Preservings

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When the Russlaender met the Kanadier

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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 Low German-speaking traditionalist Mennonite groups of the Americas.

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COVER IMAGE
Marriage of Russlaender Maria Pauls and Old Colony Cornelius Driedger, March 1927.
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NOTES

From the Editor

Aileen Friesen

The theme of this issue, "When the Russlaender met the Kanadier," is close to my heart. I am the product of a third-generation Kanadier meeting a second-generation Russlaender at a church youth event in the 1970s. In my own youth I was unfamiliar with these terms, "Kanadier" and "Russlaender," yet the existence of a cultural difference between these two worlds, despite the overlap in foods, required no explanation. For me, it was simply self-evident. My *Ditsied* (this side) started in Winnipeg and extended past the Perimeter Highway to the farmyard of my maternal Russlaender grandparents, outside of the small town of Marquette. Winkler, the home of my paternal Kanadier grandparents, filled the role of my imaginative *Jantsied* (the other side), a place visited annually around Christmas when we made the trek down Highway 3. If you had asked me the direction of Winkler – north, south, east, west – I likely would not have been able to respond. As John H. Warkentin notes in his article, these terms, *Ditsied* and *Jantsied*, "convey meanings to different Mennonites depending on their experiences and imaginations," and mine had little to do with geography. *Jantsied* didn't need to be located on a map; it was a place I didn't attempt to understand, a place that was soon forgotten on the ride home under the starry night sky listening to the hockey game.

In my youth, it never occurred to me how these places might be intertwined, bridged together in historical moments. It never crossed my mind that my own family history included a round of Mennonite musical chairs in the 1920s: as my paternal great grandfather packed up his family to move from Saskatchewan to Mexico, my teenaged maternal grandmother and grandfather left Soviet Ukraine, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and landed in Saskatchewan and Manitoba with their families. My imagination gave space to the voyage of my maternal side but refused to make room for the people in Canada, my Kanadier relatives in the West Reserve, who met the Russlaender trains, opening their homes to the newcomers.

For almost fifty years, more than an ocean separated the groups. While desire for land was a factor in the 1870s migration, culture also performed a significant role. As the groups reunited on the Prairies during the 1920s, these cultural differences produced contention. Smoking, viewed as sinful to Canadian Mennonites, was a necessity to some male Russlaender. Even something as simple as a Christmas tree, highlighted in Elisabeth Peters's article, became a symbol of the different spiritual paths taken by each group. As Russlaender Mennonites settled in places like Winkler or Steinbach, the subject of Ralph Friesen's article, they cultivated a new cultural dynamic, aspects of which were welcomed by the local Kanadier population, while others were viewed with suspicion. Such interactions produced the fullness of human exchanges: friendship and animosity, intolerance and understanding. Sometimes these encounters resulted in marriages, like in the case of Maria Pauls Driedger Buhler. Her story shows how the stability of life in Canada could soothe some of the trauma carried by the Russlaender to their new homes. In other cases, as the articles by Leonard Doell and Elisabeth Peters illustrate, these interactions reunited family members separated by the 1870s migration from imperial Russia to Canada. We often think of the 1870s migration as a movement of intact families, effectively cutting intimate ties with their former homeland. These two articles challenge that assumption.

Also often overlooked is the crisis that many conservative Mennonites faced as they addressed the conflict within their own religious communities over the migration to Mexico. Mennonite leaders like David Toews and others, so committed to bringing their co-religionists to Canada from the Soviet Union, demonstrated little sympathy for the plight of Kanadier communities conflicted over the education of their children and questions of compromise with the world. The exodus of Old Colony Mennonites to Mexico was convenient for those advocating for emigration from the Soviet Union; not surprisingly, criticism arose among some segments of the Kanadier population that empathy was readily demanded from them, but rarely shown to them.

The connections between these stories of migration deserve more research. By telling the story of migration separately, we have reinforced the division, limiting the questions that we ask and allowing for prejudices, like those of my youth, to go unchallenged. Over a hundred years ago, the Kanadier did indeed meet the Russlaender, and we are better for it.

Stories of Russlaender Trauma

Maria Buhler and Jake Buhler

In the late 1980s, I interviewed my mother, Maria Pauls Driedger Buhler. She spoke in Mennonite Low German, and I recorded what she said in English. Much later, when I looked at my notes, I noticed that her most vivid descriptions occurred when she was recounting fear, disease, death, uncertainty, and immigration. At that time, I did not understand; only later did I realize that my mother was describing her stories of trauma. After a brief biography of my mother's life, I will present poignant stories of trauma as she told them to me and then I will attempt to make sense of them.

MARIA BUHLER: A LIFE

Maria H. Pauls – the H representing the name of her father, Heinrich – was born on September 20, 1907, in the village of Grigorjewka (Hryhorivka, Grigoryevka) in Kharkiv province to Heinrich and Helena (Unger) Pauls. She was the second-oldest of seven children, of whom only four survived to adulthood. Her oldest sister, Helena, died of tuberculosis at age thirteen. Two sisters, Margaretha and Katherina, died before they were a year old. More tragedy would strike Maria. In 1918, when she was eleven, Maria's mother died of tuberculosis. Ten days later her father died of the Spanish flu. She and her four-year-old brother Jacob (later minister of the Osler Mennonite Church, from 1938 to 1963) were adopted by their grandparents Peter and Helena Nickel Unger.

Peter Unger had been influenced by Radical Pietism from Germany and his spiritual expressions imprinted themselves on his children and on his granddaughter Maria. Following the Revolution, anarchism was rampant and gangs like the one led by Nestor Makhno terrorized Grigorjewka and the Unger household in 1919. Maria was frightened because she had heard rumours of what could happen to young teenage girls. In 1925, Peter and Helena Unger along with Maria and Jacob immigrated to Canada. En route they stopped in Southampton, England, where Jacob was detained for six weeks for medical reasons. The not-so-responsible grandparents continued their journey, leaving Maria to take care of her younger brother. There an exhibitionist exposed himself to her. The siblings reached Quebec City on the SS *Melita* in late October and arrived in Osler, Saskatchewan, following a four-day train ride on November 5, 1925.

In Grigorjewka, Maria's family belonged to the main Mennonite congregational group (the *Kirchengemeinde*). But upon arriving in Osler, she was placed on an Old Colony Mennonite farmstead, with its different traditions. Maria would live on the Katharina Driedger farm, where she worked alongside Katharina's son Cornelius. She became a domestic labourer, something she had never experienced before. Maria (age nineteen) and Cornelius (thirty-five), married in 1927 following a romance that consisted of fetching cows and picking gooseberries together. They had three sons: Leo in 1928, Otto in 1932, and Irvin in 1935. Cornelius died in 1939 of a kidney condition. For two and a half years Maria was a widow. She managed the farm and the household.

In the summer of 1941, she received a letter from her childhood sweetheart, Bernhard Buhler. He, too, had migrated to Canada and had remained a bachelor on his small farm near Winkler, Manitoba. Bernhard wrote a letter to Maria in 1941 asking whether she was interested in marriage, to which she answered affirmatively. They were married in Winkler in 1941, and moved to the larger farm at Osler in the spring of 1942. Four children were born to this marriage: Jake in 1942, Ruth in 1944, Wilfred (Wilf) in 1946, and Ben in 1951. Maria farmed alongside her husband on a dairy and grain farm. She hosted dozens of conference leaders, ministers, and evangelists when they visited Osler. She was an active member of the Osler Mennonite Church Ladies Aid Society (*Naehverein*). She and Bernhard moved off the farm into the small village of Osler in 1972, where they kept a large garden. In 1975 they travelled to the USSR to meet Maria's sister Ghreeta, who had been separated from her for fifty years. It was an unforgettable reunion that also involved her brothers

The Pauls family in 1917. Back: Maria, Helena. Seated: Helena (Unger), Heinrich Pauls. Front: Jacob, Margaretha, Heinrich. JAKE BUHLER PRIVATE COLLECTION

Jacob and Heinrich, and their wives Mary and Katie.

Bernhard died of leukemia on December 29, 1977, following a short illness. Maria continued to live in Osler, where she was actively involved in the community. She got her driver's license at age sixty, and her green Chevrolet could be seen everywhere, usually filled with women on the way to visit yet other women. She practiced her Mennonite faith in a sort of tactile way. Once, when a group of boys were having an all-night party at a neighbour's house, she cooked a pot of noodle soup, added some fresh buns, and brought it to them at 2 a.m. The boys were shamed into an apology for the disturbance. In 1980, she testified in German against the building of a uranium refinery near Warman. Maria moved to Bethany Manor in Saskatoon in 1987, where she lived until 2002. She kept a fine display of flowers on her balcony. Her gregarious personality ensured many social activities with friends. She joined the First Mennonite Church.

Her health began to fail in 2000 but it did not dampen her spirit. In May of 2002, following a slight stroke, she moved to Central Haven Nursing Home. It was an unhappy time for her, but she carried on bravely until her death on October 2, 2002. A large family celebrated her life of ninety-six years. A long-time friend, Esther Patkau, spoke at the two funeral services held at Osler and at Bethany Manor.

DEATH AND LOSS: AGES 11–12

I was eleven when my parents died. First my mother died, then ten days later, my father. My mother had tuberculosis and my father was suffering from the Spanish flu. As both became weaker, they were bedridden. Mother had constant bouts of fever, so she was moved to the front room (*Vaathuss*), which was cool. Father had chills so he was moved into the summer room (*Somma Stow*), which was warm. I helped look after both, trying to make them comfortable, giving them food and water and other things. They spoke to each other through the opening at the central stove. "Are you still alive?" ("Laewst noch?") each would call out to the other. Each was worried that the other might have died when there were long silences.

One day I heard father say to Neeta (Mother's sister), "Which child do you want when we have died?" ("Woon Kjind west du wann wie eascht daut send?") She answered, "I don't know but probably Ghreetchen, the youngest one." "No," said Father, "she will go to Ghreeta, because she was named after her aunt." That night I wondered where I would go and who would care for me.

I saw Mother die. She was very weak and did not even get stiff (*stiew*) after she died. She died at 8 p.m. on September 27, 1918. As she was dying, she said, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." She said "Jesus" four times. The last time she had just enough strength to whisper the name. My sister Leena and my father also saw Mother die. I wondered what life would be like without a mother.

Taunte Marie was called immediately when it was clear Mother would die. As she neared our house, she saw a stream of light in the night sky. "Leenche is on her way to Heaven" ("Doa foat Leenche nohm Himmel"), she said. When Taunte Marie walked into the house, Mother had just died.

At Mother's funeral the congregation sang "Angels, open wide the gate" ("Engel, Oeffnet die Tore weit," song #15 in *Der kleine Saenger*). She had requested this song be sung at her funeral. She was a deeply spiritual person and partly took after her father, Peter Unger. Father attended the funeral, but he was very sick. He shivered because of his chills. He was very, very sad. Mother was *bekjeat* (had found God) at the time of her death; Father had not. He did not attend church much. Father was a very loving person but a bit hardened. After the funeral he begged God, "I want to go to the place where my wife is" ("Ekj well han woa miene Fru ess"). Father struggled with these thoughts, but in the end he was victorious.

A day after Mother died, friends and relatives brought butter, milk, and flour to the house. A large batch of dough was made. Then each family took a piece of dough home and baked buns, which were then taken to the funeral for the meal. This is how it was done in our village. After Mother's death, a maid – a young girl of eighteen to twenty years – came to help in our house.

Father died ten days later, on October 7, 1918, at 2 a.m. Someone woke me up so that I could see Father die. I cried bitterly. Father groaned (*stahned*) a lot as he was dying. Dying was so hard for him. Taunte Marie told me later that after Father died, I asked, "Now that our father is dead, what shall we children do?" ("Papa es doot, waut sell wie Kjinja nu?").

We surviving children were divided up and sent to live with three different families. Jacob and I went to live with *Groospau* (grampa) and *Groosmame* (gramma) Unger, where we grew up until we went to Canada in 1925. After the two funerals the auction sale of our parents' property took place. The administrator of orphans (*Weisenaumt*) allowed me to keep only one personal thing. I really wanted to keep both my rag doll and the set of cups and saucers. But I couldn't. I chose the cups and saucers. That night I missed my rag doll (*Koddapopp*). I had no childhood because I always looked after my four-year-old brother ("Ekj haud kjeene Kjindheit. Ekj mus emma mien veea joasche Brooda sorjen"). A year later when I was twelve my closest sister Leena died. After the funeral I was feeling sad (*trurijch*). I stood under our mulberry tree (*Muhlbaabaum*) and wondered how everything would work out because things were so bleak or black *(dunkel)*. Now seventy years later, I can say I went through very much sorrow and loneliness, but our God (*onsen Gott*) was always with us.

BANDITS AND FEAR: AGE 12 OR 13

I can't exactly remember but I was twelve or thirteen when the bandits came to our village (*aus dee Baunditen noh ons Darp kommen*). It happened very quickly – they got off their horses and went into the big living room (*Groote Stow*) of my grandparents' house. Some of my uncles and aunts were also there. The men were lined up on one side and the women on the other side. The bandits said they would shoot anyone who would not do as they said. I clung tightly to my Gramma's long dress *(Gross'mame ehre lanket Kjleid)*. There was confusion (*aules wia vedreit*). They put food and clothing into their sacks. It was very noisy. While this was happening, I remembered I had heard from older girls that

they were afraid of what bandits might do to girls if they would get taken away. Then suddenly out of nowhere my young nineteen-year-old aunt, Liese, whom I shared a bed with, came into the middle of the room with her guitar and started singing songs she had learned in school. The whole room turned silent. Not a sound except for Liese's singing, especially folksongs (*Volkjsleeda*). Then the *kommandant* faced my Groospau and spoke to him. My Groospau understood the Russian language. "This singing has done something to us. Our hearts have melted. We have frightened all of you. We will leave now." And they got onto their horses and left.

But one time when four bandits came to our farm (*Wirtschauft*), there was actually something funny that happened, and I don't know if I should laugh about it or not. You see, the bandits stole Groospau's wagon and went to where the grain was stored. They began to load sacks of grain onto the wagon. As this was happening, Groospau began telling stories to the bandits about all the troublesome spirits (*boese Jeiste*) in the village and how they were breaking machines and frightening animals and scaring people. He knew how superstitious they were. As he was speaking, he began to loosen the four hubs of the wagon, unbeknownst to the bandits. When the wagon was full, the bandits left. No sooner had they reached the main street (*Hauptgaus*) than the first wheel fell off the wagon. Then a second one fell off. The horses were so spooked (*veaengst*) that they jumped uncontrollably and ran down the street spilling some of the grain. When the bandits were able to stop the wagon, they were so frightened that they unhitched the wagon, got on their horses, and left the village. Groospau meanwhile retrieved the wagon having lost none of his grain. We thought Groospau was clever!

Church and Spirituality: Ages 15–16

When I was about fifteen, I began to think about spiritual things seriously. My father had not gone to church much before he died but my mother was very spiritual. My Groospau, Peter Unger, was very much opposed to my parents' marriage. Groospau was concerned about Heinrich's salvation (*Seeligkeit*). Groospau would kneel with me before bedtime and pray. My uncle Peter Unger studied in Switzerland and tried to become a missionary. My aunts were also spiritual but not so much as Groospau. I had both Groospau Unger and Groosmame Nickel Unger inside of me. I loved to sing in the church choir and to be with the young people. Studying the catechism was enjoyable. Groospau made me feel guilt (*Schuld*), but Groosmame made me feel assurance (*Vesejchrung*). Even after I went to Canada, I carried both inside of me.

Immigration to Canada: Ages 17–18

Things were very bad by 1925. We had gotten through the famine (*Hungaschnoot)*, but the new government that had killed the Tsar and his family was making it hard for us to live with any freedom. Buying and selling became difficult. Paper money became worthless. My grandparents decided to go to Canada. We got our visas. I had a special friend, Bernhard Buhler, but because we thought we would never see each other again, we agreed to stop our small relationship.

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The Pauls family in 1906. Second couple from left: Heinrich and Helena Unger Pauls (Maria's parents). Seated on right: Helena and Peter Unger, (Maria's grandparents) with their youngest daughter Elizabeth.

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We arrived in Southampton, England, to get our health check-ups and final travel papers. But sadly, my eleven-year-old brother, Jacob, was thought to have glaucoma. We were very sad. I cried for Jacob and that made Jacob cry. And that was not good for Jacob's eyes. After one week our grandparents told us they were getting on the next ship. Groospau said I could manage. I was very afraid because I could not speak English and how would I manage with Jacob? I was afraid I would lose our travel papers. My grandparents had left us behind. I remembered thinking that I was completely alone (*gaunz auleen*) once more.

Each morning I got up worried how little Jacob was doing sleeping all by himself with the men in the sleeping sheds. But what scared me more was a man who showed himself off (*waut deed sijch selvst aufwiesen*). It frightened me a lot, but I did not know what to do. I was frightened to walk around that dark corner. For five weeks we lived in the sheds eating strange food and waiting and waiting. Finally, we were allowed to leave.

For two weeks, I think, we were on the ship called the Melita. Sometimes we got sick, but it was better than living in the sheds. We reached Quebec City on November 1. Then we spent four days on the train, travelling day and night. We finally reached Osler, Saskatchewan, on November 5, 1925.

NEW CUSTOMS, NEW LIFE: AGES 18–20

So, I ended up on an Old Colony Mennonite farm at Osler that belonged to Katharina Martens Driedger. Her husband Johann had died five years earlier. He was a very devoted member of the church but was excommunicated because he drove a car and because he was also a store owner and had a post office at Clark's Crossing. Katharina died almost right after I arrived at the farm. That funeral was very different from those in Grigorjewka. All the traditions were different.

I was put into a room that I shared with my eleven-year-old brother Jacob. That was not easy because I was like a parent to him, but really, I was the older sister. Sometimes he did not listen to me. One night a few days before Christmas, Jacob began to cry in his bed. I went to his side to see what was wrong. He was afraid there would be no gifts for him in the bowl. Next day I went to the Osler store and was able to buy halvah and two toys for him. On Christmas morning my little brother was very happy. I was happy because he was happy. Jacob and I were in the same house as the farm owner, who was Cornelius Driedger. Cornelius was not married. I was like a maid on this farm. This was new as well. In Grigorjewka most of the maids were Russian. I went to school the first winter to learn English. My mathematics was good. There was no church building at Osler, so when a minister came around, we worshipped at the schoolhouse.

Gradually Kjnals (Cornelius) took an interest in me. When I picked gooseberries, he helped me, and when I chased the cows to the far pasture, he would come along. I had no one to talk to about this; he was thirty-four and I was eighteen. As time went along, Kjnals asked me about marriage, and I agreed. I was nineteen and a half and he was thirty-five. I felt embarrassed to marry because I was so young ("Ekj schaemed mie wiels ekj soo jung wia"). One day I came into the house and a small group of women shouted, "Surprise! Surprise!" I had never heard of a shower before. And I was in my work clothes. Kjnals wanted David Toews to marry us, so on March 10, 1927, we got on the train to Rosthern in the morning and had the wedding there and returned by train in the evening.

Less than two years earlier, I had arrived at the farm as a maid. Suddenly I was the owner of the farm together with Kjnals. Fifteen months later, on June 27, 1928, little Leo was born. I had no one to ask for advice about raising a baby because I had no family nearby. Three months later the new Mennonite church opened in Osler and that was good for me, because I got to meet more women.

MORE JOY, MORE TRAGEDY: AGES 21–34

Even though the Dirty Thirties (*dartjche Joaren*) were hard, we had quite a good life. We had more than a section of land with a small dairy (*Malkjarie*) of twelve cows that provided monthly income. Kjnals and I were able to help several farmers to get started, including my younger brother Jacob. We had two more sons, Otto and Irvin. Our church had a few financial problems, but we got over that. In some ways the 1930s were very good years. During these years we learned that my sister Ghreeta (Margaretha), who had not gotten out of Russia, had married and had two daughters. Later we learned that her husband, Jacob Wiens, had been shot by Stalin in 1937. It was a sad time.

But in 1938, Kjnals developed a kidney disease for which there was no cure. He came home each day from farm work tired and had much pain (*Weehdoag*). I felt so sorry for him. He died in March 1939. My three sons had no father, and they were almost the same age as when I lost my father and mother.

I was alone (*auleen*) again, but I had my younger brother Jacob and a hired man to do the farm work. I did all the gardening and the housekeeping and looked after the three boys. But nothing was more enjoyable than feeding the calves and the horses.

One day in the summer of 1941, I got a very big surprise. I got a letter from Bernhard (Bient) Buhler, who had been a friend in Grigorjewka when we were both sixteen or seventeen. He asked me if I would consider sharing my life with him. I said, "Yes, immediately" ("Jo, fuats oppe Staed"). He had immigrated to Canada a year later than I had and had remained unmarried. We married in Winkler, Manitoba, on November 26, 1941, and moved back to Osler in the spring. We were both thirty-four years old.

A CONFLICT OF THEOLOGIES: AGES 40–42

Na jo dann (Okay, then), an evangelical revival team led by the Janz Brothers set up a tent near Osler around 1949. Our son Leo, who was twenty-one years old, got quite involved. Some members of our church were opposed to those meetings, and especially

Maria Pauls Driedger and Bernhard Buhler in November 1941. Following page: The Driedger Buhler Farm where Maria worked as a hired helper and then as the owner together with Cornelius Driedger, and later Bernhard Buhler. Photo taken in the fall of 1957.

opposed to Leo's involvement, because he was the youth leader. A congregational meeting only for men (*Broodaschauft*) was called. Bient said it got quite heated because he stood by his stepson. One or two people wondered if Bient should resign, because he was the ordained deacon of the church. Bient was a quiet and reasonable voice. He did not necessarily support the Janz Brothers, but he did support his stepson.

For me it may have been worse. My son Leo supported the Janz Brothers, but my younger brother Jasch (Jacob), who lived just a quarter mile from us, was opposed to the revival meetings. And he was the ordained minister of our church. So in my own family we could not agree. We met several times, and I would cry, and become quite excited. It was too much for me. Jasch said he was caught in the middle and perhaps he should resign. In the end there was peace, and nobody resigned. I found myself in the middle between the fiery Groospau Unger and the quieter Groosmame Nickel Unger inside of me. Quite soon there was healing in the church. Leo went to CMBC (Canadian Mennonite Bible College), where he changed his thinking. And strangely Jasch became a bit more evangelical.

A REUNION AND A DEATH: AGES 68–70

In 1975, exactly fifty years after I had been separated from my sister Ghreeta, it became possible for us to travel to the Soviet Union (*Russlaund*). I was afraid of the Russian government, but our children said it would be safe. So my brothers Heinrich and Jacob and their wives joined us. We were on a tour, but we arranged for Ghreeta and her daughters to meet us at a hotel. For one week we were together. I cannot remember anything we talked about because all we did was cry and cry. Yes, we told stories and more stories, but when we heard of Ghreeta's life of starvation and suffering, we cried more. Her husband had been taken away by Stalin's soldiers. Ghreeta had just missed getting into Germany during the trek to Germany in 1944–45, and for that she was sent to Siberia with her daughters. I had not seen Ghreeta all those years, and later, after we returned to Saskatchewan, it seemed like a dream. It seemed untrue.

In 1977, my healthy husband Bient was only seventy years old. But at our family Christmas gathering he complained of a stomach ache that would not go away. So Wilf took him to the hospital, where he was told he had cancer (*Kjraeft*). He died ten days later surrounded by his children. At the funeral, about twelve ministers and deacons from different churches sat around the pulpit in support of Bient. We buried him beside Kjnals in the Osler graveyard. Later when I thought about what the minister had said, I wondered again about death. The minister was my brother Jasch, who I had helped to raise. He said that God had taken Bient away. That was okay, but I think I remember asking God why he was taken away so young.

UNDERSTANDING MARIA'S STORIES

My brother Otto Driedger, a social scientist, observed that at age eleven Maria was old enough to absorb the horrific events around her and commit them to memory. Her younger brother, at age three or four, was not old enough to process those events. Otto observes that the impact of trauma may linger when there is a working memory. In her research on trauma experienced by Mennonite women in Stalinist Russia, social worker and researcher Elizabeth Krahn observes that "to live within the context of traumatic life events such as political oppression, war, and displacement is to experience persistent insecurity, separation, loss, and death – being subject to external forces beyond one's control which shatter fundamental assumptions about self and the world."

Maria's traumatic stories may have been extreme ones, but they happened when other stories with similar narratives were occurring around her. The larger story was one of mass trauma impacting thousands of Mennonites. It is like a pie containing one thousand slices. Maria's story is one of those slices. Most of those slices have no remaining or recorded story. We are fortunate that Maria's story has remained with us. That her story has photographs, dates, names, and a script of things that happened. Without a story, people have no memory.

In today's Canadian society children and youth are given trauma counselling when an untimely death occurs. Maria had none of that. How did she cope at age eleven when her parents and siblings died of illness and she was orphaned? How did she deal with her fears when her house and village were terrorized by bandits? How did she carry on when she was abandoned by her grandparents in Southampton, left there with her little brother? And the panic when she encountered an exhibitionist? She had no language facility to report that incident and she would have felt ashamed to talk about a taboo subject. Yet she never forgot those events – her recall was vivid.

As I reflect on it now, these traumatic experiences, although rarely talked about, had a profound impact on her. She was an extrovert by nature, with much laughter in her innards. There certainly were psychological or emotional outbursts from time to time. But in spite of suffering so much, she was able to love much. She lived a long and productive life focused on family, church, and community – free of bitterness. The literature suggests that just as trauma is inflicted because of external social, political, and historical forces (for Maria these events included the revolution in Ukraine, the Spanish flu pandemic, and the large-scale migration of Mennonite refugees to Canada), coping with trauma requires community, belonging, and support for one's ability to make sense of the events of one's life. Krahn suggests that one way for survivors of trauma to make sense of their lives, and to heal from trauma, is to tell their stories, so perhaps in the telling of her trauma stories, Maria was also in some way working to repair the many harms she had experienced in her lifetime.

Jake Buhler worked for 15 years as a school principal in Saskatchewan before spending 21 years in Thailand and Vietnam with the Mennonite Central Committee and the Canadian Government working with refugees and poverty alleviation. He and Louise have two daughters and 6 grandchildren. He is involved in a half dozen projects in Saskatoon.

FEATURE

Our First Christmas in Canada

Elisabeth Peters

In the first week of Advent of this year I finally carried the last relic of a toy which I received that first Christmas to the garbage bin. As one gets older, reason demands that one must discard many of the things one has collected over the years, out of consideration for those who will at some time inherit the problem of dissolving our household of worldly goods. This is no simple task, considering the mass of accumulated keepsakes I have collected for sentimental reasons. For years I have tried to get rid of these little useless but for me valuable articles, piling them into cardboard boxes and wiping out the empty drawers – they are all destined for the thrift shop the next day. But by lunch time, I have already replaced half of the treasures that hold so many memories for me in the drawers, and by evening there remain only a few trivial articles in the box. It doesn't pay to take them to the thrift shop, and soon they, too, occupy their usual places in the drawers. I go through this process every Advent, so everything will be neat and tidy for Christmas, but this year I pulled myself together and tearfully discarded the last remains of our first Canadian Christmas. Solemnly I gather up several bits of rusty tin from the drawer and put them into the garbage bin, just in time for the garbage collectors. As soon as the bright yellow garbage truck has disappeared around the corner, a peculiar feeling of emptiness, of loss, comes over me, as though a part of me has gone with the little pieces of tin I put in the garbage. They represent a little metal monkey, a toy I received the first Christmas we were in Canada; it was completely corroded and actually its preservation had made no sense for years. And yet – I just wish that brightly coloured red monkey cap hadn't waved in the wind as the truck moved away! A wave of memories washes over me.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

The Dyck family shortly after they arrived in Canada. (Left to right) Front row: Dietrich, mother Katharina Dyck (née Funk) holding grandson Jascha Krueger, Elisabeth; Second row: Ella, Anna (Njuta) Katharina (Katja), Susanna (Sonja); Back row: Jacob Krueger, husband of Katja, and Heinrich Dyck.

* * *

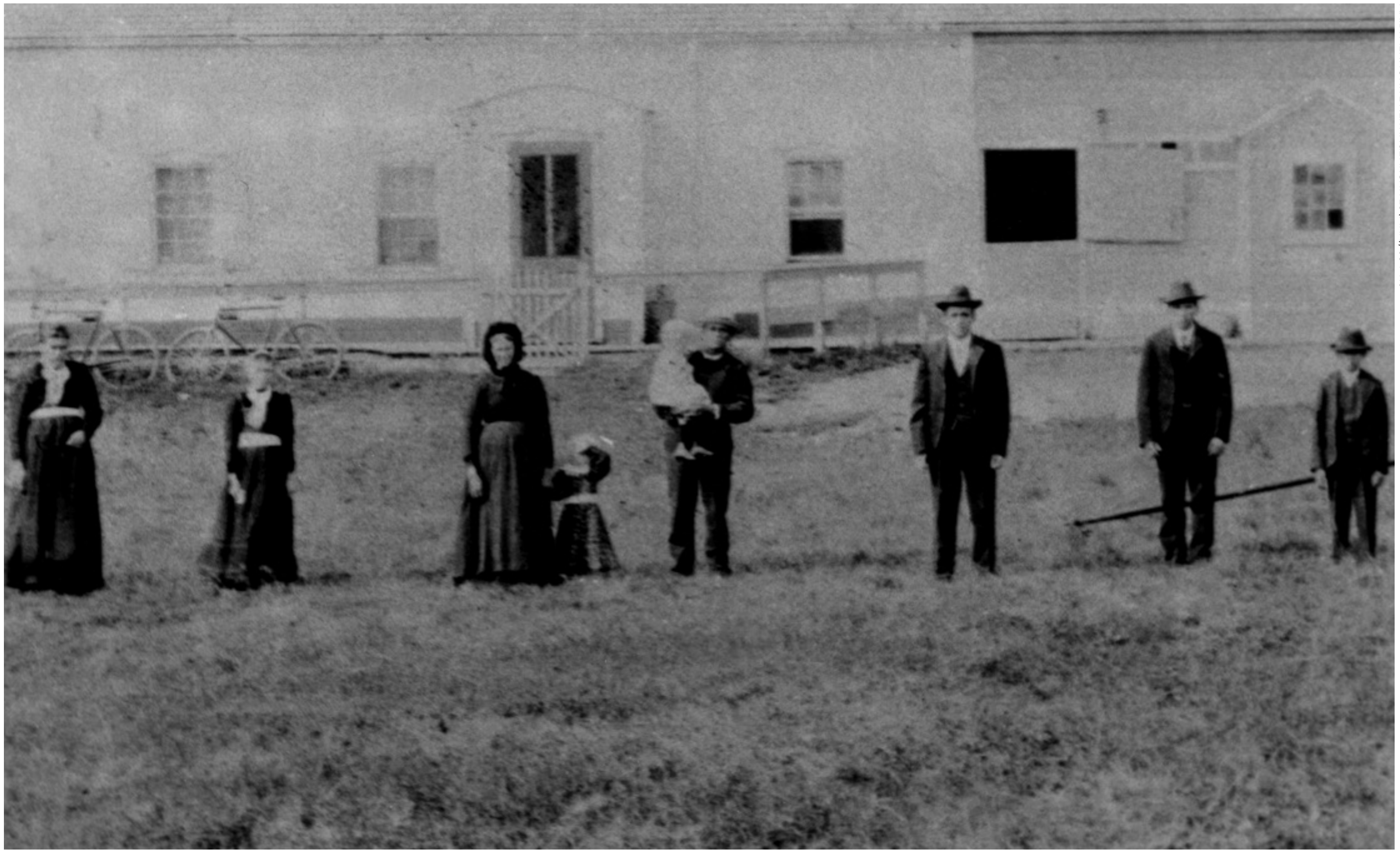
We arrived in the tiny hamlet of Rosenfeld in Manitoba, on the 6th of October, 1925, and were received most cordially by an uncle of my mother's, Anton Funk, and his large family. Uncle Anton Funk was a brother to my maternal grandfather, Heinrich Funk, and had emigrated to Canada with an acquaintance or relative family as an orphaned seventeen-year-old in 1878; he later settled on the flat plains of the Canadian prairie. The entire land area or "district" between Altona in the east, Morden in the west, the US border in the south, and Lowe Farm in the north, was settled by Mennonites. The virgin soil was exceptionally fertile – black earth everywhere – and through hard work, sweat, and persistence, most of the settlers became prosperous farmers. How clearly I remember our arrival at the farm of Uncle Anton Funk (we always called him that, never just "Uncle Anton," and my mother was always addressed by all the Funks as "Dickshe" rather than by her first name; no doubt, this was a sign of mutual respect). Uncle Anton Funk drove us from the station to the farm a few miles away. It was a fine property which deserved to be designated as a model farm, with its solid big house, built strictly according to the Russian Mennonite architectural style, and was joined to a large stable and barn.

Large well-tended garden areas surrounded the house, and in a remote corner of the front garden (*Vorgarten*) the family graveyard was situated, where Uncle Anton Funk's first wife, several children, and also grandchildren had been buried. I always felt a little uneasy in this quiet spot, and avoided the "garden of the dead" (*Totengarten*) after sunset. Behind the many farm buildings, such as machine shops, pig barns, chicken barn, and the bake-oven, which I thought was wonderful, the farmland gently sloped toward the north, where a small stream called Buffalo Creek wound its way through Uncle Funk's fields and meadows. Willows grew on its banks, and in spring one could hear the songs of the innumerable birds such as red-winged blackbirds and bobolinks, which were unfamiliar to us (we particularly revelled in the lilt of the meadowlark, which sang, as we were told, "Doft Wieb, Doft Wieb, stoh up!" [David Wiebe, David Wiebe, get up!]), and the croaking of the bullfrogs close to the water's edge. I remember I was most ecstatic about the beautiful, broad driveway, shaded by tall trees, which led into this idyllic home, where peace and serenity reigned. We knew that in this comfortable house we would not be persecuted; indeed, the doors weren't even locked, our safety secured by Teddy, the friendly dog, who conscientiously drove the cows to pasture. For my mother this farm was a haven of refuge after the terrors we had lived through in our lovely home village in Russia after my father was murdered. Here, among these wonderfully kind people, she felt safe – here she could put her head on her pillow and sleep.

The day when we arrived on the Funk farm, we were almost overcome by the abundance of food on the long table in the big kitchen-dining room. There were platters of fried ham (*Schintjefleish*), mashed potatoes, sliced white bread, butter, milk, and coffee – things we hadn't seen in our homeland for a long, long time. Right after we had left the table, a number of buggies and Model T cars, and even a sedan, or *Glauskoa*, drove up the driveway. They were the Funks' married children and grandchildren who came to greet us and make our acquaintance, as well as neighbours from the surrounding farms who were looking for farm help. Around five o'clock, after a wonderful *Vaspa* (afternoon coffee), the last vehicles left the yard, and only our mother, my little five-year-old brother Mitja (Dietrich, Dmitri in Russian) and I remained – all my siblings had been hired out to good employers, and the only difficulties that loomed in the future were our homesickness and our longing for our home (*Tüs*). Our mother and Mitja and I were given the *Grotistov* (living room) as our quarters, something we just couldn't understand – these relatives who knew nothing about us, except that we were half starved, had three dollars in cash, and a thousand in debt for the CPR transport from Moscow gave up their best room for us. With loving consideration our hosts tried to make us feel at home and totally accepted us as a part of their family. They were honest, sincere Mennonites, who had become prosperous by dint of their diligence and hard work. They had money in the bank and in the orphans' bureau (*Waisenamt*), but it never seemed to have been of great importance to them. They lived frugally but with dignity, as did most of the families in the district; they insisted on buying necessities of good quality, and never considered buying what Jihaun called *Schunt* (junk). They helped people in need, were extraordinarily soft, kind-hearted, and generous, and were delighted that we had arrived just in time for the Christmas preparations.

What a fine family they were! It consisted of "Onkel and Taunte" Funk; a grown son, Jihaun, who, like his father, had a wonderful sense of humour and almost bubbled over in his zest and joy of living; a gentle, highly intelligent older daughter, Aunsch, who was an avid reader and became great friends with our mother; and a pretty six-year-old daughter, Neta, who, being so much younger, was doted on and spoiled by all. It took us several weeks to get used to the peaceful life on the farm, and much longer to accept as natural the abundance of the good things of life, especially the well-set table, the treasures of the pantry and cellar, the absence of worry about material things. When we arrived, we each had one set of clothes – I remember how we hated to stay in our cabins on the old ship *Melita* which took us across the Atlantic, so that our mother could wash our underclothes while we stayed under the blankets. Wickedly, we were glad when she became very seasick in a terrible hurricane that struck us when we were nearing the North American continent, and we could wear our one set of underwear for several days without getting it washed. The first night before we went to bed, Aunsch and Taunte Funksche had selected complete new wardrobes for all three of us, including coats and buckled overshoes, from the Eaton's catalogue. They had ordered "substitutes" as well, so that we were well dressed within a week! School had been closed down due to a scarlet fever epidemic, but it reopened right after the Eaton's order arrived. Neta and I were driven to school every day, either by Uncle Funk or Jihaun. Mitja was too young to attend, but attached himself to our Uncle, and they became fond of each other, Mitja trotting after Uncle Funk through barnyard, stables, pigsties, and hen houses. We soon became used to living "out of the full," as our mother called it, and we were happy.

As soon as all the fall farm work had been taken care of and pig-killing time was over, the social life in the community, which consisted of visiting, picked up. The Funks' children visited their parents frequently, and many neighbours and friends came over for *Vaspa* in the afternoon, or right after supper. I think our relatives must have been popular, for in the hindsight, it seems to me they hardly ever went out in the evening; perhaps the sleigh bells announcing the coming of visitors prevented them from going away before the *Omtjis* and *Mumtjis* (misters and missusses) alighted from sleighs or Model Ts to enter the house. Since we occupied the living room, the guests were always asked into the dining room (*Atjstov*), to my mother's embarrassment, since she was well aware that, had we not been there, the visiting would have been done in the *Grotistov*. I mentioned before that the house was modelled on the room divisions in the Russian Mennonite homes, with the floors in these two large rooms painted yellow, as they were in Russia, while the large kitchen (*Koakstov*) sported a linoleum of good quality. The big chrome-trimmed cook stove was always shining clean, and in winter, a fire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The Dyck family stayed with their Funk relatives in Rosenfeld, Manitoba. The Funk family on their farm, ca. 1880.

burned in the grate all day. We always liked this room best, especially in the evening where the cozy lamp with a hand-painted opaque shade hung from the ceiling, casting a warm light on the table around which we sat.

Aunsch, my mother, and I were always reading the German magazines she subscribed to: *Nordwesten*, *Hausfrau*, and others. Jihaun looked at catalogues, while Neta and Mitja played "cars" – i.e., they lined up chairs, Mitja sitting in the driver's seat holding the round, iron coffee trivet in his hands for a steering wheel, Neta sitting behind him, cooing to the doll on her knee in good Mennonite tradition. Uncle and Aunt usually sat in the Atjstov, often joining us at some time in the cracking of roasted sunflower seeds.

I always liked best the evenings when no visitors were there. On occasions, our Uncle would head for the cellar door with measured steps, sometimes asking us children to join him. Always when we were allowed to go into the cellar with Uncle Funk, we half-starved Russlaender were deeply impressed by the abundance, the fullness, of this storage room. There were long shelves lined with glass jars of canned fruit, arranged neatly and attractively (Aunsch had a flair for the artistic). Since our greatest worry in Russia had been the lack of bread – "Where do we get a loaf of bread tomorrow?" (Woa nehm wie Morjen ein Stettj Brot hea?) our mother often asked in despair when there was nothing edible in the house – Mitja and I were most reassured by the many sacks of white flour, either Purity or Five Roses (I've forgotten), as well as numerous bags of rye flour and bran, that had been carefully placed on tables. Big barrels of pickled pork (*Sillfleisch*) stood on the floor, and smoked hams and "red" (meat) sausages, which had been transported from the smokehouse for the Christmas season, were hanging on large hooks. There were huge stone crocks and barrels of pickled cucumbers and watermelons, and tall tin pails full of lard, cooked pork ribs (*Repp spea*), liverwurst, crackles (*Jreewen*), and crackling lard (*Jreevischmollt*, a bread spread), while potatoes, beets, carrots, and green cabbage heads were stored on the cool, meticulously scrubbed cement floor. Uncle Funk then gave me the lantern to hold, since I was the oldest (southern Manitoba at that time had no electricity), and filled a large bowl (*Kumm*) with apples stored in the two wooden barrels – one contained the smaller red "snow apples" that were bright red on the outside and had a snow-white interior, the other the yellowish-green, rusty coloured "russets" that were softer and blander. Our uncle had a great sense of humour, and somehow the apples in the huge bowls always rolled over the edge and a few dropped on the floors. He chuckled quietly and said, "Whoever picks up the apple first may keep it" (Wea dän Aupel aum easchten opphäft kaun am holen). We quickly bent down and sometimes crawled on hands and knees to retrieve an apple although we could eat as many as we wanted from the bowl for the asking.

Communication between parents and children, relatives, and neighbours was generally lively, and on days when visiting had to be dispensed with due to inclement weather, the telephone was put to heavy use. Most of the Mennonite homes, perhaps all of them, had a party-line system and knew the number of

MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO (MAO) HIST.MSS.1.275.1-92

rings for every neighbour. When the call was too long, a neighbour would just pick up the receiver and say "Waiting." When we heard two short and one long ring, Taunte Funksche would go to the phone and listen. "That's Mrs. Klassen" (Daut's dee Kloasche), she said. "I guess her flu is over, since she can call. I'll phone her later," and she put the receiver back on the hook. But we had time enough to hear a number of click, click, clicks, because naturally all neighbours were listening in to find out how Mrs. Klassen's flu was progressing. Actually, Mrs. Klassen and everyone else knew that most of the receivers were off the hook; indeed, sometimes the whole listening audience got involved and there were lively conversations carried on by numerous persons at one time. I think that there was even a general ring when urgent messages were to be given to all people in the community. After some years, party lines made way for private lines generally, and listening in on telephone conversations was considered to be bad manners – being caught in illicit listening could be most embarrassing. I know that as late as 1940, my mother-in-law, who lived on a farm near Winkler, was bored on an afternoon when a heavy blizzard was raging, and decided to listen in, just to get some contact with the outside world. Gently she took off the receiver, but unfortunately she had broken in on a very private conversation between two young lovers. She was almost speechless when the young man admonished her in no uncertain terms, "Mrs. Siemens, get off the line!" (Mumtji Siemeschi, goht —— vom phone). "How did you know it was me?" (Wo weet ji wea etj sie?), she asked helplessly. "We can hear your Kroeger clock striking" (Wie headen juni Tjreajashclock schlohnen), was the terse answer. At the time we lived with the Funks, listening in was quite appropriate and acceptable. We children were never allowed to use the phone, and certainly not to take the receiver off. "That's for old people" (Daut's fe oli Lied), we were told.

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Unlike their Sommerfelder relatives in Canada, the Dyck family always had a Christmas tree to celebrate the holiday when they lived in southern Ukraine.

Three weeks before Christmas, our mother, Mitja, and I were invited to go to Altona with our uncle and aunt, because they wanted to buy Christmas gifts for the older children and grandchildren, as well as for Aunsch, Jihaun, and Neta. We were packed warmly in fur rugs in the light "Sunday" cutter with the green plush upholstery, hitched to a beautiful white stallion that Mitja adored. There were many sleighs on the road – it appeared to be an unwritten rule in the community that the third Saturday before Christmas was the time to do family Christmas shopping.

It was a cold day, but there was no wind, and the wintry roads (*Schlädbohn*, or sleigh tracks, as Jihaun called them) were excellent for sleigh traffic. Uncle Funk, who had good horses and fine harnesses, was in the driver's seat and waved his whip cheerfully at Jihaun standing near the barn door after he had stowed us all into the vehicle – his mother, my mother, Mitja, and me. As soon as we had left the yard and entered the main "line" where all the action was, our uncle couldn't resist the temptation to pass the sleighs ahead of him. With an elegant flourish, he whizzed by the other travellers, whom he overtook effortlessly, because his horses were in excellent condition, and we had an excellent driver, as my mother proudly acknowledged. "My father always did that when I was a child; you are much like him," she remarked to the great delight of her uncle. The sleigh bells were ringing merrily as we glided along, and even our mild, soft-spoken Taunte Funksche smiled and said, "How nice to hear the sleigh bells jingle so cheerfully" (Daut jeit ji eefach scheen wann dee Tjlinjasch so tjlinjern). I don't think all the farmers had sleigh bells, and in hindsight I suspect that they may have been considered too worldly. The pleasant ride seemed too short for us as we stopped in front of the general store in Altona, where well-padded *Omtjis* and *Mumtjis* were already selecting their purchases.

There were sturdy hitching posts in front of the building so that the driver could tie up his horses. They were carefully covered with horse blankets. It was colder than we had assumed sitting in the warm sleigh, and the hot breath of the horses formed a thick layer of ice rime around their mouths and nostrils. Mitja felt so sorry for the beautiful horse that he begged to be allowed to rub the frost from his nostrils with his woolen tuque. "You're a real horseman," Uncle Funk said, and secretly popped a peppermint candy into Mitja's mouth. Mitja was quite oblivious to the compliment that had been paid to him when he was pronounced a "real horseman" – all Mennonite farmers wanted to be known as "real horsemen," and took as much pride in their

fine horses as today's car owners take in their Cadillacs or BMWs. We "Russlaender" noticed that all the Mennonites we had met were very well dressed, albeit not stylishly, but their clothes were of good quality, and well made. Nearly all the older men wore deep black coloured velour caps with a little visor or shield on the front. We learned that these head coverings which the Omtjis wore were made in one of the Mennonite villages, but I no longer know its name or location. Their sons were more modern and wore felt hats or becoming fur caps which they ordered from the Eaton's mail order catalogue, together with their Sunday suits, spats (buttoned anklets of felt worn over the shoes), and their overalls or work clothes. The younger women and girls also filled their wardrobe needs with items from the catalogue. Deviating from the customs of their mothers, they despised the beautiful black lace caps (*Hauben*) which were conjured up of laces and ribbons by a cap-maker (*Haubenmacherin*) in one of the villages. Instead, they wore widebrimmed hats with colourful flowers, and red cherries and wide grosgrain ribbons. Our girls had also been given those fancy, romantic hats by their kind employers. We did not recognize them the first time we saw them in their new clothes – our half-grown children had suddenly fully grown up. Most of the people we met in the Altona store were older, and dressed conservatively.

The Mennonite men were certainly not very polite to their marriage partners, neither had the Mumtjis expected modern courtesies. They peeled off the fur blankets which had kept them warm, drew the big, warm shawls (*daut groti Döak*) more closely around their shoulders, stomped through the snow, and waddled over the threshold into the store, a bit out of breath, for none of them were underweight. At that time the older generation of Mumtjis still wore the long, wide, pleated skirt with a tight bodice called a *Joop* or *Waanick*, buttoned right up to the throat, and had long sleeves, somewhat gathered at the shoulders. On Sunday on the way to church they would proudly wear their beautiful black *Hauben*, literally works of art, but today was Saturday, so their second-best lace cap (*tjleen Sinndoagsche Huw*) was good enough. While the men grouped themselves around the potbellied heater and visited until it was time to pay for their purchases, the women happily did their "older family" Christmas shopping.

I observed them closely. It seemed to me that they all bought almost the same items – understandably so, since all the families were large and required many gifts. Nearly every Mumtji had the same order: 9½ yards of cotton material for the featherbed covers, the pattern with the red roses and the green apples, for our six married girls – you understand? 9½ yards times six! (9½ yards Bierenkortün, daut meet de rode Rosen an jreene Appel, fe onnsi sass befriede Mejalles. Vesteist? Sass Mol 9½ yard!) Six pairs men's gloves and six handkerchiefs – the best – for our six sons (Sass poa Maunshaundschtji und sass Schneppeldeatja, vonni baste, fe onnse sass sahns); for our five older unmarried daughters each a pretty sugar and cream set (fe onnsi fief onnbefriede Dajchta jieda ein schmockitt jläsanett Zockadings onn Schmauntkauntji); and for each three yards of that brown corduroy for a new dress (onn fe jiedre dree yard Maschossta tom Tjlett, von dem dunkel brünen). For the grown boys each a large pocket knife (fe de ütjivossne Jungis een enoret Kjnippsmassa); and seven red and seven green woolen tuques for the older grandsons, fourteen in all (onn saven rode onn saven jreene Wollmetzen ferri ellri Grotsähns).

The gifts having been taken care of, the Mumtjis then proceeded to purchase the traditional Christmas goodies or *Nauschwoatj*, and were joined by their husbands, who apparently liked to put their word in when it came to choices of candy. Again and again one heard the same conversation: "Pop, how many peanuts shall we buy?" (Vurratji, wo väl peanuts well wie nehmen?), or, "Buy enough chocolate candy; the little ones like them best!" (Tjeep mau jinoag von dee Schoklatcandy; dee eate dee tjleeni Tjinja aum leewsten!). Our eyes grew wide in wonder as the large brown paper bags on the counter were filled to the very top with the wonderful sweets and nuts we had never seen in the last ten years in Russia. There were peanuts and great quantities of walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, and Brazil nuts. Wooden boxes of oranges and dried apricots, packages of jellies, and candy of all types were lined up on the counter in long rows. Baked goods were of course made at home, but at Christmas time a special delicacy, store-bought cookies (*Jikoffte Koaken*) were purchased – big brown chocolate cookies covered with shocking pink icing and coconut shreds, packed in metal boxes labelled as "Christie's Biscuits." Mitja and I were each given a cookie as a special treat. We both didn't like them but mother looked at us in a very serious way, which meant absolute obedience, and we ate them, but very slowly and without enthusiasm. (For the first time in years I saw these same cookies in a store, and in a fit of nostalgia, I bought three. They still tasted as terrible as they did then, like sweet cotton batting, and I didn't even offer them to my grandchildren.)

Uncle Anton Funk paid cash for the whole bill, almost incredible for us. And then we climbed into the warm sleigh; Jihaun had warmed some bricks and placed them on the floor of the vehicle, and the cover of the fur rugs had kept them nice and warm. Uncle flourished his whip, and once we were on the good road, he allowed the eager horse to gallop all the way until we turned into the snowy driveway. The odour of fried red sausages, fried potatoes, and applesauce greeted us as we entered the warm, pleasant home. While Aunsch set the table for supper, we joined our uncle and aunt in the Atjstov, where they were talking to Neta, who had missed them. Uncle Anton Funk still had a little homesickness (*Heimweh*) for Russia, which he had left as a teenager, knowing full well he would never see his siblings again. He frequently asked our mother to tell him of our life there, our customs and usages; mother was a good storyteller, and we all enjoyed listening to her animated description. That evening she described our Christmas traditions, our Christmas trees at school on the Christmas Eve programme, and our own tree in our home. Uncle Anton had become very thoughtful after that. "Well," he said finally, "I'm afraid you are going to miss your Christmas tree this year. The Sommerfelder congregation to which we belong to does not approve of Christmas trees." Mother quickly assured

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In Altona, Peters recalled seeing many sleighs on the winter road as everyone did their Christmas shopping on the third Saturday before Christmas.

him that a tree was certainly not a necessity for celebrating the Christ child's birthday. But after supper when we went into our *Grotistov*, both Mitja and I cried softly – we couldn't imagine Christmas Eve without a tree.

Early in the next week when Uncle Funk dropped Neta and me off at school, he asked our teacher, Mr. Driedger, for a chance to speak to him. Very likely he was on the trustee board, but at that time we were not aware of this. I was a bit worried, and wondered what had been the object of the visit. I had been so good, I thought, and I loved and admired our kind teacher. What had I done?

Early on the 24th of December we saw Uncle Funk and Jihaun leave the yard on the big farm sleigh. In a short time the sleigh returned at more than a canter (Jihaun was a "horseman," like his father) and Neta, Mitja, and I, who stood at the window, spotted a little green Christmas tree on the back seat. In great triumph Jihaun brought it into the *Atjstov* while we cheered in glee. Uncle Funk had that roguish little smile on his lips which Mitja and I loved, but his soft-hearted wife anxiously asked, "Aren't we going to suffer pangs of conscience for this?" But Uncle Funk chuckled merrily and comforted her by saying, "God will be as pleased with this tree as we are, set your heart at rest on that score." And she did, I'm sure, because she trusted his judgment in everything. They had bought candles and candle holders – actually they had a stroke of luck to get them in Rosenfeld, because the store there did not carry many Christmas ornaments. The Mennonites did not have trees, and the Lutherans bought most items of that sort in Altona or Winkler. It was a fluke that they had a box of candle holders left over after the Lutheran customers had had their supplies met, but there were no decorations. We had no problems with trimming the cherished little tree under the guidance of our experienced mother. Enthusiastically, Jihaun firmly fastened the holders on the fresh green spruce branches and Aunsch hung some of her beautiful cookie hearts and stars made of peppernut dough. We children polished the little red snow apples till they shone and mother tied thread loops on them and hung them on the branches. The tree lacked the usual crown angel top, but we all felt it was a most beautiful tree.

When we entered the schoolhouse for the programme at six o'clock, our eyes grew wide in wonder. A beautiful, tall Christmas tree sparkled and glittered in the twilight of the room. Uncle Anton Funk had made the arrangements for the tree with "Teacher Driedger" when he spoke to him that day, not about any iniquities of mine! Apparently our uncle had taken full responsibility for this deviation from the district rules, privately and also with the school board – the tree was bought! In hindsight, I think he must have financed the whole project, for "Teacher Driedger" was asked to drive to Winkler and buy everything that was necessary for a "good, beautiful Christmas tree." Mr. Driedger was elated by the suggestion, although he was fully aware of possible repercussions, such as losing his job. I remember him as a fine, understanding, kind teacher who taught us many extracurricular activities, especially German songs. I still have a scribbler of them.

Following page: A Christmas dinner in Manitoba, 1913.

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After our return from the concert, we were to light our lovely tree, although the gifts (*Bescherung*) were to be received the next day when the married children with their families were coming for Christmas dinner. But when Jihaun lit the first candle, pretty, shy Neta screamed, "I'm so afraid! Blow out that candle! The whole house will burn down!" Her parents could not calm her, and we all thought that this was the end of the Christmas tree lighting. But Jihaun wanted those candles lit. He grabbed Neta by the arm and said, "Neta, now be still, or I'll take you into the barn!" (Net, nöu best stell, oda etj go met die emm Staul!). The screaming stopped instantly, and while Jihaun almost reverently lit the candles, we sang our dear old Christmas songs. The Funks did not know some of the songs since the tree was a first for them, so "Der Christbaum ist der schönste Baum" and "Kling Glöckchen" were unfamiliar. Mother, Mitja, and I, who knew those texts so well, sang heartily, and the rest hummed the melodies, joining in the well-known hymns of the *Gesangbuch*, such as "Dies ist die Nacht da mir erschienen," etc.

Christmas Day we marvelled at the many dinner guests who were in a happy, festive mood. The yard was full of cars, five or six at least. Their hoods were covered with fur blankets (*Pelzdatjin*), since, at that time, block heaters or car warmers were unknown. Uncle Funk still travelled by horse and buggy, but his sons and sons-in-law were more modern and used cars. The Funks had six married children, who all had three or four children, some even more. Uncle Funk had had a married daughter who died, leaving several children. Her husband remarried, and he and his wife had several more children, who were all treated exactly like all the other grandchildren. I never knew until I grew up that there were numerous half-brothers or sisters in this large Funk clan. Besides the Funks' married children there were in attendance that day two further sons, still unmarried; our family with ten members, although one of them was a five-month-old baby, our oldest sister's son; and a dear cousin of ours, Hans Wieler who had come to Canada on his own, since his parents and other family members were unsuccessful in leaving Russia until 1928. The long wide dining table was set four or five times, although fourteen persons could eat at one sitting. Neither tablecloths nor spruce greens decorated the table, as had been customary in Russia. (Our mother later remarked to our sister Katja, the oldest, that that had been about all that was on the table in Russia, since our food supply was almost nil.) But here in this hospitable home the table was graced by an oilcloth with big red roses on it which shone in its "newness" and the atmosphere was so festive and happy that no one even missed a white tablecloth. All the women and girls except Taunte Funkshe, our mother, and Uncle Funk's eldest daughter helped to serve the dinner, which consisted of the traditional Mennonite holiday fare: cold plum soup (*Plumimoos*), cold cooked ham cut in deliciously thick slices, and little double buns (*tjleeni Tweebak*), with mustard and dill pickles as condiments. The guests must have enjoyed the savory fare; there were so many refills that Aunsch's face had become quite hot and red from her efforts to put more meat on the huge platters and replenish the serving bowls (*Mooskommen*). Even I was asked to help with the dishes after the meal was over. I was only too happy to dry the dishes since it gave me the opportunity for listening in (*oppschnacken*) and could hear all the interesting things the grown-ups were talking about.

Right after dinner, the gifts were to be distributed. We children all sat on the floor of the dining room, and the others all found seating accommodations, either on benches or chairs. Jihaun lit the candles on the tree once again, and once again we sang "Welch' ein Jubel, Welche Freude," because it was best known to most of the people there. The singing went well this time; everyone joined in the hymns (*Gesangbuchlieder*) which all knew, and the Christmas carols (*Christbaumlieder*) were indeed noteworthy since every member of our family except for Mitja knew the song texts by memory. Our girls, with their lovely voices, supported by our brother Hein, Hans Wieler, and our brother-in-law Jasch Krueger, sang with happy hearts, and if I remember correctly all guests hummed the tunes, which were fast becoming familiar to them. At last it was time to find the plates we had put on the table. Aunsch had placed a note with the name of each child on a plate, and Uncle and Taunte Funk had assumed the role of the *Nätklos* (Santa Claus). Mitja and I were dumbfounded by our large plates filled to capacity with goodies of every kind. On top of our full plates we (at least Mitja and I) found a colourful amusing toy, the aforementioned little monkey. The monkeys wore clothes on their tin bodies and a melancholy expression on their faces, like real monkeys. Their little tin hands clung to a thin metal pole with a key in a little motor-like contrivance which allowed us to wind up the toy. Once it was wound up, the monkey slid up the pole with a great deal of noise and incredible speed, and then slid down again. What we liked best was that he grinned from ear to ear while he was sliding on the pole and laughed a jolly, tinny laugh every time he hit the top or bottom.

My monkey had a little red cap and red pants; Mitja's was in blue. I was really too old for the gift, but I loved it as much as Mitja loved his "Grishko," as he had named him on the spot. We both kept on winding our toys up over and over and made so much noise that mother wisely took the keys away from us for the afternoon.

When we left this lovely farm and serene life in spring to make our own home, Mitja and I carried our toy monkeys in our hands, lest they get damaged during the move. Mitja particularly enjoyed his Grishko and must have taken better care of him than I did of my toy. It seems to me that a few years before Mitja's death I saw Grishko quite hale and hearty sitting on the edge of the bookcase in his office. But I'm not quite sure whether my memory is reliable here – it's so long ago. In contrast, I brutally put my childhood toy, or the remains thereof, into the garbage, although with deep sadness – not because of the dashing little monkey, but because I cast away a part of my lost childhood, and only the memories are left.

Elisabeth Peters was a long-time contributor to Mennonite publications in both English and German and the author of a number of prose writings.

FEATURE

Steinbach as 'Host Country'

A Russlaender Family Story

Ralph Friesen

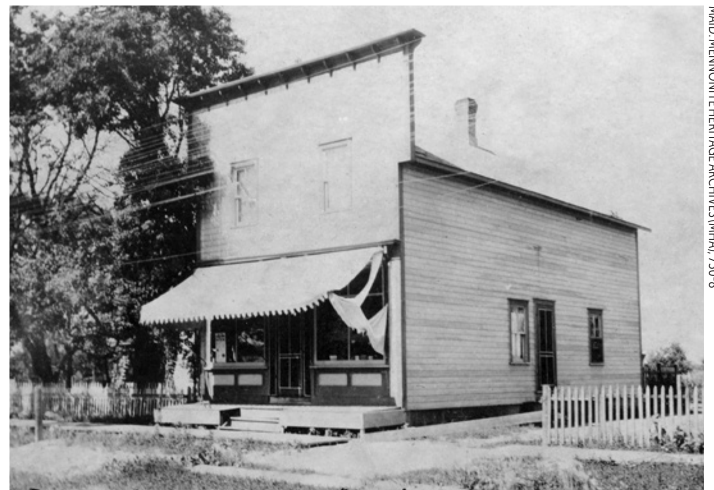
At its founding in 1874, the village of Steinbach in the Mennonite East Reserve in Manitoba was essentially an extended family. All but one of the eighteen original families who immigrated from Borozenko colony in imperial Russia (present-day Ukraine) were members of the Kleine Gemeinde church, and almost all of them were related to each other by blood ties or marriage.

As the decades passed, this ethnic/religious/familial solidarity persisted and replicated itself. Some "outsiders" did move into the village – Austrian Lutheran Kreutzers, Hungarian Catholic Soberings and Riegers, and Bergthaler Mennonite Peterses, to name the most prominent. Even these intermarried with descendants of the original families, so Steinbach retained much of its original identity.

And then, in the early 1920s, the Russlaender came. Almost immediately, the village took on a new shape. Steinbach was already something of an economic powerhouse, with various industrialists and merchants and service providers driving an ever-expanding economy. The Russlaender created their own niche in merchandising and brought new elements to village life in the form of a stronger bond with the German language and ethnicity and the promotion of education, healthcare, and culture.

The most prominent among the Russlaender families were the Vogts. Peter Vogt ran the Economy Store while his brothers Abram and John operated "Vogt Brothers." Both stores had similar inventory to that of the existing merchandising kings in Steinbach, the Reimers, who had the H. W. Reimer general store and the K. Reimer & Sons general store. The Vogts, however, also sold tobacco, and showed themselves to be hospitable to "outsider" groups from the surrounding area, such as the German Lutherans, the French Catholics, the Greek Orthodox Ukrainians, and the Old Colony Chortitza Mennonites.

One of the Vogt sisters, Maria, started a hospital. Another, Anna, started a kindergarten. A third, Katharina, was married to the writer Arnold Dyck, who purchased the local newspaper, the *Steinbach Post*. Dyck used the weekly *Post* as a vehicle for promoting the ideal of a German-Mennonite identity, and also for a series of Low German comic stories named after his protagonists, *Koop enn Bua* (Koop and Buhr).



MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (MHA), 730-8

The writer Arnold Dyck purchased the local newspaper, the *Steinbach Post*. Dyck used the weekly Post as a vehicle for promoting the ideal of a German-Mennonite identity.

With the coming of the Russlaender, healthcare and education in Steinbach improved, as did openness to the multicultural reality of the East Reserve and contiguous areas. For the first time, Steinbach residents could read about themselves, not only in the news, but also in fiction. The lingua franca of the village continued to be Low German, but now a more sophisticated and better quality of High German was employed by some.

Arnold and Katharina Dyck had four children, the eldest of whom was Hedwig, born in Schoenwiese, Chortitza colony in 1919, during the revolutionary period in Ukraine. Hedwig, or Hedi as she came to be known, was an intelligent, observant child who came to Steinbach with her parents in 1923, when she was four. Shortly before her Grade 12 graduation she moved to Germany, where she became a teacher. She married a beekeeper named Wilhelm Knoop and eventually took up writing. In 1990 she published a novella titled *Wenn die Erde bebt* (When the earth shakes). It is a roman à clef, almost a memoir, set in "Anderbach" (Steinbach), and chronicles Hedi's adolescent years.

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When the Russlaender arrived, Steinbach was already something of an economic powerhouse, with various industrialists, merchants, and service providers.

Hedi Knoop calls her narrator Connie and does not provide a surname for her mother's family, but they are clearly modelled on the real-life Vogts. Connie's mother is called Katharina, just like Hedi's. Many other details in the novella correspond to actual events and people; in effect, it provides a snapshot of Russlaender family life in Steinbach in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the quasi-fictional world of *Wenn die Erde bebt*, the narrator's family are carriers of the trauma of events lived in revolutionary Ukraine. Principally, this trauma is revealed in the stories told by Connie's aunts and by her father, whom she calls Krahn. These stories are not told to other residents of the village, the Kanadier. The adults in the family tell them to the children: the traumatic personal history of the Russlaender was passed on within the family. Knoop also describes the troubles in her parents' marriage, and while she does not make a direct connection between this discord and the radical displacement her parents experienced, the reader may understand that as a possibility.

Connie's little brother Peter (modelled after Otto Dyck) almost did not survive the trans-Atlantic journey to Canada:

> Our Peter could not even sit up by himself. He had almost died on our long journey. Already in Russia he had become very thin, and on the ship we could not get a pacifier for him, nor even any milk. He had to drink from the spout of a can of tea. Soon he was deathly ill. The ship's doctor examined him and declared that he was already dead. But mother gripped the doctor by the arm and shouted, "No, he is not dead. He's alive! He's still moving!" And she was right. Truly, he was still alive.[1]

Connie does not attribute Peter's recovery to God; rather it is due to the mother's strong-willed refusal to accept his fate. Peter's survival is miraculous, but his brush with death exacts a price in later life. As a child in Anderbach he is more comfortable with animals than with humans, develops a severe stutter, and has night terrors.

Connie's parents buy the *Anderbacher Post*, building and printing press and all, for a token amount and move into the attached house, but immediately they must face the prospect of repaying their travel debt:

> Now we had a house and a print shop, but also a lot of debt. Everything we owned still had to be paid for, including the large travel debt incurred when we immigrated. As it was, we had not even been able to raise the money for the journey ourselves. A Canadian railway company had advanced the cash.
>
> "As soon as we have paid all our debts and are in the black again we will move to Germany," said my parents. "When our immigration ship was passing through the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal, we would gladly have disembarked, for on either side lay Germany, the land of our ancestors. Yes, in origin and language, we are German," they said.

From the outset, Connie's parents signal their views and intentions. Unlike the majority of their Russlaender counterparts they do not accept Canada as their final destination. In their self-description as German, the Krahns also distinguish themselves from Anderbach's residents, most of whom were born in Canada and

have acquired English as a second language. In actuality, Arnold Dyck never became fluent in English and his sister-in-law Anna Vogt (Tante Sanna in the novella) moved to East Kildonan when Steinbach parents demanded kindergarten instruction in English. Hedi Dyck left for Germany in 1937 and was followed by her mother and siblings the next year. Arnold Dyck remained in Canada until the end of the Second World War, and then he too moved to Germany. The Dyck family's time in Steinbach was provisional, the village a temporary stopping place until they could reach their true home.

The eldest of the Vogt siblings, Aganetha (Neta), remained in the Soviet Union at the time her siblings emigrated. She was married to Jacob Kampen, who died of typhus after less than a year of marriage and just five days after the birth of their first child. Aganetha eventually immigrated to Canada in 1948, where she was reunited with her siblings. Still another Vogt, David, died in 1920 of typhus while serving in the Crimea with the White Army.[2]

> One of the boys died of typhus in Russia. That was my uncle David, who had no fear of thunder and lightning. When a storm was raging outside and Aunt Neta, who is very pious, was diligently praying to God, he would stand at the open door and, at each lightning flash, shout enthusiastically, "By thunder!"
>
> "Come back in, David, don't say that," pleaded Aunt Neta, "God will punish you, you'll be struck by lightning. Come in and close the door." But no, David stayed standing at the door and said, "By thunder!"
>
> Things were very bad for Uncle David in the terrible time of the Russian Revolution. He was discovered by bandits, who were going to shoot him. Along with many other prisoners he was forced to stand against a barn wall. Uncle David was the last in the long row of the condemned. The executions began at the front of the row; one man after another fell to the ground. While this was happening, Uncle David quietly and bit by bit edged toward the end of the barn, and in a single unobserved moment, slipped around the corner and ran.
>
> For a long time the family had no news of David, and so Aunt Neta made a vow: "Dear God, if you bring David back to us, I will fast on Fridays for the rest of my life."
>
> When David did return, Aunt Neta fulfilled her promise. It was hard for her but she got used to having no nourishment on Fridays.
>
> Only a little later Uncle David had to flee again, and this time he did not come back. No one knows when and how he died. But do you think that Aunt Neta would break her vow? No, she continued to fast unwaveringly. I do not think that was very fair on God's part.

Although Connie concludes that no one knew her uncle David's fate, she begins by saying that he died of typhus, and this is true to the facts. Connie's evaluation of the justness of Aunt Neta's bargain with God presages a later shift in her spiritual beliefs, away from the tradition of her ancestors.

Aunt Neta's brother died, but then she suffered a loss even closer to home – her only child was taken from her:

> My poor Aunt Neta suffered a very sad fate herself. As a young woman she married a very handsome man. But after a year he died, exactly on the day that she brought her first child into the world. Then, with this child, she moved back to her parents' home. There the little boy grew up along with his uncles and aunts. At the age of twenty he, like so many others, was arrested by the secret police on unproven charges and thrown into prison.
>
> Every morning Aunt Neta would get up and go to the high fence surrounding the prison, where she would keep a look out for her son. And one morning she saw him. His hands were bound behind his back and he, along with other prisoners, was being marched across the yard to the guard house for interrogation. With armed guards in front and behind him, her son turned his head just a little, his eyes seeking his mother through the wire mesh. When he recognized her he nodded at her with a small movement of his head.
>
> The interrogation lasted three days, and each morning Aunt Neta stood at the fence and watched for her son. And each time, when he walked across the yard, he turned his head ever so slightly toward her, greeting her. But on the fourth day she waited in vain, and in the days that followed he was not among the prisoners. He was gone, and no one told her where he was.
>
> She heard no more of him after that. Her whole life, she grieved for her only son. She said: "When I die, the first thing I will do is to run to God and ask: 'Where is my boy?'"

According to *A Vogt Family History*, in September 1937, Jacob Kampen Jr. "was forcibly taken from his home by the NKVD, sent into exile a few months later, and was never heard from again."[3] The Russlaender immigrant inheritance is loss and lifelong grief. As well, even the pious among them had their long-held Christian faith shaken. God does not give explanations.

Aunt Sanna (Anna Vogt, the kindergarten teacher) is also a source of tales about the terrors of the past:

> "Auntie Sanna, tell us about Russia," we begged whenever we went to visit her in her little house. Again and again she would tell us scary stories, for example, the one about the mill-owner Thiessen. He was a rich man with three sons and two daughters. But his wife had died and the children had no mother.
>
> When Aunt Sanna came back from her training in Germany, Mr. Thiessen hired her as a governess for his children. A housekeeper looked after the house management, a cook prepared the meals, and a Russian chambermaid cleaned the rooms.
>
> Mr. Thiessen was a very busy man. He had built a large mill operation which he had to look after. So he did not have much time left for his family. But he made sure that his children were well looked after and that they studied hard in school.

He was in great danger during the Revolution. The revolutionaries were after the blood of everyone whom they judged to be an enemy of the people. According to them, Mr. Thiessen was one such enemy, as he was rich and he was German.

One night, long after everyone had gone to bed, a knock came at the Thiessens' door. "Open up!" came the harsh command.

Everyone in the house knew that this was now a matter of life and death for Mr. Thiessen.

That is why he swiftly left his bed, threw on his housecoat, and left by the back door and hid in one of his employees' houses. Aunt Sanna quickly made his bed and hurried to the door to let in the roughnecks.

"Where is the boss?" they wanted to know.

"I don't know," said Aunt Sanna.

"Is he at home?"

"No, he isn't."

"We'll see about that!"

In the meantime the maid had come in and she stood there in the dress she had hurriedly put on.

"Who are you?" asked one of the men.

"The chambermaid."

"Take us to your boss," commanded the man.

But the girl was not an enemy of the people. She was a Russian servant and could take some liberties.

"Find him yourself," she said snappily.

And so they searched the whole house, wakening the children, until at last they found Mr. Thiessen's room. The bed was empty, unused.

"We'll come back. And we'll find him," they threatened. With that, they left.

Aunt Sanna trembled and could not sleep at all that night.

So it went, for many nights, until Mr. Thiessen's nerves gave way and they caught him. They dragged him out into the cold of winter to the Dnieper, where they made a hole in the ice and forced him into it. So his life ended.

Aunt Sanna told many other stories from the time in Russia, when so many died of typhus and starvation. The worst times were those when the anarchist bands fell upon the villages, robbing the colonists and refusing to leave. Aunt Sanna showed us a photograph of nineteen open coffins in which men and women lay, but also two children. We could see the cuts on their faces.

In her youth, the real Anna Vogt worked as a private tutor to the children of a wealthy mill-owner named J. J. Thiessen. Evidently the above story is a version of Anna's real-life experience. The characterization of Thiessen as "rich and German" fits the description of many of the Mennonites who lost their lives at the hands of revolutionaries and anarchists in Ukraine. Anna appears to have been at the Thiessen home when the "roughnecks" came, aiding in her patron's escape by making his bed so that it appeared not to have been slept in. She must have feared that her own life was at risk. Many years later, safe in Canada, the fictional Sanna shows her nieces and nephews a photograph of the Mennonites who had been killed, and the image of the corpses remains imprinted on their minds.

MAID: MHA, 629-V-6.0

Anna Vogt moved to Winnipeg when Steinbach parents demanded kindergarten instruction in English. Anna and her German school class in North Kildonan.

"Tante Anna" appears also in a memoir by writer Elizabeth Reimer Bartel, who was a kindergarten student in Steinbach at the same time in which *Wenn die Erde bebt* is set. Little Elizabeth, age six, listened with fascination and confusion to her teacher's stories, and in turn relayed them to her grandmother, Mrs. Anna Reimer (nee Wiebe, married to H. W. Reimer). "Tante Anna says the Bolsheviks took their houses," she reports. Protectively, her grandmother tries to steer her away from the gravity of the Russlaender experience: "Nothing for you to worry about." In another exchange about Tante Anna, Mrs. Reimer responds with a remark that the young Elizabeth could not have understood: "*Russlander*! . . . yearning for their *Alte Heimat* [old homeland]."[4] For a new generation of Kanadier, the Russlaender story was wrapped in mystery, with an aura of taboo around it.

In Steinbach as elsewhere in Canada, despite common origin and religion, the Kanadier Mennonites and the Russlaender viewed each other with mutual prejudice. Sociologist E. K. Francis observed: "The two Mennonite groups were divided by cultural and class differences. In the eyes of the native Mennonites the newcomers appeared worldly, overbearing and unwilling to do manual labor. The Russlaender people, on the other hand, found their benefactors, on whose good will they were dependent, uncouth, backward, miserly, and, above all, ignorant and uneducated."[5]

Such prejudice is also revealed in *Wenn die Erde bebt*, but in general descriptions of Anderbach's residents are relatively kind. Yet Knoop's protagonist learns from experience to be cautious about sharing the family's stories. The limitations of others in understanding and sympathizing are found not only in Anderbach. Connie's friend Kitty, who is Catholic and lives in Ste. Agathe, reacts to one such story – about revolutionary Ukraine – with disbelief.

Connie, by now a teenager, tells her friend about her uncle Johann, her father's brother, who lived in a small village called Number Two. After the First World War, bands of robbers came to the village demanding weapons and jewellery. If they could not find any, they raped the young women and shot the men:

MAID; MHA, PP-4-044-441.0

Anna Vogt worked as a private tutor to the children of a wealthy mill-owner named J. J. Thiessen. Anna with Thiessen’ s children and Liese Epp.

One night in Village Number Two things got especially bad. My uncle Johann and his two oldest sons were not at home when a large gang of robbers moved in that evening. Four or five fierce-looking men pushed their way into my uncle’s house and demanded weapons.

“We don’t have any weapons,” said Hans, the sixteen-year-old.

“You’re lying!” screamed the leader, and began to tear open the cupboard doors and fling clothing and dishes onto the floor. The family stood in one corner of the kitchen, trembling.

“Where are the weapons?” repeated the leader, threatening Hans with his axe.

“We have no weapons,” said Hans again.

“You lie, you God-damned Germans,” yelled the man furiously. “Well, our axes will do, then. Come outside!”

My cousin Hans knew what he was in for. The faces of his mother and sisters turned white as the wall as he was taken out by his murderers. In the doorway Hans turned around and spoke gently: “Good night, Mother.” Out in the yard they fell upon him with their axes.

Every house witnessed murder and slaughter, and all the inhabitants who survived the massacre fled to the neighbouring village to relatives and friends.

On his way home my uncle heard of the invasion of his village and rushed to his family in the neighbouring village. His son Hans was lost, but his wife and daughters had survived.

The next morning it seemed that peace had returned to Village Number Two. Uncle Johann and his two remaining sons got ready to go and got the horses from the barn.

But a few robbers were still in the village. They sprang from their hiding place and clubbed Uncle Johann and his two sons to death.

When Connie concludes, Kitty remains quiet, and when she finally finds her words, she says, “Connie, I know that you are not a liar. But the story you’ve told – I can’t believe it. Such things cannot happen.” Connie begins to doubt the veracity of her own tale. Returning to Anderbach for the weekend, she asks her mother if it is really true. Her mother replies: “The story is true, Connie. Your uncle Johann and his sons were brutally murdered by a terrible pack of killers. But you know, those who have not experienced such times simply cannot imagine them. Perhaps it is best to say nothing more about it.”

The Russlaender can only turn toward each other for comfort; they cannot find validation for their history of suffering and loss in Anderbach society. For Connie's mother this lack of validation has several layers. Not only is she not free to tell stories of revolutionary Ukraine to anyone outside the family, but in Canada she has lost her identity. She is a trained teacher who cannot teach, and, as if that were not enough, her husband, Krahn, does not seem to value her contribution in doing housework and raising children, whereas he singles out her sister Sanna for special attention and praise. In a conversation with another sister, Maria, Katharina voices her lament: "I was a teacher, I was independent, I had a reputation and counted in the community. Here I am no more than a housewife, I'm incarcerated, I don't count anymore. I am a slave, Maria, nothing more." Not surprisingly, Katharina is prone to depression and thoughts of self-harm.

HEDWIG DYCK
"She was a gushing joyous thing —
A livelier spirit to school did bring;
Her ready wit was dazing!
In poetry she did excel,
And enticed easily under her spell,
With a gasp we muttered, "Amazing!"
(continued on next page)

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Hedi Dyck's 1937 collegiate yearbook.

Connie's father, for his part, is also dissatisfied with Canada. In Steinbach he found security and a way to make a living, but not a home. He tells her of the lost hope of a home in Russia:

> From the rich soil of Ukraine they [the Mennonites] were able not only to make their daily bread, but also established schools, churches, hospitals, mills, and factories in their villages. Their children attended secondary schools and became teachers and doctors, newspaper publishers and artists. In their prosperous colonies in the heart of a hospitable Russia the German settlers believed they had found a home.

This golden world was destroyed, and through that destruction the Mennonites must learn that Russia-as-home was a delusion. But Krahn cannot go so far as to give up the dream of a Mennonite homeland (*Heimat*) altogether. Russia was at best a "host country," and even Canada, though peaceful and stable, is no more than that. The only remaining hope is Germany. Germany, for Krahn, is the land of origin.

Connie, who has spent her childhood and youth in Anderbach, feels a stronger connection to Canada than her parents do. She has enjoyed elementary school and high school, become fluent in English, and made friends. True, she is alienated by the religious culture in the village, and by the time she is a young woman, feels "more and more clearly that I am worlds apart from the doctrine of the preachers. I simply cannot comprehend their imagined ideas of sin and grace, of judgment and eternal damnation." But she has a profound connection to the physical place, Anderbach. She forms a mystic bond with nature, especially the field behind her house, the creek, and the trees that grow at the water's edge. In particular, she loves a certain willow tree, and the tree comes to embody a kind, feminine deity in counterpoint to the angry, all-knowing Father-God of the church:

> Whenever I came to her, whether happy or unhappy, she enfolded me in her arms. She never became angry, and she never sat in judgment on my doings. But under her canopy I learned to judge these doings myself and to look for my own paths. She was there at all hours, always ready to receive my earthly feelings and to lead them up to heavenly heights.

Krahn arranges for Connie to leave Anderbach after high school to study music in Munich. She is pained to leave her family and her willow tree behind, but excited to go on this adventure, and she does not contemplate a return. Accompanied by the pantheistic spirit of the willow, she boards a ship in New York and is enchanted by the soft and melodious German that the ship's stewards speak.

In fact, the "real Connie," Hedi Dyck, took just such a journey, followed the next year by her mother and siblings. Some family members returned to live in Canada in later years, but not to Steinbach. Katharina Vogt Dyck survived the bombing of Hamburg and returned to Canada in the 1950s; she died in Vancouver in 1966.

Insofar as some Russlaender families, as documented in *Wenn die Erde bebt*, pinned their identity to the German language, or to the notion of a German *Volk*, they were destined to lose such identifiers to the forces of assimilation and the Nazi nightmare.

"Many a time has Hedi amused and entertained us with her song and jest," said the writer of her 1937 collegiate yearbook character sketch. Decades later, she "returned" with the "entertainment" of *Wenn die Erde bebt*, in which she at last told the stories of her family's experience, for the ears of Steinbach and beyond. I do not know whether the book was publicized in Steinbach, or whether any bookstore carried it. By 1990, German readers in the town were relatively few, and the Vogt siblings who play such a large part as models for the characters in the novella were all deceased. Their descendants, however, were and are still very much a living presence in Steinbach. For readers of German, the book is available today, on Amazon, as a record of the experiences of a remarkable Russlaender family in Canada.

Ralph Friesen has contributed numerous articles to *Preservings* and is the author of *Between Earth and Sky: Steinbach, the First 50 Years*, *Dad, God, and Me*, and the co-authored of *Abraham S. Friesen, Steinbach Pioneer*.

1 Hedi Knoop, *Wenn die Erde bebt* (Uchte: Sonnentau-Verlag, 1990). This and subsequent excerpts from the novella are my translations.
2 Here and elsewhere I have relied on two family histories for background historical information: Roy Vogt, Elfrieda Neufeld, and Margaret Kroeker's *A Vogt Family History* (1994) and Erich Vogt's *The Steinbach Saga: The Story of the Vogt-Block Family & the Reimer-Wiebe Family* (2013).
3 Vogt, Neufeld, and Kroeker, *Vogt Family History*, 55.
4 Elisabeth Reimer Bartel, "A Legacy – A Memoir," *Preservings*, no. 10, part 1 (June 1997), 38.
5 E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Altona: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), 212.

FEATURE

Two Bergen Brothers and a Photograph

Leonard Doell

My paternal grandmother was Aganetha (Bergen) Doell, who died before I was born. In the early 1980s, I became interested in knowing more about my Bergen family history and relations. In the process, I found out that Aganetha was the ninth child born to Wilhelm and Helena (Funk) Bergen. Wilhelm was born in 1865 in imperial Russia and came to Canada with his parents Peter and Maria (Rempel) Bergen on the SS *Dominion*, which arrived in Quebec City on July 18, 1875. They went on to take up a homestead at Eichenfeld on the West Reserve in southern Manitoba. He was married to Helena Funk on October 6, 1889, the daughter of Jacob and Anna (Knelson) Funk of Shanzenfeld. The Funk family had come to Canada on the SS *Sardinian* on June 19, 1876.

In 1899, Wilhelm and Helena moved to the Old Colony village of Kronsthal, east of Osler, Saskatchewan. In 1908 they moved again, to an area south of Warman known as Clark's Crossing. In the fall of that year, shortly after their move, Helena and her son Cornelius died. Thirteen children had been born to her. In 1909, Wilhelm married Mrs. Maria Schmidt (nee Teichroeb, married to David Schmidt), a widow who had two children from her first marriage, of which one died as an infant. Another seven children were born to the marriage of Wilhelm and Maria.

The Bergens continued to live at Clark's Crossing until the death of Wilhelm in 1924. For many years he had been sickly, visiting both doctors and chiropractors. The main source of his health issues was an accident when he tried to stop a team of runaway horses pulling a buggy, and they ran over him. He died on February 28, 1924, of what was determined to be dropsy (a buildup of fluids in his body). Maria then moved to the Old Colony village of Neuhorst, west of Osler, where she died on January 16, 1948.

In addition to learning more about my immediate Bergen relatives, I also learned that my great-grandfather Wilhelm had a brother who never came to Canada with the rest of the family. To pursue this story, I made a trip to Central Haven Nursing Home in Saskatoon, following up on a tip that a Mr. Funk might know more about this family. After getting help at the nursing station, I walked down the hall and saw the name Funk on an open door. When I stopped to read the name, a woman sitting in a chair invited me to come in. She asked me who I was and whom I was looking for. Then I realized that I had not walked far enough and had stopped at the wrong room. I told her about my Bergen connection and she looked at me and said in Low German, "You and I are related!" It was the right room after all!

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Katharina Bergen and her husband, Aeltester Jacob Heppner, from Winkler, Manitoba. Next page left: Peter Bergen with his son Wilhelm in imperial Russia. Right: Jacob and Eva (Neufeld) family in imperial Russia.

The woman with whom I was visiting happened to be Mrs. Maria Funk (nee Bergen, married to Abram Funk), the daughter of Jacob Bergen, my great-grandfather's older brother. She then went to her photo album and took out a small tintype photo of an older man and a boy standing next to him who appeared to be his son. Maria told me about the significance of that photo.

Her father, Jacob Bergen, born in Rosenthal, Chortitza colony, in 1853, was the only child born to Peter Bergen and his first

PRIVATE COLLECTION

wife Katharina Berg. After the death of his mother, he went to live with his grandmother and his father remarried. He was raised by his grandmother, a small lady who was very old and sickly. She told him that there would come a time when men would fly in the air. When his grandmother died, he went to work for a Dr. Schellenberg. At first he took care of the horses and later the doctor let him help with rolling up pills in paper. One day he asked Jacob what he wished to do with his life and Jacob replied that he would like to become a school teacher. Dr. Schellenberg arranged for him to go to school and helped him get a scholarship. The scholarship stipulated that for every year of study he would have to teach two years. He studied for three years. After this he went to the village of Wiesenfeld to teach. Teachers would board in a different home each week. He ended up staying in the Neufeld home, where he met his future wife. After their marriage they moved to the nearby village of Prijut, where Jacob farmed and taught occasionally. He taught school for eighteen years.

Wilhelm Bergen at his farm near Clark's Crossing, north of Saskatoon. PRIVATE COLLECTION

Mrs. Funk explained that Jacob had not migrated to Canada with the rest of his family in the 1870s because his father-in-law, Peter Neufeld, had made him promise to stay in imperial Russia if Jacob married his daughter. Jacob was from a poor family and the Neufelds were well-to-do. Mr. Neufeld owned a lot of land and had many horses. Jacob eventually married Eva Neufeld in 1880, and kept his promise to stay.

Since he was determined to stay in imperial Russia, Jacob's father, Peter Bergen, went to a photographer to have a photo taken so that Jacob would have a physical reminder of him. The tintype photo that Mrs. Funk showed me was the photo given by Peter to his son Jacob before leaving for Canada in 1876. The boy standing next to Peter is my great-grandfather Wilhelm Bergen.

Jacob and his wife Eva brought seven children into the world, of which six grew to be adults. Three remained single and three were married. Eva died on January 13, 1918, in Wiesenfeld. Jacob and his family immigrated to Canada in 1925. They came on the SS *Montrose*, which arrived in Canada at the port of Saint John, New Brunswick, on December 27. They then travelled by train to Winkler, Manitoba, where they were met and hosted by Jacob's sister. The following year, Jacob and his family moved to Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, north of North Battleford.

In the fifty years that Jacob was separated from his family in Canada, he had periodic communication with them, some of which came through the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. In a letter to the *Rundschau* on April 8, 1903, Jacob asked for information about the death of his father in North America. He had heard this news through Herman Niebuhr and wanted it confirmed by one of his brothers. It was true that Jacob's father had died in Manitoba, on September 18, 1902, some seven months earlier.

In another letter to the *Rundschau* on February 21, 1923, Wilhelm Bergen wrote that he had ordered the newspaper for his brother Jacob in Russia but had not heard if Jacob had received it or not. He asked if anyone could confirm this for him.

When Jacob and his family arrived in Canada in 1925, the majority of his siblings had already died. His brother Peter died in 1916, Diedrich in 1922, and Wilhelm in 1924. I am unsure of the death date of his sister Maria, who was married to Johan Janzen. The only remaining sibling was his sister Katharina, wife of Aeltester Jacob Heppner from Winkler. After his arrival in Canada, he stayed with the Heppners and later with a Penner family in Neuenberg. He then travelled to Saskatchewan with his son-in-law Abram Funk and visited with relatives, including his sister-in-law Maria Bergen, widow to Wilhelm, at Warman. Eventually they ended up at Rabbit Lake, where he lived with his children.

It was during the summer of 1926 that Jacob's cousin Wilhelm Rempel of Rosthern had the opportunity to meet with him to talk about their childhood years together in imperial Russia. Wilhelm wrote about this joyous reunion in a letter to the *Rundschau* on August 25, 1926. They had not seen each other since the Rempel family left for Canada in 1878. Wilhelm concluded his letter with the exclamation "Wonderful God's guidance!" (Wunderbare Gottesfuhrungen!).

Jacob Bergen passed away on May 16, 1927, at Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan. At the age of seventy-three, the widowed Jacob left his beloved but troubled homeland in the Soviet Union for Canada. While he was not able to reconnect with many of his siblings, friends, or extended family, he was able to join his family in making a new start in a place of peace.

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— RESEARCH ARTICLE —

Mennonite Local War Efforts in Imperial Russia

Olena Khodchenko

At the start of the First World War, many within society welcomed the empire's entry into the conflict with enthusiastic patriotism. Mennonites, loyal to the tsarist regime, greeted the news as law-abiding citizens, and showed their readiness to do their civic duty. On the day that war was declared, Abraham Kroeker, editor of the Mennonite newspaper *Die Friedensstimme* published a patriotic proclamation: "Shall we not show the government and the Russian people that, should war develop, we will be ready to serve the interests of the Fatherland and help the needy?" Furthermore, he suggested that Mennonites should quickly start raising funds for material aid to the Red Cross, organize hospitals in the colonies, and take care of the wounded. He also believed that young volunteers could help as hospital orderlies.[1] David Epp, the editor of *Der Botschafter*, published a similar response in his newspaper.[2] This article will explore the ways Mennonites helped the war effort in imperial Russia and how their help was received by the state and the general population.

MATERIAL ASSISTANCE

Mennonites realized the need to show public support for the war effort. Prayers of loyalty to the tsar were frequently held. Mennonites also provided material support by collecting donations. By August 1914, the colonies near Aleksandrovsk (present-day Zaporizhzhia) had donated 100,000 rubles for the war effort; the districts of Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld provided 164,000 rubles, including 36,000 rubles for the Red Cross.[3] In January 1915, during Tsar Nicholas II's visit to the provinces of Tavrida and Ekaterinoslav, Mennonites from the Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld districts donated another 10,000 rubles for the war effort, sharing that they wished "to give the dear Motherland strength in the fight imposed on her."[4] Mennonites from Ekaterinoslav province gave the same amount.[5] In Tavrida province, a committee for the relief of sick and wounded soldiers was formed, which received funds from all national groups, including the Mennonites. Even smaller Mennonite settlements donated money. For example, the Kronsgarten (Polovitsa) settlement in the Novomoskovsk district (fifteen households, comprising ninety residents) spent approximately 10,000 rubles to establish a hospital with fifteen beds. In the village of Petrovka (Naumenko settlement), located in the Izyum district (ten households), residents donated 11,000 rubles, and founded a hospital for the wounded. They also provided sixty-seven horses and twenty cattle for the army; the villages Muntau and Waldheim had infirmaries with forty and thirty beds, respectively, and there were fifteen beds for the wounded in Orloff's hospital.[6]

MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (MHA), PP-4-044-776.0

Mennonite women volunteered to serve as nurses in military hospitals. The first volunteers were nurses from Muntau hospital. They served in the city of Simferopol.

Most Mennonite communities provided support for the war effort. In an appeal to the tsar, Mennonites of the Halbstadt district wrote: "Hundreds of volunteer Mennonites from all parts of Russia have rushed to serve . . . as orderlies, thus giving themselves wholeheartedly with God for the Tsar and Fatherland, not sparing their lives."[7] On their own initiative, Mennonites

provided linen, warm clothes, and necessary items for the wounded, and donated food. The Halbstadt volost collected over 14 tons of breadcrumbs in 1914, and the Mennonites of Halbstadt (Molochansk) donated about 5.5 tons of dried fruit. The Zagradovka colony donated more than six hundred horses to the military.[8]

Mennonites provided concrete aid to the local population whose family members had been conscripted. Over the course of the war, 237,000 men were conscripted from Ekaterinoslav province, 438,300 from Kherson province, and 212,600 from Tavrida province.[9] Since conscription in 1914 took place in the fall, the main type of assistance was help with bringing in the harvest. Thus, at a meeting of the Mennonites in the Zagradovka colony it was decided to help harvest and grind the grain, and to give peasant families whose heads were called up as soldiers three carts of straw each.[10] Similar assistance was provided by the Mennonites of Petropavlovka and Wiesenfeld in Ekaterinoslav province[11] and by Mennonites in the Spat settlement in Crimea.[12] The Molotschna colony provided approximately a thousand carts for the harvest. Families of soldiers were also helped with food.[13] In addition, Mennonites provided humanitarian aid to orphaned children affected by the war. For example, Johann Thiessen allocated funds to maintain ten orphans,[14] and the Mennonites of Nikolaifeld donated 1,200 rubles to maintain the orphanage.[15] Mennonites also provided aid to refugees from the front-line territories. One hundred and twenty refugee children found shelter in the Martens' house in Halbstadt (Molochansk).[16]

Efforts at assistance by Mennonites were repeatedly noted in the press and in letters of appreciation on behalf of the tsar, government,[17] and the local *zemstvo* authorities.[18] These examples show that in the initial period of the war, the support of Mennonites for the efforts of the Russian imperial state was sincere and systematic.

SERVICE BY MENNONITES

After the abolition of the colonist status for Mennonites and other groups formerly under the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Colonists and the introduction of universal military service, former colonists were conscripted into the imperial Russian military. Military service violated the religious tenets of the Mennonite faith, which contributed to the migration of some Mennonites to Canada and the United States. To reverse the situation, the tsarist regime introduced alternative military service under the regulations of May 25, 1882. Under this system, service was performed in forest and road teams, whose functions included guarding, planting, and clearing state forests, procuring firewood, and repairing and building roads and structures. By the beginning of the First World War, 1,204 Mennonites were serving in eight forestry teams. The Mennonite community paid the cost of maintenance of those conscripted into alternative service: a barracks fee of 50 kopecks from each male Mennonite from fourteen to sixty years old and a tax of 1.8 rubles based on each 1,000 rubles of property value were established.[19]

After the outbreak of the war, the leaders of Chortitza and Molotschna colonies met on July 22, 1914 (Old Style), and agreed on a common course of action, including the immediate organization of a hospital with one hundred beds in Ekaterinoslav. In response, many Mennonites already serving in the forestry camps decided to become volunteer medics, considering this service to be equivalent to the hard and dangerous work of soldiers. By mid-August, approximately four hundred young Mennonites had already shown their readiness, and fifty-four volunteers travelled to Moscow for training, to be followed by assignments to mobile hospitals. At almost the same time, a large group left for Simferopol. Not only men but also women volunteered to serve as nurses in military hospitals. The first volunteers were nurses from Muntau hospital. They served in the Tavricheskii hospital in the city of Simferopol.[20]

On July 29, D. I. Klassen, the Mennonite congregational forest service commissioner for the Russian empire, received a telegram instructing him to report to the director of the Forest

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Department. At this meeting a few days later, it was decided to summon Mennonite congregational representatives, consisting of elders G. Plett, I. Klassen, and preacher D. Epp, to Petrograd (St. Petersburg) to discuss the question of Mennonite reserve service during the war. During the meeting held the next day, it was decided that the Mennonite reservists should be called up as medical orderlies, forest guards, and for forestry work. On August 7, at a meeting in the Molotschna colony, a majority agreed with the proposal to have young men serve as medical orderlies, and the willingness of Mennonite men to volunteer for medical service was commended.[21]

The Chortitza colony and most other communities approved of Mennonite service as medical orderlies. This was reported to Petrograd and as early as August 13, 1914, the Council of Ministers decided to enlist those called up from the reserve for service, including for medical service, into the active army.[22] On September 2, the first drafted Mennonites arrived at the recruiting station in Ekaterinoslav. During that month, the state mobilized 2,651 Mennonite men from the European part of the empire and 551 from Siberia. By the end of the year, 1,585 men were attached to medical units. In Ekaterinoslav they were trained for several weeks for their future duties in the Red Cross hospital. By January 1, 1915, 2,116 Mennonites were serving as orderlies, which included volunteers.[23] These orderlies were to be supported by the military in the units and institutions to which they were sent. The state assigned the rest of the conscripts to the Forest Department.

In 1914, the cost of the maintenance of servicemen financed by the Mennonite community amounted to 476,773 rubles. The overall expenditure caused by the conscription of reservists was 172,205 rubles. In 1915, the tax on the property of members of the community for the maintenance of conscripts to forestry

The dormitory in Moscow for men serving in medical units.

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Mennonites working as medics during the First World War (Bernhard Friesen on the left and Johann Funk holding the bucket).

teams was increased to 2 rubles for each 1,000 rubles of property value. The community budgeted 537,500 rubles.[24] In reality, the upkeep cost for 1915 amounted to 872,453 rubles, including 525,277 rubles for food, 291,055 rubles for clothing, and 58,120 rubles for travel expenses. The budget for 1916 was 1,173,005 rubles. The total number of Mennonites in service by the end of 1915 was 10,821.[25]

The All-Russian Zemstvo Union (VZS), the All-Russian Union of Cities (VSG), the Red Cross, and the United Council of the Nobility managed medical institutions during the war. The wounded from the western front, for the most part, were sent to hospitals in Moscow, Petrograd, and Kiev (Kyiv). Ekaterinoslav was also a medical support centre, with twelve VZS hospitals and infirmaries, five VSG hospitals and infirmaries, two Red Cross hospitals, and two hospitals of the Ekaterinoslav nobility, as well as the 102nd and 129th combined distribution hospitals.[26] As of January 1, 1915, ninety-six Mennonites served as hospital attendants in Ekaterinoslav hospitals and infirmaries.[27] In Ekaterinoslav, a mobile hospital with some Mennonite staff was also organized and sent to the front in Galicia.[28]

In January 1915, because of an appeal to the Mobilization Department by General P. S. Savich, who reported that Mennonite orderlies were conducting anti-war propaganda at the Heir Tsarevich Hospital in Ekaterinoslav, the assignment of Mennonites as orderlies was temporarily suspended (until April). This case coincided with a campaign of spy mania directed at German speakers within the empire, which resulted in the mass eviction of Germans from the front-line territories. Concerned about this report, the military decided not to send Mennonites to the front; instead, a portion of the 1915 conscripts were sent into forestry service. But the demand for Mennonite medics, who proved to be professional and charitable workers, continued because they performed difficult work, which included carrying, nursing, feeding, and dressing the wounded and sick (often infectious). The writer D. Furmanov, who served with Mennonites in a medical train, noted their dedication and endurance. As he wrote, "they had to take care of the wounded without sleep, during the whole trip . . . which often lasted four to five days."[29] The dedication of Mennonite medics to their duties and to the empire was confirmed by N. A. Sudakova, the doctor from sanitary train no. 189, which was captured by the Germans in 1915. She testified that "our Mennonite medics were offered by the Germans to supervise the work of Russian POWs, which they refused with indignation." Prince S. E. Trubetskoi also noted the high reliability of Mennonite medics.[30]

To meet the needs of the medical department, in early April 1915, more Mennonites were called up for service. In response, 1,000 men were called as orderlies (700 from the Ekaterinoslav province and 300 from the Ufa, Orenburg and Samara provinces) and sent to the medical institutions of Moscow, Novgorod, Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, and Simferopol. Eight hundred men were called for forestry work: 100 to the Kursk province, 200 to Kazan, 300 to Perm, 100 to Kiev, 50 to Smolensk, and 50 to Kharkov (Kharkiv). By May 1, 1915, 3,093 Mennonite men served as orderlies (including 581 volunteers), 2,784 in forestry service, and 261 in road works. In addition, 1,500 men were drafted from the reserves, and about 600 were enlisted as part of the 1916 draft. [31]

In August 1915, 769 Mennonites were mobilized, mainly from Kherson, Ekaterinoslav, and Tavrida provinces, as well as from the Samara district. Taking into account those who were already at the collection point in Ekaterinoslav, 1,093 people were sent to the Red Cross, the Transcaucasian Zemstvo Union, and the Moscow and Simferopol infirmaries. The twelve sanitary trains run by the All-Russian Union of Cities, as of August 1, included 81 men, some of whom were Mennonites.[32] The VZS had 50 trains under its control; Mennonites served as orderlies in 48 of them. In the so-called "nobility" trains, there were 668 orderlies, of whom 312 were Mennonites. By this point these trains had made 814 trips to evacuate the wounded.[33] The remaining twenty-seven VZS sanitary trains, consisting of thirty to forty freight cars for troop movement (*teplushkas*), were serviced chiefly by Mennonite orderlies (one orderly for each *teplushka*).[34] As of August 1, 1915, a total of about 1,500 Mennonites served on the sanitary trains.

Mennonites also served in mobile field hospitals and mobile medical detachments (dressing and feeding stations). On the front lines, field hospitals provided emergency medical and surgical aid to the wounded. One orderly attended to each hospital ward. During periods of intensive fighting, each ward could have forty to fifty wounded.[35] The personnel of the sanitary units were responsible for providing first aid at the front line, bandaging, and evacuating the wounded from the battlefield to the nearest infirmary or hospital, as well as organizing feeding stations, baths, laundries, disinfection and inoculation stations, and other life-supporting infrastructure in the rear close to the front.

During the war the VZS formed thirty such detachments.[36] Paramedics serving in units and medics on trains often found

themselves in combat conditions. A man serving in train no. 217 described one of the trips: "Our train moved slightly forward to a destroyed railway box. Dozens of wounded people, bandaged in some way, were lying on the dusty grass near it. We immediately began loading the wounded into the wagons. The train was already full, but not all the wounded were loaded in. We put them in the aisles and in the vestibules. The whole train was already groaning with a slow, discordant moan. The fighting was evidently getting closer, but we did not see it. I only caught glimpses of the broken glass in the window of the carriage, then I heard the whipping of stray bullets on the rails. One of our orderlies was wounded in the shoulder, another was knocked off his feet by the hot air from a shell blast. But this went past our consciousness. Everyone was absorbed in one thought: 'Hurry up and load the wounded! Hurry!' A sweaty officer galloped to the train and called out to Pokrovskii (the train manager). The officer's epaulettes were covered with such a thick layer of dust that you couldn't even see the stars.

"'Hurry up!' The officer shouted in a broken voice. 'Get your train the hell out of here! It'll be too late in a quarter of an hour. You've got double traction! Now!'

"'We can still take the wounded on the rooftops!' shouted back Pokrovskii.

"'Take them on the move!' shouted the officer, spurring his horse, and galloping to the locomotive. The train started at once. Some of the wounded managed to cling to the railings and the

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Two Mennonite men serving in the forestry service, reading the Russian language newspaper *Russkoe slovo.*

orderlies dragged them onto the platform. It was only now that I noticed that it was already dusk – the fire of the bursts became clearer, and the dust on the horizon turned an ominous crimson colour.

"Then the bullets began popping against the walls of the cars, but it only lasted a few minutes. The train was moving at breakneck speed. When it finally slowed down, we realized that we were out of the 'sack.'"[37]

In the summer of 1915, six Mennonites (four from the Berdyansk team and two from the Velikoanadol'sk team) expressed their desire to serve in the active army. In August their petition was granted.[38] At the same time, the Forest Department, which received about 1,700 conscripts in the spring, also needed more men, since many employees (foresters and labourers) had been drafted into the active army. The Main Administration of Land Management and Agriculture (GUZZ) raised the issue of additional conscription for Mennonite second-class militiamen. In August, the Main Administration of the General Staff and the Ministry of Internal Affairs coordinated this issue. Following this, GUZZ proposed to send second-class militiamen (physically disabled) to the forestry teams as well. The corresponding decree was signed on September 14. At the same time, the military, having a shortage of sanitary personnel, began to apply for 500 second-class Mennonite militiamen.

Mennonites also served in other capacities. Jakob Dick, a Mennonite from a village in Crimea, was appointed deputy manager of the Red Cross nursing department.[39] At the same time, Hermann Abramovich Bergmann was appointed head of the wounded transport department of the VZS.[40] Johann (Ivan) Yakovlevich Esau, working under Prince M. P. Urusov in the Red Cross, headed a unit consisting of Mennonites that dealt with organization and supply. The unit, unlike the Russian intendant structures, worked quickly, without theft.[41] Esau was appointed by the order of Urusov as the commissioner for the conversion of three cargo steamships into floating hospitals. The steamships transported the wounded along the Dnieper to Ekaterinoslav.[42] Mennonite medics also served on Red Cross hospital ships: the *Portugal* (torpedoed and sunk), the *Thyssen*, and others.[43]

Over the course of the war, approximately 12,300 Mennonites were drafted or served as volunteers; about 7,000 were in the sanitary units. Mennonite casualties during the war amounted to about a hundred men.

ANTI-GERMAN LEGISLATION

After the declaration of hostilities between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and imperial Russia in 1914, the situation of the German and Mennonite population in southern Ukraine changed markedly. On September 7, Ekaterinoslav Governor V. A. Kolobov signed a decree, making it illegal to use the German language in public. Violation of the decree was punished by arrest for three months or a fine of up to three thousand rubles.[44] The governor of Tavrida province signed a similar decree on September 2.[45] On October 24, the Odessa Military District General, M. I. Ebelov, approved these restrictions, banning groups of more than five people from speaking German, even in church sermons. (This ban was in effect for only two months and was cancelled from Petrograd on January 24, 1915).[46] Based on these orders, all German-language newspapers were closed, including *Der Botschafter* and *Die Friedensstimme*.

Another discriminatory law was passed on February 2, 1915, allowing the state to expropriate land owned by ethnic Austrians, Germans, or Hungarians in a 100- to 150-verst zone along the borders and around strategic locations. It was logical from a security standpoint, as France and Germany enacted the same type of laws in the front-line contact zone with the enemy. But in imper-

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ial Russia, the law also provided for a belt of 100 versts along the perimeter of the Black and Azov seashores, where contact with the enemy was practically impossible, especially along the shores of the inner Azov Sea, near a concentration of Mennonite settlements. Moscow professor K. E. Lindeman concluded that the inclusion of this coastal belt in the law was intended to reduce and further limit the land holdings of Mennonites and Germans. According to the law, within sixteen months of the publication of lists of landowners, all land purchased by the subsidiary colonies, as well as purchased titled land, would be subjected to expropriation. Only households where one of the family members served in the army were not subject to the law.[47]

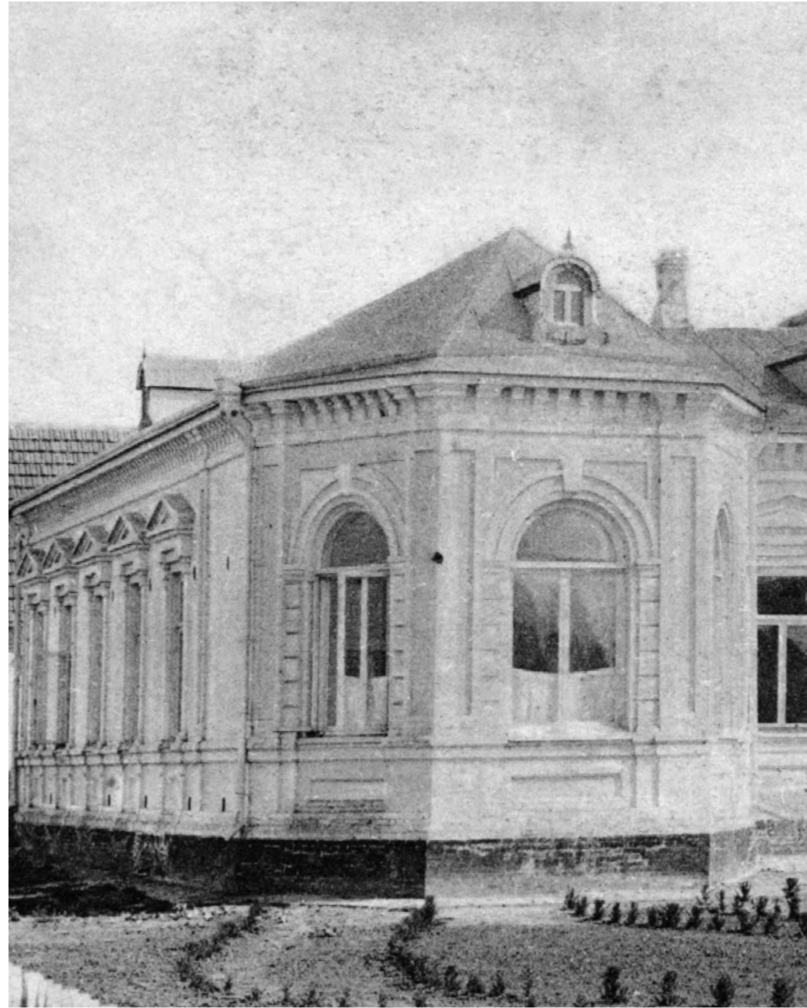
MENNONITE INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

When it entered the First World War, the Russian empire was unprepared for a prolonged military campaign. The costs for the state were enormous, as it had to restructure the economy at the expense of the production of consumer goods. The state reoriented metallurgical and machine-building plants, including those owned by the Mennonites, to the production of military equipment and armaments. These factories received money and supplies from the Ministry of War to fulfill government orders. The orders from the defense factories were divided into two

Tsar Nicholas II visiting Red Cross workers in Ekaterinoslav.

categories: the production of equipment for grain elevators and farming machinery for companies working to supply the army, and the production of armaments.

The Lepp and Wallmann Company produced three-inch shells, six-inch bombs, hydraulic presses for crimping three-inch grenades, hydraulic pumps for six-inch bombs, two-wheel wagons (about 530), 1884-model military wagons (700), and launchers (360). The factory of Jacob A. Koop produced two types of military wagons and shell casings in addition to agricultural equipment. In November 1916, the two plants merged into Lepp, Wallmann and Koop, which signed several contracts with the Main Artillery Directorate and the Ekaterinoslav Military Industrial Committee to produce shells. The Hildebrandt and Priess factory produced shells and wagons, and A. A. Unger's factory manufactured wheels for two-wheel wagons and furniture for hospitals.[48] Neufeld's factory in Sofievo produced hand grenades,[49] the Gorokhov and Jansen factory produced three-inch shrapnel and ignition cups for grenades, the G. D. Neufeld factory produced six-inch primers, and Bernhard and Anna Thyssen's mechanical and iron foundry in the Velikoknyazheskoe colony (Wohldemfuerst) near Stavropol produced marine and anti-personnel mine shells and hand grenades, produced shell grenades and cartridges, and repaired rifles.[50] Factories producing flour and cereals for defense needs included J. Neufeld and Company in Waldheim, Thyssen and Company in Simferopol, Klassen in Kiziyar, G. Schroeder and Klassen in Molochansk, Franz and Schroeder in Neu Halbstadt (Novomolochansk), the six modernized mills of Niebuhr and Company, Dik's mill in Feodosia district, and the partnership of I. I. Dik and P. Mantler in the village of Nelgovka.[51]



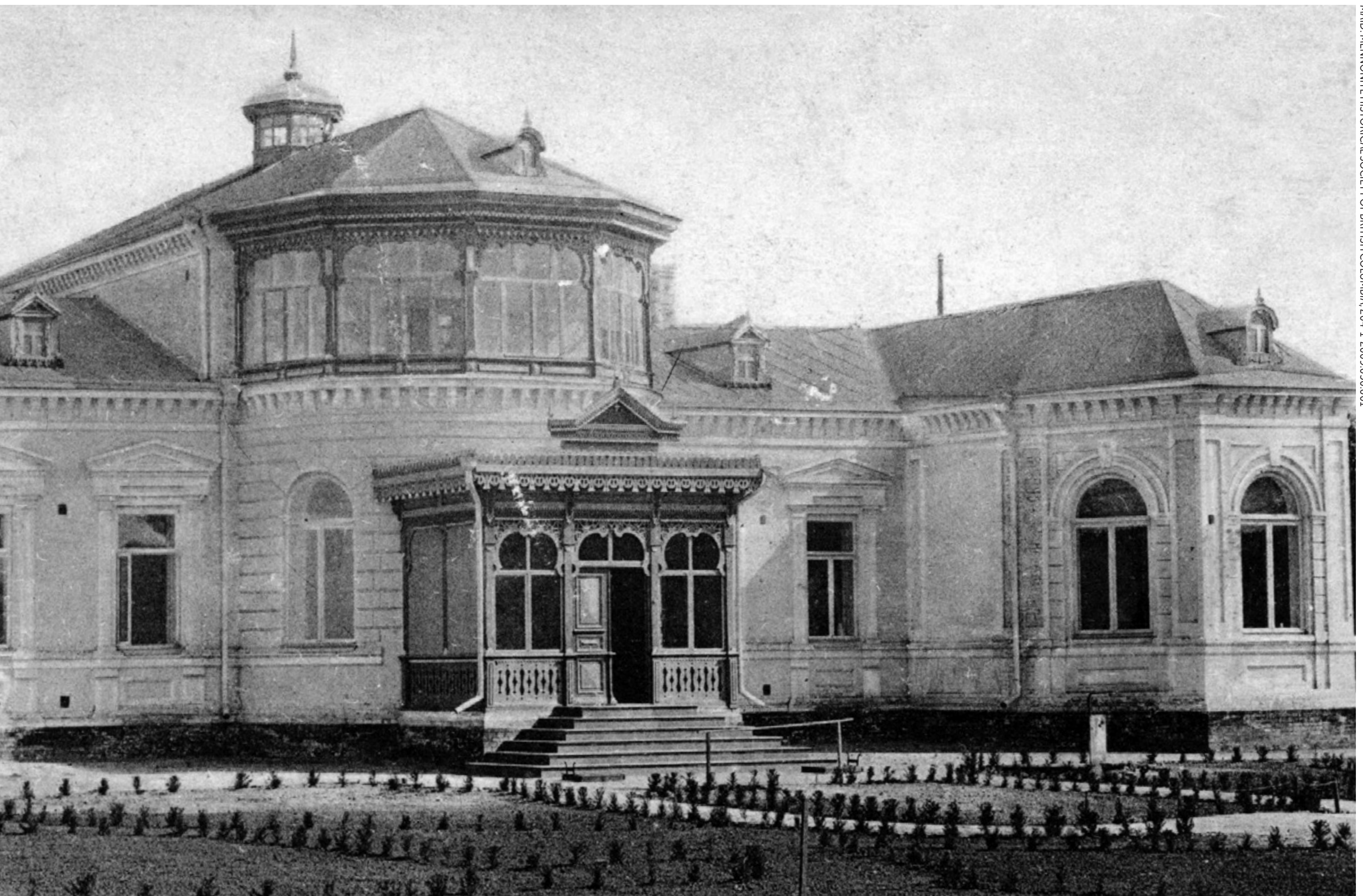
Many of the factories that continued to produce non-military goods had to downsize or stop operations, such as the Niebuhr brothers' mechanical plant in Olgenfeld, the Koop and Company mechanical engine factory in Nikolayev, the Penner starch factory in Muntau, the Dicks' pearl barley mill in Halbstadt, the Rempel mill in the New York colony, the Neufeld brewery, and others. It should be noted that during the war all Mennonite enterprises were in danger of being forcibly sold, since most were on land likely to be expropriated. The machine factory of J. J. Niebuhr in Olgenfeld, for instance, was expropriated.[52]

The Aleksandrovsk city council was especially insistent on the issue of expropriation. In addition to the land and factories in Shonviz, it acquired the Alexandrobat sanatorium and demanded the purchase of the territories of Einlage (Kichkas), Rosenthal (Kantserovka), and Nieder-Chortitza. On August 19, 1916, the Ministry of Trade and Industry succeeded in stopping the expropriation of lands on which industrial facilities were located.

UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Even before the war, the post office and the police monitored Mennonites' international correspondence.[53] During the war, censors selectively checked domestic correspondence. With the beginning of the war, the idea of German espionage was persistently instilled in the minds of the public. Spy mania intensified after the defeats of the Russian army at the end of 1914. Taking advantage of growing anti-German sentiments, peasants wishing to settle personal scores for past offenses began to submit denunciations to the police against Germans and Mennonites. According to these complaints, Germans were not reliable, and they were accused of making anti-patriotic statements. After a hearing, most accused were released,[54] although some were referred to the courts on charges of anti-government statements.[55] A few cases were brought to trial. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, which monitored the political reliability of Mennonites, had to admit that statements "of sympathy for Germany's military successes were very rare."[56] Nevertheless, searches for anything illegal and seizures of firearms from Mennonites were common.

The political police also paid close attention to Mennonites helping the war effort. As mentioned previously, in January 1915 the orderlies at the Heir Tsarevich Hospital in Ekaterinoslav were accused of anti-war propaganda among the wounded (by reading and interpreting the Bible). As punishment, some were transferred to the forestry service in the Perm region.[57] In August 1915, the Ekaterinoslav zemstvo hospital was searched and the correspondence of all Mennonite orderlies was confiscated based on a denunciation. They were also accused of reading the Bible to wounded soldiers, and of having conversations in German with captive Czechs. A search of the orderly K. K. Peters'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belongings resulted in the discovery of his wife's letters, in which she described how the denunciation of Ukrainian peasants in 1914–1915 led to searches and interrogations of residents of neighbouring Mennonite farms.[58] Based on the contents of the letters, Peters was accused of espionage, he was placed under surveillance until the end of 1915, and all his relatives were searched. His fellow orderly, D. P. Reimer, confessed at the inquiry that he read the Bible in Russian to the soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel S. I. Volsky, who conducted the inquiry, concluded that both the orderlies and the villagers were reliable, but G. L. Terentyev, head of the Ekaterinoslav police department, ordered monitoring to continue, in order to please his superiors.[59]

The Orthodox Church considered pacifism to be an "export from Germany" and engaged in a struggle against German influence in the empire. As a result of joint efforts with the political police, a secret police circular (no. 167126) was drafted and sent out to the police departments for implementation, stating that "the false teachings of Stundo Baptists, which have appeared in Western Europe and spread in Russia . . . are so strongly influenced by Germany that these sects are a breeding ground for Germanism in Russia." In this regard, it was ordered to establish strict surveillance of Baptists and Adventists.[60] The document did not mention the Mennonites, but on its basis, investigative actions were carried out against the teacher Heinrich Friesen and brothers G. Iu. and Y. Iu. Heinrichs from the village of Korneivka, Ekaterinoslav district, who assisted Baptists and helped them financially.[61] At the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, the police intended to deport several community leaders, including G. A. Braun from Rueckenau, and J. J. Friesen from the village of Tiege.[62] For the most part, however, the Mennonites during the war did not give the authorities any reason to persecute the community on the charge of sympathizing with Germany.

CONCLUSION

The tsarist regime, after inviting the Mennonites into the empire, maintained a comfortable environment for the community's development for over one hundred years. In turn, the community considered its members full citizens, and in difficult times for the Fatherland, voluntarily helped compatriots suffering from hunger, injury, and disease. Throughout the First World War, the community showed patriotism and endeavoured to serve with faith and conscience in the sanitary units, considering this service as equivalent to the hard and dangerous work of soldiers. In response, the state, wishing to rally the public against the enemy and to divert its attention from failures at the front,

The Orloff-Tiege hospital was used to treat the war wounded.

sacrificed some of its citizens, accusing the German-speakers within the empire of unreliability, sabotage, and complicity with the enemy. Against the backdrop of the anti-German campaign, a series of discriminatory laws was passed, restricting the culture of these ethnic groups and, most importantly, threatening the economic stability of the community. An exception was made for military families. With more than 12,000 Mennonites serving in the military (primarily in non-combatant positions), few were affected by the expropriation laws; however, the fear that this clause might be revoked hung over the community throughout the war. The Mennonites were saved by two circumstances: the economic needs of the state under the enormous strain of war, and the events of the Revolution of 1917. As a result, the material losses of the Mennonites did not exceed the national average. The mass expropriation of their property only began after the fall of the Provisional Government, during the civil war.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Psychological Consequences of Emigration

Jacob Thiessen

Translation and afterword by Ralph Friesen

Not much has been written about this subject, in my recollection. Personally, the topic has occupied me for a long time and therefore I want to express some thoughts about it now. I think I may be allowed to do this because I'm one of the many emigrants who must spend the rest of their lives in a foreign country. I would like to emphasize this "must" in the following.

I write this article with the intention of being of service to our emigrant community. I would be happy if others would add their own input to this important life question.

It is not open to any doubt that most of the thousands of emigrants suffer greatly from the consequences of their emigration. Financially or materially, but certainly and especially psychologically. Since this happens in secret and is generally kept quiet, publicly disclosing this "suffering," because that's what it is, and bringing it to light, can be of value.

First of all is this question: How is it that, once we have left our home soil, it is difficult or impossible for us to find our bearings in a foreign country?

We want to try to give a thorough answer to this question. Since most of our Mennonite immigrants come from Russia, I can start there. Russia had truly become our home. As it already was for our parents. We were born into it. We did not experience a struggle for existence. That is why our spiritual life was able to develop quite peacefully. From the very first day our souls were able to take in impressions undisturbed. These original and many subsequent impressions in childhood and adolescence formed our inner personality. On reaching maturity we became men and women and were seen as such by those around us. But what they didn't see – and we ourselves did not feel – was the nature of our spiritual journey or non-journey. Unfortunately, the many negative mental and emotional processes that were unconsciously dormant inside us had made us passive people. Although our life passed without strife, it was not without talent, talent such as is to be found anywhere else, since "a talent is formed in stillness," as Goethe put it so beautifully. But he immediately adds: "character is formed in the world's torrent."[1] Now talent and character make up the whole person. From this it can be seen that our mental and spiritual development was only half accomplished, one-sided. It lacked character development in the world's torrent.

Until the outbreak of the war we were hardly or not at all aware of this. Only the great event, emigration, made this fact clear to us. How negative our spiritual life experiences had been – we had only a little idea of that when we were torn away from our homeland. Unfortunately, not much more than an idea.

Arriving in the new homeland, we reacted unfavourably, negatively, to everything that impressed itself on our consciousness, as if in accordance with all the negative impressions we had received earlier in our lives. That may be an adequate psychological explanation, but it is not correct in human terms, for it is precisely here in the new world that the development of the second part of our humanity should finally have started: the formation of character. More about this below – but first this question: "What did we find in the new world and what was (and is) our behaviour towards it?"

This question is very practical, easy to answer, but at the same time weighty. Every emigrant knows how difficult it was for him to find his way in the new world. Because most of them have not gotten any further than that, finding their way. Only a few have come to acceptance.

Without exception, our men and women have fought a hard battle against new circumstances, new language, strange people, strange surroundings, etc. Very understandable, because our whole mental attitude was against the new, the strange. Hence our reaction, rising to the point of indignation, against all the new situations in which we were suddenly placed.

I am thinking first of all of my own personal experience in this regard, then of the experience of others who have given me a glimpse into their souls through their letters. "Incomprehensible people, super-Christian, but whose God is the dollar. We loathe the national language, the climate is terrible. If only we hadn't

Many Russlaender Mennonites struggled to adapt to their new circumstances after leaving the Soviet Union. MENNONITE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES, BETHEL COLLEGE

emigrated! We will never feel at home here. Our children, insofar as they are still young, will get used to the new circumstances, but we, their parents, never, never." There you have a few excerpts from letters I have received.

So it is with individual emigrants, so also with entire groups, perhaps with the whole.

The *Steinbach Post* of October 7 republished an article from the *El Paso Herald Post* of February 17, 1936, in which I read that the settlement in Mexico of seven thousand Mennonites, who have invested thirteen long years of toil into a thriving, independent paradise, is being irresponsibly destroyed because they evidently can't agree with the state government on children's education. If you can't come to an agreement with the government, you'll take your walking stick and go – where, they don't know yet.

Our loved ones in Krauel (Brazil)[2] could not get their bearings there either and, after a heavy inner struggle, they took to the road again. Most of them are now trying it in Curitiba. "Wandering without end" (Dr. Quiring).[3]

One of the many reasons why we emigrants cannot find our way in foreign lands is undoubtedly the fact that we are generally destitute. The fact that this was not so before doesn't help us now. We immigrate and are dependent. And this dependency closes the doors and hearts of the local people to us.

The fact that in our thinking and feeling we still live in the past naturally makes us demanding and makes life even more difficult for us. We were not expected in the foreign land, not wanted, and at best tolerated once we were there. Nothing more.

What makes life unbearable now is our boundless conservatism, which is deeply rooted in our soul-life. The fact that we persist in holding on to this tendency constitutes our downfall. We see it in the seven thousand Mennonites in Mexico. They, and all of us, were born into and grew up under a special programme. We hold on to this and demand it from the new government. If it doesn't give it to us or if it takes it from us, then all that's left to us is the walking stick. And if there is no answer to the question "where to?" what then? Then we artificially increase the number of martyrs. But it may be questionable whether we suffer in this respect for the sake of Jesus.

After so many years of wandering in foreign lands, it should have become clear to us that we should not blame the people and circumstances around us, or the state government, for our restless lives. In fact, we are to blame. This must become very clear to us. Let's not forget that the reason for our dissatisfaction is not outside of us but within us. We can wander from one place to another and search, always search. Will we find satisfaction? Not until we find ourselves, at any rate. And besides, it is questionable whether God calls us to move continually from place to place. This is not clear from the Bible, where God leads a people or individuals to a foreign land to stay, because he has given them a place there. Only a troubled, negative soul will always be compelled to wander.

Isn't this a characterless attitude? Not only do we lack character – we also rob our children of opportunities to build character. We will have to pay heavily for that. The fact that we are already being punished for this escapes our comprehension.

As I have pointed out that it is our own fault that we remain "homeless" despite our painstaking efforts, I also want to mention

ways in which we can find a home in a foreign land.

The first thing to do is to "forget those things which are behind."[4] As Christians we are to be obedient to the apostle's counsel. What we once were and had must not be the capital on whose interest we continue to live. When arriving in a new country, the first task is always to study its laws, conditions, etc., and through God's power, begin again with one's whole person, body, soul, and spirit. It is not for the host government to follow our instructions, but for us to comply with theirs. Our spiritual well-being does not need to suffer from this; on the contrary, only in the torrent of the world can we fully accept ourselves as Christians. It is precisely in the midst of the world that we, who are not of this world, can be light and salt to it, a letter from Christ.[5] If we flee from this opportunity, we flee from God.

My dear companions in faith, my dear fellow emigrants! The psychological consequences of emigration indict us before God and men. That there is no longer a place in this world where we can live as Christians, according to our opinion, is not to our credit.

I know we are talking about our place in the world, but first and foremost it's about our relationship with God. Because this relationship is not correct, we fear the reality of our life on earth. Certainly, this fear has its justification but also its dangers. It is God himself who assigns his children a place in the world. He places us in this existence within the context of co-existence with others. No flight from the world! How the Saviour's plea still rings through the centuries: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). He, the Saviour, never fled, because he took everything from his Father's hand. His essential being was not expressed in a world-denying flight into the hereafter; he had to worship in the middle of the world, he had to be obedient. And this is what he expects, yes, also demands, from his people. "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."[6] "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."[7] Only through this attitude can we come into a right relationship with God, only this way will our soul life be harmonious (positive), and our relationship to the world be correct. In all our wrestling and struggling, despite all disappointments and impediments, despite all temptations, we may hold to the one who said: "I am with you always." Hold to him who prayed so fervently for us: ". . . that thou shouldest keep them [from the evil one]."[8]

Our basic attitude should be: to live in the world, to belong to Christ, who has set us the example for everything. One day the end will come and we will go to that eternal home, where we are at home forever.

AFTERWORD

This article was originally published in the *Steinbach Post* in November 1936.[9] At the time, Jacob Thiessen was pastor of the small Mennonite church at Ouddorp, in the Netherlands. Born in Olgafeld, Fuerstenland colony, in 1888, he left his home at the age of twenty-two to attend Bible school near Basel, Switzerland. He had hoped to become a missionary to the Dutch East Indies under the Dutch Mennonite Board of Missions. In 1913 he went to Rotterdam for special training, and there he learned Dutch and Javanese. The First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution made it impossible for him to carry out his plans, and instead he became a bank employee, married a Dutch woman, and had two children.[10] Evidently he never returned to his country of origin.

Thiessen mentions receiving letters from others who had left his homeland. These would no doubt have included three of his younger siblings, Gerhard, Margaret, and Heinrich, all of whom came to live in the Winkler area of Manitoba in the 1920s. Another brother, Johann, did not emigrate, married a Russian woman, and lived in the village of Arkadak. He died in Siberia in 1942.[11]

As an educated Mennonite émigré, Thiessen takes it upon himself to comment on the experiences and attitudes of his fellow-believers, who, like him, have been displaced to various parts of the world. His stated purpose is to bring to light that which was hidden, the suffering of emigrant Mennonites. As his narrative goes on, though, it becomes apparent that he has another agenda, to chastise his people for their lack of "character," and to offer a remedy for this situation.

On the one hand he shows sympathy and understanding. From his own experience he knows that the transition to a new country with a new language, a different culture, an unfamiliar form of government, and a harsh climate is very hard to accomplish. Thiessen acknowledges the universal challenge of emigrants: they cannot find their bearings, cannot orient themselves (*zurechtfinden*) in their host country. Many Mennonites had come to embrace the former Russian empire as their true home, their *Heimat*. Displaced to another country – Brazil or Paraguay or the United States or Canada – they react negatively to the new, strange environment. Further, the emigrants are dependent upon their host government and fellow Mennonites, and this dependency exerts great stress. In the transaction of giving and receiving, it is the giver who has the power. To be powerless in this way, and even to be held in contempt by one's co-religionists for not complying with the socially approved "Mennonite" value of self-sufficiency, for being needy, this is not easy. To perceive that "we are not wanted" is a blow to the basic human need to belong.

Even the nostalgia of emigrants, the tendency to live in the past, is a handicap, because that "golden" past cannot be retrieved, and the energy spent dwelling on it robs them of the resources they need to continue a fruitful life in changed circumstances. Thiessen draws on his experience as a banker for an apt metaphor: "What we once were and had must not be the capital from which we receive the interest on which we shall then live." This "interest" – nostalgia – in fact, is illusory, of no real value. Nor can others be held to account for the emigrant's condition. In Thiessen's severe reckoning, blaming others only prevents us from taking responsibility for ourselves.

Thiessen criticizes his fellow émigrés for failing to make a successful adjustment to their new homes, wherever they might be. It is this failure which is at the centre of his analysis. His

article is not so much about the psychological after-effects of emigration as it is about the Mennonites' inability to perform what he sees as an essential developmental task – even while they were still in their homeland. He hangs his argument on Goethe's proverb that "a talent is formed in stillness, and character is formed in the world's torrent." The time-honoured conservative Mennonite strategy of keeping separate from the world and seeking special privileges so as to be able to live a quiet, peaceful, Christian agrarian life, reveals a "negative" – Thiessen repeats the word five times – psychology. For Thiessen, the "inner personality" of Mennonites was formed in the village life within imperial Russia, but it was untested by engagement with the broader world, in which enormously disruptive social and political forces were exerting themselves. Having avoided the hurly-burly of the world, Mennonites lacked character. The "stillness" and prosperity in which they lived allowed for certain gifts to emerge (these are not named), but this occurred in a sheltered environment, not the "real" world. The Mennonite "paradise" was created under false pretenses. The spiritual journey of Mennonites in imperial Russia was not a journey at all, but a kind of house-bound stagnation. Mennonites did not act, but were acted upon.

Jacob Thiessen critiqued Mennonites, including those who had moved to Mexico, for their expectation of special privileges. GRACE DALKE PRIVATE COLLECTION

Fellow émigré and writer Arnold Dyck would have agreed that for a time, "in their prosperous colonies in the heart of a hospitable Russia the [Mennonite] German colonists believed they had found a home." Then came the revolution and the world war and these same colonists were fiercely persecuted, so "then suddenly it is shown, where one belongs. As for those who had already thought of themselves as Russian, they were quickly taught otherwise. . . . It is best to return to the land of one's ancestors."[12] By which he meant Germany. For Thiessen, however, the idea of an earthly homeland, no matter in which country, is bankrupt.

Having negotiated with the host government to secure some version of *Privilegium*, having been granted land and the freedom to practice their religion, to speak their language, to educate their children as they see fit, the Mennonites promised to be productive and industrious farmers in return. When the privilegium appears to be threatened, and negotiation fails to produce the desired results, the fallback strategy is to leave, to "pick up the walking stick" and search for another place where they can pursue their way of life.

These isolationist strategies, says Thiessen, are a product of "our boundless conservatism, which is deeply rooted in our soul-life," revealing a kind of psychological immaturity. The very suffering of the émigrés points to the need to develop a new Mennonite soul. Thiessen wrests the walking stick from the conservative Mennonite's hand; he calls for an end to "wandering without end." He would uproot traditional strategies, however deep-rooted, from the Mennonite soul.

How shall this radical project be implemented? On a practical level, Mennonites would have to give up their notion of special treatment, wherever they find themselves. They would need to become familiar with the laws and customs of the host country, and adapt to them.

A spiritual shift would also be necessary. Thiessen invokes Scripture: in the words of Paul, we must forget those things which are left behind. We must give up the notion that we, like the Old Testament Jews, were led by God to this place or that; God does not have a physical place set aside for Mennonites. The notion of *Heimat* can no longer serve. Instead, we must hear the words of Christ, teaching us to be in the world but not of it. If we internalize Christ we will be in right relationship with God and this correction will manifest as a positive attitude and presence, wherever we are.

Thiessen makes no distinction between the status of emigrant and that of refugee. The majority of those who departed from the Soviet Union in the 1920s were arguably as much refugees as emigrants, leaving this new atheistic communist state in the hope of a better future. When Thiessen talks about the suffering of the emigrants, he speaks only of problems of adjustment to a new country, and omits entirely any mention of the horrors they had experienced during the civil war: violence, rape, murder, disease, and famine. His own situation, by comparison, appears to have been much less fraught.

Many Mennonites had come to embrace the former Russian empire as their true home, their *Heimat*. Displaced to another country – Brazil or Paraguay or the United States or Canada – they react negatively to the new, strange environment. MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (MHA), PP-8 - PHOTO COL. 500-552.0

His proposal is not psychological in the classic or Freudian sense of the word, but theological. Freud's method would involve not forgetting but recalling and working through the trauma of the emigrants, helping them re-construct their "primal scene" so that they would have greater clarity about their situation and a strategy for addressing it. Untreated, the trauma becomes firmly entrenched in the psyche, resulting in an enduring melancholia, for which "wandering" may seem to be an antidote. This wandering is compatible with another Freudian idea, of repeatedly exposing oneself to some kind of trauma, the repetition compulsion.[13]

Depression and suicidal ideation (and in some cases, suicide) were responses to trauma among the emigrant Mennonites, especially the Russlaender, documented in anecdotal stories told in memoirs or sometimes reported in newspapers. Thiessen's theological solution was actually adopted by many, and continues to be a default response among many Russlaender descendants today. There does seem, however, to be a revived effort to revisit the "primal scene" and to come to terms with it.

The article raises as many questions as it answers. Is strong attachment to physical place inherently a bad thing? Is it advisable, or even possible, to forget the past? What part does severe trauma play in hindering adjustment to a new environment? Is it not a form of aggression to blame victims for their suffering? Can you really address the subject of emigrant suffering when you omit the social and political context for the emigrants whose situation you seek to describe? When conditions are what they were under the Bolshevik regime, is not "wandering" a positive option? Has the strategy of separation from the world nothing to recommend it, given the corruption of the world? How does the historic peace position of Mennonites fit into the recommended accommodation to the dominant culture? What about the function of art – such as novels like Dietrich Neufeld's *A Russian Dance of Death* (1921–22) or Hans Harder's *No Strangers in Exile* (1934) – as a response to suffering? What does it mean, in everyday terms, to "hold to Jesus," and does this admonition still not leave room for many different interpretations?

Having rejected the notion of *Heimat*, Thiessen does come

Jacob Thiessen was born in Olgafeld, Fuerstenland colony. In 1888, he left his home at the age of twenty-two to attend Bible school near Basel, Switzerland. Other Mennonites also attended university at European institutions, developing a new worldview. MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES

back to it after all at the end of his article, allowing for it, but not as something realizable on this earth. There is an eternal land where we will be at home forever, and we can allow that thought to afford us comfort. But during our stay in this life, we must not indulge our soul's desire for a return to a physical place that we can call "home."

Ironically, the idea of heaven as home is in some way the very "world-denying flight into the hereafter" for which Thiessen criticized the emigrants. It removes us from the torrent of the world, from history, whether that history is seen as regressive or redemptive, entirely.

Thiessen's obituary mentions that he "did his best to make an adjustment to the Dutch environment but that 'in spite of his naturalization he always remained a stranger.'"[14] In some way, then, his article is a letter to himself, a kind of self-encouragement to reach for an ideal he could not achieve.

1 In Goethe's 1790 play *Torquato Tasso*, the character Leonora speaks the lines "Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille / Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt." This can also be translated as "Talent is formed in quiet retreat / Character in the headlong rush of life."

2 Krauel, a former colony of Russian Mennonites located in the district of Alto Krauel, Santa Catarina, Brazil, was founded in 1930 and dissolved in 1952 after a gradual disintegration. The colony was more commonly known as Witmarsum, after the name of the central village. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO), s.v. "Krauel Colony (Alto Krauel District, Santa Catarina, Brazil)."

3 The reference is to Walter Quiring (1893–1983), who published extensively and "devoted his time, talents and resources to the commemoration, celebration and preservation of the achievements and legacy of the Russian Mennonites who had lost their Russian homeland and rebuilt their lives in Canada, South America and Germany." GAMEO, s.v. "Quiring, Walter (1893–1983)."

4 The reference is to Phil. 3:13: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before" (King James Version).

5 2 Cor. 3:1–3: "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (New International Version).

6 John 17:18 (KJV).

7 Phil. 2:5 (KJV).

8 Matt. 28:20; John 17:15 (KJV).

9 Jacob Thiessen, Psychologische Folgen der Emigration," *Steinbach Post*, Nov. 25, 1936.

10 Obituary of Jacob Thiessen, *Mennonite Weekly Review*, May 30, 1963, 9. Thanks to Anne Vogt for pointing me to this document.

11 GRanDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry), #1214185

12 Hedi Knoop, *Wenn die Erde bebt* (Nienburg: Sonnentau-Verlag: Uchte, 1990). In this slightly fictionalized memoir of life in Steinbach, the speaker of these lines is the newspaper publisher Krahn, who is clearly a stand-in for Arnold Dyck

13 Thanks to James Rempel of New York for these insights and thoughts on the function of art in dealing with trauma.

14 Obituary of Jacob Thiessen, *Mennonite Weekly Review*.

Through the Looking-Glass

'Ditsied/Jantsied' and the Geographical Imagination

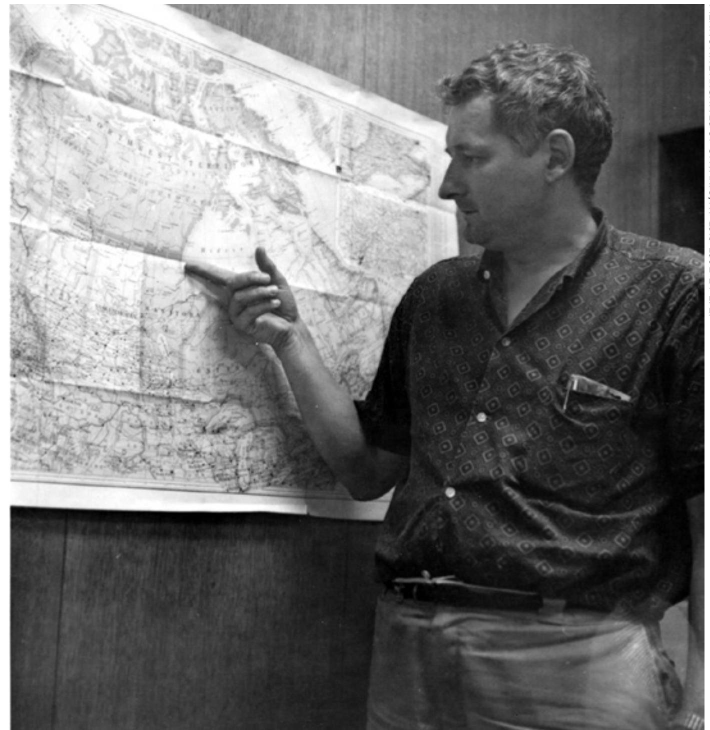
John H. Warkentin

My title comes from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, a story in which everything can be switched instantly. Just so, the terms *Ditsied* (This Side) and *Jantsied* (Other Side) can be alternated, depending on where you are within Mennonite southern Manitoba. *Through the Looking-Glass* was published in 1871, the same decade Mennonites settled in the East and West Reserves, a coincidence of no significance.[1] However, the words Ditsied and Jantsied have the same space-shifting magical geographical qualities found in Carroll's book. In this essay I express my personal impressions of Ditsied and Jantsied, together with reflections on the individuality of the East and West Reserves, including the impact of railways, the effects of their different proximities to Winnipeg and the US border, and the responses of visitors and creative writers to life in each reserve.

My early geographical memories in the 1930s and early 1940s are of Lowe Farm, a small village of about four hundred people, sixteen kilometres west of the Red River, where I was born in 1928. It is well removed from the two main clusters of Manitoba Mennonite settlement, the East and West Reserves (hereinafter ER and WR respectively). I did know something of the WR, because that was the home of my father's family. I also knew the part of Winnipeg south of the CPR main line and near the Red River, because that's where my mother's family lived. Lowe Farm, I knew, was in what was called Ditsied, but I gave it little thought. At the same time, I was vaguely aware of a place across the Red River called Jantsied, which I never visited as a child, and first saw when I was sixteen.

Lowe Farm, like most of the WR to the south of it, is situated in the flattest part of what once was the clay bottom of the glacial Lake Agassiz. Before agricultural settlers planted trees it was a land of tall grass prairie. About all I knew of the ER, which we referred to as Jantsied, was that in contrast to our naturally treeless landscape, it was where prairie and woodland met, and it was populated by Low German–speaking Mennonites, like us. Later I learned such a transition natural landscape is called parkland.

A vivid Lowe Farm memory of what I thought Jantsied must be like has stuck in my mind. I don't recall the year, but it must be from the mid-1930s that I remember a Mennonite family, fleeing drought-stricken southern Saskatchewan in an old car, stayed for a night in Lowe Farm with relatives. They were on their way, I was told, to a refuge, or so I imagined it, in the moister Jantsied, where there were woods. In my imagination Jantsied assumed mythic woodland sheltering qualities, in contrast to my familiar sparse Ditsied landscape around Lowe Farm.


MENNONITE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO, XV-19.3-1992-14-1727

John H. Warkentin, posing in 1964, reflects on the space-shifting magical geographical qualities of the words Ditsied and Jantsied.

In 1944, my family moved to Steinbach in what now to me instantly and magically became Ditsied – no longer Jantsied. Ditsied and Jantsied thus are magical space-shifting expressions. Beside relative location, the words convey meanings to different Mennonites depending on their experiences and imaginations.

I recall my first glimpse of a new, more enclosing, landscape of parkland, especially of fields and woods on the south of the

road as we came closer to our new home in Steinbach. The place we rented on the eastern stretch of the long Main Street had a deep yard that backed on the creek along which Steinbach is oriented. After a good rain, water flowed in the creek, albeit barely and slowly. This was quite unlike Lowe Farm, where all was flat, and shallow ditches paralleled the streets.

This new Ditsied had a further contrast. Lowe Farm, like much larger Altona and Winkler to the south, was a railway town oriented to the tracks (now gone) and to the cardinal directions. Beside the rails stood tall grain elevators (now also gone), owned by corporations far away or by provincial farmer pools. Steinbach, without a railway, was oriented roughly northwest-southeast along the creek. For the first week in Steinbach, if I was out on Main Street when the sun was setting, I was slightly disoriented. The western sun above and along the street was aligned differently from what my mind was accustomed to in the matching street and evening sunset in Lowe Farm. It felt eerie. Parts of my mental map and clock were still in Jantsied.

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When you grow up in a prairie railway town, some things are ingrained in your nature. New Bothwell, I have been informed, was designated "New" to distinguish it from Bothwell, Ontario. On a dazzling July day in 1979 when I drove into Ontario's Bothwell for the first time, entering not from the highway but from adjacent farmland, and rattling across railway tracks, I instantly had a strong and strange uncanny feeling that I had been there before. I soon realized why I had this response: I felt I was home. Better than any other Ontario town I know, Bothwell, located in a flat agricultural landscape, has a prairie railway town's tightly integrated alignment of rail and street grid pattern. It felt like the railway town I had grown up in decades earlier.

Mennonites established their settlements in the Canadian Prairies within a quickly developing international agricultural market economy, and commerce was the vital link to the outside world. Railways were of prime importance in establishing this connection, but their impact was different in the two Mennonite reserves.

In the ER, paradoxically, this is exemplified by the survival of Steinbach, even though it was not located on a railway, and by its eventual growth to become southeast Manitoba's dominant centre. It could have gone otherwise. Manitoba's first railway was the line from Saint Paul, Minnesota, to Winnipeg. Completed in 1878, it went into operation in 1879, a mere five years after the arrival of the first Mennonite immigrants in the ER. Later part of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) system, a short section of the line was built alongside the western boundary of an ER township, and a station was established at Niverville, right at the edge of the reserve. As Ernie Braun and Glen Klassen pointed out in the *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve*, Niverville's growth was hampered by the poorly drained lands in its immediate agricultural hinterland. Roads also were adversely affected, making access to Niverville difficult from the interior of the ER. Niverville did have Western Canada's first commercial railway grain elevator, but it did not become the leading town of the ER. In the meantime, Steinbach grabbed the opportunity.

A branch railway was never built into the eastern part of the ER, but railways still affected that area, including Steinbach. Founded in 1874 as a farm village, within three years Steinbach had its first store. When the railway line on the west side of the ER was completed, a connection from the Steinbach store to Winnipeg suppliers was made via Otterburne. Then in 1898, after the Canadian Northern Railway (CN) began operations ten kilometres east of Steinbach, the link from Steinbach to Winnipeg became much easier via La Broquerie or Giroux. Steinbach was fortunate in its energetic business leaders, who established home-grown enterprises. In the twentieth century, the internal combustion engine and good roads transformed the town's connection to the regional metropolis, reducing the dependence on rail, and Steinbach flourished.

In the WR the penetration of the larger world through the railway into the reserve was much more overt. Towns such as Gretna, Altona, and Winkler were inserted directly into the WR in 1882 once rail lines were built through it, and then in 1907 Haskett appeared as more rails were laid. As in Steinbach, commerce was essentially in Mennonite hands, but station agents and bank managers were typically non-Mennonites, perhaps along with a Jewish merchant who fitted comfortably into the Mennonite community, as I knew from Lowe Farm. All were part of a Canadian economic system linked to the world, sending out agricultural commodities and receiving manufactured goods in return.

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Many kinds of connections to the outside world existed, not just commerce. In their early years, the Mennonite reserves were of keen interest to non-Mennonite visitors, simply because the settlements were so exceptional in the Prairies. Aristocrats, including minor royalty, visited both reserves during their early years. Two examples follow, one well known, the other not.

The Mennonite distinction between Ditsied and Jantsied was unknown to such visitors. However, the sojourners recorded their impressions of Mennonite settlement, and their responses provide an opportunity to see each reserve through the eyes of others. We see the ER through the strategic eyes of someone from the governing class of the British empire, and the WR through the nostalgic eyes of a Russian exile, familiar with the kinds of landscapes from which the Mennonites came. Mennonite farm villages had barely been established when the ER welcomed its visitor who came by trail, but the WR had been settled for twenty years when its visitor arrived by rail.

After the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, individual Ontario homesteaders began migrating to the young province of Manitoba, taking up individual homesteads, but the Mennonite and Icelandic migrations of the 1870s were the first large group immigrant movements to the Canadian West. Since Queen

Lowe Farm, like most of the West Reserve to the south of it, is situated in the flattest part of what once was the clay bottom of the glacial Lake Agassiz.

Victoria's representative in Ottawa was touring the West in 1877, both the new Mennonite and Icelandic communities, welcome harbingers of hoped-for future migrations, deserved a visit.

In the summer of 1877, Governor General Lord Dufferin and Lady Dufferin made a carefully arranged official visit to the ER, where the Mennonites had only recently arrived. The Dufferin entourage camped the night of August 21, 1877, about ten kilometres west of Steinbach. Lord Dufferin, fifty-one years old, was in his prime as an orator. In his address to about seven hundred assembled Mennonites, he recognized the newcomers' pacifism but could not resist the metaphor of war as he alluded to the hard battle they were waging in settling the prairie. In her journal, Lady Dufferin wrote that Mennonites alone were ready to settle woodless plains, and noted the amazing progress they had made in only three years.[2]

The governor general's group returned to Winnipeg on August 23. Then in late August and September the party travelled eastward by the Dawson Trail to Lake of the Woods, and then by the Winnipeg River and Lake Winnipeg to visit the new Icelandic settlement at Gimli, which dated from 1875. Thus both Mennonite and Icelandic early migrations were recognized.

Prince Peter Kropotkin escaped imperial Russia in 1876.

Known today as "the anarchist prince," Kropotkin actually did not use his title of nobility. He was making his living in England as a science writer at the time he visited Canada in 1897 to report on the proceedings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science when it held its annual meeting in Toronto that year. Following the Association's summer field excursion from Toronto all the way to British Columbia, the fifty-five-year-old prince took a private side trip to visit the farm villages in the WR, on lands Mennonites began to occupy in 1875. Writing in 1897 from a Winkler hotel to his friend Professor James Mavor in Toronto, Kropotkin said he intended to travel the following day through the Mennonite settlements to Gretna.[3] We don't know what arrangements he made for the journey on Wednesday, September 22, but likely it was by horse and buggy. We do know Kropotkin reached Gretna, since in an article published in 1898 in the magazine *The Nineteenth Century*, he says he met H. H. Ewert there. In approaching a Mennonite village, Kropotkin tells his readers, he was immediately transported to imperial Russia as he saw the trees Mennonites had grown from saplings. Mennonites, he writes, prosper everywhere they move, and Canadians say they are the wealthiest settlers in the neighbourhood. He was informed that about one-third had left the villages to farm by themselves, in part for economic reasons, in part to get away from the strictures of conservative elders.[4]

Someday, I hope that Erin Koop Unger of the *Mennotoba* blog will drive with her husband, Andrew Unger, to the Eigenfeld campsite,[5] and after listening to Lord Dufferin's speech, have an imaginary *faspa* with Lord and Lady Dufferin in the arbour prepared for them on the *stap* (prairie), and report on how the couple respond to Erin's "5 Questions." Someday, I also hope that Armin Wiebe will write a tale of an anarchist prince staying a night in Winkler in the 1890s, poking through Gutenthal, perhaps treated to *faspa*, before staying the night in Gretna and then continuing onward by train to Winnipeg.

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Through the twentieth century both reserves thrived. In the ER, Steinbach became the largest urban centre in southeast Manitoba, propelled by light industry, greatly improved communications in the region, and increased commerce. In the WR, Altona and Winkler grew through agricultural processing and light manufacturing. In both reserves agriculture was intensified over the years.

In the broader space relations of these prairie reserves, two critical factors stand out. First is the relative closeness of the ER to Winnipeg, compared to the greater distance of the WR from the regional metropolitan centre. Second, the ER's location is well removed from the Canada-US international boundary, whereas the WR is right on the boundary.

Growing up in Lowe Farm, as I did from 1928 to 1944, Morris was the nearest town with pharmaceutical, medical, and other services unobtainable in our village. The next tier up in the urban hierarchy was Winnipeg. We had a railway connection to Winnipeg for shipping outgoing grain and animals for slaughter, and for incoming agricultural machinery, coal for winter heating, and gravel for improving roads. But for consumer goods, a daily transfer (truck) took orders to Winnipeg in the morning (say, to Eaton's) and brought goods back that same evening. Kids would be at the transfer office, waiting to get their new hockey sticks right off the back of the truck. The village was so small that the driver knew most of us.

When my family moved to Jantsied and the ER, I quickly saw that Steinbach had much larger transfer services to Winnipeg, along with connections to the railway in La Broquerie and Giroux. When highways were greatly improved and extended in the last half of the twentieth century, Steinbach gained in a two-fold way: northward by easier and quicker access to and from Winnipeg, and southward to an expanded hinterland toward the US border. Local Steinbach entrepreneurs recognized opportunities engendered by these developments. Two large Canada-wide transport companies emerged, and also auto dealerships that grew to serve Winnipeg as well as southeast Manitoba. In the northern part of the ER, daily commuting to and from jobs in Winnipeg became practical with good roads, as the recent growth of Niverville shows.

On Main Street, the Niverville of today recalls its space relations of an earlier time in a heritage wall that, among other things, draws attention to the Crow Wing Trail, used to travel by Red River cart from the Red River settlement (today's Winnipeg) to Saint Paul, and to Manitoba's first railway. Only a few kilometres to the west of Niverville is the Mennonite Landing, the historic site located on the Red River at the mouth of the Rat River, where the first Mennonite migrants landed from a river boat in 1874 on their way to the ER.

The WR extends a long distance east–west, and this length together with substantial north–south breadth provides sufficient space in a highly productive agricultural area to support a typical segment of the prairie urban system. Here the local urban hierarchy that emerged on three railways at the turn of the twentieth century comprised the larger commercial centres of Morden, Winkler, Altona, and Gretna, and the smaller places of Plum Coulee, Horndean, Rosenfeld, and Haskett. Other railway-based local urban systems exist to the north, but no large centre intervenes between the WR and Winnipeg. Emerson had hoped to command the WR's trade, but the Boundary Commission Trail (or Post Road, as it was known to Mennonites) was no match for direct rail connections to Winnipeg. To the south, any potential hinterland was sharply cut off by the international boundary. Commercial activities and civic administration were organized through the existing Canadian urban system, as was true in the ER.

Still, just by being there, the US to the south had a constant impact on the WR. Life north of the boundary was connected to Winnipeg, and from there east to Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa. To the south, life was connected to Grand Forks, Chicago, New York, and Washington. Of course, there was local interaction across the border, such as occasional shopping at

After moving to Steinbach, Warkentin's family rented a place on the eastern stretch of Main Street, which had a deep yard that backed on the creek along which Steinbach is oriented. JOHN WARKENTIN

nearby places such as Neche and Walhalla, rare use of agricultural services, and occasional golf before there were local courses in the WR. Lowe Farm is a considerable distance from the border, but some of our neighbours would drive to Neche to buy particular items, and my relatives in Winkler too sometimes travelled across the border to Walhalla.

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As terms, Ditsied and Jantsied are simple, direct ways of identifying the relative locations of the two main Mennonite settlements separated by the Red River. The terms may have been used as early as 1874, since an offshoot of the first Mennonite migration to Manitoba selected land on the Scratching River (now known as the Morris River) at Rosenort, west of the Red River, rather than in the ER. Associations across the Red River continued, and it would have been natural to use Ditsied and Jantsied to refer to one or the other community. Whether or not that distinction between Scratching River and the ER happened right away we don't know; however, it was likely soon applied to a much larger territory. This came after the creation of the WR in 1876 west of the Red River, diagonally across from the existing ER on the east side of the Red. In the late 1870s, Mennonite immigrants directly from imperial Russia began to settle the WR.

Separation does not mean lack of knowledge of the other. In a farming culture this is especially true of land; news of good land travels fast. Soon there was also a movement of some ER Mennonite families from poorly drained or stony land in the ER to land in the WR without such disadvantages. Most ER

Mennonites did not move, but this migration across the Red River clearly would have introduced familial associations between Ditsied and Jantsied.

In her autobiography *Enchantment and Sorrow*, Gabrielle Roy (1909–83) describes her sense of being in a strange place, yet close to home, when she accompanied her mother to Winnipeg department stores across the Red River from their home in Franco-Manitoban St. Boniface as a child.[6] She was experiencing a different culture. In southern Manitoba's Mennonite settlements, the distinction between Ditsied and Jantsied was not one of culture, nor of economic rivalry, but simply that of the relative location of two large Mennonite communities separated by the Red River. The main external economic relations and connections of the two reserves were not across the Red with each other, but each separately to Winnipeg. To this day, such a distinction continues.

Once roads were improved, the Eaton's bargain basement in central Winnipeg, with its restrooms and nearby seating, provided a comfortable place for Mennonite folk from both reserves to mingle socially when visiting the metropolis. This became known as "Winnipeg in the basement" (*Vinnipek enn tjalla*). In each reserve there was general underlying respect for accomplishments in Jantsied. However, when acquaintances or relatives from the two reserves met to chat in Eaton's, or elsewhere in Winnipeg for that matter, tongue-in-cheek Low German bantering and humorous mutual disparagement between Ditsied and Jantsied soon began, and thrusts such as "You're from Jantsied, what do you know!" ("Dü best von Jantsied, wout weest dü!") were exchanged.

Individual Manitoba Mennonites will have their own versions of how they use Distsied and Jantsied. I will give further experiences from Lowe Farm. We had family friends at Rosenort on the Morris River, also, of course, living on our side of the Red River, but the term Ditsied was never used in reference to where they lived. An aunt, uncle, and cousins lived in Arnaud, southwest of the ER. They were on the other side of the Red River, but we did not travel to Jantsied when we visited, because Jantsied referred specifically, in my mind at least, to the Mennonite communities of the ER, and to parkland rather than the open prairie landscape of Arnaud. The instant I became a Steinbach resident, all Mennonite communities on the west side of the Red River – whether Rosenort, Lowe Farm, or the WR – became Jantsied. In short, there are no consistent, hard and fast rules, because the expressions Ditsied and Jantsied are space shifters, their use depends on where you live and your life experience.

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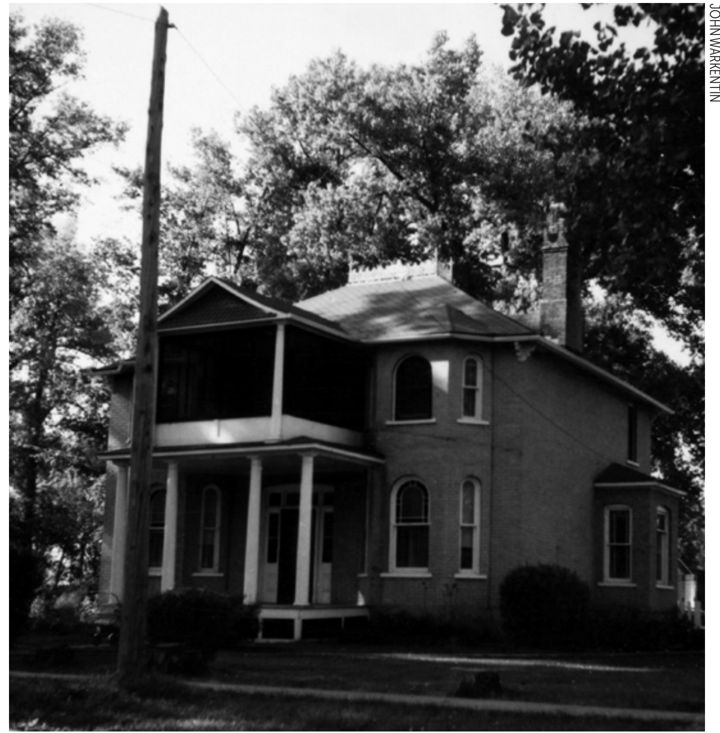
In both reserves creative regional voices emerged. Print and stationery shops play a vital cultural role in small towns, and their newspapers reflect life and stimulate it. Soon after I arrived in Steinbach, the local printery, which published the German-language *Steinbach Post*, became for me an important focus of cultural life, a stimulating place to visit and exchange ideas.


JOHN WARKENTIN

In 1897, the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin travelled through the West Reserve, visiting the town of Gretna. Perhaps he saw this mansion built by E. Penner, the pioneer Mennonite merchant in the town.

The *Post* connected a widespread Mennonite German-speaking community that extended well beyond Canada into Central and South America. It also served the local Mennonite area, but despite some excellent correspondents and contributors, it was not really a regional weekly for southeast Manitoba. In 1946, Eugene Derksen, of the family which owned the printery and produced the *Post*, founded the *Carillon News*. He purposely named the new weekly after the large southeast Manitoba electoral district of Carillon, signalling the region he hoped to cover and serve. The paper quickly achieved this goal.

In Altona, D. W. Friesen's small stationery shop, concentrating on school supplies, grew into one of Canada's largest printers of high-quality books (known today as Friesens Corporation), guided by his sons. When I was a youngster, I remember entering the stationery shop with my father, a friend of D. W. Friesen, on a visit to Altona. The shop was crammed with the kind of paper stock I never saw in Lowe Farm. In 1941, son D. K. Friesen founded the *Altona Echo*, which in 1955 became the *Red River Valley Echo* after absorbing the *Morris Herald*. Like the *Carillon News*, it became a successful regional weekly, serving an area well beyond Altona. Television, the internet, and social media have been hard on newspapers everywhere, especially small-town papers, and the *Echo* published its last issue in 2020. The *Carillon News* continues, although it is no longer locally owned. However, the two papers had important cultural roles in helping establish a sense of regional feeling in their respective areas.

Within Canada, the two reserves are Mennonite homelands. Creative writers vitally reinforce and enrich feelings for a homeland and belonging. Authors from both reserves have described life in the communities they know personally, and non-Mennon-

ite writers provide perspective by depicting life in adjacent areas. For a comprehensive analysis of Manitoba Mennonites and the creative arts, readers should turn to Magdalene Redekop's recent book *Making Believe: Questions About Mennonites and Art*. I will focus on what both Mennonite and non-Mennonite authors tell us of the geography of Mennonite culture areas, first in the ER and then in the WR.

The parkland between the forest and prairie, which runs through the ER and continues westward to the Manitoba Interlake and the Saskatchewan River country all the way to the Rocky Mountains, is an ecological transition zone. Parts of the parkland in southeast Manitoba are good farmland, but large tracts in the transition to woodland are marginal for agriculture. It is the home of a varied population, including First Nations, Métis, Mennonites, French Canadians, and Ukrainian Canadians.

In 1969, Mort Forer (1922–81), a Winnipeg writer and social worker, published *The Humback*, a novel describing the difficult life of a Métis community east of the ER (probably based on Richer), dependent on occasional jobs in the woods and welfare. Forer writes that none of the life under the shelter of the forest "dares, on threat of eternal death, peer past the ridge onto that garden of the prairie that lies a thousand miles sweet to the west."[7] Only the northern part of the ER is in that "garden of the prairie," but nearly all of the WR enjoys its endowment. The ER is not mentioned in the novel, although it is clear that a central character, Abe Epp, who owns the pulpwood outfit on which the community depends, grew up there.

The Humback is a tragic symbolic portrayal of the lives of Indigenous peoples in southern Manitoba whose lands were taken by settler Canadians, including Mennonites. Today, Canada is finally coming to grips with how dispossession affected Indigenous communities, and the grievous harm of assimilationist policies, especially through the residential school system. In one sense Mennonites were immigrants; in another, they were colonizing settlers furthering imperialism, and that is how, in part, they were seen by Lord Dufferin – it was the underlying reason for his visit.

Arnold Dyck (1889–1970) published stories in Low German filled with humour and hard truths about a pair of farmers named Koop and Bua living in hardscrabble parkland south of Steinbach. In these stories, Dyck acquainted his Mennonite readers with the wider society around them, encouraging them to reflect on it. The stories were first published in the *Steinbach Post* beginning in 1932 and then in his literary journal *Mennonitische Volkswarte*. A four-volume collection of Dyck's writing was published in 1985–90. The stories in Low German are accessible to few Manitoba Mennonites today, but Mennonite scholars have summed up Dyck's insights into Mennonite life in English introductions to the collected works and in scholarly articles.

Outside social forces have always affected Mennonites, no matter where they lived. These forces include deeper interactions with neighbouring non-Mennonite societies and with non-Mennonites who move into the Mennonite communities. In the last decades of the twentieth century, a younger generation of ER Mennonite authors began to write about this changing society. They range from a local historian to internationally known authors. None directly experienced the farm villages that once existed in the ER.

JOHN WARKENTIN

Mennonite writers have shown that for Mennonites there is no hiding from either the outside world or the cultural changes amongst Mennonites themselves.

In the novel *Sarah's Prairie* (1995), historian Delbert Plett reconstructs life in a farm village in the northern, most productive, part of the ER. It is the only novel we have that describes economic activities and daily social life in the ER farm villages. Attention is given to internal tensions as evangelical missionaries attempt to convert conservative Mennonites, and to the traumatic effects of the machine age, especially as the motor car enters a horse-and-buggy society. If anyone thought that life in Mennonite farm villages was simple, this book, almost like a sociological treatise, shows there is no hiding from either the outside world or the cultural changes amongst Mennonites themselves.

Patrick Friesen, in his poetry collections *the lands i am* (1976), *The Shunning* (1980), *You Don't Get To Be a Saint* (1992), and *St. Mary at Main* (1998), reveals the searing cleavages and conflicts that result when a more open and liberal world intrudes on a patriarchal society, especially as these clashes have often played out in individuals, families, and Mennonite churches.

David Bergen, in his novels *A Year of Lesser* (1996) and *See the Child* (1999), catches the fundamental landscape contrasts between the ER's productive fertile clays and the stony bushland where farmers such as those depicted by Arnold Dyck lived. The underlying conflicts between modern ways and older conservative Mennonite values barely register in these books: the fast-paced life of today's urban North American society,

Di Brandt poignantly illuminates the wrenching, highly personal family upheavals that occur when a conservative generation is confounded, made sorrowful, and infuriated by the social changes that envelop and change its children. JOHN WARKENTIN

including its evangelical extremists, already dominates. We see the increasing Mennonite interaction with the neighbouring French-Canadian communities, as well as the constant movement made possible by the highway and motor car, not only within the region but within southern Manitoba and the adjacent US.

In 2000, Miriam Toews, a Steinbach native, wrote a gentle memoir of her schoolteacher father, a manic-depressive who took his own life. In *Swing Low: A Life,* she adopts his voice, writing the book as if her father was composing it. What poignantly emerges is everyday life in Steinbach, where until recently everyone knew who everyone else was, and compassionate people were willing to overlook personal shortcomings. Toews's incidental comments on Ditsied (Ditzied) and Jantsied (Yantzied) are astute: "The Mennonite communities on this, the east side of the Red River, are called Ditzied, in Low German meaning 'this side.' The Mennonite communities on the other side of the Red are called Yantzied, meaning 'that side.' Of course, to the Mennonites living on the west side of the river, it is just the opposite. Both sides believe that those from Yantzied are less sophisticated and more religiously conservative. Naturally it's an argument with no end."[8]

Andrew Unger in *Once Removed* (2020) reflects on clashing views on what is worth preserving in a growing Mennonite

town, one that originated as a farm village, in the face of urban economic progress. Protecting particular aspects of Mennonite material culture, including the former home of a noted local novelist who has left for the city, is juxtaposed against the penetrating power of today's consumer society. Serious topics are approached with humour. The occasional Low German words and place names evoke the sense of deep roots in a Mennonite culture area.

In the territory west of the Red River, authors have written about life outside and inside the WR. In 1933, Frederick Philip Grove published *Fruits of the Earth*, set in the flat flood-prone lands between the Pembina Mountains and the Red River. It is a landscape typical of much of the WR, and extends from there to Lowe Farm and beyond. Land drainage made this flat clay area productive. Grove did not describe Mennonite settlement or life, though he knew Mennonites, having lived in Haskett and Winkler. He examined the universal theme of obsessive ambition for more material possessions, in this case land, at the cost of family and community relationships. From Grove you get a feeling of the sparse landscape during the early stages of settling the prairie, and the need for shelter belts. These conditions were also experienced by Mennonites, and as Kropotkin noted they nurtured trees in their farm villages as they had done on the southern Ukrainian steppe. You also get a sense of the close link between land and town, essential for life in the Prairies as agricultural settlement developed. The introspective description of the prairie landscape, seen through the eyes of Grove's central character, is reminiscent of Russian author Anton Chekhov's evocation of the spirit of the steppe in his long story *The Steppe*, set in a region where Mennonites had settled.[9]

Sandra Birdsell, of Mennonite and Métis descent, grew up in Morris near the Red River. Her collection of short stories *The Two-Headed Calf* (1997), is set in a place called Agassiz, modelled on Morris. The stories have few Mennonite characters, but we learn about ordinary life in the ethnically mixed communities that form part of the new larger Canadian society. As generations pass, numerous Mennonites have integrated into such communities, living a cross-cultural existence. Birdsell takes us into their human core. Love, comfort, bewilderment, disdain, estrangement, the complexities of life – all are there. Literary critic Philip Marchand compares Birdsell's grotesque title, referring to the uneasy coexistence of Mennonites and Métis, to Hugh MacLennan's term "Two Solitudes," a phrase widely known in Canada that encapsulates the relationship of English and French Canadians.[10]

Di Brandt grew up in the farm village of Reinland. Her early poetry collections *questions I asked my mother* (1987), *Agnes in the Sky* (1990), and *mother, not mother* (1992) poignantly illuminate the wrenching, highly personal family upheavals that occur when a conservative generation is confounded, made sorrowful, and infuriated by the social changes that envelop and change its children. Family members love, but do not understand one another. Some families cope, adjust, and mutually accept change; in others there is rigid dismissal and cleavage. Brandt conveys the usually unexpressed anguish that cultural transformation so often brings.

David Elias, raised in part in Haskett near WR farm villages, has published two collections of connected short stories, *Crossing the Line* (1992) and *Places of Grace* (1997). The stories are set in a Mennonite farm village of the 1950s located right on the US border. We get a sense of the great cottonwoods sheltering the village street in the midst of endless level grain fields, trees now old that had so impressed Kropotkin. To the west, the Pembina Mountains provide a welcome backdrop, and even though the hills are not high, they provide the same sense of romantic contrast for Mennonite farmers that the Rockies do for Alberta ranchers on the shortgrass plains. Close across the international boundary, at the foot of a village street, is the harsh outside world of the new atomic age in the silos of alien ICBM weapons, inserted into fertile North Dakota farmlands. Seemingly, life is serene in the village, but there are hidden conflicts. The general pastoral congeniality of farm village life for children growing up contrasts all too soon with the looming claustrophobic, restrictive side of a patriarchal closed community. Without pressing the issue, Elias gives a sensitive picture of social change in Mennonite life as it comes to terms with the larger society.

Armin Wiebe, in three comic novels – *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* (1984), *Murder in Gutenthal: A Schneppa Kjnals Mystery* (1991), and *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst* (1995) – mainly set in an imaginary Low German-speaking WR farm village, and also in his later collection of more introspective stories, *Armin's Shorts* (2015), shows that in our present age of cars and pickup trucks the young generation in rural areas moves about as restlessly and energetically as urban youth, and is as fully capable of producing its own fun. He describes the contemporary rural activities of the young in densely settled farm villages located somewhere in the Altona/Gretna area: farm work, wheels, fastball, getting to know girls, robust fun, local politics, religious revivals, breaking rules, and occasional visits to railway towns and distant Winnipeg. Wiebe's frequent humorous use of Low German (in his usage, "Flat German"), occasional Low German word order, and vivid English versions of Low German words deftly envelop you in this distinctive rural Canadian society, still speaking a vernacular language in a sea of English. Pungently, Wiebe presents the unstifled, good-humoured, earthy side of the community. You can't hold these young people down. The traditional local Mennonite culture is handled affectionately even if humorously, but this is set against a cutting satire of evangelical activities in the villages, local political shenanigans, and home truths about class distinctions. Hurtling around in pickups and courting on the fly stand out against a more sedate traditional Mennonite culture.

Through the art of these creative writers we learn about geographical individuality and sense of place in different parts of the southern Manitoba Mennonite culture area. However, a common powerful thread that runs right across these lands on both sides of the Red River, where Ditsied and Jantsied are still understood and used, is the impact of North American society and harrowing local cultural change. In both the ER and WR,

Mennonite novelists and poets evoke a Mennonite culture where deep conservative roots are implicit, and are affected by outside and internal forces, both secular and spiritual. These influences create tensions between young and old generations, challenge patriarchal values, and create family and community ruptures.

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The ER and WR do not exist in isolation. They are connected to the outside world through the Canadian urban system represented by the urban centres and the railway lines converging on Winnipeg. The connections take many forms, far more than the few briefly considered here.

In the almost century and a half since the ER and WR were established in southern Manitoba, populations, landscapes, and life have changed significantly, and the changes continue. Clearly, however, the ER and WR remain Mennonite homelands, recognized not only by Mennonites but also by non-Mennonite Manitobans even if by other names. But to Mennonites, this distinctive two-part culture area has long been perceived and imaginatively bound together across the Red River as Ditsied and Jantsied.

Though there is no significant economic or administrative association between them, the cultural and spatial bonds represented by Ditsied and Jantsied reinforce the idea of a common Mennonite cultural heritage in the two areas, based on language, kinship, and social experiences. Intangible and elusive as the expressions Ditsied and Jantsied are, together they add to the sense of place, the attachment and the sense of belonging possessed by Mennonites in southern Manitoba.

Mennonite settlement in Manitoba is not as closely interwoven with the Red River itself as it is with the broader Red River basin, in which the lands that comprise the ER and WR are located. Nevertheless, the river has crucial, symbolic space-defining importance. Ditsied and Jantsied are mental constructs, hinged on the Red River, that emerged quite naturally out of Mennonite life in Manitoba. They have an imaginative regional dimension, an indeterminate spatiality since no specific place is implied. If more exact location information is required, and usually it is, one immediately turns to existing specific place names that can be located on a map. There is as well a largely unconscious combination of distance and time that is part of Ditsied and Jantsied. Travelling to Jantsied implies a journey of some length, at least half a day there and back.

In everyday conversation, use of Low German continues to decline, and thus also the colloquial use of Ditsied and Jantsied. That these space-shifting terms have lasted this long points to their practical geographical utility for Low German speakers. As long as Low German is understood and used in Manitoba, the two expressions will be a subtle cultural bonding force, helping to give regional identity within the province to the lands on either side of the Red River re-settled by Mennonites in the nineteenth century.

Today, Manitoba Mennonite writers still use Ditsied and Jantsied, and if this keeps on there is hope that the words will survive beyond the memory of older folks, history books, and the academy. Certainly, Andrew Unger's satiric blog The Unger Review (formerly The Daily Bonnet) gives the expressions life. So does Erin Koop Unger in her blog Mennotoba on local history, geography, and culture. Since the words make no sense to non-Manitoba Mennonites, it is unlikely that Ditsied and Jantsied will ever enter Canadian English dictionaries. But wait. If the terms continue to be used by bestselling authors setting stories in the southern Manitoba Mennonite culture area, Ditsied and Jantsied may become Canadianisms, included in dictionaries of Canadian English beyond their current representation in the late Jack Thiessen's *Mennonite Low German Dictionary*.

JOHN WARKENTIN

In the almost century and a half since the East Reserve and West Reserve were established, populations, landscapes, and life have changed significantly, and the changes continue.

John Warkentin is a professor emeritus of geography at York University and the author of several books on the settlement and regional geography of Western Canada.

1 I am grateful to Germaine Warkentin for making the connection with Lewis Carroll in the title.
2 Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava, *My Canadian Journal, 1872–'78* (London: John Murray, 1891), 332–36.
3 Peter Kropotkin to James Mavor, Sept. 21, 1897, University of Toronto, Fisher Rare Book Library, Fisher MS 119, box 10B, file 5.
4 Peter Kropotkin, "Some of the Resources of Canada," *The Nineteenth Century*, March 1898, 403–5.
5 See Ernest N. Braun and Glen R. Klassen, *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2015), 106.
6 Gabrielle Roy, *Enchantment and Sorrow: The Autobiography of Gabrielle Roy*, trans. Patricia Claxton (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987), 1–8.
7 Mort Forer, *The Humback* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), 11.
8 Miriam Toews, *Swing Low: A Life* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2000), 8.
9 Frederick Grove, *Fruits of the Earth* (Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1933), 160–66; Anton Chekhov, *The Steppe*, in Anton Chekhov: *The Complete Short Novels*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 2005), 6–8, 41–3.
10 *Toronto Star*, June 14, 1997.

Reflections on the CPR

Russlaender 100 Gala Dinner Address

Aileen Friesen

During the summer of 2023, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada in partnership with TourMagination hosted a train trip across Canada, starting in Quebec City and ending in Abbotsford, to commemorate the centenary of the arrival of the Russlaender Mennonites from the Soviet Union to Canada. As a part of this historic trip, Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC , formerly Canadian Pacific Railway) sponsored a gala dinner at the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth in Montreal on July 8th. As a member of the Russlaender Centenary Committee executive (along with Henry Paetkau, Ingrid Moehlmann, and Richard Thiessen), I was asked to deliver the evening's keynote.

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We are here tonight to pay tribute to a moment in history special to both Mennonites and the former Canadian Pacific Railway. On the surface, this is a story about money, about a time when you lent us a lot of money – $1,767,398.68, to be exact. Perhaps we should have been paying for this dinner instead of you. But it is about more than money. This is a tribute to the lives saved through this loan, the second chance given, the generations created, the contributions to Canadian society made.

During the 1920s, the CPR saved over thirteen thousand Mennonites by extending credit for travel, with another seven thousand paying their own way as cash passengers from the Soviet Union to Canada. Simple, right? That sentence does not begin to capture the significance of this moment. After years of tragedy, after a civil war that confirmed humanity's inhumanity, after a famine that swelled the bellies of children, and after an epidemic that filled cemeteries, Mennonites carried scars, both seen and unseen. The adults who hoisted their travel trunks into freight cars moved not towards a future, but away from a past. Looking at photographs of the departures, at the train stations in Chortitza, in Lichtenau, it is clear who this migration is about. It is a migration of children. So many children, children who through a month-long trip to Canada were saved from the Soviet deportations still to come, saved from another famine, saved from the fate of losing their fathers through terror, saved from living through another devastating war. The migration gifted these children a future, which was not without its own challenges, without its own sacrifices. Yet, out of the ashes of revolution, out of the pain of loss, this new community in Canada refashioned its brokenness into a strong foundation for future generations. This is what the loan from the CPR made possible. This is the legacy that we are here to commemorate.

I speak of a loan, but in reality there were several contracts signed by CPR, represented by Colonel J. S. Dennis, and what would become the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, represented by Bishop David Toews. The first one, the agreement that started this whole movement, engendered resistance from both the CPR brass and Canadian Mennonites. To the financial vice president of CPR, or the money guy, the plan was simply "one of Colonel Dennis's crazy ideas." Dennis was not young, he was about sixty-five when he spearheaded this crazy idea as the CPR's commissioner of colonization and development. For some Canadian Mennonites, the contract to move nearly three thousand of their co-religionists for $370,000 dollars plus 6 percent interest, complete with a stringent repayment plan, demonstrated fiscal recklessness. Business leaders among Canadian Mennonites derided the plan, questioning Toews's judgement. They weren't wrong; this was a bad deal, and Toews knew it. For him, it was lives not money that held more sway; the cost of inaction far outweighed the burden of debt. With support from only part of the Canadian Mennonite community, Toews signed the contract, effectively starting, after years of disappointment, the migration movement of Mennonites from the Soviet Union to Canada.

The in-fighting among Mennonites was one of many setbacks that shaped the migration. Even before the CPR and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization could consider the fiscal and logistical needs of moving people, Mennonites had to solve the problem of the 1919 orders-in-councils that had banned Mennonite immigration after the government determined them to be culturally toxic for Canada. It took a coordinated effort to petition those in power and those waiting in the wings of power to reconsider. Gerhard Ens, the Mennonite turned Swedenborgian politician, A. A. Friesen, a teacher from Halbstadt turned trav-

MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA (MHSBC), 113-7-2013.003.061

Sir Edward Beatty and J. S. Dennis receiving flowers outside the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church.

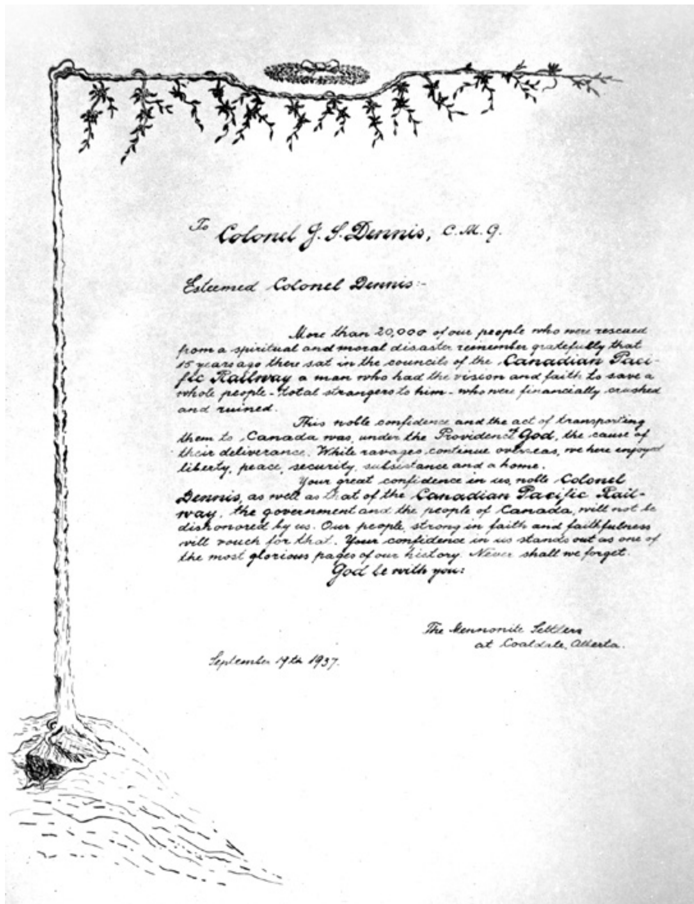
elling salesman of the Russian Mennonite plight, Heinrich H. Ewert, the principal of Mennonite Collegiate Institute, S. F. Coffman, a Swiss Mennonite minister from Ontario, and others spent considerable time assuring government officials that these migrants were the right type of Mennonites, good citizens in contrast to the Old Colony Mennonites sparring with the governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan over schools. In 1920, this plea failed to resonate, but by 1921, even J. A. Calder, the minister of immigration of the Union government in Ottawa, who had defended the ban in Parliament, expressed his willingness to talk it through with Mennonites. This was not necessary; an election in December brought a new government to power, and Mennonites, having secured the support of Mackenzie King's Liberals, soon could once again immigrate to Canada. While the CPR left negotiations in the hands of Mennonites, it isn't far-fetched to assume that they shook some hands in smoky men's-only clubs on our behalf.

Changing Canada's immigration policy was step one. And while it was a feat, we shouldn't overemphasize its significance – Canadian government officials would soon realize that the British farmers their hearts desired did not want to come to Canada. They would open the door to other groups they found objec-

B. B. Janz thanking Sir Edward Beatty of the CPR in the name of the entire Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church. MAID: MHSBC, 113-7-2013.003.064

tionable in the past, tasking the CPR and the Canadian National Railway with recruiting central and eastern European farmers to form another wave of colonization. This, by the way, had been Colonel Dennis's dream. During the First World War, under Dennis's instruction, the CPR had printed promotional materials in various languages, including German and Russian, in preparation for recruitment. The Bolshevik Revolution did little to quell those aspirations and the CPR would join a number of other transportation companies in forming a joint stock company, the Russian-Canadian-American Passenger Agency, which facilitated emigration from and immigration to the Soviet Union. Yes, some people wanted to leave Canada for the Soviet Union – in fact in Southhampton, England, my grandfather roomed briefly with a group of Ukrainians headed back. Not everyone viewed the Bolshevik Revolution in a negative light. In Moscow, CPR's A. Ross Owen set up an office, where he could receive correspondence, including letters from CPR physician Dr. Edward Drury, who complained bitterly about how Mennonites misrepresented the distance between their villages as he checked their eyes for trachoma. Mennonites, of course, complained bitterly about Dr. Drury and the accuracy of his medical exams.

Just because the CPR was developing its global interests doesn't mean that physically moving Mennonites was straightforward or uncomplicated. In the Mennonite Heritage Archives, we have stacks of correspondence, mainly, although not exclusively, between Toews and Dennis. It was a succession of crises, in which every train departing for the Soviet-Latvian border, every ship arriving in Quebec City or Saint John, New Brunswick, and every train travelling across Canada with Mennonite passengers represented a hard-fought victory. The ground was constantly shifting underneath the feet of Mennonites and their colleagues in the CPR: an outbreak of cholera in Odessa delayed the first group of Mennonites, causing a necessary rerouting of the migration, and spats between Soviet and Canadian officials over trade delegation visas, changes to Soviet protocols, and strict interpretations of Canadian regulations created a constant flow of problems



To Colonel J. S. Dennis, C.M.G.

Esteemed Colonel Dennis:-

More than 20,000 of our people who were rescued from a spiritual and moral disaster remember gratefully that 15 years ago there sat in the councils of the Canadian Pacific Railway a man who had the vision and faith to save a whole people - total strangers to him - who were financially crushed and ruined.

This noble confidence and the act of transporting them to Canada was, under the Providence of God, the cause of their deliverance. While ravages continue overseas, we here enjoyed liberty, peace, security, subsistance and a home.

Your great confidence in us, noble Colonel Dennis, as well as that of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the government and the people of Canada, will not be dishonored by us. Our people, strong in faith and faithfulness will vouch for that. Your confidence in us stands out as one of the most glorious pages of our history. Never shall we forget.

God be with you:

The Mennonite Settlers
at Coaldale, Alberta.

September 17th 1937.

MAID: MHSBC, 87-12-1988.003.007

A letter of gratitude presented to Colonel Dennis in Coaldale, Alberta, in 1937.

requiring patience as well as decisive action. Colonel Dennis, ever the steady hand, informed and advised his Mennonite associates, and, perhaps most importantly, continued to support this project despite its many obstacles. If he regretted extending credit to Mennonites, he never said it to us. Even during tense moments of conflict between the Board and the CPR, and there were many, he calmly defused the situation, often reminding Mennonites that they were not the only ones with integrity.

The issue of money was often at the heart of these tensions. As the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization fell deeper into debt with the CPR, Dennis had to reprimand Mennonites on a number of occasions, even halting the flow of immigrants until Mennonites could find more funds to lower their debt. But instead of shutting down the enterprise, instead of deciding that the hassle was no longer worth the return, instead of prioritizing the many other groups being recruited to Canada during this time, including a large number of Ukrainians from the former Austro-Hungarian empire, the CPR continued to extend credit as fast as Mennonites could make repayments. For Mennonites, this meant that Toews especially, but also A. A. Friesen, begged anyone who would listen for donations or loans to lower the debt. Sometimes Dennis also intervened in these conversations, nudging wealthy but fiscally skeptical Canadian Mennonite business leaders to open their wallets in the name of the greater good.

And Mennonites did their best – well, David Toews, C. F. Klassen, and others did their best to cajole the Russlaender Mennonites into repaying the travel debt, known as the *Reiseschuld*, owed to the CPR. Toews, who believed so completely in God, and in his community, took on the responsibility of the debt, believing that Mennonites would keep their word and repay. In 1946, after CPR forgave nearly a million dollars in interest, they finally did.

If this was 1937, I could end with the following quote from the Mennonite Brethren Church in Coaldale, Alberta, which thanked CPR top executives, including Colonel Dennis: "Your confidence in us stands out as one of the most glorious pages of our history. Never shall we forget." If this was 1946, I could end this presentation with the image of David Toews weeping when he learned that the travel debt to the CPR had been finally repaid. But it is 2023 and as we gather here in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka Nation, our ending must be different. When the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada decided to undertake this project, we made a commitment to acknowledge race and displacement as we retell our story; to acknowledge that the system which saved us hurt others. While we honour Dennis as a friend to Mennonites, we shouldn't forget that Dennis became a colonel because of his actions against the North-West Resistance, in which the Métis under Louis Riel and his First Nations allies defended their communities against the Canadian government. While we can remember with nostalgia the Mackenzie King government rescinding the ban on Mennonites, we shouldn't forget that just before the first train of Mennonites departed Chortitza, Soviet Ukraine, for the long journey to Rosthern, Saskatchewan, the government of Canada passed what would become known colloquially as the Chinese Exclusion Act, cutting off the possibility of immigration for a people who had contributed so much to the building of the railway in the west. And while we can express our gratitude to the CPR for making the seemingly impossible possible, we can acknowledge that the railway supported the settler movement, which benefitted the Russlaender and directly contributed to the displacement of Indigenous Nations, causing a legacy of pain. The inequalities of this period, of who should be allowed to immigrate, who should be allowed to settle the land, who should be allowed to preserve their culture cannot be treated as footnotes in the history of the Russlaender. They belong in the main text, they shaped this story, and including them reminds us that others just as deserving didn't receive the same consideration.

But thankfulness and truthfulness surprisingly work well together. We can be eternally grateful to the CPR, now CPKC, for the deliverance of our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents; for the Canadian Pacific ships, the Canadian Pacific Railway trains, and the Canadian Pacific Railway loan that saved them. Without your help, many of us would not exist. And in our truthfulness, we honour this deliverance by acknowledging that we might still have a debt yet to be paid.

Aileen Friesen is a historian at the University of Winnipeg and the editor of *Preservings*.

An Artist from Chortitz

Marta Goertzen Armin

Eleanor Chornoboy

Little is known of Marta Goertzen Armin and her art. She did not show her work in galleries. She was not encouraged to hang her art in public places, nor did the notion of displaying her work appear to interest her. Born October 10, 1923, in Schanzenfeld, Manitoba, she was raised in the village of Chortitz near Winkler by her parents, Abram Frank Goertzen and Elisabeth Neufeld Regehr Goertzen.[1] Marta was the middle child of seven children. Her mother died March 26, 1928, when Marta was only four. Margaretha Kauenhowen, the family's maid, helped Abram raise the children. Abram and Margaretha were married December 24, 1938. The family lived on lot 29 in Chortitz from 1926 to 1953.[2]

In a note about her stepmother, Marta wrote: "Margaret said she'd promised Mother, who had trouble getting help, she'd stay with us and look to us. Only Father believed. She was, after all only sixteen, red hair, blue eyes, and freckles, loved to work outside more than inside although she did that too."[3] Marta's son Richard Armin observed that Margaretha was devoted to the family. She taught the girls about homemaking and appears to have fully embraced the role of mother.

At the age of seventeen, Marta married her former music teacher, James (Jay) Sawatzky, who was born January 11, 1915, in Rosenthal, Chortitza colony, in imperial Russia (near the city now known as Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine). Jay emigrated to Canada with his family in 1923.[4] At the time of Jay's passing on July 12, 2008, he had been married to Marta for sixty-seven years.[5] Marta and Jay raised four children: Otto, twins Richard and Paul, and Adele. Around 1952, about the time the twins were eight years old, the family name changed from Sawatzky to Armin. Paul explained that they changed their name because during numerous border crossings to the United States, when they stated their name was "Sawatzky" they were asked if they were communists.[6]

Marta was an artist. She was a painter, a poet, a storyteller, and much more. Her heart and soul were invested in art, spanning poetry writing, playing the violin, painting, drawing, and creating. Art was her heart song. Her visual art, rendered in a wide array of media, ranged from folk to modern to abstract.

Reflecting on his mother's artistic skill, Richard writes: "Any technique or concept she used, she mastered." She worked in oil, pastels, ink, acrylic, watercolour, glued sand and string, and much more, as evidenced in her artwork with her children. Her first grandchild, Mischa Armin, describes her as "forever an artist."[7]

PRIVATE COLLECTION

As a young mother with four children born in the span of three years, Marta tapped into her creativity by illustrating stories for her children.

As a young mother with four children born in the span of three years, Marta tapped into her creativity by illustrating stories for her children. She drew little pictures on a scroll and told stories while moving the pictures across the back of what was like a paper box television. Both Marta and her children delighted in making art.[8] In later years, Marta continued to express herself in artistic activity that was life affirming and essential by including her grandchildren in her projects.

When all four children were in Indiana on a music scholarship in the mid-1960s, Marta poured herself into her art, despite having no formal training. In 1965, without her husband's blessing, Marta walked into the Brooklyn Museum Art School and requested to enrol in their art program. The empty-handed Marta was asked to show them her portfolio.

"What's a portfolio?" she wanted to know.

"It's a sampling of your work," she was told. They needed to see her work before they would consider accepting her into the program.

"I'll have a portfolio for you tomorrow," she replied.

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Einmal hatte Mama Papa schon mehreremal zum essen gerufen. Er stand aber noch immer am Zaun und erzählte sich mit Nachbar Schellenberg. Dann schlich Mama sich hinter Papa und Kipte einen Eimer Wasser über sein Kopf! Darüber lacht man Heute noch!

Once mother had called father to come and eat many times. Yet still he stood talking over the back fence with neighbour Schellenberg. Then she sneaked up behind him and dumped a bucket of water over his head! People still laugh over it!

Marta proceeded to buy art supplies and drew all night. The next day she had six completed works of art in her portfolio to show the school. Alix Davis, a long-time family friend, said that when Marta showed her brand-new portfolio, the school admitted Marta on the spot and gave her a scholarship.[9]

Marta's tenure at the Brooklyn Museum Art School (1965–66) coincided with the time her son Paul was attending the Manhattan School of Music. She and Paul had occasions to get together with Paul's friends, who accepted Marta as "one of them." Marta thrived in the company of the young, bright, and inspired artists, and her art flourished. Paul says she "never behaved as a Mom."

Paul tells a story characteristic of his mother: On several occasions Marta had been warned of the dangers in Brooklyn and advised not to be on the streets alone. Marta marched into the police station to inquire how dangerous it actually was on the streets of Brooklyn and what she could do to be safe. She was told, "act like you belong." Marta followed that advice.

While at art school, Marta was strongly urged to apply to the Art Students League of New York, which the likes of Georgia O'Keeffe, Norman Rockwell, Jackson Pollock, and others had attended. Marta declined. Instead, at the urging of her husband, Marta left the school after eighteen months to return home. Later she enrolled in the Toronto Artists' Workshop, where she took up design.

MARTA'S SKETCHES

On behalf of the Armin family, in 2019 Adele Armin donated a collection of her mother's sketches entitled "When the Sun is Two Hands High: Sketches From My Canadian Prairie Mennonite Village Childhood, Marta Goertzen, 1923–2008" to the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg.[10] In a handwritten note from 1989 about this volume, Marta explained her motivations: "Many of these are done with the left hand in attempt at strengthening the subtle muscles that control heart function. The purpose of these sketches from my Canadian Prairie Mennonite village childhood, 1920's–30's, was first of all as a kind of self therapy following open heart surgery. Seeing the extreme fragility of life at such close quarters, I wanted both to thank those suddenly great people for

this way of life that I had always taken for granted and also show our children and grandchildren these connections with their historic past. I therefore can only invite you to look at them as extended family rather than Art."

The gift of Marta's sketches from the Armin family is clearly a small yet very important sample of Marta's broader spectrum of work. The collection gives testimony to her grandson Mischa's description of his grandmother as being fully present and "receiving the world rather than forcing herself on the world."[11] She depicts her life in Chortitz from the perspective of a child, and of a parent who understands what is important to a child. The sketches detailed minutiae from Marta's early childhood in the 1920s, into the "Dirty Thirties," and beyond.

According to Richard, Marta began the sketches during a 1980s trip she and Adele had taken to visit Marta's childhood home in Manitoba. There, they toured the village of Chortitz and beyond. The sketches reflect a village with all its yards, gardens, children, and households. The subjects of the many drawings range from the memorable moments of her father comforting his grieving children after their mother died, to making Mennonite borscht, to farming practices, to toileting in the barn before bedtime and using a pot to go to the bathroom during the night.

Clearly, Marta was a keen observer and had a sharp memory for details, evidenced in her drawings organized by seasons. The child in me delights in the "footnotes" that Marta left on a number of her sketches. They are almost like an afterthought, yet they enrich the depicted story and speak of soul-filling nostalgia. In "Bucket of Water," Marta not only sketches her mother pouring a bucket of water on Marta's father, who had not been responding to his wife's reminder that dinner was ready, but she adds an addendum sketch of her father chasing her mother, with the line, "People still laugh about it."

Marta accompanied many of her sketches with a handwritten narrative explaining the drawing in English, German, and Plautdietsch. Without her explanation, most people would not know of some of the implements and tools that Marta saw and used in her early years. For example, there is not much call for manure pressers or ice cellars nowadays, and in many cases people would not be able to identify or know their purpose.

Marta's sketches tell the stories of her childhood. In a kitchen scene, featuring a cook stove and a calendar on the wall, children play with freshly hatched chicks on the floor. Her sketches bear a delightful charm that is easily embraced by the child in the viewer.

In her sketch of her mother's passing, recollected from her

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perspective as a four-year-old child, Marta touchingly describes how the local women cared for her young mother's body and how her father decided what was best for his family. There is a softness about the potted geraniums that Marta's aunts placed around her mother's coffin, recognizing the importance of beauty in the young mother's life.

In another sketch, Marta reveals her early educational experiences. She depicts the students seated at their desks in razor-straight rows, with the teacher at the front desk and a blackboard filled with lines of writing. In the "footnote," the children rush home at the end of the day. Marta's curiosity is demonstrated in the accompanying narrative. Having just been read the Bible story of Abraham and Sara by the teacher, Miss Warkentin, Marta asked, "Will we be in the Bible too one day?"

In her sketch of a *semlin* (sod hut), Marta depicts the life her ancestors would have experienced when they first settled in Canada. Marta must have heard stories and descriptions of *semlin* life as a child. Her caption on one page reads: "Two more early sketches of (earlier) Mennonite architecture as my . . . great-grandparents lived in their first years in Canada. The poorest could not afford a separate 'Semlin' for their animals, chickens, etc. & partitioned their habitat to accommodate. Also it was late in the season and so, timewise, it was not possible to put up even a rougher version for them." She continues: "Who could have predicted us descendants of the Semlin generation would ever get to live in such a fine penthouse apartment as we do in only a century plus, thanks to you." She goes on to thank the people who established the hospitality tradition that permeated the community in which she lived.

Like her drawings, paintings, and sketches, Marta's poetry, philosophical quips written on small pieces of paper, and her short handwritten vignettes are laced with unconventional humour, memories, wisdom, and pride in her children.

Marta found beauty in everyday life – even in housekeeping. In her bathroom shelving she kept tightly rolled towels, and from the centre of each roll peeked a dried flower she had tucked inside.[12]

Paul Armin describes his mother as a woman strong in herself. Marta had tremendous determination. She was fascinated by everything she touched, she read voraciously, and while she liked people, she was not a joiner of groups. Alix Davis refers to Marta as "an exceptional woman" who was unconventional, unique, strong, kind, and had a big talent. Richard Armin writes: "Outwardly she was an exemplary Mennonite wife and mother. Inwardly she kept her artistic sense modest."

Early in her marriage, as a full-time mother and homemaker, art was her support line. Marta was described as someone who sparkled. She was fascinated by everything – long before it was in vogue, Marta introduced her family to rennet, yogurt, and tofu! However, her grandson Jesse Riley fondly remembers her green bean soup (*Schaubel Sup*) and her raisin *Tweeback* (double-decker buns).[13] He also recalls that his grandmother "definitely always wore the most colorful clothing. I loved her style. So unique."

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Marta and Jay were regulars at a Toronto storytelling organization. Jesse was one of the grandchildren with whom Marta and Jay shared these events, leaving a legacy of stories to be passed on. Marta had a keen sense of family history and welcomed opportunities to tell stories that created interesting connections. She wrote that at the Mennonite bicentennial celebration at Toronto's Harbourfront, she was introduced to Dr. C. W. Wiebe of Winkler after she told a story about her Aunt Mary (Marie-Moum), who had helped many of the poorest women deliver their babies despite her one disfigured hand. Dr. Wiebe informed Marta that he had delivered many babies with Mary, but never thought to ask her about her disability. No doubt Marta reminded him that he had also been present when she gave birth to her children.

Marta was also sentimental. She embraced love and beauty where she saw it. In her very last days, she still wore a ring her ten-year old grandson Mischa had given her twenty-nine years earlier.[14] Was it due to sentiment or was it tradition that Marta and Jay celebrated every Christmas and Easter with all their children and grandchildren? Perhaps both.

In a questionnaire that Marta completed in 1992, she provided details of family history that launch into poignant stories and reflect her perspective.[15] For example, when asked her mother's profession, she responded, "Multi-talented village woman." Marta could not restrict her words to the small spaces provided on the simple questionnaire. She offered a multitude of stories, leaving the reader asking questions and wanting more – stories that balanced humour, passion, and compassion. She concluded: "For me, a village child, there was an un-realness about townspeople who always seemed to wear Sunday clothes, which made town church seem almost like looking into a peep-show. For no one's fault, I'm sure, I did not feel included. These did not seem [like] real people who could feed pigs, stook oat sheaves, to say nothing of Durum wheat – oh this is getting away from the point, yes."[16]

Marta Goertzen Armin was a woman of strength, a woman with love for family, a woman who needed to tell her story and her history, a woman with a passion for beauty and art, a woman who signed her art "Goertzen" – a woman who was truly a gift.

Eleanor Hildebrand Chornoboy weaves narratives that connect us with the past and resonate with the human experience.

1 Obituary of Marta Goertzen-Armin, *Toronto Star*, Aug. 24, 2009.
2 *Chortitz Memories... 1875–2002* ([Chortitz, MB]: Cemetery Project Committee, 2002).
3 Note from Marta, shared by Richard Armin, email to author, Jan. 2023.
4 GRanDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry), #313513.
5 Obituary of James Armin, *Globe and Mail*, Jul. 14, 2008.
6 Paul Armin, telephone interview, Jan. 2023.
7 Mischa Armin, video interview, Mar. 28, 2023.
8 Paul Armin, interview.
9 Alix Davis, telephone interview, Jan. 2023.
10 Marta Goertzen-Armin fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA), Winnipeg, MB.
11 Mischa Armin, interview.
12 Paul Armin, email to author, Feb. 2023.
13 Jesse Riley, telephone conversation, Feb., 2023, and email to author, Mar. 12, 2023.
14 Mischa Armin, "EULO-JOY," presented at Marta Goertzen Armin memorial service, Aug. 26, 2009.
15 "Preserving Our Stories: Personal History Questionnaire," 1992, MHA.
16 Ibid.

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Götzen '77

Chortitz by Winkler, Manitoba circa 1933

In the Next Issue

Our spring issue of *Preservings* will explore the religious, cultural, and social lives of Mennonites in imperial Russia before the 1870s migration to Canada. Please contact us if you are interested in contributing an article on any of our future themes:

- Mennonites and settlement in Canada
- Mennonites and Machines
- Mennonites and Natural Disaster

We also invite the submission of articles, biographies, local histories, and reflections as well as translated diaries, letters, and other archival materials for publication on topics related to Mennonite history, especially pertaining to Low German–speaking communities in the Americas.

Submissions of manuscripts and photographs may be sent to the editor, Aileen Friesen, by email to ai.friesen@uwinnipeg.ca, or via mail to the Plett Foundation, University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2E9. Contact the editor by email or by phone (204-786-9352) for clarification or additional information about submissions. If sending material electronically, please be sure to submit high-resolution photographs. They should be at least 2 MB in size.

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