

# Preservings

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“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

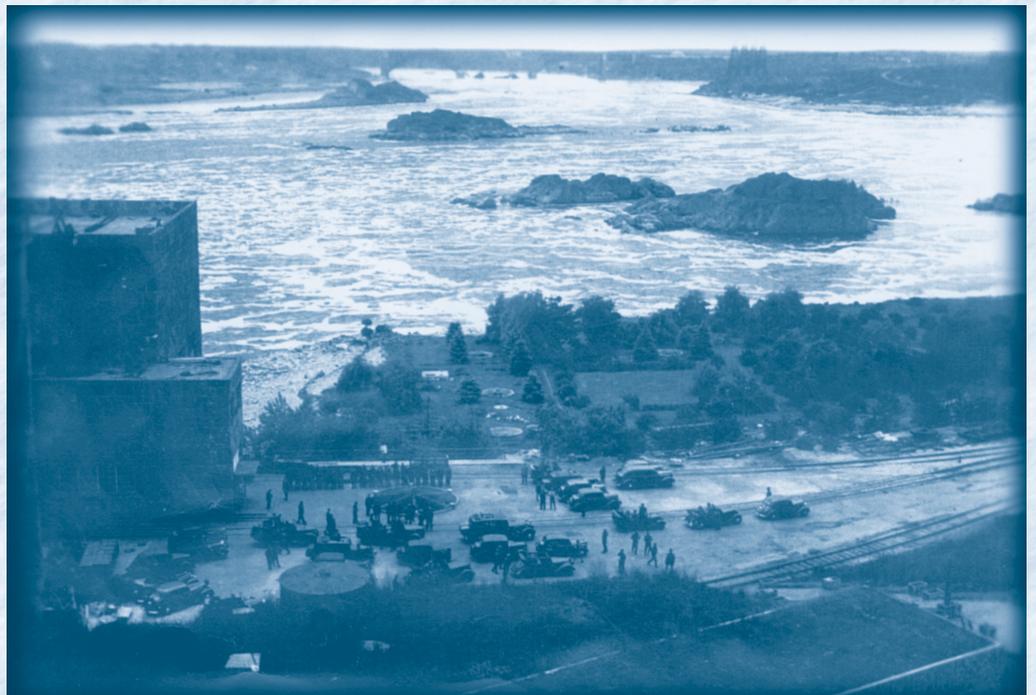
## Chortitza “Old” Colony, 1789

The story of the first settlement of the Flemish Mennonites at the junction of the Chortitza and Dnjepr Rivers in 1789 in Imperial Russia is replete with drama, tension and tragedy. It is no small task to establish a peaceful Christian community in an undeveloped steppe and to create an environment where the pioneers and their descendants could thrive and prosper. Within a century the Chortitza “Old” Colony had become perhaps the most prosperous community in the area north of the Black Sea and its industries were leading the way in the region’s booming economy.

After some initial faltering the Chortitza Flemish Gemeinde was to become the most stable and flourishing of the Mennonites in Russia. It is a precious gift of God to build a large congregation of 4000 and more members out of a population originating from different Gemeinden and various regions in the Vistula Delta in Royal Poland and West Prussia.

God had granted the Flemish pioneers noble and spirit-filled leaders who remained true to their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the face of extreme adversity and even later in the most perilous of times under the Soviets. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit the family and church divisions caused in the Molotschna Colony by Separatist Pietist predators were successfully refuted and the Mennonite Church in the Old Colony was able to build upon the sure and everlasting foundations of Christ’s commandments and to abide in the spirit of His love and reconciliation.

In this issue we feature several articles dealing with the first settlement of Flemish Mennonites in Southern Russia and their subsequent development. The work of historian David G. Rempel, (1899-1982), later of Menlo



*The German Wehrmacht at the entrance to the turbine building of Dnjeprges Hydro-electric dam, June 1941. To the left is the Hydro-electric dam; right, in the rear, the Island of Chortitza with the Mennonite village established in 1789; and middle, the bridge over the “new” Dnjepr (east channel). The road to the right was the main route for those coming from the dam and travelling north to the village of Chortitza. The small island rock formations in the foreground are the “Three Brothers”. Photo courtesy of Maria Rempel, Vatenholzerstr. 13, 326889 Kalletal-Varenholz, Germany, daughter of Einlage school teacher Johann Rempel. (A 1997 photograph from a similar point is published in Diese Steine, page 60.) The picturesque scenery in the area surrounding the confluence of the Dnjepr and Chortitza Rivers included its steep rocky cliffs, sand beaches, islands, ports, ferrys, bridges, and after 1932, the hydroelectric dam, “Dnjeprges”. These were important features of the daily landscape and life-world of the Old Colony Mennonites.*

Park, California, was important in laying the groundwork for a history of the first settlement at Chortitza in 1789 and subsequent events. We are proud to feature his article “From Danzig to Russia: The First Mennonite Migration,” reprinted from *Mennonite Life*, January 1969, pages 8-28. Enjoy.

The Editor.

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# Introduction - Feature story "Chortitza Settlement, 1789"

The most important chapter--and probably, the most controversial--in Russian Mennonite history is the settlement of the Chortitza Colony on the Dnjepr River at Alexandrowsk in 1789 and the role played by delegate Jakob Hoepfner (1748-1826). In 1786 he and co-delegate Johann Bartsch (1757-1821) travelled to Imperial Russia, inspecting lands for settlement and negotiating a highly advantageous *Privilegium* for their people.

As is so often the case with important personalities in history, their historical record can be clouded by the ideological turf wars of later generations, with sectarian historians using one or another interpretation to support particular viewpoints. In the process the significance of their historical legacy is sometimes lost. This was the case, also, with the settlement of the Delta-Flemish Mennonites in "new" Russia. Writers such as D. H. Epp and Heinrich Heese, in the Pro-Czarist school, and P. M. Friesen, Franz Isaak and others in the Molotschna Pietist Triumphant school, have shamelessly used the understandably defensive and selected recollections of Hoepfner's son-in-law Peter Hildebrand to characterize the pioneers of the Chortitza Colony as crude, ungrateful, strife-ridden and impoverished--materially, genetically, intellectually and spiritually, a state from which--in P. M. Friesen's view, the only redemption was the mass conversion of Christo-centric Mennonites to Separatist-Pietist religious culture from Germany, by whatever means necessary. Such corrupted interpretations of our history and theology are still being openly propounded by misinformed sectarians, using them to justify the most uncivilized treatment and bigoted attitudes towards conservative and orthodox Mennonites one could imagine.

These interpretations have recently been countered by the articulation of a pro-Flemish view by Henry Schapansky in his recent study, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia* (New Westminster, 2001), 519 pages (see book review essay, *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 124-129). Schapansky points out that in reality, Hoepfner together with the courageous and long-suffering pioneers in 1789 were highly successful in their colonization of the Chortitza region in Czarist Russia, creating a monument to the ingenuity and perseverance of the Delta-Flemish. The settlers as well as Bartsch and Höppner deserve our highest recognition for what they accomplished.

As Henry Schapansky has pointed out, Hoepfner's suspension from the Gemeinde and the subsequent charges laid by Kontenius, resulted from a clash between two visions of what the Mennonite community on the steppes should be like. Notwithstanding Höppner's close connections and support from among Government administrators and nobles in the region (many of whom were probably as culpable as Höppner), he was found guilty by a Russian court (see Henry Schapansky, *Preservings*, No. 17, pages 126-128). The fact that fellow delegate Johann Bartsch (the more introspective and reflective of the two) admitted his guilt and recanted makes Höppner's claim of complete innocence less plausible. The Flemish Gemeinde's

reacceptance of Bartsch in love and forgiveness refutes the argument it was driven by revenge, as some writers have alleged, demonstrating that the issue need not have ballooned into such a monster.

That having been said, the fact that Hoepfner may have taken some personal benefit from his position should not be allowed to cloud his legacy. Such practices were customary among 18th century leaders in most European countries and certainly in Russia. The humanness of our leaders, in fact, defines the epic proportions of their pioneer struggle. At the same time, it needs to be recognized--much to its credit, that such conduct was not acceptable among the Delta-Flemish.

We present "From Danzig to Russia" by David G. Rempel as the feature article of this issue. The biography of Jakob Höppner demonstrates the significance of his work. We also publish the text of Henry Schapansky's presentation at the HSHS Family History Day, March 9, 2002, entitled "The Old Colony Pioneers and the Höppner Affair." The article on the "Old Colony/Bergthal furniture tradition," by Reinland Kauenhoven Janzen, illuminates the rich culture which the Delta Flemish transplanted to the Black Sea region. Taken together, these articles constitute a significant contribution to the story of founding of the "Old" Chortitza Colony in 1789.

The battle as to what vision should articulate the Mennonite community is still raging--just as heated and intense today as it was 200 years ago. There are those amongst us convinced they must abandon and destroy the Christo-centric faith of the fathers (and matriarchs) and convert themselves to alien religion culture without delay. The exposition of a more balanced and truthful historiography will make it less plausible for such turncoats to use their corrupted version of history as a weapon as they go about their mission of leading astray and deceiving "if it were possible, the very elect" (Matthew 24:24).

The editorial considers the way in which those who promote mass conversion to Evangelical religious culture use language in ways calculated to influence Mennonites negatively about their own faith and spiritual heritage. An article on Holy Baptism and the paper by J. Denny Weaver on American Civil Religion continue the *Preservings* series on faith and theology. A number of interesting articles, letters and book reviews complete the issue.

*Preservings* has now completed 10 years of publication. In some ways, Issue 20 would seem like a good place to quit. However, we soldier onward as each issue gains a life and purpose of its own--for how long we cannot say. Hopefully, in some small way, each issue enriches the lives and challenges the faith of the people for whom it speaks. Enjoy! The Editor.

**Attention Readers:** Readers responses, critical or otherwise, are welcome: see "Letters" section for criteria regarding publication of letters and e-mails. The editor can be contacted at 1(204)326-6454 office, fax 1(204)326-6917, mail Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0. Website - hshs.mb.ca - e-mail delplett@mb.sympatico.ca

## Himmel Bleave.

The first issue of *Preservings*, No. 1, a modest six page effort, under founding editor Wilmer Penner, appeared at the end of 1992, bearing date January 1993. Since then two issues have appeared annually, with the newsletter slowly growing to its present size and scope as a semi-annual journal/magazine, with 140 pages of history, news, book reviews, editorial commentary, etc., a project in Mennonite orthodoxy. The focus has shifted from the Hanover Steinbach area to the story of the Russian Mennonites and its diaspora, a veritable "Mennonite Life" north. Issue No. 20 marks the end of 10 years of publication, not an earthshaking event as anniversaries go, but perhaps, nonetheless, worthy of note.

One of the ways of marking this milestone will be a modest change in the appearance of *Preservings*. A single colour--blue--has been added to the cover, to enhance its presentation. Blue had a special significance for our Flemish Mennonite forebears whose belief in simplicity in life and faith, dictated that their material culture traditions would be plain and functional, but tasteful--namely, function over form. This was manifested, for example, in the Mennonite furniture tradition, which as Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen has so aptly demonstrated, was based on the artforms of the Renaissance.

This principle informed distinct values in aesthetics with a preference for tasteful colours such as black, blue and grey. Black, of course, is not only eternally in fashion as the colour of refinement and good taste, it was also a practical colour for our forebears whose lives were closely bound to the soil and the pastoral life. Blue, and more specifically "himmel bleave" (the blue of the heavens), was considered the "duse" or Godly colour. In the Molotschna this even came to be called "kleingemeinsch bleave", apparently because the Kleine Gemeinde used it to paint their implements, wagons and even their house gables. As late as 1910, P. M. Friesen mocked the "Kleine Gemeinde" for their colour tastes, noting that the strict Agricultural Society had indulged them for "...what seems to us the small-minded religious concerns..." (page 198). Presumably Separatist-Pietists preferred brighter, gaudier colours such as orange, red, and yellow, upon which to base their aesthetical paradigm and with which to paint their houses and farm implements, if they had any.

Conservative and orthodox Mennonites can be proud of their more refined and subdued aesthetics symbolized by the blue "Himmel Bleave" on the cover. The windmill on the masthead replaces the historic photograph of the first ship of Mennonites immigrants arriving at the Forks in Winnipeg, Canada, on August 31, 1874, as an appropriate icon of our faith and culture. Photo credit: Frank Froese.

# Feature Articles

## Feature Article - From Danzig to Russia

“From Danzig to Russia: The First Mennonite Migration,”

by David G. Rempel (1899-1982), Menlo Park, California, reprinted from *Mennonite Life*, January 1969, pages 8-28.

### I Introduction.

The conclusion of peace with Turkey, the seizure in 1775 of the huge land holdings of the Zaporog Cossacks on both banks of the Dnieper (Dnepr) River, roughly from the later city of Ekaterinoslav in the north, to about Nikolopol and Berislav in the south, the exile of these restless and forever plundering freebooters to other regions of the empire, and the annexation in 1783 of the Crimea, added enormous expanses of land between Bessarabia and the Kuban region in the Caucasus to the Russian Empire. Vast stretches of this territory along the northern littoral of the Black and Azov Seas were organized in 1774 into a new administrative division, called New Russia, under the Vice-regency of Potemkin.

New Russia at this time possessed a sparse and motleyed population of Cossacks, run-away serfs, some military colonies, and a considerable number of nomadic tribes of Nogais.

**“New Russia...possessed a sparse and motleyed population...”**

Under the extremely imaginative and energetic leadership of Potemkin the government launched at once an extensive policy of enlisting foreign colonists, an enterprise based, in the main, on a new invitation issued by Catherine on July 14, 1785. In addition, scores of thousands of Russian settlers of varied social composition and economic level, including a goodly number of serfs, were almost at once transplanted by a wide assortment of recipients of huge grants of land.

Added to the above there came various sectarians, notably the Dukhobors, substantial numbers of “free” peasants, many “religious” persons (these were disguised escapees of one sort or another), and run-away serfs who had managed to escape from northern gubernias, often under the direct encouragement, or at least the connivance, of the viceroy or his subordinates. A widely-prevalent custom at the time was for these serfs and other “unfree” people to escape to Poland, where a residence of about two years made them “free”, whereupon they could legally move to New Russia. Serf-owners did accuse Potemkin of complicity in this kind of “under-ground railway” (Note One).

The 1785 Manifesto furnished Potemkin with the legal basis to send numerous procurement agents to various European countries to recruit colonists. Beside the promotion of agriculture, it must be remembered, that the viceroy was also engaged in the general economic development of New Russia thought the founding of new cities and ports, the promotion of various businesses and trades, and the defense of the region though

the construction of the Black Sea fleet and of naval facilities, especially at the newly founded port city of Kherson. All these projects necessitated the invitation of large numbers of foreigners of diversified specialties and skills.

### Potential Colonists.

Most of these efforts, as well as the areas of recruitment, are outside the scope of this discussion. We shall therefore touch only upon one of Potemkin's chief procurement agents, Georg Trappe, and the field of his primary activities among the Mennonites, the Free City of Danzig and its surrounding country areas, and the adjacent West Prussia which under the First Polish Partition in 1772 had fallen to Prussia.

The work of Trappe in the areas in question, the fate and fortunes of the Mennonites in them, are in their broadest outlines sufficiently well known to many readers through the books of several authors, especially those of David H. Epp (Note Two), Peter Hildebrandt (Note Three), and H.G. Mannhardt (Note Four).

The three books mentioned, though valuable for their use of local source materials, and in the case of Hildebrandt's booklet for its recollections of events personally witnessed and experienced, are rather inadequate in their treatment of many of the aspects of the story, in part because of the narrow point of view, but mainly for their failure to consult the rich archival resources in Russia or those of the Mennonite churches in Danzig or Königsberg. These inadequacies, as far as the Russian archives are concerned, were remedied to a considerable extent by the excellent work of G. G. Pisarevskii (Note Five). Paul Karge did make extensive use of the Königsberg records (Note Six).

The account that follows is based in part upon these two sources, but in the main upon rather extensive researches by the writer in the archives of Leningrad, and to lesser extent in Moscow, during the summer of 1962 (Note Seven).

Limitations of space will permit only a very brief account of a few of the more important aspects of this story, notably as concerns Mr. Trappe himself, and some political factors which at times adversely affected his recruiting efforts and impeded a more expeditious Mennonite exodus to New Russia.

The availability in Danzig and in West Prussia of a rich source of potential colonists of various qualifications, and information about their currently hard-pressed economic condition, came to Potemkin, in a larger sense, to the Russian government, through several sources in 1786. The first of these was the Russian Resident (minister) in Danzig, Mr. Peterson. In several of his communications to Chancellor Ostermann, the

**D**enen werthgeschätzten und wohlachtbaren Mitgliefern derer teuren Mennonitischen Gemeinden in Danzig, vornehmlich allen, denen daran gelegen sein kann, und welche die Vollmacht für die nachfolgende schiedt genehmigte Abschiedsrede unterzeichnet haben, wird hiemit bekannt gemacht, daß eben die Abschiedsrede, nachdem sie laut ihrer Instruktion sehr fruchtbar Anderen aus Dnieper-Ström ausgeschiedet haben, gesund und glücklich zurückgekommen sind, und am 13. März dieses Jahres neuen Serfs, das ist, am 7. März alten Serfs, die hohe Gnade genossen haben, durch Sr. Durchlaucht den Herrn Reichs-Räthen v. Deroy in 2. a. v. in der Stadt Krenmentzich Ihre Majestät. Ma. Majestät in Gegenwart des Königl. Ministers, Herrn Reichs-Räthen v. Bescheredt u. Gelandt, des Reichs-Kammer- und Hof-Referendars derer Chanceries von England und Frankreich, und noch vieler andern hohen Standespersonen, vorzulesen zu werden, und aus der allerhöchstdencklichen Russischen Monarchin eigener Munde die Versicherung des allerhöchsten Kayserl. Erlauses und Gnade für sich und alle Mennoniten-Kantzen von Danzig, die nach Rußland ziehen wollen, auf die allerangenehmste und leichteste Weise zu erhalten. Weil nun auch Ihre Kayserl. Majestät allen Mennoniten, die von dem Danziger Gebiet Luth und Helben lösen möchten, nach Rußland zu ziehen, außer 65 Thalerinnen, die einjährig 4 Ruffen zu zahlen, der schenkten Länder, von für jede Familie, keine berufliche Chancereverpflichten, Selbstverpflichten und Vorrechte allerart zu bewilligen geruht haben, dergleichen während derer Kayserl. Decret 25-jährigen ruhmvollen und ewigenverdienigen Regierung noch keinen Mennoniten verlichen worden; als werden alle Mennoniten vom Danziger Gebiet, zonen es noch gefällig sein möchte, von dieser großen Kayserlichen Guld und Gnade für sich und ihre Familien und Nachkommen Gebrauch zu machen, hiemit eingeladen, sich am bevorstehenden 9. Januarius des von Gott zu erwartenden 1785ten Jahres Vormittags um 9 Uhr allhier in Danzig im Kayserl. Hofschloß-Palais auf Langgarten, persönlich einzufinden, damit ihnen die Privilegia und allerhöchste Kayserliche Kabinets-Resolutiones in originalibus vorzulesen werden, und sie sich nach ihrem Gutdünken, und so wie es freyen Leuten, deren Verfabren aus Holland hieher gekommen sind, und die nun von ihrem Abzuge poststada praktiren werden, nicht gewehret werden darf, erklären können. Danzig, den 29. Decemb. 1787.

*Trappe invites Mennonites. Georg von Trappe distributed this leaflet in Danzig in 1787 inviting the Mennonites to settle in Russia. Courtesy of Mennonite Life, Jan., 1969, page 10.*

Minister of Foreign Affairs, he informed his superior of the situation in the middle and the working classes in the Free City and of the eagerness with which many of their members besieged him with requests to help them to emigrate to Russia. This development, of course, was a direct result of the recently published texts of the Manifestos of July 14, 1785, and of the earlier one of July 22, 1763.

Ostermann at once relayed Peterson's information to Potemkin. It is not clear whether this information contained any reference to the Mennonites as a possible source of immigrants.

The excellent reputation of the Mennonites as farmers, businessmen, and high skills in various trades and crafts was known to many prominent Russian officials, military and civilian, since the Seven Years' War when Russian troops occupied for varying periods of time the areas in Danzig and the Vistula Valley. Among the military might be mentioned Prince Rumiantsev, one time commander-in-chief of the Russian forces in the areas concerned, and a Baron Stahl. The latter at this time occupied an important military and administrative post on one of Potemkin's famous estates, Dubrovna, in the Mogilev gubernia, which for a number of years was to become the main staging place of foreign colonists en route from Riga to New Russia. Stahl, as we know from the accounts of our early immi-

grants, was particularly well-disposed to the Mennonites. Moreover, ever since the days of Peter the Great, Dutch Mennonites had held prominent posts of one sort or another in the Russian service.

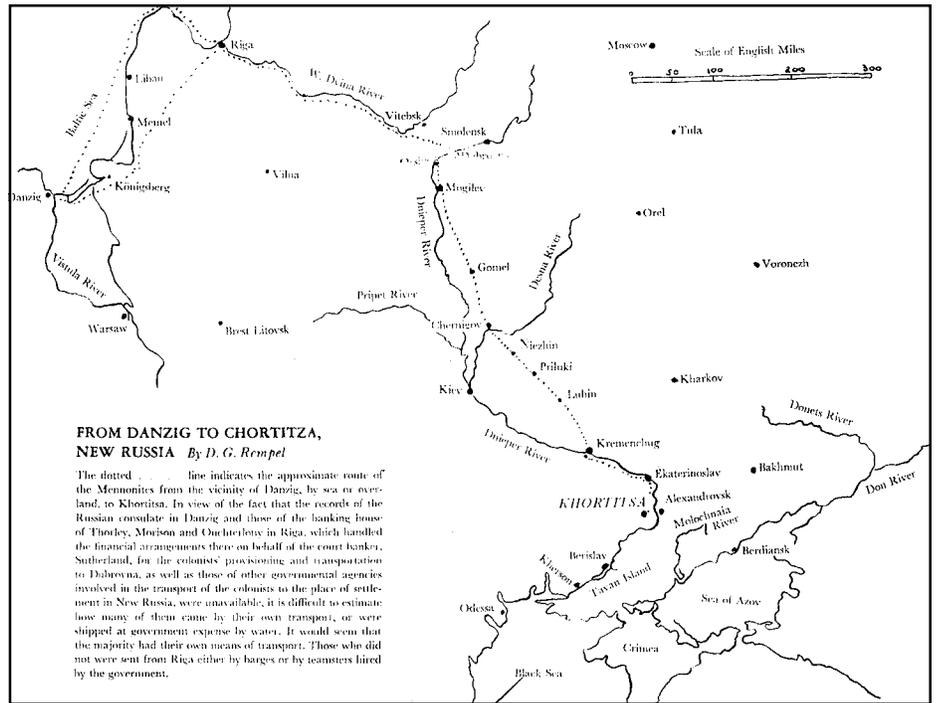
“The excellent reputation of the Mennonites as farmers, businessmen,... was known to many prominent Russian officials...”

**George Trappe (d.1798).**

However, the main source of information about the Mennonites, and the chief promoter and organizer of the Mennonite emigration to New Russia, was a certain Georg Trappe, recommended to Potemkin by the Grand Duchess, Maria Feodorovna, wife of the heir to the throne, Paul, in early May of 1786. The Grand Duchess, a former Württemberg princess, despite the intense dislike for Potemkin at Paul’s court in Gatchina, had already succeeded in placing a brother of hers on Potemkin’s staff in Southern Russia. Apparently she knew Trappe from her former home and recommended him now to the viceroy as a man well qualified to assist him in the recruitment of foreign colonists (Note Eight).

The available sources furnish little information about this potential “Caller of Colonists,” who from June 1786 to 1791 enjoyed the confidence and the seemingly unlimited support of Potemkin, which enabled him to defy the Danzig Council of Magistrates, the Prussian Resident in Danzig, Lindenovskii, and other Prussian officials, to engage in prolonged battles with the Russian consul and later the Resident, S. Sokolovskii, over his recruiting activities, and who finally from February 1788 to 1792 was able to defy the determined efforts of the Russian Foreign Ministry to put a stop to his journeys all over Europe, all ostensibly on behalf of the viceroy, and to compel his return home.

It is not known when he came to Russia, how he came to know a number of prominently placed people, and how and on what grounds he was granted an estate near St. Petersburg, in the vicinity of Gatchina, the residence of Paul. In his letters to Potemkin he claimed to have spent some 23 years in or near the Danzig area, knew the Mennonites well, could speak their language, *Plattdeutsch*, knew all about their fame in farming and various other enterprises and of the current threats to their continued well-being because of the issuance in Danzig of a number of new restrictions against the acquisition of even the smallest pieces of property, and in Prussia of new limitations upon the extension of existing farm holdings, or the purchase of new lands except with severe limitations, imposition of new obligations to support religious institutions of



Map of route taken by the Mennonite pioneers from Danzig to Chortitza, New Russia, 1788. Map by David G. Rempel, as published in Men. Life, April 1969, page 69. A similar map is published in Osterwick, page 158 and by Wm Schroeder, Mennonite Atlas (Winnipeg, 1996), page 13. Berislav, the original settlement site chosen by Deputies Höppner and Bartsch, was located south of the Dnjepr River, east of Cherson. A nuclear plant is now located near this site.

the Lutheran and Catholic churches, etc. Later, after his departure from Danzig, in letters from 1788 to 1792 to various Russian officials, he claimed acquaintanceship with prominent Mennonites in Holland and influential persons in other countries, including England.

His extensive correspondence, in German with Count Ostermann and in French to Potemkin, reveals him as a well-educated and widely-travelled gentleman. The success of his recruitment work stamps him as an extraordinarily resourceful salesman, promoter and organizer. His activity also shows him to have possessed many of the attributes of the street-corner haranguer of the populace, the uninhibited pitch of the circus barker, and the fervour of the tent missionary who, when found expedient or deemed necessary, could quote persuasively from the Scriptures and very successfully settle serious conflicts among his Danzig (Lutheran) emigrants in Riga in 1786 (Note Nine).

After some preliminary correspondence with Potemkin, Trappe went to Southern Russia where a two-part contract was negotiated between the two. Potemkin’s offers, obligations and certain promises, if the mission at hand turned out successfully, were dated June 5, 1786, while Trappe’s part of the agreement was dated June 7. Space does not permit to discuss them, except to call attention to a few provisions and certain discrep-

ancies in them, factors which apparently became the basis of Trappe’s subsequent broad interpretations of his commission, and a source of much trouble for the Foreign Ministry from 1788 to 1792.

Succinctly stated, Potemkin directed Trappe to recruit “farm families in the environs of Danzig” to whom various privileges and certain kinds of financial assistance were to be granted, and promised, in case of a successful mission, to obtain from the empress the grant to Trappe of the title of Court Councillor, a financial reward in keeping with the dignity of the Court, and the appointment to a government post commensurate with the importance of his services rendered to the empire. In addition, Potemkin promised to immediately make appropriate financial arrangements with the court banker, Sutherland, and through him with institutions affiliated with him in Riga to advance all the requisite sums of moneys for this undertaking.

The chief and most important difference in Trappe’s part of the contract is the provision which stated that Trappe was to “undertake journeys” (without any specifications as to area or countries), and to “invite people, be they farmers or others”.

An understanding was also reached that, while Potemkin was to supply Trappe with special letters of introduction to Resident Sokolovskii and

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the new Russian consul, Carl Fredstander, Trappe's mission was to be stated in very general terms, and that not a word was to be mentioned about it to the Chancellor Ostermann and the Foreign Office. Consequently, in his letter to Sokolovskii Potemkin wrote about Trappe's assignment merely as a "certain secret mission".

### Wooing the Mennonites.

Trappe, having obtained his passport in St. Petersburg on June 9, 1786, proceeded at once to Danzig. His activity there was so successful that by August 5 he had signed up 247 families, including 35 Mennonite families. The endless quarrels of his with the Danzig authorities, Prussian officials, and with Sokolovskii cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to point out that on November 1, 1786, he succeeded at last in shipping to Riga 141 persons, including among them the two Mennonite deputies, Jakob Höppner and Johann Bartsch.

Altogether during 1786 a total of 910 emigrants, 510 males and 400 females were dispatched to Riga. Of these nine died en route, 73 deserted, and 73, including dependents, entered the military service. The remainder were settled in New Russia, and are officially known as the "Danzig colonists". Aside from the two Mennonite deputies, who from Riga were sent by separate courier to Kherson, the available records do not indicate the presence of any other Mennonites in this group.

Trappe's wooing of the Mennonites in and around Danzig is generally known. We shall, therefore, again touch only briefly upon several significant but less known incidents of his activity.

The historian cannot severely enough deplore the paucity of materials bearing on so many aspects of this undertaking, especially the utter failure of the lay and the church leadership of our forebears in either the making and keeping of adequate records, or even in the preservation of the materials once in existence, and their utilization by qualified lay historians. One surely would like to know, for example, how Trappe made the acquaintanceship of Höppner, whom he himself suggested to the Mennonites in Danzig as candidate for the prospective dispatch of a delegation to spy out the land in New Russia, as well as to act as negotiator with the Russian government about the terms of an actual emigration.

### The Deputies, 1786.

While other would-be emigrants in Danzig (mostly Lutherans) were satisfied with the information concerning Catherine's invitation to foreign colonists and Trappe's persuasive oratory about them, the Mennonites, as is their usual practice, were not content to accept the generous promises of the Russian invitation at their face value, nor to trust implicitly the honeyed words of a glib "Caller of Colonists". The decision of a number of Mennonites was to send a delegation to the domains under the absolute control of the famous Potemkin, to spy out the land carefully, to choose with deliberation a site for settlement to accommodate a potentially very considerable number of their brethren, and then to negotiate

the detailed terms with the viceroy in New Russia and with the highest authorities in St. Petersburg.

The actual selection of the three deputies, one of whom was either unable or for some reason not permitted to make the journey, need not be commented on here. It might, however, be interesting to point out that there are references in the Russian archives to the fact that Trappe had made his appeal to the Mennonites personally and "through his agents". Was Höppner one of these "agents"? Did "agents" also refer to at least one or several Mennonite preachers? It may be recalled that Trappe made some rather bitter charges against one Mennonite preacher, demanding public retraction of that minister's denial, upon pressure from Danzig authorities, of having had any dealings with the recruiting agent. Were gifts tendered and received? Unfortunately, the tragic conflict, which shook the colonies at Chortitza to their very foundations during the first two decades of their existence, gave rise to all sorts of absolutely irrational and unfounded charges by the malcontents "of having been sold to Potemkin".

The official agreement concluded by Jakob Höppner and Johann Bartsch with Trappe, dated September 22, 1786, and notarized, covers briefly the following: first, all expenses, including free lodging, en route to New Russia and back to Danzig, and of all trips of inspection incident to their mission, were to be defrayed by the Russian government; second, authorities were to be instructed to give the deputies, wherever their travels might take them on their inspection trips, every possible form of assistance to facilitate the achievement of their objectives; and third, if the efforts of the deputies should lead to the emigration of some 200 families in the spring of 1787 to New Russia, Potemkin would obtain for the two men a "generous reward" from the empress in recognition for their labours and efforts.

As pointed out above, the deputies left Danzig for Riga on November 1, 1786. Fifteen days later they arrived at Dubrovna where they received a very cordial reception from General Stahl. After a brief rest they were sent by courier to Potemkin's headquarters in Kherson. The viceroy placed at their disposal one of his officers, intimately familiar with the region, a Major Meier. Under his guidance they inspected during the winter months of 1786 to 1787 a large number of recommended sites on the left bank of the Dnieper and through a large part of the Crimea. They finally decided upon a choice tract near Berislav, not very far from Kherson. Their decision on site selection and the conditions upon which they offered to lead a large emigration to New Russia were submitted to Potemkin on April 22, 1787, at Kremenchug.

### II. The Höppner-Bartsch negotiations, 1786-1788

In all their dealings with the chief Russian representatives, whether in Danzig, Kremenchug, or St. Petersburg, between August 1786 and early 1788, Höppner and Bartsch showed themselves not only as skilled negotiators, but also as men of broad vision and of deep commitment to the suc-

cessful accomplishment of the task entrusted to them by a large number of families living in Danzig or the city's territory. They proved themselves in every sense as real statesmen.

Unfortunately, the meagre historical literature has failed to properly evaluate their work and to give them the recognition of outstanding merit they so richly deserve. The few books written by Mennonites prior to 1914 were almost invariably authored by preachers, likely as not, of limited formal education and little or no historical training, and their works are characterized mainly for their pronouncedly monarchist views and strongest protestations of the most abject kind of subservience to the Tsarist regime.

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"....books written by Mennonites prior to 1914....[manifest] pronouncedly monarchist views and....abject...subservience to the Tsarist regime."

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Their treatment of the work of the two deputies, including the discussion of the tragic experiences and bitter conflicts of the formative years in the Chortitza colonies during which both men, but especially Höppner, were subjected to incredible personal calumny and loss of property, is unfortunately overlaid with exorbitant praises for the real or imagined solicitous concern of Trappe, Potemkin, Catherine, or Paul for the welfare of the Mennonites, their alleged love for them, and their "unmatched" benevolence toward the Mennonite brotherhood.

And like the restorer of a nice piece of furniture often has to remove endless coats of varnish or paint before uncovering the beauty and warmth of its wood, so the Mennonite historian has to labour diligently in what has hitherto passed for historical fact. We must test it on the basis of scholarly study of old and new documentary materials and then, where warranted, to point out that *So ist es (nicht) gewesen!* He must also stress that in regard to cause, motivation, and effect there may have been different "possibilities" than those given. Where incontrovertible evidence is available, the historian must replace erroneous views and assumptions and worn-out clichés with new interpretations of events and evaluations of the contributions of some of the great laymen of our past.

I should like to cite but a few examples pertinent to the events under consideration here. David H. Epp (Note Ten) states that Trappe, out of his solicitous concern for the safety of the deputies and his wishes to assist with the expeditious achievement of their mission, handed them a *Begleitschreiben* on September 22, 1786. He writes: *Auch Trappe hatte ein fürsorgender Liebe dabei das Seinige gethan. Um die Reisenden für alle Fälle sicher zu stellen und ihnen nach Möglichkeit die Unbequemlichkeiten der Reise aus dem Wege zu helfen, handigte er ihnen ein Begleitschreiben folgenden Inhalts bei.* (Follows text of said document).

Now the fact of course is that this letter was a contract with Trappe, concluded upon the insis-

tence of Höppner and Bartsch (one may assume that this was possibly done at the request of the Mennonites who deputized them), and at their request officially notarized as a legally-binding instrument. It was not at all a Trappe manifestation of his love for the welfare of the delegates.

Epp and Hildebrandt and other Mennonite writers after them ascribe so much significance to the use, or alleged frequent use, by Trappe, Sokolovskii, and other highly-placed Russian officials in reference to the Mennonites of the expression "My children" or "My dear children". And these authors vex almost lyrical in their appreciation of such manifestations of implied love and concern for their kin by the officials in question. The simple fact is that this kind of expression, or expressions, were the standard form of condescending address toward their exploited and oppressed subjects used by all enlightened (or unenlightened) autocrats of that age.

**Mennonite Petition, 1787.**

Let us now examine the Höppner-Bartsch list of requests and proposals, formulated in 20 points, in which they expressed their willingness and readiness to lead a large Mennonite immigration to Russia. These points, generally referred to as the "Mennonite Petition", were submitted to Potemkin on April 22, 1787, in Kremenchug.

The text of the petition, with the marginal notes of Potemkin's approval, acceptance with limitation, or his rejection, can be found in German in David H. Epp (Note Eleven), Pisarevskii (Note Twelve), or in S.D. Bondar (Note Thirteen).

A number of the points, specifically those listed as 3, 6, 9-14 and 19, dealing with subsistence allowances, years of tax exemptions, furnishing of seed grains for planting of the first crops, and extension of long-term loans, were generally based upon the privileges and grants offered in Catherine's Manifesto of July 22, 1763. They represented essentially the same things which had been offered to any foreign colonists. I shall therefore omit them from any discussion, except where the deputies' proposal differed markedly in some detail as, for example, in Point 6. This will be brought out below.

First, Höppner and Bartsch demanded the guarantee of complete freedom of religious belief and practice, the rendering of the act of allegiance through the usual Mennonite practice of simple affirmation, and the permanent exemption of themselves and their descendants from military service (Points 1, 7 and 8). These were granted.

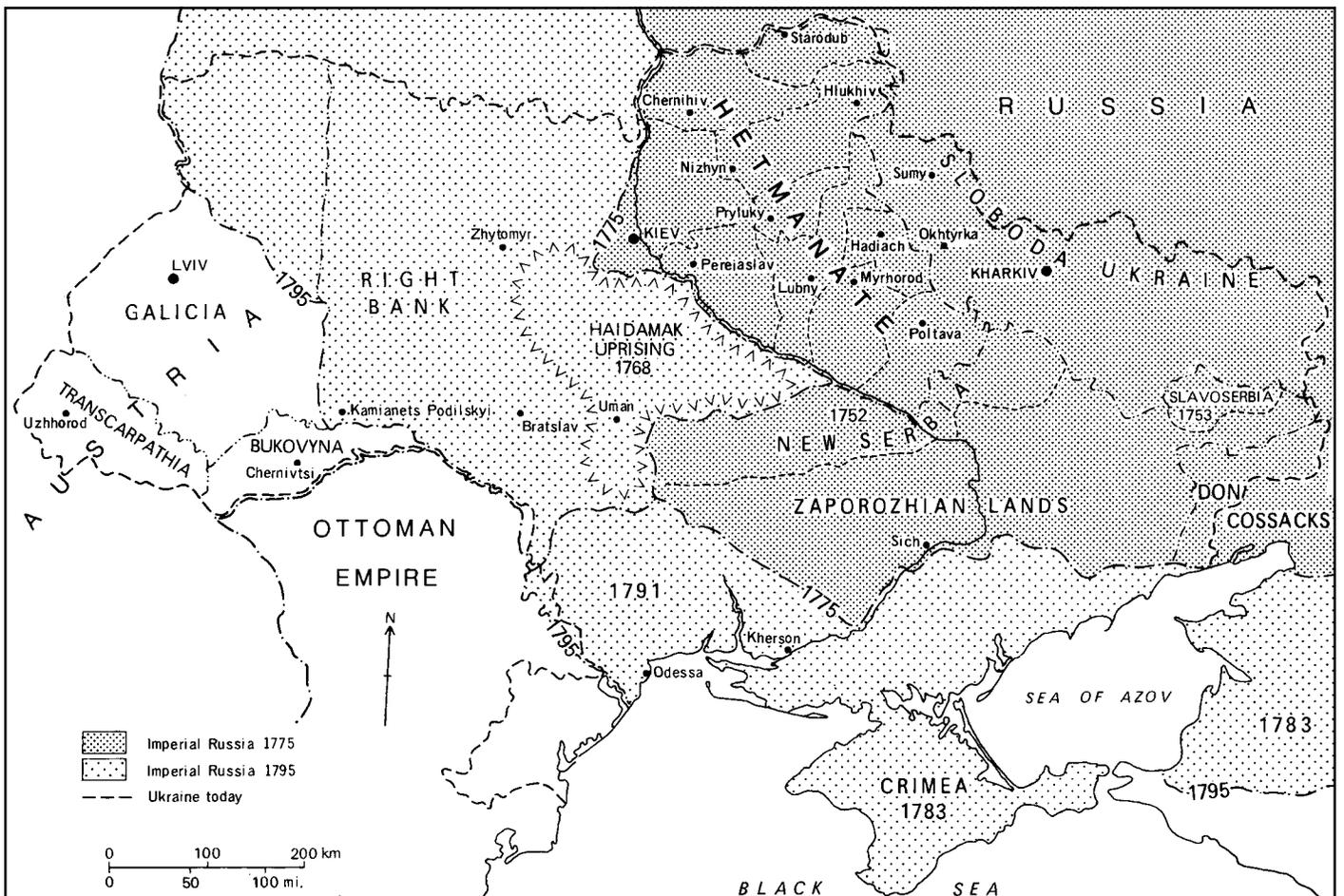
Second, they requested the approval of a huge tract of unoccupied land near Berislav, on the left

bank of the Lower Dnieper (Dnepr), in close proximity to the port and city of Kherson, then under construction, and near several of the major roads leading to the Crimea and eastward to the Don River and the Caucasus Mountains.

In addition to its size sufficient to accommodate possibly as many as ca. 1,000 families, at about 175 acres of arable land per family, its nearness to Kherson and other ports and towns, built or projected, the tract would offer the colonists convenient markets for the disposal of their grains and other agricultural and industrial products. Fisheries in the Dnieper and in many arms of its delta would give lucrative occupations for many Mennonites who were highly skilled in this and related enterprises in their present homes along the Vistula River and its tributaries.

Since the Berislav tract had little or no wooded areas, the deputies asked that several islands in the Dnieper, heavily covered with shrubs and trees, be set aside for the exclusive use of the Mennonites. They also requested the entire Tavan Island because of its extensive and rich meadow and grazing lands (Point 2).

Generally speaking, the whole tract was almost an exact copy of the lowlands they presently inhabited in the vicinity of Danzig and its environs. Its location, topography, climate, etc., were ideally suited for the transplanting of their



Map of the Ukraine, Donets and the Black Sea regions in the 18th century, showing extent and dates of Russian expansion. Courtesy of Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine A History* (Toronto, 1988), page 174. For many years the Sloboda region belonging to Imperial Russia was empty of people. In the 17th and 18th centuries significant numbers of Ukrainian Cossacks and farmers seeking freedom from Polish rule were allowed to settle here, as they provided a buffer against the Tatars. Ukraine in Slavic means "on the border". The word "Sloboda" may have originated from the Slavic word "Swododa", meaning freedom.

systems of crop-farming and stock-raising and continuation of their customary pursuits in various types of businesses, trades and industry. Except for a few important exceptions of specific areas in the tract and on certain islands, which Potemkin pointed out were already marked out for other purposes, the requests in this matter were approved.

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“....the whole [Berislav] tract was almost an exact copy of the lowlands ...[the Mennonites] inhabited in the vicinity of Danzig...”

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The next petition, contained in Point 4, specified that after the expiration of the ten-year period of tax exemption, the Mennonite lands should never pay a land tax higher than 10 kopeks per dessiatin (2.7 acres). Further, it specified that the Mennonites be exempt from transport and quartering of troops and from the performance of government road works.

Potemkin agreed to these, except that the Mennonites would be fully responsible for the maintenance of roads and bridges within their areas, and that troops would be quartered in their villages only in case of their passage through them.

In expectation that not all Mennonites would be engaged in farming, it was requested (Point 5) that the Mennonites be given the right to establish factories and shops throughout New Russia and the Crimea, to engage in commerce, to be members of trade associations and craft-guilds, and the right to freely dispose of their manufactures and other articles in towns and villages without the payment of duties of any kind whatsoever. The requests were approved, except for the provision that these undertakings were allowed but subject to existing city regulations.

Next, to facilitate their speedy establishment at the place of settlement, the government, as soon as the colonists arrived in Riga, would obligate itself to deliver at Berislav a sufficient amount of oak timbers to permit each colonist to build himself a house “in the German manner”. Furthermore, a quantity of oak timber for the construction of two flour mills and six millstones would also be on hand, so that the colonists, with the help of “some crown labour”, could proceed forthwith with their construction (Point 9). The approval read: “120 planks, each 12 feet in length, will be supplied for each colonist. So will be the timber and millstones for two mills.”

With reference to the extension of long-term loans--up to 500 rubles to needy families according to the July 22, 1763, Manifesto--the deputies insisted that the payment of such to those in need of them were to be specifically spelled out, namely: the first 100 rubles would be advanced upon the arrival of the colonists in Riga. The remainder was to be advanced in amounts of 100 rubles per month during the succeeding four months. That repayment, again in accord with the 1763 Manifesto, of the entire loan was to be without interest charges over a period of three years after the expiration of the exemption period (Point 6). This was approved.

Because Russia would eventually profit greatly from the Mennonite colonization in New Russia, the colonists should be exempted from repayment of the sums expended by the government on transporting and provisioning of the colonists en route to the place of settlement (Point 12). Potemkin's reply to this was that the exemption would have to be made by the empress herself. (This was eventually done by Catherine's grandson, Alexander.)

If the government approved the Berislav tract for their settlement, orders should immediately be issued prohibiting all wood-cutting, hay-making and stock-grazing on the lands in question (Point 15). This was approved.

In view of the fact that in the years to come many more Mennonites might decide to emigrate to Russia, they should be assured of permission to settle in the Crimea, on unoccupied lands near Feodosia, Bakhchi-Sarai, and other places, and on the same conditions as herewith presented and approved. Further, they should not be required to furnish a mutual guarantee of repayment of any government expenditures incident to their establishment, but they would arrange such a pledge amongst themselves (Point 16). Parenthetically, here is a good example of what subsequently became standard procedure or practice of what has generally become known as part of “On Mennonite terms”. Potemkin's approval read: “Upon the arrival of deputies from them, similar arrangements can be made with them.”

#### Response.

The close and intimate relationship which had been established between Trappe and the deputies in Danzig, the arrangements he had made with Potemkin for their reception at various places, and the viceroy's most generous provision of every kind of assistance to facilitate the achievement of their mission had created between the three men a feeling of trust and confidence in each other and had established bonds of strong

friendship.

Trappe and deputies were, therefore, exceedingly desirous to continue this relationship for the future. Thus, Höppner and Bartsch requested of Potemkin that his recruiting agent be directed to accompany them to Danzig, not only because he had persuaded the Mennonites to send the deputies to Russia and that he possessed an intimate knowledge of their situation in Danzig and vicinity, but also because he was in the best position to overcome any obstacles that might conceivably be raised against a projected large Mennonite emigration to Russia.

Finally, the Mennonites had so great a trust in Trappe that he be appointed as Director and Curator of the Mennonite Colonies in Taurida, where he could advise them in their various undertakings and look after their peace and safety (Point 17). Potemkin's answer was that this could be done.

To assist the Mennonites in locating the exact position of the intended place of settlement, to determine its precise boundaries, to help with the surveying of the total landed area and the assignment to each colonist of his 65 dessiatins in a separate allotment, the request was made for the appointment to them of a qualified surveyor speaking the German language (Point 18). Agreed.

Finally, upon the arrival of the colonists at Berislav, the strictest orders should be issued and adequate measures be taken for the assurance of the safety of their persons and property against injury, theft and robbery (Point 20). This was promised.

In so far then as it was humanly possible, the deputies had provided for every possible contingency and for the immediate and future interests of what was expected to become a large Mennonite exodus to New Russia.

It was not a “Petition” of desperate supplicants for a haven of refuge and short-range assistance or selfish favours, but the carefully pre-

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pared offer of a proposal of the representatives of a people, or brotherhood, who were fully conscious of the achievements of those whom they represented, be that in farming, stock-breeding, in different types of businesses or in various trades, and fully cognizant of what a valuable asset these people would eventually be for a country which offered them a new home.

At the same time, it is hardly necessary to point out that the deputies were not only keenly aware of the extremely difficult situation in which many of their coreligionists, especially the poorer segment among them, found themselves in Danzig and its territory and in West Prussia, but also fully cognizant of the evidences all around them of the consequences of recently passed and pending restrictions upon their economic life and on the free exercise of their religious beliefs and practices.

Höppner and Bartsch had to wait a long time for a reply from Potemkin. The viceroy was currently completely preoccupied with preparations for the reception of Catherine on her celebrated journey to New Russia and the Crimea. Upon the arrival of the empress in Kremenchug, Potemkin, on May 13, 1787, presented the deputies to her in the presence of the entire diplomatic corps accompanying her on the trip. And after a most gracious reception, she invited the deputies to accompany her on the journey southward. Although they were most anxious to get on with their mission, the request being interpreted as an order, they did make the journey to the Crimea and stayed with it until its return to Kremenchug some seven weeks later. While in the Crimea, they availed themselves of the opportunity to investigate a number of new sites for possible future Mennonite settlements.

#### St. Petersburg, 1787.

Upon their return to Kremenchug, Höppner and Bartsch implored (“tearfully” it says) Potemkin for a reaction to their comprehensive “Petition” of April 22, 1787. The approval finally came on July 5 in the form discussed above.

The deputies now requested Potemkin’s permission to allow them to proceed to St. Petersburg to obtain the official approval of the highest authorities to the agreement concluded with him, including the petitioning of the empress for the issuance by her of a Charter of Privileges formally sanctioning the provisions of the agreement made with Potemkin. The viceroy, not used to the questioning of his authority or the validity of his word, was at first not only much adverse to such a journey, but also to a display of his annoyance and displeasure. However, after further pleading by the deputies, stressing in particular the fact that, while they trusted his word, he was a mortal person, and that the government was a permanent institution capable of assuring the permanence of rights and privileges granted, the request was approved. What was more, Potemkin now did render every form of assistance to expedite the trip to the capital.

Here further delays ensued, though under Trappe’s guidance and through his intercession they were introduced to a number of influential personages, including Paul and his wife at their



Map of the Black Sea region showing the boundaries of the three provinces of New Russia--Kherson, Ekaterinoslav and Taurida. Note also the location of Berislav, the settlement site originally granted to the Mennonites. Map courtesy of James Urry, *None but Saints The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, 1989), page 73/Diese Steine, page 47.

court in Gatchina. At last, on September 7, 1787, Catherine issued a special decree sanctioning the agreement of July 5, thus making it an official policy of state. The action of the empress was followed by instructions from the Foreign Ministry to Sokolovskii, in a letter of rather peremptory tone, directing the Resident to render every possible assistance to Trappe, and to remind the Danzig authorities in no uncertain manner that the Mennonite emigration to Russia was an official policy of the government, and that it was not to place any obstacles against its expeditious realization. In anticipation that a large number of Mennonite farmers would move to Russia, Trappe, through a special order of the Cabinet, was directed to travel to Mecklenburg in order to recruit farm and other types of labour for the Mennonite colonies.

“....September 7, 1787, Catherine issued a special decree sanctioning the agreement of July 5,....”

In the meantime, Potemkin had taken a series of actions on behalf of the projected exodus of the Mennonites from Danzig and their arrival in Riga. A long letter of July 14 to the court banker, Sutherland, concerned the making available of the requisite moneys to cover all authorized expenditures of Trappe on behalf of the colonists and to meet the initial loan sums promised them upon their arrival in Riga. In addition, the letter contained detailed instructions of how Sutherland and his representatives were to assist Trappe in other ways.

Mention might also be made of an interesting letter of Potemkin to Trappe directing him to “hire a pastor for the colonies in Taurida”, at an annual salary of 400 rubles and a grant of 500 dessiatins of land, the latter to be the personal and heredi-

tary property of the pastor. Since the Mennonites did not have “pastors”, but *Kirchen-Diener* or *Lehrer*, the intent of this letter appears somewhat ambiguous. I may add that the position in question was eventually filled by Trappe by a Lutheran pastor whom he engaged in Amsterdam.

#### Proselytization?

The question, which in recent years has caused considerable discussion and criticism in some Mennonite quarters in Canada (namely, whether the deputies or some other Mennonite leaders at the time of these negotiations gave a promise to the Russian authorities never to engage in any proselytizing activity among members of the Russian Orthodox Church), never appears to have been raised by either side throughout this or any other period.

“....[Did] the deputies.... promise....the Russian authorities never to engage in any proselytizing activity....<sup>2</sup>”

There are several reasons for this. For centuries it had been the established doctrine and practice of the Russian Orthodox Church, enforced by the full powers of the state, that while any subject could embrace the Orthodox faith, no member could ever leave this church. Furthermore, any attempt at evangelizing among members of this church by any other faith was an offense against both state and church, and therefore punishable by both. Nor could any missionary activity by any “foreign faith” be ever undertaken among the non-Christian subjects of the empire, since such activity was the monopoly of the Orthodox Church except upon express permission of the state.

The Manifesto of July 22, 1763, the Colonization Law of March 19, 1764, and other acts, including the lengthy negotiations between 1763 and 1765 with the Moravian Brethren on this issue, reinforced these prerogatives of the state church. This was a closed matter and remained so, with very few minor modifications, until 1905.

On the other hand, the Mennonites in Danzig and surrounding areas, or anywhere else for that matter, were not impelled by any missionary purposes whatsoever. Their search for a new home was therefore not motivated or influenced by any desire to seek converts. At the risk of restating the obvious, the incontrovertible fact was and is that our forefathers were motivated by a search for a homeland where they could secure for themselves and their posterity the opportunity of a decent livelihood in agriculture and other pursuits, and a place where they could enjoy complete freedom of religion for themselves without the slightest intent of interfering with the beliefs of others. Trappe's assertion in one of his letters to Count Ostermann that "the Mennonites love nothing as much as to baptize", was simply the invention of an enterprising recruiter of colonists.

Shortly after Catherine's approval of the Potemkin agreement, Trappe, Höppner, and Bartsch embarked upon their journey to Danzig via Riga and Warsaw. The detour to the Polish capital was designed to inform the Polish government, which still claimed a shadowy authority over the Free City, of the Mennonite intentions to emigrate to Russia and to enlist that government's support against an eventual opposition in that city.

They arrived in Danzig near the end of 1787. The jubilation which their safe return evoked, the enthusiasm which the approved terms of the Russian agreement engendered, and the firm resolve which so large a number of Mennonites (over 1,000 within a few weeks) made to avail themselves of the opportunity to emigrate are all parts of this chapter of our history which need not and cannot be retold here.

### Remuneration?

I would, however, like to call attention to two documents which Trappe presented to a huge assemblage of Mennonites on January 19, 1788, when after a showy display of a notarized copy of the Russian agreement and its grand eloquent reading, he dwelt at length upon the advantages that awaited them in Russia, their rights as free citizens to make their own choices and decisions about emigration, and the hollowness, unfoundedness and sheer lies which the Danzig authorities and businessmen and Prussian officials were circulating in the city and adjacent territories.

The documents in question, both dated January 19, 1788, listed the special rights and privileges granted to each of the deputies, Höppner and Bartsch, in recognition of their services rendered in the matter of the pending Mennonite move. For reasons inexplicable to this writer, Mennonite histories seldom, if ever, mention the fact that these grants, in identical language but as separate documents, were made to both deputies,

not merely to Höppner.

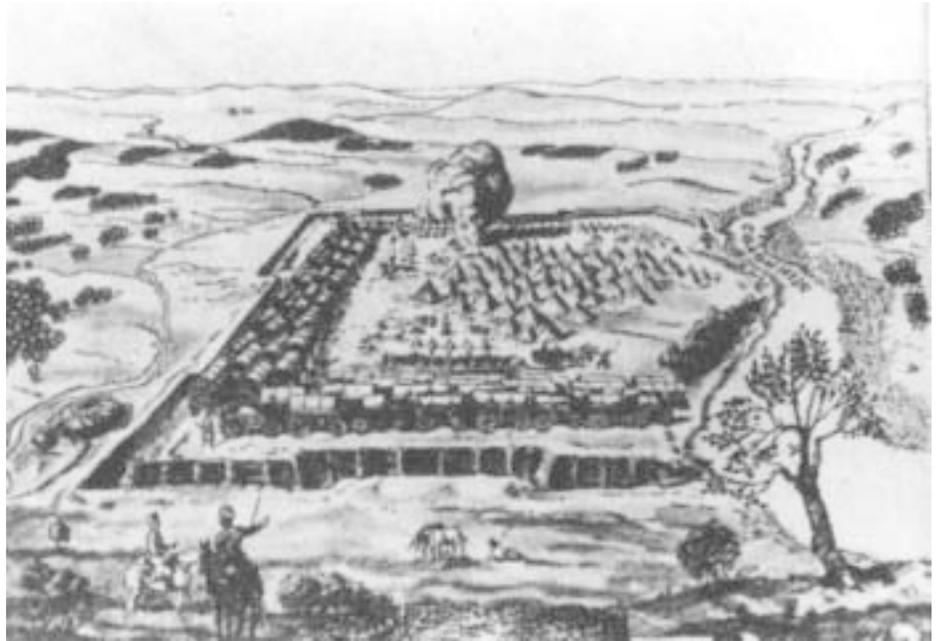
It is not clear whether the texts of these grants were prepared beforehand in Kremenchug or in St. Petersburg. They bear the date of January 19, i.e., the day they were presented by Trappe to this meeting. Both bear the signatures of Trappe and Sokolovskii, give their respective official titles, and are in the German language. Copies of them in the Russian archives are labelled as official translations from the German originals. The special grants were:

1. One of the two flour mills promised under Point 9 of the "Petition" was to be given to

Höppner, and the other to Bartsch, with the condition that after the expiration of the 15 year exemption period the recipients were to reimburse the government for all expenditures involved in their construction, without charge of interest. Thereafter the mills were to become the personal and hereditary properties of the two deputies respectively.

2. In addition to the 65 dessiatin family allotments, Höppner and Bartsch were to receive in personal and hereditary possession 20 dessiatins of hayland on the Island of Tavan.

3. Each of them was to have the right to keep



*New Russia, conquered from Turkey in 1791 possessed a sparse and motley population, including Cossacks, run-a-way serfs and nomadic Nogias. A Cossack camp, based on a contemporary engraving. Courtesy of Orest Subtelny, Ukraine A History (Toronto, 1988), page 198 bookplates.*



*Zaporozhians dancing by T. Kalynsky, late 18th century. Orest Subtelny, Ukraine A History (Toronto, 1988), page 198 bookplates.*



*The Zaporozhian Cossacks write a letter to the Sultan of Turkey. Painting by E. Repin (1891). The famous painting captures the unruly spirit of the Zaporozhian Cossacks. Photo courtesy of Is. P. Klassen, Die Insel Chortitza Stimmungsbilder Gedanken Einnerungen (Winnipeg, 1979), pages 100-101.*

a store and a bakery, to bake “course and fine” breads, and to sell the same freely wherever they wished. Furthermore, since the Mennonite colonies would be located in close proximity to main roads of travel, the availability of bread to travellers would be of great convenience and value to traveller and government alike. For these reasons they would advance to each of their proprietors a loan of 800 rubles, repayable in 15 years without interest.

4. Each of the deputies was to have the right to brew beer and vinegar and to sell these products without restrictions in towns and villages.

5. Finally, because both deputies had rendered valuable services to the country, neither was obligated to reimburse the government for its expenditures in travel and subsistence outlays for himself and members of his family.

What became of these special grants during the bitter disputes which raked the colonies during the 1790s, I shall point out below.

The concerted, extended and combined efforts of the Prussian government, which confidently expected its annexation of the Free City and territory in the immediate future, its agents in Danzig, and of the Danzig magistrates through resort to every conceivable form of coercion and means of chicanery to thwart Trappe’s and Sokolovskii’s procurement work and to halt the departure of colonists already supplied with Russian visas, cannot be taken up here. Similarly, space does not permit a discussion of Russia’s efforts to counter them, nor to detail the reasons for Count Ostermann’s decision in January-February of 1788 to call off the entire recruiting pro-

gram in and around Danzig, and to order Trappe’s return to Russia.

It will suffice to point out that the renewal of hostilities with Turkey in 1788 and the broadening of the conflict into a war with Sweden apparently persuaded the Russian government not to risk either the chance of an embroglio with Prussia, or to commit large sums of money on recruitment of colonists whose actual departure from Danzig seemed quite dubious at that time.

As matters turned out, the emigration did get underway in March of that year. Trappe and Sokolovskii persisted in their efforts to persuade the Foreign Ministry to continue their project, especially with the dispatch of a very considerable number of colonists who had already sold most of their belongings. Since with minor exceptions these would-be emigrants were not prosperous farmers, but mainly hard-pressed or unemployed trades- and craftsmen (Prussia’s tariff war of trade restrictions and boycotts against Danzig products, and Danzig’s exclusion of these people from membership in guilds and other trade associations affected them most adversely), the Danzig officials at last agreed to issue passports to these disadvantaged people. The “first Mennonite emigration” of 1788-1789, then, consisted of a poor and largely non-farming people.

How they fared en route to New Russia and their desperately hard first years in their new home we shall now take up.

### III. Establishment of the Chortitza Settlement

Hildebrandt (Note Fourteen) and Epp (Note

Fifteen) cover in their books in some detail the departure of the first groups from Danzig early in 1788, the gradual arrival in Riga of 228 families, the trials and tribulations of their prolonged stay in Dubrovna, the slow trek southward, and the bitter early years at Chortitza. Space will not permit me to elaborate on their accounts of these trying years, and I shall, therefore, limit myself to a fill-in of several important aspects of the story based on archival research (Note Sixteen).

The emigrants of 1788-1789 were, in the main, small tradesmen and craftsmen by occupation and, though possessed of various skills, owned very limited amounts of worldly possessions. This factor alone was bound to have had an adverse effect upon the progress of the colonies during the founding years, even if conditions in their new homes had been much more favourable than they turned out in practice.

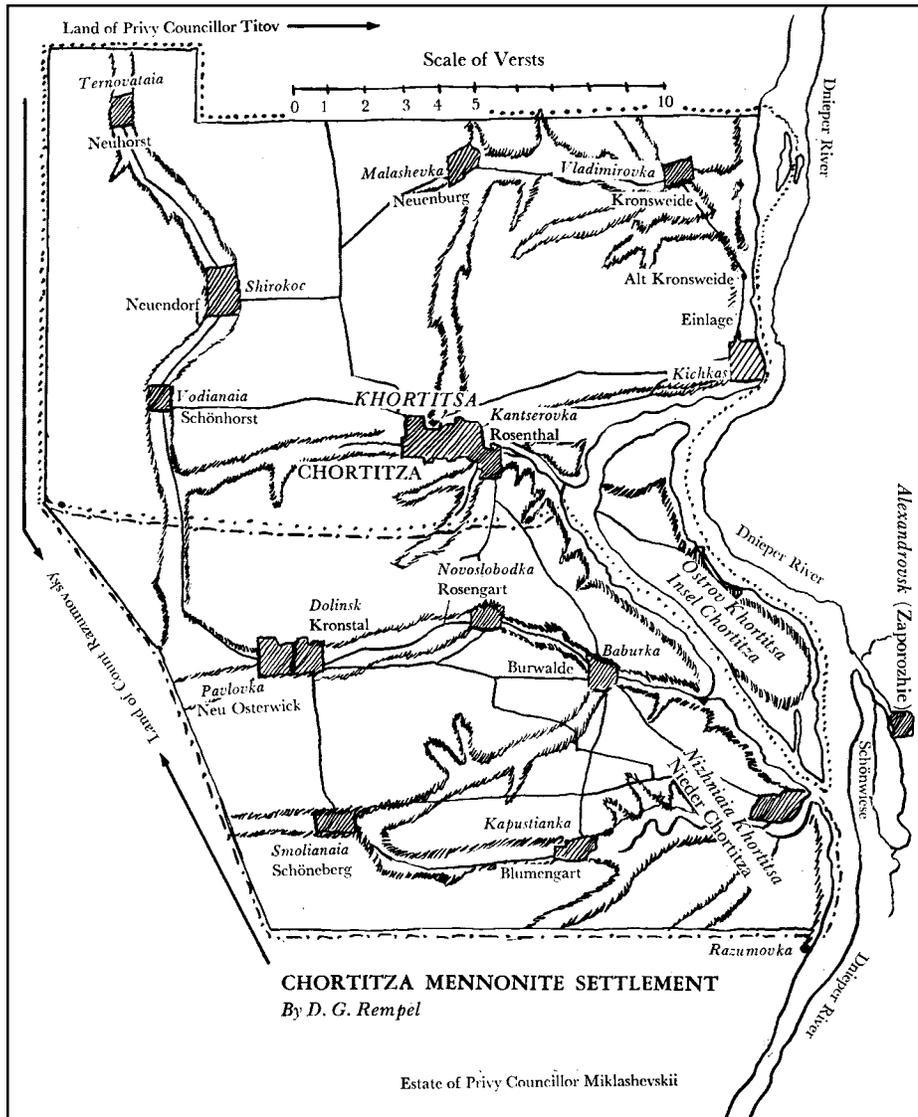
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**“The emigrants of 1788-1789 were, in the main, small tradesmen and craftsmen by occupation...”**

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There have been in our historical literature considerably varying estimates of the number of families involved in this first exodus (cf. the books by Unruh (Note Seventeen), Ehrt (Note Eighteen) and Quiring (Note Nineteen). I shall forego at this place any attempt at reconciling these estimates.

According to an official report of Sokolovskii to the foreign Ministry the total number of colonists dispatched by sea, or making their way by



Map of the Chortitza settlement, by David G. Rempel. The map is particularly interesting as it shows the deep valleys and high banks, which give the region its picturesque beauty. Map courtesy of Mennonite Life, April 1969, page 68, reprinted from D. G. Rempel, "Mennonite Colonies in New Russia," doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1933, page 77.

own transport overland, between March and November 1788 was 1,333. The figure includes an unspecified number of Lutherans. Höppner is reported to have departed with a group of 47 people on March 23, and Bartsch with a company of 20 on November 12.

Other Russian records list, by name, 228 Mennonite and 90 Lutheran families as having reached Riga by the end of 1788, or during the first days of January, 1789, thence sent via Dubrovna to the Ukraine, and been settled later that year in the "Ekaterinoslav Gubernia and the Territory of Tavriada". With few minor exceptions as to the number of "souls" (meaning taxable males between the ages of 16-60) and females among them, these records speak invariably of 228 Mennonite families having been originally settled on the "Khortitsa urochishche" ("Chortitza estate or homestead") or the "Khortitsa dacha" ("dacha" means summer home), and the 90 Lutheran families in the colony of Josephstal. Several reports of 1797 and 1798,

which endeavoured to find out about the conditions in the colonies and their indebtedness to the government, list the 228 families as having comprised 1,070 or 1,073 persons.

The journey of these emigrants to Riga, whether by sea or on land, were beset by experiences common to any immigrant group of those days. According to available information they were well cared for in Riga. The promised first instalment of 100 rubles on the 500 ruble loan was promptly advanced by Sutherland's agents to 224 families. I have found no explanation why the other four families received their portions of this instalment only on March 19, 1793.

After a brief rest in this city the emigrants, by own or government transport, were sent to Dubrovna, located in the Mogilev Gubernia. This place belonged to Potemkin. It was situated on the Upper Dnieper within about 50 miles distance from the Western Dvina River. This estate, really a small town, was used by Potemkin for a number of years as a staging area for colonists,

labourers, craftsmen, tree and plant nursery, and entire industries preparatory to their shipment to various places in New Russia.

### Government Default.

The Mennonites spent approximately five months at Dubrovna. Generally well-housed, here is where their first important difficulties arose and their first disappointments with Russian promises took place. The religious conflicts among them were due primarily to the absence of preachers to serve their spiritual needs.

Unfortunately, our historians, although mentioning the fact that the government failed to meet its promises of various forms of assistance, usually do so in briefest words, and mostly in decidedly apologetic form toward the authorities. These failures are as a rule ascribed to the fact that Potemkin and subordinates were preoccupied with matters arising out of the new conflict with Turkey. This may account for some of the delays or failures. However, it is my considered judgment that the causes for the government's failure to have met every major financial provision, of supplies, and in regard to the place of settlement cannot be attributed to the war with Turkey.

I shall briefly touch upon each of these failures. First is the matter of the remaining instalments of the loan. According to the 1787 agreement, these payments were to be made in equal instalments during the succeeding four months after their arrival in Riga. They should then have been made during the months of January-April 1789 at Dubrovna, totalling an amount for the 228 families of 91,200 rubles.

Nothing of the sort materialized. The first advances took place in Chortitza during October-December 1789, and then only in the amount of 5,654 rubles and 16 kopeks. the remaining portions were received as follows:

|            |                            |
|------------|----------------------------|
| 1790 ..... | 9,522 rubles, 32 ½ kopeks  |
| 1791 ..... | 22,897 rubles, 42 ½ kopeks |
| 1792 ..... | 11,400 rubles              |
| 1793 ..... | 24,063 rubles, 82 ¼ kopeks |
| 1794 ..... | 9,120 rubles               |
| 1795 ..... | 2,352 rubles, 50 kopeks    |
| 1796 ..... | 8,941 rubles, 76 ½ kopeks  |
|            | 88,297 rubles, 83 ¼ kopeks |

The totals from October 1789 to December 2, 1796, date of last payment, is slightly in excess of 91,200 rubles due, because it includes some payments on other accounts. It will be noticed, then, what should have been received in 5 months took fully 8 years to materialize. The loans contributed little to the promotion of the economy of the colonies. In view of the fact of the poor crops or total crop failures during these years, the moneys received had often to be used to supplement the government's handouts of food rations.

The promised travel and food allowances en route from Riga to New Russia, and the assistance grants until the first harvest, totalling the sum of some 44,000 rubles, were so paid out in small portions, and usually much overdue. In fact, by 1798 the sum of 11,566 rubles and 80 kopeks had still not been received.



The so-called 1,000 year oak situated in the northwest corner of the village of Chortitza, Imperial Russia, today Ukraine. Scientists have determined it is approximately 700 years old. Cossacks and other peoples camped under this oak for hundreds of years. In Royal Poland/Prussia, the Mennonites were not allowed to bury their dead within the village and therefore selected sites nearby, usually close to such strong, majestic trees, a symbol of the God's permanence and His enduring promises and mercy. The Chortitza oak has obtained mythic stature in Russian Mennonite culture. Photo courtesy of F. Thiessen, Neuendorf in Bild und Wort (*Espelkamp*, 1991), page 31.

#### Change of Site.

Change of place of settlement must now be considered. In accordance with an agreement made by the emigrants prior to their departure from Danzig, Höppner and several other men were to leave Dubrovna in advance of the other colonists and to proceed to Berislav to receive the promised building timbers and to make various preparations for the arrival of the rest. Höppner and others left Dubrovna in late March. Upon reaching Kremenchug, Potemkin, having heard of their arrival, summoned them to his headquarters, told them of his changed plans in respect to place of settlement from Berislav to Chortitza, and ordered them to proceed immediately to the new site, inspect it and report their findings to him at Kremenchug as expeditiously as possible.

Chortitza was one of Potemkin's numerous estates in New Russia. Comprising a portion of the land from which the Zaporog Cossacks were exiled in 1775, the estate was located on the right bank of the Dnieper, just below the rapids, and across from the frontier post of Alexandrovsk on the left bank of this river (Alexandrovsk is the present city of Zaporozhe).

#### "Chortitza was one of Potemkin's numerous estates in New Russia."

It is not clear how Potemkin came into its possession. More than likely it was simply appropriated by him in about 1775, as happened with innumerable other huge estates which military and civilian officials carved out for them-

selves from former Cossack lands. The estate, variously estimated at that time as comprising from 20,000 to 24,000 dessiatins, at first glance appeared to be a barren, treeless steppe, bisected and criss-crossed by many quite deep *balkas* (broad ravines or small valleys). Its soils were considerably inferior to those at Berislav. So was its geographic location.

On closer inspection, however--as those of us who lived there many years will recall--it was one of the most beautiful areas on the Dnieper's southern reaches. The deep *balkas*, especially the one called *Khortits-kaia*, through which a small river of the same name meandered to the Dnieper, and the *Kantsirskaia* close by, were fairly heavily wooded with magnificent oak trees. The southern end of the large Chortitza Island, which formed part of this estate, was also extensively covered with oak, poplar and other trees and various kinds of shrubs.

Whether Potemkin ever lived for any length of time on this holding of his or intended to make it one of his many homes in New Russia is not clear. The ambitious outlays for a large garden in the *Kantsirskaia* valley, which later formed the nucleus for the beautiful *Kolonies-Garten* of the Chortitza colonies, the "Potemkin Palace" on the heights of one of the valleys, which structure at the time of the arrival of the first colonists in 1789 was in the process of being dismantled, and the landing facilities on the Dnieper, called *Tsarskaia Pristanj* (Tsar's Landing)--all these apparently were planned for temporary purposes. It was here where Potemkin royally entertained Catherine and her entourage for several days when en route to the Crimea. Höppner and Bartsch

spent those festive days at Chortitza. Unfortunately, they have left us no record of either the famous event or their impressions of the area.

Höppner and his companions inspected Chortitza, as ordered. What were their impressions and reactions? According to Epp, they must have been greatly disappointed. The barren, treeless plains surrounding the estate, whose boundless monotony was broken only by a number of *Kurgany* (burial mounds of ancient dwellers of the steppes), the steep ravines on the estate itself, which seemed to break it up into "islands" and of heights that the Mennonites from the flatlands of the Vistula must have seemed like high plateaus, the high river banks, and the very sandy soils at the bottom of the ravines--all these features were in such stark contrast to the Berislav site. Whatever the inspection team's protest was, we know that Potemkin remained adamant in his orders to settle at Chortitza.

#### Reasons for Change?

What had prompted the viceroy to order this change? The usual explanation found in our Mennonite accounts is that Potemkin believed the Berislav area was in too close proximity to the theatre of military operations and that he therefore feared for the safety of the projected settlements there. In a letter of February 11, 1790, to a friend in Danzig, Höppner writes that the change had been made "upon the demand and the wise concern of Potemkin".

It seems to me that these explanations deserve little, if any, credence. There was no military action at this time anywhere near Berislav. The feverish construction of the nearby port city of Kherson proceeded apace, and hundreds of thousands of rubles were being spent at this very time on the construction of government buildings, "palaces", amusement facilities, etc. The work of the English landscape gardener, Moffett, whom Potemkin had brought to Kherson in 1783 to assist with the beautification of the city, appears not to have been halted at any time in 1789.

Moreover, in view of the fact that Potemkin shared the deputies' hopes and convictions that a large Mennonite migration to New Russia would take place, which the Chortitza site could not possibly accommodate, but which Berislav could, the viceroy's decision must have been dictated by other reasons than concern for the safety of the Mennonites.

During the last few years of his life, wretched that he was, Potemkin's finances were usually in dire straits. At the moment (1789) he was spending inordinate sums of money on the construction of his palace ("in the Venetian style") in Ekaterinoslav, shipping numerous barge loads and trees and shrubs from his various estates, including Dubrovna, for the planting of an "orangerie" on the palace grounds and a host of other exotic projects. Nor did Potemkin ever draw a fine line of distinction between government moneys and his own. There is an interesting comment made shortly after Potemkin's death in 1791 by Prince Bezborodko in a letter to Count Zavadovskii: "...No one has any idea of the value of the deceased. He owes a great deal to the crown, but the government also owes him much."

I believe, then, that Potemkin had ulterior motives for a shift of place of settlement of the Mennonites to Chortitza. He had spent large sums on it for the brief entertainment of Catherine and her guests in 1787. The income from the land must have been minimal, for he had only one small village of poor peasants on it. The settlement of a large number of Mennonite families on it would therefore have greatly appreciated its value, as well as the lands of a number of the neighbouring estates, all owned either by relatives of his (Countess Skavronskaia, his niece) or friends of his or Catherine's (Count Razumovskii, Privy Councilors Titov and Miklashevskii, and others).

**“....Potemkin had ulterior motives for a shift of place of settlement of the Mennonites to Chortitza.”**

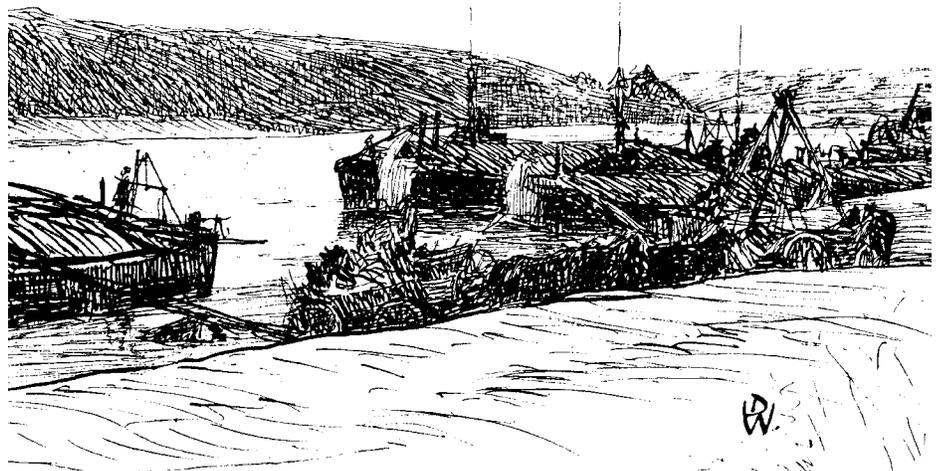
The question might be raised that since the Mennonites were to have been settled gratis on government lands (which the ones at Berislav were), would he have been able to obtain compensation for it from the government? It does seem highly improbable that Potemkin would have encountered much difficulty in collecting “his dues”. And there is also doubt whether he really possessed a “legal” title to the land. Many years later, when the government made a survey of all foreign colonies in New Russia in order to clarify the issue on what kinds of land they had been established, that is, whether on existing state lands or on lands specifically purchased for them, the notation on the Mennonite Chortitza settlement reads: “Settled on lands which passed to the government”.

**Arrival at Chortitza, 1789.**

The colonists, who had remained at Dubrovna after the departure of Höppner and his group in March, gradually set out for Kremenchug during the months of April and May. Those who did not have their own means of transport were moved by teamsters or on barges supplied by the government. The heavier belongings of the colonists, as had been the case between Riga and Kremenchug, were also shipped from here by water transport. They arrived at Kremenchug prior to Höppner's return from his inspection trip. Those who had arrived by water were, after a brief rest, sent on to Ekaterinoslav along with their baggage. The remainder stayed until the deputies' return from Chortitza, and then had to wait some more pending the outcome of Höppner's new conference with the viceroy.

Höppner's gloomy communication of Potemkin's firm orders to proceed to Chortitza contributed nothing to bolster the spirits of the travel-weary immigrants. The resumed journey southward through limitless steppes, brown and desolate under the mid-summer sun, served only to enhance their disappointments. Toward the end of July they reached the designated place. Here they were awaited by their relatives and friends who had arrived by water a few days earlier.

The disappointments of the settlers soon gave way to bitterness. Where were the fertile plains



*Ferry and boats on the Dnjepr River near Chortitza settlement, presumably at the Zarskaja Pristanj (referred to as “Priesani” by the local Mennonites), where boats from Alexandrowsk (Zaporozhe) docked, delivering goods and supplies. Ink drawing by Daniel Wohlgenuth who visited here in 1908 (see Diese Steine, page 29). Drawing courtesy of Men. Life, Jan., 1969, page 16. N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages in Russia (Vancouver, 1981), page 183, has written “Studying the sketch of Daniel Wohlgenuth one sees a group of barges, each one carrying weighing scales like tripods resting on deck. The grain was shipped downstream towards the Black Sea, where it was loaded into ships going to sea....There were no rapids south of Alexandrowsk,...boats could be kept going except for some dredging that was needed.”*

and rich meadows which the deputies and Trappe had so alluringly dangled before them? Curses and the fiercest accusations were soon heaped upon Höppner and Bartsch. They had deceived them! They had sold them to Potemkin! And where was the promised lumber for the construction of houses to give them shelter from the broiling sun or torrential rains?

**“The disappointments of the settlers soon gave way to bitterness.”**

The story of the lumber was to be a repetition of the experiences they had had with other promises already discussed above. In accordance with the Potemkin agreement of July 1787, it will be recalled, the settlers were to find awaiting them at the chosen place of settlement 120 oaken boards per family, or a total of 27,360 boards for the 228 families. Here, in brief, is the story of the lumber deliveries:

|            |                     |
|------------|---------------------|
| 1789 ..... | 3,457 boards        |
| 1790 ..... | 3,611 boards        |
| 1791 ..... | 1,766 boards        |
| 1792 ..... | 4,062 and ¼ boards  |
| 1793 ..... | 3,482 and ¾ boards  |
| 1795 ..... | 8,426 boards        |
| 1796 ..... | <u>2,277 boards</u> |
|            | 27,082 boards       |

There is a lengthy correspondence that lasted many years concerning the missing 278 boards and the promised lumber for the construction of the two mills. And in the end, the endlessly repetitious and involved bureaucratic language makes it impossible to arrive at a conclusion whether this building material was ever supplied, though the alleged expenditure for it appears on

cost-accounts for a number of years into the 19th century.

To add real injury to the many disappointment, inconveniences, and privations already endured, when the barges with the baggage arrived, the owners of the belongings found that many of the boxes had been looted of their contents and filled with stones and other ballast. And what was left was often badly damaged.

Under the circumstances, is it any wonder that many settlers gave unrestrained expression to their distrust of the deputies and complete loss of confidence in the promises made by the government? What hope was there when the director who had been appointed over them, a certain von Essen, had tried at every opportunity to extract bribes from them, often withheld five percent for himself from such government moneys as reached them, and was either unwilling or incapable of protecting them from thieving brigands who often descended upon them?

True to form, the writers of our histories, and not only Hildebrandt and Epp, in discussing these events among the settlers, do point out the rascality of some of the colonial officials. But in the opinion of this writer they ascribe a too disproportionate share of the blame to real or alleged “black sheep” and other kinds of ungrateful elements among the colonists. Unfortunately, too, they overindulge in expressions of fulsome praise and sanctimonious gratitude to local and higher government officials for their efforts to alleviate the dire conditions in the colonies. To cite a typical example, Epp (Note Twenty) writes: *Wie eine liebende Mutter Mitleid mit den Irrtümern ihres Kindes hat und es durch die Liebe und Sanftmut auf den Weg der Besserung zu bringen sucht, so nahm sich schon damals Russlands Obrigkeit unserer Voreltern in dieser kritischen Lage an....*



The banks of the Dnjepr River where the Mennonites settled. Painting by Jakob Suderman. Drawing courtesy of Men. Life, Jan., 1969, page 19. Navigation was impossible in winter when the river froze over. After the construction of the Dnjeprprogres (hydro dam) completed in 1933, the dangerous rapids north of Alexandrowsk were flooded and the Dnjepr was opened to river shipping. See Diese Steine, pages 57-61. Black Sea shipping access to world markets only came for Chortitza in 1863: Geo. K. Epp, Geschichte der Mennoniten - Vol. I, (Lage, 1997), page 211.

**[Hildebrandt and Epp]...ascribe a too disproportionate share of the blame to real or alleged....ungrateful elements among the colonists.”**

I do not mean to suggest that there may not have been among these settlers elements who even under normal conditions would have been difficult to handle or would or not have been satisfied with any kind of handouts. Nor do I wish to deny that the government did not make efforts to relieve the plight of the colonists and to remove some of the injustices to which they had been subjected. What I do wish to emphasize is the need for us to look at the record and to assess the situation from the actual experiences of those who were on the scene, and therefore not to glibly accept the judgment of an author who wrote during the times of an Alexander III, when deference to a policy of “Official Nationalism” too frequently influenced the views and guided the actions of many of our lay and church leaders.

However this may be, it is a fact that the government’s threats to the discontented and intractable souls among the colonists (namely, that no other land would be placed at their disposal, and that if they persisted in their recalcitrance, they would be sent to jail) had a desired effect. This was all the more the case because of the statements of a number of influential people who pointed out that further inspections by them of the Chortitza lands, especially those at some distance from the Dnieper River, had convinced them of the fact that the soils in many places would produce good crops of certain grains and the

lowlands were well suited for livestock raising.

Both of these arguments had the desired effect. The threats of the government convinced the opponents that Chortitza was “it”, and that they had better make the best of it. Others seemed to be persuaded that there was leadership among them which deserved greater trust than it had received up until that time. And so they proceeded to build homes as best as was possible under the circumstances.

Space will not permit me to detail the course of colony-building. I shall give only the dates and the names of the 18 colonies which eventually made up this settlement, generally known as the “Old Colony” or Chortitza Settlement:

1790: Chortitza, Rosenthal, Einlage, Ne u e n d o r f , N e u e n b u r g ,

Schönhorst, Alt-Kronsweide, and Kamp or Insel Chortitza from the name of the island on which it was located.

1797: Schönwiese and Kronsgarten, established on new government lands and founded by 32 of the 118 families who arrived here during 17793-1796.

1803: Nieder-Chortitza and Burwalde founded, in the main, by families of the 118 component, and settled on land purchased by the government in 1802 from Privy Councillor Miklasevskii, and located adjacent to the Chortitza land. Most of the purchase was formerly part of the estate *Nizhniaia Khortitsa* of Potemkin’s niece, the Countess Skavronskaia.

1809: Kronstal and

1812: Neu Osterwick, both founded by recent arrivals from West Prussia and settled on land of the 1802 purchase.

1816: Schöneberg and

1824: Neuhorst, Rosengart and Blumengart. These colonists represented in the main arrivals of 1793 to 1796 who until this date had lived in several of the original colonies, and who were now settled on land of the 1802 purchase.

And so Chortitza, despite years of great difficulties and bitter conflicts and dire predictions about its chance of survival, did come through its trials and tribulations, did expand over a period of years, and eventually became one of the most prosperous settlements of all foreign colonies in Russia.



Susanne Enns (left) and Katharina Martens enjoy the beauty of the high cliffs of the Dnjepr, opposite “de Camp” or Chortitza Island, ca. 1929. They were employed by engineer Winter, and thus able to enter the area where normally only foreigners were allowed. Photo courtesy of F. Thiessen, Neuenendorf in Bild und Wort (Espelkamp, 1991), page 33.

#### IV. A decade of Hardships: Höppner and Bartsch

Aside from the post-revolutionary period of 1917, the first decade in Russia was in every respect the hardest one the Mennonites ever experienced in that country. Seldom has their mettle and ability to survive adversities been so severely put to a test as during those years.

In no other period, too, except for the years of the bitter disputes in the Molotschnaia colonies between the landowners and the landless during the 1860s, did the Mennonite propensity for inner-group quarrelling, for personal vendettas between church and lay leaderships, and of dirty-linen washing in public, ever reach the proportions of those of 1790 to about 1801.

The issues at stake were enormous. I shall call attention to only a few of the most significant ones. The most immediate was the question of whether the colonists, after the inevitably difficult years which beset any frontier people, would manage to survive and to develop a degree of economic independence to justify the host country's heavy expenditures on their establishment. For the first 228 families during 1788-1797 they amounted to 232,085 rubles, and for the 118 families, they totalled 115,865 rubles for the years 1793-1797.

Of far greater consequence was the issue of whether these Mennonites would eventually develop an economy of such proportions as to measure up to the expectations of the Potemkin-Höppner-Bartsch agreement of 1787, and with that to justify a continuation by Russia of not only keeping her doors open to further and ever larger Mennonite emigrations, but to do so on the basis of the grants of rights and privileges never before proffered to them anywhere else in the world.

Finally, there was an issue of peculiar concern to the Mennonites themselves. Would a people who had had no prior group experience, however successful they had been in many other endeavours, in the administration of their own religious, economic, social and civic affairs, learn the very difficult tasks of governing themselves on the local and district levels?

That the Mennonite colonists would meet the issue of physical survival under very adverse conditions, I believe, could have been taken for granted. Members of a denomination who in Danzig and the Vistula areas had for over 200 years succeeded against all kinds of religious and economic restrictions in the preservation of their faith and in the gaining for themselves of an enviable record in farming and other diverse enterprises, were bound to make a go of it in New Russia, and the record is clear on this, however dismal the prospects must at times have seemed to those involved.

The answer to the second is also conclusive. The thousands of Mennonite families who were invited by Russia from 1804 on to build the Molotschnaia colonies, or who were allowed to come between 1819 and 1850, when the gates to the influx of foreign colonists were all but tightly closed except to the Mennonites, showed what a valuable asset Russia had found these colonists to be.



*The typical Mennonite dwelling, barn and shed of early Rosenthal, Chortitza Colony, reminiscent of the structures Mennonites had once lived in the Dreierfriesland and Lower Saxony, four centuries earlier. Painting by Jakob Suderman. Courtesy of Men. Life, Jan., 1969, page 24/Diese Steine, page 128.*

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“[The Mennonite colonies showed]...what a valuable asset Russia had found these colonists to be....”

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The achievements in the third field of challenge--would a group of strong individualists and non-conformists with little or no experience in self-government, be capable of learning the tasks of administering the complex affairs of what was to become a Mennonite commonwealth in an absolutists' monarchy?--were not easily predictable. But as anyone conversant with the history of the Mennonites in Russia knows, they did eventually learn the art of administering their temporal affairs to a superb degree. Unfortunately, the extant Mennonite accounts generally extol too much the end results achieved without giving proper consideration to the true nature of the church-state struggle encountered in this process. Nor do they disclose the vicious excesses which characterized this conflict during the early years in Chortitza.

#### **Gemeinde vs. State.**

The following brief commentary, based mainly upon documentary materials in the Russian archives (Note Twenty-One), might help to place the church-state struggle in Chortitza during the period under consideration in somewhat different light from those given in Hildebrandt and Epp.

The situation in Chortitza would undoubtedly have been more favourable from the very beginnings of the settlement had Trappe in 1789 assumed the office to which he had been appointed at the request of the deputies two years earlier, namely that of Director and Curator of the New Russian Colonies, and had Potemkin during the years 1789-1791 maintained an active interest in and given adequate attention to these colonies.

Trappe, as mentioned above, refused to obey the orders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1788 to cease his recruiting activity and to return home. Why he did refuse and was able to get away with it cannot be taken up here.

Potemkin during these years was not only deeply involved in military activities, but was above all preoccupied with attempts to maintain his threatened position of power in certain national councils of government and with fantastically costly entertainment endeavours in St. Petersburg to dislodge Catherine's latest favourite, and thus to regain his former powerful influence with the empress.

The supervision of the Mennonite and other colonies and the administration of their local affairs was entrusted, first by Potemkin and then by the government of New Russia, to a succession of directors, usually representing foreign adventurers or soldiers of fortune. Jean von Essen, the first one, and his successor, a Baron von Brackel, were both utterly incompetent and grasping rascals bent primarily upon fleecing the colonists to line their own pockets. In conformity with general Russian governing practices, both of these adventurers were always ready to threaten to punish any infraction of rules or disobedience of their orders with corporal punishment. Brackel actually arrogated to himself the title "Commander-in-Chief of the Colonies". To anyone familiar with certain Mennonite characteristics of independence, obstinacy, and resentment to being pushed around, the bullying tactics of the directors could hardly have been conducive to allay the smoldering embers of discontent and even less to facilitate the maintenance of law and order.

The seat of government of these officials was usually located in the Lutheran colony of Josephstal, near Ekaterinoslav, a considerable distance from Chortitza. The directors therefore often found it convenient, and at times perhaps a bit safer, to thrust the execution of various administrative directives upon the two former depu-

ties, Höppner and Bartsch. In issues of settling disputes between colonists the directors often called upon the services of the church ministers. Both expedients were bound to have unfortunate results.

For reasons which can only be conjectured at this time, the directors called much more frequently upon Höppner for execution of certain orders or instructions from higher headquarters. And Höppner's decisive character and brusque manners apparently disdained to spend much time in patient reasoning with obstinacy or obduracy. The generally incompetent staff of religious leaders served to complicate matters because it could not or would not understand the need for the separation of church and secular affairs. Both Hildebrandt and Epp testify to the weakness of the Mennonite ministry at this time, and its contributing role to some of the serious disorders in the colonies.

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**“Höppner's decisive character and brusque manners apparently disdained to spend much time in patient reasoning with obstinacy or obduracy.”**

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#### **Failed Promises.**

Resistance of the colonists to instructions and orders of the deputies was possibly heightened by the lingering feelings of distrust which many bore against them for their continuing failures to receive the promised forms of assistance from the government. The deputies' protestations that they were in no way responsible for these infernal delays made little impression upon the discontented elements. Perhaps not unlike the common attitude of the Russian peasant that “God is in heaven, the tsar is far away, and the local official is a scoundrel, or does not give a hoot”, so these Mennonites blamed the deputies because they were visibly there.

The widely prevalent opposition to the deputies was also fanned by envy of the special privileges which the government had accorded Höppner and Bartsch, especially the loan of 800 rubles advanced to each of them for the construction and operation of a store and bakery. I should hasten to point out that neither of the deputies received the other considerations, for example, the special grant of twenty dessiatins of hayland promised them in the January 1788 documents.

To the best of my knowledge, there appears to be no divergence in our historical accounts over the fact that the colonists centered their chief, if not generally exclusive, dislike and hatred upon Höppner rather than Bartsch. This may possibly have been due to the differences in their characters. Bartsch appears to have been more peaceably inclined. The events surrounding the tragic decisions of 1797 to 1798, culminating in the expulsion of both from church membership with its attendant fateful consequences, show that Bartsch was much more inclined than Höppner to submit to decisions of church and lay authorities of the brotherhood.

Perhaps a more important and persistent rea-



*Chortitza, ca. 1930. By 1914 the population of Chortitza-Rosenthal had grown to 6000. It had become not only the centre of Mennonite life and culture in Russia, it was a thriving industrial dynamo for the Black Sea region. The large chimney in the foreground may be the “Lepp & Wallmann” factory. Can any reader identify the scene, cf. Diese Steine, pages 97-140. Photo courtesy of Neudorf, Rempel and Neudorf, editors, Osterwick 1812-1943 (Clearbrook, n.d.), page 39. It is interesting that Rosenthal and Chortitz, East Reserve, Manitoba, were also laid out as sister villages.*

son for the prevailing dislike, or hatred in many cases, of Höppner was the fact that government officials at various levels continued to consult with Höppner on a variety of issues pertaining to old or newly arrived colonists, or that the latter instinctively turned to him for advice and assistance.

An important case in point is the Mennonite immigrants who arrived during the years 1793 to 1796. Brackel had planned to settle them on the Bug River, but was temporarily stymied in carrying out his plans because of the alleged difficulty in dispatching the promised building lumber to them. Höppner meanwhile endeavoured to secure permission to settle them on portions of the old Berislav site originally selected by himself and Bartsch. Despite some earlier gestures of Höppner, in deference to Potemkin that the viceroy's selection of Chortitza in 1789 had been a good decision, Höppner still hoped very much that that site was not lost for good to a large Mennonite settlement. When turned down again, it was his achievement in persuading authorities to settle 32 families of the new immigrants at Schoenweise and Kronsgarten, and that the remaining 86 families were to be temporarily quartered in five of the original colonies, pending the location of a tract of land in closest proximity to Chortitza. As we know, this did happen with the purchase in 1802 of the Miklasevskii estate *Nizhniaia Khortitsa*.

It is impossible to detail here the charges and counter-charges of the conflict which so bitterly divided the Chortitza colonists into two factions. On one side were the deputies supported by a small number of settlers. On the other side were the clergy in intimate alliance with most of the lay officials in the several colonies. This faction claimed to represent the attitudes and the wishes of the majority of the settlers, or “the opinions of the best among them”, as is claimed in some of the documents.

It is most unfortunate that Hildebrandt and Epp consciously and deliberately swept so much

of the story of these conflicts under the rug-- either because certain things might reflect adversely upon the memory or reputation of once prominent people, or because much of the controversy was embarrassing to the entire Mennonite brotherhood, or simply because the whole thing was too painful an episode in Mennonite history, and therefore was better left buried altogether.

And yet charges or allegations are left to stand which are not substantiated or borne out by the official records in Russian archives. These materials are voluminous, consisting of numerous reports by local officials in response to requests for information from higher agencies of government, or upon direct orders from them, letters of transmittal, a veritable avalanche of memoranda from one official or agency to another, statistical tables, etc.

#### **Guardianship Office.**

All this paper activity stemmed principally from a series of inquiries from the Senate, finance, and accounting offices and numerous other agencies in St. Petersburg. Their findings can be summarized in a few words: the whole governmental apparatus was a nightmarish mess. It was partly for this reason that a special department was created in the Senate in 1797 which had such salutary effects upon reforming the whole structure of “colonial” government. The title of the department was *Ekspeditsia Gosudarstvennago Khorziaistva, Opekunstva Inostrannykh i Selskago Domovodstva*. This rather formidable title is variously translated, of which the most appropriate would seem to be “Expedition of State Economy, Guardianship of Foreigners, and of Agricultural Economy” (Note Twenty-Two).

As far as the foreign colonists are concerned the most important immediate accomplishments were the sending of several investigative commissions to the colonies on the Volga and in New Russia. For the Mennonite colonies, this concerns mainly the investigations on the spot of the famous Samuel Contentius, who during 1798-1800



The first Mennonite church of Chortitza, Russia. Painting by Jakob Suderman. Courtesy of Men. Life, Jan., 1969, page 28. The pioneers of Chortitza built their first worship house in 1789, the first year of settlement, demonstrating the importance of their faith. The building soon proved too small for the thriving Gemeinde. It was replaced with the larger two-story structure in 1835. In 1935 the Soviets closed the worship house using it as a theatre. In 1997 it was used as a cultural centre (see Diese Steine, page 99-101).

made several inspections of their colonies, heard the Mennonite charges against Höppner and several other Mennonites, suggested various reforms for their settlements and the granting of a number of relief measures, lent considerable assistance to the Mennonite petitions for the issuance of the promised Charter of Privileges (which they finally did receive in September of 1800), and who for several decades was the "Chief Judge" (chairman) of the newly created "Guardianship Bureau of the Foreign Colonies in the South of Russia". Of much significance are also the various reports of Ivan Brigontsy, who replaced Brackel in 1796-1797 as Director of the New Russian Colonies.

Both Contentius and Brigontsy, in their official reports to the Senate for the consideration of the *Ekspeditsia*, generally speak very favourably of the Mennonites and their economy as a whole. However, their numerous memoranda, notes, letters, etc., present a very "messy" picture of the wranglings in Chortitza.

### The Höppner Debacle.

I shall mention only three of the most important issues of these controversies. The first has reference to the missing lumber in the colonies because this involves the Mennonite charges against Jacob Höppner and his brother Peter Höppner. These two men had been the two chief members of a committee to receive the building lumber at Chortitza. As with everything else, the boards never arrived on time. The government purchased them in northern *gubernias* and floated them down the Dneiper River to Chortitza. Some of the lumber was damaged in transit through the rapids. Goodly portions were unfit for use on construction of the houses. The contractors were either managers of the estates of large landowners, military officers, or just plain businessmen. Not all were honest, and so lengthy litigations ensued.

The specific issue involving the two Höppners was the charge by a group of Mennonites that these two had wrongly appropriated 287 boards of the construction of their own houses. The Höppners denied the charges, but the government eventually found them guilty

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**"The Höppners denied the charges, but the government eventually found them guilty..."**

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That there was considerable doubt about the veracity of the charges is evidenced by a report of Brigontsy. In his report to the Senate, dated July 5, 1801, he recommended that the fine be written off, since the Höppners could not pay the sum anyway, and since they had merely been "guilty of neglect" in the matter of the loss of the number of boards in question, and that to this day "it has been impossible to find out who has those boards".

The second charge against Jacob Höppner, pressed in particular by the clergy and the mayors of the colonies, was that during eight years in connection with various activities with which he had been connected, he had continuously created trouble and disorders which had caused much harm and great disturbances. Furthermore, at a recent house construction "he had caused quarrels and resorted to beatings".

Another charge was that his years of service had been characterized by "cunning behaviour and naked self-interest". Moreover, his brother Peter had always supported him and been party to all of the misdeeds of the former deputy. In this connection there were also accusations of allegations of misuse of government funds.

Unfortunately, in the welter of material I found in the Leningrad archival records on this area of the controversy I did not come across a single document which specifically spelled out Höppner's

misdeeds or alleged acts of misbehaviour. Nor were the records of the actual trial of the Höppners discovered. The official letter of the clergy and the lay officials of Chortitza, dated July 3, 1798, addressed to *An Seinen Hochwohlgebohrenen Insonders Hochzuerenden Herrn Ho. Rath Conthenius*, which was sent in response to an inquiry by Contentius as to why certain actions had been taken against Jacob Höppner and his brother, confines itself to a summary listing of their misguided behaviour, and with what heavy heart they had been forced to resort against them with the church's ultimate weapons, namely expulsion and application of the ban.

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**"The official letter of the clergy...was sent in response to an inquiry by Contentius..."**

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The available material does not permit making a definitive evaluation of the thoroughness with which either Brigontsy or Contentius looked into the Mennonite charges against the Höppners. What is very disturbing is that both officials during 1798-1799, i.e., two years before the actual trial of the Höppners, repeatedly use the expression "as already found completely guilty." Yet their recommendations to higher authorities concerning the punishment to be imposed upon them, and eventually accepted by the court in New Russia, and subsequently sanctioned by the Senate, invariably--at least in the documents I did come across--fail to specifically list or to discuss their "misdeeds".

However, this may be, the eventual judgement of the court was that the Höppners were to be imprisoned and to be ordered to reimburse the government for the expenses incurred to them in travel and subsistence allowances and the loans advanced to them on the basis of the general agreement of July 1787 and the special loan granted to Jacob Höppner by the basis of the January 1788 document. For Jacob Höppner this amounted to 1,845 rubles and 35  $\frac{3}{4}$  kopeks, representing the 500 ruble general loan, 800 rubles of special loan, and the travel and subsistence cost of the period of March 1788 to about July 1789.

To satisfy these claims, the government in December of 1788 sold at public auction the livestock of the two Höppners. The sale of the deputies' livestock brought 1,758 rubles and 80 kopeks. The remaining amount of 86 rubles and 93  $\frac{3}{4}$  kopeks was realized from the public sale in January 1801 of some of his other property. Attempts at collection of Peter Höppner's debts was more complicated because of smaller numbers of livestock, a house of poorer quality, and the sale of his windmill to a Greek Orthodox priest.

The Höppners did not remain long in prison. A general amnesty proclaimed in April 1801 on the occasion of the accession of the new emperor, Alexander I, was applied to them. But they were not permitted to return to their former homes at the specific request of the Mennonite authorities. Both refused to recant their "sins" or to admit of having committed any "crimes". Both also flatly refused to apologize and to beg for readmission to church membership.

Jacob Höppner and wife and small children found a temporary home on the nearby estate of Privy Councillor Miklashevskii where for several years Höppner operated a cheese factory. Eventually he asked and was given membership in the Frisian Mennonite Church in the colony of Insel Chortitza where he soon succeeded again in building up one of the finest farms in the entire settlement.

The other deputy, Bartsch, did not share the fate of his former colleague. Although also expelled from church membership, he immediately begged forgiveness for “wrong actions”. This was accepted and he was restored to membership in the church. Later, however, he suffered the humiliation of being ordered to destroy several musical instruments possessed by his family. The guardians of the purity of the faith had found the possession and the playing of musical instruments as dangerous flirting with evil.

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“Bartsch,....Although also expelled from church membership,.... begged forgiveness...[and] was restored to membership...”

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This whole tragic conflict of the 1790s included many other aspects which it is impossible to take up here.

The lay and church officials of the Flemish Mennonite congregations to which belonged the overwhelming majority of the Chortitza colonists at this time had had their vendetta. For a few years they had been able to shape, or even to turn the course of significant events. but they had not succeeded in bringing immediate peace to the colonies. Nor had they succeeded in bringing Höppner to his knees or in breaking his spirit.

Neither did their triumph last long. As a result of the discovery of the messy affairs in most of the colonies, including others beside the Mennonites and the utter chaos in the entire colonial system of government, the *Ekspeditsia* in 1801 revamped the whole machinery of government from top to bottom. The newly introduced systems of local government granted the colonists virtually complete autonomy in the administration of their local affairs. Though the new system endowed the village and volost officials with almost dictatorial powers and limited the right to vote and to hold office exclusively to landowning colonists, the possibilities were there to democratize the system, if they so desired. And this they did, though not without suffering occasional setbacks.

The words of a prominent member in Chortitza—“Thank God for the village *Schultze* (mayor) and the village council! Otherwise we might have had a pope!”—undoubtedly reflected the sentiments of most of the colonists.

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“The newly introduced systems of local government granted the colonists virtually complete autonomy in the administration of their local affairs....”

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Aerial view of “Dnjeprogres” the hydro electric dam, looking north. This photo was taken shortly after the official opening of the dam on October 10, 1932. Photo courtesy of Osterwick 1812-1943, page 159. By 1914 the Chortitza/Alexandrowsk (Zaporozhe) area had become the industrial engine of southern Russia. The discovery of iron ore in Krivoy-Rog and the abundant coal deposits of the Donets basin destined the area for greatness, providing the raw material needed for industrialization. The Mennonites of Chortitza played a major role in these developments. After the completion of the power dam, an abundant supply of hydro-elective power, quickly resulted in the growth of Zaporozhe to the present 800,000 population. In the foreground, the “Preobraschenskij” bridge built in 1928, connecting the City to the Island of Chortitza.

#### Endnotes:

Note One: C.f., eg., E.I. Druzhinina, *Severnoe Prichornomorie* (“The Northern Littoral of the Black Sea Region”), 1775-1800.

Moscow, 1959; and Apollon Skalkovskii, *Kronologicheskoe Obzrenie Istorii Novorossiiskago Kraia* (“Chronological Survey of the History of the New Russian Region”), 1730-1823, Parts I and II, Odessa. 1836 and 1838.

Note Two: David H. Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten*, Odessa, 1889.

Note Three: Peter Hildebrandt, *Erste Auswanderung aus dem Danziger Gebiet nach Sued-Russland*, Halbstadt, 1888.

Note Four: H.G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde*, Danzig, 1919.

Note Five: G.G. Pisarevskii, *Iz istorii inostrannoi kolonizatsii v Rossii v XVIII v.* (“Researches in the History of the Foreign Colonization in Russia in the XVIII Century”), Moscow, 1909.

Note Six: Paul Karge, “Die Auswanderung west- und ostpreussischer Mennoniten nach Suedrussland”, *Ebinger Jahrbuch*, Heft 3, 1923, pp. 65-98.

Note Seven: Particularly important for the period of 1789 to 1801 are the files labelled f. 383, d. 159, and f. 383, f. 162.

Note Eight: The only and somewhat extensive account about Trappe’s activity among the Mennonites in Danzig and environs is to be found in Pisarevskii’s work cited in Footnote 5.

Note Nine: Copies of documents pertaining to the relationships between Potemkin and Trappe’s correspondence with Count Ostermann, and of some other relevant material on this subject are to be found in a special volume entitled *The Moscow Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Acts pertaining to the Colonists, 1786-1792’.

Note Ten: David H. Epp, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Note Eleven: *Ibid.*, pp. 16-23.

Note Twelve: Pisarevskii, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-304.

Note Thirteen: S.D. Bondar, *Sekta Mennonitov v Rossii* (“The Mennonite Sect in Russia”), Petrograd, 1916, pp. 191-197.

Note Fourteen: Peter Hildebrandt, *op. cit.*

Note Fifteen: David H. Epp, *op. cit.*

Note Sixteen: Sources, in the main, as in footnote 7. Cf. also Hildebrandt, *Erste Auswanderung...* and Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten*.

Note Seventeen: Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederlaendisch-niederdeutschen Hintergruende der mennonitischen*

*Ostwanderungen im 16., 18, und 19. Jahrhundert*, Karlsruhe, 1955.

Note Eighteen: Adolf Ehrh, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland*, Berlin: Verlag von Julius Beltz, 1932.

Note Nineteen: Horst Quiring, “Die Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Preussen....” *Mennonite Life*, April, 1951, pp. 36-40; Jacob Quiring, *Die Mundart von Chortitza in Sued-Russland*, Muenchen, 1926.

Note Twenty: David H. Epp, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

Note Twenty-One: See footnotes 7 and 16.

Note Twenty-Two: An excellent discussion on the reasons for the establishment of the *Ekspeditsia*, the possible authors and chief personnel, and on some of its work is to be found in a series of articles by V. Veshniakov, “Ekspeditsia Gousudarstvennago Khoziaistva”, in the magazine *Russkaia Starina*, 108 (1901) and 111 (1902).

#### Further Reading:

Henry Schapansky, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia: Early History and First Settlers in the Context of the Mennonite Migrations* (New Westminster, 2001), pages 104-118; see *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 124-129 for book review essay.

H. Schapansky, “From Prussia to Russia: A Revisionists (Chortitza Colony) Interpretation of Mennonite History,” *Pres.*, Issue No. 14, pages 9-14;

H. Schapansky, “From Danzig to Russia: A Book Review Essay,” *Pres.*, Issue No. 17, pages 126-128.

Johannes von der Smisson, “History of the Church in Chortitza in the Mennonite Colonies in South Russia,” *Pres.*, No. 15, pages 3-10, translated from by Wm. Schroeder, 434 Sutton Ave., Winnipeg, Canada, originally published in *Mennonitischen Blätter*, March, May, and July, 1854, and published in German in Franz Thiessen, *Neuendorf in Bild und Wort Chortitzaer Bezirk, Ukraine 1789-1943* (Espelkamp, 1991), pages 19-24.

# David G. Rempel (1899-1992), Mennonite Historian

“David G. Rempel (1899-1992): Major Historian of the Mennonite Experience in Russia,” by James Urry, Anthropology, School of Social and Cultural Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand,

## Introduction.

David Gerhard Rempel was born in the village of Nieder Chortitza (Nizhniaia Khortitsa) in the Chortitza (Khortitsa) Colony in the province of Ekaterinoslav on November 17 (n.s. 30) 1899.

His father Gerhard (1863-1919) was a businessman who specialized in trading grain. Rempel was the second youngest son of his father's second marriage and there were three children from the first marriage.

His mother, Maria Pauls (1867-1920) of Rosenthal, was descended from the Hildebrands of Insel Chortitza. Her grandfather, Jacob Hildebrand (1793-1867), was Elder of the Schönwiese Frisian congregation and her uncle, Cornelius Hildebrand, wrote sketches of early Old Colony life which remain important historical sources.

As a schoolboy Rempel boarded with his Pauls grandparents in a household dominated by his Hildebrand great grandmother and thus was exposed at an early age to the family's rich tradition of oral history and to its collection of old documents. The Hildebrands belonged to the Frisian congregation but Rempel's father was a member of the larger Flemish congregation.

Rempel's father provided all his children with a good education. Rempel's elder half-brother, Johann (1890-1962), was a teacher and later an influential religious and community leader in Russia and later in Saskatchewan. His younger brother Jacob (1903-1976) was a Professor of Biology at the University of Saskatchewan.

## Education.

Rempel attended the village elementary school and Chortitza High School and then a commercial school. The revolution of 1917 forced his return to Chortitza and he experienced the Civil War and the activities of the anarchist Nestor Makhno. Both his parents and his brother Heinrich died of typhus within days of each other in 1919/1920. Rempel taught school until 1922 when the Soviet authorities removed him because brother John was a minister. In 1923 Rempel, with two brothers, emigrated to Canada where a married sister later joined them.

In Canada Rempel was selected to receive a higher education in the United States and attended Bluffton College in Ohio. Later he received a PhD in history in 1933 at Stanford University in California with an impressive thesis entitled *The Mennonite colonies in New Russia: a study of their settlement and economic development from 1789 to 1914*.

He taught at San Mateo Junior College (later the College of San Mateo), a position he held from 1934 until his retirement in 1964 except for a period of service with the Historic Section of the US Strategic Air Force during World War Two.

## Research.

Throughout his life Rempel maintained a keen interest in Russian and Mennonite history but had little time to do new research or writing because of his work. However, in 1962 following a thaw in US/Soviet relations, he was among the first foreign schol-

ars permitted limited access to archives in the Soviet Union.

In the State Historical Archives in Leningrad (today St Petersburg) he researched links between the Russian state and Mennonites during the 19th century. He was particularly interested in the reform policies of the Ministry of State Domains from the 1830s onwards and the Mennonite struggle over land in the 1850s. He also examined the relationship between the agricultural policies of the Tsarist government and Mennonite farming practices later in the 19th century.

While in Leningrad the very helpful and dedicated female archivists informed him that their colleagues in the Moscow Archive of Ancient Documents had discovered references to Mennonites in their own collection. Rempel immediately obtain permission to go to Moscow where he consulted 260 folios in two volumes relating to the first contacts between Mennonites and the Russian state during the period 1786 to 1796. These were concerned with the negotiations between Prince Potemkin and the Mennonite representatives, Hoepfner and Bartsch, as well as the initial settlement of Chortitza. The records from Moscow form the basis for his article re-published in this edition of *Preservings*.

In Leningrad and Moscow Rempel secured microfilms covering over 10,000 pages of archival sources chosen from over 1000 volumes of documents. He intended to return to the Soviet Union the following year but was refused permission to continue his research.

## Writings.

A series of debilitating illnesses and operations disrupted his work on writing the material up but before his death on June 27 1992 he had completed a number of important works mainly articles. These include a major account of the rise and development of the Mennonite Commonwealth and an introduction to Mennonite historiography, both published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1974.

He also contributed an account of the early years of the Chortitza Colony published in a book edited by N. Klassen in 1981 and numerous articles in the newspaper *Der Bote* and elsewhere. In his final years Rempel also collected sources on his own family's history producing a large manuscript "Branches across the wall: a memoir history of Russian Mennonite life" which still awaits publication but will prove of major interest to genealogists.

Rempel's writing reflects a particularly Old Colony view of the larger Mennonite world in the context of Russian history although it must be remembered he was a skilled historian fluent in Russian, German and English. He believed that the attention given by Rusländer Mennonites to the work of Molochna historians, especially P.M. Friesen's, was to the neglect of Chortitza writers such as David H. Epp and the role the Old Colony in Mennonite history. All his writing was informed by his personal knowledge and experience. He never romanticized the past. He was opposed to the tendency, as he liked to express it, "to sweep aspects of the Mennonite



Dr. David G. Rempel (1899-1992), Menlo Park, California, in later years. Photo courtesy of Journal of Mennonite Studies, No. 11, page 224.

past under the proverbial rug." On occasion he took singular delight in pointing out the reality of Mennonite life, especially to those Rusländer who spoke of the "Good Old Days" and "Golden Years" which they claimed to have existed before the revolutions of 1917.

Rempel's other major contribution to the Mennonite community lay in his efforts to gather material on the Mennonite past and to preserve it for future generations. He always regretted the personal loss of his family's papers and was painfully aware that revolution and war had destroyed and dispersed important historical sources. The collection of historical material he collected he hoped would form the basis of a Mennonite research library and archive and in the early 1980s he concluded an agreement with Conrad Grebel College in Ontario to receive his collection after his death. However, the College later changed its support for Russian Mennonite studies and his descendants decided to transfer the manuscripts from Conrad Grebel to the University of Toronto where it is currently located in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. The books and copies of his microfilms are still at Conrad Grebel.

## Conclusion.

Rempel possessed a strong sense of social justice. His experience of war, revolution and famine in Ukraine left him with a sense of empathy for suffering peoples around the world and he supported a wide range of social and charitable concerns. He was life-long Democrat and active in political affairs. By stature Rempel was a diminutive figure but he possessed great energy in spite of the illnesses which effected many areas of his health. To the very end he remained alert, committed and fiercely independent in mind and body.

I had the great privilege of corresponding with Rempel for over twenty years and I learned a tremendous amount from him and valued his friendship greatly. It was a particular honour to visit him twice in his home in Menlo Park in California where we spent days discussing Mennonite life and history. He is undoubtedly one of the great historians of Russian Mennonite history who through his research and writing contributed immensely to our understanding of the Mennonite past.

I have written a more detailed account of David G. Rempel's life and work, with a list of his publications, in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 11, 1993, 224-35.

# The Old Colony Pioneers and the Höppner affair

“The Old Colony Pioneers and the Jakob Höppner affair,” a paper presented March 9, 2002, at Family History Day, sponsored by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, at the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba, by Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B.C., V3L 4V5.

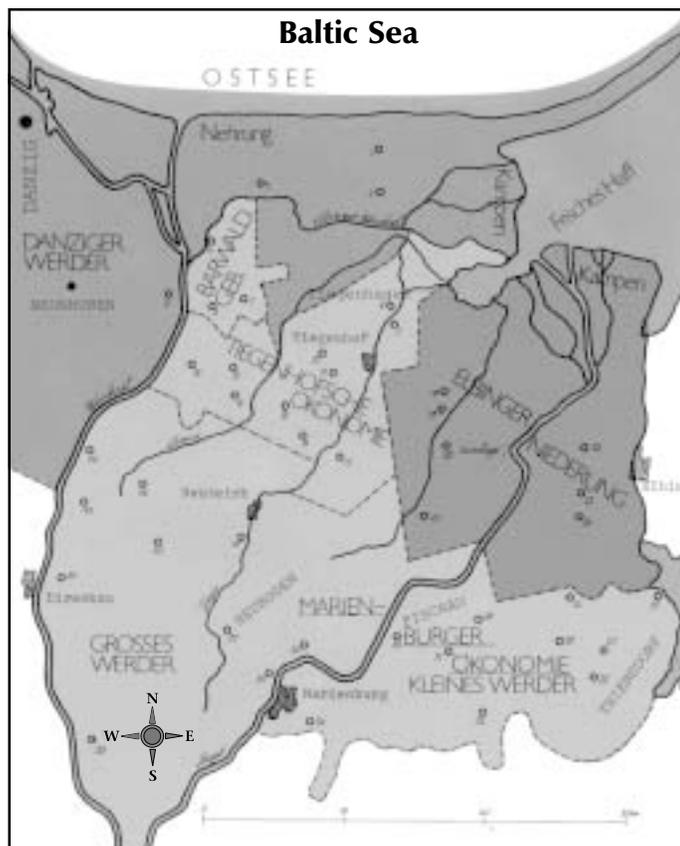
## The Thesis.

Earlier, I have discussed the first migrations of the Mennonites from the Lowlands to West Prussia (To be published in a future issue of *Preservings*). I have also reviewed some of the other major migrations in other contexts in my book (see *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 124-9). The parallels which all of these migrations present are far too overwhelming to be ignored. The similarities are far greater than any contextually determined differences.

The theme of these migration patterns is that they have two components. The first component, and chronologically speaking, the first wave, consists of Mennonites emigrating primarily to preserve traditional concepts of Gemeinde or community. The second component consists of immigration movements, subsequent to the first, of Mennonites immigrating primarily for other reasons, generally related to upheavals caused by a war or military conflict. That is not of course to say that there was no overlap between the two types of emigration. As I have pointed out previously, the existence of these two differing migration types, while easily observed, is often interpreted by historians in strange and surprising ways. They focus on the progress and economic achievements of the second component, the late-comers if you will, and discuss the first component in somewhat condescending terms.

The pioneering traditionalist immigrants, are viewed, by what I call the Prussian and Russian school of historians (which still unfortunately exists), as an ignorant and recalcitrant lot, led like sheep, by a dictatorial Lehrdienst. One writer, Postma, repeatedly refers to Dirk Phillips (as well as Leenaert Bouwens) as dictators, or Mennonite kings. Dirk Phillips was of course the leader of the first immigrants to West Prussia and Ältester of the Flemish Gemeinde. Likewise Fürstenlander Ältester Johann Wiebe and Bergthal Ältester Gerhard Wiebe have been portrayed as dictatorial (Note One). In our time, leaders of the first immigrations to Mexico and Paraguay have often been portrayed as power-hungry Ohms, wanting to maintain and extend their personnel position or influence.

As I have attempted to point out, this conception is based on a misunderstanding of the fundamental differences between the traditional and non-traditionalist Mennonite groups, which, even though these terms may now be obsolete,



Map showing administrative districts in the Vistula (Weichsel) Delta. Note the “Kampen” in the delta of the Elbinger Vistula (Weichsel) and the Nogat Rivers, which later became the well-known “de Kamp” referring to the Island of Chortütza in the Dnjepr River in Russia. Map from Horst Penner, *Die ost- und westpreußischen Mennoniten* (Weierhof, 1978), page 516. Cf. with the map in Hildebrandt’s *Zeittafel* (Wpg, 1945), page 66/H. H. Schröder, *Rußlanddeutsche Friesen* (Döllstadt, 1936), page 111.

we can call Flemish and Friesian. The Flemish groups were more democratic and community-oriented than their Friesian counterparts, who were more individualistic and more prone to assimilation.

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“The pioneering traditionalist immigrants, are viewed, by...the Prussian and Russian school of historians....[as if] ruled like sheep, by a dictatorial Lehrdienst.”

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## Pre-1815 Immigration.

In this context, the first major wave of immigration to Russia, 1788 to 1806, is extremely interesting, because the various groups were not, in fact, led by a “dictatorial” Lehrdienst. In fact, there was no Lehrdienst at all. Johann Wiebe, later described by Heinrich Heese as a little tyrant, originally refused to accept the position of Ältester when elected in 1793. Like-

wise the Flemish Molotschna immigrants (1803-06) had no pre-existing Lehrdienst.

In contrast however, the second category of immigrants, the post-1815 immigrants, who can be classified in part at least as Friesian, generally came as groups led by an Ältester.

The lack of an organized Lehrdienst in the first immigration years was to present problems, both in the Old and in the Molotschna Colonies. It had long been the rule, in the Flemish Gemeinden, that anyone had to be prepared to serve the Gemeinde when called upon. In Russia, many of those called upon, in the first years, had never previously served in the Lehrdienst. They would have benefited from the advice and counsel of senior Lehrdienst members, who however, were simply not there. In the Old Colony, some individuals originally elected were dismissed and replaced with others. In the Molotschna, no such process took place. Because these unsuitable Lehrdienst members were not replaced, dissention arose, leading to the breakaway of the Kleine Gemeinde.

The immigrants to Russia in the pre-1815 period were, with a few exceptions, Delta Flemish Mennonites. Briefly, the Flemish Mennonites placed a stronger emphasis on the Mennonite community, the

Gemeinde, and the connection between spiritual and secular life, than did their Friesian counterparts. This is the reason that Flemish Gemeinden were always the first to consider immigration as a means of preserving the community and eliminating the menace of assimilation. This treat of assimilation was, in my view, the main but perhaps not only motivating force for the first immigration to the Old and Molotschna Colonies.

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“...the Flemish Mennonites placed a stronger emphasis on the Mennonite community, the Gemeinde, and the connection between spiritual and secular life...”

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The Flemish were perhaps the majority group in the Vistula delta. But there were large Friesian Gemeinden in the delta as well. These include the large Thiensdorf and Marcushoff

Gemeinden, and the important Orlofferfelde and Danzig-Neugarten Gemeinden. While the Orlofferfelde Gemeinde was indeed smaller than the Grosses Werder Gemeinde of the Flemish, evidence indicates that the Orlofferfelde Gemeinde would have been much larger but for the loss of many members. Recent baptismal records (from the Orlofferfelde Gemeinde) from the earlier part of the 1700s, shared with me by Glen Penner, point to the disappearance of many families from later records. It seems unlikely that this could generally be attributed to death. What is more likely is that this Gemeinde, one of the most assimilationist of all the West Prussian Gemeinden, lost many members to other churches.

Be that as it may, very few individuals from any of these four Gemeinden immigrated to Russia in the pre-1815 period.

### Lithuanians.

Exceptions to the general rule are always interesting. In the case of the Old Colony, there was a significant minority group of Friesians. I have indicated that almost all of these Friesians had a common link, namely a connection to the Lithuanian Friesian Gemeinde. In this profile of the Old Colony, it may be appropriate to begin first with this exception, the Lithuanians, who were indeed a very unique group.

The history of the Lithuanian Mennonites begins with the Great Plague of 1709. This plague devastated the south coast of the Baltic Sea and a mortality rate of some 25% prevailed. The East Prussian government sought to repair the damage to the population and the economy by extending an open invitation to new settlers under generous conditions. This invitation was published abroad in various locations and is dated 20.9.1711. The primary settlement area was to be the Memelland, the land along the river Memel, in Prussian Lithuania.

It is reported that a group of Swiss Mennonites accepted this offer and settled in the Memelland. However, nothing further is known regarding this group. On 8.7.1713 a group of 42 Mennonite families from West Prussia signed a settlement contract and established the villages of Alt-Skoopien, Neu-Skoopien, and Neusorge. Another group of 18 families settled at Calwen. By 1724 there were 105 Mennonite families in the Memelland.

Most of these families appear to have come from the Friesian Montau Gemeinde, although probably joined by Mennonites from elsewhere. It seems that a number of Lutherans and Catholics also joined these Mennonite groups. This was a cause for concern and investigation both by various other Mennonite groups themselves, and by the Prussian government. In 1722 the Memel Mennonites were ordered to cease any proselytizing efforts, and ordered not to accept any new members from the Lutheran church.

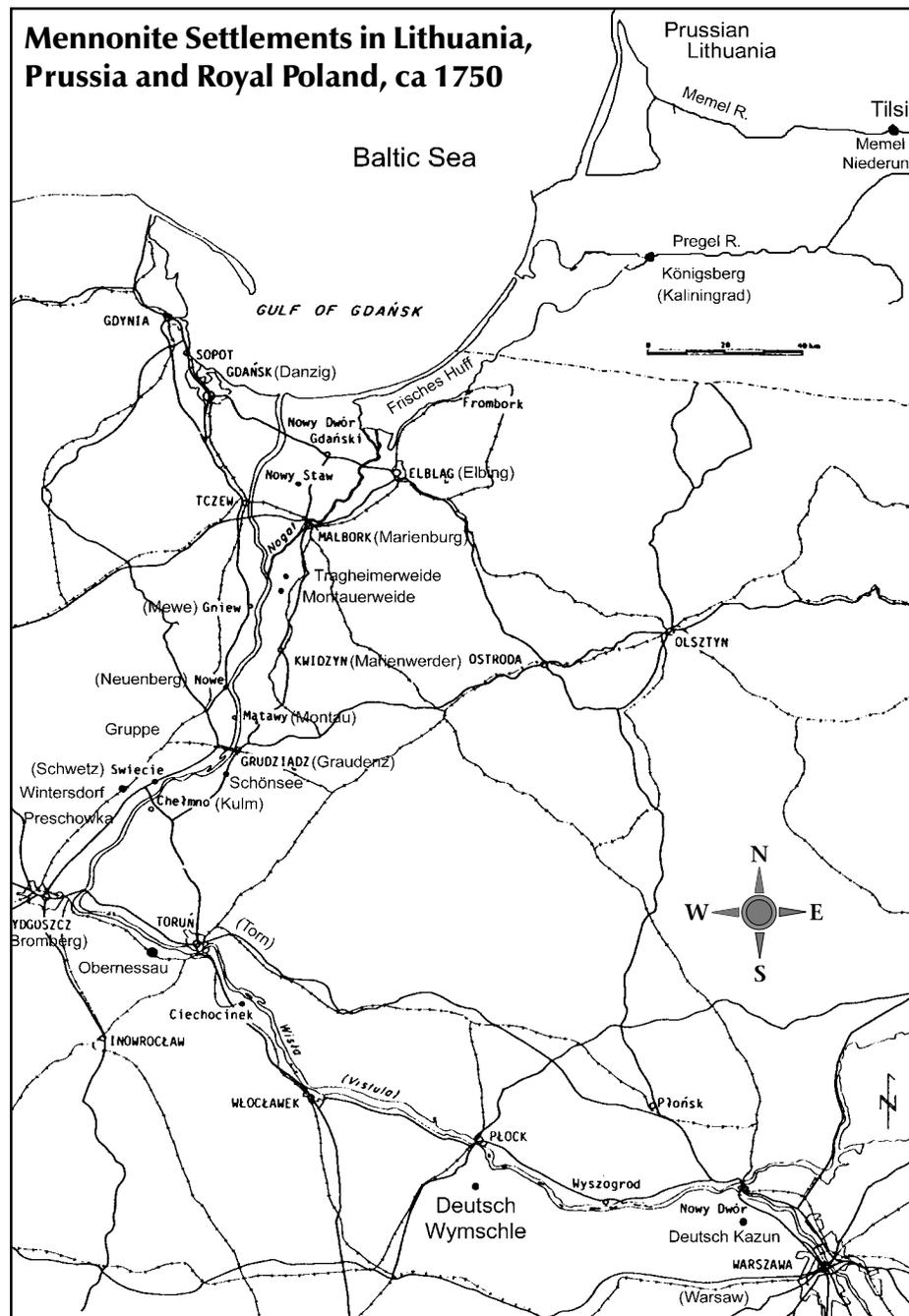
The press-gang incident occurred in 1723. Five Mennonite men were seized by a Prussian press-gang for military service. The Memel Mennonites protested and the men were eventually released. However, the Mennonites went

further and gave notice to the Prussian King that they would terminate their contract unless their rights under the contract were respected. Friedrich Wilhelm followed with an order that all these Mennonites were to leave Prussia by 11.6.1724.

This unfortunate turn of events took the Mennonites by surprise. The expelled Mennonites were re-settled throughout the Vistula Delta and Valley in West Prussia. Financial aid for these expelled Mennonites came from various Mennonite groups, including the Gemeinden at

Danzig, Hamburg and from the Mennonites of the Netherlands. A listing of 120 family heads who received aid from the Netherlands is found in Horst Penner (pages 407-08)

It seems that some of these 1724 refugees returned to Lithuania almost immediately as tenants on the estate of Rautenburg, owned by Graf Truchsez zu Waldburg. A subsequent decree was issued on 22.2.1732 by Friedrich Wilhelm, again ordering the expulsion of all Mennonites from East Prussia. At this time there were some 17 families, namely Flemish city Mennonites

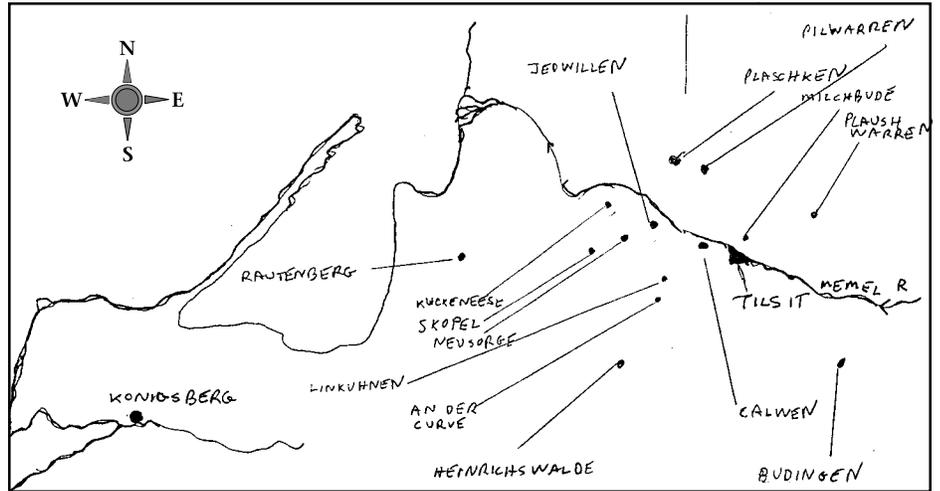


Map showing the Mennonite settlements along the Vistula River valley and in the delta as well as in the Memel/Tilsit Niederung (lowlands) in Prussian Lithuania. Based on maps by Peter P. Klassen, A Homeland for Strangers (Fresno, Ca., 1989), page 3, and a map by Bruno Ewert published in Men. Life, April 1948, page 11, with alterations. The standard map showing the various Flemish and Friesian Gemeinden in the Vistula Delta was published in Preservings, No. 18, page 124 (see our website at "www.hshs.mb.ca")

living in Königsberg. These Königsberg Mennonites did eventually receive an exemption. The Rautenburg Mennonites however had to leave.

The Dutch "Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden" took an interest in the Rautenburg group and arranged for re-settlement of some 23 old families in the United Provinces. Twelve families were re-settled in the island of Walcheren (Zeeland) and eleven in Wageningen (Gelderland). The names of some of these refugees include: Hans Janz, Andreas Kreger (Kruger), Jan Kreger (Kruger), Wilhelm v. Steen, Julius Ewert Voth, Abraham Geerts, Jacob Wedler (Wedel), Heinrich Gronau, and miller George Pauls. These names all occur in the list of 1724 exiles, except for Hanz Janz, Abraham Geerts and Wilhelm v Steen (where, however, the 1724 list includes various Janz's, Geerts' and one Joost v Steen). This resettlement plan for the United Provinces failed (according to Postma (Note Two), it was because of bad faith on the part of the refugees). Likely contributing factors include language and cultural problems. These families were all returned to West Prussia in the years 1736-44.

In 1732 the Mennonites of East Prussia were replaced by the famous and large scale immigration of Lutheran families who had been ex-



Map showing Mennonite villages in the Memel/Tilsit region of Prussian Lithuania. Map courtesy of Henry Schapansky.

pelled from Salzburg by the Hapsburg government. In 1740, Friedrich Wilhelm died and was succeeded by Friedrich II, the Great. The decree of 1732 was annulled. In this year 1740, some 60 Mennonite families, probably mostly from the 1724 refugee group, returned to Lithuania.

It was returning 1724 Lithuanian refugees who formed the last new Mennonite settlements in West Prussia, the Tragheimersweide Gemeinde, originally known as the Schweingrube Gemeinde. A list of the 47 family heads of this Gemeinde for the year 1737 can be found in H. Penner (p. 409). The first



1796 map by Carl Fättnig, Berlin, showing villages in the Memel - Tilsit Niederung or lowlands in Prussian Lithuania. The map shows many of the villages in which Friesian Mennonites lived during the 18th century. Note the map is orientated the opposite to normal: north is toward the bottom, and west, towards the Curische Haff or Bay of the Baltic Sea, toward the right. The villages of Ballgarten, Milchbude and Plauschwarren around Tilsit had Mennonite settlers. Heinrichswalde would have been south, just off the map, from Heinrichsdorf (top). Other villages with Mennonite inhabitants were scattered along the Memel River including Alt- and Neu-Skopel, Neu- and Alt-Bogduhnen, Pokraten, Jetwillen. The important village of Ratenburg is located at top, left. In addition to Friesian Mennonites there were also some Swiss Mennonites in Prussian Lithuanian, including the common surnames of Falk and Funk. Map courtesy of Henry Schapansky.

two Lithuanians who bought land in this area were Solomon Becker and Jacob Janzen.

Both the Tragheimerweide Gemeinde, and the new Lithuanian Gemeinde of 1740, had a common origin in the original Lithuanian Gemeinde of 1724. Because of their various experiences, they were not a typical Friesian Mennonite group. They had had first hand negative experiences with the Lutheran Prussian government, and at least some of them began to share the views held by many Flemish Mennonites, that a future in a Lutheran-Prussian state, did not exist for the Mennonite community. In addition, by 1788 many of these Lithuanian families had likely not laid down any firm roots, or acquired any substantial wealth or property. All of these factors made the Lithuanians a unique group, and in my view, led to their immigration in 1788, with the Flemish Mennonites, to Russia.

There is evidence of close family relationships between members of the Lithuanian and Tragheimerweide Gemeinde. There is evidence that some Lithuanians moved to Tragheimerweide, and some Tragheimerweide Mennonites moved to Lithuanian in the years 1776 to 1800. A close relationship also officially existed. In 1799, for instance, Lithuanian Ältester Dirk Janzen officiated at the annual baptismal service at Tragheimerweide.

Briefly to summarize, both the Lithuanian and Tragheimerweide Mennonites had a common origin, a common history of exile, dislocation, upheaval and financial difficulties. Most of the families of these two groups were interconnected by at most one or two generations, and family links were maintained despite the great physical distance separating the two.

#### Rosenkrantzers.

We need to also mention two groups connected with the Lithuanian/Tragheimerweide group, namely the Rosenkrantzers and the Kerbswald-Kerbshorst group. I observed earlier that the Lithuanians of 1724 had brought a number of Lutherans and Catholics into their community. It appears that at least three members of the Tragheimerweide Gemeinde, living at Rosenkrantz, revived this old issue again in the years 1773-79, when the Friesians decided to adopt a rule prohibiting marriage with Lutherans and Catholics.

These three (unknown) Rosenkrantzers objected and instituted a campaign which won some support elsewhere in the Friesian community and threatened a division in the Friesian Gemeinde. The Rosenkrantzers prevailed and a division of the Tragheimerweide Gemeinde was prevented. Some time later however, the Markushoff group was to breakaway from the Thiensdorf Gemeinde on this issue. The term Rosenkrantzer therefore refers, in those days, and later in the Old Colony, to the ideological viewpoint of these Rosenkrantzers.

It is my view, that the majority, if not all, of the settlers of Kerbswald and Kerbshorst in 1776 were from the Lithuanian group of 1724. Some of these families moved in the years 1776 to 1788 to the new villages of Kanitzken and Ellerwalde (not to be confused with the larger Ellerwald region near Elbing) of the Tragheimerweide Gemeinde. These families included Isaac Heinrichs, Herman Pauls, Jacob Friesen, Kornelius Froese and Herman Peters, all later immigrants to the Old Colony.

#### Old Colony Profile.

The direct relevance of these groupings to the Old Colony immigration movement is summarized in some data below. Briefly summarized, the vast majority of the Friesian group in the Old Colony were direct Lithuanian Friesians, along with a small number of Tragheimerweide or Kerbswald-Kerbshorst families, and a small number of unknown Friesians. The number of non-Lithuanian (that is non-direct Lithuanian) immigrants is very small indeed.

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“...the vast majority of the Friesian group in the Old Colony were direct Lithuanian Friesians,...”

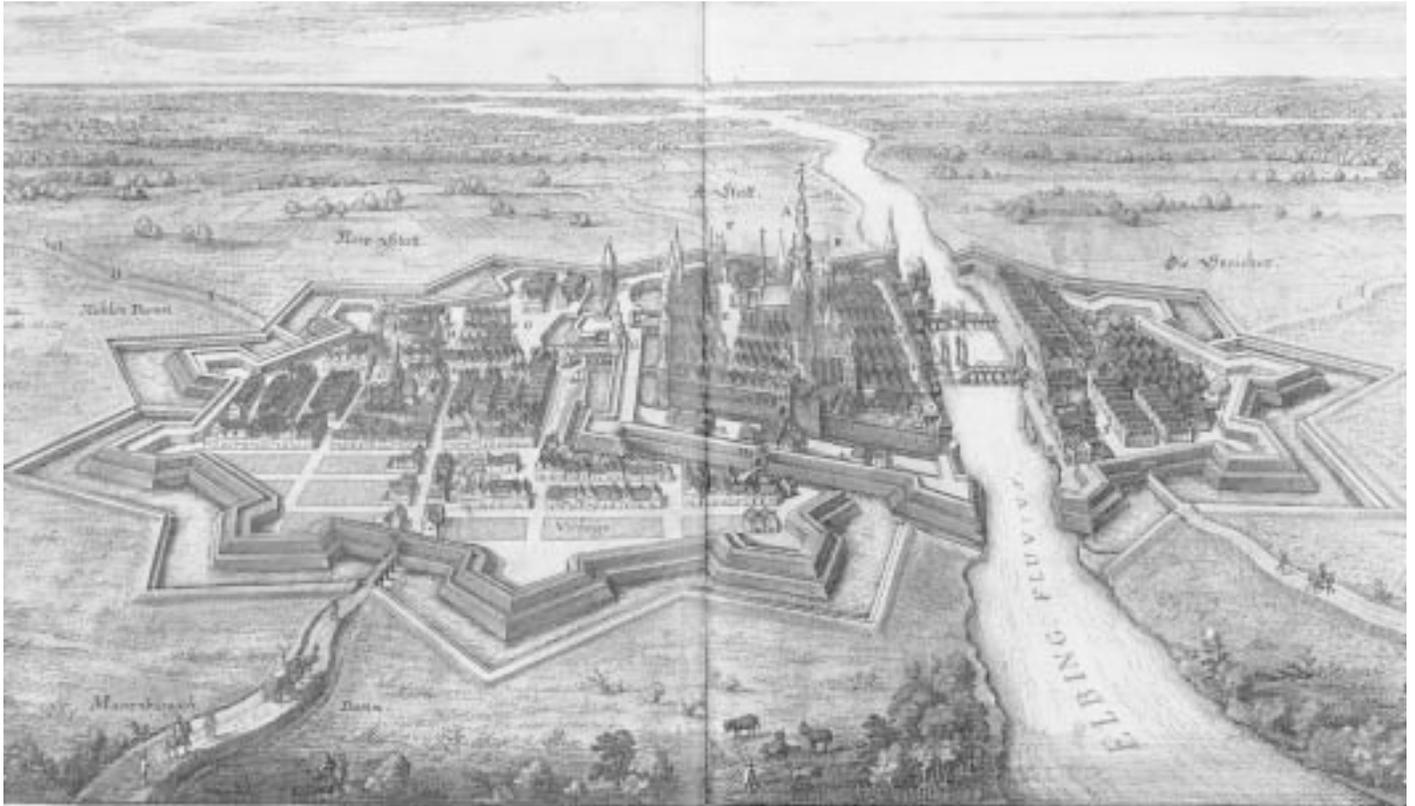
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In a sense, the Tragheimerweide and Kerbswald Mennonites also form part of this group, for the reasons mentioned above. Furthermore, there is evidence that the isolated Friesians (very few in number), not identified in any of these groups, may also have been Lithuanian. B.H. Unruh, for instance, states that Leonard Janzen, Rosenort 1776: 1 dau. (Thiensdorf Gem., Friesian) was from Lithuania and that Isaac Heinrichs, Unterkrebswalde 1776: no children listed (Thiensdorf, Landwirt, Friesian), was also from Lithuania. Leonard Janzen settled at Einlage, Isaac Heinrichs at Kronsweide, in the Old Colony.

A rough profile of the Old Colony Friesian Mennonites may be made using the Revisionslist for 1795 as a basis, taking into account only family heads.



*Drawing of Danzig (Gdansk), 1640, showing its fortified walls and battlements. In medieval times the City of Danzig was a member of the Hansa League and extremely wealthy, being the entry point for the trade emanating from the Vistula River basin and Warsaw and participating in trade and commerce around the Baltic Sea. Visible (middle left), are the Marien Cathedral built in the 13th century and the Rathaus or City Hall. Photo courtesy of Frank Tiessen, Bartholomäus Tiessen 350 Jahre Familientradition (Breslauer Str. 3, 3167 Burgdorf, 1986), page 600 (book plates): cf. with a similar drawing but from a different angle in Preservings, No. 17, page 129. Mennonites were not allowed to live and trade in the City because the Danzig Guilds were afraid of the competition. Consequently many Mennonites lived in the suburbs, particularly Schotland and Schidliz. The so-called Schotland Bible was printed in 1598 at the behest of Quiryn von der Meulen. Ältester of the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde following Dirk Phillips (1505-68). Peter von Riesen (1779-1847), brother-in-law to Kleine Gemeinde founder Klaas Reimer, lived in Schidliz. He was a miller and merchant and served for a time as a magistrate and city councillor.*



The City of Elbing in 1626, view to the north. Anabaptists (later Mennonites) settled in Elbing as early as 1531. A Flemish Gemeinde was soon organized with the first worship house built in 1590, on what is now Wilhelmstrasse. Elbing was a prosperous City and member of the Hansa League. Mennonites in Elbing enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than in Danzig where they were basically not allowed to live within the city walls. By 1585 Jost van Kampen and Hans von Keulen were granted citizenship in Elbing and allowed to engage in the silk trade. Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96), Ellerwald, was one of the prominent leaders of this Gemeinde with many direct descendants among the Old Colony Mennonites in Russia and later in North and South America. Photo courtesy of Tiessen, Bartholomäus Tiessen, book plates.

**Kronsweide (1795);**

Direct Lithuanian immigrants – 24  
 Tragheimerweide immigrants – 5  
 Kerbswald/Kerbshorst immigrants – 3  
 Misc., including Flemish Mennonites – 7

**Schönwiese (1795):**

Direct Lithuanian immigrants – 10  
 Tragheimerweide immigrants – 2  
 Kerbswald/Kerbshorst immigrants – 2  
 Misc. - 4

**Einlage (1795):** Of the 7 Friesian families in Einlage, 4 were direct Lithuanian immigrants, 1 was from Kerbswald, 2 are miscellaneous.

**Insel Chortitza (1795):** Only had 1 Friesian family, that of Peter Unger from Tragheimerweide

**Kronsgarten:** Of the Friesian families, 3 were direct Lithuanian immigrants, 5 were Tragheimerweide immigrants, and 3 are miscellaneous.

These figures indicate, particularly taking into account the relationships between the Lithuanian/Tragheimerweide/Kerbswald-Kerbshort Mennonites, that the Friesian group in the Old Colony can truly be called “the Lithuanian Group.” There were only a very small number of Friesian immigrants to the Old Colony after 1795, and these again confirm the above relationships.

It may be too, that some of the isolated cases could demonstrate a link to the Lithuanian group, however, at present not enough information is available.

Another interesting area for further research is the extent to which Lithuanian connections prevail for the isolated Friesians who took part in the pre-1815 Molotschna immigrations. One of the exiled 1724 Lithuanians, Abraham Edse, living in the Klein Werder later in 1726, appears to be the grandfather of two Edses (later in the Orlofffelde Gemeinde) who joined the move to the Molotschna in 1803. The various Krause, Kröger and Schröder families, as well as others, who participated in the pre-1815 Molotschna immigrations may very well also have a Lithuanian origin.

**Kronsweide Gemeinde.**

During the Dubrovno stay (1788-89), the various groups of immigrants began the process of building a new Gemeinde. Like the pre-1815 Molotschna immigrants, they did not have an established Lehrdienst. Unlike the Molotschna immigrants however, there were no Lehrdienst members in the group. Elections to a new Lehrdienst took place, with the Flemish West Prussian Gemeinden supervising the elections by mail. Four persons were appointed to organize the elections on behalf of the four main Flemish Gemeinden: Jacob Wiens - representing the Danzig-Neunhuben Gemeinde, Jacob Höppner - representing the Grosses Werder Gemeinde, Peter Albrecht - representing the Elbing-Ellerwald Gemeinde, and Martin Klassen - representing the Heubuden Gemeinde.

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“During the Dubrovno stay (1788-89), the various groups of immigrants began the process of building a new Gemeinde.”

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The Lithuanian Mennonites had also wanted to take part in these elections. Their candidate, David Schütz, was included in the list of candidates put forward, however the Flemish Gemeinde in West Prussia, having no knowledge of David Schütz, or for that matter of any of the other Lithuanians, declined to approve his nomination. As a result, the Lithuanians felt left out. It appears that it was the Rosenkrantzers, having already taken a position of controversy in West Prussia, who again initiated a separatist position. Included with these Rosenkrantzers appear to have been Johann Klassen and Franz Pauls, who put themselves forward as Lehrer in the newly separated Kronsweide Gemeinde. They were nevertheless dismissed from office in 1793 by the Kronsweide Gemeinde.

It was probably more a feeling of group solidarity, along with the innumerable difficulties presented during the first settlement years, which led to the permanent establishment of the separate Kronsweide Gemeinde. Very little is known as to the organization of the Kronsweide Gemeinde in the early years 1790 to 1800. Perhaps indeed, the Lehrdienst was not well orga-

nized. At any rate, the picture of the Kronsweide Gemeinde becomes clearer after the election of Heinrich Janzen as Ältester in 1800.

The Kronsweide Gemeinde originally consisted of only those Lithuanians settling in Kronsweide and Schönwiese. There were initially very few Friesians in Insel Chortitza, originally only Peter Unger, then Dirk Neufeld and Erdmann Klassen. Undoubtedly it was Peter Hildebrandt and his father-in-law Jacob Höppner who played a key role in the influence of the Kronsweide Gemeinde at Insel Chortitza.

The small number of Friesians at Einlage may also have been members of the Kronsweide Gemeinde.

It seems that some of the Rosenkrantzers took part in the original settlement of Krongarten (1793-97). The Friesians may indeed have been in the majority in Krongarten, although there was a large Flemish contingent. As a result, Krongarten became part of the Kronsweide Gemeinde.

It should be mentioned that later relations between the Kronsweide and Chortitza Gemeinde were relatively close. The differences between these two were not as great as between the Flemish and Friesian Gemeinden in the Molotschna. It seems there were only minor differences, with the Kronsweide Gemeinde being perhaps only somewhat less traditional than the Chortitza Gemeinde. Nevertheless, it does appear, as in the Molotschna, that the later Brüdergemeinde movement had its original support in predominantly Friesian (Kronsweide) families. This is an important point which undoubtedly requires further research. Jacob Reimer (1817-1891) an important founding member of the Brüdergemeinde movement was for instance born in Krongarten, while the first Old Colony Brüdergemeinde Ältester Abraham Unger (1824-80) was from a Friesian family.

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“...the later Brüdergemeinde movement had its original support in predominantly Friesian (Kronsweide) families.”

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When new villages were later established involving families from both Gemeinden, it seems the Friesians/Kronsweide families had no trouble adapting to majority Flemish traditionalist practices, as for instance in the Berghaler Colony.

There is evidence that Lithuanian Mennonites also participated in the later immigrations to Russia. The families of Andreas (1783-1866), Johann (b. 1791) and Peter (1804-49) Heinrichs from Lithuania, for example, appear to have moved to the Molotschna circa 1819.

We do not know whether the Russian Lithuanian Mennonites kept in contact with the parent Lithuanian Gemeinde. It would appear not. The Ältester of the Lithuanian Gemeinde during the time of the main Old Colony immigrations were: (1769-1791) Heinrich Janzen (1729-91) and (from 1791) Dirk Janzen (no dates). It is not known if these Janzens were related to the early Lithuanian Janzens of the



*The harbour in the city of Danzig, Prussia (today Gdansk, Poland), ca. 1930. At the right hand side is the famous tower grain elevator, built in medieval times, used to load the ships which plied the trade routes in the Baltic Sea and to the ports of northern Germany and the Low Countries. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Klassen: A Family Heritage (Winnipeg, 1980), page 7/Diese Steine, page 17.*

Old Colony. There is no evidence which, at the moment, suggests a close connection. There is however some evidence that Abraham Goertz(en), one of the 1732 Rautenburg Mennonites, who moved to the United Provinces, then later returned to West Prussia, was the same Abraham Goertz, Lehrer of the Lithuanian Gemeinde 1762 to 1765, whose children Abraham (b. 1763) and Nathaniel (b. 1768) moved to Schönwiese in 1789.

#### **Flemish Origins.**

On the other hand, the West Prussian Flemish Gemeinde did take a strong interest in the Old Colony Mennonites and did keep in touch through correspondence. The various Flemish Gemeinde of the time were as follows:

**Danzig-Neunhuben:** Ältester (1779-1789) Peter Epp (1725-89); then Ältester (1790-1807) Jacob De Fehr (1739-1807);

**Königsberg:** Did not have a continuous line of Ältester - (1795-1820) Johann Wiehler (1759-1820);

**Elbing-Ellerswald:** Ältester (1778-1796) Gerhard Wiebe (1725-1796); then Ältester (1796-1807) Peter Dyck (1763-1807);

**Grosses Werder:** Ältester (1767-1806) Dirk Thiessen (1727-1806); Co-Ältester (1795-1809) Kornelius Warkentin (1740-1809);

**Heubuden:** Ältester (1771-1794) Kornelius Regier (1742-1794); then Ältester (1795-1804) Peter Braun (1748-1803).

The Grosses Werder Gemeinde, from which the majority of all the pre-1815 immigrants came, had been divided into four districts; Burwalde, Ladekopp, Tiegenhagen and Rosenort. The largest number of pre-1815 Russian immigrants came from the eastern divisions, namely Tiegenhagen and Rosenort. Until 1809, all the districts reminded under a common Ältester and Lehrdienst. The Gemeinde of Danzig-Neunhuben and Elbing-Ellerswald were already experiencing conflict between traditionalist and modernist elements, which eventually led to a split between city and land groups, and

an almost total isolation of the City Gemeinde. In 1788 however, an uneasy truce between the two groups existed.

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“The largest number of pre-1815 Russian immigrants came from the eastern divisions [of the Grosses Werder Gemeinde], namely Tiegenhagen and Rosenort.”

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Later, the European war 1806-15 was eventually to lead to an irrevocable split at Danzig. In 1798 the modernists at Elbing city broke away from the traditionalists and elected Anton Wölcke as Ältester, who served briefly in this office for the separate Gemeinde. The city and land Gemeinde re-united a little later, but a final and irrevocable split occurred much later.

It is doubtful whether any of the Old Colony Mennonites had any connections with the rather small Königsberg Gemeinde. There is some suggestion that one or two families may have resided at Königsberg at sometime, but there is no firm evidence in this regard. (See for instance the Old Colony Revisionslisten) The Königsberg Gemeinde was a modernist city Gemeinde, and it appears, had no interest or connection with the Russian immigrants.

Peter Epp may have been the last traditionalist Ältester of the Danzig Gemeinde. He was succeeded by Jacob De Fehr, who sided with the modernists.

Of the four Ältester, all except for Kornelius Regier, were over 60 years old in 1788. Strongest support for the immigration movement came from Peter Epp and Gerhard Wiebe. It was also in their Gemeinden that the forces of assimilation and accommodation with the Prussians were most in evidence. Peter Epp, despite his age, did, in fact, agree to go to Russia and serve the Old Colony as Ältester. He died, however, before he could leave for Russia. In any event, most of his children did go to Russia, including

two of his sons, Peter (1775-1802) and Heinrich (1757-1805), who left in 1795 and were elected shortly after their arrival in Russia to the Old Colony Lehrdienst. Gerhard Wiebe's nephews, Johann (1766-1823) and Gerhard Wiebe (b. 1761) had left previously, Johann with the original immigrants and Gerhard in 1793. Johann Wiebe was to be second Ältester of the Old Colony, from 1791 to 1823.

The youngest of the four Ältester of 1788, Kornelius Regier, was to eventually go to Russia in 1794, to mediate in the dispute that had arisen in the Old Colony. He was assisted by the slightly older Kornelius Warkentin (1740-1809), later ordained by the dying Regier, and then serving as Co-Ältester of the Grosse Werder Gemeinde with Dirk Thiessen. Warkentin was to meet with Samuel Kontenius, and engaged himself to continue the promotion of the immigration movement. In recognition of his efforts, Warkentin received a gold medal from the Czar.

Deacon Johann Kauenhowen of the Danzig Gemeinde maintained a correspondence with his friend Jacob Wiens, the senior minister in the Old Colony. It is through Kauenhowen's interest and record keeping that much of the information on the first immigrants has survived.

It is my view that, despite criticisms of some historians to the contrary, the West Prussian Flemish Lehrdienst was concerned for the well-being of the Old Colony Gemeinde, and did what was possible under the difficult circumstances of the times to assist the new Gemeinde. In particular, both the Danzig and Elbing Gemeinde had to contend with the additional problem of the modernists, which eventually led to a split into City and land Gemeinden.

#### **Chortitza Gemeinde.**

By 1791, the Old Colony Gemeinde had been organized along traditionalist (Flemish Gemeinde) lines. Many of the traditionalist institutions such as the Waisenamt were established at this time (1792). Ideally, the Lehrdienst would have been strengthened, had Johann Wiebe and David Epp, the two Co-Ältester elected in 1791, travelled to West Prussia for official confirmation and ordination. This trip unfortunately did not occur (as planned), and it was to be the West Prussians (Regier and Warkentin) who had to come to Russia for this purpose. The Lithuanians of Kronsweide and Schönwiese continued to maintain a separate Gemeinde, perhaps more from a feeling of group solidarity, than owing to the agitation of the Rosenkrantzers, who were eventually dismissed from the Kronsweide Lehrdienst.

In 1793, the Old Colony Lehrdienst requested that the various documents representing the interests of the Old Colony be transferred from the Deputies to the Lehrdienst. This

was, in part, a symbolic act, and represented the wishes of the majority of Old Colonists to regulate community affairs along traditionalist lines. It was however, not welcomed by a small group led by deputy Jacob Höppner. The conflict which ensued, although aggravated by personalities and particular events, had its origin in fundamentally differing views on how society within the Old Colony was to be organized. The majority, led by the Lehrdienst, envisioned the Gemeinde as the centre of community life, in-



*The market and the market gate, Elbing 1880. Photo courtesy of Tiessen, Bartholomäus Tiessen, book plates.*

cluding a close union of spiritual and secular life, with the community being in the world, but not of the world. The minority group envisioned a wider separation of spiritual and secular life, more conformity to government regulations, greater assimilation into Russian society, and economically progressive leadership.

The majority of the Old Colony Mennonites had, in my view, left West Prussia to preserve the Mennonite Community as they knew it. Prussian government policy was to coerce the Mennonites into forceable assimilation through restrictive legislation and economic pressure. In the Old Colony, the last thing most Mennonites wanted was interference and government coercion along Prussian lines.

**“The majority of the Old Colony Mennonites had, in my view, left West Prussia to preserve the Mennonite Community as they knew it.”**

#### **Misadventures.**

The position of the Lehrdienst vis-a-vis the Höppner group was strengthened by the various serious misadventures occurring during the period when the Directors and Deputies were at the head of Old Colony affairs. I would like to list these in order of importance as follows:

1) **The broken Potemkin-Deputies agree-**

**ment in respect of the originally proposed Bereslav settlement option.** It is clear that the original Bereslav option was superior to the Chortitza option. The quantity and quality of the land at Bereslav was greater than that at Chortitza. The Bereslav land was flat and fertile and was close to the port of Bereslav, whereas the Chortitza land was hilly, broken by ravines and far from any major centre of economic activity. The only settlements in the Chortitza area were the newly built fort at Alexandrovsk and a small Russian village at Vosnesenskoe. The fact that the land itself was owned by Potemkin himself was a further problem. Prussian propagandists had already spread the rumour that Potemkin was going to settle the Mennonites as his personal tenants, possibly enserfing them. These rumours seemed to be coming true, and were not as far-fetched as might be believed. Circa 1798, the heirs of Peter Rumjantsov tried to enserf their Hutterite tenants as Visenka. Potemkin died unexpectedly in October of 1791, so any plans he may have had were not realized. After the death of Catherine II, most of Potemkins' estates reverted to the Crown.

Certainly the Mennonites could have settled as tenants elsewhere, since Russian landowners had extensive rights to promote similar colonization efforts. As well, free grants of Crown land were also generally available for would-be colonists, under the same conditions as the Mennonites eventually received. Potemkin was however the Governor-General of New Russia, and the most powerful figure of the Russian government until his death.

2) **The appointment of military men to direct the Old Colony.** The first heads/directors of the Old Colony were military men, rather than civilians and revealed a total ignorance of Mennonite institutions and culture. The Mennonites had expected that v. Trappe, a civilian, apparently sympathetic to their ideals and culture would be the curator of their settlement.

3) **The use of corporal punishment.** The use of corporal punishment (i.e. floggings, etc.) by the first two military directors to enforce their decrees would have been totally unacceptable to the majority of Mennonites under any circumstances.

4) **Carelessness in safeguarding Colony assets.** Carelessness in arranging for the protection of the Colony's horses and cattle which were stolen by Nogatai bands greatly hindered the settlement process. Carelessness was displayed as well in protecting the building timber (such as it was) which was rafted down river to the Old Colony and which was, to a large extent stolen. It is said that Peter Höppner recovered some of the stolen timber which he appropriated for his own use.

5) **The failure of government loans (prom-**

ised to the settlers) to arrive in a timely fashion.

6) **The illegal taking of five percent (5%) commissions from the government loans (such as did arrive)**, and from other government allowances by the Director v. Brackel.

7) **The theft of personal possessions rafted down the river to the Old Colony.**

8) **The dictatorial and arbitrary rule of the military directors**, and in particular, irregularities in the assignment of homesteads.

#### **The Höppner Affair.**

All of these errors would have, in and of themselves, generated a lack of confidence in the leadership of the Directors-Deputies in these early years. However, partly because of these mistakes a large number of people died in the early period, probably due to poor food and shelter, indirectly caused by mismanagement. No doubt, this aggravated matters considerably.

When however, in 1793, the leadership of the Old Colony was to pass to the Lehrdienst, the Höppner party resisted and sent off a letter complaining of the actions of the Old Colony Lehrdienst to the West Prussian Gemeinden. As a result, Ältester Johann Wiebe, along with Jacob Bergen and Nicholas Dyck, travelled to West Prussia to persuade the West Prussian Lehrdienst to mediate the conflict. This led to the trip of Heubuden Ältester Kornelius Regier and Kornelius Warkentin to Russia in 1794, to arbitrate matters on the spot. A reconciliation was made and apologies were rendered on both sides. This should have ended the matter.

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**“When...in 1793, the leadership...was to pass to the Lehrdienst, the Höppner party resisted...”**

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The reason the conflict remained unresolved was not perhaps, as Peter Hildebrandt would have it, because the settlers nursed a grudge against Höppner, but rather because a new and worse military man, Johann v. Brackel, a brutal and unprincipled adventurer, was appointed Director from 1793-97. He continued to employ the Deputies as go-betweens, and embroiled them with his unpopular regime.

By this time, the inefficiency and mismanagement of all the foreign colonies in South Russia was becoming noticed by the Russian government. In 1797, a new department, that of “State Economy, Guardianship of Foreigners, and Rural Husbandry” was created, and a Bureau of this department (the Guardians Bureau or Fürsorge Komitee) established in Ekaterinoslav to investigate these problems. At this time too, v. Brackel was replaced as Director by a civilian, Johann Brigonstzev, who made serious effort to address the complaints of both the Old Colony and Josephsthal settlers. Samuel Kontenius, now a member of the Guardians Bureau, also began his investigations. The major result of his work was that the office of Colony Director was abolished in 1801, and replaced by a locally elected system of



*The Marienburg Castle, circa 1920. The castle was built in 1274 on the Nogat River, the southern point of the Mennonite triangle in the Vistula Delta, with Elbing at the northeast and Danzig at the northwest point. The Marienburg Castle was the headquarters of the Teutonic Knights falling to Royal Poland in 1460. The Flemish Gemeinde in the southern part of the Grosswerder had its worship house in Heuboden, some 10 kilometres west of Marienburg. In the second half of the 17th century, Mennonites were allowed to pursue their trades on the castle grounds. Photo courtesy of Tiessen, Bartholomäus Tiessen, book plates.*

Oberschulze, Schulze, Beisitzer and Gebietschreiber. This action freed all the Colonies, including the Old Colony, from the corrupt and arbitrary mismanagement of incompetent Russian officials.

The Old Colony Lehrdienst, at the same time, 1798, banned both Deputies, perhaps for their inad vertent actions as v. Brackel's spokesmen. Johann Bartsch apologized in the customary way and was re-admitted. Höppner on the other hand, felt he had done no wrong and refused to render any apology.

Perhaps because of a report by Brig onstzev, Kontenius found there was sufficient evidence of wrong doing to warrant a trial of Jacob Höppner, Peter Höppner and one Peter Rempel. Exactly what charges were laid are not known. The Gemeinde probably thought the matter should rest with the traditional disciplinary measure of the ban, but by this time matters had gone too far, and Kontenius was seriously concerned with the state of mismanagement which had evolved under the v. Brackel regime.

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**“Perhaps because of a report by Brigonstzev, Kontenius found there was sufficient evidence of wrong doing to warrant a trial of Jacob Höppner...”**

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Peter Rempel died before the trial, which probably occurred in 1800. A number of Mennonites were required to testify at the trial, which

they did with great reluctance. Although it seems that Jacob Höppner had friends in the local Russian gentry, and was well-regarded in some higher Russian circles, both Höppners were convicted and required to pay a fine. As they could not pay the fine from the sale of their moveable property, they were imprisoned. After the accession of Alexander I (12.3.1801) a general amnesty was declared for minor transgressors and the Höppners were released from prison in April of 1801.

#### **Historical Analysis.**

Later historians, beginning with Peter Hildebrandt, originally a Lutheran, and then son-in-law of Jacob Höppner, portray Brigonstzev and Johann Bartsch as spineless men, seeking to ingratiate themselves with the Old Colony Mennonites. I think this is far from the truth. Brigonstzev was a conscientious civil servant, like Kontenius, and was also later appointed to the Guardians Bureau.

Bartsch, originally a Friesian (although most of his family seems to have joined the Flemish Gemeinde), was an intelligent and capable person, and likely realized, not only that the leadership under the military Directors was contrary to the spirit of the traditionalist Flemish Gemeinde, but that this leadership was not productive in an economic sense.

In comparing Bartsch and Höppner, Hildebrandt states that Bartsch was the writer, Höppner the talker. He might have also said that Bartsch was the more reflective of the two and Höppner the more impulsiv e. Johann Bartsch's

son Jacob was later a popular Oberschulze and upheld the democratic tradition of the Flemish Gemeinde in later conflicts with the autocratic Heese/Cornies group. Johann Bartsch was also I believe, brother-in-law of Jacob Wiens, a popular member of the Lehrdienst, and regarded as the senior minister of the Gemeinde. It may have been his relationship to Johann Bartsch that made him ineligible for the office of Ältester. Johann Bartsch was also incidentally brother of the Jacob Bartsch (originally also a Friesian), one-time minister of the Flemish Neunhuben Gemeinde, who later resigned because he had initiated a lawsuit against a fellow Mennonite.

The struggle between the traditionalists and the modernists did not end with the imprisonment of Höppner. It continued on for decades, and indeed is still continuing to this day. The initial victory of the traditionalists, if we can use this term, was to strengthen the position of the traditionalists in the Old Colony for a time. Later, as the struggle continued, both modernists and traditionalists were fortunate that the traditionalists adopted the only and proven method for preservation, namely emigration.

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**“The struggle between the traditionalists and the modernists did not end with the imprisonment of Höppner...”**

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The modernists of the 1830s and 1840s have long since proven to have been wrong, even in their views of how progress in Mennonite society should have been achieved. Being a modernist, in a sense is not an absolute concept, since it generally implies adoption of contemporary values, which eventually become outdated. On the other hand, traditionalist values never, in a sense become outdated, since in a sense they are not contemporary.

One of the failings of Mennonite historians, of modern and earlier times, is that they view events from their own perspective and with contemporary value sets. While this is particularly true of Brüdergemeinde historians, quite numerous as a group, it is also true of many academic or institutionally sponsored historians. Their great failing is that they do not try to view events from the perspective of those taking part in the events. They do not attempt to put themselves into the shoes of those whose lives they are indirectly portraying.

### Conclusions.

I've often wondered how I would have reacted to the events of the first decade of the Old Colony, had I been a traditionalist Mennonite. I think I would have reacted in the same way that most Old Colonists did, and deeply resented the regime represented by the first two directors. In later years, I would have resisted the dictatorship of the Cornies/Heese institutions, like most of the other Mennonites.

Too often, historians of the type I have described, set up people as heroes who fit contemporary standards of heroism. Thus, in the autocratic era of Nicholas I, the dictatorial style



Henry Schapansky, guest speaker at Family History Day, March 9, 2002, at the Mennonite Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba. He is a leading genealogist of the Russian Mennonites and widely recognized historian of the migrations from Flanders to Friesland, to Prussia and Russia.

of Cornies, Heese, Franz and others made them natural heroes, not of the Mennonites, but of the autocratic society in which they lived. Unfortunately, most historians of today, as in the past, put a high value on the economic, political or academic achievements made by only the most prominent individuals.

As a group, and as individuals, the first Old Colony immigrants succeeded, despite innumerable difficulties, in accomplishing what they set out to do, namely, to maintain the traditionalist (Flemish) Mennonite community as they understood it. In this, their accomplishment has endured far longer than the achievements of the heroes of yesteryear.

I think it is time that, while we recognize the work of those considered to be great men and women of the past, we do not forget that some of them subscribed to principles of violence, military or legal force, and autocratic methods, not in keeping with Mennonite traditions. I think it is time, as well, that we recognize the far more enduring accomplishments of the multitude of Old Colony and traditionalist Mennonites, whose deeds live on, not necessarily in books or decayed buildings, but in the ideals of Mennonite communities throughout the world, even to some extent in Russia itself.

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**“...it is time, as well, that we recognize the far more enduring accomplishments of the multitude of Old Colony and traditionalist Mennonites, whose deeds live on,....”**

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### Footnotes:

Note One: Postma p. 62 and other references.  
Note Two: Postma pp. 133-143

### Bibliography;

*The Old Colony (Chortitz) of Russia.* H. Schapansky, Rosenort 2001

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*Die Ost- und Westpreußischen Mennoniten.* Horst Penner. Mennonitisches Geschichtsverein c.V., Weierhof 1978

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### Further Reading:

For other articles and photos regarding the former Mennonite settlements in Prussia/Royal Poland, see *Pres.*, No. 12, pages 47-8; see also Dueck, “Prussian Roots,” *Pres.* No. 9, Part Two, pages 57-61; Loewen, “Land of our Forefathers,” in *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 72-74; Letkeman, “Gesängbuch, 1789,” in *Preservings*, No. 17, page 129.

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Adolf Ens, “The founding of the Molotschna Mennonite Church and its development up to the formation of the Kleine Gemeinde,” in Plett, ed., *Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde* (Steinbach, 1993), pages 31-40.

The Randy Kehler, “Chortitzer CD-ROM” with the 1878, 1887 and 1907, Chortitzer Gemeindebücher, tracing the Bergthaler people in the East Reserve, Manitoba, from 1874 to the Paraguay emigration of 1926-27, is now again available direct from the author. Many of those whose ancestors emigrated to the West Reserve, Lowe Farm, Man., and Hague and Swift Current, Sask., between 1880 and 1910, or to Paraguay in the 1920s, will find the family information here. The Gemeindebücher include detailed documentation regarding births, baptisms, marriages and deaths, with complete cross-reference.

To order, send \$50.00 plus \$10.00 postage to Randy Kehler, Box 20737, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2T2.



Randy Kehler demonstrates the features of his “Chortitzer CD-ROM” at the HSHS Family History Day, March 4, 2000. Photo courtesy of *Pres.*, No. 16, page 67.

# Delegate Jakob Höppner - From Bohnsack to Chortitza

“Delegate Jakob Höppner (1748-1826), from Bohnsack, Prussia/Royal Poland, to Chortitza, Imperial Russia,” compiled by Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Family Background.

Jakob Höppner was born in Prussia/Royal Poland in 1748. He was the son of Jakob Höppner (born ca. 1715), originally from Danzig (Flemish Gemeinde). They moved to Klein Mausdorf (Rosenort Gemeinde) where they are listed with one son and two daughters in the 1776 Konsignation (census). Jakob Höppner Sr. had another son Anton (b. 1762), married to Katharina (b. 1760).

Jakob Höppner Sr. was the son of Anton Höppner (1672-1752) and Elisabeth Wiens (1679-1753), resident in the Danzig area. Anton Höppner was the son of Peter Höppner (1650-1718) and Aganetha Wölche (1650-1715), also resident in the Danzig area (courtesy of Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C., letter to author Jan. 18, 1999).

## The Delegation.

Jakob Höppner, the younger, married Sarah Dyck (1753-1826), from Neustadterwald. By 1781 Höppner had moved to Augustkampe in the Danziger Nehrung, where his daughter Anna was born. The Nehrung was the narrow strip or tongue of land between the Baltic Sea and the Danziger Vistula River. In 1787, he and his family, consisting of six persons, had moved to Bohnsack, 10 km. east of Danzig in the Nehrung. Here Höppner owned and operated a Hakenbude, a public house for travellers and a store. Among his employees was a young Lutheran man by the name of Peter Hildebrandt (1754-1849).

Höppner seems to have been an outgoing, dynamic and enterprising personality. These qualities would serve him well in negotiations with the bureaucrats and gentry of the Russian court, but were perhaps not the leadership qualities looked for by the majority of Mennonite immigrants to Russia (from Henry Schapansky, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia* (New Westminster, 2001), page 125-6).

Jakob Höppner and Johann Bartsch (1757-1821), of Noble in the Danzig suburbs, were given a letter of authorization signed by 60 Mennonite men as well as a letter of recommendation by von Trappe. On November 1, 1786, the two men left Danzig in order to examine the lands in “new” Russia, north of the Black Sea. They choose a tract of land near Berislav, east of the Dnjepr near Kherson. In the spring of 1787 they were given an audience with the Czarina, Katharine the Great, who was on her way to the Crimea to tour the newly conquered lands. The delegates were “received by the Empress herself in a ceremonious, respectful and solemn manner, as did the powerful Russian Prince Potemkin, who showed them his goodwill,” (P. M. Friesen, page 87).

Later they travelled to St. Petersburg, in order to negotiate the *Privilegium*. Here they were also introduced to Russia’s heir apparent, Paul I, who in 1800 actually granted the charter of privileges to the Mennonites and made it the law of the land.

## The Emigration, 1788.

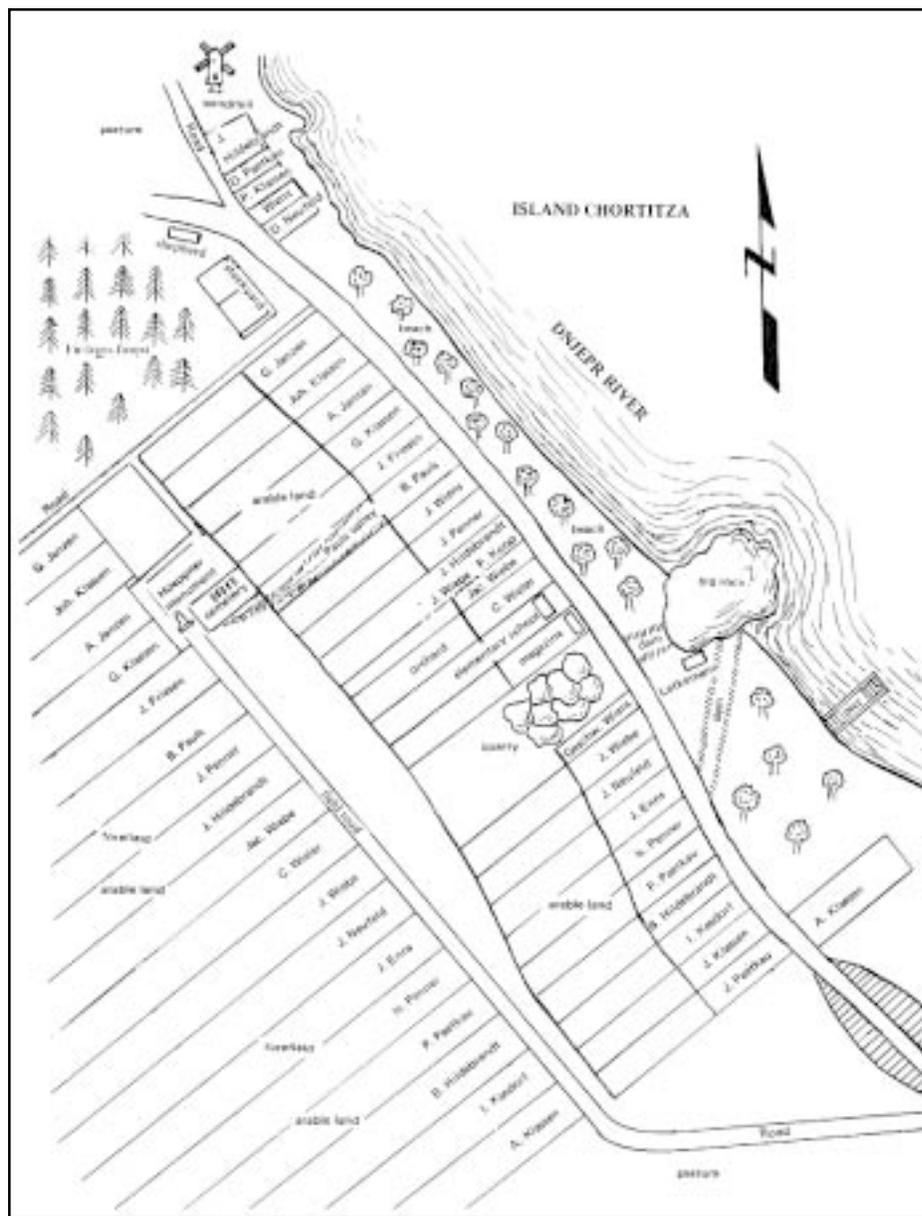
Upon their return they were greeted joyfully. They made their reports and soon a number of families had made the decision to immigrate. The first group consisting of 50 persons left from the village of Bohnsack by wagons on Easter Sunday, March 22, 1788. The total number of families who participated was 228. The journey undertaken from Danzig to Riga was 300 miles on water, then 900 miles via Dubrovna by caravan (*Heppners’*, page 9).

When they reached Krementschug where Potemkin’s headquarters was situated, Höppner was told they could not travel on to Berislav and

that they would have to settle on another site, Chortitza, along the Dnjepr River. This land was located across from the recently established frontier fort, Alexandrovsk, on land owned by Potemkin himself. Höppner and his companions objected vehemently to these new orders but to no avail.

## Settlement, 1789.

Although deeply dissatisfied, the delegates and other Mennonite pioneers settled on the right bank of the Dnjepr as ordered. Höppner himself built a large house in the cherry garden which Potemkin himself had laid out, towards the southern end of the Island of Chortitza (also known as “de Kamp”).



Map of the Mennonite village on the Island of Chortitza, from Is. P. Klassen, *Die Insel Chortitza* (Winnipeg, 1979), page viii. Delegate Jakob Hoepner (1748-1826) was among the 12 Mennonite families who pioneered on the Insel Chortitza in 1789. From *Diese Steine*, page 81.

"It was one of the best houses built and was in strict conformity with the "winklehaus" type of architecture the Mennonites had brought with them from the Low Countries. Naturally this caused further discontentment" (N. J. Kroeker, *First Mennonite Villages*, page 43). Most of the other settlers had no choice but to build and live in simple semlins or earthen huts where many died from disease. Discontentment increased and some of the pioneers referred to Höppner as the "soul merchant".

Sometime in 1794, Jakob Höppner, son-in-law Peter Hildebrand and another settler returned one evening to the island from the mainland, and found that an armed band of six bandits had broken into Höppner's house and bound the family members. The band shot at the three men and caught and tied up two of them. Hildebrand escaped and brought help whereupon the thieves disappeared (Schapansky, page 230).

Höppner made many friends in the local Russian gentry of the Chortitza area, and was something of a hunter and fisherman (Schapansky, page 232).

The failure of the Flemish Gemeinde to provide experienced ministers to accompany the settlers at Chortitza resulted in great difficulties for the pioneer Gemeinde. The first attempt to install an Ältester with the election of Behrend Penner in 1790 was shortlived with his death a year later. The Flemish Gemeinde finally completed its organization in 1794

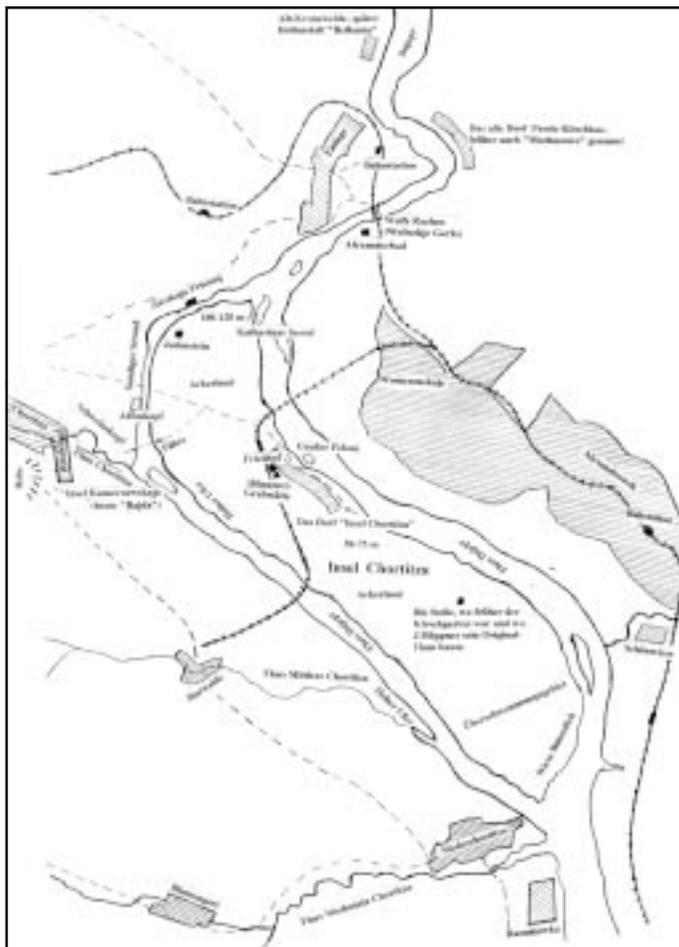
with the election of Johann Wiebe and David Epp as co-Ältesten. Many problems still needed to be resolved but the power vacuum which had fallen to the delegates by default was slowly being filled.

According to the 1793 "Verzeichnis", Jakob Höppner owned Wirtschaft No. 179 (5), and brother Anton owned Wirtschaft No. 178 (4). By 1793 delegate Johann Bartsch had relocated from the Insel to Rosenthal where he is listed as owner of Wirtschaft 157 (Unruh, page 211). In the 1808 Revision, Bartsch is shown to be a well-to-do farmer with 6 horses and 22 head of cattle. According to the 1795 Revisions-Liste, Jakob Hepner owned Wirtschaft 4, Anton Hepner Wirtschaft 5 and Peter Hilbrant Wirtschaft 6 on the island.

#### Reconciliation, 1794.

As a result of the mounting dissatisfaction, Höppner and Bartsch resigned their positions on May 29, 1793, and surrendered their Powers of Attorney and other documents to the Gemeinde in exchange for a written receipt (Unruh, page 289/ *Hildebrand's Zeittafel*, page 152).

On March 14, 1794, Cornelius Regier (1743-94), Ältester of the Flemish Heuboden Gemeinde, and Cornelius Warkentin (1740-1809), minister of the Grosswerder Gemeinde, began their perilous journey to Russia, on a mission of unification.



Map of the Island of Chortitza by David G. Rempel, showing the site of the Mennonite village as well as Potemkin's cherry orchard where delegate Jakob Höppner built his first manor house. Map by David G. Rempel (adapted from *The Heppners'*, page 12). From *Diese Steine*, page 82. Delegate Bartsch eventually settled in Rosenthal.

They were successful in resolving many issues.

Unfortunately the peace between Jakob Höppner and his supporters and the Flemish Gemeinde did not hold and the rift grew ever more serious. In 1797 both Höppner and Bartsch were placed under the ban by the Flemish Gemeinde. Bartsch recanted and was readmitted (Urry, page 69) in a spirit of love and forgiveness.

#### Trial, 1800.

In 1798 criminal charges were laid against Höppner and his brother Peter and Peter Rempel; apparently they were accused of misappropriation of funds although it seems impossible to determine at this point exactly what happened. The charges were laid by Kontenius, the Russian Government representative sent to investigate the disputation in the Chortitza and Josephthal Colonies (Schapansky, page 233). They were found guilty and fined by a Russian Court, apparently on the charges they had misappropriated timber designated for the settlers. They were imprisoned, fined and forced to repay the special loans they had received. Jakob Höppner was fined 1845 ruble and 353/4 kopek and much of his stock was sold to pay these costs (Urry, page 69). Höppner was held in jail in Ekaterinoslav and was to be sent to Siberia (Unruh, page 289).

The auction of Jakob Höppner's movable property took place in December of 1800. A bill of goods recorded August 28 and found in the home of one of his heirs showed that the following goods were auctioned: 16 milking cows with 14 calves, 4 cows without calves, 2 breeding bulls, 16 two-year old oxen, 4 plow oxen, 15 young calves, 8 old horses, 6 three-year old foals, 1 brown stallion 6 years old, 1 black gelding, 1 eight-year old gelding, 1 three-year old grey gelding, 1 brown gelding, 4 one-year old mares, 1 two-year old mare, 399 old black and white sheep, 9 old pigs and 4 young pigs. The machinery and tools included: 1 German wagon, 4 Russian wagons, 1 plow, 2 harrows with iron teeth, 4 shotguns, ...1 family dwelling 1296 square feet with 4 rooms and a cellar (*Heppners'*, page 32). The auction raised 1758 rubles (Wm. Schroeder, in *Heppners'*, page 37).

#### Amnesty, 1801.

Upon the accession to the throne of Alexander I on March 12, 1801, Jakob and Peter Höppner were freed under a general amnesty in April, 1801. Höppner had no desire to return to the Chortitza Colony and found a work place in Alexandrovsk. He also worked for a time on the estate of a Russian nobleman nearby.

On August 9, 1801, Peter Penner, Schulz (mayor) of Schönwiese (father of Kleine Gemeinde minister Peter Penner, Prangenaus), and Heinrich Janzen, Ältester of the

Frisian Gemeinde, gave Jakob Höppner a letter that the residents of Schönwiese, and the Frisian Gemeinde had no part in his imprisonment (*Hildebrand's Zeittafel*, page 159). On August 9, 1802, Jakob Höppner joined the Frisian Gemeinde who received him into their membership where he spent the remainder of his days (Unruh, page 289).

#### Retirement.

Eventually Höppner returned to the Mennonite Colony and lived on his Wirtschaft on the island. According to the 1801 Revision (*Diese Steine*, page 663), Jakob Höppner's wife Sarah, brother Anton and son-in-law Peter Hildebrand owned Wirtschaften 4, 5 and 6, respectively, on Chortitza Island. Brother Anton and son-in-law Peter Hildebrand are listed as wealthy farmers with 7 and 9 horses, and 33 and 27 head of cattle, respectively, plus a full line of farm implements.

The "Feuerstellen-Listen 1802" show that Jakob Höppner owned Wirtschaft 228 (but without further details), Antohn Höppner owned Wirtschaft 229 and Peter Hilbrandt owned Wirtschaft 230 (Unruh, page 251). The 1803 "Verzeichnis" shows that Anton Höppner owned Wirtschaft 4 and Peter Hildebrand Wirtschaft 5 (Unruh, page 214). During his last years, Jakob Höppner lived with son Jakob (1797-1883), by

then the owner of his Wirtschaft.

His children had promised Jakob Höppner they would bury him on his own property which they did, burying him up on the hill behind the village farmyards, but south across the Paul's ravine, from the village cemetery (see village map).

N. J. Kroeker writes: "The rear of this farm consisted of a deep, heavily wooded glen and a high bluff which revealed a breath-taking view overlooking the countryside surrounding the island and beyond the Dneiper toward Alexandrovsk. His son honoured this commitment in 1889 and the grateful descendants of the pioneers erected a monument in his honour in connection with the centennial celebration of the Mennonite's arrival in Russia," (N. J. Kroeker, page 46).

### Legacy.

The unfortunate controversy between Jakob Höppner and the Flemish Gemeinde should not be allowed to destroy his legacy. He and Bartsch were truly the founding fathers of the Russian

Mennonites, a community with a distinct cultural and spiritual identity whose descendants today number in excess of 600,000 souls. A great honour and tribute is due to these visionary and courageous leaders.

The question is not: was the Flemish Gemeinde bad? or was Höppner bad? It is not necessary that the student of Russian Mennonite history and/or his descendants chose between these two options. Most great leaders in history have their legacy clouded by misdeeds and errors. This does not make them any less great, merely more human and therefore more heroic. Often the same qualities that destined them for greatness also defined their weaknesses. In Höppner's case, his strong character and individualism, empowered him to step forward to lead and direct the immigration movement in 1788. A decade later these same traits made it difficult for Höppner to step back to allow the Flemish Gemeinde to reassert its rightful role in the lives of its parishioners.

In my view, far too much has been written about the Höppner affair by those seeing it only as the first step in denigrating and dismissing the Flemish Gemeinde and its ideals of Christian community, equality and discipleship. Far too little has been written about its valiant struggle to live out and promote those ideals on the newly subjugated steppes of "new" Russia in the face of much adversity and hardship. Obviously many of Höppner's own descendants very well understood the issues involved and supported the Flemish Gemeinde and the conservative



The delegate's son Jakob Höppner (1797-1883), a well-to-do Vollwirt on Chortitza Island. He was married to Anna Brandt (1804-77), granddaughter of Johann Warkentin, Blumenort, Mol. (see *Diese Steine*, page 263). Photo from *Men. Life*, April 1951, page 13. For another photo of Jakob Höppner (1797-1883) and wife Anna, see *Pauline Heppner*, Heppners in Prussia, Russia and America (*Sardis, B.C.*, 1997), page 44/*Diese Steine*, page 85.

spiritual mores it represented while at the same time treasuring and cherishing the memory of their grandfather who had contributed so much to the founding of the Mennonite settlement at Chortitza.

If one agree wholeheartedly with Rev. David H. Epp, that Jakob Höppner is deserving of a greater honour and recognition than he has received. For starters the community he and Johann Bartsch founded must surely again erect appropriate monumentation on the spots where their memorials were placed at the time of the Chortitza centennial celebrations in 1889.

I wholeheartedly agree also with the tribute for Jakob Höppner written by David H. Epp in *Der Bote*, for the 100th anniversary of the death of Jakob Höppner on March 4, 1926: "Do they still know who he was, do they speak his name, our young as well as our old ones, this man of unusual energy, inexhaustible enterprise and fearless daring, Jakob Höppner of the *Nehring*, who served the Mennonites in a matter that was more deserving than any other individual? With the help of God he created a new home for them in South Russia, opened up for the persecuted a century and more of peaceful development and with that made possible the achievement of the highest general well-being, seldom equalled for other large communities," (Endnote).



The Mennonite village on the Island of Chortitza. The photo illustrates the steep embankment behind the Wirtschaften situated along the village road parallel to the Dneiper River. Photo from Heppners', page 33. For another photo from a similar point, but with a view towards the bridge towards Zaporozhe, see *Diese Steine*, page 86.



The Wirtschaft of delegate Jakob Höppner on the Island of Chortitza, later owned by his grandchildren, Bernhard Pauls and Helena Hildebrand. A painting by their son, Heinrich Pauls, the famous painter: Heinrich Pauls, *A Sunday Afternoon* (*St. Jacobs, Ont.*, 1991), photoplate 3/Lohrenz, *Damit es nicht vergessen werde*, page 47/*Diese Steine*, page 90/*Pres.*, No. 17, page 14. For a drawing of the Jakob Hildebrand Wirtschaft on Chortitza Island, see *East Reserve* 125, page 7.

**Descendants.**

Delegate Jakob Höppner's son Jakob (1797-1883) lived on his Wirtschaft on Chortitza Island. He was married to Anna Brandt, granddaughter of Johann Warkentin (1760-1826), Blumenort,



Daughter Anna Höppner (1781-1826) and her husband Heinrich Penner (1776-1854). Photo courtesy of Pauline Heppner, Sardis, B.C. (Heppners', page 41). Such early photographs are especially significant as they show the dress styles and apparel of the early Delta-Flemish pioneers of the Chortitza settlement.



Jakob Höppner monument erected on the Island of Chortitza in 1889. Photo from Men. Life, January 1969, page 27. For another photo see Diese Steine, page 86. In March, 1973, the monument and gravestone were shipped to Canada and now stand in a place of honour at the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach (see Men. Post, Sept. 1/00 page 1). The expenses of moving the monuments of \$5335.00 were covered by the Isaak A. Hoepner family of Morden, Manitoba.



The monument to Jakob Höppner on his farm on the Island of Chortitza as it appeared before it was transported to Canada in March of 1972. In the rear, left (not on photo), stood the monument of Margarete Padalka, a Mennonite who had married a Ukrainian. Her relatives in Canada have been to visit the gravesite. The woman at the righthand side is Mrs. Ischenko, the mother of the current owner of the property. The others in the photo are her siblings. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Ischenko, Chortitza Island - May, 2000. Photo from Diese Steine, page 87.

Molotschna (see *Dynasties*, page 690). On Monday, Oct. 13, 1869, Rev. Jakob Epp reported visiting uncle Jakob Höppner on the Island of Chortitza. On April 16, 1874, Jakob Epps accompanied Gerhard Dycks to the Island of Chortitza to visit uncle Jakob Höppner. On Oct. 19, 1874, Jakob Epps' "stayed to visit with uncle Jakob Höppner, his wife, and their children, the Peter Höppners from Michaelsburg, who also plan to move to Canada," (in Harvey Dyck, *Diaries of Jakob Epp* (Toronto, 1991), pages 275, 374 and 384).

Jakob Höppner's sons Gerhard, Heinrich, Jakob, Johann and Peter, and daughter Elisabeth (Mrs. Peter Sawatzky), immigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s--Gerhard, Jakob, Heinrich, Peter and sister Elisabeth settled in the village of Waldheim, West Reserve.

The delegate's brother Anton Höppner's son Jakob (1792-1857) later moved to the Bergthal Colony (BGB A31). His son Dirk (1816-82) (BGB B18), who immigrated to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, was the great-great grandfather of Ben Heppner, formerly of Dawson Creek, B.C., the famous Canadian tenor opera singer (*Time*, Dec. 21,

1998, pages 53-55). Anton was the ancestor of the Bergthaler Höppners while the Old Colony Höppners of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mexico and elsewhere, were direct descendants of delegate Jakob Höppner through his son Jakob (1797-1883).

The story was told that during the journey from Prussia to Russia, the people had asked Peter Hildebrand, whether he would not soon want to marry. At that very moment he was holding Helena, the baby of his employer Jakob

**The Song of the Creek – by A.B.**

My thoughts were stale and musty and my world was dull and bleak  
Till I listened to the music of the water in the creek.

For winter's snows were melting and the sunshine bright and warm,  
And springtime breezes blowing with their enticing charm.

So I dropped my daily duties and left my dreary sphere,  
As the breezes brought the sound of running waters to my ear.

Oh, the wind was so delicious as it swept across my cheek,  
And my soul was quite enchanted as I listened to the creek.

Tiny grasses on the creekbank now were slightly tinted green,  
While the waters swirling past me, oh, so peaceful and serene.

Oh, bubbling, laughing waters, do you ever stop to think,  
Or pause a bit to ponder as I'm doing on your brink?

Oh, if you could only tell me all the secrets you have found  
As you travel onward to the river far beyond.

Or if I could only join you as you ripple on and on  
And never once more worry 'bout the cares that press me down.

So I ask the creek these questions and I ponder many things,  
While my soul is thus uplifted as the flowing water sings.

Oh, if I could only capture this dear moment in my hands  
And never let it slip away, to time and its demands!

So I'll drink in all its beauty while the fleeting raptures last,  
And hold each inspiration long, to savor when it's past,

For my soul has been inspired and my troubles cast abroad  
And I feel a little closer to the loving heart of God.

"The song of a creek," is reprinted with per mission from *Family Life*, March 2001, page 14.



The aged *Kruschtje* tree (wild pear tree), which stands on the former site of the Höppner monument. The word "*Kruschtje*" comes from the Russian "*Gruscga*" and means "berries". View towards the east. The grave of Jakob Höppner was supposedly located some three meters left from the tree, and the monument another three meters further left. From this place a beautiful panorama of the Paul's Ravine, the Dnjepr River and the City of Zaporozhe (formerly Alexandrovsk), across the river, is visible. Would it not be appropriate to erect another monument on this sacred site? Photo 1995 from *Diese Steine*, page 87.

Höppner in his arms, and replied, "No. I will wait until this one is grown up," (from *Preservings*, No. 15, page 103). Peter Hildebrand married Helena Höppner in 1793. In 1819 Peter Hildebrand was elected as minister of the Kronsweide Gemeinde. He was the author of the only eye-witness account of the original emigration, *From Danzig to Prussia* published by his grandson Cornelius in 1889.

In 1833 Peter Hildebrand's wife Helena drowned in the Dnjepr River, apparently by suicide (see *Sask. Men. Historian*, Vol. 4, No. 2, page 15).

Their well-known descendants included son Jakob (1795-1867), elected Ältester of the Krongarten Gemeinde in 1826, and his son Kornelius Hildebrand, well-known clock-maker and founder of the "Hildebrand & Pries" industrial works in Chortitza (see Schapansky, *Pres.*, No. 15, page 103, for a brief history of this family). He was also a chronicler and the author of the well-known sketch "Island of Chortitza: Sunday, 1840," in *Pres.*, No. 17, pages 13-17. A daughter Maria Hildebrand (1845-1920) married Heinrich Pauls, and their son Bernhard Pauls lived in Jakob Höppners' original house from 1906-1916 (*Heppners'*, page 35).

Daughter Anna Höppner (1781-1826), married Heinrich Penner (1776-1854). Their daughters Elisabeth and Aganetha married Peter and Anton Höppner, sons of Jakob Höppner (1797-1883).

#### Further Reading:

William Schroeder, "From Vistula Delta to Chortitza: A Chronology," in Pauline Heppner, ed., *The Heppners' in Prussia, Russia and America* (Sardis, B. C., 2000), pages 35-37.

*Mennonistische Lexikon*, Vol. II, page 346.  
*Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, page 811.

Peter Hildebrand, *From Danzig to Russia* (Winnipeg, 2000), pages 1-47.

D. H. Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten*

(Steinbach, 1984), 122 pages.

N. J. Kroeker, *First Mennonite Villages in Russia 1789-1943 Khortitza - Rosental* (Vancouver, 1981), pages 10-14, 19, 39, 43 and 46.

**Endnote:** From *Der Bote*, July 28, 1925, pages 5-6 and Aug. 4, 1925, pages 5-6. I acknowledge Ed Hoepner, Winnipeg, for translating and drawing to my attention this moving and most appropriate elegy.



Jakob Höppner (1822-85), son of Jakob (1797-1883), and his wife Katharina (Thiessen) Höppner, and their children Anna, Jakob and Katharina. Their son Jakob Hoepner (1850-1936), was elected Bishop of the Bergthal Gemeinde in Manitoba in 1903. Photo from *Heppners'*, page 46.



Tenor, Ben Heppner, formerly Dawson Creek, B.C. A world famous descendant of the prominent Höppner clan. Photo from *Time*, Dec. 21/98, page 53. A large reunion of the extended Höppner family was held in Steinbach, Canada, on July 21-3, 2000. A 492 page family history was published in April of the same year by Pauline Heppner, Haig Dr., Sardis, B.C., V2R 1K3.



Peter Höppner (1825-1907), son of Jakob (1797-1883) and his wife Elisabeth Penner (1824-1914). Peter and Elisabeth homesteaded on SW16-2-5W in Waldheim, West Reserve, Manitoba in 1877. Photo from *Heppners'*, page 79. The farm is presently owned by their great-grandchildren George and Mavis Dyck.



Jakob Hoepner (1850-1936), was elected Bishop of the Bergthaler Gemeinde in Manitoba in 1903. He was the son of Jakob (1822-85). Photo from *Men. Life*, April 1951, page 13.

# Evangelical Baptism

Three Writings Regarding Evangelical Baptism and Its Significance for Conservative Mennonites. Compiled and Edited by D. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

**Document One: "Baptism," an extract from John C. Wenger, Introduction to Theology (Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22801, 1996), pages 232-240.**

## Origins.

Christian baptism originated with the Lord Jesus Christ, but it had two antecedents: (1) the inter-Testamental baptism of Jewish proselytes (Endnote 1), and (2) the baptism of repentance by John the Baptist (Matt 3:6; Mark 1:4).

Christian baptism, however, was something new. It is to be administered in the name of the holy Trinity to those who become disciples. Prior to His ascension Jesus declared: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age," (Matt. 28:18-20).

This was the instruction which Peter followed on the day of Pentecost. First of all, he preached the Word of God to the people; when they were cut to the heart and cried out for the way to be saved he directed them to Christ and His saving Gospel. Those who accepted his word he baptized. "And there were added that day about three thousand souls," (Acts 2:36-41).

## Apostolic Precedent.

The apostolic precedent on the day of Pentecost furnishes a beautiful model of correct procedure for the Christian Church in perpetuity: first, there was the declaration of God's Word by a man of God; second, the Holy Spirit convicted many of the hearers of their sin; third, in true contrition and repentance they turned away from their sin; fourth, they accepted the Christ who is offered as Saviour in the Gospel; and finally, baptism was administered to those who turned to Jesus, and they were thus inducted into the membership of the church.

The proper steps are therefore as follows: (1) the proclamation of God's Word; (2) conviction of heart for one's sin; (3) contrition and repentance; (4) the acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord; (5) induction into the church of Christ by water baptism....Baptism is to be administered to those who desire it, to those who have turned to the Lord in penitence and faith, and to those who are ready to assume the obligations of Christian discipleship.

It may be observed in passing that these were the basic convictions of the Swiss Brethren and of the Hutterian Brethren of Moravia, as well as of the Dutch Obbenites later called Mennonites....

## Symbolism.

In the teaching of the New Testament baptism signifies at least four things:

1. Baptism is a symbol of cleansing from sin. When Ananias came to the contrite Saul following his Damascus Road conversion he said: "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name," (Acts 22:16).

Dr. A.T. Robertson states that the force of the passage is: "Get yourself baptized and get your sins washed away," (Endnote 2). Water is in the first place then a symbol of cleansing, the removal of the defilement of sin through the blood of Christ.

2. Baptism also symbolizes one's "death" to sin. Baptism is not a momentary burial of the physical body but the death and burial of the old life of sin. Paul represents baptism as the symbol of what Christ accomplished in this respect by His death on the cross. He begins by asserting that in our baptism we signified our intention no longer to live in sin. Just as Christ died physically and was placed in the tomb, so the Christian is to die with Christ as far as the life of sin is concerned, (Rom. 6:1-5). Following his baptism he is to "walk in newness of life," (Rom. 6:4). The death of Jesus is not only the symbol of the Christian's death to sin; it is the means which makes that death possible: "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed [rendered powerless], and we might no longer be enslaved to sin," (Rom. 6:6). The conclusion is: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus," (Rom. 6:11).

3. Peter makes a somewhat obscure statement about baptism in his First Letter. He says that just as the ark saved Noah and his family at the time of the Deluge, so baptism saves Christians now, "not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience," (1 Pet. 3:21)....In any case, Peter is not representing baptism as a sacrament which automatically conveys divine grace or which washes away sin; it is rather a step which one takes in order to have a clear conscience. The step which actually insures a clear conscience is the committal to Christ to live a life of faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ, relying upon Him for cleansing from sin and for enabling grace....Baptism truly constitutes a covenant of discipleship with God through Jesus Christ.

4. Water baptism becomes, therefore, in the final analysis a symbol of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist baptized with water but Jesus promised that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit, (Acts 1:5). This came to pass for the Jews on the day of Pentecost, (Acts 2:4) for the Samaritans a bit later, (Acts 8:17) and for the Gentiles when Peter opened the door of faith to the family of Cornelius, (Acts 10:44). And ever since the founding of the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost individual Christians have been baptized into the true body of Christ, the church, by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, who enables lost sinners to turn to Christ in repentance and faith. The Apostle Paul states this truth as follows: "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him," (Rom. 8:9). Also, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made

to drink of one Spirit," (1 Cor. 12:12, 13).

## Holy Spirit Baptism.

The term "baptism" is therefore applied both to water baptism and to Holy Spirit baptism, sometimes in such a general way as to make it difficult to know which baptism the writer has in mind: this because of the fact that water baptism is in very truth a symbol of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For example, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ," (Gal. 3:27). Does the apostle refer to water baptism or to Spirit baptism? Actually, he probably made no such distinction, although in the final analysis since the water is merely a symbol he certainly relied upon the Holy Spirit and not upon any mere ceremony for the accessioning of members to the church.

## Infant Baptism.

It should be observed that the description of baptism given in the Scriptures eliminates any thought of infants participating in this ceremony. Infants are not able to hear the Word of God, they are not capable of Holy Spirit conviction, they cannot repent and exercise faith in Jesus Christ. They cannot make the appeal of a good conscience with God, they cannot promise to renounce sin and live a life of faithful discipleship to Christ. It appears, however, that at least by the latter part of the second century there were cases of infant baptism in the Christian Church, for the leader Origen, who was born about A.D. 185, states that he was baptized as an infant. As late as the fourth century there were still many cases of adult baptism, however....

As far as the baptism of households is concerned it should be observed not only that the household of Cornelius was baptized but that the Holy Spirit fell on all who "heard the word," (Acts 10:44). Those who were thus converted were "speaking in tongues and extolling God," (Acts 10:46). Obviously, these are the people who were baptized. At the time of the baptism of the household of the Philippian jailer Luke reports that the apostles "spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house.... And he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God," (Acts 16:32-34). There is no evidence at all that Lydia was even a married woman, and therefore the baptism of herself and household (Acts 16:15) is not necessarily relevant to the present question. Scripture indicates not only that the household of Stephanus was baptized (1 Cor. 1:16) but that they had "devoted themselves to the service of the saints," (1 Cor. 16:15).

Many modern theologians assert that baptism is the pledge of a godly rearing. Concerning the necessity of such Christian nurture there is no debate at all. The only question relates to the basic meaning of baptism: Is baptism in the New Testament a pledge of Christian nurture for children or is it the symbol of a personal conversion and commitment to Christ? The basic question is not even whether there were infants in the families which were baptized; it is rather this: Are infants suitable candidates for baptism? Surely not! As to the proper subjects

of water baptism see the contrary monographs of Karl Barth (1948, 1969) and Oscar Cullman (1950).

### Baptismal Mode.

The Bible does not indicate what the mode of baptism shall be. The etymology of the Greek word for "baptize" would suggest in some cases such usages as repeated dippings, to immerge or submerge, for example sunken vessels, etc....

It will thus be observed that the three main arguments for immersion are linguistic, historical, and exegetical. And baptism upon confession of faith should always be recognized as valid. The Mennonite Church recognizes immersion as a valid baptism, for it does not require rebaptism of those who have been baptized by immersion and who later desire to transfer their membership to the Mennonite brotherhood. The belief that baptism should be by pouring does not involve a condemnation of immersion as a valid mode. The significance of a sacramental sign does not reside in its material form but in the faith of the recipient who is sincerely looking to Christ for the blessings symbolized.

### Sprinkling.

A number of considerations are also used to justify affusion or pouring as a mode of baptism. As far as the New Testament Greek word for "baptize" is concerned it means neither immerse nor pour as such but rather to *baptize*. (Interestingly enough, the Gospel of Mark seems to use a word which might be translated *baptisms* more or less synonymously with a Greek word which means to *sprinkle*.) (Mark 7:4).

Perhaps the main reason that some churches defend affusion as the proper method of baptism is that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is spoken of as a *pouring-out*. When the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place on the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter in his sermon quoted the prophet Joel as saying that this was a fulfilment of the prophecy that God would "pour out my Spirit upon all flesh... I will pour out my Spirit," (Acts 2:17, 18). In the same sermon Peter explains that it was the resurrected Jesus who from the right hand of God had "poured out this which you see and hear," (Acts 2:33). The Greek word for pour out is used a fourth time in connection with the Holy Spirit in Titus 3, where Paul explains that God "saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life," (Titus 3:5-7).

### The Patristic Church.

Those who believe in affusion also appeal to history in support of their view. In 1899 a Christian minister from Pennsylvania (A.D. Wenger, 1867-1935) visited the catacombs of Rome. One day he walked out the Appian Way to the catacombs of St. Callistus. "I had been in other parts of this catacomb twice before, but this time I told the guide that I wanted to see frescoes of baptism. Soon we reached one of about the end of the second century where a minister is represented as baptizing a young applicant. The minister stands on the bank and the applicant in the water. A handful of water has just been dipped and put on the head of the applicant where

the minister's hand still rests, perhaps to pronounce a blessing. Small streams of water are plainly seen falling from the head of the applicant...

"We went a little farther to another fresco very similar to the preceding one, and of about the same age, but the minister's feet appear to be just a little in the edge of the stream and no water is represented as falling from the head of the applicant who is in the water and standing erect.

"We went still farther eastward under the hill and beneath the Appian Way.... Here we found the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. John stands right at the edge of the Jordan and Christ stands in the water below him. It is also so represented by the picture of it in the museum. Baptism by dipping water on the head with one hand appears to be just completed and John is bending slightly forward with his hand at the elbow of Christ to help Him come "up straightway out of the water." ... This is the fresco of baptism that has been assigned by some to A.D. 107.

"I asked the guide to show me frescoes of other modes of baptism. He said, "There are no other modes represented in any of the catacombs." This is really surprising, for we know that Tertullian practised another mode as early as A.D. 200...

"In Philip Schaff's great work Vol. II, page 249, we read, 'It is remarkable that in almost all the earliest representations of baptism that have been preserved for us, this [the pouring of water from a vessel over the body] is the special act represented,'" (Endnote 3).

Those who practice baptism by affusion also regard it as a practical mode for all climates and under all conditions.

What about the argument that the etymology of the Greek word for "baptize" would require immersion? The only answer of those who do not im-

merse is that the final test of a meaning of a word is what people understand it to mean when it is used....The Greek word *baptizo* does not mean a physical *immersion* or a *sprinkling*; it means the use of water to symbolize the Christian induction of a convert into the body of Christ, (Endnote 4).

We therefore conclude that affusion or pouring is a valid mode of baptism, and can see no reason why any Christian minister should refuse to baptize converts by pouring if they believe that pouring is a correct mode. And those who have been baptized by affusion should not be rebaptized by immersion. The present writer rejoices that there now are Christian denominations who are willing to recognize both immersion and affusion as valid modes of baptism. For the basic fact remains that the validity of a Christian ordinance does not depend upon its material form but upon the spiritual attitude of the person receiving the ordinance.

### Endnotes:

1. Gerhard Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1949), I, pp. 534-35; Issac Landman, Ed., *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: The Univ. Jewish Encyclo., 1940), II, p. 68.
2. A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York and London: Harper, c. 1931), p. 808.
3. *Six Months in Bible Lands* (Doylestown, Pa.: Joseph B. Steiner, Mennonite Publisher, 1902), pp. 102-4.
4. See the scholarly monograph by Prof. John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Philadelphia: Committee on Christian Education. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1952.) *passim*. The author shows that the Greek *baptizo* does not necessarily mean immersion.



"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching...many were baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins....he said unto them 'I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance,' Then cometh Jesus of Galilee to Jordan to be baptised of him... and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him," Matthew 3:1-17. Drawing from Calwer, *Biblische Geschichte für Schulen und Familien Zweite Kanadische Auflage* (Altona, n.d.), page 112.

**Document Two: An Epistle on Baptism, 1843. A Declaration by the Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde to Johann Cornies, Chairman of the Agricultural Society.**

“To the Chairman of the Molotschna Mennonite Society for the Advancement of Agriculture and Trade, Johann Cornies in Ohrloff.

“From the Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde.

“In the response to your writing of the 10th of July of this year to all the Ältesten, requesting that we consider, examine and come to a decision with respect to the questionable consequences of the acceptance of a Lutheran youth by the name of Peter Penner whom the Ältester Peter Schmidt has received into his Gemeinde by baptism; and as to whether we are all in agreement with Schmidt that the aforesaid youth could be accepted into the Molotschna Mennonite Gemeinden?

“In this regard we do not know how to declare otherwise than that if the youth has proceeded to baptism upon true repentance and renewing of the mind, Romans 12:2 and if Ältester Peter Schmidt has received him into the true Gemeinde of Christ in accordance with the Gospel, Acts 2:38, that in that case the said youth must remain in the same. We also wish to briefly outline the fundamentals of baptism and comment with respect to which persons are to be baptized according to the teachings of our faith.

“Baptism is an evangelical act and usage constituted by God, Mark 1, 24. Baptism was first instituted by the blessed Saint John through the counsel and will of God and the highly revered Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Luke 7:30, who submitted himself as a true example and received baptism, Matthew 3:11 and 16. “Jesus Christ is also the true baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire of whom John the apostle has born witness, John 3:11 and 16. With complete power in Heaven and on earth this Jesus has gone out from God and come to earth and has sent out His apostles with the commandments to preach His Gospel to all the nations, Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15 and Romans 10:17, and to baptize all those who consider the gospel to be worthy and who truly believe in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and also to teach them that both before as well as after the baptism they are to live out everything which He has commanded unto them, Matthew 28:17.

“As obedient servants the apostles were able to follow the same in every respect and made a first beginning at Jerusalem, Acts 2:4. Then they filled all the lands here and there with the message of the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 4:16; Luke 24:47, and all those who heard, believed, and eagerly accepted this heavenly teaching were made into disciples and followers in the name of the Holy Trinity of God and baptized with water, and thereby united with Christ to practice all His commandments, Matthew 28:20.

“The teachings and commandments of Christ were not merely instituted for a certain time period but were constituted in order that

they be kept until the appearance of Christ Jesus from Heaven, 1 Timothy 6:14. Likewise He wishes to remain with those in the spirit who follow His commandments until the end of the world shall come, Matthew 28:20.

“All believers and disciples are obligated not to change nor to disparage in anyway the teachings and regulations which emanate from the commandments of God, no matter how good their intentions may be, Deuteronomy 12:8 and Chapter 4:2. Rather, they are to remain steadfast in the same according to the ways and ordinances of Christ and the practices of His highly enlightened apostles. And in accordance with these teachings to preach the gospel to all the people and to demonstrate repentance and conversion and submission to the will of God to all those who believe in the same, Acts 10:42. And these shall be baptized once with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost by an unpunishable servant ordained for that purpose, Matthew 28:20.



*Menno Simons (1496-1561) on the left, baptising. He was a Catholic priest in Witmarsum, Netherlands, who in 1536 chose to join the hated peaceful Obbenites, later known as Mennonites. Menno preached, wrote pamphlets, gathered and instructed the faithful, and carried on many successful debates defending the faith. For much of his life Menno was hunted by the Inquisition and Protestant authorities with a price on his head. Menno's motto, "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid which is Jesus Christ" 1 Corinthians 3:11. Engraving by Bernard Picart. Courtesy Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons Places, Portraits and Progeny (Altona, 1996), page 78/Old Colony Mennonites, page 3/Diese Steine, page 642.*

“But in the final end this outwardly baptism is not our entry into the Kingdom of God, Galatians 3:24. Nor does this determinable element have any might or holiness inherent in itself, 1 Peter 1:21. It is also impossible that any grace or salvation can emanate therefrom, just as neither the leprosy nor the blindness could be healed by the waters of the Jordan or the pool at Siloan, 2 Kings 2:14 and John 5:9, but rather only through the power of God to which they were being submissive and obedi-

ent by so doing, Luke 8:46.

“Likewise the water in the baptism has no power of itself to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from the impurities of our flesh, 1 Peter 3:21, but is only the evidence and a sign of the grace and blood of Christ in the washing away of our sins, Acts 22:16, which the sinner has received into his heart through faith and the rebirth and that through grace before the baptism, Ephesians 2:8, by the putting away of the sinful man in the flesh which is publicised by baptism, John 1, 12: Colossians 2:11. Without this inward baptism through the Holy Spirit and the fire, the outward and determinable water baptism is like unto the sealing of an empty letter, void and in vain, Romans 2:28.

“The baptism of Christ is constituted so that it is only ordained and commanded by Christ upon faith, repentance and regeneration. His eminent apostles, who have followed Him have neither taught nor served in any other manner. Accordingly all other baptism is therefore quite properly rejected including not only the baptism of young innocent children but also that of unpenitent, proud and fleshly-minded adults who do not believe in the word, Romans 8:8. From the *Martyr's Mirror*, *N. Bene* [page 369].

“Thus, if this frequently mentioned colonist youth has received the baptism in the manner referenced, then he is already in the Gemeinde of God and is an epistle of Christ which is recognized and read by all people. But if he has proceeded to baptism without faith, without penitence and without a new and regenerated life then he is void of all spiritual virtue just like an empty letter, and the one who has baptized him has not dealt wisely, having acted in the manner of one who seals an empty letter and forwards the same to his Lord whom he is to honour and obey. One can well imagine the honour which is put in store by such a one.” *Nota Bene*.

“Thus far from an imperfect menial servant of the gospel of the Lord, Abraham Friesen, Colony Schönau on the 8th of October, 1843.

Reprinted from *The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia 1812-1849* (Steinbach, 1985), pages 292-295.

**Editor's Note:**

By 1843 Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) had sold his thriving Wirtschaft No. 11 in Ohrloff, Molotschna Colony, and was living in turn with various of his children. At the time he replied to the inquiry by neighbour and contemporary Johann Cornies (four doors down on Wirtschaft 7 in Ohrloff), Abraham Friesen was living with daughter Margaretha (1810-77) and her husband Peter Thiessen (1808-73) on their Wirtschaft in Schönau.

It appears that Ältester Abraham Friesen's statement on baptism was largely an extrapolation and a restatement of Article XXI of Peter J. Twisk's (1565-1636) 33 article Confession of Faith, published in the Thieleman Janz van Braagt, *Martyrs Mirror* (5ed.) (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1950), page 396.

**Document Three: An Epistle on Baptism, 1869. A Declaration to Ältester Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1922) and the Brethren in the so-called Kleine Gemeinde in the Crimea, by Rev. Peter Toews (1841-1922), later Ältester.**

Blumenhoff  
August 31, 1869

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, beloved brethren. Beloved brother Wiebe, I have read your letter with great sorrow and perceive therefrom your declared understanding for the changing of your baptism, for the reason that the same had not occurred in a stream according to Scripture.

Oh how lamentable this appears to me. Indeed I can hardly believe that you no longer consider to be a baptism that for which we have so many testimonies of our forefathers, the martyrs who went to their end amidst great privation and tribulation and for whom the world held no attraction and who for the sake of Christ did not consider their own lives to be precious. They rather offered their lives unto God and their Saviour in the fire and death as a sweet smelling sacrifice. Even these holy and bloody witnesses to the truth practised their baptism with water, namely, by pouring [affusion], which is demonstrated to us in numerous places in the so-called *Martyrs' Mirror* by Thielmann Jan von Bracht, as for example, where it states that the servant of the Word (minister) baptized him by pouring a dish of water over his head, and in another place where the servant of the Word allowed water to be brought to him and then baptized the believers. In a third case the persecutor of a believer insisted that he had been baptized in such and such a house, etc.

Even the question of Peter in the time of the apostles, "Can any man forbid water", etc. also testifies for baptism by affusion. In like manner all of our venerable forefathers since the time of Menno Simons came to one mind that affusion also constituted a baptism. This is what Dirk Philips--who was a contemporary, fellow Ältester and beloved brother of Menno--writes in his so-called *Confession or Handbook of Christian Doctrine* on page 18 of baptism saying; "With His blood Christ has also sprinkled (aspersion), washed, and cleansed his Gemeinde from all their sin, and has poured the water of the spirit over them of which baptism is a sacramental sign."

George Hansen--a later servant and Ältester to the children of the Gemeinde of Philips--said as follows in a reply in his so-called *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* at pages 230-231; "Just as the pouring out of the Holy Ghost over the apostles through Christ is called a baptism of the

Holy Spirit, we also believe and confess that the baptism must take place in the Lord, but not by immersion in water in the manner that the Lord Jesus dipped the bread in his dish which he gave to Judas Iscariot; indeed no, for just as the Holy Ghost was poured out over the apostles, in like manner the water must be poured over those who wish to be baptized in the name of Jesus."

In his *Biblische Namen und Chronik Buch*, page 536, Peter Jan Twisk writes, "John did not actually baptize in the water but with water as the following texts demonstrate, Matthew 3:6,11; Mark 1:5,8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26,31; Acts 1:5, 11:16 and 19:4". On page 408 of *The Wandering Soul*, John Philip Schobali writes likewise, "the large [or high] worship service where the water of baptism was poured out over them cannot be described", and again where he writes, "thereupon the baptismal water was poured out over them as young plants on the banks of a stream", page 411. One might also mention Herman Schijn, the Ältester of the Taufgesinnten Gemeinde at Amsterdam and the writer of the history of the ancient Mennonites of Holland which can be relied upon, which not only speaks for the fact that affusion was a valid baptism but also that it was practised in that manner.

All of these lived in a time when they publicly confessed their faith and baptism before judge and Pope. Far be it from them, that had the mode of immersion been such a holy duty to them as brother Enns writes, that they would have drawn back or been inhibited because of a clashing with the world, i.e. the fear of the cross. Indeed no. They did not shy away from the cross of Jesus in this manner, rather they sacrificed estate and property, and gave their very lives, before they would concede in even the least important teaching.

Alas, where am I to commence should I not wish to recognize your baptism as a valid baptism? And how do you reason, beloved brother, now that you do not consider it to be a baptism? Where does this leave you with your baptism? For it is certain that you have not been immersed as you have been baptized by pouring. Indeed what if I also thought this way and said that it was no baptism? Would I then not also have to say together with Asaph, "I had also almost said the same, but behold by doing so I would condemn all the generation of your children," Psalms 73:15.

Oh beloved brother, without regard that you will think that I am merely inflating myself if I am not of one mind with you in this matter, I will become even more intimate and earnest. I plead with you--yes, I beg of you that you give the matter careful thought and consideration. Perhaps you will revoke your judgment and perhaps you might still change your mind, when you give thought to the earnestness of those holy testimonies of blood and to their zeal for the house of the Lord and also to their baptism. Are they to have erred so terribly? Are they to have been the ones who allowed their bodies to burn, without the love? But oh! I repeat my plea once more. Do at least retract to the point that you would at least recognize affusion as a valid baptism.

Does it not also seem to you, as if you are offending one of the least of the Lord without Scriptural grounds? And that you are perplexing the conscience of many? And disturbing the Gemeinde? Why should you have to require the same of me and others? That I should renew my baptism because, as you say, I had so often lamented of myself, which is also true. And even though I can present myself before God together



Baptismal service in the Chortitza (Old Colony) Gemeinde in the village of Nieder-Chortitza, in the barn of Johann Siemens. During Soviet times Mennonites in the U.S.S.R. were persecuted much like in the days of the Reformation. The baptism is being conducted by Ältester Heinrich Winter, the last Ältester of the Old Colony Flemish Gemeinde in Russia with 3570 baptised members in 1910. Photo courtesy of Heinrich Winter, Ein Hirte der Bedrängten (Leamington, Ontario, 1990), page 70/Diese Steine, page 174.

with the poet and say, "It is sufficient that you have found grace for your soul; the fury of God is not within me", etc., I must nevertheless daily concern myself for my sins and in great weakness lament, that I have supplicated to the Lord not only three times together with Paul but in fact numerous times, and that this, so great a weakness, would at least more and more depart from me--even if not completely. I know all too well that I need only to allow His grace to be sufficient for me. For it shall always remain true that, "Of myself I am nothing but sin; but in you, oh God, and through you, righteousness is imparted to me".

But no second baptism will avail to help me in any way, for this weakness would overtake me nevertheless. Rather even when I feel as I do now, that the chastisement of the Lord is coming upon me, because I seem to be losing the first inspiration and love for the Saviour, I would nonetheless again have to hear, confess, and repent. Indeed, I think that I would far more have to lament since I would have abused baptism, through seeking my liberty and reconciliation with God therein, when in fact baptism shall constitute a covenant with God and not the removing of filth from the flesh.

Finally even if those men, or even if only one of them who had baptized one and another of us, would have been spiritually dead together with the angel of the Gemeinde at Sardis, although they had the name that they lived, what harm would this occasion to us, if only we were being led in all truth by the Holy Spirit? Surely none of us would have such unbelief that we only have our hope in Christ for this life. Instead we also believe that just as Christ has arisen from the dead, likewise He will also awaken us through His majesty on that day and reward us according to our works, either for good or for evil.

Indeed, the fear of eternal death which is a fruit of faith was in us a long time prior to our baptism. Is this not true, beloved brother? Surely we thought much further at the time of our baptism than merely, "Now let us eat and drink for tomorrow we will die". Why would we not want to or be able to allow the earnest practice of the acclamation of Paul to be sufficient for us when he says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Corinthians 15.

Or even if one or another has first received the water, namely baptism, and has thereafter received the Holy Spirit so that as in John 5 the three witnesses, spirit, water, and blood, were not all present at the baptism; why should he not allow this to be sufficient for him together with the believers in Samaria where this was also the case, Acts 8, if only he is now wholly led of the Holy Ghost?

I have now written something with respect to baptism, but I do not hold that the Saviour and also many others have not been baptized in water. For to do so would be contrary to the Holy Scriptures. Rather it is for immersion that I fail to find any scriptural basis. If one wishes

to compare the dipping under of Naaman with baptism then one can also understand many other matters in this way where Paul refers to various baptisms of which many instances would much more bring to mind a sprinkling rather than dipping. The word dipping [tauchen] only appears twice in the New Testament and even then does not refer to baptism but rather to the dipping of a morsel in a dish and of the dipping of the tip of the finger in water. In contrast the word sprinkle [bespringen] which the apostle mentions many times, especially in Hebrews, where he also speaks of baptism in chapter 9 verse 10, truly has the examples of the old covenant in mind, such as the many washings and sprinklings. For example, the preservation of eight souls from the deluge and the passing through the waters by the children of Israel are referred to as a baptism, 1 Peter 3; 1 Corinthians 10.

I stated that I did not want to argue contrary to the Holy Scripture that baptism has not taken place in water. Rather I merely seek to demonstrate to all those who are somewhat innocent that affusion is also a valid baptism. Indeed, that in fact many, many, including those who were holy bearers of the cross of Jesus Christ, considered pouring or affusion (or sprinkling for those who prefer this term) to be a valid

baptism. And beloved brother Wiebe would you not also want to retract to the point where you could allow pouring to stand as a valid baptism? Especially when we may also conclude that Cornelius and his household, Acts Chapter 10, and similarly the jailer, were not baptized in a stream.

Nor will I argue that there never was a time when there was a preference for the immersion of the body during baptism, and I would also allow the same to stand as a baptism. But to hold that the pouring with water, namely sprinkling, is no baptism, degenerate, contrary to Scripture, and for naught and that a rebaptism is therefore necessary, I cannot understand in that way. Rather I fear much more that through this judgment the Gemeinde, even if only lukewarm and one of the least Gemeinden of the Lord, has been offended without there being reason for so doing, and that the unfortunate pronouncement of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 17 might be applicable. No one should understand me as if I did not believe that one should first repent, and first have faith, and first be inspired by the spirit of God, before one is baptized. And for as long as the spirit of the Lord will in fact lead me, I will allow it to be my earnest responsibility in the future, to first direct the growing youths towards righ-

## Legalism

Peter Toews' (1841-1922) letter of August 31, 1869, was written in the context of a decision by Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1922), Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde in the Crimea, to forsake Christocentric faith and to convert himself to Separatist-Pietist religious culture. Much like Protestant Fundamentalism, Separatist Pietism was a categorical religious culture which denied the name Christian to all--whether family, friends and/or former church brethren--who could not boast of meeting all its manmade legalistic requirements, e.g. dramatic experience as the only valid conversion (knowledge of exact time and place, etc.), eastward chiliasm, dispensationalism, flat Bible, separatism (i.e. joining their denomination), etc., etc. and of course, baptism by immersion.

In the view of Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau, fourth Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde, the fanatical beliefs and legalistic doctrines of Separatist Pietism constituted a "new legalism and works-righteousness," (*Storm and Triumph*, page 155). Heinrich Enns was a first cousin to Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Bergthal Ältester, and Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Reinländer (Old Colonier) Ältester, who undoubtedly shared such views.

In reality Separatist-Pietism had created a monster of works-righteousness and legalism far more excessive and oppressive than any other, because these practises were subjective and attempted to control and manipulate what was in the hearts and minds of its adherents thereby giving the gurus of the religious culture absolute control over their followers. By comparison the Ordnungen of Hutterites, Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites were instituted by believers in democratically conducted membership meetings and related to physical appearances and technological advances which were objective and outwardly ascertainable. The inward manipulation associated with Separatist Pietist and Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture often resulted in a spiritual reign of terror as adherents could never be sure they were meeting the expectations of their leaders. This probably explains, at least in part, the high levels of emotional breakdown and disfunction found in these religious cultures.

In this particular instance Wiebe had apparently been manipulated by his German Baptist Mullahs that he had to denounce his former brethren in Christ on the ridiculous grounds that they had not been baptized by immersion. The Kleine Gemeinde were well versed in Biblical teaching and were not misled by such silliness. Furthermore they were not about to deny their earlier profession of faith in Christ and also depart from the evangelical teaching of baptism as being a symbol of faith.

A number of the letters between the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde (Peter Toews and Gerhard Goossen, Borosenko, and Peter Baerg, Crimea), who remained true to the Christo-centric faith once received, to the secessionists Jakob A. Wiebe and Cornelius Enns, Crimea, have been published in *Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde*, pages 661-672, 719-740, 781-806 and 902-909. The Editor.

teousness-working repentance before they are baptized upon their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Enough regarding baptism for this time. I will also write a few words to you, beloved brother, as I have great concern that you might all be truly unprejudiced and circumspect, and that you would not too quickly give up the fellowship one with the other. Rather I would encourage you that he who would prevail might be more and more holy. I would also provide the brotherly counsel that none of you would now suddenly decide to move away from there because of this, unless you already stood in agreement to do so. For we do not have good examples of such a moving about from past experiences, which is neither praiseworthy nor the will of God.

Oh, may we pray to the Lord that He might grant us the gifts to examine the spirits for there are many which would that they could direct us away from our goal. Some of them come with humility and spirituality, but are inflated and without substance since they say you shall not touch this or that. Others again come with the freedom of the flesh as if we might utilize the liberty of Christ as a cover for evil. In short all around us we hear the echo, here is Christ and there is Christ. Many in fact say that Christ is in the chamber of their hearts.

And for this reason John says "Prove the spirits whether they be from God" which we must also give careful consideration in these times of ours.

I also bid you, finally, that you might forgive me for having written to you at such length. I might not have written anything at all if you, beloved brother, had not declared baptism with water, namely by pouring, as being so completely worthless. In accordance with my conviction I merely wanted to demonstrate from the writings of our venerable forefathers that when they received the covenants through faith, they also confessed and practised baptism in this manner. Do not understand what I have written about the fear of death as being a fear from faith as if I thereby wish to justify the general faith of the world, for even the devil believes and trembles. Rather, I merely wanted to remind you and to draw to your attention that we had somewhat more knowledge and faith than do innocent children when they are baptized. We have also had more faith than those Corinthians who did not believe in a resurrection but who were nevertheless baptized....

Finally, I bid you once more; I ask of all you beloved brothers and sisters, that you would truly be circumspect and that you would not too quickly or at inconvenient season, abandon the

fellowship one to the other. You are all aware of the lessons which we as well as you have already learned from other lamentable experiences. Therefore beloved brethren, be patient and strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is nigh. May the God of patience and peace direct your hearts and minds towards tolerance and the love of Christ and provide that you might be as one with Him through the salve of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Which I wish you with heartfelt greeting.

Your most insignificant brother, "Peter Toews"

Copied by *Abraham M. Friesen*, Kleefeld, Molotschna, 1869.

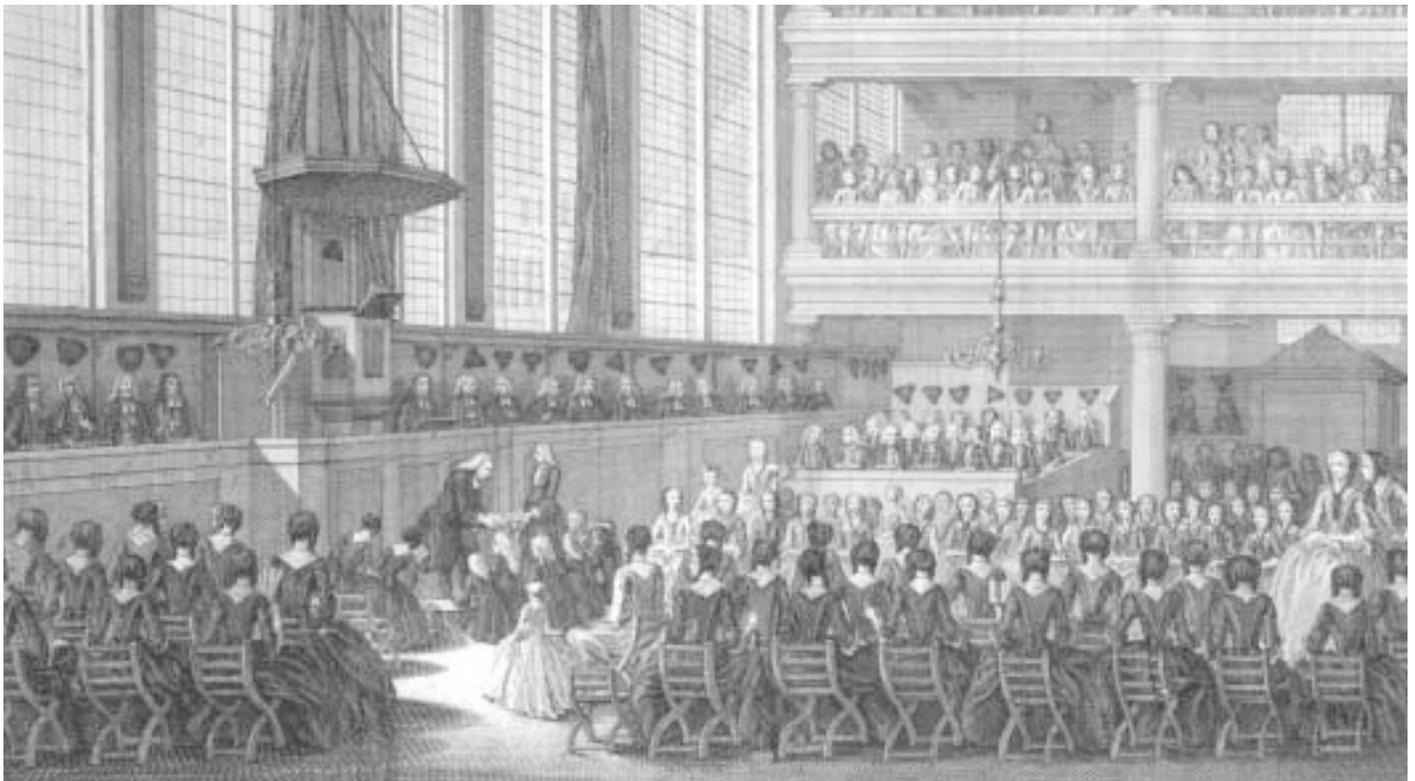
#### Further Reading:

"Baptism," in Daniel Kaufman, *Doctrines of the Bible: A Brief Discussion of the Teachings of God's Word* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania), pages 382-294.

"Of the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ," in Dietrich Philip, *Handbook* (Alymer, Ont., 1978), pages 18-66.

"Christian Baptism, 1539," in Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1956), pages 87-102.

Ron Penner, "Baptism-to pour or not to pour," *E.M.C. Messenger*, April 24, 2002, pages 5-6.



Serving holy baptism by the *Dooptsgezinden*, as the Mennonites in the Netherlands were known. The scene from the Lammist congregation on Singel Street in Amsterdam dates to the 18th century, the Golden Age of our Flemish Dutch forebears. See *Men. Life*, July 1952, page 115. During this time, Dutch Mennonites were influential in developing mercantile capitalism and international trade, owning shipping companies, banks and involved in joint stock ventures in the Far East and America. Sketch by S. Fokke, circa 1743. Drawing from Herman Schijn, *Geschiedenis dier Christenen, welke in de Vereenigde Nederlanden onder de Protestanten Mennoniten Genaamd worden* (Amsterdam, 1743-45), Volume One, pages 90/91. The history published in Latin in 1711 was translated and published in Dutch with a long foreword by editor Gerardus Maatschoen. Schijn (1662-1727), was a medical doctor. "He was the great leader of the conservative (Zonists) Mennonites in the Netherlands....He was active [in the committee] on behalf of the oppressed Mennonites in Switzerland..." resulting in their resettlement in Pennsylvania. *Men. Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, pages 454-6. Today their descendants, the Amish, are affirming the bond of unity by standing by their brothers and sisters in Christ in the Old Colony Gemeinden in Mexico, descendants of the Flemish Dutch Mennonites, originally their patrons.

# American Civil Religion,

“American Civil Religion, Christ-centered Theology and September 11,”

by J. Denny Weaver, Professor of History and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies, Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio,  
presented at the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society. A.G.M. January 26, 2002  
held at the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Introduction

It is a joy being back in southern Manitoba, where you get through a little problem by stick handling rather than just bobbing and weaving. I like that.

A decade ago my wife and I and our youngest daughter had the privilege of living in Winnipeg for a year. From an American standpoint, that makes me a lifelong expert on anything Canadian. We did attend this meeting when we were here eleven years ago. It is a privilege to be here again to review a little of what I learned then and to share some ideas with you about the events occurring in the world since September 11.

My remarks this evening provide some analysis of the American scene, along with some suggestions on how we should view the events of September 11 and the response of the United States to those events. Eventually I will talk a bit about what we might learn from some *Kleine Gemeinde* and *Bergthaler* and Old Colony writers about the events of September 11. Since these leaders are a part of the heritage that some of you claim, and I am an outsider looking in on it, it is also important for me to know how you as Canadians respond to my remarks on this material. Thus as we have opportunity I would welcome dialogue with as many of you as possible.

The events of September 11 shocked the world, and as the towers of the World Trade Center crumbled, the United States seemed shaken to its very foundations. Most Americans (Note One) felt themselves to be personally offended and attacked by the suicide pilots on planes in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. (Note Two).

We have heard innumerable times that the world has changed since September 11. A major attack occurred on United States interests on United States soil. And the response of the United States government and of the American people do make the world seem different. The president is enjoying unprecedented support in a war still very popular, and everywhere there are spontaneous displays of American flags and countless other indications of patriotism.

Yes, the world does seem different since September 11. And voices have been raised to say that this unprecedented series of events challenges our categories of pacifism and justifiable war, and that we need to rethink the meanings of peace and nonviolence and justifiable war in this new world that we live in. A recent article in the *New York Times* by a some-what Quaker Scott Simon is only one of the more visible of such calls (Note Three).

However, when we examine the events related to September 11 in just a wee bit of historical perspective, a lot of sameness appears in both

the policy direction and military response to September 11 set by George W. Bush and in the patriotic response and support for the president and the war by a large majority of the American citizenry. In contrast to newness, it is this sameness that I want to discuss tonight. It is the sameness that reveals that this particular challenge to non-violence and the commitment of the peace church is not a new or different challenge at all. It is merely a new form of the same old arguments. Although George W. Bush likely does not recognize it, he is following a clear script that prescribes his words and his actions as he leads the nation in this so-called “war against terrorism.” And although the U.S. public does not realize it, they are following the same script. What I want to do this evening is to expose and explain the script the American government and American public are following, and show that the response of the United States is very predictable. And with the script in mind, I will make a few suggestions of what some *Kleine Gemeinde* and Old Colony and *Bergthaler* writers might want to tell us about this script.

## Civil Religion.

The script that both George W. Bush and the American people are following comes from what is known as American Civil Religion. American *civil religion* consists of a “set of sacred persons, events, beliefs, rituals, and symbols,” all the elements of religious tradition. And these elements imbue the United States of America with a divine identity and transcendent agenda (Note Four). The purpose of this civil religion is to associate the nation with the divine, to infuse the American nation with a sense of divine chosenness and a belief that they have a sacred mission to exercise in the world. In other words, civil religion teaches that the United States is God’s country, and that carrying out its national mission is to do God’s work.

These sacred connotations about the American nation are derived from a founding myth. According to this myth, oppressed peoples from Europe came to America seeking freedom. This freedom was then confirmed and forged in revolutionary fashion by a war against England in 1776. The righteousness of this supposed revolutionary war was validated by God, or as the Declaration of Independence put it, by “a firm Reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence.” This founding myth then becomes the story of every American, even the most recent immigrants sworn in as citizens, who learn that their newly acquired freedom is founded upon George Washington’s defeat of the evil British in 1776.

A central feature that emerges from this founding myth is the idea of the nation’s chosenness. This idea comes from the Pilgrims and Puritans,

some of North America’s earliest English residents, who settled in Massachusetts beginning in 1620. Shaped by predestinarian Calvinism, they believed themselves to be God’s new, chosen people, making an exodus from evil England parallel to ancient Israel’s escape from Egypt, and now destined by God to inherit the promised land of the new world. As a “new Israel,” the Pilgrims and Puritans intended to base their civil laws on God’s revealed law, the Bible, and believed that to disregard that law threatened the special destiny of the new society. This was an established church, with religious beliefs linked to political structures.

A fundamental dimension of the established church is the assumption that Christian faith encompasses the social order. There is one structured state church for the state because Christianity has become identified with and encompasses all of the social order. And when Christianity encompasses the social order, the church as “people of God” has become identified with a society or with an ethnic group or with a political entity. Church no longer consists of those who respond in faith to the call of Jesus Christ. Instead church consists of the mass of the population, identified by geography, politics or ethnicity. Modern terminology for this amalgam of church and state is Christendom or a “Christian society.”

The assumption that Christianity was identified with the social order as well as the accompanying structures of state church that were generally in place by the fifth century were passed along through the medieval church and then through the Protestant Reformation, identified with names such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. Puritans and others brought the idea to colonial North America, with the Puritan’s Calvinist vision of being the chosen people becoming the one that was transformed into the myth of America’s transcendent calling and chosenness.

Following versions of the mythology kept the Puritan world view but restated the sense of being a divinely ordained society and nation in less religious and more secular language. In the Declaration of Independence of 1776, for example, the Christian God of the Puritans became Nature’s God, and the Creator, and Supreme Judge of the World, and divine providence. Laws were no longer based on God’s revealed law, but protected ‘inalienable rights,’ a secular way to identify innate rights without mentioning God. In the nineteenth century, the sense of being a predestined, chosen people eventually became a “manifest destiny” for the European settlers to possess the continent and to displace and kill off the native inhabitants. Thus modern American civil religion is a contemporary expression of an ancient idea, with the American nation replacing the people of God (the church) as those called to

carry out a divine mission in the world.

Closely linked to the sense of being divinely chosen is the belief that this chosenness is confirmed by the success of the nation's endeavors. On the *Arrabella* as the Puritans were approaching landfall, Governor John Winthrop had said, "Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire [the North American coast], then hath hee ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission." That is, they will assume that arriving without shipwreck is God's ratification of their endeavour.

In the Declaration of Independence, this claim of divine approval became an appeal "to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions" which takes place "with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence." In the nineteenth century, divine approval was supposedly made plain in the success of the European settlers in actualizing their "manifest destiny" as they eliminated the native population of the continent. In the twentieth century the claim of divine blessing, vouchsafed through success, appears in the continuing and pervasive American necessity "under God" to be the world's richest and strongest country both militarily and economically, to be first to the moon, to control space, to win the most Olympic medals, to function as the world's policeman, to be first, best, et cetera, ad nauseam.

### Myth and War.

The founding myth is built on war. War gave birth to the divinely sanctioned people, and inaugurated their entry into the new era. Weapons and war preserved the Puritans from the indigent population whose land God was supposedly giving to the European settlers. In 1776, war supposedly freed the colonists from the clutches of the evil British. As the supposed supreme event in the founding of the nation, the story of this founding war is used to teach a very specific point, namely that war is the basis of freedom and that without war there will not be freedom. The curricula of public schools and many private schools teach this link between freedom and violence very effectively. When I ask students in my classes what would have happened had there been no war in 1776, only in extremely rare instances is the answer anything other than "We wouldn't have our freedom" or "We would still be oppressed by the British." The link between violence and freedom is strongly forged in the American psyche. Students are always shocked when I tell them that on the basis of their presumed linking of freedom to war, Canada must still be an oppressed country because it has had no war against Britain.

The link between violence and freedom is celebrated on national holidays such as the 4th of July and Memorial Day. These are the holy days of civil religion. On these occasions the nation remembers and celebrates past wars and honours the people who fought them. In such celebrations, the president is the chief spokesperson, making him the "high priest" of civil religion, with other political leaders of all stripes clamouring to participate and be seen as well on

these patriotic occasions.

Civil religion portrays its version of religion in primarily civil or secular terms. The unaware do not even recognize it as a religion. In the Declaration of Independence, the God of civil religion is referred to in rather vague, distant terms—Supreme Being, Supreme Judge, Providence, and so on. Recent usage has employed additional imprecise terms for God. My favourite example comes from an address by sitting president Richard Nixon at a Billy Graham crusade. I recall watching as Nixon looked directly into the television camera and reverently confessed that the basis of his strength to carry out the awesome duties of the presidency came from his great faith in "Something Else."

Such vague references to God in civil religion are not happenstance; neither are they merely expressions of lukewarm piety. Such vague expressions are intentional; they both allow and presume that every religious group and denomination will include itself as a smaller, subgroup under the umbrella of the wider or higher national civil religion. When this happens, each denomination or religious group becomes a particular representation of the national religion. The presence of American flags in churches symbolizes this representation and union. Where this union occurs, the assumption is frequently made that institutions of the socio-political order are the appropriate avenue through which to express Christian social concern. Christians of this orientation assume and often express the idea that one serves God by serving the nation.

### Millennial Outlook.

The notion of being a predestined or elect people with a unique, God-given destiny gives American civil religion a distinctly future-oriented or millennial (Note Five) outlook—the belief that a past or present evil is on the point of being overcome, so that the nation stands perpetually on the verge of the golden age or millennium—a new era of unprecedented opportunity, goodness and prosperity (Note Six). For the early Puritan settlers, this gold age would be the society they planned to create, the new epoch in God's history. A few decades later, the belief of standing on the verge of a new epoch in God's history was translated into secular terms, and became the "novus ordo seclorum" or new order of the ages, as it stands written on the great seal of the United States. In the twentieth century, the sense of eternally standing on the verge of a new age is reflected in the slogans which popularly identify presidential regimes—the "new deal" or "fair deal" or "new frontier" or "great society." In each case, there is an assumption that the past was bad or corrupt, or that the last looming enemy such as communism was about to be overcome so that the golden age was just about to arrive with the new administration just coming into power. Former President George H. W. Bush may have been unaware of the myth-shaped, theological tradition he was continuing when he proclaimed that the 1990 war against Iraq would produce a "new world order."

Restatement and reenactment of the myth of

the golden age that is about to arrive has followed a cyclical pattern, which is well depicted in William McLoughlin's book, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Note Seven). A given cycle starts with an assumption that the society should be unified. When the unified vision is perceived to be fragmented, blame for the break-up must be placed somewhere. Finally, an enemy is found, an enemy who can represent all the evils that appear to threaten the fragmenting society, an enemy that seems to be the last obstacle standing between the present circumstances and the realization of the new order. It suddenly seems that the process of creating unity and the ushering in the new age can be speeded up by the rapid, violent elimination of the enemy.

That cycle has repeated itself several times in United States history. As previous wars removed the Native Americans, who stood in the way of European Puritans in obtaining the promised land claimed by the original colonies, the war in 1776 eliminated the British, who were preventing the later colonists from realizing their true destiny. Then came the Civil War, supposedly fought to eliminate the sin of slavery and to preserve the sacred unity of the nation from the evil of division.

In this century, wars were supposedly fought to eliminate the Kaiser and "make the world safe for democracy," and to eliminate the scourge of Hitler and the Axis powers. Ronald Reagan's arms build-up and his rhetoric about the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire" clearly fit into the language of the national mythology about war to eliminate the last evil before the golden age. Some of you may even recall a joke by Ronald Reagan when he spoke into an unexpectedly open microphone, saying "I've outlawed the Soviet Union—the bombing starts in 5 minutes." In light of Reagan's embodiment of the myth of civil religion, including its great faith in violence, this supposedly off-hand remark was frightening (Note Eight). Then the momentous and unexpected changes occurred in eastern Europe. The Soviet empire collapsed and the wheel slowed that seemed to be spinning toward an inevitable conflagration. It was Reagan's vice-president, George Bush Senior who got to proclaim the war that was supposed to inaugurate a "new world order" by eliminating the last evil, namely Saddam Hussein.

In all of these examples, from across more than two centuries of United States history, war was good. It was always a crusade, a war fought in the name of a good cause with the blessing of divine power, and wrapped in the terminology of the mythical model of the last war before the dawn of the golden age—the millennium.

### The Power of Myth.

The myth of the American nation founded in redemptive, revolutionary violence shapes the understanding of United States history. It makes war virtually an ultimate good. Didn't the Civil War purge the nation of slavery and preserve the Union? And how about World Wars I and II to save the world from the Kaiser and from Der Führer and to preserve freedom and advance democracy? The myths about war shape the public

ethos and the national self-perception of society, as well as both domestic and foreign policy. The result is a public ethos and a values system which predisposes particular individuals as well as American society in general to choose violence and war as a means of solving problems, even as individuals—whether as private citizens or politicians in the public sphere—fervently profess and believe themselves to support peace and to oppose war.

Pointing out a few additional facts reveals the power of the myth to reshape both past and present reality. For example, the shaping power of the national myth of chosenness and efficacious violence makes it convenient to ignore the fact that in 1776, only a third of the population actually supported the rebellion, and that the taxes the colonists resented paying were being collected to pay for debts incurred in the war only 13 years earlier when the colonists had considered Britain their saviour from the heinous French. The myth that freedom depends on war obliterated the several, workable parliamentary solutions to the taxation problem of the early 1770s. The myth of war as the way to purge the nation's sin has led the nation to believe that it had solved the race problem with the Civil War, and it has camouflaged the fact that outlawing slavery did nothing to eliminate the racism and white supremacy, which underlay the institution of slavery, and which continued to characterize the 'unified' nation that had no intention of treating blacks as equals in a 'free' society. The same mythology allows modern people to forget that possession of great quantities of armaments was a principal cause of World War I, and that the harsh settlement imposed on Germany after the war produced resentment that came to fruition in the Second World War, and that that war was not really fought to save the Jews (Note Nine).

The Vietnam war was traumatic because it did not fit the mythical pattern. This war showed that the nation was not invincible, an idea unthinkable if God had given the nation a special destiny. Atrocities brought right into our living rooms via the televised evening news disproved mythical assumptions about national goodness, punity, and selflessness. The war's end ushered in no new era in which the nation could take pride. On the contrary, it gave birth to a time of suspicion and distrust of government, and to serious doubts about national direction. Because this war did not fit the inherited mythical formula, it has troubled the United States greatly for the last quarter of the twentieth-century.

The myth is now working in a powerful way to rewrite the history of the war in Vietnam in the public mind. Rather than being the very divisive war that provoked large scale protests, that came to have considerable opposition in the halls of congress, and that brought down the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, the war in Vietnam is now taking on the character of a valiant cause for which some misguided politicians and radical hippies prevented the steps necessary for the United States to win.

The Civil Rights movement and the Watergate Affair that brought down the presidency of Richard Nixon also posed serious challenges to the

national myth. The Civil Rights movement belied the myth that war—the Civil War—had solved the race problem in the United States, and shattered the myth of a moral society in which all people were accepted equally. Then Nixon's Watergate Affair decimated the myth that the nation's leaders are moral examples who epitomize the nation's ideals.

The traumatic experience of Vietnam played a role in the United States rush into the war in the Gulf in 1991, as well as its interpretation afterward. As the spokesman for war, and as the civil religions' high priest for the divinely called nation with the transcendent mission of purging the world of evil, it was important that George H. W. Bush let it be known that he had spent time in prayer with Billy Graham before declaring war. When the president addressed the United States congress to announce the end of hostilities, he referred to an incident that was shown a number of times on TV news coverage. You may recall it—a video clip showed American soldiers having their shoes kissed by surrendering Iraqi soldiers while a US soldier assured them, "You're okay now." According to George Bush, that incident showed the true character of Americans—their compassion. Another very significant Bush comment was his declaration that "we have excised Vietnam." After the embarrassment of Vietnam, this war allowed the United States once again to reclaim its status as the invincible and selfless force on the side of freedom anywhere in the world. These presidential interpretations were all most clearly myth shaped.

On the other side, the national myth has also caused the nation virtually to ignore some very sad dimensions of the Gulf War—the 100,000 Iraqi battle-related casualties, the millions of lives shattered by the war, the uprisings and reprisals set in motion by the war. Thousands of children have died from food shortages and epidemics caused by the massive destruction of water and sewage disposal systems and the subsequent economic sanctions levied against Iraq. There was considerable ecological damage and uncounted millions of barrels of oil wasted by this war to secure a supply of oil to the west.

The United States' national mythology actually requires an enemy to blame for its problems. After all, how could the elect, righteous and invincible nation have fundamental problems of its own making. For the middle two quarters of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe served well in the enemy role. They had their own national mythologies that pictured the west as the enemy that needed to be eliminated. Since the demise of the Soviet Union and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, it has been necessary—in the national mythology—to create a new enemy. For a brief moment, it seemed that Iraq might become the enemy of choice. And when Iraq seemed less than a formidable opponent after the war, the Clinton administration and current Bush administration in Washington periodically raised up Iraq as a target any way. One such effort occurred soon after the inauguration of George W. Bush, when a pretext was created

for some very public bombing raids on Iraq. We can know that it was a pretext because of reports in the foreign press that were mostly ignored in the United States. The foreign press reported that the angle of attack did not allow the onboard computers in the missiles to account for wind velocity, and most of the missiles were blown off target. Since there was no follow up bombing, it seems obvious to me that far from militarily necessary, this was an act by the new United States president to prove his military muscle and keep the idea of an enemy alive.

With external enemies somewhat difficult to sustain in recent years, until September 11 some of the search for an enemy had turned inward. The persons and groups blamed for the nation's problems included illegal aliens, the poor, criminals, and homosexuals. The vehemence of public rhetoric against aliens both legal and illegal, and the harshness of moves in congress to cut programs for aliens and the poor, to speed up the exercise of capital punishment, and to deny human rights protection to homosexuals reflect the search for an enemy—a scape goat, someone perceived to be different—on whom to blame the nation's ills.

#### **U.S. Response to Sept. 11.**

Since September 11, American President George W. Bush has been calling the nation and the world to a supposed last great war to rid the world of the last great evil. Bush's manner of interpreting the horror of September 11 and of justifying the subsequent "war against terrorism" is strikingly consistent with the American myth depicted thus far.

In both presidential rhetoric and in the response of the overwhelming majority of the American public, all the elements of civil religion depicted previously are front and center. Quite obviously there is a newly-identified enemy—ultimate evil—to eliminate. And the nation pictures itself as the aggrieved innocent victim of this intrinsically evil person who hates the United States because of its virtues and values and goodness. As President Bush encourages the citizens of the nation to resume their daily lives and enjoy the freedoms of America, the scenario being pictured is removal of the last real obstacle to the nation's realization of its true destiny.

War, the sacred act, was the only response to September 11 actively considered. And when you have heard the history of civil religion just recounted, it is clear that both the violent response and the language in which it is couched come directly from the civil religion script. The only substantial questions about the response were how soon and how big it would be. As the leader of civil religion, the president has benefited from his position as its spokesman—his popularity has risen to the highest of any sitting president in the history of the United States. This event has generated its own holy days—as I write in late January, there were still commemorations on the 11th of each month (Note Ten). The response—to root out terrorism once and for all wherever it is found anywhere in the world—fits the millennial

outlook of the United States, namely to exercise its sacred calling to rid the world of the last great evil through one last war to speed the arrival of the state of security and prosperity for peace-loving people everywhere.

The myth is also shaping the interpretation of the events and the response, both in how it is understood and in things that are ignored or distorted. One example of such shaping might be the description of the installation of Hamid Karzai as head of the new interim government in Kabul. It is belabouring the obvious to say that for days before Karzai's installation there was an extensive American bombing campaign, and that Americans gave considerable assistance to the armies of the Northern Alliance in the military drive to oust the Taliban. Yet after all this military activity and bloodshed, when Karzai was installed, it was widely reported that James Dobbins, the United States Special Envoy for Afghanistan called it "the first peaceful transfer of power in decades if not in centuries" in Afghanistan. Without attributing the idea to any particular spokesperson, newspaper accounts of the installation began "In the first peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan for decades, . . ." It appears that under the shaping power of the American myth, right before our very eyes the extensive military action, massive bombing and violent removal of the Taliban was almost magically transformed into "peaceful transfer of power"—and I heard no mention of this irony anywhere in the public media.

Under the power of the myth, other things seem to become invisible. An example is the report in the foreign press of the publication of a book (Note Eleven) that claims to document negotiations between the administration of George W. Bush and the Taliban early in the current Bush administration. According to the published account, the Bush administration slowed down FBI investigations of al-Qaeda and terrorism in Afghanistan in order to make a deal with the Taliban for an oil pipeline across Afghanistan. Negotiations broke down, it appears, when American negotiators kept raising the stakes on the naive Taliban. It thus appears that as late as a month before September 11 the Bush administration was willing to make a deal for oil with people it now claims to know are wholly evil. Although this book was mentioned in a CNN interview, at least to date the major American media have ignored the story—perhaps they just cannot see the story because it does not fit with the current perceptions of innocent nation and fearless leader in a transcendent battle with evil.

The transformative power of the myth of national chosenness and purity apparently renders both president and the population virtually incapable of recognizing possible American contributions to the events of September 11. The foremost issue concerns the indifference of American foreign policy to the plight of Palestinians living under increasingly brutal military occupation coupled with the overwhelming financial and military support that the United States provides to the state of Israel. This aid is placed officially at approximately \$3 billion per year but in actual-

ity is at least twice that. This combination of indifference and support has undoubtedly contributed to the depression and hopelessness in a lot of people—and it is people without hope, who have no sense of a future who do desperate things such as undertake suicide missions. Violence is never right, and this analysis is in no way a justification of the events of September 11 or of any other terrorist acts. Rather the purpose of the observations is to point out an issue that needs to be part of the discussion when deciding how to respond, and particularly in developing a response to September 11 that can undercut the possibility of such future terrorist acts.

Beyond the Israeli-Palestine conflict, another issue concerns American wealth and influence in the world. The United States takes pride in its standard of living and in being the world's wealthiest country. The United States has about 4.5 percent of the world's population while consuming some 40 percent of the world's resources. And the nation considers it an inalienable—God-given—right to consume more than its proportional share. On top of that consumption, which means that others find less than their proportional share of resources, there is also the fact that in terms of contribution and assistance to poorer nations, the United States is parsimonious. According to figures from the World Health Organization, the United States is last—that is, least generous—among all the developed nations (Note Twelve). It requires little imagination to suspect that such attitudes and actions contribute toward resentment of the United States in which terrorism could fester.

These observations about American contributions to September 11 belie the idea of the United States as only innocent victim. And they render rather laughable the presumed innocence in the move of the Bush administration to engage Charlotte Beers at the level of Undersecretary of State to develop an advertising campaign to present the American case in the Arab world. As an innocent victim, the administration claims, America does not need to change. The problem is rather that America has been misunderstood in the Arab world—a misunderstanding that can be remedied by advertising. In this case American civil religion is fostering appalling ignorance on the part of both official Washington and the public.

### **Mennonites and Civil Religion.**

The shock of September 11 has posed something of a challenge to peace people. The temptation is to believe that this tragic situation is different and that this time violence really will be the answer. We (meaning We Mennonites) should avoid that temptation. In their response to the events of September 11, the American president and the American public are singing from a very old score, the one that contains the myths of American civil religion. I hope that you have heard enough tonight to recognize that the current invitation to war is not new at all, it is just the current version of the longstanding American proclivity to engage in righteous violence.

Americans need a lot of help in dealing with civil religion. And when I say Americans, I mean

American Mennonites as well as all Americans. At least for Mennonites, I think that the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Colony leaders whose writings Del Plett has preserved so well in his volumes and which are featured in the article in the last issue of *Preservings* (that has been so warmly mentioned), do have some things to say to us in the midst of this temptation. While these writers might tell us a lot of things, I want to pull out four points that I think are particularly important at this time. The first two of these points are easily grasped but are important to emphasize. The third and fourth are more subtle or difficult.

First, all of these writers in my essay have a norm, an authoritative reference point for their theology and for their ethics. That norm is some combination of the Bible and the story of Jesus. The ultimate authority is Jesus, and the Bible is their (and our) means of access to Jesus. For example, Klaas Reimer said that "our most essential responsibility" is take up Christ's yoke, or Reimer admonished his fellowship to "do what He [Jesus] has commanded us and forsake what He forbids and do nothing apart from His will," while Abraham Friesen wrote, "I most gladly declare that the New Testament is the foundation, the solid basis of all truth and the underlying doctrine of all other books," (Note Thirteen). Johann Wiebe wrote that although the beginning of their journey to North America was difficult, "we wish to affirm that we keep the word of God as our rule and guide," (Note Fourteen). And later he wrote, "If we consider the entire life of Christ, . . . we shall certainly not find anything, other than that all humankind, or those that call themselves Christians, with earnestness of will seek to emulate the life of Christ and to walk in His footsteps," (Note Fifteen). Gerhard Wiebe wrote that God's people had received "pure doctrine" at Sinai that they were to follow until Christ came. With the coming of Christ, then, "The apostles and we with them, have the true guideline until He will return for the final Judgment. When we read the sermon on the Mount, we can see how we ought to live our life," (Note Sixteen). And in making decisions about moving to North America, he wrote, a primary concern was "that we could have our own schools in order to teach the children according to God's Word and commandments," (Note Seventeen). For present purposes we do not need to spend time right now trying to decipher how these two sources of authority—the Bible and Jesus Christ—relate to each other. The important point is to notice that Jesus Christ is the appropriate norm or authoritative reference point for people called *Christians*. The intent of the Kleine Gemeinde writers and others I mentioned was to make Jesus Christ their source of authority.

I hope that my analysis of American civil religion has demonstrated that in spite of the omnipresent references to God and to "God bless America," the norm of authority in American civil religion is anything but Jesus Christ. From a *Christian* perspective, American civil religion is idolatrous. It lifts up the nation as the highest authority, the transcendent, ultimate authority.

Christians, particular Mennonites who have a history as a peace church, should recognize this national idolatry when they contemplate whether to listen to the national rhetoric in this time of war.

The second point follows self-evidently from the first. The Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Colony writers were all committed to non-violence. That commitment follows directly from their commitment to Jesus Christ as the norm for their lives as Christians. Klaas Reimer identified his church as “nonresistant Christians,” who teach love of enemies and who preach the gospel of peace (Note Eighteen). Abraham Friesen expressed horror at the thought that “Christians are to be able to kill somebody,” and said that “the Lord Jesus has completely forbidden the carrying of the sword or the waging of war,” (Note Nineteen). Heinrich Balzer wrote that the fruit of a person sanctified by God is “love for the enemy,” and that the “believing Christian must suffer wrong willingly,” (Note Twenty). In the account of Johann Wiebe, they “left Russia because of the military service or because we were to become subject to the secular law and worldly might,” (Note Twenty-One). And among many comments about the need to reject the sword and violence, he wrote, “For Jesus did teach Peter to place the sword back into its sheath,” which is an example of why they refuse military service (Note Twenty-Two). Similarly Gerhard Wiebe’s account of immigration also gives saving “our children from military service and ruin” as the primary reason for leaving Russia (Twenty-Three).

Such admonitions about nonresistance and love of enemies in these Kleine Gemeinde and Old Colony writers are based on a need to be obedient to the teachings of Jesus and to the teaching of scripture. I do not need to cite a lot of examples to say that they were convinced that a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord should result in lives modeled on him, and lives modeled on Jesus should lead to lives and a church committed to nonviolence.

And it is self-evident that this commitment to the rejection of violence differs from American civil religion, which has a supreme belief in violence as the foundation for freedom and order. Members of the peace church who are tempted to follow the leading of America in this war need to remember that they really belong to Jesus Christ.

Third, all of the Kleine Gemeinde and other writers under consideration had a believers church understanding of the church. None of them identified the church or Christian faith with the social order. Again this stance poses a sharp contrast to American civil religion. Mennonite, peace church people should remember this if they are tempted to think that the “God talk” in civil religion somehow makes nationalism acceptable.

The idea of “not identifying Christian faith with the social order” is not terminology used by the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Colony writers in question. However, it is another way to express one of their concerns. One critique that the Kleine Gemeinde leaders in Russia had

of the Grosse Gemeinde was that the big church engaged in local, civil government and got involved in punishment, when it allowed some Mennonites to be handed over to the Russian authorities. The same concern appears in Johann Wiebe’s account of their journey from Russia. He wrote that the “Gemeinde did not remain faithful” as “chastisement of the brethren always lessened more and more and the worldly power was applied in its place,” (Note Twenty-Four). In other words, the church was following the government’s way on discipline. Gerhard Wiebe had grave reservations about higher education, and considered it the primary cause for the downfall of the early church (Note Twenty-Five). One can argue that the idea of the Christian faith not identifying with the institutions of the social order is one aspect of this opposition to education. We would not use the same language about discipline, and today we probably disagree with the positions that the Kleine Gemeinde and Old Colony writers took on this issue. Most certainly we do not follow Gerhard Wiebe’s rejection of higher education. Nonetheless, these writers had a valid concern. Their concern was that the Grosse Gemeinde had identified too closely with Russian society by becoming involved in the Russian society’s kind of punishment and its other practices. We do not have to imitate their critique nor follow their answers to recognize the legitimacy of their concern, namely that the church as a faith community built on Jesus Christ cannot be identified with the social order that does not follow Jesus Christ.

The church today would do well to keep this point in mind. Just because we do not face serious, direct challenges from our governments, whether in Canada or the United States, does not mean that the society is becoming more “Christian.” We should not be lulled by God talk and religious language by political leaders into thinking that the social order is becoming more Christian. On this point I suspect that some Mennonites in the United States may have received a wakeup call the past few months—a government that they were wanting to tout as ‘Christian’ is proving very warlike, and clearly has the potential to challenge peace people quite specifically on their commitment to the nonviolent gospel of Jesus Christ.

My fourth point to learn from the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Colony writers is more subtle. It is related to the first three points, but I want to package them differently and make a different kind of point. One of the things to learn when observing these writers is *not to allow the descriptive to become normative*. I know that not allowing the descriptive to become normative sounds a little vague, so let me try to explain briefly.

When we look at and describe Anabaptist and Mennonite history, we can find just about anything. While I am firmly committed to helping Mennonites become and remain a peace church, I freely acknowledge that there were many Anabaptists in the sixteenth century who were anything but pacifists. We can easily find similar examples at later epochs.

The question is what we do with these his-

torical examples. Some current Mennonite academics have been arguing that these historical descriptions mean that we have been too certain about being a peace church, and that our contemporary theology needs to accommodate the nonpacifists. But I suggest that when these accommodations are made, the description of our history has become prescriptive of our actions; we are allowing a description of the past to become the norm for the way things ought to be.

But we should not be lulled into allowing historical description to become the norm. When the life of Jesus was making the reign of God visible in the world, that was a challenge to the way things were; Jesus’ life was not an affirmation that what had already happened was the way things should be in the future. On the contrary, the life of Jesus was a call to live a different way. To live within the story of Jesus is to live out the way things ought to be in the reign of God. To allow the historical description of Anabaptist violence to become the norm for today is to lessen the very tension with the world that the life of Jesus made visible.

The Kleine Gemeinde, as a reform movement within the large Mennonite commonwealth in Russia, reminds us that living within Jesus’ story can produce tension with the surrounding milieu rather than seeking to accommodate it. That the Anabaptist movement per se, as well as any reforming movement within the Mennonite tradition, also reminds us of this point does not make it meaningless for the Kleine Gemeinde. And today, when the church is tempted to follow the lead of the United States in seeking military solutions to terrorism, we would do well to remember this point from the Kleine Gemeinde, namely that living within the reign of God can result in tension with the social order. Or as I said a moment ago, the Kleine Gemeinde should remind us not to allow the descriptive of what is to become prescriptive of what will come.

## Conclusion.

Mennonites both in Canada and across the border in the United States need to keep all four of these points in mind when they are tempted to believe that a violent, bomb-laden, military response is the best way to deal with the events of September 11. I have used the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler, and Old Colony writers to remind the Mennonite peace church to resist the temptation to follow the many voices calling us to violence in response to September 11. These voices from the Mennonite past call us to remember who we are and to whom we belong. It is a call to remember that we belong to the peaceable kingdom of God and not to the myth-driven, violent

### Missions and Conversions:

Unfortunately the articles by Dr. John H. Neufeld on conversion and Dr. Titus Guenther, on modern missions were not available for this issue. We are hopeful that they will be completed in time for the December 2002, Issue No. 21.

nations of the world.

I also recognize what I have not said enough this evening. In making this statement of who we are, I have not talked about what the peace church can do and what it might advocate as an active, nonviolent response to the events of September 11. That is also a very important chapter, which we can take up another time. Here I will only say that I think there are a number of nonviolent responses, and that professing nonviolence is not a call to withdraw into an irrelevant enclave. On the contrary it is a call to continue to develop theology and ways of living that reflect the story of Jesus. This is our ongoing mission as Christians. May we not weary of the task nor fail in the imagination to pursue it.

#### Endnotes:

Note One: While the designation "American" properly applies to anyone living in North or South America, for ease of reference in this essay I will follow conventional usage, which identifies citizens of the United States as "Americans."

Note Two: The sixth seal in Revelation 6.12-17 depicts the great devastation felt by the Jews when the sacred city of Jerusalem was sacked by the despised Romans in 70 A.D. It has always seemed difficult to find an example that would depict this devastation for my young students, most of whom have lived quite secure lives. Now I just point to September 11 and they understand. Note Three: See Scott Simon, "Even Pacifists Must Support This War," *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 October 2001, A22. For another example, see comments in William Vance Trollinger, Jr., "Nonviolent Voices: Peace Churches Make a Witness," *Christian Century* 118 (12 December 2001): 18-22.

Note Four: Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., *American Civil Religion* (New York, 1974), 6. An extensive literature is available on civil religion. Although the term first appeared in an essay by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the articulation of civil religion in the modern era has followed the formulations of Emile Durkheim. The recent, widespread use of the term was stimulated by Robert N. Bellah's article, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96.1 (Winter 1967), 1-21. This watershed article has been reprinted several times, including Richey and Donald G. Jones, *American Civil Religion*, 21-44. This book remains one of the best introductions to the topic of civil religion. Among a host of additional books are Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York, 1975); Sidney E. Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church* (New York, 1975); Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1976); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, 1978); John F. Wilson, *Public Religion in American Culture* (Philadelphia, 1979).

Among writings that have particularly shaped my critique of civil religion are: Donald B.

Kraybill, *Our Star-Spangled Faith* (Scottsdale, 1976); John Howard Yoder, "Civil Religion in America," in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, 1984), 172-95; John A. Lapp, "Civil Religion is but Old Establishment Writ Large," in *Kingdom, Cross and Community: Essays on Mennonite Themes in Honour of Guy F. Hershberger* (Scottsdale, 1976), 196-207; Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, 1991); Marcela Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics* (Waterloo, 2001). Note Five: Some versions of eschatology feature a future, thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth before the final judgment. William McLoughlin borrows the term millennium from eschatology to depict the expectation in American civil religion of a golden age that is about to dawn for the nation.

Note Six: McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform*.

Note Seven: For a summary of the repetitions of the cycle, see chapter 1.

Note Eight: J. Denny Weaver, "American Millennialism: A Dangerous Perspective," *Gospel Herald*, no. 53 (23 October 1984): 734-35.

Note Nine: For such alternative perspectives on United States history, see James C. Juhnke and Carol M. Hunter, *The Missing Peace: The Search for Nonviolent Alternatives in United States History* (Kitchner, 2001); James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, 1995); Louise Hawkley and James C. Juhnke, eds., *Nonviolent America: History Through the Eyes of Peace* (North Newton, 1993); John M. Swomley, *American Empire: The Political Ethics of Twentieth-Century Conquest* (New York, 1970).

Note Ten: I did read one newspaper columnist who asked when it might be legitimate to take down the omnipresent flags and stop memorializing the 11th of September without appearing to be unpatriotic.

Note Eleven: Published in Paris as Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie, *Bin Laden, la verté interdite* ("Bin Laden, the forbidden truth").

Note Twelve: Data from W.H.O. cited in Paul Krugman, "The Scrooge Syndrome," *The New York Times*, 25 December 2001, A27.

Note Thirteen: Plett, ed., *Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde* (Steinbach, 1993), 204, 214, 286.

Note Fourteen: Johann Wiebe, "A Record of Our Journey from Russia to America," in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1875 to 2000* (Steinbach, 2000), 54.

Note Fifteen: Johann Wiebe, "Beloved Gemeinde in Christ," in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1875 to 2000* (Steinbach, 2000), 55.

Note Sixteen: Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten Aus Rußland Nach Amerika* (Winnipeg, 1900), 9; Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration* (Winnipeg, 1981), 10.

Note Seventeen: Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 26; Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes*, 33.

Note Eighteen: Klaas Reimer, "A Letter to the

Honourable Aeltester Jacob Fast," in *Leaders*, 158; Klaas Reimer, "An Answer in Reply," in *Leaders*, 162, 164; Klaas Reimer, "A Sermon on Love and Brotherhood," in *Leaders*, 204, 209, 213, 216.

Note Nineteen: Abraham Friesen, "A Letter to Abrahah Isaak, 1821," in *Leaders*, 252-53.

Note Twenty: Heinrich Balzer, "Sermon on Galatians 6:15, 16," in *Leaders*, 340.

Twenty-One: Johann Wiebe, "A Record of Our Journey," 52.

Twenty-Two: Johann Wiebe, "Beloved Gemeinde," 55.

Twenty-Three: Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 1; Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes*, 1.

Note Twenty-Four: Johann Wiebe, "A Record of Our Journey," 54.

Note Twenty-Five: Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 10-11; Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes*, 10-11.

**Editor's Note:** Because of space constraints we were unable to publish Dr. Weaver's extensive bibliography. Anyone interested in pursuing the topic can obtain the bibliography by writing to Dr. Weaver at Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio, 45817.

#### 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 call the editor at 1-204-326-6454/e-mail [delplett@mb.sympatico.ca](mailto:delplett@mb.sympatico.ca). 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) Additions to the article on the Steinbach/Ebenfeld massacre, by Peter Doerksen, *Preservings* No. 19, page 32:

1. The Neufeld family, Steinbach, was lined up so that one bullet was to kill all. Anna Neufeld got a bullet wound in her back and survived. (She later married my dad's cousin). Her brother, Peter Neufeld, avoided the bullet and fell down with the others and pretended to be dead. He was not wounded.

2. The Bergen family had fled from Ebenfeld prior to massacre. They were split up. Grandfather Jakob Bergen in Nikolai [probably "thal"]. Grandmother Bergen in Felsenbach. Jakob Bergen was not in the Old Colony at this time but did go there later, as did Susanna (Susie). She married here in June 11, 1920.

3. Mrs. Jakob Bergen was an only child so she did not have a sister Mrs. Jakob Wieler.

4. Mrs. Jakob Bergen was tortured in Felsenbach on Dec. 10, 1919 and murdered Dec. 11, 1919. Information provided by Margaret Bergen, #405-246 Roslyn Rd., Winnipeg, MB R3L 0H2

# President's Report

## Forgiveness

By Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1T4.

*Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven (Matthew 18: 21-22).*

Lately I have been reading and thinking about forgiveness. As I continue to practice family therapy I meet people who are stuck. Someone has hurt them, misunderstood them, damaged them. In turn, they are angry at whoever perpetrated the hurt, and they hold this anger inside. Often it goes around in circles as fantasies or thoughts of "getting back" at the perpetrator. Sometimes they are immersed in a stinging bath of self-reproach, angry at themselves for not having done something differently.

Holding onto anger, whether against someone else, or against oneself, is bad for you. The person who does this holding is in a kind of prison. Often he believes that he can only be released by some external force. If only the perpetrator would acknowledge how he or she has been hurtful, apologize. Or if only they could have revenge, make the perpetrator crawl. Then the victim would be free!

Actually, it doesn't work that way. The perpetrator's words or actions can make a big difference, it is true. But finally, freedom for the victim is in the victim's power. And the path to freedom is forgiveness.

Now, if you ask a Christian of any stripe, or a follower of any other religion, about forgiveness, you can expect unanimity. At first blush, everyone is in favour of it. Soon, however, exceptions are raised, and it isn't long before a clamouring for the blood of the wrong-doer (whoever that might be) is raised, too. Forgiveness is a lot easier to talk about than to do.

Forgiveness is problematic for Mennonites. Mennonite history, from its very beginnings, is entangled with the problem of persecution and how to respond to it. At some points that persecution has been external, as in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the extended pogrom by the Holy Roman Empire against those who had themselves baptized as adults. The *Martyrs Mirror* gives an extensive account of this murderous campaign, from the point of view of the victims.

Story after story recounts the brave and steadfast witness of the beleaguered Anabaptists, and their executions by sword, fire and water. Here is one: "In the year 1553, a bachelor, named Tijs, and a maiden by the name of Beerentge, were drowned at Leeuwaerden, in Friesland, for the testimony of Jesus. He was lame, and she was constantly confined to her bed. About midnight they were both put

together in a bag, with their mouths gagged, and thrown into a boat. Then they were thrown into the moat outside the town wall, and dragged along until they were dead."

The account continues: "But the righteous God, who goes with His people through water and fire, will avenge this deed in due time, and give these worthy children of God rest and peace with Him

Matthew 18 at face value, then even Charles V and his various councils and soldiers and executioners are to be forgiven. Charles V himself, apparently not having read the Scriptures with much care, issued an edict in 1535: "We prohibit all our subjects from asking for mercy, forgiveness, or reconciliation of the...Anabaptists...but that they shall be punished," (MM, p. 443).

Compare this edict with the written admonition the Anabaptist Leopold Schneider left "for the comfort and instruction of others" (he was beheaded at Augsburg in 1528), which included a plea for the forgiveness of his executioners: "I beseech Thee, O God, graciously to forgive those who put me to death" (MM, p. 427).

Whether succeeding generations of Mennonites have actually been able to take Schneider's plea to heart is an open question. There are those among us today who are still embittered toward the Catholic church, or, to take the example of a more recent perpetrator, the Russian Communists. Maybe some form of action is needed. This is not to speak of our own need to be forgiven by those whom we have wronged, whether Ukrainians in South Russia or First Nations people in North America.

Today, in North America, we live in an open, multicultural society, and no one is threatening the Mennonite way of life. Except, perhaps, the Mennonites themselves. The many

branches of the Mennonite tree speak in part to a history of disagreement and division. Entangled in this history are many strains of unforgiveness.

I have been thinking, recently, of a recent chapter in this history of division and estrangement. My generation (I am 57) was one of the first to grow up in a Mennonite church that was feverishly throwing off its heritage of salvation through discipleship in favour of a doctrine of salvation through an individual, emotional, religious experience (although the evangelical influence had been building for generations before). In response, some left the church—for other churches, or for none at all. Without a faith community, many of these youthful "black sheep" did not do particularly well. The church itself, lacking imagination, could only think of them as rebels and sinners who needed to come back into the fold. The renegades could only regard the church as an organization of intellectual and spiritual oppression.

Maybe it is time to start talking about forgiveness, on both sides.



*Anneken Hendriks, aged 53, burned alive at Amsterdam, A.D. 1571, for the testimony of Jesus. Having come from Friesland to Amsterdam, she was betrayed by her neighbour, the underbailiff. Engraving from Thieleman Jansz van Braght, The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenceless Christians...(5d)(Scottsdale, Pa., 1950), page 873.*

forever; and this murder, which was perpetrated in the dark, will be justly avenged in His great day, when every secret shall be brought into the light of open day." (*Martyrs Mirror*, pages 539-540).

One can forgive, if you like, the writer's desire for retribution. In fact, the Anabaptist response to the terrible persecution they suffered is highly ambivalent, sometimes freighted with a desire for justice and even revenge, as in the passage above. And the writer is holding onto an important truth: we are not called upon to be oblivious to cruelty. Our anger against wrong-doing is a useful and necessary motivating energy for justice, witness the 20<sup>th</sup> century examples of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela. South Africa's "Truth Commission," let by Bishop Tutu, did much to bring murderous secrets to the light of day. Wrong-doers need to be held accountable.

On the other side of the ambivalence is the pressure for forgiveness. If we take Jesus' injunction in

# Editorial - Faith and Culture

“Faith and Culture,” by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, 1(204)326-6454/fax (204)326-6719, (e-mail delplett@mb.sympatico.ca) websites: “www.hshs.mb.ca” and “www.mts.net/~delplett”

## Forsake Culture.

Terry Smith, editor of the *Messenger* (the publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Steinbach, Canada) is a man with a mission. His view seems to be that Mennonites must abandon, forsake and eradicate their culture and convert themselves to Protestant Fundamentalism (or Evangelicalism, as he would call it) if they are to be faithful believers.

In an editorial of February 27, 2002, page 1, he writes, “Because the grace of Christ is so rich and free, we need to remove a double message. God told Abraham through you all nations will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3), a promise made clearer and fulfilled when Jesus came as the Saviour of the world. The Great Commission calls us to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).”

“Sixteenth-century radical reformers did not teach, baptise, and die only to establish another denomination to serve people of Germanic cultures. Forced out by those who limited reform, radical reformers sought to reestablish original Christianity, open equally to all cultures (Gal. 3:28). Because of that, EMCers need to stop using *Mennonite* as a cultural term...”

“Still, we mess up matters. We pride ourselves on being a believer’s church, yet some EMCers define a *Mennonite* by last name. We speak of community, but for some EMCers this is reduced to extended family (‘the Mennonite game’). We invite and exclude with the same word in the same breath, undercutting our Christian witness and distorting what our spiritual forebears died for.”

Apparently Mr. Smith has concluded that Mennonites are too closed a community and that the solution to the perceived problem lies in changing their name. The purpose of the whole exercise, evidently, is to persuade others that his denomination is not Mennonite and thereby, hopefully, to become more successful at inducing others to join them, i.e. an adaptation of the North American culture which worships growth and success.

## Abrahamic Blessing.

The Smith analysis is based on a number of inaccuracies and fallacies. Firstly, one observes that Mr. Smith uses the term “culture” in two inherently conflicting ways. He quotes with approval the Abrahamic blessing as being for “all nations”, and then uses it as authority for the proposition that Mennonites should not be a distinct nation or culture. One asks, if God gave His blessing for “all” nations, how does Mr. Smith conclude that Mennonites are not under the blessing and that adherents of the religious culture he consistently favours, Evangelicalism, are?

And, of course, the “radical reformers did not teach, baptise and die only to establish another denomination.” Rather, they sought to establish apostolic Christianity within their culture or experiential embryo--the same vision that God has called all of us to follow. Their decision to focus their faith on following Christ and His commandments resulted in the development of a religious culture called “Mennonitism”.

I question how Mr. Smith infers from the great commission “to make disciples out of all nations”, that certain designated nations or communities are to abandon and/or eradicate their culture? Would he present the same message if he sent his missionaries, say to Africa, or would he instruct them to preach in Africa that Christ is Lord in all cultures? And if so, why the double standard when it comes to the Mennonites? Are the Evangelicals that afraid of Christo-centric faith and humble contrite discipleship?

Mr. Smith seems to invert the plural reference to “nations” to argue the opposite of its literal meaning, making it say there shall be only one nation, presumably the particular religious culture he consistently advocates. To me it seems arrogant for so-called Evangelicals to take scriptural references such as these out of context and attempt to turn them into support for their hyper-modernist project, that they alone possess all Christian truth.

## Christ and Culture.

Secondly, Smith’s views are premised on the incorrect belief that Christians either adopt culture or not. The presumption apparently includes the additional premise that adopting culture is bad and that good Christians somehow do not have a culture.

In his book *Artists Citizens Philosophers Seeking the Peace of the City* (Scottsdale, Pa., 2000), Duane K. Friesen, Newton, Kansas, states: “Anyone who considers the topic of faith and culture must take into account two groundbreaking works...Ernst Troeltsch’s *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1911) and H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* (1951),” (page 43). Culture is defined as “‘the artificial secondary environment’ that man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values,” (page 48).

Troeltsch’s typology included the sect, the

**Attention Readers:** The editorial opinions expressed in the editorial and/or elsewhere in *Preservings*, are those of the editor alone and do not reflect the views of the HSHS, its board of directors, and/or its membership.

mystic and the church. Both Troeltsch and Niebuhr agreed that “Religion orients humans in its purest form beyond the world, then moves back into relationship with the world through various syntheses with culture.” According to Friesen, “Niebuhr set up a dichotomy between Christ and culture...Thus Niebuhr defined the problem as a tension between Christ and culture, as if the problem were an opposition between two monolithic entities separate from each other,” (Friesen, page 52).

In response, Friesen points out “we must begin with a view of Christ as the concrete presence of God in the world of culture,” (page 53). “In fact culture is diverse, fluid and complex. To be human is to be fundamentally cultural, whether one is an Amish person...or a Harvard professor...It makes no sense to describe an Amish person as ‘against culture’ and a Harvard professor as ‘in agreement’ with culture...the Amish are not being anti-cultural. Rather they have a different cultural vision than the Harvard professor,” (page 57). Friesen states: “The perennial issue confronting the church is the relationship between the cultural visions, not between Christ and culture.” And here is the important point, “Every expression of Christianity is embodied in cultural form,” (page 58). “The Christian vision is never noncultural...The church itself is embodied culturally,” (page 59).

This, believes Friesen, reveals something important about the Gospel message itself. “The vision of the early church for us in North America, then, is not a noncultural reality ‘outside’ of culture. Rather it represents an *alternative* vision of life that requires us to engage the culture around us in a discerning way,” (page 59). And this is precisely what those whom Mr. Smith disparagingly refers to as “cultural Mennonites” are doing, whether they are conservative Mennonites in their peaceful village in Bolivia, or a community of intellectuals at Harvard University in Boston.

## Faith and Culture.

Faith is always expressed in some kind of context. With our lives and actions we create a culture. We do not think nor can we ever be or

## Abrahamic Covenant.

Students of the Middle East should bear in mind that under the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:7, “Unto they seed will I give this land”), God gave the land of Palestine to the seed of Abraham which included the descendants of Isaac as well as those of his oldest brother Ishmael. The Abrahamic people therefore include the Israelites as well as the Arabs, generally acknowledged as the descendants of Ishmael. The Editor.

act in the absence of a culture. That contextual womb and its continuation through time is culture. Culture is “the sum total of ways of living built up by human beings and transmitted from one generation to another,” (*Random House*, 2ed., page 488).

Faith relates to culture like wine in Biblical wineskins. Culture is the clay vessel which holds the wine, like the physical body which holds the spirit. No religion can exist without being or becoming a culture.

Culture is the cradle of human experience within which a faith exists. Societies and nations have cultures, religions have cultures and individual communities and families have cultures. All of these cultures exist to some extent simultaneously within each of us, making up the sum total of who we are as human beings. Some of us give more significance to one form of culture over another, but none of us is without culture. Even those, who like Mr. Smith, argue that people should eliminate a certain religious culture have a culture, namely, a culture which develops around those promoting such views.

Christianity does not exist outside of culture or in the absence of culture. It is clear then that sometimes the church and/or individual believers will be in sharp conflict with the prevailing social culture and in other respects it and/or believers will be in harmony with that culture. Someone, for example, who does not accept American civil religion, nonetheless accepts major components of American social discourse. The Amish exhibit a great deal of American culture in terms of language, entrepreneurial activities, and countless aspects of daily living, even though they do not drive automobiles. Nowhere in the Bible does it state that believers must have a piano in church or drive a Buick Eldorado to get to heaven, as certain unscrupulous proselytizers among Hutterites, Conservative, Old Order and Amish Mennonites would want us to believe.

When our Mennonite forefathers stood up for their faith, on account of which over 4,000 were martyred, they did so because of a sacred vision of the kingdom of Christ, not because they wanted to abandon their existing culture. This vision became the heart of a religious culture grafted unto the Catholic, known as Mennonitism. In the centuries to follow this new culture has variously flowered and blossomed and also suffered horrible persecution.

Yet, this vision is so persuasive that almost five centuries later, Duane Friesen writes, “I am driven by a ‘fire in my bones’ to be faithful to a vision of life that was passed on to me by my Mennonite heritage. This heritage passed on the conviction that at the centre of the Christian life is the call to discipleship, the call to follow the way of Jesus Christ and to embody that way of life in an alternative community: the church,” (page 64). This vision is shared by all practising Mennonites today, each in their own way and cultural embodiment, whether Harvard professors or Old Colony Mennonites humbly living in their agrarian villages in Bolivia.

### **Protestant Fundamentalism.**

This leads to the third point, namely, the reality that Protestant Fundamentalism is every bit as much an ethno-cultural movement as are Mennonites. The Puritans, when they came to America in the 17th century, transplanted a certain culture based on Calvinist religious beliefs nurtured within an English and Scottish context. This became the cradle of the religious culture arising around 1890 known as Protestant Fundamentalism, and its modern-day reformulation, Evangelicalism.

George M. Marsden (*Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York, 1980)), points out how Protestant Fundamentalism is founded upon the pre-Enlightenment philosophy of Francis Bacon. In the words of one of its proponents, Fundamentalism “gathers first the teachings of the Word of God, and then seek[s] to deduce some general law upon which the facts can be arranged....The popularity of Bacon, in turn, was built on the strong support for the Baconian tradition in Scottish Common Sense Realism,” (page 55). Only through historical study can one truly understand the heart of the religious culture known as Fundamentalism. And just as surely, to anyone outside of the territorial limits of the U.S.A., Protestant Fundamentalism in America would appear very ethnic indeed.

Admittedly, Protestant Fundamentalism is less distinguishable from the American secular culture than that of Mennonites or Hutterites. To put it another way, Fundamentalism shares more of the general social, political and free enterprise culture of the American continent. This also explains why it has grown faster than other religious cultures, at least among Caucasians (not among Blacks where the Muslim faith has increased dramatically).

Without question, one of the most fundamental paradigms of Protestant Fundamentalism is its aggressive growth and ruthless expansionary strategies. This also explains many of Evangelicalism’s worst cultural traits--its manipulativeness, the obsession to win at all costs, and its unholy focus on success. Americans like to win, and this cultural tradition of competitiveness extends also to their religious endeavours. Never satisfied with leaving such matters in God’s good care and oversight, the more Fundamentalist wing of Evangelical religious culture actually sees its goal as total world supremacy, culminating with a physical rule headquartered in Jerusalem (What they intend to do with the Jews who refuse to mass convert to their religious culture at that point is too scary to even contemplate).

The parts of Evangelical religious culture which have grown the fastest are those that have successfully morphed themselves into “pop” culture, e.g. using popular social functions such as “raves” and “rock concerts” to proselytize youths. (Among conservative Mennonites they try to use sports, country music and bogus bible studies as gimmicks to attract and seduce the youths.) It stands to reason that a religious culture piggybacked onto secular culture will by definition be more popular

within that culture, that being also its specific and by far its more important objective. That having been said, such popularity says nothing about how well such a religious culture and tradition actually embodies and mirrors the teachings of Christ.

### **Flemish Mennonites.**

Cultural uniqueness can be understood through the study of historical origins. Russian Mennonites are essentially Flemish Mennonites. To put it another way, the Russian experience was the single most significant example of Flemish Mennonite religious culture, just like American Fundamentalism became the single most significant manifestation of Calvinist religious culture originating in France and Switzerland. All three denominations of Mennonites emigrating to Manitoba in the 1870s were of the Flemish *Ordnung*.

Flemish Mennonites trace their roots to the areas in the medieval Low Countries, south of the Rhine. According to historian Henry Schapansky, “The lowland territories, because of their economic and cultural wealth, were regarded as the jewels in their crown...[by the Hapsburgs]...the preeminence of Flanders in the fine arts at this time is universally acknowledged....Flanders was preeminent in the textile trade...Agriculturally, the Flemish lands were the most productive in all of Europe with higher crop yields than elsewhere. Shipping, trade and commerce were equally important...The population [of Flanders] was the most literate in Europe.”

One of our brethren, Gerhard Geerts (or Goertzen), otherwise known as Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536), was the life and breath of the rekindled scholarship of the Renaissance and possibly the only true reformer of the Reformation, leaving a revitalized Catholic Church as his legacy. From Erasmus as well as from centuries of persecution, Mennonites learned of tolerance for others and their beliefs. Genuine love for others requires one to respect their faith and not merely to see them as strangers outside the pale and as pathetic targets for conversion to their particular religious culture.

Henry Schapansky writes that the Flemish Mennonites were also influenced by a movement known as the “Brethren of the Common Life” which laboured in the medieval provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland for “the improvement of education and developed new schools....” Schapansky refers to the book “The Imitation of Christ” as “One of the most popular and widely read books of all time...” The book *De Imitatione Christi* was written in Latin by Thomas a Kempis (1379-1471), or van Kampen, born in Kampen, Gelderland. “...Many of its themes,” Schapansky adds, “including those of simple, non-ostentatious living, humility, and the transitory nature of this world as compared to the next, sound very familiar to Mennonite ears.”

Schapansky summarizes certain cultural traits of the Flemish as follows: “An appreciation of the importance of community and of the democratic nature of community life. A high

level of cultural, literary, theological and philosophical sophistication. A tradition of non-agricultural employment, in crafts, trades, commerce and industry; including the occupations of linen weaving, lacemaking, brewing, distilling, engraving, printing, and of merchandising. A propensity to live near towns and cities.”

The unfolding history of the Russian Mennonites reveals time and again how these cultural traits have come to the fore. Within a 100 years of its founding in 1789, the Flemish Chortitza “Old” Colony had become a flourishing manufacturing and merchandising centre. It is evident that the Flemish Mennonites and Protestant Fundamentalists each have their unique cultural vision.

### Philosophy and Science.

Fourthly, it is not a choice of having a culture or not as Mr. Smith would intimate. It is a choice between celebrating the culture of one’s birth as the precious gift of God it is, or of choosing to abandon that gift in favour of some other. The issue of faith and culture, therefore, is far more complex than simply decrying one culture as bad and deserving of eradication and elevating another as good and deserving of ultimate world supremacy. The question of culture really amounts to a matter of choice, of trying to understand something about the culture one is told to forsake as well as learning something about the religious culture to which one is supposed to convert.

With respect to Dispensationalism, one of the primary manifestations of Fundamentalism in America in the 20th century, Marsden writes, “The disposition to divide and classify everything is one of the most striking and characteristic traits of dispensationalism,” (page 59). Marsden compares dispensationalism with Marxism, noting that it has “in fact some formal similarities to the nearly contemporary development of dispensationalism,...[in both systems] history is divided into distinct periods each dominated by a prevailing principle or characteristic. Each age ends in failure, conflict, judgement on those who rule, and the violent introduction of a new era,” (page 64).

To the Protestant Fundamentalist, “The important spiritual unit was the individual” (Marsden, page 71). Referring to organizational principles, Marsden adds, “The structures of the movement harmonized with its idealogy....[and] out of the network of seemingly egalitarian relationships among Bible teachers and students, effective evangelistic leaders emerged to build authoritarian empires,” (page 62).

Protestant Fundamentalism came about in large part as a reaction and in opposition to Enlightenment ideas and particularly as manifested in the growth of theological liberalism in 19th Evangelicalism. This explains why Protestant Fundamentalists and their philosophical premises often seem so inherently constricted, and, well--for the lack of a better term--backward. Much of their concept platform is carried on pre-Enlightenment philosophy and sci-

ence, such as the insistence on a literal six-day creation, which then articulates their thinking in areas such as scientific creationism, which as Dr. Archie Penner has proven in his new book, *Scientific Creationism*, is laughable at best and fraudulent at worst.

In comparison, the Flemish Mennonites adopted Enlightenment ideas such as democracy, personal freedom, human dignity, tolerance, equality and free market economics two centuries before they were popularized by Voltaire and Rousseau in the 18th century. Every aspect of social discourse among Flemish Mennonites in Russia--from the organization of the village pasture service, to fire insurance, to church polity and regional governance was permeated by democratic principles, where each member had a vote. Like the judges of ancient Israel, the Ältesten (Bishops) served for life, but they were leaders and not rulers.

The four-story Steinbach windmill was built in 1877 by pioneer Abraham S. Friesen (1846-1916) (*Pres.*, No. 19, page 49), a successful entrepreneur who immigrated from Steinbach, Borosenko, in Czarist Russia to Manitoba in 1874. In 1972 a replica was built at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, which was destroyed by an arsonist’s fire in 2000. Through a marvellous community effort it was rebuilt within a year. Photo by Frank Froese. A limited edition signed print of this photograph is available from the Mennonite Heritage Village, Box 1136, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, for \$29.95 plus postage and handling. Phone (204)-326-6691 for details. For the story of Mennonite windmills in Manitoba, see *Preservings*, No. 16, page 120-126.

In the Nov. 13, issue of *Canadian Mennonite*, reference was made to the windmill as “a symbol of Mennonite life.” Terry M. Smith, editor of the *E.M.C. Messenger*, responded with a letter in the Dec. 11 issue of the *Cdn. Mennonite* referring to this characterization as follows: “It is ‘a’ symbol, but it is more properly called a ‘symbol of Dutch-German Mennonite life.’ The early meaning of Mennonite was faith, not culture; in the 16th century, flames consumed people put to death for their faith. The fusion and confusion of faith and culture in parts of the Mennonite church in Canada does not help our outreach or to develop a multicultural faith community.”

I am of the view that for Mennonites in Canada, the windmill is an outstanding icon speaking of 500 years of Christo-centric faith in action, as embodied within its Flemish cultural embryo. The arms holding the sails create a cross, representing a faith centered in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The sails driven by the wind speak of the Holy Spirit, leading Mennonites through persecution, poverty, privations, and even against the allure of false prophets. The windmill pumping water or grinding grain, symbolizes the use of the resources of nature without harming the creation and of simplicity and humility before God. The grinding of the kernels of grain into flour rep-

As indicated by Marsden, the ministries of Protestant Fundamentalism typically are focused on the personality cult--rule by one man or woman, so to speak--and comparable to the Kings which the ancient Israelites eventually demanded from God and received.

### 1890s Social Views.

One of the observations made by Marsden in his study on American Fundamentalism is that “... Fundamentalists emerged...fixated on a set of views that had been characteristic of middle-class Americans in the last years before the crisis occurred. Their social views were frozen at a point that had been the prevailing American political opinion around 1890,...” (page 93).

The Mennonites who have converted themselves to Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture and their allies, frequently mock



Steinbach Windmill

resent the grass roots democracy and egalitarianism which permeated Flemish Mennonite culture and faith. In medieval times in the Low Countries, the windmills stood guard on the dikes, keeping out the destructive sea, just as the Gemeinde as a community fought against persecution and heresy. In the days of the prairie pioneers the Mennonite windmills stood as giant sentinels on the plains, beacons of hope for the weary travellers and the pilgrims toiling in the earth below.

The windmill represents the importance of tradition in the lives of those seeking to be faithful to the call of Christ, to take up the cross--traditions which are a gift from God and which bear testimony to that faithfulness. Because it is genuine and true, the windmill is an outstanding icon for Mennonites in Canada, speaking to millions of the hallowed faith which it represents and empowering them with life and hope. The Editor.

Hutterites, Conservative, Old Order and Amish Mennonites when they chose to reject certain technological advances and physical amenities in favour of a simple lifestyle, disparaging them as tradition bound or even as "Tjleeda Christ'e". According to Marsden, Protestant Fundamentalists, in actuality are themselves tradition bound, being locked into the social and cultural mores of the 1890s.

This explains why American Fundamentalists often manifest such Neanderthalian thinking on social and cultural issues and why the Religious Right invariably supports political policies which speak more about a greedy group of WASPs entrenching their favoured position in American society with laws and regulations than about the love and compassion of Jesus Christ for the poor and the oppressed. By comparison even the most isolated Old Colonier living in his village in the jungles of Bolivia is open-minded, supporting an array of progressive social programs designed to safeguard the marginalized such as the Waisenamt, deaconry, egalitarian inheritance, democratic polity, etc.

Being freeze-dried into a 1890s intellectual time-warp, Protestant Fundamentalists invariably support only the most right-wing social and cultural policies in dealing with minorities, criminals, immigrants, and those who are different-- either physically or psychologically.

A similar atrophied intelligence is manifested when Fundamentalist mission societies such as the Gospel Missionary Union, Winnipeg, target peaceful Mennonite villages in Bolivia, seeking to alienate their young and marginalized and to turn them against their parents, community and God-given faith heritage.

God is building the Church of Jesus Christ and we are all invited. It is not about establishing a pecking order, where one group of Christians decide they are in Grade XII and certain others are in Grade One. It is all about participation where all believers are equal, whether Old Coloniers in Bolivia or a community of Harvard intellectuals in Boston. This is the great lesson of the love of Jesus. By their ruthless campaign of aggression against conservative Mennonites, Protestant Fundamentalists reveal that they have missed the entire point. And that is a shame!

### **Growth.**

Fifthly, Evangelicals have a cultural obsession with growth. True to script, Mr. Terry Smith points to growth as being the reason why Mennonites in general and particularly "EMCers need to stop using Mennonite as a cultural term."

I believe this view is fallacious. What kind of religion would ask its adherents to throw away a 500 year-old cultural heritage, solely on the grounds that this is a strategy for growth? What point is there in growing if you have to exterminate who you are?

In the case of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (Bruderthaler), it has been documented they actually lost members when they

changed their name, deleting the word "Mennonite" (C. Redekopp, *Leaving Anabaptism* (Pennsylvania, 1998), see *Pres.*, No. 14, pages 143-4). When Manitoba denominations such as the Rudnerweider in 1937 and the Evangelical Mennonite Conference in 1960 converted themselves to Fundamentalist religious culture, they lost that which was unique about what God had made them. Any merchandiser knows that when product identity is lost there is no brand loyalty. Since they are denigrating most things Mennonite, there is little reason for their young people to remain. Many reject Christianity entirely--turned off by the shallow superficiality of Protestant Fundamentalism, or join some garden-variety Evangelical church, such as Pentecostal, Baptist or Alliance, thereby falling ever deeper into spiritual darkness. As a consequence those who have converted themselves to alien religious culture are locked into a treadmill where they must exert massive efforts to steal people from other Christian denominations to fill in the ranks. According to Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 70 percent of new converts are recycled "saints" stolen from other Evangelical denominations.

By comparison, the Amish have tried in their weakness to remain true to God and the heritage He gave them. They have raised families and built communities according to the commandments and teachings of Christ. Today the Amish are among the fastest growing communities in America, increasing from 100,000 in 1970 to 200,000 at present. By being faithful to the heritage given them by God, and by teaching their children about the positive aspects of that heritage, the Amish have successfully inspired generation after generation with a renewed vision of the viability of the apostolic church in modern times. In spite of their drastically different lifestyle, their young people respond positively to the call of Christ and remain true to the faith once received.

Even more noteworthy, the Amish have reversed the dilemma plaguing Mennonites who have converted themselves to Protestant Fundamentalism. Not only are the Amish keeping 80 per cent of their young people, but they are influencing positively the secular American culture at the same time that those who have converted themselves to Fundamentalism are seeking desperately to assimilate and to hide their true identity. The Amish have blessed untold millions with their peaceful Christian witness, living in harmony with nature and the teachings of the Good Book. Their positive influence on American popular culture probably equals that of the entire community of 20-30 million Evangelicals. The Amish example illustrates that Mennonite denominations do not need to abandon Christo-centric faith and their God-given heritage in order to grow.

### **I Am's What I Am.**

Perhaps some of this thinking is summarized in the words of the popular Walt Disney character, "Popeye". Popeye's famous saying was, "I am's what I am, I'm Popeye, the sailor

man."

The cartoon character merely inscribes the obvious--that people are healthier and happier, emotionally and physically, if they come to terms with who they are. Our culture, whether in faith or eating habits, is a significant part of who we are. Those who deny this part of themselves will never be the fully empowered and awesome human beings that God called each one of us to be, each in our own unique way. Those who deny who they are, are merely betraying themselves. They are the losers.

We only have one culture and heritage given us by God. The choice is ours. Do we respect it and pass it on to our children? Or do we disparage it and rob our children of their blessing? After all, rootlessness, much of it caused by three centuries of Protestant sectarianism (separatism), is one of the greatest evils of modern American society?

I do not agree with Terry Smith's suggestion that Mennonites are too closed a society (an observation most rational people will reject). In my view, the biblical mandate of believers experiencing God as a people (as a hermeneutical community) is not adhered to closely enough. Far too often Mennonites have been too open to outside influences, in the process forsaking their faith, and betraying their communal witness to the truth of Jesus and His life and teaching.

I most certainly reject Mr. Smith's proposed solution, namely, changing of the name--a solution very typical and characteristic of Evangelical religious culture. I agree with the sentiment expressed by William Loewen, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario: "If the problem is that we are perceived as a closed cultural community, our response should not be to change the words we use, but to show people that their perceptions are false. We are not a closed community and our congregations reflect that. Maybe we should reflect it more, but we have to show people that we are open, not just change the name of our culture and hope that people will assume we are open," (*Messenger*, April 10, 2002, page 6).

Mennonites have a five centuries-old tradition of tolerance for others and their beliefs, something we should all be proud of. But this tolerance goes too far when we allow false messengers to pollute and desecrate the teachings of our faith and to lead astray our young and others who are genuinely searching for truth.

### **A People Apart.**

In a number of ways, the views expressed by editor Terry Smith in his *Messenger* editorial of Feb. 27, 2002 (and elsewhere in the *Messenger*, whenever occasion seems to permit), are merely another formulation of the thesis already put forth earlier by Dr. John H. Redekopp, in his book, *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg, 1987), namely, that Mennonites should change their name. In a 1991 essay, "Mennonite Ethnicity: Medium, Message, and Mission" (*Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol.

9, pages 113-121), Dr. Rod Sawatzky analysed the views of Dr. Redekopp: "My proposal by way of conclusion would be to seek to clarify the issues but not to seek to find a simple solution. Mennonites live with and among, for and over against a great variety of individual and corporate identity options. Communities and traditions of word and deed need to be nurtured in the midst of this pluralistic situation with which first, second and 20th generation Mennonites can identify. Call these ethnic communities if you will. Yet, these will, because of acculturation and mission, increasingly be ethnicities of intention rather than of historical default. New Mennonite ethnicities will emerge as the older ones are acculturated into oblivion" (page 120).

At the same time, Dr. Sawatzky provided a description of Evangelical religious culture: "Evangelical, however, has since World War II come to denote a particular community with clearly identifiable schools and presses, heroes and authorities. Evangelicals formulate clear and distinct 'we/they' markers around the borders of the Evangelical subculture. For someone not born an Evangelical, who has not gone to the right schools or learned the appropriate in-group language, it is very difficult to break into the centres of Evangelical power. You can attend their churches but you will always remain somewhat of an outsider. Similarly, someone socialized as an Evangelical, in a profound sense will always remain an Evangelical. An organization called Fundamentalists Anonymous tries to help break that socialization for fundamentalists. How many so-called Evangelicals are using its services, I do not know."

"A literature of 'second generation' Evangelicals is already beginning to appear which is questioning the ethnocentrism of the Evangelical community. Evangelical sociologist Jon Johnston, for one, charges his community for being not merely ethnic but ethnocentric. 'As we emphasize in-group unity, brotherhood and oneness, we increasingly reject those unlike our kind,' writes Johnson. 'As a result, our walls are built taller and thicker, our righteousness is increasingly paraded, and this causes even greater rejection of outsiders...Most outsiders continue to face *de facto* rejection when they seek to be one of us, simply because they cannot instantly become acquainted with our peculiar jargon, history, power structure, and customs" (page 117).

All human activities or focuses eventually develop their own subculture. It is better to be honest and open about this question than to pretend that the faith and teachings of a particular community can be casually dismissed as representing merely culture and presumably "bad" tradition, and that the faith and traditions of another group are "good" and not a culture.

### Conclusion.

Possibly, Mr. Smith was offended at some point by someone referring to their Mennonite family connections in a non-inclusive way, and

for this we should apologize. But it should also be recognized that many believers have joined our communities that appreciate the Plautdietsch heritage and have enthusiastically assimilated. Others have enjoyed fellowshiping with Flemish Mennonites while simultaneously retaining their own culture. If I had moved to some community such as Kingston or Quebec City, I would enjoy meeting the people and getting to know the region and local culture. I would not see it as a curse or as something negative. Why would anyone moving to our communities see our culture as something negative?

That having been said, this is certainly not sufficient reason to advocate that people truncate their personae by disassociating themselves from the culture and faith which God has given them, the only heritage they will ever have. I have always found that those who understand and know their own faith, heritage and culture are far more likely to respect and empathize with someone from another culture. Someone who doesn't even respect his own faith and culture is unlikely to respect another's.

The proposition that one culture is ethnic and deserving of eradication while another is superior and deserving of supremacy flies in the face of equality and sound biblical teaching. Ironically, those who know the least about their own Mennonite faith are often those who convert themselves to Protestant Fundamentalism, and they are frequently the ones who call for Mennonites to drop their name or even hold themselves out as being the "only" true Mennonites, accusing those who remain true to the faith once received of being merely "cultural" or "traditional" Mennonites. In reality, it is the turncoats who are "cultural" Mennonites. They are the ones "hiding the light".

Over the centuries Flemish Mennonites have been shaped and touched by as many as 20 different countries and many more ethnic communities as God led them through persecution and oppression. This has resulted in a culture immensely rich in terms of language, food and customs, a veritable mini-United Nations, providing a human coat of many colours connecting us to most communities in the world in manifold ways. Most importantly, through it all, our ancestors were informed and articulated by a faith anchored in the narrative of Jesus Christ and simple, humble obedience to His commandments, resulting in a religious culture imbued by and exuding this central theme.

### Evangelicals.

Although 85 percent of Americans consider themselves Christians, only 8 percent say they are evangelical Christians, 33 percent claim they are born again but not evangelical and 44 percent describe themselves as Christians but neither evangelical nor born again. Atheists and agnostics represent 8 percent, and people of other faiths comprise 7 percent of the population.--Barna Research Group.

From *M.B. Herald*, May 3, 2002.

Rather than abandoning this culture, all those fortunate enough to be blessed by it would do well to learn to know it more intimately. Forsaking one's ethno-cultural birthright for another as advocated by Mr. Smith, will not magically make people better Christians, and certainly not better human beings. Those Mennonites such as the Amish, who have humbly sought to remain true to the faith once received, have not only been blessed with growth, but have also had significant impact on popular culture far out of proportion to their numbers. Praise the Lord for their faithfulness.

Christo-centric believers best serve Christ when they remain true to who God made them and respect and appreciate the heritage He gave them.

### Further Reading:

J. Denny Weaver, "Becoming Anabaptist-Mennonite: The Contemporary Relevance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism," in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 4, pages 162-182.

James R. Coggins, "Toward a Definition of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism: Twentieth-Century Historiography of the Radical Reformation," in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 4, pages 183-207.

Rod Sawatzky, "Mennonite Ethnicity: Medium, Message, and Mission," in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 9, pages 113-121.



*Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536) of Rotterdam. The most prominent writer and theologian of the Renaissance. It is said of the Reformation that Erasmus "laid the egg and Luther hatched it." Tolerance for others and their beliefs marked the teachings of Erasmus and influenced the Mennonites. He ideas revitalized the Roman Catholic Church and marked Erasmus as the true reformer. Erasmus came from the same community as did the Flemish Mennonites, his birth name being Gerhard Geert or Goertzen. Photo from Voolstrar, From Martyr ro Muppie (Amsterdam, 1994), page 6/Diese Steine, page 622.*

# Anabaptists, Tradition and Perspicuity

## Anabaptists.

Mr. Terry Smith, editor of the E.M.C. *Messenger*, Steinbach, routinely uses terms such as “Anabaptist” and “tradition” in an unfair way, designed to induce readers to incorrectly assume that tradition is bad, at least when it is Mennonite tradition, and that presumably to be Mennonite is bad but to be Anabaptist is good. In a number of editorials (e.g. Nov. 4, 1998, May 3, 2000, March 27, 2002), Mr. Smith refers to Anabaptists as being the true Biblical reformers of the Reformation. In reality there were many varieties of Anabaptists whose only commonality was rebaptising, including polygamous Münzterites, those running naked through the streets of Amsterdam, social revolutionaries, mystics, etc.

The defenceless Christo-centric Anabaptists were gathered into Biblical communities called Gemeinden by Obb Philips. In order to distinguish them from other Anabaptists, J. C. Wenger used the term “Obbenites”. After 1536 Menno Simons took the reins of leadership and soon the peaceful Christo-centric Anabaptists were called “Mennists”, specifically to distinguish them from the many varieties of vile and disreputable Anabaptists. It is unfair for Mr. Smith now to reverse the terminology and to confuse the quiet peaceful Anabaptists who were called Mennonites with the motley assortment of unsavoury Anabaptists.

## Tradition.

Mr. Smith characterizes Mennonites as being tradition-bound castaways who now need to learn from his idealized Anabaptists (who seem to act and think suspiciously like 20th century Evangelicals). He states that Mennonites were “saying and challenging little,” when they “saw this was a means of physical survival,” presumably questioning their courage as they braved centuries of persecution and oppression, while at the same time leaving a historical testimony of their love for Jesus Christ and their commitment to follow Him at all costs.

Mr. Smith’s casual dismissal of 500 years of proud history of the Flemish Mennonites as they fled from one country to another to preserve their faith and find refuge shows little understanding nor sensitivity for another culture. This is a grievous affront: the *Martyrs Mirror* contains far too many familiar names: Sybrant Janz and Hendrick Gijsbrechts van Kampen, 1535 (page 443), Andrew Claessen, 1535 (page 444), Quirinus Pieters, 1545 (page 474), Ryer Dircks, 1551 (page 502), Hendrick Dirks, Dirk Jans and Adrian Cornelis, 1552 (page 526), George Friesen, 1562 (page 661), Chaerlo de Wael, 1562 (page 663), Jakob Dircks, 1568 (page 724), Pieter Pieters Beckjen, 1569 (page 738), Dirk Willms, 1569 (page 741), Anneken Heyndricks, 1571 (page 872) and Maeyken Wens, 1573 (page 979).

It is unfair when Mr. Smith disparages conservative Mennonites who are striving in their weakness to be faithful to the faith once received, by referring to them as tradition-bound (Aug. 18, 1999) and to their teachings (which after all, are far more Christ-centered than those of

Evangelicals), as mere traditionalism (presumably meaning also that these unfortunate souls are fair game for ruthless proselytisers seeking to turn their children against them, split up their church communities, etc). This practice is particularly troubling given that Marsden (page 93), states that the social and cultural views of Fundamentalists were frozen as of 1890 and that their philosophy is pre-Enlightenment. It seems almost intellectually dishonest for Mr. Smith to disparage one community as being unchristian, or at best, much inferior Christians, because they are traditionalists, when in truth the community he is championing is equally traditionalist, if not more so.

By denigrating the Mennonite experience in this manner, Mr. Smith is attempting to rob us of our rightful heritage as the true spiritual and genetic descendants of the peaceful, Gospel-centric Anabaptists. This is essentially P. M. Friesen’s thesis which has long ago been proven to be without historical validity (see *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 124-5).

## Perspicuity.

The bedrock of Protestant Fundamentalist and Evangelical religious culture is the so-called “inerrancy doctrine” of scriptural interpretation. This tradition or dogma was based on Scottish Common Sense Realism, a pre-Enlightenment philosophy which held that “in essentials the common sense of mankind could be relied upon.” This philosophy decreed “...that the immediate objects of our perception were not *ideas* of the external world, but...we are directly conscious of the external objects themselves....This view that the past could be known directly through reliable testimony meant that Scripture was not regarded as representing the *points of view* of its authors respecting the past, but it was rather the infallible representation of the past itself,” (Marsden, page 113). In contrast, Enlightenment philosophy and modern thought would hold “that the point of view of the observer stood between the facts and his report of the facts,” (page 114).

Fundamentalists argued that “The Scriptures are so perspicuous in things pertaining to salvation,...that they can be understood by believers without the external help or an oral tradition or ecclesiastical authority,” (Marsden, page 111). It follows from such a belief system that all rational human beings with common sense must by definition always interpret and understand the scripture in precisely the same way. For Protestant Fundamentalists, “Perspicuity of Scripture” was the necessary corollary of the *scriptura sola* (only scripture) of the Protestant Reformers. Marsden explains, that “This view of truth as an externally stable entity placed tremendous weight on the *written word*.”

An example of the application of “perspicuity” in the so-called “inerrancy” teaching of Protestant Fundamentalism is the use of the verse 1 John 5:13, “these things have I written onto you...that ye may know that ye have eternal life,” as the basis for their dogma of “Assurance of salvation.” Based on their pre-Enlightenment

Scottish Common Realism, that the words themselves are the reality and not a description from a particular viewpoint, the word “know” in this verse is taken by itself and morphed into meaning that believers must have a specific cognitive knowledge or “assurance of salvation,” i.e. a definitive internal feeling of savedness.

Anyone with a respect for the Bible and real common sense would recognize immediately that the “these things have I written onto you,” in the verse refers to chapter 2, verse 3, which introduces the section, stating, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” In other words, the verse--far from prescribing a certain internal cognitive knowledge, in fact, means the exact opposite--that those who do not show externally that they know Christ by keeping His commandments are liars. In other words, the inerrancy doctrine holds that scriptural context and the traditions, life-experiences and historical background of a writer, are all irrelevant in understanding scripture.

Mr. Smith apparently also applies this traditional script of Protestant Fundamentalism to his reading of Anabaptist-Mennonite writings. Presumably this is what he means when he writes: “Because Anabaptism places final authority on what Scripture says, rather than on tradition, our central question is, ‘What do the scriptures say?’ not ‘What do our forebears say?’” (*Messenger*, March 27, 2002, page 6). This appears to be his way of discarding 500 years of sacred history.

Mr. Smith routinely uses terms like “mission work” (Nov. 4/89) and “assurance of salvation” (April 19/02), in connection with the Reformation period (even imputing these traditions to Menno Simons, presumably to prop up his fictitious proto-Evangelical Anabaptist theory). The problem is that these terms were only invented in the past century in the case of the Protestant mission movement, and the Great Awakening of the 18th century in the case of the legalistic dogma of the “conversion experience” and “assurance of salvation” (neither of which has much biblical basis). It is misleading, to say the least, to refer to Menno Simons in the Reformation era, as if he somehow was part of a Protestant mission movement only invented in the 19th century, or that he preached “assurance of salvation” or “conversion experience” (April 19, 2000), only conceptualized two centuries later by George Whitefield.

It is okay if Protestant Fundamentalists wish to wallow in self delusion and in their long-standing tradition of pre-Enlightenment thinking. After all, we are to love and respect our neighbours no matter how backward and traditional their ideologies and dogmas may be. But it is important that such errors not be passed on to the Mennonite community. Many readers of the *Messenger* have no way of knowing they are not being told the whole story. With all due respect to Mr. Smith and his hyper-modernist project of converting Christo-centric Mennonites to Evangelical religious culture as fast as possible, I do suggest more care and historical accuracy in the use of such terminology. The Editor.

# Guest Essay

## Spiritual Alzheimers

“Spiritual Alzheimers: Reflections on Mennonite Suffering and Loss of Heritage,”

by Harry Loewen, 4870 Parkridge Place, Kelowna, B.C., Canada hloewen@silk.net (Former Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg).

God’s people have suffered through the centuries, beginning with the Old Testament Hebrews to the first Christians and on to the time of the Anabaptists and Mennonites. Psalm 66:10-12, which speaks of Israel’s suffering, applies to the suffering of Mennonites as well: “For Thou hast tried us, O God; Thou hast refined us as silver is refined. Thou didst bring us into the net; Thou didst lay an oppressive burden upon our loins. Thou didst make men ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water; Yet Thou didst bring us out into a place of abundance.”

The old church fathers believed that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” To a certain extent this is true. When Greeks and Romans saw how the early Christians suffered and died for what they believed, many of them were convinced that the faith of Christians was true and worthy of acceptance. In the first three centuries, according to Edward Gibbon in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, some 2000 Christians were martyred. But by the time of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century the Christian religion was not only tolerated but also elevated to one of the preferred religions within Rome. The church thus grew and expanded throughout the empire.

When persecutions are too severe, however, a movement can be wiped out, as happened, for example, to the medieval Albigensians and the 16th-century Huguenots of France. The 16th century Anabaptists died in greater numbers than the early Christians. In that century alone some 4000 Anabaptists were martyred, and they were killed not by pagan rulers, as in the case of the early Christians, but by “Christian” government and church officials. Had it not been for some tolerant territorial rulers who benefitted economically from protecting these skilful and hard-working people, the Mennonite movement would not have survived.

Why did Anabaptist-Mennonites suffer at the hands of fellow Christians? Like Catholics and Protestants, Mennonites accepted the important doctrines of the Christian faith: Belief in the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Christ, justification through the grace of God and faith, and the importance of living according to what the Bible teaches. Yet there were also important differences between the Mennonite beliefs and practices and those of other Christian believers: Mennonites did not accept the Catholic and Protestant understanding of the sacraments. For Mennonites baptism was a step of obedience and a conscious decision to follow Jesus, and the Last Supper was an occasion to remember the death of Jesus and to fellowship with other believers.

In contrast to the other churches, Mennonites also stressed not a mere inward faith but a faith that resulted in practical Christian living. Moreover, their Christian faith led them to renounce violence and war-making and to stress love of enemies as Jesus had taught.

Ironically, the Mennonite way of Christian living earned them the fear and hatred of society. Men-

nonites were seen as subversive and dangerous members within the political and religious power structures of that time. Throughout the centuries they were cruelly persecuted, discriminated against, exiled, marginalized, and pushed to the fringes of civilization. Yet wherever the small numbers of Mennonites went—whether to the United States, Russia, Canada, South and Central America, Asia, and as missionaries and MCC workers throughout the world—they made the “deserts bloom” and sought to spread the Gospel of love and good will to their host societies.

Mennonites have a valuable heritage to preserve and pass on to their children and the world. It is a heritage of suffering, practical Christian faith, an ethic of love, nonviolence and a radical peace witness. God preserved the Mennonite people through hardships and great suffering for a purpose. The heritage they have inherited is not to be hidden like a light under a bushel, but passed on first to their children and then to those who are attracted to their communities. By passing on our heritage we are faithful to the God who has led his people through the centuries.

At this point I become discouraged and sad. I am disappointed in many of our churches that neglect and even reject their God-given heritage.

Especially in western Canada many churches remove “Mennonite” from their name, calling themselves community fellowships and the like. Like no-name products in our stores, they sell their cheaper Christian wares—a gospel of “cheap grace” that appeals to our consumer society. In the name of “outreach” and greater numbers, they, like Esau of old, sell their birthright for a “stew of lentils” and a “morsel of food” (Gen. 25:34; Heb. 12:16).

Many Canadian Mennonites suffer from what might be called “spiritual Alzheimer’s disease.” In a recent article in the *National Post* (Feb. 2, 2002), it was reported that Alzheimer’s patients don’t get lost while driving because they forget where they are going, but because “they have trouble keeping track of where they’ve been.” Many church member, including many pastors, don’t know where they come from. They know next to nothing about Mennonite history, nor are they interested in it. When I taught Mennonite history at the university, I was often asked by students why they had never been told about their heritage in their churches.

My sadness deepens when I see that even Russian-Mennonites who, like myself, came to Canada after the Second World War forget their suffering in the Soviet Union so easily and often abandon their heritage. Their children and grandchildren are told little or next to nothing about their Mennonite tradition and why our people had to suffer. The “place of abundance” (Ps. 66:12), their new Canadian homeland, has caused them to forget not only the hard times but also the historical God of their fathers and mothers. Mennonites number a little over one million baptized church members throughout the world—not all that many after five centuries of

their existence. According to one historian’s estimate, they would number about 12,000,000 today had they at least kept their own children within the fold. The so-called conservative Mennonites—the Old Colony, the Amish and the Hutterites—seem to be doing much better in this regard than the liberal-evangelical churches. Sociologists have shown that while the conservatives don’t stress “outreach,” they retain most of their young people and thus grow numerically more rapidly than the more liberal communities.

The conservative Mennonites seem to have understood the importance of Paul’s words to Timothy: “I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did... For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well” (2 Tim. 1:3-5).

Not all is lost and there is reason for some optimism. There was a time when even our Bible schools did not include Anabaptist-Mennonite studies in their curriculum. In the late 1940s and early ’50s there was no Mennonite history taught in the MB Bible School I attended. That has changed. Today Mennonite high schools, colleges, even universities include Mennonite history and religious studies in their programmes. In addition, there are Mennonite historical societies in all provinces and Mennonite scholars are publishing articles and books on the subject. The Mennonite way of life and message of love and peace, so urgently needed today, are becoming known throughout the world.

As concerned Mennonite teachers, writers and leaders our first task is not necessarily to convince the outside world of who Mennonites are and what they stand for. The society among which we live knows our Mennonite ways quite well. But we need to get through to our evangelical pastors and other church leaders to help them remember and love their blood-drenched faith tradition so that they will teach their members the God and ways of their forebears.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of God’s people forsaking the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and worshipping gods of foreign traditions. Similarly, to forget or turn away from our own God-given heritage and running after foreign “idols” comes close to atheism. It is to reject the God who led and preserved our Mennonite people.

This is not to say that we should only turn inward and withdraw, but rather, that we have a story to tell to others. The Mennonite World Conference is presently in conversation with the Catholic and other churches, sharing with them the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith history and theology. We should be involved ecumenically and missionally in our wider communities because we have something to share. Also, when we support the material aid work of MCC “in the name of Christ,” for example, we are following Jesus in the way our forefathers and mothers did, and this is in considerable measure because our own faith tradition is one of suffering.

# 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. We will assume that all letters and e-mails can be published, unless a contrary intention is indicated. We reserve the right not to publish any letter/e-mail or not to respond. We reserve the right to return, discard, edit and/or shorten letters/e-mails as deemed necessary. Emails should not contain attachments. All letters and emails should contain the writer's name, address and home phone number, although a street address will not be published if this is requested. Letters should be short (preferably under 300 words) and to the point.

*Box 781, Steinbach  
Man., ROA 2A0*

Thank-you for the book (*Diese Steine*). After reading a few pages, the German comes back and I don't find it too difficult, making use of the German that I learned in school. I find it very interesting because I am quite familiar with the Mennonite experiences in Russia and their decision to immigrate to Canada, and the group that came in the 1920s. Thanks again. "Peter S. Koop"

*Henry G. Ens  
R.R.#1, Box 210  
Winkler, Man., R6W 4A1  
Dec. 28/01*

Thank you very much for the books! You must have spent many hours getting this off to the press. It is certainly a great piece of work. I gave a copy to one of the latest *Russlandmennoniten* who live right here in the village. They were so enthralled with it that their friends, also *Russlandmennoniten*, begged to have it. So my friends now wants another one. I gave them two, and they were overjoyed. That's a part of their story which just went past them thanks to the terrible Soviet regime.

So, thanks once again. "Henry"  
Editor's Note: Thanks for your contribution with translating. Without the help of many people like you who recognized the need for *Diese Steine*, it would not have been possible.

*7th Flr., 330 St. Mary Ave.  
Wpg., Man., R3C 3Z5  
Dec. 27, 2001*

Thank you for your complimentary copy of "Diese Steine".

I enclose my donation in the amount of \$50.00. Regrettably, I am the only member of my family who will be able to do much more than look at the pictures because of the language problem.

I do enjoy reading your materials and wish you the very best of the season and a happy, healthy and peaceful new year.

Your's truly, "Victor H. Schroeder," Q.C.

*Box 1194, Watrous  
Sask., S0K 4T0  
Dec. 27, 2001*

Thank you for the book *Diese Steine*. I am happy to enclose a cheque of \$20.00 in appreciation for it.

In the few days that I have had it, I am well into the book and find it excellent reading. I like the structure of the book: short write-ups that can be read easily and not have to break it up in a long chapter when called away, a full panorama of the

history of the *Russlandmennoniten*, the many pictures to go with the articles. Having had the Mennonite Tour with the Ungers a few years ago, much of the early story and the present Saporoshjshy brings back many happy memories.

I hope this book is available in Germany as well. I am sure some of my relatives there would be happy to have such a book.

Thank you again, "Helen Kornelsen"

*Highfield Rd.  
Toronto, ON M4L 2T9  
Jan 1/02*

Greetings;

Thanks for "Diese Steine". I am delighted to have it, and will work my way, very slowly (with my meagre German) through it. Its quite an accomplishment for you. Congratulations. I hope you have a fine New Year. "Paul Epp"

Editor's Note: The Mennonite community is indebted to you for the design work which you have done, particularly the wonderful "Oak and Anchor" symbol you designed for the "Khortitza '99" Conference.

*hsuderman@tmlawyers.com  
Winnipeg, Man.  
3 Jan 2002*

Subject: "My Personal War Diary"

I have just read your editorial. You don't convince me. You must be reading Noam Chomsky. A left wing rant. How about some balance. Poverty is driving bin Laden? I hadn't heard that he had given away his many millions. I am no defender of Falwell and co. but in any event they do not represent the American government or thought.

The US is a diverse, multi faceted society--religious freedom is well established. It may well be that that fact bothers the fanatical wing of Islam more than anything (See Andrew Sullivan in a recent article in the New York Times Magazine).

Enough of America bashing Delbert. North Americans are not perfect but I would not want to live elsewhere. Try writing your editorial bashing the Taliban in a pre 9/11 Afgan.

"Herb Suderman"

**Editor's Note:** This is the first time in my life I have been characterized as a "left wing rant." I take it as a big compliment.

According to the CBC (Dec. 31/01 - on my way to the Sylvester Abend festivities), total world military spending is 700 billion, 300 of that in the U.S. of A. alone. 20% of the world population control 80% of the resources/wealth. Half of the world's citizens live on less than \$2.00/day. 100 billion annually would provide them with basic needs including health care, nutrition, education. I

know it would be asking too much of the Religious Right to give up one-sevenths of their tanks and bombs so that no one in the world need go to bed hungry. But then again, this is probably another one of those left-wing conspiracies, eh?

*From: Harold Funk <hfunk@dccnet.com>  
To: <delplett@mb.sympatico.ca>  
Sent: Sunday, February 24, 2002 10:56 AM  
Subject: Preservingseditorial*

Brief bio. My wife (Canadian of British background) is a tiger at genealogy. she researches mostly her side of the family but does have material from my side, mostly contributed to by others. We have seen a few 'Preservings' magazines and this Christmas she subscribed for a year. The 136-page edition arrived recently and I asked her what this was all about. She said that twenty dollars was pretty reasonable and thought she'd try it (not a bad call). I come from Steinbach but am not a 'Mennonite'. I'm an executive vice-president of a local union and have been a full time officer for more than 12 years. I love reading. I am a pacifist.

I glanced through the magazine and immediately was drawn to your editorial. I can't say that I disagree with a word you wrote. You did an excellent job. Worth the price of the magazine alone. Thank you. "Harold Funk"  
7411-113th St., Delta, B.C., V4C 5B2.

*Mennonite Church Manitoba  
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.  
Winnipeg, Man., R3P 0M4*

Thanks, Delbert, for the copy of "Diese Steine"....

This is quite an impressive collection - and I'm rather surprised at the printing run of 10,000. Well, congratulations on a significant effort.

Best wishes for the new year.  
"Victor Kliever" Director.

*Box 994, Altona  
Manitoba, R0G 0B0*

I enjoy the articles. Have friends that borrow my Preservings issues, publication. "Art K. Dyc k"

*Box 1, Grp 1, East Selkirk  
Man., ROE 0M0  
Jan 1, 2002*

Gentlemen;

Greetings! Thank you very much for a copy of *Diese Steine - Die Russlandmennoniten*, which you sent us last month. That was very kind of you. From what I have had the chance to look through,

it is a real eye-opener. The pictures are quite something as well. In short, what does one say to such a lovely work...Wow!

May I take a moment of your time to say that I don't know how you guys manage to put out just this one publication alone, let alone all the other books you have to your undying credit for the preservation and "bringing-to-light" of Mennonite history and culture, nor the ever-fascinating (and Fat!) Preservings which appear every so often. I stand constantly amazed...do you ever stop for such small matters as food or sleep? I wish I had a fraction of your abilities.

My kindest wishes to you, "Chris" C.S. Grant  
**Editor's Note:** It is blatantly self-serving of me to publish your letter but I'll do so anyway.

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*Saltcoats, Sask.  
SOA 3R0*

Thank-you for the book *Diese Steine*. The book is very interesting to us since we met so very many of these Umsiedler, the three years we spent in Germany: Every winter I try to read three or four German books to keep up our German.... Yours truly "Eldon War Kentin"

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*Jan. 9, 2002  
Churchill Dr  
Winnipeg, R3L 1W2*

Thank-you for sending us a number of your publications, including *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada*, several *Preservings*, and *Diese Steine*. Your passion for your work is admirable and your works should be read by every Mennonite who values their heritage. Both my husband and I were also much impressed with the high resolution of the old photographs I dropped off at your office (Ältester Jakob F. Penner and Sara article--my parents, *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 101-105). Continue the good work....Congratulations, "Kristine Friesen"

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*36010 Spyglass Ct.  
Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2W7  
Jan. 10/02*

Thankyou for the book you sent *Diese Steine*. What a huge undertaking. I don't read German very well. Fortunately, I have a mother-in-law who will translate articles for me. I want to draw your attention to an error in the Loewen article (page 352). The location [in Puchtin] should be Heinrichsfeld (not Heinrichsdorf)...From Blumenort, they moved to Grossweide and from there they moved to Heinrichsfeld....Thanks, "Dolores Harder"

**Editor's Note:** Thanks for drawing the error to our attention. If any of the pieces get translated please send us copies as it might serve as an encouragement to work on an English edition.

*Jan. 8, 2002  
Box 445, Warman  
Sask., S0K 4S0*

Your kindness overwhelms me. I received your book in the mail on Christmas Eve, and I want to say "Thank-you". Its the best Christmas present I've received in a long time, perhaps ever. I hugged that book...and I cried buckets of tears for what the book contains and for joy and thankfulness.... After bin Laden, the Twin Towers, and a President in the U.S. who insists on destroying whole nations while he hunts for terrorists half-way around the world, but refuses to look in the mirror where he'd be most likely to find them--there's D. Plett and Adina Reger, and there is light at the end of the tunnel and hope for humanity. What you have done onto one of the least of them, said Christ: and I'm sure He looked down the long corridor of time, and saw your face. I would particularly like to thank you for the article on page 73 "Einfach und Arm" and also for the book "Old Colony Mennonites in Canada".

Your insight into the situation is so utterly right. I lived it, and could never put my finger so exactly on the problem as you have. Our family and one Hutterite family were the only ones in a whole school district of "Brudergemeinde" and they had me brainwashed into believing that perhaps we were "untermenschen". But you sift the subtle suggestions out of the truth so skilfully and present the whole story so well, you deserve a gold medal. Some day I hope to thank-you face to face for what you have done for me personally and for my people collectively, by so generously sharing your deep insight and God-given wisdom....

Sincerely,..."Susan Doell"

**Editor's Note:** I am indeed concerned that the sometimes hurtful actions and spiteful attitudes of those who have converted themselves to alien religious culture are driven largely by ignorance of Mennonite history and Gospel-Centric theology and by a corrupted understanding of the kingdom of God and how one becomes a part of the church.

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*69 Bourkewood Pl.,  
Wpg, Man., R3J 1B3*

...Am still reading *Diese Steine*, about half-way thru it. And No. 19 *Preservings* arrived this morning. Helen and I enjoy reading both as Helen was born in Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, and my father was born in Neuenburg, not far from Osterwick. Thank-you for your enjoyable reading. "Abe & Helen" Dyc

**Editor's Note:** Actually we were a little thin on photos of the pre-1920s Neuenburg. Do you have any? and possibly a map?

**Attention: Libraries and Researchers.**

We now have available a CD-ROM with Issues 1 to 20 of *Preservings* (Note: No pictures included for Issue 8, only the script. Issues 1-7 are scanned).

Cost is \$30.00 plus \$5.00 for shipping and handling. To order send cheque or money order to Scott Kroeker, Box 21306, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2T3 (allow several weeks for delivery). Check it out first on our website - [www.hshs.mb.ca](http://www.hshs.mb.ca)

*Men. Village Museum  
Box 1136, Steinbach  
Man., R0A 2A0*

Thanks for the copy of *Diese Steine* - a very impressive work. It was gratifying to see the picture of my great-grandfather's (Abram P. Martens) house-barn included in the book. The house-barn still stands in the village of Steinfeld and is presently being used as a school, I believe. Keep up the good work! "John Peters", President, Men. Village Museum.

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*Box 1194, Watrous  
Sask., S0K 4T0*

I want to express my deep appreciation for sending me the book *Diese Steine*. On page 400 is a description of the Ebenfeld massacre in October, 1919. In this article is listed my father's cousin, A. (Abram) Penner and Quiring, the husband of Abram's sister who had just returned to her parents' place in Blumenhoff because of convulsions she had incurred from the constant fear and terror surrounding them. She and the children were saved. Among these children is Mrs. Helen (Jacob) Dyc, of Steinbach, whom you may well know.

The youngest of the Penner boys, Jacob, described this period in his diary, which I had the pleasure of translating (transposing?) for his children in Brazil. He had written his diary in the Gothic script which the children could not read, hence their father's diary remained a closed book. I am enclosing a few pages of that diary for your interest.

When most of Jacob's family had died from typhus - they had to constantly open their home to Machno bands and soldiers, who had brought typhus into their home - Jacob decided to flee. He worked his way close to the Polish border and smuggled over the border. To his surprise, he found a number of other Mennonite young men in the prison he was thrown into when the police caught him without proper papers. With the help of the German Hilfskomitee, these young fellows were released. Some went to Canada; Jacob stayed in Germany for the next seven years to study in a Bible School in Wernigerode and then joined a Zelt Mission. Upon B.H. Unruh's advice, he went to Brazil. There he married and died. His children live in Brazil, except one daughter, who lives in Germany with her family.

The description in *Diese Steine* gives a graphic picture, one that Jacob does not go into detail in his diary....

I should also mention, that I was a nine-year old in the group that was in Moscow in 1929 and came to Canada via Germany in March, 1930. Any article(s) on that period is also of great interest to me, and I note that *Preservings* 19 has more on it. Sincerely, "Helen Kornelsen"

**Editor's Note:** We were unable to publish all the letters received which mentioned personal recollections stirred by *Diese Steine*. Presumably by now most survivors and their descendants have documented their accounts in some form.

442 Castlefield Ave.  
Toronto, Ont., M5N 1L5

Congratulations to Adina Reger and you for the remarkable compilation of photographs and historical notes contained in *Diese Steine*. It will be of special value, I would think, to the Aussiedler community who long to recover their stolen past. I greatly enjoyed reading it.

I have a 1911 photograph of students in front of the Rückenau school building. The features of the building evident in the picture indicate that the building on page 267 is not the original school house. In fact, I have a photograph of the building that you show, and know for a fact that it is kitty-corner to the original school property. It may have once housed the village office. I am not sure what its current function is. When my brothers visited Rückenau in 1997, they found the school lot sadly empty and full of weeds.

Sincerely, "Leona Gislason"

**Editor's Note:** *Diese Steine* is of equal interest to our Flemish Mennonite "Kanadiers" in Latin America whose past was also stolen, often by unscrupulous missionaries more interested in expanding their "borders" than in helping these dedicated Christians build God's community. We again refer readers to your outstanding history of Rückenau, see *Pres.*, No. 17, pages 129-131.

Box 4008, RR 2  
Clearwater, B.C.  
V0E 1N0

Please renew my subscription to *Preservings*. I enjoy the magazine very much and have found relatives in almost every issue since I started getting it in 1995. Thanks to *Preservings* I have been able to contact many relatives across Canada. Please keep up the good work.

In my Dyck/Dueck family Bible dating back to 1799 I found a Steinbach Post newsclipping of a poem written by Mrs. David Loewen, about the Toews murders, and have always wondered about the circumstances. In the December 2001 issue # 19, I found answers to most of my questions regarding this yellowed newspaper clipping. Since the article was written in German I am unable to read the original, so appreciated seeing the story.

I would like to offer my copy of the above mentioned clipping to a museum or other facility if it is wanted. The clipping is in good condition.

I would like to ask if anyone can supply names and birth dates for this Toews family, as we have many Toews in our family line.

Just one further question: I am looking for a source to find a pattern for making a lace cap worn by Mennonite ladies, if anyone can help.

Thank you. Sincerely, "Vina (Dueck) Mayer"

**Editor's Note:** The clipping, if it has historical value, should go to one of several Mennonite archives. For a pattern for making the "haube" you might wish to contact the Mennonite Village Museum, Box 1136, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, or even someone like Betty Unger (see *Pres.*, No. 19, page 114) who might well know someone still making them. The Toews family, I believe, are listed in the Sommerfelder Gemeindebücher. Contact John Wall, 252 Birchwood Dr., Morden, Man., R6M 1K1.

3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart  
Indiana, 45517-1999

Many thanks for the book *Diese Steine*. I found interesting references to my great-grandfather, Ältester Heinrich Koop (b. 1844), Alexanderkrone, Mol., as well as to my father-in-law Johann Plett.

All the best in the new year. "Karl Koop"  
Assistant Professor of Theology

Box 720, Altona  
Manitoba, ROG OBO  
January 16, 2002

Just finished reading *Preservings* #19, December, 2001. This reading takes priority as soon as I get the issue. Again you have been able to publish a remarkable issue for me with so many articles of deep interest.

The article on Mennonite theology by J. Denny Weaver I found very interesting. Theology of any kind poses a problem of comprehension for me. This article attempted to state clearly and plainly the basic tenets of Mennonite theology. Many things I cannot understand, but the idea that takes on a focus that our theology can be actualized and realized if we identify with Christ. There seems to be agreement between Weaver and John Howard Yoder on this point. Our theology has validity in a modern world confused by modernity and post modernity.

*The Kingdom of God and the End Time* by Walter Klaassen also helps one understand how chiliastic ideas are born and to what tragic consequences they can lead. I have always found Klaassen's writings to be helpful in understanding difficult ideas.

"The Flight to Moscow 1929" by Colin Neufeldt relates a remarkable story. One that has been told in the book *Before The Gates of Moscow*. But it needs telling to a larger audience, and publishing it in *Preservings* gives us a wide distribution of that most remarkable story, one of the most dramatic in all of our history.

Thanks also for publishing the tribute to Martin W. Friesen by Henry J. Gerbrandt. Martin was a personal friend, and one who probably had done more than anyone else to influence positively the development spiritually and culturally of the Menno Colony in Paraguay. His story needs to be told in greater length and depth. One of the truly great Mennonite men of the 20th Century.

The article by Siegfried Bartel, another friend is also timely and relevant. Here speaks a man from experience as an officer in the German Army. I can strongly recommend his book *Living With Conviction*, where he tells in greater detail his story and conversion to pacifism.

The article on Lord Dufferin's visit also is fascinating. This man visited a Mennonite Settlement on the East Reserve in 1877, two years after the Mennonites settled there. He already finds well established and flourishing villages there. This is one example among many of visits by high and higher authorities to Mennonite colonies in Russia, Canada and Paraguay. Invariably these men had been astonished and amazed at the industry and well-being that was made possible by the Mennonite way of life. A good recent example of this was the celebration in the Village of Neubergthal

(*Pres.*, No. 17, pages 70-71).

I also had the privilege of knowing Abram Schroeder a deacon of the Chortitz Church on the East Reserve. He was also the administrator, I believe of the Chortitzer Waisenamt, the only one that remained solvent.

Henry Schapansky's book *The Old Colony* is also of personal interest. This is of course where my ancestors settled and I find both families listed there. Henry has done a prodigious amount of work in recording and completing B. H. Unruh's work in that area. Schapansky has been of great help in my own genealogical researches on both the Friesen and the Klippenstein families.

Well Delbert I have just picked out a few things that are of particular interest. There are many more. Your magazine I know is finding a wider circle of readers. Many of us appreciate the articles on the conservative churches. They appear in a new and all together truer light.

Again Delbert my profound thanks for another fine issue which takes pride of place in my library.

Sincerely, "Ted E. Friesen"

Box 69, Herbert  
Sask., S0H 2A0

Dear Mr. Plett,

Thank you for volume #19 of *Preservings*. I was particularly interested in and pleased with the map of the village of Eichenfeld. My grandfather, Jacob Dombrowsky was murdered by bandits in that village. I have so little information about him but I was pleased that he was listed as a citizen on the map. I find your publication very interesting even though I do not always read all of the articles. I have a short diary that my father wrote, after he came to this country, about the terrible night in Oct. 1919. If you would like a copy for publication, I would be pleased to forward it to you.

Yours sincerely, "Marlyn Buhr" (nee Dombrowsky)

73-31406 Upper Machure Rd.  
Abbotsford, B.C., V2T 5L8  
Jan. 21, 2002

"I deeply appreciate your writings and efforts to preserve our wonderful heritage records. "Peter Klassen"

361 Kingsford Ave.  
Wpg, Man., R2G 0J5  
Jan. 17, 2002

Vielen Dank für die Herausgabe des gelungen Buches „Diese Steine“. Ich bekam es zum lesen und dann gehts in der N.K.M.B. Gemeinde Leihbücherei wo es bestimmt guten Anklang finden wird. Schicke hiermit einen Check von \$ \_\_\_ für den Versand des Buches an die folgende Adresse [in Deutschland].

"Johann Geddert"

Leslie Ave., Wpg  
Man., R2L 0M1  
Jan. 25, 2002

It certainly was a big surprise for me when I came home one afternoon before Christmas to find your book "Diese Steine" left at my door. I am enjoying reading and learning more about the past all the time. Its like a puzzle thats falling into place more and more as more stories and information becomes available. I am enclosing \$\_\_\_\_ to continue the work you are doing and hoping to hear from you again. Wishing you all the best for the New Year - 2002.

Sincerely "Erika Koop"

Rt. 1, Box 53-J,  
Boley, Oklahoma, 74829  
Jan. 15, 2002

Thankyou for the 12 "Diese Steine" which I received quite a while back and also the 10 Preservings I received yesterday.

I thought the book would be hard to read, since it was German, but it is easy reading and I found it more interesting than the English books. With all the maps and the clear description, I am a lot clearer now where and how those villages were located; especially the Chortitza Colony. I have read it half through already.

Those 12 books were quickly all gone, so I guess there are quite a few that are interested in them. Though I think there won't be very many who will read them all through like I do but I guess they will at least look it through and read some of the stories....Love "John Plett"

Jan. 20, 2002  
Box 4181, Arborg  
Man., ROC OA0

I am very interested in the *Preservings*, also the Old Colony books and the *Diese Steine*. I feel so good to have the privilege to distribute these books. The 12 *Diese Steine* went fast, well it was 11, one of course had to stay in my home. And the *Preservings* are all gone except the last box not quite, and four Old Colony books are still with me. All would be gone but I try to give them to people that don't just take them home and forget them. There are still enough who really enjoy reading Mennonite history and they are the ones who should get them.

I often complained about not having asked my parents when they were still with us about places and people related to me. But now through all these books that I have been able to buy, concerning Mennonites and their past, I think I know much more about them then my parents ever knew. Thanks again...."Bernhard Wall"

Jan. 22, 2002  
77 Division Road South  
Kingsville, Ont., N9Y 1P5

Enclosed is a cheque for the renewal of my membership in the HSHS. I have been enjoying reading the latest issue (#19) of *Preservings*. I was specially interested in Denny Weaver's helpful discussion of "Anabaptist Theology in Face of

Postmodernity". I take it that Prof Weaver's presentation this week at the Jan. 26 annual meeting of the HSHS will be different from his essay in #19 of *Preservings*, and would hope its text will also be made available to those of us who cannot attend the meeting.

May I congratulate you and the society for meeting with the rebuilt Windmill as part of the landscape? That restoration is an expression of traditional Mennonite values.

*Preservings* continues to be full of heritage information available nowhere else. I also appreciate the articles on the Hutterite Community. With all best wishes, "Victor A. Dirks"

Box 1354, Morden, Man., R6M 1B2

Several of my E.S.L. students (recent German immigrants) were excited about your book [*Diese Steine*]. I have given them your address and phone #. They are hoping your stock has not depleted. They would like a personal copy but they are planning to buy them as gifts and send them to Germany.

The students share their grandpa and grandmas' stories of life in Russia. I think of all the stories of our new immigrant population which haven't been told much less written! Hopefully someone will take the interest and time to record the stories of these young folk who have arrived in Canada 125 years later than us.

Thank you again for the excellent material (my only regret is I've lost not cultivated my German language, now I struggle). Sincerely, "Mavis Dyck"

17610 NW Prairie Creek Rd.  
Newton, KS 67114-8004  
February 2, 2002

I am amazed at your incredible productivity! How do you do it? Thanks for sending Diese Steine. We are still in the process of studying this comprehensive volume....

Thanks! "Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen"

Box 562, Morris  
Man., ROG 1K0  
Feb. 7, 2002

Dear Sir:

Please find cheque for \$20.00 enclosed in appreciation of this book [Diese Steine]. I have found two of them now in our MCC Thrift Shop at Morris. In one of them I found a letter saying you would like a \$20.00 donation in return. That one I gave to a Hutterite Schoolteacher, who said he would be glad to send you something. I am making a donation for this one.

My question is, when is the English edition coming out? I realize this one was written in view of our non-English speaking Mennonites. But I would like to see our young generation be able to read it too. I am saving this book for our oldest daughter, who spent 2 1/2 years in Germany and reads German. Most of our younger generation do not.

Thank You. Yours truly, "P.G. Unrau"

9440 Coyle Rd., R.R.#6  
Tillsonburg, Ont., N4G 4G9  
Feb. 25, 2002

Greetings in Jesus Name!

I am sending you a general donation and membership renewal. The other cheque is a donation from a lot of brothers and sisters in the Lord that very much appreciate and say thank you for all the books that you have sent to the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Ontario. Delbert, we pray for you and those that work with you that our Lord might stay very close to you in your seemingly endless task. "Cornelius G. Reimer"

**Editorial Note:** The support of the Ontario Old Colony Church and its six sister congregations across Canada has been an important contribution to the work of *Preservings* in fighting the racist attitudes found among far too many Canadian Mennonites relative to their conservative cousins. The Mennonite Umsiedler share a similar experience as they fled the Soviet Union and returned to their former homelands in Germany. Let us join in prayer that "assimilated" Canadian Mennonites will learn that just because our Kanadier returnees use more Biblical language and sometimes wear different clothing and seek to preserve the traditions instituted by God, does not make them any less His children. Certainly separatistic religious proselytization and often garden variety bigotry have been hurtful and extremely damaging for both communities - both the predators as well as the victims.

1166 De Graff Pl.  
Wpg, Man., R2G 1Y6  
Feb. 22, 2002

Sehr geehrter Herr Plett!

Recht vielen Dank für die Zusendung des historischen Buches "Diese Steine". Es enthält viel wertvolle historische Daten. Selbst ein Geschichtsliebhaber, der viel in Weltgeschichte, Kirchengeschichte und besonders in Mennonitengeschichte herumstöbert, finde ich dennoch immer etwas Neues, so auch in Ihrem neuen Buch. Ich danke auch herzlich für die Zusendung von "Preservings", auch dort gibt es immer etwas Neues. Im lesen macht es bei mir nicht einen großen Unterschied ob deutsch oder englisch; ich schreibe aber immer lieber in deutsch, es fällt mir leichter.

Ich lege einen Scheck bei: \$20.00 für Diese Steine und für noch ein weiteres Buch Diese Steine, das ich als Geschenk weitergeben will....

Ich wünsche Ihnen und Ihren Mitarbeitern Gottes Segen, auch in der Arbeit und Dienst fürs Mennonitentum....

Nochmals besten Dank und herzliche Grüße, Ihr "Jakob und Nettie Pries"

Edmonton, Ab.  
March 8, 2002

Hello, and thanks so much for your *Preservings* - you publish an amazing magazine. Harvey Plett helped me enormously in getting the story of Enoch Seeman together - any relation?

Adam Wiebe is, of course, ancestor to more or less all of us.

Thank you again, "Rudy Wiebe"

Box 684, Hines Creek  
Alberta, T0H 2A0

To: [delplett@mb.sympatico.ca](mailto:delplett@mb.sympatico.ca)=20  
Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2002 9:56 AM  
Subject: Editor: Preservings

March 20, 2002  
Box 554, Morris  
Man., R0G 1K0

Hello....

I would like to take this time to tell you how glad I am that I was able to sell those books *Diese Steine* in due time and our people were glad to receive them. I also handed out the *Preservings* too....

Thanks, dear Freund. May I hear from you in the near future. So verbleibe ich wie immer, Freund, "David D. Janzen"

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From: "klassena" <[klassena@telusplanet.net](mailto:klassena@telusplanet.net)>  
To: <[delplett@mts.net](mailto:delplett@mts.net)>  
Subject: Thank you

Date: Mon, 11 Mar 2002 21:08:54 -0700

I went to town to mail the cheque and found your gift in the mail, a most pleasant surprise.

I admire your energy and talents and although I am what R. Wiebe might call an "aufjefollna Minist" I appreciate what you are doing. I regard the community of the plautdietschi as an oral culture very vulnerable to disintegrative forces, and I think starting with our roots we build inclusiveness and respect for others.

I haven't had much of a chance to look into *Preservings* but tasted your editorial and know I'll be back for the full course. I had checked out the Weaver article on the internet and had found it "en baet schwoa uppem Moagi", but I am delighted to find in *Preservings* a tantalizing variety of articles.

I printed out the web page on *Saints and Sinners* last night and read it in bed, but I had no expectation of receiving it. I'll be reading it the way I read Wiebe's book, in fits and bits, but over and again. So thanks again for everything. Perhaps I can return a favor down here in Sunny Southern Alberta.

"Al Klassen" [Coaldale, Alberta]

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March 6, 2002

From: [Abe\\_and\\_Anne\\_Peters@mennonitecc.ca](mailto:Abe_and_Anne_Peters@mennonitecc.ca)  
Subject: back from Mexico  
To: [delplett@mb.sympatico.ca](mailto:delplett@mb.sympatico.ca)

Just got back from Mexico yesterday and I want to let you know that your book *Diese Steine* is a big hit. Many people are reading it and they tell me they find it interesting and they are learning a lot about their history. Jacob Fehr, Vorsteher, said that on Mondays he usually gets people coming for the book. He is the unofficial distributor of the books on the Manitoba colony. I guess on Sunday they talk about the book and this generates interest.

When we were in Durango, people knew about the book but didn't have any copies at least not the people we met. They would like to have copies as well. Do you have a distributor in the Neuvo Ideal colony? Isaac Enns, Old Colony Vorsaeuger, would very much like to have a copy as would others. If you have a distributor there, who is it? If you don't have one, I suggest that Isaac would be a good person to help distribute the book.

Best Regards ..."Abe" [Winnipeg, Man.]

Well, you have done it again; given me hours of pleasure as I wallow in the pages of *Preservings*. The first thing I noticed was your inclusion of centerfold - Brittney Spears - a refreshing change from the dour pioneer faces. Then there was the equally eye-pleasing photo of my second cousin Brendan Fehr. I am looking forward to future centerfolds perhaps, HOT HEIDI HARMS DOES HANOVER, or ARE ALL KG BELLY BUT-TONS "INNIES"? AN EXPOSE.

It was very disappointing that you were unable to establish some Hanover, KG, or Old colony link with Brittney Spears. She seems to have the light colourings of the Mennonites and I am sure with further digging you may find that she is the descendant of a past Sunflower Queen.

I must send you some money for this great magazine and the cheque, as they say, is in the mail.

Thanks for your hard work, humour, dedication, and bravery.

Lori Klassen, 173 Aubrey St., Winnipeg, MB,  
[R3G 2H9 pklassen@rrc.mb.ca](mailto:R3G 2H9 pklassen@rrc.mb.ca)

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From: Peter Dyck <[pjdyck@helicon.net](mailto:pjdyck@helicon.net)>  
Sent: Wednesday, March 20, 2002 2:17 PM  
Subject: *Diese Steine*

Greetings,

What a book! Congratulations! My wife, Elfrieda, and I both like to read in bed, but not with this book. Not only because it is too heavy, but also because it isn't bed-time reading. This afternoon we read again together for about an hour — fleeing from Russia, separation of families, fear and terror. But for some also a new beginning. Very well done. We are confident it will be exactly as you say, a real treasure for Mennonites in north and south America, as well as in Europe and central America.

We have a question: when the title so prominently says: "Die Russlandmennoniten," and when it mentions daughter colonies, why is there no mention of the last of the original settlements, Am Trakt? We did not have Nestor Machnov and the "Selbstschutz," but in most other ways our experience in Am Trakt was very much like that in the Ukraine. Was leaving it out an oversight or intentional? If the latter, why?

Shalom, "Peter" [MCC, Akron]

**Editor's Note:** Thanks for your kind comments. The answer to your inquiry, however, is that *Diese Steine* was never intended to be a complete portrayal of the Russian Mennonite story. That would require five such volumes, if not more. We omitted material about many other areas and topics, e.g. Crimea, Siberia, etc. We tried to focus particularly on two groups that have consistently been omitted from the historical narrative, the Kanadier and the Umsiedler--groups of particular interest to the authors. We would be quite happy to receive submissions with survey type articles on the Am Trakt settlements as well as Siberian settlements such as Omsk and Barnaul, to name two.

Dear Mr. Plett,

....I also heartily agree with Alvin Philippsen of Abbotsford, B.C., when he says that you use too much "vehemence" in your replies to people who express their opinions on your opposition to "predator Churches" as you so bluntly call any church that seeks to win the lost for Christ. Dr. Schroeder in the previous issue clearly outlines the word Salvation and what it means and how we as Christians are responsible to God to spread the good news to others. Therefore as Mr. Philippsen says, Quote "I trust that you will give that matter your close scrutiny."

"David and Mary Penner"

Editor's Note: Anyone alleging that I am against "saving the lost" is perpetrating a barefaced untruth. You will never find such a sentiment expressed by me in *Preservings*. What you will find is opposition to certain denominations and so-called mission societies (and if the word predator bothers you, pick another one), who target particular victim communities, and I am referring here specifically to conservative Mennonites, who already profess Christ and in their weakness seek to follow His commandments and example. It is the ultimate act of cynicism and betrayal to take the holy commandment of Christ, Matthew 28:18-20, to teach all nations and to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, as a justification for purposely attacking other communities which are already Christian, tearing asunder families and turning young people and the marginalized against their faith, heritage, family and church support networks in the process. Since these people already profess Christ and practice a profound Christo-centric faith, the only possible justifications for such attacks are denominational expansion and/or because the aggressors have some kind of hyper-modernist agenda, and, apparently, the ridiculous assumption that they alone possess Christian truth. Fortunately Christ knows His own and His abiding commandment to the faithful was "...to take up the cross and follow me," not the Mullahs of Protestant Fundamentalism in the U.S. of A. I am fearful that the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:6 will apply to those who commit such wanton deeds in the name of Christ.

Since you refer favourably to the writings of Dr. David Schroeder you should also note his article "Evangelicals denigrate Conservatives" in *Preservings*, No. 15, pages 47-48, where he refers to the pain and grievous betrayal felt by conservatives when their Evangelical co-religionists pompously and without biblical grounds treat them as un-saved, thereby demonstrating the great spiritual darkness typically associated with Protestant Fundamentalists. You could do well by reading this article, as Dr. Schroeder does an excellent job of explaining the differing views of salvation held by so-called Evangelicals and Conservative Mennonites.

I personally feel strongly that if these predators (or whatever you prefer to call them) were genuinely articulated by the love and spirit of Christ they would find all manner of ways to extend to their targeted groups the hand of Christian fellowship and brotherly love. Instead of spending \$10,000 or even \$100,000 and sending agents to tear apart families and church communities perhaps they could give this money to increase their teacher's salaries, or help the poor buy land, etc.

# Debate - The Church of God and the Endtimes

## Introduction.

The topic of the Church of God and the Endtimes dealt with in the last issue of *Preservings* evidently generated some interest, particularly among those of our readers who have rejected the Gospel-centric faith of our forefathers and converted themselves to alien religious cultures. The Obbenites or peaceful Anabaptists (soon known as Mennonites to distinguish them from many vile, unsavoury and unbiblical varieties of Anabaptists), held that Christ had come to earth to fulfil the promises and covenants of the Old Testament and that a new covenant or dispensation of peace commenced with His birth.

In 1517 Luther nailed his 95 Thesis to the castle door in Wittenburg, declaring *Sola Scriptura*, meaning that scripture alone was to be the basis for defining Christian faith. In retrospect it seems that what this meant in reality for some Protestants was that believers no longer needed to centre their faith on the Bibli-

cal revelation of Jesus Christ as set forth in the New Testament Gospels (as Catholic, Orthodox and Mennonite Christians continue to do) but were freed to elevate other parts of the Bible, including the Old Testament, as their paradigm or regime of Biblical interpretation.

As a result, Protestant Evangelicals by the 18th century had departed from the idea of Gospel-centric faith, or a theology based on a biblical exegesis using Christ as the cornerstone, to what has been called the "flat" Bible where all parts of the Bible are considered equal. John Darby (1800-82) went so far as to elevate certain promises made by God to Abraham and his descendants (which technically includes all the Arabs through Ishmael) into a key which trumped all other teachings in the Bible, creating thereby his Dispensationalist teaching. Darby goes so far in this direction as to actually exclude the teachings of Jesus as being inapplicable in the current time. Darbyite dispensationalism was passionately propagated by its adherents, including Evange-

list D. Moody. Many Bible Schools were created in the early part of the 20th century specifically to propagate these beliefs. Eventually Dispensationalism was legitimized as the almost universally accepted teaching among American Fundamentalists by the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909. In this manner millions of American Fundamentalists were led even further into spiritual darkness.

Two letters to the editor were received in response to Dr. Walter Klaassen's article and other references to Dispensationalism in the No. 19 issue of *Preservings* which illustrate typical objections to a Christ-centric interpretation of scripture as adhered to by our orthodox Mennonite forebears. We have reprinted these letters together with appropriate responses as an educational endeavour for our readers.

As always we appreciate when readers take the time to write and tell their point of view, even when we don't agree with them. The Editor.

## Letter One:

January 3, 2002

Dear Walter Klaassen;  
RE: "The Kingdom of God and the End Time"  
Article in *Preservings*, #19, December, 2001

I read your article, and would like to comment. It is interesting to observe, that in the process of positing your position, you had to denigrate others who are also staunch men of faith. So, is it on the backs of others, that you gain your status as a "widely recognized Bible scholar"? For Shame! Is that what Jesus would have done? As a "widely recognized Bible scholar" by today's standards, surely you know that:

God has a plan. He picked a land (Genesis 15:18). He chose a people (Deut.26:18). He gave His Word (Genesis 17:2). The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Exodus 13:21). This Word was housed in a Jewish body. All He had to read and reread, was the Old Testament--that is the only Bible He had. This Word kept all the Jewish holy days, and true to His teacher status, taught the Word, giving insight into this Word that had not happened in the 3000 preceding years. This Word was rejected by the "widely recognized Bible scholar"(s) of His day. The simple Jewish folks who did follow His teachings, and believed that He was the promised Messiah, formed the early church, in Jerusalem. At the Rabbinical Council of Yavneh, in 90AD, by a vote of the "widely recognized Bible scholar"(s) of the day, these Jewish folks who had accepted the Messiah-ship of Him, were voted not Jews. In the 1st Council of Nicea, in 325AD, the "widely recognized Bible scholar"(s) of the day voted that these Jews, who had accepted the Messiah-ship of Him, and who formed the first church in Jerusalem, were not Christians.

Now, you, Walter Klassen, write words which state that "...the New Testament, the New Covenant, says nothing about the land nor about the physical Israel by itself. We are all God's Israel

now and our 'land' is God's universal Kingdom and our City is the heavenly Jerusalem. There are no separate divine agendas for Israel and the church."

Who gave you the permission to re-write, reconstruct, theology? For you are rewriting the Word, as given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the only written Word God gave to mankind (Torah tells us that God Himself wrote it for Moses to carry down the mountain). Is this not what the universal church, since 325AD has been doing, writing and re-writing the New Testament, to justify, rationalize and ease the tension their peculiar interpretations perpetuated, ad nauseum? How would their Word be any better than the Word, as God Himself, promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? How would your Word be any more correct than the Word, God Himself promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? How is your Word more correct than the everyday, fulfilled Jewish believer's Word?

Isaiah 40:1 says, "Comfort, comfort My people, ... speak tenderly to Jerusalem..." Exactly how does your reconstructionist theology "comfort" God's people? How will what you have written bring one single Jewish mind to rethink his position on what christianity is all about? You, and your dogma, belong with the universal church, for you have not surpassed Martin Luther. God is much bigger than the universal church ever was and is, or what the reformation brought about. And God is incomprehensible from man's perspective--His Word says "our ways are not His ways". Selah

He is a promise-keeping God--He is not finished with His Chosen People. For, if He does not keep His promises that He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then why should we, His children, believe He would keep any promises we are standing on? What you write precludes these, God's chosen people, from sharing Heaven with you. You have judged them. You have succeeded

in reconstructing the Old Testament into an allegory, and "spiritualized" all the concepts; you have substituted the gentile's universal church, for God's chosen people. It is preposterous. Just for a moment, look at what you have done with your choice of words from God's perspective. You have denied that God picked a land, that He chose a people, and that He gave His Word. You have undone most of the Old Testament, with a sweep of your pen. And the most preposterous thing of it all is that you believe in your heart that you are more chosen than the Jews were and are!!

If you are going to share Heaven with all those who accept, follow and believe God's Word, then don't write things that divide the faithful.

Respectfully, M. J. Moll, C. Psych. Box 51077 BPO, Calgary, AB. T3K 3V9

**Editor's Note:** Marianne J. Moll is the daughter of Ben D. Kroeker and Maria Reimer Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba. Her grandfather was Peter B. Kroeker of Schwesterthal, northwest of Steinbach. Mrs. Moll's father was a cousin to Rev. Ben D. Reimer, foremost advocate of Dispensationalist teachings in the Steinbach area in the 1940s and 50s and the leader of the attack on the traditional Christo-centric teachings of the Kleine Gemeinde. This may have been the source of Mrs. Moll's early exposure to such teachings. Perhaps we need to found an organization "Dispensationalists for Jesus?"

## Response:

From: "Walter and Ruth Klaassen"  
<wrklaas@uniserve.com>  
To: <delplett@mb.sympatico.ca>  
Subject: RESPONSE TO M.J.MOLL  
Date: Sat, 9 Mar 2002 16:14:50 -0800  
Response to M.J.Moll, PRESERVINGS.

Let me first of all affirm that I agree with the main part of paragraph 2 of M.J.Moll's letter to me:

“God has a plan. He picked a land (Genesis 15:18). He chose a people (Deut.26:18). He gave his Word (Genesis 17:2). The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Exodus 13:21 (I do, however, not know the purpose of this reference)). “This Word was housed in a Jewish body. All He had to read and reread, was the Old Testament — that is the only Bible He had. This Word kept all the Jewish holy days, and true to his teacher status, taught the Word, giving insight to this Word that had not happened in the 3000 preceding years. This Word was rejected by the “widely recognized Bible scholar(s) of His day. The simple Jewish folks who did follow his teachings, and believed that He was the promised Messiah, formed the early church, in Jerusalem.” There is thus no question of undoing the Old Testament.

The problem begins with the third paragraph where she quotes me: “The New Testament, the New Covenant says nothing about the land nor about the physical Israel by itself. We are all God’s Israel now and our ‘land’ is God’s universal kingdom and our City is the heavenly Jerusalem. There are no separate agendas for Israel and the church..”

She charges me with rewriting Scripture, but does not respond in any way to my point. My basis for making that judgement is that the writings of the New Testament were a new interpretation of the Old Testament by the early Christians. In the New Testament the physical realities of people and land have been changed into another reality. What does this mean?

Jesus proclaimed a different kind of kingdom, a kingdom that “is not of this world,” a kingdom whose struggle is not against “flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12) It is no longer a struggle that concerns the land of Israel, its earthly enemies or its inhabitants. It concerns the establishment of God’s kingship so that eventually every knee shall bow to God. Otherwise, what does the writer of the book of Hebrews mean when he writes: “If they had been thinking of the land they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:15-16). And why do the New Testament writers in many places consider the coming of Jesus as the beginning of a new age?

How, in the light of that, is it possible to argue that nothing has changed; that the concern is still with the physical land, and that God has separate agendas for the physical Israel and the church? Read also Hebrews 12:18,22-24,28 which stresses the same point.

If there are separate agendas for the physical Israel and the church what does she make of Ephesians 3:5-6? “In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the SAME body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel.” So there is one people, not two, because Christ on the cross “has made both

groups (Jews and Gentiles) into one and has broken down the dividing wall” (Ephesians 2:14).

The main problem with the kind of approach to the endtime represented by M.J.Moll is that it really does not know what to do with the New Testament and the church. It does not know what to do with the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God. It does not know what to do with the New Testament teaching that God’s purpose is the restoration of the whole creation, begun in the resurrection of Jesus. It does not know what to do with all the teaching about the church and its life in the New Testament epistles. It does not know what to do with the gospel message about discipleship and taking up the cross and following Jesus. It represents an impoverished and cramped view of the gospel.

“Walter Klaassen” Site 12A, c. 23 R.R.7, Vernon, B.C., V1T 7Z3.

## Letter Two:

Box 157, Kleefeld, Man., ROA 0V0  
10 Jan 2002

Dear Mr. Plett,

Thank you for the very interesting December issue of *Preservings*, with its stimulating and informative articles on Mennonite Theology. I particularly enjoyed Denny Weaver’s proposal of a way forward for the development of a distinctive Mennonite theology with a Christology of non-resistance at the core of its formulation not just as an item added to the basics of Christian orthodoxy. It was unfortunate that premillennialism was identified with Dispensationalism in a number of articles which complained about a theology that locates the kingdom of God only in the future, after Christ’s return.

Historic (post-tribulation) premillennialism, which was the majority position in the early church, needs to be distinguished from the proposal of classic Dispensationalism. In the 20th century, George Eldon Ladd wrote a number of fine books on the Kingdom of God, from an historic (or non-Dispensationalist) premillennialist perspective, arguing for the presence of the kingdom, while still affirming an interim earthly reign of Christ prior to the consummation of the rule of Christ.

Interestingly, a significant movement now dubbed Progressive Dispensationalism, although continuing to teach pretribulationism, has adopted an understanding of the Kingdom of God much like that of historic premillennialism. These ways of understanding a future earthly millennial reign of Christ pose no threat to the Mennonite vision of a community of God’s people, in this age, living under the Lordship of Christ as witnesses to and custodians of the Kingdom of God in its present form.

Blessings on you and your important ministry of preserving the communal memory of what God has done in the past.

“Terry Tiessen” Professor of Theology and Ethics, Providence Theological Seminary, Otterburne, Manitoba.

**Editor’s Response:** Scholars generally agree that the first century church, and even into the second century, believed strongly in the eminent return of Christ. This belief was not formulated in the various premillennial schemes or paradigms as they are known today. Most of these ideas and concepts were only developed and formulated in the past century or so. It is therefore an oversimplification to make the sweeping statement that the early church propounded premillennial ideas in that sense.

The early church believed that Christ would return and initiate a new age or a new era which would continue indefinitely. i.e. The return of Christ heralded the dawn of a new age, or era, in which the present history and present world would come to an end and a new world would start.

You are correct also to point out that premillennialism must be distinguished from dispensationalism and that the former existed on its own before Darybyte dispensationalism became popular.

With respect to what you call “Progressive Dispensationalism” my question would be, why not just simply follow Christ and what the scripture teaches, namely, the expectation of the return of Christ? Why is it necessary to develop all these elaborate scenarios? One of the underlying assumptions of dispensationalists seems to be the desire to predict the future. In my mind this manifests one of the key traits of Protestant Fundamentalism as an ethno-cultural movement, namely, its mania to define and classify everything, presumably rooted in pre-Enlightenment Baconian philosophy and Scottish Common Sense Realism, see Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York, 1980), page 59.

The biblical teaching is that the future is in God’s hands and we are called upon to trust God in the way the future will unfold, always sharing with the early church the expectation of the eminent return of Christ.

I have a final question: “Historic (post-tribulation) premillennialism” is quite a mouthful, but isn’t it really only good old amillennialism in another formulation? Our Flemish Mennonite forebears, although amillennial, believed that the tribulation commenced with the birth and resurrection of Christ and that it was co-terminus with the reign of Christ of the peaceable kingdom within the new dispensation of grace.

Those interested in further study of the topic of millennialism or chiliasm, would do well to read the books by Walter Klaassen, *Armageddon and the Peaceable Kingdom* (Waterloo, Ont. and Scottsdale, Pa., Herald Press, 1999), 298 pages (see *Pres.*, No. 16, page 138) and by Richard Kyle, *The Last Days are Here Again: A History of the Endtimes* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House Co., 1998), 255 pages (see *Pres.*, No. 17, page 134).

Thank-you for responding to this important issue.

# News

## A. G. M. January 26, 2002

Report on HSHS Annual General Meeting, January 26, 2002,  
by Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1T4.

### Keynote Address.

These days, the audience for theologians is generally restricted to a scattering of students in post-secondary learning institutions. The general public is wary, fearing that theologians will argue finer points of religion that might be terribly important, but are too abstract to be understood by ordinary people.

It might have been that this apprehension accounted for a smaller than usual attendance at the annual meeting of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society on January 26, 2002, which featured a keynote speech by theologian J. Denny Weaver of Bluffton College, Ohio. An audience of about 80 took in Weaver's address at the Mennonite Village Museum.

Those who attended were treated to an incisive and thought-provoking discourse on the terrorist attacks on the United States in September, 2001, and events that followed. Since those attacks, billions of words have been spoken and written in the effort to make meaning for ourselves. Weaver's is a minority view, not what you would have heard

before on CNN.

Weaver deconstructed the myth of an American civil religion, so confidently expounded by President George W. Bush. Essentially, the idea is that God is on the American side, and religious and state interests are the same. The American way--an apparently democratic form of government powered by the interests of corporate capitalism--is also, self-evidently, God's way.

A cornerstone of this myth is the idea that freedom, including the freedom to be Christian, is dependent on war. When George Washington defeated British forces in armed conflict in 1776, the United States became "free," no longer a colony. Freedom comes with the price of blood.

Weaver showed how this ideology has become pervasive, propagated through the mass media. He noted that Mennonites today, like most other North Americans, seem to buy into the belief that civil religion is legitimate. Our ancestors, he said, would not have been so



*HSHS board members l.-r. Ernest Braun, Jake Doerksen and President Ralph Friesen, in discussion during the business meeting preceding the banquet and guest speaker. Photos for this article are courtesy of HSHS board member Henry N. Fast, Steinbach.*



*A traditional meal of ham, sausage and verenekje was served buffet style. Denny Weaver, l.-r., discusses theology with Paul Reimer, Royden Loewen, David B. Reimer, Abe Bergen, Mary Anne Loewen and Helen Fast after the meal.*



*Gil Brundt, Mennonite Books, Winnipeg, faithfully attends the HSHS events with his wonderful book display, always a point of interest for guests.*



*Kleefelders, Ron Dueck, Chair of MCC Canada, visiting with beekeeper Larry Peters.*



A view of the banquet guests enjoying their traditional Mennonite meal at the Mennonite Village Museum. Front, left, are HSHS board members Ralph Friesen and Hilton Friesen. HSHS Past-President Orlando Hiebert and Donna Hiebert, right, middle.



Our guest speaker, J. Denny Weaver, Professor of History, Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio.

easily fooled. Nineteenth century Kleine Gemeinde leaders like Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), and Heinrich Balzer (1800-46) rooted their thinking in the belief that the New Testa-

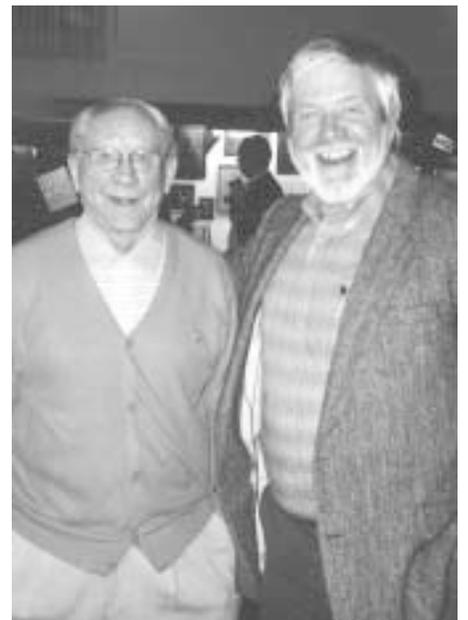


Pat and Leo McAdams, Crystal Springs Hutterite Colony, and Viola Toews, Steinbach, discuss mutual interests during the break after the banquet.

ment was the foundation of truth and that Jesus Christ was the source of authority. Where the state through word and deed deviated from this authority, it was, quite simply, wrong. To them, civil religion was idolatrous.

Weaver called upon his audience to remember that, as Mennonites, we belong to the Peaceable Church of God. As such, we are to be critical in our questioning of American Manifest Destiny, and not simply accepting of myth-driven violence.

Weaver's was a thoughtful, intellectually challenging and stimulating speech, well worth the price of admission, regardless of whether you agreed or disagreed with him.



Past-President Orlando Hiebert, schwitzing with Eastman Feeds founder Peter H. Friesen, Steinbach.



The Fabulous "Heischraitje & Willa Honich" entertained the guests with their buoyant Landmark sense of humour and upbeat Plautdietsch singing.

### Heischraitje.

As is the custom at HSHS annual gatherings, light-hearted entertainment followed. Heischraitje & Willa Honich offered up their usual blend of Low German humour and accomplished bluegrass musicianship. At times, they *daewad* through a number so quickly that those of us whose grasp of the mother tongue is a bit tentative were left with mystified half-smiles on our faces.

Personally, I think that nothing would be lost, and much would be gained, if they were to do a few numbers, straight-on, in English. Their identity as *Plautdietsche* satirists would not be harmed. Who else would philosophize over the word "Mumkje" (a married woman) and wonder whether it was all right to use the diminutive "kje" if in fact the Mrs. was not a small woman? In any case, their ability as singers and musicians cries for broader expression.

## Nobring.

These meetings are always a time to *noba* with old friends. David Toews, son of A. A. Toews who owned the "Five to a Dollar" store years ago, came up to me with a cheerful smile and greeting in Low German. Steinbach is still his home. Peter Klassen, of the accomplished C. U. Klassen clan, told of learning some of his proficient *Plautdietsch* literally at the knee of his mother and other ladies who gathered for quilting parties in the Klassen home. As a child, Peter would crawl underneath the quilting frame and sit and listen to the stories of these Mennonite ladies. What better language school could there be?

I have an on-going interest in dreams and their meaning for us in our lives (see my article on Kleine Gemeinde dream culture, *Preservings*, #19, pp. 106-113) so it was fascinating to meet Ben Eidse and hear some of his stories about the prophetic dreams of the Congolese, including the man who dreamed of being pursued by a lion. He decided not to take a journey by foot that day, and later was told that a man-eating lion was known to be in the vicinity that he would have walked through.

Once again, a successful and gratifying gathering, thanks to the efforts of the organizers, especially Delbert Plett.

### Mennonite Movie Titles.

I know you haven't been sitting around wondering what I do in my spare time, but you're about to find out how boring my winter was. I thought you might enjoy a short list of movie titles, especially re-named for marquis appeal in Mennonite communities around the world. Here we go:

Natural Born Kehlbers;

Shrecklich;

Moby Dueck;

One Flew Over the Koop's Nest;

Mennos in Black;

The Je'biss;

Yant Zede Story;

War of the Rosenfelds;

Pleetch Academy;

Poultry Jeist;

Crouching Teichrob, Hidden Driedger;

Goshen Busters;

Barten Funk;

De Peat Fuschler;

De Schwiesche Duts;

Silence of the Hamms;

Bubbat Malone;

Grumpy Old Mennos;

Jake Buhler's Day Off;

Schmaa (missing umlaut);

Schmaa II;

Shindasch's List;

Gone with the Windmill;

Bient Hur;

Who Framed Roger Loewen;

Thank you for your patients. "Chris Toews"

Top Secret - chris\_toews@hotmail.com

## Royden Loewen Steps Down

Royden Loewen, Steinbach, Manitoba, has stepped down from the board of directors of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc. He did not allow his name to stand for re-election as he has been asked to join the board of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Inc., Winnipeg.

Royden Loewen was one of the six original incorporators of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc., incorporated July 18, 1988. He was a charter member of the board of directors and has served faithfully ever since.

During the following years Royden Loewen made important contributions to the historiography of the East Reserve (Hanover Steinbach) and, indeed, for all Canadian Mennonites. He has published four books: *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Blumenort, 1983), 669 pages; *Family Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds* (Toronto, 1993); *from the inside out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863 to 1929* (Winnipeg, 1999), and his just published *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg, 2001).

On several occasions Royden has spoken at HSHS events such as the January 26, 1996, A.G.M. where he spoke on matriarch Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93). He was also our featured speaker at the November 14, 1990, A.G.M. speaking on the topic of "Steinbach area pioneers 1874-1900: Peasants or Entrepreneurs." He has published a number of articles in our journal *Preservings* which have always been well received.

His position as Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, and involvement with other boards and associations such as the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, gave Royden the experience and insight which has often resulted in sage advice and counsel to be shared at our board meetings.

On behalf of the board of directors and our HSHS community of readers, I would like to express thanks to Royden for his many contributions.

Royden, we will miss you on our board. The MMHS's gain will be our loss. We realize that changes of venue and responsibility are essential for professional and personal development and growth. We wish you well and hope and trust that your many networks and connections within the HSHS historical community will be continued and that you will stand by us with moral support and friendship.



The charter members of the board of directors of the HSHS meeting in August, 1988. L-r: standing, Royden Loewen, Art Rempel, Chair of Hanover School Division, Ernie A. Friesen, Mayor of Steinbach and John Dyck, Winnipeg, HSHS Research Director; front seated, Henry Fast and D. Plett. Missing Aaron C. S. Friesen, Reeve R. M. of Hanover. How things have changed. Photo courtesy of Carillon News, Sept. 7, 1988, page 9C.

# Family History Day, March 9, 2002

“Family History Day,” at the Mennonite Village Museum, March 9, 2002, reported by Ernest Braun, Box 595, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0.

## Introduction.

Flemish or Frisian? No, that is not a choice of salad dressings. These two words define the two main branches of Mennonites who migrated through the northern lowlands now known as the Netherlands, to Prussia and then to Russia, with many later ending up in Canada, the USA or South America. The ethnic background of most so-called Russian Mennonites is a combination of these two branches, and therefore to focus on that topic was an appropriate way to plan a Family History Day at a Mennonite Museum in Manitoba.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society again hosted that event at the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach on March 9, inviting Mennonite genealogists to participate by presenting their research, inviting the general public to take advantage of the expertise available there, and inviting a special guest speaker to provide a broader historical background. In a departure from the past, this year only two sessions were offered, both by the same speaker, and both focusing more narrowly on the “history” than on the “family” part of the event.

## Displays.

The core purpose of the Family History Day continues to be genealogy, and to that end HSHS invited the genealogists of the area to bring their work, their charts, books and artifacts for display and discussion. Advertisements in the *Preservings* and in the *Carillon* invited the public.

The day got off to a slow start in view of the inclement weather which brought a storm through southern Manitoba all night and left the Village Museum entrance clogged with snow. Prompt action by Daryl Friesen and Diamond’s equipment reduced the problem to an inconvenience in short order, and although some drifting on the highways discouraged a few presenters coming from the West Reserve, several hardy genealogists from farther afield were undeterred by the snow.

One of the attractions of the day is having well-versed genealogists on site for consultation. Bruce Wiebe and John Wall from the Winkler area were welcome additions providing specialized expertise on Old Colony, West Reserve Bergthaler, and Sommerfelder. A special presenter was Sally Harms of Winkler who has done remarkable work on many families, the most recent being the Abram Friesen family book just published in time for the day (all the more remarkable since she does the printing herself in colour, although she farms out the actual binding of the books). Ed Falk, a well-known genealogist from Winkler, and Marianne Janzen, a longtime contributor to Mennonite family history from Winnipeg, also brought their materials for display despite the

weather.

The local area was represented by many family history buffs, Al Hamm with his unique fan charts, Peter Reimer running the Grandma 3 CD on his computer, Bob Strong with his laptop and technical expertise, Henry Braun with his variety of Family History software, Hilton Friesen and his comprehensive charts on Steinbach Friesens, while local authorities like Henry Fast (Kleefeld) and Del Plett (Kleine Gemeinde) remained on hand for instant consultation. And as she has for every year since she began the event, Hildegard Adrian set up her charts and albums; and Jac. Doerksen, HSHS board member, brought the Krause genealogy, his wealth of Chortitzer expertise, and unusual artifacts of a by-gone era.

Gil Brandt of Mennonite Books set up a display, doing brisk business with the new book by Henry Schapansky, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia: Early History and First Settlers in the context of the Mennonite Migrations* (New Westminster, 2001), 519 pages (see *Pres*, No. 19, pages 124-129). In addition to recent publications about Mennonites by Mennonites, Gil offered a wide selection of published family history books.

Alf Redekopp and Conrad Stoesz of the Mennonite Heritage Centre were on hand to explain the newest arrivals at the archives. Two noteworthy items were the spiral-bound compilation of listings of microfilm now available at the Centre and information relating to the German records of World War II refugees—over 7000 microfilm reels detailing names in alphabetical order as well as a second microfilm bank cross-referenced by number to the first, giving ancestral information listed by the refugees when interviewed by the Germans after the War.

## Featured Speaker.

At 11:00 AM Ralph Friesen, President of HSHS, welcomed everybody and introduced the main speaker, Henry Schapansky of New Westminster, B.C. This name has become synonymous with the systematic analysis of the demographics, migration patterns and family histories of the first Mennonite villages in Rus-

sia, a work he completed in the early 1990s and published in *Mennonite Family History* over a period of years. This analysis has formed the final confirmation point for many amateur historians as they seek to trace their family tree



The displays at Family History Day, March 9, 2002, received a steady stream of visitors. Al Hamm with his unique fan charts and Henry Braun, with his various programs for family history software, attracted many researchers. Note the magnificent display of Mennonite-made clocks (upper, left) brought along from Russia to America by pioneer immigrants.



Ben Wall, formerly of Winkler and a recent resident of Steinbach, consults with Alf Redekopp, checking various Mennonite records available on the internet. In the rear, Jake and Hildegard Adrian and their display.

into Prussia, for it is the most complete survey of families emigrating from Prussia in the years 1788 to 1804 available to Mennonites of Old Colony or Bergthal background, and forms the backbone of his book just published last year.

Although Henry Schapansky is known for his work in genealogy, his deeper interest is in the history of the Mennonites. The comprehensive introduction to his book is an overview of the movement of the Mennonites in those early years of relocation up to the Russian era, an overview that offers an interpretation of the ethnic dynamics within the Menno-

nite community. The morning's lecture was in fact an extrapolation of this internal tension between those referred to as the Flemish and the Friesian Mennonites. Schapansky spent some time describing the rise and collision of the two ethnic cultures, and then elaborated on the implications these differences had on the development of the Russian Mennonite experience in general.

In the process he traced the movements of the early Mennonites through the northern parts of the lowlands during the persecution of the 16th century, gave a quick overview of how the various dialects and languages of the regions eventually produced the Plautdietsch that most of the Russian Mennonites spoke, and commented briefly on the meanings of

Mennonite names. For example, he suggested that Bartel, and Bartsch both derive from a first name, Bartholomaeus, a departure from Horst Penner's etymology. He listed many of the Mennonite names that have their origin in place names, e.g. van Kampen (somebody who comes from Kampen), and clarified that the prefix "de" in Mennonite names does not denote "from" as in the French, but simply "the", so that deBrujin is not a title with origins in the landed aristocracy as I might be forgiven for wishing, but simply a designation of my pigmentation.

The text of his lecture will be published in the December, 2002, *Preservings* in its entirety.

According to Schapansky, the term "Flem-

ish" refers to those families that left the urban areas of Flanders and other territories of eastern and southern Netherlands to find safety in the northeast parts of the lowlands, semi-independent East Friesland, where geography prevented the Holy Roman Empire from demanding the same conformity which was the rule elsewhere. Here the Flemish, who were usually artisans, merchants and small tradesmen with an urban outlook, higher literacy and more sophisticated theology encountered their hosts, rural Mennonites with a less refined culture and a greater independence of spirit perhaps bred of the isolation inherent in their farming lifestyle. The differences between these two cultures is evident in the church structure adopted by each: the Flemish very strict and



Lunch, one of the most important events of any Mennonite gathering. On the right side of the table, front to back, Tony Driedger, former estate planner with the Mennonite Foundation, and Steinbach local historian Ernie P. Toews. On the left side, front to back, Henry Schapansky, guest speaker and Alf Redekopp. Many research secrets and tips are exchanged over bowls of borscht.



A crowd of 100 listened attentively as featured speaker Henry Schapansky explained some of the nuances of the Flemish and Friesian roots of the Russian Mennonites. Front, right, with back to camera, is Jake Redekopp, Winnipeg, son of Henry Redekopp, founder of Redekopp Lumber in North Kildonan and a strong supporter of the Mennonite Village Museum. Many well-known writers and students of the Mennonite story are visible in the crowd. The new format for "Family History Day" with the speakers and display sharing the "Great Hall" worked out well.



L.-r.: Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, Conrad Stoesz and HSHS director Jake Doerksen, counting money? Bruce Wiebe is well known for having gathered and made available many of the Old Colony church registers. Conrad Stoesz is a researcher with the Mennonite Heritage Centre and M.B. Archives, Winnipeg. Photo courtesy of Ernie Braun.



Peter K. Reimer, Kleefeld, and compiler of the Aron Peters family book, demonstrates the Grandma 3 CD-ROM to Ernie P. Toews, local historian(left).

yet democratic, adhering closely to the Anabaptist understanding of baptism and church membership; the Friesian more individualistic, autocratic/hierarchical and exclusive.

The result of these characteristics was that the Flemish tended to guard their sense of community very closely and would emigrate before they would sacrifice it, whereas the Friesian guarded their individuality and were more prone to risk assimilation. The net result, according to

Schapansky, was that migrations of these two groups could be predicted from this difference: the Flemish were in the vanguard of every major Russian Mennonite migration beginning with the move from East Friesland to Prussia and continuing to the move to Russia, to Canada, to Mexico and to Paraguay. The Friesians in each case waited until a major crisis, such as a war, made their future there unlikely before they would emigrate. And of course at each stage there were those who never emigrated at all, although the cost was loss of Anabaptist distinctives.

After a number of questions, Ralph Friesen ended the session for lunch.

### Chortitza, 1789.

After a lunch consisting of a choice of soups and pastries available at the canteen staffed by the Auxiliary, the action returned to the family histories until 2:00 PM when Henry Schapansky again took the podium and presented a review of the history of the Old Colony that eventually resulted in the Jakob Hoepfner trial and subsequent events. He dealt with the Hildebrand account of the time, an account generally seen to be accurate in its presentation of the facts, but somewhat slanted in defense of Hoepfner since Peter Hildebrand was his son-in-law (see *Pres.*, No. 17, pages 126-8).

Schapansky gave considerable background about the various governing personalities installed by the Russian government to manage the colonies at first, figures with little understanding of the culture and faith of the Mennonites and perhaps corrupt besides. As a result of this upheaval and the appointment of a new Russian overseer, the old system was revamped to the one most of us know about: a Dorfs-Schultze for each village and an Oberschulze for the entire colony.

A lively question period followed the lecture, since to this day some sense of injury remains: namely, that Hoepfner was unjustly penalized out of what may have been a inadvertent involvement in a flawed system, or sim-



Guest speaker Henry Schapansky (right), and his father's cousin Jake Schapansky, Ile des Chenes, get a chance to meet and visit at the Family History Day, March 9, 2002, Mennonite Village Museum.

ply because of tension between two understandings of what it means to be a Mennonite, instead of for demonstrable wrong-doing. Again, the entire text will be published in *Preservings*.

### Conclusion.

After the question period, presenters folded up their charts and materials, and everyone with a new perspective on our roots, and an additional contact or two, made their way back into the raw winds of a Manitoba March. Stepping into that cutting wind on a snow-swept landscape was in itself a timely reminder of where we are, and how we got here, regardless of whether we are Flemish or Friesian. And that is what Family History Day is really all about.



John Wall, Morden, Manitoba, reviews some of the material exhibited in the displays. John Wall has made a major contribution to the historiography of southern Manitoba by computerizing the Sommerfelder church registers as well as the 1931 Old Colony Manitoba Colony church registers. Photo courtesy of Ernie Braun.

## Henry Schapansky, guest speaker

Henry Schapansky was born in Chilliwack, B.C. in 1947. He grew up in Vancouver where he attended the Vancouver First United Mennonite Church and received his education. He graduated from U.B.C. in 1971 with an Honours Degree in Mathematics. In 1983 he married Nathalie Tanguy from Brittany, France, currently lecturer of Linguistics at Simon Fraser University.

Henry is a Group Insurance Underwriter employed with Blue Cross. He has always been interested in history and in the mid-80s got interested in his own historical heritage. His interest was sparked when he received a family book and realized how much more work could be done to enhance the genealogical record. He has become the expert in Russian Mennonite genealogy and particularly that of the Old Colony Mennonites.

He has been generous in sharing the fruit of his research with thousands of lay genealogists and family historians. He published his first articles in *Mennonite Family History*, a journal from Pennsylvania, in 1988. He has recently published his *magnum opus*, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) Mennonites* (New Westminster, 2001), 519 pages, currently the most significant work on Russian Mennonite genealogy. Those wishing to read about the significance of this book can refer to the review essay in *Preservings*, No. 19, pages 124-129.

Henry's roots go back to the Old Chortitza Colony. His paternal grandparents hailed from Steinfeld, Baratov Colony, where his grandfather Heinrich was executed by the Communists in 1937. Henry's father Herman came to Canada in 1948 and eventually settled in Vancouver.

Henry's maternal grandparents Peter Letkemans lived in Schönhorst, Old Colony, where his grandfather was elected a minister in the Chortitza Gemeinde in the 1920s just before the Communists closed all the churches. The Letkemans fled Russia in 1943, coming to Canada in 1948, eventually settling in Vancouver.

Henry has published a number of genealogy and family history pieces in *Preservings* as well as the following more analytical articles: "From Prussia to Russia: towards a revisionist (Chortitza/Old Colony) Interpretation of Mennonite History," *Pres.*, No. 14, pages 9-14; and "Book Review Essay: Peter Hildebrandt, *From Danzig to Russia* (Winnipeg, 2000), 63 pages," in *Pres.*, No. 17, pages 126-128. Note all articles in *Preservings* can be obtained from our website "hshs.mb.ca."

# The Prayer of Jabez: A Brief Analysis

“The Prayer of Jabez: A Brief Analysis,” by Randy Brandt, 7578 Lamar Ct., Arvado, Colorado, 80003 (formerly of Kola, Manitoba).

## The Prayer.

*The Prayer of Jabez* has taken the evangelical world by storm. This little book (approximately 80 small pages of text) by *Walk Thru the Bible* founder Bruce Wilkinson has sold over nine million copies at this writing, and the follow-up *Secrets of the Vine* sold over a million copies in its first month. Like the *Left Behind* series, *Jabez* has moved from Christian bookstores into the mainstream. Airport bookstores feature it on displays next to New Age and Buddhist books promising personal success.

What is the message of *Jabez*? Subtitled *Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*, the book focuses on blessings that result from the prayer of an obscure Old Testament character mentioned only in one passage - 1 Chronicles 4:9-10: “Jabez was more honourable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, ‘I gave birth to him in pain.’ Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, ‘Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.’ And God granted his request.” (NIV)

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“....Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, ‘Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory!’”

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The New King James Version used by the book translates the last part “that I may not cause pain.” That does sound less selfish than most other translations. However, that variation is not my primary concern. Rather, my concern is how the book encourages people to use the prayer.

The back cover tells you that the book will allow you “to discover how the remarkable prayer of a little-known Bible character can release God’s favour, power and protection.” The word “release” means “to make available” and usually indicates that some restriction is removed. What can restrict God’s favour, power and protection? Man’s failure to repeat an obscure prayer? No. God is all-powerful, as Paul makes clear: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us,” 2 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV).

But perhaps *The Prayer of Jabez* doesn’t mean to insinuate that God’s power is restricted. Perhaps it only means that God’s choice is to withhold his “favour, power and protection” until we pray the right prayer.

The back cover goes on to say, “one daily prayer can help you leave the past behind--and break through to the life you were meant to live.”

Herein lies another problem--if just “one” daily prayer can do all that, where is the confession and repentance? Where is God praised and His name hallowed? In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus told us to ask for forgiveness, yet there’s no hint of that in the prayer by Jabez. To Wilkinson’s credit, he does refer to the danger of sin near the end of the book.

## The Book.

Let’s open the book and see what’s inside. The preface says that the prayer of Jabez is “a daring prayer that God always answers.” Since Christians believe that God answers all prayers in some fashion (negatively when not positively), the author clearly means to convey that this prayer always receives an affirmative response from God. Even the noted apostle Paul could not boast a success rate like that. His pleas to have the “thorn in the flesh” taken from him in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 were denied three times.

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“....the author clearly means to convey that this prayer always receives an affirmative response...”

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Apparently it never occurred to Paul to pray the prayer of Jabez so he would “be free from pain.”

Why not?

He was a trained Jewish scholar who knew of Jabez.

However, Paul knew something better--God has a purpose for suffering: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me,” 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV).

Paul did not beg to “avoid” pain--rather, he gloried in the power of Christ to work “through” his weaknesses and trials.

The preface of *Jabez* goes on to claim that the book “contains the key to a life of extraordinary favour with God.” Several questions immediately come to mind: If the prayer of Jabez contains “the” key--not just “a” key, but “the” key--to a life of extraordinary favour with God, why did Jesus fail to teach it to the apostles? Why did the New Testament writers deprive Christians of this secret to spiritual success? Why does Hebrews 11, the famed Hall of Faith chapter, fail to mention Jabez, supposedly the man holding “the” key to favour with God?

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“The preface of *Jabez* goes on to claim that the book ‘contains the key to a life of extraordinary favour with God.’”

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## The Mantra.

The preface goes on to claim, “thousands of believers who are applying its truths are seeing miracles happen on a regular basis.” One must question Wilkinson’s definition of miracles--anything that happens on a regular basis to thousands of people seems difficult to classify as a miracle, but we’ll disregard that as a semantic issue and move on.

Wilkinson has been praying the prayer of

Jabez word-for-word daily for three decades (Note One) calling it the most significant sentence in his life other than his prayer for salvation. Ironically, there’s no evidence that Jabez himself prayed this prayer more than once; in fact, the end of the verse points to it being a one-time prayer: “....and God granted his request,” 1 Chronicles 4:10b (NIV).

A mantra is a repetitive Hindu magic phrase or prayer in which the god is asked to give a desired blessing. I’m concerned that Wilkinson’s approach to the prayer of Jabez resembles a mantra more than it resembles the Lord’s Prayer. No one can deny that the “secret” of Jabez involves repetitive requests for blessing (see Chapter 7: *Making Jabez Mine*); in contrast, look at how Jesus introduces His approach to prayer: Matthew 6:7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words,” (NASV).

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“....Wilkinson’s approach to the prayer of Jabez resembles a mantra...”

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“But the Jabez prayer isn’t meaningless repetition--it’s meaningful,” you might protest. Perhaps. But Christ goes on to explain in the next verse that God doesn’t need to be asked repeatedly, for the simple reason that He knows what you need beforehand: “Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him,” Matthew 6:8 (NASV).

Matthew 6:8 assumes that verse 7 was referring to valid requests--don’t use meaningless repetition, because God knows what you need before you ask. To paraphrase Matthew 6:7 and 8, “Don’t nag God in your prayers!”

Some might be offended that I used a term like “mantra” to describe Wilkinson’s approach, but visit the official Jabez web site’s reprint of an article in the April 16, 2001 *Time* magazine (Note Two) and you’ll read this:

“Wilkinson, 53, says he first heard about the prayer from a seminary chaplain 30 years ago and has been ‘praying Jabez’ as a kind of evangelical mantra ever since.”

The *Time* article continues: “It’s very evangelical and very American, this whole notion that if you know the right technique, the right form, that prayer will be efficient and effective. Kind of like golf.”

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“It’s very evangelical...if you know the right technique, the right form, that prayer will be efficient and effective. Kind of like golf.”

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Formulaic approaches to prayer conflict with what Jesus told us, but even non-Christians perusing Jabez are noticing the “magic words” ap-

proach it takes. When I see self-proclaimed Gnostics enthusiastically applauding “Jabez”, I have to be concerned.

Despite my major misgivings, I don’t want to create the impression that everything about the book is damaging. In fact, once you get past the back cover and preface, there are many good things. Wilkinson speaks of longing to hear God’s “Well done!” (Note Three) and tells us that Jabez left it up to God to decide what the blessings would be (Note Four).

#### **Anecdotal Proof.**

Still, there are many unfounded assertions, and rather than building his case on the Word of God, Wilkinson continually resorts to the subjective experience of himself and others. “Clearly the outcome can be traced to his prayer,” (Note Five).

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“...Wilkinson continually resorts to the subjective experience of himself and others.”

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Is it really so clear?

Perhaps it can be traced to the graciousness of the God to whom Jabez prayed. While anecdotes tend to make for interesting and amusing books or sermon illustrations, they can’t be used as the foundation for doctrine or serious teaching; still, Wilkinson appears to rely on anecdotes more than on Scripture in making his case for the effectiveness of the “Jabez” approach to prayer.

Wilkinson claims that “what counts is knowing who you want to be and asking for it,” (Note Six), but the Bible gives us many examples of those whom God called, even if they were initially unwilling, like Moses. *Jabez* fits our modern Christian mentality of wanting to take charge. Wait upon the Lord? Not if we can help it.

The bizarre claim that “seeking God’s blessings is our ultimate act of worship” (Note Seven) is not defended Scripturally in the book; I suspect the task would be difficult.

#### **Wealth and Prosperity.**

Many who “pray Jabez” are undoubtedly genuinely seeking to improve their relationship with God. However, my concern is that the book’s approach runs contrary to sound doctrine, and is really little more than the Word Faith movement’s “health, wealth and prosperity” doctrine in a new package palatable to evangelicals immune to the Benny Hinn approach. This is not to assert that Wilkinson believes the teachings of the Word Faith gurus, but when it comes to blessings, they all seem to be marching to the same drummer.

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“....the book’s approach runs contrary to sound doctrine,....”

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The marketing hype around *The Prayer of Jabez* goes to an extreme never seen in a scholarly work. A marketing page near the back of the book promotes seven more *Jabez* resources including the leather and gift editions, and more merchandise appears monthly. While that isn’t

proof of trouble in “Jabez land,” it certainly fits in the “hyped-up” mentality seen on the official web site.

Where are the Christians hungering to serve God no matter what the earthly reward? Yes, the book speaks of leaving the blessings up to God, but at the same time it appeals to the self-centered mentality of the typical modern Christian.

How many “Jabezites” enthusiastically agree with James, the brother of Jesus? “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance,” James 1:2-3, (NIV).

Most of us want blessings from the “box in heaven” mentioned in *Jabez*--few are as eager to face the hardships and discipline that prove we belong to God.

Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter. As pointed out earlier, Jabez is nowhere in sight, although many saints who suffered for God are named. The writer of Hebrews goes on to explain the ramifications of chapter 11: “Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it,” Hebrews 12:10-11, (NIV).

#### **Conclusion.**

The Christian life is not primarily about blessings, it is about being transformed into the likeness of Christ. While *The Prayer of Jabez* asserts that “seeking God’s blessings is our ultimate act of worship,” (Note Eight), the apostle Paul tells us that our spiritual act of worship is offering our bodies as living sacrifices: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing



The author Randy Brandt lives in Arvada, Colorado and attends the Grace Church at 6969 Sheridan in Arvada. He is a descendant of Kleine Gemeinde Ältester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Orhloff, Molotschna.



Bruce Wilkinson, author of *The Prayer of Jabez*. In the 1970s Wilkinson was well-known in the Evangelical world for his book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*. He also authored the popular “Walk through the Bible” training series.

and perfect will,” Romans 12:1-2, (NIV).

May we prayerfully seek holiness and purity before our sovereign God, content to be a blessing to others rather than seeking to manipulate our Creator into showering His blessings on us.

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“May we prayerfully....be a blessing to others rather than seeking to manipulate our Creator into showering His blessings on us.”

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**Website:** Visit [www.contend4thefait.org](http://www.contend4thefait.org) for the unabridged original article, including a look at testimonials from the Jabez website.

#### **Endnotes:**

Note One: Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), page 11.

Note Two: <http://www.prayerofjabez.com/BreakthroughPages/TimeArticle.html>

Note Three: Bruce Wilkinson, *Jabez*, page 17.

Note Four: *Ibid.*, page 24.

Note Five: *Ibid.*, page 15.

Note Six, *Ibid.*, page 29.

Note Seven: *Ibid.*, page 49.

Protestant Fundamentalists proselytizers have sometimes mocked conservative Mennonites for their practice of silent prayer. One writer encouraged silent prayer on the grounds that the relationship between God and man was far too important for the believer’s voice and that of the community to be appropriated and/or controlled by a worship leader and/or by a personality cult. The Editor.



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# Kleine Gemeinde Deaf Program

ATM ("Aushilfe und Mitgefühl für die Tauben") and Cayo Deaf Institute (CDI) (Baking Pot Central Farm), Kleine Gemeinde Program for the Deaf, Box 427, Spanish Lookout, Belize, Central America, compiled by Director Frank Thiessen (011-501-8-38078).

## The Beginning, 1983.

It started June 20, 1983, when Helen, daughter of John L. and Mary Reimer was born. Before Helen was a year-old her parents noticed that obviously something was wrong with her hearing. After some time they took Helen to Winnipeg, Canada, and through medical specialists discovered that their daughter was actually deaf and would probably be so for the rest of her life.

When John and Mary returned from Canada they had a special burden to help their own daughter and also other deaf. After much praying and hard work, this burden was slowly carried over to other brothers and sisters in the church.

The first move to accomplish more sign language was when two brothers Ben Froese and Abe Penner from Manitoba taught us some basic signs. Some years later John L. Reimers along with four girls from Spanish Lookout went weekly for six months to a Catholic School in Belize City to study more about the deaf. In between teachers like Sister Elsa, Calbert Linares and Patricia Farley have taught sign language at various times in Spanish Lookout.

In June, 1989 the church sent six young people with John L. Reimers to the Bill Rice Ranch in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, to learn more about the deaf and their world. These students included Frank Thiessen, twin sister Frieda Thiessen, John L. Reimer and wife Mary Reimer (Wendelin) and her sister Sarah, Clara Reimer (Leonard), as well as two Wiebe siblings from Blue Creek.

All this had made it possible for the Reimers, Frank Thiessen and a few others to assist and participate in a deaf camp held at Global Outreach in August, 1990. This camp was sponsored and conducted by a Baptist missionary Ken Kelly. There were 30 deaf attending.

## Deaf Camp, 1993.

The Spanish Lookout volunteers had developed a burden for the deaf and wanted to serve in some way. The Kleine Gemeinde ministerial was informed, and the ministers Jakob Barkman and Eddie M. Reimer were appointed to a committee to work with them under the name, "Aushilfe und Mitgefühl für die Tauben". Their first idea was to have a big camp which was suggested by the operation run by the Baptists but which was small and incomplete. In the meantime the Baptist missionaries had withdrawn leaving the work undone.

In 1993 the four Kleine Gemeinde congregations in Spanish Lookout felt that they were ready to support and conduct their own Deaf Camp. This Camp was held at the Belize College of Agriculture in Central Farm, Cayo. This time there were 60 deaf at camp. Frank Thiessen was appointed the camp director. The workers included Harvey Pletts, John L. Reimers, Jakob and Frieda Wolfs, Leonard and Linda Loewen, and Ruben Thiessens. Many additional volunteers picked up students all over Belize and helped at the camp. The camp was more for adults than for children.

## Training.

The deaf cannot communicate and the camp focused on teaching communication, particularly through sign language. Quite often there would be 35 year-old adults who did not even realize that they had a name because they had never had any language communication. In many cases children had been abused because of their inability to communicate as their parents had never understood why they acted the way they did.

In anticipation of the first big camp in 1993, an annual deaf workers conference was conducted on Spanish Lookout. Various teachers, instructors and missionaries attended to give courses on deaf culture and communication. These sessions usually took place in the central

worship house in Edenthal. At least 30 workers attended.

Starting in 1989 a sign language school for the general public has also been held on Spanish Lookout. The training school has been held every year since, mostly in Edenthal, with up to 200 students, youths and parents in attendance.

The Belizean Government supported the work from the start with the use of the facilities at Central Farms, a former Agricultural College, rent-free.

## Saturday Classes.

After the first camp in 1993, the workers realized the incredible spiritual need and that holding a camp every three years was not sufficient to disciple and train these dear deaf people, who were scattered all across the country. At this time Frank Thiessen was also appointed to the Kleine Gemeinde committee which was in charge of the operations.

As a result AMT in 1994 started Saturday Bible Classes. These classes were held in three different areas in Belize: San Ignacio (Cayo), Mango Creek (Toledo) in southern Belize close to Punta Gorda, and Orange Walk in northern Belize. About 45 deaf attended in all three locations. Every other Saturday a group of teachers went to each place for a full day. In the morning they taught sign language classes and in the afternoon they also had classes and a church service. Around 35 deaf attended at each location with whom they met every six weeks.

## Deaf Camp, 1996.

Three years after our first camp, on August 13-19, 1996, another Deaf Camp was conducted at Central Farm. This time there were deaf from all over Belize and the border towns of Guatemala and Mexico. 102 deaf attended.

After this camp we continued with the scheduled Saturday Bible Classes. AMT has had a lot of support in making these classes possible from



Instructor Eva T. Dueck (Lawrence) (granddaughter of Ältester Heinrich J. Dueck and Rev. Abr. J. Thiessen) with five permanent students receiving their certificates after successfully completing their first year of studies.



Kleine Gemeinde instructors and workers from Spanish Lookout preparing for their three-day parents home teaching session in Toledo, Belize. 1996. Front right is Director Frank Thiessen.



Resident students at work assisting their instructors in canning food. Photo: Feb., 2001.



A view of the classroom activity. Photo: Feb., 2001.

various conservative Mennonite groups in Belize: "Caribbean Light and Truth", "Hummingbird Gospel Mission", "Amish Mennonite Aid" and "Witness to the Americas" are all continually helping with transportation and also assisting in our three-day workshops which AMT conducts every eight months for the families of the deaf. Also in December of 1996 we started with a church service in Melchor, Guatemala and held weekly services for the deaf.

#### Deaf Camp, 1999.

On August 16-23, 1999 we had our third Deaf Camp again at Central Farm. The week-long camp was blessed with 141 deaf this time. 10-12 counsellors volunteered their time to work at the camp.

After the 1999 camp the workers and AMT committee concluded that life for the deaf could be made much easier if the parents could be trained and taught about their children's condition and how they could communicate with them. This resulted in a parental training program with three day sessions held every eight months in all three locations. The idea was to develop a two year cycle of training activities, topics and materials.

AMT also started holding monthly worship services for the deaf in Belize City using the

Beachy Amish church building. They also worked here with deaf who had gotten involved in gangs, prostitution and crime. The services were always held on a Friday with instruction provided in the afternoon and the church services in the evening.

In 2001 a further change took place in the program and AMT went over to a home-based teaching method. Instructors were sent into the actual homes of the deaf people who also invited their family and friends to attend. In this way, the extended family and community network of the deaf as well as the immediate family, benefitted from the training and were able to better communicate with the them, learning how to treat them as fellow human beings, thereby enriching everyone's lives. It was found that a more meaningful teaching environment could be established in the home setting of the deaf as some people were intimidated in the larger camp setting.

#### Cayo Deaf Camp.

In September of 1999 the Belizean Government offered the AMT the use of the former Listowel Boys Training Camp, which had been closed down some years earlier. They were granted a 37 year lease with an option to buy. The camp was conveniently located on the south

bank of the Belize River, just south of the Spanish Lookout Colony. The work with the deaf was supported by both the Ministry of Human Development and the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Education was quite sceptical at first.

At this time director Frank Thiessen and wife Sara moved to the Camp to take up permanent residence here. They started with two deaf students and a deaf maid. By the present they have a student body of 24 permanent students. The current staff includes one other couple beside Frank and Sara, Dwight and Lydia Steven from the Beachy Amish in Haitieville. There are 10 single staff including teachers, dorm parents and cooks.

#### Conclusion.

Also in the past years AMT has been able to send missionaries into Mexico and together with the churches there establish classes and contacts.

As this ministry to the deaf world expands, we see an ever increasing need of more dedication for this wonderful mission outreach.

Ten years ago when I, Frank, took my first training at the Bill Rice Ranch the deaf world seemed so very small to me. If anyone then would have told me what AMT would be in 10



A view of the campus of the Cayo Deaf Institute. View to the southwest. The two story building on the left is the Director's quarters and the building on the far right is the chapel. Photo February 2001.



Sisters, Veronica age 10, hard of hearing, and Jacqueline age 8, deaf, occasional students at the Cayo Deaf Institute. The two girls are from Melchor, Guatemala. On weekends they sometimes stay at the home of Denver Pletts, Spanish Lookout, whose daughter Valerie is one of the volunteers at the CDI.

years I could not possibly have believed it, and yet I constantly pray Matthew 9:37 and 38.

The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest, (the deaf world).

Lord, take my feeble hand in Your Hand  
That Lord, Your Hand will enable my hand,  
To speak for the "ears" of the deaf,  
Firmly transplanting them into eternal faith.

Written by Frank Thiessen, Camp Director, Spanish Lookout, Belize.

#### AMT, 1989.

"Aushilfe und Mitgefuhl fur die Tauben (AMT)" began in June of 1989. Since then AMT's main goal has been to reach deaf souls with the gospel. This has been carried out through deaf camps, Saturday Bible classes, Sunday morning services, sign language, classes and literature; home contracts and personal evangelism. Most of AMT's ministry is in Belize,

but we have been doing some work in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Bolivia.

#### CDI, 1999.

In September of 1999 the Lord opened the doors to establish the Cayo Deaf Institute (CDI). Our vision at CDI is more specifically to meet the needs of the many uneducated deaf individuals in Belize and neighboring countries. Here at CDI we put strong emphasis on developing a godly character, teaching academics in a primary school setting zeroing in on language and also teaching the students a trade to work with their hands. The Cayo Deaf Institute premises have become the home base for our missionary staff from Belize and abroad.

Both AMT and CDI are run by donations which come from individual churches and friends.

#### Board of Directors.

CDI is one of the outreaches carried out by AMT. Both AMT and CDI are overseen and run by a board of directors from Spanish Lookout:

Ministerial board: Jacob Barkman, Eddie M. Reimer, John L. Reimer

AMT/CDI chairman: Gerhard P. Koop  
AMT/CDI secretary and treasurer: Harvey Plett

AMT branch directors: Leonard Loewen, Daniel Dueck, Ben T. Dueck, Walter B. Penner  
AMT/CDI general director: Frank K. Thiessen Sr.

CDI assistant directors: Eddy Loewen, Reynold Koop



Director Frank Thiessen (Diedrich) in his office at the CDI. Photo February 2002.

#### Instructors Testimonials.

"Here we actually had the map of Belize at the meeting...hands on the map, we just claimed all the Deaf for the Lord in the whole country of Belize...we asked Jesus' blood over these Deaf...that the Deaf would be able to attend Camp and learn to know Jesus as their personal Saviour," (Calvin Reimer, see page 4)

"I went home with a prayer that all these children would come to Camp. My heart went out to them, as I longed to teach them about God's love. "Long have they waited, nearly 2000 years...They have no one to teach them, and no Bible to read." (Song #214 C.H.) Lord, use me to make a difference in their lives," (Greta Penner, see page 10).

"...as a result of this, many Deaf responded. They could not resist...their faces were shining so brightly...on top of this all heaven rejoiced and was filled with gladness...we angels were oh, so proud that night...if only one sinner repents, we are greatly pleased, now there were so many, the joy was beyond measure." (Angela Braun, see page 21).

"...if Jesus would only come and take these saved deaf souls to him...out of this dark and sinful world! Their hearts are clean...by the blood of the lamb. Their sparkling eyes shine with joy. Peace lives in their hears..." (Frieda Wolfe, see page 30)

From *Deaf Camp Deeds*, August 16-23, 1999, 32 pages.

#### Further Reading:

*Cayo Deaf Institute Newsletters*, Oct. 25, 2001 and January 25, 2002, published by AMT, Spanish Lookout P.O. Box 427, Belize City, Belize.



The Cayo Deaf Institute, view towards the east along the main street. To the left is the chapel where worship services are held every day. The campus is situated on a picturesque site along the Belize River. Photo February 2001.

#### Donation Receipts.

Notice to Supporters in Canada. If you wish to receive a tax deductible receipt for your contributions, please make your cheques payable to "World Mission to the Deaf". 39 Meadow Crescent, Whitby, Ont., L1N 3J2 (Phone 905-723-1278). Be sure to state that the money is for the Cayo Deaf Institute and they will forward the money to "CDI", o/c Spanish Lookout Kleine Gemeinde, Box 427, Spanish Lookout Colony, Belize.

# Russian Mennonite Students Expelled

## 29 Mennonite Children Expelled from School.

Twenty-nine girls and boys will have to leave the Birger-Forell-Elementary School in Espelkamp (Minden-Lübbecke District, NRW), by January 31, 2002. The grounds for this perviously unheard of action: the children have offended against legitimate school regulations.

“Contrary to the regulations they have refused to take part in the class trips, and for this reason experience these consequences,” was the comment on November 12, 2001, of the spokesman for the Evangelical State School of Westfalen in Bielefeld [In Germany the Lutheran Church is referred to as the Evangelical Church]. The State Church operates the elementary schools.

The 29 students are in the sixth grade in which a total of 150 students are instructed. Already at the beginning of the year, 8300 parents had protested to the NRW School Administrator, Gabriele Behler, against the compulsory participation of their children in the class field trips. Many parents belong to the Mennonite faith, almost all of them are Russian German “Aussiedler” [those German immigrating from Russia to Germany since WWII].

Faith and conscience issues speak against permitting their children to take part in these field trips since these seriously jeopardize the efforts made to raise the children in their faith. Because of insufficient numbers, many class field trips have to be cancelled completely. Public schools are also affected by the resistance to participation in class field trips. The school administration has already implemented 13 disciplinary actions against Espelkamp students.

Ms. Behler explained that schools “must decide on their own regarding schools expeditions and field trips.” She pointed to the school regulations, which allowed individual students to be released from multiple-day trips on educational, religious or financial grounds. To the contrary, 13



*Excited students of the Plautdietsche AG in Detmold display their Low Germany compositions. Every Wednesday at 7 p.m. some 20 children from the 7th and 8th grades voluntarily sit on their wooden chairs to learn Plautdietsche. For the first time there is a Plautdietsch AG (“Arbeitsgruppe”), Low German program, in the August-Hermann-Francke United School, a private school. The school was founded some 10 years ago, largely by Plautdietsche Russian Germans in the Ostfallen-Lippe region of Germany. Photo courtesy of Frind, Nr. 2, page 15.*

school trustees in the Minden-Lübbecke District, see in the views of Behler, a hidden agenda to release religious minorities from participation in class field trips.

From *Westfalenblatt*, Nov. 3, 2001 as reprinted in *Volk auf dem Weg*, No. 1, 2002, Page 16, published by the “Historische und Hilfs-Gesellschaft der Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland”, Raitelbergstr. 49, 70188 Stuttgart, Germany.

Accompanying the above article was a note by Johann Kampen, editor, of the *Volk auf dem Weg*:

“It is an open secret that the Russian Mennonites attend the “bunte” social events [with drinking and dancing] of the “Landsmannschaft” much less frequently than other citizens. This does not in any way make them less worthy citizens than any other Germans from Russia, be they Evangelicals, Catholics or others. Their outstanding values represent the faith and language of their ancestors. It should not be overlooked to mention that a number of our local branch societies, whether in Bielefeld or Espelkamp, are particularly strong with a high proportion of Mennonites.

It is common to attribute a lack of tolerance to Mennonites. Is this really correct? And should not a good many first look themselves in the mirror before making such accusations? The aforesaid case in Espelkamp reminds me only too closely of the situation of believers in my childhood in the Soviet Union, for example, when children of a strong Seventh-Day Adventist orientation refused to attend school on a Saturday. The consequences were poor reports, remaining seated, mocking, and as a last

resort, the general laws [applied] through the parents which could become drastic.

For the benefit of the Mennonite children and the Birger-Forell public school, I hope that over the Christmas and New-Year holidays, the school administration will reconsider and come to a better conclusion, and not follow the example of a system which has disintegrated, and rather guide itself by our fundamental law, which states in article 6(2), “The nurture and raising of the children are the natural right of the parents, and their foremost responsibility. The state society oversees how they fulfil that responsibility”. J. Kampen

From *Volk auf dem Weg*, Nr. 1, 2002, Page 16. Courtesy of A. Reger, Weißenthurm, Germany.

According to news report *Lippische Landes-Zeitung*, Nr. 265, Nov. 13, 2001, the students had been expelled from the Burger-Forell-Realschule in Espelkamp.



*Cover of the CD “von Vondog en jistre” by Andreas Dück. The Low German songs on this CD are gentle and sentimental, in the same class as the work of our leading Manitoba troubadours “Heischraitje & Willa Honnich”. To order the Andreas Dück CD write Plautdietsche Freunde e.V., Robert-Hanning Str. 14, D-33813 Oerlinghausen, Germany.*



*From the cover of the CD, “von Vondog en jistre,” by Andreas Dück.*

# Plautdietsch and Its Future

A "round table" on the subject of "Plautdietsch and its future" recently took place in the Reception Centre "Gendach" in Warendorf (near Münster, Germany). Guest presenters Margarita Block and Anna Thiessen enthusiastically received 20 guests who were associated with the dialect and culture. There were various opinions regarding whether the Plautdietsch language had a future. But all were in agreement that it is up to us, whether we will be able to pass it on to our descendants.

Present were musicians and singers in "Platt": Jakob (Jasch) Wiebe had recorded "Mama" songs in the country western style on his CD. He plans to publish a songbook in the dialect. Peter Teichrib presents intelligent and substantial songs in the Russian pop-music style. He, together with the musician Nikolaj Sudakow, have produced two albums. His CD under the title "Twee unja eenem Hoot," has achieved a certain degree of popularity.

The CD by Josef Klassner has not yet been released, but the trio of the Thiessen siblings "Etj, en du, en dee" has been accepted by him. Presently Valentina Martens is busy with childrens' songs.

Plautdietsch theatre is also being produced successfully. The stage production, *De Fria* by Arnold Dyck has been presented many times (Detmold, Augustdorf, Lage/Lippe). It has gained outstanding reviews. The first time in Warendorf, there was also something serious, namely, "Ballade von der Mutter" (Ballads from the Mother) with directors Ekaterina Schmeer and Aleksej Davydov.

At the round table, women like Katharina Neufeld, director of the Museum of Russian Germans in Detmold and Elvira Satschepilo, nee Fast, nurse at the Warendorf Municipal Hospital, learned to know each other. Elvira sews dolls. Katharina researches and collects artifacts, tools, household goods, documented traditions, cloths and folk culture.

Peter Eck knows so many stories in dialect that it was immediately suggested he write them all down--perhaps he could make a book out of them. He responded that he was collecting videos of villages where Plautdietsche people had once lived.

Maria Enns, one-time teacher in Orenburg, is today writing poems and remembrances. As she was reading these, I immediately thought to my-



*The front cover of the January, 2002, Nr. 3, issue of Frind, 18 pages. Frind is a Plautdietsch magazine published quarterly in full colour by the "Plautdietsch-Freunde e.V. Editor Peter Wiens. For a subscription, write "Frind," Robert-Hanning Str. 14, D-33813 Oerlinghausen, Germany. Subscription rate: \$12.00 Euros Germany, \$24.00 Euros outside of Germany.*



*Dr. Katharina Neufeld from the Russlanddeutsche Museum, Detmold, recording vital statistics from Mennonite gravestones in the cemetery at Rosenort, West Prussia (now Poland). Photo courtesy of Frind, Nr. 2, page 1.*



*Peter Wiens, school teacher, editor of Frind, an artistically produced Plautdietsche magazine from Germany. Photo courtesy of Frind, Nr. 2, page 1. In Canada, we are too poor, we cannot afford such expensive paper and creative graphics. Congratulations!*

self, how wonderful it would be if the literature circle of Agnes Giesbrecht (Bonn), would gather all those writing in the dialect in order to conduct a course together with them.

The Plautdietsche Dentist and publisher Robert Burau, offered his help in the publishing of books.

Peter Wiens, director of the "Plautdietsch-Freunde e.V." related how his society has grown in a relatively short time. Conferences are held yearly where academics lecture regarding history and writing correctly and singers and musicians perform. In Fall of 2001 50 people went on a tour to their "roots" in West Prussia [Poland] and returned home inspired by the rich experience. Twice yearly, meetings are organized with the public in the Reception Centre ("Gendach") in Warendorf. In spring a "Spring Festival" is held and in Fall a program designated as "Honour Your House and Your Language" is presented. Nellie Neufeld, from Rothenburg an der Fulda, is very active; she is delegated and gathers her fellow countrymen twice yearly. In Warendorf we have already organized two radio broadcasts, and soon one will also be broadcasted in the Lippe region. In the future we want to send out one broadcast monthly in our dialect.

The dialect of the Mennonites has survived 200 years in Russia (and before that 200 years in Prussia) and has now arrived in Germany. We shall also be able to enjoy its originality in the future. In order that we can preserve that which appears worthy to us, I direct myself to

you [the reader] with a request. I require material for an encyclopedia of the dialect, regarding important individuals of our heritage, such as Anna Hermann, regarding those who have done much for the dialect in Russia (individual persons, folklore groups, authors, poets). Write us with interesting experiences from the life of the dialect, theatre productions, humorous items, etc. Write us and let yourself be heard and also suggest pieces of music or other items. We are happy for each item of folklore (proverbs, local dialects, puzzles, songs, etc.) and regarding special traits of the Mennonites (living styles, culture, traditions, customs, rare photographs). We are also hereby extending to you a hearty invitation to our next meeting with the topic, "Woo dee oole sunge, zwitsche dee Junge" on April 7, 2002, at 3 p.m. in Warendorf (Nordrhein-Westfalen), Public High School, Kesselstr. 17. The program includes: songs/music pieces, drama, dance, speeches, and also prips, schnettje, Tweebak, Riebelplautz. Anyone with questions is welcome to call for future information to telephone number 02581-634487 (Tatjana Klassner).

By Tatjana Klassner in *Semljaki*, March 2000 ("Countrymen" magazine for Russian speakers in Germany). Translated from Russian to German by Adina Reger, Germany.

# Radical Orthodoxy – God as a Postmodern

Christian faith has long endured the chipping away at authority that is the hallmark of modern academia. But church and campus have never seemed as estranged as they have since the advent of postmodernism, the notion that there is no universal truth, merely competing “narratives” jockeying eternally for supremacy. That is, until 1990, when a young British professor named John



*John Milbank - Supremely confident and unafraid to mix it up, this “Christian socialist” wrote his seminal work partly in response to the market-driven secularism of Margaret Thatcher’s England. From Time, Dec. 17, 2001, page 61. Readers interested in the topic of the Christian Church and post-modernism are*

*referred to the feature article by Professor J. Denny Weaver in Pres., No. 19, pages 3-18.*

Milbank pioneered what *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has suggested may be the “biggest development in theology since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door.”

Milbank opted to cite (if not love) his enemy. By exposing the nihilism of secular thought, he writes, postmodernism freed Christian theology from the need to “measure up to ... standards of scientific truth and normative rationality.” Thus unburdened, he suggests, it enjoys several advantages over secular competitors. Long before postmodernism, Christianity accepted unknowableness as part of God’s nature. The Christian “story” is dense with associations and can be applied universally. In fact, he writes, its central dynamic of ever unfolding divine love places it outside--and above--postmodernism’s conviction that each contending world view is rooted in and sustained by violence.

Milbank’s conclusion: Christian theology can now reclaim its medieval position as “queen of the sciences”, before which disciplines like sociol-

ogy, philosophy and economics must bow down. He and colleagues dubbed their movement “radical orthodoxy” and began a giddy exploration of theology’s vast, recovered social responsibilities.

The effort made them academic stars--Milbank, 49, occupies a prestigious chair at the University of Virginia and drew fierce fire. He notes that “I would not expect Muslims or Buddhists to buy this wholly, at all.” Even some fellow believers find it hard to square his vision of a peaceful, all-embracing Christianity with the religion that burned heretics and launched crusades. Besides, not everyone is a postmodernist. Conservatives cringe when he says that discussions of the actual physical reality of the resurrection have “no place” in the theology. But at the very least, he has cleared a way for the theologians to reclaim their place at the academic table, ending decades, if not centuries, of marginalization.

By David Van Biema  
From Time, Dec. 17, 2001, page 61.

## The Amish and Tractors.

“Officials of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Adjustment Administration let loose a blast directed toward Amish farmers, claiming that if the Amish would forget their religious scruples and use tractors they could raise larger crops and save more people from starving. Two House Amish bishops replied that their people were plowing and planting right under the fences and could scarcely increase their yield without more land. It would seem that the officials are afflicted with the disease of “scientific” agriculturists. Some of the farmlands that Amishmen work in Pennsylvania are among the richest in America, although they have been under continuous cultivation for nearly 200 years. At the same time, many tractor farmers have wrecked their land in two decades. Good land needs much humus which is composed of compound living particles or cells. Manure is a most important ingredient for encouragement of soil bacteria and general soil care. Tractors do not make manure. Amishmen might seem queer in some ways but they know how to take care of their land--a healthy soil is one of our most critical problems today.” -- Roger Ottmayer in *Social Questions Bulletin*, October, 1946 p. 101. From *Mennonite Life*, Jan. 1947, page 43.

## Pacifist Documentary Aired.

“The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It” is a one-hour documentary that aired on several U.S. television stations in January. Narrated by Ed Asner, the film sheds light on American Conscientious Objectors who refused to fight in World War II. The story is told through the memories of several men. One of them is Samuel Yoder, an Amish man from Goshen, Indiana, who served in an alternative service camp. Sixty percent of Mennonite men refused the draft during World War II.--Release by David Hiebert. From *Cdn Men.*, Feb. 11, 2002.

## 75th Anniversary - Menno Colony, Paraguay

### Citizens of Menno Colony and Friends.

Seventy-five years have flown by since our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, came to the Paraguayan Chaco and founded the Menno Colony in what was wilderness at the time. In June of 2002 we want to present various programs, in order to give expression to our well-being in this land, Paraguay. This milestone in our story is worth stopping for a moment in order to reflect back upon that which has transpired until now, and to gaze back into the past from the perspective of the present. By so doing, we wish to give God the glory through a special thanksgiving service. For only through God’s grace have we become, that which we are today.

All Mennos (and also those who once were), and our friends, are invited, to take part in the festivities.

The following activities are planned for June:

- a) A symposium focusing on the history of Menno Colony - June 6-7;
- b) Livestock and farm exhibition at Rodeo Isla Poi - June 11-16;
- c) Presentation of the Cantata “Ein Fester Burg ist unser Gott” - June 15-16;
- d) A traditional worship service in the first worship house in Osterwick;
- e) The theatre production “Aulles wea soo aundasch, on dann kaume noch dee Russlândia” - June 18-24;
- f) Thanksgiving worship services in the local churches - June 23;
- g) A musical “Die Wüste soll singen” - June 21-24;
- h) Exhibition of animals, agriculture and agri-industry - June 22-25;
- i) Official anniversary program - June 25. This is the highpoint of the festivities in the centre of Loma Plata, with a parade demonstrating the history of Menno Colony, exhibition, community dinner, and a closing thanksgiving service in the evening.

For more information, contact [gpenner@lp.chortitzer.com.py](mailto:gpenner@lp.chortitzer.com.py) or [gekome@telesurf.com.py](mailto:gekome@telesurf.com.py)

For accommodations contact Abram W. Wiebe telephone 595-492-2301

The administration and the Churches of Menno Colony hereby invite all interested person and visitors from all parts of the world, to come and partake of the festivities.

From *Der Bote*, March 27, 2002, page 37.

**Editor’s Note:** Our prayers are with the residents of Menno Colony, Paraguay, as they celebrate this important milestone. We hope that they will also send us photographs and writeups so that these important events can be shared with our readers.



*Symbol of the 75th anniversary celebrates for the Menno Colony, Paraguay.*

# The Pancake Curtain

## The Pancake Curtain.

During the days of the Cold War from 1945 to 1990, citizens of the West were terrified at the mention of the Soviet "Iron Curtain" or even the Chinese "Bambo Curtain". These "curtains" kept their inhabitants in a life of fearful servitude. But even more terrifying was the "pancake curtain" in the south of the Mennonite East Reserve "wo de welt met Paunküake tou je hungij wea."

Low German linguist, Jack Thiessen, New Bothwell, reports that the pancake curtain motif originates from the expression, "Wo de welt met paunküake toup jebacht es" indigenous to Plaut-Dietsch culture going back to early Prussian times, see *Prussia Language Dictionary*, Vol. 4, page 435. Thiessen explains that the reference was "to anything unknown or unexperienced which was certainly fraught with danger or disaster".

Koep and Bua, the comical protagonists in Arnold Dyck's Plaut-Dietsch writings, referred to the territory south of Grunthal as "where the world was pasted together and held in place only with pancakes" (Paunküake) (see Arnold Dyck, *Complete Works*, Vol 2). Arnold Dyck also referred to the area as the land of "Schruk and Steina" (skrub and stones).

The imagery was also drawn on from time to time by historian Victor Peters who enjoyed regaling Low German audiences with references to his first teaching position at East Barkfield, southeast of Grunthal, evidently close to the place "where the world was held together by pancakes". Retired educator Elizabeth Peters, Winnipeg, has confirmed that the concept of the place at the end of the world "held together by pancakes" was imagery indigenous to Low German and not invented by either Arnold Dyck or Victor Peters.

Some of the Russländer emigrants settling in Grunthal in the 1920s dreamed and fantasized, perhaps jokingly, of the establishment of a Mennonite Homeland. In this idyllic "Mennoland" horses would pull their plows without commands and wheat would grow four feet tall.

Anthropologist James Urry, Professor at the University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, has studied the Mennonites in Grunthal for two decades, compiling the results--hopefully soon--into a book. He has sometimes joked about the Mennonite pancake curtain and the idyllic Mennoland.

On December 7, 2001, James Urry finally received his comeuppance. On his way to visit friends in Grunthal, he was stopped at the boarder of the East Reserve, also known by some as the R. M. of Hanover, by Mennoland guards with gumstie v'le and pitchforks. After a rigorous examination by customs officials, a relieved Dr. Urry was allowed to continue on his way to Grunthal. Here he was toasted and hosted by his many dear friends including Rev. Harold Peters-Franz and Peter P. Klassen (from Rabuze Klousasz) (*Pres.*, No. 7, pages 8-9).

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James Urry, Professor of Anthropology, Wellington University, Wellington, New Zealand, produces his passport for the benefit of Harold Peters-Franz at the border of "Menno-Land" between St Pierre-Johys and Grunthal (East Reserve), Manitoba. Peters and others staged the elaborate prank on Urry on Dec. 7, 2001. They suggested jokingly that he needed a passport to cross the border into "Mennoland". In the background a Mennonite guard stands at the ready with a three-pronged pitchfork. James Urry is the leading expert on Russian Mennonite history and has long studied Grunthal and the Mennonite people in Russia. Photo by Tim Plett, courtesy of the Carillon News, Dec. 17, 2001.

## Three Mennos Receive Order of Canada

Arthur Kroeger, Howard Dyck and Rudy Wiebe on Feb. 28, 2001 at an Order of Canada Investiture Ceremony. The Order of Canada recognizes people who have made a difference to our country, from local citizens to national and international personalities. Three different levels of membership in the Order of Canada honour people whose accomplishments vary in degree and scope: Companion, Officer and Member. The ceremony recognized Howard Dyck (music) as a member, Rudy Wiebe (literature) as an officer, and Arthur Kroeger (public service) as a companion.



## The Three Mennos - Photo Credit.

Courtesy of Arthur Kroeger and taken by Tina Wiebe. Courtesy of Alf Redekopp, Men. Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Man., R3P M4, and Mennonite Historian, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, page 7. Rudy Wiebe has just published his astoundingly rich panorama of Flemish Mennonite history, Sweeter than words (Toronto, 2001).



A relieved James Urry triumphantly holds up his New Zealand passport, after having been examined and accepted for entry into Mennoland by Customs Officer Harold Peters-Franz. Standing to his right is Pancake Curtain border guard Herman Froese, Grunthal. View to the south. In the distance, behind the R. M. of Hanover sign, once lay the magnificent Mennonite Strassendorf village of Gnadenfeld (*Pres.*, No. 15, pages 90-102). Photo by Peter Klassen, Grunthal, Manitoba.

# Billy Graham Apologizes.

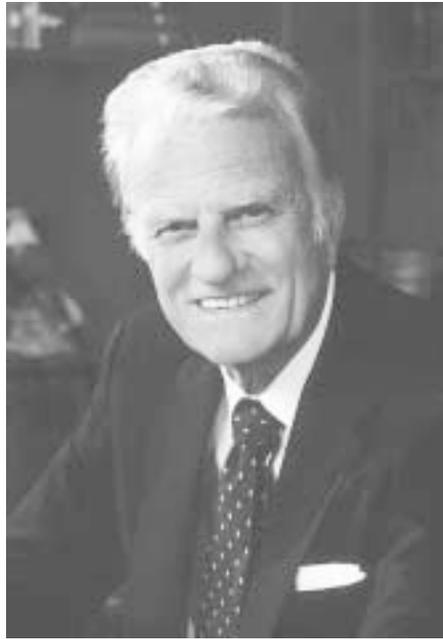
## Nixon Tapes.

Billy Graham has apologized for anti-Semitic comments he made during a 1972 meeting with former President Nixon. In their conversation, revealed in the latest batch of Nixon tapes released late February by the National Archives, Graham said the Jewish "stranglehold" on the media was ruining the country and must be broken. Graham says he has no recollection of the occasion, but regrets his comments as they do not reflect his views. The remarks shocked many who were not used to hearing divisive words from the longtime evangelist. In his apology, Graham said his legacy has been one of working for stronger bonds between Jews and Christians. Graham, 83 and in frail health, is due to preach at a June Crusade in Cincinnati, focusing on racial reconciliation. (*Charisma News Service*), from *ChristianWeek*, March 19, 2002, page 7.

## Say it ain't so, Billy.

Richard Nixon's infamous White House tapes damaged yet another reputation when comments by Billy Graham were made public last month. Millions were shocked to learn that Protestant Christianity's most revered representative was guilty of uttering anti-Semitic remarks in a private conversation with the former U.S. President more than 30 years ago.

According to the transcripts, Graham ex-



*Evangelist Billy Graham.*

pressed his concern about Jewish domination of the media, and told Nixon that "this stranglehold has got to be broken or this country's going down the drain."

He went on to say, "A lot of Jews are great friends of mine. They swarm around me and

are friendly to me. Because they know I am friendly to Israel and so forth [Dr. Graham is a dispensationalist who believe in a bizarre teaching that Israel has an exclusive God-given right to the Middle-East. Ed.]. But they don't know how I really feel about what they're doing to this country, and I have no power and no way to handle them."

Graham's immediate apology for remarks he "apparently made" but had "no memory of" failed to mollify many who were offended that a man of Graham's moral stature would harbour such thoughts.

Two weeks later, Graham issued a second statement, this time totally repudiating the comments and chastising himself for not disagreeing with the president at the time. "Racial prejudice, anti-semitism, or hatred of anyone with different beliefs has no place in the human mind or heart," he said.

Predictably, Graham turned the embarrassing revelation and his subsequent apologies into a sermon for the masses as well as himself. "Each of us must face the fact that God has 'tapes' that record not only our actions but also our thoughts and our intents," he said. "On the appointed day of God's judgement there will be nothing in any of our hearts that will not be disclosed. That is why we all need God's forgiveness."

From "On the Record," *ChristianWeek*, April 2, 2002, page 2.



## M.H.S.C. Annual Meeting Nov. 20, 2001

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada annual meeting in Winnipeg on November 30th, 2001. This photo includes many of the makers and shakers in the world of Russian Mennonite historiography. Seated (l-r): Ted Friesen, Winnipeg, James Urry (guest from New Zealand), Royden Loewen, Steinbach, David Giesbrecht, Clearbrook, Lauren Harder. Middle Row: Linda Hecht, Kitchener, Natalya Ostasheva Venger (guest from Dnepropetrovsk), Marlene Epp, Waterloo. Back Row: Abe Dueck, Winnipeg, Victor Wiebe, Saskatoon, Alf Redekopp, Winnipeg, Ted Regehr, Calgary, Bert Friesen, Winnipeg, Jake Peters, Winnipeg, Richard Thiessen, Abbotsford, Henry Fast, Steinbach, Leonard Doell, Aberdeen, Sam Steiner, Waterloo. Photo: Susan Brandt. Courtesy of Alf Redekopp, Men. Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Man., R3P M4, and *Mennonite Historian*, Vol. XXVII, No. 4, page 1.

## Amish Population Increases

According to a report from the *Mennonite Weekly Review*, the Amish population has doubled in the past 20 years. In the year 1980 10,600 Amish were living in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and in the year 2000, they had already grown to 22,300. There is also similar growth in other Amish regions. In total there are now 180,000 Amish in the USA and Canada....

To keep the young in the fellowship something must also be offered to them. They feel that they are an important part of the Gemeinde. They have enough ministers, so that the minister knows each and everyone in his Gemeinde, has contact



Two young Amish women, an image of a humble and simple Christian discipleship, inspiring millions of believers and unbelievers alike, in America and around the globe. Photo from John M. Zielinski, *The Amish A Pioneer Heritage* (Des Moines, Iowa, 1975), page 10.

with them and visits them.

Work must also be offered to them. Since the land is expensive, and the produce is only cheap, they have also created other opportunities. Only approximately one-third are farmers--the others work in building construction, carpentry, self-employment and other vocations. Some 1500 entrepreneurs in the Lancaster area belong to the Amish.

As reported in the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 1, Jan. 8, 2002, page 3.

**Editor's Note:** We praise the Lord to hear of the growth of the Amish congregations. This is evidence that when God's children follow the teachings of Christ and obey His commandments, God will grant His blessing. Of course, Satan will seek with all might and deceit to tear apart the assemblies of the faithful including sending other so-called Christians to attack them and/or to spread falsehoods about them.

### Notice to Subscribers.

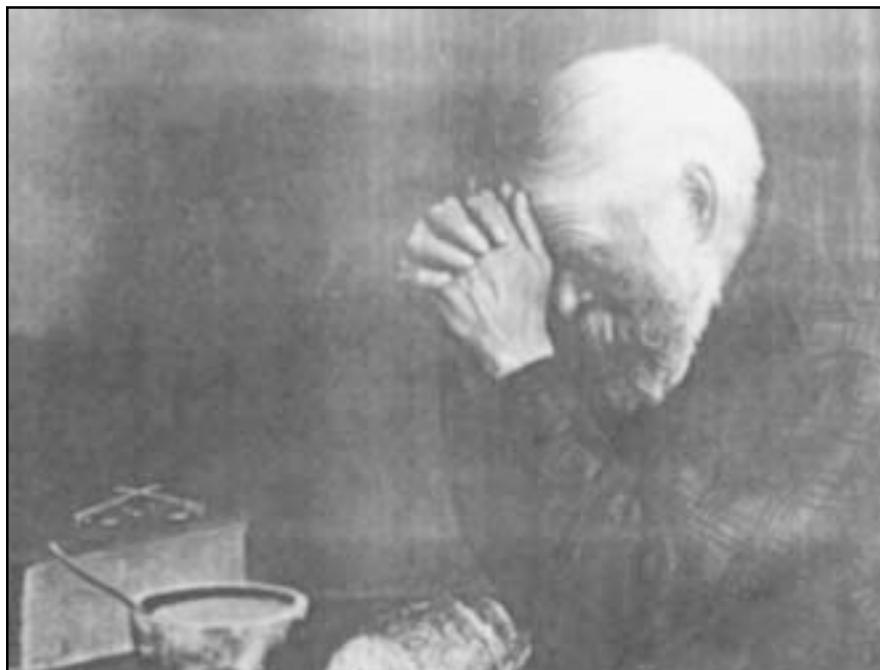
If you are no longer interested in receiving *Preservings*, or if you have moved and your mailing address has changed, please drop us a line. With each issue we lose a number of readers who have moved and have not bothered to send in their new addresses.

## "Grace" Photo Approved

In 1918, a bearded saintly old man appeared at the door of Eric Enstrom, Bovey, Minnesota. Enstrom painted the man bowing in a meal time prayer of thanksgiving. The painting called simply "Grace" has become "known and loved throughout the world," from *THE ANSGAR LUTHERAN*, Nov. 21, 1960. Received courtesy of Clystra Buerge, Albany, Oregon.

According to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, page 3B, column 6, Tuesday, March 26, 2002, the painting has been accepted as the official photograph of the State of Minnesota. "Governor Jesse Ventura last week signed a bill that was passed by both the House and the Senate into law decreeing it so. The photograph now must hang in the Minnesota Secretary of State's office." - *Rachel E. Stassen-Berger*.

Received courtesy of Maggie McQuillan Schwichtenberg, St. Paul, Minn.



"Grace," a 1918 painting of Mr. Wilden by Eric Engstrom, Bovey, Minnesota. A photo of the painting was previously published in *Preservings*, No. 14, page 100, as "portraying Cornelius W. Toews, Greenland, better than any photograph." A photograph of the painting was also used on the cover of *Saints and Sinners* (Steinbach, 1999), as well as on page 260, where it is incorrectly identified as being of C. W. Toews.

## Frank Froese named recipient of the 2002 PRIX MANITOBA AWARD

Frank Froese has received a letter from Ron Lemieux, the minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism informing him that upon the recommendation of the jury, he has been named the recipient of the 2002 Prix Manitoba Award for Heritage in the category of Education and Communication.

The award is presented by the Minister to recognize individuals and organizations who have enriched the lives of Manitobans through their contribution and achievements in the fields of heritage, recreation, and the arts. Nominations are sought throughout the Province and are reviewed by a jury of peers whose commend those worthy of recognition.

The presentation took place on Thursday, May 9, 2002 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 200, Legislative Building, Winnipeg.



Frank Froese, Steinbach, editor of "Preserving our Heritage," the newsletter of the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, wins 2002 PRIX MANITOBA AWARD.

# News from the Gemeinden

News of interest to Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Kleine Gemeinde and Reinländer Mennonites in North and South America, providing news of the Conservative Mennonites as the wholesome, fulfilled, flesh and blood human beings they are. This will make it harder for unscrupulous leaders in predator denominations to categorize them as lesser human beings and as targets and victims of territorial and/or denominational aggression. All genuine believers will be inspired by the experiences of our conservative brothers and sisters in Christ in Mexico and elsewhere. Every denomination and all communities have made important and vital contributions to the Kingdom of God and to the wider Mennonite community which deserve to be acknowledged and celebrated.

## Auction for Schools.

The third benefit school auction turned out better than expected. An auction sale was held in the Gebietsamt offices in Lowe Farm [on Highway 28], which brought in some 88,000 pesos in total for the support of the schools. Some 8000 was received from food and another 3000 from drinks and "papas". The money was being gathered in order to pay the debt from the school buses as well as school books and tuition for some children, especially those attending in Gnadenthal (see *Pres.*, No. 19, page 78) at one of the two Old Colony schools.

At first there were doubts about the results which was also case with the two previous benefit auctions, namely, for the Senior's Home at Km. 14 and also in Steinrich. It appeared as if there would be only few items [donated] and also few buyers. But the buyers were motivated--and particularly the Mexicans helped out, as is often the case. They bid up the prices on equipment, old iron and furniture--such as sofas, ovens, cabinets, etc. Grain and feed and much other material was donated and usually sold for a good price. Small items were sometimes returned and sold again.

The women on the School Committee had packed various items such as kerchiefs, calculators, new items, bedding, etc. in small coloured boxes and wrapped with Christmas paper. These presents were auctioned throughout the auction at intervals, some sold for 80 pesos and others for up to 250 pesos--each according to the size of the package. No one was allowed to open the package until the last one was sold. One man had also sold a box, saying he had cake mix, but instead found it contained a kerchief.

Many thousand pesos came from only a few apples. A case of apples went for up to 3000 pesos. The auctioneers also threw some apples at some of the bidders (those who had an auction number), and instructed the secretary, "Record the number for 70 pesos." The buyers cooperated and paid. Other apples went for 80, 90, and up to 180 pesos. When the auctioneer threw an apple at a Mexican, he immediately threw it back. He did not want to pay that much for an apple.

The unusual at such an auction creates fun, contributes to a positive outlook and for a sense of community, and helps to bring in more money. This auction brought in approximately the same as the one in Steinrich for the Senior's Home; the proceeds at the auction at Km. 14 were less.

The voluntary help was manifest everywhere. The auctioneers and recorders donated their services. Someone else slaughtered the bull for the meat without taking anything for it. The women baked the pies, and so it went, all in order to support the school system. It is a sign that a part of the neighbourhood, even if only a minority, is willing to recognize that education is an important matter.

This auction encourages the organizers, as did also the two previous ones. One of them said, "Why didn't we do this already 20 years ago. For then the schools of other denominations might not have come into our Colonies."

Report by Jorge Reimer, from *Kurze Nachrichten*, as published in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Dec. 21, 2001, page 19.

## Why the School Bus?

Many children, living along the Highway [28] between Rubio and Cuauhtemoc are gathered with a school bus and brought to Gnadenthal to a somewhat different school. It is an Old Colony school, but the children are divided into different age groups and classrooms. Many more text books are used than only the Fibel, Catechism, Testament and Bible. Scriblers are used instead of slateboards. It is expected that the teachers will use the opportunity to improve the instruction.

Report by Jorge Reimer, from *Kurze Nachrichten*, as published in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Dec. 21, 2001, page 19.

## Manitoba Colony.

Imported goods, be they old or new, usually come through dealers from the Manitoba Colony. Last summer hundreds of semi-trailer loads of goods picked up in the U.S. arrived. Much of this merchandise is sold in other colonies or to the local Mexicans. It is a great advantage for buyers, because within a distance of several kilometers, they can find virtually everything. It [the Manitoba Colony] is the business colony, which is industrializing the most, where there are hundreds of businesses, and the farmers are farming more land outside the colony than in the colony itself.

Report by Jorge Reimer, from *Kurze Nachrichten*, December 21, 2001, as published in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Jan. 4, 2002, page 9.

## Corredor Commercial Obregon.

The Government of Cuauhtemoc is one step closer to planning the development taking place along the Highway between Rubio and Cuauhtemoc, the Corredor Commercial Obregon. However, this shall only occur in conjunction with the State Government and with approval of the Colony as represented by the Vorstehers. As an example that the [Manitoba] Colony is coming into consideration is the project to plant trees along the Obregon Highway.

The State Government is making 14,000 trees available, which are to be planted here. Cuauhtemoc already has completed the plans. But the Vorstehers have some reservations regarding where and how the trees are to be planted. The Government officials promptly heeded these concerns and are revising



The office building of the Manitoba Colony in Lowe Farm, along the four-lane "Corredor Commercial Obregon" (also known as Highway 28), is always being used more and more. It is often being used for various sittings and meetings such as the two meetings with Mayor Israel Beltran Montes (regarding further electrification) and others. From *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 4, Feb. 19, 2002, page 2. The Highway commercial area is named after Obregon, the Mexican President under whom the Mennonites immigrated to Mexico and who granted them their Privilegium. The Manitoba Colony has some 20,000 residents.

the proposal together with the Vorstehers.

Buildings [along the highway] will be subject to regulatory controls. New buildings will have to be set a certain distance back from the highway in accordance with regulations. People cannot build according to their own ideas. For example, something that stinks or smells unsavoury, cannot be built adjacent to a restaurant. Such planning is merely such as takes place in all developed regions of the world, where urbanization is taking place.

From *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 4, Feb. 19, 2002, page 1.



A group of some 70 young people from the villages around Cuauthemoc meet every week under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. Kroeker for singing. They served with a number for songs of the "Post Abend" to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Mennonitische Post held in Blumenau March 29, 2002. Photo from the Post, April 5, 2002, page 2. Veteran teacher Abram Wolfe, Blumenort, Campo 22, has been conducting singing evenings with 600-800 youths every Tuesday for a number of years. Ben Loewen, Kronsgard, Campo 27, also holds weekly Singstunden and Biblestunden with some 70-80 youths attending. With more and more alien religious predators sneaking around the Mennonite Colonies seeking where they can split up churches and lead the youths astray, such activities are becoming more and more important, so that the young people will not so easily be seduced away from the true faith of the fathers and from obeying and following the teachings of Jesus.



School teachers Lisa and Tina Knelsen, Campo 116, Cuauthemoc, Mexico. They teach 26 students in Edenfeld, Swift Colony. Photo from Men. Post, April 5, 2002, page 2. The first woman teacher among the Flemish Mennonites in Manitoba was Maria Friesen Redenzel (1844-1925), licensed by the Provincial Department of Education in 1879. Maria Friesen taught in Rosenhoff in the Scratching River settlement northwest of Morris. See Preservings, No. 8, Part One, page 9.

#### Old Colony Statistics.

The Old Colony Gemeinde, Nuevo Ideal, Durango - 2614 baptized members and 7533 souls; La Honda, Zacatecas - 1548 baptised members, 4330 souls; El Camello, N. Casas Grandes - 127 baptized members and 337 souls; Manitoba Colony - 5874 baptised members, 13,159 souls; La Virginias, N. Casas Grandes - 617 baptised members, 1579 souls; Buenos Aires - 184 baptised members, 556 souls; Capulin, N. Casas Grandes - 541 baptised members, 1425 souls; San Carlos, Tamaulipas, 44 baptised members, 112 souls; Colony Nuevo Durango, Paraguay - 656 baptised members, 1947 souls. Compiled by Jakob Wall and Jakob Redekop, from Men. Post, Feb. 1, 2002, page 14-15.

#### Chatham, Ontario, Sept. 29, 2001.

The annual Mennonite Gathering was held Saturday evening, September 29, 2001, in Chatham, Ontario. On Sunday afternoon, September 30, 2001, the Mennonitentreffen was held in Leamington, Ontario.



The children's choir of the Wheatley Old Colony Academy sang a number of songs. The Old Colony Church can well be proud to have such a smart looking group of young ladies coming through their church school system. Photo courtesy of Die Mennonitische Post, January 4, 2002, page 18.



Vorsängers of the Dresden Old Colony congregation. L.-r.: Diedrich Wall, Jacob Dyck and Jacob Peters. Contrary to popular belief, singing in the "Langen Weise" without notes requires sophisticated musical ability and an exceptional memory. Dr. Wes Berg, Professor of Music, University of Edmonton, Alberta, has referred to "...the remarkable skills of the Old Colony Vorsänger...and [off] experiencing the reverent atmosphere and powerful, strangely beautiful sound of the singing of an Old Colony Mennonite congregation." He argues "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," see Old Colony Mennonites in Canada (Steinbach, 2000), page 24. Photo courtesy of Die Mennonitische Post, January 4, 2002, page 18.

### Ältester Election.

Nuevo Ideal, Durango, Mexico. A minister and deacon were elected in this colony on January 15, 2002: Isaak H. Thiessen, Schönthal, as minister and Cornelius D. Wall, Blumenthal, as deacon. An Ältester election was held on January 17, 2002, when an Ältester was elected from among the seven current ministers. The lot fell upon Ohm Peter D. Braun, Grünfeld.

On January 18, 2002, Ohm Peter Braun was ordained as Ältester, and Isaak H. Thiessen as minister and Cornelius D. Wall as deacon. Presently the Old Colony Gemeinde in this colony has one Ältester, eight ministers and one deacon. The previous spiritual leadership had felt constrained to move away, starting some six years ago, so that none had remained.

**Editor's Note:** Christians everywhere rejoice when the Lord places His workers in the vineyard to feed, lead and nurture his flock. We congratulate the Durango Old Colony Gemeinde on their successful reorganization and wish them the Lord's blessings as they venture forth to face the challenges of tomorrow.

### Apple Production.

The Municipalities of Cuauhtemoc, Guerrero and Bachiniva, produce some 80 per cent of all the apples in Mexico. In the past year, the production was some 300,000 tons, from the 30,000 hectares (much of which is not yet in production). The apples from Cuauhtemoc and area are of the better quality than from many other regions, since the climate is more favourable.

From the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 1, Jan. 8, 2002, page 32.

### Greenhouses.

In a meeting held in the boardroom of the Mennonite Credit Union, Cuauhtemoc, some 30 farmers, mostly Mennonites, heard Engineer Samuel from California report on some of the technical aspects and challenges of such

endeavours. It takes about 350,000 US per hectare to set up a greenhouse but the income can be substantial. There must be enough product produced in a area so that a semi-trailer per day can be shipped.

From the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 1, Jan. 8, 2002, page 16.

**Editor's Note:** There is considerable interest in the Mennonite colonies in Mexico in expanding and starting more greenhouses. The Mennonite colonies are located within four hours drive of the US-Mexican border where the 400 million Latin-American and the 300 million English-American worlds meet. It is evident that our Mennonite brothers and sisters in Christ in Chihuahua are ideally positioned to partake and participate in the economic activity this will generate.

### Schools.

Theme - Schools are the order of the day. What is there so special in January? There are only few serious accidents which need to be reported - and that is good. But there is more and more effort being put into the methods of education.

In Gnadenthal, the schools are closed one day each month, when the village teachers want to attend the teaching training school. Some two weeks ago, 27 persons assembled--teachers as well as other interested individuals. Instruction was provided from various teachers in subjects such as grammar, mathematics, reading and enunciation, etc. But time was also allotted for a free exchange, where the teachers had a dialogue regarding various problems faced in the classroom--e.g. what to do when parents are not satisfied with the teacher or the teaching methods, when there are discipline problems, how to inspire children to learn, etc.

On the theme of supporting teachers - Menno Loewen and Arden Dueck from Los Jagueyes are presently visiting the Kleine Gemeinde teachers in Tamaulipas and La Honda.



After the harvest, less fortunate people come to glean out the chafe. These two fellows from Napavechi are zealously gathering beans in Gnadenthal [Manitoba Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico]. It is a definite opportunity for the farmers to allow the poor to obtain something, be it beans, apples or corn. In fact, it is Biblical, see the example of Boas. By Bram Siemens, from the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 20, Nov. 5, 2001, page 3.

There are two teachers teaching in No. 102, Blumenheim. Gerhard Fehr and Abram Fehr are teaching in two classrooms with some 50 students. The children are gathered from the villages of Edenfeld, Neu-Kronsthal, Blumenhof, Neu-Edenfeld, Neuanlage, No. 102 1/2, and No. 102 by the teachers with two vans and brought to school.

Gerhard Fehr, No. 116, instructs those in the first three years [in a age], namely, the Fibler and Catechismier. Abram Fehr instructs the Testamentler and Bibler. The students are divided in such a way that the teachers do not require any helpers, as is the case in many schools where one teacher has up to 50 students in one classroom.

Report by Jorge Reimer, from *Kurze Nachrichten*, Jan. 25, 2002, in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Feb. 1, 2002, page 19.



Rev. Peter Dyck, Old Colony minister from Wheatley, Ont., and Johann and Nancy Thiessen, Leamington. Johann had a serious accident in the Neudorf Stamping Factory when a press accidentally took out all his fingers. Both Rev. Dyck and deacon Henry Friesen, Wheatley, were actively involved in writing for the recently published history book, Old Colony Mennonites in Canada Photo from Men. Post, March 15, 2002.

### Indians Receive Help



Wilhelm Dyck Loewen from Blumenort and likewise Wilhelm Dyck also from Blumenort [Manitoba Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico], brought a load of four tons of food, blankets and other items to the Indians in the mountains. The supplies were divided among the Indians under the supervision of their Governor Patracinio (right). His wife and children can also be seen on this photo. It takes about eight hours to drive even though it is only 80 miles past Creel. The road through the mountains is sometimes so narrow two vehicles could not pass. By Bram Siemens, from the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 20, Nov. 5, 2001, page 3.

# German Ambassador Visits Mennonites

## German Ambassador visits Mennonite Colonies.

Ambassador Wolf-Ruthard Born of the Federal German Republic visited the Mennonite Colonies near Cuauhtemoc, on November 29, 2001. Arrangements were made by the German Consul at Cuauhtemoc, Ing. Klaus Kientzle, on the Monday before the official visit on Nov. 29, 2001.

The Ambassador was chauffeured in a Suburban provided by the State Governor. He was welcomed in the lobby of the Credit Union building (*Pres.*, No. 17, pages 83-84). The visit started in Gnadenfeld at the Heinrich G. Wiebe cheese factory and on the way Ambassador Born insisted on hearing a few words in Low German. In response, he said, "eck vestoo."

At the cheese factory the Ambassador was greeted by the owners, Heinrich G. Wiebe (see *Diese Steine*, page 599) and son Heinrich. Their cheese factory, "Queseria America" produces 8,000 litres of pasteurized milk in half- and full gallon plastic bottles daily. Heinrich Wiebe Jr. also gave the Ambassador some of the famous "Sello de Oro" cheese. He also gave the Ambassador some of the so-called "Salchicha Menonita", produced at the Osterwick cheese factory, to taste.

After a stop at the Alvaro Obregon school in Blumenau, the Ambassador visited the Mennonite Museum and cultural centre at Km. 10, on Highway 28 (see *Pres.*, No. 19, page 79). The Ambassador addressed the gathered listeners "And encouraged them with the preservation of the German language and culture which they had brought along with them for over 300 years as a subgroup of the German people.... There is nothing better than when people know many languages, and when people out of tolerance are able to understand, empathize and sympathize with others, and can think along with them because they understand their language, how people of other cultural communities feel, how they function, the values they hold, and what significant traits they have. And the vehicle for such understanding, in the first instance, is the language."

The Ambassador stated further that Germany supports the strengthening of the German language, together with the Goethe Institute, coupled with "...all respect and recognition also for the dialect and the parental language and that

of the forefathers...." He encouraged the listeners that it would be good if they promoted and expanded their knowledge of English, Spanish and German, "...for those who achieve this, and hold firmly to their roots, in their faith and conviction, can look the world in the eye with confidence. My petition to you: support these concerns." [Editor's Note: It is unfortunate that



Ambassador Wolf-Ruthard Born greeted the Mennonite women during the visit at the Museum cultural center. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, 18. Dezember, 2001, page 7.



The German Ambassador Wolf-Ruthard Born (left) speaks with Jakob Froese from Gnadenfeld and Bernhard Rempel, Los Jagueyes. Born demonstrated a great interest in meeting with the German speaking Mennonites. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, 18. Dezember, 2001, page 5.

some of the predator proselytizers swooping around the colonies, such as Jakob Funk from Winnipeg, could not be in attendance to hear such an excellent affirmation of tolerance that has always characterized conservative Flemish Mennonites since the days of the Reformation, *Pres.*, No. 19, page 77].

After the speech the Ambassador and some 30 members of the Museum Society were treated to a traditional Mennonite meal at the La Huerta Restaurant at Km. 10.

From here the party visited the Elektrisola Factory owned by Dr. Gerd Schildbache and

sons Oliver and Detlef (see *Pres.*, No. 11, pages 23-4). Elektrisola is a world leader in its field. There are 800 such German enterprises in Mexico. Built at a cost of 15,000,000 USD, the "Elektrisola" factory produces fine grade wire for computer assembly.

The Schildbaches chose the site in the Manitoba Colony because of the loyal and trustworthy work force available here. The current manager of the plant Leonel Klassen Letkeman is also a local.

From here the party visited the modern apple packing plant "La Campana" owned by Abr. Olfert and family. The plant located at "Quinta Lupita" packs 35 tons of apples every day. The Olfert family are also the largest apple growers in the region.

From here the party visited the oven factory, "Solmatic" owned by Jakob Heide and partners and the trailer factory "Remolques del Norte" both at Kn. 7. The trailer factory produces 4,500 units each valued at \$10,000 Pesos. "Solmatic" produces 12,000 ovens of its most popular model alone. These two factories demonstrate how important the manufacturing sector is to the local economy.

The Ambassador, noting the many sunny days enjoyed locally, also asked Jakob Heide why they had not erected solar panels or large windmills. He explained that in Germany, large firms are obligated to do so in order to minimize the amount of oil that has to be burned to provide power [Editor's Note: We knew all along the resourceful Old Coloniers were right in their opposition to coal generated electrical power].

Regarding the shortage of water for irrigation, Ambassador Born replied that users do not make an effort to ration water until they have to pay something for every cubic meter.

The tour finished with a visit at Casa Siemens (see *Pres.*, No. page 123). The operator Bram Siemens reported 30,000 radio listeners.

In the view of Peter Rempel, the visit by the Ambassador and the German Consul at Chihuahua Klaus Kientzle, had created a very favourable impression. He encouraged his readers to make an effort to improve their German.

From a report by Peter Rempel, "Der Deutsche Botschafter Born fördert das Deutschtum in der Dorfern," in *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 18. Dezember, 2001, pages 4-8.

# Mexican Mennonite Museum

“Mennonite Museum, Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico,”

by Jorge Reimer, from *Kurze Nachrichten*, as published in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Dec. 21, 2001.



*The Mennonite Museum on Highway 28, north of Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico. Photo by Aganetha Rempel Quitana and courtesy of Die Mennonitische Post, Dec. 21, 2001, page 3 (see Pres. No. 19, page 79).*

The first phase of the first Mennonite museum in Mexico, at km. 10 [Highway 28, north of Cuauhtemoc] was officially opened on November 23, 2001.

The morning program was in Spanish and consisted of singing and music by the school at Km 11, speeches by the Mennonite dignitaries (Abram Schmidt, Peter Rempel, Rev. David Friesen) and honoured Government officials (Leopoldo Mares as the representative of the State Governor and Israel Beltran Montes, mayor of Cuauhtemoc). Abram Heide from the Museum board chaired the meeting.

The dedication ribbon was cut by the State officials, and the amenities and artifacts were viewed. This was followed by a lunch for all the officials and friends of the Museum.

Already the day before, the women had prepared the noddles at the Seniors Homes at Km. 14 and so the tasty noddles were served at the opening and also Wrenetje, farmer sausage (Rauchwurst) and waffles with sauce--traditional

foods for the Mennonites.

After dinner there were presentations in German, films were shown, oats were threshed, a parade of old equipment and buggies pulled by horses was held, where individuals could go along for a ride and much more. The following day, oats sheaves were made with a binder and John Deere on steel.

“It was the right weather for threshing,” said Abram Krahn Friesen, No. 110, who stooked the sheaves into the threshing machine on Nov. 23, the day the museum was official opened. “This is exactly how it also was formerly. It was cold and stormy and the dust blew into one’s eyes.”

Abram Krahn purchased this threshing machine (Kasten) at an auction sale the previous year for 1775 pesos. It previously belonged to Jakob Friesen, No. 65. Mr. Krahn is interested in seeing to it that old artifacts which belonged to the Mennonites shall remain in Mexico.

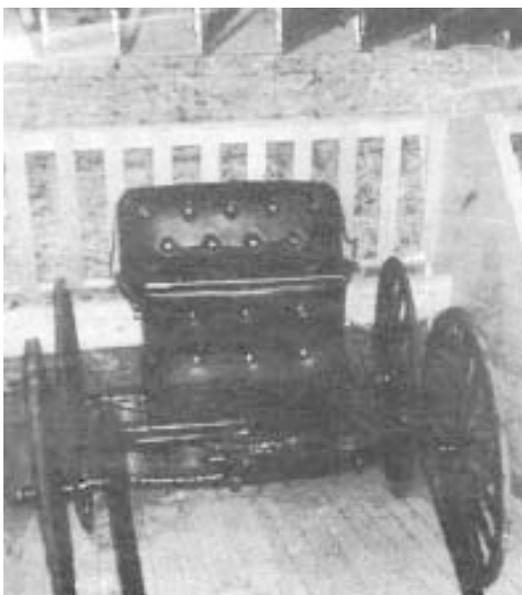
Mr. Krahn also donated an “A” John Deere

(possibly from the year 1940), to the Museum. He had grown up with such a tractor. People had often wanted to buy it off him, but he always replied that it had no price. It had previously belonged to the widow Cornelius Martens, No. 118.

After the work, the threshermen went into the house and said, they were now tired from all the threshing and were hungry for Vesper.

The more than 400 oats sheaves were sold in No. 69 for \$1.00 each, which was very cheap. But it was simultaneously also a donation to the Museum. Some 400 sheaves were threshed and the rest were processed through the hammermill and some were compressed.

The sheaves were bound in No. 69 with a binder and tied with binder twine. In the old days, the farmers worried about how they would get the sheaves set up to dry on the field, two by two, or in a round pile. Consequently the sheaves were shaped, also making it somewhat easier to load them onto the wagon in the right way.



*A two-seater buggy with wooden wheels stands in the stall of barn in the Museum. Photo by Aganetha Rempel Quitana and courtesy of Men. Post, Dec. 21, 2001, page 3.*



*A Mennonite kitchen in the new Museum in Mexico. An old sewing machine is also in the kitchen (left, not on photo). The utensil cupboard is also used as the wash stand. Mexico. Photo by Aganetha Rempel Quitana and courtesy of Men. Post, Dec. 21, 2001, page 3.*

# Caja Solidaria - Nuevo Ideal

“Caja Solidaria - Nuevo Ideal, Mexico,”

by Jorge Reimer, from *Kurze Nachrichten*, as published in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Dec. 21, 2001.

It is amazing how the “Caja Solidaria” in Nuevo Ideal has grown.

On November 28, 2001, the day that the storm was at its worst--the way storms can strike only in this region--the new building of the “Caja Solidaria” was opened. (The “Caja Solidaria” is somewhat like a Credit Union.)

The State Governor, Angel Sergio Guerrero Mier together with General Isaac Jimenez Garcia, Commandant of the Decima Military Zone, came out to take part in this important event and to officially open it. Mennonites also came as never before and demonstrated that the storm could not keep them from the ceremony either.

After the eminent officials had been shown through the building, they were invited into the auditorium, where Ing. Jose Miquel Escobar Hernandez explained how this institution had been founded on April 27, 1993. The “Caja Solidaria” started with 912 shareholders (members), from the entire municipal region with 1,645,300 pesos divided into two funds.

The “Caja” started operations on June 30 and by the end of the year, 641 loans had been made in the total amount of 939,756 pesos. Savings account transactions were only made in the amount of 12,900 pesos. The surplus in the first six months was 110,934 pesos.

Today, after eight years and five months, thanks to the trust of the members, and the assistance of the government, this “Caja” has grown so that today there are 3,062 members divided into 13 committees. The operating capital has increased to 33,562,804 pesos. During this time, loans have been made in the amount of 85,418,000 pesos, with which various projects have been supported.

At present, customers and members hold a total of 1648 savings accounts, adding up to a total of 15,806,000 pesos.



On November 28, 2001, this modern building was opened for the “Caja Solidaria” where many Mennonites were attendance although the storm was very severe. Photo by Jacob Wall, courtesy of Men. Post, Dec. 21, 2001, page 20.

At the conclusion of his speech, Mr. Escobar Hernandez also mentioned that the institution was qualified to deal with and process any government grants and programs such as “credito a la palabra” (easy credit), “credito puente” (intern loans until the Government Pro Campo money arrives), etc.

“We have the capacity to administer all Government programs,” concluded Mr. Escobar.

Finally, placards of recognition were awarded, of which two also went to Mennonites, Heinrich S. Braun and Johann H. Wall.

At the present time, the “Caja Solidaria” is the most modern in the land. Another important feature of this institution is that it has more Mennonites as members than local Mexicans. The lead-

ership is satisfactory and Mennonites are also included among the directors.

**Editor’s Note:** The Nuevo Ideal Colony was founded by the Old Colony Mennonites from Hague Osler, Saskatchewan, in 1922. It is situated about 75 miles northwest of the City of Durango with 35,000 acres. Among the leaders were delegates Benjamin Goertzen (1873-1929) (see *Old Colony Men. in Can.* (Steinbach, 2001), pages 122-4) and Johann P. Wall, also the first Ältester. 17 villages were established. More land was later purchased. The population of the Durango Colony was 3,281 in 1953. In 2001 the Old Colony Gemeinde at Nuevo Ideal had 2614 baptised members and 7533 souls.



“Think of it, how small we started, and the progress we have made,” Miquel Escobar seems to be saying to the State Governor and the other officials. The “Caja Solidaria” is presently the most modern in the country. Another feature of this institution is that it has more Mennonites as members than indigenous Mexicans. Mennonites are included among the board of directors. Photo by Jacob Wall, courtesy of Men. Post, Dec. 21, 2001, page 20.



Little Ms. Klassen thinks it sure takes a lot of hands to hold and cut a silk ribbon. But President Villa and the State Governor Guerrero Mier, as well as General Isaac Jimenez Garcia, were proud to be a part of this dedication ceremony. The Mennonites in this region, once covered with cactus and low brush, are always coming more to the forefront. Photo by Jacob Wall, courtesy of Men. Post, Dec. 21, 2001, page 20.

# Agricultural Minister Usabiaga Visits Mennonites

Federal Agricultural Minister Usabiaga Visits Mennonites, Nov. 10, 2001,  
by Bram Siemens, from the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 21, Nov. 20, 2001, pages 1-2.

On November 10, 2001, the Mennonites in the Cuautemec regions were honoured with an important guest.

For the farmers he is the most important man in Mexico, possibly the most important in the entire country, next to the President.

The Agricultural Minister visited the communal mill on the Highway near Campo 102

that this competition will get stronger. We cannot anticipate that the Government will take us out of the process of globalization. All the countries that do not follow the process have many more problems than we do, e.g. Cuba and China.

In Mexico, supports have been misused. Subsidies can remove us from the realities. The Mexican Government has problems seeing to it that

The government does not come now with promises but rather to offer joint projects, and in order to solve the problems of the land. The problems of the farmers will be solved by the farmers, and by no one else. If the government offers something which does not help the farmers, it is money thrown away.

It is necessary to find cheaper energy sources.



Three efficient, friendly young women served everybody at the meeting with the Agricultural Minister with coffee, cheese, cookies, sausage, and other goodies. They are the daughters of the Executive Committee of the Unipro: l.-r.: Tina (daughter of Peter Elias), Lisa (daughter of Peter Wiebe), and Becky (daughter of Abram Wall). Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 20 Nov., 2001, page 1.



A tasty meal was served at the meeting with the Agriculture Minister Ing. Javier Usabiaga which was praised by all in attendance. From left, Peter Wiebe, Campo 108, Ing. Usabiaga, Tina (daughter of Pete Wiebe) serving coffee and Senator Jeffrey Jones. Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 20 Nov., 2001, page 1.

[Blumenheim, Swift Colony]. An opportunity was provided here for a host of representatives (cattle breeders, apple growers, crop farmers, etc.), to present their concerns, before he spoke to the farmers for approximately half an hour.

The following are a number of extracts from his speech.

He was pleased to have the opportunity to be among the Mennonites. He gave recognition to the German community. The Mennonites have made progress through their exertion and creativity. Through discipline they have become an example for the entire country. He acknowledged that the community is grounded in religion, thrift and contentment.

There are many problems, and yet, we cannot solve them all at the same time, rather we must focus on one at a time.

On the theme of the problems brought about by commercialization:

- 1) When too much is offered;
- 2) When insufficient money does not allow ideas to be tried;
- 3) When the competence is lacking.

Slowly we will learn how to sell the products. The infrastructure is slowly getting better.

The international competition will not disappear overnight. We have to prepare ourselves

the producer himself receives the money. Then he himself can decide how he wants to spend it....

He was surprised how poorly the farmers in this region were informed about various government programs. When the concerns are large, our efforts must be even larger. Farmers have many opportunities at hand, much more so than previously.



Many farmers and businessmen came out for the meeting with the Agricultural Minister. One can see, that the various colonies were represented. Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 20 Nov., 2001, page 2.

# “Hoffnungsheim” Starts New Era

“Hoffnungsheim, Starts New Era.” by Bram Siemens, from the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 21, Nov. 20, 2001, pages 1-2.

After more than eight years, the “Hoffnungsheim” has started a new era, a new direction has been set (see *Pres.*, No. 19, page 79). Bill Ennses of Canada are busily engaged in trying to fix the right direction in this change.

Goals and objectives are good, but insufficient. They must also be carried out. Then, however, arises the question, what is the direction, what is the goal for which to strive, and how does one get there.

The goal is quite simple and should be clear to everyone: “To treat the residents--be they handicapped physically or mentally--the way we would want to be treated.

And yet, how can this be achieved? All human beings, including you and me, want to feel that we are worth something in life and that we can also

contribute something for which we can be recognized. This feeling is all the more important for the handicapped. Often they are written off in the community. They are made to feel worthless, and in many cases they are actually mocked.

It is different in the Hoffnungsheim. Here every resident can contribute something. They feel rewarded when they can work with screwing or putting books together. They are provided with a feeling of self-worth.

More facilities need to be provided in the home so that handicapped who are living at home can be brought here to participate.

The anniversary was held on November 4, some 8 1/2 years after the home opened. The committee did not only want to celebrate the anniversary, rather to include the change in policy and to publicize it.

The residents gladly told the visitors, what they are able to do in the home, and when they were asked, how things were going for them, they replied everytime, “Very well”.

“What is it that you enjoy?”

“The work,” they replied.

One can truly conclude that the work brought satisfaction, since it provides a feeling of worth, and their work is praised.

“In a case such as this, one should never criticize the workers; it is always better to make a suggestion.”

If they do something wrong, one should not say, “You shall not do it like that.”

It is better to suggest, “Why don’t you rather try it like this? Then things will go much easier or faster,” explained Bill Enns.

House parents are desperately needed, since the Bill Ennses are planning to leave shortly. Also, even if they should return, they see their work as being more in other directions, to build up the home, rather than as house parents.

What kind of people can be house parents? There is no profile. There are enough folks living in the villages here, that would make very good house parents. If they have love and yieldedness, the rest can easily be learned. Bill Ennses would gladly explain to the house parents what they need to do to be good house parents.

There was much singing on the program, also much was said. It is always especially moving when the workers together with the residents sing the song, “Gott ist die Liebe.”

Rev. Cornelius Wall, Kronsgarten, also shared many important words. He encouraged to do good without ceasing (According to Galatians 9:7). He who has seeded the good seed will also reap the good harvest. Those who work with such a home in the right spirit can also expect a good reward in Heaven.

Rev. Wall also encouraged thankfulness. When we hear of the people in Afghanistan, how they are freezing in the mountains, we have no grounds to complain.

The Johann Harms’ from Lowe Farm brought a song and a poem. The Harms family sang the song according to the melody, “Grosser Gott wir loben dich.” They are especially thankful that their sister Lena can live in “our Hoffnungsheim.”



The residents and the workers in the Hoffnungsheim sat on one side of the meeting room in the home during the 8th anniversary program. They were very glad that people had thought of them. Some 600 guests had turned out. Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 20 Nov., 2001, page 3.



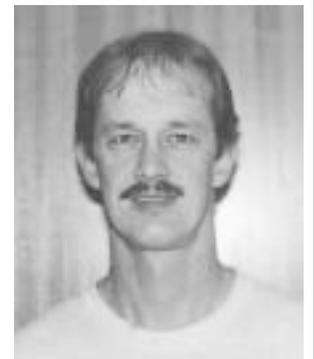
The Old Colony youths under the leadership of Franz Dycks and Bernhard Loewens, sang three songs at the anniversary. They have a singing hour every Tuesday evening. Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 20 Nov., 2001, page 4.



The Franz Dyck family, Campo 22, sang three songs at the program for the 8th anniversary of the Hoffnungsheim. Their enthusiasm could be heard in these songs. Franz Dyck is also a member of the Old Colony School Board for the Manitoba Colony. Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 20 Nov., 2001, page 4.

## New Editor

Kennert Giesbrecht of Loma Plata, Menno Colony, Paraguay, has been appointed editor of *Die Mennonitische Post*, to replace Abe Warkentin. Kennert brings nearly 10 years of writing and editing experience to the position. He has been a teacher and principal for the last 10 years. He speaks Low German, High German, Spanish and English. Kennert and his wife, Gredel, have three children. MCC Release.



Kennert Giesbrecht

# A Trial Becomes a Success

“A Trail Becomes a Success,” by Bram Siemens, from the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 18, October 1, 2001, page 1-2.

There were only few hammermills in the vil-lages in Mexico in the beginning years, 1922 and after. The hammermills were used to chop the feed. In many (in most) villages, there was only one or perhaps a pair of hammermills which were used in order to provide the entire village with chopped feed.

The machines were brought out of the U.S.A. They were used machines powered by a tractor with an endless belt.

Abram Olfert had a small blacksmith shop in Reinland, where he produced childrens' wagons. Together with Johann Loewen he wanted to construct a hammermill. For various reasons Johann Loewen was unable to finish the work, although he had already cut a few of the pieces. In the meantime, Jakob Peters worked in the smithy for Abram Olfert. Each piece had to be measured, calculated, cut, bent, welded or screwed together. After some two months the hammermill was ready...

In the meantime, four hammermills had been ordered. When they were completed the switch was made to mass production. At the most, 50 hammermills were in production at one time. Soon the production exceeded what was being sold in the villages. The market was expanded. Sonora, Sinaloa, Zacatecas and other States were important user, as over 800 hammermills were produced per year. A Gerhard Dyck lived in Sonora and sold the hammermills there.

The beginning was difficult as they had to work with limited equipment. Iron plates, which had to be round, were cut with a chisel. Peter Giesbrecht, father-in-law of Jakob Peters, made the press which



*Abram Olfert, km. 17, and Jakob Peters Rempel, Campo 4 (Reinland), stand beside the first hammermill made in the villages in Mexico. Abram Olfert is one of the leading entrepreneurs among the Mexican Mennonites and also has substantial interests in apple orchards as well as a large apple packing plant. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, Nr. 18, Okt. 1, 2001, page 1.*

cut the 1/8th inch tin plates. The roller for bending was made by Peters.

Hammermills are still being made today, but the

market is limited, partially because much feed is being rolled instead of milled, especially in the U.S.A.

## A Wonderful Gift

### The History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church 1894-2000

This book contains many names, dates and much information regarding the first 100 years of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church in Manitoba. It is the first history of the second largest Mennonite denomination in Manitoba and mother church to numerous congregations across Canada and in Latin America. To God be the Glory. 308 pages, 8x11, hard cover.

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# Factory for Large Trailers in Schönfeld

“Factory for Large Trailers in Schönfeld,”

by Bram Siemens, from the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, Nr. 20, Nov. 5, 2001, page 2.

The first trailer was completed in the spring of this year [2001] and in the beginning of November it was bought by Peter Fehr, Manitoba Colony, to haul gravel and earth. The second trailer was sold to Heinrich Froese, La Honda.

Why would someone produce these trailers?

Jakob Banman, the owner of the factory, explains that he was searching for alternatives. Things with crop farming were always getting more difficult and at the same time, there was always a need for more jobs.

The heavy diskers (sod cutters) do not bring a good income either, because the income of the farmers is so restricted.

Therefore he wanted to produce something which would also have a greater market in the outside. This idea seemed to be the right one. It appeared as if the demand would be sufficient.

The trailers have a wind suspension which allows heavier loads to be carried. The government also has a set of regulations regarding such construction which must be followed.

“Yet, it is generally possible to fulfil these requirements,” says Banman.



*Jakob Banman (left) owner, Campo 106, and Isaak Dyck (assemblyman), stand in front of a grain trailer produced in the Banman factory. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, Nr. 20, Nov. 5, 2001, page 2.*

# Forces of Destruction

## Forces of destruction.

The devastated landscape featured on the cover of this issue (*Cdn. Men.*, April 22/02) calls attention to the horrifying destruction of home and community that people in many places are experiencing these days. The photograph shows what was left after a volcanic eruption sent lava flowing into the Congolese town of Goma in January. It's a surreal image, reminiscent of a barren lunar landscape or a petrified wasteland from which all life has fled.

The destructive forces of nature can chill the soul. But even more chilling is the human capacity for destruction, arising from desperation, fear and hate. We saw it in New York and in Afghanistan. These days we see it most clearly in Palestine where two leaders schooled in terror are trying to break a deadlock that has tortured this region for so many years.

Meanwhile, thousands of peaceful civilians, Palestinian and Israeli, are paying the price of this terrible conflict. The rubble of towns and refugee camps is an image of the spiritual devastation grinding down this region of the world.

Pleas for peace are coming from many quarters. In early April, a World Council of Churches delegation joined Christian leaders of many denominations in a march for peace in Jerusalem. The marchers passed through angry crowds, holding olive branches and white ribbons. They walked to the homes of the Israeli prime minister and the U.S. consul, offering prayers and pleading for an end to the violence.

Their pleas went unheard. Then they marched to Bethlehem, but Israeli tanks blocked the way to the site of Jesus' birth.

While churches and governments are not having much success in ending the conflict, there is some unusual activity at the front lines. Israeli peacemakers sat with Yassir Arafat in his headquarters while their army attacked. Some 44 monks and nuns holed up with Palestinian soldiers inside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, saying they were prepared to starve to death rather than leave this sacred shrine to the destroyers.

But one of the most amazing protests is coming from within the Israeli army itself. Soldiers in growing numbers are refusing to serve in the occupied territories. Calling them-

selves "conscientious objectors," these soldiers object to Israel's "collective punishment" of the Palestinian people. And they cite their own scriptures in defence of their actions.



*Captured Palestinians in Ramallah lie under the guns of a tank as Israelis press siege. Modern tanks and attack helicopters vs. Molotov cocktails and rifles, shades of the Warsaw uprising in WWII. Photo from the Wpg. Sun, March 31, 2002, page 5.*



*Violence and military action continues in Israel and Palestine. Map from the Wpg. Sun, March 31, 2002, page 5. Since 1967 over 200,000 Jewish settlers have built illegal settlements in the West Bank, relegating the native Palestinians to a number of neo-colonial Bantustan ghettos, separated from each other by roads controlled and patrolled by Israeli tanks and checkpoints.*

According to the April *Globe and Mail*, there are now 370 such military "refuseniks," with more joining every week.

"These men are not peaceniks or pacifists," wrote Russell Banks, an American novelist who met with these men recently. "They are Zionists, university-educated, articulate, patriotic sons of Israel, and their stand has become in these terrible dark days the most serious challenge that anyone has put to Israel's moral credibility from inside the family."

What made them conscientious objectors to Israeli policy? Duty in the West Bank and other Palestinian territories. There they saw the refugee camps, the violent destruction of whole neighbourhoods and villages, the deliberate humiliation of the checkpoints and the appalling encroachment of the Jewish settlements.

Banks concluded that "nothing really compares" to this long-standing conflict. So many plans have been proposed; so many have failed. But he couldn't help feeling "ever-so-slightly uplifted" by these military men who refused to serve. Perhaps if enough refuse to serve, the negotiations for peace will have to begin. Margaret Loewen Reimer, managing editor - reprinted with permission from *Cdn. Mennonite*, April 22/02, page 2.

## Pleas from Palestine.

A pastor from Beit Sahour near Bethlehem was a student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 1988. The following is from an April 2 message to friends.

We are very much in need of your prayers during these evil and dark hours. Although we live exactly one mile from the very place where the Prince of Peace was born, we are facing the most powerful military machine on earth.

The Israeli tanks are all over our town. They are destroying the infrastructure of our community: water pipelines, roads, the sewage system, electricity, and all service facilities.

When a girl of 16 blew up herself and Israelis with her, the western media said this is terrorism, but no one bothered to ask what pushed this teenager to commit suicide. She had lost her father by the hands of the Israeli soldiers, her home was destroyed, and she lost any hope in life.

I am not trying to justify killing, but I am trying to clarify why people resort to desperate means. I believe that the only solution is to establish a Palestinian State beside the State of Israel, so we can enjoy freedom like any other nation.

I can tell you tens of stories about families who literally have nothing in their homes. As a result of the siege which we have been enduring for one and a half years, unemployment in Bethlehem area has risen to more than 85 percent.

I can tell stories of people who now live with their relatives in crowded apartments, and other cases of people who have lost all hope. There is a big financial need, but the main need is real peace and justice. Please pray for us.

-Bassam Bannoura - reprinted with permission from *Cdn. Men.*, April 22/02, page 14.

### Convoys to West Bank bringing aid.

The first aid convoy of three trucks and 10 other vehicles entered the West Bank town of Nablus on April 9 carrying food for besieged Palestinians.

Mennonite Central Committee is participating in the convoys that will go every other day to bring food, blankets and medicine to occupied areas.

Although Israeli forces have restricted access to many West Bank communities, the convoy was allowed in. Alain Epp Weaver, MCC worker in Jerusalem, accompanied the aid.

"The dust-covered, pockmarked streets of Nablus, torn up and bulldozed by the Israeli military this past week, were empty, the city a ghost town," said Epp Weaver. "All along the main road...we saw demolished homes and stores, cars smashed by tanks."

The convoys are being organized by various Christian organizations. Another one was scheduled to go to Bethlehem on April 15. MCC has designated \$70,000 so far for relief.

MCC workers serving in the Middle East are safe, reported MCC on April 15. Ed Nyce from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is a peace education worker in Bethlehem. Alain and Sonia Epp Weaver and their two children, from Bluffton, Ohio, live in Jerusalem.

Janet and Rick Janzen, who direct MCC Middle East programs out of the Winnipeg MCC office, left for Jerusalem on April 16 to assess the situation.

Our workers have contingency plans in place should their safety become threatened, said Janet.

MCC has been working with Palestinians since 1949, when it responded to the refugee crisis created by the formation of the State of Israel. MCC projects are now largely on hold as Palestinian staff find it extremely difficult to travel to their jobs because of Israeli restrictions.

"Palestinian society is educated and developed. That relief aid is once more necessary...is a sad statement as to how badly things have deteriorated," noted Epp Weaver.

-MCC releases - reprinted with permission from *Cdn. Men.*, April 22/02, page 14.

### Israeli soldiers protest occupation.

Some Israeli soldiers are openly opposing Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, and have refused to serve there.

"Our rule over three million Palestinian Arabs in the territories has forced put us in a position of committing a number of moral outrages," state these objectors within the Israeli

Defense Forces.

These outrages include "collective punishment" to Palestinians by "enclosing" them and denying them basic human rights.

These soldiers cite Abraham as "the first conscientious objector to collective punishment." Abraham appealed to God not to destroy entire cities. Their statement, available on the Internet at [www.seruv.org.il/YahadutEng.asp](http://www.seruv.org.il/YahadutEng.asp), also appeals to other passages in the Torah that warn against harming innocents.

"If we do not want to be cursed, we have to decline to participate in these actions, even if we have to refuse to serve in the territories altogether.... there ain't no such animal as an enlightened occupation."

At least 20 reservists have been imprisoned for refusing to serve in the territories. A statement from reserve combat officers declares that they are willing to defend Israel, but not to continue "this War of the Settlements" in order to "dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people."

-From Internet, reprinted with permission from *Cdn. Men.*, April 22/02, page 15.

### Further Reading:

Rob Granatstein, "The genesis of an unholy war: Making sense of Israeli-Palestinian crisis," *Wpg. Sun*, Sunday, April 7/02, pages 10-11.

Marianne Meed Ward, "Endtimes lens," *Christianweek*, April 20, 2002, page 3.

## The war over Palestine

- 70 AD** Jerusalem destroyed by Romans and Jews dispersed. Judea renamed Palestina in 135.
- 640** Arab conquest brings Muslims.
- 1100-1250** Crusaders conquer.
- 1517** Ottoman Turks rule until 1917.
- 1897** First Zionist Congress names Palestine as Jewish homeland (population less than 10% Jewish).
- 1917** Britain captures Palestine, Arabs promised autonomy. Massive immigration of Jews. UN recommends partition.
- 1948** Israeli War of Independence; 780,000 Palestinian refugees.
- 1967** Six-Day War. Israel occupies Sinai, Golan Heights, Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem.
- 1973** Egypt and Syria attack Israel to regain territories. Defeated.
- 1987** First Intifada (Palestinian attacks on Israeli soldiers).
- 1993** Oslo accords outline gradual Palestinian self-rule. Jewish settlements continue to expand.
- 2000** New Intifada. Severe restrictions on Palestinian life.
- 2002** Israeli military attacks Palestinian areas.

*The War over Palestine.* From *Cdn. Mennonite*, April 22, 02, page 15.



Cartoon from the *Wpg Sun*, March 31, 2002. On Sunday, April 8, 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush demanded withdrawal of Israeli armies from the occupied West Bank. As of May 3, Israel had not complied notwithstanding that the U.S. provides it with \$3 billion in aid annually. Human rights organizations reported on May 3, 2002, evidence that abuses had taken place in the Israeli attack on the Jenin refugee camp with killing of innocent civilians and the use of women and children as human shields. The Israeli Government did not allow a special U.N. delegation access to Jenin to investigate Palestinian allegations that a massacre of civilians had taken place. See "Untangling Jenin's Tale," in *Time*, May 13, 2002, pages 31-40.

# Articles

## D. W. Friesen 1879–1951, Altona - Community Builder

David W. Friesen (1879 – 1951) Altona, Manitoba, “Entrepreneur and Community Builder.” A Tribute by Sons Ted, John and David Friesen. Compiled by Ted Friesen, Box 720, Altona, Manitoba, Canada, R0G 0B0.

### Introduction.

When the Mennonite people came to Manitoba in 1874-6, a whole new way of life and world was opening up. Four generations earlier they had made a new start on the fertile steppes of southern Russia. The Canadian west presented a formidable challenge, but they had burned their bridges behind them. There was no life link to a mother colony, they were completely on their own. Their faith, their common resolution, their strong communal organization and ties had brought them here and would sustain them.

The Mennonites had left behind them the continent in which there were 400 years of bitter experiences. There was persecution, flight, re-settlement, differences within the Church, a hostile environment, not only with nature but also with man. All this they had left behind. Their dream was that in the New World there would be no heritage of oppression—social political or religious. Yet the New World also looked hostile, not only the natural environment, but also the native people whose lands they took over. There was a tension between these people and all the white settlers that encroached on their lands, culminating in the Riel Rebellion of 1885.

True the government had made land grants and given credit to the Mennonite pioneers, and also guaranteed special responsibilities in the *Privilegium* such as freedom of worship, education and the maintenance of their own institutions and lifestyle. It was an autonomous commonwealth in many ways within a larger political and social framework.

### The Friesens.

We can trace the lineage of my father, D. W. Friesen, back six generations to Jacob Friesen, Grützmacher (grist miller), listed in the village of Lindenau, Kreis (District) Elbing in West Prussia in the 1776 Konsignation.

Jacob's son Martin (b. 1760), occupation tailor, came to Southern Russia in 1795 and settled in the village of Rosenthal where he is listed as “Martin Vriesen” (short for “von Riesen”) owner of Wirtschaft 39 with 4 horses, 10 cows, 1 plow and 2 wagons in the Revision of 1801 (*Diese Steine*, page 662) as well as in 1802 (Unruh, page 252). By 1803 Martin Friesen had relocated to Burwalde (Unruh, page 213). The Martin Friesen family is listed on Wirtschaft 1 in Burwalde in the 1808 Revision: “Marg. 22, Elis. 20, Jakob 15, Agatha 13, Joh. 4, Abr. 2, Mart. 7 and Magd. 1/4; Property: 7 horses, 11 cattle, 5 hogs, 1/2 plow, 1 drill, 1 wagon, 1 spinning wheel, 30 Tschetwert grain and 24 wagons of hay” (Unruh, page 274), (see H. Schapansky, “Bergthaler Friesens,” *Pres.*, No. 11, page 33).

Martin's son Jacob Friesen (1793-1843) (BGBA15) was among the 145 pioneer families

that founded the five villages of the Bergthal Colony. The new daughter colony was strategically located 30 km. northwest of the seaport of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. This guaranteed the settlers direct access to the lucrative European grain market, something not possible in the “old” mother colonies. Jakob died shortly after the founding of the new settlement, but he was probably typical of these settlers, sons and grandsons of the Vollwir then of Chortitza who saw the daughter Colony as a strategy to perpetuate their centuries-old, household-economy farming tradition.

Jakob's son Johann Friesen (1833-60) (BGB B137) married Katharina Falk (b. 1835) (BGB A7). Katharina remarried to Abraham Friesen



A. D. Friesen, half-brother to D. W. Friesen, standing at the gravestone of his father, David Friesen, who died in 1893. The cemetery [in 1974] was still in fairly good condition at the site where the village of Schönsee used to be located (what was called at the time) on the “High-Ridge” from Grunthal to Steinbach. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History (Grunthal, 1974), page 59.

(b. 1831) (BGB B203), her first husband's cousin (BGB A2). Katharina and first husband Johann were the parents of David Friesen (1856-93), later of Schönsee, East Reserve.

### The Klippensteins.

On Mother's side the first recorded forebear is Berend Klippenstein (1781-1841) born in Krebsfelde, Prussia, who came to Southern Russia in 1804 (Unruh, page 304). Bernhard was recorded in the village of Neu-Osterwick in 1814 in the Old Colony, Wirtschaft No. 12 (Unruh,

page 283).

Sons Peter (1819-85) (BGB A114) and Johann Klippenstein (1809-77) (BGB A26) and daughter Katharina, Mrs. Johann Neufeld (1811-92) (BGB A63/39/75), also moved to the new Bergthal settlement. Peter lived in the village of Heuboden where he served as village Schulze. In Manitoba, Peter settled in Chortitz, E.R. serving as the first Secretary of the R. M. of Hanover in 1880 (*Pres.*, No. 13, page 109-10).

Brother Johann Klippenstein (1809-77) served as a deacon of the Bergthal Gemeinde. His son Peter (1831-1904) was the teacher in the village of Bergthal, compiling a *Rechnenbuch*, with outstanding *Fraktur* art (*Pres.*, No. 13, pages 114-16). In 1875 Johann Sr. served as the leader of the immigration party. He and his sons settled in Chortitz, Rosenthal and Bergthal, East Reserve.

Son Johann Klippenstein (1845-1923) (BGB B272) married Agatha Friesen (b. 1843), daughter of Bergthal pioneer Abraham (BGB A2). The Johann Klippenstein family settled in Rosenthal, East Reserve, two miles northwest of Chortitz. They were among the first to move west across the Red River in 1879, settling in Gnadenfeld, West Reserve, together with brother-in-laws Abraham, Jakob and Heinrich Friesen (BGB 1881 census, page 369). Shortly thereafter Johann Klippenstein relocated to the “old” Altona village.

It is interesting to observe that Johann Klippenstein's wife Agatha Friesen was the sister to Abraham, who had married his cousin Johann's widow Katharina Falk (see above). Another brother Martin Friesen, Neubergthal, W.R., was the father of Johann M. Friesen (1865-1932), Bergthaler minister and Inspector of Mennonite Schools from 1906-9.

### David Friesen, Schönsee, E.R.

My grandfather David Friesen (1856-93), his mother, step-father and their family crossed the ocean on the S. S. Manitoba (BGB, page 309) arriving in Quebec City, July 20, 1875. The extended Friesen family settled in the village of Schönsee, East Reserve, located approximately 12 miles southwest of Steinbach, see “Brottschuld Registers”, *Pres.*, No. 8, Part Two, page 41.

Matrilocal connections have played an important role in determining where Mennonite families settled. This was certainly true of Schönsee. The village consisted of two clans connected by sisters: the family of Kornelius Wiebe (1821-96) whose second wife Helena Klassen was a sister to Justina Klassen, wife of minister Franz Dyck (1822-87) (see *Pres.*, No. 11, pages 81-83 for biography).

David Friesen married Anna Wiens, youngest daughter of Helena Klassen by her first mar-

riage to Johann Wiens (BGB A87). According to the Seelenliste of 1883 all but two of the families in Schönsee were connected to one or both of these families (*Working Papers*, pages 157-8). Daughter Anna Wiebe (b. 1858) married Peter B. Wiebe and they were the parents of Dr. C. W. Wiebe, Winkler, recently honoured with the Order of Canada. Daughter Maria Wiebe (1869-1952) (and a half sister to Anna Wiens), who married Johann Peters, later recalled some of the pioneering experiences at Schönsee: "...My father made our shoes which he carved out of wood....Our home was a crude structure, but we managed to keep warm during the winter months...The food we ate was simple and consisted chiefly of beans, which we brought from Russia, noodles, bread and milk. We had a cow that provided the family with milk....After a few years we also had a few sheep so mother spun the wool and knit us stockings. Our beverage consisted of 'prips'....We had a pair of oxen that served in various ways..." *Pres.*, No. 8, Part One, page 42, and *Men. Memories* (2d), pages 233-4. Several of these Wiebe families later lived in Wiedefeld, W.R., see Marjorie Wiebe Hildebrand, "Agatha Wiebe, Registered Nurse," *Pres.*, No. 14, pages 80-81 and *The Oak Tree* (Steinbach, 1995), pages 20-2.

When Anna Wiens died David Friesen remarried to Anna Klassen (1862-93), daughter of Jakob Klassen (b. 1836) and Helena Kehler of neighbouring Gnadenfeld (see *Pres.*, No. 15, page 92 for photo). The "Klassen Travel" folks of Winnipeg and Menno Colony, Paraguay, are from this line.

According to the Bergthaler insurance records David Friesen was fairly well set with a house-barn valued at \$125, furniture 75, wagon 40, plow 12, sleigh 10. On December 8, 1883, he added a machine shed valued at \$10 and on July 20, 1884, a new house-barn valued at \$180. Total insured value \$530. According to the 1883 tax records David Friesen was of medium wealth with a quarter of land (20 acres cultivated), buildings assessed at \$124 and furniture at \$72. Half of the villagers including David were already farming with horses, he owned a two-horse team. His dairy herd consisted of 3 cows, 2 yearlings and 3 calves. He also owned 7 sheep and 2 pigs. His machinery consisted of a feed crusher, mower, wagon, plow, sleigh and harrows.

The Friesen family history reveals that three generations of sons were orphaned by the deaths of their fathers at an early age. It is a tribute to their mothers, and sometimes step-mothers, that these young sons grew up to be productive and contributing members of their community. It is also a testimony to the traditional Mennonite benevolent institutions such as the Waisenamt and special inheritance Ordnung which made these achievements possible.

Growing up within a society permeated by mothers, step-mothers, grandmothers and step-siblings and an Ordnung which enshrined respect for them and their affairs may well have contributed to D. W. Friesen's deep and abiding appreciation for his family, church and culture. Certainly in his case and many others the investment of time and energy made by the community



*This was the birthplace of Abram D. Friesen (and presumably of "D. W.") in Schönsee, E.R., Manitoba. In 1893 the property was purchased by Jakob K. Klassen, standing in the photo. He was the brother to Anna Klassen, the second wife of David Friesen. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History (Grunthal, 1974), page 61. Today, the Schönsee area forms part of one of the most prosperous farming districts in Manitoba.*

in the widows, fatherless and orphans brought about abundant returns.

### The Early Years.

We know little about the early years, but can imagine that they were difficult ones. The land was virgin and in that particular area there was much bush and forest and stones of various sizes. It was situated on the edge of the Laurentian Shield. The Prairies started just a few miles to the west.

Father D. W. Friesen attended school in Schönsee until the death of his father in 1893. One of his teacher's of whom he always spoke very fondly was Peter Toews [probably Jakob B. "Busch" Toews], a member of the Holdeman Church who later moved to Linden, Alberta.

David's father having passed away his step-mother Anna Klassen remarried widower Cornelius Bergmann on October 26, 1893. Cornelius was the son of the wealthy miller Johann Bergmann of Reinland, West Reserve (*Pres.*, No. 16, page 123), and Sommerfelder Brandaltester (*Pres.*, No. 17, page 31)(BGB A 165). Cornelius Bergmann lived in the village of Lichtfeld, four miles west of Altona. Presumably it was at this time that David's mother and family moved to the West Reserve where they are listed in the Sommerfelder Gemeindebuch, 1B page 139. Here father spent his teens. He was baptised on the confession of his faith in the Sommerfelder Gemeinde on June 5, 1900 by Ältester Abraham Doerksen.

Mennonites settled in Manitoba in villages in the same patterns as they had had in Russia. This enabled them to start a pioneer existence in a hostile environment. They proved that it was possible to establish a commercial agricultural community on what had been bald prairie. This tightly-knit structure worked well. But it came under pressure from the society around it, resulting in the gradual breakup of the communal structure, eventually turning into the individualistic society we have today.

Father began farming in the village of Schönau west of Altona. But farming appar-

ently was not meant for him. He left the farm and moved to Altona where he started a farm implement business. The move at that time from farm to town was a radical one and the Church was apprehensive about it. But it would indicate that father was also looking for ways of fulfilment that the traditional agricultural vocation did not offer. It was an indication of courage and determination that we learned to know in our father. We know little about the first business venture. It must have had its frustrations since it lasted only a few years. But undoubtedly he had learned lessons that he was to apply in his later business life.

Father married Maria Kroeker in 1901, daughter of Kornelius Kroeker (1842-1918) and Margareta Peters, of Gnadenfeld, West Reserve (BGB B 171a, 1881 census, page 169). Margareta Peters was a niece to Oberschulze Jakob Peters (1813-84). Kornelius Kroeker was the son of Kornelius Kroeker Sr. (b. 1819) (BGB A182) who--on Nov. 24, 1874, while still in Russia--wrote a letter to Rev. David Stoesz, already living in Bergthal, East Reserve, Manitoba. It was natural that Father found his bride in Gnadenfeld, the village where his paternal grandmother and step-grandfather had pioneered years earlier.

Maria Kroeker died on June 2, 1907. Father then married my mother Sarah Klippenstein. She grew up in the village of Gnadenfeld and Old Altona. Her youth was spent there and from what she tells us it was a fairly idyllic one. Being the youngest child in the large Johann Klippenstein family, she undoubtedly escaped some of the harder experiences of pioneering times.

### New Horizons, 1907.

Life in Old Altona Village was a stable one. The social structure remained intact. Most of the inhabitants were members of the Bergthaler Church. Occasionally this calm was punctured with a dramatic event like the one in which a school teacher, Heinrich Toews shot three of his school children and attempted to commit suicide (see *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 98-100).

In 1907 father was a childless widower and mother a young widow with three small children. She was an extra ordinarily beautiful woman as her portraits show. Their's was a marriage of love and mutual dedication to each other all through their life. For father it meant taking over a family of three children. It also meant the beginning of a relationship to the Klippenstein clan. That was a new dimension in his life. The Klippenstein family were somewhat different from those of the Friesens. Father's family was more serious, perhaps because of the hardships and early death of his parents.

The Klippenstein's on the other hand as we know them expressed a joy in living. Theirs was a more relaxed way of life. Perhaps the key communality of the group contributed towards this. Mother's outlook on life was a positive one. The early experience of widowhood must have been a time of testing in character formation. But the marriage to my father was a happy one from the start. Soon the children came, David in 1910, John in 1912 and Anne in 1914. The family grew

up together. We believe that there was no discrimination against the first family, but that all were treated alike.

In the same year 1907 our parents also changed their church affiliation from the Sommerfelder to the Bergthaler. Again it must have been a courageous act on their part to separate from the traditional church in which the majority of their family were, to a new somewhat more assimilationist church. Again it characterized the courage and independent thought of father.

Father kept up with many friendships and relations in the East Reserve, as shown in a photo of a 1910 visit with a group of Schönseers, see *Pres.*, No. 13, pages 81/*Grunthal History*, page 59.

Early in life he was dedicated to strong religious and ethical principles and to objectives in which he firmly believed. These characteristics must have been recognized for on October 6, 1912 he was elected deacon in the local Bergthaler Church. The ordination took place on January

11, 1914. He filled this role faithfully for 35 years until his resignation in the summer of 1949. It is interesting to recall that because of his retiring, shy nature he was put into a position where he had to relate to people. He was a profound thinker and because of that there must have also been differences with the Church.

While he was well versed in Anabaptist and Mennonite history, his reading also went well beyond that. The writings of Tolstoi and Albert Schweitzer and others expanded the horizon of his thought and understanding. He also took an increasing interest in the world around him. We had much evidence of that later on in his life, especially in the religious sphere. His idealism instilled in him a longing for the church without spot and wrinkle. In any event the nature of life in the Church, even though it was characterized as the progressive church, must have had its disappointments. If it did, however, he was careful not to voice criticism. His loyalty was always exemplary, even if it was frustrating to us.



1900. The family of Cornelius Bergmann (b. 1861), Lichfeld, who ran as the conservative candidate against MLA Valentine Winkler in the 1907 Provincial election, see *Altona*, page 91. L.-r.: Maria Bergmann, C. C. Bergmann, Tina Bergmann, Mrs. Anna Klassen Friesen Bergmann (seated), Helena Friesen (Mrs. Johann), Kornelius W. Friesen, Katharina Friesen, Abram D. Friesen, David W. Friesen, Johann G. Friesen. Seated in front is daughter Agatha Bergmann, and daughter Anna Bergmann standing with father Cornelius Bergmann. Cornelius was a step-brother to Sommerfelder chronicler Bernhard Toews and teacher Heinrich Toews of Altona.

## Business.

The year 1907 was a significant milestone in his life. Besides entering into a second marriage, changing church affiliation, he also entered upon a new business venture. Apparently the farm machinery business was neither a rewarding nor a satisfying one. He had been looking around for other business ventures. The position of post-master was open and he applied for it. Despite the fact that there was at least one other serious competitor, he was awarded the position.

In addition he also added on a general store to the post office. Later the telephone office was established there. All of these were housed in the building on Main Street which had a frontage of 20 feet. On the north side of the interior was the post office and on the south side the general store. There was no separation except for the space for patrons and customers in the centre. Owner, family and staff got from one side to the other by a peripheral walk on the east side.

The beginning was difficult. It meant a lot of work for father and later the children, as they became old enough to help. It was a learning process for him who had little education to understand not only the business but also the world of officialdom. That he mastered these speaks of persistence, hard work and determination. That he could do this being the kind of person he was is a marvel indeed. His shy somewhat introspective nature made it hard for him to be that cordial backslapping type of person that we have come to associate with the successful public man. Then he also had a certain outlook on life that was characterized by principles. There may have been some superficial accommodation, but I don't think that there was ever a deep compromise. Certainly we were not given that impression.

## W.W.I.

Soon afterwards in August of 1914 the calm and stable world was shattered with the beginning of World War I. The events were far away. But they brought into focus the issues that had become dormant. The question of military participation raised assimilation into the larger society. Although not articulate, they were nevertheless very much in the minds of our people. Privileges such as military exemption and confessional schools were understood to be guaranteed. Yet the gradual eroding of school rights left nagging doubts in the minds of many people.

They recalled that they had left Russia to seek a new country where their way of life could be maintained. The loosening of the social structure, and the resulting acculturation into the society around them caused further concerns. That these remained unresolved in the minds of many shows the immigration out of Canada in the 1920s to Mexico and Paraguay. Those that remained had to find accommodation without doing violence to their own beliefs and value system. Ottawa kept its promise as far as military exemption was concerned. But the war did force people to face up to basic issues in their faith.

As a civil servant Father had to maintain loyalty to the country. That in itself was an accommodation, yet I believe not a contradiction. In his mind, a well being in the country was not contra-



*Inside the D. W. Friesen general store (merchandise), right side, and Post Office (boxes, rear), left side. L.-r.: Peter H. Dueck, clerk, D. W. Friesen, proprietor, and Peter Winter, clerk. The photo was also published in Altona, page 64.*

dictory to the tenets of faith. Anabaptist thinking had stressed this. Then there was the matter of German culture. Germany was an enemy. Again the community had to work this through. In some ways it contributed to the weakening of that culture. In other ways it strengthened it. The latter resulted from the need to maintain identity and group solidarity.

When the world recovered from the devastation of World War I, it gave impetus to strong growth in various areas including the economic one. Western Canada prospered and agricultural prices rose. The whole decade of the '20s was characterized by growth and affluence.

Despite the good times there were also problems in the community. One was the Gretna – Altona School District dispute which ended with the Altona School burning in 1926. This was an acrimonious issue and repeated attempts to conciliate failed. We do not know what Father's involvement was, but knowing his nature one would assume that he would have tried to work toward reconciliation.

## Business Growth.

Following the War there was family growth again. Three sons were added to the family, Arnold in 1918, Ted in 1920 and Ray in 1922. This completed the family. One takes well being for granted when a family is healthy. What contributes to this is proper care of mind, body and soul and the harmonious relationship between husband and wife which are also an essential part of this.

In 1923 Sarah the daughter of the first marriage was married to Diedrich H. Reimer. During the first years they lived in the family residence on Main Street. The first grandchildren came: Eileen in 1925 and Vera in 1928. Mother accepted the role of grandmother very naturally as women are apt to do. For father it was, because

of his nature somewhat different. His grandchildren looked upon him perhaps with the same degree of respect and perhaps with a bit of awe that his own children did.

Granddaughter Margaret writes: "Respect, awe and love from those who knew him. A yearning to have known better from a little girl, who only remembers being spanked for raising a fuss when she had to stay with him one afternoon."

The business grew slowly. At the earliest possible age each member of family participated. At first this was part time and later all the boys except John entered the family business on a full-time basis. The girls also worked as time permitted. Family business was a good training ground for the children. First of all it was under the supervision and guidance of father. We learned in early life some basic things. One was a respectful relationship to customers and to all people. The other was that service was an integral part of life. This ethic and motivation grew out of parental faith and experience. This school of experience is one that no member of the family ever regretted.

The growth of a business such as this in a small community naturally has its limitations. In spite of this father did as well as could be expected. His objective was not dramatic growth, but simply to earn enough to keep a family in a respectable situation and to provide for education and a future. The family lived comfortably if not extravagantly. The element of thrift was deeply ingrained. This sometimes frustrated the children, especially when contrasted with the lifestyle of some neighbours.

Despite father's involvement in the business and post office, his dedication to family, he also found time for other interests. He was secretary of a society that provided insurance particularly for the growing number of Mennonite businesses. This organization he served faithfully until



Altona Main Street as it appeared in the late 1920s. D. W. Friesen residence on the left. D. W. Friesen store and Post Office, just left of the largest building, the Hotel. View to the north. The photo was also published in *Altona*, page 103.

its winding up and dissolution and integration into the Red River Valley Mutual Insurance Company. Although it meant extra work, it also gave an opportunity to establish friendships with many businessmen throughout southern Manitoba.

#### The Deaconry.

Added to all these things, but also a very real part of his life and activity was the role of Deacon in the Church. In those days that role was larger than it is today. Besides assisting in the performance of ordinances, the Deacon was expected to visit the sick, comfort the distressed and be part of the Church discipline process.

It also meant being involved in a local worship service, in the event that no minister was present. I cannot remember him preaching a sermon, but occasionally he would read the sermon. He was also actively involved in Church discipline. Young people wanted drama and sports. The Church was against that. Father's role was that of a mediator. That came from the fact that he was part of the secular community which enabled him to fill that role. That produced tension not only in his own person, but also in the family.

His role as Deacon also involved him in many community projects. In 1903 a flood in the southern Manitoba area caused much suffering. Grain and food was collected. This was sent to new settlers in the area as well as to new settlers in Saskatchewan. During World War I also much money was donated to the Red Cross. Father was appointed to administer this. At this time also the work of charity included relief work in Europe and Asia which later was taken over by MCC.

He was also involved in the settling of the Russian Mennonites who came in the 1920s. I can remember some of the families installed in our home. These new immigrants were cultured and better educated. That caused some tension between the two groups. But our parents welcomed them with open arms.

Father had an understanding and sympathy for the new immigrants. This in no way reflected on that same understanding and tolerance for his own people. This applied not only to his own church but to the whole Mennonite community.

There was neither narrowness nor intolerance in his attitude. His association also awakened in him an interest in Mennonite history in general, and Russian Mennonite history in particular.

The Depression which followed the stock market crash in 1929, inevitably made its slow but sure impact upon the community and family. The program of restraint had its effect in small as well as large items. The cultivation of thrift and hard work helped him and so many others through these difficult years. Towards the end of the '30s there was a gradual improvement in the standard of living. But for father, I believe it reinforced the austerity that he had imposed upon himself, and that he believed to be consistent with his faith. We always knew our father to be a man of simple tastes and plain lifestyle. That was attested by the fact that one day a week he fasted and that rigorously for the rest of his life.



D. W. Friesen, behind the counter of his confectionery store, ca. 1907.

#### Family.

D. W. Friesen's sister Helena (1884-1960) married her second cousin Johann Friesen (1881-1916), Wiedefeld, W.R., and they were the parents of Rev. C. H. Friesen (1903-76), later of Grunthal, Manitoba.

D. W. Friesen's half-brother Abram D. Friesen also played a prominent role in the development of Altona, serving on the first village board and managing the Bergthaler Waisenamt, *Altona*, page 121 (see page 144 for photo); See also *Grunthal History*, pages 59-60.

#### Growth.

In 1932 the parents celebrated their Silver Wedding Anniversary. Father's notebooks record the speech he gave on that occasion. He speaks of the memorable events in their lives – births, marriages, and deaths. He pays tribute to mother's devotion and support. Throughout his talk there is the profound evidence of that deep faith that characterized his being.

Anne and Al were married September 13, 1936 and the next year Dave and Mary's wedding took place on July 4, 1937. In the '30s the business began branching out. Dave started a printing business on his own. He also expanded the school supply business and started a wholesaling of school and office supplies to stores within the area. This at the height of the Depression was a bold move. Father, despite his own courageous moves earlier in life, had become somewhat more cautious and reluctantly went along with Dave's plans.

The Town of Altona grew from a population in 1924 of 150 to over 1,000 in 1946. With it grew the services such as the post office. As business expanded and the two grew side-by-side, tensions inevitably developed. The first signs of incompatibility between the two began to show and there were times when questions and feelings arose as to where priorities ought to

be placed. This was not resolved until father's resignation as Postmaster in 1949. In the meantime business continued to expand, and with it, a modest growth of income and resulting standard of living.

#### A New Period.

This of course was the beginning of World War II in September, 1939. Many had seen the signs of an approaching calamity. In retrospect one can almost see the inevitability of events coming to a climax. This was the beginning of six years of war. A war that resolved some issues, and which raised many more. It was a war that precipitated a dissolution of old forms. It polarized political systems. It accelerated global problems: over-population; economic disparity; displaced people; proliferation of nuclear arms. The Canadian Mennonite community felt foreboding in the march of events. Mennonites had to come to terms with new realities.

Our family was very much a part of the larger society as well as maintaining strong ties and loyalties to the traditional Mennonite community. This produced dilemmas. We were all very much a part of what was going on around us. Our vocations became our interests and our friends made us very involved in community life. But we were also keenly interested and concerned with what was happening nationally and internationally.



L.-r.: Ray, David W., Sarah, Ted, John, ca. 1939.

Father tried to come to terms with this. His roots were in a traditional sectarian world of the Church and its religion and also with society in all its dimensions. But his life had also been influenced by contact with the world outside. The outside happenings strengthened some of the basic beliefs and convictions. The idea of peace-making and non-conformity was an example. His reading, his observations and his contacts with people all served to strengthen these. He had an appreciation for the gentle Anabaptist-Mennonite writers and leaders. So his was a pragmatic approach which at least resulted in enough accommodation to come to uneasy terms with the situation. His inner tensions were real and took their toll. They were

caused by a desire on the one hand, to retain the traditional values within the social context, and on the other hand to recognize the obligations and responsibilities that were due to the larger society.

These tensions were apparent in his own family. John and eventually Ray joined the Armed Services. Dave and I remained at home. Eventually I established a Conscientious Objectors Status. We often wondered what went through his mind during these years. He was not a communicative person. So we had to interpret what was not expressed. It took strength of will to maintain integrity and belief, while trying to understand family and society around him. His somewhat introverted nature made it difficult for him to do that.

But his own strength of character did not give up either. He was active in many ways. One was the acceptance as Treasurer for the Mission Board of the General Conference in the USA, which found it more expeditious to have a Canadian branch. Another activity was to be part of the founding of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. They published books on Mennonite History for the use of men in Non-combatant Services. The objective of the Society was to nurture the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Mennonites.

These years also saw many family events of note. There were the weddings: Ted and Linie's September 23, 1945. In the next year Ray and Kay's April 28, 1946. Two years later John and



Family of David W. Friesen (1879-1951) and Sarah Klippenstein (1882-1963), taken 1940. Back row standing, l.-r.: David K. Friesen (1910-91), holding Audrey, Mary Stobbe Friesen, Raymond C. Friesen (1922-90), John K. Friesen (b. 1912), Ted E. Friesen (b. 1920), Alfred Loewen (b. 1914) holding Gerald; sitting: Diedrich H. Reimer (1898-1961), Sarah Striemer Reimer, Vera Reimer, Sarah Klippenstein Friesen (1882-1963), David W. Friesen (1879-1951), Eileen Reimer Walker, Annie Friesen Loewen, Jocelyn Striemer, Mary Sawatzky Striemer, Henry H. Striemer (1904-75). This photo has also been published in *Altona*, page 205, and *Johann & Agatha Klippenstein*, page 105.



David W. Friesen (1879-1951), entrepreneur and community builder. Photo in Johann & Agatha Klippenstein, page 103.



Sarah Klippenstein Friesen (1882-1963), gracious matriarch. Photo in Johann & Agatha Klippenstein, page 103.

Marta on September 9, 1948. The family gained three new members--all daughter-in-laws. Linie and Kay came out of the Rusländer background of the 1920s immigration. Marta was of Jewish background. I think Mother particularly welcomed the daughter-in-laws. She identified closer with them in some ways than with her own sons. At least she was always more concerned for them and often admonished and reprimanded her sons for not devoting enough care for the comfort of their wives.

In 1946 the first grandchildren came from these marriages: Eric in 1946, Elizabeth in 1947, Paul in 1948, Victor in 1948, Melanie in 1949. The family was growing and the reunions reflected the enriched cultural mosaic.

In 1947 mother and dad celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. This is usually not the occasion for a significant celebration, yet father insisted that it be observed. Perhaps he had a premonition that he would not live to celebrate the 50th.

#### Post-war Years.

The end of the War brought a sense of relief to all. He saw as clearly as anyone that it had created as many problems as it had solved. Standing outside of the mainstream and with his observant eye he could look objectively at what was happening. And not all of the things that he saw were good. Again with a sure sense for the positive he strongly supported the work of rehabilitation and restitution, particularly through the Mennonite Central Committee. Here too the basic tenets of the Mennonites: love and peace-making could find strong expression. The great writers of the Anabaptists had particularly stressed the reconciling, restoring and healing aspects of the Christian Gospel. There was ample opportu-

nity for that in the post-war world. Not only for the physical binding up but of reconciling brother to brother, people to people, and nation to nation.

But the post-war years also brought with it a certain fatigue. There was an unexpressed desire for withdrawal and rest. So gradually planning set in for relinquishment of duties and eventual retirement. He resigned from the insurance company. And finally in 1949 he persuaded the Church to relieve him of the office of Deacon. The same year he also retired as Postmaster and from participation in the business. The end of this decade marked the end of 50 years of intense and meaningful activity.

#### Retirement, 1949.

He did not retire with an ample pension. His income was very modest. That meant he did not have to change his lifestyle which had always been Spartan. It did mean though that he had more time to devote to his wife, his family and to his interests. The retirement for father in 1949 had come just in time. His sense of timing was good. His disciplined life sharpened and heightened that sensitivity and perception for seeing things about him as they were. He could now devote his time to interests that he had had to curtail all his life. These were reading, his long walks and the appreciation of nature. His reading concentrated much on the religious, focusing on the abiding and the enduring values of this life.

His meditations for Christmas in 1943 speak strongly of faith as the basis for an enduring society. Yet here and there also there is a yearning and expressed desire for release from this life for the realization and "assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen." This was part of the process of preparation.

Yet he could also look around and back with

a certain satisfaction. His activities had reached their conclusion and fruition. Members of the family had become established in various stations in life. He was not dependent on others. He was at peace with his family, his neighbors and those around him. He loved to see his family come home and often expressed the wish that they would come oftener. He did not show many outward signs of affection, but the depth of his feelings were there. He cherished the fact that mother was a companion in the deepest sense of the word.

#### Illness and Death.

In 1950 the first serious illness set in. From that time forth he never completely recovered. All that summer there was the continuous struggle against the encroaching disease of cancer. His physical condition continued to deteriorate. On April 25th he was taken to the hospital where he was extremely tired but in good spirits. Shortly after that he had surgery and it confirmed a terminal condition of his disease, but he had already gone through the process of acceptance and so this was merely another confirmation of what he already knew.

The time in the hospital was one of sharing and affirmation. Often there was no audible or verbal communication--when someone sat and communicated by look and inclination or a gentle handshake.

His sufferings were severe. Yet he was reluctant to deaden the pain totally. The ability to bear it was remarkable. No doubt his faith gave him the strength for this. And Mother's continual presence must have been a great comfort to him as well. The funeral took place on May 23, 1951. It was an occasion for mourning but also for celebration. The latter was affirmed time and again by those who spoke using as a basis these significant biblical texts: Phil. 1:21; Hebrews 12:22, 2 Timothy 2; 2 Timothy 4:7 8.

#### Observations.

His passing was an end not only of his life but of an era. A time that was characterized by a people that were separate and whose style and manner of life were rooted in the past even though it accommodated to the present as necessity dictated. The world of yesterday had a belief in the value system that was bounded by the family, the school, the Church, and the social organization that is the community.

Mother with that quality of strength with which some women are endowed, faced life with courage. She had her family, her friends, her community to occupy her time and interests. Life for her was still full of stimulants and challenges. In her own way she adapted to the new generation, to the grandchildren, to the time. She had a physical as well as a spiritual courage, a cheerful acceptance of what fate handed out. There was a deep concern for the well-being of family and friends. In her old age she grew ever more graceful and gracious. She was truly a matron in the finest sense of the word and in her old age she mellowed in a lovely way. People of every age from senior citizens to the youngest grandchild could relate to her and expect to be understood and loved.

Sometimes we like to think that the past was simpler and that it produced people who were not as complex. Our father was not a person that was easy to understand. Heredity and environment shaped the nature of the man. Early in life events caused him to become serious. The death of his mother at the age of four and of his father at the age of 14 were hard to take for a sensitive boy. Father took things seriously. Later on it helped him to build that strength of character that we came to know of him.

Life was serious and it was hard. Our people were just emerging from the struggle for existence and then subsistence. That called for the development of those characteristics that would help in the maintenance and growth of a society that was just emerging from the pioneer stage. It stressed loyalty to family and to community and hard work. It did not allow much deviation from the norm. Nor did it encourage too much freedom of thought. Conformity was what the group needed for solidarity and strength. This loyalty and sense of responsibility to family, to Church and to community stayed with him throughout his life. And yet he was also able to develop his own person so that he became the kind of individual that he was.

He chose his influences surely and unerringly. It was a choice of associates, friends, books and activities. These shaped his personality and his character. His formal education was skimpy indeed, a bare three months of instruction each winter. What he acquired later however was self taught, built on reading and observation. We knew our father as a man of integrity. There was an authenticity and a genuineness about him. It resulted from a view of life as holistic, that is mind, body and soul as a unity. He tried to cultivate each one in a balanced way and as circumstances permitted.

That nurture was affected through discipline and cultivation. The care of the body was maintained through reasonable exercise and proper diet. The mind was to consider in the words of St. Paul "What is honourable, just, pure, lovely, gracious of excellence to think about those things". His choice of reading was limited. But from it evolved a deep appreciation for his heritage and a desire to recreate those values within himself and to transmit that to family and to prosperity. Goethe's admonition was literally realized: "Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast, erwirbs es um es zu besitzen"

Although the emphasis was on his Mennonite-Anabaptist heritage it was not confined to that. He had learned to understand the larger world, but that did not necessarily mean compromise.

His lifestyle was simple, to the point of being Spartan. But again it was consistent with his beliefs. One might say of him what Edward Gibbon said of William Law "In our family he had left the reputation of a worthy and pious man, who believed all that he professed, and practised all that he believed." It was part of that holistic



*The Friesens Corporation founded by D. W. Friesen, a monumental legacy. Photos for this article, except as noted, are courtesy of the author Ted Friesen, Altona, Manitoba.*

view of life that made a oneness of belief and practice. That simplicity of lifestyle went much deeper than mere plainness and lack of ostentation. It had to do with basic values, with meaning for life and the other person and in relationships. It grew certainly out of the teachings of the Bible and of our Mennonite past. Perhaps it was also reinforced by his regard and reading of such people as Abraham Lincoln, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi and J. S. Woodsworth. These people personified his ideals and aspirations.

What was he like as a father? He was understanding, that is, he tried to come to terms with his children who were moving out into the society around them, moulded by different influences, forming different objectives and goals in life. But that understanding was not to be confused with weakness or compromise. His children always knew where he stood, even when it was not expressed. His family could expect fairness from him even though his children didn't always see it that way. He did try to be that in his own family where he bent over backwards not to show discrimination as regards children and step-children. He commanded respect by example, not one of his children ever smoked or swore in his presence. That respect almost bordered on awe. It did not always result in obedience.

What was he like as a businessman? The same principles applied, faith was unthinkable without the practical expression of it. That meant a strict ethical practice and honesty in his relations with staff, customers and suppliers. The New Testament Rule of "Do unto others" was operative. He was concerned that his work produce income that would provide for the welfare of the family. But many a dilemma of conflict of interest resulted in a decision for principle, and not always for family. While he did not make friends easily and perhaps had very few close friends he was very considerate of others.

His granddaughter Margaret Loewen Reimer writes, "An old man remembers the silent store-keeper who drove him home Saturday nights when he was too drunk to walk and who gave him his coat when the weather was coldest." Or

another incident, "A minister who struggled through the '30s with his growing family nods his head and chuckles 'once he took me into the basement of the store and gave me a box of oranges insisting that he couldn't sell them anyway'".

His advice to his sons was: be responsible for your obligations, pay your debts, yet if you cannot, make the proper arrangements. In other words be honest about your situation.

He took seriously the advice of Paul in his letter to the Romans, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law."

There was honesty involved in his dealings. In his business life he was the servant of the public. Yet he could also maintain his individuality. Many

a time he went the second mile. Often people would come to the house after 11:00 p.m. when the pub had just closed, and ask whether they could pick up their mail. I have never heard him refuse. And that often after 18 hours at work.

What was he like as a member of the Church? Again there is no simple answer. He served as a Deacon for 35 years. That position was not taken lightly by him. One characteristic that shone through most vividly was that of gratitude. He had many favourite texts from the Bible but the one that he had chosen as his personal key text was "In whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." That was the motivation for his life.

His comprehension inclined toward the positive. But that understanding could also be tested. Several of his in-laws joined so called sects. These were the Jehovah Witnesses and one of them had joined the Church of the New Jerusalem. He maintained good personal relations with all his in-laws. That did not necessarily extend to an agreement with religious beliefs and practices. His reading as regards other branches of Christianity was both wide and sympathetic. Having such an overview of the Church certainly made him realize the shortcomings and the narrowness of his own Church. Occasionally this resulted in criticism. But it was cautious and muted. I don't think we ever had cause to have a negative critical regard for the Church from him.

What was father like as a citizen of the world? How did he relate to community, to the nation and to society as a whole? I have already indicated some attitudes in preceding sections. He always inclined a bit toward a separateness of the traditional Mennonite Church. Yet he was also very much aware of his obligations and responsibilities to society. To him privileges were always balanced by obligations. While he believed in the prerogatives that our people had received on coming to this country, his profound understanding of the Christian faith was that of the servant as believer. That was not inconsistent with a non-resistance stance of his Church. He was a member of the global village long before

that term achieved popularity. Being that, meant looking above race and nation and creed. This meant being concerned for the welfare of all from a man who was intensely loyal to his world, to his Church, to his family, to his clan. That is a paradox that is essentially Father. Being a good Canadian meant much more than loyalty to a particular country.

How can one sum up what one wants to say about one's father. I would like to quote from the Eulogy that was given at the memorial service of John D. Rockefeller by his son Jay: "He endures in what he stood for, in what he did, in the inspiration and guidance he has given us. Let me say to you my Father that you helped shape a country and the world in your own quiet way. You have set a standard for our family and for each of us as individuals. Rest in peace. You have blessed and touched this world in good ways that will last forever."

I think that in a few words that sums up well my picture of father.

By son "Ted Friesen"

### Son John:

Father was to live his life of magnificent dignity and service, not in some monastic retreat or cathedral, but in a small community on the Canadian Prairie.

Father's stature recalls thoughts of great men. Goethe's tribute to his parents seems appropriate in honouring our parents.

"Von Vater erbt ich die Statur  
Des Lebens ernstes Zieren;  
Von Mütterchen die Frohna tur  
Und Lust zu fabulieren."

The second observation is that father, a man of humble origins, strove through continuing self-education to develop himself to his ultimate capacity, in his occupation, and social relationships, aesthetic appreciation and most importantly in religious dedication. With the same incentive he laboured long hours to assist the family likewise to pursue goals of excellence, often at great personal sacrifice to him. In his endeavours father revealed an abiding sense of humanity. His charity to all was not studied – it was unaffectedly genuine.

As for the community around him he was a living ideal of what Nobel Poet Eugenio Montale expressed at a press interview, "My ideal is everyday decency." Which he added was, "the most difficult of virtues". Dad's everyday decency was his hallmark, in the immediate sense and in the larger community that knew him.

More than anything else father was a man of peace, an idea not only expressed but boldly and consistently acted upon. There was the occasional misunderstanding in the family or even acts of violence in the community. At such times their confidence in dad would bring friends to his back room office or home to consult him in ways to resolve the conflict. Peace-making to him was what the concept of peace was all about. That consisted of striving toward the greater goal of peace on earth. That faith got through to us.

I can picture dad and us youngsters up in the old Church gallery at a Sunday morning service.

Song leader Grandfather Bergmann struck up the stirring hymn of peace "Wie Lieblich ist's hienieden Wenn Brüder treu gesinnt" The music which the media transmits today, in Brahms' version of the folk tune, in the majestic Academic Festival Overture: "In Eintracht und in Frieden/ Vertraut beisammen sind."

And as the congregation swelled the whole into a joyous crescendo dad, with his familiar slight downbeat for emphasis, poured out his soul in celebration of the eternal quest and the rewarding promise: "Also auf treue Brüder /Der Segen sich ergiesst."

By son "John Friesen"

### Son Dave:

Some of my recollections of him from early childhood on are: 1) his love and dedication for God, his family and his fellow beings throughout the world; 2) his brotherly dealings and life and service to the public; 3) his humility; 4) his thankfulness to God for the many blessings He had bestowed on him throughout his life; 5) striving to live at peace with all men and have them live at peace with each other.

The love of God was seen in his every action. He would buy a \$12 suit so he could contribute a larger amount to the starving people of Armenia, and his Church brothers in Russia, the destitute in India and Africa.

He personally sacrificed many things - more wholesome food for his family, warm clothing and a good Christian education; the opportunity for higher learning; the opportunity for his children to become established in their business or profession.

He counselled with us on matters of sex, wholesome living, marriage partners, and our relationship to God and the Church. He always had time to listen to our problems and where he could, to advise us on how to solve them. Mother would often sit in on these discussions, quietly adding weight to his words of wisdom.

As the Deacon of the Church he would serve the members of the flock in the most menial of tasks, chopping the wood to heat the cauldron of water so coffee could be served at conferences, weddings and funerals; carrying the tables and chairs back and forth; seeing that enough hymn books were available; stabling and feeding the visitors' horses; thawing snow in winter and carrying the water from wells in summer; fuelling and cleaning the wicks and lighting the lamps for evening services; even helping the mothers quiet their crying child and shepherding noisy boys from the balcony. But much more important – teaching Sunday school; leading the Bible class; reading a sermon when the visiting minister did not show up; visiting the sick, the elderly, the widows and orphans; providing food, clothing and shelter to the needy; comforting the bereaved and sharing in the joys of his fellow men.

When a widower remarried he would see to it that he first made a financial settlement for his children. When a Church member committed a crime (even attempted murder in one instance) he would spend days trying to make him right the wrong, and then making him accept the consequences to his fellow Church members.

In spite of his frail body he was a pillar of strength in the community, a confident of persons of all creeds. He considered himself a servant of the people. His business was open from 10 to 14 hours a day, six days a week. How he found the time for all these outside tasks is beyond me. He was also a studious man, keeping up with the times by reading the *Winnipeg Free Press*, his Church papers, the Bible and the many books in his library.

He seemed to find time to spend many hours with his family in the evenings, and on Sundays. He loved to sing and imbued all of us with the beauty of good music, especially Chorales.

He taught us to avoid shallow-mindedness, to deeply think through our problems, and to act honourably with all men. He was not against going into debt but he believed in the orderly retirement thereof. If it could not be paid on due date he said, make satisfactory arrangements before hand. He would never take someone to court, but would rather personally suffer the consequences of unlawful or unjust acts perpetuated against him.

Father could commune with sinners and saints and saw the good in every fellow man. He treated everyone with the fullness of love, not critically, in accordance with the Scriptures "Judge not, but that you be not judged. For with the judgement you pronounce you will be judged and the measure you give will be the measure you get."

Countless times he spoke to us to practice humility. We found this much more difficult to practice than he did.

He was always thankful. Father was not wealthy, but poor by today's standards but he did not evaluate wealth by the position of material goods. When you are rich in spirit and daily thank God for material and spiritual blessings, that is true wealth.

He lived at peace with his God and his fellow man. What spiritual anguish he suffered we could only guess at but never fully comprehend.

He was acquainted with grief but it never made him appear bitter. He lost a wife, a son and a daughter, but even in grief he could praise God.

By son "David Friesen"

### Conclusion.

This is the picture of a man who left a legacy that is evident all around us here in our community of Altona and beyond. He is the man who started a business that has developed in what is today "Friesens Corporation", an international business devoted to printing and has become one of the largest book printers today in Canada. "Ted Friesen"

### Further Reading:

Janis Thiessen, "Mennonite Business and Labour Relations: Friesens Corporation of Altona, Manitoba, 1833-1973," *Journal of Men. Studies*, Vol. 16, 1998, pages 181-202.

Esther Epp-Thiessen, *Altona The Story of a Prairie Town* (Altona, 1982), pages 64, 73, 154, 205 and 237.

Ted Friesen, *Johann & Agatha Klippenstein* (Altona, 1993), 140 pages.

# Ältester Abraham Wiebe 1871-1925

Life's Pilgrimage of our Ältester Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925),  
Rosengard, Manitoba, and Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and Swift Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, an Autobiography.

## Life's Pilgrimage of Abraham Wiebe

### Childhood.

I, Abraham Wiebe, was born in Russia, on August 18, in the year 1871. My parents had to leave their beloved Fatherland in the year 1875 for the sake of their freedom of conscience if they wished to remain in the once acknowledged truths and if they did not wish to yield up their dear children to military service. And so, together with a number of brothers and sisters they arrived here in Manitoba, Canada, in the aforesaid year with full freedom of conscience, and were received and accepted under the protection of the Dominion Government, with a grant of 160 acres of land to each head of a family, man or widow or young man of 21, for a fee of 10.00 dollars.

Oh, many thanks to God and the Government. I was raised by my dear parents who went on before us with their godly lives. I attended school and also learned to read, write and do arithmetic [1], sufficient -- if applied thereto -- that I could make my way in the material realm and thereafter through grace to partake of the salvation eternal.

In this wise I came to the point that I proceeded over to the holy baptism and was baptized by my beloved father and Ältester Johann Wiebe in about the year 1890 in the Reinländer Church in Manitoba. And there I spent another approximately two years, sometimes more and sometimes less diligently, in living in earnest before God. Thus came also the time on November 26, 1892, that I allowed myself to be betrothed in marriage to the virgin Aganetha Ginter, Rosengart, by Ohm Peter Harms in the worship house in Reinland.

### Prediger Election 1896.

We spent a number of years here until the Lehrdienst (ministerial), and I think also the Gemeinde, deemed it good and necessary to have a ministerial (Lehrer) election, because the harvest was great and the labourers few. On October 23, 1895, a ministerial election [2] was held. But since those elected were unable to accept the service because they were not blameless, a second election was immediately held the following day, as far as I know, namely October 24.

I was not present for this election and many thoughts went through my mind and my evil flesh and spirit were intermittently in a severe battle -- at one point the spirit was victorious, the next time more the flesh. And thus I spent the day with a troubled heart. My job was to haul water to the threshing machine, and after a while the thought actually occurred to me: what if when you come home in the evening, Father will say, Well, Abraham, the lot or the majority of votes has fallen upon you to be a teacher (minister). This is also exactly how it came to pass when I came home in the evening, and with precisely those words.

I can yet still describe how I was disposed and how my emotions felt. And since I had not been present in the assembly as is required by the holy

order, I drove to [3] Rosenort on the following Sunday where the Ältester and Ohms wished me much goodness.

In this manner I have from one time to another struggled in disputation and strife so that at times the enemy brought me completely to reconsider and raised up various thoughts within me which were not good and which in any case sought to persuade me that I should not accept the calling because it was only made of men not of God, and which pointed out ways where I should go and to forsake everything, so that together with David, terror and fear unto death came over me. Hence I stood in battle, sometimes I was more overcome and at other

echoed forth unto him, Return O child of man, and he forsook all the troubles and woes in which he had subsisted for about four years and fell asleep.

The funeral was held in the Rosenort school-house. Ohm Jacob Giesbrecht of Neuhorst gave the funeral sermon. He was survived by mother with six children.

Thus we continued our pilgrimage a little further until February 21, 1905, when my beloved father and Ältester [5] died and completed his difficult life's journey. Thus he had concluded his life with 67 years, 10 months and 28 days. He was married for 48 years, two months and 17 days. He sired 10 children of whom four predeceased him.

### Biography.

**Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925)** was the son of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), founding Ältester of the Reinländer (Old Colony) Gemeinde in Manitoba in 1875. In 1892 Abraham married Aganetha Ginter (1873-1913), daughter of Jakob Ginter (RGB 69-1). Abraham and Aganetha farmed on their Wirtschaft in Rosengart, West Reserve, Manitoba.

Abraham was elected and ordained as a minister of the Old Colony Gemeinde in the West Reserve in 1895. In 1907 the church requested that Abraham and Aganetha move to the newly founded Swift Current Colony in Saskatchewan to provide spiritual leadership. They were faithful to God's call and settled in the village of Springfelt where they pioneered a gain. Abraham Wiebe was elected as Ältester in the new colony in 1910.

In 1914 Abraham Wiebe remarried to Anna Harder (RGB 70-2). The family moved to Mexico in 1924 settling in the village of Neu-Hoffnung, Swift Colony, north of Cuauhtemoc. He died in 1925.

The story is told that Abraham would have preferred to move to southern Ontario where the Old Mennonites enjoyed relative freedom of religion and were not subjected to the fascist Anglo-conformity measures as was the case in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Because the other Aeltesten had opted for Mexico, he followed as well not wanting to be the cause of dissension.



*Ältester Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925), Swift Colony, Mexico, son of Ältester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengard, Manitoba. A handsome intelligent face. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Elisabeth Siemens, nee Wall, Winkler, Manitoba/Preservings, No. 14, page 7/Old Colony Men. in Can., page 49.*

times less so. And thus, through God's grace and support, I finally decided, on July 26, 1896, to make a beginning with teaching in the Reinländer Church, where a great number of brothers and sisters were present, and I think many a person will have had and felt a great compassion. And thus we carried forward our lives, from step to step, [4] through grief, cross and sorrow.

### Death, 1901-5.

Circa 1901, February 10, father-in-law Jacob Ginter was struck by a stroke attack, fell to the earth and was completely unable to help himself. And in this sorrow and misery he existed from one time to another. It was also a severe cross for the Mother and the loved ones. But a poet says, the noble cross creates truly noble Christians. On the evening of December 11, 1904, the voice of the Lord also

He became grandfather of 46 grandchildren of whom 10 predeceased him, and great-grandfather of two children. He served as teacher (minister) for five years and as Ältester for 34 years, five months and eight days. He presented 1544 sermons, conducted 294 weddings and 660 funerals. He baptized 2228 souls, including me on May 23, 1890.

### Faith Struggle.

The Reserve there at Swift Current had been arranged for by father together with the Gemeinde, and a settlement had already been started and the flock there did not want to and could not be without a shepherd. Through his death, the entire burden fell upon the shoulders of his son, and my beloved brother, Peter who had been chosen as Ältester while my father was still alive and who had been ordained by him.

And so the dear brother had often asked the Ohms whether there was not someone who might want to decide and who could move over there, in order to take [6] charge of the flock. Whereupon the teacher (minister) Ohm Franz Dick, Blumenort, finally decided to take the first step, and sold his Wirtschaft (village farm) and started to get ready for the move. In order to move there, he allowed a well to be dug there in Springfield, etc. But before he actually came to move, it became contrary to him and he remained situated in his former place. And so the persuasion began again, whether someone from among the Ohms would not commit themselves to move there.

Thus the time passed by and whenever there was an opportunity there was always again encouragement and petitioning, whether anyone had made a decision, and the compulsion in my heart became continually stronger but I kept it to myself; although my beloved wife and I had not omitted to discuss it, and she shied away from it as I did. One day during the cold days of winter, I had laid myself down for a little while on the bench (at noon) and wanted to get a little rest, and suddenly my beloved wife came to me and had two lots in her hand and wanted me to draw one of them.[7] I said that I first wanted to know for what purpose or why I was to draw [the lot]. To this she replied that if I drew the short one, we wanted to move to Swift Current, and I had many thoughts in me but I took one and it was the short one.

The time passed by and it occurred that all the Ohms were again together, and when we again went our separate ways, I and brother Peter and some others were at old Peter Harms', and it was again talked of about how necessary it was that one of us would move there. A proverb says, when the heart is full, the mouth runneth over. And so I said to the Ohms that they should decide to move there, for otherwise I might all at once decide, and then you will regret it. Oh, now I really lost out to a large degree.

But still I was unable to yield myself nor did I want to, for when I reflected thereon in my overwhelming weakness, I could hardly believe that this was God's will that I should do so. I also thought of all the obstacles which might arise there and which a weak human being [8] might not know how to overcome. But the persuasion of my heart and by the people did not lessen. And time passed until we Ohms were again together, and that this matter again came under serious discussion, and I yielded in so far that I did say that if they wanted to draw lots, I would also partake, and that if it fell to me, I would put things aside, and together with Peter I would cast all my cares onto the Lord, and in all my great poverty I would face everything which the Lord allowed to come to pass, and together with the faithful Abraham, I would go where He would send me. But there was none other willing or able to yield themselves to this extent.

But things only remained in this state for a short while, and so the urging after my surrender became so much stronger within the dear fellow minister, Ohm Jacob Giesbrecht, Neuhorst, so that he was unable to hide it in his heart any longer and so he came to Rosengart to the brother and Ältester Peter Wiebe where he presented his entire concern. And so both of them came to us and said that Ohm Giesbrecht was also willing to surrender himself in



*The Wirtschaft of Jakob B. and Judith (Wiebe) Rempel in Neu-Hoffnung, Swift Colony, Mexico. Judith was the daughter of Abraham Wiebe the first Ältester of the Old Colony Gemeinde on the Swift Colony. In the background is visible the Wirtschaft of Bernhard Rempels, parents of Jakob. In the foreground, right, is visible the Fordson tractor which the family brought along from Swift Current, Saskatchewan. The photo must date to the early years of the Mennonite settlement in Mexico, possibly 1925. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 196.*

so far as I had yielded myself.[9]

The Ohms were again called together for the following Thursday. The day and the hours were soon passed, and our intention, which deeply burdened our hearts, came closer with every beat of the clock where we would take joy or sadness upon ourselves. I think that the gracious reader will already understand what kind of joy or sadness I am writing about without me writing more about it here. Then the day arrived when we came together in order to reach a decision with the help of God. I sat in front on the sleigh and Ohm Peter Wiebe and Ohm Jacob Loewen sat in the back. Oh, what thoughts went through my mind during the two miles which we had to drive.

Oh, You beloved heavenly Father, for after all everything is known to You! I truly had to reflect upon all the beautiful and tall trees, which brought forth the question in my aching heart, to leave all of this behind? I did not know and still did not believe [10] that it could and would fall upon me. And when we were finally together, the purpose of our being there was presented to the Ohms. It was asked whether there were more Ohms who were ready to yield themselves therefore, and since there was none other besides I and Ohm Giesbrecht, we were all encouraged and admonished by the Ältester to kneel down and bow before our heavenly Father, and in our intention to plead with Him for help, strength and assistance, and that He might wish lead everything according to His holy will and pleasure. After the prayer we proceeded to the matter [at hand].

The beloved Ältester went ahead of us into the church and came back to the Ohms' (ministerial) room, and he held out his hand before us, whereby joy or sadness would be revealed, first to Giesbrecht, that he should draw his lot but he hesitated and motioned it away to me, that I should go first. Well, what was I to do? The pressure was so great that I hardly knew what was advisable. Thereupon I took my part [11] and after me, Ohm Giesbrecht took his, after which the lots were opened. Within mine I found written the words, "You shall go where to I shall send you."

Oh, how my stammering mouth broke out in

lamentation and my weeping heart broke out in tears! That was on January 31, 1907.

And when the matter which had taken place was done, we again drove home. I got off on the street across from our house. After a little while, upon my return home, I showed the lot which had fallen upon us to my beloved wife. Well, she said, she had already observed that the lot that we should move there had fallen on us when she had seen me get off the sleigh. Oh my beloved, whereby did the dear wife and mother recognize this when I alighted from the sleigh, by the joy or by the sadness? Not by the joy, rather because of the sadness. Since the matter was now settled, it should also be decided when we needed to make our departure.

#### **Saskatchewan, 1907.**

Because my wife was not well, [12] we decided to stay here for the summer and to farm our land. On March 7, 1907, I and brother Peter went to Swift Current, to buy a piece of land in the village of Springfield, which then also occurred. We bought 40 acres of land and a house for 600.00 dollars. On May 17 a son Abraham was born to us and died three days later He was buried May 22. In this manner the time was passed here. We finished the seeding and on June 21, I went to Swift Current again, and had the land registered, the southeast quarter 6-14-13. I also bought and hauled lumber and hired people to build the house which cost me 200.00 dollars, and then I hired someone for fallowing, and on July 6, I arrived home again.

And soon the [time for the] hay and grain harvest arrived again. When the harvest and threshing were completed we held an auction sale on October 8 and we got \$3648.80 in cash. But there was never any lack of work, hogs slaughtered, and everything had to be made ready.[13] Everything had to be taken to town where we filled two cars. On October 25, 1907, we had breakfast with my beloved mother and sister Maria and then took our leave with many tears. Alas, how heavily it weighed upon my heart. And then we took our places with three children: Judith, Johann and Katharina. Brother Heinrich Wiebes took us to the town of Winkler where we

had to wait until the train came until 10 in the evening. There I was sitting on the baggage in my cattle car, with steeped hands, and my thoughts and prayers according to my weak ability were directed upwards to God.

On the 28th at 5 o'clock in the morning we arrived here safely in the city of Swift Current, Province of Saskatchewan, with the family and one car. The other car arrived two days later. Of course, we were not without work here either. But God has brought us thus far in his great goodness. Because my beloved mother was old and weary of life, we received a telegram [14] that she had died.

I went to her funeral. Ohm Peter Harms gave the funeral sermon.

And thus one time after another passed by and the war from time immemorial between light and darkness was still not yet fought to the finish. Whether or not it has already been brought into fulfilment, for those whom our beloved God hath called forth from this battlefield through death, the battle is already ended.

### Ältester Election, 1911.

A number of years passed by, until July 18, 1911, when brother Peter Wiebe, Ohm Johann Friesen and Ohm Jacob Giesbrecht came here. Because there was no Ältester here as yet and because it was becoming more and more difficult for brother Peter to serve the large Gemeinde there and us here as well, it was deemed good to have an Ältester elected here. This also took place on June 29, 1911, and I, Abraham Wiebe, was elected by 77 votes. Thus it was brought into fulfilment what the apostle had commanded Timothy to do, [15] namely, to establish Ältesten in the cities, hither and yon, as he commanded him and us to do.

The election sermon was given by Ältester Jakob Wiens and the ordination sermon by Ältester Peter Wiebe, which took place on the 4th of July. Everything is known unto the Lord, how and why He directed matters in this manner, indeed, unto the most feeble one who does not have even the least of that which is required for this important work. Alas, for where am I to go except to you, Lord Jesus. For you are the true spring from which all the sick shall be nourished and refreshed. Be Thou my refuge, my help, my fortress, my shield, and at the last, my very great reward.

### Peter's Death, 1913.

In the year 1913, on the first day of July, brother Peter was here in this settlement for the last time and his travelling companion was Ohm Johan Friesen, who now as Ältester [16] is entrusted with a great common bond in his heart, and the second one was Ohm Jakob Giesbrecht of Neuhorst. Not long after they had been here, namely, September 9, I received a telegram saying the beloved brother and Ältester Peter Wiebe was very sick. Since we had planned to start threshing the very next day, I could not make up my mind should I go [to see him right away] or not. Throughout the night I had not resolved anything, what I should or should not do, or wanted to do, and many thoughts had gone forth within my heart. Early in the morning when everything was still in deepest sleep, I suddenly heard a solemn voice on the wall: But brother, do come.

And so I readied myself for the journey. and at 10 o'clock I departed [for Winkler]. I did not and

could hardly believe that he might die already.[17] It was as if a fear and anxiety occasionally overcame me during the journey. I arrived there toward the evening of the 11th, and he reached for me with his hand of love. I stayed with him during the night during which he was relatively calm. We were glad because [we thought] he was getting better.

In this manner I also spent the following day with him, and the next night Ältester Jacob Wiens stayed with him. I went along to brother Heinrich Wiebe's [place]. Possibly around 12 o'clock at night we got word that he was again very sick, and we



*The Wirtschaft of Jakob B. and Judith (Wiebe) Rempel in Neu-Hoffnung, Swift Colony, Mexico, as it appeared circa 1950. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 196.*

went over again and had to watch how he struggled in the oven of misery, but not without prayers and tears of compassion towards God, and fought like a courageous hero and said: If we must here contend a little, and press onward unto the land, the bliss of eternity [18] comforts and enables us to overcome the weary toil. O God, show me from Your heart, a glance of Your wounded countenance, for then my pain is pain no more, and all suffering felt no more.

On the 13th at 10:15 in the evening, that undescribably painful hour struck, at which time the cold hand of death was laid upon him and his immortal soul struggled free of earthly fetters after a bitter struggle unto death, and followed the call of his Lord and Master in His grace and arose upward unto that heavenly and holy sanctum after having had to undergo a seven-day [battle] in a sick bed.

His life's years which he had achieved were 52 years, three months and 24 days. He died on September 13, 1913. Born May 19, 1861. In 1888, October 25, he was elected as teacher (minister) and he served for 13 years. In 1902 he was elected as Ältester or ordained. Sermons held 1266, baptisms 762. He married 78 couples and held 104 funeral sermons. He served as Ältester for 11 years. His first marriage lasted 18 years: sired 10 children of whom five have died. [19] His second marriage lasted 14 years: children sired, nine.

He was buried on September 16. Ältester Jacob Wiens brought the funeral sermon which took place in the Reinland house of prayer, for which a very great number of people were present.

### Pilgrimage.

And so I again returned home with all my sorrow. After I had been home for a short time my beloved wife became sick and after a severe illness of three days, she was taken from my side by the unrelenting angel of death, and as I trust, in confidence, in order to bring her into His heavenly kingdom of joy, where God will wipe all her tears from her eyes. She fell asleep on October 8th, 1913, Wednesday, at 2:30 p.m., where I and my four

children then remained standing by her deathbed with the thought: Oh God, do also make it well with my soul through the blood of Christ.

Her age was 40 years, one month and 24 days. She was buried on the 11th. The funeral sermon was held by Ohm Julius Wiebe. And so one sorrow [20] after the other befell me upon this pilgrim way and what is yet to come, is unknown to us. But he who allows the beloved God to rule in everything and trusts in him always, shall always be sustained by God in all sorrow and tribulation (cross). He who trusts God the most high, has not built upon sand.

Because the Ältester in Manitoba had laid down his head and his shepherd's staff unto his rest and the Gemeinde there did not want to and could not be without the Lord's Supper and an Ältester, someone again had to go there from here and from the West in order to serve the church with communion. I was in Chortitz and in the Blumengart worship house and it was announced right away on which day there would be the election of an Ältester, which then fell upon the beloved Ohm Johann Friesen.

Since I felt very deeply struck down because of the death of my beloved brother and because I had to also minister within such a short time, and shortly thereafter had to travel to Manitoba again....(I shall close at this point)[21].

November 19, 1914, I was married for the second time with the virgin Anna Harder of Rosengart, with Ältester Johann Friesen, Neuenburg, officiating. Indeed, this is how it went with the beloved aged ones, upon whose feet and paths we daily conduct ourselves when we need good counsel. Now and again they said their cross was always great, until death cut them down and laid them into the embrace of the grave.

### Death, 1925.

Ältester Abraham Wiebe died on November 10, 1925. He conducted 1119 worship services. Funeral messages 207. Baptized 408 souls. Married 188 couples. Served as teacher for 14 years. Served as Ältester for 15 years. His first marriage lasted 20 years with five children sired of whom one died. His second marriage lasted 11 years with two children sired, one whom died.

Ältester Johann Friesen, born December 3, 1869, died in August, 1935. Achieved the age of 65 years, seven months and 27 days. Elected as a teacher (minister) in 1903. Elected as Ältester in 1913. Preached 1816 times, and baptized 1713 souls. He held 582 funeral messages 582 and married 229 couples.

### Acknowledgements.

The Autobiography of Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925) was submitted to the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4, by Mrs. Eva Dyck, 444-3rd St. N.W., Swift Current, Saskatchewan, S9H 0S5, on April 1, 1993, who had found it among the effects of her parents-in-law Peter and Anna Dyck, Wymark, Saskatchewan. Eva Dyck believed that the handwritten booklet had been sent to them some time previous by a relative in Mexico. The Autobiography of Abraham Wiebe was transcribed and translated by Ingrid Lamp also of Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Translation editing by D. F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

# My Experiences in Mexico, 1923

“My Experiences in Mexico, 1923,” by Jakob E. Peters, Box 443, Blumenort, Manitoba, R0A 0V0.

## Introduction.

It was in the time that there was much talk about moving to Mexico: my grandpa, Abram Peters, had been in Mexico, I do not know what for. Maybe he went to locate and measure out the village of Blumenort, where he planned to settle when he moved over.

He had brought different pictures from Mexico, for all his Grandchildren, to see how it was there. They were foldable sets with 10 or 12 pictures in every set. They were not photographs, but coloured drawings. I remember only a few things from the pictures: donkeys, and four or five women sitting on the ground, one before the other, with their hands in the hair of the woman before her. I was not able to see what they were doing. Some said they were looking for lice, but I think they were pleating their hair.

At that time I was in poor health. Some older people asked me then, if I would like to die. I said no, I will see Mexico, before I die. I want to see if it is actually as shown on the pictures. As is happened, the things mentioned--the women in a row, the oxcarts and donkeys (burras), I have in fact seen there as pictured.

In fact, I saw Mexico for more than 70 years. In the last years it was much different than in the beginning. The women in a row, and the oxcarts have vanished entirely, at least in the north part of the country. Donkeys are rare. A few still drove horses, but there were more cars and pickups than horse-drawn wagons on the road.

## Mexico?

How and why did we come to Mexico? The government of Manitoba had decided they would have only one school system in the province. But the Reinländer Mennonite Gemeinde (Church) would not accept any other school system then they had before and which they had been promised by the Dominion Government in 1873. They wanted to educate their children in the Christian faith, and



The author Jacob Peters and wife Margaretha, nee Thiessen. Photo taken while on a visit to Canada, in Morden, 1969. The author was born in 1918 in Blumenort, near Gretna, Manitoba. His father was Jakob Peters (1892-1918) and his grandfather Abram Peters (1865-1948) and great-grandfather Jakob Peters (1830-1909)(RGB 116-3). His second wife Anna Rempel (1850-1931), died in Mexico in Schöndorf (Campo 116), Swift Colony.

not in worldly schools. The government didn't give in, so the Mennonites looked for another country, where they could have the privilege to have their own schools. Mexico allowed this, and so they emigrated to Mexico.

My widowed mother, belonging to that Gemeinde, emigrated with them, taking her two small boys with her. The emigration began in March, 1922. We went in October 1923.

## Blumenort.

The villages in Mexico were named with the same names they had in Canada. We coming from Blumenort, four miles west of Gretna, settled here again in Blumenort. The farmlots were divided in acres: 160 acres was called a whole farm, 80 was one-half and 40 was a one-fourth farm. We settled on 40 acres. That was the smallest portion that was allowed in a village in those days. So called “Aunwohna” could own two or three acres at one end of the village. They had no right to vote in matters pertaining to the village operations. In matters that belonged to the Gemeinde, they had the same rights as other members.

We lived in Blumenort on the east side of the one street village. My aunt Agatha, my mother's sister, Gerhard Rempels, were our neighbours on the north side. Right over there on the westside of the street lived Uncle Franz Ens, the brother of my mother. So I had many cousins nearby.

In Canada we had sold all our possession, except the things we took with us to Mexico. The buildings were sold and moved away. The henhouse and the barn were moved away, even before we left. It was a strange feeling when we went out the door of the house, where we entered the barn, now we were in plain sunshine.

The moveable things were sold by auction. After our house was empty, we stayed at Franz Rempels. The things that were not sold, were brought to Gretna to be put into the railway car, to travel with us to Mexico. The last night in Canada we were at Wilhelm Peters, our neighbours. Early the next morning, they drove us to Gretna, where the train was ready to bring us to Mexico. I remember that in the same night the first snow of the season had fallen.

## The Train.

In Gretna we boarded the train. I looked out the window and saw a great crowd, people that had come to say good by. Among them was my dear aunt Maria, Mrs. Cornelius Schmitt. I saw her standing there and weep. I think she had a foreboding that she would not again see her departing sisters in her lifetime, although she planned to move to Mexico too. But she had said, she would land in Mexico at the end of her village. She meant the cemetery. And so it was. We had not been in Mexico very long when we got a telegram that she had died.

The train began to move with a jerk. The locomotive started slowly, but we were in the last wagon, and all the couplings between the wagons, gave a jerk. We were in the corridor when we fell down. The engineer warned us with the whistle before he

started, so we had time to sit down.

We, my mother, her unmarried stepsister, Elisabeth, my brother Abram and I were in the last wagon in the second-last compartment. My aunt Agatha and her family and their children were in the last compartment. How many children they had I do not know, but I remember that two or three of them that were about my age or a bit more, were small rascals. They took every chance to tease us enough to dislike them. Who else was with us on the train, I do not know.

I remember very little about the trip. It was the same day after day. But one day we passed a beautiful area and the train stopped in the midst of a meadow, and we children were allowed to go out and play on the green grass for a few minutes.

At the border between El Paso and Juarez the train stood still, I think for a whole day. They needed to settle with the border patrol for all the things we wanted to import. It was all duty-free, but it had to be settled anyhow. My brother and my cousin were allowed to go out of the wagon, but I had to remain inside; I was too small to go out.

I didn't believe it, but I had to stay inside. After a longtime standing motionless, the train moved again. We passed the city of Chihuahua. From here on a second locomotive was put behind to help. It was a very hilly terrain. One locomotive could not pull the 25 wagons up hill. The railway zig-zagged through hills, so when we looked out the windows we often could see the front locomotive. Night fell and we moved slowly forward.

## Cuauhtemoc.

The next morning when I woke, the train stood still. Then it was said, “We got there.”

It was early, but we had to get up and out. Out there was our Uncle Franz Ens, ready, with his horse and wagon, to take us to his home in Blumenort for breakfast. It was a trip of nearly one hour. I do not remember when Uncle Franz and family moved to Mexico. Maybe one year earlier than we did. He already had a big barn with a lean-to on both sides.

We lived for a few days in the lean-to on the north side, until our goods were hauled from the railway station, San Antonio de los Arenales (today Cuauhtemoc), and put into the shanty, that Uncle Franz had built for us. He had built two shantys, one for us and one for Gerhard Rempels.

There was knee-high grass on the lots where the shantys were. It rustled as we passed through it, and I had to look back frequently as we walked, fearing a snake might follow us. I had been intimidated about snakes.

## Settling.

We lived in the shanty even as our goods were hauled and put inside. For a short time Gerhard Rempels lived with us in our shanty. I suppose that the horses and cows that we had brought with us, were in their's. They were kept inside as the lots were not fenced in.

The Rempels built a small house on their lot and than moved there. At the time when they were with



The author's mother Aganetha Ens and her second husband Jakob Reimer, 1945. Aganetha's father Abraham Enns (1855-1900) immigrated from Olgafeld, Fürstenland, Imperial Russia, to Manitoba in 1899, and then the next year moved to Hague, Sask. Abram Enns' widow remarried to Abram Schmidt.

us, I said to my cousins, "As long as you live with us, your father is our father too."

But no, they didn't like the idea. Their father was theirs' only.

Mother then built a small kitchen and pantry at the east end of the shanty. Because the shanty had a door only on the northside, it was much walking around, from the door on the northside to the door on the eastside of the kitchen. But we lived there happily for two years.

Things were scarce for the first while in Mexico. We had no firewood, so our cousins, the sons of our uncle Franz, went with us with their horses and wagon to the waterholes in the meadow. Around them were many small heaps of cattle dung, which we gathered. It was good heating material.

While we were gathering these heaps, I saw a small animal. I looked at it and followed it. Then my cousin Franz asked: "What's there?"

"A small snake," I said.

He came and looked at it, and said: "A lizard," and killed him with his slingshot.

Later we found other small animals, maybe of the lizard family. They were interesting creatures. We called them spiny frogs. They were not frogs, but their shape resembled them a little. Their back and sides were very spiny. When we stroked them gently with our fingers from head to tail, they sat still and closed their eyes, they were comfortable. When we then turned them on their backs with a jerk, they were enraged. They stood on all four legs as high as they could and moved back and forth, without moving their feet, and snapped at anything we held before them.

If we held a weedstem to them they snapped and held it so that we could lift them off the ground. When we then stroked them gently again, they were relaxed again, just as fast as they had become aggravated. They sat down and closed their eyes. We often played with those interesting animals.

### Mother's Wedding.

After we had lived for two years in the shanty, we had built a new house. But we only lived in it for a couple of weeks or days. Before it was even ready to move into, a widower, Jacob Reimer of Neuenburg, came and persuaded mother to marry

him. How much he needed to persuade her, I do not know.

They celebrated their engagement in the new house. One week later they held their wedding in the church after the service, as was the custom. I was not there for the wedding ceremony, because I was only eight years then. We were not allowed in the church before we were 12 years old. After their wedding, we moved to Neuenburg. That was in July of 1926.

### Farming.

Now we had a father, and with him, seven more brothers and one sister. We now had 10 horses, 15 cows and lots of hogs and poultry. Before we had only three cows, one hog and a few chickens. But there was also a lot more work to do. The first field work that I remember where I took part, was pulling up beans, there were seven acres. We had to pull them up with our bare hands. That was hard work.

In later years we had a knife on our one-row corn-cultivator drawn by two horses. The knife was pulled beneath the bean rows, so that the roots were loosed. This made pulling up the plants much easier. When the bean plants were large and bushy, we could gather them with hayforks. The rows were about 32-36 inches apart. The gathered plants were put in small heaps along every fifth row. This allowed ample room between the heap-rows to pass with the hayrack.

The beans could easily be loaded and hauled home for threshing. The threshing we did a few years with a threshing stone. This was not literally a stone, but it was made from a very thick tree trunk about three or four feet long and two-and-one-half to three feet in diameter. Six small tree trunks, about five inch in diameter, were fastened around this trunk lengthways, in equal distances from the other. It was framed and had a double tree to hitch two horses before it.

Near the granary we prepared a round threshing place and covered it with fine, gravel-free earth. We dumped one load of beans on the place, put it in a ring at the outer edge of the threshing place, hitched two horses on the threshing-stone, and then drove it around and around. Three of us were placed at evenly spaced spots at the ring, and with

pitchforks turned the beans over while walking around.

When we got back to our starting place, the beans had been turned over three times, and were then threshed. Now the straw was piled to one side, the threshed beans shovelled and pushed to the centre of the place and a new load dumped and the whole cycle repeated.

The threshing cost us nothing, but the beans were cheap and brought little reward. One year we could not sell them. Then we cooked them for the cows, which ate them with great delight, and gave a bit more milk. So we had some reward.

### Ält. Joh. Friesen.

Ältester Johan Friesen lived in the village of Neuenburg. I was eight years when I came to Neuenburg. The Friesens had no children, so they had adopted the two Loecky children, Cornelius and Agatha. They were about my age. My stepbrothers knew them. Through this I came to know something about the Ältester, generally called the "Ollsta".

The Friesens lived not far from where we lived. The first wife of Johan Friesen was a very resolute woman. Once when one of my brothers and I were there and played on their yard, she came out and called for Cornelius to come in and told us to go home even though we had not done any unruly things.

The Ollsta was a handsome man, of medium stature, probably a little bit overweight, as I remember him. The custom there was that children under 12 were not in the Sunday morning worship services. After I was 12, I went to church every other Sunday, because some of us had to stay home watching the smaller siblings. The custom was that the ministers took turns in their service, so that Ältester Friesen was not in the Neuenburg church every Sunday. Even when he was there, many times some other preacher brought the sermon. I don't remember exactly how many preachers there were. But there were Isaak M. Dyck, his brother Abram M. Dyck, Peter Harms, Jacob Giesbrecht, Julius



1930. Diedrich Thiessen and wife Susanna Penner, parents of Magaretha Thiessen, the author's wife.

Loewen, Jacob Loewen, Franz Loewen, another Abram Dyck, and after his early death--his brother Franz Dyck and Heinrich Wiebe. The latter was the son of Peter Wiebe, son of Ältester Johann Wiebe. This is as I remember them.

Ältester Johan Friesen died when I was 17, after a sickness of more than one year. I did not hear him preach very often and remember very little of his sermons.

Ältester Friesen said: "We have our rules [Ordnung], and if we keep them, we will not become a failure."

If Ältester Friesen had to deal with an offender, he would not dispute with him for long. Automobiles were forbidden. The rule was not to drive a car. If somebody got behind the steering wheel, he had transgressed against the rule, and had to come before the clergy on Thursday, when they had their regular meetings.

Gerhard Rempel (son of Abram Rempel of Reinland), (see *Preservings*, No. 19, page 115 for a photo) had bought a car to dismantle it. He wanted to make a horse-drawn wagon out of the chassis. He could not resist the temptation, and had driven it for a few trips. There were always some men who delighted in bringing every little transgression to the "Ollsta".

So Johan Friesen came to him, as he was eagerly working, dismantling the car.

"You have bought a car?" he asked Rempel.

"Yes, but..."

"You have driven it?"

"Yes, but..."

Gerhard Rempel wanted to tell the Ollsta that he was already dismantling it. But could not.

Ältester Friesen said to him: "Thursday you come to the church in Neuenburg." And off he went. No arguments.

My neighbour Franz Peters told me, he had had a dispute with somebody and they could not make it right. His opponent brought it to the Ollsta. His custom was to be at home on Saturdays, so he bid them to come to his house the next Saturday. They went, and there, in his guest room, first one told him their problem, as he saw it. Then the other told him his viewpoint.

Johan Friesen listened attentive to both, and then he said: "Your problem is very easy to settle. You can do it between yourselves, and do not need my assistance. I will go outside, and than you work it out between yourselves. When you are done, come and tell me how you got along."

The men both felt ashamed. They easily came to terms, and went out and told him how they had made an agreement. I considered Ältester Johan Friesen to be a very wise man.

### Midwives.

I had some experiences with midwives when my firstborn was to come to the light of the world, as we sometimes called it. There were two mid-

wives in Reinland where we lived in the house of Franz Dycks, my parents-in-law. One was Mrs. Penner, and the other a Mrs. Peters. They were both elderly women. Mrs. Penner was a good friend of my parents-in-law, but they considered Mrs. Peters as more experienced and knowledgeable than the other. But when we called on Mrs. Peters, she was occupied at another place. So we called Mrs. Penner. She came but did not do much except wait for the birth to occur.

In the afternoon mother suggested to Mrs.



*Mr. and Mrs. Jakob A. Enns, the writer's uncle, 1950. In addition to farming Jakob A. Enns was a dentist and operated a store and a sawmill with his sons. In 1945 Jakob and brother Bernhard Enns owned the printery in Rosenthal (No. 6), where their children Johann and Jakob (Jakob) and Anna (Bernhard) handset the entire Bible and printed it as well as a beautifully bound Gesangbuch on a small hand press. The printery was later sold to brother-in-law George Rempel (later Vorsteher, see Pres., No. 19, page 115). Jakob A. Enns was the father of Cornelius Enns, Aylmer, Ontario, Ältester of the Ontario Old Colony Mennonite Church - East End. Photo from Mennonite Life, Jan. 1952, page 28. See also photo in 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 264.*

Penner, to take a nap. At this time Mrs. Peters came to see if we still needed her. The answer was yes. Mrs. Peters examined my wife, and said: "I think it shall soon be over." And so it was. As she worked, Mrs. Penner had finished her nap and came out of the other room, and saw that Mrs. Peters was there and doing her work. She was much surprised. This almost broke the friendship between the Dycks and Penners.

There was a Mrs. Jakob Fehr in Neuenburg who was much in demand as a midwife. She was

considered by many to be the best midwife in the whole area (Manitoba Colony). She always wanted to see her patients again on the third day after the delivery. Once after she had attended my aunt Agatha, Mrs. Gerhard Rempel (Vorsteher), she made her routine follow-up visit on the third day.

Mrs. Fehr saw fish there on the table and said to my aunt: "I hope you will not eat fish in these days." She thought it was dangerous in the days of confinement.

"Well", said my aunt, "yesterday I had a good fishmeal." It had not harmed her a bit.

I was not sure if Mrs. Fehr really was the best midwife. When my wife Sara was with her fourth child, we consulted her sometime before it was due. She did not say much about what was wrong but told us it would be best to have a doctor attending for the confinement. Midwife Fehr had a special doctor in mind but said nothing about this to us. Unfortunately we got the wrong doctor, and my wife died a few hours after child birth because of haemorrhaging.

From what the doctor did I came to the conclusion he was not a doctor but a quack. Naturally I was dissatisfied with the midwife, that she had not mentioned the right doctor to us. Of our 12 children eight were born with the aid of a midwife. Midwives did much good work at that time.

### Doctors.

When we came to Mexico to "San Antonio de los Arenales", which later was named "Cuauhtemoc", it was nothing of a city, not even a village. It began to grow as soon as the Mennonites settled in the region. But it was many years before a skilled doctor came there. During the years from 1923 to 1926 my mother had to go by train to Chihuahua to consult a doctor. There was a good German doctor there. It took two or three days for a visit to him. She usually had to wait, either for the doctor or for the train.

In Rosenthal #6 there was a young man, Johan Enns, a "trajchtmoka". Soon he also began to give medicine for minor ailments. He was the brother-in-law of my stepfather. My stepfather's first wife and the wife of Johan Enns were sisters. As I know he had no more education than the customary seven years in the village school. I suppose he had some old medical books, to learn something about ailments and their cure.

But his wisdom in medicine came mainly by experience as he was a farmer. As a little boy I had excema, a very itchy condition especially around the elbows. We consulted Doctor Enns, but we had to go to find him in the fields where he was making hay. But he gave advice and it helped. Later when more and more folks came to consult him he designated special days for his patients. Mondays and Friday, he was at home to a tend them that came for help. Soon these two days were not enough, so he added Wednesdays also. On other days he did not

allow himself to be disturbed, except for emergencies. He became widely known as a good doctor. Even from the city of Chihuahua, where there were enough skilled doctors, they came to consult him.

### Jakob Penner.

In the December, 2001, issue of *Preservings* (No. 19, pages 101-5). I read the biography of Ältester Jacob F. Penner. This must be read, for he was once my beloved schoolteacher. In 1924 when I began going to school, my uncle Gerhard Rempel was our teacher in Blumenort in Mexico. I had no special encounters with him, and so, no special remembrances. Jacob Penner, who lived in Blumenthal, about four kilometers east of Blumenort, was our schoolteacher from 1925 to 1926. I was in the second level at the time, we were called the "Catechismers". Under his tuition I became a "Testamentler"—this was the third level.

I was good diligent pupil, but had my shortcomings, and so I had some encounters with him. I do not remember exactly what my misbehaviour was at that time, but I had to come and lay myself across his chair. He had a rod—the lower end of a buggywhip—in his hand. With all his might he swung back his arm, as to give me a hard blow, but then scarcely allowed it to touch my hindparts.

I cried in fear "O Weh".

"Did it hurt?" he asked.

I wanted to say yes, but I told the truth, and said "no".

"Shall I strike once more and harder?" he asked.

Again I said "no" and he let me go.

He had a very beautiful penholder that we often admired. One day he threw this penholder to me. Oh, was I glad that he had given this penholder to me. Proudly I showed it to my neighbour. I think he could hardly control his laughter. But after a little while, the teacher ordered me to bring back his penholder. And now I became aware, I had misbehaved, and he had thrown his penholder at me, to get my attention. Now I received a stern admonition. Later he did the same thing to others.

At his desk he had a pencil sharpener, and we were allowed to sharpen our pencils there. One day one or two of my pals and I were there at the same time to sharpen our pencils. From here we could look out the window and had a view of the grave-



*The Jakob A. Enns ranch built by an American and purchased when the Ojo de la Yegua colony was established. The ranch was among the few with electricity at the time. Photo from Mennonite Life, Jan. 1952, page 29.*

yard, about 200 meters from the school. We saw two coyotes digging on a grave. Of course, we had a lot to talk about this. The teacher was occupied in the classroom, but now he came to his desk. He had a newspaper page there which he folded once, and then sewed the sides together making a bag of it. He called it a "chatbag". Now we all three had to stand near the door, each to grab the bag with one hand, to hold it open, then we should talk it full. Here we could not look outside, and had nothing to talk about. After a while we asked to go to our seats. We had to come to him with had all three of us holding the bag, to show it to him. He looked in it and said it was not quite full. I didn't know how he could see it that it wasn't full! So we had to go back and talk to each other some more and then carry the bag outside to empty it in the air. Then we could go back to our work at our seats.

Our mother had a rule, to repeat the same punishment on us, whatever we got in school. But this time, when my brother told her about the adventure I had had in school, she exclaimed: "Oh, that was then all the talking in the air, this forenoon!" There was no further punishment. I had only to tell her what I had misbehaved.

Mr. Penner was also the teacher in Blumenort the next year as well. But in the summer of 1926 my mother married a Mr. Reimer in Neuenburg, after

which we moved there. What a pity, for I had no more chance to be Penner's pupil. I had learned to love him dearly. I could not love the teacher I had the first year in Neuenburg, because he showed little love for his pupils. He used the rod—the lower end of a buggywhip—hard on the children. But not the way that Mr. Penner did on me and some other boys. I was lucky, I have not felt it.

Mr. Penner was always dear to me. When we visited our siblings and friends in Manitoba in 1969, we visited Jacob Penners as well. I had even had a chance to attend one of his weekly Bible Studies. Once when he was in Mexico, he visited us as well. I did not have such a close fellowship with any of my six schoolteachers, except my uncle Gerhard Rempel.

### Planting.

It may interest some of the readers when I write about our work the first years in Mexico. I have already written about our work with beans, but only about the harvest. The planting, cultivating and weeding was similar to that with corn. Beans, corn and oats were the main crops. In the '20s my father tried many other crops—wheat, barley, flax and millet. One year we even had an acre of sugarcane. This we liked. The rest of the field was planted in corn.

The corn was planted in April or May, long before the time of rain, if the soil still had moisture enough from the previous year or occasional winter rain. There was enough moisture if we dug six to nine inches deep, and took a handful of earth, pressed it together, and it remained in a ball. The corn was planted at that depth, and it came up nicely. The rain usually came at the end of June or the beginning of July, and then the weeds also sprouted and we had to cultivate the corn. Most of the weeds were killed by cultivating. What remained of the weeds we had to weed by hand, going along the rows and cutting them off with a hoe or pulling them out by hand.

In August or September when the ears were developed but still green, we cut off the stalks above the ears, and bound them in bundles. This was considered to be good fodder for cattle, and besides that, it made the picking of the ears, which had to be done by hand in November and December, much easier. During the work of cutting the upper stalks,



*The Wirtschaft where Prediger Franz Dyck lived until approximately 1949. When the Manitoba and Swift Colony bought the Ojo de la Yegua (Nord) Colony in 1946, two young ministers from the Manitoba Colony moved there. It was then further decided that another minister from each Gemeinde should move there, and it fell on--through lot--Rev. Jakob Wiebe, Neustaedt in the Swift Colony and Franz Dyck from the Manitoba Colony. Franz Dyck moved to the village of Springtal, selecting this village because it had a good water supply. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 174.*



*Philip Wiebe's son Franz, Neuanlage (Campo 105), Swift Colony, cultivating their corn with a two-horse team and a single rowed cultivator. Circa 1935. Rear, the Sierra Madres Mountains frame the Bustillos Valley. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 66.*

we much appreciated having sugarcane growing on the same field. If we got thirsty, we got a sugarcane stalk, cut it in pieces and chewed it. It was juicy and sweet.

Later we harvested the sugarcane, a certain portion every day and hauled it home. We had borrowed a press equipped with a tree to hitch on a horse. The horse had to go around and drive the press. Two of us sat there and put the sugarcane stalks into the press four to six at the same time. The green juice that came out of the press, was gathered in a 55 gallon barrel. In about an hour the barrel was full. The juice was then cooked the whole day, and by the evening we had a few pailfuls of brown syrup.

#### **Teaching.**

In 1941 I worked for my uncles, Bernhard and Jacob Ens in Rosenthal, in their printingshop. We printed 4000 Bibles plus 200 New Testaments. The letters had all to be set by hand. It took more than 10 months to finish that job.

How the Reinlander knew about me, I do not

know, but one day at the end of my work there, Jacob Wiebe, the darpschuld (village mayor) came and asked me to be their schoolteacher. My uncle Bernhard said, they would have no work for me after we completed the Bibles, and he encouraged me to accept the invitation. As a result I came to Reinland, and was the schoolteacher there for three years.

#### **Marriage.**

The Prediger Franz Dyck lived in Reinland. After some time I learned that his daughter Sara was interested in me. Her youngest two siblings were my pupils. I was about 24 years of age at the time, and according to the custom there, I was considered an old bachelor. But now I soon became a young husband.

My father-in-law was a beloved preacher, and a successful farmer. But oddly, when I worked my land according to his example and advice, I did not have good results. I had better results when I followed my own ideas, although I am not a farmer by nature. But I could not be anything other than a farmer.

As I already mentioned, my father-in-law Franz Dyck was a beloved preacher. When the "Nord", or, "Ojo de la Yegua" (meaning mare's eye in Spanish) Colony was established, he was appointed by lot, to move there. In January 1951 he was elected Ältester for the colony. He served the Old Colony church in this office for 13 years. He died in 1964 of cancer.

#### **Remarriage.**

I said above that I had become a young husband. But five years and four children later, I also became a young widower. There was a young widow living in Hoffnungsfeld (Campo 12), who had had even more bad luck than I. Her maiden name was Margaretha Thiessen and her first husband was Wilhelm Redekopp.

We had both married for the first time at about the same time. But after three years and 20 days, she had lost not only her husband, but her two sons also. Although she lived with her mother and three siblings, she was therefore a lonely widow. About one year after the death of my wife, I heard of her. I went to visit her, and after some time we were married.

She had come to Mexico with her parents Dietrich Thiessen and Susanna Penner, as a four month-old baby. Her father had not liked Mexico and when the train with which they had come, halted in San Antonio, he had wished that the locomotive would immediately hook up to the other end, and pull them back to Canada. But he had no choice and had to endure Mexico for exactly 20 years--from October 1922 to October 1942--when he died, at the young age of 59 years. In that year the family came out of their debt, but he did not live to see it.

Margaretha's mother remained a widow for about 22 years. Then she married the Ältester Isaak M. Dyck. This marriage lasted for a little over two years, when she died nine days before her 80th birthday.



*Father and children in the Halbstadt area, Manitoba Colony, gathering the broken off corn ears from the field which the older siblings have broken off during the day. Probably circa 1930. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 66.*

# Johann K. Friesen 1857-1934: Servant of the Lord

“Rev. Johann Klassen Friesen (1857-1934) and wife Justina nee Enns Warkentin (1856-1943): The Lord’s Willing Servants,”  
by Lorilee G. Scharfenberg, Box 106, R.R. 1, Morris, Manitoba, R0G 1K0.

## Family Background.

Johann K. Friesen was the son of Ältester Johann Friesen (1808-72) and Elisabeth Klassen (1837-71), oldest daughter of delegate David Klassen (1813-1900) (*Pres.*, No. 16, pages 107-111). Ältester Friesen’s mother, Margaretha von Riesen (1784-1835), was the sister to Abraham Friesen (1782-1859), second Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde, and to Helena von Riesen (1787-1846), wife of Klaas Reimer, Petershagen, founder of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Although Ältester Johann Friesen was blamed by many regarding the 1866 division of the Kleine Gemeinde into two congregations, he left an important legacy in terms of his conciliatory efforts among various factions among the Molotschna Mennonites, being called in on several occasions by the authorities to mediate serious disputes.

Ältester Friesen’s brother Abraham (1807-91) was a senior minister of the Kleine Gemeinde and his brother Klaas (1818-71) also of Neukirch, served as a deacon. Since three of the Friesen brothers owned prosperous *Wirtschaften* in Neukirch, these Friesens were sometimes referred to as the “Neukircher Friesens”. Brother Jakob (1820-88) lived in Kleefeld, Molotschna and settled in Rosenort, Manitoba, in 1874. Brother Peter (1812-85), was a career teacher in Marienthal and compiled the “Gemeinde Bericht” in 1848. He and some of his children settled in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Another brother Martin (b. 1823) owned a windmill in Prangenau and eventually joined the K.M.B. and moved to Kansas. His sister Helena (1823-59) married her second cousin widower Heinrich Reimer (1818-76), Prangenau, and their daughter Maria (1847-1916) married deacon Abraham R. Reimer (1841-91), Blumenort, Manitoba.

Ältester Friesen’s father Johann Friesen (1763-1830), Schönau, later Rosenort, served as the senior and much respected minister of the Grosse Gemeinde (*Dynasties*, pages 563-582). It is evident that Johann K. Friesen came from a family tradition of community service and commitment to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

## Youth and Marriage.

Johann was born on July 19, 1857, and grew up on a prosperous *Vollwirtschaft* in the village of Neukirch, Molotschna Colony, Russia. He had one brother and two sisters that lived to adulthood. His father, a renowned dairy farmer and

silk producer, undoubtedly taught him much about agriculture (*Dynasties*, pages 568-71).

The Johann Friesen family moved to Rosenfeld, Borosenko Colony, northwest of Nikopol, in approximately 1867 (*Diese Steine*, pages 374-407). March 19, 1871, Johann’s mother died because of an injury sustained in a sleighing accident when pregnant and the baby died as well.

Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau, the fourth Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde, leader of the reformers who opposed Johann’s father in the 1866 division (*Dynasties*, pages 110-135).

Justina Jr. became Johann’s wife on July 2, 1876. They were married by Rev. Peter Kroeker of Rosenort. Two of Justina’s brothers, including her twin Heinrich, almost perished in a blizzard in December of the same year.



Five generation photo taken in 1941. Front: Great-great grandma Justina Friesen, Mother Mary Rosche holding Tina Rosche, great-grandma Justina Brandt. Back: Father Henry B. Rosche, Grandma Justina Rosche. Photo courtesy of Dick B. Eidse, Rosenort, Manitoba.

His father married again within three months, but became ill shortly thereafter, and passed away in 1872. Johann Jr. was fostered by his maternal grandparents, David and Anganetha Klassen. In 1874, the Klassen family immigrated to Rosenhoff, Scratching River Reserve, Manitoba, taking Johann with them.

Johann Jr. was a strong-jawed 6-foot young man with dark hair and broad shoulders. Dec. 18, 1875, shortly after his conversion, Johann participated in the first Kleine Gemeinde baptism held in Rosenhoff, Manitoba, conducted by Ältester Peter Toews. A girl by the name of Justina was also baptized at this time. She was the daughter of Heinrich Warkentin (1833-88) and Justina Enns (1828-95), Fischau. Justina was the sister of

## Farming.

Johann and Justina lived a simple, quiet life. In the Rosenhoff *Strassendorf* village system, the Friesens lived on Section 20, between the Scratching (Morris) River and the old village trail, between neighbours Gerhard Siemens and Heinrich L. Friesen (see map, *Furrows in the Valley*, page 327). They lived in a one-room house with a stove in the middle.

According to the 1897 R.M. of Morris Assessment Roll, Johann K. Friesen owned the NE17-5-1E, with 130 of the 160 acres in cultivation, presumably his Homestead quarter. He owned 7 horses, 4 cows, 9 cows under 3 years of age and 7 pigs. The household included wife Justina, 2 single males and 5 single females, 5 are school-age and one birth. Johann also owned the S1/2 of Section 28 with 120 of 320 acres in cultivation. In spite of church-related responsibilities and the sideline job of teaching, the Friesen family became quite successful at farming.

According to neighbour John W. Dueck, they built a fine house with a basement of bought stone in 1903. No grandchildren have confirmed the existence of a house with a stone basement. The 1906 Assessment Rolls showed the Friesens owned the NE 17-5-1E, with 10 less acres in cultivation. He owned 7 horses, 4 cows, 2 cows under 3 years of age, 11 sheep and 14 pigs. The S1/2 of Section 28 now has 225 of the 320 acres in cultivation.

It has not been determined when the Friesens moved from the original lot in the village to establish a yardsite on their Homestead quarter on the west side of the Morris River. Their new yard here boasted a 1 1/2 story house with two rooms upstairs, a gabled barn, several granaries, a tool shed and a carpentry shed, which doubled as storage for the top sleigh. Near the house was a small building, which contained a bake-oven. It was heated with flax straw. (Grandson Bill Schellenberg remembers falling asleep on the straw in the corner while his grandma baked bread.) At one end of this building was a large old-fashioned maengel for pressing clothes. Neighbours would

come over and press their own as well.

As indicated in the tax assessments, the Friesens had a mixed farm. Johann never owned a tractor, but had the finest horses available for field work and for travelling. Bill remembered hauling hay with his grandpa from beyond McTavish, an area referred to as the "dempel". The first day they would cut the hay and the next they would go back, rake it and pick it up. It took a full day to haul in a load of hay.

In 1910, Peter D. Loewen, John R. Dueck, and Rev. Abram Eidse invested in the first steam-powered threshing machine. Rev. Friesen was hired as the threshing operator and David Kroeker as the engineer.

The Friesens owned a boat, useful for driving in bridge posts, which continually needed replacing after the spring flooding, and for access to the school and store during the same. Johann was known as a skilled carpenter with a workshop full of old-fashioned carpentry tools. He framed many homes and built all the caskets in the area.

### Tragedy and Compassion.

Grief and sorrow scared the first 30 years of their married lives. Their oldest son Johann died at 10 months of age on February 14, 1878. He had been scalded badly by pulling a pot of boiling water onto himself. Justina's single twin brother died in August of 1881. Seven years later, in spring-



Elizabeth W. Friesen (1892-1969) and David K. Eidse (1888-1950) on their wedding day 1914. Elizabeth was the fourth of five daughters born to the John K. Friesens. Remembered as a godly mother of 19 children, including four sets of twins, she was a faithful, hard-working and devoted partner to her husband, a large-scale farmer and businessman of Rosenhoff, Manitoba. (see Furrows in the Valley, page 459). Photo courtesy of Henry K. Dueck, Rosenort.

time, Justina's father passed away.

In a letter recorded in his letter book, Johann expressed his feeling regarding son Johann who died in January of 1892: "The beloved heavenly Father has taken our son away from us at the age of 10 years, 1 month and 4 days through the temporal death after 38 hours of severe sickness. We suffer bereavement, as he could save us so many steps, and when I went away, he would do all the work in the barn. This is also the greatest reason why we miss him so much. But otherwise one must gladly wish him the rest, as he is now spared many a grief, seeing that so many children are enticed by the world, which is a grave matter for the parents."

The springtime of 1895 brought the death of Justina's mother. A son named Johann was born and died in 1896.



Annie W. Friesen (1888-1921), third daughter of Johann and Justina. Annie married at the age of 16 to Gustav Schellenberger (1881-1943). He immigrated from Ivanovka, Russia in 1902, and was at one time a large landowner in Rosenhoff, Sanford and McTavish. Annie was the mother of 11 children, two of whom died at birth. She was an excellent seamstress, cook and woodworker until her early death at age 32. The children were fostered by many different families in the community, but have remained close to each other to this day. (see Furrows, page 452). Photo courtesy of Sandra Klassen, Morris.

Between the deaths were the joyous births of six children that reached adulthood: Justina (H.F. Brandt), Aganetha (John F. Dueck), Anna (G. Schellenberger), Henry W. Friesen, Elisabeth (D.K. Eidse), and Maria (Mrs. P.D. Harms).

In 1903 Justina gave her family quite a scare when she fell backwards off the buggy.

Johann had compassion for his children. In February 1916, upon the urging of his wife, he walked three miles in a severe snowstorm to check on his daughter Mrs. Elisabeth Eidse while she was in labour. He followed the fence lines and was relieved to find his dear friend and cousin

Mrs. A.E. Eidse (*Pres.*, No. 8, Pt. II, pages 51-54) helping out. A little grandson named Pete arrived safely.

When his daughter Anna Schellenberg was dying of uterine cancer in January of 1921, he made sure the children were all called home from school and were able to say goodbye. He shared communion with her on her deathbed, despite the fact that she'd never been baptized. (This was due to her husband's objections.) Following her death, he built her coffin himself.

In 1923 when spring flooding forced their children, the Harms', out of their home, they were welcomed. Granddaughter Tillie Schellenberg, who had lived with them since being orphaned by her mother, died at their home in 1924 of diphtheria after a short illness. It was a huge shock for the family. Again Johann used his carpentry shop and weathered hands to lovingly build a coffin. The funeral had to be held at his sons, Henry Friesen's, next door and the body kept in the hay barn. He preached on Phil 2:5-7. Until he and Justina were too elderly, they fostered several of their Schellenberg grandchildren.

### Family Life.

Justina was a busy and frugal woman. Meals were plain with plenty of fried potatoes and fried eggs. "Schinkefleisch" (ham) was for special days. She would let the cats lick the dishes before they were washed. Nothing was wasted. She had a large kjist (chest) full of hankies and shawls and other interesting trinkets. It was a real treat when



Justina (1878-1946), the oldest in the family, married Henry F. Brandt (1876-1960). They had 11 children of whom eight lived to adulthood. She had arthritis by age 48 and suffered a stroke in 1939. After many marital difficulties for which her husband was excommunicated, she died of heart failure in 1946 (for more info. see obituary in the Familienfreund, March 1946).

she'd let her children and grandchildren explore it with her. She was a buxom woman whose baking excellence showed. She provided food, clothing, quilts, and was never idle. The Proverbs 31 passage of a noble woman would describe her aptly, although she dressed from head to toe in black rather than purple.

In 1946 Justina managed to keep her neighbour, Mrs. David Siemens, from returning to her buming home by forcibly restraining her. The lady was already suffering smoke inhalation and could easily have been overcome. Considering Justina's age it was a noble feat.

Johann entertained his grandchildren with little things such as walking with his fingers across the table toward them. He was a kind, teasing grandpa who would hold his grandchildren on his lap. He had more time for them than his wife did. Sometimes the grandchildren noticed him sneaking food under the table for the cats. He is fondly remem-



*H. F. Brandt was a good farmer, owning a threshing machine and steam engine in the company of friends. Photo from Furrows, page 454.*

bered sitting at his writing desk and writing by the hour. The many cubbyholes were fascinating. (Great-granddaughter Diana Schellenberg of Kleefeld owns this desk). At Christmas the Friesens made little fuss but usually gave each grandchild a pencil. Perhaps in hindsight it reflects deeply the priorities of this man who loved the written word.

Johann was known as an expert checker player in the community, which some thought unbecoming a minister and others enjoyed thoroughly.

#### **Holdeman Schism, 1879-83.**

Piecing together the early years of Johann's ministry 100 years after the fact has been challenging. In 1878 he was elected as *Vorsänger* (song leader) for the Scratching River Kleine Gemeinde congregation.

In November of 1879 the thunderclouds began to gather on the horizon for the Kleine Gemeinde church as a man named Holdeman came to visit Ältester Peter Toews, Grünfeld. By December of 1880 Toews was pushing for the rebaptism of "true" believers.

In October 1881 the brotherhood met and hoped for unity with no second baptism. Shortly thereafter John Holdeman began rebaptizing those who were followers of his line of thinking. He baptized his converts into his own Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. Several ministers broke away from the Kleine Gemeinde, including Rev. Johann T. Enns from the Scratching River Reserve, Justina's cousin.

Deacon John Loewen of Rosenhoff had died in the midst of the conflict and needed replacing. Peter H. Unger, Blumenhof, wrote, "March 6 the (Nebraska) Ohms again went to the other side of the Red River to serve the Gemeinde there with baptism, Communion and elections....on Sunday, the 12th, ministerial election was held. First two deacons were elected, and Brother Johann Friesen, Rosenhoff, was elected with 26 votes, and the Brother Abram Eidse with 19 votes. Of these two one teacher was elected, and it was Johann Friesen as teacher with 25 votes. These two were elected

by 34 brethren."

March 22, 1882, at age 25, Johann was ordained as a minister and by June 11, he was already preaching on the East Reserve. Johann's father having been the third Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde will have helped him understand the role of the ministry and the importance of remaining steadfast and resolute in times of conflict.

Ältester Peter Toews, after joining the Holdeman Church, transferred to Johann a letter of appreciation from the Russian Czar, thanking the Gemeinde for its nursing care of wounded soldiers during the Crimea War which ended in 1855. This was added to the Gemeinde's historical document collection, of which Johann was custodian (*Storm and Triumph*, page 147). Where did this collection go?

In January of 1883 the Kleine Gemeinde church of Manitoba held an Ältester election: 88 brethren voted for Rev. Jakob M. Kroeker, 8 for Rev. Peter Baerg, Grünfeld, Rev. Jacob Dueck, Grünfeld, 6, and Rev. Johann Friesen, Rosenhoff 4. Ältester Jakob M. Kroeker was assisted by Johann for as long as he lived.

From February 17 to 25, 1884 the Scratching River ministers had meetings in the East Reserve



*Henry W. Friesen (1890-1969) married Helena G. Rempel (1890-1964), daughter of Martin K. Rempel (see Furrows p. 430). In the words of his son, Henry Friesen Jr., "Dad sold anything and everything. When horses were needed he sold horses, when buggies were needed - he sold buggies, when cars came along - he sold them. He loved to wheel and deal." He was widely known as a top implement salesman and was also a manager of the Rosenort Credit Union (see Furrows, page 387). Photo courtesy of Lorilee Scharfenberg, Riverside.*

presumably doing some damage control. Not much is written about the next several years to indicate the state of the Kleine Gemeinde church. Presumably the main split had occurred and families were trying to come to terms with the devastation of separation.

#### **Ministry, 1888.**

In January 12-15, 1888 it seems that Ältester Jacob. Kroeker, Rev. Johann Friesen and Isaac Loewen (songleader) were heading for Grünfeld (Kleefeld) from Rosenhoff and due to terrible winter weather conditions, it took 2 ½ days to arrive.



*Daughter Aganetha (1882-1965) married John F. Dueck (1875-1946). She was a mother of 14 children, losing only one daughter at birth. At first they lived in Rosenhoff and later they pioneered west of Rosenort, which she found lonely. They saw farming change from hand-seeding, using oxen, then horses and later more modern machinery. (see Furrows, page 434). Photo courtesy of Nettie Bartel, Riverside.*

What a tragedy had their lives been lost. The risks taken for the sake of Christ were high. In February 1888 three of the Scratching River ministers, presumably the two Kroeker brothers and Johann, went to Nebraska to visit their sister Gemeinde.

#### **Letters, 1889-95.**

Most Mennonite ministers carried on an extensive letter correspondence with other church leaders and parishioners. Traditionally these letters were recorded in a "Briefbuch" (Letterbook), which became a permanent record of their correspondence. It was natural that many of Johann's letters were written to ministerial colleagues and relatives in the sister congregation in Jansen, Nebraska. One of Johann's letterbooks has been preserved and is now owned by Art Cornelsen of Rosenort, Manitoba. These letters provide insight into Johann's ministry.

Johann wrote two letters dated January 20, 1899, to his mother's first cousin, Peter R. Brandt, in Jansen, Nebraska. Johann gently reprimanded his friend (and relative) because of reports of disunity in the Gemeinde in Nebraska. He writes, "As we read your letters and examine them according to the Word of God, it seems to us as if everyone looks too much at the other and forgets himself, so that I would like to counsel all to think more of the other and to forget more about themselves, as stated in the 11th verse of song 271 (*Gesangbuch*)."

A third letter dated Feb 7, 1889 but actually written March 7, is presumably addressed to Ältester A.L. Friesen who supposedly had been involved in improper financial dealings (apparently through no fault of his own). Johann gently indicated that the role of a leader is to "...feed His sheep. Oh, what an important assignment to conduct such an administration....I find myself only too unworthy to help carry out such an important assignment. I feel compelled to share my concern

with you. Noteworthy are the words of Jesus when He say, 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lays down his life for his friends,' (John 15:13) and further, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep,' (John 10:11):'

Johann asked the question: "But where, beloved, do we sacrifice our life for the brethren, or do we find this too difficult for the lust of some temporal things?...I have not written as a busy-body but as one much burdened, as it is our greatest duty to bear concern so as not to lose any sheep of the Lord." Obviously this was a difficult letter to write, since A. L. Friesen was a gifted writer and the Ältester who had stood by the Kleine Gemeinde and helped it to reorganize after the Holdeman split.

A fourth letter dated March 8, 1889 is addressed to Peter Brandt: "...a year has gone by since we left your presence there, and did so in good confidence that you would prosper more henceforth than hitherto. Yet, in vain." Johann urged humility: "...the Lord Jesus has pleasure only in the humble ones, which we can see at the beginning of the great work of the redemption--when the poor girl [Maria] was chosen to carry the holy (child) and also to give birth, and He [Jesus] also served as a teacher, as He chose the poorest fishermen to carry His Gospel into all the world....Not a day passes by that my thoughts are not lingering with you."

April 23, 1889, Johann wrote a letter to Rev. Heinrich Ratzlaff who had left the Jansen Kleine Gemeinde and joined the "Peters" Gemeinde in 1888 (later known as the E.M.B.). Addressing the suggestion that the ministers from Manitoba had been too easy on Ältester Abram L. Friesen and too hard on the Brotherhood which had concerns regarding his leadership, Johann said, "...I believe, that we at that time took a harder stand against the Ohms than against you. Beloved brother, what did we at that time demand of you brethren in working toward the end that you could once more trust the Ohms?...Even now we do not acknowledge that you alone are to blame that the reconciliation did not hold." Johann asked for patience and indicated that more decisions or advice would be forthcoming after a full brotherhood (including both Scratching River and East Reserve congregations) had been held in the East Reserve.

A month later in a letter to Peter Brandt dated June 16, 1889, Johann desperately pleaded with the brethren in Nebraska to remain patient and not to establish or go over to a new church. He emphasized that the right way to fight is with prayer and that in wrestling in prayer one becomes a servant of God.

One-and-a-half years later, February 8, 1891, another letter was written to Peter Brandt. Johann wrote candidly about the death of his 10-year old son (see above). Responding to a question on prayer he gave an explanation based on 1 Corinthians 14. Apparently some churches were using Paul's admonition regarding the practice of speaking in tongues to justify audible prayer, which the Kleine Gemeinde did not practice. Johann endorsed silent prayer according to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:6. Johann acknowledged that he and others would have been transgressing if there actually was an Ordnung saying audible

prayers should never be spoken. Johann wrote: "You think we should not reject the brethren too readily, and in that I agree. I wish salvation for myself and everyone else, but to take a stand for what I myself freely think is in accordance with the Word of God, I consider to be proper."

This is an interesting view of a passage long considered the property of charismatics. It is also worth noting that Mennonites did not emphasize audible prayers because they felt the relationship between the believer and God was too important to be appropriated or controlled (and possibly manipulated) by one individual or worship leader.

In another letter to Peter Brandt dated February 24, 1891, Johann evaluated the rules and regulations of different churches with Galatians 2:19, "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God'...Further, I would like to say that I want to acknowledge each one the way he is, seeing as I do not know how he is standing in grace before God, and many a one may well be closer to God than I am. When one reads the accounts of the martyrs, one finds they held differing regulations, yet they sealed their faith with their blood and gave their lives for the truth of the Gospel. And our faith would be truly revealed if we had to pass through such a fire of tribulation."

Somewhere during the course of the correspondence, Peter Brandt had joined the Peter's Gemeinde. In 1902 Brandt was reconciled and reaccepted into the Kleine Gemeinde showing how the Lord had blessed Johann's ministry.

The final letter in this collection was written on July 14, 1892, but it is unknown who the recipient was: perhaps it was the Ältester again.

In January 1895, Johann wrote a letter to Steinbach merchant Klaas R. Reimer (his second cousin) objecting to large business operations. Johann Friesen appears to have been a leading spokesman for those in the Kleine Gemeinde concerned that believers not be blinded and seduced by wealth and power thereby losing their focus on following the teachings of Jesus.

### Education.

From 1880 to 1883 Johann taught in the Rosenhoff school, replacing Maria Friesen, apparently the first women teacher among the Mennonites in Manitoba. Johann was examined and licensed with the Department of Education for the 1880 school year (*Pres.*, No. 8, Pt. I, page 8).

According to interviews with students who attended school in Rosenhoff during the 1900-1920 time period, Johann also filled several other roles in education. He was a trusted school board member but would also be called on to fill in for teachers during sickness.

In the Mennonite tradition the Gemeinde was responsible for their confessional school system. It was customary for one or more of the ministers to be in charge of the schools. These ministers also served as school inspectors to insure that the educational system was operating as intended. It appears that Johann served as a school inspector on behalf of the Kleine Gemeinde church. On January 27, 1898, teacher John W. Dueck recorded: "In spite of snow flurries and strong winds, Johann and David K. Friesen visited my school (in

Rosenort). I was nervous, and the children were not as orderly as usual"

In November of 1902 when the Rosche family arrived from Germany, Johann was teaching full-time again. School was in German with English as one subject. He was very strict but a good teacher according to the children.

On December 6, 1906, Rev. Johann K. Friesen, Rev. Abram Eidse and Henry L. Friesen went to Altona to inquire about the compulsory use of the Canadian flag at the Mennonite schools. They received the assurance that they did not have to do this. In 1907 Johann taught school again and continued for two years in Rosenhoff. Elisabeth Klassen, later Mrs. Peter W. Friesen, recalled that on her first try at attending school, she got scared of the teacher with his black beard (unknown) and ran home screaming. A year later, at the age of six, she tried again and liked her teacher, Mr. Johann K. Friesen. In some areas he was not very strict but in other areas, very much so. He was her teacher for two years.

Johann served as a school teacher for a total of eight years. His methodology was based on love and encouragement and not on the use of threats and force as was common under the so-called Franz-school among Mennonite teachers.

In 1908 fellow teacher and cousin Abram T. Friesen (*Pres.*, No. 10, Pt. II, pages 25-27) was visiting the Friesens and suddenly passed away from a stroke.

### Ministry, 1910-16.

From November 18 to December 28, 1910, Rev. Johann K. Friesen and Rev. Abram Eidse went to visit friends, families and churches in Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas. The Ohms were in much demand to advise other congregations when there were issues needing to be resolved.

Johann wrote eloquently and passionately in a letter to Rev. Gerhard J. Classen dated Jan 13, 1912. It is an inspiring letter encouraging revival and renewal in the church. Johann, on a personal note wrote: "...the tiring harvest, the long threshing always seems to rob the courage. We have still not finished threshing. There are still four stacks at Abram Duecks and we are waiting for milder weather, for the time being it is too cold."

On June 22, 1913, Jakob M. Kroeker died after serving the Scratching River Kleine Gemeinde (Rosenort-Rosenhoff) congregation for 30 years as Ältester. After the death of his uncle, Johann served as leader for almost a decade until Rev. Jacob B. Kroeker became Ältester.

In November of 1913, Johann K. Friesen, Abram Eidse, Cornelius Plett and Ältester Peter R. Dueck went to Meade, Kansas. According to Peter H. Unger, they conducted several services, held Brotherhood meetings and tried to deal with divisive issues in that Gemeinde. They also visited and ministered in the congregation at Jansen, Nebraska. The services here were held in the home of Peter R. Brandt, with whom Johann had exchanged many letters (*Family Register Abr. L. Plett.*, pages 51-52).

In 1914, after a funeral, Mrs. John W. Dueck wrote, "We saw again our human frailty and the earnestness of this our life as Rev. Johann K. Friesen preached. Eternity needs to be prepared

for in this short mortal life." In 1915, Rev. Peter Kroeker, an aged member of the ministerial and the man who had married Johann and Justina, passed away.

In a letter to second cousin Rev. Peter R. Reimer, Blumenort (Reimer's first wife was Johann's first cousin), dated February 12, 1916, Johann wrote on the issue of a second baptism, perhaps in light of the Holdeman church or perhaps because of the practices and teachings of the Brüdergemeinde and K.M.B.s. Johann clearly stated: "If a person has been baptized upon true repentance and Biblical faith, then we do not baptize him again, seeing that such a one would be hesitant, according to the word of Paul in Hebrews 6, not again to establish the basis of faith, but to move forward in the spiritual life and to strive for perfection. I remember the signature which we received at our baptism



Rev. Johann K. Friesen (1857-1934), the Lord's willing servant. Photo courtesy of Dick B. Eidse, Rosenort. Photo from Rosenort: A Mennonite Community, Book Two, page 3/Sesquicentennial, page 88.

that we should prove ourselves and to consider well that we would not readily want to be baptized again. I in my weakness have tried to follow this teaching, as at that time I was humble and sincere. Hence I do not find myself aright if I should be rebaptized."

Johann used the Holy Scripture, the *Martyrs' Mirror*, Dirk Phillips and Menno Simons as the basis for his theological beliefs.

#### War Years, 1914-18.

In 1915 the federal government began selling bonds to raise money for the war effort. These became known as Victory Loans and were the precursors of today's Canada Savings Bonds. In November 29, 1917, just after the newspapers released government draft notices, Johann collected 1000 dollars in the villages to send in to the Victory Fund. This was in response to the corporate decision of the Mennonites of Manitoba to lend the Government 1 million dollars without interest. The Red Cross also collected funds and to this the Mennonite Villages also donated as individuals.

The October 24 and Nov. 21, 1918, issues of the *Morris Herald* reported that in the final fundraising drive, the representatives to the Mennonite villages were: Finlay McKenzie who collected \$7,150, F.J. Last who collected \$2,560 and Rev. Johann K. Friesen who collected \$35,860, for Victory Loans. \$168,300 in total was raised from the R.M. of Morris throughout the War.

"Rev. Johann Friesen had taken the opportunity to preach a convicting sermon when a neighbour boy died in the First World War. A young lady (Mrs. C.K. Eidse) decided to talk to the minister that evening, confessing her sins, and asked to be baptized." In her own words, "I became a Christian in my late teens. My friends and I were in the back pew at church, laughing and joking, when suddenly I heard the minister's words about God. I felt as if the words were meant especially for me, and I responded."

At least two of the community youths took up arms in this War: Jacob H. Cornelsen, who died after the battle of Viny Ridge, and Otto Rosche.

The February 17, 1916 *Morris Herald* reported on the Temperance movement rally at the Methodist Church: "The Rosenort (representatives) may be Henry Eidse, John K. Friesen and C.D. Loewen likely to be on a committee." It is not known if they actually served the community in this way, but their stand against drinking must have been well-known.

#### Ministry, 1919-34.

March 9, 1919, an Ältester election was held in Steinbach. The brethren from Morris had already submitted their votes earlier. The three deacons handled the votes, and Rev. Jakob R. Dueck, Grünfeld, was chosen as Ältester with 74 votes. Heinrich R. Dueck received 72 votes, Johann K. Friesen 34, Peter B. Kroeker 19, Heinrich R. Reimer 8, Abram Eidse 5, B. R. Dueck 1, K. R. Friesen 1. This election was held by 214 brethren.

As a minister Johann accomplished many things. The most noticeable was the uniting of the Rosenhoff-Rosenort congregations in the first building that served only as a house of worship. It was built at the most northern end of the Rosenhoff district in order to satisfy both congregations.

Johann served as a minister at many funerals, and according to death certificates, also as the undertaker. The ministerial was in charge of education and so Johann visited schools, attended educational conferences, and petitioned the government to allow religious teaching in the schools. As a minister he was also a business advisor for the community.

Wisdom was a necessity. John W. Dueck wrote: "I think it will have been quite a small assembly, for at least two ministers have gone to the East Reserve, namely, J.K. Friesen and A.E. Eidse, having been invited to attend an important brotherhood meeting dealing with the excommunicated sister Manke who desires to be accepted back into the church. This sister left the church a few years ago and got married - I believe before a judge - to a Lutheran man, Manke, and was thereupon excommunicated. Now the question is: How do we deal with this case? Usually we accept only such members who acknowledge and repent of their sinful act and also forsake it. She does acknowl-

edge and repent of the sin she committed, but to forsake him?"

Johann was also involved in the beginning stages of M.C.C. In 1922 John W. Dueck wrote, "In the forenoon Johann K. Friesen read an invitation for the 11th of April to a meeting in Altona regarding assistance for Russian Mennonites so that they can come over to Canada. H.H. Ewert has been in Ottawa where he obtained permission to invite them to immigrate to Canada. The meeting that was held some time ago in the evening indicated that there were several sympathetic people, since a total of more than \$1400 had been pledged for the Mennonites in Russia. As J.K. Friesen said, he supposed the objective of \$1600 will easily be attained."

On Nov. 5, 1923 an election was held, and Rev. Jakob B. Kroeker was chosen with 36 votes to be Ältester of the Scratching River (Rosenort)



Mrs. Justina Friesen, nee Warkentin (1856-1943). Photo courtesy of Nettie Bartel, Riverside.

Gemeinde. Johann K. Friesen had 15 votes, Abram Eidse 16 and Bernhard R. Dueck 3. This election was conducted by 70 brethren.

According to John W. Dueck, Johann was recalled to lead singing when no songleaders made it to church on a certain Sunday in 1924. "On Easter Sunday Jacob B. Kroeker preached and J.K. Friesen on Monday. Both messages were good and went to the heart."

#### The Golden Years.

Another series of letters by Johann K. Friesen was found among the document collection of fellow minister Cornelius L. Plett (1946-1935) who had moved from Blumenhof/Steinbach, Manitoba, to Satanta, Kansas, in 1914 to found another Kleine Gemeinde congregation there.

In a letter dated March 27, 1925, Johann encouraged Plett with Scripture regarding the ailments of old age. Seemingly news has come that Plett had had either a stroke or suffered from rheumatism. Sickness could be viewed as having a positive side, namely, to draw believers into a closer

relationship with God. Johann made note that death is always imminent and that others whom they "...have laboured with, have left." Johann informed Plett that he conducted several services in Grünfeld, after Ältester Jacob R. Dueck's death and led a brotherhood there to bolster the spiritual morale. Just prior to finishing the letter, Jacob B. Kroeker had requested his companionship in travelling to the East Reserve to prepare the youths for baptism, lead an election and conduct communion services.

December 14, 1925, and January 7, 1926, a second letter to Plett, contained basically Christmas and New Year's greetings and tidbits of community news.

Rev. and Mrs. Johann K. Friesen celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1926, a rare celebration at that time. Johann shared his life's story (does anyone have that?) and his fellow minister Rev. Abram Eidse led the service. Friend and neighbour John W. Dueck wrote a special song for the occasion which has been published.

A third letter to his dear friend and partner in ministry Cornelius Plett is dated Feb 21 1927. It contained Scripture referring to their aging in life and the encouragement that eventually, "He (the Lord) will wipe away all tears." He adds, "We sometimes long for it, also for those who have gone on before, with whom we have laboured together."

November 11, 1928, Johann shared with Plett his sorrow over the death of his nephew's wife, Mrs. Peter Siemens and included an overview of the funeral and obituary. He also wrote about his trip home from Meade, Kansas: "My visit to you was a good experience, we also had good weather and felt the mutual love. God bless you for it. My health was good and that added to the joy. Oct. 30, 6 a.m. we left Meade, with many well wishes for a safe journey. We had the good fortune of arriving in St. Paul Oct. 31, at 8 a.m. We had a warm breakfast and then boarded the train and left at 9 a.m.. Arrived in Morris at 10 p.m. and spent the night with Mrs. John Warkentin [his sister who married his wife's brother]."

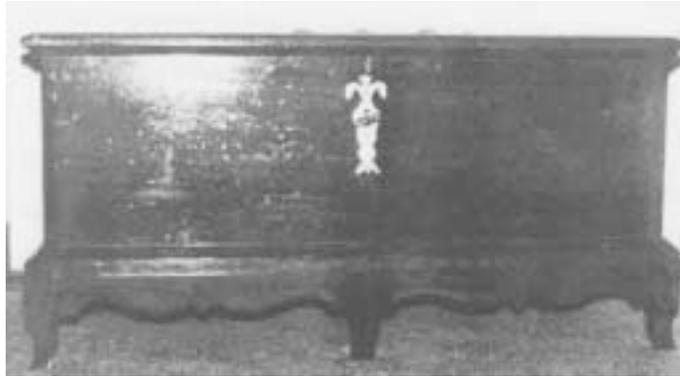
"Nov. 1st in the morning I phoned our son Henry W. Friesen and told him where I was and he soon picked me up and bought me home. And my loved ones were healthy. It was not unexpected, but my wife and children were happy to see me. And we felt very thankful for the safe journey. And I'm happy I could be there and feel your loving welcome. So let us improve our life of faith and be true to the end, to receive the costly Crown and hear the 'Well done, thou faithful servant.'"

### May the Circle Be Unbroken

*May the Circle Be Unbroken*, a Peter D. Harms family history (Steinbach, 1998), 73 pages, details the Friesen's from a grandchild's perspective. In 1920 the Peter D. Harms family "inherited one quarter bush land from Grandpa Friesen" near Flowery Bank. "Dad bought a big tractor, Big 4, and other machinery with money loaned from his

father-in-law." In 1923, when spring flooding rolled over the farmyard and invaded the house, he sent for help. The next morning, "Uncle Henry W. Friesen, Mom's brother, and Grandpa Friesen came with a wagon...to rescue and remove them to higher ground.... Unfortunately, our parents went bankrupt on this farm" (page 11).

In 1927 a move was made "...to an 80 acre farm not too far from both grandmothers." A relationship



*The ancient dowry chest ("kjist") inherited by Justina Friesen Harms from her parents. The kjist is of the type and construction of chests brought along from Prussia to Russia by the Mennonite pioneers in the Molotschna, and may well have made this journey with Rev. Johann Friesen (1763-1830), a well-to-do farmer who settled in the village of Schönau, Molotschna, on July 5, 1804. Rev. Friesen owned 8 horses and 18 head of cattle in 1808. Photo courtesy of May the circle be unbroken, page 25. The Kjist is currently owned by grandson Ken Plett, Blumenort, Manitoba.*

developed between granddaughter Margaret Harms and Justina Friesen. "Grandma Friesen offered her one cent for every gopher tail she brought her and was Margaret ever eager to trap gophers. This saved Grandma's garden from being eaten by gophers. How Margaret enjoyed the fruits of Grandma's



*The two Scratching River ministers, Johann K. Friesen and Abram E. Eidse relaxing together on the Rosenhoff graveyard during a church clean-up day! Photo courtesy of Lorilee Scharfenberg, Riverside.*

gardens: strawberry tomatoes, cherries, plums, apples, and gooseberries."

Obviously Justina's gardens were shared freely with family members and she encouraged a work ethic.

Other issues surfaced during this time for the Harms family. "There was a growing concern in Mom's heart about a big family growing up unchurched. Dad had put spirituality on the shelf. He had been hurt by ministers in the beginning of

their married life, when they had been excommunicated, and that is where his commitment stayed for years to come," (page 13). Since Johan K. Friesen was part of that ministerial, one can only imagine the strained relationship between Harms, his wife and his father-in-law.

"In the spring of 1934 Grandma Friesen moved onto the farm with the (Harms) family. Grandpa John K. Friesen had died the year before, and their children decided that she should move in with the Harms family. A small house was built for her, with a breeze-way attached to the main house." Emotionally this must have been a difficult move for her since she had lived on her homestead for at least 35 years after the break-up of the village system.

"Grandma and Grandpa had been married more than 50 years and had collected so very much. There were piles and piles that had to be loaded onto a wagon and taken to the dump. It almost broke Grandma's heart to see those treasures go which she had so carefully gathered," (page 24).

This statement alone is enough to make most women and all historians weep. What was thrown out that she treasured? Were there "in the piles" chipped teacups brought over from Prussia-Russia-Canada by her mother, a dented cradle lovingly built

by her husband, a vintage spinning wheel perhaps? Could there have been "Wunsches" from her schooldays or some remembrance of her twin brother Heinrich? Did the piles include Johann's Gemeinde documents and perhaps a letter from the Czar of Russia himself?

Perhaps it was in reaction to the loss of her personal possessions in this manner, which caused her seeming stinginess later on. Apparently they left her "...a beautiful chest full of treasures....Margaret (a granddaughter) marvelled at Grandma's big chest that held so many towels, aprons, cloth handkerchiefs, and kerchiefs. It seemed unreal to possess so many things, which were sitting in a chest day after day without being used. Whenever Margaret heard of very poor people, she laid the matter before Grandma and hoped her heart would be warmed by the need. Her reply to Margaret usually was, "Let those people buy themselves what they need," (pages 25-26). Many women today have hope chests or drawers filled with sentimental, unused items with which they'd never part with 'til death. It usually has less to do with selfishness, than with preserving history and heritage for her family.

Justina would never have been accused of being lazy, even in old age. "Grandmother spent a lot of time taking care of the little ones at the Harms house," (page 24). According to the Harms book, the young spirited grandchildren and the aged grandmother got on each other's nerves a fair bit. They viewed her as old, cranky and stingy, and showing favouritism toward one grandchild and thus creating tension in the home. She seemed often afraid she wouldn't get anything to eat, constantly cold and needing to sit where the action

was – right in front of the cookstove. The boys teasing ways annoyed her and she demanded punishment for them at times. Her asthmatic throat-clearing habits were viewed with abhorrence in light of germs. The girls didn't want her washing dishes or putting her fingers in the babies mouths. From a child's perspective, perhaps this reaction to aging is understandable.

Her redeeming factors as a grandmother seemed to be her dried chokecherries snacks and that she "...often voiced her concerns about her grandchildren. She often asked, 'Are they all in and how will they ever all be prepared for heaven?'"

Toward life's end she fell one morning when she courageously pitched in to help her daughter and granddaughter move a big barrel of water for washing. Justina fell and "likely she broke her hip; she never walked again and suffered immensely....The morning of June 7, 1943 while Margaret was sitting at her bedside, Grandma closed her eyes in death," (page 26).

One of Justina's prayer concerns was answered just after her funeral: "(Grandson) John came home for the funeral and took part in singing different songs. Before John left to go back to his job they sang several songs. One of them was 'Dem Heiligen Geiste der gnädichlich straft'. While singing this song, he broke down and cried. That evening John decided to follow Jesus," (page 27).

Certainly Johann and Justina will have prayed earnestly that the circle would remain unbroken.

#### The End, 1928-34.

In 1928 after the harvest, Johann K. Friesen planned another journey of spiritual visitation to Meade, Kansas. His family discouraged him, saying he should rather stay at home and take a decent rest. But with great assurance, Johann replied that God had protected him thus far and surely would continue to do so in the future. Unfortunately the journey did prove too difficult and he suffered fainting spells and hallucinations.

Sadly toward life's end Johann K. Friesen's senility became apparent. He aged rapidly and once walked up to the front of the church with his cap on; his only son Henry removed it as discreetly as he could. Another time he had the introductory remarks in church, prayed, went and sat down and rose again in order to preach. He had to be reminded that it was not his turn. The Kleine Gemeinde had no retirement policy for their ministers, since few had lived to this old an age! He was asked to speak at a wedding and it became painfully obvious it was too difficult. He had to be reminded to stop speaking. After all the years of dedicated service it was a sad end to a life of faithful servanthood.

During the last while, Johann K. Friesen suffered several strokes, one of which occurred at neighbour C.K. Friesen's home. Johann was not clear mentally for much of this time.

Johann K. Friesen died on Jan 21, 1934 at 10:45 p.m. His uncle, Abraham B. Klassen, wrote: "[He]..died at 11 o'clock in the evening, after a lengthy suffering, gently falling asleep in the Lord, after a 22 hour stroke....May the Lord posthumously bless his work."

Johann had reached the age of 76 years, six months and two days. The marriage had lasted for

57 years.

After Johann's death in 1934, Justina lived in her own home for eight more years on the yard of her daughter, Mrs. Peter Harms, one mile west of Rosenhoff. The reason she was billeted at their house was simply because the family owed the estate money.

Justina died June 7, 1943. She had achieved the age of 87 years, four months and three days. She suffered from a bronchial condition for many years (possibly asthma) probably aggravated due to many winters in poorly insulated housing. She gave birth to nine children of whom four predeceased her.



Mary W. Friesen (1895-1948) and husband Peter D. Harms (1889-1956), with son and daughter ca. 1924. Photo courtesy of Rev. Frank P. Kroeker, Riverside. A family photo from 1918 is published in *May the Circle be Unbroken: Peter D. Harms and Maria W. Friesen (Steinbach, 1998), page 49.*

#### Poetic Elegy.

On April 29, 1945 a reunion of the family was held at son Henry W. Friesen's, the parental homestead. A short booklet was also published.

A 55 verse poem about John K. Friesen was written by grandson Peter F. Dueck for the occasion. The poem was written in the meter and verse genre, extremely difficult to recreate in translation. The poem was translated by Nettie Bartel, Riverside, for content only. Several verses are included here to provide a sample of this reflection on Johann and Justina's lives and saintly heritage.

47. In 1934  
the hour of death arrived  
In the month of January  
He was laid to rest.

50. Grandmother in her widowhood  
lived nine years, six months in all.  
Til God Almighty granted  
Her wish for her departure.

53. Descendants of this branch  
number 269 to date.

In memorial to their lives  
This gathering was held.

55. Whoever reads this booklet  
with a gracious attitude  
Might wish, that they would not forget  
Their elderly parents love.  
Peter F. Dueck... April 29 1945

#### Legacy.

According to family statistics, Johann preached 1,232 messages in 50 years and nine months of ministry and married 45 couples. He wrote hundreds of letters and sermons, some of which are extant and scattered in the Rosenort community. He preached in Rosenhoff, Rosenort, in every church of the East Reserve, Nebraska and Kansas. Seldom was he without responsibility.

His sermons were described by friend and fellow church member John W. Dueck as compelling, well prepared, excellent, edifying, especially relating to youth. In 1910 Dueck wrote that Johann "had a compelling message about repentance, conversion and the purpose of baptism."

Another comment: "Johann Friesen preached an excellent sermon based on Psalm 103. He mentioned how King David had praised God's goodness. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits,' etc. Verse after verse extolling the goodness of God. Although David had fallen, he confessed and repented of his sin and the Lord again forgave him and gave him peace in his conscience. Friesen also felt the goodness of God in the fact that "we had been able to celebrate communion and wash each other's feet in love. We could offer God no greater thanks than to love one another, thus fulfilling His will. "He has showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

In studying the story of Johann K. Friesen, I realized he was truly the Lord's willing servant.

#### Descendants.

Johann and Justina's homestead is now owned by their great-grandson Edward Loewen. The home of Johann and Justina Friesen was owned by grandchildren Jake Letkemans for several years afterwards, but finally burnt because of an infestation of bedbugs.

Friesen descendants include Rev. Edward Friesen, a Kleine Gemeinde minister of Boley, Oklahoma, Jerry and Al Friesen, businessmen in Rosenort, Manitoba and most known in the Steinbach area, Ben Eidse, Chancellor of Steinbach Bible College.

#### Sources:

Information from interviews conducted with grandchildren Martha Dueck nee Schellenberg Oct 2, 2000 and Bill Schellenberg Oct 1, 2000.

Information from Dick B. Eidse.

Various books, personal articles, diaries.

Rosche book, *Gateway to the Past, Furrows in the Valley, Prairie Pilgrims, Prairie Pioneer*, Abram F. Reimer diaries, Peter H. Unger diary, Johann L. Dueck diaries, *Dynasties*, Peter Harms book.

# Pioneer Epistles, 1874 and 1910

## Introduction.

This article features two epistles of the Flemish Mennonites who pioneered in Manitoba in 1874-76. A similar collection of pioneer letters "From the Bishop's Desk" was published in *Preservings*, No. 14, pages 24-26, focusing on the letters and correspondence received by Ältester David Stoesz (1842-1903), Bergthal, East Reserve, Manitoba.

## Letter One:

Written to Ältester David Stoesz, East Reserve, Manitoba, by Kornelius Kroeker (b. 1819)(BGB A182), Gnadenfeld, West Reserve (1881 census, BGB page 369) and Johann Abrams (b. 1828)(BGB B74), Hochstadt, West Reserve (1881 census, BGB page 373): see also Franz Dyck (1822-87), "Letters from Bergthal, 1875 and 1876," to Ohm David Stoesz, in *Preservings*, No. 14, pages 22-23.

## Kroeker/Abrams Nov. 24, 1874.

*Friedrichsthal den 24. November 1874*

To the Honourable David Stoesz on the new settlement from his neighbours J. Abrams and Kor Kroeker, a heartfelt greeting to start, beloved brother.

We have received both of your letters, which you have written, and received the greeting which was heard by all the brethren with great joy when the Ältester read it [publically]. And so we are together in order to also gladden you and all those who have moved away with a humble writing.

We, together with our families, are—thanks be to God—well, and wish that our writing might also find you in good health. Regarding sickness of the body we apparently have nothing to complain about, but one has so much else in ones' thoughts that one for that reason sometimes almost says, "Krank wirkt dann Furcht und Hoffnung Schwebt über unser Haupt". Therefore, remember us often in your prayers that the beloved God might be gracious unto the supreme government and keep the land in peace, and that we might thereby be able to fulfil our avowed intent to follow after you.

For life here is no longer a pleasure. We can readily notice that it would be but a small measure and all hope thereto would be fully lost. But the Father of all hearts has held it thus far and will surely continue to do so. Should it be within His will to end our lives here, then it would be for the good, for your aged grandmother has talked so much about the journey, and now the beloved God has called her to Himself so that she already will not need to experience it whether it might have been difficult or hard for her during the trip.

Among yours, the old Abram Hiebert, Schönthal has died.

I cannot write much in particular except that during the foregoing summer a huge fire loss occurred in Neuhorst so that it comes out to 80 kopeke fire [insurance] money for each house. They are presently working here on selling the Wirtschaften, which, however, we are not yet able to report with certainty. It appears as if it may work, and it looks as if some money will also soon come in. This would certainly suit us very well, for otherwise our immigration appears someone negative. Our Ältester currently has difficult problems to work through there, which will also be familiar to you from earlier

which are more severe. A General from Petersburg was here—from today, 14 days ago. He demanded to speak with the Ältester, and since he was not at home, he drove to Grünau on Saturday night, which he had also requested and had spoken with him there.

So there was a brotherhood meeting Sunday, November 10, where the Ältester brought a presentation, that the General had required that the circumstances which Toleben had had read, again be presented to the brethren. However, no one elected to remain here as a result. And it was presented many times, that all wishes were that we would receive grace to emigrate.

The Ältester has been accused before the same General by a brother in the Gemeinde, for whose aged father the Ältester had called the brethren together many times in order to requisition for board and quarters, and now repays with such thanks. What did the Apostle experience when he was falsely accused?

Worthy friend, totally amazingly, remember your hat [Haud?] and your gait, which you generally walked during the threshing time, which he has often gone which summer. Do not think at all that you are forgotten by us. For as often as we are at the Schulzes [mayor] or come together elsewhere, there is talk about you. Indeed, the children large and small talk much about you.

If you can then greet Pet: and G. W. yes, all Friedrichsthalers, you will know the ones from here; also from Abram Friesen. Greet those from our village, and if you meet him, D. Funk. Greet everyone, also when you meet the Gintersche, greet her from us and the parents; yes, greet everyone there from the Friedrichsthaler.

Many letters have already come here, but we still cannot figure out exactly where you are, or whether those who emigrated from here in September are already there or not. But we must close. Receive a heartfelt greeting for all of you. Indeed, greet everyone, from Johann Abrams and Kornelius Kroeker.

**Acknowledgement:** Primary translation by Ben Hoepfner, Valhalla Dr., Winnipeg, and final translation by the editor. The Kroeker and Abrams letter is courtesy of Vol. 1559, #2., Att: Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3P 0M4. Ph. 1-204-888-6781.

## Letter Two:

On November 10, 1910, Ältester Peter Toews (1846-1915), Alt-Bergfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba, announced that the Chortitzer Gemeinde would conduct a ministerial election in Grünthal, for a minister and a deacon. A major part of the ministry of an Ältester of a large and growing pioneer Gemeinde such as the Chortitzer, was the extensive letter correspondence involved. To date hardly anything of the "Schrifttum" of Ältester Peter Toews, has come to light, and the following is the first of his writings that the editor is aware of.

## Announcement, 1910.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. Matthew Chapter 9, verses 37 and 38.

Beloved Gemeinde. We teachers [ministers] always feel more and more the deep reaching necessity for spiritual nurture, care and shepherding in that the Ohms Peter Wiebe and Johann Wiebe have died, and Ohm Joh. Neufeld is already incapable of serving the Gemeinde, and we others are already almost old. Therefore it has been decided in the Lehrdienst [ministerial] to constitute a ministerial election and we have appointed the next following Thursday, namely, November 24, for that purpose to allow one minister and one deacon to be elected from among the Gemeinde in the church in Grünthal.

Therefore we bid that all the brethren without exception make their appearance at the said place and day at 9 o'clock in the morning, with a fervent prayer. Indeed, beloved brethren, do truly prepare yourselves with prayer and supplication for this work, with fasting in sack cloth and ashes. There are countless people in need of the Gospel.

Therefore pray unto the Lord of the harvest, yes, unto the great Teacher who hath descended from the heavens, that He should prepare many for that purpose, and to implant the desire in them, to preach the Gospel. If the soul genuinely feels that it owes this to the Saviour and has a living faith in Him, then do not allow yourself to be held back by anything from coming unto Him and asking for His help. Sometimes the Lord in His grace calls people unto Him, who have sunken deep [in sin], but because the call convicts them within themselves, they forsake everything and follow after Him.

He who correctly evaluates the times and the circumstances in everything he undertakes, does that which is not only correct for himself but also impacts on the circumstances and for the well-being of those unto whom a benefit needs to accrue. Exactly the situation which is the dearest unto us, can awaken within us the deepest pain. But if we direct ourselves unto the Lord with firm trust, He will secure us and abundantly give us peace and grant us comfort. Before a person receives a blessing from the Lord, he must often place his purity and strength under testing; he places it into such proving that it is brought to light, whether they believe He can give what they desire. And thus the worth of the blessings of the Lord very much increase through time and circumstances. May such a result come forth from our endeavour in love and may we be faithful in wisdom and goodness.

Nonetheless, the godless will find errors in what we do and will point to the most insignificant objections and motivations as their grounds.

With respect to this Petition and Announcement, I subscribe hereto with due respect and as the least of the servants of the Lord as the Ältester of the Gemeinde at Chortitz, "Peter T. Toews" in Grünthal, November 18, 1910.

The "Announcement" is from the Peter S. Wiebe Document Collection, courtesy of Mrs. Justina Funk, Steinbach, Manitoba.

# Material Culture

## The Old Colony/Bergthal Furniture Tradition

The Furniture Traditions of the Chortitzer (Old Colony)/Bergthaler Mennonites in the Context of Migrations on Three Continents, by Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, 17610 Prairie Creek Road, Newton, Kansas, 67114-8004.

### Introduction.

Material objects bear unrefutably tangible and therefore critical witness to our history and to our values. They constitute primary historical documents, as do collections of oral history or written documents. That is why a consideration of the material traces of the Chortitzer/Bergthaler Mennonites is appropriate in this volume. This study presents documented accounts and artifacts found in Europe and the Americas that are key puzzle pieces or fragments in reconstructing a coherent image of the larger mosaic of the material culture of the Chortitzer/Bergthaler people. The challenge of this research is immense because of the geographic dispersion of scant evidence and because of a long tradition in Mennonite historical scholarship that elevated the significance and power of evidence of words over that of objects, artifacts, material things.

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**“Material objects bear unrefutably tangible and therefore critical witness to our history and to our values.”**

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Today the 200 year-old material culture of the Chortitza/Bergthal Mennonite historical tradition is far flung across three continents. It may be found among the *Aussiedler* in Western Germany, in the new Mennonite museums of the southern Ural plains, in private and public collections of the plains states and provinces of Canada and the

United States. It is alive in the hands of craftsmen in Mennonite colonies in Mexico and in Paraguay; its traces may be found in Brazil's Curitiba and Witmarsum region. This tradition is most generally defined by the larger Mennonite material culture tradition of Northern, Eastern and Central Europe, with its formative impulses deriving from the Vistula Delta region of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

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**“...[the] material culture of the Chortitza/Bergthal Mennonite historical tradition is far flung across three continents.”**

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The distinctiveness of the Chortitza/Bergthaler building, furniture and furnishings tradition among Russian Mennonites may lie in its earlier impetus from its originating homeland, the Vistula Delta region of today's Poland, than that which informed the later Molotschna Colony. Just like some of the sermons which ministers of the Bergthal Colony read to their congregations in Russia and later in Manitoba had sometimes been “inherited” from their predecessors in Chortitza or Danzig (Note One), so building and furniture styles were inherited via the same migration route.

### Descriptions.

If we ponder whether the Old Colony/Bergthaler material culture tradition may in some

ways be distinctive from that of the other late 18th and mid-19th century Mennonite colonies in Russia, then the admonitions against vanities of the world of Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) come to mind. He led the Bergthaler's emigration and their new settlement in Eastern Manitoba in 1875. His writing against the use of the Christmas tree (Note Two), for example, would indicate that the leadership of the colony encouraged plainness and frowned upon “unnecessary” ornament, such as the decorative painting or veneer inlay on dowry chests and other home furnishings.

But it appears that Chortitza/Bergthaler women found ways to compensate for this prescribed visual austerity, not the least with their lavish care of their flower gardens and flower-filled window sills, as we see for example in 1918 photographs of the Jakob L. Plett yard (Note Three). In the Mennonite colonies in Mexico floral decorations are abundantly present in girls' and women's clothing, on the housewares and china displayed in the homes (Note Four).

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**“...it appears that [Old Colony] women found ways to compensate for this prescribed visual austerity...”**

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One of the rare descriptions of Mennonite homes and furnishings from the third year of pioneering in Manitoba was written by an outsider, Lady Dufferin, after her and her husband Lord Dufferin's visit to the East Reserve in 1877. She uses the adjective “plain” at least four times in two short paragraphs, an indication that the plainness of these people struck her as a most distinct characteristic, as did their “neatness.”

“... Their houses are cottages very plainly built, roofed with thick hay thatch, the walls wooden, but covered with plaster. Next to, and opening into the livingroom, is a large building in which the cattle spend the winter. The inhabitants will gradually leave off this nasty plan, but it is their devotion to their cattle which makes them wish to have them so near. Everything looks neat, home-made wooden furniture, flowers in the windows and nice gardens. Necessity in Russia has taught them to make a peculiar fuel - cakes of manure, mixed with straw, which look exactly like turf. With this they go through the long Canadian winter without wood or coal.

“They dress in the plainest and least decorative fashion. the women, from their birth to their graves, tie up their hair in coloured handkerchiefs, fastened under their chins, and wear dark-colored gowns, the baby's gowns being made after the same fashion as its mother's. All the people, men and women, are plain. ... Their church is



Fig. 1. Anna Wiens Enns dowry chest, Kjest, 1789-1790, ash and inlaid veneer, ornate tinned iron hinges. Brought from Prussia to Chortitza in 1789, taken to the Bergthal Colony in the 1830s, to South Dakota in 1876, then to Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Kauffman Museum Mennonite - Photo: Mark Wiens.

most simple - plain benches without backs, and no ornaments anywhere...." (Note Five).

The "homemade wooden furniture" mentioned by Lady Dufferin would have been built after the first difficult year of survival when life was very harsh and people made do with quickly improvised furnishings. William Schroeder tells us that in Russia, the Bergthalers sold most of their furniture - exceptions would have been dowry chests which were conveniently "recycled" as travel trunks - along with farm machinery and animals at public auctions prior to their leaving (Note Six). The men crated the few things that they could bring along, and household goods such as bedding, clothing, cooking utensils, perhaps a few heirlooms, the family clock, Bible, family records and school copy books of the children (Note Seven), the toasted bread for the journey, were packed into the family's dowry chests, as those also made convenient traveling trunks. Upon arrival in Manitoba, these crates and chests which had held the immigrants' freight served as the only furniture in their first make-shift shelters, as tables, beds, benches, cupboards, and wardrobes (Note Eight).

Klaas Peter's recollection of the settlers' first improvised furnishings is quite graphic:

"After moving into their new homes, the settlers needed furniture. Even a modest housewife, after she and her loved ones had worked hard all day, longed for a bed to rest on during the night, a bench or a chair to sit on, and a table at which the family could eat. They had none of these. One had nothing to serve as a table during mealtime except a trunk around which the whole family kneeled or sat with their legs folded under them to eat. After outdoor work had to stop because of cold weather - except for hauling wood - there was more time for making furniture."

"These efforts also resulted in quite a variety of items - you can imagine what a farmer, who has never handled any tool other than a dull axe, can make. Almost no one had the proper tools; at best, a saw, an axe and a drill were the only tools available. With these the men worked, without a plane or a square, right on the ground, for there were no work benches. Many bedsteads were made without using a single board. These were the cheapest items because they were made of saplings about the thickness of an arm from the woods. Where space was scarce in the living room, bedsteads were erected one on top of the other. The bigger boys had to sleep on top...." (Note Nine).

Surely the Bergthalers' furniture which Lady Dufferin saw in the summer of 1877 was not this make-shift kind anymore, but by now the cabinetmakers and skilled craftsmen among these farming immigrants had made the kind of furniture that was customary in their homes in Russia, working perhaps during the winter months of

For a description of the canon of Mennonite furniture, including sketches of the typical pieces in the canon, see Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, "The Canon of the Vistula Delta: Russian Mennonite Furniture Tradition," in *Preservings*, No. 12, pages 87-92, available on the HSHS website: [www.hshs.mb.ca](http://www.hshs.mb.ca)



Fig. 2. Anna Wiens Enns dowry Kjst, with lid open. Kauffman Museum Mennonite Furniture inventory #1.019. H: 26" D:26" W 56". Private collection. Photo: Mark Wiens.

that year. Some of these furniture pieces would eventually become part of the collections of the National Museum of Man in Winnipeg, of the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, of the Mennonite Heritage Museum at Rosthern Junior College in Saskatchewan, and in Mennonite museums in the United States.

### The Canon.

The types of furnishings which Lady Dufferin saw would have been the following 11 key pieces: dowry chest (*Kjist*), corner cabinet (*Akjschaup*), pull-out bed (*Bed, Loaga, Bocht*), cradle (*Waej*), utility bench (*Benkj*), sleeping bench (*Schlopbenkj*), resting bench or settee (*Ruebenkj*), table (*Desch*), wardrobe (*Kjleedaschaup*), wall cabinet (*Miaschaup*), wall clock (*Klock*) (Note Ten). Several examples of these furniture types were first published in Canada by Michael Bird and Terry Kobayashi in 1981 under the general category of Germanic folk arts in Canada, but without historical and stylistic analysis (Note Eleven). In 1991, the author, together with her husband John M. Janzen established these furniture types as the canon of a distinctive Mennonite furniture tradition, on the basis of extensive research in Europe and in the Americas (Note Twelve).

Lady Dufferin's observation of human quarters adjoining animal quarters in the typical longhouse that she visited - and which caused her some barely hidden disgust - is very well documented in a photograph of the interior of the Letkeman House at Hochfield, Saskatchewan (Note Thirteen). It is a view, from the house into the stock barn, that I experienced even in house-barns built in the early 1980s in the Orenburg Mennonite settlements in South Russia.

### Dowry Chests.

More than any other artifact it is the dowry chest, or *kjist*, that has become a hallmark of that Mennonite identity which has its origins in Northern Europe and a 500 year history of migrations

for the purpose of finding religious freedom. At every point of migration, the dowry chest served as a ready travel chest, packed with necessities for survival in the strange new land, but also with smaller heirlooms and mementos of the old home, of friends and families left behind.

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"...the dowry chest...has become a hallmark of....a 500 year history of migrations for the purpose of finding religious freedom."

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At the time of the migration from the Vistula Delta to what was to become the Mennonite colony of Chortitza in the Ukraine, in 1789, families brought their household furnishings along in wagons, and their craft and building skills in their heads and hands. Among these was a family which had loaded a dowry chest of ash, with inlaid veneers of contrasting colors forming scroll and flower motifs, made to stand on a five-footed base with swagged skirt. (Figures 1 and 2) Dove-tailed corner joints are covered with inlaid baluster motifs. The large brass key plate is elaborately engraved, as are the six thick brass bosses covering the lock and hinge bolts. Tooled metal handle plates, handles and tinned iron hinges feature ornate cut and embossed designs (Note Fourteen).

This dowry chest was passed from mother to daughter who in turn took the chest along with her when she and her husband moved to the Bergthal colony in Ekaterinoslav Province at the time of its founding in the 1830s. Here, when granddaughter Anna Wiens married Diedrich Enns she inherited this chest and in 1876, when the family emigrated to the United States of America, took it along to Avon, South Dakota and on to Mountain Lake, Minnesota. There Anna Wiens Enns' daughter Anna (1857-1934) married Johann Harder in 1885, and that is when this chest entered the Harder family, where it is now in the 7th, nearly 8th generation of a wide-spread

family whose history spans the Vistula Delta of Poland and Prussia, Chortitza and Bergthal colonies in Russia, and the prairies of North America.

### Gerhard Wiebe's Kjist.

While the Anna Wiens Enns dowry chest passed through the Bergthaler stream, so to speak, Gerhard Wiebe's *Kjest* - also originating in the Vistula Delta - is still situated amidst this stream's branch in the Menno Colony of Paraguay's Chaco (Note Fifteen).

This artifact literally embodies the collective history of thousands of people. It was Monday, June 28, 1993, in the village of Blumengart, when I was led to this chest by Johann R. Penner, who had assisted with the creation of the Loma Plata museum and whose keen sense of local Mennonite history had kept track of the whereabouts of Gerhard Wiebe's *kjest*. On this day, the recorded history of this chest began in my notebook. Penner's old dusty car stopped on the yard of Maria and Abraham Falk at about 10 o'clock in the morning. The thermometer showed 90 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, and bright yellow grapefruit hung heavy in the trees. Maria Falk, born Wiebe, had just hung up her wash in the shadow of the deep veranda, the Shattendach, that is an essential part of every house here.



Elder Gerhard Wiebe's chest, Kjest, Blumengart, Menno Colony, Chaco, Paraguay. June 28, 1993. Photo: John M. Janzen.

“[The Kjist of Gerhard Wiebe]...literally embodies the collective history of thousands of people.”

She guided us to a wood tool shed where in the dark shadows I could see what remained of a once beautiful Vistula Delta dowry chest, wedged in between machine parts, feed sacks and junk. Termites had eaten into most of the bottom boards of the chest, and as we lifted the heavy lid a stench of mouse dirt filled the air. But on the inside of the lid I could still see tiny fragments of pictures with German print, dating from before 1900, proof that this chest pre-dated at least the 1927 migration of Gerhard's descendents to Paraguay.

Despite thick layers of Chaco dust and despite the badly damaged paint, the toll of 66 years of extreme temperatures in the Chaco, I could recognize immediately, on the basis of the chest's dimensions, overall form, the design of its keyplate and of its handle plates, that this chest had been made by a cabinetmaker in the late 18th century in the Vistula Delta, somewhere between Gdansk, Elblag and Malbork. What was missing was the separately constructed five-footed base - such as we see with the Anna Wiens Enns chest - on which all such chests rested in order to keep

moisture from rising from the floor into the chest. These bases were often misplaced or discarded after such chests would fall into disuse and therefore disrepair. Still, this ruin of a dowry chest had accompanied and thus “contained” the migration experiences of the Bergthaler Mennonites over three continents.

Maria Falk, present owner of Gerhard Wiebe's chest, had received it from her father, Jacob Wiebe, who in turn had received it from his father Dietrich Wiebe, the son of Gerhard Wiebe who had brought the chest as part of his family's immigration luggage from the Bergthal colony of South Russia to Canada in 1875 (Note Sixteen). On the basis of style analysis one may safely assume that the chest predates even Gerhard Wiebe's birth, and that it had been brought to Russia by his parents in the migration of 1793 from the Vistula Delta to help establish the Old Colony Chortitza.

It may well be that this chest was brought into the household as Gerhard Wiebe's mother's dowry. In contrast to the Anna Wiens Enns chest however, this one is made of soft wood, of pine, and was originally given a painted finish. Such painted finishes were typically grained, sometimes including painted floral motifs in imitation of veneer inlay, so as to simulate chests made of

hardwood such as ash, from which more expensive chests were built, often with additional decorative veneer inlay.

In the Vistula Delta and in the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies hardwood dowry chests were manufactured in a range from very plain to very fancy, that is, without any inlaid veneer decorations and simple forged iron hinges, or with elaborate veneer inlays and ornate silver-tinned and engraved brass hardware. Similarly, painted softwood chests also were available in this range from plain to fancy. But the dimensions of hardwood and softwood chests stayed the same. So we see that these two examples of Old Colony/Bergthal Mennonite material culture, one in Minnesota and one in Paraguay, reveal differences in the economic status of their respective owners and possibly also different religious attitudes toward the world of material things.

“...examples of Old Colony/Bergthal Mennonite material culture,...reveal differences in...religious attitudes...”

### Abr. Giesbrecht's Kjist.

Maria Wiebe Falk's neighbor and sister-in-law Helene Falk Wiebe also showed us an old chest, once

holding the household linens as well as money in the secret compartment of its *Bijlade*. (Fig. 4 a and b) The wood had been stained a deep oxblood red that was still visible under the dark brown oil paint which a more recent owner had applied. This chest was stored in a shed as well. Helene remembered its five-footed base, but said that her husband discarded it after it fell into disrepair.

The well-known photograph of Rev. Abram E. Giesbrecht's chest in Reinland with a little blond girl perched on its top, first published in 1953 by Walter Quiiring, illustrates the intended appearance of the chest with its five-footed base very well (Note Seventeen). (Fig. 5) Helene Falk Wiebe's chest had been brought from Niverville, Manitoba to Puerto Casada in Paraguay in 1927 by Peter L. Giesbrecht, and before him his father Wilm Giesbrecht had brought it from the Bergthal village of Heubuden in Russia to Manitoba as emigration luggage. The overall style, including the shape of the hardware, suggests that this chest too had had its origin around 1800 in the Vistula Delta.

The inside of the heavy lid was still covered with pictures, the private domain of its owners' expressions of joys, desires, hopes, dreams and allegiances: colorful seed package pictures of

Burpee's giant asters, phlox, zinnias, kale and tomatoes, magazine pictures from the 1920s of a family at a picnic, of children and their pets, a father with his young son, another magazine or book cover about Germans in some exotic country (*Deutsches Leben in...*), featuring a man on horseback in front of a prosperous farm, a snow-capped mountain in the background and palm trees in the foreground. There is a rather alluring image of a young woman clad in the fashion of around 1900, and in the very center of the chest's lid a colorprint of a gentleman who might be a British or Canadian, or perhaps a Paraguayan politician. Other, perhaps earlier pictures still from Russia, had been removed, only traces of glue hinted that the interior appearance of the chest was subject to the changes in the lives of the generations that owned it.

A painted dowry chest without its base, stored in the Museum Jakob Unger in Filadelfia, Fernheim Colony, showed characteristics that related it also to the Vistula Delta style of dowry chests with floral motifs in imitation of veneer inlay. But this chest had found its way to the Chaco via the Molotschna colony or directly from the Vistula Delta with World War II refugees.

#### **Abr. Kauenhowen's Kjist.**

There was only one home in Loma Plata, that of Johann and Aganetha Kauenhowen, where I could see a dowry chest in its traditional, intended context, holding bedding and heirlooms in one of the bedrooms. The chest had been inherited from Johann's father Peter W. Kauenhowen who was born in Grünthal, Manitoba (Sept. 24 1884) and who emigrated to Menno Colony, Weidenfeld, in 1927. His father was Abraham Kauenhowen, born 1852 in Heubuden, in one of the five villages of the Bergthal colony. He emigrated to Canada in 1875, from there to the Chaco in 1927 where he died in 1934 (Note Eighteen).

The chest's dimensions, its separately constructed five-footed base, its *Bijlade* and *Doekbrett* (a narrow board across the back of the chest for kerchiefs), links it to its prototypes in the Vistula Delta. The soft wood had originally been stained a dark red. Its most recent coat of dark brown oil paint had been applied by Peter W.'s wife, Maria Kehler. The inside of the lid had no traces of pasted-in pictures and simple, non-decorative hardware. There was a



*Helene Falk Wiebe cleans the Peter L. Giesbrecht chest, Blumengart, Menno Colony, Chaco, Paraguay, June 28, 1993. Figure 4(a).*



*The inside of the lid is decorated with personal mementos. Photos: John M. Janzen. Figure 4(b).*



*The Reverend Abram E. Giesbrecht chest, Reinland, Chaco, Paraguay, ca. 1952. This chest was also brought from Russia to Canada, then to Paraguay. Like the other chests found in the Chaco, it was probably built in the Vistula Delta region of today's Poland. From: Abe Warkentin, Strangers and Pilgrims, 1987, p. 111. For a photo of the Abr. L. Giesbrecht family see, Men. Life, Jan. 1950, page 10. Figure 5.*

lock, but no ornately cut keyplate, and the handles on the sides were missing (Note Nineteen).

It would require further study to determine whether this chest might have been brought from Bergthal by Abraham as a 23 year-old bachelor or whether the chest had come into the family through one of Abraham's three wives, to whom he was married while living in Grünthal, Manitoba. Such chests may have been built in the Bergthal settlements in Manitoba after 1875, but there is no documentation to that effect as of yet. Chests which are documented to have been built by immigrant craftsmen in the Americas as well as in the post mid-18th century daughter colonies in Russia are generally smaller in size than their Vistula Delta prototypes. Therefore it is more likely that the Abraham Kauenhowen chest was made in the Bergthal colony in the Ukraine.

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**“The inside of the heavy lid was....the private domain of its owners’ expressions of joys, desires, hopes, dreams and allegiances...”**

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Since about 1950 the furniture factory *Meubleria Paraiso* in Loma Plata, founded by Jakob Schroeder and currently under the leadership of Jakob Kehler and Gerhard Funk, supplies both Mennonite and non-Mennonite customers in all of the Chaco's colonies as well as in Asuncion and Eastern Paraguay. *Meubleria Paraiso* produces furniture not only for private homes but for all the institutions of the region, for hospitals, schools, churches, administrative offices and Indian missions. Another furniture manufacturer, *Tischlerei Hildebrandt*, is established in Filadelfia.

The forms of the furniture made here by Chortitzer/Bergthaler Mennonite craftsmen have nothing in common any more with those of the canon of furniture made in the mother colonies in Russia and in the early years in Canada, but they still reflect the values of simplicity, quality craftsmanship and practicality, and in this sense this contemporary furniture making in the Chaco expresses a traditional Mennonite aesthetic.

#### **Jakob Wall, Cabinet Maker.**

The Mennonite Heritage Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba, holds in its collection (accession # 966.1727.1, Kauffman Museum

Mennonite Furniture inventory #1.047) an intriguing dowry chest made of ash with black trim, its maker's name and date of fabrication written carefully on the inside of the lid. Literally the text reads: "Anno 1848 Maerz N. 24 verfertigt von Jacob Wall N Dorff." (See Fig. 6.b).

The abbreviation of the village name refers to the village Neuendorf in Chortitza colony. The chest may have been brought to Manitoba by one of the three Jacob Wall families which are entered between the years 1874 - 1876 in Jacob Y. Shantz's *List of Mennonites Who Migrated From Russia to Manitoba* (Note Twenty). But the chest may have been commissioned and purchased from Jacob Wall, its maker, by a customer outside of his family, by someone in the Chortitza/Bergthal region. There is also the possibility that this dowry chest may have been made by a Jacob Wall in Neuendorf near Gdansk, in the Vistula Delta and that it could have been purchased there by someone moving to or visiting from the Chortitza or Bergthal colonies.

Since the Mennonite Village Museum records do not reveal the name of the donor of this chest, it remains speculative in this case whether the maker of the chest might have also been its owner. The dimensions (length/width 135.5cm, depth 70 cm), its lidded compartment (*Bijlade*) and cross-board for kerchiefs, known as *Doekbrett*, the classical urn design of the brass handle and key-plates, the massive cast-iron and tooled handles, the decorative skirting of its five-legged base all correspond to the Vistula Delta canon of dowry chest proportions and forms. The fact that it is fashioned from hardwood also reveals the relative affluence of the chest's owner. It is very rare to find chests with names of their makers, the place of origin, a date and a serial number written on a chest.

What we know with certainty from this chest is that Jacob Wall was a professional cabinet-maker in Neuendorf, be it in the Vistula Delta or in South Russia, that he would have had at least one apprentice, that he took great pride in his craft. Certainly this cabinet-making tradition would also have been extended to the daughter colony Bergthal, so that this piece would also speak to the material culture tradition of the Bergthal colony. The high quality of this quintessential mid-19th century piece of household furniture and the fact that it is firmly dated attracted the attention of exhibitors in London [England], where this chest was featured between March and July 1992.

#### Cabinet Maker, Jacob Friesen.

At least two handbuilt pieces of furniture in



Fig. 6 (a): Dowry chest made by Jacob Wall in Neuendorf, Russia, March 1848, his 24th chest; ash and contrasting veneer. Photo courtesy of Gary Snider, Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.



Fig. 6 (b): Jakob Wall's marking on the inside lid of the chest. The text reads: "Anno 1848 Maerz N. 24 verfertigt von Jacob Wall N Dorff." Photo courtesy of Gary Snider, Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.

private collections in Kansas can be traced to the cabinet maker, builder and farmer Jacob Friesen. He was born in Russia in the village of Schönfeld in the Bergthal colony on July 16, 1834, immigrated in 1875 to Manitoba, settled in Minnesota and died there on December 25, 1910 (Note Twenty-One). (Fig. 7) Jacob Friesen, his wife Helena Penner (1842-1916) and their children were part of the group of 28 Bergthal families, who were not satisfied with the land in Manitoba and who settled in Watanwon County in Minnesota, farming five miles northwest of Butterfield. Locally that area was for many years known as Bergthal, Minnesota (Note Twenty-Two).

That Jacob Friesen had been known as an expert furniture maker and carpenter in Russia was attested to by his descendants in the Friesen family history (Note Twenty-Three). That he practised furniture building in his native village Schönfeld in Russia is also poignantly documented on the last page of his notebook - where he mostly kept records of debts and payments - but where he also wrote in neat German script the measurements for a wardrobe, signing and dating this entry on the 2nd of April 1866 (Note

Twenty-Four).

But, as Jacob's son Henry related in his memoirs, "there was no way of making a living in the new settlement [by cabinet making and carpentry], so he became a farmer ... To add to the hardship of beginning in a new country was father's loss of his right leg in 1877 ... But they were all industrious and frugal people and I don't think they ever have been really in want." (Note Twenty-Five).

Jacob Friesen is said to be the maker of a dowry chest (Kauffman Museum Mennonite Furniture inventory #1.060) which traveled with his family from Manitoba to Butterfield, Minnesota. There it came into the possession of his granddaughter Magdalen Friesen. She in turn passed the chest on to a young Mennonite refugee woman from Russia, whose immigration to the United States Magdalen had sponsored after World War II. This chest corresponds again in construction technique, its size, general form and the presence of *Bijlad* and *Doekbrett* to the Vistula Delta type, and it is reasonable to assume that it had made the journey from Schönfeld, Bergthal Colony, with Jacob Friesen's family, serving to hold the necessities for the long months of travel and the new beginning in the New World.

The exterior is decorated with carefully-applied painted-graining to simulate the appearance of a hardwood chest, but the customary decorative keyplate is lacking around the small keyhole. Hinges and handles are small and appear to have been mass-manufactured. It is possible that

this chest had been repaired and refurbished with this application of painted graining after its journey from Russia. The interior of the lid shows many blotches of white glue, evidence of the presence of paper keepsakes at one time. (Fig. 9) All have been torn out except for one large color advertisement for "The Threshing Machine of the West. The Thresher of the Period. Grain Saving, Time Saving and Money Making." The image seems to date from around 1900. It features two threshing machines on a prosperous farm yard, in the center a wagon loaded with wheat, pulled by two horses. Well-dressed women and children watch as the men work on the wagon and threshing machines. Thus this image on the inside of a Bergthaler's chest reveals its owners single-minded aspiration for successful farming.

Another documented piece of furniture by Jacob Friesen is a table he made for his daughter Maria Friesen Schroeder at the time of her marriage in 1883 (Note Twenty-Six). (Fig. 10) The pine wood is finished with a yellow paint and black trim. The top is cleated to prevent warping, fine horizontal moldings accent the table's skirt, there is a single central drawer, tapered legs are

stabilized with shaped angle brackets. Joints are strengthened with wooden pegs, not with nails. All these features place this table firmly into the canon of the Mennonite furniture tradition as it was established in the South Russian communities, Chortitza, Molotschna and Bergthal alike.

Jacob Friesen's son Henry paid tribute to his father's building skills by his account of the family farm home and especially its hearth that Jacob built in Minnesota. Henry Friesen's recollection is included here because it also constitutes a significant document of Chortitzer/Bergthaler material culture as expressed in built form both in Russia and during the pioneer period in North America. In Russia this *Holländerofen* was still being built and in use in Orenburg region Mennonite homes through the 1990s:

"The house was built on a sloping ground and had a full basement, or cellar as we called it.... The northern half was the cellar proper, and the southern half .... was used as a living room. Our most everyday living quarters in the early years, at least during the summer. It had a hard dirt floor. This was kept scrupulously clean and sometimes covered with fine sand; sometimes sprayed with

white lime. In this basement room was the bake oven which was built in the base of the chimney constructed of large sundried brick. There also



*Jacob Friesen (1834-1910) and Helena (Penner) Friesen (1842-1916) (BGB B186) with three sons (from left to right), J. John Friesen, Henry J. Friesen and Abram J. Friesen (ca. 1884). From The Van Riesen-Friesen Story, p. 27. Jakob Friesen was a brother to Rev. Heinrich Friesen (1842-1921) (BGB B, 232), Hochfeld, East Reserve, Manitoba (see Working Papers, page 62/ Pres., No. 5, page 13).*

was a cooking range built of brick where, in the early years, all the cooking was done. The bake oven was fired with straw or hay till hot enough,

then the tripod, which was rather a long "quadupod," was put in the oven after the glowing ashes had been leveled off; and then the long tray, about three feet long, with large loaves of bread was put on the tripod, the door closed and the most delicious bread was produced, the like of which we don't find on the market today. Also "zwieback" were baked in the same way. ...

"The chimney was built of sundried clay bricks, home made, about 4'x6'x10', and at the base was about 4x6 feet. In the basement room a bake-oven was built into the chimney. Besides the cooking range in the basement room, there was another contraption - a very large kettle, about two feet in diameter at the top. This was suspended with construction of bricks and a firing place beneath. This was used especially during hog killing time to render the lard and fry the cracklings, etc. It was also sometimes used in those days to boil articles of clothing and other laundry pieces when washing. The fuel used in the hearth and under the other kettle was dry twigs and branches, etc, that father prepared to proper size with a hatchet, and home-made "dung coal." This was prepared either from steer (i.e. cattle) manure, or sheep droppings. The sheep had

a shed for shelter and it wasn't long till a layer of 4-5 inches of droppings covered the floor of the shed. When there was enough this was cut into squares of eight to ten inches with a spade and set up out of doors to dry thoroughly, and then it was put under cover to keep it dry and ready for use. It made powerfully good fuel.

"The chimney as it was built was tapering upward; it was located in the center of the house. On the level of the floor of the house it was somewhat smaller than at the base, but still large enough so that another large oven was constructed in it for the purpose of baking, cooking, and heating the house. It was the only source of heat



*Fig. 9: Jacob Friesen dowry chest, from Schönfeld, Bergthal Colony, Russia, pre-1875. View of the inside of the lid with threshing machine advertisement. Private collection. Photo: Ethel Abrahams for Kauffman Museum Mennonite Furniture inventory.*



*Fig. 10: Table, Desch, made by Jacob Friesen on his farm near Butterfield, Minnesota, ca. 1883, for his daughter Maria Friesen Schroeder. Private collection. Photo: Mark Wiens.*

in winter in those early years, till the house was rebuilt and enlarged, when we began to use coal stove heaters. This oven was between the two main rooms of the house. The oven space was covered with steel plates and then a space was left above the oven - as long as the oven, about 5 feet, at least 18 inches or 2 feet deep and the same in height. It was closed with two iron-plate doors. In this space all the cooking was done in the winter when the oven had to be heated up anyway to warm the house. This oven being built of those large bricks, it's surprising how much heat it gave off when those bricks got really heated. It all seems very primitive now, but it is remarkable how well we got along under that system," (Note Twenty-Seven).

### Mexico.

From Canada the Chortitza Old Colony material culture tradition was taken to the state of Chihuahua, in the region near the city of Cuauthemoc, Mexico, in the early 1920s under the leadership of Ältester Johann Friesen. Here in the Old Colony settlement, at Campo 6, in the Spring of 1994, Ethel Abrahams photographed furnishings in the home of a Bergman family which reflect the now 200 year-old furniture tradition of Mennonite colonies in South Russia. There stood the dowry chest on gleaming linoleum, pushed into the corner of the panelled room, its form mirroring exactly the Vistula Delta type. (Fig. 11)

Somewhere along the chest's journey, probably while in Canada, it received a fresh coat of painted graining, featuring delicate painted floral motifs in black as part of the black lines that articulate each decorative field of the chest, and a while later the housewife added commercial flower decals on top of the lid and on the front of the chest, to give it a more fancy appearance. Somewhere along the way the center leg of its scallop-skirted base had gotten lost or broken off.

The pervasiveness of the heirloom chest as well as of the heirloom pendulum clock in the Mennonite colonies in Mexico is attested to also in three photographs of the 1950s, re-published in Abe Warkentin's *Gaeste und Fremdlinge, Strangers and Pilgrims*. Two of these feature the furnishings of the *Grosse Stube* (living room/parlor) while the third shows a boy in Rosenort holding a miniature dowry chest built by Abram Friesen. The degree to which dowry chests from Russia had become icons of cultural identity, especially after their practical storage function had been superseded by the chest of drawers - see for example the photo of the Johann Friesen furniture factory in Blumenort in 1951, stacked with chests of drawers - is made clear through this production of miniature versions of the canon of traditional Mennonite furniture (Note Twenty-Eight). The same phenomenon of the miniaturization of the tradition as a sign of its waning has been documented in the United States (Note

Twenty-Nine).

Here in the Bergman home in Campo 6 there was also the *Ruebankj* with its curved Biedermeier profile, a pull-out bed, a table, *Desch* with dove-tailed cleats, molding, corners joined with wooden pegs, and there was the china cabinet, *Glasschaupp*, even a child's version of the latter.



Fig. 11: Dowry chest from the Vistula Delta, via the Berghthaler colony in Russia to Manitoba, then to Mexico. Bergman home, Cuauthemoc, Campo 6. March 1994. Photo: Ethel Abrahams for the Kauffman Museum Mennonite Furniture inventory.



Fig. 12: Corner cabinet, Akjschaup, Bergman home, Cuauthemoc, Mexico, Campo 6. March 1994. Photo: Ethel Abrahams for the Kauffman Museum Mennonite Furniture inventory.

The corner cabinet, *Akjschaup*, traditionally the husband's equivalent to the wife's dowry chest, featured the most remarkable departure from the traditional Mennonite corner cabinet style. (Fig. 12)

Here a Mennonite craftsman showed off his wood-working skills with a strong, showy pat-

tern of veneer-inlaid stars and trompe l'oeil zig-zag border. The cabinet is literally crowned with an electric clock, also set within an inlaid wooden frame, surrounded by turned spokes like the rays of the sun. It is significant that the clock is given a dominant place in the home in this way, paralleling the same dominance that was once afforded the old Kroeger-type pendulum clocks.

This corner cabinet with clock expresses a very close association made between God-given and man-made resources: time and money - note the modern lock and key on this corner cabinet - and the biblical mandate of stewardship of both. It is also noteworthy that the timepiece appears on the man's, not the woman's, furniture. That all these furnishings gleamed with glossy, light reflecting varnish is an expression of the same "neatness" observed by Lady Dufferin more than 100 years earlier in the Chortitza/Berghthaler homes in Canada.

Many Mennonites in Mexico, and in Paraguay as well, have sold their heirloom chests, their handbuilt-traditional furniture and their pen-

dulum clocks over the past 30 years when they were hard-pressed for cash. Antique dealers from California and Texas, from Oklahoma and Kansas and elsewhere have systematically "combed" and emptied out the Mennonite colonies in Mexico for these kinds of furnishings, and many a Mennonite visitor from North America purchased such a coveted treasure for but a few dollars (Note Thirty). To a degree this is true in Canada and the United States as well, and in this way much of Chortitza/Berghthaler material culture has been lost to research and to the people whose collective and particular family histories these material things embody.

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### "Many Mennonites in Mexico and in Paraguay as well, have sold their heirloom chests,..."

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One such Mennonite dowry chest that had been purchased by an antique wholesaler in Mexico was in turn sold to a Newton, Kansas antique dealer in 1991. There I was able to record the evidence of the chest's travels (Note Thirty-One). The dimensions, the dovetailed joints, the shape of the separate base corresponded to the Vistula Delta type. That the chest had come from Russia to Canada was confirmed by the variety of popular color prints pasted on the inside of the lid. Prominent among these was a full-length color lithograph of Czarina Alexandra printed in Russia. Her face had been torn away. Whether this had been done by intention or by accident is interesting to contemplate but impossible to know.

There was a color print of Christ knocking on a door with Scripture verse in German: "*Siehe, ich stehe vor der Tur und klopf an,*" there was a picture of Christ as the Good Shepherd and reference to John 10:14, a lavish floral card with the

admonishment “*Wer den Sohn Gottes hat, der hat das Leben*”; a greeting card motto in German, “*Seid froehlich in Hoffnung, geduldig in Truesal, haltet fest am Gebet.*” Canadian advertisements in English from Barre Mills and for Warranted Fast Colors testified to housekeeping tasks of the chest’s one-time owner, and there were also three small printed love poems in German, each decorated with a different floral bouquet, testimony to romance during pre-immigration times in Russia’s Chortitza or Bergthal colonies.

The marred and pitted surfaces of this chest had been repainted in red, with green accents over an earlier black trim, perhaps in Mexico. A new set of plain hinges had been secured with Philips screws, and longer metal brackets were fastened to the inside of the lid to keep its boards from splitting apart, perhaps so that the chest would withstand yet another journey.

With the chests came also the pendulum clocks, packed safely inside, of the Chortitza manufacturers Kroeger, Lepp and Hildebrandt and of the Molotschna clock maker Mandtler to the United States, to Canada, from there to the Menno Colony in Paraguay, to the Cuauhtemoc settlements in Mexico and they also told time and graced the walls of Mennonite refugees in the provinces of Santa Catarina and Parana in southern Brazil. Just as furniture styles and manufacturing had been imported into the Russian Mennonite colonies from the Vistula Delta, so too had clock making skills. The people of the Bergthal colony inherited or purchased their clocks from the Chortitza clock manufacturers, and it would also have been likely that they purchased clocks from Mandtler’s shop in the Molotschna colony, since there was less physical distance between Bergthal and Molotschna.

### Orenburg.

Since the Bergthaler material culture tradition was derived from that of its mother colony Chortitza, it is appropriate to present here the picture of what had been transplanted of the Chortitza tradition to another colony within Russia, that of the Orenburg region which was established in 1892-93. Because this excursion into the late 20th century Mennonite setting of the Orenburg region serves as an example of a variation of the Chortitzer/Bergthaler material culture tradition, of the dynamics of its life and forces of its change. Stalinist Communism presented Mennonites with a tremendously challenging contradiction: as an ethnic group they were tolerated, but as a church, as believers, they were persecuted and forced underground. The lifting of these powerful constraints under Glasnost brought about a massive exodus to the West and for those

who remained, assimilation with the dominant culture - and thus the end of the Chortitzer/Bergthaler material culture tradition in Russia.

The Orenburg area daughter colony of Chortitza comprised at least 25 villages on the Tchuran, Uran and Gusicha rivers, in the rolling plains just west of the southern Ural mountains. Two years later, in 1895 the Molotschna Mennonite settlement established some 11 villages adjacent to the Chortitza Mennonite villages. Because they lay just east of the fronts of World Wars I



Fig. 13: Central hearth/stove, Hollaenderofen, in the home of Abraham and Aganetha Dyck, Chortitza, Orenburg region, June 12, 1991. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen with Abraham Dyck. Photo: John M. Janzen.

and II they survived as Mennonite settlements despite collectivization, religious persecution, deportation to Siberia and immigration by many to Brazil in 1929, until a massive exodus to Germany began with Glasnost in 1989-1990.

In the summer of 1991, my husband and I were able to record the material culture - houses, former churches, new *bethausen*, furniture and furnishings - of these nearly 100 year-old Mennonite settlements (Note Thirty-Two). Of the Chortitza villages, in addition to those of the Molotschna colony villages, we were able to visit Chortitza, named in honor of the mother colony, Kamenka, Kitschkass, Petrovka, and Pretoria, while we lived during our stay in the region in Zhdanovka. This village was composed of the villages of Deyevka and Romanovka, named after the Russian estate owners here at the time these Chortitza daughter villages were founded.

The villages Feodorovka and Nikolayevka had already been closed by the government, because their entire Mennonite population had already emigrated to Germany during the year prior to our visit. In fact, we witnessed the end of 100 years of Chortitza/Bergthal Mennonite culture in the southern Ural foothills and plains.

Our first impression was an overwhelming sensation that time had stood still for 100 years between the first settlements that Mennonites from South Russia had created in the prairie states and

provinces of North America in the 1870s (and where they hardly survived in that form beyond the first generation of immigrants in the United States) and the settlement and way of life in these Mennonite villages of the Orenburg region. The vast steppes here, used as pasture and for grain crops, are very similar to the vast prairies which Mennonite immigrants began to till some 130 years ago in North America. These parallels included the mother tongue of all of the villagers, young and old alike, namely Low German (*Mennonitenplatt*).

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“...time had stood still for 100 years between the first settlements....[in] North America in the 1870s....”

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My husband, who grew up in Central Kansas and learned to speak Low German in the community of his maternal grandparents and whose forebears in turn had been part of the 1870s migration of the Molotschna colony villagers to North America, could converse with anyone in Low German, while I was able to use my High German with all those who still were active members of the church, or at least had been as children, since that was the language in which the Bible was read

and taught. Preacher Penner, who had attended only four years of public school and who was responsible for feeding 5000 pigs at Zhdanovka’s collective “Progress,” said that he owed his High German to his studies of the Bible. However, in the church services he used Low German for his interpretations of Scripture and since very recently, also Russian. Even though Mennonites here lost the right to have their own parochial schools after the revolution of 1917, they had retained the language of their cultural roots in the 16th and 17th centuries Lowlands of the Netherlands and the Vistula Delta.

Our Russian translator, herself a first-time visitor in this region, was astonished again and again about the “orderliness,” the neatness of the Mennonite villages, laid out as a *Strassendorf* in contrast to Russian or Baschkir villages: each house, surrounded by a flower garden and white

picket fence, is situated with its narrow side toward the broad tree-lined street. On this street the privately kept milk cows, so-called "red Germans," were herded each morning to the collectively owned village pasture, and back again each evening. Without exception, all houses that were built between 1892 and 1985 followed the same basic pattern, namely that of the longhouse where living quarters, stable (*Stall*) and shed (*Scheune*) are aligned along the same axis under the same roof, with entry on the long side of the house. After collectivization the sheds had to be dismantled because private ownership of pigs, cows and cattle was not permitted, except for a few animals that served the food needs for the family.

Until the 1970s the houses were built of sun-dried mud bricks, but then mostly of fired bricks from the brick factory of the collective. Behind these house-stockbarn buildings one sees the manure pile, the outhouse, the vegetable garden and the potato patch. All houses built before the 1970s were heated by a central stove, known to this day as the *Holländerofen*. (Fig. 13) It heats three rooms and serves also as a bake and a cookstove, exactly as it had been built a hundred years earlier in Minnesota by the Bergthaler immigrant Jacob Friesen and described by his son Henry. Each home was furnished essentially with the same handmade benches, beds, wardrobes, chests, cabinets and tables as those of the Mennonite immigrant generation who settled in the North American plains, in Canada and the United States, between 1874 and 1900.

The sleeping bench, a combination of sofa and pull-out bed with its characteristic Biedermeier-derived profile was the most commonly represented piece of Mennonite handmade furniture still in use here. (fig. 14) Heinrich Dirks of Zhdanovka told us that "a Mennonite farmer should be wealthy enough that his house has room for six sleeping benches," meaning that about 10 to 12 children were desired. It was customary that two children would share one sleeping bench. On average, families here continued to have many children, especially those who remained conservative members of their church. In addition there were many variations of benches, named according to their specific function, such as *Ofenbank*, *Lehnbank*, *Melkbank*, *Packbank*, *Ruhebank*, *Fussbank*.

Tables, wardrobes, cabinets, particularly the "Glasschaupp," were of the same style as their post-1874 counterparts in North America, as were the wooden cradles which were now stored in attics or donated to the newly emerging Mennonite museums in the region.

It was startling to see that many of the benches but also the occasional chest had been given coats of solid yellow oilpaint and black horizontal trim lines in fairly recent years, the same color scheme that one observes with numerous furniture pieces in the Mennonite Heritage Village collection in Steinbach. Whether this parallel color sensibility is coincidence or a Chortitza/Bergthal-specific preference for furniture colors remains an open question until more documented pieces can be studied. Is the yellow and black scheme perhaps a contemporary simplified echo of the blond-painted graining and dark brown or black grained



Fig. 14: Sleeping bench, Schlopbenkj, with hinged seat, Pretoria, Orenburg region, June 14, 1991, in the home of Tante Marie Warkentin. She is seated on the bench on the left, with neighbor and church caretaker Frieda Pries. Photo: John M. Janzen.

trim lines that are common on 19th century soft-wood furniture, a finish that was to imitate the characteristic blond and black contrast of hardwood Biedermeier furniture? The occasional hot pink covering a pull-out bench in the Zhdanovka museum, for example, shows that rules are there to be broken by individual choices of taste.

In some of the homes one could still see a dowry chest, some of them built in these new settlements. But after 1920 hardly any chests were built because their usefulness as storage container had been superseded in popularity by the chest of drawers, and the custom of outfitting sons and daughters with a lifetime supply of linens had waned. However, older villagers had vivid memories of heirloom chests of the kind that also had been taken to North America from the mother colonies Chortitza and Molotschna. Sara Rempel of Zhdanovka remembered her mother's chest which had four large brass knobs [on the front of the lid, to camouflage the bolts of the usually massive lock], and it was painted with light yellow graining pattern. Heinrich Dirks spoke of his mother's chest with brass fittings and a key which rang out six times before the lock opened. He remembered that the painting on this chest featured two interlaced rings, two birds crossing their beaks as well as flower motifs on the chest's lid.

Very telling about the ideological changes experienced and subscribed to by many Mennonites who had remained in the Soviet Union after 1930 were the color prints with which the inside of one dowry chest had been decorated. Instead of the popular prints of portraits of Prussian and Russian royalty, even British or Swedish princesses, pious verses, New Years or Christmas wishes written in Fraktur by a school child, or advertisements from seed or flower catalogues - all of which are commonly seen inside the lids of

dowry chests from Prussia, Russia and Canada - this chest was embellished in its entire interior with Soviet propaganda prints in full color, in support of the Communist Revolution.

One of these prints, for example, was entitled *Young Atheists* and designed as a Soviet *lubok* by Adlivankin, printed in Moscow about 1930. It features a group of youths, young pioneers who are tearing down the grandmother's icon from the corner of her room while she looks on helplessly. (fig. 15) These prints had been pasted over old letters written in German. The few recognizable fragments of the German script spoke of worries about order in the congregation. This particular dowry chest had been built around 1892 for the grandmother of its current owner Agnes Friesen, born Teichrow (Tejchrib), by Dietrich Lepp who lived in the village of Pretoria. The chest was finished with yellow paint and black trim, and originally it did have a base. Its dimensions, 110cm long, 55cm deep and its height of 42cm suggest that some modification from its prototypes in the mother colony Chortitza had been made by diminishing the scale. There were three brass bosses on the lid, iron handles on the side, and a brass key plate, which however was also markedly smaller than the kind found on Vistula Delta type dowry chests.

Agnes Friesen's father Ivan Tejchrib (Johann Teichrow), 1905-84, had been a craftsman, building houses and furniture. In her attic she still kept a sleeping bench that was built by him, there was a mangle in the yard, a table, a chest of drawers, a wardrobe, a child's bench and a spinning wheel, all in use. He had also built all the furniture for his son Cornelius and his wife who lived in Tula at the time of our visit.

Among the Friesen's family records there was a little notebook that had belonged to Agnes' maternal grandfather, Heinrich Krahn (1887-1932) who also had been a craftsman. The notebook

contained measurements for a sled, for a pull-out-table, for chairs, for a pull-out bench along with a drawing of its Biedermeier-curved profile, and finally a drawing of a lathe-turned spindle.

Since our visit in 1991 the entire extended family of Agnes and Jakob Friesen has re-settled in Germany. What will have happened to their hand-made furnishings? Most likely it stayed behind with their homes that were sold to Russian occupants, recycled or discarded on junk heaps. (Fig. 16)

We also saw the pendulum clock, mostly from the clock manufacturer Kroeger in the Old Colony Chortitza and brought along from there to the daughter colony, in many living rooms, in the prayer houses and in the new museums that had formed in Zhdanovka, in Chortitza village, and in the Molotschan daughter colony village of Karagui. According to current antiquities laws these clocks may not be taken out of the country by emigrants, because the government considers these clocks Russian cultural property. Nevertheless, many of the younger emigrants have found ways to circumvent this law, and heirloom clocks that are sometimes more than 100 years-old do find their way to Germany.

The craft traditions of the mother colonies Chortitza, and Molotschna had been continued seamlessly here in the Orenburg region for nearly 100 years, until the 1980s, while in North America, both in Canada and in the United States, this tradition had waned and then ceased to exist with the first generation of immigrants, between 1910 and 1920. The reasons for this long continuity of handcrafting furnishings were not only economic ones: "We have handmade furniture because we are too poor and factory-made furniture is too expensive," but were necessitated by the initial pioneer conditions in the Urals as well as by the importance of asserting cultural and spiritual continuity in material expressions.

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"The craft traditions of the mother colonies Chortitza, and Molotschna had been continued seamlessly here in the Orenburg region for nearly 100 years..."

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#### Worship Houses.

This continuity of the furniture tradition between mother and daughter colonies and their common cultural source in the Vistula Delta also existed in the realm of church building and the organization of sacred spaces. Churches built between 1900 and 1920 followed the same trend toward acculturation to the dominant styles of church architecture in the Western world, often in the neo-Classical, neo-Romanesque or neo-Gothic visual vocabulary that we trace in the Ukraine settlements and in North America. These



Fig. 15: Dowry chest made by Dietrich Lepp ca. 1892 for his daughter, grandmother of current owner Agnes Friesen. The left print on the inside of the lid is a Soviet lubok by Adlivankin, printed in Moscow about 1930. It is entitled *Young Atheists*. The babushka is shown as a retrograde and ridiculed as a symbol of darkness. Zhdanovka, Orenburg region, Russia, June 13, 1991. Photo: Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen.

worship houses were all closed in the 1930s and given new functions as schools, as culture palaces, as vehicle repair shops or as grain sheds. After 1945 some 47 congregations formed again which met secretly in the homes of members.

After 1979 the government allowed the building of prayer houses in such a way that they were not to be distinguished from farm homes outwardly. For example, the Mennonite Brethren in Zhdanovka were permitted to build a prayer house in 1979, and the Mennonite Church built their new prayer house with official permission in 1983. It is important to note here, in the light of illuminating the dynamics of the continuity of this tradition, that these new prayer houses fol-

lowed the 18th century Vistula-Delta prayer house model both in terms of the exterior elevation and the interior spatial organization, for these prayer houses too were not, according to the stipulations of the Polish government, to look like "churches."

Simple painted benches are placed in a square along the four walls. Women and men sit separately, their bench rows facing the chancel for the preachers, elders and song leader. Sometimes the floor is packed manure when a wooden floor cannot be afforded. The only wall decoration is an old Kroeger clock, framed behind-glass paintings of scripture verses decorated with flowers, and vases filled with fresh flowers, which in June are usually brilliant hot pink and deep red peonies.

Just as in North and in South America, so here in the Ural region of what was still the Soviet Union in June of 1991, Mennonite muse-

ums were created at the time when prominent personalities of the pioneer and immigrant generation had died, when loss of memory threatened the historical consciousness of those who remained and were faced with rapid adaptation to a different dominant culture. Artifacts thus secured in museums were to act as guarantors of the communities' identity. While the oldest of these museums in the Orenburg region is in Padolsk and reflects mostly the material culture of the Molotschna villages and that of immigrants who had come directly from the Vistula Delta via Samara, the Chortitza-specific museums were located in Zhdanovka (founded under Glasnost conditions in 1989/90) in the pre-World War I



Fig. 16: A Mennonite sleeping bench, Schlopbenk discarded on a junk pile in the village of Zhdanovka, Orenburg region, Russia, June 1991. Photo: Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen.

former Mennonite church building, in the Culture Palace of the village of Chortitza (founded in 1987), and in the Culture Palace of Kitschkas with collections which had just been started in 1990.

So it is most likely due to the severe constraints of political and religious persecution and economic hardship, that the inherited material culture traditions were kept alive in order to preserve one's cultural identity and to survive spiritually and materially. Without suffering severe difficulties and threats of survival as a people after 1917 under the tyranny of Soviet communism, the material culture of the Orenburg region Mennonites would have seen the same fast pace of accommodation to the surrounding dominant culture that happened in the safe and affluent North American context. In Russia, the Chortitzer/Bergthaler material culture tradition began to dissipate with Glasnost.

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“...the inherited material culture traditions were kept alive in order to ...to survive spiritually and materially.”

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#### Conclusion.

Material culture traditions, along with language, have an identity-lending quality, but no one can preserve a tradition by freezing it, as it were. In every new place of migration traditional forms initially lend stability in the battle for spiritual, communal and material survival. But in every place where new beginnings were made by Chortitzer/Bergthaler communities, the inherited tradition gave way to new forms, everywhere powers of change are at work that alter a society from within and without. In every place of migration cabinetmakers and builders started their workshops with the inherited skills and ideas, but also creating new forms to match the needs of the new and changed environment (Note Thirty-Three).

The preservation of traditional “things” in itself cannot preserve the soul of a community of believers, but as any historical knowledge, it can strengthen the community's collective memory and as such be part of the compass that steers the community soul toward the future.”

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“The preservation of traditional ‘things’...can strengthen the community's collective memory... [and] steer the community soul toward the future.”

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#### Further Reading:

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)* (Intercourse, Pa., 1991), 231 pages.

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, “Gerhard Wiebe's ‘Kjst’”, *Pres.*, No. 6, pages 6-8; see also *Men. Post*, Vol. 18, No. 6, July 15, 1994, pages 1, 21 and 23.

#### Appendix:

Museums with Mennonite furniture and furnishings collections to which the Chortitza/Bergthaler Colony tradition relates:

**Canada:** The National Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Mennonite Heritage Center, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, Manitoba; Mennonite Heritage Museum, Rosthern Junior College, Saskatchewan.

**U.S.A.:** Kauffman Museum, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas; Mennonite Heritage Museum, Goessel, Kansas; Adobe House Museum, Hillsboro, Kansas; Heritage Hall Museum, Freeman, South Dakota; Heritage House Museum, Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

**Paraguay:** Museum, Loma Plata; Museum Jakob Unger, Filadelfia.

**Brasil:** Museu Historico De Witmarsum, Witmarsum; Sammlung Willie Issac, Collegio Erasto Gaertner, Curitiba.

**Russia:** - Omsk, Staatliches Historisches Heimatkundemuseum Omsk; Orenburg region, Southern Ural: Museum, Zhdanovka (Chortitzer settlement); Museum, Chortitza (Chortitzer settlement); Museum, Kitschkass (Molotschna settlement); Museum, Padolsk (Molotschna settlement).

**Ukraine:** Zaporozhe Museum.

**Poland:** Gdansk, National Museum; Gdansk-Oliva, Ethnographic Museum; Elblag Museum; Torun, Ethnographic Museum; Kwidzun (Marienwerder) Museum (located in the castle of Kwidzin).

#### Endnotes:

Note 1: William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, Winnipeg, 1986, 2nd ed., p. 38.

Note 2: Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Amerika*, Winnipeg, 1900, pp.52-53. See also Peter P. Klassen, *Und ob ich Schon wanderte...*, Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein Bolanden-Weierhof, 1997 on Elder Gerhard Wiebe, pp. 29-44 and the Bergthaler's emigration from Russia.

Note 3: D. Plett, *Plett Picture Book*, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981, pp. 130, 134.

Note 4: See for examples the richly illustrated volume *Strangers and Pilgrims* by Abe Warkentin, *Die Mennonitische Post*, Derksen Printers Ltd., 1987.

Note 5: Schroeder, William, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

Note 6: Schroeder, William, op. cit., p. 73.

Note 7: See published examples of such in Bird and Kobayashi, *A Splendid Harvest*, 1981, figs. 244, 245, 248-250.

Note 8: Schroeder, William, op.cit., p.88.

Note 9: Peters, Klaas: *The Bergthaler Mennonites*, CMBC, Winnipeg, 1988, p. 31-32.

Note 10: *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition 1766-1910*, Kauffman Museum, 1991, exhibition brochure, n.p. The schematic drawings of the canon of Mennonite furniture by Gesine Janzen were first published in “Mennonite Furnishings: The Dynamics of a Migrant Cultural Tradition,” by Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, *Kansas Quarterly*, 1994, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp.32-45.

Note 11: Michael Bird and Terry Kobayashi, *A Splendid Harvest*, Van Nostrand Reinhold LTD., Toronto, 1981, pp. 225-206.

Note 12: Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John M. Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition 1766-1910*, Good Books, Intercourse, Pennsylvania, 1991. This work, as well as the exhibition

by the same title at Kauffman Museum was supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Note 13: Bird and Kobayashi, op.cit., ill. 225.

Note 14: Janzen and Janzen, op.cit., p. 54, figs. 50 a,b,c.

Note 15: The account of this discovery of Gerhard Wiebe's chest was first published in *Preservings*, Steinbach Historical Society Newsletter, Vol. 4, 1995. This research in Paraguay and in Brazil was supported by a grant from the Fritz Thyssen Foundation in Germany.

Note 16: *Gerhard Wiebe Family Tree, 1800-1958*, Rosenort, MN: Lark Printing Ltd.

Note 17: Walter Quiring, *Im Schweisse Deines Angesichts...*, Derksen Printers Limited, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1953, p. 9, and Abe Warkentin, op.cit, p. 111.

Note 18: *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch, Zweiter Westpreussischer Band, Band 132*, 1963, Verlag von C.A. Starke, pp. 351-355.

Note 19: Reinhild Janzen, Paraguay notebook, 1993.

Note 20: Jacob Y. Shantz, *List of Mennonites who Migrated from Russia to Manitoba*. He names a “Widow Jacob Wall with 5 souls and 4 adults in her party” and a “Jacob Wall with 9 souls and 5 adults” for July 22 1875, and another “Jacob Wall with 7 souls and four adults” for June 21st 1876 in Toronto. Note 21: Note that in Janzen & Janzen, op.cit. on p. 209, Appendix A Jacob Friesen's entry as to his dates and colony-origin stands correction. His dates should read: born in 1834, Schoenthal, Bergthal colony, Russia, died in 1910 in Butterfield, Minnesota.

Note 22: William Schroeder, op.cit., p. 112.

Note 23: See *The Von Riesen - Friesen Story 1769-1987*, by Adeline (C.J.) Friesen, Mountain Lake, Minnesota, n.d. Typescript in the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.

Note 24: This document is preserved in the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, SA-II-511.

Note 25: *The Van Riesen-Friesen Story*, op.cit., p. 120.

Note 26: Janzen and Janzen, op. cit., p. 29, fig. 22; dimensions: H:21 1/2 x W:25 3/4" x L:36 1/4". Kauffman Museum Mennonite Furniture inventory #15.015.

Note 27: *The Von Riesen-Friesen Story*, op.cit., pp.119-121.

Note 28: Abe Warkentin, op.cit., p. 23 “In the living room of an Old Colony home in Mexico,” p. 24 “the clock and chest from Russia, the clothing, the pillows and building style speak of a pilgrimage in other lands;” p. 32 “Abram Friesen, Rosenort, builds small and large chests, identical to those brought to Canada by the Russian Mennonites and then on to Mexico, p. 24 “Furniture made by Johann Friesen, Blumenort.”

Note 29: Janzen and Janzen, op.cit., chapter 8, “The Waning of the Tradition,” p. 191 ff.

Note 30: See for example Kauffman Museum Furniture inventory #1.021 (dowry chest), #19.017 (pendulum clock).

Note 31: Kauffman Museum Mennonite furniture inventory #1.0028.

Note 32: This research was supported by a Fritz Thyssen Foundation grant.

Note 33: Jacob Friesen was part of that cabinetmaking/building tradition in Berthal, Russia. In Paraguay I only mentioned the two furniture manufacturers in the Chaco that evolved after 1927. There were others there, as well as in Curitiba and Witmarsum. Note the carpenter and furniture shops depicted in Abe Warkentin, op.cit, p. 273, Diedrich Wiebe in Reinland, Bolivia; p.280, Franz Rempel's cabinetmaking shop in Rosenhof, Bolivia; p. 325 Jakob Wieler's capentry shop in Shipyard Colony, Belize.

# Old Colony Toy Furniture and Dolls

“Old Colony Mennonite Toy Furniture and Dolls,” by Betty Unger, Box 121, Crystal City, Manitoba, R0K 0N0.

## Introduction.

Conservative Mennonites traditionally placed a high value upon children and focused great energy on their loving nurture and proper upbringing. This was particularly true among the Old Colony Gemeinde founded in Manitoba in 1875 which made immense sacrifices in education, for example, in order to disciple children in Christo-centric faith in confessional schools with a curriculum consisting of the New and Old Testaments. The central role of children in Old Colony society is manifested in the toys which they provided for their children.

During our recent stay in N. Casas Grandes, Mexico we were privileged to visit the homes of many families. This gave us the opportunity to see traditional furniture, toys and other artifacts. We were fortunate to acquire some articles by auction and by private contacts. The photo below represents some of the children’s furniture and toys from these homes – not all are vintage.

## Toy Furniture.

A display of Mennonite toy furniture and dolls in the home of Henry and Betty Unger, Crystal City, Manitoba.

The child’s Ruh Bank is modeled after the resting bench (settee) for adults. It is sturdily constructed by the tongue and groove method and measured 33 inches in length and 25 inches in height. It has a recessed inset in the back panel and is bevelled on the front side. It is painted in the traditional yellow and black. It was acquired from Katharina, Helena and Judith Froese of Colonia Capulin near N. Casas Grandes – because they were moving to Bolivia they could not take it with them. They told us that it came from Reinland, Manitoba.

We believe it came from their great-grandparents who were Franz Froese (1845-1913) and Elisabeth Friesen of Reinland. He was the second Obervorsteher of the Reinland Mennonite Colony in Manitoba from 1887 to 1908. (My mother’s family is related to Elisabeth Friesen).

Lying on the bench is a copy of the children’s book by Else Wenz-Vieter entitled *Backe backe Kuchen* (Jos. Scholz, Mainz, Verlag Wiesbaden) 10 pages. My father Abram Friesen received the book while attending the church school as a prize prior to 1916. The booklet consisted of 10 thick pages each colourfully illustrated and including a short children’s poem. He valued and appreciated it very much.

The set of chairs came from the home of Prediger Peter Wiebe, son of the late Bishop Bernhard Wiebe of Colonia Buenos Aires, Casas Grandes. They are descendants of Ältester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengard, the first Bishop of the West Reserve. I don’t know who made these chairs but notice the beautiful craftsmanship. The cradle in the foreground has seen a lot of use and is well worn. It is painted grey with black trim and measures 20 inches long, 16 inches wide (extension of rocker) and 12 inches high. It also has two screws on the side of the cradle in place of the porcelain pulls, which served both as



Display of children’s toy furniture and dolls as found in many Old Colony homes in the past and present. The 40 inch high wainscoting in the background provides a sense of scale to these invaluable treasures. This display is in the home of Henry and Betty Unger.



Free standing "Glaus Schaup" or china cabinet. blanket fasteners and as a way to secure the baby (doll). It came from the Cornelius Harder family in Colonia Capulin near Casas Grandes.

#### China Cabinet.

The china cabinet has always been part of the traditional Mennonite home. They were either built into the wall or left free standing. The cabinet was used to store china, very often as a display case, so that the chinaware was visible. The bottom of the cabinet had either drawers or shelves with solid doors. In some of the homes as in the one that I grew up in they were built into the walls and were called "Miaschaups".

The children's "Glaus Schaup" or china cabinet as illustrated above was built more recently but models the real one as seen in many of the Old Colony homes in Mexico today. It is constructed from pine and measures 42 inches high and 18 inches wide. Note the toy sewing machine dated 1926 standing on top of the "Glaus Schaup". It is a Singer cast iron machine, operated by turning a hand crank. Also note the tin litho stove, the metal dishes, the toy iron made of heavy metal, the tin litho watering can and the galvanized wash tub with a galvanized wash board.

#### Dolls.

The dolls in the photo represent only a portion of the collection in my possession. All these dolls are specially fitted to illustrate the fashion of a specific time and place. Two of the dolls are Minerva and originated in Germany circa 1900. Minerva dolls had metal heads and wooden arms and leg. These types of dolls were common in the Mennonite household at that time. The Minerva doll on the far left is dressed in traditional Old Colony clothes, however I believe that the first Old Colony Mennonite women in Manitoba did not have puffed sleeves as illustrated here; this became stylish in Mexico.



Four dolls placed on a traditional Mennonite Ruhbank (settee). All photographs are courtesy of Henry and Betty Unger, Crystal City, Manitoba.

The doll on the far right appears to be Minerva but isn't. The head was made by applying a thin layer of dough to the mould of a Minerva doll face. After the dough hardened it would be removed, painted and attached to a body. This could have been done as a hobby or was perhaps made by families that could not afford the original types.

The Minerva doll next to the one on the far left is dressed in a replica of the wedding dress of Mrs. Katharina Friesen (nee Hiebert) (1890-1988), which she wore in the afternoon when she married my grandfather (Abram Friesen) on June 12, 1910. The original dress made out of silk was sewn by Elisabeth Hiebert, a sister of the bride. The collar was purchased in Gretna and remains in the possession of daughter Mar-

garet Elias of Winkler.

The other doll is a china doll, which is dressed in a copy of the wedding dress, which my mother, Elisabeth Friesen wore in the afternoon of July 5, 1931, when she married Abram Friesen of Reinfeld. Mrs. Peter Zacharias of Reinland, where my mother grew up, made the dress. My mother will be turning 90 years of age this Fall.

Both my grandmother and mother would not have worn these dresses at the actual wedding ceremony, which were held immediately after the morning worship service. They would have been dressed in dark clothing. Both were married in the Sommerfeld Church. See the photos of both women in their afternoon apparel of the wedding day. The photo on the right is my grandmother, my mother is on the left.



Left: Betty's mother, Elisabeth Friesen modelling the dress she wore for her wedding day. Right: Betty's grandmother Mrs. Katharina Friesen (nee Hiebert) (1890-1988), with the dress she wore on the afternoon of her betrothal to Abram Friesen.

#### Conclusion.

The attention provided to the detail and expert craftsmanship of the toy furniture and the acquisition, clothing and even manufacturing of dolls for their children, speak of the important and sacred place of children in Old Colony culture. The loving efforts of parents and time spent in preparing or acquiring such toys manifest an understanding of the importance to children of their childhood games, dreams and fantasies. The toy furniture and dolls of the Old Colony people illustrate the role of material culture in understanding the lives and aspirations of our ancestors.

#### References:

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture* (Intercourse, Pa., 1991), 231 pages.

Betty Unger, "Old Colony Mennonite Samplers," *Preservings*, No. 19, pages 114-5.

"Book Launch April 28, 2001," *Preservings*, No. 18, pages 64-65, includes a writeup and some photographs of Betty and Henry Unger's presentation on Old Colony Mennonite material culture at that gathering.

# “Bound for Home, 1909”

“Bound for Home, 1909,” the D. A. Hiebert Threshing Outfit, 1900-1918,”  
by great-nephew Andy Hiebert, Box 954, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0.

## The Hiebert Story.

I have always had a fascination with the picture of David A. Hiebert (b. 1862) bound for home. It was part of a collection of old pictures that my father kept in a tallboy dresser that was in our living room on the farm that I grew up on.

David Hiebert was the son of Abraham Hiebert (b. 1827) (BGB B72) and the brother to my father’s mother Katharina Hiebert (1855-1910) (BGB B148), the famous pioneer mid-wife of Schantzenberg, near Niverville, Manitoba (see *Preservings*, No. 10, Part Two, pages 14-16/*Diese Steine*, pages 579-580).

My grandparents were both Hieberts, my paternal grandfather was Jakob Hiebert (1833-1906) (BGB A49) whose brother Johann (b. 1829) (BGB B82) was the father of Cornelius Hiebert (1862-1919), elected as Alberta MLA to its first legislature in 1905 and grandfather of Professor Paul Hiebert, author of *Sarah Binks*. The Johann Hiebert family immigrated in 1876 settling briefly in the East Reserve but had relocated to Neu-Hoffnung, West Reserve, by the time of the 1881 census (BGB 377-335) (see *Historical Sketches*, pages 22-23).

## David A. Hiebert (b. 1862).

David A. Hiebert was very much a favourite uncle of my father. He was a well known and

talented mechanical “sometime” inventor. From the stories that my father told me, he was also a restless man--never very satisfied with the status quo.

David A. Hiebert came to Canada along with his family in 1876. A year earlier, his sister, Katharina Hiebert, my grandmother, came to Canada. By 1881 the Abraham Hiebert family had settled in the village of Grünfeld, West Reserve, whereas my Grandparents stayed in the East Reserve, eventually settling in Schantzenberg (present-day Niverville). Later the Abraham Hieberts lived in the Lowe Farm area.

David A. Hiebert married at a young age and settled down to farming in much the same manner as all the other Mennonite farmers. He married Helena Giesbrecht and they had two children. She died in child birth at the birth of their third child. Being left with the responsibility of raising a very young family it did not take long before he married Pauline Binder, a Lutheran lady, to help with his young children.

Shortly after, in 1900, D. A. decided to go west to seek his fortune. They moved to the Waldheim, Saskatchewan, area, where he again started a farming operation. He homesteaded on NE 33-40-6W of 3 receiving his patent May 7, 1912. The home farm NE 30-41-5 was purchased in 1903. With a growing family and restless

adventurous spirit he preceded to engage in other related activities, and soon was a custom thrasher of some note. He operated a threshing machine and steam engine setup and was busy each year till very late in fall as the picture illustrates.

He developed what must surely be one of the very first power binders in Western Canada--a binder being pulled by two horses and powered by a gas operated stationary engine. We are not to sure how successful this was and I am unable to confirm its reliability. The information from my father was at best vague. I am not sure what date that picture was taken. From the style of the binder it was likely in the 1910 era.

Over the next 18 years D.A. Hiebert owed and operated three threshing outfits for hire, was proprietor of a barber shop and a pool hall, and owned the flour mill in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Evidently D.A. was well liked and respected in the area around Waldheim and Rosthern, Saskatchewan.

Unfortunately, the marriage relationship had its problems. In 1918 David A. Hiebert left family and friends for points west, never to be heard from again. It is believed that he died somewhere in British Columbia. His widow and two sons later moved to Fort Quappelle, Saskatchewan, where the boys operated a service station. Pauline died in the early 1960s.



“Bound for Home.” The threshing is finished for the season and the D. A. Hiebert Threshing Company has packed up and is heading home for a winter of rest. The threshermen and threshing company owners were the romantic action heroes of their day, moving from farm to farm with their gigantic machines, often making extended forays into distant regions in a concerted race against time to finish the harvest before the onset of the howling winter storms. L-r. David A. Hiebert, owner, son, hired man, and another son with the water wagon. A print of this photograph at the Mennonite Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba, sparked a year long search for the identity of the D. A. Hiebert threshing company, with the trail leading finally to Andy Hiebert, Niverville who remembered that his father had treasured the exact same photograph, it being that of his uncle in Waldheim, Saskatchewan. Inset: Inventor David A. Hiebert, right. Photo courtesy of great-nephew Andy Hiebert, Niverville, Manitoba. See *Rosthern history*, pages 48-49 and *Hepburn History*, pages 418-419.

# Books

J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 259 pages, paperback. \$22.00 U.S.

The New Testament proclaims consistently that Christ died for us. This basic idea is expressed in such terms as, "Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8), "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3), "one has died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14), and "who gave himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:4). The apostle who wrote these words does not theologize about the "how" of the atonement. That is left to us.

As soon as we start asking, "In what way did His death benefit us"? In what way was it *for* us"? we are baffled by the maddening ambiguity of the simple preposition *for*. In a quick count I found at least 22 cases of its use in the references to the death of Jesus. Always, what Christ did is *for* us. But there is no further interpretation. A study of the Greek prepositions - three different ones - that are translated as *for* does not add much more light. The New Testament does not have a logically articulated theory of atonement.

In the schools that I attended the atonement was generally explained something like this: Because people have sinned they are under the wrath of God. In His anger God could not be gracious, as He desired to be. Before God could forgive, His anger would have to be propitiated. Jesus did that on the Cross; in His suffering and death Jesus endured the wrath of God to the fullest. Consequently, now that Jesus has dealt with God's wrath the rest of us can go free.

J. Denny Weaver calls such an interpretation of the atonement "the satisfaction theory." He reminds us, as some of us have realized, that this doctrinal construction raises many questions. Why does God have to punish before He can forgive? Does the theory actually do justice to the righteousness of God, or does it change God into a vindictive monster? How does this view of a punitive God agree with the biblical message of the redemptive love of God? Then the suspicion arises, since the theory is generally attributed to the book, *Why God Became Man* (English translation), by Anselm of Canterbury late in the 11th century, could it have been coloured by medieval concepts of righteousness?

In 1931, the Swedish Lutheran, Gustaf Aulen, published an incisive critique of Anselm's view. He called it "the Latin view" and charged that it was based upon the medieval concepts of penance and merit. He described this Latin view as follows: God has to be satisfied for His lost honour by our merit, and any superfluous merit can be transferred to another. This led then to the idea that Christ's merit, in a legalistic way, makes up for our failures. Instead of this theory, Aulen proposed "the Classic View", which he found best expressed in the writings of Irenaeus (late second century). The main idea of this view is that the work of Christ is first and foremost a victory over the powers that hold humankind in bondage - sin, death, and the devil. Christ has brought their rule to an end, setting people free.

Aulen appealed for a return to this Classic View and called it, and his book, *Christus Victor*.

Weaver's theory of the atonement begins with the Classic View. He calls his reformulation of Aulen's view, "Narrative Christus Victor." He starts his exposition of the biblical material with Revelation before he moves to the Gospels, Paul, and Hebrews. Weaver does not argue that there was no violence involved in the atonement. However, while there was a violent, cosmic battle between the Creator and the adversary, as Irenaeus and Aulen had also seen it, the victory was won nonviolently when Christ submitted to the enemy and died on the cross. Jesus died because the powers of that day rejected the rule of God. The atonement, then, does not consist of retributive justice, a justice secured by balancing evil deeds with punishment. Further, Weaver's exposition of the biblical witness focuses just as much on the resurrection as on the cross. The resurrection, he argues, is in the Bible treated as the culminating evidence of the victorious reign of God in this world. "The power of the reign of God over the forces of evil is made manifest in the resurrection of Jesus" (p. 44).

Weaver goes on to interact with the contemporary criticisms of satisfaction theories of the atonement that have come from American Black theology, Feminist theology, and Womanist theology. He agrees with these critics that having a punitive God promotes violence and the practice of vengeance. He invites them to reconsider their view of God. Before they reject the God whom they meet in traditional theology, he begs them to consider narrative Christus Victor as another way of understanding God's saving work.

J. Denny Weaver's conviction is that the life

of nonviolence can only be defended credibly if we can show that God Himself is nonviolent. This book is an important first step in the argument for that case.

Reviewed by Rev. Arden Thiessen, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Larry J. McKinney, *Equipping for Service: A Historical Account of the Bible College Movement in North America* (Accredited Association of Bible Colleges, Fayetteville AR, 1997), 258 pages. Ppbk.

This readable and well-researched book provides an excellent survey of the Bible school and college movement in North America. A wide range of source materials, including books, articles, conference presentations and academic studies ensures a solid basis for this work.

Two appendices list "Current AABC Accredited Colleges" (a total of 83 are listed, 14 in Canada and 69 in the USA) and "History of the AABC Membership. inception to the Present (1947-1997)." In brief form they contain a wealth of information about the organization (which is also the publisher of the book). Extensive end notes document the sources; regrettably there is no bibliography.

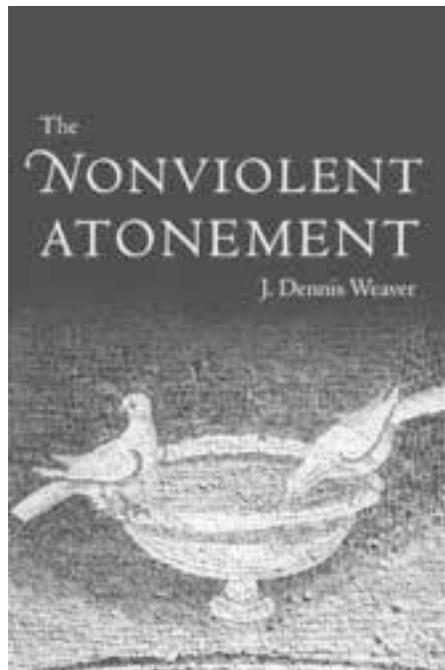
The contents of the book are carefully arranged in 12 chapters, which show the larger context of the Bible school movement in the church and North American higher education development. The rise of the movement from 1882 is documented, with important early leaders and influences. The account details the extent to which the Bible school movement was driven by the rise of dispensationalism and the desire to impose it upon Protestant Fundamentalism and beyond.

The overall history is divided into four periods: the rise of Bible schools, 1882-1920; Protestant fundamentalism, 1918-1930; growth years, 1930-1960; the changing years, 1960-present. A final chapter indicates critical issues and possible future directions.

Many histories of individual Bible schools and colleges have been written; it is good to have this kind of general overview of the whole development. One important source overlooked in the bibliography is the 1985 Ph. D. dissertation of Ron Sawatzky (presently moderator of Mennonite Church Canada) - "Looking for that Blessed Hope," dealing with the Bible school movement in Western Canada.

McKinney is well qualified as author, having himself been deeply immersed in the Bible college movement as president of Providence College and Theological Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba since 1993, and also president of the Association of Canadian Bible Colleges for a term.

Book review by Victor Kliever, Executive Director, Mennonite Church Canada, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.



Cover page of *The Nonviolent Atonement*, by J. Denny Weaver.

N. W. Ostaschewa, *Na Perelome Epoch: Mennonitskoje Soobschestwo Ukraini 1914-1931* ("A Revolutionary Epoch: The Mennonite Community in the Ukraine 1914-1931") (Moscow, 1998), 253 pages.

The primary basis for this investigation by an historian from Dnjepropetrowsk, N. W. Ostaschewa, is a number of mainly unpublished sources, with a documentary character, which have been discovered in the archives of Kiev, Dnjepropetrowsk and Zaporozhe. The book by N. W. Ostaschewa is the story of the Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies in the period from 1914 to 1931. It sets forth an analysis of the circumstances of the colonies during the first world war, civil war, famine 1921-23, NEP, and collectivization. Coming to the fore, above all else, are the relief efforts of Mennonites abroad who were concerned about the fate of the Mennonite diaspora and the preservation of a Mennonite centre in the Ukraine.

It is one of the very few books by Ukrainian authors, which has not been subjected to censorship, and where the author had full access to all important archives. One of the most important accomplishments of the author, among others, was to compile a chronology of events 1914-1931, as they took place in the Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies. New dates and detailed descriptions of the American and other relief op-



Cover of *Na Perelome Epoch: Mennonitskoje Soobschestwo Ukraini 1914-1931* ("A Revolutionary Epoch: The Mennonite Community in the Ukraine 1914-1931"), 253 pages.

erations enrich the book.

N. W. Ostaschewa leads the reader through three important phases: 1) economic crisis in the Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies 1914-1922 and the initiation of the relief efforts of Mennonites abroad; 2) the role of the "Society of Dutch Citizens" in the process of economic integration of the Mennonite colonies 1922-1926; disintegration of Mennonite society in the Ukraine 1927-1931 and emigration from the Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies.

In over 250 pages, the author reports with statistics and documents (based on archival sources) about the courage, faithfulness, com-

mitment and self-sacrifice of the Mennonite community and individual leaders such as B. B. Janz, B. H. Unruh, and others.

She writes that the real danger to the stability of the Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies were the laws regarding "liquidation" promulgated by the Government on February 2, 1915, prohibiting the Mennonites from buying or selling land and forcing them to dispose of large enterprises. In 1917, after the government realized that these laws had brought about a disaster in the land, they were repealed.

The methods of the militaristic communist policies which followed had only one goal: huge advances in a short time, to be achieved in the most primitive way with force. This led to an even further deepening of the crisis and took the last hope of a restoration away from the farmers. Added to this, came the obligations to contribute grain ("Prodraswerstka"), implemented in 1921. In December 1921, the provinces (Governements) in the Ukraine were officially declared as famine areas by the government. In spring of 1922 72 percent of the population in the Chortitza Colony was hungry, in some areas 100 percent.

The second part of the book deals with the foundation of the "Society of Citizens of Dutch Descent" describing in considerable detail the establishment, activities, reorganization (better said liquidation) of the organization, until its disintegration. The author describes this society as a closed co-operative association which directly led the economic and political life of the colonies. The organizational and financial activities of the society had a positive effect on the colonies. The society continuously struggled with financial impoverishment, redistribution of land (through which 50 percent of the Mennonites had lost their land), resettlement of the landless, poorly structured tax system, and other problems in the colonies. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the society up to the year 1926, the economic, technical, provisioning- and crop production, of the pre-WWI era had not been achieved.

With time, the society became a thorn in the flesh for the regime, and on September 4, 1925, it was reorganized (forcibly liquidated). The society was replaced with a new society known as the "Congress Bureau", but only existed until 1927.

In the third part, the author, with deep sensitivity, recounts how difficult it was for the Mennonites to adjust themselves to the new reality in the country. After the disintegration of the "Society of Dutch Citizens", the Mennonites struggled for an entire year (until 1927), in the restoration of their own Mennonite co-operative. In 1928 the government undertook a drastic change in policy--a turning away from co-operatives to collectivization. According to the law of January 5, 1930, the collectivization in the Ukraine was to be fully completed by the end of 1930. By April, 1931, 95 percent of the villages of the Molotschna Colony were encompassed by collectivization.

The author identifies three grounds for the total impoverishment of the Mennonites in the Ukraine: 1) the best Wirtschaften (full farms) were sold and the owners immigrated; forced



Natasha Ostaschewa Venger, Associated Professor of the Chair of World History, National University of Dnipropetrowsk. Dr. Ostaschewa defended her doctoral thesis in Mennonite history in 1996.

requisition of grain; 3) divisions in the colonies resulting from dekulakization--and the entire Mennonite society was brought to a division.

Immigration for Mennonites always served as a strategy of fleeing from a problem situation. Already in 1918, B. H. Unruh and A. Friesen travelled to Berlin regarding immigration. In spring of 1923, the Mennonites in the Ukraine, experienced a great disappointment--the outbreak of a cholera epidemic. Nonetheless, the first group of Mennonites was able to emigrate on April 28, 1923. In 1926 immigration was officially forbidden, but it was still possible for more families to immigrate. N. Ostaschewa writes that in the years 1923-1929, 12,000 Mennonites were able to emigrate from the Ukraine.

The disintegration of the Mennonite community in the Ukraine is the result of the internal dynamics of the establishment of totalitarianism in the USSR. Every chapter of this book is a tragic part of the Mennonite story in the Ukraine.

The book closes with a collection of previously unpublished archival documents which are of great significance and which make it into a highly interesting work.

For historians, students and regional researchers, the work of N. W. Ostaschewa is a one-of-a-kind reference work in its category. Unfortunately, the book has one drawback--it appears in the Russian language. It is urgently necessary for us and our descendants that the book be translated into German (and also English).

Book review by Adina Reger, Weißenthurm, Germany.

Robert Friesen, *Auf den Spuren der Ahnen 1882-1992: Die Vorgeschichte der Deutschen im Talas-Tal in Mittelasien* ("On the tracks of the Ancestors") (Minden, 2000), 382 pages.

Robert Friesen tells the story of the Germans in Middle Asia.

For some 50 years Robert Friesen collected documents, letters, newspaper clippings, reports from witnesses and photographs, which lie amalgamated under the title *Auf den Spuren der Ahnen*. In 384 pages, including the sketches, maps and 200 photos, the author tells the 110-year history of Germans in Middle Asia.

"For me the work on the book was extremely demanding, but it was something I did happily," says Robert Friesen who came to Petershagen (Germany) from the Soviet Union in 1989 and now lives in Minden. With *Spuren der Ahnen* he wants to reach not only his own countrymen, but also wants to give German readers the opportunity to create a picture of the lives of Germans under the Russian Czars, under the Soviets and in the Muslim Republics "in order to reduce prejudices against returnees".

Few ethnic Germans who have returned to Germany from the former Soviet Union, know the history of their ancestors. The knowledge of the past is limited for most returnees to their own family. Mostly the stories are relayed orally in little bits by grandparents. For Robert Friesen also, born in 1940 in the village of Leninpol in the Kirgiz Talas-Valley, it was very important during his childhood that he was allowed to listen in when grown-ups talked about their past experiences. As a 15-year old he began a scrapbook in order to keep track of details, names and important ideas. "At that time one didn't accept children as participants in conversation. But, nevertheless, we were old enough to understand the contents of what we heard and responsible enough not to blab about it," Friesen recalls.

At 19 he left his home village and lived another 30 years, before his emigration to Germany, in Tscheljabinsk and in the Caucasus. Here he also used every opportunity to fill out his collection about Mennonite history. So he could read in a book from 1936, that the Germans were the first Europeans to settle in the Talas-Valley in 1882. Such bits of history spurred him on to look for more ancestral tracks. "Studies about Germans along the Volga, in the Ukraine, in Siberia or Kazakhstan existed at that time, but finding them was a matter of luck. The topic of Germans in Middle Asia was never mentioned," says Friesen. Only after Perestroika under Gorbachov did the research about Germans in Middle Asia appear - Viktor Krieger (1992) and Gerhard Kronhardt (1995).

In Germany, Robert Friesen continued his research. He checked out dates, interviewed older countrymen in German, Mennonite dialect or Russian and wrote down their recollections. Meetings in Hannover in the mid-90s with former residents of his home village, and the positive reactions of his countrymen, were new motivation to continue. Finally, Robert Friesen found help and support from Dr.

Eisfeld, Leader of the Gottigen Research Centre of the Eastern European Institute for Culture and History. From him he received materials from the research conferences held in the mid-90s in Moscow, Almaty, Anapa and Dnepropetrovsk under the theme of "Germans in the Soviet Union".

During these years friends appeared, who supported his work. Many shared experiences in conversations, others made their notes available or just encouraged him. 200 photos from his countrymen illustrate the comprehensive work. The oldest one is from West Prussia (1840); the most recent ones were taken at the end of the 1990s. At first his work was regarded by his family as a hobby which they happily supported. It became serious when the book was ready to be printed and no publisher was available. One day his wife Galina said. "We'll have to bear the risk ourselves. If the book is a success, we'll be in luck; if not, we'll be in difficulty." The first printing was distrib-



Robert Friesen, Minden, Germany, author of *Auf den Spuren der Ahnen 1882-1992*.

uted in a few months, so that in April 2001, a second printing could be made. Now the book is also in the main catalogue of the National Library in Hannover.

The "Journey into the Past" begins in his book with the emigration of Protestants [Mennonites] from Switzerland to Holland and German States. Their way continues to West Prussia and to emigration into Russia. The lifestyle of these people and their continuing search for a place of refuge, the splitting of the group and the emigration of some of their members to America, all of this is the fascinating pre-history of the Mennonites who settled in the Talas-Valley at the end of the 19th century.

The economic developments of Germans in Middle Asia, the methods of confiscation and collectivization in 1929-1933, the repressive purges of 1937-1938, wartime and the

"Home Defense Army" (*Trudarmee*) 1942-1948 as also the postwar period to 1956, are documented by archival releases made available for research after 50 years. Several documents from this time period have been published for the first time in this work.

How the Germans preserved their language in Middle Asia, the background of their re-emigration to Germany and why no Germans can now be found in most of the former German settlements - these topics are dealt with in individual chapters. The reader can find reasons and explanations that make a better understanding possible for the history and lives of Germans in Middle Asia in the 20th century. The relatives of this small ethnic group, the descendants of Mennonites, are scarcely aware that the last 25 years were among the most important epochs of their way through the centuries. This epoch has been brought to a close with the return into the land of their ancestry. "He who doesn't speak about his past, deprives himself of his history," says Friesen with conviction.

"The more familiar the history of the Germans out of Russia becomes here, the fewer prejudices against the immigrants remain, and the better the integration of the newcomers becomes. That is the purpose to which I would like this book to contribute," says Robert Friesen, and supports his thought with quotations from the numerous letters that flow to the author.

"Thanks for the wonderful book! You have really achieved a comprehensive, large work, from the contents to the presentation - my compliments! In this year I'll recommend your book often," writes the producer and freelance journalist from Mannheim, D. Lachauer. Her film "Karaganda, City of the Banished" was recently telecast by the WDR network (throughout Germany).

Another reader who does not want to be identified by name, speaks nevertheless from the soul: "I read your book with great interest and would like to tell you how much the book has impressed me. I find the book extremely important because it clarifies what the Germans in Middle Asia had to endure, what deprivations amid unbelievable cruelties. I don't believe that many people here knew about them. In your book that comes to light almost incidentally, not as hyperbolic sensation. This helps to prevent one from closing one's heart due to shock. Because you name the persons and describe their lifestyles very simply, you appeal directly to the reader's humility that is so seldom used. It is as if one would somehow like to become a part of it all oneself."

Book review by Nina Schein published in the *Ost-Express* and republished in *Der Bote*, January 2, 2002, pages 36-37. Translated from German to English by Edgar G. Reimer, 3374 William Ave., North Vancouver, B.C., V7K 2Z6.

The book *Auf den Spuren der Ahnen* can be ordered from the author Robert Friesen, Luisenstraße 9, 32427 Minden, Tel/Fax 0571/87562. Price including shipping is 49.90 D.M.

Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, Piet Visser, editors, *From martyr to muppy A historical introduction to cultural assimilation processes of a religious minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites* (Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 243 pages.

For those interested in the history of the Dutch/Prussian/Russian line of Mennonites, it often seems as if the Russian angle has been researched to intricate detail, while that which happened before the Russian experience is forgotten in time. Specifically, there has been very little one could read in the English language concerning the Dutch Mennonite past; that is, until now. *From Martyr to Muppy* is an excellent read for those who wish a better understanding of their Dutch roots, as well as for those willing to look to history to aid in critically evaluating life in the present.

*From Martyr to Muppy* is not, as the name would suggest, an historical survey of the Dutch Mennonites, taking the reader from the first Reformation Days until the present. Instead, it is a loose collection of 15 essays written for the most part by Dutch historians and tracing various aspects of the Mennonite story in the Netherlands. The topics range from discussions of Mennonite contributions to Dutch literature to the story of a particular Mennonite family whose wealth was accumulated in part through trade in heavy armaments! If anyone were to think that the 470 odd years of Mennonite experience in the Netherlands have been uneventful and dull, this collection of essays would certainly prove him/her wrong!

If there is a loose thread that holds together the collection of essays, it is the desire of the editors and authors to trace the experiences of a church community that began as a despised and hunted minority (the Martyr) and turned into an up-scale community totally assimilated into the Dutch society (the Muppy: from Mennonite + Yuppie [young urban professional]). The essay that best defines this loose thread is the fourth one in the collection, entitled 'Congregational assimilation in a historical nutshell: Martyrs, Mennonites and Muppies in Haarlem' by Simon Verheus, which traces the history of the United Mennonite Congregation of Haarlem from its beginnings during the Radical Reformation till the 20th century.

The martyr history in Haarlem is as cruel as any described in the *Martyr's Mirror*. Jan Matthijsz, a sheep-shearer, has his tongue pierced on the stake in the town marketplace for speaking ill of the holy sacrament. Joriaen Simons, the bookseller, is strangled and then burned at the stake in the same marketplace. Anneken Ogiers is sentenced to death and drowned. But the persecution does have an end, due in no small part to the fact that the Mennonites in Haarlem backed the struggle of the Prince of Orange in his revolt against Spanish rule (not with arms of course, but with money for the arms!). As a result, Haarlem begins to see its Anabaptist/Mennonite minority as a slight irritation, but an irritation that can be beneficial in times of crises. And so, out of the martyr church grows a pragmatic one, a church excluded from certain parts of Dutch life

in the 17th and 18th century (no government positions for former rebel rousers), but quite content to make its mark in this innovative and progressive Dutch society in innovative and progressive ways; that is, through business and commerce.

Understandably, new wealth brings the church new opportunities as well as new challenges and dangers. The wealth of the Mennonites in Haarlem allows them to play an active role in the social and cultural life of the city in the 18th and 19th centuries, even having them take part in the drafting of constitutional changes after the French Revolution. New houses, or rather mansions, are built by upper-class Mennonites in the right part of town, leading the area to receive the nickname 'Mennonite Heaven'.

But as we can imagine, there is a downside to this newfound influence and wealth. By the 20th century, membership in the Mennonite church community drops considerably, due in part to a certain theological liberalism that sees any road to God as worthy as the faith of the martyr ancestors, and also as a result of the desire to shed this separatist image. While there is a temporary statistical blip in the early 20th century when membership increases again till it reaches 4000 members, later in the century it resumes its downhill slide until falling to the present membership of 1200. The Haarlem experience is truly a microcosm of five centuries of Dutch Mennonite history.

But there is more to be learned in this collection of essays than mere historical lessons. For one, the writings are a great eye-opener to those searching the Dutch roots of their Mennonite history. With regards to this, one could state that two (almost contradictory) conclusions emerge: the first being that Prussian/Russian Mennonites inherited much from their Dutch ancestry, and the second being that the Prussian/Russian branch of Mennonites developed into something very distinct from its Dutch counterpart.

For students of Prussian and Russian Mennonite history, much of what emerges from the history of Dutch Mennonites will seem to connect with the later story. Congregational leadership and gatherings is one example. In the first couple of centuries of Mennonite existence in the Netherlands, so-called lay (that is, unpaid) leadership was the norm, even in urban areas. One of the contributors, Otto de Jong, writes that fixed annual salaries were out of the question for Mennonite ministers, unlike their Lutheran and Reformed counterparts. He goes on to describe the church services as "vermaningen", or admonitions, pointing to the idea that for earlier generations of Dutch Mennonites, the purpose of the church service was to admonish the participants: to encourage them to continue in the "Nachfolge Christi" (discipleship, to use the Anabaptist term), and to warn them about falling from the straight and narrow path.

Another example is that of mutual aid, mentioned by a number of the authors. Alastair Hamilton points to the system of poor relief introduced in the 16th century congregations and administered by deacons and deaconesses. Mary Sprunger describes how wealthy Mennonites

founded the famous "hofjes", or poor houses, for needy members of the congregations. (A more complete description of congregational mutual aid can be found in her study of the Amsterdam Mennonites in the book *Building Communities of Compassion*, which actually duplicates some of this information.) Simon Verheus portrays the Haarlem congregation's home for the elderly built in the early 20th century, which was so elaborate that visitors called it a 'fairy castle'. Both this mutual aid and the nature of congregational leadership and gatherings were aspects of the faith continued by those who settled in Prussia and later Russia.

On the other hand, throughout the book the reader is struck much more by the uniqueness of Dutch Mennonitism than by any similarities it may have had with other brands of Anabaptism through the centuries. The best portrayal of this comes in the discussion of Dutch Mennonite literature by Piet Visser. In this essay, Visser begins by describing the poem from 1713 entitled 'Swiss Simplicity', in which the Dutch Mennonite author Pieter Langendijk has Swiss Mennonitism personified as a woman who 'criticizes the luxurious, worldly lifestyle of the Dutch Mennonites'.

Indeed, when it comes to Anabaptism/Mennonitism, for four centuries the Dutch Mennonites have certainly blazed their own trail, at times much to the chagrin of their Anabaptist brethren from other parts of the world. This uniqueness is exemplified in many ways, but the most striking is that of the assimilation of Mennonites into mainstream Dutch society through their economic pursuits.

As mentioned above, even when the Anabaptists/Mennonites began to be tolerated in the low countries, they were still excluded (or excluded themselves) from positions of influence, especially in government. Church members compensated for this by involving themselves in the economic boom that was beginning to take hold of their country. Except for provinces such as Friesland and Groningen, where the majority of Mennonites were rural, Mennonitism in the Netherlands became an urban phenomenon, and many members began to make their mark in their urban economic environment.

Mary Sprunger details this development in her essay on Mennonite involvement in 17th-century trade and industry, in which she highlights some of the movers and shakers of the Dutch world of that century. One example will suffice: Arent Dircksz Bosch was a deacon in the Waterlander Mennonite church in Amsterdam with his hands in all pieces of the Dutch economic pie. As a trader, he chartered ships in order to trade goods between Amsterdam and Danzig to the north, and as far as Lisbon to the

Since the publishers have stopped distribution, copies of the remaining stock of *From martyr to muppy* can be ordered for \$30.00 Cdn, plus postage and handling, through the Dutch Mennonite Historical Society (Doopsgezinde Historische Kring), p.a. Henk Smit, Elpermeer 27, 1025 AA Amsterdam.



Karel van Mander (1548-1606), member of the Flemish Mennonite Church in Haarlem, composed *De Gulden Harpe*, a songbook “which combined a devotional content with a recognized literary quality.” From *martyr to muppy*, page 64.

south. He was an iron seller, a potash merchant and a grain dealer. And he was also an accumulator of wealth and capital. He held an account at the prestigious Amsterdam Bank of Exchange, and owned both residential and industrial properties in the city.

When reading stories like that of Dircksz Bosch, one realizes that unlike Anabaptists in other nations, Dutch Mennonites were in the forefront of their nation’s drive to prosperity. The famous Dutch East India Company, responsible for so much of the Netherlands’ rise to the top in the 17th century, included at least one Mennonite as an initial stockholder. The flute ship, which ship enthusiasts will know as the powerhouse of the 17th century responsible for Dutch trading supremacy of that era and able to carry 150% more freight than any other ship of comparable size, was invented by a Mennonite from Hoorn. And many of the country’s leading investors and speculators were Mennonite. Unlike Switzerland, where the poverty and isolation of Mennonites assured their continued discrimination, in Holland the wealth and influence of the Mennonites led to their acceptance by society. This acceptance happened in spite of the fact that Calvinistic preachers wished the pressure against Mennonites to continue. In the words of one contributor: “The merchant had triumphed over the preacher”.

All of these topics are indeed striking for a newcomer to Dutch Mennonite history, but there is something else perhaps even more striking, and that is the similarity between the path that Dutch Mennonites took in their walk from ‘martyr to muppy’ and the path being taken by much of Mennonitism in Canada today. While the reader is left somewhat disturbed by the way the discipleship of the Dutch Anabaptist Martyr gave way to the indifference of later generation of Dutch Mennonites blessed with wealth and fame,



Joost van den Vonde (1587-1679), member and deacon of the Waterlander Mennonite Church in Amsterdam was “...the most celebrated 17th century author of the Netherlands,” courtesy of From *martyr to muppy*, page 88. Such were the ancestors of the Russian Mennonites.

he or she can’t help but wonder how different the path is that we as Canadian Mennonites are taking. In the Netherlands, Mennonites became famous authors, poets, merchants, distillers, and even armaments dealers; influential in society and their urban environment and models for all Dutch citizens to emulate. At the same time, their religious convictions ‘melted like snow in summer’, in the words of one of the writers.

With time, government office was no longer avoided, it was sought after; military service was no longer taboo, it was accepted without quarrel. After all, as a model citizen one has to blend in, be like the rest. How much different are we as Canadian Mennonites? We too have become model citizens, with our own share of business people, authors, government members. As a community, we have become influential enough to get our own university charters and the respect of the country. Swiss Simplicity, mentioned above, may very well be as disenchanting with her Canadian cousin as she was with her Dutch one. In the words of Piet Visser, editor and one of the contributors, “There are parallels between the Dutch Mennonite past and present-day Mennonite life in the United States and Canada which deserve more intensive study”.

As in every book, there are certain parts of this collection of essays that are both lacking and controversial. The essay on Mennonites in Gdansk and the Vistula Delta (the only one not concentrating directly on the Netherlands) is somewhat less than sympathetic towards Prussian Mennonites, stereotyping them as isolated, rural and backwards. The author Edmund Kizik brings previously unknown and basically senseless trivia to light (such as the fact that the Prussian Mennonites were largely overweight!), while otherwise simply rehashing well-known facts from Prussian Mennonite history. He bemoans the fact that with time, the Prussian Mennonites

“simply became Mennonites of German faith and suffered the political consequences”, alluding to his apparent prejudice against the German contribution to his personal region of residence (Gdansk).

Similarly, the reader might notice other questionable comments and attitudes from other contributors as well. Sjouke Voolstra claims that one of the reasons for a decline in Mennonite church membership in the Netherlands was “a typically Mennonite one, namely increased childlessness caused by inbreeding”. This, of course, is a thoroughly outlandish hypothesis which flies in the face of any anthropological description of endogamy. Not surprisingly, the author leaves no footnote or evidence to back up his hypothesis. Another writer, Anton van der Lam, appears to have little interest in his own topic of study, the Mennonite background of some Dutch historians, and concludes that “it is very difficult to distinguish between Mennonite and other authors. And why should we?”.

Other than these few exceptions however, *Martyr to Muppy* is a fascinating read, teaching us about the path our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands chose, and causing us to wonder, are we walking down the same road?

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David L. Weaver-Zercher, *The Amish in the American Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 275 pages.

Book review: A Servant People in More Ways Than One: How We Employ the Amish for Our Own Purposes By Steven M. Nolt,

Late on a June night in 1953 three Amish-raised teens in Geauga County, Ohio capped off an evening of antics by tying a fourth Amish boy to the back of their car and dragging him down the road and to his death. The incident shocked the Amish community and provoked commentary from correspondents to *The Budget* newspaper. Otherwise, however, the act seems to have sparked no significant reaction from a wider public—no national headlines in distant city papers or AP wire stories buzzing around the globe. The event was simply local news, and the fact that Amish youth were involved only made the story more parochial and less interesting to editors elsewhere.

Fast-forward to June 1998 when two Amish-reared young men were arrested in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and charged with intent to distribute cocaine for a drug ring tied to the Pagans motorcycle gang. Within hours the event had become a major news item far from the local police blotter. From the *New York Times* to Australian public radio and hundreds of points in between the story received extensive coverage. Television talk shows referenced the event, news magazines commissioned feature articles, and late night comedians found fodder for stand-up routines.

Through it all commentators in the 1990s could assume that their audiences knew who the Amish were and why this story was inherently fascinating. Drug busts were a dime a dozen in those

years that marked a high point in the war on drugs. In journalistic jargon, what made this particular tale a newsworthy case of “man bites dog” was the involvement of Amish actors. In contrast to the 1950s, the presence of the Amish now *made* the story.

During the second half of the twentieth century a remarkable cultural transformation had occurred. Without an organized public relations campaign, promotional budget, or celebrity spokesperson, a tiny and publicly self-effacing religious group had become exceedingly well known. So much so that the Amish often function as a cultural icon, a thing which points beyond itself to something else, something larger.

Academic purists easily can point out the ways in which most of the popular knowledge about the Amish is ill-informed, if not misinformed. Still, the fact that Americans who were rapidly losing interest in denominational distinctives of any sort were able to locate and add the Amish into their collective sense of cultural literacy is noteworthy.

This shift and its meaning is at the heart of David Weaver-Zercher’s new and fascinating book, *The Amish in the American Imagination*. A Nappanee, Indiana native and now professor of religious studies at Messiah College, Grantham, Pa., Weaver-Zercher writes not about the Amish, but about *other* people’s interest in the Amish and what that says about wider society. Anyone who has wondered about the attraction of Amish tourism, read an Amish-theme romance novel, or puzzled over whether to buy “Amish potato salad” at their suburban megamart grocery store deli will find this narrative an interesting read. On a deeper level the book challenges all of us to think about the many ways we use other people—and stereotypes of other people—for our own purposes and to advance our own sense of self.

“I have wondered at the array of responses to ‘the Amish,’” confesses Weaver-Zercher, “people who revere them, people who laugh at them, people who covet their quilts or lament that they shop at Wal-Mart. All of these responses say little about the Amish but much about those who construct meaning from what they imagine the Amish to be.”

The book explores the way various groups have “domesticated” the Amish, that is, how they have employed the Amish for their own ends, be they ideological or commercial. From Pennsylvania German professionals searching for cultural respectability to social scientists seeking primitive purity to Mennonites edgy about their religious cousins, onlookers have “put the Amish to work” for their own purposes.

Weaver-Zercher’s discussion of the rise of Amish tourism and the links between marketing consumption and praising the simple life are insightful. An especially astute chapter treats the 1985 feature film *Witness* and the chorus of supporters and detractors it generated. With subtle analysis he explores the question of who speaks publicly for a people who avoid public speech.

The book is profusely illustrated with fascinating historical and contemporary images that show the many ways outsiders have presented

and represented the Amish. Mennonite readers especially should note the chapter detailing ways their fellow church members (the text gives special attention to Herald Press) have interpreted “the Amish” in light of Mennonite agendas.

In the end, Weaver-Zercher argues that Americans view the Amish in two ways: both as a “saving remnant”—a simple and pious community living life as it once was and still could be—and as a “fallen people”—the subject of exposés and the butt of jokes that purport to reveal the hypocritical, authoritarian, and repressed nature of Old Order life.

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“...Americans view the Amish...as a ‘saving remnant’....and as a ‘fallen people’....”

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Indeed these two interpretations must go together if the Amish are to remain useful for outsiders searching for their own meaning. On the one hand it is the radical otherness of the Amish coupled with the promise that it is possible to say no to the corrosive acids of modernity that undergird popular fascination. And yet moderns also desperately want to know that the ideal is not really attainable, that in the end the cost of discipleship is not worth it. If the Amish world really *were* better it would pose an irrefutable call to change, in at least some ways, how the rest of us live—and such a summons is too much for the North American soul to bear. Thus, the dual “saving remnant/fallen people” motifs keep our idealism alive while reassuring us that we moderns have chosen the better part; we needn’t feel guilty if we only admire but then dismiss the Amish way.

When considering a subject fraught with stereotypes I hesitate to introduce new generalizations. Yet it seems to me that very often latter-day Mennonites use the Amish to enhance ourselves as we employ them in a game of Let’s-compare-my-highest-ideals-with-your-worst-examples. Such games may even be cloaked in the language of pastoral concern for the Amish, but somewhere along the way the Mennonite desire to “put the Amish in their place,” so as to assure ourselves of *our* place, is present.

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“...we employ them in a game of Let’s-compare-my-highest-ideals-with-your-worst-examples. ‘What drives this Mennonite need?’”

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What drives this Mennonite need? Are we so often cool to our spiritual kin because they embarrass us with the image of a past which we were certain had no future? Are we somehow jealous of the attention they attract without trying while we spend a small fortune on church publicity and still fail to garner widespread name recognition, let alone busloads of seekers? Do we wish that we could walk past our local meat counter and see people eagerly picking up bags labelled “Mennonite Chicken Leg Quarters”?

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“Are we somehow jealous of the attention they attract without trying...?”

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My guess is that Mennonites (especially those living near Amish neighbours) tend to think that wider society has placed the Amish on a pedestal for universal reverence, and thus Mennonites must provide a public service of taking them down a notch. If so, it may be important to remember that in some places the Amish are still resented and even feared as a threat to society’s well being. Political conservatives, for example, have long objected to the freedom the Amish receive to operating their parochial schools. Jurist Robert Bork, among others, denounced the 1972 *Wisconsin v. Yoder* Supreme Court case that legitimated Amish schools, citing it as a dangerous example of special treatment for underserving minorities.

From another perspective the Amish dissent from the mainstream threatens the potent modern combination of economics and education. In some cases businesses have been loath to move to places where census figures reveal a high percentage of the potential workforce lacks high school credentials. Indeed, lucrative industry involved in certain export markets must adhere to international trade protocols mandating the hiring of none but high school graduates. In this new economic world a local workforce with a heavy Amish contingent is as much an economic development liability as a potential tourism asset. By refusing to play by the rules that link a certain type of formal learning to higher wages the Amish have become in the minds of some Midwestern municipal officials an impediment to a brighter financial future.

In such a context of adulation and condemnation can any of us be objective observers? When I as an outsider seek to interpret Amish life for other outsiders, I strive (in the interest of fairness and Christian generosity) to highlight the values of Amish society so routinely dismissed by the modern world—yet that interpretation may say as much about my understanding of fairness and what the I think the world needs to hear as it does about the Amish themselves.

About a decade ago a thoughtful reviewer of my book *A History of the Amish* suggested that the text implicitly offered its readers my critique of modern Mennonites as well as a narrative of past Amish events. He was probably right. The “saving remnant” may lurk close to the surface of my mind as from time to time I scan today’s Anabaptist panorama. I must confess that the values of community and discipline, the role of tradition in the midst of change, and a scepticism toward the modern cult of progress are all virtues I associate with the witness of the Amish.

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“...the values of community and discipline, the role of tradition in the midst of change, and a scepticism toward the modern cult of progress are all virtues I associate with the witness of the Amish.”

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*K-Mart has come and gone broke but the Amish continue their pilgrimage, empowered by the leading of the Holy Spirit, a Christo-centric faith and a simple lifestyle living close to the land and respecting their God-given traditions. Photo by Keith Baum from Kraybill and Bowman, On the Backroad to Heaven Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2001), page 263.*

When I consider the ways I have used the Amish, though, I hope that it most often has been in a corrective effort to keep me from making my own experience into a universal yardstick. Scholars have big words for such mental traps—solipsism or essentializing the self—but it comes down to the belief that my world, my abilities and limitations, my fears, wants, needs, and resources are typical of everyone, and therefore I safely can make all sorts of assumptions about other people. This temptation is especially real for white middle-class Americans since so much of society *is* structured in ways that are familiar to us.



*David L. Weaver-Zercher: how we use other people for our own purposes. Photo courtesy of Christian Living, January-February, 2002, page 15.*

For me, then, the Amish have been, among other things, a nearby reminder that there are those who inhabit my same modern world and who live with many of the same daily realities I do, but who have responded to them in ways very different from me, and who live quite happily and productively with an alternative worldview. My assumptions about technology and entertainment, higher education and faith all have been tempered to some degree by my association with the Amish.

The Amish are not the only people who could provide me with such insights; other relationships might offer the same perspective. But in this case the Amish have served me well.

May we all find such communities where we can serve and be served, where we can know ourselves as we know others, and where we employ each other for our mutual benefit.

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Reprinted by permission from *Christian Living*, January-February 2002, pages 14-16.

Miriam Toews, *Swing Low (A Life)* (Stoddart Publishing, Toronto, Canada, 2000), \$27.95. Hardcover, 191 Pages.

Melvin C. Toews was an exemplary school teacher, principal, father and husband, an annual winner of perfect attendance awards for Church, a founder of Steinbach's first library, and a clinically, tragically depressed man.

Mel Toews was diagnosed with manic depression, now called bipolar disorder. He experienced his first "nervous breakdown" when 17. After that, psychiatrists regularly tried to convince him that he couldn't lead a normal life, and should stay away from raising a family and taking responsible jobs like teaching. Yet it was in just these things that he found a degree of stability and security.

Until his death by suicide in 1998, he was a man who clung tenaciously to the belief that words could help him align his jumbled life. The words were found in Bible verses, in Canadian history books—those he used as textbooks and those he wrote himself—on the scraps of paper left lying around the house which he collected and filed under "Family," and mostly, on the bright yellow recipe cards he wrote notes on every night to himself.

Finally, in his last visit to the hospital, he demanded that his daughters write things down for him on large legal pads. That they loved him. That he had a wife. That he was ill, but he would get better. They took to writing in his voice, so he would understand the words were about him when he re-read them.

It is from this last attempt to order his life that Miriam Toews has drawn the format for *Swing Low*, a memoir of her father that details the alternately obsessive and catatonic life of one of Steinbach's most-loved teachers. By using her father's voice to tell his story, Miriam Toews neatly sidesteps the pitfalls of the all-too-popular memoir.

*Swing Low* contains no maudlin self-absorption, no illumination of the author as yet another hard done by child. The spotlight is consistently on her father, a harsh, unforgiving light. Yet it reveals equally the love, however awkwardly expressed, that permeated the family. Miriam Toews has written a doomed love letter to her deceased father, using a style Melvin Toews himself would have appreciated: a string of chaotic, disjointed and ultimately powerful words. Where father and daughter differ, however, is that Miriam's words, whether brutal or tender, are honest. To protect himself from the horror of reality, Melvin Toews lied to psychiatrists, to his family, to himself.

#### **A Double Life.**

I got to know the Toews family 20 years ago. From my perspective, Mel Toews was a stone wall, and his wife a boisterous climbing ivy. I was never a student of his, but those that were have the fondest memories of him; he was as gregarious in the classroom as he was hermetic at home.

His daughters were flabbergasted to see their silent father explode into life at Elmdale School, where he taught Grade 6 for 40 years. There he

wrote his own textbooks, published a class newspaper by his students every year, helped them act out scenes from history, and had a kind word for every student and fellow teacher.

Miriam Toews began a quest to find out why there was such a disparity between her father's public and private life; it undoubtedly led her to write this book. "Writing," Melvin Toews says through his daughter's words, "is the result of the need to make sense of things."

So prepare yourself for a roller-coaster ride through the highs and lows of manic depression; for flashbacks through Melvin Toews' own misfitting time machine. You'll learn his mother was convinced that his "nervousness" resulted from him choking on a peanut when an infant. That Melvin fell in love with his wife when she stood up to a policeman who hit him--"I realized that I would need a girl like her if I were to survive." That his wife's veil caught fire while signing their wedding register, which she laughed at but he agonized over. That life in a small town meant that everybody knew the details of everyone's life, unless you worked very hard at concealing it.

All of this searching in the past turns up one solid, irrefutable piece of evidence that hovers over the life of Melvin Toews like a black cloud: the quixotic behaviour of his mother, a popular gossip columnist ("Pot Pourri") in the *Carillon News* for years. While every Sunday the confessed teetotaler sat primly in her favourite pew, in her private life she was a connoisseur of vanilla extract, drank straight from the bottle and often shoplifted from the local grocery store. Her family regularly sent a monthly cheque to the store to cover the damage. Apparently, Melvin also believed she was fiercely partial to her youngest son--so much so that in her column on the day Melvin received his Bachelor of Education, she instead chose to announce that her youngest son, many years before, had been valedictorian for his high school graduation.

The duplicity of Melvin Toews' mother does not explain why he was mentally ill, but it does highlight where he learned how to deal with it.

His mother steadfastly refuses to admit she drank, even while drying out at the hospital. Prodded by a psychiatrist at his first visit, Melvin eventually spills the beans that his mother drinks--not so much out of blame as to give the frustrated doctor a tiny morsel to work with. His father is upset with him, and the young man, the lover of words, decides there and then that his best defence will be to speak as little as possible. But eventually Melvin learns that his startling revelation changes nothing. "There was no stronger power in this town," he ponders, "than the power of denial."

### Tragedy and Comedy.

Despite the frustration and anger the family felt while dealing with Melvin's illness, to the author's credit she does not take easy swipes at Mennonites in general, nor lay the blame on the town's shoulders. Evidently, the well-travelled author has seen that Mennonites and Steinbach do not have a monopoly on hypocrisy.

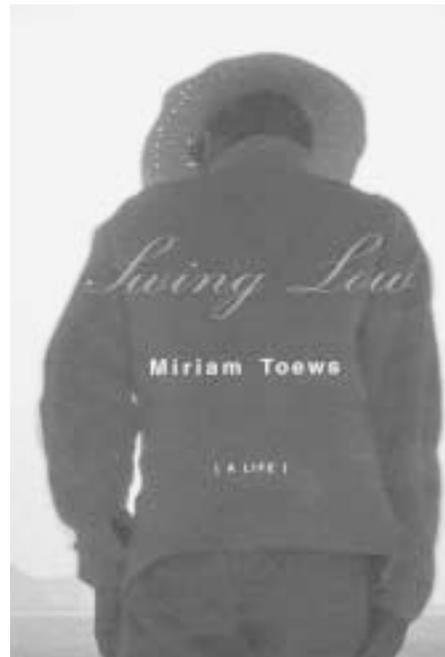
Having said that, I can't resist including one

joke Melvin tells in the book: How many Mennonites does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: Change?

I sincerely believe that the infamous sensitivity Mennonites have towards their portrayal in the media can rest easy here. In fact, despite Miriam Toews' confession that she harbours no love for Steinbach, there is a kind of delight the author takes in evoking her home town, its quiet streets, its colourful characters. She has travelled the same route before, in her second book *A Boy of Good Breeding*, though by creating a fictional, non-denominational prairie town.

In *Swing Low*, however, the stakes are higher: she is not only setting out to make people laugh at her jokes. Every bit of humour--and there are many bits--has an added poignancy to it, balanced by the tragedy that looms ahead.

Much of the humour will be familiar to deni-



Cover of *Swing Low* (A Life).

zens of Mennonite coffee shops; often Mennonites don't realize how funny they are. There are the inevitable references to the initialized first names, like Mrs. I.Q. Unger, and the colourful nicknames, like Groutfadach Abe, Melvin's youngest uncle who lived with his grandparents. It's the kind of thing that is exotic to the outside world, yet comforting to those within.

The story of Melvin's grandfather is also typical, and we all have pioneer stories like it in our past. When his grandmother dies young, the pioneer is left with four children and land to farm. When a Holdeman girl moves in to help out, they fall in love. The Holdeman family is aghast and quickly locks the girl away, but somehow the lovers elope. Melvin's grandfather pays for his sins by accepting shunning for three months, although he falls asleep in his chair while the church fathers debate his case. He went on to have 13 more children with the girl.

*Swing Low* does not recount these tales just for levity's sake; each one brings the reader closer

to an understanding of where Melvin is coming from, sometimes literally. Of particular note is Miriam Toews' explanation of her mother Elvira's side of the family, the garrulous, honest and daring brood of C.T. Loewen. As expressive as they were wealthy, George, Edward, Cornie and Elvira were (and are) all noted for inheriting their father's habit of talking like an orchestra conductor with wild flourishes of hand movements: "C.T., Elvira's father, was deep in conversation with a friend of his. They were standing outside and it was very cold, and C.T. was doing all of the talking. Finally, he stuffed his bare hands into his pockets and told his friend, 'Now it's your turn to talk, my hands are cold.'"

It was from this strong family that Elvira Toews found the courage and determination to continue with her husband, even as she went to university and became a social worker for troubled families outside of her own. Always independent and unafraid to espouse shockingly liberal views in a small town, Elvira, says her daughter, nevertheless always believed it was her duty to take care of her husband, no matter the cost.

"It's clear to me now and I wonder," Melvin asks near the end of his life, "who takes care of the good Mennonite wife?"

### Being Melvin Toews.

Of course, it's Miriam Toews asking the question; it's the good daughter pulling the strings behind the recreation of her father. And that's both the thrill and danger of her neat ventriloquism trick.

Recreating her father's voice gives the author the chance to speak directly to the audience, to let us in on the secrets stored away in the mind of the mentally ill. It's not always a coherent pattern, at least outwardly. But the jumps from flashbacks to the present, the odd moments of confusion, could have been unsettling in another kind of way. It's a difficult style to pull off, even if you are trying to duplicate broken patterns of thought. There's always the danger that if you jump around too much, you'll lose the reader's interest.

Miriam Toews has neither the poet's delicacy in stringing words together nor, happily, any of the pretension. What she does have is honesty, oodles of it, no doubt passed down from her mother. With that tool, she escapes the danger of losing her reader by repeating themes throughout the book, touchstones to let the reader know they're going in a certain direction. In addition to his obsession with words, Melvin is always walking throughout the book, walking without direction. That the direction finally turns towards suicide is tragic. That he has no words when he gets there, even more so.

Yet the empathy the author creates toward the enigmatic teacher is more powerful than tragedy. It finally assures the reader that despite the anger at the medical system, and the sadness of Melvin Toews' condition, there is a glimmer of hope. He did accomplish something despite his illness: a life. Reviewed by Byron Rempel.

### Book Reviews:

Edna Froese, "*Swing Low* that we may speak," in *Christian Living*, June 2001, pages 23-24.

"A daughter's tribute," *Madean's*, July 31, page 21.

Doris Penner, "Book explores life of meticulous educator," *Carillon News*, June 5, 20002, page 15A.

Margaret Loewen Reimer, "Daughter tells a painful family story," in *Cdn Men.*, July 10, 2000, page 10.

The Reviewer. Byron Rempel is a freelance journalist and novelist living in the Laurentians north of Montreal. His second novel is currently with an agent in Toronto. Though 40 years old and a Steinbach native, he has still avoided writing about his hometown, which he believes may be some kind of record.

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Korny Hiebert and Levi F. Hiebert, *Mennonitengeschichte: Paraguay in Bildern* (Filadelfia, Paraguay, 2001), 70 pages.

Previous issues of *Preservings* have carried a number of articles featuring various Hutterian and conservative Mennonite school systems and the efforts being made to fulfil the traditional role of confessional education in preserving faith, culture and heritage. There are still far too many Mennonite settlements where the dearly bought privilege of operating confessional schools is squandered away and where no real meaningful effort is made to instill traditional faith and heritage values, and that, far too often, because a real understanding of those elements is lacking.

In response to such questions the "Allgemeinen Schulbehörde" (General School Authority) of the Paraguayan Colonies of Menno, Fernheim, Volendam, Friesland, and Neuland, commissioned two experienced educators Korny Hiebert, of Filadelfia, Fernheim Colony, and Levi F. Hiebert of Loma Plata, Menno Colony, to develop a textbook suitable for the sixth grade in "Mennonite history as instructional material as related to the subject of Biblical studies."

The book covers the Mennonite story from its Reformation roots to the immigration from Prussia to Russia, and eventually to the settlement in Paraguay in 10 chapters. The book is beautifully illustrated with some 200 mostly coloured photographs, appropriate maps and appendices with helpful statistics on Mennonite settlements in Paraguay and Mennonites worldwide. In addition to the coloured photographs, each chapter has many interesting sidebars as well as questions for student stimulation and discussion.

It will be a joy for Mennonite students in Paraguay to be introduced to their history and faith through this excellent book. The lessons provided are basically accurate and faithfully presented and will resonate well with the students of the colonies mentioned. The socially more conservative Bergthal and Sommerfeld Colonies as well as the more aesthetical Old Colonier Colonies in Paraguay may not find these books equally useful as their's would be a somewhat different story.

However, the authors as well as the School Authority for the participating colonies are to be congratulated on a job well done. Their students



The cross and inverted crescent-moon from the title page of *Mennonitengeschichte: Paraguay in Bildern*.

will be the beneficiaries of this endeavour for years to come. School boards in other Mennonite communities would do well to examine *Mennonitengeschichte* and use it as a model for their own.

For the title page photograph, the authors have chosen the "Kruz vom Kreuzkamp" depicting the cross that the first Mennonite delegates affixed to a large tree at the most westwardly extension of their inspection tour in 1921. They hold forth the cross and the inverted crescent-moon as representing "...the entry of Christendom and civilization into the [Chaco] wilderness" indeed a worthy symbol for all Mennonites and Christians to follow.

Reviewed by Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

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Braun, Jacob A., *Im Gedenken an jene Zeit: Mitteilungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Kolonie Menno* (Historical Committee of Menno Colony, Loma Plata, Paraguay, 2001). Soft cover 6 by 8 1/2, 120 pages. Available for \$10.00 at *Die Mennonitische Post* in Steinbach.

Other than Martin W. Friesen's volume, *Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis*, 1987, little has been published about the Mennonite emigration to Paraguay in 1926-8, so this slim volume written by Jacob A. Braun, is a welcome supplement to that larger and more detailed survey of the history of the migration. Braun's book is more personal, dealing more with one leader's experience of the migration and establishment of the colony than attempting to tell the larger story.

The bulk of the collection of papers and letters was written from the fall of 1967 till New Year's Day 1969 to Jacob D. Harder, his majordomo in Paraguay, while Braun was working in Winnipeg. The material is not organized by chapters, but by topics, each with a heading. For this reason the

book begins with a comprehensive table of contents, listing all the topics in the order in which they occur in the book. It was never intended as a book, but grew out of a desire to "relate to [his friend] Jacob something of those first years" (loosely translated, EB). The peculiar value of the book as indicated by Heinrich Ratzlaff in his "Foreword" is that these are the recollections and observations of a man who was from the very beginning a leading participant, and whose views therefore have documentary value, though they were written without recourse to documents or records.

The book begins with two biographical essays, one by Heinrich K. Braun and the other transcribed by Heinrich Ratzlaff on behalf of Johann R. Penner. This section gives a brief overview of Jacob A. Braun's increasing involvement in the colony as he was appointed transportation overseer, then purchasing agent for the colony, and later Colony spokesman to the President of Paraguay. In 1935 he was elected chairman of the Chortitzer Komitee and later to the dual role of first business administrator for the Colony and Oberschulze. Jacob A. Braun, born in 1893, died in Paraguay in 1979.

The main part of the book consists of first-person recollections narrated by Jacob A. Braun about the beginnings of the Mennonite colonies in Paraguay in the 1920s. Introducing the historical reminiscences are personal letters (given in italics) addressed to Jacob D. Harder and Martin W. Friesen in Paraguay, the latter already researching the history of the emigration for his own book.

Braun begins with a cursory lesson on Mennonite history and a mild defense of migrations including those of the 1870s and the 1926-8. He then deals briefly with history of the West Reserve, including the split in the Bergthaler church with the founding of the Sommerfelder, the District schools issue and the matter of compulsory military service (page 28).

The main text, however, deals directly with a detailed narration of the events of the first group of emigrants (of which he was one) to leave Manitoba for Paraguay in November, 1926, and the subsequent establishment of the colony, including the surveying of the land, the gradual movement of the pioneers to successive interim camps, and the actual settlement in villages. He also provides an account of the evolution of the cooperative business ventures of the colony, and mentions the land purchases, especially his journey to the USA in 1948 to borrow money for such a purchase.

The somewhat controversial decision to form the "Chortitzer Komitee", the alternative entity created to deal with the flawed Fürsorgekomitee (umbrella Board originally designed to manage the affairs of the new colony) is described in a matter-of-fact way that reveals the author to be a pragmatic yet gracious man, who led this new "Komitee" to a new administration for the Colony and, further, to the creation and evolution of the now well-known Cooperative.

In general, the book is easy reading, although perhaps some additional context notes and dates could have been provided by the editor, and sometimes the content could have been edited (with some loss of voice or authenticity) to reduce the repetition.



Jakob A. Braun (1893-1979), served as the Oberschulze of Menno Colony, Paraguay from 1936 to 1939. He and his family were with the first contingent of Sommerfelder Mennonites immigrating to Paraguay in 1926, originating from the Sommerfeld area, West Reserve, Manitoba. Jakob was the son of Abram Braun (1860-1919), Eigengrund, SGB, 2A0213, grandson of Jakob Braun (1791-1868), first Ältester of the Berghthal Colony in Imperial Russia (BGB B13). Photo courtesy Im Gedenken an jene Zeit, page 1.

The editor's choice to include the personal letters with the historical has an almost antiphonal effect, as the voice from the present informs the past. Juxtaposing the concerns about the weather, employment, and family members' health, with the uninflected narration of epic events that tested most emigrants to the limit produces a bifocal view of the pioneer quest, as the present and the past interact with each other across 40 years. This device also enables the book to tell the story of a pioneer in the context of the society from which the pioneers emigrated. In this modern society, the former Oberschulze, the highest secular office in Mennonitendom, works as an elevator "boy" in an office complex within a city which had continued to advance in the arts, technology and population while the pioneers in the story he is telling were struggling just to survive. And this elevator boy by his deep understanding of human endeavours provides a reflective, almost a prophetic voice, announcing totally incidentally in his devotional musing a further sense of the shortcomings of his host society.

Although the historical facts in this book have been published before, the Loma Plata Historical Committee should be commended for their initiative in publishing this material. The peculiar value of this modest volume is in the voice of the author, a voice that characterizes the man probably most responsible for the direction of the enterprise now known as Menno Colony in the Gran Chaco of Paraguay. It gives an insight into the nature of the man, a devout, modest man, who earned the respect of his people and led them into community. This is an authentic, primary-source document from this chapter of Mennonite history. Perhaps a document such as this from a woman's point of view would create a comprehensive picture of the reality experienced by this generation of latter-day

pioneers.

Reviewed by Ernest Braun, Niverville, Manitoba.

See also Ewe Friesen, "Buchvorstellung," *Men. Post*, Sept. 21, 2001, page 21.

**Book Note:**

Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: Free Press, 2001), pages 96-97.

**Excerpt:**

"Various, sometimes conflicting, justifications for holy war can be found in the Koran. In one often quoted verse, Muslims are allowed to engage in a defensive war: 'Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged' another suggests that Muslims are encouraged to engage in aggressive war against infidels: 'But when the Sacred Months are past, then kill the idolaters wherever you find them...' Bin Laden cited this verse when he announced the formation of his World Islamic Front.

"By contrast, Jesus in the New Testament admonished his followers, 'Whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also,' and urged them to 'Love your enemies'. Of course, in practice, Jesus' message has been largely ignored by Christians, who have enthusiastically slaughtered each other and 'heathens' for two millennia.

"Muhammad admired Jesus as one of the greatest of God's messengers, but he further distanced himself from the Nazarene by removing the distinction that Jesus had earlier made between the secular and the sacred: 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' For Muhammad's success as a prophet was inextricably entwined with his role as a political and military leader. Within a century of Mohammed's death, war and conversion combined enabled the Prophet's successors to preside over a vast empire that stretched from the African coast of the North Atlantic to northern India. It is to this golden age of Islam that bin Laden harks back."

Peter L. Bergen is CNN's terrorism analyst.

Archie Penner, *The Divine Covenants: Conflict or Harmony* (Servant Publishers, Box 71, Kola, Man., Can., R0M 1B0, 2001), 217 pages. \$12.00 plus \$3.00 postage and handling.

Penner's research is instructive both in regard to its methodology and content. He states the motivation for his investigation succinctly, defines his terms carefully, presents his assumptions clearly and keeps re-examining them critically. Penner faces honestly uncomfortable Old Testament passages (which are frequently evaded), present reasons logically taking no steps for granted, and uses his sources responsibly. An atmosphere of urgency and determination permeates this courageous interpretation.

In the book, *The Divine Covenants: Conflict or Harmony*, Archie Penner investigates the relationship of the Old and New Testaments to each other in theology and ethics. He seeks to understand how the Old Testament must be viewed and handled by the New Testament believer and the role it plays for Christian faith and ethics.

He summarizes four different views of the relationship between the two Testaments:

1. Both are seen on a single plain--the flat view;
2. The Old Testament is dominant over the New Testament, at least when convenient;
3. The Testaments are separated to preserve the integrity of the New Testament, the Old Testament not being relevant for Christian theology and ethics; and
4. The author's view which he describes as follows:
  - a. Both Testaments are equally the Word of God.
  - b. Both share the same authority, if correctly understood.
  - c. Variances, though, are present in theology and ethics.
  - d. There seem to be numerous contrasting and contradicting ethical precepts and doctrines between them.
  - e. Since the New Testament claims to be the final and unsurpassed divine revelation, climaxed in the God-man Jesus Christ, the Old Testament can only be correctly understood, theologically and ethically, as it is interpreted by the New Testament revelation.
5. Additional remarks:
  - a. Applicability of Old Testament precepts and principles for Christian life:
    - 1) Must be tested,
    - 2) Must be in accord with New Testament ethics,
    - 3) Must be in accord with Jesus' life, action, and teaching.
  - b. When correctly interpreted in this way the Old and New Testaments are found to be in agreement.
6. Penner discusses the place of assumptions in human thinking and research, advising that they should be brought into consciousness, be made thoroughly transparent, and be analyzed critically, which the author does well.
7. Assumptions of this study:
  - a. A non-Calvinistic evangelical, orthodox, Anabaptistically conditioned theological position;
  - b. The OT is wholly an integral unit with the entire Judaeo-Christian Scriptures;
  - c. The God of the whole Scriptures can in no way and under no circumstances be seen as willing or doing that which is evil or immoral from the viewpoint of the New Testament.
8. Definition of Evil. The concept of "evil" is based on Jesus' petition, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." It may further be elaborated as follows:
  - a. All that finally is opposite to and opposing the pristine and unimpeachable will and intention of God, and is finally excluded from the Kingdom of God, constitutes the ultimate concept of evil in the Scriptures.
  - b. The destructive phenomena of nature, because these do not constitute the intention and true will of God for creation, are included in our definition of evil, as indicated."
  - c. With what we call "nature," for Jesus included chaotic and demonic elements behind which he saw the work of Satan, extending even to the non-human part.
  - d. There is a Protestant theological position based on an Augustinian-Calvinistic orientation which affirms a deterministic divine sovereignty. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* states that, "God

both directs men's counsels, and directs their wills, and regulates their efforts as he pleases." We have no problem with the concept of God's pleasure. However, when that concept is used to cover all that has ever happened and all that ever will happen, then we raise objections. Are there not an immense amount of matters in a fallen world that are not only a pleasure to Him, but which He actually hates? Consequently it is of prime importance to differentiate between that in which God has pleasure and that in which He has no pleasure.

9. A resolution:

a. Ascribing evil to God is totally unacceptable,  
b. Ascribing to the God of the Old Testament that which the New Testament objects to is also unacceptable.

10. A confession:

a. Evil and sin do not exist either by God's effective nor by his permissive but by His sovereign concessive will.

b. This refers not only to the problematic passages of the OT but to every aspect of God's relation to sin and evil.

c. God's concessive will includes events and actions in His creation which are contrary to His perfect will.

11. Summary:

a. Assuming that God has a concessive will does not undermine His absolute authority, but rather affirms it.

b. Although sin and evil exist by divine concession, God has the power to muzzle them and ultimately end them.

c. Real sovereignty includes the authority and power of the self-limitation of God.

In the conclusion Penner summarizes the research, proposes a solution, and validates three principles. Here are the main points of his conclusion. "There is a dominant thread of Old Testament texts which ascribes all causes...to God." Then he adds: "There is another strand of the revelation of God" which presents Him as absolutely holy, "not being able to sin, or countenance impurity, He cannot cause it either." Simply put, that is the reality of Old Testament revelation. How then do we harmonize these two strands of revelation? What is Penner's solution? i. The application of the hermeneutical principle of differentiation which distinguishes the causes directly effected or induced by God, and the causes not effected or induced by God. The New Testament is the primary supplier of the criteria that help make the judgment necessary to make the distinction.

ii. The affirmation: "every action attributed to God in the Scriptures which is incongruent with the immutable, holy, righteous, always loving, always redeeming and forever forgiving God--a God who cannot tolerate sin for a moment, neither under the Old Covenant, nor the New--is the expression of His concessive will, and not His causal or determinative will."

iii. Further clarification: "by the concessive will of God...we mean the decisive will of God which neither wills nor does any evil, absolutely. Yet because He is 'unable' to stop man from sinning, because of His covenantal commitment to His creature, man, God is obliged to give in to man and the demonic forces to do evil; including even their desire and effort to destroy Him and His kingdom, if

possible."

In appealing to the concessive will of God, Penner is following the recognized Anabaptist approach by such scholars as Guy F. Hershberger and Waldemar Janzen. Penner, though, expands the application of this principle considerably.

iv. "The reason why God is obliged to give in to sin--that which He hates with absolute and eternal hatred--is that He has created man in His own image with a given power and authority to be partner along side of Him. Thus, God is not able to stop sin as such until history has run its course and God has heard every final confession." See Phil.2:9ff.

v. "This does not mean that God cannot obstruct and prevent specific sins and evils, nor does it mean that God loses His sovereignty. But...it is the general phenomenon of sin as such which God must grant. The concessive will is couched in verbs both in the indicative and the imperative moods. In other words, that which God does not will, and that against which He is totally, and yet to which He concedes, are written and stated descriptively and imperatively, that is as commands."

12. "On the other hand, every action and revelation attributed to God must be congruent with His nature and character, as definitively argued, both from the Old and New Testament, on the grounds of the principles of exegesis, developed in this research..."

Here are "three final words of recapitulation and conclusion" arising from this research.

i. "All evil...including war,[is] related to God's will only as concession. As such [it] lies under the judgment of God."

ii. "Since righteousness and unrighteousness...are quite frequently not differentiated ethically in the Old Testament, in particular as these relate to divine actions..., the principle of differentiation derived from the Scriptures themselves must be given a decisive place and be consistently applied....The source of the principle itself is also the New Testament."

iii. "All wars, including therefore those of the Old Testament, according to the principle of differentiation, are not the will of God. All are by divine concession. The commands to evil, and therefore to wars also...come into the category of the concessive imperative."

Penner concludes: "If these principles of differentiation and concession are not accepted, then we must ask, on what basis can God be ethically vindicated and the Old Testament remain the divine Word of an absolutely holy, righteous (just), compassionate, immutable and loving God? There seems to be no alternative."

Reviewed by Ben Eidse, Chancellor Steinbach Bible College, Steinbach, Canada.

Archie Penner, *Scientific Creationism in Perspective: Biblical Creation Defended* (Servant Publishers, Box 232, Elkhorn, Manitoba, Canada, ROM 0N0, 2002), 140 pages.

There is no way I can write an objective review of Archie Penner's new book on Scientific Creationism. Archie was my pastor when I was a teenager, and over the years he has always been there as an alert intellectual who can talk to people at all levels of education on many subjects. This book is a gift from Archie to his faith community, offered



Dr. Archie Penner in his study, 1970s. Photo from Mary Barkman, *Contending for the Faith* (Regina, 2002), page 8.

bravely with the understanding that it may not be well received by all.

The book is important because it shows that a conservative evangelical Christian can criticize Scientific Creationism strongly and actually repudiate it without giving up a high view of biblical authority. Dr. Penner rejects Scientific Creationism in favour of revelational Creationism. He would probably say that the Bible tells us much about creation, but that we must receive it as revelation, not as science.

Why does Dr. Penner feel that he has to be so negative about what other evangelicals are doing? He explains himself as doing eristic apologetics. This means that he is removing obstacles that keep people from believing. When giving a reason for the faith that is within us, Scientific Creationism is not a help, it is an obstacle.

The Church has always been troubled by the naturalism of modern science, and especially by the evolutionism that arose in the 18th century and that gained momentum after Charles Darwin's 1859 book. In the middle of the 20th century, when it appeared that Genesis literalism had breathed its last in the aftermath of the Scopes trial in Tennessee, a new initiative in anti-evolutionism was born, which has been called Creation Science, or Scientific Creationism. It was a return to strict Genesis literalism bolstered by arguments from the natural sciences. New interpretations of the genealogies in Genesis allowed for creation to have happened as much as 10,000 years ago instead of Bishop Ussher's date of 4004 BC, and evolution within kinds (microevolution) was tolerated. Concordist views such as the "day-age theory" or the "gap theory" were repudiated, and theistic evolution was demonized.

In 1985, several prominent creationists visited Manitoba. Gary Parker gave lectures at the Steinbach Bible College, and Duane Gish debated at Providence College (then Winnipeg Bible College). Two members of Dr. Penner's Conference (EMC) opposed Gish vigorously in Otterbourne. One was a young pastoral candidate who asked some penetrating questions, and the other was myself, one of the debaters.

The event aroused emotions in the EMC and the young pastor was denied ordination and I was asked to withdraw from Conference responsibilities because my views were considered heretical. Would every pastoral candidate now have to toe some kind

of creationist line? The Conference resolved the problem by commissioning Archie Penner, Ben Eidse, and Arden Thiessen to formulate a position paper, which was subsequently published in *The Messenger* (Aug. 9, 1985). The article was moderate in tone, allowing a fair bit of latitude in interpreting Genesis, but drew the line at human evolution. The Mennonite Brethren issued a similar statement about a year later (*MB Herald*, Aug. 15, 1986).

With this book Archie Penner has made his position with regard to Scientific Creationism perfectly clear. It has no place in the Church's repertoire of evangelistic tools. The core of Dr. Penner's book is an examination of three classical creationist arguments. The first has to do with the amount of dust found on the surface of the moon by the astronauts. Creationists have used this argument to argue for a young earth. The second has to do with the nature of the sun's energy, and also tries to prove that the sun is part of a very young creation. The third is the notorious "footprints in stone" argument which was thought to show that dinosaurs and humans lived at the same time, and that they left side-by-side footprints in the bed of the Paluxy river in Texas. I will not tell you what Dr. Penner does with all this pseudoscience (Buy the book!), but the dinosaur story reminded me of my visit to the Institute for Creation Research in Santee, California in the 80s. Their little museum had a "footprints in stone" diorama, but there was a sign saying "out of order" on the glass.

Many more creationist arguments could have been examined, but the three chosen are enough to illustrate just what the author finds so unworthy. He finds that in each case the science is phoney because once an argument has been developed, further findings are simply ignored. Outdated ideas are reprinted again and again to supply the propaganda needed for the world-wide creationist movement. Obsolete science is freely incorporated even into books that are used as school textbooks for public and separate schools and for home schooling. Dr. Penner asks, "Does this not become a matter of honesty and morality for both the authors and the publishers?" (p. 118). There is concern and compassion here for those who have become the victims of this false enterprise.

Conventional science has also had its frauds and hoaxes. Piltdown man is given as an example. The difference between Piltdown and "footprints in stone" is that the scientific community did not cling to Piltdown after contrary evidence became overwhelming. The scientific community itself exposed the fraud, although the culprit(s) have not yet been identified. Science is self-correcting; Scientific Creationism is not. It is merely a stubborn insistence on forcing findings into a predetermined mold. Conventional scientists are also guilty of this from time to time.

Dr. Penner also takes issue with the theology of the creationists. The main criticism seems to be that it is improper to use science to support the credibility of divine revelation. To do so is to subject God to human judgement, and this should be abhorrent to us. It is as though we were substituting our words for God's. This obscures God's Word and makes it subject to falsification, as though it were just science.

I am not convinced of this argument, but then I

am no theologian. It seems to me that we have no choice but to process God's revelation through our finite minds and to make human judgements about whether we will accept it or reject it. Otherwise we may succumb to a passive believism. If I am not mistaken, this is a crucial difference between our Anabaptist theological heritage and the Augustinian synthesis that runs through Calvin and Luther and culminates in Karl Barth. It is strange that Archie Penner, the archetypical Anabaptist, should be sounding like a Calvinist!

I am grateful for this book, but I would have been even more grateful for a book that would explain Scientific Creationism's inadequacies as a system for interpreting Genesis. There is some discussion of interpretation in the book, but it does not go much beyond the obvious. For example, we are told that we do not have to believe that the mustard seed is the smallest seed in the world, even though Jesus said so. This is helpful, but not enough. The book would also have been improved by careful editing of the text and the grammar, and by the elimination of its sermon style. An index would also have been nice. The design of the book is excellent and the price is about half of what I would have expected. Whoever did the cover illustrations and layout should be commended.

Above all, the publication of this book is a witness to the integrity of the sanctified mind. Archie Penner has shown that he believes in telling the truth even though it may be hard for him and for some of his readers. I thank God for this testimony.

Sandra Birdsell, *The Russländer* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2001), 350 pages. Cloth \$34.99.

This has been a banner year for the Mennonite novel. Two of Canada's major novelists—Rudy Wiebe and Sandra Birdsell—have written spell-binding novels that will be read by Mennonite and general readers for many years to come. Wiebe has been writing novels with Mennonite settings, themes and characters for a long time, but for Birdsell this is new territory. Wiebe's *Sweeter Than All The World* is the more ambitious of the two and covers the whole range of Anabaptist history from its beginnings in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

Birdsell's novel restricts itself to the dramatic period of Russian-Mennonite history that led up to and included the terrible violence and tragic events of the Russian Revolution and the civil war that followed. Both novels benefit from the kind of painstaking research that makes the historical novel as real and authentic as any contemporary novel. And of course both writers bring their special "insider's" feel for Mennonite experience and attitudes to their novels. Mennonites are fortunate indeed to have artists of such talent and integrity to tell their story to the world.

Birdsell's primary focus in *The Russländer* is on two Mennonite families: the Abram Sudermann family and their Privol' noye estate in the Old Colony and the Peter Vogt family who live on the same estate in the pre-war years. Abram Sudermann is an arrogant, domineering skinflint who employs the intelligent and sensitive but docile Peter Vogt as the subservient overseer of his estate. Birdsell shows a sure grasp of how the Mennonite class system

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worked in Russia: the *Gutsbesitzer* (estate owners) constituted a kind of peasant aristocracy that considered itself superior to a would-be “middle class” as represented by the Vogts, and that treated Russian and Ukrainian peasant workers as little better than animals to be exploited and kept in check. That this rigid class system was in place in the generations leading up to the Russian-Mennonite demise during the Civil War is amply supported by the historical record.

The novel begins with a bold and somewhat risky device, namely a stark newspaper account of the massacre of Abram Sudermann and his wife as well as most of the members of the Vogt family by bandits in 1917. The massacre serves as the dramatic climax of the novel and by giving it away at the outset Birdsell would seem to be undermining most of the suspense in her plot. However, her gamble does pay off in the end. By vividly bringing alive the serene and mostly happy childhood world of Peter Vogt’s daughter Kathy, from whose point of view the novel is written, Birdsell sets up a growing tension and shifting contrasts in the reader’s mind as events move inexorably forward towards the grisly climax already documented at the beginning. After all, in literary tragedy it is the events leading up to the tragic climax that provide the meaning of tragedy rather than the tragic act itself.

The structure of the novel has Kathy Vogt Heinrichs, now an elderly woman in Winnipeg, telling a young Mennonite interviewer the story of her ill-fated life in Russia, from her near-idyllic girlhood in Privel’noye to the bitter years of grief, deprivation and starvation before finally escaping to Canada with her husband Kornelius Heinrichs in the 1920s. Birdsell does a superb job of describing the Ukrainian landscape, atmosphere and setting, and particularly the intimate details of everyday life on a Mennonite estate. The early pace of the novel is at times almost too leisurely as Katya lovingly recalls her close-knit family and her experiences in the private school she is allowed to attend on the estate. Birdsell has a knack for the telling act, as when she has Kathy, in a private fit of envy and defiance, throw Lydia Sudermann’s expensive drinking cup into the butter well. It is an act that will haunt Kathy with feelings of guilt for many years.

The dramatic pace picks up noticeably as war comes and then the revolution. Birdsell introduces a notorious historical figure—Simeon Pravda, a sinister albeit legless beggar well known in the Old Colony—who starts making menacing visits to the estate with his lawless henchmen and the tension builds towards the horrendous massacre that takes place in late November, 1917. The massacre scene itself is almost unbearable in its malevolent atmosphere and compelling details. Katya and her younger sister Sara manage to escape by hiding in a hole their father had prepared for them in advance. Her parents and the rest of her siblings are brutally murdered, including her lovely older sister Greta, who is gang-raped and then killed. The tyrant Abram Sudermann, stupidly defiant to the last, is viciously murdered along with his supercilious wife Aganetha.

The novel is far from finished, though, after this shattering climax; it continues as a lengthy denouement as Katya continues to relate her life in Russia, including heartbreaking deprivations and suffering

until “Bull-Headed” Heinrichs, a fearless and rebellious (he no longer believes in God) young widower, rescues Katya (as he had done twice before) from misfortune by taking her for his wife. The young couple is finally able to come to Canada where they settle down to a new life of peace and hope and raise a large family.

With so much to praise in *The Russländer*, including a prose style that is always crisp and clean and that frequently rises to eloquence, the reviewer is nevertheless compelled to point out what appears to be a weakness in the novel’s structure. There seems to be some uncertainty in Birdsell’s handling of her central character Kathy Vogt. Ostensibly the narrator of the story, Kathy does not emerge as a consistently realized narrative voice or presence in the course of the novel. As a child she takes on a definite personality, but later she seems to fade in and out as a rather distant presence and never really establishes herself as the dominant character she should be, given her role as narrator.

The problem, I think, is largely a technical one. All too often, especially in the earlier chapters, Kathy’s role as narrator is taken over by a standard third-person narrator while Kathy functions strictly as a character within the scenes. This makes for an awkward narrative technique. It means that Kathy as a young girl has to be present in every scene and absorb, for example, the complex adult political and religious conversations between her father and his friend David Sudermann (the younger brother of Abram), conversations that, somewhat implausibly, she has to remember and relate word for word many decades later in Winnipeg. Birdsell must have had good reasons for not having Kathy tell her story directly in the first person or, alternatively, for not employing a third-person narrator throughout, but on the surface, at least, either one would seem to have made for more narrative consistency and plausibility.

One might also raise questions about some of the other characters in the novel, well drawn though they are. In the early chapters the teacher David Sudermann establishes himself with his “sideways humour” as the voice of ironic reason and common sense in the novel. He seems like a potential reformer and along with his friend Peter Vogt clearly sees the negative side of Mennonite life in Russia. The difference between the two characters is that while David, as an educated member of the Mennonite elite, feels free to express his views, Peter Vogt, as the dutiful employee of Abram Sudermann, the reactionary estate owner, cannot afford the luxury of expressing his views openly, even when



Sandra Birdsell, author of the national bestseller, *The Russländer*. Photo by Doris Penner, *The Carillon*, May 13, 2002, page 8A. Sandra Birdsell is related to the *Chortitzer* and *Sommerfelder Schroeders*.

he agrees with his friend David.

Unfortunately, these promising characters come across as somewhat aborted. Vogt, of course, is a victim of the massacre, but David Sudermann, although he survives, largely fades from the scene in the later chapters. On the other hand, “Bull-Headed” Heinrichs forges a dynamic presence not only in Kathy’s mind and heart, but in the reader’s. Another fascinating minor character is Vera, the strong-minded and somewhat mysterious peasant girl who refuses to become Kathy’s friend but who materializes in certain scenes like an avenging angel, much to the discomfort of her would-be friend. The failure of the Mennonite Kathy and the Ukrainian Vera to establish a viable relationship with each other epitomizes the lack of trust and acceptance of each other on the part of Mennonites and the indigenous population in Russia.

Setting aside the largely technical reservations, this reviewer has no hesitation in endorsing *The Russländer* as a most worthy addition to the growing number of significant novels that depict the Mennonite experience in its various stages and phases over the past five centuries. We are indeed fortunate in having brilliant professional writers like Sandra Birdsell and Rudy Wiebe, along with an impressive group of younger writers, to tell our Mennonite story in all its splendour, adversity and rich humanity down the centuries.

Reviewed by Al Reimer, Professor Emeritus, University of Winnipeg.

