in Canada und Paraguay* (Steinbach, 1960), 83 pages. See article by Dr. John J. Friesen, Canadian Mennonite Bible College., Winnipeg, Manitoba, in *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, pages 58-59, for an evaluation of this valuable work.

Readers who are interested in the women's perspective of conservative Mennonite history and who do not read German will be interested to know that Maria's book has now been translated and published in an English edition under the title *My Recollections of Experiences in Canada and Paraguay* (Steinbach, 1999), 106 pages.

I believe a copy has been filed with the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1(204)888-6781.



Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984), pioneer woman writer. Photo courtesy of Maria Toews, My Recollections, page 1.



Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984) and her husband Heinrich B. Toews, son of delegate Bernhard Toews (1863-1927). Photo courtesy of grandson Ben Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.

# Life and Travel Remembrances of Bernhard Toews

I, Bernhard Toews was born August 23 (Julian calendar), 1863, in Chortitz, Province of Ekatherinoslov, South Russia. My father was Jakob Toews, born April 13, 1819, and died January 18, 1872, in Chortitz, South Russia.

My mother was born Anna Wiebe, daughter of Peter Wiebe from Neuendorf. She was born May 22, 1822, and she died on April 25, 1904, in Reinland, Manitoba, Canada.

I was quite sickly in my younger years. For that reason I only attended school for the first time in Fall of 1871. My teacher for the first four years was Kornelius Enns. In each year we were altogether some 100 students. His daughter helped him somewhat with the beginning students.

On January 23, 1872, my father was buried, having achieved the age of 52 years, nine months and five days. That same evening the entire heavens became red like flames of fire. The appearance was as if the flames of fire were smashing together above in the middle of the sky. At that time I thought (and possibly many others with me) that the end of the world had come, suddenly the fire would descend upon us and soon everything would be aglow.

But the beloved God had granted me as well as the other people more time to repent, that we could convert ourselves. This was a



*"By the 1890s a large degree of prosperity had come to the OK community in Reinland. In 1900 Jakob Kroeker (1836-1914) pictured above with his wife, journeyed to Russia for a visit. In an interesting travelogue Kroeker described the trip and specially mentioned the old Chortitz church where he had been baptised." Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 125.*



*An early 20th century character is revealed in this photo taken at the rear of the Klaas Kroeker store in Reinland. Note the style of dress typical for the OK-ers at the time. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 133.*

clear voice of God for us as humanity. Which simultaneously called out to us, "Today you are alive, today you should convert yourself," etc., or "prepare your house for you must die." etc.

In the fall of 1875 I started to attend the Central School. I studied in this school for two years, until May of 1877. There were some 100 students here in two rooms. In my (second) class there were 63 and in the first class 36 students. My teacher was the Honourable Heinrich Epp.

[1] Every morning he held one hour of religious instruction with us, except on Thursday when we had nature study. All the students were together in our room for this. The other two teachers were Johann Epp who

**"That same evening the entire heavens became red like flames of fire."**

taught German, and Wilhelm Penner who taught the Russian language, alternating, each for one hour.

February 12, 1876, my mother married for the second time with the widower Johann Bergman from Heuboden in the Bergthal Colony. We thereby also received five step-siblings.

On March 3, 1861, some 23 million serfs were freed in the Russian Empire under Czar Alexander II. In 1870 universal military service was implemented. Mennonites were given a 10 year exemption.

On May 27, 1877, on a Friday, after six [o'clock] in the evening, we departed from our old homeland by railway from Alexandrosk (17 verst from Chortitz), after all necessary preparations and travel documents had been completed, because of issues of faith.

We travelled to North America our new homeland where we had received a document from the Canadian government which guaranteed our freedom of faith, and which our delegates had received in Ottawa on the 13th of July, 1873, and brought back to Russia.

At one o'clock during the first night we arrived in Losowäja, we had to change trains. Saturday, May 28, at 6 o'clock in the morning, we arrived in Charkow. Up to here we were accompanied by my brother Peter and uncle Jakob Wiebe from Neuenberg. At around 9 o'clock we took our leave of each other, and were on our way. At 10:30 we arrived in Belgrad and at 5:30 p.m. the city of Kursk and at 11:30 p.m., the city of Ornld[?] Here we detained.

We had to wait until Sunday, May 29, at 3:30 p.m. before we were on our way. A conductor fell under the wheels of a railway car which crushed his stomach. On Monday, May 30, at 5 a.m. we arrived [2] in Smolensk, where we bought hot water for coffee for 30 kopek. In Smolensk the grain had only just barely sprouted, they were still mowing and seeding here.

At 9:30 we arrived in Vitebsk and around 11 o'clock we travelled on with a different train. After dinner an axle started to smoke, they then drove onto the open field on a spur track. We had to clear out the wagon and move into another where it was very full. They left the railway car standing there and drove on. On Tuesday, May 31, around 10 o'clock we encountered many battlements with canons in mortared placements; and with entire barracks inside.

At quarter after four we drove through a tunnel. At 7 o'clock we again drove through a tunnel which lasted for four minutes. A 9 o'clock in the evening we arrived at Werbalo border crossing and after 15 minutes we

## Preservings

crossed over the border toward Eienrenen in Germany.

Wednesday, June 1, all our baggage was

inspected. Thursday, June 2, at 3 a.m. we departed and around 4 o'clock in the evening we crossed the Weichsel (a big river) near Thorn,



*This Wirtschaft belonged to Jakob Enns in Rosenort, W. R., Manitoba. The buildings were built completely new in 1917 when the original buildings were totally destroyed by fire. Photo and caption courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 16.*



*Many OK farmers were wealthy and owned the most modern equipment. Heinrich Unger, Neuenburg, W. R., Manitoba, threshing around the Reinland area, 1910. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 158.*



*Heinrich F. Froese was one of Reinland's threshing machine outfit engineers when steam power was supreme on the prairies. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 159. Notice the modern Fordson tractor to the right of the steam engine. This photograph probably dates from the time when Anglo-conformity mania was sweeping the prairies and believers were being imprisoned for their faith.*

in any case it was a long bridge. At 6:30 p.m. we arrived in Bromberg.

Friday, June 3, at 7 a.m. we reached Berlin (capital of Germany). Here my [step] father hired a vehicle and drove into the city in order to see something of the sights of Berlin. At 11 a.m. we drove over a long bridge, over the Spree (a large river) and arrived in Hamburg at 7:30 p.m., the port city.

[We moved] into the immigration quarters where we stayed overnight. Saturday, June 4, at 7 p.m. in the evening we were taken [3] to the ship. Along the way we saw a large fire. The fire wagons drove hurriedly along the street to the fire.

In the immigration quarters we took ourselves clothes and nourishment from our chests. Sunday, June 5, around 10 o'clock in the night we embarked upon the ship and in the morning at 6 o'clock we were on our way. We took our last look at our rapidly disappearing homeland, Europe. On the ship each person received a quantity of baked white bread as well as a piece of bacon with butter to spread on top.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon we passed by the Island of Jugoland. Monday, June 6, a child died at Isaac Doerksens, 1 year and 5 months old, from "Fallsucht" (epilepsy). It [the body] was wrapped in linen and then fastened to a heavy timber, and sunk in the ocean around 2 o'clock after dinner.

In the evening at 5:30 we landed in Hull (England). By 2:30 p.m. we were already able to see land. The ship which brought us over the North Sea was called the "Sprite". Here in Hull we had to be very watchful regarding our baggage for the people spat and laughed at us. The trip across the North Sea went well for it was completely calm. Thanks be to our beloved God for the safe journey up to here.

Tuesday, June 7 at three in the morning we left Hull by railway and at 9 o'clock in the morning (that is, after a 6 hour trip) we reached Liverpool. During this time we went through 13 tunnels. In Liverpool many people travelled by donkey. The horses were [4] very large and fat here, [such] as I had not yet seen in my life.

Wednesday, June 8, we remained in Liverpool. Thursday, June 9, the doctor examined us twice, the last time on the ship. We departed from Liverpool around 5 o'clock on the steamship "Sarmatian".

Friday, June 10, at 10 o'clock in the morning we saw the Island of Ireland on our right side. At one o'clock our ship anchored, not far from the land near the shore, for five hours. When we cast off and reached the open sea the ship soon started to sway severely as there was a great storm. The passengers were just eating supper, but the cutlery did not all stay on the table.

A number soon started to vomit. It did not take long and the people had left the table. During the night we had such a heavy storm that chests and goods slid to and fro, and the waves went high, sometimes even over the fore deck.

Saturday, June 11, it became clear. The sun was shining and the storm abated. Sunday, June

12, we all awoke healthy. It was quite calm throughout the day and the ship became more stable. Monday, June 13, we again all awoke, healthy, but there was again more wind so that the ship again swayed very much. The ship which was to bring us over the Atlantic Ocean was called "Sarmatian". Tuesday, June 14, everyone was hale and hearty, there was little wind, and it drove well. [5]

Wednesday, June 15, we had heavy storm and fog already during the night and also during the day. Today a child died at Teichroeb, 1 year and 2 weeks old. They laid it in a coffin and threw it into the sea. Thursday, June 16, it became calm during the night, and we all got up well, the beloved God be thanked. In the morning, at 5 o'clock we passed by Newfoundland to our right side. We also got some snow. We also saw icebergs.

A little later we also saw land on the other side. Although there was a strong gale, the ship did not heave too bad as there was land on both sides. Towards evening the wind abated.

"....in Dufferin we had to wait for a few days until a few friends...came to pick us up with their vehicles."

When there was no wind our ship travelled about 14 sea miles (one sea mile or knot is .9 of an English mile), and against a storm it went about 11 1/2 miles, per hour.

Friday, June 17, we all awoke healthy. The sea was flat as there was no wind and the ship calmly sailed towards the harbour in Quebec. Our ship (Sarmatian) was 300 feet long and 45 feet wide. It had 10 steam engines and 20 burners for these boilers. The machines had 600 horse power. The chimney was 15 Arschien in circumference. One Arschien was 28 [?] inches.

Sunday, June 18, we again all woke up healthy. And at half 12 noon we arrived in Quebec, hale and hearty. God be thanked therefore, we were in our future homeland. We had spent 217 hours on the ship and we had been travelling for 205 hours. After we had disembarked we were soon served dinner, some ham, buns and some cheese, etc. [6]

We did not have far to go here to the railway station, from where we departed at half seven in the evening by rail. On the train they again brought us buns together with meat and cheese.

Sunday, June 19, around 5 o'clock in the morning we reached the city of Montreal. Here we were given breakfast: buns, meat, fried potatoes and tea. After waiting for two hours we again departed. Then the train passed over a nine minute long iron bridge. At five o'clock towards evening our locomotive broke down. After two hours waiting we received a different locomotive and continued on our way.

Monday, June 20, around two o'clock in the morning we got to Toronto and at 7 o'clock in the evening we reached Collingwood. We



*The four members of the Mennonite Chaco expedition pose on June 1, 1921, with the Canadian wheat they seeded in April in Pto. Casado. From l.-r.: B. Toews, Joh. Friesen, Jakob Neufeld and I. Funk. Photo courtesy of M. W. Friesen, Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis 50 Jahre Kolonie Menno - 1927-1977 (Menno Colony, 1977), page 54.*



*The delegates travel inland to inspect the property which was to become the modern-day Menno Colony, now grown to a population of 8,000 and a prosperity rivaling that of Steinbach Hanover from where most of the settlers came from in 1926. But in 1927 the situation was very different as 171 or roughly 10 per cent came to unnatural deaths because of disease and other hardships. Photo courtesy of Martin W. Friesen, Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis (Altona, 1987), photo section page 232 et seq.*

only embarked on the ship at half eleven in the morning. We boys had to lie on split wood. We drove along Lakes Huron and Superior to Duluth. The elevation of Lake Superior was much higher. Our ship had to pass through four locks, and was raised a little each time until we were high enough.

Wednesday, June 22, they also stopped for two hours on land, around 5 o'clock and around 8 o'clock they again stopped to land.

Thursday, June 23rd, we again awoke well. Around 4 o'clock and again at 9, they drove to land, where they stopped until midday. Here we went into the woods for a while. We picked some strawberries. This was a new fruit for

us, they tasted good. Then we travelled until 5 o'clock and stopped for half an hour. At 7 o'clock evening we drove through the four locks already mentioned, whereby our ship [7] was mightily raised higher until it could get onto Lake Superior.

Friday, June 24th, our ship docked around 8 o'clock in the morning and remained there until 5 o'clock in the evening unloading lumber [Kondholz]. When we stood up on Saturday, the 25th of June, it was raining hard, accompanied by strong thunder. After the rain came a thick fog which remained until midnight. Our ship remained standing during the time of the fog and often sounded its horn.

### *Preservings*

Sunday, June 26th, at 2 o'clock in the morning we departed. The fog was over. At 5 o'clock we stopped at land, also from 8 until 11 o'clock.

Monday, June 27, at half seven in the morning, we arrived in Duluth, safe and sound. We

"Dec. 18, 1919, I, together with four Weidenfelder and a number of Alt-Bergthalers, were summoned...[to] Altona....where a hearing was to be held...."

were glad to be back on land.

Tuesday, June 28, at half two, after dinner we left Duluth by railway. We had eaten some strawberries there in the city. At 8 o'clock in the evening we reached Branerd, but soon drove further.

Wednesday, June 29th, we reached the river (Red River) at 2 o'clock after midday. We got out of the wagons which stood deep in water because of the flooding of the river. We used a boardwalk to load everything into the ship which was to take us along the Red River into Canada. Soon we departed towards our destination.

Thursday, June 20. It was quite crowded on the ship. At 3 o'clock we reached the final goal of our long journey, namely, Dufferin in Canada. We were hale and hearty. God be thanked many times over. (We had travelled for some five weeks). [8]

Here in Dufferin we had to wait for a few days until a few friends who had already arrived the previous year came to pick us up with their vehicles. The Buhlers from Kronthal and the Bernhard Penners from Schoenwiese picked us up. We loaded our little baggage and drove into the Colony, some 25 miles mostly in water. My father bought two horses, four oxen, four cows and a wagon in Dufferin. We came first of all to Abram Buhlers in Kronthal where we stayed for a week and where myself and Heinrich had to tend our eight head of livestock outside the village.

Then we moved to Reinland, where father had purchased a Wirtschaft for \$500.00, into our own house. Even though it was only 20x30 feet in size we felt quite at home after such a

"... we were only brought to Winnipeg from Altona by train on the 6th of January, by the Sheriff here from Morden."

long journey. For winter we built ourselves a barn out of logs (Waldholz).

I was at home at my parents until 1885 and helped in the work for my daily bread. In January 1885, I married Katharina Funk (daughter of the Honourable Aeltester Johan Funk, Alt-Bergthal). We held the wedding ceremony in her parental home. I and my young bride moved to Reinland where we lived with my parents for 1 year and 3 months. In the spring of 1881

we moved to Peter Bergmanns in Gnadenenthal, where we settled. In summer we built ourselves a dwelling house and a small barn for the livestock.

We farmed here until 1900. We sold our 3 1/2 farms here and bought 3 1/2 farms in Weidenfeld for \$14,000.00, where we moved on February 28, 1900.

September 14, 1903, my beloved wedded spouse Katharina (nee Funk) was instantaneously torn from my side through a sudden heart attack [9]. During this time 13 children were born of whom 9 were alive and 4 had predeceased their mother and passed on into eternity.

January 28, 1914, I celebrated my marriage to Aganetha Harder from Butterfield, Minnesota, in her parental home. Soon after the wedding we drove to Manitoba, my home, where we arrived on February 6 during a fierce blizzard (according to Manitoba standards).

Since we did not want to send our children to the public schools and we were not readily able to find a private teacher, I engaged myself as a school teacher. On November 18, 1909, I started to give instruction in our summer corner room with 12 students. When the Weidenfelders united themselves in fall of 1913 so far, and sent all their children to the public school, my school came to a close. Therefore I drove to Schoenau and wanted to send my children there to the private school (where I had already sent [them] before). Since they still had no teacher there, they desired that I would engage myself there as a school teacher. We

"Here in prison we were... interrogated.... Our pockets were emptied, [we were] weighed and measured, and then brought into iron barred cells."

reached an agreement in this regard for \$30 per month.

On November 3rd I started to teach there with 22 students. I taught there in school for seven winters in so far as the Lord granted me strength for so doing. He blessed the good which I, in my weakness, was able to teach the students. The student body fluctuated between 22 and 37 during the seven years.

In March of 1919 the ministerial desired that I should lead the singing in the worship services assemblies which I also did in my weakness. [10]

December 18, 1919, I, together with four Weidenfelder and a number of Alt-Bergthalers, were summoned by court papers, to come to Altona at 4 o'clock in the afternoon to appear there before the secular authorities where a hearing was to be held as to why we did not want to send our children to the public school.

When we were being questioned, whether from henceforth I would want to send my children to the public school and I answered with "No." The sentence was pronounced against me, to either pay \$28.00 fine or to spend 20

days in Winnipeg in the government jail, from the 2nd of January until the 22nd, 1920. All of us opted for imprisonment. But we were only brought to Winnipeg from Altona by train on the 6th of January, by the Sheriff here from Morden.

Here in prison we were still interrogated regarding many matters. Our pockets were emptied, [we were] weighed and measured, and then brought into iron barred cells. We received sufficient food, three times a day. The fare was good enough for criminals (naturally not like at home). We ate always under watch by policemen with approximately 70 to 80 men in one room. But we Germans ate alone at one table. The food was the same for all.

This was a good opportunity to reflect back on one's past life and walk. Often times I thought to myself that this was only a small foretaste of the entire tribulation which is yet to come according to the Holy Scripture. I was allowed to have my Bible [11] with me. I meditated upon many a verse, particularly [?] where

"....I was allowed to have my Bible with me."

it says: "Even though you strive, you will not be crowned if you strive not correctly, or only those who persevere until the end shall be saved"

Instead of the 22nd we were released from the prison facility on the 21st of January, but with the warning that we should henceforth send our children to the public school, then they would leave us in peace. On January 22, 1920, I arrived at home, now I was extremely glad that I could again be with my family.

But I had the anxious thoughts already in prison, it could well be that I might be reported again within a month. I was, in fact, reported again in February, 1921, while I was on my journey to South America. At that time my wife had sent Erdmann to the public school, and also thereafter.

After the completion of my school year in 1920, I drove to see our beloved Aeltester Abraham Doerksen in Sommerfeld, regarding immigration--whether he was considering to search for a place in the world where we could conduct our instruction in our schools according to our articles of faith and where the schools could stand under the oversight of our ministerial.

To which he answered, he first wanted to have the "Privilegium" reviewed, and to England, if necessary, to see if it had any validity for the future or not. Shortly thereafter in June, I and the Honourable Abraham Friesen from Rosenheim went to see the Honourable Aeltester Johann Friesen in Neuenburg regarding immigration (to Mississippi). I could not placate myself [12] in my conscience regarding the document they had as to matters of faith. Shortly thereafter I again drove to Neuenburg together with a few men. The second document was read to us, it was almost the same as the first.

June 14, 1920, I travelled to Rosthern to Aeltester Aron Zacharias with a slight possibility (brought by J. J. Priesz from New York) that a document might be obtainable in Paraguay in South America which would recognize our protocols of faith.

During my trip to Rosthern I also met the Honourable Johann Wall from the Old Kolonier on the train in Saskatoon. He had also been in New York, and according to what he said, he had a good hope to receive a document in Paraguay from the government which would be in accordance with our teachings of faith.

Shortly thereafter Aeltester Aron Zacharias came to Manitoba and the two of us went to our Aeltester Abraham Doerksen for advice, for Ohm Zacharias had already had two delegates elected to send them to South America. Whereupon we were referred to J. J. Priesz, Altona, as a somewhat experienced speaker or councillor.

We drove back to Altona and met with J. J. Priesz. He said, if Ohm Zacharias would reimburse him for the travelling expenses, he would be willing to go along. He did not want a wage, that would be covered by the experience and by being able to see the sights. He also promised me my expenses if I went along, partially out of my own desire and partially because it was Ohm Zacharias' wish.

On August 27, I was summoned to Winnipeg by J. J. Priesz in order to file for our passport papers. We drove there accompanied

**"I was, in fact, reported again in February, 1921, while I was on my journey to South America."**

by Ohm Zacharias and both of his delegates, [13] Ohm Jakob Neufeld and Ohm Johan Friesen. On the 20th I drove back home. On the 27th of August, I and the Honourable Johan Schroeder drove to Winnipeg as Ohm Schroeder had also decided to come along.

On September 14, 1920, it was also decided at a brotherhood meeting in Rudnerweide that I and Johann Klassen, Rosenfeld, should travel to South America as Sommerfelder delegates in order to find out if we could receive a document [Privilegium] from a government that was in accordance with our faith.

I drove to Winnipeg two more times regarding my passport papers. On December 21, I drove to Winnipeg regarding the four Old Kolonier delegates from Hague. They were to return without results. I went there to meet them but I returned home on the 24th without success for they only came through Winnipeg

Rev. Peter Zacharias, Gretna, Manitoba, recalls that his grandfather Peter J. Dyck, school teacher, accompanied numerous Old Kolony people to court in Morden as a translator. Here the accused faced charges regarding the Mennonite schools, a privilege which the Dominion government had guaranteed them in 1873.

on the second holiday [the 26th].

On the last holiday, December 27th, I departed for Rosthern. Here I met with Ohm Zacharias and three delegates who had been in South America and spoke with each one in person. Freely they each said they believed it was possible to make a living there on the land which they had inspected. They were Abraham Klassen, Jakob Friesen and Franz Dück.

On December 30 we had also both spoken about South America and Mexico with the Honourable Johan Wall in his home. He had just returned from Mexico where he had inspected land for one month.

On January 18, 1921, it was decided at a brotherhood meeting in Rudnerweide by the vote of approximately 350 brethren that I and Isaak Funk, Weidenfeld, should travel to South America and Mexico, and to investigate whether there was anywhere a government where religious freedom [14] could be requested in accordance with our Confession of Faith and to inspect the lands and to determine on what terms it was available.

On February 11, 1921, we departed from our homes in order to carry out this duty imposed by the Gemeinde in so far as the Lord would grant us strength for so doing. From here [West Reserve], there was myself, Isaak Funk (and J. J. Priesz as spokesman). In Winnipeg we met Ohm Jakob Neufeld, Ohm Friesen and Ohm Zacharias from Rosthern and also Jakob Doerksen, delegate from the East Reserve.

A few songs come to mind which were sung in our home by all our children as well as guests who were visiting us, before I left on the long journey. (Bernhard Toews quotes three songs, the opening lines of which were as follows: "Herz aller liebster Vater Mein," "Lebet

The widely loved Old Kolony school teacher David Harder described the experiences of his people during their last years in Canada 1920-22 as follows:

"In the meantime our oppressed circumstances in Canada had not improved. Other people who lived in the vicinity of the State or Government schools and in such villages where in addition the Government had ordered the construction of new schools, were oppressed even harder."

"Nor were our ministers spared, for the aged minister Peter Friesen in Schanzenfeld together with a number of others were thrown into jail in Winnipeg for one month, because they did not wish to yield their children over to the worldly spirits. And even though most of our brethren were able to pay such punishments with money it was a plague none-the-less."

"For these reasons some of our people started to leave their Homesteads and moved to such places where they were at least temporarily left in peace, because they were far enough distant from such schools."

David Harder, *Schule und Gemeinschaft Erinnerungen* (Gretna, 1969), page 10.

wohl und dient dem Herrn," and "Auf Mein Leben Gott trau ich un angst und not."

I said farewell to my beloved family on February 11, 1921, at half eleven in the morning for approximately four months. My wish and prayer [being] that the beloved God might accompany us on our journey with success, and that our so very hard mission might be directed in such a way that it would serve for the well-being of our Gemeinde and our souls salvation and return us safely to our families.

In fulfilment of my wish I had the joy of being able to greet my family, with good health, on September 2nd, 1921, at 10 minutes after 8 o'clock in the morning, the beloved God be thanked for the successful journey.



#### Notice to Readers:

Most readers in Manitoba will have received a copy of the July 24, 1999, *Free Press* insert, "Im Celebration of the 125th Anniversary of Mennonites in Manitoba!" 12 pages, tabloid style. Over 200,000 copies were printed and distributed in Manitoba with the July 24, 1999 Saturday paper.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* was kind enough to provide us with several thousand extra copies of this valuable pictorial sketch of the story of Manitoba's Mennonites. These inserts include ten different articles written by some of Manitoba's leading scholars and historians, including Dr. Adolf Ens, Dr. John J. Friesen, Dr. Royden Loewen, Lorilee Scharfenberg, Regina Neufeld and others. They are ideal handouts for anniversaries and other special church and community events.

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# Old Colony Church in Manitoba

**"Old Colony Church in Manitoba 1875 to 2000," by Rev. Abraham E. Rempel,  
R.R.1, Box 551, Group 40, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1, Minister of the Old Colony Church.**

## Introduction

I was born in 1942 and therefore have not witnessed any of the events in the 1920s and 30s. The information contained in this report has been derived from written sources and from individuals, some of whom witnessed some of the events. I therefore cannot guarantee that all the information is accurate, and take no responsibility for errors.

Today there are seven Old Colony Congregations or Gemeinden in various parts of Canada. At the time of the migration to Mexico in the 1920s there were three--one in Manitoba and two in Saskatchewan.

I will refer to these as "Old Colony" even though the name of these communities prior to the move to Mexico was officially registered as "Reinländer". Nonetheless, they were referred to as the "Old Colony Gemeinde" in common parlance because they came from the Chortitz Colony, the first and oldest Mennonite settlement in Imperial Russia. The reorganized Gemeinde in 1936 was officially registered as "The Old Colony Church".

## The Early Years.

When the move took place from Russia in the 1870s, the Gemeinde in Manitoba was the first to be established in 1875 under the leadership of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. The Gemeinde in the Saskatoon area (Hague-Osler) was established in 1895 and the one at Swift Current in 1905, so that dream did not last very long, especially for the Saskatchewan churches.

About two-thirds of the members from the Manitoba Gemeinde moved to Mexico, also all of the clergy, so that nobody remained to keep the church in operation. The general feeling of those moving was that the ones who stayed behind were "black sheep". So the "Reinländer Gemeinde" ceased to exist in Manitoba, at least officially. The same thing happened in the Swift Current area, that church ceased to function. However in the Saskatoon area, the church managed to stay in operation, even though the Aeltester also moved. Some of the ministers, however, remained behind to continue.

## Saskatchewan.

A few comments about the Saskatchewan situation, as it ties in with our Manitoba history. The Hague-Osler Gemeinde was the only Old Colony congregation in Canada to stay in operation. It, however, struggled in its efforts, since it was difficult to provide the necessary services to its members in the field of communion and baptism. Jacob Enns, who went to "Jugend Unterricht" had to wait two years before he could be baptized.

It was told that Aeltester Wiens occasionally came from Mexico to provide these ordi-



*A host of two-bottom plows and tractors were brought along to Mexico from Canada in 1922. This wagon, plow and tractor belonged to delegate David Rempel, Schöndorf. Photo and caption courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 63.*

nances. Since there was no Old Colony Aeltester in Canada, it did not give the Manitoba group much possibility to reorganize.

Two Old Colony members of Saskatchewan, Abram Wall and Johann Loeppky started to work on full re-establishment of the Old Colony Church in Saskatchewan. They met with Aeltester C. Hamm of the Bergthaler Church to ask for assistance. It was agreed to have a meeting with some of the remaining members of the church to explore this possibility. Several brethren from Manitoba also attended this meeting. The meeting was held on March 20, 1930 with Bishop Hamm of the Bergthaler Church officiating.

An election was held for Aeltester and Rev. Johann Loeppky of the Osler area was elected as Aeltester for the church. This Gemeinde then officially took on the name "Old-Colony Mennonite Church". Their M.L.A. had suggested to them that they should use this name since they came from the "old" Colony in Russia. So once again there was an Old Colony Aeltester in Canada, who was also accessible to Manitoba. This also gave Manitoba an avenue for possible reestablishment.

## Manitoba.

Now getting back to the Manitoba situation: first of all, the church facilities. The one in Reinland, the oldest one (being the first Mennonite worship house built in western Canada), was sold to the Rüssländer Gemeinde

(later the Blumenorter Gemeinde). The one in Blumengart eventually was owned by the Hutterites. Others were sold for various purposes.

The worship house in the village of Chortitz, W.R., was the only one that remained in the hands of the Old Colony people, or was available to them to use for worship services. Apparently the Sirlucks, who were Jews, purchased most or maybe all of the land surrounding Chortitz. Mr. Jacob Heide then purchased the church and the property from the Sirlucks, for the purpose that the church could be used for worship services, if so desired. He owned the building and the property until the church reorganized and then donated it to the Old Colony Church.

Apparently he purchased the building and a three acre property for \$400.00. During the 1930s the church building was locked and Mr. Sirluck was surprised that it was locked. He had said, a church should always be open so the people could come there to pray, especially to pray for rain in the 1930s. Some people believed that even the weather patterns had changed on account of the move to Mexico. There were three years when there was not enough snow on the ground to make a sleigh track or "Schlaeden Bone" and many believed this was because of the move.

## Interim Pastoral Care.

As already mentioned, about one-third of the membership remained in Manitoba. Some probably moved later and some moved back from Mexico. It was difficult for the remain-



*Circa, 1918. This is how most of the Old Koloniers in Manitoba did their fall plowing, with a four-horse team and a two-bottom plow. In this photograph we see the sons of Peter Friesens in Reinland, Manitoba: Johann Friesen, Abraham Froese and Heinrich Froese, the latter later resident in Blumenort, Campo 22, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc. This is the quality of Mennonite model farmers which the Mexican government gained in the 1920s. Photo and caption courtesy of Peter Rempel, editor, 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 63.*

ing members to reorganize since many were still considering a move to Mexico, or at least had the idea high in their mind. Some were somewhat concerned that the Old Colony Gemeinden in Mexico would react unfavourably if they formed a new church. Also there was no Old Colony Aeltester in Canada.

So many, or most of them, attended the Sommerfelder worship services which were similar to what theirs had been. My mother told me that two ministers had come back from Mexico for a visit, and held some services here for the people. They had also tried to convince more to move to Mexico. They were Rev. Jacob Loewen and Rev. Jacob Giesbrecht. My mother also related that Aeltester Johann Friesen had come back at least once and held communion services here.

I have also been told that some of the Sommerfelder ministers, Rev. Isaac Hoeppner, William Falk, Isaac Fehr, George Froese and Peter Dyck held services in the Old Colony worship house in Chortitz. Funeral services were usually conducted by the Sommerfelder ministers. Most of the young

people joined the Sommerfelder Church or went there to Jugend Unterricht (young peoples, Catechism and baptism).

My mother said that one year there had been two benches full of boys and two benches full of girls that had gone to Jugend Unterricht in the Sommerfeld Church in Reinland, where most or all of the parents had been from the Old Colony Church.

In 1930 Rev. Johann Loeppky was elected and ordained for Aeltester in Saskatchewan for the Old Colony Church. He then came to Manitoba, once or twice a year to serve with communion. He also held baptismal and wedding services here.

During this time, services were also held in private homes, including in my wife's grandparent's home in Hochfeld. My wife remembers there was a pulpit which could be used by placing it on a table. It was in the attic of the grandparent's home. This pulpit was probably used at the time when services were held in private homes.

#### Reorganization.

"Bruderschaften" were held to see whether the Manitoba Church could again reorganize. The key people behind this drive were Jacob Froese of Reinfeld, Jacob Rempel of Blumenort, A.A. Hiebert of Hochfeld, J. Kauenhofen of Friedensruh, Peter Klassen of Blumenfeld, George Elias of Blumenfeld, John Thiessen of Chortitz, and others.

A. N. Hiebert, son of A. A. Hiebert, remembers attending such a "Bruderschaft", led by Jacob Froese. Many people envisioned Jacob Froese as a capable person to re-organize and lead the church. On June 25, 1936 the first clergy elections were held for the new church, by Bishop Loeppky who was also here to serve with communion. At the first election Jacob Rempel, Jacob Froese and Peter Harms were elected. Only Jacob Froese was ordained on June 28 according to my records. Peter Friesen was elected deacon.

November 10, 1936, another ministerial election was held where Abram Janzen, Peter

Zacharias and Jacob Penner were elected. Peter Zacharias and Jacob Penner were ordained on November 12, 1936. On June 10, 1937 another election was held where Johann Friesen and Peter Thiessen were elected. Johann Friesen was ordained on November 4, 1937. On January 24, 1939 Jacob Goertzen of Reinfeld, Jacob Goertzen of Chortitz and David Driedger were elected. David Driedger was ordained as deacon on March 9, 1939. These were the elections and ordinations in the 1930s.

The denomination was now registered as the "Old Colony Mennonite Church of Manitoba", to coincide with the name of the Saskatchewan church.

In singing it was decided to use the "Solenveze" (melody by numbers), the same melodies as used by the Sommerfelder Church. Thus the "Oleveze" was discontinued in Manitoba.

After the church had reorganized some more members moved back from Mexico, and they were accepted in the church, even though Aeltester Isaac Dyck of Mexico had felt that this church had no right to just accept them back into this new church. The first funeral of the new church was that of Abram Bueckert of Chortitz.

#### Worship Houses.

Now getting back to the worship houses. The Chortitz church was available for immediate use and was donated to the Old Colony Church by Jacob Heide. It was originally dedicated October 21, 1881. It was replaced in 1967 with a new church with the inauguration on November 12, 1967. The old church



*A stallion. Prime example of one of the large powerful horses which the Old Koloniers brought with them, which were unknown in Mexico. Photo by A. Redekop. Photo courtesy of Schmiedehaus, Die Altkolonie-Mennoniten im Mexiko, page 62.*

A slightly revised version of the article by Rev. Abram E. Rempel, Winkler, on the Old Kolony Church of Manitoba, was published in the *Mennonitische Post*, February 4, 2000, pages 14 and 15, under the title, "Die Altkoloniergemeinde in the 1920er und 1930er Jahren."

## Preservings

building was later moved to the Steinbach museum. Bishop Froese passed away in the winter of 1968 and both buildings were used for his funeral.

The Rosetown church was inaugurated on November 7, 1937. It was replaced with a new building on July 28, 1963. The old church building was used for Sunday School classes. Later the new sanctuary was moved onto a basement, and the old church sold and moved to Neuenberg where it was converted to a home.

The Blumenfeld church was built in the summer of 1938 at a cost of \$800.00. The lot was donated by George Elias. It was dedicated October 20, 1938.

The Reinfeld church was the former school and remodelled into a church. It was rebuilt in 1957 and inaugurated on September 29, 1957. These are still the four locations where church services are held today in the Old Colony Gemeinde.

### Relations with Mexico.

How did this new Old Colony Church relate to the one in Mexico?

Not always very well at first. The



Aeltester Johann Loeppky and his wife, Johanna Loeppky became the organizer of the Old Colony Church in Canada after the departure of the majority of the OK-ers for Mexico. Photo courtesy of Peter A. Petkau, editor, Blumenfeld: Where Land and People Meet (Altona, 1981), page 41. Johann Loeppky's mother Mrs. Johann Loeppky, nee Maria Martens (1858-1934), Blumenfeld, W. R., married for the second time to Isaak Dyck, and they were the parents of Isaac M. Dyck (1889-1969), Aeltester in Mexico.

Gemeinde in Manitoba was willing and open to work with the church in Mexico. However, the Gemeinde in Mexico was not always interested in having a good relationship with the church in Manitoba. When some of the members from Mexico moved back to Canada they were unable to get releases or transfers from the church in Mexico.

The Gemeinde in Manitoba did accept these people into the church without a transfer and without a certificate of good standing. Their acceptance was approved on a faith basis. They would ask the person to affirm that they were in good standing in the church, and if so, were accepted on that basis.

If they were "im Utschluss" and the reason was because of rubber tires, the "Utschluss" was not recognized as valid, and they were still accepted. A number of times a letter was written to the Gemeinde in Mexico on the matter and that he or she was sorry that they had disobeyed the Gemeinde. Usually no response was received.

Since there are a number of colonies in Mexico that are allowing the use of rubber tires, pickups and tractors, our relationship with these colonies has improved over the years.

To date no Old Colony minister from Manitoba has preached in an Old Colony Church in Mexico. I have ministered in the Reinländer Churches in the Swift Colony;



Drawing of Aeltester Isaac M. Dyck (1889-1969), Blumenfeld, Manitoba Plan, Mexico. Isaac M. Dyck was a respected school teacher. He was elected Aeltester to replace Johann Friesen of the Manitoba Plan Old Kolonier Gemeinde in 1935. Drawing of Aeltester Isaac M. Dyck by Ruth Wiebe and courtesy of Petkau, Blumenfeld, page 41. By 1964 Ohm Isaak had handed over the leadership to Aeltester Heinrich Dyck, Reinfeld, who divided the Manitoba Plan into two Aeltester Districts--north and south. Franz Kroeker, Kronsgart, is now Aeltester of the south district and Jakob Loewen, Rosenthal, is Aeltester of the north district.

these used to be the Old Colony worshiphouses. But no Old Colony minister from Manitoba has presented a sermon in a worship house actively used by the Old Colony Church in Mexico.

However, I have been sitting with the ministers of the Old Colony church at a funeral in a machine shed. I have been sitting with the ministers at a funeral in the Grünthal Church in Manitoba Plan. I have had many good visits with many of the Old Colony ministers in Mexico on an individual basis. I might add that I have also had several services in the Altenheim by Cuauhtemoc and this has been much appreciated.

### Conclusion.

In closing I would like to say that I think we must give credit to our forefathers, that they have endured hardships and trials in their efforts to keep the faith, and to stay separate from the world.

May God grant that as we look at the past we may see the good that has been done, that we may treasure the heritage left to us and build on these foundations that others have laid.

### About the Author:

Abe Rempel is the son of Aeltester Peter A. Rempel (deceased) of the Reinländer Church in Manitoba. Ministers Peter Friesen and George Friesen and deacon Abram Friesen were his grandmother's uncles. Minister Johann Friesen was his great-great-grandfather.

Abe Rempel grew up in Neuenberg and was a grain and dairy farmer in the Neuenberg area. He was elected as a minister of the Old Colony Church in Manitoba in 1975. Abe Rempel and his wife presently reside on a farm, south of Winkler, Manitoba.



The author Abe E. Rempel, Winkler, circa 1990.

# Aeltester Jacob J. Froese (1885-1968), Reinfeld

Aeltester Jacob J. Froese (1885-1968), Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba,  
by granddaughter Netha Froese Dyck, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## Introduction.

It was on November 13, 1885 in the Village of Reinland that a little boy, Jacob, was born to Johann and Katharina Froese. His parents had immigrated to Canada in June 1877 from the Chortitza colony in southern Russia and settled in the West Reserve in the village of Reinland. Many years later, he was to have a powerful influence on the Old Colony Church. In fact, the church would flourish under his capable leadership.

## Boyhood.

Still at a tender age, his parents left the village of Reinland and moved to Schoenfeld, better known today as the Zion School District, located several miles west and one mile north of Winkler. In this country setting, Jacob spent his childhood years.

He attended private school since the church required that children should attend school by the time they reached the age of six. Jacob was a good student and advanced rapidly in his program of studies, which consisted of four different courses. These courses included the Fibel, which was used primarily to teach the children to read. There was a study of the catechism of the Old Colony Church, the New Testament and the study of the Old Testament. As well, each day the teacher would devote some time to "rechnen", or mathematics.

It was in this type of school that Jacob received his education. It was an education, which would be an asset to his future endeavours.

As Jacob reached the age of 13, it was the custom for Mennonite children to leave school and graduate to the more important things in life, such as working on the farm. After all, it seemed that Mennonite children were expected to assume their father's role and become farmers.

When Jacob was 16 years old his father passed away at the young age of 43. This placed a large responsibility on the three oldest brothers who had to operate the farm. Approximately one-year later Jacob's mother married a farmer from Reinfeld, Peter Friesen.

## Teaching.

After having moved to Reinfeld, Jacob received his first opportunity to be of great service to the community. He accepted the challenge of becoming a teacher of the local school. Here his keen young mind was first put to use for the benefit of the community.

In conversations with Mrs. Maria Peters, she had this to say about Jacob as a teacher. "He was my teacher for most of my school years. He was a very good schoolmaster. However, he was strict and always meant what he said. The children whom he taught, re-



Aeltester Jakob Froese (1885-1968), Reinfeld, Manitoba. A great servant of God.



Margaret Enns Froese 1886-1965, the Bishop's wife. Servant of her people.

## Baptism and Marriage.

During his tenure as teacher, Jacob Froese was baptized upon the confession of his faith. He was baptized on June 12, 1905 in the Village of Chortitz and received as a member of the Old Colony Congregation. Bishop Peter Wiebe performed the baptismal service. Along with other baptismal candidates, Jacob was required to learn the entire catechism, which consisted of memorizing answers to approximately 150 questions of doctrine.

One year later, on July 15, 1906 Jacob was united in holy matrimony to Margaret Enns from Reinland. At first, they resided in the two rooms that were part of the school facility. Following that they took up residence in the house just next to the school, and here they lived all the rest of their married years. Within a year of their marriage, Jacob decided that farming would become his occupation and he relinquished his duties as schoolmaster after four years of dedicated service.

Through good management, wise investments and hard work Jacob Froese multiplied his holdings several times over, owning 3,000 acres of land along with his first John Deere tractor, better known as "Rumbley". All he had accumulated was the fruit of his labour.

## The School Issue, 1916-22.

A decade later, life on the farm was prospering. However, a problem of great propor-

tions arose within Manitoba Mennonite community. The Norris government was threatening to remove the right, which the Mennonites had enjoyed, of educating their own children. Now the government was demanding that teachers must conform to the government's standards. Even more alarming was the fact, that the Union Jack flag was to be flown on the school grounds. This disturbed the Mennonites, since the flag had militaristic implications for them. They also feared that they would lose their exemption from military service. They may have complied with the requirement of instruction in the English language. However, the flag was too much.

The Old Colony Mennonite community sent a delegation to explore the possibility of establishing a colony in Mexico. When the representatives returned with a favourable report, the people did not hesitate to leave. Between 1921 and 1925, almost the entire Old Colony Church left Manitoba. Only 600 members remained behind, with virtually no church to attend. Of the people that remained many joined the Sommerfelder Church.

Meanwhile, Jacob Froese along with Abram Friesen, decided to go to Mexico and get their own unbiased view of the situation. Jacob Froese decided to stay in Manitoba.

For Jacob Froese this was a period when he was exposed to numerous teachings, not necessarily exclusively those of the Old Colony Church. He frequently attended in-depth bible studies conducted by Rev. Reimer from Steinbach, H. B. Toews, Henry Janzen and A. H. Unruh, to name a few. As well, he attended services, "Bibel und Gebeststunde" at other churches in the community.

In addition, Jakob Froese was largely self taught through intense bible study and reading of reference books. This proved to be a time when he gained much biblical knowledge, which would be very valuable to him in later years.

### **Reestablishing the Church.**

When it became obvious that Mexico was not the Promised Land and people started to return to Canada, there was a need to reestablish the Old Colony Church. It was under the capable leadership of Jacob Froese that the Old Colony Church was reestablished and under his influence, it flourished. He was no longer a young man. The day he was elected as congregational minister, June 25, 1936, he was 53 years of age. On June 28, 1936, Rev. Froese was ordained as a minister. Several brethren from the Osler, Saskatchewan branch of the church came to Manitoba for the ordination. Among them was Johann Loeppky, who was in charge of the ceremony.

One-and-a-half years after his ordination to the ministry, Rev. Froese was elected as Bishop of the church. Elder Johann Loeppky of Osler again presided at his ordination as Bishop on November 14, 1937.

Jacob Froese delivered his first sermon as Bishop on the day of his ordination. His message dealt with the importance of rebuilding

the church, with great emphasis on the responsibility of each of the hearers to assist in this task. Bishop Froese possessed a tremendous burden for his people, which probably prompted him to accept such a monumental task.

### **WWII.**

Within two years, the attention was to shift from the rebuilding of the church to the tension that was developing on the European continent. The Mennonites of Manitoba became very concerned about the effects that an outbreak of war might have. Questions loomed large on what position the Mennonite Church would take.

The war came and the fears of the Mennonites were justified. The Government passed conscription. It was not clear what would happen to the young men who had attained the age of eligibility for military service.

The Mennonite churches selected three men out of the council of elders from the 10 local Mennonite denominations. This committee was to represent the Mennonite views in meeting with government officials. The committee, accompanied by Bishop Froese, went to Ottawa in February 1941 to determine if it would be possible to have Mennonite young men excused from military service, or to find out what possible alternatives could be worked out. The committee met with Member of Parliament, Howard Winkler, Judge Adamson, Deputy Defense Minister Davis and Major General La Fleche.

The Mennonite delegation was told, it would be impossible to be exempted from all service. However, it would be possible to arrange some form of alternate service including labour in the parks or on roadwork under civilian supervision. Most of the young men selected this option as their alternative service.

The committee reported that Bishop Jacob Froese had been of great assistance. Bishop Froese also assisted many young men in their attempts to obtain non-combatant status.

### **Building the Kingdom.**

Bishop Froese was frequently called upon to ordain ministers and elders, serve communion, conduct baptism services and accept new members into congregations. He did this in communities such as Rainy River, Ontario; Pinscher Creek, Brochet and Peace River Alberta; many locations in Manitoba; and as far away as Mexico. In his total ministry, he ordained 19 ministers, six deacons and two bishops.

Bishop Froese preached on a regular basis from 1936 until several weeks before his death in 1968. His sermons were always carefully written and were read in his Sunday services. Sermons were preached in the High German language. However, when additional emphasis was desired the idea was repeated and summarized in the Low German language.

Bishop Froese's messages revealed deep insight and understanding of scriptures. He



*Jakob M. Froese (b. 1917), Winkler, MLA for Reinland Constituency for 14 years. All photographs for this article are courtesy of daughter Netha and Henry C. Dyck, Winnipeg, Manitoba.*

emphasized that a person needed to experience a rebirth, as well as the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross from the sins of the world. He preached 1,727 Sunday morning messages, conducted 200 funeral services and officiated at 94 weddings.

In addition, he presided at special services, such as the dedication of the new church at Chortitz. Other aspects of his work included crisis counselling involving situations of grief caused by illness, marital discord or death. There was a good deal of casual exchange and discussion in which mutual encouragement, inspiration, assistance and exhortation occurred. He was involved in teaching at bible studies held in the village.

As well, many visits were made to senior citizens and in some cases visits where made to give communion to bedridden members of the church. His visitation program included hospital patients. In fact, Dr. C. W. Wiebe, long-time practising doctor in Winkler, recalled that Bishop Froese was one of the favourite ministers requested by hospital patients for visits and counselling.

Since government relief and welfare services did not exist in those days, programs were established within the church to support various causes. Paying doctor bills and hospitalization expenses were not unusual, since Medicare was not in existence. Many letters of need arrived from various locations. Sometimes these needs were met with the support of the church. However, Bishop Froese covered many times expenses incurred in assisting needy situations. As the same time, in his entire ministry Bishop Froese was never paid for any of his services.



Jakob Froese (1885-1968), Reinfeld, Manitoba, the Aeltester at work. He was born in the central OK village of Reinland.

#### Margaret Enns Froese 1886-1965.

Bishops Froese's life companion complemented him in every way. According to all that knew her, Mrs. Froese, had a great love for people. Her generosity knew no limits. It was almost impossible to leave her place without taking home a small token. It could be a syrup pail filled with "heenasupp", or sometimes "schmauntsupp", at other time's "plumi moos", or a bag of "tweback", perhaps some "schnetki" or some fruit from the garden.

Mrs. Froese was always giving of herself. She was the ideal woman in her setting. They frequently had company, especially as meal time. Company came at a moment's notice. Many times these turned out to be overnight guests. She possessed a genuine concern for others as was so evident in caring for a foster child, who was left motherless at the age of eight. As well, preparing three or four meals a day, for weeks at a time for thresher gangs of 25 men, could not have been an easy chore.

The fact that she was quiet in no way affected the beauty of her character. In the Old Colony families, the role of the woman was a passive one. Women did not participate in the decision making in the church, nor did they have any decision-making role in the home other than in household duties and the proper rearing of the children. For such a setting as this, Mrs. Froese was indeed a gem. It was a great loss to her husband, when she died in May 1965.

#### Death, 1968.

Bishop Froese was a voracious reader and consumed large amounts of material, including newspapers, especially the Steinbach Post, books, reference books and the Bible. He loved to get up early and watch the sunrise. He loved to see the beauty of the golden fields of ripening grain and he loved to travel and see the world.

His interests extended to include politics. He loved to discuss happenings on the political scene with his son Jacob M. Froese, who was the Social Credit Member of the Manitoba Legislature representing Reinland Constituency for 14 years. On one occasion, Bishop and Mrs. Froese were able to visit the legislature when the house was in session.

In early January 1968, Bishop Froese suffered a heart attack with complications of pneumonia.

On January 15, 1968, he went home to be with the Lord. Some 2,000 people attended his funeral and many mourned that the church had lost a very capable leader.

#### Legacy.

Bishop Froese left us with a heritage that continues. He contributed a great deal to the church and other people as a whole. He was responsible for helping many destitute people from Saskatchewan become re-established after the depression. He helped numerous families who emigrated from Russia to Canada, both financially and in terms of establishing themselves in their new country.

He left an indelible mark on the church and contributed a great deal to this cause. He was a faithful shepherd to the flock entrusted to his care and he served them well.

He served as a member of the first Board of Directors of the Bethel Hospital, in

Winkler. Although he did not participate in politics, he had two sons who served the community in positions of public office.

Reflecting upon the man and the church he served, some may tend to be somewhat critical. They look at their simple form of worship and conservatism with scepticism. However, let us remember, as written by Frank H. Epp in his book *The Glory and the Shame*, "It is one thing to recognize the weakness of the past and another to give strength to the present. No genius is required to excel in the former .....The test of education, it would seem is whether the educated have the patience to teach those from whom they have sprung. To damn what has stayed behind is the easiest response in the world. To improve on what has been left to us is the nobler choice."

May God grant that in our look at the past we may see the good that has been done, that we may treasure the heritage left to us and that we may build on the foundation that others have laid.

## A.G.M. January 20, 2001

Readers are advised that the Annual General Meeting of the Hanover Steinbach History Society will be held in Niverville, on Saturday, January 20, 2001. We hope to have a presentation on William Hespeler, founder of Niverville, based on the research and writing of Dr. Angelika Sauer, University of Winnipeg, Chair of Canadian German Studies.

Please watch the December *Preservings*, No. 17, for further details.

## Old Kolony Church in Ontario

Gemeinde statistics for the Old Kolony (OK) Church, Ontario, Canada, as compiled by deacons Heinrich Friesen and Cornelius Reimer.

**Births.** 84 males, 81 females, total of 165 souls born in our Gemeinde in the preceeding year.

**Deaths.** 15 members of the Gemeinde, 10 males and 5 females and 8 children. A total deaths of 23 persons died in our Gemeinde in the past year. In addition there were 5 children who were not entered as members so that a total of 23 were buried. Therefore there were 123 more births than deaths.

**New Members.** 87 males and 81 females were entered as members [by transfer], and 238 children. Accordingly a total of 406 souls were entered.

**Released.** 36 males and 41 females, and 110 children. Therefore a total of 187 souls have been released from the Gemeinde.

**Baptised.** 84 males and 97 females. Therefore a total of 181 souls were baptised by Aeltester CorneliusEnns and Peter Friesen.

**Marriages.** 81 couples.

**Totals.** Baptised members in our Gemeinde - 1801 males and 1940 female. Therefore we presently count 3741 members of the Gemeinde and 4438 children, for a total number of souls as of the end of this year of 8179 in our Gemeinde.

We wish everyone a blessed new year in 2000.

Reprinted from the *Mennonitische Post*, March 17, 2000, page 9.

# Old Kolony Singing

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

## Introduction.

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

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

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

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

## Old Colony Hymns.

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

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

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

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

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



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

## Choralbuch.

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

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

## Reinländer, 1875.

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

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

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

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

## Confirming the Tradition.

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

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

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

I have seen a booklet of transcriptions in Ziffern

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

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

#### Origins of Tradition.

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

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

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

of melodic corruption, of how the chorales should not be sung.

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

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

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

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

I have argued that a comparison of Old Colony Mennonite hymns and singing styles with manifestations of similar styles of melodic evolution and singing styles in English parish churches, the New England colonies, Old Baptist churches of the southern United States, and the Old Order Amish suggests that this style, including the vocal quality of the singing, represents an elemental form of music making in societies where, to return to Suppan's statement, "notation had not stabilised melodic repertoires or where melodies and texts previously fixed in notation were returned to the freedom of an oral tradition," or, as Nicholas Temperley puts it,

"In places where congregations are left to sing hymns without musical direction for long periods, a characteristic style of singing tends to develop."

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

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

#### Conclusion.

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

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

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



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

# Johann Wiebe Memorial, July 22, 2000

To: All Interested People  
From: Elaine Wiebe, 24-1605-7<sup>th</sup> St East, Saskatoon, SK S7H 0Z3  
Subject: Fund raising for the Johann Wiebe Memorial

Yes! It's going to happen! So we need your donations now!

A memorial service for Aeltester Johann Wiebe and the Reinlander Mennoniten Gemeinde in Reinland, Manitoba on July 22, 2000.

An add hoc committee has been set up for the memorial. They are C.E. Thiessen (Rosengart), CornyRempel (Reinland), Henry G. Ens, and Bruce Wiebe.

- Fund raising: In Manitoba the Reinland Community Center Board (RCCB) has agreed to write donation receipts for income tax purposes for this project. The Historic Sites and Monuments Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society has earmarked \$200 toward the project. Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, SK has volunteered help with fund raising. Gerhard Ens will be asked to include an appeal on one of his Wednesday evening broadcasts on CFAM radio. RCCB suggested that any residual funds go to a Johann Wiebe biography.

- Make cheques payable to Reinland Community Centre

- Send donations to Mr. Abe Ens, Grp 16, RR 1, Box 218, Winkler, MB R2W 4A1

- Site: A consensus was reached to mount a plaque in memory of Johann Wiebe at the Reinland Community Center (the former Reinland Gemeinde church built in 1875-1876). Another appropriate marker is to be placed at the cemetery in Rosengart to identify his burial site and those other Rosengart adherents of the Gemeinde from 1875-1925.

- Costs: A plaque approximately 15" x 15" and a granite slab about 3' x 4' with inscriptions will cost about \$1500.00 when all is completed.

- Plaque text: Peter D. Zacharias (Wiebe's biographer) was asked to draft an appropriate text.

- Date: The memorial service and plaque unveiling or dedication is planned for the afternoon of Saturday July 22, 2000 possibly around 1:00 or 2:00 o'clock.

- Invitation: Any interested families are invited to join us at Reinland, MB.

**PLEASE MAKE YOUR OWN ARRANGEMENTS TO BE THERE**

*Lets celebrate and give thanks to God! "We must tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His Power and the Wonders He has done. So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands!" Psalms 78:4,6 & 7.*

Photocopy this appeal and pass it on to any other interested people.



*Aeltester Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925), son of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), a legacy of God's leading hand. Photo from Pres., No. 14, page 7.*

# Mennonite Literary Tradition

By Dr. Elizabeth Peters, Winnipeg, assisted by Delbert Plett, Q.C., Steinbach, Manitoba.

"Mennonites have a strongly cultivated literary tradition that dates to the 16th century"--Dr. Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg.

Mennonite religious culture was predicated upon a systematic regime of study and writing modelled upon the Gospels and the Epistles. The core of the tradition was canonized with the publication of the *Martyrs' Mirror* by Thielmann Janz von Braght (1625-64), Dordrecht, Netherlands. The *Martyr's Mirror* consisted of first hand accounts of 4,000 martyrs written by women and men as they languished in prisons awaiting torture and execution.

The tradition was carried along with persecuted refugees as they fled to places like Danzig (Gdansk) on the Baltic Sea. It was codified by the compilation and publication in German of the *Gesangbuch* in the 1780s, a collection of 220 songs taken from old Dutch Mennonite hymnals translated into German and another 300 songs borrowed from the Lutheran Pietist tradition.

The literary tradition which the Mennonite pioneers brought to Manitoba in 1874 had several facets: journal keeping, correspondence, poetry, print culture, and religious writing such as sermons.

After the emigration of 1874 letters were written between relatives and friends in America, Russia and Germany. These epistles today provide an exciting bird's eye view of pioneer life. Many letters were published in pioneer newspapers such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau* (founded 1878), *Botschafter der Wahrheit* (founded 1897) and the *Steinbach Post* (founded 1913).

The poetry tradition represented by the *Martyrs' Mirror* and *Gesangbuch* is still practised by many conservative Mennonites to this very day. Margaret Penner Toews, Neilberg, Sask., (*The Scent of Water*) capably represents this genre.

One of the most notable journals in Russia was that of Abraham F. ("Fula") Reimer (1808-92), ancestor of many residents of Steinbach, Manitoba. Journal keeping was a necessity for land-owning household producers, their only record of crops, yields and weather, as well as documenting the complex intricacies of the traditional village life. By the end of the 19th century journal keeping had become largely a function of women, it being the women who managed the household economy.

The literary tradition was also manifested in *Fraktur*, a colourful folk art, often combined with the practice of *Schönschreiben* (Calligraphy) or illuminated script.

Mennonites were active in print culture, publishing 56 titles in Hanover Steinbach prior to 1930. These included devotional books, memoirs, institutional booklets and songbooks.

In recent years a number of gifted playwrights



Dr. Elizabeth Peters, Professor of Education, University of Manitoba, retired, has contributed immensely to Mennonite literature and writing with her dramas, prose and history, as well as readings. Photo courtesy of G. Lohrenz, Damit es nich Vergession Werde, page 177.

have recaptured much of the intimacy, vibrancy and humour of traditional village life using Plautdietsch. These include Kay Friesen, Steinbach, Wilmer Penner, Landmark, and Anne Funk, Grunthal. These plays are regularly produced for local audiences.

Two well known writers with Mennonite roots in southern Manitoba in the 1870s were Alfred Van Vogt, well-known science fiction writer (recently deceased), and Paul Hiebert (Sarah Binks).

The most gifted writer to emerge among the Ruszländer (those Mennonites coming to Manitoba in 1923-30) was Arnold Dyck, a teacher and artist from the Jasykowo Colony in Imperial Russia (today Ukraine). He lived in Steinbach, Manitoba, from 1923 until 1947. His most significant work is the auto-biographical novel *Verloren in der Steppe* (Lost in the Steppe). In other writings Dyck used the Low-German to convince his readers that the dialect is as powerful for tragedy as it is for the sparkling humour which characterized his humorous "Koep and Bua" sketches.

Other writers of this genre include Gerhard Friesen (*Fritz Senn*) and Jakob H. Janzen.

Al Reimer's well-known novel, *My Harp is turned to Mourning*, vividly tells the story of the tragedy of the Mennonite suffering in the Soviet Union. Another work on this theme is *Die Heimat in Trümmern* by Gerhard Toews (Georg de Brecht), formerly Stuartburn.

Dr. Jack Thiessen is well known for his Low-German short stories and the English collection, *The Eleventh Commandment*, and Low German/Plaut-Dietsch dictionary. Herman

Rempel, Morden, has published several editions of his English to Low German Dictionary. Rueben Epp has written about the origins of Low German language, with his well-known *Story of Low German and Plautdietsch*.

The *Mennonite Mirror*, a monthly magazine dealing with Mennonite life and culture was founded in 1971 with Dr. Roy Vogt as editor. It was published for 20 years. Recently it has been reinvoked in a more modest format as *Rubbard*, edited by Victor Jerrett Enns. The Journal of Mennonite Studies, now in its 18th year, is published annually by the Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg.

The transition to modern writing is represented by Rudy Wiebe. His controversial but popular novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* deals with Mennonite iniquities of the past.

Pat Friesen (*The Shunning*) and Di Brandt (*Question I asked my mother*) are two well-known poets whose writings tended to focus on the negative aspects of their culture.

Armin Wiebe (*The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*) and John Janzen Kooistra (*Shoo-fly Dyck*) are two contemporary writers who have been able to portray much of the intimacy and humour of Plaut-Dietsch culture in the English language.

Other contemporary writers include David Bergen (*A Year of Lesser*), Audrey Poetker, David Elias, Doug Reimer, John Wieler, Sarah Klassen, Lois Braun, Miriam Toews, and Sandra Birdsell.

## "The Gesangbuch"

The *Gesangbuch* originated in Prussia in the 18th century. It is still in regular use by thousands of conservative Mennonites, blessing singers with its rich message and evocative Gospel-centric lyrics: see "Chortitz Worship Service, 1874 reenactment", *Preservings*, No. 15, pages 66-67, for two samples of the beautiful lyrics of the *Gesangbuch*.

The *Gesangbuch* was later rejected by many Mennonites who adopted German Separatist-Pietist religious culture based on the edicts of June-Stilling and/or American Fundamentalist religious culture based on the doctrines and fantasies of Scofield and Darby. Editor's Note.

## 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 and mailing costs of our news-magazine.

### **Errata**

We welcome and encourage readers to take the time to draw errors and omissions to our attention. This can be done by a letter or fax to the editor (1-204-326-6917), or else a phone call to myself (1-204-326-6454). If you want to write but do not want your letter published, please so indicate. We will try to publish as many letters as we can. We really appreciate any and all assistance with corrections and clarifications as this is critical to the process of documenting our history.

1) Page 37, *Preservings*, No. 15, caption for the photograph of the 125 banner in the Steinbach "Pioneer Days Parade" Chamber President Heide Banman Reimer is mistakenly referred to as Heide Banman Harms. Our apologies.

2) Re: *Preservings* No. 15, Dec 1999, page 12, "Wat du nich lesen kanst dat motzt du roden." Translation: "You can scratch what you can not read." The proper translation would be: "What you can't read you must guess at." The last line in the next paragraph should read: "Lebe woll, frese Kohl, saufe Wein, das is was vor deimen mogen." Yours truly, "George Neufeld," Box 1483, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0. Editor's note: George. We appreciate you bringing this to our attention.

3) Page 104, *Preservings*, No. 15, the lady on the left hand side on the photograph in the bottom right hand corner is Mrs. J. Dueck, nee Helena Giesbrecht, born Feb. 1, 1902, Reinländer Gemeindebuch, page 233, R201-2, B232 C702. She was the daughter of Martin Giesbrecht born 1869. Does anyone have any information about the parents of this Martin Giesbrecht? Mrs. J. Dueck died in Mexico sometime around the mid-1990s. Yours truly "T. Sawatzky," Box 20036, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2T1.

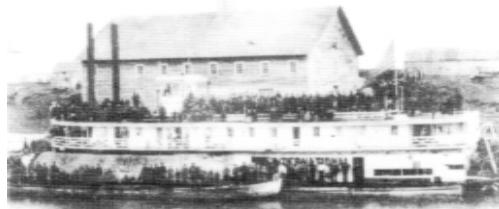
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If you are no longer interested in receiving *Preservings*, or if you have moved and your mailing address has changed, please drop us a line.

### **Mennonite Books?**

Are you looking for Mennonite Books? If you do not live near a large centre with a Mennonite Book Store, this can be a challenge. Solution: contact Gilbert G. Brandt at "Mennonite Books", 67 Flett Ave, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R2K 3N3. They offer a book club service with a **FREE** semi-annual catalogue mail-out listing many books currently available. This is also a good way of keeping up with new publications. Phone 204-668-7475; fax 204-661-8530; e-mail: [mennonitebooks@brandtfamily.com](mailto:mennonitebooks@brandtfamily.com)

# **HANOVER STEINBACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.**



## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL**

Please note that your annual membership subscription for HSHS is due January 1, 2000. No other notice or reminder will be sent.

Yes, I wish to become a member of The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society (or renew my membership) and receive the HSHS newsletter twice a year. Enclosed is my \$20 membership fee.

## **ORDER FORM**

- Please send me Vol. 1: Working Papers. I enclose \$10.00 plus \$2.00 postage.
- Please send me Vol. 2: Berghal Gemeindebuch. I enclose \$20.00 plus \$3.00 postage.
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- Please send me Obershulze Jacob Peters. I enclose \$10.00 plus \$2.00 postage.

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# President's Report

by Orlando Hiebert, Box 8, Tourond, Manitoba, R0A 2G0

## Activities Review.

It is again time to publish our June issue of Preservings. The new year has come with fewer problems and catastrophe than was predicted so we here at HSHS will continue to record and publish the history of the Southeast. This year it is the West Reserve's turn to celebrate their 125th and I'm sure they have many activities planned.

Our January 22 A.G.M. was held in conjunction with the 125th Steering Committee and I'm sure that many of you had a good and informative time. Our speaker, Dr. John Warkentin presented many interesting facts about the locations and reasons why certain sites were selected for settlement. I'm sure that we will get a better insight into the history of our Mennonite brotherhood here in Southern Manitoba when his thesis will be published in book format. I would like to thank Dr. Roy Loewen for his efforts in editing and preparing this work (see ad in book review section).

The Family History Day in March went well. There were many displays, the speakers were well received and we were certainly glad for the different venue giving us a larger room in which to accommodate the workshops. This year we also featured two workshops with speakers, Lynette Plett on oral interview techniques and Edith Friesen writing content.

As a result of the many inquiries HSHS is giving serious consideration to a reprinting of the Bergthalener Gemeindebuch. During my recent visit to the Ukraine, tour guide Olga Smekina informed me that Alexander Tadeyev, Archivist, Zaporozhe Archives, had the 1858 census of the villages of Schönfeld and Bergthal of the Bergthal Colony ready. We are hoping to publish those as well at some point once we have them.

## Ukraine, April 2000.

Checking into the hotel at Simferopol, Crimea, at midnight after arriving on a flight from Istanbul, Turkey was quite an interesting experience.

A British journalist by the name of Andrew whom I had befriended at the airport checked in first. He conducted his business in Russian with a very stern officious looking woman. While the clerk was filling out his papers he and I conversed in English. The woman made a phone call and shortly after that a young woman arrived and sat at the next wicket. When it was my turn to negotiate a room the Russian woman motioned me over to the younger woman and the first thing she said was "Sprechen sie Deutsch?" That was just fine with me. I was able to converse nicely with her and answer her questions regarding where I came from, my passport, etc.

Buying a train ticket to Zaporozhe next morning in Simferopol was a learning experience. Apparently there is a different ticket outlet for each



Orlando Hiebert, HSHS President.

train so if one wished to board the Simferopol-Minsk train one has to buy a ticket at a certain wicket and if one wished to board the Simferopol-Moscow train it is at another wicket. I managed that, plus making a phone call which is quite different than here because one has to get a ticket which has the number of a phone booth. Then one makes the call and brings the ticket back and the lady in the little booth tells you how much it has



West of Bergthal (República), three new Ford four-wheel drive tractors with Flexicoll air seeders were planting barley. These machines were owned by a German consortium custom seeding 10,000 hectares for these Ukrainian farms. Photo by Orlando Hiebert, April 2000.

cost. But buying the train ticket was not the biggest problem. The worst was getting on the train.

The train that was closest to the station building was the Moscow train. I thought that by the time my train was scheduled to leave it would have pulled out and my train would pull in right after it but that was not the case. When I phoned Olga Smekina to inform her of my arrival time in Zaporozhe she said "but you have only 15 minutes to catch the train". I spent some anxious moments half-running, pulling my heavy bags.

I presented my ticket to the female car attendant standing on the ramp and she motioned me beyond the train but this time I knew I had no time to spare so I made motions - go under the train?

should I squeeze between the cars? She then pointed over to a tunnel entrance which led underneath the tracks. When I was underneath the first train I noticed the tunnel went quite a distance but had lateral openings. When I came to the first opening I called out "Zaporozhe", and a man motioned me up the first ramp. When I arrived there I presented my ticket again to an attendant.

She motioned to the end of the train but I had no idea how far because it was a long train. So I said "Skolka" and held up five fingers - how many cars am I supposed to go back? She held up eight fingers and I thought, I'll never make it. I started off at a run, mouth dry as a desert, when she shouted after me and held up four fingers, so I made it with five minutes to spare.

I think I can feel with the "Aussiedler" when they come to a new land with strange customs and language, the difference being that their difficulties don't end in a week.

## Changes in Ukraine.

Some of the changes I noticed in Ukraine were that there were many more small tractors working in the fields than five years ago.

This seemed to indicate that there are more small farmers working pieces of land which used to be collective. Coming back from Bergthal we stopped at a field in which three new Ford four-wheel drive tractors with Flexicoll air seeders were planting barley. These machines were owned by a

German consortium which was custom seeding 10,000 hectares for these Ukrainian farms.

In the larger centres like Zaporozhe it was very evident that there were more shops, more stores with a lot of visible advertising and brand names that I recognised. Merchandise was much more readily available than five years ago. It still remains a problem that among the general populace there is a severe shortage of money.

Another wonderful change I saw was the beautifully restored Mennonite church at Petershagen. The Mennonite presence is returning to Molotschna. You will see the change when you compare this picture with the one on page 27 of the Dec. 1995 issue of Preservings.

## East Reserve.

Changes are taking place here in the "East Reserve" as well. I'm talking about the influx of the "Aussiedler" from Soviet Union-Germany to our area. Even though their number is small in relation to the population of Mennonites in this area they have a significant and valuable contribution to make to us as individuals and as a Mennonite people.

I hope that we will befriend, assist, seek to understand then and as the saying goes "roll some stones from their path"

# Editorial

By Delbert F. Plett, Q.C., editor.

## **Ukraine May 6-20, 2000.**

May 6-20, 2000, I had the privilege of making my fifth visit to the Ukraine. My first three trips were as leader of the Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tours and my fourth, last June, took me to the conference, "Khortitz '99" where I presented a paper.

It was special, for the first time, to be able to devote my time exclusively to getting to know more about the former Mennonite settlements of Imperial Russia and the peoples of Ukraine.

Having already made five day trips to the Molotschna, the homeland of the Kleine Gemeinde, I focused on the Old Colony, and various settlements in the vicinity, and, particularly, those east of Zaporozhe.

I made two visits to Andreasfeld, a settlement founded by the Kleine Gemeinde in 1863, known originally as Markuslandt, presumably after the owner of the land. I discovered as well that the northern corner or suburb of Alexandrowsk (Zaporozhe) was once known as Markushof, presumably the same landowner. In 1945 when all the Mennonite villages in the Soviet Union were renamed, it was called Pawlokischash. I hope to prepare a report on the Andreasfeld/Markuslandt settlement with some photographs for the December 2000 Preservings.

I also had the pleasure of visiting Fürstenlandt (the homeland of the core group of the modern-day Old Colony Church), Sagradowka and Jasykovo. By now I have spent some time in almost all of the Old Colony villages, they seem more scenic and rustic than those of the Molotschna.

## **Registration Requirement.**

One of the new inconveniences for travelers in the Ukraine not staying at hotels is the registration requirement. Visitors must now register with the police in the locale where they are staying.

The intent of reenactment of this "old" Soviet regime presumably is to deal with the many foreign proselytizers who have descended upon Ukraine.

Before I go on, let me be clear that not all proselytizers are bad. Good missionaries are those who go to work with existing Christian congregations, be they Orthodox, Catholic, or whatever, standing in solidarity with the people and helping in building up their communities.

Bad missionaries are those who seek to tear apart communities, alienating young people and adults from their families, preaching separatism and divisiveness. Often times the latter also preach that the only salvation is by the adoption of North American Scofieldian religious culture, dispensationalism and premillennialism. (See guest essay by Dr. Tatiana Raizantseva, T. Shevchenko Institute

of Literature, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, forthcoming in *Preservings*, December, 2000, "Proselytizing in Ukraine: Positive or Negative?"

## **Cultural Legacy.**

Overall, one is continually amazed at the vast cultural legacy of buildings and communities which the Mennonite people left in the Ukraine. Some say as many as 100 settlements (not villages) once dotted the landscape north of the Black Sea.

But the cultural legacy goes much beyond bricks and mortar. As modern-day Ukrainians seek to reestablish their national and spiritual

that everyone must adopt their particular religious culture or join their particular denomination is speaking falsely.

As long ago as 1836, Bishop Klaas Reimer, founder of the Kleine Gemeinde, rejoiced that "...God [was]...allowing the Gospel to go forth." But Ohm Klaas also expressed his profound regret that "...Satan is also zealously sending forth his servants in order that they will falsely expound the Gospel" (*Leaders*, page 145).

## **The Nusch Gemeinde.**

One of the plagues of conservative Mennonites in Latin America, are missionaries



*The Petershagen church, Molochansk, Ukraine. The restoration of this beautiful building was organized by Rev. Frank Dyck, back in Calgary as of April 19, 2000, because of a stroke. 184 people attended the last worship he conducted here. Petershagen, Molotschna, Imperial Russia, was the birthplace of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812. Photo by Orlando Hiebert, April, 2000.*

ethos in the post-Soviet world, they are often searching for historical precedents. Many are impressed by the Mennonite story (of course, all regret its horrific ending under the Soviets).

One individual related that after researching various religions (the wonders of the Internet) including the Orthodox and even so-called Evangelicalism, she was attracted to the Mennonites because its hierarchy had not exploited its adherents as did the others.

Another person noted, through an interpreter, that I had not pressured anyone to adopt the Mennonite faith. My response was that everyone should read, study and decide for themselves what they needed to do. God has called many peoples as His own and believers should be faithful to that call, be it Orthodox, Catholic or Jewish.

Genuine believers are needed in all denominations. Anyone going forth with the message

seeking to turn them away from their Gospel-centric faith and to persuade them to convert to Scofieldian religious culture.

They argue that conservative Mennonites must abandon their religious culture as genuine faith has no culture. Hence the term the "Nusch Gemeinde", i.e. the church which does not believe in anything and claims to have no culture (but typically claiming to hold the only key to heaven).

This of course is a shallow deception. There is probably no religious culture on earth which has more complicated dogma and which is more culturally articulated than so-called Evangelicalism. This religious culture came out of American Fundamentalism in the 1950s and '60s after that term had become a synonym for religious bigotry and intolerance.

American Fundamentalism was articulated by dispensationalist/premillennialist religious culture, largely defined by Scofieldian and



*Jakob Selevestrovich and wife at their home in Baborka, suburb of Zaporozhe, Ukraine (formerly Burwalde, Chortitz Colony, Imperial Russia). Mr. Selevestrovich recalled that the people in his village were starving during the famine of the 1930s. He and others went to the Mennonites who were also starving but nonetheless shared what they had.* Photo by D. Plett, May 2000.

Darbyite dogma which held that the Gospels did not apply in the current age. Even today it is said that 80 per cent of so-called Evangelicals are dispensationalists. Such teachings of course are anathema to the conservative Mennonite faith which is predicated on the opposite premise, namely, that the Gospels and following Christ are the very essence of Christian faith.

#### Faith and Culture.

There are others who argue that culture must be abandoned in order for believers to experience genuine faith. In his editorial of May 3, 2000 (page 2), E.M.C. Messenger editor Terry Smith raises the issue whether his denomination should retain the name "Mennonite". Smith's concern seems to centre on the issue that if "Mennonite means a particular culture, most Canadians are excluded."

I am not sure where this sort of reasoning is going if carried to its logical extreme. Is Smith saying that churches must adopt that particular religious culture which will be acceptable to the biggest percentage of Canadians? Is this the principle which is to govern and vitiate the hand of God working through His people over the past millennia which resulted in the formation of the Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia in 1812 and the Old Kolony Gemeinde in Manitoba in 1875?

If so, we should all become Catholic, still by far the largest Canadian church, and indeed, the largest in the world.

But I suspect that Mr. Smith had something



*The Orthodox Church on the hill overlooking Chortitz-Rosenthal, a modern-day suburb of Zaporozhe, Ukraine. The original church was built by Mennonite entrepreneurs in Chortitz such as the Niebuhrs, Koops, Hildebrand and Pries, Lepp and Wallmann and others so that their workers had a place to worship. Destroyed during the Soviet times, the church has recently been rebuilt and is now actively used for worship.* Photo by D. Plett, May 2000.

else in mind. In fact, he seems to be promoting total absorption by so-called Evangelicalism, others call it "pop" religious culture.

But is it not more important to be faithful to one's spiritual heritage than to abandon beliefs which have already stood for 2000 years merely to gain a few more adherents?

It is my impression that those people who do remain steadfast in their faith will generally be a far more significant testimony. One need only look at the Amish for proof of this statement. Although only small in number, presumably less than 100,000, they speak to millions annually who actually come to see them in their communities and to marvel at a people conformed to Gospel-centric faith.

It is interesting that Mr. Smith titled his article "An Irish Reel, a Shawl Dance and the Cross." He implies that if E.M.C.-ers abandon their "culture" they will see a day when their worship services will include an Irish reel and an Indian Shawl dance.

This seems somewhat deceptive as a study of religious history reveals that historically it has actually been the so-called Evangelicals (or at least their spiritual antecedents, the Fundamentalists) who have been intolerant of other cultures and faiths, being blinded by their messianic belief that they alone are destined to rule the world.

If acceptance of other religious cultures and faiths is actually Smith's goal then he should encourage his readership to return to their conservative Mennonite roots. Through their interactions as a small tolerated minority with hundreds of cultural groups in Imperial Russia as well as in the Americas, they have learned well the meaning of tolerance and accepting other people as individuals of worth in God's kingdom and not merely as pathetic targets for conversion to Scofieldian religious culture.

#### Lessor Faith

There will always be those who for various reasons feel more at home in a different religious culture, be it because of ignorance, lack of proper teaching, or maybe they simply feel more at home elsewhere. This is fine and people should be free to associate with the religious culture of their choice.

From time to time there are also adherents of other religious cultures who become genuinely converted and adopt the Gospel-centric teach-



*Gypsy girls walking from the Chortitz Main Street, Zaporozhe, Ukraine, where the Zentral Schule, Gebietsamt offices and worship house still stand, up the hill to their apartments. With charming smiles the two women shouted, "Don't take our picture."* Photo by D. Plett, May 2000.



The former school house in Eichenfeld, Jasykovo Colony, Ukraine, immediately north of the former Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. View to the southwest. This school was built in 1875. 83 Mennonites were murdered by Machnov anarchists in Eichenfeld in 1919. Photo by D. Plett, May 2000.

ings so clearly enunciated by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, namely, discipleship and the ethos of love and community. They are welcome to associate with a Gemeinde of Russian Mennonite background and/or to form their own based on Irish, Italian, or Ukrainian culture.

But I personally find extremely repugnant Mr. Smith's suggestion that the faith of my grandparents is in some way inferior to that of the religious culture he is promoting.

For me to know them and their faith is for me to know myself and God. True fulfilment as a human being cannot be experienced in the absence of such knowledge.

To advocate that a people should abandon their culture is to suggest they truncate themselves as human beings, lobotomizing themselves, so to speak. One asks the question, what kind of a religious culture seeks this of its adherents and what is the purpose--other than perhaps absolute mind control?

I find it difficult to understand Mr. Smith's complaint about the small image of a windmill featured on the cover of Dr. Harvey Plett's recent book on E.M.C. history. Every symbol Dr. Plett could have chosen would have some cultural connection. Or is Mr. Smith suggesting that it has to be restricted to some generic North American icon?

I do not find it anywhere in the Bible that North American "pop" culture twined with "Scofieldian" religious dogma, is in any way, shape or form, superior to the faith which brought my great-grandparents to Manitoba in the 1870s.

If Mr. Smith wishes to propagate the rites and beliefs of so-called Evangelical religious culture that is his prerogative. But he thereby seems to be rejecting the very thing which originally attracted him to the E.M.C.

#### Ku Klux Klan.

One of the most insidious organizations ever to arise in North America was the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan was founded in the southern States of the former Confederacy in the aftermath of the Civil War to suppress the new found power of blacks and oppose carpetbaggers from the north. The teachings of the secretive organizations were premised on the racial superiority of white Protestant Anglo-Saxons. The Klan was manifested in thousands of beatings, torture and lynchings of blacks, the vast majority of which went unpunished.

The hatred, racism and bigotry propounded by the organization was also directed at Jews, Catholics and immigrants.

By 1922 KKK membership had grown to 3,000,000 (I believe it peaked at around 5,000,000) with chapters across the United States and even in the Prairie Provinces. The membership represented a cross section of the white protestant community including 500,000 women. It became the great social organization for white Protestant America in the 1920s.

The political muscle of the KKK was everywhere in evidence. It completely controlled the political system and law enforcement at the local level in many southern communities and in some State legislatures. At its peak the KKK helped elect six U. S. senators. "In many communities the KKK was the law and clansmen could get away with murder."

The mighty power of the clan was finally broken through the ugly Stepanson affair, when a clan leader raped and beat a white woman on May 9, 1925.

Many KKK leaders were prominent Fundamentalist clergymen who believed that white supremacy was Biblically mandated. It is scary to realize that American Fundamentalism reso-

nated so harmoniously with such a vile and evil movement. **Source:** "Klu Klux Klan: A Secret History," A.&E. Public Access Channel, March 14, 2000.

#### Lynchings.

According to a book published by James Allen, *Without Sanctuary*, at least 4,742 African American were lynched by mobs in the southern U.S.A. between 1882 and 1968.

There were two kinds of lynchings: "At the 'orderly' ones, local bankers and lawyers, attended to keep the bloodlust in check. What that meant is merely that the victim was hanged without torture. At the wilder scenes, the crowd egged itself into a wild frenzy beyond imagining. Before Sam Hose was hanged he was doused with oil and set afire, he had his ears and fingers cut off and the skin stripped from his face. Jesse Washington, a retarded farm worker convicted of killing a white woman, was hung by a chain over a bonfire and repeatedly dipped into the flames."

Often times local newspapers announced the time and place of lynchings. In 1904 the *Vicksburg Evening News* reported how Luther Holdbert and his wife were burned to death by a crowd in Doddsville, Miss. "The couple were tortured with corkscrews that pulled out hunks of flesh. Their fingers were cut off, one by one, and distributed among the crowd as souvenirs."

Frequently the scenes were photographed and the photos sold as postcards. The *Time* article by Richard Lacayo (April 20, 2000, pages 90-91), makes the point that even the



July 19, 1935. Rubin Stacy, falsely accused of assault, lynched in Fort Lauderdale, Fl. The scary part is the faces of the onlookers in the photographs. Photo from Time, April 20, 2000.

Nazis did not stoop to selling souvenirs of Auschwitz.

In their study, James Allen and John Littlefield, collected more than 130 photographs of lynchings which were recently exhibited at Roth Horowitz gallery, New York City running through July 9. Over a hundred of the photos were published in their new book, *Without Sanctuary*.

Many of the leading members of the KKK, which orchestrated these events, were prominent adherents of American Fundamentalist religious culture, indeed, many were clergymen. **Source:** Richard Lacayo, "Blood at the Root," in *Time*, April 20, 2000, pages 90-91.

#### Catholics.

One still hears echoes of the bigoted and racist teachings of this brand of Christian Fundamentalism in some so-called Evangelical denominations and institutions such as Bob Jones University.

Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Seminary, appeared on "Larry King Live" on March 22, 2000. He was asked by Larry King whether he agreed with the statements of Bob Jones III, President of Bob Jones University, that the Catholic Pope was the Anti-Christ. As I understood Mohler's reply, he did not disavow the statement.

Evidently some modern-day Evangelicals still espouse the view that all Catholics are unsaved unbelievers.

Such views of course represent nothing more than medieval bigotry and jingoism.

Conservative Mennonites have no sympathy and have never been party to such demagoguery.

Anabaptist Mennonites were originally persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants. But modern-day conservative Mennonites have peaceful relations with Catholics, which is quite significant considering that large numbers live in Latin America.



August 7, 1930. Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, killed in Marion, Ind. Photo from Time, April 20, 2000.

This should not be surprising in the sense that Catholics, although they have large ecclesiastical structures which conservative Mennonites do not accept or recognize as being Biblically mandated, still maintain orthodox Gospel-centric Biblical teachings. Anyone who questions this statement need only listen briefly to the homilies of Pope John Paul.

In fact, in a time of growing spiritual sensitivity in Catholic, Orthodox and some of the older Protestant churches such as Anglican, United, etc., it is clear that this is where conservative Mennonites should seek and nurture ecumenical contact.

Although there are commonalities between conservative Mennonite and so-called Evangelical denominations these are deceptively superficial, mainly related to the similarities in church structure and polity.

Theologically there is a vast chasm between the Gospel-centric faith of conservative Mennonites and so-called Evangelicals, 80 per cent of whom are articulated by the dispensational teachings of Scofieldian religious culture, thus actually denying the Gospels.

In fact, as already referred to previously, so-called Evangelical missionaries for decades

have actively targeted and attacked conservative Mennonite communities in Latin America and elsewhere.

Not a very good premise for uplifting spiritual fellowship.

#### Apology.

In fairness to the adherents of Fundamentalist religious culture and their modern-day descendants--the Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest and most powerful Fundamentalist body, did some years ago issue an apology to African Americans for teaching that the Bible taught that blacks were racially inferior.

By comparison, Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the Kleine Gemeinde, in 1804 decided not to purchase a large estate in Imperial Russia, because doing so would have meant assuming ownership of a large body of serfs, something he regarded as contrary to the teachings of the Gospels. The Mennonite community at Lower Barton Creek, Belize, believes it wrong to employ people, as all are equal and one should not be in servitude to another.

According to Richard K. McMaster, in 1663 "the reformer Plocknoy and his 25 Mennonist families" from Amsterdam had rejected human bondage for their colony on the Delaware." In 1688, Garrett Heinricks, Dirk and Abraham op de Graff, and Francis Daniel Pastorius, Quakers of Dutch Mennonite background, signed the first formal protest against slavery in North America (McMaster, *Land, Piety and Peoplehood* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1985). pages 42-43.

What a difference a religious culture can make!

I am proud of mine. I think I'll hang on to it for a little while yet!

Are you proud of yours?

## Debate - Mexican Mennonites:

**For the Negative: Dr. H. Leonard Sawatzky, Dept. of Geography, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba.**

The accumulation of archival materials underpinning the cultural and genealogical history of a people is a laudable undertaking. Discovering, collecting and collating are, however, no offence intended, "mechanical" endeavours. Interpretation, within the appropriate folk-internal and greater-world context is, by contrast, "intellectual". The composition of valid folk-history demands of its writers great breadth and depth of knowledge of historical fact, and of the philosophical and practical (sacred and profane, if you like) motivations and influences, internal and external, that infused their conduct through time (history). In the absence of a rigorous intellectual approach, myth becomes history, and history, myth. The average reader of the resulting published text, not being in a position to critically differentiate, will tend to assume the interpreta-

tion presented to be essentially unassailable, especially if it enjoys the endorsement of "recognized authorities", whereupon it quickly achieves the status of "quotable", even "unimpeachable" source to future scholars.

History representing also, in part, the geography of events, it is important to render nouns, both common and proper, accurately. It is disturbing to see common place-names, or those of landscape features, persistently misspelled. That this should be so with respect to spellings using the Latin alphabet is especially puzzling (it is Zacatecas, not Zachatecus; Nuevo Ideal, not Neuvo Ideal; Cuauhtémoc, not Cuauthemoc; Tarahumara, not Tarra Humara; etc. etc.).

Common Russian terms have long since acquired standardized latinized spellings (Kolkhoz, not Kulhusz; Kurgany, not Gorgony;

Ordzhonikidze, not Ordzomkidze; Dnieper, not Dneiper; etc. etc.).

Repeated orthographic encounters such as these mislead the hitherto uninformed reader. In the informed reader they raise the disconcerting thought that if "onjefá" was good enough in this respect, perhaps "onjefá" was also good enough in the accumulation and rendering of facts. In the same context, Low German words often have so unique a spelling conferred upon them (orthographic license?) that a phonetic pronunciation hardly even approximates the spoken word. The orthography developed by Arnold Dyck accommodates the phonetic nuances of Plattdeutsch very adequately.

A particularly precarious interpretation of historical fact relating to Mennonite emigration from Canada is repeated reference to "ethnic cleans-

ing”, “expulsion”, etc. An editor who is a member of the legal profession, and a Queen’s Counsel at that, cannot be excused for endorsing the view that they were “expelled” at the behest of Premier Norris of Manitoba and/or other politicians. No elected official, not even Parliament, can exile any Canadian-born citizen, nor deprive him or her of citizenship.

As a case in point, in late 1935, when the Mennonite colonies in Mexico were undergoing severe harassment, the British Consul-General (Canadians were also British subjects then) let them know that “if....the Dominion Government....recognizes them as Canadian subjects....it is due to the fact that in so far as they are still Canadians in law the issuance of....documents cannot be denied them”. In fact, Mennonites who are third, fourth and fifth generation descendants of the emigrants of the 1920s and 1940s, and who have never even set foot in Canada, commonly retain Canadian citizenship. Thousands of Mennonites born of “Canadian” parents have expediently availed themselves of this to partake, permanently or temporarily, of the advantages and opportunities accessible to them in this country.

The totally erroneous “expulsion” theory merely underpins and magnifies an already extant, flawed vernacular history strongly focused upon persecution and martyrdom. It is neither appropriate nor acceptable, by implication, to equate the basis of Mennonite emigration from Canada with that of post-Revolutionary Mennonite emigration from the Soviet Union! Indeed, recourse to historical facts would reveal that the “necessity” to depart from Canada was to a considerable degree based upon internal power politics, coupled with erroneous perceptions of the outside world. The Mennonite secular and sectarian power structure was underpinned by collective, colony-held land titles, subject to which the individual proprietor had no right of possession anchored in law. This leverage was absent in Canada, where, despite the Reserves, homesteads were individually registered, thus from the outset diluting “colony” authority in respect to individual members of the community.

Granted, Anglo—Canadian politicians and bureaucrats were often arrogant and lacking in insight. However, they also had great difficulty in communicating with Mennonite leaders who spoke little or no English, even two generations after their arrival in Canada. Moreover, when not stonewalling, these leaders commonly threatened wholesale emigration, in the expectation that the government would capitulate rather than lose so economically significant a segment of the population. Such persons as could bridge the linguistic and cultural chasm between the antagonist factions not infrequently were pursuing an agenda of their own. Among the more cogent facts are:

- 1.) Private schools were never placed under interdiction. They did have to have qualified teachers to instruct the prescribed curriculum in the English language, however.
- 2.) There was never a proscription on the teaching of foreign languages and religious subjects,

whether in private or in public schools, outside of the prescribed curriculum. Public school premises could be so utilized at no charge.

3.) Reluctance to leave Canada was so great that, ultimately, church leaders, comprehending the threat to their hitherto near-absolute authority posed by a potentially more erudite body of parishioners, liberally invoked the threat of excommunication to “encourage” compliance. Significantly, many private-school (i.e. German-only) teachers, despairing of being able to meet even the modest qualifications set out by the Department of Education, backed the pro-emigration clergy. Family patriarchs, similarly anticipating erosion of their authority, in many cases also opted for emigration. The plainly-stated prospect of being disinherited persuaded more than a few of the younger generation to comply with patriarchal urgings to leave Canada.

In 1889 Aeltester Johann Funk attempted to persuade the Bergthalter Gemeinde that, by establishing a teacher-training school, the Mennonites would be in a position, far into the future, of controlling the classroom, and therefore the impact of whatever curriculum content the “worldly” authorities prescribed. 54 agreed; the rest retreated into a truculent, suspicious stance vis-a-vis government, coupled with persistent fear-mongering regarding its supposed intentions. It seems 1889 may have been the last (and only) time even a small group of “Kanadier” Mennonites ever proposed to build a better mouse-trap to juxtapose to the one proffered by the government. A “cult of victimology” is inappropriate to the schools issue.

As to the post-World War II emigrants of Chortitzer, Sommerfelder, Old Colony, Reinländer and Kleine Gemeinde persuasion, there was, along with “several of the above” the carefully nurtured “victimology” attached to the imposition of Selective Service. The “appropriation” of much of the economic potentials of the “conscientious objectors” was, to all appearances, resented more or less equally by both the C.O.s and their fathers.

In the course of many conversations with individuals of both generations in Mexico, Belize and Paraguay in the late 1960s and early ‘70s, Alternative Service came to the fore, unsolicited, as a significant factor influencing the determination to emigrate. None of them, however, had renounced their Canadian citizenship. Quite a number of them in fact ultimately returned to Canada, to the benefits of Medicare and in time to qualify for Old Age Security in their autumn years.

During the war, notwithstanding their uncompromising determination to regain control of their schools and German-only instruction, the government, in the course of the National Manpower Registration of 1940, never refused to, or even balked at recording their nationality as “Dutch”. The claim was historically justifiable, but it was also enormously convenient. Incidentally, the implementation of the Child Allowance Act in 1945 was perceived by many as a thinly-disguised plot by the government to initiate a basis for “justified” claims to “cannon fodder” in future conflicts. Moreover, patriarchal pre-eminence

within the family was seen as deliberately undermined by virtue of the “baby bonus” being paid to the mothers.

Another issue is the presentation of conservative Mennonite colonies as rustic and, by implication, stress-free redoubts of the good life (except for the unbidden intrusions of M.C.C. and “sheep-stealers”). A superficial encounter may indeed result in that impression. Barefoot urchins, everyone in “traditional” dress, and a general absence of “inessentials” support that view. A careful look behind the scenes reveals ecclesiastically-imposed conformity, extending also to the perpetuation of a school system incapable of imparting more than marginal literacy, conducted in a language not only alien to the country of residence, but alien also to everyday vernacular usage. High birth rates, and economic productivity constrained by restriction to basic, mainly agrarian—related activities within a chronically inadequate structure of physical resources, are reflected in a number of manifestations:

- 1) recurring need to establish new colonies, before an adequate level of supporting prosperity has been achieved in the mother colonies. Indeed, the driving force behind a number of recent hivings-off has been a seemingly irreversible level of destitution in existing colonies.
- 2) child labour, to a point that would qualify as abuse and/or neglect. Many issues of *Die Mennonitische Post* report accidental injuries and/or death involving children as young as seven years, as a consequence of being required to operate horse-drawn or motorized equipment.
- 3) a high incidence of misdemeanours and petty crime involving young people who are prohibited from engaging in more focused and wholesome activities such as sports.
- 4) a disconcertingly high incidence of “nervous disorders”, particularly among younger women with large families and inadequate incomes. “Nerve medicine”, both prescription and over-the-counter, according to regional doctors and pharmacists, is far and away the largest single category of pharmaceuticals consumed.
- 5) a disconcertingly high rate of suicide among men (and occasionally women) below middle age, not infrequently leaving behind large families whom they could not adequately support.
- 6) a disconcertingly high level of alcoholism and, increasingly, other forms of substance abuse, particularly among younger men.

Now let us condense the foregoing to something approaching a common denominator. Firstly, let us face the fact that, in conservative Mennonite society as in the rest of the world, material success (*du best waut du hast*) is a primary criterion of social status.

Foremost, in this context, is ownership of real estate, which establishes one as a ratepayer with a right to vote on colony issues. This, in effect, establishes a male, property-owning franchise. All others are “*ommundig*” in matters of secular colony affairs. The propertied, subject to the approval of the “Lehrdienst” (clergy) establish the rules for all.

Pre-eminent are the Aeltester. As in the Holy Roman Empire, in which the Popes were mightier

than secular rulers, who could be excommunicated, so are Aeltester mightier than Vorsteher. If the exodus from Canada in the 1920s is described as “ethnic cleansing”, then the liberal extension of the threat - and imposition - of excommunication in respect to otherwise legitimate aspects of personal conduct may plausibly be classed as “psycho-terror”.

Occasionally, as in the case of Pope Clement VII versus King Henry VIII, an Aeltester misjudges, invoking the “Donnadag” (=Inquisition), excommunicates too enthusiastically and, so to speak, prepares the ground for “sheep-stealers”. The tensions, conflicts and social disintegration that ensue have rarely, if ever, been resolved through the cultivation of greater latitude within the context of “conformity”. More commonly, the affected colony is rent asunder, confessionally, socially and economically, with one faction, whatever the sacrifice, physically removing itself to another location where, predictably, the process will be repeated within years or, at most, a few decades.

The material perspectives of conservative Mennonite society have not changed a great deal during the past two centuries, and are reflected in environmental impact. In South Russia they had created dust-bowl conditions by 1833 (Hildebrandts Zeittafel), just a few decades after initial settlement. In Manitoba, by the 1890s, it

was not uncommon for the wind to expose the drilled seed before it germinated. The “Dirty Thirties” were particularly dirty in those parts of Southern Manitoba where Mennonite diligence had most effectively pulverized the soil.

In Mexico, mini-ravines laced the slopes of the Bustillos and Santiaguillo Valleys within a few years of the Mennonites’ arrival. Wasteful surface-drainage works deprived the water-table of recharge. Persistent expansion of well-irrigation has come close to exhausting the Bustillos aquifer, and has already dropped it some six metres in the much smaller colony at Nuevo Ideal in Durango.

In Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Belize, Paraguay and Bolivia valuable stands of timber - oak, ebony, mahogany, lapacho, quebracho, and palo Santo, to name but a few -have been harvested (and, to a large extent, wasted and eliminated) in the single-minded extraction of wealth and/or the pursuit of land for commercial cultivation and grazing. No environment-modifying forestry, no regeneration or replanting has been put into practice.

The 8000-or-so Mennonites who left Canada in the 1920s and 1940s now collectively number, in Mexico, Belize, Paraguay, Bolivia, Argentina and Canada, at least 100,000. At the time of the main migrations in the 1920s, world population was approaching two billion. As the result of what is universally termed a

“population explosion”, it is now some six billion. If the rest of the world’s population had emulated the “Kanadier” Mennonites in this respect, world population would now be not six billion, but twenty-five billion! Or would it? Could it?

*Preservings* is doing a creditable job of collecting and collating historically relevant material which, to a large extent, would otherwise eventually be lost. That said, it should most definitely eschew tendentious, insupportable interpretations and distance itself from myth-making. Failing that, it will need to co-opt any and all who are qualified to render valid counter-interpretations, or else resort to “shooting the messengers” by discrediting them and rendering them mute or, to resort to the appropriate expression in the “cherished” German, (which, paradoxically, among Mennonites in the Western Hemisphere is almost everywhere nearly dead through neglect) “mundtot”.

“H. Leonard Sawatzky”

**About the Writer:** Dr. H. Leonard Sawatzky is a Professor of Geography at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. He is the author of *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (University of California Press, 1971), 387 pages, and considered by many as an authority on the topic.

## Debate - Mexican Mennonites:

**Rebuttal: Editor - Delbert F. Plett Q.C., Steinbach, Manitoba.**

There is little in the Russian Mennonite story that matches for drama or tragedy, the account of the Reinländer (Old Kolonier) departure from Canada in the 1920s, be it by way of flight, expulsion, exile or whatever term one chooses. Their story has yet to be told with a thorough interpretative analysis, based on their own perspective, primary documentation, and placing them within the context of the conservative Mennonite movement, a legitimate and recognized theological religious confession with a history dating to the Reformation.

Spelling, as with all rendition of facts, is critical to such a presentation. I counted three spelling mistakes in Dr. Sawatzky’s paper (which as editor I have corrected), “repeet”, “focussed”, and “acquier”, not to mention that the plural of “Aeltester” is typically rendered as “Aeltesten”. There are also a number of questionable spelling usages such as “endeavor” which is “endeavour” in U.K. English.

This reminds me of a judge hearing a life and death submission on behalf of an innocent client, only to overrule same on the grounds of a typing mistake in the argument. Pedanticism can be counter productive.

As far as the comment that as “a Queen’s Counsel [I]...cannot be excused for endorsing the view that they were expelled”, I disagree. In my view the appointment of “Queen’s Counsel” obligates one to speak out regarding injustice. One of the disappointments I have with some of the first generation of Mennonites in academia is

that they were willing to sacrifice their own heritage and culture if that advanced their careers. Instead of interpreting their own people to the world, they projected the interpretations of others against their own people and became harsher Anglo-conformists than the Anglo-Canadians themselves. In fairness it must be acknowledged that in some instances they could not speak up for fear of losing their jobs and positions in society.

Of course, even more odious are those puppets of American Fundamentalist religious culture who turned on their own people like hyenas seeking fanatically to disintegrate families and communities which God had wrought.

The fact that there were 5493 prosecutions against Mennonites in Saskatchewan from 1918-1925 and as well an “epidemic of fining” in Manitoba is well documented. The accused individuals included third-generation citizens who relied on civil rights guaranteed to them by the Dominion Government Order-in-Council in 1873. In many cases goods and property were forcibly seized by Writs of Execution and leaders such as teachers and ministers imprisoned for their faith.

Of course, Mennonites were far from alone in feeling the brunt of Anglo-conformity hatred and prejudice. Ukrainians were imprisoned during WWI as enemy aliens and Francophones were harshly oppressed, schools closed, etc. This was over and above the usual anti-semitism and oppression of First Nations people which char-

acterized Canadian society at the time.

In family law there is the doctrine of “constructive desertion”, namely, if one spouse abuses the other so severely that the victim must leave the matrimonial home, it is not considered desertion. Rather it is deemed to be constructive desertion on the part of the abusive spouse.

The number of prosecutions means that practically everyone of the 2000 or so families “leaving” Manitoba and Saskatchewan, must have felt the force of the jack boot.

I believe that most open-minded people will recognize that what took place was at best comparable to constructive desertion. If this happened anywhere else in the world, that a community had to leave their homeland because of repeated imprisonment, expropriation of property, harassment, etc, they would be considered as “exiles”. (Presumably Mennonites were spared more serious physical harm such as beatings and tar-and-featherings as experienced by their co-religionists in the U.S.A. by virtue of the fact that they lived in massive territorial enclaves.)

Within this context it was, of course, morally and ethically proper that these “expatriates” and their descendants retain Canadian citizenship. Just as a spouse who is forced by abusive conduct to leave a home does not thereby lose her marital property rights, likewise “exiled” citizens should not thereby lose their citizenship rights.

The ethically proper alternative would be for the Dominion Government to compensate the expatriates for breach of its guarantees relating to

language, education and cultural rights granted in 1873.

Further compensation would be required for 50 years of building up large territorial enclaves in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. According to G. F. Galbraith (page 42) the bridges, roads and other infrastructure built by the OK-ers in the R. M. of Reinland were of the best quality in Manitoba.

Then there would be the matter of the best farmland in the Province being liquidated at a fraction of its actual value because of the unfortunate circumstances surrounding their departures—seizures and auctions of private property by writs of execution, imprisonments, etc. The fact that the OK community was among the wealthiest in Manitoba no doubt added to the fury of Anglo-conformists, this being an insult to their Orangemen racial theory, that British culture was the most civilized and advanced in human history. By now we are talking billions, not millions.

(1) The comment “that private schools were never placed under interdiction” is misleading. First of all, it is a misnomer to talk about private schools, raising the misleading image of a few radical parents throwing together a home school. The proper reference is to Mennonite denominational schools, not private schools. The Mennonite confessional schools were public schools under a system operated by the various church denominations in accordance with traditions going back two centuries.

(2) The comment that “there never was a proscription on the teaching of foreign languages” would ring hollow to thousands of students who were physically beaten for speaking either of their mother tongues on district school property. Certainly this was an odd way of not having “a proscription”, given the clear and unambiguous wording in the 1873 Dominion Government “privilegium”.

Nor are such statements consistent with the work of Dr. Adolf Ens (*Subjects or Citizens: The Mennonite Experience in Canada 1870-1925*, the authority in the field.

A teachers’ training facility similar to the “central school” or secondary school a number of OK-ers had attended in Imperial Russia was no doubt a good idea. It provided depth to the teachers’ conferences, teachers’ exchanges and visitations during examinations, and individual tutelage, which were standard components of the Mennonite confessional school systems.

Unfortunately the idea of a secondary school became associated with Aeltester Johann Funk who autocratically pushed his Bergthalers Gemeinde toward American Revivalist religious culture, and with Rev. H. Ewert, whose view of the conservative Mennonites was that they had just as much need for enlightenment as the savages in darkest Africa. The result, quite understandably, was that OK-ers backed away from the “central school” or secondary school idea, already a part their educational tradition and experience.

Even today, many “outsiders” (including missionaries) pursue the same strategy in Mexico of separatism and divisiveness, each one endeav-

ouring to expand their own “little” empire, instead of working from the inside helping, encouraging and building up—the genuine Christian response.

By spiking the “educational” agenda with a movement to adopt an alien religious culture as well as promoting Anglo-conformity, Aeltester Funk and Rev. Ewert must take the blame for the failure of OK-ers to continue with and/or at least accommodate a “secondary school”. Such a facility would naturally have served as a teacher upgrading resource. How convenient it has been over the decades to blame the OK-ers for everything, especially since they did not believe in defending themselves—even against false charges.

In view of the complete lack of compensation by the Dominion government, it is inappropriate to raise the issue of Mexican Mennonites returning to collect old age pensions. In the next breath Dr. Sawatzky complains about conservatives not taking family allowance.

This places the OK-ers into a no win situation. If they return from Mexico and receive social benefits they are scamming the Canadian taxpayer, although all other emigrants are entitled to the same privilege. But if they refuse to accept family allowances, Dr. Sawatzky views this as evidence that they are a corrupt patriarchal society, using this as a tool for manipulation.

Dr. Sawatzky raises a concern regarding the presentation of conservative Mennonite colonies as “rustic”, etc. In reality no presentation is needed. A knowledge of the colonies reveals that the vast majority consist of loving, functional families, living and growing up together with parents and children working and playing side by side. In most cases there is a good and wholesome program of activities found among them.

Obviously there are dysfunctional families among them as is also the case with so-called “progressive” Mennonite communities in Canada. In terms of many leading indicators such as divorce rates, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, suicide, emotional disorders, etc. Latin American communities lag far behind. Reference in this regard is made to the recent Isaac Block study which showed alarming rates of spousal abuse among educated assimilated Canadian Mennonites.

To cast every social more and protocol as “ecclesiastically-imposed conformity” is ridiculous. Every community in the world has social mores and borders. Judging by what one sees on TV religious programs so-called Evangelical religious culture is largely articulated by Hollywood and the “pop” culture of the day, whatever is in vogue.

When Dr. Sawatzky refers to “chronically inadequate structure of physical resources”, is he referring to the colonies near Cuauhtemoc, considered by many to be the show-piece of agriculture in northern Mexico? Or to the new settlements in Campeche in southern Mexico where poorer families hope to make a living on small holdings as market gardeners?

Regarding child labour, it is well known that in traditional rural societies children are socialized by working together with their parents, help-

ing from the earliest age. In fact this is one of the most wonderful things of the lifestyle Mexican Mennonites have preserved. Most Canadian Mennonites of our age were brought up this way.

Does Dr. Sawatzky seriously prefer the Canadian system where most young Mennonite families are so impoverished that both spouses must work outside of the home to raise enough money to meet the “ecclesiastically-imposed conformity” of their church and cultural community, leaving the nurture of their children to nursery, preschools, etc.?

In any case, it is deceptive to insinuate that children working with and helping their parents on the family farm in any way resembles the sweat shops and/or child slave labour found in some third world countries.

As far as farm accidents are concerned, they happen. One year ago a wealthy immigrant family in our area tragically lost a little child who fell off the back of a tractor and went through a baler. Should we now disparage all Canadian farmers? All wealthy European immigrants? Or all Europeans?

As far as “wholesome activities such as sports” are concerned, there has been an active program in the Cuauhtemoc area for years organized by the wonderful Bram Siemens. This covers about half of the Mexican Mennonite community of 60,000 souls and also serves as an excellent example of how genuine Christians can stand in solidarity with their brethren and sisters helping them to build up instead of tearing down.

It is my impression that there is much more trouble with petty crime and juvenile delinquency coupled with drug use among Canadian Mennonite young people than in Mexico.

Regarding the “high incidence of ‘nervous disorder’”, it is probably true that “nerve medicines” are the highest single drug dispensed by pharmacies. This is what pharmacies do, that is their business.

It is rather cynical to mention this in the Mexican Mennonite context, since these statements apply equally well across North America. Statistics show that North Americans have among the highest rates of “emotional disorder” in the world caused by their high stress lifestyles, lack of communities, social insecurity, etc.

It is my understanding that among different confessions, Catholics have the lowest rate of emotional disorder and Evangelicals the highest, presumably caused by the constant denigration and manipulation of the human spirit found in the latter religious culture, especially during the height of its legalistic and dogmatic fervour in the 1940s and ‘50s.

Dr. Sawatzky refers to the high rate of suicide. Suicide is typically seen as an affliction of the affluent. According to one source (Kay Jamison, *Night Falls Fast*) one in 100 Americans (that includes Canadians) will die of suicide. The figure is 1 in 200 world wide. In America 30,000 every year or about 1 per 8000 commit suicide.

When I discussed Dr. Sawatzky’s allegation with members of the Mexican Mennonites History Society, in February, 1999, I was told that they had possibly three suicides (in Cuauhtemoc) since they started keeping records in the 1960s.

This is about one-tenth the American average. It is cynical to quote statistics in isolation knowing that by implication the readers will interpret same as reflecting negatively on a particular culture.

I can see, though, where a lot of pressure is put on returnees from Mexico, when they are told by caregivers (including those with an underhanded agenda to add new converts to their particular religious culture) that they must condemn their faith and culture as deficient. Such negative contextualization adds to the already high stress of immigrants seeking to establish themselves in a new country and must drive many to emotional disorders, substance abuse, and even suicide in some instances.

As far as alcoholism is concerned, Dr. Sawatzky presents no proof that the rates are higher than for drug and alcohol use among Canadian Mennonites. Sorry, but young people standing around on a village street in Mexico on a Sunday afternoon enjoying a cold beer does not count.

Dr. Sawatzky raises again the image of those "evil" Aeltesten, a fraudulently false characterization popularized by Canadian writers such as Pat Friesen, Di Brandt, Rudy Wiebe, etc. A study of our history reveals that 99 percent of the time, the Aeltesten have been faithful men of God, morally and ethically upright and wholesome individuals who spent their lives without remuneration in the service of the church of God.

As is well known, many Canadian Mennonite church communities are controlled by a few wealthy businessmen. In the wider so-called Evangelical religious culture, huge church enterprises are often controlled by autocratic megalomaniacs lacking in morality. Presumably the much publicized cases of Jim Baker, Jimmey Swaggart and Oral Roberts are only the tip of the iceberg. A recent article in *Christianity Today* bemoans the frequency of moral lapses among so-called Evangelical clergy. Hardly a great epithet either. But that's the reality of life. Dr. Sawatzky is correct that there are cases where Aeltesten have cruelly and harshly imposed their will on their parishioners. The leading examples are Aeltester Bernhard Fast (1783-1861), Halbstadt, Molotschna, and Aeltester Johann Funk (1836-1917), Alt-Berghthal, W.R., Manitoba.

But here's a newsflash: in both cases a heart-wrenching schism was caused when the gentlemen in question adopted Separatist-Pietist and/or Revivalist religious culture and then ruthlessly attempted to impose this apostasy on their people, against the will of their people.

Other Aeltesten have implemented a "retreat and retrench" strategy to preserve the best for their communities. The 1874 emigration can be viewed in this way.

Not all retrenchments have been as successful but many have. Because of NAFTA, it may not be possible for smaller dairy farmers in Cuauhtemoc to continue the family farm lifestyle. By relocating to the "south" (Campeche) they hope they can make a living on small holdings with labour intensive truck farming and thereby perpetuate their lifestyle. The same reasoning applies to the purchase of land in Bolivia, some of the best land Mennonites have ever farmed.

It is interesting that when western farmers protest about the loss of the family farm lifestyle in Canada, government coffers are opened and grant money pours forth. When conservative Mennonites experience the same thing, they incur only ridicule from experts such as Dr. Sawatzky.

To blame conservative Mennonites for the drought in south Russia in 1833 is ridiculous. The acreages they were actually tilling were far too small to have such an impact. It is equally ludicrous to blame Mennonite farmers for the dirty 30's in Western Canada.

We must have been reading different history books and talking to different survivors as it was my impression that the Mennonite territorial enclaves survived the depression with much less trauma than almost anywhere else in North America. Dr. Sawatzky may wish to refer to Dr. Donald Worster, a leading American environmental historian, who refers favourably to the farming practices of Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in Haskell County, Kansas, during the 1930s dustbowl. The East Reserve was a refuge for hundreds of families including many Russländer, who lost everything in other areas such as Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Dr. Sawatzky's reference to mini-ravines in the Bustillos valley is cynical. The same are found in every farming area of the world. When it rains in northern Mexico dried-up creeks become a torrent within the hour. Millions spent on concrete dams and aqueducts would not solve the problem.

Aquifer tables are dropping in most areas of intensive irrigation, including Orange County, California, or Winkler, Manitoba, for that matter. To single out Mennonites in Mexico is ridiculous.

In fact, if Dr. Sawatzky is so concerned about the environment, he should be protesting the conversion to environmentally harmful coal and oil generated electricity in Durango. Would windmill technology not be cleaner and more efficient given that the resourceful OK-ers could design and build it all themselves? Is it possible that such solutions are not acceptable to some outsiders as it would actually accommodate the culture and mores of the more conservative OK-ers, not to mention those "evil Aeltesters"?

At the same time Dr. Sawatzky has omitted to mention that there are probably few farming areas in the world that look as prosperous and fertile as the Bustillos Valley on an August morning when the sun rises over the Sierra Madres in the east, splashing its golden rays across 100 kilometres of irrigated Mennonite cornfields and herds of lowing Holstein cattle.

As for Mennonites harvesting the timber of lands which they have purchased, or making a living in lumbering, I suppose that is a terrible charge of which they are guilty.

But so is all of North America, Europe and most of the civilized world, except for Prince Philip in England, of course, who has probably never yet chopped down a tree on his carefully groomed palace grounds.

What Dr. Sawatzky is really saying is that it was okay for first world countries to eliminate

forests and pitch mining slag all over, but if third world countries want the same development they are raping the environment. Something seems to be wrong with this picture.

To say that "no regeneration" has been put into practice is an outright deception as areas such as Menno Colony in Paraguay or the Bustillos Valley in Mexico are under productive agricultural regimes.

As far as the population increase, it is certainly proof of high testosterone levels and good blood lines, the results of decades of low stress lifestyle.

I suppose one could also argue that the growth in population (which in fact could be closer to 150,000) was God's way of blessing the OK-ers for being true to their faith. They now form a pool of good wholesome people who will help revitalize and sustain the Canadian Mennonite community as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is important as many among us are abandoning Gospel-centric faith in favour of "pop" religious culture.

After all it is not the Yuppie "Menno" from the 'burbs in his Ford Explorer popping off a can of beans at the neighbourhood food bank as he rushes off to execute a few quick trades of hi-tech stocks, who upholds the popular image of Mennonites to the world.

Rather, it is the very same humble Old Koloniers, whom Dr. Sawatzky deprecates, or the Amish farmers, driving their horse and buggies to the fields, whose values of a simple lifestyle and Gospel-centric faith resonate so well with the post-modern world.

It is ironic how quick Dr. Sawatzky and other "progressive" Mennonites have been to take advantage of this popular image when they are lobbying governments for concessions and grants, considering how negatively they have treated those who are the source of that image.

The final point raised by Dr. Sawatzky, about shooting the messenger is the refuge of those without valid arguments for their position.

Surely an issue as fundamental as the wholesomeness of a community of 60,000 souls deserves vigorous debate. Most of the organizations active among the Mexican Mennonites have their own media outlets to popularize their view. Predator religious cultures such as the Rudnerweider use their denominational paper to spread their interpretation that redemption is necessary and can only come by propagation and adoption of Scofieldian religious culture.

Only the Mexican Mennonites themselves do not have a voice. *Preservings* has tried to present their own point of view.

In conclusion, I fail to understand why so many seemingly intelligent people (be they Anglo-conformists or even so-called Evangelical missionaries) seem to be determined by "hook or by crook" to denigrate the Mexican Mennonites.

What's the point of it all?

Wouldn't it be so much simpler and healthier if we could all learn to accept them as the wonderful and fully soteriologic human beings they are?

— The Editor, D. Plett, Q.C.

# Letters

We welcome letters to the editor and appreciate feedback from our readers and suggestions as to how we can fulfil our function better. We welcome criticism of articles and editorial commentary. Traditional conservative Mennonite communities such as the Kleine Gemeinde, Chortitzer, Sommerfelder and Old Coloniers, were shaped by constant debate and adversarial dialogue. Contrary to those who decry and condemn vigorous critique and passionate debate which has characterized the Mennonite faith since the Reformation, we celebrate and applaud the same as evidence of genuine spirituality and personal integrity and as a process essential to the advancement of historical truth and true grass-roots democracy. We will assume that all letters can be published, unless a contrary intention is indicated. We reserve the right not to publish any particular letter and/or not to respond to a letter, particularly if it refers to an issue already previously dealt with. Please keep all letters short (under 300 words) and to the point. We reserve the right to return, discard, edit and/or shorten letters as deemed necessary.

*Saskatoon, Sask.  
November 28, 1999*

Dear Del,

Working with you on the Aeltester Johann Wiebe project has been such a rewarding experience; rewarding since we could kick-start the 125 year celebrations to see the leader of the Reinlander Mennoniten Gemeinde from the perspective of his own writings in our own language. There is no doubt in my mind that we have done what God was asking of us. There are still loose ends that will need attention but we will do these.

How does one express appreciation for all your hard work and effort into making this a possibility? For the hours spent in translation, thinking back and forth from German to English, searching for the correct words, frustrations at wondering what really was this man saying. **THANK YOU.**

How does one express appreciation for all the hours spent at the computer to produce articles with correct data and to set up each page for the printers--all the while the telephone is ringing! For all your telephone calls, postage, and complimentary copies of Preservings. **MERCI BEAUCOUP.**

How does one express appreciation for your desire and eagerness to 'cross the river' and find out more about a group of people who lost so much and now will find the doorway to our birth-right--the God of our forefathers and the miracle of His Son's resurrection?

You are blessed with a great gift and we highly value your generosity to us as a family. **DANKE SCHOEN.** "Elaine Wiebe"

*Box 37, Kola  
Manitoba, R0M 1B0  
November 25, 1999*

Dear Mr. Plett:

Recently it was brought to my attention that there are unincorporated Cemeteries in the West Reserve. And as such the land owners may remove the headstones and plow the land.

How does one go about preserving these Cemeteries? Is there a Historical Society in the West Reserve? What are the legal costs, surveyors, land, others....

I know there are also unmarked graves in the one cemetery. They say there is no map of record kept of who are all buried there. There is a caretaker. I do not know if these cemeteries are family or community one, just that family is buried terre. It does not seem to be a Church related cemetery.

Please advise, "Mrs. Agatha Rempel"  
**Editor's Note:** Mrs. Rempel was referred to the "Monuments Committee" of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Inc., Att: Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein, o/c Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4 or phone 1204-888-6781.

*Dec 3/99  
11202-89th St.  
Fort St. John  
B.C., V1J 5N3*

Hello!

Enclosed please find a donation to the historical society. Sorry I'm so tardy in sending it. I look forward to my next copy of your magazine. Sincerely, "Judith Kientz"

*Dec 1/99  
Box 181, Crystal City  
Manitoba, R0K 0N0*

Dear Delbert,

I enjoy "Preservings" a lot; we have found much information that is directly related to our families even though our primary historical connection is with the West Reserve. You need to be congratulated for putting out this publication. Enclosed is a cheque for \$20.00 to cover my membership for the next year.

I would like to draw your attention to page 35 of the June 1999 edition of "Preservings". This picture of the matriarch in her living room needs some explanation. I have seen it in a number of publications and it has been displayed at times in local museums but her identity has never been

*Box 994, Altona  
Man., R0G 0B0*

Dear Sir:

The publication "Preservings" is interesting and enlightening. I am encouraged that there is finally a refutation expressed that the 1870s Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba were mostly "poor and simple pioneers". I think we have been silent far too long in allowing ourselves to be categorized in that manner. "Art K. & Mary Dyck" Editor's : The worst is that "our" children start believing the lies because the truth was not expressed and documented. How many thousands have not left our assemblies as a result?

*Jan 3, 2000*

Dear Editor:

It is with enthusiasm that we await the arrival of *Preservings*. Enjoy also the articles from the West Reserve. Enclose cheque for one year subscription. Keep up the good work. "Menno Braun" Box 672, Altona, R0G 0B0

*Dec 16/99*

Enclosed please find our annual membership renewal for \$20.00. Thank-you for the very interesting *Preservings* which we receive several times [twice actually] a year. "Harv Klassen" Box 21301, Steinbach, Man., R0A 2T3



*"Trinjche Meum". From Preservings, No. 14, page 35. "The matriarch rests from her labours."*

No. 16, June, 2000

Theodore (Ted) E. Friesen  
Box 720, Altona  
Manitoba, Canada  
January 12, 2000

Dear Delbert:

Attached is my Membership Renewal Form for the coming year, and cheque of \$20.00.

I want to comment again on the latest issue of Preservings #15, December, 1999.

Delbert you have done it again and have produced a monumental magazine.

Congratulations! There are so many things here that are interesting and I want to comment simply on a few.

The article "Poor and Simple" written by you. I believe you gave this as a paper recently. Most interesting and informational. The Thesis simply is that people in the three groups coming in 1874 who were not as simple or as poor as has been sometimes portrayed. I think it is a very valid statement. I know my grandfather's brother Beirhardt Klippenstein was a well-to-do man when he came to Canada. But as you know also the "affluent" people brought along all their poor, and consequently there may have been some equalization or levelling of income.

The paper on Elder Johann Wiebe is also very interesting. Another example of able and dedicated leadership in the religious field. We also know that there was good leadership in the civil area. Reeves Jakob Peters and Isaac Mueller attest to that.

The Guest Essay by David Schroeder provides further proof of a sound basic position, theologically and otherwise of the conservative groups. I appreciate David's calm and reasoned evaluation of the positions.

The obituary, meditation and tribute to John Dyck is well deserved and appropriate. Also the reflections are very much in order.

The description of the Low German Tour to Paraguay by Shiela Reid on P. 72 is also of great interest especially to Linie and myself since we took that Tour last year.

I learned to know Lieutenant Governor Jack Wiebe of Saskatchewan in 1996 when he was present at the book launch of *Mennonites In Canada Volume 3* in Saskatoon. A most interesting and modest person. Another person who has moved from the group known as "The Quiet In The Land" to dedicated public life.

And of course the article by Dr. Jack Thiessen, author of the new Low German Dictionary is splendid. Jack has done a monumental job of constructing this dictionary, making it the definitive work in its field. I have been engrossed in reading it from page to page, ever since I received it.

Your Editorials, Delbert, are as interesting and sometimes as provocative as always. People may not agree with you on all issues, but I am sure that many of them will turn to the Editorials first.

Then there are a goodly number of interesting Book Reviews. I particularly enjoyed the "Loeppky Family History". Also a review of "A Garden in the Wilderness", Ruben Epp's Low German book and of course Jack's Low German dictionary.

My profound thanks for your endeavours.  
Keep up the good work.  
Sincerely, "Ted Friesen"

Harry Loewen, PH.D.  
4835 Parkridge Drive  
Kelowna, B.C., Canada  
V1W 3A1  
January 14, 2000

Dear Delbert,

Thank-you so much for the Preservings and for the very fine research you are doing. We appreciate the very interesting articles including the one on Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) written by Elaine Wiebe. Keep up the good work. Enclosed is our annual membership. "Neil and Susan Wiebe"

January 15, 1999  
Steinbach, Man.

To the Editor:

My recent letter in your paper re: "The Old Colony People of Mexico", seems to have hurt some people.

Such was not my intention, I am sorry and ask to be forgiven, because I do love my Old Colony brothers and sisters.

"A. G. Janzen"

A. G. JANZEN  
Box 9, Hague  
Sask., SOK 1X0  
January 3, 2000

Dear Sir/Madam:

Thank you for your interesting magazine. I thoroughly enjoy "Preservings" with its articles, reports and up-dates on research in Mennonite genealogy.

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$20.00 for the annual membership. Yours truly, "J. Hildebrandt"

January 5, 2000

HSHS

I have enclosed my renewal. I have really enjoyed the recent "Preservings No. 15, December, 1999".

In this edition a few sources are mentioned in one of the articles, as follows:

- "Kehler/Kaehler Family Origins" in Preservings No. 10"
  - "Kehler 1808-1997 (Steinbach, 1997)"
- I would like to know if the above are still available.

Sincerely yours, "Larry Kehler" 84 Vista Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2M 4Y3

**Editor's note:** Unfortunately we do not have back issues, but we do have a CD-ROM available back to Issue 8. Also we have put this material on a web site so everyone can access it from their home <http://www.hshs.mb.ca>. Since we have no staff, no resources, no funding, it is difficult to provide copies. Copies of most issues have been provided to Steinbach Public Library who may be able to assist with providing copies.

Dear Delbert,

I wish to commend you on another information-packed issue of Preservings (No. 15, December, 1999). I also enjoyed again your spirited editorial. Parts of your editorializing may not find agreement with all readers, but there is no doubt that your opinions are interesting, relevant, and certainly expressed with passion and conviction.

As a member of the more liberal wing of Mennonites, I have found David Schroeder's guest essay, "Evangelicals Denigrate Conservatives," both timely and well expressed. The more "progressive" Mennonites should take David's gentle criticism to heart and not only apologize for their uncharitable attitudes toward conservative members, but at last recognized them as brothers and sisters who have been able to preserve values that many evangelicals seem to have lost.

Faithfulness to an Anabaptist-Christian way of life, including simplicity, humility, community, non-violence, and "following Jesus", remains an important ethos of the conservative wing of Mennonites and Amish. The "progressive" Russian Mennonites, from the time of the conservative's 1870's migration to North America, have been more concerned with material, cultural and educational progress than adherence to their traditional faith values. (On this issue see my article, "A House Divided: Russian Mennonite Nonresistance and Emigration in the 1870's," in John Friesen, ed. Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988--Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989).

It is ironic indeed that conservative groups like the Amish have been able to retain their young people (about 80%) as part of their communities, while the more evangelical and progressive Mennonites with all their "outreach" programmes are not doing half as well in this regard. An analysis of this phenomenon would no doubt articulate reasons for this difference, nevertheless David Schroeder's concerns are well taken.

With Best Wishes, "Harry Loewen"

York University  
Faculty of Arts  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M3J 1P3  
January 25, 2000

Dear Delbert,

Oh, My! I did not think that it would be this expensive. But things add up quickly.

I was most impressed by the number of people who came [to the HSHS A.G.M. January 22/00], and the hospitality was wonderful--as I'm sure it always is at your meetings.

Thank you very much for inviting me. I consider it an honour. Please convey my appreciation to your executive at the next meeting.

It is very evident that the community greatly appreciated the many splendid initiatives the So-

## Preservings

society had undertaken in celebrating the 125th Anniversary.

It was very good to see you once more, and also to renew my acquaintance with some friends I had not seen for decades.

All Good Wishes, "John (Warkentin)"

**Editor's Note:** On behalf of the board and our membership I thank you for your evocative presentation and for having the privilege of publishing your 1960 thesis as well as your more current reflections on the East Reserve.

Linden, Alberta  
February 1, 2000

Dear Delbert,

Thank-you so much for the book "Saints and Sinners". We had intended to pay for it but do appreciate it very much.

I have read quite a bit of it already and commend you on being impartial in your views.

Thanks again.

Appreciate your friendship and still have good memories of our trip.

With love, "Walter and Lydda Regehr"

309 Wallace Avenue  
East St. Paul, Manitoba  
R2E 0B1

Editor

Dear Delbert:

I am responding in regards to the letter written by Peter D. Wiebe, Crown Valley Farms Ltd., published in Preservings #15, Dec. 99. This is in regards to the picture, "Goodbye in the Rain". I concur 100% with Peter that the earlier unidentified person in the picture is indeed Mr. Jacob G. Goertzen, my father and the father of Levi and Leonard as mentioned.

I had meant to write earlier but was looking for a photo of my dad with the same profile, but couldn't come up with such a photo. I thank Peter for writing about that picture.

The information in the *Preservings* has been quite helpful to me as I am presently doing some writing about the history of my family.

Sincerely, "Jake Goertzen"

Membership renewal enclosed - \$20.00

Box 211, Linden  
Alberta, T0M 1J0

Hanover Historical Society

Mr. Plett:

I would like to renew my membership to Preservings.

Please find a cheque enclosed \$40.00. I have lost track where we stand. Hope to hear from you shortly.

Yours truly, "Frank Barkman"

Dear Mr. Plett:

We are reading and enjoying David Flynn's copy of Preservings (December 1999 issue). Enclosed is \$20.00 for a subscription/membership fee for 1 year, beginning with the June 2000 issue.

Thank you, "Helen Koop"

#1-3653 Oxford St.  
Port Coquitlam, B.C.  
V3B 4E7  
January 25, 2000

H.S.H.S.

Dear Sirs:

Enclosed: payment of \$20.00 for renewal of HSHS Membership. Please change of address card. Please send 10 copies of tabloid style/ Winnipeg Free Press/ "In Celebration of 125 Anniv. of Mennonites in Manitoba". Enclosed: Payment of \$10.00 (cheque of total: \$30.00).

Thank you, "Katherine H. Loewen"

18 Wall Rd. RR #3  
Niagara on the Lake  
Ontario, L0S 1J0  
January 30, 2000

Mr. Delbert Plett

Dear Sir:

Your magazine "Preservings" was given to me by Dave Regier of St. Catherines, Ontario, and I'm still reading it! I find it very interesting!

I am interested in genealogy work and I noticed a mention of a book by Henry Schapansky which contains "The Bergthal Sawatzkys" which you seemingly printed in "Preservings" #9 part 2 p. 14.

My roots are very much from the Bergthal Sawatzkys and I would like to read more about them. (I'm formerly from Altona, MB, and have found the Berthaler Gemeinde Buch very useful.)

Would there be a possibility of receiving a back copy of your Preservings #9, part 2? Please inform me as to the cost, etc.

Thank you, "Shirley (Sawatzky) Neufeld"

Box 445, Warman  
Sask., S0K 4S0  
February 29, 2000

Dear Mr. Plett:

You must be the absolutely most trusting, and kind, considerate gentleman I've ever happened across in my entire life. Thank you for trusting me and restoring my faith in people, this world needs more people like you. When I wrote to you recently to inquire about your magazine "Preservings", I was expecting only some information on how I would get a certain issue, and how I could subscribe to it. Well, you sent me the very copy I was looking for, plus all the information, with a brief saying, "Pay me at

your convenience". Needless to say I put a cheque in the mail that day. I hope you received it. What a privilege to be trusted that much by a total stranger and all because I'm a Mennonite! I sincerely hope that Almighty God will grant me the ability to be worthy of that name and trust as long as I live.

Unfortunately I've run across a few people in my life who were not that trustworthy, no matter what they called themselves. However, after I read your magazine from cover to cover (I simply could not put it down) I understood where you were coming from namely, do unto others as you want others to do unto you. What an excellent job you are doing of your magazine, and what a great service to our people! I thank you so much, you have just made my job as a parent a lot easier, to pass on to my family what my parents and grandparents tried to pass on to me. Sincerely, "Mrs. Susan Doell"

P.S. "Keep up the excellent work"

**Editor's Note:** Publishing your letter is obviously blatantly self-serving on my part, but why not?

Box 21592, Steinbach  
Man., R5G 1B3  
Feb. 25, 2000

Dear Mr. Plett:

I am a relative newcomer to *Preservings* and enjoy the journal a great deal. Each new issue helps verify or debunk the genealogy and history I have been pursuing. However, I am a little confused about William Schroeder's account of Mr. Abram P. Dueck (*Preservings*, No 15, p. 75). He states that Mr. Dueck was the son of Anna Schroeder (1882-1935), grandson of Rev. Johann Schroeder (1870-1956) and the great-grandson of Gerhard Schroeder (1848-1910). This cannot be. Anna was the daughter of Gerhard Schroeder and Margaretha Penner (1840-1926). Rev. Johann Schroeder was also a son of Gerhard Schroeder but with his first wife Anna Harder (1848-1876). Therefore, the Good Reverend was Mr. Dueck's uncle and not his grandfather. If I am missing something, please inform me.

The reason for mentioning this is threefold. Mr. Dueck was a neighbour of mine in Steinbach and before he passed away he gave me some documents that related to our Schroeder history. He was always a kind and generous man to me and shared stories, his hand made wood puzzles, and an interest in Schroeder history which has ended up turning him into a sort of muse for me.

The second reason for this letter deals with William Schroeder, whom I have met only once, but whose Bergthal Colony has been of great assistance to me. I was wondering where his Schroeder line linked up to mine (Reeve Gerhard Schroeder was my great-grandfather).

The third reason is a more selfish one. I was wondering if anyone had any information on Anna Schroeder's mother Margaretha Penner (1840-1926), the second wife of the aforementioned Reeve.

Along with these concerns, I would like to renew my membership as well as pass along

No. 16, June, 2000

money to pay for the memberships of three other new subscribers. The work put into this journal is phenomenal and I am indebted to the efforts of all those involved.

With Thanks, "Ray Schroeder"

P.S. Please forward subscriptions to:....

**Editor's note:** It has already been mentioned that we have not back issues. Not that we want to complain, but we have no resources, no funding, and subscriptions do not nearly cover the printing and mailing costs. However, we have good news in that *Preservings*, No.s 8 to 15, are now available on-line at "www.hshs.mb.ca." Good luck!

Box 4115, Arborg  
Man., ROC 0A0  
February 22, 2000

Dear Sirs (or whom it may concern):

Enclosed please find a cheque for twenty dollars, a one year subscription to "Preservings".

Having never heard of "Preservings" until last month, I certainly was surprised to read about the Hieberts and Esaus in edition #14 (June) - Peter Hiebert Jr. was my great-great grandfather. It appears that he must have been buried in the East Reserve. Last year I donated toward a new tombstone for my great-grandfather Johann Hiebert (Lowe Farm Cemetery).

It truly is a small world! When a grandson of mine was preparing material for a genealogy project in Grade XI he pursued the Peter Hiebert (1818-1877) book. To his surprise, he came across a classmate's name. My grandson's surname is Ukrainian while his classmate has a French name.

Thank you, "Minnie Chomokovski"

Christian Living  
616 Walnut Avenue  
Scottdale, PA  
15683-1999

Preservings:

Delbert, I enjoyed meeting you at the Ukraine Conference in 1999. Your magazine *Preservings* fills an important space in the total family of Anabaptist and Mennonite periodicals. I especially enjoy your thoughtful and refreshingly unvarnished take on issues and institutions in your editorial column.

Enclosed is a copy of our most recent *Christian Living* magazine, and we would welcome an exchange basis with *Preservings*. Please let us know if this would be possible.

God Bless you.

Sincerely, "Levi Miller"

**Editor's note:** The exchange of magazines sounds good. We are honoured.

5761 Silverado Way Suite M2  
Ankorage, Alaska  
99518  
February 21, 2000

Dear Mr. Dyck:

I have recently been made aware of your Society, and was impressed with your publications.

I am the grandson of Jakob "Berliner" Kehler and Elizabeth Schultz Kehler, and son of Neil and Frieda Kehler. The history of my Grandfather who I had never met and the history surrounding this family was something none of us children had ever known.

Last year we lost our mother at age 90 and as we are all in our 60s passing along our heritage to our children and grandchildren is very important.

I am enclosing a check for \$150.00 to cover my membership and Volume 1, 2 & 3 if they are available and any other publications that would help me understand my heritage.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly, "Donald R. Kehler"

**Editor's Note:** Unfortunately the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch*, Volume Two of the East Reserve Historical Series is sold out. We are looking for a sponsor which would enable us to reprint. Any ideas?

Box 960, LaCrete  
Alberta, T0H 2H0  
Jan. 25, 2000

Dear Relative, Hello!

I received from Aunt Margaretha Gerbrandt a photocopy of the letter from Miss Elaine Wiebe. I am happy to hear from "Preservings" of the article about Aeltester Johann Wiebe, my great-great grandfather, and I'm interested in every issue.

I don't know about the diary, I only have three letters that are written by Aeltester Johann Wiebe, two are written in 1875, and one in 1904, and a writing of son Aeltester Abraham Wiebe, and two letters written to his family after his wife passed away.

Is the June 1999 the first magazine? Please let me know if there were some issues before June 1999, Thank you!

I would like to order the issue dated June 1999 and also the December 1999, June 2000 and December 2000.

Mr. & Mrs. Wilhelm and Sarah (Wolfe) Klassen, daughter of Johann J. and Helena (Neustaedter) Wolfe, son of Johann V. and Gertruda (Wiebe) Wolfe, daughter of Jacob and Katharine (Wiebe) Wiebe, son of Bishop Johann and Judith (Wall) Wiebe.

"Wilhelm Klassen" Find Enclosed \$40.00.

**Editor's Note:** We are indeed related. My great-great grandfather Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester, was a first cousin to Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905). Rosengart, W.R., Manitoba, their mothers were sisters. See Henry Schapansky, "Bergthaler Wiebes," in *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 60-61, and 65. As already stated we have no resources, nor back issues. But Issues 8-15 are available on our web site "www.hshs.mb.ca". We are extremely interested in collecting all the available writings of Aeltester Johann Wiebe, son Aeltester Abraham Wiebe, and indeed, of all other early Old Colony Aeltesten, as their writings more than anything else will put the lie to the myriad of untruths about Old Colony people being spread by so-called Evangelical Mennonites.



A lot of food was sold at the auction sale for the new (but not yet completely finished) Kleine Gemeinde school at Gnadenthal Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. The women had worked very hard to prepare different kinds of delicious food. The items which were sold at the auction were donated for the school and were to be used to retire the costs of construction. The auction sale brought in 239,000 pesos (about \$24,000 U.S. or \$36,000 Cdn) and in addition some 40 to 50,000 pesos came in from the meals and donation of materials. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, 3 Februar 1999, page 5. See *Preservings*, No.13, page 56.

## Preservings

Mexico  
March 6, 2000

Dear Mr. Plett:

Was I ever surprised to get this nice present (the Preservings) from you. I appreciate it very much, also the Free Press copies, thank you very much.

I've been reading and reading, but it will take some time before I'll get it finished.

It has always been that way, that the Old Colony people have been put down by many, especially by those that leave their faith.

Aeltester Johann Wiebe was an uncle to my Grandfather, Jacob Wiebe. I even have a photo (very old) from Grandfather Wiebe and a brother and two cousins of his. I also have a photo of the late Aeltester Peter Wiens, he was ordained in Mexico.

I never even knew that the Preservings were printed but the whole book is very interesting.

But there were letters from three that I know, one is my cousin, the other is a second cousin to my late husband, and also one from Linda Martens, where she writes that the M.C.C. had sent all the 200,000 straw bales from Cauhtemoc to Durango. I have questioned quite a lot of people about it, and everyone says, it wasn't the M.C.C., it were the O.K. people who sent it. She also mentions that now that the Aeltester and Ohms have left us, maybe we can make the necessary changes to survive in this land.

I feel they are rejoicing in our dilemma that we're in, so they can get a better hold on the poor, for they are the ones they first seek out to lead them away from their faith.

I feel that if we had all stayed in the faith we had when our people came to Canada, the world would be a lot better place to live in.

Yours sincerely, Name and address withheld by request.

Mar 7, 2000 - I looked over my papers that I had collected and found a copy of a letter from Aeltester Johann Wiebe written in 1875, Rosengart am 22 October 1875 an die Gemeinde Christo (6 seiten). I also have a book of copied letters written back and forth from America to Russia,... so if you're interested let me know. Sorry to have missed you as you were here.

**Editor's note:** We are indeed honoured to receive a letter from far away Mexico. I enjoyed my tour to Durango in February, 1999. It is a beautiful settlement, well laid out. We would certainly appreciate receiving copies of the photographs of the Aeltesten and other Mexican Mennonite pioneers as you mention. It is tragic that the drought and economic restructuring brought about by NAFTA have made things so difficult. I am always amazed that when our Western Canadian farmers encounter the same problems they are considered folk heroes marching on Ottawa and entitled to public sympathy and millions of dollars in bailouts. But when the same thing happens to conservative Mennonites, be it in the Interlake, Manitoba, or Mexico, people like to look down their noses. We appreciate your letter and courage to speak out for your people. In the end the truth must triumph.

262 13th Street  
Winkler, Manitoba  
R6W 1S5  
April 14, 2000

Dear Brother Plett:

Thank you for the magazine "Preservings". I am impressed with the contents of this issue, which emphasizes the 125th Anniversary of the East Reserve. I also appreciated the obituary and reflections of John Dyck's life, including your contribution....

Enclosed please find my book review. Since I had read the book before you called, I could begin writing immediately. I take for granted that information will be included where readers can buy or order the book. God bless you and your helpers to continue the work of Preservings.

Sincerely, "J.K. Klassen"

6850 Claremore  
San Diego, Ca 92120  
March 3, 2000

HSHS:

Sure enough! One really can find a Reimer in every corner of the globe. My grandfather on the Reimer side was G. W. (Shusta) Reimer. My father was Henry K. Reimer (long time auto mechanic in Steinbach). My grandfather on the Loewen side was C. B. Loewen. My mother was Margaret D. Loewen.

Before my father passed away, he made mention of a diary that was kept by my uncle, George K. Reimer (Steinbach area school teacher). You might be able to talk to Evelena Reimer (my 1st cousin, lives in Steinbach) to publish this manuscript in the Preservings. If this diary exists, it should yield insight into the lives of many families throughout Hanover. His teaching career may have started in the 1930's.

"Bob Reimer"

Editor's Note: Thank-you for the tip regarding the death of Alfred van Vogt. Preservings depends on good-hearted people like you to keep up to date with important culture passages and events such as these. Thanks also for mentioning your uncle George K. Reimer, the teacher. I even had the honour of being his student for one year in Blumenort in about 1957 as part of a "special" Grade III contingent. I will leave it to Denver Reimer, Leo Braun or Bob Brandt to share the details.

Box 181, Rosenort  
Man., R0G 1W0  
March 23, 2000

Dear Mr. Plett:

Thank-you for sending me copies of Preservings. Please continue to do so. Here is a donation. Thank-you "Charlotte Wiens"

Tulpenstr. 14  
56575 Weiszenthurm  
Germany  
March 27, 2000

Hello, Herr Plett:

In der letzten Ausgabe von "Preservings" wurde das Buch von P. Wiebe, Omsk., vorgestellt.

Im russischen Teil dieser Buchbeschreibung sind einige grammatische Fehler, wie folgt, unterlaufen, aus welchem Grund auch immer:

1) HEMUbl POCCNR CNENPb  
richtig ist: HEMUbl POCCNN B CNbNPN (kurilisch)

oder: NEMCY ROSSII W SIBIRI (deutsch)

2) KATANOR 3THORPA.....??????  
richtig ist: KATAAnOr ETHORPA0N4ECKON  
KOnNEKUNN PyCCKNX HEMUEB B  
ONCKOM rOCYAAPCTBEHHOM My3EE  
(kurilisch)

oder: KATALOG ETNOGRAFICHESKOJ  
KOLLEKCII RUSSKIH NEMCHEW W  
OMSKOM GOSUDARSTWENNOM  
MUSEE (deutsch)

Ausserdem mochte ich mich fur Ihre Zeitung ganz herzlich bedanken. Sie ist ein sehr wertvolles historisches Nachschlagewerk fur Forscher der mennonitischen Geschichte, besonders fur die nachkommende Generation.

Es ist nur zu bedauern, dass es diese bedeutende, brauchbare Ausgabe von "Preservings" nicht in deutscher Sprache gibt. Es gibt in Deutschland immer mehr Personen, vor allem unter den mennonitischen Rückwanderern aus dem Osten, die fur die Geschichte ihrer Vorfahren immer mehr Interesse zeigen.....

"A. Regev"

**Editor's Note:** Dankeschon fur ihren Brief. Lieder haben wir nich die Kurilischen Karikturen auf unsre Computer Machinen um das ganz richtig zu machen.

### Visit Our Web Site:

Do you need back copies of *Preservings*?

One solution is to visit our HSHS webb site: [www.hshs.mb.ca](http://www.hshs.mb.ca)

The webb site includes *Preservings*, Issues No. 8 to 15 of *Preservings* and our special 125 anniversary booklet *Celebrating Our Heritage East Reserve 125 1874 1999* (Note no photographs included for issue No. 8, only script).

Each issue is saved as Acrobat PDF file for easy viewing on screens and the ability to do text searching. Adobe Acrobat Reader for Windows 3.1 and Windows 95/98 is included on the CD-ROM.

Readers should note that these files are quite large and may take up to an hour or two to download.

Readers interested in the Kleine Gemeinde story can check out Delbert Plett's, *Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia 1812-1875* (Steinbach, 1999), 352 pages (Note photos from the book are not included in the webb site) at [www.mts.net/~delplett](http://www.mts.net/~delplett)

# News

## A.G.M. January 22, 2000

**"1874 Revisited": A.G.M. January 22, 2000, by Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Ave., Winnnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1T4.**

### Introduction.

Although I am a member of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society board of directors, circumstances did not permit me to attend the business part of the Society's Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.), January 22, 2000. Instead, like most of the 200 or so other attendees, my wife and I arrived at the Steinbach Mennonite Church in time for the banquet, held in the church gymnasium.

"Church gymnasium" - that would have been an oxymoron when I was growing up and going to the "South End church" in Steinbach, as the EMC building was popularly known. Those of us who ran around in the basement were not exactly encouraged in this activity, and there were no basketballs in sight.

### Banquet.

Be that as it may, the well-lit, high-ceilinged hall with its adjacent kitchen



After dinner speaker Dr. Jack Thiessen and keynote speaker Dr. John Warkentin, Professor Emeritus, York University, Toronto, share some insights during the after-dinner break. Photo by Doris Penner, Carillon News, January 31, 2000, page 4A.

was a good place for a banquet. Hannah and I sat at a table with fellow guests and dined on the customary Mennonite delights, just the thing for those of us on a high-fat, no regrets diet. Conversation flowed as the fruit juice was poured.

Some of the guests mourned the recent closing of Edgar's Cafe, where people used to go to get all the news, including the parts you couldn't get on the radio, all for the price of a cup of coffee. That's not even getting into the merits of the chocolate pie.

In recognition of the wind-up of the East Reserve 125th Anniversary activities, door prizes were handed out, volunteers recognized, and a few items auctioned off following the meal.

### Jack Thiessen.

Jack Thiessen, most likely the only resident of New Bothwell who is also a doctor of philosophy, aided the digestion of Plumi Moos with his inimitable brand of Low German joking.

Jack also maintained his reputation for controversy with a few pungent comments about our community and our history. He noted that the current surge of curiosity about our forebears aligns us more closely with the living history in parts of Europe, such as Paris or Vienna, than with the "fundamentalist smile and instant Christianity" that arose in a historical vacuum among East Reserve Mennonites in the mid-20th century.



The 125 Volunteer Recognition was held in the Steinbach Mennonite Church sanctuary just prior to the banquet. While the East Reserve Reflections as heard on CHSM radio during 1999 were played, the speaker or writer of each item stood to be recognized. Here Ed Laing stands while listening to his radio spot on the Clearsprings settlement.



Crystal Spring Hutterian Choir under director Tom McAdam. The enthusiasm of the singers bespoke of the love of Christ in their hearts. Photo courtesy of Frank Froese, Steinbach, Manitoba. The McAdams family were Baptists somewhere in the United States when they were converted to genuine faith and joined the Hutterian movement.

### Hutterite Choir.

Following the banquet, the throng moved into the church's spacious sanctuary for the "entertainment" part of the evening. The youth choir from Crystal Spring Hutterite Colony, directed by Tom McAdam, sang a half dozen or more songs.

The influence of the New York-based Woodcrest Colony, in which community members are, for the most part, not of Moravian or Austrian ethnic background, was evident. The choir sang both in English and in German.



*Each person being recognized received a East Reserve mug from the 125 Committee and a copy of the Jakob Peters Oberschulz book from the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society. Here 125 Committee member Norman Plett and HSHS President Orlando Hiebert make the presentation to writer and volunteer Irene Kroeker, Steinbach, while 125 Committee Chair Karen Peters looks on.*



*Norman Plett, representing the 125 Committee, presents a East Reserve mug to Elizabeth Abrams, who contributed an article on East Reserve schools. Renown Plaut-Dietsch playwright Anne Funk and husband Henry are seated front right. Note the 20 foot 125 East Reserve banner displayed in the foyer of the church scantuary.*



*Helen Penner did an incredible job handling the sale of East Reserve 125 mementoes. This meant sacrificing many weekends to attend all the various fairs and events which took place during 1999. Here she visits with Mr. and Mrs. Lorne Peters, community rep. from Kleefeld during the break after the banquet.*

The layered harmonic renderings were carefully and beautifully crafted.

Were my wife and I the only ones, though, who hoped that they would also give us something from the old Gesangbuch? It is these centuries-old songs, however "unmusical" to the contemporary ear, that recall to us the common story of the Hutterites and the Mennonites, and reveal the Anabaptist soul.

### Dr. John Warkentin.

Dr. John Warkentin, Professor Emeritus of Geography at York University, gave an enormously informative key address on the topic "1874 Revisited."

Dr. Warkentin, a native of Lowe Farm, first studied the historical geography of the East Reserve as an undergraduate in the 1950s. His Ph.D. thesis, completed in 1960, was a landmark document from which many other subsequent histories drew facts and inspiration. A first version of the current, updated presentation was given at the Chair of Mennonite Studies Symposium at the University of Winnipeg last fall.

Acknowledging the limits of science, Dr. Warkentin drew on literary sources to help him with his exposition. When we think of a region, he observed, we think of something out there. In reality, any region, including the East Reserve, is also a mental creation. The original idea of the East Reserve, that it might serve as the landscape onto which the Mennonites could transplant their way of life from Southern Russia, was partially validated. The people worked rapidly to establish a network of villages with the same place names as the ones they had left behind. This was a remarkable achievement of organization, given the highly complex problems that had to be solved, such as deciding who would live where.

At the same time, Canada was not Russia. The familiar fields and gardens of the old country were nothing more than a memory. In 1874 the prairie was still almost entirely unplowed and the bush uncut. It was vast, and empty-looking. If you travelled further west, as Koop en Bua do in one of Arnold Dyck's classics, you were confronted with a limitless flatness, producing a strange uneasiness of mind.

This uneasiness, Dr. Warkentin speculated, also had something to do with a feeling of being on the geographical edge of the known world. This sense persists even today.

Dr. Warkentin quoted from Patrick Friesen's collection of poems about Winnipeg, "St. Mary at Main", to illustrate: "we keep drumming/so we won't perish on the edge of the prairie." In other words, we distract ourselves in whichever way we can from the dread of being so small and vulnerable. Yet this "drumming"--whether it takes the form of economic activity, music, or the written word--also indicates the tremendous staying power of the Mennonite culture in Manitoba.

Warkentin challenged some of the assumptions that have been made in some Mennonite historiography. That there was "nobody there" when they arrived on the Canadian prairies for example. The Mennonites, said Warkentin, were in the vanguard of agriculture, of a stable, property-based civilization that pushed out the nomadic Aboriginal hunting civilization.

For that matter, not all of the immigrants were agriculturalists; some, like a Mr. Schultz and a Mr. Penner, were entrepreneurs from the beginning, taking advantage of the railroad and operating out of urban centres.



*Members of the 125 Committee receive volunteer medals awarded by the R. M. of Hanover, and presented by Reeve John Driedger and Councillor Bruce Taggart. The members of the committee with their portfolios, l.-r., Norm Plett, Blumenort, Secretary and Councillor of the R. M. of Hanover; Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Historical Society rep.; Henry Kasper, Steinbach, Fund Raising; Helen Penner, Kleefeld, Mementos; Edna Vogt, New Bothwell, Events; Hildegard Toews, Grunthal, Media; Verna Wiens, Grunthal, Treasurer, and Karen Peters, Chortitz, Chair. Photo courtesy of Frank Froese, Steinbach, Manitoba.*

### **Deborah Rogalsky.**

By the time Dr. Warkentin's extensive presentation was complete, the hour had grown late, and the sanctuary was no longer full. Those still present, however, were rewarded with some richly emotional renderings of old songs, in English and German, by Deborah Rogalsky. Her version of a Low German song about a Mennonite closing the garden gate when leaving Russia was particularly moving, even for some of us who are generations removed from that event.

### **Recognition.**

Medals of recognition were given out at the end. Perhaps the most insightful observation came from a non-Mennonite, Hanover Councillor Bruce Taggart. Mr. Taggart pointed out that the Mennonite and Hutterite cultures were founded and then shaped in the fires of adversity, and that is why they have lasted so long. Without that adversity, he wondered, could they still last?

At the very least, the Anabaptist identity will not continue if the Anabaptist story is not told.

A provoking thought, for all of us who labour at that telling.



*A view of the spacious gym/banquet hall of the Steinbach Mennonite Church, with some 240 guests enjoying their traditional Mennonite meal of borst, ham, sausage, vereniki, and moouse. Mr. and Mrs. Leo Braun, Braunsdale Dairies, Blumenort, are seated front centre. All photos for this article except as noted are by Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.*

### **Attention Readers:**

For another report of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Annual General Meeting, see Doris Penner, "Mennonite writing will ensure survival: speaker," in *Carillon News*. January 31, 2000, page 4A.

### **HSHS Board of Directors**

After the A. G. M. and election of January 22, 2000, the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society board of directors consists of Royden Loewen, Orlando Hiebert, Henry Fast, Paul Loewen, and Jake Doerksen whose terms expire at the end of 2001.

The terms of Ralph Friesen, Hilton Friesen, Ken Rempel, Irene Kroeker, Delbert Plett, Ernie Braun, Henry Fast, expire at the end of the 2000.

Paul Loewen resigned from the board after the A.G.M. because of moving away to Cairnport. On April 27, 2000, his position on the board was filled by the appointment of Ben Funk, Steinbach, see announcement elsewhere.



*Neighbouring during the banquet. Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair Mennonite Studies University of Winnipeg and Mary Ann Loewen host several friends during the banquet: Rudy Nikkel, to the left, and David Reimer and Ed Hildebrandt, to the right.*

### **Business Session:**

Minutes of the business meeting of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society held at 4:30 p.m. in the kitchenette of the Steinbach Mennonite Church, Loewen Blvd., Steinbach, Manitoba.

1. President Orlando Hiebert called the meeting to order. D. Plett, was appointed as recording secretary for the meeting, Lynette Plett, the Corporate Secretary, being absent.
2. The minutes of the previous annual meeting were read. Moved by H. Fast and seconded by D. Plett that same be adopted. Carried.
3. The passing of our beloved Research Director, John Dyck, was noted by the President and a tribute given.
4. D. Plett, treasurer presented the financial report. Moved by D. Plett and seconded by

Jake Siemens. Carried.

5. The President made his report. H. Fast moved that the President's report be adopted. Seconded by Jake Doerksen. Carried.
6. Elections: The following were nominated as Directors: Royden Loewen, Orlando Hiebert, Henry Fast and Jake Doerksen. Irene Kroeker

moved that nominations cease. The aforementioned were declared elected by acclamation.

7. The President presented a motion approving the actions of the board of directors: D. Plett moved and Henry Fast, seconded. Carried.
8. Moved by Jake Doerksen and seconded by D. Plett, that the meeting be adjourned. Carried.



*Verna Wiens, Edna Vogt and Helen Penner, members of the 125 Committee did a wonderful job of setting up the 125 displays for the A. G. M. January 22, 2000. The large banner was used for parades in all the fairs held in the East Reserve during the anniversary year. The flags represented the five countries in which the ancestors of the East Reserve pioneers claimed their heritage over the past five centuries-Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. To this should be added Belgium as many East Reserve settlers had roots in Flanders. Photo by Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.*



*President Orlando Hiebert calls the business meeting of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society to order. Photo by Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.*

# Family History Day March 4, 2000

**Family History Day, March 4, 2000, report by board member Ernest Braun, Box 595, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0.**

## Introduction.

"The first thing you can do with the genealogical information that you have spent so much time compiling — is to share it."

That comment by Alf Redekopp may well be the key of the annual Family History Day at the Steinbach Village Museum on Saturday, March 4.

A dozen exhibitors and over a hundred visitors met both to exchange information and to listen to morning and afternoon presenters.

## Displays

Right from the time the day opened at 10:00 AM, exhibitors were busy explaining their current projects to curious visitors, many of whom had their own research agendas and were canvassing the room for leads.

Special genealogical charts such as the one on the Friesen family by Hilton Friesen attracted considerable attention, as did a book display by Gilbert Brandt of Mennonite Books, Winnipeg.

Esther Zacharias and Susan Reimer of Morden brought a huge tapestry of Doerksen ancestors of West Reserve background, as well as a newly published book on Gerhard Doerksen (b. 1827).

Bob Strong (Schellenberg) who had set up shop in the middle of the room was busy right till the end of the afternoon session, pursuing leads on a variety of fronts, including an elusive Solomon Doerksen (1803). The advent of powerful genealogical software and the popularity of the GRANDMA CD was reflected in the number of computer screens around the room.

Many of the exhibitors, like Richard and Thelma Unruh with an extensive ancestor chart of Unruhs, Hildegard Adrian and her work on a Warkentin line, and Ernest Braun with his newly published Braun volume and family fan chart were faces fa-

miliar from previous years.

However, Marianne Janzen and her work on the Mexican Mennonites, letters and journals, were new to the event, and attracted much attention. Henry and Helen Fast, also seasoned exhibitors, narrowed their focus this time to notes made over many years on the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, the *Nordwesten* and other turn-of-the-century periodicals of interest to Manitoba Mennonite genealogists.

Again, this generated considerable attention, since such research is often out of the reach of amateur genealogists, and excerpts culled painstakingly from reams of microfilm are a treasure.

## Richard Thiessen.

The morning session consisted of three presenters, two of whom showcased the advantages offered by technology.

Richard Thiessen of Concord College walked his audience through the GRANDMA CD Vol. 2, a CD-ROM with a data base of over 267 000 Mennonite names, available from the California Mennonite Historical Society. This CD runs on Brothers Keeper 5.2, a Gedcom-based data system that will do instant searches by name or family code, instant ancestor or descendant charts, and even instant relationship computations, a feature particularly useful in the Mennonite Game. He also called up several websites to demonstrate the daunting amount of information and resources available on the Internet through the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

## Alf Redekopp.

The second presenter, Alf Redekopp of Mennonite Heritage Centre, took the group through the resources available to anyone interested in starting a family history. He graduated quickly from the basics (B. H. Unruh and John Dyck) to all forms of resources, including translated documents now available from the

Peter Braun material, such as school enrolment lists up to the 1870s from the Molotschna villages.

Redekopp also unveiled newly acquired census and related material that is slowly bleeding out of Russia via Peter Rempel, Russian archivist. It was readily apparent that there exists a veritable riches of material, now as handy as the Mennonite Heritage Centre or for that matter as convenient as one's own computer screen.

## Ernest Braun.

The third presenter, Ernest Braun of Niverville, gave a light-hearted introduction to the task of researching one of the first Mennonite villages in Manitoba. Using his own experience of writing the history of Gnadenfeld, an East Reserve village near present-day Grunthal, as a model, he provided an annotated list of the resources that can be accessed toward that end.



Marianne Janzen of Winnipeg generated much interest with her celux-bound publications of Mexican Mennonite letters and history. This is a first for our East Reserve Family History Day.



Susan Reimer and Esther Zacharias of Morden, shown here with a newly published Doerksen family history book, brought a new dimension to the session in the form of a huge mural of their Doerksen lineage, complete with photographs. This family has its roots in the West Reserve.



**Left:** Presenter Edith Friesen of Winnipeg, writer and former reporter, led a session on how to write the story of your grandparents, using an interactive style to involve the audience. **Right:** HSHS board member and corporate Secretary, Lynette Plett, spoke about how to do an interview. She used the example of her recent research project regarding her great-grandmother to illustrate some of the do's and don'ts.

For each resource he highlighted the type of information that can be gleaned, noting for example that the Homestead Files (Prov. Archives) may well be the only place that information on the date and size of the first buildings erected by our pioneer ancestors can still be found. He ended with a list of published resources, and a reminder of the value of personal interviews with surviving relatives of the original pioneers.

#### Randy Kehler.

After a lunch of brown bread, soup and pastries, the sessions resumed with Randy Kehler presenting the features of the Chortitzer CD-ROM, a CD with the church registers of 1878, 1887 and 1907.

#### Henry Fast.

Then Henry Fast, another presenter and emcee of the sessions, described the potential value of the early weekly periodicals used by Mennonites to keep in touch with each other, especially the *Rundschau*, a Mennonite paper published by the America Mennonites in Elkhart, Indiana, which encouraged letters from both sides of the Atlantic, and reports from all sectors of the Mennonite "commonwealth".

Henry also mentioned the *Nordwesten*, a Winnipeg paper started in 1890, a source less use-



Alfred Wohlgemuth of Elma, MB discusses his family charts with Gil Brandt of Mennonite Books of Winnipeg.



Bob Strong, Winnipeg, uses his lap-top computer to illustrate the ease with which information can be retrieved on almost any family line. Looking over his shoulder is Alvin Friesen, Rosenort, and friend.

ful for genealogy than for history, but invaluable in that capacity. Others papers mentioned included *Der Mitarbeiter*, and *Der Bote*. He also made his extensive notes on these periodicals available to visitors at his table exhibit.

#### Edith Friesen.

Edith Friesen, former school teacher and newspaper reporter, now a free lance writer in Winnipeg, used the 5 W's to structure her presentation on how to write the story of an ancestor's life. She provided organization pointers and reminder techniques to overcome the perennial problems of writing: lack of time, incongruities in the information, voice and P.O.V. decisions, writer's block, etc.

Edith used a lively interactive technique to involve her audience, and left the budding writers in the group vastly encouraged.

#### Lynette Plett.

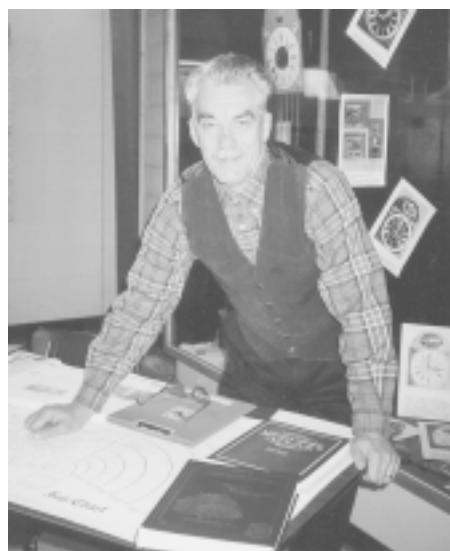
Lynette Plett used the example of one of her recent research projects, namely writing the story of one of her great-grandmothers, to illustrate some of the dos and don'ts of interviewing.

She stressed the importance of preparing for an interview, it is important to have considerable knowledge about the subject of the interview as this informs the interviewer regarding questions needing to be asked. Also equipment must be in proper working order, illustrated by the story of the interviewer who came home from a marvelous interview and realized that they had forgotten to put a tape in the tape recorder. Do not interview people in groups, Lynette cautioned, as the group will tend to dominate the conversation, not the interviewer.

Last winter Lynette attended a Oral History Workshop on behalf of the HSHS and also shared some of the ideas and methodology presented there.

#### Special Guest.

An unexpected addition to the day was a visit from Elaine Wiebe, a member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, an organiza-

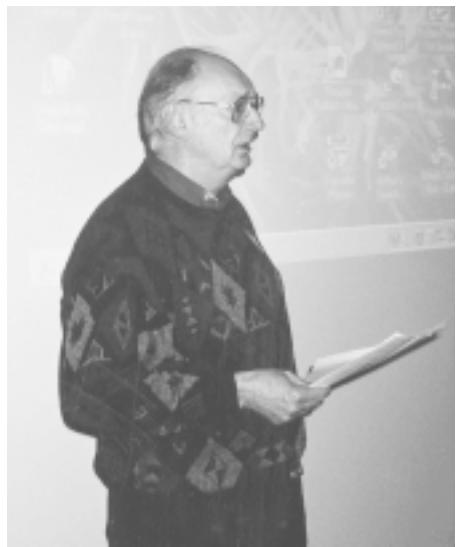


Frank Braun of Winnipeg, a post-WWII arrival in Canada, explores the Bergthaler Brauns represented by Ernest Braun to find some common connection.

tion based in Saskatoon. She included the HSHS seminar in her itinerary, intending to report back to the Society on the event, with the hope that the sister organization be able to capitalize on what seems to work well here, noted several things in that regard, especially the well-organized presentations, and on-site availability of a bookstore. Elaine Wiebe is already known to readers of *Preservings* for her contribution to the article on her ancestor, Aeltester Johann Wiebe of the West Reserve, in the December 1999 edition.

#### Conclusion.

After the sessions, the focus returned to the exhibitors who interchanged information and notes until reluctantly, one by one the tables cleared and this year's Family History Day was-- well-- history.



HSHS board member Henry Fast makes his presentation, explaining the importance of pioneer newspapers such as the Mennonitische Rundschau started by John F. Funk, Elkhart, Ind., in 1880 and used as a medium of communication between Mennonites in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Kansas and Russia.



Former HSHS board member Randy Kehler, Winnipeg, demonstrates the use of the Chortitzer Gemeindebücher, 1878, 1887 and 1906, CD-ROM which he compiled. The photo illustrates the computer set-up used for the symposium, which was hooked on-line, allowing actual demonstrations of retrieving material from the net. The Chortitzer Church Register CD-ROM is available from Scott Kroeker, Box 21306, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2T3, \$100.00 each.

# A Truth of Grain: Paul Harvey

**"A Truth of Grain", Paul Harvey, circa 1975, courtesy of Jim Doerksen, Colorado Springs, Colorado.**

The sacking of agricultural officials has become a virtual tradition in the Soviet Union. A recent Kremlin house cleaning swept agricultural minister Dimitri Polyansky and his two deputies right out of office. And they won't be the last.

In fact, it's so hard to make Russian soil grow grain that Professor R.B. Farrell of Northwestern University calls the Soviet Union's agricultural ministry "one of the most dangerous assignments in the country."

Of course, bounced bigwigs are merely targets for a scapegoat-seeking Kremlin. Even Khrushchev's fall was partly due to an inef-

fective farm policy.

There's been a lot of guessing as to why Soviet grain yields are so predictably pitiful each year--bad weather, bad resources, and so forth--but the basic truth of the matter is that the Russians just can't seem to grow the stuff!

Few remember the golden-egg-laying goose they booted out of the nest, but that's THE REST OF THE STORY.

For all the flavors of religious diversity in the United States, the Mennonites leave a particularly pleasant taste on the public's palate.

Theirs is a warm, quiet breed that believes in neither oaths nor infant baptism nor military service nor the acceptance of public office. They favor unobtrusive dress and plain living, and in their own very special way, they're re-

markably colorful.

The Mennonites. We owe them.

During the 1890s [the 1870s, actually], the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe was selling large tracts of land in Kansas. What they really wanted was homesteaders to farm this land and send their crops to market by rail. The Mennonites were among the first takers.

Now, when these Mennonites moved to Kansas, they perpetuated their gentle traditions....continued their unassuming lives....grew wheat in their own special way from their own special seed.

Then came the big drought. The worst years. It was so bad that the Department of Agriculture sent an expert from Washington to exam-

## Holdeman Document Collection

A large file of "Holdeman" (Church of God in Christ, Mennonite) materials has been donated by Clarence Hiebert to CMBS. Hiebert gathered this accumulation of research materials beginning in the mid-1960s, in order to write his Ph.D. dissertation. The resultant 630-page thesis submitted in 1971 was published in 1973 as a 663-page book, slightly modified in form, with pictures. Two thousand copies were sold.

According to Hiebert, "It is particularly appropriate for Tabor's CMBS to collect and classify these holdings because the dominant census of Holdeman people is in Kansas, located within a 40-mile radius of Tabor College. Furthermore, the historical background of the Holdeman denomination has similarities to the other German-speaking Mennonites who emigrated from Russia and Russian Poland to this area in the 1870s."

Hiebert's materials include not only many published books, but many of the internal records--conferences, yearly statistical and demographic records, and interviews with important Holdeman leaders. In pursuing his research, he visited people and congregations in Kansas, California, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Colorado, Missouri, Manitoba, British Columbia, and their mission ministries in Mexico and Nigeria. One of the notable research documents is a typewritten transcript of approximately 12 hours spent with Frank Wenger, discussing history, life and emphases of the Holdemans. In addition, Hiebert's frequent visits with Harry Wenger, another important Holdeman leader, were significant.

Included in Hiebert's collection are xeroxed copies of most of John Holdeman's private letters collected in Kansas, Manitoba and British Columbia. All twelve of the books and pamphlets written by John Holdeman--both German and English--are also part of the collection held by CMBS.

Hiebert accumulated hymnals, songbooks, devotional writings, personal testimony accounts, histories, Bible study courses, Christian doctrinal materials, minister's manuals, conference minutes, yearbooks, and children's books during his quarter century of interest in and study of the Holdemans.

Hiebert was not able to purchase the most recent publications, because of the ever increasing number of items produced. Hiebert is interested, however in helping CMBS acquire these missing yearbooks and other publications, in order to make this the best available collection of materials available to Holdemans.

Courtesy of "CMBS NEWSLETTER," Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas, No. 8 - Fall 1999, pages 6-7, editor Peggy Goertzen.



Clarence Hiebert, photograph courtesy of The Holdeman People: The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, 1859-1969 (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1972), page 664. This is the only analytical survey history of the Holdeman people currently available. It is unfortunate that the Holdemans people, once leaders in historical writing and historiography, have seemingly abandoned their literary ethos in that field.

## New Director Appointed

**New Director Appointed: Alf Redekopp, Interim Director Mennonite Heritage Centre.**

**Winnipeg, Man.** The Mennonite Church Canada Heritage Centre has appointed Alf Redekopp as interim director from November 15, 1999, to June 30, 2000. He replaces Ken Reddig, the new director of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba. Redekopp has been part time archivist at the centre since August 1994. He has been given leave of absence from the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg where he has worked part time since 1987. Earlier Redekopp taught high school for 18 years. He and his wife Kathy are members of the Home Street Mennonite Church. Courtesy of *Canadian Mennonite*, Dec. 20, 1999, Vol. 3, Number 25, page 31.

Alfred Redekopp also has solid roots in the Kleine Gemeinde, being the great-grandson of Sarah L. Plett (1846-81) and Jakob J. Thielmann (1841-94), Friedensfeld, Imperial Russia. Sarah was the twin sister to Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935), KG minister in Blumenhof, Manitoba, and later Satanta, Kansas. Alfred contributed the Thielmann chapter in the *Plett Picture Book*, pages 47.



Alf Redekopp. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Historian, Vol. XXV, No. 4, December 1999, page 4.

ine the withered crops. And it must have been a barren sight...acre upon acre of parched Kansas prairie.

Then the government inspector came to the Mennonites' land. What he found started a revolution on the plains. While others' wheat fields had failed....the Mennonites' wheat was thriving, reaching bravely for the killer sun.

In Kansas today, the Mennonite strain of wheat seed is still being used. So hardy is this strain that it can be planted in the fall and harvested in the spring, actually resisting "winter kill". Needless to say, drought continues to be a small obstacle for Mennonite wheat to overcome.

Now let me direct your attention to some 1975 Soviet statistics: The Russians needed to harvest a hundred and eighty-five million tons of grain to meet domestic demands. Because of formidable drought, they got only a hundred and forty million. To avoid mass starva-

tion, the Soviets bought wheat...from the United States.

Wouldn't Russia be lucky to have the Mennonites! Well, at one time....they did.

Nearly a century ago, there were Mennonites in Russia. But remember, their religion precludes the taking up of arms...and that's just what the Czar wanted them to do. With Europe periodically in turmoil, people who would not go to war for their ruler were particularly unwelcome. That included the Mennonites. At any rate, they were kicked out, and guess where they came.....

That's right. The same Mennonites who were forced to leave Russia came to America...where religious freedom was a written promise. Where they would not be forced to compromise their ideals, their way of life.

And you might be interested to know that they were invited to the United States by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe...by railroad

agents who were selling land in Kansas. It was a matter of coincidence that the Mennonites brought with them wheat seeds...called "red wheat"...from their homeland in the Crimea.

What the story boils down to is this: If the Mennonites had not been driven out of Russia...the United States, instead of selling, might now be buying wheat...from the Russians.

**Source.** Paul Harvey, Section 26 "A TRUTH OF GRAIN", from a collection of Paul Harvey readings, published circa 1975, pages 56-58. We are indebted to Jim and Karen Doerksen, 3917 Stanton St., Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80907, for forwarding this interesting article to *Preservings*. We are hoping some reader may be able to identify the actual book and/or publication from which "A Truth of Grain" was published in order that we can properly acknowledge it.

## A.E. van VOGT (1912-2000), Son of the East Reserve

A. E. van Vogt (1912-2000) - Science Fiction Writer dies - Son of the East Reserve, Manitoba.

**LOS ANGELES** - A.E. van Vogt, an award-winning science fiction writer who wrote more than 85 books, died Jan. 26, 2000, of pneumonia after a long illness. He was 87.

Mr. van Vogt first gained attention for stories published in monthly science fiction magazines in the 1940s and 1950s, the golden age for the genre. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America in 1976 named Mr. van Vogt a "grand master" for life achievement, the group's highest honor.

"Black Destroyer," his first published science-fiction story, appeared in the *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1939. The story about a preying, cat-like alien is considered the inspiration for the "Aliens" film series.

Mr. van Vogt, a native of Canada, moved to Los Angeles in 1944. In 1946, he published "Slan," a dark story about a telepathic mutant who tries to escape from fearful humans.

Other memorable works include: "The World of Null-A," "Vault of the Beast" and "the Weapon Shops of Isher."

The author became a naturalized citizen in 1952. He also became a convert to Nianetics, a self-healing theory founded by fellow science-fiction writer and Scientology father L. Ron Hubbard. Mr. van Vogt was the co-owner of the Hubbard Dianetics Center in Los Angeles for about eight years, but he never embraced Scientology.

Mr. van Vogt is survived by his wife, Lydia.

Services were held Monday. Donations in his memory can be made to the Alzheimer's Association, 5900 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1700, Los Angeles, CA 90036.

From Associated Press, World & National Obituaries, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, datelined February 5, 2000, courtesy of Bob Reimer,

Reimer Associates, 6850 Claremore, San Diego, California, 92120, March 6, 2000. Mr. Reimer writes that more information if needed can be found at: [www.signonsandiego.com](http://www.signonsandiego.com) (Home Page). He adds, "Enjoy *Preservings*. Read it cover to cover." Robert Reimer is a grandson of Gerhard W. "Schusta" Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba.

### A. E. van Vogt - Son of the East Reserve.

A. E. van Vogt, internationally recognized scion of science fiction writing has recently been recognized as a "Son of the East Reserve."

It was our recently deceased Research Director John Dyck who first made the connection of A. E. van Vogt to the village of Chortitz, E.R., Manitoba, where his great-grandparents, Peter and Judith (Penner) Wiebe and Wilhelm and Anna (Quiring) Vogt, both originating from the Old Colony, settled and became signatories to the village agreement.

It was John's article which first introduced Mennonites to the fact that A. E. van Vogt, one of the most widely known writers of his time, came from conservative Mennonite stock, including the Old Colony Wiebes and Vogts and the Bergthaler Friesens and Buhrs all of whom pioneered in the East Reserve before moving on the West Reserve: John Dyck, "Alfred van Vogt: Science Fiction Master," in *Preservings*, No. 10, Part Two, pages 66. John's article in turn was based on an article "Surrealistic Dreams: A. E. van Vogt and Mennonite Science Fiction," by Scott Ellis, published in *Prairie Fire*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer, 1994, pages 204-219.

John Dyck researched the family connections of A. E. van Vogt, documenting his relationship with thousands in Hanover Steinbach, see Henry Schapansky, "Bergthaler Wiebes", *Preservings*, No. 13, page 65; see also Linda Buhler, "Peter Heinrichs & Barbara Dyck Heinrichs," *Preservings*, No. 14, page 77, for a photograph of A. E. van Vogt's grandparents, Abraham



Alfred van Vogt (1912-2000), dead at 87. Photo courtesy of East Reserve 125, page 64 *Prairie Fire*, Vol. 15, No. 2, page 205.

Friesen and Maria Heinrichs Friesen.

A. E. van Vogt, of Old Colonier background, became the most prolific writer to come out of Russian Mennonite circles. Although he did not write about Mennonites, nor from within the Mennonite tradition, writer Scott Ellis observes that he was influenced by his Mennonite tradition.

Historian John Dyck writes that "Alfred van Vogt was an important part of the East Reserve diaspora. He is part of the culture and history of the Hanover Steinbach area and one of its more famous sons."

# M.H.S.C. Meeting, Winnipeg, Dec. 4, 1999

**"Historical Society undertakes 'Divergent Voices' Projects: Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) Meets at Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, December 4, 1999.**

**Winnipeg, Man.** - "Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites" describes a package of four projects undertaken by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada with MCC Canada providing key seed funding.

This initiative highlighted the annual meeting of the Society of Canada held at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba on December 4, 1999.

MCC Canada will provide \$48,000.00 of funding over the next six years in support of historical research on the relationship of Aboriginal communities and Mennonite agencies; a book on the diverse experience of Mennonite women in Canada; research on the coming, settlement and faith activity of German-speaking Latin American Mennonite (Kanadier) immigrants to Canada and study on the history of Asian and African refugees who have been assisted by Canadian Mennonite families since 1960.

The Society named a coordinating committee for Divergent Voices projects--Royden Loewen, Ken Reddig, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Lucille Marr, Leonard Doell as well as staff persons from MCC Canada who work in related areas.

## Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Board Meeting

December 4, 1999 - 8:30 a.m.

Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba



Present: Royden Loewen (President; Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society), Ken Reddig (Vice-President; Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society), Sam Steiner (Secretary; Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada), Ted Regehr (Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta), David Giesbrecht (Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia), Leonard Doell (Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society), Henry Fast (Evangelical Mennonite Conference), Ted Friesen (Mennonite Church Canada), Vernon Brubacher (Mennonite Central Committee), Abe Dueck (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches), Victor Wiebe (Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society)

Guest: Bert Friesen (Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online Editorial Committee)

An initial conference on Mennonite and Aboriginal historic relations will be held at the University of Winnipeg on October 13-14, 2000. An organizing committee is in place that includes persons from both communities.

The Society hopes to announce the author of a monograph on women, gender and family in Canadian Mennonite families early in the new year. Conversations are underway with a potential author, but contractual details had not been settled at the time of the annual meeting.

Other business included an update on the Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online which is sponsored by the Society. New articles, particularly on Canadian Mennonite institutions, will be added during the next year.

Ted Regehr reported progress in his research that will lead to a one-volume history of Mennonites in Canada. He said recent scholarship questions how "separate" Ontario Mennonites in the 19th century actually were. During 2000 his research will focus more in Western Canada. A publication date has not been established.

Board members agreed to have a new logo designed for the Society. They also heard reports from five provincial historical societies as well as a variety of Mennonite denominational archives. They re-elected Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, as President. Other executive members are David Giesbrecht (Abbotsford, B.C.), Sam Steiner (Waterloo, Ont.) and Laureen

Harder-Gissing (Kitchener).

For further information contact: Sam Steiner, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G6 - 519-885-0220 x238 - steiner@library.uwaterloo.ca.

For another report of this event see *Mennonite Historian*, Vol. XXV, No. 4, December 1999, page 4.

## Schedule 125 Events - West Reserve 1875-2000

**Schedule of 125 Events - West Reserve 1875-2000, courtesy of Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, cstoesz@mennonitechurch.ca. 1-204-888-6781/fax 831-5675.**

Readers are encouraged to watch for and participate in the following 125 Events - West Reserve, Manitoba.  
Fort Dufferin - mid July, 2000,  
Bergen Reunion, Gretna, July 28-29,  
Aelt. Johann Wiebe Memorial July 22 in Reinland,  
Heinrich Wiebe Reunion, Providence College, July 21-23,  
Sunflower Festival, July 28-30,  
Post Road,  
Neu-Berghthal home coming, July 1,  
Edenburg-Edenthal reunion, July 1-2,  
Carmen Home Coming,  
Plum Coulee Book,  
Hoeppner Reunion, July 21-23,  
Steinbach,  
Johann Warkentin Thesis published by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society,  
West Reserve book.

## Mexico Tour, 2000

**"Nikkel and Froese in Mexico"**, January 6, 2000, by Frank Froese, Box 294, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

### Introduction.

Jake Nikkel approached me in late November, tilting his cap to the side, and said: "Say Fraunz, du wiesht en Bolivien met Funk en daut hied mie so aus jie ne goude Tied haude. Best Du reid noch en Trip to mauken met mie no Mexiko?"

I immediately said sure and left it at that. A few days later Jake calls me up and asks where we are going. That put me on a spot.

What will I tell my wife, Helga?

The words from Professor Jack Thiessen's sermons came to mind: (a) Tell Helga that the apostle Paul always went alone also, or (b) some German proverb that says "Werr seine Frau lieb hat, der laesst sie zu Hause."

I chose the latter, and as Jack puts it, "When you get back home, you have someone to tell your tales to."

Well, permission granted, we settled on leaving in early January and getting back home for the Gerhard Ens Appreciation Celebration, January 21. We were to leave January 4, but then Abe Warkentin and staff insisted we wait for *Die Mennonitische Post*.

We finally left early Thursday morning,

January 6 (my birthday) with "Die Mennonitische Post" and 30 boxes of German reading material for MCC. Early Saturday afternoon we arrived at El Paso and dropped in at Jake and Mary Koop. We visited there a while, got some information and booked a motel for the night.

The next morning, Sunday, we were off to try our luck at crossing the border. All the scary stories of being delayed by the customs offic-

ers searching our printed material and wanting money were unfounded. With no Spanish vocabulary between us, we did just fine.

### Manitoba Plan.

By 1 o'clock we were in the Santa Rita Colony and continuing south to the Manitoba Colony. We were hungry, and when we saw some 12 to 14 year-old boys walking down the road having their weekend smoke, we



Jake Nikkel, MCC rep Mr. Enns from Winkler and various interested locals viewing and commenting on the MCC dairy co-op.



Jake and Frank dressed up for their Mexico Colonies Tour. All photographs for this pictorial article are by Frank Froese, Steinbach, Canada.



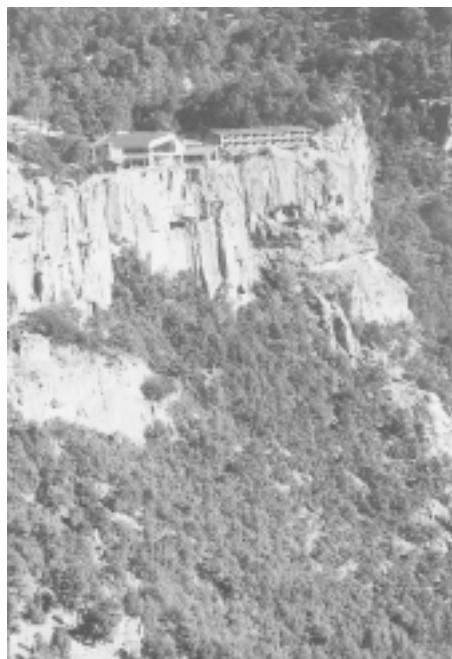
Jake Nikkel, left and "Agri King" manufacturer Abram Friesen on the right, conversing with a customer at the plant.



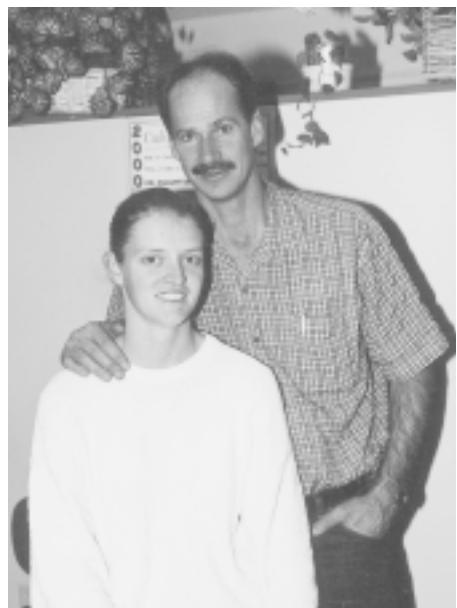
A typical village scene--concrete wall, concrete barn, concrete house, and everything else concrete; and no paint!



A young Tara Humara woman takes time out to feed her baby while selling reed woven baskets to the tourists at the hotel in Divisidero.



Copper Canyon. A view of our wonderful Hotel perched on the edge of the canyon. We had a great view in the morning as the sun came up.



Bram and Ruth Siemens at the Radio station. A daily four hour Low German program is produced here covering news, information, music, religious and children's programs. It is the Radio 1250 CHSM of Mexico.

asked them what our chances were of finding a place to eat. They told us the closest place was the Mexican village of Alvaro Obregon, a half hour up the road.

Before we got there, we stopped at Ann Froese's Grandmother to deliver a box of chocolates and greetings. After a short visit we continued on to Alvaro Obregon where we had some Mexican food which was all right, but Jake stuck to hamburgers and french fries during the rest of our vacation.

We arrived in Colony Manitoba at about 6:30 pm and as luck would have it, Jake spotted the MCC building just as we were passing by Km33. We turned around and unloaded our books and newspapers. The Enns's from Winkler were just getting ready to leave for the MCC and Amish sponsored dairy co-op at Reinland. (This co-op was the main reason for our trip. Jake wanted to see what was going on, because he was unhappy with the information given him by MCC.) We immediately asked to join them and off we went.

We arrived in time to see the milking in progress in the modern up to date parlour. 16 cows were milked, released and another group was let in. A number of locals were there and a lot of farm business was discussed which was beyond me. The overall impression I had was that

they had tough times ahead. The feed was of very poor quality, and management needed to be refined considerably to run this big operation. It seemed to me that getting a few farmers with a 5 or 8 head of cows experience to run a 200 head milking herd was too big a gap.

In Gnadental, we stopped at the radio station, but Bram Siemens was out till Thursday. We noticed a restaurant still open; "Restaurant Neveria Menys" at km6, owned by Richard Giesbrecht. We had a late supper, met some people who talked to us.

Jake Nikkel is a great talker and soon he found out that this Gerhard Rempel had a son-in-law, Abram Friesen, who operated a welding and manufacturing plant that had been partially financed by a Klassen from Grunthal whom Jake knew. Well, anyway, after that we booked into the Motel 12 "Gasthaus", near Blumenau, which was to be our home for the next week. Dave and Sara Thiessen were our hosts.

"Friend's Cafe", a short block from our motel was our breakfast stop for the next few days. A Mr. Wall has leased it and operates it with family members. Mr. Wall has a large orchard which he was considering to sell and then move to Alberta and do some cattle ranching. Monday morning after breakfast we set out to find the manufacturing plant.



The Blumenau school has a great computer class taught by a Mexican in the Spanish language. The courses run for several grades with different options. Hannah Rempel standing to the left.



Manitoba Campo 22 School, Blumenort, Manitoba Plan. These students are using "Das Blatt", a German children's publication by "Die Mennonitische Post" as their prime reading material.

We found Mr Friesen busy at work. His manufactured products sell under the name "Agra King".

#### Cuauhtemoc.

After a bit more sight seeing we were off to Cuauhtemoc to find CUMBRES FRIESEN travel agent. Just into the city, Jake tells me there is someone behind me that wants something. I check my mirror and see a police car with the coloured lights flashing!

Wow! Action! Well, I stop.



*Professor Harvey Plett discussing a point with a student at the bible school during the afternoon break. Plett was in Mexico for a 2 month teaching assignment.*



*Jake Nikkel and Knals Rampel beside this impressive dairy operation near Gnadenfeld.*



*Peter R. Kornelsen, right took us through the Kleine Gemeinde print shop at the Quellen Colony where a lot of German school material and devotional writings are printed for all of North and South America. Peter also toured us through many stores and factories as well as the hospital and church.*

The officer comes to my window with a book and says something-a lot of things. I let him know that I speak only English.

At this point Jake tells me that he believes the policeman's problem is that I had gone through a red light which he had seen, but I had not. I pull out my wad of money and offer him to take what he wants. He refuses and by this time another police car passes which he flags down.

This fellow speaks a little English, but refuses my money. I show him Cumbres Friesen's address.

He says "Follow Me".

So we got escorted to Cumbres Friesen's travel agency. He waves goodbye and I wave my thank-you.

Now we book a train ride to Divisadero, the most beautiful spot to look at the magnificent Copper Canyon. This canyon area is said to be



*A cheese factory and milk bottling plant in Gnadenfeld.*



*Mr. Wall pushing the corn bales through the hammermill for feed for his cows.*



*Here is a modern up-to-date home in Blumenau.*

about four times the size of the U.S. Grand Canyon. David Friesen (REVEREND) recommends we stay at the Divisadero Barrancas Hotel and return the next day. We also learn that David's wife is the youngest sister to Mary Friesen at Fernwood Place in Steinbach. After a lot of Low-German kibbitzing and being relieved of a big pile of money, we leave.

We go back to the MCC center at km33 to check on our chances of having someone give us a tour of some interesting villages or operations. As luck would have it, Abram and Hanna Rempel were out for a meeting and were planning to stay another week. We book them for a Thursday tour.

#### Copper Canyon.

Tuesday morning we are off to the train station. The train (first class) is 40 minutes late. It stops, we wait for some action before we act. In 30 seconds it whistles and is gone. After some waving of hands and so on, we realize that was our train.

Not to worry. Another train, a regular peasant train will be by in an hour. Sure enough. This time all the folk at the station rush to get on. We join them. Knowing no Spanish we don't know what the conductor and others are saying, but we arrive at Divisadero four-and-a-half hours later.

What a beautiful spot! From our room you can look over the gorgeous canyon. Our patio has a wood railing a foot off the 3,000 foot drop! We go for a walk, watch the local Mexican natives [Tara Humara Indians] weave baskets and are back for supper. A Mexican sings and strums his guitar while we eat. I'm tempted to join him but previous experience dictates I do no such thing. We instead ask the waitresses to join him in a few numbers. They do this.

Next morning we hire a guide to take us on a tour. There are several impressive viewpoints of the canyon. We tour a small museum, see an



Another huge house in Blumenau near the Mennonite church. Notice the ornamental steel fence instead of the cement walls.



A classroom scene at the Rosental Capoline school. Slates are still used and proper etiquette encouraged.

airstrip and return to our motel for lunch. There were also hiking and horseback tours available which we both decided not to try at this time.

After lunch we are informed that there has been a derailment which will prevent the train coming. We will have to wait for the east-bound



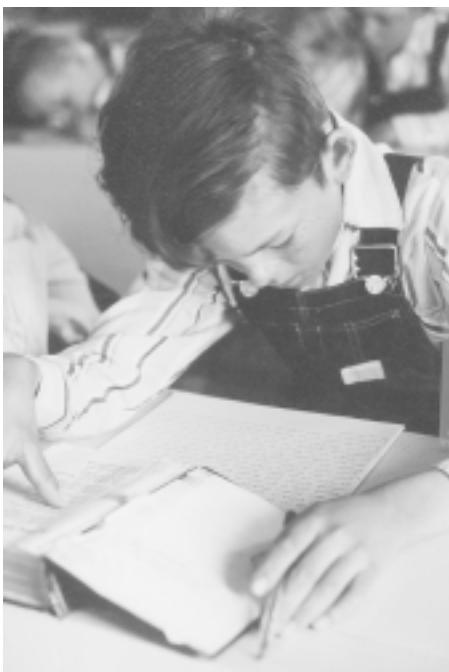
School teacher Peter Rempel and Jake Nikkel on the right watch the other two prospective cattle buyers sizing up the value of Rempel's cattle. Rempel has to subsidize his teaching with practically full time farming on the side. This is a scene of his back yard behind the school.



This fellow in Rosental Capoline in Casas Grandes is delivering the milk from various farmers to the cheese factory. As the milk goes through the opening, it is weighed and entered under the owner's name. The milk is then dumped into the cheese making vat and the empty can returned out the other side.



We spent an hour in this classroom with Mr. Rempel and the students following their regular schedule. The young girl, front middle, is reading out of the Holy Bible while the other students listen. The Bible is used to practice writing and reading skills. Students copy text out of the Bible.



Here we see this student practising his penmanship by copying scripture. Note the old and tattered Bible. Most all Bibles and Fibels were in very bad shape and also a shortage of the same. Traditional Mennonite schools had four forms or levels, more comparable to the school systems in England than the grade system standard in North America.



No matter how Old Colony you are and how far from the highway you live, some modern and worldly inventions sneak in. Here you see the front two girls having an 'instant lunch' that requires only hot water to be poured over it. Most children stayed in school for their lunch break.

heat the place. Well, we had the gas stove burning till the room was warm and then shut it off. We got a room with gas heaters the next night.

### Old Colony School.

After breakfast at the "Friend's Cafe", we wait for Abe and Hanna to pick us up.

Oh, by the way. We found it quite interesting that most restaurants



Teacher Peter Rempel in Rosenthal Capoline using the blackboard to teach reading and writing. The date at the top of the blackboard shows the date, January 16, 2000.

train to arrive. A bus will then take these people and us to Creel, about 40 miles east and beyond the blockade. We will then catch the train to Cuauhtemoc.

We catch the train and many hours later arrive at a dark train station. We catch a cab and reach our hotel at 9:30. We switch rooms. It gets cold at night minus 10 or so and the floor heating did not work too well in our previous room.

There is some misunderstanding as to which room I am referring to that Dave Thiessen had promised me, so we get a kitchenette. I asked for a room with a stove to

use instant coffee. The first breakfast at Friend's Cafe, I had four cups of coffee while Jake was chatting with some people at another table. Each time they would bring me a new cup with some instant coffee spilled in the saucer.

After that first day, they made a pot of instant coffee and poured our refills at the table. At other restaurants instant coffee was on the table like sugar and cream. They then brought you the hot water only.

Abe and Hanna arrive. We tour the Manitoba Campo 22 school. It is an Old Colony school in Blumenort. Mr Wolf is the teacher and has his daughter helping him. They have received some students from another colony which had poor teachers.

By appearance, students probably go three years to school. Mr. Wolf states that some of these new students are in their third year and have difficulty recognizing letters of the alphabet. Also, interesting in this school was the fact that there were about 30 boys and 11 girls. I was told that this ratio is somewhat high, but it is common for more boys to go to school than girls.

Our next stop is the Escuela Alvaro Obregon school at Blumenau. This is a K to 9 school and quite up to date. The school uses the German language and teaches Spanish as a second language. English and computer courses are also taught in grades 7,8,9. Mexicans teach the Spanish and computer courses. Many of the German reading, writing, arithmetic books used in this school are printed at the printing plant at the Quellen Colony, an hour's drive north of the Manitoba Colony.

The Bible School in Steinreich is our next stop. We are in time for coffee break and are treated to some freshly baked "kringel". We also meet Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Plett. Mrs. Plett is helping in the kitchen while Mr. Plett is teaching 4 courses for the next two months.

### Touring.

We then tour the country. We stop to see some steel building going up. A local fellow, John Friesen built one for himself. Before he was finished, a neighbour drove up and asked him to build him one exactly like the one he had. John can now hardly keep up with the demand. The metal building material is brought in from Texas. We also tour some huge orchards and get some idea of the wealth of these estate owners.



*The wagons have a special road built for them in the ditches. Here you see this super model taking the boys to the general store for the morning gossip and coke. Nuevo Casas Grandes.*

Supper is at the Restaurant Neveria Menys again. I forgot, we had the "Rempel special" at the Pizza Restaurant for lunch.

Friday the 14th we did our own touring. We found a feed mill that we went through. The fellow then got Knals Rampel to give us a guided tour through the cheese factory as well as the dairy operation. The dairy operation was similar in size to the "MCC-sponsored" one.

In my humble opinion, this one appeared to be somewhat more promising in being able to bring some returns to the investors. After lunch we headed east toward the lake. We never got to it, but saw many villages.

We stopped at Schanzenfeld and talked to a young Mr. Wall who was sending some poor quality feed through his hammermill. He had worked in Ontario a few summers, saved the money earned, bought this farm for \$20,000 and got married. He had 5 or 6 cows, a few calves, pigs and chickens. He worked part time at the local cheese factory and was proud and happy with his achievements. We toured this cheese factory also and it was considerably smaller than the one we had seen earlier.

During our tour of the Mennonite Colonies I noticed the fact that most of the villages marked on our maps were still villages consisting of 20 or 30 homes or more, each on a lot 100 meters wide by 1500 meters deep. They were a community.

On my trip last year to Bolivia and Paraguay, I was disappointed by the fact that most villages on those maps had disappeared with only a few farms replacing them. Neighbours seemed to be a mile or half-a-mile apart.

Well, we now stopped in at the radio station and chatted with the famous Bram Siemens and met his new wife. We passed on the mail we had for them and headed for Cuauhtemoc to do some souvenir shopping for our wives. Somehow we had not forgotten them.

It bothered us somewhat that several times that we had tried calling our respective loved one at home, there had been no one home and a message on the answering machine was all we could leave.

#### Quellen Colony.

We decided to visit the Quellen Colony Saturday. On our way there we helped some Mexican replace one of his almost rubberless tires that had lost its air, probably due to his overweight load. The farmer where we stopped to fill the Mexican's spare tire with air, suggested we stop in at Peter R. Kornelsen for information and probable tour of the Colonies. This man would show us everything humanly possible. We did this.

Peter was an Irish orphan, born in Winnipeg. He was adopted and moved to Mexico in 1948 with the rest of the Mennonites that settled here. Peter is very active in the community and plugs into church, politics, hospital, school, and industry in his everyday business.

Peter says 70% of all people living in the 11 villages are Kornelsens or related to them. His children are interested in Peter's ancestors. Peter is trying to find his roots now and anyone able to help him could contact him or Delbert Plett.

#### Church.

Because the restaurants were closed Sunday morning, the Thiessens offered us breakfast in their home. Dave had gone to church, so Sara who had stayed home to look after the motel guests served us breakfast. We decided to go to the Mennonite church in Blumenau. Philip and Laura Dyck, long time agricultural specialists and MCC workers had invited us to dinner after the service. We arrived at church in plenty of time.

The Reverend Cumbres Friesen greeted us at the door and introduced us to his beautiful wife. The service was in German with some Spanish and English. They sang well with many choruses projected on the wall. I read a greeting from 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. They responded with a return greeting to our congregation in Steinbach.

#### Nuevo Casas Grandes.

Jake and I now decided to leave after dinner and travel home through Nuevo Casas Grandes and visit the Old Colony Mennonites there Monday morning. This colony is about 4 1/2 hours northwest of Cuauhtemoc.

The Colony is about 20 km. from the highway on a dirt road. We



*Jake bids farewell to Mexico under the direction of these two officers.*



*It is not uncommon to see lady drivers on the colonies. This particular wagon had wheels that didn't match and the rear wheels wobbled so badly, I thought they were going to fall off. Nuevo Casas Grandes.*

stopped at a general store, visited a while and got directions to a cheese factory. We toured this, took some pictures of horse and buggies. I happened to see a group of children playing outside so asked Jake to pull over and see if it was a school. It was.

School teacher Peter Rempel graciously allowed us to join his students for the next hour while he was giving his instructions. My understanding was that most students attend school for three years, and there was only one 'grade' [Actually comparable more to a "Form" as found in schools in England].

The beginners sat in back and due to a shortage of books and writing tablets, they learned only through osmosis and from the blackboard. As their skills increased they moved closer to the front and received the Bible, Song book and Fibel. Nowhere in the North American continent would you find discipline as in these Old Colony schools.

Memory work is an important part of their education, partly due to the shortage of reading material. Mr. Rempel had the class recite a Christmas 'poem'. The class recites in a 'maximumum' volume. I almost dropped my video camera! The recitation was approximately 10 minutes long without interruption.

The singing was also a marvel! It was according to the old style. They then had various samples. Some songs the students would take turns being the prompter or whatever you call the person that says the line before the group sings it. Other songs would be sung in unison, full volume. When it came to the chorus, somehow these kids found a super switch and the volume was unbelievable. Throughout this singing the faces remained expressionless and their singing appeared effortless.

Mr. Rempel made an interesting comment. They had received a few students who had lived in Canada for some time and moved back. These kids could not sit still or stand at attention. It was frustrating; however, they seemed more alert and would learn and catch onto things more quickly than the others.

#### **Homeward.**

Now it was time to get going. We continued north and decided to pick a smaller border crossing rather than go through El Paso. We had just turned off the highway and were heading toward Palomas when it was my turn to say to Jake that there was someone behind him that would like him to stop.

Again, after much talking, we decided the fellows were saying "yes, you can cross at Palomas, but no, you better turn around and go the El Paso way."

I snapped a photo of Jake and the policemen. We turned around and headed toward El Paso. The police, in their hot Mustang did the same and were out of sight as fast as they had appeared. We finally made it through Ciudad Juarez travelling many unnecessary streets and fre-

quently asking for directions.

Once in the US, we stopped to see a pecan farm, an 86,000-head feedlot operation, the Mennonite Newton office and got back home in time for the Gerhard Ens appreciation celebration.

Now last Monday, April 17, Jake says to me; "Say Fraunz wesst Du nich mett de Food Grain Bank no Afrika foare met mee?"

I said that was out of my league; he should try Ron Rempel or some other big farmers. He reassured me that my style of camaraderie and touring was hard to beat. I should give it some thought.

O well, time will tell!

#### **Editor's Note:**

A number of the photographs in the Frank Froese, "Mexico Tour 2000," article were published in the *Mennonistische Post*, February 18, 2000, page 3, under the title "Die Schulen haben sich nicht verändert." The article included a commentary by *Post* editor Abe Warkentin in which he did not lambast the Old Kolony schools in Mexico as he has sometimes done previously.

## **HSHS Director Appointed, Ben Funk**

**HSHS Director Appointed April 27, 2000, Ben Funk, Steinbach, Manitoba.**

Ben Funk, Steinbach, has been appointed to the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society board of directors effective April 27, 2000.

Ben was born in Paraguay moving to Canada in 1964. Two years later he married Helen Schroeder, now owner of South East Travel in Steinbach.

Ben and Helen have three children.

He worked as a manager at Loewen Millwork, Steinbach, for many years and retired from his position December 31, 1999.

Ben has a long standing interest in the history of his people and his presently working on a history of the Funk family.



*Ben Funk, new HSHS director.*

# Archbishop Antoine Hacault Dies

Archbishop Antoine Hacault of the St. Boniface Diocese Dies April 13, 2000.

Archbishop Antoine Hacault of the St. Boniface Diocese Dies April 13, 2000. The Archbishop was remembered as a humble, gentle man who always stayed in touch those he served. He died at the age of 74 from cancer.

Antoine Hacault was born in Bruxelles, one of 18 children. He became the first Manitoban to become Archbishop of the St. Boniface Diocese.

He graduated from St. Boniface College in 1947 and was ordained in 1951. He became auxiliary Bishop in 1964 and Archbishop in 1974. He had participated in the historic 1962-65 Vatican Council which implemented major reforms within the Roman Catholic Church.

During an interview in 1996 Hacault said, "But I am what I am because of the people I serve. It's the archdiocese that made me what I am. Charity means receiving God's love and sharing it with others." From *Free Press*, April 8, 2000, page 2A.

Conservative Mennonites and Roman Catholics have always enjoyed good relationships as neighbours in the East Reserve and in numerous communities across Latin America. As attacks by so-called Evangelicals against conservative Mennonite communities become more and more insidious, they will find it beneficial to nurture and enhance their ecumenical relationships with Catholics.



Archbishop Antoine Hacault, a genuine servant of Christ, dearly beloved by his parishioners. Photo courtesy of Judy Turenne.

# Chortitzer Bishop Ordained

Chortitzer Bishop Dick Wiebe Ordained October 17, 1999.

Rev. Dick Wiebe, New Bothwell, of the Silberfeld Chortitzer Mennonite Church was ordained as Bishop (Aeltester) of the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, on October 17, 1999. He replaced Bishop Bill Hildebrandt who died last year.

The service was held in the Steinbach C.M.C. church with Pastor Cornie F. Ginter presenting the ordination message. Assistant Bishop Cornie Martens led the dedicatory prayer for the ceremony.

*Preservings* wishes Bishop Dick Wiebe God's blessing as he undertakes this important work.

The Chortitzer Conference is one of the few Mennonite denominations which has maintained the apostolic order of the threefold ministry of Bishop, ministers (teacher) and deacons. Many other denominations have already converted to so-called Evangelical religious culture where the churches are operated more on a business enterprise model with a board of directors, CEO, etc.

The Chortitzer Conference is the oldest Mennonite denomination in Western Canada. Bishop Wiebe is only the ninth Bishop (Aeltester) to have served the Chortitzer people

during their 126 years in Canada.



Bishop Dick and Helen Wiebe. Photo courtesy of CMC The Chronicle, Vol. 19, No. 9, October 1999, page 2.

# Jack Wiebe to Senate

Jack Wiebe, Herbert, Saskatchewan, Appointed to Senate April 7, 2000.



Jack Wiebe. Photo courtesy of The Star Phoenix, April 8, 2000.

Jack Wiebe, Herbert, Saskatchewan was appointed to the Canadian Senate on April 7, 2000.

Wiebe, who was a farmer, former Liberal MLA from Morse Constituency from 1971 to 1978 and longtime Liberal strategist and fund-raiser, served for the past five years as Lieutenant-Governor of Saskatchewan: see "Lieutenant-Governor Jack Wiebe," in *Preservings*, No. 15, page 85.

Jack Wiebe has thousands of relatives in the Steinbach area through his mother's grandparents Gottliebe Janhke and Helena Friesen who pioneered two miles north of the Steinbach Village Musuem in 1874, SW23-7-6E.

Helena was a sister to Mrs. Peter H. Unger, Mrs. Peter L. Plett, whose families are well known in Hanover Steinbach. On his paternal side, Jack is a descendant of Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), who broke away from the Crimean Kleine Gemeinde congregation to form the KMBs, later of Gnadenau, Kansas.

*Preservings* congratulates Jack Wiebe on his appointment to the Senate and wishes him well as he takes up his important new assignment.

*Preservings* is indebted to Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, for forwarding the *Star* article.

# Articles

## The Bergthal Dycks/Duecks

**"The Bergthal/Chortitzer/Sommerfelder Dyck/Duecks",  
by Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack Street, New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5.**

### **Introduction.**

The purpose of this article, like my other articles in this series, is to describe the movement and history of a group of families over time, in this case the Dyck/Dueck families of Bergthal. Again, I use the 1776 West Prussian census and the 1881 Manitoba census as endpoints. The families are the Dyck families listed in the index to the Bergthal Gemeinde Buch (BGB).

The surname Dyck is a very old Mennonite surname, but is not an exclusively Mennonite name, except in certain unique Mennonite variants. It is a place name and denoted a person living near a dyke. It was a common surname in the Dutch, Friesian and North German Lowlands, in areas where there were floodlands and dykes. The earliest Mennonite forms of the name are von (van) Dyck or von Dyck. The "von" was dropped by most families in the 1700s. In this respect, the name is similar to other names such as von Riesen and von Bergen, where the "von" was also dropped.

The main early variations in this name are Dyck, Dück, Dick, and Dück. At a relatively late point, pronunciation variations caused the form Dueck (Dück) to be used in writing. Even later, the pronunciation Dück also changed so that now most people pronounce Dück as Du-eck, not Dück. This does not of course imply that Dueck was an independent surname prior to recent times.

Another name which has some relationship to this name is Theichrob. The original name was Dyckgraf, meaning overseer of the dyke(s). It was then transformed over time as Deichgraf, Theichgraf, and then Theichrob and Theichgrow.

The name Dyck with its variations may very well be the most frequently encountered surname among the descendants of the West Prussian and Russian Mennonites. It is possible that almost anyone of Mennonite background has a Dyck ancestor. This writer has also several Dyck ancestors, most notably my grandmother Katherina Dyck.

But the Dycks were not the most numerous of the Mennonite surnames in West Prussia in 1776. That distinction goes to the name Penner. I mention this interesting fact because it relates directly to the other point that I have frequently made in other articles and papers. And that idea is that the overwhelming majority of Mennonite immigrants to Russia prior to 1815 were of Flemish Vistula Delta background. In the 1776 census, the majority of Penners belonged to Friesian Gemeinden. On the other hand, there only appears to have been one or two Dyck families in Friesian Gemeinden. So that

the number of Dycks who moved to Russia considerably exceeded the number of Penners who went to Russia.

The large number of Dycks living in West Prussia and Russia at the time of the Russian immigrations does give rise to some problems identifying the particular individuals who moved to Russia. In cases where exact data is not available, it is sometimes difficult to be certain of the ancestry of some individuals. The analysis presented below is by natural family groups, but otherwise is in no particular order.

### **1. Heinrich Dyck of Pietzkendorf**

This Heinrich Dyck was one of the few, and perhaps the only, Dyck who was a member of a Friesian Gemeinde before 1800. He may have been a son or a brother of Phillip Dyck, whose widow is listed as a landowner at Pietzkendorf in 1772. Heinrich was also listed as a landowner at Pietzkendorf in 1772. In the census of 1776, he is listed at Pietzkendorf with one son and one daughter. We do not know the name of his first wife, his second wife was Susanna Neudorf (b. 1754), previously married to an unknown Janzen. Heinrich died in 1791 and his widow married Abraham Sudermann of the Ladekopp Gemeinde on 19.2.1792. Abraham Sudermann went to Russia circa 1796-98, along with some of the Dyck step-children including Phillip and Abraham. Abraham Sudermann died before 1811, and his widow married Jacob Lehn (1743-1815) of Osterwick, Russia. At age 72 and 60, respectively they are listed with 2 horses, 4 cattle, 3 sheep, 1 swine, 1 wagon, No. 7: B. H. Unruh (BHU), page 284.

It seems that not all the Heinrich Dyck's children were included in the 1776 census count. His children included:

- 1.1. Heinrich Dyck (1756-1807) married Kornelia Quiring and later Katherina Thunn;
  - 1.2. Arend (b. circa 1759);
  - 1.3. Peter (b. circa 1779) married Kornelia Daniels and later Sara Meckelberger;
  - 1.4. Phillip (b. 1781) came to Russia with step-father Abraham Sudermann 1796-98, and later settled at Burwald. He married Elisabeth Letkemann (b. 1773) widow of Jacob Peters. The children listed at Burwald in 1808 may include several children of Jacob Peters. Phillip Dyck was a well-off farmer listed on Wirtschaft 25, with 6 horses, 17 cattle, 1/2 plow, 1 wagon, etc. BHU, page 277. Phillip's children include:
- 1.4.1. Peter Dyck (1804-53) married Eva Pries (b. 1805), daughter of Peter Pries of Chortitz. This family moved to Bergthal, BGB A131. After Peter's death Eva married Peter Hamm,

and later Peter Gerbrandt. Peter's children include:

- 1.4.1.1. Eva Dyck (b. 1831) married Johann Harder;
- 1.4.1.2. Peter (b. 1836) married Aganetha Reimer, BGB B 157. This family came to Canada with the Bergthalers, Schönau 1881 Manitoba census, West Reserve.
- 1.4.1.3. Dirk Dyck (1839-39);
- 1.4.1.4. Margaretha Dyck (1842-69) married Peter Loewen;
- 1.4.1.5. Dirk Dyck (b. 1845) married Eva Funk, later Helena Friesen. BGB B302, Schönau, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;
- 1.4.1.6. Jacob Dyck (1847-83) married Elisabeth Abrams. BGB B356, Grünthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Elisabeth later married Jacob Schapansky;
- 1.4.1.7. Abraham Dyck (b. 1849). He married (1) Katherina De Fehr, (2) Susanna Fast, (3) Anna Funk, and (4) Katherina Ens. BGB B357, Schönau, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;
- 1.4.2. Dirk Dyck (1809-49) married Anna Pe-



David, Heinrich and Dirk Schroeder, sons of Maria Dyck (1840-1900) and Johann Schroeder (1807-84). Maria married for the second time to Jakob Knelsen in 1887. She is buried in the Schantzenfeld, W.R., cemetery. The Heinrich Schroeder family moved to Abbotsford, B. C. Photo courtesy of Rod Siemens, Steinbach, Manitoba, grandson of David.



Rev. Johann A. Schroeder (1848-1943), son of Sara Dyck (1843-68), married Helena Funk (b. 1870), SB1 263. Here the couple sit in front of their home in Paraguay, circa 1935, with sons and in-laws: r.-l. Mr. and Mrs. Johann A. Schroeder with grandson Bernhard (son of Johann) standing at grandpa's knee. Bernhard died in a tragic fire accident at the age of 11. Next to the left is son Johann F. Schroeder (1891-1982) and wife Helena Fehr seated in front with daughter Tina; next is son Abram Schroeder and wife, nee Margaretha Hoeppner, seated in front with daughter Tina; next is daughter-in-law Elisabeth and her second husband David Braun, with son Isaac standing beside her and child on her lap. Elisabeth was married for the first time to Peter Schroeder, brother to Johann and Abraham. Photo courtesy of Peter H. Schroeder, Steinbach, Manitoba, a son of Abraham Schroeder. The photo caption is courtesy of Ben Funk, HSHS director, married to Helen Schroeder of South East Travel, Steinbach, granddaughter of Johann F. Schroeder.

ters (b. 1798), widow of David Driedger. This family moved to Bergthal, BGB A8(a). After Dirk's death, his widow married Wilhelm Unrau, then Heinrich Falk. Dirk's children include:

1.4.2.1. Elisabeth Dyck (1836-1908) married Peter Unrau, Peter Falk and Johann Bühler;

1.4.2.2. Justina Dyck (b. 1837) married Abraham Penner;

1.4.2.3. Maria (1840-1900) married widower Johann Schroeder (1807-84); see William Schroeder, "Johann Schroeder 1807-84," *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 44-47;

1.4.2.4. Dirk Dyck (1841-41);

1.5. Abraham (b. 9.3.1785) married Maria Pauls (b. 1769) and later Justina Neudorf (1793-1851). Abraham came to Russia 1796-98 as well, with his step-father Abraham Sudermann. In 1802 he was with the Jacob Wiebes of Neuendorf, BHU, page 255, No 40. In 1808 he is listed at Burwald as an Einwohner, No. 5, with 3 cows: BHU, page 277. By 1814 he had moved to Osterwick, property No. 4, as an Anwohner, owning 4 horses and 5 cows: BHU, page 284. Later, Abraham moved to Bergthal, BGB A 93.

Abraham's first wife had come to Russia in 1803 with the Hermann Olfert family. His sec-

ond wife was a daughter of Giesbrecht Neudorf of Rosenthal. Abraham Dyck's children include:

1.5.1. Johann (b. 1805, died young);

1.5.2. Abraham (b. 1811, died young);

1.5.3. Katherina (1815-98) married Peter Neufeld;

1.5.4. Abraham (b. 1816) married Maria Wiens, then Elisabeth Schultz, BGB B28. This family stayed in Russia. Abraham's children include:

1.5.4.1. Abraham (1839-41);

1.5.4.2. Peter (b. 1840) married Sara Peters, BGB C 16;

1.5.4.3. Maria (1843-1918) married Peter Martens;

1.5.4.4. Justina (b. 1845);

1.5.4.5. Katherina (1848-48);

1.5.4.6. Abraham (1859-60);

1.5.4.7. Abraham (b. 1860);

1.5.5. David Dyck (1818-64) married (1) Aganetha Goertzen, (2) Sara Rode, BGB B27. David's children include:

1.5.5.1. Abraham (1842-42);

1.5.5.2. Johann (b. 1842);

1.5.5.3. Maria (b. 1843) married Abraham Lempky;

1.5.5.4. David (1845-45);

1.5.5.5. David (b. 1848);

1.5.5.6. Abraham (b. 1851);

1.5.5.7. Johann (b. 1853) married Margaretha Funk, BGB C72. After Johann's death circa 1876, his widow married Abraham Kauenhowen (1854-1927), Schanzenfeld, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Johann is believed to have had a son Johann b. 1874;

1.5.5.8. Aganetha (b. 1855) married Jacob Dyck (b. 1847) a son of David Dyck (1820-69) (see 7.4.4. below);

1.5.5.9. Jacob (b. 1858) married Anna Bückert, Rosenthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve.

1.5.5.10. Bernhard (b. 1860) married Margaretha Dyck (1864-1922), a daughter of Gerhard Dyck (1832-93);

1.5.5.11. Aron (b. 1863);

1.5.5.12. Anna (b. 1864);

1.5.6. Justina Dyck (b. 1821);

1.5.7. Anna Dyck (b. 1823);

1.5.8. Jacob Dyck (b. 1828) married Katherina Peters, then Elisabeth Lempky (the widow of Jacob Günther), then Margaretha (nee Dirksen), BGB B97. This family came to Canada with the Bergthalers although the children of the first marriage stayed in Russia: Blumenfeld, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve.

Jacob Dyck's children include:

- 1.5.8.1. Abraham (b. 1850);
- 1.5.8.2. Elisabeth (b. 1851) married Heinrich Schapansky;
- 1.5.8.3. Jacob (1856-1923) married Katherina Banmann, Blumenfeld, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;
- 1.5.8.4. Maria (1859-61);
- 1.5.8.5. David (b. 1863);
- 1.5.8.6. Peter (b. 1868) married Anna Fehr;
- 1.5.9. Helena Dyck (b. 1831);
- 1.5.10. Margaretha Dyck (1834-98) married Peter Wolf;
- 1.5.11. Wilhelm (1835-42);
- 1.5.12. Aron Dyck (b. 1837) married Elisabeth Wolf, Rosenthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;

## 2. Heinrich Dyck of Krebsfeld

Heinrich Dyck was listed in the 1776 census at Krebsfeld with one son and one daughter. He probably had other children some of whom may have been listed elsewhere in the census. His wife was Judith Pries (b. 1731). Heinrich died before 1788, and his widow later came to Russia in 1803 with her son Heinrich, later living with her son Abraham at Neuendorf, Russia. Heinrich Dyck's children included:

2.1. Heinrich (b. 1759, died before 1808). He married Margaretha Driedger and came to Russia in 1803, along with his mother, Heinrich, and possibly Margaretha, had died before 1808, his children settled in the Molotschna.

2.2. Abraham (b. 1769) came to Russia with the first immigrants in 1788 and settled at Neuendorf. He is listed in 1795, Wirtschaft No. 2, BHU, page 240, in 1802, Wirtschaft 27 (5 horses, 6 cattle, 1 plow, 1 wagon), BHU, page 255, and in 1808, Wirtschaft No. 21 (6 horses, 15 cattle, 7 sheep, 5 swine, 1 plow, 1 wagon, 2 spinningwheels), BHU, page 269. His first wife was Agatha Thunn (b. 1757), widow of Kornelius Hiebert. His second wife was Sara Suckau (b. 1784). His children included:

2.2.1. Abraham (b. 1791). We know little regarding this Abraham Dyck, but it seems probable to me that the Johann listed below was his son.

2.2.1.1. Johann (1821-1908) married Elisabeth Dyck (1820-83). This family moved to Bergthal, BGB A101. Elisabeth Dyck was the daughter of a yet unknown Dyck who married Katherina Peters (1799-1864), who later married Gerhard Ens (1804-93). Johann later came to Canada: Alt-Bergthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Johann's children include:

- 2.2.1.1.1. Sara (1843-68) married Abraham Schroeder (1845-1907) BGB B269. Abraham Schroeder was a Sommerfelder minister. Their son Johann Schroeder (1868-1943) was a minister of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde and moved to Paraguay with the fifth group arriving May 15, 1927;

2.2.1.1.2. Gerhard (b. 1845) married Aganetha Wiens, then Margaretha Sawatsky. BGB B 374. Alt-Bergthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;

- 2.2.1.1.3. Johann (1847-74) married Katherina



In 1880 Elisabeth Dyck (1855-1926) married widower Johann Funk (1836-1917), Alt-Bergfeld, who became Aeltester of the West Reserve Bergthal in 1882. Photo courtesy of Gerbrandt, Adventure in Faith (Altona, 1970), page 84.

Toews. BGB B331. After Johann's death, Katherina married Franz Harder;

2.2.1.1.4. Katherina (1851-1930) married Abraham Schroeder, who had previously married her sister. The Abraham Schroeder family is listed in Alt-Bergfeld, W. R., in the 1881 census.

2.2.1.1.5. Abraham (1853-53);

2.2.1.1.6. Elisabeth (1855-1926) married the widower, later Aeltester, Johann Funk (1836-1917) of the Bergthal Gemeinde;

2.2.1.1.7. Abraham (b. 1857) married Aganetha Harder;

2.2.1.1.8. Heinrich (1859-60);

2.2.1.1.9. Aganetha (b. 1861);

2.2.1.1.10. Heinrich (b. 1861) married Sara Sawatsky;

2.2.1.1.11. Helena (1865-65);

2.2.2. Aron Dyck (b. 1804) married Anna Driedger (1803-56). After his death, his widow married Friedrich Wall (1807-66) of Bergthal in 1853. The index of the Bergthal Gemeinde Buch indicates that the husband of Anna Driedger was Abraham Dyck, but the analysis given here seems more likely, BGB 179a. Aron's children include:

2.2.2.1. Abraham Dyck (b. 1827) married Katherina Dyck (b. 1832), daughter of Kornelius Dyck (1802-72) (see 3.8 below). BGB B140. This family came to Canada in the 1870s and are found at Schönthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Abraham's children include:

2.2.2.1.1. Kornelius (b. 1857);

2.2.2.1.2. Helena (1858-58);

2.2.2.1.3. Katherina (b. 1860);

2.2.2.1.4. Abraham (b. 1862) married (1) Margaretha Unrau, (2) Maria Stobbe;

2.2.2.1.5. Helena (b. 1865) married (1) Jacob Siemens, (2) Johann Sudermann

2.2.2.1.6. Peter (b. 1867) married Elisabeth Dyck;

2.2.2.1.7. Aron (b. 1870) married (1) Gertruda Dirksen, (2) Anna Schapansky;

2.2.2.2. Sara (1829-57) married Abraham Günther;

2.2.2.3. Kornelius (b. 1832) married Sara Thiessen, BGB B131. This family came to Canada in the 1870s: Schönau, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Their children include:

2.2.2.3.1. Anna (b. 1857) married Abraham Neufeld;

- 2.2.2.3.2. Sara (1858-61);
- 2.2.2.3.3. Sara (1862-63);
- 2.2.2.3.4. Adelgunda (1864-1967);
- 2.2.2.3.5. Sara (b. 1867) married Heinrich Wiebe;

2.2.2.3.6. Kornelius (b. 1870, died young);

2.2.2.4. Anna (b. 1835) married Jacob Unger;

2.2.2.5. Judith (1841-60);

2.2.2.6. Aron (1844-1927) married Helena Falk (1851-1935), BGB B333. This family also came to Canada in the 1870s: Schönthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Their children include:

2.2.2.6.1. Helena (b. 1870, died young);

2.2.2.6.2. Katherina (b. 1872) married Kornelius Günther;

2.2.2.6.3. Elisabeth (b. 1874) married Heinrich Falk;

2.2.2.6.4. Anna (b. 1877) married Peter Klassen;

2.2.2.6.5. Aganetha (b. 1880, died young);

2.2.2.6.6. Sara (b. 1882) married Abraham Zacharias;

2.2.2.6.7. Peter (b. 1886) married Elisabeth Wiebe;

2.2.2.6.8. Helena (b. 1889) married Johann Fehr;

## 3. Peter Dyck of Goldberg

Peter Dyck (1749-1808) was listed in the 1776 census at Goldberg with four sons and one daughter. Not all of the children listed in 1776 have been Dyck's, as Peter Dyck's first wife was Justina, nee Giesbrecht, the widow Boschmann. She had died before 1795, and Peter had married again to a certain Maria (b. 1759), family name currently unknown.

Peter Dyck was one of the first immigrants to Russia and settled at Neuendorf, where he is found in the 1795 census list-Wirtschaft 28, BHU, page 241, 1802--Wirtschaft 53 (3 horses, 6 cattle, 6 sheep, 2 harrows, 1 wagon, 1 spinningwheel), BHU, page 256. His widow is found in the list of 1808--Wirtschaft 42 (7 horses, 18 cattle, 4 sheep, 6 swine, 1/2 plow, 1 harrows, 1 wagon, 1 spinningwheel), BHU, page 271. He had a number of sons and left many descendants. His children include:

3.1. Peter (b. 1769) married Maria (b. 1770), Neuendorf. He is listed in Wirtschaft 27 in 1795, BHU, page 241, on Wirtschaft 52 (next door to his father) in 1808 (4 horses, 5 cattle, 8 sheep, 2 swine, 1 wagon, 1 spinningwheel), BHU, page 256, and in the 1808 census on Wirtschaft 41 (next door to his mother) (7 horses, 12 cattle, 8 sheep, 4 swine, 1/2 plow, 1 harrows, 1 wagon, 1 spinningwheel), BHU, page 271;

3.2. Hermann (b. 1772, died before 1802). He married Katherina Klassen, the widow of a Johann Dyck. After his death, his widow married Peter Breuil, Wirtschaft 17, Neuendorf 1793, 1795: BHU page 241.

3.3. Anna (b. 1781);

3.4. Jacob (b. 1784);

3.5. Gerhard (b. 1787). It is possible this is the Gerhard Dyck who married Elisabeth Mannholz (b. 1794), although it is difficult to be certain. His widow married Franz

## Preservings

Giesbrecht (1790-1860) who later moved to Berghthal. BGB A117. Gerhard Dyck's children include:

3.5.1. Gerhard (b. 1817) married Katherina Neudorf, later Katherina Klassen, Schönhorst;

3.5.2. Elisabeth (1818-61) married Abraham Lempky, later Friedrich Wall of Berghthal;

3.5.3. Peter (1819-95) married Anna Thiessen, Schönhorst.

3.6. Bernhard (b. 1791);

3.7. Phillip (b. 1793);

3.8. Kornelius (1802-72) married Helena Drieger. This family moved to Berghthal, BGB A77. His children include:

3.8.1. Maria (1824-65) married Abraham Neufeld;

3.8.2. Helena (b. 1827) married Peter Günther;

3.8.3. Kornelius (b. 1830) married Elisabeth Günther, then Anna Kauenhowen. BGB B 139. This family came to Canada in the 1870s and settled at Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba 1881 census. The children of Kornelius include:

3.8.3.1. Katherina (b. 1856) married Kornelius Harder;

3.8.3.2. Elisabeth (b. 1858) married Heinrich Heinrichs;

3.8.3.3. Helena (b. 1859) married Heinrich Quiring;

3.8.3.4. Kornelius (b. 1861);

3.8.3.5. Peter (1863-66);

3.8.3.6. Johann (b. 1864);

3.8.3.7. Bernhard (b. 1865) married Maria Dirksen;

3.8.3.8. Anna (1868-1918) married Jacob Günther, then Johann Neufeld, Jacob Thiessen and Heinrich Peters;

3.8.3.9. Justina (b. 1870) married Peter Dirksen;

3.8.3.10. Jacob (b. 1872) married Anna Günther;

3.8.3.11. Peter (b. 1873);

3.8.3.12. Sara (b. 1877) married Franz Funk;

3.8.4. Katherina (b. 1832) married Abraham Dyck, son of Aron Dyck (see 2.2.2. above)

3.8.5. Peter (b. 1840) married Maria Schroeder. BGB B34a. This family also came to Canada in the 1870s, but exactly where they settled initially is not known. After the 1881 census, they lived at Reinland, West Reserve. Peter Dyck's children include:

3.8.5.1. Anna (b. 1866) married Peter Rempel;

3.8.5.2. Helena (b. 1868);

3.8.5.3. Kornelius (b. 1870) married Justina Dyck (daughter of Jacob Dyck b. 1832), then Elisabeth Dirksen;

3.8.5.4. Maria (b. 1872);

3.8.5.5. Peter (b. 1874);

3.8.5.6. Bernhard (b. 1875);

3.8.5.7. Johann (b. 1881);

3.8.5.8. Abraham (b. 1889);

3.8.6. Anna (b. 1842) married Jacob Unrau;

3.8.7. Justina (b. 1845) married Abraham Dyck (son of Dirk Dyck (b. 1813), see 7.4.2. below).

### **4. Franz Dyck of Ellerwald**

Very little is known regarding this Franz

Dyck. In the 1776 census he was listed at Ellerwald IV: 4 sons. He may have been married more than once. His children may have included:

4.1. Gerhard (b. circa 1764) married 1786 Agatha Penner;

4.2. Jacob (b. 1769) married Agatha Warkentin (b. 1779). This family moved to Russia in 1818 (BHU, page 361, No. 33) and settled at Rosenort (Rosenort, Mol. 1835 census No. 10);

4.3. Franz (b. 1772);

4.4. Margaretha (b. 1776);

4.5. Bernhard (b. 1781). This last entry is speculative and based on circumstantial evidence only. It would appear he came to Russia in 1803 and stayed in the Old Colony. He married 30.8.1803 Maria Klassen (1775-1828), widow of Peter Penner of Rosenthal. This family settled at Burwald, Old Colony. BHU p 277 No 24. Bernhard Dyck's children include:

4.5.1. Bernhard (1805-75) married Aganetha Berg (1810-83). This family moved to Berghthal. BGB A55. (Some of this information regarding the above is from John Dyck's to A55). Bernhard Dyck died in Duluth on the way to Manitoba from Russia with his married children. Mrs. Aganetha Dyck is listed in the 1881 Manitoba census with her children, the Gerhard Kehlers at Berghthal, East Reserve. Bernhard's children include:

4.5.1.1. Bernhard (b. 1830) married (1) Anna Funk, (2) Aganetha Wiebe and (3) Katherina Dyck (daughter of Dirk Dyck (1783-1874)). BGB B86. Most of this family settled at Mountain Lake, Minnesota, after they came to America in the 1870s, excepting daughters Aganetha (b. 1852) who married Gerhard Dyck (son of Heinrich Dyck b. 1818) of Alt-Berghthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve, and Agatha (b. 1853) who married Daniel Blatz of Blumstein, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve;

4.5.1.2. Isaac (b. 1832) married Katherina Kauenhowen. BGB B 149. This family settled at Weidenfeld, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Isaac's children

include:

4.5.1.2.1. Isaac (1857-1935) married Helena Hiebert, then Katherina Wiebe, widow of his brother Bernhard.

4.5.1.2.2. Aganetha (1859-1942) married Peter Bergen, then Gerhard Berg;

4.5.1.2.3. Bernhard (b. 1862) married Katherina Wiebe;

4.5.1.3. Franz (b. 1835) married Maria Berg. BGB 145. This family settled at Schanzenfeld, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve. Franz Dyck's children include:

4.5.1.3.1. Maria (1857-58);

4.5.1.3.2. Bernhard (b. 1858);

4.5.1.3.3. Aganetha (b. 1861);

4.5.1.3.4. Johann (b. 1864) married Anna Funk, then Helena Günther;

4.5.1.3.5. Maria (b. 1866) married Heinrich Gerbrandt;

4.5.1.3.6. Helena (b. 1869) married Heinrich Hiebert;

4.5.1.3.7. Anna (1871-71);



*Aganetha Friesen (b. 1845) married Peter Dueck (b. 1844). The family is listed at Schanzenberg, E.R., in the 1881 census but later moved to Altona. Aganetha was a sister to Rev. Heinrich Friesen, Hochfeld, E.R., see 12.4. Photo courtesy of Irene Kroeker, Historical Sketches, page 333.*

4.5.1.3.8. Franz (b. 1872, died young);

4.5.1.3.9. Isaac (b. 1875);

4.5.1.3.10. Jacob (b. 1875) married Helena Toews;

4.5.1.3.11. Anna (b. 1879);

4.5.1.4. Aganetha (1838-74) married Jacob Hiebert;

4.5.1.5. Kornelius (b. 1839) married Anna Esau, then Helena Reimer. BGB B 182. This family settled at Kronthal, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve. Kornelius Dyck's children include:

4.5.1.5.1. Katherina (b. 1860) married Heinrich Dirksen;

4.5.1.5.2. Aganetha (b. 1861) married Johann Hiebert;

4.5.1.5.3. Anna (b. 1862, died young);

4.5.1.5.4. Maria (b. 1864) married Jacob Hiebert;

4.5.1.5.5. Anna (1867-68);

4.5.1.5.6. Anna (b. 1869) married Johann Unger;

4.5.1.5.7. Helena (b. 1870) married Kornelius Friesen;

4.5.1.5.8. Bernhard (b. 1873, died young);

4.5.1.5.9. Bernhard (b. 1877);

4.5.1.5.10. Margaretha (b. 1879);

4.5.1.5.11. Agatha (1881-1980) married Johann Neufeld, then Johann Olfert;

4.5.1.6. Maria (b. 1842) married Gerhard Kehler;

4.5.1.7. Peter Dueck (b. 1844) married Agatha Friesen (b. 1845), BGB B267. This family settled at Schanzenberg, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve [but moved to Altona, see

12.2.]. Peter Dueck's children include:  
 4.5.1.7.1. Bernhard (1865-65);  
 4.5.1.7.2. Aganetha (1867-1949) married Kornelius Hiebert;  
 4.5.1.7.3. Jacob (b. 1869);  
 4.5.1.7.4. Peter (b. 1870);  
 4.5.1.7.5. Bernhard (b. 1875);  
 4.5.1.7.6. Helena (b. 1878, died young);  
 4.5.1.7.7. Maria (b. 1879) married Peter Klippenstein;  
 4.5.1.7.8. Anna (b. 1882) married Heinrich Hamm;  
 4.5.1.7.9. Heinrich (b. 1883);  
 4.5.1.7.10. Helena (b. 1886-1962) married Abraham Friesen;

4.5.1.8. Anna (1846-1908) married Heinrich Loeppky;  
 4.5.1.9. Helena (1849-53);  
 4.5.1.10. Katherina(1853-57);  
 4.5.2. Katherina (b. 1807);  
 4.5.3. Dietrich (1810-10);  
 4.5.4. Anna (b. 1811);  
 4.5.5. Franz (b. 1813) married Anna Kropf (1813-48). This family also moved to Bergthal. BGB 120. After the death of Franz, his widow married Peter Hiebert. Franz Dyck's children apparently returned to the Old Colony and did not immigrate to America in the 1870s. They include:  
 4.5.5. 1. Bernhard (b. 1833);  
 4.5.5.2. Maria (b. 1838);  
 4.5.5.3. Franz (1841-42);  
 4.5.6. Susanna (b. 1816);

### 5. Jacob Dyck of Ellerwald

Jacob Dyck b. 1754 came to Russia circa 1796 and later settled at Niederchortitz where he is found in the lists of 1803 and 1814. BHU p 281 No 20. This Jacob Dyck appears to be the Jacob Dyck listed at Ellerwald III 1776: 2 daughters. His second wife was Sara Neufeld (1771-1839), the widow of Bernhard Schellenberg. Jacob Dyck's children include: 5.1. Dietrich (17.7.1783-2.2.1874) married Maria Bollee (b. 1774). This family lived in Kronthal; 5.2. Jacob (13.1.1787-17.9.1849). We do not know the name of his first wife, but in 1811 he married Helena Wall (1792-1874). In 1808 Jacob Dyck was living with the Gerhard Neufelds in Rosenthal. By 1814 he had settled at Osterwick. BHU p 283 No 16. Later Jacob Dyck moved to Bergthal. BGB A88. Jacob Dyck's children include:

5.2.1. Jacob (b. 1810);  
 5.2.2. Gertruda (b.1812, died young);  
 5.2.3. Susanna (1817-53) married Johann Wiens;  
 5.2.4. Franz (1822-87) married (1) Margaretha Buhr and (2) Judith Klassen. BGB B54. Franz Dyck was a minister in the Bergthaler Gemeinde, and came to Manitoba in the 1870s, Schönsee, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve: see *Preservings*, No. 11, pages 81-82, and No. 14, page 22, for two letters written by Rev.Franz Dyck, from Russia in 1875 and 1876.



*Johann K. Dueck (1866-1923), Schönsee, E.R., served as the fourth Aeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde in Manitoba. He was the son of Rev. Franz Dueck, Schönsee, E. R., the gifted administrative organizer of the Bergthal people in Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 14, page 22.*

5.2.5. Gertruda (b. 1824) married Jacob Wiens, then Peter Höppner;  
 5.2.6. Helena (1828-1847);  
 5.2.7. Margaretha (b. 1833) married Jacob Dyck (b. 1831) son of Peter Dyck (17921847);  
 5.2.8. Klaas (b.1835) married Helena Gerbrandt, then Margaretha Klug. BGB B 153. This family also came to Manitoba, Neuendorf, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve.

5.3. Gerhard (8.1.1789-1867) married (1) Maria (b. 1792), family name currently unknown, (2) Elisabeth Höppner (1792-1881) widow of Kornelius Rempel. This family lived at Osterwick in 1814. BHU p 284 No 5.

### 6. Phillip Dyck of Zeyer

We know very little regarding this Phillip, who at the time of the 1776 census was living at Robach and Zeyer, listed with two sons and one daughter. At that time he was renting some land and was listed as a worker. This family was a member of the Rosenort Gemeinde. Much of the following is speculative in some aspects but appears to me probable. Phillip's two sons were:

6.1. Phillip (No dates currently available) married Maria Schroeder. Their children include:  
 6.1.1. Johann (1778-1828) married (1) Katherina Niessen, (2) Agatha Klassen. This family moved to the Danzig area.  
 6.1.2. Dirk (1786-1850) married (1) Sara

Penner, then Elisabeth Dyck (b. 1819), widow of Abraham Dyck. Dirk Dick appears to have come to Russia after the first waves of immigration, and appears to have married late in life. He may have moved to Bergthal at the time of his second marriage, but we do not know, at this point, where he lived in Russia in prior years. His widow later married Abraham Fleming. BGB A 107. Dirk's children include:  
 6.1.2.1. Sara (1822-44) married Gerhard Wiens;  
 6.1.2.2. Jacob (1825-49);  
 6.1.2.3. Elisabeth (1828-76) married Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe of Bergthal;



*Jakob D. Wiebe (1965-1938), Chortitz/Niverville, was the son of Elisabeth Dyck (1828-76) and Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, Chortitz, E. R. Jakob wrote a very spiritual exposition regarding the death of his mother and three siblings in 1876. See Helen Unger, Pres., No. 6, pages 9-11. Photo courtesy of Celebrating Our Heritage East Reserve 125, page 37.*



*Peter Lepp (1817-71), founder of the "Lepp & Wallman" manufacturing enterprise in Chortitz, Imperial Russia, was a first cousin to Elisabeth, the wife of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe. This postcard depicts several of the "Lepp & Wallman" factories. Photo courtesy of Lohrentz, Damit es nicht Vergessen Werde (Winnipeg, 1974), page 53.*

- 6.1.2.4. Barbara (b. 1833) married Peter Heinrichs;
- 6.1.2.5. Helena (1850-52);
- 6.1.3. Margaretha (b. 1787) married Johann Epp then Johann Dyck (b. 1792). This family moved to Russia in 1819 and settled at Pordenau, Molotschna. Johann Dyck was a son of Johann Dyck of Katzenase;
- 6.1.4. Helena (b. 1791) married the widower Peter Lepp (1778-1830). This family moved to Russia in 1817 and settled at Einlage. They were the parents of Peter Lepp (1817-71) who was the founder of the “Lepp & Wallman” company;
- 6.2. Johann (b. circa 1765) married Helena Martens

## 7. Dirk Dyck of Fischau

Dirk Dyck, who was listed in the 1776 census as a Hackenbudner (small shop-keeper) at Fischau, with 3 daughters, was a member of the Ellerwald Gemeinde. It seems his widow Margaretha (nee Reimer) married Kornelius Wiegler on 19.3.1795.

It seems also that Kornelius Wiegler later came to Russia, probably circa 1798, and settled at Niederchortitz where he is found in the list of 1803 (BHU p 214 No 40).

Some of his younger step-children came with the family at that time. Dirk Dyck's children probably include:

- 7.1. Anna (b. circa 1765), possibly the first wife of Jacob Rogalsky who came to Russia in 1804 and settled in the Molotschna.
- 7.2. Kornelia (b. circa 1773);
- 7.3. Dirk (b. 1789) living with the Johann Bergens at Neuendorf, Russia in 1808
- 7.4. Abraham (b. 1790) married Katherina Bergmann (b. 1791) listed as an Anwohner at Niederchortitz in 1814 (BHU p 282 No 3).

My analysis of this section presupposes two transcription errors from the primary documents. In BHU, Abraham Dyck is listed as age 24, his wife Katherina 27, and son Abraham 7. This would indicate that either Abraham married at about age 16, or that Katherina was previously married. In the transcription of numbers, one of the most common errors is the mistaking of a 7 for a 4 and vice-versa. While generally adverse to assuming transcription errors, assuming that Katherina was age 24 and Abraham junior as age 4, seems more likely than the other scenarios above.

The second transcription problem occurs in the Reinländer Gemeinde Buch entry 53-1. The parents of Katherina Dyck (b. 1818) are listed as Jacob or Franz Dyck and Katherina Bergmann. I have seen a photocopy of the actual page and the name of the father of Katherina Dyck is really almost impossible to decipher. It could be Abraham as well, or Peter, or in fact any other name.

Katherina Bergmann was a daughter of Wilhelm Bergmann, later of Neuenburg, Russia. Her brother Franz Bergmann also moved to Niederchortitz in 1803.

Abraham Dyck's children include:

- 7.4.1. Abraham (1810-51) married Katherina Wiens, then Katherina Hiebert. This family

moved to Bergthal. BGB A51. After Abraham's death, his widow married Johann Sawatsky. Abraham's children include:

- 7.4.1.1. Katherina (b. 1837). She married someone from the Molotschna;
- 7.4.1.2. Agatha (1839-48);
- 7.4.1.3. Maria (1840-40);
- 7.4.1.4. Abraham (1841-48);
- 7.4.1.5. Gerhard (b. 1845) married Helena Leycke, BGB B324. This family moved to Canada in the 1870s. Schönsee, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve.
- 7.4.1.6. Johann (b. 1845), a twin brother of Gerhard, married Katherina Thiessen. BGB B295. Listed in the miscellaneous section, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve.
- 7.4.1.7. Maria (1848-73) married Peter Peters;

- 7.4.2. Dirk (b. 13.6.1813, d. 1883) married 31.12.1832 Anna Unrau (b. 5.9.1813, d. 1888). This family later moved to Bergthal. BGB A91. Anna Unrau was a daughter of Peter Unrau of Kronsweide. Later the Dirk Dycks came to Canada. They and their son Abraham are found in the 1881 Manitoba census at Steinbach, East Reserve, [but were probably included there in error and should properly be part of Rosengard, E.R.] Dirk Dyck's children included:

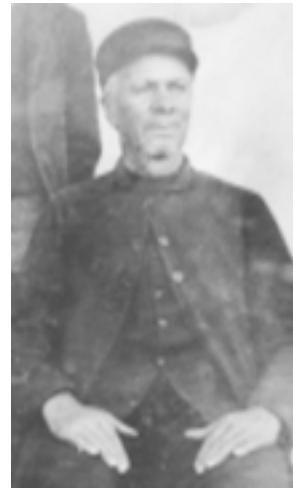
- 7.4.2.1. Abraham (1834-1922) married Justina Dyck, a daughter of Kornelius Dyck (1802-72), BGB B263 (see 3.8.7.). The Abraham Dueck family lived at Rosengard, E.R.



Abraham (1834-1922) and wife Justina Dyck, Rosengard pioneers in 1874. They were the grandparents of “Launga” Abram P. Dueck, see Preservings, No. 15, page 75 and of Justina Dueck (1896-1967) wife of Chortitzer Aeltester Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970), see Preservings, No. 6, page 9. Photo courtesy of great-grandson Peter P. D. Wiebe, Steinbach, Manitoba.

- 7.4.2.2. Katherina (b. 1836) married Wilhelm Unrau;
- 7.4.2.3. Anna (b. 1838) married Peter Penner;
- 7.4.2.4. Dirk (b. 1839) married Anna Löwen, later Helena Unrau. BGB B231. Schönthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve.

- 7.4.2.5. Peter (b. 1841) married Katherina Falk. BGB B280. Peter's wife died in 1869 and he came to Canada in 1874 without any family. It is difficult to find Peter in the 1881 census, and he may not have remarried or had any surviving children. In 1891 he was living in the West Reserve without any family.
- 7.4.2.6. Maria (b. 1843, died young);
- 7.4.2.7. Helena (1845-45);
- 7.4.2.8. Jacob (1846-1928) married Maria Neufeld. BGB B285. Rosengart, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve: see article by Linda Buhler, *Preservings*, no. 13, pages 98-101;



Jakob Dyck (1846-1928) married Maria Neufeld and settled in Roesngart, E. R., becoming the patriarch of a large family. Photo courtesy of Helen Dyck, Steinbach/Pres., No. 13, page 98.

- 7.4.2.9. Isaac (1848-1863);
- 7.4.2.10. Heinrich (b. 1851) married Agatha Ens, later Helena Martens. BGB B342. Schönthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve.
- 7.4.2.11. Helena (b. 1853) married Kornelius Günther, later Jacob Kroeker;
- 7.4.2.12. Maria (b. 1855) married Abraham Dirksen;
- 7.4.3. Katherina (1818-1891) married Jacob Reimer. This family also came to Canada (from Niederchortitz).
- 7.4.4. David (1820-69) married Katherina Neufeld. It is not certain that this David Dyck belonged to the above Abraham Dyck family, but this appears to me probable. This family also moved to Bergthal. BGB A154. See *Presevings*, No. 15, page 109 for a brief survey of the family. David's children include:
- 7.4.4.1. Katherina (b. 1844) married Jacob Penner;
- 7.4.4.2. Jacob (b. 1847) married Maria Höppner, later Aganetha Dyck (daughter of David Dyck (1818-64) (see below). BGB B55(c). This family moved to Canada in the 1870s, and was listed in the miscellaneous section, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve.
- 7.4.4.3. Maria (1849-1920) married Peter Penner, see Leona Banman, “Peter B. Penner (1846-1922),” in *Preservings*, No. 15, pages 107-13;



David D. Penner (1884-1958), *Heuboden (SE6-7-E)*, was the son of Maria Dyck (1849-1920) and Peter B. Penner, *Burwalde, E.R.* Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 15, page 107.

7.4.4.4. David (b.1852) married Maria Thiessen;

7.4.4.5. Elisabeth (b.1853);

7.4.4.6. Susanna (b.1856) married Kornelius Wiebe;

7.4.4.7. Abraham (b.1859) married Anna Wiebe, listed as living with the Abraham Friesen family, Steinbach, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve.:

7.4.4.8. Peter (b.1861);

7.4.4.9. Dirk (b.1864);

7.4.5. Wilhelm (1821-1905) married Aganetha Dyck, then Elisabeth Friesen. Again, it is not certain that Wilhelm Dyck belongs to this Abraham Dyck family, but appears to me to be probable. This family came to Canada in the 1870s.

#### 8. Jacob Dyck, Schönau.

There were several Dycks living at Schönau, so it is possible that some of what follows may need revision as new data becomes available. Jacob Dyck was listed at Schönau (Heubuden Gemeinde) in the 1776 census with 2 sons and 2 daughters. Unfortunately we know very little about Jacob himself. His wife may have been Margaretha Thiessen (1746-1818).

The Jacob Dycks immigrated to Russia circa 1804 and various members of the family settled in both the Old Colony and the Molotschna. His widow settled at Neuendorf with her younger children: Wirtschaft 23 (5 horses, 14 cattle, 12 sheep, 10 swine, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 3 wagon, 2 spinning wheels), BHU, page 270. Jacob Dyck died between 1804 and 1808. His children probably include:

8.1. Jacob (1766-1831) who married Katherina Schierling, the widow of Heinrich Wiebe of Burwald, West Prussia, and moved to Orloff, Molotschna. [He was a wealthy farmer who owned a double Wirtschaft in Ohrloff where several important ministerial meetings were held in the early days of the Molotschna Colony. His step-son-in-law Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) was the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde.]

8.2. Helena (b. 1768);

- 8.3. Abraham (b. 1772);
- 8.4. Johann (1776-1834) who, it seems, settled at Chortitzia. His wife may have been Agatha Thiessen;
- 8.5. Klaas (b. 1778) settled at Rosenort, Molotschna;

8.6. ? Maria (b. 1780). She may have been the wife of Jacob Wiens who settled at Chortitzia; 8.7. Isaac (b. 18.4.1781) married the widow of Abraham Klassen (1776-1803) of Neuendorf. She was a certain Maria (b. 1778, family name currently unknown). The Isaac Dycks were living in Neuendorf in 1808 [where he was a well-off farmer--Wirtschaft 37 (6 horses, 14 cattle, 7 sheep, 7 swine, 1/2 plow, 1 harrows, 2 wagons, 2 spinning wheels)], BHU, page 271]. Isaac's children include:

- 8.7.1. Maria (1806-1902) married Johann Siemens;
- 8.7.2. Jacob (b. 1807);
- 8.7.3. Isaac (1816-71) married Anna Koop. This connection is somewhat speculative, but appears to me quite probable. This family moved to Berghthal. BGB A80. Isaac's widow and children came to Manitoba in the 1870s. Anna was living with her children, the Peter Dirksens at Rosengart, East Reserve at the time of the 1881 census. Isaac's children include:
- 8.7.3.1. Anna (1840-41);
- 8.7.3.2. Maria (1841-53);
- 8.7.3.3. Kornelius (b.1844) married Anna Friesen. BGB B287, Neu-Berghthal, West Reserve, 1881 Manitoba census.
- 8.7.3.4. Anna (b. 1846) married Johann Unrau (1847-1925), BGB B307;



Anna Dyck (b. 1846) married Johann Unrau (1847-1925). They family is listed in Rosengart, E.R. in the 1881 census: see Prservings, No. 14, page 40.

8.7.3.5. Katherina (1848-48);

8.7.3.6. Isaac (b. 1849) married Helena Guenther. BGB B384, Rosengart, East Reserve, 1881 census;

- 8.7.3.7. Katherina (1852-52);
- 8.7.3.8. Katherina (1853-55);
- 8.7.3.9. Maria (b. 1855) married Peter Dirksen;
- 8.7.3.10. Katherina (1858-73);
- 8.7.3.11. Susanna (1860-61);
- 8.8. Peter (b. 1784) who married Maria (b. 1768), the widow of Dietrich Hildebrandt, and settled at Burwald. BHU p 275 No 12.
- 8.9. Katherina (b. 1785);
- 8.10. Franz (1786-1861) who married Elisabeth Funk;
- 8.11. Margaretha (b. 1789) who married Johann Loewen;

#### 9. Phillip Dyck of Neudorf.

Phillip Dyck (b. 1733) was listed at Neudorf, near Zeyerskainp in the 1776 census with 1 son and 1 daughter. He had other children however, who may have been staying with relatives in 1776. He was a member of the Ellerwald Gemeinde. In 1788, he immigrated to Russia and settled at Neuenburg (BHU p 240 No 8). We do not currently know the details of his previous marriage(s), but, while in Russia, he married Helena (b. 1763), the widow of Jacob Peters. Most of his children came to Russia at the same time, although his son Abraham came a few years later. Possibly, he was settling his own affairs and that of his father. Phillip's children include:

9.1. Johann (b. 1753) married Maria (b. 1758, family name currently unknown). Johann was listed separately in 1776 at Neudorf and had no children in 1776. He settled at Neuenburg, Russia, in 1788 (BHU p 240 No 7).

9.2. Abraham (b. circa 1760, died circa 1804-1806). He married Susanna Janzen in 1785, later Sara Boschmann (1766-1810) in 1788. He came to Russia circa 1796 and also settled at Neuenburg (BHU p 250 No 167, p 214 No ix(2)). Abraham took over his father's homestead. After his death, his widow married Bernhard Krahn (1783-1862). Abraham's children probably include:

9.2.1. Abraham (b. 1787) married Anna Neufeld (?) (b. 1786) and lived at Niederchortitzia in 1814.

9.2.2. Heinrich (b. 1786) married Elisabeth Arend (?) (b. 1792). Heinrich lived at Niederchortitzia in 1814. BHU 282 No 10. There is no positive evidence regarding the surname of his wife, but she could have been a daughter of Hermann Arend of Kronsweide (later Burwald). Heinrich's children include:

9.2.2.1. Johann (1813-80) married Katherina Dyck, then Maria Wiens, widow of Abraham Klassen and Peter Epp. This family moved to Berghthal. BGB A 115. Johann's children include:

9.2.2.1.1. Elisabeth (1838-95) married the widower Abraham Ens. This family came to Canada in 1891;

9.2.2.1.2. Johann (1840-76) married Aganetha Friesen. BGB B212. Johann died at Fort Dufferin, after moving to Canada. His widow married Heinrich Dyck (b. 1832) in 1877 (see below), and later Peter Falk. Johann Dyck's children are found under Heinrich Dyck's name under Miscellaneous, 1881 Manitoba census,

West Reserve. To distinguish Johann Dyck's children from Heinrich Dyck's children, I list Johann Dyck's children as follows:

- 9.2.2.1.2.1. Katherina (1862-63);
- 9.2.2.1.2.2. Katherina (b. 1864) married Peter Toews, then Franz Hoepnner (who previously married her sister);
- 9.2.2.1.2.3. Maria (b. 1867) married Abraham Wiebe;
- 9.2.2.1.2.4. Margaretha (b. 1869) married Franz Hoepnner;
- 9.2.2.1.2.5. Johann (b. 1871) married Elisabeth Neufeld;
- 9.2.2.1.2.6. Jacob (b. 1873);
- 9.2.2.1.3. Katherina (1842-74) married Peter Wiebe;
- 9.2.2.1.4. Anna (b. 1844) married Dirk Gerbrandt;
- 9.2.2.1.5. Heinrich (b. 1847) married Margaretha Braun. BGB 323. Heinrich died before 1881 and his widow married Peter Reimer. Heinrich's family is found under Peter Reimer's name at Rudnerweide, 1881 Manitoba census, West Reserve.
- 9.2.2.1.6. Helena (b. 1854) married Heinrich Wiebe;
- 9.3. Helena (b. 1764) married Peter Teichgraf (b. 1761) in 1788. They lived in Neuenburg in 1795. BHU P 240 No 14;
- 9.4. Susanna (b. 1768) married the widower Peter Hiebert (b. 1751) also living in Neuenburg in 1795. BHU p 240 No 1;
- 9.5. Judith (b. 1770) who married Peter Breuil, later Aeltester David Epp of Chortitz;
- 9.6. Margaretha (b. 1776).

## 10 Johann Dyck of Bollwerk

Johann Dyck was listed at Bollwerk in the 1776 census with one son and one daughter. He was a member of the Ellerwald Gemeinde. His children include:

10.1. Johann (b. 1765). I believe it was this Johann who married Helena Ens of the Heubuden Gemeinde in 1787. Johann Dyck came to Russia about 1796, originally living at Neuendorf where he is listed in the 1802 census--Wirtschaft 50 (3 horses, 6 cattle, 5 swine, 1 wagon, 1 spinning wheel), BHU, page 256. Johann Dyck moved to the new settlement at Niederchortitz in 1803, where he is found in the list of 1814--Wirtschaft 36 (2 horses, 8 cattle, 1 wagon, 1 spinning wheel), BHU, page 282.

After the death of his first wife, he married Anna Fast (b. 28.7.1777), daughter of Daniel Fast of Leske (Heubuden Gem.), later Schönhorst, Russia. Johann Dyck later married Anna Reimer (b. 1782), daughter of Peter Reimer of Neuendorf, Russia. Johann Dyck's children include:

- 10.1.1. Johann (b. 1791) married Helena (b. 1786) (maiden name currently unknown). This family lived at Niederchortitz in 1814--Wirtschaft 38 (3 horses, 9 cattle, 3 sheep), BHU, page 282. Their children include:
- 10.1.1.1. Maria (1812-69) married Gerhard Dyck (1809-87). Gerhard Dyck was a son of Peter Dyck (1760-1827) who came to Russia in 1817. Gerhard Dyck was later Aeltester of the Chortitz Gemeinde from 1855 to 1885 (see

12.1). A number of the letters of Aeltester Gerhard Dyck have been preserved by Jakob Fehr, Reinland, W.R., see feature articles in this issue.



*Isaac Dyck (1847-1929), served as Aeltester of the large Chortitz Mennonite Colony, Imperial Russia from 1896 until his death. He was the son of Maria Dyck and Aeltester Gerhard Dyck (1809-87). Aeltester Isaac Dyck, Chortitz Colony, was the cousin of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1837-1900), Chortitz Gemeinde, E.R., Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Franz Thiessen, Neuendorf (Espelkamp, 1991), page 34.*

10.1.1.2. Heinrich (b. 1818) married (1) Agatha Andres, (2) Helena Martens (widow of Martin Klassen), and (3) Helena Krause (widow of Johann Groening). This family later moved to Bergthal (BGB A 178), and later Manitoba. Schönfeld, Manitoba, 1881 census, East Reserve. Heinrich's children include:

- 10.1.1.2.1. Agatha (1837-75) married Cornelius Siemens;
- 10.1.1.2.2. Johann (b. 1839) married Maria Wiens, BGB B 257, Alt-Bergthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;
- 10.1.1.2.3. Helena (b. 1842) married (1) Jacob Striemer, (2) Abraham Harder, (3) Peter Wall, and (4) Peter Harder;
- 10.1.1.2.4. Heinrich (b. 1844) married Anna Wall. BGB C17(a). This family moved to Minnesota but some family members may have later moved to Manitoba.

10.1.1.2.5. Peter (b. 1846) married Elisabeth Sawatsky. BGB B310. Alt-Bergthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;

- 10.1.1.2.6. Gerhard (b. 1850) married (1) Aganetha Dyck (b. 1852) daughter of Bernhard Dyck (b. 1830) (see 4.5.1.1.), (2) Helena Hiebert. BGB B327. Alt-Bergthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;
- 10.1.2. Daniel (b. 18.3.1802, died young);
- 10.1.3. Anna (1804-36) married Johann Froese (1800-87);
- 10.1.4. Kristina (b. 1807) (Justina);
- 10.2.5. Katherina (b. 1808);
- 10.2. Elisabeth (1766-1800) married 1789 Johann Penner (b. 1766) of Kozcelitzke (Heubuden Gemeinde).

## 11. Phillip Dyck of Lakendorf

In the 1776 census, a widow Dyck is listed

at Lakendorf with one son and one daughter. She was the widow of Phillip Dyck who has probably died just prior to the census. These children were:

11.1. Aganetha (b. 1761) married (1) Jacob Warkentin, (2) Gerhard Wiens, and (3) Cornelius Funk (b. 1782). Aganetha and Gerhard Wiens had come to Russia between 1796-98 along with her brother Phillip. They eventually settled at Burwald. BHU p 276 No 15;

11.2. Phillip (b. 1763) married 1785 Agatha Hildebrandt (b. 1760). Phillip and Agatha came to Russia between 1796 and 1798 and settled at Neuendorf where they are listed in 1802 census--Wirtschaft 18 (5 horses, 7 cattle, 8 sheep, 9 swine, 1/2 plow, 1 wagon, 1 spinning wheel), BHU page 254, and again in 1808--Wirtschaft 13 (4 horses, 9 cattle, 5 sheep, 7 swine, 1 harrow, 1 wagon, 1 spinning wheel), BHU, page 268. Phillip's children include:

11.2.1. Peter (b. 1786) married Susanna Wiebe (1786-1854), Neuendorf. BHU, page 273, No 11;

11.2.2. Maria (b. 1790, died young);

11.2.3. Jacob (b. 1793);

11.2.4. Phillip (b. 1795). This Phillip is, I believe, the father of the Jacob listed below. My conclusion is however based on circumstantial evidence and is somewhat speculative;

11.2.4.1. Jacob (b. 1824) married Elisabeth Dirksen. The Jacob Dycks moved to Bergthal and then to Manitoba in the 1870s. BGB A 59. Alt-Bergthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Jacob Dyck's children include:

11.2.4.1.1. Katherina (1848-54);

11.2.4.1.2. Elisabeth (b. 1850) married Jacob Sawatsky then Jacob Elias;

11.2.4.1.3. Jacob (b. 1853) married Susanna Penner. Alt-Bergthal, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve;

11.2.4.1.4. Gerhard (b. 1855, died young);

11.2.4.1.5. Katherina (1855-57);

11.2.4.1.6. Justina (b. 1857) married Wilhelm Zacharias;

11.2.4.1.7. Katherina (1859-64);

11.2.4.1.8. Gerhard (b. 1860);

11.2.4.1.9. Helena (1862-63);

11.2.4.1.10. Helena (1864-69);

11.2.4.1.11. Kornelia (b. 1865).

## 12. Peter Dyck.

Peter Dyck (1.3.1760-26.11.1827) married Aganetha Penner (16.9.1768-15.10.1847). This Peter Dyck is not an ancestor of any male Bergthaler Dyck line, but is great interest to the Bergthaler story because of the direct matri-lineal connection to Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), its most prominent leader.

There is some confusing and conflicting data relating to the above Peter Dyck. The dates of Peter and his wife Aganetha are taken from a compilation of Gerhard Dyck of Birds Hill, Manitoba. This same source indicates that the father of Peter was a Phillip Dyck (1733-1801), who is probably the Phillip Dyck who came to Russia in 1788 and settled at Neuenburg. Son Peter did not come to Russia until 1817. The



Rev. Heinrich D. Friesen (1842-1921), Hochfeld, E. R., was the first cousin of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1837-1900), as well as to Aeltester Isaak Dyck (1847-1929), Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 5, page 13/Historical Sketches, page 330.

compilation indicates that Aganetha's maiden name was Dyck. If this is the case, then she was likely a daughter of another Phillip Dyck, namely Phillip Dyck, Thorigshoff 1776: 1 son, 2 daughters, Ellerwald Gem.

Another account, which is the basis for a number of statements in the "Berghthal Gemeinde Buch" and the "Historical Sketches of the East Reserve" was published in "The von Riesen-Friesen story" by Adeline Friesen of Mountain Lake, Minnesota. This account originates from J. John Friesen, a descendant of Peter Dyck. It provides a number of details, and states that Peter Dyck was born Jan. 3, 1742, and served for many years as a bodyguard to Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia. It also states that Peter married late in life and that his

wife was the widow Aganetha Penner. Lastly, this account is declared to be "a factual report" (Endnote).

Of the two varying accounts, the birth year provided by Gerhard Dyck, Birds Hill, is accepted for the purposes of this article.

The children of Peter Dyck include:

12.1. Agatha Dyck (b. 7.9.1804) m. 1821 Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58); 2m. 1859 Wilhelm Falk (1797-1872). Agatha and Gerhard Wiebe were the parents of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) of the Berghthal Colony, later Chortitz, E.R., Manitoba;

12.2. Helena Dyck (19.11.1807-16.11.1859) m. 1828 Jacob Friesen (1801-86) This is the ancestral family of Adeline Friesen and J. John Friesen mentioned above. Helena and Jakob Friesen were the parents of Chortitzer minister Heinrich D. Friesen (1842-1921), Hochfeld, E.R., Manitoba, whose journal and sermon were published in John Dyck, editor, *Historical Sketches*, pages 456-596;

12.3. Gerhard Dyck (4.9.1809-11.5.1887) m. 1831 Maria Dyck (1812-69); 2m - Justina Martens (1822-75); 3m - Maria Janzen (1830-1907) Gerhard was Aeltester of the Chortitz Gemeinde from 1855 to 1885 and uncle of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe. Gerhard Dyck's children included:

12.3.1. Johann Dyck (1832-68);  
12.3.2. Aganetha Dyck (1834-93);  
12.3.3. Gerhard Dyck (1836-61);  
12.3.4. Peter Dyck (1837-1907) was Oberschulz of the Old Colony from 1890-93;  
12.3.5. Helena Dyck (1840-90);  
12.3.6. Maria Dyck (1842-87);  
12.3.7. Isaac Dyck (1845-46);  
12.3.8. Isaac Dyck (1847-1929) was Aeltester of the Chortitz Gemeinde from 1896 to 1929;  
12.3.9. Agatha Dyck (b. 1850);  
12.3.10. Katherina Dyck (1852-1927);  
12.3.11. Susanna Dyck (1854-55);  
12.3.12. Abraham Dyck (1856-58).

### 13 Miscellaneous Section.

The following is a summary of the Dycks of Berghthal who are, at this time, difficult to trace to the 1776 census with any degree of probability.

1 . **Heinrich Dyck** (b. 8.4.1832). He was a son of Peter Dyck and Maria (nee) Nowitsky. BGB A146. He married Maria Epp in 1853, later Agatha Friesen, widow of Johann Dyck (1840-76) (see above 9.2.2.1.2). Later Heinrich Dyck's widow married Peter Falk. The Heinrich Dyck family came to Manitoba in 1875, and is found in the Miscellaneous Section, Manitoba 1881 census, West Reserve. Son Peter Dyck (b. 1855) and grandson Peter Dyck (b. 1882) were ministers.

2. **Abraham Dyck.** No Dates are available for this Abraham who married Elisabeth Dyck (b. 15.10.1819), parents also unknown. This family was an original Bergthal family. Later Abraham's widow married Dirk Dyck (1786-1850) and then Abraham Fleming (b. 1825). BGB A 107 and A 148. Abraham Dyck's children include:

2.1. Johann (b. 1846) married Katherina Peters, later living in the West Reserve;  
2.2. Abraham (1848-51).

3. **Johann Dyck.** No dates are available for this Johann Dyck who lived in Niederchortitz. He married Aganetha Peters (1829-66). Johann's widow married Bernhard Neufeld (b. 1830) of Berghthal in 1858, and the family moved to Berghthal at that time. BGB B89, B89(a). Johann Dyck's children include:  
3.1. Aganetha (b. 1852) married Wilhelm Wiebe;  
3.2. Elisabeth (b. 1853) married Andreas Hamm, then Johann Guenther;  
3.3. Anna (b. 1854) married Abraham Schmidt;  
3.4. Johann (b. 1855) married Maria Falk, Steinbach, Manitoba 1881 census, East Reserve.

### Endnote:

John Dyck, editor, *Historical Sketches* (Steinbach, 1994), pages 456-596.

### Sources:

Benjamin H. Unruh, *Mennonitische Ostwanderung* (Karlsruhe, 1955), 432 pages.

## Berghthal Gemeindebuch

We regret to advise our readers that the *Berghthal Gemeindebuch*, Volume Two of the East Reserve Historical Series is out of print. This work, which includes the 1874-80 ship records and 1881 census of Mennonites in Manitoba, has proved to be an extremely useful and popular reference book. The 1000 copies printed in 1993 have sold out in six years. We desperately need to reprint the book, since there are continued requests from researchers and family historians for copies.

Would you be prepared to help by making a lump sum donation enabling a reprint? The HSHS can issue you a tax deductible receipt. Five thousand dollars would enable us to proceed with this important project. Any gift of this nature would be acknowledged in the reprinted second edition. Leave a legacy that your children and grandchildren can cherish and treasure.

Warning: the culture and heritage you save, will be your own.

# Steinbach/Ebenfeld Massacres - December 5, 1919

"Memoirs" of Abram A. Enns, Ebenfeld - The Liquidation of Ebenfeld and Steinbach, Borosenko Colony, Russia, by  
Murderous Bandits, translated by Margaret Bergen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## Introduction

Several years ago, my brother John sent me a taped interview of a 92-year-old lady, made in 1992, who had witnessed the murder of my grandmother, Katharina Bergen of Ebenfeld, but murdered in Felsenbach. In the tape, she mentions an article by Abram Enns, a teacher in Ebenfeld, Borosenko Colony, at the time of the massacres of Ebenfeld and Steinbach in 1919. She mentioned that she had sent a copy of the report to the Mennonite Archives in Winnipeg. Last fall, I got a copy of this article from the Archives which I have translated into English.

Mrs. (Peters) Froese, originally from Felsenbach, Borosenko, who witnessed the murder of my grandmother, Mrs. Jacob Bergen, in Felsenbach, obtained this article from Abram Enns and sent a copy to the Mennonite Archives in Winnipeg in 1954.

My cousin, Heinrich Bergen, interviewed Mrs. Froese, in 1992, in B.C., when she was 92 years-old. On this tape she mentions that Abram A. Enns was a teacher in Ebenfeld. His parents had moved to Siberia. He had married Abram Penner's daughter, Nettie. Abram Penner lived on an estate. He and his son-in-law, Abram A. Enns, who lived in Ebenfeld, exchanged properties. Thus Abram A. Enns lived on the estate during the time of the massacre of Ebenfeld, and survived. His in-laws in Ebenfeld were murdered.

Margaret Bergen, Winnipeg, the translator of this article, and John Bergen, of Edmonton, grandchildren of the Mrs. Jacob Bergen of Ebenfeld, but murdered in Felsenbach, mentioned in this article, travelled to Ebenfeld in May 1998. One grave-stone - Schmidt - remains in the Ebenfeld cemetery. The Russian owner of the property in which the cemetery stands, told us that his mother had told him about the massacre of Ebenfeld. He showed us where the mass grave was. My uncle Johann Bergen would also have been buried in this mass grave. Our tour group, "The 1998 Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour", held a memorial service here.

"Margaret Bergen" 405-246 Roslyn Rd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 0H2.

**Attention Readers:** For a report on the 1998 memorial service at the Ebenfeld cemetery, see "Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour, May 3-23, 1998," and Gerald Wright, "Heros of the Faith," in *Preservings*, No. 12, pages 41-49.

"On November 2, 1919, five bandits came to Ebenfeld and demanded clothing from Cornelius Loewen. They threw him down and beat him horribly. At night, they shot him through his body. In his distress, he crawled to his neighbour, and while he crawled, they beat him hard with sticks. At the neighbours, they raped his wife in front of him. Then he closed his eyes forever.

"The mood was one of dread and desolation. We prepared ourselves for the worst. Most of the people said: "If only everything was over." We forgot our worldly worries, and became concerned about our souls. People comforted each other. And so we surrendered ourselves to the will of God. We succumbed to a strange feeling of cold-bloodedness (more likely we became unfeeling, or our feelings were blunted and dulled), a feeling of surrender to the circumstances. "To the will of God". Soon these tested people experienced the horrors.

"At the end of November, we heard the thunder of cannons in the west. Now we had some hope. However no one knew what was going on. We hoped for a revolution. The situation couldn't get any worse anyway.

"On December 1, 1919, Glutschenko drove to Scholochow. He did not return as he usually did.

"As it got dark, two girls, Susie Penner and Tina Epp came to my place from Ebenfeld. They begged us to be able to remain with us for the night as soldiers occupied Ebenfeld. These girls were very fearful as the soldiers were wild and dissolute. Dietrich Peters, who had brought the girls, refused to stay with us, even though we begged him to stay. (We lived on a Kutor-estate).

"At about 10 o'clock at night, a group of horsemen entered our yard. These were Glutschenko's friend with ten soldiers. They asked for supper and lodging. My wife gave them a meal. As I went to the barn to feed their horses, I saw Glutschenko returning, riding slowly. I greeted him, and wanted to put his horse in the barn.

"But he sat still on the saddle, and cried bitterly. 'Ebenfeld is no more. All have been murdered. And before the morning, all the Germans in the surrounding areas will be murdered. That is the command. But I want to save you and your family. I will save you.'

"I answered him, 'No you can't, but God can if it is his will.'

"He agreed 'Right. He can.'

"(Wonderful! A man who cursed about all holy things, now recognized God's omnipotence.)

"Then we made the following plan: Glutschenko would help me and my family to flee.

My wife prepared for the escape with great

speed, while I remained with the soldiers who were eating their supper. Soon I became aware, that a small village, near our estate, was occupied with 82 soldiers. (Or was this just a band of robbers?) Guards were stationed everywhere. So I and my family slunk through the garden to a little house where Krause, the blacksmith, lived. We sat there in darkness.

"Before we had left our house, I had overheard Glutschenko tell his companions: "Enns is my good friend and a good fellow. We will spare him and his family." Some of the men with Glutschenko, had also worked for me at one time. And so they decided to spare us.

"Thereupon Commander Alexander Grigoriev, a Cossack from Orenburg, commanded one of his men: 'Go into the village and order my people not to harm Abram Enns.'

"And Glutschenko roared: 'Tell the soldiers that if anyone even touches my friend Enns, I will chop him into pieces. That say I, Glutschenko!'

"Then he roared horribly. They were all drunk.

"I felt somewhat relieved when I heard this resolution. But yet, who could trust murderers?

"We were now in a hiding place, and yet amongst robbers. It was already past midnight, when I told my wife and girls about the terrible murders in Ebenfeld. I cannot describe this night. Words cannot describe our feelings, our struggles, our conflict, our supplications, our inner torment. The guards rode back and forth about ten feet in front of our window. We were surrounded by robbers. We faced a savage death. But our heavenly Father could protect us. Was this His will?

"In my anguish, I entreated the Lord: Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done.

"Then suddenly I heard a knocking on the door. We felt paralysed and were silent. However it was my friend, Glutschenko. I hadn't exactly trusted him, because he lost control of himself when furiously angry. He was concerned about Steinbach. How could we help them escape? I volunteered to go to Steinbach to warn them to flee. But Glutschenko, advised against this, as during this night every German would be murdered. So we decided to send a Russian. Later we discovered that his Russian had been frightened, that he had turned back when he was halfway to Steinbach.

"Finally the morning dawned. There was much activity on our yard. At 7:45 AM, the company of soldiers rode southwards towards Rosenfeld. After a while, Glutschenko halted the company of soldiers. The plan had been to liquidate Rosenfeld which was inhabited by Schwabiens (Germans). He had only 92

soldiers, and he figured it would take 920 men to do the job. So the cowardly band turned back and went towards Steinbach.

"They passed my brother-in-law, David Penner's place, but five men rode onto his yard and strangled Penner, his wife, and their youngest son. The oldest son escaped through a window. Their daughter, Anna, escaped through the back door. She had dressed herself as a Russian servant girl, and so they let her go. Then the widow Krause and her family were slaughtered. Two of her sons were terribly wounded, but survived. The victims were chopped up with sabres.

"When the band of men reached Steinbach, they murdered all those they caught. They chopped up the heads and the arms. At Cornelius Funk's home, two children survived, the younger being six years old. But this child had seven wounds on his head, and died a week later at her uncle Heinrich Braun's place in Felsenbach. Kornelia, the twelve year old, had a gun shot wound in her head but survived.

"When the murderers got to Peter Neufeld's (the last home in Steinbach) none of the monsters wanted to do any more chopping with the sabre. So Grigoriev placed all the family members in a row: the father, two sons and two daughters. One of the soldiers was appointed to kill them all with one shot - one bullet to pass through the row of people. In the last moment, Peter and Anna threw themselves down and survived.

"Anton Schellenberg had a Russian wife. They removed her from the room, and then slaughtered him. Peter Teichrob was found sitting with a child in his arms. Both were dead.

"The procedure for the killings was as follows: All the inhabitants of the house were herded into one room, and guarded. In the next room, the executioner performed his function. The victims were brought to him, one by one, starting with the oldest member of the family, and murdered. Every member of the gang was allowed to chop up the victims, but the executioner was Ivan Schwajko from Nikopol.

"There were 54 victims in Steinbach. Five survived, but one of these died later (from wounds). This occurred on December 5, 1919, according to the Julian calendar.

"In Ebenfeld, the atrocity occurred on December 4, 1919. (Our estate is included with Ebenfeld). 67 people were slaughtered, 28 survived. Amongst those that survived were my family, and the aforementioned girls, Tina Epp and Susie Peters. Several days later, Mrs. Jakob Bergen, who had fled to Felsenbach, was also murdered. First they chopped off her hand. The next morning, a murderer shot her to death.

"The days following were very terrifying for us. We were alive temporarily. But some bandits were looking for us, in order to kill us. We were able to go into hiding at Glutschenko's father's place.

"The corpses in the village were left unattended. However on the eighth of December we risked venturing out, and we buried the family of David Peters. A rubbish box was used as a coffin. On Monday, December 9, we buried the Krause family and the corpses in Steinbach. On Tuesday, December 10, we started the gruesome burial in Ebenfeld. But we were scared off by bandits who shot at us with machine guns.

"Finally on December 12, we could lay the last bodies into the tomb. I was alone at the burial amongst Russians. But when it was time to shovel the earth on the grave, several men (Germans) came from Schöndorf to help. I covered the corpses with rye straw, and said a prayer, while the Russians stood nearby with bared heads. Then we shovelled the earth in the grave, without song and in complete silence. I was a nervous wreck and deathly tired. My wife did not see the bodies. I did not want her to see the bodies. I did not want her to see them, as it was too terrible.

"The first time, I went to Ebenfeld (it was Sunday evening, December 6), I was so shocked that I could hardly carry on. My father-in-law lay there naked. My sister-in-law's (Mrs. Von Kampen) little son, who had clung to me, after the death of his father, sat leaning against the wall, with eyes open, but he was dead. Mrs. Von Kampen's youngest child lay dead in the cradle, without wounds, either frozen to death or starved to death.

"Later one of the robbers told me that he had picked up the child by its feet, and dashed its head against the wall, which killed it. Many women were first chopped up and then raped. (The cruellest deeds are perpetrated where hell is at work.)

"Two women were scalped.

"David Peters (a student at the Kiev Institute of Commerce) tried to flee, but they had chopped off his foot above his ankle while he was running, and so we found his foot about 20 feet from his body. I cannot mention all the horrible sights. So much had happened there that one could write several books to relate it all.

"And what was the reason for this mass murder? Nester Machno fought against the volunteers (White Army). He had his headquarters in Scholochowo. The volunteers were stationed at Apostolovo. The battle was severe. There were 3000 soldiers (alias murderers) in Scholochowo. Their numbers were far more than those of the volunteers. The volunteers were recruiting men for their cause. Two Lutheran villages resisted mobilization. But they were forced.

"One day the German Lutherans were placed in the front row with the remark, 'Now quickly forwards, or we will shoot you.' And they moved forwards. So that on that day they forced Makhnov to withdraw from Apostolovo back to Scholochowo, about 30 kilometres. There were many dead on both sides.

"That evening the Makhnov council held a

meeting in Scholokowo and resolved the following: "If we want to continue with our objective, the Germans will join the volunteers, and we will lose."

"Makhnov did not attend this council meeting, but his deputy, (a Russian from Great-Lupjatiecha), recommended that all the Germans were to be killed. Grigoriev volunteered to fulfil this recommendation. Thus the dreadful deeds occurred.

"Terrible things also occurred in the other villages in Borosenko Colony, but I cannot give a detailed report on these.

"On the last day of December, 1919, the government troops, that is the Soviets, arrived, and then the murders stopped, but there was still no law and order. The bandits harassed and molested us, mostly during the night. Most of the time these people billeted in our homes.

"Then typhoid fever broke out. All the members of my family lay ill at the same time. I tended the sick, kept the fire going in the stove, and fed the livestock that hadn't been stolen yet. Then I too, got typhoid fever, but now my wife felt a little better. After we had recuperated, we decided to leave our estate, because of the bandits.

"Therefore on Pentecost, 1920, we left our home and moved to Fürstenland (on the Dneiper, Militopoler Region, Gouvernement Taurien). From here we emigrated to Canada in 1926.

"One more thing: As the typhoid fever raged in Borosenko Colony, all the preachers succumbed to this sickness within a short period of time. When the situation became somewhat calmer, Bishop Jacob Rempel from Grünfeld arrived, and arranged an election for preachers. A memorial service was held in Felsenbach for all those who had died and for those who had been murdered.

"In 1924, most of the buildings in Steinbach still stood. Ebenfeld was completely ruined. As to the cemetery - a brick wall surrounded it. There were some expensive tombstones. Our grandfather, the founder of Ebenfeld, had a beautiful marble tombstone on his grave. But everything is wrecked, there is probably no trace left of the cemetery.

"Some Russians also lived in Ebenfeld at that time. The buildings were destroyed after the massacre, but parts of the walls remained. The Russians put a roof of straw and earth on these walls, and so had improvised huts.

"On the occasion of our escape from this terrible mortal danger, I close with these words, 'We have a God who helps, and who saves us from death.'

"Of this we are witness. 'Abram A. Enns'"

#### For further reading:

Margaret Bergen, "Borosenko Massacres, 1919," in *Preservings*, 11, pages 41-42; and Heinrich Epp, "The day the world ended December 7, 1919, Steinbach, Russia," in *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 5-7.

## Steinbach Massacre - The Driediger Family

Here is some information that I have about the massacre that took place December 5 (?), 1919 at Steinbach (Borosenko) [Imperial Russia]. My grandparents from my mother's side were living in Steinbach, Grandfather was manager of an estate there.

These are the names of their family that

were living there also and were also murdered all at the same time: grandfather - Johann Driediger; grandma - Maria Driediger; my uncle - Jacob Driediger; my aunt - Greta with her husband Jacob Loewen; my aunt - Maria Driediger; my aunt - Helena Driediger; then from my father's side who were also living

there were: my aunt--Anna (Warkentin) with her husband Abram Loewen; also their two children (plus one unborn child).

I am Tina (Warkentin) Mrs. Peter Peters now.

My parents were: Rev. Heinrich Aron Warkentin (father) and Sara (Driediger) Warkentin (mother).

When this happened my parents were living in Grunfeld, also Mom's sister, Mrs. Katharina Janzen, (nee Driediger); also a brother, Johann Driediger and his wife Katharina (Janzen) and a brother Franz Driediger who was not married at that time and was visiting them at the time. They only got word of what had happened a month later. So there were only these four siblings left from a large family. And as the times got very bad after the "Hungrisnot", my parents and others planned on immigrating to Canada. And by what my parents told me we were in Group Three (Shalum) leaving in 1923.

We left with only a few clothes and a bag of roasted buns. We were told to take nothing else. As Dad was a minister candidate they were especially in danger. Mom and Dad had traded in everything worthwhile, even their wedding rings for a few ears of corn.

During the hunger years, Mom told me how I had stood beside her (as a two-year-old) and asked, "Please Mom, a little piece of bread", when she was cleaning field mice for food. We left Russia in June 1923 but due to a measles outbreak in camp, I became very sick with double Pneumonia and we had to stay in Lichtfeld (Holland border) for a whole month. So we only arrived in Quebec in November, 1923, then to Saskatchewan for a year and in spring 1925, to Manitoba.

Yours truly Tina Warkentin Peters, Box 595, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A7.



*Abraham Loewen, husband of Anna Warkentin was murdered by the Makhnov anarchists in the Steinbach massacre December 5, 1919. Photos courtesy of niece Tina Warkentin Peters, Winkler, Manitoba.*



*Anna Warkentin, great-aunt of Tina Warkentin Peters, Winkler. Anna Warkentin was murdered by the Makhnov anarchists in the Steinbach massacre December 5, 1919.*

**Editor's Note:** Linda Schroeder, well-known Steinbach realtor is the daughter of Tina Warkentin Peters, author of the above recollections.



*The village of Orloff, Sagradovka Colony, 200 kilometres west of Zaporozhe, as seen from inside the ruins of the worship house of the Allianz Gemeinde, view to the south. 70 Machno victims were buried under a small mound just north of the village cemetery, located at the southwest corner of the village. Photo by D. Plett, May 2000.*

## Baratow-Schlachtin - 1918

**"Historical facts from Schlachtin-Baratov in the Ukraine, formerly Imperial Russia," author unknown, submitted by grandson Jake Nikkel, R. R. 1, Ste. Annes, Manitoba.**

"The years 1917 to 1918 were hard years. The harvest was poor or in some cases a complete failure. The Russian Ukrainians were hungry and bands of young men went out robbing. They took anything they could get, especially horses.

In order to protect the villages of Baratow-Schlachtin, Peter, the son of Elder Petkau from Neu-Chortitz, thought gifts of food for Christmas might help. A meeting was called and everyone was asked to contribute something. Each village undertook to bring food to one or more Russian villages. Among these were Sofiewka, Kalytschin, Wodjanaja, Marjanow, Dewladowa, Miloradowka and others.

The week before Christmas was very busy. Bread, zwieback and cookies were baked. Russian Frunsol was baked, a high, braided loaf. Baskets of sausage were donated. Hams and eggs and other good things were collected.

Some of the drivers from Neu-Chortitz were Jasch Klassen, Hein Funk, Jasch Giesbrecht, David Fehr, Jasch Thiessen, Franz Dueck, Peter Petkau, David Bartel, Hans and Gerhard Rempel.

Large wagons were loaded and covered with canvas. Two men volunteered to take each load. Mrs. Julius Block remembers that Christmas well. She was Katharine Penner from Neu-Chortitz.

Jacob Martens wrote about it in his diary. He was 19 years old at the time. They set out with two wagons for the nearest villages, eight werst away to the north-east. Eight werst was a dangerously long way to go at that time.

Everyone waited nervously for their return. Our fear was that they would be seen by wandering bandits, overfallen and robbed. But they came back towards evening, safe and sound. They admitted that they had been worried and kept a sharp look-out.

A large group of Reds had been gathered at the first village. They looked the men and wagons over with great curiosity. We told them that we had been sent by the village of Gruenfeld to bring them a little bit of Christmas cheer.

When they heard this they all crowded around the wagon and lifted the canvas cover. Their joy was great when they saw all the good things, and in such large amounts! Everything was carried inside with great humor.

"But what is in the other wagon?" the leader wanted to know. "That is for your neighbors to the north. We want to bring them something too."

That satisfied and pleased them. They wrote out a thank-you letter for us to take home and gave us two men to guard us the rest of the way.

They both sat on the laded wagons and helped themselves to the goodies in the baskets. One bandit, very pleased, said that he would like to travel around the world like this.

We celebrated Christmas in peace that year. Robbers did show up from time to time but they were very young and usually came alone, driven

to do it from sheer hunger. We usually gave them what they wanted.

Civil war broke out in all its violence one year later. It was to be 20 years before we would be able to celebrate Christmas again without fear of being banned to the slave labour camps for it.

### Background:

This interesting event which occurred in the Baratow-Schlachtin colony in 1918 was submitted by Jake Nikkel, Ste. Anne, Manitoba, whose parents and grandparents came from there. Can any reader help identify the author?

The Schlachtin Baratow settlement was located some 100 miles west of the Old Kolony/Chortitza

Colony. It was founded in 1874 with two original villages of Grunfeld and Steinfield.

Many families came from the Baratow-Schlachtin colony to Grunthal, Manitoba, during the 1920s including the great-grandparents of John Peters, current President of the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach.

By 1918 there were some 100 blooming Mennonite settlements scattered across the Ukraine north of the Black Sea. Each one underwent its own tragic experiences during the horrors of the Makhnov time.

Editor.

## Nestor Makhnov 1889-1934

Nestor Makhnov emerged on the scene in the region of southern Ukraine, after the downfall of the Russian monarchy in 1917, at a time when law and order disintegrated in the Russian Empire. Makhnov was born in 1889 in Gulai-Poyle, a Ukrainian village some 80 kilometres northeast of the Molotschna Colony.

At an early age, he had turned to anarchism and violence, and so landed in a Moscow prison, from which he and other prisoners were released in 1917.

During the Russian Civil War, from 1918 to 1921, Makhnov held sway over large parts of the Ukraine. Tens of thousands of landless peasants, deserters, criminals, rebels, adventurers and idealists, were attracted to his cause. He organized his own type of government and established his own "republic".

He had effective control for about two years, while fighting the Red Army and the Russian tsarist forces. He engaged in guerilla warfare. He plundered (and often murdered) prosperous farmers and encouraged looting for the benefit of his followers.

Lenin and Trotsky were quite prepared to come to terms with Makhnov, as long as his forces helped them against the White Army. In 1921, the Red Army emerged as the victor in a long and destructive Civil War. The White Army (or Volunteers) was to a great extent the remnants of the tsarist army. As soon as these were defeated, the Red Army undertook effective steps to liquidate its late allies under Makhnov.

Makhnov fled to France. He died in Paris in 1934, at the age of 45, virtually unknown and without friends. He died of drink, disappointment and tuberculosis, and is buried in Paris.

The Nestor Makhnov article is by Margaret Bergen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

### Sources:

Victor Peters, *Nestor Machno: Das Leben eines Anarchisten* (Altona, Man., 1969), 139 pages.



*Nestor Makhnov, front centre, behind him to the right, with sailor cap, Fjedor Stschuss. Photo courtesy of Victor Peters, Nestor Machno, page 57.*

# Helena Doerksen Koop (1891-1979), Memoirs

**"Memoirs" of Helena Doerksen Koop (1891-1979), Blumenhof, Manitoba/Satanta, Kansas, Blumenort, Manitoba, written in 1968, translated and submitted by daughter Katharina D. Koop, Box 3402, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.**

I, Helena P. Doerksen was born on October 23, 1891. Five winters I attended school. My first teacher was Mr. Cornelius P. Friesen from Blumenort and he was my teacher for one winter. I went to school the next three winters and my teacher was Heinrich H. Enns from Blumenhof. He was my mother's cousin. This all took place in the old school, which was situated half a mile north on David L. Plett's land [SE26-7-6E].

The last year that I attended school I was 12 years old, which was in the new school, where Peter P. Ungers now live (SW25-7-6E). My teacher was old Mr. Heinrich Rempel from Steinbach. The school was also used as a church. There were 40 children in school. Naming all the children is too much for me.

One winter I stayed home from school for one month because I had measles. The next winter I needed to visit a chiropractor, so my father carried me on to a covered sleigh and took me to Dr. Peters in Grunthal, and soon I could go back to school.

When I was eleven years old, there was no school in Blumenhof. We lived where Abram D. Reimers used to live - one half mile east of Highway #12.

My father Gerhard D. Doerksen (his father was also called Gerhard Doerksen), lived in Hochstadt. My grandfather died when he was 60 years old. As far as I know his siblings all stayed in Russia. Grandmother was Helena Dueck. She had one brother, who died as an adult, but I don't know if he was married. At least I don't know of any children. Grandmother and her children moved to Blumenhof where my parents lived.

Grandmother then married Johann Warkentin. They only lived together a few years and then he died. Then grandmother got married to Johann Janzen. They lived where Jacob D.K. Pletts lived. Then they sold the farm to David L. Pletts and moved to the Krim and built a house on the yard of old Peter Thiessens, but grandfather Janzen passed away before the house was finished. Then his children Johann Janzens bought the house and moved it to where the Janzen sisters now live and its still the same house.

Grandmother was very deaf and the first summer she lived with her daughter, the

widow Martin Barkman close to Steinbach. Then for the winter she moved to her children, Bernhard D. Doerkens, with whom she lived a few years. For one year she lived in Blumenort with C.F. Reimers, who was her granddaughter. The last three years she lived with us. She passed away at 78 years and was

who had epilepsy? He died when he was 29 years old.

After grandmother passed away, grandfather moved to Meade, Kansas and married the widow Peter Heidebrecht nee Reimer.

My great-grandparents were also Cornelius Pletts. They were the only Pletts who immigrated from Russia and how many more Pletts are there now?

I got converted when I was 17 years old and in summer was baptized by Peter R. Dueck. We were seven girls and four boys and my husband - father was also baptized then.

We always had a big garden and we seeded a lot of beets for our cows. We always had to cut the beets with a knife. This was always mine, Sara and Heinrich's job. It didn't make a difference to Heinrich with which hand he held the knife and that was very handy for us. We always had very big wooden pails and we cut the beets into these pails. This was usually done in the cellar. Since we did not have hydro we always used a lantern.

We planted turnips for the cattle that we were going to butcher. We always planted many rows of turnips in our garden. When the beef cattle were ready to be butchered we always kept the calves and once they were three years old, they were butchered. We also had to cut up the turnips for the cattle. The last few weeks they were fed chop, so that the meat should not taste like turnips.

Once the cattle were butchered, the meat was taken to Winnipeg. It took at least three days to go to Winnipeg because we drove with horses.

The calves were fed carrots, which were also cut up. We also had geese and ducks. However we did not use the geese for ourselves, because they were too expensive. They were butchered and taken to Winnipeg to be sold. The feathers were used to make bedding. We usually had about 30 hens.

We had a good life and we enjoyed it. I believe we enjoyed life a lot more than the young people do these days.

As soon as we stopped attending school we learned how to knit and sew. I did a lot of sewing on themachine. Mother used to cut the material and I sewed. In those days we each had to have five shirts. We only washed



1934. Jakob N. Koop (1890-1951) and Helena Plett Doerksen (1891-1979), Satanta, Kansas. This photograph was developed December 7, 1934, in Kansas City, Missouri. Photo courtesy of Katharina D. Koop,

buried in Blumenhof.

My mother was Cornelius L. Plett's daughter Sara. Her mother's maiden name was Sara Enns from Fischau [Her father and brothers settled in Rosenort, Man., in 1875]. Her mother died when my mother was quite young. She only had one brother Heinrich E. Plett, who was one year older than she was.

Grandfather C. L. Plett then married Helena Rempel. They had two more children, first a daughter Helena, who is now Mrs. Bernhard D. Doerksen. Then there was a son Cornelius



Jakob N. Koop farm, Satanta, Kansas, in about 1916. This was an adobe house. Note the vegetable cellar to the left. Father, Jakob N. Koop, with a team of horses, is standing in the back. Mother, Helena Doerksen Koop, is in front of the house with the children, Cornelius, Lena and Sarah. Photo courtesy of Katharina D. Koop, Box 3402, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

clothes every four weeks. We sewed everything ourselves, and nothing was bought ready made, the way things are done now.

We washed with a "Schtuk machine". I started milking when I was ten years old and always had to milk a few cows before we went to school. We had to walk a good half a mile to school. I will sing a few songs, that our teacher Heinrich H. Enns taught us - "Wir sind Kleine Schnitter" and "Mein Himmlisch Haus ist schon und klar", and "Freudenvall, Freudenvall walle ich fort".

Once the grain was ripe, it was cut with the binder and we had to set up the sheaves and I also helped on the hay rack. When I was twelve years old, mother was not well and then I had to start to help with bringing in the hay. I also had to help with setting up the hay stacks.

Once we went to Eichenbush for one week to bring in the hay. One Saturday we decided that we were finished early with working with the hay on our farm north of here and I went ahead 1 1/2 miles south and picked cranberries along the road. On Sunday C.P. Wohlgemuth's drove along that road and they met two bears - 1 old one and 1 young one. If they had met them earlier I would not have picked those berries. This was in the area where Bennie Plett's now live. In the area where Blumenort is now, there used to be a lot of bush and also the pasture for the cattle. Where Bernhard P. Doerkens live now, there was a well for the cattle's water supply.

On July 17, 1910, we got married. It was a very dry summer and no mosquitoes. There used to be very heavy thunderstorms but this is not the case now. We lived with my parents till November 6 of the next year, when we moved from Steinbach to the former Klaas R. Penner farm. On March 28, 1911 our son Cornelius was born. On November 12, 1912

Lena was born. We had a very wet summer and a late autumn.

In spring of 1913 we moved to Schönfeld and we built a house and also dug a well. Later we had a well drilled by Gerhard D. Reimer. We used the old well as a cooler.

It happened that brother Bernhard stayed at our place for a while. Bernhard and Cornelius were playing together, when Bernhard fell into the well. There was not very much water in there, but I guess enough for him to drown. The dog started barking loudly and Cornelius came running in and told me what had happened. I don't know how I knew what to do, but I saw a rope lying there and I ran to the well and threw the rope to Bernhard and I pulled him up. He wasn't hurt, but we all got really frightened and his clothes were a little wet. He could hold onto something, otherwise he would have become very wet.

On April 17, 1914, Sara was born. In fall of 1915 we moved to Meade Kansas together with our parents and grandfather. In spring of 1916 we moved to Satanta, Kansas. We lived in a dirt house. The first summer our wheat was all destroyed by hail.

On October 17, 1917, Katharina was born. In the fall of 1918 we came back to Canada. After 1 1/2 years we moved back to Satanta, Kansas and on March 5, 1928, Jacob was born there. In the fall of 1937 we came back here. The first winter we were at H. Plett's in the bush at Vassar. Then in summer we lived on the old Peter Loewen farm in Neuanlage. In winter we lived on Isaac's yard. Dad worked in the bush again.

In spring of 1939 we moved west of Steinbach, where we had to start building all over again. On December 5, 1951, Dad (husband) passed away, and Tina and I moved to Steinbach. On September 5, 1961 I got married to

Johann E. Friesen. We are now married seven years and we live in his house at Jacob P. Friesens. Dad (husband) often works in the blacksmith shop and I sew quilt patches. I adopted 12 children. Well there is a lot more that I could write but for now this is enough. From "Mother"

Sent in by her daughter, Katharina D. Koop, Box 3402, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

#### Descendants.

Allan Koop, Blumenort, and Art Koop, Greenland, Manitoba, are two well-known grandsons of Jakob N. Koop and Helena Doerksen Koop.

#### Comments.

John E. Friesen and Helena Plett Doerksen Koop Friesen moved to Cedar Wood Apartments. When Mr. Friesen died September 1971, mother moved into the Rest Haven. She died March 4, 1979 at the age of 87 years and a few months. In her life she was spinning wool, knitting sweaters, socks and mitts and sewed quilt tops together. She lived through the dust storms and the depression years. She had a hard life. Her grandfather C.L. Plett was the preacher in Satanta, Kansas. Her father G.D. Doerksen fixed the neighbour's shoes. He enjoyed gardening and had several fruit trees in his garden and he was songleader in church in Satanta.

#### Additional information.

For additional information on the KG settlement at Satanta, Kansas, see *Plett Picture Book*, pages 54-56, 87-96, and 104. See also Loewen, *Blumenort*, pages 428 and 466-69.

# Cornelius E. Reimer (1872-1942)

Cornelius E. Reimer (1872-1942): "A Man of Four Nations",  
By grandson Edward Reimer Brandt, 13-27th Ave., Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55414-3101.

## Background.

Cornelius E. Reimer was born in Heuboden, Borosenko, in 1872, son of Abraham F. Reimer (1834-1905) and Anna Eidse (1842-1922). He was only two years old when his parents arrived in New York harbour on the S.S. Hammonia on July 17, 1874.

His grandfather, Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74), second son of Kleine Gemeinde (KG) founder Klaas Reimer, died in the Russian Empire just before planning to emigrate. His second wife and widow, nee Maria Bartel (1843-1921), and ten still unmarried children emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska in 1875. Daughter Helena (1846-1919), Mrs. David Klassen, settled in Rosenhof, Manitoba.

The Jansen KG congregation included Cornelius's uncles, Peter F. Reimer (1844-78), Jacob F. Reimer (1854-1937), Heinrich F. Reimer (1858-1923), Klaas B. Reimer (1870-1931) and Cornelius B. Reimer (1873-1951), and aunts Katharina (Mrs. Peter F. Heidebrecht, later Mrs. Cornelius L. Plett, 1845-1929), and Maria (Mrs. Franz Enns, 1865-1905).

The extended Reimer family represented a significant portion of the Jansen Mennonite community.

The Abraham F. Reimer family farmed in Jansen, Nebraska. Historian Henry Fast has written that "Because of frail health at the time of the Kleine Gemeinde move to Meade [in 1906] he did not make the move" (Note One).

## Early Years.

Cornelius E. Reimer had a hip bone removed on May 3, 1892, when he was 20. Daughter Anna Reimer Brandt later recalled the operation was preformed without an aesthetic.

Cornelius was one of the many who made the journey between Nebraska, Kansas, and Manitoba, for visiting relatives and for employment opportunities.

Sometimes there was also another purpose--to find a spouse.

In 1904 Cornelius E. Reimer went to Manitoba. He married Helena D. Reimer, his second cousin, once removed. She was the daughter of Klaas P. Reimer (1864-1937) and first wife Helena D. Doerksen (1862-91). With this marriage Cornelius followed the precedent of his uncle Johann F. Reimer (1860-1941), who had married his second cousin in Blumenort: see *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 104-108.

## Marriage and Children.

Cornelius and Helena lived in Manitoba for 11 years where the oldest seven of 10 children were born. They lived on the farm-yard of father-in-law Klaas P. Reimer (1864-1937), a large-scale farmer in Blumenort, un-



Cornelius E. Reimer (1872-1942), presumably his 1940 passport photo.



Mrs. Cornelius E. Reimer, nee Helena D. Reimer (1884-1937), half-sister to Mrs. P. K. Penner, Steinbach

til about 1909. They moved to Ekron (the name of the school district), just east of Friedensfeld, into the R. M. of La Broquerie. Here they lived in two separate houses on land owned by Helena's father, where the next three children were born.

Cornelius E. Reimer worked as a carpenter during his years in Manitoba.

Daughter Anna, who had been ill, attended school only briefly in Manitoba, but Helena, who was two years older, went to school long enough to make friends. They apparently stayed with their grandparents and went to school in Blumenort, not Ekron.

## Kansas, 1915

November of 1915 the Cornelius E. Reimer family moved to Meade, Kansas, where virtually the entire Jansen KG had relocated in 1906 to 1908. Of his siblings, only Abram had joined the migration to Meade, although Nick lived elsewhere in Kansas for some years.

On the train from Manitoba to Kansas, the Cornelius E. Reimers visited relatives in



1924 Cornelius E. Reimer children, l.-r.: Katherine, Anna, George, Lena, Mary and Nick.

Rosenort, Manitoba (Eidse cousins) and Nebraska, home of his aged mother and several non-KG siblings. In Minnesota they hired a driver to take them from a train station, so they could visit his aunt, nee Mrs. Gerhard Warkentin, nee Justina Eidse. They arrived in Meade shortly before Christmas.

In Meade they rented a farm. The children attended school here, first in a private German school, then (after U.S. entry into WWI in 1917) in the English public school.

In 1920 a misunderstanding with the land-owner about the terms of the land rental forced another move on short notice. The Cornelius E. Reimer family moved to Satanta, Haskell County, in western Kansas, a new KG settlement founded in February 1916 by several families from Manitoba. Cornelius' aunt Katharina F. Reimer was married to Cornelius L. Plett, the minister of the congregation.

Cornelius E. Reimer bought the farm in Satanta on April 7, 1920, from the David K. Siemens family who had bought land but decided not to move after all (Note Two).

In November 1926 Grandfather had an accident with a hayrack, which fell on his foot, with a bolt going through it. The doctor said he would never work again and, in fact, he did not do much farm work thereafter.

This made an already difficult situation even more so. The children had to help as soon as they were old enough (12 in my mother's case). Grandfather also had hired hands at times, for that is how my father met my mother (Note Three). Son Nick worked



Cornelius E. Reimer and his second wife, nee Anna Giesbrecht (1883-1941), the widow of Peter Harder. It is believed that this photo was taken by Jakob D. Barkman, Steinbach, Manitoba, photographer during a trip to Mexico around 1940. Barkman was a cousin to Cornelius' first wife.

in Madrid, Nebraska, in 1932 and got married in 1934, settling in Meade. Daughter Helena developed a lifelong ailment in 1933.

#### Grandmother.

Grandmother, Helena Reimer, was the giver of goodies, whatever the special occasion: Christmas, Easter, perhaps birthdays. I recall receiving treasured little presents such as an Easter bunny moulded of thick, sturdy paper (or at least a paper-like substance) and a transparent model car filled with candy which was accessible through a sliding metal top.

Like most conservative Mennonite women Helena wore dresses which were black and long. One of them had many pretty small flowers in the pattern, possibly a Sunday dress.

Helena's grandson later had fond memories of sitting in her lap, a place of refuge and safety.

Helena Reimer died on May 28, 1937, only 52 years old. She was buried on June 1.

#### Grandfather.

Christmas had always been what Helena made it. After she passed away Cornelius gave out the treats which surprised some of the grandchildren. In 1937 he gave me an orange.

Cornelius E. Reimer always walked with a cane (or possibly a crutch at times), as a result he was known as "Schtock Reima." In about 1937 he asked me to sit on a sawhorse to hold down the log. With his crippled leg, it was very difficult, if not impossible, for him to saw it in the usual way, i.e., by putting his left knee on the log.

Cornelius was a reserved person who did not interact much with his grandchildren. He was not the stereotypical stern authoritarian head of household of olden days, but did not exude much warmth, probably typical for the



Cornelius E. Reimer home in Satanta, ca. 1926-27. Taken from the farmyard southwest of the house, with orchard trees on the right.



The Harder children and their spouses in Mexico (Cornelius E. Reimer's stepchildren)



The Cornelius E. Reimer home in Mexico, with a windmill similar to the one in Satanta.

times. In December 1938, Cornelius E. Reimer went on a trip to Manitoba to visit his daughter Anna (Mrs. Abram U. Brandt) and family who had moved there in July 1938.

#### **Mexico, 1940.**

In 1940 Cornelius E. Reimer moved to Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, as a lonely widower, to marry for the second time to the widow Peter Harder, nee Anna Giesbrecht. He joined the Alt-Kolonier church of his second wife-to-be.

In 1924 a number of KG families from Meade, Kansas, had settled in the Cuauhtemoc area north of Rubio, establishing the so-called "Kaunsas Darpa", Heuboden and Hoffnungsau. Among these families were a number of close relatives including uncle Jakob F. Reimer, aunt Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob J. Friesen, and Abraham E. Friesen (b. ca. 1877), whose first wife was his cousin (Note Four).

One of the grandchildren recalled that Cornelius E. Reimer had wanted to join the 1924 movement from Kansas to Mexico, but wife Helena was unwilling to go. She had been uprooted twice already, which was enough.

The Peter Harders lived in Friedensruh, a village adjacent to the two "Kansas villages" of 1924. Cornelius' relatives in Mexico must have been well acquainted with them and possibly introduced them to each other.

The letters of Cornelius' second wife Anna, show that she was a sensitive, loving woman. On one occasion her step-daughter Anna (my mother) wrote to her that she had no parents any more. Step-mother Anna was hurt by this remark. She responded, "I am your mother."

#### **Widowerhood, 1940.**

Anna Giesbrecht Harder Reimer died on June 22, 1941, after just over a year of marriage.

Cornelius was left in poor health. He was largely destitute and otherwise alone. Only the strong Mennonite tradition of community and mutual aid prevented his last years from being even more miserable than they were. Cornelius' cousins (and some unrelated Old Colony neighbours) stepped in to take care of

him. Cornelius would stay at one home for several months and then moved on to the next.

A letter dated August 7-11, 1942, from Cornelius' cousin, Sarah R. Friesen, spells out some of the details. She reports that he stayed with "us" in Hoffnungsau from July 16 to November 1, 1941. The next stop was the home of Abraham E. Friesens (Nov. 1, 1941-Feb. 1, 1942). Then "young" Isaac Dycks (he was a deacon) took their turn, Feb. 1-June 19, 1942.

The letter correspondence shows that Cornelius E. Reimer still had ideas of remarriage, although unsuccessfully in the two known cases.

On Pentecost, Cornelius E. Reimer attended church, and fell ill. He lay down at Isaac Dycks and remained bed-ridden from then on. His final "nursing home" was with Johann Classens of Friedensruh, where he died August 17, 1942.

#### **Legacy.**

It was perhaps natural that at the end of his life, Cornelius E. Reimer felt a strong attachment to his stepchildren in Mexico. They were the ones who tended to his physical needs. His own children and siblings were far away.

His letters from this period exude strong feelings, often he wrote about physical and emotional pain. His reactions to his situation ran the gamut of human emotions from reflection over his own mistakes to resignation and tolerance. He even resorted to humour.

Cornelius E. Reimer also left precious legacies, despite material poverty--for the world, as well as for (and through) his descendants.

A reunion of the family of Abraham F. Reimer of Jansen, Nebraska, was held in Lincoln in July 1997. It became evident that the descendants represented a cross-section of our entire society in terms of occupations. Disproportionately they had chosen the helping professions: ministers, missionaries, teachers, health care, public office and government service. There was an abundance of generosity, caring, sharing, warmth and enthusiasm.

So to the world through his descendants: a legacy of service.

The reunion made it obvious that an ap-

preciation of the value of kinship lives on among the descendants of Cornelius E. Reimer as well those of his siblings. The home in which Grandfather Reimer grew up still stands in Jansen and the reunion led to plans to preserve it. This physical structure symbolizes the roots of enduring kinship, despite the tragic breaking of human twigs.

#### **Endnotes:**

Note One: Henry Fast, "Kleine Gemeinde in U.S.A.", in *Profile*, page 109.

Note Two: Royden Loewen, *Blumenort*, page 469; cf. Garth Doerksen, "A Brief History of the Satanta, Kansas, Mennonite Settlement" (1983 term paper, Steinbach Bible College). See also *Plett Picture Book*, pages 54-57, 68-69, 80, 87-96, 123, 137-136.

Note Three: In 1928 my father Abraham U. Brandt had worked on threshing gangs and as a carpenter in the Waldeck, Sask., area, visiting the Gottlieb Jahnkes, his mother's aunt. After the harvest he took the train from McTavish, Man., to Enid, Ok., where he built a dormitory, and later did carpentry and farmwork in Meade and Satanta, Kansas.

Note Four: The editor kindly gave me copies of a rough translation of many letters written to Rev. Cornelius L. Plett of Satanta by his sister and brother-in-law, Jakob J. Friesens, but especially by their daughters, in Mexico, dated 1925-33. These letters shed additional light on the subject of long-continuing close ties, mostly via correspondence but also with occasional visits, between the Satanta-Meade KG members and the community in Mexico.

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# The Jakob Wieler Story

**Jakob Wieler (1842-1922) and Helena Penner Wieler (b. 1844), Eigenhoff, E. R., Manitoba,**  
**by Glen Kehler, Box 280, Oakbank, Manitoba, R0E 1J0.**

## Introduction.

Jakob Wieler (1842-1922) was the son of Jakob Wieler (1816-49), BGB A 62. Jakob Jr.'s oldest half-sister Maria Wieler (b. 1840) married Erdmann Penner (1837-1907), one of Manitoba's most successful 19th century entrepreneurs: see *Preservings*, No. 15, page 130.

Jakob Wieler's sister Eva was married to Jakob Kehler and sister Helena to Johann Kehler.

Jakob Wieler (1842-1922) was baptised on May 28, 1862. November 26, 1863 he married Helena Thiessen Penner, daughter of Heinrich Penner (1810-82) and Katarina Thiessen (b. 1817) (Note One).

Heinrich's parents were Heinrich Penner b. 1777 and Margaret Kroeker b. 1785, who had lived in Zeyerorderkampen Prussia, and moved to Imperial Russia in 1808, where they settled in Rosenthal, Chortitz Colony. They moved to the neighbouring village of Kronthal in 1814, BGB A127.

## Emigration, 1874.

Jacob Goertzen Wieler (1842-1922) and wife Helena Thiessen Penner (b. 1844) arrived in Quebec in 1874 on board the S.S. Peruvian, BGB B249.

With them were their children: Jacob (1867-1948), Heinrich (1869-1953), Helena (1871-1908) and Peter (1873-1964). Another son Bernhard (1875-1930) was born in 1876 in Manitoba.

Also on board the ship were Helena Penner Wieler's parents, Heinrich Kroeker Penner (1810-82) and wife Katharine Thiessen (b. 1817).

Helena and the youngest five of Heinrich and Katharina Penner's 12 children accompanied them to Canada in 1874: Heinrich Thiessen Penner b. 1851; Bernard Thiessen Penner b. 1854; Diedrich Thiessen Penner b. 1855; Peter Thiessen Penner b. 1858; Anna Thiessen Penner b. 1863.

## Eigenhoff, 1874.

Historian Jake Doerksen has written that "Shortly after their arrival [in Manitoba] the senior Heinrich Penner laid claim to...[SE2-7-5E]. Here he built his home in the middle of the homestead

### The Wieler Ancestry.

Who were the ancestors of Jakob Wieler (1816-49)?

Possibly he was the son of Johann Wiehler (b. 1787) of Neuenburg, Chortitz Colony, Imperial Russia. There are other possibilities but this is the best guess with the information available.

Johann was the son of Johann Wiehler (b. 1758) and his second wife Sarah (b. 1768). They came to Russia in 1788-89. Johann, in turn, was a son of Heinrich Wiehler, Haberhorst, Prussia, listed in the 1776 Konsignations: 1 son.

By Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B. C., April 6, 2000.



*Circa 1904/5. Jakob Goertzen Wieler and Helena Thiessen Penner with children and grandchildren. Standing, l.-r.: Helena Wieler (Mrs. Heinrich Stoesz), Peter, Jakob and Bernhard. Child standing is Helena Stoesz (Mrs. David S. Kehler) and the baby on the floor is possibly Heinrich or Cornelius Stoesz.*

quarter and this became known as Eigenhoff"

Oldest son Jakob Penner claimed the SW2-7-5E, son Heinrich Penner the NE2-7-5E, and son-in-law Peter Wiebe the NW2-7-5E. Son Bernhard Penner claimed the NW36 and NE35-6-5E. The name "Eigenhoff" literally meaning "my own yard", was appropriate because the village consisted of Heinrich Penner and sons and sons-in-law (Note Three).

According to the Brotschuld records, extant for 1875 and 1878, the Eigenhoffs were originally considered part of the village of Chortitz. In fact, son Jakob Penner actually lived in Chortitz and was a signatory to the Chortitz village Agreement (Note Three).

Historian Jake Doerksen has written that "Jakob Wieler, the son-in-law, registered a homestead in Reinland, but abandoned it within a year" (Note Three).

Jacob and Helena Wieler filed for a homestead on NW36-6-5E which belonged to the village of Eigenhoff. This quarter was originally homesteaded by Bernhard Penner, October 30, 1874, and then transferred to Jakob Wieler, September 21, 1876.

## New Homeland.

Jakob Wieler had reluctantly left the Ukraine (Imperial Russia), but since his wife's parents and some of her siblings decided to immigrate, he did go, but was not looking forward to starting over. Jakob's first love was astrology and not pioneering. He spent much of his time studying the books he had

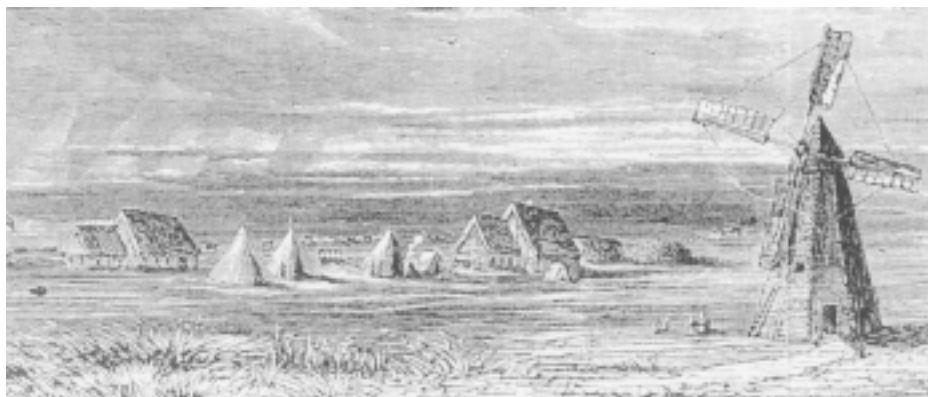
ordered on the subject. We understand he did have a telescope, to gaze in wonderment at the Galaxy on those clear evenings.

All of this had to be set aside when they arrived in Eigenhoff, and the sheer task of survival was all that would occupy his days and evenings, not star gazing. Had he carried on with Astrology in Eigenhoff, his neighbours might have labelled him "Fuela Wielar", which was not the case, as with the exception of his sons Peter and Jakob, who had disabilities, the Wielers were very hard working people (Note Four).

## Brot Schult, 1875-81.

Jakob Wieler was listed as owner of Wirtschaft No. 21 in the 1875 Brotschult register for Chortitz. The debt carried forward from 1874 (record unavailable) was \$52.90. Four times during 1875 Wieler received supplies from the Gemeinde including wheat and barley which brought his account to \$118.58. In April and August of 1877, Wieler repaid \$80.48 to the Brotschult by delivery of wheat, leaving a balance of \$56.25, which included some interest charges. April 1, 1878 Wieler signed in the "Brot Schult Register" acknowledging that his account was correct. At this time interest in the amount of \$37.20 was cancelled. April 1, 1881, interest was again charged, leaving a balance of \$63.60.

In 1877 Jakob and Helena Wieler built a large traditional house with attached barn in the village situated on SE2-7-5E. Here they farmed their 160



1877 depiction of the Jakob Wieler housebarn in Eigenhoff, East Reserve. This charcoal sketch is believed to be the work of Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada during the Vice Regal visit August 22, 1877, view to the north. In the foreground, right, is the windmill erected in 1872. Along the village street are the homes of Gerhard Schroeder, later Reeve (right), and Jakob Wieler (left). Courtesy of Mennonite Historian, March 1998/Preservings, No. 12, page 37, and East Reserve 125, page 3.

acres and lived to the end.

#### Vice-Regal Visit, 1877.

Eigenhoff also had the great honour of being chosen as the site for the Vice-Regal visit of Lord Dufferin which took place on August 21, 1877 (Note Two). Presumably the Vice-Regal party inspected the home of Jakob Wieler and admired the pristine surroundings. A more complete account of Lord Dufferin's visit was compiled by John Dyck, in the *Oberschulz Jakob Peters* book, pages 87-98.

#### Records, 1881-83.

The 1881 census lists four family units in Eigenhoff: Heinrich Penner Sr. age 77, son Peter 22, and daughter Anna 21; son Heinrich Penner Jr., age 27; son-in-law Jakob Wieler age 39; and son-in-law Gerhard Schroeder, age 33. Both Heinrich Penner Sr. and Jr. moved to the village of Gnadenfeld, West Reserve in 1882.

The Municipal tax records for 1883 list only Jakob Wieler and brother-in-law Gerhard Schroeder in Eigenhoff. Jakob Wieler was the owner of two quarters of land, 40 acres of which was cultivated,

house assessed at \$70 and furniture \$350, 1 horse, 4 oxen, 9 cows, 3 yearlings, 5 calves, 24 sheep, 4 pigs, and the usual farm machinery, for a total assessment of 1129. This compared to an assessment of 1538 for Gerhard Schroeder, one of the wealthier farmers in the East Reserve.

Fire insurance records show that Jakob Wieler had a house insured for \$400, furniture \$100, to which he added a second house on June 23, 1882, insured for \$200.

September 10, 1890, Jakob Wieler purchased Legal Subdivision 16, Section 35-6-5E, being 40 acres, presumably from brother-in-law Bernhard Penner. This is where great-grandson John Wieler lives today.

#### Scharwerk, 1903-5.

October 6, 1903, R. M. of Hanover council dealt with the complaint of Ab. D. Goertzen against Jacob Wieler regarding damage that Wieler's cattle did to the grain shocks of Goertzen on Sept. 10. Both Goertzen and Wieler were present. It was decided that J. Wieler pay A. D. Goertzen \$5.00 indemnity.

November 7, 1905, R. M. of Hanover Council decided that Heinrich Wieler would not be paid for his road work as it had not been done under supervision.

#### Death.

Jakob Wieler died on February 18, 1922, at the age of 79 years, 9 months and 10 days. He was listed in the Chortitzer Gemeindebuch, 1907, page A13d, with the family of son Heinrich Wieler.

Two sons, Jacob and Peter never married and were neither able or willing to take over the farm, but lived

on the homestead until they were no longer able to live on their own, and went to care homes in Steinbach.

#### A - Heinrich P. Wieler (1869-1953).

Heinrich Penner Wieler married Helena Klassen Unger, the 20th of the 22 children born to Peter Szwatzky Unger and Helena Klassen of Felseneton.

Heinrich and Helena Wieler farmed 160 acres one mile west of the Clearspring Mall, NW3-7-6E.

Heinrich was a very hard working individual who did not take kindly to waste, which included one's time. He worked his 160 acres and owned and rented additional hay fields including part of his parents farm at Eigenhoff. Henry and his sons looked after the heavier chores, and the girls had the cows to look after including milking and cream separation.

At haying time the girls had to participate fully, usually raking, and stooking, and being away from home the girls had to feed the gang as well. All of his daughters learned the art of making hay stacks, which had to be round, stand straight, and domed to shed water. They had to be not only functional, but look good too.

Henry was a demanding task master, who liberated his daughters 70 years before it became fashionable, allowing them to do what was then predominantly deemed mens work. In spite of his harsh work ethics, Henry provided generously for his family and would go to Winnipeg on a regular basis, bringing back large bolts of good quality cloth and accessories for his wife and daughters, who were all good seamstresses. This proved to be a blessing when they raised their own families during the depression.

#### The New House, 1910.

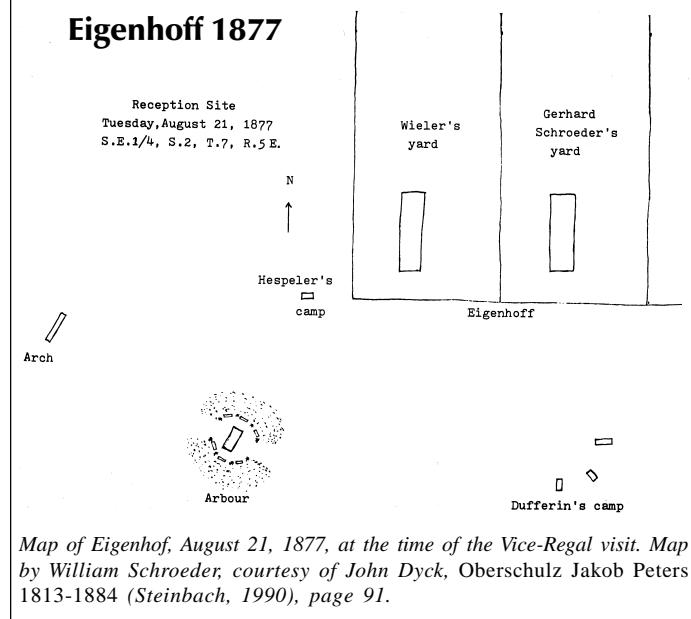
About 1918 they built a two-story home with a full basement, verandas front and back, and a second story walk out balcony where he could stand and proudly survey his fiefdom.

They hired Frank Friesen as the builder, who was assisted by his brother Paul and the Wieler children helping whenever possible.

The children started school at the Steinbach private school, and later switched to public school. Since the Wieler children were Chortitzer they were a minority, their friends were mostly Kleine Gemeindes and got along just fine.

During the winter months Henry would take the children to school in a horse drawn covered sleigh, and Henry would smoke his crooked pipe. Mr. Kornelsen the teacher would admonish the Wieler children in front of the whole class, when their clothes would smell of smoke. This hurt the children, being criticized in front of their best friends, but they would never tell their father for fear of being embarrassed, with Heinrich having a rather heated frank discussion with the teacher.

The following story recalled by daughter Annie Unger Wieler illustrates the inner dynamics of the Wieler family. Her uncle David Unger had married Mrs. Acres and farmed the south quarter section adjacent to her grandparents' farm. Her father, whom she called "Foda", always had a large herd of cattle pasturing adjacent to uncle David's grain fields. Invariably the cattle will strain through the fence to get a taste of the grain. On occasion it happened that



the cows would breach the fence and before you knew it, they were all into Ohm Doaft's wheat field, having a feast.

Heinrich Wieler loved apples and would always bring home a barrel of crisp fresh apples for the winter on his shopping trip to Winnipeg. He also had a stomach ulcer which made him deathly ill when he overate on apples, which he found impossible to resist. He would have his apple feast every time when he made his annual shopping trip to Winnipeg.

Each time he got very sick and thought he would surely die. Annie being young and a good runner would have to run the mile to Ohm Doaft's place with the news that "Foda" was on his deathbed and that he should come quick.

When Ohm Doaft arrived at the Wieler home, Heinrich apologized for the damage caused in the grain field by his cattle. Ohm Doaft would forgive him and return home. Heinrich would recover and thus all was well "until the next time."

Interestingly enough none of their sons or grandsons took to farming, but three daughters and five granddaughters were farmers.

#### **Remarriage.**

Heinrich P. Wieler's wife Helena, died December 25 1923. He remarried in 1924 to Justina Voth Poetker, a widow with one daughter and four sons, who had just immigrated from the Ukraine. Henry and Justina had one daughter together.

#### **Children:**

**1) Katharina U. Wieler** (1893-1989 married Gerhard Schultz Kehler (1888-1946).

Katharina and Gerhard had no children. They farmed near Mitchell, and retired to Steinbach due to Gerhard's failing health. Katharina remained a widow for many years, and eventually married Jacob Stoesz, a retired farmer from Niverville. They remained in Steinbach, and enjoyed a long and good life together, both living to 96 years of age.

**2) Henry U. Wieler** (1894-1970).

Henry U. Wieler married Susanna Schultz Kehler (1897-1988). They lived most of their lives in Steinbach. Henry made a living building houses and summer cottages during the summer, and spent the winters cutting and hauling firewood to Steinbach with his team of horses. Only four of their eight children would reach adulthood.



Photograph showing the builder's initials and date "1877" carved into a beam of the old Jakob Wieler house-barn in Eigenhoff. See Plett, East Reserve 125, page 19.



1918, Heinrich Penner Wieler and wife Helena Unger Wieler. All photographs for this article are courtesy of Glen Kehler, Box 280, Oakbank, Manitoba, R0E 1J0.

Henry was a quiet man who would go out of his way to avoid an argument, and would never offend anyone. Henry would let his wife do the talking, and being a good listener it made for an ideal marriage.

Susanna was a gifted story teller, and would leave her nieces and nephews spellbound with her oral history lessons, remembering minute details, including dates and names from the olden days. She would also have us in stitches with her wit and humour. Their grandson Murray Wieler Hiebert, a journalist in Malaysia, made headlines around the world in 1998/99, being the first journalist to be jailed in a Commonwealth country for contempt of court, for a rather innocent article he had written.

**3) Maria U. Wieler (1897-1950).**

Maria U. Wieler married Jacob Harder Peters (1893-1990). Together they raised five daughters and four sons, on a farm 2 1/2 miles west of Steinbach. Maria was a loving, caring and very hard working woman who loved farming and in addition to the house work, raised large numbers of ducks, geese and chickens each year.

If you were fortunate enough to be invited over for chicken noodle soup, a goose or "heina brode with bubbat", it would always be a truly memorable feast. Maria was well known for her cooking talents, and the long dining room table which was always full to capacity, would attest to her abilities.

Jacob was for many years the Reeve of the R.M. of Hanover as well as President of the Mennonite Mutual Insurance Company, see Elma Plett, "Jakob B. Peters (1869-1942), Ebenfeld," in *Preservings*, No. 11, page 72.

When Maria died (much too young), Jacob retired to Steinbach. He remarried to Tina Harder. Their four sons are well known in Steinbach, Henry, Jake, Ert, Gil, as well as a grandson, Dwight Reimer, Steinbach City Councillor.

**4) Helena U. Wieler (1899-1987).**

Helena Unger Wieler married Diedrich Penner

(b. 1890). Together they raised four daughters and five sons. shortly after they married, Helena and Diedrich moved to southern Saskatchewan.

Diedrich being a good builder, specialized in building those rather large barns that were popular in that era, until the depression put a cruel stop to all construction as well as farming, and it became impossible to make a living there. The provincial government offered homesteads in the northern part of Saskatchewan, to anyone who wanted to get away from the drought. The Diedrich Penners accepted, moving to Meadow Lake. This was another difficult situation as their land was all bush which had to be cleared by hand, before any type of farming could get underway. After many years of toil they finally managed to raise a large herd of beef cattle which they sold and moved to Quenell B.C. to be closer to their children.

**5) Annie U. Wieler (1901-91).**

In 1922 Annie Unger Wieler married Johann Schultz Kehler (1894-1962). Together they raised three daughters and eight sons. Shortly after they married they moved to southern Saskatchewan, where Johann found employment first with his brother-in-law Penner, and then with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool until the drought and depression forced them to abandon their small new house then had built in Glen Ewen.

They packed as much as they could get into the car, and with their five children headed to Steinbach, where they built a small house and settled down to another seven years of depression, sickness, and the loss of a daughter. In 1937 John's health improved and he got into veterinary work, and life was greatly improved.

Annie was a hard working mother who kept the family fed with a large garden, and a very good cook, at which she had lots of practice. Her beautiful delicate zwieback were possibly her best creations, and mass produced because of the great demand.



1916, Heinrich and Helena Wieler's new house in Ebenfeld, just completed. Heinrich P. Wieler is standing proudly on the upper balcony with daughter Ida. Mrs. Helena Unger Wieler is standing on the lower veranda together with the builders Frank and Paul Friesen.

In 1947 they bought the slaughterhouse west of town, which would give their sons employment. Annie's wonderful sense of humour, and deep faith kept her focused on her family commitment. Annie lived to the age of 90, and to the end always welcomed every family member with a smile and open arms. The only family members to make their home in Steinbach are Violet Doerksen and Joyce Stoesz: see Glen Kehler, "De Fiey Dokta: Johann Schulz Kehler (1894-1962)," in *Preservings*, No. 14, pages 87-88.

#### **6) Jacob U. Wieler (1905-82).**

Jakob Unger Wieler married Freda Johnson (1905-66). Together they raised one daughter and three sons. Jakob and his sister Annie were very close, and joined her in Saskatchewan, where he found employment with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as an elevator worker and soon learned the grain business and was promoted to elevator manager.

Shortly after arriving in Frobisher, he met and later married Freda Johnson a farmer's daughter from the area. When the drought and subsequent depression devastated the southern part of the province, the Saskatchewan Pool transferred them to Melford, where they raised their family, and spent the remainder of their life together. In 1966 Freda was killed in a tragic traffic accident, after which Jake moved to Saskatoon to be near to his children.

#### **7) Ida U. Wieler (1905-1929).**

Ida Wieler married William Giesbrecht. They had two daughters.

Shortly after they married they moved to Paraguay where their daughters were born and in 1929 Ida died, leaving her husband to raise the girls alone. Mary the youngest daughter was stricken with eye infections, caused by insects, which left her blind.

William remarried and moved back to Steinbach. Mary was as a young girl, sent to Brantford, Ontario to attend a school for the blind, which must

have been devastating for a young child who spoke only Low German, to be thrust into an English speaking world, not being able to communicate with or see her caregivers. Mary did learn to read and write, and was given a Braille bible by her aunts and uncles, which was about the only reading materials she had, as there were few other books available for the blind at that time.

#### **8) Elizabeth V. Wieler (b. 1923)**

In 1947 Elisabeth Voth Wieler married Neil Peters (b. 1924). They raised five daughters and four sons, and live in Perth, Ontario.

#### **B - Helena Penner Wieler (1871-1908).**

Helena Penner Wieler married Heinrich Stoesz (1872-1908). They had two daughters and two sons. Helena and Heinrich died within a month of each other, during a flu epidemic in 1908.

They were survived by four orphans, under seven years of age. The children were adopted into good loving homes. Helen and Henry were adopted by Rev. David Friesen and his wife Maria ("Mitche Muem") Schultz, who was later widowed, and then married Jacob "Waisenmaun" Enns. Cornelius and Aganetha were adopted by their Uncle and Aunt David and Barbara Stoesz.

#### **1) Helena W. Stoesz (1901-83).**

Helena Wieler married David Schultz Kehler (1901-68). Together they raised three daughters and eight sons. Helen And David farmed in the Blumengard area, just north of the Moray school, and later relocated to the Ekron district, three miles east of Steinbach on Highway 52.

Helena was another one of the hard working Wieler's, who enjoyed having her family around her. Her good sense of humour was evident by the hearty laughter in the household.

Helena had a large garden which kept her busy, and like her cousins, was an excellent cook and baker for which there was a great demand when she set that long table three times a day.

After they retired they enjoyed a few good years of a more relaxed lifestyle in Steinbach. The most recognized of their children are Jake and Edgar Kehler who have been dishing out gas, borscht and humour for over 45 years at that famous Husky corner of Townline road and Hwy 12.

**2) Heinrich W. Stoesz (b. 1901)** and remained single. He lived in the Niverville area most of his life, and with his brother Cornelius and cousin Henry Wieler built houses and summer cottages for most of his working life.

#### **3) Cornelius W. Stoesz (1904-98).**

In 1925 Cornelius Wieler Stoesz married Lydia Wiebe (b. 1905). Together they raised two daughters and one son.

Cornelius and Lydia lived in Niverville making a living building houses and cottages with his brother and cousin Henry Wieler. They retired to Steinbach where Cornelius, like so many of the Wieler family lived to a good age of 94 years.

#### **4) Aganetha W. Stoesz (1906-83).**

Aganetha married in 1930 to John Hiebert (b. 1907).

They lived in Red Lake, Ontario for many years. John worked for the Mining Company. When they retired they moved to Edmonton to be near their children.

#### **C - Bernhard P. Wieler (1876-1930).**

In 1899 Bernhard P. Wieler married Agatha Kehler (1879-1949).

They raised their five daughters and four sons on the family homestead, NW36-6-5E in Eigenhoff. The farm was located south across the Piney Highway (now P.T.H. 52) from their parents' farm, the Jacob Goertzen Wieler farmyard at the original village site.

Their children: Maria K. Wieler (1900-1987) never married; Bernard K. Wieler (1902-59) married Helena Kehler (1933-81); George K. Wieler (1904-56) single; Jacob K. Wieler (1906-66) married Helena Rempel Funk; Helena K. Wieler (1908-67) married David Doerksen (1910-99); Agatha K. Wieler (1910-67) m. Heinrich Poetker (1906-92); Aganetha K. Wieler (1913-49); Sara K. Wieler (b. 1915) married Jacob Harder; Henry K. Wieler (1919-94) married Maria Funk (b. 1923).

See article following by Mary Harder Bestvater, Grunthal, Manitoba, "Tribute to Tante Maria", providing the history of the Bernhard P. Wieler family.

#### **Endnotes:**

Note One: Peter K Reimer, Kleefeld, Manitoba, (377-4459) is in possession of a journal which states the name of Heinrich Penner's second wife as Friesen, not Thiessen. The source was a journal belonging to Tina Falk, Grunthal, which was compiled by her grandfather Peter Penner (1858-1933), brother to Helena Penner (Mrs. Jakob Wieler). Peter Penner had moved to Santa Clara, Chihuahua, Mexico.

Note Two: For brief accounts of the Vice-Regal visit of August 21, 1877, see William Schroder, *The Bergthal Colony* (Winnipeg, 1986), pages 95-113, and John Dyck, *Oberschulz Jakob Peters 1813-1884* (Steinbach, 1990), pages 87-98.

Note Three: Jake Doerksen, "Eigenhoff," in John Dyck, editor, *Historical Sketches* (Steinbach, 1994),

pages 125-129.

Note Four: Story as told to great-granddaughter Annie Peters Reimer (Mrs. Albert), Steinbach, Manitoba, by her mother Maria Wieler Peters.

#### Sources:

Jakob Doerksen, "Eigenhoff," in John Dyck,

editor, *Historical Sketches* (Steinbach, 1994), pages 125-129.

Debbie Wieler, "Wieler, Ben and Harry," in Fred Kaita, editor, *Niverville* (Niverville, 1986), pages 196-7.

## Tribute to Tante Maria

"Memories of Eigenhoff: A Tribute to our Tante Maria,"

by niece Mary Harder Bestvater, Box 352, Grunthal, Manitoba, R0A 0R0.

**Tante Maria** was born April 29, 1900, to Bernhard and Agatha Wieler at Bergthal. Soon they moved to Eigenhoff, to the Wieler homestead, where she lived for 82 years. Tante Maria saw a family being born, took care of the sick and helped with weddings and cared for 30 nieces and nephews.

Tante Maria attended private school in Bergthal till the age of 12. At this time, she and brother Bernhard stayed with the Kehler grandparents. Later in life the reading material of Tante Maria was her Bible, the *Gesangbuch* and the *Steinbach Post* for news.

January 2, 1930, Maria's father became sick with typhoid fever and 20 days of illness ended his life here on earth. The body was kept in the family home until the day of the funeral. The funeral took place in the home and he was buried on the homestead of his parents' farm. It was a very cold day, -30F, for the young family to be out for the burial.

In 1931 or 32, Maria's mother suffered from a severe stroke. She recovered slowly, it kept her in bed for several months. My memories are of grandmother Agatha Wieler sitting in her rocking chair. She was surrounded by her family that cared for her. They also took over the household and farming work.

On July 16, 1933, her oldest brother Bernhard got married and brought his bride Helena Kehler home to live with the family for five years. Later they bought the farm in the Tourond area and farmed there for the rest of his life. They had two sons - Ben and Harry - both have married and had families. Ben is deceased (1995). The family farm is now in the hands of a new generation.

The same year, October 12, the younger sister Agatha married Henry Jacob Poetker. They farmed in the New Bothwell area and had four sons - Jacob, Henry, Peter and John - and four daughters - Agnes, Hilda, Annie and Katie.

October 12, 1938, sister Helena married David Doerksen and they farmed in Eigenhoff. They had two daughters - Esther and Sara - and six sons - David, Ben, Peter, Abram (deceased 1947), Jake and John.

October 5, 1939, Sara, the youngest sister married Jacob Harder. They were married in the family home and farmed in the Reichenbach area. They

retired to Steinbach. Their farm is now owned by their youngest son Edward W. Harder. Sara and Jakob have celebrated their 60th Wedding Anniversary. They had three sons - Jacob, Henry and Edward - and four daughters - Mary, Eva, Tina (deceased 1948) and Martha. They have 23 grandchil-

delicious buns, cookies, peppernut (yeast kind), noodle soup, borscht, dill cucumbers and apples and oranges for treats. For most of her life, the cooking was done on a wood cookstove.

Life was not always easy and they did not stay one big happy family. June 30, 1949, her sister

Aganetha passed away at the age of 36. The family cared for her during her illness. Tante Maria had the biggest burden of care as she did the laundry, housekeeping, gardening and was the care giver to her sick sister, elderly mother and two brothers living in the household.

Five weeks later, August 4, 1949, her mother passed away. These times the bodies were cared for by Loewen Funeral Home. A church funeral was held at the Chortitz Church. Faspa was served in the family home. It was a very hot day of 103F.

The summer must have been very sad and lonely for Tante Maria. I remember her and Uncle Jacob coming to visit at our house with the car (1933 Model A). I was the one that had the privilege to go along with them. What a joy when we arrived at Grandmother's house! My older cousin Hilda had stayed, too, after her parents had come to visit. We could stay for a sleepover.

The following day Tante Maria worked in the garden. Hilda and I went in to check to see if Grandmother had any needs. The blinds were drawn to keep the house cool. The food was prepared in the summer kitchen away from the house. Grandmother ate in the house.

We went to sleep in the big room in Tante Maria's big bed with feather pillow and comforter. The room had a pull-out couch, two chairs, a big wooden wardrobe that Grandmother

had received as a wedding gift and a chest of drawers. The room had two sets of double windows to the west and north draped in white curtains. On the wall was a verse - "Thy Word is Truth". Under the chimney was a little closet with shelves to keep treasures of all kinds. In the morning we woke to the singing of birds.

Then we were told that grandmother had passed away during the night.

Tante Maria never went on a holiday, she cared for other people's needs. She knitted mittens, socks and scarves, made blankets and sewed aprons for



1903. Maria Wieler with her parents Bernhard Penner Wieler (1876-1903) and Agatha Kehler Wieler (1879-1949). They were married in 1899. Also in the photograph is son Bernhard K. Wieler. It was the custom for boys to wear dresses till about the age of two. In this marriage were born seven more children.

dren and 23 great-grandchildren. Sara and her older sister Aganetha and younger brother Henry attended English school in Randolph.

September 23, 1948, the youngest brother Henry married Maria Funk. A small house was moved onto the family farm. (They later retired in Steinbach.) They had three sons - John, Henry and Norman. The original farm is still in the Wieler family.

But there was no empty nest feeling for Tante Maria, as many nieces and nephews were always welcome to stay for holidays, visit and enjoy her



*Eigenhoff, 1930. The funeral of Bernhard Wieler took place in his farm home. He died January 22, 1930, of typhoid fever. It was a very cold day, -30F, for the young family to be out for the burial. The photograph shows a variety of cutters and sleighs used for transportation in those days. View to the north.*

many of us nieces and nephews. She had geraniums and petunias on her window sills and lovely hanging house plants. Water was carried to the house and summer kitchen from an overflowing well next to the barn. She milked a few cows by hand and separated the milk. Just think of all the parts of a cream separator! What a job to wash it!

Christmas Day, 1956, Uncle George passed away after a long illness of asthma. I remember him sitting in the kitchen reading the newspaper or listening to the radio in his room off the kitchen and next to the big room.

By this time Uncle Jacob had started to get romantic. He married a widow, Mrs. Helena Funk, with a family of six children. He moved to her farm in New Bothwell. He became the father of two sons, Edward and Peter. Jakob Wieler passed away in June of 1966.

A new house was built for Tante Maria on the family farm. The farm was now under the owner-



*Agatha Kehler Wieler, 1932. Her grandchildren recall her sitting in a rocking chair, surrounded by her family that cared for her.*

ship of Uncle Henry and Aunt Mary Wieler.

Tante Maria took care of her uncle, "Ohm Peta" (Oct. 10, 1872–Sep. 29, 1964), her father's brother. Ohm Peta lived to be 92 years. In his final days he was cared for in the Rest Haven Nursing Home. Ohm Peta never married and stayed in the original old house-barn as long as he could care for himself.

I remember going to visit him with my parents. It was a long dark walk through the barn with the old fashioned upper and lower door, to a room in the house with a cook stove, shelves for dishes, a table, a "ruhe benk" and rocking chair. When Tante Maria took Ohm Peta into her house, he must have



*Peter P. Wieler (1872-1964). Tante Maria Wieler took care of her Ohm Peta.*



*Sara and Jakob Harder, 1999, on the occasion of their 60th wedding anniversary. All photographs for this article "Tribute to Tante Maria" are courtesy of Mary Bestvater, Box 357, Grunthal, Manitoba, ROA ORO.*

thought life could not be better. Ohm Peta played the harmonica (accordian). His favourite song was "Wo findet die Seele die Heimat die Ruh. Nein Nein, hier ist es nicht."

Tante Maria had a lot of joy with nephews John, Henry and Norman Wieler and the Doerksen cousins as they lived so close to her. We all did benefit from her love. Her last days were at Rest Haven Nursing Home where niece Hilda was an LPN. She passed away February 12, 1987.

In 1980, we nieces and nephews helped her celebrate her 80th birthday at the Green Valley School in Grunthal. Many guests were out and she had a good time. We had a program, faspa, pictures and lots of visiting as our families were now growing up. She asked if we would do this again and I told her we would for her 90th birthday.

In February, 1987, many of us were at her funeral to share our sorrow of a life well lived. In her memory, let us love and care for others as Tante Maria did.

August 4, 1996, John and Lois Wieler, who live on the parcel of land (NW36-6-5E) that belonged to Tante Maria, invited cousins and families to their farm for an afternoon of getting to know each other again. It was the same day Grandmother had passed away in 1949. We had a good rain that day.

Let us thank God for the wonderful privilege we have had to live in a land of peace for 125 years. The Wieler descendants are now 280 and most are living in Manitoba.

On September 12, 1999, three Wieler descendants rode in the caravan and several more attended the church service at the original Chortitz Church to commemorate the 125th anniversary of Mennonites in Manitoba.

Submitted by Mary Harder Bestvater, Box 352, Grunthal, Manitoba, ROA 0R0.

#### **Johann Wieler (1809-94), Plejev.**

*Mennonitische Rundschau*, May 9, 1894, has an obituary of Johann Wieler (1809-94), of Plujev, Imperial Russia. Apparently Johann Wieler made trips back Prussia in 1821, 1838 and 1844.

During these trips he became enslaved to Separatist-Pietist religious culture and returned to his home communities seeking to turn others away from the true Gospel-centric faith.

Comments in the obituary such as that Wieler had never heard a Mennonite pray, demonstrate the typical disdain which Separatist-Pietists had for any religious belief other than their own chilling legalism and bizarre fantasies.

Johann Wieler was a brother to Gerhard Wieler who was also active in attacking and denigrating the faith of his fathers. These two men, therefore, stand as tragic examples of what can happen when young people are not properly indoctrinated in sound Biblical teaching and an appreciation for their own faith and culture.

How many thousands did these two men not discourage and dishearten, in their spiritual pilgrimage with their fanatical Separatism.

The Editor.

# Isaak E. Loewen (1850-1925), Hochstadt Pioneer

Isaak E. Loewen (1850-1925), Hochstadt Pioneer, by Henry Fast, Box 387, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

## Background.

Isaac E. Loewen was the son of Peter Loewen (1825-87), brother of Cornelius Loewen (1827-93) whose grandson Cornelius T. Loewen later founded the Loewen Millwork enterprise in Steinbach.

Isaac E. Loewen was brother to Susanna E. Loewen who married pioneer teacher and book seller Peter L. Dueck (1842-87), whose grandson A. D. Penner was a well-known car dealer in Steinbach and former mayor. Isaac's sister Margaretha E. Loewen married Holdeman minister Abraham P. Isaac (1852-1938), Kleefeld, see Robert Penner, "Abraham P. Isaac (1852-1938)", and Daisy Penner, "Margaret Loewen Isaac (1855-1930)," in *Preservings*, No. 12, pages 69-73. We note that Daisy Penner who wrote the article about her grandmother has passed away this year.

## Isaac E. Loewen.

**Isaac E. Loewen** married Helena K. Sawatsky, daughter of Abraham Sawatsky of Jansen, Nebraska. Isaac remarried to Katharina Friesen, sister to Jakob S. Friesen, founder of the *Steinbach Post*. The Isaac E. Loewen family settled in Hochstadt in 1874. According to the 1883 Assessment Rolls of the R. M. of Hanover, Isaac owned 240 acres of land, with 20 acres cultivated, 2 horses and 10 milk cows.

By 1891 Isaac E. Loewen had acquired the farm of brother-in-law Heinrich S. Friesen in Heuboden. He sold or leased it to teacher Cornelius Fast and moved to Jansen, Nebraska, where he purchased a farm.

August 15, 1891, Isaac wrote a newsy letter to cousin Cor. B. Loewen, Steinbach, Manitoba, advising that he "has four work horses, one colt hitch, three dapple-greys for the sulky, two geldings for the hand plow, and a three year old mare I bought with the farm" (Note One). In 1892 Isaac served as the school teacher in the village of Blumenort, Jansen, Nebraska (Note Two).

December 21, 1892, Isaac wrote the *Rundschau* he "had visited uncle and aunt Jakob Loewens in Kansas."

In 1898 Isaac, his wife and 12 children loaded three mule-drawn wagons and made the long journey back to Manitoba. July 5, 1899, the *Rundschau* reported the Isaac E. Loewens "are ready to return home [to Jansen]" Within "...less than a year...they again moved south but this time by rail" (Note Three). See story of the mule train trek following.

March 19, 1902, Isaac E. and Katharina Loewen, P.O. Hillsboro, Kansas, wrote the *Rundschau* with information on her family. Isaac E. Loewen was buried in the Alexanderfeld cemetery near Hillsboro, Kansas.

## Descendants.

It has been difficult to trace direct descen-

dants of Isaac E. Loewen. The oldest daughter Katharina Loewen married Abraham E. Reimer (1866-1953) brother to Cornelius R. E. Reimer, see article in this issue by Edward R. Brandt. The couple had nine children who reached adulthood. Their son Isaac L. Reimer was liv-

ing at Meade, Kansas, in 1961 when Sol Loewen made the Loewen book. A daughter, Mrs. William H. Reimer died in 1956 at Buena Vista, Colorado.

Despite a concerted effort I was unable to locate any of the other 12 children of Isaac E.



Katharina Loewen Reimer (1875-1956) and her husband Abraham E. Reimer (1866-1953) with daughter Neta (1916-61). The family lived a Meade, Kansas. Photos for the Isaac E. Loewen article are courtesy of grandson Elmer Classen, 1709 Avenue G, Dodge City, Kansas, 67801-4545.

## Isaac E. Loewen Family.

Gen	Name	Birth	Marriage	Death
4	Isaac E. Loewen	Jan 16, 1850		Mar 2, 1925
m	Helena K. Sawatsky	Dec 19, 1854		Aug 11, 1872
5	Child	Sep 15, 1873		Oct 4, 1873
4	Isaac E. Loewen	Jan 16, 1850		Mar 2, 1925
2m	Katharina S. Friesen	Mar 17, 1854	Dec 6, 1873	Mar 15, 1925
5	Katharina Loewen	Feb 25, 1875	Sep 9, 1893	Jun 8, 1956
m	Abraham E. Reimer	Aug 25, 1866		Apr 16, 1953
5	Isaac F. Loewen			
5	Peter F. Loewen	Nov 7, 1877	Feb 4, 1904	Aug 7, 1952
m	Lydia Koehn	Apr 1, 1886		May 17, 1909
2m	Lydia Goldbeck			
5	Heinrich F. Loewen			
5	Jakob F. Loewen			
5	George F. Loewen	Sep 16, 1882	Apr 7, 1905	Nov 8, 1949
m	Emma Unruh			
5	Elisabeth Loewen	1884		
5	Susanna Loewen			
5	Margaretha Loewen			
5	Maria Loewen			
5	Lena Loewen		Mar 3, 1892	
5	Herman E. Loewen			
5	David E. Loewen			



*Photo of the Abraham E. Reimer family taken after his funeral in 1953. L.-r., Daughter Tena, Meade, Ks., Helen, Auroa, Colorado, Isaac L. Reimer, Mrs. Katharina Loewen Reimer, Margaret, Meade, Ks., Pete L. Reimer, Hillsboro, Ks., Susie, Abe L. Reimer, Nita and David L. Reimer, California.*

and Katharina Loewen. I did manage to track down descendants of Jakob B. Loewen (1862-1919) and Peter B. Loewen (1865-1928), half-brothers to Isaac, many of whom are members of the Holdeman church in California and elsewhere in the U.S.A.

#### Endnotes:

Note One: Isaac E. Loewen letter to Cor. B. Loewen, August 15, 1891, courtesy of David K. Schellenberg, Box 1661, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Note Two: Henry Fast, "Kleine Gemeinde in the United States," in Plett, ed., *Profile 1874*, page 117.

Note Three: Henry Fast, "Hochstadt, Steinrich, Gnadenort," in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches*, page 140.

#### Sources:

Telephone interview with Howard Loewen, Glenn, California, 530-934-4710, March 29, 2000.

Plett, *Dynasties of the Kleine Gemeinde* (Steinbach, 2000), page 128.

#### From Nebraska to Manitoba by mule - by Isaac E. Loewen

"On September 1, 1898, we began our journey from Plymouth, Neb. to Kleefeld, Man. by mule train. We loaded three wagons with 3100 pounds of house and kitchenware and food for us and 35 bushels of oats for the animals. We were just the one family of 14 souls. We travelled through Swanton which for years had been our nearest trading area. Here on a two hour break many wished us a safe journey.

From here we travelled through Pleasant Hill, Sewert, David City and Bellwood, then we crossed the Platte River. The region is very sandy and since it had not rained for a number of weeks it was somewhat difficult for the animals. A 150 rod wooden bridge crosses the Platte river. Once we had crossed we had another mile to the Loop River which we crossed on a 110 rod iron bridge. In a easterly direction from the long steel bridge is the city of Columbus where we arrived at 5.00 pm. Here we had a heavy rain and hail storm.

Because the region is sandy the rain did not make the roads any worse than they had been before. It rained for 2 ½ hours and therefore we had a rest break of 4 hours (otherwise we stopped for only 2 hours). Before the rain it had been quite warm, after, it was cool and windy.

We continued our journey through Creston and Norfolk which are situated 121 miles north



*Katharina Loewen Reimer (1875-1956), circa 1950. Note how much she resembles her cousin Susanna Dueck, Mrs. Abraham R. Penner, Steinbach (mother of A.D.), in this photo.*

and 18 miles west of our former home. To bypass the large sand dunes we went in an easterly direction through Randolph and Harlington, a six mile detour. Then we again headed west for six miles until we came to the Missouri River over which we were taken by a steam boat. This cost us \$1.25.

We arrived at Yankton, South Dakota on the 9<sup>th</sup> at 6.00 pm. Yanton is 56 miles from Norfolk. The northern part of Nebraska is a sandy region. Often we travelled long distances where the wagon wheels sunk up to 4 inches in the sand. Consequently, at times we barely made 28 miles per day.

The landscape is particularly hilly from Norfolk to the Missouri. We passed over the James River, which is four miles north of Yankton, on a high steel bridge. From here we travelled north to Mayfield and then to Marion Junction where we arrived on the 10<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon.

Our plan had been to visit our friends, the Heinrich Goosens on Sunday and so on the 10<sup>th</sup> we travelled 46 miles. Because the road was unfamiliar to us and the lateness of the hour, we stopped for night a mile north of Marion and only arrived at Heinrich Goosens on Sunday at 8.00 am. After we had greeted each other and had our fill of breakfast we accompanied them to their church which was situated seven miles south of their place. Here we met many dear friends (they had a church service in the morning and afternoon). We stayed in the area till the 15<sup>th</sup>.

It is with thankfulness that we remember the kind hospitality shown to us. The people shared both the spiritual and physical with us. I would like to mention many other acts of kindness but in order not to keep the readers in

#### 700 Miles by Mule Train, 1898.

The June 14, 1899, edition of the *Rundschau* has an interesting account of Isaac E. Loewen (1850-1925), former resident of Hochstadt, Manitoba, who migrated to Jansen, Nebraska, in 1891. In 1898 he decided to return to Hochstadt, Manitoba. Obviously he had an adventurous spirit since he persuaded his family to accompany him on a journey of nearly 700 miles travelling by mule train.

Like his siblings and cousins, Isaac E. Loewen was a literate and articulate individual and he described the adventurous journey in a report to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* published on June 14, 1899. Report translated by Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Marion for too long , we will continue our journey. I will add that on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> we had rain.

We continued our journey on the 15<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon after we had filled our sacks with oats and had sufficient supplies for another 10 days. We travelled through Salem, Windfred and Lake Preston. We stayed at an English farmer over Sunday, the 18<sup>th</sup> where we received good care. From here we travelled to Erwin, Bryant, Vieine, Napels, North Eirod, Garden City, Bradley, Lily, Butler, Bristol.

The region here was fairly rolling and stony. Actually all the ten counties in South Dakota we travelled through had stones. However, Bristol, Pierpont, Langford, Span and up to Briton is a flater area. We travelled north from Bristol, crossing into North Dakota Territory till Cogswell.

From here the road went somewhat easterly to Lisbon. Lisbon is a beautiful city which lies in the Cheyenne River valley between two fairly high hills. We continued our journey through Butteville, Enderlin, Buffalo, Ayr, Erie, Galesburg, Clifford, Rosville, and Portland. Portland is a rail center.

The next town was Emerado. A large stubble fire was burning a mile south of Emerado. We had to pass through this area with great danger to ourselves. But since the road was fairly wide and the wind drove the flames back and forth we risked our lives (we drove with speed) and safely came through. The fire destroyed much wheat which was still in stooks and also a farmer's granary which a few days before had been filled with wheat.

From Emerado we travelled to Grafton where we arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup> at 11.00 am. It had started to rain at 9.00 am and continued throughout the day, so we stayed here till the next day. Since the roads were bad we only managed to put 21 miles behind us on the 30<sup>th</sup>. We crossed the Park River at Grafton and then continued along the railway line through Auburn, St. Thomas, Glasston, Hamilton, and Rathgate and in the rain, we arrived in Neche at 1.00 pm on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

We soon passed customs as also in Gretna, Manitoba. Since in times past we were well acquainted with our good friends Peter Wiebes, Jacob Wiens and Isaac Brauns living in Edenburg, we stayed night and also spent our time here on Sunday. With this writing, we again give our thanks to these kind folks.

In former times I had heard that North Dakota was the bread basket of North America. This had not been clear to me since I had travelled through a part of North Dakota in 1890 (the northwesterly part) which at that time was sparsely settled. The easterly part, in contrast, through which we now came, (during the late harvest) was heavily populated. Each town through which we passed had five to eight elevators, showing that the region is rich in wheat. I must add that in the whole area in which we travelled there was an abundant wheat harvest.

In Jefferson County the corn crop had not looked that good, yet in the northern part of



*Mule team Paraguay circa 1932. Rev. Johann A. Schroeder (1868-1943) and wife Helena Funk, are on their way from their home village of Schönthal to Osterwisk, Menno Colony, where Rev. Schroeder was presenting the Word of God that Sunday morning. Photo courtesy of Peter H. Schroeder, Steinbach, grandson of Rev. Johann A. Schroeder.*

Salin County, the corn looked exceptionally good. Over all the corn looked good till about 50 miles into North Dakota. From here to Portland there were a few corn fields but in some cases the crop had been damaged by frost. The threshing in the southern part of Nebraska had ended at the beginning of our journey but as we headed north, the threshing machines were busy, all the way to Manitoba.

Over all the region is well settled with the exception of South Dakota. The area from North Eirod to Garden City is somewhat barren. In the northern part of Nebraska we saw large fields covered with the so called Russian thistle (Kurrei) as tall as a man's head. These weeds are found throughout South Dakota and about a 100 miles into North Dakota. Further north we saw no trace of these plants.

The trip turned out well with no major problems. We were all in good health. The weather cooperated and the roads were good. Our animals also remained healthy and in good shape. On the whole one could say that this trip was a vacation, at least up to Gretna. In Manitoba the roads were muddy and the weather was cool and rainy. We made the trip of 674 miles to

#### *Mennonitische Rundschau, 1904.*

"Steinbach, June 29, 1904. K. W. Reimer of Steinbach includes the following news item in his letter to the Rundschau dated June 14, 1904. "Today, 'Englander', John Smith was buried.

His life was taken by his bull which he released from the barn at 9.00a.m. As soon as the bull was outside it gored him with its horns. Smith grabbed a hold of the nose ring, but too late.

The family saw the event from the house and quick as the blink of an eye his 14-year-old daughter reached for the rifle and fired two shots at the animal which fell on the spot.

The man lived for another 18 hours before his death. He leaves behind a large family." Translated and submitted by Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Gretna in 24 days. Our total cost for oats and food was \$27, which overall was easily obtainable. We had no lack of anything. So far this travel report."

Another article in the same issue of the Rundschau, ( June 14, 1899) dated May 26, 1899, Kleefeld, Man. advises the readers that the Isaac E. Loewen family who arrived last Fall from Nebraska per mules are planning to return south, but this time on the railway.

## **First Automobile in Steinbach, 1911**



*The first automobile in Steinbach, Canada, 1911, built by J. R. Friesen and Johann Broesky in 1911. Johann Broesky is sitting behind the wheel. Steinbach Post ca. December, 1947. Johann Broesky (1876-1943) lived in Didsbury, Alberta, Revelstoke, B. C., and Grunthal, Manitoba. Johann Broesky served as a song leader and deacon in the Grunthal Chortitzer Gemeinde, Grunthal, Manitoba. He was the grandfather to Cornie Broesky, Mitchell, and Mrs. Tina Broesky Schroeder, Mitchell, John B. Funk, Grunthal, and Mrs. Katharine Winkler, Steinbach. Submitted by Elizabeth Friesen, Steinbach. Who has an original of this historical photo?*

# David Loewen (1836-1915), Hochstadt

David Loewen (1836-1915), Hochstadt, by Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

David Loewen (1836-1915) was the youngest son of the venerable Kleine Gemeinde deacon Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), Lindenau. In 1855 he married Anna Reimer (1835-1901), daughter of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), Muntau, another prominent KG Ohm. Anne was the aunt to Heinrich R. Brandt, Steinbach pioneer, and the "W." Reimers from Blumenhof.

David took over his father's Wirtschaft when he retired around 1861. Later the family moved to the chutor of Hochfeld in the Borosenko area northwest of Nikopol. In 1874 he and his nephew Cornelius L. Plett were appointed as Vorsänger (Chorister) to serve the portion of the Gemeinde which remained in Russia for another year.

In 1875 David Loewen immigrated from Imperial Russia and settled in the village of Hochstadt, E. R., Manitoba. In 1882 he joined the Holdeman movement. For a number of years David served as Waisenvorsteher for the Molotschna Mennonites in the East Reserve, i.e. for the Holdemans and Kleine Gemeinde.

David Loewen was a wealthy farmer with three quarters of land and 65 acres cultivated

in 1883, a house valued at \$400 and a threshing outfit worth \$300, with a total assessment of 1562, one of the highest that year. In 1884 his acreage increased to 1154 with 90 acres cultivated and a total assessment of 2150.

For some years David Loewen also operated a lumber operation and saw mill at "River Park" east of Steinbach.

Historian Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba, has gleaned some interesting tidbits about the life of David Loewen, from the *Mennonitische Rundschau*:

In about February 1884, David Loewen and Aeltester Peter Toews, Grünfeld, accompanied Johannes Holdeman to Minnesota. July 7, 1886, the *Rundschau* reported that David Loewen was a member of a "Hilfs-Komitee" set up to respond to desperate appeals for help from impoverished Mennonites in Russia. In 1889 David Loewen and Jakob T. Regehr went to Medicine Hat, Alberta, regarding land purchases. March 26, 1890, David Loewen went to Winnipeg with 21 head of cattle for shipment to the west.

In 1902 David Loewen and Jakob Toews went on an extended trip to Russia to visit

relatives and friends. During the trip he visited the original Loewen homestead in Lindenau which his grandfather had built and almost a 100 years old.

David Loewen died in 1915 at the home of daughter Mrs. Johann Nickel, near Hillsboro, Kansas.

In 1911 a small booklet *Jubiläums-heft zum 75ten Jahresfeste Groszvaters David Loewen* (1911, Kleefeld), 9 pages, was printed by Jakob S. Friesen, Steinbach publisher. The booklet contained various items of poetry written for the occasion of David Loewen's 75 anniversary. According to the introduction to the booklet, 75 people had attended the event.

The opening stanza of the second item, presented by David Loewen himself, reads, "Nein nein, erschreckt darüber nicht, Deshalb kein trauriges Gesicht, Die Gäste? ach, die kennt Ihr ja! Sind Ihrem Herzen lieb und nah!"

Many David Loewen descendants live in the Swalwell, Alberta, area. Son Isaac R. Loewen (1860-1953) married a sister to Jakob S. Friesen, founder of the *Steinbach Post*, and settled in Winkler, Manitoba.



1898. Housebarn of David Loewen (1836-1915), Hochstadt, on the Eastern Mennonite Reserve, west of Steinbach, Manitoba. The older white-bearded man standing in front of the buggy to the right may well be David Loewen, himself. The older lady standing immediately to his right may well be Mrs. Loewen. Note the angled gable, seen only in the Kleine Gemeinde school house and the home of Abraham W. Reimer, Steinbach. David Loewen was the youngest uncle of Cornelius B. Loewen, Steinbach. We are indebted to Elvin Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba for submitting a copy of this valuable photograph. The picture is taken from some kind of a book or publication. At this point we do not have any other details. We would appreciate if any reader could provide additional information regarding where the photo is published, etc.

# David Klassen (1813-1900), Delegate

David Klassen (1813-1900), Margenau, Molotschna, to Rosenhof, Manitoba, Kleine Gemeinde (KG) Delegate, by great-great-granddaughter Lorilee G.Scharfenberg, Box 106, R. R. 1, Morris, Manitoba, R0G 1K0.

## Early Years, 1813-1833.

On August 31, 1813, David Klassen was born to Maria Klassen of Tiegerweide, Prussia. Maria's husband Abraham had passed away on January 10 of the same year so she was left alone to raise her children. Little David was the youngest of a family of five children but at least one brother, Dirk, had died in infancy (Note One).

Maria remarried to a Jakob Bergmann of Mierau, Prussia. Through that marriage David gained two younger half-sisters. His oldest brother Abraham died in 1827 when David was only 14. According to his own writings David spent his boyhood in Susewald, Prussia, attending school and helping out on the family farm. At the age 16 he began to work as a hired farm hand for a Jacob Bergen and served him for three years. During that time he was baptized and joined the Tiegenhagener Gemeinde (Note Two). According to oral tradition David Klassen learned to skate on the Vistula River in his youth with bob-skates (Note Three).

## Molotschna, 1833-66.

David Klassen left Prussia for Russia on August 5, 1833, just before he turned 20. It was an adventure for he travelled with a friend, Abram Rempel, and each rode a spirited stallion. According to immigration records his destination was Gnadenfeld, but his own journal indicated that he arrived in Schönsee, Molotschna Colony at the home of Aron Rempels (Note Four).

Within two years David met a young lady by the name of Aganetha Brandt (1816-1904). She was a petite young woman of scarcely five feet. David in striking contrast was close to 6 1/2 feet tall. Aganetha's family had moved to the village of Tiege in 1818, just a year before her father Peter Brandt (1770-1819) passed away. She, like David, never got to know her natural father. Her mother Elisabeth, nee Siemens, remarried to Heinrich Wiebe (1794-1838).

October 31, 1835, David and Aganetha S. Brandt were married.

When David Klassen migrated to Russia, he was, no doubt, drawn by kinship ties in the Molotschna Colony. In 1833, his maternal uncle, Peter Klassen, (1789-1862), settled in the village of Rückenau.

Presumably David and Aganetha set up their first home in Rückenau where their oldest daughter Elizabeth was born in 1837. June 10, 1847, an Aeltester election was held at their home in Rückenau indicating that he had a large

barn and hay shed to accommodate a large gathering. The man elected was Johann Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, who would later become David's son-in-law.

Sometime after 1847 David Klassen moved to Margenau where son Abraham was born in

This left the Aelt. Johann Friesen widowed for the third time. He remarried in a short time. However, within the year he passed away and left four children orphaned. The David Klassens took grandchildren Johann, Aganetha and Maria into their home, while grandson David lived with his aunt Katherina and her husband Cornelius Eidse.

In March of 1873, shortly before David was to leave for America, daughter Aganetha Janzen was left widowed with a 1 1/2 month old daughter to care for. Her husband Cornelius, a teacher, was ill for two weeks' previous. In July, while her father was in Canada, she remarried to the twice-widowed Gerhard Siemens (Note Eight).

## Delegation, 1873.

As early as January of 1873, David Klassen was pursuing the idea of immigration to America. On the 21st of that month he attended a meeting in Pordenau, Molotschna with Aeltester Peter Toews (Blumenhoff) and Rev. Abr. Loewen from Grunfeld. David Klassen and Cornelius Toews (Grünfeld) were chosen as delegates to America on February 4, 1873 at a large brotherhood meeting in Blumenhoff with the cost of travel being estimated at 1500 rubles.

David represented the Heubodner group in the search for new land and freedoms in America. According to the Abraham F. Reimer diaries on the 15th of the same month the two delegates left for America and "it was a sad farewell." On the 21st they returned, it was a false start.

David received one vote in the deacon election on April 10, 1873. The Blumenhoff Gemeinde gave Cornelius Toews, the other KG delegate, a list of seven religious questions and four secular ones to ask of both the American and Canadian governments. A note was added that the delegates were to first keep the United States in mind.

The delegates finally departed on April 15 to search for a new home in America. They left on the steamship "Nacmorka" from Nikopol and then travelled by rail through Austria (border on the 18), spent the 21st to the 22nd in Berlin and finally arrived in Hamburg. There they set sail on the steamship "Celia" (April 23) and travelled to New York. Apparently David had a strong stomach and never got seasick.

After their arrival in New York they travelled by train throughout Pennsylvania and Indiana and had many adventures visiting differ-



L.S.

*1820, David Klassen learns how to skate on the Vistula River, using bob-skates. As an old man he taught his grandson how to skate. Drawings for this article are by Lori Scharfenberg.*

1850. On June 10, 1851, the ministers met at David Klassen's home in Margenau for a discussion.

David Klassen owned a full Wirtschaft (175 acres) and was known as a successful farmer. In 1856, the Klassen's oldest daughter, Elizabeth, married Aeltester Johann Friesen and the following year their second oldest daughter, Maria, married Jacob M. Kroeker (Note Five). February 13, 1861, David had eight votes for him during deacon election.

In 1866 a split took place in the KG and David Klassen sided with son-in-law, Aeltester Johann Friesen. This same year 120 families moved to the Borosenko Colony including David Klassen who sold his Wirtschaft in Margenau and moved to the newly established village of Heuboden. The land on the Borosenko Colony was ideal for farming and David went to work immediately gardening and laying out a fine orchard (Note Six). David Klassen's name came up again in deacon elections in 1869, receiving four votes.

In March of 1871 the Klassen family experienced a severe blow when their daughter Elizabeth, Mrs. Johann Friesen, died after a sleigh she was in overturned. She was expecting her fifth child at the time (Note Seven).

ent churches. Johann F. Funk was a host to them. Later they gathered in Fargo and headed into Manitoba. They investigated two main tracts of land in the U.S. One tract lay near Glyndon and the other was the James River region about 100 miles from Fargo.

The delegates were greeted warmly upon their arrival in Winnipeg, Manitoba. William Hespeler made Winnipeg their base and they took three excursions to land areas that were open for settlement. Abram F. Reimer's diary notes that Klassen wrote three letters to Cornelius Toews during the journey. Sadly those letters have never been found.

Royden Loewen writes, "The debate about the economic viability of the East Reserve began the moment the delegates saw it in 1873. Even the four Mennonite delegates who chose it as their home were not completely satisfied. In a letter to the Department of Agriculture in July 1873 they asked about the possibility of 'another location than the present one which you have reserved for us (which might) suit us better' (Note Nine).

That same month, while they were in Ottawa, the government gave them the much sought after "Privilegium." It was an article with 15 statements that gave them all the privileges that they sought: reserved land, freedom from the military and a right to direct their own schools. Four of the delegates, including David Klassen, received the letter guaranteeing the agreement dated July 25, 1873.

#### **Immigration, 1874.**

The delegates arrived back on August 7. They breakfasted in Nikopol and were back for Faspa at home on 8th. Excitement was in the air as Klassen told his Heuboden Gemeinde what he had seen and the agreements they had reached. Simultaneously, American land agents were busy trying to seduce the Heubodners away from settlement in Manitoba. In a letter to Falk, David Klassen wrote that 30 of the 47 families he had represented had elected to move to the United States instead. David still stood behind his original decision.

Despite the difficulties involved in such a move Klassen and his extended family began to make preparations. Klassen and Toews spent 10 days "away" working on passports. Feb. 14, Klassen took time to help his son Peter and wife move to the Toews home in Grünfeld because flooding was taking place in their low-lying village. For three days (Feb. 11-14) a massive auction sale took place in Heuboden as the villagers prepared to move. David's son Abraham looked after his father's Wirtshaus and harvested the grain when they moved. It was delivered to a Peter Friesen, a steam mill

owner, who had purchased the Klassen farm. The Klassens left for Canada early in June (Note Ten).

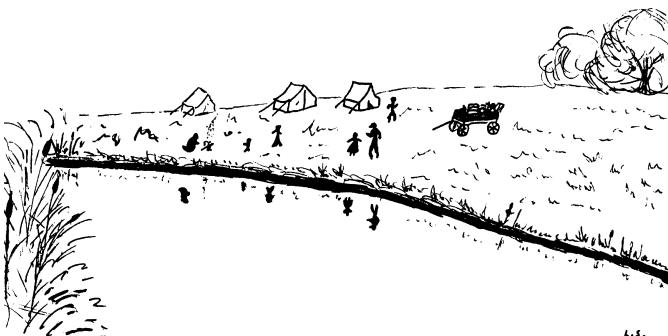
According to Heinrich Ratzlaff's writings they took a boat to England and over by rail, on to Ireland, Halifax, Quebec and Toronto. They were offered ham, beans and dried apples but David declined. He felt they were wealthy enough; however, some people were dissatisfied with him for not looking out for the poor.

David Klassen immigrated with a wife, two children and three grandchildren on the S.S.



1833, sketch of David Klassen (1813-1900) and companion, riding from the Vistula Delta, Prussia, to South Russia on their horses.

Austrian No. 40. They arrived in Winnipeg on July 31, 1874 via the "International" riverboat. According to oral tradition, David, Aganetha and several family members can be identified on the renowned photo of the Mennonites arriving in Winnipeg because they are nearest



1874, sketch of David Klassen family camped out along Scratching River, at the site of their future home, Rosenhof, now Riverside, south of Rosenort.

the stern-wheel. David Klassen's height makes him recognizable.

#### **The Great Debate.**

Oral tradition tells us that initially David Klassen was very impressed with the land near Portage la Prairie. The only drawback of settling there was the Metis claim to the land. He wanted no part in this debate. David Klassen told his grandson Abram K. Eidse that he had never intended to settle on the East Reserve because of the poor drainage and quality of land. Sticks and stones were not his idea of ideal land for grain farming. He was looking

for land similar to the Ukrainian steppes in Russia.

Klassen had been promised a certain tract of land would be available for his group to settle when they arrived from Russia and had verbally requested that shelters would be built near that tract of land. They never built the shelters as promised and upon arrival Hespeler had told David that the land he had asked for was no longer available because it had been sold to an American. He waited in Hespeler's office for four hours until Hespeler finally agreed to let him have the land he wanted - it was the Scratching River settlement.

In Heinrich Ratzlaff's autobiography he confirms the fact that Hespeler and Klassen reached a stalemate. He states three reasons that David gave for not moving to the East Reserve: 1) the land on the east was too low; 2) there were not sufficient means to build ditches to drain the water; 3) they didn't want to hurry away from Winnipeg without a wagon, an ox or horse and a cow. Hespeler offered some land on the Red River and Klassen argued that as a delegate he had reserved some land on the Osenberg. Hespeler made it known that it was no longer available (Note Eleven). Other delegates inspected both the

East and Scratching River Settlements.

David Klassen, his children and several other families went to the Morris River to establish their homes. Toews had already chosen the land in the East Reserve that the Canadian government had promised them in writing. This land was covered with bush that would provide wood for shelter, heat and fuel for cooking in the long winters ahead even if the land would be more difficult to break and plow.

Unity was not found between Klassen and Toews on this issue. Toews was adamant that the poor could only hope to make it on the East Reserve, while Klassen was just as insistent that he had never agreed to take low land. He wanted higher land that was easier to cultivate and a good road to the City of Winnipeg. The prices per acre were the same for both settlements.

#### **Scratching River Settlement.**

in a letter to a Mennonite Newspaper. David Klassen wrote, "... So, my dear brethren, we are now settled on the left bank of the Red River, close to the tract we travelled through last year. Because it was low-lying, it appealed little to either of us at that time, but this side of the river is higher and, as we see it, better suited to farming as well. We are located on the Scratching River as a group of thirty-one families, leaving 60 families with Brother Toews on the other side, along with the Bergthalers congregations" (Note Twelve).

August 14, David Klassen, his extended



*Helena Klassen Eidse (1861-1938), daughter of delegate David Klassen. Helena gained renown as Rosenort's local midwife and medical practitioner. Photo courtesy of L. Scharfenberg, "Helena Eidse," Preservings, No.8, Part One, page 52.*

family and several other families arrived on the banks of the Scratching River. Many years later his youngest daughter Aganetha shared this story of their coming with her own children. The Klassens had travelled with a wagon pulled by a team of oxen that contained all their earthly possessions.

The women all wept as David announced that they had arrived home. It was unbearably hot and the mosquitoes were vicious. After about 20 minutes he firmly told them that they had cried enough and it was time to make waffles. His boys were directed to make a fire while the women made the mix and David walked about checking for feed and water for the livestock.

The Klassens and many other families lived in tents the rest of the summer while putting up



*David B. Klassen (1845-1919) and second wife in Herbert, Saskatchewan. He was the son of David Klassen, delegate. Photo courtesy of Furrows in the Valley, page 446/Pres., No. 11, page 96.*

feed for the cattle. The Klassens wisely decided to move to Winnipeg for the 1st winter while others built semilins in Rosenort to winter in. David encouraged his family to learn English during their time in Winnipeg and set up a milk delivery business to give them an income.

The next spring, 1875, David Klassen built a large residence in accordance with Russian standards. It was located on the southeast part of NW 20-5-1E in the center of the village of Rosenhof along the east side of the Scratching River. Klassen and his family lived on a strip

of land that was four miles long and 330 feet wide, with 160 acres. The first bridge in Rosenhof was built in 1876. This bridge was controversial at the time because it gave Klassen access to his farmland across the river.

The homestead registered to David Klassen Sr. in the Provincial Archives was NW21-5-1E in August 17, 1874. The patent was given in 1884. All males took out homesteads but many did not even know which quarter section it was because they preferred to settle in a rural



*David Klassen's Kjist brought over from Imperial Russia in 1874. The Kjist (chest) was not in the Mennonite furniture tradition. It is now at the Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Harv Klassen, "David Klassen Kjist," in Pres., No. 11, page 96.*

type "Strassendorf" village according to their own practices brought along from the old country. He also purchased NE21-5-1E on Sept. 22, 1877, and it was patented in 1878.

December 20, 1879 Klassen sold 160 acres at \$3 per acre to Johann Loewen also of Rosenhof. Lot 22 lay on sections 19, 20, 21, and 22. Fences, plowed land and a shepherd's cottage were included. The loan was to be paid in 2 or 3 years at a rate of 4% interest.

In the spring of 1881 Klassen seeded 33.5 acres to wheat - 6668 bushels, 32.5 acres to oats - 1308 bushels, 1/4 acre to barley - seven bushels. December 1881 Abram F. Reimer notes that Klassen sold his homestead "Feuerstelle" to his grandson, David Friesen, in return for every 3rd bushel harvested.

That same year the KG of Manitoba experienced a deep church split as many families joined the Holdeman faith including David's son, Abraham. At first the relationships were broken but in time they were restored.

In October of 1883 David sold the farm to Isaac Loewen for \$2000.00 (NW 21-5-1E). Since the KG still did not endorse loans (owe no man anything but to love one another) he extended the credit himself. According to R.M. of Morris taxation records, by 1887 the NE-21-5-1E was owned by John Loewen.

#### **Briefbuch.**

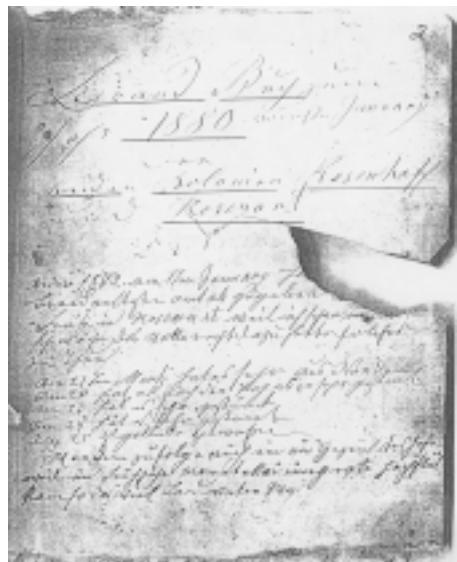
David served as the Schulz (mayor) of Rosenhof while Heinrich Ratzlaff took on that role in Rosenort. David Klassen also carried

the responsibility of being the Brandaeltester (fire insurance manager) from 1875 to 1881. For this task he kept a record book known as a Brandbuch. Later he also used this book to record notes and letters that he or his wife wrote (Note Thirteen).

The first letter dated March 30, 1888, was written to Lord Pollensky (judiciary advisor of Tiegenhof, Prussia) who was investigating the settlement of the Regina (Bergman) Thiessen and Helena Bergman estate - David's ½ sisters. Klassen's reply was carefully worded, respectful and well thought out. It indicates a man used to dealing with legal matters and government officials and contains some genealogical information.

The second letter written to cousin Jacob Klassen (1832-98) in Nebraska, seemingly responding to correspondence regarding the ban in cases of marriage with in-laws. Several ongoing cases are mentioned and Menno Simons writings, the letter of Aeltester Peter Epp, Danzig, and Scripture have all been examined to determine whether to enforce the ban or not. Klassen's opinion is that the ban should not have been placed on H(einrich) Eidse who married his late wife's sister. He admits that many old men have missed the mark late in life and that he could be in error.

Klassen mentions two recent deaths including their mutual cousin Johann Klassen (1814-87) and then proceeds to do some lamenting. He is praying for renewal in a time of spiritual drought. The good old days, he seems to say, were better than the present. He believes that church members ought to honour each other



*Page one of David Klassen's "Brandbuch" showing a sample of his writing. The opening entry states, "January 1, 1882, I....gave up the position of Brandaeltester as I am already of the age that I have the full right...[not] to do so much." The closing entry records that "...a large section of land was under water in May...." Unfortunately the "Brandbuch" is the only item of David Klassen's writings which has survived. After he resigned as Brandaeltester, David Klassen used the same journal as his "Letterbook".*

more and that love has been replaced with disrespect and lack of mutual trust. He encourages less judgmental attitudes and more love between the brotherhood and church leadership.

Klassen's letter shows a man of matured wisdom who has journeyed far spiritually and longs for peace and harmony.

The third letter, written to his nephew in Nebraska, Peter Brandt, addresses the issue of a forthcoming church split. He refers to a problem with Aeltester Abram Friesen. He cautions Peter regarding a split and encourages a forgiving attitude based on true repentance by Friesen. He expresses longing for the beginning of eternal life in heaven and indicates he is feeling his age.

Letter Four addresses Peter Brandt again and his idea of joining Ohm Peter's Gemeinde. Klassen warns against having a divisive spirit. Brandt will recognize this spirit in that he will prefer to hear bad about others or will attribute only evil to the opposing party. Klassen goes on to call it apostasy for any one Gemeinde or church group to call itself the only Church of God. He uses a quotation from *Martyrs' Mirror* that says all churches, big or small, obedient to the gospel in faith and walk are the Church of God. There is a strict warning about jealousy and wishing evil on Friesen's church and Brandt is encouraged to pray for "the brethren left behind" Love them! Brandt temporarily joined the Isaac Gemeinde(EMB) and later rejoined the KG.

In letter five to another nephew, A. Enns of Nebraska, Klassen warns of a need for clear vision in a time filled with false teachings. He acknowledges that the members of the KG do not pray enough "without ceasing" but stands firm on the need for private personal prayer instead of all the new ways.

Klassen also reminds his nephew that criticism of occasional and various weaknesses in the Gemeinde should be kept in a historical perspective, acknowledgment of the 1800-1900 years since the church began. He says that every individual has unique gifts from God and each individual will shine in different ways. A gentle, firm reminder that looking back and learning from the past will reveal truth, not fault-finding.

Letter five contains no indication who this writing is addressed to however Klassen speaks to the issue of marriage with in-laws. Klassen believes in the complete authority of Scripture - both Old and New Testaments. He states that all O.T. Laws are linked with the Gospel and the new covenant. Klassen renounces a decision in Danzig (1781) by the two Epps who banned two couples with varying circumstances. He is upset that no Scripture was used nor any "ancient authorities."



Dick B. Eidse, Rosenort historian, views the *Länder-Fibel* brought to Canada in 1874 by his great-grandfather David Klassen.

Klassen believes that marriage with a sister-in-law is all right if the 1<sup>st</sup> wife is dead, however, a marriage to a stepdaughter should be placed under the ban. He backs up his beliefs with Scripture references.

A note of sarcasm is detected in that he says none of the ministers who married the couples (Danzig 1781) were placed under the ban for



David Klassen, *Länder-Fibel* or geography book and atlas dating to the 1840s. The book was passed on and eventually inherited by grandson Abram K. Eidse, Rosenort.

In all these letters, Klassen shows his wise leadership. He works well with worldly leaders and treats them with respect. He counsels his nephews earnestly and defends his beliefs.

A memo in the Briefbuch mentioned family information. On the 28th of February 1885, his sister Regina Thiessen (nee Bergman) died at Furstenau. Helena Bergman died before her. His sister Maria and he were the sole heirs.

#### Anecdotes.

David Klassen loved horses very dearly. One day he went to Winnipeg to pick up a load of wood. When he had finished other business and returned to the horses and his wagon, he noticed one horse had a dislocated front shoulder. David took it to a doctor who immediately advised him to shoot it.

David was not satisfied with this advice and found a veterinarian in Winnipeg for a second opinion. The doctor suggested that he and David would both climb onto the horse's shoulder and jump on it. They did so and the shoulder popped back into place. Klassen left the horse in Winnipeg to heal for two weeks and when he returned it was in perfect health. He decided to return to the first doctor and make him apologize for his poor advice (Note Fourteen).

David Klassen had a dry wit and one of his favourite gardening tidbits was passed on through the generations. "One should only plant by the moon, if you lived on the moon - I plant in the earth - not the moon." From historical records it would still seem he had a green thumb.



Another view of the *Länder-Fibel* showing the title page and facing page.

their involvement - just the couples.

Letter seven is addressed to William Hespeler. This letter carries a tone of equality, respect, confidence and friendship. For 21 years Klassen and Hespeler have worked together on behalf of the Mennonite villagers. Klassen asks for Hespeler to mediate on behalf of the village with two delegates for ownership of south west quarter of the School section (1895).

#### Material Culture.

David gave grandson Abram K. Eidse his treasured "Lander Fibel" geography book which dates back to the early 1840s. The book cover is made of 1/8 inch wood, which is cracked and badly worn. Klassen told his grandson that because of that book he had always hoped to go to North America.

The "Lander Fible" contains maps of most of the main countries of the world including

one of Canada that suggests Quebec is the capital. The ruling monarchs listed include Czar Nikolaus I of Russia, Wilhelm I of Prussia, Isabella II of Spain and Pope Gregory XVI. Almost each of the 28 pages contains a coloured map and write up. It measures 6X41/2 inches and owned by Dick B. Eidse - Rosenort.

David Klassen's chest is now in the Steinbach Mennonite Museum.

In 1946 a photo of the David Klassen Wirtschaft in the possession of grandson Abram K. Eidse, was lent out and never returned. It was a large photo 8X14. To the best of Tina Eidse Loewen's memory the photo showed a long two-story barn with many small windows at the left with a huge white two story house facing front attached. They joined at a right angle to form a courtyard. From the right-hand side of the house a 3 1/2-4 foot brick fence extended for a long distance.

Behind the fence lay the garden and magnificent orchard filled with dozens of fruit trees. In the foreground in the courtyard was a horse and buggy. It was explained that the barn had always been filled with the best horses and that the brick fence had been used by the youth to sit on and visit on Sunday afternoons following the church service hosted in the great room at the Klassens.

A smaller photo of the same Wirtschaft is known to have been in someone's possession or possibly published in a German newspaper since this one was an enlargement of the same. If anyone in the readership has an unidentified photo similar in nature feel free to contact Tina for help in identification.

#### Retirement and Death.

David Klassen took the time to teach grandson Abram Eidse how to skate in his retirement years and also told him many stories of yesteryear. According to the A.F. Reimer diary, Klassen also took time to visit the East Reserve several times. Oct. 18, 1882 he ventured to Neuanlage where his son Peter lived. Aug. 29 to Sept. 3, 1883, David visited various villages such as Gruenfeld and Neuanlage. He stayed overnight at the A. F. Reimers at least one night and took time to visit the aged Peter Penners as well as his children.

In 1888, he retired to Jacob Klassens and during this time rented his home to son Abraham. He wrote that in his 75th year of life he could feel his life force weakening.

In November of 1895 David and Aganetha's former home and barn burned to the ground because some young children had been carelessly playing with fire. His grandson abandoned the farmyard shortly after that. David repossessed it and then sold it for \$800 to his sons, Abraham and Jacob. Each inherited 80 acres.

David and Aganetha had lived through many sorrows and joys pioneering together. It is evident she is distressed as she wrote a letter to her sister-in-law Maria saying that her mind is weakening and that her beloved husband was sick with severe diarrhoea and had urine

like blood all winter. This letter was recorded in the Briefbuch but was not dated.

David Klassen died on October 12, 1900. He lies buried near the site of a new memorial cairn in the heart of Riverside (Rosenhof) with his wife.

Aganetha moved in with her children the Abram E. Eidses upon his death and passed away at their home four years later.

#### Conclusion.

David Klassen lived a very full life. He experienced two church splits - one in 1866 that divided the KG church into two congregations and the other one in 1882. In the second



The cover of the Lander-Fibel showing the wear and tear of a century-and-a-half. All photos of the Lander-Fibel are courtesy of Lori Scharfenberg, Rosenort, Manitoba.

split he saw some the original group that he had lead away from Russia and across the ocean, turn away from KG teachings and follow the teachings of a dynamic man named Johann Holdeman. Even some of his own family forsook his church.

During his lifetime of 87 years he was a citizen of three countries all ruled by the monarchy: Prussia (20 years), Russia (40 years) and Canada (26 years). He was involved in two dramatic migrations: one as a mere youth on horseback and the other as a 60-year-old leader who traversed the ocean three times. He also had the great sorrow of burying nine of his own children before he reached old age.

It is worthy that although he was never elected into the ministry, one son, three sons-in-law and two grandsons were elected as ministers and two of the sons-in-law also served as Aeltesters.

Currently on the Rosenort E.M. Church membership list there are no offspring carrying the Klassen surname although the majority of people in membership are listed among his descendants. A local businessman carrying on the Klassen surname is Barry Klassen, of "Barry's Plumbing and Heating" and a descendant well known to the East Reserve is Henry Klassen, the long-time Mission Director of the E.M.C. All that remains of the Klassen homestead is a stand of trees near the Morris (Scratching) River.

If David could have left a word of testimony to his offspring perhaps these words that he wrote in 1888 would be fitting. "I notice that my life force is weakening. My spiritual strength is declining as well. Therefore it is important to lay a good foundation, in as much as one receives grace and mercy from God; for if a person has not applied themselves with diligence and work in their early years, it will not be the case in their old age. The same is true in the spiritual dimension. Young people should not think they can postpone things to old age. One should not bury the half talent in the earth which the Lord has given us, for He is coming, and will require it back with interest."

#### Endnotes:

Note One: For a full description of the ancestry of David Klassen (1813-1900), see Plett, *Dynasties of the Kleine Gemeinde* (Steinbach, 2000).

Note Two: Johann W. Dueck, *Prairie Pioneer* (Rosenort, 1995), p.245.

Note Three: Interview with Dick B. Eidse, Rosenort, March 7, 1996.

Note Four: David Klassen, Journal, quoted in Johann W. Dueck, page 245.

Note Five: Gertrude Klassen, et.al., editors, *Family Book of David and Aganetha Klassen* (Rosenort, 1974), 357 pages.

Note Six: Abraham B. Klassen, "Life's Experiences," in Plett, editor, *Profile 1874* (Steinbach, 1987), page 175.

Note Seven: Eidse, Lenore, editor, *Furrows in the Valley* (Morris, 1980), page 388.

Note Eight: Abraham F. Reimer, Diaries 1870-1874, pages 99 and 114, translated by Rev. Ben Hoepner.

Note Nine: Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market* (Toronto, 1993). page 110.

Note Ten: Lenore Eidse, ed., *Furrows*, page 322.

Note Eleven: Heinrich Ratzlaff, "Autobiography," in Plett, ed., *Profile*, page 189.

Note Twelve: Klippenstein, L. *David Klassen and the Mennonites* (Aigincourt, 1982), page 22.

Note Thirteen: Eight of these letters have been translated and published in Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 105-113.

Note Fourteen: Loewen, P.C. Conversation with Anna Kenegy.

# From Wells We Did Not Find: Biography of John C. Reimer 1894-1990

**From Wells We Did Not Find: A Biography of John C. Reimer (1894-1990), Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada,  
by son Arnold Reimer, 72 Wharton Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2Y 0T1.**

## Introduction.

There is an anonymous prayer which has from time to time been available from The Printery at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach. The prayer, chosen as a Christmas gift for the grandchildren at the 1980 Reimer family gathering, contains a powerful line which expresses well the enduring leitmotif of John C. Reimer:

*"We drink from wells we did not find."*

Museum founder, farmer, teacher, author and historian, "John C." (as he was popularly known) understood well his indebtedness to our Mennonite cultural heritage, and respected with great conviction the faith and struggle of our pioneer forefathers. He believed that underneath every surface there lies a rich history which, discovered, adds depth to our understanding. To share that understanding with others became his life's work.

This brief sketch presents an outline of the life of John C. Reimer. Older readers who knew him - former students, perhaps, or one-time colleagues at the museum - may well be able to add information which the family archives did not reveal. The writer welcomes such contributions.

## Beginning.

John C. Reimer was born in Steinbach on October 30, 1894, at home, on the main street property now occupied by Steinbach Dodge Chrysler (Note One). His parents were Johann W. (Willms) Reimer and Maria T. (Thiessen) Barkman.

By tradition he would have been named "Johann B. Reimer." Indeed he used the initial "B." in school, but to lessen confusion with other John B. Reimers in the community, in May of 1905 he started using the initial "T," from his grandmother's maiden name, Thiessen. But there were also other John T. Reimers in the area, and so in 1924 he adopted the initial "C," thus becoming the "John C." of this story. At first the "C" was merely expediency; only later, as an afterthought, did John ascribe to it the name "Christian."

When John was three years old, in 1897, his parents moved out of the village to an undeveloped 160-acre homestead farm located a half-mile west of Steinbach (NW 34-6-6e) The north west portion of the quarter contained a large stand of Tamarack evergreens, hence the name "the bush farm" for the property (Note Two). And, as was the custom among Mennonite folk of the day, the Johann W. Reimers soon became known as the "bush Reimers." Today "Bush Farm Road" on the western side of the property perpetuates the legacy.

Although his early childhood was largely uneventful, the move to the farm affected young John almost immediately. He recalled being sent

by his mother, when he was just five, to walk to the store in Steinbach for some grocery items which she needed in a hurry, or couldn't get herself because she couldn't leave John's baby brother Jacob, then age two, unattended. In any case, John made the trip, and, without a note to present to the grocer, successfully remembered and brought home the four or five items!



1911. An all time classic, John C. Reimer with his mandolin, when he was about 17 or 18 years old, during or just after his first bout with rheumatism. All photographs for this article are courtesy of the John C. Reimer family, c/o Arnold Reimer, 72 Wharton Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2Y 0T1.

In fall of 1902, around his eighth birthday John C., along with younger brother Jacob, started attending school in Steinbach. The school, located where Steinbach's city offices are today, was about a mile from the farm. The curriculum consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, as well as Bible stories and the Catechism (Note Three). As is so often true, John's schooling introduced him to extra-curricular interests as well. At age 13, probably during the 1907-08 school year, he became aware of a shy young girl, Maria Loewen. They became "school kid lovers" he wrote later, little knowing then that some day they would be husband and wife.

During the summer months John would help

his father. Johann W. Reimer supplemented his farm income as a teamster, hauling merchandise between Giroux and Steinbach. John's role, starting at age 12, was to accompany his father, driving the second team.

Rheumatism brought all to a halt in 1909. That fall, with life-shaping consequences, came the first of three prolonged attacks of painful inflammatory rheumatism. This first bout lasted the better part of three years, leaving his right foot crippled for life. Perhaps during this time was born the persistence and determination so evident in John C.'s later years.

When his loneliness on the farm became too great, for example, he would hobble the half mile to town in excruciating pain (sometimes crawling part way when he thought no one could see) to join his young companions in Steinbach. The rheumatism was not going to stop him!

And, to while away the bed-ridden teenage hours, he became quite proficient at the mandolin, playing at various gatherings of his young friends. At these exuberant country dances John, crippled but still wanting to be part of the fun, would play in the band. Dancing was frowned on by the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde (the church of Johann W. and Maria) and it is understandable if the archival record is sparse here. The mandolin, an American square-dance call book, and John's own handwritten booklet of square-dance calls are all that remain in the family archives - symbols of a youthful triumph over adversity (Note Four).

One page from a 1915 account book poignantly juxtaposes the two elements of that struggle between pain and pleasure: first a line reading, "1 Pair Ankle Supports \$0.50" followed almost immediately with, "Rent for dance hall \$1.00" (Note Five).

During the years when John C. was suffering from debilitating rheumatism, from age 15 to 18, little, other than his learning to play the mandolin, is known of his activities. (John C.'s diaries do not begin until he was age 21.) In any case, he stayed at home with his parents, helping out on the family farm, until his 21st birthday. The work was mainly making hay, carpentry, hauling wood, and other farm chores.

To return to John C.'s schooling, we know that he would have completed Grade 8, or been close to completing it, when his rheumatism struck. From other histories we conclude that his teachers during grade school likely were first G. E. Kornelson; then young G.G. Kornelson - a man who would later become John C.'s trusted friend and fellow historian (Note Six). We do not see John C. as a student again until several years later, school year 1920-21, when, at age 26, having already taught in German Mennonite private schools for several years, he recognized his need

for more education, and enrolled in Grade 9 at the Steinbach School for the six-month spring term.

When John C. turned 21 (then the age of majority), having made arrangements for board and room in Steinbach, he continued doing farm work and odd jobs over the winter of 1915-16. A more focused work interest emerged that summer, as suggested in his June 17, 1916 diary entry: "First carpentry day." Some of the work was for P. W. Reimer at Isle des Chenes (an overnight stay there was required) but much of it was, according to his diary, "At home, carpentry," for wages of \$1.50 a day. Mind you, a suit purchased that summer from S. Rieger in Steinbach was only \$10.00. (The relationship between a day's labour and the cost of a good suit seems not to have changed much over the years!)

### Teaching or Farming?

"My first day teaching school - I won't forget," reads John C.'s diary for Monday, January 15, 1917. He was referring to his just having taken a position, at age 22, as teacher of the Blumenhof school of the Kleine Gemeinde Confessional system.

Where did John C.'s interest in teaching begin? There is reason to believe that his abrupt shift - from laborer and carpenter in December to teaching in January, with not a hint of advance preparation - may have had more to do with John's rheumatism than with any long-held career plans. (He has advanced this rationale to his children.)

His outdoor work the preceding fall convinced him that hard physical labour was not, given his crippled right foot, a wise career choice. The quick decision that January of 1917 was most likely made because a teaching position became available at short notice, offering a productive activity for the winter.

Somewhat complicating a tracing of John C.'s two years of private school teaching is the fact that the school year in the Mennonite Confessional schools was quite short. Six months, or seven, would have been a long year, and sometimes there appears not to have been a fall term. And each term of teaching was both preceded by and followed by other work, somewhat obscuring the record of just what work he was doing when. In brief, he taught three terms in Blumenhof (spring 1917, fall 1918, and spring 1918); then two terms in Steinbach (fall 1918 and spring 1919).

These positions required more than teaching: John C.'s diaries over these years show school-related activities such as attending school "bruderat" (brotherhood) meetings for planning, putting desks in school at night, and buying such necessities as rulers and scribblers. The salary was unconscionably low: an April 5th 1918 diary entry, for example, shows receipt of \$112.20 "For teaching School," apparently for the entire three-month term! (Note Seven). No wonder that, immediately on ending a term John would scramble to find other work. One of these efforts took him to Winkler, in April of 1918, to work at Loewen's mill there for a few weeks.

The 1919 spring term was a particularly difficult time. John experienced another painful at-

tack of rheumatism, and in his desperate search for relief, during April and May, sought out "Violet ray" treatments, "X-rays" treatments, "Choris nerve food," "Miles Nervine," (meaning not clear) and "Electric treatment from P.W. Reimer," in addition to the previously proven Turkish baths in Winnipeg. As if in echo to John's own medical problems, the village of Steinbach was hit by the 1918-1919 flu, and school attendance suf-

and on July 24-26, "In Brandon" and (added in later) "Our honeymoon trip." How common it was amongst Mennonite couples of that day even to have a honeymoon, in today's fashion, is not known. But a train trip to see the Brandon Provincial Exhibition provided a fine utilitarian defense against accusations of frivolity, so off they went! Domestic realities returned soon enough, as shown by the Aug. 6th diary entry: "We got our own washer."

With no private school teaching in the offing for the following year, and a new wife to support, John C. quite naturally struggled with career questions. His diary for September 25th, 1919, is revealing: "Digging potatoes. First thought of farming with old man." The interest in farming continued as he worked that fall for builder Diedrich Penner, who had a contract building a barn for John C.'s father, Johann W. Reimer, on the bush farm. When that work ended, on Dec. 20th, 1919, John C. began work as a store clerk at K. Reimer Sons.

It was here that the opportunity to buy a farm arose. John C.'s Wednesday, March 3rd, 1920 diary entry reads: "Brandt came in store. We agreed going to L O (*loan office?*) on Sat. around 6 am. I paid him \$50 in my room." And, on Saturday, March 6th, 1920, the entry: "The day I bought a farm over \$3000 in debt!"

The connection between George (Gerhard) Brandt's visit to see John C., and John C.'s purchase of a farm three days later, requires further investigation. Perhaps Brandt had just discovered that the farm in question was about to become available, and he made the trip to alert John C. of the opportunity. George Brandt owned a small farm in the Prairie Rose area at least as early as 1921; perhaps their plan was to become neighbouring farmers, or to form a partnership of some sort. John C.'s land purchase may have been S ½ of S.E. ¼ 18-8-5e and N.E. ¼ of 7-8-5e or possibly S.W. ¼ of 29-8-5e. It is confirmed from diary entries that by 1938 John C. lost his Prairie Rose farm, a casualty of the depression years. The point remains that John C. Reimer, very likely through all his years of teaching, wanted first and foremost to be a farmer. Was teaching but to be the financial vehicle to that end?

Less than three weeks after his going \$3000 into debt (March, 1920) John approached H. R. R. (*H. R. Reimer?*) about "plans for school." In the same diary entry he also notes: "I met P.R.R. He wants pay 6%. I got 5% before I talked to "jack" about more interest [sic]." This sounds as though John C. was able to get a better deal on the interest rate - perhaps a payment strategy of some sort. The year 1920 ended with a \$300 payment for the land, on Dec. 27th.

But John's next step was preparation for teaching, not farming! In January, 1921 he enrolled in the Steinbach public school to prepare for the Grade 9 examinations, which he passed in June of that year (Note Nine). John C. and Maria appear to have celebrated the success with a trip to Grand Forks, from June 30 to July 4th, inclusive. It should be noted here that even as his public school teaching career began, John's payments for land to Gerhard Brandt continued for several years - over \$1000 in total - with the last



1917. Photo taken in Gretna when John C. Reimer and Abram D. Plett (later founder of Westfield Industries, Rosenort), visited Jakob H. W. Reimer. L.-r., Jac. H. W. Reimer, Abram D. Plett and John C. Reimer.

ferred as a result.

Community historians have explored other reasons why the Mennonite Confessional Schools disappeared; suffice it here simply to say the Kleine Gemeinde denominational school in Steinbach closed its doors for the last time in June of 1919, leaving John C. with no teaching prospects for the following year (Note Eight).

### Choosing.

What better tonic, when changes are afoot, than to turn to thoughts of love! John C. had already been looking ahead in that vein, and seems to have enjoyed titillating the townsfolk with his preparations for marriage. He writes, "I had rented a house in fall before we were married next summer. From then on the village people predicted our engagement day for each coming Saturday." John C. Reimer and Maria D. Loewen (born Maria D. Reimer) were engaged (in a traditional Mennonite "verlafness") on Saturday, June 28th, a week before the wedding. Perhaps it is forgivable that on his wedding day, Sunday, July 6th, 1919, John did not find time to make a diary entry.

On Monday and Tuesday, July 7th and 8th, however, John records, "Moving my furniture,"

diary mention, "To Brandt for land \$100.00" occurring on May 26, 1922.

Later, in September, John worked briefly in Steinbach for a Jewish merchant (name of firm not known) for several weeks. School wages of \$29.00 and \$50.70 are shown in his diaries for November and December, 1921, respectively. This salary initially would have been from Ekron private school; later from the Ekron public school district after it was formed on April 7, 1922.

John and Maria's first son, Enoch, was born on December 10th, 1921.

### Teaching.

The decision to join the public school system was not easy for John. Some of the Kleine Gemeinde church elders frowned on higher education, and John made a special effort to meet with them to explain his decision (Note Ten). The rationale he presented was all Mennonite children would have to attend the compulsory Provincial district schools. What better way to preserve the faith and heritage, then, but to ensure that Mennonite teachers would be teaching in those schools. And that, by law, required higher education.

Following from that beginning in Ekron, an overview of John C. Reimer's public school teaching career can be derived from a chronological listing of the schools at which he taught: 1921-22, 9 mo. (approx.), Ekron (private); 1921-22, 1 mo. (approx.), Ekron #2093 (June 1 to 30, new district formed); 1922-23, 1 year, Ekron #2093; 1923-24/1924-25, 2 years, Blumenhof #64; 1925-26, At Provincial Normal School, Winnipeg; 1926-27/1927, 2 years, Blumenhof #64; 1928-29 to 1938-39, 11 years, Blumenort #62; 1939-40/1940-41, 2 years, Ste. Anne West #1413; 1941-42, Not teaching (already starting a dairy herd); 1942-43, 5 mo., Shakespeare #2069 (2nd term, from Feb. 4, 1943); 1943-44/1944-45, 2 years, Ekron #2093 Counting the years in the confessional and district schools, Normal School, and the one-year hiatus in 1941-42, John C.'s teaching career spans 28 years, from 1917 to 1945.

School inspectors' comments would indicate that John C. was not regarded as a brilliant or flashy teacher. His strength, rather, appears to have been persistence, determination, and diligence. When School Inspectors visited the one-room rural schools of the time, they arrived unannounced, and saw the state of the school and the quality of instruction quite unembellished. The Inspectors would then leave a report with the teacher, with instructions (printed on the form) to present the report to the trustees at the next school board meeting following (Note Eleven).

A brief annual record of Inspectors' summary observations, consisting of merely a phrase or two, was maintained on a permanent record card by the Provincial Department of Education. A few selected entries from these records will show the evolution of John's teaching experi-

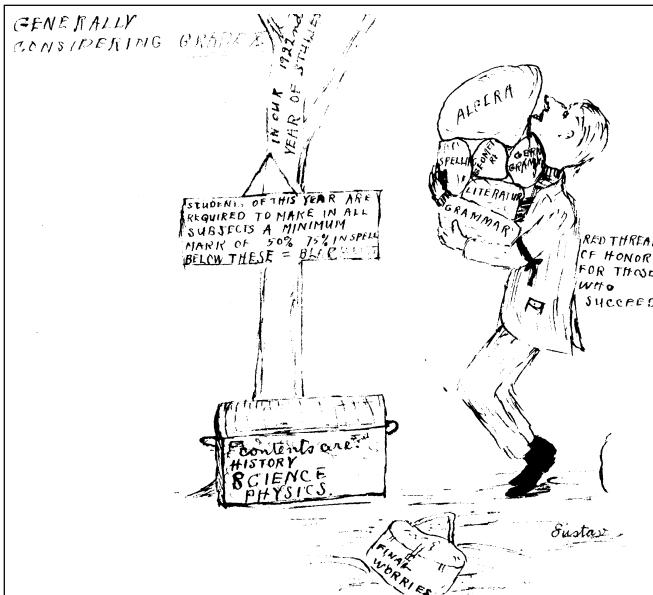
ence, starting from a brutally frank assessment of a young teacher with only Grade 9 education and no professional training, and ending with due recognition of a veteran teacher's career: Hall-Jones 1921-22, Ekron, "Teacher has no idea of method"; Hall-Jones 1924-25, Blumenhof "Will make a good teacher with experience and training. Methods good especially for no training;"

Gustav Reimer, poignantly captures the fact that, looming over all else, was John C.'s gargantuan battle with Grade 11 Algebra!

In most subjects John C. was a quick study. He mastered Grade 9 in six months, and achieved Grade 10 standing in two examination sittings in 1922, some subjects in June, in Steinbach; the remainder after summer school in Altona, in August. He next started work on Grade 11 at the summer school of 1923 in Altona, clearing most of the subjects except for Algebra and Chemistry that fall. Then, after independent home study during the winter, came another attempt at Grade 11 Algebra and Chemistry, in June of 1924. He failed both, with marks of 16% and 35%, respectively.

Summer school at the Manitoba Agricultural College in Minnedosa, July 7th to 31st, 1924, brought welcomed success in Primary Methods and Intermediate Drawing, two required teacher training courses. But then it was quickly back to Altona for three weeks to try again for the Algebra and Chemistry. John C.'s growing desperation is evident in his August 13th diary entry: "It looks all black with Algebra - 11:00 p.m."

Those August 1924 examinations brought failure once more, and there is resignation in his Sept. 30th letter to Andrew Moore, Provincial Registrar: "I wrote on both but now I find that I have failed. Mathematics are



*John C. Reimer's actual words were, "It all looks black. Does it matter?" Cartoon by colleague Gustav Reimer, Steinbach, poignantly captures John C.'s growing frustration over his difficult struggle with Algebra. The cartoon was drawn in Altona.*

Tod- 1928-29, Blumenort; "An earnest young man. Doing satisfactory work;" Herriot-1930-31, Blumenort; "A fairly effective teacher. Raising the standard of work gradually; Herriot - 1934-35, Blumenort; "A faithful worker. Giving good service here;" Conolly - 1939-40, Ste. Anne West; "Pleasant enough manner, and children appear to be reasonably happy and eager. Tries to be stimulating;" Herriot - 1944-45, Ekron; "Has given faithful service."

An Inspector's visit, understandably, raised a teacher's level of concern. Sometimes this concern extended to Maria's life as well. John C.'s older children recall the occasion, for example, in Blumenort, when John invited Inspector Herriot to join the family for supper. (Politically correct in those days?)

And, as happens in these cases, Maria had "nothing in the house" for a meal, so she scrambled to make do with what she had - fried fish and choke cherry mousse! When the meal was over the Inspector relaxed everyone with words to this effect: "What a delicious meal, and just perfect for me today. My teeth have been bothering me, and I was concerned how I would manage at supper. The soft food - fish and mousse - was exactly what I needed. Thank you, Mrs. Reimer."

An important parallel to John's teaching career is the story of his acquiring, largely through summer school and home study, the necessary academic credentials for teacher certification. The accompanying cartoon, by his Altona classmate

hard for me. I intend to write on both subjects at Christmas." John C. did not write those Christmas exams, but he did spearhead an effort by a group of local teachers to organize a summer school for teachers in Steinbach in 1925. He was successful in arranging the summer school, with Mr. Fred Tinkler as instructor. His personal hope to pass Grade 11 Algebra and Chemistry, however, was again denied, with marks of 18% and 36% in the August, 1925 examinations.

During the winter of 1925-26 John C. and Maria rented a house at 412 Elgin Avenue in Winnipeg, so he could attend Normal School - which he passed with flying colours. But that still left the Algebra and Chemistry if he was to get his permanent teaching certificate. To summer school again, Winkler this time.

And, in July of 1926, a mark of 62% in Chemistry! The mathematics, however, remained yet again. To condense a long story of great perseverance and determination, it was not until John C.'s seventh try, in 1929, that he finally conquered Grade 11 Algebra! His Professional Second Class Teaching Certificate, #667-31, soon followed on June 8, 1931.

John C. has suggested in some writings that he did have at least some of Grade 12, and has described to the family how he and colleague P.S. Guenther attended summer school at the University of Manitoba's Fort Garry campus, living in a tent on the banks of the Red River. There is also the July 19, 1932 diary entry: "Started to go to S.S. for Gr. XII Mathematics. Julius



*Sod house or "semlin" constructed in 1934 by John C. Reimer's students at Blumenort School, NE21-7-6E, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the Mennonites in Manitoba.*

Toews." And on August 3rd, 1933 the note: "Gr. XII Physics examination 3-7 p.m." In due time, as our research continues, a complete record of his credentials should emerge.

Credit must be given here to Maria's steadfast faith in John C. during these years of study. The older children recall how, in order that her husband's late-night reading and lesson preparation not be disturbed, she would take a sick or crying child out of the study room in the small teacherage, and, sometimes for hours on end, walk the floor of the school room, carrying the child to quiet it, so that John C. could study.

It was this kind of selfless, unwavering support from Maria, which continued throughout their married life, that bolstered John C. as he started his second career in farming, and as he pursued his dream of a Mennonite museum.

John C.'s teaching career was several times disrupted by his rheumatism, when he had to close the school or start the year late. On Nov. 10th, 1931 his diary mentions "his third and last hard attack of rheumatism," so severe he had went to a Winnipeg nursing home, run by a Nurse Falkenburg, for a week-long treatment. A special diet, and drugs ordered from the U.S., followed. Blumenort school was closed for a week.

There were other stresses on John C.'s teaching. While at Ste. Anne West School, in 1941, he had most of his teeth extracted, and consequently spoke with a lisp. He was advised by Inspector Conolly, if his speech was "not too badly affected" to continue teaching and to wait for "the permanent set of teeth."

Even though Inspector's reports show satisfactory work, John C. was on some occasions dogged by pockets of rate-payer dissatisfaction arising within the community - a tension not uncommon for the untenured teachers of the time. His diaries at such times show worried entries, such as "9 in favour, 2 impartial, 6 against," or even, ending his 11 years at Blumenort, the crushing, "Rate payers meeting - decided not to hire me again."

Perhaps understandably both irritated and worried by this "political" aspect of the job, John

C. was already, while still teaching, seeking more security. He began quietly preparing for a second career as a farmer, starting as early as the mid-thirties with a bee-keeping operation, and later by developing a dairy herd. In fact, John C. began delivering milk to the Blumenort cheese factory in 1940, five years before he quit teaching!

A lasting benefit to the Mennonite community arising out of John C.'s teaching career was the fact that he began, as early as 1934, to bring artifacts and antiques to the classroom to generate interest in community history. Those "show and tell" sessions were the harbinger of things to come, a precursor of John C.'s gathering of artifacts which later became the seminal collection of today's Mennonite Heritage Village.

In fact, as a history project in 1934, John C. had his students at Blumenort build on the school grounds a "semlin" sod house with a thatched roof, in recognition of the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the Mennonites in Canada. Members of the family recall his constructing a second semlin that same year, on the Steinbach school grounds, for that community's anniversary celebrations. The interest in history was certainly there!

John C.'s service to the community took other forms during these teaching years, with his active support for activities of all types. He helped to organize meetings of the local chapter of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation, established Boys and Girls Clubs, started Audubon bird clubs, and even solicited the Daughters of the Empire lodge (in Winnipeg) to "adopt" his school for the donation of library books to the children. It was also while teaching in Blumenort (1932) that John became that church's first Sunday School Superintendent.

#### Farming

As noted earlier, John C.'s first land purchase, in Landmark, dates back to 1920, when he was just 26 years old. Another land acquisition, this one unsolicited, was initiated in 1926, when his father Johann W. Reimer could no longer continue the payments on the mortgage to the "bush

farm," and sold it for \$4000 to his three sons, John, Jacob and Gerhard Reimer. Two years later, on March 14th, 1928, brother Gerhard sold his share to John and Jacob, and just a few months later, on August 22nd, 1928, Jacob also left the partnership, leaving John C. with a mortgage of \$4200 for the bush farm, in addition to remaining debt on the Prairie Rose farm.

Some rationalization of the debt load was evidently required, since John's diary for July 23, 1929 reads: "In Winnipeg with G. Brandt to transfer debt of Prairie Rose farm to Farm Loans."

John C. and Maria, since he was still to teach for many more years, did not move to the bush farm until much later. Parents Johann and Maria remained on the farm until 1932, when John C.'s mother Maria suffered a paralyzing stroke. From 1932 to 1943 the "bush farm" was rented to others, sometimes with scandalous results. One story tells of how the local police, on a tip, followed some mysterious water pipes in the barn leading up to the hayloft, and discovered a still for making home brew!

Before the family moved from Blumenort to the "bush farm," John C. suffered a set-back in the loss of his Prairie Rose farm. The drought and economic depression of the early '30s took their toll. Despite repeated letters, travels to Winnipeg to make appeals, hearings (one before a Judge Roy), and other dealings with the Farm Loan and Debt Re-Adjustment Board, the Prairie Rose farm was finally lost on January 29th, 1938.

John C.'s farming actually started in Blumenort, on a very small scale, in April of 1933, with the arrival of "two packages of bees." John maintained the apiary begun on such a small scale at least until 1945, although the last apiary registration in the family archives is for 1941. One year he shipped over 2000 lbs. of honey. As noted above, the beginnings of a dairy herd were also already in place in Blumenort, while John was still teaching.

When the family moved from Blumenort to the bush farm in 1943, John C. was still teaching, so his wife Maria and their son Joel had to work very hard, fencing and preparing the farm to receive the cattle. Settling in was made more pleasant when the farm was connected to the Steinbach Telephone Exchange on new Year's Eve, 1943.

In the later '40s, as shown in his correspondence with The Manitoba Power Commission, John C. played an active community leadership role by encouraging area farmers to sign up for the rural electrification program. Hydro electricity reached the "bush farm," as John's diary so precisely records, at 1:20 p.m. on February 15, 1947. And, perhaps in celebration of his June 1945 retirement from teaching and transition to full-time farming, John C. took Maria on a six-day trip to Norway House in early September, sailing the length of Lake Winnipeg on the S.S. Keenora.

Now firmly settled in on the bush farm, John threw himself wholeheartedly into farming. He did so both personally and in the community, serving as the founding Secretary of the Hanover Agricultural Society from 1945 till 1950. The Society's first major event was the 1946 Hanover

Agricultural Fair, and John devoted countless hours in preparation: writing, phoning, meeting, planning, building, painting. (The fair grounds were situated adjacent to the bush farm, so I saw first hand the effort it took.) He had little to gain other than the satisfaction of advancing the agricultural sciences in his community.

Interestingly, John himself did not enter an exhibit in the fair until October, 1950, when his sow, the "First thing I ever brought to a fair," he wrote, won a 1st prize of \$4.00 (Note Twelve). Although his term as Secretary ended in 1950, John continued to play an active role for the Society for many more years. On January 14th, 1956 he received an Honourary Life Membership in the Society.

John's community service in agriculture took other forms as well. In 1948 he served as the Secretary of the Hanover Artificial Breeding Association, and in 1952 he was a member of the Steinbach Horticultural Society. In the mid-50s he personally arranged a community farm implement demonstration for the Canadian Cooperative Implements Ltd.

On the "bush farm" it was indeed mixed farming. John C.'s dairy herd was not large - 14 cows at its largest. Poultry was raised mainly for domestic use. Pigs were a revenue-generating part of the farm, and provided the main meat source for the family. "Pig killing days" were a big event, with neighbours gathering to help, and sometimes youngsters were allowed to stay home from school to watch the excitement. John tried a year or two of sugar beets as well, and produced some feed grain for sale, beyond the needs of his livestock. A contract with Brett-Young Seeds to harvest grass seed produced some extra cash.

Over a million board feet of lumber were taken from the "bush farm" over the years, and each spring in the late '40s and early '50s a log-sawing rig would snarl its way through the tamarack logs which represented that year's timber "cut." John C.'s limited cow-calf operation was devastated in 1955 when 10 calves died of lead poisoning. They had been chewing the salty, sweat-saturated upholstered seats, tasty but covered in deadly lead paint, on an antique buggy which John was storing in an open machine shelter for his future museum collection.

### Traveling

Space dictates that we must leave for elsewhere a full recounting of John C.'s travels. A honeymoon in Brandon in 1919, the trip to Grand Forks in 1921, and the sailing to Norway House in 1945 have already been mentioned. To this could be added John's 1933 tour to the Chicago World's Fair; trips to Mennonite World Conferences in Goshen, Indiana (1948) and Kitchener, Ontario (1962); and - the trip of a lifetime - John C. and Maria's 37 day driving-tour to Mexico and British Honduras in 1975 with Steinbach friends Mr. & Mrs. Jacob P. Dueck.

John C.'s last major travel was his flight to Vancouver, in 1976, at age 82, to attend the funeral of his last remaining uncle, Frank K. Reimer.

### Believing

Tracing John C. Reimer's religious life seems better achieved by observing his actions rather than searching for his words. His diaries consist largely of terse references to events; they are not a journal of his inner thoughts. The writing John did for the *Familienfreund* (the Kleine Gemeinde church newsletter) was more in the vein of family and community news writing. The articles John C. contributed to genealogies, community histories, and other texts were largely historical in nature. So his deeply personal thoughts are elusive.

John C.'s baptism, day, Sunday, July 23rd, 1916, when he joined the Kleine Gemeinde community of believers, evoked strong feelings, as evident in his succinct but telling diary entry for that day: "This is one of the greatest in my life!"

His basic beliefs were those of his Mennonite background: Anabaptist, pacifist, non-resistant, holding to a literal reading of the Gospels. He learned the Mennonite Catechism as a young man. He appeared in support of his sons Enoch and Almon when they had their C.O. (conscientious objector) hearings during the war. And he was a life-long faithful member of the Kleine Gemeinde, a part of which later became the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

Beyond these basics, family recollections provide some additional insight. One event which John C. often recounted at family gatherings was his miraculous escape from death in a gravel pit. Family members place this event somewhere in the '30s. He told of how he and a fellow-worker, shoveling gravel onto their truck, were getting at the looser gravel under an overhang at the outer wall of the gravel pit. Suddenly the overhang gave way, and the next thing John C. recalls is returning to consciousness, lying on his back but uninjured, some five or six metres away.

The tip of his long-handled shovel, meanwhile, was still upright and protruding from the huge pile of gravel and debris now covering the spot where he had stood only a few seconds before. The incident impressed on him the precariousness of human existence, and reinforced his belief that our lives (with profound thanks in this case) are in the hands of God.

### Caring.

Two major themes of John C.'s religious character deserve particular mention. The first was his sense of Christian charity and humility. The family cannot recall a single incident where their parents were ever haughty or unwilling to listen to or help another person, however humble. When wandering Aboriginals came to the farmhouse door, John C. or Maria would always have something for them - even if a sack of potatoes was all they had to give.

When a mysterious, frightened stranger was discovered sleeping in the straw stack in the winter of 1955, John C. took him in, fed and clothed him, despite the fact the stranger spoke no English, was known to us only as "Jean," and might well have been an illegal immigrant. Jean stayed the better part of that winter, disappearing the day John C. offered to pay him for helping on the farm.

It was charity which led John C. and Maria to take mentally challenged Grant Reimer (John C.'s cousin) into their home for several years, while they were still physically able.

When John C.'s bachelor brother Jacob fell on hard times, John C. first gave him a room in the family home, and then, because they frowned on Jacob's smoking habit, John C. built a small house for Jacob. This house first stood on the family "bush farm;" later it was moved to Steinbach, where Jacob lived for several years. Almost every Sunday, often twice a week, John C. would invite brother Jake over for a meal.

And it was charity which led John C. to put \$100 cash in an envelope and sneak it into a destitute family's mail box, remaining anonymous so as not to compromise the pride of the poor family in having to accept charity from a known donor.

The second religious theme finding tangible evidence in John C.'s life was his belief that his first duty was to God, and that the trappings and attractions of this world were to be shunned. Christians live in this world, but are not of this world.

That meant that John C. Reimer, despite a lifetime of service to his community, never voted in provincial or federal elections. To do so would have been to acknowledge Caesar, to serve a political state which wages war. The Christian's



Lunch or midday break at the 75th Anniversary Celebrations, 1949, of the arrival of the Mennonites in Manitoba (1874). Held July 8, 1949.



July 17, 1954, Steinbach, Lot 4, Block 1. A prize photograph capturing John C.'s museum efforts circa 1954 showing his collection of artifacts housed in the original Klaas R. Reimer store to a group of Manitoba teachers. It was really a small museum even then. Daughter Mary thinks this is not exactly the same photo which is displayed in the Reimer story at the Museum.

allegiance, particularly the pacifist Christian's allegiance, can be only to God. Likely under this same view of separation between church and state, John C. refused to apply for Family Allowance from the Government of Canada.

The struggle to be separate from this world took other forms as well. At some point between 1944 and 1959 - probably closer to 1944 - John C. decided that a necktie was one item of worldly finery to be discarded. A necktie, in his view, had no purpose other than decoration and vanity (Note Thirteen).

Rings and jewelry, of course, had long been frowned on in the Kleine Gemeinde, so John C. was not much different there. He did, however, put quite a unique interpretation on the scriptural injunction to tell the simple truth and to "let our yea's be yea."

He shunned the theatre, not because of the lights and the glamour, he explained to me, but because acting on stage is a process of pretending, semblance, not truth. And so he never came to see me act in high school drama productions.

The struggle to be separate from this world, combined with John C.'s life-long regard for preserving our Mennonite culture and heritage, almost lost him to Manitoba. In 1949 he paid \$112.59 for land in Mexico where a part of the Kleine Gemeinde had moved in 1948. And the family has heard him say that he was approached by those who left Manitoba to come to Mexico to serve as their school teacher - as a school superintendent, perhaps. How close he came to leaving Canada we may never know, but the thought certainly was there.

#### Preserving

The defining motif of John C. Reimer's life was to preserve the past, his mission to transmit our Mennonite culture and values to succeeding generations. To many his name is synonymous with the word "museum". It was his dream, and it has become his legacy.

John C.'s historical interest, and his growing interest in a Mennonite museum, were first formally recognized on July 8th, 1949, when John C. was elected chairman of the committee to organize the 75th anniversary celebration of the arrival of the Mennonites in Manitoba. In addition to this main committee, one of the sub-committees formed was a "Museumskomitee," whose membership consisted of G. G. Kornelson, K. J. B. Reimer, and John C. Reimer (Note Fourteen).

Again, as in 1934, a "semlin" figured in the picture. As a nine-year old at the time, I vividly recall father John C. going to the conference site - the school yard in Steinbach where No. 3 school then stood - to dig the hole and stack the sod to build an authentic "semlin" for display at the big event.

Since the art of making a thatched roof was fast disappearing, John had to scramble to find just the right type of marsh grass, and to find an artisan who remembered how to do the thatching. (It was either for this semlin or the semlin built later at the Mennonite Heritage Village - I do not recall which - where John C. was able to complete the thatched roof only with the advice of some kind Ukrainian farmers to the south of Steinbach.)

In addition to chairing the organizing com-

mittee, John C. wrote a number of items for the 75 *Gedenkfeier* book. Over several years preceding the event he had been researching the locations of pioneer villages in the East Reserve, and land-use patterns in Steinbach, and he developed two maps for the 1949 publication: "Mennonite Settlement: Original Villages and Places in the East Reserve," and "Original Village and Field Plan of Steinbach" (Note Fifteen). These maps have been cited extensively by subsequent historians, and have been reprinted in a number of publications (Note Sixteen).

John C. also contributed an article, "Hausplan der ersten standigen Gebäude der Mennonitischen Pioniere in Manitoba," as well as an Introduction, to the anniversary book (Note Seventeen).

His interest having been kindled by the 75th anniversary, John C. began in earnest to gather antiques and artifacts which would tell the Mennonite story. In 1951 he discovered his grandfather Klaas R. Reimer's old store building - Steinbach's first store - and bought it from Fred Schalla (whose son was going to use it for a chicken coop) for \$200. He paid H. K. Neufeld \$65 for moving it to his (John C.'s) property at 72 Main Street, Steinbach.

Within a year he had filled the store with some of its original fixtures, and an artifacts collection of several hundred items. A sign explaining that this was Steinbach's first store building, and that it would be opened for viewing on request to the owner, was displayed at the front of the building.

I recall having been conscripted as a teenager, on more than one occasion, to help with washing and dusting the entire collection in preparation for

important visitors. (A Carillon photo of John C. Reimer with a 1954 teachers' bus tour to the little museum is still on display in the Reimer store, now located at the Mennonite Heritage Village.)

The "Museumskomitee" of the 1949 celebration, of which John C. had been a member, could be regarded as the seminal group behind today's Mennonite Heritage Village.

A meeting of interested East Reserve historians was convened by John C. Reimer on April 1 of 1953 - in a sense a reconvening of the "Museumskomitee" noted above. John C. seems confused in his later recollections (written in 1971 and 1988, respectively) about the location of this meeting, placing it in one version at G. G. Kornelson's home; in another at the Steinbach Credit Union, in the board room. John's diary for April 1, 1953, however, places the first meeting at G. G. Kornelson's home, and on April 30, a second meeting at what was possibly the "library room" at the Credit Union building. To date the minutes of these 1953 meetings, if they still exist, have not been located.

In any case, the purpose was clear: "to organize, what they had sometimes talked about, a historical society," (Note Eighteen). Attending were G. G. Kornelson, Rev. Gerhard F. Giesbrecht, Peter A. Braun, Gerhard F. Wiebe, C.F. Barkman, K.J.B. Reimer, and John C. Reimer. And, John C. recalls, "Later when John P. Friesen, banker in New York, heard about the society, he too sent in his membership fee. Dr. Melvin (Jake) Loewen also became a member later." The business conducted was limited. They set a \$1.00 membership fee, and "Because G. G. Kornelson had written so much to preserve Mennonite history he was made honorary member of the society." John C. Reimer was elected chair, and G.G. Kornelson the secretary.

But this group did not continue to meet. As John somewhat wistfully laments in his 1971 recollection, "The society so enthusiastically formed was not very active and later died (lay dormant) - around 1955 pretty well dead. It was not known at that time, that the committee who had written the school text books *Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten* in the '40s would later be considered the beginning of the present historical society (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society) organized in 1957" (sic) (Note Nineteen).

Part of the reason for the dormancy of the East Reserve historians' group may lie in the fact that John turned his energies in 1954 to chairing the committee organizing a major reunion of the descendants of Kleine Gemeinde founder Klaas Reimer (1770-1837). This gathering of the Reimer clan, held in Blumenort on July 8th, was attended by an estimated 1500 people, and attracted considerable attention across Canada, even bringing a reporter from *The Toronto Star*. Following the reunion John C. and Maria spent many hours compiling a Klaas Reimer family genealogy of over 9,000 names (Note Twenty). It was published in 1958.

During all of this time John C. continued to work on his cherished museum. From 1949 onward, at age 54, his life was devoted to little else. We leave it to others to tell the full museum



*John C. Reimer with his restored reaper. This photograph appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press, December 6, 1956. A photograph of the same scene from a different angle was published in Penner, Hanover 100 Years, page 52, and republished in East Reserve 125 Celebrating our Heritage, page 26.*

story, taking space here only to mention some early highlights.

John C. Reimer attended a public meeting at the Berghaler Church in Morris on April 25th, 1958, convened under the leadership of Gerhard Ens, teacher at M.C.I. in Gretna, and Gerhard Lohrenz, instructor at C.M.B.C. in Winnipeg. Ens had spearheaded a revitalization of a largely West Reserve group, the Mennonitisches Historisches Komitee, earlier in 1957. Either the smaller 1957 meeting, or the larger 1958 public meeting, can be regarded as the first meeting of an organizational structure whose history is traceable, continuing unbroken, as the founding body of today's Mennonite Heritage Village.

The second item on the agenda of the April, 1958 public meeting was a presentation by Victor Peters on the concept of establishing a museum to commemorate the centennial of the arrival of the Mennonites in Manitoba in 1874. John C., likely because he was already widely recognized for his Steinbach store building and artifacts collection, was elected to a museum sub-committee that day, along with Victor Peters.

In any case, there was now a Manitoba-wide Mennonite organization, with representatives from both the East and West Reserves, and Winnipeg, committed to a museum concept. John C.'s dream thus became much more than what some Steinbacher's had till then seen as merely a quaint idea of an eccentric school-teacher historian. John C. and H. F. Klassen reported on museum plans to a November general meeting of what was by now the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (M.M.H.S.).

A critical turn in the story may have occurred in January of 1959, when Gerhard Lohrenz wrote to John C. urging him to start the museum project in Steinbach in spring "as soon as the frost is out of the ground." It was Lohrenz's opinion that

financial support from Steinbach businessmen would soon follow once they saw the physical start of a project (Note Twenty-One). Four months later, in May of 1959, John C. reported to the M.M.H.S. on three parcels of land available for a museum site in the Steinbach area (Note Twenty-Two).

On February 13th, 1960, John chaired a meeting at Pete's Inn in Steinbach, where officers of the M.M.H.S. met with Steinbach businessmen. It was clarified in discussion that the proposed museum was to be "a museum belonging to all Manitoba Mennonites, not only to one community" (Note Twenty-Three).

The M.M.H.S., therefore, would continue to be the sponsoring body, but a special provisional committee was formed to investigate "all technical, administrative, and practical details" of a museum plan, and to report to the Society. Leaving aside the details of that early work, enough here to say that John C. was instrumental in the initial purchase of a six-acre lot for the museum, for \$3000, in 1961, and the basic shape of the project was in place. With the financial support of business and Centennial grants, the Mennonite Village Museum was opened in 1967.

In 1972 John C. donated the Klaas Reimer store building and most of its contents to the museum. Other "non-store" items in his collection, such as an antique reaper, a seven-spoke threshing stone, agricultural implements, tools, stoves, antique furniture, etc. were sold to the museum two years later. In John C.'s diaries over the period 1955 to 1980, I would estimate that 80% of the entries relate to the museum, with activities ranging from scouring the countryside for artifacts, advising museum staff, hosting museum tours, and attending meetings. For his efforts the museum gave John the title of "Curator Emeritus," and in 1974, at age 80, he received an honourary life membership in the Manitoba

Mennonite Historical Society.

In 1970 he received a Centennial Medal from the Manitoba Historical Society, with these accompanying words: "For his many years of work and interest in the History of Manitoba and his efforts in helping to establish the Mennonite Historical Society Museum," (Note Twenty-Four).

Aside from his museum work John C. was active in preserving our history in other forms as well. In 1962 he contributed an article, "History of Our Schools Since 1874" to the book commemorating the Sesquicentennial Jubilee: *Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1812 - 1962*.

As noted above, his maps of East Reserve village locations and of the original Steinbach field plan, as well as a diagram of a Mennonite house-barn building were used in Abe Warkentin's *Reflections on Our Heritage* and other works. In 1975 John C. was the compiling editor of the *Genealogy of Jacob Barkman* (Note Twenty-Five); and in 1977 co-authored with Julius Toews an article in Klippenstein and Toews' *Mennonite Memories* (Note Twenty-Six).

John C. is also extensively quoted in Royden Loewen's *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Note Twenty-seven). In 1976 he traveled to Freeman College, North Dakota, to give a lecture on museum operation, and for a number of years he was active in the Deutsche Muttersprache Vereins. On August 21st, 1982, he was featured in the *Calgary Herald*, and on May 2nd, 1987, in Victor Schwartzman's article in *The Globe and Mail*.

## Ending

John C. made one more career change in his life, this one, at age 90, the saddest and the most difficult. He became a full-time nurse-attendant for his wife Maria, who, following a hip fracture in 1981, suffered a debilitating stroke in 1984. Without a hint of complaint, after a lifetime of almost daily trips to the museum or to church or to other community activities, he redirected his energies totally to Maria, and devoted himself to caring for his companion of 65 and more years.

Although Home Care services assisted, it was not possible to leave Maria alone, and so he was largely home bound. He did not wish to give up his Christian fellowship, so one or another of his children would stay with Mother while he walked to church on Sundays. He managed to achieve perfect attendance at Sunday School in 1980, 1981, and 1983. When caring for Maria was no longer possible at home, she was placed (how she wished it otherwise) in Bethesda Nursing Care Home on January 27th, 1986. John C. drove to be with her every day, until she died on March 20th that year.

With his life's companion gone, John C.'s next few years saw him sell his home, auction off his personal effects, and move to Fernwood Seniors' Apartments. At age 92 he reluctantly

but voluntarily relinquished his driver's license. The restriction of his freedom to move became more pronounced with his first stroke in 1988, although he could still enjoy conversation, and day trips from Resthaven Nursing Home to the old farmstead. A second stroke in 1989 took

Note Seven: JCR archives, small black Account Book II, p. 63 (Apr. 5, 1918).

Note Eight: JCR archives: Nicholas Toews, unpublished essay written in partial fulfillment for B. Ed. Degree, U. of M., 1956.

Note Nine: JCR archives: file of certificates and credentials.

Note Ten: JCR archives: Item # 1097, *op cit.*

Note Eleven: JCR archives; several of these inspector's reports, each a page in length, have been preserved.

Note Twelve: JCR archives; Item #2018.

Note Thirteen: In John and Maria's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary photo John is still sporting a dapper tie; by the time of the 40th wedding anniversary it is gone.

Note Fourteen: Reimer, John C., editor, *75 Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada* (Steinbach, 1949; p. 171).

Note Fifteen: *Ibid.*, p. 152 and 154.

Note Sixteen: One or both of the maps have appeared in, among others, *Geography Review*, July, 59; in John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements in Manitoba* (Ph.D. dissertation, U. of Toronto, 1960); in Warkentin, Abe: *Reflections on Our Heritage*, (Steinbach, Derksen Printers, 1971, p. 28 and 69); and in *Mennonite Settlement* (Manitoba Culture, Heritage, and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1981 and 1985, p. 4).

Note Seventeen: Reimer, *op. cit.*, p.158 to 161. The house-barn diagram accompanying John C. Reimer's article is by C. L. Toews; John C. Reimer developed a variation of a similar plan, but with several amendments, for Abe Warkentin's book, *Reflections on our Heritage*. Frank H. Epp, in his *Mennonites in Canada* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1974; p. 215) uses Reimer's diagram, uncredited.

Note Eighteen: JCR archives, Item #1083.1 - April 1971.  
Note Nineteen: *Ibid.*  
Note Twenty: John C. Reimer, editor *Familienregister der Nachkommen von Klaas and Helena Reimer* (Steinbach, 1958), 403 pages.

Note Twenty-One: JCR archives, Item #1083.8; letter from Gerhard Lohrenz.  
Note Twenty-Two: JCR archives, Item #1035; JCR's handwritten presentation notes.

Note Twenty-Three: JCR archives, Item #1039; letter from J. J. Reimer to JCR, and minutes of Feb. 13, 1960 meeting of the M.M.H.S.

Note Twenty-Four: *Centennial Book of Remembrance* (The Manitoba Historical Society, 1971; p. 53).

Note Twenty-Five: John C. Reimer, *et.al.*, editors, *Genealogy of Jacob Barkman* (Steinbach, 1975), 99 pages.

Note Twenty-Six: L. Klippenstein and Julius Toews, *Mennonite Memories* (Altona, 1977; p. 77).

Note Twenty-Seven: R. Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Steinbach, 1983); pages 390 to 414.



John C. and Maria on their 60th anniversary, July 6, 1979. A lifetime of service to their God and community.

away his speech, his ability to swallow, and most of his movement.

To the end John remained positive. Either a smile or a wave of acknowledgment greeted visitors and nursing staff alike. It was his unselfish conviction, grounded in his religious faith, that all persons, regardless of social class or station in life, were equally deserving of respect and consideration. Throughout his life, therefore, he was first and foremost a gentleman, with a gracious courtesy based on his sense of personal dignity and Christian compassion. This attitude governed his life.

At the end, when he himself could move nothing but one arm, he would still point to the bedside chair out of concern for the comfort of his guests!

John C. Reimer died on Monday, March 19th, 1990, at age 95.

## Endnotes:

Note One: As noted by Valida Golden in Frank G. Barkman, *et. al.*, editors, *Genealogy of Jacob M. Barkman* (Steinbach, 1999); p. 179.

Note Two: JCR archives, Item #1090. 1872 survey map, annotated with original Crown Grants shows LS 13 on NW 34-6-6e marked as "TAMARAC," and assigned to "J. Peterson." LS 11, 12, and 14 were assigned "Homestead J. 'F' Tows" (sic).

Note Three: John K. Schellenberg, *Schools - Our Heritage* (Hanover School Division, Steinbach, 1985); p. 215.

Note Four: Dick's *Quadrille Call-Book and Ball-Room Prompter* (Dick and Fitzgerald Publishers, New York, 1895).

Note Five: JCR archives, small black Account Book I, p. 9 (Nov. 1915).

Note Six: Schellenberg, *op cit.*, p. 216.

# Material Culture

## Pioneer Windmills

**Pioneer Windmills, A History of Mennonite Windmills in Manitoba: Their Design and Impact,**  
**by Jake Peters, 541 Aberdeen Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2W 1W2.**

### Introduction.

The windmill, the watermill and the miller have received considerable attention in the literature of pre-twentieth century European societies. In folk culture, especially, the mill has been given a central place. One needs only to think of stories like Don Quixote, poems like "The Jolly Miller", and of many folk songs.

In German folk culture, the miller and the mill appeared often in poem and song. During the writer's school days the children were taught songs such as "Es Klappert die Muhle."

Es klappert die Muhle am rauschenden Bach...  
 Bei Tag und bei Nacht ist der Muller stets wach...  
 Er mallet uns Korn zu dem kräftigen Brot,  
 Und haben wir dieses so hat's keine Not.  
 Klip klap, klip klap, klip klap.

Flink laufen die Rader und drehen den Stein...  
 Und mahlen den Weizen zu Mehl uns so fein...  
 Der Backer die Zwieback und Kuchen draus backt,  
 Klip klap, klip klap, klip klap (Note One).

The above song refers to a watermill but the idea of the importance of the mill is implanted by concepts unrelated to the source of power. As well, there were poems with lines such as the following:

Wer Korn und Weitz zu malen hat,  
 Der bring mir's in die Muhl herab,  
 Den schuet ichs zwischen die Muhlstein  
 Und mal es sauber, rein und klein (Note Two).

Such songs and poems, in a peasant society, served to strongly reinforce the role of the mill in the community.

### Windmill Design.

Until 1890, the Mennonites used primarily the traditional mill types. The post mills were usually fairly small and were built so that the whole unit could rotate on a fixed post. Among the Mennonites in Prussia and Russia (especially in the Chortitza Colony) (Note Three) the post mill was the type most commonly used. Despite their small size some of these mills generated enough power to run two sets of millstones. The post mills had several other advantages; they were inexpensive and long lasting.

A second type, the smock mill was usually found in areas where wood was the most plentiful building material. The name is derived from this mill's resemblance to a peasant smock. The design originated in the mid-seventeenth century. The body was fixed, but the cap could be turned in order to face the sails into the wind.



*Windmills and watermills remind Mennonites of their "old" homeland, Holland. The above windmill stood guard on the dyke Schönsee-Schönneberg near the Weichsel River, Prussia (today Poland). Photo courtesy of Gerhard Lorentz, Damit es nich Vergessen Werde (Winnipeg, 1974), page 7.*

All the early (pre-1885) Manitoba Mennonite windmills were of this type, including those at Grünfeld, Tannenau, Eigenhoff and Steinbach (East Reserve), Rosenort (Scratching River), Reinland, Rosenthal and Burwalde (West Reserve).

Galbraith, writing in 1900, describes them as follows: "A quaint institution of the Mennonites when they first came to Manitoba, was their flour mills. These are of very ancient pattern, the buildings being of octagonal construction and pyramidal in design, and a good deal more capacious than they appear to be at first sight. They had a height of about 30 feet. The grinding power was derived from the wind, and the great arms and huge sails of the motor looked decidedly pretentious from underneath. Several of these mills are still standing and are a novel sight in the country" (Note Four).

A different mill type, the Dutch origins of which are quite ancient, is cylindrical in shape and constructed of bricks, mortar or stone. These mills shared the rotating cap design of the smock mills. The Mennonite colonies in Russia employed this design frequently. The mills in Blumenort, Blumstein and Alexanderwohl, Molotschna, as well as the one at Spat in the Crimea are representative of this type (Note Five).

Bringing a mill into operation required skilled tradesmen. The mill builder was invariably an experienced carpenter with demonstrated ability.

Once the mill was built, someone with expertise had to dress the stone (that is, carve in the grinding edges). This arduous task required skill since the quality of flour a mill produced depended to a very great degree on how well this person did his job. Jacob Wall of Neuendorf (Chortitza) paid ten ruble (silver) and one pud of flour in 1847 for dressing his millstones (Note Six). The entire stone cost him 48 ruble.

The miller also had to have an aptitude for his work. He had to recognize the signs of an oncoming gale before it arrived. (However much the miller might want wind in moderation, too much of it was his greatest danger). There is at least one documented case of the wind destroying a windmill in Neuenburg (Chortitza) and a case in 1848 where a mill burned (also in the Chortitza Colony), most likely because the mill went out of control in a strong wind. The same thing also happened in Manitoba, in Eigenhoff, E.R., in the 1880s (Note Seven). If a miller ran out of grain and his mill was out of control in a gale, he faced the probability of fire because of

This article is an endeavour to gather the information currently available regarding Mennonite windmills in Manitoba. Much information can still be gleaned from private journals and other sources. Hopefully this article will encourage readers to note any fact and details not included here and to pass such information on to the writer.



*A so-called “post mill” where the entire housing turned with the wind as the sails were rotated. This is an early windmill in Rosenthal, Chortitza Colony, Ukraine (formerly Imperial Russia). Photo courtesy of N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages in Russia: Khotitzia-Rosental (Vancouver, 1981), page 83. Hundreds of Mennonite windmills once dotted the landscape of southern Russia.*

the sparks the millstones threw when they came in contact.

The miller had to keep the correct amount of grain flowing through the stones. He had to be almost intuitively aware of what was happening on the floor above him and outside of the mill. There were also a host of mechanical tasks he had to perform as well as keeping his mill clean, rolling up the sail cloths at night and unfurling them in the morning.

#### **Historical Background.**

Mennonites have a long standing involvement with wind milling going back to Reformation times in the Netherlands. In 1650 the Mennonite Minister Pieter Pietersz built a windmill in the Zaen district of Holland which is still operational. He may well have been the same Pieter Pietersz (1574-1651), whose writings were later translated into German by the Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and brought with them to Manitoba (Note Eight). In Friesland and elsewhere in the Netherlands, Mennonites learned to use windmill power for water drainage as well as grinding grain.

In Prussia also the Mennonites built many windmills, largely for draining wetlands, utilizing the expertise brought along from the Netherlands.

In Russia “corn milling” became the sole object of Mennonite mills. When the Prussian Mennonite delegates negotiated the terms of settlement with the Tsarina’s officials they insisted on assistance in building several windmills. The windmill quickly became a prominent feature on the landscape of the Russian Mennonite colo-

nies. By 1860 there were one or more in most villages in Chortitza and Molotschna. By 1865 the Bergthal Colony had five windmills (Note Nine).

The mills were generally operated on a custom basis. The farmer would bring his grain to the miller, who would grind it for him. The fee charged would range from one twelfth to one eighth of the flour. Perhaps another eighth was withheld if the miller himself had helped with the sifting. By 1914, commercial milling, which had begun during the 1850s had grown into a major industry.

#### **Windmills in Manitoba.**

“The windmill is perhaps the most awesome and beautiful building ever constructed for harnessing natural power for an industrial purpose. It is difficult to imagine that the Canadian landscape was at one time dotted with these majestic, imposing and yet graceful structures. Many were of enormous height and even the more modest ones possessed the qualities of monumentality and authority. Next to churches, windmills were the most respected and admired structures for the service they rendered to the community” (Note Ten).

The above quotation sums up how most outside observers perceived Manitoba Mennonite windmills. (Priamo does not devote any space to milling on the Canadian prairies.)

One can trace the beginnings of milling in Manitoba to the early days of settlement. The Red River settlement had a functioning windmill in 1826 (Note Eleven). As agriculture developed ever increasing numbers of mills were built, with new mills being constructed in the settlement, at least, until the 1860s. This article will focus chiefly on windmills built by the Mennonites between 1876 and 1925.

The Mennonites of Manitoba built (or rebuilt) 11 windmills in the period 1876 to 1906. Not all of these mills were of the same type. Three were reconstructed mills from the Red River settlement, four were smock mills built by Mennonite carpenters, and several were of contemporary

North American mill design.

The documentation on these mills is rather scanty. With the exception of the windmill in Steinbach, there are seemingly no extant records regarding either their design or operation. Everything that can be deduced about them is drawn from several old photographs.

#### **East Reserve.**

In Manitoba the Mennonites’ first venture into windmill construction occurred in 1876, when several East Reserve villages bought three Red River windmills. The mills essentially followed the smock mill design. It is not certain from what locations these mills originated or if they were



*Remains of the brick constructed windmill at Alexanderkrone, Molotschna, Ukraine (formerly Imperial Russia), still standing at the present time. All Mennonite buildings in Russia were typically built of brick, an interesting adaptation. Photo courtesy of Rudy Friesen, Into the Past: Buildings of the Mennonite Commonwealth (Winnipeg, 1996), page 203.*



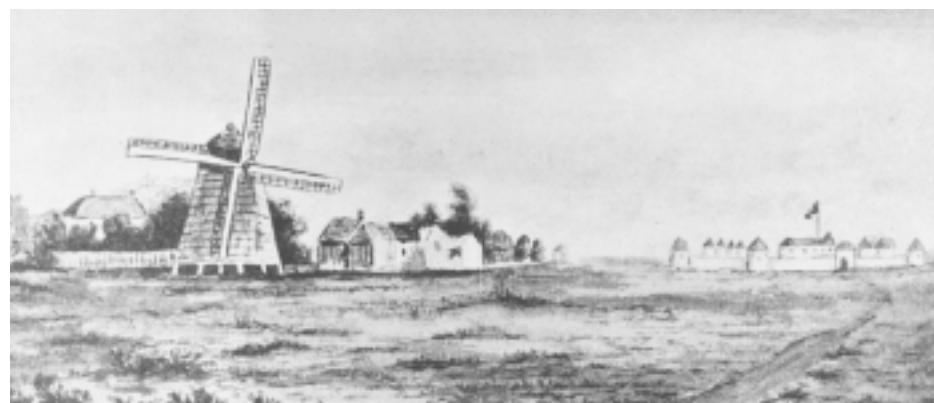
*Dutch style windmill and housebarn Wirtschaft in Blumenort, Molotschna, Imperial Russia, Photo courtesy of They Seek a Country, page 308. Milling was a common occupation and enterprise among members of the Kleine Gemeinde, see Plett, Saints and Sinners (Steinbach, 1999), pages 178-179. A number of KG associated families settled in Blumenort, Imperial Russia in 1804/5.*

still operational at the time of purchase. They were moved to the villages of Grünfeld, Tannenau and Eigenhoff. The Grünfeld windmill was owned by Cornelius Toews, one of the 1873 Kleine Gemeinde delegates. The Eigenhoff windmill was owned by Gerhard Schroeder, later Reeve of the R. M. of Hanover. After its unfortunate accident already referred to, the Eigenhoff mill was acquired by Peter Loewen, Hochstadt, and reconstructed in that village. According to grandson Johann W. Dueck, it was a "Holland-style" windmill (Note Twelve).

The Eigenhoff and Tannenau mills were reconstructed by Peter K. Barkman, who had formerly been involved with windmill building in Russia as well as owning a windmill in Margenau, Molotschna, and later in Rosenfeld, Borosenko. None of these windmills lasted long.

In 1876 a steam powered mill was constructed in the village of Reinfeld by Peter Wiens and Jakob Braun (Note Thirteen). It was ready to make flour by late autumn (Note Fourteen). According to another source, the Braun and Wiens mill was purchased a few years later by a group from Rosengard eight miles west of Steinbach and relocated there. But it did not remain here very long and by the 1880s it was sold to English farmers who soon retired it and sold it for scrap (Note Fifteen). The remnants of this mill were later purchased by Peter "Schmidt" Toews, and relocated near Steinbach, and used as a blacksmith shop (Note Sixteen).

This meant there were four mills within a three mile radius of Tannenau. Competition in the milling business further increased when a well constructed steam powered mill was built in Steinbach in 1880. The final blow was that in the late 1870s and early 1880s many people moved out of this area to the West Reserve. It is not surprising that these mills all disappeared in a short time. According to John Warkentin they



*Fort Garry in 1846, from a painting by Paul Kane. The windmill at the left is of the type purchased by entrepreneurs Gerhard Schroeder, Eigenhoff, and Cornelius Toews, Grünfeld, in 1876 and relocated to the East Reserve. Photo courtesy of Manitoba Public Archives.*

"all disappeared without a trace" (Note Seventeen).

#### A. S. Friesen Mill.

In 1877 Peter K. Barkman was contracted by Abraham S. Friesen to construct a windmill in Steinbach. Barkman took up work on the mill at a wage of 50 cents per day (Note Eighteen). This was the first windmill designed and built by the Mennonites of Manitoba. Apparently the inspiration for the mill was a contract awarded by William Hespeler in 1876 to provide 825 logs 20 to 30 feet in length and over one foot in diameter. The thought occurred to several people involved in the project that such logs were just right for building a windmill.

The best logs were taken from the Hespeler contract and construction began. The mill was wider at the base than at the top to strengthen the structure. The oak timbers, shingles, steel shafting, bearings and millstones had to be hauled from Winnipeg to Steinbach by ox and wagon. The wood for the large shaft and spindle for the wheels and rollers on which the roof was to rest, so as to turn the arms of the windmill into the wind, had to be turned by lathe in Winnipeg. The (remaining) iron work was done by Klaas Reimer, an experienced blacksmith from Russia (Note Nineteen).

The windshaft of the mill was made of four 12-inch square timbers which were firmly bolted together. It was a difficult task to round the ends on such a massive beam. This had to be done however, since the end to which the sails were attached had to fit into the neck bearing. The brakewheel (which was 12 feet in diameter) was fastened to the other end. This wheel was fitted with wooden brakeshoes by means of which the mill was stopped or released. From the second floor platform the miller could control this brake by means of a pull rope. In normal conditions this would stop the mill.

The brakewheel connected with an iron cog-wheel which transferred the power to the 36-foot-long, 10-inch-square main shaft.

The *Carillon News* describes the rest of the power train as follows: "This shaft reached down to the second floor and fastened to a wooden wheel about five feet in diameter and sitting in a horizontal position.... [It] turned an iron wheel



*Derelict windmill showing the frame construction of a windmill. This is believed to be the remains of Robert Logan's windmill, Point Douglas common. Photo courtesy of Manitoba Public Archives.*

about 3 1/2 feet in diameter. To this iron wheel the five foot upper grindstone was fastened while the lower stone was set solidly in the floor" (Note Twenty).

From this description it seems that the mill, initially at least, had only one pair of stones.

The mill was a four-story building which cost A. S. Friesen \$2,000.00. During the years (1877 to 1879) when the mill was in Steinbach, it apparently did not have the fantail which one sees in all pictures of it. The *Carillon News* article states that the sails were faced into the wind by means of a hand crank. The fantail was added sometime after the mill was moved to Rosenort.

The milling was done as follows: first the grain was hauled by rope to the hopper floor. From the hopper the grain was fed into a "shoe" and from there it moved into the eye of the runner (top) stone. The grain, as it was ground, moved from the center to the edges of the stone, and came out as flour. The flour dropped down a spout to the floor below where it was bagged. Sometimes it was sifted first.

The output of the mill, while at Steinbach, was estimated at 40 bushels per hour. When Peter Toews later owned the mill at its new location in Rosenort (Scratching River) it could apparently grind 100 bushels per hour in a good wind. The difference was due to the fact that there were fewer trees to interfere with the wind at Rosenort.

For windmills, their potential capacity "is roughly proportional to the square of the length of the sail" and output is "proportional to the cube of the windspeed" (Note Twenty-One). Thus, a small difference in windspeed means a great deal of difference in power. If in a strong wind more grain was fed through the stones the speed at which the sails turned was the same as if a much smaller amount was ground in a lighter wind.

#### Rosenort, 1879.

The Steinbach windmill's output did not satisfy A. S. Friesen, so he added a steam engine as an auxiliary power source. When this also was inadequate he sold the mill to Isaac Loewen, Franz Froese and Jacob Toews of Rosenort for \$1,500.00 in 1879.

In the early 1890s, when Peter Toews owned

it and served as miller as well, he often left his fields to do custom grinding. If a "good" wind came up one had to take advantage of it. This mill had the good fortune of not facing a great deal of competition. Largely due to this fact it was the mill which stayed longest in one location. It did, however, change owners frequently.

In February 1920 it was sold for the last time to C.K. Eids and J.H. Friesen for \$1,000.00. They dismantled it for its timbers. Considerable wood rot in the mill lessened the worth of their purchase. Some of the mill's timbers were built into local bridges, one set of stairs ended up in J.H. Friesen's home, and the stones were passed to A.D. Dueck, the local blacksmith.

The viability of the windmills had decreased largely because many farmers had begun obtaining their simplified "post" windmills, typically mounted on top of the barn or large granary, and used for grinding grain for animal feed. Also by the end of WWI, many farmers acquired small efficient gas-powered tractors with which they operated their mobile own grain crushing outfits doing custom feed crushing for neighbours.

#### West Reserve.

In the West Reserve the development of milling followed a somewhat different course. The Reserve quickly became one of the most densely populated areas in the province. Four service centers sprang up in the area in the first quarter century after settlement. In addition to this there were a host of small agricultural villages whose people wanted feed ground for their animals and flour for household use, and they wanted these services as close to their village as possible. (Distance was a greater obstacle when one travelled by oxen or horses and wagon).

In 1880 there were already steam powered mills existing in several communities outside the Reserve. Nelsonville and Mountain City near the western edge of the Reserve and Emerson to the east of it had mills. By 1878 Johann Wall had his mill in Blumenort functioning. By 1890 there were steam powered mills at Emerson, Gretna, Blumenort, Morden, Mountain City and at Walhalla, North Dakota, seven miles south of the international boundary. It was in this context, where quality milling was increasingly more available in the towns and where the links between town and country were steadily becoming closer, that the windmill owners had to try to keep their business venture going.

#### Reinland Mill.

The first windmill built in the West Reserve was the one in Reinland (ca.1879). There is some question about who the builder of the Reinland mill was. John E. Veer wrote in a letter that he was the carpenter who built the first flour mill in

the West Reserve. The reference is vague and might also refer to the Blumenort mill. It is certain that its original owner was Johann Bergman, a wealthy Reinland resident. In the 1881 tax roll the mill was assessed at \$300.00, although the building costs may have been almost as great as those of the Steinbach mill.

In December 1886 Johann Bergmann died and Jacob Giesbrecht, formerly of Michalsburg (Fürstenland), South Russia, purchased the mill for \$775.00. A letter in the *Rundschau* announced that he was planning to add another set of millstones for the purpose of producing flour (Note Twenty-Two). Until this time the mill had been used only for animal feed. For flour milling the

How the mill was stopped is uncertain. In such a situation an experienced miller would usually run the maximum possible amount of grain through the stones. Next he would have to go uncouple the fantail (which kept the sails faced into the wind) and then, by hand, crank the mill around ninety degrees to face it out of the wind. The mill could then be stopped with the brake.

Most millers stopped these happenings before a crisis developed, but even the most experienced among them were sometimes surprised by a sudden strong wind. If he noticed that the windspeed was increasing, or that the wind direction was inconsistent he would either stop the mill entirely or at least stop temporarily and reduce the amount of cloth on the sails.

In the event of frequent changes of wind direction it was inadvisable to run the mill because of the danger of it being tail-winded (Note Twenty-Four). A mill is tail-winded when the wind acts on the reverse side of the sails and turns them in the opposite direction to which they should be moving (normally the sails turn counter clockwise).

#### Burwalde Mill.

The community of Burwalde also had an eight-sided smock mill. Little can be said of it, since the information collected about the mill, in 1948, contains several inaccuracies. The mill probably stood in the southwest corner of Section 36-3-5W (the Henry J. Loewen farm). It apparently did both flour milling and feed grinding.

The circumstances through which the mill came to Burwalde are unclear. An article in the Diamond Jubilee Yearbook states that the ...mill had been built by Mr. Klaas Enns and Frank Goertzen at Reinland and moved part by part to Burwalde where it was set up (Note Twenty-Five).

This can hardly be correct for several reasons. There was no person by either of these names living in Reinland, or in either of the villages adjacent to it, at this time. Second, a comparison of photographs of the mills makes it doubtful that the two could be the same mill. The Reinland

mill had a fantail, whereas the cap of Burwalde mill was turned by means of a tail pole with two outriggers. Siding was nailed horizontally on the Reinland mill and attached vertically on the Burwalde mill. Perhaps it was the Rosenthal mill, not the one from Reinland, which was moved to Burwalde.

In 1907 the Burwalde mill was no longer operational. Its sails had been knocked down in a storm. It is uncertain whether the mill was functioning until that time. In 1907 the internal workings of the mill were still intact. Some time after this the mill was sold and moved to Plum Coulee.



The "Hollander" style mill built by Peter K. Barkman for Abraham S. Friesen in Steinbach in 1877. It was relocated to Rosenort, where it operated for many years and where this photograph was taken. See Jake Doerksen, "Wood engravings East Reserve, 1877," Preservings, No. 12, page 37, and the Jakob Wieler article elsewhere in this issue, for a sketch of the Gerhard Schroeder windmill in Eigenhoff.

people had relied on the steam powered mills in Walhalla and at Blumenort (Note Twenty-Three).

In June 1888 a near disaster was experienced at the Reinland windmill. The wind direction was continuously shifting back and forth between northwest and southwest. In the process the wind velocity increased markedly. The miller became aware of the fact that his sails were rotating at far too great a speed. He applied the brake but found that the force of the wind was too great for the brake to stop the mill. The application of the brake heated the brakeshoes so that the whole upper story was filled with smoke. By the time neighbours arrived to help, the windmill had begun pitching badly.

### Reinfeld Mill.

In approximately 1895 a mill was built in the village of Reinfeld. This mill was a departure from European windmill design. It did not have sails, but rather a large fan with many smaller sections attached to it. Each of these sections had many small metal blades to catch the wind. When one wanted to stop the mill these sections could be folded forward mechanically. If the mill was faced into the wind it would cease turning. The fan could be manually turned into the wind.

This mill was quite distinctive although it is possible that either the Gnadenhal, Neuhorst or Neu-Berghal mills (of which no known photographs exist) used a similar design. Even in England there were mills which operated on similar principles (Note Twenty-Six). The Reinfeld mill also bears a strong resemblance to mills advertised in the van Allen and Agur implements catalogue at the turn of the century.

Johann Krahn of Reinfeld said that the mill stood at the south end of the village. It had millstones about five feet in diameter. Often long line-ups of wagons would be left at the mill by farmers who wanted to have milling work done. If a good wind began blowing at night the miller would get up and start milling. It is likely the mill was used only for grinding feed since it had only one stone. In the early 1920s a gasoline engine was added to serve as an auxiliary power source for the mill.

The Reinfeld mill changed owners several times during the 30 years it was in operation. In the late 1920's it fell into disuse and was bought by Mr. Sirluck and was moved to Winkler to serve as a grain elevator (Note Twenty-Seven).

### Other Mills.

Finally it should be noted that there were several other windmills in use about which we know little besides the fact that they existed (Note Twenty-Eight).

The mill at Gnadenhal was set up in 1898 by Johann Wall after he sold his properties in Blumenort (he had owned a steam-powered mill in the latter village). He moved the whole mill to Gnadenhal where he rebuilt it as a windmill which he used for grinding animal feed. It is unlikely that the mill received much use after Johann Wall's death in 1909. Nothing is known of the design of the mill.

The Neuhorst windmill did not follow the traditional designs. It had a fan with metal blades, but whether or not it had any of the features of the Reinfeld mill is not certain. The mill was in use from about 1895 to 1921 and was used only for grinding feed. According to one source, a young man met his death in an accident in this

mill (Note Twenty-Nine). The mill stood in the community pasture allotment.

The only known windmill among the Bergthal settlers of the West Reserve was located in the village of Neu-Berghal.

Ray Hamm says the following of it: "A windmill helped...[the villagers] meet more of their own needs. George Hamm was...one of the technicians in the village and he had the windmill. He crushed grain for cattle feed and apparently also

its ideal. It was the misfortune of the windmill owners that they were living in a changing world. New technology and the economies of scale of commercial millers such as Ogilvies and Lake of the Woods made the best of windmills obsolete. The large companies could produce cheaper and sometimes better quality flour. Farmers increasingly chose to sell their grain to a grain company and buy their flour elsewhere as transportation improved. By 1900 many individual farmers were grinding their own livestock feed, thus servicing a large part of the market needs.

Technologically, the Mennonite mills of Manitoba showed considerable variety. Some of their windmills had fantails; on others the cap had to be removed by means of a tail-pole. Some of their mills required sailcloths but at least two of them did not. Some communities, of course, never bothered with windmills at all; they chose to immediately adopt the steam-powered mill. These mills, however, if they were not located in the commercial centers were also unable to maintain themselves.

New designs and patents for the windmill existed which made life easier for the miller. Items such as adjustable shutters for the sails or an air-brake were already in existence when the Mennonites came to Manitoba (Note Thirty-One). Yet no one of their mills ever applied these inventions. It seems that those who sought new technology did not think of the windmill at all, but built steam-powered mills instead.

It is interesting to note that each group who settled in Manitoba (Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthal) accepted a broad range of milling technology. All of them used both steam and wind-powered mills. In this area, at least, the terms conservative and progressive lose their meaning.

### About the Author:

Jake Peters is an avid researcher and historian of Mennonite life and culture in Manitoba. He has written a number books including a study of Mennonite private schools and another on the Mennonite Waisenamt. His biography of Sommerfelder Aeltester Abraham Doerksen is being published in Volume Three of the West Reserve Historical Series, publication forthcoming. Jake Peters lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Attention Readers:** This is a slightly revised version of this article published in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Number 20, Jahrgang 23, February 18, 2000, pages 1-2 and 15-16.

### Endnotes:

Note One: According to the Hochfeld school teacher, Ernie Kroeger, the song came from a



*Photograph of the Reinland windmill built by Johann Bergmann, in 1877 or shortly thereafter. The individuals on the platform are believed to be the Mr. and Mrs. Jakob Giesbrecht, the second owners of the mill. Photograph courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland (Altona, 1974), page 130. The windmill is part of the village scene drawn by W. T. Smedley in the early 1880s and published in Picturesque Canada.*

ground flour for household use. It was a great relief when he acquired a stationary engine to power his grinder: he no longer had to wait for the wind. Later Mr. Gerbrand bought this whole unit" (Note Thirty).

### Conclusion.

These Manitoba millers pursued a trade which had been common among the Mennonites and their ancestors since at least Reformation times.

The miller fulfilled a vital function for the rural community which had self sufficiency as



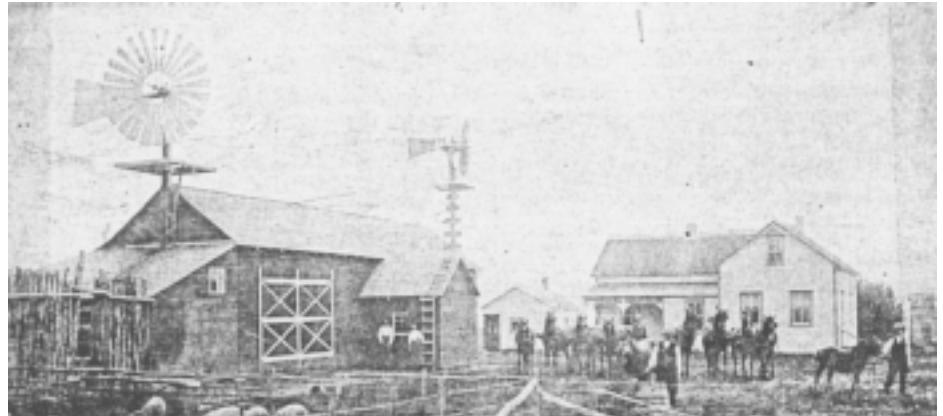
Burwalde, West Reserve, the old derelict mill, 1907. The upper portion sits on top of the tower like a cap and was turned with the long post visible in the right hand side of the photograph.

book called *Liederschatz fur Kinder*.

Note Two: Quoted in Carol Priamo, *The Mills of Canada* (Toronto: Mcraw Hill Ryerson, 1976), p. 100.

Note Three: For illustrations see Gerhard Lohrenz. *Damit Es Nicht Vergessen Werde* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1977), pages 6-8, 35, 197, 247.

Note Four: J.F. Galbraith, *The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Morden: The Chronicle Press, 1900), p. 34. Some of the mills were more than 30 feet tall. It should also be noted that not all smock mills were eight sided. They could also be six, ten, or twelve sided.



Jakob J. Stoesz (1867-1947), farmyard, Neuhoftnung, three miles north of Niverville, E. R. Photo courtesy of George Unger, Family of Jakob Stoesz and Anna Wiebe (Goshen, Ind., 1996), 75. These windmill units were fairly common in the East Reserve by 1900. Aeltester Peter R. Dueck, Steinbach, owned one, see Plett Picture Book, page 37. Ab. E. Giesbrecht, Gnadenfeld, E. R., owned one in 1910, see E. Braun, "Gnadenfeld," Preservings, No. 14, page 70.

Note Five: See Lohrenz pp. 188-189, 245.

Note Six: Jacob Wall Diary, Johann Wall Collection. Vol. 1086. Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.

Note Seven: *Ibid.* cf. Jake Doerksen, "Eigenhoff," in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches* (Steinbach, 1994), pages 126-7.

Note Eight: Vd. Z. Neff, "Pieter Pietersz," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Volume Four, pages 175-6.

Note Nine: William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1974), p. 22.

Note Ten: Priamo, p. 113.

Note Eleven: Aubrey Fullerton, "Flour Centennial in Western Canada." *Northwestern Miller* (Sept. 8, 1926). page 978. See also A. S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-1871*

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), and Barry Kaye, "Flour Milling at Red River: Wind, water and steam," *Manitoba History* 2(1981) p. 12-20.

Note Twelve: As recalled by grandson Johann W. Dueck, "Reminiscing about the pioneer years," in Levi Dueck, editor, *Prairie Pilgrims* (Rosenort, 1999), page 31. The author uses this quote referring to "Holland-style windmill" with hesitation because technically the "post", "smock", and "tower" mills are all "Holland-style windmills.

Note Thirteen: Gerhard F. Wiebe and Peter A. Braun, "Economic Development of the East Reserve," in Plett, ed., *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 229-230. This article was first published in Klaas J. B. Reimer, ed., *75 Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada* (Steinbach, 1949), pages 106-122.



1898. A windmill of the new style with a fan-tail in Reinfeld, north of Winkler. The photo also shows the unique beauty and efficiency of the "Strassendorf" village transplanted by the Old Colonists from the steppes of Imperial Russia to the Canadian prairies, becoming a paradigm of religious faith and life, enabling the community to make immense strides economically within a few years. Photo courtesy of Manitoba Public Archives.



A replica of the Abraham S. Friesen "Hollander style" windmill in Steinbach in 1877, was constructed at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach as a centennial project in 1974. It stands as a lasting monument to the windmill tradition of southern Manitoba's Mennonite pioneers, an icon of their heritage and culture.

Note Fourteen: Johann W. Dueck, *op. cit.*

Note Fifteen: G. G. Kornelsen, "Regarding German Settlements [The East Reserve in 1900]," in *Der Nordwesten Kalendar 1945*, pages 81-86.

Note Sixteen: Peter W. Toews, "Life's Chronicle," in Plett, ed., *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach, 1990), pages 140-141 and 145.

Note Seventeen: John Warkentin, "The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1960. p. 157.

Note Eighteen: Peter T. Barkman, "Recollections," in Klaas J. B. Reimer, *Das 60 Jahrige Jubiläum der Mennoniten Ost-Reserve* (Steinbach, 1934), pages 32-35, translated and published in Julius



The drive shaft and gears of the windmill at the Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach.

Toews and L. Klippenstein, editors, *Mennonite Memories: A Century Past but not Forgotten* (Altona/Steinbach, 1974), pages 58-63; 69-74; and Julius Toews and L. Klippenstein, editors, *Mennonite Memories: Settling in Western Canada* (Winnipeg, 1977), pages 58-63; and also in Plett, ed., *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 132-135.

Note Nineteen: K.J.B. Reimer (?). "Pioneer Millwrights Were Adept." *Carillon News* Progress Edition. (December 1947). p. 70. see also G. G. Kornelsen, "Steinbach, Then and Now," in Plett, ed., *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 257. Additional information regarding the A. S. Friesen mill will be found in the forthcoming family history by Ralph Friesen and Hilton Friesen, *A Man of the People: Abraham S. Friesen*, Winnipeg, publication forthcoming.

Note Twenty: *Ibid.* p. 10.

Note Twenty-One: Frederick Stokhuyzen. *The Dutch Windmill* (Bussum, Holland: C.A.J. Dishoeck, 1962),

p. 93.

Note Twenty-Two: Peter Abrams, *Mennonitische Rundschau*. VII (December 15, 1886). p. 1.

Note Twenty-Three: For the whole section of the Reinland mill I have relied heavily on Peter D. Zacharias. *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Reinland, 1976), pp. 122-23, 129-30.

Note Twenty-Four: Stanley Freese, *Windmills and Millwrighting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 114-116.

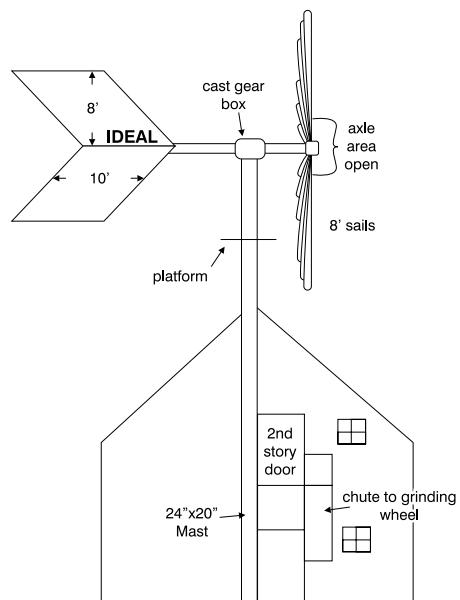
Note Twenty-Five: Dorothy Wiebe, ed. *Diamond Jubilee Yearbook of the Burwalde School 1888-1948* (Burwalde, MB: Burwalde School Board, 1948), p. 11.

Note Twenty-Six: See Freese, plate 27c.

Note Twenty-Seven: Frank Brown. *A History of Town of Winkler, Manitoba* (Winkler, 1973), p. 36.

Note Twenty-Eight: There is a very real problem in writing about windmills in southern Manitoba, because the factual base is so very limited and because any "facts" which are discovered are unrelated to what is already known and usually cannot be confirmed by any independent source.

Note Twenty-Nine: Zacharias, p. 130 says this accident occurred in Reinland, whereas in an interview with Jacob Rempel, he maintained that it happened in Neuhorst. On the existing informa-



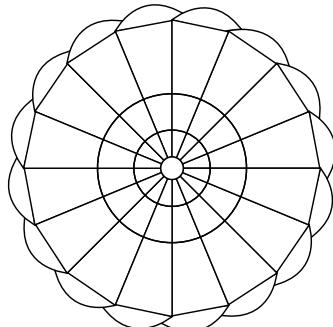
Drawing of blade windmill acquired by Heinrich E. Plett, Blumenort around 1900. It replaced a smaller unit acquired shortly after 1890. Drawing as recalled by son Ben R. Plett, Blumenhof, March 26, 1981. The sketch shows how the large fantailed mill was attached to the end of Plett's large barn. See R. Loewen, Blumenort, page 144.

tion one cannot determine which was in fact the case. The historical testimony of both Rempel and Zacharias is solid in most matters where confirmation is possible.

Note Thirty: Ray Hamm, ed., *Neu-Bergthal: Heritage and Cookbook* (Transcona, 1980), p. 15.

Note Thirty-One: Both of these features can be seen on the windmill at the Mennonite Village Museum.

Front view of windmill. 8' sails plus 4' axle area. Total circumference 20'. Sails and cross braces of angle iron, sails and tail of tin sheets power direct drive to bevel gear and down to second floor to threshing stone on top of stationary stone.



Detail drawing of 1900 blade windmill unit which powered Heinrich E. Plett's feed crusher on the "Platt'ehof", a small family owned industrial and retail hamlet in Blumenort. The Plett feed crusher crushed a lot of "shroud" for neighbouring farmers. Later it was replaced by a regular feed mill. Drawing as recalled by son Ben R. Plett, Blumenhof, March 26, 1981.

# Balthasar Denner, Portrait Artist

**Balthasar Denner 1685–1749, Portrait Artist, by William Schroeder, 434 Sutton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2G 0T3.**

## Family Background.

Balthasar Denner was born on November 15, 1685, in Altona a village on the right bank of the Elbe River about two kilometres west of Hamburg. His father was Jacob Denner (1659–1746), a Mennonite minister, and his mother was Catharina Wiebe (1663–1743) (Note One).

Balthasar was the oldest child and the only son in a family of seven. An accident at the age of eight left the boy with a permanent injury. He walked with a limp for the rest of his life. His convalescence was very slow and he was forced to sit still for long periods of time. To cope with his boredom, the boy sketched pictures of the people and things around him. Soon he could copy other paintings with amazing accuracy. When Balthasar was 11 his parents made arrangements for their son to have formal art lessons.

His first teacher was a Dutch painter named Franz van Amama who taught him how to use water colors. For a short time, while his father served as pastor in one of the Mennonite churches in Danzig, Balthasar received instruction there in the use of oil paints.

The Denner family moved back to Altona in 1701. Since their son had reached the age of 16 they apprenticed him in a firm belonging to a rich uncle. Seeing that hard physical work was out of the question, Balthasar was assigned to clerical duties. For the next six years he was busy writing letters, keeping records and balancing accounts. However, during his spare time he nurtured his artistic skills.

## Painting.

In 1707 at the age of 22 Balthasar Denner applied for and was accepted in the Berlin Academy of Art. Favorable conditions in Berlin had attracted many foreign artists especially from Paris and Holland. Soon the school was considered to be one of the best in northern Europe.

While still in Berlin in 1709 Denner painted the first portraits for which he was paid. The subjects were Duke Christian August, Administrator of Holstein-Gottorp, and his sister, Maria Elizabeth, Abbess of Quindlinburg. The Duke was so pleased with his picture that he invited Denner to come to the Gottorp Castle near Schleswig to paint more portraits for him. His main project was a large group portrait measuring 1.78 metres by 1.38 metres of 21 members of the Duke's court (Note Two).

News of this painting spread from city to city and Denner's career as a portrait artist was

launched. At no time in his life was he in need of commissions for court portraits. During the first few years of his career he maintained his art studio in his home in Altona and worked mostly in the Hamburg area, but as his fame spread lucrative contracts enticed him to leave the comforts

in northern Europe. He quartered his army in Denmark and in Mecklenburg and then set out to visit Copenhagen, Berlin, Hamburg, Paris and Amsterdam. Wherever he went he gave and received or demanded lavish gifts. On his journey through Schleswig-Holstein he stayed in the

Gottorp Castle where he saw Denner's magnificent group portrait. Peter liked the painting and insisted on taking the masterpiece to Petersburg as a souvenir. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the Duke was able to persuade the Czar to accept a Holstein globe in its place. Peter did not appreciate the globe and according to tradition used it for target practice.

## Marriage, 1712.

Balthasar Denner married Esther Winter in 1712. They had six children, five girls and one boy. In spite of the fact that Denner moved his wife and children from one court to another they were a happy family. The children frequently helped their father in his studio by entertaining his customers with vocal and instrumental music during the long tedious sessions and by painting the clothing and background after he had

of his home and temporarily relocate in distant cities in northern Europe.

Peter the Great had defeated the Swedish forces at Poltava in 1709 and gradually pushed them back onto their former territory. Early in 1716 the Czar decided to visit some of the cities

painted the face.

## Fame.

In 1720 Denner went to Hanover where he met many English lords and ladies who invited him to England. He accepted that invitation and



*Artist Balthasar Denner (1685–1749), and his family. Photograph of painting courtesy of Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas.*

of his home and temporarily relocate in distant cities in northern Europe.

Peter the Great had defeated the Swedish forces at Poltava in 1709 and gradually pushed them back onto their former territory. Early in 1716 the Czar decided to visit some of the cities



*Miniature portraits by Balthasar Denner of his wife Esther Winter and of himself. Photo courtesy of Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.*

took his family to London in 1721. En route they stopped in Rotterdam where they were guests of a well-connected English merchant named Ferly. Balthasar had brought with him a portrait of an old woman. The painting was a minutely detailed demonstration piece with which he hoped to impress his potential clients. Two Dutch painters and art critics, Adrean van der Werff and Karl van Mander, could only compare it to the Mona Lisa.

In London the masterpiece caused great excitement and many rich and influential people came to see the painting for themselves. Finally the ambassador from Austria, Baron von Palm, persuaded Denner to send the painting to Vienna where King Karl VI (1685-1740) purchased it for 4700 imperial guilder. Two years later the Hapsburg King asked Denner to paint a portrait of an old man which could serve as a matching counter-piece for the painting of an old woman.



*Portrait of an old woman by Balthasar Denner.  
Photo courtesy of Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum on Braunschweig, Germany.*



*Portrait of an old man by Balthasar Denner. Photo courtesy of Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum on Braunschweig, Germany.*

These paintings gave Denner international acclaim (Note Three), and his services were in ever greater demand. It seemed that he had no equal and no competition. The rich and nobility in northern Europe contended to employ Denner as their portrait artist.

### Imperial Russia, 1740.

Denner, who was always in frail health, could not tolerate the London smog and returned to his home in Altona in 1728. During this phase of his career he painted a portrait that had an impact on Mennonite history and perhaps on European history. In the fall of 1740 Duke

Frederick Karl of Holstein-Gottorp invited Denner to come to Kiel where he painted two life-size portraits of the Duke's twelve-year-old son, Karl Peter Ulrich (1709-62). Denner also made 10 copies of one of the originals. The copies were sent to various courts in Europe. One of the originals was sent to Petersburg where it served as a silent reminder that Peter was an heir to the throne of Russia.

Peter's mother Anna Petrovna (1708-28) was the eldest daughter of Peter the Great. She died in exile in 1728 shortly after the birth of Peter Ulrich. In November 1741 Anna's sister Elizabeth (1709-62) led a successful coup and became the

## Altona Mennonite Church, 1601

The Mennonite Church in Altona, Germany was founded in 1601 when Mennonites fleeing persecution were first allowed into the city.

The first meeting house of the congregation was built in 1674 on a street called "Grosse Freiheit" with an attached cemetery.

It was destroyed in 1713 when the city was burned by Swedish forces. Rebuilt in 1717 it was destroyed again by Allied bombing in 1944.

A new meeting house with parsonage was built at 20 Mennoniten Strasse. The baptised membership of the congregation in 1953 was 681.

By 1899 the name of the congregation had been changed to Hamburg-Altona.

Altona and Hamburg were physically one community but they had distinct histories.

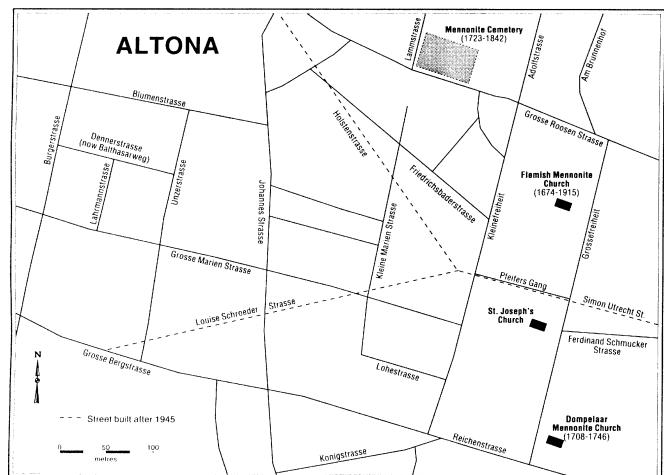
Hamburg founded in 801 by Charlemagne was an independent city state. It became a Hanseatic city in the 13th century. Like Danzig in the Vistula delta it became a centre of great wealth with a population of over a 1,143,000 by 1939.

Mennonites in Altona Hamburg were involved in weaving, shipping, whaling and commerce. Some well known names were de Voss, Siemons, Stockman, Lammers, Amoury, de Buyser, Harmens and Janssen.

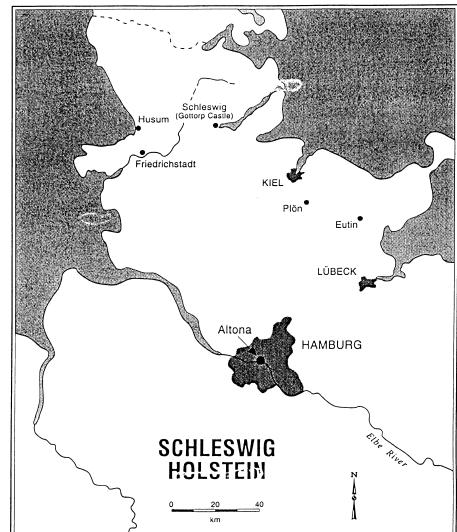
Several well known writers came out of the Altona Hamburg Mennonite community including Jakob Denner (1659-1746), see Pres., No. 15, pages 142-143, and Gerrit Rossen (1612-1711), a wealthy businessman and minister, who published a catechism in 1702, *Christliches Gemüths-Gespräch von demgeistlichen und seligmachenden Glauben*, which went through at least 22 editions, and from 1857 also published in English.

### Source:

H. van der Smissen, Hamburg, Mennonite Encyclopedia, Volume Two, pages 639-643.



*Map of Altona. For a map of Altona as of 1753 and a map of Hamburg-Altona, part of Hamburg, Germany, see Wm. Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (2d) (Winnipeg, 1996), page 10.*



*Map of Schleswig-Holstein, showing location of Altona, relative to Hamburg and other points in North Germany. Hamburg was the port of European departure for the 1870s Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba.*

Czarina of Russia. Knowing that she would not marry or have children, Elizabeth appointed a successor within a year of her accession. She adopted her orphaned nephew in 1742 and proclaimed him her heir.

Two years later when Peter was 16, Elizabeth brought Sophia Augusta Frederika from Anhalt-Zerbst to Petersburg to be the wife of her adopted heir. When Sophia (Catherine II) came to the throne she was instrumental in bringing the Mennonites to Russia.

Czarina Elizabeth was so impressed with Denner's painting of her adopted son, the future Czar Peter III, that she extended the most generous offer to the artist in 1742. She proposed to pay all his expenses plus an annual fee of one thousand ducats if he would come to Petersburg and serve as her resident portrait artist. Denner politely declined her offer.

### Tragedy and Sorrow.

This was also a time of pain and sorrow in the artist's family. At the request of his aging parents Denner had moved back to his home and the Mennonite community in Altona. In a period of just over two years three members of the Denner family died and were buried in the Mennonite Cemetery on the Roosen Strasse in Altona.

Balthasar's mother Catharina Denner died on December 23, 1743. She was 80 years old.

A few months later his beautiful and very gifted daughter Catharina fell ill and died on August 26, 1744. She was an accomplished vocal soloist, violinist and pianist. She had studied art under her father and was well on the way to fame as a miniature artist. Her early death was a great loss to the Denner family.

Balthasar's father Jacob Denner died on February 17, 1746, at the age of 87. He had served as a minister in the Mennonite Church for more than 60 years. Denner did not paint for about one

year. Grief over the loss of loved ones had drained him of his artistic creativity.

### Death and Legacy.

When Denner was able to go back to work we find him swamped with commissions in Mecklenburg. During the seven years that Denner lived in London he developed a close friendship with Johan van Gool (1685-1763) whose home was in Rotterdam. Van Gool spent much time with the Denner family and learned to appreciate their hospitality and generosity. In 1749 Van Gool was collecting material for a biographical encyclopedia of Dutch artists and wanted to include a biography of Denner (Note Four).

Denner mailed the requested material on February 14, 1749. As it turned out this was fortunate for posterity because Balthasar Denner died in Rostock on April 14, 1749. There were 46 unfinished portraits in his studio at the time of his death (Note Five).

Denner was survived by his wife Esther and three children Maria, Esther and Jacob.

Throughout his entire career Denner had the pleasure of serving people who appreciated his work and showered him with acclaim. To this day many of his paintings can be found in art galleries in northern Europe. A signpost on a small street in Altona bears the name "Balthasarweg" and silently reminds those who pass by of the Denner family who lived there more than two centuries ago.

Author William Schroeder

### Endnotes:

Note One: There was a Mennonite church in Altona since 1601. The first members were refugees from various provinces in the Netherlands. See Wm. Schroeder, "Jakob Denner: Betrachtungen," *Preservings*, No. 15, pages 142-3.

Note Two: The painting is now in the Oldenburg

Castle in Eutin.

Note Three: These two portraits are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

Note Four: The University of Amsterdam has that encyclopedia.

Note Five: The unfinished paintings are in the Schwerin Staatliches Museum. That museum has 75 Denner portraits.

Anthony van Dyck is claimed by two nations: Belgium, where he was born in 1599, and Britain, where he died in 1641 at the height of his career as "principalle Paynter in Ordinary" to Charles I.

To mark the master portraitist's 400th birthday, Antwerp's Royal Museum of Fine Arts (May 15-Aug. 20) and London's Royal Academy of Arts (Sept. 11-Dec. 13) will host the largest ever exhibition of his work.

Portraits of Flemish burghers, Genoese nobles, British royals, courtiers, and the artist's friends will be joined by landscapes, religious paintings, water colours and etchings.

From *Time*, May 10, 1999, Vol. 153, No. 18, page 3.



*Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641), pioneering baroque painter. He may well be related to some of the Dycks in the Hanover Steinbach area whose roots go back to Flanders in Belgium, from where they fled to Friesland in the Netherlands to escape the Inquisition.*

## A Table Made By Johann Wiebe

"A Table Made By Johann Wiebe", written and submitted by R. Dale Keeler, Box 41, Vanscoy, Saskatchewan, SOL 3J0.

### Introduction.

An old table my wife Betty Ann (Wall) and I purchased from her Aunt, Mrs. Mary (Wiebe) Thiessen, from Warman, Saskatchewan, has a more significant history than we could have ever realized.

We were told it was about 100 years old and had been made by my wife's great-great-grandfather, a Mennonite Minister in Manitoba.

We had no further information of who this Elder Wiebe was until we were recently contacted by Elaine Wiebe who is compiling a history of the Wiebe family and its descendants with special attention given to Johann Wiebe.

More information has come to us through a publication called *Preservings*, a Magazine/Journal of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc. We have come to recognize the apparent historical value of this artifact and I will give a brief history and description of the table.

### Historical Background.

Johann Wiebe was born on March 23, 1837 the seventh child of eight. He settled in Olgafeld, Fürstenland in the southern Ukraine [part of Imperial Russia]. He became Aeltester of the Chortitz Mennonite Church in Fürstenland at the age of 33.

In 1875 Aeltester Johann Wiebe and a large number of his followers left Russia and travelled to Canada to settle in Manitoba in an area that came to be known as the West Reserve.

This year marks the 125th anniversary of that event. In his lifetime Aeltester Wiebe baptized 2228 persons, married 294 couples, delivered 1544 sermons and conducted 660 funeral services. He was the father of ten children, grandfather of forty-eight and great-grandfather of two before his death on February 21, 1905. He served as Aeltester of the Gemeinde for over thirty years.

Notwithstanding the tremendous responsibility that fell on the shoulders of Johann Wiebe

as minister and leader of his denomination as well as family and farming duties, he must also have developed a talent for joinery and cabinet



*Wide angle view of the Johann Wiebe table with a 1916 Martyr's Mirror lying on top. Note the fine quality metal handles and the lock mechanism on the drawer. Photographs for this article are courtesy of R. Dale Keeler, Box 41, Vanscoy, Saskatchewan, SOL 3J0.*

## Preservings

making as evidenced in the fine example of the table that we purchased.

### The Table.

This type of table can be looked upon as a traditional Mennonite piece along with the “kjist”, “kjleadaschap”, “schlupbank” and “eckschap” found in most households. According to historian Reinhild Kauenhowen Janzen the style used in furniture construction as well as the design of homes and barns originated from the Netherlands and the Vistula Delta of Poland where the Mennonites lived during the 16th and 17th centuries. Furniture was well built to be practical and utilitarian with very few embellishments.

The table stands 29 inches tall. The top measuring 27.5 inches wide by 42 inches in length is made up of two 3/4 inch pine boards 14 1/2 inch and 13 inch in width. The underside of the top has dovetailed splines set into channels on either end. These serve to prevent the top from warpage and also secure the top by means of wooden dowels to the 3/4” by 6” pine rails—the horizontal members of the table frame. The legs are slightly tapered and are of maple (bird’s eye pattern on two legs).

Mortise and tenon joints secured with dowels hold the legs fast to the rails. Additional strength here is also provided by small decorative brackets mortised into the table legs. Applied horizontal mouldings held by 2d or 2 penny wire nails (1” nails) are attached to the rails.

A small bevelled lapped drawer of pine measuring 14” by 18” centred on one side is fastened together with 2d (1”) and 6d (2”) wire nails. The fact that wire nails are used gives us a clue to the table’s age. Wire nails came into common use in construction and limited use in furniture building after 1895. Prior to that square iron nails were employed. The drawer has a

drop brass pull and is fitted with a brass drawer lock and nickel plated escutcheon.

It is interesting to note that a bottom consisting of a 3/4” by 16” and a 3/4” by 4.5” pine boards creates a hidden space on either side of



*Close up view of Johann Wiebe table showing the fine workmanship. The table represents a careful balance between the conservative Mennonite aesthetic of simplicity and function as the greatest beauty and the natural tendency of an expert artisan to perfect his work. It adds perspective and depth to Johann Wiebe's leadership and shepherding of his flock to know that he had learned the art of Mennonite furniture making and possibly pursued it as a hobby and method of relaxing.*

the drawer which is only accessible by the removal of the drawer. It is possible this table was built for and used as a writing desk by Aeltester Wiebe since a kitchen table would certainly have not been fitted with a drawer lock. The table was originally painted with a type of red paint or stain as evidenced by splatters on the underside of the top, and had a black trim around the top edge.

We can only speculate how the Aeltester’s table made its way to Saskatchewan into the hands of his grandson Peter J. Wiebe (1888-1956). Johann’s eldest son Jacob Wiebe (1858-1921), Peter’s father, who lived in the village of Rosengart, Manitoba, across the road from his father, moved with his family to Springfelt, near Swift Current Saskatchewan in 1906.

Did Jacob take the table to Saskatchewan or was it part of an inheritance after Johann’s death?

### Peter J. Wiebe (1888-1956), Springfelt, Sk.

Peter J. was Jacob’s third son from his first marriage. Peter married Maria Wall (1895-1984) in 1914 and from this union were born four children: Annie (1915-99) married William Wall (1910-78); Katherine (1918-98) married John Thiessen (1912-58); Peter (1920-99) married Anne Guenther (b. 1921); and Mary (b. 1922) married Abe Thiessen (1918-90).

Peter was a successful farmer in the Springfelt area having built his own house complete with a coal furnace as well as having a threshing outfit which he hired out. In 1923 the family sold their farm and moved to Mexico where Peter hoped to be the owner and operator of a general store. This venture did not work out so they sold what they could to finance their trip back to Springfelt. They rented a house in Springfelt in which they lived for seven years.

Peter worked for others.

In June 1930 on a hot windy day while Mrs. Wiebe was baking bread, the house caught fire and burned to the ground. Family and neighbours helped rescue possessions from the burning building including the table which Peter had been using as a writing desk in which he stored important papers in the secret area behind the drawer.

Eldest daughter Annie had a pet brooding hen setting on eggs in a back leanto shed that was forgotten until it was too late. Neighbours had to forcibly restrain Annie to prevent her from running into the burning building in an attempt to save her pet. After the fire they lived in several locations and suffered much hardship in the drought-stricken area of southwest Saskatchewan.

### Lizzard Lake, Sask.

In August of 1934 along with several other Mennonite families, the Wiebes moved by wagon train to a parkland area called Lizzard Lake situated north of Biggar, Sask.

A great deal of work had to be done before winter and they were fortunate that it was a long fall. Mrs. Wiebe and the girls dug the cellar while son Peter age 14 cut and hauled logs to a local sawmill to be cut into boards for the house. Mr. Wiebe put up hay for the few head of livestock they had. Since times were hard they had to make do with what they had and so the table was used in the kitchen serving many purposes. Mr. Wiebe had made two benches from lumber salvaged from an old “kjleadaschap” (clothes cupboard) to provide seating for the children.

After her husband’s death, Mrs. Wiebe eventually moved to Saskatoon, Sask., then to Warman, Sask.

### Conclusion.

But the old table was still in use.

Mrs. Wiebe removed the original red paint and applied a varnish finish. When advancing age forced her to relocate from her little home in Warman to the nursing home, the table was passed on to her youngest daughter Mrs. Mary Thiessen. Along with her husband Abe, Mary spent many hours of hard work completely refinishing it and applying a new varnish finish with a dark brown trim.

In spite of its advanced age of 100 years the table still remains as sturdy as the day it was built. One can see little niches and scratches in the soft pine top and an acid stain perhaps from an old battery radio.

My wife’s mother Mrs. Annie Wall died January 26, 1999 and her uncle Peter Wiebe (Annie’s brother) died August 1999. It is regrettable they did not live long enough to learn the history of their great-grandfather as I know that they would have found it very interesting.



*Maria and Peter J. Wiebe, brother Klaas Wiebe, and his son Henry Wiebe. Photo taken in the early 1950s in Lizzard Lake, Saskatchewan.*

# The Veeda Droag, Bergthal, 1862 and 1874

"The Veeda Droag, an ancient Mennonite custom of communication and community, as manifested in two examples from the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, 1862 and 1874," by Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Introduction.

One of the interesting traditions adapted by the Mennonites into their form of the Strassendorf village paradigm was the "Veeda Droag" or "pass along" where a letter addressed and delivered to a particular village was passed along by the first recipient to the next one named in the list, and so on.

In an age before telephones and e-mail, the "Veeda Droag" was commonly used for announcing events such as funerals, weddings, Velaffnisz (betrothal) and barn-raisings. The wording of the document was typically quite eloquent, presumably everyone had form letters with standard wordings for whatever the occasion.

The Veeda Droag was also used as part of the system of Mennonite governance with edicts from secular and ecclesiastical authorities also circulated in this manner. The process was then carefully documented in the village minute book which also served to record the service which individuals had performed in the process, such as delivering a letter to another village, for which each one was duly and precisely compensated by the Strassendorf regime.

The Veeda Droag letters are important documents which should be preserved.

One of the important letters in the history of the Plett family is an 1862 invitation to a barn raising by Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), in Kleefeld, Molotschna Colony--*Preservings*, No. 9, Part Two, page 53-56.

These letters, of course, provide the specific information contained therein. e.g. the particular death, barn raising, or whatever.

But their importance goes far beyond the obvious. They inform the historian, for example, about the village of residence of those invited to the event, often up to 20 or more families.

They can even provide the information regarding the sequence of households in a particular village. In the letter by Peter Friesen, presumably almost everybody in Friedrichsthal was invited to partake in the barn raising. Since one neighbour was required by protocol to carry the letter forward to the next neighbour listed on the reverse side of the invitation, one can presume that Fried. Wall lived at one end of the village, that his next door neighbour was Johannes Penner, and then Peter Friesen, etc., etc.

If the information regarding the size of the village and number of Wirtschaften was available, the Peter Friesen letter could actually be used to reconstruct the physical layout of the village. This, in turn, could lead to archaeological digs, etc.

The 1862 Veeda Droag letter came to Manitoba with the Banmann family of Blumengard, E.R. Cornelius and Franz

Ballmann (Bahmann/Banman) were the last invitees listed in the village of Heuboden. It seems the last one on the list got to keep the letter itself.

The Banman family still well known and rather prominent in the New Bothwell and Steinbach area deserves recognition for having preserved this important document.

The 1874 Veeda Droag letter is an invitation to the "Velaffnisz" (betrothal party) for Maria Peters, daughter of Cornelius Peters, to Gerhard Wiebe. It is interesting that the invitation is issued and signed by the bridal

couple themselves.

The 1874 Veeda Droag letter was sent to many of the neighbours in Heuboden, and retained by the family of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) and passed on to his grandson Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970), elected Aeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde, Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1932.

For a sample of a Veeda Droag letter for a funeral, see Document Four, "Krahn Letters" article, *Preservings*, No. 15, page 13.

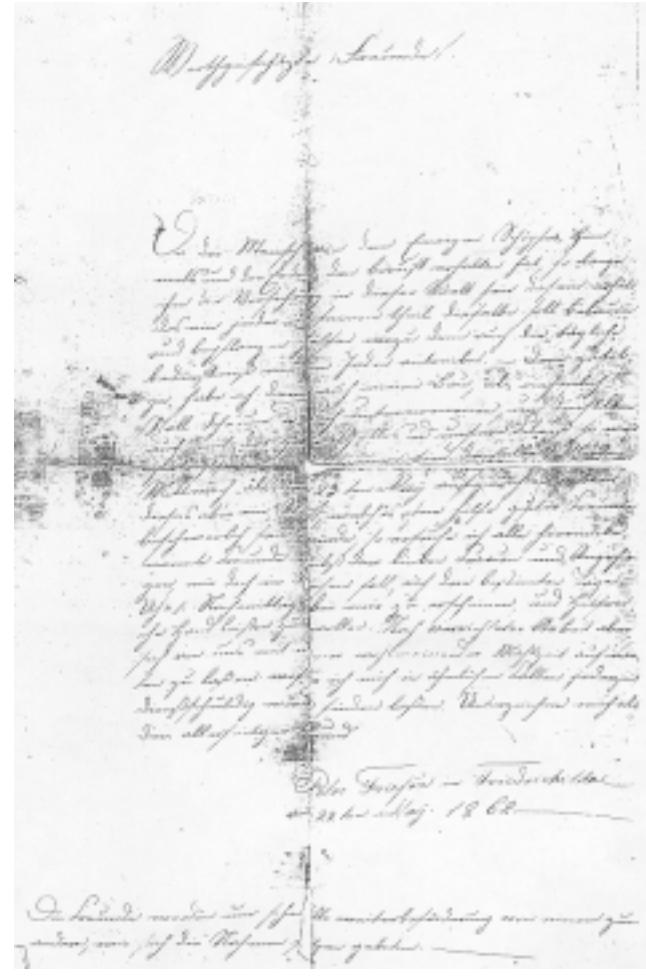
The Editor.

to provide a similar service.

I sign my name as your ever-faithful friend  
Peter Friesen, Friedrichsthal  
May 22, 1862

[Reverse page of Barn-Raising letter with the list of invitees]

The friends are asked to expeditiously pass



Front page of the Peter Friesen, Friedrichsthal, Bahrung letter, 1862, courtesy of Sheryl Kornelien, Box 3413, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0. Anyone with information regarding the identity of the sender of the invitation is asked to contact Preservings.

on this letter from one to another, in the order that their names follow on the reverse:

In Friedrichsthal: Fried. Wall, Johann Penner, Peter Friesen, Cornelius Siemens, Cornelius Kroeker, Jakob Braun, Thomas Sawatzky, Franz Dyck, Peter Heppner, Johann Berg, Heinrich Dyck, Cornelius Wieb, Jakob Rempel, Fried Wall, Peter Buhr, Jakob Stoesz, Johann Peters, Jakob Wiens, Johann Buhler, Johann Heppner, Wilhelm Friesen, Daniel Blatz [?], Gergen Krahn, Gerhard Wall, Johann Doerksen, Heinrich Streimer, Heinrich Dyck, Johann Wall, Peter Friesen, Jakob Klassen, Abraham Dyck.

In Schönthal: Johann Neufeld, Jakob Ginter, Jakob Dyck.

In Bergthal: Gerhard Klassen, Cornelius Friesen, Jakob Martens, Peter Friesen.

In Schönfeld: Jakob Friesen, Abraham Friesen.

In Heuboden: Franz Ballman and Cornelius Ballman.

#### Further Reading:

For more information regarding the Cornelius Banmann family, see Sheryl Banman Kornelsen, "Cornelius and Anna Banman Travel Chest," in *Preservings*, No. 11, page 93-94.

**Gerhard Wiebe and Maria Peters, betrothal invitation, September 28, 1874, submitted by Justina Wiebe Funk, New Bothwell, Manitoba, daughter of Aeltester Peter S. Wiebe, Chortitz.**

#### Translation of 1874 Betrothal Letter:

Dearly beloved friends:

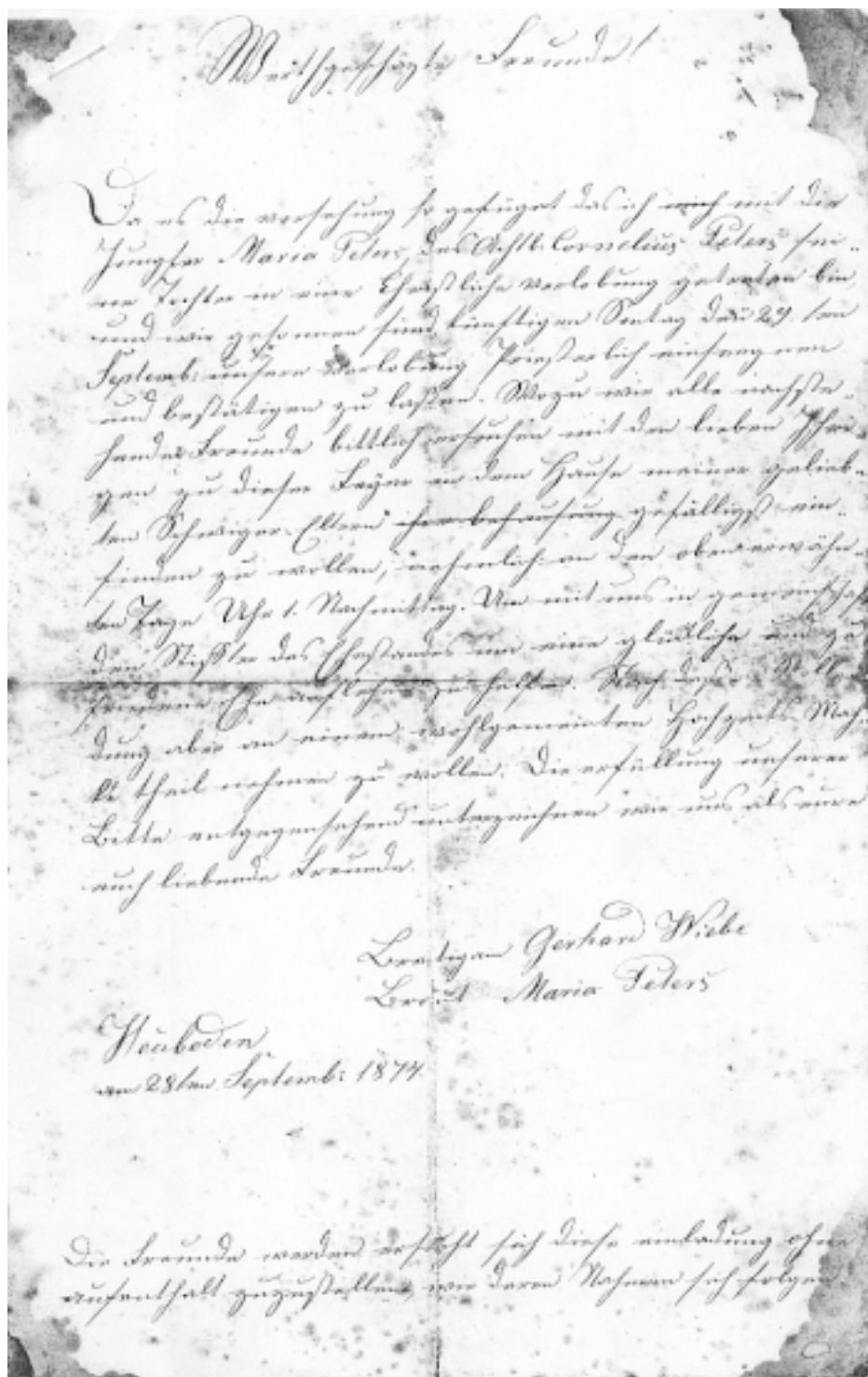
Since the Overseer has so led that I have entered into a Christian betrothal with Maria Peters, daughter of the Honourable Cornelius Peters, and we are minded to allow our betrothal to be blessed and ecclesiastically ordained on the forthcoming Sunday, the 29th of September, and for which purpose, I would beg that all the next following [named] friends might be so kind and wish to make their attendance on this day at the home of my beloved parents-in-law, together with the loving family, on the aforementioned day, namely, at o o'clock after midday, in order to communally celebrate together with us and to constitute the marriage and to help seal therein my good fortune and peace.

And after the completion thereof, that you might wish to take part in a well intended wedding feast. And in anticipation of the fulfilment of our wishes, we subscribe hereto as your loving friends.

Groom "Gerhard Wiebe" Bride "Maria Peters" Heuboden, the 28th of September, 1874.

Our friends are asked to present this invitation without delay, in the order which the names follow:

This invitation is directed firstly to the Honourable Peter Epp, and thereafter as follows:



Front page of the Gerhard Wiebe and Maria Peters betrothal invitation letter, 1874. Note the precise calligraphy ("Schönschreiben") which characterized these letters. This letter is courtesy of Justina Wiebe Funk, New Bothwell, Manitoba.

#### The Reverse of the Betrothal Invitation:

In Heuboden:

Peter Epp; widow Jakob Bükert, Johann Dyck, Peter Ens, Franz Janzen, Franz Janzen, Cornelius Neufeld, Abraham Ens, Johann Bergmann, Gergen Krahn, Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, Johann Wiebe, Peter Toews, Peter Toews, Peter Schmidt, Jakob Peters, Peter Peters.

#### For Further Reading:

See Cathy Barkman, "A Funeral Announcement/Invitation, 1871," in *Preservings*, No. 6, page 26, for the funeral announcement issued for Katharina Penner, Heuboden, February 26, 1871.

# Book Reviews

Please forward review copies of books of relevance to the history and culture of the Hanover Steinbach area to the Editor, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, phone Steinbach 1(204)-326-0645 or Winnipeg 1(204) 474-5031. It is customary for publishers to provide a free copy of a book to the publication, this copy is provided to the person selected to do the review as a reward for doing the work.

Julius Loewen, *Jasykowo: Mennonite Colony on the Dnieper* (Beausejour, Manitoba, Canada, 1995), 169 pages, translated from the German by Jakob B. Klassen.

I was happy to have obtained a copy of *Jasykowo* for three reasons.

First of all, the book stands as a sample history for a 100 or more daughter colonies of the Mennonite world in Imperial Russia, most of which have only received the briefest notations, if at all, in the historical record. The settlement consisting of 23,000 acres purchased at 40 ruble per acre lay immediately to the north of the Chortitzia/Old Colony. The settlement had four villages--Nikolaifeld, Franzfeld, Eichenfeld and Adelsheim founded in 1869 and Hochfeld added in 1872. The family villages of Petersdorf, Reinfeld and Paulsheim were also considered part of Jasykowo.

The founding of Jasykowo took place in the first burst of Mennonite colonization activity in the wake of emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Other settlements well known in the story of Manitoba's Mennonites included Fürstenlandt, south of Nikopol (homeland of Johann Wiebe founder of the Reinländer Gemeinde), Borosenko, and even Markusland, located east directly across the Dneiper from Jasykowo, the latter two being founded by the Kleine Gemeinde from the Molotschna.

Although I have not personally toured Jasykowo, I got a sense of rich farmland as my train from Kiev to Zaporozhe pulled through the area just around sunrise on the morning of May 26, 1999. Hopefully I can tour the area during my visit to the Ukraine of May, 2000.

The opening chapters of *Jasykowo* provide valuable albeit brief insights into the settlement and pioneering period of the colony. Early chapters such as "The Beginning", "Agriculture", "The Seed", etc. provide priceless details of cultural, social and economic life only possible in a memoir/history such as this. Quite naturally, Loewen tends to focus on Franzfeld, his home village.

I read with interest details about horse breeding in the village, commerce and industry. The Jasykowo villages were evidently quite typical of the Mennonite experience. The statement that "Community work was conscientiously recorded in the accounts of the mayors office" (page 28) would have been true also for a typical village in southern Manitoba in the 1890s as it would be to this day for the villages near Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

Loewen informs us that the Waisenamt office was "located in Neuendorf, a village in the Chortitzia Colony" (page 30), a little detail that I did not know.

Under "Customs and Traditions", Loewen describes the wedding parties which were held,

lasting for two days, as well as funeral services and various events in the religious calendar (page 34).

Loewen obviously had a special interest in education in the village and devotes two chapters supplemented by the biographies of four of the most important educators, Heinrich Andres ("a pronounced socialist"), Gerhard S. Derksen, Abram Froese and Heinrich Epp (pages 42-57).

The section covering the pre-revolutionary period is understandably short of hard data such as lists of residents of each village, lists of school children in each school, which we know was extensively documented by both Mennonite and Czarist regimes. Possibly information of this nature has been preserved and can still come to light.

The second reason I was glad to read *Jasykowo* was its holistic treatment of the experiences of the territory from the onset of WWI to the final liquidation of the residents at the end of WWII. Although there is a multitude of writings and memoirs about the Soviet Inferno (or the Mennonite holocaust) being published, they are mostly autobiographical dealing with the experiences of a particular individual or family.

In *Jasykowo* Loewen deals with each period in chronological sequence making it easy for the novice reader to understand the effects which the different periods and government programs had on the residents. The German occupations, Selbstschutz, Machnov massacres, NEP, collectivization, the famine of 1933, the great terror of 1937, and finally the German invasion of 1941 are all described in personal chilling detail.

In "Trial by Ordeal" Loewen describes the experiences of a friend of his who was induced to write reports about his neighbours but "he wrote them in such a way that they did not harm anybody" (page 82). This resulted in his exile. His wife voluntarily decided to join. The couple were so emaciated physically and emotionally by the experience of surviving in their northern Gulag labour camp that when the man died one night while eating supper his wife "lifted him off the chair....returned to the table and had supper and ate till I had my fill...the sharp hunger pangs had shut out any emotions" (page 84).

One of the interesting aspects of the Soviet inferno for me as a lawyer was the extent of the legal process required by the regime. Although possibly as many as 10 to 20 million were "exiled" each case went through a trial and sometimes an appeal. For example, during the dekulakization period huge tax quotas were levied against the Mennonite farmers. When they eventually could not pay their properties were seized by executions and sold. The farmer,

denounced as a kulak was "exiled". It struck me how similar this process was to that employed by the Manitoba Government when they wanted to eradicate the Plaut-Dietsch/Mennonite culture from the southern part of the Province in the 1920s.

Loewen himself is arrested and imprisoned in a dark damp overcrowded basement in the militia prison in Chortitzia. He was accused of hoarding foreign currency. He tells how a Suderman stood up to the commandant and upbraided him for the prisoners' horrible conditions. To everyone's surprise, Suderman was not shot on the spot and the commandant actually made an effort to improve their situation (page 93).

Loewen tells also the horrible story of a woman from Chortitzia who was sentenced to several years forced labour for "because she had picked a few corncobs which had fallen off a wagon and were scattered on the road" (page 102).

Of great interest are the details of the formation of the "Kolkhuz" or collective farm. I have twice visited one of these institutions in the Molotschna and found it of great interest how the villages were converted slowly from being a collection of individual village farms consisting of Mennonite housebarns to one economic unit where each villager was an employee as well as a stakeholder.

Here I find confirmed the reason why none of the large magnificent barns are left in the former Mennonite territories. It was "no longer profitable for the large enterprise to continue its operations in the small barns" (page 112 and 138). Consequently they were taken down and the bricks reused to build larger Kolkhoz barns.

Loewen identifies "three comrades who were assigned to help Franzfeld build the workers' paradise" (page 122). Einhorn and



Julius Loewen author of *Jasykowo: Mennonite Colony on the Dnieper*, title pages.

Rassawky "mixed like fire and water....The two fighting roasters were so concerned about each other that they neglected their duties."

On one occasion in 1932 the women of the village banded together and simply refused to acknowledge a decree forcing them to give up their personal chickens and cows. "The men did not dare to speak out against these measures" (page 124). Any such action or even less could result in deportation to the Gulag. But the women banded together and one evening simply walked over to the enclosure took their cow and walked home. "The party authorities demanded to return the cows immediately....But against all expectations, all remained calm, and the women kept their cows."

Loewen seems quite proud of the progress which the Franzfeld Kolkhoz made notwithstanding seemingly constant bullheaded interference from the administration and NKVD. The Kolkhoz made significant advances with the sale of seed grain, horses and new specialty crops.

Thirdly, I found *Jasykovo* of special interest as I personally knew Eugene Derksen and

#### Attention Readers:

Those readers interested in more information regarding the Mahknov massacres in Jasykovo are referred to Ike Warkentin, *John Warkentin and his Descendants 1820-1990* (Box 50, Group 32, RR1, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 4A3, 1990), pages 278-310.

The book includes extracts from the daily diary of Katharina Hildebrandt (pages 278-287 and 296-302), a personal account by J. A. Dyck, a moving poetic elegy by Aeltester J. Klassen, and a register of 83 Mennonites murdered in Eichenfeld.

Aeltester Klassen aptly entitles the name of his poem, "Schmerzenweg Eichenfeld--Leichenfeld" (pages 292-293).

Two members of the Warkentin clan, Daniel and Isaac, farmed for most of their adult lives in the Silberfeld/Landmark area. Their descendants such as Peter Warkentin, "W.W. Construction" and Rev. Alf Warkentin, Landmark, are well known in the Hanover Steinbach community.



Isaak John Warkentin (1875-1919) and wife Maria con Kampen (1880-1961). Isaak Warkentin was murdered in Eichenfeld, Jasykovo, by Mahknov bandits, his wife escaped and came to Canada in 1924. Photo courtesy of Johann Warkentin and his Descendants, page 151.

Victor Peters, whose roots lay in these settlements. I always had the highest regard for them, both made outstanding contributions to the lives and culture of their people. *Jasykovo* gave me a better understanding of what had made them the outstanding individuals they were.

According to the foreword by friend Dr. George K. Epp, the book was first published in German in 1957, but was translated "to make it accessible to those who do not read German." For this the family of the author is to be highly commended as it tells an important chapter of our story in a very special and personal way.

Reviewed by D. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba

John D. Thiesen, *Mennonites and Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America ca. 1933-1945* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1999), 330 pages \$28.00.

This is a remarkable book. For the first time in English, we have the disturbing story of South American Mennonite flirtation with Nazism. By John Thiessen, archivist and historian at Bethel College, Kansas, the book represents thorough research, precise writing, balanced interpretation and a thought-provoking conclusion.

The story actually begins in 1930 when Soviet Mennonite refugees, by way of Moscow, settled in Fernheim, Paraguay and Caterina,

Agatha Fast Grant, *Cornelius Fast: Volume One* (Blumenort, 1999), 114 pages.

This is a family history of Cornelius Fast (1840-1927) and his children. The book opens with a somewhat paraphrased version of the Cornelius Fast biography published in *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 23-24. It is printed on thick paper, and obviously a book which the many descendants of this family in Blumenort and elsewhere will treasure.

One of the finest features of the book is an excellent collection of photographs, including some early prints of Cornelius Fast's sisters Helena, Mrs. Andrew Boese, Aganetha, Mrs. Heinrich Esau and Margaretha, Mrs. Martins, who evidently lived in Minnesota at one time or another.

The short vignettes for each of the children of Cornelius Fast, are well documented from primary sources and interviews. These too are vividly illustrated with photographs which have been reproduced with exceptional clarity.

Of particular interest to aficionados of local history will be the sections on Aganetha Fast, dubbed the "Florence Nightingale of Steinbach" for her role in saving lives during the Spanish influenza attack of 1918, see *Preservings*, No. 10, Part Two, pages 38-40, and Margaretha Fast Reimer, who rose to considerable local influence with her marriage to Aeltester Peter P. Reimer, Blumenort, one of the leading churchmen of the area.

This is a well done family book which will enrich the social history of our community. Reviewed by D. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.



Aganetha Fast, the "Florence Nightingale of Steinbach," heroine who fought the 1918 Spanish Influenza epidemic, risking her own life. Photo courtesy of Cornelius Fast: Volume One, page 42. Aganetha and sister Margaretha made significant contributions to our community in avenues available to women in conservative Mennonite culture, namely, medical/healing and pastorally, as a clergyman spouse. See Saints and Sinners, page 207-8, for a further discussion of Biblical feminism as manifested in conservative Mennonite faith and culture.



Margaretha Fast, who rose to singular influence as the third wife of Bishop Peter P. Reimer, Blumenort. She stood by her husband as he led some 100 conservative KG families to Mexico in 1948 where he passed on. In this way Margaretha played an important role in the reformation of the Kleine Gemeinde, which has been blessed of God to grow into the modern-day 2000 member denomination. Photo courtesy of Cornelius Fast: Volume One, page 56.

Bazil. In 1933 they found in Hitler hope for "a more conservative public morality and eradication of the Communist Party". They also found hope for their suffering relatives back in the Soviet Union, and for themselves in the extremely difficult frontier conditions of Paraguay's Chaco.

Spurred on by a pro-active German government, a parade of travelling Nazi emissaries and encouragement from well-known German Mennonite leaders Jacob (Walter) Quiring and B.H. Unruh, colony leaders began arguing that Mennonites could survive only with the ideas of National Socialism.

Thiesen argues that Nazism took root primarily because it was seen as the only road out of the difficult Chaco and the eventual repatriation and return to Germany. He also credits the movement to two dominant personalities, Fernheim colony president Julius Legiehn and colony school administrator Fritz Kliewer. Such leaders led the colony in celebrating its Germanness and thanking "God that He has given the German people such an energetic Führer in A(dolf) Hitler".

The story, however, is also about conflict among Mennonites. Leaders of neighbouring Menno colony, Canadian migrants of the 1920's, criticized Fernheim's privileging of Germanness over Christianity. In the US, Mennonite Central Committee people, who underwrote Fernheim, were "dumb-founded" that Fernheimers seemed to be "diluting their Mennonite faith".

Mennonite Brethren church leaders, who as late as 1944 would declare that with "Hitler (as) leader...we need harbour no fears on matters of faith", nevertheless became alarmed once Fritz Kliewer, an MB himself, openly questioned pacifism. The climax of the movement occurred on the night of March 11, 1944, when physical clashes pitted supporters of Kliewer and Legiehn against equally violent groups of vigilantes. Under pressure now from the US government, including the FBI, Paraguay exiled the two leaders from the Chaco.

The book raises troubling questions. Were the Mennonites who fled the terror of the Soviet Union during the late 1920s under the protection of the German state, justified in celebrating German ethnicity and German blood ties? How is it possible for a people known for their peace-loving theology and tolerance of minorities to turn to Hitler's racist, militaristic and pagan messages? And more pointedly, are Mennonites today insulated from being drawn into nationalistic and militaristic messages. John Thiesen is to be congratulated for raising difficult questions with this controversial account.

Reviewed by Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg. Reprinted with permission from the *M. B. Herold*, December 17, 1999, page 24.

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Frank G. Barkman, Albert Goossen, Donald Bartel, Phyllis Dueck Toews and Harvey Kroeker, *Genealogy of Jakob M. Barkman*

(Steinbach, 1999), 235 pages, \$12.00 plus \$3.00 postage and handling (contact Frank Barkman, Box 1595, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0).

Members of the Barkman clan, especially descendants of Martin J. Barkman (1796-1872), have a long standing interest in genealogy and family history. It was grandson Jakob G. Barkman, Hillsboro, who in 1900 compiled and published *Familien-Verzeichniss des Martin J. Barkman, Rückenau, Sud-Ruszland*, 8 pages, one of the first family books published among the Russian Mennonites. Others among the clan, such as grandson Martin B. Fast, long-time editor of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* (an inter-denominational Mennonite newspaper from 1878-1926), were prolific writers about their family.

Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75) himself, was literate and articulate in the best of the Kleine Gemeinde tradition leaving a number of sermons and letters for posterity. His biography appeared in *Preservings*, No. 9, Part Two, pages 1-10.

In 1975 a "blue-ribbon" committee made up of Waldon Barkman, John C. Reimer, Farnk P. Wiebe, Corn. W. Wohlgemuth, George T. Reimer, John R. Unger and Peter F. Barkman, compiled a genealogy with some biographies, published as *Genealogy of Jakob Barkman 1825-1975* (Steinbach, 1975), 99 pages.

The book, unfortunately, is long out of print, and therefore unavailable to those not fortunate enough to own a copy. The new edition will rectify this situation.

It is an attractively produced book, spiral bound, with an up-to-date listing of family members. Most of the historical writings from the earlier edition have been reprinted and will allow me to place my copy of the earlier version into the rare book section of my library, as many of the 1975 books are already falling apart from repeated use.

A few new historical items are included in the new version. A biography of oldest son Martin G. Barkman submitted by Phyllis Dueck Toews taps the writings of her grandfather Jakob D. Barkman, the Steinbach photographer frequently featured in *Preservings*.

Another important contribution is the brief write up about Jakob G. Barkman (1856-1899), a Steinbacher all his life and patriarch of a large clan of prominent local citizens, but hardly mentioned at all in our history books. Younger brother Johann G. Barkman, of course, has become well-known not only as the longest serving mayor of Steinbach (an incredible 25 years of service), but as one of the most influential and significant civic leader in our City's history: see *Preservings*, No 12, pages 50-54, for a biography.

Those members of the Barkman family interested in more of the history of the clan, and its branches now spread across the Americas, may wish to refer to my chapter on the Barkman family, published as Plett, "Jakob Barkman Genealogy 1765," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach, 1990), pages 279-297.

The committee is to be congratulated for their efforts in compiling and publishing this book. Many descendants will be grateful.

Reviewed by Delbert F. Plett, Q.C.

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Ron Friesen, *John R. and Maria Friesen: Kleefeld Pilgrims of a Mennonite Tradition* (Box 1186, Beausejour, Man., R0E 0C0, 1999), 178 pages.

Ronald Friesen has written what we always knew he could do masterfully, that is, write a book that is at once significant and worthy. It is a history of his family in Kleefeld. When the head of the family is a leader in community affairs, like getting a cheese factory started, it should be a challenging book for any history buff who is interested in Mennonite 20th century local history. When the family head, John R. Friesen, is also a pastor and minister of the Kleingemeinde Church it becomes of interest to many of us who experienced and witnessed the changes the KG went through.



*Johann R. Friesen and Maria Friesen, nee Dueck, a family portrait, 1925. Johann R. Friesen (1897-1983), Kleefeld, was the grandson of Heinrich L. Friesen (1851-1910), Rosenort, Manitoba. Maria was the granddaughter of KG minister Jakob L. Dueck (1839-93), Grünfeld, E.R. Photo courtesy of Kleefeld Pilgrims, page 65.*

The author starts with the immigration to Canada from Russia, tracing the family roots as far back as the Von Riesen forbears and also to Klaas Reimer, the founder of the KG in 1812. It was quite fitting that his father (J.R. Friesen) married Maria Dueck, daughter of the then Altester, or bishop, of the Kleingemeinde Church, Jacob R. Dueck.

The author has much more to say about the central role of his father Mr. J.R. Friesen in the Kleefeld community, e.g. owning one of the first threshing machines in the district. As mentioned earlier, he was instrumental in getting the milk producing Kleefelders to support his idea of beating the Great Depression with their own Co-op cheese factory. He was also a charter member of the Ste. Anne Co-op Oil Ltd. and was very much in the forefront when the Bethesda Hospital Society was founded over 60 years ago.

But it was as a KG minister that Mr. Friesen's impact was greatest. Perhaps it is not so surprising your humble reviewer, who knew Kleefeld so well, having lived there for 40 odd years, would say many lives were greatly influenced by the church.

Replete with pictures throughout, the author's imitable style of writing is really quite engrossing and frequently elicits a response from the reader, "Yep—that was just like Mr. Friesen!".

**Book review by Neil Dueck, Box 22054, Steinbach, Man., R5G 1B6.**

See also book review by Doris Penner, *Carillon News*, January 17, 2000.

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Peter D. Wiebe, et. al. *The Ancestors and Descendants of Johann Wiebe, August 3, 1866 - July 12, 1924* (Altona, 1999), 156 pages,

This new hardcover family history will serve as a permanent reminder of both the Wiebe heritage and the significant Wiebe presence in our region. Its attractive binding will complement any setting, and its contents will wear well in any conversation.

The book begins by providing a fine review of what is known about the early background of the Wiebe name, and publishing anew much of William Schroeder's material about the emigration from Russia to the New World.

Although information about earlier Wiebes is mentioned, the "ancestor" part of the title really begins with Abraham Wiebe I, born 1752 in Neudorf, West Prussia (an unfortunate typo consistently renders the name as Nuedorf and later the village in Russia as Nuendorf instead of Neuendorf).

The story of Abraham's son, Abraham II, who moved to Bergthal, is given in greater detail with a brief history of Bergthal as a backdrop. Abraham III is the one who emigrated to Canada in 1876, settling in the East Reserve in a village also called Neuendorf, an incomplete village near Steinbach not mentioned by Schroeder. The emigration story is bolstered by Bergthal material (maps/diary) and an interesting obituary of Abraham Wiebe (1819-

87) clipped from the *Rundschau*. It is one son of Abraham III whose family constitutes the "descendants" portion of this book.

Johann Wiebe (1866-1924) and the 15 children of his two wives Anganetha Peters and Anna Dyck comprise the remainder of the book. This family left the East Reserve to pioneer near Plum Coulee, where the ancestral house pictured on the cover of the book was built, and from where the diaspora occurred. The only surviving daughter of Johann Wiebe, namely Elizabeth, has written a short life story of her father, a story that evokes the character of the man as he encountered the hardships of a pioneer.

The rest of the book is devoted to Johann's children in the order of birth, each section begun with a one-page family group sheet complete with an attractive portrait oval of the son/daughter, and then working its way progressively through all the children and grandchildren to the present day. A numbering system identifies Johann Wiebe as #1, each of his children as a letter of the alphabet and the next two generations again in Arabic numbers.

The layout is two-column with bold large font type identifying the second generation (offspring of Johann Wiebe) and smaller bold type identifying the third and later fourth generation. Many fifth generation are given as well, although the numbering system does not seem to include them. A useful feature is additional space after each second generation chapter for later "Additions", with appropriate headings for Birth, Marriage etc.

Each section includes a portrait and life story of the second generation, as well as names of children and dates of birth, marriage and death, where applicable. A strength of the book is the high percentage of anecdotal updates on the lives of the third and fourth generation descendants, most of which are accompanied by quality photographs. Such complete coverage is a testimony to a strong family network and to the organizational skills of the family committee.

Many of the Wiebes in the Niverville and Steinbach area will be interested in this compilation. Some prominent names appear as descendants of Johann Wiebe, not least the chair of the committee and the voice heard in much of the introductory section: Peter D. Wiebe, long-standing Hanover School Board Trustee for New Bothwell. D. P. Wiebe, with sons Peter and John, is a name synonymous with trucking in the Southeast. Alvin Wiebe of the Niverville Credit Union, and Norman Wiebe, active in Niverville community affairs for much of his life are direct descendants of Peter J. Wiebe, only son of Johann and his first wife Anganetha Peters.

Other connections include the Broesky triplets, Frank, Abe and Jake who are the sons of Annie Wiebe, and Ruth Wiebe who married area hog farmer Lorne Loepky of Tourond. Martha (Friesen) Suess long-time teacher and principal in Steinbach, who with her husband Stan have been teaching in the Christian College in Lithuania is also a descendant of this

family.

Much of the family centers around Plum Coulee and Horndean, where many descendants have become recognizable figures, among them Lyndon Friesen of Golden West Broadcasting.

Perhaps a fitting descendant to finger in closing is young Adam Wiebe, a fifth generation descendant of Johann Wiebe, and perhaps the youngest of that name to carry on the tradition begun by Adam Wiebe, the great Prussian engineer (died 1652) and probable ancestor of the Manitoba Wiebes.

As a family history book, this volume attempts the impossible: a complete register of descendants with photograph, life stories and vital statistics of a family begun in 1866 and extending from Brandon to Bolivia, and from British Columbia to Australia. What is remarkable is how close it comes to achieving that goal.

Congratulations!

This book will serve as a valuable resource for generations to come. Copies are available from Peter Wiebe, Box 102, New Bothwell, MB R0A 1C0.

Reviewed by Ernest Braun, Niverville.

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Frieda Esau Klippenstein, *Neuberghthal National Historic Site: A Cultural Landscape History* (Niverville, Western Canada Service Centre, Parks Canada, Winnipeg, MB, 1997), 91 pages.

This glossy 199-page cerlux-bound study, underwritten by Parks Canada, documents and interprets the "cultural landscape and settlement history of Neuberghthal" [WR], with the intent that it serve as a basis for the "commemoration initiatives" proposed for the site. The work is intended for internal government purposes and not for dissemination to the general public.

Nevertheless, the study is a significant work that contributes to the history of the Mennonite settlement in Manitoba and justifies some attention.

According to the Introduction, in 1984 an initiative by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recognized the significance of certain agricultural settlement patterns of the prairies, and in 1989 designated Neuberghthal, WR, as an example of one such pattern; namely, the Mennonite *Strassendorf*. The rest of the book constitutes a discussion of the Mennonite Street Village, providing historical background of the village system as it was developed in Europe, a chronicle of its manifestation in Neuberghthal, and a site-specific catalogue of its features.

The body of the study is organized as a report, with maps and other graphics supporting the text. The four parts of the body are broken down into subheadings, each discussing an aspect of the Strassendorf system. A comprehensive photographic appendix and extensive bibliography complete the publication.

The bulk of the publication is devoted, first,

to the settlement history of Neubergthal and, secondly, to the discussion of its particular features.

The history portion begins with a brief introduction to the aboriginal peoples of the area and their lifestyles, especially as they were affected by the decisions of the Federal Government after the Hudson's Bay Company relinquished its territorial prerogatives just prior to the arrival of European settlers like the Mennonites. Several historical maps of general interest and some of a more technical nature serve as support or even appendix to the text here.

The next portion describes the adaptation of Strassendorf village pattern to the Manitoba prairies in the 1870s, and then documents the founding of Neubergthal specifically, listing the founding families and describing the developments occurring in the village during the time the village agreement was in force. Another section deals with the dissolution of the village, and finally with the village life as it is today. Each section betrays careful research both of relevant documents and of the site itself.

Moreover, each section seeks to address the central question of the publication: why is this village special? what about it is representative of a tradition that has disappeared? and why is this vestige of a system so rare among Manitoba Mennonites today?

Much of the value of the publication resides in the comprehensive compilation of information about early Mennonite village life as it was played out in this village, from little-known details about architecture to unusual pioneering coping mechanisms. The study also yields considerable insight into the nature of the dilemmas faced by the settlers at successive intervals in the first half century in particular, and provides reading at a level much beyond the scope of most village histories, delving into sociological and demographic aspects of the Mennonite lifestyle instead of specific family histories.

The second major portion of the work documents the special features of the village system and provides an interpretation of their significance. In this category, the housebarn, yard plan of the average village lot and the Mennonites' farsighted use of trees figure largely. In passing, some comments are directed at explaining the relationships of the Mennonite pioneers to market centres and social structures such as schools and churches.

The last part of the print text is a short "conclusion", one that is perhaps already anticipated in the report itself and likely a function of the purpose of the document. Nevertheless, Klippenstein contributes some valuable insights into the central issue: why did the village system break down so quickly in Manitoba after having served so well for almost a century in Russia? Should the study be reissued, maybe the writer would consider developing the significance of her material more fully, especially as it illuminates the Mennonite psyche, one that is uniquely revealed in this unraveling of tradition among a very traditional people.



Sarais, built circa 1875, presumably by an Old Colonist in the West Reserve, Illustration 22. One of the many excellent photographs reproduced by Frieda Klippenstein in the *Neubergthal...Landscape History*.

One of the truly worthy attractions of the volume is the section between the body of the report and the conclusion, a section consisting of a rich dossier of photographs, many in colour, documenting many heritage buildings of the different styles, as well as a progression of aerial photographs of the village beginning in 1948. One special photograph is the rare depiction of a "sarai" ca. 1875. Altogether the book contains 26 maps and over 80 illustrations. Also included in the Appendix at the end are photocopies of original Township maps, Homestead Registers and the Village Agreement and its cancellation Agreement as they apply to Neubergthal.

Another valuable asset to the study is the bibliography that goes well beyond the more narrow confines of the study to cover Mennonite history in Manitoba in a broader sense, listing publications that many younger Mennonite enthusiasts might not know exist.

This publication is unique among Mennonite village histories, not only in its rather specific focus (dictated by its initial purpose), but also in its unusual take on the topic: the material is given from the point of view of an outsider, and the audience is perceived to be an outsider as well. Whereas village histories are usually family or at least community affairs, with everybody recognizing somebody, this publication is analytical and objective, lacking that quaint warmth we expect from the genre, but more than making up for it in thoroughness and documentary detail. It is a valuable corollary to the genre.

The material definitely merits a larger audience and with discreet changes may well attract considerable interest. As it stands, the publication with its proliferation of maps/graphics is a reference work, giving much primary source material (at least in photocopy) but not clearly integrating that material with the text. If the material were to be republished as a reference resource only, perhaps changes could be made to exploit more fully that wealth of primary sources.

Were the book to be reissued for the gen-

eral public to read from beginning to end, other editorial changes could be made to render the study more reader-friendly: changes in layout, and integration of maps/graphics, including perhaps, captions that explain their significance/relevance to the appropriate part of the text. Another revision might be a less passive style. This is essentially a government document, with a style that accommodates that context, a style that may need to be liberated from that context.

Frieda Klippenstein has brought into one volume a richness of descriptive, analytical and visual detail on a topic usually dealt with in academic tomes or in footnotes - the Strassendorf system. No aficionado of Mennonite history will want to be without a copy of this work.

Reviewed by Ernest Braun, Niverville.

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Horst Gerlach, *Nightmare in Red*. Second Edition. (Freeman, South Dakota: Pine Hill Press, Inc., 1995), 270 pages, \$24.99, paperback.

On February 4, 1945, at the age of 15, Horst Gerlach, living in a small German village in East Prussia, watched helplessly as two Soviet officers led his father away. Horst would never see his father again. Several days later Horst himself was forced to leave his homeland and shipped off to Siberia to work in appalling conditions in a Soviet labor camp. *Nightmare in Red* is the story of Gerlach's struggle for survival during the nearly two years that he was held prisoner by the Russians.

Gerlach's account begins as the Russian army is closing in on Germany in early 1945. Quickly the serenity of life on the farm is replaced by indescribable horror and violence. The Gerlachs and their neighbors are forced to house the invading troops, who feast and celebrate and then ransack their homes while the families are locked into the cellar. Gerlach recounts episodes of Russian atrocities; of rape, brutality, and torture at the hands of Russian

soldiers. Several days after Horst's father is taken away, Horst too is forced to say goodbye to his mother and is marched away by the Russians.

What follows is truly a nightmare. Prisoners, dressed only in rags despite freezing temperatures, are herded like cattle into trains. Forced to travel in overcrowded freight cars, they are deprived of food and water and stripped of all human dignity. As the prisoners are lined up to be interrogated and assessed by their captors, Gerlach remarks: "What had happened to the once-so-proud and specially propagated Aryan race?" (p.71).

Forced to endure cruel and inhumane treatment at the hands of his captors, it is little wonder that Gerlach comes to view the Russians as an inferior people. "Our treatment was inexcusable for human beings but justified in the Russian mind.... Such utter disregard by our captors for the dignity of human beings was an attitude I ranked as the worst of crimes. My feelings toward the Russians because of this action were very bitter. I discredited the Russians as a race. Such treatment, I believed, would never be perpetuated by my nation—Germany." (p.101-2).

*Nightmare in Red* helps the reader to understand why so many of our German-speaking WWII survivors would see the Russian communists as depraved and despicable when compared to the Germans; and yet, Gerlach does not wholly exonerate the Nazis. While few Germans in the camp would ever be convinced that there was any redeeming value in the communist philosophy, when the end of the war ultimately brings to light Germany's efforts to exterminate the Jews, many of the prisoners are appalled. "[W]e heard of the atrocities in the German concentration camps. When we heard for the first time how people had been burned alive, hanged, and their gold teeth collected, we were shocked. Although we had not been treated well, the German atrocities were too gruesome to be compared to our lot. These reports sounded unbelievable to many of us; other fellow Germans lost any of their remaining illusions about the righteousness of Nazi methods." (p.114).

Gerlach and his fellow inmates lived day-to-day, without hope, barely surviving. After nearly two years of ever-worsening conditions, moving from camp to camp, farther and farther north, the news that German prisoners are to be released comes just in time. "I said goodbye to another world. I left the Reds. But the nightmares of the days under their control would never leave me." (p.200). They are taken south by train, and finally released into a devastated and divided Germany. Gerlach finds his way to the West, and then in 1951 he comes to the U.S. for an extended visit.

The last 60 pages of the book include an epilogue and an addendum. In the epilogue Gerlach tries to put the German people's acceptance of Hitler and his version of Nationalism into perspective. According to Gerlach, propaganda, mass education, and public pressure led to a nationalistic spirit that soon over-

took all Germans. Even nonresistant Mennonites were carried away by this feeling and many joined the German army.

Gerlach's story helps to shed light on how and why so many of our Mennonite people who survived the war in Europe were grateful to the Germans and slow to criticize them for their complicity in the holocaust of the Jews. For those of us who have been brought up in Mennonite churches where Sunday School and worship services were held in the German language, where the Germans were the "good guys" in the stories our parents and grandparents told about their WWII experiences, where the first time we heard about the holocaust was in school—not at home and not in church, Gerlach's book helps illuminate why our parents thought and felt the way they did.

The final addendum is an attempt to bring us up-to-date on what happened after Gerlach arrived in America. This section seems like an afterthought and is somewhat less successful. Gerlach's recollections and observations seem trite when compared to the first two-thirds of the book. Too often the writing lacks coherence and reads like a poor translation.

Gerlach's *Nightmare in Red* is as gripping and horrific a tale as Elie Wiesel's award-winning account of the Jewish holocaust in *Night*. Both stories are worth telling. They are a reminder to future generations that man is capable of great wickedness.

War is hell.

By sharing his story, Horst Gerlach reminds us that our present peace and prosperity are precious but fragile gifts that we must not take for granted.

Reviewed by Rudy Nikkel, Steinbach, Manitoba.

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Walter Klaassen, *Armageddon and the Peaceable Kingdom* (Waterloo, ON, and Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1999), 298 pages.

As we approached the year 2000 we were inundated by many end of the world predictions, largely from the pens of the premillennial popularizers. In this volume Walter Klaassen offers us an alternative view of the kingdom of God. Now retired, Klaassen is a well-recognized Anabaptist scholar. His perspective arises out of the convictions which have developed over a lifetime and thus represent a personal confession of faith.

*Armageddon and the Peaceable Kingdom* is divided into two sections. Part one examines and critiques the end time ideas from the early church to the present. The author next distinguishes between prophecy and prediction. Chapters three to six analyze and evaluate premillennial dispensationalism. Klaassen's chapters focus on common premillennial themes: the new world order, the rapture, the tribulation, and end time judgments.

In these chapters, the author shows how the dispensationalists have misused Scripture, utilizing a "cut-and-paste" approach to the prophetic passages. In doing so they have produced end time ideas which Klaassen regards

as "Fundamentalist science fiction." He comes down hard on these modern forecasters but he still regards them as Christians.

In part two, beginning with chapter seven, Klaassen presents what he regards as a biblical view of end time events. He does not focus on Daniel and Revelation as do most premillennialists. Rather, he bases his ideas on a balanced view of the New Testament, giving considerable weight to the Gospels and epistles.

Klaassen does not use the words preterist or amillennial. But his ideas are akin to those positions and he links them to Anabaptist teachings. The kingdom of God began with Christ's first coming, not with a future millennium. The kingdom is not a literal physical kingdom but a spiritual one which people can now enter. Christ's rule is here and now and it concerns peace and justice, not power and materialism. The book of Revelation does not address future events, especially those in our day. Rather Revelation speaks to developments in the first century.

Klaassen must be commended for this book.

He provides an antidote to the widely popular premillennial eschatological position. He rightly castigates the forecasters who are making wild and irresponsible predictions regarding the end of the world. Moreover, he correctly labels the end time scenarios as set forth by many dispensationalists as "Fundamentalist fiction."

Still, I have several questions/objections. In his brief survey of Christian eschatology, Klaassen fails to mention the Millerites—perhaps the most famous millennial movement in American history. Also, in criticizing premillennialism, the author seems to focus on the views of Peter Lalonde. Admittedly, dispensationalists espouse similar views. But why does he put the spotlight on a lesser known figure?

Yet more problematic, Klaassen lumps all premillennialists together.

To be sure, the premillennial dispensationalists are the driving force behind the current end time mania. But not all premillennialists are dispensationalists. Not all defer the kingdom of God. Some see it as both a present and future reality. There are also premillennialists who do not engage in irresponsible end time speculations.

Having said this, *Armageddon and the Peaceable Kingdom* provides a valuable service to the kingdom of God as we enter the year 2000. It brings some sanity to an increasingly irrational situation. Hopefully, it will be widely read in Mennonite circles.

Reviewed by Richard Kyle, Professor of History and Religion, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas. This review was first published in *DIRECTION* 29:1 (Spring 2000), pages 76-78. Reprinted with permission.

Norman Unrau *Those were the Days!* (Prince George, B. C., 1994), spiral bound with 93 8 1/2 by 11 pages.

This slim volume of memories will be of considerable interest to those who wish to document the education in the early District schools of the East Reserve, and to those who grew up in the Lister West School District in particular. Norman Unrau of Prince George, B.C., has published privately a series of vignettes of his childhood as the son of a school teacher/farmer father.

The book begins with an introduction, a title page and then plunges into narration. The story begins in the early 1930's in various schools on the West Reserve, but really picks up in 1936, when the Peter J. Unrau family moved to a scrub farm south of Grunthal and east of St. Malo. From this point the narration slows to include all facets of life in the Depression. The story continues through Unrau's school days up to and including the Second World War, closing with a tribute to some of the service men he knew from the area. A strength of the book is the sheer number of names, which enable the historian to reconstruct an entire neighbourhood.

This is a book of reminiscence, chronicling the life of a young boy growing up under circumstances typical for those who lived on a quarter section of land producing mainly stones and scrub poplar. Unrau personalizes the subsistence farming culture that characterized the region, giving names to the inhabitants, and character to their lifestyle. The book is also in a way an indirect character study of Unrau's teacher father, who was a pioneer in a time when pioneering was finished in most parts of the East Reserve. The closeness to nature and its encroachments on the life of the family form a large part of the specific memories that Unrau relates, memories that range from domestic rituals to youthful capers involving school, work and hunting, as well as many family related incidents.

The tone of the book is never sentimental, or even overtly nostalgic. It is light hearted and mellow, with a conversational flair and often with the confessional air of a man who once was a boy.

The book is enhanced by many photographs with captions, several photocopies of school registers and a map of the Lister West district. Most of the pictures are of people from the neighbourhood.

A later 1998 revised edition of the book has also been published, an edition somewhat more carefully organized, with many subheadings and a smaller format, but without the photographs provided in the earlier one. Copies may still be available from Norman Unrau, 283 Boyd St. Prince George, B.C. V2M 4X1.

This is the kind of book every son wishes his father had left behind, offering the voice and the gentle chagrin at times that make authority figures so much more human.

Reviewed by Ernest Braun (born in the Lister West district).

John Dyck, *A Foundation Like No Other: Mennonite Foundation of Canada* (Winnipeg, 1999), 173 pages. Order from Mennonite Foundation of Canada, Unit 12, 1325 Markham Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 4J6. \$15.00

This book written by John Dyck, Winnipeg, contains the story of the first twenty five years, 1973-1998, of Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC). It is a hard cover book of 176 pages.

The author emphasizes MFC's desire to help us as Christians to be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. The first chapter, a meditation, is written by David Schroeder a former professor at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. Schroeder suggests that we have received above and beyond what we have earned. God expects us to be good stewards. Then he writes, "Stewardship applies to all of life. It applies not only to time and money, but to everything that we do. ... There is no secular aspect to our lives in which we can do as we please. All of life has become sacred in Christ and, therefore, all of life is a sacred trust. All of life is stewardship."

Leaders in a number of Mennonite Conferences realized this especially since our church members became progressively wealthy and therefore had money to invest. One forerunner of MFC, Mennonite Mutual Foundation, summarized its purposes as follows: "The Foundation serves the church by offering specialized assistance in matters relating to the stewardship of accumulated possessions. It encourages capital gifts and bequests. It provides effective management of gifted property together with a convenient channel for distribution to any part of the total work of the brotherhood."

With the hopes of achieving these goals, representatives of four Mennonite Conferences met on Mar. 9-10, 1973 to organize MFC. These Conferences were, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Mennonite Conference of Ontario, Western Ontario Mennonite Conference, and Northwest Mennonite Conference. By 1988 two additional Conferences had joined namely the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference.

The first half of the 25 years of MFC's existence was a struggle. Committee members spent many hours trying to decide how to help the few staff persons to work effectively and how to inform the individual church members of the help MFC can give, as to how to invest money so that it can support charitable causes. MFC also helps to make plans for future use of these investments, like the making of wills, or charitable bequests, etc.

MFC now manages 40 million dollars. By the end of the first quarter century 12.9 million has been channelled to participating conferences, schools, churches, MCC, senior citizen homes and a variety of other causes.

It is important to note that our government has given credibility to our organization. The MFC Retirement Fund was approved by Revenue Canada and became a reality in 1992. Registered with Investors Group Trust, this fund was designed to offer the community a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP)

and a Registered Retirement Income Fund (RRIF). Persons associated with any of MFC's participating conferences are now able to put their retirement funds to work in a church-related context while earning competitive interest rates. These monies were available for investment in first mortgages to churches and church related agencies of participating conferences as well as for first mortgages on family homes of pastors.

For your own benefit you should read "A Foundation Like No Other". The 176 pages of this book indicate how hard the representatives worked to make this a real Inter-Mennonite project. Dyck carefully reports how hard board members worked to keep this ship afloat. At times it seemed as though they would not succeed. I believe the united efforts of six Conferences was one reason for their success. God has blessed the efforts of the organizers and the staff members. You can only get the real impact of the importance of MFC if you read the book.

I appreciate the fact that six Mennonite Conferences are unitedly working together in the area of stewardship. We have seen how God has blessed us if we work together supporting Mennonite Central Committee. Separately we could have never achieved what God has allowed us to do together. MFC is another example of how God blesses us if we work together.

I appreciate the goal of MFC: to help people joyfully accept God's grace in Jesus and to become empowered to practice generous, grace-filled, first-fruits living, and in this living to give glory to God, the giver of all.

John Dyck carefully researched the development of MFC and wrote most of the book. Larry Kehler helped to assemble the last minute details because John struggled with an incurable cancer. He died on June 22, 1999, just weeks before the manuscript was delivered to Friesen Printers.

May God bless your reading of "A Foundation Like No Other."

Reviewed by J.K. Klassen, Winkler, Manitoba.

Horst Gerlag, *Hutterer in Westpreuszen Ein Bruderhof in Wengeln am Drausensee* (Herausgegeben von der Landsmannschaft Westpreuszen, Münster/Westfalen, 1999), 20 pages, Sonderdruck (special off-print from the der Westpreuszen-Jahrbuch, Bd. 49, 1999).

As already indicated in the publishing details, this modest looking booklet of 20 pages in an off-print of an article by German-Men-

#### Attention Readers:

Are you interested in reading more about the Hutterites and their Gospel-conformed lifestyle?

Coming in the next issue, "Hutterite Education in Manitoba," by Art Rempel, Steinbach, Manitoba, "Hutterian Education Liaison Officer", Department of Education, Province of Manitoba.

nonite historian Horst Gerlag originally published in the Westpreuszen-Jahrbuch, an annual historical journal about West Prussia, home to Mennonites for almost half-a-millennium. Although modest looking, the booklet packs an amazing amount of material, made possible by a small print.

The title "Hutterites in West Prussia", is a misnomer as the work sketches in brief that entire Hutterite story from its beginnings in Reformation times.

One learns many interesting details of the early Hutterian period.

The first Bruderhof was founded in the area of Begenitz in 1529. At its peak in the 16th century (usually referred to as its golden years), the Hutterian movement counted as many as 70,000 adherents with some 100 Bruderhofs, concentrated in but not restricted to Moravia.

Sixteen century Hutterite schools were renowned for their excellence. Hutterites are credited for starting the first Kindergarten schools.

Hutterite Vorsteher Peter Sermond was sent to America and later visited Newfoundland. In 1608 he was dispatched to Genoa and Lisbon.

By 1595 severe persecution had beset the Hutterites. The wealthy Bruderhofs became frequent targets for marauding armies and various states endeavoured to wipe out sectarians.

As a result inquiries were made regarding possible places of refuge including in West Prussia.

In 1604 seven Hutterite families with eight teams of horses journeyed to the Vistula delta where they established a Bruderhof in Wengeln, on the east side of the Mennonite triangle--Elbing, Marienburg, and Danzig.

Problems soon arose. The Hutterites were skilled artisans, renown for their fine ceramics. This resulted in opposition from the Guilds in Danzig, fearful for their trade. A hearing was held October 7, 1604, where Joseph Hauser and Darius Hein spoke for the Hutterites. Ably they defended Hutterian teachings and practices, the record of which forms a vivid profile of Christian community in action.

The outbreak of the Thirty Years War (1616-46) and the persecution which followed, heralded the decline of the Hutterian movement.

Gerlag surveys briefly the unfolding story of the Hutterites, how a remnant relocated to Wischinka, north of Kyiv, and finally the move to the Molotschna region in south Russia (today Ukraine), where they settled close to the Mennonites.

In 1874 they came to North Dakota and in 1917 to Manitoba.

Horst Gerlag has done an interesting job of presenting much well documented information as well as some new material in a small booklet.

This is a book which I would recommend to German-speaking Russian-Mennonites in Latin America and more recently in Germany. It is also a book which many Russian Mennonites living amongst or near today's modern Hutterite Colonies in Western Canada could read with considerable benefit.

The author has recently produced an English edition of his *Nightmare in Red*. Perhaps he will consider the same for *Hutterer in Westpreuszen*.

Presumably the book can be ordered from the author Dr. Horst Gerlag, D-67295, Weierhof, Post Bolanden, Germany, telephone (06352)5494.

Reviewed by the editor.

Ted D. Regehr, *Peace, Order & Good Government: Mennonites & Politics in Canada* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2000), 130 pages. \$10.00.

There is a children's fable in which the North Wind and the Sun have a contest to see who is able to have a traveler remove his cloak as he journeyed along an open road. All the bluster the North Wind could command only resulted in the traveler pulling his cloak tighter around himself.

However, after only a short time in the

warmth of the Sun, the traveler willingly removed his cloak. Dr. Regehr's informative series of lectures published under the title: *Peace, Order & Good Government: Mennonites & Politics in Canada*, brings this simple allegory to mind.

The Mennonites have reacted in a similar fashion to secular authorities over the course of their journeys. They have obstinately opposed government efforts to compel compliance or participation in activities that contravened core beliefs in respect of education, non-violence or even participation in some social programs. On the other hand, they have willingly participated in activities of government and the broader secular community when those core beliefs have been respected and protected.

In his book, Dr. Regehr explores the relationship of Mennonites with secular political authorities in Canada. Although Dr. Regehr is a distinguished professor and historical scholar whose main area of specialization is Western Canadian history, his study of this relationship

John Warkentin's 1960 doctoral thesis *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba* has now been published by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society. This work is written from the perspective of an environmental geographer. It covers in particular the agricultural, commercial evolution of the East and West Reserves and should be read as a companion to *In Search of Utopia* by Dr. E. K. Francis.

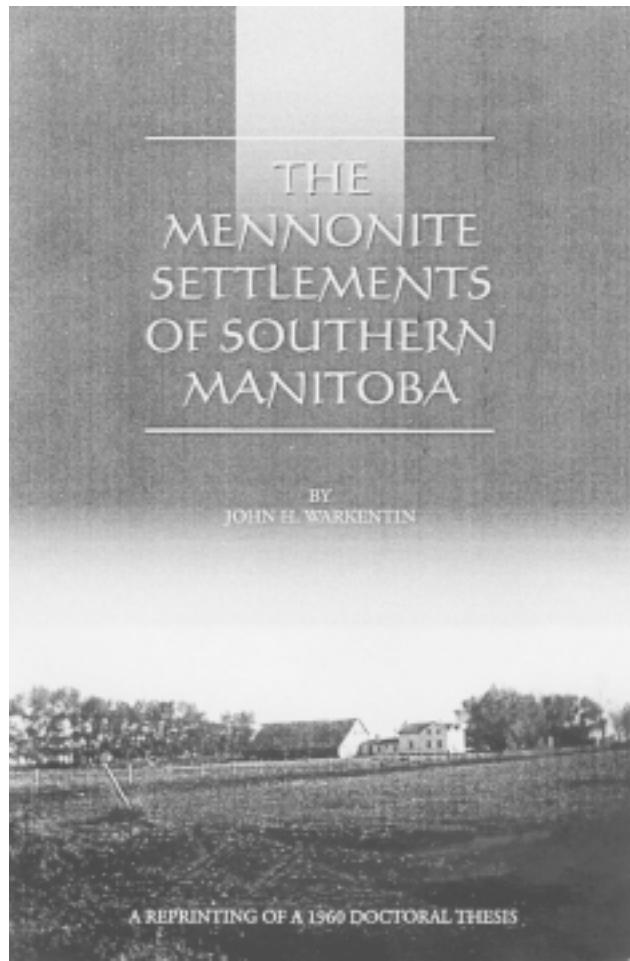
Warkentin has been widely acclaimed as one of Canada's leading academics in the field.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society board of directors is proud to publish this book as its special 125th anniversary gift to the Mennonite communities of Manitoba and their descendants across North and South America.

This book has been specially edited for the HSHS by Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, Manitoba's leading rural social historian.

Of particular interest to readers will be the numerous photographs which Dr. Warkentin took as he conducted his field research in the 1950s interviewing old-timers many of them still born in Imperial Russia to document the incredible cultural richness of the Mennonite people.

Available from the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, Box 1920, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, for \$20.00 plus \$3.00 postage and handling. Twenty (20) per cent discount for cash orders for five or more copies.



Cover of John Warkentin's *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*. Available in June, 2000.

does not purport to be a comprehensive or scientific examination of Mennonite political participation in Canada. Instead, by relying on a variety of sources including personal interviews and newspaper articles, he reviews in a clear, concise fashion the challenges that the Mennonites in Canada faced in following the biblical obligation to support, obey and respect governments in all matters not contrary to their religious convictions.

The primary method the Mennonites used in maintaining their allegiance to both secular authorities and the Kingdom of God involved the practice of what the author calls "the politics of patronage". Although this term has pejorative connotations in a modern political context, in this context it simply refers to the negotiation of special religious and other concessions from a secular authority in return for economic services and exemplary citizenship.

This approach to dealing with secular authorities worked reasonably well when dealing with autocratic rulers like Fredrick the Great of Prussia or Catharine the Great of Russia who each in their turn promised and granted generous privileges to the Mennonites. This reliance on bargaining with patrons for concessions continued with the Mennonite migration to North America. In the New World, pacifist groups found willing patrons in men like William Penn, or in Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe of Upper Canada who promised American Mennonites religious privileges when revolutionary patriots threatened the practice of their beliefs.

The Ontario Mennonites were able to gain significant concessions and privileges through this approach to the art of politics. The reliance on political patrons enabled them to settle a number of serious disputes over the ownership of the land that they had settled on and assisted them in maintaining their military exemptions during the War of 1812.

Gradually this ability to fashion practical solutions to difficult problems extended from negotiating with political leaders to a greater involvement with secular and other religious groups in order to achieve specific political goals. For example, a significant alliance between Mennonites and other Protestant groups developed in opposition to the attempt by Anglican leaders to establish their church as the Church of Canada. This struggle over "state religion" merged with the struggle for control of the education system in Upper Canada. By working together with these other groups the Mennonites were able to preserve their control over education in the major Mennonite communities. However, in religiously and ethnically diverse communities they agreed to participate with other Protestants in the development of a shared Christian educational system.

As the political system in Upper Canada permitted local towns and villages to establish their own local governments, Mennonites increased their direct involvement in political affairs out of the practical necessity of developing local services such as roads and fighting

fires. However, as a great variety of agricultural, legal and financial problems required coordinated action beyond the local level, it was not surprising that those involved in local government and concerned about problems beyond their jurisdiction sought election to the provincial Legislature or the federal Parliament

This practical application of the art of politics continued with the settlement of the Mennonites in the western Canadian provinces. Initially most of these Mennonites supported the Liberal Party because of its favourable immigration policies. Many later supported the Conservative and Social Credit parties when these parties were seen as being more supportive or representative of their values.

Mennonite support for parties advocating socialist principles was considerably dampened by the experiences they suffered at the hands of Soviet communism, but this did not prevent substantial numbers of them from supporting the democratic socialism of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and later the New Democratic Party. In general, however, Dr. Regehr concludes that the Mennonites "appreciate and vote for honest, pragmatic, relatively scandal-free governments which are respectful of their social and religious values and ideals."

While the original intent of the lectures was to focus on how the Church and Christian faith influenced the two different Western Canadian political movements represented by Social Credit and the CCF, Dr. Regehr decided to include ethnic as well as religious Mennonites active in all parties and levels of elected government. This more general approach came with the realization that when it comes to political involvement, Mennonites are "all over the map", difficult to define as Mennonites and inconsistent in their reference to theology and history when justifying or criticizing participation in political affairs.

Despite the difficulty in identifying the base of information from which to draw conclusions, Dr. Regehr has made a number of observations that have provided considerable insight into a seemingly confusing relationship. He finds that Mennonite involvement in political affairs is based on a pragmatic application of "peace order and good government" rather than a radical application of the teachings of Jesus that many earlier Anabaptists had advocated. He argues that this pragmatic approach does not constitute an abandonment of a primary loyalty to Christian principles but rather a practical recognition that secular governments cannot operate on an identical basis as the Kingdom of God. When the God ordained role of secular governments conflicts with Christian principles the demands of the secular authority can be disregarded.

Dr. Regehr skillfully traces the political participation of Mennonites in Canada, and concludes that despite the difficulties of constituency relations, party discipline and cabinet solidarity, there is evidence of "much hard work and sincere efforts to make the entire political and economic system of Canada work better

and more equitably".

While he modestly describes his efforts as an attempt to describe "some of the experiences, concerns, successes and failures of some Canadian politicians who have important Mennonite religious, ethnic and cultural links", in fact his work provides an important resource for other social scientists who may decide to pursue this important subject. Furthermore it provides practical examples and insight for those laypersons who wish to understand how the religious principles of God's Kingdom can be applied in the context of a modern secular state, rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is His.

Reviewed by Vic Toews, Winnipeg, Manitoba [Editor's Note: Vic Toews is the former Minister of Justice, Province of Manitoba].

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Gerhard Lohrenz, *Sagradowka: A History of Mennonite Settlement in Southern Russia* (C.M.B.C. Publications and Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Winnipeg, 2000), 112 pages [Trans. by Victor G. Doerksen, from the German original published as part of the Echo Verlag Series, 1947, Rosthern, Sask.].

Gerhard Lohrenz's book *Sagradowka* is a valuable book, and is of more than purely historical interest. With its short introductory history and detailed reports of the difficulties of pioneering and the continuing lot of the Mennonites of Sagradowka until the middle of the 20th century, it is a fascinating collection about Sagradowka that is not only full of significance for pleasure reading, but also for researching.

Lohrenz was knowledgeable about the Russian Mennonite phenomenon, and had gathered information about his homeland Sagradowka for years. He was able to handle the materials available to him and present the history of Sagradowka for the reader in a very accessible manner, and indeed, the reader does not find it difficult to keep in view the who, when, to whom, and for what reasons.

The story of Sagradowka is in the first place a historical depiction that relies on stories, reports, and data. It is developed in two parts: (1) The burgeoning life until the first World War, 1914 ("die gute Zeit" [the good era]); (2) The ruin of the settlement, that began one day in July 1914, when peace was taken from the quiet villages.

Lohrenz describes the distinct parts of Mennonite settlement life: self-government, church life and agricultural life, schools, etc.

The settlement was established in 1871 by landless people from the Molotschna colony. The *gepachtete* land was divided into 17 villages.

The better part of the first settlers were very poor. Many of them had to earn their food as labourers in Russian villages. They struggled for their existence, which was not an easy one. The name "Sagradowka" was a synonym for poverty and neediness among the Molotschna Mennonites for a while. Still, there were some

successful beginnings in agriculture and settlement life. God allowed these people to succeed because they were God-fearing, hardworking, and frugal.

Because of their great poverty, the settlers understood immediately what the value of a better education would be. Right in the first winter classes were held, although there were no trained teachers present. Still, the picture changed in no time. In 1878-79 teachers who had diplomas settled here. By 1890 all the schools had teachers with teaching certificates. A teacher without the appropriate training could no longer find a position in Sagradowka.

The civic life, the government of the Ohrloffer Wolost (which is the name of the settlement), was handled by strong characters like Heinrich Warkentin, Jakob Reimer, Johann Koehn. Out of their poverty, they offered much time and energy. They were God-fearing men, who stood for justice and righteousness. They knew world history and church history and were able to make decisions and judgements based on their knowledge.

The spiritual life was much alive in Sagradowka, even if the Christians, following several un-Christ-like cases, needed to learn to pray again. Most of the settlers fell under the direction of the *kirchliche*, which opened its assembly place in Nikolajfeld in 1891.

Only three families amongst the initial settlers belonged to the Mennonite Brethren church. This church was a branch of the Gemeinde Friedensfeld for a long time. By 1888 the Brethren church in Tiege had built a place of worship.

“...Noteworthy about this period was that initially in this settlement, the relationship between the leaders of both communities was so friendly and the official interaction between them was arranged so sensibly, like perhaps nowhere else at the time...” P. M. Friesen.

And then there was also the Ohrloffer Evangelical Mennonite church. It originated in 1907, with 27 families. The life of the Gemeinde and the cooperative work of these three churches was significantly different from other settlements. The “hohe Zaun” [high fence] that stood between the Gemeinden of other colonies, was broken down here from the beginning. The Gemeinden had “Waechter auf Zions Mauern” [watchkeepers on the walls of Zion].

Quote: “...Among the Mennonites of Russia, from whom there was seldom anyone who would venture into the city, the birth rate was almost as high as biological laws will allow it to be. It has been calculated that on account of this, the Mennonite population doubled every 25 years. Few peoples on the earth can record such an increase...” Sagradowka was no exception to this rule. More land was bought or *gepachtet* in order to ensure the descendants of their existence.

An especially sorrow-filled chapter, that may be picked out from the entire contents of the book, is the relationship between Sagradowka and the mother colony, Molotschna. That relationship was not without friction (according to Lohrenz). The *Pacht*

document was one of the objects that led to misunderstandings. When it came down to the final determination, the mother colony demanded obligations that were unfair for Sagradowka. On top of that matter, the mother colony did not take any precautions in the area of spiritual mentoring (preachers, etc.). There was not a single preacher among the first settlers. On the issue of teaching staff there were also no efforts made on the side of the mother colony. The first teachers were shoemakers, tailors, and even wanderers.

The Mennonites at Sagradowka were not offered any help, not even the mother colony felt obligated to concern itself with its young settlers. They were forced to make their own life for themselves, in contrast to the Ansiedler of the mother colony. "...Thus the Mennonites acted in the “guten Zeiten” [good days], after which people often yearn..."

Lohrenz has also presented the life of the Sagradowka people after the first World War, in a very clearly arranged form and accurate retelling of events by means of stories of personal experiences. Suddenly one day, the situation of Germans in Russia changed. An instigation against them began. What would now happen to the Mennonites?

One government thrusts aside another, life becomes increasingly uncertain, bands of murderers tear through the villages...One gains a very clear picture of the happenings and yet has the impression at moments that the author knew much more than he wrote down on paper. Why could a loving God allow so many innocent people to lose their lives, as Mennonites were known as the “Stille im Lande” [quiet in the land]?

The agricultural destruction that had been planned for in the new system of decimation, as well as the spiritual degeneration of the Christians are presented, briefly stated, in a manner that is easy to follow.

Because of the inhuman persecution, years of hunger, the enforcement of the new communist regime, displacement, murder, many Christians let themselves slide. But the Word of God was still carried forth, even when it was done on foot, to the sick and the dying. There are names and deeds mentioned that ought to be a good example for us. Many were silent...

Sagradowka was sacrificed to an evil time.

Sometimes we are lacking an account of the “shadow” sides of the truth.[?]

A list of the citizens of Sagradowka who were murdered by Machno in 1919 concludes the book.

Reviewed by Adina Reger, 56575 Weiszenthurm, Germany [Trans. by Julia Zacharias, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Adina Reger, is a German writer who was born in Siberia. She has roots in the Sagradovka settlement.].

George and Dorothy Unger, *et.al.*, editors, *The Family of 3.8 Jacob Stoesz & Anna Wiebe 1834-1996* (1512-6 Kentfield Way, Goshen, Ind., 1999), 209 pages.

The book, *The Family of 3.8 Jacob Stoesz & Anna Wiebe 1834-1996*, is the third Stoesz Genealogy book that has been published. There were seven Stoesz siblings who grew up in the Bergthal Colony, Russia, and decided to emigrate to Canada and the USA. (The eighth sibling, Peter, stayed in Russia).

It was the vision of the late A.D. Stoesz of Mountain Lake, Minnesota that all the Stoesz lines remain as a family and he worked at keeping the lines of communications open and hoped to publish a comprehensive study on all the Stoesz families. However he realised that this was a bigger task than he had time for and published a smaller work focusing on the Johann Stoesz line in 1972.

While A. D. Stoesz has passed on, his vision has not been lost. Other Stoesz descendants have caught the vision and have worked at keeping the families connected. People from both sides of the river published the second Stoesz book in 1987, entitled *Our Stoesz Heritage: 1836-1987*. It focused on Minister Cornelius Stoesz’ line who settled in Blumstein, East Reserve. This third book focuses on Cornelius’ brother Jacob and his wife Anna Wiebe.

This 209-page book carries on A.D. Stoesz’s vision, but the editor also states that “our immediate hope is that this book will encourage families to tell and also write down their own and their family experiences for their children and grandchildren...If we do not understand our past, we are prone to repeat the mistakes of the earlier generations, and be less likely to continue in the wiser ways.”

As one wise man once said, if we deny our own history, we deny God whose hand can be seen in it.

The book begins with a brief summary of the Anabaptist story and the early Stoesz story, found in a more complete form in the earlier books. It then traces the story of Jacob and Anna Stoesz and their six adult children as they moved from the East Reserve to the West Reserve, and others down to South America. There is a mix of story, vital statistics and photocopied photos. It also contains some unique reports or research such as a report on the burial practises among the Mennonites in Paraguay, as the Paraguayan Stoesz’ experienced them.

The numbering system used in the second Stoesz book was incorporated into this book, which makes the links between the families easier to navigate. A unique aspect of the book is the indexing of it. No master index appears, but after each main family (children of Jacob and Anna Stoesz) an index can be found. As with almost any book with such detailed genealogies, inaccuracies are bound to occur. This book has its share of them, however the writers have made attempts at corrections where needed.

The story of Jacob Stoesz and his siblings plays an important part in the life of the fledg-

ling church in Manitoba. Brother Cornelius was a minister and brother David was Aeltester after Gerhard Wiebe resigned his post. Jacob Stoesz was the first Brandtaeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde. These three brothers, and the connections they had through their wives, was unique. This story still needs to be flushed out, as this publication does not add to this story.

This book is a welcomed addition to the Stoesz story here in Manitoba and in South America. It provides the basic genealogical information and some story information, but leaves room for more research. Hopefully it encourages other to continue the interest in our family history and how God has worked in it.

Reviewed by Conrad Stoesz,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Delbert F. Plett, *Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and North America* (Steinbach: Crossway Publications, 2000), 767 pages. \$40.

Delbert Plett, who has dedicated a large part of his life to reclaiming the past of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites, has at last completed this Herculean task.

*Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde* is the seventh volume of Plett's Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series. It details 20 family histories, proceeding alphabetically from Baerg through to Wiebe (See endnote). Some of these histories, such as that of the Cornelius Toews or Abraham von Riesen families, were told in shorter form in *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874* and are now greatly amplified and enhanced. Others, such as those of the Baerg, Bartel, Doerksen, Isaac and Neufeld families, are new. In these latter families only one or perhaps several branches were KG related.

Relatedness is Plett's essential point. As one of thousands of descendants of these KG "dynasties," I have a continuing sense of appreciation for what Plett has done. Since he began what was then his rather lonely work in 1978, many others have joined him in telling these and other family stories. Yet his contribution is singular. He is the teller of the Kleine Gemeinde story; all others who have added or will yet add to the tale must acknowledge their indebtedness to him.

Before Plett came along, the Kleine Gemeinde story was neglected or derisively dismissed by Mennonite historians. He has done his utmost to ensure that this error cannot be perpetuated.

From the beginning, Plett chose to emphasize family stories. In doing so, he took hold of a quintessentially Mennonite obsession: to figure out who is related to whom. That is what *Dynasties* is about. By taking this approach, Plett is able to illustrate that the historical Kleine Gemeinde, rather than languishing somewhere on the margins of the larger Mennonite picture, actually is at the centre. The Kleine Gemeinde kinship network, reach-

documents his sources, so it is a simple matter for the reader to go and find more information if wanted.

At the same time he is at great pains to point out who is related to whom, and the many criss-crossing connections within and between clans. He also offers the reader links to the present day. In the Peter Enns chapter, for example, we find that one of the Enns daughters married a Thiessen, and one of the Thiessen daughters married a Barkman, whose daughter married a Reimer, whose son was John C. Reimer (co-founder of the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum), whose niece Dolores Giesbrecht married Helmut Pankratz, a well-known Steinbacher today.

Like the writer of Deuteronomy, Plett relies on the paternal line to identify family descendants, but as the above example shows, he can also wind in and out of paternal and maternal lines.

Much information is provided through charts showing family lineage, with birth, marriage and death dates where available. Plett relies on various censuses, ship records, school and church records, journals, letters, gleanings from the *Mennonitsche Rundschau* provided by fellow historian Henry N. Fast and a range of family and other history books, to augment the genealogical details. He provides information on immigration, occupation and economic status for each family.

Plett also selects details about people's lives, mundane or esoteric. The reader might wonder: how important is it to know that, "in 1864, A. Block made a loan to Cornelius Loewen"? Or that in 1899 David Koop reported that "he visited in Manitoba and uncle Johann Esau who has three holes in his legs"? And yet, to the family historian, just such details invite further questions about the economic status or kinship or friendship of A. Block and Cornelius Loewen; or whether Johann Esau's difficulties were brought on through accident or disease.

Sometimes these details fall into place with other information that has been collected, allowing the researcher to come up with at least a sketchy portrait of an ancestor, where previously there was only a blank.

Plett is well known for his war of words against the "Separatist-Pietist" movement, which introduced end-of-the-world and personal salvation anxieties into traditional Mennonite communitarian ways of life in Imperial Russia or perhaps already in Prussia. He has conducted this war quite vigorously in some

## East Reserve Reflections



Karen Peters and Hildegard Toews, editors, *East Reserve Reflections: Celebrating Our Heritage 1874 1999 125 Years* (East Reserve 125 Steering Committee, Box 1720, Steinbach, 2000), 74 pages.

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For a review of *East Reserve Reflections*, see Doris Penner, *Carillon News*, May 15, 2000.

ing across centuries and continents, is in some sense a symbol of what it means to be a Mennonite.

Plett does not try to be exhaustive in the telling of the 20 individual family histories. Instead, he selects revealing bits of information or telling anecdotes and records these. In some cases, the fuller story of a particular family may be found elsewhere. Plett conscientiously

least a sketchy portrait of an ancestor, where previously there was only a blank.

of his other books as well as in the pages of *Preservings*. Nor does he disappoint in *Dynasties*.

A striking example can be found in a footnote at the end of the Bartel chapter. According to “oral tradition” Heinrich Bartel (1834-67) “was induced by religious jingoism to join the infant Bruedergemeinde and the resulting emotional turmoil led to his [suicide].” That might be too heavy a load to put on the religious jingoists, whoever they were, but the statement clearly illustrates Plett’s passionate belief that the Separatist-Pietists betrayed a more authentic and genuine spirituality typified by the early Kleine Gemeinde.

Easily the most substantial chapter in *Dynasties* is the 18th, consisting of 156 pages devoted to the Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) clan. The space is warranted, as many of the spiritual and secular leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde in the 19<sup>th</sup> century came from this remarkable family. The von Riesen family embodies and exemplifies the book’s theme of extensive family relatedness. Six of the von Riesen children were formally associated with the KG. Of their 56 grandchildren, 12 married each other, and 37 of 176 great-grandchildren inter-married. Today, many young people in Steinbach, Manitoba; Meade, Kansas or Spanish Lookout, Belize are descended from Abraham von Riesen and Margaretha Wiebe eight times and more.

Many of us derive a great sense of satisfaction from knowing about our ancestral family connections. Indeed, we are coming to understand that our very individual identities, which we had mistaken as unique, derive from these connections. Our common heritage is both biological and cultural, ethnic and religious. For generations, our families worked and lived together, inter-married, entered into business partnerships, fought with each other, attended each others’ celebrations of birth and ceremonies of death.

The game we still play, then, of finding out how we are related and to whom, may be our way of connecting to the time when these kinship networks formed the fabric of a whole cloth that was truly a distinct people. The pressures of globalization became irresistible for the KG (and a host of other distinct groups) during the 20th century. As we move into a future in which trans-national corporations and Hollywood combine to flatten out distinctiveness even more, we know that the astonishing phenomenon of inter-relatedness will end, is ending.

The KG kinship network no longer has the meaning for everyday life that it held for so many years—not in North America, anyway. We are past all that today, perhaps. Both the culture and the faith itself have metamorphosed into forms that our ancestors would not recognize.

It is a loss: we miss the values and identity and security provided by the group. Yet we still have the opportunity to tell and re-tell our family stories and in so doing make new connections with our parents, and their parents,

and so on. Each individual can make of these connections what he or she will. My version of the family story will not be the same as my brother’s—in that sense, we have two different families. But at least we have a family, and we can find threads, themes and traits, that extend back in time and space through vast distances. We are not so individual, and not so alone, as we may have imagined ourselves to be.

**Reviewed by Ralph Friesen, Winnipeg**

Endnote: The families are: Jakob Baerg (1775-1845), Prangenau; Johann Bartel (1764-1813),

Kronsgarten; Gerhard Doerksen (1767-1837), Fischau; Cornelius Eidse (b. 1770), Fischau; Cornelius Enns (1743-1806), Fischau; Peter Enns (1791-1857), Neukirch; Cornelius Fast, Friedenshof; Isaac Harder, Muntau; Philip Isaac (1694-1753); Johann Janzen, Reinland; David Klassen (1700-1780); Koop families on the Molotschna; Peter Neufeld (1697-1769); Peter Regehr (1740-1811); Bernhard Rempel, Reinland; Claasz Siemens (1758-1834), Rosenort; Cornelius Toews (1737-1800); Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810), Ohrloff; Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), Blumenort; Jakob Wiebe (1754-1829), Schoenau.

# Congratulations, 125th Anniversary

Congratulations to all residents of the West Reserve, Altona Winkler, Manitoba, from the HSHS board of directors: President Orlando Hiebert, Vice-President Ralph Friesen, Treasurer Delbert Plett, directors Royden Loewen, Ben Funk, Ernest Braun, Jake Doerksen, Henry Fast, Hilton Friesen, Ken Rempel and Irene Kroeker.

1999 is the 125th anniversary of the founding of the West Reserve (Altona Winkler) Manitoba, and the establishment of the Reinländer Gemeinde (later the Old Colony Church) under Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905).

Best wishes to Altona Winkler and the Old Colony Church as you celebrate your 125th anniversary.