

Preservings

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MISSION

To inform our readers about the history of
the Mennonites who came to Manitoba in the
1870s and their descendants, and in particular
to promote a respectful understanding and
appreciation of the contributions made by
so-called Low German-speaking conservative
Mennonite groups of the Americas.

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COVER IMAGE

"Arrival" by Gail Sawatzky. Sawatzky, an
acrylic landscape painter, currently resides
in southern Manitoba. Her paintings can
be viewed at www.gailsawatzky.com

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FROM THE EDITOR

Aileen Friesen

With great excitement, I start my tenure as editor of *Preservings* and as the Executive Director of the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation. Hans Werner, who previously held both positions, retired after serving the foundation for over ten years. As the first Executive Director, Hans helped to give shape to the foundation's daily activities and breathe life into its mandate. Through his leadership and scholarship, he has contributed a unique perspective to the study of Mennonite history. As the editor of *Preservings*, he helped to set the agenda for future study, moving the journal in new directions by exploring themes such as the interaction between Mennonites and Indigenous peoples. I am grateful to Hans' for his mentorship and thankful that his insights will still continue to shape the historical conversation.

Since its beginnings in 1993, *Preservings* has played a vital role in promoting the study of the 1870s Mennonite community and their descendants, encouraging researchers, both amateur and professional, to seek out new sources, ask thought-provoking questions, and write about the people, places, and practices that have shaped Mennonite religious and cultural life. It has been a treasure trove of ideas, forging new paths for discovery and enquiry. It has been an open space for debate and discussion within the community on the importance of history in defining the contours of Mennonite life. Despite changes to its design, this will continue to be the essence of the journal.

Family histories have a place of prominence within *Preservings*. It is often through the writing of the intimate and the personal that Mennonites have addressed broader themes within their history. Therefore, it is fitting that the theme of this issue is the trajectories of family life. Why use the term trajectory? To draw our attention to the ways in which our individual lives are influenced by the decisions and events that shift the fortunes of our families; to find the moments and decisions that reverberated through our community and, in some cases, transformed the outlook of subsequent generations. While the term trajectory might seem to some as too restrictive and narrow to describe the complexities of family life, the sense of momentum conveyed in the word is helpful for highlighting the force by which decisions and events, both large and seemingly small, shaped the paths open to individual families.

In Mennonite life, migration has been one of the factors that altered, in fundamental ways, the prospects of the family. The



Aileen Friesen and Andrea Dyck (L–R), on a tour of the former East Reserve.

ERNEST BRAUN

first three articles in this issue show how the willingness of families to abandon familiar landscapes in order to protect their faith, to show solidarity with their community, and to follow God's calling, strained resources, changed lifespans, altered the marriage pool, redefined economic opportunities, and separated family members. The frequency by which families subjected themselves to this upheaval had significant repercussions.

It was not only migration, but also education that gave rise to new trajectories for both individuals and for families. Shirley Penner Bergen's article about her mother, Ida Hiebert, shows how a simple move from the farm into Winkler by Ida's family created the opportunity for furthering her education, which in turn opened doors to new experiences for this young Mennonite woman. While marriage, children, and home still arguably defined much of her life, the example of Ida illustrates how trends like urbanization encouraged the embracing of professional roles, which offered new opportunities and paths for Mennonites.

Material culture often followed or memorialized these trajectories, as Mennonites carried objects with special meaning (or material value) to new lands. In this issue, two articles illustrate how often clocks served these dual purposes, witnessing the arduous journeys of their owners and standing as concrete reminders of past lives purposely or tragically left behind. The intimate memories of Liza Kroeger and the fact-finding mission of Ernest Braun also illustrate how the meaning attached to material objects hinges on who tells the story. In fact, all of the articles addressing this issue's theme show how deeply we as individuals look for ourselves within the trajectories our family stories.



Der Menoniste
Le Menonite.

THE SUDERMAN FAMILY

Tracing Successive Generations

Hans Werner

In the book, *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*, Arlette Kouwenhoven uses the Fehr family as an organizing principle to tell the story of four hundred years of Mennonite history.¹ Stimulated by Kouwenhoven's book and the idea that we can learn much about the bigger questions of history by focusing closely on the details of a single family, I will follow the trajectory of the Suderman family. The story of the Sudermans addresses not only the theme of migration, but also the vagaries of infant mortality and death of women in childbirth, the influence of decisions made by individuals and family units that had consequences not only for them, but also for their descendants, and how a family adapts to the larger scale events that enveloped their lives.

Since naming practices have usually dictated that the family name was that of the male line, choosing to focus on the Suderman family line means that the story here will also be dominated by sons, rather than by daughters, by fathers, rather than mothers. It also means that branches of the family will constantly be left behind as the focus will be on the line of Sudermans that ultimately includes the family of my wife, Diana Werner (Suderman).²

Our quest for origins necessarily ends when we run out of sources. It is not clear when the first Anabaptists came to

northern Poland, but judging from one of Menno Simons' letters he had visited a Danzig (Gdańsk, Poland) congregation in 1548.³ Dirk Philips, the first *Ältester* (Elder) of the Danzig Mennonite Church arrived in the 1560s before the Flemish-Frisian schism made it to Danzig.⁴ It is also not known when the first Sudermans arrived in the area, or when and where they became Anabaptists. For centuries, the Suderman name was associated with the history of the Hanseatic League. As a confederation of cities in northern Europe that formed a commercial network, the Hanseatic League provided markets for the guilds and merchants of their respective regions. Various Suderman families centred in Dortmund, Cologne and Rotterdam were prominent in the Hanseatic trade network going back to the thirteenth century.⁵ Although by the time Dutch-North German Anabaptists arrived in Danzig the Hanseatic league was in decline, trade of grain between Amsterdam and Danzig continued to be one of the most important connections between West Prussia and the Netherlands.

The Mennonite Sudermans seem to have been city people living in or around the cities of Danzig and Elbing (Elblag) with a significant number involved in merchant activities. Although the Dutch or German connection of the Mennonite

Sudermans remains obscure, we can trace the family line of Diana's Suderman family as they migrated from Danzig to the rural areas of the Vistula (Wisła) delta, and on to Russia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Mexico.

DANZIG

Johanna Suderman (who was born in 1657 in Rotterdam) and an Abraham Suderman (whose wife died in 1667 and he died in 1679) are the oldest Suderman entries in the Danzig Flemish Church records;⁶ however, these Sudermans cannot be connected directly to the line of Sudermans that we are following here. The marriage of Abraham (I) Suderman and Catharina Dunckel in the Flemish Mennonite Church in the city of Danzig, on 13 November 1701 is the first Suderman record traceable to the present generation. The presiding minister was the *Lehrer* (teacher) Christoph Engman who would succeed the Ältester Georg Hansen in 1703 but then fall victim to the plague in 1709.⁷ The split in the Mennonite church that created Flemish and Frisian congregations carried over into West Prussia where it persisted long after having subsided in the Netherlands. In Danzig, the Flemish congregation was the larger of the two. The Flemish Church's first building was outside the city walls at the Petershagen Gate.⁸ The language in the Flemish church where Abraham and Catharina were married would have been Dutch, while the language at home

A Prussian Mennonite wedding proposal involved an *Umbitter*, someone who came to negotiate a possible union before the groom arrived to formally ask. The process was captured in a 1780 sketch by the Polish artist, Daniel Chodowiecki who lived in Danzig and then in Berlin.

was gradually becoming the Werder Platt (Low German) of the Vistula Lowlands. Abraham Suderman (I) was approximately twenty-one when he married, his bride was a year or two younger. There are likely gaps in the family record since Abraham (I) and Catharina's first recorded child came some ten years after their marriage. Between their wedding day and the birth of the first recorded child, about one-half of the population of the Danzig area died from the plague. The plague coincided with the Great Northern War between Sweden and Russia and struck the Danzig area in March 1709. The number of deaths due to the plague peaked in September and October, and it was over by the end of the year. The Flemish Church lost 160 adult members and 230 children to the plague.⁹ The Dunckels, Catharina's family, were also from Danzig and lived in Neugarten, an area between the primary and secondary walls of the city. Catharina's father,

and Catharina Suderman: Hendrich (Heinrich) and Antonie (Anton I) born 1711 and 1713 respectively. Heinrich and Anton (I) were four and two years old when their father Abraham (I) died at the age of thirty-five. Their mother, Catharina (Dunckel) remarried two years later to Johann Tielman. There are no recorded offspring from this second marriage. Catharina died in 1737 at the age of fifty-six. Abraham (I) and Catharina's oldest son, Heinrich, had a large family and died in 1777 in St. Albrecht (Gdańsk-Swięty Wojciech), a village near the city, which may indicate the family lived there. Anton (I) married Catharina Boldt, the widow of Jacob Hamm on 25 November 1742 when he was twenty-nine years old.¹¹

Anton (I) and Catharina's married life occurred during a challenging time for Danzig Mennonites. The city's economy suffered and Mennonites' ability to forge a livelihood was under constant pressure

population of the areas under the control of the Danzig city council. Anton (I) and Catharina had six children and almost all of them migrated to other areas. Arendt was baptized in Heubuden (Stogi) and in 1789 was living in Marienburg (Malbork), Heinrich died at age ten, Anna (Anke) died in Koenigsberg (Kaliningrad) at age forty-nine, Anton (II), the line we are following here, moved to the delta, Jacob became a Lutheran and moved to the Memel lowlands, and Magdalena married Gerhard Schultz, but died eleven months later in childbirth. The child also died. Anton (I) died at the age of sixty-four while his wife Catharina (Boldt) Suderman lived to be seventy-four. When the family section of the Danzig church records was begun in 1789 she is listed as being in the hospital or alms house. The hospital was a residence maintained by the Danzig congregation for those unable to support themselves and in danger of becoming beggars.¹³ Given that she was a widow, elderly, and with no children living nearby, Catharina's final home was in the Flemish Church Hospital.

VISTULA DELTA WEST

Anton (II), the fourth of six children of Anton (I) and Catharina (Boldt), was born in 1746 and the only thing we know about his spouse is that her name was Elizabeth. Anton (II) appears in the village of Schoensee in the 1772 Land Census conducted when the rural areas were transferred from Polish authority to the new Prussian administration. Schoensee is a village in what was termed the *Grosswerder*, or large island between the Vistula and Nogat Rivers. It would be interesting to know more about what stimulated the migration from the city to the rural area of West Prussia and to Schoensee in particular, but all we know is that Anton (II) must have moved there before 1772. In the 1772 land census he is listed as owning no land and was likely quite poor.¹⁴ Anton (II) had four children. The oldest two, Abraham and Anton, were twins. Four years later the 1776 Special Census of Mennonites indicates that the family had one daughter and four sons. At the time of the census Anton (II) was



Diana (Suderman) Werner walking the paths of her ancestors in the former village of Langfuhr, now the Wrzeszcz neighbourhood in the city of Gdańsk, Poland. Abraham and Catharina (Dunckel) Suderman must have lived here because their son, Anton (II) Suderman (1713–1777) was born here.

Anton Dunkel, likely fell victim to the plague, since he died in 1709.¹⁰ Sometime before 1713 Abraham (I) and Catharina lived in Langfuhr (Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz), another village outside the Danzig city gates, since their younger son is recorded as having been born there.

The Danzig Flemish Church books record two sons born to Abraham (I)

from the guilds of the city. Mennonites in the suburbs of Danzig were primarily engaged as peddlers, cloth and spice sellers, linen weavers, and brandy distillers. In the 1750s they faced the imposition of special taxes and legal restrictions on their economic activities.¹² The result was a steady migration from the city and its suburbs and a decline in the Mennonite



PLAN DER STADT UND SITUATION VON DANZIG. ARCHIWALNE MAPY POMORZA GDANSKIEGO. WWW.MAPYEXPLORACJA.PL/POMORZE/DANZIG/1711.JPG.

The area of Mennonite settlement in the suburbs of Danzig. Langfuhr is at the top right corner of the map, and Neugarten is located between the primary and secondary walls of the city along the long lane that goes to the village of Schidlitz. This image is a fragment of a 1711 map of the Danzig area.

in his early thirties and was a labourer. He is listed as an *Eigengärtner* or *Eigentümer* (property owner), which meant he likely owned his house and yard, but was not a landowning farmer. The census indicates his economic status as *schlecht* (low), which, while not sounding good, placed him in the same category as three quarters of the Mennonites in the delta.¹⁵ One of the twins, Anton (III), died at age ten in 1778 and another son died after five weeks. From subsequent church records we do know that there were two surviving sons, Abraham (II) and Aron (I). Anton (II) died in 1780 at the age of thirty-four and it is unclear exactly what happened to the two boys, who were thirteen and eight at the time, and their mother. Abraham's (II) baptism record indicates he was baptized in the Baerwalde church in 1791 and that he was from Neuteicherwald (Stawidła); however, when he got married on 19 February 1792 he is listed as being from Pietzkendorf (Pieczewo) a neighbouring village of Langfuhr.¹⁶ Aron (I) was baptised in the Ladekopp

church in 1792 and listed as being from Schoensee.¹⁷ In 1795 Aron (I) married Magdalena (Krahn) Peters, a widow ten years his senior.

KHORTITSA

The years of 1795 and 1796 were eventful for Aron (I) Suderman and Magdalena (Krahn) Peters. In March, Magdalena's first husband, Arend Peters, died leaving her with five children ranging in age from three to fourteen. Later that year she married Aron (I) Suderman; he was twenty-three, she was thirty-three. Magdalena was pregnant when they migrated to Russia and in June 1796 their first child, Abraham (III), was born in the village of Neuendorf in the Khortitsa colony in South Russia (Ukraine).¹⁸ Aron's (I) brother Abraham (II), his wife Susanna Neudorf, and one son also migrated to Russia a year later and both families initially settled in the village of Neuendorf. Abraham (II) had one son whose descendants would move to the Bergthal colony after 1836. The

Aron (I) Suderman family seems to have prospered in the village of Neuendorf. By 1811 the family had seven horses, twenty head of cattle and twenty sheep, which placed them among the most well-to-do in the village.¹⁹ In his diary entry for the 29 January 1837, the minister David Epp records that Aron Suderman is to receive additional compensation for his work as the head of the orphan's bureau (*Waisenamt*) because of his age. Aron (I) died a year later on 14 February 1838.²⁰ Jacob Suderman, a son of Aron (I) and Magdalena, married Katharina Derksen and they had four children of whom three reached adulthood. Between 1840 and 1844, Katharina died and Jacob was remarried to Justina Loewen, a daughter of Franz Loewen from the village of Neuenburg who was in her twenties, while he was in his mid-forties.²¹ The marriage to Justina likely resulted in Jacob moving to Neuenburg and they must have become landowners by 1847 as he is entered on a list of Khortitsa colony householders as living in Neuenburg.²² Jacob Suderman



A portion of Koppen's 1811 map of the Vistula Delta showing the Gross or Marienburger Werder (the area bounded by the main Vistula channel, the Nogat and the Szkarpawa rivers. The village of Schoensee is in the upper middle portion of the map just below the "T" of "Tiegenhofsches".

and Justina Loewen had six children of whom five reached adulthood. Jacob died on 25 August 1875 on the eve of the migration to Canada.

After his death the extended Suderman family consisted of the following members, with their approximate ages and respective families: His widow Justina (Loewen) Suderman (age 53). Her step children from Jacob's first marriage to Katharina Derksen included: Abraham (III) (39) and his wife, Agatha Boldt, and four children; Elizabeth (38) and her husband, Jacob Braun, with four children plus two children from her first marriage to Jacob Knelsen; Maria (35) and her husband, Andreas Schmidt, and two children. The children from Justina's marriage to Jacob Suderman included: Justina (28) and her new husband Cornelius Krahn; Margaretha (27); Franz (23), who would marry Ann Wieler six weeks after his father died; Johann (14); and Anton (IV) (9).

With the exception of Andreas and Maria (Suderman) Schmidt, the Sudermans of the Khortitsa and those from the Bergthal colony immigrated to Canada in the 1870s. After the rest of the family immigrated to Canada, tragedy claimed the life of Jacob Suderman's daughter Maria and her husband Andreas Schmidt, who had remained in Russia in the village of Schöneberg. In an 1880 diary entry Jacob Epp records an apparent murder-suicide, with Maria found dead on the porch of the couple's home, while her husband Andreas was found dead in the implement shed. Their two children were still asleep in the home.²³

WEST RESERVE

The extended family of Jacob Suderman immigrated to Canada in two separate movements. Justina (Loewen) Suderman arrived at Quebec on the S.S. Sarmatian on 30 June 1877. With her were two sons, Johann and Anton (IV), and daughter Margaretha. Her daughter Justina (Suderman) Krahn was on the same ship with her husband and family. The next year, the Abraham (III) Suderman, Franz Suderman and Elizabeth (Suderman) Braun families arrived on the S.S. Peruvian on 30 June 1878.²⁴

Justina (Loewen) Suderman settled in the village of Osterwick on the West Reserve of southern Manitoba. The choice was not arbitrary since Isaac Loewen, her brother, who arrived on the same ship also settled in Osterwick. Three sons of Isaac Loewen would become storekeepers in Winkler, Gretna and Osler, Saskatchewan. Franz and Abraham Suderman settled at Burwalde, the Brauns at Gruenfeld, and the Krahns at Schoendorf.

The Sudermans became members of the Reinlaender Mennonite Gemeinde, more commonly known as the Old Colony Church. In 1880 Ältester Johann Wiebe called for a re-registration of members after church controversies erupted which, to a large extent, had arisen out of the differing backgrounds of the new immigrants. With one exception the Suderman families registered and hence are recorded in the Old Colony Church records. It seems the Franz Suderman family was never registered as Old Colony, even though the family arrived with other migrants from Khortitsa and settled in Burwalde on the western side of the reserve, which was traditionally part of the Old Colony area.²⁵

The widow Suderman, her single daughter Margaretha, and her two young sons became farmers in the village of Osterwick. Considering that they only arrived in the summer of 1877, Justina and her children made substantial progress in their first three full summers in Canada. By the end of 1880, when a census of the West Reserve was taken, they were assessed more taxes than most of their village neighbours. They had broken thirty acres of land, owned four horses and had a total assessment of \$565 compared to the village average of \$476. Justina may also have brought with her the proceeds of disposing of her property in Russia.²⁶ Her son Franz and his half-brother Abraham (III) living in the newly established village of Burwalde had young families and arrived a year later; their assessments were \$381 and \$386. Abraham (III) and Agatha Boldt had seven children of whom six reached adulthood and had families. A number of their older children migrated to Mexico, while their sons Abram (IV) and Franz

remained in the Winkler area. Their descendants became Bergthaler members and farmed in the Greenfarm and Haskett areas near Winkler.

Johann Suderman, the older of the two sons that accompanied their widowed mother, Justina, to Canada remained in the village of Osterwick. He married Margaretha Banman in 1884 and the couple had twelve children, eight of whom survived to adulthood. Johann's first wife, Margaretha (Banman) died in 1905 and Johann married Helen (Dyck) Siemens, with whom he had two children. Many of Johann's descendants joined the Sommerfelder Church but some also joined the Bergthaler Church when English and Sunday School began to enter Mennonite communities. One son, Cornelius, would migrate to the Menno Colony in Paraguay in 1927. Another son, Franz, married Katharina Peters from the village of Reinland and moved there. Franz and Katharina's son Frank was the father of



PRIVATE COLLECTION

Johann and Helen Suderman, who lived in the village of Osterwick.

Diana (Suderman) Werner. He purchased a farm between Chortitz and Schanzenfeld in the 1950s and farmed there together with his son Bruce and son-in-law, Nick Heide (Dorothy). After Bruce's untimely death in a vehicle accident in 1974, Hans Werner (Diana) joined the farm. Frank also purchased a farm in the Neepawa area



PLAN GENERAL NOGO MEZHEVANIA EKATERINOSLAVSKOJ GUBERNI. EKATERINOSLAVSKAUE: WILVOGTAHNEFORSCHUNG. [HTTP://CHORTISQUARE.CHBUCH.CH/BOOK/1790.PDF](http://CHORTISQUARE.CHBUCH.CH/BOOK/1790.PDF)

A portion of a 1790 map of the Khortitsa area.

and assisted his son-in-law Cornie Fehr (Hilda) to take over that farm.

Anton (IV), who was nine when he came to Canada, married Helena Dueck in 1888. Anton and Helena may have lived in the Greenfarm area after their marriage since there is an Anton Suderman who homesteaded NW 25-3-4 on a Time Sale.²⁷ Abraham (III)'s descendants who later lived in the Greenfarm area did not include an Anton.

Sudermans from the Bergthal colony,

descendants of Abraham Suderman (II) arrived on the S.S. Nova Scotian on 27 July 1874 and settled in the East Reserve. Later they moved to the West Reserve village of Neu Hoffnung.²⁸

SASKATCHEWAN

By the 1890s Mennonites in the area immediately south of Winkler were facing acute land shortages. The rate of infant mortality and death in childbirth had begun to slow and families quickly became

large. In 1895 land became available in Saskatchewan with the establishment of what would become the Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve near Saskatoon. Ninety-six families left from the Winkler train station that year and in April 1900 the *Morden Empire* newspaper reported that a thousand people had come to see off a large group of settlers headed west.²⁹ On 23 February 1900 Anton (IV) Suderman and his family left the Winkler area to settle in Osterwick, just east of Warman,



MENNONTIE HERITAGE ARCHIVES 107

A train leaving for the Northwest from the Winkler station around 1900. Some people believe that this picture depicts Mennonites leaving for Mexico in the 1920s.

Saskatchewan.³⁰ His older brother Franz also moved to Hague-Osler in 1909 as a widower after his wife, Anna Wieler, had already died. The two Suderman families who moved to Saskatchewan were, in some ways, a study in contrasts.

Anton (IV) and Agatha (Boldt) broke thirty-six acres of land in their first year and by the time they received title to their land in 1902 they were cropping forty-six acres of land and had six horses and five head of cattle.³¹ In 1905 the Great Northern and the Canadian Pacific Railways intersected a mile from Osterwick and the village of Warman was born. The proximity of Osterwick to Warman meant the village soon faced the pressures of modernization, which threatened the village's survival. In 1909 Anton (IV) Suderman sold his farm and moved to the Swift Current colony, which had been established five years earlier. When Anton and Agatha Boldt moved to the village of Neuendorf near Wymark, southwest of Swift Current, they were in their forties and had a large family.

Anton (IV) and Helena (Dueck) had thirteen children, ten of which survived to adulthood. Large families and the realities of farming before mechanization made for unusual family dynamics. Franz, one of Anton and Helena's sons, married Maria Driedger. Franz died on 3 November 1918, when Maria was pregnant with their second child. The child, also named Franz, was born on 23 April 1919. On 22 June 1919 Maria married Anton (V), Franz's younger brother, and she and Anton (V) had ten children, all of whom survived to adulthood and had their own families. After Anton (V) died Maria would marry two more times before she died in 1982 at the age of eighty-five.³² While Anton's (IV) brother and sister-in-law, Franz and Anna (Wieler), have no record in the Old Colony Church, Anton's (IV) family consistently followed the path of Old Colony migrations. It was difficult to avoid the 'world' and railways and railway towns continued to invade Anton (IV) family's desire to remain separate from

their influence. The family tells a story about the railway coming through their land in Neuendorf. When a town was to be built, the railway wanted to name it 'Suderman.' Anton (IV)'s son, Johan, had the homestead entry for the land but refused this honour. The village was then named McMahon.³³

Franz and Anna had seven children, but only two daughters survived to adulthood. Like his brother Anton (IV), Franz also obtained entry, the process for applying for a given quarter section, in 1899, but must have arrived in Osterwick in 1909 since he broke ten acres of land, built a house, and moved in that year. In 1911, the year he died, he was cropping thirty-six acres. Franz died in Hague-Osler in 1911 at age fifty-nine, Anna (Wieler) died in 1904 at age sixty. Having no surviving sons meant that the Franz Suderman line ended in Hague-Osler. Franz and Anna's daughters had large families, but they were Martens and Loewens.³⁴

LATIN AND SOUTH AMERICA

The extended family of Anton (IV) Suderman migrated to Mexico sometime in the 1920s. Anton (IV) and Helena (Dueck)'s family spread throughout the Latin American diaspora. Their children's location at the time of their deaths included the Swift, Manitoba, and Durango colonies in Mexico and the Shipyard Colony in Belize. Anton (IV) died in the Swift Colony in Mexico in 1929. The 1930 Mexican Census indicates that his widow, Helena (Dueck) lived with three adult daughters, two of whom were twins, in the Swift Colony village of Rosenhof.³⁵ In addition a son, Anton (V), is listed as living in the village of Rosenbach in the Manitoba Colony, with his wife Maria and eight children.³⁶

CONCLUSION

This long view of the Suderman family shows critical points where circumstances and family decisions influenced the trajectory of successive generations. For instance, Anton (II)'s decision to move to Schoensee to a great extent determined that his descendants would move to the Khortitsa colony. His descendants, and those of his brother Abraham (II), would be the only Sudermans who did not migrate to the Molotschna colony. In turn, this also meant that their descendants would be the only Sudermans to settle in Manitoba in the 1870s. The Sudermans also demonstrated a tendency towards matrilocality—the tendency for men to move to the villages of their wives. Perhaps matrilocality explains the move to Schoensee. It is also remarkable to see

how small most Suderman families were in the eighteenth century. Two Suderman fathers died in their mid-thirties, mothers died in childbirth, and the deaths of children visited families regularly. In the twentieth century, in Canada, families suddenly became large. The reduction in child mortality and the improved birth conditions, combined with the absence of birth control, meant families became large quickly and therefore, for an agricultural community, the search for land became constant. Family memory was preserved most distinctly by the Suderman family in the naming of their sons. The reader could be forgiven for getting lost among all the Antons, Abrahams, and Arons. For at least 250 years the Sudermans had an Anton in every generation.

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- 1 Arlette Kouwenhoven, trans. Leslie Fast and Kerry Fast, *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration* (Leiden: WINCO, 2013).
- 2 I am indebted to the genealogists who have transcribed and made available the family records upon which this article is based. I am particularly indebted to Glenn Penner, who provided advice and research in answering specific questions of the Suderman genealogy of the Prussian period.
- 3 Peter J. Klassen, *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), 49.
- 4 H.G. Mannhardt, *The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569-1919*, trans. Victor G. Doerksen, eds. Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiessen (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2007), 47.
- 5 See for instance Bruno Meyer, *Die Sudermanns von Dortmund: Ein hanisches Kaufmannsgeschlecht* (Pierer, 1930).
- 6 "Births, Baptisms, Marriages and Deaths in the Danzig Church 1665-1943," transliterated and digitized by Ernest H. Baergen, www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Danzig_Records.htm. I have not preserved the myriad of spelling variations found in the various sources but have rather standardized spellings to the most common recent spellings of names.
- 7 Ibid. and Mannhardt, 92.
- 8 The first Flemish church building was outside the Petershagen gate on private property, since a Mennonite congregation could not own land. In 1686 the property was transferred to the Ältester, Willem Dunkel. Mannhardt, 115-116.
- 9 Mannhardt, 91.
- 10 "Neuerrichtetes Kirchen Buch erster Teil 1789," transliterated and digitized by Ernest H. Baergen, www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Danzig_Family_Book_1.pdf.
- 11 "Anton Sudermann (1713-1777)" in *Family book of the Flemish congregation, begun 1789*, vol. 1, p. 182, https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_310/bdms19/0184.jpg.
- 12 Edmund Kizik, "A Radical Attempt to Resolve the Mennonite Question in Danzig in the mid-Eighteenth Century: The Decline of the Relations Between the Danzig City Council and the Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 2 (1992): 127-154.
- 13 "Anton Sudermann (1713-1777)," https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_310/bdms19/0184.jpg.
- 14 The 1772 Prussian land census (Kontributionskataster) records are located at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (Dahlem). A digital image of the page with Suderman records was provided to me by Glenn Penner. An index of 1920s extraction of these records, the Marburger Auszüge can be found at: www.odessa3.org/collections/land/wprussia. The record for Anton Zuterman is listed as being on Film 6036, Page 622, Registration Number 284.
- 15 Glenn Penner, introduction to "The Complete 1776 Census of Mennonites in West Prussia," www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.pdf.
- 16 "Ladekop Mennonite Church Record Book," Image Files, Mennonite Library and Archives, p 60-61, https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_306/60-61.jpg and www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Baerwalde_Baptisms.htm.
- 17 Adalbert Goertz, "1782-1805 Baptisms in Baerwalde, West Prussia," *Mennonite Family History* (January 1988): 26, and "Baptisms in Ladekop, West Prussia, 1782-1804," *Mennonite Family History* (April 1989): 66.
- 18 "Chortitza Mennonite Settlement Census for 1 September 1801," Odessa Archives, Fonds 6, Series 1, File 67, transcribed by Tim Janzen, www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_September_1801.pdf.
- 19 "Chortitza Mennonite Settlement Census for May 1811," State Archives of Dnipropetrovsk Region (SADR), f.134, op. 1, d. 299, translation and comments by Richard D. Thiessen Thiessen, www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_May_1811.pdf.
- 20 "Jacob Wall Diary." The version used here is the German transcription on the Willi Vogt genealogical website, <http://chort.square7.ch/Eich/WallOr1.htm>.
- 21 Little is known of Katharina Doerksen; she may be the daughter of Jacob Doerksen and Katarina Peters. See Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry [hereafter GRANDMA] #529292.
- 22 "Annotated List of Chortitza Colony Householders for 1847," State Archives of the Odessa Region, f. 6, Op. 2, d. 11519, transcribed by Glenn H. Penner, www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_1847.htm.
- 23 Diary entry for January 28, 1880 in Harvey L. Dyck, *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
- 24 "Quebec Passenger Lists 1874-1880," annotated by Cathy Barkman, www.mennonitegenealogy.com/canada/quebec/quebec7480.htm.
- 25 John Dyck and William Harms, eds., *Reinländer (Old Colony) Gemeinde Buch, 1880-1903*, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2006), 219-3b, 237-4, 261-3b, 338-1, 408-3.
- 26 John Dyck and William Harms, eds., *1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve*, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1998), 104-105. The village map on page 104 lists Justina Suderman as the resident of Lot #9, but the assessment listing from 1881 on the next page lists her assessment under Jacob Bueckert. Justina married Jacob in 1880 and he must have come to live with her in Osterwick.
- 27 "Land Grants of Western Canada, 1870-1930," database, www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/land/land-grants-western-canada-1870-1930.
- 28 See notes found in GRANDMA entry for Johan P. Suderman, #186469.
- 29 Hans Werner, *Living Between Worlds: A History of Winkler*, (Winkler: Winkler Heritage Society, 2006), 27.
- 30 Leonard Doell, *Mennonite Homesteaders on the Hague-Osler Reserve, 1891-1999*, (Saskatoon: Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, 1999), 25. Here it is recorded that the Anton Sudermans left for Saskatchewan in February of 1900, however, his homestead record on page 266 indicates he broke thirty-six acres already in 1899.
- 31 Doell, 266.
- 32 GRANDMA, #191548.
- 33 *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve: 1895-1995*, (Saskatoon: Hague-Osler Reserve Book Committee, 1995), 184. McMahon is located on NE 10-13-12 W3, which was Johan Suderman's homestead. See: Saskatchewan Homestead Index, www.saskhomesteads.com.
- 34 GRANDMA, #140508 and #139768.
- 35 "1930 Census of Mexico—Rosenhof," <https://mennonitehistory.org/1930-census-of-mexico-rosenhof/>.
- 36 "1930 Census of Mexico—Rosenbach," indexed by Cornelius Heinrichs, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, <https://mennonitehistory.org/1930-census-of-mexico-rosenbach/>.

THE VANDERHOOF EXPEDITION

In Search of Freedom

Harold J. Suderman as told to Jane Suderman

Since my boyhood I remember hearing references to Vanderhoof at family gatherings at my grandparents' home in Morden, Manitoba. I learned that the Suderman family had suffered three deaths

in four days during the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic while pioneering in the wilderness near Vanderhoof, British Columbia. One of the three was my dad's older brother, John, a young man in the prime

of life with a reputation for great physical strength. His death was a terrible blow, particularly to my grandfather. Another death was my dad's brother-in-law, Peter Dyck, husband of his sister Helen and



The Suderman family, before their departure to Vanderhoof in 1918. My father, Jake, is standing at the back in the middle.

father of two infant boys. The third was Peter's brother, Abram, who had come from Manitoba to marry another of my dad's seven sisters, Tina.

Many years later, after my dad had passed away, my wife Wilma (née Reimer) and I visited dad's youngest sister, my aunt Dora (Suderman) Enns in Indian Head, Saskatchewan. One of her first questions was, "Did you visit Vanderhoof?" Whenever I saw Dora in her later years, she would importune me to go and find the site where our family had pioneered.

My answer, finally, was yes. We were able to update her on our mission to look for the old homestead and to elicit more information about the time she remembered as two miserable years of her childhood. When my dad died in 1945 I inherited his old photo album with scenes of the two-year, ill-fated venture that my grandfather later not only believed had been contrary to God's will, but also had wiped out the prosperity the family had enjoyed before in Neu Hoffnung (New Hope), Manitoba.

In the following pages I have recorded my efforts to describe what happened in Vanderhoof and to understand what motivated my grandparents and other like-minded Mennonites, mainly from the Altona-Winkler-Burwalde area in southern Manitoba and some from the Mountain Lake district of South Dakota, to leave their comfortable existences and begin again, almost from scratch.

A FATEFUL DECISION

The Sudermans,¹ like other Mennonites who had left Russia in the 1870s, were concerned about the Military Service Act of 1917, passed to boost recruitment in the war effort if needed. It gave the government the right to impose conscription on men aged twenty to forty-five and although it allowed for conscientious objectors to perform alternate service in hospitals and in other non-combat roles, it included no specific exemptions for pacifist groups like the Mennonites who had come to Canada with governmental assurance they would be exempt from any form of military service.

In early 1918 the Act was revised to

exclude all blanket exemptions. Even though pacifist religious groups could still qualify for exemption, the confusion surrounding the Act heightened fears already present among Manitoban Mennonites. Many also viewed any participation in war, including as a conscientious objector, as contributing to militarism, which violated their pacifist beliefs. My grandfather, Johann Suderman, struggled with how to respond to what he considered to be a betrayal by the Canadian government. Historically, Mennonites had responded with passive resistance and a rejection of governmental authority to events of persecution or challenges to their anti-militarist stance. Non-resistance had often encouraged migration, as from the Netherlands to the Vistula Delta during the sixteenth century or from Prussia to Russia during the reign of Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century, and finally from Russia to Canada in the 1870s.² In each instance, Mennonites were offered land and religious freedom; the latter was a promise kept for a period of time, but then in each instance rescinded in some way. In some cases, Mennonites themselves questioned this belief. For instance, in Russia, some Mennonites would come to arm themselves against the raids of the *Makhnovists* during the Russian Civil War, but that was a rare active response to threats of and realized violence against them and their land during a time of anarchy.³

In Manitoba, most Mennonites chose to take a wait-and-see attitude to the Military Service Act, and in hindsight, I am surprised that my grandfather did not react the same way. But he was a man of deep faith and had three sons already of military age whose salvation he feared would be compromised if they were conscripted. Still, his decision to embark on a journey of faith could not have been easy.

Both Johann (1868–1950) and his wife Susanna (née Giesbrecht, 1873–1948) had experienced firsthand the challenges and tragedies of pioneering in an unfamiliar and untamed territory. Johann was turning six when his family joined the first group of 160 Russian Mennonites on the arduous seven-week trip from Russia⁴ to southern Manitoba by land,

sea, lake, and river. They carried little but the clothes on their backs when they got off the paddle-wheeler at the junction of the Red and Rat Rivers on 1 August 1874. Without the assistance of the Indigenous population he and his family would not likely have survived the record cold winter of 1874–75. His father, Abraham, aged fifty-two, died only seven months after arriving. Susanna's family had also come in the first contingent of Mennonites and she lost two brothers to starvation in the first year in Canada. Susanna herself had temporarily become blind from a lack of nutrition.⁵

To make the prospect of leaving even more difficult, Johann and Susanna had become prosperous farmers in Manitoba by 1918 in a successful operation in Neu Hoffnung, a village near Gretna. Nonetheless, they decided to leave and re-establish themselves as far away as possible from the long arm of the government in order to live their faith in peace.

They were encouraged by Heinrich H. Voth (1851–1918), a Mennonite Brethren elder and *Reiseprediger* (traveling evangelist) from Minnesota.⁶ Voth had helped found the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church, and although the Sudermans were members of the conservative Sommerfeld Mennonite Church at the time, some of them, including Johann, Susanna, and my father, Jake, eventually joined the Mennonite Brethren Church established by the charismatic Voth.

Voth was also committed to non-violent resistance and, to evade the American draft bill passed in 1917 (he had two sons of draft age), he joined other American Mennonites from South Dakota and Minnesota and moved his family to Winkler. Two of Voth's daughters lived there already, one married to Aaron Dyck and the other to Peter Neufeld. Another son, Henry S., also a *Reiseprediger*, was soon to marry Susie Warkentin, daughter of Johann Warkentin, a Mennonite Brethren deacon in Winkler who, despite his affiliation, was among those opposed to the migration.⁷

A few months later, however, the Canadian Military Service Act was passed and the American families in Winkler,



The young, strong, and healthy Suderman men cleared the land for planting.

including the Voths, with the exception of sons Henry S. and John H., prepared to trek west to the newly-opened Nechako River Valley at Vanderhoof, British Columbia. Part of their plan was to set up a Mennonite Brethren colony.⁸ The Sudermans also decided to join the colonization attempt.

DESTINATION VANDERHOOF

In the spring of 1918, the Suderman family set out for Braeside, about ten miles northwest of Vanderhoof, to homestead along the Nechako River, a tributary of the Fraser. Johann had scouted Vanderhoof before buying and evidently believed in its farming and economic potential. It was a northern frontier region, far from Ottawa but newly accessible by train—Vanderhoof Station had been opened in

1912–1913 by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. Land was offered at a good price in the municipality and, with the rail connection, the settlers could foresee their grain being carried to markets as it was on the prairies.

Johann made extensive preparations for the journey. He was intent on success and wealthy enough to take along all necessary resources and equipment. He and Susanna had sold their farm and amassed everything they and their twelve children might need for the coming venture. They chartered three freight cars and one open rail car from the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and loaded them with cattle, horses, feed, furniture, farm implements, a steam-powered tractor, a car, and a threshing machine. The *Vanderhoof Herald* reported on their arrival that the

Sudermans' heavy steam-powered tractor was the first of its kind in British Columbia. Johann's Model-T Ford, one of the first in southern Manitoba, was the second in Vanderhoof (the first was owned by a local doctor).⁹ My father, Jake, who was very independent, drove out to Vanderhoof in his own car. En route he took pictures of the majestic mountain scenery with his Kodak Model A camera, which I still have, along with his faded photographs.

Anna (Suderman) Labun, a girl of twelve in 1918, recalled that each of the freight cars required someone to ride along to look after the horses and cattle. From time to time, the train stopped so the animals could be watered. The rest of the family took over an entire coach on a passenger train and got to Vanderhoof

first. When the cattle arrived, they walked them from Vanderhoof to the farm ten miles away, constructing log bridges over little gullies when necessary.¹⁰

Johann had also looked to the family's spiritual needs and brought two enormous tents, one for shelter while they felled trees and constructed homes, and one to hold church services for themselves and the other settlers. Voth became the spiritual leader of the community and my father told me that up to one hundred people

darting all around. The *Nature Guide to the Nechako River* I consulted when we visited in 1992 confirmed her memories. Vireos, jays and thrushes, swallows, chickadees, warblers, sparrows, creepers and nuthatches, pipits, waxwings, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, blackbirds, and finches were among the many songbirds that were often heard before they were seen.¹¹ Migratory birds including swans and geese also pass through the region. When the salmon ran, Dora and Anna

stands poised to bring down an axe over a huge stump in order to split it; in another, he and Abe prepare to lever out a stump with nothing more than a long pole; in others, the men are using the tractor or the horses to pull out stumps. In yet others, they strive to extract, by brute strength, the tractor itself, mired in the muck of a field after rain. And in the background, always, the towering forest.

I also have pictures of threshing with Johann's steam-powered thresher as part of the scene. I have no trouble identifying my father because in the field he always wore a battered felt hat. It was backbreaking labour, for men and horses, and when I look at the pictures and remember my own days working in the fields of southern Manitoba in the 1930s, I marvel at how they had the strength to carry on.

Their first buildings were constructed out of logs. The settlers built homesteads and a church, the interior and roof of which were finished with lumber cut at the saw mill on the Voth homestead.¹³ The church was established a few miles north of the Nechako River and fourteen miles west of Vanderhoof, on what is still the Braeside Road.

Despite some negativity from the non-Mennonites of the area towards the settlers for speaking German in town and holding church services in German and, of course, for avoiding the war effort, the Sudermans and a few other families forged ahead and created a new Braeside school district, built a temporary school house, and hired a teacher.¹⁴

If character is destiny, there is something about the Suderman character that did not shy away from a challenge and led, perhaps, in part to similar courageous ventures in the years to come. Religious zeal, a sense of adventure, attraction to the unknown, a strong will, and fearlessness were common traits. Risk did not deter them from perilous or unconventional endeavours, before or after the Vanderhoof mission, especially when undertaken in the service of faith and conviction.¹⁵

Despite nature's mighty testing, Johann was determined and had tragedy not struck in the fall of 1918, the Suderman story might have continued to unfold



I could only find the remnants of one of the buildings that had formerly stood on the homestead of my family. Nonetheless, rediscovering this place was a wonderful moment for me as I contemplated the peaceful scene and the sad story it harboured. This photograph shows the Suderman family farm in 1918.

assembled in the tent sometimes, dressed in their Sunday best for the service.

The Sudermans had bought 160 acres along the river next to the farm of Peter and Helena (Voth) Neufeld. To my Aunt Dora, aged 10, the land seemed an earthly paradise when they arrived. She recalled the bounty of fish—sturgeon, trout, and salmon—in the fast-flowing river, the beauty of the forest, and the abundance of wildlife, especially of birds warbling and

would stand in shallow water with a pitchfork stabbing the fish and pitching them onto shore.¹²

To John, Jake, and Abe, strong and healthy young men in their twenties, fell the majority of the work of clearing the land for planting. In the beginning I think they might have enjoyed their battle to bring nature to her knees! Photographs in my old album show them engaged in this Herculean struggle. In one, my father

there. Certainly, my grandfather would not have come to believe he had incurred God's punishment in fleeing the law of the land.

TRAGEDY AND RETURN TO MANITOBA

Helen Suderman had married Peter Dyck in 1914 and with their two young sons, and Peter's brother, Abram, they followed the family to Vanderhoof in the fall of 1918. Abram and Tina were to be married in Vanderhoof by Heinrich Voth on November 3.

The little group boarded the train in Altona, Manitoba on October 18 in cold and rainy weather. As they traveled westward on their long journey they shared space with soldiers coming home from the war, and it was this that may have sealed their fate. Some of the soldiers may have been carrying the deadly influenza virus known as the Spanish Flu that ravaged the world that year, and by the time they arrived in Vanderhoof near the end of October, the two brothers were already feeling the onset of its deadly symptoms.

The virus, a variety of H1N1, was first detected in Spain. It raced through the trenches of the First World War and as war-weary soldiers returned to their home countries many carried the virus with them. By the time the epidemic had run its course in 1919, between 20 and 100 million people had died from it around the world, including 30,000 to 50,000 Canadians.¹⁶ Everywhere, the virus was most lethal to young, healthy men and pregnant women. It arrived on the Mennonite reserves in Manitoba in late October of 1918. Amongst Mennonite populations in rural Manitoba, the mortality rate was more than double (14.3) the Canadian average of 6.1 per 1,000 population for reasons as yet not understood.¹⁷

For Peter and Abram, the flu ran its customary quick and horrific course of pain, thirst, delirium, and pneumonia. Abram, aged twenty-four, succumbed on October 29, and Peter, twenty-nine, two days later. Their funeral took place on November 3, sadly the very day set for Abram and Tina's wedding. Almost the entire Suderman family had come down with the flu, and

on November 2, the oldest and strongest of the Suderman sons, John, aged twenty-five, also died.

At an outdoor funeral for the three young men, Peter Neufeld, Heinrich Voth's son-in-law, spoke on 1 Peter 1:3-5, and D.J. Dick on Jeremiah 29:11 (the elder Voth was at a conference in Minnesota).¹⁸ Because a casket could not be built in time for John, his body was placed on the lid of one of them and reburied later. The newly widowed Helen managed to briefly come outdoors, and only Tina and Anna were well enough to accompany the coffins to the graveside where they were placed in shallow graves and covered with boards and a thin layer of earth. So many in the area were dying that material for a tin lining of the coffins could not be obtained and it was decided to remake them later and ship them back to Manitoba for reburial. In the spring of 1920, when the Suderman family gave up and returned to Manitoba, the bodies of the three young men were transported by train in sealed coffins and reburied on the prairie in the family plot of Gerhard and Anna Dyck, Peter and Abram's parents, in the Rosewell Bloomfield Cemetery.

More deaths in Vanderhoof followed. The 67-year-old Heinrich died on November 26. He had felt his health declining after his trip to Minnesota and predicted his own life was nearing its end. In the two days before his death he built his own coffin, arranged his funeral service, gathered his family to pray, and then passed away after a nap. His young grandson, Peter Neufeld, died of tuberculosis on December 31.¹⁹ Thus within the space of two months, the Suderman and Voth families had lost three young men, a child, and their spiritual leader. They were devastated.

They laboured until the spring of 1920, but not only had the tragedies taken their emotional toll, the settlement itself turned out to be economically unviable. There was no market for their produce and no outside employment that could bring in income. My grandmother Susanna wanted to leave. She could see nothing but further backbreaking labour for her two remaining older sons, Jake and

Abe. Spiritual unease followed personal misfortune and financial strain, and the Sudermans abandoned the farm they had toiled so hard to carve out of the primeval forest. The Voths did the same, returning to Minnesota while the Sudermans returned to Manitoba. Within another six months, most of the settlers had left the area and Mennonites did not homestead there again until the 1940s and 1950s.²⁰ Ironically, the Military Service Act was never applied to the Mennonites. In the end, they had lost their right to exemption on paper but not in practice.²¹ My father would later say only that "it had all been a big mistake."

Johann and Susanna lost almost everything. Back in Manitoba, they bought land near Morden next to the Dominion Experimental Farm. The farm was repossessed when they were unable to keep up with the mortgage payments. They then bought a 40-acre plot on the south edge of Morden beside the railroad tracks. The house was so close to the tracks that the vibrations of passing trains cracked the plaster. During the Depression they relied on their daughter Anna's intermittent wages from work on another farm. Eventually the market garden provided a living for Johann and Susanna and two of their children, Susan and Ernst, who lived with them. It was said of Johann that when he went out into the streets of Morden to sell his produce (much sought after), he refused to set out until his white shirt was ironed and his cuff links were in place.²²

My father, Jake, who had taught school before Vanderhoof, went back to teaching in one-room prairie schoolhouses around southern Manitoba. And so ended that short but fateful chapter of the Suderman family saga, begun with such high hopes and ending in such sorrow.

AFTERMATH OF FAILURE AND CHANGE OF HEART

I must say that to this day I cannot understand how my grandfather could have been so bereft of wisdom as to have sold his every acre of land and set out on such a perilous venture with an entire family dependent on his decision. I can only suppose he thought he would never



Jake and John at a turbulent section of the Nechako River. Nechako means "big river" in the Indigenous Carrier language.

go back. Presumably, belief in the righteousness of his epic undertaking blinded him to the possibility of failure; he did not envisage it and therefore made no provision for it. And perhaps he was more moved by Voth's vision of a Mennonite Brethren colony than by reason.

Heartbreak and defeat in Vanderhoof resulted, however, in soul-searching and spiritual suffering for Johann. He believed the frontier deaths and his failure to prosper were God's punishment for his attempt to escape the Canadian government. His thinking on this point is also somewhat of a mystery to me. Years ago I accepted his rationale at face value, but with the passage of time I ask myself: what did he identify as the sin that had incurred God's displeasure? How could his sin have been following his conscience? Faith journeys were a Mennonite tradition when their convictions were threatened. Why would he come to think that, in this instance, God had wanted him to resist militarism but not flee it? Or did he feel he had jumped the gun, the Military Service Act not yet having been applied? He never clarified his reasoning to me and neither did my father. They didn't talk much about the lost two years. The closest I can come to my grandfather's spiritual train of thought is that because Canada had been

good to the Mennonites, he should have found a way to abide by its laws.

In retrospect, I believe he suffered from "survivor's guilt," which would explain his sense of being punished, and from remorse for having prospered during the war when grain had garnered high prices, and then having tried to spare his sons while some of his "English" neighbours not only lost theirs in the war, but had been forced to sell land for lack of labour.

Perhaps he also felt that overconfidence and pride in his abilities had contributed to his downfall. Having amassed wealth once, he was sure he could do it again. The Greeks would have called it *hubris*; my grandfather would have interpreted it as God's judgment for the sin of pride.

I can only speculate on the reasons for his conclusion, but I can say with certainty that his anti-militarism and rejection of civil authority (Mennonites believed war was a function of government) became less absolute after Vanderhoof.

When war was declared in 1939, my father and I tried repeatedly to enlist in the army. We didn't want to stay behind while others risked their lives, and we had listened in horror to speeches by Adolf Hitler live on our short wave radio. To us, tuning in so far away on the vast Canadian prairie, Hitler was the voice of evil. As soon as war

was declared, we went to the Fort Osborne Barracks in Winnipeg and filled out the forms and wrote the tests but we were both refused on medical grounds. This happened each time we tried until finally I went to Winnipeg to join the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in 1943 having heard that the RCAF was recruiting. I was accepted and trained in various places including Montreal and Debert, Nova Scotia, not as a pilot, because of my eyesight, but as a radio mechanic.

My father died unexpectedly in 1945 of a failed operation and when I got the news by telegram, my brother-in-law Joe Schwartz (married to my sister, Irma) and I rushed by train to Manitoba for the funeral at which we stood in uniform. I expected my grandfather Johann to be upset at the sight, but he wasn't. He spoke kindly to us and when I came home after the war and Wilma and I lived in Winnipeg, he came to visit and offered his unconditional support for whatever I might do next. The patriarch, whose will was once iron and whose wishes few would have dared to counter, had softened.



The Suderman photo album from Vanderhoof includes this picture of the local Indigenous population.

Other returning veterans were not as lucky as I was with family and church. My family and community welcomed me back without censure while others who had enlisted as fighters or conscientious objectors were shunned by both family and church. Sometimes the families of soldiers who died were left to mourn uncomforted. My grandfather's dilemma over militarism and pacifism mirrored the rifts in the larger Mennonite community, a difficult period of Mennonite life in Canada that has been well-examined in both academic and non-academic forums.²³

VANDERHOOF REVISITED

In 1992, a year before Aunt Dora died, Wilma and I made it to Vanderhoof. My objective was to find and photograph what might be left of the Suderman farm. I knew it lay on the north shore of the Nechako at Braeside, just west of the Braeside-Engen ferry which preceded a bridge built nearby in 1919. If I could find what remained of the docks, I would have the farm location.

As we approached the town on Highway 16, I was struck by its remoteness! The landscape had changed little in almost a century. Majestic evergreens, like the ones my father and his brothers felled and cleared, digging and hauling out the stumps to plant grain, covered the hills. The memory brought to mind my father's physical strength and resourcefulness in hard times. In summer when he had no income from teaching, we hired ourselves out as farm labourers and built houses to make some money—very little! I remember digging out basements and foundations with nothing more than a shovel!

Finding the remains of the ferry involved some sleuthing. Upon arriving in Vanderhoof we went straight to the O.K. Cafe in the Vanderhoof Community Museum for a bite to eat and to ask questions. One thing led to another and after lunch we went from place to place and person to person around town. People remembered the ferry and roughly where it crossed the river, and through contacts suggested by the waitress in the café, the receptionist of the museum, our chamber



I knew that if I could find the remains of the ferry docks, then I would be able to discover the location of my family's former farm.

maid in the Hillview Motel, local historian Lilian Macintosh, a gruff employee of the Unified Feed Store who had sold land in Braeside, and a few serendipitous chance meetings, we followed false leads, went on wild goose chases, and came up with dead ends until, after much perseverance, we were able to identify the sites on either side of the river where the ferry had docked.

At one point we followed a lead to an impressive house and outbuildings with a lean-to for cattle on the shore below. The house sat above the Nechako with a commanding view of the fast-flowing, almost rushing, river. It occurred to me that had things worked out differently, some Suderman descendants too might be living in such a home overlooking the river.

It wasn't until the second day, however, that we finally located the Engen side of the ferry. In my notes I wrote: "We continued down Engen Road to the end ... the ferry site. We walked that last few steps to the water's edge. It was a beautiful walk, the air fragrant with Indian paintbrush and sweet grass, wild lilies, daisies, and wild roses, and a little yellow flower; there were sighing breezes wafting through the very tall evergreens that shaded our trail, and a choir of birdsong radiated out of the trees, and butterflies, huge ambling butterflies!"

I could see why a little girl of 10 would remember the place with wonder, [so] pristine and beautiful. I snapped a couple of pictures to record the view of the north shore of the Nechako where I assumed the Braeside ferry landing would be, as well as the Nechako itself."

Shortly after, we discovered the Braeside moorings. We had dropped in on our waitress's cousin, a Mrs. Lorna Ephrom, who gave us good directions. The road to the landing, overgrown towards the end, went down almost to the water and we parked and walked a good distance to the water's edge where we ran into a Karen and Melvin Wiebe. Melvin worked as a gravel trucker at the gravel pit and knew exactly what we were looking for. He showed us the two concrete anchor moorings in the sand, with bent and protruding rusty threaded bolts, once used to anchor the line for the ferry. I now knew where I was in relation to the Suderman farm!

Mel also told us a driver had recently unearthed two rotted, ant-infested wood coffins at the gravel pit, and a third down the hill from it. The coffins carried no identification, unfortunately, and he said that graves of settlers and Indigenous peoples were often found, so there could be no assurance that these three had belonged to our family.

We left the site and almost immediately came across an abandoned old house on our left that we had missed walking down, with a large meadow that ran down the slope to the river. From descriptions I'd heard and photos I'd seen, I knew immediately that this must be the Suderman farm and the remnants of one of the buildings. It was a wonderful moment! We stood and contemplated the peaceful scene and the sad story it harboured. So much family history ran through my mind.

I was never able to track down a record of sale to the Sudermans to confirm the site. I tried Land Recording divisions in Burns Lake, the capital of the Nechako district, Vanderhoof, Prince George, and the BC Archives in Victoria but was unable to unearth a document for the sale. Nor, to my disappointment, did the Nechako Valley Historical Society or Vanderhoof

Historical Society have any such record. However, I remain convinced that this was the Suderman farm and what remained of the homestead so hard won from the land.

WAR AND PEACE

The Necho Valley surely was a Garden of Eden, but not for the Sudermans. Their pioneering effort had impoverished the family into the next generation and resulted in spiritual distress. Rather than helping them prosper, they believed God had punished them for attempting to evade the draft.

Vanderhoof's failure presaged the end of four hundred years of Suderman belief in and practice of uncompromising passive resistance, anti-militarism, and rejection of governmental authority. The idea of participation in some wars in some form, as among other Mennonites,

had taken hold among us starting with my father and me.

Nonetheless, I still believe that peace is always best. I have been involved in working for world peace for many years as a member of organizations like Citizens of the World and the World Federalists, and was one of the early promoters of the United Nations Declaration of Human Duties and Responsibilities. I believe human beings have responsibilities as well as rights, and one of our responsibilities is to seek peace.

I am among the last of those who have lived through many of the great upheavals of the twentieth century, and now in the twenty-first century remain rooted in the belief that a militaristic response to international conflicts is misguided, and that it is still possible to conceive of a peaceful world.

¹ Suderman (also Sudermann) was a relatively common surname in West Prussia (now part of Denmark and Germany) and in what is now Belgium when the Anabaptist movement began in 16th century Netherlands. In the old part of Antwerp, there is a short street called "Sudermanstraat." According to a Flemish document unearthed and translated for me by a local archivist, the street was named after a Heinrich Suderman, a German who came to Antwerp in 1345 to bring presents to two cloisters, the Zwartusters (Black Sisters) and the Cellebroeders (Brothers of Celle). For his generosity, a nearby street was named after him and while it has seen better days, the name still stands, as do the cloisters, though one is now a school and the other an office building.

My Suderman family tree, to my knowledge, can be accurately traced back to 18th century Prussia. Family lore passed down from generation to generation has it that some of our forbearers were members of the Prussian cavalry, and one possibly a lawyer for the Hanseatic League, the commercial and defensive alliance of Baltic states and Low Countries. Nowadays Antwerp lies just across the border from Bergen Op Zoom in The Netherlands. The old castle in Bergen once belonged to the von Bergen branch of my family and is now a museum and City Hall. My grandfather Johann Suderman's wife, Susanna Giesbrecht, descended from the Marquis of Bergen (the Dutch government sent payment to her and other descendants when it bought the castle). Could Heinrich Suderman be a forbearer of Johann, linked to the von Bergens by proximity and conversion? It's a tantalizing thought, especially since we know that the Russian colony (Berghthal) from which the Sudermans and Giesbrechts emigrated in 1874 was composed of Flemish Mennonites.

² Ernest N. Braun, "Why Emigrate?", *Preservings* 34 (2014): 4-10; Hans Werner, "Something...we had not seen nor heard of: The Mennonite Delegation to Find Land in 'America,'" *Preservings* 34 (2014): 11-20. In brief, the Mennonites who left Russia and chose Canada were concerned that their status as non-militaristic citizens, their *Privilegium*, granted under Catherine the Great, was to be rescinded. There is indication they were also land hungry. Similarly, those who left Prussia in the 18th century were restricted by the militaristic regime of Frederick II ("The Great") in not being allowed to buy more land since they were legally exempt from military duty and military taxes.

Before that, during the Spanish Inquisition in The Netherlands in the 16th century, the Mennonites had accepted land and religious freedom in Prussia.

³ Derek Suderman, "Peace Perspectives," Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, 1998. www.mhsc.ca/index.php?content=http://www.mhsc.ca/mennos/tpeace.html; Ross W. Muir, "Let nobody judge them," *Canadian Mennonite*, Oct. 23, 2013, www.canadianmennonite.org/articles/let-nobody-judge-them.

⁴ The area to which Catherine the Great invited the Mennonites was then known as New Russia, and by the Mennonites as South Russia. It is now Ukraine. For simplicity, the term Russia will be used in this article, as in Braun, "Why Emigrate?"

⁵ Allan Labun, *The Family Story of John and Susan Suderman*, (Winnipeg: CP Printing, 2014), 67 (Allan is Anna Suderman's son); Howard Dyck, "Tragedy in Vanderhoof," *Mennonite Historian* 41, no. 3 (Sept. 2015): 4.

⁶ Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arm's Length: ME Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Press, 1987), 10-15 and 72-83; also cited in Peter Penner, "The Heinrich Voth Family: From Minnesota to Winkler to Vanderhoof," *Mennonite Historian* 24, no. 4 (Dec. 1998): 1-2.

⁷ Penner, "The Heinrich Voth Family," 1-2.

⁸ Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length*, 15, 79.

⁹ J.V. Neufeld, *The Mennonite Settlement near Vanderhoof in the Necho Valley British Columbia 1918*, cited in Labun, *The Family Story of John and Susan Suderman*.

¹⁰ Labun, *The Family Story of John and Susan Suderman*, 65.

¹¹ *The Nature Guide to the Necho River* (Vanderhoof: District of Vanderhoof, 2013).

¹² Labun, *The Family Story of John and Susan Suderman*, 69.

¹³ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴ J.V. Neufeld, "The Necho Valley Settlement, 1918," and the diaries of Peter Neufeld, cited in "Mennonite Settlement near Vanderhoof, B.C. in 1918," Feb. 12, 2018, <https://vanderhoofonline.com/mennonite-settlement-near-vanderhoof-bc-1918/>.

¹⁵ Jake (1895-1945) organized educational trips in summer for his colleagues to places like the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. That he could have spent what little money we had on his family, rather than on some of his adventures, was a sore point with my mother and sisters. He was also a missionary

spirit in Burwalde and not always appreciated for promoting his Mennonite Brethren views in his schools. Jake's brother Henry (Harry) followed his sister Marie to California where she lived with her evangelist husband, Henry F. Klassen from Steinbach. Jake's sister Margaret went to India as a missionary and spent over thirty years there as a leading force in public health. She trained nurses, pharmacists, and medical staff and evangelized in villages near the hospitals where she worked.

¹⁶ Janice Dickin, Patricia G. Bailey, and Erin James-abra, "Influenza (Flu)," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Sept. 29, 2009, www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/influenza.

¹⁷ Glen R. Klassen and Kimberly Penner, "The 1918 Flu Epidemic," *Preservings* 28 (2008): 24. Klassen and Penner are inclined to discount religious, cultural, and geographic factors for the higher rate of the flu among Mennonites and hypothesize that social or genetic factors may be responsible, but further research would be required to be sure.

¹⁸ Dyck, "Tragedy in Vanderhoof," 2. For a moving account of the three deaths, see the letters of Peter and Helena Neufeld and Diedrich and Maria Dyck translated by Howard Dyck. In possession of Howard Dyck.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Conrad Stoesz, "Migration to Burns Lake, B.C., 1940," *Preservings* 28 (2008): 29; Penner, *No Longer at Arm's Length*, 15.

²¹ Patrick Morican, "Local World War 1 Stories" in *War Memorials in Manitoba: An Artistic Legacy* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Historical Society, 2014), 91-92, www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/features/warmemorials/stories.pdf.

²² Labun, *The Family Story of John and Susan Suderman*, 80.

²³ For example: Randy Turner, "A Soldier Shunned: the horror of war, the conflict of faith, the Mennonite burden," *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov. 9, 2013, www.winnipegfreepress.com/special/lestweforget/A-soldier-shunned-230552091.html; *The Pacifist Who Went to War*, directed by David Neufeld (2002; Ottawa: National Film Board of Canada), film; Vernon Toews, "I was a C.O. during World War II," in *Manitoba Mennonite Memories*, 1874-1974, eds. Julius G. Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Centennial Committee of Manitoba, 1974); Muir, "Let nobody judge them"; Peter Penner, "By Reason of Strength: Johann Warkentin, 1859-1948," *Mennonite Life* (Dec. 1978): 4-9.

FAMILY STORIES

From the lives of Johan and Maria (Neufeld) Harms

Leonard Doell

The older that a person becomes, the more one ponders the past. Conversations start to center around events of the past as well as one's origins. For instance, I now take special notice when March 6 arrives on the calendar. This is the day when my mother Katherine (née Harms) was born. Sadly, historical research is often only begun after someone has died. The death of a parent or friend can cause us to reflect. I am no exception, and now that my mother is gone, I often wish that I would have asked more about her life and family. A resource for me has

been to talk with other members of her family and to document their stories. The following is a collection of stories I have gathered about my Harms family.

My mother's maiden name was Harms. The Mennonite Encyclopedia states that the name Harms is recorded in Mennonite church records dating back to 1572. The name is a Frisian Dutch name and can still be found in the Netherlands today. The name "Harms" is unique as it can be used as a surname or a given name. For example, my great Uncle Herman Harms who died in Swan Plain, Saskatchewan

had both. The name "Harms" means Herman or son of Herman, as the following variations of the name show: Harms, Harm, Herman, Harmens, Hermens, Harmszen, Harmsen, and Harmesz. From the Netherlands our ancestors moved to Poland (Prussia), to escape persecution for their beliefs.

Another interesting aspect about the Harms family is their variety of occupations. A Prussian Mennonite church record lists Harms with the following occupations: farmers, linen weavers, school teachers, labourers, and beer



With limited opportunities available for young farmers, the Harms decided to move to Hochfeld, Saskatchewan.

makers. Some eyebrows might be raised in regards to the last occupation mentioned, but at that point in Mennonite history, consuming or brewing alcohol was not viewed as a sin, although it was a sin to abuse it. Likely, there was abuse of liquor like there is now, but consuming alcohol was accepted as being a part of their daily diets. The main reason that Mennonites became distillers was the fact that the Prussian government refused them the opportunity to participate in many other trades.

Over the course of time, I became very interested in knowing more about the lives of my great-grandparents, Johan and Maria (Neufeld) Harms. In this article, I have recorded some of the things I learned about them, their travels, and the struggles they encountered. Johan Harms was born on 24 February 1864 in a Mennonite village in southern Ukraine. His parents, Johan Sr. and Aganetha (Hamm) Harms were farmers. I suspect that they were a poor family, as when land became available to be rented in the Fürstenland colony, they moved together with many other poor families with the hope of obtaining farmland. This proved to be short-lived because of the many changes taking place in Russia. Mennonite leaders were unhappy with the changes to their community's military exemption and their right to educate their children with their own curriculum and in the language of their choice. In 1873, communities in Russia sent delegates to find a new home in North America. The Canadian government promised these delegates a home to live in freedom. The first Mennonites left Russia in 1874 and the Harms family followed in 1876, arriving in Quebec City on June 23 aboard the S.S. Quebec.

The Harms family then took a smaller boat through the United States, down the Red River and into southern Manitoba. They unloaded their goods and went by foot or horse and wagon and traveled inland. A house was built in August 1876 in the village of Hochfeld on the West Reserve. It was most likely a *semelin*, an A-framed structure made of sod and logs, dug into the ground. The following year they built a house, twenty-four feet by

thirty-four feet, which resembled a building that they were used to. The first year must have been very difficult because they left Russia before they could harvest their crops and arrived in Manitoba too late to plant anything. The Harms homestead was located near present-day Winkler on NE S-1 T-1 R-4 W. They farmed their land from the village and in 1882 they



Johan and Maria (Neufeld) Harms moved to Canada with their families during the 1870s. They were married in Hochfeld, Manitoba.

cropped forty-two acres. They also built a stable measuring eighteen by twenty feet in that year. In addition, they owned two horses, one cow, one heifer, three pigs, one wagon, one plow, one harrow, and one grass mower.

In order to patent their homestead, Johan Harms Sr. had to become a Canadian citizen. He appeared before a judge in the courthouse at Emerson, Manitoba on 12 December 1882. Here he affirmed (rather than swore) his allegiance to the laws of Canada. Johan Harms Sr. was illiterate and had to sign his homestead record with an 'X.' Another requirement was that the Harms family had to be free of immigration debt. In order to immigrate to Canada, the Harms family had borrowed money from the Old Mennonite people in Ontario. This debt could be repaid once they were established in Canada. Johan Harms Sr. paid the last

of his debt to the Waterloo Society and was granted a patent to his land on 15 March 1886.

My great-grandfather, Johan Harms (born 1864), married a local Hochfeld girl by the name of Maria Neufeld. The marriage took place on 27 December 1883. Like her husband, Maria had also been born in Russia. She was born on 22 February 1865 to Herman and Maria (Dyck) Neufeld, who immigrated to Canada on the S.S. Canadian, which arrived in Quebec City on 19 July 1875. Johan and Maria Harms introduced the name Herman into the Harms family.

It was customary for a young married couple to live with either of their parents for the first year of their marriage. This custom allowed the young couple to save some money to purchase a farm of their own. Therefore, Johan and Maria likely spent their first year of marriage with the senior Harms family in Hochfeld. In the spring of 1891, Johan Sr. (born 1828) died and an auction sale was held at the home of his widow on Monday, March 16, 1891. The auction was held under the direction of the Old Colony Church Waisenamt, which oversaw that half of the assets went to Aganetha, with the other half to be divided amongst the children. The following articles were sold at the auction: a house and barn, two horses, a cow, a pig, a wagon, a sleigh, a grass machine, a ripper, two plows with iron harrows, and a carpenter work bench with tools. Aganetha then moved to the village of Friedensruh, where the 1891 Census of Canada showed her living with her son Johan (born 1864) and his family. It was here that my grandfather Jacob Harms was born in 1891. Aganetha died on Boxing Day in 1896.

By the turn of the century, the majority of the available farm land in Manitoba's West Reserve had been taken up by homesteads, which limited the opportunities for young farmers. By 1891, Mennonites began to move westward, initially into Alberta but finally settling in Saskatchewan. The Old Colony Mennonite Church negotiated with the Canadian government for a block of land for settlement north of Saskatoon in 1895.

This became the Hague Osler Mennonite Reserve. In the spring of 1898, the family of Johan and Maria Harms, along with Gerhard and Katharina (Harms) Bartsch, who was Johan's sister, along with the family of Jacob M. Klassen arrived by train at the Hague Siding and became some of the first homesteaders to settle in the village of Hochfeld. Johan Harms erected a 16 by 28 foot house in Hochfeld valued at \$250.00. A stable, granary, hog barn, and a well, all valued at \$300.00, were added soon afterwards. Every year, the Harms family made improvements to their homestead, SW S-14 T- 41 R-4 West of 3. In 1898 they broke fifteen acres; the next year they broke fifty and cropped fifteen. Every subsequent year, they broke more land so that by 1902, they were cropping 135 acres. They also added more horses and cattle every year. In 1898, they owned 2 horses and 2 head of cattle; by 1901, they owned 5 horses and 8 head of cattle.

Hochfeld was one of the largest villages in the Hague-Osler Reserve. The Harms children attended the private, German-language school in the village but by 1916, the provincial government began to enforce the Compulsory School Act, which meant that private schools were to be closed and children needed to be sent to the English-language public schools. In 1918, the government built Passchendaele School #4084 on the south end of the village, named after a battle site during the First World War. Under threat by the government-appointed school inspector, Mr. Johan Bartsch sold the land where the school was built. A poll was taken by the province seeking approval for this school district. Even though the local landowners all voted against it, the government built it anyway. Parents refused to send their children to this school. In reaction to this refusal, the government levied fines against many parents, who often had to sell off their assets in order to pay them, or it sent parents to jail. Church leaders appealed to the government, reminding them of the *Privilegium*, a document given to Mennonites in 1873 in which the government had promised them that they could conduct their own schools in the language of their choice (German) and use

their own curriculum. The Harms family also paid many dollars in fines.

In response, the Old Colony Church sent a delegation to countries in Latin America in 1921 to find a new home. The Mexican government provided assurances that Mennonites could live out their faith in Mexico. Between 1922 and 1928, approximately eight thou-

a difficult parting, for in the two years that she had lived with the Harms family they had grown very fond of one another. She had finally felt that she had a home and now this was broken again. Klaas Neufeld died on 20 July 1978 and his wife Agatha on 5 March 1992.

In addition to Agatha Neufeld, the Harms household also extended a wel-



In 1926, Johan and Maria Harms decided to move to Durango, Mexico to escape having to send their children to public, English-language schools like Passchendaele (above).

sand Mennonites moved to Mexico. In 1926, Johan and Maria Harms moved to Durango, Mexico with their family, with the exception of Herman, Jacob, Peter, and Aganetha (who was married to Jacob Harder). The move was very difficult, both for those who moved and for those who stayed. Emotional farewells were said, knowing that they may never see one another again.

In addition to raising their own children, Johan and Maria also helped to raise another young woman by the name of Agatha Wiebe. Agatha's parents Aron and Aganetha (Klassen) Wiebe had homesteaded north of the village of Hochfeld. Her mother had died on 29 August 1919, when Agatha was twelve years old. Agatha continued living with her father up until 1924, when he passed away. Before his death, Aron Wiebe arranged for his daughter to move into the Harms's home. Agatha remained with the Harms until her marriage to Klaas Neufeld on 11 July 1926. In the fall of that year, the Harms moved to Mexico. They wanted the newlyweds to move with them but the latter chose to remain. For Agatha this was

come to other people who were disabled or in difficult circumstances. This included Mrs. Abram Giesbrecht, an older woman in a wheelchair; a young woman who was called "Stomme Auntje," who could not speak; another young woman by the name of Helena Teichroeb, whose parents were too sickly to look after her and who came to stay at their house until her parents were well again; and Peter Reimer, a mentally disabled bachelor. Peter Reimer and his brother Jacob were both bachelors who preferred to live alone. They were older men when they immigrated to Canada from Russia, living in Hochfeld for a time in a small wooden shack. They went to live in the Great Deer area, on the west side of the North Saskatchewan River. People from Hochfeld were quite concerned about them, so Johan Harms and Gerhard Bartsch went to visit them. They found Jacob dead in bed and Peter nearly frozen and suffering from malnutrition. They took him back to Hochfeld where he lived with the Harms family. He was a simple man who earned money for his tobacco smoking by splitting firewood for people and making wooden spoons.



Poverty, desperation, and frustration filled the life of Maria Harms in Mexico, (pictured with her second husband Jacob Hiebert). She was a gifted midwife and her God-given talents were in demand not only in Saskatchewan but in Mexico as well.

When Johan Harms moved to Mexico in 1926, Peter went to live with the Bartsch family. The Harms household was very lively, full of loud discussions on controversial subjects. Holiday seasons, when everyone was at home, were very hard on Peter. At one such gathering he left the dinner table and said, "Thank goodness, I don't have children!"

Following the Russian Revolution, nearly 22,000 Mennonites came to Canada during the 1920s, in order to escape famine and violence. After their arrival in Canada, these Mennonites were often billeted with friends and relatives who had migrated to Canada some years earlier. In some cases, these immigrants had no immediate relatives and they sought refuge in homes of other compassionate Mennonites. The David Loewen family was in the latter category and was billeted with the Harms. The Loewen family was very grateful to the Harms for the year that the family spent living in their summer kitchen, and for sharing their home and resources with them.

The lives of Johan and Maria Harms included a great deal of movement. Born in Russia, they moved to Hochfeld, Manitoba, then to Hochfeld, Saskatchewan, and finally they helped to organize the village of Hochfeld in

Mexico. After a short stay in Mexico, two pairs of children and their families returned to Canada: their son Johan and his wife Helena, and their daughter Katharina, who was married to Jacob Wall. Johan passed away on 12 January 1928 at the age of sixty-three. His life was characterized by hard work and making a living by farming and being a carpenter. He helped to build many of the homes in Hochfeld and when there was a death in the community he would build caskets for the deceased.

There is a story about Johan's death that comes from the family of his son Jacob. Jacob and his family had not moved to Mexico with his parents but rather stayed living in the village of Hochfeld, Saskatchewan and later moved to a farm west of the village. The family had been sitting at the table eating a meal when they heard a bang on the wall behind Jacob. Jacob looked up and said to his family that his father had just died in Mexico. When he was asked about how he knew this, he said that the *Gouta Yeist* or Holy Spirit had sent him the message. The next morning, he went to the Hague train station where he received a telegram that confirmed that his father had died at exactly the time he had heard the bang on the wall. After Johan's death, the newly widowed Maria

returned to Saskatchewan for a short visit.

Maria Harms remained a widow for almost two years before she married Jacob Hiebert on 24 November 1929. Hiebert had moved from Gruenthal, Saskatchewan to Gruenthal, Durango in Mexico but the couple made their home in the village of Gruenfeld. In a letter that she wrote to her son Jacob in 1944, one feels the poverty, desperation, and frustration that filled their lives. At the age of seventy-nine they were still attempting to farm. They required this income because there was no old age pension available to them. Since they were old and found it difficult to work, they hired a maid. She was paid ten pesos per month. This was not very expensive, but for the Hieberts it was a lot. The crop was a small one. "The two-acre corn crop," Maria wrote, "has produced fairly well but the other feed has not." They needed to purchase all of their feed that year, which was expensive. They rented out one acre, which gave them some income, but when the milk cheque came it was not enough to pay all the bills. It became necessary for them to borrow some money and they kept hoping that some of their children in Canada would send them some more. Many items had to be sold in order to stay alive, namely the wall clock from Russia, a clothes closet, a Russian *kist* (chest), a creamer, and an irrigation outfit. In October 1945, they had an auction and sold their belongings, their buildings, and their nine acres of land and went to live with Maria's daughter, also named Maria, and son-in-law, Jacob E. Klassen, in the village of Gruenthal.

Maria Harms Hiebert was a gifted midwife and her God-given talents were in demand not only in Saskatchewan but in Mexico as well. She also prepared bodies for funerals, so she was often the first to see them when they entered the world and then helped to prepare them to leave. Jacob Hiebert died in Mexico on 9 June 1946. Maria Harms Hiebert's earthly struggle ended on 23 July 1947. She had been very sick the last four and a half days before her death. Rev. Johan P. Wall, a fellow Saskatchewan Hochfelder, paid the last tributes to this tired pilgrim.

IDA'S MEMORIES OF TEACHING

Shirley Penner Bergen

My mother, Ida Hiebert (married name Penner), was one of the first women from Winkler to enter the teaching profession. She was born near Plum Coulee, Manitoba in 1903, as the youngest of Jacob and Maria Hiebert's eleven children. Although she was fortunate to miss the heavy toil of the early pioneer days experienced by her older siblings, her diary and memoir provide a glimpse into the opportunities that education created for young Mennonite women.

Ida's early school years were spent in the Bloomfield school division. She looked back on this time fondly, remembering how her grade two teacher taught her the names of all the wild flowers. In her diary, she described how the Christmas program was the highlight of the school year: "It was usually on the 23rd of December, the shortest day of winter, but it seemed the longest day for us. Finally, it was time to go. Two horses were hitched to the big bobsleigh and we all piled in for the two-mile ride to school. We small ones would have to get under the fur blanket, head and all, because it was so cold. But that did not keep us from hearing the sound of the bells jingling on the horses' backs as they pulled the sleigh across the crunchy snow. At last came the loud 'ho-ho' from the driver and the horses would stop. We were there. With wide eyes we beheld our school, all lit up with a shining Christmas tree and walls and windows decorated so that we could hardly recognize our school. The rows of desks were pushed to one side and in their place were long benches on which our parents sat and



CENTRE FOR MENNONITE BRETHREN STUDIES (CMBS) NP132-01-12

Ida Hiebert's father gave her a ride to her job in the village of Blumstein. Ida recalled how the car had no anti-freeze and therefore, the water had to be drained every night after the first frost.

listened to our plays and songs."

After finishing grade eight, Ida stayed home, like her sisters, and learned to cook, sew, knit, and crochet. Likely, she would also have married by the age of twenty, but her father retired, sold the farm, and moved to Winkler where a high school had just been started. She was the right age to enter this school, which was run

by J.R. Wolkof. Unfortunately, as she was set to start in 1918, a flu epidemic broke out and classes were cancelled. To make up for lost time, she took grades nine and ten in one year.

Afterward, Ida entered the Manitou Normal School, which trained teachers. As she recalled, "In 1921 I sent in my application to take four months

of Normal School training in Manitou. The requirements were grade eleven and eighteen years of age. I had just graduated and turned eighteen in October so I was accepted. I had never lived away from home before. It was a memorable day for me when I packed my new trunk and set out for Manitou. Sarah Enns and I from Winkler and Mary Bryson from

believe that maybe I could. My blackboard writing improved. The Geography Lesson I had to teach in the public school was very well done, he said. I left with my Third-Class Teachers Certificate. To get my Second-Class Certificate I attended three Summer Schools graduating in 1927. Normal School had been transferred to Winnipeg so I never again entered the

brought me back on Monday. The cars had no anti-freeze so the water had to be drained every night after the first frost. I vividly recall him pouring water into the radiator early Monday mornings in sub-zero weather disregarding the water trickling down his sleeve. During the coldest winter months one of my brothers or sisters would pick me up with the horse and sleigh, unless there was a severe snow-storm. The weeks got very long if I had to stay at my boarding place for the weekend. I loved seeing my nieces and nephews and meeting my friends in church.

On my first day as a teacher I tried to carry out what I had learned. Planning was one of my strong points. I got there early and put my plan on the side of the blackboard in great detail, showing how I was going to fill the minutes between 9 and 4 o'clock. Finally, I was ready. 9:00 came and went. No children arrived. I looked out the window to the east, then to the west... The prairie road led to some farm houses, but no children could I see coming. My timetable remained on the board. I went home.

The next day—still no pupils. I stayed at school from nine to four and again went home. The third day two families came. The Public Health Nurse also came. When she saw their school sores, [impetigo] she quarantined them. So Monday my first five [students] stayed home with their sores, but five new ones came. During these days I was very happy that the Wolkofs lived across the road so I could go there with my problems. Finally, I had 15-20 pupils that first year.

The school was a one-room wooden building with three windows on each side and a round iron stove in the middle of the room. Every day after the children were dismissed the room had to be tidied and swept, not by the janitor, but by the teacher. Keeping the stove going was one of the most difficult parts of my job. The coal bin was a large box on the side of the school with a large cover on hinges. Every day before leaving, I would have to lift the wooden lid, climb over the 4-ft high side, fill my coal pail and then get out without spilling it. The fire would not go out at night if I dumped in a pail of coal



The Manitou Normal School trained teachers for public schools. Ida, on the left in the back row, attended this school.

Darlingford found the same boarding place for \$35.00 a month with an older couple. They had another boarder, a working man. Between the six of us we finished a big barrel of sauerkraut that winter....

We had a very good principal at Normal, Mr. J.W. Gordon. His way was to ask for volunteers to teach a class. This was a disadvantage to me because there were always others eager to do it so I could get out of it. The result was that at the end of the four months, I and seven others had to stay seven more weeks because he had not found out whether we could teach. I could not even go home between sessions. I cried bitterly that night, gritted my teeth and stayed. But in those seven weeks I learned more than in the previous four months. Mr. Gordon was like a father to me and gave me confidence. 'You CAN do it,' he told me over and over again. I began to

halls of that stately building where the direction for my life had been set."

It is amazing that this teaching program could prepare young people to teach eight grades in four months. Imagine how much work it would be in a one-room school with eight grades, especially preparing handouts for the students. At that time, the teachers had to duplicate them on a home-made hectograph. Ida recorded the following memories of her early teaching days: "The following year I was hired to teach in a small country school five miles south of home, the village of Blumstein. This doesn't seem far now but in those days the gravel roads were rough at best and a mire when it rained. My father let me use his new Touring Car when the weather was favorable. In winter I boarded close to the school for \$14.00 a month. My father picked me up on Friday and



Ida regularly played her guitar with her class in Schönwiese. She used music as part of her teaching method to distract fidgety children.

and closed all the drafts. In the morning I would come early, crawl into the bin again, and heat up the room before the children arrived. No such thing as turning up the thermostat!

I enjoyed teaching children and influencing their lives. Wherever possible I got them to participate actively. Learning to perform for the class was important throughout the year but especially at the School Christmas Concert. I tried to arrange for every child to have a part. The entire community came to watch the concert, even if it was three hours long. The children all received candy bags which I packed the night before.

I taught nature study as I had learned it, showing the children how to identify birds and wild flowers which were abundant everywhere. We were allowed to pick them to make wreaths for May Day or Children's Day in church. In 1928 Nature Study Workbooks were prepared for Manitoba schools. These helped pass

on a greater appreciation for the world around us.

Music was a vital part of my teaching. When the older boys got fidgety while I was trying to teach them to sing from notes, I picked up my guitar and we had a singsong. Often I met with teenage girls in the evening to sing for fun. In Schönwiese the community formed an orchestra. In every school district a Young People's Club was started from these musical get-togethers. We sang, recited poems, talked about God and the meaning of life. One of the songs we liked to sing was Paddle your own Canoe:

'If called to study or to play/ whate'er thy hands may find to do/ Accept the help that others bring/ but paddle your own canoe.'

Chorus: Just paddle your own canoe/
Just paddle your own canoe/ Success in the
end will surely attend/ Just paddle your
own canoe.

The greatest thing in life to know/ Is

do the right in what you do/ And this is mostly done by those/ Who paddle their own canoe.

See those in life who've made a mark/
Whose noble deeds the world can view/
Their life should lead you in the way/ To paddle your own canoe'

I did not have too many problems disciplining the children. I hated spanking which was the accepted form of punishment. My methods included writing sentences, begging pardon or making the person stand at his/her seat. But these methods didn't always work. One dismally cold January day I had to punish four boys more severely. I made them each chop wood for five minutes. Then they had to think of a game to play with the others because it was too cold to go out for recess. In the evening a letter from Isaac, my fiancé, made for a good ending to a very difficult day. Before I got married in 1934 I taught in the Blumstein, Schönwiese, Edward, and Valleyfield

school districts. In all my years of country school teaching there was one thing I could not accomplish. I never managed to read many of the tempting story books that lined the shelves of these schools. The reason was that I had to prepare lessons every night for all seven grades.

My love for books created tension between me and my parents. Although my mother also had a desire to read, work always came first. The Saturday chores waiting for me when I came home for weekends were washing the floors, baking, sewing or helping in my older siblings' homes. I sang in the church choir and taught Sunday School as well. Not much time for reading but I always tried to squeeze it in. We came to blows over the following incident.

I hadn't been teaching long when a World Book salesman came to visit me at my school. It didn't take him long to convince me what a valuable asset these books would be for my teaching. So I bought them on the installment plan since I only made \$80.00 a month. When I told my father about these good books, he was very disgusted. He had generously allowed me to keep all my wages which was very unusual in the 1920s. Also, he had planned to buy me a good horse when I turned 21 or got married, just as he had done for his other daughters. He was furious that I had squandered my money on a set of encyclopedias! So I made a deal. If I could keep the books, he didn't have to buy me a horse. It seemed a bitter trade-off at the time, but looking back, it was a wise choice. Horses were replaced by cars shortly thereafter. My encyclopedias were useful, not only during my teaching days, but my own children had this resource as well. Encyclopedias were not readily available in school in the 1940s."

From 1930–1932, Ida took time out from teaching to attend Winkler Bible School. This school was in German and the teachers were well-trained in the Bible and composition. This was good for students who only had grade eight, but Ida had been teaching so she was active in writing short plays, playing and singing and teaching Sunday School, preparing her own lessons. She was thrilled when

the principal, said, "Your trial sermon is as good as any man's." As the school closed at the end of April, many young people were willing to try high school. J.R. Wolkof made this possible for them by reviewing the year's work in May and June. With a high school diploma, new horizons opened for them and many became teachers, nurses, preachers, and pursued other occupations.

Her diary of 1933 changes in tone somewhat. Marriage was on her mind, although she rarely mentions her suitor directly as that was not her style. She believed that personal matters and angry thoughts should be kept private. She was



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Ida and other Mennonite young women in rural Manitoba were determined, dedicated, and creative teachers who contributed much to their local communities.

always cheerful and pleasant even when she felt differently inside. This is what she found when she arrived at school 1 January 1933: "The school was warm when I got there, which was quite an improvement. But many traces of Christmas were left which we cleaned up. Only 15 of 35 pupils were present. I opened with the Lord's Prayer, a chorus, a story and a talk of a few words and we wished each other a Happy New Year. During the first recess the children began tearing around the room, but calmed down one by one, when they had to forfeit something for being noisy. Since I had not prepared lessons and the classes were not all represented, I took the classes as was suitable, ending with a Bible story. I left the school at 5:00 p.m., corrected homework, had supper, prepared lessons for [the] next day and wrote two letters. I could have worked faster if my thoughts had not always wanted to stray."

Ida married Isaac Penner in 1934.

They planned to teach together in the Valleyfield School; however, Isaac did not receive his Teachers Certificate in the mail. Instead, they resigned from Valleyfield and Ida became a truck driver. Ida spent the following seventeen years at home in Winkler where they raised a family of five, of which I am the oldest. In 1942 her parents needed more care, so Isaac and Ida moved into their home. Her mother had a debilitating stroke a few years later. It was a very difficult time. Ida's mother passed away in 1946 and her father died in 1950. Isaac and Ida sold their house on Pembina Rd. and moved to Winnipeg where there were more opportunities for work for Isaac.

Eventually Ida resumed teaching. She taught for five years, and after a brief period of illness, substituted for seven more years. She noticed some differences between teaching in the 1930s and 1950s. For instance, she found teaching only one grade (instead of eight) to be very satisfying. Also, by the 1950s, the textbooks had greatly improved. She really appreciated the many aids now provided for the curriculum. Teacher handbooks had handouts to run off for each lesson, which lessened Ida's work. Occasionally she used the hectograph for emergency handwork she prepared the night before, but there was now an improved version called a Duplicator in schools. Despite these improvements, the one thing that bothered her was the unruly behaviour of the kids in the classroom and hallways. She expected pupils to respect the teacher.

This is an example of one of the first women from Winkler who entered the teaching profession. These women were determined, dedicated, and creative; teaching opened a new sphere of activity for them. They did not do it for the pay nor was there tenure in those days. They were generally well accepted by the parents and improved the spiritual life in the villages through youth clubs. Most importantly, they gave the children a zest for learning. As Ida remembered, "I enjoyed teaching and becoming a part of the community. Lasting friendships were formed. We worked hard and enjoyed life."

PERSEVERANCE AND FAMILY

The Journey of the "Schulz Clock"

Helga Elizabeth ("Liza") Kroeger



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE KROEGER CLOCK HERITAGE FOUNDATION

I distinctly remember the moment this clock came into my life. It was in the summer of 1964. We lived in Winnipeg, and my parents, the late Arthur and Elfriede Kroeger, had decided it was time for another family road trip. Our destination was Vauxhall, Alberta, a town with fewer than a thousand people. My mother loved to travel, and it didn't matter that we'd be camping along the way. Our once bright red, now very faded, tent, five air mattresses, and five sleeping bags were tightly folded and fitted into a wooden car-top carrier made by my father's own hands.

By sunset on the second day we had arrived at uncle Peter's farm and I can't remember a lonelier place. Not that he was alone, living with his wife, aunt Irene, four lively and fun-loving teenagers of indeterminable ages, and a collection of farm animals. I remember thinking, what fate had befallen the Schulz family that they should be stranded in such a place? (My apologies to any southern Albertan readers; the beauty of this place was lost on me at the time). As a pre-adolescent, needless to say, this summer trip was straining. Adding to my discontentment, on the day we said our goodbyes we had to make room in the trunk of our 1960

From its beginnings as a wedding gift for my great-grandparents, through the calamities of war and revolution, the Schulz clock arrived in the safe haven of the Canadian prairies. If you have a story to share about a Kroeger clock, please visit the Kroeger Clocks Foundation website at kroegerclocks.com.



A portion of Arthur Kroeger's parchment sketch used for the restoration of the Schulz clock.

Ford Falcon (with no air-conditioning) for two dusty old crates containing rusty clocks and pendulums. As my father took out our travel bags and stuffed them into the already crowded back seat with me and my two sisters, I was not amused. On the long road back, did my father attempt to impart to his daughters the story of Mennonite clocks? I believe so as he was always telling stories about life in the Mennonite colonies of the Russian empire. But in that moment, I did not make the connection between these stories and the clocks in our trunk.

I cannot recall much about my father's restoration of the "Schulz" clock after its journey to Winnipeg. Decades later, I discovered the tracing that my father must have made before he began repainting the clock dial. Where did he find the pattern that he would use to restore this clock? Did he base the restoration on his childhood memories, when he saw it as a boy hanging in the two-story mansion of his maternal grandmother, Anna (Zacharias) Schulz? The clock had been a wedding gift from the Schulz family, made with care by David D. Kroeger, his paternal great-grandfather, a clock maker in Rosenthal.¹

From my father's notes, I realize now that this was the first of many clocks that he would restore. He spent an inordinate amount of time in preparation: his study on parchment alone attests to his great care and attention to detail. His dedication speaks to the responsibility he must have felt as the heir to the Kroeger clock-making legacy. Looking at the clock, I imagine that the "regal" motif on the clock dial of golden scrolls against a dark

burgundy background appealed to his sensibilities. There was always a hint of fancifulness in my father's work.

And so, the Schulz clock took its place in our family home. At first, it occupied a rather mundane position in the basement; in our next house, it would become the centre attraction in the entrance hall. Always ticking, as the pendulum swung back and forth, always chiming, as the bell struck the hour, this clock witnessed the story of its owners: from its beginnings as a wedding gift for my great-grandparents, through the calamities of war and revolution in the southern Ukrainian steppe and the strains of the shipboard journey to the "New World," as it arrived in the safe haven of the Canadian prairies.

Although Kroeger clock-making had its beginnings in the Vistula Delta, it flowered in the town of Rosenthal, in the Khortitsa colony. Johann Kroeger (1754–1823) migrated into the Russian empire in 1804 and his descendants would continue the trade, making many of the clocks that survive today—estimated to be many several thousand. Distinctive clocks were also made by other Mennonite clockmakers, such as Peter Lepp, Gerhard Hamm, and Cornelius Hildebrand in the Khortitsa colony, and by the Mandtler family in the Molotschna colony.

Like the Schulz clock, which can be seen in the exhibition, "The Art of Mennonite Clocks" at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach until April 2019, many of the timepieces were commissioned by parents as wedding gifts for their children. They became cherished heirlooms, passed down through generations. As families immigrated, they carried these clocks to North, Central, and South America, despite being heavy and cumbersome. In their new countries, these clocks made a house feel like a home as their ticking and ringing accompanied the domestic life of generations of Mennonites.

These clocks are an important part of Mennonite material culture. As Kathleen Wiens, exhibition developer for the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, writes, "Physical objects are where we find evidence of the resilience and creativity that not only brought us through the challenges of history, but also brought joy into people's lives and homes. Tangible heritage is not the quaint side projects of our ancestors: it is our people embedding their priorities, experiences, hearts, minds, and spirits into our physical world."²

The Schulz clock has its own story of hardship and strength. From the "bloodlands" of eastern Europe to Canada, the clock journeyed with my great-grandmother who, like so many others, cherished this connection with her past. When the clock was installed in our basement in 1964, safe and sound in suburban Canada, I wasn't yet a teenager. I was oblivious to its presence, absorbed in my own world, more interested in dancing to the Beatles than in contemplating my family's past. But children become adults. And adults come to see that the past defines their present and sets the stage for their future. The Schulz clock has been a witness to my journey.

¹ Arthur Kroeger, *Kroeger Clocks* (Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Heritage Village, 2012), 104. Until recently, very little research existed on Mennonite clocks and their importance to community identity and historical memory. My father's book built on the small existing body of literature. His research provided an important step towards bringing attention to the stories of the then known surviving clocks. His extensive travel, documentation, and restoration work resulted in the verification and detailed documentation of at least 250 clocks currently in private collections and museums in Poland,

Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Canada, Mexico, Belize, and Paraguay. Some of this research took place in regions now unsafe to access due to on-going conflict in Ukraine. There is reason to believe that many more clocks survived than have been documented, and many more stories of hardship and strength remain undocumented and inaccessible.

² "I Love Stories About People Going Rogue": 5 Questions with Kathleen Wiens," *Mennotoba*, www.mennotoba.com/i-love-stories-about-people-going-rogue-5-questions-with-kathleen-wiens

NOT A KROEGER

The Migration of a Werder Clock

Ernest Braun



This round-face Werder design was no longer made after 1840. The clock was likely manufactured in Prussia by a non-Mennonite tradesman and then brought into the Russian empire.

“I have good news and bad news,” was what the late Arthur Kroeger said to me on the phone in June of 2013.¹ The good news was that he had managed to repair my clock. But the bad news was that it was not a Kroeger clock. In fact, it turned out to be a round-face Werder design which, according to Mr. Kroeger, was no longer made after 1840. Moreover, the primitive face painting, the unusual one-hand mechanism, and the two-piece face design indicated that the clock was manufactured in Prussia by a non-Mennonite tradesman and then brought into the Russian empire, likely by a Mennonite family.

It is certain that the clock arrived in Manitoba aboard the S. S. Peruvian in July 1875 in the possession of the Wall family, either the son Johann (1848) as family legend suggests, or the widow of Johann Wall Sr. (1818), Susanna Krahn (1824), who had remarried Johann Mueller. Both son and mother ended up in Rosengart, West Reserve, where the clock kept time for over thirty years.

Some unknowns still exist: was the clock purchased new or second-hand? Was the clock brought into the family from a wife’s side at some point along the way? How did the clock end up in the possession of the Johann Wall family? If, in fact, the clock was purchased new by an ancestor of Johann Wall (1848), then the most likely scenario would be that his great-grandfather, Johann Wall (1768) of Danzig, acquired the clock



A detailed view of the inside gears of the clock.

prior to emigration in 1795, and that it was passed on to the succeeding generations of sons until it ended up on the ship with his great-grandson. If the clock was bought second-hand, then its provenance is impossible to guess. If the clock came via a wife's family, then the trail leads back to Prussia and to an early acquisition date by either the unknown wife of Johann Wall (1768) or perhaps through Helena Redekopp (1798), the wife of his son Johann Wall (1793).

The clock can be placed with certainty in the hands of the Johann Wall family of Neuendorf, Khortitsa, prior to emigration. From Russia, the clock has continued to follow the migrations of Mennonites: first, with those coming to Manitoba who arrived in Rosengart, West Reserve. According to Susan Wall Funk (1927), the clock was inherited by her father, Isaak Wall (born in 1886 in Rosengart, West Reserve), one of the younger sons of Johann Wall (1848). The Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry (GRANDMA) indicates that before 1909 the family moved

to Saskatchewan, where several children were born. In about 1922, Isaak Wall took the clock to Mexico and it kept time for their family in Blumenhof, Swift Colony. In 1936 they returned to Manitoba, living in the Morris area, and later in the Plum Coulee district. Upon the death of Isaak Wall in 1946, the clock ended up with his daughter Mary Wall, who eventually gave it to her sister, Justina (Wall) Doerksen, the youngest in the family. Somehow, during that time, maybe during a move, the pendulum was lost. Susan Wall Funk commented that it had been fairly worn already at that time but was still serviceable. The last direct descendant to own the clock was Susan Wall Funk, who lived near Grunthal with her husband Jacob. During the years in Grunthal, a new pendulum was constructed by John Broesky. In the 1990s, the Funks sold their place and moved to Kleefeld. Orlando Hiebert, a relative of both Susan Wall Funk and her husband Jacob Funk, purchased the clock at auction. Ernest Braun, Tourond, bought the clock from Orlando in fall of 2012 and took it to Arthur Kroeger to

be repaired.

Today the clock is part of "The Art of Mennonite Clocks," the new exhibit in the Gerhard Ens Gallery at Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV), jointly sponsored by the Kroeger Clocks Heritage Foundation and MHV. The exhibit is on display until April 2019.

THE JOURNEY OF THE WERDER CLOCK

1875: Neuendorf, Khortitsa to Rosengart, West Reserve, Manitoba

Pre-1909: Rosengart to Saskatchewan (exact location unknown)

Ca. 1922: Saskatchewan to Blumenhof village, Swift Colony, Mexico

1936: Blumenhof, Swift Colony, Mexico back to Manitoba, Canada

Post-1950: Morris to Plum Coulee district

1994: Plum Coulee to Grunthal, Manitoba

Ca. 1994: Grunthal to Tourond, Manitoba

¹ A version of this article originally appeared in Mennonite Heritage Village's blog "Village News" on May 26, 2018, www.mysteinbach.ca/blogs/8935/history-of-a-werder-clock/. It is reprinted with permission from the author and from Mennonite Heritage Village.

BRIDGING CULTURES

Mestizo and Mennonite Communities in Northern Mexico

Abigail Carl-Klassen



MENNONTHERITAGEARCHIVES [MHA] 592-370

The first Old Colony Mennonites from Saskatchewan and Manitoba arrived in Chihuahua, Mexico, on 8 March 1922 by train. Locals met them to look at "the big blondes getting off the train."

Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders: Cross-Cultural Encounters in the *Campos Menonitas* of Chihuahua¹ was an oral history project conducted by Abigail Carl-Klassen and Jonathan Klassen in northern Mexico in the spring of 2018. The project is a collection of forty-two audio recorded interviews that seeks to document and explore the experiences of Cuauhtémoc area Mennonites past and present who have built relationships with the larger Mexican community, and to recognize the perspectives and contributions of *Mestizo* (the majority ethnic and socio-linguistic group in Mexico comprised of Spanish speaking people of mixed race, primarily Caucasian and Indigenous heritage) and Indigenous Rarámuri people who have developed

close ties with the Mennonite community in the Cuauhtémoc area. The narratives of seven project participants (José Luis Domínguez, Marcela Enns, Clara Enns, Jacobo Enns, Veronica Enns, Raúl Ramírez "Kigra," and Dr. Patricia Islas Salinas) are featured in this article because they embody the varied and complex cross-cultural dynamics that have been forged between Mestizo and Mennonite communities since the beginning of Mennonite settlement in Mexico in 1922. They are examples of how families from Mestizo and Mennonite backgrounds have built long-lasting relationships across cultures despite fears, prohibitions and/or taboos.

The first Old Colony Mennonites from Saskatchewan and Manitoba arrived in

the small *rancho* of San Antonio de Arenales (now the city of Cuauhtémoc), Chihuahua, Mexico, on 8 March 1922, two years after the end of the Mexican Revolution. Twelve-year-old Sixta Molinar Hernández was in the crowd that had gathered, "*a ver los rubios grandes bajar el tren*," (to see the big blondes getting off the train).¹ She thought Mexico was being invaded. In the bustle of the spectacle, someone handed her a jar of warm milk. Despite all the excitement and busyness of their arrival in a new country, the Mennonites had still been milking their cows on schedule on the train and had disembarked after many days of travel bearing gifts. In turn, many Mexicans offered food, candy, and gum, communicating through hand signals since none of the Mennonites spoke Spanish.² José Luis Domínguez, Sixta's grandson, a Cuauhtémoc native, and celebrated author of twelve books including *La otra historia de los menonitas* (*The Other Mennonite History*) published in 2015, the only comprehensive history of Mennonite settlement in Chihuahua written in Spanish, chuckled as he recalled his grandmother's memories of the Mennonite's arrival in Mexico. "I felt that we owed a debt to the Mennonites. I felt we owed them this jar of milk, and a time arrived when I thought of writing the tribute to them to pay for this jar of milk. So I feel like it's a debt we contracted, as a family, but it's also the encounter, right? An encounter between two cultures that impacted my grandmother."³

During his interview,⁴ José reflected on his family's long history with the Mennonites, beginning with this famous jar of milk. A self-taught writer with no formal degree, he described his family's humble roots and discussed his childhood experiences as a field hand in the 1970s: "Those of us who worked in the field, we were the men of the house. My uncle and I were there with the Mennonites. My connection to the Mennonites is very deep. When I was small, I would come here to the public plaza. I was hired to go cut and hoe the bean fields when there wasn't



MHA 590-102.0

From the outset of settlement, land was a site of interaction between Mennonites and Mestizo, as well as a source of tension.

very much machine technology. I was very young, about 9, 10 years old. Sometimes, not all the time, because I was very small, they told me I was very young to be going to work, but when the time came, well, I went to earn my daily wage of 4, 5 pesos for the work. And there were breaks during the day and they gave us *Zwieback*, the traditional sweet food-jam, bread, butter, frothy milk, everything—it's clear that we lived side by side with them.... In the harvest season it was worth it when we finished they would call us to go collect what was left behind in the fields. Those same Mennonites gave it to us. And that was another way in which we lived together. We were in their field almost all day. We took lunch out there. Gathered the things that had fallen in the fields, skimmed them, cleaned them, loaded the beans up to take home. And of the sacks that belonged to the whole family, they sold half at market and ate half. And I think that made an impression on us, it made an impression on [the] Mestizo community of Cuauhtémoc. That contact was when they hardly spoke Spanish. Tall, private and hard workers.....So, I think that was [the] beginning, I wanted to demonstrate my thankfulness for that generosity they have, because the Mennonites are always very generous with the poor.”⁵

José's book, *La otra historia de los menonitas*, primarily focuses on the growth and development of the Cuauhtémoc area Mennonite colonies. It emphasizes topics such as the creation of schools, education reform, and literary work created in

Mexico by and about Mennonites; however, it also explores some of the conflicts and tensions that have arisen over the years between the Mennonite and Mestizo communities. Therefore, it offers an understanding of Mennonite migration to Chihuahua through the lens of Mexican history, especially the years following the Mexican Revolution. Tensions between the Mestizo and Mennonite communities were particularly high during that time as Mennonites had settled onto 100,000 hectares of land (a portion of the former Hacienda de Bustillos) that they had purchased from the wealthy Zuloaga family, an arrangement that came with permission and privileges from then President of Mexico, Álvaro Obregón. At the same time, *campesinos* (tenant farmers) returning to the Cuauhtémoc region from the revolution had not been given the land that had been promised to them in the peace treaty signed between the Mexican government and revolutionary leader General Francisco “Pancho” Villa. There were raids on Mennonite farms and the federal government had dispatched troops to the Mennonite colonies to provide security.⁶ On 3 April 1922, the Mexican City newspaper, *El Excelsior*, carried the complaints of the governor of Chihuahua, Ignacio Enríquez, who wrote: “No more Mennonite colonists are wanted....Chihuahuan landowners have found the way to leave our compatriots without land, selling their large estates to foreigners.”⁷

According to José, the hope for reignit-

ing a radical, agrarian revolution in Mexico was extinguished with the assassination of Pancho Villa in Parral, Chihuahua in 1923. He maintained, however, that tensions in the Cuauhtémoc region cooled significantly between Mennonites and displaced Mestizo campesinos after the government granted the campesinos land near the railroad station in Cuauhtémoc in 1927 after a long campaign led by agricultural labor organizer Belisario Chávez Ochoa.⁸ José explained in further detail in his interview saying, “Ejido El Semaoyote and Ejido Dolores were parcels of the Zuloaga’s land that were sold to the Mennonites and many people who lived there [who were campesinos under the Zuloagas] left, but they didn’t want to leave, because they were armed people who had gone to fight the revolution. The government made an agreement with them and gave them a piece of land. So this part of Cuauhtémoc was founded by unsatisfied campesinos who had no land because their fight in the revolution had been unsuccessful. And then they were stripped of their land because the Mennonites came to settle there.”⁹ This land, officially named Ejido Cuauhtémoc, became known as Colonia de los Doscientos, (The Two Hundred Colony), named after the two hundred pesos that the government gave to each family who had resettled there.¹⁰

In northern Mexico and the adjoining border towns in the United States, folklore surrounding the Mexican Revolution, and particularly Pancho Villa, abounds.



According to an Enns family legend, the Mexican revolutionary leader General Francisco "Pancho" Villa visited the family farm in 1922.

There is hardly a corner, including in the Campos Menonitas, that is untouched by tales of raids, romance, and shootouts.

The Enns family, who lives on the border of the Swift and Manitoba Colonies has a legacy of cross-cultural relationship building and boundary pushing that goes all the way back to an early encounter between Gerhard Enns Guenther and Pancho Villa soon after the family's arrival from Canada in 1922. The Enns's youngest daughter, Marcela, a fourth generation resident of the Campos



Susy (and her husband Jacobo) Enns, who left the Old Colony in 1980, have had close interactions with people outside of the Mennonite community. Jacobo started a successful seed business with his brother, selling to both Mestizo and Mennonite clients. He has also devoted time and resources to improving the quality of life for people of all backgrounds in the Cuauhtémoc region.

Menonitas and a professional photographer whose images are featured on the *Darp Stories* YouTube Channel,¹¹ recalled this piece of family lore during her interview, “My [great-] grandfather actually met Pancho Villa....He had come to their house and asked for two cows. And then my grandpa’s like, ‘Yeah, you can have them.’ And he said, ‘No, I don’t want them, I just wanted to know if you were going to give them to me.’” According to family legend, after that brief encounter with Pancho Villa, the Enns's livestock was

left intact and the farm was never a target for raids or unrest.¹²

Marcela's father, Jacobo, who preferred to be interviewed in Spanish rather than English, also remembered the hospitality of his paternal grandparents, Gerhard Enns Guenther and Helena Dyck Neudorf. Lifelong members of the Old Colony Church, his grandparents were very traditional in their religious and social practices, driving a horse and buggy and managing their small farm without electricity or running water; yet, they pushed against local convention by informally adopting two Mexican orphan brothers whom they raised alongside their other children. “[They] arrived from Sinaloa and their father was murdered in Chihuahua. The poor widow couldn’t keep her children and so my grandparents adopted them. Ismael and Mónico. They grew up with my grandparents and they were always there with my grandparents. And when my grandparents died, they stayed there with my dad and all the uncles working. They taught us Spanish and from a young age we worked together with them.”¹³

Jacobo worked on the family farm milking cows, raising pigs, and planting and harvesting crops from a young age, completing the sixth grade at a traditional Old Colony school. He and his wife Susy left the Old Colony Church in 1980, soon after they got married. Jacobo’s desire for a truck and increased contact with the world outside the colonies fueled their decision to leave.¹⁴ Marcela described her parents’ experiences in the years after leaving the church and the differences in the reactions of her mother’s family, who shunned them for years; her great-grandfather, Gerhard Enns Guenther, who accepted them while remaining a member of the church; and her grandfather, Isaak Enns Dyck, who was also excommunicated from the church. “When my parents left the traditional church, my grandparents on my mom’s side, they did not talk to them at all. They were not invited to family gatherings, nothing. And on my dad’s side, it was a little bit more like, since my grandpa [Isaak Enns Dyck] was a total rebel, he always wanted to do

things differently. He was like, ‘Oh, good for you...’ My grandpa always had friends over as well, that were Mexican. But that was not seen as okay in their community, at all. They didn’t like that at all, but he was always excommunicated anyway. So he probably just thought, like, ‘Oh well, they can’t do anything to me now I’m just going to go and invite people over.’ I don’t know why, but they were always a little different. Even my grandpa’s cousins, everybody that is a little bit related to me through that side of the family, they’re all very open-minded. And I think it has to do with how, I guess, my great-grandparents raised them. Because they thought differently back then than most people in the community.”¹⁵

Marcela’s cousin, Clara Enns, a midwife, highly sought-after seamstress, contestant on the TV show “MasterChef México” in 2016, and a cross-cultural bridge builder in her own right, who was also interviewed for “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders,” agrees. “My grandpa just had a bigger vision of the world...in my family it was very, very normal. They [Mexican people] were very welcomed. They were family friends. Not just someone who was an outsider.”¹⁶

In the late 1980s, Jacobo started a successful seed business with his brother who lives in the United States, selling to both Mestizo and Mennonite clients. In the following years, he devoted time and resources to improving the quality of life for people of all backgrounds in the Cuauhtémoc region, including providing monetary and nutritional support to Indigenous Rarámuri communities and sitting on the board of ENLAC (*Instituto de Entrenamiento para Niños con Lesión Cerebral y Trastornos del Aprendizaje*) (Training Institute for Children with Cerebral Palsy and Learning Disabilities), a Cuauhtémoc based non-profit organization that provides physical therapy and family support for children with disabilities. In 2016, he was recognized by the government of Chihuahua for his charitable work in a special edition magazine titled, *Hombres y mujeres menonitas destacados: Caminos inspirantes (Outstanding Mennonite Men and Women: Inspirational*

Journeys). The article noted, “[h]is dream is to continue to help others alongside his children and to promote the creation of a carpentry workshop and training center in the Sierra Tarahumara that would offer work to Indigenous people and provide for their needs.”¹⁷

Almost one hundred years after her great-grandfather’s encounter with Pancho Villa, Marcela is following the Enns family tradition by breaking with conventional expectations and pushing boundaries to build cross-cultural relationships. She’s lived in Vancouver and Guadalajara, has worked as a model, and is unmarried at twenty-seven, defying her community’s expectations for Mennonite women. Describing her childhood rebellion against the prohibition of women wearing pants or make-up, she laughed, “I was always in trouble for everything!”¹⁸ She showed off a family photo she posted on her Instagram account “How_Mennonites,” which shares *Plautdietsch* videos and photos that make humorous observations about Mennonite culture and has more than 2,800 followers, saying, “Look at that neon green dress my mom made for herself back in the ’70s. That was back when she was still Old Colony—and she says *I’m a rebel!*”¹⁹

In addition to running her photography business, Marcela manages one of her father’s businesses, Cabañas las Bellotas, a property of rental cabins and recreational facilities in the Campos Menonitas that serves people from a variety of backgrounds, from traditional Mennonites to Mestizo people from Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua and Juárez who want a retreat from the city. She reflected on the uncommon nature of her position saying, “I have interaction with people outside of the community on a daily basis. But most girls my age don’t... I have received very little resistance. I’m impressed. Because my dad always has treated us as equals—guys and girls. So, a lot of people are like, ‘Your daughter is going to run it, is she capable of doing it?’ And then dad’s like, ‘Yeah, of course she is.’”²⁰

On 12 May 2018, Marcela and her older sister Veronica, a celebrated ceramic artist and painter who works out



MARCELA ENNS.

A photograph from the exhibit, *A Look at My Sisterhood*, which explores the bonds of traditional and liberal Mennonite women across generations.

of a studio in Campo 10, were invited to exhibit their work, “*Una mirada a mi hermandad*,” (*A Look at My Sisterhood*), which explores the bonds of traditional and liberal Mennonite women across generations, at Cuauhtémoc’s *Festival de Tres Culturas* (Three Cultures Festival). This cultural celebration seeks to promote understanding among the region’s three cultures: Mestizo, Rarámuri, and Mennonite. Nearly one hundred years

after the arrival of the Mennonites in Cuauhtémoc, a crowd gathered in the *Teatro de Cámara*, the local municipal event center, to witness the launching of the exhibition. Moving seamlessly between Spanish, *Plautdietsch*, and English, Marcela and Veronica greeted visitors, posed for pictures, and described how their work was inspired by the labor of Mennonite women and the long legacy of women artisans in the Mennonite com-

munity.²¹ Veronica contextualized her work saying, “I’ve tried to see how I can make art about my heritage and roots. I find it sculptural when the women make cookies and *Werrennikje*, because ceramics is the same. It’s modeling. I was very inspired by that.... For as long as I remember, I was always looking through my mom’s little *Kjiste* to see the drawings of my grandma. My grandma [Helena Rempel Bueckert] used to do the drawings for the children’s books. In the coloring books it’s usually the activities of the woman that are being drawn. And also the farm...but the women’s work is celebrated in the coloring books, but in ordinary life, their work isn’t celebrated.”²²

Raúl Ramírez “Kigra,” Veronica’s boyfriend and Chihuahua-based photographer who has exhibited his work throughout Mexico and in the United States and Europe, photographed the event. A full house of family and friends from the Mennonite and Mestizo communities, as well as government representatives from the Department of Tourism and the Mennonite Resource Office all celebrated the opening.²³

Before the ribbon cutting officially launched the exhibition, the Enns sisters were introduced by Dr. Patricia Islas Salinas, a professor at the Cuauhtémoc

campus of the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez), a family friend, and a lifelong Cuauhtémoc resident. Dr. Islas Salinas, who researches and publishes on education, health, and women’s issues in Chihuahua’s Mennonite colonies,²⁴ has also collaborated with the Enns family on several cultural and educational projects, including the aforementioned *Hombres y mujeres menonitas destacados: Caminos inspirantes*.²⁵ She reflected on her family’s ties to the Mennonites and on how the relationship between the Mennonite and Mestizo communities has changed over the years. “When I was a girl it was common for my grandparents to go visit the Campos Menonitas because many people from Cuauhtémoc went to buy cream, cheese, eggs, all the products the Mennonites are known for selling. And so, I have been in contact with Mennonites since I was a girl. I remember going with my grandparents to the houses where these things were sold. And so I played with the Mennonite girls that were around. We ran around, even though we didn’t understand each other because of the language. But, like kids, we played.... When I was a girl, years ago, we saw the Mennonites as strangers. The Mennonites we saw were in Cuauhtémoc,

in the center, shopping and going to the bank in their buggies. And it got a lot of attention. It was a relationship, yes, like with strangers. And now it is common, very common, to see mixed marriages, for example. And twenty years ago, that was IMPOSSIBLE. Unspeakable. You were walking the line of excommunication if you stayed with a Mestizo. Now there are even churches there that have mixed marriages. And so you can already see more cross-culturalism. Now, everything has been revolutionized.”²⁶

As the centennial of the Mennonite settlement in Mexico approaches, the “Rebels, Exiles, and Bridge Builders: Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Campos Menonitas of Chihuahua” seeks to document the ways in which dynamics and relationships between Mestizo, Indigenous, and Mennonite individuals and communities have changed and grown over time. It captures what members of those communities currently anticipate for future cross-cultural interactions. The project narratives featured in this article represent some of the dramatic and lasting changes that have occurred in much of the region over the last hundred years and reflect the general sense of optimism that many interviewees expressed about the future dynamics between communities.²⁷

1 Dominguez, José Luis, *La otra historia de los menonitas* (Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua: Editorial Kleidi, 2015), 68.

2 Ibid.

3 José Luis Dominguez, interview by Abigail Carl-Klassen, February 26, 2018, Interview 23, “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders: Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Campos Menonitas of Chihuahua” Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Archives.

4 The “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders: Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Campos Menonitas of Chihuahua” Oral History project is a research project consisting of forty-two oral history interviews conducted in Mexico by the author, in both Spanish and English, in the spring of 2018. The project was funded by a research grant from the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation and the oral interviews and research materials are archived at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

5 Dominguez, interview by Carl-Klassen, February 26, 2018.

6 Dominguez, *La otra historia de los menonitas*, 95.

7 Ibid., 93.

8 Ibid., 109.

9 Dominguez, interview by Carl-Klassen, February 26, 2018.

10 Programa de Apoyo a las Culturas Municipales y Comunitarias (PACMyC), *Fundación del Ejido Cuauhtémoc Chihuahua*, directed and performed by Ariadne Lozano (Chihuahua: Secretaría de Cultura del Estado de Chihuahua, 2015), YouTube.

11 The Darp Stories YouTube Channel showcases selected

interviews from the “Rebels, Exiles, and Bridge Builders” Oral History Project for the general public. It is available at www.youtube.com/channel/UCGy9sd_xNDQtwffveCOhvhg.

12 Marcela Enns, interviewed by Abigail Carl-Klassen, February 6, 2018, Interview 11, “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders.”

13 Jacobo Enns, interview by Abigail Carl-Klassen, March 3, 2018, Interview 28, “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders.”

14 Ibid.

15 Enns, interview by Carl-Klassen, February 6, 2018.

16 Clara Enns, interview by Abigail Carl-Klassen, February 7, 2018, Interview 12, “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders.”

17 Angélica Chávez Lícón, Patricia Islas Salinas, María Olivia Treviso Nevárez, et al., *Hombres y mujeres menonitas destacados: Caminos inspirantes* (Chihuahua: Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua, 2016), 31.

18 Enns, interview by Carl-Klassen, February 6, 2018.

19 Marcela Enns, conversation with Abigail Carl-Klassen, March 20, 2018.

20 Enns, interview by Carl-Klassen, February 6, 2018.

21 “Verónica y Marcela Enns exponen su obra ‘Una mirada a mi hermandad,’” *Heraldo de Chihuahua* (Chihuahua, CH), May 15, 2018.

22 Veronica Enns, interview by Abigail Carl-Klassen, March 11, 2018, Interview 29, “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders.”

23 Raúl Ramírez “Kigra,” conversation with Abigail Carl-Klassen, May 14, 2018.

24 Dr. Patricia Islas Salinas, *Mujeres menonitas: Miradas y*

expresiones [Mennonite Women: Looks and Expressions] (Chihuahua: Instituto Chihuahuense de la Cultura, 2016); Islas Salinas, *La colonia menonita en Chihuahua: Escenarios para el bienestar social [The Mennonite Colony in Chihuahua: Scenes for Social Welfare]* (Chihuahua: Centro de Estudios Multidisciplinarios en Investigación Intercultural, 2016); Islas Salinas, *Menonitas del noreste de Chihuahua: Historia, educación y salud [Mennonites in Northeastern Chihuahua: History, Education and Health]* (Chihuahua: Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, 2017).

25 Dr. Patricia Islas Salinas, interview by Abigail Carl-Klassen, January 26, 2018, Interview 7, “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders.”

26 Ibid.

27 The complete audio interviews, transcripts, translations (for interviews conducted in Spanish) and supplemental donated materials (photos, newspapers, books, and government publications) are available at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg. Selected interviews and clips from the project, accompanied by landscape images of the Campos Menonitas provided by local photographers and project interviewees Marcela Enns, Veronica Enns, and Raúl Ramírez “Kigra,” are available on YouTube as part of the Darp Stories Project, which seeks to make “Rebels, Exiles and Bridge Builders” available to a wider audience, particularly to people from Old Colony origin communities throughout the Americas.

FAMILY MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Glenn H. Penner

Mennonite family legends, new and old, are too numerous to count. Most traditional Mennonite family names have at least one myth regarding their origin or how these surnames found their way into the Mennonite community. Many of these are so outrageous that they can be immediately discarded; although family members often tenaciously cling to these myths claiming that they cannot be wrong. Some appear to have started out as being based in fact and then have been corrupted over generations.

Mennonite family legends tend to follow one or more of a group of themes: 1) Origins of families and family names; 2) Very early family members (possible progenitors); 3) Jewish, Roma, and other origins; and/or 4) Immigration and other exploits.

How do these legends start? Some start as true stories which change (through exaggeration or faulty memory) with each telling and, after a few generations, become almost unrecognizable. Some are essentially invented or seriously exaggerated with the purpose of entertaining or emphasizing the importance of the family. Red hair or an unusually dark complexion running in a family must indicate that an ancestor had an affair with a non-Mennonite (as if Mennonites could not have red hair) or had Roma ancestry.

These days we have access to resources which can help us look into some of these legends. For instance, scans of many original church registers and census lists are now available online.¹ Several different types of DNA testing can be used to

investigate the ancestry of the descendants of those mentioned in these legends.² With these tools, we can assess the claims made and attempt to distinguish fact from myth.

FAMILY LEGENDS

The oldest known set of family legends was written around 1785 by Ältester (Elder) Benjamin Wedel (1754–1791) of the Przechowka congregation in West Prussia (later the Alexanderwohl congregation in Russia and Kansas). In the process of starting a church register, Wedel attempted to trace all of the existing families back as far as possible.³ In most cases the information he provided on the earliest known members was based on local folklore. The best-known example was the origin of the Mennonite Ratzlaff family. The first Mennonite Ratzlaff was supposed to have been a Swedish soldier who, upon hearing a sermon (by one of the Mennonite preachers), stuck his sword into a hedge post and was later baptized as a Mennonite, joining the Przechowka congregation and marrying the daughter of Ältester Voth. The timing is about right for such a person to have been in one of the Swedish wars, but Ratzlaff is hardly a Swedish name. If there is any truth to this story the first Mennonite Ratzlaff may have been a soldier of eastern European origin who fought in one of the Swedish wars.

Another early recorded Mennonite family legend comes through the 1815 court proceedings of David von Riesen (Friesen) of Elbing in West Prussia.⁴ Von

Riesen joined the Prussian army during the Napoleonic wars. As a result, he was excommunicated by the Elbing/Ellerwald Mennonite church. After the Napoleonic wars he attempted to rejoin the church through litigation. Von Riesen claimed that, according to family legend, his earliest van Riesen ancestor arrived in Poland (later West Prussia) as a soldier with the army of Carl Gustav during the Swedish War (1655–1660). This is simply not true. First, there were already Mennonite van Riesens in the area before this war. Secondly, van Riesen is obviously a Dutch name and more likely originated from the city of Rijssen in Overijssel. Thirdly, Y-DNA evidence, at this point in time, shows that there is only one Mennonite Friesen/von Riesen/van Riesen family with no evidence of a second Swedish family.

THE LEGEND OF MICHAEL LOEWEN

There is also the legend of General Michael Loewen. This legend can be found in two documents written by Heinrich H. Neufeld that I have translated and reproduced: an article in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and a *Geschlechtsregister* (genealogy) of Michael Loewen. Both documents were copied and annotated by an unknown person with the initials JFF. JFF's comments are in the parenthesis. In the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, the following was printed:

"Grandfather Michael Loewen was born in 1606. Married to Sarah Eckert in 1630—just when the Rottenkriege⁵ was occurring in Germany (meaning the Thirty Years' War from 1618 to 1648, between Protestants and Catholics), the Emperor sent General Michael Loewen to put an end to the war. His image is carved as a hero in stone and seen in Germany at the gate of the arch, where the emperor makes his entrance. Here he was married and baptized by Georg Hansen as a Mennonite. They lived in Marienwerder. He became 104 years old. In 1633 a son, Karl Loewen, was born; in 1637 a son Nicolaus was born and died in 1640. In 1656 Karl Loewen married Elisabeth

Steingardt. They had one child Karl and the mother died. He married again, to her sister Maria Steingardt in 1659. Their children were two sons, Abraham and Jacob, and one daughter. Again, the mother died. In 1683 he married the third sister Martha, the youngest. Their parents were the Abraham Steingardts who also lived in Marienwerder.”⁶

The “Geschlechtsregister of Michael

Loewen” provides more genealogical information about the family that can be tested against other records. I have highlighted some important information for my argument in the square brackets.

“In 1684 their son was born (who was certainly called Michael) and a daughter, Margaretha, in 1688. Grandfather Michael married Justina Hildebrandt in 1710. In 1711 a son named Michael

was born. After that there were three sons and two daughters, all died [young]. Grandfather died in 1743 and grandmother died in 1752.

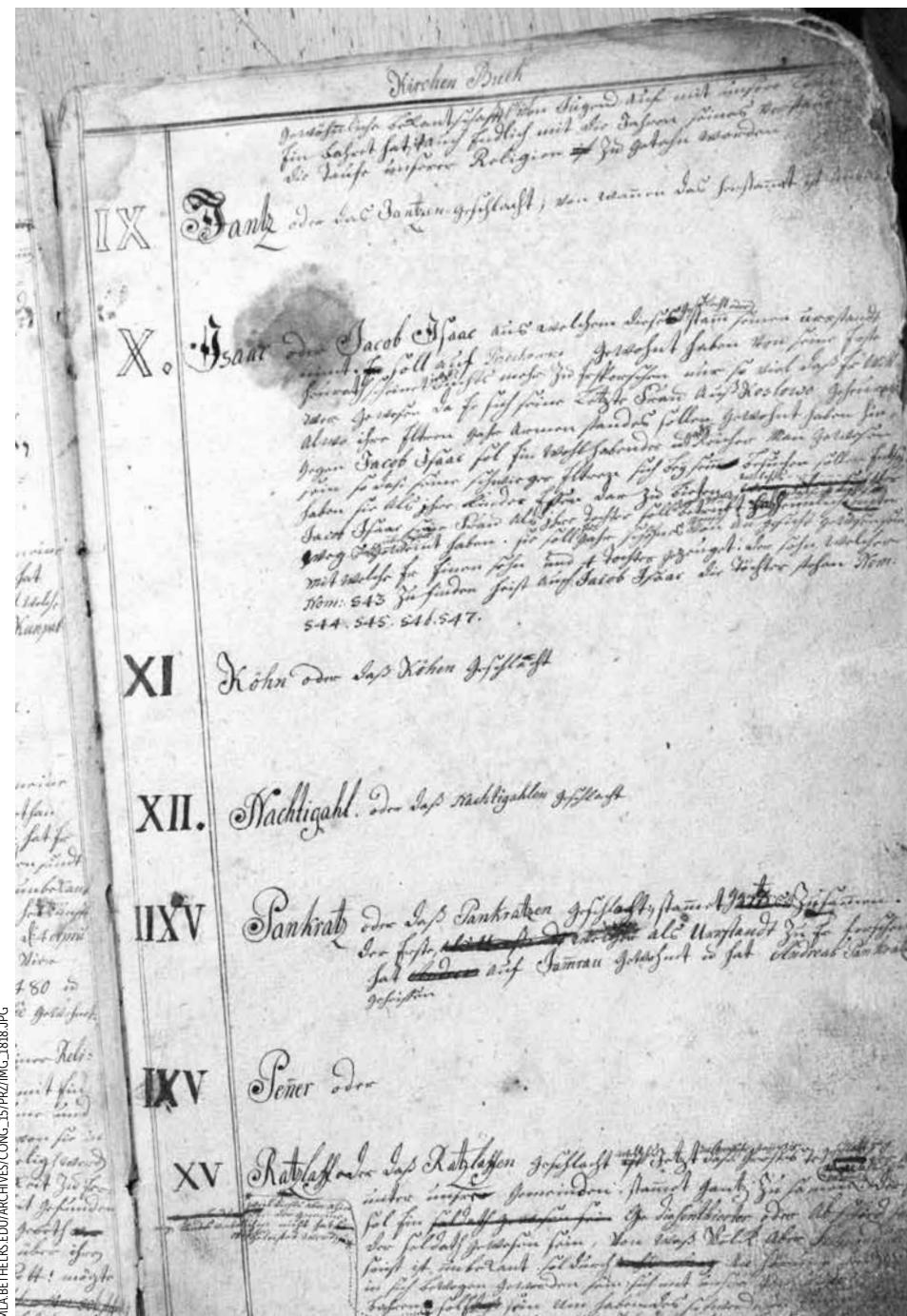
In 1738 our grandfather Michael Loewen (III) married Katharina Hildebrandt. Son Julius born 1740, son Michael 1743, son Diedrich born 1746, daughter Katharina born 1748 and daughter Margaretha born 1751. Grandmother died in 1768 and grandfather in 1761.

In the year 1768 grandfather Michael Loewen (IV) married Justina Schellenberg. The children were: Bernhard 1770, Paul 1771, Michael 1773, Jacob 1775, Diedrich 1779, Katharina 1781, Maria 1784, Elisabeth 1787, and Margaretha 1790, who was my grandmother. [This is actually his great-grandmother].

In the year 1809 this great grandmother married our great grandfather Peter Martens. The children were Peter 1810, Margaretha 1811, and in 1814 my grandmother, named Helena, was born. My great grandmother lived to be 57 years old and great grandfather lived to 87 years and 9 months. They moved from Prussia to Russia by horse and took up residence in Grossweide, where they both died.

In 1835 my grandmother Helena (nee Martens) married our grandfather Heinrich Ewert and 12 children were born. They moved from Grossweide to Sparrau where they both died.”⁷

This legend is a mixture of fantasy and factual information. First, during the time of the Thirty Years’ War, generals and other military leaders were taken from various parts of the European nobility or aristocracy. There is no indication that Michael Loewen was part of this group. The Thirty Years’ War is well-documented and there is no record of a leading general named Loewen. The only known European emperor during this time was the Holy Roman Emperor, who was the head of the Catholic coalition in the war. Prussia was only a Duchy and Poland had little involvement in the conflict. This means that Loewen must have originally been Catholic and not of Mennonite descent. However, the idea that he was Catholic is inconsistent with DNA analysis of twenty-three Loewen men, of



The oldest known set of family legends was written around 1785 by Ältester Benjamin Wedel of the Przechowka congregation in West Prussia. In the process of starting a church register, Wedel attempted to trace all of the existing families back as far as possible. In most cases the information he provided on the earliest known members was based on local folklore.

which four are known to be descended from Michael Loewen (IV) and nineteen who are known not to be descended from this family. The Y-DNA results indicate that the descendants of Michael Loewen belong to the same Loewen family as the rest of the Mennonite Loewens, not a separate Catholic family.⁸ There does not appear to be any record of a memorial to a General Loewen at any city gate (although such a memorial may have disappeared over time).

The legend also claims that Loewen was baptized by Georg Hansen. Georg Hansen became the Ältester of the Danzig Flemish Mennonite church in 1690.⁹ Since there was a hard rule that only a Mennonite Ältester could perform baptism Loewen had to have been over eighty-four years old at the time of his baptism. It is claimed that he lived to be 104 years old. At that time such an age would have been a national record, if not a world record, given that those who survived childhood rarely lived past the age of seventy. Aside from this General Loewen myth, I know of no other record of a Michael Loewen who lived during this time period. Although the name Michael does appear in the early Loewen family, the name Karl does not. Considering how strongly early Mennonites stuck to traditional naming patterns it's hard to believe that two successive Karl Loewens existed without having any descendants with the same first name. What is even more difficult to believe is that Karl Loewen married three sisters over a period of twenty-seven years. I have yet to find any documented evidence that anyone named Karl or Carl Loewen even existed during this time period.

Once passed the first three generations in this family legend things become more believable, although all the dates which can be compared with original records are wrong. Unfortunately, the many discrepancies between the last three generations in the Loewen document and the original church and immigration documents are too numerous to work through here. I will concentrate on the second and third Michael Loewens. The earliest mention of a Michael Loewen is the marriage of

Michel Leuens and Trinke (Katharina) Boldt in 1706 in Danzig. This marriage is found in the marriage register of the Flemish Mennonite church of Danzig.¹⁰ Both the date and the wife's name do not match those for Michael Loewen (II). The next occurrence of the name is found in the Catholic burial register for Tiegenhagen (West Prussia, now Poland).¹¹ Mennonites were rarely allowed to have their own cemeteries and were usually required to bury their dead in nearby Lutheran or Catholic cemeteries and pay the required fee. The Tiegenhagen Catholic records mention Mennonites going back to 1721. There are no Michael Loewens until the burial of the wife of a Michael Loewen on 1 December 1742. Michael Loewen was buried on 10 December 1746. These dates do not match those for Michael Loewen (II) and his wife but they are within a decade.

The next mention of a Michael Loewen is the death of Elisabeth, wife of Michael Loewen of Tiegenhof, on 31 December 1758 at the age of forty-two years. If this refers to Michael Loewen (III) the date is out by ten years and the name is wrong. There is also a Catharina Loewen who died on 20 January 1770 in Tiegenhof at the age of fifty. However, she could have belonged to any one of the several Loewen families who lived in the Tiegenhof region at that time. I have been unable to find the death of Michael Loewen (III) in the Tiegenhagen Catholic records. Mennonite records for this region were not started until 1782.¹² The family of Michael Loewen (IV), who later immigrated to Russia, is found in these records. The original General Michael Loewen document must have been written long after the immigration of Michael (IV) to Russia in 1804 and appears to be based on a mixture of memory and imagination. The birth date of Heinrich H. Neufeld's own grandmother and her siblings and the marriage date of her parents are all wrong.¹³

The most frustrating aspect of this is that the original document owned by Heinrich H. Neufeld (1876–1947) has disappeared. Only copies, which themselves have inserted information, or where dates are re-jigged, are available.

THE NOBLE BLATZ FAMILY

Another family legend concerns the nobility of the Blatz family. Members of this family did not join the Mennonite community until after their immigration to Russia and most of their descendants are found in Manitoba. The following information was posted on the message board of the Ancestry website: "My information on Michael Blatz is that he is from nobility in Germany. He was the son of the King's family. He lived in a castle where the Rhine and Neckar Rivers join, not far from Mannheim and Heidelberg, Germany. He was a Doctor of Philosophy and his 2 sons were well educated in Heidelberg. In 1812, during the Napoleon[ic] wars, Michael, his 2 sons, Daniel and Andrew and his wife, fled to Russia. They loaded up all they could carry into two handcarts and walked to the Molochai [sic] area in Russia. His sons Daniel and Andrew taught school. The family was of the Catholic faith, but Daniel was baptized in the Mennonite faith in Russia."¹⁴

The following description from the GRANDMA database version 5.06 supports this interpretation: "Michael Blatz lived in a castle in Germany, and was a member of the nobility. The castle was destroyed in 1712, after which time he moved to Russia. The castle was located at the junction of the Neckar and Rhine Rivers. They moved to Russia with a two-wheel cart in 1804: Michael, his wife, and his two sons (Blatz, D.G. p. 8; K. Stumpp, p. 395). In the 1811 Prischib Colony Census he is listed at Alt-Nassau #44, where his surname is given as Platz (K. Stumpp, p. 885)."¹⁵

According to research done by Cornelia Carstens of Germany,¹⁶ using Catholic church records of Obernburg near Heidelberg, the only confirmed statements made in these legends is that the family lived in the Heidelberg region before emigrating and that the family consisted of Michael, wife Elisabeth, and sons Daniel and Andreas. Her research shows that Michael Platz was born in Obernburg on 22 January 1756, the son of baker Johann Thomas Platz and Maria Margaretha Guttner. Johann Thomas

himself was the son of a baker. Michael married Elisabeth Metzler on 19 July 1785. A son, Daniel, was born on 1 June 1788 and son Andreas was born on 11 December 1795. At that time his father was described as a fisherman (*piscatoris* in Latin). Exactly when the Platz family moved from Prussia to Russia is unknown. By 1811 they were living in the Prischib colony in the village of Alt-Nassau in Russia.¹⁷ Daniel Platz/Blatz transferred to the Mennonites sometime between 1820 and 1822¹⁸ after marrying Maria Klassen (in 1816 or 1817).

JOSEPH NOWITZKY— THE “JEWISH MENNONITE”

The legend of Joseph Nowitzky, the “Jewish Mennonite,” illustrates another type of family myth. The following is a story written by Heinrich A. Dyck (1906–1985): “A Heinrich Dyck was born in Prussia in 1754. When his parents emigrated to Russia he went along. It happened that Heinrich Dyck married and settled down to make a home in that so called Russia. At that time there was a man there by the name of Joseph Nowitzki, who was a businessman. He sold cloth and whatever else was involved with this. Since his sales territory stretched over a wide area he looked for places where he could stay for the night. He found such a place by Heinrich Dyck. From here he went from place to place to bargain, as it is said today. The reason he stayed for night in such places was because it would take too much time to go home every night. It would take too much time and he would not sell as much.

One day we saw this Joseph Nowitzki come again—and what did we see? He had a child with him—this had not happened before. These people took both of them in, in a friendly manner and welcomed them since they were very hospitable people. They could stay overnight and eat with them. He was also asked why he had the child with him, since it is so cumbersome to have a child along all the time. Then he gave them the reason for this: ‘Look, dear people, my wife has died and I cannot leave my daughter (her name was Maria) alone. That is the reason.’

The next morning, he asked the Heinrich Dycks if it would be possible to leave the daughter with them while he was making his usual sales trips in the area. When finished he would come and take his daughter home again. (The distance to his home the writer of this does not know). However, while on his business travels the thought struck him—would it be possible to leave Maria with the Dycks permanently? When he had finished his rounds he came back to the Dycks. The next morning he asked the Dycks whether this, leaving Maria with them, would be possible. This was discussed and was accomplished. He, namely Joseph (as we will call him from now on), then drove off in a joyful mood, knowing that his child was in a good place. He came back like before, but this situation, his daughter being here, resulted in a very close bond to this place. However, one other thing has to be mentioned. These Heinrich Dycks insisted that she had to come along to church. This was done. Maria always went along, listened to the sermons, and was happy to do this. Even though she was a Jew and did not understand everything. However, with time she understood more and more.

Maria matured and became older and she reached the age where she had to go to school. She was a diligent student and thus the teachers and the people were satisfied with her. Maria did not stop with her school years. Oh no! She grew up to be a fine young lady. When she reached the age where it was time to be part of the church membership procedure, she decided to take this step with the help of the Dycks. Joseph, Maria’s father, came again and again to visit Maria. When the membership classes were completed Maria asked to be baptised. When father Joseph came again after Maria was baptised, father Heinrich Dyck said to Maria she should come to him. She was obedient and came. Then father Dyck said to Maria that she should tell her father what she had done. Maria did as father Dyck had asked her and told her father Joseph what she had done, that she had been baptised. Then her father Joseph was displeased with this, spat in his child’s face, and said, ‘From

now on you are no longer my daughter!’ He drove away and never came back again. One can imagine how Maria felt about this!

Maria was not the only child in the family. Oh, no! These Heinrich Dycks had their own children. (The writer does not know how many.) However, there was a Peter among them. When Maria Nowitzki came to the Dycks, Peter felt sorry for Maria and had sympathy for her. Who would not have had sympathy for her? When the time came, that they were of the age for each of them to choose whom they wanted as a partner for life, Peter chose Maria. He took her as his wife. (The writer does not know the date and year when this happened. He hopes to find it.)

The dear God blessed them with 6 children—Peter, Jacob, Heinrich, Johann, Helena, and Katharina. After Maria Nowitzki died, Peter Dyck looked for another wife and found Maria Regier. From this marriage another 2 children were born—Barbara and Abraham.”¹⁹

One can make several observations and conclusions about this version of the Nowitzky legend. First, the early Khortitsa colony families are well documented by the census lists of 1795, 1801, 1807, 1811 and 1816.²⁰ None of these lists show a Heinrich Dyck who fits the description above. More importantly, none of these lists show that Joseph Nowitzky even had a daughter Maria. Also, Joseph Nowitzky’s wife, Helena Boschmann, did not die until 1858, long after the time period of the story above. In fact, Khortitsa colony records show that Joseph Nowitzky was not a travelling salesman of any kind: he started off as a farmer. In 1801 he owned two horses, ten cattle and a wagon. In 1805, he gave up his farm and moved to the Molotschna colony, where he was a miller.²¹ By 1811 he was back in the Khortitsa colony and living in the village of Neuenburg where he owned six horses, six cattle, a wagon and a plow. Finally, autosomal DNA results for descendants of Nowitzky’s daughter Justina are consistent with Joseph Nowitzky being an Ashkenazi Jew. However, DNA results for descendants of alleged daughter Maria show no Jewish ancestry.

		Anno. 1705 getrouw
Jan: 19		Jan C.E. Dylsba & Maria von L. gant d. Dyck d.
Juni: 14		Antony Comyns & junior Hants de getrouwetolff
Aug: 23		Jan G. Janus "Davida Rammens"
Sep: 6		Saint M. Jofan Regent, Maria Johanna
Okt: 11		Jan D.v. Daniel Daniels & Ruth Friedrichs
		Jan Rijckens & Anna Brinck Kaimers
Nov: - 25		Janneke Janus "Davida Rammens"
		Jan D.v. Abraham Nijsse, Lisbetje Döller
		Hacai Fautzau "Augusta de Katane, N.B.
8		Hendrik Zoolen "Magdalena Elsas g. d. Dyck d.
30		Jan C.E. Janus Dylsba "Elisabeth Gorraus" — Dijn 13 jaer

Anno. 1706 getrouw

Jan: 10.		Jan A.F. Elans philips son Dylsba, Magdalena Rammens
17		Saint M. Frants Regent, Davida Döller
		Jacob son Bergau "Goedertje Comyns,
Apr: 5		Jan C.E. Janus Gander, Davida de Lys
		Johan Dierckx, Klara Fautzau
Juni: 27		Sanderlo Comyns Rammens, Lisbetje Getrudis d. 5. str. Dyr
Aug: 8.		Jan D.v. Jofan s. Spronck, Sintje Rammens
Sept: 12		Saint F. Janus G. d. Leiberman "Ermilia Rammens"
Okt: 19		Sanderl. Adriaen Willems, Davida Diemers
		C.E. - Geert Janus, Davida G. d. Lys
31		G. Dierckx, Davida G. d. Lys
		Davida Daniels, Ruth Döller
Nov: 14		Saint A. Kuijf Comyns, Ermilia Boltz
		Dijn 13 Jaar

These days we have access to resources, like scans of many original church registers, which can help us look into some of these legends. This marriage register of the Flemish Mennonite church of Danzig, for instance, can help us to distinguish fact from myth.

What is the connection between the Dycks and the Nowitzkys? Helena Boschmann, the wife of Nowitzky, was the stepdaughter of Peter Dyck of Neuendorf. However, there appears to be no known connection between this Peter Dyck and the Dyck family claiming to descent from Maria Nowitzky.²²

Another version of this story was recorded by Johann Epp: "Justina von

Liechtenstein, daughter of the Baron von Liechtenstein, married a Jewish pharmacist Nowitzky. Because of this they were rejected by her parents. The young Family Nowitzky was in a bad way. They came to Poland, then to Russia. There they met the Mennonites and found help with them. They accepted their belief. Her daughter married Low German Mennonites in the old colony. Mrs. Pauls has visited

the castle of the Barons of Liechtenstein and also his family grave. On the grave stone of the mother of the family tomb in Liechtenstein is the inscription: 'She died of a broken heart because of an unruly daughter.' Ms. Pauls says that Justina's brother Anton visited her several times in Russia. Mrs. Toews (born 1894, she lived in Curibita) also knew about this story. In addition, Maria Peters (1881–1949)

related how she, that is to say, the descendants of the Peters family, had been decried as Jews in the Nazi era because of their ancestral origin.”²³

One can immediately see that this version of the legend is another classic attempt to connect early Mennonite ancestry to some sort of nobility. A connection to the royal family of Lichtenstein seems highly unlikely. Additionally, it is claimed that the above excerpt comes down through the descendants of Peter Peters and Justina Nowitzky. This is not correct. The people mentioned were descended from Jacob Peters and Helena Bergmann. Helena's parents were Anton Bergmann and Justina Nowitzky. This might explain the origin of the name Anton: he was the husband of Justina Nowitzky, not her brother. Justina Nowitzky's family is well-documented²⁴ and does not contain any Lichtenstein nobility!

IMMIGRATION STORIES

There are many legends of families travelling from Prussia to Russia by foot, often pushing a type of wheelbarrow or pushcart. Historian David G. Rempel

states that these stories are not true and an exaggeration of the hardships that immigrant families went through.²⁵ There are also many legends claiming that a particular ancestor emigrated directly from “Holland” to Russia. These are all simply not true. There is no evidence whatsoever that any Mennonites emigrated directly from any Dutch territory to Russia, even via Prussia. We know the village of origin of nearly every family who immigrated to Russia.²⁶

An example from the “Pioneer Portrait of the Past” series which ran in the *Altona Echo* for several years illustrates both of these categories of family legends.²⁷ The article reads: “Our great, great, grandfather Falk walked from Holland to Germany and from there to Russia. To cover the distance by foot from Germany to his destination in Russia took him two years. Then, when the Mennonites migrated from southern Russia to Manitoba, he was among the pioneers. He died at the age of 108 years.” Heinrich Falk did indeed immigrate from Russia to Manitoba and did reach the advanced age of 96 years, but

he was born in Schönwiese, Khortitsa colony, Russia in 1799.²⁸

Another common immigration theme is that of an ancestor of the family immigrating alone as an orphan. There certainly were orphan children who immigrated. However, records show that they immigrated with their foster families or relatives. In some cases, the so-called orphan children had lost a father and immigrated with their mother and stepfather and therefore were not really orphans.

CONCLUSION

I have presented just a few examples of the various family stories which I have collected over the years. Although entertaining, most are far from accurate. Myths and legends are part of our Mennonite culture and they are worth collecting and investigating. Unfortunately, some of these have been incorporated into published genealogies or appear in the GRANDMA database and are often treated as if they were historical fact. If you have a family myth or legend to relate, please contact the author.²⁹

1 See www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/ for a large collection of early genealogical material.

2 Glenn Penner and Tim Janzen are the administrators of the Mennonite DNA Project. For more information see www.mennonitedna.com or contact the author.

3 For a translation see: www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1.Guetlige_Numbers_and_Notes.07.27.17.pdf. A good scan of the original page can be found here: https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_15/prz/IMG_1818.JPG

4 Horst Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen* (Weierhof, Germany: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1978), 326–327.

5 This refers to the Red War.

6 *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 7 May 1941, 6. Translated by the author.

7 *Geschlechtsregister* (Michael Loewen) copied 15 Feb 1940. I would like to thank Dave Loewen (Abbotsford, BC) and Jason Loewen (Woodbury, MN) for providing me with family copies of this document.

8 See www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/ for a large collection of early genealogical material.

9 Christian Neff and Nanne van der Zijpp, “Hansen, Georg (d. 1703).” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* [hereafter GAMEO], 1956, [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hansen,_Georg_\(d._1703\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Hansen,_Georg_(d._1703)).

10 Marriage Records of the Flemish Mennonite Church of Danzig – 1706. A scan of the page can be found here: https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_310/bdms17/0093.jpg

11 Catholic Church records of Tiegenhagen, West Prussia.

12 Records of the Mennonite church of Tiegenhagen, West Prussia. Various transcriptions and scans can be found here:

<http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/>

13 These are found in the Records of the Frisian Mennonite Church of Orloffefeld, West Prussia and the Lutheran church records of Tiegenhof, West Prussia (which contain Mennonites after 1800).

14 See “Michael Blatz 1760,” *Ancestry.com Message Boards-Surnames-Blatz*, 6 Dec. 2000, <https://www.ancestry.com/boards/surnames.blatz/11.12.13/mb.aspx>.

15 More information about the Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry [hereafter GRANDMA] database can be found at: <https://www.grandmaonline.org/gmystore/pc/Overview-d1.htm>.

16 I would like to thank Maureen Hiebert (1942–2017) of Winnipeg for forwarding her email correspondence regarding the origins of the Mennonite Blatz family.

17 Karl Stumpf, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the years 1763 to 1862*. (Lincoln, NE, American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1997), 395, 883, 885.

18 Odessa State Archives f.6, op.5, d.2.

19 Tim Janzen, “Joseph Nowitzky, the Jewish Mennonite,” *Preservings* 25 (2005): 68–70. I would like to thank Tim Janzen for extensive discussions regarding the Nowitzky family and DNA testing.

20 1801 Census, Chortitza colony, South Russia Odessa Archives, f.6, op.1, d.67, extracted by Tim Janzen, http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_September_1801.pdf; Nov 1807 Chortitza colony census, State Archive of Dnipropetrovsk Region [hereafter SADR], fond 134, op.1, d.175, transcribed by Tim Janzen, http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_November_1807.pdf; May 1811 Chortitza colony census, SADR, fond 134, opis

1, delo 299, transcribed by Richard Thiessen, http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_May_1811.pdf; May 1814 Chortitza colony census, SADR, fond 134, opis 1, delo 406, transcribed by Richard Thiessen, http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_May_1814.pdf; Oct 1814 Chortitza colony census, SADR, fond 134, opis 1, delo 405, transcribed by Richard Thiessen, http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_October_1814.pdf; Dnepropetrovsk Archives, fond 149, file 498, which contains an October 1816 census for the Chortitza colony (transcription in the possession of the author).

21 Odessa State Archives, op. 1, d. 201.

22 For more information see the GRANDMA database: www.grandmaonline.org/gmystore/pc/Overview-d1.htm.

23 Johann Epp, *Gedenke des ganzen Weges... Band 1*, (Lage: Logos Verlag, 2000), 404.

24 For more information see the GRANDMA database

25 David G. Rempel, *A Mennonite family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, 1789–1923*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

26 See, for example, Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der Mennonitischen Ostwanderung im 16. 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, (Karlsruhe: self-pub., 955) or Peter Rempel, *Mennonite Migrations to Russia 1788–1828* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2000).

27 Elizabeth Bergen, “Pioneer Portrait of the Past (160): Heinrich and Justina Falk (1898),” *Altona Echo*, 25 Jun 1979, 8.

28 For more information see the GRANDMA database.

29 Contact the author at gpenner@uoguelph.ca

CHASING OUR HERITAGE IN BOROZENKO

Grace Dueck



The Mennonite Heritage Cruise in Odessa at the outset of the journey.

This past summer, I had the privilege of boarding a ship with 190 passengers, all on a quest to visit the scenes which formed part of their heritage, the Mennonite colonies in Ukraine. As I was preparing for the Mennonite Heritage Cruise organized by Walter and Marina Unger, which they lovingly dubbed the floating Mennonite University, I did not know what to expect.

All of the cruise participants were sent their *Ahnentafel* a few months in advance. An *Ahnentafel* is best described as an ‘ancestor table,’ a genealogical numbering system which lists a person’s direct ancestors in a fixed ascending sequence. My *Ahnentafel* traced my genealogy back to my thirteenth great-grandfather,

Jakob Harnasveger, born between 1480 and 1500, in the Netherlands. Clearly my heritage is Dutch and having visited Friesland in the Netherlands, from where my people purportedly hailed, I had felt an enormous affinity to the landscape there, the people, and the foods they ate. Really! The only difference between their cow pastures and those at home on the Canadian prairies was that they were enclosed by canals, as opposed to our fences.

Visiting Ukraine, therefore, was not so much about visiting the place of my origin, as visiting one of the past homes of my people. Forever on a quest for religious freedom, military exemption, and other educational and lifestyle rights,

Mennonites moved many times and that is how they ended up for a period of time in Ukraine. Here they adopted Ukrainian foods such as perogies, cabbage rolls, and Borscht. I find it fascinating that they even retained the Ukrainian names for these dishes. Perogies in Ukrainian are called *Varenyky*!

Most of the passengers on our cruise had relatives who had left Ukraine in either the 1920s or the 1940s. My people, however, left in 1874, before the wars and famines that were so devastating for the Mennonites who remained and that left so many deep scars. Hence, whereas many of the passengers were searching for lost records of relatives gone missing, for graves of those who had been massacred, or for buildings where their loved ones had lived and died, I was searching for happier sites. I was chasing villages where my great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers had been born.

My *Ahnentafel* pointed to Borozenko as the birthplace of several of my ancestors, as well as of several of my husband’s, Terry. We are both from the Kleine Gemeinde background and although I no longer strictly adhere to the tenets of this Mennonite group, I still do treasure their peace stance, their community mindedness, and their honest hard-working ways.

As early as 1860, Kleine Gemeinde members left the Molotschna Mennonite settlement to find farmland for their landless members and to distance themselves from the politics of the Molotschna colony. In 1865, the Borozenko colony, twenty miles northwest of Nikopol, was founded by 120 Kleine Gemeinde families. This is where two of my great-grandfathers were born, as well as one great-great-grandfather. My husband’s side of the family boasted three great-grandparents who had been born in Borozenko. We were both keen to visit this area, so we proceeded to book our own private tour, with the assistance of our cruise organizers.

While still at home, I had mapped out each of the six villages of interest on Google Maps. Of course, the current-day names of these villages are no



A schoolhouse in Heuboden.

longer Heuboden, Rosenfeld, Steinbach, Friedensfeld, Annafeld, and Blumenhof, so the search for these villages meant equating them with their present-day names. With the help of several resources and maps, I was able to piece together our journey. Unbelievably, Google Maps actually loaded in the remotest parts of Borzenko and although the navigation feature was disabled, we were able to clearly follow the path I had outlined for us while still at home. At times, our guide and our driver were uncertain about which way to take. I would reassure them that the road I pointed to would be the one, but they still needed to stop and ask the locals. Each time, the locals verified my directions!

It was gratifying to see my research come to life before my eyes. The villages were just as they had been on the satellite images I had zoomed in on while back home. Steinbach, which no longer exists but for a fruit grove across the

Bazavluk River, was set in the bend of a stony river, just as the satellite image had shown. Stones in the middle of the river! Steinbach, which means “stony brook,” was the birthplace of Terry’s maternal grandmother’s father! As the day progressed, each village we visited came to life. Our Google Map research had laid the foundation for a day of discovery and memories.

It was delightful to meet the locals and to see their hunger for people from afar. Their stories, interpreted for us by our guide, were poignant and full of memories. It was as if they were bursting with untold information, and their friendliness and willingness to help was amazing. It is intriguing that despite our ancestors only spending nine years in the Borzenko region, we feel such a tremendous connection to it!

I have compiled a travelogue of the villages we visited, the names of relatives who were born there, and some snapshots of

our day in Borzenko—walking through the grasses, breathing in the air, and feeling the land upon which our people walked.

In Heuboden, which was the birthplace of my great-grandfather, Cornelius P. Janzen, we saw an old schoolhouse built by Mennonites, now used as a home. It was built in 1898, after the Kleine Gemeinde left the region. This schoolhouse had a typical Johann Cornies roof. As we left Heuboden we found the cemetery, located east of the village, where the gravestones of Katarina Schellenberg and Helena Schellenberg were situated.

The villagers in Heuboden warned us of our next destination of Blumenhof. They told us that the farmers there had fierce dogs, meant to protect their cattle, and that we should be careful. We did come upon these dogs, but according to one local farmer, they were mellow and friendly during the day, and only became fierce at night. Still, having them come near, sniff our clothes, and check us out



An Orthodox graveyard.



GRACEDUECK

A view of the site of the former village of Steinbach.

closely was a bit anxiety provoking! But Blumenhof was the birthplace of my great-great-grandfather, Peter R. Reimer.

Our next stop was Steinbach, Borozenko. This village was the birthplace of Terry's maternal grandmother's father, Johann W. Reimer (20 January 1870). The river was low when we visited, so the stones that would be typically underwater were exposed on the banks of the river, as shown in the photo.

Our tour then visited Rosenfeld, the birthplace of my great-grandfather, Johann F. Unger. In Rosenfeld we saw a number of houses built with the Flemish bond brick pattern common to most Mennonite buildings. We also saw an old well that our guide thought might have been built by bricks made by Mennonites, since they were much longer than present-day bricks.

Friedensfeld was the birthplace of

Terry's maternal grandmother's mother, Maria T. Barkman. A local gentleman in Friedensfeld, working in his garden, jumped in our car with us and gave us a tour of the village! We visited the former Mennonite Brethren Church-School building, which has now been restored and is still in use. We also saw the site of the former flourmill, owned by a Friesen, Isaak, and Wiens, which has now been torn down. The only evidence that remains of the Friedensfeld flourmill was a few lone bricks.

On the periphery of many Orthodox graveyards one can find old tombstones of the Mennonites who had lived and died in Borozenko. Usually a Mennonite burial site can be identified by the lilac bushes that still thrive there today. From my readings, I have noted that lilacs held special significance for the Mennonites. Our guide told us that the Mennonites

had always planted lilacs around their graves and it was heartwarming to see that they still blossomed there to this day. One blogger, commenting on the symbolism of lilacs among Mennonites, writes: "Today, despite the best efforts of Stalin and his Soviets to erase the memory of those quiet Anabaptist communities, plantings of lilacs remain as witnesses to our past."¹

Our time spent in Borozenko, enriched our spirits and deepened our roots and our sense of connection to our heritage. There was a sense of calm as we bounced along the bumpy roads, saw field upon field of sunflowers, felt the summer breezes, and touched the meadow grasses. Borozenko, you gave us life. Our hearts are grateful.

¹ Bruderthaler, "Neu Brüderthaler: Ethnic Russländer Mennonites," June 23, 2010, <http://bruderthaler.blogspot.com/2010/06/significance-of-lilacs.html>.

REVIVE US AGAIN

A Brief History of Revivalism in Steinbach

Ralph Friesen

Steinbach has a one-hundred-year history of religious revivalism, dating back almost to the earliest days of settlement. In this article I will sketch an outline of that history and speculate on the influence it has exerted on the town (now a city) and its inhabitants.¹

Revivalism began with “The Great Awakening” (1720–50), a series of Christian revivals that swept across Britain and its American colonies, followed by a second Great Awakening (1795–1835),

preaching and rousing music.”² The whole revivalist impulse was based on polarities, the perception of opposites, an antithesis between saved and lost.³ It is important to note that “revivalism has always assumed that only its own type of religious experience can be perfect.”⁴

At first glance Steinbach would not seem to have been open to revivalist influences. Practically all the original settlers were Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites from villages in South Russia. All the adults

kirchliche-type is basically a cultural church. Membership tends to be by birth into the religious-cultural community. Church and community become identical. The moral demands made by the church are indistinguishable from the general cultural standards of the community . . .”⁶

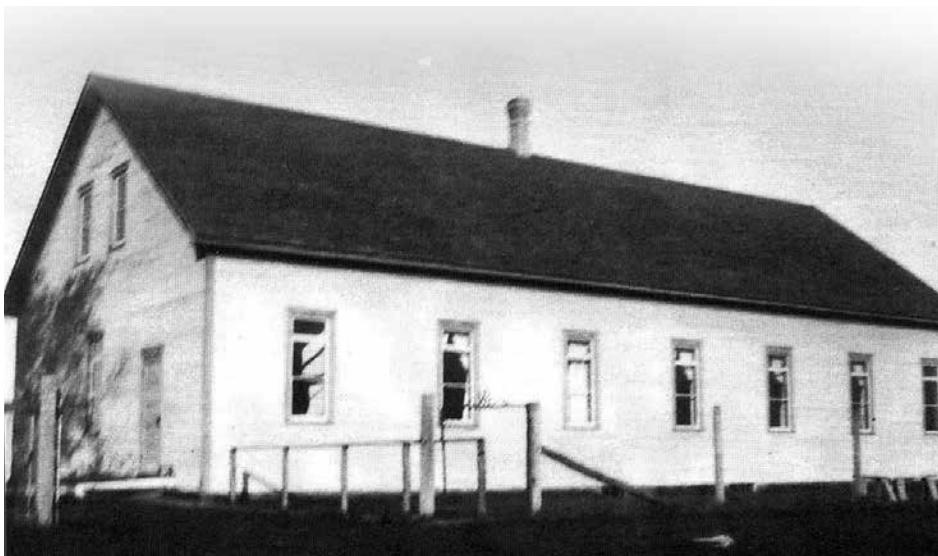
For some, this situation was not good enough. Even the *Ältester* (bishop) of the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, Peter Toews (1841–1922), was dissatisfied with the spiritual condition of his own people. He would have agreed with church historian P.J. B. Reimer: “There were too many who thought that a true believer must only fear the wrath of God and live a constant life of penitence and spiritual misery.”⁷ In material terms the Steinbach settlers exhibited remarkable skills of industry and commerce. But for Peter Toews, such success was just another challenge to spiritual health.

JOHN HOLDEMAN

Toews invited John Holdeman to speak in the East Reserve villages, including Steinbach. Holdeman (1832–1900), a born-again Old Mennonite from Kansas via Ohio, declared that he had been shown in a dream that many Kleine Gemeinde members had not been truly converted upon baptism.⁸ A completely new start was needed, with each person to be re-baptized before joining the Church of God in Christ.⁹

On a return visit in December 1881, with his fellow preacher Markus Seiler, Holdeman held meetings at the home of Franz Kroeker. At one of these Peter Toews came under conviction: “A special power gripped me which made my whole body shake and tremble so that I thought the place moved beneath us, and I instantly received a great joy. Having arisen from prayer, the trembling and movement still continued throughout my body.”¹⁰ Similarly, Maria Barkman (néé Friesen, 1860–1942) testified that “joy unspeakable and glory flooded my soul” upon her conversion.¹¹

Revivalism’s intent was to bring about



Practically all the original settlers in Steinbach were Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites from villages in South Russia. All adults were baptized members of this church, pictured above.

and more manifestations in the twentieth century. The term has the following definition: “Revivalism was an attempt to lift an otherwise routine and often dry, doctrinaire and moralistic Protestantism out of complacency to a more fervent level of faith, by holding a series of revival meetings characterized by emotional crises of faith, effected by strongly worded

were baptized church members. So why choose Steinbach? For the revivalists, there were two answers to this question: “To awaken us, as children of God, from the lax condition into which we fall again and again and also to bring sinners to Jesus.”⁵

Steinbach’s original population was, in Leland Harder’s term, *kirchliche*. According to Harder, this means: “The

harmony, understood as forgiveness by and atonement with God. The convert's perceptions may be enhanced, so that the whole world, especially nature, appears clear and beautiful.¹³

Such an experience is a crisis in the individual's life, happening instantaneously. Even if its emotional effects wear off in time—and they do—the individual is marked by the experience, and because of it may make behavioural changes which last a lifetime. Revivalists promoted such experiences as part of a general renewal movement whose membership was based on a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ As such, they can be called *evangelisch*, contrasting with the aforementioned kirchliche Mennonites.

The Kleine Gemeinde in Steinbach had no counter-punch for testimonies like Peter Toews's, other than to dig in and become more kirchliche than ever. The old religion would serve as their social and religious blueprint for the next thirty-five years and more.¹⁵

But the old religion's authority had been undermined. Until this point, every aspect of life in Steinbach, whether religion, edu-



The establishment of a new church, the Church of God in Christ (pictured above), changed Steinbach as now there were two congregations claiming to be the one true church.

just such powerful experiences. Toews and other converts were received into the Church of God in Christ through the laying on of hands and baptism by Holdeman. More meetings stretched well into 1882 and many people were converted. In Steinbach, which by then had grown to twenty-eight families with a total

population of 128, twenty-two adults were baptized into the new church.¹²

Psychologist William James has shown that conversion experiences have a psychological structure, beginning with the sense of sinfulness and inadequacy, moving toward a painful surrender of the personal will, and then reaching a sense of inner



The Bruderthaler Church in Steinbach promoted the idea that you could be a good Christian and be successful in business.

cation, health or commerce, had come under the purview of one Gemeinde. Now there were two Gemeinden, with “one, true church” (Holdeman) alongside another “one, true church” (Kleine Gemeinde). It seems an unconscious decision was made to ignore the logical problem. Yet, the door to other forms of revivalism had been opened.

RISE OF THE BRUDERTHALER

In 1886, an impoverished school teacher named Heinrich Rempel (1855–1926) took up residence in Kleefeld. He had emigrated from the Molotschna village of Waldheim, “a hotbed of evangelical revivalism.”¹⁶ He began a correspondence with Aaron Wall, organizer of a Mountain Lake, Minnesota Mennonite congregation known as the “Bruderthaler,” or “Brethren in the valley.” In 1895 Wall and itinerant preacher Heinrich Fast (1849–1930) came to Steinbach to teach “repentance and forgiveness of sin.” As a result, a branch of the Bruderthaler church was formed in 1897.¹⁷ Now there were three congregations in Steinbach.

Subsequently, Heinrich Fast made frequent visits, winning converts. Then, as early as 1908, George P. Schultz also began conducting revival meetings—or, as they were called in the German-language newspaper reports, *Erweckungspredigen*.¹⁸ Schultz, a graduate of the Moody Bible Institute, was the predominant evangelizer in Steinbach through the 1920s and 1930s. Believers were to “live on fire for the Lord” and turn “the main objective of all that we do as farmers, businessmen, teachers, preachers . . . to [the saving of] souls.”¹⁹ His voice was so commanding that when he preached in the church on Mill Street, he could be heard as far away as Loewen Garage on Main Street. It was said that he “screamed the gospel.”²⁰

In that scream was the ideology of D. L. Moody, the father of American fundamentalism.²¹ Moody preached a literal interpretation of the Bible and the imminence of the Second Coming, to be followed by a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. He also believed that social problems could be solved only by the divine regeneration of individuals.²²

These views found sympathetic ears in Steinbach, despite a certain discomfort with fundamentalism’s patriotism and its support of armed conflict. As historian Frank H. Epp has so astutely observed: “For timid Mennonite people such expressions of self-confidence helped to wash away an apologetic gospel and inferiority feelings, which generations of persecution, isolation and nonconformity had written deep into their souls.”²³ And sociologist Calvin Redekop goes further, to suggest that the rejection of tradition and embrace of revivalism contained an element of self-hatred.²⁴

The Kleine Gemeinde had always been wary of unbridled commerce, fearing that it would lead to spiritual decline. The Bruderthaler had fewer qualms. According to P. J. B. Reimer, “The mission of this church . . . was to try to build bridges between authentic evangelicalism and conscientious service in the economic realm.”²⁵ In short, you could be a good Christian AND a successful businessman. With the Bruderthaler, Steinbach gave itself permission to become an economic powerhouse.²⁶

From the early 1900s through the 1930s, Steinbach was visited at least forty times by evangelists, not including the annual visits of Holdeman speakers whose focus was on their own group. All of these were Mennonite, most of them Bruderthaler; most were American.²⁷ By the late 1930s, Steinbach revivalism took on a new form of expression, transplanted from urban America—the street meeting. Up to this point, evangelists had delivered their messages in German. Now, they experimented with English. The first to do so was Steinbach native son John R. Barkman of Henderson, Nebraska, who in April 1938, “preached in English at the street meeting Saturday evening, speaking on the signs of the times.”²⁸ Another innovation was added as a “brass band played evangelical songs.”²⁹ Revivalism provided an entry point for a larger world and revival meetings provided socially approved theatre in a town where worldly forms of entertainment were suppressed.

The Dalzell family of Grandview, Manitoba also held street meetings, begin-

Revival Meetings

at the
Steinbach Gospel Tabernacle

Sunday Oct. 2 to Oct. 7 inclusive
Sunday Service 11 A.M. and 7:30 P.M.
Weekdays 8:00 P.M.

Rev. C. B. Dircks of Nipawin, Sask.,
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Good singing and Special Music at all sessions.

Everybody welcome

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In June 1942, an inter-denominational group built a Quonset-style structure which they called the tabernacle. Revival meetings were held as soon as the structure was ready.

ning in 1938³⁰ and continuing through the war years. The Dalzells preached “the living Gospel for a dying world” and featured hymn singing accompanied by guitars and an electric vibra-harp. Their music and their presentation of a Christian family with pretty girls and a redeemed father who had once been the town drunk had a strong appeal for an entertainment-starved Steinbach audience. For the first time in the town’s history, the evangelists were not Mennonite.

THE TABERNACLE

In 1929, a young man from a farm near Steinbach was converted at one of George P. Schultz’s meetings. This was Ben D. Reimer. As his daughter and biographer Doreen Peters puts it: “He experienced something he had never known: that a person could be converted *in one night*.” In that night, his struggle with conservative members of his own church, the Kleine Gemeinde, was born. He developed a passion for evangelizing. In April 1946, Reimer held evangelistic meetings in the Kleine Gemeinde church in Steinbach. He was strongly opposed by some elders, especially those from rural villages, and for some years this conflict threatened to tear the church apart.

Revivalism was even a factor in the physical appearance of Steinbach. In June 1942, another inter-denominational group built a Quonset-style structure which they called the tabernacle. True to the adage “build it and they will come,” revival meetings were held as soon as the

tabernacle was ready. Rev. Peter Tschetter³¹ spoke in both German and English, followed by the blind evangelist J. J. Esau.³²

By the late 1930s, revivalism had inspired an all-Mennonite inter-denominational group to establish the Steinbach Bible School. The school became a kind of incubator for the local revivalist movement. Graduates of the three-year program took courses in personal evangelism and could receive a diploma from the “Evangelical Teachers Training Association” of Chicago.³³

In 1946, the Bible School and cooperating churches invited Hyman Appelman, a “Russian-born Jew, formerly successful Chicago lawyer, now internationally known evangelist,”³⁴ to Steinbach. The *Carillon News* estimated that 8,000 people attended Appelman’s meetings over six evenings at the tabernacle: “This has been one of Steinbach’s greatest evangelistic revivals, 400 people or more decided to turn to God.”³⁵ The town’s population at the time was around two thousand.

Through revivalism, Steinbach developed a missionary consciousness. The EMB had ordained couples as missionaries already in the 1930s, but it was not until the early 1950s that Art and Martini Janz went to Africa under the Congo Inland Mission. Meanwhile the Kleine Gemeinde had formed the Western Gospel Mission in 1946, spearheaded by Ben D. Reimer. Almost immediately, missionaries were sent to Ukrainian communities in rural Saskatchewan. By the early 1950s, the Kleine Gemeinde changed its name to the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) and formed its own Board of Missions, especially to send Ben and Helen Eidse to the Congo. Mission work became firmly established as a vital part of Steinbach’s religious identity.

The EMC imitated earlier practices of the Bruderthaler, and held their “own” revival meetings annually, featuring American speakers like Marvin Eck and Don Shidler. Shidler, especially, exerted a strong influence, visiting regularly through the 1950s, 60s and 70s. He probably had a greater effect on Steinbach’s religious culture than did big-name evangelists with their one-time visits.³⁶

By the mid-1940s, the target audience for revivalism expanded to include children. In the traditional Mennonite view of redemption, children were members of God’s kingdom, maintaining this status until they either accepted or rejected conversion as young adults. Now the so-called “age of accountability” was lowered to twelve or even ten years old, and an “*innere Mission*” began, to evangelize even the children of life-long church members.³⁷

In 1946 the Kleine Gemeinde united with other denominations in Steinbach to found Red Rock Lake Bible Camp in the Whiteshell of Manitoba. Many children and adolescents from Steinbach attended. It was hoped that they would be born again and come home with a testimony to share. Also, different churches began to offer summertime Daily Vacation Bible School classes.

Revival preachers had always relied on fear as a motivator for conversion, by emphasizing the “end times” scenario and the risk of eternal punishment in the fires of Hell. Some church people jokingly spoke of “scaring the hell out of people.” But what happens when you scare the hell out of children? Revivalists did not seem to worry about the ethics of their tactics.

Mennonite historian and retired teacher Ernest Braun recalls his experience as a 10-year-old Chortitzer newcomer to Steinbach in 1958, of encountering a Saturday night street meeting: “That the town fathers felt it was necessary to have a public meeting on the street where the people of town would be flagellated, and that would take place the night before we all went to church—that idea was heartbreaking to my little understanding. What was the point if Sunday school and church were not accomplishing their purpose in edifying and supporting our Christian walk?”³⁸

Revivalism affected family dynamics. As a young teenager, poet Patrick Friesen answered the altar call at a revival meeting in the 1950s, only to find that, instead of joy, he felt “hollowed out, defeated.” His conversion had not worked. Leaving the church and seeing his parents sitting in their car, smiling, he felt that he had betrayed them by not getting saved, despite his intentions of pleasing them. On the other hand, he felt that his parents had betrayed him, albeit without malicious intent: “They gave me over to others to do their work with me, to break me down in order to save me.”³⁹



George R. Brunk II organized revival meetings in Steinbach that drew thousands, including many children and young people.

BRUNK AND COMPANY

In June 1957, George R. Brunk II arrived in Steinbach from Denbigh, Virginia in a semi-trailer with the motto “the whole gospel for the whole world” emblazoned on it. The trailer transported his huge, circus-style tent. Brunk, a Swiss Mennonite who had schooled himself in the art of mass revival, was an imposing and impressive figure, standing six-foot-four and speaking with a deep, powerful voice.

The Steinbach meetings drew thousands, including many children and young people. All the Mennonite evangelical churches in Steinbach took part in the organizing and sponsorship. Ben D. Reimer observed that “warmer fellowship among the different church groups” resulted from these meetings. He added: ‘Scores of lost men and women, boys and girls found forgiveness of sin and peace for their souls, as they repented of their sin, forsook it and surrendered to the Lord. Backsliders were restored. Victories were won over habits that displeased the Lord.’⁴⁰

It was evangelism on the business model, with statistics carefully kept to measure success. The rural campaigns in Manitoba, which included Winkler and Altona, resulted in 907 responses to invitations to salvation (all recorded on “decision cards”), 1650 dedications, and total offerings in excess of \$24,000. Brunk was credited with exposing the “falsehoods” of the kirchliche way, striking “deep into the heart of a formalistic and traditionalistic Mennonite community life.”

In the summer of 1965, another tent evangelist set up stakes in Steinbach. This was Max Solbrekken, the son of immigrant Norwegian parents. Although not as tall as Brunk, Solbrekken established his “he-man” credentials with stories of his pugilistic background and confrontations with knife-wielding thugs and agnostics bent on disrupting his meetings. Solbrekken added a new element for Steinbach audiences—he claimed the power of divine healing of physical and mental illnesses and performed “miracles” on the stage. Stiff-limbed people



In 1968, 3,400 people packed the newly built Steinbach arena on the opening night of an eight-day “Crusade for Christ” held by Barry Moore.

became mobile, deaf people were made to hear, and drug addicts were cured of their habits.

A *Carillon News* article stated that “between 1500 and 2000 persons heard God’s servant on closing night.” The headline-writer declared that “Steinbach had never seen anything like it.”⁴¹ Subsequent to Solbrekken’s visit, a local Ukrainian-Canadian evangelist formed the Full Gospel Fellowship church (Pentecostal) in Steinbach.

No more tent meetings were held in Steinbach. With increased mobility, residents could easily get to Winnipeg, and large numbers did go to hear the Janz Team in the Winnipeg Auditorium in 1964 and to Billy Graham’s “Centennial Crusade” in the Winnipeg Arena in 1967. The next year, 3,400 people packed the newly built Steinbach arena on the opening night of an eight-day “Crusade for Christ” held by Barry Moore.

By the 1970s, revival meetings were becoming rarer, perhaps because the charismatic movement was growing, and

revival-style preaching was integrated into the churches’ Sunday services. Some of the last revival meetings in Steinbach were those conducted by the Sutera twins, Ralph and Lou. The Suteras, from Ohio, were agents of an organization called the Canadian Revival Fellowship.⁴² Well-groomed and smartly dressed, they had no big tent or tabernacle or arena. Instead they ministered in church buildings, and featured something called a “prayer room,” a separate space from the main worship area, where people were invited—or pressured—to go when they felt themselves to be under conviction.⁴³

The Suteras held meetings at the EMC church in January of 1978. The effects of these meetings were mixed; some people became more dedicated Christians while others actually left the church.

THE FRUITS OF REVIVALISM

Revivalism was an important factor in the establishment of new church congregations in Steinbach, each responding to some variation of theology or practice that

seemed to its members a truer expression of faith than the one they had left. Over the years, hundreds and perhaps thousands of individuals had a conversion experience. Without such conversions, they might have been “lost.” From the standpoint of fundamentalist theology, this fact alone stands as a wonderful outcome. As well, revival meetings gave many people an opportunity to bring their existing commitment “up to date,” without necessarily making a public statement about it.⁴⁴ For many, making a decision for Christ supported a stable home life, charitable giving,⁴⁵ and success in making a living.

On the other hand, revivalist methods generated informal resistance, especially from adolescent youth. In the 1970s, a revival preacher urged Steinbach high school students to “bring rock records and filthy books and romance novels and makeup to be destroyed.” One student dutifully trashed her rock records but held some back to sell to “unsaved” classmates. She did not want to suffer a total loss.⁴⁶

Other young people responded by

blaspheming or “spotting” as they tried to relieve the unbearable seriousness of the terrible choice between heaven and hell. Some would imitate the content and rhythm of revival preaching, accompanied by others who would sing or hum “Just As I Am,” in an atmosphere of suppressed hilarity mixed with concealed dread.⁴⁷ Revivalism presented challenges to faith and intellect and the need to belong. How individuals met such challenges powerfully affected their psychological development.

Revivalism seems to have left municipal politics untouched. Steinbach did not become a theocracy. Many of the mayors and councillors, while they would have called themselves “Christian,” did not identify as fundamentalist or even evangelical, and ran town affairs in a spirit of pragmatism promoting continuous growth. In the larger political picture, however, Steinbach’s current strong adherence to conservatism corresponds closely to the politics of American fundamentalists.

It is possible, even likely, that from its inception Steinbach attracted more revivalist activity than any other small population centre in Canada. But not every trace of traditionalism in Steinbach was erased. The Mennonite Heritage Village, dedicated to telling and honouring the traditionalist story, has become a vital part of the city’s identity. There are megachurches, but not every church is fervently charismatic or fundamentalist.

William James says that the circumstances of human life teach us that we are helpless and dependent. Accordingly, a “religious” response is required, of surrender and renunciation and sacrifice. The traditionalists tried to nurture such a response over the whole adult life-span, the revivalists tried to orchestrate it as a crisis in one’s life. Either way, as a community, Steinbach’s identity was, and continues to be, indelibly “religious.”

¹ This article is based on a presentation given at the Mennonite Heritage Village, sponsored by the EastMenn Historical Committee.

² Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick, “Institutionalizing the Revival: The Culture of Revolutionary Christianity,” October 4, 2012. <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxyandheterodoxy/2012/10/04/institutionalizing-the-revival-the-culture-of-revolutionary-christianity/>. Accessed March 29, 2018.

³ George Marsden, quoted in Calvin Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism* (Telford, Pennsylvania: Pandora Press, 1998), 174.

⁴ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The New American Library, 1958), 184.

⁵ G. G. Kornelsen, in the *Steinbach Post* (SP), May 4, 1938.

⁶ Leland Harder, *Steinbach and its Churches* (Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite Bible Seminary, 1970), 35-6.

⁷ P.J.B. Reimer, ed., *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1812-1962* (Steinbach: The Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), 23.

⁸ Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 175.

⁹ *Steinbach Post*, November 9, 1938; A. F. Reimer, Diary, November 7, 1879; Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Steinbach: Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 2nd edition, 1990), 180-183.

¹⁰ In Delbert Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1990), 560.

¹¹ In *Genealogy of Jacob M. Barkman* (Steinbach: Martens Printing, n. d.), 74.

¹² Clarence Hiebert, *The Holdeman People: A Study of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, 1858-1969*, (PhD thesis, 1971), 164; Peter J. B. Reimer, ed., *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference*, 23.

¹³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 181.

¹⁴ Leland Harder, *Steinbach and its Churches* (Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 1970), 35-6.

¹⁵ Strangely, on the level of commerce and everyday interaction, Steinbach carried on almost as if nothing had happened. The new religious ideas of the Holdemans were expressed within that group, while the Kleine Gemeinde held to own beliefs. Social interactions, while limited in certain ways (they would not attend each other’s funerals or weddings) continued, particularly in civic administration or business. Holdeman Gerhard R. Giesbrecht served as Steinbach’s Schulz, or mayor, exactly at the time of the split, and Johann G. Barkman served as Schulz of Steinbach for many years after that.

¹⁶ Ernie P. Toews, *Peter R. Toews 1872-1953* (self-published, 1998), 24. See also Helmut Huebert, *Molotschna Historical Atlas* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 2003), 194: “Revival came to the Molotschna in 1884 and 1885, especially in Margenau and Waldheim.”

¹⁷ *Steinbach Post*, September 23, 1942, and K. J. B. Reimer, *Die Post*, April 13, 1965; Ernie P. Toews, “The Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church,” unpublished mss.

¹⁸ *Mennonitische Rundschau*, June 10, 1908.

¹⁹ Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 242. Loewen is quoting from Schultz’s “Autobiography.”

²⁰ Leona Rempel, interview, June 11, 2018.

²¹ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 145.

²² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dwight-L-Moody>, accessed March 12, 2018.

²³ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada), 237.

²⁴ Calvin Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 191.

²⁵ P.J.B. Reimer in Leland Harder, *Steinbach and its Churches*, 48.

²⁶ Glen Klassen, email, February 19, 2018.

²⁷ According to newspaper notices and the diary of Rev. Peter D. Friesen.

²⁸ Barkman was of pioneer stock, a grandson of miller Peter

T. Barkman and merchant Klaas R. Reimer. A convert to the Bruderthaler, who by then had re-branded themselves as the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB), he was one of the founders of Grace Bible Institute in Nebraska, a fundamentalist college attended by many Mennonites, including some from Steinbach.

²⁹ *Steinbach Post*, April 13, 1938.

³⁰ Peter D. Friesen diary, May 28, 1938.

³¹ Evidently, a “Prairieut” or non-communal-living Hutterite.

³² *Steinbach Post*, July 1, 1942.

³³ *Steinbach Post*, October 18, 1939.

³⁴ *Steinbach Post*, July 3, 1946.

³⁵ Peter D. Friesen diary, July 17 and 19, 1946; *Carillon News*, August 8, 1946.

³⁶ Reg Toews, interview, June 11, 2018.

³⁷ Calvin Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism*, 167.

³⁸ Ernie Braun, email, April 4, 2018.

³⁹ Patrick Friesen, email April 11, 2018.

⁴⁰ In Frank H. Epp, ed., *Revival Fires in Manitoba* (Denbigh, Va.: Brunk Revivals Inc., 1957).

⁴¹ *Carillon News*, September, 1965.

⁴² See Praxis website: <https://www.praxisministries.org/crf>. (Accessed July 31, 2018.)

⁴³ Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick, “Institutionalizing the Revival: The Culture of Revolutionary Christianity,” October 4, 2012. <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxyandheterodoxy/2012/10/04/institutionalizing-the-revival-the-culture-of-revolutionary-christianity/>. Accessed March 29, 2018.

⁴⁴ Travis Reimer, email, March 28, 2018.

⁴⁵ Steinbach leads Canadian cities in median charitable donations. See: Global News, February 22, 2017. <https://globalnews.ca/news/3265299/fewer-canadians-giving-to-charity-but-more-is-being-given/>. Accessed August 3, 2018.

⁴⁶ Edward Krahn, email, January 25, 2018.

⁴⁷ Edward Krahn, email, January 25, 2018.

CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP NUMBERS

Mennonites from Latin America

Bill Janzen

The provisions in Canada's citizenship laws from 1977 to 2009 allowed a sizeable number of Mennonites who were born in Latin America to "derive" Canadian citizenship from their Canadian ancestry. This avenue to citizenship was vital because most of these Mennonites could not meet the criteria for becoming landed immigrants. I described some aspects of how this worked in my article, "A Personal Reflection on 35 Years of Migration Work" which was published in the 2011 issue of *Preservings*, but I did not indicate how many Mennonites obtained Canadian citizenship in this way.

Unfortunately, no one knows exactly how many of these Mennonites received citizenship on the basis of derivative claims. Government officials, both in Ottawa and at the Citizenship Processing Centre in Sydney, Nova Scotia, have told me that they do not have numbers. Because of that I made inquiries, early this year, with twenty Mennonite individuals who were involved in this work. (There are more but I was unable to contact them). Some of those I contacted did this work in Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) offices in Aylmer, Chatham, Leamington, Winkler, Taber, Ottawa, and Bolivia.



KENNERT GIESBRECHT

Others did it on an independent basis in Mexico, Belize, and Paraguay. Some are still active in it. Most of these workers only had estimates but several came up with solid numbers.

THE LEGAL PROVISIONS

To understand the numbers, a brief summary of the legal provisions is necessary. One essential condition in those derivative provisions was that a person be born of a parent who had Canadian citizenship. But this condition was not always enough. Several of the legal categories also required that a person be born in wedlock. This was complicated because Mexican law, which Canada had to follow, stipulated that only civil marriages had legal standing. In their early years in Mexico, most Mennonites did not know this so they just had church weddings. As a result, many children later discovered that they were considered "born-out-of-wedlock" and therefore rendered ineligible for Canadian citizenship. Because of this and some other limitations, not nearly all the Mennonites in Latin America could make derivative claims for Canadian citizenship, but many could, even though they had been living outside of Canada for several generations.

The provisions, which opened in 1977, began to close in 2004. In that year the government stopped accepting derivative citizenship applications from people born abroad before 15 February 1977. Then, in 2009, the government replaced the more



KENNERT GIESBRECHT

Vegetable harvesting in Ontario has relied heavily on labour provided by Mennonites from Mexico. Many such people were able to "derive" citizenship from their Canadian ancestry.



Mennonite colonies in Mexico in 1923.

far-reaching derivative claim provisions with the first-generation-born-abroad principle, meaning that if a child was born outside of Canada after 16 April 2009 to a parent who had Canadian citizenship but who was not born in Canada, then that child could not make a derivative claim. Such a child would have to become a landed immigrant before receiving citizenship. Thus, the 2009 changes 'narrowed the door' substantially, though they also opened a small one. By removing the born-in-wedlock requirement, some older people whose parents had been born in Canada before the migration to Latin America but who had hitherto been barred from Canadian citizenship because of this requirement, could now apply. However, such people could not pass any citizenship rights on to their born-abroad children.

MEXICO

In response to my request for numbers, Sara Penner, a worker in Mexico, obtained information from the Canadian embassy in Mexico City with annual totals for the

years 1999 to 2017. This was most helpful! The total for these nineteen years was 19,373 applications. The information also showed a drastic drop in numbers after 2009. The total for 1999 to 2009 was 16,355, meaning that the average was 1,487 per year; for 2010 to 2017 the average was only 377 per year. No doubt, this drop is due to the change in the law described above. But what about the years from 1977 to 1998? Unfortunately, the embassy had no numbers for those twenty-one years. We will have to make an estimate for them. But how should we do that? We could simply take the number, 1,487, which is the annual average for the years from 1999 to 2009, and apply that to the preceding twenty-one years. This would lead to a total of 31,227; however, I believe this estimate is too high, for several reasons.

For a time, many people in Mexico travelled to Canada and then applied for citizenship from within the country. This might be one reason why the number of applications going through the embassy

in the early years after 1977 was probably lower. For a time, this method of applying for citizenship from within Canada was easy to do. A second reason for this lower number of applications is that several workers in Mexico helped people fill in application forms and then sent the forms to workers in Canada, who then submitted them to citizenship offices here. Officials in Canada encouraged this practice because then, when the people actually got here with their certificates in hand, they had the right to work and apply for health care, etc. However, at a certain point, perhaps in the mid-or-late 1980s, the government requested that all applications from people living in Mexico be sent to the embassy. This new request would have increased the number of applications going through the Canadian embassy. Another factor that would support a higher number is that families in Mexico tended to have more children in the early years than in the later years. How should we weigh these different factors? I have only a few pieces of information



from different workers in Mexico to help make an estimate for that time, but I will suggest that 18,000 applications were processed through the embassy in the years from 1977 to 1998. If we then add that to the number from 1999 to 2009, which is 16,355, we get a total of 34,355 as the number of people who received their certificates through the embassy in Mexico City in the years from 1977 to 2009.

SOUTH AMERICA

One other piece of solid information emerged from someone working in the administration of Menno colony in Paraguay who reported submitting 4,361 applications from 1987 until the present. This person did not state how many were from before and after 2009; however, in light of the sharp drop in Mexico I will assume that 3,800 of the Menno colony certificates were from before 2009. This person also did not provide a number for those submitted in the decade before 1987, but this figure will have been several hundred at least. Another person, working

independently for people from the Chaco area, believes that their office submitted 2,000 applications over the years. Again, there is no distinction between the years before and after 2009; however, I will assume that the total for the Chaco before 2009 is at least 6,500.

What about the colonies in East Paraguay and those in Argentina? I have no information about them, but I will assume that 500 people received citizenship. Nor do I have any numbers for Belize, but I will assume that 1,500 people received citizenship. As for Bolivia, one person who worked under MCC from 2002 to 2005 estimates that 7,500 Mennonites received Canadian citizenship, not including those who already had Canadian citizenship when they moved to Bolivia. These numbers for South America add up to 16,000. If we add the approximately 34,000 for Mexico described above, that brings the total for Latin America to 50,000. Applications from these countries would have been sent to the appropriate Canadian embassies in

Buenos Aires, Argentina, Lima, Peru, and Belize City, Belize.

CANADA

What about citizenship applications submitted by workers in Canada? The MCC workers in Aylmer feel that my initial estimate of 17,000 is safe. For Chatham and Leamington, I had discussions with long-time MCC workers and settled on 5,000. For Taber, Alberta, I was able to contact most of the people who have worked there over the years and concluded that the number is at least 6,000. In the case of Winkler, the current staff feel that 4,000 is a very safe estimate. My assistants in the MCC Ottawa Office, especially Freda Enns, submitted many applications from people in the United States. Enns believes that 2,000 applications would not be an exaggeration. This suggests a total of 34,000 for Canada. I know that a few independent workers in the United States were active for many years. I will assume that 1,000 people received their Canadian citizenship through them. Independent

workers in Canada also submitted applications, but I will not make an estimate as to how many people received certificates through them. By adding 50,000 for Latin America, 1,000 for the United States, and 34,000 from within Canada, we get a total of 85,000. This does not yet count those



A meeting of documentation workers in Aylmer, Ontario. Bill Janzen, a retired director of MCC's Ottawa office, is in the centre of the back row.

applications sent in by independent workers in Canada, whose numbers would be significant. For the purposes of this article, however, I will stay with 85,000 in order to be on the safe side. Also to be noted is that some of these numbers for Canada may include people who did not themselves have a derivative citizenship claim but who were married to someone who did, which made it easy for them to get landed immigrant status. Such people could then apply for a 'grant' of citizenship.

A number of other pieces of information are noteworthy. In 2013, I asked an official in Ottawa who was travelling to the Processing Centre in Sydney, Nova Scotia to inquire about the total number of Mennonites who had received citizenship. Upon his return he emailed that they did not have an official number, but that they had fifty feet of shelf space full of binders of Mennonite family trees. Such family tree information was necessary because for a long time officials had to determine whether certain ancestors of an applicant were born in a civil marriage. Often different descendants of such ancestors would submit different civil marriage certificates for them, which required officials to sort out the conflicting information. Additionally, the mere fact that the offi-

cials had so many linear feet of binders full of this information means that they were dealing with a very large number of applications. Another noteworthy piece of information is that in 1989 there were official reports that ninety percent of the vegetables in Ontario were being harvested by Mennonites from Mexico. This too indicates that whatever the exact number, there were a lot of people. Finally, I also have an old manual of 186 pages, which was prepared for the government specifically to train new officials to deal with Mennonite citizenship cases.

CONCLUSION

The changes in 2009 did not close all avenues for obtaining Canadian legal status. Mennonites from Latin America continue to get Canadian status in various ways. My personal involvement in assisting Mennonites to obtain Canadian citizenship also did not cease after 2009; in fact, it increased because of certain legal issues. The reality, however, is that the number of Mennonites getting Canadian legal status today is much smaller than it has been in the past. The legal avenues that were open from 1977 to 2009 make that a very particular era. One question about the work of that time is: how many of the people who received Canadian citizenship actually moved to Canada? In my article from 2011 I stated that the number of those who moved, together with the children they have had since moving here, could be 60,000. Today, I would say that the number is more than twice that high.

The fact that not everyone who received Canadian citizenship moved to Canada sheds light on the motivations involved in attempting to obtain legal status in Canada. There is little doubt that most of those who obtained Canadian citizenship and subsequently moved to Canada wanted to escape poverty. That is what all of us who worked on these cases heard from applicants countless times. For those who did not move, Canadian citizenship was more like an insurance policy, to be used if things got really bad. It also made travel easier. Besides those who moved to Canada and those who stayed in Latin America, are those who came to Canada

for short periods and then returned to Latin America. Some of these people came for seasonal labour summer after summer; others lived in the country for some years and then moved back, often with new resources and new ideas that then influenced social, economic, and religious life in their home colonies, perhaps both positively and negatively.

Those who moved to Canada have followed various social and religious paths, going into many different occupations and joining different churches, or none at all. Of particular interest is the establishment of Old Colony churches in Canada. The Old Colony Church in Ontario has thirteen different places of worship as well as eight English-language schools. Many of the Old Colony people live in small towns. The historic impulse to settle in a remote, isolated area no longer seems to be their mindset in the context of their return to Canada. Very few are farmers, though some do earn their living in agricultural work.

MCC became involved with the administrative side of these issues to help people who were already in Canada to live here legally and to settle down. We did not expect it to become such a large movement. But when the legal doors stayed open and the message about escaping poverty persisted, we felt we should continue. The fact that some people obtained Canadian citizenship for reasons other than living in Canada legally was not a major concern for us.

I must mention that some people in Latin America who could have obtained Canadian citizenship chose not to, even if their future looked bleak. They felt that God had called them to leave Canada. They felt that to now get a piece of paper that would enable them to move back would mean that they did not trust God.

Many points related to the acquisition of Canadian citizenship, and the resulting migration, merit further discussion. The main purpose of this article is to shed more light on the question of how many received Canadian citizenship from 1977 to 2009. If anyone has additional information on this matter, I would be pleased to hear from them.

MEMORIES OF ALTBERGTHAL

Lawrence Klippenstein



ALBERT FALK

The "Klippenstein corner" of the Altberghthal cemetery.

I cannot recall when I became conscious of my registered name, nor that of my home community. Certainly, it was before I began attending our local school where on the first day of arrival my name (borrowed from the book *Little Women*, which my mother had enjoyed a lot, an aunt once told me) was entered in the school register of the Altberghthal, SD, No. 1296 (a number that I also learned of later).

I did not know anything about our community cemetery but would become acquainted after my grandmother, Maria Dyck Klippenstein, passed away on 16 March 1943 at the age of sixty-four, and my mother, Helena, on 7 November 1944, at the age of thirty-six. Both received local burials.

Of those events, I recall most clearly a short meditation at my grandma's home before her funeral given by Uncle Bernhard, a public school teacher, who exhorted us (in Low German) to consider all the good things Grandma had brought

into our lives, and her expectations, as he had understood them, of her children when they became adults.

Even more indelibly etched in my mind was the customs of gathering the immediate family around the opened casket of a deceased just prior to burial. In these cases, that was the Altberghthal cemetery. I recall very clearly that the day of my mother's funeral was very rainy and the procession, headed by a horse-drawn wagon for the three miles from the church to the cemetery, took longer than usual. Those standing by my mother's grave at the end included my dad, and his five sons. My youngest brother, Alvin, was three at the time. My mother and grandmother were the first adult deaths, less than two years apart, in our extended Klippenstein family.¹ I would discover many years later that the location of a number of the Klippenstein family members, going right back to the first migrants to move to the West Reserve in approximately 1890, was

a special corner of the cemetery area where still stands the headstones of at least seven members of the clan, including those of my mother and grandmother.²

The village of Berghthal, West Reserve, one could say, began with the movement of people from the South Russian community of Berghthal to Manitoba in 1874–1876. These migrants first settled east of the Red River in a government land grant sector that received the title "East Reserve."³

Berghthal of the East Reserve was one of the first villages founded by the new Mennonite settlers after arriving in the late summer and early fall of 1874. The sons of Johann Klippenstein, Sr. occupied a number of sections in the neighbourhood of Berghthal, East Reserve. Son Heinrich became a leading landowner fairly early. When a decision was reached by a number of Berghthal families to look for more productive land west of the Red River, all of Johann Sr.'s sons and daughters made the move. Heinrich, however, left about a dozen years later than all the others. Having arrived in the west, they all agreed to settle in one of the new villages of the area, Neuberghthal. Heinrich would later settle in Altberghthal. Both "Berghthals" of the West Reserve were established around 1879 and we are left to wonder what kind of discussion ensued between the two to sort this out. There is a theory that suggests they did it by calling one of them the "old" Berghthal or Altberghthal for the Berghthal on Buffalo Creek and the other one could then be called "new" making Neuberghthal, the one to the southeast of what would later be the town of Altona.⁴

The most northerly of the village residents, possibly Mr. Johann Wieler, apparently offered land free of charge to be used as a cemetery. It would run up against the creek bank to the west and to the north. Presumably it was assumed that caretaking and maintenance would need to be divided somehow among the other residents. One doesn't know if burial fees of any kind existed at first. It would be ten years or more until the first burial took place there.

No list of all burials in the cemetery has been found so far. An effort to create a list and situate burial plots already in use, was attempted some years ago by Alvin Klippenstein and Martha Dyck Martens, one still a resident in the community at the time and the other a former resident. Names of persons buried were drawn from individuals with good memories, especially Martha's grandmother, and burial sites if unmarked were entered that way in notes that came with the map, while existing headstones were deciphered as well as possible. The resulting list thus created comprised a total of some sixty persons, young and old, believed to be buried there.⁵

The Altberghthal cemetery came up for special care and interest when the Bergthaler Mennonite church of Altona decided to celebrate its 125th anniversary in August of 2007. That date was predicated on research which indicated that the roots of the congregation lay in meetings held in the village of Hochstadt beginning in 1882, and the move of that group to Altona in 1912 where a new church building to accommodate this Bergthaler group was constructed.

It was further discovered, or high-

lighted at least, that the burial plots of the Bergthaler bishop (Aeltester) Johann Funk and his wife Louise, with the original headstones remained intact in the Altberghthal cemetery just a few miles west of the Altona church. It became known further at that time that Bishop Funk, once ordained to serve as a "Bergthaler" Aeltester, in 1882, had retired from his ministry in February 1911, and passed away on 17 March 1917. Many members quickly agreed that a public tribute in the form of a plaque, to be placed in the congregational lobby space, would fit in with the celebrations very well.⁶

The cleanup of the cemetery for that occasion had been managed by two residents of Altberghthal at that time, Henry D. Wiebe and Alvin Klippenstein. They would continue to be involved in the maintenance of the cemetery until Alvin's death in March of 2010. It would take about five years to rally the energies of family and community to continue the mowing and repairing that maintenance required. For some years it was totally overgrown with tall grass, and the headstones, which Alvin and Henry had repaired for the Funk celebration, had begun to crumble again. There was

no fund available at the time to hire the required help.

Access to the grounds had been improved and some offers of clean up again were submitted. A small Altberghthal historical group remained interested but seemed to need more time to make the cleanup project its own. An older project of renovating the old Altberghthal school building was gaining some interest and would soon become a prominent enterprise in the community. Local involvement in cemetery care had faded almost completely, but diaspora (families who had moved out of the district) Altberghthalers were not ready to admit defeat.⁷

We warmly invite interested persons to visit the cemetery as it looks today. Information about locating the site can be obtained from the office of the Bergthaler church in Altona. This congregation retains in its membership a number of families who have once resided as adults or children in the Altberghthal community. It would be a simple matter, once out there, to take a trip to Neuberghthal where the old Altberghthal school renovation is being completed. The church office is able to point you in the right direction to get there.⁸

1 See Lawrence Klippenstein, *Peter and Maria Dyck Klippenstein: A Brief Sketch of Their Life and Work* (Steinbach: The Cousins, 2008), 25. Grandpa and Grandma had a large family—thirteen if three infant deaths are added—giving me, in due time, nine married uncles and aunts, with a total of 55 first cousins on my dad's side. By contrast, on my mother's side we had only one cousin, with another one deceased in infancy. That provided very different settings for family gatherings. See the hundred and twenty-five years Klippenstein genealogy in Bernhard Klippenstein, comp. and ed., *Genealogy of Heinrich Klippenstein 1849–1977. Third Edition* (n.p., self published, 1978.) This title was inadvertently omitted in the published bibliography of the Peter and Maria Dyck Klippenstein volume.

2 A story of family upgrading of the headstone and burial site of Johann Klippenstein, a son of Heinrich and Sarah, is related in a note from Dorothy Janzen, daughter of Johann, in a brief "In Memoriam" in a family newsletter, *Klippings* dated No. 9 (the last in the series as it turned out), March, 2001.(8) It seems that a space created for an urn once held that marker for Tina Schwartz Klippenstein (d. 1964), wife of Johann, though it has now been removed, leaving vacant the opening created to hold the urn. No available record exists of where the urn may have been moved to, or by whom.

3 A definitive historical geographic composite portrait of this area has recently been published in Ernest N. Braun and Glen R. Klassen, eds., *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve. Illustrated* (Steinbach: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2015), pp. 24ff. Some data on the West Reserve (a land grant more than twice the size of the first, west of Red River) is included on pp. 236ff. It gives special attention to the location and condition

of well over 100 cemeteries in this area. A data scrapbook on the former West Reserve is being compiled for publication by Lawrence Klippenstein, chair of the MMHS WestMenn Historical Committee.

4 The earliest burials may have happened already in the 1880s. Buffalo Creek allowed the families who chose to join the Altberghthal community to settle along the east bank of the water leaving it with some grassland on either side of the creek for each settler to draw from for feed and water required by horses and cattle—in effect to be the community pasture. Sixteen quarters of land were allotted to Altberghthal, creating the pattern of sixteen householders in a row forming along the east side of the creek, with a few subdividing these lots to add several more families at the height of settlement. Heinrich, who moved to Altberghthal ca 1890 apparently bought one of the existing homesteaded sections, or in time possibly several more—alleged to have made him one of the biggest landowners in the village. For the story of Neuberghthal beginnings see Rose Hildebrand and Joyce Friesen, *Neuberghthal. A Mennonite Street Village. A Sense of Place with Deep Roots* (Altona: Neuberghthal Heritage Foundation, 2013), 1-102.

5 A copy of this map is in the author's file.

6 A summary of the Aeltester Funk ministry to the Bergthalers, along with details of his struggles, e.g. with regard to the higher education issue is found in Lawrence Klippenstein, "Aeltester Johann Funk," *Church, Family and Village*, 213 – 228, and Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith. The Background in Europe and the Development of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church* (Winnipeg: The Bergthaler Mennonite

Church of Manitoba, 1970), 63-118. A report on the Bergthaler Church celebration appears in Elmer Heinrichs, "Fellowship, food abound at Altona Bergthaler's anniversary," *Heritage Posting*, No 58, October, 2007, 1-2. Technically Aeltester Funk headed the West Lynne Mennonite Church at the time of his Aeltester ordination. He continued to hold the position after a Bergthaler church was formally established and recognized in Manitoba ca 1892.

7 The school renovation undertaking began in earnest in 2010. Although the old building had been protected, stronger community interest in restoring the building to new and modern uses grew over time. It is now under the umbrella of the Neuberghthal Heritage Foundation which brought significant resources to complete at least the exterior and first floor restoration and add washroom facilities as well.

8 Anything you might want to know about Neuberghthal, now a National Historic Site, can be obtained from owltree@sdnet.ca. If you wish to know something more about Buffalo Creek on which the cemetery at Altberghthal is situated, I can offer the following: the creek, the longest in the municipality, enters Canada from the U.S. just west of the former site of Haskett, continues through the village of Reinland, turns toward the northeast, through the old school district of Neuhoftnung (which was once used the Altberghthal school building till ca 1980, after it closed at the original site in 1964) and on then through Altberghthal and Schoenthal (northwest Altona) to Rosenfeld where it is channelled to reach the Red River at St. Jean on Highway 75. The creek route would make an interesting hike, end to end, mostly in the former West Reserve! A new map is available to help you, so walk on!

THE DYCKS OF WALDHEIM

Julie McNeice



PRIVATE COLLECTION

The Julius Dyck boys of Waldheim, Manitoba.

The following is a creative historical account of the Julius T. Dyck family: who they were, what they stood for, and trustingly, what they stand for today. Julius Dyck was the builder and original owner of the Dyck log house which is at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba. This article is written by Julius T. Dyck's great-granddaughter Julie—named after Julius and his grandson Julius (Jim), her dad.¹

In the village of Waldheim, Manitoba in the summer of 1876 twenty-four-year-old Julius Dyck was tall, like his grandpa "Little John" Dück. Julius, still showing freckles, slim-built but strong, stood over his days' labour, that of building his twenty-four foot by thirty-six foot log house out of seasoned oak, each log dove-tail notched with continuous squared

timber framing as he'd been taught in the old country. It was "believed to be the second farm home built west of the Red River in western Canada," according to an article in *The Morden Times* in 1962.

Julius was born in the village of Neuhorst in the Khortitsa colony in South Russia, where his father, Peter, was a landowner. Peter married Julius's mother, Aganetha Toews, on 4 March 1852. Julius was born 16 December 1852 and sister Aganetha in 1854. His father died on 27 July 1855.

Julius's mother, although born a Toews, had been married previously to John Klassen (Kausen) and brought two sons to her marriage with Peter: son Peter, born in 1839, and John, born in 1841. Her husband, John, died in 1847 and she re-married to Peter Dück. After Peter

passed away, Julius, his mother, and his sister went to live with his grandfather, Little John, in the village of Nikolaifeld in the Yazykovo colony where they were living in 1873 when the census was taken.

In early 1876 young Julius and his family immigrated to Canada with a group of Mennonites to settle in southern Manitoba on the West Reserve. Travelling together from their home in Waldheim, Russia was Julius and his wife Katherina (Unrau); Julius's mother Aganetha; his sister Aganetha, married to his wife's brother Abram; and step-brother John Klassen. Little is known about the family's journey except they travelled from Hamburg and arrived in Quebec City on 19 June 1876 aboard the ship S. S. Sardinian. Other points of departure were Liverpool, England on June 8 and Londonderry, Ireland on June 9. Julius and Katherine had married on January 11, just days before they left their homeland.²

According to family oral history, the family experienced a tragedy right before they left from Russia. On the eve of their departure, Abram Unrau, Katherine's father, attended either a wedding or a celebration of the upcoming immigration on the island of Khortitsa and Abram, while rowing back with his friends, drowned. The story Uncle Frank Sr. told was that the boat was sinking because there were too many people in it, and because he (Julius's father-in-law) was the only one that could swim he jumped out of the boat. They couldn't let him back in or it would sink, and he drowned. Apparently, one of them became a Christian and confessed this tragedy; however, it is difficult to prove as there are no known records of his death date. Family historian Esther Zacharias has handwritten in her book on the Unrau family that Abram "was struck on the head with an oar and drowned."

In Manitoba, Julius took up a homestead patent at SE21-2-5WPM on the West Reserve in August 1877. According to his homestead application, he had been living and farming in the village of Waldheim since 20 July 1876. He had twenty-four acres under crop and another

twenty-four acres broken and under cultivation. According to the 1881 census for the village of Waldheim Julius was said to have two horses, one cow, two heifers, two hogs, a wagon, plough, and a harrow. His application for a homestead patent indicated that he “had made improvements on the land in the form of one dwelling house 24’ X 36’ and one stable 24’ X 16’.” According to Julius’s grandson, John (Jr.), Julius built a small log cabin 20’ X 20’ on the homestead for shelter while breaking up his land. Julius’ mother Aganetha took out a homestead patent as well at SW21-2-5WPM.

In 1881–82 Julius took his log house apart log by log and numbered his logs, marking them sequentially in Roman numerals for easy re-assembly.³ It was unusual for Mennonites to number the logs in such a way; however, Julius was forward-thinking and industrious. Julius moved the log house to his farm one and a half miles west of Waldheim and placed the log house almost on the west property line of SE 21-2-5WPM. He positioned his mother’s house very near to her east property line of SW 21-2-5WPM, so they were within steps of each other. He then proceeded to live there with his family.

According to family oral history, the church excommunicated Julius because of this effort to defy authority by moving from the village; however, I have not been able to verify this story. One family member recalled hearing Julius was one of the first to be excommunicated “but there was a Hoeppner and George and Peter Sawatzky that later were [excommunicated] as well.” During our lengthy discussions at family gatherings over the years, many potential reasons for Julius’s move have been proposed. For instance, in the mornings the horses were brought from their stables in Waldheim to clear the land as the reserve was “heavily oaked” according to early explorer John Palliser. They returned in the evenings immeasurably tired. Many young Mennonite farmers objected to their horses being worked that hard and became quite distraught at having to treat their animals this way. Also, the farmers were being pressured to live on their land by nearby

non-Mennonite farmers along what was colloquially known as the Menno-Canuck line, of which Julius’s mothers land abutted. All of these reasons make sense; however, none are known as fact.

With the exception of John (Johann), the Julius Dyck boys were tall. Yet, what he lacked in height, he made up in character. Great Uncle Frank often told the story of a time when they were hanging out with the Johnson brothers and young John rode up on one of the family horses. One Johnson boy said “Hey, he’s too young to be with us, send him home!” and Frank replied “[If] you think you can send him home, you go ahead and try!”

Julius died on 9 February 1909 and is buried in the Waldheim cemetery. His death certificate states “as a result of [a] fall.” In her book on the Unrau family, Esther Zacharias has hand-written “he fell off the barn roof” while other family members say he fell off a hay rack or wagon, or a tree. In any case he is said to have broken his femur and subsequently developed gangrene. He “suffered greatly” according to family history. His brother-in-law, Abram Unrau, signed the death certificate as a witness and it was confirmed by a Dr. Hiebert, who lived in Morden.

Two years later, while working in Saskatchewan, young John was summoned by his mother to “come home to look after the farm.” John had married Katherine Hoeppner, who was a year younger than him, in 1910. John’s mother (Katherine Dyck) had remarried Isaak Fehr in 1910 and passed away in 1933. Isaak passed away in 1935.

The Dyck farm prospered under John’s careful guidance; orders for all farmhands were to have horse-teams outfitted and ready to go at six o’clock a.m.! As one former farmhand told John’s son, Jake, “He’d see four completely outfitted teams come out that barn and head off in four different directions at six a.m. sharp” every day except on Sundays. Cousin Hughie recollects Grandpa John as having at least forty horses. According to my Uncle Jake, a barn sixty feet by forty feet, pre-cut from Eaton’s, was put up in 1924 or 1925.

In time John and wife Katherine (Hoeppner) had children: John

(1911–2004), Tina (1913–2005), Pete (1916–1979), Tony (1917–1948), Julius known as Jim (1919–1955), Isaac (1921–1979), Liz (1923–present), Anne (1925–2011), Henry (1928–present), and twins Frank (1930–2008), and Jake (1930–present).⁴ Katherine died tragically in 1930 after giving birth to the twins. Frank then went to live with his Hoeppner aunts until age two at which time John was told to “come get him or we will keep him!” Tina and Liz were expected to take on the role of mother, but that was a hopeless task with five rambunctious brothers to look after!

The family continued to live in the original log house until 1930 when John built a new home. They only lived in this new house for five years as it burned completely to the ground in 1935. This forced the Dyck family to move back into the log house until they rebuilt, which wasn’t until 1942. While tragic for the family, this event gave them a tremendous advantage during the Great Depression as John used the insurance money to pay off the mortgage on the properties he was purchasing. Uncle Henry could recall witnessing the fire when he was seven as he and his sister Tina frantically rode their horses to alert the field-hands. Apparently the younger children had been berry-picking with Tina when the fire started, and their dad was in town.

After 1942 the log house was used as a *shmode*, machine shop, or blacksmith’s shop. It could also be used for the family’s newlyweds as my mother Susan (Peters) Dyck described to me how she lived there for a short time after she married my father, Jim, in 1942. Uncle Frank and Jake both carved their initials in the overhead beam coming out of the living room area of the Old Dyck House that can be seen to this very day. Siblings John and Tina had double weddings in that house on 17 November 1935: John married Mary Reimer and Tina married Jake Hiebert.

From all accounts it was quite something growing up in the Dyck family. John Dyck experienced a profound conversion and he is said to have displayed such remorseful grieving after his wife’s death in the Pentecostal church he attended that



Katherine Dyck (Hoeppner) died tragically after giving birth to twins in 1930.

he was asked to do his grieving at home. “After service the third week the pastor came to him and said the church had had a meeting and he was to go home and not come back until he had control of his emotions.” He went to the barn to pray. He spent three solitary days and nights in the barn until he emerged, a changed man, strong in faith. He talked to his brother Isaac about his life-changing experience and after a while, he had to ask his brother, who was in deep thought “Isaac, are you there?” Isaac replied, “I have been a lay pastor for eleven years and I do not have what you have!”

While the children, in their own words, had to grow up on their own, John was a loving father. He was well-known in the rural community to be “good at veterinary work” and his name is written as

witness on a few vital statistics certificates for attending deaths and births. There is a story told that he sat up nights with a Mr. Braun, who, at age thirty-four, was dying at home alone with cancer. John sat with him, holding his hand and reading scripture. John also loved to *schpitzeer* (chat) in the evenings and on the weekends. Quite often neighbours would come over for a coffee to talk about old times and where their family originated. While John could be exacting and didn’t suffer fools gladly, he also had a kind heart.

As a grandfather, John also had a memorable personality. My cousins Hugh and Ron tell a story about being in the car with Grandpa John, who was a real speeder. As Grandpa John drove through the three dips in the road on the way to town, they would yell “whoopie” as their stomachs

lurch. On one of these trips, Grandpa John hit a rabbit. He put on the breaks and as Ron recalled, “Guess what we had for supper!”

Hughie recounts a story of how he was staying overnight and slept with his Uncle Frank upstairs in the log house. Grandpa came in one morning from outside (they could hear him downstairs) and yelled upstairs, “Get up!” Uncle Frank said, “Never mind” as Hughie went to get up. And sure enough, in a little while Grandpa called up the stairs again to “GET UP!” Frank got his boots and banged them on the floor. He said they’d be okay for a while, and Hughie could stay in bed.⁵

HUNTING

Hunting has always been an important part of the Dyck family and they always

made use of the meat. The Dyck farm was large and there was always plenty game running through their creek ravine. In fact, foxes really became such a nuisance that the RM of Stanley implemented a bounty at five dollars per fox sometime around 1948–50.

Uncle Jake says in 1948–50 the brothers got in a lot of fox hunting and they could hunt starting usually when they were eighteen years old. One time they were south of Winkler going across a field and shooting from the window of their vehicle. They were chasing two of them and had gotten one—the second one seemingly had got away, when they met up with the RCMP at the corner who said, “the other one’s over there!” pointing to it.

Hugh recounts that they often went wolf hunting with horses, and that Grandpa had hounds. They had a system of hunting with hounds in the way they chased down the wolves. Two or three hounds would run fast and get a wolf between them and throw it. One time a killer wolf had hold of one of his hounds by the throat and Grandpa pulled its mouth open so that the wolf let it go.

My mother Susan told me that my father, Jim—named after his grandfather—often spoke of the Dyck boys target practicing with .22 rifles in the log house while their dad (my Grandpa John) was away. My mom said that my dad was a crack-shot as the boys were taught to be, so as to do no harm, or “not cause unnecessary suffering to animals.” Ammunition was very expensive, so it was necessary to shoot well to save money. Growing up, I recall that cousin Jim who would always share his box of .22 shells with me, even though one cost around 75¢ and he only got 50¢ per week for allowance. I learned very quickly not to waste bullets.

My father died as the result of a fox hunting accident and his brother Henry was severely injured when their airplane, a piper cub, hit an air pocket and came down in 1955. Henry survived but was in a coma for three months. My father was almost declared well, and then developed gangrene again in his leg stump and passed away seven weeks after the accident. I don’t know if he had developed a bacter-

ial resistance to penicillin, but I do recall mom saying that the head nurse Heidi Giesbrecht wanted to try a new drug but couldn’t persuade the doctor.

MUSIC AND EICHUCKEN

Music was always important in the Dyck family. They were tenors and had good singing voices. As I grew up, we always got together at Grandpa Dyck’s for the Christmas gathering and, if we didn’t have a song to sing or could recite something we had been practicing from our church Christmas concert, Grandpa would hand us his Bible and we’d read from it until he lifted his hand for us to stop.

Pig killing was also a time when the whole family got together. I can recall getting up way before the sun did to drive out there for a long day following it up with a wonderful supper of *schinkenfleisch* (ham), *eichicken* (fried potatoes), and *schmountaf* (cream gravy) made by my capable aunts.

My Dad and my grandfather loved their eichicken cut razor-thin and fried just right in a cast iron frying pan. My mother lovingly tossed them as she fried them; years later, she would gesture with her spatula and remind me over and over again: “This is the first thing your dad gave me after we were married. I didn’t have a spatula to fry his potatoes, so he made me one out of a soup spoon.”

FAMILY MYSTERY

A story is recounted of how in the 1930s or 1940s the RCMP came to the Dyck farm to investigate a report that there was “some kind of weed growing all along the fence line.” It turned out to be “the largest natural crop of hemp ever found to be grown in Manitoba,” according to one cousin. There is some speculation as to how it got there: Mexican labourers or

“bird-droppings.” After the police had left the boys found it growing all over the place: behind the pig barn, right behind the house, by the chicken barn, and even into the bush! Jake said he found it growing on his farm across the way too, once he knew what to look for! Great Uncle Jake, who smoked a lot, said that it was “just like tobacco.” He went upstairs to get rolling paper to try it but declared that “Oh, my, was that strong!” The RCMP did not bother the Dyck family further about this mysterious “weed,” as they had received a good report about them. During my research, I discovered an article which indicated that many early farmers in the Pembina Valley used to grow hemp, so this story could be totally innocent.

CONCLUSION

Aunt Alfrieda tells of how Great Uncle Frank Sr. came back to visit our original farm when he was quite elderly and recounted how in his youth the buffalo had roamed and that you could still see places where they had laid along the creek. He was so disappointed because “nothing was the same.” The old post road went through by the creek bed, and there was plenty of wild plum trees, chokecherry and black cherry bushes.

In 1960 Frank and Jake bought the farm and took down the barn. In 1963 the Dyck “Waldheim” log house was moved to the museum. Frank left the farm in 1990 to move to Morden.

The Julius Dyck’s are a special people and the Dyck house at Waldheim holds many good memories for its descendants to recount as oral family history when they get together. The land at SE ¼ section 21-2-5 WPM where the log house stood remains in the Dyck family and is presently owned by Julius’s great grandson Larry Dyck.

1 Genealogy available at: <https://www.mccasa.ca>

2 Katherine was born in 1853 to Abram Unrau and Justina Reimer in the village of Schoenberg in the Khortitsa colony.

3 The barn was built on the north end of the house, in the typical Mennonite housebarn tradition and in time eleven children were born: Aganetha (1877–1954); twins Julius (1878–1887) and Abraham (died 1878); Peter (1879–1946); Katherine (1885–1958); Abraham (1887–1964); Julius (1889–1968); Johann (1890–1968); Jakob (1892–1968); and Franz (1894–1982). Julius’s two daughters are said to have moved to Mexico with their new husbands. Julius and

Katherine also raised foster-daughter Katharina Klassen (1902–1920), daughter of Julius’s half-brother, and Peter’s son, also named Peter, who died in 1902. This information is from the Julius Dyck’s family record sheet, extracted from his Bible.

4 The first of John Dyck’s sons to die was Tony in 1947 as he was hit by a gravel truck while mowing a ditch along Highway 432 in the 1-6 area. The “1-6” area is in Township 1 Range 6.

5 By this time some of the Dyck boys, including Jim and Tony, were at Conscientious Objectors Camp at Clear Lake, as was brother-in-law Dick Zacharias.

METAPHORS FOR LIFE

Inspired by Mennonite History for Young People

Aileen Friesen

Over the past three years, the Plett Foundation has published four books in its "Mennonite History for Young People" (MHFYP) series: *Leaving Canada*, *Discovering Mexico*, *Living in Mexico*, and *Leaving Russia*. These books present Mennonite history in an easily digestible format that allow readers to explore how Mennonites migrated to new lands in Canada and Mexico and adapted to their surroundings. Students at Mornington Central Public School in Newton, Ontario have started using these books as part of their history, geography, and language curriculum. This specific

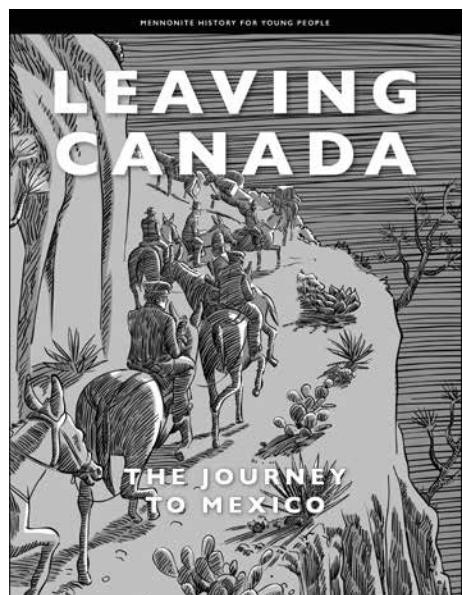
school has a significant population of Low German speaking students and David Martin Mennonites. One teacher at this school, Jennifer Kelly, recently wrote to the Plett Foundation about how she has been using these books to bridge together Mennonite children from different backgrounds in her elementary classroom. As one her students notes: "It is entertaining to learn how The Old Colony people immigrated [sic] from Canada to Mexico. It is very interesting because I can relate to significant things like the Old Colony language is similar to David Martin Mennonite language. Another thing that

I could relate to was that the Old Colony almost live the same as the David Martin people do. The old colony people live on farms and the David Martin live on farms too."

The "Mennonite History for Young People" series has not only helped understanding between students from different Mennonite backgrounds in Ms. Kelly's class. She observed that many of her students went home after school to engage in a conversation with their parents about their own family's history. As Ms. Kelly writes: "Students have been asking me daily to take these resources home to share with their families because their parents have connections to some of the people in the books, therefore making the information we are learning real, relevant and intriguing." The lessons the children learn in school about their own history have inspired inter-generational conversation and a shared curiosity about the past.

The prologue to *Leaving Canada* begins with a quote from Ältester Isaak M. Dyck, who supported the migration to Mexico. He said, "*Das Leben ist ein Wanderstab*" or "Life is a walking stick." As a creative learning exercise for the students, Ms. Kelly had the children learn about metaphors by following Ältester Dyck's example. The students, inspired by their community's cultural context and their own family's experiences, created their

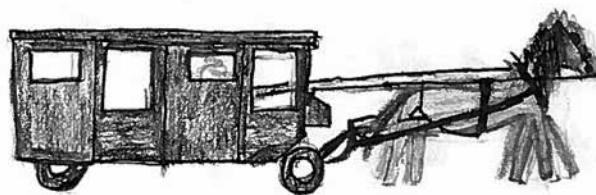
In 'Leaving Canada', the minister said "Life is a walking stick." Write a metaphor for what life is to YOU in your culture/family. Draw a picture to represent your metaphor.



own metaphors for life, completing the sentence "Life is...." Some of the children's responses from this exercise include: "Life is chores, because chores are hard work to do and we have to do it so the animals stay alive and we stay alive" and "Life is milking a cow because we need the milk to survive so we treat the cow nice so the cow treats us nice."

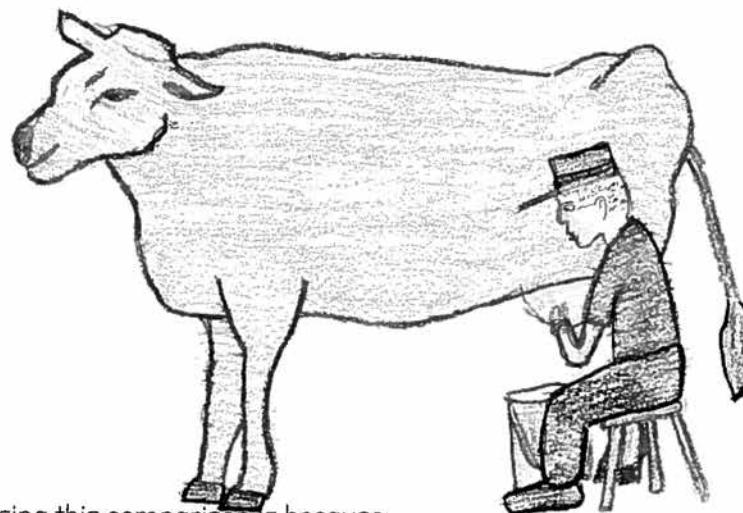
When the Plett Foundation embarked on the ambitious project of creating a curriculum that would appeal to young people and teach them about their own Old Colony Mennonite past, we hoped that the books would engage young minds but also encourage a curiosity about history in the lives of the adults around them. The four volumes of the MHFYP series and the creative and insightful ways that students have adapted this metaphor to their own lives shows the significance of the past for communicating values and beliefs for future generations.

LIFE IS... Driving in a horse and buggy



Life is hard Just as the horses have to work hard.
My reason(s) for choosing this comparison is because...
We travel in horse and buggy

LIFE IS... milking a cow



My reason(s) for choosing this comparison is because...
we need the milk to survive
so we treat the cow nice so the cow treats us nice

REMINISCENCES OF THE PAST

Abraham P. Isaak

Translated from German by grandson, Alfred Isaak

On the face of this earth, where generation after generation arises from finiteness and passes into infinity, I also, as one entering the foyer to eternity, first saw the light of day on 31 December of 1852 at six o'clock p.m., in the village of Schoenau in the territory of Molotschna in southern Russia.

I was tenderly nourished by my mother through babyhood and lovingly nurtured and cared for by my parents as a boy. In my sixth year, which was a very young age for a child of that era to begin school, I entered an elementary classroom where I persevered for six years. Although not at the beginning, but little by little, though

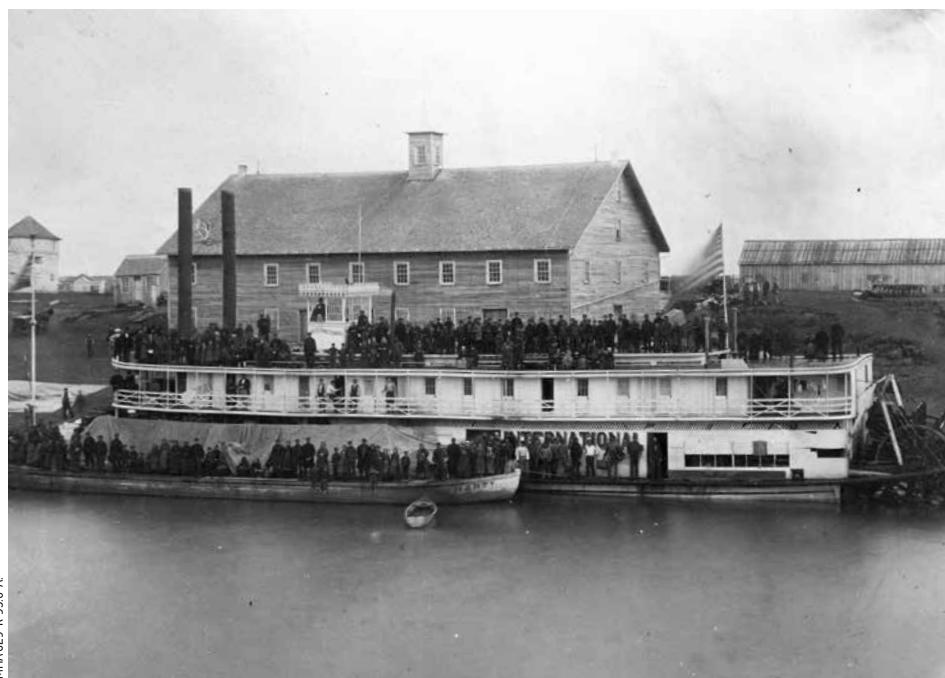
not with outstanding aptitude, my learning ability improved, to where my studies became pleasurable to me instead of drudgery.

This good fortune to reside in my parental home was not to be mine to enjoy for long. In my twelfth year my dear father passed away at the age of fifty-four. According to my mother he died of consumption¹ with a very strong desire to enter the mansion of eternal rest. For three years after his death my mother, together with us as children, remained on the farm; the management and work undertaken and directed by my two older brothers, John and Peter.

After these two boys married and established their own homes, mother deemed it necessary to dispose of the farm by public auction, stock and implements included. Mother moved to Abraham Friesens, her second oldest daughter's place, where she made her home. In my fifteenth year I had to leave my parental home and found refuge in the servant's quarters as a farm hand at my uncle Kornelius Plett, in Kleefeld, who gave me employment through harvest time till November 11. After that my cousin Gerhart Goossen of Lindenau hired me, again as a farmhand. This contract remained in effect for one year.

Before the year ended Gerhart Goossens, together with seven others, purchased a block of land from a nobleman and moved ninety miles away from the mother colony. I moved along with them to the new colony, which they named Gruenfeld. After the contract with Goossen expired I found refuge and employment at Frank Froeses, in Heuboden, for another year, again as a farm laborer. [The] Froeses lived about five miles from Gruenfeld. Although not washed from all faults and vices as pure as father Froese desired, thanks to his good nature we nevertheless remained affectionately inclined one toward another. "A true friend is a staff acting as a support and regulator."

After the year's service for father Froese was ended, the newly formed village approached me, through the instigation of Gerhart Goossen, my former employer, about something that I had never thought of before, and must have seemed strange to almost everybody else as well, and that was whether I would take on the job as a teacher for the children of Gruenfeld. And that's how it came about. I turned from a stable-hand to being a schoolteacher! I felt, as a result of this change, quite lifted up, but on the other hand considering my own lack of education, humbled and inadequate, wondering if I was really cut out for this job. Acquiring various teaching manuals I studied diligently. To obtain the respect of the children I refrained from vir-



David Klassen (who is on the far right) served as a delegate in 1873 to find opportunities for Mennonite emigration from Russia.

tually all association with other youth. My school teaching was my sole occupation to the exclusion of every other diversion. I had never before in all my life experienced any occupation that proved to be so pleasant. I retained this job for four winters and the fifth till Christmastime.

Though school affairs were my chief joy and delight, the management of which I pursued diligently, I nevertheless was not immune to the Creator's instilled inclinations that He has placed into the heart of man. With this inclination strong within me I fell in love with a young maiden by name of Margaretha, daughter of Peter Loewen. We were united in marriage on December 26, 1873. This change in my life, thanks to God, we are privileged to continue to live in, right up to this present time.

To the displeasure of the village congregation I deemed it necessary to give up teaching. My father-in-law, a widower for the third time, was in the process of marrying a widow Esau from the town of Neuosterwick, some sixty miles from my father-in-law's estate. As newlyweds we were to reside on my father-in-law's farm. This would obligate my dear Margaretha to remain alone with the Russian servant who was in charge of the cattle and sheep, while I taught school during the day, a situation we deemed as being far from ideal. Also at this time negotiations were already in progress to move to America.

The Russian government was pressured by its people to change existing laws. Tsarina Katrina (Catherine), who had invited the Mennonites to move to Russia from Prussia, promised them religious freedom as well as exemption from all military service. This privilege was enjoyed for seventy or eighty years. The changed laws required the Mennonites to join the military, or in lieu of that, engage in forestry service. This tradeoff from military service to forestry service was granted to the young men through the benevolence of the Russian government. If this still did not find acceptance they were at liberty to emigrate. This was indeed praiseworthy of the government of that time.

In 1873 this latter prerogative was exercised and a delegation consisting of

David Klassen and Cornelius Toews was dispatched to Canada. They found the Canadian government very receptive to the idea, consenting to help in defraying the emigration costs and granting the Mennonites the same religious liberties that they had enjoyed at the time of their immigration into Russia. The Canadian government set aside eight townships for this purpose.

In the beginning of 1874 the business of selling their farmland began in earnest. Some was sold to the Russians but most of it went to Catholic and Lutheran Germans. Their other chattels were disposed of by public auction, also for a good price. This constituted a busy time. Several, to save time, clubbed together, brought their chattels together to one place, putting numbers on the articles to know what belonged to whom. The sales were held almost daily through the beginning of the New Year, creating busyness for everyone. These sales were held on the property of those who had moved away from the mother colony and located elsewhere. The buyers at the sales were mostly non-Mennonites, but there were also those Mennonites to whom our emigration was a laughing matter. Now, fifty years later many, many have deeply regretted and bemoaned the fact that they too did not also forsake their beloved Russia and move to a free North America to seek a new homeland. This would have saved them many hardships and heartaches, even death from the whole Russian mismanaged economic and political revolution and upheaval that ensued in the following years.

When finally everything was sold and all preparations for the journey completed, we, sixty families in total, of our Kleine Gemeinde group, seven families stayed back that came later, boarded the steamship on the Dnieper River, the fourth of June, 1874, traveling downstream to Kherson where we stayed overnight. The following morning we got on a different ship to Odessa, a harbor city on the Black Sea in Russia. On June 6 at 9:45 we boarded a train, traveled through Austria to Breslau in Germany. At the Austrian border our passports and also our chests

and trunks were examined but nothing was found that did not pass. From the Austrian border we traveled through her cities, Tarnopol (current-day Ternopil—editor), Lemberg (Lviv), and Krakau (Kraków) to Oswivim (Oświęcim) on the Prussian border where at six p.m. we disembarked and spent the night. In the comfortable, cool evening air my wife and I went for a walk in the open fields and gardens. The beautiful blooming, sweet smelling, ambience breathed upon us its fragrance. This part of creation, the workmanship of God, gave us more pleasure than did the fancy, architectural, engineering handiwork of man that we saw in the large cities. We had no children at this time so this was for us virtually a honeymoon. We were as carefree as during our school years. Parents with children carried a much larger responsibility and were not as buoyant. What we realized only in a small measure at this time was that in our new home it would be quite different.

Leaving Oswivim on the ninth of June at 8:20 in the morning we went directly to Breslau where we arrived at three o'clock p.m. At 10:20 p.m. we boarded the next train, which took us to Berlin where we arrived on June 21 (in transit we had switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar). The twenty-second of June we stepped off the train and went to the waiting room. Here two young men who were going to take us into their care met us, but they and we noticed, much to their embarrassment, that a different shipping company than the one on which we were booked employed them.

Presently a Mr. Spirgo, the leader of our group of emigrants met us and we were taken in handsome carriages through the beautiful city of Berlin, the capital of Germany, to the railway depot, where, after Spirgo took our tickets, we boarded the train for Hamburg, a large seaport on the North Sea, the place of our departure. After dinner on Monday, June 22 we arrived at Hamburg where Meger and Company supplied us with living quarters in a large, four-story Emigration Building. Here we met other Mennonite emigrants from our area who had left their homes before we did and had stayed in



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With help from people like Jacob Y. Shantz, (pictured above with his family), from Berlin, Ontario, Mennonites were able to settle successfully in Manitoba.

these quarters for a few days already. Up to here we had traveled at our own expense but from here to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, the Canadian government paid our fare, \$34.00 per person directly to the shipping company.

At ten o'clock a.m. on June 26 we left Hamburg on the steamship Elbe, crossed the North Sea and landed at Hull, England, on Sunday, the twenty-eighth of June at two o'clock p.m. Because the English are more religious than the Dutch or the Germans they kept the day of rest and as a consequence our baggage stayed on the ship till Monday. We, together with Peter Duecks, Mrs. Dueck is my wife's sister, went for a walk in the English city to while away the time. Due to the absence of commerce on Sunday, almost absolute quietness reigned in the city. We met very few other pedestrians. At one point a total stranger stopped to admire the Duecks' baby that Peter was carrying and gave it an affectionate kiss.

Early Monday morning, the twenty-ninth of June, at seven o'clock a.m. our chests, trunks and crates were transferred to baggage cars. We were invited to the hotel for a delicious breakfast of white bread, buttered and served with coffee. The good, nourishing, rye bread that was our staple in Russia was not available in England or elsewhere during the entire trip. Their digestive organs are doubtless too weak and incapable of handling such roughage. After breakfast we hurried to the railway station where Spirgo, our leader, attending to his responsibilities came into the coaches and warned us not to allow the children to poke their heads out of the window because we'll be traveling at lightning speed. That's how we sped on, through field and valley, high bridges and through long, dark tunnels. The fiery steed carried us for seven hours, as though stung by horse flies! Confined to the tunnels, the steam and smoke frightened and almost suffocated us. The engine seemed to be

spurred on to greater speed to get out into the open again. It appeared to us that such speed had never been our lot in Russia or Germany. England's transportation moved at much greater velocity than the countries we had traveled through up to this point. Upon our arrival at Liverpool we were assigned our night's lodging and after supper we retired for the night and enjoyed a comfortable night's rest.

On the thirtieth of June, after breakfast we made our way to the huge seaport on the Atlantic Ocean, entrusted its captain, and ourselves to the ocean steamer Austria and to our God and commenced our journey across the mighty Atlantic Ocean.

As is common to man, even as did the children of Israel in the wilderness, some of us murmured against Spirgo, blaming him for some of the poor quality food that was served on board. However, this patient man, knowing quite well what kind of weather we might encounter on the open seas, comforted us by telling us

that tomorrow you will be satisfied with the ship's fare. The tempestuous storm that came upon us already the first three days of our journey made virtually everyone seasick. Instead of desiring better food we lost the stomach's contents over the tongue.

Both on land and on the railroad it looks as though man is lord over nature but when on the wide-open sea, once the elements begin to rage uncontrollably, the picture changes. It stirred pity in us to see so many fathers, mothers and their children lying helpless with seasickness. Together with a few others who were not seasick, we endeavored to serve those who were smitten. Doubtless we could have helped even more. The sailors tried to console us, stating that it was merely windy, not stormy. The fourth day the storm subsided and the passengers became happier and their appetites returned. We were happy when we heard that those who followed us several weeks later on the same ship had smoother sailing. The sailors had referred later to the previous voyage as a stormy one, especially so on the first part of the trip.

After a seventeen day journey, stopping at Newfoundland and also at Halifax to unload freight we arrived at Quebec City, Canada, in the early afternoon, where we anchored and disembarked, safe and sound. God be thanked that we finally landed safely on Canadian soil in North America. That is all except for two children that died en route and were buried at sea. Katrina, a daughter of Frank Froeses and Jacob son of Jacob Friesens became sick, died and were committed to the sea.

After leaving the dock we were transferred to the main waiting area at the train depot. That afternoon we spent a refreshing time of recovery till early evening, walking in the beautifully blooming, artistically arranged flower gardens on the outskirts of the city. Beautiful indeed is nature and life. Only man is corrupt.

At 8 o'clock in the evening we boarded the train for Montreal where we arrived Saturday evening, the eighteenth of July at 7:45 p.m. After a good supper we boarded the next train to Toronto. Sunday morning, the nineteenth, we dis-

embarked at eight a.m., but due to the fact that it was Sunday we had to unload our own chests and trunks. Here members of the Old Mennonite church greeted us. We worshiped together with them, their minister serving us with the Word.

These Mennonites, knowing both the Dawson, Canada, and the US (Duluth) routes, though they knew that it would prolong our journey, negotiated with the government to our advantage. For an additional two dollars per person we could travel to Manitoba by way of Minnesota, USA. This avoided the Dawson route through Quebec, Ontario and eastern Manitoba, a route that entailed a lot of riding on wagons on extremely rough corduroy roads through muskeg, swamp, floating on shoddy canal barges while crossing countless, small, mosquito infested lakes, where baggage, due to lying in water in the bottom of the barges would have been spoiled. This route was almost impossible for women and children to navigate, there being no railroad as yet, neither proper resting accommodations nor places to eat.² Finally on July 12 at noon the welcome news reached us that we were being routed around through the USA.

Our baggage was loaded onto boxcars and we boarded coaches for the six hour journey to Collingwood, on the shore of Georgian Bay which forms part of Lake Huron, arriving there at nine o'clock p.m. The people and language were foreign to us and here we were, feeling quite lost, without guide or interpreter. Fortunately the ship and train personnel knew exactly what to do and an hour later saw our baggage and us safely transferred onto a ship and we lifted anchor, heading for Duluth, Minnesota. The twenty-third of July we reached a waterfall where we passed through locks, which lifted us in three stages from Lake Huron onto Lake Superior. After being lifted through the locks at Sault Ste. Marie, we were back on the open sea. Such and many other noteworthy things we observed and experienced on our trip.³ Most of us were born and raised on the steppes of southern Russia and were unfamiliar with either railways or steam-

ships, having never traveled on either one or the other.

At midnight between the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth we arrived at Duluth, took what luggage we usually carried with us and went into the Emigration Building, staying there overnight. It was Sunday so Uncle Abram Loewen conducted a worship service with us there.

Monday afternoon at one-thirty we boarded the Pacific Railway train and headed for Moorhead, Minnesota, slept fitfully during the train ride and disembarked at six o'clock in the morning on Tuesday, July 28. We stayed outside until four o'clock in the afternoon when we boarded a barge that was towed behind a steam powered tugboat and began the journey down the Red River. This river flows north between wooded and sometimes open banks. The trip down the Red River was, because of the countless hoards of voracious, biting mosquitoes, distinctly lackluster. The torture they inflicted on us in the open flatboat was something we had never before experienced. "No wonder that Pharaoh released the children of Israel from their bondage after the plague of flies," (Ex. 8:24) he soliloquized. Eventually, at nine o'clock p.m. on July 31 we arrived in Winnipeg.

Here William Hespeler, a government appointed guide welcomed us and took us under his wing. As interpreter he advised us on what to buy that would prove most important when beginning our new life in a new country.

Saturday, August 1 we left Winnipeg and headed back up the mosquito-infested Red River to the point opposite the land, the eight townships, on the east reserve, that the Canadian government had allocated for Mennonite settlement. This land was approximately ten miles east of the Red River.⁴ Here, August 2, 1874, thanks to a loving God, our journey by land and water was safely concluded, except for the ten miles that required traveling by foot. Mr. Hespeler had hired ox carts and Metis at the Emigration Office to freight the crates, trunks and baggage the last ten miles. A friend, Mr. Shantz, a Canadian Old Mennonite had, out of love for us, occasioned temporary shelters to

be built here for the women and children, which sheltered us from the sun and from some rain.

We men struck out in different directions looking for homesteads and after having selected one, registered it with Mr. Hespeler for the sum of ten dollars.⁵ This material, both bulrushes and trees, of course stood us in good stead and was used

The building of a house for the upcoming winter, though our awareness of the severity of Manitoba's winters was limited, and putting up some hay for a few head of livestock we knew would require earnest effort. This was quite a change from a honeymoon trip to the strenuous exertion needed and employed to establish an earthly existence in a new country on

our dear mother, sixty-one years of age and Sister Helena, age fifteen, built a dwelling of sorts, on the northwest quarter, west of the marshy creek, for the first winter. Our building materials were reeds (bulrushes), which grew in abundance in the flats close by, and some purchased rough boards and hand cut rails for walls and rafters. The reeds were tied in small bundles



SCENE ON THE RAT RIVER MENNONITE RESERVATION, MANITOBA.

In 1874, Isaak and other Mennonites settled in the East Reserve. In the first year, their meager planting of grain, potatoes and other vegetables was totally demolished by grasshoppers.

to build our first winter's home. We never ran out of firewood or water. We sold firewood to those grain farmers that thronged on clean, choice, rock-free land, where water was hard to find but everything grows well if and when planted, including trees. However, when grasshoppers, drought, flood, hail or poor grain prices brought the grain farmers difficult times we were marginally better off. We even sold firewood to the poor prairie farmers.⁶

Having completed the legal aspects of the transaction we were ready to establish a new home here in North America.

undeveloped, virgin soil.

My teaching career, where I had without worries dreamed away the best years of my youth, paying no attention to farming methods, did not stand me in good stead now and had to be changed immediately. Though difficult, it was not impossible. Where there's a will there's a way, and in spite of mistakes, failings and blunders, under the canopy of the most High, we have always somehow managed.

We, my brother Peter and I formed a partnership and filed jointly. Together, my wife and I, Peter's wife and two children,

and placed on the roof. On the inside the cracks between the boards and rafters were pasted over with paper to keep out drafts. The underside of the rafters were lined with the rough boards and plastered with paper as well. When the boards dried out the paper ripped, losing even that bit of effectiveness. In these primitive quarters we six spent our first winter in Canada.

On November 20, in this crude hut my wife gave birth to our first child, a fine son whom we named Peter. The morning of his birth, the temperature under the bed where she lay was fifteen degrees

Fahrenheit, or minus six to seven Celsius,⁷ The cook stove being heated to full capacity, she endured this trial well and she's still my healthy companion, loving wife and the devoted mother of our children. The small lad, Peter, throve, growing to be a healthy, husky boy, stronger and heavier than the four boys that followed him,



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Mennonites quickly established farms and gardens after their settlement in Manitoba.

and is presently in his fifty-sixth year.⁸ As soon as the severely cold winter let up, my brother Peter and I sallied forth with our axes to cut down poplar trees, of which there were more than sufficient on our land, with which we built a log house, sixteen by sixteen, patterning it after the Russian type of structures that we were familiar with, situating it in the woods in the middle of the section on the east side. We lived in this through the early summer during which we built a second longer one for mother, Margaretha and me.⁹

Our meager planting of grain, potatoes and other vegetables that first year was totally demolished by grasshoppers. As a result of this disaster we had to, the following year, live on what was left in our pockets, which were by now quite empty, ours as well as other's. Somehow we managed to survive. The government as well as the Canadian Old Mennonites gave us money and food with which we scraped through but with little room to spare.¹⁰

In the fall, 1875, the rest of the Kleine Gemeinde as well as the Bergthalers Gemeinde all came over into Canada, none stayed back in Russia. This latter group, whose Colony was situated a hundred and fifty miles from the Molotschna colony in Russia, though coming on different ships, also settled in the eight townships, east of the Red River, reserved for the Mennonites. Some English-speaking

people settled in the northeasterly corner of this block of land.

There was not a mile of railroad in the province of Manitoba, nor in Saskatchewan or Alberta for that matter, and very few roads, none of them graded.¹¹ There was not a single dwelling in the thirty miles from our house to Winnipeg at that time. Winnipeg, with a population of two thousand, was the town where we received our mail and got our groceries and other necessities. This distance we traveled by foot or with oxen.

We encountered many strange, unusual adventures in our first year's sojourn in this new land. Looking back it now seems almost miraculous that in spite of great difficulties we were quite happy. To obtain staples with which to feed ourselves so that we could survive, I would take a load of hay, drawn by oxen, to Winnipeg, a journey of three days and two nights and consider myself fortunate to receive three dollars in cold, hard cash. When, that first winter, the whole city of Winnipeg ran out of flour we had to go to Emerson on the Minnesota border to purchase that commodity. Fortunately I did not take part in that particular feat of endurance.

This trip was undertaken in winter, again with oxen, when the temperature was just short of minus fifty.¹² In forty miles there was just barely overnight shelter found for the men and none at all for the oxen. The poor animals' noses were frostbitten but in spite of the hardship endured, men and oxen came back home bringing loads of flour and the community survived. Such are some of the homesteading difficulties encountered in a new country.

The people of the Bergthalers persuasion who had sold their land on credit fared even worse than what we from the Molotschna colony did. Though they received their money later, it did nothing to get them through the second winter. Those of us who had brought our money with us fared a little better. It wasn't strange to see flour bags converted to trousers. During the week, available Sunday trousers were worn as underwear and the flour bag pants turned into Sunday underwear.

The second planting in 1876 yielded

a small but good harvest. The grasshoppers, after cleaning up the previous year's growth had all flown away. For the quality wheat that we harvested and hauled the thirty miles to Winnipeg with oxen, we received fifty cents a bushel, twenty-five cents in cash and the balance in supplies. Thinking back now everything really went remarkably well. We were happy and content.

Hold on! Here I come to a point where my wife's happiness and mine came to an abrupt halt, for a while. The third winter in this new land, the thirteenth of December at three o'clock in the afternoon I left with half a cord of firewood for a steam driven sawmill, (toward what today is Steinbach) if indeed the mill could be so called, sell the wood and with the proceeds, purchase a gallon of coal-oil for the lamps, oil that cost from seventy-five cents to a dollar per gallon. It was the calm before the storm! The weather was mild to the point where one's shoes became wet when walking in the snow.

While driving back I was suddenly, with a mighty blast enveloped in a snow-storm, a blizzard from the northwest, the likes of which Manitoba has probably not seen since.¹³ To keep the oxen on the trail was impossible; they simply turned their tails to the wind. I had little choice. To this day I know of no other method that I could have implemented by which I could have remained alive. I unhitched the oxen, separated them by removing the fasteners from between them and released them. I broke the crust from a snow drift with my feet, scraped away the loose snow and lay down in the scooped out hollow with my head cradled on my arm, thinking as I did that I would probably never again arise. In a short while I was entirely covered with the wildly blowing snow, quite comfortably warm at the beginning. The storm raged over me, I heard it but its force and fury had no effect on me. This was at approximately six o'clock in the afternoon. This comfort did not last long. I was wearing a fur coat, brought along from Russia, under which I remained dry but below it my body heat melted the snow, my legs and my face became wet and grew colder and colder. As I became more and



Otto Schultz and Erdmann Penner opened stores in Gretna, Morden, Plum Coulee, and Tannenau. Penner and Schultz helped Abraham Isaak after he was caught in a terrible blizzard.

more chilled I started to battle sleep. There is a saying that freezing to death is an easy way of dying. Nobody has ever verified this but I came so close to experiencing it that I have no difficulty in believing it. My growing colder and the approaching night both worked together to make it ever more difficult to stay awake. Even while thinking that I wasn't sleeping, I dreamt that I was in a room, together with other people, warm and comfortable, even more comfortable than what normally would be the case. It took a mighty effort to tear myself away from such comfortably sweet sleep. In the sure knowledge that in this life I would never wake again, it was possible, with the help of God to open my eyes and bestir myself enough to remain awake. Had I been single I would undoubtedly have given myself over to a permanent

sleep, but sympathy for my dear wife, the very thought of what she would have to go through if I remained unfound till spring, worked powerfully to help keep me awake and alive. I had no idea where I was lying. In all probability, if I died here it would be springtime, after the snow melted before they ever found whatever remained of me after wild animals devoured me. Such thoughts motivated me to endeavor to remain awake and alive.

Hours later, after the wind had died down I broke out of my snowy bed. The skies were clear, the stars twinkled and the temperature, as I found out later, stood at minus twenty-six Fahrenheit. My nose and ears immediately froze. I ran in one direction but found no house or village. Oh, how alone I felt! It seemed there was no one else in this frigid world! Who or

what was it that urged me to take a different direction? Was it not God's watchful eye over me? I had not run far in this direction when I saw a light. With great thanksgiving in my heart I ran toward the light that shone in this house. I saw that my life was saved. I arrived at the door and knocked loudly.

"Who's there?" came from within.

"I, Abraham Isaak."

Upon that the door was opened. I found myself at Erdmann Penners. Mrs. Penner was in confinement, hence the light at two a.m.

My nose and ears were promptly washed and rubbed with turpentine, which thawed them relatively painlessly. After giving me food I was shown to a good bed and slept blissfully.

The next morning, Schultz, who

together with Penner owned a nearby store,¹⁴ took me to my brother John's place in Gruenfeld. John wasn't at home but had gone the one and a half miles to our farm to see whether I had arrived at home safely. John had seen one of my oxen come into the village and had brought the other one in from a nearby field. He did not find me home but to save my wife anxiety had not mentioned the fact to her that my oxen had found their way to his place. Half way back to Gruenfeld he changed his mind. If they brought me in dead, he thought, the shock would be even greater for her than if she had been told about the oxen. With that he turned around, went back and told her about it.

Till now her father's teaching had helped her to maintain her composure. That teaching embodied the fact that even in the face of comprehensive evidence to the contrary, one must remain hopeful. All hope torn away, agony and grief left her devastated. John nevertheless had to walk back to his home and halfway there he met John D. Dueck, Gruenfeld, bringing me home. My brother John accompanied us back to my home.

Imagine the sorrowful scene! My wife was so grief stricken and comfortless that when we drove onto the yard, even at the urging of mother and my sister Helena who looked out of the window and saw me, exclaiming how I was sitting upright in the sleigh, she would not, could not believe that I was safe till I walked in the door. Thus were we given to each other anew.

This weighty experience drew us closer to God in thanksgiving and prayer.

Though our understanding of conversion, repentance and peace with God was limited, insofar as we had light and understanding, by the grace of God, we had endeavored to live conscientious lives. When Bishop John Holdeman came preaching and bringing us a clearer understanding of the true meaning of being born again and living a Godly life, we were engrafted as living branches into the true vine Jesus Christ, and baptized into His church. Some months later, in 1882, I was elected into the ministry and as an ordained servant of God labored and enjoyed, more or less, this privilege till my seventy-eighth year, forty-eight years later.

AFTERWARD: MEMORIES OF A GRANDSON

Grandfather suffered a stroke but lived another eight years longer. Though I remember but little of him, I do remember being at their house. Aunt Mary, Dad's sister, (unmarried) together with Grandfather lived in a small house on the farmyard, when, as children will, I decided to run out and play. Grandfather was sitting in his wicker rocker with his legs stretched out and in my haste I tripped over his feet. He laughed. I felt offended; after all, I might have been badly hurt. I did not consider it funny. As a child I very soon forgot the incident. Years later Dad told me that as a result of his stroke he was not able to control his emotion, neither his laughter nor his crying.

I had just turned four three days previously when Aunt Mary came running to the house while we were eating breakfast to tell us that Grandfather had passed

away. Of course we, my older siblings and our parents, hurried to the small house. It was my first glimpse of someone lying peacefully in bed, (he must have died from a second massive stroke or heart attack) not breathing. After looking a short while I thought of my cracklings, (*Jreewe*, a staple at many Mennonites' breakfasts) which were cooling rapidly and left the others at their grieving to finish my breakfast and thought, even as I ran back that the '*Jreewe*' would be too cold to enjoy. I think as a child I grieved more because of my spoiled breakfast than of Grandfather's dying. Such is a child's way of thinking. I was right, insofar as nobody, myself included, likes cold '*Jreewe*'.

Another incident as told to me by my Dad: One day while Dad and Grandfather were pitching sheaves onto the hayrack Grandfather suddenly started flailing his pitchfork wildly in the stubble and calling loudly, "*Doft, come me mol halpe disse Schlangen loot schlone!*" (Dave, come and help me kill these snakes!) Dad looked and there wasn't one snake to be seen, let alone many. Poor Grandfather, suffering from a severe cold, had taken some ether, a not uncommon household remedy at the time, in liquid form to try to alleviate his suffering and wound up hallucinating! Fortunately it soon wore off.

I greatly bemoan the fact that Grandfather did not keep up his biographical writing. I assume that pioneering was struggle enough to engage his time and energy, leaving little physical and mental stamina to continue chronicling what now would be extremely interesting to his posterity.

¹ The translator, Alfred Isaac, has add comments and clarification in the endnotes. Consumption refers to tuberculosis in today's language.

² Pierre Berton's historical book, *The National Dream*, relates that the hardships endured on the Dawson Route were the undoing of other settlers on the way to Winnipeg, destroying health due to lack of proper nourishment and inclement weather, some succumbing to swamp related diseases and fatigue. The whole Canadian, or Dawson route as it was called at the time, was a political boondoggle, that served merely to line a few politicians' pockets, as well as their friends' who did the actual ferrying.

³ Grandfather never mentioned Sault Ste. Marie, either because he forgot, or it wasn't called by that name at the time.

⁴ They stopped in the vicinity of the confluence of the Rat River and the Red River about five or so miles west of where the town of Niverville is presently situated.

⁵ Due to the fact that someone beat my grandfather by minutes in registering a choice piece of ground, free of stones, about four miles southeast of present day Niverville, near the junction of highways 52 and 59, grandfather settled for, and on, section 30, Township 6, Range 5 E in what is now Hanover Municipality, approximately seven miles farther into the bush to the south-east, a mile and a half from Gruenfeld. As a result, I, (the translator) have farmed the rocky, saline, flatland acres with plenty of trees as well as plenty of bulrushes near the slow-moving Toround Creek, for forty years.

⁶ One hundred and five years after grandfather homesteaded this land I traitorously sold the homestead and moved west.

⁷ At that time temperatures were measured in Reamur, a unit of temperature measurement that has fallen so far into disuse that this translator cannot even find the correct spelling for the word, a unit of temperature measurement that comes

closest to the Celsius equivalent.

⁸ Peter died prematurely at age fifty-eight due to an asthmatic attack resulting in cardiac arrest.

⁹ This was inadvertently so exactly on the half mile, in the middle of the section, that later when the official land survey was run the half mile line would have run through the middle of the living room.

¹⁰ Compare that with today's opulence! It must have been extremely discouraging.

¹¹ A few years later a rail line from Winnipeg to Emerson passed within eight miles of the homestead.

¹² Translator's conversion from Reamur to Fahrenheit.

¹³ That's what grandfather thought then, we've seen some bad ones since. In 1941, a storm I clearly remember, a Mr. Fast, near Niverville, froze to death.

¹⁴ His store was in the village of Tannenau, approximately two and a half miles northeast of present day Kleefeld.

JOHANN WALL

Conrad Stoesz



MENNOMITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES

By December 1877, Johann Wall had established a mill in the village of Blumenort.

One of my favorite collections at the Mennonite Heritage Archives is the Johann Wall fonds.¹ The collection includes a diary written from 1824–1860 by Johann's father, Jacob, a photo, portion of a blueprint for a mill, financial records, school records, and a map. If stacked together the materials would be approximately twenty-two centimeters thick.

Jacob Wall (1850–1909) was born in the village of Neuendorf, Khortitsa colony to Jacob Wall (1807–1860) and his second wife Helena Neufeld (1817–1903). Johann was the third of three children born to Jacob and Helena Wall. Jacob's first wife was Judith Dueck and they had seven children together.

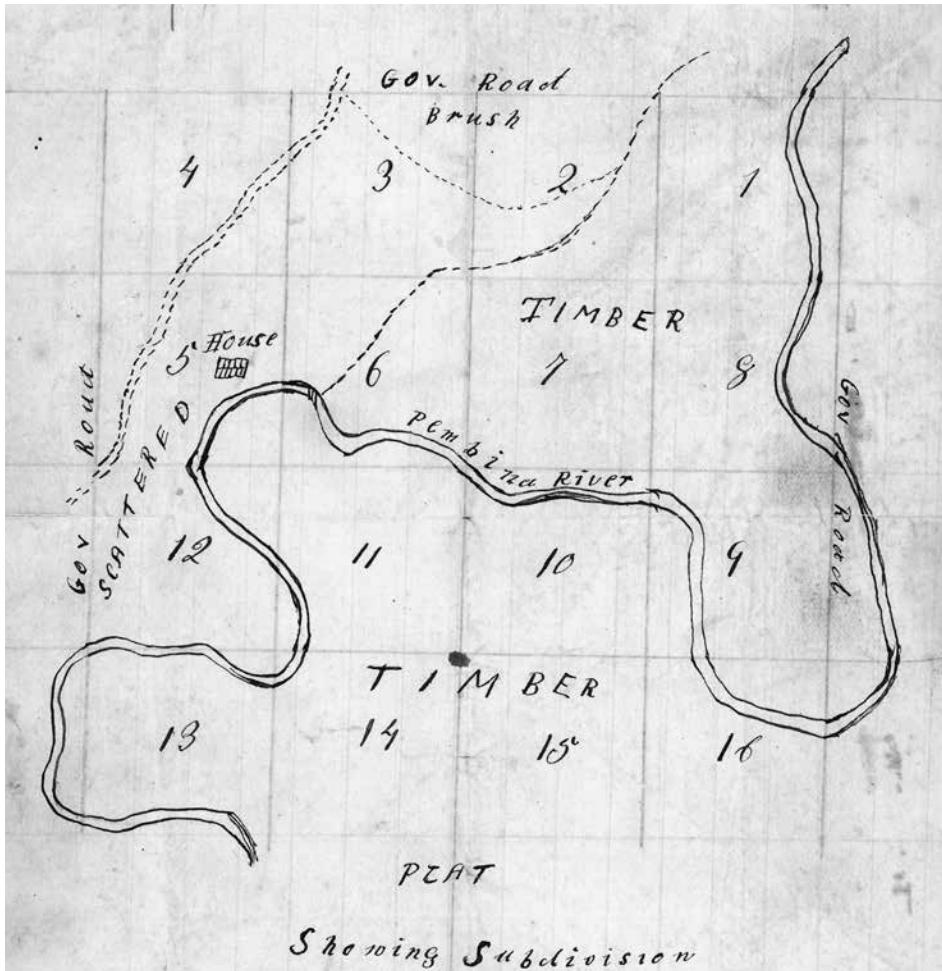
As a young man Johann began his apprenticeship at Hermann Neibuhr's mill in Khortitsa. Johann's sister, Katharina Peters, had moved with her husband (Heinrich Peters) and family to New York in 1876, and soon after moved to the Old Colony region of the Mennonite West Reserve. Katharina encouraged her brother Johann to move to Manitoba and set up a mill. Johann accepted the invitation and in the spring of 1877, he and his brother-in-law, Peter Peters, left for Manitoba. They stopped in Berlin where they did some sightseeing and had their picture taken. Johann arrived at West Lynne (now Emerson) on 30 June 1877. After some initial surveying of the situation to find a good place where the mill could be located, Johann left for Berlin, Ontario (now Kitchener) with \$500 from Old Colony bishop Johann Wiebe, presumably to get supplies to build the mill. Upon return the *Oberschultz*, Isaac Mueller, gave Wall \$1,000 for the mill. Clearly the invitation from his sister was an invitation from the community and the money from community leaders showed the high level of support for Johann and the mill. In the Wall papers there are fragile pieces of mill blueprints.

By December 1877, the mill was in operation in the village of Blumenort, lot 13, on the east end of the village, hugging the American border. The mill was

Reserve and 960 acres in the Swift Current Reserve of Saskatchewan. He farmed two and a half quarters of land in Manitoba until November 1895, when he sold his land to his three neighbours and bought a farm west of Gnadenhthal (8-2-3W) for \$8,500 from J. J. Livingston. In 1898, Wall moved the mill close to Gnadenhthal and converted it to a wind-powered mill for grinding grain. Why was the mill converted to wind power? Evidently the need for lumber from the mill had decreased over time. This assumption is supported by the fact that, starting in the 1890s, Mennonites had begun selling their wood lots. Presumably, the best trees had already been taken, the need for lumber was reduced after the initial settlement period, and new rail lines brought competing purchasing options into the community. With less lumber being sawed, there may have been less fuel to power the steam engine, thus encouraging the conversion to a more readily accessible power source.

Wall died in 1909 and his wife in 1927. Their son John was managing the estate when he died suddenly in 1932. A new executor, W. C. Miller, was appointed, but due to the size of the estate and poor economic conditions, winding up the estate took a long time. The process was almost completed when Miller died in 1959 and Jacob Rempel was chosen to complete the process. Rempel donated the materials to the archives in 1975 and 1976.³

I find the Wall fonds interesting because of the variety of materials it contains. The old Jacob Wall diary, the once mysterious map and blueprints, along with financial and educational materials, makes this fonds more diverse than many others. For more details about the Johann Wall fonds visit our website www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/papers/Wall,%20Johann%20fonds.htm



A map in the Wall fonds reveals that, to compensate for the lack of trees, Old Colony members bought wood lots in North Dakota, some as little as a mile from Blumenort.

steam-powered and had two functions: to grind grain and to power the saw mill. The West Reserve was part of the open plains where trees only grew along waterways. A map in the Wall fonds reveals that, to compensate for the lack of trees, Old Colony members bought wood lots in North Dakota, some as little as a mile from Blumenort.² Trees were cut in North Dakota over the winter and then hauled to the mill to be made into lumber for the community's building needs. Johann Wall's map is for a parcel of land that has the Pembina River meandering through it, a bit of brush on the northern sections, with other sections filled with timber. The map also shows trails, the government roads, and even a house. The land description is NE-12-163-55, which is about five miles south, south west of Blumenort. At one point the Old Colony Mennonites owned over 1,350 acres of timber in North Dakota.

The Blumenort mill ground grain by

day and sawed logs by night. During the first years in Manitoba, Mennonites struggled to survive and the mill owners extended credit to Mennonites for flour and wood. The saw dust was collected and used in the homes as a coating over the dirt floor. The saw dust had practical but also aesthetic purposes: mill workers kept the darker and lighter saw dusts separated in order that women could use these different shades to make patterns on the floors in the living and guest rooms of their homes.

Along with the mill, Johann acquired 480 acres of land in the Hague-Osler

¹ The term "fonds" is a technical archival term that refers to the materials collected by a person, family, or organization through the course of their lives. The archival term "collection" refers to an artificial grouping of materials such as a scrapbook of newspaper clippings about the Royal family.

² For further discussion on the wood lots see Bruce Wiebe, "The Timberlots of the Manitoba Mennonites in St. Joseph Township, Pembina County, Dakota Territory," *Preservings* 27 (2007): 47-52.

³ For more information, see Johann Wall fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives; Elizabeth Bergen, "Steam mill built in

Blumenort," *Red River Valley Echo* (January 24, 1973): 4; John Dyck, ed., *1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1998); Lawrence Klippenstein, ed., *Resources for Canadian Mennonite Studies: An Inventory and Guide to Archival Holdings at the Mennonite Heritage Centre* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1988), 101-104; Jacob Rempel, "The First Steam-operated Flour Mill on the West Reserve," in *Manitoba Mennonite Memories 1874-1974*, Julius Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein, eds. (Altona, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee, 1974), 43-48.

ANADOL FORESTRY UNIT

David Rempel Smucker



MHA088.1410.

Gerhard G. Dueck stood in front of a blossoming tree at the Anadol forestry service unit. There he learned from his cousin David Friesen how to plant, transplant, prune, and graft trees.

The forestry service (*Forstei* in German) was the fruit of a decade of negotiations between Mennonite leaders in Russia and Tsarist officials in light of the introduction of universal military service in the empire. It became law in 1880.¹ A head forester, usually a Russian national appointed by the Forestry Division of the Ministry of State Domains, would be responsible for the entire unit or camp. The Mennonite recruits could choose a

unit foreman (*starshii* in Russian) from among their own men, as well as several aides (*Gefreiter* in German) to the foreman. The Mennonite churches would choose a business manager (*Oekonom* in German) and a chaplain.² The duties of the men in these camps centered on improving and protecting the forests, both fruit and forest trees, by planting, thinning, and guarding them. They also distributed saplings to the local Russian population with the hope that those receiving these saplings would continue to expand their own fruit orchards and forest plots.

GERHARD G. DUECK

Gerhard G. Dueck³ was born on 27 May 1891 to Gerhard Dueck and Margaretha Wiens in the Schönfeld settlement.⁴ At age twenty-two he began his term in the forestry service (*Forstei*) for about five years (1913–1917) at the Greater Anadol forestry unit about sixty kilometers north of the Sea of Azov in Ukraine. Created in 1881, Greater Anadol was among the first two forestry units. On 3 May 1923, he married Anna Braun and immigrated to Canada in 1924, where he settled near Springstein, just west of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and attended the Springstein Mennonite Church. From 1951 to 1980 he led and/or participated in a series of eleven reunions of Mennonite men (and often their wives), who did alternative service in Russia in the forestry service and/or the medical orderly service before and/or during the First World War. He died on 29 January 1985.

Two translated and annotated accounts written by Dueck follow: an account published⁵ in translation⁶ in 1966, *Onsi Tjedils*, and a shorter, unpublished account, translated by his daughter from his handwritten papers.⁷ Although we find some repetition, the two accounts each provide materials not found in the other.

ONSI TJEDILS

At the beginning of March 1913, I made preparations to begin my forestry service at the Anadol forestry unit. A large box was procured and filled with provisions such as ham, sausage, butter, and a large glass container of marmalade (*Warenje*).⁸ Underwear was packed. Outerwear was provided at the forestry unit. That consisted of a grey uniform, shirt and pants for work days, a grey suit with shiny white buttons and a green collar for Sundays. In summer we wore white clothes for work with a peaked visor cap; instead of shoes we received money for boots. That is how we were provided for: from home by our dear parents and at the forestry unit by the mother colony, that is, by all the Mennonites through a specifically levied assessment per capita.

After arriving at the Wolnowacha⁹ station, I hired a carriage for the 8 *versl*¹⁰ trip to the barracks. As we turned into the driveway and by the time I dismounted, my baggage had disappeared into the barracks. “Very eager service,” was my thought. My cousin met me and took me to room #3. That had already been arranged beforehand. A while later he asked, “Where are your things?” “I don’t know,” I answered. “I only know someone hollered ‘two here’ as I came on the yard.” “Well,” he said, “then they will be in #2.” The explanation is that they thought that if they got the belongings, they would get the man. My cousin went searching and came back shortly without my things but with about 10 fellows. Greetings followed: “What’s your name?” I answered. “Is Dave Friesen your relative?” “Yes,” was my answer. “You’re not lying.” After I had good-naturedly answered everyone, my belongings were returned. (David



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Sometime between 1913 and 1917 at the Anadol forestry service unit a group of 7 men rode bicycles, possibly on their way to a work site or on a leisure trip. From left to right: Mr. Enns, Peter Mandtler (1913, 7.4), Nikolai Rempel (1913, 3.1), Gerhard G. Dueck (1913, 1.1), Peter Isaak (1913, 1.14), Abram Lepp, Gerhard Dueck (1913, 6.15, from Neuenberg).

Friesen¹¹ was my cousin and was the foreman at that time. He died in the North.)

I got my belongings, but the outer bindings were in pieces and the marmalade did not survive the stormy reception. The bindings were returned in pieces with the explanation. "We are honorable people. We always return everything, even in pieces." You can imagine what the contents of the box looked like. In the meantime other newcomers arrived. We all received a large sack and were instructed to go to a big stack of straw. That is where we would find the colony feathers to fill our sacks. In the barracks we were to sew up the open end. One of the elders was there with a container of water into which we had to dip our needles periodically to prevent them from getting too hot and setting the straw on fire. They would not want to be responsible for that.

The bed consisted of a framework of boards with holes on each side through

which cords or ropes were pulled; it served in place of a bedspring. The bed frame had four legs; above was the aforementioned large bag of straw that we sewed up, a pillow, a bedspread and a blanket. And did we ever sleep soundly! The bed frame was decoratively painted.

On the first day the rules were read to us before we went to bed, how we would need to behave at the outset of our service. Through D. Friesen's efforts, I managed to get into instruction in the tree nursery and in the garden. After we had received all our equipment, we went to the *Terij*.¹² Since the forest was over 1,000 *Desjatinen*¹³ large, we had another purpose: to construct a small barracks about 5 versts¹⁴ further [from the workplace], so that we would not have to return the entire distance to the workplace everyday.¹⁵

On the first day at work we hauled underbrush out of the forest to the road. The second-year men then bundled it.

When they realized that we would be unable to reach the prescribed quantity in the prescribed time frame, they demanded that we increase our efforts another notch.¹⁶ We could not increase our efforts, so we just had to work a little longer to reach our quota. Luckily, it was Saturday when we regularly only worked until noon. In time we got used to the work.

When work began in the garden and in the nursery, 12–15 men were transported to primitive summer houses. The more interesting activities there were pruning trees, grafting, picking fruit, etc. In spring and fall many fruit trees and forest trees were widely distributed. Starting in my second year, it was my job to bring the packaged trees to the station. Peter Isaak,¹⁷ a third-year man, introduced me to this work. We made up to 20 trips per day.

We also had a wonderful, large fruit garden. Fruit trees and vines of various

kinds lined the avenue with their different kinds of fruit. I have a picture of five guys standing in front of a gate covered in vines. In the summer we were awakened by the singing of the nightingales.

We got a lot of visits from our fellow servicemen in the forest when the fruit was ripe. I can still visualize Jacob Schroeder¹⁸ (died several years ago in an invalid home) coming around the corner with his motorcycle dragging his long legs to come to a stop. He seldom used his brakes. Yes, where are all our dear friends? Nick Rempel,¹⁹ my true friend—we spent the entire 5 years in service together. He perished in exile. His family is in Canada. Hans Dueck²⁰ belonged to our work detail. W. Bartel, our head gardener, is said to have perished in Koltschak's army;²¹ Peter Mandler,²² Andreas Vogt,²³ the foreman David Friesen—I could go on and on naming names of those who were dear to me.

We too had visits from preachers. In the summer of 1914 Rev. Bartel, the father of the head gardener, and the teacher Rev. Benjamin Unruh²⁴ came for a visit. On the same day we got the news of Russia's declaration of war on Germany. Benjamin Unruh then declared, "Now we'll get a new Russia." It did not take long before a call went out for volunteers for the medical service. Many registered, including Nick Rempel and I; we were asked to stay because we knew the work. We stayed until everything fell apart.

First war, then the overthrow of the Tsar, Kerensky, and finally the Bolsheviks. For 5 years I served the fatherland as a non-combatant. Because the war was against Germany, we were forbidden to speak in German. This directive was difficult to adhere to because we had not used the Russian language in forestry service. (In Canada it was not difficult to relinquish the German language.) When someone spoke Russian in forestry service, he was smeared with shoe polish. We were afraid that he would lose the hair or the skin on his chest.²⁵ Such a patient was cured for life. During peacetime we often received leave. This was forbidden during wartime, but then we got more visitors at the forestry unit—parents, relatives,

women and brides came for visits.

Our business manager or Papa, as he was called, was Preacher Abram Klassen.²⁶ He had ably proclaimed the word of God to us. That had positive consequences. There were opportunities for Bible studies, prayer meetings, and music sessions.

was a difficult time. I am thankful for God's grace and guidance.

Because I wrote at the beginning about bringing some food to the forestry unit, some of you may be led to believe that there was not enough food to eat at the forestry unit. That is not true. There was



To occupy the men, an extensive library was made available and they also played sports.

A well-stocked library was at anyone's disposal. There was opportunity for growth and activities to enjoy during the idle hours. One of the more educated men was given time off from work, in order to do some active teaching. There were some who were interested in furthering their education. During my time the teacher was Heinrich Enns,²⁷ later from Steinbach. He was editor of the *Post*. He died several years ago. He was a student in the vocational high school in Berdiansk.

Breaking the rules, despite repeated warnings, was severely punished, and in some cases, with lashes. This was so-called *Schinelliborscht*.²⁸ And even then, sad to say, there were things that happened that had a life-long effect.

In the fall of 1917 our horse barn burned down. Several days later we were overrun. I was on leave at home at that time and did not return to service. That was the end of this chapter. What followed

good nourishing food. The cooks and the bakers did their best to keep the unit satisfied. The provisions from home were for between meals. The dear mothers were always so worried that their sons were not well cared for.

"STORIES...BY MY PARENTS"

In 1912 I was conscripted. To fulfill my obligation to the state, I had to work in the forestry department. So in March of 1913 I left by train for the Forstei, Greater Anadol. When I arrived at the station, I hired a carriage/wagon to go the camp where I would work. Before the vehicle could come to a complete stop, the guys had already grabbed all my boxes and bags and thrown them on the camp wagon; we went for a rather boisterous ride. Later when I unpacked everything, I found to my horror and chagrin that several of the jars of jam and preserves my dear mother had so lovingly packed among my clothes

were broken. You can imagine how my clothes looked. Needless to say, the next few days I had to spend my spare time washing and cleaning my clothes, towels, etc. That was not my idea of fun.

My first day of work was Saturday. We worked hard all morning, and were hot and sweaty when we arrived back at camp. Lucky for us, it was Saturday, when we only worked until noon.

There were different areas of work. Since my cousin, David Friesen,²⁹ was a leader of a group of 12–15 men working in the orchards, I was assigned to this area. I enjoyed this very much. I learned a great deal about transplanting, pruning, grafting, and thinning so that fruit trees would thrive and produce more and better fruit. I learned as much as possible and hoped to utilize this knowledge to improve our orchard at home. During Spring and Fall many shrubs and trees were sent to different parts of the country. I was designated to take these to the train station by wagons and horses. I enjoyed this job very much; in fact, I enjoyed all my time at the Forstei,

where I worked for almost five years.

At first we had regular leaves, could go home or to relatives; our families were also able to come and visit on occasion. Then the war broke out and our privileges were cut off—no more visiting. Until then we had mainly spoken Low German, even if our administrator was Russian. That came to a sudden halt. Most of the young men had only attended the German village schools and their skills in speaking Russian were limited. If they were caught speaking German, the resulting punishments were often unpleasant—even flogging.³⁰ I was fortunate; I had learned Russian in the high school [*Zentralschule*]. And at home we always had Russian workers, so that I was quite fluent in the language.

A bit more of life at the forestry camp. It was a place of approximately 3,000 acres, mostly forest. Poplars, ash, oak, as well as other trees and shrubs were among those grown there. The older trees were chopped or sawed off and, as I already mentioned, taken to the train station and shipped to other parts of the country.

Our main camp had five bunkhouses with 20 men in each one. There was a special house for the leader/organizer and another for the maintenance person. This house was also the home of our minister and his family. The preacher held Sunday morning services. His services were certainly needed. We also had visiting clergy from our home villages speak to us. I remember Preacher Abram Klassen³¹ encouraging us to walk in the ways of the Lord; those messages really spoke to my heart. We also met in small Bible study groups. There was quite an extensive library, very good books. I enjoyed reading, so read many a book. Oh, and then there was sports, something I was very much involved in.

Minister Benjamin Unruh³² came to speak to us the day war was declared between Russia and Germany. He said: “After today Russia will never be the same again, it will be entirely different.” His prophecy certainly was fulfilled, and we experienced that. All forestry camps were eventually closed and we were sent home.

1 Jacob Suderman, “The Origin of Mennonite State Service in Russia, 1870–1880,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* XVII (1943): 23–46, is the earliest account in English. Lawrence Klippenstein, “Launching the Russian Mennonite Forestry Service,” *Peace and War: Mennonite Conscientious Objectors in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union Before World War II, and Other COs in Eastern Europe* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Archives, 2016), 69–83. The first two sites, Greater Anadol and Asov, were built and occupied in 1881.

2 Klippenstein, *Peace and War*, 74–75. “Sometimes one person served as both chaplain and business manager.”

3 *Der Bote* 62:8 (Feb. 20, 1985): 7. He and his wife celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1973: *Der Bote* 50:21 (May 22, 1973): 5.

4 The Schönfeld settlement, Dueck’s birth location given in the *Der Bote* obituary, was an area comprised primarily of private estates, approximately fifty kilometers north of Molotschna Colony. See Rudy P. Friesen, *Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture, Landscape and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 2004), 455–470.

5 David P. Heidebrecht, Gerhard J. Peters, Waldemar Günther, eds. *Onsi Tjedils: Ersatzdienst der Mennoniten in Russland unter den Romanows* (Clearbrook, British Columbia: self-published, 1966), 40–44.

6 *Our Guys: Mennonite Alternative Service in Russia under the [sic] Romanows*, trans., Peter H. Friesen (Beausejour, MB: Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home, ca. 1995), 34–36. This English translation of *Onsi Tjedils* served as the basis for this translated account by Gerhard G. Dueck. The author has done editing, such as translating lines omitted in the English translation and adding information in notes. The author has also made some copy editing changes, such as changing punctuation. Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, gave helpful

advice concerning Russian, German, and Low German.

7 Elizabeth (Dueck) Peters, “Stories written by my Parents and Others,” unpublished typescript, 3–4. What is printed here is an excerpt of the typescript, which is fifteen pages in length. Mrs. Peters, daughter of G. G. Dueck, lives (2018) in Gnadalton, Manitoba.

8 Russian word for marmalade.

9 Probably “Volnovakha,” as in W. Schroeder and H. Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas: Second Edition* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1996), 63.

10 Distance measure: 8 Versts equals ca. 8.8 kilometers or 5.28 miles.

11 Presumably David G. Friesen (6.10 in 1913 Anadol photograph). See Helen Koop Johnson, *A Tapestry of Ancestral Footprints* (Waterhouse, SK: self-published, 1995), 216–217, for a sketch of his life. All numerals following or associated with individual names refer to the author’s unpublished studies.

12 *Teritj* is a Russian word possibly referring to the place where protective cream was rubbed on the body to deter insects.

13 Land measure: approximately 1,000 dessiatines = ca. 1,092 hectares or 2,700 acres.

14 Distance measure: ca. 5 versts = approximately 5.3 kilometers or 3.3 miles.

15 *Our Guys*, 35, omitted the translation of all the text between “After we had received...” and “...workplace everyday.”

16 *Mau oapgeschroawi* is probably Low German for increase/turn up/ratchet up something.

17 6.15 in 1913 Anadol photograph.

18 5.9 in 1913 Anadol photograph. Present at 1951 reunion in Manitoba (2.19).

19 3.1 in 1913 Anadol photograph.

20 Possibly at 1951 reunion in Manitoba (17).

21 Alexander V. Kolchak (1874–1920) was a Tsarist naval admiral, who sought to bring together the pro-Tsarist armed forces

after the revolution. He was later based in Omsk, Siberia, and received Allied support. His efforts failed and the Bolsheviks executed him.

22 7.4 in 1913 Anadol photograph. *Der Bote* 57:2 (Jan. 9, 1980): 7, an obituary of his wife, Katherine (Warkentin) Mandtler, states that Peter (d. 1970, St. Catherines, Ontario) became a Mennonite Brethren pastor.

23 9.7 in 1913 Anadol photograph. Present at 1951 reunion in Manitoba (2.36).

24 Presumably Benjamin H. Unruh (1881–1959). See Harry Loewen, ed., *Shepherds, Servants, Prophets: Leadership Among Russian Mennonites, 1880–1960* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 401–426.

25 This is a speculative translation of the Low German phrase, “..daut am de Brost aufschali kunn...,” which refers to some type of hazing punishment.

26 *Our Guys*, 36, omits the name of Preacher Abram Klassen (4.9, 1913). 4.9 in 1913 Anadol photograph. Klassen is pictured with his wife in Walter Quiring and Helen Bartel, *Als Ihr Zeit Erfüllt War: 150 Jahre Bewährung in Russland* (Saskatoon, SK: self-published, 1963), 172:5.

27 Present at 1951 reunion in Manitoba (10).

28 “Schinelliborsch” refers to a type of physical punishment, as described in detail by Franz P. Thiessen in *Onsi Tjedils* (60) and *Our Guys* (48). The “Schinell” was a forestry coat thrown over the head of the person to be punished, so that he could not see the identities of his fellow forestry volunteers. Two belts wrapped together served as the lashes on a clothed rear of a man. The use of the word *Borsch* (a Ukrainian soup loved by Mennonites), in this context, is presently unknown.

29 See note 11.

30 See note 28.

31 See note 26.

32 See note 24.

MY LIFE STORY

Heinrich H. Penner

Translated by Elfrieda Schroeder

I was born June 25 (according to the new calendar) in the area of [Ekaterinoslav] in the village of Neu Rosengard. My parents were farmers and my father had great interest and skills in that area. My mother also worked outside and helped along, and soon we had a nice little income. At the age of five I became very ill and had a high fever. My parents took me to a doctor and after some time I regained my health. When I was six years old my parents moved to Pluhof, to the village of Hamburg (#3) and that is where I began to go to school. My teacher was already

old, his name was Enns. Because I didn't enjoy school I tried to escape by crawling out on my stomach, and I succeeded! But when I arrived at home my dear mother sent me back, which wasn't to my liking at all. On the way back, I tried to figure out how I could escape and I saw a hole that someone had dug. I jumped in, but, oh dear, it was not quite deep enough for me to be well hidden. A man came by and took me back to school. There was a barn close to the school and I ran in there and hid under the hay. But it didn't take long and the teacher came to the barn, saw me

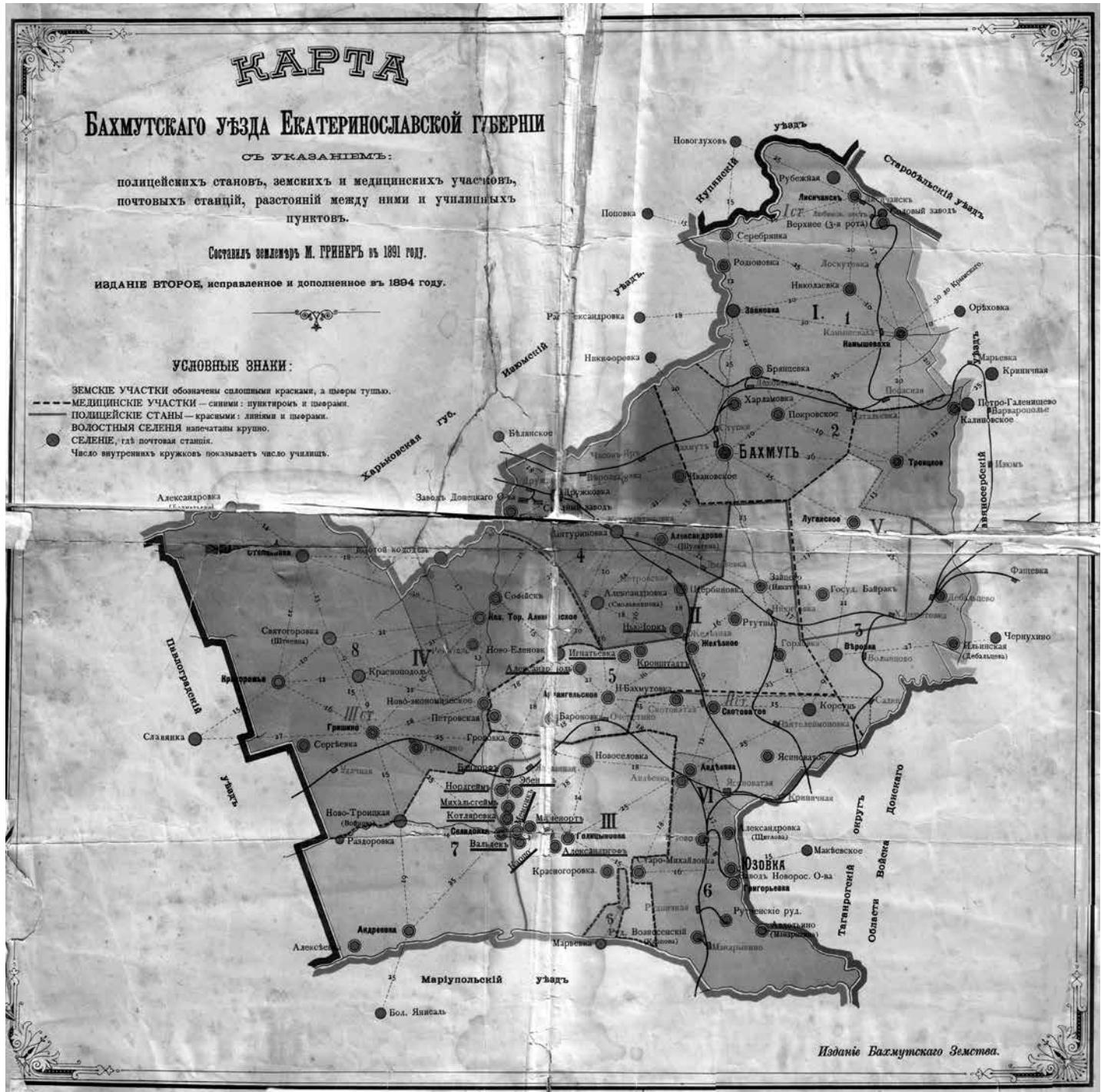
and said, "Heinrich, get back to school!" The teacher had a sour watermelon and he gave each of us a piece and ever since then I enjoyed going to school.

I loved horses and always wanted to go along from the time I was very young. When my father didn't take me along I would crawl under the wagon holding on with both hands and running with my feet. Because I was a small person, this worked quite well. Sometimes my father had travelled for a few miles already when a passerby told him there was a passenger under the wagon. After two years my parents moved to their own farm (they had previously rented land) located in Bachmut district, close to Jusowsk.¹ Our village was called Ignatyevka (#6). My father had lost a lot of money and had little to begin with.

A small creek flowed across our yard in the new settlement. Father dug a cellar nearby, put a roof over it and moved in with his family now consisting of eight people. After some time, there was a huge



A school in the village of Ekaterinovka, in the settlement of Ignatyevo.



The Khortitsa colony purchased land in the district of Bachmut from Count Nikolai Ignatyev. Seven Mennonite villages would form the Ignatyev settlement.

downpour and water flowed into our basement. Father had a hard time keeping us above water, and we all had to climb onto the table, but we managed.

My time to participate in the work arrived, and I had to ride the horse every day while threshing and hoeing. I soon got tired of wanting to go along but my dear father reminded me that I had always had that desire. One day, during the melon ripening time, I was riding a horse with

one horse beside me. Both horses were dragging a large, round stone with which to thresh the grain. Two girls came with a large yellow melon which they wanted to show me. The horses got spooked and began to run. I, with my short legs, fell between the horses. Father saw the danger and within seconds he grabbed the reins and pushed the horses into the wheat where they stopped. This all happened very quickly and now they searched for

me in the straw. The angel of the Lord must have stood guard over me. I was lying on the scale and holding onto it and that is how I was saved from death.

When I was twelve years old I contracted diphtheria. My sister Agnes died from it, but I stayed alive, even though the doctor thought I would die as well. When I was 14 years old I committed my life to the Lord. Pastor Peter Wiebe baptized me on 12 July 1901, when I was 18 years old.

The following winter I thought about America often and spoke to my parents about it. I told my father that once I had completed my service in the army I would leave Russia and go to America. Shortly after that my father asked me if I wanted to leave Russia. I told him that I had read about how different it was in America. All were equal, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned. They did not treat each other the way the Russians do.

After some time, father told me that he and mother had discussed it and agreed that if I wanted to go to America I should not wait too long. Preparations were made and in May we were ready to get the papers. But how? A good friend, P. Niessen, thought he might be able to help. He drove to the city but returned without papers because the officials said I first had to do military service and then I could leave Russia. After my friend, P. Niessen left, my father said to me: "Well, my Heinrich, what do you say now?" In order to think about it I was quiet for a while. But after a while I said, "Father, if you give me time and money..." (In Russia we just always had to work, there was no time for anything else).

Father must have had his thoughts as to how this would all come about, with an inexperienced 19 year old who had never left home and had only attended the village school. He said, "You would like to try to obtain the documents yourself?" "Yes," I replied. "Will you be able to do that?" I told him that I would not return without the documents. My father had to give me the first document, a paper he had to sign to show that he gave me permission to travel in Russia. The second paper I had to obtain from the village mayor. The mayor told me just to go home and work since my father needed my help. (His name was Martin Wiebe). I said, "Uncle Wiebe, I am not leaving until I have the papers." (It was already evening by now). He said, "For night you will probably want to go home." "No," I replied, "Uncle Wiebe, I am not going home until I have the papers. Father has given me his permission in written form, and you as mayor have no right to refuse to give it to me." As I stood there, he reconsidered, and gave me the papers,

although he made some remarks about it.

Next in line was the *Oberschulze*, and since he wasn't at home his secretary gave me the finished documents but told me that the *Oberschulze* would have to sign them. He had gone to another village to visit with the pope.² When I arrived there, they were both in a good mood and signed everything immediately.

Something else about this trip. My father wanted to go to the station to get wood because we were building a barn, and so I could go along with him to the *volost* (district) where the *Oberschulze* was. But because he was not there, I had to walk the rest of the way, which was ten miles. Since I now had three of the documents, I wanted to go to Stanoweg and had to travel by train to Jusowa.³ Since father had left me at the *volost* and I didn't have much money I knew ahead of time that it would not be enough and I would have to save it as much as possible. I was hungry, walked to the train station without a ticket to wait for the *Nadwerakel*.⁴ He told me he didn't have time, I should come later. But I knew he wanted money and I didn't have any. I told him I could wait, he told me to leave, but I said I wanted his signature before I left, and so I stood there for hours. Finally, everyone was gone and I was the only one left. He got angry, I think he wanted to lock up, and told me to leave. He called me some Russian names that were quite vulgar, signed my papers, and I was done. By this time, it was dark. I walked along the road, not knowing where I was going, when all of a sudden, a Russian found me. I had actually hired him to drive me and thought he was long gone, but he had waited and was willing to drive me back since I had not yet paid him. We were not far along the road when he told me this was a dangerous area and he thought someone would soon be coming along who would want money. "Well," I said to him, "then I'd better pay you now," since I only had the amount of money I had promised him, and I paid him. "Well," he said, "what if someone comes now?" "Well then," I said, "I will give him my hat, that is all I have." We drove along for a little while, then he stopped suddenly. "Get off," he told me, "the train

tracks are over there, you can go along the tracks, I'm not driving you any farther." I thanked him and suddenly I was alone on a dark road. I had felt for some time already that I should leave the wagon as soon as possible. I walked along the tracks and thought to myself that there would be a station coming up soon. Lo and behold, it didn't take too long. Around midnight a train arrived. I got in and drove along, but the conductor told me that without money I would not get far and I had to dismount at the next station. I arrived at the waiting room hungry and tired, sat down and fell asleep. I don't know how long I slept, but it was four o'clock in the morning when I woke up. I found out that I was ten miles away from home. On this stretch to our village I had to go through two large Russian villages. This was not so good at night, but I decided to risk it. As I was walking along (it was the month of May) I had the thought that I should remove my shoes so that I would walk quieter, and I did that, and away I went. I hadn't gone very far when I realized that three men were running after me, yelling at me to stop, but I ran as fast as I could (I had learned to do this when I was young, under the wagon) and I got away. When I arrived at home just at sunrise, my dear mother was still in bed. She was very worried about me, and when she heard everything about where I had been she said, "I have decided not to let you travel any more, I was very worried about you, without money or food—now give it up already and do not talk any more about travelling to America."

When I had been home for a few days my father said to me, "Well, Heinrich, what now?" I replied, "When I have time and money again then I will travel to Ekaterinoslav to the governor to get my last papers and then I am going abroad."

"Well," said my father, "then I will take you to the train station tonight." (In the village we didn't know the train arrival and departure times). So, we went at any time and waited until the train arrived. This station was ten miles away from our village, and after that I had to go 300 miles by train. Father discovered that if we waited two hours I could go with a freight train



NATALIYA VENGER

Ekaterinoslav, current-day Dnipro, Ukraine, was a large multi-ethnic city in South Russia.

and arrive at Ekaterinoslav in the morning. I had never been in a large city before and lost my way. There were many Jews in this city and I met some of them in a restaurant. They thought I was another Jew and they gave me advice about how to handle the police, who always want money. When I arrived at the door of the front yard of the governor, the police, who was standing guard outside, sent me back with the comment that it was Friday. The Jew explained that I should come from the other side and when the guard called I should quickly open the door and go inside. The police called, but I was already inside and there was the second one. He asked me what I wanted, I asked for the governor, and he took me to his office. There I met a secretary, a woman, and I gave her my papers.

When she saw my name, she said in German, "A German going to Germany?" "You bet," I said. "Good," she said, "The governor is not here, but will be here in

two hours. Here is a paper. With this you can go through the doors and in two hours you can come again." I arrived in time, and everything was ready for me. In one day I was on the train with my papers on my way home. When I arrived at home my parents were surprised that I came back so soon and was ready for a trip abroad. This was in May 1903.

The last preparations were made quickly, money and whatever else was still missing. On 10 May 1903, I said farewell to my home. "In ten years" father said to me, "I will send you money and you come back for a visit." Father and mother accompanied me to the train station. The name of the city from which I departed at age nineteen was Konstantinovka. The trip took me across Germany to Bremen and from there over the ocean to Halifax, Nova Scotia on the ship Asieria. It took thirteen days to cross the ocean. The trip was good. I did not get seasick and I found a friend, D. D. Neufeld. Strangely

enough, many years later in Canada, he became my brother-in-law, even though he was married at that time. (His wife died and he married my wife's sister).

There is so much I would like to say about Germany. I was in Bremen for eight days. I also drove through Berlin and Koenigsberg, but the people at that time were not polite toward those of us from Russia. Why, I don't know, it was not pleasant. They were very bossy, always thundering their commands at me.

When I arrived in Canada everyone said "please" and "thank you," yes, that is what I was looking for, and now I was here. The address I was looking for, and the place I wanted to go to was John Koop, Bingham Lake, Minnesota. In Halifax I had bought a ticket that took me to Winnipeg, with the idea that I would be quite close to my destination. When I wanted to buy a ticket and told the agent where I wanted to go, he knew nothing of such a city until I wrote it down for him. He told me



MHA05-90

Heinrich Penner wanted to leave Russia even though villages like New York (pictured above) in the Ignatyevо settlement were thriving at that time.

through a translator that I would have to cross another border and I would have to present myself to the office of Uncle Sam. I did everything they asked me to do, paid and left. When all was said and done I had to run to catch the train that took me across the border. On 26 June 1903, I arrived in Bingham Lake, Minnesota at the home of John Koop. Mrs. Koop was my niece on my father's side. She was the youngest in her family. I stayed with the Koops for two months. My payment was \$55.00, and I was happy to have some money as mine was long gone. When I arrived at the Koops, I had to borrow one dollar from Mrs. Koop to pay the man who had driven me there. After that I worked for Peter Wiens with the threshing machine. That fall I earned \$62.00. My third place of employment, and my third winter was with A. J. Wiebe, pastor of the M.B. Church. I worked for \$5.00 per month. The people meant well. I had no extra expenses and had enough money

left over to buy myself some clothes. I soon discovered what it was like there, but I enjoyed it. I took care of 17 horses, 40 head of cattle and 40 pigs. Everything was very well organized. Mr. Wiebe was always the first one to get up in the morning to take care of the livestock. He had the habit of letting his worker sleep until he awoke him. I was with them until threshing time and in summer I received an increase in wages. From there I went to North Dakota for threshing time. I worked for a Mr. Boldt and received \$3.00 a day to stock sheaves. In North Dakota the harvest happened later and so it was harvest time when I arrived. I worked forty-two days for W. Bremer during harvest time, operating the threshing machine, at \$2.75 per day. From there I went to Winkler, Manitoba. I knew some people there. Jacob L. Dyck was my half brother and had arrived from Russia that summer. His wife's maiden name was Schellenberg and she had an aunt here (Mrs. Reimer) and that is

why they came to Winkler, Manitoba. I stayed with the Dycks one month and drove to Minnesota once more. In spring I returned to Manitoba with all my money and the Dycks and I prepared to move to Saskatchewan to buy a homestead there. The homestead was located three miles south of Herbert. My brother had a wife and a child, but no money. I had the money and so we decided to build on my land. They moved onto the farm and I went back to North Dakota to earn some more money. In April of 1905 I seeded 80 acres with four oxen for \$15.00 a month at the Jacob Martens' farm in Herbert. When I finished that job, I left. In North Dakota I first worked for W. Bremer. In June I worked for A. Benke and in May with H. Reimer on the threshing machine. In July I painted at various places. After the threshing time I took a job to deliver the mail for Uncle Sam. I got a button on my cap and everyone had to make way for me while driving. I had to drive 40 miles

every day. In winter it was very cold but I endured it until March.

During the time I was in the U.S.A. J. L. Dycks received word that Mrs. Dyck's parents wanted to emigrate from Russia. The Dycks borrowed money and built a house in town to host their parents. The place where I lived was now empty except for me (although the furniture remained in the house). In Herbert I took employment with I. S. Wiens in the Land Titles Office. At night I drove back to my homestead. At that time there was a law declaring that one had to spend nights on the homestead for six months. If one plowed ten acres of meadow for three years then one received the Land Title. Mrs. Dyck's parents arrived with two daughters. They bought a farm, two miles south, and began building immediately. At that time the paths went across the field and the path to my farm was between their house and their barn. Since we knew each other well, I often stayed with them for supper. In June their daughter, Neta, and I, agreed to get married and we were married by Ältester Benjamin Janz on 22 July 1906. We moved to my farm where we stayed until the month of November. Then I went back to town to work as a clerk in P. P. Kroeker's store (later Kroeker & Co.).

Because my brother Dyck and I were brothers-in-law he made a plan that we would go into business together. He bought a livery and feed stable and persuaded me to quit my job at the store and so we were together. Dyck stayed in the barn and I took over the horse and buggy and drove people. This is the time where the dear Lord held his protective hand over me and accompanied and protected me. Following are just a few of my experiences. At that time there were a lot of ranchers who tended wild cattle under government supervision. The cattle (approximately two to three thousand at a time) required a sulphur bath once a year due to diseases. That was a big job. They built large corrals into which they herded the cattle. It was dangerous to get the wild herd into the corral. One day, when I was helping (on foot not horseback) and watching a designated spot, a large ox ran past me and knocked me over, a whole herd galloping

after him. A cowboy, trained to watch for danger, was there immediately. I got away with a scare and a hard knock. They all thought I was trampled underfoot, but the Lord held his protective hand over me. That day I was sent home because the person in charge thought I might have other injuries.

There were twenty-five miles to drive. After I drove out of the mountains I had to drive through a deep ravine. One of the horses stumbled and pulled the reins as well as the buckle through the ring on the harness and so I had only one rein. It was very steep, on both sides towering mountains, what now? The horses kept going faster and faster and I pulled on one rein as we began climbing up. When I arrived at the top the line was still caught even though I tried my best to loosen it. On this mountain there was a large flat area and I tried to steer the horses in as large a circle as I could manage. Miraculously, the rein loosened. I pulled the horses to a standstill and took a break, thanking God for the amazing rescue. That was the second miracle on one trip.

Another time I had driven sixty miles south of Herbert with two men (the first time I was north of Herbert). At that time the farms were very far apart. We only found one rancher and at night we found ourselves on open prairie thirty-five miles from this rancher. I didn't know what to do as my horses were very spooked. I unhitched them, tied them together with one of the reins and tied the other around my leg. We then sat down in the buggy but it didn't take long for the horses to spook and they pulled me along. Fortunately, they soon stopped and I realized the danger into which I had put myself. I could have died. I was so tired that I couldn't help falling asleep, so I discussed it with the others and decided to tie the horses to the wagon shaft. We would each sit by a wheel and when the horses tried to pull away we would hold the reins. We sat until three in the morning when suddenly the pull was so strong that the reins tore and the horses were gone. It took us thirty days to find them. There were just the three of us with one buggy, and we didn't know how far it was to the

next farm. I told them I would walk to the rancher who lived thirty-five miles away. I knew the way, but it was the month of July and very hot. I left at 3 a.m. and had a long day ahead of me. As a young boy I could run fast and I took off in a horse's trot. I had no food with me except for a small piece of cheese, so ate nothing. The higher the sun rose, the greater was my thirst. It was around three in the afternoon when I arrived at the rancher's place. On the way I had to cross a fenced-in area of 28 miles, containing wild cattle. I thought I had seen my last days. I was able to wet my tongue with some very dirty water. When I arrived at the rancher's place he was not at home. I sat down by the well, grabbed the pump and was finally able to quench my thirst. Then I was overcome by fatigue. I lay down and slept. I don't know how long I slept, but after some time the rancher (Tom Walsch) arrived, woke me up and asked me what I wanted. "Tom" I told him, "I need a horse to ride home." He immediately fetched a horse and saddled it. "Tom," I said, "we'll see each other again." I rode another 30 miles to Herbert, there I put the horse in the barn, walked home, a block away from the barn, then went straight to bed. That is when I really realized how weak I was. The effort, the thirst, the hunger! The Lord gave grace and I was able to overcome the hardships I had endured. The second day I took a "sulky" (two wheels) with a horse and retrieved the buggy. The other two men were no longer there. It took me two days to get the buggy.

The next time it had to do with water problems again. But this time there was too much water, not too little. I drove sixty miles north of Herbert with a government agent. There we had to cross the Saskatchewan River. We couldn't go across with the ferry and I thought we would return but the man said no. We drove to the second ferry. The ferry man came and talked with the man who was with me, and I discovered that he was a secret police agent. The ferry man had to take us across, but couldn't do it with the ferry, so we went across by canoe. When I looked around I saw that another man was trying to cross the river with the horses and

buggy. I just saw the two horses' heads and the human head. I turned to the policeman and said, "We will lose our horses." He calmly answered me that the government would pay for any losses. Luckily, we made it across. By that time, it was morning. Now we could walk on dry land further into the forest. He told me to stop, walked into the forest and disappeared. After a short time, someone came and asked me what I wanted. I told him that I had driven a man here and that he went into the bush. The man quickly ran back. I waited hours until the policeman (in plain clothes) returned and told me to feed the horses. He showed me a barn and went into the house. But, what was going on there? I felt bad to see a group of men with a bad smell I didn't recognize. I thought that I wanted to get away from there as quickly as possible. When we left I asked him what he wanted at that place. He told me the neighbours were arguing over borders. However, I believe they were crossing borders of the law because that's what it smelled like (homebrew). Now we went toward the river again and I was happy that it was dark, that way I couldn't see the dangers of the river. The ferry man was not there, but the policeman knew what to do. He made a small fire and soon two men came with a canoe from the other side of the river and took us back again the way they brought us across before. I was thankful to God that the river separated me from those evil people. After five days we arrived safely in Herbert again.

Another time I took a trip in a blizzard. I no longer knew where I was going. I was alone. The horses would not give up. The farms were very far apart, but at midnight I saw a light and I knew that that is where I wanted to go. Sometimes I couldn't see it but then it lit up again. It was very cold. When I arrived there, I was so disorientated that the next morning the dear man who lived there had quite a time explaining to me how I should go home. I wanted to take a different road, away from the city, this time with a sled.

Another time I was on the buggy with four other men seventy miles from the town of Herbert on the prairies. We wanted to look at some land when it began

to snow. We wanted to hurry because we knew the danger of getting lost. If we did not find shelter we could freeze to death. I told the men who were looking for land that two should walk on each side of the buggy (half a mile behind it). That way they could still see me driving in the middle. I went straight south with the help of my compass. I drove for half an hour when I saw one of the men come toward me. I asked him "What's wrong, and where is your partner?" He told me, "I'm not coming to you, you are coming

in our eyes we found each other. That was an amazing experience, hungry and frozen as he was, we were happy to have him back among us. We were so thankful to God for the protection he had granted us. When we went to rest I heard the men telling each other what had all happened that day and how they had given up hope that they would ever return home alive. When all five of us were in the buggy they said that they thought I too had lost my way and that we would never find our way back. When we returned to Herbert that

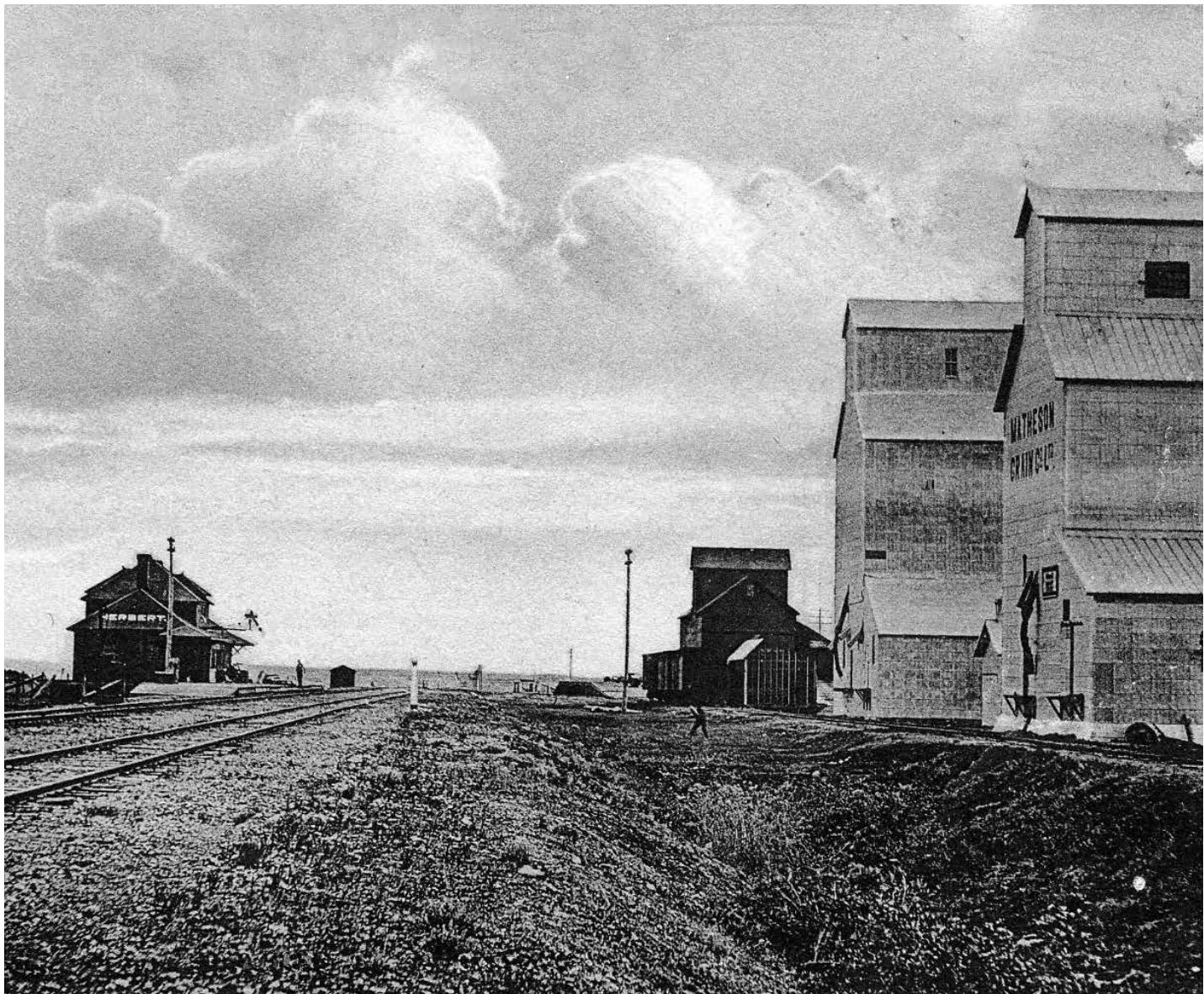


Penner bought a homestead three miles south of Herbert, Saskatchewan.

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS PAMPHLET COLLECTION LXX-97

to me." Then I knew that he was lost. It was eleven o'clock in the morning and I went immediately to find his partner, but in vain. He was not to be found. We drove to the other side and there we found two men. So now we had to find the fourth one. We searched until four o'clock in the afternoon, but in vain. After some talk back and forth I said, "It's better if one is lost than if we are all lost," and drove toward the place where we had spent the night. It had cleared up and I told the three men they should look everywhere for the lost man. I drove as much as possible over the hills, and all at once I heard someone yelling, "Isn't that a person over there?" I stopped and asked them to make some kind of movement with their hats to see if we would receive an answer. Sure enough, he gave the same sign back. We immediately drove back and with tears

morning (we still had to drive sixty miles) they told me that they never wanted to see this prairie again. Thanks be to God we arrived home safely. They drove away and I took others to show them the land because many very badly wanted to buy land. That spring I was home for only three days in three months. I think I was too inexperienced. I just saw everything from a positive perspective. One day in fall, when the days were short I drove a man to a rancher. It was twenty-five miles from Herbert and I had never been there. Fresh snow had just fallen. The last farmer lived nine miles from the city and at that time there were no roads, just tracks. We drove toward the ranch on freshly fallen snow, without a road. We saw cattle and piles of hay but no buildings. Finally, we came to a fence. I had heard that the fence was twenty-eight miles long. What now?



We drove along to try to find a way, but in vain. We stopped and listened to try to hear animals bellowing. We walked over the snow. All at once my partner said "A horse has run here, but in the other direction." We assumed it was a cowboy and his horse. We went in that direction, and luckily, we came to the buildings just after midnight.

My health suffered under all these difficult circumstances and I decided to sell my half of the business to my brother Jacob and move to a farm. This was in spring, but by fall we decided to move into the city of Herbert. When my brother was alone in the livery stable he was racking his brain about how he could get me back as his partner. He knew I would not want to go back to the barn, so he sold it and

bought a machine shop so I could stay at home (i.e. I wouldn't have to drive out to the country.) There we did a booming business for a couple of years, until 1913. I must add that my wife was often quite sickly in the last few years and in fall of 1912 we decided to go to California to get medical help. My brother Jacob sold half of the business and also $\frac{3}{4}$ section of the land, so we only kept 4 and $\frac{1}{4}$ with the buildings. We rented them out and stayed in the city. Since my wife had surgery by Dr. Abert in Paradise Sanitarium she was very weak and I stayed home until 1914. Then I took a position in D. Brownstone's store. I really enjoyed this work, but my wife's health left much to be desired and we decided to move to Oregon, U.S.A. However, I did not enjoy the work, espe-

cially in the saw mill. My hearing had weakened considerably as well. I left the family there, we had four children by this time, and went back to Herbert to take up my much-loved work in the store, this time at J. B. Miller & Co.

It was 1923 when a typhoid epidemic broke out in Herbert. My whole family became ill and Lizzie (Elizabeth, Lieschen) died in December. My wife died on 20 January 1924.

¹ It is unclear what this location refers to—editor.

² He uses the word Papst. Obviously the Oberschulze was not visiting the Roman Catholic Pope. But in Russia, the Orthodox priest could be called "pop," pronounced pope which might explain his use of this term—editor.

³ It is unclear what locations he is referring to in this sentence—editor.

⁴ The meaning of this term is unclear. My guess is that word should be Nachal'nik which means chief—editor.

A FIVE DOLLAR “MODUS VIVENDI”

Bruce Wiebe

A “Modus Vivendi that was eventually reached” according to E. K. Francis¹ and, a “pattern of peaceful co-existence between Gebietsamt and municipality gradually developed and with it an acceptable modus vivendi” according to Adolf Ens.² This describes the results following an encounter that Johan Friesen³ later recorded as Ältester Johan Wiebe having been summoned to Morden and

appearing before a judge with regard to the lack of cooperation on the part of the Manitoba Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde members with the provincially imposed municipal government. The church members did not participate in municipal elections and refused to serve as councillors or in any appointed positions. The Gebietsamt tax and financial records were not shared with the elected

Council and the turnover of the administrative office in Reinland to Council was opposed.

The defining moment in achieving this “acceptable modus vivendi,” however, appears not to have resulted from court intervention as has been previously thought. What actually occurred was certainly less confrontational. The 3 December 1883 elected (by acclamation) Rhineland Municipal Council,⁴ which had replaced the 1880 provincially appointed Council headed by Isaac Miller as Warden, requested that their Solicitor, John B. McLaren of Morden, should meet with Ältester Johan Wiebe and *Obervorsteher* Isaac Miller. In response to a letter from McLaren, Wiebe and Miller met with McLaren in his Morden office on 30 November 1886.

There is no mention of a translator having been present at this meeting and Isaac Miller was doubtlessly sufficiently conversant in English, his duties as Obervorsteher having put him in regular contact with government authorities as well as with businessmen in Emerson and Winnipeg. This accord ushered in the period of peaceful co-existence allowing the Rhineland Municipal Council to fulfill their responsibilities while the West Reserve Gebietsamt continued unofficially with theirs.

Just prior to this meeting, McLaren who had until now billed for his individual services, requested of Council to be put on retainer, \$50 annually for all his services, but this was declined by Council on 10 November 1886,⁵ hence the \$5 fee.

A letter from McLaren reporting back to Rhineland Council is reproduced here:⁶

J.B. McLaren, M.A.
Barrister
Morden, Man. 30 November, 1886

William Rempel, Esq.
Secty-Treasurer Rhineland Municipality
Reinland

Dear Sir,

Today in answer to my letter, the bishop Mr. Wiebe, accompanied by Mr. Miller, called upon me; and we had a long talk about Municipal Matters and about the petition sent to me by your council. We spent most of the afternoon in discussion. I was not able to convince them that they were wrong in objecting to serve as councilmen or pathmasters; but I think they now understand more clearly the object and nature of the Municipal Act, and that they are inclined to regard it more favourably than before. They say that they will obey the Government and also that they will conform to the Municipal law and pay their taxes and do their road-work without any trouble; and that all the people of their church will do the same; but they do not wish to serve in the council, or as pathmasters or officers of the Council. I suppose there is no objection to allowing them that privilege or exemption. They say that in every village or locality there are plenty of men not of their community, who are willing to serve and act. They have promised not to oppose in any way or hinder the Council in their duties, or any of its officers, or prevent the proper working of the Act.

Yours truly
J.B. McLaren
Fee \$5.00

¹ E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona: D.W. Friesen, 1955), 95.

² Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 74.

³ *Ein Reisebericht von Russland nach Amerika anno 1875 herausgegeben vom Ältesten Johann Wiebe* (Cuauhtemoc, Mexico: Librería Aleman, 1994), 37.

⁴ Ens, 71.

⁵ R. M. of Rhineland November 10, 1886 Council Minutes and January 11, 1887 By-Law No. 34.

⁶ Altona & District Heritage Research Inc, R. M. of Rhineland, Correspondence 1886, Location 14.



MHA698-042.

Manitoba Mennonite Heritage Photography Project

Dr. Susie Fisher and a team of top-notch researchers (Andrea Dyck, Mennonite Heritage Village; Frieda Klippenstein, Parks Canada; Dr. Roland Sawatzky, Manitoba Museum; Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Heritage Archives; Anikó Szabó, Art Director and Graphic Designer) are embarking on an exciting book project that engages the creative work of three photographers who lived in Manitoba Mennonite villages in the early twentieth century. The three

photographers are Peter G. Hamm (1883–1965) of Neubergthal (West Reserve), Peter H. Klippenstein (1878–1960) of Altberghthal (West Reserve), and Johann E. Funk (1876–1968) of Schönwiese (East Reserve). The Plett Foundation is a proud supporter of this project, which was awarded a publication grant in 2018. This extensive collection of photographs presents an unparalleled lens into daily life and culture in Mennonite village settings throughout Manitoba.



PETER H. KLIPPENSTEIN COLLECTION, MHA 1013



MHA 526-42-002

The work of early Mennonite photographers, like Peter G. Hamm, are preserved as glass plate and film negatives at the Mennonite Heritage Archives and the Mennonite Heritage Village Archives.

A Tribute to Dr. Hans Werner

Royden Loewen

It is my pleasure to salute Hans Werner on his retirement as Mennonite history professor and executive director of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc. He has held this position at the University of Winnipeg since July 2005, a time during which he helped shape the Plett Foundation and provide it with sterling leadership. During this time he has exercised his duties with dignity, thoughtfulness and a steady hand. The Plett Foundation Executive Director is an exacting position, requiring community outreach, financial oversight, and

editorial skills and, because it is linked to the broader enterprise of Mennonite history, it also includes the role of a teacher, researcher, and committee member.

Hans has also served to advance Mennonite scholarship and the social history of Mennonites in particular. His Ph.D. dissertation, *Imagined Homes: Soviet Germans in Two Cities*, published by the University of Manitoba Press, allowed his skills as an immigration historian to shine; he compared and contrasted a sending society (the Soviet Union) to two very different receiving societies

(Bielefeld, Germany and Winnipeg, Canada), and then within this comparison he also accounted for different faith expressions, including that of the Baptists, Lutherans, and Mennonites. His second book, *Living Between Worlds*, was a community history of Winkler, a place in which Hans (a son of an immigrant family in the East Reserve) made his home with his wife Diana (a daughter of West Reserve settlers), farmed with his extended family, served as a young man as chair of the town's credit union, and raised their three children – Christopher, Melissa, and Julia. His third book, *The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory, and the Second World War*, took him in yet another direction, to the memories recorded in a lengthy oral history project with his father, John Werner. Hans introduced his readers to the fascinating story of 'Johann' born in Siberia, who served in the Russian Army as 'Ivan,' and then in German forces as 'Hans', and finally, who

worked as a mechanic for the US Army as 'John', a name he kept when he moved to Manitoba in 1948. His father's many names were made meaningful by a deft hand and an inquisitive and empathetic mind that in so doing also seriously engaged the theoretical underpinnings of memoir studies. Hans's most recent book venture, a global historical atlas of Dutch-North German Mennonite migrations will open up this story to a multi-variant set of explanations, including those related to class, ethnicity, and gender, but also to mobility, acculturation, agricultural innovation, and environmental relations; further, it will link the disparate worlds of Western Europe, Russia, North America and the Americas more generally.

Among his most noted pieces of scholarship are his many papers given at conferences and published in various journals; Hans's papers are always innovative and ever seeking of alternate explanations from those offered in the traditional canon. His work on an unlicensed female herbal medical practitioner, sued by Manitoba's College of Physicians in the 1890s, pointed to ideas of social boundary and gender in an insightful manner. His work on pre-marital sex and pre-nuptially conceived children among Manitoba settlers, based on extensive research on genealogical and marriage records, was among the most widely read articles ever published in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*: it evidently asked questions everyone else was too afraid to ask. His paper on land sale records for Mennonites who moved from Manitoba to Mexico shed light on a long-held consternation of how it was that Old Colonists could move from the richest farms of the West Reserve and then be caught in a sharply downward financial vortex in Mexico. Other papers on a Mennonite deported from Canada to Russia in about 1930 because he failed mental health standards and then disappeared into Russia's maze of madhouses, or a paper at the recent Holocaust



Hans's retirement dinner hosted by the board of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation. L-R: Kerry Fast, Robyn Sneath, John J. Friesen, Abe Rempel, Conrad Stoesz, Kennert Giesbrecht, Royden Loewen, Leonard Doell. Hans is seated in a well-deserved place of honour.

conference in Kansas where Hans reported on careful research about Nazism and the Mennonite in hidden places, all point to a willingness to pose difficult questions.

Along the way Hans served the University community itself in multiple ways. Most notably he was a long-serving member of the University of Winnipeg Pension Board, but also served with distinction on numerous Department of History committees, as well as on the editorial board of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. Hans could always be counted on to provide independent thought and insight. No doubt, looking back, he will be best remembered for having served as the architect of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies. Perhaps it was created through collaborative effort, but the Centre was his idea, and the structure of it cast by his steady mind. The Centre was created to allow the next generation of Mennonite historians at the University of Winnipeg

to recognize that Mennonite Studies in today's world can never focus solely on one country. In this instance it allowed the Plett Foundation, with its focus on the Dutch-North German-descendant Mennonite diaspora in the Americas, to be linked to the global Mennonite community. And linked to the Centre was another one of Hans's ideas and that was its partnership with Canadian Mennonite University and Mennonite Church Canada to take over the archives at Mennonite Heritage Centre and put it on a new foundation with a full time archivist, a re-cast transnational mandate, and new name, the Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Hans is a friend to a great many folks. The size of the McNally Robinson bookstore audience gathered for any one of his regular book launches is always held as a standard against which to judge other launches. His friendships are based always on his magnanimous personality, quick wit, and friend-

liness. At the University we will all remember his many stories: often intricate, full of irony, heartfelt, always entertaining and timely. He would sprinkle his exchanges with wisdoms and adages: history is the process by which the present is made to seem inevitable; it is a virtue not to be tempted to write your memoirs; we should all have the right to be forgotten; beware of the two dimensional person. He would be self-deprecating and always speak about his family in positive, not boastful terms. He would speak of his 'most remarkable' wife, or of his 'sharp penciled' children in a high-cost housing market, or their abilities to turn misfortune on its head with a good dose of cunning and chutzpah. Of course he would also say that for some reason his own grandchildren were the smartest and most beautiful kids he had ever met.

Hans's accomplishments and his sense of citizenship, his congeniality and kindness enriched daily life for all of us, includ-

ing Andrea Dyck, the executive assistant at the Centre. He certainly made my life as Chair in Mennonite Studies easier, in every respect. Hans was an excellent teacher: among his many admirers is a student who wrote this about him: "The best prof at the U of W hands down. Hans has made me a better writer, thinker, debater and student. Here is a man whose true calling is teaching." This record of teaching and indeed of service allowed me to approach the Vice President when Hans announced his retirement, not to ask for a new Mennonite historian who could double as Executive Director of the Plett Foundation, but simply for the permission to 'replace Hans.'

It was an easy request to make; filling his shoes will be more difficult. We all wish Hans a magnificent retirement, happy sailings on Lake Winnipeg, an easy and joyous time with his wife Diana and family, and much more of his innovative historical enquiry.

Strangers and Pilgrims

Volume II

The English-language version of *Strangers and Pilgrims, Volume II: How Mennonites are Changing Landscapes in Latin America*, published by Die Mennonitische Post, was released in September 2018. The first volume of this series was published in 1987 and as, Kennert Giesbrecht, the author of volume II and managing editor of the Post, notes in the foreword, the world of Low German Mennonites has

expanded to almost four times its size since then, with approximately 160 colonies spread throughout the Americas today. *Strangers and Pilgrims, Volume II* provides an update on the history and life of Mennonites in the established colonies in countries like Mexico, Belize, Bolivia, and Paraguay. It also gives readers insights into the life of the newest Mennonite settlements in Argentina, Peru, Brazil, and Colombia, about which very little scholarship exist. Recognizing the need for a bilingual publication, *Strangers and Pilgrims, Volume II* was released in separate German- and English-language versions, both featuring full-colour photographs and maps that help to give shape and context to the history of these Mennonite communities. The Plett Foundation is a proud supporter of the *Strangers and Pilgrims, Volume II* project. The English-language book was awarded a Plett Foundation publication grant in 2017, which helped to fund its publishing, printing, and distribution costs.

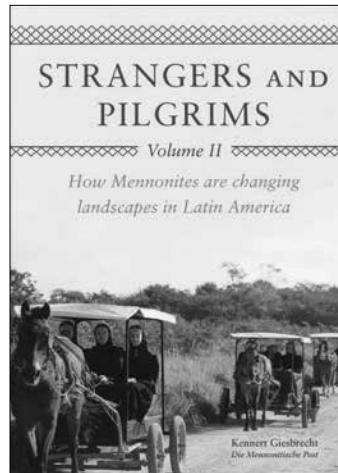
CTMS Annual Lecture

At the 3rd Annual CTMS lecture, held at the University of Winnipeg on May 17, 2018, Dr. Rebecca Janzen, Assistant Professor at the University of South Carolina, delivered an engaging talk entitled "Unexpected Connections: Mennonites in Mexican Media." By exploring the portrayal of Mennonites in Mexican archival documents, photographs, and television, she helped to shed light on the complicated ways in which Mennonites have been presented in Mexican culture.

Dr. Rebecca Janzen's research focuses on Mexican literature and culture, with special attention to religion, gender and disability studies. Her first book, *The National Body in Mexican Literature: Collective Challenges to Biopolitical Control* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015), explored images of disability and illness in 20th century texts. Her second book, *Liminal Sovereignty: Mennonites and Mormons in Mexican Popular Culture* (SUNY, 2018), focuses on religious minorities.



ANDREADYCK



Beyond The Village Circle

Narratives by Mennonite Women from Bolivia

By Martha Hiebert
Steinbach, Manitoba
Self-published, 2017, pp. 99. Softcover.

Reviewed by Kerry Fast

Beyond the Village Circle is a collection of sixteen stories, vignettes according to the author, drawn from the lives of Bolivian Mennonite women. They are easy to read, some as short as three pages, others as long as thirteen pages. In total, eight colonies and three communities are represented, and two stories are anonymous.

It is not an easy thing to speak strangers and ask them if they would be willing to talk to you about their lives, and Martha Hiebert is to be lauded for her determination in pursuing her dream of more than twenty years and putting herself very much outside her comfort zone to bring us these stories. Hopefully the German they are translated into will make the book accessible to the women who told their stories to Martha.

While each story is unique, several themes are apparent, and along the way we get glimpses of Bolivian Mennonite life: Old Colony piety, community and family dynamics, intergenerational relations, colony life, and Mennonite–Bolivian interactions.

A disproportionate number of stories are about *Doktimumkjes* (healers) or midwives, but this is perhaps not surprising. These are women who interact with a variety of people on a daily basis, both Mennonite and Bolivian, and who

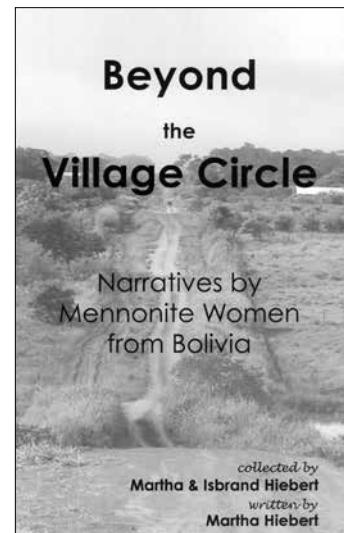
travel regularly to Santa Cruz for supplies and to give assistance to their clients as they visit doctors, and thus telling their story to a stranger may not have been as intimidating as for women who do not have a public role in village life. We read of Anna Banman who inherited her mother's practice and Anna Doerksen, who, after nursing her husband who had MS for many years, was instrumental in establishing a care home for seniors. Eva Friesen took over a neighbour's pharmacy in part because colony leadership had approached her to take over a government-run immunization program on her colony, and she had found this medical work meaningful. Lottie Friesen fulfilled a childhood dream by becoming a Doktimumkje and developed a partnership with a Bolivian doctor to further her medical knowledge. We read of the harrowing night Greta Klassen delivered three babies—all in a night's work!—and of Helena Bergen who was brought up in her parents' practice and who, at the age of eighteen, successfully delivered a baby of her own. These are stories of women actively engaged in their communities, providing a vital service and finding meaning in attending to the health needs of their fellow Mennonites.

Another theme around which several stories circle is re-loca-

tion to Bolivia. Maria Wiebe, who as a teenager resisted her family's move from Paraguay to Bolivia, tells us how she was reminded of a hymn by a neighbour that sustained her throughout her life. The story of Lena Hildebrandt reveals a woman who took the challenges of settling in Bolivia in stride. Aganetha Doerksen too took her new life in stride, but also found humour in what others might have seen as a hardship. On the first morning of their new life in Bolivia, she and her family woke to find themselves covered in sand and soot from an overnight wind storm. They couldn't help but laugh at how funny they looked. Susanna Fast and her husband not only resettled their own family from Mexico, but took in a neighbour woman with a handicap and welcomed her into their new life in Bolivia. The story of Katharina Rempel, who moved from Swift Colony in Mexico, is a fitting final story of the collection. Her daughter was the first baby to be born on the new colony of Chihuahua.

And then there are stories of religious tension as women turned to more evangelical forms of Christianity. For one woman and her family, this meant being evicted from their rented home. Martha Kehler experienced the difficulty of moving from Canada to Bolivia, and her family, feeling constrained by the expectations of colony life, could never entirely accept Old Colony life nor were they ever entirely accepted. Maria Harder and her husband, driven off their colony because of a violent attack on her husband, eventually set up a small hotel and dedicated their lives to serve the community around them. Helena Janzen tells the story of her husband's painful excommunication from the Old Colony and their move to a community of evangelical Mennonites. These are more difficult stories to read because they remind us of the reality of intra-community conflict and of power imbalances that exist in communities.

Certainly for all of the women whose stories appear in *Beyond the Village Circle*, their worlds



stretch well beyond the village. Many have lived in more than one country, and many of them have had experiences that made them re-think their place in their colony. For others, their daily work of providing healthcare brings them in contact with a wide circle of people. But even as the women's lives extend beyond their village, these stories are bound together by the village circle. They show us the central role women play in Bolivian Mennonite life, they show us the fabric of village life and the tensions that exist there, but they also show us how these women invested in their communities to establish a place for themselves.

La Batea 55 Jahre

La Honda, Mexico

Self-published, 2017, pp 156. Softcover.

Die 17 Kolonien in Campeche

La Honda, Mexico

Self-published. Softcover

By Peter T. Bergen

Reviewed by Helen Ens

La Batea 55 Jahre and *Die 17 Kolonien in Campeche*, Mexico are two picture books compiled, written and published by Peter T. Bergen. It is written in an easy to understand German, although people in Germany might find the writing style and grammar somewhat antiquated.

The photography in this volume is amazing. Peter Bergen must have gone to great lengths to put this collection together. How did he manage to get these marvellous aerial photos? The pictures tell their own stories of the hardship of pioneering.

In the 1870s many Mennonites left the south Ukrainian steppe to become pioneers on the prairies of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Within fifty years of their settlement, many of them pulled up their stakes from their comfortable villages, which were located almost at sea level, and moved to a plateau of the San Antonio Valley, a plateau of approximately two thousand meters above sea level, in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Another colony settled in the state of Durango, also at a similar altitude. They were motivated by the fact that the Canadian government demanded that they send their children to public schools where the language of instruction was to be English and a host of other subjects were to be taught,

ignoring their privileges promised them in 1873. In 1962, this time for economic reasons like land scarcity, a large number of this same group of Old Colony Mennonites again moved from their homes in Durango, joined by others from Chihuahua, to the neighbouring state of Zacatecas. Here they formed the La Batea Colony. From here some would move in 1983 to the state of Campeche. Four major migrations in a little bit more than a hundred years, which always involved settling in locations where clearing the land was necessary even before tilling virgin soil was possible! With that in mind the two picture books speak volumes.

"La Batea" means "the basin," and that is exactly what this area is: a huge basin enclosed on all sides by mountains, still at an altitude of 2,430 meters above sea level. Long before Mennonites came to occupy this land a tunnel had been dug to drain the lake Valderamo when too much water accumulated there. This drainage tunnel is still in use. There are good maps at the back of both books, but I would have appreciated a complete map of all of Mexico with the names of all the different Mennonite settlements and their respective states.

This land at La Batea was bought from an engineer, Angel

Mier. He and his family remained living within the area of the colony for several years and there seems to have been a fair bit of social interchange between them and the colony. I was looking for signs of the non-Mennonite culture rubbing off on the Old Colony Mennonites. Maybe I detected something in a picture on page 14. Also, it was interesting to note where and when rubber tires on tractors made their appearance.

Bergen has also, in the La Batea volume, included a brief but comprehensive history of the Mennonites from the times of Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons, to life in Ukraine, and the move of the Old Colonists to Mexico. The latter is a graphic report of the search for land in Latin America, where they would be assured of their special privileges, which included having their private schools, using the German language, and maintaining their unique way of living. He also illustrates the moves to the Chavi Colony in Campeche and the Fresnillo Colony in Bolivia.

Let me translate the first paragraph of the message Bergen has put on the back cover of the Campeche volume: "Come with me to the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, to the State of Campeche, for a trip through the seventeen Mennonite colonies. During the last almost four decades massive groups of Mennonites have come to settle in this southern state of Mexico in the midst of a jungle where there was hardly any agriculture before the advent of the Mennonites; also in the midst of the archeological zones of the Mayas." I was disappointed that this last sentence was the only reference to the very rich history of the Mayas, who inhabited this region during the pre-Hispanic era and left many footprints.

The front and back cover pages of this volume are very informative. The front page has a small, typical picture taken in each colony with the respective name of the colony and the year it was started. There are no German names: all of them are in Spanish!



I find the top three pictures on the back cover most intriguing. The first displays an age-old tradition, dating back to Russia, maybe even to Prussia, in which dough that has been kneaded in community, is now being distributed among the neighbours for baking Kringle and buns. This is done for any *Gaustjibott* (social gathering), whether it be a wedding or a funeral. In the second picture a girl in proper Old Colony apparel and hat displays pumpkin/squash seeds, a new cash crop grown in the colonies. It demonstrates the capacity for adjusting to new environments and climates, especially in the field of agriculture. I counted at least ten new and different crops grown in these colonies by the Mennonites, all shown in this book. The third picture shows the advent of electricity and the use of rubber tires on tractors, which in this case is used to transport a bevy of girls dressed in their Sunday finery. The bottom picture portrays the commercial centre of Hopelchen where you can encounter Mennonites at any hour of the day.

The pictures in both books have captured the spirit of pioneering of these groups of Mennonites and historical societies owe a debt of thanks to Peter T. Bergen for his efforts to save the past for future generations. As he writes, "This book is not a complete history of each colony, only a shallow overview. But if it serves to spur the people on to write down their stories so that they do not get lost then one goal has been achieved."

Johannes der Evangelist über alle Kapitel erklärt

Ein Täuferischer Bibelkommentar von 1597

By Hauprecht Zapff
Edited by Martin Rothkegel
MacGregor, Manitoba
Hutterian Brethren Book Centre, 2017,
pp. 446. Hardcover
Reviewed by Titus Guenther

Sermons in Hutterian communities were traditionally based on an extensive Corpus of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works of Bible interpretations by their leaders (iii). The manuscript that forms the core of *Johannes der Evangelist* by Hauprecht Zapff (now added to this Corpus) was discovered in the Library of the Brunkenthal Museum in Hermannstadt (Sibiu, Romania).

The publication of this meticulous, verse-by-verse Commentary on the Gospel of John by Hauprecht Zapff (1546–1630), Hutterian preacher and Bible scholar (vii), is clearly a special addition to the previously published biblical teachings from this Anabaptist branch of the church. Other writings by Zapff include several sermons, a comprehensive Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, a Little Handbook for catechesis, as well as five hymns for his Hutterite faith family (viii).

Zapff's work falls within the latter part of the "golden era" of Hutterian theological and biblical writings. According to the foreword, the Hutterites continue "to draw on the literary legacy of their forebears from the sixteenth century: Peter Riedemann's

Rechenschaft, the Great History Book, the "Ancestral Hymns," the Great Book of Articles, as well as numerous Confessions, Letters, and Documents all originated in this foundational century" (i)—now expanded by Zapff's *Johanneskommentar*, unearthed by Martin Rothkegel.

In view of Zapff's historical timeframe, readers may expect him to show a strong convergence in methodology with his predecessors. However, while sharing some traits with teachers, he also diverges from them. Rothkegel, church historian and editor of this commentary on John, demonstrates that Zapff does not follow the "paraphrasing" method so central to Riedemann and others in their biblical interpretation—Riedemann, e.g., produced "paraphrases" of each Synoptic Gospel and fragments of paraphrases on John's Gospel.

By contrast, Zapff offers an "expository commentary" (*Expositionskommentar*). That is, exegesis for Zapff is not a running "transcription" of the biblical text but an interpretive commentary clearly distinct from and longer than the actual Bible verse(s) being interpreted (x). Specifically, this

manuscript of Zapff's *Täuferischer Bibelkommentar* on John uses the text of the 1524 German New Testament, published in Zürich (xi). In Rothkegel's edition of the commentary, the Bible verses are helpfully set apart in bold print while Zapff's exposition appears separately in light print.

Since Zapff eschewed university education (cf. 331, et al.), his exposition, accordingly, shows no evidence of him using Greek or Latin biblical texts. While he does not extensively follow the paraphrasing method, he does subscribe to the "Reformation principle that Scripture interprets itself" (xi). Thus, Zapff adduces a great many parallel Scripture verses from both Old and New Testaments in order to elucidate the particular words of a given text. Rothkegel notes a "three-step" method to the work of Zapff: "explanation of the plain sense of the words, revelation of the hidden spiritual meaning (through use of allegory or typology) and practical application for the Hutterite congregation" (xif). What distinguishes Zapff most from Riedemann and contemporaries is the importance he assigns to the "literal or historical" meaning of the biblical text (xii).

Zapff does subscribe to the allegorizing and typological method. Rothkegel explains that typology allows Zapff to interpret, for instance, all issues mentioned in John's Gospel referring to the Mosaic Law, Israel's worship practices and the Land of Palestine as pointing to Jesus Christ and the salvation wrought by him. Furthermore, Zapff sees Christ's teaching as pointing to the Hutterite church and its proclamation and ordinances (xii).

The Christology at the centre of Zapff's *Johannes der Evangelist*, is interesting. Unlike the Polish "anti-trinitarian" Anabaptist Brethren, and unlike the Melchiorite Anabaptist doctrine of incarnation—though these groups are not directly named—Zapff defends "the pre-existence and divinity of Christ and his essential oneness with the Father"



(John 1:1ff. and throughout) (xii). Another pervasive theme in this *Johanneskommentar* is that of the "new birth," wrought solely by the Holy Spirit; only those "born again," followed by the outward sign of baptism, are enabled for true discipleship, practiced within the Hutterite communion and its ordinances (xiiif).

In order to make Zapff's pre-modern German manuscript accessible, Rothkegel most helpfully "transcribed" the manuscript with certain grammatical and spelling adjustments while also preserving the original texture. In the footnotes, the editor offers modern counterparts to the manuscript's antiquated terms and phrases. But Rothkegel's wonderful introduction (vii–xx) is more than helpful; it is decisive for conveying the book's message and contextualizing it in its historical setting and Hutterian "church-culture." Rothkegel's introduction alone provides extensive insights into Hutterite history, life, and theology.

The fact that Zapff's *Johannes der Evangelist* is published in German will surely delimit the reach of this most valuable book. Clearly however, all Hutterite leaders/communities and other church history scholars with fluency in German, will find Rothkegel's edition of Zapff a rich window into the life of this Anabaptist church branch.

Transformation on the Southern Ukrainian Steppe

Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies
Vol 1: 1812–1835

By Harvey L. Dyck and John R. Staples

Translated by Ingrid I. Epp

Toronto University Press, 2015

pp. 576. Hardcover

Reviewed by Aileen Friesen



This collection of Johann Cornies' letters, the first of three slated volumes, offers an intimate portrait of the opportunities and challenges of frontier agrarian life in early nineteenth-century Russia.¹ Cornies, who became renowned for his agriculture initiatives and reforms in the Molochna Mennonite community, corresponded with a variety of friends, relatives, acquaintances and state officials both within and outside of the Russian empire. These letters

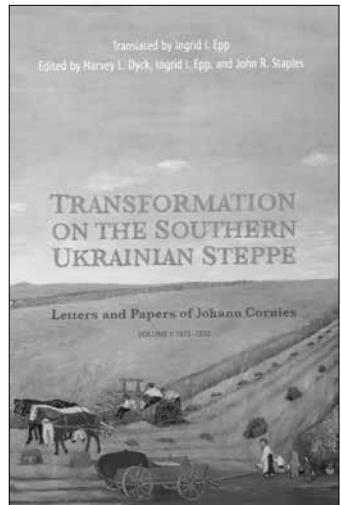
represent a significant resource for scholars interested in everyday provincial life in this multi-ethnic empire. As many of the original letters are extremely difficult to read, this volume ensures that researchers without skills in reading Gothic German script can still access these treasure troves of information. The late Ingrid I. Epp should be recognized for her masterful translations, which in the strong editorial hands of Harvey Dyck and John Staples bring to life the dynamism of Cornies' world as his words and influence reached far beyond the confines of the Mennonite community.

Cornies' correspondence offers new insight into how Mennonites engaged with each other, their neighbours, the environment, and Russian officials. Through their depictions of an assortment of themes from horse thievery and land disputes to cholera outbreaks and tensions over distilled alcohol licenses, these letters capture the personal and professional relationships and feuds that shaped early Mennonite economic and social development. They make clear that Mennonites were not

quite as independent as they later would claim; the guiding hand of Russian officialdom was never too far, reminding Mennonites that they must fulfil the Tsarist state's expectations in order to earn their privileges (227).

The letters reveal that Cornies acted as a gatekeeper not only to the Mennonite communities, but also to their neighbours. When a number of unexplained deaths occurred in one of the neighbouring Nogai villages, Andrei Fadeev, a guardianship official, relied on Cornies to obtain information (194). As it turns out, the deaths were the result of a cholera outbreak, which required the quarantine of infected villages. Cornies informed Fadeev that the Nogai had concealed the outbreak because they feared that doctors would disregard their Islamic practices and disturb the dead by digging up the bodies (201). Cornies' ties to the Nogai community were deep, as evidenced by the frequent personal references to individual families that accompany his correspondence with Daniel Schlatter, a Swiss missionary who had lived among the Nogai (316). In fact, one of the most interesting documents of this collection is an ethnographic essay that Cornies published on the Nogai, which offers a detailed account of their social, religious, and cultural practices. Cornies' assessment of the Nogai arguably revealed as much about the worldview of Mennonites as it did about the Nogai community.

While these letters offer only glimpses into Cornies personal religiosity, they are packed full of revelations on Mennonite business practices and the development of the local Molochna economy. Through his travels to buy merino sheep in Saxony, for instance, we encounter the difficulties of buying and transporting these new additions across borders and witness the resourcefulness of Mennonites as they navigate



through the perils of bureaucratic regulations. Cornies shows a gift in managing business and people, a skill that helped him develop his own personal empire. As a father, he attempted to pass these lessons on to his son, offering counsel on how to handle people, money, and patronage, encouraged his son to travel physically, but not morally outside of the limits of the Mennonite world.

While the documents are wonderful, the placement of Johann Cornies and his correspondence within the historiography of the Russian empire could have been improved. John Staples admirably contextualizes Cornies as a leader within the Mennonite community; yet the introduction only superficially engages with the vast and rich literature on colonization and empire that has emerged over the past twenty years. In particular, Willard Sunderland's pioneering study that gives agency to both state officials and settlers is dismissed as being centralist in focus; David Moon's equally significant contribution on the role of settlers and scientists in the agricultural development of the steppe receive no mention. This critique, however, does not diminish the importance of this book, which offers a fresh new look into New Russia's frontier communities.

¹ This review originally appeared in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 2017. It is reprinted with permission from the author and from the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*.

To the Editor

The D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation encourages community engagement and discussion of topics related to the history of Mennonites. The opinions expressed in these letters are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the foundation.

March 20, 2017

Evelyn Wieler

I found the autobiography of David Mantler on page 62 of *Preservings* # 36 of great interest as he is one of my ancestors.

P.S. My mother was a Mantler who came to Canada with her family (Henry P. Mantler, 1888–1951) in 1926.

n.d., 2016

**Fried-Marie Elias
Swift Current, SK**

I live very close to what was an Old Colony Reserve, south of Swift Current, pre-1921, but I "married" into this region; it happened. I was born and grew up in the Arborfield, Saskatchewan area, totally non-Mennonite area.

You can tell that South Swift Current was Old Colony at one time, because of the "Darps" which are still named by those long-ago names: Schoenfeld, Blumenhof, Chortitz, Rhineland, Rosenhof, etc., etc.

Now to confuse you further, my mother grew up south-west of Swift Current, near Lac Pellitier (French name). She married by Arborfield Dad. And I married a Swift Current man.

Rosabel Fast's article about *Leaving Canada* inspired me to write this. My mother spoke often about "When the Old Colonists left---." The villages and area were literally cleaned out, although not completed because some refused to go.

She (and also her much younger sister) told about the immensity

of "cleaning out as with a huge broom" the Old Order [sic] people. Special trains, apparently, took them all the way to Mexico. Aunt Betty had a close friend, a teenager, who cried and cried. When the day came, my aunt went into the train with her friend and both cried again.

My aunt witnessed the practical things which were done to do the practical necessities such as eating (since they could not stop at a café or grocery-mart). They saw wash-tubs full of buns and fried smoke sausages. They saw bottles of water, lots of them. For long-range food, they saw oven-baked and, thus, dried out bread slices. These would not get moldy. She could not remember what kind of protein food would have been prepared for long-term nutrition.

She remembered the tears, tears, tears. She said that some young men refused to go – and they hid on that departure day, even harbored by Aunts and Uncles who also refused. Imagine the trauma!

Because my mother talked about "When the Old Colonists moved to Mexico ---," I know that it was a big and traumatic event. She knew these people. These teenagers. She saw the people who would not come back very often, maybe never.

Years later, 1962–1964, I taught at La Crete, Alberta and I knew some families who had moved there from Mexico. I taught their children.

Amazing!

January 21, 2018

**Peter Bergen
Waterloo, ON**

Dear Mr. Werner,

Preservings is always interesting reading and in the last issue, the article on the "*Lebenswecker*" was especially so, as it was commonly used among the Mennonites. It was ordered from Germany and many families had one. However, nowhere do I see you give it the Low German name by which it was known. They called it the "*Schnalla*." They had their own idea about how it worked, as you point out, but basically it increased the blood supply to an area and the hope is that this increased supply of blood would contain healing elements. Additionally, those sharp needles would have a strong psychological effect.

One could also speculate about an acupuncture-like effect. If one uses a hot water bottle, electric blanket, hot compresses, this accomplishes the same thing. When the physiotherapist applies heat by various means it had a similar effect, but their equipment is so much better and more efficient.

The *Schnalla* pictured could be the one we donated to the Mennonite Heritage Village a few years ago. [Editor: Yes, the "*Lebenswecker*" pictured in the article is that same one. We are grateful to Mennonite Heritage Village, who made a photograph of the artefact available and allowed us to publish it.] It was given to us by an aunt in Winkler many years ago. It was made in the U.S. and had directions in English and German. Thanks for your article.

January 10, 2016

**Peter Unrau
Morris, MB**

Thank you for the latest issue of *Preservings*. I greatly applaud you for championing the Conservative churches. However I cannot agree with all your observations. I also grew up, and still am a member of a so-called Conservative Church (not Old Colony). I just celebrated

my ninetieth birthday. In all those years, I have seen and heard, and experienced a lot. I have seen our church come from believing that following the old traditions, trying to obey the 10 commandments, [and] being baptized was enough, basically your works could get you saved, to the teaching that by grace and faith we are saved.

Southern Manitoba has a lot of immigrants from Latin America. According to what we hear from them, is that where they come from their church have not made this transition. I think that should be of great concern to us.

**Journal of
Mennonite
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JMS Forum:
Mennonites, Land and the Environment

Volume 35, 2017

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In the Next Issue

Our next issue of *Preservings* will explore how Mennonite communities were shaped by their encounter with railways in Russia, Canada, the United States, and Latin America.

We are interested in the significance of railways to the development of Mennonite industry, communal life, travel, employment, and immigration. In some cases, Mennonites deliberately rejected the building of the railway in their communities. This is also part of the story.

We also invite articles, biographies, local histories, reflections, and archival materials on other topics in Mennonite history, especially pertaining to Low German speaking communities in the Americas.



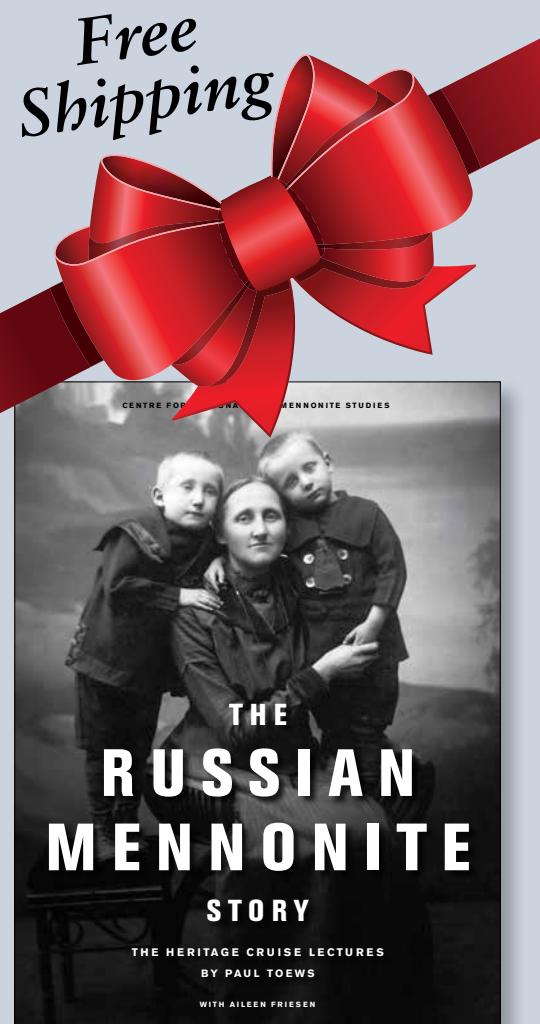
Submissions are Due June 30, 2019

Please send manuscripts and photographs to the editor, Aileen Friesen.

Feel free to contact the editor for clarification or additional information.

Submissions may be sent by email to the editor at ai.friesen@uwinipeg.ca, or via mail to the Plett Foundation, University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2E9.

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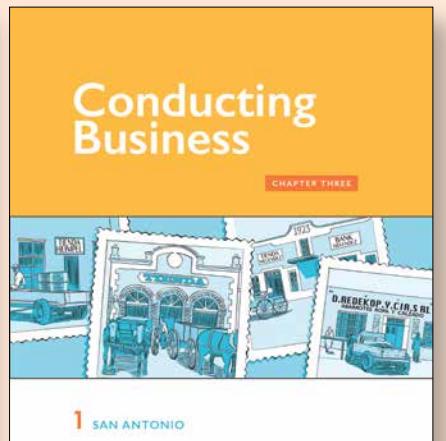
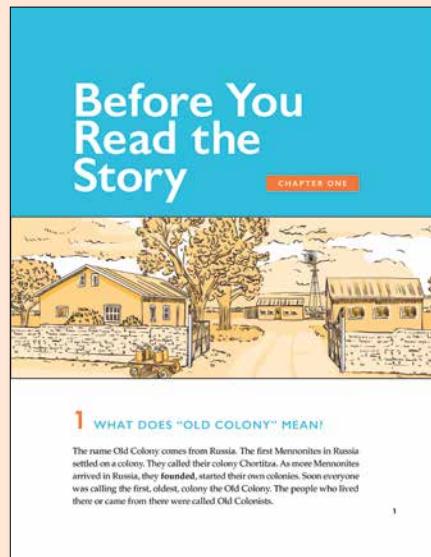
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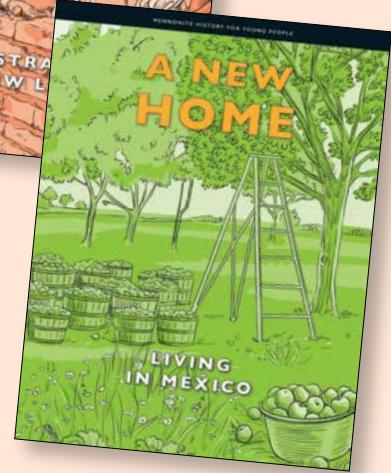
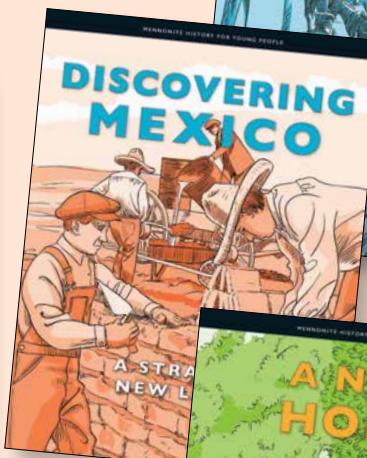
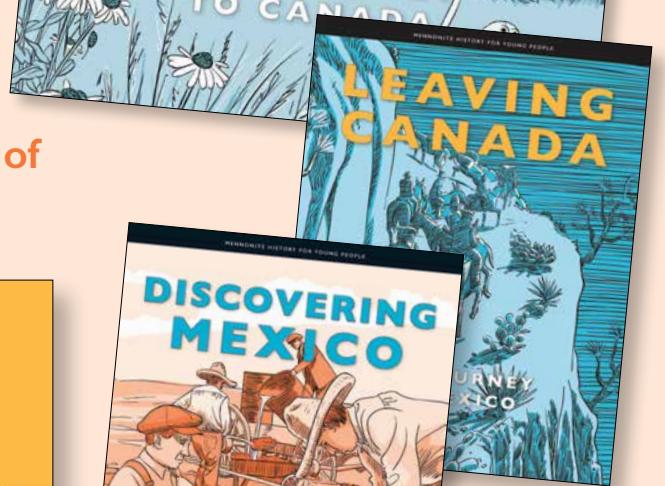
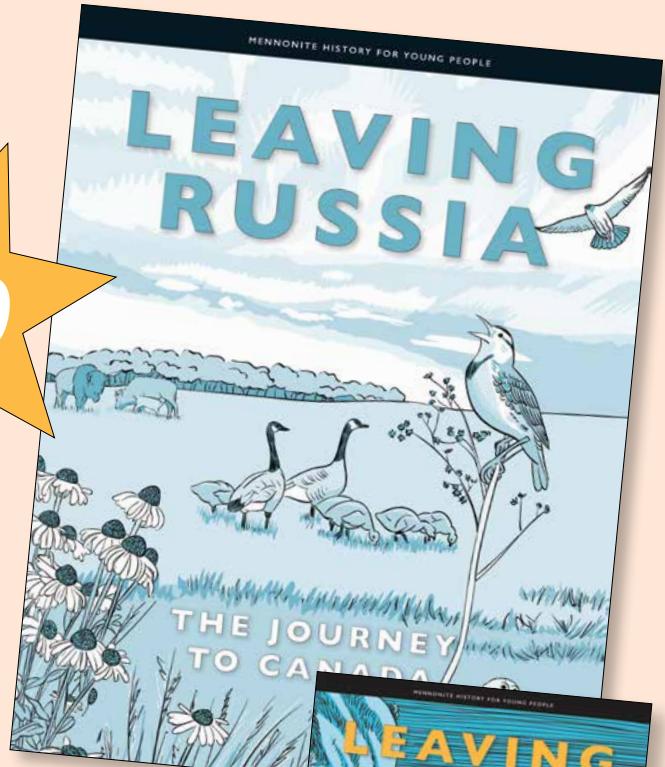
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