

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



The Lehrerseminar in the Chortitza Colony was built in 1912 and included a model school for practice teaching. Photo Credit: George Dyck, Beamsville, Ontario.

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In this Issue

In this issue we are taken the length and breadth of the Dutch-North German-Russian Mennonite scattering across the world and over time. Sjouke Woolstra's article about early Dutch conservatives offers rare and interesting insights that point to some conservative ways still practiced that have their origins in the 17th and 18th centuries. Woolstra died in a sailing accident in 2004 and we are indebted to Lydia Penner of the Netherlands for translating this article. The difficult times during the Soviet period were the subject of Nataly Venger's presentation at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in the spring of 2007. Venger offers an interesting perspective on the period, suggesting that if examined in the context of the Soviet regime and its time, Mennonites were remarkably successful achieving things for themselves that others could not. To be sure that ultimately also ended, but hers is an interesting and refreshing perspective. Titus Guenther's article not only helps us know Ältester Martin C. Friesen but also the history of the migration to Paraguay. Henry Schapansky sheds light on how estates in Russia came to be and how familial connections sustained and expanded them. Ralph Friesen's article explores a difficult aspect of the human condition, 'sexual sin' and how the Kleine Gemeinde dealt with specific cases. Bruce Wiebe's article brings to light new research about the securing of timber for the early settlers on the West Reserve across the border in North Dakota, while Lawrence Klippenstein adds another biographical piece to the rich contribution made by the Wiebes, in this case Heinrich Wiebe, to both East and West Reserve life. Royden Loewen's article acknowledges the 50th anniversary of Mennonite presence in Belize. Roy shows us how Spanish Lookout settlers maintained earlier traditions and developed new ways of expressing their conservative orientation in a tropical environment. Change is always part of history and Adolf Ens uses John Dyck's earlier research to give us a picture of early Mennonites who pursued higher education, while Jesse Hofer challenges the idea that Hutterites do not have a mission orientation. As always, the personal writings of our people tell their own stories. The memoirs of P.A. Elias offer an interesting window into early Bergthaler-Old Colony relations while the everyday life of a farm woman highlight the journal of Maria Voth. Altester Peter R. Dueck and the 1918 flu epidemic offer our first hint at Glen Klassen and Kimberly Penner's research on how that epidemic affected Mennonite churches. Finally, a number of new books have been reviewed by generous contributors. It is indeed a rich potpourri.

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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.

Editorial by Hans Werner

In its Summer 2006 issue, *Word Alive*, the newsletter of Wycliffe Bible Translators carried feature articles about Mennonites in Bolivia, in Germany and in Canada. The focus of the issue was on Low German speakers in these three diverse areas, and more particularly on the translation of the Bible into Low German. Wycliffe Bible Translators were instrumental in creating Daut Niehe Testament, and then later translating the complete Bible into Low German. The articles in the newsletter also included a comprehensive timeline along the bottom of its pages that outlined the course of Anabaptist history over the centuries. The timeline of Mennonite history is conveyed simply, but thoroughly and notes the migrations to Russia and then to Canada and the persistence of Low German in the varied environments where Mennonites lived.

The articles about conservative Mennonites, however, convey themes and approaches that have become all too familiar. Even the headline "Fresh Breezes in a Barren Land" sends the reader down a path that disparages the Old Colony Mennonite belief system. Those who have left the Old Colony Church are glorified and their quest for faith occupies a privileged position over that of the community they have left. While

the author is careful not to directly challenge the Old Colony Church's claim to also being a Christian community, the implication is clear. Leaving the Old Colony Church contributes to a "spiritual awakening"; those who stay "don't get the spiritual help" they need. (p 5)

To be sure, there is always a place to gather the flock that has become disenchanted with the existing order among other Mennonite groups. Mennonite history, however, forces us to acknowledge how difficult it is for Mennonite groups, be they EMMC, Berghaler, Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Church, or Old Colony to speak to those who have become disenchanted with their way of doing church. It is, however, lamentable that there is a desire to 'evangelize' our own brothers and sisters in the Old Colony Church. Particularly, it would seem, for church groups that consider themselves to be fully 'modern'. Modern in the sense that they have left behind what they consider to be antiquated agricultural methods or education systems. In some sense they may also be modern in the sense that they are so confident that their understandings of scripture, salvation, and the nature of the Christian life are 'true', while other understandings are flawed. The indictment offered by Word

Alive is sweeping, Old Colony leaders have robbed their people of "the joy and freedom found in Christ." (p 8)

While there may be much that our Old Colony brothers and sisters could learn from the more 'modern' Mennonite church, I would submit the reverse is also true. Their approach to the 'speck' in their neighbour's eye is, however different than those who feel they need to be evangelized. They quietly try to model for us a simpler lifestyle, one that respects the connection of family and church; one that recognizes that submitting to the Gemeinde is also a true dimension of the Christian community. They recognize much more clearly than some of their coreligionists the dangers of spiritual pride and the arrogance that too often accompany new approaches to the Christian life, approaches so often borrowed from North American evangelical movements and blind to how deeply they have drunk at the wells of American culture and militarism.

While working to gather the flock of disenchanted conservatives is commendable, is it necessary to disparage the community in the process? Would not an approach that walks beside conservative Mennonites as they work out their salvation be more in keeping with our joint heritage? Who knows, along the way the more 'modern' Mennonites might find useful lessons in the simple ways of our Bolivian, and other conservative brothers and sisters.

News

Conservative Swiss Mennonites Settle in Manitoba

For the past two summers the Manitoba landscape has begun to change as a new conservative Mennonite community near Gladstone, Manitoba has sprung into existence. Although media reports have referred to them as Amish, the twelve families have registered their church as the Westbourne Orthodox Mennonite Church. The group has purchased about 1,000 hectares of farmland and has begun constructing homes and barns. Although Manitoba has been home to conservative Russian Mennonites, this group of Orthodox Mennonites represents the first settlement of Swiss origin conservative Mennonites outside of Ontario. The twelve families moved to the prairies from near Walkerton, Ontario.

The Orthodox Mennonite group in Manitoba uses the Dordrecht Confession of 1632 as the basis of their faith. The confession is included with other writings in a booklet published in English in 1984 from which

they derive their preaching and teaching. The book also includes an excerpt of Geritt Roosen's "Christian Spiritual Conversations." (Pres., 26, p. 22.) In their Sunday morning services they have an opening sermon, a longer sermon, and prayer in 'Pennsylvania German' with singing in 'High German', and a time of silence. Their preacher reflects on the sermon text and topic on the preceding Saturday and then preaches extemporaneously. On Sunday afternoons in springtime, the youth who have requested baptism are taught the articles of the Dordrecht Confession – three articles per session.

Although not affiliated with them, as is typical of many Old Order Mennonites in Ontario their homes are not served with electricity or running water and for ordinary travel and field work they use horses. They do use engines to power their threshing machines and travel by motorized vehicles for longer distances. They have acquired used farm implements in Manitoba, which they are adapting to their form of horse-drawn agriculture. They are friendly and welcoming, but are limited in their ability to host visitors, given their lifestyle and resources.

Plett Foundation Board meets in Aylmer

The Plett Foundation Board held its semi annual meetings in Aylmer, Ontario in early October, 2007. The Board took the opportunity to meet in Aylmer as a number of Board members and the Executive Director were participating in, or attending the Mennonite History Conference at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo on October 12th and 13th. It was a full day that included meeting leaders from the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Aylmer, a tour of their school, an interview on the local Low German radio station, De Brijg, and an evening in the local Sommerfelder Church to hear a presentation about the shootings of Amish children in Nickel Mines, Pa. last year. The Board heard a report from the Executors of the Delbert Plett Estate, which noted that they had liquidated about 1/2 of the estate and transferred funds to the Foundation. The Board also considered a number of grant applications and approved its 2008 budget. Among the initiatives to be explored is the potential for creating a Mennonite History curriculum for use by conservative churches.

Continued on page 42

Feature Articles

“Unholy Holiness”

The Teachings and the Life of the Danzig Old Flemish or House-Buyers

Sjouke Voolstra... (d. 2004)

translated by Lydia Penner, The Hague, Netherlands.

The Nature of the Anabaptist Reformation

As an introduction to a treatment of the faith convictions and practice of the Danzig Old Flemish in the middle of the eighteenth century, it is necessary to sketch briefly the essence of the Anabaptist movement in the foregoing centuries, since these conservative Mennonites were the ones who strove to maintain its original nature in their teaching and their life. The Anabaptists have a position of their own in the Reformation that took place in the sixteenth century Roman Catholic Church. This position is not only characterized by their zeal to have infant baptism replaced by a believers baptism based on the New Testament, even though this rejection of traditional baptismal practice resulted in the abusive nickname Anabaptists or re-baptizers. Believers' baptism is only one of the expressions of their struggle for emancipation that was motivated by religion, but which also had important social, cultural and political consequences because religion and society were so interwoven in those days. Anabaptists may be considered the most radical of the pious that broke permanently with the traditional church because traditional, clerical mediation of salvation offered them less and less assurance of personal salvation of the soul.

Liberating themselves from Roman Catholic guardianship, and spiritualizing the efficacy of sacraments, they sought a new source of faith and life. In this they wanted to grant authority only to the Bible, without further theological and philosophical definition. Clergy who had made a cattle market of administering the sacraments, in particular the sacrament of confession, and academics who were alienated from simple Biblical truth through their philosophical whittling, had lost the respect of the people. Uneducated laity and lower clergy, directly inspired by the Biblical message, rose to take on the role of prophet and interpreter of Scripture and to gather true believers into a community that reflected all the characteristics of the early church.

The urge for sincere penitence and evangelical purity was motivated and strengthened

by the expectation that the end time was at hand. True believers felt legitimated in separating true Christians from those Christian in name only in their own narrow or wider circle, thereby seizing the initiative with respect to the Last Judgment which was about to occur. Applying strict discipline, the truly penitent and re-born believers tried to keep and guard their evangelical purity in teachings and life, and in this way sharply delineated the distinction between them and the established church, which in their view had become one with the world.

The Anabaptists, therefore, at first formed an explosive amalgam of apocalyptic expectation, anti-clericalism, anti-sacramentalism, emancipation of laity and struggle for the simplicity of the first believers, purity and sinless life. Thanks to the allowances given them by the anti-Roman Catholic government, this movement could develop and maintain itself in the United Lowlands as a tolerated minority church alongside the public Reformed Church. They were called Mennonites or Mennists after one of the founding fathers, Menno Simons (1496-1561). Uniting this ethnically and religiously diverse Anabaptist movement turned out to be a difficult task, because, partly due to the lack of a central authority in teaching, no uniform answer could be found to various questions having to do with its original radical nature. What is the essence of the true church and what were its boundaries? What is the most adequate way to discipline a congregation without spot or wrinkle in relation to the height of the measuring-rod? Who has the charisma and therefore the qualifications and the authority to explicate the Bible and to administer discipline? The degree of exclusiveness and conservatism was revealed in the more or less rigid attempts to establish the boundary between the church of true believers and the world of second class Christians as clearly as possible and to preserve it. The existential question as to which church offers believers the most certainty of inheriting eternal life divided not only Rome and the Reformation, then Lutherans, Calvinists and Mennonites, but finally, in an even more intensified way,

the inheritors of Anabaptist radicalism itself. The denomination of Old Flemish maintained their independent existence for centuries in increasingly smaller congregations. In the second half of the eighteenth century the assimilation process speeded up, and these conservative Anabaptists began to flag in their strict shunning of the world, so that the “holy Mennists” in the Netherlands disappeared from the stage altogether halfway through the nineteenth century.

Old Versus Young Flemish

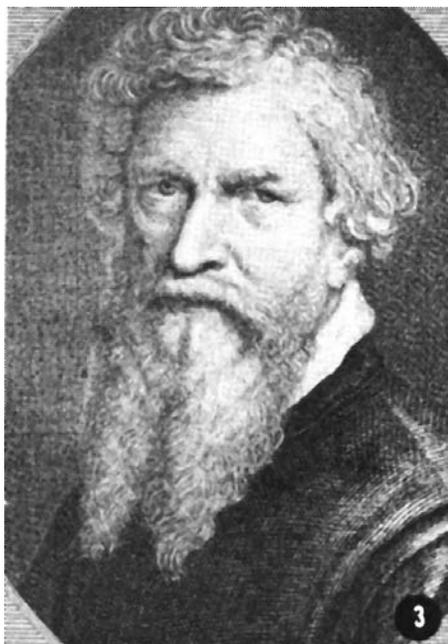
What the differences were that persisted within the faction of Flemish Mennonites, who were gradually integrated into the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands at the beginning of the Golden Age after various immigration waves from the South during the sixteenth century, can be deduced from a text by Jan de Witte, published posthumously in 1638. We know little of the antecedents of this man, except that he belonged to the congregation of moderate Waterlanders in Amsterdam.¹ In his book, written in the form of a dialogue, he joins the line of moderate Flemish who sought union between Frisians, Flemish, High Germans and Waterlanders with their peace presentation: *Christelijcke Geloofs-Belijdenisse des Olyf-tacx*, published in 1629 in Amsterdam.

De Witte is convinced that there is uniformity between all parties as far as basic issues are concerned, but that they oppose each other only on nonessentials. He categorizes the differences by distinguishing between teachings of a theological nature and those relating to practice. He considers the theological reflection on the Trinity and on the incarnation of Christ as belonging to the differences “existing only in opinion, without any consequences whatever.” The teachings of the second category are characterized by both “consequences and an orientation toward actions”; for instance, baptism, church leadership, discipline and marriage.² In the spirit of the letter which Lubbert Gerritz, the conciliatory elder (or bishop) of the Young Frisians, directed to the congregations in Prussia in 1596, De Witte

also calls for toleration on points that do not touch the fundamentals of Christian faith.³

The Doctrine of the Trinity

Accused by the Reformed of unorthodox Socinianism concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and incarnation, the Flemish were forced to present their views to the Repre-



Lubbert Gerritz (1534-1612), elder of the Jonge Frisian congregation at Amsterdam in 1596. Photo: Mennonite Encyclopedia, vol. II.

sentatives of the Court of Holland in 1626. The elder of the congregation of Young Flemish in Harlem (“in the Block”) had an important role in formulating the response, so that this apologia is simply given his name as the confession of Jacques Outerman.⁴ The Reformed accused the Flemish in general of being unorthodox with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity because they refused to speculate in philosophical terms on the relationship of the three “beings” or “persons” within the one divinity, as the dogmatic tradition was wont to do. They wanted to keep to the purely Biblical description of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, a rationalistic-Biblicist approach that brought them near to the teaching of Socinus, an Italian-Polish reformer who did not regard the ecclesiastical, Trinitarian interpretation of the teaching about God as scriptural either. The authorities, not as sharp in their understanding of doctrine as the Calvinist ministers, eventually declared the sequence of Bible references on this teaching presented by Outerman and his colleagues to be orthodox.

The Doctrine of the Incarnation

Their declaration on the incarnation of the Son of God, based purely on the Bible, received a similar positive assessment from the government.⁵ The issue was not that Christ was the Word made flesh, for this was undisputed according to John 1, but how God became man in Jesus Christ. In short, had the divine being changed into flesh or had it taken on human nature? Melchior Hoffman, the father of Dutch Anabaptism, propagated the teaching that the Word had not taken on Mary’s flesh when it became man. In his view, the reconciliation between God and man could not be perfect if Christ had not been wholly without sin as unblemished sacrificial lamb and therefore had not had any part in Mary’s sinful nature. (The doctrine of her immaculate conception, that is to say unstained by original sin, only became a universal doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church in 1854; until then it was an open question.) The view of Christ as the perfect, physical, visible Word of God, leading at the same time to an emphasis on Christ being the exclusive norm for faith, became part of the teachings of Menno Simons and his fellow elder Dirk Philips. The latter was to put himself forward as the spiritual leader of the Flemish during and after the Frisian-Flemish schism (1566-67).

The conservative wing of the Mennonite tradition, both the Old Flemish and the Old or Hard Frisians, is easily identified in its holding firm to the completely divine origin of Christ’s human nature. In their emphasis on the perfect originality of Christ as the New Adam, they provide the Biblical-theological basis for their own striving for moral perfection and for the purity of the church which may justifiably be called the body of Christ. They were convinced that embracing this doctrine was essential for salvation. By limiting themselves to strictly Biblical argumentation, the conservative Mennonites toned down the conclusion somewhat that Christ had no part of Mary’s human nature, without, however, giving up the tenor of their explanation of the incarnation of the Word. In imitation of Menno Simons, they were of the opinion that true insight into this mystery was to be entrusted more to the ministers initiated in the secrets of Scripture than to the ordinary members of the congregation.

This interpretation of the incarnation as Christological basis for the sinless congregation was common to all Mennonites. Jan de Witte, then, writes that no congregation can be found which confesses Christ as having proceeded from Mary’s sinful substance and therefore be accused of unorthodoxy regarding the Melchioritic-Mennonite doctrine of incarnation. But, in the name of peace,

members were henceforth required to desist from far-reaching speculations not based on Bible texts concerning the ways and means of Christ’s incarnation. De Witte’s denial that belief in Christ’s wholly divine nature has any relevance to ethics indicates that, as far as the tenor of this teaching goes, his opinion diverges from that of the conservative Mennonites.⁶ Their opinion was, after all, that their striving for a sinless existence depended partly on holding fast to belief in Christ’s wholly divine origin.⁷ This view remained more or less explicitly the most important theological point of difference between the Old and the Young Flemish concerning the issue of what the true church of Christ was.

Re-Baptism

With respect to the practice of faith, the differences in viewpoint in the Flemish camp come to light in their distinctive conceptions regarding baptism, church discipline and marriage. Jan de Witte complains that the Old Flemish require fellow believers from other groups to be re-baptized when they come from another congregation, in so doing cancelling the first baptism.⁸ With their practice of re-baptism, the Old Flemish wanted to guard the boundaries of their true congregation. Stimulated by Jacques Outerman, the opinion that faith and penitence were sufficient for believers’ baptism and that a repeat was therefore out of the question nevertheless gained ground among Young Flemish.

Procedure for Discipline

In keeping with the spirit of the times, all Mennonite groups regarded supervision of true faith and right morals as the chief task of the “church government.” Like the Reformed, and among themselves, they differed in their opinion as to how rigidly discipline or censure should be carried out.⁹ One need not be surprised that the Old Flemish, with their obsession with purity, should have an extremely strict discipline. They were inclined to bring not only public sins into the open and punish them, but also the so-called secret sins that were only known to the sinner or within a small circle. Neither did they make a very nuanced distinction between big and little sins, and they applied severe disciplinary measures without a remonstrance beforehand or without temporary exclusion from the Lord’s Supper, so that the sinner, by means of excommunication and shunning, was immediately cut off entirely from the community, facing all the psychological, social and economic problems involved. Irrespective of rank or position, without doing detailed analysis, they used the same drastic

remedy for different kinds of ailments. The less conservative Mennonites, by contrast, wanted to have only public sins censured, with exclusion from the celebration of the Lord's Supper as its greatest punishment, until the fellowship between sinner and congregation could be restored through public confession of sin.

An important issue in the procedure is also, who is involved in the disciplinary procedure. Did only the leaders of the congregation make the decision on the sinner or was the whole congregation or brotherhood, that is, all male members of the congregation with voting rights, involved in it? The conservative Mennonites preferred the approach of giving all brothers a say, while the more moderate assigned this task primarily to the ministers and deacons in leadership. Judging by our standards, the Old Flemish appear to be more "democratic" than the Young Flemish. Becoming wiser through the ups and downs of experience, moderate Mennonites opted for arbitrage solely by elders or ministers from outside the congregation. Taking into account the many family and other relationships, it became evident that, in conflicts where the boundaries of the local congregation were crossed, such as, for example, the one between House-buyers and Contra-House-buyers in Franeker, a local disciplinary matter could divide the whole Flemish faction from Duinkerken to Danzig. To the moderate Mennonites, the best procedure seemed to be to have the decision of the elders, authorized by the congregation to carry out God's verdict, accepted in silence, by the majority of the brotherhood. Jan de Witte therefore expects that: "The church will not readily divide, if the heads of it remain undivided."¹⁰

Marriage

There was another question besides the practice of re-baptism and the approach to discipline which kept the Old and Young Flemish apart, namely marriage. From the beginning Mennonites put great value on the "spiritual marriage," that is to say marriage between couples of the same religious conviction. And that is grounded in various reasons, according to De Witte: it is advised in the Old Testament, it strengthens and nurtures love, in that way you keep to the path leading to divine salvation better, it is better for children and housemates and it arouses no argument from your own or the other denomination. The Old Flemish reached the conclusion that marriage with someone from another denomination, including another Mennonite one, deserved excommunication.¹¹ In view of the fact that they considered only a marriage with

believers of their own denomination to be "in the Lord," they firmly retained the commandment against "outside marriage." The Danzig Old Flemish eventually distinguished themselves from the Groningen Old Flemish on this point of "outside marriage"; the latter increasingly began applying more moderation and accused their spiritual relatives of rigidity on this question. However, for the Danzigers, the commandment against "outside marriage," with the practice of re-baptism and rigid discipline, formed a permanent and immovable fence around the traditional congregation without spot or wrinkle.

Doctrine and Practice among the Danzig Old Flemish around 1750

Has time, after more than one hundred and fifty years, taken the edge off the conservative Mennonites' original, precisely articulated doctrine and ascetic approach to religious practice? What is our impression of the teaching and life of the Danzig Old Flemish halfway through the eighteenth century when the "Memoriaal" was written? The fact that both the Groningen and the Danzig Old Flemish began to publish material about their doctrines can indicate that the knowledge about its content was no longer self-evident in their own circle and outside it, or that the chasm between what was said and what was done had increased. Did it not eventually become evident, after all, that the contours of teachings and life that were now presented on paper as the norm for members would become even more blurred in later generations? The "Memoriaal," with published teachings as the touchstone, reveals the first signs of this gradual but unstoppable assimilation. At the same time, we can interpret the publication of their confessions as an attempt to give expression to the respectability and the orthodoxy of Old Flemish tradition in a time when liberal Mennonites were again being accused by the Reformed of Socinian heresy, such as in the case of Johannes Stinstra, a minister in Harlingen, who was forbidden by the Frisian Legislature to preach from 1742 to 1757. In this matter the Old Flemish clearly chose the side of the orthodox opponents of Stinstra in Mennonite circles, led by the "Zonist" Jacobus Rijdsdijk.

Confessions

In former times the doctrines of all Mennonite parties were preserved in handwritten confessions that had been formulated by elders and used in religious instruction preceding baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹² The articles of such a confession were taken from the writings of sixteenth century

founders of the Mennonite tradition, such as Menno Simons and their leader Dirk Philips, naturally expressed as much as possible in Biblical language. Why such confessions did not appear in print can be explained by two reasons. By not publishing them, they made it difficult for opponents to gain access to the doctrinal content. Reformed ministers were thus forced to infiltrate services where elders read the handwritten confession aloud in preparation for the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Only in this way could they acquaint themselves with Mennonite heresies in order thereafter to dispute them from a Calvinistic perspective. A second reason that applies to the Old Flemish is related to the fact that they did not participate in the Flemish process of unification. In the first half of the seventeenth century the various confessions were collected and published as statements of unity during the unification strivings of a number of Mennonite groups. In view of the fact that the Old Flemish distanced themselves from this endeavour, they felt little obligation to publish their confessions as works of pacification.

Faith Instruction

In the eighteenth century Mennonites everywhere felt an increasing need for printed catechetical material that could be used by the pater familias for the religious training of his family and housemates. This task did not originally belong to the preachers and ministers, even though the question-and-answer form suggests that baptism instruction was entrusted more and more to ministers in the eighteenth century. The Old Flemish, too, in this way attempted to stem the rising tide of developments in their congregations leading to waning enthusiasm and conformity to the world. The Prussian congregations had the use of such a resource already in 1671, *Ein Glaubensbericht vor die Jugend, durch einen Liebhaber der Wahrheit gestellt und ins Licht gebracht*, published by the elder of the large Old Flemish congregation in Danzig, Georg Hansen.¹³

The Dutch congregations of the Danzig tradition also had a short catechism, based on the twelve articles forming Old Flemish confessions, formulated by Roelof Agges Joncker, minister in Oldemarkt: *Mennoniste Vragenboeck* (Steenwijk, 1709).¹⁴ In the foreword to his catechism, Pieter Boudewijns mentions the original intention to publish a larger edition of "a certain little book."¹⁵ It is possible that Joncker's *Vragenboeck* is meant here. The elders and ministers could, besides, refer back to a very extensive earlier explication of doctrine, also in the traditional twelve points, *Christelyck Huysboek* (Hoorn,



The Danzig Mennonite Church, built 1817-1819 when the Flemish and Frisian congregations had already been united into one congregation. Photo: *Heritage Remembered*, 29.

1643) by Jan de Buyzers, elder of the Old Flemish congregation in Hamburg-Altona.¹⁶ Pieter Boudewijns, elder of the Danzig Old Flemish in Harlem and Amsterdam, was able to use this already published literature in putting together his *Onderwijzing des christelyken geloofs* (Haarlem, 1743).¹⁷ During these years, the Groningen Old Flemish published many summaries of their faith; these were much more learned.¹⁸ All published confessions in the form of a catechism have the dual goal of providing subject matter for teaching baptism candidates and of strengthening the faith of members of the congregation who are on the point of straying from the narrow way.

The Danzigers continued to be hesitant about systematic summaries of their doctrine which might distort or replace the simple Biblical truth. Pieter Boudewijns therefore feels the urge to remove, in his introduction to his *Onderwijzinge*, two objections coming from his people. Did the summarizing of Christian doctrine in a few points not limit the message of the whole Bible? And did the answers to the questions thought up in the catechism not show too much human interference? In his argument against the first objection, Pieter Boudewijns points to Jan de Buyser's highly valued *Huysboek*, which has also divided the material into twelve articles. And, by having the answers to the questions consist as much as possible of literal quotes from the *Biestkens Bible* still used by Old Flemish, he tries to prevent free interpretation as much as possible.¹⁹ Evidence that he did not publish his catechism on personal authority is provided

by the "Approbation," signed by his colleague elders and ministers, included in his *Onderwijzinge*, a custom no doubt copied from the Reformed synod.

Boudewijns's *Onderwijzinge* prescribes, the "Memoriaal" of his father-in-law registers. In combination with the impressions the German Lutheran minister Simeon Frederik Rues gained of Mennonite congregational life in 1741, we get a good insight into the relationship between the faith that is presented and the faith as it works out in practice.²⁰

Twelve Articles

By compressing the material into twelve articles, likely analogous to their unpublished confession,²¹ Pieter Boudewijns's *Onderwijzinge des Christelyken Geloofs* deviates from the Prussian confession which includes many more articles. He retains the division of the Twelve Articles of the Old Flemish confession and of Jan de Buyser's *Huysboek*, which, as he says, was customary in his own congregations.²² That gives his book a somewhat unbalanced structure at times.²³

In the first article, a very extensive one: "Faith in God and Jesus Christ," he treats thirteen chapters: knowledge of God, the Bible, God, the Trinity, God's characteristics, creation, preservation and rule, the fall of man, the promise of the Messiah, the incarnation of Christ, the offices of Christ, universal grace and redeeming faith. The treatment of the "free will" (art. 11) has been separated from it and has been placed as a separate article just before the final section

concerning eschatology. These articles (1, 11 and 12) discuss the actual doctrines in a traditional way, with reference to salvation history, as is done in the general Christian creeds such as the one summarizing universal Christian faith, the "Apostolicum." These three articles together describe the faith content (*credenda*).

The ninth article of the twelve in the "Apostles' Creed" states: "I believe in the holy, catholic, Christian Church, the communion of saints." This article, in general, offered the people putting Mennonite confessions together a good starting point for describing the essence and the function of the church (*agenda*). Boudewijns, too, in articles two to ten, treats successively the following ecclesiological themes: 2) the mission of the ministers of the church, 3) baptism, 4) the church, 5) the Lord's Supper, 6) foot washing, 7) marriage, 8) civil government and non-resistance, 9) the oath and 10) church discipline. Here one might have expected that reflections on the visible and invisible church (art. 4) would have preceded this whole series. In this as well, Boudewijns's religious instruction shows very little systematic insight. Pieter Hendriks's *Schriftuurlyke Katechismus* with its 25 chapters, less constricted by the Old Flemish straitjacket of twelve articles, does show a much more logical structure.

Credenda

A few notes on the doctrinal section of Pieter Boudewijns's catechism, the articles 1, 11 and 12.

Knowledge of God

It is striking that he, as a representative of orthodox Mennonites who, with the Reformation slogan "by Scripture alone" as their banner, opposed everyone who thought that there could be any other way to true knowledge of God, should dedicate his first chapter to the question how you can know God from nature. The most consistent in this respect is the confession of the Old Frisians, Pieter Siewerts and Pieter Jans Twisck, the so-called XXXIII Articles, where the scriptural basis for knowledge of God comes first. But the description of God as Creator allows every leeway for using God's presence in nature as a source of knowledge, as was the custom in Reformed dogmatics.²⁴ In this respect Pieter Boudewijns is a man of his time.²⁵ Theologians of his time educated in natural philosophy had the knowledge of God proceed from reflections on the universe, viewing reason, given in creation, as the best source of knowledge. The most radical of these, the Deists, reduced faith to such a natural knowledge of God and dem-

onstrated little need for a higher knowledge revealed exclusively in Holy Scripture. The revelation of God in his Son, including the substitutional suffering of punishment on the cross by Jesus Christ, was laid on the Procrustus-bed of reason, so that only Jesus' function as an example remained.

In Pieter Boudewijns's work, general knowledge of God acquired from the "book of Nature" is further explained by Scripture. The Bible has the primary and last word. In it we read that God is Spirit and not only nature. His unity as existing in Father, Son and Holy Spirit is explicated extensively. This retention of the doctrine of the Trinity, without losing himself in philosophical speculations, keeps him in the Mennonite tradition.²⁶ Upholding this doctrine indicates retention of orthodox ideas against the Socinian denial of the Trinity of being of which Johannes Stinstra, minister in Harlingen, was accused. However, Boudewijns consciously avoids getting into polemics with him.²⁷

Fall and Restoration

There is no reason for much optimism about the natural possibilities for preservation of mankind, fallen with Adam into sin. If anything good is found in him, it is not due to the natural remains of man before the Fall, but come from the power of universal grace. By painting the depth of the Fall in the darkest colours, the miracle of the incarnation of God's Son and of the undeserved forgiveness of sins through his death on the cross are accented even more. "He who is to redeem humankind could not be man brought forth from man, because, being worthy of damnation himself, he would not be able to redeem himself, much less another."²⁸ The origin of the Redeemer is not from Mary's human nature but from the Holy Spirit. Only in that way is Christ the Mediator (Gal. 3:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), a term which – along with Christ as "ransom" (Mark 10:45 par.; 1 Tim. 2:6) – serves as shibboleth of the orthodox, Biblical doctrine of reconciliation resisting the reduction of Christ to nothing more than an example for virtuous behaviour.²⁹ He maintains the Mennonite doctrine of the incarnation, supported extensively by the traditional Biblical references. What the incarnated Word achieves, finds expression



The Biestkens Bible, named after its printer, Nikolas Biestkens was commonly used by Dutch Mennonites in the 16th century. Photo: Mennonite Encyclopedia, vol. I.

in all its dimensions in the three offices of Christ. Christ the prophet is the teacher of righteousness to whom all must listen. Christ the high priest is the priest who offers himself as sacrifice in order to reconcile mankind, weighed down by guilt, with God. Christ the king is the ruler of the heavenly kingdom; He alone deserves our absolute obedience and subjection.

Universal Grace and Free Will

Concerning the issue whether man has the freedom to resist the offered grace, there is no question of bowing to non-Mennonite, or Calvinistic dogmatism, a reproach from the side of the "enlightened" directed at the right wing. The enlightened had cut themselves off from the original reform and Mennonite roots on the matter of the central doctrine of Christ's mediator role. Halfway through the eighteenth century, therefore, the entire right wing of the Mennonites made a last effort to revive the original reformation traits characterizing the Mennonite movement, including the Christ centric doctrine

of reconciliation and justification, by making use of their own sources.³⁰

How un-Reformed the orthodox Mennonite ideas of Pieter Boudewijns are, is very much evident in the doctrine concerning the universal offer of grace (art. 1, chap. 12) and free will (art. 12). In contrast to the Reformed doctrine of predestination and a non-free will, he retains the conviction that God's grace calls on all people to repent and that He has therefore not predestined a certain number to salvation or doom without their having any influence in it. Grace is an undeserved gift, but you can fall from grace. Even after the Fall, God has allowed mankind freedom to do good and not do evil. This good behaviour nevertheless does not occur on the basis of one's own strength but follows from a grace that can actually change the heart and the behaviour of sinful man so that it conforms to the mind of Christ. Gift and task are held together; it is a faith that works through love. Grace that does not raise moral standards is no grace.

Such a faith consists of three traditional components: knowledge, consent and trust. Pieter Boudewijns is neutral about whether a deep, inner, "emotional" experience of communion

with the suffering Christ, as emphasized in the pietism of Herrnhuters that also gained support with a few Prussian guest members, is an aspect of this redeeming faith that is essential for all believers. He recommends a middle road between an exaggerated sense of certainty of salvation based on this emotion, though without human effort on one hand, and the despair that can haunt the believer if he appears not to be able to overcome sin on the other hand.³¹ His greatest concern is that the duty to sanctify one's life and to obey Christ's commands may not be disturbed by either extreme expression of faith.³² Neither triumphalism nor pessimism should be allowed to frustrate the daily defence of regenerated life against constant temptation.³³

The Last Things

The necessity for this striving is, of course, nourished by the expectation that the believer will some day give account, before God, of his doings, his words, his works and his thoughts. Since there will be no more

time for repentance between dying and the Day of Judgment – the Reformation had, after all, given up the belief in a continuing cleansing of the soul in purgatory – constant alertness and effort were required: “Day of death Day of judgment.”³⁴ Following the usual structure of salvation history (creation, fall, restoration and fulfillment), Pieter Boudewijns concludes his teachings with the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment. He ends his book as follows: “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.” (Jude, 24-25 NIV)

Type of Faith

Boudewijns’s emphasis on sanctification in his doctrinal articles clearly points to the characteristic original Mennonite type of faith. The strong contrast between the old and the new creation, between the fallen and the restored state of man is reflected in the sharp separation between the world and the church. Faith consists in the gracious, inner efficacy of the Holy Spirit together with the convicted, penitent and obedient soul. Everything hangs on the consistency between inner and outer conversion. The result of this transformation, granted as a gift, is a life that witnesses of this gift of grace through good works and that is guarded and preserved by a strict church discipline. Against the spirit of the times, with its natural religion and growing human autonomy, the Danzig Old Flemish continued to draw from the legacy of their fathers by constantly requesting attention for revealed religion, in particular for the significance of Christ for salvation. Just as their fellow believers, they wanted to be “reasonable-emotional,” but always with great respect for the foolishness of the cross and with ongoing dependence on the grace and teaching of Christ. In spite of their affinity to pietism with respect to their Christ centrism, they avoided the radicalism of the Herrnhuter revival movement. Their assurance of salvation did not express itself in ecstatic joy, mind and emotion kept each other in shaky balance, their liturgy remained sober and there was no question of an urge toward mission activity. Dynamic Mennonite piety threatened to become petrified solely into form in the ever smaller family churches and was already crumbling in Boudewijns’s time, falling apart entirely a generation later.

Agenda

In what forms did this doctrinal faith,

in obedience to New Testament guidelines and ordinances, appear in personal and congregational life? At first the Old Flemish gave expression to their simplicity in sober clothes unadorned with collars and buttons and wore shoes without buckles. Simplicity was also applied in the furnishing of houses and in food and drink. Mirrors, paintings, china and crystal were not found in their homes. Excessive behaviour and merriment were avoided. Getting a portrait made of oneself and wearing wigs, except on the advice of a doctor, were considered expressions of vanity.³⁵ But in the course of the eighteenth century the characteristic simplicity began to disappear, first of all in the city congregations. The brothers shaved off their beards; the women began wearing silk clothes and went to the meeting-house with church books decorated with silver, hiding their face devotedly during prayer behind a richly decorated fan.

Church Government

Of the various church leaders mentioned in the New Testament, only three were considered by the Old Flemish to be valid as leadership in their own congregations: pastors, teachers and carers of the poor.³⁶ Pastors, superintendents or elders [presbyters] were called to manage the combination of several congregations and possessed the sole qualifications to administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Teachers were preachers responsible for proclamation of the Word and carrying out church discipline in the local congregations. Carers of the poor or deacons collected alms and looked after the needy. Frequently preachers came out of this group.

The whole “brotherhood,” that is all baptized brothers, was involved in elections. Only an elder could refuse the office if elected in consideration of the great amount of time involved in it. Fellow elders ordained him by the laying on of hands. There was no special ritual for the installation of deacons and teachers. Of course, every potential teacher was examined as to his orthodoxy ahead of time by two fellow teachers. Older widows could also be deacons.

In this hierarchy the greater office enclosed the lesser one, and the tasks of teacher and deacon sometimes overlapped. The numbers varied per congregation. The Danzigers in Amsterdam had four teachers and a deacon, those in Harlem two elders and four teachers. The election and installation of local ministers was carried out by brothers from the congregation and the ministers. Apostolic succession was traced back to the Flemish leader of earliest times, Dirk Philips, considering that they had doubts

about the correctness of Menno Simons’s baptism. (Indeed, Menno is wholly silent as to who baptized him.) An election could not be refused and lasted for life, although they became increasingly flexible about this rule. They did not receive a set salary for their service. But the congregation took adequate care of the lay preachers, although it was considered very praiseworthy if a minister earned his own living as much as possible without neglecting the interests of the congregation. They did not wear special clothing. In contrast to other groups where the ministry functioned much more self-sufficiently, among the Old Flemish “the brotherhood,” the gathering of baptized male members, was involved in all major decisions. This undoubtedly had a practical basis; the small size of their congregations made such a process of decision making readily possible.

In the meeting-houses ministers sat on a raised area facing the congregation. The elder or preacher did not raise himself above the congregation and held his sermon sitting down. But in the liturgy even conservative Mennonites eventually adapted themselves more and more to the way of doing things in the public church, including preaching from a pulpit.³⁷ Prayers were silent only, whereby the men knelt, leaning on their bench. A song leader led the singing which consisted primarily of psalms.³⁸ It was not considered respectable to make a public show of generosity. At first the alms were received by the deacons in the church council room but later they were discreetly deposited, after the service, in a collection box, hung up in the hall for this purpose.

Baptism, Lord’s Supper and Foot washing

The celebration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper also give expression to their doctrine in a characteristic way. No one could be baptized without the consent of the congregation and only the elder was qualified to perform a baptism, and that only in the public gathering of the congregation.³⁹ Immersion was not the usual practice; pouring with water from a pitcher or jar was considered adequate.⁴⁰ But the neat sprinkling with the hand also came into vogue here.⁴¹ Only those “who have a penitent heart and openly confess and accept faith in Christ” – this, of course, laid before the whole brotherhood and in accordance with the confession of the whole congregation – were allowed to participate in this ceremony. Without the “figure of a penitent heart” and “the confession of truth,” the baptismal water as such is useless and the form of baptism of even less importance.

The Danzig Old Flemish remained re-

baptizers. To become a member of their congregation, a person baptized as a child, but also one baptized as an adult, had to be re-baptized, even if he or she belonged to other conservative groups such as the Groningen Old Flemish or the Hard Frisians. Baptisms occurred twice a year, preceding the Lord's Supper where, of course, only those who were correctly baptized could be present. The baptismal candidates presented their written confession to the church council, or (in the case of inability to read and write?) they were examined orally. The congregation was then asked whether there were any objections to admitting candidates to baptism. After having heard sermons about the outstanding confession in two consecutive gatherings, the candidates had to assent to it, summarized in three questions, during the baptismal service. The water for the baptism came from a simple jar or pitcher that stood under the elder's chair. The new members were welcomed with the brotherly kiss by the whole leadership. In its simplicity and modesty it must have been an "unholy holy" ceremony that made a deep impression even on outsiders.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper, where as many members as possible participated, was the ceremony par excellence that gave form to the idea of the gathered community of saints, the public body of Christ.⁴² Celebrating communion with Christ assumed that nothing must be found among the members that was not in accordance with the mind of Christ, thereby hindering perfect spiritual communion ("union") with Him. Participants must be united in the confession of faith, they must be incorporated into the congregation by baptism, and they must be at peace with one another. A divided and impenitent congregation could not celebrate union, and there was no room for members who had not confessed their public sins. The issue was this visible church of true penitents. However, Pieter Boudewijns and his supporters no longer took on themselves the role of judging believers outside the true church of Christ. God alone is the judge of those who belong to the invisible church.⁴³ As preparation for the Lord's Supper, one must engage in self-searching to determine whether one could consider himself or herself worthy to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Traditionally, the gathering itself must be free of all "Romish" blemishes. Bread and wine are only signs pointing to Christ's crucified body, the elder explained with emphasis. Not bread and wine that are changed into the body and blood of Christ with the priest's consecration, but inner identification with Christ's substitutional suffering and a

changed heart offer the best surety for an experience of the presence of Christ in his church. There was as a consequence no altar or table that could raise thoughts of a repetition of Christ's sacrifice. The people no longer came to the priest to receive the host. The members of the congregation allowed themselves to be served by the elder, assisted by the deacon, as he passed bread and wine around, for the greatest among them is the one who serves. Selfless love is pictured most effectively in this humble service by the elder, thereby embodying the service attitude of Jesus. That is why he alone was qualified to administer the Lord's Supper, and no one else.

The 1714 report of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the Prussian congregation of the Danzig Old Flemish is moving in its simplicity. In their agape meal (in a large room of the farm in winter; in a shed or cow barn in summer) the preacher called upon each person by name to break off a piece of bread made of wheat and to dip it in a bowl of milk, after which these very profane ingredients of a Lord's Supper were enjoyed, as long as they lasted, at a long table covered with a white cloth. After prayer and a sermon and the exchange of the latest news of family and livestock, everyone went back to his own house. In this ceremony, too, there was no singing.⁴⁴

The Danzigers in Harlem and Amsterdam celebrated the Lord's Supper at set times, twice a year in June and November, following on baptism services. After 1745 it was decided that this ceremony could also take place on the third Sunday after Easter and in fall. This had practical motives; these dates were in the travelling season for baptismal candidates from Prussian sister congregations. In this regularity they differed from the Groningen Old Flemish who held communion only rarely because it depended on their ideal that all members of the congregation must be in perfect peace; and besides, the washing of one another's feet, as third sacrament, was part of the ceremony. The Danzigers performed foot washing as "a sign of respect, love and service" after supper and before going to bed, only for a travelling elder or minister who was being offered hospitality.⁴⁵

Marriage

The Danzigers continued to take seriously the command against marrying outsiders, without making any distinction between marital relations with Catholics, Protestants or members of other Mennonite denominations.⁴⁶ Pieter Hendriks, the spokesman for the Groningen Old Flemish who were in this respect more moderate, is amazed at the per-

sistent "stiff stoutness" of the Danzigers with their pretence to being the only true church, when, in his judgment, they sometimes showed less evidence of faith than the more frivolous Mennonites.⁴⁷ However, according to the Danzigers, marrying "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39) means that a marital bond could be formed only with those with whom one had spiritual union, that is to say with those with whom one was connected in spiritually related congregations through confession and baptism. If you began meddling with this principle, before you knew it you were involved in discussions as to what else might be tolerated as well. That was the general direction of their objection. He who wanted to marry a non-Danziger was excommunicated until the marriage candidate of the other denomination had been baptized in the Danziger congregation.⁴⁸ The Prussian congregations sent future marriage candidates from outside their own congregations to the Netherlands to be baptized there and to return again as a Mennonite. Every form of proselytising was strictly forbidden them by the government in Poland and Prussia.⁴⁹

When members of the public, that is Reformed Church in the Netherlands got married, the church solemnization of it counted as a legal civil marriage. This was not the case with Jews, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Remonstrants and Mennonites. They were required to register their marriage at the city or town hall. Among the Old Flemish it was the custom to have the civil confirmation follow on the solemnization of the marriage as part of a regular Sunday service, while among the other religious minorities, the civil marriage preceded the church ceremony.⁵⁰ Perhaps the Danzigers wanted to express the primacy of the spiritual over the civil marriage by maintaining this sequence, a principle that characterized the Mennonite movement from the start. The rule against "outside marriage" resulted in a very limited marriage market. This can be the reason why Pieter Boudewijns permitted marriage between cousins if civil law allowed it, regardless of the traditional objections to marriages between people who were too closely related.⁵¹

Civil Government

Loyalty to the government and faithfulness to one's own principles – this tension between the world with its laws of its own making and the true church governed by the Law of Christ is discussed in articles about non-resistance⁵² and the refusal to take oaths. One owed obedience to the civil government, inasmuch as this was not in conflict with what God has commanded. And the government, according to the Dan-

zigers, was owed the highest esteem when it allowed a minority not to carry weapons or swear an oath if the Gospel forbade it. If the lower ranks of government corroded these liberties granted them, an appeal to higher ranks of government was allowed, even though they wanted very much to avoid worldly litigation of disputes between members of the congregation.⁵³ Typical of orthodox Mennonites was their loyalty to the House of Orange, which they regarded as their surety for the liberties granted them with respect to carrying weapons and swearing oaths. Pieter Boudewijns and his supporters were undoubtedly also of this opinion, as shown in their congratulations to Willem IV in 1747 when he became governor of the whole Union.

But they could not themselves participate in any way in a civil government because the New Testament offered no guidelines on this. They accepted the office of government in the world as ordained by God, but the church of Christ had another government. The separation of church and state that they had in mind naturally meant that the church did not participate in the use of power and the instruments of violence that went with it. The “gentle and non-resistant Christians” were forbidden to take revenge or to fight, other than with spiritual weapons. The truly pious did not, therefore, want to protect their own life and possessions with weapons; they could only hope for protection from a government that favoured them and, as instrument in God’s hand, treated them well. Non-resistance and non-revenge as typical characteristics of the mind of Christ naturally included the sphere of personal life; slander and hurtful language against the neighbour were equally reprehensible. Public and personal non-resistance developed from an inner attitude that was traditionally described in terms such as patience and longsuffering, a state of mind that mirrored Christ’s mind and spirit.

The gospel command not to swear oaths did not cause great problems in economic and legal dealings in view of the fact that governments in general allowed Mennonites simply to say “yes” or to state a promise. The Danzigers were no different from other Mennonites with respect to the appeal to speak the truth and to give sincere testimony.⁵⁴

Church Discipline

Their strict practice of church discipline continued to be a typical characteristic, even though some moderation showed up halfway through the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ Superintending the behaviour of members was not only the task of the leaders but also

a serious duty for members themselves. Everyone must, of course, avoid seeing “the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye” and paying “no attention to the plank in your own eye” (Matt. 7:3 NIV), Pieter Boudewijns warns. But misconduct that did damage to another’s soul and robbed the congregation of its good name and reputation should be dealt with. Such disciplining and censure should not be seen as interference but as a service of love. The issue was to keep the congregation pure and to stimulate the sinner to repent so that the salvation of his soul would not be threatened. Those who when spoken to about their misbehaviour immediately showed penitence about it in the congregation could expect a certain clemency. But a member who persisted in a non-penitential attitude about public sins, was treated with the rule of Christ (Matt. 18:15-17), which could eventually end up in excommunication from the congregation and shunning by members.

However, the rigidity in formulation and practice was already somewhat mitigated, as revealed in what Rues says about it.⁵⁶ Boudewijns no longer says in so many words that the excommunicated person is delivered up to the devil, considering that excommunication from the congregation no longer means, according to him, that the excommunicated person is placed outside any fellowship with God. The accused was always asked to give an account of himself before the congregation and could only be condemned by the whole congregation. The excommunication extended to public sins that damaged the image and the character of the congregation, such as a sexual offence, adultery, drunkenness, quarrelsomeness, losing faith, “outside marriage,” taking service on a warship and fraud.⁵⁷ Public offences had to be punished, even when penitence was immediate. Boudewijns still maintains the principle that penitence does not take away punishment. Secret sins, however, did not need to be revealed in the congregation. In this respect the Danzigers could refer to similar advice from their spiritual father Menno Simons, who had also distanced himself from the excessively intimate confessions that were customary in David Joris’s circle.

He or she who was punished with excommunication was not only excluded from the Lord’s Supper but also had to be shunned in eating and drinking, buying and selling, conduct, the so-called “daily exchange.” Boudewijns does not raise the subject of marital shunning, whereby the excommunicated person was also shunned by the marriage partner; this practice clashed with the conviction that matrimony was a

divine ordinance. And yet, the practice was still so strict that a married couple could not eat together at table if one of the two was excommunicated by the congregation.⁵⁸ For Pieter Boudewijns, the guideline was that all unnecessary fellowship with an excommunicated person should be avoided. This must not, however, any longer lead to total isolation; after all, you are to love your enemy and does that not apply to relations with your excommunicated brother or sister? Shunning was practiced from love and was intended for the improvement of the sinner. The congregation must approach the reinstatement of an excommunicated person who had given evidence of penitence with the same care as was given to the joining of the church through baptism. In this respect as well the total brotherhood guarded the boundaries of the congregation without spot or wrinkle.

Epilogue

Pieter Boudewijns would have been glad if Simon Eduaards Toens, elder of the Danzig Old Flemish and father of the person who put together the “Memoriaal,” had put together a catechism outlining the doctrines. But he had not been able to reach a decision on this and in his turn asked Boudewijns to do it. By writing down his doctrines halfway through the eighteenth century, Pieter Boudewijns laid out a path in doctrine and in life for fellow believers between the most precise (“in remote places in the country or on the islands”) and the Groningen Old Flemish.⁵⁹ These conservative Mennonites were tied together – in spite of small differences among themselves – by their striving to keep the church without spot or wrinkle intact, following the trail of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, and to keep out the worldly mind-set that did not correspond to the nature of Christ, which was creeping into the church, by ascetics and strict discipline.

The result for these Mennonites faithful to the tradition was the accusation by people of their time that they, lacking “an inner conviction and impulse of emotion,” were in the end only concerned with the outer things of faith. It is proper that we, some two-and-a-half centuries later, take to heart not only Rues’s negative judgment but also Martin Schagen’s comment: “This we as humans cannot know; and therefore one must refrain from judgment.”⁶⁰ However that may be, without understanding of and respect for the motives of these conservative Mennonites, we lose all sight of the intentions of the original Mennonite movement.

April, 2004.

Footnotes

1 *Vredeschrift, daer inne gehandelt wort van de voornaamste verschillen in de Leere en verstanden onder de Doops-ghesinde Gemeente ofte Mennisten soo gheenaamt; en bewesen wordt dat de selve verschillen van sulke gewichte niet en zijn, datse daerom verscheyden Volcken behooren te blyven, maar wel mochten t'samen vereenigen ende also de ergerlijke scheure wechnemen* (Amsterdam, Denijs Verschuere, 1638). On p. 145 the person who furnished this work reports that the same author has also published a "letter to a certain good friend opposing marital shunning." Very likely I.D.W., *Sommige Spreucken* (Amsterdam, 1605) is also written by Jan de Witte. He has also written the texts of several songs. See: *P. Visser, Broeders in de Geest. De doopsgezinde bijdragen van Dierick en Jan Philipsz. Schabaelje tot de Nederlandse stichelijke literatuur in de zeventiende eeuw*, vol. I (Deventer, 1988), namely 78, 112-115.

2 *Vredeschrift*, 18.

3 *Ibid.*, 185ff.

4 Jacques Outerman (ca. 1547- before 1639), probably came originally from West-Flanders (Diksmuide). Around 1560 mention is made several times of reform-minded people of the same family name (Oultreman, Aetseman) who belonged to the Brugge brotherhood. On the basis of both chronologies it is not at all self-evident that he, as S. Cramer concludes, (*Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, dl. VII (The Hague, 1910) p. 553-554, n. 2) is the same person as Jacob Keest, the most important opponent of Thomas Byntgens in the affair of the house purchase in Franeker. This Jacob Keest was a tradesman in thread in Kortijk, against whom the Inquisition began an investigation in 1553, which led him to move to Harlingen in 1562. He is named Jacob van Reninge, after the village where he came from in West Flanders. For references to biographical information see: J. Decavele, *De dageraad van de Reformatie in Vlaanderen* (1520-1565) vol. II (Brussels, 1975) 130, 156. For justified doubts about this identification see: S. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden. Geschiedenis van de dopers in de Nederlanden 1531-1675* (Hilversum/ Leeuwarden, 2000) 299, n. 114.

5 For the significance of this view of the incarnation in Mennonite tradition, see: S. Voolstra, *Het Woord is vleesgeworden. De melchioritisch-menniste incarnatieleer* (Kampen, 1982).

6 *Vredeschrift*, 57: "The view that Christ is from Mary does not, in itself, produce a lack of divinity, and the opinion that he is of the Word, no fear of God. Virtues and vice come from another quiver."

7 Menno Simons's strong statements criticizing the Reformed doctrine of the incarnation as adoptionist are resonated here: "I do not confess such a Christ who would be earthly, from the flesh of accursed Adam, and in his humanity having no father; and I would rather die ten times than to acknowledge such a Christ as my redeemer." (In: Martin Micron, *Een waerachtigh verhaal* (1556), 65.)

8 *Vredeschrift*, 74: "How deeply the Flemish were heard to sigh and complain about the House-buyers who re-baptize their members. How un-Christian, how absurd and how offensive they found it."

9 G.J. Blokland, *De Heilige Gemeente. Een onderzoek naar de doopsgezind-gereformeerde tegenstelling in de Nederlanden in de 16e eeuw inzake het vraagstuk van de kerkelijke tucht*. (Diss. Ev. Theol. Faculty in Heverlee (Liege) 2003.)

10 *Vredeschrift*, 96. In the same spirit the author proposes, on pp. 163-165, a disciplinary procedure that diminishes the threat of division.

11 *Ibid.*, 123ff. Besides Gen. 6, Deut. 7 and Ezra 10:3, they used two passages from the New Testament to motivate this command against "outside marriage": 2 Cor. 6:14 ("Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" NIV) and 1 Cor. 7:39 ("A widow...is free

to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." NIV).

12 Voolstra, *Het Woord is vlees geworden*, 65-66, provides an example of the use of such a confession by travelling elders in gatherings of the Flemish congregation in Zierikzee, 1609.

13 Georg Hansen (died 1703; deacon and minister from 1655; elder from 1690) was shoemaker by profession and the most important spiritual leader of the Old Flemish in the delta of Weichsel and Nogat, specifically in the Gross-Werder to the north of the city of Malbork (Marienburg) with Heubuden as the largest country congregation. He defended the liberty of Mennonites against the attacks of the Roman Catholic Church and the government. He is the author of the first Dutch language confession of faith of the Danzig Old Flemish, published in Danzig in 1667. On the basis of this confession, the Old Flemish congregations in Prussia (Danzig, Heubuden, Grosz-Werder, Elbing) and the Dutch congregations of the Danzig Old Flemish were re-united in 1730. The confession was copied by the Dutch congregations and accepted. This confession, reprinted in German in 1768 (*Confession oder Kurze und einfältige Glaubensbekenntnisse derer Mennoniten in Preussen, so man nennet die Clarischen*) was used in the Prussian Old Flemish congregations until 1861. A number of books of religious instruction in the form of question and answer were already circulating from 1700, even before the appearance of the catechism of Heinrich Donner and Gerhard Wiebe in 1778. This form can indicate that religious education was assigned to catechism teachers or ministers in those days. In 1699 Hansen completed a book about regeneration: *Spiegel des Levens, geschreven door George Hansen, in syn Leven Oudsten der Gemeente Godts tot Danzig* (Amsterdam, 1705) and also published: *Erforscher der Warheit* (1680) and *Einfältige Antwort der Mennonisten die man Clerchen Nent, auff den Erforscher der Wahrheit* (Danzig, 1706). See: H.G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde. Ihre Entstehung und ihre Geschichte von 1569-1919* (Danzig, 1919) 73, 77ff. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, II, 250-251 („Hansen, Georg“) and 305-312 („Heubuden“).

14 Roelof Agges Joncker was preacher in Oldemarkt (1699-1712) and Nieuwvliet (1712-1730). He also published a songbook: *Eenig psalmen des propheten Davids. Op sodanigen wijsen als bij de Boeren en Zeeluy veel bekennt zijn; nieuwelijks in licht gestelt* (1709). He caused much offence in his last congregation through his way of life. See: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* (1889) 110ff.

15 Pieter Boudewijns, *Onderwijzinge des Christelyken Geloofs, volgens de Belydenis der Christenen die men de Oude Vlaamsche Mennoniten noemt. Waarin derzelve Leere in Gemeentelyke Huishoudinge, Schriftmatig voorgesteld en bewezen word* (Haarlem, 1743; sneek, 1825, 2de ed.) *2 fw. Here and following reference will be made to the second edition.

16 Jan de Buyser, probably from Amsterdam, was minister with the House-buyers in this suburb of Hamburg from around 1640 to 1670. His *Christelijck Huys-boeck ende het eendrachtigh gheluyt in de Geestelijcken Tempel Salomons, oft Gemeente Jesu Christi* (980 pages) consists of a collection of writings by various Mennonite authors and is intended to be read in the home circle. The first section (pp. 1-625) consists of twelve articles explicated with quotes from Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Vincent de Hondt and others. The second section (pp. 627-821: "Naerder Verklaringe") and the third (pp. 823-980: "Hooghnoedige Vertooninge") consist of more detailed commentary on the articles by the author himself. He also published *Christi Hemelvaart (lost) and Naerder verklaringe over mijn klein Boeckjen ghetuyleert 'Christi Hemelvaart'* (Altona, 1664). See: *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I, 487-488 ("Buyser, Jan de").

17 Pieter Boudewijns was leader of the Danzig Old Flemish in Harlem (1730-1753) and Amsterdam (1756-1761). On September 22, 1743, the day he finished editing his catechism, he was ordained elder by Simon Eduardsz. Toens. For younger youth he made a short summary of the extended catechism for older youth intended for baptism preparation: *Korte schets van de onderwijzinge* (Haarlem, 1744). The second edition of his catechism (Sneek, 1825) was bought by the "Precise Mennonites" in Balk. Their congregation originally belonged to the Old Frisians (Pieter Jeltje's People), but they later considered themselves Old Flemish. This congregation still had pastors with no higher education until 1854. They confessed to affinity with the Danzig denomination, seeing they had the custom to observe foot washing only with visiting ministers and not as an ordinance for the whole congregation.

18 Pieter Hendriks, *Schriftuurlyke Katechismus, waarin de Grond-leere der Doopsgezinden in 't Gemeen, dog der sogenoemde oude Vlamingen in 't bysonder met den Woorde Gods is openegelegd* (Groningen, 1744). It includes an appendix with a sketch of Menno Simons's teachings in the form of a dialogue. This minister of the Old Flemish congregation in Sappemeer is not only in conversation with the tradition, but also with the theology of his own time. He defends the doctrine of the Trinity against Johannes Stinstra and also publishes: *De vier Uytersten des Menschen* (Groningen, 1741), *'t Geslagte Lam of de Lijdende en verzoenende Hoge priester* (Groningen, 1741), *Korte Schets van verscheiden waarheden des Christendoms* (Groningen, 1745) and the book of sermons *De redelyk bevindelyke godsdienst der weerloze Christenen* (Groningen, 1747). Mennonite Encyclopedia, II, 703 ("Hendriks, Pieter").

19 The quotes from the Old Testament are taken from the Biestkens Bible, the ones from the New Testament, from the Biestkens Testament. The apocrypha were treated as having the same value as early Christian literature and were not considered infallible as basis for true teaching. (Boudewijns, *Christelyke Onderwijzinge*, *4-4 fw.) In the eighteenth century the Reformed States General translation began to replace the "Mennonite Bible." It seems as though the country congregations retained the Biestkens Bible longer ("Memoriaal," p. 19; 27). Hendrik Pieters, a Groningen Old Flemish, used the States General Bible in his *Katechismus*, although he sometimes used the Biestkens Bible as a reference, as is evident on p. 350.

20 Simeon Frederik Rues, *Tegenwoordige Staet der Doopsgezinden of Mennoniten, in de Verenigde Nederlanden [...] Vertaelt en Met Aentekeningen ter ophelderinge van eenige Byzonderheden vermeerdert* [by Martin Schagen] (Amsterdam, 1745)

21 In the two confessional sermons preceding the baptismal service "the confession of faith of the congregation, containing twelve main subjects, was reiterated and discussed point by point, with many references to Holy Scripture." See Rues, *Tegenwoordige Staet*, p. 46.

22 Pieter Boudewijns, *Onderwijzinge*, p. *3 fw.

23 The same sequence is also found in Joncker, *Mennoniste Vragenboek*.

24 The text of the confession of the Old Frisians in Hoorn is added to T. van Braght's *Martelaerspiegel*, vol. I (Amsterdam, 1685) ff. 409-450. In his *Schriftuurlyke Katechismus*, Pieter Hendriks summarizes both forms of knowledge of God in a chapter about "God's being and Holy Scripture."

25 Even other Mennonite, contemporary catechisms of both orthodox Mennonite and Remonstrant-Mennonite origin have the general knowledge of God from nature precede the particular knowledge of God from Scripture. See resp. *Kort Begrip van de Leere des Waarheyt, Volgens het Gevoelen der Doopsgezinde*

Christenen: Hun vergadering houdende t'Amsterdam op de Princegragt, in de Arche Noachs. By wyse van Vragen en Antwoorden opgesteld door Jacob Kat (Amsterdam, 1735) en Grond-Beginsels van de Leere der Waerheid die naer de Godzaligheid is; ter Onderwyzinge van de Jeugd en van onge-oeffende Bejaerden; Bij wyse van Vraegen en Antwoorden opgesteld door Joannes Bremer (Amsterdam, 1743).

26 Compare the popular, non-academic defense of the doctrine of the Trinity: Menno Simons, *Opera Omnia* (Amsterdam, 1681), f. 390: "And although they are three, yet they are one in divinity, will, powers and activity, and cannot be separated from each other any more than sun, luster and warmth."

27 "But such personal disputational writings are not very edifying," according to Boudewijns, *Christelyke Onderwyzinge*, *4.

28 Boudewijns, *Christelyke Onderwyzinge*, 67.

29 *Ibid.*, 108. Pieter Hendriks, *Schriftuurlyke Katechismus*, 46-57 („Van des Middelaars Persoon en Staaten") has a separate chapter on Jesus Christ as Mediator precede the doctrine concerning church offices.

30 See, for example, how Menno Simons's teaching gets renewed attention from the Groningen Old Flemish Pieter Hendriks (see above), but also from Joannes Deknatel, the pietistic minister of the Mennonite congregation "bij 't Lam" in Amsterdam and friend of the leader of the Herrnhuters, Count Zinzendorf. He published Menno's treatise on justification, and also an anthology of his works: Joannes Deknatel, *Menno Simons in 't kleine. Behelzende verscheide merkwaardige Verhandelingen en woordelyke Uittreksels uit zyne Werken* (Amsterdam, 1735). In this anthology Deknatel uses Menno's emphasis on the significance of Christ's reconciliatory sacrifice and role as mediator to take a stand against the Deism that makes the gospel nothing more than moral teaching and sees Jesus Christ only as a prophet. (*4)

31 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, 130-131. The unrestrained, rather ecstatically joyful and also tolerant character of the Herrnhutter "theology of the heart" will have been the greatest stumbling-block for the strict Old Flemish. See for a concise description of Herrnhuter faith: H-C. Haqhn, "Theologie, Apostolat uns Spiritualität der Evangelischen Brüdergemeine," in: M.P. van Buijtenen and others, eds., *Unitas Fratrum Herrnhuter Studien* (Utrecht, 1975) 287-314.

32 It may be that Pieter Boudewijns takes a stand against the radical, pietistic "blood and penitence theology" of the Herrnhuters. There was a congregation of brothers in Amsterdam since November 24, 1737; Johannes Deknatel, along with other important Mennonites, was closely involved there as "helper." Three Old Flemish members from Prussia residing in Harlem, Abraham van Gammeren, Willem Focking and Karel Schreeder joined the Herrnhuters in 1743-44 (because of the common ground of the German language and inner piety?) and were expelled because of this. Another member, Pieter Veen, was a sympathizer. See: "Memoriaal," 44-46, 59, 68 and 47. Count Zinzendorf also visited Harlem. On December 2, 1744, Johann Leonard Dober installed a congregation of brothers in the Spaarnestad, where Deknatel was present. In 1748 they bought the Flemish Mennonite church building in the Kruisstraat; the government prevented its being taken into use. The Harlem Mennonites did not have a positive attitude to "the wandering band from Germany, called Herrnhuters, with inner images and ineffective waiting for divine promptings." See: J.P. Jacobszoon, "Joannes Deknatel in 't kleine" (master's thesis University of Amsterdam; ...) 50-51. Neither did the Herrnhuters make headway with the Danzig Old Flemish (at the Oude Verlaat) in Blokzijl, where they had a group led by the Mennonite preacher Volkert de Graaff. See: F. Smit, *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezinden in Blokzijl*

(Steenwijk, 1992) 73.

There is little evidence of Herrnhuter influence on the Old Flemish congregations in Prussia at this time. However, the Herrnhuters acquired great influence in some conservative Mennonite congregations in Central Poland in the nineteenth century and may be considered the inspiration for the Mennonite Brethren congregations blossoming in Russia. See: E.L. Ratzlaff, *Im Weichselbogen. Mennonitensiedlungen in Zentralpolen* (Winnipeg, 1971) 100-102; 165.

33 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, pp. 376-378. Boudewijns finds the Mennonite conviction that grace bringing no change in deed and thought cannot be called grace at all, the inextricable connection between gift and task, in the following Bible texts: 1 Cor. 4:7; Efez. 2:7-9; 2 Cor. 6:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:4-9; Heb. 3:14; 4:1; X:26; Phil. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:5. Emotionalism must never lead to neglect of ethics; conservatives and liberals are very much agreed on this in their common resistance to Herrnhuter quietism. "Moral teaching is the soul of religion," according to the Lamist minister Johannes Bremer, who opposed his pietistic colleague Deknatel. See on this Bremer's *Grond-beginsels van de Leere der Waerheid* (Amsterdam, 1743) **4 fw.

34 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, 409.

35 Prussian elder Georg Hansen excommunicated the famous painter Enoch Seemaan at the end of the seventeenth century because he also did portraits. The artist resisted this judgement in a biting essay: *Offenbarung und Bestrafung des Georgen Hansens Thorheit* (Stoltzenberg, 1697) and went to the Netherlands. In Prussian country congregations the climate changed as well. A pastel of elder Hans van Steen from the middle of this century has been preserved. See: Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde*, 78-79. Wearing wigs was in general not tolerated in Prussian congregations. See: Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 27-29.

36 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 2: "Van de dienaren der Gemeenten"; pp. 145-176. Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 24-26; 40-41; 54-56.

37 In 1743 a pulpit paid for by the teachers came into use in the congregations of Harlem and Amsterdam. "Memoriaal," 48; 57. The four churches in Heubuden, Tiegengagen, Fürstenwerder and Ladekopp, built in 1768, had a pulpit at the long end as part of the ministerial bench. See the illustrations in: Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten, II* (Kirchheimbolanden, 1987).

38 Did the Old Flemish sing in their services in the sixteenth and seventeenth century? It has been suggested that this was at first not the practice among Old Flemish in Prussia, as in Heubuden. "The precise Mennonites ["The precise were called Flämische, or Klahrken, or Reinstoff, and Feinstoff..."] don't sing, but sit quietly in their devotions until the preaching begins; the coarse Mennonites, on the other hand, sing psalms and other Lutheran songs." See: A. Harwich, *Geographisch-Historische Landes-Beschreibung derer dreyen im Polnischen Preussen liegenden Werdern* (Königsberg, 1723) 290. However, they had songbooks, probably for use in the home circle, such as *De Gulden Harpe* (1620) by the Old Flemish Karel van Mander. It was only in 1724 and 1752 that songbooks in Dutch were printed in Amsterdam for the congregations in Prussia, namely *Veelderhande Schriftuurlyke Liedekens*. According to: *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, II, 307. But who, then, sang from the *Pruys Liedt-boeck, inhoudende schriftuurlycke nieuwe Liedekens* (following the earlier publication by J.J., Danzig, 26.3.1604) which had been intended for the Prussian congregations long before? It is Martin Schagen who makes it appear that the psalms had replaced earlier songbooks. (See: Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 43, noot*) There he also mentions a *Gezangboek van de Gemeente in Pruisen*.

39 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 3: "Den Christe-

lyken Waterdoop," 171-200. Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 17-18; 45-49.

40 In 1869 baptism was still administered in the traditional way in Prussian country congregations, such as Ellerwalde near Elbing, as reported in an eyewitness account by Anna von Bodkelmaan-Loewen: "After a somewhat long baptismal sermon, the elder simply poured the baptismal water over the head of the candidate from a wide-based pewter pitcher. A thin stream of water fell on the bowed head with its neatly parted hair, on the bunch of flowers, and, since this, too, was bent in humility, the thin little water jet jumped joyfully onto the red tiles, where, astonished and self-reflective, it came to rest and, ceasing further jumping activity, formed a little puddle. I shall never forget that little image. It was so unholy holy, so self-evident." [my italics; the title of my introduction is from this quote] (Penner, *Mennoniten*, II, p. 259.)

41 On October 6, 1748, it was decided that baptism would henceforth be administered "from a basin in the manner of sprinkling." "Memoriaal," 146-147.

42 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 4: "Het Avondmaal des Heeren"; 221-240. Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 49-53.

43 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 4: "Dat 'er een Gemeente Gods zy, dewelke Zigtbaar, ende Onzigtbaar is"; 201-220.

44 Hartwich, *Geographisch-Historische Landes-Beschreibung*, 292.

45 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 6: "De Voetwasschinge"; 241-256. Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 53-54.

46 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 7: "Het Christelyk Houwelyk"; pp. 251-270. Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 56-59.

47 Pieter Hendriks, *Schriftuurlyke Katechismus*, **2.

48 Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 35.

49 *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, II, 309.

50 According to Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 56 and 59. Pieter Boudewijns, however, says nothing about the desired order of church and civil marriage.

51 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, 267. In the Political Ordinance marriages of blood relationship between cousins, that is, between children of an uncle and an aunt, were not forbidden, although the Reformed Church had objections to this. See: H. Roodenburg, *Onder censuur. De kerkelijke tucht in the gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam, 157801700* (Hilversum, 1990) 310.

52 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 8: "Het Ampt der Werldlyke Overheid, en de Weder-Wraak"; 271-292.

53 In disputes with non-members it is allowed to involve the civil court if necessary. See: Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, 289.

54 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 9: "Het Verbod van de Eed, en de Verplichting van het spreken der Waarheid", 293-307.

55 Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinge*, art. 10: "De Broederlyke Waarneminge, Afzondering, Meidinge en Weder-Aanemng", 308-343. Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 20-35.

56 Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 62.

57 Rues, *Teegenwoordige Staet*, 31-32, provides an example of the excommunication of a teacher/salesman in the Danzig congregation in Groningerland who was accused of indirect involvement in illicit trade (paying too little tax on imported goods). The "Memoriaal," p. 15, probably sheds light on the identity of this excommunicated person, where he mentions the mediation of elder Simon Eduards Toens in a disciplinary matter against the minister of the Danziger congregation in Sappemeer, Cornelis Eijes, "who had taken a false step."

58 *Ibid.*, 33.

59 *Ibid.*, 33-34.

60 *Ibid.*, 35, n*.

The Mennonite Challenge to the Soviets

Congregations under new national policies in the early communist period

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(Based on a public presentation at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Spring, 2007)¹

Usually when Mennonites think about the history of their congregations in the early Soviet period, their first response is about persecution, and this becomes the memory pattern for understanding that period. This is of course true and cannot be disputed. But persecution as a phenomenon means the presence of at least two participants: persecutors and victims. Traditionally the victims are supposed to be Mennonites. I would like to offer a different approach about how Mennonites lived and survived, how they struggled for their future, how they tried to save their religious and cultural identity, and how they overcame those circumstances. I would like to show that they were not just victims. They did not let themselves be considered as victims. They created their own future.

The history of the Mennonite communities in the early Soviet period has unique and extraordinary examples where the ethnic minority offered the authorities its own scenario, and the authorities were ready to accept it. It was a dialog of two partners: the Soviet government and the Mennonites, a tiny religious group. And why was dialogue between two completely different, even hostile societies, even possible? Why were the Mennonites so active, and even brave, to approach, and why were they listened to by the Soviets?

In order to understand properly this phenomenon in Mennonite and Russian history we should make a small digression into the past. The appearance of Mennonite communities in Russia was connected to the colonization policies of Catherine the Great (1762- 1796). Catherine proclaimed the foreign migration program in the Manifestos of 1762-1763 at the very beginning of her rule.² These documents concerned colonization, but at the same time they also introduced her modernization program. At that time Russia could not compete with most European countries in the area of economic development. Russian modernization was late, and it operated according to a so-called “catch up” model. The empress wanted to strengthen the social base of modernization by inviting congregations and ethnic groups that, as she considered, could be reliable partners of the state. Despite the traditional system of serfdom in the Russian empire, she provided future

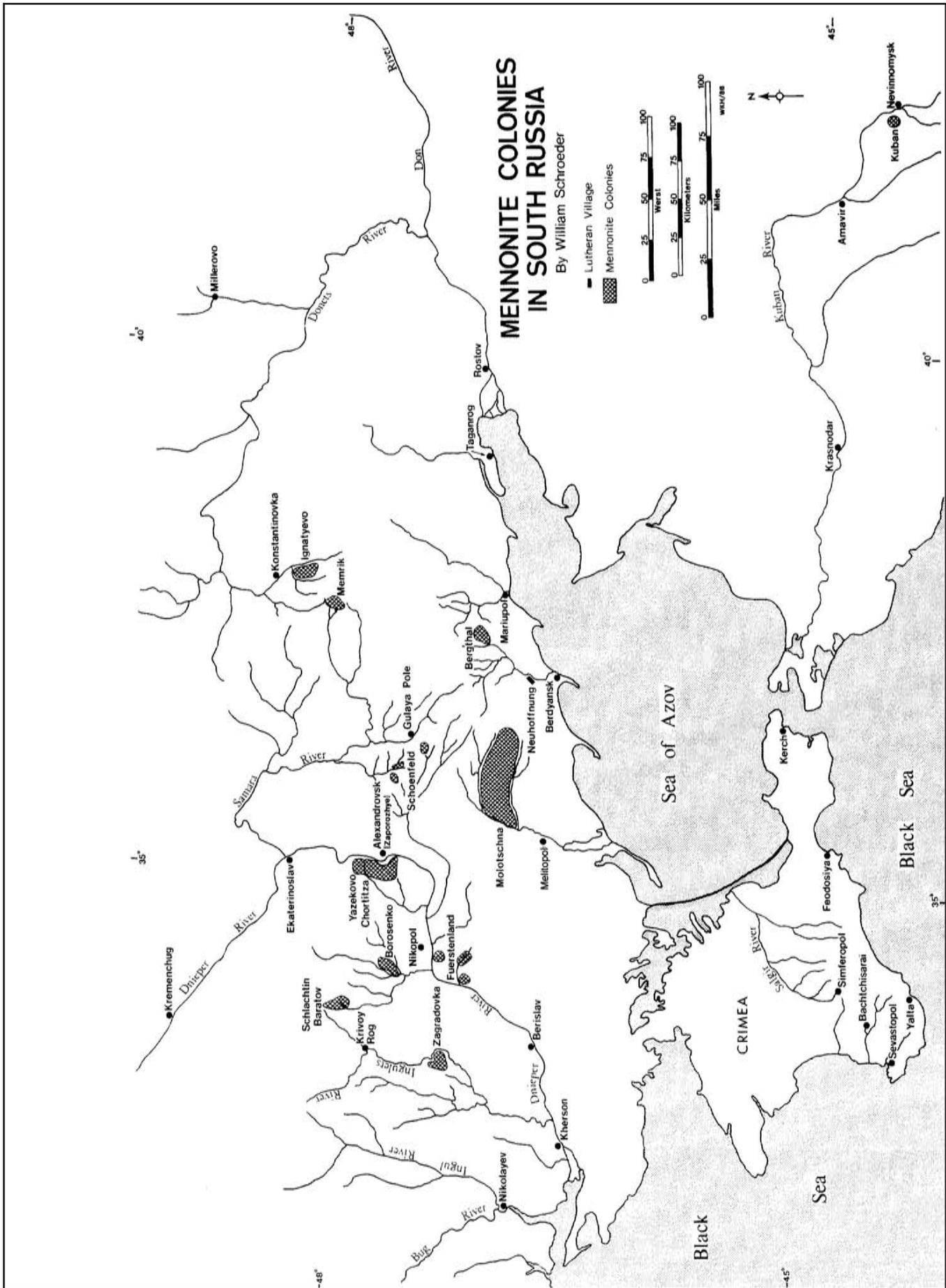
colonists with the complex set of freedoms and privileges inherent in the rest of European society. “Privileges” provided Mennonites not only with the possibility of being landowners, but also allowed them to run different kinds of businesses, live in cities, and, at last, the right of community self-administration. This last privilege was especially important, because it converted congregations into “micro-civil” societies. Here the civil society is able to realize its political, economic, and cultural interests without the government’s interference. The system of self-administration influenced Mennonite identity, developed traits of economic rationality in Mennonite behavior, and stimulated personal responsibility and initiative. We should take into account that the process of the formation of the civil society had just begun in Russia. It was the government that had initiated its formation.³ Peasants did, however, not participate in that process. The social base of a civil society consisted not only of independent people, but of owners. Even after the system of serfs was abolished, the Russian peasantry, who had gained personal freedom, did not become “owners.” In the Russian Orthodox mentality the tradition of creating

capital and respecting property was almost absent.⁴ In this respect Mennonites differed significantly from other agrarian groups. Self-administration became a unique code for Mennonites, which in combination with private ownership, opened possibilities for the colonists and Mennonites, and contributed greatly to their success in Russia. Since Mennonites had a history of self-administration, the self-determination that they experienced from the very beginning of their stay in Russia, prompted community survival and prosperity.

The Mennonite community was not just a collection of neighbors visiting the same church or prayer house. It was also an economic and civil corporation with elected administration. Mennonite communities had extensive experiences negotiating with Russian authorities, and they had learned to achieve positive results. Russian tsarist authorities usually had given concessions to Mennonites because of their political loyalty and economic abilities, which were important for Russia. Mennonites were skillful farmers and talented entrepreneurs. Actually they created a base for machine building and mill industries in Southern Ukraine.⁵ Mennonite communi-



A Mennonite farmstead in the village of Blumenort, Molotschna. The owners, Gerhard Weiss and wife, son Gerhard and daughter are standing in front of their home. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre.





The Peter Unger flour mill in Neu York. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 45-9.

ties themselves were deeply integrated. They had their church and school system, medical and charitable institutions, and private banking systems.⁶ Being pacifists, Mennonites wangled the possibility of alternative military service from the Russian government (universal military service was introduced after the period of the Great Reforms), and they administered that system themselves. Describing the phenomenon of the Mennonite society, D. G. Rempel called it “the Mennonite commonwealth.”⁷ The term is controversial, but is nevertheless rather widespread in modern historiography. In comparison to other ethnic groups, the Mennonite population was very small. In 1914 the Mennonite population in the Russian Empire was about 100,000 people.

We should note that the total population of the Russian Empire was more than 165,000,000 people.⁸ So the Mennonite population in Russia was comparatively low. But the Mennonite communities were a specific form of a society. They had never been indifferent observers of the political and economic situation around them. If problems were reasonable for them, they could solve them.

Actually the period of sad and crucial changes started for the Russian Mennonites, as well as for whole Russian society, at the time of the First World War. There was a seven-year stretch of war, revolution and civil war. Nationalists wanted to limit German landholdings and business influence, in particular in regions close to Russia’s

borders with Germany. They argued that Russian Germans were a potential security threat. Since Mennonites spoke German, their entrepreneurship and farming system were in danger. In 1913-1914 nationalists proposed laws to the state Duma limiting German landholdings, but Mennonites and their political allies managed to avoid them.⁹ When the tsarist state collapsed, the newly formed Provisional Government canceled anti-German legislation. Because of those anti-German campaigns, Mennonites welcomed the February revolution of 1917. However, in October 1917, the second revolution occurred and the Bolsheviks, who promoted the ideas of socialism, gained power in Russia.

Initially this change of power had minimal consequences for Mennonites. Mennonites lived on the periphery of the Russian empire. Of approximately 120,000 Mennonites in Russia, about 60 percent lived in South Ukraine. They experienced the change of power not as a revolution, but as descent into anarchy and civil war.¹⁰

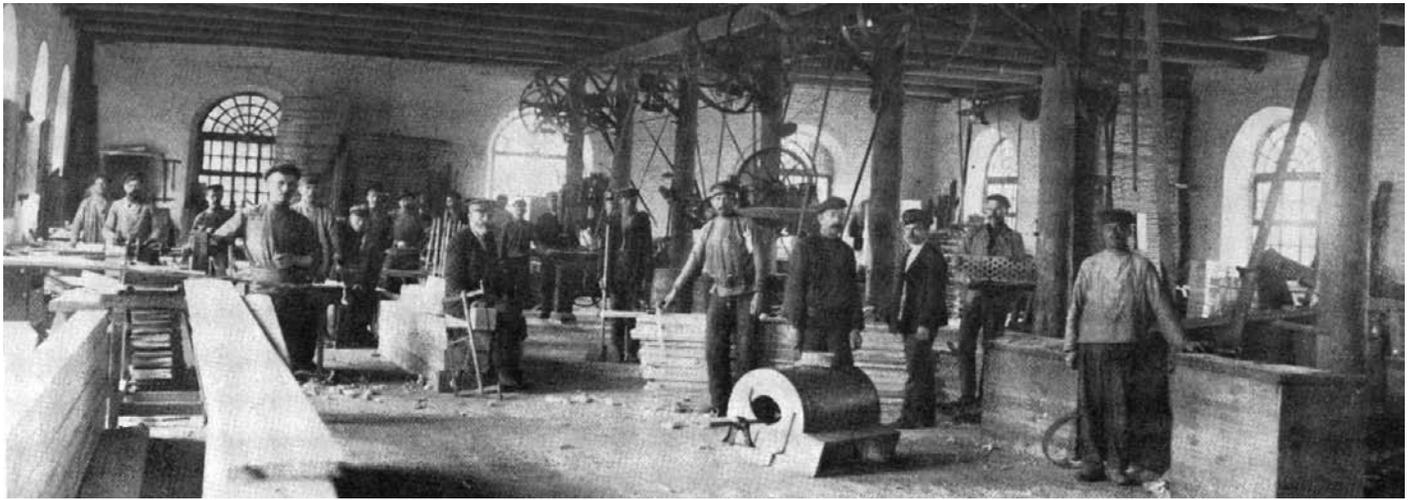
Since 1917 the cruel fight between various political forces had become a reality of the political situation in Ukraine. It was perhaps one of the most brutal civil wars in world history. The Bolshevik Red army, the White army led by Denikin and Wrangel, and the Austrian – German army, occupied the territory of Ukraine from spring till autumn of 1918. In addition, there were numerous groups of bandits, as well as Machno’s army. The latter was the most hostile towards the Mennonites.¹¹

Every political force mentioned above, irrespective of its political orientation, brought destruction to the population in the South Russian region, and to the Mennonite colonies in particular. Mennonite communities communicated and negotiated with all these military forces, except with Machno. Every new political group needed economic support, and loyalty from the local population. But the result of these relations was always another food tax.¹² Mennonites’ perception of these national events was completely different from those of other groups, and so when they negotiated about private economic activity, land ownership, and religious freedom, they depended on the views of the authorities. They did not understand, and did not share, the mottos of national independence and social freedom proclaimed by different nationalistic political groups. In those events and in that political struggle, Mennonites realized their marginality and looked for the possibility of stabilization.

In contrast to the other political group who negotiated with the Mennonite popula-

THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS ON THE TERRITORY OF THE MENNONITE COLONIES (NOVEMBER 1917 – NOVEMBER 1920)

December 1917-April 1918	The establishment of the Bolshevik “Soviets” (Councils)
April – November 1918	The German-Austrian Army in the south of Ukraine
December 1918 -April 1919	General Denikin’s White Voluntary Army on the territory of the colonies
January-April 1919	Bolshevik power restored
July-October 1919	New offensive by Denikin
October 1919 –November 1920	Machno’s terror
January 1920-June 1920	Bolsheviks’ power. Prodravverstka – full requisition system.
June-November 1920	Wrangel’s army in the South of Ukraine
November 1920	The Bolsheviks became the indisputable masters in the South Russia area



The milling area of the J.H. Niebuhr factory. Photo: *Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllt War*, 58.

tion, Machno's aim was the complete destruction of Mennonite settlements. In 1918 the colonies confronted Machno's army for the first time. In that year the Molochna colonies' Selbstschutz, whose centre was in the Blumenthal settlement, repelled Machno's attack. In 1918, Machno soldiers attacked Chortitza villages, and took control of some of them. In March 1919, Machno made an agreement with Dibenko, one of the Red Army leaders, about common offensives.¹³ Machno's attacks were especially deadly for the Mennonite colonies after March 1919. In the Chortitza and Nikolaifeld districts he destroyed, plundered and burned about 22 villages. In October 1919, when Machno's army headquarters was in the village of Orlovo, he almost invaded the Molochna settlement. Machno left these territories in March 1920.¹⁴ So, it is easy to predict someone's questions, "Why was Machno's army so brutal to the Mennonites?" The answer is complicated, and is based on historical circumstances, public sentiments, peculiarities of the Machno army organizational system, and personal traits of the "Peasant army" leader, Nestor

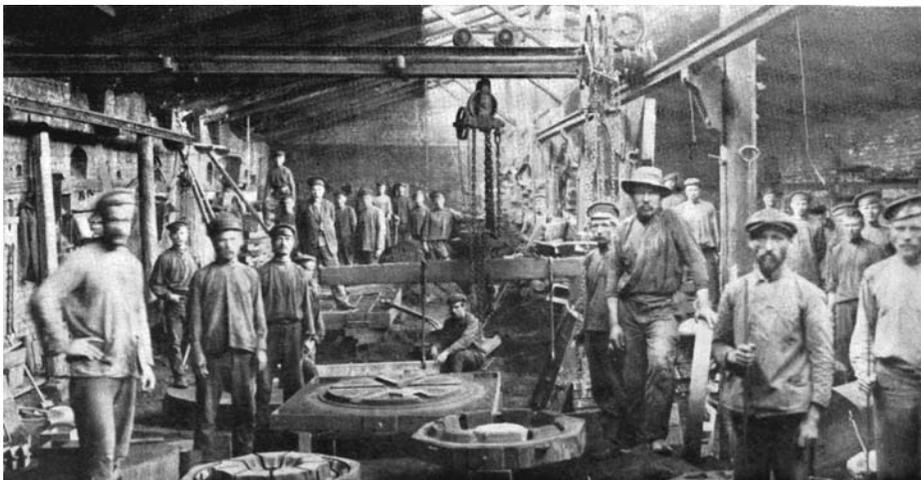
Machno.

In 1918 Mennonites supported the German army of occupation. They offered financial help to the Germans, and there was information that some colonists and Mennonites had taken part in the execution of peasants who had cooperated with the Bolsheviks.¹⁵ The Mennonite "Selbstschutz" had been prepared by Denikin (or White army) officers. Denikin's army's aim was to restore the monarchy. So, first of all, Mennonites were considered by Machno as military enemies. It should be noted, that it was Vladimir Lenin who had first invited the German troops to the former Russian territory, when he made a peace treaty with Germany in 1918.

We should also take into account the social nature of the so-called "Peasant Army" led by Machno. It consisted of peasants who were the uneducated and the most easily influenced part of the Russian society.¹⁶ During the previous decades, the tsarist authorities intensively used the example of the Mennonite colonies to achieve different aims. State authorities utilized different tactics: from "colonist

propaganda" to "anti-colonist propaganda." The anti-colonist propaganda was initially used about 1866, when authorities needed to justify their legislation changes – to abolish "Privileges." Anti-colonist propaganda was a main base for "Anti-colonist consciousness" that existed in Russian society as a result of irresponsible and careless government policy and also German-Mennonite economic influence. The Mennonite communities, which kept their world closed from the larger society, were often considered as dangerous and unknown. And these circumstances also contributed into an "anti-colonist consciousness." The peasants were the main owners and transmitters of this kind of consciousness.

The majority of Machno's soldiers had just come back after the First World War.



The foundry of the Niebuhr factory. Photo: *Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllt War*, 58.



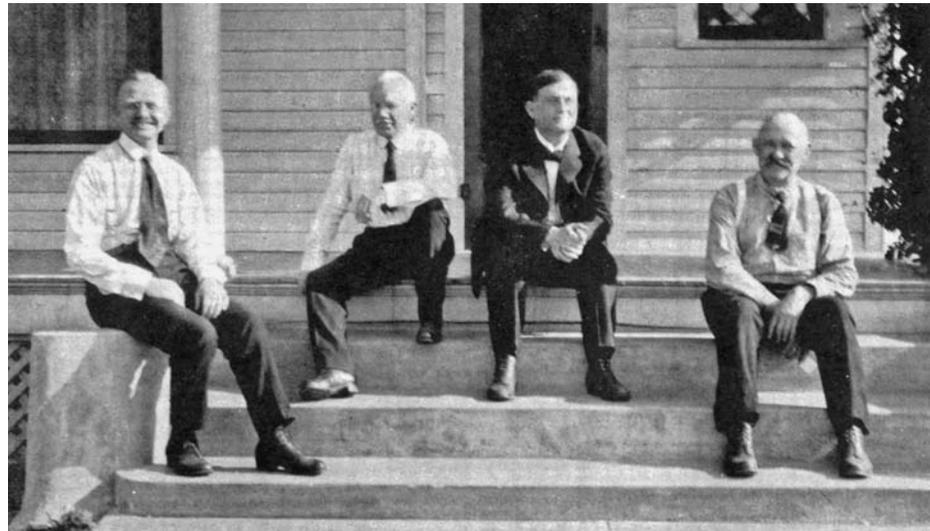
Nestor Ivanovich Makno (1888-1904) was an anarchist and leader of bands that terrorized Mennonites during the Civil War. Photo: *The Makno Archive*. <http://www.nestormakno.info>

They had been fighting for four years. They had become accustomed to seeing cruelty and human blood, and probably they had almost lost a feeling of compassion, in particular compassion for enemies, especially if somebody directed them to their enemy. Coming back after the war, peasants saw economic decline in their villages. They asked about who was responsible for these changes? Machno, who had a personal history with the Mennonites and colonists,¹⁷ explained to his soldiers that the Mennonites, who had cooperated with the German occupants and White army, must pay with their lives. Machno directed negative peasant energy toward the colonies. Machno definitely was a charismatic leader, and his soldiers trusted him completely. We also must note that Machno did not provide his army with food, and that is why stealing was almost encouraged. So Mennonites were considered enemies. All the negative sentiments of the peasants (anti-colonist consciousness, their hatred of successful, rich people who they thought had caused the economic decline, their unhappiness, their misunderstanding of the situation, their political blindness) were focused in their anti-Mennonite attacks.

So, coming back to our Table, I would like to emphasize that the Mennonites were not indifferent to all those events. They resisted cruelty and lawlessness as much as possible. They also realized that any "power" is better than anarchy, and, of course, a strong, constant and stable power was much better than a temporary one. In Ukraine the Bolshevik government was set up in November, 1920. At that time Mennonites were looking for a dialog partner.

The Civil war caused an economic crisis on the territory of the colonies. Settlements suffered significant destruction. Despite all these changes the economic crises in Mennonite colonies did not have an irreversible character.¹⁸ Under peaceful conditions, relying on their experience, diligence and land, Mennonites could have had a real chance to achieve prosperity again.

If one wants to understand the complicated and sometimes hidden nature of the Soviet Russian Empire, the policy regarding nationalities is a good place to start. The result of any plot and revolution is solved in the sphere of social relations. It is an historical axiom that getting power is much easier than keeping it. In early Soviet Russia the question of keeping and protecting power, and the question of the nationalities were closely related. It was deadly dangerous for the authorities to ignore the problem of the nationalities. That is why Soviet Russia had to introduce a broad program for the



The Studienkommission of 1922. A.A. Friesen, C.H. Warkentin, B.H. Unruh and J.J. Esau. Photo: Mennonite Exodus, 45.

national minority population. That program was caused, and also determined, by the main political and economic goals of the Soviet state. Whatever the Bolsheviks said about their policy about the nationalities, in historical perspective it consisted of two main stages: some concessions and then – Sovietization. The Bolsheviks aimed to use the same tactics in realizing these goals on the different minorities. In their projects, the Soviet authorities considered the different ethnic groups as subjects of the policy, not co-creators or co-authors. But the actual situation was more complicated. This was evident in the Bolshevik relations with the Russian Mennonite communities.

Because of economic destruction, the Bolsheviks first relied on an extremely radical communist method – *prodrazverstka* which meant "complete food requisition." It was a special system of taxation when food-stuff, resources and tools were taken away from the villages and transferred to cities for maintaining the army and proletariat. It was the simplest way to solve the urgent food and supplies problem. The Bolsheviks used the same radical methods in their re-

lationship with the population. But it was really a way to nowhere, to "a blind alley." What about the Mennonite colonies? After the requisitions, every peasant family was left to the mercy of God and had to struggle for survival.¹⁹ Who would sow and gather a new harvest? The Mennonite colonies that formerly had been prosperous agrarian settlements were completely exhausted by the spring of 1921. It was at this time that the Bolsheviks, reconsidering communist methods, declared the transition to a New Economic Policy (NEP).

The possibility of a dialog was also determined by mutual perception and mutual comprehension between the two parties: the Mennonite society and the Bolsheviks. How did the Soviet authorities view Mennonites? Their view was related to their previous experience with the colonies. The Bolsheviks took into account the methods that the Tsarist regime had used in its cooperation with congregations. Mennonites had always been recognized by the Russian state as an official foreign confession - along with Islam, Catholicism, Buddhism and others. It guaranteed them religious freedom and

INFORMATION ABOUT MENNONITE RELIEF²⁸

American Mennonite Relief activity on the territory of South Ukrainian gubernias

Date 1922, March - 1923, April

Number of people served 5,000 – 40,000
(in different periods of activity)

Number of meals served..... 7,400,000

Number of Kitchens 120 (including 7 for children)

Amount of food provided 150,000 pudovs²⁹ (2,457,000 kg.)



MCC's relief efforts included sending tractors to suffering Mennonite communities in the Soviet Union. Photo: Lost Fatherland, 63.

autonomy, as long as they did not attempt to proselytize Orthodox believers.²⁰ Because Mennonites lacked a regular clergy, shared the pacifism of many of the Russian sects, and because the Mennonite Brethren movement proselytized among Russians, there was a strong movement to re-categorize the Mennonites as a sect in the years preceding World War I.²¹ The Bolshevik's attitude to the sectarians was rather positive. The Mennonites, who had been called a sect before the revolution, benefited from this status now. Sectarian ministers also had rights not given to Orthodox clergy on the grounds that their clerical work was part-time and unpaid. They were allowed to own land and they were not formally under repression. But Bible study was forbidden at school, and discouraged outside of school. During the early Soviet years, Mennonites were allowed to have their meeting houses and to keep the traditional religious mode of life. They were permitted to establish three seminaries to train preachers. These were located in Crimea and Siberia.²²

In economic terms the Bolsheviks viewed Mennonites quite positively. They admired Mennonites' farming abilities, and this became a basis for communication, negotiation and cooperation. The Bolsheviks took into account the foreign contacts of the Mennonites. At that time this factor worked positively for Mennonites. Many of them had wealthy relatives in European counties and in North America. There were also official contacts between communities. These relations were established during the drought and famine of 1921-1923, when five south Russian gubernias were starving as a result of the Bolshevik requisition program.²³ The Soviet government refused to help colonies, taking into account their

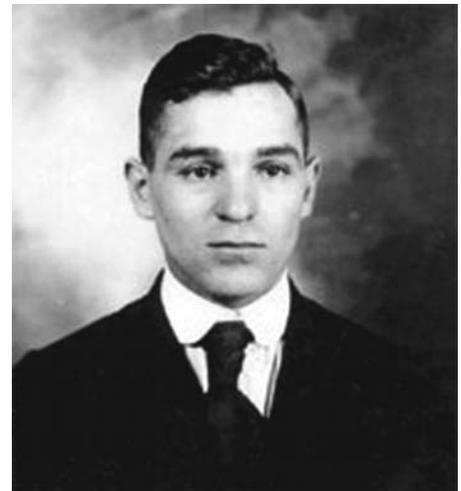
previous wealth and farming skills.

When Mennonites saw that their future was in their own hands, they looked for support from foreign communities. The search for official contacts with American and European communities began in 1919, when according to the documents of the Mennonite meeting in Rückenau, the so-called "Study Commission" was sent abroad.²⁴ In 1921, American, Canadian, Dutch and German communities responded to this appeal for help. The contracts between the organization "American Relief Administration" and its section "American Mennonite Relief" were signed in 1921.²⁵ The same agreement was signed between the Soviet authorities and "Dutch Mennonite Relief." Achieving these agreements was possible because of the Mennonites' arrangements and contacts. In the documents we find the conditions of these organizations' activity. Their activity was supposed to occur on the territory of those volosts (districts) where Mennonite settlements were located. But food aid had to be supplied to the whole population irrespective of their nationality and confession. That help was started in March 1922, and was vitally important for Mennonites. In the spring of 1922, seventy nine percent of the South Ukrainian Mennonite population was starving.²⁶ As a result of the famine, 809 people died in the Molochna settlement, and 515 in Gnadenfeld. One hundred and thirty three fatal cases were registered in Chortitza.²⁷ Starving people used cats, dogs and field mice for food. It is difficult to imagine, but the situation in the neighboring Ukrainian colonies was much worse. We know some cases where people, while losing their minds, cooked their dead relatives and used them for food. So during the famine and

drought, Mennonite efforts and contacts were a crucial factor in helping the population survive.

I am not exaggerating when I say that the credit for overcoming famine in Ukraine belongs to relief organizations. There were ten organizations in Soviet Russia, and four of them were Mennonite Relief organizations.³⁰ The Bolsheviks intended to use these contacts extensively in the future. Mennonite famine relief efforts demonstrated Mennonites' ability to direct financial assistance to the Soviet Union.

The so called "New Economic Policy" offered a good political climate for the negotiations between Mennonites and the Soviet authorities. Actually there was nothing new invented by the Bolsheviks in the "New Economic Policy." After "war communism" with its total food requisition, the national economy was put under free market conditions. Bolsheviks recognized NEP as a concession to private capital. They re-evaluated their opportunity in Russia. They hoped that private business would become a way to restore the national economy, and provide the basis for a social economy. At that time the importance of cooperative associations increased. The so-called "co-operatives" were collectives of peasants and workers who united for a common activity. The communists encouraged the co-ops among the representatives of different confessional group. The authorities considered it a "road to socialism" and a good way to re-educate believers.³¹ The new law about co-ops, which was passed in 1921, admitted collective associations according to the territory where the members lived, and granted wide



Clayton Kratz (1896- 1920?) was part of a group who went to Russia to investigate the needs of the Mennonites in order to coordinate a relief response just as MCC was emerging as an organization. He was captured by the Red Army and his fate remains unknown. Photo: www.mbhhistory.org/profiles/kratz.en.html

possibilities for private business. So NEP provided for Mennonites a legal economic possibility to accommodate themselves to Bolshevik rule.

The South Ukrainian Mennonites formed a cooperative organization of this type in February, 1921, under the leadership of B.B. Janz. Initially it was called the Union of South Russian Mennonites.³² In 1922, this Union was approved by the authorities under the name "The Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage."³³ According to law, it was an economic Union with a rather wide system of proxies. It was important for the Soviet government that they would organize agricultural co-ops. That is why this organization was given many rights: protection of land ownership, dealing in any raw materials and manufactured goods, and cooperation with foreign enterprises. For a while, the Mennonite Union was able to take control of schools and the systems of charity in the colonies.³⁴ It was almost able to reestablish the Mennonite commonwealth, but under Communist control, within a country where power belonged to the Bolsheviks, who were the impatient enemy of democracy.

The chairman of this association, B. B. Janz, formulated the main purpose of the organization as follows: "Independent citizens on independent land."³⁵ That motto sounded like a challenge to the Soviet authorities, but at the time the Bolsheviks accepted it. We should also emphasize that the Ukrainian Union was only a first step for the great international program that Mennonites wanted to realize. Janz wanted to involve Mennonite groups from different European and American countries in that program. This project of a Mennonite International Society expected great economic possibilities.³⁶ It was to be beneficial for both parties. For example, it was possible to establish some private business in the form of "Concessions." Concessions could help run businesses and provide prosperity not only for Russian Mennonites, but also for foreign Mennonite communities. Vladimir Lenin used to say: "We introduce NEP seriously and for a long time." Mennonites trusted this statement. They had

a rational protestant consciousness. They were really convinced that only order and private activity were the engine of progress. I guess that some Mennonites believed that the Bolshevik authorities had also come to this conclusion.

It was an extraordinary event not only because of the religious base of this Mennonite Union, but also because of the extraordinary power that the Union had over the colonies. As a rule, the Bolsheviks were afraid of extra-territorial national organizations, but in this case they allowed even two organizations of this kind. The second one was organized in Russia in 1923. Its name was: All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union. The Bolsheviks tolerated the formation of a powerful economic organization with freely elected officers.³⁷

In 1923 the Soviet government initiated some changes in national policy. The formation of national districts was an important aspect of that policy. Seven national districts were established in Ukraine.³⁸ The Molochanskiy German national district was among them. The possibility of another district - Chortitza district - was under discussion until 1928.³⁹ The reason for this long discussion was because of the Chortitza colonies' location. It was situated very close to Dniproges, a big dam that was being built on the Dniper River. It was a strategically important point. The Chortitza national district was finally established in 1928, but it existed only for one year.⁴⁰ The authorities were afraid of the connections Mennonites had with their relatives abroad. Nevertheless, the New Economic Policy and national districts offered some possibility of Mennonite colonies integrating into the society, and yet protecting their commonwealth system.

The Mennonite Union was the most influential organization in the settlements during the period from 1921-1926. It provided economic and political management in all Mennonite colonies within the Union, and played the role of "the second power."

The legal power in the colonies was held by the so-called "Soviety" (local councils). One "Soviety" controlled several

neighboring villages. Every Soviet had a chairman. Under the conditions of the nationality policy, a chairman could be elected from the ethnic group that made up the local population, and he had to be a Communist party member. At least, that is how it ought to have been, but not in the case of Mennonites. Sometimes the most influential people in Mennonite society, namely, preachers and former landowners, were elected as chairmen. It was rather common for a chairman to also be a member of the Mennonite Union.⁴¹ Thus these local councils – Soviety – were put under the guidance of the Mennonite Union, and not under Bolshevik control.

The Mennonite Union had one more unique right, which distinguished it from other cooperative organizations. It was not under the control of the State cooperative system, but acted independently of this system. The activity of this Mennonite organization embraced almost all the Mennonite settlements in Ukraine, totaling 173 villages. The population of these settlements was not under the control of the Soviet power. It was almost independent.

The Union's primary focus, as widely advertised by Mennonites, was economic activity. . It positively influenced the colonies' recovery. Mennonite economic activity slowly but steadily came back to life. Mennonites also partially solved the problem of land distribution. While land was re-distributed all over Soviet Russia, and other local peasants had 8-10 acres per family, Mennonites could have about 80 acres.⁴³ But under the conditions of the Soviet economy, economic development had not achieved the level of 1914, that is, at the start of the First World War. In order to solve the land problem, the concession "Holland-Ukraine" was established. It was one of the most successful projects that Mennonites would realize concerning the International Mennonite Union program.

"Holland-Ukraine" bought 1,200 – 3,000 hectares of land and made it available to local Mennonites for rent. It helped to solve the twin problems of food and land. "Holland – Ukraine" supplied agricultural machines for its tenants. This concession was abolished in 1927, a year after the Ukrainian Union was liquidated.⁴⁴

As members of the Mennonite Union, Mennonites were able to struggle for their religious rights. In May 1924 they demanded that the Central Executive committee of the USSR allow them to have their religious meetings in prayer houses, meet in Bible study classes, and publish national newspapers. Mennonites also insisted that the authorities should stop atheistic propa-

"The Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage" (1921 -1926)⁴²

Area of activity.....	5 gubernias (Katerinoslav, Donetsk, Kherson, Odessa, Kharkov)
District offices.....	7 (Chortitza, Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld, Schoenwiese, Mariupol, Memrik, Tiege)
Villages	173
Farms.....	14 511



A 1925 meeting of Mennonite representatives in Moscow. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre.

ganda. They wanted to establish orphanages for those Mennonite children who had lost their parents. In 1925 the first issue of the Mennonite magazine *Unser Blatt* was published. It was definitely very good for Mennonites, but its publication was censored by the Soviets.⁴⁵

One more concession made for the Mennonite was alternative military service. The negotiations continued for four years and a law was passed in 1925.⁴⁶ Mennonites were pacifists and individuals were allowed to appeal to local courts for the right to do alternative service. Instead of military service Mennonites took part in the construction of the most important Soviet power building projects. It should be noted that this law was abolished in 1929.

The activity of the Mennonite Union ensured the isolation of the communities, and protected them from Sovietization. In this Bolshevik country it was the only example of self-government. When the Soviets realized that, its response was consistent with the Bolshevik's character. Although the Mennonite Union managed to escape the state administrative system, it had caught the attention of the police: the GPU and NKVD.

The story of confrontation between the Soviets and the Mennonites began in 1924-1925, the last two years of the Union's existence. The headquarters of the Union, was moved from Molochna to Kharkov, the capital of Soviet Ukraine. The activity of the Union was being checked. In a final document that was worked out by the

special commission, the Union was called a "kulak – nationalistic" organization.⁴⁷ The destiny of the Union was prejudged. The violent liquidation of the Union was hidden in the form of a reorganization. The Union was divided into separate cooperative societies under the authority of the State co-op system. As a result of this reorganization eleven separate associations of Mennonites were established.⁴⁸

Mennonites did not immediately realize the significance, the danger, nor the irreversible character of these changes. They tried to revive the united Mennonite cooperative system, and so the "Bureau of the representatives of the Mennonite cooperation" was found in 1927. But in 1927 the authorities prevented any Mennonite acts of ethnic integration.⁴⁹ The authorities had become suspicious of Mennonites. Mennonites were seen as a group that had been associated with the old tsarist regime. These groups were deprived of civil rights. They could not vote. They were denied ration cards and access to education. Mennonites were considered kulaks and exploiters. Generally speaking, for the Bolsheviks the whole Mennonite society was a "Kulak society." And that kind of community had to be destroyed.

In 1929 the law "About religious cults" was passed.⁵⁰ It completely prevented any Mennonite church activity. All prayer houses were closed. The authorities reintroduced the law about the separation of church and state. Those who propagandized, or taught religion in school, were prosecuted under

the terms of the criminal code.

All these events were the result of an objective modification of the state. The communist party formed a totalitarian dictatorship that had total control of all spheres of life. The confessional and economic needs of the Mennonite population were ignored, and the legislation only served the Soviet government's interests and aims. Anticipating these circumstances, the Mennonite Union arranged an emigration program for the Mennonite population to Germany and Canada. Between 1923 and 1926 about 19,000 Mennonites emigrated legally.⁵¹ It happened that B. B. Jantz's slogan "independent citizens on independent land" became the slogan of the emigration.

Looking back at the Mennonite experience in the period from 1917 – 1926, it is apparent they suffered the same fate as the rest of the Russian population: war, anarchy, famine, a little influx of freedom, and then, the darkness of totalitarian terror. There was, however, one important difference. As an unusually prosperous group, Mennonites had much more to lose. If someone thought about the revolution as a promise of a better future, for Mennonites it was terrible. It meant a much worse future: loss of their privileged economic, political and legal status, loss of their autonomy, and loss of control over churches, the school system, local institutions, and self-administration.⁵²

I am deeply convinced that the activity of the Mennonite Union in Ukraine was not only one of the brightest events

in Mennonite history, but also one of its greatest victories. Mennonites won in the duel between two unequal competitors. The positive results of that victory were not only that thousands of Mennonites were able to survive and emigrate, but also that their neighbors got food and machines from foreign Mennonite centers. Mennonites offered authorities their own scenario, their own plan of the Mennonite villages' development. It was their challenge to Soviet power. That challenge was accepted by the authorities because it served their economic purposes. In other words, Mennonites "sold" their economic skills and foreign contacts in order to get a short period of "Privileges." Historically it was a very favorable, but rather short, stage of the Soviet government's development, the period of NEP. At that time the Soviet government was divided and fragmented. This was the reason why Mennonites could get more concessions than the Bolsheviks wanted to give. Under these conditions they prolonged the existence of the Mennonite commonwealth. They let the Mennonite society survive and emigrate. Taking into account the authoritarian nature of the Bolshevik power, it was rather easy to predict that these concessions would be short-lived.

The Soviet government was totalitarian not because it was strong, but because it was frail and weak. Its economic goals were huge, and the state was able to use the appearance of democratic measures to achieve them. The Soviet government needed to involve the entire nation in the process of state development. But what kind of state were they being asked to support and develop? The era of the NEP and its national policy demonstrated that the majority of the population was ready to choose democracy and a free market economy. But democracy was not part of the nature of the Bolshevik Communist government. It was clear that the Communist regime was not supported by the majority of the population. The whole country was becoming a big GULAG, a "prisoner nation." It was a sad prognosis for the culture, identity and economic traditions of Mennonites who had to live in the first Bolshevik state in the world.

Endnotes

- 1 I wish to thank John J. Friesen and Olga Shmakina for their help in editing the article.
- 2 Manifesto "pozboleyniyi vsem inostranzam, krome zhidov, vihodit i selitsa v Rossii, i svobodnom vozvrashenii v svoyo otechestvo russkikh ludey, bezhavshih za granitsu (4th of December 1762)," in: *Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii*, Saint

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- 8 Mironov, *Social history of Russia*, 15-22.
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- 10 It was counted according to: "Spisok naselennih i nenaselennih punktov Berdianskogo uyezda k 1 Yanvara 1911," Berdiansk, 1911; "Spisok naselennih mest Yekaterinoslavskogo uyezda Yekaterinoslavskoy gubernii," Yekaterinoslav, 1911. See also: "Report prepared by the Department of National Minorities (1925)," Central State Archives of Supreme Power and Administration Borders (Ukraine, Kiyv) (CSASPAB), fond 1, inventory 2, file 3273, p. 66.
- 11 Ostasheva N. Venger, *At the turn of the epoch*, (Moscow, 1998), 51. (in Russian).
- 12 Ibid., 56-62.
- 13 Ibid., 56-58.
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- 15 *Civil war in Yekaterinoslav (1918-1920): Sources and materials*, (Dnipropetrovsk, 1968), 35. (in Russian)
- 16 Mironov, *Social history of Russia*, 122-125.
- 17 Belash, *Nestor Makhno*, 20.
- 18 Venger, *At the turn of the epoch*, 60 - 62.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Martin, "Russian Mennonite Encounters," 1-19.
- 21 O. Beznosova, *Voprosy germanskoy istorii*. (About what P.M. Friesen did not tell), (Dnepropetrovsk, 2006), 23-45.
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- 27 "Otchet organizatsii 'Pomgol'", in: State Archive of Zaporizhzhya Oblast (Ukraine, Zaporizhzhya), fond 230, inventory 1, file 11, p. 14.
- 28 "Otchet o deyatelnosti zarubezhnih organizatsiy,"

- in: Central State Archives of Supreme Power and Administration Borders (Kiyv) (CSASPAB), fond 258, inventory 1, file 29, p. 893.
- 29 1 pood (pud) is 36.11 lbs., 16.38 Kg.
- 30 Correspondence between a Secretary of "Pomgol" Committee Tilman and Levitzriy, in: Central State Archives of Civil Societies of Ukraine (Ukraine, Kiyv), fond 258, inventory 1, file 4, p. 589.
- 31 Litzenberger, 64 - 67.
- 32 Toews, *Selected documents*, 37-38.
- 33 Ustav "Soyuza Gollandskih Vihodtzev na Ukraine", in: Central State Archives of Supreme Power and Administration Borders (Ukraine, Kiyv) (CSASPAB), fond 5, inventory 1, file 976, p. 1-12.
- 34 Venger, *At the turn of the epoch*, 173.
- 35 Po voprosu utverzhdeniya proekta, in: Central State Archives of Supreme Power and Administration Borders (Kiyv) (CSASPAB), fond 27, inventory 3, file 15, p. 1-2.
- 36 Osnovniye polozheniya "Internatsionalnogo Mennonitskogo Aktzionernogo Obshestva", in: Central State Archives of Civil Societies of Ukraine (Ukraine, Kiyv), fond 27, inventory 2, file 210, p. 5.
- 37 Toews, *Selected documents*, 160.
- 38 B. Chirco "Natzionalniye menshinstva na Ukraine," in: *Ukrayinskiy Istorichniy Zhurnal*, 1990, Vol.1, pp. 51-64.
- 39 *Itogy raboti sredi natzionalnih menshinstv na Ukraine*, (Kharkov, 1927), 107 - 109.
- 40 Many Mennonites, who had been repressed, took part in this dam construction. J. Dick wrote in his book: "It was a city that was not blessed by God". He also mentioned that there were 34 arrested preachers and teachers among 52 people who lived with the author in the same "barak" (room for prisoners): J.J. Dick, *From exile in Russia into Mission work in India*, (Gretna, Manitoba, 1940), 5.
- 41 Venger, *At the turn of the epoch*, 91.
- 42 Zakluchitelnyy akt komissii obsledovaniya deyatelnosti Mennonitskoy organizatsii, in: State Archives of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk), fond 1, inventory 1, file 1930, p. 24; Central State Archives of Civil Societies of Ukraine (Ukraine, Kiyv), fond 271, inventory 1, file 490, p. 1-2.
- 43 Zaklucheniye po zemleustroystvu, in: Central State Archives of Civil Societies of Ukraine (Ukraine, Kiyv), fond 27, inventory 2, file 211, p. 8.
- 44 Predvaritelnyy dogovor ob obrazovanii contzessii "Gollandiya - Ukraina", in: Central State Archives of Supreme Power and Administration Borders (Kiyv) (CSASPAB), fond 27, inventory 5, file 299, pp. 39 - 41.
- 45 Chirco, 51-64.
- 46 "The law about obligatory military service," in: Central State Archives of Supreme Power and Administration Borders (Kiyv) (CSASPAB), fond 5, inventory 3, file 1053, p. 86. See chapter XVI about exemptions.
- 47 Zakluchitelnyy akt komissii obsledovaniya deyatelnosti Mennonitskoy organizatsii, in: State Archives of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk), fond 1, inventory 1, file 1930, pp. 24-38.
- 48 Otchet o reorganizatsii "Soyuza Potomcov Gollandskih Vihodtzev", in: Central State Archives of Civil Societies of Ukraine (Ukraine, Kiyv), fond 271, inventory 1, file 490, p. 2.
- 49 O sozdaniy obyedineniya "Buro syezdv Mennonitiv", in: State Archive of Zaporizhzhya Oblast (Ukraine, Zaporizhzhya), fond 4177, inventory 3, file 2154, p. 43.
- 50 Litzenberger, 64 - 67.
- 51 Venger, *At the turn of the epoch*, 148 - 168.
- 52 Martin, "Russian Mennonite Encounters."

Ältester Martin C. Friesen (1889-1968):

A Man of Vision for Paraguay's Mennogemeinde¹
Titus F. Guenther, Canadian Mennonite University²

[The Mennonites] will build a city in the [Paraguayan] Chaco – not a state within the state – and we, the people from Asunción, from Pilar, from Concepción, and from Villa Rica will go there to greet them; all who hunger and thirst for justice/righteousness will go to behold the Mennonite city, where the motto of our flag – peace and justice – is seen burning in the hearts of these citizens who honour the name of God, and who will not shed the blood of their neighbours nor that of their enemies, and they will not grow rich at their neighbour's expense.³

Preamble

These words from one of Paraguay's leading newspapers in 1921 show what high expectations that country's government had for the prospective immigrant Mennonites. Would the newcomers be able to fulfill these promises in the coming years? Or would they disappoint their new hosts and prove right the critics who bitterly opposed the government's plan of welcoming this alternative faith community to pioneer in the inhospitable Chaco? This article seeks to answer this question.

On June 25, 2002, the Menno Colony in the Paraguayan Chaco celebrated its 75th anniversary. Together, North Menno (or Old Menno) and South Menno, consist of some 80 villages with 9,146 inhabitants.⁴ Of the 1,763 Canadian immigrants that settled in Paraguay in 1927, nearly one tenth (167 persons) still lived in the colony and were able to participate in the celebration of their lengthy sojourn in that country.⁵

Several significant achievements can be noted about Menno Colony today. First, although the emigration from Canada to Paraguay resulted from an uncompromising stand on private, church-centred education, the Menno community has thoroughly overhauled and "updated" its education system in the intervening decades. Besides transforming schooling on the elementary level, it has also created quality high schools and helped to establish a university-level teacher training school. And it has played an important role in the founding and running of a theological seminary, Centro Evangélico Menonita de Teología Asunción or CEMTA, as well as the Evangelical University of Paraguay.

Second, this group's church life in Canada was austere and form-bound, while in Paraguay, over time, far-reaching innovations have been carried out. For example, a more collegial district church leadership has replaced the Ältester (elder) system in the Mennogemeinde (Menno Colony church). Choral singing and musical instruments have been introduced in worship, as well as a freer style in the delivery of sermons.

Third, the emigrants left Canada without any interest in doing outreach mis-

sion. Yet after a time they enthusiastically engaged in mission work, which included service projects inside the colony boundaries and beyond. Critical observers from the outside, like anthropologist Jacob A. Loewen and historian James Juhnke, have praised particularly the Mennonite-Indian Mission Settlement project in the Chaco for its exceptionally holistic character.⁶

These developments happened not in spite of, but rather because of the values the community and its key leaders held when they decided to move to the country in which they would eventually build a prosperous new home. Much of this community advancement, it can be argued, is attributable to the creative leadership of Ältester Martin C. Friesen. The Elder knew how to promote and implement reform in church and school at a pace that brought significant change, but did not alienate the sizeable conservative segment in that community. Only a small number eventually separated from the Mennogemeinde, leaving for Bolivia in the 1950s because things were "going too far" in Paraguay. A history of the life and work of Elder Friesen will help readers understand better the history of the colony as a whole.

Biographical Data

Ältester Martin Cornelius Friesen "was born on the east side of the Red River in the village of Osterwick (later renamed New Bothwell) [in] southern Manitoba and died in [Loma Plata] Menno Colony, Chaco, Paraguay. He was the [fifth] son of Cornelius T. and Katharina Friesen who had emigrated from Bergthal Colony, Russia, to Manitoba in 1875." Thus begins the terse sketch of the elder's life-story in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* by Martin W. Friesen, the late historian and archivist of Menno Colony and eldest son of Martin C. Friesen.⁷ It also notes that "Martin attended elementary school and later took initiative for study on his own, particularly in theology,"⁸ which suggests that although he never attained formal higher education, he nevertheless exhibited a hunger for learning.

Other specific biographical details could be added. His paternal grandparents were

Cornelius B. and Anna (Toews) Friesen, who came from the village of Bergthal, in Bergthal Colony, Russia, in the 1870s and his great-grandparents were Peter and Anna (Banman) Friesen.⁹ His father, Cornelius T. Friesen, served as chair of the *Waisenamt* (trust fund for orphans) for 29 years. Katharina, his mother, died in 1908 when Martin was 19, and he also lost a brother to typhus. Martin, himself, was laid up for weeks with the same illness in 1909, but he recovered. (No doubt, this experience with serious illness proved to be valuable preparation for the future leader when the migrants would be plagued by the same sickness in Paraguay in 1927). On June 1, 1909, after his recovery, he was baptized by Elder Peter Toews, thus becoming a member of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church. Martin's father, having lost his first wife, married Gertruda Dyck Wiebe in 1909, thereby bringing together two large families.

Two years later Martin married his stepsister Elisabeth Wiebe, who also came from a prominent Chortitzer family, her father being Heinrich D. Wiebe, the son of Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900). His marriage to Elisabeth lasted 57 years, and produced three sons and four daughters.¹⁰ In 1924 Martin was elected minister in the Chortitzer church and then in 1925 at the age of 36 he was chosen Ältester.¹¹ He would serve in this office for 41 years, stepping down only two years before his death in 1968.¹²

My own recollections about the elder include his occasional visits to our home in Menno Colony and of course the many church services in which he preached. On his visits to my family, the elder knew how to earn my affection, as he paid me attention and talked to me. I got to hear Elder Friesen preach quite often and witnessed him conducting communion and baptismal services on Pentecost. His sermons were always pastoral, and consisted of engaging interpretations of biblical passages and, as I recall, a favourite passage of his was Romans 12.

By the time I reached conscious age, the Mennogemeinde had already undergone substantive innovations. For instance, externally it had done away with the unbearably

hot Predigerrock (minister's frock) and I cannot even remember a time when he himself still wore the frock. (According to my father, Elder Friesen first allowed the younger ministers to lay aside this formal attire in the 1940s.¹³) I also remember that he gave his ongoing support to innovative endeavours introduced by his son Martin W. Friesen. Martin W., for example, was among the first to organize a choir in Menno Colony's village of Ebenfeld. It was also in Ebenfeld that Martin W. in the 1950s first opened the doors of the "Bible School" – a forerunner of the later *Zentralschule* (high school). In fact, Ebenfeld, eventually became an example and a resource for other parts of the colony.

The Migration: Causes and Motives

Friesen's leadership role is most apparent during the migration to the Paraguayan Chaco in 1927. Leading a diverse group such as the Paraguay-bound Mennonites was not easy. Historian Martin W. Friesen explains: "The 1927 emigrants to Paraguay from Canada came from three different Bergthal Mennonite groups: 70 percent from the Chortitz congregation (located in Manitoba's East Reserve), 20 percent from the Sommerfeld congregation (in Manitoba's West Reserve), and 10 percent from the Saskatchewan Bergthal congregation (located in the Rosthern, Saskatchewan, area, and closely related to the Sommerfeld Mennonites)."¹⁴ These groups made serious efforts to unite under one elder prior to the migration but failed to reach a formal agreement, even though they were otherwise agreed on the core convictions of their faith. They were also agreed on the necessity of the emigration - that it was no less than a "divine command."¹⁵ As will be explained further on, Friesen would play a central role in having these diverse groups get along in the Chaco.

One of the foremost concerns underlying the move to Paraguay, as Elder Friesen's writings show, was the education of their children. Citing a petition from October, 1920 to the government, a good five years before he was ordained as elder, he identifies this concern by saying: "There is nothing in the world, for which we would hand over to others the important responsibility of the upbringing (Erziehung) of our children." And if the pressure toward a "religionless classroom" (religionsloser Unterricht) should continue, he warned, "we will be obliged to seek out a new homeland, where we and our children will be able to live by our faith."¹⁶

The reason for leaving Manitoba, in Friesen's mind, was not scarcity of land or

worries of military conscription, motivations in some previous Mennonite migrations. In fact, the fear of the imposition of universal military conscription that, according to the elder, arose for Mennonites as early as 1916, had soon dissipated when the government did not proceed with the dreaded legislation. Rather, as explained by fellow Menno Colony minister Abram A. Braun, the migration of 1927 was caused by the Manitoba government's intervention in the Mennonite church-based education during and after World War I.¹⁷ As their petitions to the government reveal, especially disconcerting for these Mennonites was their experience of the suppression by the government of religious and moral education in the classroom.¹⁸ To achieve its aim of (supposedly) raising the educational level among the Mennonites,¹⁹ and imposing the English language so as to assimilate the German, French and Ukrainian minorities,²⁰ the government installed English teachers in the community's schools. As the elder recalls, matters became especially difficult after the government imposed monetary fines or prison on those who would not cooperate, thus ending educational freedom for the Mennonites.²¹

While Elder Friesen mentions that the government schools, with their prescribed curriculum and their banning of religion from the classroom,²² had to be conducted in English, this latter point was clearly a subordinate one, as it does not appear in the final petition cited above by Friesen. Rather, freedom of education and religion were at the heart of their concerns. Of course this "freedom" was dependent on their being able to use the language that they knew. Why was religious schooling so important? The petition spells this out: "For it is our conviction, that schooling without religion would be damaging to the moral formation

of our children, would weaken their faith, or might even lead to the loss of faith."²³ Thus, the often presumed idea that Mennonites in Paraguay were so conservative and so fearful of the English language that they fled the country is without foundation. As Martin W. Friesen notes, the Mennonites insisted on being allowed to use German "alongside English"²⁴ and not necessarily to the exclusion of the latter.²⁵

When negotiations with the Canadian and Manitoba governments remained fruitless, Elder Friesen and the Mennonites turned their sights on South America.²⁶ In 1921 they sent a delegation to Paraguay and it returned with a warm invitation from that country along with written guarantees of exemption from military service (Law #514) and freedom of education and religion. Six years later, in 1927, 266 families (1763 persons) emigrated to Paraguay.²⁷ The family of Martin C. Friesen left Canada on August 23, 1927 with the second last group of migrants.²⁸ His thinking on the issue of emigration is clear from a farewell service held on Sunday, August 21st, which filled the Chortitzer church to overflowing. His farewell speech was based on Jeremiah 51: 6: "Flee from the midst of Babylon, save your lives, each of you! Do not perish because of her guilt, for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance; he is repaying her what is due."²⁹

Unfortunately, we have no evidence of how he interpreted that text. But surely all listeners were conscious of this being a significant move. The elder had sent off the first group on November 21, 1926 with the reminder that "This is a serious undertaking. We are in need of God's help and we need his grace. Jesus says 'Without me you cannot do anything'."³⁰ Another source reports a similar exhortation: "Remember, without God you can do nothing. There is



A meeting of ministers from the churches in the three Chaco colonies of Menno, Fernheim, and Neuland. Martin Friesen is in the centre of the front row, in the dark suit.

malice in the world; be alert. Pay attention to your children. When you reach your destination, do not forget to be thankful. Do not quarrel on the way, but try to practice love among yourselves.”³¹

All too soon Elder Friesen was put to a serious test. The migrants met with disappointment when upon arrival they had to wait for months in Puerto Casado (the port town on the Paraguay River) before they could occupy their land, land which had yet to be surveyed. Many of the newcomers became sick with typhus and other ailments; about ten percent of the immigrants died and were buried in Puerto Casado. As Edgar Stoesz and Muriel Stackley record, Elder Friesen was bombarded by complaints from the men at church business meetings. Their complaints were numerous: “The children are sick. We have had to dig too many graves. Lines to the makeshift toilets are intolerable. The sand flies are unbearable. The mosquitoes are relentless.” Stoesz and Stackley continue:

Martin C. Friesen absorbed this verbal pounding for hours in that Puerto Casado camp. These were reasonable folk whose frustrations had simply overflowed. One after another, their voices cracking with emotion, they reminded their Ältester (elder) that money and patience were being exhausted by the delay in Puerto Casado that should never have occurred. The land they had bought in the Chaco should have been surveyed before they arrived from Canada. When would they be permitted to possess the land they had bought?

The elder listened, then answered slowly:

“It is hard. It will get harder. Why do we make it harder by disobedience and hesitation? ...I sense a spirit of service is lacking. We must not think “I have” but rather “we have.” Have you spent your God-given strength and willing spirit to do your share of the work? Don’t ask for things to come to you. Just be faithful in doing your duty...Aren’t these just temptations? Is every bit of suffering too much for us? We have absolutely not been pushed to our limit.... Let’s not crave the things our neighbors have. Lead a good life. Bring up your children with discipline and to honor God. Use God’s word as a guide and be led by His Spirit.”³²

When, after their meeting with Elder Friesen, the men returned to their tents, their wives, not satisfied with their report, went as a group, seeking to convince their leader “that the migration to the Chaco

should be abandoned.” Martin C. “re-minded them...that they came to Paraguay confident that it was God’s will. God would sustain them.”³³

Holding the congregation together was difficult. The three groups that had left Canada came with two Ältesten; besides Elder Martin C. Friesen there was Elder Aaron Zacharias, who led the Saskatchewan Bergthaler group. Zacharias, however, became ill and died at age 56 in the temporary Bergthaler village Palo Blanco on October 10, 1928, thus “increasing the leadership load borne by Martin C. Friesen.”³⁴ In spite of Elder Friesen’s efforts to hold the emigrants to their course,³⁵ 323 of them did return to Canada, leaving between 1200-1300 people to begin the settlement in early 1928. In the end “one out of four either died or returned to Canada.”³⁶

Still, it is clear that this young elder led with a sense of authority. Long-time colleague and minister Abram Reimer asserted much later that Friesen “was a born leader.” But his knowledge of sickness and death from personal experience - his brush with typhus in Canada, for example - also seem to have helped. He presumably understood and shared the people’s hardships and was described as a gentle but resolute leader. Being of robust build and health himself, he could perhaps bear more than most people. But he was also a person of deep piety, prayer and a life-long ardent student of Scripture. And he was humble. After patiently enduring complaints and abusive accusations from distressed fellow migrants, for example, his simple response was: “You are right, I am as bad as you say, and worse. It is only by the grace of God that I stand before you.”³⁷

Time would heal these early conflicts between the elder and his people. When the newcomers finally reached their new land of present-day Menno Colony, they lost little time in carving out a new existence. They built simple adobe brick homes (many used thatch) along straight street villages and tried farming. Their grain seeds from Canada however proved unfit for these climes, so they had to switch to cotton, peanuts, castor beans, watermelons, manioc, and other more profitable crops.³⁸ That they achieved a modicum of comfort in a short time is attested to by the report of T.K. Hershey and Amos Swartzentruber,



Joseph and Helena Guenther under a papaya tree in their fruit orchard, Osterwick, Menno Colony. This orchard is right next to the Mennonite church.



The Mennonite church in Osterwick, Menno Colony. It was built in 1995 to replace the first Mennonite church in Menno colony, visible in the far left.

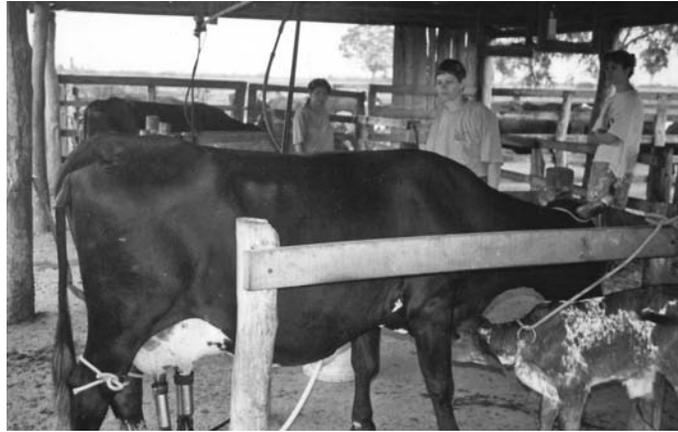
Old Mennonite Church mission workers in Argentina under the United States-based Eastern Board of Missions and Charities. Their home church in the U.S. had instructed Hershey and Swartzentruber to travel from Argentina to visit Menno Colony in early 1929 to investigate the reports in the media of great suffering among the new settlers. They issued the following report: "The hardest time for those Mennonite settlers in the Chaco has been overcome. The time of waiting [at Puerto Casado] was very difficult... It is hard to imagine what these people have gone through... Today, however, one can see that they are of good cheer, generally content and are glad to finally be on their own land...."³⁹

Developments in Education

Martin Friesen went on to provide special influence on the subsequent developments in Menno Colony in the overlapping areas of education and church life. To a certain extent he even influenced the economic sphere. The colony's remarkable economic developments have been reported by Stoesz and Stackley, by Mennonite Economic Development Agency's ⁴⁰*The Marketplace* magazine, and most recently by "insider" authors Abram Hiebert and Jacob Friesen⁴¹ in connection with the colony's 75th Anniversary celebrations. However, while the elder was a member of the administration of the settlement initially, he soon handed this over to other capable persons. But he maintained an ongoing, intimate relationship with the colony administrators to the end of his life.⁴²

His foremost concerns, however, were the church and the schools. The first church building in the colony was located in Osterwick, Elder Friesen's village. Here it served

also as a venue for larger colony-wide meetings such as *Bruderschaft* (church-brotherhood meetings) and perhaps *Koloniessitzung* (colony business meetings). Schools, however, were built in each village. In keeping with past tradition, these



Hanna Guenther Hiebert, centre, with her daughter Elissa, right, and Martha, an aboriginal woman, left, in the milk shed. Mennonites produce about two-thirds of the dairy products in Paraguay. Dairying is one of the main parts of the economy in Mennonite communities

schools usually doubled as "churches" on Sundays. Schooling at this time consisted of the Russian Mennonite "classic" four components or levels: the Primer, the Catechism, the New Testament and the whole Bible. The educational objective and methods were simple, and have even been dubbed "medieval." The objective was to teach pupils – boys age 7 to 14 and girls 7 to 12—to read, write and do arithmetic.⁴³ The teachers were laypersons or ministers, chosen by each village community.

Although this model prevailed in Menno Colony for about 25 years, the elder's eldest son, Martin W. Friesen, eventually organized a summer school for teachers. This "upgrade" for teachers enabled them to introduce additional subjects from Germany's school curriculum during the 1950s. During this same period, Martin W. also

started a Bible School in Menno Colony, a forerunner of what soon became the *Vereinsschule*, then the *Zentralschule*, and finally *Escuela Secundaria* (High School) in Loma Plata. This Spanish nomenclature hints at the fact that gradually the national curriculum was introduced, including extensive use of Spanish, alongside German, a move that would later achieve recognition from Paraguay's ministry of education.⁴⁴ Other innovations in the secondary schools became possible by generous support received from Germany in the form of lab equipment, maps and textbooks. Moreover, Germany provided a salary supplement to German teachers in all schools of the Mennonite colonies for many years. This proved to be very helpful in a country in which the colonies had to create and maintain their entire social services and safety net, including the financing of their whole education system.

In the 1970s and 1980s, as a result of Elder Friesen's vision, and as the means of transportation were improved, district schools with teams of teachers replaced the one-room village schools. Also, as support for secondary education gradually grew throughout the colony, satellite *Zentralschulen* were opened in various regions of the colony. A report from around 1990 about primary and secondary schools states:

Eleven [district primary] schools are in operation with ca. 1,100 students [in 2001 – 1,300 students] and 50 teachers. An accredited secondary school is operated in Loma Plata, with six branch schools in other areas [with some 600 students in 2001].⁴⁵ Fernheim and Menno [Colonies] together maintain a teacher training school (located in Fernheim) and an agricultur[al] school (located in Menno).⁴⁶

During the same time, Menno Colony became an active player in the development of two post-secondary institutions. The first one was set in motion in the 1960s when five Mennonite colonies co-founded the Mennonite *Lehrerseminar* (teacher training school) in Filadelfia. Later the *Lehrerseminar* began offering a complete university-level program with national recognition. The second university-level institution, of which the *Mennogemeinde*, a member of the *Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden von Paraguay*, was a co-founder in 1994, was the Evangelical University of Paraguay (Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay or the UEP), which by 2005



A Brahman cattle herd. For Menno Colony, one of the most important aspects of their economic base is raising cattle.

had about 1,100 students.⁴⁷ Another more practically oriented inter-colonial training center was the *Berufsschule* (vocational school), which was located in Loma Plata, Menno Colony.

How did Menno Colony obtain teachers for upgrading its education? Elder Friesen proved to be resourceful also in this regard. He encouraged his son, Martin W., to become a self-taught pioneer in education.⁴⁸ Elder Friesen was in regular contact with his counterpart Elder Jakob Isaak of the nearby Fernheim Colony, founded by Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union in 1930. The former surely received help from the latter in terms of ideas on how to foster education and obtain books for the advancement of his sons.⁴⁹ The leaders of Menno Colony also sent Andreas Sawatzky,⁵⁰ a young adult, to get more education in Asunción in the 1950s in order to teach in the *Vereinschule*. But home-grown resources soon proved insufficient. Helmut Isaak (son of Elder Isaak) was hired by Menno Colony in the early 1960s and served in Menno for a number of years.

The hiring of Jakob Redekopp of the third Chaco Colony, Neuland, founded by a second wave of Soviet refugees in 1947, is a further indication of Elder Friesen's proactive approach. Redekopp at first declined the elder's invitation, whereupon Friesen remarked to Redekopp: "Yes, you Neuländer are like that. You like to make light of [Menno Colony's] poor education. But when one invites you to help out, you refuse." Shortly thereafter Redekopp joined the staff at the *Vereinschule*, where he made a significant contribution.

Menno Colony eventually also obtained a number of teachers from Canada, including Hans Dueck, Abram A. Teichroeb, Franck Dyck, Theo Friesen, John and Edna Peters, and Frank and Marianne Zacharias and, from Germany, Gerhard Neufeld,



The principal, Elissa Hiebert Friesen, in front of her elementary school.

and Michael and Maria Rudolph. These teachers helped to improve the calibre of Menno's education. A number of Latin Paraguayan teachers were also eventually hired for the Colony's *Escuela Secundaria*, located in the town of Loma Plata. All of these teachers worked alongside the numerous local colony teachers.

Elder Friesen's Vision for the Church

Martin C. Friesen saw education as inseparable from the life of the church. That the formation of the young was of paramount importance to the elder and his church is evident in several early statements by him, as well as in the above quotation, which the elder highlighted from the church's 1920 petition to the Canadian government (cited above). His writings and the testimony of others indicate that in Friesen's view education required the colony's best efforts and depended on the support of both home and church. In a published sermon on "The True Church of Jesus Christ"⁵¹ he discusses "sanctification" (defined as "turning away from evil and doing the good") and elaborates: "A life of sanctification has educational effects first in the family. It brings us to the cross of Christ, where we should lead our children also....The joy, toward which the human being tends from youth – and human beings are looking for joy – should be directed to the better way, so they may flee from self-centred joy and instead come to know joy in the Lord."

For Friesen, moreover, Christian education was aimed at building up the church: "When children are raised up on a biblical foundation, where a life of sanctification is cultivated and practiced, then the church



Werner Franz, President of the Centro Evangélico Mennonita de Teología Asunción (CEMTA), sitting in his office.

has a good future. The good influence of father and mother, passed on to the children through the life of faith [of the parents], will receive God's blessing" (March 16, 1969:1). The elder calls this "preventive church discipline" which begins in the family and is much preferable to "reactive" or "corrective" discipline. The elder did practice corrective discipline from time to time in the form of excommunication from the church, but he was not in favour of the ban.

Abram Reimer, long-time fellow minister, noted in his eulogy at the elder's funeral that youth always had held a special place in the elder's heart: "His greatest joy was to know that the young people were constructively occupied." Conversely, "the undisciplined carrying on" of youth worried him greatly. One thing was very clear to him: "the youth of today is the congregation



The gate to the Centro Evangélico Mennonita de Teología Asunción (CEMTA). It is a seminary supported by the five colonies: Menno, Fernheim, Neuland, Friesland, and Vollendam, although students also come from Latin and Paraguayan Mennonite churches. This seminary, plus the Mennonite Brethren and Baptist seminaries, form the theological faculty of the Evangelical University of Paraguay.



Teacher Astrid Fischer with two of her students at the Children's Shelter in Asunción. Menno Colony participates in this program.

of tomorrow.”⁵² Not surprisingly, therefore, and as part of his “preventive church discipline,” Friesen promoted a holistic program of building sound character in children and youth on a broad front. This caused considerable opposition from those who did not share his views, causing him to go through what Reimer calls “grievous and dark times.”

In an editorial comment in Menno Colony’s *Jubiläumssonderausgabe* (of *Menno informiert*), Andreas Sawatzky describes this opposition, and shows how Martin C. Friesen’s original address, entitled, “The True Church of Jesus Christ and its Calling as Seen in the Light of the Gospel Teachings,”⁵³ openly challenged this conservatism. According to Sawatzky, this address was delivered at a *Bruderschaft* on October 1, 1955, precisely in order to address the “accusations” from the “tradition-bound church members.” People who reproached Elder Friesen claimed that through his innovations in the church and the starting of a *Fortbildungsschule*, “the church under its ministerial leadership (but especially its elder) was abandoning the biblical teaching and becoming more and more worldly, indeed was taking the ‘wrong way’ [Irrweg].” “These innovations,” the reproach went on, will “foster the very ‘worldliness’ for which we had left Canada.” Sawatzky notes that in this speech Ältester Friesen argued that the “ministerial of Menno [Colony] wanted the exact opposite: through innovations and more programs like Bible study and choral singing... all of which can be defended with the Bible; [the *Lehrdienst*] was aiming to revive the church and lead it to a deeper reading of the Bible.” Significantly, this speech was published in the *Mennoblatt* in 1969 as a sermon a year after the elder’s death and republished in full again in 2002 in the Colony’s *Jubiläumssonderausgabe*.

The rewards for these efforts indeed far outweighed the frustrations. Minister Abram Reimer noted that Elder Friesen “later also observed and enjoyed many blessings,” including the youth ministry, and “experienced many a joyous hour listening to choirs and the singing of youth groups.” The youth evidently reciprocated the elder’s love for them by honouring him and his wife Elizabeth with musical evenings on their birthdays in their later years. These welcome results did not come about easily or quickly. Martin W. Friesen sums up the process this way.

Upon the arrival of the immigrants, Churches and schools were established according to the old ways. Ältester Friesen soon recognized that these institutions were suffering severely, as they were too



The largest church building in the Menno Colony, situated in Loma Plata. This is where Ältester Friesen preached his farewell sermon and presided over the communion service that followed.

restricted by tradition. He worked hard for renewal, which however, progressed very slowly but which did not come to a standstill either. A small group encouraged him in this endeavour.... Ältester Friesen was the right man for the right job at the right place and time. He challenged church and school to move beyond the practices of their ancestors and directed them towards spiritual renewal.

Martin W. Friesen continues: “Originally the large majority of his parishioners were against this” reform to the point of making “an attempt at splitting the Gemeinde.” The attempt, however, “was not successful and slowly but surely the impact of the new efforts widened and worked for the blessings of peace and unity,” concludes Martin W.⁵⁴ More than successfully averting the threatened schism, Elder Friesen, with the help of able ministers, actually managed to win over the other two groups, the Saskatchewan-originated Bergthaler and Manitoba-originated Sommerfelder congregations, into one united Mennogemeinde under one ministerial leadership. Thus, in about “1950 the joint name ‘Chortitzer Mennonite Church of Menno’ was changed to ‘Mennonite Church of Menno’.”⁵⁵ Writer Peter Klassen, of neighbouring Fernheim Colony, calls this unification “one of the most remarkable phenomena” from the point of view of Mennonite history. “The three church groups [Gemeinden] came together in a few years into one; and this [unified] church in turn carried out the most radical reforms, without this leading to further splits,” Klassen writes.⁵⁶ In one sense the conditions for this union were provided by the developments of the migration itself. The Sommerfelder had left Manitoba

without their Elder Heinrich J. Friesen, who stayed with his church in Manitoba.⁵⁷ They thereby effectively joined the Chortitzer church already in 1928, actually placing themselves under Elder Friesen’s leadership from the beginning. The Bergthaler, whose elder died in Palo Blanco in 1928, hesitated for a while but eventually joined the *Mennonitengemeinde zu Menno* or Mennogemeinde around 1950.⁵⁸ However, all three groups had in effect depended on the services of Martin C. Friesen as the overall elder all along.

Martin C. Friesen was the leading elder until he retired from the position in 1966, passing on his office to Minister Jacob T. Dueck as his successor. But for many years he had the assistance of two ordained assistants (*Hilfsältesten*), Martin T. Dueck in South Menno and Abram B. Giesbrecht in North (Old) Menno. Undoubtedly, Martin C’s leadership and his style of collegiality had laid the groundwork for the new developments in church leadership practice that were introduced around 1980: the centralized Ältesten system was deliberately replaced and the Mennogemeinde was reorganized (by ministerial action) into district churches with leading ministers in each district.

Perhaps it is not surprising that a church that conquered the historic separation of its constituent groups should also show increasing openness towards the larger Mennonite world body. We may note that the Mennogemeinde joined the *Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden von Paraguay* (Union of Mennonite Churches of Paraguay) as early as February 12, 1968, about two months before Elder Friesen’s death.⁵⁹ But it did not stop with uniting churches in Paraguay. Martin W. Friesen could report

further by 1990:

This [Menno] conference is a member of the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America, as well as of the Conference of Mennonites in South America,⁶⁰ the Vereinigung der Mennoniten-gemeinden in Paraguay, and the Chaco Mennonite Conference (the latter consists of all Mennonite congregations in Neuland, Menno and Fernheim colonies)⁶¹

This implies that the greater Menno-gemeinde participates in one conference with Mennonite Brethren and Evangelical Mennonite Brethren churches of Fernheim and Neuland.

Martin W. Friesen characterizes church life in Menno around 1990 as follows:

[A]ctivities...take place in eleven large church buildings. Total membership is about 3,000 [4831 in 2001],⁶² including 55 ministers and 40 deacons. The entire Gemeinde is divided into nine regions... [14 in 2002], with a leading minister responsible in each. Several local churches have organs. Each local church has a choir and musical instrument groups, which serve on Sunday mornings and on other occasions. Singing in harmony rather than unison has been practiced for some years already.⁶³

As indicated above, these innovative changes are attributable in no small measure to its long-time Ältester. Historian Martin W. Friesen rightly notes:

Martin C. Friesen served as leading elder of the entire Gemeinde [practically from 1928] until 1966 and was responsible for many of the changes in congregational practice, as well as [for] the introduction of higher levels of education.⁶⁴

A fuller description of other aspects of life in the Menno Colony would show the same type of collaboration with other Mennonite colonies in Paraguay in education, economic matters and in the remarkable Mennonite-Indian Mission Settlement project, during most of the history of the Chaco colonies.⁶⁵ Again, these aspects are summed up well by Menno Colony's resident historian, Martin W.:

Menno Colony has long cooperated with the other Chaco colonies (Neuland, Fernheim), as well as with Friesland and Volendam [in East Paraguay] in every possible way. It is also a member of the

Asociación de Servicios de Cooperación Indígena Mennonita [Council for Indian & Mennonite Cooperation]. The colony also has its own relief organization, the Comité de Asistencia Social [the Social Assistance Committee], which seeks to help poor [Latin] Paraguayans in a special way. It



The first church in the Menno Colony, identified as the first Mennonite church in South America. It is preserved today as a historical site.



A well-kept cemetery in the Menno colony, which includes the graves of the early leaders.

is helped in this by the International Mennonite Organization of Europe.⁶⁶

For many years Mennonite Central Committee North America has also rendered significant assistance in monetary terms and by way of consultation. Today, however, the Paraguayan colonies, including the mission-settlement project, are largely self-sufficient.

Factors in Church Renewal

The above portrait of the life and work of Elder Martin C. Friesen, if sketchy, readily confirms Menno Colony Minister Abram Reimer's attestation: "He was a born leader, chosen for this by the people and confirmed by God." Fernheim Colony historian Peter Klassen also notes in relation to the Chor-titzer group: "it had in its Elder Martin C. Friesen a powerful leader."⁶⁷

Klassen also asks the question: "Where can we find the explanation for this process of change" that has occurred in the Menno-gemeinde? He ventures some guesses:

The influences [may have come] from the neighbouring colonies. After many years of fearful avoidance followed a time of mutual openness. Contacts increased through joint events, like faith and ministers conferences. Many young people from Menno developed relationships with the youth of the other colonies through shared educational institutions. Frequent visits by ministers from North America, many of them evangelists, did their part.⁶⁸

But Klassen defers to Menno's "insider" historian for an additional explanation:

[Martin W.] Friesen, however, is of the opinion that the strongest influence derived from a will to change that was directed from within [and came from]...Elder Martin C. Friesen, even if this will-to-change [Wandlungswille] initially found only a lukewarm reception. However, the circle of those who accepted his vision has steadily grown over time. In any event, the 'Mennonite Church of Menno' has by [1988] entered fully into a levelling process [Nivellierungsprozess], which makes the Mennonite churches in Paraguay increasingly similar to each other.⁶⁹

Neuland Colony historian Jakob Warkentin in connection with Menno Colony's 75th Anniversary History Symposium

has advanced another plausible reason for the opening up of the conservative people of Menno. Namely, when the worldly-wise Mennonite refugees (the Neuländer-to-be) arrived in the Chaco in the late 1940s, they were housed for several months in the homes of Fernheim and Menno Colony residents. Through this the Mennos discovered that people with more education, who sang in four-part harmony, were lively and dressed colourfully, could still be genuinely committed Christians. In Warkentin's words, "the Mennos realized that... a differentiated school system and a variegated church life need not lead to a falling away from God or the rejection of the faith tradition of their forebears, but offered genuine help" to the community against getting stuck in too strict a traditionalism. Moreover, argues Warkentin, the "ongoing

interaction between the Neuländers and Mennos resulted in the gradual normalization of the relationship between Fernheimer and Mennos.⁷⁰

We may grant that this encounter likely influenced significantly the opening-up process (which was a two-way process, according to Warkentin), but its beginnings had been stirring for some time, indeed from the colony's beginning as was noted above. But in the decade to follow, major changes took place which were evident everywhere.

Theological Moorings of the Menogemeinde

We have seen that the uniting of the various groupings of Menno Colony into one "conference" happened at least partly by default. But it is evident from Martin C. Friesen's extant sermons that his patient yet persistent efforts at building unity was instrumental and was clearly built on a solid theological vision of the one true church of all committed Christians. In the sermon on "The True Church of Jesus Christ," cited above, the elder declares that this church has two key characteristics. It must model a life of "sanctification" and of "unity" (not to be mistaken for uniformity). The conditions may have been favourable for uniting the three church groups into one Menogemeinde from the outset, as suggested earlier.

We have already touched on the elder's definition of "sanctification" above as "turning away from evil and doing the good." On unity he writes: "Many organized churches exist but there is only one true church of Jesus Christ. This church was elected before the foundation of the world was laid (Ephesians 1:4) and its origin is in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ." He then shows that "Christ himself laid the first stone" in Peter's confession. "On this rock – the confession spoken by Peter – I will build my church. First [it was built on] Peter and the other Apostles and then on each individual disciple until today. On this ground each brother [and sister] must stand."⁷¹ On this personal groundedness the elder is emphatic: "Thus, not by baptism or the reception into the outward congregation do we become members of the church of Jesus Christ, but through regeneration [citing Titus 3:3-7 & Eph. 5:26-27]. Every one must personally speak the confession, worked by the Spirit of Christ (not just a memorized one): 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'."⁷² In summary, says the elder,

The characteristics of the true church of Jesus Christ are that each person in it:

1) is grounded on the Rock of Jesus Christ, 2) has received forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ, 3) has received the Spirit of Christ, 4) walks on the road of sanctification, [and] 5) his[/her] name is written in heaven. This church is the light of the world. It is equipped with the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) and has received the task of mission, to be the bearer of the light and to proclaim the Gospel throughout the whole world.⁷³

Clearly, Friesen's Christ-centred understanding of the church contains an explicit theology of missions. He notes that "in order to be able to fulfill this great mission, it is important that the church pay attention to, and preserve/practice these two conditions, 'unity' and 'sanctification.'"⁷⁴ As biblical grounding and to sketch the content of this unity, Elder Friesen cites Jesus' High Priestly prayer (John 17) and the Apostles' Gathering (Apostelversammlung) in Jerusalem of Acts 15. At that gathering, he notes, unity remained "victorious" because "the Apostles wanted what the Holy Spirit wanted." However, this is no mindless literalism for the elder. For he writes: "The model of that Meeting of the Apostles is exemplary in making decisions according to God's will: They let the Word of God speak; they let themselves be led by the Holy Spirit; they also used their minds, they thought about things and took the circumstances into account. The goal of the Apostles was Jesus Christ. If one turns one's gaze from this goal, things go badly."⁷⁵

The elder makes sure to nuance the meaning of Christian unity, saying: "Christ wills like-mindedness and not uniformity." Thus, while strongly pressing the personal dimension of Christian faith and life, he stresses with equal force the collective, churchly nature of Christ's body: "The Spirit of Christ binds us together with God and unites the hearts, when [the Spirit] dwells in us. Therefore, 'be zealous to preserve the unity in the Spirit and the bond of peace'"⁷⁶ For the elder this translates into a practical rule of thumb: "May the following also be our motto: 'In the main thing unity, in secondary matters freedom, [but] above all love'."⁷⁷

Summing Up

The goal and efforts of Elder Martin C. Friesen's life were to renew and build up the "true church of Jesus Christ." For Friesen this consisted of the ingathering of believers who were in living relationship with God in Christ, united in one living church body with all other believers, past and present. As he described it in a letter of 1927, these

believers are not individualistic, saying "I have," but rather say "we have," and they are willing to suffer for and with Christ and serve one another. Though conversion and union with others were paramount for the elder, he held that ongoing sanctification was of equal importance to the health and growth of the church. The growth was to happen in two ways: a) by raising the young in "the way of the Lord" and incorporating them into the church, and b) by missionary witness to the world. Both tasks were to be realized primarily through the example of Christian living – of parents before the children, and the church before the watching world⁷⁸ – that is, by being bearers of the "Christ light." In fact, the church's unity and sanctification were to be the condition for fulfilling the calling to mission.

I have made limited reference to the mission initiatives of the Chaco Mennonites in their joint efforts between the various churches and colonies. Though, as stated above, they originally had no intentions of undertaking mission in Paraguay, they have in fact practiced the "migration evangelism" that John H. Yoder wrote about in 1961 in his classic pamphlet on missions, *As You Go: the Old Mission in a New Day*.⁷⁹ The Menogemeinde, in concert with neighbouring churches, has been actively engaged in the Indian-Mennonite Mission Settlement project, which has resulted in a church with about 7,000 Indigenous church members from about a half dozen tribal societies. This is not to mention the additional educational, service and church outreach programs among Latin Paraguayans (in the Chaco and in East Paraguay) in which Menno Colony also strongly participates along with the churches from the neighbouring colonies.

The Menogemeinde is, of course, not a perfect community. It faces major challenges about how to stay focused on striving for nothing else but building "the true church" in order to illumine the world within and around it. For all its work at creating a caring community with an elaborate social safety net, and for all its church renewal and updating of the education system, its total autonomy in all things (Selbstverwaltung) has placed this Christian community into its own kind of Constantinianism in a microcosm. This is becoming more evident as the third and fourth generations are coming onto the scene. Not all offspring are embracing a consciously Christian life and many have not responded to the elder's "preventive church discipline," although church attendance is surprisingly strong even today. Perhaps we could say that when the colony became prosperous, many

parents became less diligent in attempting to model the sanctified life.

Nevertheless, the overall achievements of Ältester Martin C. Friesen are considerable, although he did not work alone. Just as the emigration to Paraguay was “a decision made by the Chortitzer Mennonite people as a whole,”⁸⁰ in which the church leaders acted as “discussion leaders,” so in the Chaco the elder showed great skill in delegating tasks to co-workers and to the whole congregation.

Today the time of the Ältesten system is past in the Chaco. Now it is up to the current generation to be creative in finding ways of carrying on the work of God’s kingdom, of leading through modelling and thereby inviting participation from members in the church as well as outsiders to join the church. We have indicated some ways in which they are rising to the challenge.

As Ältester Martin C. Friesen had lived for the church so he died in and for the church. When he felt death approaching he prayed for the grace to celebrate communion once more, which was granted to him. Following the celebration, he stood up to deliver a moving farewell speech. This included asking forgiveness for when he had shown insufficient love to his fellow-members. A couple of hours later he died during his siesta (Mittagschlaf) in the hospital room where he was visiting his ailing wife. As his church in Chortitz, Manitoba, had sent him off to Paraguay in 1927, so his Mennogemeinde in Loma Plata gave him a moving farewell. The biggest church in Loma Plata was filled to overflowing as thousands – including many from the churches of the neighbouring colonies – came to say their goodbyes to their beloved leader of 41 years.

Indeed, in one way “a lifetime of kingdom work” had come to an end with the elder’s death. Yet, in other ways the seeds sown in his lifetime have sprouted and are still prospering in thousands of Christian lives throughout the Mennogemeinde and beyond. The improved quality of education, through the conscious initiative of the faithful traditional community’s leadership,⁸¹ has benefited Menno on many levels, and even benefited communities abroad through Menno’s emigrants. Its educational innovations have instilled greater self-confidence in the community’s ability to face internal challenges and enabled it to relate constructively and missionally to the surrounding aboriginal communities and the Latin society in Paraguay. It has created a spirit of openness in the formerly isolated colony.⁸²

One may ask whether, seeing that the

colony has developed its own progressive education system over time, it was worth the trouble and cost of leaving Canada. How can one justify the loss of 170 lives upon the group’s arrival in Paraguay? Still, one must realize that the emigrants were interested less in “escaping higher education” (as noted earlier) and more in recovering the freedom to keep religious/ethical formation integrated with general practical and academic education. Their freedom in Paraguay enabled them to pursue this goal and to a large extent they put it into practice. And besides preventing education from becoming secular or an end in itself,⁸³ the Paraguayan Mennonite churches are using education to equip workers for vocations within their communities and beyond. As a recent study shows, these colony churches are involved in a variety of mission and service projects today in and around the colonies and throughout the country – home to them now for more than 75 years.⁸⁴

Service involvement for Paraguayan Mennonites, including those of Menno Colony,⁸⁵ has also increasingly come to include the holding of political office. Three Mennonites, two of them from Menno Colony,⁸⁶ have successively held the position of governor in the Chaco province of Boquerón (a post comparable to a Canadian provincial premier). As well, an educator and a medical doctor, both from Menno Colony, are now holding the positions equivalent to minister of education and minister of health, respectively, in the province of Boquerón.⁸⁷ Of late, the Paraguayan president has also appointed several Mennonites to key ministries in the national government.⁸⁸

Have Mennonites, in whom the government of Paraguay placed lofty hopes in the beginning, fulfilled those hopes? At the initial 1921 reception of the Mennonites, the nation’s leaders assured the opponents of the Mennonite immigration that the Mennonite immigrants would “not build a state within the state” but would build a “city” filled with “peace and justice,” the ideals enshrined in the nation’s flag. To be sure, their present level of participation in the life of that nation, including its political life, is not without risks to their community’s Christian calling and cohesion, and they are conscious of this.⁸⁹ But many colony members believe that the biblical injunction to “seek first God’s kingdom” and engaging in “servant leadership” (Mark 10:42-45) includes serving in political office and participating in party politics as well as participating in business or industry. In any event, the fact that Paraguay’s Mennonites were invited by the government

now around the turn of the century to serve in public administration is a huge vote of confidence in them.

Will Mennonites be able to live up to the government’s expectation and carry out this calling with integrity while remaining true to their Christian ideal? Time will tell. Mennonite history, also in Paraguay, is clearly a dynamic one and is continually unfolding. Would Elder Friesen have affirmed the increased degree of involvement by Mennonites in the nation’s public life? It is hard to say. But in light of the many changes he formerly both initiated or supported, the elder seemed to understand and accept that for the Christian church to be “in the world” but not “of it” meant that it could not stand still. He would have insisted that the church must be en via (on the move), balancing its rootedness in its faith tradition with innovations that enable it to be a recognizable sign of God’s kingdom and God’s mission in and to the world.

Endnotes

1 This article contains the augmented material, which the author presented at the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society workshop at the Thresherman’s Museum, near Morden on October 27, 2001. By way of method, this article does not aspire to be an exhaustive “biography” of Elder Martin C. Friesen, nor a rigorous “history” of Menno Colony. Rather, it wishes to put together a biographical and historical sketch of the elder and his community that will help readers to understand his significance or role in the birth and development of the Mennogemeinde. To this end, a selection of sources have been consulted, both older and current ones, but with no claim to exhaustiveness. Having lived his first 25 years in this community, the author was able to draw on his memory at many points in the discussion.

2 The author was born and grew up in the Mennogemeinde in Paraguay. He is Associate Professor of Theology and Missions at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Canada. All photos by the author.

3 Cited by Peter P. Klassen from *El Liberal* (July 22, 1921), a leading newspaper of Paraguay, in *Die Mennoniten in Paraguay: Reich Gottes und Reich dieser Welt*, Band 1 (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein e.V. Bolanden, 2001) 73f.; my translation.

4 From personal communication with Michael Rudolph, Paraguay, April 2001.

5 “Von den damaligen Einwanderern leben heute noch 167 in der Kolonie Menno,” reports the community paper, *Menno aktuell* (June 2002).

6 Cf. Jacob A. Loewen, “Missions Today: Three Models of Kingdom Building,” *Mennonite Reporter* (Oct. 3, 1977); James C. Juhnke, “Paraguay: The Great Exception,” chap. 10 in *A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979) 185-192. This is, however, only the most notable of a number of Christian service projects with which the colonists would benefit their host country.

7 *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (ME), vol. 5 (1990) 313; cf. *Mennoblatt* (1 May 1968): 3. The elder’s niece notes that he was “the fifth of twelve brothers and sisters...” Katherine Friesen Wiebe, “Bishop Martin C. Friesen 1889-1968,” in *Preservings*, No. 7 (December 1995): 12-13.

8 ME, (1990): 313; Friesen Wiebe, 12.

9 Royden Loewen, ed., *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863 to 1929*, (Winnipeg, MB: The University of Manitoba Press, 1999) 316; Adina Reger and Delbert Plett, QC, *Diese Steine: Die Russlandmennoniten* (Crossway Pub. Inc., 2001) 350.

10 Friesen Wiebe, 12; Reger and Plett, 607.

11 ME (1990): 313.

12 Reger and Plett, 606, mistakenly date the elder's retirement in 1965. In the *Namensverzeichnis*, 677, his death date is also wrongly recorded for 1965. The dates for Elder Friesen's father, Cornelius T. Friesen, are given as 1860-1922 (607) but the writers claim that he was still alive to witness the departure of his son's group to Paraguay in 1927 (606).

13 Cf. Peter P. Klassen, *Die Mennoniten in Paraguay: Reich Gottes und Reich dieser Welt*, (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein e.V. Bolanden, 1988), 319.

14 Martin W. Friesen, ME, vol. 5, (1990) 554; his brackets.

15 Cf. M. W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis*, 147-153. Cf. Abraham S. Wiebe, "Die Bergthaler Mennonitengemeinde aus Russland über Kanada nach Paraguay," in *Jahrbuch 3* (September 2002) 15-17; cf. J.A. Braun (2001) 18.

16 Martin C. Friesen, "Die Auswanderung nach Paraguay - 1927" in *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis* (1977) 16; my translation. The extended quotation reads: "Diese Bittschrift brachte ganz klar zum Ausdruck, daß wir die wichtige Verantwortung der Erziehung unserer Kinder um keinen Preis an andere übertragen könnten. Denn es sei unsere Überzeugung, daß ein religionsloser Unterricht in den Schulen, für die Moral unserer Kinder nachteilig sein würde, den Glauben schwächen, wenn nicht überhaupt zum Glaubensverlust führen müßte. Und wenn diese Einschränkung und der Druck, unter welchem die Mennoniten zur Zeit stünden, so weitergehe, wir uns gezwungen sahen, eine neue Heimat zu suchen, wo wir und unsere Kinder unseres Glaubens leben könnten" (Grammar is unaltered; Umlaute inserted).

17 Abram A. Braun, "Religionsfreiheit und unsere Schulen," in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, (15. April 1925) 4 (Braun formed part of the ministerial in Menno). Cf. Reger and Plett (p. 605) on this point: "Im Jahre 1916 hat die Manitoba Regierung ihre Garantie, die sie den Mennoniten im Jahre 1873 gab, nämlich ihre eigenen Schulen zu haben, gebrochen und darauf die Gemeindeglieder aufgehoben. Das hatte zur Folge, dass Ältester Friesen und eine beträchtliche Gruppe seiner Anhänger sich schließlich entschlossen, nach Paraguay auszuwandern." The question of whether this "Garantie" fell within provincial or federal jurisdiction remains without clarification here.

18 Adolf Ens points out that "the Manitoba School Act of 1890 only removed sectarian education, not religious/Christian [education]. During W.W. I, it forbade anti-war indoctrination and use of an enemy alien language. As far as I know, 'Mennonite' public school districts continued to teach religion" (from personal communication, September, 2002; my emphs.). To many of these Mennonites, however, these restrictions were too limiting. And did forbidding the use of German not severely reduce the Mennonite church's ability to be a protagonist in their children's education? Did forbidding "anti-war indoctrination" still allow the teaching of pacifism?

Abram A. Braun, one of the emigrants, knew well enough that the government regulations were not a complete proscription but left room to teach religion and German outside of regular school hours. He asked rhetorically: "Wenn uns die Religion eine halbe Stunde [den] Tag vorgeschrieben wird, ist die Religionsfreiheit dann noch für voll zu halten?" He is not against Sunday Schools, but "Mit den Sonntagsschulen können wir nicht alles gut machen, was in

der Woche verboten wird" – though Sunday School is preferable to young people being idle. As to the use of German, he notes also that the restrictions are not absolute. However, "Minister Braken hat selber gesagt, daß das einsprachige Gesetz da steht wie eine Mauer." Some German was permitted, "aber genügt das, um die Sprache, unsere Muttersprache zu erhalten?" Compared to this, the Privilegium offered by Paraguay, "das ist mehr Religionsfreiheit als in Canada" (1925) 4.

19 The purported inadequacy of these private schools, as well as the presumed superiority of the English state schools, is open to question, as the following comment by historical-anthropologist James Urry shows: "The negative accounts of Mennonite schools need to be re-read against two considerations. First, Mennonite schools constructed as a means of acquiring basic numeracy and literacy did not need to be organized in the same way as state schools with qualified teachers, timetables, curricula, etc. What appears [to be] chaos and a low standard is just a more easy-going pragmatic approach to schooling. Secondly, the state schools were terrible! They were under-resourced and the teachers were often barely out of school with no proper training or qualifications. But they were like little military units with order and control like the barracks." Personal communication, January 17, 2002.

20 Cf. E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: the Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955).

21 Martin C. Friesen reports: "Viele zahlten längere Zeit Geldstrafen und auf der Westreserve wurden auch Brüder ins Gefängnis gesteckt, um sie zum Schicken ihrer Kinder in die Regierungsschule zu zwingen." "Die Auswanderung nach Paraguay - 1927," in Martin W. Friesen, *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis* (1977), 16; cf. Edgar Stoesz and Muriel Stackley, *Garden in the Wilderness: Mennonite Communities in the Paraguayan Chaco 1927-1997*, (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1999) 24, who make reference to an "epidemic of fines" and "a series of arrests."

22 For a nuanced discussion of the 1916 School Attendance Act and a 1919 court case against Mennonites violating the act, see Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (University of Ottawa Press, 1994) 138-153.

23 Martin C. Friesen, in M.W. Friesen, *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen*, 16; my translation. For the original German, see my note #16 above.

24 Cf. Martin W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis*, 48f. In *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen* (1977: 9f.) M.W. Friesen carefully clarifies the group's priorities, admitting that German was of great importance, but not of highest importance; religious instruction was: "Zunächst stimmt es schon, dass ihnen das Uebernehmen der englischen Sprache in ihren Schulen zuwider war. Dann aber, als sie meinten zu merken, dass, wenn sie die englische Sprache annähen, sie ihre Privatschulen vielleicht doch behalten dürften, meldeten sie sich beider [sic] Regierung, dass sie gewillt seien, die englische Sprache in ihre Schulen einzuführen. Die Regierung...freute sich, dass diese Gruppe sich fuer die englische Sprache entschied, wollte ihnen aber die Lehrer stellen und das bedeutete, auch ihren Unterrichtsstoff (darunter keine Religion!) einführen. Darauf brachen diese Mennoniten ab. Dass sie aber der englischen Sprache wegen Kanada verliessen, wie es immer wieder von Nichteingeweihten [an]gegeben wird, entspricht nicht der Tatsache" (round brackets are his).

25 On the relative unimportance of the German language to the various Mennonite groups from 1916 to 1919, see Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?* (1994) 156f. Ens confirms that the petitions to government around 1919 clearly differentiate between the German language and religion (and the freedom to teach

it); they were willing to give up the former but not the latter.

This assertion, that language was secondary, derives credibility from the fact that when the Menno Colony in Paraguay later developed or upgraded its education system, it introduced Spanish as a second language of its own accord. And the colonists have progressed far in this regard. After attending the 75th Anniversary celebration in Loma Plata, at which the President of Paraguay was also present, Dr. John Schmidt noted that most of the speeches were delivered in Spanish (from personal communication with Dr. Schmidt, July 18, 2002). This shows that many colonists are fluent in Spanish, one of the nation's two official languages. Fewer have acquired Guaraní, the other official language of Paraguay.

26 Stoesz & Stackley, state: "Finally in July 1920 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against the Mennonites: they would not be allowed to control their schools. It was the definitive word. Cost what it would - and cost it did - those considering emigration were now ready to migrate." *Garden in the Wilderness* (1999) 27; my emphasis.

27 M.W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis* (1987) 174.

28 This should be the sixth group as reported by Menno Colony's senior statistician, Abram B. Giesbrecht, ed., *Die ersten mennonitischen Einwanderer in Paraguay - Einwandererliste*, 2. Auflage. (Loma Plata: Druckerei Friesen 1995) 52; cf. especially his *Einwandererliste*); see also M.W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis* (1987) 172f. Royden Loewen, ed., citing from C.T. Friesen's diary, reports that Martin C. Friesen left in the 5th group (From the *Inside Out*, 324). (Loewen seems unaware that Martin C. is C.T. Friesen's son, describing the former as "a frequent associate" of the latter [cf. 316]). Whether it was the 5th or 6th group, it definitely was not the "last group," as Reger and Plett write (*Diese Steine* [2001] 606). For there were seven groups in all - Giesbrecht lists each group with its respective members.

29 Friesen, *Neue Heimat* (1987) 173. The paper, *Der Nordwesten* says that in spite of rainy weather, 200 cars and 100 horse-drawn carriages had come to the send off. During the service they sang the following songs: "Willkommen, liebste Freunde, hier," "Als Lot und Abrah'm schieden," and "Die Gnade sei mit allen" (cited by Friesen, *Neue Heimat* (1987) 173).

30 See Friesen, *Neue Heimat* (1987) 155; my transl.

31 Stoesz and Stackley, *Garden in the Wilderness* (1999) 26.

32 *Ibid.*, 23.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, 28.

35 M. W. Friesen, reports that "They were convinced that this was a holy undertaking." Cited by Stoesz and Stackley, *Garden in the Wilderness* (1999) 27.

36 Stoesz and Stackley, *Garden in the Wilderness* (1999) 29; one source says 170 died.

37 *Ibid.*, 36.

38 Cf. the listing by the pioneer couple, Peter T. and Gertrude Hiebert, "Ostewick, Meno-Kolonia [sic], Paraguay," in *Mennonitische Rundschau* (2. Januar, 1929) 9.

39 Cited by M.W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat* (1987) 353; also 373-391. Cf. John Horsch, "Offizieller Bericht über den Besuch [by Hershey & Swartzendruber (sic)] auf der Mennonitenkolonie in Paraguay," in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, (serialized) February 1929 & June 12, 1929 issues.

40 MEDA stands for Mennonite Economic Development Associates. Cf. the 50th Anniversary edition *The Marketplace: MEDA's Magazine for Christians in Business*, Vol. 33, Issue 6 (November December 2003).

41 Hiebert, Abram W. und Jacob T. Friesen. ...eine bewegte Geschichte...die zu uns spricht. Materialien

zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Kolonie Menno. Ein Beitrag zur 75. Gedenkfeier Juni 2002. Loma Plata, Paraguay, 2002. Cf. especially part three of this book on the economic history.

42 M. W. Friesen *Mennoblatt* [May 1, 1968] 3; A. Reimer *Mennoblatt* [May 1, 1968] 5.

43 Peter P. Klassen. *Die Mennoniten in Paraguay: Reich Gottes und Reich dieser Welt.* (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein e.V. Bolanden, 1988) 66.

44 For a careful study of the history and development of the Paraguayan Mennonite education system, the reader may be referred to Jakob Warkentin, *Die deutschsprachigen Siedlerschulen in Paraguay im Spannungsfeld der staatlichen Kultur- und Entwicklungspolitik* (München-Berlin, 1998).

45 Michael Rudolph's 2001 figures are as follows: Secundarschüler, grades 7 - 12: 600; Primarschüler: preschool to grade 6: 1300 (personal communication, October 2001).

46 Friesen, "Menno Colony," 554.

47 Both the so-called General Conference seminary, CEMTA (Centro Evangélico Menonita de Teología Ascunción), and the Mennonite Brethren seminary, IBA (Instituto Bíblico de Asunción) – along with other participating schools – constituted significant players in the UEP.

48 Another son, Cornelius W. Friesen, also thrived through these educational helps from elder Friesen and was to be a long-time influential minister in the churches of South Menno and, for a time, as teacher in the Bible School. Some of his insightful articles appeared in the *Mennoblatt*, of which one, "Die erste Fahrt in den Chaco," is reprinted in the 75th Anniversary edition of *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay*, Jahrgang 3 (September 2002) 146-151.

49 Whether this included advice on what books to use may remain an open question. But Martin W. makes the claim that the elder simply wrote to Germany and ordered Richard Lange's grammar books. But the teacher conference rejected their use and insisted he take them back home. But some interested teachers privately picked up copies and slowly began to use them in class. "Das war im Jahre 1933." *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen...* (1977) 118.

50 His article, "Der Einfluss der Schulen im internen Wandel der Kolonie Menno in den fünfziger und sechziger Jahren," in *Jahrbuch...* 3 (Sept. 2002) 59-82, sheds significant light on the philosophy of education and the far-reaching developments in Menno Colony's educational undertaking – especially from the late 40s and into the 70s (Sawatzky, 2002, 62).

51 Martin C. Friesen, *Mennoblatt* 1969 (posthumous), March 1, pp. 1f. & March 16, p. 1. This sermon is re-published in its entirety in *Menno informiert, Jubiläumssonderausgabe*, No. 6 (June, 2002), 2-4.

52 Abram Reimer, *Mennoblatt* (1. Mai, 1968) 5; my transl.

53 Martin C. Friesen's sermon was re-published in *Menno informiert, Jubiläumssonderausgabe*, No. 6 (June, 2002) 2.

54 Martin W. Friesen, "Martin C. Friesen in Paraguay," in *Preservings*, Delbert Plett, ed., No. 7 (December 1995) 13.

55 "Mennogemeinde," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, V (1985), 554.

56 Peter P. Klassen. *Die Mennoniten in Paraguay* (1988) 318.

57 Martin C.'s father, C.T. Friesen notes in his diary entry of October 24, 1927: "on October 25 Ältester H[einrich] J. Friesen (of Altona) served us with communion at Chortitz and on October 26 served communion in Grunthal..." (Royden Loewen, ed., *From the Inside Out* [1999] 324). (The elder, accompanied by Peter Dueck, arrived on Oct. 24; hence the early entry.)

In this connection we may mention that, according to

Katherine Friesen Wiebe, daughter of Peter C. Friesen (niece to Martin C. Friesen), the Sommerfelder Ältester had also ordained Martin C. Friesen as Ältester just two years earlier. In her words: "the worship house in Chortitz was filled to overflowing when [in December 1925] Elder Heinrich J. Friesen and Rev. Peter W. Dueck came from Altona, West Reserve, to ordain Rev. Martin C. Friesen as Bishop of the Chortitzer Gemeinde." (*Preservings*, No. 7, Dec. 1995, p.12). Thus the relationship between the Chortitzer and Sommerfelder was an open and cordial one.

58 Klassen, *Die Mennoniten*, 318.

59 *Richtlinien* 2002, 5.

60 Andreas T. Friesen, grandson of Elder Martin C. Friesen, has served as president of the Conference of (the German) Mennonites in South America for a period of time.

61 Friesen, "Menno Colony," 554.

62 A recent statistic reports 9146 inhabitants for Menno Colony and 4831 church members (personal communication with Michael Rudolph, April 2001).

63 Friesen, "Menno Colony," 554.

64 *Ibid.*

65 For an earlier profile of this project, cf. Titus Guenther, "Social Change Without Violence," in *Misology: An International Review*. Vol. 9, No. 2 (April, 1981) 193-211; also James C. Juhnke, "Paraguay: The Great Exception" - in chap. 10 in *A People of Mission*, (Faith and Life Press, 1979) 185-192.

66 Friesen, "Menno Colony," 554.

67 Klassen, *Die Mennoniten*.

68 I recently heard an anecdotal story from Martin Sawatzky (a native of Paraguay) in which Elder Friesen, in the early years, is said to have come home from a visit to Filadelfia bringing with him schoolbooks for use in Menno. However, because they were authored by a certain pro-Nazi teacher, Julius Legiehn, the Menno people rejected the books and asked the Elder to return them – which he did. (From personal conversation with Sawatzky October 12, 2001.) Cf. also the above documented parallel incident with the Richard Lange books at the teachers conference of 1933.

69 *Ibid.*

70 Jacob Warkentin (*Jahrbuch* 2002: 114).

71 Friesen, "True Church," 1.

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Ibid.*

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.* "In der Hauptsache Einigkeit, in Nebensachen Freiheit, vor allem Liebe."

78 On this point, Martin C. and his church community anticipate by half a century the profound insights that John Howard Yoder develops in *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1992, 2001) 88 pages - Reviewed in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 2002: 271f.

79 We could argue that the Mennonite churches of Paraguay are a close embodiment of the mission strategy of Yoder's "migration evangelism" – again their practice predating theory. For instead of sending singles or individual families as missionaries, a sizeable group moved to, and took up residence in, the "mission field." The "missionary community" was large enough to forestall extreme loneliness and small enough to necessitate ongoing interaction with the local people around them. This migrant missional community did not return for "furloughs"; it cast its own destiny with that of their new neighbours. By living as a loving disciplined Christian community, its light shines in the society where it has chosen to live.

80 Irene Enns Kroeker, *Preservings*, 1995:10.

81 That this was a deliberate and "christianly pragmatic" step is plausibly suggested by James Urry who states: "Of course Martin C. Friesen had to contend as

much with a conservative negativism from within as much as forces from without. Recognizing that being in the world but not of it still required a pragmatic approach to a changing wider world. To be 'in' needed responses if they were to remain 'not of;' otherwise the community would fail. I think this is what has happened in some areas of Mexico." (From personal communication with Urry, January 17, 2002.)

82 Similar conclusions were drawn also in a recent Historical Symposium regarding changes/ developments during Menno's 75-year history, when the community paper *Menno aktuell* reported: "Einige der zentralen Gedanken konzentrierten sich auf die Betrachtung des Wandels in der Kolonie Menno. Besonders auf dem Gebiet der Gemeinde und Schule hat die Kolonie einen tiefgreifenden Wandel durchgemacht von einer konsequent weltabgewandten Haltung zu einer Öffnung, die heute die Integration in die nationale Gesellschaft, das Mithalten auf wirtschaftlichem Gebiet und die Zusammenarbeit mit den Nachbarkolonien wie auch den anderen Ethnien ermöglicht, ohne dass jemand das Gefühl hat, dabei die eigene Identität zu verlieren. Vielmehr sieht es vom heutigen Standpunkt aus betrachtet so aus, dass sich einerseits das Gemeindeleben verstärkt hat, und dass die Bildung die Grundlage für eine bewusstere Regelung des Zusammenlebens, für die Heranbildung von Führungspersönlichkeiten in allen Bereichen der Kolonie geführt hat. Bei dieser Entwicklung spielten sowohl innere wie äußere Faktoren eine Rolle. Im Inneren war es der Mut des Ältesten und verscheidener weitsichtiger Personen, die sich wagten, auch gegen die allgemeine Meinung zu stehen. Von außen her wirkte die Anwesenheit der Fernheimer, die in den Bereichen Gemeinde, Bildung und Verwaltung schon von Russland her manches mitgebracht hatten, das man abschauen konnte." (Cf. Geschichtssymposium zum Thema "Kolonie Menno: 75 Jahre Tradition und Wandel," gehalten am 6. und 7. Juni in der Kirche der Mennonitengemeinde Loma Plata - *Menno aktuell*, June 2002.)

83 Abram A. Braun (in "Religious Freedom in our Schools," 1925, p. 4), I believe, had this in mind, when, after asserting the primacy of "religious formation" for the church, he explains that he is not in principle against all education; he opposes the pursuit of a detached "worldly" education. In his words: "Es soll hiermit auch nicht heißen, daß ich gegen jegliche Schulbildung bin, denn wir brauchen Männer [Personen], die eine anständige Schulbildung haben, aber es wird von der Welt aus zu sehr darnach hingestrebt, um eine allgemeine Schulbildung in Weltweisheit ins Werk zu rufen."

84 For a convenient recent summary of some of these programs, cf. Stoesz and Stackley, "From Isolation to Outreach Service & Mission," chap. 15 in *Garden in the Wilderness* (1999), 161-170.

85 For Menno Colony, to have a former Oberschulze hold the office of governor of Boquerón Province, would seem to constitute a paradigm shift from their original vision for Mennonite life in Paraguay, since one of the principles set up in a ministerial meeting on January 17, 1923 in Saskatchewan (in which Elder Friesen was present) notes explicitly: "es wurde gänzlich verboten, ein obrigkeitliches Amt zu bekleiden" (Abraham S. Wiebe, 2002, 17, based on minutes).

86 Incidentally, both of them are married to daughters of Martin W. Friesen, and thus granddaughters of Elder Martin C. Friesen.

87 From personal conversation with Michael & Maria Rudolph on Jan. 19, 2005.

88 cf. Kroeker 2004.

89 There are Mennonites who wrestled with this decision for a time and, "after much study of the writings of John Howard Yoder," concluded "that politics should be seen as 'service for the well-being of all,'" reports Kroeker (2004: 8).

Articles

On The Origins Of The Mennonite Estates In Russia

by Henry Schapansky

Many readers will have wondered, as have I, how the large Mennonite estates in Russia came into being. From a study of the very first large estate owners, perhaps the only true estate founders, I have drawn some interesting conclusions.

Firstly, the estate founders did NOT become large land-owners through successful farming. Rather, they were most often commercial men, who acquired substantial amounts of capital through non-farming activities, or alternatively, or in addition, acquired capital from inheritances. These inheritances were often acquired through female connections. This is therefore sometimes not evident to later historians. Much of the capital thus acquired through inheritances originated in wealthy West Prussian immigrant families, which in turn, was often again generated previously through non-farming activities. These amounts of capital were then later invested in purchases of large, sometime huge, quantities of land at a time when land prices were exceptionally low.

Secondly, many of these first estate owners had connections with Old Colony families, as might be expected, since, in the Old Colony non-farming activities had a greater tradition and acceptance than in the Molotschna.

Subsequent estate owners of later generations became such, as a rule, through marriage connections with these relatively few first estate founding families. Indeed, it seems likely that the majority of later estate owners were descendants of, or married into, families of the first estate owners, or were from other well-to-do immigrant families to Russia.

I would like to illustrate these conclusions by analyzing these first estate owners, which are summarized in the data below, mentioning in particular families with Old Colony connections.

A brief summary might be in order here. Heinrich Thiessen was, and had been a successful miller, in West Prussia, and later in Russia. Johann Cornies, as is well known, built up his capital resources by marketing Molotschna farm products in the cities and towns of southern Russia. Wilhelm Martens likewise built up a capital in marketing farm products, and had also likely acquired capital through inheritances. His career likely

really began after he moved to Halbstadt, Mol., and married Justina Willms. David Schröder inherited his capital through his marriage connection with the wealthy Kliever family. He increased this capital through his lumber and wood-working business in Ekaterinoslav. Daniel Peters operated a feed-lot (for sheep) in the later Jasykovo area, north of the Old Colony. Heinrich Janzen was likely also a merchant, since his sons Michael and Heinrich are said to have been merchants.¹ Janzen and Peters were in-laws.

The above conclusions would appear intuitively correct as well. During the early period of Russian settlement, farming would not, in itself, have been particularly suited to building up large amounts of wealth. Transportation facilities were very limited, and it was difficult to bring farm products to market. On the other hand, those merchandisers who did bring farm products to the cities and towns were able to realize substantial profits. The more so since not only were roads bad or non-existent, but ever present was the danger of attack by bands of robbers. Indeed, some Mennonite merchants were killed by robbers on business trips, including Jacob

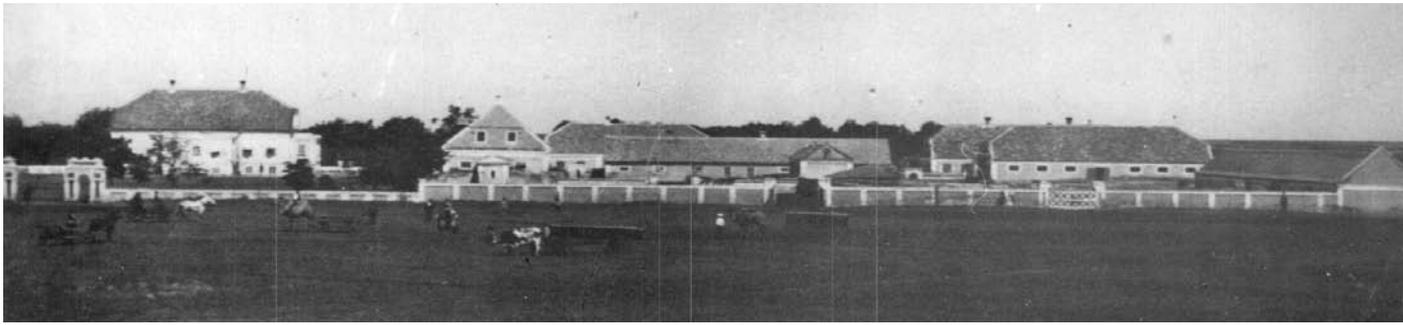
Dyck, whose widow later married Wilhelm Martens. This high risk corresponded with the greater profits to be drawn from commercial trips. Other Mennonite business men saw opportunities in the unique situation of the underdeveloped and relatively young towns and cities in the region of the Mennonite Colonies. The lumber business of Schröder thrived because of the need for wood and building supplies in the woodless steppes of southern Russia. The first millers would be successful for similar reasons. In general, it was an early lack of commercial competition which created these unique opportunities. In later times, these conditions would cease to exist, and profits from such enterprises were considerably reduced.

It may be observed too that commercial men, whether through contacts with clients and customers, or during business trips, would be more likely to receive news of investment opportunities in then unoccupied portions of the Molotschna or elsewhere, than the typical farmer who spent his entire work-day on his Wirtschaft.

Before some of this acquired capital was actually invested in the purchase of land, many of the above entrepreneurs rented



A home on the "Voranjaja" estate. It belonged to Abram H. Bergmann. On the front steps sits the Bergmann family. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 44-161.



The estate of Abram Wieler in the Kharkow area. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 44-21

large amounts of land, generally in what were then unoccupied portions of the Molotschna, to raise large herds of sheep, for the purposes of wool production. The early 1800s were ideal for wool producers in Russia since cloth “factories,” often run by serfs and widely distributed in villages and towns across Russia² (not the huge factories associated with the English cloth mills) had a great demand for the wool. This was to change in later times, with the increasing importation of Australian wool to Europe, the competition of cheaper English cloth with Russia products, and increasing land prices in Russia. To rent enough land, these early sheep ranchers needed considerable capital, or at the very least, sufficient credit standing. These ranchers were generally the merchants mentioned above. Early wool producers made lucrative profits through the relatively cheap rental of land not then being used for other agricultural purposes. Examples include Cornies and Janzen as will be seen below.

It should also be observed that a number of early and wealthy immigrants did not necessarily invest their funds for their own or their family’s benefit. It appears that some of these early immigrants used their wealth to help fellow Mennonites establish themselves in Russia. Most noticeable in this respect, for example, are members of the Kleine Gemeinde, whose early wealthy immigrants did not establish large personal enterprises or estates, but rather assisted other Kleine Gemeinde families to rent and purchase land in the Molotschna or elsewhere. As a result, the later “landless crisis” had almost no direct effect on the Kleine Gemeinde.

We need to define what is meant by an estate. Some authors define an estate in Mennonite Russia as any land holding outside of an organized Colony. This definition seems inappropriate, as many small properties would thus be included, many even smaller than the standard colony holding of 65 desjatines, which was the basis for a full Wirtschaft (a desjatine was equivalent to about 2.7 acres). Then too, the value of later larger land holdings in western Sibe-

ria, for example, would be very much less than similar holdings in southern Russia. And indeed, larger landholdings in Siberia might be required to maintain individual farmers, while this would not necessarily be the case elsewhere.

The word “estate” too may be inappropriate in many cases, having an English connotation of a non-farming property owner deriving income from permanent tenant farmers. The Russian word used in describing these properties is ‘Khutor/Chutor’, while the German word is ‘Gut’.

Holdings of 500 or more desjatines should properly be classified as an estate, while holdings of 100-500 desjatines should be termed a large farm.

The Forestei listing of 1908, which was used as a basis for self-taxation, to raise funds to support the Mennonite forestry camps (see below) summarizes these estates³ as follows:

Jurisdiction (to which the owners belonged or where they were registered) ^(a)	Number of estates	Land area (desjatines)	Average holding
Halbstadt Volost	150	140,338	936
Chortitza Volost	74	45,264	612
Gnadenfeld Volost	70	24,287	347
Nikolaipol Volost (Jasykovo)	19	23,374	1,230
Alexanderthal Volost (Alt Samara)	9	3,156	350
Velikokjnashesk Volost (Kuban)	8	1,394	174
Orloff Volost (Sagradovka)	2	400	200
Totals	332	238,213	718

^(a) Not necessarily where the estates were actually located.

A listing of some of the early large estate owners and their properties follows.⁴

— N i c h o l a s W i e n s (16.2.1768-31.12.1821) Altona, Mol. 1808, later Rückenau.

A son of Nicholas Wiens (1737-29.7.1797), Herrenhagen 1776: 2 sons, 1 dau.

m. 1.2.1787 Anna Wiens (1764-1.1839).

The Oberschulze, Mol. (1804-1806).

Wiens began intensive sheep raising early in Russia. He may have held two homesteads in Altona. Wiens became embroiled in disputes with various individuals, including Ältester Jacob Ens, and later moved to Rückenau in 1814. In 1815, it seems he was convicted of providing false information in a case involving Johann Heide. Renting unoccupied Molotschna Colony land, he expanded his sheep raising enterprise. He was granted 350 desjatines of this land outright by Tzar Alexander I, who had been favorably impressed with the Wiens establishment during his visit in 1818. This was the basis for the Steinbach estate. Although he had several sons, none apparently left male descendants who inherited the property, which then passed to his son-in-law, Peter Schmidt (29.11.1789-12.5.1856) m. 18.8.1814 Anna Wiens (20.3.1796-4.11.1870). Peter Schmidt’s father, Daniel Schmidt

(30.6.1759-6.1.1821) of Zweibrücken, left the Empire in 1810 during the war years to avoid the conscription of his sons by the French. Peter’s sons Nicholas (22.7.1815-14.9.1874), Heinrich (2.2.1824-29.7.1884), and Johann (24.5.1826-19.7.1864) were involved with the Wüst Brethren, with Nicholas joining the Templers. In 1908, Peter Schmidt (20.1.1860-30.5.1910) and Nicholas Schmidt (16.7.1863-15.11.1913) owned 11,887 + 350 and 1,112 desjatines of land

respectively, which included the original Steinbach estate. They were grandsons of the above Peter Schmidt.

—Heinrich Thiessen (1755-3.5.1838) Ekaterinoslav.

A son of Abraham Thiessen, Ellerswald I 1776: 3 sons, 2 dau., 1 female person.

m. 2.1785 Maria Wölke (1766-31.3.1833)

Heinrich was a miller by trade, who had purchased the mill of his brother-in-law, Kornelius Stoez (28.12.1731-28.12.1811) of Krebsfeld, in 1786 while still a young man. When he came to Russia in 1804, his net worth was assessed at 4,316 Thalers. He settled at Ekaterinoslav, establishing the first industrial enterprises in that city, including a treadmill. He was registered at Chortitza, Old Colony.

Many of Heinrich's male descendants were involved in the milling or other commercial businesses. Many of them nonetheless bought land and or married into estate owning families. It may have been son Heinrich (12.8.1794-28.2.1859) who first bought land in the Ekaterinoslav area, which in 1852 was rented out to other Mennonite families. This Heinrich also bought some 1,900 desjatines of land in the Schönfeld/Brasol area. His son Peter Thiessen (15.3.1826-28.10.1906) m. 6.11.1847 Helena Kädtler (25.10.1832-25.3.1900) was later owner of the Roppovo (Miroľjubovka) estate (395 desjatines). Other descendants also owned land in the Schönfeld area.

—Johann Cornies (20.6.1789-13.3.1848) Orloff, Mol.

m. 1811 Aganetha Klassen (26.12.1792-30.3.1847)

Details of some of the activities of Cornies have been given elsewhere.⁵ Like Wilhelm Martens, he built up an initial amount of capital by merchandizing farm products of the Molotschna throughout southern Russia. He then began raising large herds of sheep, renting cheap and unoccupied land within, and later to the south of the Molotschna Colony. Making very large profits on this enterprise, he bought some 3,350 desjatines of land south-west of the colony in 1832, the basis of the (Alt) Taschtschenak estate. Some 500 desjatines, which he had been renting within the Molotschna were granted to him outright by Nicholas I in 1836, the basis of the Juschanlee estate. Later, he bought about 6,700 desjatines from the Baroness Kampenhausen (the Kampenhausen/Stokopani estate), another 1,700 desjatines in the Taschtschenak region in 1842 (the Verigin

estate), and some 12,000 desjatines in the Crimea (the Buruntcha estate).

The Kampenhausen estate passed to his daughter and her husband, Aganetha Cornies (11.12.1812-18.9.1858) 2) m. 10.9.1846 Phillip Wiebe (29.9.1816-15.9.1870). Wiebe was a son of Phillip Wiebe (b. 18.6.1778) an immigrant of 1828 (Tiegerweide, Mol.). The Verigin estate passed to his granddaughter and her husband, Justina Cornies (b. 7.5.1846) m. 28.4.1870 Johann Klatt (29.9.1842-8.1918). Klatt was a son of a Lutheran, Karl Klatt, who joined the Neumark Mennonites in the immigration of 1834. (Alt) Taschtschenak and Juschanlee remained with his son Johann Cornies (22.12.1812-18.6.1882), although Juschanlee was sold in 1879 to Heinrich Reimer (see below).

—Wilhelm Martens (31.12.1781-10.6.1845) Schönwiese, Old Colony, later Halbstadt, Mol. A son of Aron Martens (1756-23.1.1801) of Schönwiese, Old Colony.

m1) 25.11.1809 Aganetha Berg (10.3.1792-18.7.1819)

m2) 16.4.1820 Justina Willms (7.9.1795-24.2.1828)

3)m3) 11.9.1828 Maria Rempel 913.10.1791-2.3.1870)

3)m1) 7.8.1813 Heinrich Willms (12.8.1784-20.2.1823)

m2) 1823 Jacob Dyck (20.1.1790-3.8.1825)

Martens moved to Halbstadt, Mol. in 1823, the year his brother-in-law Heinrich Willms died. By this time, he had likely begun a career selling farm products throughout southern Russia. This was a hazardous occupation with high risk, owing to the presence of marauding bands of robbers and Nogai tartars. Consequently, competition was limited, and profits high. His brother-in-law Johann Willms (7.4.1791-3.8.1825) and the second husband of his third wife, Jacob Dyck (20.1.1790-3.8.1825) were both murdered

by such a band of robbers while returning from the annual fair at Romny (Poltava Prov.), where they had sold Molotschna wool. Martens had probably received financial help from his brother-in-law Heinrich Willms (12.8.1784-20.2.1823). Heinrich Willms had 5,000 Rubles cash and possessions valued at 1,390 Rubles when he came to Russia in 1819, along with his father Heinrich Willms (20.3.1759-21.4.1826).⁶ The first marriage of Heinrich Willms had been with the widow of Heinrich Peters (1766-20.12.1807) of Vierzehnhuben, whose father Johann Peters (19.1.1737-25.3.1804) had been listed at Vierzehnhuben in 1776 as being of middle class status.

Descendants of the Heinrich Willms family, it may be noted, were also involved in the milling business, owning the large mill at Halbstadt/Muntau, as well as owning large estates.

Jacob Dyck's mother, Anna Born (8.7.1770-18.3.1849) 2) m. 29.9.1787 Jacob Dyck (14.7.1747-18.1.1811), Sandhoff 1776: 2 sons, 1 female person, had come to Russia in 1819 with her family, and was listed as having 6,900 Rubles cash, and possessions valued at 940 Rubles. She settled at Altona, Mol.⁷

Martens first bought 7,000 desjatines of land in the Neu Taschtschenak area, the Schönfeld estate. Later he bought some 20-24,000 desjatines in the Jerlitzkoye area near the Black Sea, the Meersfeld estate. In 1836, he bought some 15,000 desjatines of land from Councilor Brodsky, the Brodsky estate. In his time, Wilhelm Martens was the largest and richest Mennonite estate owner.

Part of the Meersfeld estate was passed to his daughter, Maria Martens (8.10.1821-30.10.1895) m. 3.3.1842 Peter Schmidt (23.10.1817-11.5.1876) of the Steinbach estate. His son Jacob Martens (b. 4.9.1815) m. Katherina Wiens (b. 8.1.1817) received part of the Brodsky estate. In turn, another portion of the Brodsky estate



Brodsky estate, property of the Dyck family. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 44-180

later passed to Jacob's daughter Maria (b. 10.2.1844) m. Peter Banmann (1841-1907). Peter Banmann was a son of Peter Banmann (1815-1885) of Kronsweide, a brickmaker who moved to Berdjansk circa 1843. The step-son of Wilhelm Martens, Jacob Dyck (13.8.1824-17.9.1894) m. 12.10.1846 Anna Schmidt (4.10.1828-8.4.1912), of the Steinbach estate, also received part of the Brodsky estate. Daughter Helena Martens (10.5.1813-30.12.1901) m. David Schröder (10.8.1808-15.4.1877) and his other children received various portions of the above estates.

Peter Schröder, who married the widow Katherina Neufeld (d. 23.4.1853) widow? of son Wilhelm Martens (25.4.1811-21.1.1859), also appears to have acquired land at Taschtschenak. His son Peter Schröder was a later large estate owner in the Crimea (8,000 desjatines) and Duma deputy. The senior Peter Schröder, who married the widow Katherina (nee Neufeld) (d. 12.6. 1864), son of Wilhelm Martens (25.4.1811-21.1.1859) seems to have been a great-nephew of David Schröder below.

— D a v i d S c h r ö d e r (20.9.1776-23.7.1834) Ekaterinoslav.

A son of Isaac Schröder (16.5.1738-8.10.1789), Kl. Lubin 1776: 4 sons, 1 dau.

m. 1807 Aganetha Kliever (21.7.1785-22.7.1840)

Schröder came to Russia in 1804 with the Heinrich Kliever family. This Heinrich Kliever, his future father-in-law, was one of a group of four who had been assessed at a net worth of 16,398 Thalers when they moved to Russia. With the aid, no doubt, of his father-in-law he set up a lumber and wood-working enterprise in Ekaterinoslav. Schröder seems to have been registered at Kronsgarten, Old Colony. The shortage of lumber in the southern Ukraine and the increasing building activity in the region made this enterprise very profitable.

Following the example of Wilhelm Martens, he bought 3,000 desjatines of land at Neu Taschtschenak (the Neuteich estate). His son David (10.8.1808-15.4.1877) bought 20,000 desjatines in the Jerlitzkoye area (the Davidsfeld estate), as well as land (7,200 desjatines) in the Umenzov region with his brother Peter (28.2.1816-3.7.1876).

—Daniel Peters (11.1.1794-23.7.1879). Fürstenau, Mol. 1808

Daniel Peters was a step-son of Peter Martens who came to Russia in 1804,

settling in Fürstenau Mol. 1808 and moving later (1815) to Schönsee. He appears to have been a natural son (born out of wedlock) of Daniel Peters and Eliesabeth Brandt. This Daniel Peters was a son of Elias Peters, Baumgart 1776: 2 sons, 2 dau. The father of Daniel (junior) is not named, but the other information is found in the Gerhard Wiebe diary for 1795. In 1808, he was living with his grandfather Jacob Brandt at Fürstenau, Mol.

m1) 20.11.1817 Maria Hamm (15.2.1800-18.9.1839)

m2) 20.1.1842 Helena Janzen (24.2.1816-17.7.1861)

2) m 3) M a r i a D y c k (25.7.1811-8.12.1895)

m 1) J o h a n n S i e m e n s (1.10.1808-12.12.1853)

By 1840, Peters had purchased some 6,000 desjatines of land just north of the Old Colony, along the main route between Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav. Here he developed a feedlot business involving sheep. Most of the land was intended for his children, with portions of the land being rented to other Mennonites in 1852. His children also bought additional land. Most of these estates were incorporated into the Jasykovo Volost when it was established circa 1870. The villages of Reinfeld ((Tschistopol), Petersdorf, Paulsheim and Hoffungsfeld were originally part of the Peters estate.

Daniel Peters was a brother-in-law of estate founder Heinrich Janzen (see below).

—Heinrich Janzen (b. 1795). Niederchortitza (1814), Old Colony.

2)m1) 11.11.1813 Anna Hamm (b. 1784)

m 1) K o r n e l i u s F r i e s e n (1773-23.7.1813)

Heinrich Janzen was a son of Peter Janzen (b. 1770) m. Maria Klassen (b. 1774) of Einlage, later Niederchortitza. Janzen moved to Schönsee, Mol. in 1823. He may have been a merchant as likely were his sons Michael (b. 1819) and Heinrich (b. 1824). He followed the example of Cornies in renting unoccupied Molotschna land to raise large herds of sheep. In 1839, he had been sub-leasing land from Cornies in the area of the future Landeskrone,⁸ and in 1848, was renting land to the north of the village of Waldheim.⁹ Later, he bought some 3,000 desjatines of land in the later Brasol/Guljaipolje area, the Silberfeld estate. His holdings subsequently amounted to some 20,000 desjatines in the area, including the later Grünfeld and Wintergrün estates. These estates may have passed to

his descendants, including Katherina Janzen m. (?) Johann Goosen (b. 1829), Maria Janzen (b. 1825) m. (?) Jacob Goosen (b. 1822), and Margaretha Janzen (b. 1830) m. (?) Nicholas Wiens (b. 14.10.1828). Grandson (son of Michael (b. 1819)), Peter Janzen (24.3.1850-31.8.1889) m. 28.10.1878 Maria Cornies (14.7.1853-10.1915) was later owner of the Elbing estate in the Taschtschenak area.

Heinrich Janzen was a brother-in-law of Daniel Peters above.

—Thomas Wiens (b. 1792) Altona, Mol.

A son of Daniel Wiens (4.11.1762-27.8.1842) m. 10.3.1789 Agatha Wiens (17.9.1764-27.2.1839), Altona Mol. 1808.

m. Helena Klassen (b. 1797)

Helena Klassen was a daughter of Johann Klassen (b. 1745), of Altona, who had been assessed at 8,000 Thalers when he moved to Russia in 1804. Likely with the help of his wife's relatives, he was able to buy 3,000 desjatines in the Melitopol region in 1836, the Hochfeld estate. Later he bought some 2,500 desjatines in the same area, the Ebenfeld estate.

—Kornelius Heinrichs (29.7.1805-20.3.1870) Einlage, Old Colony.

A son of Kornelius Heinrichs (24.4.1782-24.4.1828) of Kronsweide, Old Colony.

m. Helena Martens (b. 2.8.1809)

Established the Heinrichsfeld/Kornejevka estate, to the north of the Old Colony, in the region of the Daniel Peters estates, the Bergmannsthal estates, and the Jasykovo Colony. The total land area of the estates appears to have been approximately 12,000 desjatines in 1908.

—Abraham Neustädter (b. circa 1812) Einlage, Old Colony.

A son of Johann Neustädter (b. 1789) of Einlage.

m. Katherina Martens (no dates)

Bought land in the Jasykovo area, listed at 746 desjatines in 1880, the Kleinfeld estate. These holdings were expanded by his children, who married into other large land owning families.

—Isaac Zacharias (27.12.1831-1905) Österwick, Old Colony.

A son of Wilhelm Zacharias (20.5.1795-28.7.1855) of Österwick.

m . A n n a B r a u n (9.1.1832-12.7.1880)

Founder of the Zachariasfeld estate

in 1864. Some 690 desjatines in 1899.

—Abraham Bergmann (b. 31.10.1819?)
Likely a son of an Abraham Bergmann of
Gerschevo, W. Prussia.

1)m. Susanna Friesen (b. 4.9.1818?)
m2) X Warkentin (unknown)

Came to Russia in 1862, and bought
some 4,436 desjatines of land to the north of
the Old Colony, the Bergmannsthal estates.
This land was inherited by sons Hermann
(12.6.1850-14.2.1919) m. 17.8.1872 Helena
Heinrichs (12.5.1852-1924) and Abraham
(5.4.1853-29.1.1920) m. Susanna Janzen
(8.9.1854-1902), who also expanded their
land holdings. Hermann was elected to the
Third Duma in 1907 and the Fourth Duma
in 1912. Herman and some of his sons were
murdered in 1919 by revolutionaries.

—Other large estate owners:

Many later large estate owners were
persons who married into the above fami-
lies. Examples include:

Heinrich Reimer
(3.6.1837-26.5.1909) m. Aganetha Schröder
(4.2.1839-15.10.1883) who bought the
Juschanlee estate of 1,955 desjatines in

1879.

Abraham Klassen
(5.10.1830-8.9.1888) m. 19.11.1853 Ma-
ria Schröder (15.8.1834-7.1.1903) of the
Davidsfeld estate (1,600 desjatines), and
other estates.

Endnotes

1 Friesen, PM., *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische
Brüderschaft in Russland (1788-1910)*, (Halbstadt,
Molotschna, 1911), 696.

2 It should be noted that Johann Klassen (b. 1781),
originally of Rosenort, later Halbstadt Mol., was a
principal of the cloth factory at Halbstadt. He was
a step-son of Aron Penner, a wealthy immigrant
of 1804 and several times Oberschulze of the Mo-
lotschna Colony. See Henry Schapansky, *The Men-
nonite Migrations (and The Old Colony)*, (Rosenort,
2006), 202.

3 As summarized by H. Huebert in his introduction.
See Helmut Huebert, *Mennonite Estates in Imperial
Russia*, (Winnipeg, 2005). The 1908 list likely under-
estimates the number and size of the estates.

4 A main reference for this section is the work of H.
Huebert (cited above). It should be noted however
that Huebert's work includes far too many estates (he
estimates that there were about 1,000 estates—his
book includes some 1,176 estates). There are more
duplicate entries in his work than even Huebert admits.
These duplicates are caused by duplicate or missing
estate names (e.g. the Zimovnik estate is obviously the
same as the Neu Kapitonovsky estate), or by duplicate
owners where separate listings for the husband and

wife of the same estate occur (e.g. the estate of Dietrich
Thiessen (b. 27.12.1870) m. 15.8.1903 Julia Martens
(b. 20.9.1881) is listed twice —p. 201 and p. 75).
Then too, there are a number of very small “estates”
listed, some as small as 12 desjatines—not even 1/4
of a normal Wirtschaft. Huebert cites Bodnar as list-
ing 331 Mennonite properties at over 100 desjatines
in 1894. Probably the total number of large farms
and estates as defined in this work would be about
500 or less in 1909.

5 For example, in my recent book (cited above)

6 Peter Rempel, *Mennonite Migrations to Russia
(1788-1828)*, (Winnipeg, 2000), 161.

7 Rempel, 155.

8 M. Woltner, *Die Gemeindeberichte von 1848 der
deutschen Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer*, (Leipzig:
S. Hirsal, 1941), 161.

9 Woltner, 158.

Additional References:

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Taschtschenak*, Kitchener (unpublished
document, no dates, made available to me
by Katherine Martens, Winnipeg).

Peters, K., *Genealogy of Cornelius
Willms*, Winnipeg, 1973.

Peters, K., *Genealogy of Aron Martens*,
Winnipeg, 1977.

Peters, K., *Genealogy of Isaac Schröder*,
Winnipeg, no date.

Spanish Lookout Colony, 1958-1960:

Three Years of Change in the Jungles of British Honduras (BH)

By Royden Loewen

adapted from a chapter from *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-20th Century Rural Dis-
juncture*. Books available through *Mennonitische Post* book store, Steinbach, Manitoba

Prologue

In December 1991 I visited Spanish
Lookout colony for three weeks with my
wife Mary Ann and three children, Rebecca,
Meg and Sasha. During that time colony
leaders allowed me to examine church and
colony records in my hope to write about the
history of Spanish Lookout in a book on the
post-World War II scattering of the Kleine
Gemeinde people. I was especially interested
in the story of the migration of the Kleine Ge-
meinde to Mexico between 1948 and 1952 as
my grandparents, Isaac P. and Maria Loewen
and several uncles and aunts were part of that
move. I was also interested in the subsequent
move by many Kleine Gemeinde people to
British Honduras (today Belize) in 1958 as
that move included the families of my uncles
Abram P. and Peter P. Loewen. During my
visit to Spanish Lookout my Dad's cousins
Menno, Abe, Tony and Peter Loewen and
their families, and Ältester John Loewen, and
Ältester Abram K. Reimer were of special
help. Many other leaders, friends and rela-
tives displayed true hospitality. I am deeply

grateful for their generosity. I am also deeply
respectful of the commitment of the Spanish
Lookout Colony to the Anabaptist principles
that took them there in first place in 1958 and
wish to offer my sincere congratulations to
them on their 50th anniversary.

Introduction

After World War II conservative Men-
nonites in Manitoba became very concerned
that school laws, evangelical lifestyles and
modern society in Canada were making it
difficult to guard their faith as a non-resistant,
plain people. Their response was to stand up
to the ‘world’, to modernity and immigrate
to Latin America and build new communi-
ties. Beginning in 1948 about 1200 would
go to East Paraguay and 800 to Chihuahua,
Mexico. In migrating south they answered
an old challenge; they did what they believed
“Nachfolger Christi,” literally “followers of
Christ,” would do in these circumstances.

Among these migrants were 150
Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite families (595
persons) from Blumenort and Kleefeld on

the east side of Red River in Manitoba and
Rosenort on the west side. An initial migra-
tion took them to Chihuahua where they
established Quellen Kolonie at Los Jagueyes.
In 1958 a secondary migration took place
after the Mexican government began talking
about an intrusive social welfare scheme,
the “Seguro Social.” This time the move
was to British Honduras (BH). Here they
established Spanish Lookout Colony in the
western jungles of the Cayo district near the
Guatemala border. It was a second conserva-
tive Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite colony in
Central America.

The aim of the BH migrants was
to seek to remain faithful to the simple
traditions of their parents. Many wanted
continuity with life as it had been in Mexico
between 1948 and 1958. Still, the very aim
of anti-modernity required the newcomers to
the jungles of BH to adapt. Life in BH would
hardly be the same as it had been in Mexico.
These conservative Mennonites skilfully
built a new church organization, established
a new colony governance, adapted farming

practices to a new and difficult climate, and found new markets for new commodities. In all of this the colonists showed remarkable adaptability, courage and commitment to their original vision.

In migrating from one country to another, the Mennonites had of course resorted to an old way of doing things. Mr. George Koop writes about the difficult early years in his book, *Pioneer Years*, so those facts don't need to be repeated here. My hope is that with the help of selected Bruderschaft minutes and colony administration minutes that Spanish Lookout leaders allowed me to examine on a three week visit to the colony in December 1992 I will add to Mr. Koop's history. What is clear is just how many changes and close co-operation were required to make Spanish Lookout Colony the success story it has become over the years.

The Role of the Bruderschaft: "As it was in Mexico"

Among the first tasks of the colonists was the reestablishment of those institutions required for community life in Spanish Lookout. A guiding principle was to organize the new colony along the lines of Quellen Kolonie in Mexico. Again and again when the *Bruderschaft* (the Church Brotherhood) met during that first year in 1958 they decided to do things "as in Mexico." The *Bruderschaft*, the *Dienersitzung* (Ministerial Council), the private school system, and the *Hilfsverein* (colony mutual aid system) all needed to be re-founded. In June 1958 at its very first meeting the *Bruderschaft* selected interim song leaders and Rev. Abram J. Thiessen as its interim "church leader." They were "interim" because the brethren did not want to sever ties with Mexico. In fact, the *Bruderschaft* at the same time invited the popular Ältester Cornelius R. Reimer from Mexico to travel to BH and conduct Spanish Lookout's first baptism service and its first communion service. On 5 October 1958 Reimer held the baptism of the youth by "reading" the old, 1632, "articles of faith," and five days later he baptize those youth who been accepted by the *Bruderschaft* as morally fit for baptism.

By August 1958 the *Bruderschaft* also had reestablished the private school. School houses were constructed and covered with "four-foot wide palm leaves." A school committee was also created, the *Bruderschaft* deciding that such a committee should consist of three fathers and one preacher. But again, "as in Mexico," the *Bruderschaft* decided that it would democratically "elect" all school teachers.

By September 1958 the *Bruderschaft* had also reestablished the *Hilfsverein*. Once again, it was done "as in Mexico," with an



The store at Barton Creek, Belize. Barton Creek was established by Kleine Gemeinde people from Spanish Lookout in 1968. Photo Credit: Delbert Plett, 1998.

investment of one quarter of one per cent of each household's total value. Then in October the *Bruderschaft* decided to meet monthly "as in Mexico." It thus signaled that the church body would not only oversee moral issues as it had done in Canada where it tended to meet only as events required. The brethren also agreed to reestablish their fire insurance agency with the only caveat being that they should "keep in mind...[that] our [wooden] houses are worth more here" than the brick houses back in Mexico. In BH the *Bruderschaft* would be the final community authority; all colony institutions dealing with education, mutual aid, roads and farm economy were answerable to the *Bruderschaft*.

A final organization established "as in Mexico" was the *Vorsteher Komitee*, the Colony Administration committee. "As in Mexico" it would take care of all temporal needs on the colony. The first Spanish Lookout *Vorsteher*, or colony mayor, was Peter F. Friesen who had held that office in Mexico. But as noted above, the *Bruderschaft* remained the real colony body of governance. It elected the *Vorsteher* and made it clear that this elected official was ultimately responsible to the *Bruderschaft*. It seems also to have elected some other offices; in January 1959, for example, Gerhard Koop was appointed "colony secretary" by the *Bruderschaft*. Also of importance was the fact that "Vorsteher Komitee" meetings and "Allgemeine Versammlungen" meetings always began with prayer and scripture reading.

Within months of undertaking the difficult settlement of Spanish Lookout, *Vorsteher* Friesen fell ill, suffering from what we would today call depression and the mental strain of

leading a people in a very difficult move and relocation. It was the *Bruderschaft* that intervened and attempted to "encourage" him. It also defined more clearly his duties, and then tried to lighten his load by electing two assistants, one immediately, and the other they decided to elect "once the others have come from Mexico." By mid-September 1958 the *Bruderschaft* had Johann L. Barkman as the first of those assistants. The ministers also intervened on November 28 when it deemed that the Colony Administration had had to use "so much money on colony roads" that it was unable to repay its loans to individual colony farmers. An internal audit showed that "no dishonesty had occurred" and that the specific reasons for the empty treasury included the construction of five immigration houses, slow internal land payments, the costly initial survey, a bulldozer and sawmill purchase, and land payments to Olga Burns. The *Bruderschaft* now gave a boost to the temporal Colony Administration by requesting all families make larger contributions to the colony's mutual aid fund.

Changes Required in Building a Faith Community in BH

Despite this commitment to do things "as in Mexico" the new situation in BH demanded a host of difficult changes. One early sign of such change was the June 8, 1958 decision not to construct a wood frame church, but instead build a temporary "palm roof under which the church should have its services." The palm roof was an inexpensive method of church keeping, but its porous roof absorbed so much sound it was difficult to hear and the church body considered the merits of a built in wooden ceiling, and the climate so hot that the time for meeting was changed to

an early 8:30 A.M. Also, by February 1959, after only nine months, the initial covering of leaves was in need of replacement. Mennonites now lived in the topics!

Another sign of the new circumstances of BH was the moral issue of correct dress raised at the first June 1958 Bruderschaft. Mennonites of course did not have much experience living in a hot and humid tropical environment. One problem concerned "privacy in the river," the source of water for bathing and washing in the weeks before any private dwellings had been constructed. This issue was settled on April 6, 1959 when river bathing as a sport for the youth and even some adults was again criticized. A practice was now begun in which women and men bathed on alternate days. A second problem arose in the spring of 1959 as ministers planned for the spring baptismal service. The question of dress was raised again: "whereas baptismal candidates have traditionally been dressed in dark clothes, but now in the hot weather do not wear jackets, should the boys be encouraged to wear shirts that are not too lightly colored?" By June 1, 1959 the Bruderschaft had adopted a new policy: "young men are to wear dark shirts" at baptism.

If the jungle experience forced the church to consider new paths of conservatism, so too did two unexpected events in 1958 and 1959. Both pushed the community to a greater self awareness and perhaps to a more conservative stance. The first event came to light during Ältester Cornelius Reimer's September 1958 visit to BH. On September 29 Ältester Reimer reported to a seemingly surprised Bruderschaft that although a majority of Mexico colonists had voted for the relocation to BH, not everybody intended to move. Indeed, it seemed that the members who remained in Mexico wanted to strengthen, not dismantle Quellen Kolonie. The Bruderschaft was told that "those who don't want to move to BH...want to have a ministerial election in Mexico."

Within months the matter became even more serious when individual members, including Vorsteher Friesen, wondered whether it would be wise to leave the difficult jungle and return to Mexico. Some now criticized those who wished to return as doubters, as the "Israelites," those who rather wished to return to their Egyptian taskmasters than find freedom in the Promised Land. Records indicate that the Bruderschaft and the preachers were deeply worried about the talk of returning to Mexico. On October 3, 1958, the Bruderschaft decided to ask the Mexico church not to "vote too quickly" for a slate of new ministers, perhaps to reconsider their decision not to move south. A vote in Mexico, if it were taken, would clearly put Quellen

Kolonie in Mexico on a stronger footing and hopes for a complete transplantation to BH would be lost.

In late 1958 and early 1959 Spanish Lookout ministers worked hard to encourage people to give life in BH a chance. Still the desire to return increased among the people the more they realized just how difficult life in the tropics could be. The ministers could not forbid the return, but as the ministerial minutes show, they could try to convince people not to go. In November 1958 the ministers advised a "poor man...against it"; in January 1959 they "convinced" a brother who "wanted to go back to Mexico" to stay; in February they counseled a woman not "to return so soon...if she had come here in faith," even if it was for the purpose of marriage; in July they answered a more general murmuring of "people [who] are asking why did we move" with the short rebuttal, "they have the social security there." The decision to migrate to BH had been and continued to be seen as a step of faith.

This line of thinking became more widely accepted following some shocking news from Mexico. In the spring of 1959 Ältester Cornelius Reimer died of a stroke at age 57. Spanish Lookout people had clearly hoped Ältester Reimer would move to BH and his death marked a painful disruption in leadership. On April 3 colony ministers asked bluntly, "how will we carry out the work in the absence of Ältester Reimer?" Then they pledged themselves to "guard against the church work falling behind." As a priority, the youth "would be spoken to," thus encouraging them to choose the faith, (literally "be converted") and "then someone will be appointed to baptize them." Then on August 23, 1959, after agreeing on the biblical basis for a life-long term for Ältester, the Bruderschaft elected the newly arrived and "orderly" Heinrich J. Dueck as their very own Spanish Lookout Ältester. (See also, Koop, *Pioneer Years*, 63).

Some colonists saw Aeltester Dueck as more conservative than Cornelius Reimer had been. Dueck was said to "favor having things more simple" and preached his first sermon on the main points of the 1899 Blumenort conference in Manitoba. At that conference practices such as photography, musical instruments, funeral eulogies and government jobs had been forbidden. Increasingly the older members recalled the years in Canada, between 1899 and 1919, with nostalgia; these were the years when the popular, but conservative Ältester from Steinbach, Manitoba, Peter R. Dueck, strongly opposed the telephone, fashionable dress, English-language schools, rapidly growing town businesses and the car, always warning

the brotherhood against being "conformed to the ways of the world." As Menno Loewen recalls, it was only with hesitation that colonists received permission even to own large trucks with which to haul products to market. (For a fuller account of the life of Ältester Peter R. Dueck see: Royden Loewen, "Cars, Commerce, Church: Religious Conflict in the Urbanizing World of Steinbach, Manitoba, 1900-1930," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993), 111-134).

Re-establishing Social Boundaries

Mennonites in BH also had to come to terms with how they should relate to the outside world in Belize. Even though Spanish Lookout lay a long distance from Belize City, was located as colonists said "behind" the Belizean river, and was crossed only by a manually driven ferry, relations with the host population and government had to be determined.

Professor Leonard Sawatzky observed in his book *They Sought a Country* (361) that Spanish Lookout's extraordinary productivity was well-known to the government and noted that "it is the expressed wish of the premier that the rest of his countrymen emulate it." The government's admiration was not lost on the first Mennonites. George Koop notes in his book *Pioneer Years* (19 and 20) that some years after the initial 1957 scouting trip to BH, Delegate John D. Friesen recalled how he and other delegates had become "acquainted with the Minister of Mines and Natural Resources, Honourable George Price, who soon became the Prime Minister of British Honduras for about 20 years." Friesen was struck by the irony that at "the magnificent Fort George Hotel [in Belize City]...we as a group of lowly Mennonite farmers dined at the same table as the Hon. George Price."

But the very fact that these farmers readily met with top BH officials suggests a self-assured or confidences. And this confidence, as described in George Koop's *Pioneer Years*, was apparent in the colony's other dealings with government. Colonists for example accepted government assistance in jungle clearing, as it enabled farmers to turn five acres of jungle into arable land for only 40 dollars an acre (53). Koop also writes that the colonists felt safe in approaching the government for a five-year \$20,000 loan at 6% interest when their second payment to the land vender, Olga Burns, came due in 1960 (127). They also accepted government help in constructing a new ferry after two primitive ferries were swept away by flooding (117). (It should be noted thought that in 1971 a fifth ferry was constructed after "our colony offered the government \$7000 in

order for them to build a steel ferry" (120).

Yet colonists became more hesitant when government initiatives threatened to have a long term affect. Thus, in October 1960 as the Versammlung minutes show, when colonists were asked "whether we wish to hand over our main road to the government" they were very clear: "we consider it ours, that is to be understood [owned by] our church membership and our road committee."

Indeed, Spanish Lookout colonists never accepted government initiatives without serious reflection. Even a report that the BH government mandated daylight saving time of half an hour, led the colonists at the October 31, 1958 Bruderschaft meeting to ask, "do we want the same?"⁵⁸ Just a month later, on November 3, when colonists heard of BH's mandatory two week time between the reading of marriage banns and the wedding, rather than the one week Mennonites were accustomed to, it was decided that a spokesman should be sent to ask whether "we can have it like we used to."

Feelings were even more mixed on questions of colony-police relations. The terms of the December 1957 Privilegium stated that the government would protect the colonists and the colonists would accept that protection. Yet, Mennonites were a non-resistant people who were not sure how much they should rely on police protection. In July 1959, for example, after a theft on the colony, ministers bluntly asked whether we "should...report wrong doings to the government?" Could such an act not "violate God's plan" for a non-resistant people, perhaps lead to God "withdrawing his hand" of protection? Their conclusion at the July 20, 1959 Bruderschaft meeting was that they would "rather suffer wrong, than do wrong."

Building a New the Colony System

The colony also relied on new approaches to develop the colony's economy. Borrowing a term from other Mennonites in Latin America, the Spanish Lookout farmers spoke of the "colony system." In this arrangement the Colony Administration experimented with new crops under new growing conditions and on unknown and untested soils. It also guided farmers' efforts to produce commodities for the market place.

Of course neither crop experimentation or exportation were new among Mennonites. What was new at Spanish Lookout was the corporate, colony-centered, approach to marketing. Individual farmers worked through the Colony Administration not only to obtain land, but to market products and secure credit. Colony representatives dealt with wholesalers and retailers and with government marketing boards and inspec-

tion agencies.

The "Allgemeine Versammlung," the Colony Assembly, of September 24, 1960 showed just how this agenda worked. There were signs at this meeting of a closely interwoven community, but also examples of quite an aggressive relationship to the outside world. The meeting began with prayer by Vorsteher Johann Barkman and the singing of "Jesu, Du Allein." Then it heard reports on the colony's roads, the drainage system, its land distribution, where to invest the last \$700 U.S. payment for land sales at Quellen Kolonie in Mexico and how to organize the production of marketable vegetables.

This thoughtful approach to the outside market appears frequently during the early years. In October 1960, for example, the Colony Administration recorded that it "once again had chickens in 'cold storage'" awaiting more favourable prices. In December 1960 it took note of product "shrinkage" and sales "commissions" before deciding to sell the chickens into the market.

The very next year, in May, the Komitee recorded that because egg prices were low as a result of "overproduction" in the country, the colony was holding some 50 cases in Belize City and only a few months later, in September 1961 it recorded that Belize City buyers would "willingly take all our eggs."

For the Colony to work required an elaborate system of sub-committees. In 1961 alone the Colony Administration oversaw the work of the "Road Committee," the "Land Committee," the "Bush Committee," the "Ferry Committee," the "Abattoir Committee," the "Planting Committee," the "Sawmill Committee" and the "Fruit Tree Committee." In addition separate "Village Meetings" were headed by the mayors of each of the villages. And elected positions for "Colony Secretary", "Colony Auditor" and "'Cat' Overseer," that is the overseer of the colony's Caterpillar crawler tractor, added to the elaborate organizational structure. (In addition, all male members also belonged to road work crews that served at least three days a year). In January 1961, too, farmers decided to construct a colony-owned general store, the Farmers' Trading Centre, and talked about erecting a colony-owned cannery.

To make this elaborate system work, the Colony Administration levied a series of annual taxes. These included a 1/2 of a percent gross income tax on commodities, a 2% tax on most vehicles and tractors, and a 2% sales tax on selected goods purchased off the colony. The administration held such moral persuasion that during the first decade there is no record of a colonist disputing the landownership system and only one of

a farmer balking at paying taxes. In such instances, the Colony Administration could simply mandate that local businesses or farmers purchasing the truant's beans and corn charge him the tax and forward the same to the colony office.

Early records show that the system worked. In his book, *Pioneer Years*, George Koop describes in detail how colonists successfully followed the Canadian practice of a square grid survey system, carving a road system along carindal points, due east and west, and due south and north, even through the jungle floor and over a very rolling landscape. By September 24, 1960, the date of the first existing minutes of a Colony Assembly meeting, Spanish Lookout's basic road system had been established and farmers were already improving it. Those minutes read that the "culverts on the colony will have to be strengthened. A bridge is needed at P.R. Pletts' and H.H. Duecks'. Also a road is needed at B.B. Duecks' and Jo.W. Pletts'... About a bridge or ferry; it was discussed but not decided."

Finally, the administration also did its part in creating associations with new groups of Mennonites. Even with early difficult times the Colony association never seems to have approached the Canadian EMC communities, their first and second cousins, for help. In contrast, new friendships and ties to the Swiss-American 'Old' Mennonites in Pennsylvania and to Chortitzer Mennonites in Paraguay were created soon after settlement in BH in 1958. On September 24, 1961 the Colony Administration heard a report from Mr. Bernard P. Plett about his fact-finding trip to the Menno and Bergthall Mennonite colonies in Paraguay. His mission had been to study the colony system Mennonite had established there since their respective beginnings in the 1920s and 1940s.

Throughout the 1960s other associations were created with American Swiss Mennonites, encouraged by the Swiss American-run "Mennonite Centre" in Belize City. The center, an economic development agency, quickly became the agency through which Spanish Lookout farmers marketed most of their commodities in the city. According to "Allgemeine Versammlungen" minutes from 1960, a real sense of trust was soon established. That year Spanish Lookout received "a gift of purebred Holstein heifers" from Swiss American Wisconsin Mennonites. A year later, when the last land payment was due to Olga Burns, Spanish Lookout sent two delegates "to ask some [Swiss-American] Mennonites in the eastern United States for a loan."

Conclusion

Mennonites came to BH to resist changes they were seeing in Mexico. And of course they had come to Mexico because of threatening changes in Canada. The Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites who moved to BH, however, did much more than stop time. In fact for their conservative principles and ideals to take root, they realized that change

on their part would be required. Their story at Spanish Lookout is one of old ways on new paths. Congregational life, an education system, a colony governance structure, and indeed farming a new environment all required thought and adaptation. The chaotic mud-filled days that followed Hurricane Hatti of October 31, 1961, was a powerful

reminder that life in the tropics would not be easy. God-given talent and foresight would be required to make things go in Belize. To the outsider, Spanish Lookout was a place "frozen in time," in fact its culture was the product of vibrant, creative effort as fertile as the jungle in which it was rooted.

...continued from page 3.

Mennonites and Hurricane Dean in the Miami Herald

By David Ovalle and Martin Merzer
Salamanca, Mexico
Posted on Thursday, Aug. 23, 2007, *Miami Herald*

Though the closest city escaped catastrophic damage from Hurricane Dean, the storm ravaged the livelihoods of a historic people so isolated that the only hint of modernity comes from the jetliners that fly overhead.

They are not indigenous Mayas. They are Mennonites, 800 descendants of 16th-century European Protestant reformers, who mostly shun the modern world, but boarded buses and found shelter from the storm inside the city of Chetumal.

As Dean made its final landfall Wednesday, August 22, near Tuxpan and weakened inland, they inspected their settlement in the Yucatán Peninsula -- accessible only by a precarious mud road through an otherwise impenetrable swamp -- and confronted this reality:

Ninety percent of their homes were destroyed. Their corn crop lay flattened. Their horse-drawn buggies leaned to this side and that, battered beyond repair.

"There's nothing. Now we have nothing left," said Isaac Dick, 27, whose one-room wood-and-tin home near the Caribbean coast imploded as though it were balsa wood and aluminum foil crushed by a child's thumb.

Six hundred miles away, along Mexico's Gulf Coast, Dean restrengthened to Category 2 intensity with 100-mph winds as its core slammed the nation for the final time, making landfall near Tecolutla, 40 miles south-southeast of Tuxpan.

Then, it moved inland, weakened and was demoted to a tropical depression.

Flooding Reported

Widespread flooding and modest damage were reported along the coast, and officials expressed deep concern about the possibility of flash floods and mudslides

inland as Dean's still-abundant rain worked through Mexico's mountains.

Floods and landslides in that area killed hundreds in 1999.

Dean's death toll in the Caribbean already stood at 20 before it reached Mexico, rising by seven as Haitian officials reported more death. Thus

far, no reports of storm-related death or serious injury have emerged from Mexico.

Along the country's Caribbean coast, where a much stronger version of

the storm made its first Mexican landfall, the Quintana Roo state capital of Chetumal escaped catastrophic damage.

Not so in Mahahual, a small, up-and-coming beach resort that thrived mostly on money from the cruise industry and its tourists.

Now, it's known as the coastal spot first hit by Dean's eye wall and its most powerful, 165-mph winds.

On Wednesday, authorities allowed business owners and residents back into Mahahual, an hour's drive from the main highway through a biological preserve.

Even then, the view of the Caribbean was stunning -- except on the beach, where it appeared that an invasion fleet had bombarded the white sand.

Rows of tourists shops stood blown out. Three small fishing boats lay entwined in thick trees 200 yards from the beach. At a ruined outdoor market, wind chimes usually sold to tourists still hung, now clinking against the fallen slabs of a tin roof.

"It looks like Iraq," said Jose Rogelio Juarez, 46, who found his gift shop emptied by the winds, with a layer of sand and coconuts inside. "It looks like a beach in here."

The town's fledgling tourist infrastructure was gone, too. The dock for cruise ships suffered extreme damage.

The details were different but the outcome much the same in Salamanca, the 5,000-acre farming settlement of Mennonites seven miles from the nearest paved road.

Their ancestors fled persecution in Holland hundreds of years ago, first to Germany, then Russia, Canada, Chihuahua

in Mexico, Belize and finally, four years ago, the swamps of Salamanca.

Mennonites travel by horse-drawn cart and use kerosene lamps to light their homes. Few speak Spanish.

Humble Lifestyle

Amid the bustle outside the shelters in Chetumal, they were distinguished by their attire -- plaid dresses and bonnets for the women; dark trousers, suspenders, long-sleeved shirts and straw caps for the men.

The government provided buses for them, to and from the farms.

But the devastation was amplified by their humble lifestyle. Strict Mennonites believe modern technology taints their faith.

They do not use running water or electricity. Most learned of the storm from Mexicans who came to buy goods. Tropical storms had brushed Belize in the past, but nothing on the scale of Dean.

Said Jacobo Dick, no relation to Isaac: "I don't even have 50 pesos. Now we have nothing."

Few Mexicans even know of the community. The Mennonite men weren't sure how to ask for government help.

For Isaac Dick, the damage was nearly complete.

Dean reduced his one-room home to a tangled pile of pillows, dolls, blankets and empty Cup-O-Noodles containers. Fortunately, his horse, Dal, survived the storm without injury.

Several months ago, Dick had begun building a cinder block house to replace his one-room home. A tanned father of three with sad blue eyes, he works 12-hour days tending six acres of corn, now uprooted by the storm.

Dean stole the tin roof of the new home, leaving it crushed in the cornfields, Dick said as a blue butterfly landed on his right shoulder. He shooed it away, without smiling.

He pointed to distant patches of land. "Houses used to be there," he said. "Now they're all gone."

That night, his family would sleep in the usual pitch black of the farmland.

But with no roof overhead.

Sexual “Sin” and its Consequences among the Kleine Gemeinde in 19th Century Imperial Russia

By Ralph Friesen

Introduction

This account was originally presented at the conference on “Family and Sexuality in Mennonite History” at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario, October, 2007. The reader will note that the word “sin” in the title is in quotation marks. The quotation marks represent an attempt to de-toxify the subject of violation of norms of sexual behaviour. Violating such norms, and then also speaking openly about the subject, far more with sex than in any other area of life, seems to attract severe judgement, guilt, fear, denial, and self-righteousness—a kind of poison.

The people named in this article were real and most of them have living descendants, some of whom will read this account. I am one of those descendants, the great-great-grandson of Abraham F. and Helena Friesen. The stories have all been previously published, mainly in the books of the late Delbert F. Plett, whose research on the Kleine Gemeinde was prodigious. The difference here is that the stories are brought together, in the hope of shedding light on our ancestors’ lives from an angle previously ignored, or even hidden. They were not only farmers, entrepreneurs, church leaders, midwives, teachers, etc.—they were also sexual beings.

In the end (perhaps to the disappointment of some!) less is revealed about sexual behaviour than about moral and religious codes governing it, and the responses of the Kleine Gemeinde to a variety of situations occurring in the 19th century. My intent is to present these stories as a part of our history, without condemnation. Both the offenders and the ministers who sought to discipline them were doing the best they could with the light they had at the time. “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone.”

Repentance and forgiveness

Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), originally elected a minister of the Danzig Mennonite Gemeinde in Prussia in 1801, was appalled by what he saw as the moral and spiritual corruption of his fellow Mennonites. As far as he was concerned the situation only got worse in the Molotschna Colony in South Russia. He tried to persuade his fellow ministers that reforms were urgently needed. When his concerns were met with

indifference he countered with a rationale as old as the Mennonites themselves—“Come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). In 1812 Reimer and 18 others broke away to form the group that came to be known as the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites.

As Reimer saw it, he and his followers embodied new hope for a church without spot or wrinkle, the true church of Jesus Christ. They would not be enthusiasts, like some of the Mennonites who were influenced by the German Romantic Jung-Stilling; rather they would show their Christianity through their honesty, hard work and humble piety, turning their backs on the lusts of the flesh. Still, Reimer acknowledged that Satan does not sleep, that Christian living meant a repeated crucifixion of fleshly nature from which there was no rest until death.

It is safe to assume that sex, as one manifestation of the flesh, was not a topic of *Groote Stow* (visiting room) discussion among the Mennonites of the time, however much it might have been an inescapable fact of barnyard life among the farm animals. Nevertheless, it is a topic raised with some frequency in the journals and letters of ministers, who had to deal with sexual misbehaviour among the membership just as surely as they contended with other problems and disputes that were part of life in an unredeemed world. Then as now, however, sexual acting out was particularly dangerous because of its potential to disrupt social stability.

The picture of sexual “sin” that emerges in this presentation is surely partial—all of the incidents were recorded by ministers, all male. I was not able to find stories told by women, either in journals or as part of oral tradition. Most of the instances concern single young people on the verge of marriage, and there is no instance of a married woman committing adultery.

Whatever the social and political realities of the Gemeinde were, theological justification for its position on sexual misbehaviour, as for its position on almost all matters of daily life in the community, was found in the Bible, specifically in the writings of the ascetic Apostle Paul. Pleasure and desire were to be actively repressed and sexuality expressed only within marriage, for the purpose of procreation.

As a general rule, when an offence of a sexual nature occurred, the woman was held accountable more stringently than the man. As in other European peasant societies of the time, women were subordinate, but in sexual matters they were assigned responsibility; in guarding their chastity they ensured social stability.¹ Beneath the examples of sexual acting out were dark undertones of feminine “foolishness” and lack of restraint.²

As well, if unmarried young adults were involved, the parents were also held accountable—they were expected to be watchful over their children’s behaviour. Once their children were safely married, parents were no longer called to account for their actions.³ It was the village collectivity, formally in the all-male church brotherhood meetings and informally through the gossip of women, which protected community honour and reputation by exercising control over family affairs.⁴

Offenders were expected to come under conviction for their sin, openly confess, show remorse, and ask forgiveness from the brotherhood. Whether they did so or not, the wrong-doing would be punished by the use of the ban—apparently spontaneous repentance was not to be trusted; it was thought that only the ban would be effective in bringing wrong-doers to true conviction and repentance, as it gave them a taste of being set apart from the community which nurtured them. And only in this way could grace be manifested, as, after a time of separation, often a few weeks, sometimes months, the remorseful sinner was formally received back into the Gemeinde once more, with warm handshakes. The paradigm for this drama of sin, remorse, repentance and forgiveness was the parable of the Prodigal Son, which in turn was understood as an illustration of God’s own forgiveness and love for the sinner who came to realize and acknowledge his sin. And then order could be restored. The community, of course, would not forget the offence, and sometimes it was permanently etched into the identity of an individual or a family.

Almost invariably, the offenders and the members of the brotherhood and ministerial which exercised discipline were related to each other. The remorse-repentance ritual, along with the fact of relatedness, led

to a particular kind of family and community politics around sexual misdemeanors. While some offenders quickly acknowledged their culpability, endured the ban, and were re-accepted, others resisted. The ministers attributed such resistance to the sin of pride. There was little recognition of the possibilities for sin on the “righteous” side of the equation—self-righteousness, prurience, lack of compassion. Personality clashes and family power struggles might also enter into the picture. On some occasions the “rebels” left the Gemeinde rather than submitting themselves to the ban. Evidently the ban was effective in helping the Gemeinde maintain purity, but sometimes at the price of anger and bad feeling and unforgiveness.

Ministers were expected to show leadership, and the quality of their leadership reflected not only on their religious faith and skills in conflict resolution, but also on the minister as a man. If he was stringent with the ban, for example, he might be seen as strong, but also as too rigid; if he was relaxed with the ban he might be better-liked, but open to criticism as weak. Ministers were seen, and saw themselves, as defenders of the faith and shepherds of the community flock; good leadership brought honour to the Gemeinde, and bad leadership, shame. If sexual acting out was “female,” its containment was “male.”

The weeping woman

In 1836 Klaas Reimer published “Ein Kleines Aufsatz,” his short autobiography, from which the following account is taken. During his time as minister in Danzig a young unmarried woman gave birth to a child. The ministers summoned the woman before them and asked her to name the father. They already had their suspicions, and possibly had already reached their conclusions about the answer, as she was a stepdaughter to a “young, prosperous and handsome” man named Franz Fast, who had “an elderly wife.”

Reimer admonished the woman to confess and she began to weep, whereupon a senior minister called an end to the process. Disappointed, Reimer fell silent, thinking that she would soon have confessed “if only the punishment for sin would be explained to her.”⁵ Despite the quasi-incestuous nature of the incident, he seems to think of it simply as adultery—the woman and her stepfather had intercourse, so the stepfather was unfaithful to his wife and the woman was party to this infidelity; therein lay her sin. Reimer thought that purity could have been restored had the woman informed on the perpetrator, and

both been punished so as to bring about repentance, which in turn would open the door to re-acceptance into the church. But the child . . . as soon as it was born, the child, Reimer notes offhandedly, “was immediately taken to the orphanage in the city.” This is heart-breaking. Why was the woman not allowed to keep her child? Would Franz Fast have been expected to pay for its support into adulthood? Was the child later reconciled with the mother; was she or he able to live as a member of the community? Why didn’t Reimer express any such concerns? According to historian Delbert Plett, Reimer was acting out of compassion for the young woman, and the ministers conspired to keep Franz Fast’s transgression a secret, though it meant the ruin of the woman’s life.⁶

If sex between a stepfather and stepdaughter was considered adultery, then what constituted incest? The answer may surprise. Reimer became unhappy with his fellow Grosze Gemeinde ministers on another occasion, when his neighbour Isaac Toews requested permission to marry his housekeeper, following the death of his wife. The fact that she was his housekeeper was not a problem, but the fact that she was the first wife’s sister, was. Reimer read to the ailing, 60-year-old Toews the teaching about such a marriage, namely, that it amounted to incest. Apparently the teaching, which Reimer supported by citing the arguments of church leaders who had ruled on such situations in the past, was a continuation of the Roman Catholic doctrine of “affinity”: marriage makes a man and woman one; hence their siblings become each others’ brothers and sister—and marriage to a sibling would be incest. This definition was not taken all that seriously by the Grosze Gemeinde, and it would be one of the distinguishing marks of purity among the Kleine Gemeinde later, though contentious even among them well into the 20th century. Sex between a parent and a child, or between siblings, was of course also considered incest, and forbidden. This caution is all the more remarkable considering that marriages between second cousins were practically the norm in South Russia, while marriages between first cousins were fairly common, and went unremarked upon. Indeed, it seemed that marriage into a family to which there was already a connection ensured a kind of social bonding and security. As well, the Kleine Gemeinde forbade marriage with other Gemeinden, including Mennonite, on the grounds that such signified an abandonment of the pure faith.

1. “Scapegoat”

Church discipline sometimes threatened to deteriorate into an inter-family power struggle, rather than a spiritual matter. Around 1835, a generation after the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde, a young woman named Sarah Sawatzky was to be married, whereupon, in Reimer’s words, “it came to light” that, in the past, she had been the sexual partner of an already-married man, Heinrich Friesen (1815-1850), her first cousin.

The trespass of Heinrich and Sarah might never have been known, except for a problem of wagons. Ältester Reimer’s son Klaas designed a new wagon in 1835 but stopped production after some brethren objected. The critics included Reimer’s brothers-in-law Cornelius Sawatzky (1781-1840) and Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), fathers of Sarah and Heinrich. The Reimers repented for offending those in the Gemeinde who thought the wagon too much of an innovation, but when Sarah’s intended marriage was announced, it appears that Klaas Reimer junior, in retaliation against the Abraham Friesen family for their criticism of his wagon-building, revealed the old information about her affair with Heinrich Friesen.⁷

Abraham Friesen expressed penitence and humility for his son’s misdemeanour, as expected. There is no mention of them calling upon Heinrich. The ministers also extracted a confession from Sarah. However, in Reimer’s words, Sarah’s father “did not want her to acknowledge so much guilt and instead stated before all the brethren that his daughter was now supposed to be the scapegoat upon whom all the sin was to be cast.”

Instead of being “drawn into deep inward remorse together with the prodigal son” Reimer says Sawatzky fought back with “insults and scorn.” Nor would he submit to church discipline; he and his wife, for all their close familial connections to the Gemeinde, withdrew. Reimer found it frightful that a father would “protect adultery” in this way, thus eliminating the possibility of God’s grace.⁸ For his part, Reimer seems unaware that a desire for revenge could have played a part in this story.

2. “Blindness”

Parental responsibility was also at issue in two other instances involving the prominent von Riesen clan: the Jacob F. Friesen family and the family of his brother, the minister Abraham F. Friesen.

Eighteen-year-old Margaretha, daughter of Jacob F. (1820-1888) and Margaretha

Friesen (born Toews, 1819-1860), gave birth to a child out of wedlock in February, 1859. She was immediately dismissed from the fellowship, and so were her parents. In the words of the minister Johann Dueck (1801-1866): "In their blindness they had strengthened their daughter Margaretha in her fornication and adultery . . . so that the Gemeinde was put to shame."⁹ The word "adultery" suggests that the father of the child was a married man, but there is no reference to him.

Since the Friesens acknowledged their failing they were accepted back into the Gemeinde within two weeks. Margaretha's re-acceptance came months later, on May 24th, and she married the next year, a month after her mother's death.

3. "Unpraiseworthy conduct"

Things did not go so smoothly with Abraham F. (1807-1891) and Helena Friesen (born Siemens, 1812-1888). In late summer of 1871 Abraham and Helena took a two-week trip from the Borosenko Colony to Molotschna. They left their youngest son Johann, 19, at home alone with the hired maid, who happened to be Johann's first cousin, Helena Siemens. In December it became known that Helena, 29, was pregnant.

The Gemeinde elders, including Ältester Peter Toews, himself only 30, began an extensive inquiry. They visited and questioned both Johann's and Helena's parents. Helena confessed her sin and asked for forgiveness but even so the brotherhood separated her from the Gemeinde early in February, 1872. When she gave birth to her baby, (also named Johann) on May 9, 1872, Johann presented himself as a candidate for baptism, a prerequisite both to church membership and to marriage.

The ministerial was reluctant to allow things to go further until they had gotten to the root of the issue. They interviewed the Friesen children and concluded that the parents had been "too careless." The Friesens became furious and "in their passion renounced the Gemeinde."¹⁰

But young Johann Friesen was received into the Gemeinde through baptism on August 13, 1872, leaving the way open for marriage to Helena Siemens at her parents' house in Annafeld, on August 24th.

4. "Fornication with a soldier"

There are two instances of sexual acting out with Russians. On November 20, 1855, 33-year-old Margaretha Harder, an unmarried daughter of a family from Muntau, was dismissed from the fellowship "because of fornication with a soldier."

When he found out what had happened, Margaretha's father, Isaac (1794-1870) "beat her in anger," and as a result he was also dismissed. The Kleine Gemeinde had strict rules against physical violence and enforced them with the ban. Both Margaretha and Isaac must have repented of their wrong-doing, for they were re-accepted into the Gemeinde on December 4th.¹¹

5. "Out for the night with the Russians"

On another occasion late in 1873 a daughter of Martin Klassen (1822-1882) and Margaretha nee Toews (1829-1913), of Annafeld, Borosenko Colony "stayed out for the night with the Russians" and ran away.

The church's censure again fell on the parents, specifically Martin Klassen—"he was at fault," according to Ältester Peter Toews. His case was not helped by a history of numerous encounters with the brotherhood over failure to repay debts.¹²

6. "As if he had been carrying on"

In the summer of 1857, 21-year-old Cornelius Toews, in the words of the minister Johann Dueck (1801-1866), "entered the room of a woman through the window and stood before the husband as if he had been carrying on with the wife."¹³ This came to light as a result of Toews' own confession, but having admitted his trespass, he then "denied everything." The brotherhood dismissed him from the Gemeinde.

It is a curious-sounding thing—entering a house through a window, and apparently encountering an irate or puzzled husband instead of the object of his affections. Or perhaps the husband came in after Toews had already been in the room for some time in the company of the wife. The offence was apparently not adultery but the suggestion of it, or the intention of committing it. Toews must have been a brash young man, to think he could get away with such a stunt in a community where everyone's doings were carefully watched. Or perhaps he was carried away by desire.

At some point soon after, the brotherhood must have been satisfied that Toews was repentant, for he was re-accepted into the Gemeinde. He married¹⁴ and started a family of his own as a saddle- and harness-maker in Hierschau. But he was beset by loneliness and, under conviction for his earlier misdeed, confessed to "3 or 4 elderlies and experienced brethren." He fell on his face to ask God's forgiveness, upon which his conscience became clear.¹⁵

It was essentially a private act, but the private eventually would have to be

made public. In 1868 Toews was elected a minister, although officially he could not stand for this position, as he had once been under the ban. The ministerial retroactively revoked the ban, saying that it had been applied in error. This caused some to object, and Toews, rather than make trouble, resigned in a gracious letter where he once again acknowledged his youthful folly.¹⁶

7. Ribbon on his cap

A final example does not have any explicit sexual reference, but from today's perspective may be seen as raising a question of sexual orientation. In 1860 49-year-old Heinrich Ratzlaff (1810-1864) of Blumstein, asked to be accepted into the Kleine Gemeinde but was first put on 14 days' probation because of his "accentuated walk, parting of the hair and the ribbon on his cap." Whether the possibility of homosexuality even occurred to the Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood we don't know, but they were somehow made nervous, even though Ratzlaff was a married man. He was commanded to "do away" with the offending behaviour and apparently complied, for he was accepted into the Gemeinde.¹⁷

Consequences

The public consequences—we have little information on the personal, emotional, relational ones—of sexual sins amongst the 19th century Kleine Gemeinde varied.

1. After the "wagon" affair, Abraham Friesen, having shown proper penitence, became Gemeinde Ältester and an outstanding leader, while his son Heinrich seems to have led an ordinary Mennonite farmer's life. Cornelius Sawatzky renounced the Gemeinde, while his daughter married and also apparently led an ordinary life. She and her husband did not immigrate to North America, however, suggesting the probability that they also left the Kleine Gemeinde.

2. Jacob F. and Margaretha Friesen immigrated to Canada, as did their daughter Margaretha; her son was the first child born in the Rosenort settlement in Manitoba. There is no genealogical record of the illegitimate child; we do not know if it survived. She married Peter H. Dueck (1837-1931).¹⁸

3. Abraham F. and Helena Friesen did not attend their son's wedding. They left the Peter Toews Gemeinde and immigrated to Nebraska with the "Heuboden" branch of the Kleine Gemeinde. Johann and Helena Friesen emigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba and in 1879 they moved to Nebraska. They were known as "Siemens Friesens,"

a faintly sarcastic reference to the unusual circumstances of their marriage.¹⁹

4. Margaretha Harder, characterized by Ältester Peter Toews as “weak physically and spiritually” later immigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba with her brother- and sister-in-law the Peter Penners. She became a ward of the church, and spent her later years being hosted in various homes in the East Reserve. She never married.

Her father Isaac died in 1870 having lived for many years as a widower: “he was said to be much loved in the village, especially by the children.”²⁰

5. Martin Klassen and family first immigrated to Manitoba, where he renounced the Kleine Gemeinde in May, 1875, then moved to Gnadenu, Kansas. The unnamed Klassen daughter who ran off with the Russians was probably Elisabeth. Elisabeth was dismissed from the Gemeinde, then re-accepted. She married the son of prominent Kleine Gemeinde minister Klaas Friesen (1793-1871), lived in Jansen, Nebraska, and had two sons.

6. Cornelius Toews secured the confidence and respect of his community in later life, perhaps in part because of his willingness not to insist on his version of events. He was one of two Kleine Gemeinde delegates to North America in 1873, prior to immigration. In Manitoba he followed his Ältester brother Peter and became a Holdeman convert.

7. Heinrich Ratzlaff might have succeeded in changing his gait, and likely eliminated the ribbon from his cap. He died a member of the Kleine Gemeinde, four years after receiving censure. His son Heinrich became first a Kleine Gemeinde, then a Bruderthaler (Evangelical Mennonite Brethren) minister in Nebraska.

Of the six sets of parents of those who were discovered to have broken the Kleine Gemeinde code of sexual morality, three left, unwilling to accept the responsibility that the ministers placed upon them. Their children, the direct offenders, generally remained within the Gemeinde, as did other offenders when no parental responsibility was assigned. By and large the procedure of repentance and forgiveness was effective in helping the Gemeinde maintain social order, whatever the hypocrisies, minimizations, or guilty or angry feelings might have been. As for who had the experience of God’s grace through forgiveness—Cornelius Toews says he did; and we do not have the testimony of others on the subject.

Last word

It may not be possible to claim that the Kleine Gemeinde was guided mainly by compassion in all their dealings with sexual misdemeanors. But I will give the last word to Ältester Abraham Friesen, in his plea to the ministers of the Grosze Gemeinde regarding the plight of Franz Thiessen and his daughter Anna, imprisoned for incest in 1820 and condemned to rot in a Russian prison. He wrote two letters in October and December of 1821, petitioning the ministerial to show mercy and gain the Thiessens’ release:

*Are these not truly the lost sheep which the Saviour has commanded us to seek in Luke chapter 15? That these people are forced to languish in confinement and to endure your judgement completely divorced from all compassion gives me a very disquieted spirit and conscience. . . . After all, the commandment to stone has been revoked by the beloved Saviour according to John 8. Although this form of adultery is not as commonplace as the other, it is nonetheless my view that we have no commandment from the word of the Lord to punish in any other way than excommunication and avoidance. . . . The Lord Jesus wants to forgive all the sins of mankind other than the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And how can we deal so harshly with our fellow man? As if we ourselves are without sin? For the sake of the love of Jesus do allow yourselves to be moved.*²¹

Thiessen died in prison; his daughter was released but exiled to Siberia; Friesen’s eloquence could not move the Grosze Gemeinde ministers from their intransigent position.

Endnotes

1 Ann Goldberg, *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 146.

2 Goldberg, *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness*, p. 41. Nineteenth century German physician Johann Christian Heinroth represented Heinrich Jung-Stilling’s writings as illustrating a reprehensible “lack of will,” a kind of religious madness which was “symbolically gendered as feminine.”

3 Even today the Hutterites have an expression for this situation: “Sie haut a Deckela ‘funden’—“she’s found a lid.” Something once open has been sealed.

4 Goldberg, *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness*, p. 131.

5 Klaas Reimer, “Ein Kleines Aufsatz,” in Delbert Plett, *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia 1812-1874* (Steinbach: Crossway Publications, 1993), pp. 122-123.

6 See Plett, *Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia 1812-1875* (Steinbach: Crossway Publications, 1999), p. 272.

7 Klaas Reimer, “Ein Kleines Aufsatz,” in Plett,

Leaders, p. 144. Whether it was pre-marital sex on Heinrich’s part is not clear; his wedding date to a converted Catholic named Anna Makofski is given as about 1830, but this could not have been possible, as he would only have been 15 or so; the actual wedding date is unknown.

8 Klaas Reimer, “Ein Kleines Aufsatz,” in Delbert Plett, *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia 1812-1874*, pp. 144-145. Plett, *Dynasties*, 583-4. Sarah married Jacob Isaac (1813-1881) in 1836; they lived in Rosenort. This family did not immigrate to North America.

9 Johann Dueck diary, Plett, *Leaders*, p. 485. As in previous instances, the ministerial waited until the child was born before taking action. Perhaps such pregnancies were well-hidden, and the facts of the matter only began to come to light when the child was born. There were social implications for such a child, whose identity was partly defined as “evidence” of the parents’ sin.

10 Diary of Peter P. Toews, in Plett, *Profile*, pp. 154. My description of these events is based on pages 151-157.

11 Johann Dueck diary in Plett, *Leaders*, p. 475; Plett, *Dynasties*, p. 184; Henry Fast, *Gruenfeld 1874-1910* (Manitoba, 2006), p. 73.

12 In Delbert Plett, *Profile*, p. 164. Which daughter was it? Genealogical records of this family are somewhat contradictory: Peter Toews’ genealogy shows only one daughter, Elisabeth, born May 7, 1852 and baptized March 18, 1873. The Quebec ship lists show Elisabeth but also Anna, aged 18 in 1874 (born October 15, 1855), along with five younger siblings. The Toews diary also records that Elisabeth Klassen was excommunicated on August 11, 1874, for an unstated reason, and reaccepted on September 15th, shortly before the family emigrated to North America. The fact of Elisabeth’s excommunication is a strong indicator that she was the adventurous daughter. In a letter dated September²², 1874, Toews states that Elisabeth Klassen “was again accepted into the church” (in Henry Fast, *Gruenfeld 1874-1910*, Kleeefeld Historical Society, 2006, p. 261). Sister Anna, most extraordinarily for her time and place, married a “Mr. Commonsell”; apparently she shared Elisabeth’s spirit of adventure. No record of Elisabeth’s life in North America exists, other than that she married David Friesen, eight years her junior, the son of the second marriage of prominent Kleine Gemeinde minister Klaas Friesen (1793-1871), and that she lived in Jansen, Nebraska, and had two sons. Staying out all night with the Russians had not damaged her reputation beyond repair, but it is likely that she did suffer social disapproval. Her marriage date is not known, but if she married Friesen when he was, say, 21, she would have been 29, much past the usual age for a first marriage.

13 Johann Dueck diary, in Plett, *Leaders*, p. 481.

14 He married Elisabeth Friesen (bef. 1840-1864), probably in 1857, the same year of his adventure.

15 Plett, *Leaders*, p. 824.

16 Plett, *Leaders*, pp. 481, 821; Cornelius Toews letter in Delbert Plett, *Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1850-1875* (Steinbach: DFP Publications, 1986), p. 205.

17 Johann Dueck diary in *Leaders*, p. 489.

18 Delbert Plett, *Saints and Sinners*, p. 270. Peter H. Dueck’s mother, Anna Harms (1808-1874), remarried to Heinrich Ratzlaff, the one with ribbon on his cap.

19 Abraham F. Reimer diary and Plett, *Profile*, p. 271.

20 Johann Peter Harder, “Memoirs”, quoted in Plett, *Dynasties*, p. 184.

21 From Delbert Plett, *The Golden Years*, pp. 180-181.

The Timber lots of the Manitoba Mennonites in St. Joseph Township, Pembina County, Dakota Territory

by Bruce Wiebe

The first villages on the West Reserve in Manitoba were settled in 1875. The first passenger ship that year carrying Russian Mennonites, some of whom were destined for that area, docked in Quebec City on July 1, 1875. Here they boarded trains for Collingwood, Ontario on Lake Huron. Because of the hardships of the Dawson Route between Fort William and Winnipeg, the settlers traveled on Great Lakes steamers to Duluth, Minnesota, then by rail to Moorhead where boats that navigated the Red River were headquartered. From there they went down the Red River to Fort Dufferin, where they organized themselves into villages before moving onto the land. Diaries of that period indicate that under ideal conditions and connections it took a minimum of twelve days to make the trip from Quebec to Manitoba. Accordingly, the first settlers would have arrived at Fort Dufferin about mid July. It is reported that 300 families settled eighteen villages that first year. The most easterly of the first settled villages included Blumenort, Kronsthal, Rosenort, Neuhorst, and Schoenwiese. These five villages were situated far from the wooded slopes of the Pembina Escarpment, and with winter approaching, the first shelters were of necessity "Simlins." Better construction required timbers and these were within sight, but across the 49th parallel, the International Boundary, in the Dakota Territory of the United States.

When the 1873 Mennonite delegates from Russia were on their inspection trip to Manitoba, some found it not to their liking and returned to Dakota Territory earlier than the others. References to the timber along the banks of the Pembina River are found in the journals of some of the delegates.

June 9, 1873 – The five of us, Lorenz Tschetter, (Wilhelm) Ewert, (Andreas) Schrag, Tobias Unruh, and myself (Paul Tschetter), and Brother (John F) Funk, decided to return to Dakota.

June 11, 1873 – We stepped from the ship at Fort Pembina. At noon we started out, going westward into Dakota. On one side of the road were thick woods of oak and (linden) trees with the Pembina River winding its way through the woods. A short distance (three to five versts) to the north is the Canadian boundary line. We drove on for twenty-seven versts and remained

for the night at the home of a man who was part Indian. After supper we took a walk into the woods, where we found many beautiful trees such as oaks, poplars, and (lindens) often so thick that two men could hardly reach around them. We came to a stream that flowed swiftly enough to drive a fair sized mill.

June 13 – We crossed the Pembina and two other small streams We then returned home, crossing the Tongue River which flows into the Pembina (River) three versts away from the Red (River).¹

John F. Funk's diary of the same journey also comments on the timber along the river:

Our road lay along the Pembina River, a fine stream, furnishing good water however, with a fine belt of timber We traveled some 18 miles and came to the farm of Chas Bottineau we obtained lodging for the night. The next morning we proceeded twelve miles further west, and about noon arrived at the foot of the St. Joseph mountain Here we found a little town known as Wall Halla and stopped at the house of a German friend George Emmerling ... [who] has been living here for several years, has 800 acres of good land, in the valley of the Pembina River. There is here a good soil, very rich, and plenty of timber, stone, and building sand. He is building a sawmill on the River which will be ready for sawing the present season. ... We left Wall Halla with many regrets. The natural beauty of the place, the mountains, the river, the timber²

Although the Bergthal Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and Molotschna delegates were not represented on this side trip along the Pembina River, perhaps the delegates may have discussed their findings with each other. Jacob Peters, Heinrich Wiebe, and Kornelius Buhr may have been aware of this timbered area, sawmill, and German speaking settler in such close proximity to the Canadian border, and may have reported this information to their fellow Bergthaler as well as Fuerstenlaend and Chortitza colonists in Russia.

The Americans had established a Customs House in 1864 at Smugglers Point on Section 11 of Township 163 and Range 54. In 1876, the Canadian Government first records a Customs Preventive Station at Smugglers Point, later Spencerfield, which

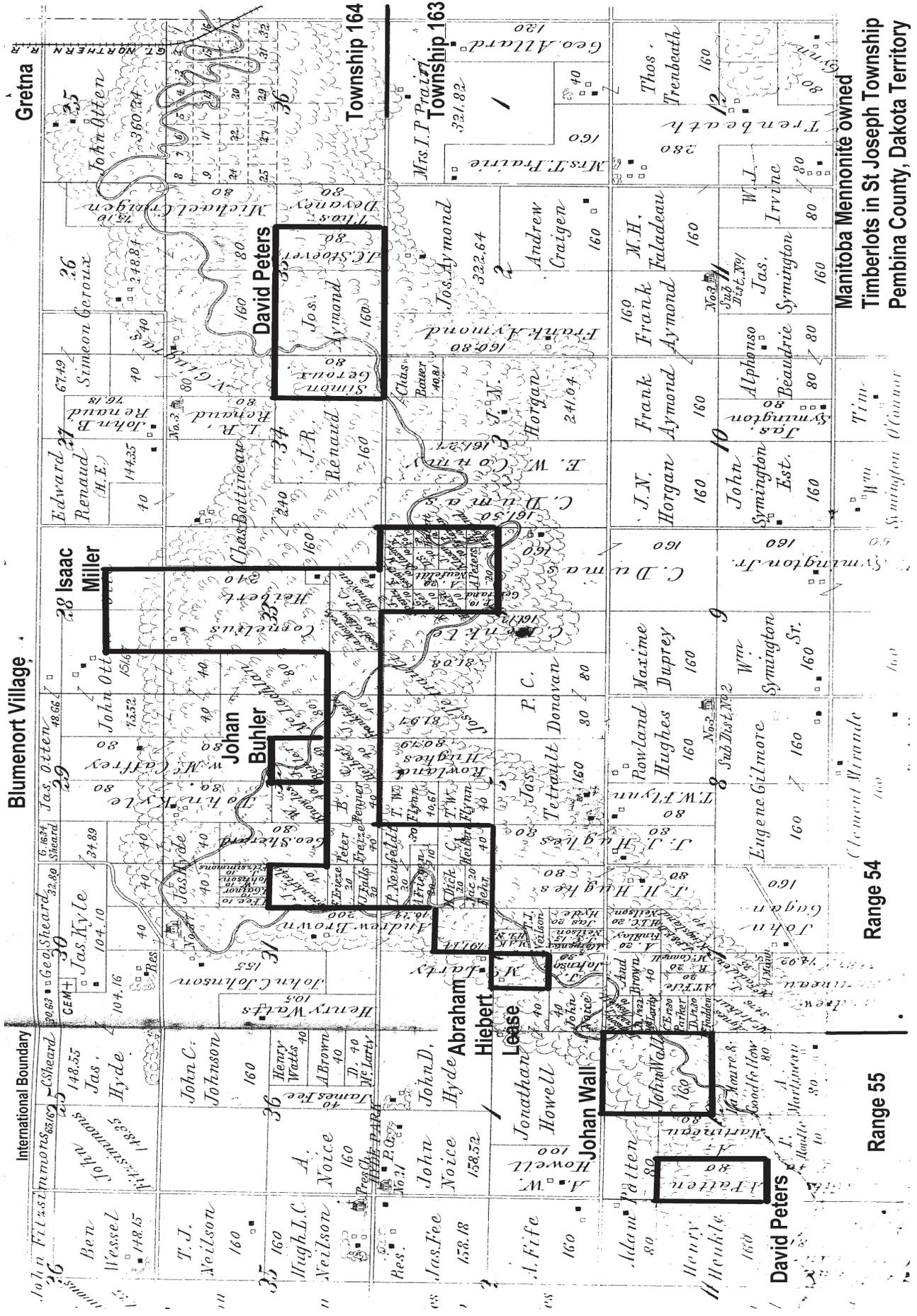
was located just east of the Mennonite Village of Blumenort.³ With access across the border, it was only logical that timber would be acquired as nearby as possible.

To facilitate this, the West Reserve Gebietsamt under the administration of Obervorsteher, or Oberschulz, Isaac Miller, acquired wooded lands in the vicinity of the Pembina River for the benefit of the settlement. Miller had arrived in Quebec City on July 20th and would only have reached Fort Dufferin after August 1st. On October 4th, 1875, within two months of his arrival, he purchased 160 acres from George Reed for which he paid \$1000 cash. Composed of the East half of the North West Quarter, and the West half of the North East Quarter both in Section 33, Township 164, Range 54, the property was only a half mile south of the border, about 1 mile from Blumenort.⁴ This purchase, or Warranty Deed, as well as all subsequent ones were registered in Miller's name personally.

That Isaac Miller a non-English speaking Russian Mennonite immigrant was able to purchase property in the Dakota Territory of the United States on behalf of the West Reserve Mennonite Settlement is significant. He will have required assistance in these matters, but no documentation has been located as proof. It is possible that the German immigrant George Emmerling of Walhalla had some initial involvement. His acquaintance with Mennonites began in 1873 with the visit of John F Funk and five of the Mennonite Delegates. However, West Reserve Colony Administration records would indicate an even more intriguing probability. William Peale Leslie, an English immigrant to Canada, was the Customs Collector at Spencerfield and then later relocated to Gretna. He also held the position of Magistrate as early as 1881 and most Homestead Applications were signed in his presence. He wrote numerous letters to the Canadian Department of the Interior on behalf of Mennonite homesteaders. Isaac Miller referred to him as a friend. West Reserve expense records document significant payments to Leslie for "Wald" (woodland). Examples:

The woodland from Leslie costs \$750.

Paid to Leslie for the woodland



\$100.

Paid to Leslie for the woodland \$350.

Balance to Leslie for woodland \$300.

Paid to the Customs Collector for woodland \$350.

Paid to Leslie for woodland \$350.⁵

This would seem to indicate that Leslie may have been an intermediary for the purchases of, or payments for, land in the United States. His assistance to the Mennonites in this matter could be perceived as being in conflict with his official capacity as an agent of the Canadian Government.

The arrival of more settlers in the following years, particularly in 1876, necessitated the purchase of more lands for timber. On July 31st, 1876 Miller purchased 80 acres from Judson LaMoure for \$362.50. This land, the South West Quarter of the South East Quarter, and the South East Quarter of the South West Quarter all on Sec 28, Twp 164, Rg 54 was immediately to the north of the previous purchase and only a quarter mile south of the border.⁶

Evidence for building construction having begun in earnest on the West Reserve is given by the extent of Miller's 1878 purchases. During the month of September of that year he purchased 803 acres in Pembina County at a cost of \$5000.

From Jacob Frankenfield- 320 acres for \$2000:

-The East half of the South East Quarter - 31-164-54

-The South half of the South West Quarter and

the South half of the South East Quarter all on - 32-164-54

-The South West quarter of the South West Quarter- 33-164-54

-Lot #4 on 5-163-54⁷

From William Goodfellow- 160 acres for \$1000:

-The South West quarter of the North West Quarter-5-163-54

-Lot #1 and

the South half of the North East Quarter all on- 6-163-54⁸

From Judson LaMoure- 322 acres for \$2000:

-The North East Quarter of 4-163-54

-The West half of the South East Quarter and

the East half of the South West Quarter all on- 33-164-54⁹

The large sums required at this time could not be managed by the Gebietsamt and the purchases would not have been

possible without the cooperation of the land owners. Jacob Frankenfield accepted a mortgage for \$1920 at 10 percent,¹⁰ while Judson LaMoure and William Goodfellow did the same for \$2880.¹¹ Three approximately equal payments were due on each mortgage on January 1st for three years beginning in 1879. All the purchased lands were contiguous; with the nearest access point just East of Blumenort and only one quarter mile south of the International Boundary. With the exception of this quarter mile, all transportation could be over property owned by the Mennonite settlement, a maximum 5 miles distant from Blumenort over this indirect route.

Several individual Mennonites also purchased timber lots in St Joseph Township, the first being Johan Wall of Blumenort in 1878, followed by David Peters of Blumenort in 1880.

Wall purchased 160 acres on the Pembina River from Joseph Cyr for \$450, being the North East Quarter of Sec¹², Twp 163, Rg 55. This he had subdivided into 16 ten acre parcels which were platted but never registered or sold.¹² Peters purchased 160 acres, also on the Pembina River, from John Atchison for \$1000, being the East half of the South East Quarter of Section 34, and the West half of the South West Quarter of Section 35, both parcels being in Township 164, Range 54.¹³ A year later Peters purchased 80 acres for \$450 from Alfred Dease, being the North West quarter of the South West Quarter and the South West quarter of the North West Quarter, both on Sec 12, Twp 163, Rg 55.¹⁴ However, on October 4, 1882 this parcel was sold by the Pembina County Treasurer to Edward Collins for the 1879 back taxes of \$7.09.¹⁵

The Mennonites of the West Reserve now had access to 1363 acres of timber lands, not taking into consideration the non-documented leases or timber purchases that individuals may have made. For example, Section 36, Township 164, Range 54 was a school section, and being directly on the River, was nicely timbered. A plat of the North Half shows 32 parcels of ten acres each which would logically have been for lease purposes. One documented transaction occurred as early as May of 1877 when Abraham Hiebert of Schoenwiese, later Gruenthal, entered into an Agreement to purchase the timber on the South West quarter of Sec 6, Twp 163, Rg 54 and was given ten years in which to remove it, but whether the conditions of the \$600 payment were met and the timber removed is not documented.¹⁶

A description of the type of land, tim-

ber, and the nature of the Pembina River in Township 163, Range 54 is found in the Surveyors Field Notes of October 1867. Firstly some general observations:

This Township is composed of timber and prairie land of the best quality. Pembina River courses through the entire Township from East to West, along the Northern line of sections, while the remainder or Southern portion of the Township is principally flat prairie.

Settlers are found along the River in the Northern tier of sections.

Herds of horses and cattle are grazed upon the prairie adjoining the woodlands. No coal or stone quarries are found in this Township.

Some excerpted specific notes.

North on a random line between sections 3 & 4

22 Chains¹⁷ Enter timber brg E & W

36 Chains Pembina River 90 links wide runs E

40 Chains Set temporary ¼ sec cor. (Isaac Miller's land begins to the left of this point)

41 Chains Pembina River 100 links wide brg N W

65 Chains Pembina River 100 links wide brg N E

74 Chains Road brg N E

80.61 Chains Intersect N Bdry, 23 links west of corner to secs 3,4,33,34 (End Miller land)

Land Level, Soil Good

North between Secs 32 & 33 (Miller's land on both sides for first 20 Chains)

29 Chains Pembina River 100 links wide brg E & S E

Land level, Soil & Timber good

East on a random line between Secs 28 & 33

(Miller's land to the left and right starting at 20 Chains and ending at 60 Chains)

40 Chains Set temp ¼ sec cor

57 Chains Leave timber & enter prairie brg N W

Land level, Soil good¹⁸

The timber was available and as early as 1878, Johan Wall had erected a gristmill in Blumenort.¹⁹ In 1879 he purchased a saw which could be powered by the mill. His enterprise does not appear to have been totally independent of the Gebietsamt or church, because in the fall of 1877, Ältester Johan Wiebe and Isaac Miller had given him \$500 and \$1000 respectively.²⁰ As

well, a steam powered mill was the first item on the agenda at a colony brotherhood meeting.²¹ By early 1881 the Mill was operating double shifts, sawing wood by day, and grinding grain by night.²² On the Dakota side of the border, a sawmill owned by Moorhead and Marcellais was in full operation that same year.²³ The George Emmerling referred to in John F. Funk's diary already had a river powered operating sawmill at Walhalla as early as 1873.²⁴

Beginning in 1885, more property transactions occurred in St Joseph Township.

That year Johan Buhler of Kronsthal purchased 40 acres from George Sheard for \$470, being the North West quarter of the South East Quarter of Sec 32, Twp 164, Rg 54, which was bisected by the Pembina River.²⁵ David Peters of Blumenort, in the name of his wife Helena Peters, purchased another 160 acres in 1888, this time for \$1400 from Joseph LaPorte, being the West half of the South East Quarter and the East half of the South West Quarter, both on Sec 35, Twp 164, Rg 54.²⁶

The majority of transfers, however, occurred when the Gebietsamt began to divest itself of the lands they purchased but that were registered in the name of Isaac Miller. In 1886, before he declined to serve further as Obervorsteher, he sold 760 acres of which 720 acres were to West Reserve Mennonites. The other 40 acres on the South East Quarter of 28-164-54 and no longer of value for timber were sold to land neighbor John Otten.²⁷ In 1888 Miller sold 40 acres to Donald Mcgarty but retained the timber rights for a further ten years.²⁸ This sale was at the extreme west of the original parcel on 6-163-54 and preserved the contiguity of the Mennonite lands and their access point to Blumenort. In 1891, 160 acres were sold to a Mennonite with timber rights retained for four years. By 1897, contiguity did not appear to be an issue and the South West quarter of the South East Quarter of 32-164-54 was sold to Leopold Frank.²⁹ Now only 40 acres on 5-163-54 were left in Miller's name, and he was getting quite advanced in years. In 1906, 10 acres were sold to Edward and Heinrich Stegman,³⁰ and in 1908 the remaining 30 were sold to Jacob Knelsen. Miller took back mortgages in lieu of cash in only two of the sales, the sales to John Otten³¹ and to Cornelius Hiebert.³²

Both David Peters and Johan Wall liquidated their private holdings during the 1890's.

In 1890, Peters sold the East half of the South East Quarter -34-164-54, 80 acres to Simon Geroux for \$450.³³ The same

year he recovered \$200 by signing a Quit Claim Deed in favor of Adam Paten for the 80 acres on 12-163-55.³⁴ Shortly after his reported move to Oregon, Peters and his wife sold 160 acres for \$400 to Joseph Aymond, being the South West Quarter of 35-164-54.³⁵ Their final sale for \$412.50 was recorded as Helena Peters and husband to Herman Hellofs in 1899 for the 80 acres on the West half of the South East Quarter -35-164-54.³⁶ In 1895, Johan and Aganetha Wall sold their 160 acres, the North East Quarter of -12-163-55, to Charles Shove for \$650.³⁷

The actual documentation for sales and transfers of Mennonite owned lands is difficult to verify and in some cases exasperating for the researcher today, and will have been even more so for the Register of Deeds at the time. The following examples are recorded:

Abraham Friesen of Rosenort sold his 30 acres for \$50.50 in 1901.

Franz Froese of Reinland sold his 20 acres for \$20 in 1897.

Peter Froese of Schoenwiese sold his 40 acres for \$120 in 1895.

Peter Gerbrand's 10 acres were sold by Elizabeth Friesen for \$50 in 1904 but no evidence of transfer to Friesen or of her authority to sell were located.

Peter Hiebert's 10 acres were sold for taxes in 1897.

Johan Klassen of Neuanlage's 10 acres were sold by his Executor D. Klassen for \$165 in 1905.

Bernhard Penner of Schoenwiese sold his 40 acres for \$100 in 1897.

Johan Peters of Reinland's 20 acres were sold by Jacob J Falk for \$50 in 1897 but no transfer to Falk was located.

The documentation concerning the properties owned by Abraham Peters of Rosenort, Peter Friesen of Rosenort, and Heinrich Hildebrand of Neuendorf is particularly complex. The taxes paid on the properties of Peters and Friesen indicates continuing ownership in their names, however actual payers are not indicated, except in 1906 when Henry Ritz is recorded as having paid the taxes. Friesen died in 1893 and Peters in 1894. In 1908 a Warranty Deed transferring ownership of the 40 acres once owned by the above three Mennonites to William Kean for \$200 is signed by Abraham Peters, Abraham Klassen, and Heinrich Hildebrand. The signatory Hildebrand is himself, Peters is obviously the son of the deceased actual owner, and how Klassen came to portray himself as owner of the deceased Friesen's 10 acres is not evident.³⁸

In 1911 a Johan Wiens transfers to

Rudolph Sheler, for consideration of \$150, the 20 acres once owned by Abraham Peters and the 10 acres once owned by Peter Friesen. There is no evidence of Wiens receiving these properties from Peters and Friesen or that the previous transfer to William Kean was abrogated.³⁹ September 15, 1914 the matter appears to finally be resolved with the entry into the records of an eleven page "Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order of Judgement." On April 2nd, 1914 the Pembina County Sheriff was unable to serve notice to the defendants which included Abraham Peters, Peter Friesen, Abraham Klassen, and Heinrich Hildebrand because none resided in Pembina County. On April 11th, 1914 a Summons Notice was mailed to the defendants at Gretna Manitoba. The Summons Notice was also published in the Neche newspaper, the Chronotype in its April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, and May 7, 1914 issues. The Plaintiff was Rudolf Sehler.

Finding XV in the document notes:

That ever since the year 1893 and for more than 20 years prior to the commencement of this action the Plaintiff has been and now is in the open and notorious and adverse possession of the SE ¼ of the SW ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section 4, in Township 163 North of Range 54 West to the Defendant Abraham Peters and William Kihn and all other persons claiming the same.

It further refers to Abraham Klassen "who claimed to have some interest in the land described" and states that William Kihn never paid \$120 to Abraham Peters, Abraham Klassen, and Heinrich Hildebrand and never possessed the land "and thereby forfeited his said contract."

It goes on to state: "That on the 20th day of January, 1911 one Johann Wiens claiming to own the said (property)..." did not occupy the land, "but the same was at the said time occupied by the Plaintiff." Findings XVII and XVIII continue similarly for the balance of the Peters property and that of Peter Friesen.

The "Conclusions of Law" state:

That the Plaintiff is entitled to the judgement of this court that he is the absolute owner in fee simple of the Premises described in the complaint and has title thereto by 20 years adverse possession. ... and that the defendants and their unknown heirs and all other persons unknown claiming any estate or interest in or lien or encumbrance upon the premises described in the complaint and herein above described be forever debarred and enjoined from ever asserting the same adverse to the plaintiff ...⁴⁰

The findings of fact that Rudolf

Sehler as plaintiff was in possession since 1893 of the land owned by Peters and Friesen may indeed be correct, but it is the contention of this researcher that Mennonites from Manitoba continued to harvest timber and firewood from these lands till much later. At least one Rosenort village document indicates that Abraham Peters Jr. fetched a load of wood from "Dakota" in 1896. Property taxes continued to be paid.

The fact that Abraham Klassen and Johann Wiens present themselves as owners of some of this property in 1908 and 1911 respectively leads to a conclusion that the heirs of the deceased owners Peters and Friesen sold their interests to said Klassen and Wiens, but likely on a verbal basis for no registrations are recorded in Pembina County. How the Register of Deeds would enter transfers from Klassen and Wiens to a

third party without prior transfers existing to show them as owners would indicate a rather lax registration procedure. The fact that service of notice was not affected upon the Defendants or that the Defendants chose not to contest the action would seem to indicate that harvestable timber was depleted and the property no longer had the value for which it was originally purchased by Manitoba Mennonites.

Name	Village	Acres	Year	Price	Description	Sec, Twp, Rg
Dyck, Heinrich	Kronsgart	20	1886	\$160	N ½ SE ¼ NE ¼	6-163-54
Esau, Peter	Blumenhof	40	1886	\$400	SE ¼ SW ¼	33-164-54
Ewert, John		20	1886	\$200	N ½ SW ¼ SW	33-164-54
Fehr, Jacob	Reinland	20	1886	\$200	S ½ SE ¼ NE ¼	6-163-54
Friesen, Abraham	Rosenort	30	1886	\$240	S ½ NE ¼ NE ¼ SW ¼ NW ¼ NW ¼	6-163-54 5-163-54
Friesen, Peter	Rosenort	10	1886	\$100	NE ¼ SE ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Froese, Franz	Reinland	20	1886	\$160	N ½ Se ¼ SE ¼	31-164-54
Froese, Peter	Schoenwiese	40	1886	\$320	SW ¼ SW ¼	32-164-54
Gerbrand, Peter		10	1886	\$100	SW ¼ SW ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Giesbrecht, Johan	Schoenwiese	40	1886	\$480	NE ¼ SE ¼	31-164-54
Goertzen, Franz	Blumenort	10	1886	\$100	NE ¼ NW ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Heinrichs, Isaac	Gruenthal	40	1886	\$400	SW ¼ SE ¼	33-164-54
Hiebert, Cornelius		160	1891	\$480	W ½ NE ¼ E ½ NW ¼	33-164-54 33-164-54
Hiebert, Johan	Neuhoffnung	10	1886	\$100	NW ¼ SW ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Hiebert, Peter		10	1886	\$100	SE ¼ NE ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Hildebrand, Heinrich	Neuendorf	10	1886	\$100	SE ¼ SE ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Hildebrand, Isaac	Blumenhof	40	1886	\$400	NE ¼ SW ¼	33-164-54
Klassen, Johan	Neuanlage	10	1886	\$100	NW ¼ SE ¼ Ne ¼	4-163-54
Klassen, Johan	Rosenfeld	40	1996	\$400	NW ¼ SE ¼	33-164-54
Klassen, Martin	Neuanlage	10	1886	\$100	NW ¼ NE ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Knelsen, Jacob		30	1908	\$300	S ½ SW ¼ NW ¼ S ½ N ½ SW ¼ NW ¼	5-163-54 5-163-54
Kroeker, Gerhard	Blumenort	10	1886	\$100	SW ¼ NW ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Neufeld, Heinrich	Gruenthal	20	1886	\$200	NE ¼ SW ¼ NE ¼ SE ¼ NW ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54 4-163-54
Neufeld, Peter	Kronsthal	50	1886	\$400	E ½ NW ¼ NW ¼ NW ¼ NW ¼ NW ¼ N ½ NE ¼ NE ¼	5-163-54 5-163-54 6-163-54
Penner, Bernhard	Schoewiese	40	1886	\$400	SE ¼ SW ¼	32-164-54
Peters, Abraham	Rosenort	20	1886	\$200	SW ¼ SE ¼ NE ¼ SE ¼ SW ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54 4-163-54
Peters, Johan	Reinland	20	1886	\$160	S ½ SE ¼ SE ¼	31-164-54
Peters, Wilhelm	Rosengart	40	1886	\$400	SE ¼ SE ¼	32-164-54
Schellenberg, David	Neuanlage	10	1886	\$100	SW ¼ NE ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Spent, Jacob	Silberfeld	10	1886	\$100	NW ¼ NW ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Voth, Cornelius	Silberfeld	10	1886	\$100	NE ¼ NE ¼ NE ¼	4-163-54
Wall, Jacob	Neuhorst	40	1886	\$320	SE ¼ SW ¼	28-164-54
Wiebe, Heinrich	Neuhorst	20	1886	\$200	S ½ SW ¼ SW ¼	33-164-54

Transactions concerning another set of land parcels may also be of interest. In 1894, "Jacob P Friesen and Peter J Friesen (Co-partners), under the firm name J.P. Friesen & Son of Gretna," purchased 320 acres south west of Gretna from Norman Gingras for \$4000 and the commitment to pay Gingras's \$1200 mortgage in favor of the Security Trust Company, being the SW ¼ of SW ¼ -26-164-54, the SE ¼ of SE ¼ -27-164-54, the E ½ of NE ¼ -34-164-54, the NW ¼ -35-164-54.⁴¹ The Friesen's owned a Lumberyard in Gretna and this purchase was for the timber that was on the land. In 1898, Jacob P. and Margaretha Friesen, and Peter J. and Henrietta Friesen, all of Gretna, sold this same property to Asa Fanset for \$2800 but retained the timber rights until December 13, 1908.⁴² Enoch Winkler, the Gretna Lumber Merchant, also owned timber property.⁴³

Property taxes were part of the ongoing cost of land ownership. Properties were assessed and taxed on the basis of 40 acre parcels, each 160 acre quarter section consisting of a North East 40, North West 40, South East 40, and a South West 40. In 1879, Johan Wall's four forty acre pieces on 12-163-55 were assessed equally at \$80 each and taxed at \$1.04 each totaling \$4.16 which he paid on May 31, 1880. By 1882, the assessments had changed, 2 parcels were valued at \$200 each, and 2 at \$160. He paid the significantly increased taxes of \$15.14 on July 14, 1883.⁴⁴

As noted above, Isaac Miller's timberland purchases over four years totaled 1043 acres for which the Gebietsamt paid \$6362.50, plus another \$160 in 1886 to satisfy a Quit Claim. Sales of these lands between 1886 and 1908 returned \$8070 plus the retained timber rights for 10 years on 40 acres and 4 years on 160 acres. How the timber was allocated to and paid for by West Reserve Mennonites is not apparent, but this may only have been done on a cost recovery basis or may have involved some compensation to the Gebietsamt. Property taxes totaled \$14.96 for 1877 and were paid May 27, 1878. The 1878 taxes of \$11.52 were paid July 17, 1879. By 1881 the tax bill had increased tenfold to \$108.83 and this sum was paid on February 28, 1882.⁴⁵

The disposition of Gebietsamt properties by Isaac Miller will be of interest to family researchers and is included here alphabetically by purchaser.⁴⁶

The felling of the trees and shaping of the timbers was a laborious task, particularly the large oaks which were used for the framing of houses and barns. Jacob Friesen, later of Reinfeld, son of Peter

Friesen of Rosenort, had particularly rough gnarled hands which he told his grandson Peter Wiebe, had come from cutting timber south of Rosenort. The Friesen's had constructed buildings earlier, but with the 1886 purchase of 10 acres, more timber remained to be cut. The Abraham Peters, also of Rosenort, purchased 20 acres. Their barn which stood till the late 1980s was built in 1878 and constructed of oak main timbers, roughly 8 or 9 inch square. A cross piece with sway braces salvaged from that barn by this author, is still solid 128 years later.

Endnotes

- 1 Published in: *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, Volume II, (Altona: The Hutterian Brethren, Crystal Spring Colony, St. Agathe Mb., 1988). The excerpts are from pages 723-725.
- 2 Originally published in *Herald of Truth* and reprinted in Clarence Hiebert, *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need*, (Newton, Ks: Faith and Life Press, 1974), 86.
- 3 Frank G. Enns, *Gretna, Window on the Northwest*, (Altona: Village of Gretna History Committee, 1987, 1-2.
- 4 Pembina County Courthouse, Register of Deeds Office, Cavalier North Dakota, Deed Book A (old), 480,481.
- 5 Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg, Mb., Microfilm #653, Files 13 and 14.
- 6 Deed Book A (old), 587,588.
- 7 Deed Book A, 99,100.
- 8 Deed Book A, 100,101.
- 9 Deed Book A, 97,98.
- 10 Mortgage Record Book 1, 42,43.
- 11 Mortgage Record Book 1, 44,45.
- 12 Deed Book A, p 77; Plat Sketch, MHC, Volume 1706.
- 13 Deed Book A, 498,499.
- 14 Deed Book B, 108.
- 15 Deed Book B, 473.
- 16 Deed Book A (old), 626,627.
- 17 A Surveyor's chain is made up of 100 links, each a length of 7.92 inches.
- 18 Pembina County Courthouse, Surveyors Field Notes, Book 4, 122,134,145.
- 19 *Manitoba Mennonite Memories*, (Altona: Mani-

toba Mennonite Centennial Committee), 43-46. Here it is noted that the mill was in operation by December 1877, and that Wall was in partnership with Peter Peters until 1879.

- 20 Milling Records of Johan Wall, Blumenort Mb. MHC, Volume 1086.
- 21 Peter Wiens, Gebietsamt Secretary Notebook, MHC Volume 4231, File 4.
- 22 *West Lynne Southern Manitoba Times*, March 26, 1881, Legislative Library, Winnipeg Mb..
- 23 *Ibid.*, April 2, 1881.
- 24 Funk Diary, Brothers in Need.
- 25 Deed Book K, 421.
- 26 Deed Book T, 226.
- 27 Deed Book L, 608.
- 28 Deed Book R, 323.
- 29 Deed Book AM, 360.
- 30 Deed Book G3, 247.
- 31 Mortgage Record Book 23, 79.
- 32 Mortgage Record Book 28, 236.
- 33 Deed Book AB, 407.
- 34 Deed Book S, 236.
- 35 Deed Book AE, 536.
- 36 Deed Book AB, 28.
- 37 Deed Book AK, 96.
- 38 Deed Book E3, 534,535)
- 39 Deed Book M3, 551.
- 40 Deed Book N3, 463-465 and 476-482.
- 41 Deed Book AJ, 434.
- 42 Deed Book AS, 82.
- 43 Deed Books C, 515 and R, 254. In February 1882 Winkler purchased 160 acres of timberland in Pembina Township and sold same in December 1887.
- 44 Taxation Records, 1879, 1882, Tax Assessor Storage Vault at Pembina County Courthouse.
- 45 Taxation Records, 1877, 1878, 1881, Tax Assessor Storage Vault at Pembina County Courthouse.
- 46 Pembina County Courthouse, Register of Deeds Office, Deed Books and Page Numbers:
H. Dyck L-350, P. Esau L-368, J. Ewert L-364, J. Fehr L-352, A. Friesen L-362, P. Friesen L-359, F. Froese L-374, P. Froese L-371, P. Gerbrand L-345, J. Giesbrecht L-371, F. Goertzen L-356, I. Heinrichs L-370, C. Hiebert AE-33, J. Hiebert L-351, P. Hiebert L-347, H. Hildebrand L-357, I. Hildebrand L-369, J. Klassen L-358, J. Klassen L-365, M. Klassen L-354, J. Knelsen M3-186, G. Kroeker L-346, H. Neufeld L-360, P. Neufeld L-361, B. Penner L-372, A. Peters L-349, J. Peters L-366, W. Peters L-374, D. Schellenberg L-353, J. Spent L-348, C. Voth L-355, J. Wall L-367, H. Wiebe L-363.

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Heinrich Wiebe 1839-1897

Bergthal Minister and Land Scout
Lawrence Klippenstein

The life story of Heinrich Wiebe, a farmer and minister from Bergthal, south Russia, later Ukraine, has been traced back to Blumenort, West Prussia, and to the birth of his great grandfather Heinrich in 1776. The senior Heinrich's first wife was Judith Dyck who may have been the aunt of his second wife, Maria, born 23 January 1776. Their family of nine children included Helena, the wife of Bernhard Wiebe who together became the parents of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), later a Reinländer Mennonite Ältester (bishop) in Manitoba, Canada, and Gerhard Wiebe (1800-1858), the father of Heinrich, the subject of this study.¹

This Heinrich's parents, Gerhard and Agatha (Dyck), had six children: Gerhard (1827-1900), later a Bergthaler/Chortitzer Ältester in Manitoba, Johann (1829-?), Heinrich (1839-1897), Anna (1843-?), Aganetha (1833-1873), Agatha (1838-1839) and a second Agatha (1843-1929). Gerhard had come to New Russia (Molotschna colony) with his parents in 1803, among the first families to begin the settlement, and then moved to Einlage in Chortitza (Old Colony) in 1816. Gerhard then moved with his wife, Agatha, to the Bergthal colony where they were residing in the newly-founded village of Heuboden at the time Heinrich was born on 29 September 1839. His birth is recorded as being in the village of Schoenfeld, established two years earlier. This could have been the place where Heinrich's parents resided while their house was being completed in Heuboden.²

Heinrich may have begun attendance of the local village school in October, 1845. Here he learned to write, do arithmetic, and read from a German primer known as the Fibel. In his readings he progressed to the Old and New Testaments, and no doubt completed the eight years that the program of the day required. There is no evidence that he continued his formal education after that, but it can be deduced from his later involvements that he was an intellectually active and quite capable pupil. His youth was no doubt spent in helping on the fam-

ily farm and participating in the life of the Bergthal youth group of his time.

After being baptized on 1 June 1859, Heinrich was married on 25 October 1859 to Margareta Falk, born 26 March 1840, and baptized on 5 June 1858. She was the daughter of William (1797-1872) and Helena (Paulz) Falk (1802-1849) from the village of Schoenthal in the Bergthal colony.³ Heinrich and Margareta had six children before emigrating to Manitoba in 1874: Heinrich, born 12 September 1860,

administration before moving to Manitoba nine years later.

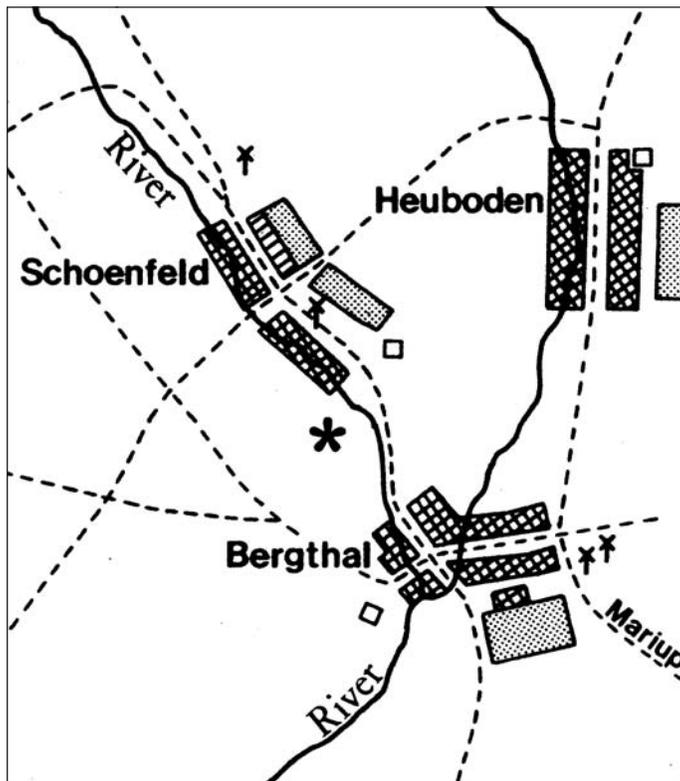
A generation of families had grown up in the community by now. Bergthal, nestled in a beautiful valley, and with the encouragement of Johann Cornies as well as a government-sponsored development program, was well-treed with over 4,000 planted in Bergthal alone. Like other typical Russian Mennonite villages it had a straight and wide main street running the length of the village. A neat row of mulberry trees regularly divided one farmyard from another. From the heights of the so-called "Schoenfeldscha Boaj" (the Schoenfeld hill), one could obtain a majestic panoramic view of the entire main village locale.⁶

But the community was also grappling with serious problems. The 1860s became a time of much unrest in many south Russian Mennonite villages. A decree emancipating the serfs had been passed in 1861, and a number of other reforms raised difficult questions among those that felt some of these changes would harm their churches and families.

The increase of landlessness only deepened such anxieties. By 1867 the number of landless families in the Bergthal colony as a whole had risen to 218, a 300 per cent increase in the past two decades. In less than 10 years, i.e., by 1874, the number of landless families rose to 350.⁷ Overpopulation and the need for more farm land became very urgent factors in considering emigration to

North America when that option arose at that time.

These issues might not have created a crisis if the matter of universal military service for Russia had not also come to the fore in the late sixties. It led to announcements of pending legislation that would bring in general conscription for all citizens of the nation.⁸ This reform proposal immediately caused deep apprehension in all Mennonite settlements, especially among their leaders. Universal military conscription would strike at the heart of the pacifist Mennonite faith and a confrontation with the state would certainly follow.



Bergthal colony villages of south Russia in the life of Heinrich Wiebe. Map: William Schroeder, The Bergthal Colony, revised edition, 20.

Agatha, born 8 February 1863, Susana, born 12 December 1864 and died 17 June 1866, Gerhard, born 18 April 1867, Wilhelm, born 3 July 1869, and Johann, born 12 July 1872.⁴ They made their home in Schoenfeld.

As head of a growing family, Heinrich had already begun a period of significant service in the church and the Bergthal community. He was chosen to be a deacon on 23 April 1864, and then, still only 25 years old, was ordained as a minister by the Bergthal Ältester Jacob Braun on 28 February 1865.⁵ That would make him a church leader of considerable experience in preaching and

The idea of emigrating arose first as a way of resolving this dilemma. Beginning in the minds of leaders like Cornelius Janzen and Leonard Sudermann, both from the Mennonite congregation in Berdiansk, this proposal quickly found strong resonance among the ministers of the Bergthal colony as well. All these men were strongly opposed to conscription, and to the proposed civilian service alternatives that were ultimately accepted by the majority of Russian Mennonites.⁹

Ältester Gerhard Wiebe, ordained to his office in 1866, did not warm up overnight to the idea of leaving the colony, whereas other community leaders like the Oberschulze (district director) Jakob Peters did so without much delay.¹⁰ When William Hespeler, sent by the Canadian government to recruit settlers in Europe, arrived in south Russia in 1872, he took pains to look up the people discussing emigration to North America. In November of that year he met Mennonite representatives from Bergthal and other colonies to discuss opportunities for settlement in Canada. Heinrich Wiebe participated in that conversation and remained a part of emigration talks throughout the several years preceding departure of the Bergthal families.¹¹ Not surprisingly then, the congregation agreed to appoint Heinrich Wiebe and Oberschulze Jakob Peters as part of an eleven-member investigative delegation to explore North American settlement possibilities in 1873.¹² As this venture progressed Wiebe became more and more convinced that a move to Canada was the proper step to take. Perhaps he was already converted to the idea when he met Hespeler the previous year.

The Bergthal representatives, provided with a clear commission for their task, commenced their journey after a special service of commitment held on ¹³February 1873. Wiebe and Peters both made farewell speeches. By 9 April the two men, along with a Bergthal estate owner, Cornelius Buhr, who had joined them at his own expense, and, it would seem, without a specific congregational commission, were in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.¹³

They spent a week in Berlin (later Kitchener), Ontario, hosted there by a newly-appointed Canadian immigration agent, Jacob Y. Shantz. From there they travelled to the USA, ending up in Elkhart, Indiana, where they hoped to meet the other nine members of their south Russian delegation. Here they stayed for two days at the home of editor/publisher John F. Funk, and learned to know about Swiss Mennonites (often referred to as “Old Mennonites”) of that area. Extra meetings were arranged for the local con-



The landing site for the Wiebe family at the confluence of the Rat and the Red Rivers near the East Reserve. Credit: Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, MB.

gregation to meet the delegation.

John F. Funk reported later, “Wiebe spoke in our meeting house on Thursday evening.”¹⁴ From here the delegates went on to Chicago to continue their investigation of US land prospects. They were accompanied by Bernhard Warkentin, a south Russian Mennonite who had been with a similar, but privately-organized, investigation delegation from the Molotschna colony a year earlier.¹⁵ The other delegates had arrived in New York on 22 May, and had already done some land scouting on their own.

Wiebe shared some of his own thoughts on their undertaking with a Hutterite delegate, Paul Tschetter, during a short period in late May when the Hutterite and Bergthal delegates spent time together in St. Paul, Minnesota. Tschetter had been on land inspections in Nebraska and Texas, as well as in other western states, areas which, as he put it in his diary, they did not like.

He then went on to record what remains the longest conversation held by any of the nine other delegates with the Bergthal members during this 1873 trip: “...Oh, how glad we were to see them. It seemed to me that they were of my own....In the morning we proceeded to the railway station, Wiebe helping me to carry my baggage. On the way we talked about nonresistance and how he liked the country here. He said the country did not appeal to him much, and that after all, the question of military service is the most important. He thought it would not be possible to secure total exemption from military service in the United States, but that the English government would be more liberal and grant a Charter guaranteeing exemption from military service that was better than what this country could afford. He spoke very sensibly so that I

learned to love him. He said that one should not only consider the land question but also not forget the matter of freedom, for that is the reason why we came to this country and are making this long journey....”¹⁶

The Manitoba portion of the trip began in mid-June. The delegates completed inspection of the reserved land southeast of Winnipeg by 21 June, and looked for a church to attend in Winnipeg on the Sunday of 22 June. Wiebe and Jacob Y. Shantz who now led the delegation, along with William Hespeler, attended an English service. Shantz understood the language, and Wiebe may simply have wanted to try it out, or use the chance to become better acquainted with Shantz to learn privately what he might have to say about Manitoba as a place for settlement.

Five of the delegates expressed disinterest in seeing more, and soon headed back to Moorhead, Minnesota. The Bergthal and Kleingemeinde delegates, along with Leonard Sudermann and Jacob Buller, prepared to continue the Manitoba exploration, turning now to areas west of Winnipeg, perhaps with special interest in the land owned by Hespeler and Shantz around Portage la Prairie. They had been told that fourteen townships were available to Mennonites in this region. About this time Buller and Sudermann also decided to return, and the others decided this was as far as they wanted to go.¹⁷

An unfortunate encounter between local metis residents and a driver for the delegate party created a small crisis near House’s Hotel at Whitehorse Plains. Hespeler had the delegates confined to an upstairs room while he called for military assistance from Winnipeg, all the while guarding the group with a drawn pistol. Wiebe took issue

with Hespeler's handling of the affair, and threatened to depart immediately, never to return to Manitoba again. Hespeler coolly reminded him that he would be struck down the moment he left his room, and stoutly declared his readiness to shoot if that is what it would take to defend his family, and in this case, his guests.¹⁸ Assistance did come from Winnipeg, and the group arrived safely in the city to conclude its trip. The delegates could now plan their return to south Russia with a visit to Ottawa enroute.

The Whitehorse Plains incident did not dissuade the Bergthal and Kleinegemeinde delegates from deciding to recommend Manitoba to their co-members back home, though it may have negatively influenced their opinion about the prospects of the Portage La Prairie area for Mennonite settlement. Guided next to Ottawa by Hespeler, these delegates now prepared their formal statement, agreeing to accept an offer of settlement from the Canadian government, pending agreement with detailed stipulations regarding terms of immigration on matters such as education, exemption privileges, etc.

Wiebe thus became one of the four signators of a document drawn up first, likely in German, by Wiebe, and then translated by Shantz. Dated 23 July 1873, the document ultimately reached the Minister of Agriculture, J.H. Pope, for official authorization.¹⁹ On the way east some days prior to setting out the Mennonite petition, Wiebe had preached at the Christian Eby meetinghouse in Berlin.²⁰

Pope replied to the petition with a detailed memorandum dated 25 July with what the government viewed as a satisfactory arrangement for having the Russian Mennonites immigrate to Canada. The official wording of an Order-in-Council became available two days later. As the delegates understood it, the Canadian gov-



The Hudson Bay store near Ste. Anne, Manitoba, where the 1873 Mennonite delegation stayed during the tour of the East Reserve area before immigrating the next year. Credit: Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, MB.

ernment had now given them a new Privilegium, not unlike the one they got when their forebears had left West Prussia to move to New Russia almost a century earlier. The Canadian document came with the signature of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and the date of 13 August 1873.²¹

Wiebe and Peters gave detailed reports on their land scouting findings, and their agreement made with the Canadian government, when they returned to Bergthal in late August. Excited audiences listened eagerly to what the delegates told them, and now envisioned a positive solution of their problems. As historian Gerbrandt put it eloquently, "The colony that had faced depression and even bankruptcy for so long, suddenly saw the dawn of a new era break forth in splendor before them."²²

In the spring (April or May) of 1874, Ministers Heinrich Wiebe, David Stoesz and Kornelius Stoesz were asked to join Ältester Gerhard Wiebe for a visit with General Eduard von Totleben in Halbstadt. The General, a special emissary from the Tsar, had been assigned to make an all-out attempt to stem the emigration, and if necessary to offer an alternative to military service. That alternative would be accepted by a large majority of the Mennonites, but the Bergthal leaders would not change their minds. They agreed to take the General's request to their congregation at home, and did so. However, as Gerhard Wiebe later recalled, "the brethren still unanimously agreed to emigrate."

Preparations speeded up, as it was decided that the families of Bergthal would all leave as a united congregation. Wiebe and Peters as well as Ältester Wiebe, and the other ministers and colony leaders determined now to make the move work out to the best advantage for the whole community.

Dividing the Bergthal leadership for an emigration that was designed to stretch over three years, Wiebe was asked to go with the first contingent that left the colony on 16 June 1874. On 27 July this body arrived in Quebec City in two ships, the SS Nova Scotian carrying 283 persons, and the SS Peruvian bringing 521 persons. Heinrich (listed as "Wiebe") appeared in the published passenger list of the second sub-group. The families of two fellow-ministers, David and Kornelius Stoesz, were in the same group. Shantz reported both groups as arriving in Toronto, where he met them on 31 July. Two more groups left in the subsequent months, the final one spending the winter with Ontario Mennonites, and leaving for Manitoba the following spring.²³

Financial questions had been a major

concern for the new immigrants from the beginning. Property sales in Bergthal had gone very slowly, and prices had been low. Many of the families would need assistance if the whole community was to move as one body. Connections with the Old Mennonites of Berlin, Ontario, and more specifically with Jacob Y. Shantz would prove to be crucial for the success of the venture in the months and years to come. Actually Shantz had begun to initiate fund-raising for Russian Mennonites about to reach North America as soon as the Cornelius Janzen family from Berdiansk had arrived in Berlin in mid-August of 1873.²⁴ Already in September of that year Wiebe had written a letter to Shantz about getting financial aid for the Bergthal families hoping to leave soon, but apparently had not received an answer until one came at the beginning of the new year.

Responding to Shantz from Schoenfeld in the Bergthal colony on 16 February 1874, Wiebe began by acknowledging the letter from Shantz written on 23 January earlier in the year. The latter had obviously understood quite clearly, no doubt from Wiebe's September letter, some of the financial difficulties faced by the Bergthal emigrants. At that point Wiebe had noted that ninety families hoped to come in the spring. Shantz wrote that he was making provision to prepare immigrant housing for the newcomers in Manitoba. Wiebe mentioned, perhaps not for the first time, the possible need of a loan "for several years."²⁵

Pleas to the Canadian Mennonites for financial assistance in making the move were unambiguously reiterated further in a letter written on a ship enroute to Manitoba via the Great Lakes and Duluth on 7 August 1874. It was signed by three of the Bergthal ministers including Heinrich who may actually have been the writer. In fact, data on the loan transactions that then took place, i.e. on 1 August 1874, suggest that arrangements for assistance were firmed up as soon as the groups arrived in Toronto on July 30 and 31.²⁶

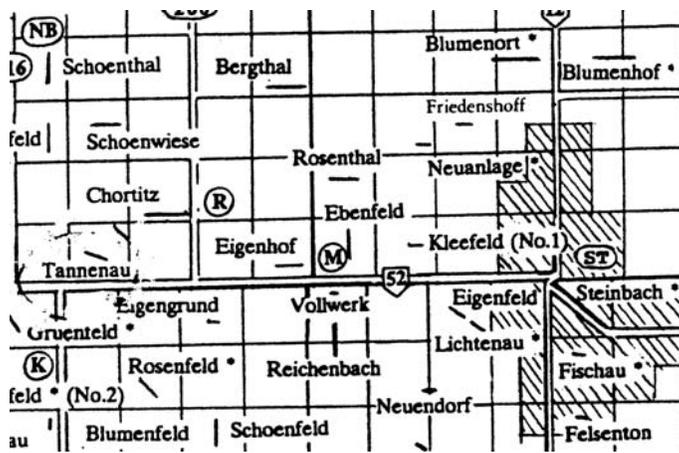
Heinrich and his wife, Margareta, with their five children, Heinrich, Agata, Gerhard, Wilhelm and Johann, reached the East Reserve on Saturday, 15 August 1874 (New Style).²⁷ From then on their movements are somewhat difficult to document. According to one source, Wiebe applied for a homestead on the northeast quarter of Section 4, Township 7, Range 5E on 1 September 1874, just two weeks after arriving in Manitoba. This land belonged to the Tannenau village allotment, situated between the land of Chortitz to the east and

Heuboden to the west. Around 7 March 1876 Heinrich froze his ears while walking to his home at Tannenau with David Stoesz. His daughter Agata died 26 October that same year, and another Agata was born three days later, perhaps still at Tannenau. It appears that Heinrich cancelled his homestead patent in 1876, and the land became property of Heinrich Nikkel.²⁸ It is unclear which farm Heinrich purchased next.

Wiebe and Jakob Peters who came to Manitoba two years later than the Wiebe family, and who retained his Bergthal position as Oberschulze, carried major leadership roles in the new community from the moment they arrived. Wiebe's involvements are not yet as clearly researched as they are for Jacob Peters. Klaas Peters would later recall however, that both men had to take the brunt of complaints and even accusations of betrayal of the people as the new settlers needed to cope with various hurdles and major disappointments in their new village communities. On the positive side, Klaas Peters also recorded the fact of Wiebe's helpfulness on the question of well location, and other important matters in the very early months of pioneer life on the East Reserve.²⁹

Wiebe no doubt carried on his ministerial duties along with the Ältester, Gerhard Wiebe, as well as the ministers David and Kornelius Stoesz along with other ministers and deacons elected to serve by this time. Eight of the Bergthal meetinghouses were found in the villages of the northern townships of the East Reserve which existed already in 1874 – Bergthal, Chortitz, Ebenfeld, Hochfeld, Schoenthal, Pastwa, Grossweide and Schanzenberg. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, Ältester Gerhard Wiebe and David Stoesz, minister and later Bergthal/Chortitzer Ältester, say very little in their published writings about the work of Heinrich in the early settlement years.³⁰

Involvements with managing the Bergthaler loan now lodged with the Ontario Mennonites will have taken up some of Heinrich's time during this period.³¹ It seems that Wiebe also carried responsibility for writing periodic reports to Mennonite newspapers like the *Menmonitische Rundschau* to share their ongoing current financial needs with the larger North American Mennonite community. Besides that, attention needed to be given to details connected with the large 100,000.00 loan made from the Canadian government.³² There also re-



Tannenau on the East Reserve, Manitoba, where Wiebe applied for a homestead. Credit: John Dyck, ed., *Working Papers of the East Reserve Village Histories*, 11.

mained the accounting of monies that were continuing to come from Bergthal back home for the sale of properties there, not to mention other details related to helping all the families who were moving to make it to Manitoba in the next two years, i.e. through 1876 when the Bergthal emigration terminated.

In October, 1874, Ältester Gerhard Wiebe wrote the Ontario brethren that Heinrich Wiebe and others were most thankful and pleased about the way the move had gone till then. On 13 April 1875 the Russian Aid Committee in Ontario minuted receipt of another request for a Bergthaler loan by Heinrich Wiebe. Just prior to that, Johann Schwartz of Altona (?) in the East Reserve had sent an essentially positive report on the total situation on behalf of Wiebe who, in Schwartz's words "was too much occupied to write himself," but ended the letter with "Heinrich Wiebe also sends his love to all".³³

As one of the signators in a ministerial list of persons who sent a special address written to Lord Dufferin on the occasion of his 1877 visit to the East Reserve, it may be assumed that Wiebe participated in a rather elaborate reception provided for the guests. Wiebe's signature showed up also on the 1878 "General School Decree" of the Bergthal villages in the East Reserve. It is quite possible that he served as school inspector for a time during those years.³⁴

By this time, the East Reserve included 45-50 Bergthaler villages and five to ten larger and smaller Kleine Gemeinde villages. The total number of families may have risen to over 1,100 families. Pioneering problems still persisted, above all with the challenge of poor and swampy land spread over large sections of the region. As early as 1877 some families had begun to search for better land in the West Reserve, and by

1878 a transmigration westward was well underway.³⁵

Heinrich and Margareta with their children may have been part of the first wave of this move. Their reasons for going are not documented. It is possible that Heinrich did not feel himself fitting well into the relatively traditionalist cast of thought which appeared to prevail in the ministerial circle of the Bergthaler community, above all the views held by his brother, the Ältester Gerhard Wiebe. Four of his ministerial colleagues, including Johann Funk, who was ordained to the ministry in October, 1877, also joined this move. Little is known

about Heinrich's farming success, or lack of it. Most of his neighbours in Tannenau and a number of Bergthalers from villages to the south also left, so land problems will have plagued the people here also.³⁶

A new church register begun in the West Reserve under the direction of Minister Franz Dyck in 1881, listed the Wiebe family first, then added the families of four other Bergthaler ministers, Johann Funk, Abram Bergen, Isaac Giesbrecht, and Abraham Schroeder, along with Deacon Jacob Hamm.³⁷ Exactly when the Wiebes took up residence in the village of Edenburg to which they relocated is unknown. Homestead application entries for the village generally began in 1879, but Edenburg is thought to have had some squatters before that date, and the Wiebes may have been among them. Historian John Dyck chose the period from fall of 1879 to spring of 1880, as the time when they moved. The Wiebe's land lay on the northeast quarter of Section 2, Township 1, Range 1 West.³⁸ The Wiebes belonged to what has been called a Bergthaler sub-group of five families in the community. The family had recently mourned the death of their young son Wilhelm who had passed away in 1876, but rejoiced in the birth of a child whom they also named Wilhelm, on 16 May 1879. He passed away in 1887.³⁹

Two children of the Heinrich Wiebes, Wilhelm and Agata, will have been entered in the first school register of the new school erected in 1883. Heinrich no doubt served as religious leader of the community from the moment his family arrived in Edenburg, presumably holding services in homes, and then the school. That could change when a church building was erected in 1883 also, on land donated by the Wiebes. The community soon became the leading congregation in the southeast sector of the

West Reserve.⁴⁰

About this time Heinrich was drawn into a small circle of education-minded West Lynne Mennoniten Gemeinde (Mennonite congregation) members which included several businessmen like Erdman Penner, later of Gretna, and also Minister Johann Funk who had been ordained Ältester in 1882. This group succeeded in opening a teacher-training institute known as the *Gretnaer Normalschule* (Gretna Normal School) in 1889. It closed after a year, but reopened a year later, in 1891, when a trained teacher, Heinrich Ewert, came from Kansas in the USA to lead the fledgling institution. It then got the name *Mennonitische Bildungsanstalt* (Mennonite Educational Institute).⁴¹

When the new institution became the focus of a major controversy over educational matters in the West Lynne Congregation, the majority of the members signaled their strong opposition. The break came around 1892. That left Ältester Funk with several Bergthaler ministers including Heinrich Wiebe to head up a relatively small group which took the name *Bergthaler Mennoniten Gemeinde*, and continued supporting the Gretna school. This group also stood behind an emerging church program led by Funk, which would include Sunday Schools, an emphasis on missions, somewhat less traditional worship forms, and promotion of elementary education through public schools and a government curriculum.

In 1895 Johann Funk, Heinrich Wiebe and Minister Franz Sawatzky were appointed to begin a new Bergthaler church register which would record the names of the founding member families and others who had joined since the division. It is clearly noted here that only four of nine children born to the family survived to adulthood: Heinrich, Gerhard, Johann and Agata (II).⁴² Interestingly, a class list kept by Benjamin Ewert from his first year as a new teacher in Edenburg included one Gerhard Wiebe, aged 25. The student took some upgrading in Grade V. He may have been Heinrich and Margareta's son.⁴³

Several other facets of Wiebe's life and work need to be noted before closing the story. One was his ongoing concern related to immigration, and more particularly the repayment of loans. The other concern could be cited as his "interchurch connections." A series of four of his letters, preserved in the John F. Funk collection in the Mennonite Archives in Goshen, Indiana, USA, reflect his involvement with helping later immigrants from Russia to reach Canada.⁴⁴ The cases of a Jacob Hamm and

a Kehler family are touched on in this correspondence.

The year 1892 became a banner year with respect to the loans, because the final repayments occurred at that time. In a March 1894 letter "to the Ontario brethren," Wiebe recalled their path of mutual aid and general experience of settling during the past two decades. He felt he needed to especially thank them once more for all the help given the Manitoba Bergthalers during this period.

In poignant words of appreciation, he wrote: "Brethren, conditions among us have changed very much. The cry for bread of



Map of the Edenburg area of the West Reserve to which the Wiebe family relocated in the mass move to this region in 1878-1882. Credit: Gerhard J. Ens, *The Rural Municipality of Rhineland...1884-1984*, 21.

the years 1874 and 1875 are no more. We are compelled to join the psalmist in Psalm 118 to say, 'Thank the Lord for He is good; his steadfast love endures forever'.... You stood by us in the days of the immigration with good counsel and means; when the grasshoppers destroyed our first crop, you helped us again.... I am moved to thank God when I consider how He blessed us so that we could repay, in 1885 and 1886, all the money we borrowed in 1874 and 1875, the sum amounting to about 100,000.00... If there had been no brethren in Ontario, then there would not exist 10,000 persons in the fertile valley of the 'Red River of the North'.... God will reward you for your deeds."⁴⁵

As to interchurch connections Wiebe enjoyed the visits of many guests from abroad, especially in the later years of his life. In the fall of 1890, as one instance, Bishop Mack of Pennsylvania and Minister Isaak Peters of Nebraska conducted services in the Edenburg-Gretna area. These men also visited the East Reserve and then were brought back to the home of the Heinrich Wiebes by his brother, the former Ältester, Gerhard Wiebe. Heinrich

Richert, prominent in the mission program of the General Conference Mennonite Church headquartered in the US, had visited Manitoba, and most likely the Wiebes also, a year earlier in 1889.⁴⁶

Wiebe had contacts as well with an evangelist, N.F. Toews, who appeared in the area in the early 1890s. His emphasis on conversion was well-received by some, probably including Wiebe, as, by many but likely not including Wiebe, were the dispensational sermons of J.J. Balzer from Mountain Lake, Minnesota.⁴⁷ Balzer's preaching particularly, caused Heinrich H. Ewert to seriously question his theological perspective. Ewert had become the new principal of the Gretna Normal School in 1891. Wiebe supported Ewert's work and in 1895 invited him to teach a catechism class in Edenburg. By this time Wiebe was nearing the end of his life, but the division of the West Lynne congregation made these last years the most turbulent period of his ministry.⁴⁸

Wiebe's role in the events leading up to the 1892 division in the West Lynne congregation remains somewhat obscure. The bishop, Ältester Johann Funk, took the main blows of what happened. The majority of the ministers, again not including Wiebe, did not support his educational initiatives, especially the opening of the teacher-training school in Gretna. They also opposed the new ventures of evangelism promoted by outsiders from the General Conference, and they held firmly to their traditional Bergthaler colony forms of worship and community organization. Only about sixty families, including the Heinrich Wiebes, registered for membership in the new ledger, and of these only about a third originated in the Bergthaler colony in south Russia. Ältester Funk leaned heavily on Wiebe, the Ewert brothers, and also the Hoffnungsfeld colleagues to help the rump group of West Lynne members, now calling itself the Bergthaler Mennoniten Gemeinde not only survive, but carry forward its multi-faceted vision.⁴⁹

Wiebe's connections with a non-Mennonite religious body known as Swedenborgians remain essentially unexplored. The teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg were brought to Edenburg through Mark Seiler, a minister of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman). When Seiler joined the Swedenborgian movement he was excommunicated from the Holdeman fellowship, but became quite active in promoting his new religious views through literature and preaching in the Edenburg area, which he visited in 1887. He made contacts first with a few Kleine Gemeinde

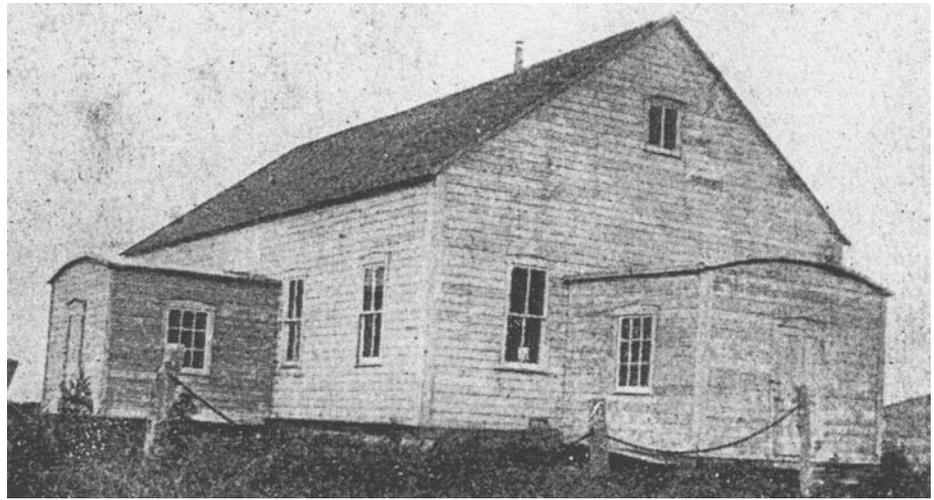
families residing in Edenburg, but did not hesitate to meet with other families also.

Among those receiving promotional materials from Seiler was Heinrich Wiebe who would be described by a Swedenborgian leader in the USA as definitely interested in ideas being studied in Swedenborgian study groups and discussions. They may have envisioned a potential new convert to their church. But Wiebe likely had other reasons for wanting this information. His eulogist, Benjamin Ewert, would refer to Wiebe after his passing as a man dedicated to oppose false teachings, and Swedenborgianism would undoubtedly have been seen as that by the leading minister in Edenburg.⁵⁰

For better or worse, Heinrich Wiebe had experienced a new world of diversification and much political, socio-economic and religious change during the first two decades and a half of "Bergthaler" life in Manitoba. Many unfamiliar developments lay just ahead. But they would be left to others to live with and respond to. After a three-week heavy illness, Wiebe died as a relatively young man at the age of 57 on 30 January 1897. Six of his ministerial colleagues in the newly-founded Bergthaler Mennonite congregation, including the recently ordained Benjamin Ewert, spoke at the funeral which was attended by a large number of mourners who packed out the church. Among them were his wife Margareta along with their four children, and several grandchildren.⁵¹

Heinrich was buried in a cemetery established on his own quarter section of land not too far distant from the church where he had preached for fourteen years. He had served at weddings, married young people, comforted the bereaved, and gave leadership under various circumstances in the local community and in the church at large.⁵² Margareta outlived him for nearly twenty years. She presumably remained a resident of Edenburg. Her death occurred on 14 June 1920.⁵³

Family data on the Wiebe family as a whole is incomplete. The oldest son, Heinrich, who married Helena Friesen, a year his senior, resided with his parents at the time of the 1881 census.⁵⁴ Two of Heinrich and Margareta's children, Agata, born 1863, and Wilhelm, born 1869, passed away, perhaps during an epidemic, in 1876 on 26 October and 14 October respectively, soon after arriving in Manitoba. Two sons born later, Wilhelm on 16 May 1879, and Wilhelm, on 19 March 1882, also died in childhood on 31 April (sic), 1881 and 22 June 1887 respectively. Of the four children who survived to adulthood two have records of baptism for membership in the West Lynne



The first church at Edenburg, where Wiebe preached from 1883, when the church was built, to 1897, when he passed away. Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB.

congregation, i.e. Heinrich, baptized on 2 June 1879, and Gerhard on 2 June 1887. Agata, born 29 October 1876, joined the Bergthaler Mennonite congregation on 3 June 1895.⁵⁵

In the early 1970s, as the centennial celebration of Mennonite life in Manitoba drew closer, members of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society gave more attention to the life and work of Heinrich Wiebe, along with the neglected cemetery where Wiebe had been laid to rest seventy five years earlier. In 1972, when it was rumoured that the farmer who owned the land

on which the cemetery had been established was about to plough over the whole area, the headstone was removed to Cairn Corner at the junction of Highway 30 and the old Post Road, now Highway 243, about half a mile northeast of Gretna. A commemorative plaque was attached to the base. Wiebe's headstone still stands there today, next to the larger cairn recalling the Mennonites' arrival in the province.⁵⁶ The headstone of David Schellenberg, an early pioneer of Neuanlage village, is also found there.

At the dedication service for the Heinrich Wiebe headstone, Henry J. Gerbrandt, a long-time minister of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba, then resident in Winnipeg, concluded his tribute to Heinrich Wiebe with these words: "Wiebe's life style might be challenged by some of us today. He was a heavy smoker, and liked his "Schnapps"...but today we are thankful for men like Heinrich Wiebe. If there is one thing that mars this day for me, it is the fact that we have not asked representatives of the Sommerfelders, the Old Colony Church, the Reinländer Church, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada to take part in this unveiling. Wiebe belongs not only to the Bergthalers alone. He belongs to all of us....."⁵⁷



The headstone for Heinrich Wiebe, discovered in the Edenburg cemetery, and in 1972 moved, with a plaque added, to Cairn Corner near the former village of Neuanlage, close to Gretna, Manitoba. Credit: Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, MB.

Footnotes

1 This study is an expansion of my preliminary essay, "Heinrich Wiebe, 1839-1897," *Mennonite Mirror* (March 1973), 19-22, and (January/February 1974), 37-39. For family background data see Henry Schapansky, "The Bergthaler Wiebes," *Preservings* No. 13 (December 1998), 60-61.

2 See William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*. Revised Edition (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1986), 17-23, 131. See also Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18.*

und 19. Jahrhundert (Karlsruhe: Im Selbstverlag, 1955), 345.

3 Ibid. On the Falks see John Dyck, ed., *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch 1843-1876* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc., 1993), 139, Entry 28. For a sketch of the Bergthal school system see Schroeder, 45ff. This depiction includes a discussion of the new school regulations which had been adopted in 1850, on which the suggestion of Heinrich's school beginning is based. See also Henry J Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith: The Background in Europe and the Development in Canada of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba* (Altona, MB: The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba, 1970), 29-33.

4 See Henry Unger, Martha Martens and Adolf Ens, eds., *Sommerfeld Gemeinde Buch: Registers of the Church at West Lynne 1881-1935* (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2004), 1A-2, n.a., Kirchenbuch 1881-1895 (n.p., n.d.), located in Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives (MHCA), Vol. 715, 2, 97, entry no. 2, and John Dyck, *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, 138, which has Johann listed as born 27 August. Schroeder, 131. Ältester Braun had resigned from his position in 1866. This placed two brothers, Gerhard and Heinrich, in key positions of the congregation.

5 Schroeder, 131. Wiebe's ministerial colleagues at the time of his ordination also included Abraham Friesen, ordained as minister in 1849, and Franz Dyck (Dueck), ordained as minister in 1854. David and Kornelius Stoesz were also ordained before moving to Manitoba. John Dyck, *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, 47, 103. One of Wiebe's original sermons has survived in the B.J. Schellenberg papers, MHCA, Vol. 549, File 22. Both Friesen and Dyck emigrated to Manitoba. A brief biography of Braun (1791-1868) is in Schroeder, 128. Schroeder gives a brief sketch of Bergthal church life in *ibid*, 36ff.

6 Schroeder, 25-28. Travellers in recent years have confirmed the existence of the still very beautiful setting of the village now renamed Respublika and connected by a paved road with several Russian towns like Volodarsk, nearby. All the other four former Bergthal villages have also been renamed, and are still inhabited.

7 Schroeder, 39,59. The "landless problem" is discussed in all major Mennonite studies of Mennonites in tsarist Russia. One recently-published version is found in George K Epp, *Geschichte der Mennoniten in Russland*. Band II (Lage: Logos Verlag, 1988), 150ff. See also James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, MB: Hyperion Press Ltd., 1989), 147, 151-52, 196, 207. The Bergthal situation is discussed in more detail in John Dyck, *Oberschulze Jakob Peters 1813-1884* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 1990), 17ff.

8 For a study on how this new military legislation, enacted in 1874, affected south Russian Mennonites, see Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations 1789-1939", unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA, 1984.

9 A published version of the Bergthal ministers' perspective on the military question and the issue of emigration is in Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*. Trans. by Helen Janzen (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981). This book was originally published as *Ursache und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Amerika* (Winnipeg, MB: Im Selbstverlag, 1900).

10 On the beginning of the emigration to North America see Gustav E. Reimer and G.R. Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar: Cornelius Jansen and the Great Mennonite Migration, 1874* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office, 1956), 39ff, and Klaas Peters,

The Bergthaler Mennonites. Trans. by Margaret Loewen Reimer (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1988), 7ff.

11 Details on the Hespeler-Mennonite conversations of November, 1872, are found in Ernst Correll, "Mennonite Immigration into Manitoba: Documents and Sources, 1872, 1873," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (MQR) XI (July 1937), 196-227, and (October 1937), 267-283, and Klaas Peters, 10.

12 For the story of this investigative journey, including details on the involvement of Wiebe and Peters, see Schroeder, 72ff, and John Dyck, Peters, 49ff.

13 John Dyck, Peters, 47ff, with a travel schedule on 63, Schroeder, 72ff, and Klaas Peters, 13.

14 (John F. Funk), "The Russian Deputation," *Herald of Truth*, May, 1873, as cited in Clarence Hiebert, comp. and ed., *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1974), 43.

15 The 1872 land scouting trip by Warkentin and others is discussed in David Haury, "Bernhard Warkentin: a Mennonite Benefactor," *MQR XLIX* (July 1975), 179-202. See also Samuel Steiner, *Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz* (Winnipeg, MB: Hyperion Press Ltd, 1988), 70ff, including a published reprint of the Shantz Narrative of a Journey to Manitoba, 163ff.

16 See J.M. Hofer, trans. and ed., "The Diary of Paul Tschetter, 1873," *MQR V* (July 1931), 199.

17 Further details of the tour can be found in several diary accounts of it, e.g. Leonhard Sudermann, *From Russia to America: In Search of Freedom*. Trans by Elmer Suderman (Steinbach, MB: Derksen Printers, 1974), 13ff, and John F. Funk's record in Diary of John F. Funk During His Land Inspection Trip in Behalf of the Anticipated Immigration of Mennonites from Russia, June 3-July 26, 1873 in Hiebert, *Brothers*, 48ff.

18 The Metis-Mennonite confrontation is outlined in some detail in Lawrence Klippenstein, "Manitoba Metis and Mennonite Immigrants: First Contacts," *MQR XLVIII* (October 1974), 476-488. See also Lawrence Klippenstein, "Schantz and His Narrative," in Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius G Toews, eds., *Mennonite Memories: Settling in Western Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: Centennial Publications, 1977), 39-44.

19 Gerbrandt, 56-57, and E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba*. Second Printing (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), 36-49.

20 Based on notes taken by Ezra Eby and cited in Steiner, 85.

21 The English original of the letter signed by John H. Pope is in Francis, 44-45. For an analysis of the terms and the John Lowe correspondence with the delegates, see Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 16-19, 48. See also Gerbrandt, 55ff, for another account of the exchanges of the delegates with government officials regarding the signing of the immigration charter.

22 Klaas Peters, 17-18, and Gerbrandt, 59.

23 The Totleben meeting with the Bergthal leaders was recalled in Gerhard Wiebe, 38-39. For the sequence of ships taking immigrants, and passengers lists, see John Dyck, *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, 44-45. The Heinrich Wiebe group is listed on 266-271.

24 On Cornelius Janzen's coming to Canada and then to the US in 1873, see Reimer and Gaeddert, 82ff.

25 Wiebe's letter of 16 February 1874, written to Shantz of Berlin, Ontario, was published in *Herald of Truth*, Vol. XI, May, 1874, 89-90. See also John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874 - 1910* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc., 1994), 416.

26 Gerhard Wiebe, 38-39. See also the letter signed by Wiebe, Kornelius Stoesz and David Stoesz published in *Herold der Wahrheit*, September, 1874, 153-154. This same issue ran a report by Jacob Y Shantz on

the coming of the first Bergthal families to Manitoba. He noted their need for funds, and forwarded their request for a loan of 20,000.00. Wiebe appears to have been in charge of fund-raising for the new immigrants. See Philip Wismer papers, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana, Mss 1-180, Memorandum book.

27 See the David Stoesz journal in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches*, 416. Stoesz uses the Old Style (Russian) dating in this part of his journal. The Julian calendar (used in Canada) would be twelve days later, hence 15 August.

28 David Stoesz, *Historical Sketches*, 412, 417. The homestead location of the Wiebes cited here is based on data received from Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba. Wiebe's homestead purchase is not reflected on the homestead map of the area provided by John Rempel and Williams Harms, eds., *Atlas of original Mennonite Villages and Homesteaders of the East Reserve, Manitoba* (Altona, MB: by the editors, 1989), 4, 6. See also Rhinehart Friesen, "Tannenau" in John Dyck, *Historical Sketches*, 235ff, who includes the homesteading date of 1876 for Nikkel, but makes no reference to the brief residence of the Wiebes in the community, in fact, records the land as "applied for" and not as "purchased from" anyone.

29 See Klaas Peters, 29ff, and on the leadership of Oberschulze Peters, John Dyck, *Jakob Peters*, 75ff

30 On the early church organization of the Bergthal communities of the East Reserve see Dennis Stoesz, "A History of the Chortitz Mennonite Church of Manitoba, 1874-1914," unpublished MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1987, chs. 1-2. See also John Dyck, *Historical Sketches*, 104-124, 202-207 and his *Working Papers of the East Reserve Village Histories 1874-1910* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Ltd., 1990), 13-32, 45-70, 85-90.

31 In a letter addressed to Elias Schneider of the Ontario Russian Aid Committee, dated 30 March 1875, and published in *Herald of Truth* Vol. XII, June, 1875, 90, and another one written by Ältester Gerhard Wiebe dated 2 October 1874, and published in *Herald of Truth* Vol. XI, December, 1874, 202-203.

32 See Steiner, 99ff on the large loan made from the Canadian government. An example of Wiebe's reports on finances and other matters is in "From Manitoba," *Herald of Truth*, Vol. XII, November, 1875, 184.

33 Letter date-lined "Winnepeg (sic), March 30th, 1875" in "Mennonite Reserve," *Herald of Truth*, Vol. XII, June, 1875, 90.

34 Wiebe most likely wrote the address itself. Its full text in English translation is in Schroeder, 102-104. The School Regulations noted here appear in English translation in John Dyck, *Working Papers*, 125-126ff. Its signators are the Ältester Gerhard Wiebe, and three ministers, Kornelius Stoesz, David Stoesz and Heinrich Wiebe. The village of Eigenhof, where the Dufferin celebrations took place, was located only a mile or two east of Tannenau where Wiebe had homesteaded three years earlier.

35 Mennonite settlement of the West Reserve had begun already in the summer of 1875 when Reinlaender families from Chortitza and Fuerstenland in south Russian began to immigrate into the area. A few Bergthal families were also among these arrivals. See Peter Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Reinland, MB: Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976), 33ff. See also Gerbrandt, 33ff on the Bergthalers. moving to the West Reserve in the 1875-77 years. They appear to have intermarried with the Reinlaender and settled in their villages. See the David Stoesz journal in John Dyck, *Historical Sketches*, 410-455, for various entries dealing with land drainage problems, and 422 for his first reference to the move westward which had been underway for several years by then.

36 Johann Funk and his family had resided in Bergthal,

from where a number of other families went west also. Funk would settle in what came to be called Altberghal southwest of Altona around 1879. See Jacob Doerksen, "Bergthal," in John Dyck, *Working Papers*, 13ff, and Rhinehart Friesen, "Tannenau", in John Dyck, *Historical Sketches*, 235ff. See also Lawrence Klippenstein, "Johann Funk (1836-1917)," in Adolf Ens, Jacob E. Peters and Otto Hamm, eds., *Church, Family and Village: Essays on Mennonite Life on the West Reserve* (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2001), 213ff.

37 Henry Unger, Martha Martens and Adolf Ens, eds., *Sommerfeld Gemeinde Buch: Registers of the Church at West Lynne 1881-1935* (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2004), 1A-2.

38 John Dyck, "Edenburg," in Adolf Ens, et al, eds., *Church, Family and Village*, 272. See also Rempel and Harms, 17, and their *Atlas of original Mennonite villages Homesteaders And Some Burial Plots of the Mennonite West Reserve Manitoba* (Altona, MB: by the editors, 1990), 16-17.

39 Unger, et al, eds., 1A-2.

40 Gerbrandt, 139-140. The school, District No. 330, may have been the first public school organized on the West Reserve, a move Wiebe most likely did not oppose, perhaps even encouraged. Dyck, in "Edenburg," *Church, Family and Village*, 280.

41 Gerhard J. Ens, 'Die Schule Muss Sein': *A History of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute* (Gretna, MB: Mennonite Collegiate Institute, 1990), 9ff. The West Lynne Mennoniten Gemeinde, so called because the town of West Lynne across the river from Emerson was the postal centre for the West Reserve in its early years, consisted primarily of Bergthal families from the East Reserve who immigrated to this new Reserve in 1878-1882 and later, but also including a number of Reinlaender families who had immigrated to the West Reserve directly in 1875-1878. This group gained particular identity with the registration of these families in a new church register begun under the direction of Minister Franz Dueck in the East Reserve in 1881. See Unger, ix-xii, and Zacharias, 183ff. The Bergthal families from the East Reserve settled in some twenty-five or so villages in the eastern section of the West Reserve an area that had not been occupied by the Reinlaender families which had arrived from 1875 on.

42 Gerbrandt, 92-93. The new register took a while to get started. The beginning of a membership listing was made in 1895, and another start was made in 1896. It was not till 1903 that an initial listing was completed by Heinrich Ewert under the direction of assistant Ältester Jakob Hoepfner of the Winkler area. This register, still surviving as Ledger No. 1 of the series of Bergthaler "books," is now lodged in the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives (MHCA) as Vol. 718. Wiebe's family is listed there on p. 24. An attempted correction to the birth date of the second Agata is in error. On the formation of the ledger see Gerbrandt, 105-106.

43 See MHCA, Benjamin Ewert Collection, Vol. 549, File 49.

44 Copies of the letters are in the author's files. The originals are in the John F. Funk Collection, "Correspondence," Hist. Mss. 1-1, Chronological Correspondence series.

45 The original German text of these letters is in *Mennonitische Rundschau* 18 April 1894, 2. A longer excerpt from it, in an English translation, is found in Lawrence Klippenstein, "Rev. Heinrich Wiebe: An Early Pioneer," *Mennonite Mirror*, February-March, 1974, 74.

46 Discussion of visits by US and other Mennonite visitors is in Gerbrandt, 103ff.

47 Ibid. While the very successful ministry of Toews initiated a spiritual "spring" in Manitoba (H.H.Ewert's term), it also brought with it some controversy related to his intervention in local church affairs, when he

advocated the closing of the Edenburg church so a town church could be started in Gretna.

48 Gerbrandt, 112. The advent of Benjamin Ewert, Heinrich's brother, as teacher in Edenburg in 1892 added another strong force to the church during these years. Organizational problems in the West Lynne Congregation added to the challenge of leadership. The relationships between Wiebe, Johann Funk, Benjamin and Heinrich Ewert and ministers emerging in the Hoffnungsfeld community near Winkler need further research.

49 Funk's work is summarized in Lawrence Klippenstein, "Johann Funk (1836-1917)" in Adolf Ens, et al, eds., 213-228. See also Gerbrandt, 78-118.

50 See Benjamin Ewert, reporting on the funeral service in "Korrespondenzen," *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 25 Februar 1897, 4.

51 Ibid. Ewert noted a family of five children, though the Wiebes had had nine in all. Unger, et al, eds., 1A-2. He summed up the work of Wiebe as having been "a leader of the people (during the immigration), and in later years a deeper spiritual life in the Bergthaler church, and always a stout defender of the truth." See also Gerbrandt, 141.

52 The cemetery site is still visible to this day, though

now merely a small grove of trees, with a mouldering headstone or two.

53 MHCA, Vol. 718, Bergthaler Register No. 1, 24.
54 John Dyck, ed., *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, 363. The Heinrich Wiebes are listed here as having, in their home, their son Heinrich, aged 21, with his wife, Helena, aged 22, along with three younger children at home, i.e. Gerhard, 15, Johann, 7 and Margareta (sic - should be Agata), 5.

55 Unger, et al, ed., 1A-2. The record for baptism is unclear for Johann. Some members of the Wiebe family appear to have moved to Saskatchewan. Bergthaler Register No.1, 81, has an entry for the family of Agata, married to Cornelius Wiebe. Agata died in 1932. This data was gleaned from a 3 March 2003 email conversation with Ron Wiebe, a great grandson of Heinrich and Margareta, resident in Plum Coulee, MB.

56 See Betty Wiebe, "Memorial Unveiled," *Bergthaler Gemeindeblatt*, xxxvii (October 1972), 5.

57 A copy of the complete text of Gerbrandt's presentation is in the author's files. It could be added that two of Heinrich's grandsons, George (1897-1973) and William Wiebe, then of Plum Coulee, were present to unveil the cairn. On the event program see also (Lawrence Klippenstein), "Pioneer minister's memorial unveiled," *Red River Valley Echo*, 14 June 1972, 1.

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Manitoba Mennonites Attending Post-Secondary Schools 1890-1924

Brief Biographical Sketches
compiled by John Dyck (1928–1999)
edited by Adolf Ens

Professor Emeritus in History and Theology at Canadian Mennonite University

Leaders of the main immigrating groups of Mennonites who came to Manitoba from Russia the 1870s had reservations about formal education beyond the elementary school level. They saw it as an avenue for creating social differences within the community that would undermine the egalitarianism that their non-hierarchical Anabaptist view of the church promoted. Both groups were also reluctant to become enmeshed in contracts with government or outsider bodies of the larger society. Their understanding of separation of the church from the state and of its members from the world could be jeopardized by such arrangements.

Leaders of the Chortitzer Church on the East Reserve and the Reinländer (Chortitz-Fuerstenland or Old Colony) Church on the western portion of the West Reserve, (and to some extent of the Sommerfelder Church on the eastern portion of the West Reserve), accordingly resisted public elementary schools and discouraged their members from attending any post-secondary institutions of learning. Until the introduction of compulsory elementary education near the end of World War I and the emigration of large numbers of these groups to Mexico and Paraguay in the early 1920s, Manitoba Mennonites seeking higher education came largely from outside of these three large church bodies.

The late John Dyck began his decades-long study of this aspect of Manitoba Mennonite society by collecting incidental discoveries of persons studying in post-secondary institutions. Later he also searched selected normal school and university records systematically to supplement those incidental discoveries. His list of about 175 persons attending such schools through 1924 allows us to see who these early seekers of education and professional training were and where they came from.

The list below is in alphabetical order, allowing readers to find quickly their ancestor or an early teacher or other significant leader, or a relative for whom post-secondary schooling frequently led to geographical or ideological separation from the Mennonite community. A chronological look at this trend toward post-secondary schooling

provides insight into the community itself. Who were these first ones?

The list shows six persons who entered their first post-secondary institution during the 1890s, one woman and five men. Four were teachers for part of their career: John Goosen (later secretary of the RM of Hanover), William Abrams (later a businessman in Rosthern and on the board of Rosthern Junior College), Abraham Buhr (later a lawyer in Saskatoon and Winnipeg) and Helen Penner Hiebert (a home-maker teaching brief stints at Wesley College in Winnipeg). The other two became medical doctors, Erdman Penner Jr. and his brother-in-law, Gerhard Hiebert, graduates from McGill University and practicing in Winnipeg and Rosthern. The careers of five of them took them out of the southern Manitoba communities. There were strong inter-connections among most of them.

During the next decade, 1900-1909, 40 entered post-secondary institutions, a 7-fold increase. The influence of the Mennonite secondary schools in Gretna (since 1890) and Altona (since 1906) now became strongly evident. So did the impact of new immigration from Russia beginning in the 1890s. Thirty-four (85%) of the 40 obtained one or more levels of teacher training. A large number of them received their first teaching certificate through the MCI in Gretna or the MEI in Altona, and many remained in the community to become teachers in Mennonite village elementary schools. The medical services field was again represented by two medical doctors and a dentist, but perhaps more importantly by two nurses. Anna and Margaretha Siemens were born to Jacob and Helena (Peters) Siemens in Mapleton, North Dakota and received part of their professional training at the Bethel Deaconess Hospital in Newton, Kansas, before establishing a private nursing home in Altona about 1915. Two, Peter Hooge and Henry Vogt, became lawyers, practicing in various communities in Saskatchewan and in Winnipeg. Two became professors, Alfred Ewert, Gretna, to Oxford and A.P. Friesen, Steinbach, to Bethel College in Kansas.

H.H. Ewert, Prussian-born educator, who came to Manitoba from Kansas to

become principal of the secondary school in Gretna, had a strong influence both on this sharp increase in Mennonite post-secondary students and in the preponderance of teacher training sought by those attending post-secondary institutions. His own children studied dentistry (Carl and Paul) and arts (Alfred) and his brother Benjamin became a minister in the Bergthaler Church after teaching in some village schools. Other teachers to become more widely known as ministers were Ewert's colleague, John M. Friesen, and Jacob F. Sawatzky, Hoffnungsfield, Manitoba and Herbert, Saskatchewan.

In the decade 1910-1919 some 70 entered post-secondary institutions. The numbers declined sharply after the onset of WW I in 1914. Sixty (just over 85%) entered teacher training schools and a few the medical profession. A pattern seemed to have been established: service professions like education and health were acceptable, even though the latter tended to lead graduates out of the Mennonite community.

In the first decade, students tended to come from the Kleine Gemeinde or from the margins of the Bergthal and Reinländer Churches. When the Bergthaler Church split in 1892, a minority remained Bergthaler and did not oppose higher education. Sommerfelder opposition declined after the MEI in Altona began to provide teachers for their villages. The Mennonite Brethren Church, founded in 1888, also did not oppose higher education. If the primary pool for Mennonite post-secondary students came from only these three small groups, the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler, and Mennonite Brethren churches, then the numbers compiled by Dyck are fairly impressive.

Note: Normal School, as Teachers College was known at that time, was intended to be a post secondary teaching institution but in times of teacher shortage accepted students who had not completed high school provided that they met certain other qualifications. One of these was previous teaching experience. Teachers were then required to complete high school within a reasonable time. Some Inspectors were authorized to conduct Normal Schools in selected locations. Principal H.H. Ewert

of the Gretna school was so authorized during some of the years while he was inspector. Persons with any valid teacher's certificate were therefore included in the table below.

Abrams, William, (20 Aug 1874 in Rosenthal-23 Feb 1939, Hague, SK), son of Peter & Susanna (Rempel) Abrams; married Regier from Rosthern; studied in Gretna School, Business College in Winnipeg from January to May 1894; teaching in Schoenfeld (Schoendorf?), between Winkler and Morden 1894-95, from 1896-1899 in Gretna clerking and teaching; 1900-1909 partnership with Mr. Friesen in general store in Rosthern, 1909-1923 in Land Titles Office in Saskatoon, served on the board of Rosthern Junior College 1903-1912; 1923 to Glendale, CA and then San Pedro, CA, immigrated 1878 from Chortitza; Source: Clifford Schink, Rempel-Abrams Family History, unpublished, loose leaf binder in my office, JD. (UC) RGB 90-3.

Baerg, Frank J., 3rd class certificate from Normal School in 1902; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1929.

Banman, Alexander, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914;

Barkman, Cornelius, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914;

Barkman, John R., (16 Aug 1899 Steinbach-), son of P.T. & Katharina (Reimer) Barkman; married Anna P. Friesen, Steinbach in 1920; studied at Steinbach Public School, graduated from MCI in 1915; MCI 1906-1920; first year College, Manitoba University; Winnipeg Normal School 1922-23, Moody Bible Institute 1929-32, Bethel College 1939-40; ten years public school teacher in Rosenfeld, Hochstadt, Steinbach, Manitoba and Acme, Alberta (1928-29); Henderson Bible School teacher 1933-39; Zoar Church, Kingman, KS 1939-40; Field Secretary Oklahoma Bible Academy 1942- ?; President Grace Children's Home, Henderson, Nebraska 1936- ?; Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church; Source: *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*, 1934. *M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Berg, James C., (-11 Aug 1948 Queenston St. Wpg), LL.B. from University of Manitoba in 1917; Mennonite background?

Blatz, Jacob G., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914;

Brandt, John K., graduated from MCI in 1913; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923; taught in Burwalde, Reinland 1938-43, Manitoba and Saskatchewan; taught in Saskatchewan in 1929; immigrated 1902; Mennonite Brethren Church; Source: *M.C.I. Annual*

1929; *Reinland*:266;

Braun, Jacob, (1880-1913); son of Gerhard Braun (1857-1932) and Anna Janzen (1857-1935) of Burwalde; married Helen Wieler (1878-); grad MCI 1905; Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1901; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1909; taught in Burwalde one year; taught at MCI 1906-1910; dean of residence at MCI 1906-7; principal in Lowe Farm and Laird public school; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitza; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Brauns of Osterwick* 82; *MCI History* p. 74.

Brown, Peter, BSA., BEd., (1896-), son of Gerhard Braun (1857-1932) and Anna Janzen (1857-1935) of Burwalde; married Helen Wieler (1878-); married Mary Friesen (1910-); grad MCI 1917; Manitoba Agricultural College 1924; University of Chicago in 1928; teacher and dean of men's residence at MCI; taught at Greenfarm, Haskett and Broadlands; principal at Gretna Public School 13 years; principal at Winkler Collegiate 14 years; St. Johns High School in Winnipeg 8 years; active in a broad range of teacher's activities and community organizations; Bethel Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitza; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Brauns of Osterwick* 103;

Bueckert, Peter, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911; immigrated 1893;

Buhr, Abram, B.A., LL.B., (28 Jul 1880, Schoenwiese, East Reserve, MB-14 May 1960), son of Johann and Helena (Friesen) Buhr of Edenburg, (grandparents Jakob and Katharina (Funk) Buhr); married Maria Kelly in 1907, Selkirk; MCI 1895-99; first Mennonite to obtain government teaching certificate in 1899 [G.J. Ens, *Die Schule*, 27]); Gretna book names 1892 teaching certificates on p. 86; BA from Wesley College 1902-07; lectured Wesley College 1907-08; Chicago University one term in 1908, graduated in law from Manitoba Law School; before 1911 to Saskatoon, then Morse, where he served on town council and school board; 1926 back to Winnipeg, with Dr. Gerhard Hiebert to west coast in the interest of opening land settlements in Yarrow, etc.; literary editor of *Vox Wesleyana*, till fall of 1906; presented series of radio talks on Mennonites on CBC "My Neighbour" series in 1936 which were later published; sold his practise to David Friesen (Qualico Construction) who had articulated with him; retired in 1957; Morse Town Councillor 1914-16; Member of School Board 1914-22; Secretary Treasurer of Liberal Party of Sask. and of the Provincial Constituency of Swift Current 1918-25;

Mayor of Morse, 1924-26; President and Treasurer of Mutual Supporting Society of America (Head Office in Winnipeg) 1934-38; President and Treasurer of Mutual Aid Society, Head Office Morse; Director of Winnipeg Bible Institute 1929- ?; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; Source: Helen Regier, Jakob Buhr Family, (North Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Press, Inc), 48 (UA) "The 1907 graduates were led by Abraham Buhr (moderns) of Gretna, whose brilliance won him a post at once on the faculty" of Wesley College. Bedford, University of Winnipeg, 56. "Abraham Buhr ('07), a medalist in languages, was appointed immediately after graduation" Bergthaler Mennonite Church/Elim Chapel; family immigrated 1874 from Bergthal; Source: *Bedford*, 52; *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*; *Vox Wesleyana* 1906 — at 1, 1905 - 10 at 39, 1906 - 10 at 103, 1907 - 11 at 133, 1907 - 11 at 130 and 133; BGB A188;

Buhr, Jacob H., (17 Apr 1879 Schoenwiese ER-29 Aig 1973 Altona), son of Johann and Helena (Friesen) Buhr, married Gertrude Louise Wieler, (15 Jul 1879 Prussia-27 Jan 1967 Altona), grad MCI; Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1901; taught school for a few years; operated his own hardware-furniture store in Gretna till 1911; general store in Morse SK from 1911-1943; Winnipeg 1943-1966; Ebenezer Home in Altona; Bergthaler Mennonite/Bethel Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1874 from Bergthal; Source: Helen E. Regier, *Jakob Buhr Family*, (North Newton, KS), 38;

Buhr, Peter S., B.A., (20 Jan 1896 Edenburg-), son of Jacob and Susanna (Friesen) Buhr; grad MCI in 1916; married Katherine Warkentine in 1934; graduated from MCI in 1916; Bluffton College 1920; Wesley College 1923; 1st class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1924; taught in Killarney in 1928-29; Principal of MEI in Altona; three years in wartime censorship work in Ottawa; teacher at University of Manitoba; retired to Cobourg, Ontario; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Buhr, William S., (9 Dec 1898 Edenburg-3 Jul 1967), son of Jacob and Susanna (Friesen) Buhr; married Anna Wiebe of Blumenhof in 1919; graduated from MCI in 1918; 2nd class teaching certificate from Provincial Normal School (Winnipeg) in 1923; teacher; taught in Neuhoffnung in 1918; minister for 20 years including many years in the Bergthaler Church; Colporteur for the British and Foreign Bible Society for 19 years; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929; *Remember Our Leaders*;

De Veer, Gerhard, Grade IX at MCI in 1918 with an address at Acme, Alberta; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Derkson, Catherine, (b. 22 Sep 1903), daughter of Frank & Mary Derkson of Winkler (WRB1-292, 1881 Blumstein then Plum Coulee), Winkler High School, teaching certificate from University of Brandon, started teaching in 1921 (9 years in Winkler, Hochfeld, Valleyfield, etc.), married Goldie Dagg who had a theatre in Winkler and a Creamery in Treherne, she also taught 1954-1969, (personal interview by John Dyck with Catherine Derkson Dagg at Bethel Place on 19 Jan 1998). (Family photo in Winkler History Book p. 130 & 131), family immigrated 1880 from Nepluievka;

Derkson, Elizabeth, (b. 20 Feb 1907), daughter of Frank & Mary Derkson of Winkler (WRB1-292, formerly Plum Coulee), Manitou Normal School, married Jim Hamm, family immigrated 1880 from Nepluievka;

Derksen, H., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913; (is this same as Helena?);

Derkson, Mary, (b. 9 Mar 1900), daughter of Frank & Mary Derkson of Winkler (WRB1-292, formerly Plum Coulee), Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1922; school teacher; married John H. Klassen, son of Martin J. & Maria (Hiebert) Klassen (30 Jul 1900-20 May 1934); when her husband died she returned to teaching 1942-1946 in Greenfarm, Zion and Winkler S.D.; then she started a dress shop in Winkler. (Johann Hiebert book) (Same as Mary Klassen?) (personal interview by John Dyck with Catherine Derkson Dagg at Bethel Place on 19 Jan 1998). Immigrated 1880 from Nepluievka;

Derkson, William F. (Bill) (b. 30 Jan 1905), son of Frank & Mary Derkson of Winkler (WRB1-292, formerly Plum Coulee), Manitou Normal School, taught at Blumengart Hutterite Colony. (personal interview by John Dyck with Catherine Derkson Dagg at Bethel Place on 19 Jan 1998). Family immigrated 1880 from Nepluievka;

Dick, Clifford, B.A. from University of Manitoba in 1919; Ll. B. from University of Manitoba in 1923; probably not of Mennonite background;

Dick Robert L., University of Manitoba, BA 1923;

Doell, D.I., (11 Feb 1881 Hoffnungs-feld-), son of Isaac and Agatha Doell; married Katharina Neufeld in 1904; Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1903;

Doell, D.J., Provincial Normal School

in Altona in 1905;

Driedger, John W., grad from MCI in 1920; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal in 1925; taught in Rosville, 1925, Grimsby in 1929, Reinland 1919-32; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929; *Reinland*:266;

Dyck, F.U., B.A., (13 Mar 1894 Waldheim-), son of Julius and Katharina (Unrau) Dyck R160-1; married Katharina Hildebrandt of Greenfarm (first child born in 1928 and no other children shown in Bergthaler register) Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914; grad MCI in 1917; Bluffton College in 1923; On MCI staff in 1923-24; taught at Haskett in 1929; on staff at Rosthern Academy; family immigrated 1876; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Dyck, Frank W., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (1st class) in 1926;

Dyck, Dr. George, MD., (13 Feb 1885-20 Oct 1970, Glendale, CA) (U1914 M.D.); married Eva Murphy; grad from MCI in 1908; Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; MD from Manitoba Medical College in 1914; practised medicine in Gretna 1914-1918, moved to USA; on 8 Feb 1915 he was elected to the board of College of Physicians; held a Colonial Medical Certificate of the United Kingdom in London, a Physicians and Surgeons Certificate in California, a Certificate of Service for the Canadian Army Medical Corps 1918-1919. He died in Glendale, CA on 20 Oct 1970. (This appears to be George Dyck, born 13 Feb 1885 to Elder David and Helena (Rempel) Dyck of the MB church in Winkler and later in Saskatchewan, whose obituary says their son George lived in California); immigrated 1895 from Colorado; parents were Mennonite Brethren Church; Source: Gretna:198, 212- see Neche Chronotype 15 Oct 1914, 212, 214); from Joan Anderson, Student Records at the University of Manitoba, in a telephone conversation in February 1997; (MR 15 Feb 1933 obit of David Dyck says son Gerhard in CA)

Dyck, Isaac I., graduated MCI in 1929; teaching certificate from Gretna in 1893; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Dyck, Jacob E., (28 Sep 1889 Hoffnungs-feld-1970), son of Isaac and Katharina Dyck; married Helena Warkentin, daughter of Cornelius and Maria Warkentin, in 1912; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1926; taught for 47 years in following schools: St. Peters, Schanzenfeld, Wakeham, Glencross, Bur-

walde, Zion, Greenfarm (1925-41), Altona (1941-62); organized school choirs and conducted a band in many communities where he taught school; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; Source: *Brauns of Osterwick* 231, 236, 240;

Dyck, John I., (21 Feb 1892 Reinland-1 Jul 1960 Winnipeg); son of Isaac Dyck and Helena Bergmann, nee Hiebert; married Anna Friesen; to MEI 1910-1912; rural school teacher starting 1914 or 1915; later in business; (Johann Hiebert book, 146)

Dyck, Joseph, Ll.B. from University of Manitoba in 1918;

Dyck, Lizzie (Elizabeth) E., (1885-), married George G. Brown (1883-1944); Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910 and again in 1914; taught in Glencross in 1909; Source: *Brauns of Osterwick* 110;

Dyck, Peter J., (9 Jan 1883-26 Jun 1969), son of Jacob and Elizabeth (Wiebe) Dyck, imm. 1902, married Katharina Wiebe, MEI 1908-09 for teaching certificate and later in summer classes for Grade XII; Provincial Normal School in Morden (3rd class) in 1910; Provincial Normal School Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1925; taught at Hochstadt, Greenfarm, Gruenthal, Altona, Krons-feld (Haskett), Melba, Neuhorst, Reinland, Neuberghal, Blumenthal, Roseville; retired to Schoenwiese and Winkler; Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church; immigrated 1902 from Fuerstenland; Source: *Descendants of Jacob Dyck and Elizabeth Jaeger; Reinland*:266;

Eidse, Lena, (Helen) B.Sc., grad MCI in 1921, from Manitoba Agricultural College in Home Economics in 1924; teaching school; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Enns, Helena H., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913;

Enns, J.J., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913;

Epp, Henry W., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; Provincial Normal School in Morden (3rd class) in 1911;

Ewert, Professor Alfred, (14 Jul 1891-1961) son of H.H. Ewert, grad MCI 1906; (UB1912 B.A. Rhodes Scholar); BA at Wesley College in 1912; MA at Oxford in ??; Professor at Oxford University in England in 1929, 1934, (Gretna book, 181). In 1912, "Curiously, as in 1909, the Rhodes went to Alf Ewert of Wesley (as did five other silver medals)" Bedford, 87 (grad from Wesley College). Alfred Ewert (science) was first in his course (1912) and won Rhodes scholarship to Oxford and after the war "returned to Oxford as a scholar and teacher and became one of the world's most noted experts in the French

language." immigrated 1891 from Kansas; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Bedford*, 57. See also 58, 63.

Ewert, Rev. Benjamin, (26 Nov 1870 Thorn, Prussia-22 Jun 1958 Winnipeg), son of Wilhelm and Anna (Janz) Ewert, married Emilie A. Ruth of Halstead, KS in 1895; 1883 to Kansas, 1892 to Manitoba, Mennonite Seminary at Halstead KS 1884-90; Provincial Normal School in Gretna 1893-95 and 1900; teacher in Edenburg 1892-1902; Bookstore and Printer in Gretna 1903-19, where he printed the *Mitarbeiter*; Superintendent of Old Folks Home in Gretna 1919-21; Itinerant Pastor for General Conference Mennonite Church from Ontario to BC, resident in Winnipeg, 1921-38; 1895 ordained to ministry in Bergthaler church, ordained as elder for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1926, together with Johann M. Friesen visited Rosenorter churches in Saskatchewan and proposed the formation of the Canadian Conference; established Bethel Mission Church in Winnipeg about 1937; played a leading role in founding of First Mennonite Church; at various times, served as secretary, vice President and President of Conference of Mennonites in Canada 1921-42; Committee on Schools, Bergthaler Church 1915-18; Delegate to Ottawa in Military Matters in Jan. 1917; Member of Executive of British and Foreign Bible Society 1932-42; Statistician of Canadian Conference; immigrated 1892 from Kansas; Source: *Leaders*; *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*;

Ewert, Dr. Carl, BA, MA, MD, (10 Aug 1886-) son of H.H. Ewert; Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1901; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1902; BA from Wesley College in 1906; Wesley College 1906, Science; McGill 1910; literary editor of *Vox Wesleyana*; MD from McGill; practising medicine in Prince George, B.C. in 1934, immigrated 1891 from Kansas; Source: *Gretna* 167; *Bedford* 56; *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; (U1906 B.A.)

Ewert, Elma, RN, (11 Feb 1903-) dau. of H.H. Ewert; graduate from Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal and served there as nurse in 1934; family immigrated 1891 from Kansas;

Ewert, Dr. Paul, BA, MD, (23 Aug 1883-) son of H.H. Ewert; MCI 1901; Oberlin College, Ohio; fall 1907 to McGill; 1927 in charge of hospital in Golden, B.C. in 1934, immigrated 1891 from Kansas; Source: *Gretna* book, 167) *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Ewert, Dr. William, MD, (14 Sep 1894-) son of H.H. Ewert; grad MCI 1909; dentist in Altona and Plum Coulee; immigrated

1891 from Kansas; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; (*Gretna* book, 226);

Fast, Agnes, (27 Jun 1883-1977), daughter of Cornelius W. and Helena (Fehr) Fast, married James D. Anderson in 1924; studied nursing in Minneapolis; served as midwife and operated a temporary hospital in the Kornelson school in Steinbach during the flu epidemic of 1918; Sources: *Preservings*, June 1997, Part Two:39;

Fast, Daniel, grad from MCI in 1905; Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; (Is this the same as D.J. Fast who graduated from MCI in 1905 and taught in Herbert in 1929? Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929);

Fleming, Margaret, BA, University of Manitoba/Winnipeg BA 1921;

Friesen, Abram J., (7 Sep 1872-), son of Jacob and Maria (Leyke) Friesen; Provincial Normal School (3rd class) in 1902; to Saskatchewan in 1902; immigrated 1876 from Bergthal;

Friesen, Abraham Penner, B.A., MA, PhD, (2 Jun 1887 Blumenort near Steinbach-), son of Johann and Helena (Penner) Friesen; married Agatha Hamm, Gretna; studied at Steinbach Elementary School 1893-1901, graduated from MCI in 1916; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (3rd class) in 1906 and 2nd class in 1913; University of North Dakota in 1917; A.B. from Bethel College 1924; MA from University of Colorado 1928; PhD from University of Kansas in 1935; taught in Kleinstadt, MCI Gretna 1909-11 and 1916-19; Principal at High School in Steinbach 1911-1915; Grad. Asst in Physics, University of Colorado 1923-24; Instructor in Chemistry and Physics at Bethel College 1925-32; Professor of Physics and Chemistry, Natural Science Division, Bethel College 1932-1943 and ___; Member: Society of Sigma Xi, American Association for Advancement of Science, Am. Physical Society, American Association of Physics Teachers, Optical Society of America; Kansas Academy of Science; General Conference Mennonite Church; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Pioneers and Pilgrims* 247; *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*, 1943; *WR Bergthal Church* 1-87;

Friesen, Bernhard M., (22 Jun 1882-), son of Martin and Margaretha (Klippenstein) Friesen; Provincial Normal in Gretna in 1901 and again in 1903; later at Wesley College; taught school for a few years in Manitoba before moving to Rush Lake in 1910, where he was in several businesses with his brothers Abram and Peter; family immigrated 1875 from Bergthal; Source: *The History and Genealogy of Johann and Agatha Klippenstein*, 123; *WR Bergthaler*

Church, Vol. 1, p. 87;

Friesen, Erdman, QC, LIB, (12 Jul 1904 Altona-1969); married Jean Donahue of Regina; began articles in *Swift Current* in 1921, called to the bar in June of 1926; worked as city solicitor for Regina, around time of WWII the couple divorced and Erdman joined the RCAF, posted in Moosomin and Ontario, after war practised law in Toronto and Port Hope, appointed Queen's Counsel, remarried Helen Marie Carscallen; family immigrated 1875 from Bergthal; probably held a college degree when he began articling in 1921;

Friesen, Henry M., (10 Jan 1887-), son of Martin and Margaretha (Klippenstein) Friesen; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1922; family immigrated 1875 from Bergthal;

Friesen, Helen L., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924;

Friesen, Jacob U., (21 Sep 1892-); son of Peter J. and Henrietta Friesen; married Sara Mathilda Krehbiel of Halstead, daughter of Peter S. and Margaretha (Schweitzer) Krehbiel of Simpson, Sask., in 1914; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; Bergtaler Mennonite Church, family immigrated 1874;

Friesen, John Everett, QC, LIB, (1 Sep 1895-5 Apr 1987), son of John M. and Maria (Kehler) Friesen, moved with family to Herbert in June 1910; in 1922 married Myrtle Inch; 1911 worked as clerk in law office, Central College in Regina to complete High School requirements, began articling with Abram Buhr in Morse in January 1916, and transferred to F.C. Hayes in Swift Current in 1919, stayed with Begg, Hayes and Friesen until he started his own practise in Swift Current in 1926, alderman of Swift Current 1936-39 and 1943-48, mayor 1953-54, January 1957 appointed to the Bench for the District Court of Shaunavon, 1959 (1957?) transferred to judicial centre of Regina in 1959, retired in 1970 at age 75, Queen's Counsel in 1971, practised law till age 83; family immigrated 1875 from Bergthal;

Friesen, John M., (3 Sep 1865-Nov 1932), son of Martin and Margaretha Klippenstein) Friesen; married Maria Kehler, daughter of Jacob and Eva Kehler; Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1900; later a 2nd class teaching certificate; teacher in Manitoba schools, Inspector of Schools in Manitoba, ordained to the ministry in the Bergthaler Church in 1895; together with Benjamin Ewert visited Rosenorter churches in Saskatchewan and proposed the formation of the Canadian Conference; moved to Herbert in 1911, taught school, served as Justice of the Peace; immigrated

1875 from Bergthal; Source: Remember *Our Leaders*, 9;

Friesen, Mary F., married Peter Brown; grad MCI in 1927; Isbister scholarship in Grade XI in 1926; Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (1st class) in 1929; taught in rural schools three years; Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*; *Brauns of Osterwick*, 73, 104;

Friesen, P.M., brother to minister John M. Friesen and the Friesens who owned an implement shop in Altona; taught at the Altona public school between 1903-1906; did he have any post secondary training? Source: Altona, p. 78;

Froese, Jacob, grad MCI 1917; grad from Bible School of Los Angeles, in evangelistic work; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Funk, Dr. B.J., MD, grad MCI 1905, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; medical doctor in Herbert in 1927; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Funk, John J., (27 Dec 1877-1958), son of Jacob and Katharina Funk; married Sarah Buhr, daughter of Cornelius and Sara Buhr, in 1903; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; taught school for 25 years; Source: *Descendants of Peter Buhr* 1816-1887, 48;

Giesbrecht, Gertrude, (29 Feb 1894-27 Jul 1982), daughter of Jacob and Anna (Toews) Giesbrecht; married Isaac G. Brown in 1914; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913; taught school; Source: *Brauns of Osterwick*, 71, 102; (Nancy Neufeld's Julius Toews chart);

Giesbrecht, Jacob N., (21 Jun 1893-), son of John and Sara Giesbrecht; married Tina Hildebrand in 1919; graduated from MCI in 1918; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1922; taught in Zion in 1929; Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929*;

Giesbrecht, John Howard, BA, (23 Jan 1898-10 Nov 1977), son of Jacob and Anna (Toews) Giesbrecht; married Agnes Dyck (dau of Isaac and Elisabeth (Hooge) Dyck) in 1925; grad MCI in 1923; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg in 1928; teaching at MCI; University of Manitoba BA 1927; taught in Winkler in 1929; teaching in Gnadenthal; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*; *M.C.I. Annual 1929*; (Nancy Neufeld's Julius Toews chart);

Giesbrecht, Peter H., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923;

Goossen, John D. grad MCI in 1903; 1891 Provincial Normal School in Pilot Mound; secretary treasurer of Rural Mu-

nicipality of Hanover; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Guenther, Peter S., graduated from MCI in 1920; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923; taught in Steinbach in 1929; taught in Randolph two terms; Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929*; *Preservings*, June 1996, Part One:22;

Ham, Arthur Leslie, (-1968 in Westmount, Quebec) B.A. from University of Manitoba in 1920, further studies there in 1923; was manager of Canadian Life Underwriters Association in Westmount Quebec. Mennonite background?

Harder, Mary B., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Heinrichs, Bernard, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Heinrichs, David, (11 Jul 1895 Winkler-), son of Johann and Anna Heinrichs of Herbert; married Helena J. Buhr of Mountain Lake; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal in 1924;

Heinrichs, John J., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Hiebert, Dr. Abraham B. Hiebert (23 Aug 1847-5 Feb 1914), (son of Abraham & Anna (Hildebrand) Hiebert, nephew of Dr. Dietrich Hildebrand of Burwalde, Russia, marr. 1869 Sahra Loewen; Nieder Chortitza, Russia to Rosenthal, Manitoba; Certificate for completed "a thorough course of instruction in the treatment of Cancer Tumors, Sesofulas, skin diseases, Nasal Catarrh and Rheumatism and has acquired a thorough knowledge of their treatment. He is now competent to treat the above named diseases successfully...". Dr. L. H. Gratingny M.D., Cincinnati, Ohio, 12 Feb 1895. Immigrated 1875, S1B217. Source: Photocopy in my file of original certificate which includes above wording as part of a sworn statement; received from Bruce Wiebe, Winkler;

Hiebert, Anna, (20 Aug 1885-), daughter of Johann and Maria (Penner) Hiebert, MEI 1910-11, later away from home attending school, marr. John Doern who also attended MEI, (PB117); family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*;

Hiebert, Annie, RN, (1892 Gretna-28 Sep 1966 Calgary), daughter of Cornelius and Aganetha (Dueck) Hiebert; study details unknown; served as nurse, Assistant Superintendent of nurses for 11 years at Calgary General Hospital; retired ca. 1960; family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens* 117, Johann Hiebert book, 174;

Hiebert, Cornelius, MLA, (2 Aug 1862-), married A. Dick in 1888; Conser-

vative MLA for Rosebud in first Alberta Legislature 1906-1909; overseer for village of Didsbury 1902-04; school trustee 1902; lumber merchant; immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*; *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 1983:98; Johann Hiebert book, 174;

Hiebert, Cornelius, LIB, (25 Aug 1895 Gretna-27 Feb 1964 Nanton AB), son of Cornelius and Aganetha (Dueck) Hiebert; marr Florence Lillian Moir, (PB); grew up and studied in Calgary, practised law in Nanton 1922-1962 in partnership with Lorne L. Miller as Hiebert and Miller; secretary treasurer for the town of Nanton 1927-1952; was active in the organization of the Nanton Golf Course, the first tennis courts in Nanton, the Nanton Rifle and Revolver Club; family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; practiced law in Altona 1922. MLA in Alberta's first legislature 1905. *Mennonite Historian*;

Hiebert, Erdman, (18 Aug 1888 Pilot Mound-1942), son of Johann and Maria (Penner) Hiebert; married Erna Kehler of Gretna; studied music in Winnipeg; details not given; family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*; Johann Hiebert book, 118;

Hiebert, Ernst Heinrich, (25 Sep 1889 Pilot Mound-1962 Toronto), son of Johann and Maria (Penner) Hiebert; studied at MEI 1910-11, studied art; became an artist; (PB119); family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*; Johann Hiebert book, 119;

Hiebert, Eva, (6 Jan 1899 Neuhoffnung-12 Aug 1980 Steinbach), dau of Philip and Helena (Loeppky) Hiebert; marr 10 Jul 1932 to Steinbach area farmer Abram K. Barkman, (PB); attended Altona and Winkler schools; worked in Ninette Sanatorium as nurse's aid for a year; Provincial Normal School in Manitou and Winnipeg; taught at Strassburg, Grimsby, Schoenau, family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*; Johann Hiebert book, 145;

Hiebert, Dr. Gerhard, BA, MD, (13 Sep 1868 in Berdjansk-25 Dec 1934 in Winnipeg), son of Gerhard and Susanna Hiebert; BA from St. Pauls College in MN 1894-95; MD from McGill University, Montreal ca. 1905; post graduate work in Germany ca. 1910; served as Medical Doctor in Winnipeg, Chief Surgeon at Winnipeg General Hospital (now Health Sciences Centre) in the 1920s, immigrated ca. 1892 from Mountain Lake; invited to address the first meeting of Halbstadt Zentralschule graduates in Winnipeg. This meeting led to the organization of the Concordia Hospital. Source: *Granny Stories*, *Winnipeg*

Free Press, Steinbach Post, West Reserve Bergthal Church Register;

Hiebert, Helena J., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913; taught in Winkler; Source: *Winkler: A Proud Heritage*, p. 144.

Hiebert, Ida, Winkler, (4 Oct 1903-9 Dec 1997) daughter of Jacob and Maria Hiebert, Plum Coulee; first teachers certificate at age of 18; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1926; taught in southern Manitoba schools till her marriage to Isaac Penner in 1934; moved to Winnipeg in 1950 and taught in Birds Hill, Headingly and Winnipeg schools; Source: Ida Penner obituary in *Winnipeg Free Press* 12 Dec 1997;

Hiebert, Dr. John, Klippenstein Book, p. 22, refers to a Dr. John Hiebert who came to Altona and Maria Hiebert worked for him from 1906-12;

Hiebert, John, (21 Jan 1892-), at MEI Altona 1910-1912, teacher, later business, family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; (PB46)

Hiebert, J.H., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911;

Hiebert, Paul Gerhard, BA, MSc, DSc, LL.D, (17 Jul 1891-), son of Johann and Maria (Penner) Hiebert; married Dorothea Cunningham; studied at MEI 1910-11, BA and gold medalist at U of Manitoba in 1916, Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1917; M.Sc. McGill in 1922; D.Sc. McGill in 1924; LL.D. from University of Manitoba in 1977; professor of chemistry at University of Manitoba 1924-52, wrote Sarah Binks, Willows Revisited, Tower of Siloam and others, (PB120) (U1916 B.A.; 1974 LL.D.). family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*; Johann Hiebert book, 120-123;

Hiebert, Rudolph Werner, (11 Apr 1900 Altona-), son of Johann and Maria (Penner) Hiebert; studied as a geologist at University of Manitoba; professional geologist; retired in Toronto, (PB124). Family immigrated 1876 from Bergthal; Source: Jacob and Helena Siemens;

Hoepfner, Annie, (12 Jan 1894-28 Jun 1965), dau of Elder Jacob and Aganetha (Dueck) Hoepfner; married Jacob A. Toews in 1916; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; taught rural schools 1916-1922; active in Sunday School organization and teaching; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1876 from Chortitza; Source: *Abram J. and Maria Toews Family*, 31;

Hoepfner, Bernard, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913;

Hoepfner, Jacob N., (10 Jul 1901 Winkler-1950); married Susanna Sawatzky;

graduated from MCI in 1917; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924; taught at Plum Coulee in 1917 and seven other schools (including Kleefeld WR for two years) and Elim Bible School; ordained to the ministry in 1932; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1876 from Chortitza; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929; Remember Our Leaders, 66;

Hoepfner, P.J., graduated MCI in 1904; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911; taught in Schanzenfeld in 1903-04; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Hooge, Jacob B, (11 May 1879-29 Feb 1956), son of Johann and Maria (Peters) Hooge; married in 1908 to Maria Toews, born 27 Aug 1888 to Abram and Maria (Dyck) Toews in Reinland; grad from MCI 1904; teaching certificate from Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1901; 2nd class certificate from Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg in 1906; taught in Lowe Farm 1907-1910; in Blumenfeld in 1928-29; operated a store in Lowe Farm and then Winkler from 1910-1918; Home for the Aged in Gretna 1918-19; Bethesda Home for the Aged in Winkler 1919-46; started Hooge Cleaners in Winkler; immigrated 1876 from Franzthal, Molotchna via Chortitza; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929; *Abram J. and Maria Toews Family*, (Abram J. and Maria Toews Family History Committee, 1989);

Hooge, Peter J., LL.B., (5 Jul 1886 Winkler-1963), son of Johan and Maria (Peters) Hooge; married Margaret Matchett of Saskatoon in the Grace Church on April 11, 1917; MCI in 1900-03; Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1903; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1906, LL.B. from University of Manitoba in 1914 (with honours in final year); Saskatchewan Law Course (with medal in final year); Principal of Herbert Public School 1907-09; began articling on 4 Sep 1909 (4 firms), U of Manitoba and U of Saskatchewan; Practised law in Saskatoon 1914-16; practised law in Leader 1916-33; in Rosthern 1933- ?; solicitor for Leader 1916-33; Crown Prosecutor in Judicial District of Leader 1925-31; Solicitor for town of Rosthern 1933- ?; Official Receiver for Judicial District of Prince Albert and Saskatoon 1935- ?; secretary treasurer of Leader; King's Counsel in 1937; elected Liberal MLA in 1944; appointed district court judge in Moosomin in 1948; retired in 1960; to Burnaby in 1961; admitted to BC bar at age 75; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1876 from Franzthal, Molotchna via Chortitza; Source: *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*, 1943;

Hooge, Susan, (14 Apr 1884 Winkler-23 Feb 1971 Gretna), daughter of Johann and Maria (Peters) Hooge; married Peter H. Buhr in 1908; teaching certificate in Provincial Normal School (Altona) in 1905; taught for a few years until marriage; general store in Morse 1911-1919; car dealership in Gretna 1919-?; retired to Winnipeg; Bethel Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1876 from Franzthal, Molotchna via Chortitza; Source: *Jacob Buhr Family*; Photo in D'Shtove shows her teaching in Thames 1925-1926.

Isaac Susan, moved from Winkler to Altona ca. 1898 and stayed there till 1900, except for eight months training in medicine in Kansas; Source: *Altona*, 73; *Nordwesten*, 26 May 1898, 5; 30 Mar 1899, 5; 18 Jan 1900, 7; *Altona: A Pictorial History*, p. 18, 28;

Janzen, Henry H., (9 Sep 1890-Mar 1979) graduated from MCI in 1911; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923; taught in Rosenheim in 1929; later became elevator operator in Winkler. Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Janzen, Jacob J., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1922;

Kehler, P.P., (14 May 1882 Altona-30 Aug 1964); married 1) Susanna Warkentin, 2) Mrs. Henry Grabinsky; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911; taught in Neuhoftung, Altbergthal, Hochstadt, village of Altona, Neubergthal for a total of 27 years; ordained to the ministry in 1938; Bergthaler Mennonite Church;

Klassen, Elizabeth, Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924;

Klassen, Helena, (18 Sep 1896-7 Aug 1951 Manitou), dau of Martin J. & Maria (Hiebert) Klassen; married Peter Friesen; MEI ca 1910-?; Beatrice, Nebraska nursing academy 1920; returned and became farmer's wife; Johann Hiebert book, 278;

Klassen, Dr. Jacob, grad MCI 1912; dentist in Philippine Islands in 1927; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Klassen, Mary, Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (1st class) in 1924;

Klassen, Peter, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; (Could this be the Klassen involved with the *Volkszeitung*?)

Klassen, Peter A., graduated from MCI in 1906; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1911; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Kliwer, Gerhard J.P. (27 Mar 1898-1944 Blumenort), son of Peter and Anna (Loepky) Kliwer; married Maria Penner in 1920; graduated from MCI in 1915; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924; taught in Steinbach in 1928-29; family immigrated 1875; C1907-B251;

EMB Church; Immanuel Church; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929; Nettie Neufeld's *Buhr Family Book*. 24; *Preserving*, 9 Dec 1996, Part Two:66;

Kornelson, Gerhard G., (23 Sep 1878-6 Apr 1958), married Anna Dyck in 1910; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911; taught in Steinbach 1903- ; immigrated 1875;

Kornelson, Jacob G., grad MCI in 1916; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1918; teacher in Steinbach; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Kornelson, William, graduated from MCI in 1912 and 1918; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1919; taught on the East Reserve in 1929; Source: *The M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Kroeker, Abram Arthur, (6 Dec 1892 Winkler-), son of Abraham and Helena (Wiens) Kroeker; married in Hepburn, SK in 1914 Lizzie Nickel, born 22 Jun 1894 in Alexanderthal, studied at MCI Gretna 1911-12; teaching certificate from Provincial Normal School at Morden in 1913; Bible Institute of Los Angeles 1920-22; served as public school teacher 1913-15; Winkler Bible School teacher 1930- ?; farmer 1928- ?; Pres. A.A. Kroeker and Sons 1935- ?; Chairman Sunday School Committee of Northern District Conference of the MB Church; Assistant Pastor of the MB Church in Winkler; Director of Winkler Bible School; Director of Bethel Hospital Society in Winkler; Director of Manitoba Temperance Alliance; Director of Manitoba Seed Grower's Association; Source: *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*;

Kroeker, P.P., Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; (Could this be the Volkzeitung Kroeker?) (ck 1893 immigrants);

Krueger, Isbrand, Reinland '29, graduated from MCI in 1927; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1929; taught in Langevin in 1929; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Krueger, Leonard H., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1921;

Loeppky, Peter A., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913;

Loewen, David H. (18 Jul 1898 Silberfeld-); married 1) Agnes Teichroeb 2) Anna Kehler, studied one year at MCI, a year in German Bible School, a year at a missionary medical school, a year at Wycliffe Bible Translators Linguistic School, elected to ministry in the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in 1932; served as itinerant minister among Bergthaler churches, in C.O. camps and as missionary in Mexico and Jamaica; Source: *Remember Our Leaders*: 166;

Loewen, Mary J., BA, BEd, MRE, (1905-); daughter of John J. and Anna

(Braun) Loewen of Winkler; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924; University of Manitoba/Winnipeg BA 1936; also studied at Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Chicago; Garret Biblical Seminary; Elgin Mental Health Hospital; taught at Altona, Winkler, Steinbach, Winnipeg and in Virginia; General Conference Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitza; (at Bethel Place in January 1998) Source: *Brauns of Osterwick*, 277;

Loewen, P.I., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913;

Loewen, Sadie, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Neufeld, Cornelius C., (9 Oct 1906-7 Aug 1977), son of George G. and Elizabeth (Martens) Neufeld; married Gertrude Hooze in 1932; graduated from MCI in 1926; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924; taught in Silberfeld in 1929; later in Winnipeg; President Crosstown Credit Union Soc. Ltd; Bethel Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1891 from Chortitza; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Neufeld, D.C., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911;

Neufeld, Gerhard G., B.A., (21 Mar 1884 -27 Apr 1945) son of Gerhard and Anna (Kroeker) Neufeld who moved to Lost River as a Sommerfeld minister; married Elizabeth Martens in 1903; MCI in 1904; 3rd class certificate from Normal - Morden School in 1911; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1922; BA at University of Manitoba in 1920; University of Manitoba/Winnipeg BSc HEc1938 (confirm that this is the right George Neufeld); teacher Schoenthal ca. 1904-1915, taught in Gretna 1903-4; MEI 1909-10, Principal of Altona Public School 1918-25; Principal of Gretna Public School 192_-; Inspector of schools for R.M. of Rhineland, Stanley and Pembina 192_?-; immigrated 1891 from Chortitza; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Altona*, 125;

Neufeld, George M., (23 May 1904-28 Dec 1977), son of Gerhard G. and Elizabeth (Martens) Neufeld; married 1) Margaretha Wiebe in 1925 2) Lillian Wedge in 1972; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924; immigrated 1891 from Chortitza;

Neufeld, Jacob G., (12 Apr 1894 Rosenbach-), son of Gerhard and Anna (Kroeker) Neufeld; married Elisabeth B. Dyck, daughter of Bernhard and Maria Dyck of Rudnerweide, in 1918; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; began teaching in Altona in 1921 and became

principal in 1929; Source: *Altona*, 125;

Neufeld, Jacob, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905;

Neufeld, Johann, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905;

Neufeld, P.H., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1908; taught in Winkler in 1912. Source: *Winkler: A Proud Heritage*, 202.

Neufeld, Sara E., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913;

Neufeld, Wm., Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; University of Manitoba/Winnipeg 1929;

Nickel, Anna, (17 Apr 1885-), dau of Peter and Maria (Wiebe) Nickel; married Jacob Kroeker; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913; immigrated 1902;

Nickel, Elizabeth E. (Lizzie), (22 Jun 1894-), dau of Peter and Maria (Wiebe) Nickel; married A.A. Kroeker; graduated from MCI in 1916; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; immigrated 1902;

Nickel, Margaret E., (13 May 1890-), dau of Peter and Maria (Wiebe) Nickel; married John Kasper; graduated from MCI in 1916; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913; immigrated 1902; (ck. *MR* 19 Feb 1902);

Nikkel, P.E., (24 Jul 1893 Silberfeld-Rosenfeld area-), son of Erdman and Anna (Loewen) Nikkel, marr. Elisabeth Goossen, Marion SD in 1912; Gretna Public School 1900-08, Rosthern Academy 1912-13; Moody Bible Institute 1914-17; Tabor College 1923-24; evangelist in Canada and USA 1917-23; Bible School teacher 1920-28; pastor at Winton CA 1932-37; farmer 1932- ?; Mennonite Brethren Church; family immigrated 1878 from Puchtin; Source: *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*, 1943;

Penner, Dr. Erdman, Jr., BA, MD, (5 Jan 1872 in Russia-15 Mar 1960 Rosthern), son of Erdman and Maria (Eitzen) Penner, married Blanche Mallette in 1903; one year University of Toronto (left due to ill health); BA from Wesley College in 1897; MD from McGill in 1901 (gold medalist); practised in Rosthern 1903-05; in Winnipeg with brother-in-law Dr. Gerhard Hiebert 1905-08; Rosthern 1908-retirement; immigrated 1874 from Bergthal; Source: *Granny Stories*, see ads in *Mitarbeiter*. (U1897B.A.); Hague Osler Mennonite Reserve 321; (son Erdman was a cartoonist with Walt Disney Studios);

Penner, Gustav E., (10 Jan 1884 Butler, KS-), son of Johann and Elizabeth Penner of Hillsboro; married Helena Unger, born 15 Sep 1885 to Peter and Helena Unger of Edenthal, in 1909; MCI in 1904; Provincial

Normal School in Gretna in 1903; 3rd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1917; taught in Kronsgart 1907-08; immigrated ca 1900 from Kansas; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Penner, Helen, (Hiebert), (15 Oct 1874 in Winnipeg-1969), daughter of Erdman and Maria (Eitzen) Penner, attended school in Mountain Lake, graduated MCI in 1893, BA from Wesley College in 1899, founding member of Modern Languages Club which became part of the University Women's Club later formed at the U of M, Winnipeg School trustee. Source: *Granny Stories*, West Reserve Bergthal Church Register. (U1899B.A.) "Another change in teaching personnel came in the middle of February [1900] when Helena Penner was forced to resign owing to the death of her mother." Bedford, University of Winnipeg, 48. "Helena Penner [1900], of Gretna, taught for almost a year." Bedford, 51. "The modern languages were taught...in 1924-5 by Mrs. G. Hiebert (nee Helena Penner), who returned after an absence of over two decades to assist her Alma Mater in a time of need." immigrated 1874 from Bergthal; Bedford, 161; *MCI Annual 1927*;

Penner, Jacob, (born ca. 1880) teaching certificate from Gretna MCI after studying there Sept. to Nov. 1904, taught in Altona School Dec 1904 to Jun 1905; later City of Winnipeg councillor, active in Social Democratic Party of Canada from its inception in 1908, married Rose Shapak; family immigrated Aug 1904. Source: MHCA Volume 2275-8, interview of Jacob Penner by his son Roland Penner;

Penner, Jacob P., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Peters, Anna W., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923;

Peters, Henry F., grad MCI in 1922; studying engineering University of Manitoba; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Peters, Lydia, Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1925;

Peters, Wilfred S., (-November 1955 Brandon) M.D. from the University of Manitoba in 1910; Mennonite background?

Reimer, Peter J.B., son of Johann R. and Aganetha (Barkman) Reimer, married 1) Elizabeth Kehler in 1926 2) Maria Brandt in 1946; graduated from MCI in 1923; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924; taught in Steinbach in 1929; taught in Randolph one year and again for nine years; Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929*; *Preservings*, June 1996, Part One:22;

Reimer, Peter Derk, (15 Nov 1885-15 Feb 1936), son of ; married Maria Neufeld (daughter of Gerhard and Anna (Kroeker)

Neufeld) in 1907; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923; Is this the Peter D. Reimer who was principal of the Altona school till 1929? (Altona, p. 125);

Rempel, G.S., (11 Jul 1895-9 Apr 1969); married Helena Schultz; graduated from MCI in 1917; teachers college in Saskatoon 1918-1919; taught for 20 years including in Saskatchewan in 1929; ordained to the ministry in 1937; Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929*; *Remember Our Leaders*, 135;

Rempel, Harry, Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1924;

Sawatzky, Cornelius F. (21 May 1876 Bergthal ER-11 Jul 1974); son of Franz and Elizabeth (Peters) Sawatzky; to Edenburg in 1888; married Anna Friesen in 1898; Bible School in California in 1919; served as minister in the Bergthaler churches in Saskatchewan and as evangelist in Conference of Mennonites in Canada; family immigrated 1874 from Bergthal; Sources: *Remember Our Leaders*: 159; *The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan*: 107;

Sawatzky, Jacob F., (19 Sep 1881 Winkler-1966), son of Franz and Katharina (Guenther) Sawatzky, marr. Cornelia Klassen, Herbert in 1907; High School 1901-03; Provincial Normal School 1902, Provincial Normal School in 1903 (2nd class cert.) and 1905; public school teacher 1900-25; minister Herbert Mennonite Church 1908-28; minister at Bethlehem Mennonite Church, Bloomfield, Mont. 1928-38; minister First Mennonite Church Madrid, NE 1938- ?; treasurer of the Mission Committee of Canadian Conference 1920-25; Member of Examining Committee of Northern District Conference 1938-41; General Conference Mennonite Church; immigrated 1876 from Chortitza; Source: *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*, 1943; *Remember Our Leaders*, 125;

Sawatzky, Jacob J., Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1901; Source: Gretna, 1902; *MCI History*, 26; perhaps from Hochstadt?; is this the same person who was in real estate in Winnipeg ca. 1905? Source *MCI History*, 26. *Gretna 1902*;

Sawatzky, Katharine, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905;

Schellenberg, Dr. Henry, D. (D. according to *M.C.I. Annual 1927*, which says he graduated from MCI in 1924 and he is enrolled in Manitoba Medical College) is this the same as Heinrich J. Schellenberg in Winkler Mb, born 18 Sep 1900 to Jacob A. Schellenberg, *27 Apr 1869 and Anna Siemens *15 Aug 1873, who married Gertrude Braun; they had a daughter Lena Myrtle, born 1932?, who married Wilmer Penner,

son of Abram and Mary (Reimer) Penner; Winkler Mennonite Brethren; (Jacob A. Schellenberg taught in Reinland for seven years in the 1920s - Reinland) Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Schellenberg, Jacob A., graduated from MCI in 1905; taught in Reinland in 1922-29; (had 5 children in Reinland school: George I, Herman III, Willie V, Abram VI, Peter VII) Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929*; *Reinland*:266;

Schellenberg, Peter A., graduated from MCI in 1916; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1925; taught in Reichenbach in 1916; Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929*;

Schroder, F.W., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911;

Siemens, Anna, (18 Aug 1877 Mapleton-19 May 1963 Altona), dau of Jacob and Helena (Peters) Siemens; 1890 to Schoenthal, Manitoba; ca. 1910 Nursing School at Newton, Kansas and at Grand Forks, North Dakota; established private nursing home in Altona ca. 1915-1935 with her sister Margaretha; retired in Altona; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitza; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*, 204;

Siemens, Dr. George J., BSc, MSc, PhD, (31 May 1907 Schoenthal-), son of Johan and Anna (Hiebert) Siemens; marr. Margaret Toews; U of Manitoba B.Sc., M.Sc.; Toronto University for Ph.D.; teacher in rural schools including Grossweide; teaching at Transcona and Rosenfeld; Altona High School teacher; Principal of Winkler Collegiate 1940-1944; taught at University of Toronto, Professor of Biology at Toledo University 1947-1967; taught comparative anatomy at University of British Columbia in 1960; Professor of Genetics at U of Colorado, 1968-1977; retired to Denver, Colorado; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitza; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*, 125c, 237;

Siemens, George G., BA, B.Ed, (25 Mar 1902 Rosenfeld-), son of Gerhard and Agatha (Wiebe) Siemens; marr. Tina Heinrichs of Bergfeld; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (3rd class) in 1924 and 2nd class in 1926; 1935 BA and 1959 B.Ed from U of Manitoba, started teaching in New Kennedy School in 1921, then in Thames (Bergfeld) and Pleasant Valley; 1935-44 principal of Kane Consolidated School; taught at Winkler Collegiate 1944-1967; treasurer and choir director of Winkler Bergthaler Church; trustee and one year as chairman of Garden Valley School Division; 25 years as director of Winkler Coop Store; 16 years elected to Winkler Credit Union Society Ltd.; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitza; Source: Jacob and

Helena Siemens; 138ff;

Siemens, Helena H., (22 Mar 1889 Schoenthal-6 Jan 1956 Schoenthal), dau of Johann and Anna (Hiebert) Siemens; MEI; Provincial Normal School (Morden) (3rd class) in 1911; Provincial Normal School (Winnipeg) (2nd class) in 1917; taught 1912-1932; active in Rhineland Agricultural Society and a member of its Women's Institute since its inception in 1836; editor of Unser Missionsblatt for nine years; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitz; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*, 104; Johan Hiebert book, 206, 213;

Siemens, Henry J., (26 Jun 1900 Schoenthal-), son of Johan and Anna (Hiebert) Siemens; married Elizabeth Klassen in 1928; in 1919 to Manitoba Agricultural College in Winnipeg 1925, University of Minnesota at St. Paul, County Extension Agent at Watford, ND ca. 1928-1930; Farm Manager with Colonization Finance Corp. in Brandon (1930-1945) for 15 yrs. including two years as Director of Czechoslovakian - Sudetan immigrant settlement at Tupper, B.C.; 1946-1970 in Edmonton as District Superintendent for Canada Colonization Association (CPR) until 1962 and as an Independent Appraiser and Farm Supervisor thereafter; (PB108); family immigrated 1875 from Chortitz; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*, 121; Johan Hiebert book, 231-232;

Siemens, Jacob G., (20 Jun 1897-), son of Gerhard and Agatha (Wiebe) Siemens; married Eva Braun; MEI Altona, taught in private schools two years and from 1921 till 1945 in Gnadenfeld, Altbergthal, Edenburg, New Bergthal, Kronsweide, Kronstal; during the war years with the Civil Service; teaching from 1945-61, his last school was Altona Public School; retired to Winnipeg; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitz; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*, 126, 136;

Siemens, Jacob J., (23 May 1896 Schoenthal-9 Jul 1963 Schoenthal), son of Johan and Anna (Hiebert) Siemens, married Maria Heinrichs of Halbstadt in 1922; MEI Altona, 2nd class teaching certificate from Provincial Normal School (Winnipeg) in 1929; for ten years taught in Halbstadt, Grossweide and Lowe Farm; turned farmer; played a leading role in the organization of Rhineland Agricultural Society in 1931, Rhineland Consumers Co-operative Ltd., Co-op Vegetable Oils Ltd., Federation of Southern Manitoba Cooperatives; Manitoba Co-operative Wholesale Ltd., Manitoba Beet Growers Association; charter member of Co-op College in Saskatoon; director of Cooperative Union of Canada;

inducted into Manitoba Agricultural Hall of Fame, his four brothers were well educated - two of them had doctoral degrees, family immigrated 1875 from Chortitz; Source: *Heinrichs of Halbstadt 107; Jacob and Helena Siemens*, 115;

Siemens, Margaretha, (22 Oct 1879 Mapleton-9 May 1957 Altona), dau of Jacob & Helena (Peters) Siemens, 1890 to Schoenthal, Manitoba; ca. 1910 Nursing School at Newton, Kansas and at Grand Forks, North Dakota; established private nursing home in Altona ca. 1915-1935 with her sister Anna; retired in Altona; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitz; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*, 204;

Siemens, Maria, (14 Aug 1902 Schoenthal-), dau of Johann and Helena (Hiebert) Siemens, MEI Altona; married Henry Reimer in 1926; (Reimer had attended MEI and taught briefly at Bergfeld and Steinfeld); Home Economics at Manitoba Agricultural College; 1926 to Lowe Farm where her husband operated a general store; 1946 to Sardis, BC and later to Aldergrove, BC; family immigrated 1875 from Chortitz; Source: *Jacob and Helena Siemens*; 123; Johan Hiebert book, 233;

Siemens, Peter H., MCI in 1903; Provincial Normal School in Gretna in 1901; teacher in Winkler in 1927; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Siemens, Peter, grad MCI in 1916; attended Bible Institute of Los Angeles, missionary work among hill tribes in Carolina, USA; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Sobering, Simon H.R., (31 Oct 1889 Hungary-19 Dec 1959), son of Heinrich and Magdalena (Rieger) Sobering; married Helena Friesen of Gretna in 1914; Provincial Normal School in Morden (2nd class) in 1914; immigrated 1900; Sources: *Preservings*, June 1997, Part Two: 45;

Striemer, Tina, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911;

Suderman, Jacob E., grad MCI in 1917; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1913; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1922; principal of Rosenfeld school 1929; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927*;

Suderman, Margaret, RN, (10 Apr 1902 Altona-), daughter of John P. and Susanna (Giesbrecht) Suderman; Altona Summer School 1922; Morden High School 1921-23; Winnipeg General Hospital 1924-27 for RN; Moody Bible Institute 1927-28; Tabor College 1928; nurse at Winnipeg General Hospital in 1927; Nurse, Cook Co., TB Hospital Chicago 1927-28; Missionary Nurse India 1929-?; Mennonite Brethren Church; Source: *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*;

Toews, Abraham L., grad from MCI in 1903; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1924; taught in Alt Bergthal in 1928-9; Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929*;

Toews, A.P., born 1899 in Steinbach; married 1) Anna Mierau; 2) Mrs. Anna Wiebe Friesen; Grade XI at MCI, graduated from MCI in 1923; Normal School in Winnipeg, graduated from University of Manitoba with a BA in 1947, two years at United Church Seminary in Saskatoon for a B.D.; Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri for a B.D.; Concordia Seminary at St. Louis for a Th.M and D.Th.; taught 20 years in Manitoba, including 1924-27 in Blumenort, one year in Saskatchewan and four years in Missouri; served as pastor in Langham 1944-48, Dallas Oregon 1948-51; secretary of EMB Missions in Omaha 1951-); assisted elder Benjamin Ewert in founding of EMB congregation in Winnipeg; authored several books; Source: *M.C.I. Annual 1929; Blumenort*, 399;

Toews, David A., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Toews, Julius G., B.A., (30 Apr 1893 Reinland-11 Jul 1981), son of Julius and Anna Toews of Rosewell, married Helena Buhr, daughter of Jacob and Susanna (Friesen) Buhr, in 1912; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911; grad MCI in 1916; University of Manitoba 1925; taught in Steinfeld and Burwalde, MB and Main Centre, SK; taught at Steinbach public school 1919-ca. 1944; with MCC in Europe ca 1944-1947; in Ontario 1947-1950; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual 1927; Jakob Buhr Family; WR Bergthal Church 1-158*;

Toews, Justina, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914;

Toews, Wm. J., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911; (Could this be William Toews, born 1899, brother of Julius G. Toews, page 17 of Nancy Neufeld chart?)

Unger, Margaret A., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (3rd class) in 1918 and 2nd class in 1920;

Unger, Mary C., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (3rd class) in 1911;

Unrau, Peter, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914;

Vogt, David, Ll.B., (19 May 1900, Edenburg-3 Mar 1979, Ottawa), son of Heinrich and Judith (Wiebe) Vogt, grandson of Wilhelm and Anna (Quiring) Vogt of Edenburg, grad MCI 1917, moved to Neville with his family ca. 1910, entered articles with Abram Buhr on December 19, 1923, married Katherine Wiens of Herbert on May 9, 1926, purchased Abram

Buhr's law practise in Morse in 1926 when the latter moved back to Winnipeg, grad Saskatchewan Law School; called to bar on December 28, 1926, mayor of Morse 1931-33, secretary treasurer of Morse 1935-39, joined Ordinance Corps in WWII and stationed at Kingston, after war worked as civil servant in Ottawa, first with Wartime Prices and Trade Board and then as legal advisor to the Department of Indian Affairs until his retirement; family immigrated 1874 from Chortitzza; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Vogt, Henry, L.I.B., (9 May 1889, Edenburg, -24 Feb 1968, Winnipeg), son of Heinrich and Judith (Wiebe) Vogt, grandson of Wilhelm and Anna (Quiring) Vogt of Edenburg, married Aganetha Buhr in Edenburg in 1907; graduated MCI in 1907, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; graduated Indianapolis College of Law in 1913, called to bar in 1920, lawyer in Neville, 1922 to Morden, 1926 to Winnipeg, took on agency for Holland-America Line in addition to law practise, involved with Mennonite Immigration Aid with Abram Buhr, 1929 to Swift Current, 1931 to Winnipeg; parents of science fiction writer Alfred E. van Vogt, born 26 Apr 1912, who married Edna Mayne Hull of Brandon and later moved to California; family immigrated 1874 from Chortitzza; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927;

Voth, Isaac H., Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1923;

Voth, Peter, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1911;

Voth, Sarah, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905;

Warkentin, Bernhard, BA, (17 Mar 1892-18 Aug 1984), son of Johann and Sarah (Loewen) Warkentin, grad MCI 1908; BA from Wesley College in 1914; MB minister in Winkler, served as school inspector in Manitoba; served in WWI; see *Mennonite Reporter* 31 Oct 1977 and 29 Oct 1984, p. 15; farmed at Rosebank; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; teacher at MCI 1909-1910, Source: *MCI History* 73;

Warkentin, Helen, grad MCI in 1913; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; public school teacher for some years (Winkler in 1912; Edenthal ca. 1914-15) then missionary in India; served in India in 1929; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929; *Memories*; *Winkler: A Proud Heritage*, 202;

Warkentin, Isaac J., BA, (27 Nov 1885-1971), son of Johann and Sarah (Loewen) Warkentin, MB minister in Winkler, MCI in 1905; Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; Wesley College

B.A. in 1912; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1919; studied in Leipzig, Germany ca. 1915; Principal of MEI in Altona, in Lowe Farm in 1929; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 1987:38;

Warkentin, Jacob B., Winkler '27, Provincial Normal School (2nd class) in 1902; Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1927 and (1st class) in 1928;

Warkentin, Peter W., Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1914; grad at MCI in 1917; Winnipeg Normal School in 1923; studied a year each at University of Manitoba and Manitoba Agricultural College; taught in Reinland 1921-22; principal of Plum Coulee school 1929; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; University of Manitoba/Winnipeg BA 1936 (confirm that this is the right PW); *Reinland*:266;

Wiebe, Abraham, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; (is this the same as Abram B. Wiebe?)

Wiebe, Abraham H., BA, MA, PhD, (1 Oct 1892 Bergfeld ER-29 Aug 1979), son of Jacob and Katharina (Hiebert) Wiebe; married Ruth; graduated MCI in 1917; BA from Bluffton College in 1922, MA from Ohio State University, Ph.D. from University of Wisconsin in 1929; conducted research for US Department of Fisheries in Madison, Wisconsin; later was employed by the Tennessee Water Board, family immigrated 1875 from Bergthal; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *Pioneers and Pilgrims* 247;

Wiebe, Abram B., (30 Aug 1883 Rosenthal Russia-15 May 1941), son of Bernhard and Margaretha (Dyck) Wiebe; married Susanna Klassen in 1911; graduated from MCI in 1915; Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; taught in Amsterdam School 1929; immigrated 1902 from Chortitzza; Source: *M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Wiebe, Agatha, RN, (9 May 1887, Weidenfeld-), dau. of Peter B. & Anna (Wiebe) Wiebe and grandson of Bernhard and Cornelia Wiebe; brother to Dr. C.W. Wiebe; in 1927 married widower F.F. Thiessen and moved to BC; MCI 1906; MEI 1909-10, American RN at the German/English Evangelical Deaconess Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri 1911-1914; Canadian RN after post graduate studies in communicable diseases at King George Hospital in Winnipeg 1916; seven years as nurse in TB Sanatorium at Ninette; family immigrated 1876 from Chortitzza; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; exhibit at Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach;

Wiebe, Agnes, attended Provincial Normal School in Morden; Provincial Normal

School in Winnipeg (2nd class) in 1921; are 133 and 134 same person?

Wiebe, Dr. C.W., MD, LMCC, (18 Feb 1893-) son of Peter B. & Anna (Wiebe) Wiebe and grandson of Bernhard and Cornelia Wiebe, marr. Lena Groening of Plum Coulee, MEI Altona 1908-09, one year Wesley College, Normal - Morden School in 1913; 2nd class certificate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1918; Manitoba Medical College, Alexandria Hospital intern, post graduate studies at Toronto General Hospital; teacher in Schoenthal 1913-14; in Lost River SK 1915, in Queen Centre 1917-18; in Schoenthal 1918-20; medical doctor in Winkler 1925- 1978; member of the Manitoba legislature for Morden-Rhineland Constituency 1932-36; chairman Winkler School Board, director Bethel Hospital Society Winkler; Bergthaler Mennonite Church; family immigrated 1876 from Chortitzza; Source: *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*, 1934; see biography;

Wiebe, Frank, Provincial Normal School in Winnipeg (1st class) in 1924;

Wiebe, Katherine, Provincial Normal School in Morden (2nd class) in 1914;

Wiebe, Lizzie, Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910;

Wieler, Helene, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; married Jacob Braun, see above;

Wiens, Gertrude, Provincial Normal School in Altona in 1905; is this Mrs. Peter Braun, born 1887, whose husband Peter (1888-1964) in *Brauns of Osterwick*, 149?;

Wiens, Catharina, of Lowe Farm, married Frederick Philip Grove in 1914; (he was twice her age) Provincial Normal School in Morden in 1910; taught in Wakeham 1913 and 1913-14; taught in Winkler 1914-15; Source: *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 1987:38;

Winter, Peter, F., BA, (13 Apr 1896-), son of Cornelius (31 Mar 1871) and Maria (Friesen) (20 Oct 1879-5 Nov 1915) Winter who are in Winkler MB; (Cornelius' second wife was Katharina Quiring from Bingham Lake, MN); grad MCI 1913, Gold medalist in Mathematics at UofM; Normal - Morden School 1913; Winnipeg Normal School in 1917; grad from University of Manitoba in 1923, taught in Edenthal (Memories, 11), and Grenfell, SK 2 years; taught in Regina in 1929; post-graduate studies at University of Toronto; family immigrated 1875 from Bergthal; Sources: *M.C.I. Annual* 1927; *The M.C.I. Annual* 1929;

Wolkof, John R., Provincial Normal School in Morden (3rd class) in 1911;

Rediscovering a Tradition & Vision for Hutterite Mission¹

By Jesse Hofer

Silver Winds Hutterite community
Sperling, Manitoba

“Hutterites have not traditionally attempted to engage the outside world,” claims a recent article in *The Western Producer* magazine, a popular farmer’s weekly published in Western Canada. “They have done little to convert outsiders and strenuously resist the encroachment of the outside world on their colonies”, asserts the special feature on Hutterite economics amid the decline of the average farming family.² Geographer and author John Ryan makes a similar observation in an interview with CBC radio: “There is one interesting thing about Hutterites...they’re a fundamentalist religious group, but they are not missionaries. They really do not attempt to convert anybody to their way of life.”³

As a young member growing up in a society that was a visible religious minority, the fascination of seeing my people represented in the media was always quite pronounced. Even more curious was the emerging realization that our Biblicist Anabaptist tradition, according to popular media and scholarly sources, was neglecting a central command of Christ, namely, the Great Commission.

The idea of disengagement from the outside society is reinforced by Karl A. Peter who suggests that the original mystical element of *Gelassenheit*, alive and thriving in the founding generation of Hutterites, has today been replaced by a passive ritualization of the faith that is concerned only with maintaining the internal order.⁴ Together with other media, the sources cited above create the impression that Hutterites are not at all interested in engaging the world abroad. However, the historical record, together with an emerging Hutterite consciousness of social responsibility, challenges this insular depiction.

Hutterite missioning has a complex history that has vacillated between an active program of evangelizing and an inward, protective policy of withdrawal from society. Although Hutterites in North America have commonly been identified as a non-proselytizing Anabaptist group, this description falls far short of the historic Hutterite vision for mission and the current interest in reviving this tradition.

Hutterites were among the most active and successful missionaries during the century following the Reformation: Jakob Hutter, Peter Riedemann, Leonard Dax and

Peter Walpot were among the giants who defended the faith and produced apologetics for the faith used in various dialogues with other faith groups. Under the leadership of Andreas Ehrenpreis one hundred years after its genesis, a renewal of the Hutterian brotherhood coincided with a strong emphasis on gathering seeking souls into the church. Hutterite mission journeys were sponsored to connect with relatives in former homelands during the Russian era and again in the early North American years following immigration.

In North America, Hutterites have experienced unprecedented prosperity and internal growth but also a decline in non-ethnic membership. The focus of any external mission program has taken a back seat in favour of an inward-looking mentality that rewards and honours sacrifice and diligence for communal work as a ritualistic means to salvation.⁵ The relationship with the Society of Brothers is an important influence on the Hutterite awareness of issues beyond the borders of their *Gemeinden*. Finally, the establishment of Palmgrove Community in Nigeria is a chapter in process in the Hutterite tradition of active missionizing. Although the mission effort in North America has been neglected over the past number of generations, there are hopeful signs that it might yet make a comeback to a vibrant, dynamic movement documented during the founding era and the Golden Years.

The practice of mission can be represented by various outreach efforts that range from the stereotypical missionary business of preaching and teaching, to the faithful witness of the believing church community. Further differentiated, the methods might include a) active evangelizing and preaching the Word to unbelievers; b) gathering, creating and maintaining a socio-economic order that rejects the principal contributing factors to poverty and oppression: war, class disparities, private property, and inefficient resource use; c) witnessing God’s love and character to the culture through the faithful life and conduct of a united, loving Christian community; and d) ministering to the material needs of an oppressed population.

Historically, Hutterites have been involved in each description of mission outlined above; traditionally, they have

been very active in the second and third engagements and at present, are increasingly concerned with developing the final expression of mission. A similar distinction between internal and external mission efforts is apparently made by Jesus when he sends out his disciples on two separate occasions: the first party is specifically sent to those of the house of Israel with the instructions to go without gold, silver, satchel, shoes or staff (Matt. 10: 5-16). The expectation or assumption seems to be that they will be provided for since they are among their own. The second set of instructions outlined in Luke 22: 35-38 indicate a change in mission strategy, presumably because the disciples are now carrying the message to unfamiliar, perhaps even hostile areas. Similarly, different historical and existential forces have shaped the type of interaction Hutterites have participated in throughout their 450-year history. Certain principles of the faith further predispose Hutterites to favour some mission strategies over others.⁶

The central Scriptural text that shapes Hutterite belief and practice—the Sermon on the Mount—is pivotal for understanding Hutterite attitudes regarding almsgiving or charity, one form of mission outlined above. The traditional Hutterite teaching on Matthew 6: 1 emphasizes almsgiving as the act of helping the needy, that is, by “serving the widows and orphans as well as the sick and older people and caring for the young children by wiping and washing wherever needed or required.”⁷ Nowhere can this devotional care be exercised more faithfully and completely than by surrendering to and living in community like the believers of the early church. Believers are to do this service in a love-inspired way for God’s sake, not to get praise and reward here on earth, lest they forego their heavenly reward, for “nothing is more damaging and futile than to misuse a medicine; the best remedy becomes the worst if it is misused and so it is with almsgiving, praying and fasting.”⁸ Not only was the command of extending charity to the faithful taken seriously, an attitude and inner motivation inspired by love for God and one’s fellow man was also deemed necessary.

Historical forces further illuminate the traditional Hutterite emphases on mission. Forged in the crucible of the Reformation,

Hutterites are an Anabaptist group whose communal lifestyle has been counter-cultural from its very inception. While magisterial Protestantism envisioned a reformed Christianity along political boundaries, the office of the missioning apostle was denied.⁹ Chief among the critiques of the day levelled against the Anabaptists by the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches was the right to mission in their territory. The state churches asserted that the Hutterites and other Anabaptists did not possess the divine authority to engage in this practice.¹⁰ When early Hutterite missionary Claus Felbinger was challenged with the accusation, he responded: “We go not only into this land, but into all lands as far as our language extends. For wherever God opens a door unto us, shows us zealous hearts who diligently seek after Him, have a dislike of the ungodly life of the world and desire to do right, to all such places we aim to go...”¹¹ The web of Hutterite missionaries reached out from Moravia and spread into many areas of Europe, including Bavaria, Württemberg, Hesse, Thuringia, the Rhineland, Silesia, Prussia, Switzerland, Poland, Italy, Denmark and Sweden.

In keeping with their sectarian view of their renewed church, the Radical Reformers reverted to the outlook that every believer was a disciple, an apostle sent to convert the world, even, or especially, among the established churches who lay in error and deception.¹² In anticipation of Luther’s priesthood of believers idea, the Anabaptists conceived of a “universal lay apostolate”, a membership where the believer was “not a reformer, but a converter, not a parishioner but, reviving the original meaning of that New Testament word, a sojourner (paroikos) in the world whose true citizenship was in heaven.”¹³ The fluid character afforded to their church identity set the course for Hutterites to engage in seeking out people of like heart and spirit. Despite the charges directed against them and the persecution that persistently hounded their mission encounters, the early Hutterites pursued mission dialogues in a variety of ways. Correspondence included written communication, personal interaction and even group-evangelism secretly hosted in barns and in the open.¹⁴

The founding generation of Hutterites, crystallized from the centrifuge of intense persecution from the established churches, participated in extensive mission programs dedicated to collecting God’s people and leading them to Moravia, the promised land where tolerance was granted to various religious groups. In a sense, the very existence and growth of the early Hutterite church

owed itself to the assiduous and persistent efforts of men like Jakob Hutter and Peter Riedemann, who sought out and sent back to the church, men and women who were convicted of the Hutterite faith.

Hutterites trace their namesake to the early charismatic, capable leader, Jakob Hutter, not because he was the founder of communalism or Hutterianism, per se. Neither did Hutter provide the early church with a unified written charter for guidance after his death. This distinction was unwittingly claimed by Peter Riedemann, who penned his apologetic Confession of Faith to explain or defend the Hutterite faith to a Lutheran lord, Philip of Hesse in 1542. Hutter led the brotherhood for a mere six years, before he suffered martyrdom by being publicly burned at the stake in the courtyard below *das goldene Dach* of Ferdinand I in Innsbruck.¹⁵ Why was Hutter’s name thus immortalized?



Jakob Hutter (1500-1536), early Hutterite Servant of the Word, Vorsteher, leader and missionary. Photo: www.wikipedia.org

Jakob Hutter’s name arguably survives in the Hutterite designation because of his remarkable organizational skills, whereby he gathered and ordered early Hutterite life. Originally from the Tirol, Hutter first appears at Austerlitz, Moravia in 1529 to seek a haven for his persecuted flock. However, Hutter was not interested in simply establishing another communalist faction in Moravia to compete with the Wiedemannite, Gabrielite and Philipite groups already in existence. His short life as a Hutterite is a remarkable story of how he tirelessly

sought to first unite his Tirolean group with Wiedemann’s group at Austerlitz, and then sought union with the Philipites at Auspitz and finally, the Gabrielites at Rossitz. Consumed by his passion for a united, visible church community, Hutter made the dangerous expedition back to Tirol several times to shepherd his flock there and eventually led them to Moravia. In one epistle to the church at Moravia, Hutter offers a warning note on the nature and authority of mission:



*Peter Riedemann (d. 1556), working on his *Rechenschaft* while imprisoned in the dungeon at Marburg. An artist’s conception by Ivan Moon. Riedemann was one of the most active and successful missionaries in early Hutterite history. Photo: Leonard Gross, The Golden Years of the Hutterites.*

...But when I say more of us are needed here, I do not mean that everybody should now take it upon himself to come running without the permission and knowledge of the Servants and of the whole Church. We will not receive anyone who comes like this, and God will also punish him from Heaven. But whoever is sent by God and his Church, whoever comes in love, in the fear of God and in the truth, we will receive with joy and thankfulness, in brotherly love, as we would receive the Lord himself.¹⁶

By appointing interim leaders and serving as a trusted arbitrator at the communities in Moravia, Hutter maintained a level of integrity and order in the early congregation. Hutter envisioned and modelled the orderly, disciplined church as an effective witness to the world, a mission that could only be realized when the scattered believers were united as a single church community.

Another passionate and successful early

Hutterite missionary was Peter Riedemann. Himself one of the most active and faithful missionaries of the founding years, Peter Riedemann explained to Philip of Hesse that the early Hutterites took mission seriously. In the church, according to Riedemann, there are various offices that are necessary for the orderly teaching and service of the community and for the well being of the church. Among the servants, the apostles are considered first and are of primary importance, since God commanded that they “go throughout the country and establish the obedience of faith for his name’s sake.”¹⁷ They are to be joined in the service of teaching and baptizing by the bishops and shepherds who minister within the communities of the faithful. A fourth office, fulfilled by the elder, served the function of coordinating efforts wherever needed within the church.¹⁸ The understanding of offices serving both the local communities and the larger church in missions abroad underscores the commitment to mission in the early Hutterite church.

More can be learned about early Hutterite mission attitudes from Riedemann’s meditation on “How One Is Led to the Church.”¹⁹ In keeping with his vision of the gathered church as a pure light of grace and a witness to the truth, beamed at a world of darkness and unbelief, the gathered souls should have a similar desire to live a life of pure and holy conduct as evidence of the indwelling truth. The Spirit plays a key role in the gathering process. It is paramount that the missionary be convicted by his calling, like the disciples of Christ departing from Jerusalem after receiving the Spirit. Further, by employing both Word and sign, the gospel and the power of the Spirit, their mission would be successful. Riedemann confirms his belief that God desires all of humanity to know Him and receive his grace: “It is God’s will to call people to this covenant, and to reveal and make himself known to them through his words.”²⁰ Only when the Spirit seals the Word in our hearts, can we hope to be led into the church and experience the truth. Because of the prerequisite of the Spirit for fruitful and blessed mission, Hutterites were careful to apply a communal discerning process before sending out missionaries.

Early Hutterite mission efforts were important not only for gathering the faithful, but also for urging the church to remain a faithful witnessing community for the unbelievers’ sake. Before missionaries were sent out from the Gemeinde around Easter and again in autumn, an elaborate ceremony committed them to their calling and connected the community conduct

and witness to the missioning strategy.²¹ There was likely a palpable grimness to the ceremony, because many of the missionaries never returned.

The ceremony involved a series of exchanges between the missionary and the community, intended to impress the significance of his commission. “A New Song, Written in 1568, on the theme of ‘When the Brethren Depart for Other Lands’” was sung especially for this occasion. The original command and desire of God for mission was reinforced; it involved sharing the message of God’s saving grace extended to those who accepted his call, as well as harsh judgment on unbelief. An accounting for every deed and idle word would be exacted from every person. A prayer was offered for the missionary that he receive divine guidance in all his efforts, that the Spirit drive his interpretation of Scripture, and that his time be invested in edifying tasks. Also, an appeal was made to open the hearts of the people approached by the missionary. Next, God’s real wrath against those who failed to carry out his will to preach repentance to a sinful generation and to gather the faithful into community was emphasized. The missionary was reminded of the “pangs of misery” he could expect from an unbelieving world. He then asked for the continual prayers of the community for encouragement and protection, followed by a confession of faith emphasizing the eternal reward for faithfulness.

In addition, the community was reminded that the world and the returning seekers would only be convinced of the message the missionaries carried by a unity of words and deeds. Thus, the consistent witness of the church was an important and necessary aspect to the missioning process. The community responded with a blessing on the mission. Finally, a prayer offered by the missionaries declared complete trust in God’s will and carried the conviction that they were called through his divine Word to the task at hand.²² The life and expression of the community, therefore, was intimately connected to the evangelizing effort and provided an impetus and urgency that propelled both the missionary and the community.

The Golden Years (1565-1592) are an important era in Hutterite history for several reasons. Following periods of intense persecution in their formative years, the second-generation Hutterites now prospered economically and missionary activities took on a vigorous and urgent note.²³ Intense passion for the practice of community of goods, together with the general literacy of the brotherhood, made

this period unparalleled for generating religious tracts, hymns, sermons and other documents that remain influential and foundational even today.²⁴ The brothers who paid the heavy price of public martyrdom were a radiant witness that attracted other seeking souls.

Modern Hutterites look at the Golden Years in the promised land, Moravia, with pride and reverence, considering the era a sacred span where material prosperity, peace and internal unity was won by a faithful program of carrying the Gospel to the world and faithfully witnessing in a calamitous age.²⁵ Hutterites were among the most active and successful missionaries during this era: Claus Felbinger, Leonard Dax, Veit Uhrmacher and Peter Walpot were among the giants who defended the faith and produced apologetics for the faith used in various dialogues with other faith groups at this time.

Under Peter Walpot’s leadership (1565-1578), the Hutterite church continued the tradition of gathering searching souls of similar persuasion. Equipped with the freshly printed *Rechenschaft* of Peter Riedemann, many more missionaries were sent from Neumühl “into all dominions of the Empire” to share the message of communal Christian living in an Anabaptist sense.²⁶ The ebb and flow of missionaries demanded a degree of administrative and organizational skills that Walpot ably demonstrated: correspondence routinely brought by returning apostles were dutifully shared with the community and faithfully responded to.²⁷ Further, Walpot patiently and sensitively attended to the orphaned Gabrielites and was successful in leading many into the Hutterite church.²⁸ Peter Walpot was also strongly devoted to shepherding the task of calling and gathering the faithful from as far as the German language reached in his time.

Following the Hutterites’ expulsion from Moravia to neighbouring Slovakia and Hungary in 1622, Andreas Ehrenpreis became an important leader who emphasized mission. A key part of Andreas Ehrenpreis’ revival attempts in the middle of the 17th century centred on his understanding of mission, articulated in his important mission document, the *Sendbrief*. By the end of the sixteenth century, “the fiery missionary of the early days, who had the goal to save the soul[s] of his fellow countrymen, gradually became a professional missionary who performed his tasks very seriously but without eagerness.”²⁹ Indeed, the historical context in Hungary during the seventeenth century was almost a complete reversal of the earlier Moravian experience. Where

Moravia had been a tolerant haven for religious refugees from all extents of the empire in the sixteenth century, Hungary now lay in political unrest and religious intolerance under the Hapsburgs.³⁰ Another indication of the general upheaval was the attempt to establish a community at Mannheim, reflecting a departure from earlier ideal of geographic proximity.³¹

In addition, Hutterite mission strategy changed from an early flexible organization to an increasingly institutionalized form, and the missionaries' earlier commitment to the disciplined message of the brotherhood began to wane. Refugees from famine-ravaged areas like Württemberg, Bavaria and Zürich were encouraged to come to Moravia, where a promising future beckoned.³² Although the church officially warned against persuading people with smooth talk and an idealized image of the Hutterian church, some deviations appear. The influx of "very few useful people" coincided with the intense persecution of the Thirty Years War, making Ehrenpreis' era one of the most dismal in Hutterite history.

The main thrust of the Sendbrief was a forceful, creative apologetic for community of goods or Gütergemeinschaft, directed at various Anabaptist groups. The target audience of the booklet was primarily the Swiss Brethren, although a section explaining the Hutterite understanding of the Trinity and Christology suggests it also addressed the Polish Brethren.³³ It is estimated that through the Sendbrief, Hutterite mission activity was revived by the early 1640s.³⁴ Ehrenpreis also turned his attention to the collection and writing of Hutterite sermons and songs, thereby ensuring the successful transmission of basic theological materials to the future generations. Although it appears that Ehrenpreis revival attempts were only marginally effective, his writings would be instrumental for future revival events and reflect an important awareness that mission was necessary not only to revitalize the church, but was an integral part of the discipleship package.

Between 1690 and 1755, Hutterites gave up community of goods. In 1755, Carinthian Lutherans exiled by Maria Theresa came into contact with Hutterites at Alwinz, Transylvania. After dialoguing with the Hutterites about their teachings and beliefs, the Lutherans were persuaded that community living was a requirement for a Christian. This story imparts several important mission lessons. First, the exchange and dialogue that occurred between the old Hutterites and the Lutherans indicates a willingness to share the Hutterite story because the non-communal Hutterites

likely felt gripped by its noble details and a general uneasiness for abandoning their teachings. Viewed from another angle, Andreas Ehrenpreis' literary efforts a century earlier, apparently in vain since the Hutterite brotherhood collapsed a few short decades after his death in 1662, became significant for the revival of the Hutterite faith. The connection was re-established and new life was breathed into the Hutterite story on two separate occasions, arguably because of the preserved literature traceable to Ehrenpreis' efforts.

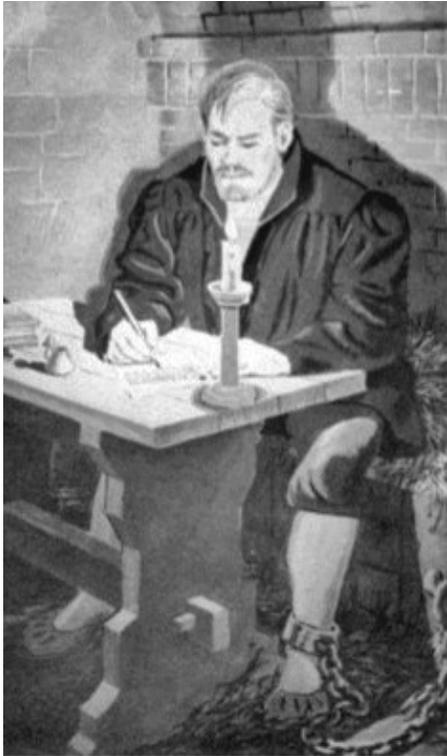
Although mostly concerned with establishing, maintaining and reviving community during the Russian era, there are some instructive stories from that period that reflect a capacity for mission. Elder Johannes Waldner, himself a capable historian and first author of *Das Kleine Geschichtsbuch*, corresponded intensively with Pietistic groups, especially with the Herrnhut Brüdergemeinde.³⁵ He was friends with an elder of the Moravian Brethren at Sarepta on the Volga, Johann Wigand, who wrote a description of the Hutterites in the Ukraine during his leadership. Waldner also wrote letters to Wigand. The correspondence indicates an active interest in and attention to faith groups of similar background.

At various points in their history, Hutterites have been forced to emigrate to escape persecution. The various relocations, often in times of war and distress, meant that some of their own were left behind, either because they were imprisoned or married to a non-Hutterite. Several missionary journeys were made to bring these members back to the fold. Between 1781 and 1784, at least five mission journeys were sent out from Vishenka, Russia to Carinthia, Sabatisch, Slovakia, Danzig and Prussia.³⁶ Michael Waldner or Schmied-Michel also travelled back to Russia from South Dakota, to try and convince more people to join the community; however, nobody accepted his invitation. Taken together, these stories demonstrate a deep concern for seeking out and inviting believers to join the community.

Another interesting and instructive mission story from this period (1784) involved a twenty-one year old man by the name of Johannes Hofer.³⁷ Apparently naturally intelligent and well read in the Bible, Johannes began neglecting his work in the smithy to study the Bible and compose songs. When the master smith complained about his negligence, Johannes began criticizing the brotherhood for being too concerned about temporal things like work and not enough about spiritual affairs, like converting people. Eventually

he even criticized elder Joseph Kuhr and spoke obstinately about the other brothers. When nobody took heed of his opinions, he decided to leave for Germany to "proclaim the Gospel of truth and establish a community".³⁸ Approaching the royal government at Breslau with a petition promising to bring people if they were granted religious freedom and a place to live, Johannes was able to obtain a letter of endorsement. He was then able to secure a suitable location with houses and a well-established farm at Gross Strehlitz. With all these arrangements in place, Johannes wrote a letter to the Hutterite community in Russia urging them to send a Servant of the Word and some brothers to start a new community. The brotherhood met to consider his request, but "they could not believe that God would use such a self-willed and self-appointed man to gather his elect."³⁹ As a result, his request was denied and little was heard from Johannes Hofer thereafter. This story indicates that the communal discerning and decision-making process was still practiced for making critical decisions concerning mission.

Hutterite interactions with the Society of Brothers communities revived the vision for renewed mission experiments in the 20th century. Although to date the two societies are not in fellowship, the influence imparted during their years of unity was significant. The union of the two groups served to connect the North American Hutterites with their historical roots and created a renewed interest in Hutterite history and its relevance for mission obligations and other implications today. As part of an address to Hutterite leaders and German school teachers at a conference in Hutterville, South Dakota, Professor Rod Janzen observed that "all Hutterites—in all three branches—have become much more spiritually and socially self-aware—in a collective and dynamic sense—as a result of the Bruderhof encounter...."⁴⁰ Janzen further highlighted the differences in terms of how Hutterites and the newer communal society interact with their respective host societies in another article; nevertheless, he argued, there has been an important exchange of influences in the mission area.⁴¹ Moreover, in *Brothers Unite*, Leonard Gross draws a parallel between the 20th century encounter to the merging of the Carinthian Lutheran and old Hutterite streams in the 17th century, a union that breathed new life into the Hutterite movement of old.⁴² Clearly, the Bruderhof encounter has challenged the Hutterite church to look beyond its borders in order to extend the radical social statement of communal living to the culture at



Eberhard Arnold (1883-1935), centre, founder of the Society of Brothers or Bruderhof communities; this group was united with the Hutterites shortly before his death. Photo: www.perefound.org.

large in creative ways.

The founder and leader of the Society of Brothers movement, Eberhard Arnold, persistently and courageously pursued unification with the North American Hutterites. Despite his ill health and absence from his young, vulnerable Rhön Bruderhof community amid the rumours of an impending war, Arnold embarked on the strenuous overseas voyage to visit the Hutterites with the intention of seeking out common ground for uniting. His diary entries reflect an optimism he felt as he visited all 29 colonies at the time. He writes that “everywhere now they are beginning to rejoice all the more in our Bruderhof, in its hospitality and sphere of influence as a Hutterian mission station.”⁴³ Concerned that the centuries separating the Hutterites from their origins would have dampened the resolve, he joyfully reported that “the call of Jesus for mission is deeply anchored in their consciences. But they doubt if the present world is ready to hear and receive it.”⁴⁴ Arnold’s diary reflects a healthy tension in the Hutterite consciousness between preserving and maintaining the distinct faith and lifestyle of the forefathers, while cautiously, hopefully reaching out to the Bruderhof community.

Also recorded in Arnold’s private reflec-

tions is a streak of disappointment in some of the practices of the Hutterites that he felt were not faithful to the gospel. Among his concerns was the question of unity between the Leut as well as a how a vision for a witness and mission were to be realized by a radical kingdom community in the 20th century.⁴⁵ Eberhard Arnold rejoiced in the fact that his official ordination as a Hutterite minister at Standoff Colony, Alberta made the Rhön “the first Bruderhof to belong at the same time to the Dariusleut, Schmie-deleut, and Lehrerleut.”⁴⁶ His intense interest and passion for a united Hutterite church that would be a salt and light to the earth is evident in his prolific works.



Palmgrove School, where over 1200 children from Palmgrove Community and the surrounding area receive their primary education. The school was built largely through donations, including several bikeathons sponsored by Providence Christian Services. Photo: Clara Wollmann.

The young Bruderhof communities were themselves a powerful witness in Germany during the Nazi era. With the Nazi ascent to power, the market for pacifist Christian books published by the Bruderhof evaporated. Bruderhof booksellers were sent to the last available option—Switzerland—with special instructions. After receiving a special blessing from the community, an act that reminds one of the ancient Hutterite custom, they were sent on the perilous trip. The price of the literature was consciously kept affordable and the books “were to be bought for their message, not for sympathy for those suffering from hunger”⁴⁷ at the Alm and Rhön Bruderhofs. Accordingly, necessary begging or “travelling in Franciscan style” was to be kept clearly separate from the book-selling. During a time when the community was being closely watched and harassed by the Nazis, the book sellers carried the dangerous brotherhood message beyond the German border in an attempt to raise not only funds, but to rouse any souls of similar heart and mind. On this point, the

early Bruderhof missionaries encountered similar dangers as early Hutterite missionaries. Perhaps the historical parallels in this respect helped to win the necessary trust from the North American Hutterites in order to make a union and cross-influence possible. Further, the Bruderhof Society was the first church to openly criticize the totalitarian Nazi regime.⁴⁸ The vital connection to the Hutterites in North America provided the necessary recourse should this bold move prove disastrous for the young movement.

Palmgrove Hutterite Community in Nigeria is an example of a significant cross-cultural project initially involving

the two communal groups. The community mission project helps to bring into focus the common misconceptions that Hutterite mission efforts do not extend beyond their immediate communities. A sizable school at Palmgrove provides an education for the community’s children, as well as for more than a thousand children from outside the community. The school project was made possible in part by fund-raising bike-athons involving Hutterite youth and older people. Inno Idiong, resident minister and leader of



Palmgrove Century bikeathon poster advertisement. Image: Peter McAdams.



Clara Wollmann Basel, from Silverwinds Colony, posing with children at Palmgrove Hutterite Community in Nigeria. Photo: Clara Wollmann.



Members of Silverwinds Colony shucking corn before they are canned and prepared for winter storage. Viele Arbeiter machen die Arbeit leicht. (Many workers make the work easier.) Photo: Stefan Kuhn.



The Prairie Praise choir composed of youth from ten Hutterite colonies across Southeastern Manitoba. Photo: Tirzah Maendel.

Palmgrove, is currently serving as chairman in the municipal government of Utu Abak in an attempt to reverse the corruption that plagues local politics and leaves the area's infrastructure in poor condition. His absences at Palmgrove for extended periods of time make it necessary to have outside help to teach and support the people. Usually, a married couple and several young baptized single men and/or ladies serve at Palmgrove for times ranging from several months to several years. Reverend Paul Wollmann, minister at Silverwinds Colony, was assaulted and shot by a group of bandits during one of his stays as supporting minister. Since his convalescence and return home, Paul Vetter* and his wife, Clara Basel*, have returned to teach, train and witness to the African people at Palmgrove.⁴⁹ The remarkable resolve and courageous witness is both an inspiration and a challenge to the next generation to "step into the waters and wade down a little bit deeper". The incident is a reminder that the Great Commission is not easy; it comes with a price. Yet it remains a command of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Moreover, Reverend Edward Kleinsasser from Crystal Springs Colony has spent considerable time and effort in Nigeria and Liberia on mission trips; in fact, at the time of this writing, he and his wife were spending a couple of months at Palmgrove Community, Nigeria. In an effort to ignite interest and awareness for current mission projects and existing needs in the field, Kleinsasser frequently presents information to Hutterite audiences about the various Hutterite mission efforts, both locally and abroad. He is also very active in coordinating the collection and shipping of donated items to Palmgrove and elsewhere.

Modern expressions of mission, though less obvious, indicate a growing concern and awareness in this area. The recent interest in choral singing is one example. Many colonies sing for neighbours and at senior's homes and hospitals in their local communities; Christmas carolling in local towns is also becoming a common outreach method. Decker Colony has an annual neighbours' evening around Christmas time where they invite their neighbours and treat them to an evening of song, socializing and snacks. Other colonies have produced semi-professional recordings as a means of sharing this gift with the larger community. My own community choir is planning a similar project for the upcoming months; an extended effort and time investment is required from the youth to practice, record and finally share the selection of songs with

the community and the world.

Hutterite teacher and choir director Butch G. Wipf has composed over 200 choral songs, many of which speak strongly to the mission theme.⁵⁰ He also directs the Western Manitoba Hutterite Youth Choir, a mass choir of 150 youth members. Among their reasons for singing, the choir cites “outreach/mission work” and “building community on a larger scale” as central to their existence.⁵¹ A similar mass choir composed of Hutterite youth from Central and Eastern Manitoba, called the Prairie Praise choir, shares the vision for community building by “encourag[ing] our members to participate in their own communities and the larger Canadian community by performance”.⁵² Both choirs value and reinforce community, and pursue outreach efforts to the larger Canadian community either via recordings or live performances. A senior Hutterite minister has called such experiments “a silent mission”⁵³. They reflect a mobilized effort to share a small part of the blessings of the Christian communal life experience with the larger society.

On the Internet front, Hutterites maintain a website to answer inquiries from outsiders and to clarify misconceptions about their unique way of life. Since 1996, www.hutterites.org has seen over a million page views and interest keeps increasing, according to webmaster Mark Waldner.⁵⁴ The site has recently added a Hutterite history feature designed by Decker high school students. Hutterite CD recordings and compositions by Butch G. Wipf are for sale at the site’s online store. Wipf says that “it is evident and clear that God is using the recordings for this purpose. The many encouraging and positive comments via emails and letters assure us about that.”⁵⁵ He also believes that his “vision and dream for more outreach is shared by many, many Hutterites”.

An additional window into the current Hutterite interest in missions abroad is provided by a blog detailing daily life at Palmgrove Community, Nigeria that is linked to the site.⁵⁶ The blog reports the successes and challenges faced by the Hutterite missionaries as well as interesting features on the Nigerian culture. Discussions are in progress to organize and moderate

a special forum at hutterites.org where a group of member-Hutterites respond as a team to seekers posting questions on the website.⁵⁷

At least two emerging communal experiments outside the Hutterite heartland of central North America have drawn inspiration from Hutterite history and sources via the Internet. One such group is Pilgrim Community Ventures,⁵⁸ founded in September 1993 in Apple Hill, Ontario. A founding leader within their community

with some of them [Hutterites]”, indicating that future contact and cross-influence is likely to occur. In this fashion, electronic media have made it easier than ever before to interact with seekers and other faith traditions abroad while remaining active in supporting the local community.

A new interest in publishing has coincided with increased attention on higher education and historical self-awareness. The Hutterian Brethren Book Centre⁶¹ operated by Baker Colony is a non-profit service aimed at providing educational resources to Hutterite educators as well as retailing Hutterite literature to the general public. Currently, the book centre is facilitating a French translation of Ehrenpreis’ *Brotherly Community the Neve family (Communauté Fraternelle: La plus grande exigence de l’amour)*⁶² As a further effort to develop understanding between Hutterites and other people, a scholarly journal is in the planning stages and has been registered as a domain name at <http://www.hutteritejournal.com>. Increased self-representation in print and other forms will hopefully open doors for people considering this lifestyle and aid the media in more accurate reporting.

Many Hutterite colonies have also provided financial and volunteer support for various relief efforts outside the church. For example, many colonies support local food banks and soup kitchens. On a larger scale, Starland Charities is a mission project coordinated by Joel Decker at Starland Colony near Gibbon, Minnesota that partners with reputable local mission organizations. The program collects resources donated by local merchants, repackages them to suit their destination, and distributes the supplies to the appropriate partner charities. Ben Kubassek’s Habitat for Humanity construction projects are another mission that Hutterite businesses have significantly supported both by donating building materials like trusses or sheet metal or by volunteering several weeks of service to build dwellings and small business operations for destitute families in Romania. Baker Colony at MacGregor supports an orphanage mission in Haiti. Women from several colonies volunteer their time to make quilts for Mennonite



Ben Maendel Vetter, minister at Baker Colony, handing out treats to Haitian orphans. Photo: Baker Hutterite Community.



Ladies from Cascade and Baker posing with bundles of cloth destined to be made into blankets for MCC. Photo: Baker Hutterite Community.

writes that they have “studied the Hutterite faith ... and found many Biblical truths in your writings,”⁵⁹ especially the principle of separation from the world. The second group, composed of eighteen members, is located in France. According to Elizabeth Neve, community member and director of Microtec Informatique, the group has found Hutterite information on the Internet useful when considering practical questions of establishing Christian community in France.⁶⁰ She writes that “we continue to correspond



Several adult Hutterite men from Acadia Colony, working with Christian Aid Ministries at the reconstruction effort in Indonesia following the tsunami tragedy. Photo: Lowell Hofer.

Central Committee (MCC) relief efforts in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Following the tsunami in Indonesia in 2004, the Hutterite church officially requested donations from its member-colonies to support MCC's relief efforts in the devastated regions. For two weeks in March of 2007, three young men from Acadia colony near Carberry were sent to Indonesia through Christian Aid Ministries to help with the reconstruction effort.⁶³ Evidently, Hutterites are playing important roles in various material relief efforts.

The dynamic nature of Hutterite mission both in the past and at the present, together with rapid changes in global issues like environmental degradation, power distribution, technology applications and economic instability make it difficult to project a mission form into the 21st century, but one thing is clear: Hutterites have not abandoned the traditional vision for mission. The rich, varied tradition of dialoguing with other faith groups; of dynamic, radical kingdom-building within the church; of seeking and gathering and preaching the gospel; and of ministering materially to the underprivileged is a clear challenge to the church today. The fact that the media perceives Hutterites as a non-proselytizing religious society concerned only with its internal affairs is unfortunate. The stereotype provides a clue to the degree to which Hutterites have deviated from their historic desire to live lives modelled after the Sermon on the Mount, which commands Christians to be a light and salt to the world. Nonetheless, the existence of the Hutterite society itself continues to be an important witness to the host society, but more needs to be done to share this radical statement with the world. The Hutterite church has a lot to offer to today's violent,

thirsty, hungry, power-polarized, hurting world. If the church desires to be faithful to its calling as a living witness of God's love and redemption through Christ it will continue to develop a capacity, eagerness and creativity for the mission effort in its various expressions until He returns.

Endnotes

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- 43 *Ibid.*, 149.
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- 48 *Ibid.*, 177-178.
- 49 Report by Mrs. Clara Wollmann; also, official report completed by Nigeria Police Force, March 21, 2005. Vetter is a term of respect applied to senior Hutterite brothers and uncles; Basel is the female version of the term applied to sisters and aunts.
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Biographies

Peter A. Elias (1843–1925)

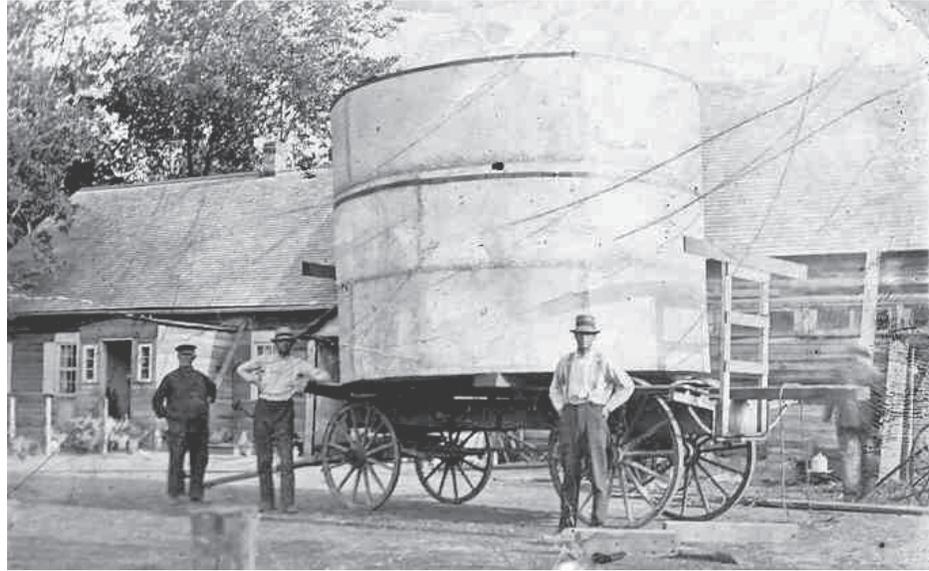
Rosengart and Blumengart, Chortitza Colony; and Michaelsburg, Fuerstenland Colony, Russia;
Gruenfeld, Blumenfeld and Hochfeld, Manitoba

By Adolf Ens

Ever since sociologist E.K. Francis (*In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba*, 1955) and church historian Henry J. Gerbrandt (*Adventure in Faith: The Bergthaler Church of Manitoba*, 1970) quoted Peter Elias in their books on the social, economic and religious history of Mennonites in Manitoba, readers have been intrigued. Who was this Peter Elias and what did he write?

Peter and Katharina (Martens) Elias came to Manitoba in 1875 with the first shiplod of Mennonite immigrants from the “old colony” of Chortitza and some of its more recent daughter colonies. Earlier arrivals from Bergthal Colony and from the Kleine Gemeinde in Molotschna colony had settled on the East Reserve (Niverville to Steinbach area) and at Scratching River (near Morris).

Elias was born in 1843 to a working class family. His father worked in the Abraham Niebuhr windmills in the villages of Rosengart and Blumengart in the Chortitza Colony. Here he attended the village school, fortunate to have as teacher Isaak Bergen, who taught in Rosengart for 22 years and from whom, Elias writes, he learned many “good things.” No doubt it was in the village school where Elias began to gain his far-ranging knowledge of the Bible. The story of the prophet Elijah being taken



P.A. Elias on his yard in Hochfeld. He is the darkly dressed man on the left. Photo Credit: Henry Unger

into heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2) impressed him when as a young lad he had to stoke the brick oven to heat the “baking house” at the Niebuhr windmill where the family lived. He often prayed that he too might experience that kind of closeness to God. But as he grew older, he confesses, his youthful piety dimmed.

In 1865 Elias moved to the village of Michaelsburg, Fuerstenland Colony,

founded on rented land the year before. The following year he married Katharina Martens. By the time they emigrated to Canada the first four of their eleven children were already born. While the attraction of being able to own land in Canada was undoubtedly a factor for farmers renting in Fuerstenland, Elias understood and supported the religious conviction that non-resistant Christians could not accept the universal service laws introduced by Russia.

In Manitoba, the family lived for a few years in Gruenfeld-Blumenfeld area where Elias farmed and opened a blacksmith shop. In 1891, after five years of living together with brother-in-law Abraham Giesbrecht on their farm that was outside of any village, the Eliases moved to Hochfeld. In spring of 1918 they sold their farm and retired. Two of their children died later that year, Jacob (37) and Elizabeth (29), both unmarried (in the Spanish flu pandemic?).

Elias was obviously always interested in current events and history. He seems to have access to many historic documents, copied by him and carefully preserved. He also kept notes on many events.

The bulk of Elias’s writings, which Francis and Gerbrandt referred to as diaries, were more like memoirs. Most appear to

The Family of Peter A Elias (1843-1925) and Katarina Martens (1846-1929)

1. Aganetha (1867-1941) married Franz Guenther (1868-1939)
2. Johann (1869-1946) married Anna Friesen (1867-1916)
3. Peter (1872-1955) married Maria Fehr (1878-1939)
4. Maria (1874-1950) married Johann Friesen (1864-1925)
-married Daniel Penner (1872-1926)
- married Jacob Peters (1875-1953)
- 5 Katharina (1876-1966) married Herman Neufeld (1871-1903)
- married Heinrich Unger (1863-1948)
- 6 Helena (1878-1941) married Johann Wiebe (1878-1963)
- 7 Jacob (1881-1918)
- 8 Abram (1883-1964) married Anna Froese (1886-1959)
- 9 Agatha (1885-1937) married Peter Klassen (1885-1905)
- 10 Elisabeth (1889-1918)
- 11 Heinrich (1891-1930) married Maria Kroeker (1892-1983)

have been written after his retirement. One grandson thought that Elias had written one memoir for each of his surviving children. Descendants have all or portions of at least three or four longer documents.

Unlike many other diaries and memoirs of the time, which recount family history and domestic events, Elias focuses almost entirely on issues in church and society in the Mennonite community. The sample below may strike the reader as being very critical of the leaders, but the emphasis on living the Gospel faithfully is the goal toward which Elias strives.

Sources

A few portions of Peter Elias writings have been published.

A brief autobiographical sketch is found in English translation by Bernie Elias in Mary Zacharias, *Elias Heritage 1766–1989* (Winnipeg: by the author, 1990), 19–21. This book also contains a very extensive genealogy of Peter Elias descendants and a few ancestors.

A more extensive account of the reasons for the emigration and an autobiographical account of the actual voyage and the pioneer years of settlement in Manitoba was first published in a series of installments

in *Mennonitische Rundschau* in January, February and April, 1926. That was republished in English translation by Jake Wiens in Adolf Ens, Jacob E. Peters and Otto Hamm, eds. *Church, Family and Village: Essays on Mennonite Life on the West Reserve* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2001), 41–52.

The excerpt below is translated from the memoir preserved by Elias' daughter Katharina and her second husband, Heinrich Unger. A copy of it is found in the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, volume 1079.

Beginnings of Mennonite Settlement on the West Reserve 1875–1888

Tension between Bergthal and Old Colony Settlers

By Peter A. Elias. Translated by Adolf Ens

An excerpt from his unpublished memoir entitled “An Account Beginning in 1871 Concerning the Immigration from Russia and Developments in Canada.”

Introduction

Readers should know that this only a partial account, because to narrate everything that transpired would fill a large book. Hence, this writing shall serve as a small mirror to remind posterity how Christendom has continued to deteriorate. Once it falls asleep and begins to value human ordinances and rules above God's things begin to go downhill in my opinion, sometimes more, at other times less, but never does it return, as the reader will discover.

Internal decay in Russia

My story begins in Russia where we lived until 1873. We still had freedom to practice our religion in peace, following apostolic principles. However, in practice we had already for some considerable time gone over to the world in many aspects. Schools could hardly be advanced enough; teachers educated in the old manner were gradually replaced with more highly trained ones. And so it came about that the younger generation ruled over the older; ostentatious dress took over, and extravagant living gained the upper hand. Everything was dealt with according to the law. Offenders received corporal punishment at the Gebietsamt (civic government of the Mennonite colony) while spiritual discipline through excommunication soon

fell into disuse.

End of exemption from military service

God (der liebe Gott) finally grew tired of this manner of life of those who called themselves followers of Christ. The Government developed a new defence policy during the years 1872–1873, which was to take effect in 1874. Under this law Mennonites would also have to provide the state with soldiers. This was too hard for some, to think that they would have to place their child into the front ranks, should war occur, where it could easily be shot dead. No, that should not happen. Now it was time to remind the emperor of the conditions under which we came here from Prussia and of the reiterating those conditions under the Privilegium of 1800. These provided for full freedom of religion according to our principles. Until this time those privileges had not been a problem for most officials.

The bishop now consulted with the rest of the ministerial leadership, and a bit later the mayors (Schultzen) with their villagers, about what to do next. Eventually they decided to choose a deputation. This was speedily done. Elected were Bishop Gerhard Dyck, Rosenthal, and Minister Heinrich Epp, who was also a teacher at the Zentralschule (secondary school) in Chortitz. Accompanying this delegation at his own expense was a Mennonite by the name of Heese from Ekaterinaslav. The Molotschna Colony had also elected a deputation to send to Petersburg, namely

Bishop Leonhard Sudermann, Ministers Peter Goertz and Franz Isaak, and Colony Secretary Hermann Janzen.

This deputation left on 16 February 1871 and arrived eight days later, travelling over the vast snow fields of Russia, at the large metropolis of St. Petersburg. The next day they met with the delegates from Molotschna and agreed to work at their task together. They first drafted a petition to His Excellency, the Minister of State Domains. Through the mediation of President Ettinger¹ they were able to get an audience with the Minister the following day, February 26. After reading their brief the Minister explained that he was unable to make any promises as yet and left the chamber. A certain Baron Medem² then entered and told them that they should be satisfied with the Minister, that he intended to be their advocate.

Next they had an audience with Count Heyden, president of the commission drafting the new military service legislation. He did not promise them full exemption but suggested that if their conscience did not permit them to wield the sword, they could still provide Sanitätsdienst, that is to provide ambulance and other medical services. To this suggestion the Bishop replied that they could not do that either, that as a church they had responsibility for their youth which they would be unable to exercise if the young men served in distant military settings for years at a stretch. The entire church order would suffer under these conditions and deteriorate.

After these meetings the deputation

had several more opportunities to speak with the above officials as well as with Senators Fernegros and Hahn and with Governor General Kozebug,³ all of whom agreed that total exemption from service would not be possible. The Molotscha deputies then suggested that they should try to get an audience with the Emperor himself in order to present their petition in person. However, President Ettinger, Baron Medem, and also the pastor of the Brüder-Gemeinde⁴ whom they had consulted at the suggestion of President Ettinger, discouraged this approach. After these high officials had promised their participation and help, they would regard such an attempt to see the Emperor as an insult and as a sign of mistrust. So you see: these high officials could help us very much, but also do some damage. As a result we dropped the idea.

Compromise proposal

“Now, my beloved,” our Bishop asked: “What do we do about this? Is not the arm of the merciful Father in Heaven stretched over us in grace so that we do not have to take the sword? There is a big difference between bearing the sword and tending to the sick. God’s commandment is: You shall not kill. But note how the good Samaritan is praised for picking up the half-dead person, taking him to the inn, pouring oil and wine on his wounds and healing his bruises.⁵ This good Samaritan is compared to our Saviour Jesus Christ, who came into the world to heal, to save and to help. Thus far the letter of Ältester G. Dyck.

Dear Reader: Is it possible to compare the service of the Samaritan with the ambulance service? I say “No,” and hope that this is in agreement with all right-thinking pilgrims of Zion. Would it be appropriate for a Christian to provide Samaritan service to those whom those people mercilessly wound? By this I do not mean to say that if I incidentally came across such a wounded person I would abandon him in his pain. Oh no! But to make common cause with those who create horror with sabre and bayonet, yes even with unheard of thunder of cannons and many other even more terrible things, so that many an innocent person has to end life in great agony; and others, in their wild raging against the enemy, fall in the blink of an eye with no opportunity to think of God, only having served Satan to their end No right-thinking reader can comprehend how this could work: when all the wounded are gathered after a battle and brought to the field hospital where a

Samaritan is ready to treat the casualties so that as soon as they have recovered they can attack again. No! What we can accept is that the good Samaritan would not pass us by since we all lay wounded where no priest or Levite could help us, but Jesus as Samaritan had to come to pour oil and wine into our wounds. That is still the case today; priest and Levite pass by the wounds instead of pointing them out, as they ought to. Instead they promise people freedom and encouragement, saying that there is no danger.

So the deputies returned having achieved what is noted above. The young men had to serve in the barracks,⁶ and the people were affirmed in their belief that such service was not in conflict with their faith. But many were not convinced and could not really trust that assurance. You see, dear readers, when the shepherds no longer see the danger, how shall the ordinary lay person?

Invitation from Canada

At that moment God sent a man by the name of Wilhelm Hespeler from America, sent by the government to recruit immigrants and offer them freedom of religion. Was this not a way out for distressed souls? And the emperor graciously permitted the emigration.

Accordingly, a deputation was sent in 1873 consisting of Minister Heinrich Wiebe and Oberschulz Jacob Peters from Bergthal Colony together with another church member, Cornelius Buhr, traveling on his own expense, and from the Kleine Gemeinde in Molotschna David Klassen and Cornelius Toews. They left with heavy hearts, as one can well imagine, knowing that they would not see their loved ones for many months. I will allow one of the deputies to speak for them from America.

We are still in the dark about how things will work out. But you can believe that my heart has already often cried out for help so that I should not despair. I had never imagined that we were confronted with such a huge assignment. Please pray for us that things will work out for God’s honour. I heartily long to see you face to face again soon, but count on waiting months more. Times are too serious to conclude our task superficially, so it will take some time yet. (Thus far the quotation.)

This reveals the mood of the deputies in the far wilderness, 13,000 miles from home, including a stretch of 2,700 miles by water (ocean).

But God brought them back safe and sound. Soon after their return a movement

toward emigration swept through all of Russia. However, many also opposed the idea, some defiantly, and paid next to nothing for the surplus items the emigrants had to sell.

Settling in Manitoba

The Bergthal bishop left with virtually the entire colony. From the Fuerstenland Colony (on rented land) Bishop Johann Wiebe went with a large number. In the first year of emigration in 1874, 230 persons emigrated. In 1875 another 516 left for Canada, of whom 209 landed at the Rat River to join the 230 who had come the year before. The other 307 landed at Dufferin at what was called the Pembina settlement.⁷ At the Rat River settlement 2800 bushels of barley were seeded the first year and 2300 bushels of potatoes were planted. Many thanks to God for bringing us safely to America. How many a ship founders and sinks on the ocean, and yet all of our immigrants crossed safely.

Dear Reader: we are called emigrants in a physical sense. If only we were also so in a spiritual sense! Unfortunately this has not been the case. In the beginning it seemed as though many were impressed. Harmony and peace reigned, concord and love prevailed; it seemed as if new world had been created, a new humanity. How should we evaluate this freedom of religion? However, others were not concerned about this freedom. Maybe their concern was to multiply their earthly treasures, which soon became noticeable.

It took only two years for the peace among those who called themselves ‘brothers’ began to break. It began in this way. We had settled in villages according to our custom in Russia. Soon strangers from outside of our Gemeinde (church or congregation) arrived and sought to buy land among us. Some of our brothers agreed and sold them land. The Gemeinde feared this mixing (which could in any case hardly be withstood). So the bishop called a brotherhood meeting. This consultation concluded that, since the government had given us the privilege of selecting a new reserve for ourselves where no one would hinder us from living according to our religious principles, we should accept this as our right. We feared that if we allowed this to proceed it would soon lead to a disintegration of villages. Furthermore, this could also lead to a mixing with other ethnic groups (Nationen).

To forestall this and further complications it was decided not to sell land to those outside of the Gemeinde. Anyone making such a sale would thereby render

himself brotherless and would be considered as ban worthy and could be shunned. This soon revealed who had immigrated only in order to pursue his own will. One was astonished at the amount of incivility there was in humankind. When one allowed one's nature free reign, evil began to take over rapidly. Some sold their land to outsiders despite the agreement not to do so. Others took their land out of the village plan deliberately to wreck the village, forcing everyone to settle on his own homestead. Many a poor person thereby dragged not only himself but also his fellow brother into material poverty. If that is how he deals with his brother, how will he appear in God's eyes? God's commandment says: Whatever you want people to do to you, do to them,⁸ but here they did the exact opposite. And since those who did this were no longer seen as brothers in our church, the afore-mentioned Bergthaler Gemeinde accepted them as members.

This contributed much to pull our Gemeinde apart. It seemed as if all church order was being lost and Christianity ground to dust. The saying became true: Distress teaches prayer and duress makes one heed the Word. Do not doubt that many a person soon prayed urgently to the Saviour God for help, to rescue us from this evil. Threats and admonition were ineffectual. It soon came to the point that, when someone or another needed to be admonished or to appear before the brotherhood (which occurred frequently), he would say: I am not a member of your church, for I have long since gone to the Bergthaler.

Separation from the Bergthaler

Therefore the bishop called another brotherhood meeting for 5 October 1880. After a long discussion it was decided that every member who wanted to remain with the Gemeinde and agreed to obey faithfully the promises made with their 'yes' to God and the Gemeinde at their holy baptism, should report to the bishop. Those who did not wish to do so were free to make another choice. Now the Gemeinde was divided. Some joined the Bergthaler Gemeinde and some remained outside of the church entirely.

I now want to clarify for the reader the difference between us and the Bergthaler Gemeinde. When we came to America we were still one church, but this did not last long.⁹ First, they made the break by accepting our disobedient members, who were under excommunication, as members in their church without first asking

them to be reconciled with us. That is, they united themselves with such persons who, according to God's Word, should be shunned. That is why we had to separate ourselves from the Bergthaler.

Secondly, they chose [local government according to] the law and served together with Englishmen in one office, which is not appropriate for Mennonites. Our Confession states: "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14) "and do not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Ephesians 5:11) Thus, the Bergthaler were no longer considered one with us.

Before it came to that, however, there were already those in our Gemeinde who pressed to accept legal government. When it was not agreed to, some succeeded in 1883 to arrange with the Province to introduce municipal government in our Gemeinde, for which there had to be candidates. Six volunteered as councillors and one as Reeve. Since in our Gemeinde none of the offices had coercive powers, these seven took everything under their control and governed the people according to provincial law. The instigators of this move are noted here. Jacob Giesbrecht, Reinland, took the office of Reeve.¹⁰ I will omit the councillors, but the Clerk was Wilhelm Rempel. They undertook a number of actions, culminating their opposition to the church by accusing Bishop Johann Wiebe, unsuccessfully, before the government.

Thus our Gemeinde stood in constant conflict. Always there were some on both sides who did not want the separation. Parents did not want to acknowledge that their child, or children, had broken covenant; children did not want to think this of their parents; friends or neighbours did not want to think it of each other. These did not practice shunning. Frequently, at a public meal at which persons from both groups were present, they said: "We don't practice partisanship." And to those who held back, they said: "They have no love, whereas we demonstrate love." But they failed to notice, or did not want to notice, that their own was only worldly love. This was obvious from their works: their dissolute life, the way they accepted the world's standards, their participation in everything.

When driving they always wanted to be at the front. Their buggy was to be the most distinguished, their horses decked with bells. In clothing they sought the latest styles: fur coats with the fur on the outside; the wives and girls had to be dressed

like ladies. And then they screamed about those who withdrew from this kind of behaviour that they were entrapped by party spirit, pretended to be very pious, and did not want to have fellowship with them. How will all of this end, they asked? We all have to die some time, and they want to get into heaven as well as we; so if we can't live in fellowship here, how will we do it in heaven?

With this kind of talk and other similar arguments they led many weak brothers and sisters astray. Since the Gemeinde seemed unable to find any better counsel according to God's Word, it remained under much pressure and hardship in its efforts to admonish and discipline. Up to ten at a time, and even more resigned from the Gemeinde and joined the Bergthaler, and were then excommunicated by the Gemeinde.

On a number of occasions it happened that ex-members, whether Holdeman or Bergthaler, needed a minister, they first came to one of our ministers for help. I say 'Bergthaler,' and they were members there but had left us because of disobedience and had been accepted as Bergthaler members but had been excommunicated by us. Our ministers usually declined their service except in the case of funerals, not wishing to participate beyond that in their community. If such persons were not satisfied with the service rendered, they slyly also invited a Bergthaler minister. These served willingly and propagandized roughly as follows.

See here, dear people: What kind of state are we in? Should we not be the kind of Christians who serve each other willingly and demonstrate our love? Your ministers, on the other hand, are quarrelsome, and take sides. Where they should seek the lost sheep in the wilderness, they reject it, saying: "Let it go. It is not our concern." We, on the other hand, serve you and make no distinction.

The Bergthaler ministers sought to defend this stance with several Scripture passages. Did not our Saviour eat with tax collectors and sinners¹¹ (which your ministers and their ilk do not do)? Their behaviour is a matter of some concern. Where are they going with this spirit of partisanship? In this manner and with many similar arguments they deceive the weaker brothers and sisters, succeeding in landing most of them in their net. This is common practice among them.

But what is the source of this problem? First, this class of people has not experienced a new birth. Of course, they will

have confessed it at baptism and promised to strive faithfully and obediently to follow the precepts of the Gospel. But what happened to their promise? It must have blown away with the wind. What are human promises for, if not to keep God's commandments? How shall humans excuse themselves? True, in these times there is much talk, even practice, of love, in a totally wrong manner, we have to confess to God. God commands that we shall love Him above all else. But these people choose a totally different path, namely loving after the flesh. They make it appear as if God is a God of disorder, as though He didn't know what is best for us.

How many people do the opposite of the order of God? Does such action intend to say: "God, the way in which you have ordered things is not wise. You say to the husband/the wife: 'If your wife/husband disobeys your Word, you should shun her/him.'" And you reply: "I refuse to do that." In general, nowadays, it is not appreciated when the Gemeinde has had to take its disciplining responsibility seriously, as has frequently been the case as the above account shows. Human unrighteousness began to gain the upper hand.

I will now give some specific examples.

Some people began to insist that it was not only right, but our duty to obey the government when it commands something, since all authority is ordained by God and all should be subject to it.¹² As a result the Gemeinde often had to resist this trend at that time. It frequently happened that those who had separated themselves from us, together with those who were excommunicated and had also been accepted as members by the Bergthaler, elected persons into public office on our side.¹³ Our people generally accepted this, explaining it as an obligation as indicated above.

Others transferred their fire insurance to the *Bergthaler Brandordnung*, which operated according to the law. They also served as *Brandschulzen* (fire insurance directors) among the Bergthaler even while they were still members of our Gemeinde.

At an earlier brotherhood meeting issues like this had been dealt with and it had been agreed that any one who accepted or served in an office outside of the *Gemeinde*, or took his fire insurance outside where it was regulated according to public law, could no longer remain one of us but was excommunicated. Those under the ban were no longer considered "brothers" if they did not reverse their position.

Ten years have elapsed since I wrote the above account. In the meantime the decay has doubled in spite of vigorous opposition to the transgressions from the onset of the separation.

Buggies with rooftops were considered inappropriate for our members. At first it seemed that this position was accepted. Some members, who had already bought one, sold it again. They thought that in time it would not be permitted for members to set themselves on the same plane as the world with their fine buggies. However, while the bishop suggested from the pulpit that this trend should diminish, among the elites (*höheren Stand*) it began to flourish. With that, the issue seemed finished. The bishop appeared to be tired or had lost courage to continue to resist the trend. Gradually opposition to it grew silent and the Gemeinde was flooded with "top buggies" and anyone wishing to have one could do so.

At the beginning there was also such a strong prohibition of bicycles that no one owning one was baptized. Baptized members who already owned a bicycle were not dealt with as strictly; they were not to own one, but were generally not forced to get rid of them. As a result, non-baptized persons who owned a bicycle did not get rid of it, but merely refrained from using it until after they were baptized. This led to a very uneven practice, since someone owning and using a bicycle was denied baptism. How could such a practice be maintained?

This gave rise to many things that at first were punishable and are now no longer given a second thought. At first, after the separation from the Bergthaler, it was strongly forbidden to invite anyone from outside of the Gemeinde to any public meal. Not a trace of that position has remained. Another policy introduced after the separation, one which I consider among the most important, is this: If persons came to the Gemeinde to announce that they were leaving, or if they left quietly and were discovered to have left, they were excommunicated without exception. The reason for this was that they had joined a sect; that is, they joined a Gemeinde which received as brothers those who had been excommunicated by us. This was a good reason, for they joined with people who sat at the same communion table together with those who stood under the ban with us. Accordingly, those who had communion with banned persons should be shunned as well as the banned persons.

Some left our Gemeinde to marry a

Bergthaler woman. There was no process with them; they left at their own risk. Those mentioned earlier had to be disciplined because they left a Gemeinde of God to join a sect. These, who left for marriage and as a result joined her group, were considered to take a less dangerous path. But dear Reader, where in the Gospel can one find such an exception? Since both followed the same path, neither would reach the goal. The first were designated adulterers/divorcers (*Ehebrecher*) in that they had broken their spiritual marriage to the Gemeinde. Now, if someone who breaks a physical marriage cannot remain in God's Gemeinde, how much more serious is breaking the spiritual marriage by leaving the Gemeinde? It is true that such a person must be excluded. But, just as they first break the spiritual marriage by leaving, so also those who leave to get married commit the same offence since they leave and join the same Gemeinde just like the first, where they are joined together as members of one another.

All this has to be agreed to. But in reality everything seems to be ordered according to human judgement and not in keeping with God's commandment and order (*Ordnung*). This uneven way of ordering things cannot endure. Indeed, some gladly used the opportunity of marriage, because they were eager to get out of our Gemeinde, but out of fear of the ban still delayed such a move. Otherwise they agreed more with the Bergthaler than with the Gemeinde of which they were members.

In spite of this the Bishop continued to think that everything was still being ordered according to the word of God. Only, some Gemeinden went too far over to the world. If they rightfully drew attention to many of our shortcomings, he comforted the people that the Bergthaler were not quite 'at home', and we should be very cautious around them. One of the letters which he wrote to the Bergthaler Gemeinde shows us a number of reasons why some left our Gemeinde and were excommunicated. This letter follows below to show the Reader how things stood between our Bishop and the Bergthaler, whose bishop at that time was Johann Funk.

Bishop Johann Wiebe writes to Bishop Johann Funk

Rosengard, 23 March 1888

I wish the Christian reader salvation and blessedness.

If you remain faithful to my teach-

ing, you are my true disciples.

Dear Friends, Bishop, Ministers and the dear Gemeinde. I cannot help, as God's grace enables me in my weakness, faithfully and honestly to explain to you the situation in which we find ourselves. We are divided among ourselves. What is the reason? Answer: We have to confess that we are poor sinners and our fallen flesh and blood always wants to follow the wrong path. Daily and hourly we must strive against this and earnestly desire by God's grace to live, act and walk uprightly. At the same time we do not want to wrong you or hurt you; on the contrary, as God gives us strength we would much rather do what is best for you. I firmly believe that when the hour of our departure comes and we have to appear before the judge of the whole world, all of us will wish to leave this world and be received into the blessed arms of Jesus.

Those who wish this must seek to live with Him here in this time of grace, as Paul teaches us: "I live, but not I; Christ lives in me."¹⁴ If this was the main goal of our striving as well as yours, that Christ might live in us, could we then be separated as we now are? But Christ cannot live in us unless we first die, and that is the reason why we don't understand each other any more. We humans don't want to die, or even hear of dying; that is, die to sin spiritually. For how could we live in the sins to which we have died? Understand what I say, for Paul asks: Don't you know, watchers, church members, "that all who are baptized into Jesus Christ are baptized into his death?" Only those; and he goes on to say: "So we are buried with him through baptism, so that as Christ has been awakened from the dead, through the glory of the Father, so we too shall walk in newness of life, according to Romans 6:3-4.

If we would know this in a spiritual manner and be activated by it, would it then be possible for so many of our members to separate themselves from us and cross over to your Gemeinde? Unless it should be that our Gemeinde is no longer to be seen as a Christian Gemeinde and considered such by God, and your Gemeinde is God's Gemeinde; and that these members are taught through the Holy Spirit and directed to fulfill this saying of Paul: "Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6: 17-18.

But if they have left our Gemeinde

through this good Holy Spirit, who teaches and leads people in all truth if we submit ourselves fully to him, then how can they be unwilling, when they can no longer have fellowship with our people because the Holy Spirit has asked them to leave and not touch anything unclean, or if they have allowed themselves to be led by this good Holy Spirit, is it possible that they separate themselves from our Gemeinde with such widely different attitudes?

One says that a great chasm has opened up between him and me. We invited him to appear before the brotherhood and he replied like those who rose up against Moses and Aron: "We will not come up." Read Numbers 16:12.

Another one is highly enamoured of visible, outer pomp and feasts his eyes on it; but he was not content to be satisfied with this himself. He wanted the ministers to give him liberty to indulge in this. That would make it easier for him, if they helped him to carry this load. How abominable must such a person with his unregenerate heart be before the holy God who says: "I abhor the pride," (Amos 6:8) and "I will make an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless." (Isaiah 13:11); and Peter says: "God opposes the proud." (1 Peter 5:5) So if God opposes us, then what can save us or protect us? Do you still think that all this does not present a danger?

A third one has already given free reign to the flesh; he has sung, danced, and lived a Godless life. Fearing that he would receive a good admonition for this, he left as soon as possible. Paul says: "To set the mind on the flesh is death." Yes, he says: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God;" (Romans 8:6, 7) If you live according to the flesh you must die. And John says: "He who commits sin is of the devil." (1 John 3:4, 8).

And you still think that you do no wrong in accepting such people into your Gemeinde and thereby strengthen them in their mindset? Have you done this with God (ask yourselves) or against God? "Saul, Saul," we read in Acts 9:4-5.

The fourth and fifth ones live such sinful lives, after the flesh, that they are no longer in your Gemeinde. Dear God! How sad is the state of those who claim to be followers of Christ, but in reality are not. "Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." (2 Timothy 2:19)

With the sixth one, anger has become the complete lord and master, so that reconciliation became impossible. So he left us as John teaches in 1 John 2:19, and

joined your Gemeinde. John says: "By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not do right is not of God nor he who does not love his brother. ... Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:10, ¹⁵)

The seventh and eighth and others like them, left the Gemeinde in order to take their land out of the village, and thereby tear the villages apart. This caused a great deal of hurt, with some losing their livelihood as a result. The Gemeinde did not want this and opposed it vigorously and asked those who wanted to do it nevertheless, to come before the Gemeinde to give their reasons and with a good, free conscience be accountable for their action. At that, some resigned from the Gemeinde and thereby also the spiritual marriage. Others left quietly and joined your Gemeinde.

Do you still say: There is no issue? Or are you able to have peace with God? Jesus says: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

Listen, there is much talk nowadays about love. But almost no one is there to prove and practice it. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 7:12) And Paul, the richly experienced apostle, teaches us that "love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right," etc. (1 Corinthians 13:5b-6) Thus, if you walk in the love of Christ, how can you rejoice over brothers like this and that you are growing while we are decreasing? For Christ says: Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters," (Matthew 12:30) no matter how large the group is. Christ says: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be light; but if our eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Mt. 6:22-23)

May God grant enlightened eyes so that many might see, in this difficult, confused time, what is needed to come out of their grief and misery to a right recognition of the truth and so feel and find living faith through repentance and remorse.

Ninthly, many left our Gemeinde who made flesh their arm and turned their hearts from God (Jeremiah 17:5). They called on worldly powers for help and no longer let God alone be Lord, like the children of Israel of whom it is written: "He appointed a ruler for every nation, but Israel is the Lord's own portion." (Sirach 17:17) "And he said to them, 'Beware of all unrighteousness.' And he gave commandment to each of them concerning his neighbour." (v. 14) 15 O, how this agrees with Jesus' own words in Matthew 18.

"But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; and they said, 'No! but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the heathen [RSV: nations].' And the Lord said to Samuel, 'they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.'" [1 Samuel 8: 19-20; 7] See, dear Reader, if the literal Israel had God alone as its leader without a king, how much more should the spiritual Israel follow Christ, who has gone the way before us and confirmed it with his blood. Yes, He is the Way the Truth and the Life,¹⁶ and his good Holy Spirit wants to accompany us and be our leader, if we will give him our hand. But it says in Jeremiah 5:4-5: "Then I said, 'These are only the poor, they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the Lord, the law of their God. I will go to the great, and will speak to them; for they know the way of the Lord and the law of the God.' But they all alike had broken the yoke, and they had burst the bonds."¹⁷ In chapter 2:20 it says: "I will not be overthrown like that."¹⁸

But that is the reason why so many have left our Gemeinde, for they freely say: "It is better to punish with whipping than that so many are called before the brotherhood for admonition." They say that they acknowledge God but their works deny it. Titus 1:16. In a similar manner many have departed from us, who are marked as dead in God's Word and who no longer want to live according to the pure evangelical truth which they once confessed. That way was too narrow and tight for them, for on this path they should crucify their flesh together with the passions and desires, according to Galatians 5:24. And that was far too difficult. They would rather visit the bars and get drunk and lived in a manner so abominable that even the world could hardly have exceeded it. O, the works of the flesh are obvious, according to Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 1:28-32, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

These and others, perhaps innocent

in God's eyes and still well-meaning members, have been called to ministerial elections in these circumstances, in order to choose teachers and shepherds who will teach and pasture the Gemeinde according to God's holy will. That is why I strongly fear whether they have not all together done what is wrong before God and are largely enemies of the cross according to Philippians 3:18. Not, my dear Readers, that I want to judge anyone. I well know that it is written: "Judge not, that you be not judged,"¹⁹ do not damn so that you will not be damned. Rather, they are being judged by him who said: "The word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day." John 12:48.

"Thus says the Lord God Your prophets have been like foxes among ruins, O Israel. They ["You" in RSV] have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel that it might stand in battle in the day of the Lord. ... Woe to you who sew pillows [magic bands – in RSV] upon all wrists, and make veils for the persons of every stature in the hunt for souls! Once you have captured the souls belonging to my people, you promise them life." Ezekiel 13: 3-5, 18.²⁰

I, on my part, weak and insignificant as I myself am, and continually becoming more aware of my weakness and the large depravities of my flesh, struggle with all my will against this and wish for you too, the best that God can give, both here and there. Our call is to watch and pray that we may not fall into temptation.

I have strongly resisted writing a letter to you, but since you have returned to us the debts of your members, I have been urged to write. Now I ask you before God and our Saviour Jesus Christ do what is right. If you accept members such as named above, and leave the debts with us We read in Romans 15:27: "They did it willingly and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings." And among you it was not allowed to be thus.

O my dear friends! Go into God's counsel and examine yourselves before the Lord and clean up everything in this good time of grace so that it may go well with you. That is the essential content, conclusion and intent, heart and meaning of my writing to you and yours, namely that you might see the unrighteousness of your dealings and depart from your wrongdoing with a bruised disposition as you come before the Lord and pray with

all your heart for his mercy.

May the God of all grace, the Holy Spirit of peace, and the love of Christ give you his grace so that you may read it with unbiased heart and that what you have read may bring forth fruit from you.

Written by me, Johann Wiebe, the lover of your souls, after truth.

(Copied 17 July 1888. Peter Elias)

Footnotes

1 Privy Councillor Ettinger was president of the Supervisory Commission (Fürsorgekomitee). P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 587.

2 Baron Medem, a high official in the Ministry of Crown Lands, was a former president of the Supervisory Commission (Fürsorgekomitee). P.M. Friesen, 587.

3 Kozebue was Governor-General of New Russia. P.M. Friesen, 593. Privy Councillor Hahn was frequently sought out by Mennonites in their negotiations with the government. *Ibid.*, 248, 253, 257, 363, 364-366, 369.

4 Two letters from Pastor Theodor Hans of the Evangelical (Moravian) Brethren congregation in Petersburg, relating to the military service and emigration issue are found in P.M. Friesen, 598-602 See also 588.

5 See Luke 10:29-37.

6 Alternative service workers in the forestry stations were housed in barracks.

7 Actual Mennonite immigrant arrivals were 1,543 in 1874 and 3,21 In 1875. Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 22. Elias probably identifies family units.

8 Matthew 7:12.

9 The Gemeinde at Bergthal Colony (founded 1836) had its own bishop (Gerhard Wiebe) and ministers, and was functionally an independent body. However, it was still part of the larger Chortitza Flemish Mennonite Church. The Gemeinde at Fuerstenland Colony (founded 1864) was still more closely tied to the mother church in Chortitza but had its own (assistant) bishop (Johann Wiebe) since 1870. In Manitoba the two groups aimed initially at close unity.

10 Actually the municipal council chosen in December 1883 had an English Baptist, Jarvis Mott as reeve. Giesbrecht took over in 1885.

11 Mark 2:15-16.

12 Romans 13.

13 The Reinländer had settled the western portion of the West Reserve on arrival from Russia, while ca. 1880 the Bergthal people relocated to the eastern portion from their original settlement on the East Reserve. They accepted municipal government without objection.

14 Galatians 2:20.

15 Verse numbers are according to the RSV translation. In the German translation cited by Wiebe, the verse references are 15 and 12.

16 John 14:6.

17 Elias cites this passage as Isaiah 5:5.

18 The reference is not clear. It does not appear to be either to Isaiah or Jeremiah 2:2.

19 Matthew 7:1.

20 The last sentence is translated from Luther's German version; the RSV reading is significantly different.

The Last Days of Ältester Peter R. Dueck

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Peter R. Dueck, Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde in the East Reserve, died in the early morning hours of January 7th, 1919. He was only fifty-six and his sudden death undoubtedly came as a shock to the whole Gemeinde. Isaac W. Reimer, husband of Peter's niece, was roused from his sleep and summoned to the farmhouse one mile south of Steinbach where he helped to wash the body according to the common practise of the time. Peter's wife Sara, aware that her husband was not well, had tried to talk to him during the night, but he was unresponsive, and finally at about 1:30 a.m. she realized that he had died.²

The Ältester's death was attributed to a heart attack and we must accept that diagnosis because we can be quite sure that the people of 1919, although they did not consult professional doctors about such things, knew what they were talking about. The timing of Peter's death, however, suggests that there may have been aggravating factors that contributed to his death, most notably the influenza epidemic that had been raging on the East Reserve and throughout the rest of Canada since October of 1918.

Peter himself had the flu in late November together with Sara and all nine of their children. They were so ill that neighbours had to take care of their cattle. But the whole family survived. On Dec. 4th Peter was well enough to officiate at the funeral of a widow who had died of old age and the flu. The Manitoba government had closed all the churches in November; this was the first Kleine Gemeinde funeral after the re-opening of the churches. And although the funeral was poorly attended, the Ältester was able to announce that there would be a full-fledged *Andacht* (church service) on the following Sunday, Dec. 8th. There was, and Peter preached on John 10:21-29: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish...."

But the flu deaths continued to mount throughout December and Peter accepted his duty as Ältester. He had a weak heart and he was still undoubtedly convalescing from the flu, but in the month before his death, he conducted at least two more funerals, one of them for nineteen year old Maria Unger. He also had a busy

Christmas season, preaching two sermons in Blumenort and convening and leading a meeting of church leaders in Gruenfeld (Kleefeld) on Dec. 27th. This meeting seems to have been a distillation of all the problems facing the Kleine Gemeinde at a time of rapid cultural change and at a time of war. A telling item on the agenda was a decision to resist the new trend in singing that was coming in, judging it to be too light-hearted. There is a sense of deep sorrow in Peter Dueck's diary, which is especially obvious when it comes to the annual summing up for 1918. The list of deaths ends with that of three children who succumbed to the flu: Peter Barkman's Klaas, Jacob Reimer's Ruben and John Koop's little unnamed son.

There can be little doubt that Peter Dueck's refusal to spare himself at a time of crisis in his church contributed to his early death. In a letter written to his brother Bernhard shortly after Bernhard's ordination in 1914, Peter confides that at the time of his election as Ältester (July 17, 1901) he was so troubled and terrified that he could still feel the effects of that overexertion more than ten years later. He had been, at 38, fifteen years younger than any of the ministers under his authority! Peter's son Jacob, one of the younger members of his family, recalls sometimes seeing his father pause in the course of farm work and become lost in thought, gazing into the distance. He was man with a lot on his plate.

At a time of crisis, such as the onset of an influenza epidemic, which may result in the sudden death of family members including young children, ministers can be expected to bear a lot of stress. In the case of Peter Dueck such stress may have led to his untimely death. His unflinching care for infected families and his involvement at their funerals may have exposed his own family to the virus. His strong faith in the God who gives eternal life gave him the courage to do his duty.

But should the Church have expected so much from one man? This is the sort of question that we are asking in the course of a research project funded by the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation. We want to find out how the Mennonite churches of Southern Manitoba were af-

fectured by the 1918 pandemic. Perhaps there are some things we can learn from their experience, which would help in the event of another pandemic. We are also still trying to find more information on the Hochfeld epidemic memorial stone.³ If you have diaries with pandemic references or other oral or written stories, we would like to hear from you. We can be reached at grklassen@gmail.com.

Footnotes

¹ We wish to thank David K. Schellenberg for invaluable help and especially for directing us to the diaries of I.W. Reimer. We also thank Loren Koehler for help in the EMC Archives and Jack Klassen for help in reading Gothic script. The idea for this story came from Henry Dueck, grandson of Peter R. Dueck.

² The funeral for Peter R. Dueck, which, according to the *Steinbach Post* was the largest ever seen in Steinbach, was held on Jan. 11, but he was not buried at the time because his brother Bernhard R. Dueck, a minister in Rosenhof, was sick with the flu and unable to come to Steinbach for the funeral. So the burial took place on Jan. 21st with Bernhard conducting the service. (Peter R. Dueck diaries, EMC Archives, Steinbach, Manitoba)

³ *Manitoba Cooperator*, Vol 65 No. 25 (June 21, 2007), p. 1.

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Glimpses into the Life of a Farm Woman during the War Years

From the daybook of Maria Voth

Maria Voth was the wife of Jacob Voth, who lived in Silberfeld, near Altona, in the earlier years of the twentieth century. She was the grandmother to Mary, Mrs. Benno Loewen, who has the diaries in her keeping and has written this introduction.

Maria (Krueger) Voth was born in Rosenthal, Russia in 1883. Her mother Maria was born Toews and died in 1889 while giving birth. The baby died. My grandmother Maria was six years old at the time. Her father Jacob Krueger remarried in 1891 to Maria Hamm. They came to Canada in late December of 1899. Grandmother was 16 years old.

They moved to Neubergthal because Mrs. Krueger had family there. My grandmother worked as a maid for David Schellenbergs, Peter Friesens and Jacob Kroekers. She married grandfather Jacob Voth in 1903. They farmed on N.W. 21-1-1 for 50 years.

The family had membership in the Sommerfelder church with a church being located right in their community.

Gretna and Altona both served as the larger centres where they did their shopping. Neubergthal also played an important role in



Maria and Jacob Voth

their lives, being the larger village nearest them. Sommerfeld was the village a little farther away to the southeast, which served as the home base for the mother church of the Sommerfelder conference.

She was a great helpmeet to my grandfather for 67 years. She kept a journal for many years. We are missing a few. She also kept a financial book for many years. Besides the diaries, I also have that in my possession.

Jack Klassen translated the journals for me which has made her come alive again for those who cannot read the old Gothic writing. She was an inspiration for me in my childhood, and now with the English translation again. May this translation be a blessing to this generation again.

The translator has picked a cross-section of entries from the diary in order to give the reader a glimpse into the life of a Mennonite farm woman of that post-pioneer era.

Below are some entries from Maria Voth's diaries chosen to show various aspects of her daily activities. For the first years of 1936 and 1937 entries have been chosen which reflect what the woman's experiences were throughout the year. Subsequent diary entries are more topic specific.

- Mary (Martens) Loewen

1936

January. Today is New Year's Day the 1st of January, 1936

A cloudy day and 15 below. We had gone to church. Minister William Falk gave us a nice New Year's sermon. The children were

in church also and came over for lunch and to visit. Jakob and Maria came over in the evening too. Yes, with God's help we have again seen the New Year in. What will it bring us? Or how will we fare in this year? The future lies dark before us. But we don't want to be without hope for the Saviour and Shepherd who so graciously helped us through the old year and protected us, will again be our helper, comforter and protector in the New Year and will ultimately lead us by the narrow way into the heavenly home and into eternity.

January 11

It was 21 below in the morning and windy. Today is Saturday. A cloudy day. Again it looks like snow coming. Tomorrow there will be church here again. Now the week has come to an end again. The time passes so quickly and we humans along with it.

A poem: How can I sleep peacefully in dark and gloomy night,

If my thoughts, God and Father, don't dwell on you,

For the day's doings brought confusion to my heart,

Only in your presence is peace and blessedness.

January 20

It is 35 below. Clear and no wind. Our father took cream to Altona in the forenoon. We are cooking borscht today for father's birthday. I made butter today. The girls baked a cake. Today is Mrs. P. Voth's birthday as well. This Monday King George of England died of bronchial cathar and a weak heart.

January 21

It is 34 below. It is clear and still. Today is father's 61st birthday. The children were here, and John Kruegers. In the afternoon it became windy from the northwest and began to storm. By the time they wanted to go home it was storming really bad. I was most concerned about Susie and John with the children, but did they reach home safely? Yes they did, and they hadn't even been cold.

January 31

The last day of the month. It is 23 below



Maria Voth and Granddaughter Mary Loewen

with a northwest wind. It began storming in the afternoon. We had gone to Jakob Krueger's for a birthday. There were many guests. It was very cold going against wind. Yes, another month has gone from our life. Time passes, but whoever does God's will endures into Eternity.

February 7

It is 34 below. Quite clear in the morning but it became cloudy and windy toward evening. We made chicken noodle soup for lunch. After lunch we had C. Voths as guests. They live in Gnadenfeld. Towards evening our black cow gave birth.

February 12

It is 35 below and quite clear. It is very cold. Just when we wanted to go to Grandmother's place the children came to visit. I gave Sara the little sweater which I had knitted for her. It fits her well.

February 29

It is 18 below today. The wind is from the southeast. After lunch it stormed again. This morning the other black cow gave birth. She had a big calf. I and father went to Gretna and I went to visit John Toews. It is Saturday and again it is storming. This is the last day of the month. We have again put away 2 months in this new year, and the Lord has again helped us until now. We don't want to forget to thank him for all the good things he has done for us.

March 2

It is again 8 below. Very cloudy in the morning but nice. We went to visit C. Voths in Neuhoffnung this morning. Jakob has now completely finished his kitchen cabinet. The girls thawed snow today because we want to wash tomorrow.

March 8

Today it is 5 below. It is Sunday today. Our people all went to church. Only I was home alone. I had my devotions at home in the Testament and songbook (Gesangbuch). Reverend Zacharias was in church. After lunch we went to visit G. Wolfes. Today was a very nice Sunday.

March 10

It is 2 below today. I darned today and fixed various items for the summer. I've got aching in my right hand again, also in the right foot and knee. Hopefully it will soon be better. We popped corn today and made cornballs. We all like them very much.

March 16

It is 6 below today. There is a north wind

and overcast. Father took cream to Altona today. Today we are combing the wool for Maria's under blanket and want to make it new.

March 19

Today is a wonderfully nice spring day. It was 7 below this morning. No wind and clear. The sun is shining so warmly. For the first time this winter Father and Jakob are bringing hay into the haymow. The snow drifts are very high. Today we are making the underblanket. Now I think it will soon be spring. Father went to Gretna in the afternoon.

April 2

It is 15 below today. It is overcast again but no wind. Father and Maria went to Altona with cream. Today is my 53rd birthday. The children were here for a visit. The Lord be thanked for his love, his kindness and mercy which he has shown me. From my youth on he has protected me and has helped me in my trouble. The Lord shall always stay with me.

Verse: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

April 10

It is 2 above, overcast and is melting a lot. It is Good Friday. Today we all went to Gnadenfeld with the big sleigh for the Easter program. The driving was very bad because it was melting so fast. It was 8 above. The Easter program was good. The children learned so many nice verses and sang many nice songs. The choir also sang many nice songs. I always really enjoy listening to all that, the Lord be praised for this.

April 11

Today is Saturday and Holy Eve. A very nice day. It is really melting fast. Today the water came up to the dam, and also ran over it. Today ours dug open the bridge so the water could get through. I made butter today and then we got everything ready for the Easter festivities.

May 2

It is Saturday and a very nice day today. The girls are cleaning up all the leaves in the yard left from the trees in Autumn which we didn't have time to do then because it got cold too soon. We set the first biddies (clucks) today.

May 4

It is a cold, windy day. We had gone to Altona and bought paint to paint the kitchen.

We had 20 dozen eggs with us which are still 14c. When we came home we had visitors, sister Katherina, the Mrs. John Heinrichs, and her Maria, the Mrs. P. Hiebert, coming from the East Reserve. They visited here with siblings and friends. Yes, we talked about a lot of things. In the evening we went to Martens. Susie and John were just taking their chicks out of the brooder. There were around 200 and all white. I had brought Susie the stockings which I had knitted for Sara. We also bought a bushel of potatoes for seeding. My rheumatism is worse again in my leg and hand. I guess it must be the cold weather.

May 8

We are working hard with our strawberries. They were much too close together. The girls and Jakob's Maria hoed everything in the garden, and I cooked soap again. Now we have made 9 1/2 boxes of lye soap. We also have 40 lbs. of beef tallow which makes very nice white soap.

May 26

It was a nice day. Jakob is starting to plow the summerfallow today and father is seeding corn. It amounted to 3 acres. The girls mangled and ironed everything and Maria baked cookies.

May 30

It is very hot again. We are very busy today. We're cooking and baking for the holidays. Today people came from the East Reserve and brought fresh cheese. Father bought some for 17 cents a pound. Father is installing the screen door for the kitchen. Today is Holy Eve for Pentecost. If we would only get a good rain. The grass in the cow pasture is getting sparse and dry.

June 3

It is a cool day. Today we are washing sheep's wool. Both Marias are planting their shoots and flowers near the kitchen. Jakob Guenters of Stuartburn came for lunch. They brought half a cord of poplar wood and traded oats for it. I also gave them a bag of chicken feed. After 'Faspa' they went to their parents the David Schellenbergs at Neuanlage.

June 6

This morning (Saturday) it was quite foggy and overcast. Father went to Gretna this afternoon and Sara went along and got some candy. Maria set the last of the biddies. Altogether we set 23 clucks and Jakob's Maria has one sitting on duck eggs.

June 8

It is a cool overcast changeable day. Maria sewed in the morning. After lunch we did a lot of planting. Cabbage, tomatoes and onions. A lot of stuff hasn't come up yet in the garden and the worm has taken a lot. We have reseeded lettuce and radishes. Father and Jakob are making window screens.

June 24

Today we are washing. The first time this year with well water. The rain water disappears when it doesn't rain. It is very dry. We need pasture. The cows would give a lot more milk if they had good grass. Everything is quite small in the garden but the Lord has determined it thus for us so we want to adjust to it. The Lord has always taken care of us so far and will look after us in the future.

June 30

It is a nice day and Jakob's birthday. He is now 23 years old. Father was mowing grass in the pasture all day. I and Maria are laying a brick floor in the old kitchen. It is not supposed to be so dusty anymore when we cook in there. Canning will soon start now because the blueberries are already ripe. The month is now in the past. How the time passes so swiftly and we humans also! Eternity is coming fast and furiously. Oh, may we be ready when it comes time to bid farewell to this world. May the Lord be merciful to us poor sinners and finally grant us his eternal salvation by his grace. Mr. Wilhelm Friesen was completely crippled. He could not move a limb and had to lie for 19 difficult days. Now he is at home in his final resting place.

July 5

Today is Sunday. We were at church. Elder P. Toews had a good sermon for us. After lunch we went visiting to John Kruegers. P. Voths were there too. In the evening we went to grandmother's place. Then I let the bees sting my hand because of my arthritis. Now the hand is very swollen. Today it is very hot. It is 27 above with a southeast wind. The wind is as hot as though it's coming out of an oven. It is so oppressively hot.

July 28

A cool day today. It is very busy with the grain harvest. I and Maria are taking care of everything at home. We baked bread and burnt 'Pripps'. (A form of roasted grain beverage).

Aug. 26

It is overcast again. Today for the first time this year we slaughtered young chickens for roasting. They tasted very good.

The girls brought in the manure today. It was all dry.

Sept. 5

Today is Saturday. It is very hot and muggy. The girls are looking after the chores. I'm moving everything out of the chicken barn and am watering everything down with the watering can. Jakob is splitting wood. We went to Gretna after lunch. Stopped for a bit at J. Toews and then it began raining hard. Ours also went to the new store owned by a Jew. He has put on a big sale. Going home was no fun. It hadn't rained much at our place. After we had eaten Fasma it rained hard again so that the current was strong as the water surged to the creek. It rained long. Our cistern filled completely and the barrel too. There was water standing in the creek. It rained 1 1/4 inches. Nice rain, God's blessing. The water had been getting really low in the wells.

Sept. 10

It is a nice autumn day. Today ours went to Winnipeg and only I stayed home alone, although I was not really alone, the Lord Jesus is always with me. At 9 o'clock John brought Susie with the children, then I had companionship. In the morning it was wet for driving because it rained a bit at night. They left at 6 o'clock in the morning and were back at 9:30. I and Susie had the roast chicken ready and then we ate immediately. The girls had all gotten winter overcoats at 15 dollars a piece. Maria got a blue one, and Susie and Tina got brown ones. They were all quite pleased.

Sept. 17

It is a very nice day. The girls are taking care of the wash. Father and Jakob are cutting corn with the horse binder, and I'm beginning to work among the strawberries today because a lot of it is root bound. I'm loosening it up and uprooting the weeds. After lunch we had visitors. C. Voth's bridal couple Justina and B. Bergen. Mrs. J. Heinrichs came here too with the girls. Maria is supposed to sew school clothes.

Sept. 22

It is up to 20 above today. We are hoeing in the garden. We had 'Sommaborscht' for lunch. Maria has finished the dresses for Mrs. Heinrichs. She wants to bring them there today. I'm feeling a lot better and want to go work in the garden.

Sept. 29

It is a clear day and the wind is from the south. Today we went to Drayton. Brother Andreas went along too. I got 3 different

medicines again. They cost 3 dollars. On the way home a fire got ruined so Father bought a new one but there was a lot of duty on it. J. Krueger brought us the dog.

Oct. 13

In the morning it was not cold at all, 3 degrees above. They are cleaning out the garden and spreading manure. After lunch we went to Altona with chickens. We had 24 chickens with us. They are working on the highway and they are up to Altona with it.

Oct. 25

It is Sunday today and Thanksgiving. We were in church, only Maria stayed at home alone. Reverend W. Falk had a nice Thanksgiving sermon for us. I enjoy it so much when I hear such a good sermon. The children went straight to Martens from church. It is cold today. It was blowing snow this morning. It is a cold Sunday and for me a difficult time. My heart is hurting so badly and the tears don't want to quit coming. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. The Lord will not forsake me, even though I am so sinful. Thank the Lord for he is good and his mercy endureth forever. Amen.

Nov. 4

It is 14 below. We are slaughtering Jakob and Maria's piglet. He wants to sell it to the butcher in Gretna. He got 15 dollars and 12 cents. We went to town after lunch for the funeral of Mrs. P. Hiebert. 10 cars went to the graveyard. Reverend Abram Friesen had the graveside sermon.

Nov. 6

It is cold today. We are helping kill pigs at Peter Voths. Church father J. Martens moved away yesterday to Winnipeg. Mrs. Martens wants to get into the hospital right away. She needs the doctor because of her goiter.

Nov. 10

Today it is nice again. The wind is from the south. We're killing pigs. We got 12 pails of lard from 3 pigs, and much meat and sausage. It was a hard day for me since my back was hurting so badly.

Nov. 13

It is very nice today but quite cloudy. We're cooking chicken noodle soup for lunch. Jakob is screening barley again. After lunch we took some products to Gretna. Maria had 5 plucked ducks with her. She got 15 cents a lb. The lard is still 15 cents too. Father bought a basket of Spy apples for \$3.00.

Nov. 19

It is a very nice day. 9 above. Father and Jakob are still fetching straw home today. I collected and packed all the stockings. We want to send them to Toews in Gardenton. I and Tina were in the garden and put manure on the Rhubarb. The chickens are all outside. Doubtless the cold weather will come soon after all this nice weather.

Dec. 2

It is getting a little colder now. We slaughtered 15 chickens today. My work is knitting. Maria is sewing. The cows have been out on pasture all of November because it stayed so nice.

Dec. 5

It is 19 below and windy. Today is Saturday. We have much to do. Father is smoking the beef sausage. We made butter and baked. I and Tina cut up all the tallow. The extra meat has all been sold for 2 cents per lb. Actually it is too cheap but we got just as much for it as if we had shipped it.

Dec. 17

It is still nice today. Today is Jakob's Maria's birthday. After lunch ours went to Gretna and to Neche. I and Jakob's Maria stayed at home.

King Edward the 8th the king of England is our king too. He has abdicated because of a woman whom he loves. She can't marry him because he is a king. He refused his office and went to Austria. He wants to marry a woman who has been divorced 2 times. He will go down a wrong path. It is less than a year when his father died and he became king. Now we have a new king George the 6th and king of India. He is the brother to the king who gave up his throne and his wife is queen Elizabeth. The crowning will only come in May. It was a big upheaval for Great Britain. The countries loyal to Britain have all accepted this new king but they feel sad about Edward the Eighth. The old queen Maria, who was the mother of the two sons, is in deep sorrow. It is not yet a year since her husband died and now this upheaval. She is so concerned about her sons. The Lord will not forsake her. He will give her the strength to bear everything that is laid on her. The Lord bless and protect her.

Dec. 18

It is still nice. We cleaned the oven and the stove pipes. We are getting ready for the holidays. The girls baked 2 kinds of cookies. Jakob's Maria has painted all the tables and chairs. Father is almost finished with the sleigh. It is a very hard day for me again.

Dec. 21

It is 7 below and a very nice, clear day. Maria is sewing. Tien is cleaning the windows on the outside. I am knitting and father went to Gretna. Jakob's Maria is also cleaning. Today P. Voth came home from the hospital.

Verse: Accompany me with your blessing, O Lord, on my way,

Direct my actions, and let them be edifying.

Dec. 23

It is a lot nicer. The thermometer shows 0. Tina Heinrichs came here and got her dress which Maria had sewed. The sleigh is ready to use but there isn't any snow. The cars are still driving like in summer. The road is good. We are cooking meat and baking cookies. It is 5 above today. The chickens are all outside like in summer. We got 9 eggs today but the weather will soon change. There is a cold wind from the north already.

Dec. 31

The last day of the year. It is 18 below. It is very cloudy and a storm from the northwest with intermittent snow since morning. This is the first snow storm of the year. The old year is saying farewell today. We've already baked the New Year's Cookies (fritters). Father wanted to go to Gretna but it's storming too much. Tomorrow there will be church too. If we look back on the past year and remember how graciously the Lord has led us through, we just can't give him enough thanks for the Lord has kept us all alive and given us health. He has given us food and clothing and many other good things. Yes, he gave us a harvest and blessed our cattle, fields and garden that they brought forth fruit, and he has protected us from fire and flood. We owe him much thanks despite many tears having been shed and though our heart has often been very burdened because of anxious care about our salvation during our journey to Zion. So we thank the Lord with our whole heart for that also, and it is a reminder that we won't always be here and that we seek the eternal, for the Lord says: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Blessed is the servant, who, when the Lord comes, He will find awake."

Thank the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever. We stand on the threshold of the old year. Just a few more hours and then we'll enter the New Year.

1937

Re Church Split, 1937

I want to write something here about our church. The old Sommerfelder church

has split. Now there are two denominations. For a long time already things didn't go well among the ministers. There were four that wanted things different from all the others. They weren't happy with the way things had been for so long. They wanted something new. They wanted to get out. They were W. Falk, Froese, Hoepfner, and Zacharias. Those four's church aren't very big. There are approximately 700 baptised members who went with them, and they voted in William Falk as their Elder. Now they want certain church buildings, but it isn't sure yet which churches they'll get. From February 1st, 1937 there are two congregations. If at least every thing would be done on friendly terms it would be good, but the evil one doesn't sleep. The whole Sommerfelder church before the split was very big. At New Year the membership was just under 10,000 souls. These were baptised members and all children plus unbaptised. Now it has become somewhat smaller. And so they have had ministerial elections in 5 of our churches and elected 5 ministers. Isbrand Friesen, Gerhard Dueck, Isaak Friesen, Jakob Unrau and Jakob Friesen. We don't know yet whether they will all accept the ministerial positions. May the Lord again give us good shepherds who will preach the Word of God truthfully. And may he give them strength and courage to speak appropriately for it is very difficult in the office of a minister to be a good shepherd. Elder Peter Toews found it very hard in all these matters. May the Lord give strength and courage for he is the chief shepherd over a large congregation.

Jan. 7

It is 30 below. Everything is covered with hoarfrost in the barn. This morning our black cow had a calf. She had a pretty dapple-black female calf. What a fortunate thing for the New Year. Our chickens have laid up to 13 eggs a day. Up to this point we have sold 23 dozen fresh eggs but the winter is so cold they will probably let up with laying. We have grandmother's chickens here too. 70 chickens and 1 rooster.

Jan. 13

It is windy and stormy today. The girls cleaned up the wash and baked. Then we also made butter. For lunch we cooked Selenki soup from beef.

Jan. 21

It is 23 below. It is father's 62nd birthday today. We didn't have many guests, only the children. Jakob went to Altona and bought an almost full barrel of sauerkraut, and he bought a thermometer for father's birthday. Jakob, Maria and the girls had bought it for

father.

Verse: Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matth. 5:4

Does the cross become a burden
Which Christ's disciples bear,
Jesus speaks to me of peace,
Which overcomes all care.

The Lord does not forget the cry of the poor. Ps. 9:13

Feb. 4

It is 19 below. It's still windy and storming a bit. Father went to Altona. He bought overshoes for me which cost 75 cents. Today William Falk was instated as elder.

Feb. 5

It is 15 below and overcast. Today we are baking yeast "Päpanät" (sweet buns for Easter). Maria finished her wool rug. It's very pretty. We're having "Rollkuake" for lunch. It has snowed hard since noon and we had a snowstorm in the evening. Today the 2 black cow had a calf.

Feb. 7

Today is Sunday. It is 23 below. I and father went to church. Elder Peter Toews was preaching, but he can see very poorly. His vision is getting worse and worse. He wants to go to Winnipeg to see a doctor. It is very cloudy and has been snowing all day. A lot of snow came down.

Feb. 8

It is 19 below and still quite windy. It's still storming pretty good. Today in Gretna there is Freins' John Deere show. Ours went too. Father, Jakob and our Maria saw a lot of things and got "Faspa" too - one cup of hot coffee and sandwiches. It lasted from 2 o'clock until 5:30. They came home at 6:30.

Feb. 13

It is 6 below. It is overcast and beginning to snow. The wind is from the northwest. We had a snowstorm all day. It is Saturday. Our Bessie had a calf this evening.

Song verse: Jesus wept. John 11:35
Once even He, the friend of man,
Wept in this earthly vale of tears,
He pays attention to your tears,
He has the pow'r to give you help.

Feb. 24

It is 12 below. We had a snowstorm again all day. It's the third day already. February is determined. Maria and Tien are crocheting pillow cases and I am knitting on little Jakob's sweater. Father made a picture frame today.

Mar. 17

It's a very nice day. Ours are grinding the corn today with the small grinder. After lunch we all went to Altona. Only Maria stayed at home. We went to the hospital to visit the women who were ill.

Mar. 18

It's nice today. Jakob took cream to Altona. We baked today. I cleaned the oven. We're hard at work combing wool. Today we smeared all the chicken roosts with Nikertin Sulphate.

Mar. 26

It is a cloudy, quiet day and Good Friday. The dying day of our Lord Jesus Christ who once died on the cross for us poor sinners. It is the most important holiday for us. We were all at home and didn't have visitors.

Mar. 29

Today is Easter Monday and a very cloudy day. The children were here for a visit. It's melting every day now. It will soon be finished with the sleigh tracks. They are starting to drive with buggies already. It is so overcast that it looks like rain.

April 2

It is 8 below with alternating cloudiness and sun. We had chicken noodle soup for lunch. Jakob and Maria were here. Today we have a birthday. I am now 54 years old. We're all busy sewing for summer. It's thawing so slowly giving very little water. Want to hope that it will rain a lot in summer. We bought the cream separator in March. We got \$7.00 trade-in value for our old one after which father still paid \$59.00 additional.

Verse: And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain! Sam. 12:21

April 10

It was 7 above today and was really thawing. We've already seen some wild geese flying north today. The crows are here already and the field mice are awake after their winter's sleep. We'll probably have spring now. Ours brought in hay today. John was here on business with Sarah. I seeded tomatoes and peppers into a seed box today. Today is Saturday.

April 21

It is a very cloudy, foggy day. We are baking today. I've been rubbing out corn all day. We rubbed out 2 sacks full. Today Mrs. Jakob Schmidt died.

April 27

Very cloudy in the morning. It cleared up after lunch and the sun shone brightly. Hadn't seen the sun for over a week. It got to be 10 above after lunch. The girls cleaned one of the halls today. I cooked parsnips for lunch, the last of the bonemeat. I prepared the white lime for tomorrow.

April 28

Interchangeable sun and cloud and it doesn't want to get nice. We are cleaning in the big room. I did the whitening. After lunch I and father went to Martin Hieberts in Gnadenfeld and got 50 chicks. We had bought them. They are so expensive. 6 dollars.

May 12

Today it's very cold and stormy. There'll be a high time in London today for it is the coronation of the king. There will be those from Canada. Many strangers from other countries. There will be much to see and to hear there. May the Lord give the king and queen a long life so they can rule their subjects in a christian and loving way. May God bless and keep them, and also the old mother.

May 17

Today is Pentecost Monday. The children were here for a visit. Also Mr. Martens and Peter Sawatzkys' Sara. After 'Faspa' Cornelius Voths from Lowe Farm, and G. Voth from Mexico were here too and stayed for supper. Then they went back to Lowe farm.

May 28

It is windy today. We still have a lot of work in the garden. Everything is coming up. The lilacs are blooming and so are the tulips and hawthorns bushes too. To the Lord be much praise and thanks for it.

June 1

It is a very nice spring day. After lunch we went to Neche to get wood from the bush. I, father, Jakob and Maria went. Father had ordered 6 cords of wood at \$3.75 per cord. The people are moving a lot of wood and brush out of the bush.

June 3

It is very nice. Jakob's Maria is in the hospital in Altona. This morning a little son was born to them, at quarter after four. Jakob then came home. Around 7 o'clock they went to the bush again for wood. The girls are waxing the floor in the kitchen.

June 17

Today there is minister and deacon election in Rudnerweide. The girls are taking care of the wash. For lunch we're having beef stew. We want to do a lot of hoeing in the garden now. The watermelon plants are up already.

June 19

Today is Saturday. There is a consumer's picnic in Altona today. Ours all went. Only I and Maria stayed at home. We need rain badly in the garden. It is dry. The cabbage plants are already growing. We are watering them with water from the creek.

June 23

It is hot again today. Father is still painting the wagon. Tien hoed in the garden. The gold and red roses are blooming. Very nice! After lunch the girls and Jakob are polishing the car and painting the wheels. Huge clouds formed toward evening and we had a big storm. When that was over we got a lot of rain with a lot of lightning and thunder. Very intense thunder and lightning. It rained $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Father had mowed some grass in the creek bottom for fodder. The Lord be thanked for the nice rain and blessing.

Verse: Oh Lord, make us diligent,
Then our life will have meaning.

July 2

It is hot today. The girls are taking care of the wash. We've canned rhubarb with apricots. We shipped 11 cans of cream in June for a total of \$38.76. That is quite good coming from 7 cows. There is very good pasture this year and also lots of hay. Today ours sawed up the 6 cords of firewood with the saw rig and the steam engine. Father sawed into his left pointing finger. He has a big wound.

July 8

It looks like rain today. It keeps getting cloudy. We are having pea soup for lunch. We want to go to Altona today since we've bought 30 lbs. of blueberries at 4 cents. They've started working on the highway again today.

July 9

It rained all night, 1 1/8 inches. There was water standing on the yard in the morning. Very nice rain, God's blessing. We worked with the blueberries all day. Had pie for lunch.

July 21

We've already picked a pail full of cucumbers. Also sold 3 pails full of gooseberries. Today there is a funeral in Gretna for old Mr. Jakob Rempel. For lunch today we

are having chicken borscht. Jakob has cut all the grass and also on the yard.

Aug. 1

Today is Sunday. We didn't go to church. The children went visiting after lunch. It rained again and the mosquitos were so terribly numerous, that the poor cattle were screaming. It also produces very little milk and there is no help for it. Father makes smoke regularly for milking and for night, but the poor cattle have to endure and those who milk too. It has never been as bad as this before.

Aug. 13

It's another nice day. Ours are still in the feed grain. We have 80 acres, of which 40 acres are oats and 40 barley. Today Maria is setting up stooks. The oat sheaves are very heavy. I and father went to Gretna because we needed more binder twine. We brought another 100 lbs.

Aug. 24

It is windy again today. We are cooking 'Shele' (jelly) today. Also rhubarb, apricots, plums and cherries. We've also preserved for 'Moos'. The girls went to visit P. Voths and I wove the onions together. Ours are threshing at Sawatzkys.

Aug. 28

Today is Saturday. The wind is from the northwest so it is not as hot. They are threshing at P. Voths. A horse sickness has broken out which has come out of the United States. Our horses are still healthy but many have died.

Aug. 29

Today is Sunday and a cool day. I and father went to church. There were only a few people there. Many went to church at Rudnerweide were Abram Peters was confirmed as minister. Reverend P. Dueck had a nice message for us. After lunch we and the girls went to visit Jakob Rempels in Rosenort. We bought plums in the village at 2 cents a lb.

Sept. 4

Today is Saturday and a cool day. We had the threshing gang here. For lunch we had beefsteak, donuts, tea and milk, potatoes and tomatoes. We had a nice harvest this year. We got over 2000 bushels of wheat.

Oct. 3

It is cloudy and 16 above. The sun came out after lunch. We had gone to church. Reverend Peter Wiebe had the introductory sermon, a nice harvest festival message (Ern-

tedankfest). The children came for lunch. We had beef soup. Toward evening George Friesens came over and stayed for supper. We and Maria went to visit G. Voths in the evening. It was a nice Sunday.

Today little Peter is 4 months old.

Oct. 14

It was 8 below at night. We have moved everything inside now. We, Jakob and Maria went to a funeral in Altona today. Maria's grandmother was buried. She got to be 78 years old and had already suffered for a long time. One after another is placed in the grave and eventually it will be our turn. Then we will have to go too. Pray God that we will be ready to depart from here.

Nov. 5

It is a very nice day and the wind is from the south. Today we are slaughtering our 3 pigs. We had about 12 pails of lard and a lot of meat and sausage. We had beef roast and beef borscht for lunch. It was a very difficult, busy day.

Dec. 6

Today is a cold and stormy day. The wind is from the south and it's snowing occasionally. We had apple wereneki for lunch.

Dec. 26

The wind is from the south. It's the second holiday. The children came for a visit. We had roast chicken and 'Moos' for lunch. In the evening we heard a German Christmas program from Regina on the radio.

Dec. 31

It is cloudy and snowing all day. It is 'Holy Eve' (New Year's Eve), the last day of the old year. Now the year is in the past again. We are baking New Year's cookies (fritters) and 'rebbspaa' (cooked spare ribs). The Lord has led us through the old year so wonderfully. He kept us healthy and has given us a good harvest. He gifted us with peace and love in our homes. We owe the Lord a lot of thanks for all that he gave us in the old year. So many people are sick and have to continue accompanied by pain. The Lord be gracious to them and strengthen the poor ailing on their sickbed so that they can carry the burden which the Lord has laid on them. And we are still healthy with children and grandchildren together. The Lord be praised and thanked for it.

1939

Feb. 25

Another very nice day. Today is Saturday. We're cleaning and baking. The Watkins man was here for lunch. We bought some medicine and got another 5 bars of soap for

washing hands. Jakob took butter to Gretna after lunch. It is 17 cents per lb. Maria made 2 pairs of pants and shirts for little Peter. The chickens laid 27 eggs.

Mar. 14

We are having a snowstorm today. It's snowing and blowing. In the evening father and Jakob went to a meeting in school at Gnadenfeld. It was about the church yard, were we have also bought a plot.

April 7

Today is Good Friday when our Lord and Saviour was nailed to the cross for us poor sinners who can now be saved if we only want to. After lunch the children all went to the Easter festivities at the Silberfeld school. They had a nice Easter programme. In the evening they went to the Gnadenfeld Easter programme and had a nice celebration there too.

May 6

Today is Saturday. Ours went to Gretna. Today the royal entourage left England to come to Canada and the United States.

May 14

Today is Sunday and a nice day. Ours all went to church. I, Jakob's Maria and little Peter stayed at home. Today they recited the Catechism. The children all went to visit Jakob Kruegers. Then Martens came down for a visit. When they left Jakob Bergens came for a visit from Altona. We took them home afterwards.

May 17

Today is Holy Night before Ascension Day. Ours went to town. Today the royal entourage from England arrived by ship in Quebec. We heard it over the radio. A 21 gun salute was given on their arrival and the military band played. God bless the king.

May 24

It's raining and it rained at night and continued almost all day. Today is a big day in Winnipeg. It's Victoria day and King George's birthday is also being celebrated since he is guest in Winnipeg. They are the king and queen of England. The Lord bless and protect them on their trip.

May 28

Today is Pentecost Sunday. We and the girls went to Sommerfeld for the baptism service. Then we stopped by at mother's place. She was at Sawatzky's. The old uncle had passed away at 7 o'clock in the morning. Early in the morning the barn burnt to the ground at Jakob Friesens in Gnadenfeld. 5 horses and 2 calves died in the fire. It is so

terrible to have to happen to living animals. After lunch we went to grandmother's place. Before we went home we heard that Mr. Henry Klippenstein of Stuartburn had died.

June 11

Today is Sunday. There is communion service. We went to church at Sommerfeld. After lunch the children came down and also Mrs. B. Funk with her children. We went to G. Voths in the evening. Our dappled cow had a calf this morning.

July 24

It's a nice, cool day today. We went to G. Voths after lunch to say farewell because siblings Frank Voths want to leave. We had coffee together and sang 2 farewell songs. Then we said farewell. It was quite sad. They then went and we accompanied them till over the border. Lord, protect them on their journey.

Sept. 12

It's windy today. We baked bread today. For lunch we had chicken borscht. We also cooked ketchup. Both Marias went along with father to Altona. Transfer Neufeld got our black cow today.

The German/Polish war began at the beginning of September.

Oct. 1

Today is Sunday and harvest festival. We had gone to church. Reverend Abram Friesen had a very nice harvest festival message. After lunch we went to visit old C. Voths. In the evening there was a wedding at John Wiebes of their daughter Margareta. The children both didn't belong to any church. They are Russelites. They are disrupting all proper order. It is sad. What will come of it. Evil is taking over.

Nov.12

Today is Sunday. We heard a nice German service on the radio. For lunch we had a pork roast. After lunch I and father went to Altona to visit Mrs. Spent. We were home in the evening.

Nov. 26

It's a very nice day and our 36th wedding anniversary. We have now journeyed together for 36 years on the way to Zion, the city of God. The time has not yet seemed long to us. We have shared joy and sorrow. When dark clouds came along the Lord always graciously helped us. The Lord be praised and honoured. And we ask the Lord to be with us and near us on our further pilgrimage which is left to us. Then everything will happen as it should.

1940

Jan. 21

It is 8 below and windy. Today is Sunday and father's 65th birthday. We both went to church with the buggy. Reverend G. Loewen had a nice message. Susie was in church too. Our wish for father is that he will have a lot more birthdays yet and that the Lord will keep him with us for a long time yet. The Lord be thanked for it.

Feb. 14

It is still quite cloudy. We heard the funeral service of Lord Tweedsmuir on the radio from Altona. He was a government man.

Feb. 19

It's a very dark day. There is still war in Europe. Oh, it looks so dark, things look sad in the world and in Canada there is an election for Prime Minister. Oh, that we would have a good government again.

Feb. 29

It's a clear day. Now winter will come. We have enough snow to go by sleigh now. This is the last day of the month. I have a sore chin. It still doesn't want to heal. It always gets sore again and I have intense itching on the outside of my hands. I have all kinds of medication from the doctor but nothing seems to work. On the long run it will help. Many people have these sores and the itching. It's spreading a lot among the people. The children's little Peter is sick too. He's been sick since Monday. Maria was in Winkler at Mr. Martens' bedside for 2 days and 2 nights.

Mar. 26

It is 20 below today and the last of the holidays. Maria was sewing all day. Today is government election day. Prime Minister Mackenzie King will be head of the government for another five years.

May 19

Today is Sunday and a nice day. We all went to church. Reverend Jakob Unrau had a nice preparation sermon for holy communion. After lunch we, Jakob and Maria went to C. Voths for a visit. G. Voths came down too.

It was a very difficult day for me again today but the Lord will not forsake a poor sinner who cries for help. "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee." 1 Samuel 20:4

This write into your hearts,
Distressed ones, groan no more,
Despair not in your anguish,

As though no help was near.

May 20

It is nice today. Maria and I put in the floor of the summer kitchen using old bricks. Oh that the evil war in Europe would come to an end. It is so terrible with the loss of so many lives.

Aug. 19

A nice day. We and the girls went to Gretna and were registered. It's done from 16 years old and as old as people get. In the evening Jakob, Maria and Hein went to register too. Registration days that are left are the 20th and 21st. We are baking for threshing again.

Aug. 31

It's the last day of the month and the war in Europe rages on. How will things turn out with all the unrest in the world, but the Lord has managed to control, protect, and lead the nations of the earth until now and he will make an end to this evil war too. The war has raged for 1 year now.

Oct. 11

It's a nice day. The children are all in the corn again. Father went to town and I'm home all alone. I make all the meals and take care of things at home.

The war in Europe is still raging on. It must be terrible there, the way the airships are dropping the bombs. The big city of London must be almost in ruins by now. Agh, if it would only end soon!

Dec. 9, 10 & 11

All the boys aged 21 to 24 had to go before the judge in Morden. He will interrogate them as to why they don't want to go to war. Their fathers had to be there as well as the elder and some ministers from each congregation. This has never happened before. I am dreading to think where everything is going. If only the evil war would end, is our wish. God grant it.

1941

Jan. 25

It isn't cold at all this morning. It will get colder though. Today is Saturday. Jakob was in Altona and bought me a new ink pen holder. It is a new kind. I will now try to write with it. It seems to work pretty good.

Jan. 27

It is 20 below. It's Tien's birthday today. She is 31 years old. Jakob went to Gretna with the big sleigh. He wanted to get something from the train. Father wants to go along to Sommerfeld to a brotherhood meeting

because of the youth. It looks like they'll all have to become soldiers. If the war would only end.

Jan. 28

It's a cold day. The people have loaded cattle again. It's leaving today. Elder Peter Toews from our church and Elder Schulz from the Bergthaler church want to go to Ottawa to see the government about the young men. Will it accomplish anything?

Feb. 14

It is 14 below and a nice day. Father went to Gretna. Today is Valentine's Day. Today the school children will be very busy exchanging valentines.

O love the Lord, all ye his saints. Ps. 31:23.

Feb. 19

28 below in the morning and a bit of wind. It is quite clear with the sun shining brightly. Another cold day. After lunch the Gnadenfeld sewing circle came here. Jakob Kehler hitched a team to the big sleigh and brought 8 women along with him. They sang 4 songs from the "Evangelische Sanger", then they all began doing their handwork. After this we all had 'Faspa' together. We really enjoyed it.

Mar. 2

It was 12 below in the morning. Today is Sunday. Father and I went to church. Neither of us knew the minister. He had a good message. After the service he read to us about everything the elders had arranged when they went to the government in Ottawa. This was about our young men who don't want to go into the military. They won't have to do this, but they will have to work in the park and on the highways for 4 months. When we got home the children Susie and John were here to visit. A Mrs. Henry Martens has died in the Altona hospital. She was sick for a long time already and had been operated on 2 times already.

July 13

Today is Sunday. We were at church. Bernhard Neufeld had a good message. There we heard that Voths' Peter is supposed to go to Riding Mountain Park to work there, also Driedgers' Jakob and many others. They want to have 80 there this time but now they're also taking 22 year-old youths. Yes, the times look very dark. What is coming in the future? There may be a difficult time coming but the Lord will not forsake his own in hard times. The Lord is so gracious and merciful. All those who call on him, all those who implore him earnestly, he will hear

in time of need. Oh, the war has brought so much distress and misery. It's been raging for almost 2 years now. How will it all end?

Sept. 10

It's very nice today. We all went to Morden to the Experimental Farm. We wanted to buy apples there but didn't get any. Then we went to the park and ate lunch there. We had brought along food. We were all there except Peter. We all ate at one table under God's open sky and warm sun. We really enjoyed the food. It was all thrown together and shared. After eating we went up the hill where they are making the new dam. They want to dam off a ravine so the water will be held back for a lake. Next we went into town and bought something in the store and ate some ice cream. After that we headed for home. We bought some crabapples in Winkler and also a box of apples together with Susie and John. Then we cooked apple 'Schele' (jelly).

Nov. 30

Today is Sunday. We were all in church except Maria and little Peter. Reverend B. Neufeld had a good sermon. After lunch we had visitors, the George Voths and Helen. We and Maria went to visit the John Heinrichs. Today is the last day of this month and the Lord has always been with us and near us. Thank the Lord for it. The evil war is still raging in the world. The Lord grant that there will be peace once more.

Dec. 31

It's the last day of the year. It was 20 below in the morning. The year has come to an end. The Lord has been with and near us and has given us health and strength to work, and has given us food and clothes. Thank the Lord and Saviour for all the good things He has done for us throughout the year. If the evil war would only stop, but who knows what would come after that. Things seem to be getting worse instead of better. I wonder what all we will have to live through. Till now it has gone very well for us. We haven't felt much yet from the war but it can still come. We pray the Lord that He will be with us and protect us in the future and right till the end of our life.

1942

This year again I want to write down the most important things so that if I should have forgotten it I can look it up and read it later.

With God's help we have again arrived in the New Year. What will it bring us? It lies like a dark veil before us. But we want

to keep hope this year too for He has ruled the world and all the nations until now and He will further protect us on our pilgrimage to the heavenly Land of Canaan.

Jan. 29 (should be 31)

It's the last day of this month and Sunday. Father and the girls went to church. After lunch all our children were here for a visit. Again one month is gone from our year. Time passes so fast and we people have to go along with it. How merciful the gracious God has been to us again. He has kept us healthy while there is war in Europe and a costly time. Oh, so many lives have been lost already and we are still under his protection. May the war end soon.

April 2

Today is my 59th birthday. It's a nice day. It makes for difficult driving because of the mud and water. Jakob and Peter went to Altona this forenoon. When they came home father went to Gretna. They all went on the buggy. Consumers bought the Coblenz store and have begun to serve customers this week. Brother Abram is the bookkeeper there.

April 7

The last holiday. Today a lot of the boys were to leave for camp again. They couldn't go, though, because the bus that brought them and was going to pick them up again came only as far as Winkler. The highway and the railway track were under water just then. The train couldn't go either because a lot of water was coming off the Pembina Hills where they had so much snow. There was a flood in Winkler, Plum Coulee, Horn Dean and Rosenfeld. Today there is a cold wind. We went to visit G. Voths by buggy.

April 30

It's the last day of the month. Yes, the month of April has also come and gone. We've had a lot of windy and cloudy days in April and also a lot of rainy weather... and the war is still going on. More and more young men have to go to the camps. Now they have removed many of the camps to Vancouver, B.C. They have to work in the forests there too and they are to have written that things are going fairly well there. There is to be a brotherhood meeting about the youth. The ministers and the elders are quite concerned about it.

May 3

The brotherhood meeting was held on this day in the church at Rudnerweide. There it was decided that they would go to Ottawa again regarding the young men. There are 7 Mennonite churches working together.

Men were chosen who are quite involved in this work.

June 7

Today is Sunday and a very nice day. We all went to church after lunch. The Lord's Supper was here in our church. Susie and John were here in the evening.

Verse: Illuminate Lord, my light,
For I'm a mystery to myself!

Aug. 12

In the morning it was cloudy and rained soon after, but not a lot. It is windy with sunshine now. It will soon be dry again. We want to go to Hildebrand after lunch. I fell down and wrenched my foot. We are cooking chicken noodle soup for lunch. My medicine has helped a lot already. I am a lot better with God's help.

Verse: The meek will he guide in judgement: and the meek will he teach his way. Ps. 25:9

Sept. 30

It's the last day of the month. Now September has ended and the war is still raging. It's been going 3 years already and it's creating all kinds of consequences here too. The time goes by so fast.

Oct. 23

Today is court day in Morden. Tien's Peter had to appear there too. Jakob went along too. It had snowed in Morden so it was all white. There had been many boys there who had to appear before the judge. The boys came home while we were having 'faspa'.

Oct. 31

It's the last day of this month. Today is Saturday. I and Maria cleaned everything up in the morning and father went to Gretna. After lunch he went to help Jakob with the shingling. Maria cleaned the kitchen. We got a letter from Frank Isaacs of Winnipeg. She would like cracklings, liver sausage and butter if it's not too much work. October has come and gone, it has brought us very good weather, also cold, stormy weather. If only the evil war would end. It has raged for 3 years now but the Lord rules over the nations on earth.

Dec. 26

Today the children were all home. The grandchildren all said their verses and sang 2 songs. Little Peter also sang 2 songs. Then they all got their presents. They were all very happy. Who knows what next Christmas will be like, whether we will all still be alive and can be together like we are today? The Lord be thanked and praised for it and that he has

granted us this day.

1943

Jan. 2

25 below in the morning. A very cold day. The sun is shining brightly. After lunch Reverend Bernhard Neufeld and Reverend Jakob Hildebrand were here. Father went with them to Altona. Then David Driedgers came here too and got their picture for the silver wedding which Maria had made. Maria was very sick. Her throat is very sore but she has improved a lot already. A lot of boys had come home from camp, including John, the son of John Heinrichs.

Jan. 4

18 below in the morning and cloudy but it had cleared up by lunchtime. Then we took the car to mother's place and the siblings' place. There is quite a bit of snow and yet the road is open. The driving was fine but we couldn't get on the yard at the other end, there was too much snow. We left the car on the road. Our Maria is a lot better already. We have a lot of snow and it's been quite cold. In Neuberghal a lot of boys got notices again.

Jan. 29

12 below in the morning. My hand is in bad shape today. It is quite swollen. It's hurting, burning and I have a stabbing pain. I have a difficult day today. I can't put my hand in water. I've only been able to read a book, pull apart a small blanket and then sew together the cover for it. In the evening John Heinrichs came over for a visit. They had many pictures of B.C. with them and we looked at all of them. She also brought Maria something to be sewed.

Jan. 19

28 below in the morning and a bit windy. A very cold day. Today Tien and Peter put their big pig into the barn. There is no coal in Altona now. Then Jakob went to Gretna for coal and got some. If the cold continues like this there'll be a shortage of coal.

April 30

It looked quite nice in the morning but it soon turned cloudy and windy. It was 2 below in the morning.

It is the last day of the month again. Oh, how time flies. We lived through 4 months of this year and the war still has no end. If the nations would only stop raging and destroying. The government wants a lot of money again. This is their fourth loan. If things continue like this everything will be destroyed in the whole world. May God grant that this evil war will finally end.

June 30

I didn't write down much in June because I didn't get to it. I didn't have any time to do it. We were very busy, but in July I want to do more recording. The grain looks very good because it has rained so much in May and June. We have hoed the garden twice now. Everything is standing up well in the garden. This is the last day of the month. The Lord has helped us thus far, to him be praise and thanks.

Dec. 31

It's the last day of this month. It is New Year's Eve. We have cleaned up everything and have baked the New Year's fritters. (Nie' Joasch Kuake). Father went to Gretna. Maria is still sewing something.

Yes, how graciously the Lord has kept us throughout this past year and has sent us prosperity and health. We owe so many thanks to the giver of all gifts who has given us a good harvest again. Bless thou the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

1948 to 1952

June 22

The emigration train was to leave for Onbek, Ontario from Letellier this morning. Father, Peter and I went too. It was a very long train and there were a lot of people there who watched as the train left. A lot of parting tears were wept there. There were parents going, who left their children behind, and also children going, who left their parents here. That is a very sad farewell.

In 1947 father, I and Maria went to Mexico to visit there. We went along with Thiessen Bus Lines. He had 14 passengers and John Klippenstein was the driver. We were all Mennonites on the bus. We had a good time. We left on the 5th of June and came home on the 30th of June.

July 8

There was sewing circle auction sale at our neighbour Zachariases' place. A lot of people came and they raised quite a bit of money. Altogether they got over \$400.00. It was for missions and the hospital and for various other causes.

Siblings John Voths were here for a visit too from Saskatoon.

1948 – The new hospital in Altona is finished. They moved in with the patients and everything else at the beginning of July.

There was a dedication to the Lord on June 25th for all those who would enter there. It was a very nice service. Our ministers spoke and the choir sang our songs. It wasn't as nice after lunch. Everything was in

English and there were many other nationalities there such as the French who are Catholic. Many men spoke. It was held outside and the weather was nice. It was overcast in the forenoon but clear in the afternoon with the sun shining. Then it was warmer. God bless the hospital so that it will remain German and not become Catholic.

May 1

Today is Sunday. It is raining. The children were all here today. We ate 'Faspa' together and then Peter took us to the hospital in Altona. Ours stayed until I was put to bed. Then I ate supper after which I was being prepared for the operation. I had a very hard night, weeping and praying a lot that the Lord would not forsake me at this difficult time, and that he would stay by me and not leave me in my anguish. He did not forsake me and stayed by me. The Lord is my shepherd.

May 2

A nice, clear day and my operation day. They came to get me at a little after 9 A.M. Father, Maria and Jakob were sitting in the waiting room in the hospital. Then the head nurse asked me, "Are you ready for what we want to do with you?" I said, "Yes, for living or for dying". Then she began to give me anaesthesia. There were 3 doctors and 4 nurses in attendance. They took out my gall bladder and appendix.

1949 – July 14

We still have sunny, dry days. This year June was very dry. It rained a bit over an inch in spring. Since then it has only rained a little bit now and then. The grain has a good stand and the wheat has large heads and yet the earth in the wheatfield has such large cracks that you can insert your hand. How can the grain still grow and look so good? We have only gotten a few strawberries because it's too dry. Ours have finished the hay harvest. We got 6 hayrack loads. The cows haven't got enough pasture now. The pasture is almost dry. Father is feeding the cattle. If only we could get potatoes and cucumbers. Jakob is building a grain bin and has 3 men working for him. Peter is building a lean-to to the machine shop for the truck. Father is helping him. The girls are cooking rhubarb and gooseberries.

Mar. – 1950

We are now getting hydro. They wired our buildings last week. It is thawing. There's a lot of water in the creek already. We're all glad spring is arriving for the cold winter has been too long already.

May 7

The water is now in Winnipeg. Many people have moved out. Many houses are standing in water and many streets are under water. The bridges are in danger of being taken out. They have removed the patients in many of the hospitals. Many churches are standing in water. A good part of the city is flooded. Many people are working there. They are making dikes with sandbags in order to keep the water out. It rained hard last week. A drizzle for 3 days. It was a total of almost 3 inches of water. There's never been such a big flood here before.

May – 1950

There is a big flood. The Red River is over it's banks and has overflowed many towns and much land. From Winnipeg to Emerson all the towns are under water and it hit Morris the worst. The people all had to move out and 40 homes were swept away with many houses damaged by the water. The Red Cross has done a lot. Seeding time is a month late.

Nov. 20 – 1950

We killed pigs on the 15th of November. We did 2 and the children 1. Thank the Lord we got enough of everything. It was 15 below this morning and we have some snow. We and Maria helped kill pigs at our children's place, the J. Martens, on the 18th. It snowed a lot in the morning but the sun came out in the afternoon. When we came home we had hydro. When we came on the yard the yardlight came on and the electric light was on in the barn as well as inside everywhere. That made quite a difference from before.

June 6

Today Maria's cow had a calf. The 6th there was also the sewing circle auction sale. It was at Penners' place in the haymow. Outside it was raining all afternoon. It had rained ¾ inch. Now everything can come up in the garden and on the field. The sewing circle brought in \$314.00.

Oct. 9

It was Sunday and we were all invited to the East Reserve for a farewell celebration for Mrs. J. Kliever. A bedspread was also raffled off and Mrs. Jakob Loepky was the lucky winner. She got the crocheted bedspread on which Mrs. Kliever had worked for 2 years. She got \$152.00 for it, which was enough to cover her trip back home.

Today princess Elizabeth with her husband arrived in Canada from England by airplane. They will now explore all of Canada.

Feb. 6

Today King George the 6th of England died. He died quietly in his home at night. His daughter princess Elizabeth has become queen of England. Elizabeth the 2nd. Now we have a queen again.

June 2 – 1952

We had a good rain. The Lord be praised and thanked for it. Now everything will come up in the garden and in the field. We haven't had a lot of rain in June, but enough so things will grow and flourish. It hailed in some areas but not here. Our father hired the Funks to build our house and they have worked diligently. It didn't take long and the outside was done.

Oct. 1 – 1952

We moved to Altona today. It was a cold, stormy day. The car garage is ready too. The boys all helped build. Father put on all the storm windows.

I had a lot of sores on my face but it is gone now.

Oct. 28

Today Norman David Loewen of Red and White died in the hospital and Mrs. J. Wiebe of Grunthal died on the same evening of asthma. Both funerals are on Monday, November 2.

The weather is still nice and there has been little frost. We are planning to kill pigs on the eleventh.

Oct. 29

October was rainy too to start with, but the rest of the time we had good harvest weather. God be thanked, all harvesting is finished. Peter had finished all threshing by the time it was pig killing time both flax and sunflowers. The boys have finished all field work they wanted to. Isaac Driedger has died too. The funeral was here at Altona in our church. C. Nickel had the funeral sermon.

Doctor Breitenbach has died in the hospital in Winnipeg too. He was a catholic.

Oct. 23

Today, Sunday, our children were all here for a visit. Father is sick. His stomach is bad, and his neck is a lot worse. I have rheumatism in my legs.

Here in town many have died again, Mrs. Bernhard Krahn, Mrs. Henry Hildebrandt and old Abram Funk. Now there are funerals again. Blessed is the servant whom his Lord, when he comes, finds waiting.

D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc.

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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.

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Book Reviews

Martha Martens, John Penner and Mavis Dyck, editors. Second Edition. *Reinländer (Old Colony) Gemeinde Buch 1880-1903* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2006), 502 pp.

By Alf Redekopp,
Director, Mennonite Heritage Centre,
Winnipeg.

This volume is a revised edition of the 1994 publication, *Reinländer Gemeinde Buch 1880-1903* Manitoba, Canada. A slight change in the title of the revised edition to include the words "Old Colony," is a helpful addition as it acknowledges how this group of Mennonites were commonly identified.

This volume is a reproduction of the first church register begun in Canada by the Russian Mennonite settlers from Chortitza (the "old colony") and its newer daughter colonies (Fürstenland, Nepluievka, Judenplan, Baratov and Borosenko) under the leadership of Bishop Johann Wiebe who started to arrive in 1875 on the Red River near Emerson, Manitoba. From the immigration sheds at West Lynne, the immigrants settled in villages of the kind they had known in Russia. Living in a close community pattern with sharing village lands on the open field system was very important to them. When other Mennonite settlers originating from the Bergthall Colony who had first settled in Manitoba's East Reserve between 1874 and 1876, began to relocate to the western part of the region where the Old Colony people had settled, Bishop Johan Wiebe called his congregants together and reviewed the reasons and principles for having left Russia. Those in agreement with these principles were to enter their names in the (new) church register. This marked the beginning of the book.

Within 20 years of the arrival of the first settlers, there was a further migration to establish daughter colonies in the Northwest Territories (now Saskatchewan) at Hague in 1895 and near Swift Current in 1905. Beginning in 1922, these three communities again largely uprooted and migrated to Mexico when they could not negotiate a satisfactory compromise with the Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments regarding the education of their children. The Manitoba and Swift Current groups settled in Chihuahua while the Hague group settled in Durango.

Not all members joined the emigration. Those that remained re-organized in Hague (1929) and in Manitoba (1936).

This volume is "the" book to get for any descendants of one these groups who are interested in tracing their family history.

The original volume consisted of 421 pages, often with up to three families entered on a page. Each entry would include the names of the male and female head of household including their birth, baptism, marriage and death date, the female's maiden name, as well as the names of their parents, followed by a listing of the children with their birth, baptism and death dates. The original also included cross-references to the pages where the parents or children might appear in the volume as heads of their own households.

This revised edition has added a number of features not found in the earlier publication. For example, there are indexes of the parents by the father's name as well as by the mother's name. There are links to other sources such as the 1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve, Pioneer Portraits published in the Red River Valley Echo, GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) and a pre-1878 church list which occasionally includes names that did not find their way into the Reinländer church register. The explanations to the comments in the original register have also been re-worked in this edition.

The editors must be thanked for their thorough proof-reading, and the publishers for producing another accessible and inexpensive volume.

John J. Friesen. *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2007. 230 pp. \$32.50.

By Rick Schroeder

John J. Friesen's new book provides a valuable extension of the ongoing saga of Mennonites as they make the transition from the modern into the post-modern world. Friesen's study of Mennonites moves the investigation of the faith, civic, and cultural practices of Manitoba Mennonites in particular, well into the 21st century.

Friesen divides his history into three major periods: from settlement in the 1870s

to the migration to Mexico in the 1920s; 1920 to 1950, a period he labels "Engaging Society"; and the 1950s to 2000 where his theme is "Expanding Horizons" Within these sections there are a number of short chapters that explore various dimensions of Mennonite life. Quotes from other histories and primary sources are featured in the sidebars of the large format book. There are many pictures that add considerably to the book's readability and interest.

John J. Friesen's writing is clear and succinct, and his optimism shines through as he reviews the history of the numerous Mennonite migrations and the people's response to the various challenges to their lifestyle, rituals, and community practices. In contrast to other authors, his positive perspective contributes a refreshingly upbeat vision of the potential fate and future of this Anabaptist church, and he succeeds in dispelling preconceptions that as a result of the globalization and urbanization that has occurred since the Second World War, that Mennonite communities have been so utterly transformed that their futures were in doubt. Rather than being on a collision course with obscurity, Friesen posits that a renewal may yet occur, as it has done in the past, and that the most conservative of Mennonites may be the catalyst for that change.

H.G. Mannhardt, *The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569-1919*. Translated by Victor G. Doerksen. Edited and annotated by Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen. Epilogue by Tomasz Ropiejko. Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas and Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, 2007. 286 pages, including new bibliographies.

By John J. Friesen
Emeritus Professor of Church History
Canadian Mennonite University

This translation makes available for English language readers one of the most important books about the history of Mennonites in the former settlements along the Vistula River. Although the focus of the book is on the Danzig Mennonite Church, it also reveals a lot of the general history that influenced the other Mennonite churches in the area. It allows readers to look into the changing identity of the Danzig Men-

nonites as they negotiated the ever-changing political, economic, and religious conditions their beloved city experienced as it was successively part of Poland, Prussia, and Germany.

The excellent translation was done by Victor Doerksen, retired professor in German at the University of Manitoba, and now living in Kelowna, British Columbia. The editing and various additions are provided by Mark Jantzen, who teaches history at Bethel College in Kansas, and John D. Thiesen, archivist at Bethel College. Thiesen is also archivist for the Mennonite Church. Jantzen's specialty is Polish and Prussian Mennonite history, and he has published numerous studies in this area.

Not only does this volume provide a translation of the original text, which in itself would have been of great benefit for English language readers, but it provides a number of additions, which greatly enhance the book. The volume opens with an extensive, and insightful, introduction in which Mannhardt is located within the changing interpretations of Mennonite history. In his survey of Anabaptist history Mannhardt expressed the new interpretations, of that time, by Ludwig Keller. Mannhardt also reflected the view prevalent among Danzig and area Mennonites of his day, that integration into the German cultural and political context was positive and desirable.

At the end of the volume an interesting eight-page epilogue is added, entitled "The History of the Church Building after World War II." It was written by Tomasz Ropiejko, pastor of the Pentecostal Church which is presently using the church building. Ropiejko describes the restoration projects after the war, and traces how the building has continued to serve as a place of worship for different church groups.

The editors add numerous footnotes to the ones Mannhardt included. These footnotes provide additional primary sources in a variety of archives in Poland, Germany and the USA, they add background information, they provide context, and they generally assist readers to better understand the text. At the conclusion of the book, the editors add three bibliographies, one of works cited by Mannhardt, another of works cited by the editors, which incidentally is twice as long as the list of works cited by Mannhardt, and a third which includes works by Mannhardt. This last bibliography indicates the scope and depth of Mannhardt's scholarly activity.

To help readers find the location of places referred to in the text, two lists of place names are added, first, a list of German place names with their Polish equivalents,

and then a list of the Polish place names, followed by the German names. The translated text itself uses the German spellings, followed by the Polish names, because that was the use when the book was written, and the use during most of the years Mennonites lived in the area.

A number of maps, as well as additional photos, enhance the volume. The overall impression is that the editors went to great length to help readers understand and appreciate the history of the Danzig Mennonite Church. The book is published by Pandora Press in a very attractive format.

The book was written in 1919, on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the founding of the Danzig Mennonite Church, and the 100th anniversary of the dedication of its church building. The author, Hermann Gottlieb Mannhardt, was the lead pastor of the Danzig Mennonite church, and had been in this office since 1880. Mannhardt was well educated, having studied at the universities in Strassbourg, Berlin and Kiel in the areas of German language, history, philosophy, and theology. When his home congregation found itself without a leading pastor, it turned to Mannhardt, who had recently completed his studies, and was undecided about whether he would become a Protestant pastor or join the Mennonite church. The call from his home congregation helped him decide that issue.

The outline of the book reveals Mannhardt's view of the Danzig Mennonite Church's identity. He sees its identity rooted in the sixteenth century Anabaptist experience. He devotes a lengthy section to a discussion of this part of the story, developing the new interpretations of Anabaptism recently published by Ludwig Keller. He includes a whole chapter on Menno Simons.

Then follows the history of the Danzig Mennonite Church. In Mannhardt's view, as he unfolds the story, the identity of the church was largely shaped by its long struggle for acceptance and recognition with the city council, guilds, and business community in Danzig, with the Roman Catholic bishop of the area near Danzig, with the princes of Poland, and with the King of Poland. In later years, this struggle continued with the Kings of Prussia and the emperor of Germany. Although Mannhardt also gives some attention to the internal life of the congregation, and discusses leadership, beliefs, and practices, the story is framed within the continuing struggle of the Mennonites in Danzig to gain equality with citizens of other confessions. In his view, by 1919, this had been achieved, and he sees this as good. To allay any doubt about whether this was the right direction for the

Danzig Mennonite Church to take, he shows how this is consistent with the vision of the early Anabaptists.

The Danzig Mennonite story falls into three historical eras. One is the Polish era which ended in 1793 when Danzig placed itself under Prussian control. The Prussian era continued until 1871, when Prussia became part of the German Empire. The German era continued until 1919, when the author was writing. 1919 was however, a very troubling time for Danzig, since it was shortly after Germany had lost World War I, and the empire was being dismantled by the victorious allies. Danzig was being rent from its true home in Germany, as Mannhardt saw it, and was being established as a semi-independent city under Polish control. Poland was a newly created country with no infrastructure or history of governing. Mannhardt expresses the great anxiety Danzig inhabitants felt about the Mennonite community's future in this fragmented situation. For the church, it also meant that it was now separated politically from its co-religionists in the immediate area along the Vistula River, some of whom were within the borders of Germany, and some within Poland.

This volume is a very helpful addition to the few studies available in the English language about Mennonites in Poland/Prussia. It is of high quality, and will be of interest to many who wish to learn more about this important segment of Mennonite history. Out of this context came most of the Mennonite communities in Russia, and many Mennonites in Canada, the United States, and Latin America. The descendants of this relatively small community along the Vistula River are legion, and their influence extensive. This book will help readers better understand the creative and formative context out of which these people came.

Abraham Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I* (Winnipeg/Hillsboro: Kindred Productions, 2006). Softcover; 520 pages; ISBN 1-894791-07; \$39.99 Cnd. \$35.99 U.S.

By Harry Loewen
Professor Emeritus
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This is a big book. Of the 520 pages, 148 pages, nearly one third of the book, are notes, an extensive bibliography, and an Index. Like all of Professor Friesen's publications the book is well researched, documented and forcefully argued. While written with the educated reader in mind, the book is not

easy reading. From the beginning to the end the book is a sustained argument with many side and related issues interwoven, but all of which contribute to the author's conclusion, namely that the Privilegium (privileges) extended to the Russian Mennonites by Tsar Paul I in 1800, not only set Mennonites apart from their Slavic neighbours and allowed them to benefit economically, but which also became the cause of their suffering in the twentieth century.

Contrary to most Mennonites' belief that the privileges were a good thing, allowing the Russian Mennonites to exist and do well as an ethnic/cultural community, Friesen questions that assumption. While the Privilegium allowed Mennonites to enjoy religious freedom, conduct their schools in the German language, and exempted them from military service, for most of them their faith had become a religious tradition only, not a personal faith. Moreover, the privileges set them apart from their non-Mennonite neighbours which later came back to haunt them. Friesen sees positively the revival movements of the mid-nineteenth century which sought to bring new spiritual life to the Mennonite communities. Especially the establishment of the Mennonite Brethren church in 1860, which called Mennonites back to a personal faith-commitment, was, according to Friesen, a return to Anabaptist faith and values.

An important part of the book is the issue of Mennonite cultural identity. The question of whether the Russian Mennonites are of Dutch or German origin is not new. Some Mennonites thought of themselves as being Dutch whereas others saw themselves as of German background. Historically, most Russian Mennonites had their ethnic and spiritual roots in the Netherlands. As followers of the Frisian Menno Simons (c. 1496-1561) they were persecuted and driven from their Dutch homeland. They settled in the northern German territories, Poland and Prussia where friendly rulers welcomed them. They were joined by South-German Anabaptists and over a period of two centuries the Dutch Mennonites became integrated in German society and acquired the German language, including Plautdietsch (Low German), a mixture of Dutch and German. When they came to Russia before and after 1800, they spoke Low German at home and used High German in their churches and schools. In tsarist Russia they were simply known as "Mennonites," culturally and religiously different from the German Catholic and Lutheran colonists.

The question of whether the Russian Mennonites were Dutch or German arose in earnest at the end of the 19th century

and before the First World War. Because of their special status under the Privilegium, Mennonites had become relatively wealthy, with some acquiring large tracts of land and establishing various industries. The surrounding Slavic population that did not enjoy such economic advantages began to question the Mennonites' preferred status and wealth. The rich "foreign Germans" were resented because of the privileges they enjoyed and in 1915, during the war against Germany, the government passed Land Liquidation laws according to which Germans were to be deprived of their landholdings. Mennonites, "in defense of privilege," began to defend themselves by seeking to prove that they were not Germans but of Dutch background.

Perhaps for the first time in history Mennonites began to think historically about their ethnic origin. Peter J. Braun wrote a booklet, *Kto takie Mennonity* (Who or what are the Mennonites?), in which he attempted to show that historically and linguistically Russian Mennonites were of Dutch background, which in a sense was true; the majority had originally come from the Netherlands. But the Russian authorities and critics were not convinced, for Mennonites spoke German, conducted their church services and schools in German and throughout their stay in Russia thought of themselves as being German.

Fortunately, with the defeat of the tsarist regime toward the end of the war, the liquidation laws were never implemented. But now the question of ethnic origin also changed. When the German army occupied Ukraine for about six months in 1918, Mennonites were happy to be German again, for with the help of the German military they were able to retrieve their stolen property which they had lost during the time of anarchy. Moreover, when the Germans retreated, Mennonites accepted their advice to form self-defence units (*Selbstschutz*) to protect themselves and their property against Makhno and his peasant bands. However, during the 1920s emigration it was the Mennonites' *Holländerei* (the argument that they were Dutch) which was to their advantage in leaving the Soviet Union and find new homes in the West.

In the emergence of Republican and Nazi Germany there was Benjamin H. Unruh who argued for the Germanness of Mennonites. Friesen is quite critical of Unruh who to this day is revered by many Mennonites for helping them to come out of Russia. Not only did Unruh support the *Selbstschutz* in 1918-20, but he also sought to prove in his writings that Mennonites were of German background and interpreted, along

with other Mennonite Nazi sympathizers, Russian-Mennonite history in line with Nazi ideology. But during the Second World War being German or Volksdeutsch (ethnic German), as "Germans" outside of Germany were called, was to Mennonites' advantage in that they were helped by the German army in 1943 to leave Russia for Germany and safety. When the war ended, however, Mennonite refugees, hoping to escape the advancing Red Army and finding new homes in Canada and South America, found it to their advantage again to be of Dutch origin, as MCC officials argued before the Western authorities.

Toward the end of the book the ethnic identity question leads Friesen to address the religious identity of Mennonites as well. According to Friesen, it is not all that important where Mennonites come from geographically or linguistically. He is concerned that they return to their Christian-Anabaptist beginnings from which many, including Russian Mennonites, have strayed. In their pursuit of defending their Privilegium, their ethnicity and culture, many Mennonites lost what the Anabaptists believed and lived. The faith and life of the Swiss Brethren and Menno Simons, Friesen suggests, ought to be the example and guide for Mennonites today.

As Friesen writes from a Christian-Anabaptist perspective, this book will be controversial among so-called "secular" historians and those who subscribe to the "polygenesis" theory of Anabaptist studies. Students of "conservative" Mennonite history will be critical of the author for failing to include the *Kleine Gemeinde* among the 19th-century revival movements. And some readers may feel that the lengthy quotations in small print from primary sources could have been reduced, summarized, or relegated to the end notes.

Henry Fast. *Gruenfeld (now Kleefeld): First Mennonite Village in Western Canada, 1874-1910*. Steinbach, Mb.: by the author, 2006. 370 pp., maps, appendix, \$35.00 Cdn.

by Jake L. Peters.

This book tells the story of a group of *Kleine Gemeinde* families with origins in the Molotschna Colony in Russia, and more recently from the Borozenko area who settled in the present day Kleefeld Manitoba area. They sought to regain education and religious freedoms in Manitoba that had, or were expected to erode in their homeland. The story focuses on the village of Gru-

enfeld, and six surrounding villages and hamlets: Heuboden, Schoenau, Rosenfeld, Blumenfeld and Hochstadt.

The story begins with the pioneer families. Fast identifies and provides a brief description of each family, limiting himself to those born prior to 1875, and who established a household in the community. With these parameters he identified some 30 family names (Berg, Barkman, Bartel, Broeski, Doerksen, Dueck, Enns, Esau, Fast, Friesen, Giesbrecht, Goertzen, Goosen, Hiebert, Isaac, Klassen, Kornelson, Loewen, Plett, Radinzel, Reghr, Reimer, Rempel, Schellenberg, Siemens, Thiessen, Toews, Unger, Warkentin, Wohlgeomuth). The pioneers are located not only in their villages, but also in terms of their early homestead and pre-emption applications, patents and sales. This information gives us an indication of the mobility of the early pioneers. The village land maps add a nice touch to the picture.

Gruenfeld, settled in 1874, is located at 32-6-5E. Records show that 15 families and one bachelor lived in this village during the 1874-5 winter. This village was disbanded officially by the village council in 1903, and each person moved to his legally registered land. Today only a few markers of this village remain: an oak tree, cemetery cairn, back street, and a few old buildings. Several villages never achieved a critical mass of pioneers to survive beyond the first few years. For example Blumenfeld was located on poor soil and had limited family ties resulting in slow disintegration.

The foundation for the villages was the Kleine Gemeinde church. It originated in Russia as a reform group in 1814 to recover the pure church advocating a simple life style and non-involvement in political matters. Disciplinary matters frequently became the focus of church business. The dissension that developed in the group overtime was further sustained during the migration when one bishop took his group to Nebraska, and the other one took his group to Manitoba. The Manitoba group, led by Bishop Peter Toews, suffered a further serious schism in 1881-82 as the result of the itinerant ministry of Johannes Holdeman. This resulted in a division and the formation of the Holdeman church. Half of the Gruenfelders joined the new church. This schism, according to Fast, forced the Kleine Gemeinde to retrench and take a strong protectionist stance toward outsiders. It is interesting, however, that the Holdeman Church in Gruenfeld shared their building with the Kleine Gemeinde once every four weeks, and shared the cemetery until 1940. This community was also the target of Mormon missionaries in 1884 but

they were strongly resisted by all.

Freedom of education was one of the privileges granted the Mennonites. So it is not surprising that the pioneers made early arrangements for the education of their children. The private church school model was adopted with the church council in charge and responsible for hiring a suitable teacher for each school. Only Gruenfeld and Hochfeld had enough students to support a school. The main subjects were reading, writing and arithmetic, but grammar and spelling were not to be overlooked. Early on the Kleine Gemeinde accepted an offer from the provincial government to accept the status of a district school. This acceptance gave them an annual grant of between \$80 and \$100 dollars, but also required teachers to be examined and licensed annually, and schools inspected by government appointed inspectors. Fast provides brief sketches of fourteen Gruenfeld and fourteen Hochstadt teachers. Most teachers had short-term commitments. The flag legislation in 1907 ended the district school and both schools reverted back to private schools. Later both schools became public schools again.

Early agriculture was based on man and oxen power. The oxen pulled the plow to break the prairie, and man broadcast the grain, cut it with a scythe and raked it together. Mechanization arrived slowly with the mower and hay rake, threshing machine and self-binder. Other commodities included milk, cheese and eggs. Honey production, which started in 1897, has become the trademark of the Kleefeld community. The ingenuity of the pioneers is shown in the Fast Black Smith Shop which manufactured self-propelled grass mowers, and ditch digging machines in the early 20s. One of the latter turned into a dragline that was used to build roads and ditches in the RM of Hanover to improve drainage.

The Gruenfelders were sustained by several para-church organizations: Brandordnung (Fire Insurance), Waisenamt (orphan care), and Teilungs Verordnung (inheritance rules). Fast provides good examples of how these organizations functioned in the villages. Village networks were also maintained by via newspapers such as the Mennonitische Rundschau, and Nordwesten, personal letters, and a local telephone system. The Ideal Telephone Company started in 1908. Fast found more than a hundred letters and included several in the chapters and many more in an appendix. This gives the book a unique grassroots character. Just reading the letters gives an interesting insight into early village life.

Fast concludes the book by describing briefly the life cycle of the villagers in terms

of stages: birth, childhood, courtship, marriage, death and funerals.

With the use of original personal letters, government documents, personal diaries, fire insurance records, newspapers, periodicals, pictures, and family connections, Fast demonstrates his skills as a historian as he creates the Gruenfeld story. In many ways I see this book as a practical model for writing Mennonite village histories, and as such should be of interest to a wide range of scholars. The story told here is shared by other Mennonites who arrived in Manitoba between 1874 and 1876, and settled in villages. The issues of securing a homestead, applying for patents, and struggling with the wording of government documents are well illustrated in the Gruenfeld story. The descendants of this village should forever be grateful to Fast for shaping this story in such an informative book. When reading the chapter on the pioneers, we gain a sense family and connections that this village nurtured, and left as a legacy for you, and the larger community. My hope is that other descendants will be encouraged to write their village stories.

Royden Loewen. *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. xxiv, 331 pp, maps, photos. \$32.95 Cdn.

By Hans Werner
University of Winnipeg

Royden Loewen's new book displays all the insights and delicious ironies we have come to expect from him. In this study, Loewen compares the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites of the R.M. of Hanover with those of Meade, Kansas during a time of dramatic change in rural life. The book begins with the assumption that there was a rural disjuncture in the middle decades of the twentieth-century and then compares how Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in the two locations reacted to the physical environment, how they changed, and often reinvented what it meant to be Mennonite, and how they created new models of what it was to be men and women.

Loewen begins with a chapter on the general changes that the middle decades of the twentieth brought to agriculture in Southeastern Manitoba and compares them to those in Kansas. In the next two chapters he focuses more specifically on the environment, using the image of the snowdrift for Manitoba and the dust bowl for Kansas. The third chapter traces the

development of a middle class in both locations and then Loewen shifts his focus dramatically for the next two chapters to the radical divergence of religious sensibilities. The spectrum among the Kleine Gemeinde widens considerably from “religious retrenchment” on the one hand to “celebrated evangelicalism” on the other (p. 82). Loewen’s analysis of the influence of North American evangelicalism on the Kleine Gemeinde suggests that it provided both continuity with their earlier religious understanding, and a bridge to being more like their non-Mennonite neighbours. For the most conservative of their number who would seek out the jungles of Belize, the evangelicalism of Canada spurned them to remember an earlier golden age in Manitoba but to reinvent conservative traditions thousands of kilometers away.

The next two chapters, some of the most engaging in the book, focus on gender in both locations, but use a feminine Kansas and a masculine Manitoba as the venues of analysis. Here Loewen reads his sources carefully to lay bare for his readers what playing football for the Landmark Dutchmen, and a news story about a woman hitting a cow on the road tell us about the changes the rural disjuncture brought to notions of gender. Finally, Loewen turns his attention to the diaspora of the Kleine Gemeinde more specifically. One chapter seeks out the Kleine Gemeinde of Spanish Lookout, Belize, while the other looks at the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites that ended up in the cities of Winnipeg and Denver.

The book concludes that dispersion was the most important consequence of the rural disjuncture and it produced remarkable diversity among a group with historically shared understandings. According to Loewen, as a result of the rural disjuncture the Kleine Gemeinde people created new understandings from “inherited ethnoreligious symbols and an imagined regional and even national culture (p. 230).”

Royden’s latest book is a rich cultural history that tells a compelling story of how change came to southern Manitoba Mennonites in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. It enhances our understanding of how rural Mennonites became urban, how the manliness of farm work was overtaken by the new masculinity of the football player, how farm women became homemakers and then professional women, and how being Mennonite was redefined in diverse ways.

Karl Koop, editor, *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition, 1527-1660*, Kitchener ON: Pandora Press, 2006. 366 pp.

By Helmut Harder
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Karl Koop’s *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition* is the eleventh volume in the Classics of the Radical Reformation (CRR) series. While the series is dedicated to providing the English readership with important texts of the Anabaptist movement, this is the first volume featuring a compendium of Anabaptist-Mennonite confessions of faith. The fourteen confessional statements in the collection are selected from the years between 1527 and 1660. As such, the work takes us well beyond the first several generations of Anabaptism.

Many of the Confessions selected for this collection will be unfamiliar to readers, as historic confessions of faith are rarely on a “must read” list. Some were available only in Dutch or German, and have now been translated into English. In a helpful introductory essay, the editor provides historical perspective on the role of confessional statements and on their potential for Anabaptist studies. As well, each of the fourteen statements receives a brief introduction that gives an account of authorship, and positions the confession within its historical context.

In the general introduction, the editor notes that 20th century European and North American research into Anabaptist-Mennonite sources has tended to neglect the study of confessions. He ascribes this to various factors. Dutch scholars tended to see early confessional statements as restricted to issues of a particular era. North American historical research tended to neglect the study of confessions, giving attention to ethical, historical, and socio-political issues rather than to doctrinal matters. Only recently has there been a renewed interest in Anabaptist and Mennonite confessions. Koop is among those giving attention to this genre of literature in our day.

The volume organizes the confessions into two major geographical sections: Swiss/South German and Dutch/North German. Within these there is some chronological sequence, with matters of geography and church alliances taking precedence.

The first section begins with “Congregational Order” (ca. 1527), the earliest extant outline of an Anabaptist statement on communal practice. The “Christian order” includes meeting three or four times a week for Scriptural study, leaving frivolity behind,

admonishing one another in love, sharing possessions, avoiding gluttony, celebrating the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of Christ’s death, and upholding communal commitment. Apparently Jacob Hutter was considerably influenced by this document.

The “Brotherly Union” of the Swiss Anabaptists (1527), known as the Schleithem Confession, is stated in much the same spirit as the “Congregational Order,” although with additional themes and with considerable elaboration. Themes include baptism, the ban, the breaking of bread, separation from abomination, congregational leadership, the sword, and the oath. Here we find early roots of Mennonite pacifism.

The third document, a “Confession of Faith by Jörg Maler” (1554), is quite different in content and style than the first two. It is personal, pietistic, and reflects the influence of the early Christian creeds, with separate paragraphs on Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Church, Forgiveness, Resurrection, and Eternal Life. There is little of the earlier Anabaptist emphases on community, discipleship, swearing of oaths, or the sword.

The “Swiss Brethren Confession of Hesse” (1578) comes from a period and a territory that reflects a more irenic relationship between Anabaptist congregations and Lutheran churches. The 38 brief confessional statements are supported by biblical texts written out in full, apparently a way of emphasizing that the Anabaptists also rested their faith on biblical authority. Surprisingly, there is no statement on oaths or the use of the sword.

The second section, featuring confessions of Dutch and North German Anabaptism, begins with the “Kempfen Confession” (1554). Its dominant theme is the call to be true to Jesus Christ – 1) his incarnation, 2) our baptism informed by the master, 3) the Lord’s Supper as commanded by Christ, 4) heeding only preachers who follow the teachings of Christ, 5) relating to authorities in accordance with Christ’s ways, and 6) following Christ concerning weapons. The influence of Menno Simons is evident here.

The “Wismar Articles” (1554) introduce a major issue of Anabaptism at this time, the manner of exercising church discipline. Should the approach lean toward tolerance or strictness? Seven of the nine articles of this confession deal with the discipline issue. Another interesting feature is the question of the role of children in the community. The Wismar Articles follow Menno Simons and Dirk Philips in the rejection of warfare.

The “Concept of Cologne” (1591) was designed to solve doctrinal and practical issues between Anabaptists in the north and in the south. The main issues concern

an understanding of the incarnation and the question of how to apply the ban. The “Cologne” document was devoted to unity, and for a time it brought disparate groups together. But it did not resolve the issues once and for all.

The next three confessional statements have their origin among Mennonite churches in the Waterland district of northern Holland. The “Waterlander Confession” (1577), a comprehensive statement of twenty-five articles, was intended to build unity among a less rigorous sector of the Mennonite church. At issue was the application of the ban. The Waterlanders sought to be irenic rather than strict in matters of doctrine and practice.

When a group of English Separatists in Europe sought relations with the Waterlander Mennonites, the “Short Confession of Faith” (1610) was formulated to serve as a unity statement. Union was accomplished, but as a result the Frisian Mennonites broke with the Waterlanders to form their own conference. The 40-article statement gives detailed attention to doctrine and matters of church order.

A debate, centred in the Netherlands, between those among the Waterlanders who advocated the “outer word” as sufficient for salvation and those who insisted on the necessity of the “inner word,” lies behind “The Thirteen Articles” (1626). This confession affirms “both and” rather than “either or.”

The remaining four confessions reflect emphases and struggles of three Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in the 17th century: the Frisians, the Flemish, and the North Germans.

The “Confession of Faith According to God’s Word” (1617), by far the longest of the fourteen confessions of faith included in the volume (pp. 169-265), articulates the conservative stance of the Old Frisians who were concerned that the teachings of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips should remain intact.

The “Confession of Jan Cents” (1630) was formulated by Frisian and High German leaders who were concerned about the deep and widespread divisions among the Dutch and North German Anabaptists. The Jan Cent statement contributed to a significant agreement among Frisian, Flemish, and High German Anabaptist, achieved in 1639.

Along the same line, the “Dortrecht Confession” (1632), initiated by Flemish leaders, led to a formal union between Frisian, Flemish, and High German Mennonites in 1639. The Dortrecht Confession is seen by many as preserving the integrity of 16th century Anabaptism. In North America it

is utilized by some Mennonite groups to this day.

The “Prussian Confession” (1660) concludes the volume. While details of its origin, its initial purpose, and its authorship are not clear, this confession has been reprinted numerous times and has provided the basis for faith and order among Mennonite churches in Prussia, in Russia, and in North and South America for almost three centuries. For at least the first six decades of the 20th century it was the basis of the major confession of faith for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

A review of these fourteen articles of faith leaves the reader with several observations: First, it is apparent that confessions of faith in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition served the double role of uniting as well as dividing Mennonites along the lines of beliefs and practices. Second, confessions of faith are rarely self-standing. They are like strands in a loosely bound cord, crafted over time. Third, this volume of confessions offers a rich resource of biblical-theological underpinnings for the faith and order of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage.

Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition, 1527-1660, should prove to be an indispensable resource for theologians and historians interested in scholarly research and occupied with questions of Mennonite ecclesiological identity. Furthermore, Anabaptist-Mennonite confessions of the past commend themselves to all who seek to understand the Christian faith from a Mennonite perspective today.

While reading a compendium of historic confessions of faith is not a scintillating experience for the modern reader, this reviewer gained a new appreciation for carefully and poetically articulated formulations of the faith contributed by our lay theologians in past centuries. A notable example is Article XVI of “Confession of Faith According to God’s Word” (1617), which contains a compellingly beautiful account of the suffering and death of Christ!

Marjorie Hildebrand, compiler and editor. *Reflections of a Prairie Community: A collection of stories and Memories of Burwalde S.D. #529*. Winkler: Friends of the former Burwalde S.D. #529, 2004. ISBN 0-9736829

Reviewed by Tina Fehr Kehler

This book is a compilation of articles, recollections, stories and historical data about Burwalde, a community northwest of Winkler, Manitoba. Its intent is to preserve

and pass on the history of the settlement and endurance of a prairie community and the strong religious faith of its people.

The first chapter outlines the beginnings of the Mennonite settlement in four articles. Two of them recognize the native inhabitants of the lands prior to the Mennonite’s arrival. Will Braun exhorts the reader to be mindful that the settler’s freedoms came at the expense of Aboriginal people’s way of life and their banishment to reserves. The other articles detail the struggles between Mennonites and Anglo settlers as they negotiated their respective spaces. The use of the prevailing judicial system to settle these disputes, and the early demise of the village attests to a community that embraced change. The Mennonites who settled in this area did not resist transformation as did their traditionalist counterparts. Instead of being wary of how new innovations or provincially run education would affect their way of life, they welcomed them. As Dorothy Wiebe Dyck asserts in an article, “The abandonment of the village system led to the gradual assimilation with the rest of Canadian society.”

The failure to maintain a traditional Mennonite village system did not mean the abandonment of community and faith. The rest of the chapters are, as the title suggests, a compilation of reflections of a community that largely organized itself around the school.

The second chapter, which makes up the bulk of the book, includes short histories of each of the families who homesteaded in the area. These pages are adorned with family portraits, moments of a bygone era frozen in time. Newer photos of some of the families are also included. The records of events are usually written by a member of the family. Some include genealogies while others tell stories related to the events. Combined, the vignettes show a community that struggled to raise families through illness and death with the means that they had at their disposal. Many speak of individuals’ strong faith and involvement in religious endeavors in the community. The accounts also reveal the importance of farming as a way of life for many. However, the following generation’s variety of occupations and residences across Canada reveals the transformation over the prairies beginning in the mid 20th century.

The remainder of the chapters describe the school, and the religious and non-religious events around which the community revolved. Of significance to the community was the burning of the first school house that was erected in 1890 and the construction of the new one in 1937. This event was

recounted by several individuals throughout the book. The third chapter includes pictures of some of the classes, stories about teachers, subjects taught, and experiences by teachers, of which there were an ever-revolving number. One page lists all the teachers who taught at the school until its closure in 1977. These chapters chronicle the birth, life and death of the one room school in rural Canada.

The school district was the centre for religious expression though the book does not clearly state why the church did not provide this function. The residents tell stories about the religious activities in which they participated. These activities include the “Jugendverein” or Young People’s group, Sunday School and the Burwalde Bible Study and Sewing Circle. The latter group confirms the importance of both religious instruction and service within women’s groups that sprang up in Mennonite communities across Canada (See *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women’s Societies in Canada* by Gloria Neufeld Redekop). While religious and faith sentiments run throughout the book, few references indicate a “Mennonite” identity. Any reason for this is pure speculation but perhaps it was simply assumed or perhaps it is a result of their assimilation into the larger Canadian society.

The school was also the nexus for non-religious events including sporting activities such as skiing, baseball, ice skating and hockey. 4H and other agricultural clubs along with clubs focusing on home economics also proliferated. The juxtaposition of religious and non-religious activities surrounding the school defies the notion of a public/private split that continues to play itself out in southern Manitoba.

Other events are given cursory attention at the end of the book including the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church and Winkler Bible Camp, experiences regarding World Wars I and II, the flu epidemic of 1919, and the polio epidemic of the 1950s. No separate attention is given to the Depression of the 1930s. The family histories touch on some of these events, but it would have been good to hear more stories to get various perspectives.

This book is likely to be of greatest interest to “Burwaldians” and social historians interested in prairie life. As other history books of its kind, it pieces together patches of lives that make up the quilt of a community’s history. The best parts about this book for the outsider, but social history enthusiast, are the stories. I wish there would have been more of them. Realizing that not every family member is going to be a good storyteller, perhaps future compilers of these

types of books can utilize those who are adept at interviewing and storytelling to flesh out the lives of those to whom reference is given. The stories tell of hardship and fun. They reveal adaptation and accommodation to change while maintaining, as a reunion motto suggests “To God be the Glory.”

James Urry. *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006. 400 pp., maps, \$27.95 Cdn.

By Hans Werner
University of Winnipeg

Mennonites tend to believe that their history has been characterized by a long-standing and powerful aversion to politics. The belief that the Christian should be separate from the world also acknowledged ‘rendering unto Caesar’ but it meant becoming involved with the state any more than necessary. James Urry’s book aims to dispel that view of the Mennonite past.

It is a big book and covers a lot of time. Urry divides his explanation of Mennonite involvement in politics into three major sections, Europe, Russia, and Canada. As this division implies, the book focuses on Dutch-North German-Russian rather than Swiss-South German Mennonites. Within this basic geographic division, Urry covers a period from the Reformation in Europe in the 1500s to 1980 in Winnipeg—a span of over four hundred years. Urry’s book makes the case that Mennonites have not been far from the ‘power plays’ of the world throughout the period and in the national contexts he examines (p. 4).

During the reformation period and for the next few years, Mennonites tried to upset the political order in revolutionary ways, Urry argues. Some Mennonites, such as those migrating to Prussia began to use confessions and catechisms to define themselves both religiously and within the political order in which they lived. Urry contends that the creation of confessions and catechisms were not only religious, but political processes. Urry then proceeds to outline the political nature of Mennonite Privilegia and their relationship to the state when that state began to recognize the rule of law and constitutions. Urry’s European exploration ends with the Prussian Mennonites migration to the Tsar’s empire. Urry portrays this as political failure, in the sense that Mennonites were unable to use the levers of power in a state that began to espouse equal treatment under the law, rather than privileges for some.

Urry’s first chapter in the Russia sections

is entitled “Power and Privilege,” which he argues were the themes of Russian Mennonite political life even through the reforms of the 1860s when the Tsar began to modernize the Russian state. The dynamic changes that began to overwhelm Russia after 1905 were a period, according to Urry, where Mennonites focussed on solidarity to more effectively keep their privileged place in a changing political landscape. By the time of the early Soviet period, Urry suggests, Mennonites worked the political levers to the best of their ability in order to remain autonomous within a state that fundamentally challenged their view of the world and the Christian within it.

The Canadian period of the Russian Mennonites marks a time where Mennonites no longer practice politics to gain privilege, but rather where they begin to exercise political power through representation in a democratic system. They began to vote and the unity that had often characterized their approach to the state began to disintegrate and often became fragmented. Urry’s chapters on the Canadian period cover new ground. Urry’s analysis of figures like Harry Enns, a Conservative member of the Provincial Cabinet for many years, and the controversies surrounding the appointment of George K. Epp as a returning office in a Winnipeg riding are new and shed light on developing Mennonite political activity.

Urry concludes that it has never been entirely true that Mennonites were the ‘quiet in the land’. In fact, Urry subtitles his conclusion; the “Loud in the Land.” He acknowledges, however that the degree and methods of political participation have been different at different times and places.

Urry’s wide knowledge of the history in which his analysis takes place is remarkable. It also makes the book somewhat difficult to read. There are a lot of words, and even then for the average reader, the knowledge of European, Russian and Canadian history that Urry assumes his readers have limits the book’s readership to a specialist audience.

James Urry has once again challenged Mennonites to think differently about themselves and their history. One can see in his analysis that all flavours of Mennonites, whether the more conservative, or those with a more liberal and modern outlook, have had to use political means just to stay away from what they thought were the ways of the world, or to assure that Mennonites would be able to remain Mennonite in the face of increasing nationalism. As he points out, even when Mennonites have been highly critical of the state, they have also embraced it and used its tools to further their own identity as citizens of a different kingdom.

Letters

Dear Editor

Glen R Klassen's unfortunate article 'Another Look at the Creation-Evolution Debate' seriously misrepresents the thrust of my layman's article on 'Planes in Ice' in our Creation magazine (see www.CreationOnTheWeb.org/planes). Klassen states that the Lost Squadron planes found under 250 feet of glacial ice were 'exactly where they should be', because we now know that the snow falls that rapidly in that part of the world. But that was never in doubt in the article, whose whole point was to show how astonishingly fast normal snowfall can build up thick ice sheets! Given his distortion of this matter, it will not surprise discerning readers to find that he has also dealt in a most cavalier fashion (putting it kindly) with the very careful analyses of meteorologist Mike Oard on this whole matter of ice cores and dating. I invite readers to use the search engine on our site www.CreationOnTheWeb.org to check these ice core articles out firsthand.

The biblical arguments that Klassen brings up to support his efforts to get readers to switch to 'theistic evolution' are unfortunately even more spurious, and also easily debunked from our site—e.g. the 'two versions of Genesis' furbphy. His article evades the main issues for the believer in this debate—for example, the way in which long-age beliefs, (which put death and bloodshed and disease before man and thus before any Fall), undermine the key planks of the Gospel. What is at stake is the entire authority of the Bible, because all Klassen's careful smokescreens cannot evade the plain fact that Genesis is written as real history—and was always treated as such by Christ and the NT writers.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Carl Wieland
Managing Director,
Creation Ministries International
(Australia)

Dear Mr. Editor:

It is unfortunate that Delbert Plett, without whom there would undoubtedly have been no Preservings magazine, had to pass into eternity, while still a relatively young man.

Having known both of his parents and been in their home when Delbert was still

quite a young boy, then having later observed many things about him on one of the tours he led to the Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Germany and Holland, I think I might have a little insight into his character.

He was neither a great hero, a great saint or a great demon, but like many of us, very much a product of his heredity and his upbringing.

I believe he was more than anything a talented entrepreneur who recognized early in life the advantages a smart lawyer would have in acquiring wealth.

A lot of the religious opinions he expressed, I am deeply convinced were a direct reaction against inconsistencies he witnessed in the lives of people he saw and heard while growing up. Had I been in his place, I would probably have reacted the same way.

Delbert was neither a trained historian nor a trained journalist and many of the errors with which Harold Jantz rightfully charges him in his letter in the 26th issue of Preservings, a trained historian would not have made.

It would be totally wrong to posthumously deify Delbert as a great lightbearer or pathfinder of the Christian faith, but quite right to acclaim him as someone who dug out interesting facts about his Mennonite forbears which would have otherwise remained in obscurity.

Sincerely, Gerald Wright,
Niagara On The Lake, ON

Response:

Thank you for your letter. It is truly unfortunate that Delbert Plett died when it seemed he still had a lot to contribute to the Mennonite scholarly world. And, as you indicate, we are all shaped by our experiences, both negative and positive. Or context often defines the issues we see as most important, and gives us the tools with which to address those issues.

As you rightly indicate, Delbert made a major contribution to the study of Mennonite history. His voluminous books helped readers to understand more clearly the Kleine Gemeinde, the Old Colony, and other so-called conservative groups.

But Delbert's contributions were not primarily in providing more information about those groups, important as that was. His most important contribution was that he provided readers with a new lens with

which to see those groups. In earlier studies, including the monumental work about Mennonites in Russia by P.M. Friesen, the Kleine Gemeinde were denigrated as backward, narrow minded, poorly educated, and poverty stricken. Their approach to faith issues was seen as impoverished.

Delbert helped readers see that this approach was coloured by Friesen's own Pietist context, and that it caused him to miss the richness of the Kleine Gemeinde faith expressions. Delbert showed that the Kleine Gemeinde, as well as the other conservative groups, expressed a faith heritage which had deep roots in the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement. Even though it was different from the faith expressions of the Pietists, it was as valid, and as Plett would often say, even more valid than the Pietist expressions which were after all imports from another faith heritage, either Lutheran or Baptist.

If you concluded from my comments at the end of Jantz's letter that I concurred with Jantz's critiques, then you read me wrong. I do not agree with Jantz's letter. What Delbert Plett did very helpfully in his writings, including in *Diese Steine*, was to point out that the strong negative bias in earlier Mennonite research was not based on careful research, but was ideologically driven. Delbert pointed out that if one looked carefully at the details of the conservatives' history, sermons, and diaries, one would see that they were strongly biblical, and faithfully expressed the historical Anabaptist Mennonite heritage. Plett further pointed out, correctly, that many of the innovators, like the Pietists in Russia and evangelicals in North America, often sold their spiritual Anabaptist Mennonite birthright for a poor pot of porridge made up of nationalism, war, individualism, and spiritual arrogance.

Did Plett at times overstate his case, and make claims for the conservatives that were exaggerated? My view is that at times he did. But his main points were valid, and needed to be heard. In this regard he has made a major change in the way the history of conservatives is interpreted today.

Jantz, in his letter, expresses the often biased, and erroneous, views of earlier writings by Russian Mennonite historians. This biased view, according to which the Pietists were right and truly Christian, and the conservatives were wrong and needed conversion, has largely been discarded by

later Russian Mennonite historians. Janz's letter also misinterprets the story of the conservatives in Canada and Latin America. For example, he thinks that migrations from one country to another were inspired by misguided, autocratic leaders who caused their members unnecessary hardship and death. He fails to see the religious motivations of those moves. In condemning those migrations, he even condemns his own church in Canada, which would not be here today if it were not for conservatives who led the way in settling western Canada in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Without those conservative communities, there would have been no 1920s immigration to Canada from the Soviet Union, the migration which brought so many of Janz's people to Canada. In numerous places in Latin America, the conservative were there

first, and the more progressives, while they consider themselves superior to the conservatives, benefit from the foundations laid by those early pioneers.

Janz lists Old Colony weaknesses (some of which are likely true, but others of which are false accusations based on stereotypes), and then wrongly assumes he has presented a balanced view of their faith communities. His methodology would be similar to listing the weaknesses of the Mennonite Brethren church, and then claiming that one had fully described that church. The views that Janz expresses fail to understand the depth and quality of the Old Colony people's faith, and thinks their faith is not genuine. He creates the wrong context within which to interpret their history, and then ends up seeing only negatives. I would hope that within the Anabaptist Mennonite com-

munities of faith we would be able to see beyond our own communities' expressions of faith, and accept each others' views as good, even if we do not fully share in all their convictions.

The Old Colonists have historically expressed a strong belief in community, in a wholistic view of faith that addresses all areas of life, a healthy scepticism of capitalism, a suspicion of modernity and progress, a simplicity of life and faith, a simple straight forward belief in the Bible, and a willingness to suffer for the faith, even if it means moving to a new land. To see these views as simply impositions by autocratic leaders, as Janz does, is wrong.

I hope these comments help to clarify my remarks about Janz's letter in the previous issue.

John J. Friesen, co-editor.

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Barton Creek, Belize, 1998. Photo credit: Doreen Plett.

