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

Grain Merchant Cornelis Terwen (1621-?), Flemish Mennonite at Dordrecht, with his wife Segerina Lodewijcks Verbeek (1612-?) and their two-year-old son Lodewijk. The family came from a distinguished business family that had fled from Flanders. Many of the men in the family served as deacons. The painting was probably done by Samuel van Hoogstraten, although it has also been ascribed to Abraham Conincxvelt. (Credit: Piet Visser and Mary Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 149)

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In This Issue

John J. Friesen, co-editor

This issue focuses on the Dutch and Flemish Mennonite stories as background to the formation of the conservatives within the Dutch, Prussian and Mennonite history. The Flemish Anabaptist movement forms the context for the origin of the conservative wing of Dutch Mennonites, and yet, relatively little is known about this rather large movement. Articles in this issue will hopefully begin to shed more light on this important segment of the story. A number of the articles in this issue were planned by Delbert Plett before his death. A few of the studies were earlier published in books or periodicals likely not seen by our readers.

After an article by Walter Klaassen which places Menno Simons into context, a number of studies focus specifically on the Flemish story. Marjan Blok provides insight into the rather large Anabaptist movement in Flanders. Allan Friesen retells the sad story of the Frisian-Flemish split, a division that rent the Mennonite community for centuries. Roy Loewen traces the Flemish origins of Mennonite inheritance patterns - patterns that are still widely practiced in many Latin American Low German speaking communities. Karl Koop discusses the Dordrecht Confession of faith - a confession which originated in the Flemish context, and has been one of the most influential Mennonite confessions of all time. Micheal Driedger studies Geeritt Roosen, a businessman from the Altona Mennonite church near Hamburg, Germany, who had Flemish roots.

Jack Thiessen's study of Dutch words in Low German demonstrates the continuing influence of the Dutch language among Low German speaking Mennonites. This section concludes with a few articles about Mennonites and artistic life. These are taken from *Mennonite Life* and show the connection between the famous Dutch artist Rembrandt and Mennonites. The articles were originally published at the 350 anniversary of Rembrandt, and are included here at about his 400th anniversary.

The biographies and family histories section begins with three articles about *Aeltesten*, or bishops: the diary by Johann Loeppky from his trip to Mexico in the 1920s to find land for his people, the story of Herman J. Bueckert, a much loved bishop from northern British Columbia, and the account of Jacob F. Isaac, the last bishop in the Kleine Gemeinde in Kansas. Four articles deal with families: the Hamm, Unger, Broesky, and Froese families. One article makes an interesting connection between a Mennonite family and one of the principle people who tried to assassinate Adolph Hitler in 1944. Heinrich and Elizabeth Plett's instructions for their newly wed children is not strictly a biography, but reveals a lot about family life in the 1930s in one Mennonite community.

The second set of articles address a number of different issues. Lawrence Klippenstein looks at letters written by one of the delegates to Russia in the 1780s, Johann Bartsch, to his wife, and the other is a new detailed map by Ed Hoeppner of the route taken by the delegates to Russia, Bartsch and Hoeppner. Peter Penner writes about his recent trip to the Omsk area Mennonite settlements in southern Siberia – settlements that have been largely ignored in Mennonite scholarship. Bill Janzen writes about the history of Mennonites in Saskatchewan leading up to their migration to Mexico in the 1920s. The section concludes with an article by Glen Klassen about creationism - an issue of interest to many conservative communities.

The latter part of the journal includes items which shed additional light on conservatives. The section on Hutterite life is new. The items are written from within a community that has strong beliefs, and now finds itself in the midst of considerable change. The news item section is expanded, and highlights either research about, or activities by, conservative Mennonites. Material culture has a few items about how material remains can highlight the history of a people. The issue concludes with a number of book reviews.

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Preservings, a journal of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., is published annually. Co-editors are Hans Werner 1.204.786.9352 h.werner@uwinnipeg.ca and John J. Friesen, 1.204.487.3300, jjfriesen@cmu.ca. The annual subscription fee is $20.00, and should be made out to the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, and mailed to Hans Werner, D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2E9. Reader responses are welcome. Please send manuscripts, articles, and/or photographs to the above address at the University of Winnipeg. Our mission is to inform our readers about Mennonite history, and in particular to promote a respectful understanding and appreciation of the contribution made by the so-called conservatives.

D.F. Plett Foundation Names Executive Director

The D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc. is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Hans Werner as its executive director. The decision was ratified at the Foundation's spring meeting held on May 8 at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Werner is a native of Steinbach and past resident of Winkler where he was part owner of a farm corporation and served as chair of the local Credit Union, now resides in Winnipeg with his wife Diana. Hans and Diana attend the Bethel Mennonite Church and have three grown children. Werner who speaks Low German and High German, has just completed a history book on Winkler, *Living Between Worlds.* In 2002 he received a doctorate degree from the University of Manitoba with a study of the migration of Germans from Eastern Europe to Canada and Germany and their struggle in establishing a sense of home in new places. Over the past few years Werner has taught Canadian and Mennonite history at the University of Winnipeg.

Werner's duties with the Plett Foundation will include administering its grants program, co-editing the *Preservings* magazine, overseeing the publication and distribution of history books on Old Colony and other conservative Mennonite groups, and general administrative tasks. The Plett Foundation office will be located at the University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue, close to the historic downtown Hudson's Bay store. As his position with the Plett Foundation is a half time placement, Werner will have a half time position teaching of Canadian and Mennonite history at the University of Winnipeg. You can contact Hans at 204-786-9352. All correspondence to the Foundation as well as letters to *The Preservings* magazine can still be sent to D.F. Plett Foundation, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba.

In accepting his new appointment Werner expressed his enthusiasm for the mandate of the Foundation. He noted that "I am pleased to be involved with this important work to recover, preserve and tell the story of the Mennonites who migrated to Canada in the 1870s and then spread to Saskatchewan and Alberta, and from there to Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia and other Central and South American countries, with many descendants returning to Canada." We are very pleased that a person with Hans's range of abilities and interests, and his energy and sense of integrity, will administer the foundation's programs. We are confident that the Foundation's mission to further a respectful approach to the history of conservative Low German Mennonites of the Americas will be significantly enhanced with Hans's appointment.

Dr. Hans Werner

Royden Loewen, President
D.F. Plett Historical
Research Foundation Inc.

Editorial

Preservings' mission is to give voice to, and to study, the so-called conservatives in the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage, particularly the descendents of those who immigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s. In this issue we are also including some articles by, and about Hutterites.

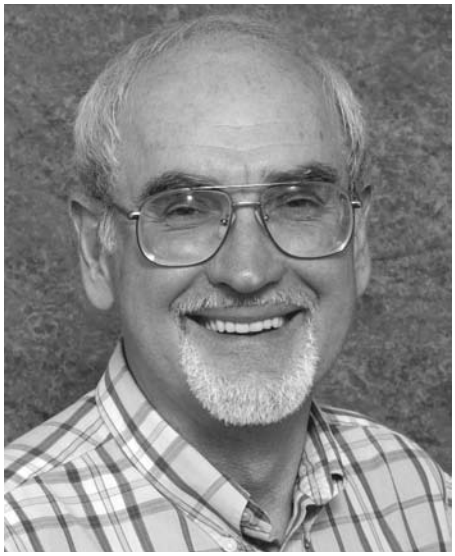
Why, you may ask, is it important to give attention to conservatives' history and experiences? Is there any more to tell? Is this not too narrow a part of Mennonite history to warrant this much attention?

It is true that considerable research attention has been given to the conservatives' history during the past number of decades. It is our view, however, that more stories need to be told. We want to tell the conservatives' story within the larger Mennonite story. We want to bring to light source materials that show the struggles they face in their everyday faith and life. We also want to provide a positive interpretation of the conservatives, not to idealize them, nor to minimize their problems, but to legitimate their view of being Christian. From that perspective we wish to address their successes and failures like we would those of any other Mennonite group. And, we want to provide them space to tell their own stories.

In dealing with the experiences of conservatives, one of the issues that arises is the relationship of Christian faith to modernity. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christianity in Europe and North America has been influenced by modernity. Modernity is the belief that progress is good, that the new is better than the old, that newer technology is better than the old ways, and that cars should replace horses and buggies. These preferences are not neutral, but carry with them value judgments.

These value judgments also carry over into areas of faith. In Europe, Pietism developed about the same time as modernity. Both reacted to, and critiqued, an orthodoxy that had gripped both Protestant and Catholic churches. Although there was often tension between Pietism and modernity, they also reinforced each other. As modernity inclined people to see the new as good, the new forms that Pietism introduced in the areas of worship, missions, and hymnodies were interpreted as being more spiritual and more genuinely Christian than traditional patterns. The old was not only seen as that which happened in the past, but as something negative.

In America, the conflict between modernity and tradition was even greater. The United States was the first western country founded on the modern principles of individual rights, progress, and equality. The American constitution saw these truths as self-evident to all right-thinking people. The American form of government with two elected houses and a president, but no king, was a rejection of the traditional European forms of royal government. The system of election in which each person had one vote (even though this principle was not fully implemented until two centuries later when African Americans were finally allowed to vote) was a rejection of the European assumptions of nobility and privilege. When modernity was tied to a capitalist economic system, it became a powerful force for challenging old–world values.



John J. Friesen

This spirit of modernity pervaded all aspects of American life, including the religious. The

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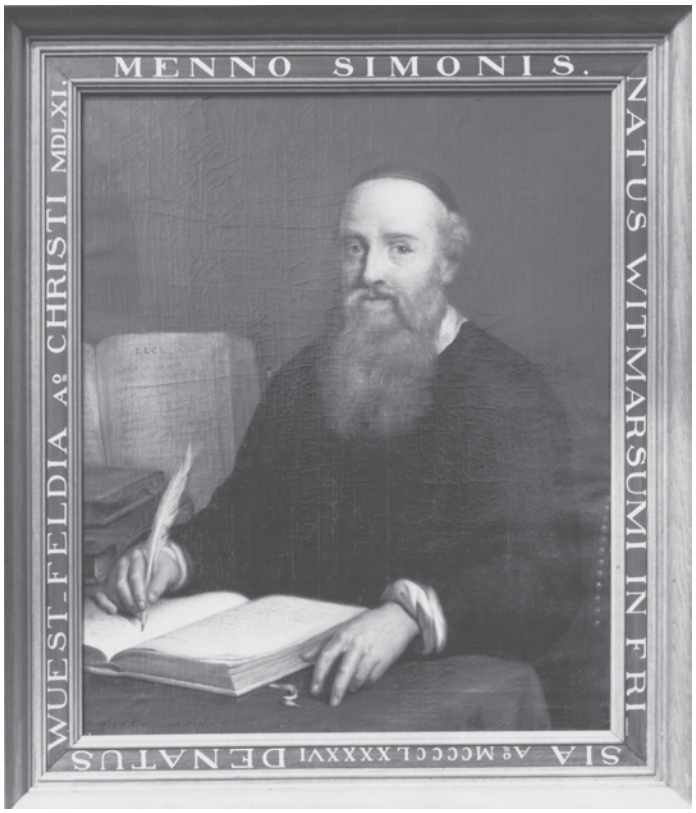
Feature Articles:

The Life And Times Of Menno Simons

Walter Klaassen, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

For most of us, Menno Simons and many other notables of our past are figures in a vacuum. We know quite a lot about Menno as a person, about the details of his life and work, and particularly of the years after his conversion. Much has been written about him, his theology has been carefully examined, his controversies with other theologians, Protestant and Roman Catholic, illuminated, and his many wanderings in the service of his Lord traced again and again.

But Menno Simons did not walk across and act upon a stage that was empty. It was filled with events and people and controversy. This is not to suggest, of course, that scholarship has quite disregarded events of the time other than those with which Menno was concerned. This would be impossible in the first place and is in fact not so. But most of us have never had the chance to go through all that scholars have written, and know of Menno only through short monographs and descriptions in which the wider context could not be dealt with. What follows is an attempt to supply a context by endeavouring to describe in part the world as it was in the days of Menno Simons. His life and work will then be seen in the context of a real world, a world as real as the one in which we live today. As the story progresses we will become aware of a number of parallels between the world and times of Menno and our own world and times, for there are many points at which these two eras, although separated by four centuries, are surprisingly similar. First of all, it is necessary to give a brief resumé of the life of Menno Simons.



Painting of Menno Simons. The original hangs in the meetinghouse in Witmarsum, Friesland, Menno's home town. The painting is in the Burkhart style. (Credit: Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 80.)

Menno Simon He was born in the year 1496 in Witmarsum in the Dutch province of Friesland. It is possible that his parents made their living at dairy farming for which this part of the Netherlands is famous even today. Most likely he received his theological education in a neighbouring monastery. He studied Latin, some Greek, and the great theologians of the early church, and was thus prepared for his ordination as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1524 when he was twenty-eight years old he was ordained as priest in Utrecht and began his service in Pingjum, a town near his home. He seems to have lived the life of a small town priest of that day, doing what was prescribed: baptizing children, officiating at the Mass, burying the dead, hearing confession, and little else.

About this time a teaching was abroad in the Netherlands which denied the Catholic doctrine that the bread and wine of the Eucharist became the very flesh and blood of Christ under the consecrating hands of the priest. During his first year as priest Menno began to entertain doubts about this doctrine. After carrying this doubt about with him for two years and under the influence of Martin Luther and others, he finally began to read the New Testament. He soon noticed that what he read there, and what the official teaching of the church was, did not agree. It now became for him a question of which authority he would follow, the traditional teaching or Scripture? He chose the Bible, and in addition began to read Luther's writings. Gradually his views matured into independence as he gained confidence that he was on the right path.

The next question to be clarified was that concerning baptism, a question forced on him after hearing of a man who had been executed for submitting to rebaptism after he claimed that his baptism as an infant was not valid. Now he immediately consulted Scripture as his authority and found that what he read there about baptism differed not only from what Rome taught but also from what was taught by Martin Luther and the other reformers. But he did not leave the Roman Catholic Church as yet. Rather, he moved a step up the ladder in that he went to be priest in the larger church in his home town.About the year 1532 Anabaptists began to appear in his congregation. These were the people who had been baptized with what they believed was the true baptism of repentance and faith. They made him feel guilty because they had had the courage to be rebaptized and he did not. Moreover, he did not want to give up a pleasant life. In 1534 some Anabaptists came from the city of Münster in Westphalia with the message that God was setting up his kingdom there, and that a young man named Jan van Leiden was the new King David. This new divine kingdom was to be the lead-in to the return of Christ for judgement. So the priest Menno began to preach against them and to argue with them, saying that to replace Jesus with Jan van Leiden as the Davidic king was blasphemy. He became so adept at debating with them that he was frequently called upon by the church to deal with these people. More importantly, it was also in this year that he decided to accept the baptism of faith secretly. But still he stayed in his position as priest. When in March, 1535, his own brother and members of his congregation were killed at the siege of the Old Cloister where Anabaptists had fortified themselves; he knew that the time for decision had come. Thus, even while he continued to function as priest in Witmarsum, he also began to be a pastor to Anabaptists who would have nothing to do with the sword-bearing Anabaptists who had come from Münster. He cautioned them not to become involved in violence.

In the winter of 1536, after he had been persuaded to become a leader of Anabaptists, Menno quietly left his home to become a wan-

Interior of the church in Witmarsum, Friesland, rebuilt in 1961 in the traditional style. A portrait of Menno, in oil, hangs on the left wall. (Credit: Jan Gleysteen)

dering pastor, concerned with looking after the spiritual welfare of his brothers and sisters in the faith. He worked in Groningen and East Friesland, at the same time studying and writing pamphlets to strengthen and guide those in need of spiritual help, and to win those in danger of losing their evangelical faith. From the time of his leaving Witmarsum in 1536 until 1554 he was a hunted man, and for much of the time he had a price on his head. He wrote in 1544 that he "could not find in all the countries a cabin or hut in which my poor wife and our little children could be put up in safety for a year or even half a year." He worked hard in East Friesland, at times moving further afield to Cologne, Lübeck and Danzig. He carried on extensive theological controversies with Roman Catholics and Calvinists, and also had to deal with numerous problems in his own fellowship. For twenty-five years he carried on this most difficult work, for the most part in secret, travelling and meeting with his people at night. With the human defects he had, (Menno was crippled in his later years), he nevertheless took on himself the life of a disciple of Christ, willingly carrying the cross of suffering. His great concern was for the church of Christ, and his motto, well known to all of us, but of which we must always be reminded was: "Other foundation may no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." He called on all to repent of their sins, to receive God's offer of forgiveness, to be baptized upon the confession of faith, to enter the New Jerusalem, the church, live there in obedience and holiness, and to do good to everyone. Menno Simons died on January 31, 1561, but his labours follow him in the world-wide fellowship of Mennonite churches.

Revolution and Reformation

The times of Menno, the first half of the sixteenth century, were times of radical and revolutionary transition. His world was in process of metamorphosis; it was changing from what it had been into something else. This was true in almost every respect. Some of the changes had begun long before Menno was born, and had not yet reached completion at his death. It was a day such as ours, in which the old order was passing never to return.

We shall begin with what might be called the political situation of the day in Western Europe. The ancient cathedral of St. Machar in Aberdeen, Scotland, is not much to look at. In fact, it is ugly. The towers are squat and ungraceful. The apses and the chancel collapsed several centuries ago and are no longer there, but this old cathedral has something that no other European cathedral has, namely a unique ceiling. Again it is not beautiful; there is no intricate stonework, no graceful vaulting, and no lofty pillars on which it is supported. It is flat and somewhat dark, being constructed of dark timbers in a sort of checkerboard pattern. Each of the squares contains a coat of arms, and in the centre there is one somewhat larger and more magnificent than the rest. The ceiling was put into the cathedral and decorated in this way about the year 1550, and represents the Holy Roman Empire as it then was: the Emperor's coat of arms in the centre, and those of all the individual rulers who owed allegiance to him all around. That ceiling represents a nostalgic dream held by the bishop of St. Machar's, and, what is more important, held by Charles V who became emperor in 1519. He was the last of the emperors of an age that was passing away; an age in which both emperors and popes had worked for a Europe united under one crown and one church. At times there had been a measure of success in this attempt, particularly during the time of Charlemagne in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Charles V considered himself to be a second Charlemagne, and to him, as to Charlemagne, "the religious and political unity of Christendom was both the ideal purpose of his life and a practical object of policy."[1] Through a series of unexpected deaths and marriages Charles was ruler of an area of Europe practically as large as that of Charlemagne. He was emperor of Austria and Tirol, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, parts of Italy, and also a large area in the Americas. It was Charles's dream to keep Europe united under one crown and one church, but the time for its realisation was past. Both Emperor and people wanted peace; in fact, many people believed that the Empire was the last chance for peace in Christendom. Charles V was called "the restorer of the Roman Empire" and "the future ruler of the whole globe."[2]

Perhaps no part of the Empire desired peace quite as much as the Netherlands, the home of Menno Simons, for they were the very centre of the Empire's trade and industry. The people of the Netherlands complained of having to fight the Emperor's wars, and that Spanish troops were kept in the Netherlands to keep the people in their place. Taxes were heavy and prices were constantly rising. Towns like Leiden, long prosperous due to its weaving industry, were losing their prosperity, thus causing unemployment among artisans and dislocation of the social structure. From 1530 onwards, Anabaptists and Lutheran preachers found a ready hearing among the discontented artisans of the industrial towns. But although everyone wanted peace, there was no peace. Although all wanted political unity in the interests of prosperity and religion, Charles failed to give it. The old order was changing, things were not as they had been, and no idealism could bring back the unity of state and church as it had been under Charlemagne. Charles' abdication in 1555, six years before Menno's death, "was his own recognition of the failure of the last attempt to re-establish the medieval

Melchior Hoffman, founder of Dutch, North German Anabaptism. (Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 21)

concept of Christian unity under the leadership of emperor and pope."[3]

The most important single reason for Charles' failure to actualize his dream was the religious revolt called the Reformation. There had been demands and movements for reform for about two hundred years, but those who were the key to the reformation of the church held the reins of power in church and state. They benefited by its abuses—today we call it conflict of interest—and therefore nothing came of it. John Wycliffe in England and Jan Hus in Bohemia tried, but were by and large unsuccessful. It remained for Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk, to begin again, and this he did in 1517. He wanted to reform the church, not break with it, but his reformation was too radical; it cut right across the vision of emperor and pope of a Europe united under the imperial crown and the triple tiara. It exposed as unscriptural much of the then current teaching of the church. What had begun as a plan for reformation became a revolt when Luther publicly burned the papal document that condemned his writings in December, 1520. The support of the German nobility protected Luther from the death of a heretic, and, through the medium of the new technology of printing, his writings spread far and wide like little bits of explosive that helped bring down the rule of the Church of Rome in Western Europe and destroy for ever the dream of Charles V. This was therefore the time when people discovered again the foundations of New Testament Christianity: that one is saved by grace through faith, and not through the works of the law. It meant the destruction of the unity of the church because the church refused to be reformed so radically. The time of Menno Simons was therefore the beginning of a new day for the church of Christ.

An engraving of Menno Simons by Jan Luyken in 1681 in Amsterdam. (Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 76)

Science and Technology

But there were other factors as well that mark Menno's time as a new day. About eighty years before Menno's conversion, printing was invented in Europe. Some decades before that, the process for making paper had been invented, so that by the year 1410 there were paper mills in most European countries. There were those, of course, who looked with contempt on this new material, but gradually its commercial value was realized, and when the printing press came along in 1450, an inexpensive printing material was already available. It meant that the cost to produce a book was now relatively low and also that it retailed at prices which, although high by our standards, even low income people could manage if they were thrifty. Growing literacy created an increasing demand for books. The universities were experiencing an unprecedented influx of students that resulted in the lowering of standards of academic excellence, but also in a demand for more books. Soon there were large printing concerns in many cities, but also many itinerant printers whose stock and materials could be put in a cart. It was an itinerant printer who published Menno's works; the house in which this was done is still standing.

Printing was an important factor in the break-up of the old order. The volume of books and pamphlets that poured from the printing presses of Europe could not be effectively censored by church and governments. But they tried: books were burned and prohibited, but they were printed in secret and circulated by individuals. Two years before Menno's death the pope established an index which contained the titles of books harmful to the church, among them books by Luther, Erasmus, and Menno. But prohibition only served to make those books more popular, especially in Protestant areas. The attempt by the churches to control ideas, and here one must also include the large Protestant churches, was frustrated by the printed book.

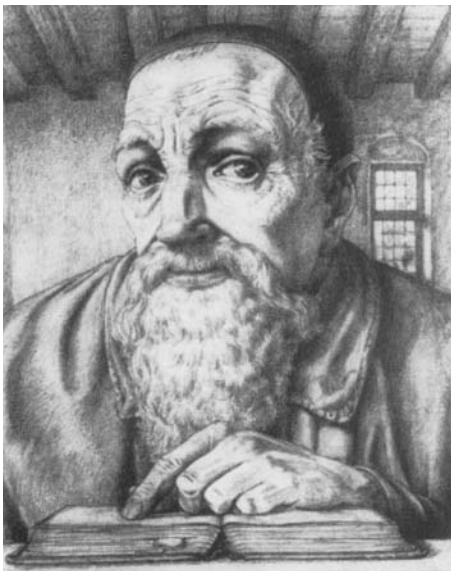
The time of Menno was also a time of new developments in agriculture and science. The catastrophe usually referred to as the Black Death occurred in 1350. About one-third of the population of Western Europe died, and for one hundred and twenty-five years, Europe suffered from the effects. About 1475 a change began. There was an enormous population increase which appeared to people of that day to be a serious problem indeed, and ways of dealing with it were suggested. Some said that another plague was needed. Others suggested a large-scale war. By the year 1500, a few years after the birth of Menno, the high population had stimulated demand for increased production. In the meantime peasants had attained a measure of freedom from their landlords, so that they began to take more personal interest in their land. The result was that production went up. Peasants sold their own produce and enjoyed the proceeds themselves. During Menno's years, the work of reclaiming land from marsh and sea in the Netherlands and northern Germany continued. Because of the demand for

An engraving of Menno Simons by Abraham de Cooge in ca. 1650. (Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 75)

farm produce, farmers experimented with new crops like turnips and clover. This in turn led to the production of a large volume of literature on farming and farming methods, now possible because of printing. New crops and the increasing demand for farm products led to new methods of cultivation, and so we could go on. Of all this, Menno must have been aware, or perhaps he was even quite familiar with these changes since it is possible that he himself was born on a farm. Many of those whom he served must have been farmers who would have spoken to him about their problems. In agriculture much was new and changing.

The great scientific revolution did not come until several generations after Menno's death, but Menno's day saw some of the developments that prepared the way for it. Certainly a new interest in science was widespread. The discovery of the scientific works of ancient Greece and Arabia stimulated the curiosity of Menno's contemporaries. But now, instead of merely getting information from old books, there were those who began to gain new knowledge on the basis of observation. There was more application of the scientific knowledge to practical uses. In medicine, for example, the human body was being dissected to learn more about its structure and function. The science of geometry became increasingly important for navigation, for surveying, and for gunnery. There was increased interest in astronomy. It was Copernicus, the Polish astronomer, who died in 1543 while Menno was working in East Friesland, who propounded the theory that the earth and the planets revolve around the sun, a view that was still dangerous then because it seemed to contradict Scripture. Perhaps the most significant thing about science in Menno's time was that it was becoming increasingly secularized. For a long time the clergy of the Roman church had been the guardians of learning; from now on the

An engraving of Menno Simons by Pieter Holsteyn?, ca. 1662. (Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 71)



Pencil drawing of Menno Simons by Arend Hendriks, 1948. (Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 99)

scientists were largely laymen who were less concerned than churchmen to harmonize their findings with official doctrine. It was the dawn of modern secularism, the division between the sacred and the secular.

It was during Menno's lifetime that the first great voyages of exploration were made by Europeans. Christopher Columbus was on his second voyage of discovery in the year 1496, the year of Menno's birth. It is interesting to note in this connexion that in time some raised objections to these voyages of discovery because, it was argued, people had enough to do where they were without discovering new lands that would presumably bring new problems. Sebastian Brant, in his satire *The Ship of Fools*, first published in German in 1494, wrote words very reminiscent of some modern critics of space exploration:

Some have explored a foreign land
But not themselves can understand.

This did not, however, discourage people, for when Menno was sixteen years old a Spanish explorer discovered Florida and in 1521-1522, Ferdinand Magellan circumnavigated the globe. In 1534, the year of Menno's conversion, Jacques Cartier sailed up what came to be known as the St. Lawrence River. The days of Menno were significant days, in that suddenly the world was a globe rather than a flat surface, and it was infinitely larger than anyone had supposed. Unheard of wonders and possibilities opened up before the eyes of Europeans. Since Menno lived in the Netherlands and within fifty miles of the greatest of all European trading ports, Antwerp, it is likely that he heard many tales about the new world , told originally by Spanish and Portuguese seamen who came into Antwerp from all over the world. It was a time of widening horizons, of expectations, and of surmise about what might lie in the future.

The age of Menno was one in which war was constantly being waged in some part of Europe or another. The one hundred years ending with 1560 were more decisive for the evolution of the art of war than any subsequent period until the late eighteenth century. During this time men broke with the past in the art of conducting warfare. The discovery of gunpowder gradually led to a complete change, and since there were plenty of wars, lessons were learned quickly. Military and national leaders became increasingly concerned about the possibility that defensive military secrets might get into the hands of the great enemy of the western world, the Ottoman Turks. Judging from the example of the Roman Empire, Europeans became convinced that the greatness of a nation depended in the first place upon its strength, and this was supplied by a strong army. Strong military potential was looked upon as a guarantee for peace in which the arts and sciences could flourish, and the nation could prosper, all of which sounds very modern indeed. Seen against that background, the Anabaptist insistence about living without weapons (*Wehrlosigkeit*) was more than an ideal. It was rather a grappling with the realities of life in a real living context.

One more thing needs to be mentioned to round out the picture. The sixteenth century world was divided into East and West, as is also the twenty-first. The great enemy of Western Europe then, the Ottoman Turks, had established a foothold in the Balkan peninsula in 1345 and the centuries-long war between Christendom and the "infidel", as the Turks were called, began to be fought on European soil. In 1453 Constantinople, which had been a Christian city for a millennium, fell to the Turks after its walls had been destroyed by cannons, and shortly thereafter it became the Turkish capital, and renamed Istanbul. The Turks conquered Greece and what are today the Balkan republics and Albania, and from the year 1521 onwards kept Europe in constant terror by attacks against Hungary and Austria. Martin Luther and other religious leaders of the day, including some Anabaptists, believed that the Turks were the rod of God's anger against Christendom, and that they were the forces of evil in the days just preceding the return of Christ and the end of the world. In 1529, five years after Menno's ordination to the priesthood, the main battle between east and West took place at Vienna, the West gaining the victory. It was not until ten years after Menno's death, that the threat was over, at least temporarily.

The times of Menno were therefore times of anxiety, fear and foreboding. At the same time, many in Menno's age thought, much as we often do today, that in spite of all the trouble and uncertainty, it was a great age in which to live. Ulrich von Hutten, a humanist knight, expressed this sentiment for his generation in a letter of 1518 when he wrote: "O century! O sciences! It is a pleasure to be alive!" It was a coarse and rough age, but also a heroic one, one that brought out the worst in men but also the best. It was the age that produced Machiavelli and the Borgias whose very names have become synonymous with intrigue, murder and the ruthless use of power. But it was also the age that produced Erasmus of Rotterdam, Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli and Menno Simons.

Against that picture of a civilisation in a state of change, a civilisation setting out on new paths never trodden before, a civilisation threatened with destruction from without and within, we must look at the life and work of Menno Simons. Menno was not a well-known man in his time. Most of the world was much too concerned with the great events that were transpiring all around to take notice of a fugitive priest who had become an Anabaptist preacher. Our age is different from his in many ways, but the call of God remains the same for us as for Menno, the call to a new life in Christ, the call to witness to that foundation which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

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Anabaptism in Flanders: An introduction

Dr. Marjan Blok, Herent, Belgium

Sixteenth-century Flemish Anabaptism knew a tumultuous history. It surrendered more martyrs than any other Reformed tradition in the Southern Provinces of the Low Countries and eventually disappeared altogether from Flemish soil. Nevertheless, the significance and contribution of this movement should not be underestimated. The neglect of scholarly attention is in part due to the lack of an historical sequel to its brave beginnings, and in part due to the nature of the texts that remain. Where Anabaptism as a whole enjoyed ever-increasing attention among historical researchers, Anabaptists' martyr texts have infrequently been the focus of study, likely because of their perceived lack of theological content. Furthermore, the proliferation of Mennonite movements in the Low Countries, making their study somewhat more confusing, has made their sources perhaps less popular among scholars than the Swiss and German texts.

We would like to take a brief look at the history and theology of the Flemish Anabaptists and will seek to elucidate the importance of the martyr texts. We may remark already at this point that the contribution of the Flemish Mennonite movement has not been without significance. Both in England and in the Netherlands, the Flemish left their mark and their texts. Their martyrology and confessions have become the heritage of Mennonites everywhere. For example, in the famous Martyrs' Mirror by Van Braght, fully two-thirds of the sixteenth century martyrs are of Flemish descent. This fact is lost because we often designate the martyrs as "Dutch" thus doing the amazing history of Flemish Anabaptism an injustice.

The history of the Flemish Anabaptists commences at about 1530 and extends until 1640, although most Anabaptists had disappeared by the turn of the century. Flemish Anabaptism appears within the context of late medieval historical and theological development. The Waldenses, the Brethren of the Common Life, the Sacramentarians, a flourishing humanism - especially that of Erasmus, the Loïsts, the Family of Love and the Chambers of Rhetoric, as well as late medieval theology, form part of the historical background of the Flemish Anabaptist movement. We hesitate to speak of precursors and prefer to leave the question of origins aside in favour of understanding the general climate in which Flemish Anabaptism emerged and whose many traces it obviously bears. All these movements could be said to be similar in that they are expressions of the collapse of medieval hierarchy and the evolution of literacy.

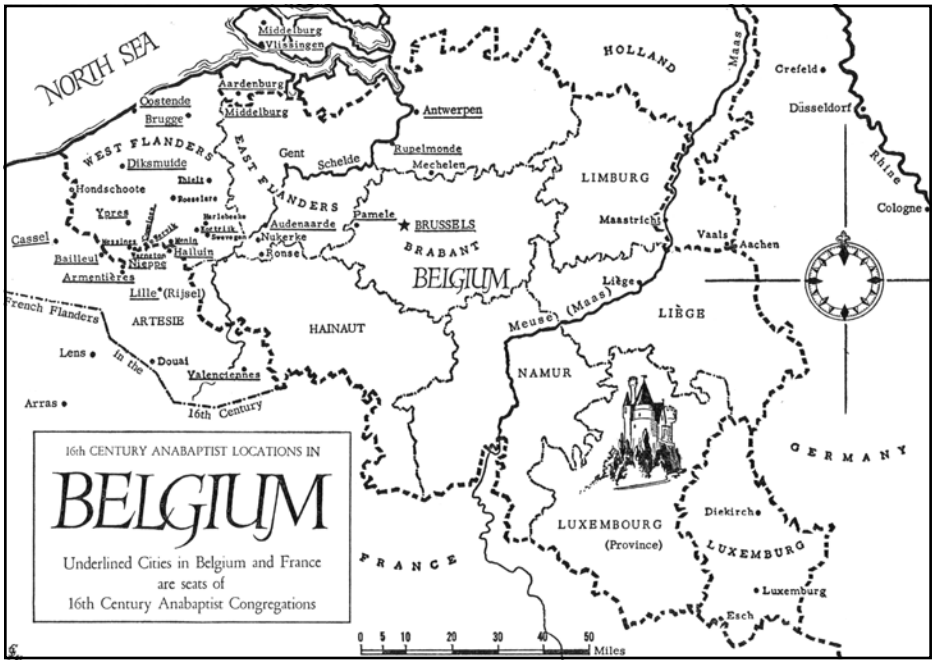
The similarities between late medieval Catholicism and Flemish Anabaptism are striking, especially in their perceptions of sanctification. Penitential theology remains essentially the same for the Flemish Anabaptist martyr and the Roman Catholic believer. For both the perception of the role of reason is strongly reminiscent of that in nominalism. Flemish Anabaptists are hardly foreign to their society, but are part of the cultural and religious revolution taking place in Flanders during the sixteenth century. During this century the Dutch Republic and the Southern Provinces of the Low Countries are born as separate nations. The development of Reformation history in the Netherlands coincides with this political development. At the time the Low Countries are involved in a struggle to free themselves from Spanish rule. In 1522 the Inquisition is organized as a civil jurisdiction by Charles V, and in 1523 persecution claims its first martyrs, Henry Voes and John Esch.

If Charles V enjoyed a measure of popularity this certainly could not be said of his son Philip II who came to power in the year 1555. Persecution greatly increased in the second half of the century causing tensions and open revolt against king Philip in the sixties. The ensuing 80 years war resulted in the final separation of the Northern and Southern provinces, a development which was to have a profound effect on the history of Protestantism in the south. The Pacification of Gent in 1576 sought to unite all the provinces of the Low Countries under the leadership of William of Orange. However, this union did not last and the situation of the Reformed and Anabaptists became increasingly difficult. After the fall of Antwerp in 1585 the political future of the Southern Provinces, and therewith that of the Flemish Anabaptists, was decided. Anabaptists took refuge in Emden, Frisia, Zeeland, and England.

The origin of Flemish Anabaptism can be debated. Most likely it arrived in Flanders through the ministry of Melchior Hofmann in the north. Of course the early development in the north and especially the Munster incident in 1535 did not give Anabaptism a very good reputation. Although we find no trace of Flemish Anabaptists participating in the Munster event, we do have radical forms of Anabaptism in Flanders as well. We mention the followers of Mathieu Waghens in Gent and John of Batenburg as well as David Joris. After 1535 the influence of Menno Simons is predominant, however.

Menno never visited the south but Flemish Anabaptists regularly traveled to the north. In 1535 we find the first "edict" issued by Charles V against all those infected by Anabaptism who were to be punished with death by fire. We find early centers of Anabaptism in Maastricht, Hasselt, Antwerp, Mechelen, Brussel, Ghent, Brugge, Nieuwpoort, Oudenaerde, Aalst, Ieper, and Kortrijk along with the disputed duchy of Gulik. We know of these places largely because of the persecution which followed the "edict" just mentioned. The records resulting from this first period of persecution give us some idea as to the extent of the Anabaptist movement, but the records are nevertheless incomplete. We find mention of 60, 000 Anabaptists in a letter of the English ambassador to Brussels, Sir John Hackett. Guido Marnef estimates 2,000 Anabaptists in Antwerp alone around 1566. J. Briels arrives at a more conservative estimate of 6,000 Anabaptists in total in the south.

The first Flemish Anabaptist martyrs were probably Jerome Pael, beheaded in Antwerp, Willem Mulaer, beheaded in Ghent, and Arendt de Jagher and Jan van Gent-Brugge all martyred in 1535. Persecution eventually became so intense that the government of Brussels instituted a rule to give convicted Anabaptists (with the exception of their leaders) at least a fifteen day period to recant their faith. This was supposedly done for fear of executing too many people, seeing the large number of Anabaptists. There is some disagreement as to what happened after



this first wave of persecution. Some feel the movement largely disappeared. A.L.E. Verheyden, however, states that by 1550 Anabaptism had become the main non-Catholic confession in Flanders.

One of the main problems in this early time was leadership. Some leaders complained in a letter to the brethren in Antwerp: "We, leaders of the churches in Flanders, are thoroughly worried and saddened concerning the great need and suffering which we note and see in our churches everywhere as the poor weak brethren walk as sheep without a shepherd. Herewith we may complain and say that the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few." The situation improved after 1550. At this time leadership figures included Jacob de Roore and Leenart Bouwens (sent from the north) as well as Adriaan van Kortrijk and others. Most of these leaders were engaged in trade, a fact which likely contributed to the spread of the movement.

In 1550 a certain Jan van Sol took it upon himself to devise a plan against the Anabaptists which he submitted to the authorities. The plan revealed some interesting facts about the movement at this time. The peaceful Anabaptists were designated as the most important movement in the Low Countries. Van Sol described the activities of the deacons and the functioning of social aid within the churches, an element he took to be proof of the fact that the Mennonites were increasingly well off. Although Van Sol's exact plan was not accepted, a wave of persecution again swept the land. The Pacification of Gent of 1576 made matters somewhat easier for a while, at least in theory. The previous edicts were annulled, but the Anabaptists now faced strong opposition from the Calvinists. Nevertheless, outright persecution ceased for the time being. The worst punishment at this time was banishment.

This relative time of quiet came to an end in 1585 with the fall of Antwerp. Two years of voluntary exile were suggested and many did indeed leave the country. After 1587, the manhunt intensified provoking further gradual emigration. The last Flemish Anabaptist to suffer martyrdom in the south was a woman named Anneke van Uytenhove, buried alive in Brussel in 1597. Her death brought to a close a tragic time of heavy persecution, a time of which Verheyden has estimated that seventy percent of all the martyrs in the south were Anabaptists. Persecution of the Anabaptists in Flanders and their subsequent exile benefited Anabaptist brethren in the northern Low Countries and far beyond.

Many texts resulting from this time are still available to us, mostly in the form of martyr literature. Martyr texts were not meant to be accurate, or provide complete historical description, but functioned as a means of edification and legitimization. The martyr letters and testimonies, often written under excruciating circumstances, reveal a community with a renewed sense of understanding the world and religion.

The theology reflected in the martyr texts revolves first and foremost around the concepts of *boete en beteringhe* (to do penance and better yourself). These concepts dominate Anabaptist understanding of the church, the sacraments and death. The medieval preoccupation with death and the fear of hell are familiar themes in the martyrs' letters. The presence of biblical texts forces a new awareness of imperfection, thus intensifying the penitential understanding. The conscience of the individual now stands in judgment of the true penitential attitude. The salvation of the soul through penance acquires cosmic dimensions, as its ultimate expression in martyrdom reflects the struggle between God and the devil. Simultaneously, penance becomes the paradigm for social struggle, as the frequent use of the Exodus metaphor illustrates. The powerless minority forges a self-understanding through its own ritual, sacraments and social structure, vis-a-vis a powerful, or rather overpowering, society.

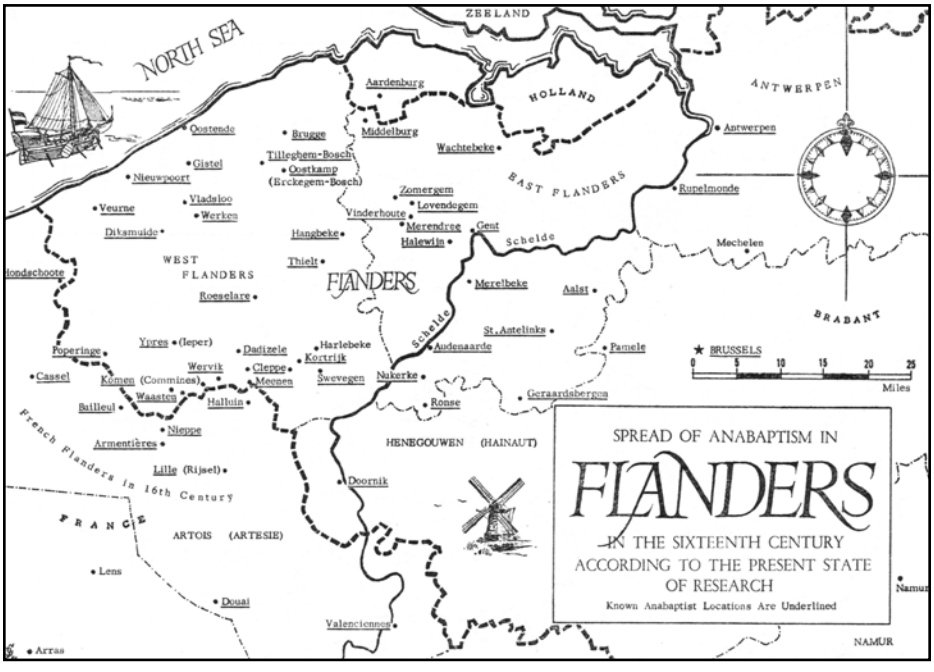
The central role of the concept of *navolging* (to follow after) and the symbol of the suffering Christ are paramount in this struggle with a powerful world. The innovative element in Anabaptist penitential theology is its reliance on Scripture rather than on the mediation of the clergy. *Lydtsaemheyt* (long suffering) in following the suffering Christ, constitutes the response of the powerless to unjust power. Anabaptist Christology does not center around a redemptive theme but rather focuses on that of Christ, the king, who willingly suffered as an example for the church. The eschatological motivation is a new element providing a rationale for temporary suffering and rendering penance a cosmic event of greatest urgency; similarly, the martyr's death gains eschatological significance.

Anticlericalism is rooted in this intensified emphasis on penance made possible by literacy, and as such is not a criticism of the position of the clergy. Church structure and ecclesiastical roles remain essentially the same, albeit with a more democratic emphasis. The "magical" function of the clergy is broken by the comparative power of literacy, and hierarchical ecclesial forms collapse. Church discipline is a practice that acquires little emphasis in the south. The church structure, the sacraments and the role of scripture are familiar to us from other Anabaptists groups, but gain a specific emphasis in the Flemish context. Space does not allow us to pursue this theme further at this point. We may say, however, that the Flemish Anabaptists developed their theology according to their own particular situation.

N. Van der Zijpp has listed several differences between the southern and northern brethren as follows: First, the congregation in the south centered around the brotherhood, rather than around one or more elders. Second, the Flemish were stricter in the issue of the ban as applied to marriage. Third, the Flemish were more elaborate in dress. Fourth, Flemish Mennonites were mostly weavers united in guilds.

Many Flemish Mennonites fled to the Frisian area where these cultural differences became apparent and led to a whole range of conflicts between the Flemish and the Frisians. As a result of subsequent splits in the brotherhood, confessions were written to attempt to unite the differing factions. Several important documents of this nature were drawn up in the seventeenth century, among which is the confession of 1626, called Olijftack.

It is, however, the well-known Dordrecht Confession of 1632 that especially bears the marks of Flemish influence and reflects the strong theological contribution made by the southern brethren. This confession by the Flemish can be considered as the main document of its kind within all of Anabaptism. Further evidence of their influence and leadership during their time of exile in the north is their participation in the religious debates with the Calvinists during the sixteenth century. When Mennonites were more or less forced into these debates, the Flemish proved to be most capable, and were therefore sought out by their northern brethren to speak



for the Anabaptist churches. The documents that remain from these religious debates provide a vivid picture of the consistent development of Flemish Anabaptist theology.

Having surveyed some general factors of the Flemish Anabaptist movement, it is now perhaps worthwhile to take a closer look at some of the personalities within the movement and gain some understanding of the courage with which these believers faced the problems that resulted from sixteenth century religious frictions. Flemish Anabaptists found themselves in such a difficult situation precisely because they were truly pioneers. They were the first generation that took on literacy and changed from being a largely oral people into being literate. They developed a consciousness that belongs to that change as is reflected in their theology. It is precisely because Anabaptists came from non-learned groups that their movement was so radically other, and was feared more than any other contemporary group. Furthermore, they were easily apprehended by the authorities.

It was already mentioned they were persecuted more than any other reformed confession. Why is this? Some of the reasons may be that 1) they developed an essentially pacifistic conviction - a stance that did not sit well with those whose primary concern was to defeat the Spanish; 2) they exhibited peculiar social behaviours, as in not baptizing their children. This alerted friend and foe alike to their presence; 3) they did not swear the oath. We often forget what practical difficulties they encountered because of this conviction. Swearing an oath was more or less on par with today's custom of providing a signature. It therefore became obvious at any official occasion that they were Anabaptists; and 4) the idea of *lydtsaemheyt* did not allow for any pretence of being a good Catholic, an attitude some groups had adopted. Hence, the Anabaptist was easily noticed - more so than the Calvinist - and arrested.

Let us examine the life of Leenaert Plovier by way of example. This Anabaptist believer came from Menen, a city not far from Kortrijk, in the southwest of Flanders. We know that Leenaert Bouwens baptized in Menen. Sources tell us that persecution started after 1566 in this region. But even before this date, the town was not safe for Anabaptists. Authorities had appointed citizens in every street to report any suspicious acts, and any person entering the town was obliged to present written testimony of their orthodoxy. Due to these measures, several Anabaptists decided to move away, among them our Leenaert.

Leenaert got into trouble in Menen when he refused to swear the oath. Born in 1524, he would have been about 34 years of age when his career had advanced to such a stage that he was elected master weaver and quality inspector. However, in order to accept this post he was obliged to appear at the city hall and swear alliance to the trade. He discussed his unfortunate dilemma with his friends who suggested they would help him by pretending to take the oath, if Leenaert would cooperate. We read in the texts: "...even though he refused the oath, his companions were content, saying, come with us to city hall and show your face, being of the opinion that the judge would not notice the irregularity. But he (Leenaert) could not suffer his conscience to be compromised and from that time onward has suffered greatly and sought his abode in secret and became a fugitive to Antwerp together with his wife and children in the year 1558."

Leenaert sought refuge in Antwerp, where he traded in silks, but there too he was no longer safe, it turned out. After about a year he decided to move his family to Frisia with all their earthly goods. After his family had left, Leenaert remained in Antwerp for a while to finalize some business. At this time he heard that the authorities had drawn up a plan to arrest all those who did not conform to city rule. Leenaert hastened to meet some of his fellow believers outside the town in the dead of night to warn of the upcoming actions. This brought about his own arrest, for it is here that he was found by the authorities. They approach Leenaert and ask him if he was in possession of a New Testament to which he truthfully answered "yes." Thereupon they arrested him and brought him to the "Steen," the main prison in Antwerp.

Now his family came to the rescue. His father-in-law from Menen arrived. Apparently he was rather well-to-do and was under the illusion that speaking to some of the right people would fix the problem. He offered gifts to the authorities and was promised that his son-in-law would now be released. The father left reassured and convinced the problem was resolved. Nevertheless, Leenaert was convicted and, together with two women (Janneken and Maeyken), was executed. All three were put in sacks and drowned in winevats in the prison itself two weeks before Easter of the year 1560. During his time in prison Leenaert wrote six letters, two of which remain. Leenaert expressed the purpose of his writing: he wished his children to know for what reason he was condemned to death so that they too would seek salvation.

His letters run as many other martyrs' letters, and provide a clear example of how the Flemish Anabaptist experienced his or her faith. He starts off by instructing his children concerning some practical matters: They should obey and honour their mother, they should develop a friendly attitude and refrain from lying. (Leenaert, of course died because he took this rule very seriously. He explains that no liar will ever see the kingdom of God). The children are, furthermore, instructed to learn to read, especially the "testament" in order to discover the commandments of Christ.

He then explains what the gospel means to him: God's grace is made available to all men. Here we see the same themes developed as in Menno Simons Fundament of 1539. This sort of parallel invites speculation as to the influence of this particular work in the southern Low Countries. For Leenaert, like Menno, grace calls us to penance and bettering our lives. This means leaving the world and its wrongdoings and leading a righteous life through following the word of God.

The use of Scripture is worthy of mentioning here. As in much of the martyr literature, scripture is quoted extensively. In Leenaert's first short letter scripture is quoted no less than 45 times! His letters are a brief, but impressive, legacy which this courageous young man left us at the age of 36. He was preparing for death, although in his own words he said, "I committed no wrong."

We could spend many hours examining the inspiring lives of many other courageous Anabaptists. We might briefly mention Jacob de Roore who was arrested in 1569. Jacob was a deacon in the church although he probably adopted that title, instead of being called a bishop, in order to avoid persecution. We know that de Roore traveled throughout the country preaching and performing services such as marriage ceremonies (but not baptism). De Roore also came to feel that the situation in Flanders was no longer safe and planned to move his family to Cleve. When he returned to fetch them he was arrested in Bruges and sentenced to death. Jacob left us 19 letters both to his family and to the church. All of his letters contain a quotation from 1 Peter 4:19 in rhyme form: "All who suffer after the will of God pray do heed, to commit their souls, to the faithful Creator with charitable deed." De Roore tells us of the difficult circumstances under which he wrote the letters, testifying that sometimes the paper was too small or sometimes he hurried in order not to be discovered.

Another particularly moving account is the story of Janneke Munstdorp. Janneke is arrested together with her husband Hans and executed in 1573 in Antwerp. Hans is to die first and Janneke remains in prison to await the birth of their child before she too will die at the stake. We can scarcely imagine the courage of this young woman as is evident from a letter she writes to her little daughter, about one month old at the time, to explain that she and her father will be unable to parent her because they have chosen to follow a different path. She writes her farewell: "Since I am now delivered up to death, and must leave you here alone, I must through these lines cause you to remember, that when you have attained your understanding, you endeavour to fear God, and see and examine why and for whose name we both died; and be not ashamed to confess us before the world, for you must know that it is not for the sake of any evil. Hence be not ashamed of us; it is the way which the prophets and the apostles have gone, and the narrow way which leads into eternal life, for no other way shall be found by which to be saved." The letter is more than moving and demonstrates a level of conviction that many in our century cannot begin to comprehend.

Many more interesting things can be said about the Flemish Anabaptists. Mention of these few names and brief accounts of their lives will have to suffice for the time being. The stories of many more may be found in Van Braght's Martyrs' Mirror. It is hoped that the history of the Flemish Anabaptists will receive the attention it deserves even though few if any traces have been left in their own country. Nevertheless, as we have seen, they left their legacy in the Anabaptist movement as a whole and it continues to speak to us today.

The Frisian-Flemish Division
Causes, Consequences, and Historical Clues

Allan Friesen, Laird, Saskatchawan

It is an unfortunate truth that both sixteenth century Anabaptism and the denominations that were born from the movement have been known for their numerous controversies and divisions. Of all the divisions that occurred through the years, one of the most devastating for the movement was the division between Flemish and Frisian Anabaptists in 1566. It was a split that divided the young Netherlandic Mennonite Church into two antagonist camps, followed the movement across Europe (including even to Russia with the Mennonite migration), spawned even further divisions, and had its affects felt for over two hundred years. This despite the fact that the division's causes were more personal and cultural than theological in nature, and should have fizzled out as the original antagonism between leaders passed to the next generation.

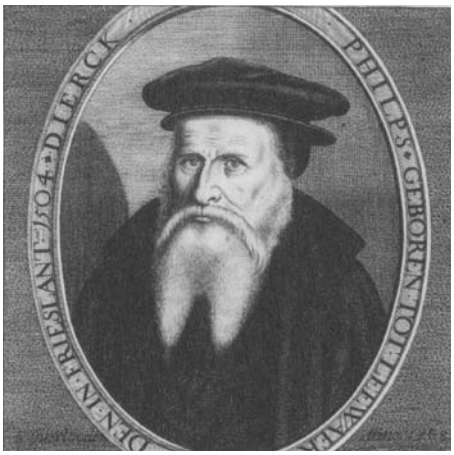
Causes

The Flemish and Frisian Anabaptists first came in contact with each other towards the end of the first half of the sixteenth century. The Anabaptist movement itself had spread rapidly through western and northern Europe in the early 1530's without regard to national boundaries. However, it was not uniformly accepted within every nation and the response of the political powers varied greatly as well. Because of its proximity to Brussels, the seat of Spanish power in the Low Countries, the region of Flanders was strongly under the control of the Spanish Catholic Hapsburg dynasty, and Anabaptists suffered severe persecution.

By 1561, the Inquisition was so concerned about the spread of Anabaptism that it instructed the Council of Flanders "to repress the Reformation more actively and in particular to exterminate the Anabaptists."[1] It is estimated that during this time, the number of Belgium martyrs was around 3000, the vast majority of them being Anabaptists.[2] Only two options were open for Flemish Anabaptists: suffer the persecution or flee to some territory more open to religious dissent. Although some made it as far as England and Danzig in those early years, many Flemish Anabaptists found the northern province of Friesland to be a safer haven.

The newly arrived refugees were well taken care of by their Frisian brothers and sisters, and soon there were large numbers of Flemish emigrants in the Frisian congregations. In spite of the loving acceptance, however, the differences between the two peoples of a common faith were readily identifiable. Horst Penner states that: "Die Flamen, zunächst liebreich angenommen und unterstützt, wichen doch in Volksart, Gewohnheiten und Kleidung…sehr von ihren meist bäuerlichen friesischen Gastgeber ab."[3] (The Flemish, initially lovingly accepted and supported, differed considerably in their rituals, customs, and dress from their Frisian hosts, most of whom were farmers.)

Thus, one of the main causes of the disunity, which began to form between the two groups of Anabaptists, was their cultural difference. The Flemish refugees had come from the region of Europe which was a leader in weaving and dying cloth (many were weavers), and thus their normal dress seemed extravagant to their Frisian brothers and sisters who were much more conservative with regards to clothing. In contrast, the Frisians were proud of their farms, houses, and home furnishings.[4] The Flemish, who had been forced to leave all of their possessions behind, questioned their Frisian brothers' and sisters' ties to their worldly possessions.



Dirk Philips, who tried to heal the Frisian-Flemish split, but to no avail. (Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons, p. 99)

In addition to the cultural differences, at first there also appeared to be at least one theological difference, namely, a different view of church authority, although with time this difference faded into history. Because of persecution, the Flemish had developed a loose church structure, with authority being placed in the hands of the local congregation. In contrast, the Frisians had opted for a more centralized leadership structure in the form of elders and bishops, which had served them well for some time. Menno Simons had been the most influential of these leaders until his death in 1561.

In spite of these differences, by the 1560's most congregations in what is now the northern Netherlands had both Frisian and Flemish Anabaptists worshiping side by side, at least, until a spiraling controversy developed, leading to the split in 1566.

In 1560, the ministers and church councils of four Anabaptist congregations in Friesland: Harlingen, Franeker, Dobkum and Leeuwarden, drew up a covenant known as the *Ordinatie der vier steden*, an agreement of nineteen points ranging from relief aid to the poor to the joint jurisdiction over ministers in the four congregations.[5] Six years later, a Flemish refugee, Jerome Tinnegieter, was elected minister in the Franeker congregation. Through the structure of the covenant, the leadership of the other congregations, dominated by Frisians, openly questioned his gifts for ministry and blocked his election.

Upset by the development, Tinnegieter moved to have his congregation at Franeker removed from the covenant. A hastily called meeting drew only 30 of 300 members, who decided to let their council decide the matter. It moved to withdraw from the covenant. When six members of the council protested, they were suspended. The majority of the church congregation then tried to reverse the decision, broadening the divide until the two factions began holding separate services, being given the name 'Frisian' and 'Flemish', and effectively banning each other.

An attempt at arbitration occurred several months later when two ministers from Hoorn, Jan Willems and Lubbert Gerrits were called to intervene in the situation. In the subsequent meetings they chaired, "Willems admonished those present not to weigh every issue on a golden scale of right or wrong, but to forgive and ask forgiveness."[6] The two demanded that the parties accept binding arbitration and announced their findings: "That the Frisians and also the Flemish, should kneel, confess their mistakes and guilt, ask each other for forgiveness, and henceforth live and walk in peace and brotherly love."[7]

After the Frisians were allowed to stand from their kneeling position, the Flemish began to rise as well, but Willems and Gerrits stopped them, informing them that since they were the guilty party, they would need to be helped up by their Frisian brothers. In anger, the Flemish rescinded their agreement to arbitration, and in a short time the dispute was spreading all over what is now the Netherlands.

In desperation, the elder Dirk Philips was called from Danzig, Prussia to come and mediate the dispute. Philips welcomed the chance to intervene in a situation that was beginning to have serious repercussions for the young Church. He saw his role as a neutral one, in spite of his being Frisian, writing that: "It (the Prussian congregation) has also been moved to send us out to listen to both parties, to investigate and determine where the truth is and where it may be found."[8]

Already, before arriving in Emden, he had in fact been laying the groundwork for mediation through letters to the two conflicting sides. In them he appealed to the most important goals the two sides shared, including their common mistrust of the Calvinist (Reformed) Church, which was making inroads into so-called Anabaptist communities: "In addition, these divisions will lead to the happiness and glory of the enemies and adversaries of the truth

Jacob Roore, Flanders, being interrogated before he was executed, 1569. Credit: Martyrs' Mirror, 7th ed. 775.

who…wish the destruction of God's congregations," he wrote.[9]

One of Philip's continued demands during mediation was his insistence that the leaders of the two factions meet face to face. When the Frisian side stonewalled on this demand, Philips ended up meeting separately with both sides on six different occasions.[10] However, as time went on, Philips became more and more frustrated with the stonewalling by the Frisian side. This, combined with his feeling that the original covenant itself had been unjust, drew him increasingly into the Flemish camp:

"So we have taken every care to get both parties together so that we might finally hear and thoroughly understand the disputed matter. But we could not succeed in that. For the Flemish (as they are called) were certainly prepared for that, yes, they have had a longing for it, that their matter might finally truly come to the light of day. But the Frisians (as they are called) did not wish to do it that way; they have not wanted to accept our reasonable, friendly, and Christian request and desire."[11]

In the end, Philips decision to side with the Flemish led not only to failure in his mediation attempts, but actually to his being banned by the Frisian side. They thus banned one of their own elders!

Consequences

The results of the division were first felt in Friesland. The Anabaptist church was split into two camps, divided not by theology but by culture and personal antagonisms. In turn, this first division spawned other divisions in both groups, as churches struggled as to where they should belong. In time, the schism spread all over the Low Countries, even to places where members were neither culturally Flemish or Frisian. Unfortunately, Netherlandic Mennonites who chose to stay out of the controversy as *stilstaanders* ended up being excommunicated by both the Flemish and the Frisians![12]

The most unfortunate consequence of these occurrences for the Netherlands was the loss of influence suffered by Anabaptism as a result of the disunion. While the growth of the church through the middle half of the sixteenth century had pointed to the probability of it becoming the major denomination in the Netherlands, after the schism the influence and success of the Church began to decline. And just as predicted by their elder Dirk Philips, the loss for the Mennonites became a gain for the Reformed Church, and probably even contributed indirectly to the appeal of Reformed theology in Mennonite circles.

Although the area of lower Prussia near Danzig had already been settled by many Anabaptists long before the division of 1566, the controversy extended to Prussia as well. As in the Low Countries, the schism here too was long lasting and painful. Marriages between the two groups were not allowed unless a re-baptism was performed on the party wishing to join the new fellowship. The first marriage in which this re-baptism was not required in the Prussian congregations only occurred in 1768, and it was 1772 before the two sides held joint ministers' meetings. The two congregations in the city of Danzig only finally united after the Napoleonic Wars had destroyed both their church buildings in 1807. The war had pulled the two sides together, and so the decision was made to jointly build one new church building, which was completed in 1819.[13]

It was actually 213 years after the fateful separation of the Frisian from the Flemish before the first Mennonites began to emigrate from Prussia to Russia, but even then, the disunion followed them. In the newly formed Chortitza colony, the Frisian emigrants, although at first only thirty-six families out of a total of 228,[14] formed their own congregation with Johann Klassen and Franz Pauls as ministers. They founded a separate village which they named Kronsweide. It was decades before the two groups again united, finally healing a division that had survived almost two and a half centuries.

Historical Clues

Two questions in particular arise for people of Prussian and Russian Mennonite heritage with regards to the history of the schism. The first is: "Are there still traces of either Flemish or Frisian traditions in Mennonite churches today?" And the second arises from the first. "If I can trace my church history to either the Flemish or Frisian side, does that make me ethnically Flemish or Frisian?"

Traces of Frisian and Flemish Traditions

Not being separated by theological differences, the Frisian and Flemish groups nonthe-less developed different worship practices through the years. The Flemish congregations practiced baptism by pouring, the Frisians by sprinkling. In the Flemish congregations, bread was distributed to the members by the minister while they remained seated. In the Frisian congregations, the members filed past the minister, who handed the bread to them as they filed by.[15]

If these practices are used as clues, many Mennonite churches which originated in Prussia or Russia will probably confirm the dominance of the Flemish practices. On the other hand, other Flemish practices have been abandoned through the years in these churches as well, such as the fact that Flemish sermons were once read while the minister remained seated. In this case, Reformed Church tradition, with its love of pulpits, obviously overturned the dominant Flemish practice. In other cases, the minority Frisian

practice actually prevailed, such as the Frisian reliance on strong hierarchical leadership, as opposed to the Flemish congregational model.

A more helpful clue to discover whether one's congregational tradition came from the Flemish or Frisian churches is through the study of the backgrounds of congregations themselves. Mennonites in Prussia tended to settle according to alliances. The Great Marienburger Werder was largely Flemish in settlement, with the congregations of Heubuden, Rosenort, Fürstenwerder, Tiegenhagen and Ladekopp all characterized as Flemish. Only Orlofferfelde in the central Werder was Frisian in allegiance. In other areas, such as in the small Marienburger Werder, across the Nogat river, the Frisian side was stronger, with congregations at Thiensdorf and Markushof.

Of the early emigrants to Russia, most came from the Great Werder, hence the strong Flemish affiliation. Nevertheless, emigrants who had come from Frisian churches were also present in both the colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna. Only the daughter colony Bergthal was purposefully settled by just Flemish Church members, largely in order to avoid the religious controversies that had occurred in settling Chortitza almost two generations earlier.

Hans Knevel, a clothsheaer in Antwerp, being imprisoned, 1572. Credit: Martyrs' Mirror, 7th ed. 946.

Questions of Ethnic Origins: Flemish or Frisian?

This question is probably more difficult to answer than the first. There can be no doubt that the division itself was largely fueled by the differences between the two cultures. And even where the schism was exported to other regions, cultural differences remained for some time, which would possibly imply that the separation actually was an ethnic one. For example, in the Great Marienburger Werder, evidence seems to point to the fact that the Frisians and Flemish actually were following different linguistic traditions until the late eighteenth century. The Flemish congregations only began to abandon Dutch in their church services in the 1760s and 1770s. In contrast, already in 1678 elders and ministers of the neighbouring Orlofferfelde (Frisian) congregation sent a letter of request for aid to the Mennonites in Amsterdam, which was written in High German,[16] suggesting that they did not have the linguistic capacity to write in the Dutch language.

Nevertheless, it appears as though the ethnic origins of the two groups were much more fluid than one would suspect from the names. Already when the division began, elder Dirk Philips referred to the sides as Frisian and Flemish "as they are called", suggesting that perhaps even then the division was not totally ethnic. Philips, himself a Frisian, sided with the Flemish, who in Danzig considered him their first elder!

Through the years, family names have continued to defy the contention that the one group was Flemish in origin, the other Frisian. For example, a study of family names of elders and ministers in two Prussian Flemish congregations (Fürstenwerder and Heubuden) in 1857, shows that only three (Regier, Dyck, and Zimmermann) of the eleven family names represented had probable Flemish origins. The others suggest roots from Holland (Claassen, Wall), Germany (Wiens, Penner), native West Prussian (Reimer), and even Frisian (Epp, Töws, Wiebe). In total, of the 24 people identified as leaders in these two Flemish congregations, only a quarter had Flemish family names, while fifteen percent actually had probable Frisian origins![17] And while this can by no means be seen as an exact science, it shows the difficulty of linking ethnic origin to Frisian or Flemish congregational roots. To give two more examples, the Flemish name Quiring was already represented in the Frisian Orlofferfelde congregation in 1677,[18] while the Polish Sawatskys were found in Flemish congregations by at least 1743.[19]

Concluding Thought

In the end, the historical clue that a study of the Frisian-Flemish division most leaves us with is not about ethnicity but about unity. Looking back, we see how a Church became divided and remained so, in spite of common theological convictions. We also see that the disunity only allowed other less biblical traditions to gain prominence. Perhaps this is a fitting lesson for those of us who claim an Anabaptist heritage today, since we still have a difficult time getting along!

Endnotes

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The Dordrecht Confession of 1632: An Enduring Legacy[1]

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The Dordrecht Confession of 1632 has been one of the most widely used doctrinal statements ever produced by Mennonites. Initially it was a confession intended to bring about unity among Flemish Mennonites. However, in 1660 the Dordrecht Confession was included in Thieleman Jansz van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, and in the same year it was adopted by Swiss Anabaptist refugees in Alsace. Four years later it was translated into German and came to be used by a number of Anabaptist groups particularly in southern Germany and Switzerland. Over time the confession was reprinted more than 250 times and translated into languages such as English, Spanish, and French. It was often utilized to facilitate internal cohesion in congregations, to introduce the faith to newcomers, to foster inter-church discussions, to inform governments about the Mennonite faith, and, more recently, missionaries used the confession in their work as a means of communicating the gospel in such far off places as Honduras, Kenya, and Tanzania. Along with the Elbing Catechism of 1778 and the Prussian Confession of 1660, the Dordrecht Confession may be considered one of the most representative statements of faith in the Anabaptist-Mennonite theological tradition.

Given its status and track record, why, we might ask, has the Dordrecht Confession been so popular among Mennonites around the world, and why did Flemish Mennonites decide to adopt it in the first place? How important have confessional statements like the Dordrecht Confession been for Mennonite faith and life? Have not Mennonites been mostly concerned about the practical side of the Christian life, leaving the theologizing to others?

Mennonites-a confessional people

It has sometimes been assumed that Mennonites have never given much attention to creedal or confessional statements of faith, and that their expression of faith has been mostly focussed on ethics rather than doctrine. Throughout much of the twentieth-century European and North American scholars have in fact argued that Anabaptists, and Mennonites who came after, had little use for doctrinal statements. Yet recent studies, especially in the last twenty years have shown that present-day Mennonites are inheritors of a long and rich confessional tradition. While it is true that Mennonites have emphasized the importance of practical living, it is also the case that they have invariably held specific convictions about the faith essentials.

Sixteenth-century Anabaptists affirmed the ancient creedal formulas, especially the Apostles' Creed, and soon began producing their own confessional statements. For example, in 1527, just two years after the first adult baptisms in Zürich which marked the formal beginning of the Anabaptist movement, Swiss Anabaptists adopted a seven-article statement of faith entitled the "Brotherly Union," sometimes referred to as the "Schleitheim Confession." Two decades later, in 1545, another group of Anabaptists near the city of Cologne, who were probably directly influenced by Menno Simons, produced a summary statement that has been referred to as the "Kempen Confession."

Between 1577 and 1632, the Dutch Mennonites produced an extraordinary number of confessions of faith, and several of them, including the Dordrecht Confession, were brought together in two separate collections published in 1665 and 1666. In subsequent years single confessional statements or collections were reprinted "so that altogether over 100 printings were in circulation by the end of the eighteenth century."[2] While Dutch Mennonites would eventually give less attention to their confessional statements, due to the influences of the early enlightenment, the rise of pietism, and in reaction to strict confessionalism that threatened the unity of the churches, Mennonite communities, especially in the regions of Prussia, Poland and southern Russia, would continue to produce an abundance of faith statements. When European Mennonites came to North America, they continued to write and adopt statements of doctrine. It is possible that adherents of Anabaptism produced more confessions of faith than any other Protestant stream.

Reasons for Writing Confessional Statements

Statements of faith like the Dordrecht Confession were produced during an era following the Reformation that historians have identified as "the confessional age," an era of identity formation when most churches in Europe were seeking to make explicit the central tenets of the faith. Mennonites were drawn into the spirit of this "confessional age" and many communities in the region formulated doctrinal statements to reinforce internal doctrinal cohesion, to facilitate discussions between groups seeking to unite, and to foster inter-church, even ecumenical, cooperation.

The confessional age saw changes in church structures and practices, especially among the Lutherans and the Reformed, but also among the Mennonites. After years of creativity and searching, the churches felt driven to consolidate, to explicate and elaborate in a precise manner the essentials of the faith. Through catechisms, confessions of faith, the spoken word, the production of martyr books, hymn books and devotional materials, the churches sought to define who they were vis-à-vis one another. Seen in this context, the writing and adopting of confessional statements was a natural result of Mennonites coming to terms with the challenges of their time.

There were several challenges—perhaps the most serious one was related to the question of identity. In an earlier era, Mennonites had established themselves as a community separate from the world. Their identity was inextricably tied to being an underground church that involved suffering and even martyrdom for the sake of the gospel. Now in a world of growing acceptance, they were less certain as to what distinguished them from other Christians, less certain of their *raison d" etre*. This new situation was brought on by economic, social, political, as well as religious factors.

In the area of economics, while making up only ten percent of the population, Mennonites controlled most of the whale and herring fisheries, a number of lumberyards in the cities of Zaandam, Amsterdam and Harlingen, and many business enterprises in other cities like Deventer and Middelburg. In the province of Twente they laid the foundations for the weaving industry, and elsewhere became involved in textiles and shipbuilding. They were involved in foreign trade, first with the East Indian Company, and later independently in the Baltic regions. In rural areas of Friesland and North Holland they were recognized leaders in the field of agriculture and engineering, taking responsibility for draining swampland eventually to be used for agricultural endeavours. These activities brought Mennonites into the mainstream where they were also in a position to contribute in cultural activities such as in literature and art. The Mennonite, Arel van Mander (1548-1606), produced a considerable body of literature and works of art. Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) who has been described as the "Shakespeare of the Netherlands" was a deacon in the Mennonite Church in Amsterdam for a time before joining the Catholic church in 1640.

During this period, Mennonites also cultivated relationships with the civil authorities. As early as 1566, under the noble Prince William of Orange, they were treated with courtesy and civility, and in 1572 were able to secure certain freedoms in exchange for money payments. In 1577 local authorities in the town of Middleburg were closing Mennonite businesses, with the hope of pressuring Mennonites into active military service. Prince William stepped in ordering that the shops be reopened, and that the authorities not require the Mennonites to swear the oath or participate in military service. Evidently, with the help of Prince William as well as his successor Prince Maurice, the Mennonite presence and point of view was becoming an accepted fact in Dutch society.

Along with these political, social and economic changes, Mennonites encountered changes on the religious level in that interaction and inter-church conversation was now possible without the threat of serious consequences. They conversed with Calvinists, Arminians (later called Remonstrants), Spiritualists, Collegiants (also known as Rijnsburgers) and Socinians. These encounters, in an increasingly pluralistic milieu, challenged Mennonites to examine their faith tradition, to see whether their own beliefs made sense, and whether, in the end, being Mennonite really mattered.

IV.
Confeſſie
Ende
Vredehandelinge/
Geſchiet tot Dordrecht/ A°. 1632.
den 21en. April/ tuſſchen de Doops-ghelinde
diemen de Vlaminghen noemt: Waer-
in een yder kan ſien ende mercken/
hoe eñ waer op dat deſen Vre-
de gemaeckt eñ be-
veſtight is.

Matth. 5. 9.
Salich zijn de Vrede-maeckers/ want ſy ſullen Godts Kin-
deren ghenaemt worden.
Hebr. 12. 14.
Jaeckt nae den Vrede ende Heylichmaeckinghe / ſonder de-
welcke niemandt den Heere ſien en ſal.
1 Corinth. 7. 15.
Godt heeft ons in Vrede gheroepen.

TOT HAERLEM,

Ghedruckt by Hans Paſſchiers van Wesbuſch, Boeck-druckerop 't Marckt-veldt inden beſlagen Bybel. 1633.

VOOR-REDEN,
Op den Vrede-handel tot Dordrecht Anno 1632. den 21. April, tuſſchen de Doops-gheſinde, diemen de Vlamingen noemt, gheſchiedt.

AEndachtige, Vreedlievende, heyl- eñ- waerheyt-ſoeckende Leſer: Alſoo ons dagelijcx ter oorẽ komt, dat eenige menſchẽ die onſen Vrede niet ſeer toegedaen en zijn, en derhalven na den aerdt der Liefdẽ, die alle dingẽ tẽ beſtẽ duyt, daer het beſte niet van en ſpreeckẽ, waer deur ſy de ſimpele eñ eenvoudige herten (die ſomtijts (het welck te beklagẽ is) meer ſien op menſchẽ die teghenwoordich zijn, als op de

(§ 2) Lee-

Title page of the Dordrecht Confession. (Irvin B. Horst, Mennonite Confession of Faith, p. 41)

Inter-church conversations with the Calvinists were perhaps the most intense, especially with those who held to a strict doctrine of predestination. On the advice of the Reformed synod, held at Dordrecht in 1574, some Reformed ministers entered Mennonite meeting houses to refute the preachers and to try to convince them of their wrong teachings. Occasionally disputations were organized to combat Mennonite "heresy," such as at Emden in 1578 and at Leeuwarden in 1596. One of the most active Calvinists who wrote against the Anabaptists was Guy de Bres, who co-authored the Belgic Confession in 1561, and in it condemned the Anabaptists for their baptismal theology, their views with respect to the civil authorities, justice and order, economics, and Christology.

The Spiritualists and the Collegiants were also a challenge for the Mennonites in that they tended to advocate a non-denominational approach to Christianity. They were inclined to reject the importance of external religious institutions, sacraments, and ceremonies as well as the relevance of theological doctrine. They favoured a religion based upon the direct, illuminating and sanctifying inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the soul of each believer. In addition, they believed that one could have direct, unmediated contact with God through the Spirit; they held that the visible church and external religion were unnecessary, and some relegated Scripture to a secondary status. A number of Mennonites joined this non-denominational option, pleased to shed some of the old Anabaptist teachings.

All of these experiences—the movement toward acculturation and the interaction with other religious traditions—brought about a crisis of identity, and eventually a response from the Mennonites was needed. And it did come. Mennonites began writing martyr books, such as the *Martyrs Mirror*, to remind themselves of the faith that their forbears had died for. They published songbooks and devotional materials to foster personal and corporate worship. They turned to Anabaptist writings, such as those by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, to augment their understanding of the beliefs and practices of their tradition. Finally, Mennonites began to articulate in the form of confessions of faith, what it was that they believed. Just as other Protestant denominations were formulating statements of belief, in a time of change, transition and consolidation, Mennonites also began to see the need to summarize the essentials of the faith beyond the summary statement of the Apostles' Creed.

Historians have sometimes concluded that the emerging preoccupation with confessional writing was something essentially new in the Anabaptist tradition, the assumption being that Mennonites were compromising their tradition by borrowing a literary (confessional) genre from mainstream Protestantism. There is some truth to this, but it is also the case that the writing of confessions was a natural and necessary response by Mennonites, given the challenges that they faced. By the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, in an age of toleration and cultural flourishing, Anabaptism was no longer an underground movement, but an emerging denominational entity seeking to survive in a religiously pluralistic environment. Mennonite leaders were compelled to think more systematically about the faith. It was a response by a group coming to terms with the challenges of the day, requiring instruments of support necessary for survival in a changing socio-economic, political and religious context.

Yet there was also another, more specific, reason why the writing of confessions seemed like a good idea. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Mennonites were hopelessly divided into a number of separate denominations, and a number of leaders began to think of ways of working at unity. Many anticipated that confessions of faith could serve as instruments of unity. It is in this context that Flemish Mennonites contemplated writing a confessional statement like the Dordrecht Confession.

A Statement of Unity

The story of conflict and reconciliation among the Flemish Mennonites can only be briefly summarized here; nevertheless, we need to go at least as far back as the era of Menno Simons to understand some of the root causes of the conflict. We sometimes think of Menno as a leader who brought unity to the Anabaptist movement. Indeed, Menno and his colleagues, Dirk Philips and Leenaert Bouwens, gave strong and decisive direction to the Anabaptist movement in the Low Countries after a very difficult beginning period culminating in the debacle at Münster. Yet, their view of the church as being "without spot or wrinkle," and their version of strict church discipline also had some undesirable outcomes that would eventually lead Mennonites down a difficult path.

In Menno's church, to maintain the purity of the body of Christ, those who committed serious moral offences were disciplined, or removed from the fellowship of the church. A problem stemming from the practice of discipline was reaching consensus concerning the proper and appropriate reasons for church expulsion. Not surprisingly, Mennonites found it exceedingly difficult to agree on the procedures necessary to confront the moral failures that arose in their midst.

After the death of Menno Simons in 1561, lack of agreement persisted, often aggravated by cultural and theological misunderstandings. A major controversy that emerged following Menno's death took place between Flemish and Frisian Mennonites. The Flemish were newcom-

ers to Friesland, having come as refugees from Flanders (present-day Belgium). The Flemish differed in various respects from the Frisians, which eventually led to major misunderstandings. The Frisians were upset by the apparent worldly dress of the Flemish, while the Flemish resented the Frisians for their wealth and high standard of living. The Flemish were incensed by Frisian arrogance, believing that they had already been tried by fire through their days of persecution in Flanders.

Eventually these cultural tensions mixed with issues having to do with church polity. The Flemish in the town of Franeker wanted to elect their own minister, Jeroen Tinnegieter, and felt they had the right to do so on the basis of congregational authority. The Frisians did not favour the election and felt that they had the right to intervene on the basis of a decision made by the regional church council to co-operate. Frisian congregations in Franeker, Harlingen, Leewarden, and Dokkum had drafted a nineteen-point statement known as the *Verbond der vier steden* ("Covenant of the Four Cities"), which gave the other congregations the power to intervene in Franeker. The result was a conflict in which different groups banned each other. Unfortunately, attempts to bring about unity between the splintering groups from the 1560s to the 1580s ended in failure.

Over time further conflicts developed within both the Frisian and the Flemish groups. One of these conflicts relates directly to a Flemish schism, which the Dordrecht Confession was eventually meant to address. In 1586, at Franeker, a certain elder of the Flemish congregation purchased a house allegedly by questionable means. The quarrel that ensued in the local congregation eventually included all the Flemish congregations leading to an unfortunate schism. Members belonging to the group in support of the elder who had purchased the house were called "*Huiskoopers*" ("House buyers") and became known as the Old Flemish. Those opposed to the purchase were called *"Contra-Huiskoopers" ("Contra House buyers")* and became known as the Young Flemish. Evidently the Frisians also could not avoid internal division. In 1589 the issue had to do with church discipline and initially two factions emerged, the distinguishing nomenclature echoing the Flemish divisions: the conservatives were called Strict or Old Frisians, while the progressives were called Young Frisians. Yet even within these groups there was a lack of cohesion and still further divisions ensued.

By the early part of the seventeenth century Dutch Mennonites were divided in a tragic sense. There were at least ten different groups and few acknowledged the legitimacy of the other. The outcome was devastating and served to weaken the Mennonite reforming movement throughout northern Europe. The divided nature of late sixteenth-century Mennonitism was an important factor in the emergence of several confessional documents, including the Dordrecht Confession of Faith, although some of the first confessional statements clearly preceded a number of the conflicts.

The *Concept of Cologne* of 1591 was probably the first confessional statement produced with the specific intention of facilitating reconciliation between Mennonite groups that had previously divided. It was a brief confession with sixteen articles probably formulated by Leenaerdt Clock, and was initially intended as a basis of union between Frisians and a group of High Germans. Other confessions of faith, such as the Short Confession of 1610, were utilized to bring about agreement between Waterlander Mennonites and a group of English separatists. Soon the Flemish took notice of the way in which other groups were working at reconciliation, and so they too began to work in earnest for reconciliation and peace among themselves. At the centre of the drive were leaders such as Tobias Goverts, Pieter Jans Mooyer, Abraham Dirk Bierens and Dirk Dirks. These leaders presented three questions as a way of encouraging the Flemish congregations to consider unity with the other groups. The questions were the following: "(a) What are the basic marks of a Christian Church? (b) Are these distinctives only found in Flemish congregations? (c) Is making peace forbidden by the Scriptures?"[3]

When the congregations failed to give adequate answers, the leaders proceeded to answer the questions themselves by writing a confession of faith. This confession, called the *Olift-Tacxken* ("Olive Branch") was then sent with accompanying material dated Sept. 16, 1627 to congregations in the provinces. The accompanying material consisted of a "*Brief tot Vreed-Bereyding*" (Letter of Peaceful Intentions) and a *Presentie* (Presentation), indicating a desire for peace between the Frisians (probably including the High Germans) and the Flemish. The seriousness of their intentions was underscored when, on January 2, 1628, they called for a united fast and a day of prayer.

The activities were not received favourably by everyone. Some Frisian and Flemish Mennonites continued to regard each other with suspicion, as one particular gathering in the town of Zaandam on November 13-15 of 1628 indicates. Pieter Jans Twisck, a Frisian leader who had already spoken out against unity in 1622, noted the impurity of the Flemish church. He regretted the divisions of the past but maintained that the Flemish were becoming lax in their church discipline, and pointed out that they were becoming too worldly in matters of dress. Claes Claesz, a Flemish leader, responded with counter accusations, saying that some Frisians appeared to be more willing to follow their leaders than the will of God. In the end, the Frisians at Zaandam rejected the Olive Branch confession, and likewise, some Flemish opposed the idea of uniting with the Frisians.

The Olive Branch confession, however, received greater attention from another group of Frisians and a group of High Germans. On October 3-5, 1630 they met with the Flemish having worked out a confession of their own a year earlier, the intent had been to solidify their own theological position and formulate a response to the Olive Branch confession. Their response, the Jan Cents Confession, was received favourably by the Flemish and appeared to be consonant with the Olive Branch confession that the Flemish had put together earlier. Yet details concerning the practice of shunning, the recognition of each other's baptisms, and the implications of marrying outside of the faith still needed to be resolved. At the October meeting at the *Singelkerk* (Singel Church) in Amsterdam the two groups evidently moved closer together. In the next decade negotiations continued until agreement was finally reached in 1639.

Throughout this entire period the Flemish initiatives had been successful in smoothing over differences with the Frisians and High Germans. Yet ironically, problems stemming from the *Huiskooper* fiasco of 1586 had not yet been resolved, and the Flemish themselves needed to settle the conflicts that were still brewing in their own back yard. Some initiatives looked promising especially in the city of Dordrecht where Flemish congregations had merged under the leadership of Adriaan Cornelisz. Having entered a period of growth the community at Dordrecht seemed poised to assume some form of leadership. Adriaan Cornelis, with the help of Flemish elders at Amsterdam and Haarlem--Tobias Goverstsz. van den Wijngaard, Pieter Grijspeert, and others--appealed for a conference at Dordrecht where the various Flemish parties could be represented to discuss unity initiatives. Unfortunately the first attempts to come together were met with resistance from local town officials and a small group of Flemish leaders who were less enthusiastic about unity conversations. Eventually another meeting was arranged and an 18-article confession of faith was produced as a basis for unity, which came to be known as the Dordrecht Confession.

According to Hans-Jürgen Goertz, the confessional-writing process probably required several considerations. First of all, the confession would need to bridge the differences among the Flemish. Second, the formulation could not interfere with the wider unity discussions of the Frisians, Flemish and High Germans, which had come under the inspiration of the Olive Branch confession. At the same time the wording could not weaken the negotiating position of the Flemish. Finally, it could not in any way threaten those belonging to the Reformed church. The Flemish had reason to fear the Reformed, for they had already protested to the civil authorities against so many Mennonites coming together at Dordrecht. Although the meeting did take place, the Mennonites were regarded with suspicion and needed to be on their guard.[4]

In the end, 51 ministers signed the Dordrecht Confession on April 21, 1632. Most of the signatories were Flemish, but some were also Frisian and High German. The meeting closed with the observance of the Lord's Supper. In 1633, the Dordrecht Confession was printed along with a publication of a new hymnbook, based on the 18 articles of the Dordrecht Confession entitled *Fondament, ofte de Principaelste liedekens over de Poincten des Christelijcken Geloofs* ("Foundational or Principal Songs

concerning the Points of the Christian Faith"). The Confession itself was first published with a preface and introduction at Haarlem in 1633 with the title *Confessie ende Vredehandelinge* ("Confession and Peace Agreement").[5]

The Flemish, Frisians and the High Germans continued to work towards unity in the following years. In 1636 there was a gathering at Amsterdam and all three parties expressed their willingness to unite, and a meeting on April 26, 1639 finally achieved formal union. For the occasion, three thousand persons gathered for a five-hour meeting that included worship, fellowship and celebration. It was a significant event in that for the first time in about a half a century the Flemish, Frisian and High German Mennonites experienced genuine fellowship and a warm spirit of being a part of one family.

It would be preferable to end this story on such a high note, but events among the Dutch Mennonites would turn for the worse, and church conflicts would re-emerge in the 1650s and 1660s. Ironically, the troubles stemmed from the confessions themselves in that Mennonites could not agree on how much authority their faith statements should have in the life of church. Some gave the confessions virtually as much authority as Scripture; others had no use for doctrinal statements whatsoever. The groups argued back and forth, and eventually another large split among the Dutch Mennonites ensued. Evidently, confessions of faith could be instruments of unity, but when improperly handled, they could also facilitate division.

No Generic Theology

Like most Mennonite confessions of this era, the Dordrecht Confession of Faith includes in its 18 articles the whole range of Christian doctrine including teachings on God and creation, the fall of humanity, the coming of Christ and salvation, the nature of the church, the practice of baptism and communion, church discipline, relations with government, the importance of non-resistance, the rejection of oath-swearing, and teachings about the final judgement. Some of the articles clearly highlight Anabaptist distinctives, such as adult baptism, non-resistance, and the rejection of the oath, but most reflect the views held by other Christians. And yet, even in these articles, the Flemish offer their own distinct theological accent.

Scholars have sometimes remarked that Anabaptists and Mennonites held to beliefs common to all Christians except for a few distinct emphases. In one sense this is true of the Dordrecht Confession; the framers of this statement held to general Christian teachings like their Lutheran and Reformed counter-parts and even used the language of the Apostles Creed in talking about Jesus. And yet the language of the Flemish is distinct in the same way that all churches and denominations have a particular way of speaking about the faith. There is no "theology in general" in Dordrecht, nor could there be in the same way that we do not find a generic interpretation of Christianity in the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed Church, or in the Apostles' Creed, for that matter, which was originally intended as statement of faith in the context of specific Gnostic heresies. Christian language, like any language, is always perspectival and tradition-bound in some way; it is always, historically conditioned shaped by context. Even non-denominational churches that hope to be "simply Christian," or "only Biblical," or hope to transcend denominational baggage in some way never manage to do so. We are all shaped by certain traditions and all draw from specific schools of thought even if we claim otherwise.

There is no clear answer to the question as to why the Dordrecht Confession was adopted by so many Mennonite groups throughout the centuries. The confession is irenic in tone, well written, and relatively brief. Menno's divisive celestial-flesh Christology is hardly noticeable, and the traditional Anabaptist emphasis on free will is not explicitly present either, which suggests that the Flemish might have consciously produced an accommodating statement that outsiders like the Calvinists could accept. The civil authorities are praised for their "laudable rule" signifying perhaps that the Flemish wanted to escape criticism from the state. And yet, the Dordrecht Confession is not so agreeable at every point. It places a strong emphasis on repentance and amendment of life, the new birth, church discipline, the rejection of the sword, and the swearing of oaths. While some parts of the confession sound accommodating, other sections reflect strict resolve to stay on the "straight and narrow." Whatever the reasons may be, this Flemish statement of faith has for centuries served as a useful orientation for Mennonites, striking an acceptable balance in its description of the faith.

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith is hardly used today, having been superseded by current confessional statements that, no doubt, more adequately express the church's teachings for our present world. Whether their legacies will be as enduring as that of the Dordrecht Confession will be for future generations to assess.

Endnotes

1 This presentation draws heavily from two recent publications: Karl Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition* (Kitchener, Pandora Press, 2004) and Karl Koop, ed., *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition 1527-1660*. The first work provides historical and theological background to Mennonite confessions of faith of the early seventeenth century. The second volume is a compendium of fourteen early confessions of faith in the Anabaptist tradition including the Dordrecht Confession of Faith, translated by Irvin B. Horst. Both volumes can be ordered from the Canadian Mennonite University bookstore, or directly from the publisher.

2 Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 51.

3 *Mennonite Encylopedia IV*, s.v. "Olijftacxken," by Christian Neff and Nanne van der Zijpp.

4 Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Zwischen Zwietracht und Eintracht: Zur Zweideutigkeit Täuferischer und Mennonitischer Bekenntnisse," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 43/44 (1986-87), 33.

5 Irvin B. Horst, *Mennonite Confession of Faith* (Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1988), 13.

Roots In Medieval Flanders:

Searching For The Genesis Of Mennonite Inheritance Practices

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In 1955 a detailed and thoughtful history and social study of Manitoba was completed by E.K. Francis, a young Austrian scholar. That book, *In Search of Utopia* has become a standard work, explaining who the Manitoba Mennonites were and what was unique about them.[1] In an obscure footnote in one of his works relating to Mennonites in Manitoba, Francis spoke of the history of Mennonite inheritance practices. He wrote that he had found evidence that the root of those practices could be found in medieval Flanders. But he left no further explanation.

Clearly Mennonites had a very distinctive inheritance culture, one which they codified in elaborate documents called *Teilungverordnungen*. Knowing just what must happen when a parent dies, when both parents die, when a step parent dies, or when children die, continues to be an important part of Mennonite community life, especially in Central and South America.[2]

The inheritance practices that our Mennonite ancestors carried to North America in the 1870s included what scholars have called "bilateral, partible" practice. "Partibility" meant that upon the death of the parents, the farms or estates were divided among the children, often literally, into fragmented eighty, forty and even twenty-acre parcels. "Bilaterality" meant that both sexes, girls and boys, inherited land equally. This system was in contrast to many German systems where farms were divided but only sons could inherit; the sisters had to rely on land inherited from their husbands or on a special marriage dowry from their parents. The 'Mennonite' system also differed from "impartibility," where the entire farm was left to only one child, a system often seen in England. This system varied, with "primogeniture" meaning that the oldest son inherited the farm and the younger and female

siblings were compensated by relatively small cash payments. Or as in Russia, one might see "ultimogeniture" at work, a system where only the youngest son could inherit the farm.

Further, and maybe even more radical than "bilateral, partible" practices in the "Mennonite" system was the custom of estate division upon the death of a parent, no matter whether the surviving parent is the father or the mother. In fact the Mennonite system required that such a division occur so that at least one half of the estate was set aside for the children of the first marriage, at least on paper, before the surviving parent remarried and another crop of children came on the scene .

Making sure this all happened was the *Waisenamt*. Historians often assume that the *Waisenamt* was there for children who had lost both of their parents, that is, the true orphans. It is important to keep in mind that technically a child becomes an orphan when only one of the parents dies. Arguably, then, the *Waisenamt* bore the name "orphans' bureau" not because its duty was to parentless children, but to ensure that the property of the children who had lost one parent was protected. Thus, shortly after the funeral of the parent, the *Waisenamt* stepped in, took record of the value of the estate, and assigned one half of the estate to all children equally. This act allowed the children to claim that part of their inheritance upon turning 21. The surviving parent, whether widow or widower, could not dispose of that half of the estate as they wished; they were required to hold it in trust for the minor children.

All this is written up in the earliest document available for this study, the 1810 *Waisenverordnung* from the Khortitsa Colony in Russia.[3] That document adds a third dimension to the Mennonite practice. This is, that inheritance had an important faith dimension, a factor apparent from the very first line in the preamble: "not without reason does the Holy Scripture repeatedly exhort us to carry out what is just and righteous." This ideal was followed with a warning from the biblical book of Isaiah [10:1-4]: "Woe unto them that...turn aside the needy from judgment, and...take away the right from the poor...that widows may be their prey, and that they [may] rob the fatherless!" It is surprising perhaps that Mennonites in Russia lobbied the government to make sure that these principles could be preserved.[4]

The 1810 version of the *Waisenverordnung* moved quickly to practical matters. To ensure that the rights of the children were protected, the first article demanded an urgent early step following a death: "within eight days after the death of a husband or wife, the village administration is to make an accurate evaluation...of the estate" and "promptly submit a detailed report to the *Waisenamt*," that is, to the Orphans Office in charge of settling estates. The second step reflected a similar concern: even if only one spouse died, guardians were to be appointed to protect the interest of the children. In the event that it was the father who died, the widow, too, should have her guardian, a well respected village man. And to protect the inheritance of children under the age of 21 from a dishonest step-parent, the division of the estate must occur before the remarriage of the surviving spouse or six

Every Mennonite Waisenamt had a printed rule book, that included the regulations for how estates were to be divided. (Jake Peters, The Waisenamt: A History of Mennonite Inheritance Practices, p. 9)

weeks after the death of the spouse, whichever occurred first.

Within the article outlining this step was a fundamental aspect of the Mennonite system: "of the remaining property the testator or testatrix retains one half and the other half goes to the inheritors [the children] in equal amounts." The surviving parent owned only half the farm. Yet, to protect the farm from being fragmented even before the children had reached age 21, the ordinance at once declared that "the [inheriting spouse], whether man or woman, in every case remains the possessor of the entire property" and that "the inheritance of those under age remains...[in the property] until the minor becomes of age." But in all circumstances the surviving spouse was compelled to pay out the child's inheritance in the spring during the "week of Pentecost" following that child's twenty first birthday. The ordinance's lengthiest sections attempted to ensure that these principles of a "just" and equal inheritance were realized in every conceivable scenario. [5]

I have written about the social and religious consequences of this system in *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s*.[6] But the question still remains about the origins of this system and whether Francis's thinking that such a practice may have come from the Flemish region of Europe. In *Hidden Worlds* I refer to an economic historian H.J. Habukkuk who wrote about partible-bilateral inheritance practices in the Rhine River Valley region, including the Palatinate, Flanders and Friesland, the birth places of most of European-descendant Mennonites.[7] But, in this equation, what was the role of Flanders, the historic birth place of most so-called "Russian" Mennonites?

A quick survey of some recent works suggests that the very system we have designated as "Mennonite" – bilateral, partible, and divisible upon the death of one of the spouses – was practiced in Flanders almost 1000 years ago. We may think of that time as medieval or even the dark ages. Still, studies indicate that while this was a time when the state was relatively weak and could not offer the same protection it did later, and that the countryside was more violent than in the 1500s, special care was taken to ensure that children inherited their fair share of the estate, that boys and girls were treated equally, and so too widows and widowers.

Consider for example the work of David Nicholas. In an article entitled, "Of Poverty and Primacy: Demand, Liquidity, and the Flemish Economic Miracle, 1050-1200, published in the *American Historical Review* in 1991, he seeks an explanation for the economic take off in a part of Europe that had relatively bad land.[8] One of the reasons for its success, he argues, was that its inheritance system did not allow for large estates to be built up or for people to become impoverished.

He writes the following of medieval Flanders: "Every time a married person died in Flanders, a great deal of property was ipso facto alienated from that person's [clan or household]. It was thus very difficult for Flemings to build up estates to pass undivided

to their children, for all inheritances were absolutely partible without regard to sex or age. This inheritance [practice] doubtless forced many peasants off the land, since all sons and daughters divided their parents' property. It also forced many widows [and widowers]... into the labor market. But these customs also fostered commercial development, by forcing frequent changes of ownership, regroupings, and alienations of all assets except land. Some family businesses escaped total ruin because the wife's half of the....property was not liable for debts that her husband incurred without her participation. Property exchanged hands extremely rapidly in Flanders, and this is the essence of the free market economy."[9]

Nicholas goes on to say that "literally thousands of cases survive in the archives [in Belgium] showing this property regime in unchallenged use in Germanic Flanders after 1200." He further suggests that these practices "entered Flemish law in the mid-eleventh century, just as...monumental economic changes were occurring."[10].

Some of these ideas can be found in expanded form in Nicholas's book titled *The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children and the Family in Fourteenth Century Ghent*, published in 1985. Again in this book he writes of the uniqueness of the Flemish system: "throughout the Middle Ages the most common form of handling the aspirations of daughters and some younger sons was to give them marriage positions, then exclude them from the parental inheritance."[11] This system, he writes, stood in contrast to that in Flanders which "had rigidly partible inheritance for both rich and poor," a system that encouraged the development of nuclear as opposed to extended families. And again, it was not only partible, but "in a simple inheritance, in which a couple had children only by each other, the surviving parent [without regard to gender] got half of the common property, while the children divided the other half equally without distinction of age or sex."[12]

He concludes that this system meant that Flemish women "seem to have been in a particularly favorable situation" and in fact "exercised considerable behind-the-scenes power over their men and [were] frequently found in the business world, either as partners of their husbands or sons or acting independently."[13] At the very least when brothers, for example, schemed to keep the property only for themselves, sisters had recourse in courts of the day. This practice is documented in a case in 1365 when the daughters of deceased Gillis Libbe stopped their brothers by successfully appealing to the custom of "bilaterality," called by them, a division according to "where the hearth was split."[14]

Another consequence of this system was that a certain level of equality existed within any one village. The fact was that this inheritance system made "it very difficult for families to hold substantial properties for several generations," a system that had an equalizing affect among families.[15] The fact was that the farm or estate was inherently unstable after one of the spouses died. As Nicholas writes, although "the property of children was normally kept undivided as long as all remained at home in the 'common nest'...it might be split into equal shares when all the children reached their majority" at age 21.[16] Husbands or wives of a first marriage were even legally unable to get around this measure by willing land or property to each other. In 1357, for example, the sons of Jan Van der Ellen were able to wrestle their share from a stepmother who claimed that Jan had given her all of his property. Problems of bitter sibling rivalry could of course rise when heirs demanded their exact shares; thus in 1378 local courts in the city of Ghent "admonished the children of Goessin Rijm to behave like kinsmen, not like strangers who try to divide everything down to the last penny."[17]

Finally, the system also meant that children were protected, and it seems indeed treasured. We might think of the middle ages as a time when people were crude and violent, but Nicolas writes that the Flemish inheritance system pointed out a different picture. He writes that "there can be no doubt that the conjugal unit and the clan took their responsibilities toward children extremely seriously and expended considerable time, effort and money in raising them properly....Children were valued, cherished and protected by those in authority over them. Hence we can consign to the rubbish heap of history the notions that 'childhood' was suddenly 'discovered' in the modern age; that the conjugal family in preindustrial Europe was an economic rather than an emotional unit."[18]

So, what does all of this mean? It certainly suggests that what we know as the "Mennonite" inheritance system has very deep roots in the history of our people. It means too that perhaps our ancestors already practiced what we refer to as "Anabaptist" values of equality, love and peace well before the 1500s. If as Nicholas states there are thousands of records on the medieval Flemish family, perhaps a new rich area of research awaits our young historians.

The administration of a Waisenamt usually had an official seal which was used on all legal documents. (Jake Peters, The Waisenamt: A History of Mennonite Inheritance Practices, p. 9)

Endnotes

1. E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1955).
2. For a thorough overview of Mennonite inheritance practices see: Jacob Peters, *The Waisenamt: A History of Mennonite Inheritance Custom.* Steinbach: Mennonite Heritage Museum, 1985.
3. "Waisenverordnung von Russland, 1810," trans. Ben Hoeppner, Mennonite Heritage Village. I thank John Dyck, Winnipeg, Manitoba, for bringing this document to my attention. See as a variation of this document: "Teilungsverordnung der an der Molochnaia im Taurichten Gevernament angesiedelten Mennoniten, 1857," Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg. I thank James Urry, Wellington, New Zealand, for bringing this document to my attention.
4. See: David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914" (Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 1933), 110.
5. The scenarios were numerous: "how to deal with children from more than one marriage?"; what to do "if the partner in the second or third marriage dies without descendants?"; "what to do when both parents die one after the other?"; "what to do when two die one after the other without leaving any physical heirs?"; "what to do when there are no physical heirs?" The answer to each of these questions was contained in a separate article, outlining in detail how grandparents and grandchildren differed, when uncles and aunts could expect an inheritance, and where step children fit into the picture.
6. Royden Loewen, 'If Joint Heirs of Grace, How Much More of Temporal Goods?': Inheritance and Community Formation," *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press; North Newton KS Bethel College, 2001). This article was previously published in Spanish as "Si son herederas de la gracia, más aún de los bienes temporales: El sistema de herencia igualitario entre los Mennonitas de Canada," trans., Maria Bjerg in Reproduccion Social y Sistemas de Herencia en una Perspectivea Comparada Europa y los paises Nuevos, eds., Maria Bjerg, Herman Otero and Orieta Zeberio (Paris: L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1998): 145-170.
7. H.J. Habakkuk, "Family Structure and Economic Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Journal of Economic History* 15 (1955): 1-12. See also: George C. Homans, "The Frisians in East Anglia," *The Economic History Review* 10 (1958): 189-206.
8.David Nicholas, "Of Poverty and Primacy: Demand, Liquidity, and the Flemish Economic Miracle, 1050-1200, *American Historical Review* 96 (1991):17-41.
9. Ibid, 38.
10. Ibid, 39.
11. David Nicholas, *The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children and the Family in Fourteenth Century Ghent* (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985),
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 119.
13. Ibid., 190 and 207.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 191.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 194.
18. Ibid., 208.

Geeritt Roosen (1612-1711) Altona, Germany

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Introduction.

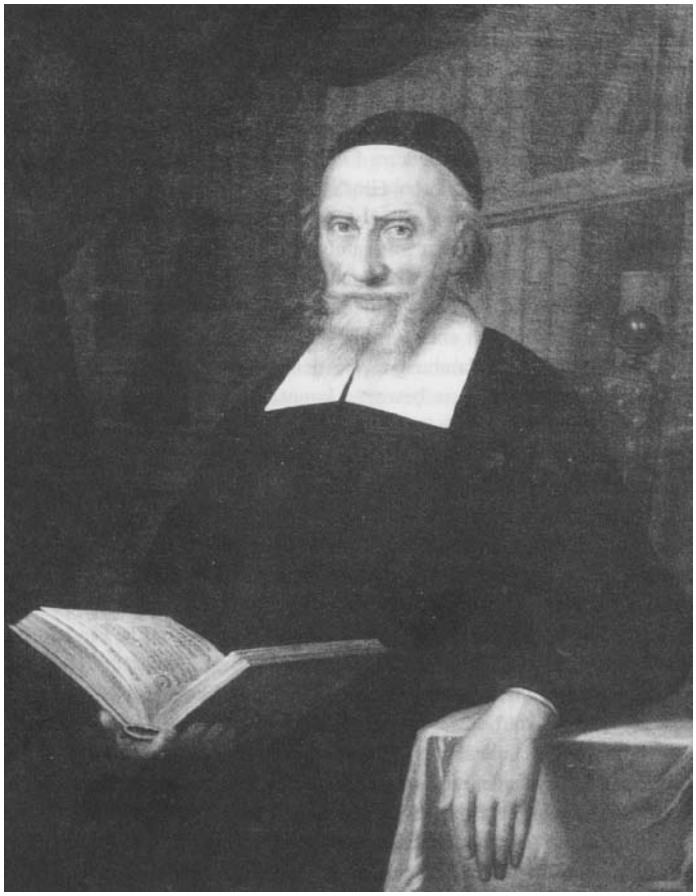
The subject of this article had his name recorded in several variations: Gerrit, Gerhard, Gerard, Rosen, Roose, Rooze, Rose. However, when he signed his own name he regularly used the form "Geeritt Roosen." He died in 1711, only a few months before his one-hundredth birthday. Declining vision and an unsteady hand seem to have made it increasingly difficult for him to write sermons and conduct other administrative business after about 1699. Despite the effects of his grand old age, he continued until his death to be the patriarch of the Hamburg-Altona congregation, one of the key centres of the northern European Mennonite *diaspora* in the seventeenth century. Because he was so involved in local German Mennonite affairs, as well as in the affairs of Mennonites in the Netherlands and beyond, to tell his history is to tell the history of his community.

Family History.

Roosen's family history was both typical of, and different from, most of his fellow Mennonites in northern Germany. First, it was typical because he could trace a large part of his family back to the Low Countries. In the 1680s he wrote a chronicle recording genealogical information for the generation of his children and grandchildren. Branches of his forebears' families had names like Amoury, van Sinteren, Quins, and Goverts. These names were Netherlandic in origin, or, to be more specific, Flemish.

The bulk of northern Germany's early Mennonite settlers probably came from areas like Flanders in the southern Low Countries after the 1560s, when war, persecution and poor economic conditions made life intolerable for them in their homeland. Protestant emigrants from Flanders (large numbers of whom were Calvinists after the middle of the sixteenth century) did not leave only for northern Germany. England and the northern Netherlands were the main destinations. Nonetheless, enough found their way to the regions around Hamburg. As a result, small but rich pockets of Mennonite culture developed there by the seventeenth century. This is especially significant, because without immigration it is unlikely that there would have been Mennonites in northern Germany. The local population and local authorities were almost exclusively Lutheran in allegiance.

Although Geeritt Roosen, like most of his peers, was of Netherlandic ancestry, his family's past was unique in one important regard. His direct male forebears were very likely the earliest of adult baptizing Protestants to settle in Holstein, one of the regions in northern Germany near Hamburg. In his family chronicle from the 1680s, Roosen recounts the story of Cord Roosen, who apparently moved to Holstein around 1532 to escape unfavourable conditions in his home (the German borderlands of the Low Countries near Mönchengladbach). Cord is said to have settled on a farm near Lübeck, and, although several of his children seem not to have become Anabaptists, the son who inherited the farm, Geerlinck, certainly did become a Mennonite.



Geeritt Roosen (Michael Driedger, Zuflucht und Koexistence. 400 Jahre Mennoniten in Hamburg und Altona, p. 30)

It is from this branch of the Roosen family that Geeritt was descended. Geerlinck Roosen's son Paul, Geeritt's father, was the family member who first moved from the Holstein countryside to Altona, then only a modest village very near to the great port city of Hamburg (today Altona is a part of the city of Hamburg, but until the 1930s Altona and Hamburg were two separate jurisdictions). In short, more than most of his peers, Geeritt Roosen's family had a relatively long history in northern Germany.

Geeritt Roosen was proud of this relatively long local connection to northern Germany, because it placed his family close to Menno Simons. Before Geeritt's father Paul moved to Altona in 1611, he spent some time on the estate of Fresenburg, near Oldesloe, now called Bad Oldesloe, located about halfway between Hamburg and Lübeck. This is where Menno Simons had found refuge before he died in 1561.

Because of a lack of sources, it is not clear why Bartholomäus van Ahlefeldt, the Lutheran lord of Fresenburg in the middle of the sixteenth century, decided to tolerate Menno and his followers. Ahlefeldt certainly did not share the widespread sixteenth-century opinion that Anabaptists were criminals, and we can speculate that he may even have had religious sympathies for the men and women he tolerated on his lands. However, he never accepted their faith. A very likely explanation for his decision is that he hoped to gain an economic advantage by bringing hardworking and self-disciplining refugees to his lands from the economically prosperous regions of the Netherlands.

Life in Hamburg and Altona.

Because of hostility from most Lutheran authorities in their new home territories, the Netherlandic immigrants to northern Germany found it difficult to establish themselves in urban northern Germany in the sixteenth century. Civic governments in Hamburg published decrees against Anabaptists several times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, Hamburg's constitution required that only Lutherans could hold political office, and Lutheran clergymen insisted frequently that non-Lutherans be expelled from the city. Nonetheless, a small number of Mennonite families had settled in Hamburg by the very beginning of the seventeenth century, and their numbers grew as the century progressed.

Geeritt Roosen was one of the Mennonites who established his household in Hamburg in the course of the seventeenth century. In 1640 he married Maria Amoury and the couple moved to Hamburg's St. Michaelis parish on the city's west side in 1641. Here the Roosens lived for the rest of their lives, conducting their business affairs and raising a family.

Hamburg was not Roosen's town of origin. He was born in Altona in 1612, soon after his parents moved there from the Holstein countryside. In contrast to Hamburg's strict Lutheran policies, Altona's Lutheran authorities were much more tolerant of non-Lutherans. In Roosen's lifetime Altona was controlled by rivals to

Hamburg (after 1641 the Danish monarchy). To try to attract business away from Hamburg, Altona's government offered economic and religious freedoms to Calvinists, Catholics, Jews and Mennonites. The Mennonites received their first legal charter of privileges in 1601, and the charters were renewed when a new count or king took power. Because of these freedoms, Mennonites and other non-Lutherans built their places of worship in Altona. Thus, even though Geeritt Roosen spent most of his long life based in Hamburg, he travelled a short distance to Altona to participate in church services and meetings.

Business Affairs.

When Roosen moved to Hamburg, he also began his own independent business affairs. Unfortunately, little information survives about his economic activities. However, his will indicates that he was very wealthy in the later stages of his life. The source of his wealth would have included the sale of stockings. Evidence of this is an early advertisement for stockings from about the middle of the seventeenth century.

He also played a minor part in Hamburg's lucrative whaling industry, one branch of economic activity in which Mennonites played an especially significant role for many generations.

Whaling was of special importance for the history of the Mennonites because record profits from this activity allowed leading members of the congregation to donate enough funds to build a proper church, the congregation's first. The new church was completed in 1675. Before that time, Mennonites met in a simple meeting house in Altona. According to Roosen's own notes, there were about 250 baptized members of the congregation when the new church was completed.

Career as a Deacon.

Geeritt Roosen began his many years of service to his congregation as a deacon in 1649. He replaced his father, Paul, who had died in 1648.

1648 and 1649 were pivotal years for two other reasons. First, 1648 marked the end of the Thirty Years War. Hamburg itself had not been attacked in this series of conflicts, but in the 1620s in the Holstein countryside armies had levelled parts of the estate of Fresenburg, on which some Mennonite families lived. To escape the ravages of war, some fled to Altona. In other words, war, together with attractive legal privileges in Altona, contributed to a shift in the focus of Mennonite life from the countryside to towns. Other towns in northern Germany that had a growing Mennonite population in the early seventeenth century included Glückstadt and Friedrichstadt.

In addition to immigration from the northern Germany countryside, the Mennonite congregation based in Altona also grew due to the arrival of newcomers from the Netherlands. Although the worst persecutions of Protestants in the Low Countries had diminished by the end of the sixteenth century, there still continued to be a very active movement of Mennonites across northern Europe, between centres like Amsterdam and Danzig (Gdansk). Hamburg and Altona were one of the hubs of Mennonite travel. People moved between these centres for familial, business and congregational reasons. As a deacon, Roosen would have helped Mennonite newcomers and travellers, as well as the less advantaged of his congregation.

A 17th century woodcut advertisement for Geeritt Roosen's stocking business. He was also involved in whaling, and by the time of his death, just a few months short of 100 years, he was quite wealthy.

The second reason that 1648 and 1649 were important years is that they marked the beginning of a schism among Mennonites in Hamburg and Altona. As the Mennonite population grew in the two urban centres, so too did the diversity of opinion about matters of faith. In addition to Geeritt Roosen's congregation, there were at least two other smaller and probably more socially conservative groups of Mennonites in Altona at the beginning of the seventeenth century. However, almost nothing is known about these groups because they left so few records, and they disappeared by the end of the century. The schism that began in 1648 was a disagreement between members of Roosen's own congregation.

For reasons that are not entirely clear, a group of seventeen congregational members declared their belief that baptism was only a true baptism if it was conducted by full immersion of the believer. The small group also expressed opinions about footwashing and communion that Geeritt Roosen and others in the congregation felt were unnecessary innovations. Roosen and his allies in the congregation felt that baptism by sprinkling was enough, and any further requirements were too strict and exclusive.

Disagreements between the two factions continued and escalated. Despite attempts by Mennonites in the Netherlands to mediate between the two sides, the conflict led to a permanent division when in 1656 Geeritt Roosen's family, which owned the property where the congregation met for services, prohibited the immersionist faction from using that property. The immersionists, who became known as Dompelaars (Dunkers in English), survived as a separate group until the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Dompelaar congregation died out.

Career as a Preacher.

Geeritt Roosen was promoted from a deacon to a preacher in 1660. In the first several years of his service as a lay minister, he only preached sermons. It was not until 1663 that he was ordained. From 1663 until just a few short years before his death, he preached, baptized new members, administered communion, and married congregants. Although he was by no means the only preacher in the congregation during these years, he was the most significant.

One of the key issues that Roosen confronted as a preacher was relations with the Dompelaars. In the 1660s representatives from Roosen's faction and the Dompelaars exchanged several pamphlets, which they published. In the 1660s both sides claimed to want a peaceful end to the disputes about baptism, but the acrimony only increased. Roosen himself was not directly involved as an author of these pamphlets, but he did have more to do with the Dompelaars later in his career.

Between the 1680s and the 1740s Jacob Denner was the preacher for the Dompelaars (see *Pres*., No. 15, pages 142-143). He was charismatic and popular, and Roosen's congregation twice (1691 and 1701) discussed the possibility of inviting him to preach in their church. In 1701 they actually extended the invitation and Denner accepted. Despite the improving relations between the two groups, they never reunited.

The 1660s were turbulent years in the career of Geeritt Roosen for other reasons. First, late in 1659 Quaker missionaries from England convinced the family of one of Hamburg and Altona's Mennonite preachers to convert to Quakerism. In 1660 Roosen published a pamphlet against the Quakers. To make matters more complicated, the 1660s were a period of heightened conflict among Mennonites in the Netherlands. A disagreement (known popularly as the "War of the Lambs") between factions of one of Amsterdam's leading churches led in 1664 to a major schism which divided Mennonite congregations throughout the Netherlands and Germany.

Geeritt Roosen had many personal connections with members of the more conservative faction in the Netherlands, and he helped insure that his congregation sided with this group, which after 1664 became known as the Zonists. One of the key beliefs of Zonist congregations was their emphasis on confessions of faith as tools for defining and maintaining Mennonite orthodoxy. The Hamburg and Altona congregation under Geeritt Roosen's leadership remained allied informally with the Dutch Zonists until 1706, when the northern German congregation joined the Zonist Society, a network of allied Dutch congregations. The Hamburg-Altona congregation remained a key member of this Society throughout the eighteenth century.

Under Roosen's leadership congregational government became increasingly formalized. Membership in the Zonist Society is one example of this. Another is a more regular system of congregational record keeping. From 1656 until about 1699 Roosen was the congregation's main record keeper, making notes about baptisms, marriages, births, deaths, and sometimes also meetings. However, it wasn't until 1698, near the end of his career, that meetings of the congregational council were recorded regularly in a protocol book.

Furthermore, before the end of the seventeenth century there were no recorded rules for the conduct of congregational business. 1697 and 1705 were the first times that rules guiding the selection of preachers, the gathering of meetings, and other important congregational affairs were written down in a form that has survived. Roosen played a leading role in these developments.

Geeritt Roosen was incredibly active as a minister. He travelled several times (1660, 1665, 1670 and 1675) to congregations in the Netherlands and once went to visit Mennonite settlements around Danzig (Gdansk) in 1676. He also put a great deal of effort into preaching. Dozens upon dozens of his sermons survive in his own handwriting. He also wrote pamphlets on a wide variety of topics, ranging from religious subjects (baptism, predestination and the nature of Christ), to ethical issues (nonresistance, greed and conduct in marriage), to new cultural trends (the wearing of wigs, and the use of beautiful but impractical tile ovens for heating), to history and politics. Many of these pamphlets and sermons are preserved in Hamburg's State Archives.

Death and Legacy.

In 1711 a large procession of mourners gathered to celebrate the life of Geeritt Roosen. Roosen had died that year, just a few months short of his one-hundredth birthday. He had served his congregation since 1649, first as a deacon and then as a preacher. In that time he had not only contributed significantly to the development of Mennonite life in northern Germany, but he had also won friends from other confessional backgrounds.

The funeral procession of 193 pairs was almost certainly larger than Roosen's congregation, and one of the men who read a eulogy at the funeral was a Reformed preacher from Altona, Laurentius Steversloot. In his will, Roosen granted a significant sum to the local Lutheran parish church, St. Michaelis, its guesthouse, and the local plague and discipline houses. In other words, he was a Mennonite leader who sought and received the respect of his Protestant neighbours.

Roosen's career was also celebrated by Mennonites. A section from the third volume of Hermannus Schijn and Gerardus Maatschoen's *Geschiedenis der Mennonieten* from 1745 was devoted to his memory. His major historian was his descendant Berend Carl Roosen, also a minister in the Hamburg-Altona congregation from 1844 until his death in 1905. B.C. Roosen wrote a book-length biography of his predecessor, a two-part history of his congregation, and a history of his family, together with a biography of Menno Simons.

Major Writings.

The best way for us to judge Roosen's career for ourselves is to read his two most accessible writings: *Christliches Gemütsgespräch* (Christian Spiritual Conversations) and *Unschuld und Gegen-Bericht der Evangelischen Tauff-gesinneten Christen* (Innocence and Protestation of the Evangelical Baptism-Minded Christians). Both were first published in 1702, although the first was written in 1691.

In *Unschuld und Gegen-Bericht* Roosen wrote a defence of Mennonites against Lutheran charges of heresy and sedition. In the 1690s Lutheran preachers in Hamburg had increased their traditional attacks on non-Lutherans, including Mennonites. Roosen's defence was only one of several Mennonite responses to the attacks. In addition to general historical arguments, Roosen also included information about the early history of the Anabaptists in Holstein, as well as a confession of faith plus German translations of three of Menno Simons' writings.

The *Gemütsgespräch* is the more widely available of the two published texts, as it has been republished many times and has even been translated into English. It is a catechism in the form of 148 questions and answers and its intended audience was young believers. In the late eighteenth century, German Mennonites published a text entitled *Auszug aus Gerhard Roosen* (Selections from Geeritt Roosen). The text has a similar format to the *Gemütsgespräch*, but it was almost certainly attributed wrongly to Roosen.

Conclusion.

The content of *Christliches Gemütsgespräch* and *Unschuld und Gegen-Bericht*, together with his other writings, shows Roosen to have been a moderately conservative Mennonite for his time. He was careful to emphasize what he thought were the essentials of the Mennonites' unique faith, including lay ministry, adult baptism and nonresistance.

At the same time, he impressed upon his readers time and again that Mennonites were good Protestant Christians who held orthodox views about the Trinity (in his day anti-trinitarianism was a crime in some European jurisdictions), as well as being especially obedient subjects of secular rulers. While he was tolerant of Mennonites marrying Protestants from other churches, as long as they remained loyal to their faith, he vigorously fought doctrinal deviations by leaders in his congregation. In other words, he hoped to encourage the peaceful coexistence of Mennonites and their non-Mennonite neighbours and rulers, while preserving traditional Mennonite practices and beliefs.

Further Reading.

"Altona-Hamburg Mennonite Church 1601-2001," in *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 82-83.

"Altona Mennonite Church, 1601," in *Pres.*, No. 16, page 128.

William Schroeder, "Balthasar Denner 1685-1749," in *Pres.*, No. 16, pages 127-129.

William Schroeder, "Jakob Denner 1659-1746," in *Pres*., No. 15, pages 142-143.

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Driedger, Michael, "Zuflucht und Koexistenz: 400 Jahre Mennoniten in Altona und Hamburg," book review in *Preservings*, No. 21, pages 133-134.

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For more about Geeritt Roosen, the history of Mennonites in northern Germany, and the literature about these subjects, see the following works.

Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, January 2002. ISBN: 0-7546-0292-3.

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Michael D. Driedger, "Kanonen, Schießpulver und Wehrlosigkeit. Cord, Geeritt und B.C. Roosen in Holstein und Hamburg 1532-1905," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, volume 52 (1995), pp. 101-121.

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Dutch-Flemish Words in Mennonite Low German

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Prof. Walther Mitzka, an eminent dialectologist at Marburg, but originally from East Prussia, was the first to observe that Mennonites in their Prussian home had retained Dutch remnants (*Restwoerter*) in their otherwise West Prussian dialect. When we met in Marburg in 1956 Mitzka immediately sought me out wondering what we called currants in Mennonite Low German in Canada. I told him we called the fruit *Olbassem,* whether red or white.

He asked me what the etymology of *Olbassem* was. I admitted ignorance. "Then I will tell you," he thundered; Mitzka was gruff. "It comes from an eel broom because Mennonites baited currant bushes with carrion and then jerked them out of the water in the morning to harvest their favourite fish." I replied, I did not believe his explanation.

He reddened all over and said, "You prove me wrong and I will arrange for a scholarship which will last until you get any degree you desire." I was teaching High School in Marburg at the time and had no intentions of changing course. However, Mitzka was a total *Mensch* and I was tempted. Of course, we immediately took off in opposite directions and looked up *Olbassem*. My instincts proved right. The term means *Ol* which is the word for ale and *bassem* which is a bastardized form of Middle Dutch *bessie* meaning berry.

When next we met, Mitzka had the application forms for a German Academic Exchange Scholarship at the ready. I filled them out, got the scholarship and wrote an acclaimed thesis on Dutch Remnants in Mennonite Low German. The thesis was published by that venerable house Elwert Verlag of Marburg and because it contained historical truths relating to the Mennonite expulsion from Ukraine by the Red Hordes, the book was placed on the Communist Index. This, in turn, led to an exhibition of books in West Germany that were not for public view in the "East." And this in turn led to the popularization of my thesis.

The terms listed below are all to be found in the Dutch, which is not to say that some terms, like *vondoag,* are not used in western Low German areas. They are. However, from Hamburg east to West Prussia this term, as many other cognates listed here, is not known in the Low German dialects.

A

Achtapel - m. eine säuerlich-süße Apfelart, Kurzstielapfel, ostfries. agt, agtje. Nur im Weichselwerder bekannt und durch holländische mennonitische Kolonisten im 16 Jh. in die Danziger Gegend gebracht. A sweet-sour apple variety known only in the Vistula triangle, introduced by Dutch Mennonite settlers in the sixteenth century.

Aufsonderung - f. Absonderung, besonders im Simme von einer Strafe, die über ein gefallenes Gemeindeglied verhängt wurde. separation, seclusion, isolation, shunning, particularly of a "fallen" church member.

auftjwieme - schw. v., w. v. dahinsiechen, langsam sterben. to waste away, to die or deteriorate slowly.

aunmood - adv. & adj. 1. einer Person etwas zumuten 2. um etwas bitten, 1. to expect or demand something from a person 2. to ask for or request something.

äwaklunje - schw. v., w. v. über die Stränge schlagen. to step over the traces of horses, but also of people who go too far. Hee klunjt äwrem Sälestrang: er tritt über die Stränge: er rebelliert gegen die Regeln, ob in der Kirche oder in der Gesellschaft schlechthin: he is rebelling against the rules, whether church, community, social mores, etc.

B

bäaje - schw. v. w. v. 1. eine Wunde waschen 2. Kompresse auflegen 1. to bathe a wound 2. to apply compresses; this term was widely used in West Prussia with the same meaning.

backe - schw. v., w. v. kleben, kleistern. to stick together.

bachrijch - adv. & adj. klebrig. sticky, gooey.

Beje, Bäaje - n. Ferkel. piglet.

Beleah - m. Lehre. teaching., doctrine.

Beluara - m. Nachspäher, Voyeur. eavesdropper, voyeur.

bepauje - schw. v. w. v. mit großen, unförmigen Händen jemanden über's Gesicht fahren oder tolpatschig befassen, "töpelhaft liebkosen." Dieses Wort kommt nur im Werder und in der Elbinger Niederung vor. Vgl. ndrl. paaien, paaijen, mndl. paejen; ostfries. paien, peien, pojen, überall mit zweifacher Bedeutung. 1. "beruhigen, besänftigen, befriedigen, liebkosen, streicheln". 2. ein Schiff verpichen und dichten, es mit Teer bestreichen (engl.: to pay) 3. in belästigender Weise befassen. 1. to caress someone's face with huge, clumsy hands 2. to stroke pets, particularly cats 3. to paw. since the term **pauje** is listed exclusively in the former home of Mennonites in West Prussia, it is obviously of Dutch provenance.

Bescherinj - f. Bescherung. occasion when gifts are bestowed.

beschwieme - schw. v. w. v. in Ohnmacht fallen, durch rasches Umdrehen schwindlig werden; die Besinnung verlieren. to faint or feel dizzy; to lose consciousness. ndrl./Dt. in zwuem vallen.

betjletsche - schw. v., w. v. die Äste eines gefällten Baumes mit einer Axt abschlagen. to limb a tree; to smooth a log or rail with an axe or hatchet.

Betjselemp - f. Hosenbein. pant leg(s).

Betjselint - Hosenband, als der Taille. waistband on trousers.

Betoch - n. Bezug; Bedeckung, die Schutz vor dem Wetter bietet. protective covering to shield from the elements. a shelter. S. **Schuling.**

Betochbogge - m. leichter Einspänner mit Dachbedeckung. top buggy.

Bia - f. (pl. **Biere**) Bettbezug. Linen covering for feather bed and pillows. Verwandt mit dem englischen Wort bier. related to English bier.

Bieschlach - m. 1. vor der Haustür befindlicher Vorbau 2. niedrige Wand zu beiden Seiten der Tenne in der Scheune meistens als **Owesied** bekannt. 1. porch 2. threshold, annex.

Bitsijch - n. Kleinkind; Knirps, Gernegroß, Dreikäsehoch. whippersnapper.

Bleiwa Biedel - m. Blauer Beutel; Armenkasse der Mennoniten im Großen Werder. blue bag (sack) ; the Mennonite alms bag in the Great Werder or Great Delta.

bleiwe - schw. v., w. v. eine Notlüge vorbringen. to fib; to tell a white lie.

Blenk - f. offene Stelle im Eis eines Flusses oder Sees. open spot in the ice of a river or lake.

blesune, plesune, bresune - schw. v. w. v. heulend und klagend weinen. von frz. blason zu blazoen (ndrl.) Wappenschild. Die Etymologie ist unbekannt, aber das Wort kommt mit selbiger Bedeutung in verschiedenen niederländischen Dialekten vor. to blow, to trumpet: to cry loudly, to lament. the etymology is unknown although various Dutch dialects use the verb in the same context, namely to cry loudly, particularly of children.

Blies - leichter Regenschauer, plötzliches sichtbeeinträchtigendes Schneegestöber. light rain shower, without lightning and thunder; squall; usually causing, temporarily, poor visibility.

Bockfleesch - n. ganze Hühnerbrust. keel of a chicken; white meat together with the breast bone of a chicken. fillet.

Bonsel - n. Büschel, besonders Blumen. a sprig, cluster or bunch of flowers.

brosch - adj. leicht brechbar, spröde (wie von trockenem Holz oder Stroh). brash; brittle as of dry wood and straw. mnl. broosc, ndrl./Dt. broos.

Brostspald - f. Brosche. brooch.

C

D

dach - adv. hell. bright.

dache - schw. v., w. v. leuchten, Tageseinbruch. to brighten, to light up.

dachet Lijcht - n. helles Licht. bright light.

däj, deaj, däg -adv. & adj. tüchtig, gediegen; derb, kräftig, ziemlich, beträchtlich. competent, prosperous, robust, strong, rather, fairly, considerable.

däwere, däwre - schw. v., w. v. 1. dröhnen, poltern, laut krachen, (wie von einem Gewehr oder von einem Pferdewagen, der polternd über Steine rollt). Däwere ist nur im Großen Werder belegt, also in der westpreußischen Heimat der niederländischen Mennoniten. Dieselbe Bedeutung haben mndl. ndrl. daveren, ostfries.

daferen, mnd. daveren 2. verletzen durch einen Schlag. 1. to crash, to thunder loudly, used of thunder, discharge of firearms 2. to sustain hurt by a blow as of a hammer. obviously of Dutch and/or Middle Low German provenance since **däwere** is the verb for thunderous noise in those geographic areas.

Ditj, Dütj, Dytj - m. Familiennamen Dick, Dück, Dyck. Mennonite family name Dick, Dueck, Dyck.

Ditjreiw, Ditjreew, Ditjröb, Ditjroeb - m. Deichgraf, Teichgröw, usw. Familienname aber auch ehemals der Beruf, Deichgraf. Mennonite family name but also the profession of dike-reeve anglicized to: Teichroeb, Teichrieb, Teichroew.

Doak - m. Schwüle; hohe Luftfeutichkeit. sultry or humid weather; high humidity.

doakijch - adv. & adj. feuchte, schwere, schwüle Luft. humid, sultry weather.

doake - schw. v., w. v. leicht nieseln oder regnen. light drizzle.

dreekollearijch - adj. dreifarbig (nur im Zusammenhang mit Katzen gebraucht. three-coloured cat (used only in this context).

Droat - f. Brauch oder Sitte. custom.

drock - adv. & adj. sehr beschäftigt. busy, occupied with work. **wie habe daut seea drock: wir haben viel zu tun: we are very busy**. ndrl./Dt. druk. **drocke Tiet** - f. Hochsaison. busy season.

Mennoniten sind stolz auf ihre Emsigkeit und deshalb ist **drock** das meistgebrauchte Wort im Dialekt sowie auch im Hochdeutschen. Mennonites are proud of their high work ethic and their extreme "busyinessess" and so **drock** is the most commonly used word in the dialect as well as in High German, even used in sermons.

Drockijchtjeit - f. Arbeitslast. work loads; preoccupation.

Duj - große Winde. large block and tackle; windlass.

duje - schw. v., w. v. 1. schwerfällig Fortschritte machen 2. schlagen, verprügeln 3. auf einem Saiteninstrument klimpern 1. to plod, to make arduous progress 2, to administer a beating 3. to strum on an instrument.

E

Eedzh, Eidzh - f. tiefe Futterkrippe. deep manger in the stable.

eenkollearijch - adv. & adj. einfarbig. of one colour.

eentjanijch - adj. einkennig; scheu; von Kindern, die nur die Eltern (meistens die Mutter) kennen und gegen Fremde schüchtern sind; auch von Pferden. to make strange as of children, relating only to parents, or one person, usually the mother; also of horses.

ennbecke - schw. v., w. v. verenden (von Kleintieren, besonders von totgebrüteten Küken). dying of small animals and birds, particularly of still-born chicks.

F

feede - schw. v., w. v. versorgen, aufziehen, erziehen (wie von einem Kind). to rear a child; to assume control of bringing up a person, particularly a child.

Floa - f. lange, klaffende Wunde. long, gaping wound.

Flohm, Floom - m. & n. Nieren und Darmfett der Schweine; ebenfalls Schmalzfett beim Vogelvieh. the fat around animals' kidneys or intestines; fat of fowl. hd./ohg: floum; nd./LG. Vloom, vlaum.

Floms, Flomsch - n. Flämisch. Flemish.

foaken - adv. oft, häufig, oftmals. often, frequently. ndrl./Dt. vaak.

Friese - pl. Mennonitische Glaubensrichtung und ethnische Herkunft im Gegensatz zu den Flammen; siehe/see **Klarken**, a Mennonite church group holding a distinct religious conviction and of different ethnic background to the Flemish (Flammen).

G

Gaunstjitjel - n. & pl. junges Gänschen, Gänseküken. gosling, goose-chick.

Glooje, Glauje, Gloaje - pl. 1. feurig heiße Glut 1. red hot embers 2. **dem woa etj de Glooje läse: Dem werde ich die Leviten lesen. 2. I'll read him the riot act.**

H

Heeft - n. (pl. **Heefta)** 1. Haupt 2. Kopf 1. head 2. head as chief.

Hock - n. (pl. **Hocks**) 1. eingefasster Raum im Stall für das Jungvieh; Verschlag oder Box im Stall, in dem Jungvieh oder auch Pferde gehalten werden 2. Getreidekammer im Speicher. 1. pen, box: fenced in area outside or partitioned off area in the barn/stable in which young cattle or horses are kept 2. grain bin. ndrl./Dt. hock, hocktjes.

Hollenda - m. Holländer, Nachkomme der aus Holland stammenden Ansiedler in der Weichselniederung und im Pregeltal; oft waren Holländer und Mennonit synonym. Dutchmen, descendants of Dutch settlers from the Vistula Lowlands and the Pregel Valley; often the terms Holländer and Mennonites were used synonymously.

Holtjedaune - pl. Holzpantoffeln. wooden shoes or slippers.

hoojohne - schw. v., w. v. gähnen. to yawn.

I

iedel - adv. eitel, wie in eitle Freude; lauter nichts als. nothing but, pure. anglosäschisch: idel, mnd. idel. ndrl./Dt . ijdl.

J

Japs - f. (pl. **Japse**) 1. Maß für soviel wie beide Hände gegeneinander greifend fassen können. 2. letzter Atemzug 1. used as a measure for the amount that can be held between cupped hands. 2. final breath. Ndrl./Dt. - gaps, mnd. - gepse.

japse - schw. v., w. v. letzter Atemzug im Todeskampf. last gasp during the agony of death.

Japsjemeend - f. friesische Richtung der Mennoniten, weil die Täuflinge mit der **Japs** (verschlossenen Händen) Wasser getauft wurden. the Fri(e)sian congregation, so-called because the baptismal candidate was baptized with two cupped hands full **(Japs**) of water.

Jedruzh - n. Lärm, besonders vom Straßenverkehr, störender Lärm, verworrenes Geräusch. noise, particularly traffic noise, grating noises. ndrl./Dt. gedruisch.

jenietsch - adv. beharrlich, fleißig bei der Arbeit. demonstrating stamina at work, diligent, industrious, quick.

Jräp - f. Griff (besonders an der Tür). handle, particularly of a door; grip.ndrl./Dt. greep.

K

Klarken - pl. die Art der Mennoniten im Werder, welche die feine oder flämmische heißt: "Ob nun wol zwar von den Mennonisten unterschiedene Gattungen sind, so findet man doch nur zweyerley Art im Werder, alsz die feine und grobe Mennonisten. Die feinen werden Flämmische, oder Klahrken oder Feinstoff genannt, die Groben aber nennt man Friesen, oder Bekümmerten oder Dreckwagen. Den letzteren Namen haben diese erhalten, weil sie zwar alle anderen Sekten der Wiedertäufer verdammen, doch sie gerne annehmen, wenn sie aus anderen Mennonisten-Gemeinden abgesetzt sind, deswegen sie auch solchen Namen von dem Dreckwagen bekommen haben" (Preußisches Wörterbuch). one of two branches of Mennonites living in the Prussian Werder; they were called Flämmische (Flemish) or the fine ones as opposed to the Friesen who were called coarse or "Dreckwagen" (according to a contemporary source they got this latter name because of their acceptance of persons excommunicated from other Mennonite groups).

kloffe (klosse) - schw. v. w. v. laut auftreten, trampeln, poltern, besonders durch Holzschuhe verursacht. to walk heavily, noisily, trample, particularly as with wooden shoes. ndrl./Dt. klossen.

Klua - n. Knäuel (Wolle). skein, roll ball of yarn or twine.

Klubutje (Butje) - n. kleine Hütte oder Schuppen. a small shack.

Klunj - m. 1. Besen aus Weidenstrauch 2. Fischnetz 3. Tanz. 1. a bunch of willow branches tied together to form a broom 2. fish net 3. a dance, usually barn dance.

Kluta, Klute - m. (pl. **Tjläta, Tjlieta**). Erdklumpen. Erdkloß. clod, clump of earth. ndrl./Dt. kluit.

Klutanoasch - f. schwanzlose Hühnerart. type of tailless chicken.

knooje - schw. w., w. v. schwer arbeiten, mühsam vorwärts kommen beim arbeiten, fahren u. dglm.. to work hard, to progress slowly while working, driving, etc. ndrl./Dt./fries: knoeien.

Kollea - f. Farbe. colour. ndrl./Dt. kleur.

Koppspald - f. Kopfnadel. headpin.

Kraumpspald - f. Windelstecknadel. safety pin used for diapers.

kroage - schw. v., w. v. zur Hochzeit einladen, bei einem Mahl bittend nötigen. to summon, invite, call; to urge (someone). ndrl./Dt. kragen

Kroos - n. (pl. **Tjreesa**) Becher. Glas mit

Henkel und Deckel. goblet, mug with handle and lid; cruse. ahd. kruog, kruag, crog, croc. nhd. kruoca, dän. kruus, ndrl. kroes, engl. cruse, frz./fr. cruche, schwed. krus, poln. kruz, aleman.chruse.

L

läajch - adv. niedrig. low, base.

Läajcht, Leajch, läach, leg - f. & adj. 1. niedrig 2. Tal 3. kleiner Bach, Teich. 1. lowland. 2. valley 3. small brook, pond. ahd./ohg. läge, mnd/mlg. lech, lege, ags. lah, ndrl./Dt. laag, leeg.

leeftolijch - adj. & adv. liebreizend, holdselig, anmutig. lovable, gracious, amiable. ndrl./Dt. lieftallig.

Leeftolijchtjeit - f. liebreizend. loving kindness. ndrl./Dt. lieftallig.

Leewoatj - f. & m. Lerche; auch von einer trächtigen Kuh (wohl des dicken Bauches der Lerche wegen) gebraucht. lark; also used to describe a pregnant cow (probably because of the protruding belly of larks). hd./ohg. lerahha, mhd./mhg. lewerch, mnd./mlg. lewerike, lewerke, ndrl./Dt. lewerik.

liepe - schw. v., w. v. augenaufschlagen; seitwärts verstohlen beäugeln. to look up; also to scrutinize furtively.

lohte, lat-, jelohte - st. v. aussehen (niederländisches Restwort laten: intransitiv). to appear. (Dt. Laten intransitiv). **Noh waut woat daut lohte? Wonach, wie wird das nur aussehen? what would that look like?**

M

mäa, mär - adv. mürbe, übereif. mellow, soft, overripe. agd./ohg. maro, marawi, mhd./mlg. mar, mea, ndrl/Dt. morw, murw.

Mateje, Matäaje - f & schw. v., w. v. Materie, Eiter; eitern. pus. fester. frz./fr. Matiere.

Mauring, Maurintj - m. verschnittener Kater. castrated tomcat.

Meiw - f. (M. **Mau**) Hemdsärmel. sleeve. ndrl./Dt. mauw, mnl./mdt. mouwe, mhd./mhg. mouwe, mnd./mlg. mouwe.

Menjsel - n. eine Mischung, besonders flüssig. Basis oder Grundsubstanz für **Moos**. mixture, particularly of a liquid; a base or stock for **Moos**. ndrl./Dt. mengsel.

Menjselreara - m. Schneebesen. eggbeater.

moaj, mooj, moi - adj. 1. müde, faul 2. auch gemütlich und angenehm, besonders als Bezeichnung von schwülem Wetter. 1. tired, lazy, apathetic 2. cozy, pleasant, particularly of mellow-humid weather. ndrl./Dt. mooj.

Moschtje - n. Meise. titmouse. mnd/mlg. meese, meske(n). ndrl./Dt. mees, meeze.

N

nieschierijch - adj. neugierig. curious, snoopy. The Dutch term is nieuwschierig and since gierig (neugierig) is Dutch also but different, the former suggests Dutch provenance.

noda - adv. (comp.von/of **dijchtbie**) näher. nearer, closer. **noda'bie** - adv. näher. closer. ndrl./Dt. nader, naderbij.

O

Olbassem - pl. Johannisbeere. currants, both red and white. ndrl./Dt. aalbes, aalbezie (mndl./mdt. aalbes, aalbezie, pl. aalbesen, aalbezien). pl. bessen: Beeren, berries. wörtl., lit. aleberry.

ooltnäsijch - adv. & adj. naseweis, altklug, vorwitzig, frech, besonders von Kleinkindern. precocious, impudent, forward, particularly of smaller children.

Onnjemack - n. Beschwerden, Leiden oft as Redenart benutzt: **Daut Ella tjemmt mett Onnjemack**: Altwerden bringt Beschwerden. difficulties, sorrows, hardships. this term is usually used in a proverb: "old in years, brings hardships and tears." ndrl./Dt. ongemak.

Onnoosel - m. Taugenichts, verkommener Mensch. good-for-nothing, even degenerate person. adj. unordentlich, wild. mnl./mdt. nosel, nose: harmful, guilty, miserable. mnl./mdt. nosen: to bother, hinder, harm, ndrl./Dt. onnoozel.

Oohmtje - m. & n. Herr (Bezug auf verheiratete Männer), wie Oomtje Thiesse 2. auch Diminutiv-Verkleinerungsform, etwa wie Onkelchen. 1. Mr. (refers to married men like Mr. Thiessen) 2.diminutive, little man.

Oom - Ohm, Herr, Prediger, Geistlicher. Mister, Reverend, sir.

Oomtjestow, Oohmtjestowtje - f. & n. Versammlungsraum der Prediger in der Kirche vor der Andacht: **Oom** ist die vertrauliche Benennung des mennonitischen Gemeindelehrers. Bei den Mennoniten in Kanada heutzutage wie schon im Weichseldelta gilt **Oom** als Anrede, bzw. als ehrende Bezeichnung betagter oder ehrenswürdiger Herren, vgl. **Oom.** ministers' room. **Oom** is the Mennonite term for their village teacher or minister. today in Canada, **Oom** is the respectful address used when addressing elderly men. **Oomtjestow** is the term still used today when referring to the room in which the ministers congregate before the church service.

P

pienijch - adj. & adv. emsig, fleißig. diligent, industrious. ndrl./Dt. pijnig.

Plack - f. Fleck, Mal. Stell, Sprenkel. spat, spot, stain, ndrl./Dt. plek.

plenjre, veplenjre - schw. v., w. v. vergießen, überschwappen besonders von kostbaren Flüssigkeiten. to spill, particularly of costly liquids. ndrl./Dt. plengen.

preeme, prieme - schw. v., w. v. priemen; Tabak kauen. to chew a wad of tobacco. ndrl./Dt.: pruimptje: Pflaumchen. little plum.

Preemtje, Priemtje - kleiner Ballen Kautabak. small wad or chaw or cud of chewing tobacco.

Preemtobbak - m. Kautabak. chewing tobacco, twist.

Prell - n. Prüll, Gerümpel. junk, odds and ends. ndrl./Dt. prel.

Q

R

räse - schw.v., w. v. vom Zittern der Fenster bei Donnerschlägen oder sonst merklicher Erschütterung des Hauses; vibrieren, dröhnen. vibrations of windows due to thunder; also used in a broader sense of vibration in general.

roare - schw. v., w. v. weinen, heulen von Menschen; Gebrüll von Tieren. rare - tosend brüllen, stark schreien, zunächst vom Rindvieh, dann von der See. to cry, howl, roar of people but also the bawling and lowing of cattle; also the noise of great conflagrations or the roar of the sea. ndrl./Dt. reeren.

Rut - f. Fensterscheibe. window pane.

S

schäle - schw. v., w. v. spülen, besonders von den Wogen des Meeres, welche sich am Ufer brechen; Bezeichnung für schnell fließendes Wasser. to wash, particularly of waves against the shoreline; to flow swiftly, of water.

Schatel - n. Untertasse. Saucer.

Schatelbeintj - f. Geschirrschrank. china cabinet.

scheedle - schw. v., w.v. 1. sondern, abtrenned reinigen besonders Schweinegedärme (Flatj) in Vorbereitung auf Wurststopfen 2. auch Mischen von Spielkarten. 1. to separate; to shuffle, like playing cards 2. to clean and scour hog intestines in preparation for use as sausage casings. nur im Danziger Werder belegt. term used only in the Danziger Werder.

Scheep - f. (pl. **Scheepe**) Schuppe. fish scale (nicht Haarschuppen, not dandruff); das menn.-nd. Wort für Haarschuppen ist **schenn**. the MLG term for dandruff is **schenn**.

scheepe - schw. v., w. v. Schuppen des Fisches; Schuppen entfernen. to remove scales of a fish.

Schenn - m. Haarschorf, Haarschuppen. dandruff. ndrl./Dt schin, ursprünglich/originally schinn: Haut, Fell wie noch jetzt engl. skin, isl. skinn, dän./den. skind. originally schinn, skin, fur.

Schimagaun - n. Kautabak. chewing tobacco. ndrl./Dt. schiemansgaren: Seemansgarn, zum Bekleiden von Tauen. originally yarn used by sailors to cover cables and ropes.

schindeare - schw.v., w. v. immerfort schelten, meckern, schimpfen. to complain constantly, to grumble, to scold, to nag. ndrl./Dt. schinderen.

schippe - schw. v., w. v. transportieren, verfrachten. to ship, to transport.

Schirtj - f. Grille. cricket.

Schlaub - f. Vortuch, Latz, Serviettchen. bib. ndrl./Dt. slabbetje.

Schlaubbetjse - pl. Overalls, Latzhosen. overallls..

schlaubre - schw. v., w. v. schlabbern; Speisen aus dem Mund fließen lassen und sich damit beschlabbern. to slobber, slabber. ndrl./Dt. slabbern, slabberen.

schlure - schw.v., w. v. Arbeit verzögern, hinausschleppen, hinausdehnen. to drag out work, to procrastinate, to delay. ndrl./Dt. sleuren.

Schlut - n. & f. poetisch für Schloß, auch Verschluß, auch Endung. poetic term for castle, padlock and ending.

Schluw - f. 1. Hülse, Schale, Pelle 2. Person ohne Rückgrat. 1. shell, hull, husk (of seeds). 2.

person who lacks courage or backbone.

schluwe, schloof, jeschlowe - st. v. ausziehen, abnehmen, die Schale, Hülsen von Erdnüssen entfernen. to pull off, to remove, to husk.

Schluwesoht - Hülsenkörner. legume seeds.

Schluwsäl - n. Art Pferdesiel. utility harness.

schmeissijch - adv. & adj. geschmeidig, biegsam, wendig (gefällig vom Freier). soft, pliable, dexterous, slender, agreeable (of a suitor). ndrl./Dt. smijdig, smedig.

schnucke - schw. v., w. v. Schluckauf haben. to hiccup.

Schoof - n. (pl. **Schoowa**) 1. großer Vorrat, eine ganze Menge, reichlich 2. Schar, Schwarm, Haufen. 1. a good supply, a large quantity, many 2. group, band, swarm. ndrl./Dt. schoof.

Schroag - f. (pl. **Schroage**) Holzgestell mit drei oder vier Füßen auf dem Washgefäße, Bachtröge, auch Särge beim letzten Abschied vor dem Hinterlassenen ins Grab gesetzt warden. 2. das Stangegestell über Öfen, auf welchem nasse Wäsche oder nasses Holz getrocknet wird. 3. Leichentuch. 1. supporting platform or trestles to support water basins, baking troughs or also coffins at the graveside service 2. a wire contraption on which wet laundry or wet wood was dried above the stove/oven 3. shroud.

Schulinj - f. Schutz; eine schattige Bleibe, in die man sich zurückzieht, um sich vor Hitze, Kälte oder Regen zu schützen. shelter; a shady nook sheltering from heat, cold or rain, the elements. ndrl./Dt. Schoeling.

Schwoata Peeta - m. Schwarzer Peter beim Kartenspiel; offensichtlich stammt dieses Wort noch aus der niederländischen Heimat, wo der Schwarze Peter ein Gehilfe des Nikolaus ist. Er droht unartigen Kindern nach Spanien zu verschleppen. Der Ausdruck stammt aus der Zeit als die Mohren Nordafrikas weite Teile Europas besetzten. Black Peter, a boogey man at a game of cards; obviously this term dates back to the Netherlands, where Black Peter was an assistant to St. Nick, Santa Claus, who threatened to take naughty children to Spain at the time when North African Moors occupied much of the Iberian peninsula.

siedlintjs - adv. seitwärts. sideways. ndrl./Dt. zijdelings.

Soss - f. Schnuller, meistens ein Lappen, der mit süßem Teig oder Brot gefüllt und Kindern zum Lutschen gereicht wird. a sop which is filled with sweet dough or bread, then inserted in a piece of cloth and twisted shut as a soother for little children. s./see **Zockatett, Keiwsel.**

Spald, Spal - f. Stecknadel. pin, headpin. ndrl./Dt. spal.

spläse, spleese - schw. v. w. v. Ineinanderflechten zweier Stricke. to splice as of ropes or strings.

Spree - f. Star. starling, blackbird. ahd/ohg. spra, ndrl./Dt. spreuw.

Stelozh - f. Baugerüst, Gestell am Bau. scaffold, frame, trestle. ndrl./Dt. stellage.

Stoot -. Zeitraum. an amount of time.

Stoottje, Stootstje - n. dim. Suffix. kurze Weile, von kurzer Dauer. short amount of time. ndrl./Dt. stoot.

Struck -. Strauch, Sträuche, Untergehölz. underbrush, brush, shrubbery, brambles. ndrl./Dt. struik.

Struckhatjs - Strauchhexe, Schreckschraube. literally: brush-witch, hag; an ugly, cantankerous woman; battle axe.

Strunk - m. das harte Innere eines Kohlkopfes. hard inner core of a cabbage head.

T

tachentijch - f. achtzig. eighty. ndrl./Dt. tachentig.

Tjeew - f. (pl. **Tjeewe**) Mundwinkel, hintere Kinnpartie; auch Kinn; Kiemen. jaw, edge of the back of the mouth; gills. ndrl./Dt. kiewen.

Tjielpogg - f. Kaulquappe. tadpole.

Tjiesskaulf - n. weibliches Kalb. female calf.

Tjieta-ama - m. Kücheneimer: (Behälter für restliche oder übriggebliebene Flüssigkeiten). slop pail in the kitchen used for storing liquid kitchen remains.

Tjietawota - n. Abwaschwasser. swill, dish-water.

tjietre - schw. v., w. v. im Wasser patschen, Wasser vergießen 2. eitern von einer Wunde. 1. to spill liquids, to splash around in water 2. to fester.

Tjliea - f. (pl. **Tjliere**) Drüse. glands, node, nodule. mnl./mdt., cliere, nwfris. klier, ostfris. klir(e).

Tjnäp - f. Taille. waist.

Tjnäprock - m. Faltenrock. pleated skirt.

Tjnief - n. Tachenmesser. pocket knife, jack knife. mnd./mlg. knif - n. ndrl./Dt. knyf - m.

Tjniepa - m. (pl. **Tjniepasch**) Käfer (Kneifer). bug, beetle. ndrl./Dt.

tjrape - schw. w., w. v. falten, fälteln; sorgfältig ein Gefäß luftdicht verschliessen. to crimp, to seal air tight.

Tjreltje - n. Kringel am Schwanzende eines Ferkels. a curl at the end of a piglet's tail. ndrl./Dt. krulletje.

Tjrietje, Tjriedtje - n. Blumenstrauß, Girlande. sprig, garland, bouquet, posy, spray, corsage.

Tjwiel - f. Speichel, Spucke. spittle, saliva. mnl./mdt. quijl, quilen. mnd./mdg. quil, fris. kwyl, quijl. quiel ist im Friesischen Gebiet und in Flandern belegt, daher ein altes Restwort. the word **tjwiel** is a remnant word from the Flanders-Flemish area.

tjwiele - schw. v., w. v. spucken. to spit.

tjwieme - schw. v., w. v. kränkeln und sich daher kümmerlich entwickeln. to be sickly and therefore develop poorly; to fade away slowly. ndrl./Dt. kwijnen, quenen. mnd./mlg. quin.

Toch - m. 1. Luftzug 2. Aufwind. 1. draft (draught) of air current 2. courage of persuasion. **wann hee eascht mol em Toch wea**: wenn er erst einmal richtig im Schwung war: once he got into the swing of things; once he got going or a stiff breeze from behind.

Tochdäa - luftdurchlässige Drahttür. screen door.

Tochfensta - n. luftdurchlässiges Drahtfenster. screen window.

toopkuakse - schw. v., w. v. zusammenbrechen von (Gebäuden). to collapse, to buckle.

Tridjtratj - f. Puffspiel. backgammon.

U

utfloome, utflome - schw. v., w. v. Fett, besonders bei Gänsen, aber auch von Schweinen, beim Schlachten entfernen. to extract fat from poultry, especially geese, but also from pigs during slaughtering.

utplatjche - schw. v., w. v. ausbleichen, durch Einwirkung z. B. von der Sonne die Farbe verschiessen. to bleach, as from the sun or bleaching agents.

utschluwe, schloof ut, utjeschlowe - st. v. 1. bei einem Wettspiel gewinnen 2. Saat, wie z. B. Erbsen, von einer Schote entfernen, auspulen 3. enthülsen. 1. to win a contest or game 2. to remove seeds from a pod 3. to shell, husk.

Utstäwinj - f. Täfelung, Tafelwerk. wainscoting, paneling.

V

vekolleare - schw. v., w. v. Farbe verlieren, Farbe wechseln, besonders rot oder reif werden wie Korn/Getreide. to change colour, blush, discolour, particularly at the stage of ripening of grain.

Vemohna - m. Ver-Ermahner; früher Bezeichnung für den mennonitischen Prediger. admonisher: formerly term for a Mennonite preacher.

vemohne - schw. v., w. v. ver/ermahnen, mahnen. to dun, admonish, exhort, expostulate.

Vemoninj - f. Ermahnung. admonition.

venäje, veneaje - schw. v., w. v. verneigen, Verbeugung machen. to bow, especially to/before a lady.

Venasse - pl. Grimassen, Fratzen schneiden. grimaces, antics.

veniele - schw. v., w. v. vertilgen, verschlingen 2. zerstören. 1. to devour, to wolf down food. 2. to destroy, obliterate.

veschimpfiere, veschumfiere - schw. v., w. v. verunstalten, entstellen, verunzieren. to spoil the looks, appearance or effects of; to distort.

veschmiete, veschmeet, veschmäte - st. v. 1. verwerfen, besonders vom Glauben 2. krümmen. biegen, wellen (von Holz). 1. to reject one's faith; to rid one's self of something by rejecting or throwing away 2. to warp.

veschräje - schw. v., w. v. versengen, ausdorren, besonders von Korn durch Hitze und Trockenheit, spröde werden. to singe, scorch, parch of grain through heat and dryness. ndrl./Dt. **verschroeijen**.

vondoag - m. heute. today. ndrl./Dt. vandaag.

Vondoagdendach, Vondoagschendach - m. heutzutage, in unserer Zeit. nowadays, at this time; today's day.

W

weede - schw. v., w. v. jäten. to hoe, to weed. ndrl./Dt. wieden.

Woat - m. Erpe, männliche Ente. drake.

Romance of Low German

J. John Friesen (Reprinted with permission from *Mennonite Life*, April, 1947, 22)

According to definition, any means of communicating ideas is a language. For this reason a form of communication that is much older than either High German or English, and which is replete with convenient and expressive idioms, should certainly be included in the family of languages. This is the case with Low German.

There are those who seem to think that because the language is called Low German, it is so low that they must avoid using it, as a thing of ill repute. These people probably do not know that High German and Low German lie on the same linguistic level. It has probably never been pointed out to them that the sole reason for the use of "high" and "low" in referring to one or the other is that the fact that one was spoken in the lowlands of Germany, the other on the highlands. That is true very largely today. No significance attaches to the definitives "low" and "high" other than geographical. The original designation is not "Low" German but Plauttdeutsch.

Low German Literature

Still others ask why Low German is not a written language. It can be said that it is used in writing, but not so commonly as High German. It was by a sheer turn of circumstances that High German became the literary language in Germany. Just as Wyclif's translation of the Bible into his own dialect, one of several in early England, helped to set the literary style and standard for the English language, so Luther's translation of the Bible into the form of speech that he used set the literary style for Germany. Had Luther's speech and translation been Low German, it would likely have become the literary standard.

There is a considerable body of Low German literature. I mention a few items and names at random. Reinke de Vos is a work that appeared in 1498. It became highly popular and was translated into many languages. *Till Eulenspiegel* is a name in Low German folklore which has become associated with all sorts of whimsical frolics and amusing stories. A collection of popular tales that clustered about him appeared in 1515 and 1519. The earlier edition is found in the British Museum. The latter was translated into English and almost all European tongues. Fritz Reuter, born in 1810, is known as "the greatest writer of Plattdeutsch and one of the greatest humorists of the century."

Attention has been called in earlier issues of *Mennonite Life* to a contemporary Mennonite writer in Low German, Arnold Dyck, of Steinbach, Manitoba. To those familiar with the tongue, he can provide moments of jolly laughter, and added insight into human nature. His writings are classics of their kind.

It is of special interest to those who know and use this speech that a book was published at Munchen University in 1928, entitle *Die Mundart von Chortitza in Sued-Russland,* written by Jakob Quiring. This is a scholarly treatise on Low German as spoken by Mennonites from Russia.

J.H. Janzen's one-act plays, *De Bildung, Utwandre,* etc., always draw large audiences not only because they are humorous, but also because they express sentiments and attitudes of Low German speaking people better than any other language.

A World-Wide Language

It should be noted that Low German, too, has its variations. The Mennonites of the Holland-Prussia-Russian backgrounds have developed their speech to a well-standardized form. Those who came from Russian to the United States, Canada, Mexico, Paraguay, and Brazil speak that common language.

But not only the Mennonites from Russia speak Plattdeutsch; a nearly identical Plattdeutsch is spoken by others in many parts of the world. An amusing incident is told by one of our cowboys of the sea. On his recent trip to Danzig his ship took the shortcut through the Kiel Canal, and was piloted by a German. The young man approached the pilot, and in his Plattdeutsch asked him whether he, too, could speak it. The pilot was amazed to meet an American who spoke his tongue, and he called to his mate: "Hauns, komm mol hea, hia ess eena ut Aumerikau de redt grod so aus wie." The cowboy of the sea was born and reared in America. His forbears had left Holland probably around 1530, making their home successively in Prussia, in Russia, and in America. During this span of more than 400 years, and in strange environments, a language that amazed the German had been kept alive. This young American, with many others, possesses an intellectual inheritance of practical value, which only the thoughtless would dismiss lightly.

It will interest the readers to learn that there exists a weekly paper, *Plattdeutsche Post*, published in Brooklyn, New York.

During World War II the Mennonites of Brazil were not permitted to use the High German language in worship services. For years, they used the Low German in their singing, preaching, and praying. Even the Scriptures are published in current Low German editions.

A Member of the Family of Languages

I have spoken of Low German as a language. It is a living language. This can be illustrated by use of a chart as found in books on such matters. Languages are classed into families. We are illustrating this by the use of a language tree. The West Germanic language is one of the older languages and is the trunk of the tree that divided into the Low German and High German language families. As there are a great number of variations of High German, so there are of ancient Low German. Among them are the English, Dutch, Frisian, and modern Low German.

Several things become obvious from this language tree. First, that among the languages, High German and Low German hold the same rank. Second, that these are in a sense basic languages, from which dialectal differences spring. These differentiations became languages on their own merit, which becomes clear in the relationship between Low German and English. We remember that the Angles and Saxons, tribes from the lowlands of Germany, occupied the island, now England, in the fifth century and became the ground stock of English society. The English speech of today has acquired a composite vocabulary, but it is descended from the speech of that ground stock. No languages show closer kinship than that between Low German and English. The close connection can best be demonstrated by a reference to some simple English words. I take them as they come to mind. "Knife" is the Low German Knif. The English retains the "k" in spelling, but not the sound. The words, "trough," "through," and "rough" have their exact counterpart in Low German, but in the latter tongue "gh" is given its proper sound value, which the English corrupts into "f". Words like "gruff", "help" and "go' are entirely alike in sound in both languages. These are a few illustrative cases. They indicate that English is derived from Low German, which is a much older language than English, and that English is a Low German speech.

It is estimated that somewhat less than half of the English vocabulary is of Low German origin. It might be noted, too, that the letters "L.G." after a word in the dictionary mean that the word comes from the Low German. In many cases the letters "A.S." are found after a word. They stand for Anglo-Saxon, an older form of *Plattdeutsch*. For instance, the English word "deal" (a share) is the Anglo-Saxon Dael, the same word used in Low German. Or the word "mean" (to signify) is the Anglo-Saxon work maenen which we recognize as Low German, too. Again the work "fifty" is fiftig in Anglo-Saxon and fiftig in Low German. This is merely calling attention to the identity of Anglo-Saxon and Low German. There is a great deal of history stored up in the Low German vocabulary.

A third thing that we get from the tree is, not only that Low German holds the same rank as High German and that it is a basic language; but that, because it is basic, it is of educational value. It is evident that knowledge of languages is of intellectual import. By 1200 every educated person was expected to know three languages. Among Europeans today it is quite common to know several. To those of Low German tradition it is no small thing to be the inheritors of a language which is the background of a number of other languages, and the key to English, as an eminent British scientist, Thomas Huxley, has reminded us. A student of English who is of Low German ancestry has a tool for the study of English, and a broader view of that language than a Britisher who knows no language but his own.

For such reasons *Plattdeutsch* is an intellectual asset, and its possessor measures his

self-respect by the regard in which he holds his native tongue.

Mother Goose Rymes in Low German

Wherever Low German is spoken there lives a literary type, found more often in the *Volksmund* (oral tradition) than on the written page, where it is given only scant attention. It is the Mother Goose rhyme.

A student of English was asked three questions: What are Mother Goose rhymes? What is their origin? What is their value? The first she answered by quoting the Humpty Dumpty rhyme. To the second question she replied that the origin is unknown. To the third she said just this: "Childhood is unthinkable without them."

Low German Children's Rimes by Warren Kliewer

(Reprinted with permission, *Mennonite Life*, July 1959, 141-142)

Unfortunate though the loss would be, the unrecorded German folk traditions which made complex and rich the lives of the Mennonite immigrants to North America the traditions of songs, rimes, and proverbs will probably not survive another American generation, or if these traditions do survive, they will probably be locked in the memories of a few isolate individuals. For younger Mennonites in their adolescence or in their twenties have all too willingly neglected the traditional German dialects for the sake of their neighbors' English. Frequently *borscht* and *tweeback* have lost their place to canned and frozen American food; frequently we have substituted ephemeral popular songs for the ancient farce and wit of our traditional songs, and flat English clichés for the rich proverbial speech of the Ukrainian *darp* or the Swiss mountain village.

It is apparent that if the folklore of Mennonites is to be collected, it will have to be done very soon. And feeling this necessity of collecting the traditional lore which was a part of my own heritage, I recently searched for what might remain of the Low German traditions in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and found an enticing treasure of proverbs, songs, and folk poetry. Of this large amount of material I should like to present a small group of rhymes, a sample which I hope will suggest to those things which we grew up with and took for granted.

The rimes that I have selected seem to fall into a class by themselves. For although children's rimes have been abundant among the Low German speaking Mennonites, the verses in this small group are unique in that they are recited by adults to children. Each of the rimes includes a game which the adult plays with the child for example, there are three counting games similar to the English "This little piggy went to market." It is obvious that these rimes have no purpose but entertainment, for none of them have a great deal of intellectual content. These rimes are intended, if I may invoke the duality suggested by Horace, for delight but not for instruction. Yet three year olds do not demand significance in their poetry, and anyone, who sees a child bounced on a grandmother's knee while she recites one of these poems and who hears the child's shrieks of laughter, can easily recognize how effective these rhymes are.

My informants were Mrs. J. John Friesen who lives near Butterfield, Minnesota, and my mother, Mrs. Elisabeth Kliewer, living in Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

I. The first rime is one that is very common and widely known among Low German Mennonites. The version which I learned as a child is as follows:

A. Tjen Entje Mul Entje Nas Pieptje Oagbrontje Tschip tschiep, Hontje.

From Mrs. Friesen I received a variant form:

B. Tjennentje Mulmentje Backblosstje Piepnastje Oagbrontje Tschiep-hontje

In this game the adult would hold the child on this lap and gently pinch the child's chin, his mouth, his nose, (and his cheek in the B variant), and finally is eyebrow. While reciting the final line, the line which the child often waited eagerly, the adult would pull a lock of the child's hair. The child was expected to laugh at this, and he usually did.

II. Three of these rimes were recited while the adult counted the child's fingers. The first of these, a rime which the parent recited rapidly, began with the adult rubbing the child's palm with one finger as if the adult were actually stirring groats.

A. Ream 'rom, dee Jret brennt aun, Rea 'rom, dee Jret brennt aun. Jev disem waut, Jev disem waut, Jev disem waut, Jev disem waut. Disem riet dee Kopp auf enn schmiet 'em wajh.

Again I received a variant from Mrs. Friesen.

B. Rea Jretje Jev dem waut. (Four times) Dem riet dee Kopp auf enn schmiet em wajh.

Beginning with the little finger, the parent would count off by pinching the ends of the child's fingers while reciting the short line which is repeated four times. The thumb was pinched and "thrown away" in pantomime while the last line was recited.

III. Another counting game accompanied this simple rime.

Tjleena Finja Goldringa Langhauls Buttaletja Lustjetnetja.

As the text indicates, the adult began counting with the little fingers and ended with the thumb.

IV. The order of counting was reversed in the next game with its more whimsical, imaginative rime in which the fingers are personified. The counting went from the characterless thumb to the little finger, who was no doubt mistreated because of his size.

Dit's Dumtje; Disa, dee scheddat Plumtje; Disa, dee lasst; Disa, dee aat; Disa, dee hielt: "Mame, etj tjrie nuscht."

V. Some of the games, however, were more vigorous than the relatively sedate counting games. I was able to find two games in which a child was rocked on the adult's lap. The first three lines of the next rime were recited while the child was rocked back and forth three times. During the fourth line the child was tickled in the abdomen. And of course he usually laughed.

Holt soage, Wota droage, Fustje schlappt em Struck. Tjrie daut Haunstje bi de Buck, Buck Buck.

VI. The final text is a little more complex than the rest of these games, for a fragmentary story is part of the rime. Little Helen falls from the manger and is first knocked down by the bull and then helped up by the ram. But in spite of its narrative content, the verse still contains a first line of humorous nonsense syllables.

Hup sup sup sup adetje, Leen fallt vom Vadetje. Tjam dee Boll en schtad aa doll. Tjam dee Bock en holp aa op.

With the child held on his knee, the adult would bounce the child up and down while reciting the first line. Falling from the manger was imitated in the second line when the child was tipped on his back and then straightened up. A fall was again pantomimed with the third line, and on the fourth line the child was pulled up to a sitting position.

Mennonites in Amsterdam

Irwin B. Horst (Reprinted with permission from *Mennonite Life* 7, July 1952, 113-115)

The history of Mennonites in Amsterdam is the 1 history of a large, urban congregation located in Holland's largest and chief city. In spite of its situation it must be said that the church has remained intact for more than four centuries and has always counted its members by the thousands. It is today the largest Mennonite congregation in existence and no doubt always has been so.

"The United Mennonite Congregation of Amsterdam" as the church is called, is located at Singel 452 in a historic part of the city. This church building was erected in 1608 and enlarged in 1632 by the prominent merchant Warendorf, who lived at Singel 454 which is now the janitor's dwelling. At his death he donated the building to the Flemish Mennonite congregation.

This old church was built as a "hidden" church, that is, it was erected between two street fronts at a time when Mennonites were not allowed to publicize their church life. The simple and sober architecture, as we11 as a rectangular floor-plan with the pulpit in the middle of the long side, is a reminder of early Mennonitism.

This original Mennonite meetinghouse of the Flemish Mennonites designated "near the Lamb" because it was located near a brewery which bore the sign of a lamb, has been preserved throughout the centuries and remains today the center of Mennonite life not only in Amsterdam, but for a11 of Ho11and. However, it has not always been so, and there were in the seventeenth century more than a score of Mennonite groups with eleven different, places of meeting. To understand this it is necessary to refer a bit to the earlier history of the Mennonites in Amsterdam.

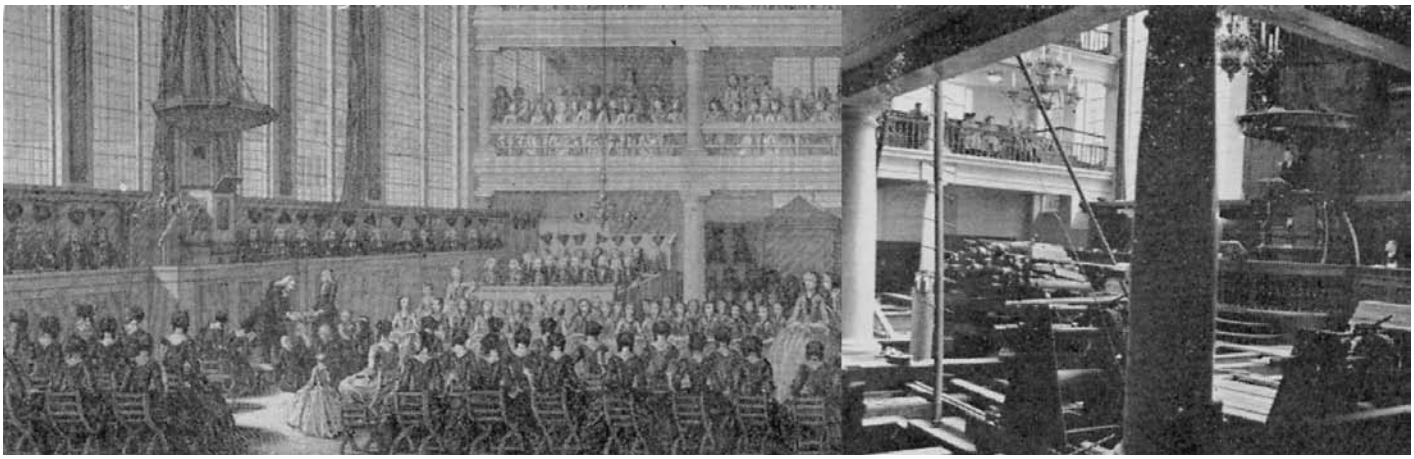
In the sixteenth century Mennonite world many roads led to Amsterdam. The city was becoming a kind of "melting pot" for many kinds of both foreign and native Mennonites. Typical of this immigration was Nicolaes Biestkens, a Mennonite printer from Emden, who moved his press via Harlingen to Amsterdam, or the Vondel family from Antwerp who arrived by way of Cologne and Bremen. Amsterdam received its share of the many refugees from the south who were fleeing from persecution in Brabant and Flanders. Thus the stage was set for Amsterdam, rather than Antwerp or Emden, to become a leading center of Mennonite life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

However, it must not be thought that the congregations in Amsterdam were composed only of a Mennonite dispersion. From the beginning of the Anabaptist movement in thc Netherlands there was a strong indigenous brotherhood in Amsterdam. Jan Trijpmaker, an apostle of Melchior Hoffman, came from Emden in 1530 and was later followed by Hoffman himself. It is known that by 1533 there were already three to five thousand Anabaptists in the city. When Jan van Leyden ca11ed his faithful to Münster in 1534, the authorities stopped twenty-one boats on the Zuiderzee containing three thousand Anabaptists who were mostly from Amsterdam.

The Münster aberration had its effect not only on the Anabaptists in Amsterdam but also on the city authorities, and both revolutionary and peaceful groups were mercilessly persecuted. Jacob van Campen, the leader of the peaceful element, was executed. Hundreds were tortured and put to death in the city. The town square (the Dam) is holy ground for Mennonites, and the most of the city on the west side near the Ij became known as the "martyr's moat" (Martelaarsgracht) because of the many bodies thrown into the water there.

A Memorial of the Singel Mennonite Church, Amsterdam

Interior of the Singelkerk Mennonite meetinghouse in Amsterdam. (Credit: Jan Gleysteen)



Baptism service of the Lamist Mennonite Congregation, Amsterdam on Singel Street during 18th Century.

Against this background of persecution in the first half of the sixteenth century and influx of outside Mennonites in the second half, an entirely different picture presents itself in the seventeenth century. From the standpoint of prosperous church life, economic well-being, and cultural development, this century was certainly the golden age of Mennonitism in Amsterdam as well as in all of The Netherlands. The tolerance of the native Waterland Mennonites was supplemented by the vitality of the Flemish and the stability of the Frisian elements. Out of this combination came strong church leaders such as Hans de Ries, Lubbert Gerritsz, Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan, and others. Economically, many Mennonites were prominent in East India trade and in the Greenland whaling enterprise. Culturally, the period produced Holland's leading literary figure, Joost vanden Vandel, and possibly Rembrandt, the greatest Dutch painter. Aside from Rembrandt, the Amsterdam Mennonites can count among their members the artists Carel van Mander, Govert Flinck and others.

This seventeenth century was one of both external and internal strife for the Amsterdam Mennonites. With their Reformed neighbors there was endless discussion about infant baptism and efforts to remove the suspicion of Socinianism. Striking closer to the faith and church life of the Amsterdam Mennonites were the Quaker and Collegiant movements and to a lesser extent the Moravian Brethren and Pietism in the eighteenth century. But the external dispute was dwarfed by the extensive .and intensive internal division and strife, which split the Mennonites not only in Amsterdam but through out the whole of The Netherlands. At the same time, it must be remembered that the Waterlander congregation of the Tower (Toren) joined the Flemish congregation "near the Lamb" in 1668.

A unifying factor among Mennonites in Amsterdam, as well as the whole Dutch brotherhood, was the relief work in behalf of fellow Mennonites undertaken during the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. The relief agency, known as the Funds for Foreign Needs (Fonder vor Buitenlandsche Noden) helped suffering Mennonites from the Pfalz and Switzerland and was active for more than a century. This was the time Swiss and German Mennonites were migrating to Pennsylvania and they were helped on their way through Holland and across the ocean. A petition was also sent to the Swiss government to relinquish persecution. Flood and famine relief was sent to Mennonites living near Danzig on the delta of the Vistula, as well as help to the suffering Huguenots who were fleeing from France. In these words of charity the Amsterdam congregation took the lead and organized the program and received the support of many congregations of various wings of Mennonites throughout the land.

The Lamist Mennonite congregation's home for orphans.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were periods of decline for Mennonitism in the Lowlands. Many of the congregations declined in membership and the smaller ones could no longer support ministers and church buildings. For many years the stronger congregations in Amsterdam supported weaker congregations financially. Also during this period Amsterdam with the help of a few others took the lead in organizing a Mennonite seminary designed to train ministers for churches all over the land. This seminary, now under the administration of the AIgermene Doopsgezinde Societeit (ADS), continues in this function until the present time.

While this period was a time of decline, several movements of inner strengthening and outreach were undertaken which had their setting in Amsterdam. In 1801 a union of the remaining Mennonite congregations in Amsterdam was affected to form "The United Mennonite Congregation." In 1811 the ADS was created as an instrument of financial and ministerial well-being for the entire brotherhood in Holland. In 1847 the Mennonite Society for Promotion of Gospel Propagation Especiaily in Overseas Possessions was organized at Amsterdam as a missionary outreach to the Dutch East Indies. Mennonite professors at Amsterdam investigated and wrote about the history of the Mennonite movement. Also materials were collected in the archives and library of the congregation. This has resulted in the accumulation of an invaluable source of materials concerning Mennonite history and faith.

Thus, the Amsterdam Mennonite congregation has continued throughout four centuries, through persecution and prosperity, through growth and decline. Today, it is still evident that Singel 452 with its offices, auditorium, library, seminary, and many conference rooms is the center not only of a large city congregation but for the whole of Mennonitism in Holland.

Rembrandt van Rijn 1606-1956

. Van der Zijpp (Reprinted with permission from *Mennonite Life,* 11, October, 1956, 142)

During this year [1956, ed.] throughout the Netherlands, the birth of the great Dutch painter, Rembrandt Hamensz van Rijn, which occurred 350 years ago, is being commemorated. He was born July 15, 1606, at Leiden and died October 4, 1669 at Amsterdam. In commemoration of his birth, large exhibitions of his works of art are found in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. There are some 100 of his oil paintings, 200 of his etchings and approximately 250 of his drawings on display.

Rembrandt is not only the greatest of all Dutch painters, but he was also a true Christian for whom the Bible had a special significance. The exhibitions of his works of art again demonstrate this clearly. Particularly outstanding among his etchings is the Hundred Gulden print made in 1649 in which Rembrandt features the contents of Matthew 19. Around Christ, who stands in the middle of the drawing, are the Lord who pays his slaves, the children who are being blessed, and the rich young ruler, etc. Another of his great etchings is that of the Crucifixion. There are the three crosses at Golgatha. On the left side a group of disciples with Mary, on the right side in the darkness, the unbelievers. Among the pictures we find a number of illustrations of the Holy Family, the Risen Lord, and many of other Biblical accounts. Among the drawings, Biblical subjects are predominant.

And yet, the significant fact is not that Rembrandt used the Biblical accounts in his works of art, but rather the manner in which he used them. There is a great difference between his earlier and later works. In his early works he follows somewhat the Italian Baroque where the Bible subjects are used more or less as subject matter. After 1642 a great change took place. A crisis came into his life. His wife died and the admiring world turned its back on him by turning to painters of less significance. Rembrandt becomes a poor artist. These disappointments deepened his inner life and his art. It is evident that for him there is only one book and the figure of Christ becomes more and more central for him and his work. This is the reason for the miracle that he does not become bitter in his sorrows but that he observes man and features him with a great love and devotion.

Christ and the Disciples of Emmaus (1648). This is one of Rembrandt's numerous portrayals of this subject.

After his apprentice years, Rembrandt, not yet twenty years old, established himself at Leiden as a painter. Six years later in commemoration of a substantial assigment, he moved to Amsterdam and in 1634 married Saskia van Uylenburgh. In 1639 be bought a house in Amsterdam in which he gathered a large collection of art. He was rapidly becoming famous. In 1642 his wife Saskia died, which was a hard blow for him. During the same year he completed the now very famous "Night Watch" which was not very popular. His finances dwindled rapidly. Commissions for paintings decreased and by 1656 his debts had grown to the point that he had to give up his art collection and his own house. Some support and comfort came to him through Hendrickje Stoffels who kept house for him. Together with his son Titus, he opened an art store through which he earned his daily bread. In 1662 Hendrickje died and in 1668, his son Titus followed, one year before his own death.

It has been claimed that Rembrandt was a Mennonite; however he was not a member of a Mennonite church. He did have numerous contacts with Mennonites. He made paintings and etchings of the Mennonite minister of Amsterdam, Cornelis Claesz Anslo, and other Mennonites. He also painted rabbis and Reformed minders. However, *this* much must be said. During the later years of his life, Rembrandt's work reveals piety which was closely related to the Mennonites of his day and environment. This consists of sobriety, inwardness, a turning away from outward things, and a concentration on the essentials which was a part of the Dutch Mennonite piety, especially of the Waterlanders. Also, Rembrandt was spiritually akin to the Mennonites in his deep love for his fellow men as a creation of God.

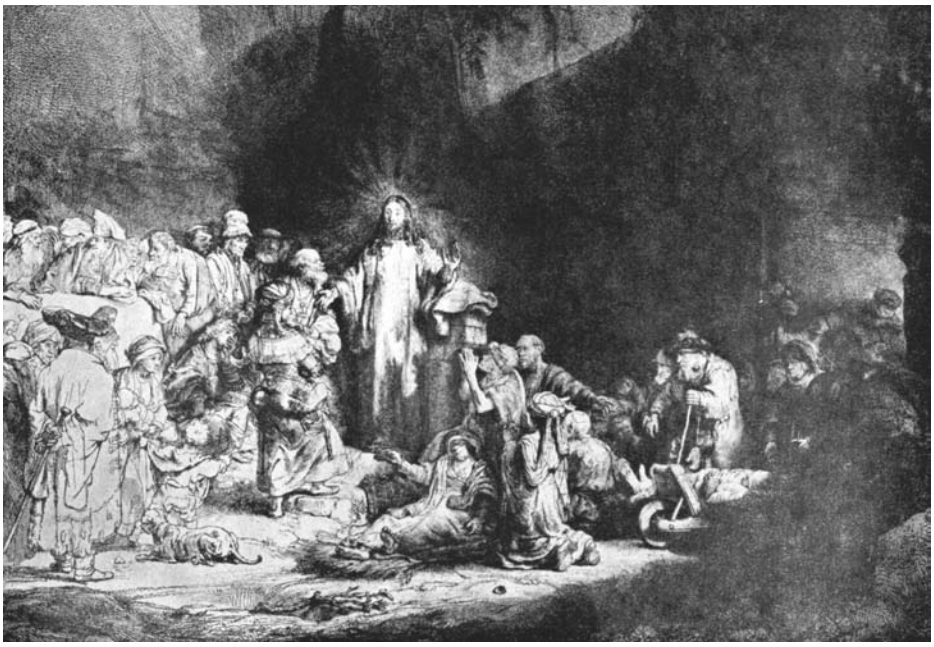
Rembrandt Knew Mennonites

Irvin B. Horst (Reprinted with permission from *Mennonite Life 11,* October 1956, 148-154)

At the mention of the name "Mennonite" the man in the Hundred Gulden Print turned half around. He, the eternal onlooker, thickset under a broad beret, hands to his back and crisscrossed with a cane, was the artist himself. There was no mistaking the genial but troubled look of his middle years. His glance of recognition was but momentary, and what it said I am not sure. There were signs of happiness but an overcast of sorrow. Of this I am certain, he knew the name and it meant a great deal to him. Had I mentioned persons (he never loved people in the abstract) I might have learned more Hendrick Uylenburgh, Cornel is Anslo, Jacob Backer. But his interest passed, and he turned again to the people, lowly and proud, suffering and pharisaical, and the Master among them.

We will be well served by articles on Rembrandt and Mennonites if they lead us on to the greater subject of his art. The 350th anniversary of his birth is again a great opportunity to enter the spiritual intensity with which Rembrandt saw the realities of human existence. Especially to the Christian, Rembrandt is the prince among great artists. Who among the notable painters so richly illuminates both the Old and New Testament? "Anyone who seriously loves Rembrandt will know that God exists and will believe in him," his later countryman, Vincent van Gogh, wrote while still a missionary in the Borniage to his brother Theo at Paris. Rembrandt is thus an evangelist, and to those to whom the insights of the artists are as, or more convincing than, the formulas of the logician he speaks eloquently about Christian faith and human life.

To ask about the influence of Mennonites on Rembrandt is to turn from the disclosed tree to the hidden roots, a worthy task, but one with many dubious results. More than one historian has stated directly that Rembrandt himself was Mennonite. Some art critics have found the Mennonite mystique an answer to the particular religious piety which his work reflects. These conclusions often rest on inconclusive evidence, and spiritual kinships do not submit to exact statement. As distinctive as the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith is, with a special appeal to the nonchurchly person of Rembrandt's character, as Hans-Martin Rotermund has shown at some length. Yet Mennonitism is Christianity of the Protestant type. Visser 't Hooft's rejoinder to Rotermund reveals, among other things, that Mennonitism and the Reformed faith in the Netherlands in the 17th century after all did have some things in common.[2] It has been repeatedly observed, however, that Mennonitism was more closely related to indigenous religious



Jesus Teaches and Heals the Sick (Mall. 19) (The Hundred Gulden Print).

life in the Netherlands. Schmidt-Degener finds Christianity in Rembrandt of a preRenaissance type, an expression which is more universal, as though sectarian divisions never existed.[3]

However, this much we do know about Rembrandt and the Mennonites: he met and knew many of them well. For several years he resided with a Mennonite family; he met them within the close proximity of his easel, one of whom was a prominent minister and leader; he knew some of their aspiring artists and trained them in his own studio. Thus much we can say and with un impugnable evidence. It may be worth our while to bring together these facts in summary fashion in order to see that Rembrandt's contacts were numerous and significant. At the end of this article an attempt will be made to compile a list of all the Mennonite subjects which occur in Rembrandt's art. The list here is doubtless incomplete, and we shall be delighted to have additional items pointed out. [4]

The closest relationship Rembrandt had with Mennonites occurred during his early years in Amsterdam as an artist, about 1631 to 1635, from the twenty-fifth to the twenty-ninth year of his life. During this period he lived with the Hendrick Uylenburgh family in the Jodenbreestraat where he himself later bought a house. Uylenburgh was an art merchant and had bought some pictures from the young Rembrandt while he still lived in Leiden and was his "agent" during the time the artist was establishing a reputation. Also, while living with the Uylenburghs, Rembrandt married Saskia van Uylenburgh, a close relative of his host but a member of the Reformed Church. They were married June 22, 1634, and the first year of their wedded life was spent under the Uylenburgh roof.

The point of special interest here is that Hendrick Uylenburgh was a Mennonite of the Waterlander persuasion. He came originally from Friesland but had lived at Danzig and Krakow where he became a member of the church. In Amsterdam as a merchant he maintained his affiliation with the Waterlanders and his family followed in his footsteps. Thus Rembrandt had an intimate connection with a devout Mennonite family during an early stage of his career. If one recalls how closely Mennonite family life was guarded, even among the more liberal Waterlanders, one asks on what arrangement Rembrandt was accepted in the household for a four-year period.[5]

The first Mennonite subject to be portrayed by Rembrandt were doubtless members of the Uylenburgh family. Pretty good evidence exists to show that the portrait painting done in 1632, sometimes thought to be Lysbeth van Rijn, Rembrandt's sister, is really Maria van Eyck, the wife of Hendrick Uylenburgh.[6] Much better known are Rembrandt's portraits of the Dutch Mennonite minister, Cornelis Claesz Anslo. We have two drawings, as well as two different etchings of this Waterlander preacher, along with the well-known painting of him in his study conversing with a widow. All of these pictures date from 1640-41, when Rembrandt was at the height of his popularity. Anslo, 1592-1646, was known in Amsterdam as "a very earnest, pious, upright, and intelligent preacher." He must have frequently visited the Uylenburgh home, since he was the leading Waterlander minister in the town. Rembrandt's interpretation is sympathetic, which may indicate that he was favorably disposed toward the minister.

Another Mennonite subject of special interest is that of the Dutch calligrapher and schoolteacher, Lieven Willemsz van Coppenol. We have a drawing of "Master Coppenol" and

Lysbeth van Rijn, now claimed to be Maria van Eyck, wife of Hendrick Uylenburgh, in whose home Rembrandt lived. Photo credit: Adolph D. & Wilkins C. Williams Collection, of Fine Arts.

BerlinCornelis Claesz Anslo. Detail from Cornelis Claesz Anslo and Wife. Photo credit: Kaiser Friedrich Museum.

One of Rembrandt's etchings of Cornelis Claesz Anslo.

Wife of Cornelis Claesz Anslo. Detail from Cornelis Claesz Anslo and Wife. Photo credit: Franz Stoedtner.

two distinct etchings and a painting. These were done during the 1650's, a very difficult period in Rembrandt's life, which may indicate that Coppenol remained a loyal friend of his. The painting was executed in 1658, the year Rembrandt was declared bankrupt and his house and belongings sold at public auction. Coppenol himself had some difficult experiences. A year after the death of Rembrandt's Saskia in 1642, Coppenol's wife also died; later he became mentally deranged. His profession, that of schoolteaching, brought him into strange relationship for a Mennonite and his connections with the church were at times strained. In 1644 he married again, this time a sister of Catrina Hoogsaet (Hooghsaet), a Mennonite lady who Rembrandt painted in 1657. "Trijn

Formerly believed to be Hans Alenson, Mennonite minister and writer. It is now established that it is a portrait of John Ellison, Norwich, England. Photo credit: Penryhn Castle, England.

Lieven Willemsz van Coppenol, a Mennonite friend of Rembrandt. (Painting). Photo credit: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel.

Jans," as she was known, was married to Hendrick Jacobsz Rooleeuw, a brother of Lambert Jacobsz, Mennonite minister and artist of some note at Leeuwarden.

Among other known Mennonite subjects in Rembrandt's work is the painting done in 1652 of Nicolaas Bruyningh, a member of a prominent Mennonite family in Amsterdam. The Ermitage at Leningrad possesses a portrait painting of Jeremias de Decker, a Dutch poet of considerable accomplishment, who was a member of the Waterland Mennonite church in Amsterdam.

When we consider Rembrandt's pupils we find more evidence of close friendship with Mennonites. Two of the most outstanding of his pupils, Govert Flinck and Jacob Adriaensz Backer, were Mennonites and closely attached to Rembrandt, especially Flinck. Both of these artists had been pupils of Lambert Jacobsz, thc Mcnnonite minister at Leeuwarden, before coming to Amsterdam during 1633-34. Flinck came close to the spirit of his master and was noted for his painting of Bible subjects. Backer,

Catrina Hoogsaet (Hooghsaet). She and her husband were friends of Rembrandt. Photo credit: Penryhn Castle, England

Drawing called "Groote" Coppenol.

the son of Flemish emigres who settled at Harlingen in Friesland, also did many Biblical subjects. His "Erection of the Cross" is considered a great painting. [7]

Among the pupils of Rembrandt we also find two sets of brothers who were from Dutch Mennonite families. Jan and Samuel van Hoogstraten were painters of some note, and the latter particularly, an artist at Dordrecht, followed closely the style of his master. The brothers Jacob and Philips Koning likewise came from a Mennonite family and early in Rembrandt's career took lessons from him. Philips was the better known painter of the two and became a friend of Rembrandt's.

The number and nature of Rembrandt's contacts with Mennonites, as outlined above, indicate that the relationship was more than casual. Rembrandt welcomed such meetings, was favorably inclined toward Mennonites at least as persons, and in a few instances developed friendships in their circles. How much they influenced him we can only surmise. Possibly

Etching called "Kleine" Coppenol.

the most significant influence, affecting the subject matter and spirit of his work, came in the Hendrick Uylenburgh household. Rembrandt's devotion to the Bible was certainly nurtured and cultivated in this atmosphere. Further than this we may not go, a least if we are to stay within the limits of trustworthy information. That Rembrandt was a Mennonite is a tradition that indeed cannot be entirely ignored. In an Italian book by Francesco Baldinucci, published in 1686 (Rembrandt died in 1669) at Venice, a statement exists to the effect that Rembrandt considered himself a Mennonite.[8] Baldinucci had this report from Bernhard Keihl, a former pupil of Rembrandt's who later lived and worked in Rome. While this statement cannot be overlooked, there is lack of corroborative evidence from any other source. Also, Baldinucci's account of Rembrandt in general contains so many inaccurate details that one is inclined to question its reliability. It is enough to believe that Rembrandt knew Mennonites well and that his life and work were touched by their influence.

1. Hans-Martin Rotermund, "Rembrandt und die religiosen Laien bewegungen in den Niederlanden seiner Zeit, "Nederlandsch Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek, 1952/1953, pp. 104-192.
2. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, Rembrandts If/' eg zum Evangelium (Zurich, 1955), particularly Chapter VII, "Rembrandt und die Kirche."
3. F. Schmidt-Degener, "Rembrandt's Tegenstrijdigheden," in the Rembrandt T enstoonstelling Catalogus for the exhibition atthe Rijksmuseum, 13 July to 13 October, 1935, p. 27.
4. No doubt further Mennonite items will come to light in The Drawings of Rembrandt by Otto Benesch when the complete edition in six volumes appears.
5. H. F. Wijnman, "Rembrandt en Hendrik Uylenburgh te Amsterdam, "Amstelodamum, June, 1956.
6. Ibid. Also in the Rembrandt T elltoonstelling Catalogus for the exhibition of Rembrandt paintings at the Rijksmuseum, 18 May to 5 August, 1956, pp. 32-33.
7. Kurt Bauch, Jakob Adriaensz Backer, ein Rembrandtschuler aus Friesland (Berlin, 1926).
8. For a full text of the statement see Rotermund, op. cit., pp. 125-27

The Apostle Paul in prison.

List of Mennonite Subjects in Rembrandt's Art

Drawings

1. Portrait of Cornelis Claesz Anslo (preparatory drawing in reverse for the etching of 1641), 1640, Benesch 902, at the British Museum, London.

2. Figure of Cornelis Claesz Anslo (study for painting, 14. Portrait of Jeremias de Dekker, 1666, Bredius 320, of 1641), 1640, Benesch 903, at the Louvre, Paris. In the Ermitage at Leningrad, U.S.S.R.

3. Lieven Willemsz van Coopenol at his writing table, c. 1646, Benesch 908, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary.

4. View over the ramparts near the Heilige Wegspoort, Amsterdam (the blunt gable to the left of the Poort is that of the Mennonite Church of "The Lamb"). c. 1640-41, Benesch 952.

5. (Doubtful) Elderly man in a wide-brimmed hat. (Hofstede de Groot said this drawing was known as "the poet Vondel in front of his house." Benesch says, "The person represented shows some resemblance to Anslo and wears a collar distinctive of a Mennonite minister." c. 1640. Benesch 904, at Berlin in the Kupferstichkabinett.

Etchings

6. Portrait of Cornelis Claesz Anslo, 1641.

7. Cornelis Claesz Anslo in study with widow (or wife), 1641.

8. Portrait of Lieven Willemsz van Coppenol, (known as the "de Kleine Coppenol"). c. 1653.

9. Portrait of Lieven Willemsz van Coppenol, (known as the "de groote Coppenol"). c. 1658.

Paintings

10. Cornelis Claesz Anslo in study with Bredius 409, at the Kaiser Friedrich, Museum at Berlin.

11. Portrait of Lieven Willemsz van Coppenol, 1658, Bredius 291, in the Edward S. Harkness Collection at New York City.

12. Figure of Nicolaas Bruyningh, 1652, Bredius 268, in the Gemaldegalerie at Kassel, Germany.

13. Portrait of Catrina Hoogsaet (Hooghsaet), (wife of Hendrick Jacobsz Rooleeuf), 1657, Bredius 391 at Penryhn Castle in England.

15. (Doubtful) Portrait of Maria van Eyck (wife of Hendrick Uylenburgh), 1632, Bredius 85, in the Nationalmuseum at Stockholm, Sweden. (Note: If it can be established that this figure is Maria van Eyck, rather than Rembrandt's sister, then at least a score of items may be added to this list. See for example the eight paintings in Bredius, 83 to 91. There are also many extant drawings of this figure.)

16. (Doubtful) Portrait of Lieven Willemsz van Coppenol, c. 1632, Bredius 164, in the Gemaldegalerie at Kassel, Germany.

17. (Doubtful) An Elderly Man in an Armchair in W. A. Clark Collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. James D. Breckinridge in Handbook of Dutch and Flemish Paintings in tbe William Andrews Clark Collection (1955) states: 'This magisterial portrait, whose subject was probably a member of the Mennonite sect, seems to have been a companion picture to the Old Woman in an Armchair, No. 38 in the Altman Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art." Schmidt-Degener, "Portretten door Rembrandt, II: Mennisten," Oud-Holland XXV, 1914, pp. 1-7 identifies costume as that of a Mennonite; dates ca. 1640

18. (Doubtful) Hans Alenson and wife (two paintings). Hofstede de Groot, Valentiner, Alfred Rosenberg and others claimed that these paintings represented Hans Alenson and his wife. Alenson was a well known Dutch Mennonite leader and writer. More recently it has been proven that the paintings represent the Rev. and Mrs. John Ellison of Norwich, England. The paintings were formerly at Henri Schneider, Paris, and are now in the Penryhn Collection in England.

Additional Reading on Rembrandt

For additional information regarding Rembrandt and the Mennonites see the January 1952 issue of *Mennonite Life* which contains an article by H. M. Rotermund "Rembrandt and the Mennonites" and Cornelius Krahn "Rembrandt, the Bible and the Mennonites." Significant books on this subject are Jacob Rosenberg "*Rembrandt*, II V ols. Harvard UnielJfsity Press, 1948; H. M. Rotermund "*Rembrandt und die Religiosen Laienbewegungen in denNiederlanden seiner Zeit,*" Nederlandsch Kundst historisch Jaarboek.

Rembrandt's mother.

Some Rembrandts In America

John F. Schmidt (Reprinted with permission from *Mennonite Life 11,* 1956, 155-159)

Boston The Artist in His Studio. Photo credit: Museum of Fine Arts.

Nothing short of amazing is the continued and increasing popularity of a Dutch artist born three hundred and fifty years ago. Among the treasures of the creative genius of man his paintings, drawings, and etchings are prized the world over. Scores of Rembrandt's works have found their way to America where in museums and art collections they continue to inspire the multitudes who visit these centers of art. As one handbook puts it, "Probably no other artist in history has won such wide and enduring popularity."

The Rembrandt collections in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City and in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C., are outstanding in their scope and variety of Rembrandts. Apart from these major coflections, however, almost every large museum prides itself on showing at least one, if not several, works of the master. Because Rembrandt van Rijn, according to Horace Shipp in The Dutch Masters, " . . . stands among the supreme half-dozen artists of the world," such collectors as Andrew W. Mellon, Henry Clay Frick, Joseph E. Widener, J. P. Morgan and others of similar means and persistence have spent vast fortunes to bring Rembrandt to America.

Among the subjects Rembrandt treated, religious subjects take first place, followed no doubt by portraits. While less in quantity, his landscapes are no less remarkable in revealing the artist's deep understanding of his subject

A Girl with a Broom. Photo credit: Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

and his consummate artistry. His religious subjects are not as numerous in American galleries as his production of such paintings would indicate that they should be. Happily they are present in the larger collections.

A few representative Rembrandts are presented to readers of *Mennonite Life* from the collections in American museums.

Among the portraits by Rembrandt the most fascinating and revealing are his self-portraits, ranging from the time of his youth, when he was a successful and even fashionable master, to his lonely old age when his face reflected the tragedy of bankruptcy and the unbroken will of a great man. From the Mellon collection in the National Gallery of Art we present a self-portrait from the time of his last years. Of all Rembrandts in the National Gallery of Art, this was singled out by David E. Finley, curator, as the most significant. He says of this painting:

Here Rembrandt seems to reveal his whole complex personality. He makes us conscious of his strength, his weakness, his tragedies as an individual, his triumphs as an artist. Most of all, he impresses us with his deep understanding of

Portrait of Youth in Black Cap. Photo credit:William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art. Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, Kansas City.

human nature and his unshakable faith in the essential nobility of man.

Much has been said by art critics of Rembrandt's profound psychological penetration of his subjects. E. H. Gombrich in *The Story of Art* has this to say:

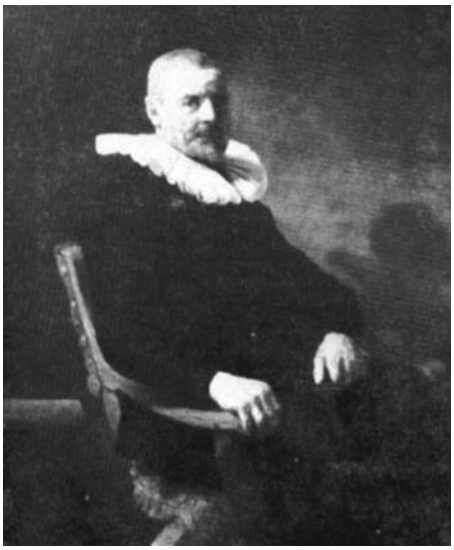
"Other portraits by great masters may look alive, they may even reveal the character of their sitter through a characteristic expression or a striking attitude. . . But in Rembrandt's portraits we feel face to face with real human beings with all their tragic failings and all their sufferings. His keen and steady eyes seem to look straight into the human heart."

Rembrandt's close association with Mennonites and his appreciation of simple Mennonite piety as revealed in his Biblical paintings, has intrigued Mennonite scholars. In the W. A. Clark collection in the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C, we find the painting, "An Elderly Man in an Armchair," of which the handbook notes that he "was probably a

The Mill. Photo credit: Widener Collection. National Gallery of Art. Washington. D. C.

The Deposition of Christ. Photo credot: John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida,

The Apostle Paul. Photo credit: Widener Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.



An Elderly Man in an Armchair. Photo credit: W. A. Ciark Collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Portrait of Saskia van Uylenburch. Photo credit: Adolph D. & Wilkins C. Williams Collection, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Portrait of Himself. Photo credit: The Frick Collection, New York

Mennonite." This may have been a companion picture to the "Old Woman in an Armchair" in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The large two-volume Rembrandt Bible, a copy of which may be seen in the Bethel College Historical Library, with its wealth of paintings, drawings, and sketches, shows the extent to which Rembrandt used Biblical materials, at first no doubt because of their intrinsic dramatic quality but certainly also in his latter years as a means of expressing his religious faith. To quote Theodore Rousseau, Jr., Curator of Paintings, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Rembrandt knew well the moving, familiar stories of the Old and New Testaments and was attracted by the opportunity they gave him to paint human beings under the stress of deep emotions."

"The Deposition of Christ" from the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and "The Apostle Paul" from the Widener Collection in the National Gallery are good examples of his portrayal of religious subjects,

Even in his presentation of nature Rembrandt sought to go beyond the obvious and the material and interpret the spiritual aspect of a scene. In the Widener collection at the National Gallery we see an outstanding example of his rather rare landscapes, "The Mill." Of it Horace Shipp says in *The Dutch Masters:*

Once in the country he saw a mill silhouetted against the evening sky. He painted it-an asset for the "company" which owned him. In 1911 it was sold for one hundred thousand pounds, the highest price any picture had commanded up to that date. It reveals Rembrandt approaching nature in that same mood of search for the infinite which underlies almost all his work: the subject pictures, the scriptural ones, the portraiture even. The immensity of earth and sky in such a picture. . . is a physical counterpart of that immensity of spiritual experience of 'The Three Crosses' . . . .

Charles H. Caffin in *How to Study Pictures* makes the claim that Rembrandt is recognized as the Prince of Etchers. Included in his prints are landscapes, portraits, Biblical subjects and studies of beggars. Since Rembrandt was devoted to truth and sincerity, he presented people as they were. This art method lent itself particularly well for the presentation of Biblical subjects, as with a few effective lines he was able to suggest motives and reveal emotions. Among his great portrait etchings is that of Cornelis Claesz. Anslo, the Mennonite minister. Originals of this etching are found in the Art Institute of Chicago, the Fogg Museum of Art in Cambridge and the Mennonite Art Collection in the Bethel College Historical Library. In the same year that Rembrandt executed the etching of Anslo he also painted the well known portrait of Anslo and his wife. (*Mennonite Life*, January, 1952).

Such great etchings as "Christ Healing the Sick" known as the Hundred Gulden Print, and "Jews in a Synagogue" may be seen in the Metropolitan Museum, while "Beggars Receiving Alms" is in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Fortunately, original paintings, drawings, and etchings by Rembrandt are sufficiently numerous in America that all who wish may increase their appreciation for the great master by visiting museums in their particular area. The literature on Rembrandt is also extensive, much of it designed for the amateur in the realm of art appreciation. Mennonites need not deny themselves an acquaintance with this great artist of the human spirit.

One writer estimates that of Rembrandt's total output, we still possess more than six hundred paintings, well over two hundred etchings, and not far short of two thousand drawings. (Tancred Borenius in Rembrandt, Selected Paintings, New York and London, (Phaidon Publishers, Inc., 1952).

Besides the art galleries represented in the paintings shown on these pages, prints of Rembrandt paintings have been received from the John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia, The Art Institute of Chicago, The Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Portrait of a Bearded Old Man. Photo credit: Adolph D. & Wilkins C. Williams Collection, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Self-Portrait. Photo credit: Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Aeltester Johann Loeppky

Journal On A Trip To Mexico - 1921

This journal was written by Johann Loeppky, *Aeltester* of the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan, north of Saskatoon, on his trip to Mexico, in which he investigated settlement possibilities for his church. (editor)

January 19, 1921

Administrator Benjamin Goertzen and I went on a trip to Mexico. Yes, while times are changing so also has come the time of not having freedom in our own schools. So we have agreed, three congregations, one from Manitoba, one from Swift Current (southern Saskatchewan), and we from the old west, to search for land where we can again have our freedom of schools and such. The three congregations pushed for a single congregation immigration because of the lack of school freedom. All we have seen and heard makes us fear for our beloved young people, who are now very wild, unruly, unrestrained and unbridled in their way of life, who also don't honour their parents or the church. They don't want to listen, but live free and are impudent in this world.

Therefore, the above three congregations have often had brotherhood meetings to discuss what can or could be done. Many trips have been made to the Government to ask them to give us, through grace, the freedoms which were offered to our forefathers in 1873 before they immigrated from Russia and which were offered them in Canada again. Could we again have these freedoms in our churches and schools? Their answer was, "You can have your freedom of the church, but the schools were the responsibility of each provincial government itself, and the provinces have rules of their own against which the Dominion Government does not interfere." When we spoke to the provincial government they told us because of all the nationalities, they had to put English into the schools.

So up until now we three congregations have not been able to teach our way, because the school rules are compulsory. All children from 7 to 15 are to attend public school for ten months of the year. However, they offered us if we would teach some English in our German school, even if only one hour a day, they would let us have our old ways. Yet, we feared this compromise. We gathered many times, had meetings and decided to immigrate to a different country, as we could no longer have our way of teaching with God's word. (Read Mark 10:23)

As mentioned before, many travels and trips were made, to search for freedom of schools, etc. They travelled to South America and the west side of Mexico, but always returned with unsatisfactory results. Mexico, however, did not leave us hopeless and so we didn't give up on this possibility. Again and again meetings

Ältester Johann Loeppky and his wife. Johann Loeppky was instrumental in reorganizing the Old Colony Church in Canada after the migrations to Mexico in the 19320s. Preservings, June 2000.

were held, with considerations, prayers and begging for guidance, and then again we started on our huge project. The administrator Mr. B. Goertzen and I from the old west, David Rempel from Swift Current, and Minister Julius Loewen, Uncle Klaas Heide, and Cornelius Rempel from Manitoba, finally all agreed to go to Mexico, in hopes of getting our freedoms. However, it was not a simple task or trip we were undertaking, such as going sight seeing from one place to another. I, especially, feel inexperienced and humbled to go and appear before the government and ask for freedom for our way of life. We hoped and prayed that God would be with us on our trip on this serious task to help us conquer all our fears and trials. On January 19, 1921 we left Osler, in hopes of returning, and praying that God would be with us on our journey. My wife and I prayed together and asked our daughters to pray also on the morning of our departure. I also prayed in weakness to ask forgiveness of all my sins through his grace, also praying for a safe return to my family and congregation.

When all our tears that we shed for thee, but by thee are written in heaven, that I through grace can reach where all yours are, who have come through great troubles.

Who have washed their clothes and have made their clothes bright in the blood of the Lamb, O Lord, may I now and forever pray, erase through Jesus' blood, and through grace fare good with me.

In this world I can earn nothing, even if I have made a trip. I am still only dust and ashes, yes, a sinful person. Through the promise of thy dear Son, namely, that nobody shall be lost but rather gathered by him, I dare to pray: Lord through grace, go not with me in judgement and cast me not from thee, then my emotions of fear will break.

As has been mentioned before, we left January 19th from Osler for Saskatoon. As our tickets had been bought from here to go to Winnipeg, we left at 12:12 pm, via C.P.R. with good weather and health for both families. The long train started slowly and we sat quietly, sad, among all these strange people. In our passenger car all was quiet and peaceful, in hopes that we would again return to the town of our departure. The train gained speed as we went past one town after another. The next morning on January 20th at 7:00 a.m. we arrived in Winnipeg.

We found accommodations to stay until our groups from Manitoba and Swift Current would arrive. There were no arrivals from Swift Current on the next train although telegram arrangements had been made prior to leaving. We went back to our hotel to wait for the Gretna, Manitoba train. In the meantime, our deacon became ill with pains in his leg, an injury from back home. Mr. Goertzen's condition grew worse. He was unable to walk around town, spending most of his time in bed. In this position, I thought to myself, I can't stay in this town any longer.

When the train from Manitoba was supposed to arrive, I went alone to meet my group. At home I had sent word with Minister Peter Harms (who was then visiting out west), to my brother Minister Isaac Dyck, that I would very much like to see him before we left for Mexico. Yes, when the train came, my brother Isaac Dyck and deacon Isbrand Friesen (from the Manitoba colony) were there to see if we had really come. How glad I was to see these two men, amongst all these strange people. We embraced dearly, and shook hands.

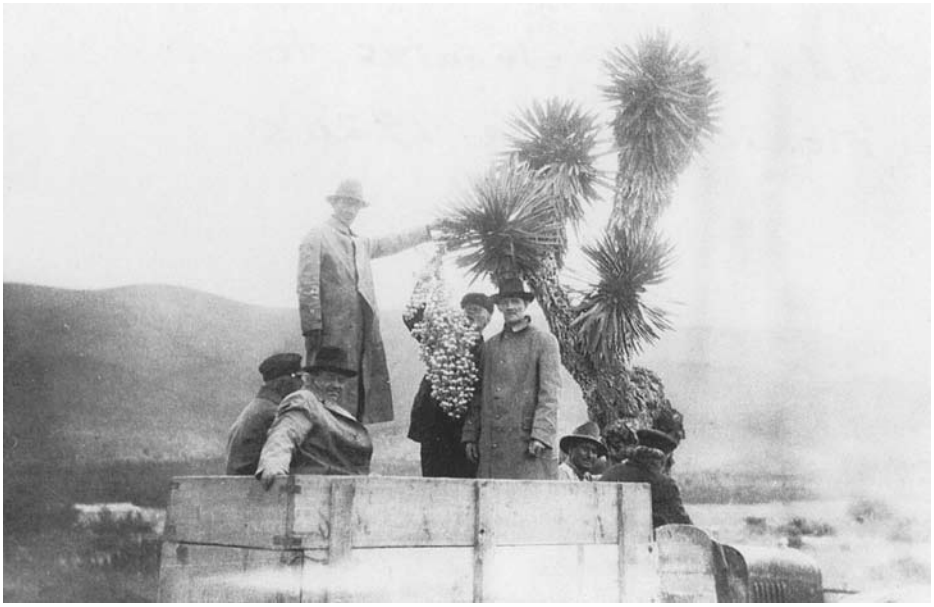
I thanked them heartily for coming, and asked whether their delegates had not received the earlier mentioned telegraph of our arrival

in Winnipeg. They said that they had their gathering on Thursday in Reinland and had not received any word. They came because of the message I had sent with Minister Peter Harms to my brother Isaac Dyck. They wanted to take us with them to their colony. I told them of the sick deacon, Mr. Goertzen, who was still in the hotel room. In telling of his sickness, time passed quickly, and we agreed to go with these two men to their colony. The deacon was a little better on Thursday morning, after a somewhat better night, so we left Winnipeg for the colony in the morning.

On Friday we again went to Winnipeg and continued our trip with a few more people from Swift Current. A widow, by the name of Mrs. Abram Kornelson (*Waiseman*), told us of many experiences in her life time. She was sick with cancer and was on her way to see a doctor in Rochester, but had just brought her family to stay with relatives in the colony. This sick widow told us of many hardships she had endured, of her suffering, and how she had earnestly prayed to God to embrace her, and through grace help her. It was a great help, on our important journey, to remember how much she had endured, and she gave us faith and hope. Many tears were shed by her in a short time on the train.

God is a precious friend who so gladly wants tears, at least those that come from a true believer, from one who hungers and longs for his Grace. Hopefully he will enter her name in the everlasting testament, and for all her sorrows and suffering through grace be rewarded. In the scriptures, flowing tears are like sheaves. Tears show that a person's heart has softened, and that the Lord plans to enter into one's heart, and does so in a person following the holy trail by his Son. In this manner is a person born again through the holy seed, and one becomes a much better person after enduring sadness and hardships. Yes, my beloved, after repentance, then everything is important. One is spiritually risen from the dead and works to serve the living God. As Jesus said "the words I speak are Spirit and Life."

When we arrived in the colony, we went to uncle Isbrand Friesen's for dinner and then on to Gnadental to see my brother Abe Dyck, who took us to my home place where I was born on January 29, 1882. We arrived at my parent's place towards evening and I stayed the night and had a long talk. The next day my relatives came to see me and with tears in their eyes wished me God's blessing and God's help to bring me back safely. Many a song we sang together. When one can once again enter into one's parent's home, to see where one's cradle once stood, to be with parents and relatives, one becomes childish. Your heart softens; there's so much love and honour, then one gets the feeling to say, "Lord, I am not worthy for all the trust and faith you have bestowed on me, a humble servant." Oh, if only I could one day be saved when I die, also likewise for my parents and relatives, that we may meet someday in that heavenly home, and singing of the righteousness, who have come through great toils and who have washed their clothes brightly in the blood of the Lord. Oh, what joy that would be, but my beloved, I am still too much a sinful person. Oh Lord, I must say, let grace go before righteousness, because I have no power in me to overcome, as I am only a reed swaying in the wind. By grace, weak as I am, help me, through thy great mercy.



Old Colony delegates to Mexico in the 1920s. Photo credit: Leonard Doell.

The next day was Sunday, and we went to church, to the old prayer house in Reinland, where a huge congregation had gathered to hear us. I had chosen for my text Rev. 2: 1-5. When I think back to that time, how many brothers wished me God's nearness, and closeness on such a trying trip, I must say, may God bless you and I hope he has heard your earnest prayers. Often the words of David in Psalm 133 have entered my mind, "how nice and loving it is when brothers live and work together." Yes, the brother love has kept us together. From church, I went along with my brother-in-law, Abram Friesen to Schoenwiese for dinner, and visited my sister who heartily welcomed me. After visiting there, I went to Minister Jacob Loewen from Blumengard to see Klaas Heide. My brother Isaac Dyck also came in the afternoon, and the time went by fast. Our Deacon came over in the evening, having visited his in-laws in the village. I soon saw that he wasn't feeling better, walking with a limp as he came into the room, and so we first talked of his illness and then discussed other subjects. Mr. Goertzen was quiet, didn't talk much, was very patient, but helpful with advice. *Aeltester* Johan Friesen came over also, and gave us many comforting words for our trip. He gave me God's blessing and bade me farewell. He was in full hope that we would not come back unfruitful. Brother Isaac Dyck and I stayed night at the Heide's and this was the first time in our lives that my brother and I stayed together and we talked a long time. Our hearts were both so bound together, just like David and Jonathan's. The night wasn't long and morning soon came with limited time left.

It was Monday morning and we prepared to continue on our trip. Time passed quickly, and soon it was time to say farewell to my brother. Mrs. Heide prepared a meal to take with us. After breakfast, our transportation of horse and buggy, waited for us, as their son was supposed to take us to Gretna. In hopes of meeting again, our last goodbyes were said. The Lord will make it possible, since this is all done for the foundation of our faith. We left Heide's at 11 a.m., and after about two miles, we found out that Uncle Klaas Heide had left his passport at home, so we turned around and went back quickly, got the passport and soon we were on our way again. It wasn't long before we arrived in Gretna, and boarded the train, which was supposed to take us to Winnipeg. In Rosenfeld, Uncle David Rempel, who was from Swift current, boarded. He had also been in the colony visiting his in-laws in Rosenfeld, that is, if I'm not mistaken. So we were now all together, heading for the big city of Winnipeg. In Winnipeg, we met Uncle Johan Wiebe from Herbert, Sask, who welcomed us heartily and wanted to give us a helping hand on our long journey. Once in Winnipeg we quickly went to apply for our passports. It was soon night time and so we found a place to rest.

Tuesday morning came and we had to return to pick up our passports. At the American Consul, things were not easy, but finally after being deeply questioned our papers were ready.

On January 25, at 4:45 p.m., we left Winnipeg, arriving the morning of the 26th at 8:30 a.m. in St. Paul, Minnesota. Two train officers met us, who must have received word from Uncle Johan Wiebe that he would be travelling with us. The two took us to their huge office where we could stay until the train left for Kansas City. Here in St. Paul our dear Deacon became concerned about his leg, which was not getting any better. He talked about

Old Colony delegates to Mexico in the 1920s. Photo credit: Leonard Doell.

returning home, which gave me some concern, because I didn't want to be the only one from our congregation. The trip was too important. We encouraged him to travel one more day to Kansas City, with the hopes that he would feel better then. Uncle Johan Wiebe bought a cane for him and he agreed to continue travelling. We left the next day at 2:55 p.m.

On the train, Uncle Heide was greatly concerned about Mr. Goertzen's leg. He doctored it by massaging it, and washed it with medicine. When I think of these men, with their fatherly concern they helped out so Mr. Goertzen could stay with us. They showed their love as best they could, but where was our returned love? We travelled all night and arrived in Kansas City, Kansas at 7:00 a.m. Our Deacon felt much better, having slept somewhat. His leg didn't hurt as much now. We were all in better spirits and we again felt our prayers were answered. Praise the Lord and forget not all the good He has done for thee. He who forgives all our sins, heals all our wounds, both in the flesh and in the soul. He has saved our lives through redemption and through Grace he has given us health, Psalm 103. The Deacon really enjoyed his breakfast with us the next morning.

We left again on the train at 9:25 a.m. Slowly the train started, travelling south west. We were now far from home, and our thoughts were often with our loved ones we had left behind. Our trip continued, closer and closer to Mexico. We travelled all day, without many stops, and arrived at the border city, El Paso, Texas, on January 29 at 1:05 p.m. I was amazed to see such a big city so far south. I had also been amazed at the huge mountains we had seen in Texas. The earth was very red and nothing grew but cactus. It was strange for us from the cold north to see the warm south. The cattle were so thin and wandered among the cactus. The weather was beautiful and then we met with snow. It got colder; we even saw snow fences. We were higher than sea level, but before we reached El Paso, the snow was all gone and it was warm again.

Arriving in El Paso, we looked for quarters to stay in so we could rest after our long trip. Evening came shortly, and our thoughts again wandered over hills and mountains, as though on the wings of an eagle, to our beloved ones at home, including our dear congregation. In fellowship we all sang, prayed and praised Him who had so graciously helped us thus far. To him be honour and praise from now until eternity. When we went to bed the deacon was feeling much better.

It was 5 degrees fahrenheit on the morning of January 29th. After we went for breakfast, we wanted to get our passports stamped. Arriving at the Mexican Consul, we saw a long line of people. We didn't know what to do, because we could not enter the Consul. If we stayed we would have to join the line, instead we agreed to go back to our quarters. Once there, we talked about many things, including the papers we had brought with us to present to the Mexican Government. It was agreed to send a copy of our requested privileges from El Paso to Mexico City, so that they could there read and approve our requests, as we wanted to travel on to the west coast of Mexico to look at land. Uncle Johan Wiebe studied the papers to make sure there were no mistakes. His English was better than his German. Some papers had been written in English at home. Mr. Wiebe said that some wording was not properly translated and the meaning was different from what was intended. He thought it would be wiser to hand them our papers in English so they could translate them into Spanish. We had copies made, and sent one to the Mexican Government.

When we were almost finished with our papers, the Deacon, Mr. Wiebe, and myself, saw Mr. Rempel and the others coming for us. They had been looking for us, because the line-up was gone and now it was time to go to the Consul. It was only a short while, and we were finished. Our plans were to leave today, but Mr. Wiebe had sent a telegram to Mexico City, to a man named Arthur J. Bronof. Mr. Bronof sent another man named Daniel Solis Lopez, to give us free tickets or make arrangements for the same at the border. Mr. Lopez arrived, greeted us heartily, and was ready to take us to Mexico City. Back home, however, we had planned to go to see the land named Culiacan, on Mexico's west coast. By now it was evening, so we all went to bed.

January 31, 1921 at 1 p.m. the train was supposed to leave for Tuscon, Arizona. It was a very long day. We went into the park, and saw many animals we had never seen before, at least not by my inexperienced eyes. We also saw a huge camp of soldiers on the border. We asked whether the Mexicans were such a dangerous group of people. We were told "no, but the United States fears Japan will invade through Mexico". That evening, ready for departure, we were told the train was over crowded and it would be best to wait until the next morning. More patience. To us it seemed like a long wait, but on such a long trip you encounter many things, and so once again we went to bed.

February 1, 1921

Today at 1:20 p.m. we again boarded the train. We travelled all day and through God's help arrived in Tucson at 6:00 p.m. The summer weather was beautiful. We have now travelled some 312 miles on this trip, through many different kinds of land, hills and valleys, and seen many cactus. Once again a place to sleep and rest was sought.

February 2, 1921

Today, we went with two automobiles to a border city named Nogales. Mr. Enlaf, a land agent, met us in Tucson, and wanted to trade or sell us land in Culiacan. He gave us free tickets on the Southern P.C. Railroad. This railroad goes through Mexico to Rinz where we planned to go later. On our trip to Nogales we saw modern irrigation, and huge fields of rubber plants, which I had never seen before. We saw some Mennonite farmers, but spoke to none. Arriving in Nogales we went through customs again to get our passports stamped. It was time again to go to our hotel.

February 3, At 7:00 a.m. we again boarded the train and travelled south. We saw orange gardens and many different kinds of fruit trees. The people seemed strange, for as soon as the train came to a stop, there were people on both sides selling food and other things, some of them making themselves loudly heard. The rich and the beggars are all mixed. The pigs are around also, and wait for any bit of food which may drop by the wayside. These pigs seemed very skinny, which we were not used to seeing back home. We travelled until 6:30 p.m. and arrived safely in the city of Guaymas. Here we saw a bit of the ocean and our hotel was only a few steps away from the water.

A wondrous place for a city, but in the world there are also many other wondrous or miraculous places. We arrived at our destination in the evening and stayed overnight. All

had a restful night in Mexico. We woke up early and prepared to travel on. Upon awakening, Uncle Johan Wiebe noticed his mattress was splattered with blood. He showed us and we were shocked and astonished. We could not come to any other conclusion other than a murder had taken place there a while back. On the walls and doors were bayonet holes. Yes, we were now in Mexico and this was no news to these people. Upon dressing, I noticed my socks and shoes were damp, presumably caused by the humidity. After breakfast, we were back on the train. There were many people travelling south, and at one time the train circled around a small body of water.

The people were very polite and did their best for us. Some of them wanted to know why we were here and where we were going. In one town, a vehicle came near the window of the train and two armed men boarded. A man in the vehicle outside handed bags of gold to the men on the train, one after another, throwing them under the seat, and there were so many that they ran out of room and had to use the aisle as well. After all was loaded, these two fine men sat down quite comfortably in front of us and kept watch over their gold. Before too long, both men fell asleep. People on the train, stepped on the gold when walking through the aisle, but all remained in good order. To our amazement it looked so plain and matter of fact.

We travelled all day and night, and before dusk saw some land that we liked. It had some bushes and good soil. We arrived in the big city of Culiacan at 5:00 a.m. We took a taxi to a hotel and were warmly greeted. We soon found a place to eat breakfast. It was now February 5, and Mr Enlaf rented a big truck and together we went looking at the land. In the forest we saw huge cacti. Our uncles said that here we wouldn't be able to drive with horse and wagon. The bushes and trees were dense and almost impossible to walk through. On the ground were many kinds of prickly thorns, that poked into our shoes. The soil was good, mostly black loam.

After travelling further, we saw some settlers who had already cleared quite a lot of land. In the villages we saw different kinds of trees and even some flowering trees. Finally, we came to a very modernized sugar factory, which operated all year around. Here sugar and syrup were processed in great quantities. Upon observing these great works, I thought to myself that Mexico is far more advanced than Canada, because those great sugar cane plantations are a wonder to see. My eyes couldn't see enough of this as Solomon says in Proverbs 27:20, "the eyes never tire of seeing." On one side of the road, sugar cane plantations stretched out as far as the eye could see, and on the other side, banana plantations did likewise.

It is amazing to see that the earth is so well equipped to live on and grow things on, (Isaiah 45:18). It bends a young inexperienced person like me, down to the dust, that the works of the Lord are so great and his wonders so many, too many to count. For He lets all different kinds of trees grow to provide food and beauty to behold. Genesis 2:9-10. Out of the earth, he lets water flow to irrigate the garden. This is evident here, for the water comes from the east, out of the hills, in a wide stream that passes on the outskirts of Culiacan, and through the huge expanses used for plantation irrigation, into the ocean. There is continuous warm weather here, Summer and Winter are no different. From one field to the next it is always growing season.

Banana trees require one year to grow to produce and when almost ready, a new shoot appears at the bottom, and after a year the first one dies. Leaves grow three, four or more together. They grow seven feet long and about one-and-a-half feet wide, and they grow only on top. It is wonderful to see. I went and stood under one tree and told my companions, if it rained, I wouldn't get wet. On the top, under leaves, hung many bundles of bananas. The trees are ten to twelve feet tall and higher.

We then went to the sugar and syrup factory, where all the activities were shown and explained to us, but they are impossible to describe. With wonder we saw the ground in Mexico. The various soils we have seen are no comparison to the soil in Culiacan. Via a different road we returned to the city. The road we travelled was a very good, two lane road. We saw more open land, both settled and under irrigation. Towards evening we arrived back in the city, tired and hungry, so we found a place to eat.

After retiring for the night, we discussed our day and the many wonderful things we had seen. The land, bushes, and the huge trees, although mostly thorny were discussed. How did we feel about all of this, and also would our congregations back home approve? Quietness filled our room, especially for Mr. Goertzen and me, for this wasn't the land we wanted to trade our Saskatchewan land for. To tell the truth, we were not satisfied even though the soil was good. We didn't see how our poor people could clear a few acres of the heavy brush, in order to plant a garden. Our people knew nothing about clearing brush and forest, especially after living on the open prairies. Uncle Klaas Heide said that if we wanted this land, he would look elsewhere for land for his congregation, because this land had not left a good impression on him either. They wanted to stay close to us, as did the others. We surrendered our thoughts to Him who rules, and sometimes things go differently than we planned. In the evening we wrote to our beloved families and congregations. I slept little that night, as my mind was filled with important issues.

Today is Sunday, February 6. We awoke healthy and praised Him who had watched over us, thanking Him eternally. Sunday is not important to the worldly city. The people were happy and amused, and took their disregard for Sunday in stride. We soon noticed they were preparing for holidays on Monday and Tuesday. Parties are a wild urge for worldly people. I thought of the words from Genesis 6:11-13, "all flesh had corrupted by their ways upon the earth so that the Lord had to destroy them from the earth". They sang and danced until late last night. However, they never bothered us, but were always very polite to us. We went to see the huge irrigation canal. It looked very expensive and seemed to involve very hard work.

The next day, Monday, the weather was twelve degrees. It was a wonderful, calm, quiet, warm day. Once again we went to look at land on the east side of the city. We saw beautiful gardens, pineapples, many different kinds of gardens, and lots of brush and trees. On a small ranch we saw a well that was twenty-one-and-a-half feet deep, with lots of good water, beautiful trees. Where branches were cut off these trees, a milky substance ran out. This substance was used to make wax. We also saw red wood trees. The wood is so hard, it is almost impossible to cut. The trees were so different from ours in the North. We also saw a leather factory, where people were working very hard. The owner spoke English well and the workmen were Mexican. Back in the city we wished to leave, because the wild life of the people there was getting to us. The evening came and we went to bed preparing to get up early the next day.

On February 8 at 6:00 a.m. we left Culiacan on a long train, arriving in Mazatlan at 2:30 p.m. near the big ocean. From Culiacan to Mazatlan was lots of brush and tall trees. It was a nice area and mostly settled. We rested here, as the train had been very crowded. The day came to an end, in this rather peaceful town. The next morning, on February 9, we awoke refreshed and healthy and praised and thanked the Lord for protecting us in this big city. We all went to the big ocean and saw many ships, both big and small, and even a ship with sails that was preparing to leave. It didn't take long and before we came near, the sail was put up and the anchor loaded and it started to sail away. At first it went on a half wind but it didn't take long and we could only see the white sails which was something my eyes were seeing for the first time. We watched many other ships coming into the harbour that were loading and unloading. Some ships quite a distance away were loaded with smaller boats. We could hear the roar of the ocean, while standing on the shore.

While we were standing and watching the ocean and hearing the sounds, I thought of how other delegates had twice travelled on the huge ocean, to look at land in South America, but found none, all for our faith and beliefs. "Oh," I thought, "these men did much for their congregation, for it was a dangerous trip. As the scripture says, they who travel on the ocean speak of the dangers of it." Looking at a ship on the ocean, it looks but like a feather swaying to and fro.

We walked along the ocean's shore and saw God's wonders. We also saw what people had accomplished, the good roads and in the hills that only held water and rock, people have worked so hard to build a very modern road. Fi-

Old Colony Mennonites departing to Mexico from the Hague train station in the 1920s. Photo credit: Leonard Doell.

nally we climbed onto a large hill. There stood a huge wireless station, (*Funtenstation*). Close to the station stood a high tower one-hundred-and-forty-nine feet high. It was in operation. We then went down the hill towards town, and a light rain fell.

We went back to our quarters, but Uncle Johan Wiebe went downtown. Because of the rain, he went into a private home and soon noticed his money pouch missing. Shocked he returned and told us. He wanted to report it to the police, so Daniel Solis Lopez went with him. Shortly, he returned with the police, and we were to identify him, by saying that we knew Mr. Johan Wiebe and all was in order. In the meantime they caught the thief, and Mr. Wiebe got his wallet back, however ten dollars was missing from the twenty-five dollars he had lost. This happens in Mexico and I will talk more about this later.

We had to stay another night in this town because of the train schedule. We got up early on February 10th, and left again by train travelling south. Again it was a warm day. This train had eight passenger cars and many freight cars. It was the southern train that travels on Mexico's west side from Mogales to Ruis. As far as this railway goes we can use USA dollars, because the train belongs to the United States. We arrived safely at 9:00 p.m. in Ruis. We had travelled close to the ocean in some places, with water on either side and farther back through the hills and forests we met small rivers that had no bridges. Down under it was cemented and we got quite a jolt, but this was nothing new in Mexico.

Arriving in the evening we had to find quarters, but the hotels were terrible, with small cafes and open on one side. After supper a place had to be found to sleep. Some of us slept on a wagon and some of us slept in the café. They brought us some beds and bedding and we made the best of it. The next morning we again went out to look for some land, and soon came to a city called Tudspoon. One hundred and thirty thousand acres of land was close by. It was cleared and had a few huge trees and some seeded grass.

This is February 11, it is eighty-nine degrees fahrenheit, and fairly hot. Uncle Cornelius Rempel was getting sick. He got out and rested, the Mexican got upset for he wanted to get us to the train station as planned. I showed him my watch and using sign language asked him when the train was leaving, he indicated at 12 p.m. So I told him, lets hurry. The Mexican pointed to Mr. Rempel, who was again sitting down, and shook his head. I told our group that we must hurry or else we will miss the train, for we had been told that our departure was at noon. Uncle Klaas Heide said he would take uncle Cornelius Rempel on his mule in front of him, and would help him. Uncle Cornelius Rempel said he could go no further. Uncle Klaas Heide told him even if we couldn't go further we must still go on, and he would stay to help him. Our mules were very smart, knowing that we were not good riders, so they were very lazy.

Because we travelled so slowly, Solis and the Mexican decided to send a telegram to the train station, asking them to wait until we came. Our guide told us approximately where to ride, and guided us around a mountain through lots of stones, going steeply upwards, and sometimes through deep ruts, so deep that our luggage hit hard against the stones and broke. When we reached the top, our mules were wet. It had been very hard for them.

The guide spurred his mule and left us, and we saw how mules can run when they have to, for the telegram had to be delivered fast. Slowly we travelled without our guide, but we couldn't be slow. Then we saw the mountain where at the bottom lay the town where we were to catch our train. We couldn't see our guide for he was far ahead of us, and the city came closer, or rather, we came closer to the city. We looked forward to leaving our mules. Both men and beasts were tired. We came closer and closer to the city and finally we saw it. How joyful we all were. The words of a poet entered the mind of a humble servant (myself), and I recalled "Ye hills and valleys help me to sing, my Jesus to him be praise, that though so many humble days I so far have been protected. Have a good night, it is high time for me to leave the past."

As we neared the city it was too bad we didn't stay together. We rode two by two together. As we entered the city on very narrow streets, we got lost. Two others had gone ahead of us. When my partner and I came to a big house, we saw the grey donkey the telegram carrier had rode in on, but no one was on it. We dismounted and very soon there were helpful people, wanting to feed our mules, and suddenly the guide appeared and told us to hurry to the train station. It meant, getting back on our donkeys, and with our guide giving us directions in a big hurry. He went back to find our other members.

We didn't really know where to go, for we couldn't see the city. Then, south of us, we saw a small train moving back and forth behind a house. We thought this must be the station. But where were our partners? The Mexican, our guide, and Solis came from another direction. All the uncles except two were here now. They had taken a wrong road. I stood beside the train, which was now ready to leave, and I could see the others coming. They slowly came down the same road we had come as if they were not sure which road to take. I whistled and waved my cap and told the others.

We were all glad, and Solis was preparing our free tickets, but our partners had not arrived. I again went outside and stood beside the people, whistled and waved my cap, until they saw me and hurried. The baggage was quickly unstrapped from the donkeys, and we boarded and had our luggage handed to us through the trains windows. We departed at twelve noon. And so through God's help, we had come through the huge mountains. His ways we cannot grasp. We were often on the edges of deep cliffs and had our donkeys made a mistake, we would have fallen into the deep down yonder. But our donkeys were used to climbing, but to us it seemed impossible. Often I turned my head the other way.

God's grace kept us from all harm. To Him we give praise and thanks until all eternity. In heaven we want to forever sing hallelujah, but in this troublesome world we are among the heavily burdened pilgrims, and we are often troubled by not knowing if we'll be able to climb the mountains in life. We have to continue climbing, even though the mountains are high, mount Zion from where all help comes is much higher. How often have I recalled those times when we travelled together, I especially thought of Uncle Cornelius Rempel who often took a rest, quiet and contented, when the rest of us were more restless.

Yes, my beloved pilgrims, all of you who will hear and read this, let us go hand in hand, that we will not fall. For the precipices are steep and should we fall, we cannot come to that city, we so often long for. We will surely reach it if we keep on climbing, for there up high shines the crown that Jesus will hand to us when he says, "I am the Way, the Light, the Door through me you can enter in. I will carry thee to that place, where thou shalt see my holiness. The mountains will have to depart, for to you I am the highest. As often as you find a safe gate, I will help you over safely. Your last request or plea I hear. I place on you the crown of life, in airy choruses of angels I will now bring your soul within, here thou shalt be with God forever. I am thy shield and great reward I, Oh Son of God."

So, with God's help through the huge mountains, we arrived in San Marcos on February 14 at 12:00 p.m. We left shortly for the huge city named Guadalajara, arriving there at 4:00 p.m. We were now due for a resting period; we were very tired. In this big city we saw street cars, the same as in the most modern cities in Canada. In this city we were shown a river flowing beneath it, closed in on top and people were walking and driving on the enclosed river. This is supposedly the most beautiful place in Mexico. We were told the temperature doesn't rise higher than twenty-seven degrees Reaumur in summer and not below zero degrees in winter. It was now bedtime, and we thanked and praised our creator for being with us and not leaving us. We had a good night's sleep.

The next morning coming out of my quarters, I met the two old uncles, who were refreshed and happy, they had a good night's sleep. Now all of us were more ambitious and happy. We had no real pain from riding the donkeys. In fellowship we all ate breakfast, after which we again toured the city, the huge buildings, and the covered river, (mentioned earlier). We were not very interested though, because our thoughts were mainly on Mexico City where we were supposed to meet the President. This was very important to us. I also met a German person who wanted to sell me some land, but I was not interested now, because I was not sure we wanted to buy land here. Our privileges of freedom of religion and our faith were more important than land at this time.

I asked this person about weather in Mexico. How much rain they had, did it thunder when they had rain? Yes, he said, often lightening as if the whole heavens were burning, a great amount of lightening, thunder and very great cloudbursts of rain. I left this friend, for the day had come to an end. Approximately at 5:00 p.m. we again left in a long train. It was full of many different kinds of people, giving us reason to closely watch our baggage. Upon leaving the city, our thoughts were that we might never see it again.

We again travelled through mountains and valleys, past islands and a lot of land that was under cultivation. We travelled all through the night and finally on the 16th of February at 9:30 a.m. we arrived in Mexico City. On our trip we had seen many grain fields with good irrigation systems, and old areas with very expensive land. We were welcomed in a friendly manner into this huge city that has a population exceeding well over one million. A hotel named Mageskeet was our resting place after the long journey.

Old Colony Mennonites departing to Mexico from the Hague train station in the 1920s. Photo credit: Leonard Doell.

We were now far south of Canada, where our loved ones were, and how nice it would have been to get a letter. We did a lot of walking around in Mexico City the next day, thinking about the huge undertaking ahead of us. We met Arthur J. Bronof, who was supposed to take us to President Obregon. He had been notified ahead of time by uncle Johan Wiebe, who had worked with Mr. Bronof and Mr. Lopez earlier.

The time passed quickly until we were to meet the President. We were notified by Solis to go see the President on the evening of the 17th, but to first go to the man in charge of acreages. We were silent, thinking of what we would say to "Your High Honour," for we didn't want to make any mistakes. We planned who was to present our wishes, choosing uncle Julius Loewen, with the rest of us helping out where and whenever possible.

The evening soon came, and after preparing, we went to the office of the Minister of Acreages. Together with him, we went with cars to the palace of the President. Arriving at the gate of the yard, we were met by a host of armed soldiers. The Minister drove in first, and we were all granted permission to enter. In the huge court yard we were led by armed guards to the palace door where we entered and were seated. We waited awhile, and then the President came. He greeted us warmly and shook our hands, using his left hand for his right arm was missing because of a shooting which occurred years ago. We were asked to be seated and Julius Loewen presented to the President our wishes on paper. We were asked many questions about how we lived, etc. and we answered the best we could. The following is an account or write-up of our interview with the President, which we drew up later in our quarters.

Mexico City, February 17, 1921. The following is an account of our presentation on the above mentioned date in the palace of the President Alvaro Obregon, in the presence of the President, the Minister of Acreages, A.J. Bronof and Daniel Solis Lopez as interpreter.

1. Marriages: The Mexican government had experienced before hand, that marriages were performed by a minister without both parties being in love. This was disapproved of by the Government, and so a rule was enforced that a judge be present in the house of the couple wishing to wed, with both sets of parents in attendance, who were then asked if their children were going to be wed of their own free will. If this was answered with a yes then notice was given for three weeks, one week at a time, or a notice was posted. If in this time no one had anything against their marriage, the wedding was approved.

Their rules were strange to us, so we talked them into not interfering with our customs. However, if our newly weds were to register through the Government, they had to appear before the judge, before or shortly after the marriage. They both had to say that they married of their own free will, then sign papers which were registered, and it would be ruled a marriage. The reasons for these rules was that if later the marriage became illegal, or they divorced, the woman in the marriage that had been registered, could claim possessions and be protected by the law. A marriage that is not registered leaves the woman unprotected.

2. The *Waisenamt*: The President's answer to this was, that in order to make it easier for them, they would follow our testament, if troubles should arise. They did not have a rule for orphan inheritance. However, if trouble arose, these would rule as follows. They would

give heed first to the son, then the wife, then the daughter, etc. It was agreed upon, that when people joined our church, and promised to obey the rules of the church, that the *Waisenamt* rules were included.

3. Schooling: The President gave us permission to have our own schools, teachers and language. He questioned whether it would be reasonable to later learn the country's language? However, when we told him our reasons and explained our experiences and why we opposed this, he praised our solid foundation of beliefs and promised never to interfere or harm us in any way in our schooling.

4. Exclusion from military service: We were granted freedom from joining the military, since they choose only Mexican citizens. Should we however, on our own free will wish to join, we were granted this privilege.

5. Taxes: No definite answer was given to us about tax omission for the first few years. However, they would do their best to help out the new settlers. A more descriptive answer would be given later.

6. Immigration: The immigration of our old, weak, or crippled families would be no problem. This was because the President was crippled at the time his right arm was shot, yet he later became president.

7. Land: We wondered whether the government owned land suitable for farming and or agriculture. They said they had such land and we could look at it.

8. Documents: We asked, since we were strangers in this land if they would help us out by obtaining the right papers for land purchases? This was granted.

9. Settling: This time, we were promised help for all our immigrants to get to their settlements from the border. Furthermore, all belongings, be it horses, cattle, machinery, or household goods were duty free and the cost of transportation was half price. This help would be supplied from the border to the settlement. These were their rules for all their inhabitants.

10. Government: Our tenth and last question was whether these privileges had to first pass through congress. The President answered by saying that he did not sign any papers that had not already passed though congress.

In the end, with tears in my eyes I said thank you for the friendly welcome and for granting us our privileges. We will look up to you as a very gracious government, and you will be rewarded in Heaven. The President and the Minister were emotionally moved, and the President stated that we should come to the republic of Mexico, to live in a beloved land.

After an hour and a half we departed with warm hand shakes. The President reminded us that we had found a better welcome here than in any other land or country that we had already been to. After our farewell to the President a servant came out of another room and bid us farewell also. We were astonished at his uniform, with the shiny decorations on his shoulders, etc. In friendship, he offered to show us everything in this huge palace. We went onto the second floor, and he showed us the Mexican coat of arms, an eagle holding a snake with it's beak and claws.

After showing us around for a while, he informed us that it wasn't very convenient to show us the rest of the palace. However, he informed us that if we came back the next morning, we could have a better look at the palace. We agreed, and went back to our quarters. We praised and thanked Him, who can rule and lead the hearts of your Highness (the President), according to His holy will. This we felt truly of the President and Minister of Acreages. 1 Kings 10:6-9.

On the 18th of February, we all woke up healthy and happy. At 11:00 a.m. we again walked to the President's palace. At the gate we informed the soldiers why we had come. The servant met us at the door, and showed us the rest of the palace and all the worldly goods that a President in this world possesses. I thought of the President's riches, but I was more concerned about our privileges. If only we could get them according to our requests, that would be our heartfelt wish. Worldly riches will in time decay, and happiness to the President and other kings will be eternal riches. Revelation 21:24.

We walked around a lot in the city, to make time pass. We saw the beautiful flower gardens the Mexicans had made, with many different kinds of plants and some had bouquets for sale. We wandered on to a street called "Lions Street," where a white lion lay on both ends of the street. They must have been monuments of long ago, of which there are many in Mexico. Today we had a good thunder shower. We saw several American planes flying overheard.

February 19, 1921. We awoke healthy, and we are still in Mexico. If all the documents are ready, we will leave tomorrow. We again walked around the city. In a house we saw four meteorites that had fallen from the sky, so they told us. One weighed 28,980 pounds. They looked like stones. The days seemed longer and longer. We decided to send a telegram home to find out if all was well there. They were happy to receive word and all was well at home.

February 20, 1921. The next day was Sunday, and we held a service in our hotel room. Minister Julius Loewen spoke. After dinner we drove out of the city close to the mountains. At the bottom of the mountains was a beautiful place of small rivers and islands. This place was given to the workers of Mexico City so they could live off it. One island was planted with this and another with that, and all had many flowers. The islands were small, about fifty feet by one hundred feet, although some were a bit bigger. We could see snow in the distance on the mountains. We also saw a distant volcanic mountain. However, to get a closer look at it meant riding a horse or a donkey a whole day just to get there, so we didn't go.

Today is February 23 and we are still in Mexico City. The weather is warm between five to eight degrees. Yesterday, February 22nd, was a holiday and so our paperwork rested on the table. We again talked to Mr. Bronof, and were told in twenty-four hours it would all be ready. It seemed like a long time to wait to us.

February 25th, we woke up in good health and praised the Lord for it. The whole day was spent with our papers, which requested freedom in our schools, etc. Our documents were prepared, but as far as for schooling, we were required to learn and teach Spanish also. This we did not approve of since we thought or understood, that the President had given us all rights of schooling, including the language. He had mentioned that it might be helpful for us to learn the language, for it might be useful in the future. Should we ever come before the courts, our language would not be approved of.

We told them the Spanish language would hinder our young people, and that up until now, our Mennonites had learned only the German language. He again approved of our solid foundation. We could not believe that after receiving promises of freedom in our schools, it had been changed within the documents. We asked Mr. Bronof whether we could again speak to the Minister of Acreages, who had been with us when we talked to the President. He, however, wanted to go ahead of us. We followed and were again allowed to present our wishes. Uncle Johan Wiebe sat close to the Minister and explained our situation as best he could. It wasn't long before he consented to our wishes of teaching German only in our schools, and we left shortly after in hopes that finally our wish would be granted. We went back to get our tickets for the trip back home, however we wanted to look at land in Durango.

On February 26th, we again awoke in good health. There wasn't much we could do about our paperwork. Time moved slowly for us, but the people were helpful and always ready to show us around to see something new. Even though we were not interested we went with them. A certain Mr. Wolf, showed us points of interest. We again travelled out of town and saw a dairy farm that had twenty-five jersey cows. These cows were always fed in the barn, and the owners said he usually cleared one thousand pesos a month from these cows. It has become cloudy and we are preparing to leave tomorrow. The President had wanted to see us once again, before we left, but was too busy. We left Mexico city on February 27, 1921. Mr. Bronof promised to send the documents to Durango, to a hotel where we would be staying, the hotel Mageskeet. We travelled all day, and Daniel Solis Lopez was with us once again. We went through a tunnel for a long time. The next day we reached Sakatica (Zacatecas). It has lots of flat land, red earth, and hardly any grass or trees. At one time the Mexicans said we were suppose to look out on the other side of the train windows, for we would see fine gardens. We soon saw beautiful gardens with irrigation. Not long after we came to a big city with many people. We travelled on, and night time soon arrived. Upon going to bed, Mr. Julius Loewen, discovered his suitcase was missing. No use looking for it, for it had been stolen. Finally we came to the big city of Durango.

March 1, 1921 we went in search of land in

three automobiles. By night time we had gone as far as Conatlan, where we spent the night. The next morning we travelled north, coming to a big valley with lots of plain level land. We drove alongside a lake, and the further north we travelled, the better the land was. Now and then we saw a river, some with good water. Close to the lake, there was lots of grass and the soil was lighter. Overall there was good grass, big gardens with fruit trees, lots of horses, cattle, mules, donkeys, sheep and goats. We were always heartily welcomed while we viewed the land. We thought this was good enough for us, and Mr. Bronof wanted to buy it for us. Actually, Mr. Bronof thought of asking the ranchers, whether thy would like to sell. However, we decided not to buy just yet, and wanted to look at more land first. We thought of our congregation at home and wondered what they would say about our visit with the President and about the rules regarding the freedom in our schools. When we travelled back, we saw more good land, just as suitable as what we had seen yesterday.

March 4, 1921. We awoke in good health, having stayed overnight in Conatlan and saw ranches and good land, mentioned earlier, southeast of town. We saw a big field of winter wheat, just as good as the best wheat back home. We also saw gardens with many kinds of fruit, except bananas. One of the ranches we saw had 75,000 acres, and 73,690 was with good irrigation.

From here we travelled to another ranch. They also had good land which lay on the west side of the railroad. We went back again to Durango, arriving at 5:00 p.m. We had left our luggage with the hotel owner and all was in good order. We had a restful night and once again the next day we all went to see more land. The first land we looked at was at Poonos. From there we walked two miles to a ranch, and from there we rode on a wagon and two horses. Our driver only had small mules, who could only go three-quarters of a mile on a very sandy road. It seemed impossible to continue. We agreed to go back. Back at the ranch, we had dinner and then went back to town.

At the ranch we saw very good soil, trees, grass and a big fruit garden. This ranch has approximately 65,000 acres, and the owner told us the ranch had started in 1731, and had many people living on it. Out on the field we saw many teams of horses and mules plowing with a share plow. I went over to one team and asked the man whether I could try my hand at plowing. He stepped aside, and I tried my best to hold the plow, but I couldn't plow the way the Mexican could. The wells were ten feet deep and all the land was under irrigation. We arrived back in the city but had to wait for the train.

We sat down in the post office, which was only a little mud brick house, with no window. The only light that came in, came through the door. It was warm in this house. I told myself if I ever moved to Mexico, I would live in a wooden house, because I did not like the smell of the one we were in.

Arriving back in Durango, we went back to where we had stayed earlier. In the evening, we went to the city governor and told him that we had seen good land in the province of Durango. We told him how we had talked to the Mexican President about our freedom of living, schools, *Waisanamt,* etc., and that these freedoms had been granted to us. He explained that these freedoms would also be upheld here, but the *Waisanamt* (orphan organization) they would leave up to us, except they requested the names of the leaders, just in case someone else showed up and claimed to be a leader. We thanked them again wholeheartedly for welcoming us, and Mr. Julius Loewen again extended our appreciation. The governor would have liked to talk to us some more, but he had no more time. He also mentioned that he was sorry that we were seeing the remains of a rebellion in the country. Train cars had been burned, and here and there were huge piles of debris. Before we left Durango, we received our papers of freedom, sent by Mr. Bronof. One set of papers for each: for Manitoba, Swift Current, and our congregation at home.

On March 6 at 9:00 o'clock in the morning, we left the city of Durango in good health. Uncle John Wiebe accompanied us to El Paso. We arrived in Torreon at 7:30 in the evening three and a half hours late due to delays. We had to wait in that city until two o'clock at night, before we could board the train that came from Mexico City.

Travelling very slowly, with many delays, we finally arrived at noon in El Paso on March 8, after 24 hours. We let someone take us to the border, but were unable to cross because our passports had not been stamped by the American Consul in that city. We had to wait quite a while before he came to his office. When he finally arrived it took him quite some time to decide what he wanted to do. But there was another, in a similar position, who seemed to come to our aid. The problem seemed to be the state, or that particular part, did not want to let Mennonites in. But we only wanted to travel through. He asked if we had travel cards. Yes, we said, and showed them to him. Then it was different. He charged $10.00 from each of us, completed our papers and let us go.

So we came to the border and could cross shortly. They examined our baggage thoroughly and took some out. I had bought two canes of sugarcane to take home, but they would not let me do so. These were minor hindrances and we could cross the border safely. We left El Paso at 10 minutes to 9 o'clock in the evening.

Some letters from home reached us in El Paso, and were eagerly read with longing and yearning. There was one letter, though, we were sorry to receive and gave us no joy. We had to see that once again the enemy in our congregation was not at rest, and some time later took the opportunity to, unforgettably, make a tear in our members.

Yes, we were now sitting in a different train than in Mexico. Even though they had given us good transportation overall, and we had gotten used to the Mexican ways among the people; it is, nevertheless, completely different over the borders in the States. Man feels as though in Canada.

We travelled even farther north on the Rock Island Railway. At Santeroca there was some snow, but the trees were green. The trees are called evergreen. By noon the snow was gone, and the winter wheat was a nice green. It looked like the land was light soil. By evening, we were in Kansas.

All of a sudden, a father with his daughter came into our car; a Mr. Heinrich Reimer. They were on their way to see a doctor, for the daughter, in another city. They were of the Kleine Gemeinde, as they were called. This meeting was so sudden - a meeting of such old fashioned Mennonites. Also, their speech was very much like ours. They were very sorry they had not known when we would be returning, or they would have invited us to stop over in Meade. They were very interested to know how we had made out in Mexico and with what results. The loving God knows how to preserve His own; even in the United States.

On the 10th at 7:15, we arrived in the big world city of Kansas City. It rained all the way from Kansas City to St. Paul; much water and green fields.

In Des Moines, also a large city, we had to wait several hours. We ate supper. On the 11th we all got up, healthy and arrived at 7:00 in the morning, with an overcast sky. The river was not yet frozen.

With the street rail "Street Car", we drove to Minneapolis. It took about 30 minutes. These two great cities are side by side with no space in between. Then we ate our noon meal. In the evening only three of us travelled on; Mr. David Rempel, Benjamin Goertzen, and myself. The others left from St. Paul to Gretna, Manitoba.

In Emerson it was quite cold. With God's help, we arrived in Winnipeg at 8:30 in the morning. It was quite cold.

Mr. David Rempel left at 3:45 in the afternoon for his home; and we had to wait until 10 o'clock in the evening. The next day, the 13th of March, at 2:45 in the afternoon, we arrived in Saskatoon. From there we went, by train, to Warman. It was Sunday and Mr. Isbrandt Friesen met me at the station and took me home. At home, they were all healthy. The Lord be thanked many times.

And so, we had made this important and significant journey. Even though we sometimes had to wait for long periods of time, we really had nothing to complain about; always being in quite good health, "except at the beginning, the likeable director", and good news from home always arrived. Our loving families were in good health and this always gave me new strength and courage so that we were not so unduly weary. Great homesickness we all had to endure, especially in the evening when we were so alone and thought over our day. We were so far from home, surrounded by a strange people, that oftentimes watched us in astonishment when we were working together, but they did us no harm. It is something special that we experienced.

Tribute to Aeltester Herman J. Bueckert, Prespatou, B. C.

Jacob G. Guenter, Warman, Saskatchewan.

Herman (1911-2001) was the son of Sarah and John Bueckert of Schoenwiese; a village established in 1899 on land bought from the Canadian Pacific Railroad. It was located on NW quarter section 19 Township 40 Range 4 West of 3, between Hague and Osler, in central Saskatchewan. Since the English school district wasn't established at the time when Herman was of school age, he attended the private German School that was built on village property reserved for it when the village was formed. The school plot provided enough room for the schoolhouse, an attached teacherage, and a playground. Provisions were made to pasture a cow, if the teacher had one. Herman's ninety-one-year old sister Justina recalled that there were about 41 students at one time and the number increased to about 50 when the Christmas season approached. His teachers from 1917-1921 were Johann Klassen and Peter Unruh.[1]

Elder Herman Buckert, Prespetu, B.C. Minister in the Old Colony Church Frying Roll-Kuchen, July, 1969.

Classes in the village school were conducted five days a week for six months of the year. Depending on harvest conditions, they began in November and ended in March. The school hours were similar to those in the English schools; namely, from 9-12 in the morning and from 1-4 in the afternoon with a fifteen-minute break between each period of classes.

The three subjects taught were reading, writing and arithmetic. The beginner started school by learning to read the *Fibel* (Primer) and advanced to New Testament reading and more mathematics. At the age of ten the pupil, if doing well, was promoted to Bible reading. The *Catechism* was studied thoroughly and the student was expected to memorize all questions and answers by the time he or she finished school. The *Schulten* (village overseers) closely controlled what the students learned.[2]

Herman was a conscientious student, learned rapidly, and wished to continue his education. When the Gruenthal School District was formed, Herman was asked by his father to attend night school to acquire some English. He attended four months, driving the approximate two miles by horse and sled. Herman was accompanied by friends Isaac Bueckert who sat on a big box on the sled, and Cornelius Dyck, who crawled in the box and hitched a ride as well. Dyck had recently immigrated to Canada from Russia, and was anxious to pick up the English language. The tuition fee was one dollar per month. Since Herman was excellent in the German language, he learned very quickly and did well in reading and arithmetic, which helped him considerably in his farming career and in his ministry.[3]

Aeltester Herman J. Bueckert was a master of many trades. He was a good carpenter, machinist, preacher and farmer. He left home at a young age, working for farmers at Hepburn and Dalmeny area during the summer months.[4] Herman and Helena Harms exchanged marriage vows on June 13, 1937. They lived for a time with Aron and Helena Guenter, her parents, in the Steele district southeast of Hepburn, before settling on their own farm east of Neuanlage. Later in the 1940s they moved a mile north of Chortitz, farming at that location until 1961.

Scarcity of land prompted another move. They with their family of six settled at Prespatou, approximately 60 miles north of Fort St. John, B. C. With opportunities coming their way, the family members obtained land of their own, and with hard work and usually sufficient rain, the vegetation was good over the years. Since they lived a distance from town, it was fortunate that all were good carpenters and mechanically minded.[5]

Bueckert's shop, which included various tools, was his pride and joy. Conceivably, his motto was "why buy it if I can manufacture it". He built his own power-take-off snow blower from scratch to prepare himself for the harsh winters. He worked many hours on it to get it to perfection. Known for his neatness, *Aeltester* Bueckert was routinely contacted to build a coffin for members of his church. He never charged the underprivileged for his work.

Herman was a lonely man after his wife Helena passed away on December 16, 1984. Helena had given Herman a lot of support, realizing that his profession of *Aeltester* needed more support than someone in some other position. She was a wonderful asset to him. Parishioners sometimes don't know the magnitude of a pastor's role, and perhaps none understands it better than the pastor's wife, who inevitably shares the burden. But Herman's life didn't stop there. He was very self-sufficient. He could cook, sew, patch his own clothes, and bake bread, cookies and buns. He had an ample supply of food ready if company arrived.

After many years of service Rev. Herman Bueckert retired in 1990 and lived in the Prespatou Lodge near his place of worship. Johan Fehr replaced him as *Aeltester* in 1992 and later, in 1995, his son John Bueckert became *Aeltester*. Rev. Bueckert provided sound and stable leadership during difficult times and left a legacy of spiritual faithfulness. He was warmhearted and a good coworker to many, often enjoying fellowship in a kind humorous way with both young and old.

The life work of *Aeltester* Herman Bueckert, Prespatou, B.C.

Elected as Church minister June 15, 1950. Ordained as minister Aug. 24, 1950 by *Aeltester* Jacob J. Froese, Old Colony *Aeltester*, Manitoba.

Elected as *Aeltester* July 8,1969 and ordained July 13, 1969 by *Aeltester* Abram Loewen.

Sermons preached: as minister – 669; as *Aeltester* – 647. Total 1316. Last sermon preached Jan. 1992. Text: Matt. 2: 13-23.

Engagement sermons (*Verlobungreden*): as minister – 17; as *Aeltester* – 23. Total 40.

Officiated at weddings: as minister – 13; as *Aeltester* – 37. Total 50.

Officiated at funerals: as minister – 16; as *Aeltester* – 26. Total 42.

Baptismal sermons: 43. Baptized 230 members

Communions held: 104. Passed the communion bread to 10, 211 members.

Conducted six brotherhood meetings.

Conducted the vote for 2 *Aeltesten* and 1 minister. Ordained 7 ministers and 2 Deacons.

Officiated at 1 Church dedication.[6]

Endnotes

1 Justina Bueckert, Dalmeny Spruce Manor Home. Interview by J. G. Guenter Warman, Sask. March 16, 2001.

2 Helena (Guenter) Friesen, Saskatoon, Sask. Interview – March 17, 2001.

3 Optic – Justina Bueckert.

4 John J. Bueckert, Hague, Sask. Interview by J. G. Guenter, March 16, 2001.

5 J. G. Guenter, *Men of Steele*, 1981, 157-158.

6 Prespatou Old Colony Church – Prespatou, B. C.

Ältester Jacob F. Isaac (1883-1970)
The last Kleine Gemeinde *Aeltester* in Meade, Kansas

Selected Writings, Personal Memories and Reflections from Relatives & Acquaintances
W. Merle Loewen, grandson, Ellinwood, Kansas
Lee Isaac, son, Hugoton, Kansas
Al Isaac, son, Hillsboro, Kansas

Genealogy

Jacob F. Isaac was born to Abram P. Isaac (1845-1923) and Margaretha B. Friesen 1848-1920). The Isaac clan (his parents, the grandparents, Diedrich Isaac Sr. ca 1819-1879 & Anna Penner ca 1819- ; an uncle & aunt, Diedrich P. Isaac 1846- , & Katherina Rempel 1847-1897) came to America on the *S.S. Hammonia,* Hamburg & Le Havre departure, arriving in New York on July 17, 1874 from Ukraine, South Russia. (*On a personal note, both of my paternal & maternal families came to America on the same ship*).

Jacob F. Isaac's maternal roots trace back to Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810), and Margaretha Wiebe (1754-1810), his third great grandparents who "founded a dynasty and their family was to become the most prominent in the Kleine Gemeinde (KG)." Abraham von Riesen was the second *Ältester* of the Kleine Gemeinde and the descendants of Abraham and Margaretha included many spiritual and secular leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde denomination throughout the 19th century. The family lived in Tiegenhagen, West Prussia (near present day Gdansk, Poland), but by 1798 they had moved to nearby Kalteherberg. In 1803 they left Kalteherberg and emigrated to the Molotschna Colony in South Russia.[1]

Faith Roots Heritage

As Delbert Plett suggests, the "possible family connection of Mrs. Abraham von Riesen, nee Margaretha Wiebe, should not be overlooked. Matrilineal networks were extremely important in a conservative intellectual community such as the KG."[2] The Wiebe family was prominent in Prussian church circles. Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96), Ellerwald, was *Ältester* of the Elbing Gemeinde from 1778 to 1796, a period coinciding with the formative years of KG founders. He had considerable influence on the KG, particularly through his twenty-article *Confession of Faith* which "they regarded as an authoritative exposition of evangelical doctrine."[3] In fact, "Gerhard Wiebe's Confession of Faith is believed to be the one which became the official doctrinal statement of the KG."[4] Plett goes on, it is evident that the Abraham von Riesen household was devotedly Christian and practiced an earnest spiritual life. Six of their children and many of their descendants became prominent members of the KG. The major premise of this reform movement was the restitution of the Apostolic church as rediscovered in Reformation times by Menno Simons, Dirk Phillips, and others, as practiced and applied by the leaders of the Danzig and Tiegenhagen Gemeinden, West Prussia, during the 17th and 18th centuries, and their leaders, Bishops Georg Hansen, Hans von Steen, Peter Epp, and others. These beliefs were foundational to KG faith and culture.[5]

The Kleine Gemeinde in Russia – A Brief Synopsis

In his 1987 book, *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874*, Steinbach Bible College professor and genealogist, Henry Fast, outlines the beginnings of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia. Immigrants from Prussia formed the Kleine Gemeinde in the Mennonite Molotschna Colony in south Russia in 1805. An ordained minister, Klass Reimer had become concerned about the spiritual condition of the people. His focus was that the Scriptures were to be the guide for faith and practice. In 1812, Klaas Reimer was chosen to be the first *Ältester* of this small separatist group known as Kleine Gemeinde. "Between the years 1863-1874 the majority of the Kleine Gemeinde separated themselves geographically from the larger Mennonite group. … A majority of the Kleine Gemeinde moved to Borosenko from Molotschna during the next few years, and settled near Nikopol on the Dnieper River in a number of villages"[6]

Political Stress & Emigration

As the political climate in Russia continued to change, some Russian Mennonites again felt the need to find a new homeland to protect the freedoms that had brought them to South Russia in years 1803 to 1805. "By 1872 a minority group among the Russian Mennonites was working actively for emigration."[7] As *Ältester* Leonard Suderman wrote in a small book entitled *In Search of Freedom*:

It was a serious question that confronted our Mennonite community in Russia and Prussia and brought them to the decision to send a delegation to the United States of America. We hoped to find a suitable place to preserve our evangelical beliefs and confession for ourselves and, in the future, for our children…. In Russia, however, we thought that further persecution had been avoided by the "eternal Privilegium," renewed by Czar Paul in 1800. But twenty-six years ago (1871) a new military law indiscriminately obligated the subjects, including the German colonists, to military service. This concern to find a new home became a serious and common one.[8]

According to Suderman, one of the most prominent proponents of emigration was Consul Cornelius Janzen, whose recommendation was to "arise and let us flee."[9] As Suderman notes:

Jansen was a prosperous Berdjansk grain merchant who was intimately connected with the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde through his marriage to Helena von Riesen, the daughter of Peter von Riesen. (son of Abraham von Riesen, 1756-1810). Jansen had strong sympathy for the principles of the Anabaptist Mennonite faith. His position as a well-traveled grain merchant and consular official for the Prussian government made him an excellent and influential proponent of the emigration movement. Jansen played a crucial role in the promotion of the actual emigration by gathering information about North America. Jansen had been in correspondence with the Mennonites there since 1868…. Jansen also worked earnestly through American and British diplomatic officials to collect information regarding settlement conditions in America as he had in mind nothing less than a large-scale

Bible school held in the church basement in Meade, Kansas in 1936-37. Photo courtesy of Merle Loewen.

mass emigration. In 1872 Jansen published a collection of writings regarding the dangers facing nonresistance in Russia and the prospects of settlement in America.[10]

Early Kleine Gemeinde Leadership Development

After the death of Klaas Reimer in 1817, his brother-in-law Abraham L. Friesen was chosen as *Ältester,* serving until his death in 1849. Johann Friesen, a nephew was chosen and installed by his uncle to be the new *Ältester* in 1847. Through numerous leadership challenges and changes, Abraham Friesen was the catalyst that directed his group to Nebraska when they emigrated in 1874. According to Plett, another influence that persuaded A. L. Friesen to settle in Nebraska was Cornelius Jansen. Jansen was a Mennonite grain merchant from Berdiansk who had been exiled from Russia in 1873 because of Jansen's strong activities in promoting Mennonite emigration…. During these months Cornelius Jansen and his son Peter travelled extensively in the American West, and promoted this area to various Mennonite groups, one of which was A. L. Friesen' group. A. L. Friesen's father was a cousin to Mrs. Cornelius Jansen…. About 30 families of A. L. Friesen's group left Borosenko in the middle of June of 1874. They travelled by riverboat from Nikopol to Cherson, and from Cherson to Odessa on a large ship. From Odessa to Hamburg the group travelled by rail…. In Hamburg they embarked on the *S. S. Hammonia* bound for New York. … Waiting to greet these families on their arrival were Cornelius Jansen and his son Peter.[11]

The Kleine Gemeinde settlers immediately began the search for land, sending a number of men with Peter Jansen to inspect available land in Kansas and Nebraska. … They chose to negotiate for 15,000 acres of land that was owned by the B. & M. Rail Road near Fairbury, Nebraska. …On August 11, 1874 a Memorandum of Agreement was drawn up and signed by M.M.R.R. Land Commissioner, A. E. Touzalin and Jakob Fast [*my grandfather Heinrich F. Loewen's uncle & adoptive father*] and Peter Heidebrecht of the Kleine Gemeinde. . . The cost to the Kleine Gemeinde was between $3.51 and $3.75 an acre.[12]

The Jansen, Nebraska years

Jacob F. Isaac was born in Jefferson County, Nebraska on April 7, 1883 on a farmstead about a mile and a half east of Jansen along what became known as "Russian Lane" in the village of Rosenort. He was the fifth of eight children born to his parents. The three oldest had been born in Russia before their parents (his mother Margaretha Friesen was born in Blumstein, Molotschna Colony) had immigrated to America almost nine years earlier.

A local history of the town highlights the Mennonite origins of Jansen.

"The town Jansen was named in honor of Peter Jansen, a Mennonite colonizer, farmer, politician, diplomat and traveler…. On August 28, 1886, he purchased eighty additional acres of land on which the town of Jansen was to be located. On October 1, 1886, it was deeded to the 'Town of Jansen.' … In less than a year, thirteen distinct businesses were operating. Among these were hardware and implement stores, a lumberyard, grain elevator, hotel, general store and bank. . . Shortly after the turn of the century there were six Mennonite churches . . . in the Jansen community."[13]

The Kleine Gemeinde Church in Jansen

After initially meeting in homes for group worship after emigration, the Rosenort school house east of Jansen was built and *Ältester* Abraham L. Friesen's KG group shared the building with other Mennonite church groups for separate worship services. The first KG church building was located in the village of Heuboden [built in 1883] and became known as the 'Heubodner Gemeinde'. This village area was located about three miles west and four miles north of Jansen. Sunday morning services then rotated between Heuboden and Rosenort. "Serious problems arose in the Heubodner Gemeinde shortly after the 1877 [minister and deacon] election which resulted in members leaving the Kleine Gemeinde and joining Isaac Peters' church. … On December 5, 1878, 39 baptized believers joined Isaac Peters group."[14] The Isaac family was part of the controversy and for a number of years they (the Abraham P. Isaac family) "belonged to Peters church, but were later again accepted into the Kleine Gemeinde."[15] "In many ways Peters' understanding of doctrine and teaching was similar to that of the Kleine Geimeinde. He rejected baptism by immersion and the doctrine of the Millenium, but held fast to the doctrine of nonresistance. In practice he differed from the Kleine Gemeinde. He placed a greater emphasis on the new birth experience through repentance and the knowledge of sins forgiven, and "recognized all evangelical means to this end: live preaching, indoctrination of youth, study of the Bible and congregational prayer meetings."[16] Slowly the KG congregation started to recover from the severe upheavals of the late 1870s. "Young people were still joining the church. On December 12, 1880, A. L. Friesen baptized 6 persons in the Rosenort schoolhouse. There also seems to have been a continual transfer of membership between the Peters' church and the Kleine Gemeinde. Neither church rebaptized transferred members…. Spiritually too, the church was making some progress." In early 1883 the Nebraska and Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde formally merged. "In 1885 there was a need to increase the ministerial. Two deacons and one minister were elected."[17] "Three years after his election [1888] the new minister, Heinrich Ratzlaff, had a sharp disagreement with the A*eltester* A. L. Friesen, and he, together with a number of members, left the Kleine Gemeinde and joined Isaac Peters' church."[18] "Earlier history indicates that ministers were at times removed from office for what we today might consider very minor errors in judgment. Probably Ratzlaff's criticism of the *Aeltester* Friesen was the improper behavior that precipitated this split…. The years 1887 to 1906 were relatively quiet years for the Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska"[19]

Ministerial Conference of 1889

In 1889 the Kleine Gemeinde developed doctrine and practice resolutions that were revised in 1899 in Blumenort, Manitoba, and adopted on July 1, 1901 by all the Manitoba & Nebraska ministers for their constituency. They were as follows:

"*First*: . . . it is resolved to on the basis of the following scripture passages not to hold any office, nor to vote. . .

Secondly: On the basis of God's words our members are not permitted to attend services led by other ministers except for those worship services recognized and attended by our ministerial. …

Thirdly: On the basis of God's word we do not recognize marriages not performed in the Lord. …

Fourthly: We believe that Sunday school as well as singing practice, particularly the four-part harmony practice, will do us more harm than good. They will lead us away from the simplicity in Christ. …

Fifthly: We consider portraits and photographs to be unscriptural. First, they serve to honor mortal and worldy-minded men: secondly, they lead to idolatry… and thirdly they lead to adultery and non-christian marriages. …

Sixthly: Except for an ordinary sermon, we do not consider it scriptural to adopt the new practices in our funeral services. …We do not accept as scriptural the singing, prayer and preaching at the graveside as practiced these days. . ."

To what extent the resolutions mirror the thinking of the Nebraska group is not clear…. It is clear, though, that the articles discussed dealt with issues of that day and were directed particularly at areas where other local churches seemed to take greater Christians liberties. Both the Manitoba as well as the Nebraska Kleine Gemeinde had suffered numerical losses by the fact that their members were attracted to the preaching and practices of other churches. The resolutions were an attempt to stop this migration. Both the Sunday school and singing practice were seen by the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial as tools that would mar the thinking of their young people and would ultimately lead them astray…. The resolutions of 1899 are also of interest in what they do not refer to. No reference is made in the articles concerning dress, jewellery or styles…. All churches that were competing for their members were united in practicing a very conservative life style."[20]

Emigration Again Beckons

"After farming in the Jansen area for a number of years Abraham [Jacob F. Isaac's father & family] went to Colorado in 1892 to look for land. Evidently he was well pleased since he homesteaded half a section there. However, drought brought them back to Jansen in 1897."[21]

"The concern for their young people was the motivating factor that forced the Kleine Gemeinde church to consider a colonization program in the early nineteen hundreds. Basically, two concerns were evident. When Peters' church also started Sunday School in 1890, followed by "Jugend Verein," the Kleine Gemeinde young people were attracted to these activities. These methods

of Christian nurture, however, were viewed with suspicion and seen as dangerous by their elders and gave cause for concern. The other concern centered around the economic problem of securing land for the next generation. It was becoming more and more difficult for a beginning farmer to compete with the established farmers for the short supply of available farm land."[22]

Jacob F. Isaac recalls the following. "I remember very clearly when the first meeting was called. When the idea of colonization was presented to the congregation some people were almost shocked, especially these that had farms. The matter, however, was not dropped, but prayerfully discussed. At the close of the first meeting, many of those present became more concerned. The idea of colonizing to help our young people became an earnest matter and with God's help moved ahead. The congregation was called together many times and believe me when I say that our elderly brethren and ministers were very much concerned that a new colonization might be the Lord's will. The congregation approved, with about 90 percent, the motion to look for new location. A committee was organized and sent out to various places; Canada, Colorado, and Kansas. Kansas was found the most suitable place to colonize, and the movement was started in 1906." [Part of an article written in 1948] [23] "It is said that Martin T. Doerksen [he had been elected a minister in 1898] was instrumental in suggesting Meade, Kansas, as a suitable place. He made a deal with real estate man, Mr. Fulingen and Charlie Paine of Hutchinson in which he traded his one quarter section of land in Inman, Kansas, for six quarters of land southeast of Meade. The first families of the Jansen Kleine Gemeinde that moved in 1906 settled on these six quarters."[24]

Marriage of Jacob F. Isaac (1883-1970) and Katherina J. Friesen (1880-1936)

Parents of the groom, Jacob F. Isaac were Abraham P. Isaac (1845-1923) and Margaretha B. Friesen (1848-1920). The bride, Katherina J. Friesen was the daughter of Rev. Cornelius L. Friesen (1841-1923) and Sara S. Janzen (1843-1892). Her father was a brother to *Ältester* Abraham L. Friesen who led the Kleine Gemeinde from Russia to Nebraska in 1874. She was a first cousin, twice removed of Helena von Riesen, wife of Cornelius Jansen, and the leader of the emigration movement from Russia to America.

Upon confession of their faith in Jesus Christ, the bride and groom had been baptized in the KG Church by *Ältester* Abraham L. Friesen, the uncle of the bride, and received into membership. Her baptism was May 22, 1898 and his was June 2, 1901.

They were married by the bride's father on November 10, 1901. Jacob F. Isaac wrote in a 1948 article that he had $14.00 in his pocket, a new suit, and shoes for the wedding date. "November 10, 1901 we were united in marriage giving the hands for a togetherness for a life, which ceremony was performed by her father named above. We were at this time living at Jansen, Nebraska."[25]

The Kleine Gemeinde in Meade, Kansas

In a brief autobiography written by Rev. Jacob F. Isaac, at the request of his Sunday School teacher at the Meade E.M.B. Church in 1948, he reviewed the emigration to Meade, Kansas.

"After a period of years, the young people here in Nebraska began to wonder what are we going to do, as families were growing up and renting land was getting to be a problem, so this went along for a while and the situation grew more pressing. And as a whole the financial condition was not to compare with of today. Land was getting high in price at that time, even if some had been fortunate enough to buy some, but the fellowman our brethren, who were quite a number, and could not raise the funds to buy some land felt out of the game. So this led to a very concern thought, what is to be done. The eyes were lifted up with the Psalmist words, to the hills from whence cometh our help. Psalm 121, 1 and 2.

Kansas was found the most suitable place, to colonize, and the movement was started, in 1906. In the fall five or six families started the train of immigration to Meade, Kansas, with others following, as time permitted. The first ones that came here, to make their start, for them it was quite hard, 20 miles from the railroad station, where they now expected to settle, in an open prairie, free range with many cattle around. So it was quite a task, with what help they had to start. It was in the horse days, and everything was to be hauled with horses. Thinking of the horse days, when we came here on the train to look at this land, and our real estate people, that took us around, to show us the land, they just had one car, and two or three buggy teams, as we were quite a group of home seekers, that could not all ride in that one automobile, so at times we took turns about, and sometimes the run to car, especially when it went into town, was pretty fast. Also we loved one another anyway.

In 1907 our people began to move in by groups, started in February, and the movement went on, till our whole congregation was here. Of course the coming here, for instance myself and family [*writers note, my mother Margaret, age 4 and two brothers, Henry, age 2 & Pete, age 2 months, were the initial immediate family*] it was no pleasure, when we got out of our train on March the 9th looking at the skies blue, and the weather dry and hot, and to believe that this was the place, for the future home.

We were greeted from those that already had unloaded their cars (author's note: apparently railroad cars) with livestock and belongings. So we grasped the encouragement we received, and soon were on our way to their homes.

Nothing to wait and nothing to lose, of the busy time approaching, for us to build, with more help available, we started in too. But it was more of a change than I had figured, 6 miles from town [Jansen] where we lived before, and now 20 miles to haul our lumber. One day I was getting a load of lumber, and when I had driven for at least two hours, setting on the wagon in the hot sun. Believe me I would have wished myself back, as the Israelites, back to Nebraska. The start was very hard, and so different from what we were used to. But trust and obey, was the consequence. And the good Lord provided our needs. We all were very busy, helping each other to get started, with a home, and on Sunday when we gathered in a congregation, we shook hands, and were glad to see each other. At the beginning we had our Sunday worship in a home that was bought with the land. We had three ministers, Rev. Martin T. Doerksen, Rev. J. J. Friesen, and Rev. C. L. Friesen who was the writer's father-in-law."[26]

To meet the growing need for a church building "the decision to build was evidently made in the Sunday evening of June 2 at the brotherhood meeting. On September 4, 1907, Jacob F. Isaac returned from Meade with 1264 ft. of lumber for the church building. Construction began a few days later on the south side of the settlement, using voluntary labor, and the building was finished by the end of September."[27]

"Referring back, back when we came to this open prairie, with no roads laid, but wagon and cattle trails, and the outlook was dry, and furthermore the people encouragement, that they gave us, was not very promising for the new settlers. They said that this country was settled at three different times, and they had left, and the cattleman knowing, that they would have to give up their free range, did not encourage us, that we would make a success. But as heretofore stated, the trust of these settlers rested on the promise of the Almighty, who created heaven, earth, and man.

And soon we became more familiar with the climate, and ways of doing in this country. The climate was very mild, through the winter, frost almost none, did not hinder plowing all through the winter. So people started to plow up this prairie, as much as was needed for planted crops, trees, etc. to show the people, we were trying to make it go. The first years we raised corn, but in later years did not yield well, so it came out of practice. Kaffir, maize and cane was raised, according at time in satisfaction. Wheat was light in yield up to 1914, then a good crop, was raised previous years wheat was raised but not as now in the more modern days, of more machine equipment.

I well remember, the days when we sat on the plow all day, with a team of horses hitched to it. Those horse days were not just so, it meant to have a team of good horses. Especially a driving team, these horses were cared for, washed, cleaned, and stood under blankets when not in use, and the one in the lead with a good pair of drivers, kept the lead, and woe, the man that tried to pass.

Plowing our ground, and hauling our wheat to town 20 miles with horses, gave us young people quite a thrill, and inspiration. We most always went in groups to town, loaded from 12 to 18 wagons with wheat, hitched the horses to the loads, and strung them out, at times 18 in a row. Horses were trained to follow the wagons, and we men, as many as could get on the front wagon, visited, and the six hours that it took to reach the elevator, did not seem long. Often we were greeted by a steam engine, along the roadside where they threshed. No wonder when some of the old pioneers think back and say 'Eck bang

me no de ole tit.'. .

So this colonization has expanded to this present time into many families, from various places. The Kleine Gemeinde made the start in 1906, built two large churches, and grew to a large congregation, the largest in the Mennonite settlement. . .

Referring back to the '30's is when we had the big drought and the times got to be so pressing, that people began to wonder. Wheat that was raised in the first part of the '30's was very low in price, and the debts that people had could not be met, with the accumulating interest, and it became a very hard problem, people wanted to hold onto their land, and were unable to meet their obligations. So the government stepped in, and loaned money. Also our Meade people were very kind, in helping our people. If it hadn't been for the Meade business people, many people would have lost their farms. Although the time was so pressing that some had to give up in the long period of drought, we owe the Meade people a great expression of gratitude for the patience they had.

The dust storms ceased, and the crops have been very good, for several years. So people were lifted out of the drought, and have become prosperous, that as a whole, we will have to remind ourselves, that it were not we, that helped us out, it was the mightiful Lord that helped us out. Praise to His holy name and blessing."[28]

Personal Emigration & Assets Summary by Jacob F. Isaac in 1909

"I came here from Nebraska in 1906 and have 240 acres, a solid piece, perfect in lay and quality of soil. I have over 160 acres in cultivation and crops. My 48 acres of wheat is growing well and promises fully, yes, over an average crop. It is now June 15 nearly to the changing of colour toward ripening. I can raise wheat here. Have 60 acres of corn on sod, as that is one of the best first crops, and yield pays, besides I get the land in condition at once and the next year it is old ground . . . I am well pleased with the results the last two years, and satisfied with this location. My land is fenced and cross-fenced and have good improvements. House and barn, etc and total cost of improvements about $1200.00."[29]

Called to KG Church Leadership

In fall of 1911 I was elected a preacher in this new community which gave us great responsibility. As a young married couple, this work was taken seriously by both of us. The Lord gave grace and we could do it only in weakness. In this service my dear wife was a special support. In 1914 the Lord went a step deeper with us, and I was made Elder in the church. We both sought the will of the Lord, and asked what he wanted us to do. But here too we were made aware that the grace of God was sufficient for those who trust him. The important work taken as leader of the church, I realized that I had not always done it as I should. I pray therefore for understanding, and forgiveness. I want to trust the LORD even though it's hard.[30] (*The text of Rev. Isaac's acceptance sermon for the office of Elder/Altester was published in Preservings #25, 2005*).

The 1920's

In the 1920's some significant change did occur in the Meade Kleine Gemeinde church. Recognizing a need to supplement religious training for their children a Sunday school was started shortly after World War I. Some impetus for this was also due to the fact that instruction in the German language was discontinued in the schools during the war. So the Sunday school served as a vehicle for instruction in the German language as well as to give religious instruction

The exact year of the first Sunday school is not known to the writer, but Jac. F. Isaac notes that on January 6, 1924, Sunday school teachers were elected for the coming year.Another significant change is illustrated by a comment recorded by Jac. F. Isaac on January 20, 1926. 'Today, for the first time, the sisters were present at brotherhood meeting, and I believe with good results.' Up to this time all church related decisions had been made by the men only. . . we see here a remarkable break with tradition.[31]

In 1922 *Aeltester* Jacob F. Isaac, along with several other Meade church leaders, were part of a delegation that included Canadian KG leaders to explore the feasibility of relocating to Mexico.[32] About five Meade families, including Rev. M. T. Doerksens, moved to Mexico in September of 1924. In a few years some families returned to America.[33]

A Typical Meade Kleine Gemeinde Sunday

Since the Meade KG settlement stretched southeast of Meade for over 20 miles, it was necessary for the early community to build two churches, the initial building in 1907 near the south end of the settlement, also known as the South or 'the long church,' and later the second one, the North church, five miles south and three east of Meade. The congregation then alternated worship services between the South and the North churches to accommodate travel concerns. Noon meals were provided for families who traveled a distance to church. Members in the vicinity of the Sunday church building made Saturday preparations to provide spontaneous hospitality on Sunday (so no invitations were needed, just go to a home of choice), and a hearty welcome was waiting with a generous noon meal, plus a lunch (*faspa*) in the afternoon around 4:00 p.m. The afternoon was spent in visiting and fellowship, while children enjoyed playtime.

The morning worship service followed a Sunday School (after 1924) for children only, whose initial purpose was to teach German, while the adults visited in the sanctuary. In the late 1930s, the writer remembers having Bible lessons sitting with children on a bench in the cloakroom. Men and women sat on separate sides of the church. Growing children were allowed to sit in gender specific groups toward the front. Men and women entered the church building from separate ends, through a cloakroom where coats and wraps could be hung. Clothes were dark colored and drab, with floor length dresses and shawls for women and no ties for men with their simple dark suits.

When it was time for the worship service to begin, the ministers would emerge from their private conference room and file into the sanctuary. About half way to the low platform stage they would pronounce a blessing for all to hear "The peace of the Lord be with you all, Amen." Once on stage the leader moved behind the pulpit, while the others sat facing the congregation. Then the designated song leader "vorsaenger" would come to lead the congregation in unison singing, often quoting a phrase and then the congregation singing it, and then the process was repeated until the song was completed. At prayer time the whole congregation would turn around in the pews to kneel on the floor. After a lengthy period of silent prayer, people would wait till they heard the shuffle of the elders' feet as they stood up so the congregation could again be seated. There was no passing of offering plates, but an alms box was near the exit to receive donations. Thereafter followed a sermon in German that had been written by the speaker and that would usually last an hour or more. Occasionally baptism by sprinkling (pouring a small amount from a pitcher on the head) would be held for the 18 to 20 year olds who had completed the annual instruction class of scripture and doctrine to prepare for church membership. With electricity being unavailable in the early years, there were no evening services. Brotherhood meetings, 'broudaschaft', would be held on occasional Sunday afternoons to deal with issues like church discipline.

Ältester Jacob F. Isaac and his wife Maria Dueck Isaac with their two sons Levi and Alvin. Photo taken in 1941. Preservings, June 1997

The 1930's

Several trends became evident in the Meade KG Church during this decade. First, membership began to plateau in comparison to the Canadian KG churches. Secondly, unrest among the membership became more intense. "On the one hand there is a complaint that the ministers are not speaking out against modern trends in dress, etc., like they used to do. On the other hand, a number of Meade Young People write about their experiences at the Meade Bible School. They write

about prayer meetings, seeking and knowing the Lord's will for their lives and serving the Lord in song and testimony, etc. Traditionally, such overt expressions of faith were suspiciously viewed as pride. Now a growing number of the younger members saw these as evidence of spiritual life. The ministerial, especially the bishop Jacob F. Isaac, was hard pressed to give leadership during this time of transition in the church."[34]

Updated Information on the 1930's and Early 1940's.

Ältester Jacob F. Isaac suffered a personal family loss, when Katharina, his wife of almost thirty-five years, died on July 30, 1936. He was left with five children at home, with the only daughter still at home leaving for marriage within two months. Thus four sons needed someone to assist with household care. Soon *Ältester* Isaac traveled to Canada to visit Rev. Heinrich R. Dueck, a leader in the Canadian Kleine Gemeinde, and his family. Rev. Isaac and his first wife had been frequent visitors to the Dueck home in Kleefeld, Manitoba. Now the widower proposed marriage to the oldest daughter, Maria, who had the unique experience of being the first Kleine Gemeinde woman to attend a Bible School in Winkler from 1927-29. Thereafter she had taught Vacation Bible School with the Canadian Sunday School Mission. Her credentials seemed to be a good choice for the *Ältester* in his responsibilities. Maria accepted the challenge and they were married by her father on December 6, 1936. To this union were born two sons, Lee in 1937 and Al in 1940.[35]

There were also concerns by some young people regarding the discontent against *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac. They felt the criticisms of him were unjust and "Brotherhood" meetings did not address specific complaints, but focussed on general discontent, which was difficult to address.[36]

The mounting burdens of the KG church's struggles about its vision as seen by the *Ältester* and some ministers, and the divergent views of a large number of the membership who seemed to prefer the traditions of the Kleine Gemeinde in its earlier years took their toll on the *Ältester.* In early July 1939, he suffered an emotional crisis that demanded some family attention. In August 1939 Rev. John R. Dueck and wife came to Meade from Chicago. Rev. Dueck was a brother to the *Ältester*'s wife Maria. Perhaps some time with his minister brother-in-law was a positive factor. He recovered with renewed commitment to stay the course in his leadership capacity.[37]

Both the Manitoba and Kansas KG ministers had felt the need to clarify the faith and practice of their congregations. In 1937 a list of 23 items were addressed and published for guidance.[38] But the effort did not seem to stem the tide of discontent as the efforts were apparently viewed as too legalistic. Some internal reform activity began to blossom in the Meade KG community as a Bible School had been established in 1936 in the basement of the EMB Church and these students were beginning to assert their views that favoured less legalistic living. In the summer of 1942, July 26, Rev. Henry R. Harms, pastor of the EMB Church, baptized 13 boys and 11 girls in the J. R. Classen pasture pond, about a quarter mile southwest of the church.[39] Of the twenty-four baptized, nine were from Kleine Gemeinde families.[40] Some of the nine joining the EMB Church were from leadership families of the dissident group of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Manitoba KG ministers were sent to help seek reconciliation. Rev. Heinrich R. Dueck, (the father-in-law of *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac) from Kleefeld, Manitoba presented a series of messages to the Meade KG churches in August 1942 and concluded with a Communion service at the North Church on August 21, 1942.[41] Missionary Peter A. Friesen from Denver conducted a series of revival meetings in late November 1942, rotating between the North and South church buildings, concluding on December 2nd.[42] But reconciliation could not be achieved and the Meade KG had its final worship service in the South Church on January 31, 1943. It was noted that only four families were in attendance.[43]

In 1942 leadership from the dissident KG group contacted the EMB Church Board to intervene with *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac, who had refused to resign,[44] to release the North church building for the "breakaway" group to start a new church and also supply them with a pastor. After some difficult negotiations, the EMB Church Board was able to secure the desires of the KG group and also offered them Rev. Henry R. Harms as pastor, since Orlando Wiebe was now available to become the new pastor of the EMB Church.[45] Orlando Wiebe was ordained as the EMB Church pastor on Sunday, March 28, 1943.[46]

On February 21, 1943 the dissident KG group began worship services in the North KG church building, under the leadership of Rev. Henry R. Harms. In 1944 the church became known as the Emmanuel Mennonite Church.[47]

Renewal and Refocus Through "Sowers of The Seed" and the Meade Bible Academy

Since *Profile of the KG* was published in 1987, this writer has done interviews with former KG individuals, as well as several of my uncles. These interviews add an interesting dimension to the involvement of *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac's younger sons and other young people in the Youth movement and the Meade Bible School.[48] Both Ben (1918 -), the third youngest, and Abe (1922 -), the youngest, from the *Ältester*'s first marriage, were quite active in the movement known as "Sowers of Seed". They said these meetings had singing, audible prayer, personal testimonies and speakers, some of whom came from Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas. "The elder at this time cannot be accused of opposing the more spiritual emphasis desired…"[49] Both sons also say that their attendance at these meetings was heartily supported by their father. Both brothers were responsible to lead meetings at various times. Abe became known for his speaking and teaching ability through this movement. Ben attended Bible School for one year before he was drafted for CPS service. "Abe also graduated from Meade Bible School on March 23, 1941."[50] In 1944 he married Ruth Friesen, a Meade Bible School classmate and daughter of EMB Church deacon, Henry R. Friesen (1892-1971) and Wilhelmina "Minnie" Schmidt (1901-1979). Later he was an active Sunday school teacher in the EMB Church, while Ben served as a church trustee. Some family have stated that it was hoped Abe would consider entering the ministry, which apparently he did, but instead, for whatever reasons, later choose farming as a vocation. Both men became very successful farmers and were also active in the EMB Church.[51] Al Isaac, in his high school EMB Sunday school class, had his brother Abe as a teacher and says he was outstanding in his presentations and interaction.[52]

Numerous KG youth were influenced by the "Sowers of Seed" movement and the Meade Bible School. "As there had been considerable bickering within the Kleine Gemeinde some of the young people turned to the Bible School rather than their own ministers for their source of inspiration. The evangelistic spirit of the Bible School soon captivated many of the Kleine Gemeinde youth. . .The Kleine Gemeinde Bible School students and other young people who had caught this evangelistic spirit organized prayer meetings…. The prayer meetings were probably the most effective medium through which this evangelistic spirit was disseminated throughout the Kleine Gemeinde."[53]

"I remember being in the committee for the church young people's prayer-meeting, meeting once a month in the North [KG] church. . . The influence of Dr. John R Dueck [the *Aeltester*'s brother-in-law]; Mr. Barkman of Grace Children's Home [Henderson, Nebraska], and others that inexorably moved the KG more into the lively mainstream of the evangelical church. All of this was hard for those deeply entrenched in the KG traditions/beliefs."[54] Dr. John R. Dueck became the coordinator for organized groups of "Sowers of Seed" at Meade, Kansas; Jansen, Nebraska; Henderson, Nebraska; Luton, Iowa; and Marion, South Dakota. "… a number of Meade Young People write about their experiences at the Meade Bible School. They write about prayer meetings, seeking and knowing the Lord's will for their lives and serving the Lord in song and testimony, etc."[55]

The movement was also greatly strengthened by the arrival of ministers like Rev. J. J. Gerbrandt, who came from Marion, Kansas and served as principal and teacher of the Meade Bible School from 1936–1941 and Orlando Wiebe, who came from Tabor College to become the next principal and teacher from 1942-1946.[56] These teachers and pastors are given credit for encouraging the young people to become students of the Scriptures. They have indicated a newfound joy and freedom to live in God's grace, experiencing the assurance of salvation by a personal faith in Jesus Christ, and living without the restrictions of the past legalistic focus they sensed was "works" oriented. Evangelism blossomed as Bible School and Academy youth participated in such activities as some Saturday evening street meetings (singing, testimonies, distribution of gospel tracts) in Dodge City, Kansas. There was also a renewal of confession of wrong deeds that had been done amongst the KG Church body and to the *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac. Earlier even a son of the *Ältester*

was involved in confession before the Church body.[57] In a post KG disintegration incident, pews in the vacant South KG Church building were piled in the lobby, blocking entry doors and then it was used for a roller skating party. This action was later addressed by the leader of the group in a private meeting with *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac. The guilty leader requested forgiveness for this action of indiscretion and disrespect and with the repentance, the request was graciously granted during this lengthy meeting with the *Ältester*.[58]

Post Disintegration of the Meade, Kansas Kleine Gemeinde

Some reasons for the final disintegration of the Meade KG in February 1943 are well described by Henry Fast. "The leaders that had brought them out from Russia had passed from the scene. The new leadership was unable to cope with the wide variance of ideas within the church membership. Many of these new ideas were motivated by the Bible school in Meade and were a mixed blessing. . . Finally, it seems, it was their inability to wait for change that culminated in the final solution; to tear down and begin on a new foundation"[59]

What the previous generation could not seem to accomplish, the next generation of KG children did. They built on the ashes of disintegration, began to rise up and assert their new found freedoms, and became active in constructive leadership in both the Emmanuel Mennonite Church and the EMB Church. It also took some of them far beyond the boundaries of Meade County. The "melting pot" for the renaissance of growing cooperation in the community seemed to be the Meade Bible Academy where the students were challenged to respect and love each other, stretch their "world view", move forward empowered by the Scriptures as they interacted with each other and moved out beyond previous personal boundaries. Exchange music programs and athletic competition with other Bible Academies became a regular part of the intra-state and inter-state schools like Central Kansas Bible Academy in Hutchinson, Kansas, Berean Academy in Elbing, Kansas, Hesston Academy, Hesston, Kansas, Oklahoma Bible Academy in Meno, Oklahoma, and Corn Bible Academey, Corn, Oklahoma. Just as their forefathers had experienced the change in agrarian opportunities, this new generation used education as a vehicle toward integrating into a society that took many out of the Meade community into new professional opportunities of ministry.

Another significant transition phase emerged that began to bridge the past isolation of the Mennonite community and the people of the city of Meade. Both Mennonite Churches joined the Meade Churches Ministerial Alliance to cooperate in various special joint services, the two Mennonite Churches began a joint AWANA ministry at the Emmanuel Church in Meade (new building in town decision made in 1963), as an outreach to children in town and also to serve both churches, and joint Vacation Bible Schools started on an annual rotating basis between the city and the country church. Social and governmental cooperation expanded into memberships in Meade Service Clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, Home Demonstration Units, the Meade County Fair Board, Coop Elevator & Supply Board of Directors, County Board of the United Department of Agriculture, and the Meade Public School Board, where some members were elected by the community from both the Mennonite Churches. In other business activity rural owners moved their companies into Meade, while others established new businesses in town, and numerous people left their farm homes to live in town. Thus the "ashes of the KG disintegration" of the early 1940s and the rural isolation since the emigration from Nebraska were permanently broken, apparently propelled by the significant vision to "reach out in the name of Christ and touch people for His glory," a teaching that had been nurtured at Meade Bible School and Meade Bible Academy. The graduates seemed to feel empowered as they left their home community for higher education and opportunities thereafter to minister throughout the world, no longer bearing the burden of the strife of the previous generations.

"Since the beginning of the Meade Bible School in 1927, alumni have distinguished themselves as clergy & missionaries, in agriculture, aviation, business, computer specialists in business & government, construction, educators, elementary to university service with advanced & doctoral degrees, government personnel, medical office personnel, nurses and doctors, the military, and radio ministry."[60] Thus many graduates of Meade Bible School/Academy, representing both churches, have earned professional degrees, such as doctoral, both medical & educational, specialist degrees, masters degrees, along with the completion of four-year college degrees.

Reflections about *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac by former Young People[61]

"A good memory: the Pastoral blessing pronounced, in German, even as the line of elders were coming in from the back of church. It may have been the benediction for Aaron to speak to Israel as in Numbers 6:24-26. That is indeed a beautiful prayerful benediction, blessing."

"Of the row of preachers sitting on the platform, I was most excited when Rev. Jacob F. Isaac got up to preach…. I thought he was interesting…. I don't think he was so traditional."

"I think the demeanour and delivery of messages by Mr. Isaac were probably more pleasant than the very sober, strict messages by some of the other ministers. I actually believe he was a more friendly, attractive sociable person than his strict, austere peers on the bench."

"Sermon topics tended to refocus on two primary parables, the 'Wise and Foolish Builders' from Matthew 7 and the 'Ten Virgins' from Matthew 25."

"I don't remember any sermon topics that he preached. My guess is that his sermons were exhortations from Scriptures for practical Christian living, rather then oriented to living according to traditions."

"I liked the singing as I didn't know anything else, but I can't say I was very blessed from it. But I remember some of the German words of the 'Gesangbuch' ".

"Thought prayer times were always to be silent. So didn't really learn to pray, especially, not out loud."

"I think I enjoyed the congregational singing, such as it was."

"My early S. S. Memories are of the 'Fiebel' which was intended to teach us German. I enjoyed studying German, but they were not Bible stories."

"What influenced me the most is memory work (Scripture) was the'Jugend Verein' where we had Bible verse contests. One person was selected for the next meeting and that person chose a team of contestants. We would recite Bible verses till somebody repeated a verse and then had to sit down. The last one up was the winner."

"We did memorize some Scripture, but were not encouraged to study the Scriptures for ourselves . . ."

Personal Comments About *Aeltester* Jacob F. Isaac:

"…friendly and understanding. . . thought he was very spiritual. . . very generous and willing to help . . .easy to consult with." "…impression was that he knew the Bible very well... studied a lot... many books in the library." "…(parents) felt many of the accusations were false, ..." "…not old enough to be in the *Broudaschaft* (membership meetings), so impressions . . . came from parents. . . (J.F.I.) went to many of the members' homes to try to straighten out ... misunderstandings." "…good father and husband that really loved and respected his wife... considered Mrs. Isaac as being very special and spiritual" "…often felt [people] did not notice what the Jacob F. Isaac's were really like and did not fully understand their motives…often hurt with them."

Post KG *Ältester* Years for Rev. Jacob F. Isaac

The transitions that had gained momentum and were transforming the Meade Mennonite community also impacted the *Ältester's* family. During the last several years of the Meade Kleine Gemeinde, a number of the *Ältester's* children started attending the EMB Church. During the years from 1937 to 1944, three of the sons had married daughters of EMB Church Board member families and became regular attendees there. The oldest daughter, Margaret J. Isaac Loewen and husband William with their two young boys, stayed with the KG until the dissolution in January 1943. The Loewen family had frequently participated in evening and other special services at the EMB Church, so the transition was less difficult.

Rev. Jacob F. Isaac was forced into retirement as an *Ältester* because the majority of his congregation had abandoned him; thereafter he with his second family also followed the rest of his Isaac extended family into worshiping at the EMB Church as a layperson. Although the former *Ältester* no longer had an administrative office, in the EMB Church several of his sons were elected to positions for the Trustee Board, some family members taught Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. Later, grandchildren were selected for leadership positions with a great-grandson

becoming the Church Moderator in the 1990s.

In the area of education and spiritual reform, the former *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac, who had encouraged his younger sons, Ben and Abe, to become involved in the "Sowers of Seed" spiritual renewal activities and Abe's graduation from Meade Bible School, could look back in his later years with satisfaction that his appreciation for the study of the Scriptures and continuing education were adopted by his family. The two sons of his second marriage were encouraged to attend and graduate from Meade Bible Academy. They participated in music groups and sports teams (both Lee and Al played varsity basketball while at MBA, Lee played basketball at Grace University and Al taught high school and coached basketball along with other sports at Corn Bible Academy, Oklahoma and Berean Academy, Elbing, Kansas). In addition the *Ältester's* grandchildren, who lived in the Meade community, graduated from MBA, and after its closing in 1966, from Meade High School with fine academic achievement, outstanding music awards, and some distinguished themselves in sports participation. Many attended colleges and universities where they continued to achieve as they had in their high school years, earning academic and music honors, and some participating in varsity sports.

At the end of the 1950s Rev. Jacob F. and Maria Isaac sold their remaining farmland twenty miles southeast of Meade so they could relocate in the City of Meade, joining numerous Mennonites from both churches who also adopted the rural to urban living transition. Here they were later joined by a number of their children who also either built or purchased homes in Meade.

Fresh new attitudes had come into a revitalized Meade Mennonite community with evidence of more cooperation between the two churches that replaced the negative allegations of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Former friendships that had become strained were re-established and intermarriage between youth of the two churches became a more common practice. Even a former dissident KG leader, after the loss of his spouse, married the widow of a former EMB Church leader.

The *Ältester* who had given early support to the "Sowers Of Seed" movement as a positive change, which perhaps earlier had been stymied by resistant forces came to see the time when this movement gained significant support in the EMB Conference as the program was adopted by some churches through the leadership of his brother-in-law, the Dr. John R. Dueck. The former *Ältester*, when the family decided to move to Meade, also demonstrated his good will by putting away past differences by selling his land to a family with Kleine Gemeinde roots.

Rev. Isaac demonstrated his life-time commitment to being selected in 1914 as *Ältester* by refusing to resign from that position when requested to do so prior to the final disintegration of the Meade Kleine Geimeinde, and also later when he declined an opportunity to relocate to Canada in 1944 to live in his recently deceased father-in-law's home. His initial promise to God to remain true to that position was not to be broken, even though he was no longer active in that position.

Rev. Jacob F. and Maria Isaac continued to exhibit a spirit of love by living the final years of their lives in the Meade community by accepting renewed relationships with grace and kindness.

Final Comments from Rev. Jacob F. Isaac's Two Youngest Sons

In a letter to *Preservings* editor, Delbert Plett, Al Isaac, Hillsboro, Kansas writes:

Thank you for the books (The Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series) you gave. You handled some sensitive topics in a balanced and respectful manner, and I appreciate that in your writing. My father, *Ältester* Jacob F. Isaac, was a leader in a very difficult period - period when younger people were chomping on the bit to go a different direction and the older guard pulling on the reins to keep everything in check. On numerous occasions I would hear my father express concern about how to keep the message of God and the Gospel clear in a period of change. Frequently when I would leave the house, his last words to me were in low German 'Don't forget the important'.

Lee and Al Isaac:

At a very young age, we became aware that God had a special place in Dad's life. There was no joking when referring to God. Dad had the utmost respect for the sovereignty of God and light-hearted comments in reference to God were not acceptable. The same was true of God's Holy Word, The Bible. We were taught that you did not place the Bible on the floor, you did not place other books or things on the Bible and you held it in a reverent manner, i.e. you did not curl it up so you could hold it in on hand. If you held it in one hand, you would cradle the Bible in the flat open hand.

The casual reference to God and the common pearly-gate stories of today, as well as the disrespectful handling and interpretation of God's Word would have saddened Dad's heart. It would have saddened his heart because he knew it was an affront to God.

A common sight as we were growing up was Dad sitting at this roll-top desk reading and studying the Bible. He would read other books occasionally, but it was usually the Bible. His Bible was well marked. They also note that often when guests were at the house, the discussions would center on Biblical issues.

Endnotes

1 Delbert Plett, *Dynasties of the Kleine Gemeinde*, (Steinbach, Mb: Crossway Publications, 2000), 529, 531.
2 Ibid, 530.
3 Ibid. 530.
4 Ibid. 651.
5 Ibid. 533.
6 Delbert Plett, *Profile of The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874* (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1987), 88, 89 and 90.
7 Delbert Plett, *Storm And Triumph* (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1986), 249.
8 Ibid. 250.
9 Ibid. 255.
10 Ibid. 251.
11 Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874*, 93 and 95.
12 Ibid. 95-97.
13 D. Paul Miller, "The Story of Jansen, Nebraska," *Mennonite Life*, October 1954, 175.
14 Plett, *Profile of The KG 1874,* 117.
15 Ibid. 107.
16 Ibid. 117-118.
17 Ibid. 120.
18 Ibid. 121.
19 Ibid. 123-124.
20 Ibid. 126-127.
21 Ibid. 107.
22 Ibid. 128-129.
23 Ibid. 129.
24 Ibid. 129.
25 Rev. Jacob F. Isaac, *Obituary of Mrs. Jacob F. Isaac, Died July 30, 1936,* Written August 17, 1936.
26 Isaac, *A Brief Autobiography, 1948.* Courtesy of Lee Isaac, Hugoton, Kansas. See also *Profile of The KG,* 131.
27 Isaac, *Diary.* Courtesy of Lee Isaac, Hugoton, Kansas. See also *Profile of The KG 1874,* 133.
28 Isaac, *A Brief Autobiography, 1948.* See also *Profile of The KG 1874,* 131.
29 Isaac, *Letter in Meade Globe newspaper,* July 15, 1909. Courtesy of Alma Regier, Meade, Kansas; see also *Plett, Dynasties of the KG,* 248-249.
30 Isaac, *Obituary of Mrs. Jacob F. Isaac.* Delbert Plett notes that the deacon and minister election was on October 22, 1911, with ordination by Ab. L. Friesen on October 29, 1911. The election as Ältester occurred on November 23, 1914 with installation on November 29, 1914 by Peter R. Dueck from Manitoba. Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874*, 134.
31 *Meade KG Geimende Buch.* Courtesy of Lee Isaac, Hugoton, Kansas; see also *Profile of The KG 1874,* 135.
32 Delbert Plett, *Preservings,* June 1999, 104-105.
33 Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874,* 135.
34 Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874*, 137. G.T. Doerksen, former missionary to China, started the school located near the EMB Church in 1927. It was closed after the 1930 class graduated but was reorganized in 1936 by the EMB Church and met in the church's basement.
35 For further insights into Jacob F. Isaac's second marriage to Maria Dueck and her contributions to the ministry at Meade, see Wendy Dueck, "Maria Dueck Isaac, 1898-1975: A Woman Ahead of Her time", *Preservings,* June 1997, 47-49.
36 Merle Loewen, *Personal Interviews, 2000-2004.*
37 Ibid., *Margaret J. Isaac Loewen Diary.*
38 Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874*, 138.
39 Loewen, *Margaret J. Isaac Loewen Diary.*
40 Alma Regier, *Meade EMB Church Baptisms,* 28.
41 Loewen, *Margaret J. Isaac Loewen Diary.*
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874,* 138.
45 Loewen, *Interview with EMB Church Board member late 1990's.*
46 Ibid., *Margaret J. Isaac Loewen Diary.*
47 Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874,* 138.
48 Ibid. 137.
49 Daniel J. Classen, "The Kleine Gemeinde of Meade, Kansas," Bethel College paper, 1949, 29.
50 Loewen, *Margaret J. Isaac Loewen Diary.*
51 Ibid., *Personal Interviews, post-2000.*
52 Ibid., *Personal Interview, 2004.*
53 Classen, *"The KG of Meade, Kansas,"* 27-28.
54 Loewen, *Personal Interview, 2004.*
55 Plett, *Profile of The KG 1874,* 137.
56 Loewen, Meade Bible Academy history from *"*MBA Memories 1953-2003*" by Merle Loewen;* Orlando Wiebe's Meade arrival date from *Margaret J. Isaac Loewen Diary,* September, 1942.
57 Ibid., *Interviews of former Meade Bible Academy students,* 1990-2004.
58 Ibid., *Interviews with Lee Isaac, Hugoton, Kansas and Al Isaac, Hillsboro, Kansas.*
59 Plett, *Profile of the KG 1874,* 139.
60 Ibid.,*"MBA Memories 1953-2003."*
61 Ibid., *Interviews, 2003-2004.*

Hamm Family Journals

Translated by John Dyck (died 1999)

Introduction

In 1837 Peter Hamm (1817-67) (BGB A162) left his parents' home in Prussia and went to Russia. After five years in the Molotschna Colony he joined his brother, Andreas in the Bergthal Colony. Later he lived in Einlage, Chortitza for several years. After his death his widow married Bernhard Klippenstein and joined the Bergthal emigration to Manitoba in the 1870s.

The journals which follow come from the pens of the oldest and youngest sons of Peter and Helena (Penner) Hamm. Peter Hamm was born April 4, 1850 and his son Bernhard Hamm was born March 30, 1879.

These records of emigration from Prussia to Russia and from Russia to Canada, together with family information give us a glimpse into the feelings of some of the younger generation at the time of the emigration.

The family information for Peter Hamm (1817-67), can be found in the *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, A162. The originals of these journals are in Volumes 1104 and 2047 at Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.

Journal of Peter Hamm 1850-1900

Records of Peter Hamm, Neubergthal, Gretna Post Office, Manitoba, Canada.

Parents and Grandparents.

Father, born in West Prussia, in the Government District of Marienwerder, Stuhmer region, in the village Usnitz in the year 1817 March 22.

Left Prussia on September 17, 1838 to travel to Russia. Spent five weeks and five days on the trip to the Chortitza Colony. After resting there for several days he continued to the Molotschna to the village of Schönsee where he worked for five years.

In 1843 he moved from there to the Bergthal Colony and on December 11, 1847 our parents were married. In 1849 father taught school till 1851. In 1851 they moved onto the farmyard (*Wirtschaft*) in Schönthal. In 1853 he purchased the windmill together with the house in Bergthal. In 1858 he sold the windmill and purchased a *Trittmuehle* in Einlage.

Our dear mother was born on October 4, 1826 in the Chortitza Colony.

In 1791 our grandfather was born in Prussia. and in 1795 our grandmother was born in the village of Fürstenwerder in Prussia.

Births.

Father (Gerhard Kehler) was born in April 1807. Mother (Agatha Kehler) was born in April 1812. Peter Kehler was born July 11, 1863. Gerhard Kehler was born May 6, 1838. Agatha Kehler was born September 27, 1840. Gerhard Kehler was born July 24, 1842. Anna Kehler was born November 1, 1844. Jacob Kehler was born September 14, 1846. Sarah Kehler was born December 4, 1848. Frans Kehler was born September 19, 1852. Abram Kehler was born January 18, 1855.

Deaths.

Mother Agatha Kehler died August 10, 1874. Father Gerhard Kehler died January 25, 1877. Peter Kehler June 3, 1876; Frans Kehler January 14, 1882; Agatha Kehler April 10, 1886; Johann Doerksen January 14, 1900; Peter Hamm December 1, 1900; Anna Kehler October 1, 1904; Agatha Kehler August 21, 1908; Gerhard Toews April 5, 1906; Mrs. Gerhard Falk February 15, 1908; Abram Funk October 16, 1913; Peter Toews March 27, 1914; Gerhard Kehler November 24, 1914; Rev. Johan Neufeld July 15, 1911; Mrs. Johan Neufeld May 15, 1912; Uncle Jacob Kehler February 26, 1929, age 82 years, 9 months, 13 days; Abraham Kehler May 8, 1929, age 79 years, 3 months, 19 days.

Birth register, Feb. 11, 1894.

I, Peter Hamm, was born April 16, 1850. My wife Sarah was born December 16, 1848 in Schönfeld. Daughter Agatha was born August 8, 1869 in Bergthal in the South Russian Province of Ekaterinoslaw, Bergthal Colony.

Born here in Manitoba, North America: son Peter born July 9, 1875 in Bergthal. Son Bernhard born March 30, 1879 in Bergthal. Daughter Helena born January 14, 1884 in Bergthal. Daughter Sarah born March 1, 1887 in Bergthal, East Reserve, Chortitz Post Office.

Our daughter Agatha was married on November 17, 1889 here in Neubergthal, West Reserve, Gretna; Our son, Peter, married on January 1, 1899; Our son, Bernhard, married on August 9, 1903; Our daughter, Helena, married on July 5, 1904; Our daughter, Sarah married on July 21, 1908.

Feb. 11, 1894.

We arrived from Russia and unloaded on the East Reserve on August 15, 1874. We lived on the East Reserve in total 13 years, 8 months and 4 days in Bergthal, Chortitz Post Office. On March 19, 1888 we left there and moved to this reserve. We arrived here on the 21st in Neubergthal, Gretna Post Office. We were married on October 25, 1868.

My Siblings.

Brother Peter born January 28, 1849, only lived eight weeks. I, Peter Hamm, was born April 16, 1850. Sister Helena was born January 2, 1855. Brother Johann born September 29, 1857, lived eight days. Brother Johann born September 22, 1858. Gerhard born February 25, 1860. Jacob born October 18, 1862. Bernhard born February 18, 1865. Brother Heinrich born March 17, 1869.

Deaths.

Grandmother [died] in Prussia in 1835. Grandfather [died] in the same place in 1859. Grandfather Bernhard Penner in Bergthal on March 15, 1855. Grandmother in Schönfeld on March 14, 1865. Father died on July 31, 1867 in the city of Berdiansk on a return trip from Prussia. (Another record says he had left for Prussia on March 27 of the same year) Mother-in-law (Agatha Kehler) died on August 10, 1874 at the Immigration House on the East Reserve, 61 years old.

Father-in-law Gerhard Kehler died in Blumengart on the East Reserve on January 25, 1877; 68 years, 6 months, 18 days. Brother-in-law Franz Kehler died in 1882. Brother-in-law Peter Kehler died in 1875 in Blumengart, East Reserve. Sister-in-law Mrs. Peter Toews on April 10, 1886 in Bergthal, East Reserve. Brother-in-law Johann Doerksen Janaury 14, 1900 in Bergthal, West Reserve. Aunt Mrs. Jacob Kehler on February 25, 1892 in Grunthal, West Reserve. Mrs. Jacob Kehler, February 1, 1899 in Kronsthal, 42 years, 11 months, 8 days.

In November 1902. In the night of November 20 to 21st at 3:00 Sarah, daughter of Bernhard Klippenstein died after a two week illness, buried Sunday, November 23, 1902, age 6 years. November 21, 1902 there was a funeral at Jakob Hamms for their son, Martin.

Father died in 1900. Father died on December 1 at 6:00 in the evening, buried on December 4th. Reached the age of 50 years, seven months and 15 days. My parents lived together 32 years, one month and five days. Our mother died February 16, 1928 at the age of 79 years, 2 months 11 days.

Journal of Bernhard P. Hamm 1879-_____

Record of Bernhard P. Hamm, Schönhorst.

A Record of my Parents, Grandparents, Great, Grandparents, Uncles and Aunts, my Siblings and us and our children: Written by me, Bernhard P. Hamm on the farm in Schönhorst. Started to write in the year 1933, on February 20.

My great-grandfather was born in the year 1791 in Prussia. My great-grandfather was born in the year 1795 in Prussia in the village Fürstenauerweide. My grandfather was born in the year 1817, March 22, in West Prussia in the government district of Marienwerder, in the Stuhmer Region in the village of Usznitz. My grandmother was born on October 4, 1826

in the Chortitza Colony. Our grandparents were married on December 1, 1847.

On September 17, 1838 grandfather, as a youth, left Prussia for Russia. He spent five weeks and five days on the journey to the Chortitza Colony. After a few days of rest here he continued on his journey to Molotschna to the village of Schönau where he worked for five years.

In 1843 he left there for the Bergthal Colony, where he married in 1847. From 1849 until 1851 grandfather was a school teacher. In 1851 he moved into his home and Wirtschaft in Schönthal. In 1853 he purchased a windmill and a house in Bergthal. In 1858 he sold the windmill and purchased a treadmill in Einlage. That is all, as far as I know, that my father has written about my grandparents except for the birth register of his children.

Bernhard P Hamm, Schönhorst, Manitoba.

My great-grandfather was born in the year 1795 in Prussia in the village Fürstenauerweide in the government district of Marienwerder, Stuhmer region, in the village of Usnitz. My grandmother was born in the year 1826 on the fourth of October in the Chortitza Colony. Grandparents were married on December 1, 1847.

Grandfather left Prussia for Russia as a young man on September 17, 1838. He spent five weeks and five days on the trip till he arrived at the Chortitza Colony. Here he rested for several days and then continued to the Molotchna Colony to the village of Schönau where he worked for five years.

In 1843 he left there for the Bergthal Colony where he married in 1847. From 1849 until 1851 grandfather was school teacher. In 1851 they moved into the farmstead (Wirthschaft) in Schönthal. In 1853 he bought a windmill and a house. In 1858 he sold the windmill again and bought a treadmill in Einlage.

That is all, as far as I know, that my father has written about the grandparents, except for the birth register of the children.

My father is born April 4/16, 1850. (Sommerfelder B296); My mother is born December 4/16, 1848; They were married October 13/25, 1868; My sister Agatha was born August 8, 1869 in Bergthal, South Russia, government district of Ekaterinoslaw, Bergthal Colony; Brother Peter was born July 9, 1875; I, Bernhard, was born March 30, 1879; My sister Helena was born 14 Jan 1884; My sister Sahra was born March 1, 1887, in Bergthal, East Reserve, Chortitz Post Office.

Deaths, Father's Side.

Great-grandfather died in 1859 in Prussia; Great-grandmother died there in 1835 also in Prussia; Grandfather died in the city of Berdiansk on his return trip from Prussia. He left for there on May 27 of the same year. Grandmother died December 12, 1916 at 1:00 at night after a five months illness. She was 90 years, two months and seven days old.

My Parent's Journey.

On June 14, 1874 my parents emigrated from the village of Bergthal, Russia, where they had lived since 1868. Yes, what a sobering step this must have been for them to leave everything behind: the parents (although they followed shortly thereafter), the big and beautiful fruit gardens with all the beautiful apples, pears, apricots, cherries, plums and a variety of other nice fruits. In order to go to a land of which they knew nothing and which was known to them only as a wild territory which was home to the Indians. Yes, what will it have cost them to surmount, to overcome all that, what sleepless nights it will have given them. And why? Yes, only out of love for their children, to keep us free from military service. For this we cannot thank them enough.

What have our dear parents also missed on account of us young people? For we have enjoyed such good times until now, compared to those to be pitied people who must live in that hard and sorely tested Russia. Yes, what murder, fear, hunger and tyranny, slavery and misery have we been spared. And we have our dear God and the parents to thank for that. First God, that he has placed it in the hearts of our dear parents to do this, and our parents that they have seen this big undertaking to completion out of love for us, their children.

Oh yes, may our dear God continue to be so gracious to us and to our children and spare us all from the great misery and distress of which we hear almost daily from the former home of our parents. But we are in God's providence here, too, and do not know what the future holds for us. And we are no better than those people but I believe that if we all turn to God from the bottom of our hearts he will protect us from this great distress. For that is the joy that we have in Him, if we ask Him He hears us; yet He delays His response sometimes in order to test our faith.

On June 15, 1874 our parents left from Konstantinowka at 4:30 in the afternoon. Arrived in Charkow on the 16th at 8:00 in the morning. About 5:00 in the afternoon they arrived in Kurko. They left there at 6:00 in the evening for Oral where they arrived in the night at 12:30. They left Oral on the 17th and arrived at Duenaburg at 9:30. From Charkow we passed a lot of forests. The grain was poor except for the rye. Arrived in Wintebecks at 2:30 in the morning. From there we left at 3:00 in the morning. Arrived in Polotks at 1:00 in the morning of the 19th. We laid over half a day in Dueneburg. The grain here is somewhat better. This part of the trip is the worst I have had so far. We were unable to continue and spent the night in Dueneburg. We left Dueneburg at 11:00 noon for the Prussian border where we arrived about 10:00 in the evening. Arrived in Erkuhmen. But is Erkuhmen not a Russian city? The topsoil is not like what we are used to but a fuller, white clay mixed with sand.

(A portion missing)

I was wrong, Erkuhnen is a German city. The grain stands better here than it did between Charkow and the border; it is mainly winter wheat. On the 22nd of this month we experienced the first signs of illness when some were afflicted with diarrhoea. There is a lot of forest everywhere. The crops are looking worse again and just starting to come up. They are just now planting (*gesteckt*) potatoes which amazes me. After Dueneburg we saw much farmland and they were still seeding.

We arrived in Wilma at 4:30. Immediately on the other side of Wilma we passed through the first tunnel and before Kowna through the second. On the 25th we crossed the border at Erkuhnen and spent the night there. Weleft there at 8:30 in the morning. Grain crops look good, there is much forest, but the black and white cattle are not to my liking; the general settlement plan does not appeal to me for there are no organized communities.

Erkuhmen was the first Prussian city. From there we passed through the following cities: Insterburg, Köningsberg, Braunsberg, Elbing, Duerschau, Konitz, Branberg, Schneidemuhl, Kreuz and Lantsberg. We saw rye that was already ripe. From the Berlin railway station to the Hamburg railway station we crossed ten bridges and on entering the city another four. We left Berlin at 12:00 noon and arrived in Hamburg at 8:00. From Erkunen to Berlin we saw beautiful grain and good rye.

In Berlin the party under the leadership of Janzen and Penner caught up with us at 5:00 in the afternoon. The temperature in Berlin was very hot. All of Prussia, together with the settlement patterns, do not appeal to me in the least. But then, perhaps that is like that Frenchman who said, "One can go east or one can go west, home is still the very best."

On Monday, June 24 we boarded the ship at 4:00 in the morning but we did not leave for Hull until 7:00. We arrived in Hull at 12:00 at night. On June 25 at 8:10 we departed from Hull. June 26. The ship that took us to Hull was called Pacha. It was seventy steps long and 12 steps wide. Between Hull and Liverpool we crossed 138 bridges. We arrived in Liverpool at at 1:00. Between Hull and Liverpool we saw wild oats which we have not seen since we left Charkow.

In England we passed a huge number of coal pits and factories. It is hillier than we have seen in any other land, which is why there are so many bridges and tunnels. Everything is black with soot. We stayed over in Liverpool from Tuesday until Tuesday. I do not like it here at all because it is a rough people. Especially the youth are boldly impudent and not at all like the youth in Mariupol or any other Russian city we passed through.

In Liverpool I saw two horses loaded down with 73 bags of rice, something unheard of. In Liverpool I bought tobacco for one shilling, that is equal to one dollar per pound and it is bad tobacco at that. The tobacco is bad everywhere and still so expensive. If it won't get any cheaper I will likely have to quit smoking. Here in England the tools are more expensive too than they were in Russia. I saw chisels priced at a dollar and more, and

that was for a small one.

Sugar is priced at 13 to 15 kopecks or four pence; one dollar equals 48 pence. There are no planes (*Spansägen*) to be purchased here. The wagons are poorly made and cumbersome. I bought a pair of shaving razors at two shillings per pair or half a dollar. That is the equivalent of 75 Russian kopecks for the dollar costs one rubel and 51 kopeks.

On Monday at about eight o'clock in the morning we went to the railway station to get our carry-on baggage for tomorrow, the 2nd, we want to leave here. On the first our daughter, Agatha, took sick and, since several of our people already have to stay here, we are fearful that that might also happen to us. But God will help as he has in the past. On Monday, the 2nd, Agatha was somewhat better. Monday at noon we brought our baggage to the docks, that baggage which we do not carry with us.

On Tuesday, the 2nd, we departed from Liverpool on the ship named Peruvia Glason. As we sailed out of the harbour we passed six warships which greeted us with six cannons firing. They were tremendously (*ungeheuer*) big. Our ship is 150 steps long and 12 steps wide. We boarded the ship at 6:00 in the morning and left the dock at 11:00 at noon. On July 3 at about 8:00 we were all ordered on deck so they could clean our cabins. On July 3 we arrived at Quens Lowe; from there we saw no more land. Here the seasickness started and lasted till Saturday, when most passengers were on deck again.

Saturday the 6th. In the morning we passed a sailboat that was coming toward us. That was the first ship we met on the ocean. The ship's crew is terribly barbaric and lacks feeling; they consider all people worthless.

Sunday, July 7. This is the sixth day we are swimming on the sea and the fourth in which we have seen no land. Oh, how lonely it is without all our family members. Our ship's clock is now 7:00 but according to Russian time it must now be 1:00 noon. The depth of our ship runs from 18 feet above water to 32 feet below water, a total of 50 feet, and all iron. So far it has been windy every day. The ship is under the direction of Captain Watts.

Monday, July 8th we met another ship, the second on this journey. The ocean is calm and not as blustery as before. But it is getting dark again and they are taking down the sails. The wind is from the southwest; from Liverpool till today it was always northwest. Today is the fifth day we have sighted no land - just birds and the occasional porpoise. Some have also seen a large fish; they maintain it was a whale.

On the eighth at noon we met another ship. On Tuesday, the ninth, it was windy and cold, so that whoever had a coat found it comfortable. On the night between Tuesday and Wednesday we arrived at the city of St. Johns, Newfoundland and in the forenoon we left for Halifax. At St. Johns we ran into heavy fog. The ocean is peaceful. From St. Johns we travelled very slowly. From the island we encountered many icebergs and had to stop frequently until the fog lifted.

Thursday the 11th. Today it is clear but still cold and windy. Wednesday evening we had a short church service. Thursday morning we still saw no land but passed two ships at a great distance. They were sailboats. The ocean is calm and we travelled with full sails. Wind northwest. In the afternoon we passed several ships but only sailboats, one of them carried 1073 souls.

Friday the 12th in the forenoon Peter Friesen's daughter died. She had the (*weisse Fresen*) and had become sick on the second day of the journey. She was sick in bed for 10 days. The ocean is very smooth and without any waves. About one o'clock they buried the body in the ocean. It is a very sorrowful experience to give one's loved ones into the ocean. They buried the body in the ocean as we entered the harbour. If we had taken the body on to the land we would have had to spend four days in quarantine.

At 2:00 we arrived in Halifax where several passengers disembarked and a large amount of freight, consisting of tea and iron, was unloaded. We left Halifax for Quebec at 4:00 in the morning. The weather is clear and warm; the ocean is calm. On the north side land is visible all the time.

Sunday the 14th. Land was still in sight. Northwest wind. The ocean is more restless than it has been for the past couple of days. Every Sunday we have pudding with molasses but no soup at noon. The sea is restless again so that some are throwing up again. Sunday we saw land again at about 3:00. It is quite chilly and passengers are again looking for their coats and sunshine. We had no church service on Sunday. In the evening we had more wind in the St. Lawrence Gulf than we have had on the entire journey, but it came over the hills. Southwest wind. Monday, calm and the voyage is going well. Land is always in sight to the southwest, but also to the north at a great distance.

Monday night we arrived in Quebec. Tuesday morning we disembarked. The weather is nice but foggy. Wednesday the 17th at 4:00 in the morning we left Quebec. We saw a great deal of forest and water. On July 17 at 5:00 in the afternoon we arrived in Montreal. We left for Toronto at 8:00 in the evening where we arrived at 5:30. Between Quebec and Montreal we saw large fields totally under water. From Montreal the land is somewhat higher but stony and with lots of woods. The grain is ripe, at least the rye. From Toronto they went to Collingwood. In Toronto we saw some of our Mennonites, also Mr. Schantz. We left Toronto on Friday the 19th at 1:00 in the afternoon. There is bush everywhere. The grain looks good but sparse. The land is somewhat higher again than between Quebec and Toronto.

We arrived in Collingwood on Friday, July 19. Collingwood is on Lake Huron. In this city we divided into two groups and the first group continued their journey at 9:00 on Friday. We saw immense forests with large sections along the tracks burned down with millions and millions of trees lying around and rotting. The land here is somewhat higher than at Quebec but it still seems low and with few hills. In Toronto Peter Hiebert's wife became ill and had to stay in bed, which is why he and his family also stayed behind.

On Monday the 22nd they buried two children. In Collingwood I bought some tools: a chisel for $1.25; a plane for .25; a compass for .20. In Toronto I bought a chisel and also a spade, a drill and an axe, all for $2.94. On the other side of Montreal we crossed over a bridge that was six miles long. It was made of iron and stood on 25 beams. And it was dark with only an air hole now and then. At another city we crossed over a bridge at which I counted 15 beams but there might have been more. The weather is clear. From Collingwood I wrote my second letter home to Russia; it cost 14 cents.

Tuesday, July 23. The weather is clear and warm. In the afternoon we had a church service and at 3:00 we boarded the ship but we did not leave till 4:00. While we were aboard ship we had the pleasure of fishing for the first time in Lake Ontario. I have not made note of any stops from Lake Ontario to Lake Superior.

Thursday, the 25th, we passed through the canal between the two lakes for the river has rapids so that it is not passable. The canal has three locks into which the ship has to enter. After the ship passes into the first lock, the gate behind it is closed and the one in front opened so that the water level rises and the ship can pass into the second lock. Then that is closed until the ship has passed through. The city at the end of the canal is called Sault St Marie, where Kornelius Ginter's daughter died, whom we left behind on the land and then continued our journey. It is the seventh child to die on our trip and two have been born.

Friday, July 26. It is so strange, as soon as we were on Lake Superior and could not see any land, it turned cold and foggy, just as on the ocean. The weather is nice, the water smooth and the trip is more enjoyable then on the train. I sold a Prussian silver half-Groschen for 15 cents. And they have sold some Russian silver rubles here on the ship for $2.10. It would have been good if I had kept my silver money and I would not have lost so much on exchange.

Friday, July 26. Today we have been six weeks en route. Today we made fish hooks so that when we get ashore we can fish. Fishing is very enjoyable and we want to make the most of it if only we get an opportunity. I, at least, won't leave them unused. The bridge at Montreal is the longest of those which I described on page 37, six miles long.

From now, July 26, 6:00 we have another 120 miles to travel to Duluth. We arrived in Duluth at 10:00 in the morning. We left here on Saturday, July 27 at 2:30 in the afternoon. On Sunday, July 28 we arrived at Moorehead

at 6:00. We laid over in Moorehead on Sunday and did some fishing but did not catch much. In Moorehead I bought 15 pounds of apples at 11 cents per pound. That was on Tuesday, July 30.

Wednesday, July 31 at 10:00 we left this city down the Red River. Today, Friday, it is seven weeks that we have been on the trip. The Red River has bush on both sides, but it is sparse, so that in some places we can see through it. The Dakota side has even less than the Minnesota side. On Friday, August 2 our mother became seriously ill in the morning but became somewhat better in the afternoon. On the Dakota side we met several farmers and we saw very nice cattle. All America has German cattle, but only red cattle and black and white cattle but more red than black and white and no Russian greys. I have seen few sheep. Horses are very expensive. Today, Saturday, we had a thunderstorm with rain so that almost all our possessions became wet. Our mother is worse today than she was yesterday but she still ate something at noon and is peaceful. From Friday to Saturday, August 10 our mother died. Monday, August 12 we viewed our land. We had some rain. It is very hot. Tuesday the 13th it is even hotter today than it was yesterday. It is clouding over; perhaps it will rain for the water supply is low. On the 14th I wrote home to Russia.

On June 14, 1874 we left our home in Russia and on August 3 we arrived at the Red River. (**End of the journey**)

The above my father wrote on the ship and I have copied it here for my children for a remembrance.

Reflections.

Yes, that is the journey of my parents on the ship from Russia to America. What hardships this will have caused them! What troubled thoughts will have been stirred up in many feeble hearts, how many concerns and thoughtful hours they will have experienced on the ship. Eight weeks on the journey, all their possessions left behind, just following the voice of their conscience in order to give their children a new home, where they themselves did not know what to expect.

Of course, several men had travelled through the area and examined it before they emigrated but how can a few men select for such a large number of people? One does not like this, and another objects to that, and there were different dispositions. But it was permitted only to go forward; it was impossible to turn back. First, because there was no money and second, they had become tired and weak from the long journey.

Many travellers will have built castles-in-the-air about their new home on the long journey. Yes, it is as if I can feel my father's emotions when he writes, "Oh, how lonesome it is without all my dear family members." I feel that I understand his emotions and his frame of mind he wrote those lines. Yes, he had his closest family members, his wife and children, with him but how barren and lonely it must have seemed. Yes, only one ship on the great ocean, as he wrote - no land in sight, only heaven and water. They must have felt like Noah in the Ark.

However, since they travelled with faith in God, they will also have experienced many joyous hours. But there were also some tests, as the instance where father writes that they have buried the body of Peter Friesen's daughter in the ocean. Since their own daughter, Agatha, also took sick, they will no doubt have considered that this could also happen in their family. But our dear Lord stood by them and it did not happen to them.

East Reserve.

I remember very well how my mother spoke about their joy that they could bury her mother in the earth. But that must also have been hard for them; after they had safely completed the journey their mother was taken from them.

Now they had to apply their energies to making their living; now it was time to work. No home, no land, winter at the door, seasonal expectations uncertain, not knowing just when to expect winter. Weak and exhausted from the long journey, food was very scarce. I remember the stories my parents told.

While they were in the immigration houses, mother had dough ready for baking, when an Indian from the half-breed settlement (*hohe Britten Stap*) arrived with an ox (and a cart) and said they should get on board and he would take them to their land. They loaded all their possessions, including the bowl with the dough and drove away. After what seemed like a long ride the Indian stopped the wagon and said they should unload, this was their home. Here on the wild prairie, without a house, they unloaded and under the clear skies was their new home.

The men immediately started cutting down trees and cutting reeds to build houses. The men prepared lumber and the women tied the reeds in small bundles and from this a house? The parents said they just built a *Sarrai*. We would think of it as just a roof because that is all it really was. Father found this work very hard because he was not used to it, since he had been a miller in Russia, but he always worked alongside the others.

Mother told us how father walked to Winnipeg several times, since nobody had a vehicle, and brought a small pail of lard, a small side of bacon and some flour. The lard and bacon lasted one year. He had also brought some potatoes but they had been frozen and were sweet. The flour had been badly infested. So mother made potatoes one day and noodles, sprinkled with bacon fat, the next and that was all the variety they had in their diet. For breakfast they had coffee made with grain (*prips*) and bread. Father used to say when he came home hungry and tired, "Potatoes and noodles one day, and noodles and potatoes the next."

What would our response to such a diet be today? Today we are dissatisfied if the bread does not turn out just as we expected and we feed it to our dogs and cats. Well, the animals have to eat, too, but when I think about those days or the hungry people in Russia—with what an appetite they would eat if only they had bread—then even the bread that did not turn out well tastes good.

When we kill pigs in fall we set the big table with assorted foods: cookies, pies, bread, meat, soup and more. Do we thank God enough for his goodness? Could he not take this away from us as well? Are we any better than those people? Certainly not. I believe that we are living in a time of grace through which our dear Lord would draw us closer to Him. We do not know how close we are to the end but the parents withstood those difficult times and later enjoyed good times.

Bergthal, East Reserve.

At that time several families banded together and settled where they had built their first *Sarrai* and started a village which they called Bergthal. That was 30 miles from Winnipeg and the men frequently walked that distance. They bought oxen and wagons, sometimes several families acquired one vehicle and a cow together. They cultivated the land and seeded it, but in the first years the grasshoppers took everything. Frequently their crop froze because the frost came earlier in those years and seeding was started later.

The times were difficult. Roads were almost impossible to travel and if they went with a small load they frequently got stuck. Then they would carry the bags on their shoulders through the swamp, go back to get the cart, then reloaded the bags and continue until the next bog. This would be repeated many times so that it would sometimes take a week and more to make a return trip to Winnipeg. Today we have such nice roads and travel so fast! How times change and how the vehicles have changed!

They did not have drills in those days. I can remember when father took a blanket filled with wheat over his shoulder, with a smaller portion in front of him, from which he would seed by hand. Then the field was harrowed and seeding was finished. Neither were there any binders, when the crop was ready for harvest it was cut by hand with a scythe, the women followed and bound it into sheaves. Then they stood it upright for drying. When it was dry it was brought home where it was piled.

There were no threshing machines; the grain was threshed with horses or oxen around a threshing stone and then cleaned. Neither were there any baggers; the grain was bagged by hand and carried on the shoulder into the granary. How the time has flown and in what kind of a time are we living today? Everything is done by machines and we do almost everything sitting down: seeding, harrowing, cutting, threshing ploughing.

The times improved for the parents, too. The climate turned milder. Crops brought a

better return until the parents again owned a full farm. Other things change as well. Instead of cutting grain with a scythe they bought a reaper pulled by horses which cut the grain and dropped individual sheaves unbound, they still had to be bound by hand.

Then threshing changed and several neighbours joined together to purchase a threshing machine, not the kind we have now since they did not yet have steam engines, rather, horses or oxen would be harnessed to go in rotation around a cylinder from which another cylinder was extended to operate the threshing machine. Instead of a self feeder three men fed the sheaves into the threshing machine. One on each side cut the string which bound the sheaves and a third man in the middle fed the sheaves into the cylinder.

Neu-Bergthal, W. Reserve.

And so everything has continued to improve until the present time. The parents continued to farm there until 1888 when they sold their land and moved here [to Neubergthal on the West Reserve] with all their possessions.

On March 19, 1888 they left there [Bergthal on the East Reserve] and on March 21 they arrived here in Neubergthal. They lived in their first location, at the Chortitz Post Office address for 13 years, eight months and four days. Here they built another house on the farmstead where my brother Peter P. Hamm lives at the present time.

While the house was under construction they lived with father's brother, Johann Hamm. They lived together there until December 1, 1900, when my father died. He had been sickly for a long time and sought help from different doctors and sometimes it would provide temporary relief but he became gradually weaker until December 1 at 5:30 in the evening when he died.

That was a difficult time for all of us, but especially for our dear mother. It was hard for her to bury her husband and the father of her children, which I can now clearly empathize. At times our dear God cuts such deep wounds but he heals them again. Yes, he also healed the wounds for our dear mother that she did not have to feel the pain quite as much. He blessed us all so that we had our daily bread and nourishment. Since my brother, Peter, had already married and was living with our parents, he took over the farmstead and mother continued to live with him.

She still lived a long time and what a difficult time it must have been, when she recalled the former times when she could share her joys and sorrows with her dear husband. But our ways are not God's ways and he knows what is best for us. Although sometimes it is hard to understand how these circumstances could be for our good.

Mother lived another 27 years, 2 months and 15 days with her children until February 16, 1928 at 5:00 in the morning, when she died. Now they are together again under the protection of the Holy One where death will never separate them again and there is no sorrow, no worry and no affliction.

What is the life of man here on earth? If life has been precious, it has been filled with toil and labour. In the same way our parents, what toil and labour they have experienced on this earth all their lives. When I consider their experiences, the grief and worry that has been their lot, I cannot wish for them anything better then that God has taken them out of this troublesome and worrisome world and unto Himself.

(Research notes added by Delbert Plett, died 2004)

The first documented evidence of the founding of the village of Neubergthal was recorded in August, 1879, when Bernhard Funk, Gerhard Hamm, Johann Hamm and Gerhard Wall Sr. made homestead entries. In addition Johann Klippenstein, Peter Klippenstein, Martin Klassen, Bernhard Klippenstein, Johann Klippenstein Jr., and Peter Klippenstein each made a land purchase (see Frieda Esau Klippenstein, *Neubergthal National Historic Site*, page 310).

The following summer Cornelius Dyck, Martin Friesen, Jakob Hamm, Heinrich Klassen, Martin Klassen, Bernhard Klippenstein, Johann Klippenstein Jr., and Peter Klippenstein made homestead entries.

The oral tradition that Neubergthal was founded in 1876 is questionable. Firstly, the naming of the village as Neubergthal as opposed to Altbergthal located two miles west of Altona already indicates that the former was founded after the latter. The secondary migration of Bergthalers from the East to West Reserve only started in 1878 which would imply that Neubergthal was founded at the earliest in 1879 and Altbergthal possibly in 1878.

An examination of the Brotschuld registers of the Bergthal Gemeinde in the East Reserve (1874-78) shows the following East Reserve origins for the Neubergthal settlers: Peter and Bernhard Klippenstein and Gerhard Wall from Bergthal, Martin Klassen from Schönsee, Jakob Hamm from Grossweide, and Martin Friesen and Heinrich Klassen from Ebenfeld. Comparison of the known places of residence of the Neubergthal and Altbergthal settlers with the Homestead Cancellations will provide more detailed information about their origins and perhaps disclose the settlers' intentions respecting the common name.

The story of teacher and *Fraktur* artist, Peter Klippenstein, speaks for the experiences of most of the Neubergthal pioneers. As a young man he taught in the village of Bergthal in the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia. Together with his family, parents and siblings, he came to Canada in July 1875. Peter and brother Bernhard settled in Bergthal, three miles north of modern-day Mitchell west of Steinbach.

The brothers' insurance in the East Reserve Brandordnung was cancelled in 1881. The fact that they had already acquired land in Neubergthal in 1879 indicates that the move to the West Reserve was a deliberate and carefully planned strategy of secondary migration. According to oral tradition the beams of the modern housebarn which Peter had erected in Bergthal, East Reserve, were carefully notched, taken apart and reassembled in the new location in the West Reserve.

The presence of 4,000 Old Colony pioneers already well established in the higher better drained lands to the west of Altona, must have been a great help to the 1500 or so Bergthaler who moved across the river. By reconstructing their home and stable in Neubergthal in 1881, and by carrying forward the name Bergthal from one continent to another and from the east side of the Red River to the west, the Peter Klippensteins as well as other Bergthal pioneers reflected nostalgia and respect for a past which directed them confidently into the future (see *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 114-116).

Kornelius and Elisabeth Dyck Unger

Felsenton, Manitoba, By Pauline Unger Penner, Blumenort, Manitoba

Grandmother.

Elizabeth was born to Abram Wiebe (born Jan. 14, 1819, died: Feb. 21, 1878) and Aganetha Dyck Wiebe (born Aug. 14, 1831, died: date of death unknown). Elizabeth was the 15th of 20 children. Four children died at various ages before becoming adults. Aganetha Dyck Wiebe was the daughter of Abraham Dueck, Schönsee, and was great-grandfather's third wife. Some of grandmother Elizabeth's brothers remained in Russia when the family emigrated to Manitoba.

Grandmother Elizabeth married Cornelius Klassen Unger on July 1, 1883. (born Jan. 3, 1860, died: Mar. 1933). They were four months short of being married fifty years.

Grandfather was also the fifteenth of twenty-two children (one previous marriage) born to Peter Unger (born Jul. 29, 1812) and Katherina Klassen Unger (born Sep. 7, 1832).

My father Abram Wiebe Unger (born Feb. 16, 1896, died: Oct. 7, 1983) was the fourth of eight children. He married Katharina Derksen Wiebe (born Jul. 22, 1902, died: Nov. 4, 1996) on October 27, 1922.

The given name to a child was a high priority to my grandparents. So when the first child was born to my parents (a daughter) grandfather travelled many miles with horses from Felsenton, to near Niverville where my folks were residing. The first daughter was called Elizabeth. Our maternal grandmother had passed away when my mother was only thirteen. Her name was Aganetha, and that name was to be for the second daughter that might come along. Well sixteen months later I came along, so my dad called me Paulina. He liked that name and no grandparents had come. I married Jake Penner, son of Aron M. and Marie Goossen Penner on July 1, 1951.

Eighteen months later another daughter was born. Then both grandfather and grandmother came over; she was named Aganetha. Later a brother was born, and called Abram after our dad. Later another sister, Mathilda, brother Otto, brother Willie, and in 1936 our youngest brother Anton (Tony). Each of my dad's brothers that had daughters, had one named Elizabeth, a good sturdy name.

As our grandparents lived about 3 1/2 miles south and west of Steinbach, and our parents lived at the Prairie Rose area for some years, Christmas gatherings at the grandparents were not always attended by us. Distance, horse travel, and small children did not mix very well. We always eagerly looked forward to the times we did go to Christmas gatherings, especially the Christmas bags with goodies and a hankie. Sometimes we did not get the baggies till March, but we opened them with great eagerness, and grandma hugged us and I know she loved all her grandchildren.

Children of Kornelius and Elizabeth Unger:

Their children, to the best of my knowledge, come in this order:

1. Daughter Katharina, born: 1884, died: Nov. 1946.

2. Daughter Aganetha, born: 1887, died: Jun. 29, 1942.

3. Son Cornelius, born: May 1894, died: Jan. 29, 1962. He married Maria Barkman. They had five sons and three daughters.

4. Son Abram (my father), (born: Feb. 16, 11896, died: Oct. 7, 1983). He married Katharina Derksen Wiebe. They had four sons and four daughters.

5. Daughter Helena, (born: 1898, died: Mar. 8, 1978). She married widower Klass K. Friesen. They had one daughter.

6. Son Peter, (born: 1899, died: Sep. 19, 1969). Peter married Maria Ginter. They had ten daughters and one son.

7. Son Gerhard, (born: Aug. 1902, died: Jan. 11, 1940). He married Maria Sawatsky Dyck in 1938. They had one son, Abram, (born: Nov. 1939), who was six weeks old when his father died.

8. Daughter Elizabeth, (born: 1905, died: passed away at age three years from diphtheria).

As far as I calculate, there were 29 grandchildren.

Journal

Copied by A.W. Unger, from his grandfather's diary, written in the Gothic German script:

1819 January 14	I, Abram Wiebe, was born.
1838	I was baptized by Aeltester Jacob Dyck in Neuendorfer Kirche.
1839 May 9	I was joined in matrimony to Susanna Kopp.
1840 February 12	Our son, Cornelius, was born on a Monday at 2:30 in the afternoon. The Lord be with him.
1841 June 14	Our daughter, Anna, was born on a Saturday. The Lord be with her.
1843 September 8	Our son, Abraham, was born Wednesday at 6:30 in the morning. The Lord be with him.
1844 December 2	Our son, Peter, was born at 7:00 in the evening. The Lord be with him.
1846 July 14	Our daugther, Maria, was born. She died five days later.
1847 July 4	Our son, Martin, was born. The Lord be with him.
1848 October 29	My wife, Susanna, passed away on Friday at 1:15 in the afternoon. She was 32 years, 1 month and 10 days old. We were married 9 years, 8 months and 20 days. Born were 4 male children, and 2 female children. One male child predeceased her into eternity.
1849 February 2	After a period of 3 months and 21 days as a widower I joined in marriage to Maria Klassen. She was born February 18, 1921.
1850 May 6	Our son, Wilhelm, was born at 1:00 in the morning. The Lord be with him.
1852 May 18	Our son, David, was born and he died right away.
1853 June 21	Our daugther, Maria, was born. The Lord be with her.
1855 January 7	Our son, David, was born. The Lord be with him. His mother died at his birth. He was adopted by Abraham Funks. For the third marriage I was joined to Aganetha Dyck.
1855 June 5	Marriage to Aganetha Dyck.[1]
1858 January 31	Our son Jacob was born.
1860	Aganetha born.
1862 December 22	Elizabeth born.
1864	Helen was born.
1865	Johan was born.
1868 March 13	Our son, Henry, was born. The Lord be with him.
1870 January 20	Our son, Gerhard, was born at 8:30 in the morning. The Lord be with him.
1872 February 13	Our son Bernhard was born.
1876 July 13	Our son, Heinrich, died at 8:00 in the evening on the great ocean and at 10:00 the same evening, he was put to rest where the watery grave awaited him. Oh what a heart-breaking parting it was. "The Lord will find his own everywhere." It is written, "And the sea gave up the dead that were in it." ("Und das Meer gab seine Toten wieder.").[2]

This is the end of his *Tagebuch* (diary). Great grandfather Abraham Wiebe passed away February 4, 1887, age 68 years and 26 days. Great grandmother Aganetha Dyck-Wiebe passed

The Wiebe Family.

Grandmother came with her family to Canada from Russia; arrived at Quebec on July 30, 1876 on the S.S. Sardinian (Bergthal Gemeindebuch). The family included her parents, Abram and Aganetha Wiebe, sons: Jacob (17), Johann (9), Gerhard (5), Bernhard (3), daughters: Aganetha (14), Elizabeth (13), and Heindrich (8), who died at sea, and was buried there.

I must have been somewhere in my teens when I last visited my grandmother. She was spending time at her only married daughter's place. She was concerned about how all the people were accepting Family Allowance (*Rejierungs Yelt*) She asked me if we were also accepting it. I said "no". Then she asked, if we had applied for it. I said yes, but so far we had not received any money.

I also noticed what beautiful hands she had, and they must have done an awful lot of washing with lye soap and a scrub board. Grandma your hands were beautiful. Grandmother had an eye problem. She always wore a head covering (Duok) and had a blue patch covering her one eye.

Writing this brings back so many memories. est well, grandma.

- Granddaughter, Pauline Unger Penner

Endnotes

1 He did not include the date of his third marriage. The date has been taken from *The Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, 94, B29.

2 Revelation 20:13, KJV.

A Useful Instruction for the Beginning of a Christian Marriage

written for their Children by Heinrich and Elisabeth Plett

Beloved children, Jakob and Gertruda, in remembrance. Your wedding day was October 4th, 1931; [we] began to write on the 18th of January, 1932, from Heinrich and Elisabeth Plett.

I feel constrained to provide you, our beloved children, with a short memorial to take along with you, as you commence your life's journey, with the wish that you might take the same to heart and that you would receive it from your parents, who love you dearly, knowing well that during the course of your wedded life, much wisdom and good advice will be beneficial for you. Do take note, that your current status can be associated with all manner of circumstances; you can await joyful and blessed days, as well as sorrows and cares. That is, if the Lord will allow you to live together for a time in this sorrowful world. Yet, we are of the firm conviction that you have set out upon your wedded life in sincere prayer unto God, and have sought out His leading in this most serious undertaking. Therefore, you can also be comforted and assured that our God of peace and love was with you and will bless your beginnings. From then, henceforth, it will also be your duty and obligation to articulate your lives according to the word of God and to always have God before you and in your hearts and to live in the fear of the Lord.

Since young wedded people are often in need of instruction for their inexperience, I thought I would put before you several writings and citations from the Word of God, although they might have already been mentioned during the course of the betrothal, of which I have to instruct you. There are a number of scriptures necessary to know in the laws of Moses: in Leviticus chapter 18, verse 19, and chapter 20, verse 18, and Ezekiel 18, verse 6; and after that the Apostle Paul provides some clarification in Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3, verses 1-7, and Colossians 3, verses 18 and 19, defining the nature of the obligations of the wedded couple, bringing forth the love and mutual trust which is to arise there from by the will of God. And yet, we should exert ourselves in our faith to always exercise the virtues enumerated in 2 Peter 1, verse 6, in order to carry out the admonishments of Paul and 1 Thessalonians 7. And in this vein, there would be many directions applicable to marriage. For this reason I also advise you to diligently read in the Word of God, and to regard it as your road guide in all circumstances, which may well come upon you. Also that it might shine as a bright light throughout all the days of your lives whereby you will also be able to comfort yourselves in many a joy and blessing. Particularly, for the present, may you truly feel blessed that your hearts have been truly betrothed to each other, and, as we hope, have mutually been surrendered to each other.

On! What an unspeakable good fortune it is to have found someone who wishes to be entwined with us from their innermost being: who wishes to take mine, and I theirs, with everything that they have and are, to stand together, mutually sharing and carrying joy and sorrow and out of love and responsibility to accept and to entrust everything to each other, and that not only for a brief time, but until your last breath. Oh, beloved children! May God preserve you in such good fortune in everything which may befall you. Indeed, our wish would be that it might—on both sides—increase from time to time. Oh, how we parents from both sides will rejoice when we see our children walking in love and harmony, being glad one for the other, and serving each other as God has commanded, each one serving the other in joy and sorrow, according to their gifts.

Beloved children. Would that God might grant you such grace, for the wedded life holds within it so many aspects, and for which reason it does not unfold without much effort. Yes, there is the exercise of the sunshine, blessing and joy, as well as its many obligations and duties: [but also] various trials of the flesh as well as of the spirit. Yes, there is much concern and work in taking heed to constrain the [fleshly] nature - to deny oneself and break one's own will and so on, as a willing sacrifice, making the one indebted to the other. It does not do any damage and, indeed, brings good fortune to the marriage not to cease from so doing. To the contrary, this is good and wholesome in the Spirit and according to the will of God, shall bring the well-being of the marriage to fruition, and is generally productive, as is demonstrated by the experience of all properly constituted marriages.

Therefore, beloved children, trust in the help of the Lord at all times with good courage for He cares for his virtuous children, and do not forget the God who is your shepherd and call upon Him without ceasing. Thank Him always for everything which He might bestow upon you. Go about your work with diligence and sincerity, but never without care and take with full appreciation that which is entrusted unto you. To you, our beloved son, that you would here and there make your wife feel she is the most precious and holy goodness in your life; the one whom you care for, cherish and treasure above all else, next only to God. And to you, our beloved daughter, regarding how you can manifest to your man, a true, servant-like, submissive and friendly love and that you might come to his support with good advice and joyful deeds, and that he might nowhere feel as blessed as when in your presence.

Therefore, beloved children, take heed of and avoid the first accusing word or dissatisfaction, which would be your greatest good fortune. Indeed, consider for the moment, the difference between a happy and an unhappy marriage, for there is certainly nothing more miserable in all the world than strife and disputation in wedded life, and conversely, there is nothing more blessed than peace, love and harmony. For this reason, beloved children, be diligent for the sake of love and harmony and gladly acquiesce to deny your own intentions, so as not to disturb the peace, for thereby one can avoid much [evil].

Therefore, children, take into consideration in thought and deed, and learn from the outset to mutually carry each others character weaknesses and misdeeds in love or to circumvent the same in order not to disturb the peace and the glorious and worthy blessing of the home. Undoubtedly this will provide both of you with daily trials, for certainly at times the situation will occur were it is necessary to remain silent, yield, endure, confess, apologize and to deny yourself. But make haste to do so and contemplate only the best thoughts one towards the other, and

firmly hold fast to the love of God. Take note of what experience will bring: namely, the more unselfishness, submissiveness, yieldedness and patience is pursued in a marriage, the more precious and blessed it is for the man and wife. Oh, what a blessing such self-denial brings for one's own heart and life. For exactly through this, the image of God within us human beings is summoned forth and born unto a new creation, whereby the old selfish nature is weakened and one dies [more] unto self.

But who is capable of all this? For how quickly our own power and intentions are too weak and our self-made plans prove insufficient. One often finds to be true: that we humans are so completely incapable of everything good, and that a higher power is therefore needed for all those entering into a Christian marriage. [It is essential] that they take God along into their marriage as Helper and Lord, who will supply both the man and woman with the necessary power and support for the fulfilment of their obligations.

Oh, how blessed can life be for you in this your newly-entered situation, if you have taken God along with you and hold fast to Him until the end. Indeed, then you have everything where you can lament your cares and sorrows and that which can comfort your heart and emotions and that which can also truly safeguard you from sin and wrongdoing. Oh, what a great privilege for someone who can hold and complete all his deeds and intentions with God. Therefore, beloved children, partake fully of this inwardly wealth. Drink daily from the God's rich and abundant grace. May grace, and indeed, the God of peace and love be with you upon all your paths, until you are parted from the other [by death]. Amen.

Oh beloved children, do hold fast unto the faith once received and be true workers in the *Gemeinde*. Beware of all unrighteousness and follow all good counsel. Be on guard against all new fashions and if you see something in your *Geschwister* [brethren and sisters in the *Gemeinde*] that is not good, seek to speak with them that they can make it better, and do not speak evil of the *Gemeinde*. As long as I have been in the *Gemeinde* I have also warned against pride. There are the watch chains, the stiff colours, the combing of the hair, and the repeated grooming, indeed, everything which belongs to pride, for James says, "...to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin," James 4:17.

Oh, beloved children, battle [life] in wisdom, appropriate in care the precious moments, build your feelings towards each other upon truth and virtue, taste the heavenly things and not those of this world, zealously place your hands upon the plow and do not look back, do not fall behind, arise upon Mount Zion that you may see the love of God, which is without measure. Be of good courage. If you do not come to stand upon the uppermost step, continue zealously forward, for your Beloved will come to greet you - He can carry the weak and take them by the hand. The Lord has empathy for our illness and strengthens those who lack possessions, so that they shall walk and not be weary. Place your trust in this and not on your own strength. Remain faithful to your beloved Saviour until your death. Finally be watchful in all things that you do not fall into vanity and pride. Remain in humility and give God the glory for everything you do and are, for all goodness is from God.

But sadly this is not believed. Many flatter themselves for their faith in Christ, but they do not the very least to become Christlike in humility, suffering and dying, and thereby, to inherit the eternal life. Alas, if only our eyes might see that the servant of Christ cannot thrive in worldly pride, but can only blossom in humility. Not upon the wide and easy road of the flesh, rather upon the one and narrow way towards the new Jerusalem; not in earthly abundance and temporal riches, rather within the kingdom of Christ and God which is like unto a priceless pearl lying hidden from all the worldly-wise. Whoever would wish to find this treasure must search for it in lowliness of mind and dig deeply in the Godly acre; for he [who seeks] will find it, but one must be willing to surrender everything—to forsake one's all.

He who wishes to be filled with the spirit of compassion, must cleanse his heart from all greed and must be the enemy of pride and a conqueror of the [attractions of the] world, and. above all else, there are the hidden evils such as seeking for honour, self-love, wisdom, fame and spiritual pride, which must be expelled from the heart. Where these all are crucified, killed and buried with diligence, there will grow the godly fruits such as humility, patience, love, godly peace, compassion, and everything which belongs to a Christlike walk.

Wherefore, beloved children, I admonish you, petition your heavenly Father without ceasing, that He might grant you all this and that He might also wish to receive more and more from you. When you have thus received Him, you must not be idolaters nor reckless, for the Holy Spirit which teaches correctly flees from the idolaters and abhors the reckless. You must also be concerned, beloved children, that you do not sadden or slander the Holy Ghost, for all sin and slander of mankind shall be forgiven them, but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall no be forgiven them. And those who speak a word against the Son of Man, they shall be forgiven, but whoever says something against the Holy Ghost, he shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor the next. Behold, beloved children, guard yourselves against all damaging blasphemy, withhold your tongue from cursing, and guard yourselves with diligence from [wrong] intentions, for thereby you shame the spirit of Grace.

Oh beloved children, what a joy and glory is the [reality] which has been prepared for all pious Christians. Who, then, is so defeated and fearful that they would not suffer a little for such joy and glory. It is true, that the flesh finds suffering and tribulation to be distasteful, but one must be mindful of the words of Paul: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," [Hebrews, 12:11].

Oh, the unspeakable love of the Heavenly Father, how over abundant is Your grace, and how limitless Your goodness, that you have prepare such glory for those whom you have chosen. Who can sufficiently thank you for all the virtuous deeds which you have so richly showered upon us, and continue to manifest daily. Blessed be Your name into eternity.

Oh, you beloved children, walk in the fear of the Lord, in order that at no time you would become inclined toward sin, and forget not the commandments of the Lord your God, rather fear the Lord for He is truly to be feared, for those who fear the Lord walk upon the way of the righteous.

Wherefore, do not love the world, my children, nor that which is therein, for everything which is in the world, namely, the pleasures of the eye, the lusts of the flesh and a life of pride, cometh not from the Father but from the world. Oh, beloved children, do not allow pride to rule over you, neither in your words nor in your thoughts, just as Tobias admonished his son, who cast away those who were proud in their hearts, but raised up the humble. For which reason David says, "I thank the Lord that you have humbled me, for before I was humbled, I erred." Therefore, my children never raise yourselves up in your hearts; rather make yourselves equal to the lowly, for before a man goeth to the ground, he becomes proud and arrogant. A scornful disposition cometh before a fall. Therefore guard yourselves against accusations and where you are living in a house, be quiet and still, and gossip not outside the house about that which occurs inside the house.

Lass mich Beten, Lass mich Wachen,
Bis mein Letzen Tag Anbricht,
Lass mich ja nicht schläfrig machen
Bleibe du, bei mir ein Licht,
Lass stets deinem Gnadenschein
Leuchten in mein Herz hinein.
Hilf mir Kämpfen.....
Noch ist meine Bitte, aller meist,
Um ein Zerkeirschtes Herz,
Und dem gewesen neuen Geist,
Bei Buss, und Sündenschmerz,
Sonst gieb mir es, wie es dir gefält,
Viel oder wenig auf der Welt,
Mir genügt wenn ich dich habe.

Now, my beloved children, I will hope that you might find this insignificant writing of sufficient worth that you would read it and reflect thereon and then also to accept it from your father out of love. For thereby it may also be of use to you, You will also perceive here from the love and concern which we have towards our children, and that we are highly concerned for their well-being in this time and for eternity.

In love, from your parents, "Heinrich and Elisabeth Plett". The writing finished on February 9th, 1932. Please write down all importance events in this booklet, that your descendants can see it.

The Von Stauffenbergs and the Klassens

Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, BC.

One of the most well-known and celebrated events of the resistance movement in National Socialist (Nazi) Germany is the assassination attempt on the life of Hitler in July, 1944, carried out by Claus Schenk, Graf v. Stauffenberg.[1] Claus, and his brother Berthold Schenk, also Graf v. Stauffenberg, are widely remembered today, in Germany as well as elsewhere, among the national heroes of the German resistance. Many streets and squares in Germany today are named after Claus v. Stauffenberg.

Less widely known is the Russian-Mennonite connection to this family. Maria Klassen (also Classen), from a Russian-Mennonite family, was the wife of Berthold.

The Klassens

The family history of Maria Klassen is worthy of note, as many of her relatives were well-known figures in Mennonite Russia. This family history can be briefly outlined as follows:

1. Abraham Klassen (17.2.1722-20.10.1788) 1776: Neuendorf: 1 daughter, 2 males, 2 females (Danziger Werder)

m. Katherina Dyck (3.5.1724-15.2.1779)

Abraham was listed in the 1776 census as of middle class status, and was a shop-keeper.

2. Johann (8.3.1758-9.10.1812)

2)m. 9.11.1778 Helena Konrad (29.9.1752-13.2.1846)

m1)17.11.1771 X Martens (unknown)

Johann moved to Russia in 1804, settling at Tiege, Molotschna (1808).

He was not particularly well-to-do at the time, having come to Russia with 300 Thalers. Johann was not listed with his father's family in 1776, and, at age 18, was no doubt working for another family elsewhere.

3. Abraham (26.2.1783-13.2.13.2.1846) Tiege Mol. 1808

2)m1) 23.1.1806 Justina Töws (16.11.1768-24.5.1829) Widow of David Harder (b. 1764)

1)m2) 17.9.1829 Margaretha Goosen (29.12 1808-10.12.1872)

David Harder had been relatively wealthy, and this may have played a part in Abraham's increasing prosperity. Abraham's brother, Johann (23.7.1785-28.10.1841) was Oberschulze, Molotschna 1827-33. Abraham moved to Blumenort, Molotschna in 1818.

4. Abraham (5.10.1830-8.9.1888)

m. 19.11.1853 Maria Schröder (15.8.1834-7.1.1903)

Maria Schröder was from one of the wealthiest Mennonite families of Russia. Abraham himself owned more than 1 estate in Russia, later living at Davidsfeld. His brother Gerhard (23.9.1832-4.1908) of Blumenort was a leading personality, having been a chairman of the Molotschna School Board and a founder of the Tiege Taubstum Schule (the Tiege school for deaf-mutes), one of the leading institutes of its kind anywhere. Gerhard was also instrumental in the purchase of land for the founding of the Memrik Colony.

5. Heinrich (8.9.1866-21.2.1923)

m1) 14.1.1888 Anna Friesen (28.1.1868-12.9.1892)

m2) 18.2.1898 Margaretha Dirks (15.7.1878-23.10.1965)

6. Maria (b. 5.2.1900)

m. 20.6.1936 Berthold Schenk (15.3.1905-10.8.1944)

On her mother's side, Maria Klassen (also: 'Mika', Classen) was a granddaughter of Heinrich Dirks (17.8.1842-8.2.1915) m. 1869 Aganetha Schröder (20.12.1844-26.8.1911). Heinrich Dirks was the well-known Sumatra missionary, and later Ältester (1881-1915) of the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde (Russia). Her maternal grandmother was from the wealthy Schröder family already mentioned.

The wealthy families of Mennonite Russia suffered greatly during the revolution and civil war in Russia. Most of these families, that is, those families who survived the bloodshed and atrocities of the period, emigrated elsewhere, mainly to Canada. Most members of the Heinrich Klassen (1866-1923) family likewise emigrated to Canada. Daughter Anna (b. 30.8.1901) m. Edgar Reimer (31.8.1896-1943) stayed in Russia. Edger was a grandson of Heinrich Reimer, a chairman of the *Landwirtschaftlicher Verein* and of the *Orloff Zentralschule* Board. Edgar was also a second cousin of Maria Klassen. Daughter Aganetha (b. 9.12 1898) married 25.10.1919 Heinrich Lüder (14.2.1894-22.5.1939). Lüder may have been a soldier of the German occupational forces in the Ukraine in 1918. Perhaps because of this connection, Maria moved to Germany with her sister Aganetha, rather than emigrating to Canada.

Maria may have worked for some time in Germany as a Russian instructor. She probably met Berthold Schenk in 1926. He was hoping to enter the diplomatic service and was studying Russian in the years 1927-8. They wanted to marry during these years, but the opposition of his parents, as well as Stefan George, led to a postponement of marriage plans. Maria, unhappy as a result of this rejection, had thoughts, perhaps naïve, of returning to Russia. Berthold's uncle, Nicholas, Graf v. Üxküll, persuaded her (1936) to stay. After the deaths of George and his father, they did marry in 1936. A photograph of Maria and Berthold (1930) suggests that Maria was both attractive and vivacious.

The Von Stauffenbergs

Berthold and Claus were sons of Alfred Schenk, Graf v. Stauffenberg, who was Ober Hofmarschall (Lord Chamberlain) to the King of Württemberg. This family may be outlined as follows:

1. Alfred Schenk (d. 20.1.1936), Graf v. Stauffenberg

m. 5.1904 Caroline, Gräfin v. Üxküll-Gyllenband

2.1. Berthold (15.3.1905-10.8.1944)

m. 20.6.1936 Maria Klassen (b. 5.2.1900)

2.1.1. Alfred Maria (b. 28.11.1937)

2.1.2. Elisabeth Karolina Margaret (b. 13.6.1939)

2.2. Alexander (15.3.1905-1963)

m1) 11.8.1937 Melitta Schiller (d. 8.4.1945)

m2) Marlene Hoffmann

2.3. Konrad Maria (15.11.1907-16.11.1907)

2.4. Claus Philipp (15.11.1907-20.7.1944)

m. 26.9.1933 Nina, Freiin v. Lerchenfeld

2.4.1. Berthold (b. 1934)—later general in the Bundeswehr (the West German Army)

2.4.2. Heimeran (b. 1936)

2.4.3. Franz-Ludwig (b. 1938)

2.4.4. Valerie (b. 15.11.1940)

2.4.5. Konstanze (b. 1.1945)

On their mother's side, Berthold and Claus were descendants of August, Graf Neithardt v. Gneisenau (1760-1831), a famous general of the Napoleonic wars. Claus was likely named after his uncle, Nicholas, Graf v. Üxküll-Gyllenband. The v. Stauffenbergs were staunch Catholics, as were Berthold and Claus.

In their student years, Berthold and Claus joined the circle of poet and writer Stefan George (12.7.1868-4.12.1933). Stefan George and his writings were to have a major and long-lasting effect on the Stauffenberg brothers. Berthold and Claus remained very close friends and companions throughout their lives. Claus named his oldest son after his brother.

Berthold, after studying law, served as an instructor at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Foreign law, and then served at the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague (1930-32). He was dissatisfied with legal work, and had no desire to set up in private practice. His main desire was to enter the diplomatic service and the Foreign Office. Before the war, an opposition group had begun to gather, often meeting at the estate (Kreisau) of Helmuth James, Graf v. Moltke. Early members of this "Kreisauer Circle" included Berthold, his uncle *Oberstleutnant* Nicholas (1877-14.9.1944), Graf v. Üxküll, his cousin Hans Christoph, Freiheer v. Stauffenberg, Moltke, Yorck (also a cousin), and Trott. In 1939, Berthold was inducted into service, as a staff naval judge. In September, 1941, Hans Christoph asked Berthold to approach Claus with an invitation to join the resistance. At that time, Claus refused to commit himself.

Alexander, lecturer/professor of ancient history, was an early and outspoken opponent of the Nazis. In a public lecture of 1937, he

opposed the official party line. He was later deeply grieved that his brothers had not asked him to join the attempted coup of 1944. His first wife was also a remarkable woman. Of Russian-Jewish background (her grandfather was from Odessa), she had made a career in aviation, both as a researcher in aerodynamics, and as a pilot. Because her work was deemed vital to the war industry, she and her family remained relatively immune to persecution. Commissioned (1937) as a *Flugkapitän* (air captain) in the Luftwaffe, she received the Iron Cross II (1943) and was nominated for the Iron Cross I (1944). While flying a Bücker 181 trainer on a visit to her husband on 8.4.1945, she was shot down by an American fighter. Although she landed her plane, she died soon afterwards of bullet wounds.

Claus joined the 17th Cavalry Regiment in 1926. He was successively promoted as follows: *Leutnant* (1.5.1933), *Hauptman* (1.1.1937), *Major* (1.1.1941), *Oberstleutnant* (1.1.1943) and *Oberst* (1.4.1944). In 1938, he served as a staff officer under *Generalleutnant* Erich Hoeppner during the occupation of the Sudetenland. He served in the Polish campaign (1939) and later in the French campaign (1940). It was soon after the Polish campaign, that his uncle, Nicholas, Graf v. Üxküll, and Fritz-Dietlof, Graf v. d. Schulenburg, approached Claus to join the resistance movement. They told him of the persecutions in Germany and the mass killings behind the lines in Poland. While sympathetic, he did not immediately join the resistance. Also that time (1939), he was approached by Peter, Graf Yorck v. Wartenburg (his cousin) and Ulrich, Graf Schwerin v. Schwanenfeld (1902-1944) to join the resistance movement by accepting a posting as adjutant to Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Walther v. Brauchitsch.

On 31.5.1940, he was posted to the Army High Command, Army General Staff-Organization Branch. Gradually, and for many reasons, Claus came to see the necessity of taking an active role in the resistance. Not the least of these reasons was the persecution of religious groups by the Nazis, and Claus was particularly upset by the persecution of Jews and Catholics. Claus was also very upset when other reports reached him of the systematic mass killings of various groups. Early in 1942, he began criticizing the Nazi government in an open manner, and by September, had begun approaching leading military officials (including Generals and Field Marshals) to take the lead in overturning the government. These overtures were mildly rebuffed, but Claus and his colleagues were made anxious for his personal security. Claus decided to escape potentially serious trouble by applying for and accepting a posting in the field. On 15.2.1943, he was posted as senior staff officer to *Generalmajor* Freiherr v. Broich, commanding the 10th Panzer division in Tunisia. On 7.4.1943, he was seriously wounded, eventually losing an eye, his right hand, and 2 fingers of his left hand. In autumn of 1943, Claus met with various members of the Kreisauer Circle, and joined the resistance.

Operation Walküre

After recovering from his wounds, Claus was appointed Chief-of-Staff to the General Army Office, located in the Bendlerstraβe, in Berlin, also the headquarters of the Home Army. On 1.6.1944, he was appointed Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, and Chief of Army Supplies, *Generaloberst* Friedrich Fromm.

One of the functions of the Home Army was to carry out "Operation Walküre" in the event of an internal emergency. This plan, approved by Hitler, and reworked by Claus v. Stauffenberg, Olbricht, Quirnheim and Tresckow[2], was a contingency plan involving the use of the Home Army to take temporary control of the government, in the event of both serious internal disturbances and a breakdown in communications with the Armed Forces High Command-the *OKW* (the *Oberkomando der Wehrmacht*), and the Führer's Headquarters. Many of the senior members of the Home Army, were however, members of the resistance movement, unknown, of course, to the Nazi government. The members of this resistance group included members of the Kreisauer Circle, leading officials of the military, some recruited by Claus, as well as Fromm. Claus was recognized as their military leader, Goerdeler, the civilian leader.

The plan of this resistance group was to activate Operation Walküre in assuming emergency control of government, after having disabled the Nazi government through the assassination of the leading Nazi officials. It was originally deemed essential that Hitler, Göring and Himmler be eliminated at about the same time. Claus was to play the key role in the assassination attempt, since he was the only member of the resistance group with easy and regular access to Hitler.

On 9.1.1944, Helmuth James, Graf v. Moltke, was arrested and meetings of the Kreisauer group came to an end. Despite v. Moltke's reservations, most members of the group supported the planned assassination. Later, in July 1944, Julius Leber and Adolf Reichwein were arrested. At that time, Claus decided to personally carry out the assassination, after several prior attempts had miscarried.

At a meeting with Hitler on 11.7.1944, at the Berghof, Berchtesgaden, Claus was advised not to activate the bomb he carried because neither Göring nor Himmler were present. On 15.7.1944, at the Führer's headquarters "Wolfsschanze" (Rastenburg, East Prussia), Claus was ready to set the bomb and so advised the military principals in Berlin, who requested that Claus delay the attempt because Himmler had not appeared at the Wolfsschanze. Preliminary activities in Berlin were camouflaged as a "practice drill".

On 20.7.1944, Claus and his adjutant, Werner v. Haeften, flew to the Wolfsschanze. They succeeded in activating only one of two planned bombs. At 12.35, he entered the conference room, placed the bomb, but not exactly where he had wished, as the room was crowded, and left "to answer an urgent call from Berlin." The bomb exploded at 12.42, killing 4 of the 24 persons in the room, wounding the rest, some seriously. By an odd happenstance, Hitler had been protected by the massive oak conference table and was only lightly wounded. Nevertheless, Claus thought, from what he had seen, that the attempt was successful and flew to Berlin, where a conflicting report had already reached Olbricht. At 15.00, Operation Walküre was finally activated, but with Fromm withdrawing his support. At 17.00, a radio broadcast announced that Hitler had survived the attempt, and military support for the coup melted away. At 22.30, Claus was arrested by officers loyal to the regime, and Fromm ordered the immediate execution of the known conspirators. This was due, perhaps, to camouflage his own involvement, and that of others.

During the night, the following were shot on orders of Fromm and buried (in uniform with their decorations). A day later, Hitler ordered the bodies dug up and burned.

Generaloberst (ret.) Ludwig Beck (1880-20.7.1944), former Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, *Generalleutnant* Werner Freiherr v. Fritsch, later *Generaloberst* Franz Halder. He had resigned (18.8.1938) because of Hitler's policies in the Czech crisis, and was then asked to take retirement.

Oberst Claus Schenk v. Stauffenberg (1907-20.7.1944), Chief-of-Staff, Home Army *Leutnant* Werner v. Haeften (1908-20.7.1944), Adjutant to v. Stauffenberg *General* Friedrich Olbricht (1888-20.7.1944), Commander, General Army Office

Oberst Albrecht Ritter Mertz v. Quirnheim (1905-20.7.1944), Chief-of-Staff, General Army Office

Other members of the resistance group were arrested soon afterwards, including Berthold v. Stauffenberg. Many suffered a slow and terrible death by strangulation in Plötzensee prison (Berlin). Those executed a few days later in Plötzensee included:

Generalfeldmarshall Erwin v.Witzleben (1881-8.8.1944)

Generaloberst Erich Hoeppner (1886-8.8.1944)

Generalmajor Helmuth Stieff (1901-8.8.1944)

Generalleutnant Paul v. Hase (City Commander-Berlin) (1885-8.8.1944)

Oberstleutnant Robert Bernardis (1908-8.8.1944)

Hauptmann Friedrich Karl Klausing (1920-8.8.1944)

Oberleutnant Albrecht v. Hagen (1904-8.8.1944)

Oberleutnant (res.) Dr. Peter, Graf Yorck v. Wartenburg (1904-8.8.1944)

Dr. Berthold Schenk, Graf v. Stauffenberg (1905-10.8.1944) *Marine Oberstabsrichter* (navy court judge)

Oberleutnant (res.) Fritz-Dietlof, Graf v. d. Schulenburg (1902-10.8.1944)

Korvettenkapitän Alfred Kranzfelder (1908-10.8.1944) (Commander-Navy)

Family members of the resistance group were also arrested. Some were also to have been killed but many escaped death owing to

the rapid Allied advance. In total, the execution of some 200 persons was directly linked to the attempt of July 20. Included with later causalities were:

Generalfeldmarshall Erwin Rommel (1891-14.10.1944) Commander Army Group B. He was in essence forced to commit suicide. *Generalfeldmarshall* Günther v. Kluge (d. 19.8.1944) Commander-in-Chief, West. Committed suicide.

Generaloberst Friedrich Fromm (1888-12.3.1945) Commander-in-Chief Home Army *Generalleutnant* Karl-Heinrich Stülpnagel (1888-30.8.1944) Military Commander-in-Chief, France

Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-9.4.1945), Chief, Amt Ausland/Abwehr (foreign counter-intelligence, to 1944)

Dr. Carl Friedrich Goerdeler (1884-1.2.1945) former Mayor-Leipzig and *Reichs Commisar* for Prices (resigned 1937) Dr. Julius Leber (1891-5.1.1945) (former Reichstag deputy)

Dr. Adam v. Trott zu Solz (1909-26.8.1944), legation counselor-Foreign Office

Oberstleutnant (res.) Dr. Cäsar v. Hofacker (1896-20.12.1944), a cousin of Claus, aide to Stülpnagel

The significance of the coup attempt of July 20 is twofold. Firstly, had the assassination itself been successful, which it very nearly was, the plans of the resistance group would likely have been implemented in full, with an earlier end to the war, and the saving of very many lives indeed. Nazi officials would have been prosecuted by Germans themselves, instead of through the Allied tribunals. Secondly, although unsuccessful, it demonstrated to the world, as it still does today, that many prominent Germans were willing to risk their lives to save the honour and lives of their fellow countrymen in the struggle against the Nazi regime.

Today, there is a museum at the Plötzensee prison commemorating the resistance, and those who died in August, 1944 (I visited this museum in 1980, not knowing, at the time, of any Mennonite connection with the v. Stauffenbergs). The name of the Bendlerstraβe has been changed to Stauffenbergstraβe, and the former HQ building houses the German Resistance Memorial Centre

Endnotes

1 **Titles Used**

Titles of Nobility (in order of rank): (1) German- Fürst (female-Fürstin), English- Prince/Princess (2) Ger.- Herzog/Herzogin, Eng.-Duke/Duchess, Fr.- Duc/Duchesse (3) Ger.- Markgraf/Markgräfin, Eng.- Marquis/Marchioness, Fr.- Marquis/Marquise (4) Ger.- Graf/Gräfin, Eng. Earl/Countess, Fr.- Comte/Comtesse (5) Eng.- Viscount/Viscountess, Fr.- Vicomte/Vicomtesse (6) Ger.- Freiherr/Freifrau (also Baron/Baronin), Eng.- Baron/Baroness, Fr.- Baron/Baronne. The lesser nobility includes (7) Baronet (Eng. only) (8) Ger.- Ritter, Eng.- Knight, Fr.- Chevalier. The English "Margrave" applies to foreigners titled Markgraf. The English "Count" applies to foreigners titled Graf/Comte. In England, a Baron is usually addressed as Lord, and may sit in the House of Lords, along with the higher ranks. In Germany, the daughter of a Freiherr/Baron is a Freiin/Freifräulein/Baronesse.

Military ranks:

Generalfeldmarshall—Field Marshal
Generaloberst—General
General—Lieutenant-General
Generalleutnant—Major-General
Generalmajor—Brigadier (General)
Oberst—Colonel
Oberstleutnant—Lieutenant-Colonel
Major—Major
Hauptmann—Captain
Oberleutnant—1st Lieutenant
Leutnant—Lieutenant

2 *Generalmajor* Henning v. Tresckow (1901-21.7.1944) committed suicide on the Russian front, the day after the attempted coup.

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Johann S. Friesen (1853-1937), Aasel Friesen

by great-grandson Roger Penner, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Medicine Hat, Alberta

Johann S. Friesen was the son of Jakob K. Friesen (1822-75) and Katharina Schierling (1820-1909).

Johann S. Friesen married Anna Barkman, daughter of Peter K. Barkman (1826-1917), owner of Steinbach's first steam mill in 1880.

The Johann S. Friesen family belonged to the "Friesens" Gemeinde of Joh. Friesen. They visited frequently at the home of Abr. F. Reimer, Steinbach, Borosenko. Johann S. Friesen must have been an enterprising individual. On June 11, 1872, he sold a mill to Abr. S. Friesen for 250 ruble. By 1874 the family, together with his parents, lived in the village of Nikolaithal, Zagradovka Colony, a new Molotschna daughter colony in Cherson Province, 100 miles west of Borosenko.

In 1874 Johann and his young bride immigrated to America. During the journey they were accosted by thieves, whose robbery attempt was thwarted by the resolute response of Anna, by all indications a feisty woman. She recorded the events of the robbery in a journal that she kept.

The young couple settled on *Wirtschaft* 17 in the village of Steinbach. In 1883 they sold their *Wirtschaft* to the widow Isaac L. Plett and moved to Blumenfeld. In 1896 the Johann S. Friesen family was resident in Hochstadt. For a few years they lived in Winnipeg, but in later years they moved back to Steinbach.

Sources:

Delbert F. Plett, "Peter K. Barkman 1826-1917," in *Preservings*, (9) (1996): 41-46, has some information on this couple as well as a photograph.

Johann S. Friesen (1853-1917), Anna Barkman Friesen (1854-1923) and their son. Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Historical Sketches."

A Glance into the Lives of Elizabeth (Martens) Froese and Herman K. Froese.

Henry Kasper, Steinbach, Manitoba.

They traded a land of plenty but filled with political tyranny, for an unknown hope—Canada, and we are glad they did.

Herman K. Froese was born on January 24, 1880 in Steinfeld, South Russia. He had two brothers, David and Kornelius, and five sisters, Anna (H. Rempel), Maria (John Klassen), Liese (Isaac Hildebrandt), Lena, (Ben Hildebrandt), a twin to H.K.F., and Greta (Hein Klassen).

Elizabeth (Martens) Froese, was born on October 5, 1885. She had one brother, Abram P. Martens and one sister Maria (Abram Olfert).

On September 9, 1901 Herman K. Froese and Elizabeth Martens were married in the Kirchliche Church. The wedding invitations consisted of a sheet of paper with hand written particulars of the event followed by a list of guests invited to the wedding. The invitation was given to the first person on the list, who in turn delivered it to the next, and so on. The last person took it to the hosts, who were then sure it had made the rounds.

Herman and Elizabeth Froese. Photo taken ca. 1940

Herman Froese's parents were: Kornelius Froese (September 1841 -September 30, 1910) and Anna Schapansky (January 1, 1843 - June 9, 1917). K. Froese was a successful farmer in spite of the fact that he was a fistula sufferer and one leg did not function. He managed the farm effectively from a wheelchair (or bed).

Elizabeth M. Froese's parents were: Peter Martens (May 11, 1847 - October 30, 1910) and Maria Dueck (May 16, 1843 – April 30, 1918). Mr. Martens was a blacksmith by trade as well as a farmer. Herman K. Froese served as apprentice in his father-in-law's blacksmith shop. At the Martens' wedding, a delicacy of fish soup was served.

Coincidently, according to legend, a wels (catfish) was caught in the Dnieper River just prior to the wedding. The enormous wels was loaded on to a wagon where it extended the full length with the tail hanging over the rear of the box. Sound economics dictated the fish be served immediately and what better occasion than a wedding feast? The Peter Martens' farm was eventually taken over by Herman and Elizabeth. They prospered on this farm and their household grew with the birth of children as follows: Maria (February 23, 1903 - September 8, 1918) Anna (Geo Kasper) (January 18, 1906 - September 16, 1997) Cornelius (August 3, 1908 - September 21,2003) Peter (May 13, 1911) Liese (CF Neufeld) (April 3, 1918 - January 12, 2004)

In 1918-1919 the Spanish Flu was rampant in south Russia. Maria, at age 15, fell victim to the epidemic while Anna was sick to a lesser degree. About the same time, Cornelius was stricken with Typhoid fever. He was not expected to survive. Coffee and other condiments left over from Maria's funeral were stored for further funerals likely to come. But it was not to be. Cornelius's work was not finished. As a young man, he served the church as Sunday school teacher, then as lay minister, and after ordination in 1961, as minister until his final call to the hereafter. Understandably, there was a void in the Froese household after the passing of Maria. Shortly after her death in 1918, news came from Gnadenthal that a little girl with a sick mother and aging grandmother needed a home. Herman K. and Elizabeth packed their buggy and went off to Gnadenthal. The same day the boys, Cornelius and Peter, were assigned to thatch the straw roof on a barn. Anxiety overcame them and more time was spent watching the road, waiting for the arrival of their new sister Liese, than thatching the roof. Her addition once again completed the family unit.

Herman and Elizabeth Froese. Photo taken ca. 1907

At this time, around 1923, a shortage of food became progressively more prevalent and began to alter the lives of the family. As an example, the elder son, Cornelius, still only a teenager, was assigned to plant corn. All went well until his cousin saw what he was doing, came running up and desperately grabbed a few handfuls of seed corn for immediate consumption.

Herman Froese had a number of fine horses, but he was particularly proud of his black stallion. When Herman K. became aware that the Machno bandits were in the vicinity, he hid his prize horse in the barn. He kept it well fed and watered, so the animal would make no noise. The bandits did arrive, took the horses, plundered anything of value to them and left. Only then did Mr. Froese realize that hiding anything from them would have meant certain death for the family, had it been discovered.

Political unrest grew and in September 1926, an option to relocate to Canada was reluctantly accepted. Proceeds from the sale of equipment and other effects covered the traveling expenses as well as leather jackets for the boys—a status symbol in their day. Their land was taken over by the "Red Paradise".

With the exception of Anna, the whole family went to Djawglado to board the train, and then off to Ekaterinoslav and Moscow where the necessary paper work was done. Riga turned out to be a health scrutiny station for prospective Canadian immigrants. Clothes and bodies were treated with vermicide; hair was shaved in many instances, eyes treated, etc. They traveled from Riga to Montreal and then to Winnipeg. The Colonization Board received them in Winnipeg and routed them to Arnaud. When they arrived in Arnaud, there was no one to greet them. In a strange country, in the middle of the prairies where a foreign language was spoken—if ever they had a moment of despair, this must have been it. Later a family (the Kaethlers) provided a small house for them, which served in the interim.

In the spring of 1927, Herman Froese and his brother-in-law, A.P. Martens purchased six quarters of land in Kleefeld, with the help of the National Trust Co. A year later, the partnership was dissolved and the Froeses relocated to Pansy on a 1/2 section of land. One half of the land was cultivated and the other half in bush, but all of it was under mosquitoes. Special concessions were made, for example horses and seed grain were supplied by National Trust Co. A year later, in the fall of 1928, the eldest, Anna (Kasper) arrived in Canada, bringing the whole family together again. Years later the inadequacy of the local school became a concern for Cornelius and he decided to move his family to Grunthal. In 1936, Herman and Elizabeth Froese also moved to a farm 1 1/2 miles north of Grunthal.

Throughout his life, Mr. Froese's gentle disposition was his strongest negotiating weapon. For instance, one fall evening a half dozen or more riders on horseback showed up on his yard. He went out to greet them and asked what their mission was. "We are here to *schobanack* (to do mischief)", was their response. "This is Halloween Night!" Mrs. Froese, looking out the window, had flashbacks of the old country. The pranksters finally decided to drag the cultivator onto the road. Mr. Froese conceded that if they must, he would help pull the cultivator. They pulled only a couple of steps when one of them said: "This is a no-fun guy, lets move on," and they did.

Mr. Froese never owned a car. Once he took a driving lesson from one of his sons. This turned out to be a short course. He drove the car from the middle of the road to the ditch, and at once concluded horses were a more reliable method of transportation. His poor eyesight was likely the reason for his disinterest in driving.

In 1945 plans were made to retire and move to Grunthal. On July 15, just before moving day, Mr. Froese passed away after being hospitalized for three days. Mrs. Froese made her scheduled move and lived alone in a small house till her death on October 2, 1961. She had never required medical attention until her last month.

Gone - but fondly remembered by those whose lives they have touched.

Johann Broesky (1838-1912), Colourful Pioneer

by great great grandson Robert Broesky, West Bank, British Columbia

Family Background.

Without a doubt, Johann Broesky (1838-1912) was one of the most colourful characters to settle in the East Reserve in 1874.

Johann Broesky was born in Prussia. After his first wife died, he joined Gottlieb Jahnke, Juluis Radinzel, and a Mr. Vetrowsky in a move to Russia. Evidently all three men were Lutheran. Their only possession evidently was a hand cart.[1] In Russia the men found employment with various Kleine Gemeinde (KG) farmers, including Cornelius Loewen, in the Borosenko area northwest of Nikopol.

Daughter Anna Broesky (born July 6, 1869) was taken in as the foster daughter of Peter P. Toews, Bishop or *Aeltester* of the Blumenhof KG. Another daughter Florantine Katharina Broesky was taken in as the foster daughter of Jakob Friesen (1820-88), brother to Johann Friesen, third *Aeltester* of the KG. Another daughter Elisabeth Broesky was taken in as the foster daughter of Johann Esau (1828-1906), Rosenfeld, the first KG *Brandaeltester.*

Johann Broesky had a desire to join the KG and was presented to the brotherhood at a meeting held on December 26, 1873. According to the "Genealogy Register" of Peter Toews, Broesky was baptised in the KG upon the confession of his faith on May 20, 1874, possibly one of the last baptisms before the emigration to America.

Ten days later, May 30, 1874, the first group of emigrants left Borosenko and embarked upon what would be a 6 week-long journey to Manitoba. Johann Broesky was among the first group of 65 families who arrived at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers in Manitoba on August 1, 1874.

Second Marriage, 1874.

Gottlieb Jahnke and Julius Redinzel also came to Manitoba and settled in Blumenort, where all three married daughters of veteran Molotschna school teacher Cornelius Friesen (1810-92) and Maria Rempel (1819-97): see Helena Jahnke, "Lineage of my Grandparents, Klaas Friesens, born in West Prussia," in *Profile 1874*, pages 209-212, for the story of this family. Maria Rempel was the daughter of Abraham Rempel (1798-1878), a prosperous *Vollwirt* from Margenau who emigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba in 1878.

On December 19, 1874, Broesky married Anna, daughter of Cornelius Friesen, in the first wedding to take place in Blumenort. Daughter

Johann Broesky's son Cornelius F. Broesky was an aggressive farmer who also owned steam thresher.

Elisabeth is listed as part of Johann Broesky's family in Peter Toews' "Genealogy Register", an indication that she may have been given back for him to raise after his second marriage.

"Johann's second marriage was quite traumatic and ended in separation, and so did his membership with the Blumenort Kleine Gemeinde" (*R. Loewen, Blumenort*, p. 269)

Anna became mentally ill and Johann moved out of the home living at various locations such as Heuboden and Didsbury, Alberta. Johann died in British Columbia, separated from his family.

Anna was taken in by her parents and looked after by the Blumenort church. The journals of neighbour Abr. F. ("Fula") Reimer contained numerous references to her situation, such as when she tried to burn her house down. Anna died September 9, 1927, and was buried in Grünthal. She was honoured by a lengthy write-up in the *Steinbach Post*, September 14, 1927, by school teacher Gerhard G. Kornelsen, in which he stated, "According to Katherina (Jahnke) Klassen, niece of Johann and Anna Broeski, her aunt Anna was a praying mother and grandmother, who prayed much for her children and grandchildren."

Children:

Some of the Broesky sons joined the Chortitzer church and lived in Schöneberg, northeast

Johann F. Broesky, a son of Johann Broesky lived with his wife in the village of Schoenenberg, northeast of Grunthal.

of Grünthal. Cornelius F. Broesky was an agressive farmer, owning a threshing outfit and steam-engine.

Son Martin F. Broesky (1887-1921) was an inventor and built the first car in southeastern Manitoba in 1905. In 1914 Martin moved to Saskatchewan, homesteading north of Morse. He was appointed as one of the delegates to investigate settlement opportunities in Paraguay but died of a heart attack before this came to pass.

Daughter Anna Broeski married Peter W. ("Schmedt") Toews, well-known Steinbach blacksmith who moved to Swalwell, Alberta, in 1907: see Peter W. Toews, "Life's Chronicle," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 137-155. They were the parents of Herman B. Toews, formerly Calgary, Alberta, an avid genealogist.

Conclusion.

The good in our history can serve as a heritage for generations to come and the bad can be an example so that descendants need not suffer the same mistakes.

Endnotes:

1 Royden Loewen, *Blumenort, a Mennonite Community in Transition* (Blumenort, MB: Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983), p. 268.

The 1920s Migration of Old Colony Mennonites
from the Hague-Osler Area of Saskatchewan to Durango, Mexico

Bill Janzen, MCC Ottawa

Presented to the Annual General Meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan,
Hague, Saskatchewan, March 3, 2006

It is a privilege to be invited to this occasion and to speak on this topic. The topic has been close to me for a long time. I remember, as a child in the 1950s, the letters that came to our home from my maternal grandmother who, as a widow, had moved to Mexico in the smaller 1948 migration, with seven of her adult children. Her letters seemed always to speak of hardship and the sadness of her family's separation. Later, in my University studies, I came across papers about the 1920s school crisis - papers that confirmed the stories that my mother and father had told me about how their parents had paid fines for keeping them out of the public schools in those years. Then, in my MCC work, I was able to help returning Mennonites whose parents came from here, with their residual claims to Canadian citizenship. These and other things have led me often to reflect on this topic.

It is not a simple topic, with one side being completely good and the other bad. Nor is it easy to place ourselves in that context, almost one hundred years ago, when so many things were different. Nevertheless, our task is to try to understand. To help with that, I have broken the topic down into five time periods, each representing a particular phase of the story. I should also explain that I will use the popular name "Old Colony Mennonite Church" even though its official name in the 1920s was "Reinlander Mennonite Church".

1. 1892 - 1908: Two School Systems With a Little Friction

Even before Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, the law allowed for public schools. People in any given area could organize a school district, hold a vote, and if a majority wanted to set up a public school then the land in the district would be taxed to help pay for it. Also, the government would then provide an inspector to check up on the school and give some other assistance. But attendance was not compulsory; nor was it compulsory to organize such districts. As a result, the Old Colony people were free to continue with their German language private schools. There the curriculum included reading, writing and arithmetic as well as Catechism, the New Testament and the Old Testament. The "sacred" and the "secular" would be held together. And children would attend until age twelve or thirteen. The purpose of these schools was to prepare children, not for life in the larger society, but for the Old Colony way of life. For that purpose they were not bad.

It is not surprising, however, that some people living on the edges of the Old Colony settlement would want something different. In the Rosthern area where, starting in 1892, Mennonites of different backgrounds had settled, the prominent Gerhard Ens, who later became a member of the provincial legislative assembly, complained that the Old Colony people always voted against getting a school district and a public school. Finally, in 1899, when an Englishman came and built a mill in Rosthern, they quickly organized an election and got all the construction workers that he had brought in to vote. With that majority Rosthern got its first public school.[1]

In the Osler area in 1902 a certain Mr. Wilson also complained to the government about the opposition of Old Colony Mennonites. The response he got back from the Department of Education advised: "if at all possible … arrange the boundaries of the district [so] that when the vote ... is taken a majority [will] be in favour of it."[2] Soon thereafter when the Hague school district was formed they used a similar approach. The boundaries were drawn so as to include much land owned by people in nearby villages but not the villages themselves, thus gaining their tax money but not their opposing votes.

2. 1908 - 1917: Public Schools Gain Supporters

One Old Colony person who wanted to send his children to a public school was Isaac P. Friesen. He lived in Rosthern where he had a store and where he had also begun to attend the Mennonite church. He had decided that at some point he would join that church. Also, once his children reached school age, he would send them to the public school in Rosthern. In other words, his mind was no longer oriented toward the Old Colony. But he had been baptized into that church and he wanted, very much, to avoid getting excommunicated from it, partly because if that happened then many members of that church would no longer do business in his store.

To prevent that from happening I. P. Friesen visited the Old Colony Aeltester, Rev. Jacob Wiens, and asked if he could withdraw his membership from that church. Later he told government officials, "I begged and prayed Mr. Wiens more than I ever did any man for any favour."[3] Even Rev. David Toews, the minister of the Rosthern Mennonite church, visited Aeltester Wiens to ask about this. But the theology of the Old Colony church at that time held that once people are baptized into the church they could not be released - excommunicated yes, but not released. This will seem unusual to us but some other churches also held to this position.

Another person in a such a situation was Jacob J. Friesen. In 1908 he wrote to the provincial Education Minister, J. H. Calder, stating:

> As I am one of the excommunicated Mennonites I think it very necessary to tell you briefly my experience in this matter and hope that it might stir up the Government…. I lived in Warman until last spring and my business connections were principally with the members of the so-called Old Colony Church; and as I had two boys of school age I was sending them to the public school in Warman,…As soon as the leaders of the Old Colony church got notice of my steps they excommunicated me and forbade all the members to have any more dealings with me. The consequence was that I had to give up my home, my business, and everything for the sake of giving my children a better education.[4]

What was the government to do in the face of such appeals? It set up a Commission of Inquiry headed by the Deputy Ministers in the Departments of Education and the Attorney General. These two senior officials held hearings in Warman on December 28 and 29, 1908. They heard more than a dozen such excommunicated people. They also interviewed Aeltester Wiens and two other Old Colony leaders. These church leaders explained that they were following the teachings of the Bible, referring to Deuteronomy 6:7 about the sacred calling to teach children, and to Romans 16:17-19, 2 Thess. 3:6 & 14, and 2 John 10, about church discipline. They also referred to the *Privilegium,* meaning the fifteen point letter from the federal government, given to them in 1873, on which they had relied in their decision to leave Russia and move to Canada. That letter promised them unrestricted freedom in the schooling of their children.

How could this situation be resolved? The Saskatchewan government threatened to cancel the right of Old Colony ministers to solemnize marriages if the church did not give its people the freedom to attend public schools. But the government did not carry out that threat. Indeed, it appears not to have taken further steps at this

time. Meanwhile, the Old Colony church held a "Brotherhood" meeting, in accordance with a promise it made to the Commission of Inquiry, to review its practices. The decision at that meeting was not to change their practices. In January 21, 1909, Aeltester Wiens reported on this meeting to the government stating:

"May the Spirit of counsel, the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge and understanding rest upon you, [as noted in] Isaiah 11:2, to enable you to administer your office as God's servants. This is the wish of your poor and weak people. God be thanked that hitherto under your wise Government and under your protection, our belief, according to God's word, has been left undisturbed,...We, therefore, thank the Government with all our hearts and pray God that he may provide you with wisdom and strength and be your protection and shield in this life and your great reward at the end [Genesis 15:1]... We, therefore, ask you, fully trusting in the above mentioned freedom, to enjoy your protection in the future, and pray you ... to leave our belief undisturbed....When we remain true to our promise [at baptism] we feel ourselves forced not to accept the claims made upon us by our rebellious brethren. This was unanimously decided and voted on at the meeting, which was promised you in Warman, and which was held on the 19th instant, and at which more than 300 brethren were present. ... we cannot accept [their] claim without transgressing God's word and commandments. ...we would ask you kindly not to consider us disobedient and troublesome people. No, we wish to obey you in everything insofar as Jesus teaches, in Matthew 22:21, 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.' We trust that you will not deprive us of this right. And we believe that when the books of judgement will be laid before the Judge of Judges, as shown in Revelations 20:12, that many of the accusations against us will not be found to be as they have been represented. We now commend you to the mercy of the Lord and pray that he will guide and lead you and ourselves as your subjects to the inheritance of eternity..."[5]

Even though the government did not take further action at this time there were other significant developments. In 1910 the government introduced a physical training and drill program into the public schools that was not only patriotic but militaristic, so much so that even Mennonites who had accepted public schools asked that their children be exempted from it.[6] Also, by 1915, in a few areas the provincial government imposed fines on parents for not sending their children to public school.[7] Meanwhile, more public schools appeared on the edge of the Old Colony settlement. The Lily and River Park schools on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River were started in 1911 and 1912 respectively, and the Heidelberg and Reinfeld schools, north and east of Hague respectively, were started in 1914.[8] Also, a number of prominent individuals called for an expansion of the public school system. This is understandable. The prairies were filling up with settlers from

A Mennonite with horse-drawn wagon in the City of Nuevo Ideal, Durango in 1999. Delbert Plett.

many parts of Europe. There were Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, French, Icelanders, and many others. It was not wrong for the government to try to build a certain common ground in the schools and to ensure that all newcomer children learned one common language.

J. S. Woodsworth, who later became the national leader of the CCF, wrote, in 1909, about the importance of the public school "to break down the walls" which separate the different cultures.[9] J.T.M Anderson, who later became a Conservative Premier, wrote:

The children in the public schools to-day will be the fathers and mothers of the next generation, …it is essential that they …be given an insight into our Canadian life and ideals, so that they in turn may impart these to their offspring…. Unless we gird ourselves to this task with energy and determination, imbued with a spirit of tolerance, the future of our Canadian citizenship will fail to reach the high level of intelligence which has ever characterized Anglo-Saxon civilization.[10]

Another proponent of the public schools was the Rev. Dr. E. H. Oliver, Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College in Saskatoon and Vice President of the Saskatchewan Public Education League. In 1915 he conducted a survey of schools in several immigrant settlements including 32 Old Colony Mennonite schools in the Hague and Swift Current colonies where, altogether, some 800 children attended. These, he said, "are receiving what no stretch of the imagination can designate as an adequate education, …[they] are learning nothing of our literature, our history, or our language …, Can this state of things be allowed to continue? … What is the function of a school? … I venture to state that the function of our schools must not be to make Mennonites, nor Protestants, nor Roman Catholics, but Canadian citizens." In his view the primary function of the school is to turn a child into "an intelligent and patriotic citizen". [11]

Interestingly, the Deputy Minister of Education was more moderate, despite the onset of World War I. He responded to Oliver's campaign by saying: "Just at this time when it is easy for any agitator to rouse the prejudices and the passions of people on racial matters it behooves our better men to require from others calmness, deliberation and foresight … Those who shout on [public] platforms about Canadian citizenship being endangered because 800 children in Saskatchewan are being educated in Mennonite schools are hysterical fools."[12]

The deputy minister of education may have been moderate but in the atmosphere of "The Great War" there were increasingly strong feelings in support of everything British and against everything German, especially Germans who did not serve in the military. This is not all that surprising given that Canada was intensely involved in that war, more so than in World War II. On a per capita basis, almost twice as many Canadians were killed in WWI. And since few French Canadians served, the burden on English Canada was heavy.

Also, in that war there was no Alternative Service Program, as there was in WW II, where Mennonites could show that, even though they might be exempted from military service, they were still willing to render a substantial service to the country. And as the law then was, Mennonites could gain exemption on the basis of a church leader's signature without having to personally appear before a judge to explain their faith. All these things contributed to the strong feelings against Mennonites. The unwillingness of Old Colony Mennonites to accept public schools was one more factor.

3. 1917 - 1919: Forcing the Public Schools

In this war-time atmosphere the provincial government, in the spring of 1917, passed the School Attendance Act. In effect this law made it compulsory for all children between the ages of seven and 14 to attend a public school where English was the language of instruction, if the children lived within a public school district. The government now also had the power to create public school districts if the people living there did not want to do that on their own. Further, the government could expropriate land, have schools constructed, appoint official

trustees who would then hire teachers, and impose fines and prison terms if children did not attend.

Premier Martin took a direct hand in things. In the summer of 1917 he came to Hague to visit the Old Colony Aeltester, Jacob Wiens. He also visited some Old Colony schools. Early in 1918, he wrote to Aeltester Wiens stating:

After seeing the schools that were being conducted in the Mennonite colonies I came to the conclusion that it was high time that some improvement should take place; and I now desire to advise you that it is the intention of the Department of Education to enforce the provisions of the School Attendance Act …If you desire to retain your private schools you must have these schools conducted according to the standards of efficiency of the public schools and the teachers employed by you must be recognized by the Department of Education and the authorized text books of the Department of Education must also be used.[13]

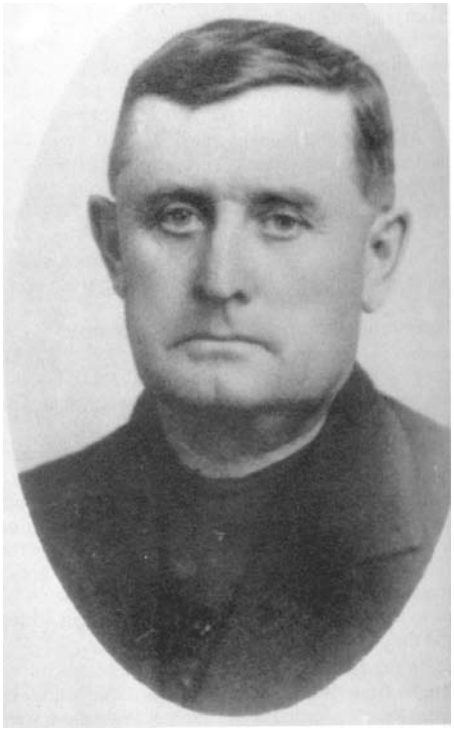
To be fair we must note that the Premier's letter appears not to close the doors to private schools completely but there was a big difference between private schools as he envisioned them and the Old Colony private schools.

How did the Old Colony church respond? It now sent a delegation to Ottawa to request of the federal government that it ensure that the provincial government respect the promise about full religious freedom, including freedom in relation to schooling, that had been given to them in that 1873 letter from the federal government. The relevant paragraph in that letter stated:

"The fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Mennonites without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools."[14]

Unfortunately, when the Old Colony church now approached the federal government, it took a different view. The government now interpreted that 1873 letter to mean that what the Saskatchewan provincial government was now doing did not really violate that letter. Later, Manitoba Mennonites took the matter to court. But the Courts, even at the highest level, ruled that the federal government had never had the authority to make that promise since education was within provincial jurisdiction not federal jurisdiction.[15] Either way, that 1873 promise turned out to have no value in relation to the schools question. For the Old Colony Mennonites, and for others, this was a major blow.

In the summer of 1918 the Saskatchewan government began to expropriate land in Old Colony areas, to send in construction crews, and to build schools. Passchendaele (Hochfeld), Pembroke (Neuanlage), Venice (Blumenthal), Renfrew (Blumenheim), and Scarpe (Blumenhoff) were built that year. Early in 1919, La Bassee (Reinfeld), Embury (Gruenfelt), and Steele (Schoenwiese) were erected.[16] (In the Swift Current area, a similar number were opened in 1918



Johann P. Wall (1875-1961), Hochfeld, Hague, Saskatchewan. Wall was a delegate to South America and Mexico in 1919 and 1920. He was instrumental in the migration to Durango in 1924. Leonard Doell, Hague Osler, 580.

and 1919.) The government appointed official trustees who then hired teachers. These teachers went to the schools even though, in some cases, no children came. Interestingly, often the teachers and the official trustees were other Mennonites. (In the Renfrew school building, which now stands on the grounds of the Hague museum, there is a chart showing that in the first two years no children attended.)

The government now took enforcement actions mainly by fining people. It decided not to send parents to jail, lest they appear as martyrs. Nor did it fine people in every village, only in some, counting, presumably, on a demonstration effect. Both Neuanlage, where my father grew up, and Blumenheim, where my mother grew up, were among those that were fined. For Neuanlage, for 1920, there were 231 fines resulting in the payment of $2,250.00. For 1921 the total for Neuanlage was $3,178.00. For Blumenheim, the respective totals were just over $1000.[17] Eleven Saskatchewan Mennonite districts paid a total of $26,000 in 1920 - 21 in fines and court costs. That was a lot of money in those years, enough to construct and furnish five one room country school buildings together with teacher's residences.[18]

For the Old Colony people the burden was heavy. In addition to the fines for not sending their children to the public schools, they also had to pay taxes for those schools. On top of that they paid a certain church levy to keep the private schools running. In the Swift Current area when some families did not pay, the police came and seized, "three horses, a hog, and five cured hams," and sold them at a public auction. When the resulting sum did not cover all the outstanding fines they came back and seized, "five cows, two heifers and two horses". Gradually more and more people became impoverished.[19]

The government would not have taken such a hard line if public voices had not supported it. The Provincial Liberal Party at its convention in 1917 passed a supportive resolution. So did the Saskatchewan Rural Municipalities Association and the Council of the Rural Municipality of Warman which included most of the affected Old Colony Mennonites of this area. The Saskatchewan School Trustees Association met in Saskatoon and called for "national schools and one language". At Swift Current a citizens meeting passed a resolution stating that, "the children of these people must be educated up to our standards of British and Canadian citizenship, so that they may, in the future, voluntarily relinquish their claims to an unjust exemption."[20] This is what the Old Colony people suspected, namely, that one purpose of the public schools was to persuade people to abandon the teaching about not going to war.

4. 1919 - 1924: Facing Continued School Pressure and Seeking a New Homeland

By the summer of 1919 the Old Colony churches in the three areas - Hague-Osler, Swift Current, and Manitoba - had come to two conclusions: (i) that the provincial governments in the two provinces were determined to force them to accept the public schools, and (ii) that the federal government's 1873 promise of unrestricted freedom in matters of schooling would not protect them. These groups now held meetings where they made the momentous decision to look for a new homeland. (Some people from the Manitoba Chortitzer and Sommerfelder groups and from the Saskatchewan Bergthaler, soon made a similar decision.)

Finding a new homeland would be complicated. They needed to find a country which would give them the freedoms they were losing here and which had a piece of farm land large enough for all three Old Colony groups to settle in together. Further, in order to raise the money to buy such a large piece they needed to sell their land in Canada. Each of these tasks was a huge challenge. Having to deal with them together was bound to be very difficult, not to mention that at the same time they continued to face the burden of the school fines.

(a) Getting a *Privilegium* and Finding Land

On August 4, 1919 a delegation with representatives from all three Old Colony settlements set out for Latin America, not to return until late in November. They spent most of these four months in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. A personal tragedy happened in Brazil where Rev. Johann J. Wall, one of the two Hague delegates, got sick and died. A more general blow was that the delegation, despite their diligent search, did not find what they were looking for. None of the places they visited was suitable, either because of problems with the land or because the governments were not willing to give them a sufficiently broad religious freedom.[21]

They also considered the US. Land agents, having heard of their plans to leave Canada, came to them with a number of proposals for settling there. Again the Mennonites sent delegations, visiting some half-a-dozen states. A proposal from Mississippi was particularly attractive. They met with the Governor of that state and also with the US Attorney General and at one point they committed themselves to buying 100,000 acres there. But then, in June of 1920, when another delegation was to make further arrangements, it was not allowed to cross the border into the US. The reason never became clear but these groups took it as a sign from God that they were not meant to move to the US. That also meant that they had to get out of their commitment to purchase that piece of land. This proved difficult and costly in itself.[22]

Some in these groups, in the fall of 1920, also inquired about isolated areas in northern Canada, including northern Manitoba and northern Quebec. However, the government of Manitoba was not encouraging. As for Quebec, at this time it did not have a compulsory school attendance law and Premier Taschereau seemed hospitable to the delegates but gradually they sensed that that province would prefer French speaking settlers.[23] Also, in neither place was the federal government willing to help them with the broad school freedoms that they desired.

Interestingly, the Hague-Osler group did not join in the delegations to Quebec. They had decided to work with John D. F. Wiebe, a Mennonite Brethren businessman from Herbert, Saskatchewan who had made connections with the family of the President of Mexico. Thus it was that the first trip to Mexico was made by the Hague-Osler delegates by themselves, in the fall of 1920, without the participation of the Swift Current and Manitoba groups.[24] When this delegation returned with a positive report the other groups dropped the northern Manitoba and Quebec options. Now they all set their sights on Mexico. (Incidentally, Jack Wiebe, who in recent decades has served as Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan and as a Senator in Ottawa, is from the family of that John D. F. Wiebe.)

By January 1921 a full delegation with representatives from all three Old Colony groups was in Mexico. They met with the President. He was not enthusiastic about their insistence on separate schools in which the Spanish language would not be taught. He said he hoped that eventually they would learn Spanish too.[25] But he was so eager to attract these farming people that he agreed to a broad range of freedoms, giving the delegates a letter that they accepted as their new *Privilegium*. One report states that Rev. Johann Loeppky from Hague, "extended a heartfelt handshake to the President and with tears in his eyes thanked him and the ministers for the kind reception."[26] The report continues: "There was no doubt in their [the delegation's] minds that Mexico would be their promised land" (See Johann Loeppky Journal, p. 37, this issue of Preservings.)

The next task, after getting this *Privilegium* from the Mexican government, was to find a suitable piece of land in Mexico. This was challenge enough but now a different issue arose. While in Mexico to look at land, it became apparent that the Manitoba and Swift Current delegates felt that the Hague-Osler people, who were less well-off, might not be able to put out as much money, and that as a result, if they bought land altogether and if difficulties arose then the Manitoba and Swift Current people might be left "holding the bag," with a disproportionate share of the financial burden. Apparently, Rev. Johann P Wall from Hague and Mr. Klaas Heide from Manitoba clashed on this issue.[27] As a result there was a parting-of-ways. The Manitoba and Swift Current groups, helped by John D. F. Wiebe, proceeded to purchase a total of 225,000 acres in the state of Chihuahua in September of 1921. And in March of 1922 six chartered trains carrying nearly 5,000 people left Manitoba for Mexico.[28]

After the parting-of-ways in Mexico in the fall of 1921, the Hague-Osler group was not sure what it should do. Their exclusion must have been a major disappointment for Rev. Johann Loeppky who had been at the forefront in exploring the Mexico option. Reportedly, the Hague group now looked for land elsewhere.[29] As a result things became drawn out. And during this time the economy in Canada went into a slump and land prices fell, making it more difficult to sell their land at prices that would give them the large sums they needed to buy land elsewhere. For the Hague-Osler group the whole idea of moving was in doubt.

However, the Saskatchewan school situation remained bleak. As a result, in 1924, they again turned their eyes to Mexico and purchased a piece of land in the state of Durango, 500 miles south of Cuauhtemoc where the Manitoba and Swift Current people had settled.[30] The first chartered train left Hague on June 4, 1924 with approximately 140 people. Another seven trains left at different times over the next two and one-half years. Others left in small groups even later, the last one in 1934.[31] But the total number of people who moved from here was just under one thousand, far below the Manitoba number. It represented only one quarter of the Old Colonists of this area. For Swift Current the percentage who moved was higher and in Manitoba the vast majority moved.[32]

The purchase of the land was complicated too, or rather, the selling of the land here. In each of the three areas - Hague-Osler, Swift Current, and Manitoba - the initial intent was to sell the land in one large block to one large buyer. That would keep the people together; it would give the church a large sum of money with which to buy a new block; and it would dissuade individuals who might be tempted to stay back in order to buy the land of those leaving in what could be "a buyer's market". In each of the three areas they entered into dealings with a large buyer but in each case the plan fell through, resulting in legal wrangling, major financial costs, and, particularly in the Hague-Osler area, a loss of internal unity as key people were blamed for not preventing that outcome. Not surprisingly, this led some people to back away from the idea of moving.In the Hague-Osler area when the block sale was being planned, all the people who owned land and who were committed to moving, signed their land titles over to four leaders, - Rev. Johann P. Wall, Jacob Friesen, Benjamin Goertzen, and Peter Reddekopp. These leaders could then, on behalf of the group, enter into dealings with a land company. The agreement, signed in 1921, has 27 pages and lists over 400 pieces of land from south of Osler to north of Hague, from east of the South Saskatchewan river to near the old number 11 highway in the west.[33]

When no migration materialized at the time that the agreement was signed and when future steps seemed uncertain, many of the original landowners wanted their titles back. This was allowed but apparently the process caused so much frustration that some people including my father's parents decided not to join in the migration, meaning also, that they would now send their children to the public school.[34] Those who did eventually move sold their land on an individual basis. One positive consequence of this was that it enabled the newly arriving *Russlander* Mennonites, who were fleeing from the Soviet Union, to buy some of the farms of those leaving for Mexico. In the decades that followed the *Russlander* presence in these communities had many positive effects.

(b) The Continuing Burden of School Fines

The school fines continued to be a major burden in the period from 1919 to 1924 while the search for a new homeland went on. To describe it I will read excerpts from three letters from Old Colony leaders. They are no longer pleading to have the 1873 commitment to unrestricted freedom in school matters honoured. They are only asking the government to suspend the fining for about two years to make it a little easier for them to settle their affairs and move away. The first letter, written on April 13, 1920, is from Johann F. Peters, a leader here from Neuanlage. He appealed to the Premier stating:

"We cannot send our children to public schools because it is contrary to our religious belief. It is against the laws of God according to our faith. We would have to trespass the promise given to our God and Redeemer at the time of baptism... Is the Premier's intention to force us to disobey God's commandments ... in that case our Redeemer would say: 'If you are trespassing my commandments and not remain true unto them, you will become unworthy of me,'...If you knew how hard it is to be a true Mennonite, ... If you had been here and seen the conditions you would not have had the heart to exact money from these poor people. I beg you, Honourable Sir, to be good enough to grant us two years time to leave this country if you consider us a bad class of people. We believe that we are worthy of such a privilege at least."[35]

The second letter, a petition to the provincial legislative assembly, was sent on January 7, 1922. It was signed by the Swift Current Old Colony Aeltester and all six ministers there.

They say:

"We, the Reinland Mennonites near Wymark ... have enjoyed the very much appreciated liberties in the past through the benevolence of the Government of this province and of the Dominion as well, which causes us to feel heartily thankful towards Almighty God and also to the said Governments, ... we trust and hope that it will be accepted by the Venerable Assembly if this petition is brought before you, in which we pray you to kindly bear in mind your humble servants in your position as Legislators, to consider in what serious a position we are put by having enforced the School Attendance Act upon many of us, notwithstanding the facts that we have been granted by the Dominion Government the privilege of not being restricted in educating our children ... If these enforcements of said Act could be suspended for ... a few years ... it would be worth much thankfulness to us, and you, Honourable Gentlemen would receive a great reward ... in eternity. ... We are preparing, as our Forefathers have done centuries ago, to migrate, not for the sake of language but for the sake of our religious grounds to which we all have professed before God ... which we can hold only in teaching our children in our religious principles from childhood on ...(2 Tim. 3: 14) ... It is with grief and sorrow that we prepare to migrate to a new home but [we] are hopeful as we have found and got promised what we desire, but to carry out such an undertaking it takes time and money, and to get the latter we have to sell out, which also takes time, and for this reason we humbly pray once more, like children do to their fathers, and please do not reject our prayers when we petition you to suspend the enforcement of the said Act ..."[36]

The third letter was written on February 12, 1923, by Rev. Johann P. Wall here from Neuanlage to the Minister of Education. It stated:

"... I feel myself compelled to come to you with my request in the name of our whole Church Council, as well as the whole community. As you will know well enough, our church, the so-called Old Colony Mennonite Church of Hague, Saskatchewan, has for a long time been under the pressure of the Saskatchewan School Attendance Act, which requires of us to send our children to the Public Schools, to which we cannot consent on account of our conscience. ... But since these exemptions [given by the Dominion government in 1873] have been taken away from us by the Provincial Government ..we felt ourselves compelled to look around whether we could find a place anywhere in this world where we could find and enjoy those privileges lost here. And thanks be to God,... we have succeeded in finding these in another country. ... And therefore we have deemed it our sacred duty to leave our beloved country and to submit ourselves and our children to the great inconvenience and material loss unavoidingly created thereby - as our forefathers did when they left Russia - and try to get there where we have been offered that which we have lost here... But such is not a matter which can be accomplished in a short time, particularly under the present financial depression that rests on nearly the whole world [and] the poor crops of the last few years.... there are many who are weakened so much in financial respect through the many, many prosecutions that it is a very great loss to the country, especially to the District, since they have been unable to do their farming according to the usual good methods. Yes, many of them could not support themselves any more and would be in need and misery if they had not been supported by others. But the credit is exhausted and paying the school fines will eventually cease. And when the farmers are deprived of their working stock they cannot do their farming, as much as they want to do it. Therefore we direct our most submissive petition to you and through yourself to the Hon. Gentlemen of the Provincial Government: Have mercy with our poor people. God will reward you for it. If you cannot keep the exemption that was granted to our people, please give us a few years in which to settle our affairs we pray."[37]

In addition to these letters from Old Colony leaders, a number of prominent individuals in the larger society also pleaded for moderation. In November 22, 1919, W. W. Cooper, a businessman in Swift Current, reported that it now seemed likely that a sizeable emigration would take place, and that, since "there are a number of families reduced to destitution through the fines being imposed upon them," perhaps the government should consider "that the School Attendance Act not be forced for a period of about two years ... to give the families that leave the country an opportunity to get away..."[38] On May 29, 1920, Henry Vogt, a lawyer in Swift Current, who had appealed to the Premier earlier already, did so again. His further discussions with Old Colony leaders had persuaded him that they would not object to teaching the English language but that they opposed the school system which the government was attempting to force upon them. They feared that it would eventually change the church, even on the basic teaching of military service. Vogt argued that if the government would offer an arrangement whereby they could retain their private schools but teach English, then the emigration plans would be set aside.[39]

In November of 1921, A. J. E. Summer, a real estate agent in Saskatoon, appealed to the Premier stating:

"This movement, if allowed to take place will be a serious economic loss to the West, and to a lesser degree to the Dominion as a whole,... An extensive trip of inspection ... has prompted me to ask whether it is necessary that thousands of the best farmers Canada possesses should be allowed to leave in this manner. Twenty-five years in the history of the nation are nothing but that time would suffice to prove that the present matters of contention would solve themselves. I suggest that even at this late date an effort be made to avert this migration..."[40]

In the fall of 1923 the Deputy Minister of Education, A. W. Ball, prepared a memorandum for the Minister suggesting that since in the six years that the School Attendance Act had been in force there had been no appreciable headway in getting Old Colony children into public schools, the government would now be amply justified in attempting to work out a compromise. No government, he said, has been successful in applying methods of compulsion and punishment in the case of conscientious objectors.[41]

Another person, J. N. Doerr, who had taught in a public school near a Mennonite settlement wrote that while the public schools were superior in those many things which are considered necessary for man's equipment in this materialistic age, the Mennonite private schools were superior in "the science of human relations". He condemned the intolerance in society, praised the Mennonites for not contributing to the prison population and for their ability as farmers, and called on the government to work out a compromise so that the Mennonites would stay in Canada.[42]

In spite of these and other expressions of sympathy, the policy of the government did not change and the Mennonites, as we have noted, at least a number of them, eventually moved away. Others eventually gave in.

5. After 1924: Adjusting to New Realities

Certainly, the departure of the first people for Mexico in June of 1924 was a watershed but not everything changed. As already noted, the move from the Hague-Osler area was drawn-out. People went in small groups over a number of years. It must have been hard for families to weigh all the factors and to decide on whether to move or to stay. People will have agonized over the question for years. Spouses will not always have agreed. Young couples, looking forward to marriage, will have become separated. Some people who did move, soon returned, with reports of economic hardship, banditry and other challenges.

For those who stayed here things were not entirely clear either. In about ten villages the German language Old Colony schools continued until 1929 or 30 and some people continued, periodically, to pay fines until then. Others, knowing that school attendance was not compulsory if you lived outside of a district or more than three miles from a public school, got around the problem by moving out such distances or by sending their children to live with relatives who lived in such areas.

But not everyone resisted the public schools. Most of the teachers in the public schools were Mennonites, belonging to the General Conference or the Mennonite Brethren. And a good number of them were very caring people. They carried enormous loads. In Renfrew school, where no one attended in 1920, enrolment stood at 74 in 1930, and they were all in one-room.[43] But in Cornelius Boldt, from west of Osler, they also had the finest of teachers. There were many excellent teachers. In addition to their work during the day, many teachers held evening classes

for those older teens who wanted to learn English. My mother recalls attending such classes for two winters - the only English language schooling she ever had. In Grunthal, in 1929, a Jacob Miller still taught in the German school but his younger brother, George, had studied in the public system and obtained certification as a public school teacher. Thus, at one point, the people in the village, some of whom were still paying fines to keep their children out of public school, hired George to hold English language evening classes for them. They paid him $1.00 per month.[44]

What happened to the church? The Old Colony leaders from all three areas who moved to Mexico portrayed the move as a move of the church, meaning that people who did not move were no longer part of the church. But this was not quite as true in the Hague-Osler area as in Swift Current and Manitoba where the Old Colony churches disappeared when the trains left. (In Manitoba a new Old Colony church was established fifteen years later. In the Swift Current area many of the people who stayed eventually joined the Sommerfelder church, as did the one remaining minister Rev. Jacob Peters.[45])

In the Hague-Osler area things were different largely because Rev. Johann N. Loeppky stayed back, as did Rev. Abram Wall. Loeppky was a key leader. Why did he stay back? Had he become disillusioned with the migration and its many problems? Was it his compassion for the many people who, because of the fines, had become too impoverished to move and who needed a spiritual shepherd here? Whatever the reason, the ministers who did move were very upset with him. They saw him as a betrayer.[46] But when the others left, he, and Rev. Abram Wall, continued to hold worship services here even if in many villages the services were only every third Sunday.

After some years, when it became clear that many people would not move anyway, there was a sense among the people that the church here should be rebuilt. But how could they do this? There was no Old Colony Aeltester. The people then asked Rev. Cornelius Hamm, Aeltester of the Bergthaler church here, to preside over an Old Colony Aeltester election. Loeppky was elected. Hamm was then requested to ordain him. Not long after that Loeppky arranged to have more ministers elected so as to better serve the people and rebuild the church.[47] Loeppky then also helped to get the new Old Colony church in Manitoba going.

In the 1940s and 50s the Old Colony church in this area started having Sunday Schools.[48] Back when they had their own private schools with a lot of Bible teaching in the curriculum, Sunday School was not an issue. But when those schools closed, their children received no Christian education except that from their homes. It took some time but eventually Sunday Schools were accepted.

Also significant is the emergence of other churches. Already in the 1930s I. P. Friesen who had been excommunicated from the Old Colony church thirty years earlier and who, subsequently, had been ordained as a minister in the Rosthern Mennonite church, came and held services in these villages if he was invited. He was an unusually gifted speaker. People responded well. Eventually, some people in the Grunthal and Chortitz areas were inspired by his preaching to organize a new church, calling it, Rudnerweider, the name of the new church that arose in Manitoba from a similar revival there. Later that church was renamed the EMMC.[49] Other churches appeared too.

Is there a way of summarizing this whole story? We can note that there has been an extensive diversification in many aspects of life. In terms of church affiliation, people gradually joined a range of different churches or chose not to join any at all. In their educational pursuits people began to take many different directions. In their occupations, they made their living in increasingly diverse ways. In their geography, people moved to many different places, including big cities and remote rural areas. In their lifestyles and their ways of thinking people also became increasingly diverse.

Most of us now accept that diversity. It has some good aspects. But some people would say that instead of calling it diversity, we should call it a fragmentation or even a fracturing process. Certainly, it is different from the Old Colony vision of keeping a whole community of people on the same path, of holding the sacred and secular together, and of enfolding everyone in the embrace of the church. There is much to be admired about the Old Colony vision but in my view we should not be too sentimental about it. Keeping everything and everyone together can be stifling. But the harshness with which that way of life was broken down was not justified or inevitable. A little more leniency and wisdom from government leaders, and in some instances also from church leaders, could have spared a great deal of heartache.

What does it mean for us? Certainly, we should acknowledge that people struggled hard, with deep issues, and that many acted with courage, devotion and self-sacrifice. We can learn from them even if we do not fully agree with them. We should also acknowledge that the descendants of many who moved have become very poor, with little access to education or economic opportunity. But staying in Canada has not prevented problems either, as all of us know well.

It would be nice if we could solve every problem, heal every wound, and bring home every lost sheep, both there and here. But that is not in our power. Nevertheless, we can, by God's grace, take some steps and bring a little understanding and reconciliation to the scattered pieces that make up this story to which many of us are connected.

Endnotes

1 Leonard Doell, "The Mennonite Private Schools" in *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve*, published by Hague-Osler Reserve Book Committee, 1995, 639

2 Ibid, 651

3 "Proceedings of the Commission of Inquiry at Warman, December 28 - 29, 1908", 27, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB) files, Saskatoon.

4 Quoted in William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities in Canada,* University of Toronto Press, 1990, 100

5 Ibid, 103

6 Doell, op. cit., p. 653. See also, Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870 - 1925*, University of Ottawa Press, 1994, 115

7 See Adolf Ens, op. cit, 116

8 Doell, op. cit, 652

9 Quoted in Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920 - 1940: A People's Struggle for Survival,* Toronto, MacMillan, 1982, 99

10 Quoted in Ibid

11 Quoted in Ens, op. cit. 123

12 Ibid

13 Quoted in Janzen, op. cit., 105

14 Ibid, 88

15 Quoted in Ibid, 96

16 Ens, op. cit., 151

17 William Janzen, "The Limits of Liberty in Canada: the Experience of the Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors", Ph D. dissertation, Political Science, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1981, 240

18 Ens, noted in Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities in Canada*, University of Toronto Press, 1990, p. 107

19 Janzen, Ibid, 107

20 Ibid, 106

21 Epp, op. cit., 111. See also H. L. *Sawatzky, They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971, 32

22 Sawatzky, Ibid, 31

23 Epp, op. cit., 112 and Sawatzky, Ibid, 35

24 Sawatzky, Ibid, 36

25 Ibid, 39

26 *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve*, op. cit., 374

27 Ibid, 43, note 36

28 Ibid, 49

29 Ibid, 44

30 Ibid, 49

31 Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, op. cit., 386 and 220

32 Ibid, 374, See also Sawatzky, 50, Ens, 214, and Abram Janzen, "Aeltester Johan M. Loeppky, 1982 - 1950: As I Remember Him" self published, Hague, Saskatchewan, 2003

33 Agreement, Oct. 10, 1921, Between Johann P. Wall, Jacob Friesen, Benjamin Goertzen and Peter Reddekopp, and The Union Liberty Company Limited, of Winnipeg, SAB files. Both of my grandfathers, Peter P. Janzen and Wilhelm R. Wiebe are on the list alongside more than a hundred others.

34 The reason why my mother's parents did not move in the 1920s had to do with one daughter's medical condition.

35 Quoted in Janzen, Ibid, 108

36 Ibid, 110

37 Quoted in Janzen, op. cit., 110

38 Ibid, 108

39 Ibid, 109

40 Ibid

41 Ibid, 111

42 Ibid, 112

43 *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve*, op. cit., 41

44 Doell, op. cit., 659

45 Leonard Doell, "Swift Current Old Colony Mennonite Church" in, *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, 1875 to 2000,* (ed) Delbert F. Plett, Crossway Publications, Steinbach, Manitoba, 2000, 153.

46 Abram Janzen, op. cit. Also informative is a letter, dated September 10, 1933, from Rev. Johann P. Wall in Mexico, responding to Mr. C. B. Dirks who, while teaching in the Renfrew public school, wrote to Wall in an effort to help a local individual who had been excommunicated before the move to Mexico.

47 Leonard Doell, "The Old Colony Mennonite Church" in *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve*, op. cit., 585

48 Ibid, 587

49 *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve*, op. cit., 618

Setting our Sights on Siberia

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The Beckoning Altai

Driving south from Novosibirsk, twelve time zones away from Calgary, one crosses a political, geographical line into the southernmost part of Western Siberia. This Altai Region of more than two million people reaches south and west to Kasachstan, and east to the famous Altai Mountains. Barnaul, a city of 650,000 with its 45,000 to 60,000 university students attending the various parts of the Altai State University (ASU), sits at the center of this Region.

At the extreme west one finds the 'German National Region', created by Boris Yeltsin in 1991. This is where one will find most of the *Ruszlanddeutschen* who are left, by now thoroughly Russianized, and some still working in such entities as the Friedrich Engels Collective, centered in the village of Protassowo. North Americans often forget that there were over two million Germans in Russia before 1914 and the Revolution of 1917. Even before that these vast steppes of Western Siberia were peopled by voluntary but largely landless immigrants between 1906 and 1910. Those who stayed after my family left for Canada in 1926, resisted the First Five Year Plan, and failed to get out of Russia in 1929-30, were subjected to severe repressive measures, and suffered during the purges of the 1930s.

In 1941, however, the immigration into the Altai was different. When Nazi Germany attacked Soviet Russia, the Volga Germans and others were deported en masse into this Region and into Kazakhstan, forced into the Labor Army or collectivized.

During my brief visit to the western Altai in the year 2000, I was billeted for a few days in the central village of Protassowo. This was only fifteen kilometers from the village of Orlovo where I was born in 1925 and where I lived with my family for the first fifteen months of my life. [The two pictures show me (with my sister Erna and parents) then and in 2000 on the main street of Orlovo (Orloff)]

Voluntary Service and the Barnaul Germans

In October/November, 2000, I went to Barnaul under Rotary International's Voluntary Program. My way was paid for two months to do English as a second language (ESL). Not that I was qualified to do ESL at the most basic level, only to help those who had had some English. I was given hospitality by a Russian Rotarian, Oleg Startsev, a Physicist, and his wife Ludmila. Oleg is the one who made the arrangements for me to help two different classes of adults who already had some elementary English.

When some of the remaining *Ruszlanddeutsche* (Germans in Russia - formerly Lutheran, Catholic, and Mennonite) in Barnaul heard about my coming and that I was equally facile in German (almost) and was hoping to visit my birthplace, this doubled the interest for all the

people I met. As a result my life was enriched by so many experiences, encouraged as I was by the Barnaul Club to take advantage of these opportunities.

Soon I met Johannes Schellenberg, 80, a longtime editor of the German-language weekly for *Ruszlanddeutsche*. As a result, my opportunities to meet people grew and grew. I met the very significant professor and writer Lev Malinowski who gave me a copy of his book on *Germans in Russia* (in German). Schellenberg gave me his book (in Russian) on Orlovo, my birth village. I also met two renowned Barnaul artists of this background who gave me autographed copies of their portfolios. One was Alfred Friesen of Mennonite parentage, and the other Johannes Sommer, a Volga German, a sculptor (*ein Bildhauer).*

I had unexpected media exposure. People from the press wanted to know about my visit to my birth village and area. As a result there were two stories about me in Slavgorod's *Zeitung fuer Dich* ("Newspaper for You"), as well as in the Barnaul city newspaper (Russian). A Mrs. Filistovich (mother of my student Denis who did well in three languages) interviewed me for a Barnaul German Radio program. This was aired in two instalments. At a Russian/German Cultural Event I was asked to speak briefly.

Experiences

First, I was privileged to see much of the Altai, from one end to the other, from Slavgorod in the west and the villages mentioned above, set in the vast *Kulundasteppen* of Siberia, to Gorno Altai in the east, nestled in the foothills of the Altai Mountains, with its richly endowed birch forests. The countryside in the west was dotted with German-built villages, the rest with Russian. I witnessed life in a *Kolkhoz* (a collective) whose formation had been forced upon most people; saw a village of summer *dachas* (with their saunas and gardens) alongside the Ob River; stopped at open markets; experienced (with fellow Rotarians) the unusual phenomenon of Russian women hitchhiking alone along the highways, to get to town or the market. One I remember as having the face and neck of a Cleopatra, but hands of a kitchen maid.

My Rotary hosts, the Startsevs, and Schellenberg made sure I took in several concerts of Siberian-style orchestras: featuring balalaikas and accordions playing classical music. I attended two Baptist churches services, one in the German region, one in Barnaul. I spoke with an interpreter briefly at the end of the service in the latter church – a very new and imposing church building [shown on page 75].

In all I visited three museums (one holding pieces of every precious stone found in Siberia, huge, indicating the enormous wealth of that vast land; one holding the Siberian mummies; another showing the sleigh which carried Stalin to Barnaul at the beginning of collectivization; one archive housing the records of the repressive measures forced on *Ruszlanddeutsche* in the Altai by the NKVD during the period 1929-31. I was invited to visit ten schools where English was taught. Invariably I had an exchange with the students and tried to answer their many questions. One class of children in a school for the gifted kept me going for 90 minutes.

All of this only confirmed in my mind that we needed to raise our sights to Siberia and form some kind of formal or informal Research Group that would link Canada and Siberia. I even thought we needed to create "Friends for a Mennonite Focus on Siberia's *Ruszlanddeutsche*" (or something like that). I was convinced we needed to capitalize on the openness of the Russians in Siberia who have already published much on Mennonites and other Germans to link up with us. Perhaps we have the potential to harness young Russians to do research for people from abroad.

With such thoughts I want to give some reasons why we should and eventually did form up

such a group, why we should raise our sights to Siberia, why we should not be satisfied to focus all of our attention on the Ukraine.

One, the story of the first Mennonites on Kulundasteppe is phenomenal

For one of my classes, a group of MA-level physics students, I wrote an imaginary piece on how 800 families, coming from many locations – for example my maternal grandparents from Sagradowka, and my paternal grandparents from Neu-Samara - managed to settle on that virgin grassland, the *Kulundasteppe,* and build up to 50 villages within a period of three years (1908 to 1911). I gave these budding engineers and physicists an imaginary recreation of how this was done. My Russian students, till struggling with English and too shy to speak much, were quite ignorant of this voluntary settlement of Mennonites in the Altai. But they could appreciate the difficulties they had faced - travelling a long way by wagon and rail, and wagon again. On the Steppe they found no trees or stones for building, no nearby lakes or rivers for water, just grass growing on loam and clay.

These students knew about the Germans and the German National Region granted them by Yeltsin in 1991. But they did not know that these Mennonites had so impressed the Russian government that the Tsar's PM, Peter Stolypin, came to visit as early as August 1910. The locale chosen was Orlovo (Orloff) where I was later born. My maternal grandfather, a minister and teacher, from Sagradowka, Peter J. Wiebe, was asked to give the address of welcome in Russian under Jacob Reimer, the *Oberschulze*. He offered the traditional loaf of bread and a pinch of salt (G. Fast, *Steppen*.…)

Who was this Stolypin? During one of my presentations to a seniors group in Calgary someone asked: Was this the same man who hunted down all those thousands of people in the previous four years? "Yes, this 'PM of all the Russias,' Count Pyotr Stolypin, was that same Stolypin! He had much blood on his hands." The Tsarist reforms of 1905-06, following the terrible defeat at the hands of Japan in the Far East, as welcome as they were to some, did not slow down the revolutionary activity of certain political parties, neither on the right or left. One of these, the Socialist Revolutionaries, particularly, made it their business to assassinate as many government officials as possible, as highly placed as possible, hoping to take out the Tsar too.

In response Tsar Nicolas II had given Stolypin full powers not only to deal with reforms such as opening the steppelands of Western Siberia to settlement, but also to dealing with such anarchic destructive activity. These revolutionaries killed Stolypin on his visit to Kiev in 1911.While Stolpyin paid thus for his murderous reactionary measures, the Orlovo Mennonites under Reimer honored him with a statue whose story was told in some detail by Schellenberg in his *Orlovo.* If he had been able to continue his reforms, Stolypin might have stolen much of Lenin's thunder.

This anomaly brings out the contradiction within the Mennonite relationship to government. Leaders like Stolypin were anathema to the intellectuals, the liberal parties (the Kadets, constitutionalists) and, of course, to the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and SRs, but acceptable, tolerable, to the Mennonites.

One adult class of Russians improving their English.

Johann Schellenberg told how this monument was destroyed in 1918, after the Bolsheviks came to power. The granite slabs left lying around were taken to another village where they were used as a foundation for a monument to partisans in the civil war 1918-1921. The obelisk was moved to a different village in 1967 for the 50th anniversary of the Revolution. Later it was returned to the grave of the partisans where it was overgrown with weeds.

Johann Schellenberg

Siberia: not only Unknown but Neglected

Once I had received some insight into what Siberia, especially the Altai, had to offer in this period since 1990 of relative freedom and greater opportunities for gratification, and open to visitors and tourists, Rotary Clubs and business, I regret that Siberia has been left so in the dark and neglected.

While the very name Siberia (*Sibirien*) causes some to shudder, Gerhard Fast recaptured some of the mystery as well as excitement when he recalled in 1957 how they had felt as settlers a half century earlier: "Siberia: this land of mystery with its vast steppes, mountains, and mighty streams, with its immeasurable riches in gold, silver, coal, iron, with its wolf population, with its places of exile for political prisoners and convicts, and with its mosaic of strange peoples, shall now become our home" (*Steppen*).

The coffee table book of the 1960s by Walter Quiring and Helen Bartel *In the Fullness of Time* left us a mixed message, as translated: "The fate of the Mennonite settlers of Siberia is generally unknown abroad. It can be said with some certainty that to some degree they are still in existence today, though without a doubt completely changed. Through the intended levelling and collectivization of all aspects of life and the unrestricted influx of foreign elements into the Mennonite settlements a gradual russification appears inevitable."

The Germans who have written about the Volga, Volhynian, Black Sea, and Bessarabian Germans in the '70s and '80s found their information drying up for lack of access to sources. For example, George J. Walters *Wir Wollen Deutsche Bleiben* (1982) wrote about their 1941 exile into the vast silence of Siberia under Stalin. His regime closed the door to the press from the West, and even got all the War Leaders and even General Eisenhower to cooperate

Oleg Startsev shown here with the driver, Rotarian Boris Chesnekov.

with behind-the-scenes repatriation after the War. Walters was pleased however to quote from Solzhenytsin who knew, from his own experience in the Gulag, that the Germans could adjust in Siberia and make a life anywhere (304-305).

The neglect shows up in the two editions of picture histories produced by Gerhard Lohrenz. Unlike the Quiring volume, the first has no photos from Siberia, and only about fifteen pages from Sagradowka. The Table of Contents of the second edition indicates a section on Siberia, but really there is only a map and then a reversion to the more familiar Ukraine. There are several pages devoted to Siberia, more to Karaganda. Siberia was either a closed land to those from the south, or a land not worth bothering about, as no one from the south, not even from Siberia, had ventured to make such a collection of pictures.

I myself, for some years, wrestled with a measure of low self-esteem because I came from there. I will not belabor that point here, but I come from the landless, those who moved to new and difficult locations because they had no prospect of advancement or status without property.

Baptist Church in Barmaul.

Our own mapmakers and atlas producers have been slow to venture into the north and east, though the second edition of Huebert and Schroeder did include a map and some explanation. We know from various sources that many more maps of other areas could have been developed and included.

Once you have been able to exploit the interest in the original colonies and their immediate offshoots in the Ukrainian context to the extent of having a research center in the former Molotschna, a revived church center, can appeal to humanitarian and financial resources on behalf of the Ukrainian Christians, and can combine that with an annual tour of interested North Americans, it is hard to lift the interest to Siberia. No doubt Paul Toews was substantially correct to justify, in the pages of the *Mennonite Weekly Review,* the strong focus on the Ukraine as the "crucible for the development of many religious and cultural values that to this day still flavor Mennonites of NA." His view was that we owe much to the Ukraine and should be willing now to 'enter the open door to a new "unparalleled" mission and service opportunity.' The annual Mennonite Heritage and Memorial Tour, a wonderful thing in itself, came to solidify the focus on the Ukraine both as tourist and mission gratification. On the other hand, someone has called this a strange mixture of business and the exploitation of Mennonite sentiments (email, 24 March 2001).

Much has been realized there that is not begrudged. All of this is legitimate if disinterested and if the promoters are prepared to face the facts, such as the anomalies mentioned above, and all those contradictions that are coming to light in the story of the *Ruszlanddeutsche.* Actually, from what I have read about Mennonites in the works by the Russian historians, they are being quite generous to Mennonites in their sympathies and their coverage.

Equal Gratification

Having been north and east, I came to the conviction that it is time and that it can be equally gratifying to give some serious attention to the history of the Kulundasteppe and its colony as well as those settlements closer to Omsk. After all, one of the cardinal rules on research is this: when you know of research material or publications that fall into the category of your subject, you cannot ignore them in your reading. From now on, given the wealth of materials available in the recently opened archives: Omsk, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Barnaul, and perhaps other smaller cities, and the multitude of books and articles emanating from Siberia, there is no longer any excuse in not including the Mennonites of Siberia, even if we have to work with the Russians to get at the story.

Also, these voluntary settlements in Siberia have been there half as long as the first settlements on and near the Dneiper. This alone is justification enough. In fact, the Siberian settlements are going to be the longest continuous settlements of ***Ruszlanddeutsche***. They never totally ceased operation, even though stressed beyond measure by inefficient socialist planning and tyranny based on the world's most frightening example of paranoia. True, many of the original villages are gone, but Protassowo, where I stayed for five days, was enlarged on the collapse of a number of smaller villages on the east end in order to create a more efficient kolkhoz – though that has been disputed. What Quiring/Bartel seemed to predict forty years ago, that there would be (was) an influx of strangers, is now coming true, but not all *Ruszlanddeutsche* will return to Germany before 2005 (if that is the cut-off date!)

Now the Story is Told by Russian Historians

When I got to Barnaul, I discovered that Russians seemed to have a head start on telling the story of the Stalin Terror. Many articles and books have been written during the last 15 years in Siberia. In fact, when I met Johannes Schellenberg in early October last year, and we talked about this, he thought so much had been written about the *"Repressalien"* [repressive measures] that little more needed to be done. Had I been able to carry home all of the books I was actually given, most of them in Russian, of course, and had I been able easily to read them, we would have some better impression of the validity of his perception. [I just could not carry home two feet of books!]

When my (our) friend James Urry heard I was going to Siberia, he began to send me copies of certain articles from a journal entitled *Forschungen zur Geschichte u. Kultur der Ruszlanddeutschen*. This is the work of Detlef Brandes and others in Essen, and is published by *Klartext Verlag*. Brandes has seen to the translation and publication of many Russian articles on the *Ruszlanddeutsche* in this Journal. This is where I discovered the work of Andrej Savin and Larisa Belkovec before I met them personally in Novosibirsk. I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to make those contacts in a totally unexpected way.

Russians of course have told the story without isolating the Mennonites, as we have largely been doing in the south. What is necessary in true historical research is context and comparison for understanding. Whereas Walters isolated the Volga Germans, Manfred Klaube has dealt with all of the Germans (as did Adam Giesinger, Winnipeg, in his *From Catharine to Khrushchev*), though naturally focussing on certain villages which were predominantly Lutheran

What is that story?

As stated, the western Altai region contains the Mennonite colonies with a continuous life since 1908. The people were not deported en masse from the Altai as were the *Volgadeutsch* in 1941-42 from their home of more than 150 years. Even then, none of us could have wished to live in those villages through various aspects of the Leninist and even less the Stalin years. Their gratifying earlier life was weakened, distorted, their religious and social habits totally threatened, so that nearly everyone wanted to

Teaching Staff of Barnaul School for Visually Impaired Children.

leave by 1929, when the great majority had been content to stay in 1926.

What happened during those three years? And up to the beginning of The Great Fatherland War? What really unsettled many (including my grandfather Peter J. Wiebe, leading minister in Orlovo) was the development in 1927 of the German Rayon under a German Communist Section. One of the main reasons the Kremlin was prepared to give the German colonies some degree of autonomous status was the fact there were German Communists available and prepared to lord it over their own kind of people. By creating autonomous regions they could use these Germans to sovietize the German-speaking colonies in the *Muttersprache*. Some of these, often prisoners of war from 1914-1917, had already assisted in grain requisitioning during War Communism. In July 1927 such a German Rayon was organized, including 57 villages, taking Halbstadt as its center of gravity. In these villages were just over 13,000 people, 96 % of which were Mennonite and other Germans.

This sovietizing meant the reduction or eradication of religious services, the introduction of atheistic teaching in the schools, new programs for all youth. Sovietization was one thing. The collectivization campaign of the First Five Year Plan in the *Kulundasteppe* was quite another (1928-32). This was accompanied by a concerted chorus of anti-sectarian venomous press directed against the Mennonites and many Baptists in Siberia. These groups were singled out just when Stalin himself made a visit to Barnaul and Rubsovsk in the Altai. All of the 'rich peasants' and others were branded as kulaks; they were portrayed over a period of about six months as the 'absolute enemy' of the regime (1928 to 1930). "*Das Bild des absoluten Feindes*" as written by Savin, I believe, is horrible to contemplate. The Communist press tarred and feathered all so-called sectarians with such designations as class enemy, misleaders of all youth, spies, counterrevolutionaries, wasters, drunkards, reactionaries, and their 'prayer houses' were designated combat headquarters for the counterrevolution.

Larissa Belcovec, right, with Elena Marchuk, my host in Akademgodorok.

Katarina Berg and her daughter Anna, Protassowo Collective, always working.

In this way the world of the Mennonites and other Germans collapsed: spiritually, intellectually, and culturally. The principles and values on which they stood explain the panic emigration of 1929. Were they not descendants of those invited by a Tsarist government; had they not enjoyed decades of independence; had they not been recognized far and wide as model farmers, enjoying the highest productivity; and how could they be ***expected to be glad*** to join a collective? [Schellenberg, 50]

This labelling of the sectarians as the 'absolute enemy of the state' in the press stood in sharp contrast to the more balanced, wholesome portrait of the German colonist in Party and Soviet documents. Larisa Belkovec has found references to the image of the 'model farmer' who had 'great respect for the law.' The positive elements were diminished somewhat by those things less pleasing to the Kremlin, such as the *"Drang nach dem [Westen],"* the desire to emigrate; their determination to remain landowners and 'kulaks' (exploiters of soil and people); to remain religious rather than ideological; to shy away from party organs and functionaries. To the Communists, most displeasing of all was the fact that the German women stood with their men. They were labelled "*rueckständige Frauen*" (backward-looking women) in her *"Das Bild des sibiriendeutschen Kolonisten in Partei - u. Sowjetdokumenten "* [Belkovec (9/99)].

Accompanying these disturbing changes was disenfranchisement, as told by Olga Gerber, which applied to: *"Geistliche, Pastoren, Prediger, Vorsaenger, Kantoren und Diakone…"* This of course occurred over a period of a decade, beginning about 1927. Even then, their world had been devastated enough that they thought of nothing but emigration as a protest against these repressive measures. The Kremlin functionaries naturally thought it quite monstrous that these, their best farmers, would want to leave at the beginning of the implementation of their beautiful theory of collectivization.

Back in Halbstadt, the colony party functionaries were also not amused when the farmers who had remained or returned ventured into more active protests against collectivization in the early part of 1930. As substantiated by Schellenberg who was not far away in Gruenfeld this was interpreted as a *"Kulakenaufstand*", in which Mennonites participated. They seemed on this occasion to escape severe punishment when the Slavgorod police rode in. Some were subdued only after a large contingent was rounded up in 1931 and sent off by train to Omsk, where they were put on a barge down the Irtysch and back up the Ob to create a new work area at Narym, above Tomsk – without provision, without adequate clothing – and ordered to produce logs. [Detlef Brandes (4/99); Schellenberg, 50-52.]

Even after succumbing to collectivization, they did not escape the aftermath of the mass terror which was initiated by the murder in Leningrad of Kirov in 1934 – one of the most discussed events in Soviet history. This impacted on the Germans in Slavgorod, Halbstadt, and Orlovo in a devastating way with the personal visit in that year of Molotov, a right hand man of Stalin. Molotov had been Premier of the USSR, and succeeded Litvinov as Foreign Secretary in 1938, I believe. He was very harsh in his demands. [Belkovec; Schellenberg, 63]. His visit was marked by arrests for 'stealing' heads of grain during a drought year. The Gulag for 'five grains' of wheat! Anyone was in danger of being called a 'spoiler, saboteur.' People were challenged to become finger-pointers. Identify the kulak, have him sent away and get 34 rubles! Many Mennonites were 'cleansed

away' by other Mennonites or Germans. Those who refused to help with the ferreting-out work were themselves in danger of arrest (Schellenberg, 60-67).

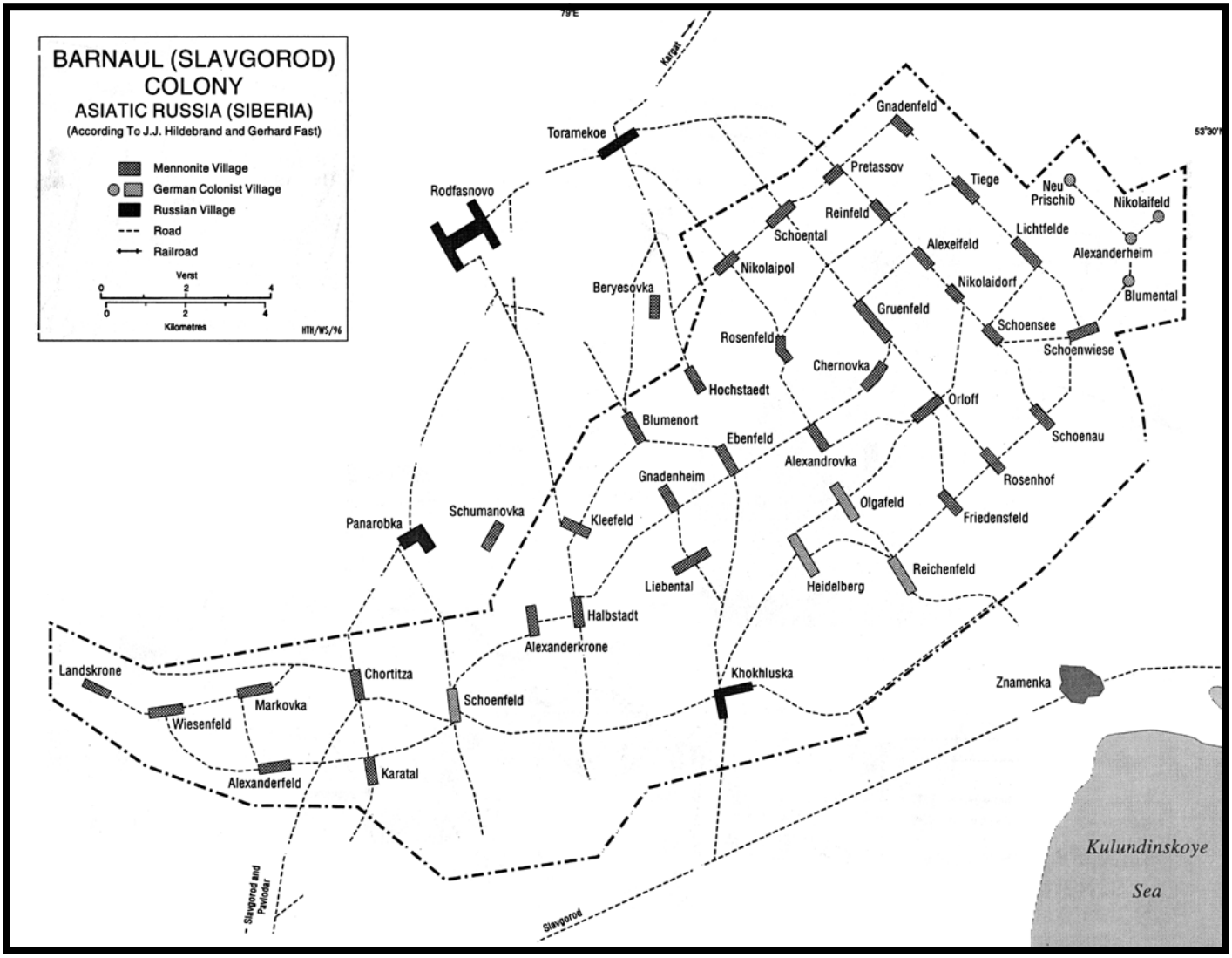
There was no way in which one could escape this system. Either one went along with it and had a living, perhaps even some rewards for extraordinary achievement, or one was accused of sabotage. What I learned while in Siberia was proof of the circumstance that it was most difficult to even become a martyr for the cause. Those branded as kulaks or arrested and sent away were not sent away because of a faith issue. They just could not deliver the unreasonable norms expected of them, least of all in drought years, which came often, yet brought no easing of the demands.

There were mass repressions in 1937-38 when millions in Soviet Russia from all occupations and all levels, the military not excluded, became victims of one man's paranoia. Schellenberg provided names for a number of villages in the Altai. One could intone the names on our senses if we wanted to do a 'memorial' to them.

During the Great Fatherland War the work force of the various collectives was reduced to women, girls, and young boys who ran the machines until they ground to a halt for lack of servicing, and they delivered grain all winter by horse and sleigh all the way to Slavgorod – from Orlovo sixty to eighty kms.

There was no improvement in their barbarous lot until after Stalin died and Krushchev finally took over. The kolkhozes merged, consideration was given once again to ownership of the produce from private lots. Eventually, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Orlovo and Protassowo kolkhozes prospered, in Russian terms, and life became more secure and assured. These

This is part of the group that explored the "Siberian Initiative" of 2001 in Winnipeg: L. Klippenstein, J. Urry, T. Regehr, D. Giesbrecht, W. Unger, and P. Toews.



collectives continue to this day and some of my Kroeker relations grew up and successfully raised families there and claimed to have all they required.

A 'Siberian Initiative'

The utmost necessity of a research initiative into the records of that story came home to me when Johannes Schellenberg took my Russian host, Oleg, and me to an archive in Barnaul that housed 42,000 cases of people who were repressed in the 1930s. Oleg, a Russian of about 50 years, away from home, grew up without being aware that such things had taken place right there in his Altai region, in Slavgorod, at the Friesen mill converted by the NKVD into a jail. He came away appalled at the perpetration of those horrendous Stalinist crimes against humanity, including many more Russians than Germans. Good God, he exclaimed, what did these innocent people do to deserve such treatment?

Those archival resources were mostly in Russian, but some, even the minutest records of those repressive measures involving Germans were in German. Nevertheless, it seemed obvious that those with complete Russian language skills and knowledge of the archives and the ways of Russian archivists would do better at digging out the story than those from abroad with weak language skills and facing many frustrations.

For this reason it is a pleasure to recall that in 2001-02 we launched what was called a "Siberian Initiative". At that time I told some historians from Western Canada and Fresno my story of how I managed with the help of a Rotarian in Novosibirsk to make contact with several historians and to discover Andrej Savin. He communicated easily in German and already had an impressive list of articles about Germans in Siberia, including joint authorship with Detlef Brandes, Duesseldorg, of *"Sibiriendeutsche im Sowjetsystem 1920 - 1941"* (Siberian Germans in the Soviet System, 1920-1941). Hardly did I know that he would become our chief channel of communication between East and West and continues to do work of huge significance to all Mennonites.

Paul Toews, Fresno, was successful in finding funds to support Savin's research into archival collections in Siberia, particularly Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Barnual, Omsk, and of course Moscow. The first significant result of that, as already reported, is Savin's preparation in Russian of a volume including an introductory essay, an annotated listing of 1000 archival files in various depositories across Siberia and Moscow, as well as more than 100 selected documents on Mennonites.

Clearly, it is time to look north and east into Siberian Russia.

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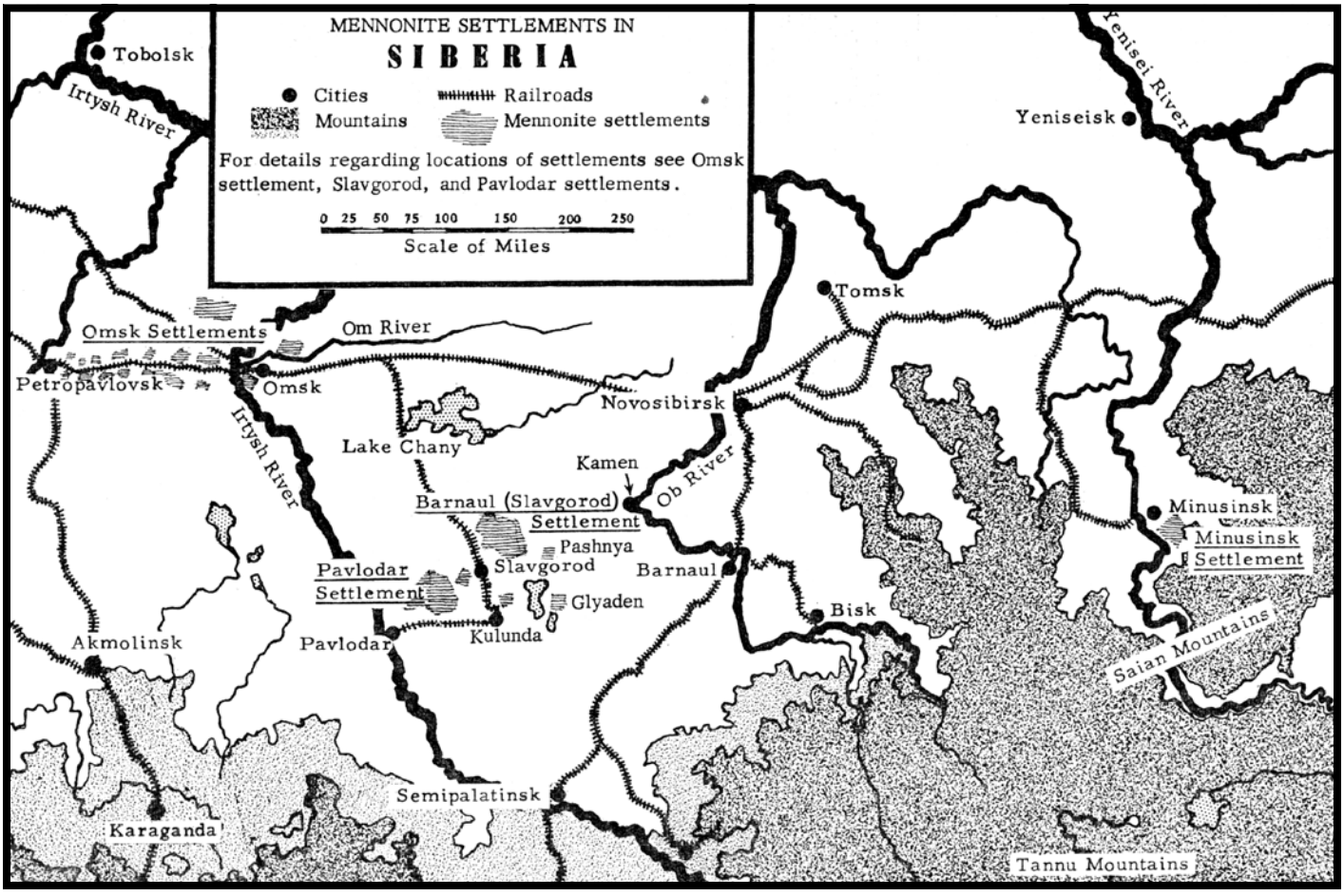
Adapted from what I wrote in May 2001, June 2006.



Four Letters to Susanna from Johann Bartsch
as a Mennonite Land Scout in New Russia 1786-87

Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg and Edwin D. Hoeppner, Winnipeg

No one to date has written much about the personal collection of correspondence and other materials gathered and held by Johann Bartsch of Danzig. He is believed to have been the secretary of the two-man Danzig Mennonite delegation (the other person being Jakob Hoeppner) which investigated New Russia settlement possibilities in 1786-87.

As it happens, some of Bartsch's writings have survived. The first of these writings to be published may have been the excerpts from, and references to, four letters which he wrote to his first wife, Susanna, while on the journey to New Russia and back. These letters are quoted in the 1889 centennial publication by David

Catherine the Great (1729-1796). British Museum, London.

H. Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten Versuch einer Darstellung des Entwickelungsganges derselben.* A *Mennonite Encyclopedia* entry on Johann Bartsch, provided by Dr. Cornelius Krahn, makes reference in its brief bibliography to "Johann Bartsch letters" of which copies may be found at the Mennonite Library and Archives (MLA) in North Newton, Kansas, USA. This collection includes the four letters to Susanna under discussion here. They are among the Bartsch letters microfilmed at the MLA, and sold in a duplicate copy to the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

The same letters are also included in a larger collection of letters and other documents once in the possession of *Aeltester* David H. Epp (1861 -1934) of Ekaterinoslav, south Russia, and brought to Canada after World War II. It is said that they were deposited with his younger brother, and founder of *Der Bote,* Diedrich H. Epp (1875-1955), of Rosthern, Saskatchewan. That collection remains with the extended family, with some photocopies also extant in the authors' files.

All the letters are written in German longhand Gothic script and available in quite legible handwritten copies of the original. It is not known where the originals, if they still exist, are located.

Who were the Johann Bartsches of Danzig?

Johann Bartsch was born 6 September 1757, the second son of Jakob and Christina Philipsen Bartsch, possibly from Danzig. He married Susanna Lammert, also born in 1757, the daughter of Jakob and Susanna (von Niessen) Lammert of Tiegenhagen. She was baptized in 1773 in the Orlofferfelde Frisian Mennonite Church by *Aeltester* Heinrich Donner. Johann and Susanna married on 15 August 1779. They had three children, Susanna, b. 10 February 1782, Maria, b. 21 July 1783, and Sara, b. 10 January 1785. Mother Susanna passed away on 15 November 1790 in Rosenthal, Chortitza settlement, shortly after they had emigrated to New Russia in 1788-89.

In 1788 Johann and Susanna and their family emigrated from the village of Nobel located about seven kilometres south of the city centre of Danzig. His place of birth is not known with certainty at this point. For its living the family ran a small dairy, and Johann may have acquired some proficiency as a shoemaker sometime in his life. The family worshipped with his parents in the Neugarten Frisian congregation led at the time by *Aeltester* Isaac Stobbe. This congregation occupied the first building constructed by the Frisian congregation in the Neugarten suburb of Danzig just outside the city wall in 1638.

The Land Scout Challenge

In 1786 the routine family and farm life of Johann Bartsch was radically altered by the arrival in the area, of Georg (von) Trappe. As an agent of Tsarina Catharine II and her Viceroy in New (south) Russia, Grigorii Alexandrovich Potemkin. Trappe had come as a "caller of colonists" to promote emigration among Mennonites and others, inviting them to occupy unsettled lands of the recently-acquired New Russian territories . On 27 July/7 August 1786 he presented specific proposals to both Mennonite congregations in Danzig. There was almost immediate interest in Trappe's offer so that within a week or more an emigration movement began to emerge. Danzig city officials opposed this development, hence the church leaders were forbidden to have further contacts with Trappe.

Trappe was not deterred by his opponents, however, and continued his promotion of Russian colonization opportunities among various German communities in Danzig. He believed that with the tacit support of the Flemish Mennonite *Aeltester* Peter Epp and possibly other church leaders, that almost immediate interest in such possibilities would quickly expand if the path could be cleared to leave. It was then suggested by several Mennonites to *Aeltester* Epp that it would be very helpful if the Mennonites could send reliable representatives to see for themselves the land being made available, and to be involved in tailoring the settlement offer to suit their specific wishes and needs. This idea was conveyed to the Russian Consul General Sokolovski who agreed with this idea. The name Jakob Hoeppner was brought forward as someone suited for becoming part of a New Russian land scouting delegation.

A group of sixty Mennonite family heads signed a power-of-attorney document (*Vollmacht*) authorizing several selected persons to make the settlement investigation in New Russia. The three men chosen were Jakob Hoeppner, a member of the Flemish church, and living In Bohnsack somewhat to the east of Danzig near the Baltic Sea, Jakob van Kampen, and Johann Bartsch, a young farmer from the village of Nobel. Van Kampen withdrew before the delegation got underway. That left Hoeppner and Bartsch to undertake the trip, with Trappe as guide and interpreter for the expedition. The delegates

Vice-Regent of New Russia, Grigorii A. Potemkin (1739-1791).

claimed to be representing 270 to 300 families who were interested in moving to New Russia.

By an agreement Trappe made with the delegates, a document signed on 22 September/3 October 1786, all the expenses of the land scouting trip would be paid by the Russian government, and funds and other support would be provided regularly as needed. This document also stated that the day of departure for the delegates was scheduled for 19/30 October that year.

A number of German Lutheran families

were also assembling to travel at this time. The number of passengers, including Hoeppner and Bartsch, totaled 141. Many people were present to see them off, not certain if and when they would see the Mennonite delegates, or the other passengers, again. The ship's skipper, Kedtels, assured the group that God had given him the promise that the ship would arrive safely in Riga shortly.

The First Letter to Susanna

Susanna was left at home to look after their small farm, and, of course, their family – Susanna, Maria and Sara. The first letter, written from Riga, is dated 31 October/11 November 1786 . While addressed specifically to Susanna, Johann was undoubtedly directing his message to a larger body of people back in his home community and it certainly will have had a wide readership when it arrived at its destination.

Riga , 11 November 1786

My dearly beloved wife and children, cousins, brothers and sisters,

First of all, I extend my wish for all of you to enjoy everything that is needful and of benefit to body and soul, and want to inform you that, God be thanked, we all arrived in Riga safe and sound. I am writing this specially to you, my dear wife, to say that it would be my happiness, and my sincerest wish that this letter with its few lines may find you in good health and enjoying life's blessings. (gluecksseligen Leben).

Praise and thanks to God, both of us are in good health, and in eight days of good (bei guten) *and miserable weather, strong winds and much danger, have reached Riga. No one on board was lost, and all arrived safely.*

This is our situation. We are in Riga, our money advanced beforehand for our support, is being passed on to us without delay, so with God's help, we will be able to continue our journey with its intended purpose, as soon as possible. I cannot say when we will be returning, but you can assume that it will certainly be in late spring. I also do not know if we will have more opportunity to write.

In closing I would like to sincerely ask that you do not be anxious or worried about me, as to how things will go in the future. But let me assure you that God who is present everywhere, as protector of His own, wishes to, and can, keep us from harm and danger.

Practice godliness and above all beware of sin, which has been the root of all evil since the beginning, and still is that and I shall myself take heed of my warning and keep it in my heart. And do not forget to pray for us, and I will be mindful of the same for you and us, attempting to persevere before God in all humility, so that the love of God shall keep us all, so that we may experience good things as He has promised they will.

Furthermore, be true to your profession (Beruf), doing the best you possibly can, paying no attention to useless gossip about us coming from the mouths of all kinds of ignorant people. Govern our children well and lead them to honour God. Do not forget what I reminded you of regarding my only little son, shortly before our departure. And look after the affairs of our farm and everything else so that you can be assured that in every aspect I will be able to meet you again in love when we are together again

*I conclude with commending you, my dear wife and the children to the protection of our gracious God. I remain your ever affectionate (*Zuneigung*), loving and faithful husband*

Johann Bartsch

After a few days of rest in Riga, with time to take care of small business matters, including further traveling arrangements, the delegates continued by sleigh southward to their next stop at Dubrovno, a small town in White Russia (Belorussia, then the government of Mohilev), which belonged to a large estate owned by Potemkin in this region. Here they were placed under the friendly hosting care of Lieutenant-Colonel Baron von Stahl, Adjutant General of Taurida. This place would become a significant stopover for the emigrant families in 1788 on their way to their new homes in New Russia.

From Dubrovna Bartsch wrote a second letter to Susanna back home dated 20 November/1 December 1786. It was also in the possession of David H Epp when he wrote *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten* so he could quote from it in his book. The full text reads as follows:

My sincerest wish and heart's desire is that this brief letter from me will find you healthy and happy. My dear wife, I am sure there is nothing that will please you more than to receive what I have to say about our situation. We had not thought that we would write again. However after meeting our host, M. (Herrn) Baron von Stahl in Dubrovna and being received in such a friendly manner, he also offered to send our letter along with his to Danzig.

I will mention only the one thing. We left Riga and arrived in Dubrovna in 12 days. We traveled without any health problems or obstacles, and thanks be to God have not experienced sickness or any other need. We arrived in Dubrovna on 29 November and will be traveling on to Kremenchug with a courier on 1 December. There we expect to speak with His Serene Highness Imperial Prince (Ihro Durchlaucht den Reichsfuersten) Potemkin himself, to present our plans and complete what we came out to do.

We have received our agreed-upon monthly financial support promptly. However in Russia money is frequently….. and food is expensive so we have to be careful to make ends meet, with no overspending anywhere. As far as we have come we have come to believe that a fellow-German making goods in the German way would be able to ask whatever prices he wished because the quality of Russian cheese, butter and farming practices (Ackerbau) is a joke (ein laecherlich Ding), and very high-priced, not to mention the price of foreign German goods.

For my part, I would hope most sincerely that you would remain completely at peace regarding my well-being, and carry out your work with diligence under the fear of God. Take

Georg (von) Trappe (? –1798), the recruiter of Colonists. Mennonite Heritage Centre, 436-1.

*good care of our children and look after them with love and common sense. Do not favour the older children over the younger ones and remember that we have them together. Keep in mind that the good you do to the smallest (one) (*was du auch den allerkleinsten Gutes thust) *I regard as something done to me personally- so much about our present circumstances.*

In closing I would wish that our gracious and compassionate God, the creator and sustainer of all creation, would govern (regiere) *you and sustain you, dear wife, and loved ones, with his great goodness, and that he would lead you through his good spirit, so that you may with your whole heart cling to, honour and serve God, and flee from all sin!*

Ah, yes, dear Father, grant us in these last and perverse evil days, which prevail in every land, the spirit of your dear Son, so that through him we may serve you rightly till our dying days, and to discern the comforting voice of your dear Son speaking these words: Come you blessed of the Father, inherit the Kingdom that has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world. Amen

J. Bartsch

Dubrovna 21 November/1 December 1786

After a short rest stop in Dubrovna the delegates, aided by a courier, traveled via Kremenchug to Potemkin's temporary working headquarters at Kherson where they were located most of the winter. Here they were given a guide, one Major Meier, a man intimately familiar with the area, and in the winter of 1786-1787 the delegates set out on an extended exploration of possible sites for Mennonite settlement on the left bank of the Dnieper River north of Kherson, the region of the Molotschnaya Waters on the east side of the Dnieper, areas adjacent to the Ingul and Inguletz River as far north as St. Elizabeth, and also the Crimean peninsula, a former Turkish possession which had become Russian territory only in 1783.

After weighing various settlement site op-

tions, Hoeppner and Bartsch chose an attractive tract of land, as they saw it, at the confluence of the Konskaia and Dnieper rivers across the river opposite the city of Berislav, not far north of Kherson. It reminded them a good deal of the terrain of Danzig and its surrounding areas which they were familiar with back home. Their decision and a list of conditions which they judged would need to be met if Mennonites were to come in large numbers, were incorporated in a "twenty-point petition" which they submitted to Potemkin's chancellery at Kremenchug on 22 April/3 May 1787. The petitions included a request that Potemkin might intercede with the Tsarina on their behalf.

The petition lay unattended by Potemkin for some time due to preparations he needed to make for the imperial visit of Tsarina Catherine to inspect her southern realm sometime during those weeks. The tour brought Tsarina Catherine as far as Kremenchug 30 April/11 May, and on 2/13 May Potemkin presented the two delegates to Tsarina Catherine in the presence of the entire diplomatic corps which accompanied her on the trip. Catherine received the delegates most graciously, told them that prospective Mennonites settling in New Russia would certainly have her protection and benevolence, and invited the delegates to go with her and the entourage as they completed the trip further southward to the Crimean peninsula.

The delegates would have much preferred to get their business over with and be on their way home, but realized (perhaps were advised) that this was an invitation which could not be refused. So they accompanied the royal entourage, did some more exploring during their time in Crimea, and all the time hoped that Potemkin would give a response to their petition soon. He took his time, and on 4/17June they inquired again. Potemkin was present in Kremenchug from 16-18 June /27-29 June1787 and could attend to the Petition. On 4/15 July the Twenty Point Petition was returned to the delegates with Potemkin's responses to each of the requests.

The delegates now felt they must go to St. Petersburg to have the agreement of the Twenty Point Petition ratified at the court. Though Potemkin resisted the idea at first, he did agree in the end that this would be a useful procedure and made arrangements for them to be accommodated properly in traveling and during their stay in St. Petersburg. So as Hildebrand put it," Accompanied by many well wishes from various high officials, they set off by courier". Available sources do not mention the length of the trip but two weeks and perhaps a day or two more would probably have been sufficient to get there.

The stay in St. Petersburg stretched somewhat beyond expectations in order, first of all, to let Hoeppner's leg heal (he had injured it just before arriving in St. Petersburg), and secondly, to obtain the appointments with officials which the delegates sought during these days. A meeting with Grand Duke Paul and his wife, Maria Feodorovna at Gatchina could be arranged by Trappe and an acquaintance of his. The delegates were warmly received, a pleasant portent, as they saw it, for the emigration that was being planned. At the conclusion of that meeting they handed a Mennonite Confession of Faith to the couple, and wished them well also.

The most important event of all, to be sure, was the drawing up of Catherine's personal statement affirming the Potemkin/Bartsch/Hoeppner agreement (*Immenoi Ukaz)* by Count Alexander A. Bezborodko, acting for the tsarina. In summary form it drew up the items of the Twenty Point Petition with Potemkin's responses given on 15 July some months before. The tsarina signed the document, with the count's counter signature added. This document was dated 12/23 August though it was not officially published till 7/18 September 1787.

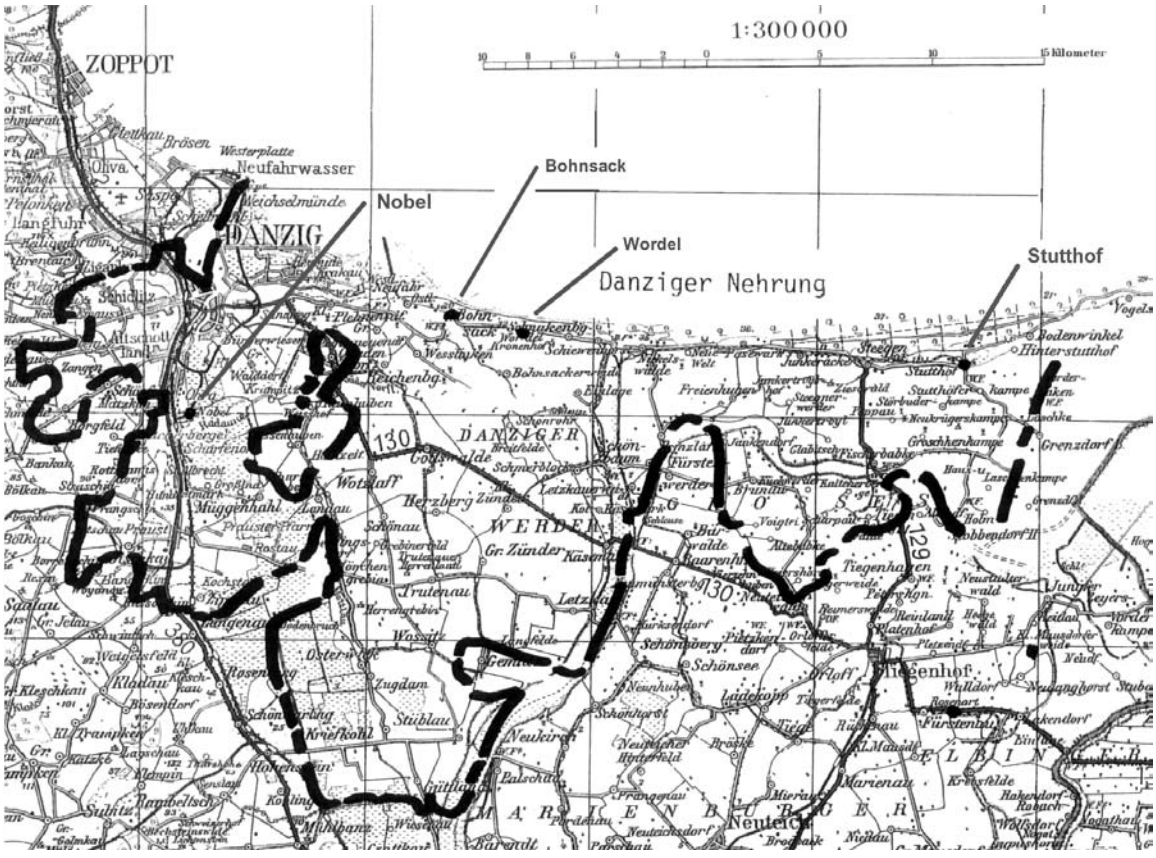
Here in St. Petersburg, on 17/28 August, as these exciting events unfolded, Bartsch wrote another letter to Susanna, the longest one of those extant and being considered here. The text reads as follows:

My beloved and faithful wife:

I hope you will readily agree that things in the world do not always happen the way people would want them to. I believe I am right to assume that you are finding my long absence dragged out and disheartening, and that you may be depressed about it by now. Certainly we did not imagine at the time of my departure that my return would be delayed this long, resulting no doubt from the fact that none of us had ever had anything to do with powerful monarchs and empresses. And yet those who are familiar with such things wonder how we could complete our business as quickly as we did.

So how did this happen? It is because those who know about the immensity of the Russian empire and the incredible amount of work that must take priority over our concerns can see how this might happen. One cannot always proceed with one's business and plans as one might wish to, but one has to adapt to one's circumstances, and with much patience and effort wait for the favour and graciousness of the great empress and those who serve her.

Time has dragged on very much for me also, and concern for you and our children has burdened my heart greatly as well. Yet I have been fortunate to have remained mostly in good health for which I thank God, and which I value greatly. This is all the more noteworthy since the



Territory of the City of Danzig in 1785. Adapted from Historisch-Geographischer Atlas des Preussenlandes, 1970.

different areas have such varied weather. Sometimes we were in warmer parts, then in more moderate ones, and again in colder regions, and God gave us health throughout.

I am in fact now healthier than I was last fall when we left. In winter I did have a small setback when I froze all my toes, and I am not quite certain how that could happen. I was however quite sick and did not know what was really happening to me. That is, however, all in the past, and I cannot really imagine that it was the departure which made things difficult. I was told that I would have a big problem being so far from my family. I did make it through, however. God is always present, and remains so for us at all times. He has protected me against all evil, and kept me till this hour, so that I am closer to him than to many people.

During our travels in spring we were well cared for under the never to be sufficiently praised protection of Mr. Court Counsellor von Trappe. Now we are in a world-renowned city where we have no needs of any kind. If we have enough money we can buy anything we wish, and thus lack nothing, although things are expensive. Thanks be to God, we are still able to pay for what we need, and have sufficient funds for that. It is amazing how expensive butter and cheese are here in Russia. A pound of butter costs two five (zwei fuenf), and is of poor quality. A pound of cheese costs eight six (Secht). If we want to have some we simply have to pay the price, but this cannot harm us much because a time may come when it will be said: The measure you have measured us with, we will use on you also.

We have indeed been gone a long time, but in so doing have learned to know this country better, and can understand more clearly what would be advantageous to us. Things are not so attractive in the part of the country where we are now. We hope it will be better next year. Hardly a day goes by when it does not rain, which means the grains must rot on the fields. Where it would rain this much in Danzig, especially in fall, the late crops and the second hay harvest would suffer much damage from the rain.

*It is almost unnecessary to write more, but I do need to tell you, dear wife, that this is probably the last letter I will ever in my life write to you from Russia . Whatever else may happen yet, I do not know. But I do want to tell you as my courageous, faithful wife, which I trust you remain, that we expect to come home soon. It seems to me that in fact we are close to home already. We have only a short distance to go by land now. The first one hundred and fifty(?) (*dritte halb hundert) *miles(Meilen) will take us to Danzig .*

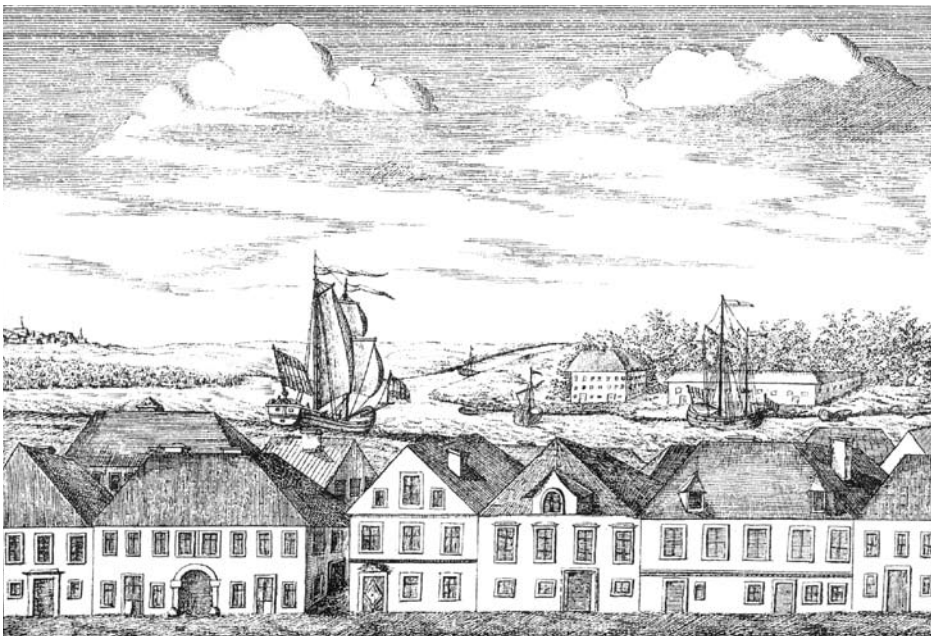
We have basically finished everything we need to do and that we have come this far we humbly owe with deep thanks to the excellent and well-planned provisioning of our Court Counselor. It might otherwise easily have taken half a year longer.

*As things stand now, our affairs are being wound up, but I cannot say just when we will get there (*to Danzig). *I hope very much that these lines will find you in good health, and that God may regard you and all our people useful according to His wisdom, and may keep you healthy, and that we may in peace meet each other again.*

Do not let the remaining short time of our absence get too long for you. The time may go faster if you pray for our safety and safe return. Since one cannot always be praying, and really may not do so, it will be good to be busy with useful husbandry, which will certainly not displease me. I have no better advice to give to you. Fare well, my dear wife, and the same to our children. May God continue to sustain and shelter you.

I remain unchangeably your faithful husband

Johann Bartsch
S. Petersburg
28 August, 1787



The first generation of buildings in Kherson, founded by Vice Regent Potemkin in 1778, as they will have appeared to Hoeppner and Bartsch during their visit to the Crimea with Catherine the Great in 1787. Drawing by Johann Weber (1766-1835) in Hans Halm, Die Russen…, (Innsbruck: Hans Halm, 1960), p120a.

Bartsch, Hoeppner and Bartsch now made plans to return to Danzig as soon as possible. Trappe suggested they go via Riga and then Warsaw, and then on to Danzig, and they were able to engage a stagecoach to make the trip. In Warsaw they planned to inform the Polish government about the planned emigration to New Russia, with the hope that this government, being a client state of Russia, and not wishing to offend the latter, would suppress the Danzig city administration's obstructive tactics and strategies.

The trio was quite surprised in Riga to meet up with a small group of Danzig Mennonite families who were already on the way to New Russia – in effect, the very first group to emigrate to New Russia. They had received Danzig documents permitting departure, had also travelled to Riga by ship, and had arrived just a few days prior to this encounter. Exactly where they were headed is not quite clear – a report of the Berislav agreement presumably had not yet reached Danzig. They were in any case stranded in Riga. They had already exhausted their travel funds, and had begun to sell their personal possessions in order to purchase food and other provisions. Trappe could quickly connect them with the appropriate authorities for the needed support.

Here in Riga, then, Bartsch decided to write one more letter to Susanna which may have reached her only shortly before the delegates got back in early November. It is dated 7 October Old Style, 1787(i.e.18 October New Style) – the first one in which Bartsch's dating recognizes the two-calendar difference explicitly. The text follows below:

My warmly loved and dearest wife:

I am very pleased and happy that you have received my letter from St. Petersb. in good order. I had written that I did not intend to write again, but a good opportunity (to send one?) *moved me to write this short note. I am pleased to tell you that God be thanked I was well throughout the seven weeks we spent in S. Petersburg, and that after six days travel we arrived safely in Riga. However, I am not able to say when we will leave this city. Some important matters of business concerning many people need to be looked after, and that takes time, so one cannot know how long it will be till we arrive at home.*

But if it should still be a while and disturbing rumour rmongers should spread talk about some misfortunes on the way having delayed us, I ask you, dear wife, not to listen to such scandalous chatter. Only a few can speak intelligently about these things. We have had the honour to travel with Counselor von Trappe. So far nothing harmful has happened to us, and we trust that God's protection will be with us and that

we will see you again soon.

I hope with all my heart that I will find you and the children all in good health and good spirits. If I find it so then with various other circumstances I will be moved to praise and honour you. That will be a great joy to me, and my sincere love for you remains as always. God's best to you always!

Your faithful husband
Johann Bartsch

The three-man delegation arrived in Danzig on a Saturday, 30 October/10 November, a market day just before Martini (St. Martin's Day),i. e. 31 October /11 November 1787, which was a Sunday. The trip had taken them one year and eleven days. The three men now headed straight for the Russian consulate on Langgarten Street and were warmly welcomed there. People generally were astonished to see the delegation again, many having doubted that they would in fact return. Interest in emigration was significantly heightened at once, and people came from near and far to discuss the future of the move. Trappe set about immediately to report to the consulate and then also to the Mennonites themselves.

The Russian consulate quickly gave the green light to proceed with the emigration. Trappe now prepared a report to the churches with a further invitation to become part of the move, noting especially the land grant feature of the terms of settlement. He also invited all interested parties to gather at the Russian consulate on 8/19 January 1788 at nine o'clock in the morning, to receive the original documents of the Charter of Privileges and the supreme imperial cabinet resolutions, as well as other information pertinent to the emigration. Trappe then distributed this report in the two Mennonite congregations of Danzig and other locations on 21 December/1 January 1788.

Johann found his family had managed quite well in his absence, their great longing to have him back notwithstanding. Susanna had milked their cows daily and had it picked up for delivery to the city several miles away. They may have had help from neighbours and others to get by. By all accounts her needs had been well met. No doubt they now spent hours discussing Johann's experiences, and hearing him share many stories about the trip which the letters had not included. Most certainly they thanked God again that he had been given a safe trip, a journey of much longer than expected duration, and not without various difficulties along the way.

The Danzig Mennonite Church worship house (19th century). Photo credit: H.G. Mannhardt, Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde: Ihre Entstehung und ihre Geschichte, 1919). Frontispiece.

A scene from Alt Schottland, a Danzig suburb inhabited by Mennonites, around 1688. Photo credit: Kurt Kauenhowen, ed., Mitteilungen des Sippenverbandes der Danziger Mennoniten-Familien Epp-Kauenhowen-Zimmermann III (Dezember 1937) Heft 6, 202.

They now needed to look at the question of emigration themselves. What all their own family reasons were for going is not specifically known. The remuneration and rights promised by Trappe to him and Hoeppner assumed the move. Nothing Johann had seen or heard had seemingly dissuaded him from joining other Danzig and Prussian Mennonite families who would be planning, as they saw it now, to move to the Berislav area of New Russia, under the rule of Vice Regent Grigorii Alexandrovich Potemkin and Tsarina Catherine II, and establish a new home there.

Significance of the letters

The four letters Bartsch wrote to Susanna in 1786-87 did not provide her with very much information about what the delegates experienced on the trip, or about the discussions they had with officials and others as they went along. There would obviously have been a great deal to say – a book could have been written about that year plus some days, as journalists and other writers would look at it today. There is some oral evidence that Hoeppner may have kept a travel diary, although a manuscript of this kind had not surfaced for research so far. We may assume that Trappe will have reported to the authorities at Kremenchug or St. Petersburg, or both. Perhaps Hoeppner wrote to people back home and filled that information gap, but again, we have no letters from this trip showing that he did.

There could have been other letters by Bartsch which too did not survive. He did write a good deal when the emigration got underway and later, it would appear. These four seem to have been designed to be more or less personal letters which could reassure Susanna that all was going well on the trip, and that he himself was in good hands, namely in Trappe's and Hoeppner's – and that wherever they stopped provisions were at hand. That would have meant a great deal to Susanna. Perhaps this was what she was most interested in, as seemingly Bartsch surmised.

That the correspondence could be undertaken does speak of a postal system that functioned well enough to get the four letters through. We are not aware that Hoeppner wrote to his family, and the community, as Bartsch did. There may in fact have been personal couriers who could take mail with them alongside the regular mailing system. The 7 October 1787 letter seems to suggest that.

We do become better acquainted with the personal piety and spirituality of Bartsch, perhaps more than through anything else that he wrote. A great deal of Christian concern is reflected in the writing, and his love for Susanna and his family is amply documented there. It is still a good question to ask: How was it that Bartsch, with three small children, and still a young man, had the courage and readiness to undertake this venture? Material rewards alone? Hardly.

Bartsch's counsel to his wife may seem somewhat patronizing to readers today, and some may wonder if she was given to frivolity, or at least that there was some reason for him to worry that she might not be up to be head of the home during his absence. Or again, his patronizing tone may be due to the style of male headship as understood and practiced in those days. It has even been suggested that the "very young son" mentioned in at least one of the letters may not have been a child of Susanna and Johann, but only his. One can ponder these questions but in the available documents there is silence on them so far.

The letters also offer some orientation to the time line of the venture, and give the first indications of what would become the transit route to the settlement site in the next two years. The delegates blazed the trail, as it were, for many families who would come later – 228 in the first wave of the emigration. Bartsch himself would lead one of the emigrating family groups in late fall of 1788.

To study the emigration, we need now to look at other writings of Bartsch, which are also translated for non-German readers. Perhaps future articles on this topic will widen our perspective on the Prussian emigration to New Russia which this total corpus of extant writings offers to readers today


St Petersburg
Krasnoi Selo
Gatchina
Kingisepp (Jamburg)
Luga
Volchov R.
Gdov
Pskov (Pleskau)
Porkhov
Riga
Baltic Sea
Libau (Liepaja)
Jelgava (Mitau)
Jekabpils (Jakobstadt)
Velikiluki
Siauliai (Schaulen)
Daugavpils (Dvinsk, Dunaburg)
Klaipeda (Memel)
Drissa
Velizh
Western Dvina (Duina)
Polotsk
Kedainiai
Vitebsk (Vitsyebsk)
Pillau (Baltiysk)
Cranz (Zelenogradsk)
Kaunas (Kovno)
Smolensk
Nemunas River
Königsberg (Kaliningrad)
Danzig (Gdansk)
Orsha
Dubrovno
Russia
Nobel (Niegovo)
Bohnsack (Sobieszewo)
Alytus
Merkine
Dirschau (Tczew)
Mstislavl
Mogilev (Mahilyow)
Marienwerder (Kwidzyn)
Krichev
Graudenz (Grudziadz)
Kulm (Chelmno)
Gardinas (Grodno, Hrodna)
Cherikov
Thorn (Torun)
Bialystok
Dnieper River
Desna River
Vistula River
Bug River
Gomel (Homyel)
Warsaw
Prypjac River
Chernigov (Chernihiv)
Nizhyn (Niezhen)
Pryluka (Pryluky)
Kiev
Pyriatyn
Lubny
Dnieper R.
Central Europe
Kremenchuk (Kremenchug)
St Elisabeth (Kirovohrad, Kirovograd)
Dnepropetrovsk (Yekaterinoslav
Southern Bug R.
Nedaivoda
Krivoi Rog
Khortitsa (Chortitza)
Olhopil (Olgopol)
Hromoklija R.
Davydov Brod
Ingul (Inhulets) R.
Ingul (Inhul) R.
Beryslav (Berislav)
Ochakov
Kherson
Kinburn Fortress
Perekop
Aibar
Theodosia (Feodosia)
Karasubazar
Staryi Krym
Simferopol
Bakhchisarai
Sudak
Sevastopol
Inkerman
Black Sea
Bartsch - Hoeppner Routes 1786/87
– – Departure from Danzig
–---- Return Via Kremenchug - Danzig
..... In Catherine II's Entourage
Route Researched by Edwin D. Hoeppner
Map Design by Christopher Werner
0 50 100 200 300 400
Kilometers
N
W
E
S

Comments on the map of the route taken by Hoeppner and Bartsch 1786-1787

Edwin D. Hoeppner, Winnipeg

Danzig to Riga

By sailing ship with Skipper Kedtels.

Riga to Dubrovno

The land route up the western Dvina (Düna) River, now known by the Latvian name, Daugava, was on its right bank. In the 18th century it is likely that the route crossed from Vitebsk to Orsha on the Dnieper River.

Dubrovno to Kremenchug

According to the 1 December 1786 letter of Bartsch to his wife the delegates were accompanied by a courier for this segment of the trip (David H. Epp. *Die Chortitza Mennoniten*, 13, and *Mennonite Historian* in References). The Danzig-West Prussian Mennonite emigrants of 1788/89 followed this route and they most likely were using the route used by the delegates in 1786.

Kremenchug to Kherson

David G. Rempel and others have stated that the delegates followed the Dnieper River southward to Kherson, but this is rather unlikely. Oleksandr O. Melnyk, Principal Research Officer of the Krivyi Rih Museum of Regional Studies and History, has recently pointed out that in 1775, immediately after the end of the Russian-Turkish war in 1774, the Russian authorities opened a new postal road connecting Kremenchih (sic) with Kinburn. On 25 April/8 May that same year a postal station was established on this road " in the tract Krivyi Rih" (see References). This is confirmed by Hans Halm in his list of all the place names on the route taken by Catherine II and Potemkin on their return from the Crimea via Berislav - Kremenchug. Halm comments, "Das ist also die grosse Poststrasse".

The road south from Kremenchug followed the height of land (i.e. the Wasserscheide) between the Ingulets and Saksagan Rivers to Krivoi Rog, then down west side of the Ingulets valley to Davidov Brod and then to Berislav and to Kherson. The delegates will also have travelled this route on their way northward to hand in their petition to Potemkin at Kremenchug, and to be presented to Catherine.II. (the possibility of which had been hinted at by the Russian Consul General at Danzig in 1786. See *Zwei Dokumente*, 15.)

Kremenchug to Kherson to Crimea to Kremenchug (in Catherine II's entourage)

Simon Sebag Montefiorie tells us that Catherine and her entourage departed from Kiev by river barges, specially constructed for this purpose at Krichev, and arrived at Kremenchug 30 April/11 May 1787 (see References). Here Bartsch and Hoeppner were presented to Catherine on 13 May N.S. At this time also they received an offer they felt unable to refuse – an imperial invitation to journey in her entourage to the Crimea. The entire route of Catherine II's famous Dnieper-Crimea jurney is shown on a map by Count de Segur, Ambassador of France, who was among those invited for the trip (see References). This map, as well as Montefiore's excellent book, have been used to reconstruct the route of the delegates .

The journey by barge ended when some of the barges ran aground some distance short of Kaydak which itself was a short distance upstream from Ekaterinoslav. Montefiore states at one place that the grounding was 25 miles from Kaydak and later states that it was 30 versts (approximately 30 km.). Kaydak appears to have been absorbed by urban sprawl but it can be found on a topographical chart as Novo Kaidaki; it should not be confused with Stari Kaidaki downstream from Ekaterinoslav. From near the grounding the main party travelled overland along the west or right bank of the Dnieper via the site of Khortitsa and Berislav to Kherson. It is not known whether all of the entourage travelled by land also, or whether they were constrained to endure their passage through the Dnieper rapids, and down the river to Kherson.

Kremenchug to St Petersburg

The delegates continued their return from Kremenchug apparently alone, but possibly accompanied by Trappe northward, most likely along the route of Segur's map via Chernigov and Krichev, the center of another of Potemkin's large estates. The road from Smolensk to St. Petersburg was new; it was completed in 1787.

St. Petersburg to Riga to Warsaw

According to Erik Amburger, the most important route into Russia went via Riga and Pskov (see References). Roads run both ways so Trappe and the delegates will most likely have diverged from the new route south at Luga to head toward Pskov. However it is possible that Trappe and the delegates may have departed from St. Petersburg by the older route which went via Krasnoi Selo-Kingisepp (Jamburg)-Gdov to Pskov so these places are included on the map (see References – Amburger, 1980). Peter Hildebrand recorded (see *Zwei Dokumente,* p.22) that the party travelled from Riga to Warsaw. The detour from Riga to Warsaw has not been acknowledged by Mennonite map makers to this day. Perhaps they are waiting for appropriate research in the Polish government archives to confirm Hildebrand who is in effect our only published "eyewitness".

Warsaw to Danzig:

In a 1989 article Heinz Lingenberg discusses Prussian postal routes. It appears that a route southward from Danzig may have connected with a Polish route at Thorn. Most likely Trappe and the delegates used this route to arrive at the Russian Consulate General at Langgarten 74, Danzig , announced by post-horn fanfare, on Saturday, 10 November 1787.

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Another Look at the Creation-Evolution Debate

Glen R. Klassen, Adjunct Professor of Biology, Canadian Mennonite University

Several years ago *Preservings* took note of a new book by Dr. Archie Penner, a Mennonite scholar (*Scientific Creationism in Perspective: Biblical Creation Defended* Servant Publishers, 2001). I reviewed the book at the time although my name was omitted through an oversight. I commended Dr. Penner for his honesty in facing a problem that can get a scholar into hot water very easily. Perhaps it is time to reflect on that problem again, especially with so much new publicity coming out around creation and evolution.

At one time it seemed quite clear that the Bible was telling us that the universe had been created only a few thousand years ago in a six-day course of creative miracles. Now it is not so clear. Some of the necessary rethinking of Genesis is due to biblical scholarship and some of it is due to science. Most biblical scholars no longer expect to learn any geology or anthropology from the Bible because they don't think that was the purpose of these writings. The Bible does not satisfy our curiosity about such things; that's what science is for.

What has science found? In asking this question we must be very careful to stick with science as just a way of tying together what we observe about the world and not let science become a religion that displaces our faith. Many scientists and others have been misled into atheism by expecting far more from science than it can deliver. Science can't answer the questions that really interest us, such as: how can we live so that we and our communities can be everything that God wants us to be, creatively and morally?

However, science does come out with honest discoveries about the world that may disturb our faith. One of the things that science has found is that the universe is billions of years old and that the earth itself is about 4.5 billion years old. This figure is based on the study of rocks, mostly studies using radioactivity measurements. I think that the results are reliable, but in the creationist community there is a lot of criticism of the use of radioactivity for dating rocks. So instead of getting into the isotope dating debate, I will develop a different argument. It has to do with the thickness of the ice caps on Greenland and Antarctica.

In the middle of Greenland and in the middle of Antarctica the ice is about 3 km deep. Various teams have drilled down to the bottom of the ice with a hollow drill bit and have brought up long pencils of ice (ice cores) so that the layers of ice can be counted. If there is one layer per year, similar to the rings in a tree trunk, then we can find the age of the ice cap by counting the rings.

The results are in. Scientists think they can count about 110,000 layers in Greenland before they hit bedrock, and at least 420,000 in Antarctica before they hit a huge lake under the ice cap. One recent ice core from Dome C in Antarctica seems to have 720,000 annual layers. So if each layer is one year, the earth must be very much older than 6000 years.

If we accept this argument, then we will have a slightly different view of the stories in Genesis, especially the genealogies, which seem to give an unbroken line of historical ancestors all the way back to Adam, who was present on Day 6. No matter how the list of ancestors is reinterpreted, there is no way that it can reasonably be stretched back 400,000 years. We then ask: what was the *purpose* for including the ancestor lists in the Bible? Maybe the whole point was that the God of the Hebrews was the same God that created the world and the first people. The writer wanted to make a connection between the history of God's interaction with Israel and the creation of the universe. Yaweh is truly the creator of the world. Who are we to criticize the method used to convey this message?

Creationists, of course, don't accept the great age of the polar ice sheets. They have not produced much of a response to the ice core argument, but one of their number, Michael Ooard, has tried valiantly to give a creationist version of the ice core discoveries. His main argument against the standard interpretation is that at the deeper levels of the ice there are many layers per year (thousands) and that the methods used to count the layers are biased in favour of the old earth hypothesis. Ooard thinks that there was only one very short ice age immediately after the flood, which occurred in about 2300 BC.

The trouble is that Ooard presents no evidence for his model. He starts with the absolute belief that the earth is only about 6000 years old and then tries to think (guess, actually) how he can still have an ice age. As science, his efforts are worthless. This is a very strong criticism, but for those who want some honest science here, I think the criticism is deserved.

As for the creationist's criticism of how the ice bands were counted, all of their arguments have been carefully evaluated and refuted by the Christian geologist Paul H. Seely, with the help of glaciologists Todd Hinkley and Richard Alley (www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2003/PSCF12-03Seely.pdf). The creationist's idea that extra ice bands were inserted by individual storms or ice melts is not believable and cannot possibly account for the number of bands actually seen. Scientists can easily tell the difference between an annual band and one produced by a melting episode.

The main strength of the ice core studies is that there is great agreement between ice cores from Greenland and from Antarctica and these agree with sediment cores from the ocean bottom. The events that created the annual band patterns are truly global events, and not just seasonal storms or ice melts.

There is an almost humorous footnote to this story. Carl Wieland from *Answers in Genesis* has drawn attention to the so-called Lost Squadron – a fleet of World War II P-38 fighter planes abandoned on Greenland in 1942. They have been found under about 250 feet of ice and several kilometers from where they were last seen. This depth was surprising at first and it was used by creationists to cast doubt on the validity of the ice core work. If the Greenland ice builds up that fast, then surely the whole glacier is only a few thousand years old! Unfortunately for Wieland and *Answers in Genesis*, we now know that the planes are buried near the coast of Greenland where about seven feet of snow falls each year and where there is a lot of shifting of the ice. The planes are exactly where they would be expected to be.

It would be nice if *Answers in Genesis* would now move Wieland's Lost Squadron article to the file on their own web site reserved for "Arguments we think Creationists should NOT use", right beside the "Footprints in Stone" story and the "Dust on the Moon" story. Archie Penner got it right.

So the earth is undoubtedly much older than what a literal reading of Genesis can accommodate. I guess we will have to conclude that the Genesis genealogies are expressing the Hebrew faith that the same God who rescued them from Egypt also created the universe. It is not a statement of science; it is a statement of faith expressed in a way appropriate for their time.

Once we no longer need to insist that the Bible tells us that the earth is only a few thousand years old, we are free to think of the past as a long story of change and development. This is what the fossil record suggests. The geological map of Manitoba is very interesting in this respect. As you enter Manitoba from the east you notice the edge of the Canadian Shield made up of precambrian rock with no fossils in it, except for a few rare microbes. After Beausejour the rock is limestone, full of fossilized sea creatures that you can easily see in your Tyndall stone fireplace. You pass through three more different fossil communities until you come to Morden with its huge dinosaurs. All of Manitoba is tilted to the west so that when the glaciers scoured off the top, the layers, which were laid down horizontally, now come up for air one after the other according to age. From east to west it's oldest to youngest. Each layer has a distinctive and strange population of fossilized creatures.

There is no chance that all of this can be blamed on a world-wide flood that happened about 4000 years ago. Chaotic floods don't organize geological layers in this way, placing the strangest creatures deeper and the most familiar ones higher in the earth. Why are none of the familiar forms mixed into the deep layers by accident? Creationists have indeed tried to produce such out-of-place fossils but such "data" never survives scrutiny for long. The data only survives on the web pages of the creationists themselves. And sometimes one

creationist organization will discredit the "data" of others. The scientific community would not deliberately suppress real out-of-place fossil data. Evolutionary scientists may be biased in their interpretation of such data, but they would not be able or willing to hide it. Only conspiracy theorists who don't know any real scientists would spread such malice.

Yet there are good scholars out there who still say they believe in the young earth. The best of them (Kurt Wise, Paul Nelson, John Mark Reynolds) admit that the evidence supports an old earth better than a young earth right now but that they are precommitted to the young earth because of their view of he Bible. So they will endure the ridicule of the scientific community for the time being. Unfortunately, these good people are so preoccupied with the creation-evolution controversy that they don't get around to doing much laboratory science. They are like C.S. Lewis' character Reepicheep, a militant mouse whose loyalty and valour are unquestioned but who suffers a bit in credibility.

The evidence for an old earth is so strong, however, that most people will try to incorporate it into their belief systems. Conservative Christians found ways to do this a hundred years ago. B.B. Warfield, James Orr, and Charles Hodge were staunch conservatives in reaction to liberalism, and all of them believed in the old earth. Even William Jennings Bryan, the defender of the Bible at the Scopes Trial in 1925 was an old-earther.

As a result, a great number of Christians are comfortable with the idea of the old earth and do not let it decrease their respect for the Bible. There are different ways to interpret Genesis other than the strictly literal one.

There are some real problems with literal interpretation. The most obvious one is that Genesis has two origin stories which don't agree on important details. In the first story humans do not appear until day six while the second story starts with the creation of Adam. The first story has male and female humans created at the same time, the second completely separates these creations into two different times and two different methods. Adam was formed from dust early in the story; Eve was made from a rib late in the story. There are people who invent circuitous arguments to resolve these discrepancies but for me they don't work. Jews and Christians over the millennia have always been aware of these differences in the two stories and have intuitively realized that you can take the Bible seriously without pushing it to a literalistic extreme. Christians face the same dilemma when comparing the four gospels. Many of the details don't match perfectly from one gospel to the other, but this is no reason to doubt the stories. In fact it makes the stories more believable because it is less likely that someone has tampered with the stories to make them agree on small details.

If the earth is very old, and if there have been living things present almost from the start, as the fossil record tells us, and if those living things have been very different from those we see around us today, then we must have a theory to account for these realities. The theory has to account for change. Change in complexity, size, distribution, body plans, and what not. Scientists have such a theory and it is called evolution.

Evolution, in one sense, is simply the history of life on earth. From a Christian point of view, it is the story of God's ongoing creation. That's what God has been doing over the eons of time that this universe has existed. Species have had their time of flourishing (usually a million years or so) and then they have become extinct so that they could be replaced by a new species. Their molecules and their place in nature were needed for the next species. This is the ongoing story: newness, flourishing, extinction-- episode after episode, while every conceivable niche in nature became filled with living things. Such was God's will. It's very much like our own lives – we are born pristine, we enjoy the life span that we are given, and then we decline and die, sometimes very painfully. We accept this formula and gladly bring children into the world to experience such a life, with all its ecstasy and horror. We trust that everything has meaning in the end and that it is in the care of a loving God. This is what faith is about.

You notice that I have been writing only about evolution in the sense of the history of life on earth, and that I have not mentioned Darwinism yet. Darwinism is much more controversial than just general evolution. It is an attempted explanation for the changes that evolution tells us about. In common language it is the survival of the fittest. Everyone, even the strict creationists, agree that Darwinism (natural selection) accounts for changes in microevolution: the development of antibiotic resistance in bacteria and the development of wolves, coyotes, dingos, and wild dogs, to name only two examples. But not everyone believes that this mechanism can cause the big changes that we call macroevolution. They would say that dinosaurs can't change into birds – special creation is required for such major changes.

At this point I would have to confess that I don't really know whether natural selection is powerful enough to produce all the diversity and complexity we see in the living world. To prove it solidly, we would have to know the detailed history of the past. As it is, we have only the fragments of the past – spotty fossil records, jerky family trees, and hints from embryology and biogeography. How could we possibly prove that natural selection can explain absolutely everything? We would have to keep looking forever. And how could we prove that a certain apparent gap had been closed by means of a miracle? There is always the possibility of a future scientific discovery that would explain it better. If we want proof we are in trouble.

We will just have to live with our uncertainty about what causes the changes in living things over the eons of time. Whatever the explanation, our faith tells us that it is all God's doing, whether we can explain it with science or not. Here is a simple analogy: when a cook bakes bread, is it the cook or the oven that causes the bread to bake? Both at the same time. Some philosophers would say that the cook is the primary cause of the bread, and the oven is the secondary cause. God's action is the primary cause of all that exists, and this existence is brought about by the processes of nature, which are the secondary causes, working within God's will.

When I was growing up I always looked forward to hearing Frank C. Peters preach. I remember once he was talking about our attitude to science and faith and how we should be cautious about what we say on either side. He told us about a dear relative of his who visited the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Upon seeing the extensive fossil displays in the basement, he turned away with the comment, "Na, dit gleew eck aula nijch!" (Well, I don't believe any of *this*!)

I am grateful for people like Frank Peters and Archie Penner who have led us toward open mindedness while modeling respect for the authority of the Bible.

Hutterite Christmas Traditions

Dora Maendel, Fairholme Hutterite colony, Portage la Prairie

"Ihr feiert drei Tage Weihnachten?" (You celebrate Christmas for **three** days?) Our German visitor was incredulous. *"Ausgerechnet ihr -- mit eurer starkgeprägten Arbeitsethik!"* (You (Hutterites) of all people -- with your strong German work ethic!) A history student from the University of Berlin, Bodo Hildebrand made extended visits to Manitoba during the late 80's for the field research of his doctoral dissertation on the Hutterite education system. In 1988 he experienced his first Canadian winter and spent Christmas with us.

His previous visits occurring in spring and summer, Hildebrand was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of farm work. A career university student, he found it back breaking to help weed watermelon and load turkeys.

He was duly astonished, therefore, to learn that Hutterites treat both Boxing Day and the day after as Sundays, including a morning church service, an afternoon of relaxation and leisure and a brief evening vespers service just before supper. The second and third days especially, will be enriched by visiting with family and community members from distant colonies.

A group of young people making sausages at Fairholme colony.

The three morning church services traditionally include specific lessons: the New Testament story of Jesus' birth from Luke's Gospel on Christmas Day, followed by teachings about the faith and devotion of the shepherds, Hannah and Simeon. A teaching about the Old Testament prophecies elaborates on the Messiah's effect on people, with special emphasis on the joy and gratitude we owe for the miracle that made it possible for us to live in Christian Community as sisters and brothers. This is combined with an exhortation to be of a forgiving spirit, willing to share and serve the community in whatever capacity.

Inasmuch as these Holy Day teachings constitute a reminder to be thankful, Christmas for Hutterites might be described as an extension of the Thanksgiving Day theme, not unlike the way Hanukkah is for Jews and the Christmas Eve feast of twelve meatless dishes with wheat a central part of the festive table for Ukrainians.

Singing is an important aspect of Hutterite Christmas celebrations, and many carols of German origin are part of every family's beloved repertoire, including *"Lobt Gott, Ihr Christen allzugleich"* (O praise the Lord, ye Christians all), "Silent Night*"; "Ihr Kinderlein Kommet"* (O Come Little Children) and *"O du Fröhliche"* (O thou joyous Day). There is a strong tradition of Saturday evening family singing and group singing with a major focus on participation, but today there is also an increased emphasis on choir singing. At the school Christmas concert and after Christmas Day dinner many colonies will enjoy songs by the young people as well as the children. In some colonies the children join the adults for a candle lit Christmas dinner in the *Essenstubm* (adults' dining room), a festive departure from the norm of taking their meals in the *Essenschul* (children's dining room).

Since relationships are so pivotal to Hutterite community life, it's no surprise that much of the preparation revolves around foods to be enjoyed during the holiday as well as for months to come. In a very real sense, the primary purpose of these preparations is to enhance people's appreciation for Christmas, thus strengthening community and family relationships.

In a Hutterite community one of the major jobs before Christmas, along with the Fall cleaning of homes, community kitchen, church and laundromat, is *Schwein schlochten* (hog butchering). It marks the shift from outside work to inside or winter kinds of work and is the culmination of much of the annual farm work, from making Sauerkraut to doing chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese. Just a few decades ago this meant two full weeks of plucking geese alone, in addition to the day-long jobs of chickens, ducks and turkeys.

Although a Canadian population uninitiated to the palatable delights of goose has largely eliminated commercial goose production, Advent still marks the full-scale return to indoor winter activities such as knitting, crocheting, cross stitching, wool carding, quilting and sewing. Summer months busy with gardening and canning, often only leave time for mending and repairs.

Whether *Schwein schlochten* occurs in November or just before Christmas, one meal of the *Heätzwurst* (heart sausage) is saved as the dinner entree for the second or third Christmas Holiday. While the noon meal on both those days is rich and delicious, neither is quite as sumptuous as the actual Christmas Day dinner of roast duck or goose -- often with a glass of homemade dandelion or chokecherry wine. Sometimes a *Schnapsl* is served - for the women a smidgen of fruit flavoured brandy and for the men a finger of alcohol.

Heätzwurst is always broiled, and served with potatoes and gravy, baked parsnips and/or carrots, steamed sauerkraut and *Tschweschpen Mues*, a special dessert/side dish of stewed

dried fruit which complements the rich salty taste of the *Heätzwurst* particularly well. *Tschweschpen Mues* is often thickened with cornstarch, or flour, or simply by adding heavy cream after cooling. *Tschweschpen* translates to prunes, and *Mues* to compote.

Baking has become another integral Christmas tradition for Hutterites. In late November or early December one of the women cooking duos bakes fruit cake with the help of the head cook. Because it tends to be expensive, it is often alternated with a simpler kind such as vine torte, chocolate, white or Princess Elizabeth cake.

Another delightful Christmas pastry is cookies, a spectacular event in some colonies with a dozen or more different varieties baked by the *Dienen* (young women), in one day. On those days, breakfast in the community kitchen is accompanied by the aroma of gingerbread or macaroons, girlish chatter and laughter, and a carol or two floating in from the *Bochheisel* (bakery). In other years cookie baking is spread out over Advent with only two varieties made each week. Fresh baking provides a fine opportunity to make a gesture of thanks to a neighbour or business associate.

Hutterite young people at Fairholme colony baking cookies.

Individual gift-giving varies among Hutterites and is a significant aspect of Christmas for some families, while others try to de-emphasize it. Children always receive a gift from the colony, though shopping may be the parents' responsibility with each age group allotted the same amount of money, e.g., ten dollars for five year olds and fifteen for twelve year olds. Parents may add to that in order to afford a larger item such as a keyboard or even skates - an incredible contrast to the time in our history in late seventeenth-century Slovakia (Hungary) when Hutterite communities were so poor it was not possible to provide everyone with a pair of shoes. Upon entering a home it was imperative to leave one's shoes at the door. Everyone inside was in stocking feet and it was understood that anyone needing to leave would slip into whatever fitting pair of shoes was available at the door.

In an effort to reduce or avoid the materialistic consumerism gift giving can so easily become, some families have made a tradition of drawing names so that each member receives a gift and is obligated to give only one. Others refrain from individual gift giving altogether.

Although gift giving practices may vary from colony to colony, a traditional highlight observed by all is *Necklus taldn*, the distribution of an elaborate array of Christmas treats to every family in the community. Throughout the Advent weeks the *Hausholter* (steward, secretary treasurer) who is also responsible for grocery purchases, chooses different products from wholesalers and other outlets in Winnipeg or Brandon. He is assisted by several senior women, his wife and/or the head cook. The very word *Necklus* conjures up images of delectable snack foods: chocolate, jujubes, peanuts, fruit, crackers, sardines, smoked oysters, ham, popcorn, soda pop, chips and fruit juice among others. Often it includes the year's supply of household products such as cough drops, shampoo, bath soap, even fabric softener.

In addition to meeting everyone's needs equitably, the celebratory abundance of things sweet and delicious is symbolic of the wondrous richness of life and the myriad blessings effected in our lives by the Messiah whose birth we commemorate.

Two other characteristics of *Necklus taldn* are the fair distribution which is expressive of our belief in brotherly caring for all. It also illustrates and underscores the importance of family and hospitality because some items are put away expressly for times when company comes. "The only time my mother ever served canned ham was when we had visitors, making it the most special of foods," a friend told me recently. "Mother sent me to the community kitchen fridge for some pickles, which she served with sandwiches or a plate of ham, cheese and crackers,"

Another special memory from the same woman involves the tradition of Christmas Eve singing. "After each of us had a bath, we gathered in the living room to sing our favourite *Weihnachtslieder* (Christmas songs), until we were warm and thirsty. Then my Dad opened a large can of orange juice and served us each a glass. It was delectable and remains for me an unforgettable part of the joys of that evening."

A Christmas Eve memory from my childhood is a marvelous pot pourri of older sister Sarie giving us baths in the aluminum tub behind the coal stove. At the other end of the living room Mother was finishing some shirts for the boys. "Chris, run over to *Ona Basel* (Aunt Anna), and get me the *Knupfluchausnaner* (buttonholer)," she urged. After my bath I hurried to the sewing machine. I loved watching the buttonholer's staccato dance up and down the pencil marks on the shirt-front. Threading the needle to sew buttons, Mother started the first song of the evening. My father joined her and I hear their voices still, *"Das herzens Jesulein, Das herzens Jesulein!"* (O blessed Baby Jesu!)

These and many other memories result from our Christmas traditions, and if three days seems a little long and drawn out, I'm reminded of the importance of our sabbath, a weekly day of rest. It's widely recognized that its civilizing influence on mankind is incalculable. This brings to mind a comment by my Ukrainian history professor at university. Explaining the Greek Orthodox custom of a lengthy Christmas Season he said, "Some people have a problem with the longer festive period, but with its family-strengthening traditions of relaxed gatherings with good food and warm, stimulating company, it seems to be closer to the way Christmas was meant to be celebrated."

After his Winter 1988 visit, our friend Bodo echoed similar sentiments. "*Es ist doch wunderschön,* ***drei*** *ruhige Feiertagen geniessen zu können!*" he concluded. (It's wonderful to be able to enjoy **three** peaceful Holy Days!)

Graduation Address At The Oak River High School Graduation

Jennifer Kleinsasser, Hutterite colony, Dominion City, Manitoba.

Guten Tag! graduates, teachers, honoured guests! This marks the first time I have been asked to speak at a graduation ceremony. It is a privilege, an honour, and a humbling experience.

During the last 2 years, I have started teaching on the HBNI IITV system. My students' grade levels range from grades 7 to 12. I find it a marvellous experience to be in contact with Hutterite students from over 20 colonies. Often, their intelligence and spiritual maturity astound me, and I recall talking to Anna Maendel from Fairholme about this.

"What are all these intelligent, gifted young people going to do with their lives after they graduate?" I asked Anna, "They can't all be teachers! Don't they need more options? Shouldn't we (the older generation) be paving the road for more options for our graduates?"

Anna's answer, as usual, was quite short, but wise. "That is not our job – to pave the way for them," she said. "That is the work of the graduates themselves. They will need to pioneer ways to use their education in service to their Hutterian communities."

Good, that lets me off the hook – it's not my job, Claudia, Phoebe, and Joseph, to pave the way so you can use your education to serve your community. That's your job.

After all, the best teachers do not provide clear-cut answers. Instead, they model asking difficult questions. And the toughest questions you'll ever ask are the questions you ask yourself.

In considering life after high school, are you asking, "What can Oak River possibly have to offer me, me with a high school education and plenty of raw, natural talent, to boot?" or are you asking, "What can I do for Oak River? For my faith community?"

Many "*junga Leut"* bemoan the lack of opportunity for our high school graduates, especially women. Brandon University nursing and engineering programs for Hutterites are not yet a reality.

Teachers, both Hutterite and non-Hutterite, wonder how they can continue to motivate and inspire their students, with so few options available, careers such as accounting, medicine, dentistry, or engineering.

Present options of teacher, teacher's assistant, gardener, head cook, *Zeich Schneiderin, Essenschule Ankele, Kleineschule Ankela* are too few. Cooking, sewing, and gardening are fine, but these days, *Dienen* (young women) would prefer a few more options.

"Could we have more options, please?" they ask, "You know, just for the sake of having more options?"

What we need to keep in mind, is that for us Hutterites, our particular community's needs come first. Anyone wishing to join our way of life needs to be very clear on this. For that matter, any individual born into a Hutterite community who aspires to seriously and passionately pursue this way of life needs to be very clear on this also.

When BUHEP (Brandon University Hutterite Education Program) was formed, it was <u>not</u> to provide more options for our young people, but to meet the needs of many communities for their own Hutterite teachers. I remember our professors' amazement when they learned that we Buhepers had not even chosen the career of teaching. This lack of choice goes directly against main-stream society's individualistic way of choosing a career.

Perhaps 1/4 of my Buhep group had wanted all their lives to be teachers, but they certainly weren't the majority.

And yet, it worked! Our traditional methods of using elder consensus, or community consensus, proved to work as well, if not better, than main stream society's individualistic method of choosing a career.

So the first question for us as Hutterites is not, "What can colonies offer their high school graduates in the way of career options?"

Rather, the first question should be, "What are the needs of my community?"

Do Hutterite colonies really need their own doctors, dentists, engineers, or accountants? If the answer is yes, then perhaps some pioneering work needs to be done.

If the answer is no, not really, but I, personally, would love to be a doctor, then perhaps I am still spiritually immature, and I need to learn more about what being a *G'ma schofter,* a communitarian, is all about. Being a Hutterite is about what the community needs, as determined by the community.

In our school, we have a full-time non-Hutterite teaching assistant. Liz Griffin is 60 years old, with a husband, two grown children, and grandchildren. I have learned a great deal from Liz Basel, about the amount of "good works" non-Hutterian society, or "die Welt", accomplishes via volunteering activities. Liz Basel volunteers for a Ladies Group that's part of Manitoba Women's Institute, which is part of a world-wide organization.

The group was founded in 1910, and its mission statement is to work for change and the betterment of life for women and families in Manitoba. It is a non-profit organization, with all monies raised going either to community projects, or to charities such as Cancer Care Manitoba, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the MS Foundation, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and Farm Safety for Just Kids.

Members of the Ladies Group also volunteer to work in old folks' homes, or personal care homes. They volunteer to visit shut-ins, people who need to stay at home because of health issues, or simply because they're too old to travel or drive.

They volunteer to drive older people to appointments, or to drive the older children of busy young mothers with small babies to sporting events. They plant and care for huge, gorgeous gardens in their town. They knit scarves for needy people overseas, and blankets for the local Emergency Ambulance Service.

I asked Liz for an approximate number of hours she spends volunteering every month. She stated that she considered her volunteering time to be low, about 30 hours a month, or about 1 hour every day. (This was an average: as some months she does much more than this, other months less.) Other women in her group volunteered as much as 2 or 3 times that amount!

Now, what does this have to do with Hutterite society, with Oak River, or Glenway, or other Hutterite faith communities? Surely we don't need to do all that volunteering, because the culture, traditions, and rules of Hutterian life take care of so many things.

Nevertheless, this group of women, ages 40 – 80 plus does all this volunteer work. How much more could a young Hutterite graduate contribute?

In many ways, Hutterianism is an extremely efficient system, an institution. Some people, usually ex-Hutterites, state this very disparagingly, as if this were somehow a fatal flaw. In reality, it is a tremendous strength!

One of the standard questions doctors and nurses ask a young mother is, "Will you have help, when you arrive home from the hospital?" I remember their amazement when I told them how we Hutterite women are supported when we come home with a small baby.

All of you know that a Hutterite mother with a newborn has a close relative or friend in her home for at least 2 or 3 weeks, to take care of the house, any older siblings, as well as provide support. This *Obwoterin* is automatically exempt from any community duties in her own colony, so she can freely devote her time to help care for the new mother and baby.

And the support for a young Hutterite mother doesn't stop there. For 6 whole weeks, she needn't prepare a single dinner or supper, and is exempt from all community work. Another relative on the colony does the laundry for her. Do you know how different that is from the life of a typical new, non-Hutterite mother?

Dos is wos schrecklich's, de Hutterite system! Actually, it's pretty wonderful!

Although we might not need volunteers to help young mothers with babies, what about other areas. What about caring for some of the needs of the elderly or sick?

So, I challenge our graduates to find their own areas to volunteer their time and energy. Consider the needs of your particular Hof. I can give you some suggestions, as well as some examples.

Obviously, I am most familiar with examples from Fairholme and Glenway. Anna and Dora volunteered to go for university training to become teachers. BUHEP is a result of that.

Sandra, while she was still a *Diene (young woman)*, volunteered to work in the *Kleine Schule, at* a time when she was already working in the school. She was also the main person in charge of Fairholme's large U-pick strawberry

patch.

Every fall, all the Fairholme *Dienen* are hired by local potato growers to help sort potatoes. This translates into 3 weeks of potato sorting, with every *Diene* working an 8 hour shift, every 2nd day. If your colony is in financial difficulty, as is the case with Fairholme, the money goes toward paying off debts. Otherwise, the money could go to any charity.

This venture was initiated by Chris Vetter, after he received inquiries from interested growers. Still, this is largely a volunteer project, because if the *Dienen* had said, "No, we don't have time," Chris Vetter would have accepted this.

Selma developed a computer program for *Weinzedl*, farm bosses. She also spends a great deal of time in school, doing administrative work for Anna, as well as volunteer administrative work for the HBNI IITV system.

Clearly, we should be asking, "What can I do in Oak River, for Oak River? Or even, for the larger Hutterian community, for the world?

When the tsunami disaster hit, did we Hutterites do our part in helping the unfortunate people whose lives it devastated? Yes! Each colony contributed $1000 or more in financial aid, on the advice of Jake Vetter, our Elder. Still, it's fair to ask: Is that enough, considering the great material wealth we enjoy?

What about the poverty that exists right here in Canada, in Manitoba, in Winnipeg? Do you think Hutterites could help? How?

I don't mean for the *Haushalter* simply to sign a larger donation, say for $10, 000, rather than $1000, because that doesn't really require much from you or me, now does it?

If we want our Hutterite community to change for the better, then we need to be a fixer, not a finger pointer.

My volunteering examples all involve women, because no one in Hutterite society has more free time than Hutterite female graduates. In main-stream society, after graduation comes either university (and a part-time job!), or a full-time job.

Not so for Hutterite *Dienen*. They have free time, and lots of it, especially in winter. Yes, there are arts, crafts, sewing, but those are hobbies, and mostly, activities you do for yourself, not for the benefit of your Hutterian community, or the wider world community. In fact, it can lead to *Eigennutz (selfishness)*!

Young Hutterite *Buem* (young men) do generally get a job assignment after graduation. So, is there room for volunteer work for *Buem*? I say, "Definitely!" Both before and after graduation.

Remember, in the colony, many of our needs are taken care of by others. That gives us even more free time than Liz Basel! She must prepare 3 meals a day, every day, do all the shopping for all the groceries, as well as the shopping for all household goods. She must do banking and accounting. The list goes on and on.

We need to ask ourselves: how are we Hutterites using all the glorious time our wonderful system provides us with?

I was talking to a friend of mine about volunteering, and he stated: "One of our high-schoolers started helping our electrician with electrical work, on his own, whenever he had free-time. Now, he's our electrician's right-hand man."

My friend concluded by saying, "Now, who do you think is going to be our colony's next electrician? There's a good chance that this high-schooler's volunteer work will pay off big time! Even if he won't be our next electrician, he's establishing himself as a hard worker, someone willing to do more than his share. People notice this; they keep it in mind whenever there is a role to play or an *Amtle* (job) to fill."

Another area to think about is bake or garage sales. More and more Hutterite colonies are trying these. Most of the money goes straight into more material goods for their own community. Maybe this generation of graduates could start bake sales where the proceeds would go to a soup kitchen in Winnipeg, Winnipeg Harvest, or Habitat for Humanity, or any other charity, rather than the acquisition of one more material "thing" we can well do without.

In addition, Hutterite children need their own books! We teachers have absolutely NO BOOKS to give our students where they will see their own Hutterite lives reflected and validated. We now have one, the very 1st children's book, by Linda Maendel, Elm River. Several more are on the way, all from BUHEP students or teachers, who are already very busy with teaching.

Why can't Hutterite graduates write children's literature, about Hutterites, for Hutterites? Do you know what a need there is for children's book tapes, stories recorded on cassettes, English, German and Hutterisch? What a fantastic amount we could amass, if even 25% of the graduates at every colony volunteered just an hour of their time daily!

This doesn't mean it will be easy, or that volunteer work doesn't require sacrifices on your part.

When Oak River students first informed me that they wanted me to be their guest speaker for their September graduation, I knew it would be a very busy time of year for me.

I was still marking work from last year's IITV course, and starting a new school year, as well as planning for the IITV orientation day in Baker. I could have said, no, but I've learned that while I can't do it all, I can do more today than I did yesterday. So I said, "Yes."

However, months ago, I bought some beautiful fabric for my family, in anticipation of a Glenway *Hulba*. I wanted to make new outfits for my 3 little girls, a new shirt for my husband, and a dress for myself. This is a Hutterite tradition – any really special occasion usually calls for new clothing.

I planned to make these outfits last week, but I was busy teaching in the mornings. The only time I had for writing my speech was in the afternoon, while my girls were sleeping. When they awoke after 3, writing was impossible until they went to sleep at night.

As the week wore on, I continued to use all my afternoons and any spare minute on my graduation speech. It became clear that I would not have time to make a new dress for my baby.

By Tuesday, I realized that sadly, my two older girls would also go without.

By Wednesday, I saw that Ray's shirt would have to go, and late Thursday evening, I came to the tragic conclusion that my own dress would also fall by the wayside.

Did you notice that my dress isn't brand new? Wasn't it a small sacrifice to make, so that I could find time for more important work, like writing a speech.

How often do we say, "I don't have time," instead of considering what frivolities (like new dresses) we could eliminate, so we have more time for volunteering, for giving of ourselves to others?

I would like to conclude by reflecting on our shared Hutterian heritage. Volunteering is not really a completely new idea to Hutterites, as perhaps you might think. It just has a different name in Hutterite society. It's called *"G'ma Orbit"*.

In community, if you manage your cook week, your Obwosch wuch*, your weekly Friday cleaning job well, that's not good enough. If you just do what you absolutely know to be your part, your job, then you haven't done your part.*

If you are strong and able, your part is to work until all the work is done. You MUST do more than what is absolutely necessary, in order to fulfil your duty to the community.

Community work ALWAYS comes first.

As my *Suzanne Basel* used to say, "If a colony has even one member willing to do more than his or her share, then the colony is lucky and has been blessed."

These sayings are uniquely Hutterite, and reflect the sacred heritage our ancestors left us. All focus on fulfilling Christ's commandment of love - daily acts of loving service for our neighbour.

Remember, our repentance for sin, and our faith in Christ must be made visible in doing God's will.

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in? Or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to You? And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, My brethren, you did it to me." This is the ending of the familiar story Jesus tells us in Matthew 25, verses 37-40.

If you read Matthew 25: 41, it becomes clear that the unrighteous are not condemned for doing evil, but for **their failure to do good.**

Scary, isn't it?

Thus, it comes back to volunteer work. Work for others. Work for the community.

When you leave Oak River, or your own Hutterite faith community, either because of death, or simply because of marriage, or because you moved away, we know that your family and close friends will miss you. The question is: "*Wie wetn die G'ma dich vermitzen?* What legacy will you leave behind?"

I wish you courage, strength, and wisdom as you seek to capture and revitalize this precious essence of what it means to be Hutterite, a disciple of Christ, living out His commandment of love. God be with you! *Der Herr sei mit Euch!*

Our Christmas Wonder

by Linda Maendel

Elm River Hutterite Colony, Newton Siding

This year Christmas will be different,
Without dad's jovial presence at our house,
Leading us in song,
"Der Tag, der ist so Freudenreich…"
O day, so rich in joy!
Gently reminding us that Christmas is more
Than receiving and giving presents.
Sharing his favourite from our school Christmas concert
Reminiscing over coffee, with a childhood crony,
Reflecting on Christmas teachings
Heard throughout the Holy Days
Adding his sense of humour to our gathering,
"If things don't get fixed in this house,
It won't be because I didn't receive tools!"

Still despite the ache of missing him
Christmas will be …
The quiet joy of
Singing German carols with family,
"Stille Nacht" with the choir and
"O Du Fröhliche" over communal Christmas dinner,
Creating handmade gifts,
Sharing home baked dainties with a neighbour,
Planning a celebration supper for our children,
Writing letters to loved ones seldom seen,
The whole community preparing
Gifts for disadvantaged children,
Visiting elderly friends and receiving
A clumsy card with a childish message,
"I like you. You are a good teacher."

So…
Our ongoing Christmas peace
Is celebrating Christ's birthday by
Continuing to build community,
Faithful to the way dad taught us --
Patient and steadfast to the end.
Anticipating the time when we
Celebrate together again in that Other Home!

News

The Khortitsa '99 Grants Program

For Research, Publications And Library Acquisitions
In The Former Soviet Union

The Grants Program is funded through private donations and an international consortium of the following institutions and organizations in Canada, Germany and United States: The Anabaptist Foundation-Canada (Vancouver); The California Mennonite Historical Society; The Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno; The Mennonite Central Committee (Akron, Pennsylvania); The Mennonite Heritage Centre (Winnipeg); The Research Program in Russian and Soviet Mennonite Studies (University of Toronto); and the Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Kulturerbes des Russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums e.v. (Göttingen).

The Awards Committee has assigned the following grants:

A. Year I, 2000-2001
Grants

1..Berestan, Yury, National U of Dnepropetrovsk, candidate dissertation $350
2. Krylov, Nikolai, Melitopol State Pedagogical University, senior scholar 500
3. Ostasheva, Natasha, National University of Dnepropetrovsk, doctoral research 950
4. Romaniuk, M. V. , State University of Zaporozhe, candidate dissertation 350
5. State Archive, Zaporozhe Region, library grant 1500

B. Year II, 2001-2002
Grants

1. Besnosova, Univerity of Dnepropetrovsk, George Epp , post-candidate $900
2. Besnosov, Aleksandr, University of Dnepropetrovsk, candidate dissertation 350
3. Krylov, Nikolai, Melitopol State Pedagogical University, Senior Scholar 500
4. Ostasheva, Natasha, National University of Dnepropetrovsk, post-doctoral 900
5. Romaniuk, M.V., State University of Zaporozhe, candidate dissertation 350
6. Vibe, Petr, Omsk Historical Museum, senior scholar 500
7. Omsk Historical Museum, library grant 500
8. Institute of Ukrainian and German Studies, Dnepropetrovsk University, library grant 500
9. State Archive of the Zaporozhe Region, library grant 1500

C. Year III, 2002-2003
Grants

1. Besnosova, Oksana, University of Dnepropetrovsk, George Epp post-candidate $900
2. Besnosov, Aleksandr, University of Dnepropetrovsk, candidate dissertation 350
3. Moskaliuk, L.I., Pedagogical University of Barnaul, Siberia, George Epp doctoral 900
4. Romaniuk, M.V., State University of Zaporozhe, candidate dissertation 350
5. Shtrek, Liubov I., Omsk Pedagofical University, candidate dissertation 350
6. Vibe, Petr, Omsk Historical Museum, senior scholar 500
7. Vibe, Petr, Omsk Historical Museum, publication subsidy 1500
8. Institute of Ukrainian and German Studies, Univ. of Dnepropetrovsk, library grant 500
9. Omsk Historical Museum, library grant 500
10.State Archive of the Zaporozhe Region, library grant 1500

D. Year IV, 2003-2004

1. Sennikova (nee Shtrk), candidate dissertation $400
2. Moskaliuk, Larisa, doctoral dissertation 950
3. Vibe, Petr, senior research 500
4. Bobyleva, Svetlana, senior research 500
5. Ignatusha, Alexander, senior research 500
6. Krylov, Nikolai, senior research 500
7. Institute of Ukrainian-German Studies, Univ. of Dnepropetrovsk, publication grant 1500
8. Zaporizhe Regional Museum, Library ... 800
9. Omsk Historical Museum, Library 500
10.Institute of Ukrainian-German Studies, Univ. of Dnepropetrovsk, Library 500

E. Year V, 2004-2005

1. Lyakh, Katarina , candidate dissertation $400
2. Vibe, Petr, doctoral dissertation 950
3. Krylov, Nikolai, Melitopol Pedagogical University 500
4. Zaporizhe Regional Archive, Library grant 500
5. Omsk Historical Museum, Library grant500
6. Institute of Ukrainian-German Studies, Univ. of Dnepropetrovsk, Library grant 500
7. Omsk Historical Museum, Historical grant 500
8. Barnaul State Pedagogical University, Library grant 500

F Year VI, 2005-2006

1. Babkova, Valeria, Stavropol, George Epp candidate dissertation $400
2. Beznosova, Oksana, Dnepropetrovsk National University, senior research 500
3. Blinova, Anna, Omsk PSU, candidate dissertation 400
4. Krylov, Nikolai, Melitopol PSU, senior research 500
5. Lyakh, Katarina, Zaporizhe State University, George Epp post-candidate 950
6. Omsk Historical Museum, museum grant 500
7. Vibe, Petr, George Epp doctoral grant ... 950
8. Zaporizhe State Archive, library grant ... 500

Types of Grants:

Grants have been awarded for a variety of research and writing projects. The following titles are typical:

"The Socio-Political Life of Germans and Mennonites in Southern Ukraine, 1917-1933," "Mennonite Industry and Its Influence in the Development of the Southern Ukraine Region, 1800-1920," "The History of Protestant Sects in Southern Ukraine, 1850-1917," "Mennonite Society, 1871-1917: The Socio-Economic Developments of Mennonite Society in the South of the Russian Empire," "The Socio-Economic Life of German and Mennonite Colonies in Siberia from the Late 19th Century to the First Third of the 20th Century," "The German-Speaking Colonists of Southern Ukraine in Their Multicultural Surroundings," "Former Mennonite Khutors, Estates, Settlements and Villages in the Berdiansk and Melitopol Regions," "History of the Siberian Germans Based on Archival and Museum Collections," "The History of the Establishment and Development of Mennonite Settlements in Crimea," "The Status of Mennonites in Tsarist Russia," "The Impact of Soviet Religious Legislation on Mennonites in Western Siberia, 1960-1990."

Library acquisition and museum development grants have also been made.

Gifts to support this program are welcome. In Canada, please send them to the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3M 3N3; in the United States send them to the Centre for MB Studies, 1717 S. Chestnut Ave., Fresno CA 93702. Gifts should be designated for the Khortitsa '99 Awards Program.

Awards Committee:

Harvey Dyck, John Staples, John J. Friesen, John B. Toews, Peter Letkemann, Paul Toews, Gerhard Hildebrandt, Peter J. Klassen

On behalf of the awards committee,

Peter J. Klassen, Chair
11 October 2006

Mennonitische Forschungsstelle

Gary Waltner, Archivist and Librarian, Weierhof, Germany

In 1948 the German Mennonite Historical Society (Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein: MGV) voted to establish a Mennonite library and archives, the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle (MFSt). Dr. Ernst Crous, along with his wife Rosa, both librarians in the Prussian State Library, who had been evacuated from Berlin with a part of the Library to Göttingen in Lower Saxony in the early 1940's, accepted the responsibility of collecting and cataloging the small, but growing collection. One compelling reason for starting the MFSt was the fact that a good number of church books from former East and West Prussia had been rescued by Mennonite refugees when they were forced to leave their homes. Since the churches no longer existed, the question was raised as to where these books should be deposited. These valuable documents remain one of the most important archival collections in the library today.

From it's beginning until 1960, the collection was located in the home of Ernst and Rosa Crous in Göttingen. In that year, Ernst and Rosa Crous decided to move back to Krefeld to a retirement home. The collection was also taken to Krefeld where it was housed in the city hall. Both Ernst and Rosa Crous continued to work with the collection, along with Irmgard von Beckerath, until their death in 1967 and 1968. Since no one could be found in Krefeld who was willing to take on the responsibility of the collection, the MGV asked the Principal of the Heimschule in Weierhof, Helmut Haury, if room for the collection was available on the campus of the Gymnasium (German Mennonite Secondary School). A large room in the attic of the schoolhouse was available, and in 1968 the complete library was moved to Weierhof. Here the collection was expanded by the inclusion of Christian Neff's library which until then had been located in the parsonage of the Mennonite Church at Weierhof. Dr. Horst Penner from the Nordpfalz Gymnasium, along with Paul Schowalter, Elder of the Weierhof Mennonite Church and Gerhard Hein, Elder of the Monsheim Mennonite Church, were placed in charge of the collection. In the course of the next four years, all three became ill and were unable to administer the library.

In 1974 the MGV decided to accept the offer of Nelson Springer, head of the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen, Indiana to spend a sabbatical year along with his family at Weierhof to catalog the library and sort out the archival material. This was done from June, 1976 until August, 1977. Shortly before Springer's year ended, Gary Waltner was asked to take responsibility for the collection.

Over the years, the collection expanded until the space on the fourth floor of the school was overcroweded. Paul Schowalter helped procure a yearly monetary grant from the local state of Rheinland-Pfalz to help buy books, while many people donated books and documents. Gary Waltner served as the volunteer, part-time director of the library and archives. Since he was employed by the American government as teacher/principal, much of the correspondence and work involving the library had to be done evenings, week-ends, or vacation time. Help for visitors left much to be desired, and assistance offered to researchers was often at a minimum.

None-the-less, the collection continued to grow as new books were purchased, or donated by private individuals. Many of the donations were in the area of genealogy. Soon the attic room became too small, crowded with boxes stuffed into corners, magazines stacked in the aisles, and a shortage of shelves. In order to keep abreast with cataloging books, measures supported by the local employment office to reduce unemployment were initiated. Over the years, Christine Neff, Christa Kägy, and Klaus Till were employed to carry on the daily work in the library. Volunteers worked in the library as time permited and others helped with typing correspondence. Without their assistance, the day-to-day administrative routine could not have been accomplished.

Mexico Mennonites Provide Relief Aid

In October, 2005, hurricane Stan devastated Guatemala, El Salvador and surrounding countries, as well as southern and central Mexico. About 80 deaths were directly attributed to the storm and another 1,500 to 2,000 deaths were caused indirectly. Damage was estimated at between one and two billion dollars (US).

The Low German Mennonites in the state of Chihuahua, responded generously, donating about 150,000 US towards disaster relief in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. They sent representative to the disaster areas, and together with Nicholas King, country Representative for MCC, assessed the situation, and made recommendations as to how best to respond to the needs. Low German Mennonites also sent local volunteers to do some of the reconstruction work. There was tremendous local support for this project. Individuals contributed to the project, and the Old Colony Church near Cuauhtemoc donated $100,000 US. About 2,000 Bibles were also sent to Chiapas, and distributed through local Mexican churches. Plans are to send another shipment of Bibles in January, 2007.

This is a cooperative relief project including the Low German speaking Mennonites, Spanish speaking Mennonites, and Mennonite Central Committee Mexico.

John J. Friesen, based on information provided by Mary Friesen, director of Low German programs, MCC Canada, and Peter Enns, former *Vorsteher* (Administrator) of the Old Colony Mennonite Church, Cuauhtemoc.

Co History Conference Was A Success

Conrad Stoesz, Winnipeg

The "War and the Conscientious Objector" Conference, held at the University of Winnipeg on October 20-21, 2006, was an attempt to talk about and remember the stories of the people and their communities who strove to be loyal citizens but also be true to their faith and conscience in the Second World War. Presenters from various backgrounds, including Hutterite, Mennonite, former Jehovah's Witnesses, Doukhobors, and Quakers participated in the two-day event, with more than 25 presentations.

The conference was well attended. High school students and men in their 90s who had served as COs were in attendance. People interacted with the speakers whose papers where not only historical, but also gave ideas and challenges for the present.

Almost 11,000 men claimed conscientious objector status and worked in forestry camps, mines, farms, industry, hospitals, and in the medial corps. Of these about 7,500 are estimated to be Mennonite, although exact numbers are difficult to determine because the Canadian government systematically destroyed its records related to the World War II CO experience in Canada.

The CO's work during the war was significant. B.C. Minister of Lands, A. Wells Gray, wrote in 1943 "[The CO workers] have served a function of great national importance and will continue to do so in these camps. The need is as urgent as ever and they cannot be replaced." The importance continues today with numerous aid agencies that grew out of this experience including Mennonite Disaster Service and others. For more information about their CO experience visit www.alternativeservice.ca

While the conference focused on WWII, there were also presentations about the Vietnam war and the current Iraq war. Christian Kjar recently deserted the US Marines and fled to Canada because he realized he could not, in good conscience, kill another person even after all the training he received. He explained how the indoctrination was carried out and how he felt people were trained to devalue and treat enemies inhumanely. What he was being taught about Muslims in the Marines did not reflect what he knew about these people from the experience in his own family.

Conference organizers hope to provide the sessions of the conference in video format in the near future. For more information email co@mennonitechurch.ca

From time to time, the future of the MFSt was discussed at meetings of the MGV. All were in agreement that something had to be done to alieviate the crowded conditions and a permanent home for the collection was considered an absolute neccessity. Due to lack of funds, plans did not materialize. The newly elected president of the MGV, Eckbert Driedger, recognized the need for a permanent home for the growing collection. In 1995, members and friends of the MGV were informed of plans to construct a building in the Mennonite community of Weierhof. Local farmers donated the building lot, dismantled an old barn on the site, dug the basement, and hauled away the dirt with their tractors and trailors. Within a few weeks, work began in earnest on the site. Four retired farmers, Eckbert Driedger, his brother Reinhard Driedger, Werner Galle and Herman König took charge of recruiting volunteer workers to help with the daily work. Thanks to the many hours of volunteer help, the building progressed. Two years, almost to the day, after beginning to build, the whole collection was moved from the attic of the school to the new location. For the first time since 1948, the collection had it's own home, and for the first time in the history of European Mennonites, a building, constructed for the sole purpose of housing a library and archives, had been built.

Since the building was completed, work in the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle has more than doubled. In part this was due to the new building, because through it the MFSt became better known within our own church community, and among academic scholars. Then too, Gary Waltner retired from teaching, and volunteered to serve full time as the director of the MFSt. Thus, for the first time since 1967, a full time person was present to help visitors and to answer the telephone and e-mails from around the world. Various activities in the archives and library centre, such as conferences, exhibitions, historic presentations, etc. have also helped catapult the MFSt into public view.

The present staff consists of one full time volunteer director, one part-time paid secretary, one part-time paid worker, two volunteer archivists and one-full time volunteer librarian. Other volunteers help care for the grounds, do repair work, and care for the physical plant. Only with the combined efforts of the entire staff, is it possible to carry out the extensive work of the library/archives.

What is included in a days' work? Cataloging books, including those that have been part of the older collection, as well as recent acquisitions, are high on the priority list. Private researchers and students who are working on Anabapatist, Mennonite, Amish or Hutterite themes use the facilities. Genealogists often use material in the archival collections. Books are loaned out, questions answered via e-mail requests, and the general administrative day-to-day duties have to be completed. Researchers, coming from a distance, have the option of staying in our guest room. We are often called on for presentations on Anabaptist or Mennonite related topics to church or other historically interested groups. A small "Infobrief" is published twice a year in which news from the MFSt is sent out to friends and supporters of the library.

To be sure, we cannot begin to measure up to the standards of North American Mennonite Libraries with their financial basis and well-trained employees. However, we feel that with the resources available to us, we are a significant cog in the wheel of Mennonite libraries throughout the world. It is the goal of the MFSt that we may be able to contribute to the academic and historical community not only in Germany, but far beyond its' boarders.

Amish in Pennsylvania - What Kind of People are these?

Joan Chittister, OSB October 9, 2006

The country that went through the rabid slaughter of children at Columbine high school several years ago once again stood stunned at the rampage in a tiny Amish school this month.

We were, in fact, more than unusually saddened by this particular display of viciousness. It was, of course, an attack on 10 little girls. Amish. Five dead. Five wounded. Most people called it "tragic." After all, the Amish who represent no threat to society, provide no excuse for the rationalization of the violence so easily practiced by the world around them.

Nevertheless, in a nation steeped in violence - from its video games to its military history, in foreign policy and on its streets - the question remains: Why did this particular disaster affect us like it did? You'd think we'd be accustomed to mayhem by now.

But there was something different about this one. What was it?

Make no mistake about it: the Amish are not strangers to violence.

The kind of ferocity experienced by the Amish as they buried the five girl-children murdered by a crazed gunman two weeks ago as not really been foreign to Amish life and the history of this peaceful people.

This is a people born out of opposition to violence - and, at the same time, persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants in the era before religious tolerance. Having failed to adhere to the orthodoxy of one or the other of the controlling theocracies of their home territories, they were banished, executed, imprisoned, downed or burned at the stake by both groups.

But for over 300 years, they have persisted in their intention to be who and what they said they were.

Founded by a once-Catholic priest in the 16th century, as part of the reformist movements of the time, the Mennonites - from which the Amish later sprung - were, from the beginning, a simple movement. They believe in adult baptism, pacifism, religious tolerance, separation of church and state, opposition to capital punishment, and opposition to oaths and civil office.

They organize themselves into local house churches. They separate from the "evil" of the world around them. They live simple lives opposed to the technological devices - and even the changing clothing styles - which, in their view, encourage the individualism, the pride, that erodes community, family, a righteous society. They work hard.

They're self-sufficient, they refuse both Medicare and Social Security monies from the state. And though the community has suffered its own internal violence from time to time, they have inflicted none on anyone around them.

Without doubt, to see such a peaceful people brutally attacked would surely leave any decent human being appalled.

But it was not the violence suffered by the Amish community last week that surprised people. Our newspapers are full of brutal and barbarian violence day after day after day - both national and personal.

No, what really stunned the country about the attack on the small Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania was that the Amish community itself simply refused to hate what had hurt them.

"Do not think evil of this man," the Amish grandfather told his children at the mouth of one little girl's grave.

"Do not leave this area. Stay in your home here." The Amish delegation told the family of the murderer. "We forgive this man."

No, it was not the murders, not the violence, that shocked us; it was the forgiveness that followed it for which we were not prepared. It was the lack of recrimination, the dearth of vindictiveness that left us amazed. Baffled. Confounded.

It was the Christianity we all profess but which they practiced that left us stunned. Never had we seen such a thing.

Here they were, those whom our Christian ancestors called "heretics," who were modeling Christianity for all the world to see. The whole lot of them. The entire community of them. Thousands of them at one time.

The real problem with the whole situation is that down deep we know that we had the chance to do the same. After the fall of the Twin Towers we had the sympathy, the concern, the support of the entire world.

You can't help but wonder, when you see something like this, what the world would be like today if, instead of using the fall of the Twin Towers as an excuse to invade a nation, we had simply gone to every Muslim country on earth and said, "Don't be afraid. We won't hurt you. We know that this is coming from only a fringe of society, and we ask your help in saving others from this same kind of violence."

"Too idealistic," you say. Maybe. But since we didn't try, we will never know, will we?

Instead, we have sparked fear of violence in the rest of the world ourselves. So much so, that they are now making nuclear bombs to save themselves. From whom? From us, of course. The record is clear. Instead of exercising more vigilance at our borders, listening to our allies and becoming more of what we say we are, we are becoming who they said we are.

For the 3,000 dead in the fall of the Twin Towers at the hands of 19 religious fanatics, we have more than 2,700 U.S. soldiers now killed in military action, more than 20,000 wounded, more than 10,000 permanently disabled. We have thousands of widows and orphans, a constitution at risk, a president that asked for and a Congress that just voted to allow torture, and a national infrastructure in jeopardy for want of future funding.

And nobody's even sure how many thousand innocent Iraqis are dead now, too.

Indeed, we have done exactly what the terrorists wanted us to do. We have proven that we are the oppressors, the exploiters, the demons they now fear we are. And - read the international press - few people are saying otherwise around the world.

From where I stand, it seems to me that we ourselves are no longer so sure just exactly what kind of people we have now apparently become.

Interestingly enough, we do know what kind of people the Amish are - and like the early Romans, we, too, are astounded by it. "Christian" they call it.

Graham Brings Unwieldy Baggage To Mennoville

Will Braun, editor of *Geez* magazine, Winnipeg. Credit: *Canadian Mennonite*, November 13, 2006, p. 13.

It was an awkward encounter. One of the more prominent Christians in the world came to the Canadian capital of Mennonitism, bringing with him some ungainly baggage. And he probably underestimated the awkwardness ahead, hoping he could leave his past comments abut Islam and nuking Afghanistan at the border on his way to Winnipeg.

The night the Franklin Graham Festival opened (Oct. 20), his past statement that Islam is a "very evil and wicked religion" was all over the airways. Both Graham and Christianity suffered a black eye, but Graham was not the only one feeling the heat. The event also put Mennonites in a tight spot.

Many Mennonites are staunch supporters of Graham, whose inheritance from his father Billy is a legacy of credibility and respectability. If people were to come to Christ at the event, how could anyone question him?

Other Mennonites were unable to reconcile the gospel of love with Graham's call for America to use "every hellish weapon in (its) inventory,…the weapons of mass destruction if need be, and destroy the enemy." Sure, some people would get saved at the festival, but does that mean Graham can say whatever he wants without being questioned?

So what were Mennonites to do? Would our official bodies endorse the event, condemn it, remain silent or find some middle ground? The main Mennonite response was to squirm – probably a realistic response given the range of sensitivities in our family of faith.

After passing a resolution to both support the festival and engage Graham in discussion, Mennonite Church Manitoba wrote to Graham, specifically noting the Sept. 14, 2001 CNN transcript in which the "hellish weapons" comment appears. In his reply, Graham simple stated that Christians come out at different places on this matter. He apologized for any offence taken, but in no way retracted the statement.

Despite this, Norm Voth MC Manitoba was quoted in the *Winnipeg Free Press* as providing unqualified backing of the Graham event. He told me later the Free Press did not accurately reflect the balance of his interview, adding, "The use of violence is certainly not a way of creating peace."

An ad hoc group of Mennonites uncomfortable with official Mennonite reticence on the issue sought to have the gospel of peace proclaimed alongside the gospel of individual salvation. I, and fellow New Order voice writer Aiden Enns, participated in this group, which held an interfaith prayer service and handed out leaflets to people entering the festival. The leaflets suggested the love and forgiveness that would be preached that night should also be extended to our enemies. They included a tear-off piece festival-goers could sign and place in the offering plate, asking Graham publicly to bless all people of Iraq and Afghanistan during the festival. The initiative drew media interest, locally and beyond. But some Christians, of course, were offended.

Amidst the specifics of the Graham issue, the question remains? Can we, as a Mennonite family, constructively and openly work through differences on matters such as this? Voth, who attended the festival, is open about the fact that for some Mennonites the Graham approach is "entirely desirable," while others have understandable difficulties with it. "I wouldn't necessarily want to argue [the Graham model] is the way of the future," he said. Voth said that all sides must be heard respectfully, and that the Mennonite church "needs to find creative ways to talk" about "what forms of evangelism we want."

West Reserve 130th Anniversary at Threshermen's Museum Reunion

Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Pembina Threshermen's Museum, located between Winkler and Morden on Highway 3 does not have the high Manitoba profile of Mennonite Heritage Village. Like MHV, it is a kind of village layout, with numerous historic buildings of the area on it, a well-used restaurant, and en extensive collection of agricultural equipment, as its name suggests. Every year it sponsors a Reunion, 2005 being its 37th. Its current director is Bill Enns.

Pembina Threshermen's Museum is also where Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society highlighted the 130th anniversary of the former West Reserve on September 9 – 10, 2005. A number of exhibitors were invited to set up displays to feature the theme in some way. Mennonite Heritage Village was noticed for its fine travelling exhibit submitted by director Jim Penner, to bring congratulations, and to join in the celebrations. Mavis Dyck, vice president of the MMHS Local History committee at the time, presided over the celebrations and the planning.

It was good to bring the two museums together a little more. At least five of the major MHV heritage buildings, including the house barn, the private school, and the old Reinlaender church brought in from former West Reserve communities like Chortitz near Winkler, Waldheim, Hochfeld, and Blumenhof near Gretna. A closer liaison has also developed with Neubergthal near Altona through the studies done by MHV curator Dr. Roland Sawatzky on the architecture of the West Reserve communities of Reinland, Chortitz and Neubergthal. A very fine exhibit brought to MHV last year by Margruite Krahn, president of the Neubergthal Heritage Foundation, helped to firm up these ties, as did a special MHV tour to Neubergthal headed up by Dr. Sawatzky recently.

The exhibits of the Reunion program included a large map of the 17 townships which comprised the original West Reserve land allotment. Here one could easily locate the original villages, and follow the historic Post Road Memorial Trail which was established by MMHS several years ago. There were village exhibits from places like Altbergthal, Kronsfeld, Reinfeld, Waldheim, as well as Blumenfeld, Burwalde (topic of a recent new community history) and Schoenwiese.

A pictorial history of the Reinlaender (Old Colony) Mennonite Church included information on the 2002 Chortitz community cemetery project, headed up by Mavis Dyck. Sommerfeld Church history photos of the 1993 centennial of that community, and its 2004 Sommerfelder Church register book launch, were there as well.

Various individuals brought private collections of information, like the diary of Shirley Bergen's mother about her teaching days in the Valleyfield School in 1933. Family story exhibits connecting Duecks, Dycks, Hoeppners, Schellenbergs, Bueckerts, Kroekers and others could be found there.

As at all proper museum events, people enjoyed wonderful, home cooked food. A parade of buggies, antique cars and tractors, etc., highlighted the local museum's central themes significantly. Various demonstrations of rope making, log sawing, flour grinding and pig butchering, etc., all well known to MHV patrons as well, completed the scenery of the Reunion event. Reviewing Village, Church and Family history over 130 years would not be complete without these features. You can get more details on how things went by calling 1-204-325 7497.

Submitted by Lawrence Klippenstein, editor of the newsletter, *Windows on the West Reserve.* It is available from klippensteinL@aol.com or 584 Berkley St., Winnipeg MB R3R 1J9.

Old Order Mennonites move to Manitoba

John J. Friesen

During the summer of 2006, a group of Old Order Mennonites (not Amish as reported by the *Winnipeg Free Press* and repeated by *The Mennonite Historian*) bought land in Manitoba with the intention to set up a permanent community. They bought 11 quarter sections of land north of Gladstone, about 100 kilometers west of Winnipeg. When their settlement is completed it will include about 200 people.

The Old Order Mennonites are moving from a community about 35 kilometres west of Walkerton in southern Ontario. They investigated settlement possibilities in Manitoba because land in their area had become too expensive to allow for expansion.

Old Order Mennonites, like Old Order Amish whom they resemble in many respects, strive to live faithfully according to the teachings of the Bible. They take seriously texts that deal with community, peace, and being separate from the world. They reject modern conveniences like motor vehicles because they fear they will threaten community and make them dependent upon the world. They dress and live simply, rejecting the fashions and consumerism of the world. They don't vote in elections because they do not want to participate in the war-making decisions of the government.

When the Old Order Mennonites had selected their land, a small group came to Manitoba to begin to construct the necessary buildings. They came by bus to Portage la Prairie, and were met by one of the members from the Baker Hutterite colony south of Bagot. Baker hosted them, helped them make connections, and transported some materials to their construction sites.

Old Order Mennonites formed in Ontario in the 1880s. In the preceding decades, the Mennonite community had been facing influences from modernity and evangelical renewals. Not nearly all Mennonites were in favour of the changes these movements inspired. Tensions in the Mennonite community finally came to a head, and despite repeated meetings, the differences could not be resolved.

The church divided, and one group decided to follow faithfully the old ways, and became the Old Order Mennonites. The other group decided to accept some of the modern ways, and became the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. Recently, after a number of name changes, this group became part of Mennonite Church Canada.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* article indicated that the arrival of Old Order Mennonites will have an influence on the Gladstone community. Horses and buggies will travel on the roads, including the Yellowhead Highway. The town has put in place a hitching post for the horses. The newcomers are planning to open a furniture store and are already looking for suitable local birch, oak and ash trees to use in making furniture.

The Old Order Mennonites returned to Ontario in the fall with plans to return in Spring.

continued from page 3

evangelical revival movement that began around 1800, and is also called the Second Great Awakening, thoroughly embodied the new spirit of modernity. It was an English language revival movement that swept across the American frontier as it rolled west. It rejected traditional forms of religion and theology, and expressed a simplified theology that emphasized personal conversions, direct relationship with Jesus, and a personal morality.

Emphasis on the individual's personal conversion dovetailed well with the individual rights enshrined in the American constitution. Use of the English language shaped a uniquely American revivalist theology that played a powerful role in the melding of European immigrants into American society. European languages, customs, and semi-communal economic patterns were viewed as old fashioned, traditional, un-American and negative. Although many church groups initially resisted this pressure of modernity, most could not withstand it, since it was closely tied to nationalism, and to values of good and evil.

The twin forces of evangelicalism and modernity influenced Mennonites strongly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, creating divisions within Mennonite groups. Among Swiss Mennonites and the Amish, divisions happened during the 1870s and 1880s, resulting in the formation of both the Old Órder Amish and the Old Order Mennonites. Among the Russian Mennonite immigrants to Western Canada and the USA, the rift came in the decade following World War I, and resulted in thousands of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and a few from Kansas, moving to Mexico to form Old Colony churches. They rejected modernity, evangelicalism, and economic capitalism in favour of traditional forms of faith, church, life-styles, and economic organizations.

During the past number of decades, critiques have been leveled at modernity from the perspective known as post-modernism. It has been pointed out that modernity, despite its promises, did not really deliver the good life. It promised progress, but at the expense of the wisdom of the past. It emphasized individual rights and created a host of new freedoms, but often destroyed community. It celebrated rational and scientific solutions, but failed to give heed to matters of the heart, spirit and soul, as well as of the envirnment. Modernity failed in many respects.

It is within this context of examining modernity that a more positive evaluation of the conservatives' rejection of modernity may be in place. Studying the conservatives is not an exercise in nostalgia, nor the idealization of a peculiar group, but a serious look at an alternative to modernity. Theirs was an alternative seeking to be faithful to scripture, rooted in community, and tested over time. It may have something to say to all of us, even those who are not conservatives.

John J. Friesen Co-editor

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Preservings 2006

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Material Culture

Passing on the Comfort

From a brochure displayed at the exhibit, and edited by John J. Friesen.

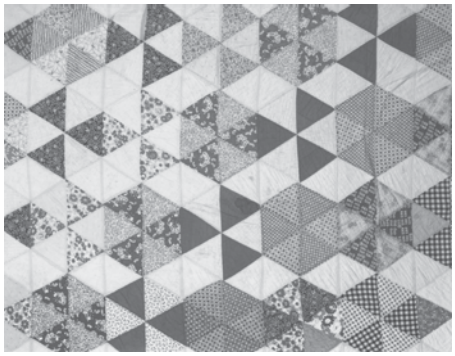
On June 2-6, 2006, Mennonite Central Committee exhibited a display of quilts at the Canadian Mennonite University, called "Passing on the Comfort – The War, the quilts and the Women who made a Difference." The traveling display will be exhibited in Mennonite communities throughout North America until 2008.

The display includes18 quilts and comforters made by North American women and sent to the Netherlands by MCC following World War II. The exhibit pieces together the stories of those who stitched, distributed and used these gifts of comfort, and honours those who responded to the horrors of war with courage and compassion.

For decades, the quilts were in the care of a Dutch woman, An Keuning-Tichelaar. During the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, her home served as a refuge for Jews, hungry children and others in danger. Following the war, like many other Dutch Mennonites still reeling from their losses, An and her husband sheltered Mennonite refugees from Ukraine. MCC provided her with bedding for the refugees, who eventually moved on to build new lives in Paraguay. Some of the quilts stayed behind. These were loaned to MCC for use in this exhibit.

The quilts and their stories testify both to the cruelty of war and to the power of compassion. They were also a reminder of the current needs of refugees and others affected by war, poverty and natural disasters.

Today MCC supporters continue to pass on the comfort and hope by sharing blankets. The Winnipeg MCC material aids office, for example, each year receives thousands of blankets from Mennonite churches and Hutterite colonies in the area. These blankets are folded, baled, and shipped to suffering people around the world.



Caption needed.

The Peters' barn moved to the Mennonite Heritage Village

On May 29, 2006 the Peters' barn was moved from the village of Vollwerk (now Mitchel, Manitoba) to the Mennonite Heritage Village. Built in 1885 by Peter Peters, the son of Jakob Peters, the first *Oberschultz* (Reeve) of the former East Reserve, the barn was one of the last remaining heritage buildings on the former East Reserve.

In early May it appeared that the barn would simply be demolished to make way for a new building. But then a number of people, including some descendents of the Jakob Peters family, worked to save the building. They persuaded the owner to delay demolition for a short time. The Mennonite Heritage Village was approached if it would be willing to accept and restore the barn. The MHV agreed to accept it if funds would be provided to finance the project. A committee was established, and it agreed to secure the necessary funding. A mover agreed to transport the building, and a foundation was poured on the museum grounds. And so, at the end of May, barely a month since the project began, the building was moved.

The building is in remarkably good shape for its age, and stands as an excellent reminder of the architecture of the day. It housed the animals, the hay, and other feed for the animals. On the MHV grounds the barn is attached to the Waldheim house. The two form the second house barn unit in the Mennonite Heritage Village.

The Peters Barn exhibits a number of interesting architectural features. Large diagonal braces are connected to spanning cross beams in a unique design directly related to Medieval Danish and north European barns. The sway braces are lap-notch, instead of mortis and tenon, with a curve on top of the joint seen only among older Mennonite barns (pre -1890). The horse stall dividers are also curved and have been preserved. The inner wall of the "schien" (storage end of barn) is full log construction, which is uncommon but was probably built to shelter livestock from fierce northwesterly winds. Only a handful of barns like this remain in Manitoba, and most will probably be destroyed in the next 20 years.

The barn is a material reminder of Jakob Peters, a remarkable pioneer. In Russia he was the *Oberschultz* of the Bergthal colony, a position somewhat similar to that of reeve in Manitoba. In 1873 he was one of the 12 delegates to inspect settlement possibilities in the United States and Canada. He recommended that the colony move to Manitoba. He laid plans for the sale of the entire colony in Russia, for the move, and for the establishment of new communities in Manitoba. He remained in Russia for a year to sell and dissolve the colony lands, and arrived in Manitoba in 1875 to personally direct the settlement process.

As *Oberschultz* of the entire East Reserve, Peters laid out villages and organized the farmers into works groups to build the necessary roads and drainage ditches. When the provincial government established its own municipal system, he negotiated with the government to have the two municipal systems, the Mennonite and the provincial, work harmoniously and smoothly together. When Lord Dufferin, the governor general, and his wife and daughter visited the East Reserve in 1877, Peters was the official spokesperson for the Mennonite community. Peters' commitment to serve his community was continued by his descendents in that both his son and a grandson served as reeves of the area.

The Peters' barn being moved to its site on the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach.

Letters

Editor's note: The 2005 issue of *Preservings* #25 carried an article by Delbert Plett (p.12) written shortly before his death, in which he responded critically to a letter written by Harold Janz about him. Janz had distributed the letter to a select number of people. The following letter is the one written by Janz to which Plett responded.

Despite its strengths, local lawyer has produced a very troubling history

By Harold Jantz

Steinbach writer, historian and sometime lawyer, Delbert Plett, has established a reputation for an immense output. Over the course of several decades he has produced a range of books and more recently twice annual periodicals which have unearthed a vast amount of history of a portion of the Mennonite family that has been neglected by too many of Mennonite historians.

When I read the last of the Mennonites in Canada series, volume three by Ted Regehr, *A People Transformed*, I asked myself where the conservative groups had disappeared to. They were virtually invisible in this volume.

That's not a criticism that can be put to Plett's writing, since he has made it his mission to unearth the story of the Old Colony Mennonites (Reinlander, Somerfelder (sic.), Chortitzer, Bergthaler) and in particular the Kleine Gemeinde churches and their people.

His most recent project is a 691-page volume, *Diese Steine*, the story of the Russian Mennonites, written and edited together with Adina Reger of Germany, a 1987 emigrant from the Soviet Union. Reger acts as a court translator and interpreter in Germany and has published earlier works before becoming involved in this project with Plett.

Though *Diese Steine* may be inaccessible to some readers because it's in German, those who read it will find a great deal to enrich and enjoy. But they will also encounter stark prejudices that will be hard to digest.

A great deal of good

First, the strengths. *Diese Steine* attempts to tell the story of Russian Mennonites by recalling the history of their migration into what was known as New Russia, the beginnings of these settlements, the growth of the colonies, their emergence of daughter colonies, stories of civic and church leaders, growth of enterprises for which Mennonites in Russia became renowned, church struggles, the movements that emerged among them, the migration of a large segment to America in the 1870s and on, and eventually the further migration of a segment to Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, beginning in 1922.

In fact Plett goes even further. He not only has an account of the Anabaptist beginnings, he also attempts an overview of the entire history of the church, going back to the New Testament church. More about that later.

The Russian part of the story is told by colonies and often by villages. That has allowed Plett and Reger to do well what they do best--tell the story of people, their experiences, their enterprises, and the special contributions they have made and institutions they created. Scores of pictures accompany the text. A whole section recalls the terrible years of suffering and exile through which many went, and which a large number didn't survive.

A large segment of the Russian Mennonite colonies, troubled by the changing political climate, chose to leave for America in the 1870s. The book follows the reasons for their move, and the new tensions which grew to such proportions in Canada 50 years later that they again began looking for a new homeland, this time in Latin America. The stories of leaders and experiences during these years provide insight into the courage and conviction that led thousands to embark on a road of great sacrifice.

The book ends with a section of reflections on the history of the church, about conversion and the new birth, about assurance of salvation, about the relationship of conservative and progressive Mennonites and about the kingdom of God.

The concept of *Diese Steine* is an admirable one and a great deal of what it contains is genuinely valuable reading. Not just that, it's highly interesting and by bringing together a large amount that might have been originally printed in obscure places or long out of print sources, Plett and Reger have done us a great service.

Not merely frustrating

However--and this is not a minor however--what is not merely frustrating but genuinely offensive is Plett's use of venues such as this to ride a hobby horse against what he terms the "separatist-pietists" or often merely the "pietists" among the Mennonites. This bias colours his interpretations of others everywhere. The number of instances of this in *Diese Steine* are so numerous and their implications so serious, they deserve some reply.

Plett believes that the Pietist movement--which largely birthed the modern evangelical movement--is the source of all manner of ill and has brought virtually only harm to Mennonites, while what we now know as the Old Colony Mennonites and the Kleine Gemeinde represent true "evangelical Christianity" and virtually all that is good in Mennonite Christianity. He uses every writing for which he is responsible to drive home this idea, no matter what violence he does to reason or truth.

A brief explanation: Pietism was a movement in European Protestant Christianity which attempted to bring renewal to traditional, formalistic Christianity by placing emphasis on devotion to God, the experience of the encounter with God, and on a sense of release from the guilt of sin. It placed great emphasis on the inner life and a sense of the presence of God. It also greatly stimulated the missionary impulse and accelerated the breakdown of barriers between Christians of different traditions. It had aberrations, as any student of its history will acknowledge, but it also brought genuine renewal. A great deal of millennialist speculation was fostered by some branches of Pietism. Yet it is quite unlikely that renewal would have come to Russian Mennonites without the influence of Pietism. The Mennonite Brethren were the largest group to emerge because of this influence in the mid-1800s in Russia, though one could also say that the Evangelical Mennonite Conference represents a later result of similar influences. Much of the so-called "kirchliche" Mennonite church in Russia was also influenced by Pietism and experienced spiritual awakening through it. A part, like the Kleine Gemeinde, steadfastly resisted the most visible Pietistic influences in Russia, as did also for the most part the Old Colony groups who migrated to Canada in the 1870s and then on to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s and on.

Even though in some of his writings (e.g. *The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia 1812-1849*) Plett recognizes different forms of Pietism, in *Diese Steine*, he acknowledges virtually no differences. The illustration that Plett uses most frequently concerns the writings of a German Pietist Jung-Stilling who popularized the idea that Christ was coming soon to create his millennial kingdom and that a safe place for believers who wanted to escape the catastrophe coming upon this world would be somewhere in the east in Central Asia. A group of Mennonites, led by a certain Claas Epp Jr., caught up this notion and actually trekked to Turkestan to what they thought would be a safe place. Even though others in the movement had already repudiated him, Epp came to believe that he would be one of two special witnesses to Christ's return and would be resurrected bodily on a day he predicted. It didn't happen and Epp died many years later a sadder and wiser man. Even though a moderately prosperous colony eventually emerged, the movement must be judged a failure. Many people died of hardships and epidemics in the early years and a large number soon left for America.

Plett ranks the Epp episode alongside the violent Muenster uprising of early Anabaptism as an illustration of the terrible consequences which can flow from error. It is not hard to agree that these people were in error. But what does Plett have to say about the people who left Canada for safety from an evil world in Mexico

or Paraguay and again for safety in Bolivia? What has their flight into more and more remote areas been but an attempt to escape to a place where they might be protected from the world in which so much evil exists. And if one is to judge such flights by the number of deaths they caused, the flight of the Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde people led to far more deaths, since the numbers were far greater. Moreover, whenever Plett writes about the conservative Mennonites they are "pilgrims," but when it concerns people like the Claas Epp or Abraham Peters' followers they are misguided fanatics. Even though in the case of those who went to Paraguay in the '20s, 170 out of 1700 died while waiting to get onto their land and over three hundred returned disappointed to Canada soon after, from Plett nary a word of judgment.

One could cite numerous illustrations of this kind from *Diese Steine*, some of them quite outrageous. For example, he places a picture of a conservative minister, Abram Friesen (p339), into the book and notes that he was the uncle of the historian Peter M. Friesen, who produced the most important history text in Russia. Yet P.M. Friesen never mentions him in his book. Plett uses this to illustrate the shame that he claims many evangelical or pietist Mennonites have toward their conservative Mennonite relatives and who thereby show their "limited and impoverished worldview and their cultural hostility." Does Plett run pictures of all his relatives in his publications? If not, why not?

Story of Gnadenfeld

The community of Gnadenfeld in the Molotschna colony was clearly a powerhouse of renewal within Russian Mennonite life, spiritually, educationally and through the openness it generated toward new ideas, economically. It was a village that came about through the immigration of 40 families in 1834 from a place in Prussia called Brenkenhofswalde-Franzthal. Now it's important to note that ten of those families were from Lutheran background, but were now Mennonites. Plett won't recognize them as Mennonites--in fact he barely recognizes the community, giving less than a page of text to it. About the former Lutherans, however, he says that since the group couldn't come up with enough Mennonites, they allowed some Lutherans to join the company. Plett doesn't mention that the entire group was actually led by Wilhelm Lange, who had converted to their faith from Lutheranism years before and was their elder and leader at the time of the move, nor does he note that August Lenzmann, another former Lutheran, became their elder some years after coming to Russia, or that Johann Klatt, still another new Mennonite, became one of the leaders of educational reform among Russian Mennonites. Instead he says that the lack of enough Mennonites to complete the group accounts "for the non-Mennonite (sic) names in the group, names like Lenzmann and Lange and others" in the group. It appears that unless the names were right, they could not be Mennonites.

Plett has taken his information from a modest work by Agathe Loewen Schmidt of Kitchener (entitled *1835-1943, Gnadenfeld, Molotschna*), who in turn got her information from P.M. Friesen. Schmidt indicates that 10 Lutheran families "who in the meantime had become Mennonites" joined the trek to Russia. While she indicates their origin, she is nonetheless clear that they had already become Mennonites when the move took place in 1834. P.M. Friesen, however, is very clear. He says that under the leadership of Wilhelm Lange, a former Lutheran teacher who embraced the faith of the Mennonite flock in Brenkenhofswalde and eventually became not merely its minister but its elder, people of other faiths "streamed to his preaching." When the decision was made to move to Russia a number of other evangelical families joined the church "by baptism upon their confession of faith" (Friesen, p80) "with the permission of the royal Prussian government". Such a shift did not happen easily, since both the state church and the government normally refused to allow it. Friesen adds that "these were all families who had long attended the church and long expressed the wish to join."

This point is an important one because the Gnadenfeld church represented a new openness to others instead of the insularity which had led many to believe that being Mennonite meant belonging to a narrowly defined ethnic community. A strong case can be made that Gnadenfeld more than any Russian Mennonite community of that time encouraged openness to other Christians, openness to learning, openness to renewal of the faith, and openness to people of other cultures.

Thus, while Gnadenfeld played an unusually important role in the eventual transformation of Russian Mennonite life, especially because of its openness to spiritual renewal and to improved education, *Diese Steine* gives virtually no attention to it and the new Mennonites who were part of it are dismissed as not worthy of carrying the name.

Another example. Because he places a highly negative interpretation upon "Pietism," Plett cannot resist the temptation to insert an explanatory phrase behind his co-editor Adina Reger's account of her great-grandfather Aron Reimer, who she said had in 1899 moved to Orenburg and "served as a minister within the 'church' Mennonites and in the same year both he and his wife had been converted." Unwilling to let her description stand, Plett inserts an editorial note, "Presumably what is meant is they had been converted to the separatist-pietist faith." He doesn't respect even his co-editor.

Written vs off-the-cuff sermons

One might cite other examples of where Plett's hostility to Pietism takes him. The following appears in an essay on the Bergthal Colony, the first of the daughter colonies created in Russia (*Diese Steine*, pp333-346). In describing the life of the colony he contrasts the solid teaching in the schools and the rejection of the end-time "fables" of the separatist-pietists by the Bergthal preachers with the acceptance of such ideas by people like historian P.M. Friesen and other preachers who had gone to "European Bible schools" and elsewhere.

"Fortunately," writes Plett, unlike the conservative ministers who "carefully put together and re-wrote" their sermons, because the Pietists preached their sermons "off-the-cuff," no records remain to continue to do damage. One hates to disabuse Plett of his notions, but plenty of sermons and sermon outlines remain. Anyone familiar with the work of Mennonite Brethren itinerant ministers knows this. There are hundreds, if not thousands of such sermons extant. Many of these preachers carefully prepared sermons that they preached, sometimes memorizing the content, since they did not want to read them as they had observed it done for generations with deadening effect.

Furthermore, neither P.M. Friesen nor many others bought the millennial notions of Jung-Stilling, with which Plett seems so determined to tar everyone who embraced Pietist influences.

Still in the section on the Bergthal Colony, Elder Gerhard Wiebe is described as being "like a Moses" as he led his people out of "the danger lying ahead of them" in Russia to a new home in Canada. This is a theme that Plett has touched on in numerous places. Presumably, it was the faithful, true followers of Christ who left for the Canada in the 1870s and the ones willing to make compromises who stayed behind. In some ways such an interpretation would not be too problematic if it was simply coupled with a clear recognition that compromise and failure are possible for any group, even when it appears they passed some tests well. One outcome of Plett's stance is that he appears to show little sympathy for the history of suffering and martyrdom which the Mennonites who remained in Russia endured. On the other hand, again and again his writing conveys the sense that the suffering and hardship that the conservative Mennonites embraced in the Americas was a consequence of genuine faithfulness to Christ, even though there are many instances that might put such an interpretation into question.

To cite one example which you will not find in his book: a few years ago the entire collective spiritual leadership of the Durango Colony in Mexico and a small group of followers abandoned the colony and moved further south, taking the *Armenkasse* (treasury for the poor) with them and leaving the colony of some seven thousand people entirely without spiritual leadership. The main point of tension dividing the colony concerned whether it would be right to allow the colony to be tied into an electrical grid.

Why should we be concerned?

Why should one be concerned about the interpretation Plett is placing upon the conservative Mennonites? Perhaps there is no need to be troubled by the many forced interpretations which are rife throughout his work.

One should be concerned because the beliefs which have carried the conservative Mennonites, especially those within the Old

Colony Church groups, to new homes in Mexico, Bolivia, Paraguay and in a great many cases back to Canada again, have left these people at a tremendous disadvantage. A large percentage are functionally illiterate. U of M geographer Leonard Sawatzky estimates as many as 70 percent or more have been leaving their schools without an ability to read and write. Virtually all of their learning has been rote. Their language skills in the language of the countries in Latin America that they live in are so poor that they cannot adequately deal with the societies around them and their institutions. The Mennonites of Cuauhtemoc, one of the most progressive groups among the Mennonite in Mexico, created a credit union of which they are justifiably proud. Yet virtually all of the staff other than the management are Spanish. Old Colony villages could not supply the staff. And the culture created in the colonies would not encourage young Mennonite women to work in such a setting.

The social problems among the conservative groups are great. A note in a recent issue of the *Mennonitische Post* suggested that as many as 50 percent of the young people in Mexico are experimenting with drugs. Alcoholism is a major problem. The rebellion of the young people takes forms that indicate the limited horizons with which the communities struggle. Racing and spinning circles with half-tons, drinking, experimenting with drugs, engaging in sexual activity (incest is a serious problem, says a well-known anthropologist who knows the colonies well), are some. The church, on the other hand, has often discouraged young people from gathering to sing choruses and hymns, to conduct Bible studies or to carry on with organized sports, because these weren't done in the past.

Because the church has embraced retaining the practices of the past as one of its key values, for many Old Colony churches virtually any change becomes almost impossible. Though a good many have already made changes against church wishes, rubber tires were wrong because they made travelling into the city easier. Electricity was wrong because it connected the community to the world. Anyone who wasn't part of the church community was a part of the world, even other Mennonites. People who left Mexico for Canada, even if they joined Old Colony churches here, or went to groups in Mexico, were excommunicated, causing great pain and in many cases leaving people here unable to join anywhere.

In Bolivia, where some of the colonies have struggled very hard to survive, individual farmers have had to give up trying to succeed on their landholdings. A recent issue of the *Mennonitische Post* states that "dozens" had been ex-communicated by their church leaders for going to work for Bolivians, because that too is against church teaching. They can't work for "people of the world."

Studies have shown too that because of their rapid growth (the 7000-8000 who left Canada in the 1920s now have probably 140,000 descendants) more and more of the people in Mexico and Bolivia are landless. Their population has doubled every 15 years and a bit. If world population had grown at the same rate, we would have 30 billion people on the planet. That is part of the reason many have returned to Canada. Even the land once held by small landholders is increasingly moving into the hands of large landholders.

Thus it is curious that even though in numerous places and in *Diese Steine* too (pp229, 248*)* Plett refers to an Abraham F. Thiessen, who advocated for the landless in Russia and was exiled to Siberia for his efforts, where it concerns the landless now, he is curiously silent. Where Thiessen is concerned, Plett is quite ready to reproach Mennonite society for not acknowledging Thiessen's critique. But he cannot somehow concede that the Old Colony church might be contributing to the problem today. He can't see how the very attitudes and practices he praises might be creating the problems for which he has so roundly condemned the mainstream Mennonite leadership in Russia. Indeed, he has even criticized MCC for the work it has done in Mexico as it has attempted to address exactly such needs.

Summary of church history

Plett has become so convinced of his own interpretation of the truth among Mennonites that he even provides us with a summary of the history of the church from its early beginnings, writing it so that it will reinforce his view that the Old Colony and Kleinegemeinde Mennonites represent true "evangelical Christianity" while others somehow represent a corruption of that faith.

As a result he has arrived at a number of very strange conclusions. (Again, one would not be terribly concerned if he wasn't making such an effort to feed this into conservative Mennonite communities in Mexico and elsewhere where it will only serve to perpetuate what have been highly damaging perspectives.) It has many very misleading statements. Just a few will suffice to illustrate.

For example, he tries to define what he is says is the "evangelisch-zentrischen Glauben" [the evangel-centred faith] of the conservative Mennonites in contrast to the "Evangelikelen--einer bestimmten amerikanischen ethnokulturellen religioesen Bewegung" [Evangelicals--a certain American ethno-cultural religious movement]. The one, he argues represents true biblical Christianity and the other is something ethno-cultural and clearly a deviation from the faith of the early Christian church.

One does not need to argue that everything about North American evangelical Christianity is okay in order to see the nonsense in what Plett is claiming. If anything has characterized American evangelicalism it has been its willingness to embrace people of many ethnic backgrounds. No other Christian movement worldwide in the last half century has been as effective in bringing new people into the household of Christian faith as evangelicalism. In many places individual churches often have people of dozens of different nationalities. It surely takes a huge twist of logic to put people who have literally fled from those of other backgrounds forward as a model of evangelical Christianity while writing off evangelicalism as a narrow "ethno-cultural movement."

Another example. Plett picks on the famous Scopes "monkey trial" of the '20s to try to illustrate the obscurantism of fundamentalism and its offspring evangelicalism, to which, he writes, Mennonite groups like the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference and the Evangelical Mennonite Conference have succumbed, but the Mexican Mennonites didn't (p632). The implication would be that Mexican Mennonites would have been on the side of the angels in the Scopes trial, would not have embraced a six day creation, could have accepted evolutionary origins, etc., etc.

Many of the criticisms that Plett levels at contemporary evangelicalism could be accepted if he had the ability to temper his language or make distinctions between voices or groups, or if he had the honesty to acknowledge the serious problems in his conservative colony Mennonite backyard. But he constantly demonizes the one while lauding the other. Targets in the persons of Jimmy Swaggert, Jim and Tammy Bakker, Jack Van Impe, Jerry Falwell or Hal Lindsey and others are huge. But they are only a part of the story. If some have embraced aberrations because of their preoccupation with prophecy, their over-readiness to support Israel, their leaning toward success theologies and consumerism, their militarism, or their easy acceptance of cultural norms, others have moved in quite different directions. These have given themselves and their resources gladly for a world in need, they've learned to use the media responsibly to convey a witness for Christ and the gospel, they've begun countless ministries to respond to the needs of their world, they've built schools, and they've welcomed large numbers of people into the household of faith.

This balance is missing in Plett's writings and notably in *Diese Steine* too. By haranguing and assaulting the Pietist, evangelical influences as he does and in turn exalting the Old Colony-Kleine Gemeinde teaching and practice, he is doing the Old Colony people in particular a great disservice. Their needs are so great and so urgent that one could reasonably argue that his flood of publications are harming the Old Colony people more than they're helping. They are obscuring what should be a great concern to the entire Mennonite church family. And that is the tragedy.

Last revision:
Harold Jantz
February 6, 2006

The writer is former editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* and founding editor of *Christian Week,* a national evangelical newspaper. He also serves on the board of Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

Response

Since Delbert Plett is gone, and not able to respond, let me make a few comments.

Harold, in your letter you raise some good

questions that deserve consideration. Delbert himself, was interested in divergent views, and solicited them, even if he did not always accept them. You are right in observing that Plett wrote history with a particular bias, and presented an interpretation that many people within the pietist/evangelical orientation found grating. The reason why Plett wrote from such a strong anti-evangelical view point was because he felt that most Mennonite history had been written from a strong anti-conservative bias, and he wanted to correct the imbalance.

Your letter itself reflects some of the imbalance of previous historians, against which Plett wrote. In the discussion of Mennonites in Russia, you say that, "Yet it is quite unlikely that renewal would have come to Russian Mennonites without the influence of Pietism." This statement is a value judgment written from within the Pietist stream. It negatively judges those who were not Pietist, and ignores their genuine efforts of reform and renewal. Subsequent parts of the letter characterize the conservatives as narrow, ethnic, and closed. The letter makes little attempt to understand them from within their own perspective.

In the latter part of the letter, in the discussion of the Old Colonists and Kleine Gemeinde in Latin America, their faults are lifted out. You discuss them from the standpoint of an evangelical outsider, noting their failures and weaknesses. However, little attempt is made to see their genuine strengths.

Essentially, from this letter I gather that your main problem with Plett is not that Plett criticizes the evangelicals, nor that he sees the conservatives through rose-coloured glasses, nor that he tries to correct an imbalance of historical interpretations. Your primary problem with Plett is that you are unwilling to accept Plett's view that the conservatives' understanding of faith in Jesus Christ is legitimate and genuine. Is this view not arrogant and self-righteous?

If you would be willing to acknowledge that the conservatives' view of being Christian is a valid biblical view, then fruitful discussions about problems and weaknesses in both the pietist/evangelical and conservative churches could be undertaken. Then the questions and problems that you legitimately raise about the Old Colony Churches in Mexico and elsewhere, could be discussed, not within a context where one side is assumed to be right and the other wrong, one Christian and the other false, but where both can learn from each other.

- John J. Friesen, co-editor.

To the Board of the D.F Plett Historical Foundation,

It is very difficult for me to write this email. I have tried to "cool-off" for about two weeks now but every time I open the December 2005 issue of *Preservings*, my temperature rises. Here's my 'BEEF':

Several years ago, I was approached by the late Mr. Delbert Plett about writing an article about Faith Mission (FriedensBote) Inc for the *Preservings* paper. I did submit my article and some pictures to Mr. Plett. I don't remember exactly what all transpired but I do remember several telephone conversations with the late Mr. Plett where we discussed Faith Mission, our purpose, our activities here in Canada as well as our mission in the FSU. I thought we were off to a good start but after I had submitted my article to Delbert, he rewrote most of it, adding information which he assumed to be correct and changing the wording to suit his "extreme conservative views." After proof-reading the final copy, I again discussed some of these discrepancies with Mr. Plett, hoping to get him to correct the copy to the original meanings as I had written them.

However I soon realized that he was not prepared to make these changes so I told him, in no uncertain terms, that we did not want any part in his *Preservings.* We did not want the Faith Mission name to appear in the paper. I also mentioned at that time that we as the Old Colony Church of Manitoba would not be offended at all if we would not receive any more of his "Free Literature." (It was at this time that we came across some small tracts from Delbert. I do not know what it was called, but I believe it was about some Mexican young people going to their Bishop for some spiritual help.) I know that the leadership in the Old Colony Church was very disappointed about this false teaching.

Well, you are probably wondering what was wrong with his version of the article. To start off, Delbert always came back to the fact of the "**Old_Colony" - Faith Mission**. I told him, again and again, that Faith Mission had absolutely nothing to do with the Old Colony Church. We have a five man Board of Directors. Yes, three are from the Old Colony Church, one Sommerfeld Mennonite Church member, and one Reinland Mennonite Church. We are incorporated as a separate charity with no church affiliation in our by-laws.

Another issue I had with Delbert was about the way he always managed to glorify the Old Colony Church, no matter where it was, in Manitoba, Mexico, Bolivia, or wherever. I am a member of the Old Colony Church of Manitoba and I know for a fact that our church has as many, if not more, problems than any other church. Delbert was also one of those extreme traditional legalists who believed that we can not have assurance of salvation as the Bible teaches. They believe we can only live by the hope that we shall be with Jesus in eternity. (I understand Delbert did feel the joy of the assurance of salvation just before he passed away. Praise the Lord!)

Now for the current issue that we need to rectify! Where did you get your facts as printed on page 20 of the December 2005 *Preservings*? Did you dig them out of the back of Delbert's filing cabinet or garbage bin? It looks to me like some of this is possibly from the same information that I threw out a number of years ago. However, I have a couple of questions: (1) Who is 'another well-informed source in Winkler?' (2) Where are the seven Old Colony Congregations in Canada? (3) Please provide the scripture reference that makes "it clear that affusion is THE biblical mode" of baptism. (I know that we, the Old Colony use this mode but to me the Bible has never been very "clear" in defining one mode over another.) (3) Yes, we do distribute our humanitarian Aid through the Baptist churches of Ukraine, Georgia, Estonia, Moldova, etc. but the teaching and preaching of the EChBc of the FSU is much closer to the teaching and preaching of the Old Colony church here in Canada than any 'Mennonite' mission abroad that we know of. We have been richly blessed and honoured to be able to work with them for the last 15 years. (4) You mention that 'something seems to be wrong.' I agree something is wrong. I would suggest the 'WRONG' as being page 20 in the December 2005 *Preservings*. The whole article was obviously written to stir up controversy.

We, the Faith Mission Board would like to sit down with 'some' of the Preservings Board of Directors and discuss this misleading information. Possibly we could agree on something positive about the work that Faith Mission is doing.

Yours sincerely,
Jake M. Elias - Manager of Operations
Faith Mission (FriedensBote) Inc.
Winkler, Manitoba

Response by Abe Rempel, Winkler

John Friesen, co-editor of *Preservings,* asked me to respond to the email since I am a board member on the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, which publishes *Preservings*. I am also from the Winkler area, thus making me somewhat more familiar with the situation.

First, Elias mentions that every time he reads this article, his temperature rises. This presumably means that he is angry or upset, because of remarks made by a different person. This is not a Christian attitude, as the Bible teaches us to be meek, patient, and refrain from anger.

One of the duties of the Plett Foundation Board is to continue the publication of *Preservings*. The attempt is to provide interesting reading material, with most of it having a link to the conservative Mennonites who migrated to Canada in the 1870s. In the past, numerous articles and books have been written about the conservative Mennonites, portraying their way of life. However, many authors wrote very negative articles about them, and the positive side was ignored or overlooked. This was a concern of Delbert Plett, and he felt the positive must also be exposed. There is still considerable interest for the *Preservings*, as inquiries have been coming in regarding the publication of the next issue. However, if there are some churches on our mailing list not interested in receiving it, then we should remove them from our mailing list.

The Bible teaches in Matthew 7:11, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." To use statements that these who live in hope and trust of receiving eternal life "are extreme traditional legalists," is very judgmental. We know that if our faith will

have been genuine to life's end, then we will receive salvation, but our faith will be judged on Judgment Day. The last verse of I Corinthians 13 says that we are supposed to have faith, hope, and love. There are so many different beliefs about salvation in the world today, that one often needs to pray that the Lord will grant one the true faith in Jesus Christ so that one will be able to inherit eternal life.

Many of the Amish Mennonites also have the same beliefs we do. I quote from page 31 of the book *Amish Life*, "To assert that one can be sure of going to heaven is to the Amish people a manifest boasting. This teaching is disruptive to the community, for it places individual experience above the community. Humility, submissiveness, and hope are the accepted indicators of godliness in waiting for the Great Judgment."

I have also had discussions regarding this issue with many church ministers in Canada, U.S.A, Mexico, Bolivia, and Paraguay. They all agree on this issue. In the Bible we can read of the prayer of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee, in his prayer, indicates that he is a righteous man and the publican asks for forgiveness of sins. The problem was the Pharisee was not righteous, because his prayer was not accepted by God. In Matthew 7:21-23 we can also read that on Judgment Day many will go last that were so sure of their salvation. They will try to convince the Lord by telling him all the good they have done. In Matthew 25 we can read that the true believers will ask, "Lord, when have we done this or that for you?" They will feel humble and meek, and had not given any thought that they had been doing good works.

Also, many of our ancestors had the same faith, in trust and hope, to receive salvation, and I think Elias also had the same faith. So we need to be more careful about this issue. I could quote more examples from scripture, but leave it at this for now.

In answer to some of Elias's questions:

1. I do not know to whom Delbert refers. I have discussed church history with Delbert numerous times, but know very little about faith missions.

2. The seven Old Colony congregations at that time were:

a. Fort St. John area, B.C., Bishop John Bueckert

b. La Crete, Alberta, Bishop John Klassen

c. Vauxhall, Alberta, Bishop Jacob Giesbrecht

d. Worseley, Alberta, Bishop Benjamin Wolfe

e. Saskatoon, Sask., Bishop Peter Wolfe, now Bishop Aron Neufeld

f. Winkler area, MB, Bishop Peter Wiebe

g. Southern Ontario, Bishop Cornelius Enns (deceased), and now Bishops Herman Bergen and Peter Zacharias

Recently, the Old Colony Church in Manitoba has split. We are the German Old Colony Mennonite Church, and our Bishop is John P. Wiebe. We partner with all the other churches listed above, plus the Old Colony congregations in the U.S.A. The other Old Colony Church in Manitoba, of which Jake Elias is a member, is standing alone.

3. About baptism: Matthew 3:11 says, "I baptize you with water." It does not say "in" the water. In Acts 10 we read the story of Cornelius. After preaching, Peter asks, "can anybody forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" They probably wouldn't have had something ready for immersion, but we believe that they were baptized by affusion. I could list more examples pointing to baptizing by pouring on the head. However, our church recognizes both, and we cannot agree with the Baptist minister that it has to be by immersion. Whether all Baptist congregations are set on baptism by immersion, I do not know. I only know about the Winkler Baptist Church.

So, hopefully, this letter will provide some answers to the questions alluded to in the above letter

Rev. Abraham Rempel
Minister of the German Old Colony Mennonite Church
Board member of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation

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Letter to the Editor - Preservings 06

Helene Wiens (Janzen) – Kyrgyzstan

(Editor's note. This letter (a translation of the German original) was written to Delbert Plett, co-editor of *Diese Steine* by Helena Wiens in Kyrsyzstan. Although it is not a direct response to *Preservings*, the letter is included here as one person's response to Delbert Plett's extensive work in making historical writings widely available at relatively little cost. Since this letter comes from within the former Soviet Union, where historical materials were difficult to acquire, this letter is special.)

English translation

To Delbert Plett, the publisher of the book *Diese Steine, Die Russlandmennoniten*. I am Helene Wiens (Janzen), born 1937.

Greetings, Dear brother!

I would like to share with you my joy and heartfelt gratitude for this book. We received it from my husband's cousin, Elvira Voth, in Steinbach. I recently read the entire book. Yes, not only did I read it, more accurately, I studied it. Carefully looked at every photo and read what was written underneath the picture. I also studied each map. These are very necessary to gain a full understanding of where our forbears used to live.

My parents were both from the Zaporoshye area. My mother (Anna Berg) was born in the Molotsch, (village Friedensruh), and my father, Jacob Janzen in Blumenfeld, although I do not know in which colony.

And when I read the book, *Diese Steine* (Chapter 58), I discovered that the four Janzen families who in the 1840s settled in Petershagen on an estate, which was part of Blumenfeld, were my forbears.

My great grandfather Johann Janzen was three years old when his family settled in the Schoenfeld colony on the estate near Blumenfeld. And this Johann Janzen's great grandfather, also a Johann Janzen, came from Prussia in 1804, and founded the village of Petershagen. (Chapter 43)

I was glad when I discovered this in the book. And then I had many questions, because I wanted to know more. But whom should I ask? Then I thought of writing to Germany, where one relative of the Janzen's was still living (83 years old). And from him I received answers to all my questions about my grandmother's and father's younger years. In addition, a family history of the Janzen family (1752-1905). I was very happy, and it agreed with what was written in *Diese Steine*, chapters 43 and 58.

And now the book has become even more valuable for me. I read it slowly, a little every day, in order to better understand and retain it.

We lived in circumstances where such books were simply not available to us. To God be thanks that things are different now.

I am very thankful that the Lord finds people who make the effort to gather such documents and publish books in order that Mennonites will be able to know their story better. The Lord will reward them for the huge task that they have done.

I am so happy that this book came to me. Unfortunately, most Mennonites have left for Germany, although a few are still here, including a sister in our church. She could hardly wait until I could give her the book to read. I hope that the book, *Diese Steine*, will also be read in Germany, since there are so many Mennonites from Russia, who are interested in the story of their people.

My father was five years old when Peter H. Enns, the minister, became teacher in Blumenfeld. Thus he was Peter H. Enns' student. It is too bad that I cannot read the recollections about him, since I do not have them. My grandfather had a mill in Blumenfeld, and unfortunately died at age 39 from cholera. In 1917 the revolution came, and in 1919, when my husband (she likely meant her father) was 14 years of age, the estate families had to flee and leave their homes forever. He was only 18 years of age when he became minister. Spoke the word when all lived in fear. The churches were closed, so he spoke at funerals. Was without a vote and a home; had to flee frequently to stay alive. Those were his years as a youth. He died in Bischket (likely also in Kyrgystan) in 1976. Served as preacher until the end of his life.

Again, thanks for the book. Yes, if only these stones could speak! But we look forward to seeing each other again, and that is comforting.

Greetings,
Helene Wiens (Janzen)
Kyrgyzstan 1 October 2005

Letter to Editor

The December issue of *Preservings* brought

sadness. The first sadness is that Delbert Plett has passed away. We are indebted to his passion and hard work in preserving Mennonite history. The second sadness was the article entitled *Delbert Plett's Final Words.* It contained strong words against those who disagreed with his viewpoint, as he has presented it in *Preservings* over the last few years. We all have our personal biases, but an academic journal is not the place for them. We hope fervently that articles in *Preservings* can move toward greater objectivity.

Ken and Carolee Neufeld, Winnipeg

Dear Ken and Carolee Neufeld,

Thanks for your letter and for your expressions of sadness. Many will miss Delbert Plett's passion for Mennonite history, his vision of a biblically based understanding of the Christian faith, his ability to include a wide range of the Mennonite community in his readership, and his strong conviction that the faith of the so-called conservatives in the Mennonite community should be treated with respect. Since most of the conservatives did not speak up on their own behalf, he took up their cause.

This brings me to your second expression of sadness, namely, Delbert Plett's strong words in the articles he wrote toward the end of his life, and which were included in *Preservings* No. 25 as his final words. These words were included because it seemed appropriate to respect his final expressions of concern. These words were also consistent with his writings in earlier editions of *Preservings*. He drew attention to the gross injustice done to the faith of conservatives, and believed that this could not be done by a carefully nuanced approach. No one would take note, nor catch the seriousness of the problem. His critical tone was part of the message - form and content were interrelated. Delbert appreciated vigorous debate on the issues he raised, but he wanted people to be clear about what point he was making, and he did not want to be ignored. And in this I think he was successful. People did sit up and take notice, as is evidenced by his wide readership.

John J. Friesen
co-editor Preservings

To the Editor:

I was disappointed to see that there was some unauthorized editing done on my G.K. Epp book review. As a result, I think you should print the following as a note in the next *Preservings*:

"The last sentence, second paragraph, of my review of G.K. Epp's 3 volume series suggests that I, the reviewer, believe that the complete separation of religious and civil spheres is a "necessary good". This is not at all what I said in my original version of the review. I stated that this was a theme of the series (G.K. Epp) itself. I, myself, expressed no such view, indeed, in the context of the traditionalist Mennonite community, I rather think the opposite."

Henry Schapansky, British Columbia

D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc.

2006-2007 Board of Directors

Preservings

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John J. Friesen, telephone: (204) 487-3300, email: jjfriesen@cmu.ca

Dear Friends:

With this mailing, the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation is pleased to be able to provide another issue of *Preservings.* Through it we hope to continue the vision of Delbert Plett to help readers better to understand and appreciate their Mennonite heritage. Our plans are to continue to produce *Preservings*.

There are of course considerable costs incurred in preparing, editing, printing and mailing this journal. We invite all readers to assist in covering the costs by subscribing on the form attached below. The subscription fee is $20.00 per year.

We also invite you to contribute articles, biographies, or news. You may know of people whose story should be told in these pages. Maybe grandparents, relatives, or neighbours' stories would be of interest to our readers. Please contact us about writing such stories, or let us know who might be able to do so. We depend upon many willing writers for the content of the paper.

Blessings to you.
Sincerely,
John J. Friesen and Hans Werner, co-editors for *Preservings*

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Book Reviews

Harry Loewen, *Between Worlds: Reflections of a Soviet-born Canadian Mennonite* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2006). Softcover; 358 pages; ISBN 1-894710-63-0; Bibliography, Index; $35.00 Cdn. $31.50 US.

Reviewed by Hans Werner, University of Winnipeg

The life story of a professor hardly seems to be the kind of book that a reader would immediately be drawn to. In fact, a history professor is often offered as the perfect example of an uninteresting life. So faced with the prospect of reading the memoirs of professor Harry Loewen, the former Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, one naturally wonders how exciting it really could be. Loewen's story, however soon captures the reader's interest, not only for its personal drama, but also as an interesting look into how his thinking developed on questions of history, Mennonites, and the wider church.

Loewen was born in the Soviet Union, and in 1937 at the age of six he lost both father and grandfather to the Stalinist terror. During World War II the Loewen family, now headed by Harry's mother, survived the trek out of the Soviet Union into Nazi Germany and then came to Canada in 1948. Loewen's family settled in Coaldale, Alberta where Harry became active in the local Mennonite Brethren Church. Harry and Gertrude Penner were married in 1953 and, along with starting a family, the next years were spent between Winnipeg and Kitchener pursuing further studies interspersed with teaching and pastoral assignments. In 1978, Harry became the first holder of the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, a position he held until he retired to Kelowna in 1995. Tragedy struck the Loewens when they lost their retirement home and almost all their possessions, including most of his collection of books in the fires that swept through parts of Kelowna in the summer of 2003. The book ends with a sample of essays written by Loewen that elaborate the themes that he alludes to in his life story and that were important in elaborating his thoughts.

It is readily apparent how Loewen's personal experiences influenced his thinking on many questions later in life. His experience of Nazism during World War II seems to have developed a strong need to warn any who would listen of the wrongness of anti-Semitism. The loss of his father and the resulting influence of his mother seem to weigh heavily upon his later approaches to the challenges of loss, forgiveness, and injustice. Loewen does, however, allow his later thinking to impose upon his understandings of the events of these formative years to a considerable extent. After all, he was eight or nine years old when the war broke out and a youthful fifteen when it was over. His interpretation of these events would seem to reflect much more his later views than his consciousness at the time. While Loewen acknowledges this tendency in the preface where he suggests, "recollections of events of past years, …have been shaped by my later imagination," he only marginally addresses the problems that realization poses for his story (p7-8).

No less interesting is the story of how Loewen's thinking progressed on questions of the Christian life, the church, and being Mennonite. Here Loewen continues to keep tightly to the biblical injunction to not attempt to remove the sliver out of the neighbour's eye when a beam blinds one's own eye. Loewen reserves his sharpest criticism for his own Mennonite Brethren. He accuses them of not remaining true to their Anabaptist theological origins; he chastises them for their willingness to be influenced by North American religious currents (p147) and accuses them of being judgmental and intrusive in their approach to personal lifestyles and practices (p 229). In contrast, Loewen is generous in his approach to the more conservative groups. Although there is only one anecdote about actual interaction with Amish, he concludes that the more conservative groups have in many ways better preserved their Anabaptist roots than his Mennonite Brethren coreligionists (p 227). Loewen is nevertheless clear that the life of the conservatives is not for him. It is here where the reader might well ask for more reflection. Although he devotes an entire chapter to the question, the reader is still left wondering how he resolved respect for the conservative point of view on the one hand while challenging his coreligionists to be less 'conservative' in their judgements of personal lifestyles.

On the whole the book is classic Harry Loewen. As a former student of the Professor, the text rings true to the tone of his lectures; the questions he asked in his classes are revisited again here, as are the debates in which he participated. Loewen did live between worlds, not only in the events of his life, but also in the development of his ideas about faith and life, Mennonites and history.

Irmgard Epp, ed. *Constantinoplers: Escape from Bolshevism* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2006), pb., 370 pp. $29.95 CND.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg

The story of how the Civil War after the First World War in the Soviet Union ended with the flight of the last several hundred thousand people from the Crimean peninsula to Constantinople, is known to many. But first hand accounts of the fortunate individuals who managed to save their lives that way, are less readily available. This volume, prepared by the author in tribute to her father, Cornelius Heinrich Epp, contains several dozen stories about the experience that reflect with deep pathos the often desperate actions of, and personal feelings about, that traumatic escape.

The first two accounts, written by Gerhard Wiens and John P Unruh, include useful background material to create a context for the story of Mennonite soldiers who fought in the White Army under General Wrangel. They also relate how some of them managed to emigrate from the Soviet Union via Sevastopol and Constantinople. Extensive accounts by Peter Gerz, John J. Dyck, and Peter D Froese deal with experiences in the army. While these do not provide a systematic account of what happened during the final year and months of White Army resistance to the Reds, they do give significant windows for understanding what Mennonite soldiers had to contend with in military service during that relatively short, but fateful, period.

The episode of the so-called *Selbstschutz* (Self-defense militia) is not central to these reports. However, it is clearly the most immediate background for Mennonite involvement in the White Army. It was the termination of the *Selbstschutz* that led to a harsh Red Army prosecution of all Mennonites who had been part of the *Selbstschutz*, even though that body intended to oppose only the Makhno forces, not the Red Army itself. This prosecution led to the flight of hundreds southward from the Molotschna into the Crimean peninsula as the Civil War came to an end.

Part Three, titled " The Hollanders' Desperate Flight," begins with an account of a reunion of " Constantinoplers," in Yarrow, B.C., in June, 1952. It was here that a decision was made to collect written stories about that fateful experience, and the task was begun. Then follow a dozen more stories, in the course of which one learns about the refugee situation in Constantinople. Here MCC set up a refugee centre which could serve the escapees for several years. It become a gathering point to make plans for moving to permanent new homes, some in Europe, but mostly in North America. The oft-told story of the "62", a group of young Mennonite soldiers of the White Army who made it together to the United States, belongs to this chapter of the story.

The final section of the book brings in accounts of a number of people (not all White Army ex-soldiers) who did not leave via the Crimea, but went first to Batum and then traveled to Constantinople to leave the Soviet Union with the others. The harrowing experiences of delay at Ellis Island in the United States form a distinctive part of this experience.

It is interesting to note that the several dozen accounts do not include much reflection on the problem that going into active military service created for Mennonites who were historically pacifist. It seems fairly clear that the self-defense initiative during Makhno times, once tacitly or even openly sanctioned by leading Mennonite ministers and teachers (see Dr. Abraham Friesen's recent book, *In Defense of Privilege)* seemed to leave the door wide open to take up arms. The Mennonites of that time did not seem to recognize that this action compromised their historic understanding of the Christian faith.

The material is now at hand to write a more comprehensive history of this part of the Mennonite story. In this book the material is still in fragments, but this material along with other studies, e.g. the story of the refugee home at Constantinople, will make it possible to tell a more integrated story. The editor is to be commended for managing an impres-

sive collection of data. Trafford Publishers has done a very creditable job in getting the book published. Maps, e.g. the one on the cover, photos, and a readable type font enhance the book. To obtain the book contact aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

Hermann Heidebrecht, *Auf dem Gipfel des Lebens*, Christlicher Missions-Verlag, Bielefeld, 2004. 288 pages.

Reviewed by Helen Kornelsen

From a stable boy to professor, from dreamer to martyr. This biography of Jakob Aron Rempel is a most fitting tribute to a highly significant man among the Mennonites in Russia. He was a brilliant scholar, a sacrificial, dedicated Elder and a courageous and fearless leader. His faith in God was his source of strength in all the variable circumstances of his life.

Jacob Rempel lived in the chaotic, turbulent times of World War I, the Russian Revolution, the overthrow of the Czar and government, and the suppression of all Christian endeavors and institutions under Communism. In the end he died a martyr.

As the eldest of ten children in a poor family, he went to work at an early age to help support his family. He was a stable boy, with a manure fork in hand. The prospects of an education for this seventeen year old appeared very limited, indeed. Nevertheless, he nurtured lofty dreams - dreams of obtaining a thorough education; to some day become a teacher or a missionary. To that end he used every available means for self-study.

The break came when he was invited to teach the children of a Mennonite farmer in Novo-Shitomir, a village in the Judenplan. The next step led to a teaching position in a public school in Orenburg, thanks to the assistance of an uncle. Here he upgraded himself on the side and learned the Russian language. With a teacher's certificate in hand, he returned to Ukraine.

Johann Thiessen, a wealthy millowner and editor of *Botschafter,* offered a stipend to a worthy student to study abroad in the Evangelische Predigerschule (ministers' training school) in Basel, Switzerland. Jakob applied and was accepted. Thanks to his generous sponsor, he was able to continue his studies in Basel from 1906 to 1911. While in the University of Basel, he taught Greek and Church History. He was approaching his doctoral exam when due to his mother's critical illness he was called home. He was never again to return to Basel.

He was appointed teacher at the Chortitza Zentral Schule in the summer of l912. In 1914 he married Maria Sudermann. Two years later he was invited to fill the position of minister in the Neu Chortitza congregation. This was the largest congregation in Ukraine, comprising 22 villages in an area of more than 3,000 square miles, with an active membership of 3,200 and a total of 8,000 persons to serve. Jakob later commented that these years were the happiest years of his life.

Its duration, however, was short. World War I entered the scene. The Russian Revolution swept all normalcy of life aside. Pressures from the Communist government made life and ministry uncertain and dangerous. Hard times had come.

Included was the shattering blow of his wife's death from the Spanish flu in 1918. In 1920 he was ordained Elder of the Neu Chortitza congregation. At the same time an invitation to be Professor of German at the University of Moscow caused Rempel an intense inner struggle. He chose the Eldership to that of an academic career.

In 1922 he was appointed chairman of the Commission for Church Affairs (Kommission fuer Kirchliche Gelegenheiten). With this appointment, his responsibilities were multiplied and took him away from home and family. It was less worrisome after his marriage to Sophie, his first wife's younger sister, but it was still stressful to be away so much. His position called for repeated negotiations with government officials. These negotiations were both unpleasant and dangerous. His consolation over the matter was expressed in a letter, "I thank God that I have been able to witness to my faith to anti-Christians."

On January 13, 1925 he was able to officially open the final *Bundeskonferenz* (Confederation of Mennonite Congregations). There he was elected delegate to the first World Mennonite Conference to be held in Basel in June 1925. While waiting for his visa, he toured the Mennonite churches in Germany, preaching and consulting with other ministers in reference to Mennonite congregations in Russia. The three months of waiting ended in denial of the visa.

Upon his return from Germany, Rempel was fully convinced that the political pressures upon him and the Christian churches was increasing. He was asked why he had not stayed in Germany and called his family to join him there. He stated simply, "I could not leave my congregation." In 1929 he, too, agreed to emigrate with his family. The Rempels joined the thousands of Mennonites streaming into Moscow with the sole purpose of obtaining a visa to leave Russia. November 16, 1929 he was arrested.

A lengthy road of sorrow and suffering, prison and exile, followed. He wrote to his beloved Sophie, "I have reached the summit of my life." His letters explained his situation, courage and total commitment to God's will. While in exile he attempted to escape on several occasions, but was rearrested sooner or later. Part of his suffering was his great longing for his family. He was shot September 21, 1941 in the prison yard of Orjol.

Included in this biography, and parallel to Jakob Rempel's experiences, are many historical events and sights, both in Russia and wherever he travelled. The author has ably described the relationship of the Mennonites under the Soviet Union, especially as a result of World War I, and how it affected the Rempel family. The reader will be convinced of Jakob Rempel's dedication to God and his people. Seldom is the history of Mennonites in Russia so well illustrated in one man's life experiences.

The book, written in German, is published in Germany. Hopefully it will be translated into English some time soon to enable readers in Canada to be enriched by the life and ministry of Jakob Aron Rempel.

Ronald Friesen. *When Canada Called: Manitoba Mennonites and World War II* (Winnipeg: by the author, 2006), pb., 353 pp. 15.00 CDN

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg

Fortuitously, this volume arrived in the public domain just as the final touches were being put to the CO Conference sponsored by the Chair of Mennonite Studies, and several other groups at the University of Winnipeg in late October, 2006. That conference gave the theme a good deal of new publicity, and the rising total of Canadian deaths in the Afghanistan war makes the question of appropriate involvement pertinent to our times and daily experience.

This volume begins by summarizing the context at the start of World War II, discussing the early meetings of Mennonites about how to respond to the situation, and leads us helpfully to look once more at the larger question of whether to join the killing, or "conscientiously object," the view that was central for Mennonites at the time. Judge Adamson as "arbiter" of exemption claims from military involvement, gets an almost larger than life treatment. Then follows a review of the various aspects of life which would call for ongoing evaluation and decision-making for Mennonites wondering how to respond – the Victory Bonds (which many Mennonites purchased), rationing for all, agriculture during war-time (the war was a real boost for farmers, as it turned out – my father's farming included), and, of course, the enlistment of thousands of Mennonite men in the armed forces (some members of congregations, others not) , with thousands of others taking a CO stand (not always from personal conviction, to be sure).

The "stout-hearted men and women" taking a CO position at the time are represented in the book by a group from southeastern Manitoba. Brief sketches of civilian service rendered by a number of individuals are included. One notices a somewhat larger profile, often up to an entire-chapter, for the men who joined the active forces (pp.223 - 326) as compared with the COs (pp. 141 – 210). It is certainly in order that both groups be represented in the total picture of Manitoba Mennonite participation in the war effort. There is actually still much room for more analysis of why this "great divide" presented itself as it did, even though men did have to make a choice of one or the other. It was indeed a reality, as the author notes, and one that Mennonites still have not quite come to terms with.

It is also a reality, one could observe, that the veterans of Mennonite background have managed to create a larger public profile of memory of their involvement (plaques, cairns, memorial services) in Mennonite communities, as compared to the COs who seem to have found it more difficult, and perhaps less necessary, to place their work and convictions on record in this manner. Further research on the reasons for the "conviction cleft" (to kill or not to kill), might bring forth reasons for this also. This is something Friesen may work on as he pursues this study further in the coming years.

What he does touch on at the outset, and again might explore further, is how the newspapers in Mennonite communities (*Steinbach Post*, *Morden Times*, *The Carillon News*, the newly-created

Altona Echo, etc) placed themselves in the middle of this activity, often supporting the war effort explicitly (with ads they ran, if not editorials directly), sometimes dodging the issue to a degree, but carefully avoiding opposition to the war which would endanger their existence and bring speedy reprisals. We do well to ponder how the normally tolerant and benign governmental powers of Canada quickly metamorphosed into another much more threatening face (as often the general public did also) when it chose to be part of the war itself. What really is the essential nature of governing authorities, wherever they are to be found?

Friesen has produced a very readable and thought-provoking sketch of something really important that calls for more discussion and research. As intimated earlier, the recent CO conference has indeed set such further studies in motion. The published papers, scheduled to appear later in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, and perhaps elsewhere, will demonstrate how this theme is continuing to be creatively pursued in our own circles and beyond.

Werner, Hans, ***Living Between Worlds: A History of Winkler*** (Winkler: Winkler Heritage Society), 2006.

Reviewed by Ken Reddig, Winnipeg

This is one community history book that has got it right. Most often community history books fall into traps and seek more to accommodate the members of the community who they hope will purchase the book rather than properly telling the story. The need to tell a story somewhat objectively and "critically" is not often understood. It is the quick recitation rather than the long-term impact of the book that is sought.

What makes for a good community history? There is no easy answer, but in part it is an initial critical understanding of the community, trends, people and issues that the community has encountered and addressed together. For a community such as Winkler this can be hampered by the fact that it is a community that over a long period of its history it has been largely dominated by a particular group of people with a common history and religious perspective—namely Mennonites.

Where this book has it right is in highlighting the relationships both within and outside of the many different kinds of Mennonites that made up the community as well as the relationships with those non-Mennonites who from time to time played an integral role within the economic, social or religious life of the community.

A well-told story within the book is of the interaction between early Jewish peddlers and the conservative Mennonites who made up the community initially. Of interest is the fact that the economic relationship was largely based on a barter system and it was between the Jewish peddlers and the Mennonite women. As the peddler would make his rounds in the villages outside of Winkler, he would trade cloth, pots and pans and other household necessities with the village women for eggs, chickens and garden produce that they would have grown. Later this relationship continued as some peddlers set up stores in Winkler. Of note is that Jews within the community even had a Synagogue with a Cantor. However, the Jewish community outgrew the smallness of Winkler and they began to move to other provinces or to larger urban centres such as Winnipeg in order for their children to be able to avail themselves of the better opportunities for higher education.

The book does not follow a timeline as such, but rather is broken up into thematic chapters that interweave with each other while at the same time are spread over selected time periods. This methodology allows for good interaction between the various aspects of community life and does not necessarily restrict the author from pursuing a theme to its present-day conclusion. Where often such an approach can enhance the possibility of the author engaging is repetitiveness, the author clearly takes great pains not to fall into that trap.

One of the major themes of the book is the initial beginnings of the community with a good discussion of the importance of the coming of the railroad. For communities on the prairies their survival was measured by whether or not a railroad came through their community. It was the necessary ingredient for a community to flourish on the western Canada landscape—and where it was missing it often spelled death or disaster to a new struggling and growing community. Entering this story was of course the competition with other nearby communities who either had or did not have the railroad. While the railroad was vitally important its presence did not ensure success. Nearby towns with railroads would compete for commerce particularly with the agricultural business of the regions farmers. This competition could become intense and with Winkler it was intense especially with nearby Morden. It resulted in tensions which still exist to this very day. The book contains numerous stories and anecdotes that illustrate these tensions.

The book has a good blend of text and photos. Of course, everyone would like more pictures, but the blend between good history and just another picture book of a town is well balanced. Often in reviewing some community histories one gets the sense that current inhabitants have lobbied for the picture of their grandfather, business or home and certainly name to be included. Some community histories are best-sellers because they have done just that—and their sales are not at all indicative of whether or not they are good histories. To some extent the author has acquiesced a bit in this direction when he lists all the early families and also the civic leaders. But for the most part he has developed a fine mix of photos and text that are rarely matched in histories of other communities.

Immigration played a role right from the very beginning of Winkler—and in a fascinating way immigration remains a vital ingredient in the ever-changing culture of the community Winkler today. Initially it was with Mennonites from Ukraine in post 1870 and later 1920 waves. Today it is with Mennonites from Mexico and also people with distant Mennonite backgrounds, but now largely Baptist in orientation, from Germany. In all phases of these immigrations, they have proven to be a necessary ingredient for economic survival of the community. Initially they fit into and played a significant role in the development of a thriving agricultural economy. Today it is in the skills they bring to a well-diversified manufacturing environment that has amazingly complimented the rich agriculture region within which Winkler finds itself.

Another good balance within the book are stories of how the community survived and was affected by outside influences such as the World War's and the global depression. While significantly impacted by these influences, the author notes how the community pulled together. It was during the intense economic constraints between 1920's and the 1950's that the arts, mostly in the form of performance music, flourished and gained a lasting foothold within the community through the dedicated efforts of such choral conductors like K. H. Neufeld, who eventually led workshops and conducted choirs across Canada. The arts were aided with people such as John Konrad who helped launch music festivals, orchestras and himself was a fine violinist.

A humourus anecdote related the fact that during these hard times there was also renewal within the congregations that made up the town and its immediate environs. This had its effect upon a local Jewish merchant who noted that following a particular series of revival meetings within the community, the merchant was pleasantly surprised at the number of people coming into his store to pay for goods that they had taken or to settle old accounts. The author notes that evangelist was achieving what the police and courts could not. This response so affected the merchant that he himself attended the meetings one evening just to find out what was affecting the local church attenders.

During the economic turbulence of the 20's and 30's most of the town's businesses survived, though many farmers went bankrupt. Corn became the favoured crop - as it was reasonably drought and heat resistant. Corn and other new crops and related industries sustained the agricultural community surrounding Winkler, but by the 1950's it no longer was able to keep the community vibrant.

The town was "falling behind" economically. It could no longer grow without greater diversification beyond the agricultural economy. What was needed was industrial growth. This slowly began happening and then gained momentum. Perhaps its greatest boost cam through the promotional activities and ideas of Henry F. Wiebe. As a former school teacher, then Credit union manager and later mayor, Wiebe was the promotional fire within the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber - previously the Board of Trade - had long been composed of reluctant followers, who feared the displeasure of the town. Wiebe, the author notes, was the masterful promoter and industrial expansion began on a pace that to this day is the envy of small towns and communities across Canada. The key to this expansion was making sure there was always well-serviced land available for industrial expansion. Wiebe's genius was to apply promotion with good business sense that today is the textbook standard for good community development.

The combination of good writing and good anecdotes within an engaging narrative sets this book apart from most others. Whether or not you have a connection with this vibrant community, reading this book is a delightful adventure that sweeps you up in the passage of time within one prairie community. I highly recommend it.

"The Singel Mennonite Church, Amsterdam. Note that it is a "hidden" church. Photo credit: Jan Gleysteen."

Photo of Bad Oldesloe, "Menno Kate" on a single sheet.
Caption: According to tradition, this linden tree, near Fresenburg between Hamburg and Luebeck in northern Germany, was planted by Menno Simon's himself, and the house was occupied by Menno Simon's printer. Menno lived in this area during the latter part of his life. (Credit: Jan Gleysteen collection.)