

Preservings

~ A Journal of the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.

Preservings \$20



Issue No. 33, 2013

"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



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In this Issue

The feature articles in this year's issue take us back to the story of the Mennonite presence in the delta of the Wisła River in present day Poland. We begin with Peter Klassen's review of the unique context of religious tolerance that attracted primarily Dutch Mennonites to the watery delta. My own article picks up this story, focusing on the landscape and environment that shaped the ancestors of many of us. John Friesen explores how Mennonites had to defend against those who challenged their orthodoxy while Mark Jantzen's article takes us to a time when many Mennonites had already left for Imperial Russia and Mennonite sensibilities were increasingly in conflict with the sense of what the obligation of citizens were to the state. Finally, we have the stories of two modern-day researchers, Glenn Penner and Roland Sawatzky, who made trips to Poland to uncover and help celebrate the Mennonite experience together with Polish partners.

We also have interesting articles on other themes. Leonard Doell, who hails from Saskatchewan, has had an ongoing interest in the story of those who tried Alberta, before settling in the Saskatoon area. The relatively new Mennonite presence in Two Hills, Alberta continues to amaze both the residents of the area and us as observers. Mary Shaw, who works in the Two Hills Mennonite Elementary School tells us about this unique experiment. Andrea Dyck's article is based on a Master's thesis she completed a few years ago. Her reading of letters to the *Mennonitische Post* from those who had migrated to Mexico in the 1920s tells us about their interactions with Mexicans. Donald Stoesz's contribution to this issue takes us into a little explored area, the question of why ministers preach on certain passages of scripture and how that has evolved over time.

Our biography section has a diversity of stories. Ralph Friesen unravels a complex family, Abram Buhler provides us with an old letter that tells us about spiritual mentoring, David Schroeder remembers Bishop David Schulz, and Conrad Stoesz tells about some marginal Stoesz's. We end with a son's reflection about his parents on their fiftieth anniversary.

Iris Reimer Nowakowski shares her memories of Steinbach and the EMC church during the tenure of minister Peter D. Friesen and Eleanor Hildebrand Chornoboy, reflects thoughtfully on Faspa, one of the most potent traditions of Mennonite life. A note from Ernest Braun tells about a CD of early aerial photos of the East Reseve in Manitoba, an important research tool created by the EastMenn Historical Committee. Finally, we are indebted to our book review contributors who have read books for us and not only tell us what is being written about, but also their thoughts on what they read.

Hans Werner, Coeditor

Preservings, a journal of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., is published annually. Co-editors are Hans Werner 1.204.786.9352 plettfoundation@gmail.com and John J. Friesen, 1.204.488.8128, djfriesen1@shaw.ca. The annual subscription fee is \$20.00, and cheques 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.

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Editorial

by Hans Werner
co-editor

It has been a difficult year in the world's media for those on the conserving end of the Mennonite spectrum. For months a small Swiss Mennonite group that migrated to the Gladstone-Plumas area of Manitoba from Ontario a few years ago made the news when all their children were removed from family and home by child welfare agencies. The Westbourne Mennonites, as they have come to be called, live on Ontario style farmyards, are seen on the highways with their buggies, and generally avoid the technologies of the world. The RCMP became involved, and there were allegations of the use of instruments of physical punishment that shocked the sensibilities of most Manitobans. As I write this there is news that some of the children will finally be returned to their families.

The story of the rape of many women in Bolivia again made the news both inside and outside Mennonite circles. A story in a magazine called *Vice*, claimed the rapes were continuing. *Vice*, an online media phenomenon that has been described as the "edgiest, wildest online media brand" and as "gonzo journalism" (the British *Guardian*), caught the attention of Mennonites and others. The last I checked the web version of the story had 511 comments, the author had been interviewed on CBC's *As it Happens*, and the *Canadian Mennonite* magazine reproduced the story for a Mennonite audience.

The Bolivian rape story was soon followed by a report in the *Canadian Mennonite* of MCC workers returning from the Durango Colony in Mexico. Here the reporter assured us that the conservative Mennonites there were "impoverished in every aspect of life" and that the church restricted their basic freedoms. Our society is drawn to these stories like the shoppers who cannot pass by the 'news' portrayed in the gaudiest way in the magazine rack near the checkout in the grocery store. Our Mennonite audiences, which for the most part have abandoned the 16th century view of what it meant to be separated from the world seem to be fascinated by these stories as well.

Let me be clear. There can be no doubt that sexual abuse of daughters and mothers, the excessive use of physical force in disciplining children, and the abuses of power by religious and civic leadership are to be abhorred wherever they occur. It is also true that there are problems in conservative Mennonite communities—problems that cry out for resolution. From the point of view of how the media has portrayed these stories, it is encouraging that even in the often-flawed reports there were glimmers of hope. The journalist who pursued the Bolivian rape story acknowledged at the end of her interview

on *As It Happens* that for eleven days she had enjoyed living with a "very wonderful and very kind family," she had found evidence of "good and decent people," women who were "empowered in their own worlds," and were "laughing and enjoying life." The *Canadian Mennonite* reporter wrote sensitively about the Westbourne church leaders, who broke with their deeply held aversion for the media to acknowledge that there was a problem and accepted help from 'modern' Mennonites in seeking a resolution. The portrayal of Durango Mennonites did not go unchallenged by others who work with Old Colony Mennonites, with one comment suggesting the article's portrayal of Old Colony Mennonites was "aberrant and harmful."

Sadly, however, these kind of media reports are not isolated, but have become a cottage industry in the desperate competition for an audience. It is doubly sad that our Mennonite media are seemingly just as eager to sensationalize and to use language that certainly contributes to the further marginalization of those communities. We seem not to recognize how these troubling media reports illustrate the large gap in our selective sensitivity to those who are not like "us."

Our society has made us very careful how we talk about religious groups, be they Muslims or our Aboriginal peoples who also espouse values embedded in a traditional past. These sensibilities seemingly do not apply to our conservative brothers and sisters who are fair game for the gaze of North Americans who 'know better'. While secular society feasts on the failures of an exotic religious group, 'modern' Mennonites alternate between being embarrassed, and viewing conservative Mennonites as objects of mission efforts.

Our highly critical stance towards conservative Mennonite piety harkens back to an earlier, now somewhat embarrassing chapter in Christian missions, when North Americans believed that when 'pagan' men found Christianity they would wear white shirts, suits, and ties, and women would wear suitably modest clothing in unsuitably hot climates. It seems we are still not able to separate sharing our faith with others, and foisting our culture on them. Imagine for a moment what our conservative friends might think when in these same publications they read about modern Mennonite debates surrounding sexuality, or miss reading about the incidence of divorce and the growing trend among our young people of living together before marriage. We do not seem to be able to see how the lifestyles we lead, the issues we face, and the values we espouse might look through their eyes.

We cannot expect secular media to leave our conservative friends alone and it will remain difficult to separate what constitutes a cover up or a glossing over of real problems, and what amounts to raw persecution. To some extent persecution is what our Anabaptist forefathers would have considered inevitable. Surely, however, our conservative friends deserve better from the rest of us.

Our Cover

Our cover features some of the images of the people active in recovering the Mennonite story in Poland. The background is an 1834 map of the Vistula Delta. Source: Preussischer Kulturbesitz, scan provided by Walter Epp.

Feature Articles: Prussia

Mennonites in Early Modern Poland: A Land of Contrasts

Peter J. Klassen, Fresno, California

A well-travelled visitor in early modern Europe must surely have been struck by the variety of forces and changes at work in that region of the world. A number of countries were involved in exploration, trying to discover just what lay beyond the horizon. Discovery of new lands, often followed by establishing new colonies, provided new challenges and added vibrancy to long established states. Sometimes attention was directed to the heavens, as when Copernicus opened new vistas in space, or the advent of printing made the rapid dissemination of ideas possible.

But the expansion of the resultant new possibilities did not necessarily bring change in the political structures of the time. Early Modern Europe was still characterized by concentration of power in the hands of the few. Goals of the so-called “absolute monarchs” showed few signs of being modified in favor of greater freedom for the masses. Some historians have written about themes such as “the age of despots,” and have emphasized efforts to maintain power in the hands of the privileged classes. Rulers such as Louis XIV were determined to keep tight control of their realms, while James I wrote about the “divine right of kings.”

There were, however, exceptions that presented other options, including that of greater individual freedom. Among these exceptions, the nation of Poland presents an interesting contrast. Whether occasioned by royal choice or regional circumstances, that nation presented a remarkable contrast to much of the rest of Europe. Although Poland, like other realms, had a monarch, here there were no assumptions that royal power was absolute - no need to project images of a “sun king.” Instead, Poland offered an intriguing contrast where power was shared by such entities as the royal court, ecclesiastical potentates, regional authorities of various capacities, city councils and a variety of landlords, none with illusions of absolute power.

With such a variety of power structures, Poland provided a wide variety of economic, political and religious distinctives. Among these was a characteristic largely lacking in most parts of Europe: the freedom of religious choice. While not all regions of Poland permitted this, many areas permitted a measure of religious diversity that was rare in most countries. While the bishop of Warmia, for example, made it known that he wanted no “heretics” in his jurisdiction, the bishop of Włocławek (Leslau) had no such concern. As a result, persons of different

religious beliefs settled in lands around Danzig and in many parts of the Vistula delta and valley.

For Mennonites, this meant that they were free to help develop the marshy delta and make it one of Poland’s most productive regions. In addition, they could settle in the Danzig environs, and soon establish a number of crafts and businesses, as well as build two churches in the Danzig community.¹ Such developments should not be interpreted as evidence of full religious freedom or equality before the law. In some regions Lutheran-dominated city governments tried to check the expansion of both Calvinist and Mennonite bodies, but enterprising immigrants always found other areas of economic opportunity.



A view of the old city of Gdańsk (Danzig). Mennonites were initially not allowed to live within the city. As a result, although many of them carried on commercial activities in the city, they lived in the villages outside the city walls. Photo Credit: Peter Klassen.

Many of the Mennonites who came to this region were refugees from the Netherlands, where the long arm of Philip II of Spain was trying to eradicate heresy. The *Martyrs' Mirror* records much of the tragedy of such efforts. Poland, however, provided a haven for religious nonconformists, and so Dutch windmills soon dotted the delta. Marshlands were drained and transformed into productive farmlands. Evidently the impact must have been widely noticed, for when the regional lord who owned much of the land in the Tiegenhof area became aware of these possibilities, he sent emissaries to the Netherlands to bring some of these experts in land drainage to his territories. As a result, a number of productive villages soon appeared in the region. This was replicated in many parts of the delta and along the Vistula River.



Mennonites were welcomed to the low lands of the delta to drain it and make it productive. Before the advent of machines wind was an important source of the power needed to raise the water. This was one of the last Dutch-style windmills in the delta, subsequently destroyed by an accidental fire. Photo Credit: Peter Klassen.

This remarkable demonstration of religious toleration at a time when this was not common in most of Europe aroused considerable interest, both supportive and critical. At the same time, Polish leaders agreed that diversity in religious matters should not be used to divide the nation, and in 1573 issued the "Confederation of Warsaw" to commit themselves and their heirs to toleration.

Since there is in our Republic no little disagreement on the subject of religion, in order to prevent any such harmful strife from the beginning among our people on this account as we plainly see in other realms, we mutually promise for ourselves and our successors forever, under the bond of our oath, faith, honor, and conscience, that we who differ with regard to religion will keep the peace with one another, and will not for a different faith or a change of churches shed blood nor punish one another by confiscation of property, infamy, imprisonment, or banishment, and will not in any way assist any magistrate or office in such an act.²

No doubt this declaration will have struck the champions of absolute monarchy or religious exclusivity as potentially

dangerous. This document must surely be seen as an emphatic rejection of imposing religious uniformity by force, a practice only too common as it spread devastation in parts of Europe, and which would continue to take a very heavy toll, as in the Thirty Years War. In the midst of that destructive conflict, Poland again held high the torch of toleration, when King Władysław in 1642 made a remarkable declaration:

We are well aware of the manner in which the ancestors of the Mennonite inhabitants of the Marienburg islands (Werder), both large and small, were invited here with the knowledge and by the will of the gracious King Sigismund Augustus (King 1548-72), to areas that were barren, swampy, and unusable places in those islands. With great effort and at very high cost, they made these lands fertile and very productive. They cleared out the brush, and, in order to drain the water from these flooded and marshy lands, they built mills and constructed dams to guard against the Vistula, Nogat, Haff, Tiege and other streams.³

The contrast between this document and sentiments expressed in other parts of Europe, such as Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, could hardly be more stark. Clearly, Poland was charting a new course, out of step with other large European countries. The Polish king's bold action affirming earlier similar statements, encouraged towns and landlords to invite Mennonites to settle in the Vistula Delta, as well as along the river. As a result, dozens of villages were either established or expanded by new settlers, mostly from the Netherlands.

Sometimes, the newcomers were so successful that some towns or landowners imposed restrictions on them, often in response to those who did not like the economic competition. At the same time, in a number of instances where Mennonites encountered opposition, they quickly found other villages or landlords who welcomed them. There was always another place that provided new opportunities. This tolerant attitude continued throughout the period of the kingdom's existence. A different world emerged when, in the latter part of the 18th century, Austria, Prussia and Russia divided Poland amongst themselves.

Not surprisingly, during the more than two centuries when Mennonites lived under the Polish crown, a number of



A painting of Crown Prince Władysław Vasa by Peter Paul Rubens around 1624, eight years before becoming King Władysław IV. Although a Catholic, Władysław IV was remarkably tolerant of Protestants and, as the declaration of 1642 suggests, of Mennonites in particular. Image Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

questions arose that reflected the challenges that faced religious communities that viewed the appearance of a number of Mennonite communities and their introduction of a different form of worship with some concern. Usually, verbal attacks on Mennonites aroused little concern. Thus, when the voivod (province) of Pomerellen in 1676 denounced the city of Danzig for serving as “a nest of Mennonites,”²⁴ and asserting that recent flooding was divine punishment for such action, the city council, now joined by Elbing, praised Mennonites for having helped to rebuild the dikes. More such settlers were needed, they said. So Mennonites took comfort in the fact that they had strong supporters who knew them well and appreciated what they had done.

Sometimes challenges came from different sources. Baltic trade was a vital factor in the Polish economy, and this was especially true of Danzig. Thus, when the Hansa in 1535 adopted a resolution stating that “if a congregation in a Hansa city holds to the error and heretical teachings of the Anabaptists,”²⁵ it could be barred from the privileges of trading with members of the Hansa. Wismar was accused of such practices, and so an investigation was ordered, but no action was taken against the city. Evidently the investigation produced no convincing



One of the restrictions faced by Mennonites was that they could not build churches. The first church building used by Mennonites in the Delta was this townhouse in the city of Elbląg (Elbing), which they began using as a church building in 1590. Photo Credit: Peter Klassen.

evidence, or perhaps Wismar had exercised some persuasive tactics.

But challenges continued. When the Lutheran bishop of Ducal or East Prussia, Paul Speratus, complained to Duke Albert that the duchy harbored heretics, the Duke ordered their expulsion.²⁶ Melanchthon also entered the fray when in 1545 he warned the duke that Anabaptists were settling in his duchy. The duke responded: “If Anabaptists will not convert (to Lutheranism), they cannot live here.”²⁷ At first Albert issued a number of expulsion orders, but when his officials warned that Mennonites made significant contributions to the economy, Albert permitted exceptions. Religious uniformity might be desirable, but a strong economy was more vital. It is ironic to note that a Lutheran duke ordered expulsion of Mennonites, but Catholic kings and bishops, Lutheran city councils and lords of various faiths permitted Mennonites to live in numerous regions of Poland. At the same time, it should be noted that toleration was often questioned. Thus, in 1573 the Danzig city council sent representatives to the Sejm (national parliament) with instructions to oppose religious toleration. Only Catholicism and Lutheranism, but not Calvinism or Anabaptism, should be tolerated. The Sejm took no such action.



Duke Albert in Prussia was the last Grand Master of the Catholic Teutonic Knights. He was an early convert to Lutheranism and became ruler in Lutheran East Prussia. Albert was painted by the famous reformation artist Lucas Cranach the Elder in 1528. The painting is in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig, Germany. Image Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

The question of religious toleration long remained a matter of great interest, and challenges came from various quarters. Few were as dramatic as an investigation conducted in 1678, under the direction of the local Catholic bishop, and with the approval of the king, John Sobieski III. The investigation was conducted in Danzig, with the bishop presiding. One can imagine the dramatic events: the bishop is flanked by two Carmelite monks, two Cistercian monks, a Jesuit scholar asking the questions, while the bishop's secretary takes notes.

It is important to note the larger historical context. Just three years earlier, England had adopted a law that prohibited assemblies of more than five persons unless approved by the Church of England; in France, after years of conflict, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes would soon, in 1685, order Protestants out of the country; Germany was still reeling from the destructive Thirty Years War, but in Poland Mennonites are invited to a discussion with a bishop!

One can only imagine the high drama that January 17, 1678 when Mennonite leaders, only with Bibles and their understanding of Scripture faced Bishop Sarnowski, supported by his theologians and lawyers. Elder Hendrik van Duhren, leader of the Frisian Mennonites, was the first to be questioned. He had asked his fellow-believers in the Netherlands to help draft the replies. We have handwritten minutes of the meetings. Since the question of Arianism had arisen, a question about the Trinity was to be expected. The response, which reflected a belief in a triune God, evidently satisfied the interrogators. Other issues raised included the role of Scripture, the means of grace, the meaning of the incarnation, the dual nature of Christ, the specific practices and beliefs of Mennonites, and the role of the state. When asked whether Catholics were also members of the family of God, van Duhren responded that all "holy people" who accepted Christ's teachings participated in God's salvation. When van Duhren was asked if he believed the pope was the Antichrist, he responded with "the strongest negative."

Following van Duhren's interrogation, Hansen, together with delegates from his Flemish Mennonite church, appeared to present his defense. He presented a copy of a confession of faith, together with responses to forty-eight questions given to his church by the bishop's staff. The printed versions state that an additional copy was presented to "His Royal Majesty in Poland, John III in Dantzig."⁸

This document was evidently the first Mennonite confession printed in Royal Prussia. Leaders of the congregation had carefully reviewed Hansen's answers. An analysis of the answers suggests that the Mennonites were determined to show that their faith rested upon Scripture, and so they included many biblical quotations. The confession included statements about the divinity and humanity of Christ, the Christian's responsibility to the state, rejection of oaths, the last judgment and other topics. When asked about the statement rejecting participation in war, Hansen responded that the old adage of "an eye for an eye," had been superseded by Christ's command to love one's enemies. While Mennonites wanted to be good citizens, they held that Christ's command took precedence over earlier statements about responding with violence.

When the question of baptism arose, Hansen asserted that he and his church felt that belief in Christ must precede baptism, and so infants were not baptized. When the question of rebaptizing those who had been baptized as infants arose, the

Jesuit asked where scripture permitted such a practice. Where was there any suggestion of rebaptism in scripture? Hansen responded that in Acts 19 the record shows that those who been baptized by John were indeed rebaptized when they received fuller knowledge, and were then, as Acts puts it, baptized "into Jesus." The Jesuit's response is not recorded in the minutes, but one can almost imagine a moment of awkward silence. When asked about the role of the pope, Hansen responded that he was prepared to give the pope the entire honor God had given him, although he did not state what that might be. Apparently this cryptic response was not pursued further.

When the interrogation was over, Hansen reported that the church was now freed from "suspicion." At the same time he noted that this favorable finding had cost his church "a heavy contribution of money." This was not especially unusual; on another occasion, Hansen reported that some "Jesuit fathers" had approached him with a request that he contribute to the construction of a tower for a Catholic church. Hansen's church gathered the funds and forwarded them. But others felt they too might share in ecumenical largesse. A local Lutheran congregation also asked for support, and requested 300 florin for the building of a church. The funds were gathered; Hansen laconically reported the money was received with "great thankfulness."⁹

The interrogation of van Duhren and Hansen strengthened cooperation between Mennonite churches in the Netherlands and in Poland. Furthermore, the "right" of Mennonites to exist in Poland had now been affirmed by a bishop, just as a king had confirmed it earlier. Mennonite leaders tried to make sure that the good will of religious and political leaders was buttressed by building cordial relations with other parts of the community as well. Leaders in local matters were another important part of the society in which Mennonites functioned, and so efforts were made to build bridges of mutual acceptance and understanding.

In this pursuit, few Mennonite leaders were as significant as elder Heinrich Donner of the Orloffefelde congregation. He had built cordial relations with local government officials, and clearly had won their confidence. On one occasion, when a person from another faith, who had been baptized as an infant, wanted to join his church, he proceeded to plan for her baptism. Some of his fellow-ministers wondered if this might raise conflicts about rebaptism, but Donner was not deterred. He invited a local government official to come to the baptismal celebration; the official came, and created no problems. The absence of official objections showed that Donner's community stature and rapport served his church well.¹⁰

Some of Donner's fellow ministers, however, felt that he was jeopardizing the relative freedom of the Mennonite church. Elder Jacob Siebert of the Thiensdorf congregation contended that Mennonites were violating an understanding with governments if they accepted converts from other churches. Donner disagreed, contending that Mennonite churches should welcome those who wished to join them. No external body should determine who could join a Mennonite church. Donner insisted there was no agreement that Mennonites had made stipulating they would not permit others to join them. Other churches might object, but the individual must be free. Evidently Donner's position prevailed, and no official objections were made.¹¹

The issue long remained a contentious one, however, since both Lutheran and Catholic churches opposed Donner's position, and some Mennonites did not wish to risk alienation.

1. Kurze Anleitung zu dem würdigen Genuss des heiligen Abendmahl's	S. 4.
2. Morgen-Gebet eines Communicanten	13.
3. Erinnerung vor dem heiligen Abendmahl	15.
4. Selbstprüfung zur wahren Vorbereitung	21.
5. Gebet bey dem ersten Genuss des heiligen Abendmahl's	27.
6. Gebet vor dem Abendmahl	29.
7. Desgleichen, ein anderes	31.
8. Einige Seufzer bey Empfang des Brodt und Weines	36.
9. Gebet nach dem heiligen Abendmahl	38.
10. Desgleichen ein anderes	42.
11. Abend-Gebet eines Communicanten	44.

Anleitung zum würdigen

Genuss des Abendmahl's.

Sich habe es von dem Herrn empfan-
gen, das ich euch gegeben habe. Denn
der Herr Jesus in der Nacht, da er
verrathen ward, nahm er das Brodt;
dankete und brachs, und sprach: Neh-
met, esst, das ist mein Leib, der für
euch gebrochen wird, solches thut zu
meinem Gedächtnis. Dasselbigen gieb
chen auch den Kelch nach dem Abend-
mahl, und sprach: Dieser Kelch ist
das neue Testament in meinem Blut,
solches thut, so oft ihrs trinket, zu
meinem Gedächtnis. Denn so oft ihr
von diesem Brodt esst, und von die-
sem Kelch trinket, sollt ihr des Herrn
Tod verkündigen, bis daß er kommt.
Cor. II, 23 bis 26.

A 2

I. Kurs

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Heinrich Donner was a farmer and Ältester of the Orloffserfelde Church. He was widely read and also published numerous religious and historical materials. The image is of the table of contents and first page of his prayer book published in 1788.

Heinrich Donner, *Abendmahl's-Andachten: Gebete, und Liedern, vor, und nach dem heiligen Abendmahl, zum Gebrauch der Taufgesinnten Gemeine in Preußen. Marienwerder: gedruckt bey Joh. Jac. Kanter, seel., Erben, [ca. 1788]*. Image Credit: Mennonite Library and Archives, Newton, KS.

Nonetheless, Donner stood his ground and also assisted other churches that shared his views.¹² No doubt an important factor for Donner was the absence of a uniform policy among Catholic bishops. Some welcomed Mennonites onto their lands; others denounced them as heretics. Similarly, a generally beneficent attitude at the royal court, as when King John Casimir in 1650 issued a royal decree stating that Mennonites living on crown lands enjoyed royal protection, offered support for congregational autonomy. The king went further: laws issued against Mennonites were to be declared null and void.¹³

At the same time, since Poland was a country with many local jurisdictions, local governments sometimes took action against Mennonites. Thus, in 1676 the voivode (governor) of Pommerellia used a session of the local sejmik to denounce "heretics," such as the Mennonites. This time, Mennonites were

championed by representatives from Marienburg (Malbork), who stated that Mennonite farms were models; more such settlers were needed. Representatives from other towns supported this position, and the matter was dismissed.¹⁴

But religious issues were by no means the only challenges that confronted the Mennonite communities. Early modern European rivalries and wars did not spare Poland, and in 1598 dynastic rivalry between Poland and Sweden led to war, at first in areas claimed by both countries in the eastern Baltic. The struggle soon spread and eventually, the notorious "Swedish Deluge" of the mid-seventeenth century brought widespread devastation to the Danzig and Delta regions.¹⁵ Mennonites were forced to flee from their homes on the outskirts of Danzig. In the Delta Swedish troops destroyed numerous villages, including many where Mennonites had settled. The Peace of

Oliva in 1660 finally ended the conflict. Fortunately for the Mennonites, their fellow-believers in the Netherlands provided economic assistance, and gradually relative prosperity returned to the region.

The respite from war, however, was of short duration. Soon the Great Northern War (1700-1721) brought Swedish troops once more into Poland. Again, Mennonite communities suffered from the war. Apparently Charles XII, king of Sweden, was intrigued by Mennonite practices when he encountered Mennonites as he led his army along the Vistula. The *Orlofferfelde Chronik* states that in 1709 Charles' army came to Toruń and besieged the city. When the soldiers needed food, local Mennonite farmers were ordered to make provisions available. Reports stipulate that on one occasion the local Mennonite minister, Stephan Funk, heard the army chaplain preach. The minister, wanting to analyze what the chaplain was saying, began to take notes of the sermon. This was reported to the king, who at once expressed interest in the event. The minister was ordered to appear before the king who, according to the *Chronik*, asked the minister what he had been writing, and why. Funk replied that he was a Mennonite minister and had taken notes because he wanted to determine whether the sermon was biblical. The king's response indicated that he apparently knew something about Mennonite beliefs. He commented that he knew that Mennonites did not approve of war, but he would like to know on what grounds they based their belief. Funk responded directly, "On Scripture." The king reportedly commented, "I see you are a preacher. I'd like you to give a sermon in my presence and show that war is not permitted. When can you be ready?" Funk responded, "In sixteen days. But I would like your majesty to guarantee that this will not create danger for me." The king quickly responded that his grace would assure protection.

After 14 days Funk approached the army camp and was taken to the king, who asked, "Are you ready?" "Yes, your majesty," Funk responded. The king then addressed his attendants, "My Lords! I have ordered this Mennonite preacher in my presence to give a sermon on war, and to show that according to the basic teachings of Mennonites and the witness of Scripture, war is not permitted. You will listen carefully, and do not interrupt." With that the king turned to Funk and said, "You may speak."

Funk turned to the king and his attendants, and began to preach. He asserted that fighting in war is forbidden in many passages of Scripture. At the conclusion of the sermon, to which those present had listened very carefully, the king asked if anyone wished to express disagreement. "No," came the response. The king then dismissed the assembly and spoke to Funk alone. "You have very clearly stated your position, but it is not clear to me that all war is forbidden by Scripture. There must be some exceptions." Funk replied, "If your majesty will permit, I want to state that there are no exceptions." The king responded, "None at all?" Funk replied, "Possibly there could be an exception in the case where a king is attacked in his own realm." But certainly there was no biblical warrant for invading another country. The king, who was determined to capture Toruń, reportedly stated that he would inflict as few casualties as possible in the seizure of this important center.¹⁶

Despite the courteous treatment given Funk by the king, the royal army continued its military action in Poland. (Perhaps some enterprising readers will search further, and see how

the Swedish army and its king recorded this incident.) In any event, the war continued, and Charles XII continued to expand the scope of his military endeavors.¹⁷ But much of Northern Poland, where most of the country's Mennonites lived, had suffered severe economic hardship. Once again, Mennonite communities embarked on a rebuilding program, and the fertile Delta and Vistula valley inhabitants gradually recovered from the wounds of war.

It is remarkable that, despite political uncertainties and frequent wars that adversely affected Mennonite settlements in the Vistula Delta and the Vistula Valley, Mennonite settlements managed not only to survive, but also to expand and become economically stronger. The challenges they faced were many and serious, but resilience and ingenuity stood them in good stead. One of the thorny issues that long remained problematic was the question of dues to pay to the churches, whether Catholic or Lutheran. A long-established practice stipulated that persons paid dues to the local parish. This was an important principle that provided support for the local churches. But what should Mennonites do when they bought land from Catholic or Lutheran landlords? The local priest, whether Catholic or Lutheran, wanted to retain the income from the land, even if the new church members were neither Catholic nor Lutheran. In 1686 a local Lutheran minister outlined the dilemma: "In the Large Werder the Roman Catholics hold all the parish churches even though they have almost no adherents."¹⁸ Despite such challenges, Mennonite leaders usually were able to find an accommodation with local ecclesiastical and political leaders so that local Mennonite congregations could live in peace with their neighbours.

Another arena in which Mennonites were able to develop their own practices and policies was in the education of their children. Very soon after settling in Poland, they began to establish procedures that would provide at least some measure of formal instruction for their children. A usual practice was to have the church building also serve as the teaching center. Where no church structure existed, homes were used to facilitate education of the children. Village reports state that the Mennonite villages of Gross Montau and Gross Lubin had schools as early as the 16th century. Sometimes formal statements refer to schools, as in the cases of leases for farmers settling in Upper and Lower Gruppe in the Large Werder. Here a number of schools were established where Mennonites constituted a majority. In other villages, Mennonite children might attend Lutheran or Catholic schools. Existing records refer to Mennonite schools in the villages in the Ellerwald, Heubuden, and others, but founding dates are often not given. In some instances, where villages were established on crown lands, teachers might be paid by the royal treasury; in essence, this meant that some tax funds paid by the villagers were used by royal officials to pay teachers.¹⁹

Uniform policies covering teacher qualifications, curriculum, attendance requirements or conditions in schools were usually nonexistent, so primary education was very much a local and family matter. In cities, such as Danzig, however, government interest in children's education became evident early. A directive, issued in 1601, stipulated that parents should send children to school when they reached the 7th year.²⁰ The statement included both boys and girls. Schooling should continue at least until the children could read and write. Students were permitted to help at home in harvest time.

Education was to be taken seriously, for if parents neglected to send their children, they could be subject to fines. Education of children came to be seen as increasingly important, for a regulation issued in 1655 directed that students be in school from their 7th to their 14th year. At the same time, another directive stated that teachers should be appointed only if they had been examined and approved by the local pastor.²¹ Schools and parents were to be partners.

Evidently directives did not always achieve their objective. One government official declared, “Alas! Everywhere great ignorance is evident among our young people,”²⁰ and corrective measures were to be adopted. Records do not show how effective proposed measures were. Since later reports also lamented the shortcomings of children’s education, no panacea had been found. At the same time, a measure of diversity was apparently recognized, for in the village of Petershagen instruction was available in both Polish and German.

These guidelines were designed for schools in Danzig or Danzig-owned territory. In lands up the Vistula, or along the Nogat, education was under local jurisdiction, and so varied greatly. Persons living in the Ellerwald, under the jurisdiction of the Elbing city council, were apparently expected to take a rather broad view of education. Here there was to be regular church attendance, and no unnecessary work was to be performed on Sunday.

But educational and religious practices varied from region to region, from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and from authority figure to authority figure. Thus, when Mennonites in the Schönsee congregation learned that the local bishop felt the time had come to review Mennonite policies and agreements, they offered to pay an additional 4,000 florins for the maintenance of their usual practices. The bishop suggested the issue was not money, but the welfare of souls, but when the offer was increased to 10,000 florins, the bishop had a change of heart. The traditional rights were affirmed, and all was well.²¹ Then, as later, diplomacy and finance could be persuasive determinants.

Although Mennonites often found their religious practices under attack, a champion of the religious and educational rights always seemed to appear on the scene. But vigilance was always essential, and liberties could never be taken for granted. Thus, when Augustus II assumed the Polish crown in 1699, renewed efforts to link Mennonites to Anti-Trinitarians, who had been expelled earlier, created new problems. Once again, Mennonites found aid at the royal court. In a remarkable decree, the king pointed out that his predecessors had invited Mennonites to come to Poland. He then proceeded to give a

remarkably comprehensive overview of Mennonite liberties. This included freedom to practice their religion, including the right to observe the Lord’s Supper and baptism according to their beliefs, establish their own schools and hire their own teachers. Seldom had Mennonite rights been so fully and firmly outlined.²²

Similar decrees were issued by later monarchs. In 1736 Augustus III confirmed all previously-granted privileges of the Mennonites, although in 1750, after protracted negotiations with the Danzig guilds, he agreed to restrict some economic enterprises of Mennonites. Altogether, when Mennonites compared their situation in Poland to the history of their fellow-believers in many other countries, they had reason to be grateful. But as the war clouds gathered again in the latter part of the 18th century, the future looked uncertain.

Endnotes

1 For an overview of the Danzig Mennonite churches in early modern times, see H.G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde, Ihre Entstehung und ihre Geschichte von 1569-1919*. (Danzig, 1919).

2 Wilbur, Earl M., *Socinianism*, quoted in George H. Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1139-40.

3 Archivum Państwowego w Gdansku, 358/132 (translated by the author).

4 Gottfried Lengnich, *Geschichte*, VIII, 126-127.

5 The resolution stipulated that if “cyn gemeine in cyner anzestadt mit dem ardemē und ketterschen leere der wedderdoper odder sacramenterer bosmittet und behaft were und darinne beharrede,” it was to be excluded from all commercial activity of the Hansa until corrective action had been taken (Klaus Friedland und Gottfried Wentz, *Hanserezesse, vierte Antheilung, 1530 bis 1560, zweiter Band*; Wien Böhlau, 1970, p.83).

6 Paul Tschackert, *Urkundenbuch zur Reformationsgeschichte des Herzogthums Preussen*, Band 1, (Leipzig: Hirzel. 1890). 203.

7 Tschackert, ibid., III, 94.

8 “Ihrer königl. Majest. In Pohlen Johanni III übergeben in Dantzig,” Biblioteka Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Gdańsku, MS 594.497.

9 H.G. Mannhardt, *Danziger Mennonitengemeinde*, 88.

10 Donner, *Chronik*, 9, 17-19.

11 Geheimes Preussisches Staatsarchiv, II, Generaldirektorium, Westpreussen u. Netzedistrikt, CIX. No. 1, vol.2, fol. 152.

12 Donner, *Chronik*, 53-55.

13 W. Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten*, 84-85.

14 Lengnich, *Geschichte des Preussischen Landes Polnischen Antheils*, vol. VIII, 126-127.

15 See Harvey Plett, *Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church*, 141-143.

16 The *Orloffefelde Chronik*; W. Mannhardt, *Wehrfreiheit*, 43-44.

17 He was eventually killed during a siege on the Swedish-Norwegian frontier.

18 Christoph Hartknoch, *Preussische Kirchen-Historia* (Frankfurt, Danzig, 1686).

19 E. Wernicke, *Kreis Marienwerder aus der Geschichte des Landkreises bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, (Hamburg, 1979). 205.

20 APG, 01018, 4.

21 Emil Waschinski, *Das kirchliche Bildungswesen*, 486.

22 The text of the decree is given in W. Mannhardt, 87-98 (German), and LXV-LXVI (Latin).

Mennonites and the Vistula: The Land and the Water

Hans Werner, Winnipeg, Manitoba

When we try to uncover where the distinctive faith and cultural practices of the Dutch-North German stream of Mennonites originate we often look to Prussia where Mennonites lived for about 250 years before the migration to imperial Russia. It is in Prussia, where Low German came to be; it is where the system of church leadership evolved, and where the first mutual systems to protect against fire were created. The list could go on. It is not often, however, that we have considered

how the particular geographic context of the Vistula Delta (Żuławy Wiślane) influenced the sensibilities of the Mennonites who later moved to Imperial Russia, then to Canada and the United States, and more recently to Mexico, Paraguay, Belize, Bolivia and Argentina. In this article I want to provide an overview of the Vistula Delta from an environmental point of view, and to suggest how Mennonite culture was influenced by the relationship of the land and water in the Vistula Delta.



A Google Earth view of the Vistula Delta looking south from the Baltic Sea. The point where the Vistula divides at Biala Gora is in the centre of the image with the narrower Vistula valley disappearing on the horizon. The higher land that defines the boundaries of the delta is clearly visible in the centre foreground where the Vistula channel comes right up to the edge of the delta. Image Credit: Google Earth.

The Landscape

The Vistula (Wisla) River's source is in the Carpathian Mountains and it winds its way north through Poland where it is joined by the Narew (which has the Bug as a main tributary). The river formed its delta when some time in the past it broke through the hills left by receding glaciers. These moraine hills form the sides of an upside down triangle with its base the sand bars that separate the delta from the Baltic Sea. The river itself separated into many channels that kept changing as the delta formed. The largest of these channels split the Vistula into two main branches at Biala Gora, the Nogat and what is now called the Leniwka. The point created by this major division of the river is also the highest area of the delta at eleven meters above seal level. The lowest point of the delta is near the lagoon (Zalew Wiślany/Frisches Haff) in the northeast corner of the delta where the land is 1.8 meters below sea level. Fully twenty-eight percent of the delta's 1700 square kilometers is below the sea with almost one-half (forty-seven percent) less than five meters above sea level.¹ The branches of the Vistula created three islands known as *Werder*, the Large Island or *Grosser Marienburger Werder*, between the Nogat and the Leniwka, the Danzig Island or *Danziger Werder* in the northwest and the Small Island or *Kleiner Marienburger Werder* in the northeast.

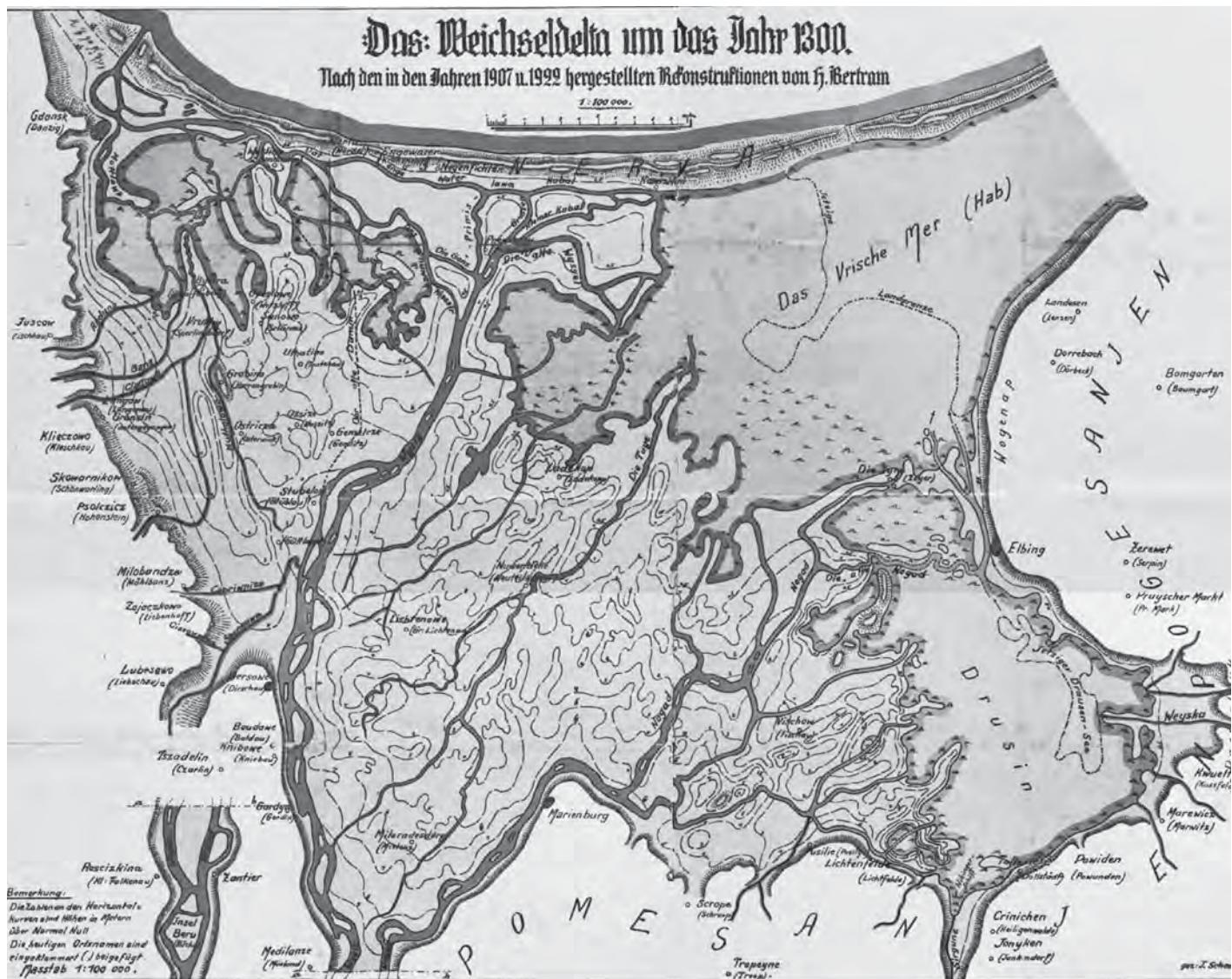
The Vistula brings its load of sediment from the long journey from the Carpathian Mountains and when the water slows down after leaving the moraine hills the sediment settles, creating alluvial deposits that became the soil Mennonite farmers would cultivate. These alluvial deposits range from a few meters to sixty meters in depth. Although the delta was likely forested in prehistoric times, it became largely a treeless



The major geographic divisions and features of the Vistula Delta.

plain with soils that are primarily loam, sand, and peat with the potential for productive agriculture once the land is drained.²

Flooding was, and remains a constant threat for the low-lying delta. Like the Red River familiar to Manitoba Mennonites, the Vistula flows north, the same direction as the progress of the spring melt. When the spring melt proceeds at the same pace as the arrival of the previous week's melt water from further south, the progressively higher crest of the Vistula creates the potential for mass flooding in the low lands of the delta. Ice



The Vistula delta as it may have looked in 1300. The map was created by Hugo Bertram in 1924. Image Credit: Bertram map insert.

jams are another major contributor to flooding with the same reaches of the Vistula experiencing ice jam flooding every three to five years. Between 1328 and 1896, 174 cases of dikes being breached in the area of the mouth of the Vistula were attributed to ice jams.³ A third source of flooding is caused by storms on the Baltic that push the water into the lagoon, raising the level of the water in the channels and rivers that empty into it.

Before the Mennonites Came

Today the Vistula delta is a complex and highly developed landscape with a population of 200,000 people and “surface waters ...that lost their natural properties through long lasting human intervention.”⁴ It was not always so. A map of what is now the Vistula delta drawn as it might have looked in 1300 shows large areas of the present delta still submerged. The population of what is now Poland lived primarily on the highlands. Slavic and Baltic peoples surrounded the delta; to the west were the Kashubians, to the south the Poles, and to the east the Baltic or Old Prussians. To the extent that the delta was occupied it consisted of small Slavic or Old Prussian settlements on the higher ground that offered some protection from the almost annual floods. As Gerhard Driedger notes,

“the people in these small and scarce settlements lived from fishing and hunting. There was little if any farming.”⁵

The recorded history of human interaction with the delta environment begins with the attempts by the Christian Poles to missionize and subjugate their Kashubian and still pagan Prussian neighbours.⁶ The Kashubians became Christian between the 10th and 12th centuries but the Prussians were fiercely resistant, particularly if being Christian meant being dominated by the Poles. In the early 13th century, the Polish Duke, Conrad of Masovia invited the monastic Teutonic Knights to help him conquer and convert the Prussians. The Teutonic Knights were a Germanic order active in the crusades as a field hospital and then as a fighting force. As the crusades were winding down, the order’s Grand Master, Herman of Sals, was looking for a new project to sustain the order. In 1226 the Pope granted the Teutonic Knights control over all the land they could conquer from the Prussians. The Teutonic Knights arrived at Toruń in 1230 and proceeded down the Vistula to the Baltic, building castles along the Vistula at Kulm (Chełmno), Marienwerder (Kwidzyn), and Elbing (Eblag). By the end of the 13th century the Teutonic Knights had gained control over the entire delta, including Kashubian Gdansk, and had established their

headquarters at a large castle they built at Marienburg (Malbork) on the Nogat.⁷

Soon after the delta came under their control the Teutonic Knights began organizing the building of dikes and finding settlers to farm the land that they were able to wrest from the grip of the water. The first records of the incorporation of the village of Neuteich (Nowy Staw) in 1310, for instance, note that it was the *Dorff czum Nuwen Tiche*, the village by the new dike. Dikes had to be constructed along the Vistula and the Nogat to try to keep the rivers in their channels during flood events. These were called *Damm* while the lower dikes along the lagoon built to keep storm surges from inundating the delta were called *Wall*.⁸ By 1380 the main dikes were completed, although Horst Penner suggests it is unlikely that all the areas below sea level were claimed before the Teutonic Knights effective domain over the delta came to an end.⁹ The order actively sought out settlers to come to drain the land, to farm it, and of course to pay taxes. The method used was to appoint a *Locator*, someone with money, or to whom the Order was indebted, who received an allotment of land with the obligation of finding settlers who would render it economically beneficial to the Order. The *Locator* became the head of the settlement and received a portion of its taxes.¹⁰ The settlers were not serfs, as was common in Europe in medieval times, but their status was determined by the Culm Law.¹¹ They were not obligated to the Knights directly, but had obligations in the form of taxes and the building and maintenance of the dikes—no small obligation! To consolidate their hold on the delta, the Knights realized that settling Germans on the land was in their interest, although Old Prussians and Slavic peoples were allowed to stay, provided they were Christians.¹²

Draining the land required digging drainage channels and because there was almost no natural slope, windmills were used to pump the water. The windmills raised the water using the power of the wind to drive a wheel with buckets that scooped the water over a splashboard. Windmills of this type were limited to raising the water thirty or forty centimeters resulting in a number of them being built in a row to raise the water enough to drain low-lying areas.¹³ By 1361, 45 villages were established on the plain of the Vistula delta with approximately two thirds of the land that was half a meter above sea level being used for agricultural purposes.¹⁴ But the water did not give up the land easily. Floods devastated the delta regularly. A major



Hermann von Salza, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights when the Order gained control of the Vistula Delta in 1226. Image Source: Wikipedia; the original painting is in the Deutschordenshaus, Vienna.



The Scharfenberg (Bystra-Osiedle) main windmill before it was demolished during World War I. The mill is a water wheel bucket mill similar to those used during the era of the Teutonic Knights. Photo Credit: Bertram, 10.

flood in 1328 breached the dikes along the left side of the Vistula and inundated the Small Island and portions of Gdansk. Initially dikes were basically piles of dirt, but after floods in 1352 dike builders began to place a carefully packed layer, or ‘plug’ of clay in the lower center of dikes to prevent seepage.¹⁵

The Polish kings, never having resigned themselves to the presence of the Knights, attacked them and in the famous Battle of Tannenberg in 1410 the Knights were defeated. The battle almost wiped out the Knights and their influence on the delta entered a period of decline, as did the old order throughout Europe. In 1466 the second peace treaty of Thorn (Toruń) created Royal Prussia, with Danzig (Gdansk) and Elbing (Elblag) and the areas surrounding them becoming free cities. The Large Island became the property of the Polish king. The wars of the 15th century devastated the countryside and many settlers abandoned their farms for life in the cities on the edges of the delta. As a result, the Polish kings, who needed money to fight their wars and sustain their households, faced reduced rents and increasingly borrowed money from wealthy city merchants. In exchange the merchants acquired control over large areas of the delta.¹⁶ Massive flooding in the early 16th century capped the decline that had begun a century earlier. There were floods in 1526, 1528, 1533, 1540, 1542 and 1543. The 1540 and 1543 floods were particularly severe. The March 1543 flood breached the dike at Schöneberg (Ostaszewo), more than 500 people lost their lives, and almost half of the Large Island was inundated for several years. Farmers left the delta in large numbers—the water had reclaimed much of the land and it became a “water wilderness ...covered with reeds.”¹⁷

The Arrival of the Mennonites

By the time of the floods of the 1540s, the Reformation had brought Anabaptist ideas to the Dutch and North German areas. The first adult baptism took place in Zurich in 1525 and Anabaptist ideas arrived in the Netherlands a short time later along with persecution by the Catholic emperor Charles V. The connections between Holland and Danzig were extensive and common since both were important members of the Hanseatic League. Rumours of greater tolerance in the East were soon prevalent in Dutch areas. The first Mennonites began arriving in Danzig on ships from Holland after 1530 and because diking and draining skills were particularly welcome, Dutch farmers were generally well received as



A 1909 map of the area of the villages of Reichhorst, Wengelwalde, Augustwalde and Hohenwalde, which were built on land reclaimed from the Drausensee in the 16th century. Source: "Thiergart" map sheet, Archiwalne Mapy Pomorza Gdańskiego. www.mapy.eksploracja.pl.

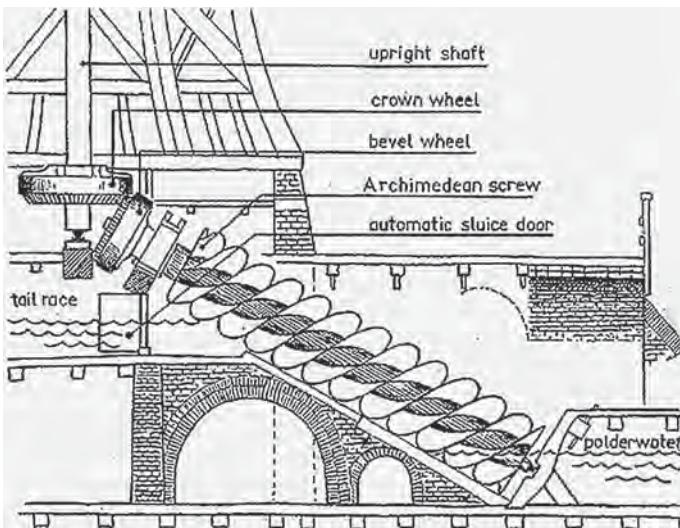
settlers to drain the devastated Small Island. Among them are found names that are common among the Mennonites of Prussia.¹⁸ In the Large Island, where the Polish king had dominion, the Loitze brothers of Danzig had acquired large blocks of land in 1548 against debts owed them by the Polish crown. In 1562 the Loitze brothers brought in Dutch Mennonite farmers to drain the land, which became the Tiegenhof (Dwór Gdańsk) sub region. A similar development was created nearby after 1569 when the Polish crown gave up land in the Bärwalde (Niedzwiedzica) area, which by 1627 listed a Mennonite as its village *Schulz* (mayor).¹⁹ Mennonite immigration continued at levels that caused the Catholic Bishop of Culm to complain as early as 1608 that this area of the delta was completely filled with Anabaptists.²⁰

The status of these new settlers was based, not on the Culm Law, but on *emphyteutic* tenure. Under this system a block of land, called a *tenuta*, was given to a *Locator*-like person such as the Loitze brothers who charged prospective villagers an initial lump sum fee in exchange for a lease that often ran for 30 or 40 years. Annual rent began after three or five years, presumably allowing the settler to make the investments in the time and energy necessary to build drainage works to make the land arable. The village of Platenhof (Cyganka) for instance, had its first contract in 1610, made between Anna von Morlangen and six Mennonites for a 40-year term. It was renewed in 1656 for another 40 years. The agreement absolved the Mennonite

farmers from any dike maintenance obligations other than for the dike along the Tiege River, they could brew beer for their own consumption and were allowed to fish along that portion of the Tiege River that abutted their land.²¹

It is an interesting question whether the high degree of cooperation necessary to manage the water and the land led to a highly developed sense of community among Mennonites, or whether their shared status as persecuted coreligionists had helped to create a sense of community that would stand them in good stead in reclaiming the delta. Regardless, the Mennonites who migrated to the delta after 1530 embarked on an intensive rebuilding program, reclaiming the land from the water on a large scale using sophisticated methods. Mennonites are credited with the ability to polder the areas under sea level and even into the *Frisches Haff* and the *Drausensee* (Drużno), by creating temporary dikes, pumping out the water and then creating permanent dikes.

Between 1584 and 1590, for example, Mennonites built a dike right through the middle of the *Drausensee* isolating a large part of the western side of this shallow lake or estuary. A row of windmills was built along the dike to pump the water to the other side, canals were dug and settlement and agriculture begun. The villages of Reichhorst (Żukowo), Wengelwalde (Żółwiniec), Hohenwalde (Krzewsk), and Augustwalde (Wiśniewo) were settled on the dewatered former lake bottom at elevations of almost two meters below sea level.²²



A diagram of a windmill using the Archimedes Screw, an innovation that allowed water to be lifted considerably higher than the older bucket wheel. Source: <http://www.let.rug.nl/polders/boekje/types.htm>

Mennonites brought a number of technological innovations with them from their experience in the Dutch lowlands. They created distinctive homesteads with houses and barns attached to create a compact yard site that was built on a small hill with dirt that came from the canals that had to be dug when a new area was drained. Windmill designs were improved over those used in the Teutonic Knight era and horse driven pumps were used to pump water when there was no wind. The Mennonite engineer Adam Wiebe is credited with introducing the screw pump to the delta to provide greater lift capacity. Developed by the Greeks in the 3rd century B.C.E., the Archimedes screw had not been used in the delta before the Mennonites arrived. In contrast to the thirty or forty centimeters of lift provided by the scoop wheel system, the screw could raise the water two meters or more.²³

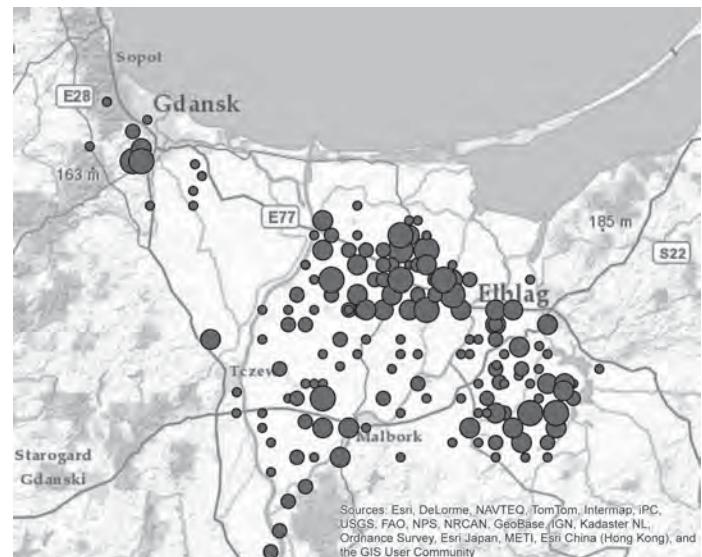
The water did not easily give up the land, even for the experienced Mennonite immigrants from the Netherlands. War and flood, the latter occasionally caused by the former, wreaked havoc on Mennonite attempts to reclaim the land from the river. The two wars with Sweden, 1626-35 and 1655-60 were fought in predominately Mennonite towns and villages. The second of the wars was particularly devastating when Swedish forces retaliated against an attack by Danzig's armies by opening the dikes south of the Danziger Haupt on March 7, 1657 while the Vistula was at flood stage. The entire Little Island up to the edges of the city of Danzig was flooded and for the duration of the war Mennonite farms were inundated.²⁴ The troubles were not over even after the war. In the 17th century the dikes failed 36 times and every third year "Mennonite farmers, their families and the cattle they managed to save, lived on their yards for weeks—sometimes months, surrounded by water."²⁵

In the delta environment a high level of cooperation was the most critical factor in managing the complex drainage systems and constant threat of flood. To deal with the challenges of the environment, Mennonite cooperation extended to all areas of economic and community life. Renting the land and negotiating the lease was usually done by community elders who could commit their coreligionists to thirty and forty year leases. Dikes had to be monitored during periods of flood risk leading

to the offices of *Deichgeschworene* (dike watchman) and *Deichgraf* (dike supervisor).²⁶ Horst Penner offers an example of the organization required to manage flooding on the Nogat:

When the river level gauge on the Ellerwald monitoring booth reached 2.75 meters one half of the men in the community were mobilized for dike watch. If the river rose higher, all the men were mobilized to monitor ice movement while the dike watchmen and supervisors were called to their monitoring posts. If ice conditions were deemed to be dangerous every available resource was mobilized. The following measures were implemented during emergencies: At those points along the dike where there was a danger of overtopping, crates were pinned to the dike with stakes and filled with manure. Where the dike was in danger of eroding, bundles of sticks were used to protect it; where there was seepage coming from the river side of the dike, the trickle channels were dug up and stuffed with reed bundles and manure and when possible a cofferdam was built around the area of seepage.²⁷

By the latter half of the 17th century the system of *emphyteutic* tenure gradually gave way to ownership under Culm Law. Mennonites began to purchase land and by the time the Prussians came to have dominion over the delta in 1772, Mennonites were buying up land to assure the survival and way of life for their large families. The implications of a change of ruler, from a Polish to a Prussian monarch, and the resulting change in administration were mixed for Mennonites. While they likely found the new sense of order and efficiency of the Prussians to be in tune with their own sensibilities, the Prussians were also militaristic. Beginning in 1789 Mennonites left the watery lands of the delta for the wide-open steppes of Ukraine.



Mennonite settlements in West Prussia in 1776. The size of the circles indicates the relative population of Mennonites in each village. Village populations were tabulated from the 1776 Special Census of Mennonites taken after Prussia gained control of much of the Delta in 1772. Most of the Small Island remained part of the free city of Danzig until 1793 and was not enumerated for this census. Sources: base map, ESRI; "The Complete 1776 Census of Mennonites in West Prussia," compiled by Glenn Penner; http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.htm

The Vistula delta became an environment modified on a grand scale by human intervention. Land was literally taken from the water and made into farms. It almost seems that the Vistula River and what Horst Penner refers to as the “water wilderness” that it wanted to create, represented the disorder of sin in the world and had to be resisted. Reclaiming the land and ordering the environment, on the other hand was a Christian mission. The environment may have also reinforced, or even helped create, deeply held Mennonite cultural values of cooperation and order. The delta environment did not allow for individual action. To survive everyone had to work together, everyone had to obey the rules. Although the historians of the Mennonite experience seem not to have uncovered sources that document conflict in the community about water, it must certainly have been there. Dissension could not, however, get in the way of doing what had to be done to save the community from going under the water. A German saying also prevalent in the delta was “*wer nicht deichen will, muss weichen*,”—“he who is not willing to dike, must leave.” Quite possibly it is in the Vistula delta environment where deeply engrained values of ‘looking after things’ were born in Mennonite culture.

Endnotes

- 1 Piotr Kowalik, “Flood control in the Vistula river delta (Poland),” *Environmental Biotechnology*, 4(1) (2008): 1; Jerzy Cyberski, et al, “History of Floods on the River Vistula,” *Hydrological Sciences Journal*, 51(5) (October 2006): 811 and A. Jarzębowicz, et al, “Vistula Plains (Zulawy Wislane): Introductory Case Study for the Workshop on Selected Problems in Environmental Risk Management and Emerging Threats,” http://kio.pg.gda.pl/ERM2009/download/ERM_cs_1.2.pdf, 8. The Vistula was Weichsel in German and the point where the Vistula splits was known to Mennonites as the Montauer Spitz. For the period considered here what is now called the Leniwka retained the name Vistula.
- 2 Paul Thomaschky, *Die Ansiedlungen im Weichsel-Nogat-Delta* (Munster: E.C. Brunn’sche Buchdruckerei, 1887), 17.
- 3 Cyberski, 813.
- 4 Jarzębowicz, 8 and Kowalik, 2.

5 Gerhard Driedger, *The Werder: The Land between the Vistula and the Nogat*, 3rd ed. (Lethbridge: By the Author, 1995), 4-8 and 20.

6 These early or “Old Prussians” should not be confused with the adoption of the name by the German state of Prussia much later.

7 Dan Stone, “The Teutonic Knights,” *Preservings* 30 (2010): 19-22 and Driedger, 14-15.

8 Driedger, 21.

9 Cyberski, 813 and Horst Penner, *Ansiedlung mennonitischer Niederländer im Weichselmündungsgebiet von der Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts bis zum Beginn der preussischen Zeit* (Weierhof: Mennonitischen Geschichtsverein, 1963), 11.

10 Driedger, 30-31.

11 The Culm Law (Kulmer Recht) was granted to the cities of Kulm and Thorn (Chelmo and Torun) by the Knights Grand Master in 1255 and formed the basis for the legal rights and obligations of all the settlers in the delta. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulm_law.

12 Thomaschky, 41-44.

13 Driedger, 26-27.

14 Driedger, 23-25.

15 Cyberski, 814 and Driedger, 27 and 37.

16 Horst Penner, *Die ost- und west preussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen* (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1978), 122-123.

17 Penner, *Ansiedlung*, 11, Driedger, 45 and Cyberski, 814.

18 H.G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde: Ihre Entstehung und ihre Geschichte von 1569-1919* (Danzig: Danziger Mennonitengemeide, 1919), 37-38.

19 Penner, *Ansiedlung*, 58-59.

20 Penner, *Ansiedlung*, 44-45.

21 Penner, *Ansiedlung*, 48.

22 Penner, *Die ost- und west preussischen Mennonite...*, 136-137. Usually considered a lake, the Družno sometimes receives sea water along the Elbląg River, which accounts for its occasional designation as an estuary reservoir.

23 Driedger, 54 see also Bertram, 11.

24 Penner, *Die ost- und west preussischen Mennoniten...*, 198. The medieval Danziger Haupt was at the point where the Leniwka branch of the Vistula split into two, the Martwa Wisła emptying into the Baltic at Danzig, and the Szkarawa turning east to empty into the Frisches Haff.

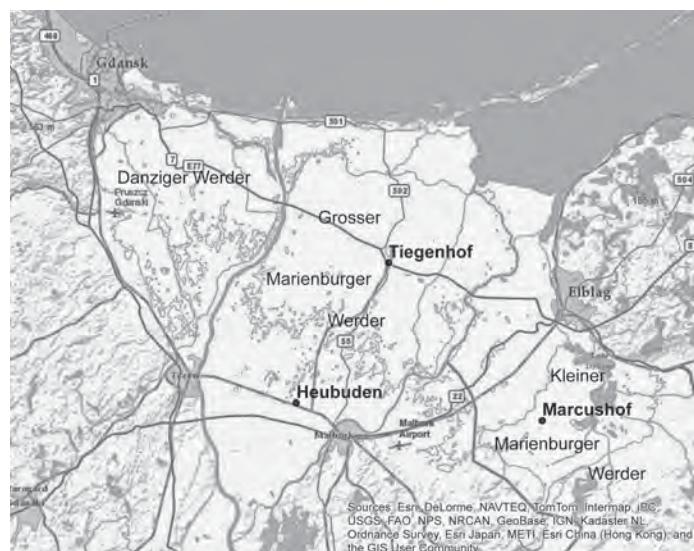
25 Penner, *Die ost- und west preussischen Mennonite...*, 200.

26 Peter J. Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland & Prussia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 27 and Driedger, 37.

27 Penner, *Die ost- und west preussischen Mennoniten...*, 201-202. The account is dated from 1821.

Mennonites in Poland: Heretics or Orthodox

John J. Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba



A map of the modern day Vistula Delta area. Markushof is the present day village of Markusy.

In September 1726 Mennonites in the Danzig (Gdansk) and Elbing (Elbląg) areas along the Vistula region in Poland faced a crisis which could have resulted in their expulsion. Mennonites were suspected of being Socinian, or Arian, that is, in not believing in the Trinity. Mennonites were interrogated to see if they were orthodox or heretical. If they had been found to be heretical, they might well have been expelled from their homes and villages, and Mennonite history would have been significantly altered.

The accusation of heresy was specifically made against the Markushof (Marxhoff) Mennonite Church south west of Elbing, Poland. The church was required to defend its faith before a tribunal presided over by Herr Dr. Weichmann from Danzig. The Ältester of the Markushoff Mennonite Church presented the response in written form on behalf of the Mennonite community.¹ A handwritten copy of the questions and the responses is extant in the Gdansk State Archives in Gdansk, Poland.²

The background to this interrogation lies in the Anabaptist history of both the Netherlands and Poland. The Anabaptist story in the Netherlands is well known. After the debacle at



An engraved portrait of Menno Simons by Jacobus Burghart, 1688.
Image Credit: GAMEO.

Münster in 1535, when the violent wing of Dutch Anabaptism was defeated and disgraced, a new Anabaptist direction was set by a group of people, including Dirk Philips and Obbe Philips. Menno Simons, a priest, left the Catholic Church to join this movement because he felt he could offer assistance. He emphasized that faith and life should be based on the teachings of the Bible and not on dreams, visions, or direct revelations from God. Instead of violence and revolution, he emphasized that the Bible teaches forgiveness, reconciliation, turning the other cheek, and loving the neighbour. He taught that Christian life ought to be lived in community, where people's needs were taken care of, and leaders were elected from within the community of believers. Menno Simons had such a strong influence on the Anabaptist movement's direction, that a large portion of it became known as "Mennonite."

Continued persecution by the Spanish who controlled the Netherlands resulted in many Mennonites fleeing to the Danzig (Gdansk) and Elbing (Eblag) areas of Poland for refuge. Here they rented lands or set up small businesses, or shops, and after incredible hardships, and the loss of many lives to disease, they managed to establish thriving churches and communities.

The reason Mennonites from the Netherlands settled in Poland was that when the Reformation began, and the western European governments persecuted and terrorized those

of dissenting or different religious views, Poland granted tolerance to minority religious groups, including Lutherans, Reformed, Anabaptists, Jews and others. In 1569, when Poland and Lithuania joined together to form one large Commonwealth at the Treaty of Lublin, the Commonwealth enshrined this religious toleration in law, when the parliament (Sjem) met on 6 January 1573 to elect a new king, and "signed an agreement not to engage in war 'for differences of faith and church.'"³ This law provided a measure of protection to religious minority groups, including Mennonites.

In 1642 the Polish-Lithuanian King granted Mennonites a *Privilegium*, which was a legal document that enshrined in law certain rights that would govern them as a minority religious group without citizenship. The *Privilegium* included the right not to bear arms in time of war. This *Privilegium* was renewed by every king until the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist in 1795. As a result of this *Privilegium*, even though Mennonites were frequently threatened by local religious or civic officials, they were never expelled. So in 1728, when this interrogation of the Markushof Mennonite Church took place, Mennonites were still under the protection of the *Privilegium*.

It may seem strange that in 1728 Mennonites would be threatened with expulsion when the Commonwealth had been tolerant of religious minority groups, and Mennonites had received a *Privilegium*. The answer to this puzzling question lies in the history of religious dissent in Poland, and the fate of the Polish Anabaptist movement.

When the Reformation began in western Europe in the early sixteenth century, that is, in Wittenburg (Martin Luther 1517), Zurich (Ulrich Zwingli 1523) and Geneva (Jean Calvin 1538), it gradually spilled over into Poland. Various Anabaptists also circulated through the country, introducing the ideas of adult baptism, pacifism, lay leadership in churches, and equality between rich and poor - between peasants and nobles. The Polish Anabaptist groups also debated whether God was triune or singular. Most opposed the Trinitarian views as expressed in the Nicene Creed because they believed that the idea of the trinity was a fourth century corruption of the biblical understanding of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They believed that according to the Bible there is only one God, and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not God.

Lutheran and Calvinist preachers also arrived in Poland and gathered adherents. Spiritualist leaders, emphasizing the inner renewal and leading of the Spirit and de-emphasizing outer forms like baptism and communion, also preached. These various reform groups were quite fluid, with people freely moving from one to the other. The Catholic bishops opposed this religious tolerance, and the proliferation of religious groups, but were powerless to stop the developments. Time and again when they introduced legislation that would restrict religious freedom they were out voted by the nobles who supported toleration, and did not want to duplicate the destructive religious wars in Western Europe.

In 1563, the Polish Reformed group (Calvinists), the largest reform group in Poland, divided into Major and Minor groups. The Minor group, the Anabaptists, were known as the 'Polish Brethren.' This Anabaptist movement was centred in two locations, one in Rakow near Crakow, the old Polish capital in the south of the country, and the other in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital city in the northern part of the Commonwealth.⁴

Many of the Polish Brethren were well educated and of noble birth. They set up their own school of higher learning at Rakow. Graduates from this school spread throughout Poland. To further promote their ideas, they set up a printing press at Rakow, which published a stream of books and pamphlets. The Brethren were well educated in the best recent scholarship of the Renaissance. They became known as rationalists who were skilled in debates.⁵

Faustus Socinus was born in Italy in 1539, and received a good education. His views on God and his formulation of anti-trinitarianism were strongly influenced by his uncle Laelius Socinus. In 1552 Faustus published a book advocating that Jesus is divine, but not God. There is only one God, not three. In his theology, he was biblical, attempting to get back to the original pure Christian beliefs. In his view, the Nicene Trinitarian view of God was a fourth century corruption of the original Christian non-trinitarian belief about God.

Socinus lived in Italy for more than two decades, working as a secretary. Eventually the threat of being hauled before the Inquisition drove him to emigrate, and he made his way to Poland. Arriving in Poland in 1580, Socinus joined the Polish Brethren since their views were similar. He wrote books, debated, and taught at their school at Rakow until his death in 1604. Within a short time he had reshaped Polish Brethren theology according to his own beliefs, which included anti-trinitarianism, rejection of infant baptism, and advocating for social justice and fraternity.⁶ Before long the movement was named after him: Socinianism.⁷

After Socinus' death, the Polish Brethren movement continued to flourish for a number of decades. It was, however, under constant threat by the Calvinists and the Catholics. It was especially the Catholics, led by the Jesuits, who tried to have the government condemn the Polish Brethren as an Arian heresy, a fourth century view outlawed in all European countries. In 1638 the Jesuits managed to have the school and printing press at Rakow closed.

Twenty years later, in 1658, the Jesuits gained a major victory when a law was passed in which all Socinians/Polish Brethren/Anabaptists were condemned as Arians and ordered to leave within two years.⁸ This broke the Socinian movement in Poland. Large numbers of Socinians emigrated to the Netherlands, German states, England, and other countries, influencing church and society wherever they went. In the Netherlands, the Socinians made contact with Mennonites and Doopsgezinde, further strengthening the view that there was a connection between Socinians and Mennonites.

In the early seventeenth century, during the height of the Socinian movement, they made a number of attempts to have dialogue with Mennonites in the Danzig area with the stated aim of merging with them. Socinians at Rakow presented petitions to Mennonites in the Danzig area proposing formal dialogue and union in 1606, 1607, 1610, 1612, and 1613.⁹ The repeated attempts at dialogue and union were made all the



Faustus Socinian. Image Credit: Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, accessed September 17, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/34906/Faustus-Socinus-engraving>.

more urgent in that the Socinians had a congregation near Danzig at Buskow, led by Christoff Ostorodt, an articulate, well-educated, and well-known leader. This congregation drew some Mennonites into membership, and the Mennonite churches in Danzig were worried that this trend would continue.¹⁰

The Socinians were eager and persistent. Mennonites were, however, cautious and reluctant. The two groups had much in common and both wanted to recover the essence of early Christian faith. However, they differed over the use of reason. The Socinians were rationalists, arguing that the Bible and the Christian faith ought not to be seen as opposed to reason. Their view of the use of reason to understand faith led the Socinians to reject the Nicene trinitarian theology, and to advocate for a Unitarian view, in which Christ is not seen as God, but as a great teacher, and one who revealed the will of God to humanity. The Holy Spirit was also not accepted as God,

but as coming from God, and providing comfort and guidance for believers.

Mennonites were hesitant to engage in dialogue with the Socinians, because the Socinians were university educated scholars who were skilled at arguing and debating. Mennonite leaders were lay people, often with only an elementary school education. The class difference was also intimidating for Mennonites, because many of the Socinians were from the nobility and projected the confident bearing of upper class people, whereas Mennonites were mainly farmers, crafts people, and small shop keepers, not used to moving in the circles of the educated and the privileged in Poland.

That Mennonites consistently rejected these overtures for dialogue and merger with the Socinians turned out to be fortuitous when the Socinians were expelled from Poland in 1658. Had they merged into one group, Mennonites would likely also have been expelled when the Socinians were driven out.

However, the threat to Mennonites persisted. To some extent Mennonites were under threat because of the similarity between Mennonite and Socinian beliefs on a variety of issues as noted above. This opposition to Mennonites was also due to the growing intolerance in Poland during the seventeenth century which had led to the expulsion of the Socinians in 1658. This intolerance continued to intensify, and threatened all non-Catholic groups, including the Calvinists and Mennonites. These threats against Mennonites were part of the effort to return all of Poland to the Catholic fold. However, despite the growing intolerance in the country, the Mennonite *Privilegium* which successive kings continued to sign, provided a measure of protection.

In 1678 the Danzig Flemish and Danzig Frisian Mennonite churches were both investigated by Bishop Stanislau Sarnowski. The Mennonite churches were each given 48 questions which they had to answer verbally in a formal interrogation, followed by a written answer to the questions.¹¹ The questions asked about their view of God, that is, checking if they were Socinian. They were also asked about their views on other issues, including justification, the church, election of ministers, baptism,

<p>Björn Geminus Gordius Dantzig anno 1662 d. 1. Sept. Götegård, Stora Skärsön, Gotland Franska Kyrkan i Dalgö Franska kyrkan i Göteborg Gamla Vallby, Gotland Göta älv, Läckö Merita Kastell Göta älv, Västervik De Ostflottan som inföll den 1. Oct. i Stockholm, företrädet av den svenska flottan Sankt Erikskyrkan Marina kyrka Sankt Sigismund med i mera. Sign. 12 f.</p>	<p>Björn G. G. idem anno 1669 d. 7. Sept. Jan Skultetus David Söder Geert M. Löd Jan Jon Bonijou Miguel Ramo Dimitri Melts Pietro da Reggio Hilte Brunnard Dimitri Tschernow Ludt Jon Hugason Hilte Lohberg Ludt Jon Bruduan Arnold Jon Parus Ludt Jon Bonijou Dasa Tschernow Eustachius de Bruduan Ludt Humpfing Ludt Jagtshu, d. 8.</p>
<p>Anno 1668 d. 21 Oct. i mors Dillman Dankel Gun wachten made Janz Scherzer Ellerstrand Tschernow Janz Lovelsson ur Rölla Janz Jon Lovan Barbara Söder Janz Jon Lovan Marita Tschernow Sara Jon Lovan Merita by Montgorges 9</p>	<p>Anno 1670 d. 27 July Cornelius J. Almström Cornelius noble, d. 8 Sept. Jacob J. Löp Jacob Abbing Janetius Hugason Jacob Biffling Maria Jon Gadis d. 9. Sara Lovan Maria Scherzer Augustina Lilaberta Dantzig Tschernow Marita</p>



The Thiensdorf Mennonite Church in the photo was built in 1899 at Preussisch Rosengart in response to the combination of a major flood and the healing of a 1791 rift in the church that had resulted in two buildings, one in Thiensdorf and one in Markushof. The events of 1727 occurred when the Markushof congregation still met in a barn in the village. Image Credit: Thiensdorf and Preußisch Rosengart Mennonite Church (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, Poland), GAMEO.

because it was a rural congregation, and thus expected to be less sophisticated and maybe less able to defend itself than would a congregation closer to Danzig.

The Markushof congregation, located southwest of the city of Elbing near the Drausensee¹⁵ was one of the larger Frisian Mennonite congregations in the Polish province of Royal Prussia.¹⁶ Founded in 1590, and built on land reclaimed from the Drausensee through a lengthy fifty year reclamation process, it was located on fertile land. This allowed for many farmers in a small area, so the congregation was quite large. Even though it is not possible to determine the exact size in 1726, records indicate that in 1790 the congregation consisted of about 2,000 persons.¹⁷ Although this membership figure is from a somewhat later time, it is also a few years after the first emigration to Russia when some of the members may have emigrated. It may thus be that the membership in 1728 was not quite 2,000 people, but it is clear that it was of a substantial size.

The Markushof church was closely allied with the Danzig Frisian Mennonite congregation, even sharing an *Ältester* (bishop) for a number of decades.¹⁸ The Frisians were more open and liberal than the Flemish, willing to accept as members Mennonites who had intermarried with non-Mennonites. It also accepted their children as members, and this was always risky, since children of mixed marriages did not come under the protection of the Mennonite *Privilegium* and thus did not qualify for exemption from military service.¹⁹

The Frisians, furthermore, represented a movement among Mennonites in Poland toward unification. Their church was the result of the merger of Frisian Mennonites, High German Mennonites, United Mennonites, Waterlanders, and Hutterite Anabaptists from Moravia. The Hutterites had settled in the area around Markushof following the severe persecutions in Moravia in the 1620s.²⁰ The only Mennonite group which did not unite with the Frisians was the Flemish. Thus, it is possible that the authorities saw the Frisians, who were more open minded, as the Mennonite group most likely to have had connections with Socinians.

The first page with entries in the Danzig Flemish Church Register that records baptisms dating back to 1667. The register was recovered by American Mennonite relief workers after World War II. After their recovery, the original books were stored at the Mennonite Library and Archives in Newton, Kansas. In 2009 they were transferred to the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle in Weierhof, Germany. Image Credit: Mennonite Library and Archives, http://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/cong_310.php.

communion, foot washing, marriage, discipline, shunning, oaths, and free will.¹²

The Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church's defence was led by their minister Georg Hansen (d. 1703), a cobbler by trade. His written answers were published in a booklet, entitled the *Fundamentbuch*, and used for catechetical instruction by Polish Mennonite churches for almost a century.¹³

Despite their feelings of inadequacy, the Danzig Mennonites were able to successfully defend themselves, however, not without the payment of a considerable sum of money. Georg Hansen, in a lost letter, said,

As a result of the examination, we were fully exonerated from all suspicion. However, it cost a large sum of money again. It was hard to raise the amount, but God helped us to do this.¹⁴

The interrogation of the Markushof Mennonite Church in 1726 was not asking about Mennonite beliefs generally, like the 1678 interrogation of the Danzig Mennonite churches, but was directed specifically at their view of God, that is, whether they believed in the trinity. It would seem that the intent was to make a connection between them and the Socinians.

No information is given as to why this question was directed at the Markushof congregation, nor what the occasion was for demanding this confession. Maybe Markushof was interrogated

From 1709 to 1728, the Ältester of the Markushof Mennonite Church was Melchior Friese or Froese. During his time as leader of the church, the church services were held in his granary (*Scheune*) in the village of Markushof.²¹ It may be that the investigation of the Markushof congregation may have been occasioned by the congregation's request to build its first church building. Up to the 1720s, rural Mennonite congregations in Poland were not granted permission to build churches. Since two years after the investigation by Dr. Weichmann, the congregation received permission to build its first meeting place, the request for permission may have drawn the attention of the authorities. Since permission was granted, it seems that the answers given by the Ältester were acceptable, and the congregation was not seen as Arian or Socinian.

The following is a translation of the questions submitted by Dr. Herr Weichmann, and the answers provided by the Markushof Mennonite Church.

CONFESION OF THE MENNONITES IN MARXHOFF REGARDING THE ARTICLE ABOUT THE HOLY TRINITY, PRESENTED BY ITS ÄLTESTER ON THE OCCASION THAT THE CONFESION WAS DEMANDED BY DR. (HERR) WEICHMANN FROM DANZIG. 1726 SEPTEMBER.

I. Question: Whether divine nature consists of three persons?

Answer: Since we do not find the word 'person' expressed anywhere in the entire Holy Scriptures, we are fearful (so sind wir furchtsam) of using the word "person", since according to the clear witness of our beloved saviour, God is spirit (John 4:24). Since God cannot be portrayed by humans, we do not understand why we should name and confess three persons in the Godhead. We believe and confess the Holy Trinity (Heilige drey Einigkeit) to be one, eternal, undivided divine being, which has revealed itself in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:16) - three and yet only one single, true God according to the witness of John. In heaven there are three witnesses, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and the three are one (I John 5:7). We therefore confess the Holy Trinity to be one, united, eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, always present, and undivided divine being.

II. Question: Whether these three persons are to be distinguished in their divine nature, so that one person is the Father, a second person is the Son, and a third person is the Holy Spirit, or whether these are merely different names which, however, do not indicate different persons?

Answer: We believe and confess that one is the Father, a second is the Son, and a third is the Holy Spirit. The Father is the creator and the one who sustains all things in heaven and on earth, including all visible and invisible creation (Genesis 1:17). God created everything out of nothing, is the source of his own being, and causes all other things to be (I Corinthians 8:7 [6]). Everything has its being from God and exists because of him; he is the source for all Gods (I Corinthians 11:12). All that is good has its origin in him. God is the inexhaustible wisdom from whom all good and perfect gifts must come (James 1:17), and who in an inexpressible manner has from the beginning given birth to his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who is eternally divine (Micah 5:[2], 3).²² The

Holy Spirit proceeds from God who therefore is the God and Father of all who are called children in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 3:[15],16). He is the first and the last (Isaiah 41:4). He sits, lives and rules on his royal, divine throne forever and ever (Revelation 4:9). God is merciful, long suffering, patient, and just. He visits the sins of his children unto the third and fourth generation. Those who love him and keep his commandments he comforts, and he bestows upon them his grace unto the thousandth generation (Exodus 34:7).

Concerning the Son of God

We believe and confess that he is our redeemer, mediator, and saviour who saves us from the curse of the law. He also fulfils the law and is the only Word of the Father through whom all things were created, as John testified. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word; the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him is nothing created which was created. In him was life, and life was the light (John 1:4). He is the divine power (I Corinthians 1:24), the wisdom of God (Colossians 2:3), truth and life (John 14), who is born before all creatures (Colossians 1:15). He is the reflection of his glory and the image of his being. He was with God his heavenly Father from the beginning in all majesty and glory (Philippians 3). Christ lives and reigns with him from everlasting to everlasting.

That is why we believe that in the holy, divine nature there is no Father without the Son, and no Son without the Father; without and outside of Jesus there is no Father, and without and outside of God there is no Jesus, as the beloved saviour himself testifies when he says, "Philip, whoever sees me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'show us the Father.'" (John 14:9) The Father reveals the Son (John 13:1) and the Son witnesses concerning the Father that he is one with him.

Concerning the Holy Spirit

We believe and confess that he is the eternal Spirit of God and Christ, (I Corinthians 12:4) the Spirit of truth, (John 14:16,[17]), the spirit of all heavenly wisdom (John 3), the Spirit that teaches us, instructs (Revelation 3:19), punishes (Genesis 3:3), and leads into all truth and rebirth (John 3:8). He intercedes for us before God with sighs too deep for words (Romans 8:[26,27],28). He is the eternal, unending Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. He has one will and desire, constitutes one divine being, and makes visible and glorifies the Father and the Son in us (John 16:14).

III. Question: Whether one of these three persons is lower or inferior to the others, or whether all three are of equal nature, equal majesty, and equal glory?

Answer: We believe and confess that of this Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, none is the greatest, rather that they are equally eternal, incomprehensible (I Kings 8:27), and unseen (Deuteronomy 4:12, John 1:18), the only wise one, glorious, majestic, equal in power, glory and honour, and also that none is greater nor above the other, even though the Lord Jesus confessed that the Father is greater than he (John 14:28). Here he is speaking about his divine humanity, and not about his eternal, unending divinity. Thus we acknowl-

edge all three as equally great, equally eternal, equally glorious, and equally majestic.

IV. Question: Whether all three persons constitute one divine nature.

Answer: We have already answered this question in the first and in the succeeding points, in that although we believe and confess that one is the Father, a second is the Son, and a third is the Holy Spirit, nevertheless they are one in nature and will. Just as the sun, to use an example from nature, gives off a glorious brilliance and warmth, and yet at the same time casts a shadow, there are not three suns, but only one sun which accomplishes all of this. Thus, applying this spiritually, it is the same with the holy trinity and with the nature of God. There is one who is the Father, a second who is the Son, and the third who is the Holy Spirit. This does not constitute three natures, but one single, eternal, undivided divine nature - not three Gods, rather only one God. "Turn to me, and you will find salvation, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and no one else" (*Isaiah 45:22*). This almighty, eternal and holy God be praise, glory, honour, and thanks, now in time and for ever and ever. Amen, Amen, Amen.

The key question behind the interrogation was whether the Markushof Mennonite Church believed in the Nicene view of the trinity. To this question the church responded that it was fully and unequivocally trinitarian. It affirmed that it accepted Jesus' divinity and did not see Jesus as merely a good teacher, as the Socinians taught. It considered God the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as equal, and did not see the Son and the Holy Spirit as subordinate to the Father. In short, the Markushof Church affirmed a traditional trinitarian view of God, and distanced itself from the anti-trinitarian, Socinian tradition in Poland.

The way the church made these theological affirmations is significant. The church largely based its views on scripture. In each section, the document repeatedly referred to and quoted scripture. After practically each attribute of God, a biblical text was noted that supported that particular attribute. Both Old and New Testament selections were cited.

The writer was at pains not to use the traditional creedal language employed by the interrogator. Right at the beginning of the first answer, the writer said that since they did not find the word "person" in scripture, they were fearful of using the term. Thus the writer was trying to make the point that their faith was based on scripture, and not on the creeds.

And yet, the writer did use the creedal term "nature" a number of times to describe the oneness of the trinity. The term "nature" did not seem to represent the same kind of problem for the writer as did the term "person." It is interesting that the writer accepted the central Nicene term "nature" which defined the basis for the unity of the Godhead, but rejected the creedal term for defining the differentiation of the Godhead.

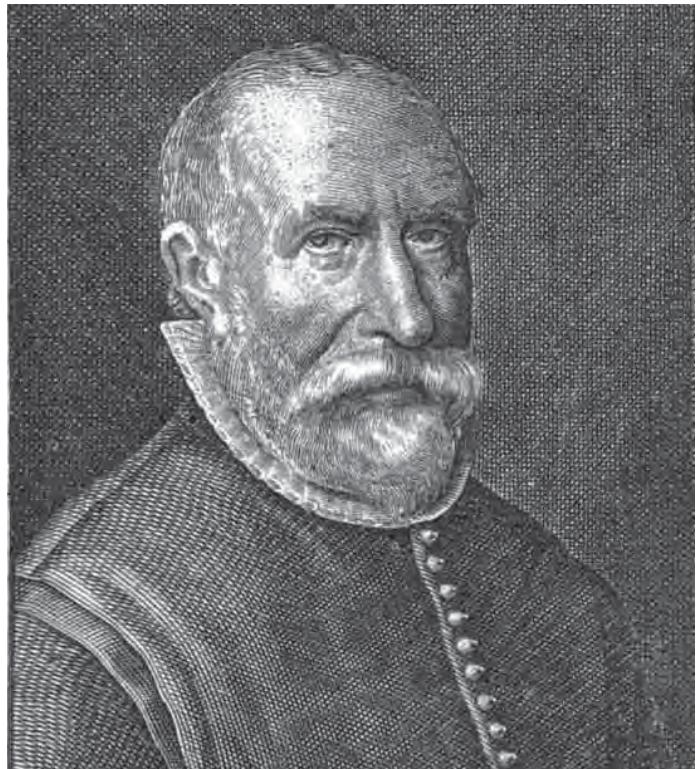
After the writer rejected some of the language of the historical creeds, and had made the point that his church's faith was based upon scripture and not the creed, he went to great lengths to affirm that he agreed with the content of the historical creeds. In each section the writer was careful to affirm the traditional content of the creeds without using the specific creedal language. The writer was affirming that the Markushof

Mennonite Church defined itself as orthodox, and that they had the confidence that this faith, which was based on scripture, was consistent with the faith expressed by the Nicene Creed.

One question that arises is what confessions, if any, the Markushof Church used to respond to Dr. Weichmann. A comparison of language and Bible references was made with the Dortrecht Confession.²³ The Dortrecht Confession was drawn up in 1632 on the occasion of the union of two Mennonite groups in the Netherlands. The Dortrecht Confession has a very short section on God, and no explicit discussion of the trinity. So this Confession likely was not used by the leaders of the Markushof Church in drawing up their response.

A comparison with two confessions by Hans de Ries, that of 1578 and 1609, shows considerable dependence on the latter confession.²⁴ Hans de Ries (1553-1638) was a Mennonite minister in Alkmaar, Netherlands. His confessions were used extensively by Mennonites in the Netherlands and by Polish Mennonite churches. In de Ries's Confession of 1609, the major focus was on the controversy between the Calvinists and the Arminians on the nature of Predestination and Free Will. However, in the section on the nature of God and the trinity, de Ries used language and imagery that was quite similar to the Markushof answers given in 1726.²⁵ The Markushof writer seems to have either used the de Ries confession, or used another confession which stood in the same tradition.

The most recent confession available to the Markushof church was that by Georg Hansen presented to Bishop Sarnowski in 1678. Hansen's defence was published as the *Fundamentbuch*, and also known as *Ein Glaubens-Bericht*.²⁶ It was used extensively by Mennonite churches in the eighteenth



HANS DE RIES OUD LXVI
Hans de Ries (1553-1638), from an engraving by Willem Jacobsz Delff (1580-1638) after Michael Janszoon van Miereveldt (1567-1641).
Image Source: Wikipedia Commons.

century. Hansen used many biblical images and hardly used the more philosophical language of “person” and “nature” at all. As matter of fact, he warned against using philosophical language. But then he inserted a section into the confession in which he explicitly and forcefully affirmed the belief in one God, He stated that no one should attempt to separate the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, for they are one.²⁷ Again he used biblical imagery and Bible references to make his point. This seems to be a pointed rejection of the Socinian’s belief about God, and their philosophical methodology. Some of Hansen’s Bible references appear in the Markushof answers, and the tone and direction of his arguments are similar to that used by the Markushof Church.

Nothing further is heard about this interrogation in 1726 of the Markushof Mennonite Church, and so one can assume that their answers were accepted. However, the interrogation itself underlined the Mennonites’ precarious status in Poland. They were protected by a *Privilegium*. However, the fact they needed a *Privilegium* underlined their status as non-citizens and aliens in an adopted country in which they had to be ever vigilant to defend themselves.

Endnotes

1 The term *Ältester* was used by Prussian and Polish Mennonites to designate the leader of a congregation or Gemeinde. In its Polish and Prussian context of the sixteenth century, the term *Ältester* was a common term used to designate the head of an organization. As such, it was a civil term with no particular religious or ecclesiastical connotations. It appears that Mennonites in the Polish regions around the Vistula and Nogat river lowlands chose this term to disassociate their church leaders from the roles of leaders in the surrounding Lutheran and Catholic churches.

2 Gdansk State Archives, 369,1/371.

3 Peter J. Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 14.

4 George Huston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, Third Revised Edition (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publications, Inc., 1992), 1050f.

5 www.Polish Brethren. August 29.2013.

6 Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1169-1170.

7 Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 1162.

8 *The Polish Brethren*, Part 1, 39.

9 C. J. Dyck, “Hans de Ries and Socinianism” in *Socinianism and its Role in the Culture of XVI th to XVII th Centuries* (Warsaw, Poland: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1983), 88-89.

10 Harvey Plett, “Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church. A Study in Continuity” Ph.d Dissertation, U of Manitoba, 1991, 254.

11 Plett, “Georg Hansen,” 221.

12 Plett, Georg Hansen, 227.

13 Plett, Georg Hansen, 221f.

14 Plett, Georg Hansen, 218.

15 It was referred to as a *Werder* because it was below sea level and thus surrounded by dikes that drained the land and made it arable.

16 In 1410 Poland defeated the Teutonic Knights at the great battle of Tannenberg. When they were defeated a second time in 1466, Poland forced the head of the Teutonic order, to recognize the King of Poland as his feudal overlord, and to hand the province of West Prussia over to Poland. Poland renamed the province Royal Prussia. It is in this province that Mennonites in the sixteenth century found refuge.

17 “Markushof” *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, III, 43.

18 In the early years of the seventeenth century the Danzig and Markushof Frisian Mennonite congregations had a common Ältester. Jan Gerrits van Emden was elected Ältester of the Markushof congregation in 1607, and was at the same time Ältester of the congregation in Danzig. His open inter-Mennonite spirit seems to have shaped the character of the two congregations. “Thiensforf” ML IV, 313.

19 Thiendorf-Preussisch Rosengart, ML, IV, 314.

20 For a discussion of the emigration of Hutterites and other Anabaptists from Moravia to the Kleinwerder, see “Thiensforf-Preussisch Rosengart” *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, IV 313-314; „Gerrits van Emden“ *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, IV, “Josef Hauser,” *Mennonitisches Lexikon* II, 265-266; Horst Penner, *Die ost – und west-preussischen Mennoniten* (Weierhof, Germany: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein e.V., 1978), 79-80.

21 Horst Penner, in two different articles indicates two names. In *Die Ost - und Westpreussischen Mennoniten*, 268 he indicates that the Ältester’s name was Melchior Friese. In “Thiensforf-Preussisch Rosengart” *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, IV, 314, he says that in 1728 the Ältester was Melchior Froese. Since Friese is likely the Low German pronunciation of Friesen, it is not clear how the two surnames are to be reconciled, unless Friese is simply a misspelling of Froese..

22 In the Luther Bible, it is actually Micah 5:1 that refers to the Messiah who is to come as one whose origin “von Anfang und von Ewigkeit her gewesen ist.”

23 Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope and One God. Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America, An Introduction* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985.), 63.

24 Cornelius J. Dyck, *Hans de Ries: Theologian and Churchman: A Study in Second-Generation Dutch Anabaptism* (UMI Dissertation Services, 1962), Confession of 1578, p. 278f, and Confession of 1609, p. 288f.

25 Dyck, *de Ries*, 290-292.

26 *Ein Glaubens-Bericht fuer die Jugend Durch einen Liebhaber der Wahrheit gestellt und ans Licht gebracht im Jahre Christi 1671.*

27 *Ein-Glaubensbericht*, 50.

Mennonites in Prussia Becoming Germans: The First Hundred Forty Years

Mark Jantzen, North Newton, Kansas

Johannes Janzen was born into a Mennonite family in Imperial Germany on May 21, 1896. His parents were Johannes and Martha (Block) Janzen. Nothing is known of his childhood or upbringing, but Pastor H. G. Mannhardt baptized him in the Danzig Mennonite Church on Palm Sunday, April 9, 1911. When the Great War broke out three years later he initially served with the German cavalry until switching over to become a fighter pilot in the new-fangled German air force. He was assigned to Baron Manfred von Richthofen’s fighter wing and rose for a time as high as squadron leader, one of five reporting directly to the Red Baron. He was shot down behind Allied lines on June 9, 1918, and was a prisoner of war until the war ended later that year. He was credited with thirteen “kills” on Allied aircraft, the second of which was a Sopwith Camel, the

plane made famous to North American readers of the Peanuts comic strip as the type that the Red Baron repeatedly shoots out from under Snoopy. Perhaps Snoopy should also beware of this Mennonite Red Baron whose personal color design for his Fokker triplane has been sold as a limited edition collectors’ model.¹

Janzen’s story does not match the typical one of Mennonites in Prussia from the sixteenth to nineteenth century, but is common for German Mennonites in the twentieth century. His biography raises a number of important questions for Mennonites and historians alike. Why did Mennonites eventually change their centuries-old stance against military service and embrace military service? What were the forces or circumstances that led them to this radical reordering of life and theology? Was



Lieutenant Johannes Janzen was of Prussian Mennonite origin and was baptized in the Danzig Mennonite Church. He enlisted in World War I and became part of the famous Baron von Richthofen's squadron and is pictured here standing beside his World War I fighter airplane.

Photo Credit: http://www.fokkerI.com/DRI_403.jpg.

it a shift of a few years, a single generation, or a slow, gradual modification? Was it driven by internal developments or external pressures? In what sense did these shifts indicate a move away from being “Mennonite” as the sole or most important locus of identity, to being “German” as the core of individual and group identity?

The most basic answer is that over time both “push” and “pull” factors transformed the Mennonites of provincial Prussia into people whose primary self-identification was German. A century of persistent and diverse governmental and social pressure impelled Mennonites to give their highest loyalty to the nation; that is, to become nationalists. The government politicized family matters by tightly regulating Mennonites’ property and inheritance rights and by circumscribing whom they could marry. At the same time Mennonites slowly turned toward increased participation in the German nation as they came to understand, embrace, and benefit from social, cultural, economic, and especially educational involvement in the dynamic, progressive nineteenth-century German society. In the end they literally rewrote their centuries old confessions of faith to make soldiering acceptable. The lynchpin to this nexus of connections was military service and the Mennonites’ experience documents how becoming soldiers became a necessary precondition to joining the German nation.²

Theories of Nationalism

The earliest scholarly assessments of nationalism suggested that in a secularizing modernity Christianity was replaced by nationalism as a primary religious force, an idea that is still relevant to some researchers especially as ethnic group identity is given cosmic significance by some group members.³ Others have claimed that nationalism as an ideology grew out of modernity as a way to make sense of enormous social changes. Ernst Gellner, for example, has argued that the shift from an agrarian society to an industrial one swept away all differences of rank, caste, or social position, thereby creating the idea of equality in the nation. Thus Gellner can imagine that social changes alone explain, indeed require, the emergence of nationalism.⁴

The most influential theory in the last couple of decades sees nationalism as a cultural artifact, that is, a set of ideas and cultural practices constructed over time by individuals interacting with social forces. The classic statement of this approach is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*.

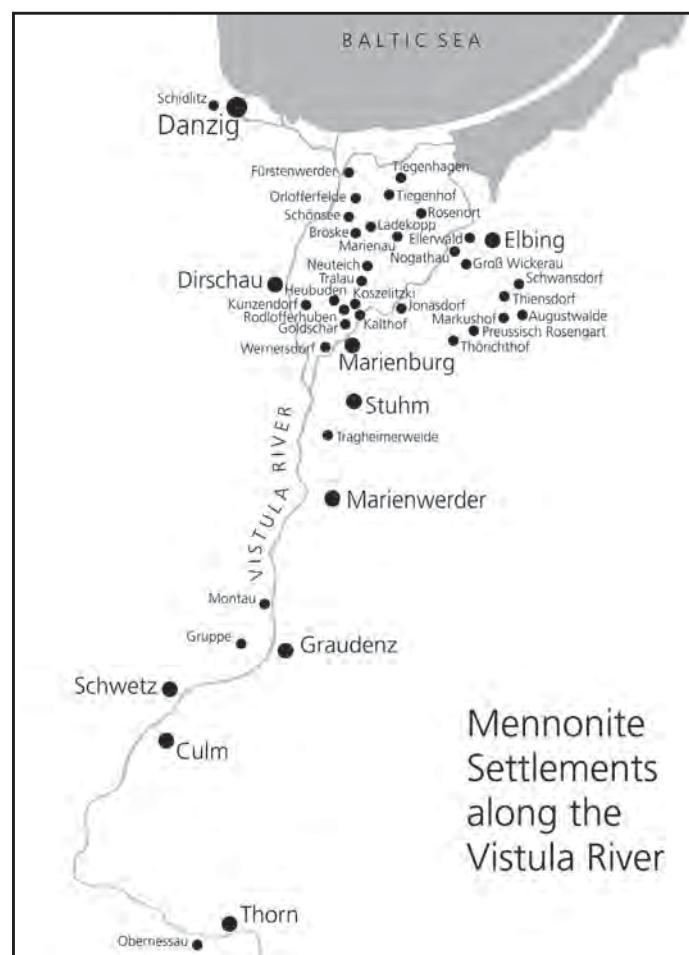
Anderson argues that moderns learn to imagine themselves as a political community via shared print media and mutually dependent economic and career opportunities limited by the other, imagined as a foreign nation.⁵

Mennonites in the Vistula River region experienced German nationalism in all of these aspects, but clearly in two different phases. In the first phase the royal government used the rhetoric of nation to crystalize support for increasing state and monarchical power, an approach to emerging nationalism as an exercise in state-building documented by historian John Breuilly.⁶ In this early stage, the government negotiated directly with Mennonites to extract additional money and support in exchange for granting special privileges to Mennonites that included freedom of worship and exemption from military service.

In the second phase of German nationalism, and especially after the revolutions of 1848, increasing numbers of Germans further down the social scale weighed in on the discussion of the proper relationship of Mennonites to society. Seeing themselves as part of the democratic sovereign as Germans, they insisted that Mennonites conform to the nation and to equality before the law. In this phase Mennonites were offered both the carrot of real acceptance into the German nation and the stick of compulsion if they refused to do so.

Political Arrangements for Mennonites in the State-Building Phase

Mennonite communities existed along the Vistula River since the sixteenth century, with the vast majority living in



the delta region. During this time Mennonites lived under Polish rule in a country with a weak central government and significant autonomy for local nobility and city governments in Gdańsk/Danzig and Elbląg/Elbing. Mennonites signed leases with, or bought land outright, from these local landlords, who also granted them religious tolerance. Mennonites leased a significant portion of their land from royal stewards, who managed land on behalf of the Polish crown. Under this system if growing Mennonite communities ran out of available land in one location or faced local hostility, they had the option to expand or shift to another landlord. All of these arrangements were covered at the state level with Charters of Privileges signed by the Polish kings.⁷ Thus, Mennonites' place in early modern Polish society was arranged by royal, noble, and municipal contracts directly negotiated by Mennonite leaders and government officials.

These political arrangements were overthrown by the partitions of Poland from 1772 to 1795. Poland's neighbours, Russia, Austria, and Prussia, dismembered the Polish state over the course of these twenty-three years. The territory of the delta was known as Royal Prussia because roughly half the land here belonged to the crown while Ducal Prussia to the east was part of the Kingdom of Prussia. After the first partition in 1772 these names were changed to West and East Prussia respectively.



Partitions of Poland 1772 to 1795

Records from this time show that about 13,000 Mennonites lived in Royal Prussia, a number that remains more or less constant for the next hundred years as emigration to Russia roughly offset natural population growth. Mennonites would have constituted about 4 percent of the population in Royal Prussia (excluding Danzig) but in Marienburg County they were 10 percent of the population and controlled 25 percent of the agricultural land.⁸

The highest priority for Mennonites was to obtain agreements with their new political overlords that matched their Polish arrangements. The public side of this process occurred on September 27, 1772, when various strata of Royal Prussian society acknowledged the change of sovereign during a homage ceremony held at the castle in Marienburg, the former seat of the Teutonic Knights.⁹ They used this opportunity to submit copies of the Charters of Privileges granted their community by the Polish kings. They requested that the Prussian king grant



The Marienburg Castle was built by the Teutonic Knights at Malbork and became their headquarters. It was completed in 1406 and is one of largest castles in the world. Photo Credit: Hans Werner

them a similar Charter, the main points of which they summed up as "continuation of religious freedom and at the same time exemption from all recruitment."¹⁰ In order to sweeten their request, the Mennonite congregations of the area contributed "two fatted steers, 400 pounds of butter, 20 cheeses, 50 pairs of chickens and 50 pairs of ducks" to the official reception buffet.¹¹

The Prussian king, Frederick II, immediately slapped the Mennonites with a 5,000 *taler* tax that the Mennonite leadership was responsible to collect and pay on behalf of the entire community. Significantly, the start date of July 1, 1773 matched the day that liability for military service registration began for those peasants who were required to enroll. Since military service in this fashion had not existed in Poland, this was the first time that Mennonites stood out from many of their neighbors over the issue of military service.¹²

Although Mennonites were promised tolerance at the homage ceremony in 1772 and started paying a special Mennonite tax to avoid military registration and service in 1773, they were not satisfied with what seemed to them to be ad hoc, informal arrangements. They continued to appeal to the government in Berlin for a formal Charter of Privileges to match what Polish kings had granted them. Finally in 1780 they were able to get Frederick II's signature on such a document. The charter noted that as long as Mennonites were loyal, obedient, paid their regular and special taxes, and fulfilled their duties, "they will remain eternally free from military registration and personal military service and their enjoyment of religious freedom and freedom of commerce and livelihood according to the laws and regulations of our Kingdom of Prussia will be undisturbed and protected."¹³

Prussian Constraints

Mennonites had seemingly gotten everything they asked for, but disagreements over freedom of commerce had arisen even before the Charter was signed. The Elbing city council under Polish rule had used a process of requiring Mennonites to get special permits before they could buy property in the city, likely as a source both of regulation and additional revenue. This process was now extended to Mennonites more broadly in the area as the new Prussian administrators learned of this

possibility. Under a stronger, more centralized government like Prussia, a quirky local regulation could become regional regulation, making it much more difficult for Mennonites to work their way around it. West Prussian officials expanded this permit process to the whole province as early as 1773 and it was a major irritant for Mennonites, who found it increasingly difficult to buy real estate if it was purchased from a non-Mennonite.

Officially, the reason for this new restriction was the fact that land ownership in Prussia was tied to military service. Farmsteads, not individuals, were registered with the military, which could then check if one of the household's multiple sons or hired hands could be compelled to serve. Mennonite farmsteads were not on the rolls, so if a Mennonite bought a Lutheran farm, it had to be deleted from the list. Over the course of the 1770s, the practice of usually allowing Mennonites to buy such property only if it was coming out of bankruptcy evolved. After the Charter was issued in 1780, Mennonites hoped these problems were behind them, but in fact, the restrictions became even tougher. Alarmed church leadership petitioned officials locally and in Berlin for relief, but to no avail.

Political events to this point had developed to either push Mennonites out of Prussian society or into converting to Protestantism in order to survive economically. A direct invitation from the Russian government for Mennonites and others to move to New South Russia where land was widely available, however, now coincided with the seeming impossibility of attaining land in Prussia and provided a pull factor for emigration. Thus Mennonite migration out of the Vistula Delta started in 1788 as at first it was especially the poor and landless who turned their back on Prussia shortly after they came under its rule. Without the new real estate restrictions, which were linked to Prussian military service, it seems unlikely Mennonites would have migrated to Russia at all.¹⁴

Restrictions on Mennonites were tightened further after the death of Frederick II in 1786 and his replacement, his nephew King Frederick William II. The new king's Minister of Culture, Johann Christoph Wöllner, acted in 1788 to turn state policy from the indifference and even contempt for religion evinced by Frederick II to vigorous support of the state Protestant Church by having the new king promulgate an Edict on the Religious Constitution of the Prussian States. Wöllner's edict was aimed at eliminating Enlightenment-inspired rationalist theology from Prussia's pulpits. The edict also set clear markers for orthodoxy by stating which churches were official and established – Reformed, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic – and which groups were only tolerated sects – Jews, Moravian Brethren, Mennonites, and Hussites. All other religious groups had no official status. In order to stabilize these relationships, proselytizing was strictly forbidden. This edict was the first time that Mennonites' status was categorized with other religious communities, an important step toward dealing with religion as a general social and political problem and away from a practice of each group making arrangements with the government in total isolation.

Nonetheless, a special Mennonite Edict in 1789 sharpened restrictions yet again. Wöllner's desire to strengthen the state church was the driving force behind this edict and the complaints of Lutheran clergy and laity along the Vistula provided him with additional motivation. Church taxes, and hence pastors' salaries, were also tied to property taxes of various types

and Mennonite property was not always assessed to help support the local Lutheran parish. Thus most of the edict dealt with imposing church taxes on Mennonites and especially around the issue of paying fees for, and registering their births, weddings, and deaths with the local Protestant pastor, which was the only form of official record keeping practiced in those days.

Of greater significance for the Mennonite community were the linkages this edict created between restrictions on property, civil, marriage, and family rights, and the Mennonite refusal to serve in the military. The informal practice of requiring permits to buy property from non-Mennonites, which almost always resulted in a denial, was now codified in law. In addition, marriages between Mennonites and non-Mennonites were tightly regulated, with the children of such "mixed" marriages to be raised as non-Mennonites and in the case of non-Mennonite husbands to remain liable for the draft in any case. All of these difficulties were justified by the fact that Mennonites would not fight for the state.

The government claimed not to be anti-Mennonite, just opposed to people who would not perform their duty. As the preface to the edict noted on behalf of the king who issued it,

Although We are inclined on the one hand to remove all coercion from our subjects' exercise of freedom of conscience, the well-being of our states requires on the other hand that the adherents of religious opinions which prohibit them from fulfilling one of the preeminent duties of loyal subjects – the defense of the fatherland – may not have all those civil privileges enjoyed by subjects who willingly undertake this duty, but rather they must submit to curtailments which provide a modest, if inadequate, indemnity for their exemption from that most important duty of a citizen.

The edict went on to note:

Our Jewish subjects are subject to the same conditions, and Mennonites have even less reason to see such as coercion of conscience since these limitations do not impinge upon religious opinions and church services but merely deal with them in the civil sphere of the state, to the defense and culture of which they contribute even less than do the Jewish subjects.¹⁵

The next round of tightening restrictions came in 1801 from a governmental declaration that reinterpreted the application of the 1789 edict. The wars resulting from the French Revolution in 1789 would last twenty-five years and completely engulf Prussia. In the run-up to the clash in 1806 that destroyed the old Prussia, efforts were being made to increase military recruitment. One side effect was an increase in complaints from Mennonites' Protestant neighbors about the fact that Mennonites boys were staying home and Protestant boys were going to serve. One of the aspects of the 1801 Declaration made it possible for Mennonites to avoid all restrictions of their rights if they would only serve in the military. Here, the push factor the Prussian state had slowly crafted over the last twenty-five years was now balanced with a pull factor that would allow Mennonites to become full members of Prussian society for the first time.

An additional push was added to compel Mennonites to change their position, namely, the military exemption would now only be passed down from father to legitimate son and in

no other way. Thus, widows or daughters with property who married would have husbands who were now automatically liable for military service. Prussian state policy deliberately targeted Mennonite women in order to force the men to serve. Elder Heinrich Donner of the Orloffserfelde congregation noted in his diary that the decree had stolen both their religious freedom and their means of making a living.¹⁶

High mortality rates meant marriages were frequently ended by the death of a husband. In fact, widowed women headed roughly 8 per cent of all Mennonite families.¹⁷ Less certain is the number of families with just daughters but certainly there would have been many. This discrimination against women property owners resulted in the migration that established the Molotschna Colony in Russia, the largest single wave of Mennonite migration out of the Vistula River valley until the community's destruction in 1945. In the years 1802 to 1806 approximately 370 Mennonite families left West Prussia for Russia.¹⁸ The massive emigration soon caused the government to reconsider their policies. They were losing too many valuable taxpayers, even if they were worthless as soldiers. In 1803 the declaration was amended to allow the military exemption to pass to any Mennonite, not just father to son. While a trickle of emigration continued for decades, the biggest flood was over. Moreover, a permanent set of Mennonite property rights was now established. Mennonites could own as much property as they had in 1803 and not any more, unless, of course, they accepted military service. This constraint remained more or less constant for the next seventy years, establishing a baseline for the push factor of discrimination and the pull factor of full civil rights for Mennonites over the issue of military service.

One telling example of the way in which the persistent pressure created by these arrangements penetrated deep into Mennonite homes and families is the failed attempt of Rudolph Robert Zelewski to become Mennonite. Rudolph was born February 21, 1828 in Danzig as the illegitimate child of a Catholic maid and an unknown father, and placed in a children's home. Friedrich Gustav Kliewer, a Danzig businessman who was a member of both the city council and the Danzig Mennonite Church board, brought the boy to his home at age three as a foster child. In 1840, when Rudolph was twelve years old, Kliewer, with the permission of the children's home administrator who was the legal guardian, petitioned for permission for Rudolph to join the Mennonite church. This request went all the way to the king himself, who noted that those in tolerated religions like Mennonites and Jews could not adopt Christians, that is, Protestants or Catholics, and without adoption, joining the church made no sense. Two years later, when Rudolph reached the legal age at which conversions were allowed in Prussia, he petitioned the king directly himself. Now he was told that he could join the Mennonite church but would not be released from military service. Although no further records about Rudolph are known to exist, since Mennonite churches at that time would not accept members who were registered for the draft, it would seem that Rudolph never became Mennonite.¹⁹

Arrangements for Mennonites after 1848 in the Modern Nation State Phase

In 1848 much of Europe experienced revolutions that threatened to overthrow numerous monarchies. For several years the outcome was in doubt before kings were able to reassert

their authority. At stake in all the revolutions were issues of political liberty, especially establishing constitutions, parliaments, and guaranteed rights for citizens that would limit royal power. In some countries, like Hungary and Germany, an additional question was how to create a nation state where before there had been none. The territory of Germany in 1848 was divided into about forty states, the largest of which were Austria and Prussia.

For Mennonites these events were significant because for the first time the debate over Mennonites' position in society was aired in front of a broad public that was starting to think of itself as the sovereign ruler of Germany and shaped by elected parliamentarians instead of being limited to royal officials and Mennonites themselves. Such debates took place in the Frankfurt National Assembly, a body elected throughout the German territories in 1848 for the purpose of writing the first German constitution and thereby creating the first German nation state.²⁰

The mere presence of Mennonites in Germany triggered controversy that would not have otherwise erupted over the proper relationship between loyalty to society and the nation, and to one's own religion. The assembly debated these issues as it sought to create a bill of rights, known as the Basic Rights, as part of the constitution. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish concerns were taken into account in this process and, although controversial, Jews were granted full civil rights and Jewish representatives in the assembly pledged Jewish cooperation with and integration into German society. The general assumption was that the nation made no problematic demands of religious communities and if a doubtful case arose, national interests would take priority over religious ones.

Juxtaposing three of these Basic Rights, however, demonstrates the problem that arose uniquely for Mennonites. One claim, that "all Germans are equal before the law," was clearly aimed at the nobility, who enjoyed numerous special laws that only applied to them. Yet the Mennonite Charter of Privilege fell into this category as well. Another clause stated, "The enjoyment of civic and civil rights will neither depend nor be restricted on the basis of religion. Religion must not hinder the fulfillment of national duties." This statement was explicitly aimed at emancipating Jews from legal discrimination. Finally, another clause noted, "The obligation of military service is the same for everyone."

Clearly Mennonite objections to military service would not fit easily into the new rhetoric of equal rights and equal obligations for all. Since the sixteenth century Mennonites had in fact both suffered from and depended on the inequality in society to create a niche of toleration for them. The whole assembly debated their problem at length before their claim to exceptional treatment on the basis of religious freedom was explicitly voted down and they were directed to serve in the military. Their main defenders were representatives from the Vistula Delta who knew the Mennonite community there first hand. Their main antagonist was Hermann von Beckerath, a Mennonite from Krefeld in western Germany where military service had already been accepted. Beckerath argued successfully that the new state, which was to be built on liberal principles of equality, could not allow people to pick and choose which responsibilities they were willing to take on. Some of the more extreme members of the assembly even explicitly labeled Mennonites as threats to national security.²¹

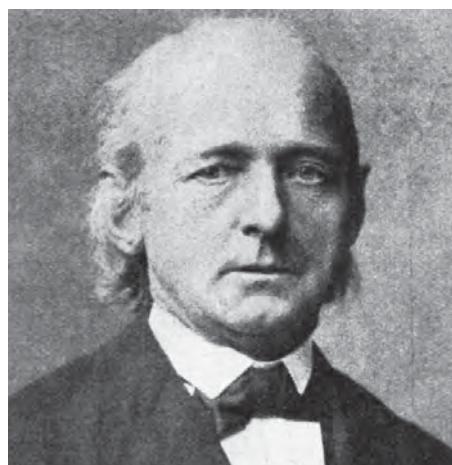
The direct challenge the Frankfurt constitution presented to the equilibrium worked out by Vistula River Mennonites and the Prussian state nonetheless dissipated quickly as by 1850 it was clear the constitution would not be implemented as intended since the German rulers had reasserted control in their respective territories and dismissed the National Assembly. Large portions of the Basic Rights, including all the language quoted here, were included, however, in the 1850 Prussian constitution, but crucially the king retained much control in this constitution and issued clear directives to his government to return to the status quo ante on Mennonite issues. Nonetheless, the debates in Frankfurt continued to fester for the next twenty years. Mennonites had been granted a reprieve, not a solution.

In the meantime, economic, social, and educational developments continued apace. Mennonites were drawn more and more into German society as a responsible part of the nation and those who sought to gain from such new associations pushed the traditional status quo of Mennonites' relationship with society every bit as hard as the National Assembly had done.

One prominent example of such a push to join German society more fully came from Carl Harder from Königsberg in East Prussia. The year 1846 was a key year for this twenty-six year old young man. His home congregation hired him as their first university educated and salaried pastor and he married Renate Thiessen from the Elbing congregation. He published a book on the life of Menno Simons and began publishing the first newspaper for Mennonites in Germany, the *Protestant Mennonites Monthly*. He also accepted into membership a banned liberal member of the Rosenort Mennonite Church, sparking a long-running conflict with conservative rural elders in West Prussia. Harder's sermons and polemical writings promoted democracy only two years before the revolution broke out and he advocated a liberal theology that saw much good that was worthy of emulation on the progressive side of Prussian society and much hypocrisy worthy of condemnation in conservative and traditional practices. His writing explicitly called for decoupling baptism from church membership and implied baptism could be dropped altogether since it was only the internal motive of the seeker that mattered. These opinions got him banned from several rural pulpits, including in the Ellerwald portion of the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation. He also supported military service and mixed marriages.²²



A painting of Hermann von Beckerath from a family collection. Beckerath was a Mennonite from Krefeld who was one of the most influential advocates for not allowing exemptions for state obligations, such as military exemption, in the debates of the Frankfurt National Assembly in 1848. Image Source: Wikipedia Commons.



Karl Harder was born in Koenigsberg, East Prussia in 1820 and was a lithographer by trade but became a pastor. He pastored in Neuwied for twelve years, where he tutored the future Queen of Romania, and in Elbing for thirty years. He died there in 1898. Image Source: GAMEO

Harder's positions drew a lot of negative attention from conservatives and the government, who had police spying on his church services. Some families, however, rallied to his support in Elbing, breaking with the main church and in 1852 erecting a new building where he served as pastor. He attracted prominent Mennonite lay people to his cause, including Heinrich Stobbe, who owned the renowned Machhandel distillery in nearby Tiegenhof. By 1855 government officials cooperated with conservative Elders to strip him of his post as Elder of the Königsberg and new Elbing congregations. In 1858 he moved to Neuwied in west central Germany to take up a pastorate there, but returned ten years later to Elbing when times and attitudes had changed. A limited suffrage had been introduced to Prussia so democracy was no longer taboo. The government no longer backed traditional Mennonite leaders, pressuring them instead to accept military service. Harder had excelled in the more open and liberal atmosphere in Neuwied, tutoring the future Queen Elisabeth of Romania. Back in Elbing, he managed to arrange to teach Mennonite religious instruction, in place of the Protestant instruction they accepted everywhere else in Germany, to the young Mennonites in the public school system. For late nineteenth-century Mennonites the former pariah was now celebrated as a key leader who had been ahead of his time.²³

Liberal education was not the only avenue into the German nation open to Mennonites. Others pursued more pious education that had the potential to take them into German society from the conservative side. In 1826 members of the Heubuden and Danzig churches started a Mennonite primary school in the tiny village of Rodlofferhuben, just across the Nogat River from Marienburg, not far from Heubuden. In 1836 opposition from Protestant clergy in Marienburg forced the school to move to Bröskefelde further north in the delta.

The school closed in the 1870s. During its existence it was the key institution for drawing Mennonites into alliances with mission-minded Protestants as well as with the temperance movement in Prussia. Mennonites started a local branch of the Danzig Mission Society in Bröskefelde, providing a third of the society's income in some years. Although only a small minority of Mennonites became involved with this school and with the mission movement more broadly, it helped establish a possibility of Mennonites becoming acceptable Germans via a more conservative theological and political path.²⁴

Moving from the Margins of Germany to “In” or “Out” of the Nation in the 1860s

The 1860s were a tumultuous decade for Germans and Mennonites. The Prussian constitution of 1850, while modeled in part on the work done by the National Assembly and giving power over taxation to the newly-created parliament it had created, reserved all decision-making power on military matters for the crown. When in 1860, the military and the crown proposed increasing the size of the army to match the growing population, along with other changes in the military draft and service laws, the parliament refused to appropriate the money to do so. The king prorogued the parliament, but new elections only returned a more liberal body even more opposed to his aims. Complete deadlock ensued. In 1862 the king appointed Otto von Bismarck as chancellor and he skirted constitutionality in order to implement the king's military policies.



Wilhelm Mannhardt was the son of the Mennonite minister Jacob Mannhardt and the first German Mennonite to receive a PhD. His main area of study and research was as a folklorist of Baltic peoples. Although he was prominent in his field, he suffered from poor health all his life, which prevented him from gaining a professorial position. He worked primarily as a librarian in the Danziger Stadtbibliothek from 1862 to his death in 1880. Image Source: Mennonite Library & Archives, Bethel College (<http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/numbered-photos/pholist2.php?num=2011-0144>)

As part of this larger drama, in 1861 a Member of Parliament named Lietz from the village of Marienau in the heart of the Vistula Delta moved that Mennonites' exemption be revoked. Given the deadlock that prevented any legislation from passing, the idea posed no immediate threat, but it clearly indicated that Mennonites' position on the sideline of military service, and hence in the German nation itself, was threatened. In addition to sending a deputation to visit the king and other government officials, Mennonite leadership also commissioned a treatise that would explain to parliamentarians specifically the history and theology behind Mennonites' refusal to serve in the military. They hired Wilhelm Mannhardt as the researcher and author of this study. Mannhardt was the first German Mennonite to earn a Ph. D. and was the son of long-time Danzig Mennonite pastor Jakob Mannhardt. He also was an emerging star of the new academic discipline of folklore, following in the footsteps of Jacob Grimm. He pieced together the story of Mennonites' political arrangements both from congregational archives and from government records in Berlin.²⁵

In the resulting book, *The Military Service Exemption of the Mennonites of Provincial Prussia*, Mannhardt reviewed Mennonite history from the sixteenth century on and argued that their refusal to kill others was rooted in long-standing theological conviction.²⁶ In the latter, contemporary portion of the book he asserted that the legal basis for their exemption in Prussia was a formal and legal privilege acquired under onerous conditions. This precise legal terminology could be found in the General Civil Law Code of Prussia and was originally written to deal with the privileges of the nobility. Such privileges could only legally be revoked if they were properly compensated, creating a path for ending serfdom back when the code was written in the late eighteenth century under Frederick II. Mannhardt now argued that since no compensation could be given for revoking Mennonites' privileged right to freedom of religion, which is how they understood their military service exemption, only Mennonites themselves could give up this privilege without compensation; the state could not legally force them to serve.²⁷ Three thousand copies were printed and copies were sent to members of parliament and other government officials.

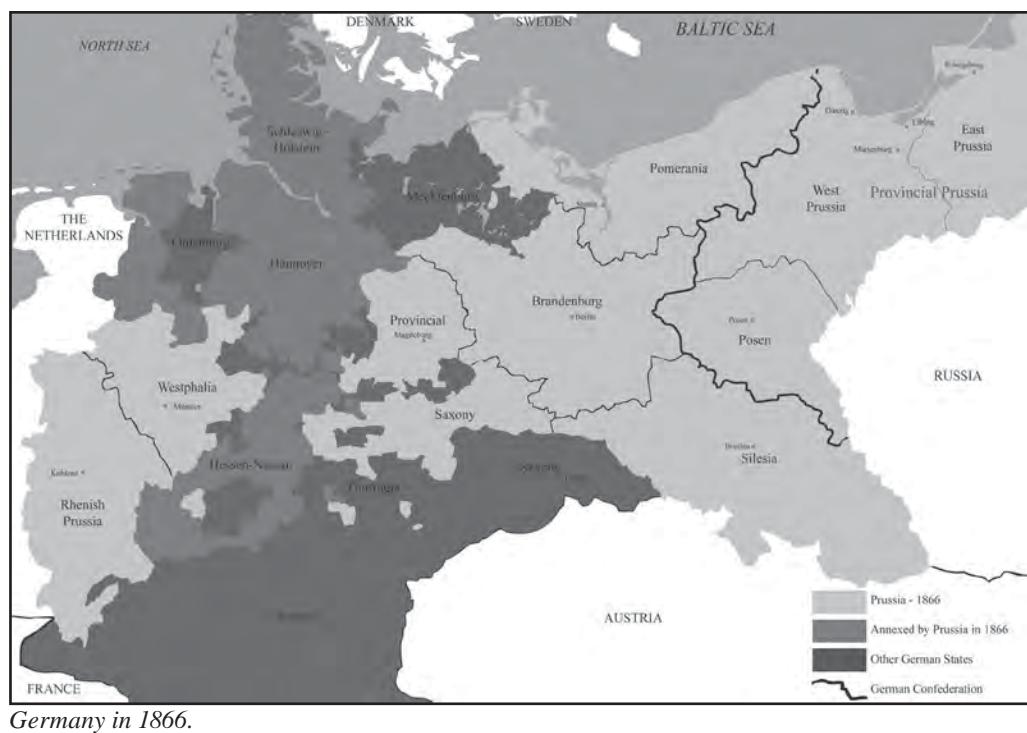
The constitutional crisis and ensuing legislative deadlock in Prussia did more to protect Mennonites at this point than Mannhardt's writing. Wars with Denmark in 1864 and Austria in 1866 engineered by Bismarck resulted in a greatly expanded Prussia that now led a North German Confederation on the way to establishing a German Empire in 1870. In debates over the constitution of this new confederation, its parliament decided to keep the emperor's family and other former ruling families exempt from military service. In October 1867, however, parliament explicitly discussed and voted to impose the draft on Mennonites and Quakers. Mennonites again visited the king and other officials in Berlin, resulting in a royal order dated March 3, 1868, that allowed Mennonites to serve as non-combatants.²⁸ There was, however, no longer any way for them to avoid military service altogether.

The imposition of the draft in Prussia, even in non-combatant form, precipitated a tremendous conflict among Mennonites over their proper place in German society and in the German nation. Mennonites from the Vistula Delta sent competing public petitions to Berlin. The first one from October 1868 included almost eight hundred signatures of Mennonites

who pledged to serve in the military but demanded that the discriminatory Edict of 1789 be repealed so they could be equal to other Germans. When that brought no response the petition was repeated in November 1869 and gathered almost 1,300 signatures. In between those two rounds of petitions, roughly 1,800 Mennonites signed a petition that claimed Mennonites' exemptions had been revoked by angry liberal parliamentarians who resented Mennonites' recent electoral support for conservatives. They volunteered to give up the recently acquired right to vote if their military service exemption could only be restored.²⁹ Both liberal and conservative Mennonites had joined the political process by this point, petitioning and voting in opposite directions to advance their competing internal religious stances.

Crucially, the presence of the draft forced Mennonite young men to make decisions as individuals that previously had been regulated by the community as a whole. The state's grasp now dealt with atomized individuals, not community privileges. Johann Dyck of the Heubuden congregation in 1872 had exhausted several options to postpone his April 22 induction date and thus went into hiding. Police found him that same day and took him to the military office in Marienburg where it was decided to send him to Berlin under military escort. Once there he refused to put on the uniform, so it was put on him by force. Next he refused even to affirm, not swear, his loyalty to the emperor and induction into the army, since the Mennonite exemption from swearing oaths was still being honored by military officials. He was sentenced to several days in prison and then asked and refused to affirm again. This cycle repeated itself for months until he was apparently given a medical discharge. The congregational leadership and his family supported him in his refusal and attempted to visit him in Berlin.³⁰

Two years later another young man took a position at the other extreme. Bernhard Fieguth in the same Heubuden congregation had enlisted in the army with his family's clear support. Gerhard Penner, the Elder of the congregation, therefore on June 7, 1874, refused to serve him communion. The family apparently reported Penner's opposition to military service to local authorities for he was



Germany in 1866.

brought up on charges the next week for using a church office to oppose national laws. The case made its way to the High Court in Berlin, which upheld Penner's conviction and fine. Penner emigrated to Beatrice, Nebraska, soon after, taking the communion set with him, since he did not regard those who remained and served as true Mennonites. The set is now on display at the Kauffman Museum in North Newton, Kansas.

Perhaps as many as two thousand Mennonites, or roughly sixteen per cent, left the Vistula Delta in the late 1860s and 1870s over this issue, with more than half going to Russia and the rest immigrating to Kansas and Nebraska.³¹ Although partly a generational issue, the conflict also revealed a split between those who were deeply integrated into German society and those who would rather emigrate than acquiesce to changing mores in society.

Particularly illuminating on the issue of integration is the public stance encouraging military service that Wilhelm Mannhardt took after the draft was imposed. He had noted in his foreword back in 1863 that he was leaving his personal views out of the book.³² He had been a German nationalist since his youth when the revolutions and events of 1848 inspired him. He wrote patriotic poetry at that time that implied he would have volunteered to fight for Germany against Denmark that year if he had not suffered from ill health almost his whole life. After the draft was imposed on Mennonites, he wrote a seven-part newspaper article series from December



1868 Royal Order granted Mennonites the right to non-combatant services but finally eliminated any possibility of not performing any military service. Image Credit: Mark Jantzen.

1868 to January 1870 that argued for Mennonite service in the military, preferably as medics.

Mannhardt's defense of Mennonite military service opened with questions about the clarity of biblical teaching on never going to war. He noted the obvious examples of God endorsing war in the Old Testament. The New Testament record was also ambivalent, as disciples carried swords even into the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus dealt with a Roman centurion without commenting on his profession. Having undermined biblical authority as the Mennonite community had traditionally understood it, Mannhardt raised the philosophical and theological question of self-defense. Once the obligation for self-defense was proved, he widened it to include defense of the nation in classic "just war" terms, citing rational arguments and authorities. He thought a progressive revelation was working its way out in which eventually humans would be able to live in peace, but for now order and justice needed to be maintained by state authority. In addition, he noted that early Anabaptists and specifically Menno Simons were just plain wrong to think that they could form holy communities of dedicated Christians devoted to peace. That approach, he argued, jumped over the necessary stages of development and in any case, all the quarrels, schisms, and disagreements in Mennonite history demonstrated that although Mennonites claimed to be for peace, they were incapable of living it out. Finally, the authority vested in church leaders to maintain these communities had devolved into a tyrannical hierarchy and had created a clique, not a church, deformed by their improper isolation from the fatherland.

Mannhardt's essay and his own life laid out many of the arguments that were pulling Mennonites into the German nation. Additional education made their traditional ways of the reading the Bible seem simplistic and inadequate, and as in Mannhardt's case, led to successes and triumphs in endeavors far afield from traditional Mennonite concerns. The complex issue of self-defense and the rational arguments for just war theory are difficult to counter once traditional Anabaptist biblical arguments are discredited. And the desire to be part of a larger group that is also striving for moral improvement and greater freedoms, which is how Mannhardt presented the German nation, had a special appeal to an oft-disparaged minority anxious about its status in society. Most striking in this regard was his positive comment on Arnold of Winkelried, a Swiss soldier credited with sacrificing himself to maintain Swiss independence in the fourteenth century. Although his sacrifice cannot be historically documented and was in fact a myth created in the nineteenth century by romantic nationalists, Mannhardt praised his dedication to liberty and the needs of the whole society while not mentioning a single historical Anabaptist martyr, a succinct summary of the movement of Mennonites into the German nation over the hundred forty years after they came under Prussian rule.

Endnotes

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Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

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Mennonite Plautdietsch: Language and History

Christopher Cox, Edmonton, Alberta

Reprinted from the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*, 2008.

Introduction

This article presents a brief outline of the development of Mennonite Plautdietsch, from its beginnings in the Vistula Delta in what is now Poland in the 16th and 17th centuries. The history of its words reflects the history of emigration and exile of Mennonite Plautdietsch speakers and thus presents a living record of the history of the Dutch-North German Mennonites. This article has benefited immensely from the efforts of scholars who have devoted considerable time and effort in researching the etymology of Plautdietsch. They include Reuben Epp, Tjeerd de Graaf, Walther Quiring, Rogier Nieuweboer, and Jack Thiessen, among many others, upon whose collective work this article largely rests. Their contribution to the common understanding of the history and structure of Mennonite Plautdietsch is gratefully acknowledged here.



Reuben Epp was a descendant of 1920s Mennonites who was educated as a mechanic, but devoted much of his energy to studying and writing in the Low German language. His works include an orthography of Mennonite Low German. Photo Credit: Reuben Epp, *The Spelling of Low German & Plautdietsch* (Hillsboro, KS: Reader's Press, 1996).



Jack Thiessen grew up in Manitoba, studied at the University of Manitoba and then completed a doctorate at the University of Marburg in Germany, specializing in Low German. He has published a number of works in Low German. In 2003 he completed a Low German dictionary and in 2010 a translation of Alice in Wonderland. Photo Credit: Preservings 15 (1999): 131.

The Prehistory of Plautdietsch

Plautdietsch belongs to the Indo-European language family. The Indo-European language family represents the largest portion of the languages spoken in Europe today. Many of the similarities observed between the words, sounds, and grammatical features of languages belonging to this family are thought to be primarily due not to borrowing, but rather to having a common linguistic ancestor. Historical linguistics has long insisted that all of the Indo-European languages can be demonstrated to have gradually branched off from a single proto-language over the course of several thousand years. As speakers of this common proto-language spread out from their homeland throughout Europe and northern Asia, the varieties of this language spoken by each migrant group continued to differ from one another – sounds gradually changed, and new words came to be adopted. The varieties spoken by these now geographically separated groups eventually became so different from one another as to represent separate languages. In this view, all of the modern Indo-European languages are essentially siblings and cousins of one another. Some languages are more closely related, often sharing an immediate parent (e.g. French, Italian, and Spanish developed out of Vulgar Latin), while others (e.g. Russian, a member of the Slavic branch, or Hindi, of the Indic branch) are more distantly related, separated by a greater amount of time and more historical changes to their respective sound systems and vocabulary.

The branch of the Indo-European languages that concerns us is that of the Germanic languages, which are thought to have developed in the area of the North and Baltic seas, and spread over time throughout northern and central Europe. This group developed into three sub-branches: the North Germanic languages, including Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Icelandic; the West Germanic languages, including English, Dutch, German, Frisian, Afrikaans, and Yiddish; and the now-extinct East Germanic languages, including Gothic. While all three branches are related, the closest similarities between languages are found within each one: while Danish shows some similarity to German, for instance, it shares more features with its Scandinavian sister languages, with which it is more closely related. Plautdietsch falls into the West Germanic branch, being a variety of Low German (Niederdeutsch).

The relationship between Plautdietsch and the other West Germanic languages is thus one of siblings, not of parents to children: no one language from this group represents the 'original' or 'purest' form of the language, even where their names might be thought to suggest otherwise. Rather, the

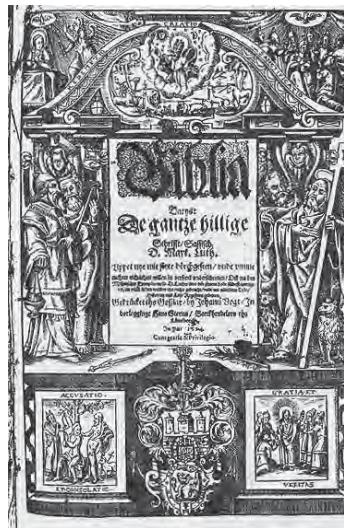
names of several of these languages, such as High German and Low German, reflect their historic geographical distribution: High German originally referred to the varieties spoken in the highlands of central Europe, close to the Alps; while Low German referred to the varieties spoken in the lowlands of northern continental Europe bordering on the North and Baltic seas. As sister languages, then, they are closely related, but have independent claims to long and distinct histories: modern Low German is considered to have descended from Old Saxon in the north, while modern High German is descended from varieties of German spoken in the central and southern regions of what is now Germany. Importantly, both languages have long and largely independent histories as written languages as well, with written records for each language dating back to at least the ninth century, if not earlier.

Indeed, Low German has a notable history of use in formal, written contexts. Low German once served as the official language of the Hanseatic League, an alliance of trading guilds which dominated maritime commerce in the North and Baltic Seas for several hundred years during the late Middle Ages, doing business in a region stretching from England to Finland and from Holland to Russia (cf. Epp, 1993). As the *de facto* language of northern European commerce during this time, Low German was a language of considerable prominence: trade agreements were written, negotiated, and signed in Low German in places as far away as Finland and Russia, serving as the common language between merchants of different nationalities.

The important role played by Low German as a *lingua franca* during this period ultimately left its mark on the languages of northern Europe and Scandinavia, as well, where Low German borrowings were relatively common. The modern Swedish *Byxa*, ‘pants, trousers’, can be traced back to the Middle Low German word *Buxe* (Plautdietsch: *Bexe(n)*); the Danish word for paying, *betele*, was borrowed from Middle Low German *betale(n)* (Plautdietsch: *betohle(n)*). Even Icelandic, the most distant of the Scandinavian languages from the Low German sphere of influence, shows signs of contact with Low German, with words such as *Edík*, coming from the Middle Low German *Etik*, still close in form and identical in meaning with the Plautdietsch *Ädikj*, ‘vinegar’. Even Finnish, a language not belonging to the Indo-European family, contains borrowings from Low German, including *lakana* ‘sheet, bedsheet’, from the Low German *Lakan* (Plautdietsch: *Loake(n)*). Words such as these remain in active use in these languages even today, and all have their roots in the Low German of the Hanseatic League.

The Emergence of Mennonite Plautdietsch

The gradual decline of the Hanseatic League throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, when its commercial, political, and linguistic influence began to shift to the powerful kingdoms of central Europe, proceeded largely in parallel to the emergence of the Anabaptist movement in the early sixteenth century. As



Alle Vader in den Hemmel.
Dyn Name werde gehillt-
get. Dyn ryke kame. Dyn wille
geschee/ vp Erden / also im Hem-
mel. Onse dachlike Brodt gyff
vns huden. Und vorgyff vns vn-
se schulde/ also wy vnsen schulde-
ners vorgeven. Und vore vns
nicht in vorsokinge. Sünder vor-
lösevns * van dem övel. Gente
dyn ys dat Ryke/ vnde de krafft/
vnde de Herlichkeit in ewicheit/
Amen. Wenteso gn den Menschen ère

On the left is the title page of a Saxon Low German Bible. Johannes Bugenhagen helped Martin Luther translate the Bible into German and then translated it into Low German. The 1614 edition of his translation was published by Hans Stern in Lüneburg and printed by Johann Vogt in Goslar, Germany. On the right is the Lord's prayer. Image Credit: Wikipedia Commons.



The Krantor in Danzig represents one of the city's most famous landmarks from the time of its place of prominence as a Hansa City in the 15th century. The combination gate and lift crane loaded ships and was used to raise the masts of sailing ships. The crane was driven by men walking on a wheel. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

persecution of early Anabaptists in the northwestern lowlands of Europe grew increasingly severe, an eastward wave of migration began from these areas to parts of northern Germany and eventually to the Hansa city of Danzig (present-day Gdańsk), where freedom from violent persecution was at least temporarily assured. This sojourn in northern Poland, which would come to last several centuries, brought Mennonite immigrants into sustained contact for the first time with the local varieties of Nether-Prussian Low German (Niederpreußisch), which they would eventually come to adopt as their own.

Importantly, however, this transition in languages did not take place without leaving its mark. Speakers from northwestern Europe did not give up their native languages wholesale, but rather introduced elements of their native Dutch and Frisian dialects into the local Plautdietsch, producing something new. Dutch words from this time period are common, and are still to

be found in the core vocabulary of contemporary Plautdietsch: words such as *Oohm* ‘minister, reverend’ (Dutch *oom*, ‘pastor’), *Prell* ‘junk, odds and ends’ (Dutch *prel*), *Kollea* ‘colour’ (Dutch *kleur*), *Olbassem* ‘currants’ (Dutch *aalbesen*, literally ‘ale berries’) are commonly cited as being derived from Dutch sources during this time period, as are *drock* ‘busy’ (Dutch *drok*), *ladig* ‘empty’ (Dutch *ledig*), *tachentig* ‘eighty’ (Dutch *tachentig*), and *vondoag* ‘today’ (Dutch *vandaag*) (cf. Thiessen, 1963, 2003, 2006). A slight influence from Frisian might even be perceived in a few modern Plautdietsch words: the word *Kjwiel* ‘spit’ might be related to the Frisian word *kwyl*, and the word for wedding, *Kjast*, might well be related to the Frisian word *kest*, meaning ‘choice’. The latter etymology would explain the Plautdietsch word for a slaughtering bee, *Schwienskjast*, literally a “pig’s wedding”, but which would have originally meant the choice (*Kjast, Kest*) of a pig for butchering (cf. Nieuweboer & de Graaf, 1994). Mennonite Plautdietsch is thus a language which reflects considerable linguistic diversity from its very beginning, being at its core unmistakably Low German, but with notable influence from Dutch (and, to a lesser extent, Frisian) upon its basic vocabulary. Mennonites in northern Poland thus not only adopted Plautdietsch as their everyday spoken language, but also adapted it, incorporating elements into it which reflected their distinctive heritage.

Mennonite Plautdietsch in Russia

The First and Second Partitions of Poland (1772, 1793) brought increasing numbers of Mennonites under Prussian political control, and marked the beginning of the end of the early Mennonite sojourn in the Vistula Delta. As political pressure grew for Mennonites to comply with mandatory military service, and facing widespread land shortages, many Polish Mennonites accepted the invitation of Catherine II to migrate to lands in southern Russia (present-day Ukraine) recently acquired from the Ottoman Empire. These Mennonite settlers brought with them their now-familiar Plautdietsch as the language of home and community. This act of emigration effectively removed their Plautdietsch from its original context, setting them apart from their closest linguistic kin and continuing the process of development of a distinctively “Mennonite” Plautdietsch.

Emigration not only separated Plautdietsch-speaking Mennonites from other speakers of Low German, but also brought them into contact with other Slavic languages, namely Ukrainian and Russian. Early borrowings from Russian and Ukrainian into Plautdietsch might be taken to shed some light on the kinds of contact which occurred between Mennonites and their new neighbours. Many such borrowings represent foods not prominent or generally familiar in Mennonite kitchens of previous generations: *Arbus, Rebus* ‘watermelon’ (Rus. *arbuz*), *bockelzhonn* ‘tomato’ (Rus. *Baklažan*

‘eggplant’, which belongs to the same biological classification as the tomato), and *Schessnikj* ‘garlic’ (Rus. / Ukr. *česnok*) all appear to be borrowings from these Slavic languages, and likewise *Bultje* ‘white bread’ (Rus. *bulka*), *Pastje* ‘Easter bread’ (Rus. / Ukr. *paska*), *Borscht* ‘(beet) soup’ (Rus. / Ukr. *boršč*), and *W(a)renikje* ‘perogies’ (Rus. *vareniki*, which can be traced back further to the word *varit* ‘to boil’). Cultural and commercial items feature prominently among early borrowings, as well: cf. *Poppaross* ‘cigar, cigarette’ (Rus. *poparos*), *Peklatjes* ‘washers, thin pieces of metal’ (Rus. *podkladka*), *Laufanje* ‘general store’ (Rus. *lavka*), and *Schemedaun* ‘suitcase’ (Rus. *čemodan*).

The relatively clear classes into which these early Russian and Ukrainian borrowings fall, as well as the general absence of words indicating personal relationships (e.g. nicknames, kinship terms, words for clothing and the home, etc.), would seem worth noting. This might tentatively be taken to suggest that contact between early Mennonite settlers and their Slavic neighbours was not particularly close: if these borrowings can be taken as evidence, at least, the closest salient contact would appear to have been in the domains of commerce and unfamiliar foods and cultural products. These words represent the first unambiguous departure of Mennonite Plautdietsch from the path trodden by other kinds of Low German, distinguishing it from those varieties which remained primarily in Poland. These early borrowings are still to be found in many of the varieties of Mennonite Plautdietsch spoken by the descendants of Mennonites who emigrated from Russia in the 1870s and 1880s, albeit with heavy adaptation to fit the sound system of Low German.

For those Mennonites who remained in Russia after the educational reforms of the 1860s and the mass emigration to



Arnold Dyck came to Canada in the 1920s where he became a writer, editor and publisher. He is most famous for his Low German writings, particularly his Koop enn Bua series of comic novels. His writings were compiled in a four volume collection in the 1980s.
Image Credit: Arnold Dyck, Collected Works, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

North America of the 1870s and 1880s, the degree of influence exerted by the Russian language upon Plautdietsch appears to have increased significantly. Slavic borrowings in the speech of later emigrants – those who left Russia in the 1920s and 1930s following the Bolshevik Revolution, for example – reveal not only kinship terms such as *Plemenikj* ‘nephew’ (Rus. *Plemjannik*) and nicknames such as *Wanja* ‘Johnny’ (Rus. *Vanja*, from Ivan ‘John’) and *Ljolja* ‘Helena’ (Rus. *Ljolja*, from Olga), but also words from the domains of the home, such as *Kuchne* ‘summer kitchen’ (Rus. *kuxne*), and of clothing, such as *Paltoo* ‘coat’ (Rus. *pal’to*, itself borrowed from French *paletot*) (cf. Epp, 1993; Quiring, 1928; Thiessen, 1963). These later Russian borrowings suggest a different relationship with Slavic neighbours than was common in previous generations, demonstrating a greater familiarity with the dominant culture and further integration into Russian government and society – all areas which compulsory Russian-language education would have made increasingly familiar and accessible to Mennonites in Ukraine.

Outside of borrowings, other words reflect the often tragic changes in circumstances which accompanied this period in Russian-Mennonite history: as Jack Thiessen (2003) points out, the word *huseare(n)*, once meaning simply ‘to house’, comes to take on a decidedly bitter flavour for many Mennonites who were forced to ‘house’ Machnow anarchists in their homes during the turbulent period after the Russian Revolution, turning what was once a neutral Plautdietsch word into one loaded with intensely negative historical connotations.

Mennonite Plautdietsch Abroad

For those Mennonites who migrated to North America, the situation surrounding early borrowings from English largely parallels that of early borrowings from Russian. Early English borrowings generally represent words from outside of the hearth and home, dealing primarily with commerce, cultural items, and technology. Thus, we find preserved in the speech of many Mexican and Paraguayan (Menno Colony) Plautdietsch speakers English-derived words such as *Stua* ‘store’, *Kottalöag* ‘catalogue’, *Zista* ‘cistern’, *Kjäik* ‘cake’, *Koa* ‘car’, *Trock* ‘truck’, and *Pienatsbotta* ‘peanut butter’, despite active contact with an English-speaking majority having ended for these communities over seventy years ago (cf. Hedges, 1996; Rohkohl, 1993). With the introduction of compulsory English-language education and increased rates of bilingualism between Plautdietsch and English, borrowings gradually came to take on a more informal character, with English nouns and verbs being turned into Plautdietsch equivalents productively, and occasionally for humorous or ironic effect (e.g. *aunswitche(n)* ‘to switch on’, or *utstraightene(n)* ‘to straighten out’).

It should come as little surprise, then, to find similar patterns of borrowing from Spanish in Mexican and South American Plautdietsch outside of Brazil, beginning with cultural items and technologies either unfamiliar or uncommon in Mennonite communities—consider, for instance, *Wratschtjes* ‘sandals’ (Spanish *huaraches*), or *Burra* ‘donkey’ (Spanish *burro*), as well as any number of names for previously unfamiliar food and produce – again demonstrating the strongest influence in those areas of technology and commerce where contact with Spanish speakers has been most intense (cf. Hedges, 1996; Rohkohl, 1993).

Similarly, for those Mennonites who remained in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, compulsory education in Russian and the dissolution of the original Mennonite colonies through emigration and exile led to further changes to the language. Common Plautdietsch words were occasionally replaced – what was referred to as *Kjees* ‘cheese’ by previous generations of speakers is now called *Sir* by many such groups, adapting the Russian word *syr* – and more idiomatic phrases from Russian were translated into their direct, word-for-word equivalents in Plautdietsch without any apparent loss in meaning. Indeed, much as with English borrowings in North American Plautdietsch, some speakers of Plautdietsch in this Russian group are comfortable enough in both languages to permit on-the-spot conversion of native Russian words into Plautdietsch equivalents: Russian words like *guljať* ‘to go for a walk’ and *popadat'* ‘to get caught’ can now be “translated” into Plautdietsch forms like *guljeie(n)* and *papadeie(n)*, and used like any other Plautdietsch word in conversation (cf. Nieuweboer & de Graaf, 1994; Nieuweboer, 1999).

Conclusion

Throughout all of these Mennonite communities, it is remarkable to observe the tenacity with which Plautdietsch has been maintained, despite continual economic and social pressures favouring its abandonment. The miracle of its survival is no less noteworthy when one considers that the varieties of Nether-Prussian Plautdietsch out of which the Mennonite variety developed have now all but disappeared from the dialect landscape of the Vistula Delta. Mennonite Plautdietsch is, in effect, the last non-moribund representative of the dialects from which it originated and of an entire division of the Low German languages, remaining vital under what might reasonably be considered highly unfavourable conditions for the retention of their language across generations.

It might be suggested that Plautdietsch has remained vital where other, related languages have begun to fade away not merely as a consequence of its geographical isolation or the relatively strong coherence of Mennonite communities and colony-centered settlements, both factors mitigating against a wholesale migration to the dominant language; but rather as a result, at least in part, of its function within these communities as the language of hearth and home, a locus of community and of culture. Plautdietsch, the warm and familiar *Muttasproak*, serves for many not only as what Rohkohl (1993: 46) cites as the “Sprache des Herzens, der Seele” – the language of the heart, of the soul – but further as an integral part of sustained community, the central store and primary token of a shared history and cultural experience. When viewed in this light, the language might be seen to provide not only words and phrases, but also a means of common identification and sustained community, a home which could be picked up and transplanted, as often as necessary, to the Russian steppes or the Siberian tundra, to the Canadian prairies or the Paraguayan Chaco.

Thus is the gift of Low German: that it connects these dispersed Russian Mennonites into a single and vital linguistic community, bridging the deep rifts left by emigration, exile, and differences of confession (cf. Thiessen, 2000). Its current forms around the globe, however varied, reflect in living colour the collective experiences of its speakers, tracing back the unique history of this group, step for step or word for word, back from the Americas to Russia, from Russia to Prussia, from Prussia to the northwestern lowlands, and beyond – giving us all the more reason to appreciate the precious gift of this language in all of its detail.

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Uncovering the Polish-Prussian Mennonite Past: Land Records in Polish Archives

Glenn Penner, Guelph, Ontario

With the help of a grant from the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., genealogist Glenn Penner made a trip to Poland to locate and create digital copies of land records in the archives in Malbork, Poland. Below is a translated article from a Polish newspaper describing his trip and an explanation of the collection of records that he and his research assistant digitized. The description of the records is an excerpt from the web page (http://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/VI_53.html) where the first digitized records are located. Glenn Penner can be reached at: gpenner@uoguelph.ca. (eds.)

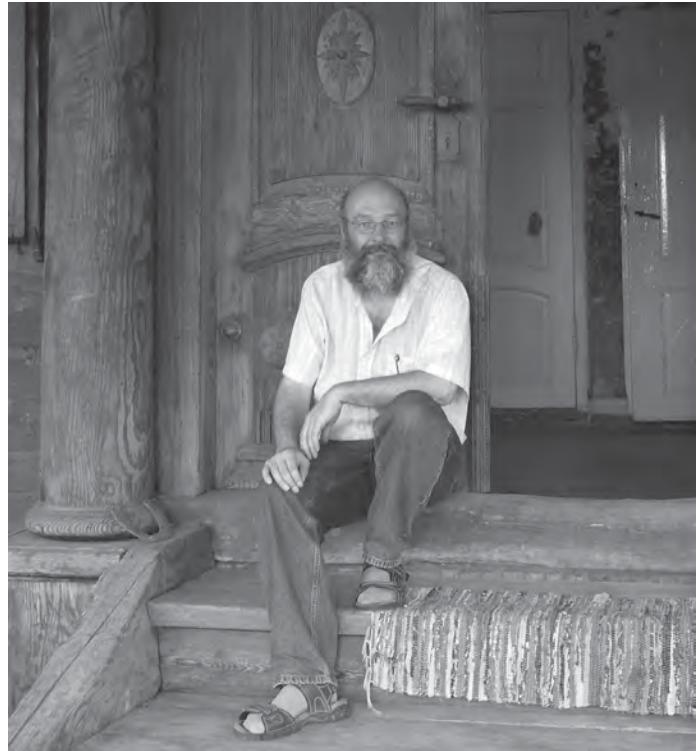
Incredible Histories Close to Us: A Canadian on the trail of the Mennonites

By Marta Chmielińska-Jamroz from *Gazeta Malborska*,
15 May 2013 issue No. 20.

REGION. Glenn Penner lives in Canada and gathers documents about the Mennonites in Żuławy region. Last week he came to Malbork to copy historical records. He also visited Mennonite cemetaries--one of them located in Stogi (Heubuden).

Glenn Penner came to Poland last year for the first time. He stayed in Malbork and spent most of his time in the archives copying and reading old Mennonite documents. This time he also has been spending plenty of time in the archives but besides that he experienced some Mennonite places as well. Glenn Penner was born in Canada as a Mennonite. His family emigrated from Poland (Prussia) to Russia and from there to Canada. Penner is a Professor of chemistry and also works with the D.F. [Plett] Foundation which was created in 1996 by Delbert F. Plett. Mr. Plett was a historian and a lawyer from Steinbach in the Canadian province of Manitoba. People who work with this non-profit Foundation believe that a solid knowledge about their history can strengthen feelings, beliefs, culture, church, society and a sense of peoplehood. The Foundation promotes and supports research about Mennonites who arrived to Canada from Russia in the 1870s.

Prof. Penner is also responsible for the Mennonite DNA Project. One of the main goals of this project is to find out how many common ancestors modern, living Mennonites have. It also helps to make connections between families and Mennonite names. It is part of a bigger project which concerns research about the origin of Mennonites and other religious groups such



Glenn Penner is an avid genealogist who has done extensive research into Prussian Mennonite family records. He is pictured here sitting on the steps of a former Mennonite home in the Vistula Delta. Photo Credit: Glenn Penner

as Amish and Hutterites who originate from former lands of Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland.

Glenn Penner's main purpose for visiting Malbork is to make family connections between many Mennonite clans and families up to 1820. "I have researched families which names are so familiar to me and I could find the same names in records almost 200 years old", says Glenn Penner.

Besides studies and research in the archives Professor Penner, together with his research guide Tadeusz Pilat, had a chance to visit several Mennonite cemeteries and villages. It happened because of an unexpected meeting in the archive. They both met Karolina Manikowska and Tomasz Wąsik from Malbork who are fascinated by Mennonite life and culture. The whole group of new friends took an interesting trip around the



Tadeusz Pilat was Glenn Penner's research assistant in locating and filming Polish land records in the Malbork Archives. He has a Masters Degree in Library and Information Sciences, is an accredited genealogist, and is particularly interested in electronic databases. He is fluent in German, English and Polish, and reads Russian and Latin. Photo Credit: <http://www.progenealogists.com/tpilat.htm>.

places. They could all experience touching and special moments. "Thanks to Karolina and Tomasz I could "touch" those places. I have seen them in old documents," says the Professor. "I could also find my last name on four surviving grave-stones. However it was not my close family but because of the DNA research I know that all Penners derive from one progenitor. It is a miracle that those cemeteries somehow survived."

The Professor says that seeing Mennonite cemeteries is not so emotional for him. Those people died such a long time ago and their descendants are now in Canada not even knowing that their ancestors are buried here in Polish soil. So it is a different feeling than for those Poles who visit Polish cemeteries in the Vilnius region.

Thanks to Professor Penner, Karolina and Tomasz could enrich their knowledge about traditional Mennonite cuisine, way of living and most important, the proper way of pronouncing Mennonite names. The so-called Russian Mennonites in Canada still use their own language which is Plautdietsch. This language is a dialect of the low-German. It is not used by many people but still used among the orthodox Mennonites.

Mr. Penner has not finished his research yet. He plans to come to Poland next year to continue his work.



A photo of the informal tour group on a dike in the Vistula delta. From left to right, the group's driver Robert (cousin to Karolina), Tadeusz Pilat (Glenn's Polish co-worker), Karolina Manikowska and Tomasz Wąsik from Malbork. Photo Credit: Glenn Penner.



The cemetery at Stogi (Heubuden) is one of the largest and best preserved Mennonite cemeteries in the Vistula Delta. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

West Prussian Property Records from Polish Archives

Glenn Penner, Guelph, Ontario
and John Thiesen, Newton, Kansas

Property and inheritance records are important sources for genealogical and historical studies. Unfortunately for Low German Mennonites, the earliest West Prussian records are in Polish archives and have been difficult to access. An early use of these records is found in B. H. Unruh's classic book on the emigration from Prussia to Russia: *Die niederländisch-niedersächsischen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*. Unknown, or unnoticed, by the many researchers who have used this book are the many references to "Hyp. Beil. Akten" in the extensive lists of immigrants. These are the *Hypotheken Beilagen Akten*, which were thoroughly researched by Franz Harder of Danzig and the information he obtained was provided to Unruh. Unfortunately all of Harder's collection was destroyed or went missing after his death towards the end of World War II.

As a result of the partition of Poland in 1772, most Mennonites ended up living in West Prussia, a province of the Kingdom of Prussia (Frederick the Great was king at the time). In 1783 the Prussian *Hypotheken Ordnung* initiated standardized recording of property and inheritance records. Village *Grundbücher* (*Grundbuch*) and *Grundakten* were started.

Many of these records have survived and are located in Polish archives. The first part of this project to make these records available was funded by the Plett Foundation. It concentrated on the extensive collection in the archives at Malbork, Poland, formerly Marienburg, West Prussia.

A few useful definitions:

Grundbuch (pl. *Grundbücher*) — A large ledger (400-600 pages) recording the transfer of land from one owner to another.

Grundakten — A "file" (Dossier) of legal documents (*Akten*) regarding a specific property in a given village. These were more detailed than what is found in a *Grundbuch*. They may also contain information and documents from well before 1783.

Blatt — Each property is referred to as a “*Blatt*.”

Hufen — unit of land measurement = 16.8 hectares = 41.5 acres. These records use the *Culmisch Hufen*. A variation of this word, *Huben*, is occasionally used in old Mennonite literature.

Morgen — there were 30 *Morgen* per *Hufe*. One *Morgen* is equal to 1.38 acres.

Ruten — there were 300 *Ruten* (square rods) per *Morgen*. One *Ruten* is equal to 200 square feet.

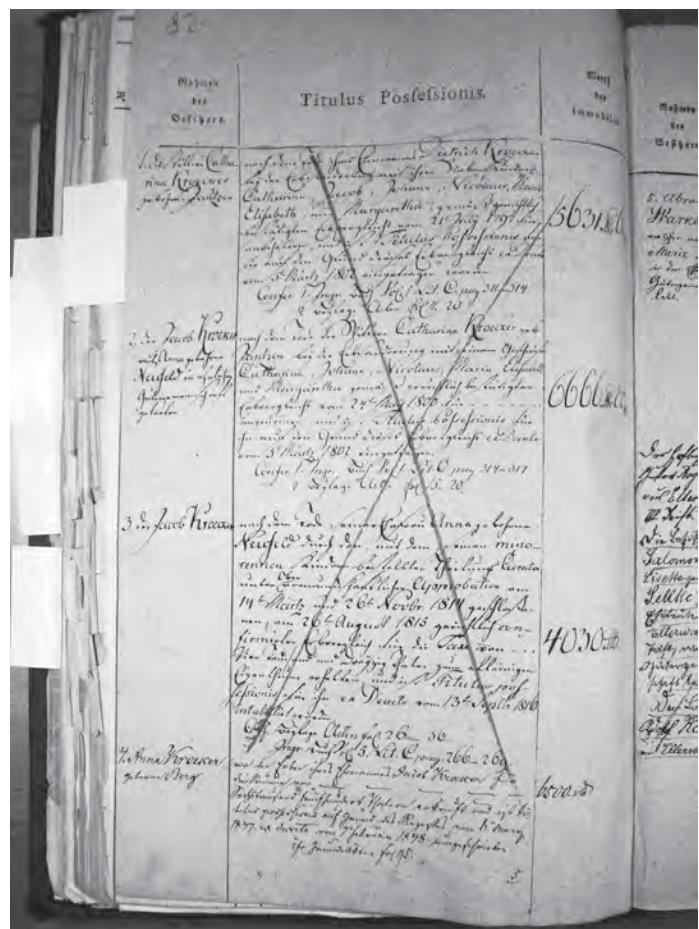
A few words about using the records:

1) These are not church registers or census lists. You will not find nice, neat lists of names and dates, nor will you find any reliable indices. You will need to carefully search the pages of the records for the village of interest in order to find the person you are looking for. This is part of doing real historical and genealogical research!

2) These records are written in a rather legal style of 18th and 19th century German. Even those with some knowledge of German may find it difficult to decipher the terminology and work out the often complex relationships described in these documents.

3) It is important to note that husband and wife were joint owners of a property. As a result, the maiden names of wives are provided (something rarely done in many Mennonite church records). Also, all legitimate children had equal inheritance rights (unlike in some European countries). So if a husband or wife died while owning a property, all of the living children and children of deceased children of that person (not step children) are frequently listed as heirs. See, for example, the case of Dietrich Kroeker, on the accompanying copy of his record. His listed heirs are his children by his 2nd wife Catharina Jantzen (his 1st wife was Anna Loepp). This implies that he obtained his property by virtue of his marriage to Catharina Jantzen. This illustrates the caution one should use when interpreting these records.

The first images of this digitization project can be accessed at: http://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/VI_53.html



A page from the recently digitized land records in the Malbork Archives documenting the land transfers of Dietrich Kroeker. Source: Ellerwald Grundbuch Blatt 36 (page 82). State Archives of Malbork, Poland, Fond 502, File 421. Found at: http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/VI_53/Malbork/Ellerwald/Ellerwald_Grundbuch_Bla... 30-60 Malbork Archives Fond 502 File 421/IMGP0755.JPG.

Mennonite Heritage in Poland: A Visit to the Chełmno (Culm) Region

Roland Sawatzky, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Between June 13 and 19 this summer, I was invited to participate in two Mennonite history-related events in the Chełmno region of Poland. I was asked by the Parks Service of Poland and the Friends of the Lower Vistula Association to speak at a conference detailing the cultural history of the Vistula River Valley. I was also asked to attend and present at the Chrystkowo open-air museum’s “Weekend with Mennonites” festival.

Mennonites began to settle in what is now Poland (part of which was known as Prussia) in the mid-1500s and lived there until 1945. Much of what is considered traditional about Russian-Mennonites has its origins in that area – including the housebarn architecture at the Mennonite Heritage Village.

Mennonites are currently very popular as a topic in Poland, due in large part to the popularity of a certain Russian singer who claims Mennonite heritage. However, they are also acknowledged to have been a peaceful people who helped reclaim flood-prone land for agriculture that the Polish people still use. A number of Polish heritage groups have recently engaged the local communities about historic Mennonite habitation in their country. They have successfully accessed European Union funding for creating heritage sites. My trip to Poland was directly related to these efforts.

My host was Wojciech Marchlewski, who has researched and published about Mennonite settlements in Poland. On our travels, Marchlewski took to me to numerous architectural sites



An example of a fascine fence made of wattle. In addition to minimizing sedimentation during floods, they were also used in emergencies to fortify dikes against flood waters by adding sandbags and dirt. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.

and cemeteries.

At the conference in Chełmno, I presented a short lecture about Mennonite landscapes in the Vistula River Valley, and the continuity in work habits, landscape and architecture that extended into settlements in Russia and Canada.

That evening, scholars and international guests were invited to a watermill heritage site at Gruczno. Exhibits included the water mill, steam engine demonstrations, *fascine* (wattle) fences and bee hives. *Fascine* fences were built by Mennonites to obstruct sand and silt during flood periods: while nutrients would make it through with the water, most of the heavier material was kept from obliterating their fields.

Saturday, June 15 was the first day of “Das Wochenende mit Mennoniten” at Chrystkowo (Christfelde), a small village near Chełmno. This open air museum features one large Mennonite-style house built in 1770. Here I gave a Power Point presentation for the general public as part of a series throughout the afternoon about Mennonites around the world. I presented about Mennonites in Canada (historic and modern); others presented on Mennonites in Mexico, Poland and The Netherlands.

Demonstrations and exhibits at the event included cheese making, reconstructed 17th century wooden wheelbarrows and spades, basket weaving, doily making, steam tractors, ice-cream making and historic fishing in a pond. The highlight was a cooking contest among three groups of college students, who were asked to cook traditional Mennonite food



Three groups of students participated in Mennonite food cooking contest at the Chrystkowo Museum. The Sommaborscht won. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.

by their professor. The judges included a restaurant critic from Warsaw, the Dutch Mennonites, and me (a last minute decision). The students cooked throughout the day in the kitchen of the housebarn. I was partial to the *Sommaborscht* (which won the contest).

I then received a wonderful, in-depth tour of the 1770 house from Mr. Marchlewski. What struck me was the similarity in design of the rooms of the house with our own housebarns at the Mennonite Heritage Village, although the Polish house was much larger.



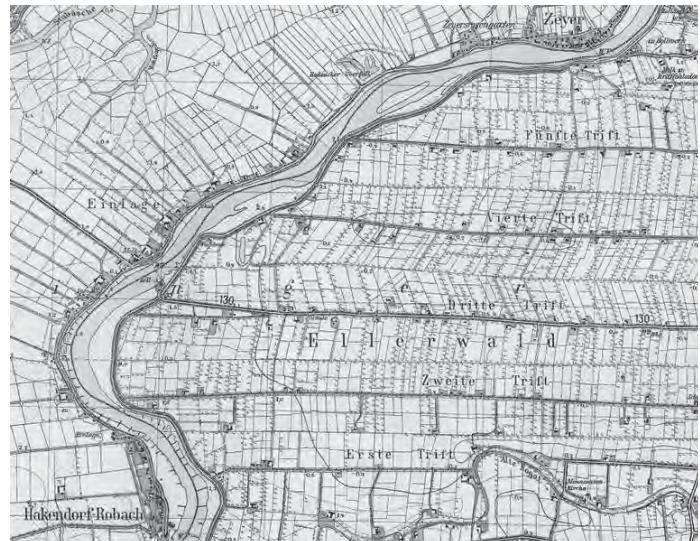
Top: A housebarn in the village of Chrystkowo (Christfelde) built in 1770. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.

Far Left and Middle: The exterior and windows of the 1770 housebarn. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.

Bottom Right: The 'gang' between house and barn. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.



The Ellerwald 'Triften' from the air. The map on the right shows the area of the 'Triften' in the early 20th century. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky. Map Source: Preussische Landaufnahme, Image: GAMEO, http://amzpbig.com/maps/1881_Zeyer_1931.jpg Archiwum Map Zachodniej Polski.



2 Photos Above: A windmill in the village of Palczewo (Palschau) used to make flour. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.



Right: A Mennonite exhibit in the Zulawski Museum in Nowy Dwór Gdańsk (Tiegenhagen). Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.

Another part of my trip to Poland was participation in a documentary being created by Steinbach's Laszlo Markovics for the MTS "My Manitoba" series. The topic is Mennonite windmills, based on the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum's theme for 2013. The cameraman for the documentary met up with us at the Chrystkowo site and I interviewed Marchlewski about Mennonites, windmills, land-use and water management. The film should be complete in November.

A number of visitors, including myself, were then taken up in a small 4-seater plane to view the landscape, in particular the "Triften" (land strips) that Mennonites helped develop in the region and are still used in some areas.

The next morning was spent at the windmill at Palczewo, in northern Poland about 10 km west of Elbląg, where we filmed more footage for the documentary. The windmill contained 5 levels, not including the cap, and was used to mill, clean, sift and pack flour, complete with an "elevator" system.

We then went to Nowy Dwór Gdansk (formerly Tiegenhof) and visited the Zulawski Museum, which exhibits the history of the region (including windmills and furniture), with the entire second floor dedicated to Mennonite history.

Afterwards we drove to the former settlement of Ellerwald (where some Sawatzkys lived in the 1650s). This group of former Mennonite villages, located just west of Elbląg (Elbing)

in the Vistula Delta, were based on low-lying "polder" fields, protected by dikes and previously drained exclusively by windmills.

We were also able to visit Malbork Castle (Marienburg), the centre of the Teutonic Knights' region of control, which was the forerunner of Prussia.

We visited Toruń (Thorn), the site of a new Mennonite open-air museum. There is now a new "Mennonite Street", where the Toruń Mennonite cemetery is located and a Mennonite housebarn is being reconstructed. This structure is constructed with about 95 percent new materials, but it includes a number of original elements and is based entirely on the original floor plan and construction details.

On my last day, we visited the former Mennonite village now known as Nowe Wymyśle. This village has numerous excellent examples of Mennonite housebarn architecture, as well as a dilapidated school house, cemetery and Mennonite Brethren church (1865). This village was extensively studied and recorded by Marchlewski in the 1980s, but has since become quite dilapidated, with some of the houses having disappeared. Very poor families live in the homes.

I would like to thank my guide and translator, Wojciech Marchlewski, without whom this trip would simply not have been possible.



On a new "Mennonite Street" in Thorn an open air museum is being created with a housebarn, constructed with new materials, but based on an original plan and using original techniques. On the right is a timber framer with his reconstructed axe. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.



The former school in Nowe Wymyśle on the left and the former Mennonite Brethren Church on the right. Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.



Articles

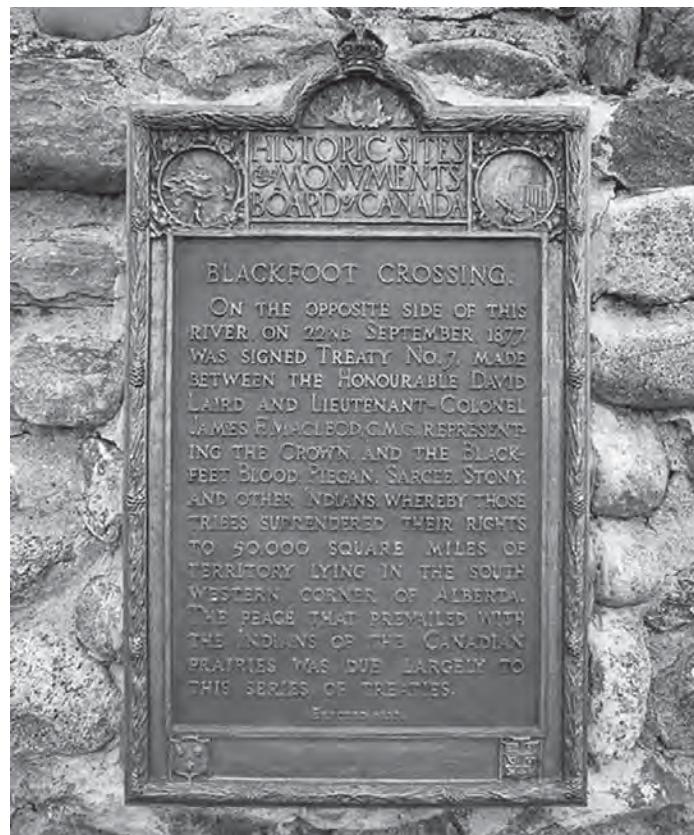
The First Mennonite Settlers in Alberta

Leonard Doell, Aberdeen, Saskatchewan

For a number of years I have gathered information on the Mennonite settlement at Gleichen, Alberta and how settlers from there moved to Saskatchewan in 1891 to become the first Mennonites in that province. In Alberta, the understanding has been that the Swiss Mennonites were the first Mennonites to settle in Alberta. Recently, I stumbled across material that challenges the belief that either of these groups were the first Mennonites to have lived in Alberta. In this article, I want to share the information I found that shows that there were actually three settlements in Alberta at the same time. The following is a description of who the settlers were, how the settlements began and what happened to each group. It has been a fascinating search and I have learned a lot in the process.

Treaties and Trains: Opening the land for settlers

The signing of Treaty 7 in September 1877 at Blackfoot Crossing near Gleichen created the opportunity for white settlers to have access to the land for settlement, an area that



Blackfoot Crossing is where Treaty #7 was signed in 1877 and is presently an historic site on the Bow River that immerses its visitors in Blackfoot culture and history. Photo Credit: Grapher78, Wikipedia Commons.

encompassed 35,000 square miles. It was here that Lieutenant Governor Laird as representative of the Queen, met with about five thousand Indians including the Blackfoot, Bloods, Piegan, Sarcees and Stonies to create a sacred covenant of how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people would live together and share the land.

As Richard Price notes, the

prospect of increased settlement in their territory gave some importance to a Treaty from the Government's point of view. The Blackfoot too, no doubt saw their own position differently than they had prior to 1870. In that year their numbers were greatly reduced by smallpox. Whiskey, which had been a major item in the American buffalo robe trade, had further weakened them. The Mounted Police had stopped the trade in whiskey but their arrival, followed by that of the first settlers must have aroused concern for their future position. The danger that the buffalo would disappear was becoming more evident each year. Late in 1876, their food supply was further threatened by the arrival on the edge of their territory of five thousand Sioux, refugees from the USA. All of these factors were likely to have disposed the Blackfoot to making a Treaty, whether or not they were actively proposing one.¹

Chief Crowfoot was the leader of the Blackfoot who helped negotiate the Treaty. He was a great orator, a brave warrior and a hunter with considerable skill and courage. It was through his leadership and diplomacy that a Treaty was made. A biography notes:

Crowfoot was also a man of peace. In 1843, for instance, he adopted the Cree leader Poundmaker, thereby helping end decades of hostilities between two tribes. He resisted the Sioux Chief Sitting Bull's call to war against the Canadian and American governments in the late 1870s. And most notably he refused to join Louis Riel's Metis Rebellion of 1885. All the while he was suffering unimaginable personal tragedy. Between 1885 and 1886, for instance he lost at least 8 children to tuberculosis. His adopted son Poundmaker, was jailed for his alleged role in the 1885 rebellion...and died of a haemorrhage just four months after his release from prison. Crowfoot would die on 25 April 1890. As Edgar Dewdney, the Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories during Crowfoot's time once said, Crowfoot died beloved by his people, feared by his foes and esteemed by all.²

The transition to reserve life following the Treaty was very difficult and Crowfoot's people faced starvation and often felt betrayed by the Queen's representatives and the police who promised to help them. With the Aboriginal peoples adapting

to a settled life on reservations, the building of the railroad proved to be a further source of upheaval for them. In 1883, the main line of the CPR passed along the northern boundary of the Reserve and stations were built at Cluny and Gleichen. When railway surveyors began encroaching on reserve land, the Blackfoot objected because the railway cut across small portions of the reserve. Once Father Lacombe intervened, and with Edgar Dewdney's backing, Crowfoot agreed to accept other lands south of the Bow River and eventually the Blackfoot reserve boundaries were changed, so that between Crowfoot station and Gleichen the railway forms the northern boundary of the reserve. After the surveyors had marked the path for the railroad, there came swarms of rough, exploitative men who camped near the Reserve. Drinking, gambling, and prostitution accompanied the construction and of course affected the Indian people.³ As Hugh Dempsey notes: "Although the Blackfoot had been told that the railway would be of great help to them in bringing food to the Reserve, it was also a source of concern. Trains belched clouds of sparks from their potbellied smokestacks, setting fire to thousands of acres of the prairie grass. In addition, Indian horses wandered onto the right of way and were killed by passing trains."⁴ In 1889, a peasant farming policy was implemented by the government based on the premise that Indians had to experience subsistence farming before they could progress to a more advanced stage of production. They were not allowed to purchase labour saving devices and had to make their own tools. A permit system introduced in the 1890s, prohibited Indian farmers and ranchers from buying or selling produce or stock without a permit from the Indian agent. Chief Crowfoot died in the spring of 1890.

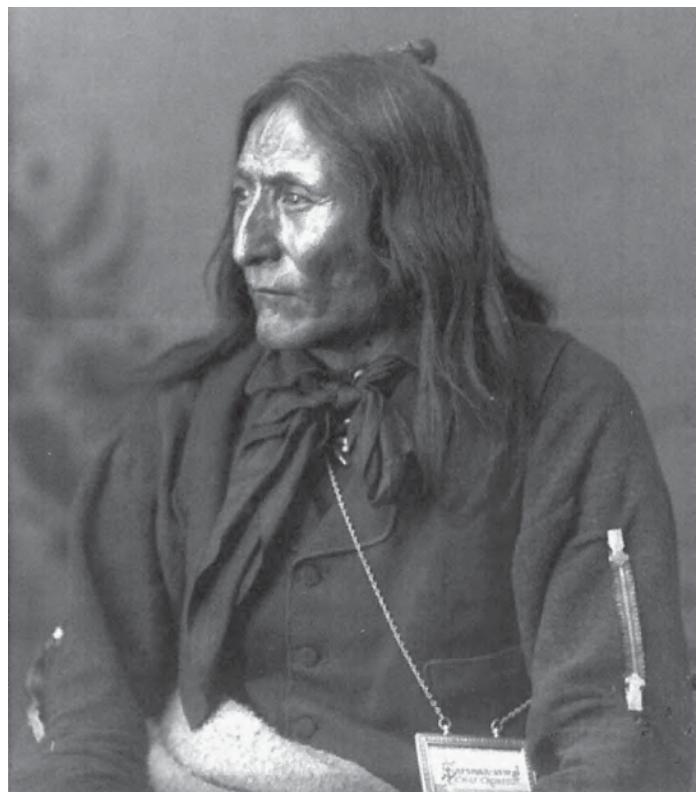
Settlers began to flock into the southern Alberta ranching country and into the farming country to the north and the east. During the summer of 1884, some 2,000 settlers took up homesteads in Alberta.⁵ Settlers faced many challenges including prairie fires, drought, severe winters, conflicts between settlers and ranchers, as well as tensions with their indigenous neighbours. It is in this context that Mennonites arrived to make this place their home.

Mennonite Landseekers Begin to Explore the West

The Swiss Mennonites

In the late 1880s, there were various groups of Mennonite delegates that came to Alberta to search for land. One of these groups were Swiss Mennonites from the Kitchener-Waterloo area in Ontario. In a 1980 article Dr. Alexander Malycky attempted to identify the first Mennonite settlers who came to southern Alberta and he described the challenges he faced in doing so. He acknowledged the various sources of information that he found that raise doubts about whether Elias W. Bricker (an Old Mennonite from Ontario) was the first Mennonite settler in Alberta.

Malycky also discusses the role of Emil Griesbach (1855-1954) in settling the Gleichen area. Griesbach played a prominent role in the Gleichen locality, as its early overseer and later mayor, businessman and civic leader. Griesbach arrived in Winnipeg from Germany in December 1883 and soon joined a CPR construction crew. As a railroad worker he came to Alberta the following spring, first working and later settling in Gleichen. Malycky quotes an autobiographical article that appeared in 1908, where Griesbach asserts: "im Jahre 1888,



Chief Crowfoot was born into the Blood Tribe in 1830 but was raised as a Blackfoot after the death of his father and the marriage of his Mother to a Blackfoot man. He became Chief of the Confederacy and led his people into signing Treaty #7 at Blackfoot Crossing. He died in 1890. Source: Provincial Archives of Alberta, Image: Wikipedia Commons.



The Siksika Nation Reserve #146, is located adjacent to the Town of Gleichen. The name Siksika comes from the Blackfoot words, "sik" meaning black and "ika" meaning foot, with the s connector between the words. Photo Credit: Leonard Doell.



Chief Crowfoot died of Tuberculosis in 1890 and is buried on the Siksika Reserve at Blackfoot Crossing. Photo Credit: Leonard Doell.

brachte Ich durch empfehlung die ersten Mennoniten nach Gleichen.”⁶ Malycky found additional information concerning Griesbach’s role in bringing Mennonites to Alberta in a 1912 article where we learn that already

in 1886-87..., he corresponded with German newspapers and the articles published abroad from his pen proved the starting point of the Mennonite migration to Alberta. During the year 1888, he assisted in locating 1,443 homesteads for these people and incidental to that service he covered the ground on foot practically all the way from Gleichen to Edmonton. During the very dry season of 1888-89, he located most of these people at Didsbury.⁷

A reference to travelling to Edmonton also appears in his autobiographical article, “Im begleitung von Herrn Schantz von Waterloo Ontario, bin Ich im Jahre 1887 von Calgary zu fusz nach Edmonton gelaufen”. Malycky assumes that the reference to Shantz refers to Jacob Y. Shantz, the respected businessman from Ontario.⁸

There were other Swiss Mennonite delegations that scouted the land in Alberta. In 1899 the *Calgary Weekly Herald* reported,

that a party of excursionists whom we mentioned as having arrived from Waterloo, Ontario last Sunday morning having made an examination of a part of the country around Calgary, have gone up to Banff to see the wonders of the mountain country at the National Park before returning to the level lands of their own country. What interests the people of Calgary district most in connection with their visit is what they thought of the capability of the country, as a farming and dairying country. Having been courteously treated and no effort spared on the part of the excursionists receptionist committee to facilitate their obtaining information, they felt it due to the community to make public their views about the place and property. Consequently they came to the Herald office and asked to make public their ideas about what they had seen and heard around Calgary. The group was thankful for the hospitality extended to them by John Ingram, proprietor of the Palace Hotel. They visited a number of farms and saw the varieties of crops grown. At the conclusion of their stay they said that they would recommend the area for their Ontario farmer friends who were coming west. They also suggested that the Herald publish their ideas and share the paper with Toronto area papers, so that people could become more knowledgeable about the west. They signed as : Joseph Y. Shantz, Haysville, Ont; George Proudfoot, Berlin, Ont; J.S. Hallman, New Dundee, Ont; Henry Hillgartner, New Dundee, Ont; Moses Bechtel, Kussouth, Ont; Sammuel Ponan, New Dundee, Ont.’⁹

A High River local history suggests: “We know that in 1889, Elias W. Bricker came with a CPR sponsored home seekers excursion to Calgary and from there he went south into the vicinity of High River and took up a homestead situated about half a mile north of the future Aldersyde, a locality which he named and where he was the first postmaster.”¹⁰ That same year the *Calgary Herald* reported that Mr. E.W. Bricker of Elora Ontario, with his wife and family of eight children arrived on Friday to settle in Alberta. The *Herald* noted, “Mr. Bricker

has rented J.J. O’Neil’s place on the junction of Sheep Creek and High River and has already commenced ploughing. Mr Bricker brings with him a span of heavy mares, 3 good milk cows, sheep, pigs, poultry, etc. He is a good specimen of Ontario farmer and well to do.”¹¹

A 2012 article written by Jim Bowman, provides some helpful information about Elias Bricker and the beginning of the Swiss Mennonite settlement near Aldersyde and the Mountain View Mennonite Church. According to Bowman:

Elias Bricker (1853-1939) was a part of the group of Mennonites from Waterloo Ontario, who were invited by the CPR to consider settlement along the route of its subsidiary, the C&E (Calgary to Edmonton) Railway. Elias was the only one of the group to file for land along the branch line which was proposed to run from Calgary to Fort Macleod. His choice was either very astute or very lucky... Elias sold his farm in Elmira Ontario and in 1891 settled on NE 7-20-28 w of 4M, a quarter section traversed by the nearly completed C&E Railway, with a corner of the land touching the Highwood River and just north of the Townsite of Aldersyde. The Brickers were industrious and enterprising and eventually the farm expanded to four quarter sections strategically located west of Aldersyde. The village, though never as big as Okotoks or High River, became an important junction point in 1910 for a new railway line that extended to Lethbridge via Vulcan... Besides farming, the Brickers established a small brickworks using clay from the banks of the Highwood River. They also operated a cream separator patronized by local farmers.



The photo is of the first Swiss Mennonites Catherine and Elias Bricker, who settled at Aldersyde in 1891. The photo was taken in 1920. Image Credit: High River Museum.

Bowman goes on to say that as far as he knew, the Bricker family was “Alberta’s earliest Mennonite family.” This is only partly true. They were the first Swiss Mennonite family to settle in Alberta but more research in this article will show that there were Russian Mennonite families from Manitoba that settled in Alberta before them.¹²

There are other hints of early Swiss Mennonite settlers. In April 1891, David Gascho, an Amish farmer from Musselburg Ontario, wrote a letter to the Department of Agriculture asking

for information about the availability of land in the Northwest.

So please dear gentlemen, be so kind as to let me know about the Government land up there, prices and all. Could you perhaps let me have a map of the whole Northwest showing the places where land is to be had, yet cheap, in a place where it is not too cold? Is land to be had yet near Edmonton? I have some acquaintances there and they seem to do well up there. If we should get a start there once, it might be the case that a great number would follow. But we wish to settle near a railway if possible or in a place perhaps where a railway will soon be built. Is there a chance to settle or homestead? Please let me know all about it.¹³

The letter raises the question of who his acquaintances were, fellow Amish or Mennonites? If so, when did they move to Alberta and where?

The community of Didsbury was settled somewhat later but under the leadership of Jacob Y. Shantz. The *Mennonitische Rundschau* reported in 1892 that

on his return trip from Alberta NWT, Mr. Jacob Y. Shantz arrived on Friday 7 October 1892 in Winnipeg and then in the evening continued his journey home. He led a deputation from Ontario to an area 46 miles north of Calgary, near the station of Didsbury to search for land and to look at it with the intention of creating a colony there in spring. With this in mind, Mr. Shantz built an Immigration House, 100 by 20 foot in size and then dug a well which hit good water at the 12 foot mark. Wood to build homes is in place so that the newcomers can begin building when they arrive. In addition, they have set up provisional lodging in the Immigration House at the Station. Mr. Shantz is planning on bringing immigrants from Pennsylvania and Indiana to help settle this colony....¹⁴

Malycky notes that “following his exploratory trip in 1892, [Schantz] brought in 1894 a substantial party of Mennonite Brethren in Christ from the area around Waterloo Ontario to the site of future Didsbury.”¹⁵

The Russian Mennonites, searching for land in the Northwest

According to E.K. Frances, the “cry for more land, that is for more land suitable for their type of farm economy and social organization, came at the opportune moment when the Dominion Government began to open up the North West Territories for large scale immigration and colonization.”¹⁶ Gerhard J. Ens’s history of the R.M. of Rhineland notes that only the richer farmers and businessmen could buy land, and that inability of ordinary families to establish their children on farms meant the moving to the northwest became steadily more attractive. Henry Jacobsen, an agent sent to Manitoba by the Dominion Government claimed that young farmers:

were on the move or were going to move sooner or later but if the young people go, it may not be so easy to keep the farmers back as these people dread and are averse to separation from their kindred.¹⁷

Although many of what was only a trickle of families that had moved to the United States as early as 1888 returned, Ens notes

that “the move to Northwest Canada beginning in the 1890s, had more serious repercussions. The settlement of Indian and Metis troubles after 1885, plus the opening of new railways in the west, Regina to Prince Albert and Calgary to Edmonton; opened vast new areas to settlement.”¹⁸

Jacobsen, the Dominion Government Intelligence officer, visited the Mennonite colonies in September of 1889 when it was learned that “some Mennonites of these reserves were contemplating moving to the United States.” He visited with the principal and most influential men to see if this was true. He also tried to persuade them to remain in Canada rather than to choose the USA. At the end of his report to the Commissioner of Dominion Lands he writes that “I have thought out a plan by which the thousands of acres of good vacant Government land in Southern Assiniboia and southern Alberta might be looked over by a deputation of influential and able Mennonites from the Eastern Reserve with the assistance of the CPR Company, the carrying out of which of course, entirely rests with you.”¹⁹

Not all Government officials shared the same views as Jacobsen and his colleague J.H. Metcalfe about keeping Mennonites in Canada. In October 1889, Metcalfe sent a telegraph to the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, saying that he was exerting every effort to retain Mennonites in Canada, who desire to remove from Southern Manitoba owing to lack of land. “Eighteen representatives from different villages held a meeting in the Intelligence office today and are going west to select land tomorrow. CPR gives free transportation. Will your department pay expenses of guide and horses at the three points between here and Calgary, very important that this be done, will arrange if you authorize.” The acting secretary for Lowe responded the following day to say that there are no funds at the disposal of the department from which these expenses could be paid.²⁰

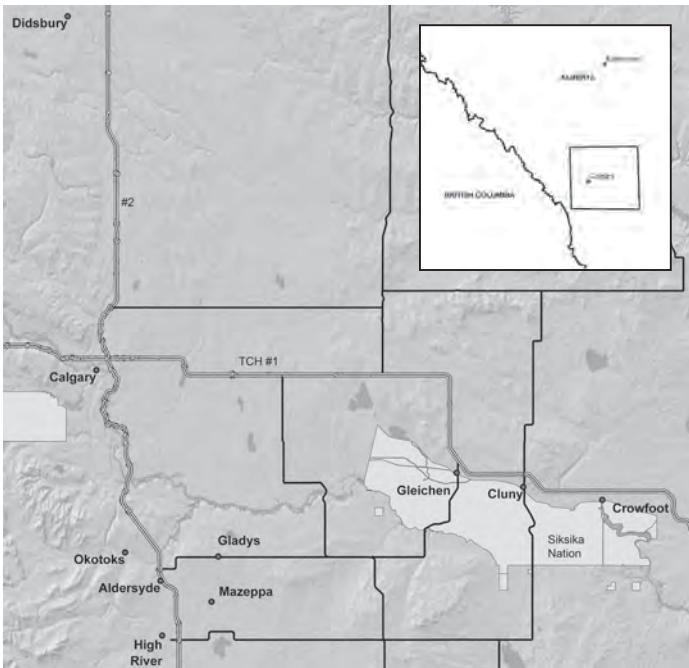
There were many delegations that went looking for land in the Northwest. There were individuals, there were groups sponsored by the CPR and accompanied by colonization agents, and there were delegations sent by their churches.

In the spring of 1889 a letter to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* reported that, “David Loewen and Jacob Regehr from Hochstadt Manitoba describe the trip that they took by train to Alberta, leaving home on April 1 and arriving back on April 19th. They visited the area around Medicine Hat and Dunmore, as well as an area southwest of Lethbridge.” Two weeks later, the *Rundschau* correspondent from Hochstadt wrote that “two more landseekers left in May for Alberta, namely David Unger and Johan Esau. They were able to travel for free. It was reported that Unger brought back some gooseberries with him that he had picked himself near Medicine Hat. Unger said he would like to move there if he could sell his place in Manitoba.”²¹

The same year Jacob Wiens and Klaas Peters raised funds in the community to make a trip to the Northwest (Alberta) and Oregon to explore farming possibilities. They returned home on June 21st by way of San Francisco, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Montana and the Dakotas.²²

While Wiens and Peters were returning home, the *Calgary Herald* reported the arrival of more land seekers:

four representatives, men from Morris and Gretna Mennonite settlements in southern Manitoba, whose names are Cornelius Striemert, Peter Gerbrandt, Fried Wall and Gerhard Rempel, arrived in Calgary this morning with the object of looking up a district where they can locate 200 families. This would



Mennonite settlement areas in Alberta ca. 1890s.

require all the Government land in at least six townships. Mr. Bouchier of Calgary Government Land Office, knows these gentlemen well and says they are well off and trusted men of these settlements and undoubtedly mean business. They have procured rigs and driven out in the direction of the Little Bow River, where the required amount of land can be had without any settlers on it.²³

The *Herald* updated the story a week later suggesting,

*there will be a large influx of Mennonites into this district this fall and next spring. The four gentlemen who came up here from Manitoba whose names we published at the time as representatives of 200 families that want to move here from Manitoba, have made a selection of several townships of land on Arrow Creek. They have gone to Winnipeg to see if they can make satisfactory agreements with the Government land Commissioner to get the land enblock. If they do, a move will be made at once towards coming out here.*²⁴

In his annual report for 1889, the Dominion Immigration agent for Calgary L.Z.C. Miquelon reported that

*the CPR having run three different excursions for the benefit of eastern farmers, a large number from Ontario and the Eastern Provinces availed themselves of the opportunity and about one quarter of these visitors made homestead entries before returning on the excursions and are expected back with their families next spring. The same company moreover granted a great reduction in the passage money to 40 Mennonites of Manitoba and Dakota, they have during the past fall visited the portion of Alberta lying to the southeast of Calgary. Twenty of them made homestead entries before returning and from their answers to my questions as to the probable numbers of Mennonites who are likely to settle next summer, I have been able to estimate that there will be about 100 heads of families or about 350 souls.*²⁵

The *Rundschau* reported on additional Mennonite land delegations to Alberta during the summer of 1889:

*On Monday, July 15, a deputation of land seekers who had been in the west arrived back in Winnipeg. They were E. Hiebert, a farmer from Gretna; David Friesen from Sommerfeld; Abram Loepky from Eigenhoff; Jacob Toews and Jacob Loewen from Altona. They left for Calgary July 8th and travelled extensively in that area. They travelled from Calgary in a northwest direction and then southwest to an area where nine townships of land around the station Cheadle was reserved for Mennonite settlement. This land interested them very much. It is fruitful and there is a good water supply to be found there, they just need more trees everywhere. The best location they found was between Cheadle and Langdon, 810 miles west of Winnipeg on the CPR. They have selected eight Townships of land in this area. The land is prairie with few trees but good grazing and pasture land. Some people are hoping to take up land there this fall.*²⁶

The increased volume of visitors and delegations created some unique problems for land agents. On June 25, 1889 the Mayor of Calgary sent H.H. Smith, the Dominion Land Commissioner in Winnipeg, a telegram asking him to open for Settlement Township 20 Range 27 west of 4th Meridian. It was understood that this is one of the Townships that the Mennonite agents from Manitoba had asked the Government to reserve for them, but several farmers from around Guelph had already made a choice of land in that Township. All that is necessary for the government to do, writes the Mayor, is to set apart another township instead of 20 for the Mennonites.²⁷

There was a lot of pressure on land agents and land-seeking delegations to get to the land first and then have it set aside for them before someone else got it. Mennonites complicated this by insisting on having blocks of land reserved for them. For Russian Mennonites negotiating block land settlements was very important to their choice of land. Their farming practises, their social and religious structures were based on a semi-communal way of life and living in villages (or homesteads near one another) on blocks of land near one another was a key part of who they were.

There were many who wanted the west to be settled but did not want the block settlements reserved for newcomers. At the height of the land search in the summer of 1889, the editor of the *Saskatchewan Herald* shared his strong feelings on the question:

*About two hundred Mennonites have resolved to leave Manitoba and move further west and having selected the Calgary district as the place of their choice, they have asked the Government to reserve for them ten townships for five years. We hope the Government will do nothing of the kind. Reserves have been a serious draw back to the country and ought not to be perpetrated and colonies of foreigners are not much better. There is no reason why foreign immigrants should be accorded privileges that are refused to Canadians.*²⁸

In November 1890, Jacob Y. Shantz of Berlin, Ontario returned from Northern Alberta with the Mennonite delegates who were much impressed with the country near Lone Pine, beside the C&E Railway (now known as Olds, Alberta). The

Calgary Herald reported - "we hear that if land can be secured here from the Government and the Railway, a large body of the younger generation of Mennonites will come on at once from Southern Manitoba."²⁹ This is confirmed by the report of the Dominion Government Immigration Agent L.Z.C. Miquelon, who made a trip to this area to check it out. "The first 20 miles are without wood and is called Lone Pine. On these last twenty miles, four townships have just been chosen by a Colony of Mennonites of Dakota. They will arrive in spring. From Lone Pine there is enough wood for settlers. The soil is good and the railway is already built beyond Lone Pine."³⁰

There was another delegation that came in 1891 under the leadership of Klaas Peters. According to June 15th edition of the *Calgary Herald*,

Peters, a Mennonite, who resides at Gretna in Southern Manitoba and who spent last winter in Southern Russia in the Immigration interests of the Dominion, is in town today with a Mennonite delegation consisting of Heinrich Wiebe, David Waldner, John Hofer, Gerhard Klassen, David Friesen, Wilhelm Peters, Franz Bergen, Abram Buhr, Michael Buhler and 1 or 2 others. Misters Waldner and Hofer come from Freeman, Hutchinson County, South Dakota; Mr. Buhler is from Southern Russia and the others from Southern Manitoba. They are all Mennonites with the exception of Mr. Buhler and 2 others who are Lutherans. They will go to Red Deer on tomorrow's train accompanied by Mr. Bouchier. Mr. Peters will stay with them as long as they are in this part of the country. The delegates have already seen the country around Duck Lake and Prince Albert and think well of it.³¹

A few days later the newspaper picked up on the travels of this group again.

Mr. Bouchier's last trip north extended through the country from the 4th Siding of the C&E (Calgary to Edmonton), 39 miles out (2 ½ miles from Chamberlains at Stoney Creek), through the lands on the Eastern side of the Railway up to and including Poplar Grove. He accompanied the Mennonite delegation, which by the way included a Bishop and 2 clergymen. The country traversed is townships 32, 33, 34 in Ranges 27 and 28 W of 4 M, which has been reserved by the Government for the Mennonites, they found within the districts an abundance of water and good land but the Mennonites preferred the country immediately alongside the Railway and they will ask for a transfer of the Reserve to the latter locality of which they are well satisfied. Mr. Bouchier finds it almost impossible to locate settlers land while on the spot, owing to there being so few townships surveyed in sections of the district and where they are surveyed there is great difficulty in locating the section marks. It is right to note the fact that Mr. Bouchier found sufficient rain in that part of the country. He has been up there in the Dog Pound country every week for the past three weeks. The first week it rained on him for three days, the second two days and the third week part of one day (Monday last). Mr. Bouchier is receiving nothing to meet his expenses in showing settlers through the country. He trusts to be able to sell the C&E lands by and by, receiving his commission for his service but in the meantime he is at considerable expense in showing settlers to the free grants, a fact which the Government

should take into consideration. He is laboring without compensation to have the Government lands near Calgary settled, while the Dominion agent at Calgary is giving all of his time to settle land in the Edmonton district.³²

The search for Alberta homestead land continued into the turn of the century. "In 1900, Jacob Y. Shantz accompanied a small group of Manitoba farmers who had not been able to acquire land. His selected destination was again the Didsbury area. Numerous homestead applications were registered, albeit twelve miles further east, apparently implying that homesteading by others had continued in his absence. These family names were typically Braun, Dyck, Friesen, Hamm, Hiebert, Janzen, Neufeld and Reimer."³³

Perhaps one of the most interesting and unusual (peculiar) requests for land in Alberta came from Jacob Friesen of Winkler, Manitoba. He, along with a delegation of Mennonites from there, had visited in Saskatchewan and then proceeded to look at land in Alberta. In a letter to W.F. McCreary, the Immigration Commissioner from Winnipeg, dated 11 June 1900, he shares some observations and requests for land.

I may say that they were all more pleased with the Alberta district north of Innisfail to Edmonton and northeast of that, they would like to try and reserve several townships East of Beaver Lake in Ranges 15, 16, 17 in Townships 49-53 inclusive, if there would be any chance of the railway coming from Prince Albert to Edmonton in the near future, it now means a 65 mile drive to reach the nearest point of it from Edmonton and the roads almost impassable at that and they did not think that they could get their people out there that far from a railway with bad roads in the spring and really no assurance when the roads would go through there, they would have picked right up and taken land if they could get the three Indian Reservations at Hobbema, the Ermine Skin, Samson and Bob Tail, the best piece of land we have struck in our journey. Do you think there is a chance of it going open for settlement sometime in the near future? And if so, can it be got for a Mennonite Reservation? If it can, it would be settled in no time. Kindly let me hear from you in regard to this as my delegation was much more pleased with that district than they were with Saskatchewan, although it is good there, they liked it better in Alberta.³⁴

The response from McCreary's office was received on June 21, 1900 and was very clear that there was no intention whatever of opening these Indian Reserves for settlement. "Of course if they picked out certain lands we would readily reserve them for 30 days to enable their friends to make entry but as you are aware, we are not making reservations for anyone."³⁵

The Mennonite Settlements at Gladys Ridge and Mazeppa

Judging by the interest in the land in various parts of Alberta, one would assume that Alberta should be one of the most heavily populated provinces of Mennonites in Canada. All of the visits by individuals and groups of land seekers did not result in the emigration to Alberta that many had hoped for or anticipated. It is very difficult to determine how many Mennonites actually applied for homesteads since, unlike those in Saskatchewan, the Alberta Provincial Archives do not contain this kind of information. Saskatchewan homestead

records also have helpful information about homestead cancellations, providing a trail of the movement of people and why they moved. In addition, the CPR Land Grant records in the Glenbow Archives also do not provide the researcher with details of settlement, only the ownership of a particular parcel of land. The first movement of people from Manitoba appears to be have been very fluid; some came out of a sense of adventure and curiosity, others moved with the intention of homesteading and starting a new life, some stayed, but the majority left disappointed. So it is somewhat like a puzzle, where you try and piece a picture together from a variety of sources in order to find the truth.

I could not find any references to Mennonites actually living in Alberta prior to 1890, even though Dr. Malycky suggests that through the efforts of Emil Griesbach this may have happened. The first Mennonites to actually settle in Alberta came in the spring of 1890 near the communities of Mazeppa and Gladys Ridge, south of Calgary. The Gladys Ridge local history, *Through the Years*, is very vague about these first settlers:

It is believed that at about this time (1889), there were some settlers on the prairie land back from the river because of evidence of plowed ground and dug wells. But who these people were, remains a mystery. There is no record of them in the Land Titles office in Calgary. Some old timers say they were a small company of Mennonites. Nobody knows.³⁶

The Mazeppa history book, *Leaves from the Medicine Tree* has a similar story. It says, “a Colony of Mennonites settled at Mazeppa. They left the area in 1896 because of drought and frost. Not even potatoes would grow at that time.”³⁷

Letters to the German weekly newspaper, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, provide a helpful link between those who came to Alberta from Southern Manitoba and shared their experiences with their families and friends back home. There are two letters that give some insight into the beginnings of their life in Alberta, one written by “IR” and the other by Isaac Rempel, presumably the same person. Rempel writes that on the 20 May 1890, he arrived from Manitoba and everything was green and had been green for three to four weeks.

The land here is to our liking, there is also good land for settlement that opened up. As far as I can tell the water is good, the grain and grass are also good. So far we have had enough rain and as of yet mainly pleasant weather, so that those of us who are building are able to remain doing so. We have needed to haul building material from Calgary, which is 35 miles distant from us. Our home is presently finished enough so that we can live in it, it is 31 feet long and 16 feet wide. About 10 miles from here they have started to set up a sawmill, where we will be able to purchase all kinds of building material. They have also started surveying the railroad line and construction is to start this summer. When the railroad is finished we expect many people will begin settling here.³⁸

In September, he wrote:

it has frozen a little bit each month but not that much that it had damaged our grain. I think that the grain here in Alberta

can be closely compared to Southern Manitoba. The land in Manitoba that Julius Siemens talks about, may also be good land but Mr. Siemens has not seen the land here south of Calgary and the land at Gleichen. It is 30-35 miles northeast of here and at one time he thought that this would be very good land for a Mennonite settlement and yet now he spreads negative news. This is wrong. I believe that here in Alberta we can make a good living.³⁹

There were many Mennonites who came to Alberta but left shortly afterwards. There were, however, two families and their descendants who persevered over a number of years: the Rempels and Walls.

Gerhard and Helena (Miller) Rempel lived in Neuhorst Manitoba before coming to the Gladys Ridge area in 1890. There are no homestead files for them or their adult children, which included their son Isaac who wrote letters to the *Rundschau*. There is, however, a CPR land grant issued to Gerhard Rempel in May of 1890, for two pieces of land: the NW and NE 25-Tp 19-R28 West of 4. In 1891, they appear in the Census records for the sub-district known as High River. According to Saskatchewan Homestead Records, Gerhard Sr. (1842-1910) and five of his adult children all took up homesteads in Alberta but abandoned them, this included: Isaac (1865), Gerhard Jr. (1867-1953), Sarah (1868-1927) married to Isaac Klassen, Johan (1870-1923), Peter (1873). Isaac and Sarah Klassen had a son named Cornelius who was born while they were living here. By 1896, they were living near Rosthern, Saskatchewan and had taken up homesteads there.

The second family was Heinrich Sr and Agatha (Bueckert) Wall. He homesteaded the SW 6- TP20- R26 West of 4 in Alberta and abandoned it. Heinrich Sr (1850-1920) and his oldest son Heinrich Jr (1872) both homesteaded here. Their family also appears in the 1891 Census for High River District. In December of 1897, they entered for a homestead at Rosthern Saskatchewan. In the Alberta Provincial Homestead Records there is a Johan M. Wall who applied for a Pre-emption in 1889 for NE 4 and the SE 4 of Tp20-R26- West of 4. It is not clear how long he may have been here. This Johan M. Wall (married to Aganetha Dyck) is the nephew to Heinrich Wall Sr.

After 6-7 years of trying their best to make a living, the Mennonites left. Since there are no diaries available from the Mennonites who settled in the Gladys Ridge area, the best explanation of the sequence of events that led to their leaving is found in the life story of John V. Thompson who also settled in the Gladys Ridge area in 1889.

John's first crop was harvested in 1890, cradled and bound by hand, then hauled to a neighbours' for threshing. The next year he was haled out and then a succession of dry years followed. Sloughs dried up and wells had to be dug to provide water for the increased numbers of livestock. John dug a 40 foot well and stoned it up. In 1893, he dug another, which gave a good flow at fourteen feet. 1894 was the driest yet, with not a drop of rain falling in June or July. A fire started at Mosquito Creek and the next day it reached the Bow River at Arrowhead Creek. A small hailstorm helped put it out but men fought the fire for seven days and nights as the sod was burning and every breath of wind started the fire again. Indian boys from the Dunbow Industrial School helped put it out.⁴⁰

The Gleichen Mennonite Settlement

In 1890 the *Nordwesten*, a German weekly newspaper, reported on a group of land seekers from Manitoba who visited Alberta that spring. They were not interested in the land southeast of Calgary near Mazeppa but

spent time near Gleichen, a station on the CPR, east of Calgary. The land here interested them more (since they found both wood and coal in the area) and some left back to Calgary immediately after seeing the area in order to sign up for a homestead. About one and a half miles from Gleichen, the open prairie begins, where there are large areas of land available for homesteading. There is great anticipation that the area next to the settlement of Calgary and near to Gleichen, a large German Colony is going to break out. The first migration from Southern Manitoba to this area should begin next spring.⁴¹



Gleichen was founded in 1883, located on the CPR line from Medicine Hat and named after the German Count Albert Edward Wilfred Gleichen, who was a financial backer of the CPR. Photo Credit: Leonard Doell.

It is quite possible that Rev. Gerhard Paetkau was a member of this delegation, because in June 1890 he purchased a CPR land grant for NE 31-Tp 22-R22 West of 4.

In April 1891, a group of fifteen families left Southern Manitoba to settle at Gleichen. The *Calgary Herald* published a letter sent to them by Emil Griesbach where he notes that "15 families with 16 carloads of stock arrived at Gleichen on April 16 and will proceed to locate to their lands as soon as possible. One of their number, Mr. Sawatzky from Gretna has brought a steam thresher with him. The parties are all from Gretna and that vicinity."⁴²

Abraham H. Friesen was one of these families that made the trek. He and his family had come from Russia in June of 1890 and spent the winter with the Jacob Ens family in the village of Rosenort, Manitoba. He did not see any possibilities for farming in Manitoba so he joined the move to the northwest. In his letters to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and in his personal diary, we get a glimpse into the many challenges his family and community faced at this time. He was disappointed when he arrived:

I did not like it here at all, there were no trees and no brush, almost no grass and no water, only many loose stones on top

of and in the soil which is quite hilly. We dug in the hard loam 42 feet deep but there was still no water, with rocks from pea size to a foot in diameter in size. With lots of hardships I plowed about 10 acres of land, picked all the stones and even seeded part of the land.⁴³

In the previous year it was not as dry as it is now, you can see this in the grass, which in the spring time did not burn out. It did not snow here this past winter and the rain has stayed away up until now and the grass is drying up. The Edmonton district sounded very appealing to us because of the mild climate but when some of us wanted to go see this land it had severely frozen, then we saw that this land was low and wet and that the best land had been taken up by English farmers, other land is heavily grown over with willows and poplar and other trees that grow in this area.⁴⁴

In his letter two weeks later on July 15, 1891, Abraham H. Friesen informed the readers of *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* that 11 of the 15 families who moved to Gleichen would be leaving.

It is very difficult work to move twice in one summer he writes, but we all now see that we cannot stay living here. Gerhard Paetkau, Isbrand Penner, Johan Sawatzky and Abram Sawatzky are all staying here. If all goes according to plan, then we will arrive with God's help in the new area and I will then write about how things are going with us there. Today there should be news arriving from Winnipeg if we will be getting a train, it is supposed to cost \$70.00 for the trip from here to Duck Lake.⁴⁵

In a history of the Peter Siemens family, life at Gleichen is described in this way:

They continued to farm in Manitoba until 1891, when their son Peter wanted to start farming but there was very little land available for young men in this area. In the spring of 1891 they decided to move to Gleichen, NWT. They spent three miserable months with only their wagon for shelter trying to find good farm land but could not find it... They finally gave up and said that the land is only good for ranching and not suited for them. Peter had said, "How will we survive if the gophers are dying?⁴⁶

There two different versions of who should be credited for recommending the area around Duck Lake Saskatchewan for possible settlement. In his diary, Abraham H. Friesen credits Klaas Peters, a land and immigration agent in the service of the CPR, who had been visiting Alberta with other land seekers from Manitoba as being the one that suggested to them to move to Duck Lake, "which they did right away."⁴⁷ A second version by J.J. Andres of Rosthern, credits Abram Buhr. Andres claims:

A bachelor, Abram Buhr, had followed the above group to Gleichen. That year the railroad was built from Regina to Prince Albert and Abram Buhr had been told that south of Duck Lake there was a large area of beautiful country suitable for farming. He left to investigate and what he found he liked, especially the land in the vicinity of today's Town of Rosthern. He selected a quarter of land one mile north of the present townsite... Abram Buhr left for Prince Albert where the

land titles office was situated to file his claim for this quarter. He then returned to Gleichen and told the people of the land where he had taken a homestead. The settlers immediately decided to move to Rosthern. Two men were sent to Winnipeg to petition the railway authorities for lower fares to Rosthern, which they were granted. As soon as the freight cars arrived, all chattels and goods were loaded and they were on their way to Rosthern....The group that arrived here from Gleichen were ten families who had not seen the land before. They arrived in July and immediately took a liking to the country.⁴⁸

Abraham H. Friesen writes that

it was the mosquitoes that were the first ones to greet them, since there were no people in this wilderness and the conductor told us that the train cars should be empty when he got back 35 hours later from Prince Albert. At that time there were 3 trains a week with mixed cars, passenger and freight cars from Regina to Prince Albert. So early morning the poor cattle were unloaded first and then machinery and other belongings. Then the building of huts started and in no time there was a city of rough boards and canvas buildings up. The name existed already even though along this very new track there was nothing but a water tower on a creek where we got our water for our cattle. The name is Rosthern.⁴⁹

In a later letter he writes to tell everyone that “his family, thanks to God,” ...[is] healthy and the other settlers are too, except Mrs. Aaron Friesen who sprained her foot as she stepped backwards into a hole in the roof.⁵⁰

Conclusion

According to his homestead record, Rev. Gerhard Paetkau lived on his land at Gleichen from April 1891 until April 1896, without once being away. In 1896, he left the homestead due to ill health and was away for one year. In June 1897, the Homestead Inspector wrote that a friend of Mr. Paetkau had just informed him that his house and stable had recently been destroyed by prairie fire. It is unclear whether Rev. Paetkau returned to Alberta or not. In the 1901 Census for Lisgar, Manitoba, Rev. Paetkau appears living with his wife and step-daughter Maria in the village of Reinfeld. In 1911, the Census for Manitoba shows that Rev. Paetkau was living with his son Jacob. He died in Manitoba on 8 October 1915.

It is quite possible that the Mennonites that had settled at Gladys/Mazeppa shared church services with the group at Gleichen. Rev. Gerhard Paetkau had been elected as an Old Colony minister in Russia in 1868 and came with the group to Alberta to serve as their spiritual leader. With the departure of Rev. Paetkau in 1896 due to ill health, combined with the difficulties in farming, this may have been the catalyst for the Mazeppa people to move to Rosthern.

There was a small group of Mennonites that remained living at Gleichen up until 1902. In his homestead record for NE 32-22-22 W of 4, Isbrand Penner was seeking to leave Gleichen in March 1902 with a party of Mennonites who were leaving there later that month.⁵¹ It has been assumed that Russian Mennonites from Manitoba only lived in Alberta for a few months before leaving. We now know that a small group of them lived here for a considerable period of time and seriously attempted to make Alberta their home.

Gleichen Families that Migrated to Saskatchewan

The following table lists the families that moved to Saskatchewan from Gleichen. There are thirteen separate family listings even though it has been claimed that only eleven families moved to Saskatchewan from Gleichen. The reason may be that Jacob Friesen, who married Maria Siemens, may have been considered to be part of the extended Peter Siemens family. One other possibility may be that Peter Siemens Sr. and his wife Maria may have been considered to be part of his larger extended Siemens family. Another possibility is that single Heinrich Martens came with his brother-in-law and sister Isaak and Sarah Martens Dyck.

Franz Dyck (1860-1943) and Katharina (Penner) (1865-1909) Dyck



moved to Rosthern with their 10 children. After the death of his first wife he married Widow Wilhelm Janzen (nee Maria Peters) (1870-1949). They had two more children together. The Dycks moved to Mexico in the 1920s.

Franz Dyck in the photo to the left, and his two brothers Klaas and Isaak and their families attempted to settle at Gleichen but soon moved to Rosthern. In the 1920's Franz and his family moved to Mexico.

Isaak F. Dyck (1853-1929) and Sarah (Martens) (1853-1908) Dyck



moved to Saskatchewan with their six children. After the death of his wife he married Widow Jacob Neudorf (nee Katharina Reimer) (1857-1937). They joined the Bergthaler Mennonite Church where he served as their *Waisenmann*.

Isaak F. and Sarah (Martens) Dyck settled at Rosthern after a short stay at Gleichen. He provided strong leadership in the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Waisenamt. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.

Klaas D. Dyck (1866-1927) and Maria (Peters) (? -1927) Dyck



homesteaded near Rosthern but he soon became a prominent businessman in Hague. They moved to California. Klaas was a brother to both Franz and Isaak above.

Klaas and Maria (Peters) Dyck moved to Hague after being at Gleichen. Here he became a prominent businessman, settling later in California where they both passed away. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.

Aron Friesen (1854- ?) and Maria (Neudorf) (1858- ?)Friesen

moved from Shanzenfeld, Manitoba to Gleichen. They had seven children of which four died as children.

Abraham H. Friesen (1858-?) and Aganetha(Klassen) (1864-1903) Friesen

had 13 children together. After the death of his first wife he married Katharina Klassen. They became part of the Church of the New Jerusalem shortly after coming to Rosthern.



The Abraham H. and Aganetha (Klassen) Friesen family came to Canada in 1890, landing in Manitoba, then off to Gleichen and then off to Rosthern. They became charter members of the Swedenborg Church at Rosthern.

Jacob Friesen (1868-1935) and Maria (Siemens)(1869-1896) Friesen



had three children together, the oldest dying in 1891, shortly after arriving in Rosthern. In 1897 he married Helena Klassen (1877-1970) the daughter of Old Colony Minister Rev. Peter Klassen. The Friesens moved to Mexico in the 1920s.

Helena Klassen Friesen was the second wife of Jacob Friesen who lived at Gleichen, Alberta. Helena married Jacob at Rosthern and later moved to Mexico. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.

David B. Janzen (1863-1947) and Eva (Fehr) (1865-1895) Janzen

had three children together. After her death, he married Katharina Klassen (1873-1930) and they had 5 more children together. His third wife was Mrs. Gerhard Rempel from Chortitz near Swift Current.

David K. Janzen (1839- ?) and Agatha (Boschman) (1839-1896) Janzen



had 8 children of which five grew to be adults. After the death of his wife he married Widow Johan Boschman nee Kathatina Klassen.

Jacob B and Aganetha (Hamm) Janzen family. Jacob moved to Gleichen at the age of 23 with his parents David and Agatha(Boschman) Janzen. He married Aganetha at Rosthern. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.

Heinrich Martens (1866-1907) and Aganetha (Elias) (1874-1902)

He moved to Gleichen as a single man and then to Rosthern. He married at Rosthern and they had one child together who then died as an infant. He then married Justina Zacharias (1885-1907). They had three children of which two died as infants. The third, named Heinrich grew up with his Zacharias grandparents after his parents died.



Peter Siemens Sr (1827-?) and Maria (Boschman) (1825-?) Siemens

came as parents to adult children.

A photo of the Siemens heads of families that moved from Gleichen, Alberta to Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Front left to right: Peter Jr. and Peter Sr. Standing left to right: Johan and Abram. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.

Peter Siemens Jr (1849-?) and Elizabeth (Martens) (1849-1916) Siemens

had 11 children of which 8 grew to be adults. Their youngest daughter Katharina born 9 June 1891, was most likely born at Gleichen. She married Aron Zacharias (1838-1919) after her husband died.



Peter Jr. and Elizabeth (Martens) Siemens family, taken at Rosthern Saskatchewan. They too lived at Gleichen for a short time and then moved to Rosthern. Photo Credit: Ben Fehr.

Peter E. Siemens (1871-1899) married Sarah (Friesen) (1871-1946) Siemens

had 5 children three became adults. She then married Herman Unger (1861-1939) after her husband died. They had 8 children together, 1 died as an infant.

Johan Wiens (1862-1913) and Anna Janzen (1866-1915) Wiens

had twelve children together, three died as infants including Agatha (1885-May 1891), who may have died at Gleichen.

The families who stayed in Gleichen for a while longer included the following:



Abram Sawatzky (1861-1949) and Helena (Peters) (1866-1926) Sawatzky

had 15 children together of which three died as infants. After the death of his wife Abram married Widow Abram Derksen (nee Maria Penner) (1864-1957). Mr. Sawatzky ran the Hague Ferry for many years. He moved to Hague in 1892.

Abram and Maria (Penner) Sawatzky. Abram and his first wife Helena (Peters) lived at Gleichen, Alberta before coming to Hague, Saskatchewan. He was the ferry operator at the Hague Crossing over the South Saskatchewan River for many years. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.



Johan Sawatzky (1820-1893) and Anna Friesen (1820-1849)

had 6 children and three became adults. Johan then married Widow Berg, nee Katharina Hamm (1825-1856), they had four more children but only one lived to become an adult. His third marriage was to Anna Hamm (1832-?) and 5 more children were born, only two lived to become adults, including son Abram above. After his death Anna married Peter Wolf (1835-1916). Johan moved to Saskatchewan with his son Abram in 1892 and died there.

Anna (Sawatzky) Hamm. She was born on July 25, 1891 at Gleichen, Alberta, the daughter of Abram and Helena (Peters) Sawatzky. She later married Jacob Hamm. Image Credit: Jim Heinrichs.

Isbrand Penner (1866-1953) and Susanna (Peters) Penner (1869-1898)



had 6 children and one died as an infant. Two daughters, Susanna (1894-1972) and Maria (1895-1956) were both born at Gleichen. After Susanna died, Isbrand married Katharina Bueckert (1880-1957). They had 14 children, two died as infants. Isbrand is known for his attempts to make a perpetual motion machine. He was the step son of Rev Gerhard Paetkau. He took up a homestead at Hague in 1902.

Isbrand and his second wife Katharina (Bueckert) Penner. Isbrand and his first wife Susanna Peters and family moved to Gleichen, Alberta and were among those who lived there the longest. He was the step-son of Rev. Gerhard Paetkau. Isbrand lived near Hague and later Warman, Saskatchewan. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.

Rev Gerhard Paetkau (1834-1915) and Katharina (Fogt) (1835-1878) Paetkau

had 9 children, seven died as infants. His second marriage was to widow Friesen nee Helena Giesbrecht (1833-1880), she had one son from her first marriage. He then married Widow Bernard Penner (nee Aganetha Friesen) (1834-1910). She had 5 children from her first marriage. He moved to Gleichen from Shanzenfeld, Manitoba.

High River Families that Moved to Saskatchewan



Isaak and Sarah (Rempel) Klassen lived at High River, Alberta. She was the daughter of Gerhard and Helena (Miller) Rempel. They later lived halfway between Hague and Rosthern. Photo Credit: Walter and Martha Klassen.



Fred Wall sitting on the right, is seen here with his wife Katharina (Rempel) and son Abe. Fred moved to High River when he was 13, with his parents Heinrich and Agatha (Bueckert) Wall. The Wall family moved to Saskatchewan, living at Warman for many years. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.



Heinrich and Katharina (Thiessen) Wall. Heinrich was 19 when his parents Heinrich and Agatha (Bueckert) Wall moved from Manitoba to High River, Alberta. Heinrich came back to Manitoba to marry Katharina and then moved to Rosthern shortly afterwards. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.



Johan Rempel, son of Gerhard Rempel abandoned his land at High River to settle at Rosthern. He married Aganetha Neufeld at Rosthern. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.



Cornelius and Anna (Penner) Klassen. He is the son of Isaac and Sarah (Rempel) Klassen and was born at High River, Alberta on 30 October 1891. Photo Credit: Walter and Martha Klassen



Peter G. and Katharina (Hildebrandt) Rempel family came to Rosthern after abandoning their land at High River, Alberta. Image Credit: Leonard Doell.

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The Mennonites of Two Hills, Alberta

Hans Werner and Mary Shaw

Alberta Town becomes a Mennonite Place: Two Hills, Alberta

Hans Werner, Winnipeg

As Leonard Doell notes in his article in this issue, Mennonite land seekers looked for land in the Mundare area of Alberta in the 1890s. Mundare is just north of Highway 16, about forty-five minutes east of Edmonton. While no Mennonites seem to have put down roots in the Mundare area in the 1890s, the community of Two Hills has recently become a magnet for Mennonites. Two Hills is approximately forty kilometers northeast of Mundare in a mixed farming area of central Alberta and since the late 1990s, Mennonites have settled in and around this community in large numbers.¹

The first homesteaders in the Two Hills area were English speaking settlers, but after 1900 large numbers of Eastern European immigrants made their home in the area giving it the Ukrainian flavor often associated most clearly with the town of Vegreville, just 45 km away. Like many prairie towns, Two Hills was established when the CPR came through in 1927. The new hamlet took its name from a local post office that owed its name to two hills just outside the present day town. Two Hills was incorporated as a village in 1929 and as a town in 1955.¹

In the late 1990s Mennonites from the Vauxhall area of southern Alberta began to look for land to establish themselves as farmers. They believed that it would be better for their children to grow up on a farm than to be absorbed into the larger towns and cities of Southern Alberta. Life on a farm would serve them better in furthering their ideals as a conserving Mennonite community. Not surprisingly the Mennonites who looked for farms and a new home in central Alberta were migrants from other areas with strong origins and connections to the Mennonites of Mexico. Finding suitable farmland at an affordable price was the first challenge and the Two Hills area had appeal because of a generational change that saw older farmers retiring, with their children finding the attractions and careers in Edmonton more appealing than life on a mixed farm. The population of Two Hills was in decline in the late 1990s and there were serious concerns that the local health care facilities would be closed and they were in danger of having to send their children to schools outside the community.

The original migrants to Two Hills were Abe Martens, and the brothers Heinrich and Jacob Wiebe. There were soon others, primarily members of the Old Colony Church, and Heinrich and Jacob were instrumental in organizing the Old Colony

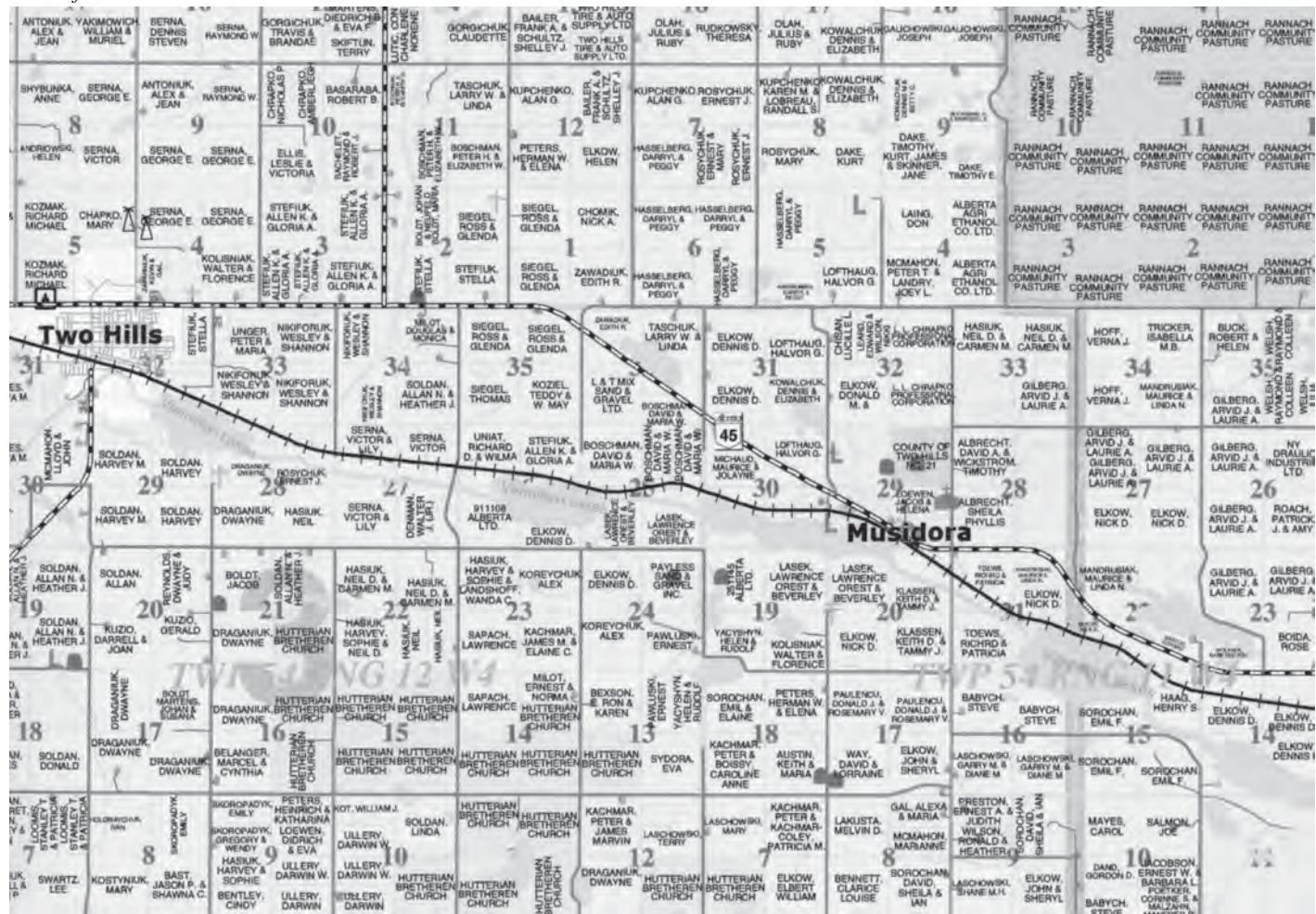
church that initially met in a local hall. Later, Heinrich became the Ältester and Jacob a deacon in the rapidly growing Old Colony congregation. The timing for a start in farming was not

good for the early migrants to Two Hills. Although there was farmland for sale at a reasonable price (\$800/acre) their arrival coincided with drought and mad-cow disease—a combination that proved too great to overcome for many of the original settlers. Although there are successful Mennonite farmers in the Two Hills area, for Abe Martens and his partner their previous work in metal fabrication stood them in good stead. Soon metal fabrication became the dominant activity and industry the main employer in Two Hills. Mennonite entrepreneurs hired their fellow Mennonites who had metal fabrication skills that are so common among the Mennonites from Mexico and their descendants. Double A Trailers, begun in 1999 when they manufactured two to three trailers per week with a work force of two, grew quickly and in 2013 was producing 1900 trailers a year with a work force of thirty-six production workers and an office staff of six.² Other manufacturing enterprises soon appeared and the combination of servicing both the agriculture and oil industries created opportunities for Mennonites with metal fabrication skills.

The prospect of work soon attracted more Mennonites and they came from southern Ontario, from La Crete, from southern Alberta and from Mexico. The 2011 census counted 1379 people in the town of Two Hills, a 31.7 percent growth from the 2006 census. The 2012 municipal census reported further growth of the town to 1431. The surrounding rural county of



The area of Alberta east of Edmonton where Ukrainians settled around the turn of the century. Since 2000, Two Hills has become a centre for Mennonite settlement.



A property ownership map of Two Hills and the area just east of the town. The land owned by a Hutterite Colony to the southeast shows up clearly and there are parcels here and there that have Mennonite names associated with them. The large Old Colony Church is located just north and east of Musidora. Image Credit: Two Hills County No. 21.

Two Hills also grew by 8.3 percent between 2006 and 2011, almost achieving the average growth rate for Alberta.³ Instead of the prospect of closing down the hospital, new doctors arrived in town, the school division created a Mennonite only school (see the accompanying description).

Along with the influx of Mennonites came the building of churches. At first the Old Colony members held worship services in a local hall, but then built a church at Musidora, just east of Two Hills. Other churches soon followed, including a Chortitzer Mennonite Conference and a Reinländer Church.

My visit with various people in Two Hills suggests the influx of Mennonites has been a dramatic change for the town. As a local tourism website notes: “Today, Mennonite settlers have brought a different feel to Two Hills giving shopping and dining a distinctive Mexican flare.”⁴ Some people acknowledged that adjusting to so many ‘different’ people had its tensions, but on the whole the community is encouraged by the new life the migrants have brought. The local library’s planning process concluded one of the major threats to the town’s well-being would be if Mennonites left the area.⁵ I heard reports of new friends being made, Mennonites were being asked to become involved in local politics—a prospect they were uncomfortable



The Old Colony Church and Fellowship Hall at Musidora. Photo Credit: Hans Werner.

with, there were new restaurants and new possibilities. For me walking along Two Hills streets had an air of familiarity. It felt like being in La Crete, or Grassy Lake, Alberta; Winkler, Manitoba, or Aylmer, Ontario.

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.townoftwohills.com/history.htm>
- 2 Notes of a conversation with Abe Martens and http://www.doubleatrailers.ca/about_us.php
- 3 *Population and dwelling counts for Canada, provinces and territories and census subdivisions (municipalities), 2011 and 2006 censuses.* <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca> and <http://townoftwohills.com/>.
- 4 http://www.tourismsolutions.ca/places/Town-of-Two-Hills_10250
- 5 <http://www.twohillslibrary.ab.ca/Our-Plan-of-Service>



Large oil industry equipment being transported east of Two Hills. The combination of agriculture and oil industry economies has created opportunities for Mennonite entrepreneurs and workers in the Two Hills area. Photo Credit: Hans Werner.

The Two Hills Mennonite School

Mary Shaw, Two Hills, Alberta

The first Mexican Mennonites families came to Two Hills around 2000. There was an immediate need for English education for these families who spoke only Low German. At the time the only school available was the Two Hills Elementary Public School. The St. Paul Education Regional Division agreed to hire teachers to teach English to the Mennonite students



The Two Hills Mennonite School children going for a walk with their Old Colony Mennonite Instructional Assistant. In the background on the right-hand side of the photo you can see the construction equipment working on a new school building. Photo Credit: Hans Werner

and provide separate classrooms in the Two Hills Elementary School. Mennonite parents wanted their children in a school where they would be separate from the non-Mennonite students. They wanted to keep their Old Colony traditions as well as their German language religious classes. As numbers grew from a beginning student population of approximately 30 students, the Mennonite community required more space for classes. The St. Paul Education Regional Division renovated the Two Hills School, and the Two Hills Mennonite School was sole occupant of the former elementary school. A new public K-12 school was built for the Two Hills non-Mennonite population.

The two schools have been in separate facilities since 2005. In the years since 2000, the student population has grown to over 500 students. Eight portable classrooms have been added to the school to accommodate students. Two Hills Mennonite School continues to have a separate school board which sets the guidelines for the school. All Mennonite students start and end their day with 15 minutes of Old Colony melody singing

and chanting of their traditional prayers. They are also given 80 minutes of school time to teach the German Catechism and Mexican German curriculum. German is taught by local Mennonite teachers hired by the Mennonite Board. All English subjects are taught by publicly educated teachers using the Alberta Public School Education Curriculum.

The school has a staff of 53 people that include Mennonite German teachers and English public school teachers and Instructional Assistants. Technology such as computers, television, DVD and CD players are not permitted in school. Listening to music and playing musical instruments is also not permitted. Students continue to keep their traditional Mexican Mennonite dress code and all German classes and German devotion times have remained the same for all students.

At the present time there are 534 Mennonite students in the school. The Alberta government is presently building a new school for the Two Hills Mennonites. It is to be completed by 2014.

“A Friendly Mexican”¹: Mennonite Interactions with Mexicans

in *Die Steinbach Post*, 1922-1967

Andrea Dyck, Winnipeg, Manitoba

In the spring of 1950, G. M. Siemens published a serialized account in *Die Steinbach Post* of a trip he had taken to visit the Mennonite colonies in Mexico.² Among his observations about the trip, he frequently noted the interaction of Mexicans and Mennonites within the colonies, including this brief description of a friendly lunch between two men from these groups:

One day, we had the pleasure of having lunch with a friendly Mexican at Isaak T. Penner’s. This [Mexican] man already spoke a bit of Low German and Penner spoke a bit of mexikanisch [Spanish], and so they can understand each other.³

Siemens’ travelogue, including this image of the friendly, albeit perhaps halting, communication between Mennonite and Mexican men, highlights the informal relationships that, nearly thirty years after the arrival of Mennonites in Mexico, had sprung up between Mennonites and their Mexican neighbours. Although Mennonites had immigrated into Mexico in order to remain, as another letter writer in the *Post* put it, “an isolated, pure German folk group,”⁴ these interactions formed an important aspect of life among the Mennonites living in Mexico.

This article explores the lives of the Mennonites in Mexico through the lens of *Die Steinbach Post*. As the only newspaper distributed throughout conservative Mennonite communities in both North and South America, the *Post* is a unique source for an historical examination of the communal identity and self-perception of the Mennonites in Mexico.

The Canadian-born Mennonite immigrants writing in to the *Post* arrived in Mexico in search of what they considered to be religious freedom, an aim they thought would best be achieved by isolation from the wider society. An examination

of the letters written by these Mennonites to their relatives and friends in Canada between 1922, when Mennonites first migrated south, and 1967, when the *Post* stopped publication, reveal a complex picture of Mennonite life in Mexico. They display a Protestant, German-speaking ethnic minority that came into regular contact with members of the Catholic, Spanish-speaking society in Mexico. These connections, significant in and of themselves, also demonstrate that these associations with wider society did not undercut the Mennonite lifestyle, but served instead to help define and sharpen their unique religious and cultural identity.

The Mennonites who immigrated to Mexico in 1922 stemmed from the 7,000 Mennonites who, threatened with the Russian government’s plan of “russification”, which included plans for universal military service for young men and governmental control over schools and civil organizations, emigrated from Russia to Canada in the 1870s.⁵ In 1916 and 1917 respectively, the Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments amended their provincial education legislation, ending the use of minority languages as the language of instruction and outlawing private, church-run schools in favour of a public education system.

Upon their immigration to Canada, Mennonites had received privileges from the Canadian government that included the right to educate their children according to their traditions, which meant that Mennonite communities in these provinces relied heavily on their private, church-run schools that were taught in the German language.⁶ As a response to their sense of having been betrayed by the Canadian government, conservative Mennonite groups began to investigate the possibility of emigrating. By 1921, a delegation had been sent to Mexico

and on 25 February 1921, an agreement was reached between the Mexican government and the Mennonite delegation. This agreement enabled the 1922 Mennonite emigration to Mexico by allowing Mennonites to settle in exclusive, bloc settlements in the states of Chihuahua and Durango and to live according to their unique brand of Anabaptism in isolation from Mexican society.⁷

Previous studies exploring the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations provide a useful framework when investigating the case of the Mennonites in Mexico and their interactions with, and perceptions of, Mexicans. Fredrik Barth's work on social boundaries demonstrates that an ethnic group's ability to maintain its distinctiveness is not dependent on cultural or geographic isolation, but, ironically, actually depends upon relationships with other groups.⁸ He outlines the means by which minority groups exercise control over certain areas of social interaction, thereby guarding some aspects of the community's culture from outside pressures while leaving other areas open to the influence of the broader society.

Another significant concept in illuminating the social interaction analyzed in this article is the idea of ethnic reinvention. Historians Kathleen Conzen, David Gerber, Ewa Morawska, and George Pozzetta suggest that ethnicity is not a static concept, but is instead in constant flux as immigrant groups interact with one another, forming their identity "in terms of what [they are] not," in relation to surrounding society.⁹ Indeed, immigration historian Rudolph Vecoli argues that the concept of ethnicity can in fact only be fully understood within the concept of inter-ethnic relations.¹⁰ In his examination of immigrant letters, historian David Gerber argues that through the act of writing letters, immigrants imagined themselves, reinvented their lives, and constructed their own understandings of the social relations in which they were enmeshed.¹¹ This constructed identity and the boundary Mennonites negotiated between themselves and their Mexican neighbours can be seen in their letters written to the *Post*.

In general, scholars studying this group of Mennonites have not made the connections made between Mennonites and the wider Mexican society their primary focus. When studies have addressed this topic, they have often focused on the institutional or economic levels of interaction between Mennonites and Mexicans. Sociologist Calvin Redekop's 1969 study, for example, addressed the economic interdependence that emerged between these groups,¹² while geographer Leonard Sawatzky's 1971 work considered, among other areas of interaction, how Old Colony Mennonites fit into the context of post-revolutionary Mexican politics.¹³ Studying the community in the late twentieth century, Kelly Hedges used the lens of linguistics to explore the extent to which Mennonites had either remained isolated from, or had become acculturated to, Mexican society.¹⁴ While all of these studies in some way address the issue of the Mexican populations surrounding Mennonite settlements and the interactions between these groups resulting from this close proximity, none place their primary focus on the encounters that occur between these two ethnic groups.

Despite their desire to live in isolation from the Mexican world surrounding them, the letters published in the *Post* demonstrate that Mennonites in Mexico came into contact with their neighbours on a regular basis throughout the forty-five years under investigation. Though these connections could not be classified as primary relationships, defined as "personal,

informal, intimate, and usually face-to-face," involving "the entire personality, not just a segmentalized part of it,"¹⁵ they were significant in the Mennonite experience in Mexico. Interactions within the local economies surrounding the colonies, for example, shaped the way Mennonites did business. As new settlers, and later as farmers and business people, Mennonites occupied an important role in their local economies. Simultaneously, Mexicans came to play a vital part in Mennonite economic endeavours forming the marketplace for Mennonite products as well as providing a pool of cheap labour for Mennonite farms¹⁶ and Mennonite-owned businesses.¹⁷



A Mexican worker at the Jacob Penner farm in Schoental. In the 1920s Mexicans were willing workers on Mennonite farms. Photo Credit: 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexico, (Cuauhtémoc: Comité Pro Archivo Histórico y Museo Menonita, 1997), 62.

These interactions in the marketplace were frequently fraught with tension and were often reported by letter writers with a negative tone.¹⁸ Other areas of conflict, such as instances of theft and attacks on the Mennonite colonies, and tensions with the state and federal governments, also brought Mennonites and Mexicans into regular contact with one another, albeit under the most strained of circumstances. These various conflicts played a large role in forming Mennonite opinions and perceptions of Mexico and its inhabitants.

In the midst of these various tensions between Mennonites and Mexicans that were reported by Mennonites in the *Post*, another, more amicable, aspect of the relations between Mennonites and Mexicans emerges. Within the letters written to Canadian friends and relatives, Mennonites in Mexico reported frequently on the interpersonal relations that were forged across the social boundaries between these groups. While economic transactions and various areas of conflict were more widely reported, the acts of compassion, the casual agricultural advice shared between farmers, the occasional visits between neighbours, and the informal friendships that were struck up between Mennonites and Mexicans all played no less significant a role in this inter-ethnic relationship and, at the same time, helped shape the perceptions Mennonites had of themselves.

Steinbach Post.

Eine wöchentliche mennonitische Zeitschrift für den Familienkreis.
Das erste und einzige mennonitische Wochenblatt in Kanada.

Jahrgang XI.

Steinbach, Man., den 11. Juli. 1923.

Nummer 28.

Die Wanderer von Emmaus.

Zwei Brüder gingen voll Weh und Kummer.

Die Seele war gefordert am Platz des Schmerzes.

Sie hatten erlebt von ihm das Heil, Nam' war der heilige Grab sein Leid, Es machte ihnen zwar Herzschmerz.

Der Tod des Herrn der Herrlichkeit,

da kam ein wundernimmer Mann und läut' ich den vornehmsten Wan-

dezeit-aus.

Und diente aus das heilige Wort Von Jesu Christo, ihrem Gott.

Sie sind viel gewonnen in seinem

Leid.

Ed heimte ihr Herz in heiliger Blut.

Wußt' er unter ihr armes Tuch,

Kabau-a-des Brod und bantend es

durch.

To ward das Seel' so groß und so

viel Mangel des Herren der Herr-

lichkeit.

So daß sie erkannten ihre Osterglück,

Wer er verhinderten vor ihrem Blick

Sie aber bescherten im Blauden ih-

nach.

Und dankt' "Er lebt Hollejia!"

Heim.

Heim, ein schönes Wort. Wer auf

einige Zeit kein rechtes Heim gehabt,

so wie verloren, was ein Heim ist.

Bei den Menn' wieder recht froh wieder

bei den Menn' in trauten Heim zu sein,

doch der langen beschwerlichen

Reise, und nach der beschwerlichen

Reise in England, und darum gesche-

ht es auch mit einem beschwerlichen Her-

zen alle Freunde von fern und nahe.

Mennonites mochte nur die besten Freunde von Fernen danken für die netten Se-

gernsamkeiten und die Gebete, die aus-

nahmen Herzen für die die Menn' im

Unterwest zum Zion der Gnade em-

treten waren und sie sind uns be-

wußt, daß wir doch auch bewahrt wer-

den sind vor manchem Unglück. Zu-

gleich grüßt ich die Brüder und

Schwestern, alle die mir ihren Gaben

des Reisungs- und Hilfswerk mög-

lich gemacht haben und spreche im

Auftrage der zufoligen Reichsälter-

der herzlichen Dank dafür aus!

Wenn sie es nun noch ob der erlobte

Hilfe noch möchten weiter um Bei-

stand zu bitten, so tun sie es nur, weil

die Tage von der Rot gezwungen

werden. Nur wie die Reichsälter-

heit, kann diesen Hilferuf verstehen.

Der Herr hat uns durch die Reichsälter-

heit ein wundernimmer Mann

und läut' ich den vornehmsten Wan-

dezeit-aus.

Und dentste aus das heilige Wort

Von Jesu Christo, ihrem Gott.

Sie sind viel gewonnen in seinem

Leid.

Ed heimte ihr Herz in heiliger Blut.

Wußt' er unter ihr armes Tuch,

Kabau-a-des Brod und bantend es

durch.

So daß sie erkannten ihre Osterglück,

Wer er verhinderten vor ihrem Blick

Sie aber bescherten im Blauden ih-

nach.

Und dankt' "Er lebt Hollejia!"

Heim.

Cusi, Cusihuiriachi, 14. Juni 1923.

Will dem Editor der "Steinbach Post" mal fragen, ob unser Steinbach Post noch immer noch Poste. Soaf.

Vor 161 geht, denn ich habe es bis

jetzt unterstellt, sie weiter zu befehl-

en, oder abzuwagen, denn wenn sie

nicht zu teuer kommt möchte ich sie

in Mexiko auch lesen, und viel-

leider bin und wieder mit einem Nei-

ben Brief eingedrungen, denn wie ha-

bast dort in der alten Heimat noch

viel Geschäft, auch eine lieb alte

Mutter, Witwe Abram Hämmer u.

Vorn gepflanzt, aber weil es in dem

und Bekannte, von denen wir gerne

und mößt hören möchten.

Wie führen nämlich am 16. Des-

ember von Herbert und Marie, Soaf,

ab nach Mexiko, 27 Familien mit 18

Frauen, Kinder. Die Reise nahm uns

eins über 11 Tage. Rennen an un-

seren Bestimmungsort (Wetzelsdorf),

am 28. Des. 7-Uhr morgens an die

Reise ging langsam, aber Gott sei

Danke, alles sehr glücklich. Bis wir

an unseren Bestimmungsort angelom-

mten, wurde unser himmlischer

Fahrer zu Ehren, Lieb No. 679 im

alten Schraubzug gelungen, es dann

langsam und umständlich nach unter

Land. Vorläufig war das größte Haus

es, ist zwar nur auf meistigartige Art

gebaut, von rauhe Lehmsiegeln, aber

wie hatten doch ein Odda. Als wir

dann alle Habseligkeiten dorthin ge-

setzen hatten, ging es auf Land befehl-

hen und Dorfer ausmessen und an-

legen; dann wurde angefangen mit

Hölzer dauen, das Bauholz ist hier

nur halb so teuer als in Kanada, oder

es ist auch nicht so gut. Als die

meisten Gebäudeteile errichtet

waren, und fast ein jeder auf seinem

eigenen Platz wohnte, wurde ein we-

iter aufgebaut; aber weil es

Winterzeit war, wollten wir nicht

daß das Land aufbrechen, weil wir

daß es nicht so gut war im Winter,

aber weil es in dem

Land so teuer war, mußte es

jetzt aufgebaut werden, und

Adopting the native form of housing was, however, a new and difficult development for Mennonites. While some writers commented solely on the lack of aesthetic value of the Mexican-style gradually being adopted for Mennonite houses,²¹ others noted some of the more serious difficulties that were associated with this architectural adaptation. In 1933, a letter from Abram Wolf pointed out that, even after Mennonites had adapted their buildings to the Mexican style architecture, the building methods Mexicans utilized for these sturdier, adobe structures still left Mennonites perplexed. After a particularly severe storm had passed through Wolf's village the previous night, he wrote:

This morning, as we got up, we saw our buildings in shambles. Several walls of the clay-brick buildings had fallen out, from the big rain, that had fallen during the night. We had wondered at first, at how the Mexicans had built such thick walls on their houses. One always learns more...We



Building houses out of adobe bricks soon replaced wood as a construction material. Photo Credit: Gäste und Fremdlinge, (Steinbach: Mennonitische Post, 1987), 21.

Mennonites understand how to save money, but often not in the right places: we saved on the buildings; made the walls only twelve inches thick, while eighteen to twenty-four inches would have been better.

Wolf concluded ruefully: "The Mexicans are in some things ahead of us."²² As this letter writer points out, the long and difficult process of adapting their lives to the Mexican environment by accepting some Mexican practices was not just a matter of acculturating, as the very process itself served to reinforce the distinct sense of separateness from Mexican society that Mennonites felt.

Mexican Advice to Mennonite Farmers

Adapting to the Mexican landscape in their agricultural techniques was a process similarly fraught with difficulty and numerous failures in the early settlement years. As noted by many scholars and non-academic Mennonite writers alike, Mennonites "had to re-learn many things in order to become successful farmers in the new, strange land."²³ They hint at the reality that Mennonites learned the methods they needed to succeed from their Mexican neighbours.²⁴ The letters published in the *Post* add another dimension to this discussion by explaining more explicitly that Mennonites managed to adapt their methods in relationship to the Mexicans around them, rather than in isolation from them. Letter writers made it clear that they paid close attention to the agricultural successes of their neighbours, especially when their own efforts resulted in failure.

In his 1923 letter, Abraham Görtsen wrote of the poor condition of Mennonite cattle and crops, comparing them to the animals and farms owned by Mexicans, which "were in good condition" and "growing very nicely," respectively.²⁵ A year later, B. B. Zacharias observed the Mexican farmers in the vicinity of San Antonio, noting: "The Mexicans, who had old land under cultivation, planted their corn very deep [in the soil] in the middle of April, and it had moisture to go up;



A crew making bricks for the first home of the Diedrich Peters family in Neuendorf. The man on the wagon is Johann Bueckert while the Ziegelstreichers (literally brick levelers) are Mexican. Photo Credit: 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexico, (Cuauhtémoc: Comité Pro Archivo Histórico y Museo Menonita, 1997), 89.



Mennonites found Mexican agricultural practices foreign to them. Here a Mexican peasant is planting his beans with oxen. Photo Credit: 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexico, (Cuauhtémoc: Comité Pro Archivo Histórico y Museo Menonita, 1997), 62.

though they also had some frozen corn mixed in too.”²⁶ As these examples demonstrate, the newcomers did not merely note the relative success of the Mexican farms surrounding them, they also learned from their farming techniques. Despite the notions of superiority held by the Mennonite community, in the first years of settlement, Mennonites came to realize that Mexicans had the knowledge and expertise that they themselves lacked, which would allow them to survive in the Mexican environment.

Letters written to the *Post* illuminate another angle of this story of adaptation. They not only point to the fact that Mennonites paid careful attention to how Mexican’s constructed their buildings or what the Mexican farmers surrounding them were doing, they also highlight that these two groups interacted in a seemingly regular, friendly, and informal way. Mennonite letter writers frequently reported on the advice or words of wisdom they received from Mexicans. At the end of a long and hard year of poor crops in 1929, for example, J. Wiebe wearily noted that the Mexicans “prophesy a rich harvest for the coming year, which is also the wish of many, but the probability of coming through the long, tight year seems sad.”²⁷ Wiebe seemed to have taken took some measure of comfort in the optimistic predictions of a better future from his Mexican neighbours.

It was not, however, only in the early, difficult years that Mennonites listened to Mexican counsel. In mid-May 1949, A. B. Schmitt of Blumenort, Durango informed his or her readers that the early fruits and vegetables, already in bloom, had likely frozen due to an overnight temperature that had fallen to minus six degrees Celsius. To this bad news he or she added that Mexicans “were here yesterday as it froze, and were happy; [the frost was] an indication, that [the season] can yield a good crop.”²⁸ A year later, a frequent correspondent from Quellenkolonie, H. C. Penner, began his letter by writing: “The weather here sets itself ever more toward rain. The *Einheimischen* also prophesy of an early rainy season. We would also very much wish this for the grazing grounds and gardens.”²⁹

Similarly, when storms repeatedly buffeted the Santa Clara and Quellen colonies in April and May 1953, Gerhard G. Voth wrote: “There is a storm almost every day. On Thursday the nineteenth there was such a storm that I would rather have preferred not to look outside; there were quite a number of dirt drifts.” But, he continued, “The Mexicans say, when we have a lot of storms, then we also have a lot of rain.”³⁰ In a

comparable vein, H. C. Penner’s May 1953 letter stated: “Last week Wednesday and this week Thursday, we had lots of wind, which then also turned into a storm; the *Einheimischen* tell us, the more wind, the more rain; therefore, let us only keep good courage!”³¹ In times of trouble or when Mennonites had become perplexed and disheartened by the sometimes harsh Mexican climate, these letters suggest that their Mexican neighbours repeatedly offered them words of wisdom or, as in the final two examples, of encouragement. These letters suggest that, while social boundaries continued to feature prominently in Mennonite life in Mexico, individual Mexicans nonetheless played a significant role in assisting and even encouraging the relative newcomers from Canada.

While Mennonites paid specific attention to how Mexicans farmed and shared a bond over their common experiences in agriculture, the letters to the *Post* demonstrate that Mennonites exercised an on-going awareness of, and interest in, the life of the surrounding Mexican community more generally as well. Many letters commented on extraordinary events, like sudden deaths or murders, within the Mexican society around them.³² Letter writers often reported these events in a very matter-of-fact way; others, however, wrote with a clear sense of sympathy for the tragedies that had befallen their neighbours. In 1958, when Nuevo Ideal in Durango experienced extensive flooding, for example, D. F. Braun observed that, though the situation was not too bad in the colony,



An 18th century painting of a mixed Amerindian-Spanish man with his Amerindian wife and their child. The painting entitled, “A Mestizo man and his Indian Wife, 1763,” is from a series of paintings by the Mexican born Spanish painter Miguel Cabrera. Image Source: Wikipedia Commons.



These two male members of the Tarahumara people were photographed in Tuaripa, Chihuahua in 1892. They may well be representative of one group of 'Einheimische', or 'wild ones' that Mennonites encountered when they migrated to Mexico some 35 years later. Tuaripa is approximately 200 kilometers southwest of where Mennonites settled in Chihuahua State. Photo Credit: Carl Lumholtz, Image Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

the poor Mexicans almost all have houses built of raw clay bricks, which then soak up all the water from the great rains, and collapse inwards. In their hurry to flee from the flood with their lives, some people have only the clothes on their backs, and even those are soaking wet.³³

Along with frequent reports on specific events, letter writers also wrote about the general condition of abject poverty that many of their non-Mennonite neighbours experienced on a daily basis. Writing in 1952, for example, Agatha Ens observed:

The weather has once again been very nice these last few days after the rain shower. It can already be felt that last year was a crop failure, especially among the Einheimischen. Every day a great number of women with children come to our door, wanting to have food and clothing, yes even the wild ones let themselves be seen often now.³⁴

Another writer, Johan G. Friesen, also wrote in a compassionate tone as he reported on the conditions of the peasant farmers surrounding the colonies, explaining that the Mexicans could not work all of their land because "they do not have enough to allow them to eat until they are satisfied."³⁵



In this 1983 photo Mennonites are unloading food they donated to help alleviate famine among the Tarahumara after a crop failure. Photo Credit: Gäste und Fremdlinge, (Steinbach: Mennonitische Post, 1987), 31.

These letters demonstrate two points. First, Mennonites were keen observers of the events and circumstances that governed the lives of the Mexican population surrounding the colonies and that this was not specific to the realm of agriculture, where it could be argued, Mennonites would have had something to gain from paying close attention to their neighbours. Second, despite their oft-patronizing attitude toward the populations beyond the borders of the colony, Mennonites repeatedly and consistently expressed concern for these neighbours. Sawatzky's study also found that, though Mennonites in Mexico lacked patriotism for their Mexican homeland, they "manifest[ed] a considerable sense of responsibility toward government and the Mexican population in their immediate environs."³⁶ Letters written by this community and published in the *Post* support this claim again and again.

Mennonite-Mexican Relationships

In addition to the recurring commentaries letter writers offered on Mexican society, Mennonite letters indicate the existence of individual relationships, sometimes even some apparent friendships, fostered across the racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries that divided the two communities. These letters suggest that these associations were more frequent than the secondary literature would indicate and that these informal relationships sprang up between individuals from the very beginning of Mennonite settlement in Mexico, continuing right through until the end of the forty-five years under investigation here.

Already by January 1925, for example, Peter Schulz wrote of a five-day sightseeing trip he, along with three other Mennonite men, had taken. The men started out from Cusi, Chihuahua at one o'clock in the afternoon and rode until seven o'clock, when they arrived at their destination for the day. Here they had arranged to stay in the home of a Mexican family that night. Little is said about their hosts, but Schulz concludes his account of their first day of travel by stating: "Although the people were very poor, we still found a nice welcome there."³⁷ Other writers reported on trips they had taken accompanied by Mexican friends. In 1933, a writer calling him, or herself, "Correspondent" told readers that a "Mexican friend wanted

to ride to a friend in the vicinity of Santiago Paposquianio and wanted me to accompany him. As I have desired to ride there awhile now, in order to take care of some small business, I accepted the request." The planned trip was delayed for a week and by the time they departed, "one other Mexican had decided to accompany us."³⁸ Similarly, a writer calling himself, or herself, "F. B." wrote a letter reminiscing about a trip taken with P. Neudorf, who was addressed in the letter. "F. B." wrote: "Friend P. Neudorf, I remember you often, also on the little trip we took, in which we brought that Indian along with us."³⁹

The evidence of these relationships in the letters to the *Post* all indicate that the connections between Mennonites and Mexicans seem to be secondary in nature. Primary relationships such as, for example, romantic ties between Mennonites and Mexicans, were very seldom mentioned by letter writers. In fact, in the forty-five years under investigation here, only one such event was even hinted at in the newspapers' pages. On 9 August 1950, Ida Köhn from Saltillo delivered the news that Herman Köhn, the son of the community's storekeeper, had disappeared without a trace, explaining: "on Sunday, about three months ago [he went] to a Mexican wedding and has not yet returned. [...] He didn't tell anyone here where he was going. After receiving a ride with a truck up to Saltillo, no one has seen him. And he hasn't let himself be heard from either."⁴⁰ Just over seven months later, on 14 March 1951, Köhn wrote again, this time to give her readers the joyous news that Herman had returned. Framing the narrative within the parable of the prodigal son from the New Testament, she wrote, "He was lost and is found again! He was dead and is now alive! He has put away his unrighteous ways and wants to now lead a better life!"⁴¹ Köhn never offered her readers any further details about Herman's time outside the Mennonite colony, leaving his motives, his whereabouts, or details of his "unrighteous ways" all to speculation. Certainly, a ten-month romantic interlude is a possibility, however, for Redekop notes that in Mexico "occasionally some young fellows may go to the larger towns to get drunk or to rendezvous with Mexican girls."⁴²

Although short in detail, letters published in the *Post* are peppered with references of relationships between Mennonites and Mexicans. Most of these types of examples are found in short paragraphs buried in the rest of a letter's text or in passing phrases, as the first example indicates. Such references are so small and easily overlooked that they might appear, on the surface at least, to be insignificant. Their importance, however, lies not only in their presence in the letters, but also in the reality to which they point. Mennonites seem to have been more reserved about reporting on their relationships with Mexicans than about their associations with their coreligionists. The fact that they still do frequently mention these relations demonstrates their importance in the daily lives of Mennonites living in the colonies. As David Gerber contends, the very existence of such reports in immigrant letters provides insights into the writer's "own self-understandings."⁴³

Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that these references to Mexicans served to reinforce the hierarchical nature of Mennonite-Mexican relations in the Mennonite imagination. Whatever the context in which letter writers reported on Mexicans, that Mennonites were socially, culturally, and economically superior to Mexicans was front and centre in their minds. Reporting on the devastating effects of flooding on villages surrounding Nuevo Ideal allowed D. F. Braun to

assure his readers that the Mennonites had survived, wordlessly asserting Mennonite advantage in relation to the hapless Mexican flood victims. Highlighting the ever-increasing number of indigenous beggars visiting her door, Agatha Ens simultaneously established for her readers that her household, though by no means wealthy, was still not as poor as those of the Mexicans surrounding her. By framing the young Herman Köhn's return to the Mennonite community as a story of the prodigal son returning home from a life of unrighteousness, Ida Köhn could assert moral and religious superiority to the Mexican world outside the Mennonite colonies.

Conclusion

The letters published in the *Post* that commented on Mennonites' changing perceptions of Mexicans, the assistance given to Mennonites by their non-Mennonite neighbours, and the friendships forged across social boundaries illustrate the many connections between individuals in the Mennonite and Mexican communities. Moreover, it is significant that the commentary Mennonites offered about their Mexican counterparts spans all five decades between their arrival in Mexico and the conclusion of the *Post* in 1967. This consistency demonstrates that association with people outside the borders of the colonies were not only fostered in the difficult, early years of settlement when Mexican expertise was needed, but also long after Mennonites had become accustomed to their new country.

It is important to note that the desire to remain isolated from outside society persisted among Mennonites in Mexico and continued to be a significant part of their identity throughout the period under study. Indeed, this aspiration to maintain their distance from outsiders led to a number of secondary migrations to British Honduras and Bolivia. The evidence of relationships and the closer ties of friendships given in this article does not seek to undermine this indisputable fact of life for Mennonites; instead, this article has sought to contribute a more nuanced approach to the connections that were made across the many social barriers separating these two ethnic and religious groups.

Though Redekop's assertion that very few primary relationships can be found between Mennonites and Mexicans has proved accurate,⁴⁴ the many secondary relationships that infuse the letters written by Mennonites in Mexico and published in *Die Steinbach Post* played a significant role in the lives of the Mennonite writers. They influenced how the Mennonite community imagined itself by enabling it to define itself "in terms of what [it was] not."⁴⁵ The associations with wider society, therefore, did not undermine the Mennonite identity, but served instead to help reinforce their "sense of separation and apartness"⁴⁶ from the surrounding Mexican world.

Endnotes

1 *Die Steinbach Post* [hereafter SP], 12 April 1950, 6.
2 This article presents research originally published by the author in thesis form as "And in Mexico We Found What We Had Lost in Canada": Mennonite Immigrant Perceptions of Mexican Neighbours in a Canadian Newspaper, 1922-1967" (MA Thesis, University of Winnipeg, 2007).

3 SP, 12 April 1950, 6.

4 SP, 16 September 1936, 3.

5 John Friesen, "Reinländer Mennonite Settlement on the West Reserve, 1870s-1920s," in Delbert Plett, ed. *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, 1875 to 2000* (Steinbach: Crossway Publications Inc., 2001), 8.

6 Bill Janzen, "The 1920s Migration of Old Colony Mennonites from the Hague-

- Osler Area of Saskatchewan to Durango, Mexico,” *Preservings* 26 (2006): 67.
- 7 *Privilegium* is the German term used by Mennonites throughout their history to describe the documents that outlined the various agreements they made with national governments prior to their immigration that granted the community a certain set of privileges. For a re-print of the October 1921 letter sent from the Mennonites in Canada to the Mexican Government that outlines the various Mennonite requests, see: *SP*, 25 November 1925, 1, 3.
- 8 Fredrik Barth, “Introduction,” in Fredrik Barth, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget, 1969), 10.
- 9 Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, and George E. Pozzetta, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, 1 (Fall 1992): 14.
- 10 Rudolph E. Vecoli, “An Inter-Ethnic Perspective on American Immigration History,” *Mid-America* 75, 2 (1993): 234.
- 11 David A. Gerber, “The Immigrant Letter Between Positivism and Populism: The Uses of Immigrant Personal Correspondence in Twentieth-Century American Scholarship,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, 4 (1997): 3-34.
- 12 Calvin Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of an Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969).
- 13 Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 67.
- 14 Kelly Hedges, “‘Plautdietsch’ and ‘Huuchdietsch’ in Chihuahua: Language, Literacy, and Identity Among the Old Colony Mennonites in Northern Mexico.” (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1996).
- 15 Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 31.
- 16 Numerous letter writers commented on this cheap labour offered by Mexicans and on the state of poverty many of their Mexican neighbours lived in. For examples, see: *SP*, 13 December 1933, 8; *SP*, 21 June 1950, 8; *SP*, 9 August 1950, 8; *SP*, 20 September 1950, 6; and *SP*, 2 June 1954, 8.
- 17 Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites*, 126.
- 18 For examples, see: *SP*, 28 September 1948, 4; *SP*, 20 September 1950, 6; *SP*, 15 July 1953, 6; and *SP*, 28 January 1958, 3.
- 19 Isaak M. Dyck, *Auswanderung von Canada nach Mexiko*, anno 1922, trans. Robyn Sneath (Cuauhtémoc: Imprenta Colonial, 1995), 71.
- 20 Ibid., 96. There does not seem to be complete agreement about the time this shift took place. Sawatzky also mentions this shift, stating that the practice of building Canadian-style homes characterized the “early period,” from 1922 until 1926. Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 110. Writing in 1944, letter writer C.P. Friesen, however, describes this gradual shift from Canadian to Mexican style homes as extending even into the 1940s, for some Mennonites. *SP*, 18 October 1944, 6.
- 21 One writer, calling him- or herself “A Southerner” used a poem to inform readers of some of the details of colony life in Santa Clara. Regarding housing, “A Southerner” writes: “Of bricks are the houses here / From earth the roof, completely without beauty” *SP*, 9 May 1934, 6.
- 22 *SP*, 27 September 1933, 6.
- 23 G. C. Rempel, comp. *Rempel Family Book: A Family History and Genealogy of Wilhelm and Agatha (Sawatzky) Rempel and their Descendants* (Winnipeg: Friesens Corporation, 2000), 32.
- 24 For example, see: Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 117.
- 25 *SP*, 11 July 1923, 1, 2.
- 26 *SP*, 17 December 1924, 1.
- 27 *SP*, 24 December 1929, 3.
- 28 *SP*, 18 May 1949, 4.
- 29 *SP*, 14 June 1950, 1.
- 30 *SP*, 1 April 1953, 4.
- 31 *SP*, 13 May 1953, 8.
- 32 For examples of typical accounts by letter writers of sudden deaths in the Mexican community, see: *SP*, 27 July 1949, 5; 2 April 1952, 1; *SP*, 18 June 1952, 5; 8 September 1954, 5; 21 September 1955, 3; 18 April 1956, 6; 27 June 1956, 4; 30 July 1957, 6; 17 July 1958, 2; 12 August 1958, 3; 4 November 1958, 2; 16 December 1958, 8; and 23 December 1958, 4 (written by A. W. Peters).
- 33 *SP*, 9 December 1958, 1. For more reporting on the effects of the flood amidst the Mexican population, see also: *SP*, 11 November 1958, 3 and 23 December 1958, 9.
- 34 *SP*, 24 April 1952, 4.
- 35 *SP*, 13 August 1952, 2.
- 36 Sawatzky, *They Sought A Country*, 326.
- 37 Along with staying overnight with his Mexican hosts, Schulz displays a keen interest in the Mexican indigenous population throughout the report of his trip. He notices and visits their abandoned homes, carved out of stone in the mountains, and seems quite impressed by their workmanship. *SP*, 28 January 1925, 3.
- 38 *SP*, 12 October 1933, 6.
- 39 *SP*, 31 March 1937, 6.
- 40 *SP*, 9 August 1950, 5.
- 41 *SP*, 14 March 1951, 7.
- 42 Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites*, 135.
- 43 Gerber, “The Immigrant Letter Between Positivism and Populism,” 23.
- 44 Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites*, 117.
- 45 Conzen, et. al., “The Invention of Ethnicity,” 14.
- 46 Hedges, “‘Plautdietsch’ und ‘Huuchdietsch,’” 173.

Historical Origins of the Church Lectionary

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Introduction

Have you ever wondered how Scripture texts are chosen for worship services on Sunday mornings? Sometimes, the minister bases his or her sermon on a text that he or she has found inspirational. At other times, he or she chooses to preach on a book of the Bible, starting with the first chapter and continuing on to the end. On the high holidays, such as Christmas or Easter, the choices are more obvious. Scripture texts specific to the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus are read for that Sunday.

The early church had a similar predicament in regard to the Scripture readings that it regarded as pertinent for each Sunday morning. Because the death and resurrection of Christ was the most important part of the salvation story, the church focused on these two events. Readings from Matthew 27, Mark 15, and Luke 23 were used for Good Friday, while Matthew 28, Mark 16, and Luke 24 were used for Easter Sunday.¹

A similar set of texts was chosen for the birth of Christ. January 6 became known as Epiphany, the time when the wise men visited Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. December 25th

was chosen as a date to celebrate the birth of Christ. Readings of the visit of the shepherds to Bethlehem from Luke 2 became standard, while a reading of the visit of the wise men from Matthew 2 was read on January 6th. The time difference between these two dates is the reason that this holiday season is known as the “the twelve days of Christmas.”

As certain readings became a priority, the church felt that it should take a longer time to prepare for these “high holidays.” Jesus’ forty days of fasting in the wilderness was used as a template for the number of days that Christians should reflect on the passion of Christ. Matthew 4:1-11 was chosen as the text for the first Sunday of Lent, with four more Sundays of Lent to follow. Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem as a “king riding on a donkey” (Matthew 21:1-9) was chosen for Palm Sunday, the beginning of Passion Week. Jesus’ last supper with his disciples (John 13:1-15) was chosen for the Thursday before his death. Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet became known in Latin as the *mandatum* (command) that Jesus gave to his disciples, hence Maundy Thursday.

A similar set of feast days developed in regard to the weeks following the resurrection of Jesus. Following Luke's report that Jesus had appeared to the disciples for forty days before ascending into heaven (Acts 1:3), Ascension Day was celebrated forty days after Jesus' resurrection.

The appearance of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, ten days later, was celebrated in a similar fashion. Pentecost was a Jewish holiday, which honoured the establishment of the Ten Commandments fifty days after Passover. Christians borrowed from this Jewish tradition to celebrate their own understanding of the universal presence of God. Readings from Acts 2 as well as Acts 10:44-48 were used during this time. The latter text chronicles the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his Gentile family.

One of the natural outcomes of celebrating the arrival of the Holy Spirit was to tie this appearance to the incarnation of Jesus as the Son of God and with the revelation of God as the Lord of Creation. The Sunday after Pentecost was designated as Trinity Sunday to affirm the fact that God revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.



Pope Gregory I (590-604) was instrumental in creating the Catholic lectionary, which organized worship for the next 1400 years. In this painting by the Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán dating from 1626 he is appropriately portrayed holding a Bible. Image Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

A similar time of preparation developed in regard to Christmas. Four weeks became the standard time of anticipation for "the coming of Christ," as Advent came to be known (from the Latin, *ad venire*, "to come"). Readings about Jesus as the promised Messiah (Matthew 11:2-10) along with references to the second coming of Christ (Luke 21:25-36) became prominent during this time.

The rest of the church year slowly filled in around these high holidays. The six to nine weeks between January 6th and the start of Lent became known as the Sundays of Epiphany. The six weeks following the resurrection of Jesus became recognized as the Sundays of Easter. The twenty-three to twenty-seven weeks between Pentecost and Advent were designated as the Sundays after Trinity Sunday, or Ordinary Time.

Readings from the Gospels were chosen in accordance with these various seasons. Chapters from Matthew were read during Epiphany and Lent (Matthew 2, 4, 8, 13, 15, 17, 20, 21), while Luke became more of a priority during Ordinary Time (Luke 1, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19). Appearances of Jesus to his disciples after Easter (Luke 24, John 20) along with his instructions to his disciples in John 14-16 were featured during the Sundays of Easter.

One can see how standard readings for each Sunday of the year slowly evolved from a focus on the most important Christian events to a more encompassing approach. According to Hughes Old, Pope Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D.) was a leader in shaping the lectionary in its current form.² From the beginning of the seventh century, the church began to use a set of one-year readings that were adopted by the mainline churches in the West for the next fourteen hundred years.³ It was only in the early 1980s that the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches decided that it was time to add more Scripture readings for each Sunday of the year. After several years of consultation, a three-year cycle of Scripture readings was agreed upon, that included more Old Testament texts and used the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as the basis for its three-year cycle. These readings came to be known as the "Revised Common Lectionary."⁴

Reformation's Response to the Roman Catholic Lectionary

One of the surprising aspects of the Reformation was that the Anglican and Lutheran Reformers adopted the one-year Roman Catholic Church lectionary virtually without changes for use in their churches. As Table 1 indicates, the only major changes that the English and German Reformers made was that they substituted Matthew 21:1-9 for Luke 21:25-33 for the first Sunday of Advent, Matthew 17:1-9 for Matthew 13:31-35 for the sixth Sunday after Epiphany, and Luke 14:15-24 for Luke 15:1-10 on the second Sunday after Trinity Sunday.

While the reasons for these changes are beyond the scope of this essay, the new importance that Protestants placed on Scripture has to be found beyond the fact that the Lutheran and Anglican Reformers adopted the Roman Catholic lectionary virtually verbatim. The most obvious difference had to do with the fact that the Scriptures were now being read in the vernacular in the Lutheran and Anglican churches. The true significance of the German Lutheran and English King James Bible emerges out of the fact that parishioners could now understand what they heard from the pulpit. They could also verify what they heard by going home and reading the Bible for themselves. By contrast, the Roman Catholic Church

Table 1: Comparison of Various Lectionaries (1500-1992)¹

(Protestant Changes marked in bold)

(Staggered texts italicized and marked with brackets)

Lectionary 1	Lectionary 2	Lectionary 3	Lectionary 4
Anweisung der Lieder: 1872	Anglican Book of Common Prayer: 1962	Lutheran Worship Historic Pericopes: 1952	Roman Catholic Daily Missal: 1958
First Sunday of Advent			
Matthew 21:1-9 Romans 13:11-14	Matthew 21:1-10 Romans 13:8-14	Matthew 21:1-9 Romans 13:11-14	(<i>Luke 21:25-33</i>) Romans 13:11-14
Second Sunday of Advent			
<i>Luke 21:25-36</i> Romans 15:4-13	<i>Luke 21:25-36</i> Romans 15:4-13	<i>Luke 21:25-36</i> Romans 15:4-13	(<i>Matthew 11:2-10</i>) Romans 15:4-13
Third Sunday of Advent			
<i>Matthew 11:2-10</i> <i>1 Corinthians 4:1-6</i>	<i>Matthew 11:2-10</i> <i>1 Corinthians 4:1-6</i>	<i>Matthew 11:2-10</i> <i>1 Corinthians 4:1-5</i>	(<i>John 1:19-28</i>) (<i>Philippians 4:4-7</i>)
Fourth Sunday of Advent			
<i>John 1:19-28</i> <i>Philippians 4:4-7</i>	<i>John 1:19-28</i> <i>Philippians 4:4-7</i>	<i>John 1:19-28</i> <i>Philippians 4:4-7</i>	Luke 3:1-6 (<i>1 Corinthians 4:1-5</i>)
Christmas Day			
<i>Luke 2:1-14</i> <i>Titus 2:11-14</i> <i>Isaiah 9:2-7</i>	(<i>John 1:1-18</i>) (<i>Hebrews 1:1-14</i>)	<i>Luke 2:1-14</i> <i>Titus 2:11-14</i> <i>Isaiah 9:2-7</i>	<i>Luke 2:1-14</i> <i>Titus 2:11-15</i> <i>Isaiah 9:2-6</i>
Sixth Sunday after Epiphany (Transfiguration)			
Matthew 17:1-9 2 Peter 1:16-21	Matthew 17:1-9 2 Peter 1:16-21	Matthew 17:1-9 2 Peter 1:16-21	(<i>Matthew 13:31-35</i>) 2 Peter 1:16-21
First Sunday of Lent (Invocavit)			
<i>Matthew 4:1-11</i> 2 Cor. 6:1-10	<i>Matthew 4:1-11</i> 2 Cor. 6:1-11	<i>Matthew 17:1-9</i> 2 Cor. 6:1-10	<i>Matthew 4:1-11</i> 2 Cor. 6:1-11
Second Sunday of Lent (Reminiscere)			
<i>Matthew 15:21-28</i> 1 Thess. 4:1-7	<i>Matthew 15:21-28</i> 1 Thess. 4:1-7	<i>Matthew 15:21-28</i> 1 Thess. 4:1-7	(<i>Matthew 17:1-9</i>) 1 Thess. 4:1-7
First Sunday after Trinity			
<i>Luke 16:19-31</i> 1 John 4:16-21	<i>Luke 16:19-31</i> 1 John 4:7-21	<i>Luke 16:19-31</i> 1 John 4:16-21	<i>Luke 16:19-31</i> (<i>1 John 3:13-18</i>)
Second Sunday after Trinity			
Luke 14:16-24 1 John 3:13-18	Luke 14:16-24 1 John 3:13-18	Luke 14:15-24 1 John 3:13-18	(<i>Luke 15:1-10</i>) (<i>1 Peter 5:6-11</i>)
Third Sunday after Trinity			
<i>Luke 15:1-10</i> 1 Peter 5:1-11	<i>Luke 15:1-10</i> 1 Peter 5:5-11	<i>Luke 15:1-10</i> 1 Peter 5:6-11	<i>Luke 5:1-11</i> (<i>Romans 8:18-23</i>)

See endnote #3 for a complete list of Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and German lectionary texts.

continued to believe that the Scriptures had to be read in Latin because this was a universal language that transcended the parochialism of national cultures.⁵

The Zwinglian and Calvinist Reformers from central Europe chose an approach different from their Lutheran and Anglican compatriots. They rejected the Roman Catholic lectionary, which used a variety of texts on a selective basis (*lecto selecta*), in favour of reading the Gospels on a continuous manner (*lecto continua*). This meant that the Reformers began the first Sunday of the New Year with a reading from Matthew 1 and 2, continued the next Sunday with Matthew 3 and 4, and so on. This pattern went on until Good Friday and Easter, when Matthew 27 and 28 were used as the primary Scripture texts.⁶ A similar pattern was used for other books of the Bible, such as the reading of the Gospel of Luke after Pentecost (see Table 1 previous page).

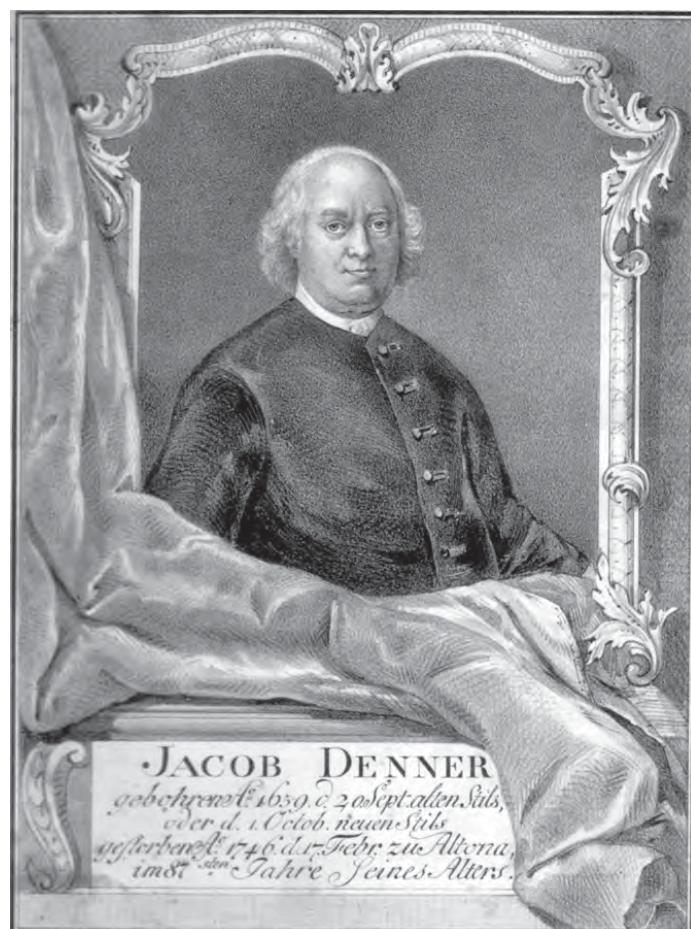
Anabaptist Usage of the Church Lectionary

The Anabaptist use of the church lectionary is instructive in the sense that it imitates the Protestant Reformers' response to the Roman set of readings. The Swiss Anabaptist reformers chose to follow the *lecto continua* use of Scripture as represented by their Reformed counterparts. As Table 2 indicates, the Amish community continues to use the continuous reading of Scripture as established by Zwingli and Calvin. It starts with Matthew 1 and 2 on the first Sunday of the New Year and continues until Matthew 13, the story of the Sower and the Seed, before switching to the passion narrative of Matthew 26 and

27. After Pentecost, the Amish continue their *lecto continua* reading of Scripture by reading from Luke 12 to 19.

The earliest evidence that Prussian and Russian Mennonites used the *lecto selecta* tradition of the Lutheran church is from a book of sermons that Mennonite pastor Jacob Denner from Altona, Prussia published in 1730. Entitled *Christliche und erbauliche Betrachtungen über die Sonn- und Festags-Evangelien des ganzen Jahres* (Edifying Christian Interpretations of the Sunday and Feast Day Gospel Readings of the Year), each sermon is based on the gospel for that Sunday (e.g. Matthew 21:1-9 for the first Sunday of Advent, Luke 21:25-36 for the second Sunday of Advent). Walter Hohmann, in his 1962 article on "The Christian Year," suggests that Denner's book of sermons "appeared in many editions and exerted a tremendous influence in and beyond the Mennonite group in Danzig and its environs. Numerous Mennonite ministers of later generations, conversant with the German language, had a copy of Denner's sermons in their library."⁷

A second, independent reference that Prussian and Russian Mennonites used the Lutheran lectionary is from Sommerfelder Mennonite historian Peter Bergen. He notes that by 1854, a weekly series of Gospel and Epistle readings had been added to the end of the *Gesangbuch* that was being used by the Mennonites in Prussia.⁸ These series of readings were later compiled into a list of texts under the heading, "Anweisung der Lieder," and published in subsequent Russian (1859) and American editions (1912) of the *Gesangbuch*.⁹ A comparison of these readings with the Lutheran lectionary shows that there



A Portrait of Jacob Denner (1659-1746) from the frontispiece of the first American edition of his sermons published in Philadelphia in 1860 and the first page Image Credit: GAMEO.





Cover page of the 3rd edition of the German *Gesangbuch* published in Odessa, Russia, 1859, along with the first page of the church lectionary known as the *Anweisung der Lieder*.
Image Credit: Donald Stoesz.

Service List of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church														
First half of 1998														
Sommerfeld*	Staatsburg	Altona	Rudnieweide*	Reinland*	Platt Coulee	Kronswiede*	Winkler	Morden	MacGregor	Winnipeg	New Bethel	Steinbach		
Jan. 1, 1998 - New Year	19	16	10	14	4	18	20	3	17	9	8	13	24	
Jan. 4 - Sunday	20	23	1	16	9	12	18	22	11	15	21	6	13	
Jan. 6 - Epiphany	23	11	17	24	8	3	22	6	4	14	10	21	19	
Jan. 11 - 1st after Epiphany	4	13	9	15	20	7	16	18	22	12	5	3	1	
Jan. 18 - 2nd after Epiphany	8	23	19	18	10	14	24	15	21	20	16	9	17	
Jan. 25 - 3rd after Epiphany	13	12	3	4	5	10	14	2	19	1	11	17	22	
Feb. 1 - 4th after Epiphany	9	1	12	8	15	21	6	24	20	16	22	23	5	
Feb. 5														
Feb. 8 - 5th after Epiphany	14	20	11	9	7	17	19	10	3	21	4	15	18	
Feb. 15 - 6th after Epiphany	16	5	22	3	4	23	10	8	6	19	43	14	12	
Feb. 22 - Septuagesima	15	18	23	2	11	5	21	13	24	17	20	1	9	
Mar. 1 - Sexagesima	6	22	18	19	14	12	11	16	10	24	4	20	15	
Mar. 8 - 1st before fasting	5	17	7	23	19	3	13	1	12	4	9	8	14	
Mar. 15 - 1st in fasting	21	10	6	20	1	16	15	7	11	18	24	22	7	
Mar. 19														
Mar. 22 - 2nd in fasting	10	2	14	5	16	24	23	11	8	13	12	19	20	
Mar. 29 - 3rd in fasting	12	15	4	17	18	6	1	9	23	22	19	5	21	
Apr. 5 - Palm Sunday	1	7	24	10	6	13	4	20	15	23	14	11	16	
Apr. 10 - Good Friday	18	14	8	13	3	22	12	21	5	9	17	16	19	
Apr. 12 - Easter Sunday	22	19	20	6	12	1	8	4	2	5	15	24	23	
Apr. 13 - Easter Monday	20	4	13	11	24	9	3	14	16	15	21	18	10	
Apr. 19 - first half of Articles	19	6	5	1	21	8	17	12	18	3	23	7	22	
Apr. 26 - 2nd half of Articles	8	24	19	16	9	15	20	5	1	6	10	4	11	
Apr. 30														
May 3 - Catechism	3	11	21	24	22	20	16	23	17	10	18	14	12	
May 10 - Catechism	17	12	23	7	5	19	18	22	13	8	1	21	6	
May 17 - Catechism	11	13	16	4	2	10	24	19	14	20	5	9	1	
May 21 - Catechism, Ascension Day	24	18	10	15	4	12	21	6	22	11	8	23	17	
May 24 - Articles	5	16	1	19	17	14	9	8	20	12	6	15	13	
May 31 - Pentecost Sunday	16	20	18	21	23	4	22	7	9	24	11	10	3	
June 1 - Pentecost Monday	13	5	15	22	8	17	14	18	19	1	12	6	2	
June 7 - Preparation (Trinitatis)	9	3	12	23	10	16	6	15	21	17	20	8	4	
June 11														
June 14 - Communion Service	1	22	1	14	13	18	5	10	4	19	9	11	24	
June 21 - Thanksgiving	23	8	17	12	15	21	7	1	6	16	3	13	20	
June 28 - 4th after Trinitatis	15	19	11	8	14	5	10	24	12	4	22	2	18	
July 5 - 5th after Trinitatis	6	21	3	18	20	11	23	9	8	22	13	17	14	

Figure 1. The 1998 Rotation Schedule (Andachts Liste) for Sommerfeld Mennonite Ministers, based on the Church Calendar Year. Image Credit: Donald Stoesz.

Anweisung der Lieder,	
welche bei Erklärung der gewöhnlichen Sonn- und Festtag-Evangelien und Episteln können gesungen werden.	
Am 1. Sonntage des Advents.	(auch: Schändliche Erwartung des Erlösers.
Von Jesu Einzug in Jerusalem.	Eph. 2. Röm. 13, 11-14.
(auch: Verheißung des Erb-	Erg. Matth. 2, 1-9.
lseros).	Gr. Joh. 15, 1-16.
Bon den Zeiten des jüngsten Todes.	Eph. 1. Röfe 3, 15.
(auch: Die nahe Zukunft des Erlösers.	Eph. 1. Röfe 2, 18.
Johannes Zeugniß von Jesu.	Eph. 2. Röm. 15, 19-23.
(auch: Das neue Werk des Erlösers.	Eph. 3, 1-22.
Am 2. Sonnt. des Adv.	Eph. 4. Philipp. 4, 4-7.
Bon den Zeiten des jüngsten Todes.	Erg. Luk. 21, 25-36.
(auch: Röhre Verhängnisung des Erlösers.	Eph. 4. Luk. 24, 7-10.
Eph. 3, 1-22.	Eph. 5, 6, 10-11.
(auch: Der heilige Christtag.	Eph. 6, 1, 21-23.)
Röm. 1. Sonnt. des Adv.	Röm. 20-23, 253, 314, 335, 475, 492, 566, 609, 669.
Johannes steht zu Jesu.	Am heiligen Christtag.
Eph. 1. Kor. 4, 1-6.	Eph. 2, 11-14.
Eph. Matth. 11, 2-10.	Eph. 3, 2-7.
	Eph. Luk. 2, 1-14.

is virtual agreement between these two lists. Bergen also cites a book of sermons by Lutheran pastor Louis Harms (1808-1865), *Predigten über die Evangelium des Kirchenjahres* (Sermons on the Gospels of the Church Calendar year) that was used by churches in Prussia and Russia.¹⁰

Canadian Prairie Mennonite Use of the Church Lectionary

There is ample evidence to suggest that Canadian Russian Mennonites made use of the *Anweisung der Lieder* from 1874 to the present. Peter Bergen considers it an article of faith that, together with a bishop system, catechism instruction, and baptism during the Easter-Pentecost season, the West Prussian Mennonite congregations established a bi-yearly service schedule that was based on the church lectionary known as the *Anweisung der Lieder*.¹¹ Bergen traces the origins of the Sommerfeld Mennonite church (1894-present) to these Flemish Mennonite congregations that were in existence from 1561-1789. He provides an English translation of the weekly Sunday readings listed in the *Anweisung der Lieder* and presents a 1998 church service list that is organized according to the church lectionary (see Figure 1).¹² He regards the pastors' use of this lectionary as part and parcel of what it means to be a faithful member of the Sommerfeld Mennonite church.

Analysis of the sermon texts used by the first bishop of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church, Rev. Abraham Doerksen (1852-1929), shows that the lectionary was in use by its ministers. Rev. Doerksen based 19 of his 71 sermons on the readings in the lectionary, for an average of 25 percent. This percentage increases if one takes into account the fact that he preached these nineteen sermons a total of 299 times out of a total of 767 preaching assignments, for an average usage of 39 percent.¹³ Rev. David M. Stoesz was another Sommerfeld Mennonite minister who used the lectionary on a fairly frequent basis. Of the 63 sermons that he wrote and preached between 1912 and 1934, 44.5 percent of these sermons (28) were based on the lectionary. Rev. Stoesz preached these 28 sermons 348 times out of a total of 882 preaching assignments, for a percentage usage of 39.5 percent.¹⁴

Another set of sermons based on the lectionary comes from a group of Sommerfelder ministers who served

Table 2: Ausbund Lieder Register*

Starting at New Year's

	Schriften	Lieder	Nach der Predich
1.2.	Matt. 2 & 3	06-770-604 (v 5)	35 or 716 (v 14)
3.4. Berg Predigt	Matt. 4 & 5	623-770-802-359	512 v21 or 115 (v 4)
5.6.	Matt. 6 & 7	563-770-683	316 or 445 (v 6)
7.8	Matt. 8 & 9	512-770-445	789 or 791
9.10	Matt. 10& 11	46-770-475	786-554 or 748
11.12	Matt. 12 & 14	766-770-554	512 (v 21) or 475 (v 14)
13.14 Saeman	Matt. 13 & Joh.15	265-770-348	265 or 655 (v 18)
15.16. Ostern	Matt. 26 & 27	700-770-445	385 (v 25)
17.18. Neugeburt	Johan. 3 & Romer 6	604-770-359	408
19.20. Ordnung	Matt. 18 & I Cor. 5	666-770-310	254 (v 11)
21 Gros Gmay	Lucas 22:1-33 &		
22.	1 Cor.10:1-25 &		
23.	1 Cor. 11: 2,17-34 & Johan. 13:1-18	449 or 481-770- 302-411 (v 8)	692
24.25. Pfingsten	Apostel. 1 & 2	217-770-649-275	786
	Matt. 19:1-12 & I Cor. 7		
	& Eph. 5:21-33	508-770-378	712
26.27. Freiheit	Johan. 8 & Gal. 5	411-770-359-297 (v 8) or 265	445
	Apostel. 3 & 4	341-770-341 (v 7)	35 or 115 (v 4)
28. 29. Ernte	Johan. 4 & Off. Johan. 14	706-770-683	452
30.31 Einsammlung	Lucas 12 & 13	766-770-492	512 or 492 (v 5)
32.33	Lucas 14 & 16	348-770-492	554-786 or 706 (v 12)
34.35	Lucas 17 & 18	706-770-445	786 or 789
36.37	Lucas 19 & Eph. 4	576-770-700	576 (v 44)
38.39	Johan. 10 & I Thess. 5	46 or 563-770-683	748-655 or 316
40.41 Neugeburt	Wie im Fruhjahr		
42.43 Ordnungs	Wie im Fruhjahr		
44. Gros Gmay	Wie im Fruhjahr		
45.			
46.			
47. 48. Alvater	Ebraer 11 & 12	411-770-453-489	655
	Johan. 14 & 2 Cor. 5		
	or Luc. 10 & 1 Cor. 13	706-770-205	35
	Romer 8 & 12	46-770-475-683	789-278 (v 11) or 683 (v 17)
49.50 Welt Ende	Matt. 24 & 25	554-770-492	576 (v 44)-554 (v 18) or 35 (v 30)
51.52 Christag	Lucas 1 & 2	385-770-604	591 (v 1)
Nachmittag		541 (v 7) -341 (v 14)	385 (v 20)-70-868 (v 46)-
			649 (v 4) -284 (v 5) -348 (v 6)
Bann	Lucas 15: 1-25	272-520 (v 30)	
Liebe	Johan. 10 & I Cor. 13	453-770-641 (v 28)-692 (v 20)	31

*Ausbund Lieder Register of Amish Community: Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin (Shipsheiana, Indiana: Rocky Ridge Printing, 1995), p. 4. I have arbitrarily numbered the Sundays of the year (1 to 52) and placed Pentecost in the middle of the year to give the reader some perspective on when the scripture texts are used during the year. Note the two communion services, one which follows Easter and the other which follows Thanksgiving.

Andachts-Tabelle für das letzte halbe Jahr in 1957

Monat	Datum	Feste	B. S. W.	B. F. W.	C. W. J.	J. F. W.	J. S. N.	B. C. R.	A. F. R.	J. J. S. R.	H. R. S. R.
Juli	14. 4. Sonntag nach Trin.		Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.		Erb.		Riv.
"	21. Danktagung	Riv.	Wpg.	Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Erb.		
"	28. 6. Sonntag nach Trin.	Riv.	Riv.	Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Erb.		
Aug.	4. 7. Sonntag nach Trin.	Erb.		Riv.	Wpg.	Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.	
"	11. 8. Sonntag nach Trin.	Erb.		Riv.		Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.	
"	18. 9. Sonntag nach Trin.	Weibf.	Erb.		Riv.	Wpg.	Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	
"	25. 10. Sonntag nach Trin.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Erb.		Riv.	Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.		
Sept.	1. 11. Sonntag nach Trin.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.		Erb.		Riv.	Wpg.	Chort.	Rosgb.
"	8. 12. Sonntag nach Trin.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.		Erb.		Riv.		Chort.
"	15. 13. Sonntag nach Trin.	Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.		Erb.		Riv.	Wpg.
"	22. 14. Sonntag nach Trin.		Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Grünt.	Erb.		Riv.
"	29. 15. Sonntag nach Trin.	Riv.	Wpg.	Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.		Erb.	
Okt.	6. Erntefest		Riv.		Chort.	Rosgb.	Grünt.	Silbf.	Weibf.		Erb.
"	13. Vorbereitung		Riv.		Silbf.	Chort.	Rosgb.)	Erb.	Grünt.	Weibf.	Wpg.
"	20. Vorm. Abendmahl	Chort.	(Vorbereitung		Weibf.	Grünt.)				Erb.	
"	20. Nachm. Abendmahl	Riv.									
"	27. Vorm. Abendmahl	Grünt.	(Riv.	Chort.	Danktag.	Silbf.)		(Vorbereitung	Wpg.	Erb.	
"	27. Nachm. Abendmahl	Weibf.									
Nov.	3. Vorm. Abendmahl	Erb.		(Danktag.	Grünt.	Weibf.)		Silbf.	Chort.		Riv.
"	10. Nachm. Abendmahl	Wpg.)		Vormittag	Silbf.	Chort.	Riv.	Rosgb.	Weibf.	Grünt.	Erb.
"	17. 22. Sonntag nach Trin.				Weibf.	Grünt.	Riv.	Erb.	Rosgb.		
"	24. Danktagung				Chort.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Grünt.	Erb.	Riv.	Rosgb.
Dez.	1. 1. Advent		Rosgb.			Chort.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Grünt.	Erb.	Riv.
"	8. 2. Advent	Riv.	Rosgb.			Wpg.	Chort.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Grünt.	Erb.
"	15. 3. Advent	Riv.	Erb.		Rosgb.		Chort.	Silbf.	Weibf.	Grünt.	
"	22. 4. Advent	Grünt.	Riv.		Erb.	Rosgb.	Wpg.	Chort.	Silbf.	Weibf.	
"	25. Weihnachten	Chort.	Grünt.		Riv.	Weibf.	Rosgb.	Erb.	Chort.	Silbf.	
"	26. Weihnachten		Silbf.	Grünt.		Riv.	Weibf.	Rosgb.	Erb.	Wpg.	
"	29. Jahreschluss	Chort.	Riv.	Silbf.	Grünt.		Weibf.	Rosgb.	Erb.		

Psalm 52, 10

Riv. Riverville; Rosgb. Rosengard; Grünt. Grünthal; Weibf. Weidenfeld; Chort. Chortitz; Ehb. Steinbach; Silbf. Silberfeld; Wpg. Winnipeg.

Figure 2. The 1957 Rotation Schedule (Andachts Liste) for Chortitzer Mennonite Ministers, based on the Church Calendar Year. Image Credit: Donald Stoesz.

in southern Saskatchewan from 1914-1943.¹⁵ Peter J. Dyck (1875-1948) settled in Dunelm, Saskatchewan (Swift Current area) in 1907 and established a Sommerfeld Mennonite church there. He served as deacon and minister for 36 years. Another minister, Abram J. Peters (1877-1960), was from Duncairn, Saskatchewan. Twelve sermons preached a total of 95 times can be identified as based on the church lectionary. These range from Matthew 11:2-10 and John 1:19-28 for Advent, Matthew 8:1-13 and Luke 8:31-43 for Epiphany, and Luke 10:23-27, Luke 14:1-11, and Luke 17:11-19 for the thirteenth, fourteenth, and seventeenth Sundays after Trinity Sunday.

The Chortitzer Mennonite Church on the East Reserve also appears to have used the church lectionary for their worship services. Among papers found in a box of sermons by Chortitzer Bishop Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970) is a “Rotation Schedule” that was in use in 1957 (see Figure 2).¹⁶

Evidence that Chortitzer ministers preached from lectionary texts comes from various sermons by Rev. Peter F. Wiebe. Rev. Wiebe was ordained on December 21, 1926 as a minister in the Niverville church. On Pentecost of 1928, Rev. Wiebe based his sermon on John 14:23-29 and preached it in Chortitz and Rosengard. This gospel text is cited as a complementary Scripture to the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-13. During Advent of 1928, Rev. Wiebe preached two sermons on the basis of Matthew 21:1-9, a story about the entry

of Jesus into Jerusalem as a king. Rev. Wiebe also preached a sermon in 1939 on Luke 5:1-11, a text listed on his sermon title page as appropriate for the “fifth Sunday after Trinity Sunday.”

Rev. Isaac A. Warkentin (1890-1964) was another minister from the East Reserve who used the lectionary. Ordained on November 28, 1926 in Russia, he settled in Steinbach, Manitoba in 1935 and three years later helped start the Steinbach Mennonite Church, which joined the General Conference Mennonites of Canada in 1942. The texts that he used were John 1:19-39 and Philippians 4:4-7 for Advent, 1 Corinthians 13 for the Sunday before Lent, and Luke 14:16-27 for the second Sunday after Trinity Sunday. This was in addition to the Scripture texts that were normally used for the high holidays, such as Luke 2 for Christmas, Matthew 2 for Epiphany, and Acts 2 for Pentecost.

Two other ministers from different traditions need to be mentioned. Rev. Cornelius G. Stoesz (1892-1976) represents a minister from the Evangelical Mennonite Missionary Conference (EMMC) who continued to write out his sermons and use the lectionary long after he left the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church in 1937.¹⁷ Although the EMMC church was founded on the idea that the Holy Spirit should play a larger role in a minister’s choice of texts and that a minister could speak extemporaneously, Rev. Stoesz continued to find the discipline of writing out his sermons and reading them to be helpful. Of the 59 sermons that he produced, 36 percent of them (21) were

based on the church lectionary.¹⁸ This percentage increases to 40 percent if one considers the number of times that he preached on these texts (205/507 preaching assignments).

Peter Regier (1851-1925) grew up in Rueckenau, Prussia and was ordained as a minister by his father in 1879.¹⁹ By 1894, he, together with his wife, Anna, had moved to Canada and settled in the Tiefengrund area in Saskatchewan. He helped start the Rosenorter Mennonite Church, which helped found the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1902. Rev. Regier was the most conscientious of the pastors mentioned in his use of the lectionary. Out of a possible 52 Sundays, Rev. Regier used 41 Scripture texts from the lectionary and preached on them a total of 218 times. To take only one example, he preached for 14 consecutive weeks on the set of gospel texts outlined in the lectionary from Good Friday to Pentecost. Rev. Regier also used more lectionary texts from the Epistles than any of the other ministers mentioned. The books of James, Corinthians, Titus, Colossians, Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, and Thessalonians were all worthy of his attention.

Conclusion

It would appear on the basis of the above analysis that the Lutheran church lectionary was adopted by the Mennonites during their time in Prussia. The fact that, firstly, Prussian Mennonite pastor Jacob Denner wrote a book of sermons based on gospel readings from the lectionary in the middle of the eighteenth century; that secondly, the book of sermons by Lutheran pastor Louis Harms circulated among the Prussian and Russian Mennonites in the middle of the nineteenth century; and that third, readings from the Lutheran lectionary were incorporated into a Prussian Mennonite Gesangbuch (1854) at about the same time, demonstrates that the church lectionary was used by the Mennonites sometime between 1730 and 1854. It is interesting to note in this regard that of all the Mennonite pastors mentioned, the one who used the lectionary most consistently was Rev. Peter Regier, a Canadian immigrant from Prussia at the end of the nineteenth century.

The fact that the church lectionary was used mostly by conservative Mennonite groups needs reflection. Hughes Oliphant Old provides a clue to this phenomenon when he notes that the lectionary was first established by Pope Gregory the Great to sustain the churches that had been established in Europe as a result of missionary efforts. Many of the priests were uneducated and so needed a type of “manual” to use in their readings and reflections on Scripture.²⁰ One can see the similarity between this situation and that of Mennonite pastors as they pioneered and shepherded their churches in Russia and Canada. Most of these ministers were farmers by profession and so did not have a lot of time or education to choose appropriate Scripture texts for each Sunday. The lectionary provided a handy guide by which Mennonite pastors could reflect on a set of texts that covered a fairly large portion of the New Testament.

Further research is needed to verify the extent to which other Mennonite groups used the lectionary. For example, did Old Colony and Evangelical Mennonite Conference (*Kleine Gemeinde*) pastors also organize their church life according to the church calendar year and use readings from a lectionary? A cursory look at ten sermons written by *Kleine Gemeinde* pastor Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915) shows that he used Philippians 4:4 to preach on the first Sunday of Advent.²¹ He also preached on John 10:12-16 and 1 Peter 2:11-12, two texts that

were normally used on the second and third Sundays after Easter. Further research into sermon texts used by a variety of Mennonite pastors will help ascertain the extent to which the lectionary shaped the faith and worship of Mennonite believers.

Endnotes

1 It should be remembered that just as it took the church more than three centuries to decide which books of the Bible to include in the canon, it took the church over six centuries to find a pattern of readings that it found helpful for each Sunday morning. Note the discussion by Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Medieval Church*, Volume 3, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 143-185.

2 Ibid., pp. 170ff.

3 For an English translation of the Lutheran church lectionary that developed over many centuries, see Paul W. Nesper, *Biblical Texts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1952), pp. 207-218. A Lutheran lectionary under the heading, “Nachweisung der Sonn- und Festaeglichen Episteln und Evangelien durch das ganze Jahr,” was also added at the end of the German Lutheran Bible. A Prussian Mennonite family by the name of Friedrich Gustav Woelke (b.1842, spouse, Elsie Wiebe, b. 1852) owned a copy of this Bible. *Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift des alten und neuen Testaments nach der deutschen Uebersetzung Dr. Martin Luther's*, published in Berlin, 1876. For the Anglican lectionary, see *The Book of Common Prayer* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1962). For the Catholic readings, see *The Saint Andrew Daily Missal*, by Dom Gaspar Lefebvre (Belgium: Liturgical Apostolate Abbey of St. Andrew, 1958). As noted in the essay, these various versions of the one-year church lectionary are virtually identical.

4 *The Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). Cf. the discussion of the revised common lectionary in *The Anglican Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), pp. 7-13.

5 The extent of this belief is indicated by the fact that the Latin Scripture text is still included along with the English translation in the 1958 *Roman Missal* consulted for this assignment (see endnote 3).

6 See Hughes Old's discussion of this *lecto continua* approach, *The Biblical Period*, Volume 1, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 10-18, *The Age of Reformation*, Volume 4 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 46ff, 94ff.

7 Walter H. Hohmann, “The Christian Year,” *Mennonite Life*, July 1962, Volume XVII, p. 135.

8 Peter Bergen, *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church* (Altona: D.W. Friesens, 2001), p. 11. The songbook was known as *Gesangbuch zur Kirchlichen und hauslichen Erbauung Fur Mennoniten-Gemeinden*. It was published by Edwin Groening in 1854 in Danzig, Prussia. This *Gesangbuch* is also mentioned by Walter Hohmann in, “The Christian Year”, p. 135.

9 “Anweisung der Lieder,” *Gesangbuch: Eine Sammlung geistlicher Lieder zur Allgemeinen Erbauung und zum Lobe Gottes* (Songbook: A Collection of Spiritual Songs for General Edification and to the Glory of God), 3rd edition (Odessa, Russia: P. Franzow, 1859), pp. 1-10. A 7th edition appeared in the United States in 1912 (Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonitischen Verlagshandlung, 1912), pp. ix-xviii. Peter Letkemann has noted in personal correspondence that the first “Anweisung der Lieder” that he is aware of appears at the end of a songbook that was published by Georg Rogall in 1731, *Kern alter und neuer Lieder* (Koenigsberg, Prussia). Prussian Mennonites borrowed over 300 hymns from this hymnbook when they published their own *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* in 1767. Note Peter Letkeman's discussion, “The Tale of Two Gesangbücher,” *Preservings*, No. 18, 2001, pp. 123ff, also his Ph.D. dissertation, “Hymnody and Choral Music of the Mennonites in Russia, 1789-1915” (University of Toronto, 1985), pp. 83-85. This means that Mennonites were at least aware of this lectionary by the 1730s and incorporated it into their own songbook by the 1850s.

10 Peter Bergen, *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church*, p. 11. Louis Harms, *Predigten über die Evangelium des Kirchenjahres* (Sermons on the Gospels of the Church Calendar year) (Hermannsburg: Missionhandlung, 1905). A book of sermons by Ludwig Hofacker, *Predigten fyr alle Sonn-, Fest-, Feier-tage*, first published in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1831 was also popular among the Russian Mennonites (personal correspondence with Peter Letkemann).

11 Peter Bergen, *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church*, pp. 9ff.

12 Ibid., pp. 220-227.

13 Donald Stoesz, “Analysis of Five Workshop Schedules” (unpublished article), pp. 5, 15-19. The sermon texts that Rev. Doerksen used can be found in Peter Bergen, *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church*, pp. 69-76.

14 Donald Stoesz, “Analysis of Five Worship Schedules,” pp. 5, 15-19. The sermons that Rev. David M. Stoesz used can be found in Volumes 1561, 1562, 1563 in the Archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre. A summary of these texts can be found in Donald Stoesz, “Interpretation of Rev. David M. Stoesz' Preaching Assignments” (unpublished article), pp. 23- 35.

15 Information about these sermons can be found in the Peter J. Dyck collection,

listed as Fonds MH23 in the Archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. More information about Rev. Dyck and Rev. Peters can be found in *Treasured Memories: A Dunelm History* (published 1982), Abram Funk, *Kirchen: Vorstand der Sommerfelder Gemeinden im Saskatchewan, Alberta, and B.C. und die Friedensfelder in Manitoba* (Swift Current, Saskatchewan: self-published), and *Die Steinbach Post*, November 24, 1943.

16 The Rotation Schedule found among the papers of Bishop Peter S. Wiebe along with the sermons by Peter F. Wiebe can be found in the Christian Heritage Library Collection, Volume 2122, in the Archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba. A biography of Bishop P.S. Wiebe can be found in Gustav Dueck, *Chortitzer Mennonite Conference: 1874-1990* (Steinbach: Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, 2004), p. 102. An obituary of Peter F. Wiebe can be found in the same book, *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 107. Other references to Rev. Peter F. Wiebe can be found in Gus Dueck, *History of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church* (unpublished manuscript), pp. 152, 189.

17 For a history of this renewal movement, see *Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider/EMMC: 1937-1987* (Altona: D. W. Friesens, 1987). For a biography of C. G. Stoesz, see *Our Stoesz Heritage* (Steinbach: Cornelius and

Aganetha Stoesz Book Committee, 1987), pp. 135ff.

18 Donald Stoesz, "Analysis of Five Worship Schedules," pp. 5, 15-19. A complete summary of Rev. C. G. Stoesz' sermon texts can be found in Donald Stoesz, "Interpretation of Rev. Cornelius G. Stoesz' Preaching Assignments" (unpublished article), pp. 26-33.

19 Information about Rev. Peter Regier (1851-1925) along with his sermons can be found in Volumes 1458, 2835, 2845, and 4901 at the Archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Supplemental biographical information about Rev. Regier can be found in Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: 1786-1920* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 312ff, 324ff, as well as in a series of articles by Lawrence Klippenstein, "Peter K. Regier: Churchman-Farmer (1851-1925)," *Mennonite Historian*, September 1976, December 1976, March 1977, and June 1977.

20 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Medieval Church*, Volume 3, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, pp. 143ff, 170ff.

21 Delbert Plett, "Biography of Peter R. Reimer," *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve: 1874-1910* (Steinbach: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 1994), pp. 360-361.

Biographies

Katharina Janzen Friesen: Everything is a Mystery

Ralph Friesen, Nelson, British Columbia

On a late winter's day in 1894, in the Mennonite village of Steinbach, Manitoba, Katharina Friesen gave birth. She was 20, almost 21; it was her first child, and her husband, my grandfather Klaas R. Friesen, must have experienced a mix of anticipation and apprehension during his wife's time of labour. That same evening, February 22, district inhabitants noticed a strange sight: "the so-called northern lights visible to the south were white and red like blood until 10 p.m. It lasted about 3/4 of an hour. When the moon rose, it [northern lights] disappeared gradually."

Perhaps the blood-red sky was a portent of what was to come. Katharina developed a fever. Years later Klaas wrote in his memoirs that it was probably "*Wochenfieber*," which translates literally as "week fever," with reference to the period of roughly a week that women spent in bed in those days, after they had given birth. In English the term would be "childbed fever," or, clinically, puerperal fever.

The symptoms are harsh. A rise in body temperature is followed by a fast pulse, burning or cutting abdominal pain, frequent vomiting, diarrhea, and a bad-smelling vaginal discharge. Emotionally, the birth mother is subjected to strong feelings of fear. Katharina suffered in this terrible way for five days. She died at around 10 o'clock in the evening, February 27, and was buried in the frozen ground of what is now known as the Pioneer Cemetery in Steinbach, on Saturday, March 3. The temperature that day was - 5° Celsius.²

Puerperal fever is brought on by bacterial infection of the genital tract or uterus, and can develop into sepsis, in which case, in a rural village society without antibiotics, there would be little recourse for treatment. In the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe six to nine out of every 1,000 deliveries involved this malady, and it was the single most common cause of maternal mortality. Most of these women would not have died had attending doctors known that infection was spread by germs. Without such knowledge, they neglected to wash their hands, often going from one birth to another, and became agents of infection. Although Dr. Ignaz Semmelweiss, a Hungarian physician, discovered the solution to this problem in the mid-

1800s (washing with an antiseptic solution before doing a delivery) the incidence of puerperal fever declined significantly only in the 20th century, as the medical establishment was slow to change its ways.³

Katharina was the daughter of Johann S. (1840-1905) and Margaretha Penner (1844-1889) Janzen, of Blumenhof, a village one mile east of Blumenort, which itself was six miles north of Steinbach. The Janzens were well-to-do farmers with several children of whom Katharina, born March 7, 1873, was the fourth. Johann and Margaretha had originally settled in Scratching River (Rosenort) on the "other side" of the Red River, and moved to Blumenhof in 1877. One indicator of their prosperity was their purchase of an upright steam engine, costing more than \$1,000, in the 1890s.⁴ They used some of their



Klaas R. Friesen, at approximately 21 years of age.
Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.



Sara (nee Siemens) and Cornelius P. Janzen, 1940. Cornelius P. Janzen was the brother to Katharina Janzen Friesen. Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.

wealth to buy the school section (29-7-7E) two miles east of the Blumenhof school, and assist their children in settling there.

All of the siblings except for Katharina moved to this plot of land and created a small farming community known as *De Krim* (the Crimea).⁵ Katharina's brother Johann settled there with his wife Gertrude von Niessen, as did her sister Margaretha with her husband Peter F. Thiessen, both in 1892. They were followed by eldest brother Cornelius and his wife Agatha Friesen, the next year, and finally by sister Elisabeth after her marriage to Johann K. Loewen in 1900.

Katharina was the exception because she married Klaas R. Friesen on October 22, 1892, and Klaas was a village machinist,



Elisabeth (nee Janzen) and Johann K. Loewen at their home in De Krim, c. 1938. Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.

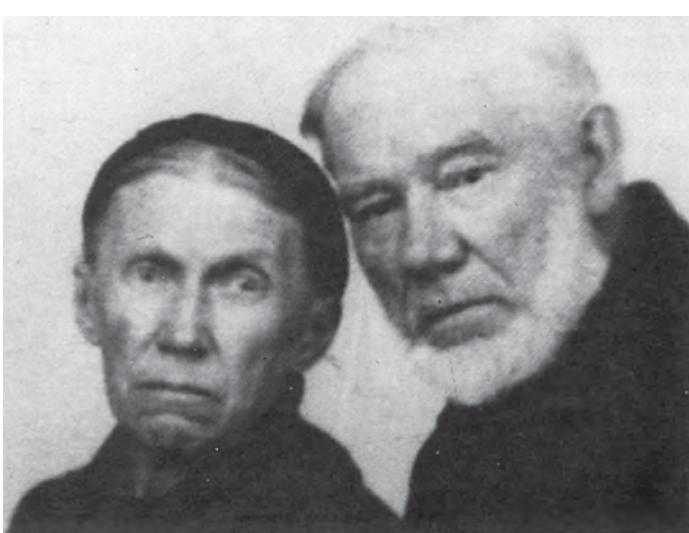
not a farmer. She moved to Steinbach to live with him. Like so many other couples in the Mennonite settlements, their parents were connected by bonds of common ancestry. Katharina's paternal grandfather Cornelius F. Janzen (1812-1864) lived a good part of his life in the village of Neukirch, Molotschna, South Russia—and Neukirch was well-known as a community of Kleine Gemeinde Friesens. Among these was Abraham F. Friesen (1807-1891), Klaas's paternal grandfather.

These grandfathers, Janzen and Friesen, were brothers-in-law, married to sisters, who were daughters of patriarch Claasz Siemens (1758-1834). Cornelius F. Janzen was married to Sara Siemens (1809-1885) and Abraham F. Friesen was married to Helena Siemens (1812-1888). The respective grandchildren, Katharina and Klaas, were second cousins.

Katharina's grandmother Sara was widowed in 1864, and in 1874 emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska, with two of her daughters, while some of her other children, including Katharina's father, emigrated to Manitoba.

Two letters of Sara Siemens Janzen, written to Katharina's parents, are extant. In the first, dated December 23, 1875, she speaks of her loneliness, and, somewhat impatiently, of her children's silence: "Now my beloved, what are all of you up to there in the far distance? I do not get to see you at all! This saddens me . . . you do not write at all!" She inquires specifically after her grandchildren: "What are you doing? Are you all learning?" She berates her older grandchildren for not writing to her, and then asks after the youngest at that time, Katharina, two years and nine months of age: "What is the little Katharina up to? Is she still so very lovable? If only I could get to see her again!"

In the second letter, dated June 26, 1881—Katharina now being eight years old—Sara still pleads with her children to come and visit her, or even to come and live in Nebraska, but, perhaps wearily, adds: "I will resign myself to the realities as they are. Most important is that the loving Heavenly Father would be gracious and redeem us. This is my innermost wish." She again has a word of admonition for her beloved grandchildren: "be obedient to your parents, which is the first commandment." It seems there was some difference between



Margaretha (nee Janzen) Thiessen (1867-1936) and Peter F. Thiessen (1859-1937). Image Credit: Ralph Friesen.

Sara and her son; she speaks of reflecting on “promises”—in her first letter she mentions that Johann owes her money—and then putting these things in the past. Ultimately she admits to her own weaknesses and comes to a kind of acceptance: “In God everything is a mystery, He maketh matters to be as it pleaseth Him.”⁶

Sara died in Blumenhof while on a visit to her children and grandchildren on January 13, 1885. Katharina was 11 years old at the time.

Katharina grew into young adulthood, was baptized and became a member of the Kleine Gemeinde at Blumenort on July 7, 1892.⁷ Evidently she was lovable not just as a child, but as a 19-year-old, and she married Klaas R. Friesen of Steinbach that fall, on October 22nd, a day before his 22nd birthday. They were married at Blumenort, with the minister Abraham Kornelsen of Heuboden presiding. That winter they moved into the bush at Pine Hill, about 20 miles southeast of Steinbach, as Klaas was running a sawmill there, which he and his older brother Abraham had purchased from their father.

The young couple lived in the bush all that winter, in a cabin on the sawmill site. One night toward the end of March they awoke to the cry of “fire!” “We looked out through the window everything was red and lit up.” The sawmill burned down completely, and Katharina and Klaas moved to Steinbach where they “lived in peace”⁸ upstairs in his parents’ home. This was a large house, surrounded by maple trees, on the east side of Main Street across from what is now Friesen Avenue. Klaas and Abraham and their father invested in a big lathe and other machine repair equipment and launched a machine shop repair business, named A. S. Friesen & Sons. In addition, Klaas repaired watches and clocks. The thriving village of about 250 inhabitants, “with its smoke stacks and the blowing and humming of steam boilers,” was dubbed the “metropolis of the East Reserve” by a Winnipeg visitor.⁹ The future seemed to hold great promise for Katharina and Klaas.

Katharina became pregnant and the couple awaited the arrival of their firstborn. In his memoirs, written around 1918, Klaas later recalled that time:

When I or we, i.e., I and my very much beloved wife, had lived together 1 year and 4 months, there came a hard blow, namely my wife went into labour and, after six days [actually five], on February 27, 1894, she died from a kind of fever, probably childbed fever. This began on Feb. 22, 1894. Oh that was such a great pain for me, beyond description. When one must stay behind, abandoned, oh then there is no other counsel but to turn to the beloved Saviour, as He is so full of love that His own heart must break! When one comes to Him, so deeply burdened and sorrowful, then there is comfort and help through Him in all circumstances, that is, for a heart surrendered to God.¹⁰

He expresses his suffering, but does not speak of his wife’s. Physician Charles Meigs of Philadelphia told his students in 1848 that he had seen women afflicted with puerperal fever “who not only suffered intolerable pain, but in whose minds that pain seemed to excite the most unspeakable terror.”¹¹ We don’t know how much of Katharina’s pain and terror Klaas witnessed, or what efforts were made to ease it. There was no doctor in the village. A midwife would surely have been present, quite likely Aganetha Barkman Reimer of Steinbach

or Mrs. Peter B. Toews (nee Anna Toews) of Blumenort, both of whom had taken a six-month course in midwifery and other medical procedures with Justina Neufeld of Mountain Lake, Minnesota in 1892. If it was Mrs. Reimer, then Katharina’s death was an extremely rare occurrence; in her career Aganetha Reimer delivered more than 600 babies, and only two mothers died.¹²

In the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, correspondent Heinrich Rempel announced to “all the friends and acquaintances of Klaas R. Friesen in Steinbach that his wife died last week in childbirth, and was buried on the 3rd of the month [March]. He is a son of Abr. Friesen (Post Master in Steinbach); her maiden name is Katharina Janzen, daughter of Johann Janzen in Blumenhof.”¹³

Struggling to express his sorrow, even years afterward, Klaas quoted verses from an old hymn, *Ist’s auch eine Freude* [“it is also a joy”] trying to reconcile himself to his loss. One stanza, often quoted by the Mennonites when a loved one died, goes as follows:

*Endlich kommt er leise
Nimmt mich bei der Hand
Führt mich von der Reise
Heim ins Vaterland*

*At last he comes so softly
Takes me by the hand
Leads me from this journey
Home to the fatherland.*

The “very dearest” had been taken from him, Klaas wrote. Therefore, “I must and can say with Job: ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”

The youthful widower did not know what to do. His mother and Katharina’s mother both offered to care for the baby, a girl who had also been named Katharina. But little Katharina lived only 19 days before she followed her mother. She died on March 13th. In later years Klaas would tell his children that he felt partial relief that the child did not survive, as he felt he could not care for it. He wrote in his memoir that “the foreknowledge of God had planned that she should not stay long in this world of sorrows.” Perhaps she chose not to stay, not being sufficiently wanted by her father. Whatever the case, in Klaas’s words, her “hour of redemption” [*erlösung Stunde*] tolled, and she answered. Many years later he remembered:

Now I again was completely alone and felt very lonely. Now when the child was buried, we did not invite many sorrowing guests. We went with the small body to the school and had the school children sing a few appropriate songs.

“Fort, fort, mein Herz zum Himmel,” they sang. Away, away my heart, to heaven. Weeping, Klaas could not sing along. Standing in the school house, he was taken back to his own school days, his own childhood: “the innocent singing of the children seemed to me as if it were the songs of angels.”¹⁴

His loved ones dead and buried, Klaas took refuge with his parents, and with his faith. Time passed; his thoughts were “often in heaven” with his wife and baby. But he continued his work at the machine shop and looked again to the future with hope. On September 13, 1894 he married again, this time to



Katharina B. (nee Thiessen) and Klaas R. Friesen, 1941. Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.

18-year-old Helena, daughter of Gruenfeld Kleine Gemeinde Ältester Abraham L. Dueck. She was my grandmother and so my family has Dueck ancestors instead of Janzen.

The story takes a final turn. After Helena's death in 1914 – she had borne 10 children – Klaas married for the third and last time, to Katharina B. Thiessen. Yet another Katharina! This one was a daughter of Peter F. Thiessen (1859-1937) who had settled in *De Krim* many years before, having married for the second time to Katharina Janzen's sister, Margaretha. Katharina Thiessen was a daughter of her father's first marriage, to Maria Buhler. Still, by marriage she was a niece to Katharina Janzen.

And, given the complex interweaving of relationship and connection among Mennonites, even this is not quite the final turn. My parents, Peter D. Friesen and Margaret Rempel, were married in 1931. My mother's mother was Sara Janzen Friesen (1876-1923.) Sara was a granddaughter of the same Cornelius F. Janzen who was also Katharina Janzen's grandfather—they were cousins. And my mother, like the baby Katharina who lived such a short time, was also born on February 22, nine years later. And in this meandering and complex fashion, a kind of circle was completed. It turns out that my siblings and I have Janzen ancestors after all! As Sara Siemens said: "In God everything is a mystery."

Endnotes

- 1 Abraham M. Friesen, Blumenort, *Diary*.
- 2 Abraham M. Friesen, *Diary*.
- 3 "Puerperal Fever," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puerperal_fever, accessed January 29, 2013.
- 4 Roy Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Steinbach: Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983), p. 50 and p. 107.
- 5 So called because the Crimea region in Russia had a reputation for prosperity. See Royden Loewen, *Blumenort*, pp. 250-1.
- 6 In *Pioneers and Pilgrims: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, Nebraska and Kansas, 1874 to 1882*, Delbert F. Plett (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1990), pp. 78-9.
- 7 Abraham M. Friesen, *Journal*.
- 8 Quotations from Klaas R. Friesen *Memoirs*.



Margaret (nee Rempel) and Peter D. Friesen, 1931. Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.

9 "The East Reserve," by "H. B.", *Der Nordwesten*, June 21, 1894.
10 Friesen, *Memoirs*.

11 Judith Walzer Levitt, review of *The Tragedy of Childbed Fever* by Irvine Loudon, in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, August 24, 2000, accessed at: <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM20008243430819>, January 29, 2013.

12 Katherine Martens and Heidi Harms, *In Her Own Voice* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1997), p. 29.

13 *Mennonitische Rundschau*, March 21, 1894.

14 Friesen, *Memoirs*.

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Mennonites on the Margins

Conrad Stoesz, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Peter Stoesz, Son of Bergthal finds life in Alt-Samara.

Land was essential for a prosperous family. As families grew in the Mennonite colony of Chortitza, Russia, more land was needed. In 1836, a daughter colony was established known as Bergthal (mountain valley). The new settlers not only held hopes and dreams of owning their own farm, but of also establishing a community built upon their faith principles. Differences were minimized and beauty came through order and uniformity. However, not everyone could fit themselves into this mold.

Peter Stoesz (1838-1908) was the ninth child of Jacob Stoesz (1779-1859) and Barbara Wiens (1803-1878). Peter was born in the Chortitza colony, Ukraine, but in 1839, the family moved to the village of Schoenthal in the Bergthal Colony, 212 km east, south-east of Chortitza. The Bergthal region was mild with annual temperatures ranging between 38 and -24 degrees Celsius. The wind had free reign in the open steppe. The black, sandy soil was fertile, being 51-71 centimeters deep. To the north-west was a small mountain range where the Mennonite settlers created a rock quarry for buildings and making milling stones.¹

Here in Bergthal Jacob Stoesz established a farm and carried on the family tradition of milling. Son Peter was baptized in 1862 at the age of 24, while other members of the family and community were baptized around the age of 20. Is this a clue that Peter did not fit the community mold?

In the 1860s, an educational scout chose two young men, Peter Schroeder (1852-1920) and the older Peter Stoesz, for further educational training in Chortitza *Zentralschule* (high school). The school was under the direction of Heinrich Epp who brought the school into a “bright new period.”² The *Zentralschule* was a place for teacher training and it was during this time that Peter likely learned Russian. It was hoped the men would return to the Bergthal colony after four years and become leading teachers in the community. It is unclear if they finished the four years of education; however neither Schroeder nor Stoesz remained in Bergthal after their higher education stint in Chortitza.³

Family lore has it that while away, Peter’s letters to his sweetheart back home in Schoenthal were intercepted and went undelivered. When he returned home, the woman he loved had married another man. “He lost faith in the Home Folks and for a while, in women as a whole.”⁴ He was so upset by this that he moved to the edge of the Mennonite world, 1160 km east to Alexanderthal, Alt Samara, Russia. The rest of his Stoesz siblings (4 brothers and 3 sisters) migrated in the other direction, west to Manitoba in 1874, with brother Johann moving to Mountain Lake, Minnesota in 1877.

While there is often some truth in lore, other documents suggest other (or additional) factors were at play. Peter likely was away in Chortitza in the first few years of the 1860s. He was baptized in Bergthal in 1862, but by September 1863 Peter had moved far away from Bergthal or Chortitza. He was clearly unhappy living in Bergthal where he admits he had difficulty finding his place. In a letter to his sister Maria dated September 27, 1863 Köppenthal [Am Trakt colony?], Peter

wrote: “I have been thinking about my past... You were right at times, sister,... not every life is exemplary, and I have never tried to say mine has been. Life there [in Bergthal Colony] was too routine and unbearable. You don’t know how difficult it was for me being a pawn, sheepishly following the flock.... You know yourself, how Babylonian it was at your place, and maybe still is.”⁵

Another curious incident revolves around the division of assets after the death of his father Jacob in 1859. As is customary, an inheritance document (*Teilungskontrakt*) was drawn up which divided the estate evenly – half to Peter’s mother, Barbara, and the other half evenly distributed among the eight children. “The Widow Stoesz commits the sum of 1044 Rubles, 22 Copeks ... to her legitimate heirs to be distributed equally. Mrs. Stoesz commits herself in writing to each of her eight children the above named amounts on October 1 of this year, 1863, either in cash or as an investment at the rate of 5%.”⁶ Signatures of the heirs are on the bottom of the document – but there are only 7 signatures. Peter’s name is not listed. Was there a falling out in the family, or was it simply that he was away and upon return he received his inheritance?

It is clear from Peter’s own words that he was unhappy in Bergthal. He finally settled in Alt Samara, some 450 km north-east of Am Trakt on the Volga River. Alt Samara was settled by new immigrants from Prussia in 1859 and was one of the last settlements of Mennonites coming from Prussia. Peter settled with people like his father, born and raised in Prussia. The colony was made up of Mennonites and Lutherans. The colony was administered by the *Oberschulze* and the secretary or *Kreisschreiber*. Council meetings, gathering reports from the village mayors, taxation, area (*volost*) court, reporting to the Russian government, and the day-to-day administration of the colony fell to the *Oberschlze* and *Kreisschreiber*.

Colony leaders soon recognized the need for an administrator who had Russian and German language skills. Heinrich Penner and David Ewert were authorized by the colony to seek out capable candidates. They went to neighboring colonies and finally hired Alexander Hoppe from Warenburg. He was *Kreisschreiber* until 1863, followed by Herman Neufeld until summer of 1864, followed by Johannes Rheingold in 1865. The next person to hold this position was Peter Stoesz who held the position for 38 years until 1903. Peter Stoesz is remembered as a gifted administrator.⁷ He was recognized for his service by the Russian government who awarded him two medals.⁸

Peter married and had three daughters, Kathe, Alma, and Maria, and a son, Johann Alfred. His daughter Alma describes Peter as a well-built man who was hospitable and jovial.⁹ His wife died in 1892. Sometime later he married widow Auguste Claassen. She brought three children into the marriage. After his retirement, Peter took his nest egg of 8,000 rubles and made some land investments in Ufinschin which did not go well. He and Auguste later moved to Saratov, some 400 km south-east of Alt Samara, near Am Trakt. In 1907, Peter made the long trip to the Crimea to visit his daughter Alma. It is reported that Auguste joined the Mennonite Brethren church¹⁰ (other reports say Baptists) while Peter did not. Peter lent money to

Открытие памятника въ Александрталь 1912 г.

У Господа спасение.
Иов. 3, 10.



The Alt Samara Kreisamt building where Peter Stoesz worked.



Peter Stoesz with his wife Auguste. Stoesz is wearing the two medals he received from the government. Image Source: A.D. Stoesz, A Stoesz Genealogy 1731-1972.

the church, which was never repaid. Peter died a poor man, leaving few financial resources for his widow and children.¹¹

While Peter separated himself from his family, he wanted to remain connected. His closing remarks to his sister in 1863 were “Have a happy life, greet your children, [and] tell David to write to me soon, and anyone else that is able to. Tell as many to write as can.”¹² Brother David Stoesz was a faithful letter writer. One of the first entries in David Stoesz’ diary, April 23, 1872, David records, “wrote to my brother Peter.”¹³ During the lead-up to emigration, David wrote to his brother Peter several times, possibly to encourage participation in the emigration to Canada. Once in Canada, references to writing to Peter are fewer. This was also the time of pioneering and David also carried the duties of assistant and later Bishop for the Chortitzer Mennonite church on the East Reserve in Manitoba. It is likely that other family members also wrote to Peter Stoesz. Peter did write letters; at least once David references a letter from his brother. Peter also wrote to his nephew Dietrich Stoesz in Minnesota, giving him a photo of him and his wife Auguste taken ca. 1890.

Peter Stoesz was a man who found it difficult to fit the mold set for him in the Bergthal Colony. With some resentment, he moved east and refused to join his siblings as they migrated west to Canada. Peter built a life for himself in Alt Samara where he put his education from the *Zentralschule* to good use, establishing a distinguished career as a public servant in Alt Samara. Here he had his own family, which he loved and cared for. While he moved away from his siblings, extended family remained important to him as seen in the flow of letters to and from family and friends an ocean away. Perhaps some more of these letters still exist.

What ever happened to Alfred?

This has been a long standing question in the extended Stoesz family. An obituary in a Russian medical journal from 1956 shines new light on the professional life of Dr. Alfred Peter Stoesz (Mar 18, 1899-Nov 18, 1955).¹⁴ But it raises new questions and leaves many others unanswered. The last piece of information that the family in North America had is dated 1930. At that time, Alfred expressed interest in coming to North America with his wife and son, but finances and learning a new language were large barriers.

From the obituary, we now know that A.P. Stoesz (A.П. Штесс or A.P. Shtess) cobbled together enough funds to put himself through medical school and became a psychiatrist. His doctoral dissertation explored brain injury. Later, he found work at the Saratov University Hospital, studying nervous diseases. In 1925, he undertook a study of lesbianism. After 17 sessions of psychoanalysis and hypnotherapy, he claimed to have cured Aleksandr Pavlovich of her same-sex attraction and her addiction to cigarettes. His findings were published in 1925.¹⁵

From Saratov, Alfred moved north to be the first psychiatrists to work in the remote Yakutia area. Yakutia holds the record for the lowest air temperature recorded in the Northern Hemisphere at -64.4 degrees Celsius.¹⁶ In 1927, he published an article on mental illness in the region.¹⁷ He was the head of the psychiatric department in Yakutia until 1928. His professional record resumes again in 1931, when he was employed by the Soviet army until 1936, as the chair for nervous diseases at the medical institute at the military medical academy in Kuibyshev (now known as Samara). In 1936 he published an important study on incontinence.

Over his career, Alfred wrote over 40 important scientific works and supervised 3 doctoral students. One of his students, Ilesheva Razaliya Galievna, became the first woman to become a professor of psychiatry and was still practicing in 2009.¹⁸ During World War Two he worked as a consultant at a number of military hospitals. In 1947, Alfred was appointed head of the psychiatric department at the Kazakhstan National Medical University, a position he retained until his death in 1955.

A.P. Stoesz was collaborator in the “politics of medicine” in the last years of Stalin’s rule. A.P. Stoesz made a presentation at the 1951 Pavlov session in Moscow. He was one of the few leaders from outside Moscow to attend the open sessions as well as the closed sessions. This event was designed to impose Pavlovian dogma on the profession and lobby for more resources, especially for the treatment of war veterans.¹⁹ In 1953, Stoesz was instrumental in organizing the first psychiatry conference held in Ksyl-Orda.²⁰ The obituary goes on to say that Alfred was a good lecturer, “A decent hard-working person with high self-discipline.”

The obituary, however, says nothing about his wife or son, referenced in family sources.²¹ Not surprisingly, the obituary says nothing about his German-Mennonite upbringing. Also absent are the reasons for his moves to remote locations such as Yakutia and Kazakhstan, where many Mennonites and others



A.P. Shtess (Alfred P. Stoesz) as a noted psychiatrist in Kazakhstan.

deemed threats to the state were deported. It is significant that Alfred was able to remain working in his field, when so many other professionals were removed from their positions. These missing pieces remain a mystery.

While new documents shed significant light on the professional life of Alfred Stoesz, his family of origin remains unclear. Certain family sources have long claimed that Alfred Peter Stoesz was the son of Peter Stoesz (June 11, 1838-1908).²² However, others have called this into question.²³ Peter married and had daughters Kathe, Alma, Maria, and a son named Johann Alfred, according to A.D. Stoesz’s book *A Stoesz Genealogy*. After Peter’s wife died (her name is not known), he married Auguste Klassen (Mar 13, 1863- Jan 15, 1922). This was to be Auguste’s third of four marriages. She and Peter had no children. Auguste’s first marriage

was to Abraham Claassen (b. Aug 11, 1859-) in 1882. They had three children Johan (b. Dec. 4, 1887), Rudolph (b. Feb. 2, 1893- Aug 8 1953), and Justine (b. Jul 22, 1894). Rudolph emigrated to Canada in 1925 and worked as medical doctor at the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg.

After Abraham’s death, Auguste married businessman Jacob Stoesz (b. Jun 5, 1853) of Elbing, Prussia.²⁴ They are to have had a son, Jacob Alfred Stoesz. After Jacob Stoesz died, Auguste married Peter Stoesz. After Peter’s death in 1908, she married Jacob Wieler in 1915.

So who is Alfred’s father? Peter or Jacob? Both Peter Stoesz and Jacob Stoesz were at one time married to Auguste. Both Peter and Jacob had sons with the middle name Alfred; although Auguste was the mother of Jacob’s son, Alfred, not Peter’s. According to the obituary, Alfred was born in 1899. If Peter were Alfred’s father, Peter would have been 61 years old at Alfred’s birth. If Jacob were Alfred’s father, Jacob would have been 46 years old at Alfred’s birth, an age that initially seems more plausible. However, Alfred went by the name Alfred Peter Stoesz or A.P. Stoesz, suggesting Peter was his father. Or is there another explanation?

If anyone has clues to the Peter Stoesz family letters or any information about Dr. Alfred Peter Stoesz please contact Conrad Stoesz at cstoesz@mbconf.ca.

Endnotes

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A letter by Ältester Cornelius Regier (1742-1794) Describing his Faith Struggles

Abram Buhler, Warman, Saskatchewan

Historical Context (eds.)

This letter was written in 1773 by Cornelius Regier, the leading minister (*Ältester*) in the Rosenort Mennonite Church, in West Prussia to Abraham Buhler, a fellow minister in his church. The Rosenort Church was one of the largest in West Prussia. In 1755, when the church celebrated its first Communion in the first building the government allowed them to construct, 1,566 members were present. In 1787 the baptized membership had increased to 1,836 people. So when Regier expressed dismay in the letter about taking on the task of *Ältester*, he realized he was taking on the care of a large number of people.

This letter was written one year after Prussia took this region from Poland, and Mennonites came under Prussian rule. This is also five years before the first group of Mennonites emigrated to Russia to found the Chortitza colony. So the letter reflects some of the anxiety in the community about the future of the Mennonite churches in Prussia, since under Prussian rule it was more difficult for Mennonites to maintain their historic beliefs in peace and non-resistance.

It is also noteworthy that descendants of the two ministers, Regier and Buhler, many years later, were leading ministers (*Ältester*) of two quite different churches (*Gemeinden*) in Saskatchewan. Buhler emigrated to the Chortitza settlement in Russia, and when it founded the daughter colony, Bergthal, in 1836, Buhler moved there. In the 1870s, when the Bergthal colony migrated to Manitoba, his family was part of the group. In the 1890s, when a part of the Bergthal settlement in Manitoba moved to the area north of Saskatoon in what is now Saskatchewan, the Buhler family migrated again. Thus it was that in 1949, Abram J. Buhler, a descendant of Abraham Buhler to whom the letter was addressed, was ordained *Ältester* of the Bergthal Mennonite

Church of Saskatchewan, one of the more conservative, or conserving, Mennonite churches in Saskatchewan.

Cornelius Regier's history was quite different. He died on his trip to the Chortitza settlement in Russia to try to resolve leadership problems. His family remained in Prussia. They were part of the Mennonites' valiant attempt to be true to their identity under intense nationalistic pressures from Prussia. After 1871, when Prussia was unified with the other German states to form a united German empire, Mennonites lost their right to be exempted from military service. Most Mennonites in the former Prussia accommodated to this new situation, but some emigrated. In the 1890s, Peter Regier, the *Ältester* of the Rosenort Mennonite Church in Prussia, and a descendent of Cornelius Regier, emigrated to Saskatchewan with a sizeable minority of his congregation; the majority stayed in Prussia. In Saskatchewan Regier became *Ältester* of the Rosenort Mennonite Church, one of the most progressive of Mennonite churches in Canada. It founded Rosthern Junior College and was one of the groups founding the Conference of Mennonites in Western Canada in 1902.

Thus the descendants of these two ministers in the Rosenort Mennonite Church in West Prussia in the 1770s took two very different migration routes, and their descendants became leaders of two quite different churches in Saskatchewan; one conservative and the other progressive.

Introduction

Cornelius Regier of Heuboden, Prussia wrote his life story in a letter to Reverend Abraham Buhler who had been influential in his conversion. It is written in the old German style with long flowery sentences, which makes translation difficult. The date was 1773.

This letter has been in our family for over two centuries, first copied in 1874



Ältester Abram J. Buhler was a descendant of Abraham Buhler, a fellow minister recipient of Cornelius Regier's letter. He was elected Ältester in the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church in 1949. Photo Credit: Preservings 22 (June, 2003): 101.

by my great grandfather, Johan Buhler of Neuendorf, Chortitza, who brought it to Canada. In 1974 my father, Abram J. Buhler, transcribed it again using English letters. Now I will do my best to translate it into English, because I believe it is an important piece of Mennonite history.

Cornelius Regier became the *Ältester* (bishop) of the Rosenort congregation near Heuboden and died during a trip to the new settlement at Chortitza, Russia, where he was going to arbitrate differences in the church.

As I understand it, his descendant, Peter Regier, became *Ältester* also in the Rosenort Church. In 1893 he moved to Manitoba and in the following year came to Tiefengrund in the Rosthern area, and established the Rosenort Church of Saskatchewan. My father, Abram J. Buhler, descendant of the Abraham Buhler in the letter, became the *Ältester* of the Bergthal Church of Saskatchewan in 1949, not many miles from Tiefengrund.

The Letter

My dear friend Abraham Buhler!

Your loving, very acceptable and encouraging letter has arrived at the right time, and in its uplifting contents I have seen, and with great pleasure observed, the friendliness and love of God, which is evident in your soul in great measure. My wish for you is that you may be faithful unto death in the things concerning God and Jesus Christ, which I truly trust will be the case.

Yes, I say many thanks for your account of how the Lord Jesus has at all times led you and for the good teaching you provided. I look forward to coming as far in the ways of the Lord as you have. I am still at the beginning; however, I hope that the love of Jesus will not depart from following and enlightening me, since He is the true light that came into this world to lighten all mankind (John 1:9). This is my wish, prayer and desire.

It has been my desire to write to you about the leading of my soul from my youth and to reveal my unworthy condition to you. I declare that I have been led to do so. The reason that I have procrastinated so long is partly due to many troubles and hindrances, the greatest of which has been the unworthiness I feel. Please interpret this all in love. O Lord, allow this all be done to your glory.

When my parents started me in school as a boy, I was naughty. I knew how to take advantage of situations and made jokes in front of other students. After this had gone on awhile and my conscience bothered me, our loving God won my love and revealed His saving grace to me.

With His great friendship and love, He revealed to me that all my worldly friends and deeds were vanity. I had the feeling I must die. Woe unto me if I am not accepted by God's grace. I also had other thoughts of despair.

These thoughts kept knocking at my heart's door, even though I tried to ignore them, but our loving God kept on until



Ältester Peter Regier (1851-1925) migrated to Canada in the 1890s when the Prussian Mennonites were gradually giving up the principle of nonresistance. He was a descendent of Ältester Cornelius Regier through a successive chain of Ältester. (father, Peter (1825-1897); grandfather, Peter (1798-1856); great grandfather, Abraham (1774-1851); great great grandfather, Cornelius the writer of the letter. Image Source: GAMEO.

I could not stop them and I had to believe it was the truth. Once I was convinced, my desire was to love Jesus and be like Him.

Since my parents lived in Rosenort, it so happened that one Sunday I went to church with them in Rosenort. *Ohm* (minister) Abraham Buhler preached from the words from Jeremiah 14: 7-9:

O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, act for your name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against you O hope of Israel, the savior in time of trouble, why should you be as a stranger in the land and as a wayfaring man that turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be as a man confused, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet you, O Lord, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; leave us not.

With these words he presented a very sharp repentance message and this was the first sermon I had listened to with my heart. It was not without fruit. At that time I was approximately 13 or 14 years of age and from that time on I had a desire and love for God's word. I especially wanted to hear Abraham Buhler preach. I would not let a Sunday go by without hearing him.

His words echoed so deep in my heart that I wrote pages full of my thoughts, and these were not without effect upon my soul. With God's help it became a driving force in my life. The usual friends in whom I had earlier found pleasure were now bitter to my soul. When I saw them coming, I would hide in the outhouse in the garden, filling my time with prayer and singing in loneliness.

Although I was not without doubts that God would hear my prayers and was besieged with temptations, yet it was a sweet pleasure with my God, for this was the first love where God blessed me with His kiss of peace, and through this revealed His friendship which I cherished for a time.

While I was feeding the cattle one winter's day, I determined to read through the Bible. As I was reading in the books of the kings of Israel and Judah, I rejoiced when reading about the wise kings and was saddened by those that sinned; even as you have experienced with your people.

I finally determined to be baptized and join the church. After my baptism I thought to myself, 'Now you will have to serve the Lord with more zeal.' But I fell into depression and instead of being active for God, I became lukewarm and forgot my first love. I again started to keep company with my old friends from whom I had parted. I had the reputation of being a good man, but I fell so low that I still can't forget and often sigh with David, "O Lord, remember not the sins of my youth."

In 1764 I was married in our Heuboden church. Since a minister was needed, it pleased our loving God to have me and my brother Peter Regier elected to serve God's word. This brought with it doubts, especially when considering my unworthiness. After three weeks I presented my first message from the words that Jesus preached in Mark 1:15, "The time

is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel."

I thank God for the gift of memorization, with which our loving God has blessed me. But, my speaking was not with the true spirit's power. I well knew the way to Jesus and also how to present this way so a poor soul could find grace, but I was slack in beseeching the Lord in prayer. I was hanging on to both sides, for I had the reputation of having many talents and was famed for my sermons. So I was satisfied.

Some members of the Tiegenhoff church had lost their love for Jesus and this affected some of our members who then came to me for advice. This awoke in me anew a stirring so that I again searched for Jesus, but not without fear and anxiety until I felt that Jesus would offer me grace. Then this hope fell away because I had left the first love.

During this time of alternating thunder clouds and sunshine, I was encouraged to entrust my sermons and myself wholly to God, and not write them out, but speak the words that the Lord Jesus would give me at that hour.

This advice seemed good, but I lacked faith and confidence in Jesus and could not put it into practice. It happened that G. W. came and told me of his experience. He had also felt the spirit tell him to preach the words that Jesus provided at the moment. He had doubted, but finally tried it, relying on God's grace. God then had assisted him.

This was a new demand on my heart, 'Won't you also trust Jesus who can help you in small things as well as great?' So it happened that, as we approached Christmas and it was my turn to preach, I experienced a soft inner urge to trust Jesus to supply the words I should speak. Yet, this caused a debate in my soul until the day came.

Yes, the first day I took a written message based on Luke 2:1-14 which I had used previously. In the afternoon I determined to use a different text the next day, but when I came home I had a guest who hindered my resolve. This saddened me, and he stayed for the night. With this lonely feeling I could not gain victory in prayer and supplication from Jesus. The hope I had enjoyed sank within me and I decided to keep on as before. When I awoke the second holiday, I again was convicted to fully trust Jesus and in response to His word throw out the net. So I resolved to speak on Luke 2:15-20 about the shepherd's zeal to find and worship Jesus, but I was still in doubt as I prepared to speak.

In spite of my doubt I went ahead and thought, "Now you will see what our loving God will do with you." For the opening I chose the words of the dying Jacob, "Lord I wait on your salvation." My intention was to start with Jacob's words and speak as much as the Lord would give me.

As I began to preach I felt joy and when I read the text I had confidence that mouth and words would be supplied from Jesus.

On the third day I chose a different text and I experienced victory again, but after Jesus had brought me unworthily thus far, the enemy sought to rob me and fill me with pride. There now arose in me such proud thoughts. 'Look, now you are someone! Grace such as this God only imparts sparingly and now you are among those who experience special favor.' Thoughts like these and others plagued me often, and I judged those who spoke of this as a strange thing until I became fearful of losing God's grace. I besought my Jesus in humility not to let me fall into this snare, but to always keep me humble and small until I felt His help to rid me of this horrible pride. The

dear Savior has helped me that to this hour I can trust and rely on Him in faith to speak whatever His love demands.

In 1770 it pleased our loving God to receive my father-in-law through a natural death after he had served as *Ältester* in our *Gemeinde* (church) for almost 30 years. This caused me no small anxiety, since I wondered whether this position might fall to me, for which I felt much too unworthy. However, that summer I was elected *Ältester*. How I felt is hard to describe. I was only 27 years of age. I fell into depression and lost all courage and trust in Jesus. I was tossed about like a ship in a violent storm with no anchor.

When I came home I went into my room, fell on my knees and prayed to Jesus for His grace. It seemed the only answer I got was, 'You are far too great a sinner. This office is to your damnation. You have received forgiveness from your sins, but in this position you will be lost, and there is no mercy for you.'

While these thoughts were playing in my conscience, I was determined to go to the *Ältester* who had led the election, namely Dirk Thiessen, and refuse to accept the role. After reaching this conclusion, I felt someone saying to me, 'Wait a while and think this through.'

With these thoughts I refrained from resigning, for the words of Paul in 1 Timothy 3:2-4 rang in my heart, "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, an apt teacher, not given to wine, not violent, not a lover of money, patient, not a brawler, not covetous, one that rules well his own house, having his children in submission with all gravity." I also remembered the verdict to the church of Sardis, "You have a name that you live, and yet are dead."

So I lived for a time without hope and comfort and had little or no reason to believe that God would be merciful and forgive my sins. Yes, all the comfort which the Lord had granted through His grace was now completely gone. When I considered what an example I should be, and faultless, then my courage sank. I thought that if I did not have this heavy responsibility, I could at least be saved –but not now.

In God's word I found, "As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live," Ezekiel 33:11. Then I thought, I will, and if God wants all sinners to repent then I must accept this and say, "Dear God, if you don't want the death of sinners; rather that all men repent and live for you, then you dear God, do this to me and make me blessed. I do want your blessing so much, my God. You know my heart and condition better than I can say. If I can't obtain salvation in my position, then please release me from my role as *Ältester*. I give you my soul, body and life, make me your possession."

This gave me some comfort and, having entrusted myself into His care, I asked him to mold me into his will. In Zechariah chapter 3 is the account where the high priest Joshua had filthy clothes. The angel told him to remove them and he was cleansed from his sins. I prayed that my Jesus would forgive my sins for His love's sake and clothe me with His righteousness that I might become more like him, which is still my daily desire and prayer.

Oh, if only man would, in true knowledge, zeal, faithfulness and love, earnestly seek to become clothed with Jesus Christ, to bind and wed himself with joy and true faith with Jesus in judgment and eternity. I have understood from your writing that you are clothed therewith and have joy in your peace with God.

So often when the dark clouds gather and the dark days hover over my soul, I say, 'I come in misery and pain, oh Lord, acknowledge my misery and distress and forgive all my sins which are ever before me.'

I have to confess that very often I could not claim joy and peace with God in my soul, but I thank my God that I can withstand the tempter through the grace of Jesus.

*When I in danger pray and sing,
Then will my heart rejoicing ring;
Your Spirit freely tells me this
will be a foretaste of heaven's bliss.*

With this, I strengthened my belief and in my soul rejoiced that I lived in Jesus' grace, and comforted myself that as long as I lived in this tabernacle, His grace was sufficient for my soul. This is my daily prayer, desire and supplication: that I might be ever faithful. Oh, my Lord Jesus, bless me herewith

and make me faithful; may we always continue in prayer to God in the name of Jesus that He will make us true and steadfast.

Prayer is necessary at all times. Yes, may He enlighten us that we will do what is right in all things and learn to have compassion for our weak neighbour. Through our prayers, example and counsel may we help him that we might learn to receive the weak in his weakness and not confuse his faith, but point him to Jesus. Yes, may we from the depth of our hearts desire to lead the wandering soul to the good shepherd who will gladly receive him.

In humility I pray that this, my unworthy writing, will in love indicate my feelings. The reason I did not write sooner was due to my feeling unworthy, but since you so openly wrote of your life, my heartfelt love demands it of me. I hope that you will at an opportune time honor me with a letter.

After greeting you in the name of Jesus, I want to entrust you into His care and remain your friend and brother.

Cornelius Regier, Alt Muenchterfeld, 11 February 1773

The Legacy of Bishop (Ältester) David Schulz

A Presentation to the Altona Historical Society

March 5, 2013

David Schroeder, CMU Professor emeritus, Winnipeg

Early Years

David Schulz was born March 11, 1897 in Weidenfeld, Manitoba. His parents were David and Helena Schulz. His father died within the first few months of David's life. His mother then married Heinrich D. Dueck from the village of Schoenthal near Altona, who had recently come from the East Reserve.

Schulz received his elementary education in the Schoenthal school where the family moved when his mother remarried (D. Schulz, p.1). Later, two years of high school at the Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI) in Altona and a winter at the Winkler Bible Institute were added. He taught two years at the Reichenbach S.D. near Rosenfeld after completing his MEI training.

His step-father, Heinrich Dueck, was associated with the *Waisenamt* (Mennonite Orphans Bureau, and Savings and Loan institution) as early as 1889. Since Dueck conducted business from his home, Schulz got to meet people who were coming from the East Reserve as well as people from the West Reserve (Gerbrandt, p. 1).

At nineteen years of age Schulz had blood poisoning in his leg (David, p. 1). He suffered three weeks at home and then another four weeks at St. Boniface Hospital. It was here that he wrestled with the meaning of life and where he found



David Schulz was born in Weidenfeld, but grew up in Schoenthal, near Altona. He became Ältester of the Berthaler Church in 1926. Image Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.

forgiveness and peace with God. In 1917 he was baptized in the Bergthal Mennonite Church upon his confession of faith by Ältester (bishop) Jacob Hoeppner (David, p. 2).

In 1919 David married Tina (Katharina) Friesen of Schoenthal, daughter of Bernhard and Agatha Friesen. David and Tina Schulz had a large family: Leonard (1922), Ben (1924), Albert (1926), David Harold (1928), Menno (1930), Waldo Henry (1932), Linda Clara (1933), and Victor (1937). Olga was added in 1947 at age thirteen.

After Schulz completed his high school and teacher training, he taught in the Reichenbach School District. (Gerbrandt, p. 2) and at Queens' Centre near Kane. From 1920 to 1926 the Schulzes rented a small farm from their parents. When David was called to be the Ältester of the Bergthal Mennonite Church, they bought a farm in the Weidenfeld S.D. from Isaac Funk. The house burned down before possession, and so they bought a house from Jacob Toews which they

moved onto the property (Tina, p.22). Next, they purchased the Peter Schroeder farm in Weidenfeld. In 1951 the Schulz family moved to Altona and farmed the property from town during the years 1951-1961 (David, p. 8). David Schulz died November 19, 1976.

The legacy of a dual call and ministry

The accepted pattern for a person's call to the ministry in the Sommerfelder and Bergthaler Mennonite Church was that the congregation called the minister, and after much soul searching, the person called finally yielded to the call of God. The wife was expected to support her husband in this ministry. This is not exactly how it happened for David and Tina Schulz. They felt called of the Lord even before the call came from the church. They took the call from the church as a confirmation of their inner call.

Tina was prepared for her life of ministry with her husband through various events. She grew up in a very pious and religious home. She acquired an unshakable faith through the struggles of life and death in her family, especially the death of a younger sister, and the illness and death of her father of a brain tumor or aneurysm. She made a conscious commitment to Christ early in life and never doubted God's goodness. She committed many of the hymns of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church's *Gesangbuch* (hymnbook) to memory. These songs were a spiritual comfort and strength to her in difficult times, for early in life she began to suffer annually from a bronchial infection that caused her to be confined to bed for periods of time. She was baptized on the confession of her faith by Ältester Abram Derksen of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church and according to Henry Gerbrandt (p.3), she started singing while being baptized.

Tina was prepared for the transition from the Sommerfelder Church to the Bergthaler Church by her friendship with the William Dueck girls in the Schoenthal district. They attended MEI *Jugendverein* evenings (youth church services) together (Gerbrandt, p. 2). This furthered her interest in poetry, singing and drama, and other youth activities. Schulz indicated that he liked that Tina accepted Christ early in life and that she grew up in a Christian home (David, p. 2). He had the faith that she would help him in his ministry.

After David and Tina were married in 1919 in the Bergthaler Mennonite Church, they chose to serve as teachers in the Queen Centre School District southeast of Kane. They started a Sunday school, organized a *Jugendverein* and a choir in the district (Tina, p. 18). They also worked together in the *Jugendverein* in Rosenfeld (Tina, p. 20). It is at Kane that David preached his first sermon.

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church's call to the ministry to Schulz in 1920 presented a vocational crisis for David and Tina. They were much in prayer about this call, and about the changes that would have to be made to accept it. They chose to leave teaching and to find a farm to support them in their ministry. Thus David Schulz was ordained as a minister in Altona on September 26, 1920, together with his brother-in-law, Peter B. Friesen.

David and Tina soon became a strong visitational team. She accompanied David on these visits, and not only when he visited widows. Tina was especially gifted in their visits to the sick and bereaved. She said that she found it rejuvenating to team up with David in his visits to the bereaved and the dying, and to pray and sing with them (Gerbrandt, 15). She found ways to accompany David even as the family grew and home responsibilities increased. It was especially difficult when chicken pox, scarlet fever, and mumps visited the home (Tina, p.26-28).

Their ministry was a team ministry, even though it did not have that name at the time. Tina saw to it that David always appeared in perfect attire in his public roles, but she did more than that. She was an active participant in his ministry. I suspect that she was not only a good listener, but knew the people well and had good advice to give where needed.

The Legacy of persuasive proclamation

In his memoirs Schulz apologized for his sermons being weak and poorly done (David, p.3), but that evaluation depends on what measurements are used. His sermons were not so-called topical or exegetical sermons, yet they clearly presented the gospel of salvation and applied Scripture to every-day life. The sermons were always sincere, intimate, relevant to the situation, and short. People might not remember the text he used, or the Scriptures he quoted, but they never forgot that they had been addressed by the Word of God. This is well documented by Henry Gerbrandt in his unpublished manuscript on David Schulz (Ch. II).

It is not surprising that in retrospect Schulz thought his sermons were weak. He did not really have time to study and work at his sermons because of his many duties in the Church, plus the demands of the farm and the needs of a large family.

The legacy of a true and gifted Ältester (Bishop)

In 1908 Jacob Hoeppner of Winkler had in mind to take over the leadership of the Bergthal Church from the aging Johann Funk and offered to do so in a letter written to each family in the church. After several months, the Ministerial Body met and decided that, if he carried out his plans, there would be a split in the church and he would not be able to claim any of the church buildings. Things were smoothed over somehow and nothing came of Hoeppner's proposal.

In 1911 the Ministerial asked Funk to retire and Hoeppner was ordained Ältester of the Bergthaler Church. In 1920, after nine years as leader of the church, Hoeppner was ready to retire from his office. However, the vote for a new or assistant Ältester was not held until November 1925. In a decisive vote (84 to 31) David Schulz was asked to become the Ältester of the Bergthaler church. The leadership of the church was turned over



Tina (Katharina) Friesen also grew up in Schoenthal and her and David were married in 1919. She grew up in the Sommerfelder Church. Image Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.

to him at the Ministerial meeting on October 5, 1926 (David, p. 4). David Schulz dedicated himself fully to the responsibilities of an *Ältester* of a growing church, serving in this role from 1926 to 1962. The challenges were many and often difficult, but he met them with strength and integrity.

Schulz did not keep accurate count of all the sermons he preached, the catechism classes he taught, the baptisms he performed, the weddings at which he officiated, the funerals he conducted, and the communions he officiated at. He estimated he had conducted at least 200 weddings and presided at 200 funerals (David, p. 3). Baptisms and communion cups served were no doubt in the thousands.

Under his leadership the church grew from having three main centres (Altona, Winkler, and Edenburg) to some fifteen additional meeting places (Morden, Plum Coulee, Lowe Farm, Spenser, Steinbach, Morris, Carman, Graysville, Homewood, Gretna, Halbstadt, Kane, McGregor, Gladstone, and Austin) (David, p.5). The baptized membership grew from about 700 to more than 3,000.

To work together with the increasing number of ministers and deacons, and always chairing the *Bruderschaft* meetings (monthly meetings of ministers and deacons), without any major interruptions from 1926 to 1962, is a credit to his ability to work with the ministers and meet the needs of the church.

As *Ältester*, Schulz represented the church at Manitoba and Canadian conferences. This included his involvement in the Bible conferences that had been carried on since the early 1900s, attendance at the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) where he was vice-chair in the years 1953-1958, and the establishment and development of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba. It also meant representing the Bergthalter Church at the Mennonite World Conferences (David, p. 8).

A legacy of evangelistic concern and action

David Schulz's interest in personal salvation was the basis of his preaching. The system of rotating the preachers so that they ministered in all of the congregations was well-suited to his messages. Many persons found faith through his preaching and were then baptized by him and added to the Bergthalter church. He reminded his co-workers of their responsibility to evangelize.

So significant was the call to faith that week-long evangelistic meetings (*Evangelizationswochen*) were held annually in the various meeting places. Much of the effectiveness of his message rested on the personal way he met old and young after the message. He made them realize that he had spoken to them personally. These week-long evangelism meetings were not new with Schulz. They had been a characteristic of the Bergthalter Church since it began in 1892. Schultz, however, gave these meetings new meaning and life. (Gerbrandt Ch. V).

At times outside evangelists were invited to present these evangelistic messages. During the mid 1930s, the messages of Isaac P. Friesen of Rosthern, Saskatchewan in the Winkler area resulted in a great religious awakening, which led to the institution of a special *Prüfungsstunde*, a time of examination prior to baptism.

Friesen's preaching lead to the break-up of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, with many people leaving to establish the Rudnerweider Mennonite Church. Other Sommerfelder Church members decided to join the Bergthalter Mennonite Church, largely because of the warm, invitational spirit projected by Schultz. When the Rudnerweider Church organized, Schulz consented to ordain William Falk as its *Ältester*.

Schulz participated in the Southern Manitoba Crusade for Christ in the 1950s. The committee representing most of the



The Bergthalter Church Lehrdienst or Ministerial in 1965. The Ministerial was the spiritual and organizational leadership body of the Church. Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Center Archives.

Mennonite churches in southern Manitoba invited (Old) Mennonite evangelist George Brunk, with his huge tent, chairs, piano, organ, and living accommodation for some of his crew, to southern Manitoba. Many people came forward at these meetings for spiritual counseling. However, Brunk's emphasis on proper clothing for women and proper forms of piety caused David Schulz to confront and challenge him to preach the gospel and stay out of "our women's hair and skirts!" (Gerbrandt, p. 3) He did not accept what he thought was Brunk's legalism. There were fewer objections to evangelists such as J. Toews, Leo Janz, and Myron Augsburger who were invited to preach in southern Manitoba in the following years.

Soon, however, Schulz and others felt that in these mass evangelistic services there was too much emphasis on the date of conversion and on counting the number of conversions at each session. Also, often the same people came forward at each campaign, thus indicating a rather shallow commitment (Gerbrandt, p. 3). Furthermore, the mass campaigns had the effect of removing evangelism from the local church and this was certainly not what Schulz wanted to see happening.

The other area in which David Schulz had concerns, and to which he dedicated a lot of his time, was home and foreign mission. The gospel was not only to be preached locally, but wherever there were people who had not heard or responded to the Word of God. This led to work in Mexico and Northern Manitoba under the Mennonite Pioneer Mission.

He was not happy, however, that the General Conference Mennonite Church saw Canada as a Home Mission area by financially supporting some of the new immigrant ministers. He felt supporting immigrant ministers was the responsibility of the Canadian churches. He did, however, support foreign

missions through the General Conference, and some of the earliest Canadian missionaries to India and Africa came from the Bergthaler Church.

A legacy of support for education

Schulz began his ministry as a teacher. He had two years of education at the MEI and also attended the Winkler Bible Institute for a winter. He could see that teaching and preaching needed to be improved within the church. When the Winkler Bible Institute began in the fall of 1925, the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church and the Bergthaler Church both supported it. A. H. Unruh, the first principal of the Institute, indicated that the school had its beginning after a series of Bible presentations at the Bergthaler Church in Winkler. The *Ältester* of the Bergthaler Church provided the land for the school's first buildings. Young people from both churches attended. When it became evident to the Bergthaler Church that the Bible Institute was to remain under the sole control of the Mennonite Brethren, and that the Mennonite Brethren teachers were using the institution to proselytize Bergthaler students to join the MB Church, David Schulz and his ministers felt they had to look elsewhere for the educational needs of the Bergthaler Church.

David Schulz joined with Johann Bueckert, *Ältester* of the Blumenorter Mennonite Church to establish a Bible school which would more adequately meet the needs of their churches. Elim Bible Institute was established in 1929 and located in the facilities of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna. Johann Enns, a minister from Ste. Elizabeth, Manitoba was appointed as the first teacher.

Elim Bible Institute operated for two years, closed for five years due to the Depression, and re-opened in 1936 at the MCI,



Students in front of Mennonite Educational Institute, Altona, Manitoba. David Schulz had attended the school for two years and was a dedicated supporter of church-based education. Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.



Originally built by Johann Schwartz as a home for his family in 1902, in later years this building served as the residence for the students at Elim Bible Institute. The building is still standing and is now known as "Gallery in the Park", an art gallery and sculpture garden in Altona, Manitoba. Photo credit: Gordon Goldsborough, Manitoba History.

again with the support of the Bergthaler and Blumenorter churches. In 1940 Elim moved to Altona. Bergthaler and Blumenorter ministers served as teachers, and Schulz served on the board for many years. The school served the Bergthaler Church the way Schulz had envisioned it would (Gerbrandt, Ch. VI).

The MEI in Altona, in which David and Tina Schulz attended high school, burned down in 1928, two years after Schulz was ordained as *Ältester*. The school was not rebuilt. When the Schulz children were of high school age, several of them studied at the MCI in Gretna.

David Schulz was actively involved in the founding of Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC). In 1930 he was elected to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada *Schulkomitee* (School Committee). This committee regularly reported to the CMC until 1944. In 1936 the Conference established a *Höhere Bibelschulkomitee* (Advanced Bible School Committee) and Schulz was a member of this committee as well. It eventually evolved into the CMBC board, and Schulz served on it until 1955.

Initially the School Committee of the CMC tried to co-operate with the Mennonite Brethren to establish a college. The Mennonite Brethren had established the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) in Winnipeg in 1944. Though several CMC teachers taught at MBBC, co-operation in terms of governance seemed out of the question. The CMC then established CMBC and began classes in 1947.

Arnold Regier, from Newton Kansas, was appointed as the first President of CMBC. Schulz was not always happy with his leadership, because CMBC was not providing the support for churches that he was looking for, in the areas like support for the German language and preparation for pastors to work as lay persons in the church. He wanted well-trained ministers, yet spoke against the salaried ministry (Gerbrandt, Ch. VI). At the same time, however, he supported the school, including the idea that the CMBC budget be part of the Conference budget.

A Legacy of the German language

The two World Wars made it hard for churches to continue to use the German language. After World War I, the Manitoba government insisted on English as the language of instruction in primary and secondary schools. Thousands of Mennonites who refused to accept this requirement emigrated to Mexico and Paraguay. Others, like the Bergthaler Church, remained in Manitoba and sought to preserve the German language through its use in worship and Sunday School.

World War II made it even more difficult for Mennonites to maintain the German language, since speaking German suggested being pro-Hitler. Many Mennonites, however, feared that losing the German language would also mean the loss of Mennonite faith and culture. I personally argued at that time that one could change languages without changing one's faith. Now I think that those who feared the loss that would result from giving up the German language may have been more right than I thought, especially when I see how the use of English has brought with it the theology heard in much of the public media.

In any case, Schulz was dedicated to the quest to retain the use of German in the church. He would have liked CMBC to be more helpful in this by preparing students to be more proficient in the German language. But CMBC was a Canadian school and not all regions shared the urgency of placing that much emphasis on German.

Championing the *Privilegium*

Schulz championed the *Privilegium* the government had given Mennonites on August 13, 1873, in which the Canadian government promised that Mennonites would be exempted from military service. Since the Canadian government had kept its promise in World War I, he believed they should and would do so again in World War II. But when the Canadian government did not exempt Mennonite men, but required that Mennonite men appear before a judge to defend their request for Conscientious Objector (CO) status, Schulz supported the young men in every way possible.

During World War II Schulz was opposed to the 1920s Mennonite immigrants' offer to the Canadian government that Mennonite men do alternative service in lieu of military service. He was aware that in Russia Mennonites had done alternate service in forestry work and had provided medical aid at the army front lines in time of war. But Schulz was insistent that Mennonites should be completely exempted from military service – even alternative service.

This position by Schulz was opposed by the CMC leaders, most of whom were 1920s immigrants, and by B. B. Janz, a prominent Mennonite Brethren leader. Schulz was supported by the *Ältesten* of the churches that had immigrated in the 1870s, namely, the Rudnerweider, Sommerfelder, Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, Holdeman, Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, and Chortitzer. The *Ältesten* of these churches formed a committee (Council of Bishops or *Ältesten Kommittee*) to negotiate with the government for complete exemption. The leaders of the 1920s immigrants formed their own committee, which negotiated with the Canadian government and offered alternative service. Even though both sides had met together before the war on May 15, 1939, and had hoped to speak with a common voice to the government, this did not happen.

Schulz's stance on the issue of alternative service was interpreted by some to mean that he was biased against the

1920s immigrants. This was hardly the case, since a number of ministers in the Bergthalter Church were 1920s immigrants, and Schulz worked closely and well with them. At least one group of the 1920s Mennonite immigrants, the Blumenorter Mennonite Church, asked to be included in the Council of Bishops, and their request was accepted.

On February 14, 1941 the Canadian government decreed that all Mennonite men of military age could have the option of doing alternative service, and gave the executive of the Council of Bishops (Peter Toews, David Schulz and Jacob F. Barkman) three choices: 1) medical work under military training and service, but without arms; 2) hospital and first aid service for the wounded but under military supervision and 3) labour and work in parks, fire-fighting, and road construction under civil supervision. The Council of Bishops chose the third option.

What had already become clear was that the World War I option of full exemption from military service was no longer available as a form of recognizing the *Privilegium*. All applicants for CO status would have to appear before a judge in a court hearing and be questioned on their beliefs. For Schulz this meant many days of attending court sessions and advocating for persons who applied to stay on the farm or serve in a CO camp.



Conscientious Objector card belonging to David M. Stoesz of Altona, Manitoba, signed 13 May 1918 by Abraham Doersken, a bishop of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church.

Intercessions by Schulz and other *Ältesten* were especially important for those who were denied CO status and were in danger of being sent to prison. For Schulz this sometimes meant five trips to Winnipeg in a week. Gerbrandt (Ch. VII, p.3) indicates that Schulz and his colleagues worked tirelessly to keep Mennonite boys out of the military and out of prison. When the men were given their CO status and their military service was "postponed," Schulz and his colleagues visited the persons serving in the camps.

During this time, David Schulz can be seen as the link between the conservative cluster of Mennonite churches and the CMC. Schulz maintained good relations with members of the Bishops Council, as well as with the leaders of the CMC, most of whom were more recent immigrants.

After the war Schulz, together with others, sought to keep the peace and service emphasis alive by conducting annual Inter-Mennonite Peace Conferences in both eastern and western Manitoba. In 1950 a Peace Committee was established on which David Schulz was an active member (Anna Ens, *Unity*,

p.106). The full impact of this work came with the Peace and Service work of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

A legacy of Relief and Rehabilitation

The difficulties in working together in the Alternative Service Program also caused the conservative Council of Bishops to break with the newly formed Mennonite Central Relief Committee (MCRC) headed by Bishop B. B. Janz of the Mennonite Brethren and Bishop David Toews of CMC. Janz and Toews sought to include the churches represented by the Bishops Council in the newly formed MCRC in a meeting on May 28, 1941, but in this effort they were not successful (Harder, Toews p. 246). The churches of the Bishops Council in Manitoba formed the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee (CMRC). Many thought this break was unnecessary, but Schulz defended it.

Fortunately, these two streams came together later in the formation of MCC Canada in 1964. Thus the churches from the 1870s and 1920s immigrant groups were able to co-operate within MCC Canada in its relief and rehabilitation work. In later years, the first MCC Thrift Store was begun in Altona. From this beginning in a centre where the Bergthalter Church is strong, Thrift Stores have spread throughout Canada and the USA.

Meeting the challenges of an Era

David Schulz began his ministry in 1926, almost a decade after World War I had come to an end, when the teaching of religion and German had been taken out of the elementary schools, and after about 6,000 Mennonites from Manitoba had emigrated to Mexico and Paraguay, and about an equal number of Mennonite immigrants from Russia were making their home in Manitoba.

There was the typhoid epidemic in Southern Manitoba that needed attention and the effects of the Depression years needed to be overcome. According to Ted Regier, David Schulz and J. J. Siemens, an Altona area farmer and businessman, had different approaches to the Depression. Schulz tried to help the members of the church and Siemens the members of the total community (Regier, p. 140). But this is not entirely the case, since Schulz was active in organizations that served the community far beyond his own church. He helped establish the Altona Hospital, the Ebenezer Home for the Aged, Eden Mental Health Centre in Winkler, and radio station CFAM in Altona (David Schulz – GAMEO).

Both Siemens and Schulz were strong leaders, though at times they were also stubborn. One speculates what could have happened if they would have worked together rather than against each other. As it was, each person sought the best for the Mennonite people, but without regard to the other's work.

World War II heightened the language question and the difference in the experience of the early and later immigrant groups with respect to military service, alternative service, and world relief. The inability to present a united front to the government was not only painful, but brought to the fore differences that would take years to overcome. On the other hand, the different organizations cemented some relationships that were fruitful once all the separate organizations became united in MCC Canada.

The education question was a constant concern. Early attempts to work together fell apart, but to duplicate education



Ebenezer Home for the Aged officially opened on June 10, 1962 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Manitoba Premier Duff Roblin.
Image credit: Altona Archives, Collection 1, #20.

at all levels (high school, Bible school, and higher education) was becoming much too expensive. Solutions would have to come after Schulz' time.

From the earliest times of his ministry, Schulz was a farmer and had to look after his farm in addition to the constant work of the church. At the same time he insisted on the lay ministry. He wanted well-trained pastors but insisted that they do this as lay ministers. This pattern was difficult for young ministers if they did not already own land.

David Schulz became ill at the CMC annual conference held in St. Catherines, Ontario, in 1962. It was a malady from which he never fully recovered. He could still give counsel from his home or bed, but active leadership of the whole Bergthaler church was no longer possible.

The things that troubled David Schulz most in his last years were not of his own making, or that of the Bergthaler Church. First, the very success of the church made it impossible to have one bishop do all the work of catechism instruction, baptisms, communion, weddings, burials, preaching, farming, etc. Pressures were building that required more bishops to take care of all the work that needed to be done, and, if these offices were added, what should their responsibilities or powers be? Should each meeting center have its own bishop? If so, then the Bergthaler Church would in essence become another Conference, which was hardly necessary.

Second, relations to other levels of conferences became a problem. How should the Bergthaler Church relate to the General Conference, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (of which they were co-founders) and the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba? Was the Bergthaler "conference" still needed? In light of this, the dismantling of the Bergthaler Church in 1969 came as no surprise.

Third, the question of whether the understanding of the function of a bishop was really biblical or necessary in relation to the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, was a problem not only for the Bergthaler Church, but for all churches that had retained the bishop system of organization. This had already become clear to the Bergthaler Church when four other

bishops were ordained to assist Bishop Schulz in his work.

Fourth, the use of the English language in church services could not be postponed forever, even though the use of German was bolstered by new immigrations after World War II. The language question was left to take its course in every congregation.

Fifth, already in his lifetime the divisions that had been so painful during the war were being overcome when the MCRC and CMRC joined to form MCC Canada.

Conclusion

David Schulz was a giant among Canadian Mennonite leaders. His ability to provide inspirational leadership, his love for his people, his people's love for him, his ability to work with the conservatives in the *Ältesten* Committee on the one hand, and with the new immigrants in the CMC on the other, his involvement in numerous community projects, his pastoral care, and his inspirational leadership all testify to a man who expressed the best in servant leadership for his time.

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Abe and Sally Rempel

Reflections by their son James Rempel at their 50th Wedding Anniversary
Winkler, Manitoba - May 5, 2013

After our parents were married they moved to a farm which was located about one mile north of Neuenberg. They had a dairy and grain farm, and lived on the farm for 36 years. They owned 620 acres. In 2001 they moved off the farm into a new house in Winkler, and have lived in Winkler for about 12 years. Crops were better in some years than others, but they never had a complete crop failure in all those years.

Our parents were involved in public life. Dad was involved with a grassland project in St. Claude for seven years, and in 1960 received a certificate for his participation and contribution to this project. At the age of 25, Dad was appointed secretary treasurer of Birkenhead School District. At the age of 26, he was elected trustee of the Birkenhead S. D. He served in both capacities until Garden Valley became a unitary division.

When Garden Valley became a unitary division, Dad was elected as trustee for Ward three of the new division. He was then appointed as chair of finance, and this position had its responsibilities and challenges. At the age of 29, Dad was elected vice president of the Garden Valley Trustee Association, and served for a number of years. In 1975, after being elected as a church minister, he relinquished his position as trustee on the board. In 1983 he ran for another term as trustee, and was elected by acclamation and served from 1983-1986. He was then chair of the Planning and Building Committee, and also served on other committees.

Our parents were also very involved in the church, and served for 49 years. Dad was a song leader (*Vorsänger*) for 11 years, and is now in his 28th year as a minister of the gospel. Mom served on the community sewing circle and on other community functions. She was also a Sunday School teacher for 15 years.

Dad served on the Salem Home Board of Directors for 12 years, six as treasurer, and one as chair. He also served on several committees. He was a director of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba Board of Directors for 12 years, serving

on the executive committee for six years, on the finance committee for five years, and vice chair for one year. Dad also served on the Kanadier Board of MCC Canada for 25 years. In 2002 our parents did a two and a half month MCC assignment in Mexico. Our dad served on the Winkler Resource Committee for a number of years and served on the Habitat for Humanity Board for two years.

In 1969 Dad and Rev. Abe Wiebe of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church were asked by MCC to assess the need for a documentation office in Winkler to assist Kanadier people with documentation work, mainly those moving to Canada from Mexico and South America. An office was opened. It was open two days a week, and Dad and Abe Wiebe each worked a day a week on a voluntary basis. After some time, a part-time staff person was hired, but Dad continued to assist in the office and did some work out of their home. Dad is still assisting people in this manner. An MCC Family Services Committee was formed to oversee the operations of the office, and Dad was chairman of this committee for about 10 years. In 2004 Dad was appointed director of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, and is still serving on that board today.

In 2012 Dad published a 218 page German book called the *Katechismus Erleuterung*, which he had written over a number of years. About 2,000 copies were sold in the first six months.

What is the secret to Dad's successful public life? It is not only the dedication and hard work he put into it. He had someone at home who would take care of things when he was not around – someone who would take care of the children, make meals for the numerous guests, keep the house in order, give him support when needed, and the list goes on. It is his wife, Sally, our mother who helped to make him successful. Let's remember that behind every successful man is usually a woman – a woman like our mom. We thank God for her and as you can see, she is still at his side after 50 years of marriage. Thank you, Dad and Mom, for all that you have done.

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Reflections

Steinbach during the Days of Reverend Peter D. Friesen, Pastor of the Kleine Gemeinde

Iris Reimer Nowakowski, Winnipeg, Manitoba



Rev. Peter D. Friesen was pastor of the Kleine Gemeinde Church in Steinbach during the 1940s. Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.

Sale" was born. Reverend Peter D. Friesen was probably never consulted, for the women knew that he was a reasonable and understanding man, and his wife was also most likely one of the group.

It was customary during my early childhood in the latter 1940s and early 1950s for women to do handiwork in their spare time. They crocheted doilies and tablecloths, knitted mittens, scarves, sweaters and baby girl dresses. Many embroidered whole sets of tea towels. The women met in the church basement many afternoons to make colourful quilts for themselves and for those in need. Not all of these items had a clearly designated purpose, so some cheerful, fun-loving woman must have suggested the idea of an auction sale and the annual "Ladies Sewing Circle Auction

As the only daughter of an older mother, I was allowed to accompany her to many women's gatherings and so it was that I, fun-loving and adventurous, walked with my parents down the centre of town to this annual event.

All the Sunday School curtains in the basement of the Kleine Gemeinde Church were drawn back to expose a hall-like



The Steinbach Kleine Gemeinde Church, c. 1940s. Image Credit: Ralph Friesen.



A view of Steinbach's Main Street in July, 1958. Image Credit: Ralph Friesen.

gathering place on Main Street. Chairs and benches were set up and one of the husbands was appointed as auctioneer. There was something to be had for every budget. A beautiful lace doily—what's the starting bid? A box of fudge—who will start me off at 25 cents? Everyone bought something. Everyone had fun. The men laughed and teased and tried to outbid each other, while the women looked on. Proud and pleased they knew that the proceeds would go to some of their favourite charities.

When all the items were sold, everyone gathered to buy homemade apple pie with ice cream. Medium strength coffee, derisively called *Kleinjemeinscha Plefke* by outsiders, made with water heated in the kitchen's *miagrope* (large cauldron) and served from huge metal kettles accompanied the luscious dessert.

Everyone enjoyed the fun, the laughter, and the friendship, maybe especially the lone little girl in attendance. I may just be the only person still alive who was ever there.

Though all of this was soon to change to a stricter pastoral oversight that eliminated much of the fun of events like this, it was allowed to happen under the kind and understanding eye of this gentle man, Rev. Peter D. Friesen.

The little girl in attendance at the auction sales was a curious, adventurous, and quiet observer. She often walked alone along Steinbach's Main Street to any of the stores that were of interest to her. She spent countless hours with her father at H. W. Reimers Ltd. looking at everything on both floors, in the mezzanine offices, and in the basement's defunct dairy room. Walking out back past the kerosene dispensers, the rope-worked elevator, the large weigh scales, and the grain bin, she went to watch the chickens in their coop.

She observed all the interesting customers who came to buy, sell or just to visit, and spit sunflower seed shells onto the floor in one of the two designated conversation areas that the store offered. She listened to conversations, learning very early on that if she was very quiet and unobtrusive the conversations sometimes got really interesting.

Eventually, she left and wandered further down Main Street to one or more places. In her explorations she'd often go to Mintie's Youngtown, the store owned by Marina Reimer's father, her Uncle Joe's Penner Electric, past Walt's Studio to see the photographs displayed in the window and across the



The H.W. Reimer Store was a prominent business on Steinbach's Main Street until the 1960s. Ben H. W. Reimer, the author's father, was a son of the founder, H. W. Reimer. He is picture here in a 1951 photo with his wife, Anna. Image Credits: Steinbach: Is there any place like it, 42 and Ralph Friesen.



Steinbach flour mill.



The Joe Penner family at Christmas, 1952. Image Credit: Ralph Friesen.



The author's uncle, Peter Janz and his family in the 1950s. Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.

street, kitty-corner to the “show” to see the movie posters.

Passing the church she soon came to the flour mill. Further on at the Penner home she’d glance left onto the porch to see if Mrs. Penner (J.D. and A.D.’s mother) with her coarse black hair net was sitting outside in the fresh air with her husband. She wandered past Jonas Friesen’s lumber business which had, if it was the Christmas season, an amazing, blinking decoration that said, “Merry Xmas”.

She crossed Lumber Avenue, went past her Aunt Helen and Uncle Pete Janz’s building and past the Dodge dealership to the McLeods store. She sat for hours watching Mr. Buss fix shoes in his little shop. She spent a lot of time looking at everything in Book and Variety Store and in McBurney’s Drugstore. She walked quietly past the Tourist Hotel, trying, but failing, to

look into the windows where one of her uncles was probably whiling away the afternoon behind the swinging red door.

Then she came to Rev. Peter D. Friesen’s store, climbed the steps and entered the small but neat shop where the friendly pastor worked during the week. She headed right down the left aisle to where the books were displayed. She wished that she could have one. Once she could. That time she had money and bought the book, *Bambi*. Mostly, each time she visited, she just looked at all the books that held her interest.

That friendly pastor never asked her to leave and never watched to see exactly what she was doing. During her explorations of Main Street’s offerings, she felt safe and welcome in the Friesen’s store, as she generally did in that seemingly ideal era.

Faspa: What is its Origin?

Eleanor Hildebrand Chornoboy, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Somewhere between the covers of a book with a Mennonite theme, the reader may find a reference to *Faspa*. *Faspa*, as defined by Herman Rempel in *Kjenn jie noch Plautdietsch?* is “teatime, coffee break; a coffee and snack time between lunch and supper.” In Jack Thiessen’s *Mennonite Low German Dictionary - Mennonitisch Plattdeutsch Wörterbuch*, he uses the modern German and Mennonite Low German where the letter ‘v’ is pronounced as an ‘f’. He spells the word *Vaspa* and defines it as “four o’clock coffee time,” with a reference to *Vesperbrot*, “a light lunch in the afternoon.”

The 1918 *A German and English Dictionary* defines Vesper as “1. evening; 2. vespers, evening service; *zur Vesper essen*, to eat one’s afternoon’s luncheon. It also refers to *Vesperbrot*, afternoon luncheon, “... afternoon (5 o’clock) tea.” The same dictionary describes *Vespern*, as “to take one’s afternoon or evening luncheon; to make a collation between dinner and supper.”

In *The Russländer*, Sandra Birdsell differentiates between a special *Faspa* of sliced melons, freshly baked *schnetje* to dip in jam and honey and perhaps a *plautz*¹ as opposed to the everyday *Faspa* of buns and cheese. Yasch, in Armin Wiebe’s *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, is concerned that, “My *faspa* almost climbs up from my panz...” when Oata says she has made him something special - *Schmauntzup*, thick sour milk mixed with green onions and cucumbers.

In his autobiographical novel, *Of This Earth*, Rudy Wiebe says that before their Sunday afternoon guests “leave for their own evening chores, our Sunday afternoon visitors will eat *Vaspa* with us — the Mennonite custom of ‘late afternoon tea.’”

Martha, in David Elias’s *Sunday Afternoon*, decided she had upset her father enough for one day, and turned off the television. “I’ll make us something to eat,” she said and went into the kitchen to fix them some *fastba*.

According to *The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes*, first printed in 1961, “Sunday ‘*Faspa*’ when visitors came, Tweeback were always served with coffee. Some prefer to dunk them, others believe dunking spoils the taste. Butter was never served with the buns as the goodness of the butter was already baked in the buns. Now we bake our buns with shortening, serve butter, jams, jellies and cheese with them.”

The *Mennonite Heritage Village Cookbook* provides rationale for *Faspa*

FASPA is a lunch served around three or four o’clock in the afternoon. Faspa also serves as a social time, when people sit down together, and visit, have a bite to eat and relax. Sunday Faspa is a special occasion and there are very few homes in any Mennonite community where it is not observed. Guests are often extended special invitations to come for faspa.

The tradition of faspa stems from the fact that the majority of the people were farmers. This meant long days of work. From noon until the end of the working day was too long to go without food, so there developed a custom of stopping to rest and eat lunch in the afternoon. Then, being refreshed, they were prepared to continue their labours.

Norma Jost Voth, in *Mennonite Foods & Folkways from South Russia*, says, “Sunday afternoon’s *Faspa* table was the social highlight of the week. This was the time to welcome friends and offer hospitality to neighbors — the time to bring out the best china and the favorite Saturday baking.”

The *Canton Monitor* cites Henry J. Van Dyke Jr.’s May 1880 article in *Harper’s Magazine* where he describes his visit to the Mennonites of Manitoba, “west of the Pembina, on the British side of the boundary line.” Van Dyke tells of being invited to the table. “In the middle of the room was the dinner table; presently three or four girls came in from their work, and we were cordially asked to sit down with them to the Vesper-brod of black bread, melons and coffee.”

In her 1922 *Romantic Canada*, Victoria Hayward describes her tour to Morden, Manitoba on the C.P.R. train with the intention to visit Mennonites in that section. She does not use the term *Faspa* or *Vesper*, but describes the afternoon snack from the perspective of an outsider,

The Mennonite women in all the villages lend a hand with the horses, grooming them and getting them harnessed, ready to go in the wagon or to draw plough or harvester. We had not noted this work so much among other foreign women. The



No Mennonite cookbook could be complete without reference to *Faspa*. This image is from the recent and very popular *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*. Image Source: Judy Wiebe, *Mennonite Girls Can Cook* blog, <http://www.mennonitegirlscancook.ca/2008/12/zwiebacksgrandma-buns.html>

women work very capably and easily with the horses and it doesn't seem hard work to them. They are at their best, however, in the little kitchen, before the door of which the wind was strewing the golden leaves when we went for afternoon—no, not tea—coffee! It is a Mennonite custom to have coffee and bread-and-butter and perhaps jam, every afternoon at four o'clock. The men leave off ploughing and come in from the fields for their cup of this refreshing hot drink. Mr. de Fehr said the Mennonites think coffee very stimulating and good for a man that works. I fear that all our Canadian farmers are not so well looked after by their wives in the cold autumn afternoons at the ploughing! The coffee is ground fresh in the little mill over the stove at every making—a pointer for any who wish to adopt this custom.

A good number of Mennonite historians hold to the hypothesis that *Faspa* is linked to the tradition of Vespers. Does the word *Faspa* or *Vaspa* have the same root as Vespers? *Vespresa* is Latin for evening prayers, vespers. Vespers, in the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran traditions, is a sunset evening prayer service, usually consisting of singing or chanting, psalms, Bible readings and prayers. In the Anglican faith it is referred to as Evensong.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, in *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, refer to numerous Vesper words:

Vesperbrot: dry food eaten in the afternoon or early evening.
Vesper kaffee: afternoon coffee
Vesperkorb: a basket used to take the food and drink to the workers in the field
Vesperläuten: the ringing peal at the beginning of the church's evening celebration. In Protestant areas the vesper bell also heralded the end of the work day.

Vespers date back to the 6th century, but it is not entirely clear when or how *Faspa* originated. According to Johann Christoph Adelung (1732-1806), in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, *Vespern* is an "afternoon snack," and was derived from the

word Vesper in central and northern Germany. It is reasonable to believe that meals could have been taken after Vespers and the name of the meal adopted from the service. One could extrapolate that the peal of the village church bells called people to prayer and others to the *Faspa/Vesper* table — or to the *Vespermahlzeit*. Like other words adopted by Mennonites as they migrated from Holland or Germany to Prussia to Russian occupied Ukraine and to other regions of the globe, it is not a stretch to consider that the word *Faspa* evolved from Vesper.

One theory espoused by Jack Penner, farmer in southern Manitoba, is that the times meals were taken during the busy farming season, correlated with the horses' need for water and sustenance to keep up their hard work throughout the day. It was especially during the spring, summer and autumn months, when farmers and their horses worked from sunrise to sunset. The working men had breakfast before the day's work began, a second breakfast around 10:30, dinner at noon, *faspa* around 4:00, and supper at the end of the work day. Their horses were fed and watered at the same times.

While Vespers has been defined as an evening service, the Grimms also refer to morning Vespers. Adelung cited *vormittagsvesper* (before noon vespers) as Low German. That is, in North German, Vesper is also known as a second breakfast. Even in Germany today, the morning *Zwischenmahlzeit* (between meal time) is also referred to as *Brotzeit* (bread time), Vesper, or *Zweites Frühstück* (second breakfast) eaten around 10:30 in the morning. This second breakfast correlates with the second breakfast that Mennonite farmers shared during their long work days.

Sunday was a day of rest in keeping with the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy 5, verses 12-14: "Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou."

In order to obey this commandment, Mennonite women did all their baking for Sunday *Faspa*, on Saturdays. Traditionally, *Faspa* was served every day of the week, and often Sunday *Faspa* was more elaborate than the regular *Faspa* of weekdays. Women baked fresh bread, cakes, cookies, and other sweet things on Saturday in preparation for their families and for company that would come to visit on Sundays. Having all the food prepared meant that on Sunday the women only needed to prepare coffee, set the table, and clean up after the *Faspa*. No cooking was required. On Sundays, most homes did not sit down to a big evening meal after *Faspa*. They might have a light meal later in the evening, and that was sometimes also referred to as *Faspa*, possibly because it was often a meal with the leftover cold food from the afternoon *Faspa*.

In *Faspa with Jast*, I note that "traditionally Mennonites had *Faspa* every day, but over time, with people working at sedentary jobs and often employed off the farm, *Faspa* has come to be reserved for Sundays and holidays when *Jast* comes to visit. *Faspa* feeds the body and nourishes the soul. It is a time of telling stories and sharing experiences."² *Faspa* has evolved from simple fare to include cold cuts, particularly bologna and salads along with the traditional cookies, cakes, bread, cheeses and coffee. It remains a cold meal served with hot coffee.

The tradition of bringing *Faspa* to the fields gradually diminished with the advent of high powered machinery, farmers stopping by local restaurants for “take-out”, and farm women working at regular jobs or being actively involved in the farming operation as opposed to cooking and taking care of the children. However, many ‘retired’ farm men and women fondly remember the days when the women harnessed the non-working horses and packed a hearty *Faspa* for the men working in the field. They brought hot coffee with cream in jugs plugged with cork stoppers, baskets of glass cups and plates, freshly baked pies stacked in egg crates, and piles of homemade buns to feed the men working in the field. After the men were done eating, the women packed up the dishes, gathered the leftover crumbs and returned home to milk the cows, feed the pigs and chickens, and prepare a hot supper of boiled potatoes, *Schmaund Fat* and fried farmer sausages or *Schintjfleesch* to take to the men in the field.

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Endnotes

- 1 *Schnetje* are biscuits or scones; *plautz* is a coffee cake made with fruit and topped with crumbs.
 2 *Jasti* is the Low German word for ‘visitors’.

Research Notes

Aerial Photograph Project by EastMenn Historical Committee

Ernest N. Braun, Niverville, Manitoba

Background

The idea of compiling all of the aerial photographs of the Mennonite East Reserve arose out of EastMenn Historical Committee’s (EHC) mission in 2007 to publish an historical atlas of the East Reserve, somewhat along the lines of the earlier Rempel and Harms project in the later 1980s, but expanded with aerial photographs and other updates. The earliest investigations were done by Jacob Doerksen of Niverville in late winter of 2008, engaging the National Air Photo Library in Ottawa in negotiations regarding the acquisition and digitizing of the entire Reserve. In October his repeated contact with Ottawa resulted in a decision by the Committee to order all eight townships in print and digital format. By January 2009 he had obtained price lists and flight-line maps of the area, but it had become clear that the Library was unwilling to undertake a project of this magnitude and complexity. Alternative plans to obtain the copies locally from the Mines and Resources office in Winnipeg were explored, and in the end Ernest N. Braun and Henry N. Fast were delegated by the committee to do the leg work. In the meantime, EastMenn applied to the Delbert F. Plett Historical Research Foundation for a grant to cover the very substantial costs, a grant duly received and gratefully acknowledged.

Aerial Photography

In the early part of the twentieth century, the mapping of much of Canada was facilitated by means of aerial photography, a surveying development pioneered by Canadian Surveyor General Edouard Deville after World War I, and continued at intervals, one of which was 1946, when much of the land in southeastern Manitoba was photographed from the air. The airplane flew in straight lines east-west, usually turning at the Red River and doubling back, snapping somewhat oblique photographs at set intervals, while flying at a pre-determined altitude and speed. The result was a sequence of topographical photographs at a reasonably high resolution for the time (somewhat comparable to the resolution obtained in rural areas by Google Earth today), all of them along flight-lines, which were given numbers for later reference. Each snapshot was then given a number and appended to the number of the flight-line. The flight-lines were then plotted on a map of the area, in our case, a map of southeastern Manitoba. Occasionally a flight-line goes north-south. In at least one or two cases the only shot available to us was from such a line, which presented some challenges with regard to orientation.

Since none of the photographs are tied to section-township-range numbers, the first task was to examine the map to identify a flight-line close enough to a recognizable landmark, and noting the flight-line number, walk to the stacks to find the box

with photographs labeled with that flight-line number. Each box could have up to 100 photographs. In a hit or miss way one tried to find the photograph with the landmark to provide a starting point, and then thumbed one's way either up or down the number system to find the edge of the East Reserve, hoping there were mile roads to help define where one section ended and the next started. There were other challenges, not the least of which was the incidence of lens glare, or cloud cover. Since the camera was set automatically, almost half of the photographs contained only partial sections (e.g., portions of two sections, but neither complete), and therefore one needed to choose the photographs carefully.

The aerial photographs themselves are on file in hard copy at Canada Maps, 1007 Century Avenue in Winnipeg, Manitoba, placed in boxes numbered according to flight-lines which were superimposed on a map of the province. Once a specific photograph number has been determined, one can obtain a photocopy on site, or order print from the host agency, National Air Photo Library, 615 Booth Street, Room 180, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0E9, a division of National Resources Canada. Cost per reproduction is between \$12 – \$20.00 depending on quality of reproduction and to some extent volume of order.

Creating a CD of Aerial Photos of the East Reserve

The Mennonite East Reserve consisted of eight townships, three in the north part of the Reserve, 7-4E, 7-5E, and 7-6E, then two in the next township line, 6-5E and 6-6E, and two more below that 5-5E and 5-6E, and finally one more at the southernmost tip, 4-6E.

A CD was created, which contains eight folders of photographs, one for each township. A township consists of 36 sections of land, each section being one mile long and one mile wide. That means that each township folder should contain 36 aerial photographs, one snap shot for each section, as the plane flew in an east-west direction, snapping photographs automatically at intervals along each flight line. That would require six flight lines, since there are six rows of sections in each township.



However, in fact, there are only four flight lines for each township, which means that only four rows of sections are centered on the photographs, and the other two flight lines tend to have one row of photos where the section is offset with half of another below or above it. For that reason, each township folder on this CD actually has two photographs of each section: one - the original copy [scanned], which will be instantly recognized since it is skewed and has a white border, and the other - de-skewed and stitched, with red markers on each corner of the section, and with the section-township-range printed in red beneath the section. These have been placed alternately. Both copies are in jpg format, and will support some enlargement. Researchers should note that wherever the original copies contain partial photographs only, there will be some duplication. The CD has a special folder that details all the flight-lines and photograph numbers for easy access for other researchers.

Also included in each township folder are two copies of a composite of the entire township; i.e., all 36 photos stitched together to give an overview of the entire township to trace water courses, vegetation, trails and other features not easily discernible on individual sections. One copy has been enhanced slightly for increased contrast. The stitching is somewhat approximate, since the skewed originals do not lend themselves well to uniformity.

The corner markers for the southernmost twelve sections of 4-6E should be viewed with some caution, since there are no survey grid lines on which to hang them, and no GPS coordinates to assist in placing them. They are somewhat approximate, but close enough to serve for most purposes.

For orientation purposes, a map of the East Reserve has been included: this map was first published in *Settlers of the East Reserve*, Volume 4 of the East Reserve Historical Series in 2009. The map was created by Dave Harms of Altona from information provided by EHC, and is used with permission.

Search Instructions

If the only information the researcher has is the section-township-range, e.g. 25-6-5E, the easiest way to find that photograph is to recognize that the last two numbers are township numbers, and the first is the section number. In this case, the researcher would need to find the 6-5E folder and double click on it to open it. That will show all 36 section photographs, each in two versions, and one simply clicks on the one identified as 25-6-5E. Each section shows up twice, both as an original scan of the photograph, and as a stitched/de-skewed photograph with corner markers and identification number. As noted above, each folder also has orientation diagrams for section numbers and for township placement within the Reserve.

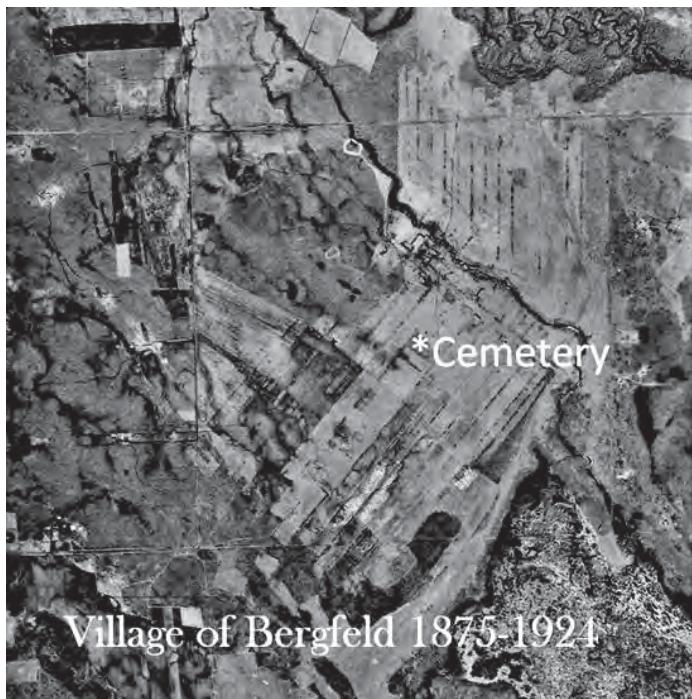
Each township has also been stitched in its entirety, specifically for tracing water courses, trails, roads and vegetation, and for placing any one section into its larger context. This larger photograph is stitched somewhat loosely and may have some misaligned edges. For detail work, please refer to individual sections, which are more accurate.

Research Applications

In general, these photographs offer a snapshot of each section at this point in time - showing the location of fields, yards, vegetation, watercourses, roads, etc. in 1946. As such, it is possible to determine with absolute certainty any number of

geographic variables. In some cases, long-standing arguments can be resolved by checking just one photograph: e.g. at what angle did the original village of Gnadenfeld lie relative to the north-south grid of new roads laid down later? Where was the cross street in Gruenfeld relative to the old village itself? Where did the Crow Wing trail cross the southern boundary 7-4E? And so on.

I. *Township Composites*: These have only been roughly stitched, but are accurate enough to establish watercourses, trails, cultivated acreage and distribution, and tree cover. One can determine the extent of the mile-road grid as of 1946, since in the southern part of the Reserve it was far from complete.



II. *Individual Sections*: These are carefully stitched, and will provide adequate resolution for most purposes. They can be used to search for homestead locations, evidence of former settlement patterns including in some cases the sites of pioneer Mennonite villages, as well as all of the same uses as the composite photos.

III. *Interpretation*: It takes some familiarity with the photographs to know for certain exactly what one is seeing: water courses are usually edged with obvious foliated vegetation and therefore are easy to follow. Trails are more difficult to detect, partly because many of them were already no longer in use in 1946, partly because they are so narrow, and partly because cultivation had already obscured parts of them. In some cases, the photo was taken when there was still run off water or even snow on the ground, and that should not be confused with other vegetation types. Water will usually show up as black, even to the twin parallel ribbons on each side of a municipal road. Buildings are often seen only as shadows or sometimes as roofs or half of a roof, the other half being in the sunlight and therefore not registering on the photograph.

This research tool will be particularly useful in adding new perspectives to our understanding of the natural environment and settlement patterns of the East Reserve.

Official Launch

The CD was officially launched at Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach on August 4, 2012 at Pioneer Days. A number of complementary CDs were handed out, and special recognition was given to Ernest N. Braun and Henry N. Fast for the many hours of work put into this project. They also provided a demonstration on how to use the disk by requesting audience members to give their land description, i.e., 6-7-4SW. The CDs are available at Mennonite Heritage Village Book Store and at the RM of Hanover Office in Steinbach, and at Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. The suggested retail price is \$30.00.

Foundation Supports Indexing of Important Mennonite Newspaper

Over the last number of years the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. has partnered with the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre to continue the indexing of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*.

The *Mennonitische Rundschau* was a grassroots paper with wide spread support in the Mennonite community. Foundation funding has made possible indexing of the years: 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, and 1916. In 1916 alone there were 1,613 articles, 3336 subjects, 45 births, 370 death notices, 916 local reports, and 304 weddings. By the end of 1916 there were 8,092 unique subjects indexed.

The *Mennonitische Rundschau* has a long history as a vehicle connecting Mennonites in the United States, Canada, and Russia. For the first many decades it was a non-denominational Mennonite publication and carried information for all members of the Mennonite community,

including the Mennonites who arrived in North America in the 1870s. This paper is a primary source document that is unparalleled. However, it is vastly underused due to a lack of access. Increasingly researchers have a dwindling knowledge of the German language and the gothic script, so the creation of a comprehensive index becomes vital for researching and telling the story of the Mennonites who came to Canada in the 1870s.

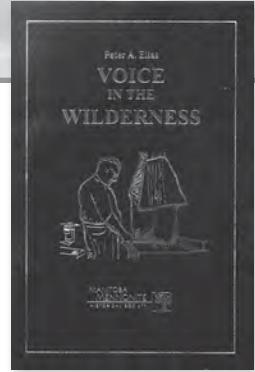
Indexes for the years 1878-1909, 1920-1939 were created earlier by the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the participation of the Foundation is making it possible to create a detailed Author, Title and Subject index for volume 4, 1910-1919.

This decade includes the Great War and revolution in Russia and responses in North America. Once the index is completed it will be a valuable resource for local historians, genealogists and other researchers.

Book Reviews

Voice in the Wilderness Memoirs of Peter A. Elias 1843-1925

Adolf Ens and Henry Unger, trans. and eds.,
Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2013, softcover 164 pp. \$20.00



Voice in the Wilderness is the 6th published work in the Mennonite West Reserve Historical Series of Southern Manitoba published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. It is a compilation of three translated memoirs and letters written by Peter A. Elias, a blacksmith and farmer, who migrated from Russia to the West Reserve, present day southern Manitoba, in 1875. Elias states that he wrote his memoirs to instruct future generations in godly living and following the Scriptures as a follower of Christ. Whatever the intent, the book presents a rare first hand account into the Mennonite pioneer community.

Editors Adolf Ens and Henry Unger begin with an introduction of the Elias family, an historical analysis of the migration and settlement and point out recurring themes in Elias' writings. They combine and arrange Elias' three memoirs into three parts. They include liberal endnotes to reference other historical sources, provide explanations and Scriptural references. It is unfortunate that some of the maps and pictures are not clear and that there is no close-up picture of Elias himself.

Part one is an autobiographical account of the life of a Mennonite in Russia before the migration to Canada. Elias describes everyday routines of going to school, butchering hogs, field work and the farming of silk worms. This section also describes the initial migration to Canada, the moves to locations around southern Manitoba, and recounts the deaths of close family members. Many of his stories, such as the one of his son Jacob's struggle with tuberculosis, show us Elias's struggle between using modern interventions and the possible consequences it could have on one's salvation.

The second part is the longest section. It is a compilation of an historical and religious analysis of the Church in its emigration from Russia and the early years of the Mennonite

settlement in Canada. He disagreed on the interpretation and implementation of Scripture, the application of the ban, the ministers' own ethical behaviour and their relations with other churches. He often admonishes the ministers for their inconsistencies. He was very distraught over the hardship caused by the separation between the Reinländer Gemeinde and the Bergthaler. He was particularly distressed by the inconsistent application of bans, but he was also frustrated by the consequences of the bans as they resulted in families leaving one church for another, breaking up villages and creating economic hardship for those who were caught in the middle.

The title, *Voice in the Wilderness*, indicates that Elias spoke like a prophet of old, critical not only of how the community lived its religious life, but also of the religious leaders of the day. Elias was concerned with remaining true to the Scriptures in belief and action. His criticism of the church leaders rested on their inability to mete out church discipline consistently. At times, his criticism seems to have put himself under their scrutiny as well. But, as the editors note, "his accounts of those meetings read as if the disciplinary body, not he, is on the 'hot seat.'" (p.15)

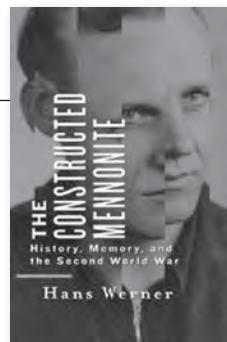
Part three is a short reflection on conflict surrounding the emigration to Mexico, which Elias did not participate in. While his faith held firm, he did not seem able to align himself with leadership that he believed was leading people astray.

The book concludes with a series of translated letters full of admonitions to remain faithful to the Scriptures, a theme that runs throughout his memoirs.

Tina Fehr Kehler
Winkler, Manitoba

The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory, and the Second World War

Hans Werner, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013,
205 pages, soft cover, pictorial, maps, index, \$27.95



The author of this book has already established himself as an authority on the post-war ethnic German immigrants by his numerous articles for the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* and his interest in both the hitherto Mennonite communities of Winkler and Steinbach, Manitoba. Rather than stay with farming he pursued academic studies in history, achieving a Ph.D. in History from the University of Manitoba in 2002. Having been

born to a couple who were post-war ethnic German immigrants and having studied those who settled in Bielefeld, Westphalia in the 1970s and 1980s,¹ he was prepared to take on the story of his own family, especially that of his father.

What brought it home to him was listening to his father recall and relate – and repeat – his many experiences in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, and then having to compare that

with a written memoir he discovered fortuitously. A close relation, Tina Werner Hinz, had written all about the early years of the Werners in Siberia and her account was substantially different from the stories of his father.

This was disconcerting for both the father, Hans Werner and his first son Hans, the author of this volume. It seemed that reconstruction was required on the basis of what the younger had been taught in the discipline and ethics of historical research and writing.

Actually, I found this book most intriguing quite without thinking of it academically. Werner deals honestly and courageously with behaviours in his family which were always severely criticized in my conversations with the more pious refugees and *Umsiedler*: serving in the military, making compromises with the communist educational system by entering its doors, leaving a wife or two behind in Russia or elsewhere and marrying another, and discovering as he grew older that his father could not qualify easily for emigration because he had served the National Socialist state of Germany in war-time.

Hans Werner's father came from a generation that chose to stay in Siberia in the early 1920s. His family failed to get past Moscow in the panicked attempt at emigration in 1929, were collectivized, and adapted to the system in a Mennonite village southeast of Slavgorod. He was quick, intelligent, mechanical and easily fitted into the most important sector of a *kolkhoz* – the Machine Tractor Station. He even came to merit the designation, *Stakhonovite* (an overachiever). His mechanical aptitudes always stood him in good stead, whether fighting in

Soviet armies, or when captured by *Wehrmacht* forces soon after their invasion of Stalin's Russia in 1941. He served the *Wehrmacht* and the German state mostly in ordnance, such as driving trucks where needed, until he was captured by the Americans.

Luckily he was not sent back to Russia; instead he was fortunate to meet Mennonites who not only steered him into the movement of Mennonite refugees westward to Gronau, he found those like Cornelius Wall and Gerhard Fast who helped in the matter of baptism and marriage (by the way, Cornelius Wall is not identified on the photo, page 138).

The author's training in history and his professional integrity dictated the decision to reconstruct his father's life for the sake of his mother, her family, and posterity. We, his readers, are glad he did not walk away from it, and that he took courage to question his father in advanced age and explain the reasons for doubting some of his claims.

Historians have this as an adage: we don't trust memory as much as we trust written records. Both require careful examining. That message, Hans Werner also left with us.

Peter Penner
Calgary, Alberta

Endnotes

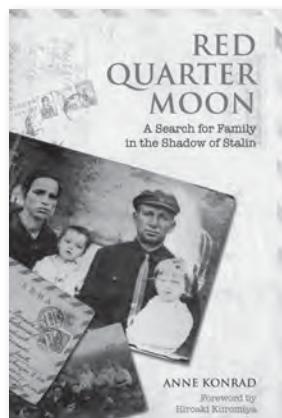
¹ "Feeling at Home": Soviet Mennonites in Bielefeld, Germany, 1950-1990," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 20 (2002): 155-178.

Red Quarter Moon: A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin

Anne Konrad. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 356 pages; bibliography, index, \$35.00.

Red Quarter Moon is a momentous chronicle of one person's years long piecing together the stories of her relatives. Her book is not about just any relatives, but those locked behind what during the Cold War was called the 'iron curtain'. There they experienced the full weight of dislocation, survival, compromise and conflicted identities that feature so prominently in the stories of the Mennonites who stayed behind in the Soviet Union. Anne Konrad takes us on a journey of discovery where she carefully weaves together the saga of her experience of finding her family members, and the stories of the family members themselves.

For the author, the search to find out what lay behind the "stiff-backed photographs in a cardboard box," (9) that are in our attics was a much bigger project than it is for many of us. Fortunate to be married to Harvey Dyck, a historian of Mennonites, Russia and the Soviet Union, she was able to travel with him to uncover the remnants of the Konrads and the Brauns that were her family. Her father was the only one of his siblings that came to Canada in 1929, her mother had left behind brothers and sisters, both would hear only fragments of what had happened to them. Even just looking at the



family trees in Konrad's book the reader gets a sense of the story of so many Mennonites who remained in the Soviet Union. There are marriages with Slavic sounding spouses, others with German, but not Mennonite names, and hints of relationships torn apart by war, exile, irreconcilable identities, and too often execution. The text poignantly conveys to the reader the tearing apart of a community by war, ideology, and brutality.

The author of *Red Quarter Moon* also allows the reader into her thoughts during the years she spent following up some of the most obscure leads. We learn about the challenges of the stiffness and inflexibility of bureaucracy and her coming to terms with relatives who have become very different from her own sensibilities. She invites us into her experiences of seeing the places where her family members lived and sensitively, but with integrity, allows us into their worlds—worlds that are in many cases unrecognizable as Mennonite. The book is thus a valuable and important contribution to the understanding of what happened to the people and their families who were often known in Canada only by the occasional photograph or letter.

The book is loosely organized along the main themes that dominate the Soviet Mennonite story after the revolution. The attempted escape via Moscow in 1929, collectivization, the purges of the mid 1930s and the Second World War are the periods of disruption and dispersal. The reorientation, or regrouping, begins in Stalin's work army, the Gulags and then the further dispersal as the remnant of Mennonites find new associations and places. Konrad ends with a chapter on the interrogation files, which most effectively illustrate how people came to their end; when truth no longer had currency or meaning.

The story of Mennonites in the Soviet Union is most often narrated as a tragedy and Anne Konrad's account shares that narrative structure. On the whole, however, she avoids

demonizing the individuals who did the the work of a brutal ideology. She also extends grace to the characters she meets in person and in the records she uncovers—acknowledging the compromises, tensions, and challenges they faced. For the reader, the book's main challenge is to navigate the complex familial relationships in the stories she tells and the personalities she meets. In spite of helpful family trees, it is often difficult to remember how a person relates to the family and to others in the story. In that sense her comment in the acknowledgements that her husband thought there were too many names is shared by this reader.

Hans Werner
University of Winnipeg

The Survival of a Community: The History of Neuenburg and Birkenhead School District

Henry Unger, Morden, MB: self published, 2012, softcover, 250 pp, index.

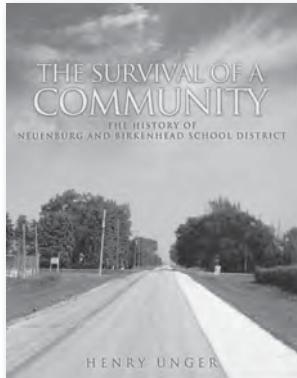
Neuenburg now has a local history book. It is the fourth of the many Old Colony villages, after Reinland, Blumenfeld, and Gnadenthal, to have accomplished such a feat. For the author, it was a labour of love (and sometimes a burden) for many years. The 400 photos, 22 maps, and numerous tables and lists give the book its attractiveness and make it a mine of information. A number of diary and memoir vignettes make it an interesting and illuminating read.

Unger begins with the inevitable chapter surveying church history from the Reformation to the Mennonite departure from Russia. Two firsthand immigrant accounts enable the reader to empathize at least a bit with settlers coming to a new home.

The formative years of Neuenburg are well researched and described. Unger guides the reader through the federally regulated settlement process and then proceeds to the formation of the village. The *Straßendorf* was a lot more than just a group of people sharing a physical location. The village had its own council, while it also related to the larger regional administrative system. Unger includes a copy of the original village agreement in English translation.

In addition to the governmental context, villages were also part of the web of social institutions that regulated their lives. Fire insurance regulations were clearly understood and enforced. The village had to create a school to serve its children. A herdsman was hired to care for the village cattle. When a death occurred, the church was there and an inheritance system determined what happened with the estate.

The private village school has its own chapter. It chronicles how the school was created within the intellectual context of the Old Colony attitudes. The author has managed to access recollections from pupils of the Neuenburg private school despite the years that have elapsed. Unger's description of the general private school routine will be new and interesting for many readers.



The book briefly examines the out migrations of Neuenburg families to the Hague-Osler and Swift Current areas of Saskatchewan. Of much greater impact on the village was the whole sequence of events that began with the outbreak of World War I in Europe. The whole provincial education scene changed. The government wanted a school system that would promote a jingoistic patriotism. Private schools like the one in Neuenburg were no longer acceptable. The Old Colonists made numerous efforts to maintain their own schools, but to no avail.

The result was a substantial emigration to Mexico. Only six of the twenty-nine families remained in the village. As a consequence of the exodus the Sirluck family and Kroeker farms both established large land holdings in the area. New people came to the community to operate the Sirluck farm and the Kroeker farm offered employment to many people living in the village.

The emigration also created a huge disjunction in the educational system in Neuenburg. A new public school was formed in 1921. Many of the living Neuenburg descendants are a product of this type of school. The chapter in the book deals largely with the administration of the schools: teacher's wages and duties, the people in the classes, and the biographies of the teachers. What is not treated very fully are the activities and rhythms of school life. It is probably a reflection on the kind of sources that were at hand. It is noteworthy that with respect to local control over education (that is, the parents' ability to make effective decisions about their children's education) there was a significant degree of continuity from the earlier private school system.

Unger has a diverse chapter entitled "Serving the Community and Beyond." Neuenburg had a long history of providing ministers, first for the Old Colony Church and later for a wide variety of Mennonite churches. Other forms of service treated in the chapter are the Ladies Aid Sewing Circle, Boys' and

Girls' Clubs, Seed Growers' Clubs, Conscientious Objector service and sporting activities.

Economic activity in the village was strongly related to agriculture. Even though there were other ventures such as a blacksmith shop, gas station, and a store, they were all in the service of a farm community. The recent era has only seen slightly greater diversification.

The question of community survival seems difficult to the reviewer. Do we think of community today the same way as our forbears did? The people who came to Neuenburg in the 1870s brought with them ideas such as a village commune, an open field system, a special inheritance system, and notions of humility and mutual aid. It could be argued that, even though the physical community remains, in many respects it is discontinuity that is in the forefront. What, if anything, survived of the world envisioned by the original settlers? Perhaps some descendants of Neuenburg would have a different perspective on this issue than today's residents.

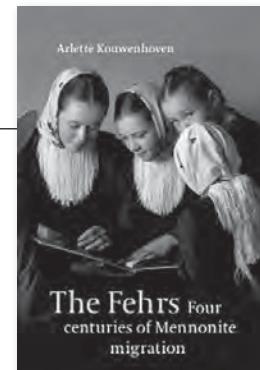
In addition to all the above material there are several chapters of family-level information. The chapters on "The First

Settlers" and "Community Family Profiles" are especially noteworthy. It is an unfortunate fact that some of this material does not read easily, but it is still a 'goldmine' for the genealogist and the family historian.

The book has two slight technical flaws. The pictures are less clear than one would wish for in a 2012 publication. Secondly, there are some consistency and spelling issues. Is it Kronstal or Kronthal (p. 3)? Fuerstenland was rented from Grand Duke Michael Nikolaevitch (p. 2). Should page 71 not read that "salaries for teachers...during the 1930s...reflected the economic reality of the time" (not realty)?

On the whole, however, *The Survival of a Community* is an impressive achievement, and despite the reviewer's comments, shows a great deal of labour and many hours of careful research. The book deserves a wide readership.

Jacob E. Peters
Winnipeg, Manitoba



The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration

Arlette Kouwenhoven. Leiden, The Netherlands:
Winco Publishing, 2013, 264 pages; index.

Many Canadian Mennonite descendants of immigrants from Russia know something about their pre-Canada ancestors in Ukraine, or even earlier in Poland/Prussia and perhaps all the way to the Netherlands. Most are also aware that from Canada there were further migrations southward to Mexico and other Latin American countries. In this 'biographical history' Arlette Kouwenhoven traces both the geographical movements and the cultural shifts of this stream of Mennonite migration by following one family lineage through some fifteen generations.

The author is not an historian, but an anthropologist. She is not a Mennonite (*Doopsgesind*) and neither she nor her family were part of any of the migrations she describes. But her roots are in the place where Menno Simons taught and ministered in the 1500s; and the perspective she has chosen to follow is that of the conservative Flemish Mennonite stream of the de Veer (DeFehr, Fehr) lineage.

The story begins in the Netherlands and then moves through Poland-Prussia, Russia, Canada and on to Mexico, identifying one or more generations of Fehrs in each area. Kouwenhoven's interest is in the particular kind of conservative culture reflected by a particular branch of Old Colony Mennonites currently living at Sabinal in northern Chihuahua Province, Mexico.

The first de Veer ancestor was born just five years before the death of Menno. It was still the age of persecution, distantly familiar to many Mennonites through the *Martyrs Mirror* still found in Old Colony homes today. After the persecution of Anabaptists abated in the Netherlands, members of the wealthy class of merchants and seafarers found their way into the Mennonite church. The de Veer lineage followed other Dutch families in expanding trade into the city of Danzig on the Baltic Sea. The new local cultural influence can be seen,

for example, in the Germanizing of the name to Defehr. Here the urban merchant influence wanes and the shift to an agrarian folk takes over, hastened by Polish authorities who in 1749 declared Mennonites to be non-citizens. This shift from the sophistication of Amsterdam and Danzig to Klein Mausdorf (small mouse village) and the migration inland gradually shrank the cultural horizon of the Flemish Mennonites.

Kouwenhoven's telling of the story of the first two stages of the development (Netherlands and Poland-Prussia) is rich in social and cultural detail and full of interesting anecdotes. One receives a certain sense of discovering this era anew, from a new set of eyes using archival sources and recent publications. The next stage of the eastward migration, into New Russia, is more familiar to many Mennonite readers, closer to the present, the conservative wing differentiated more clearly. And, of course, many have read this story as told by another non-Mennonite anthropologist, James Urry. Like Urry, Kouwenhoven places more importance on social and economic reasons for divisions in the church than church historians have tended to do.

The account of life in Canada for the Fehr lineage contains much more personal information, available about individuals and families. While the biographical picture becomes more focussed, numerous errors slip into the larger story. West Reserve people, where the Old Colony group settled, did not draw water from the Red River (150). Most of the Bergthal people who moved from the East Reserve to the West Reserve beginning in 1878 created new villages; very few settled on individual farms (158). Stevens (Stephens) did not ever develop into a town (163); the location of Steinbach and Reinland identified on the Manitoba map are off by a good six miles (11).

The discussion of the school issue (178-184) in Manitoba and Saskatchewan during and immediately after World War I is quite confusing and ambiguous. Given its significance in the decisions to immigrate to Latin America, this is unfortunate.

The Mexico portion of the story is told more briefly. The Fehr lineage shifted from Manitoba to the Hague-Osler settlement in Saskatchewan. In the negotiations to move to Mexico after World War I, the Hague group broke with the larger body of the Old Colony community. Its leadership was unable to convince even half of its membership to move to Durango, Mexico. Once there, this portion of the "Flemish" church proved to have greater resistance to adapting to change; forbidding the use of rubber tires in place of steel lugs, or electric power from the grid made it difficult to survive as famers. David Fehr II became bishop at Sabinal, one of the daughter colonies of Durango, but it seems that even his own sons may break with their father's Gemeinde. With the way of unchanging "tradition" dying out in Mexico, Kouwenhoven suggests "alternate ways" (217) of faithfulness with another branch of the de Veer line, C.A. and Abram DeFehr, whose descendants today are active in the Winnipeg business community and the Mennonite Brethren

church. Between those two ways lies a whole spectrum of gradations. In most of them one might find a Fehr.

Kouwenhoven concludes the introduction to her story of one line of the De Veer family with this observation: "An amazingly rich, yet often a tragic history that deserves to be told in detail!" To compress four hundred years of detail into a modest 240-page book means that much connective material can only be sparsely traced. The author succeeds, however, in describing the setting of the various stages in the long migration so that the rich detail has a context. Whether the most recent descendants of the De Veer line in Sabinal (and similar groups in Bolivia, Belize, and elsewhere) will find that longer, connective linkage to their roots in this book is another question.

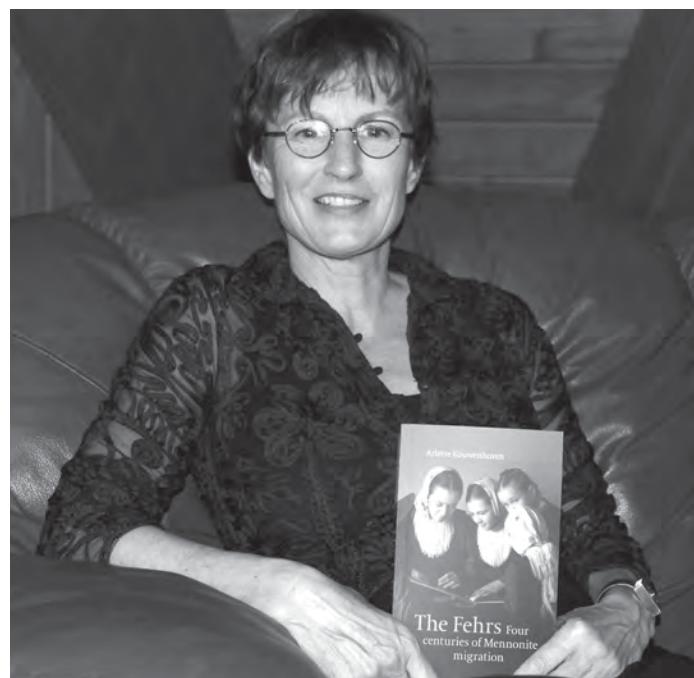
Adolf Ens
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Note: A review of the original Dutch edition of this book (*De Fehrs. Kroniek van een Nederlandse mennonietenfamilie*) by Lydia Penner, Den Haag, Netherlands, appeared in *Preservings* 32 (2012): 78.

Book News

Dutch Author Launches English Version of Fehr Book

On June 6, 2013 Dutch author Arlette Kouwenhoven visited Winnipeg to launch the English translation of her book about the long and varied migrations of the Fehr family. (See review above). The launch was held at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and was followed by a launch in Saskatoon and readings at



Arlette Kouwenhoven is a Dutch author. She is seen here holding the English language edition of her recent book. Photo Credit: Conrad Stoesz.

McNally Robinson bookstores in both cities. The book originally appeared in Dutch in 2011 and the release of an English language edition of the book was made possible in part by a publication grant from the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation.



Plett Foundation Executive Director, Hans Werner, receiving a complimentary copy of the *The Fehrs* from the author at the June 2, 2013 book launch. Photo Credit: Conrad Stoesz.

Book News cont.

News

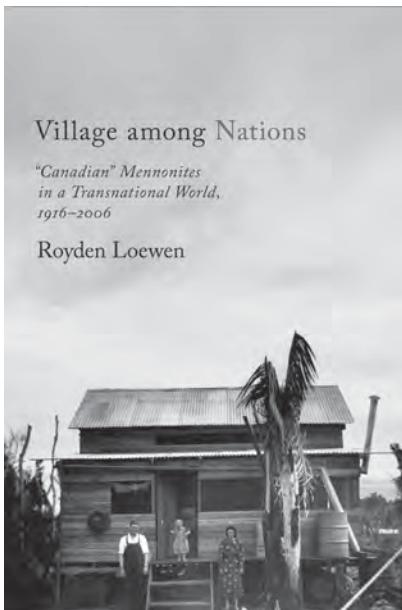
New Book Explores Mennonite Migrations to the South

The prolific historian of the Mennonite experience, Royden Loewen, has come out with a new book on the Mennonites who migrated from Canada in the 1920s and their subsequent remigrations all over the south and, in some cases, back to Canada. The book is to be launched in Winnipeg at about the time this issue of *Preservings* goes to press. *Village among Nations* adds a missing chapter of Canadian history: the story of these Mennonites who emigrated from Canada for cultural reasons, but then in later generations ‘returned’ in large numbers for economic and social security.

Loewen analyzes a wide variety of texts – letters, memoirs, sermons, field research and oral history interviews. Here are the voices of migrants who nurture kinship ties, debate land settlement, interact with curious outsiders, ponder religious meaning, and deliberate on issues of citizenship. They relate the hidden experiences of this uniquely transnational ethno-religious community.



Royden Loewen has published a number of book length studies of Mennonites. He is the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg and Board Chair of the Plett Foundation.



Village among Nations

*"Canadian" Mennonites
in a Transnational World,
1916–2006*

Royden Loewen

Plett Foundation Board Meets in Kansas

The Foundation Board held its semi-annual meetings in the fall of 2012 in Southwestern Kansas. The Mennonite Evangelical Church in Copeland, Kansas graciously hosted the Board. The Board took the opportunity to learn about the 5000+ Low German speaking Mennonites who have made their home in the Montezuma, Copeland, Sublette, Ulysses and Liberal area. Board meetings were held on Saturday and on Sunday Board members visited area churches. In the evening, Executive Director, Hans Werner made a presentation on the history of Mennonites in Siberia and showed pictures of a visit he made there in 2010. There was active interest and discussion about what Siberia was like, stimulated in part by recent interest in acquiring land in Tartarstan by Mennonites from Mexico. There were additional meetings and contacts made by Board members among the Reinländer and Old Colony Churches and with a committee of people in Newton who work with Low German Mennonites.



Board member John J. Friesen visiting with one of our hosts from the local church in Copeland, Kansas. Photo Credit: Hans Werner

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Letter to the Editor

In the 2011, issue of *Preservings*, I wrote an article entitled "Mennonite Immigrants in a Land of First Nations." In this article, I incorrectly talk about the Treaties and how Aboriginal people "ceded or surrendered" this land in order for Mennonite settlers in Southern Manitoba to become able to homestead it. I have since come to understand that this is not a correct view of the sacred Treaty making process that took place between Aboriginal people and the Queen (on behalf of settlers). The Aboriginal people came with a worldview to share the land, which was not a commodity to be bought or sold but something that the Creator had entrusted all to care for. Treaties were sacred covenants that expressed gratitude to the Creator, sacred trust for the earth and its resources, mutual respect and a model of how two peoples should share their lives together for as long as the sun shines, grass grows, and waters flow. How we understand the spirit and intent of the Treaties that were made long ago is important because it guides our thinking today in how we understand the meaning and implementation of them and our ongoing relationship with Aboriginal people.

Peace,
Leonard Doell

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Preservings

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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 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 on page 102. The subscription fee is \$20.00 per year.

We also invite you to contribute articles, biographies, or news. You may know of people whose story should be told in these pages. Maybe grandparents, relatives, or neighbours' stories would be of interest to our readers. Please contact us about writing such stories, or let us know who might be able to do so. We depend upon many willing writers for the content of the paper.

Blessings to you.
Sincerely,
John J. Friesen and Hans Werner,
co-editors for *Preservings*



The narrow strips of farmland called 'triften' just west of Ebląg and the Nogat River winding its way to the Zalew Wiślany (Frisches Haff). Photo Credit: Roland Sawatzky.