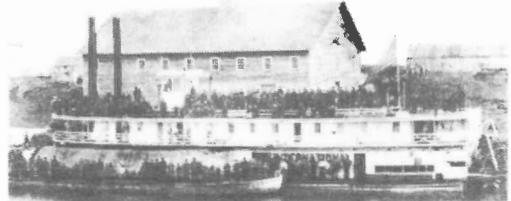


Preservings

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No. 6, June, 1995

Gerhard Wiebe — Feature Story

Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) — A Father of Manitoba

By D. Plett, Q.C.

A stark and lonely gravestone marks the spot in Randolph (Chortitz) where Manitoba's most important and significant Mennonite leader was buried 95 years ago. Gerhard Wiebe led his Bergthal people to Manitoba, a decision which drew the Fürstenlander/Old Colonists here as well, a total of 7000 people. During the 1920s many of their descendants moved to Paraguay and Mexico establishing blooming settlements which now spread out over Latin America with a population in excess of 100,000.

Meanwhile the Mennonites in Manitoba sponsored and welcomed their impoverished brethren fleeing starvation and anarchy in Russia, so that many of them settled here as well. In spite of continual emigration, the Mennonite communities in Manitoba presently number 60,000, or 6 per cent of the total population. They are well represented in all segments of Manitoba's economy and society.

It is trite to say that without Gerhard Wiebe and his sincere and inspired leadership,

none of this would have occurred. He was truly a father of Manitoba. Not as a political figure, like Louis Riel, who obtained reform by armed revolt, but as a social and cultural leader whose people built the Province and many prospering settlements in Latin America, brick by brick, and acre by acre of thriving farmland.

One would expect that every school child in Manitoba would know the name of Gerhard Wiebe. In fact, the very opposite is the case: Wiebe has frequently been denigrated and vilified. Historians Henry Gerbrandy (page 61), Martin W. Friesen (pages 466-7) and Quiring (page 24) have described Wiebe as "fearful", "paranoic" and "ignorant", while others like P. M. Friesen (pages 592-4) and Frank Epp (page

195) have implied that Wiebe's people were of a lower socio-economic caste with inferior genes.

Is it possible that these assessments are incorrect? In his biography of Gerhard Wiebe, published in Volume 3 of the East Reserve Historical Series (pages 313- 321), Professor Adolf Ens calls these judgements "inadequate."

For this reason the HSHS has decided to do a feature issue on Gerhard Wiebe and his family in the hope that his memory can be resurrected and restored to its proper place. It is impossible to understand the history of our area, and indeed the entire Mennonite community in Manitoba, without some knowledge of the man and his spiritual legacy.



Gerhard Wiebe gravestone. (Photo courtesy of Orlando Hiebert.)

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Gerhard Wiebe Biography

Ancestry

Gerhard Wiebe's ancestral roots go back to Prussia, to the village of Blumenort in the Vistula Delta, where his grandfather Heinrich Wiebe (born 1746) is listed in the 1776 Konsignation (census) and belonged to the Rosenort-Orloff Gemeinde. In 1803 Heinrich Wiebe and his family moved to the Molotschna Colony, where they settled in Blumenort.

The fact that the village was named for Wiebe's place of origin in Prussia indicates that the family was held in some esteem. In 1816, Wiebe and his family moved to the Chortitza Colony where they settled in the village of Einlage, but not before three of his children had put down roots in the Molotschna: son Peter in Lichtenau, son Nickolas in Tiege, and daughter Maria who married Cornelius Enns of Fischau.

Parents

Heinrich Wiebe's son Gerhard (1800-1858) married Agatha Dyck, daughter of Peter Dyck (born 1742) and Aganetha Dyck (born 1768). Agatha was a brother to Gerhard Dyck, the Aeltester of the Chortitza congregation in Russia during the 1870s. Another sister Helena was married to Jakob D. Friesen, and their son Heinrich was a Bergthal minister resident in Heuboden near Steinbach, Manitoba.

The many connections of the Wiebe family outside of the Old Colony no doubt made it easier for Gerhard Wiebe Sr. to contemplate a move to a new settlement some 200 miles east, past the Molotschna River, where the Bergthal Colony was established in 1833.

In 1839, when Gerhard Jr. was twelve, the family moved to Bergthal where they settled in Heuboden. Contemporary reports indicate that each of the young families had up to five wagon loads of possessions indicating that they were relatively well-off. It was here that Gerhard Wiebe Sr. died in 1858.

His widow emigrated from Russia together with her family and at the time of the 1881 census, she was living in the village of Edenberg, West Reserve, where her son Heinrich, the Bergthal delegate, had settled.

Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900)

In 1857 Gerhard Wiebe Jr. married Elisabeth Dyck, daughter of Derk Dyck and Sarah Penner. They lived in the village of Heuboden where their ten children were born, only five of whom would grow up to found their own families.

Gerhard Wiebe and other members of his

family were known for their dedication to service, their willingness to be accountable, their earnest faith and humble servanthood approach to leadership. Wiebe soon found favour within his community and was elected as a deacon of the Bergthal Gemeinde in 1854 and as a minister in 1861.

Sermons

A review of two of his sermons written in 1862 reveals that Gerhard Wiebe was a man of intense spiritual reflection and insight. In his "Sermon for Communion 1862," he repeatedly refers to the great love of God as a worthy reason for sinners to repent and to follow the way of the Cross. He writes, "let us . . . acknowledge our great grief and cast ourselves down before Him in great humility . . . and then, may all of us who are repentant sinners and who are remorseful because of our sins, come to the One Who casts no one away."

Wiebe emphasized the joys of Christian living, ". . . to be joint heirs already of His Kingdom here below and also in his Kingdom of grace, and after that, to be dwellers of heaven in the eternal kingdom of glory, and to be recipients of joy and salvation through grace." He encouraged his flock so that, ". . . even in this time of grace we receive a foretaste of the joys of eternity." He writes, "The kingdom . . ." would envelope those who followed the cross, ". . . so that we may have a genuine joy of the holy spirit within us."

Leadership

In 1866 Gerhard Wiebe was elected as the Aeltester to replace Jakob Braun. It was in the area of personal leadership and conciliation within his Gemeinde, that Wiebe stands without equal among his peers in Russia. He assumed leadership at a time when the nearby Molotschna Colony was in a state of constant strife, when one group of Mennonites in the Old Colony made repeated trips to Odessa to file accusations against other groups, when Separatist Pietist fanatics were charging across the steppes seeking to devour and tear apart families and church communities wherever possible.

In 1868, for example, Wiebe's cousin, Heinrich Enns (1807-1881) of Fischau, Molotschna, an articulate writer and publisher of seminal Mennonite writings, was forced to resign as Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde in disgrace. Throughout this period, Gerhard Wiebe quietly led his Bergthal Gemeinde in

peace and unity and kept it free of dissension and strife.

Ministry

Wiebe's ministry was noteworthy for his concern for the poor and underprivileged. His Gemeinde was one of the first in Russia to accept corporate responsibility for its landless.

Wiebe's vision for the church was founded on New Testament principles and included everyone within the community, whether orphaned, widowed or poor. The church was to be universal and to minister to all within its spiritual and physical boundaries. The Gemeinde was not to be bounded by narrow moral or legalistic theological premises as was often the case with the Separatist Pietist or fundamentalist congregations of the time.

Emigration

Gerhard Wiebe was a man of iron will and rugged determination. When the issue of military conscription raised the option of emigration, Wiebe travelled extensively to the Molotschna, the Old Colony and Yalta, to make representations of behalf of his people.

It was at this time that Gerhard Wiebe met with the Czar's plenipotentiary who gave him the opportunity to ask for a large estate with serfs for himself and his descendants, if only he would change his mind. It was evident that the Russian authorities realized that if they could keep the Bergthalers in Russia they would break the back of the emigration movement. Typically Wiebe's reaction was to ask only for freedom for his people.

Wiebe was hurt but not intimidated by leaders in the mother colonies who were bent on compromise with Russian authorities and who used all means at their disposal, including ridicule and scorn, to try to change his mind. With the hindsight of history, it is almost laughable (were is not so sad) to think of leaders such as Gebietschreiber Johann Epp of the Old Colony who openly disparaged Wiebe during the delegation to Lavadia in Yalta to meet with the Czar. Typically Wiebe chose not to exact revenge against his enemies although the Czar gave him that opportunity.

Wiebe was unshakable in his conviction. His extensive kinship network in the Molotschna, Old Colony and Prussia, and the fact that he used the Bible and not Jung-Stilling as his guide, gave him a much clearer focus on the events unfolding in Russia. Like a Moses, he led his Bergthaler people of some 500 families to North America and safety from the gathering storm.

A poem which Wiebe wrote sometime later sheds light on his concerns regarding the emigration:

- 2) Manche selge, frohe Stunde
Haben wir dort zugebracht
Wenn wir als aus einem Munde
Lobten Gott bei Tag und Nacht,
Bis der Kaiser Alexander
Durch die Regeln uns entdeckt
Dasz er ändert die Gesetze,
Was uns oft hat aufgeweckt.
- 8) Dasz wir bald nach weinig Jahren
Unsre Freiheit werden los
Und das Schreckliche erfahren
Gebt dann unsre Kinder los.
Darum haben wir verlassen,
Unser liebes Vaterland,
Wo wir einst so sicher saszen
Das ist von uns abgewandt.

Concern for the Underprivileged

The emigration period revealed Wiebe's leadership qualities at their best. The

wealthy, including he himself, gave of their money in the Waisenamt so that all the poor and elderly could come along. When the Chortitz Colony refused to honour the co-insurance system that the Bergthalers had paid into for many years, Wiebe counselled forgiveness and exhorted his people to share the loss.

Gerhard Wiebe felt intensely the pain of those in his church who were in need. In a letter to Jakob Shantz of Berlin, Ontario, written from Hamburg, Germany, on October 2, 1874, Wiebe appealed on their behalf, ". . . I pray, as a weak servant of the Lord, do not reject our petition, as they are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and every one members one of another."

In a letter of February 19th, 1875, to the Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Peter Toews, Wiebe demonstrates his unshakable conviction, "I in particular, have been at the point of giving up, for it seems that new obstacles are rising in our way daily. But then if I look back or look at the world around us, I cannot do otherwise, I must press forward. Our beloved God is always so gracious, He con-

tinues to grant us strength and courage. His grace is renewed every morning."

Manitoba and Tragedy 1876

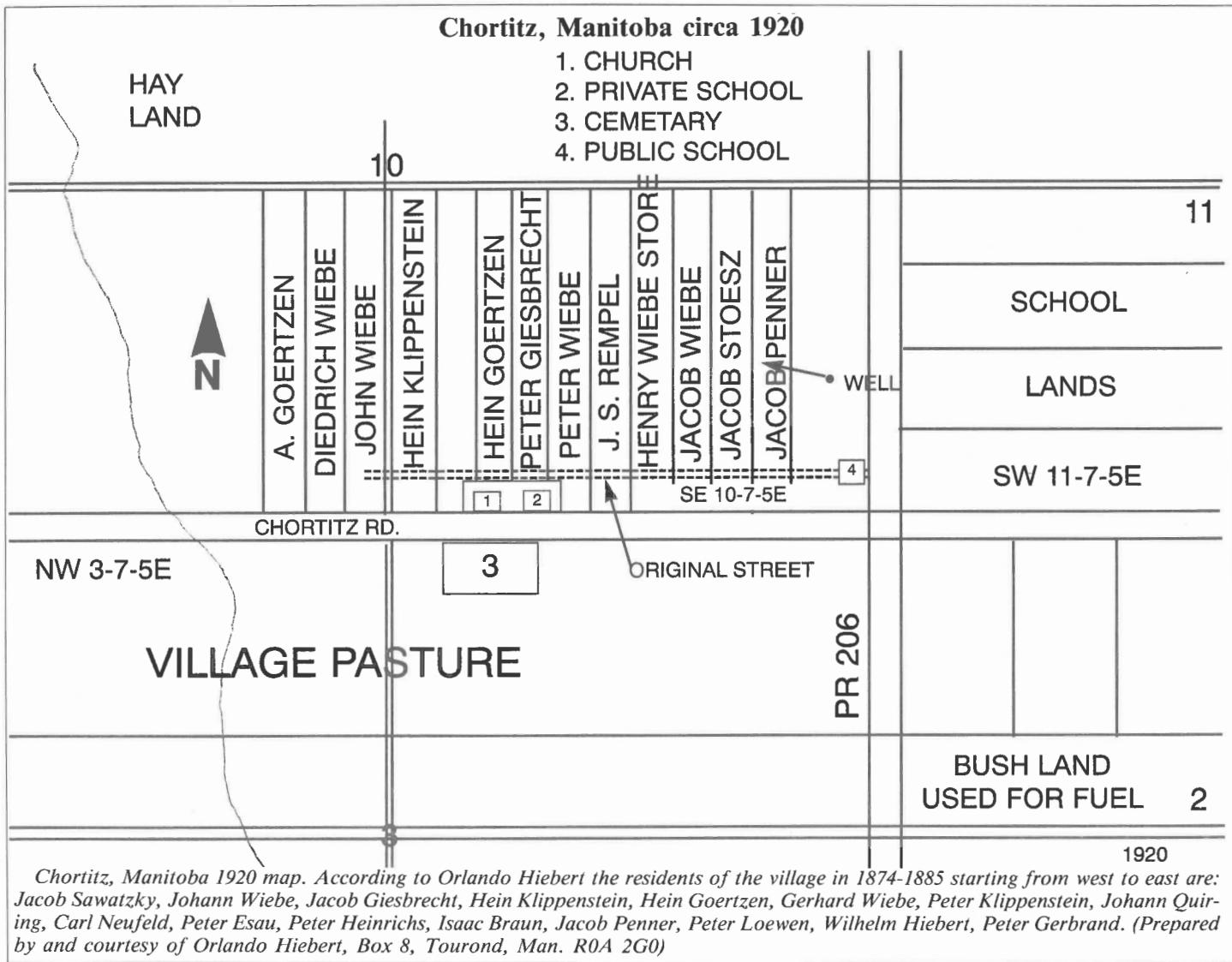
Wiebe and family arrived in Manitoba in the summer of 1875 and settled in the village of Chortitz, now Randolph. Orlando Hiebert has written that Wiebe homesteaded the SE 10-7-5E, filing for patent on July 20, 1875. This was the actual quarter section of land where the village was located.

Tragedy struck in late 1876, when his wife Agatha, and son Isebrandt, son Gerhard and then daughter Agatha died, all within a space of four months.

Even in his lonely widowhood Wiebe carried on the relentless burden of his office in his home Gemeinde and elsewhere. In 1876 he was called to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, to ordain Gerhard Neufeld, the first Bishop of the First Mennonite Church, which shows the respect which he had earned in the pioneer community.

Chortitz - Village Life.

Gerhard Wiebe was a community-minded



Chortitz, Manitoba 1920 map. According to Orlando Hiebert the residents of the village in 1874-1885 starting from west to east are: Jacob Sawatzky, Johann Wiebe, Jacob Giesbrecht, Hein Klippenstein, Hein Goertzen, Gerhard Wiebe, Peter Klippenstein, Johann Quiring, Carl Neufeld, Peter Esau, Peter Heinrichs, Isaac Braun, Jacob Penner, Peter Loewen, Wilhelm Hiebert, Peter Gerbrand. (Prepared by and courtesy of Orlando Hiebert, Box 8, Tourond, Man. R0A 2G0)

man who believed that economic and social relationships should be properly documented. On October 15, 1877, he signed a village agreement providing for the communal use of the SE 10-7-5E which he had homesteaded, which agreement was registered at the Winnipeg Land Titles Office on March 13, 1879. This was the quarter section on which the actual village of Chortitz was located. According to this agreement Gerhard Wiebe's sons homesteaded the following land: Heinrich - NW 34-7-5E, Peter - NW 2-7-5E, and son Johann - NW 35-7-5E and SW 3-7-5E.

Dr. Adolf Ens has noted that the Wiebe family was reasonably well-to-do. The 1881 R.M. of Hanover tax records and the 1882-3 *Seelenliste* show that Gerhard Wiebe and sons Heinrich and Johann each had their own Wirtschaften in Chortitz. Sons Peter, Jakob and Diedrich, are listed as resident with their father at the time. Gerhard and his two oldest sons are listed at the end in both records which likely means that their three Wirtschaften were situated side by side at the west end of the village, close to where the church and cemetery are located.

According to the East Reserve Bergthaler Brandordnung, Gerhard Wiebe was insured for "house \$375.00, furniture \$200.00, two wagons \$60.00, plow \$10.00, A house from Quiring was added September 5, \$100.00, December 23, 1883, one third of a threshing machine \$55.00; for a total of \$800.00."

Resignation 1882

Contemporary journals and diaries document the countless travels and journeys which Wiebe made in the service of his Gemeinde. We can picture him sitting alone by candlelight in the late evening preparing a sermon or deliberating over an issue in his beloved Gemeinde, such as certain younger ministers in the West Reserve who wanted to forsake their traditional faith in favour of more American style religiosity.

Or we can think of Gerhard Wiebe pulling off his driveway with horse and cutter in the middle of a raging snowstorm on his way to preach in the church in Grunthal, or perhaps, enroute to provide leadership to the Bergthaler community in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, or in the West Reserve.

Dr. Adolf Ens has written that "All this activity came to a sudden and mysterious halt in March 1882" (page 317) when Gerhard Wiebe suddenly and unexpectedly resigned as Aeltester. This event has remained under a pall of silence for over a century.

Apparently Wiebe had fondled an adult servant woman. Although he had not committed adultery, Wiebe was beside himself with guilt and shame. In the circumstances he felt himself unworthy to carry out the duties of his office and withdrew.

To the joy of his enemies, his resignation was also the subject of false and scandalous rumour, that he had committed adultery with a married woman.

Memoirs

As seen from his correspondence and sermons, Gerhard Wiebe was an articulate person. Possibly following the example of his cousin Heinrich Enns who was a prolific writer during his years as a deposed Aeltester, Gerhard Wiebe used the time to gather his thoughts and reflect upon his experiences and that of his Gemeinde which he loved above all else.

It was during this time of lonely widowhood and disgrace that Wiebe wrote his famous *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Ruszland nach Amerika*. These memoirs were originally serialized in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and then published as a book shortly after his death, by his son Dietrich.



Remarriage and Retirement.

Son Jakob writes that Gerhard Wiebe gave his farming operation over to his sons Dietrich and Jakob in about 1887. Two years later Gerhard built himself a house on the yard of his son Johann, so that Jakob could move into his former premises.

Gerhard Wiebe married for the second time to Elisabeth de Vehr (1823-1908). She had been married for the first time to Wilhelm Esau of Kronthal in the Old Colony and for the second time to Peter Loewen (1825-1887) of Hochstadt, a member of the Kleine Gemeinde who had joined the Holdeman church in 1882.

According to granddaughter Mary Steingart, Gerhard Wiebe's choice of spouse caused further unhappiness amongst his former parishioners and occasioned much criticism. Apparently his ministry had been strict with respect to marriage with outsiders and he had always counselled people against

it. Now he himself had broken the protocol.

On October 24, 1891, Gerhard Wiebe signed a Bill of Sale, selling his homestead (SE 10-7-5E) to his son Peter D. Wiebe. This indicates that at the age of 64 he had retired from active farming.

Evaluation

Upon reading the later recollections of son Jakob, one questions whether the period of intense personal loss and grief after the death of wife Agatha in late 1876 (as well as three children), at a time when Gerhard was immensely preoccupied with the work of the church — and no doubt too busy to grieve, permanently changed his personality and outlook.

Gerhard Wiebe resigned in 1882 because of a moral indiscretion. This brought him into a period of remorse and depression which led him at times to consider suicide.

In this situation what had once been one of Wiebe's most positive traits, his sensitive and conciliatory nature — which had attracted parishioners to his ministry and enabled him to keep his community united, now became his biggest enemy. The man who had counselled and led thousands through personal tragedy and grief, who had helped many find forgiveness for moral sins and apostasy, was unable to find forgiveness within himself for having fallen and failed his community.

In his memoirs Wiebe describes this as being adrift upon the ocean where he was beset by the wiles and taunts of Satan; "... The sea of sin was so great and the storm so severe. . . But a heavy fog had settled around the boat so that the poor boatman could see nothing except rope, knife or poison. It was one evening, when the distress had become so severe that the sailor could see almost nothing except death and destruction . . . But he pulled back in alarm . . . and so the poor sinner could, with God's help still evade them."

In time, Gerhard Wiebe was able to find grace for his sin and peace for his soul finding "a certain hope that through grace he . . . [would] stand at the right hand of Jesus . . ."

Wiebe did not blame others or the church for his fall and "... believe[d] that many sincere members have supported [me] . . . in prayer to God, although they did not know my dangerous situation. But God's eyes saw my pitiable condition, and He in His mercy accepted their prayers. For that the writer gives thanks to God and the dear Church."

Conclusion

The tragic end to his ministry may condemn Wiebe to permanent ostracization by his Mennonite enemies. Like Louis Riel, Wiebe was disparaged by the very community that he was instrumental in creating. Like Moses, he was unable to enjoy the fruits of his labour in the promised land.

Fortunately, the tragic end to his leadership does not hinder a re-evaluation of his contribution in the secular realm. As already stated above, Wiebe more than anyone else, deserves credit for the thriving and vibrant Mennonite community in Manitoba today. This includes many descendants who no longer think of themselves in those terms, the so-called Mennonite diaspora.

The simple concrete monument still stands today. Although Wiebe's legacy has been rejected by the modern Mennonite church — and so be it, it is time that he was accorded his proper place in the history of our Province. He was truly a builder of our community and a cornerstone and father of Manitoba.

The Faces of Gerhard Wiebe

This feature issue includes a number of articles about Gerhard Wiebe and his family. Jake K. Doerksen enjoys researching the history of his Chortitz/Bergthal people. Recently he discovered a letter by Gerhard Wiebe to the Department of Education which adds to the growing list of his writings and which is published here for the first time. Orlando Hiebert is the resident expert on the village of Chortitz, now Randolph. He has compiled a map of the village of Chortitz which is published here for the first time.

Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen has done outstanding pioneering research on the material culture of the Russian Mennonites. Her article regarding the trunk of Gerhard Wiebe which she discovered while on a trip in Paraguay in 1993 adds an interesting dimension to our knowledge of the Wiebe family.

The brief notes about son Johann D. Wiebe by granddaughter Justina Wiebe Funk illustrate how quickly oral traditions fade and how difficult it can be to reconstruct someone's life 86 years after their death. Hopefully the growing list of journals, diaries, as well as contemporary records and newspaper reports will enable this family branch to flesh out the biography of an important pioneer personage such as Johann D. Wiebe.

The biography of son Dietrich D. Wiebe by his grandson Dietrich F. Wiebe, informs the readers about the man who actually published the memoirs of Gerhard Wiebe and who also served his people faithfully as a Waisenman, minister, and emigration leader. The biography of brother Jakob D. Wiebe by granddaughter Helena Unger Peters, author of the Wiebe family book in 1973, tells the story of another son who raised a large family and who shared some of his father's spiritual mysticism.

Through the stories of his children, his writings and the artifacts he possessed, we learn more about Gerhard Wiebe. We see that he was a man of many faces and dimensions. Hopefully these articles will encourage others to research and document the history of the Wiebe family, and particularly, that of sons Johann, Heinrich and Peter.



Gerhard Wiebe gravestone with the Chortitzer church in background. Randolph, Manitoba. View to the north. (Photo courtesy of Orlando Hiebert).

To his spiritual followers, Gerhard Wiebe has achieved a larger than life stature as a hero and valiant warrior of the faith. The articles in this issue enhance our knowledge

of the man and his faith, and start to sketch out some critical chapters in the history of our Province.

Gerhard Wiebe: Correspondence with the Protestant Board of Education

By Jacob Doerksen

Introduction.

In *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Amerika*, Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe explains why the Bergthal Colony emigrated from Russia. One of the main reasons was that the Russian Government was trying to get involved in the education of their children and take control.

During the 1840s the Agriculture Union under Johann Cornies had gained control over Mennonite schools in the Molotschna and to a lesser extent in Chortitz. Bergthal was unique as they were not affected by these developments and retained full control of their own educational system. When this control was threatened they chose to immigrate to Canada where they were promised that this would be their right.

They had only been in Canada for a few years when they were approached by Government representatives and offered financial assistance. The Bergthal Mennonites reluctantly accepted only to withdraw a few years later. At the very first meeting of the Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde Aeltesters with the Protestant Board of Edu-

cation, Aeltester Wiebe became suspicious of the Board's motive when they were asked to grade the teachers according to each ones qualifications.

Ten years later Wiebe's concerns, that the government was seeking direct involvement in the education of the children in return for the grant, was realized. By this time the East Reserve Bergthalers had far removed themselves from the government offer.

The following three letters deal with this issue. The first is from the Protestant Board of Education to the Mennonite Churches on the East Reserve. The second and third are as they appear in the Minute Books of the Protestant Board of Education. The second may be a copy of that which was sent to Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe and the third appears as a translation of his reply and may not be exactly as first written. I have also included some other pages from the Minute Books so that the reader may better understand the events of the times.

Letter One:

Winnipeg, October 17, 1878
To the Churches of Manitoba

The Protestant School Board has been informed that there are about 1600 school chil-

dren in the Mennonite communities and since the board is concerned that financial support set aside by the government also be of benefit to their schools, the undersigned members of the school board intend to inform you about this important matter.

The first step would be to divide the schools of the villages into school districts according to your own wish and discretion.

Namely, you may choose teachers from your own people. The instruction in your schools are to be left entirely in your hands, your rights and privileges shall in no respect be interfered with and the instructions in your school may be in your own language or as you may choose.

The Government grant for those schools that are listed with the school board is from \$80.00 to \$100.00 per year.

The school board desires to have a meeting with your elected delegates, which is to be held in Mr. Hespeler's office on November 6 to make explanations and for the answering of any questions that you may have

Respectfully,
W. Cyprian Pinkham
School Superintendent
James Robertson
Stewart Mulvey

Minutes:

(From the General Meeting of the Board of Education Minute Book "B" PAM G955)
March 31, 1881

Mr. Hespeler on behalf of the Committee approached by the Superintendent to examine the Mennonite teachers reported that the examinations have taken place and the following seven candidates had been deemed worthy of their Certificates: Jacob Toews - Hochstadt, Diedrich Friesen - Steinbach, Cornelious Friesen - Blumennort, Maria Friesen - Blumenhof, Johann Friesen - Rosenhof, David Hiebert - Rosenort. (Only six were listed in the minutes but the seventh was Abraham Isaak Gruenfeld.)

The reports were signed by Wm. Hespeler, Peter Toews of Gruenfeld, Peter Toews of Blumenort, and (Canon O'Meare and Mulvey?). Certificates were ordered and issued to these seven and travelling expense of \$21.00 paid.

Wm. Hespeler stated that there would only be seven Mennonite Schools during the present year. The remaining fifteen having been withdrawn by the persons having charge of them from the list of public schools.

After some consideration it was moved by (W. Mulvey?), seconded by (Dr. Ross?) and agreed.

That the Superintendent and Mr. Hespeler form a committee to draw a circular letter to be addressed to the Mennonites who have decided upon this course asking them if there is any cause in the way in which the Board of Education has hereto headed the issue for such action.

Letter Two:

(From the Protestant Board of Education Minute Book "C" PAM G956)
June 14, 1881
The following was read at the meeting of June 14, 1881

To Rev. Gerhard Wiebe and Community of Mennonites over whom he has jurisdiction.

The Protestant section of the Board of Education regrets to learn through the Committee of Teachers examiners, that the Teachers of your Community have not presented themselves for examination with the view to being recognized as public school teachers. It would be gratifying to the Board of Education to know whether you have any objection to the general regulation under which your schools have been managed during the past two years, or if there have been anything asked of you by the Gentlemen who have represented the Board in matters affecting the Mennonite School grant agreement which may have given you cause for declining to avail yourselves of the generous aid given by the Government.

The Board will be glad to receive a reply through your Bishop or from the School Trustees addressed to me.

Signed W. Cyprian Pinkham
Superintendent Education Education Offices
Winnipeg 5 April 1881

Letter Three:

Translation Chortitz May 11, 1881
To Rev W. Cyprian Pinkham,
Superintendent of the
Protestant School Board, Winnipeg.
Dear Sir:

I beg of you not to misconstrue my motive for having so long delayed answering your enquiring of the 5th April which was on account of my absence from home.

The reason why we withdrew from accepting the Government Grant support was because our Community had hesitated for the last two years to accept the same but consented through the urging of the teachers as well as Wm. Hespeler, who gave us to understand that the Teachers' examination would be held in the centre of the Reserve, which was not done this year and so the examination took place at Niverville, and the community thought better not to accept the Grant.

We also understand that all matters in connection with school should be left to our own decision.

We hope that the Government and the School Board will not on account of this decision feel annoyed with us. Further, we think it better not to act on these matters different than our brethren on the Western Reserve who have never yet accepted the Grant and we wish to be uniform in our doings.

As we are the Shepherd of the Lord's we are not permitted according to the Word of God to build the community.

With kind regards we beg to sign in the name of the community.

Elder Gerhard Wiebe

Gerhard Wiebe's 'Kjest'

By Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen

Material objects bear critical witness to our history and to our values. It is with this understanding of the significance of tangible things that I went to explore the material culture of Mennonites in the Chaco colonies in Paraguay in June of 1993.

I wanted to see to what extent the preservation or the neglect of inherited key household furnishings and the creation of new ones reflected continuation and change of traditional values and beliefs. A grant from the German Fritz Thyssen Foundation supported this work¹.

More than any other material object it is the dowry chest, or *kjest*, that has become a hallmark of that Mennonite identity which has its origins in Northern Europe and a 500 year history of migrations for the purpose of finding religious freedom... At every point of migration, the dowry chest served as a ready travel chest, packed with necessities for survival in the strange new land, but also

with smaller heirlooms and mementos of the old home, of friends and families left behind.

Would I discover such chests in the Mennonite villages of the Chaco? And would I find chests built in the Chaco that followed the pattern of those that had been brought from Canada via Russia, or directly from Russia with the Fernheim colony people?

The Jacob Unger Museum in Fernheim displayed indeed a large chest whose dimensions, painted decorations and handforged decorative metal hardware all pointed to its origin of around 1800 in the Vistula Delta, then Prussia. And in one home in Fernheim I was shown a dowry chest built in the 1940's after the pattern of the traditional Vistula Delta chests, a pattern that had continuing use in South Russia.

However, the museum in Loma Plata had no such chest at all in its collection, regrettably. Still, I had seen a large plain dowry chest in the home of a Kauenhoven family in Loma Plata, a chest that had been brought with the migration of 1927 from Canada,

and before then from Russia in the 1875 migration. Therefore, I could assume that more chests could be found in other homes.

Johann R. Penner who had assisted with the creation of the Loma Plata museum and who had heard of my interest guided us to the village of Blumengart in Menno Colony where he knew of the existence of the "Gerhard Wiebe chest". In other words, the chest of the Elder Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) who led the emigration of the entire Bergthal community from South Russia to Canada's Manitoba province.

It was Monday, the 28th of June, and ten o'clock in the morning when Johann's dusty old car pulled into the yard of Maria and Abraham Falk. Even though it was winter in the Chaco, the thermometer showed 90 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, and bright yellow fruit hung heavy in the grapefruit trees. Maria had just hung up the wash in the shadow of the deep veranda that is part of every house here.

Asked about "the old chest" she guided us to a wooden tool shed where in the dark shadows I could see what remained of a once beautiful Vistula Delta dowry chest, wedged in between machine parts, feed sacks and junk. Termites had eaten into most of the bottom boards of the chest, and as we lifted the heavy lid a stench of mouse dirt filled the air. But on the inside of the lid I could still see tiny fragments of pictures with German print, dating from before 1900.

Despite the thick layers of Chaco dust and despite the badly damaged paint, the toll of 66 years of extreme temperatures in the Chaco, I could recognize immediately on the basis of the chest's dimensions, overall form, the design of its keyplate and of its handle plates, that this chest had been made by a cabinet maker in the late 18th century in the Vistula Delta, somewhere between Gdansk, Elblag and Malbork. (Fig 1)

What was missing was the separately constructed five-footed base on which all such chests rested in order to keep moisture from rising into the chest from the floor. These bases were often misplaced or discarded after such chests would fall into disuse and therefore disrepair. (Fig 2) Still, this ruin of a dowry chest had accompanied and thus "contained" the migration experiences of the Bergthal Mennonites over three continents.

As we traced the inheritance history of this chest with the help of the genealogy documented in Helena Unger, *Gerhard Wiebe Family Tree, 1800-1958* (Rosenort, MN: Lark Printing Ltd) we found that the present owner, Maria Falk, received the chest from her father, Jacob Wiebe, who in turn had received it from his father Dietrich Wiebe, the son of Gerhard Wiebe who had brought the chest from Russia to Canada in 1875.

But on the basis of style analysis we can safely assume that the chest predates even Gerhard Wiebe's birth, as it had been brought to Russia by his parents on their

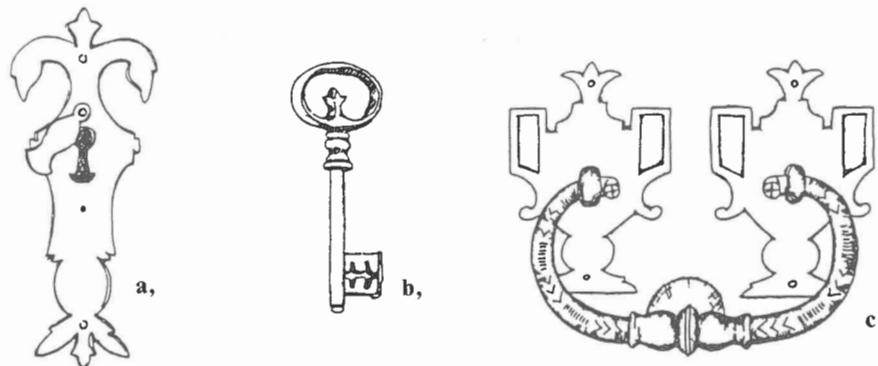


Fig. 1 a, b, c
Style of the keyplate, key and handle plate of the Gerhard Wiebe chest. (Drawing by Gesine Janzen)



Fig. 2
Examples of typical chest bases of Mennonite dowry chests, as would have been placed under the Gerhard Wiebe chest. (Drawing by Gesine Janzen).



Fig. 3
A dowry chest in the Vistula Delta style, painted graining and floral decoration. Private collection. (Photo by Mark Wiens)

migration of 1793 from the Vistula Delta to help establish the Old Colony Chortitzia. It may well be that this chest was brought into the household as Gerhard Wiebe's mother's dowry.

Originally chests made of pine were given a painted finish, often grained in such a way as to simulate hardwood such as ash from which more expensive chests were built in the same style. Those were often decorated with inlaid veneer design. Figure 3 shows a Vistula Delta chest with painted imitation grain and painted designs in imitation of the inlaid

chests made of hardwoods. This is what Gerhard Wiebe's chest may have looked like before it left the Vistula Delta for Russia.

Maria Wiebe Falk's neighbor and sister-in-law Helene Falk Wiebe also showed us an old chest, once a dowry chest holding the household linens as well as money, and stained a deep oxblood red still visible under the dark brown oil paint. This chest was stored in a shed as well, but it was in somewhat better condition.

Helene remembered its five-footed base, but said that her husband discarded it after

it fell into disrepair. The chest had been brought from Manitoba to Puerto Casada in Paraguay in 1927 by Peter L. Giesbrecht, and before him his father Wilhelm Giesbrecht had brought it from Russia to Manitoba as emigration luggage. The overall style including the shape of the hardware suggests that this chest too had had its origin around 1800 in the Vistula Delta. (Fig 4)

It is to be hoped that in Mennonite communities everywhere the awareness of the historical significance of such objects will grow and will be taught at home, at school and in the churches. We are still losing too many traces of our history to the highest bidders at the auction block or to the temptation of discarding the old in favor of the "practicality" or gleam of the new.

Endnotes:

1. For a full treatment of Vistula Delta style dowry chests see *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition: 1766-1910*, by Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John M. Janzen, Good Books, 1991; also see the author's article "Sources and Styles of Mennonite Furniture in the Vistula Delta", *Mennonite Quarterly review*, Vol. LXVI, No. 2, April 1992, pp. 167-198. For a comprehensive treatment of Mennonite furniture as a migrant tradition, tracing it from the Vistula Delta to South Russia, to North America and to Brazil and Paraguay as well as today's remaining Mennonite villages in Russia's Orenburg region, see the author's article "Mennonite Furnishings: The Dynamics of a Migrant Cultural Tradition" in *Kansas Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 31-45, 1994,



Fig. 4

Helene Falk Wiebe washes off Chaco dust from the Peter L. Giesbrecht chest, brought from Niverville, Manitoba, to Mennon Colony, Chaco. (Photo by John M. Janzen).

and the author's article in *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 1994, entitled "Mennonitische Möbel: Zeugnisse einer wandelnden Gemeinschaft", pp. 7-27. A short ex-

cerpt of this work appeared under the same title in *Die Mennonitische Post*, Vol. 18, N.6, pp. 1, 21, 23, July 1994.

Biography of Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen

Dr. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen is an art historian, teaching at Bethel College and at the University of Kansas. Between 1983 and 1993 she served as curator of cultural history at Kauffman Museum, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, where she and her husband John M. Janzen curated the award winning special exhibition "Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition 1766-1910." Most recently she served as short-term volunteer for Mennonite Central Committee in Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern Zaire. Reinhild was the special speaker at the HSHS annual meeting on February 12-13, 1993. (See *Preservings*, Issue No. 2, page 3).



Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John M. Janzen with their children Bernd Gunnar, Marike Sofie and Gesine Sara, Christmas 1993, in their house "Heuboden", Newton, Kansas. (Photo courtesy of Mennonite Post).

Johann D. Wiebe (1853-1909)

By Justina Wiebe Funk,
New Bothwell, Manitoba

Grandparents Johann D. Wiebes lived in Chortitz, now Randolph, Manitoba, very close to the church which is still standing there. They lived on a farm where they raised a big family.

Johann D. Wiebe married Barbara Peters on October 2, 1872, daughter of Cornelius Peters (1816-1887), who was the brother of the Oberschulz Jakob Peters. Johann and Barbara had six children together of which two died young. Barbara died on August 4, 1884.

Johann D. Wiebe was elected as a deacon of the Chortitzer Gemeinde on December 15, 1881.

On February 3, 1885, Johann married for the second time to Maria Sawatzky, who was my father's mother. They had twelve children, but several died young.

Grandpa Wiebe passed away on January 9, 1909. Grandma was a widow until August 17, 1919, when she married Heinrich Peters. Later they moved to the Chaco, Paraguay.

My father Peter S. Wiebe also was a Bishop of the Chortitzer Gemeinde from March 16, 1932, until he retired in about 1968.



Wedding picture November 26, 1916.
Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970) and Justina
Dueck (1896-1967). Bishop Peter S. Wiebe
was the son of Johann D. Wiebe (Photo
courtesy Justina Wiebe Funk).



Johann D. Wiebe coffin picture 1909. L to r: Sons Heinrich and Jacob; Mrs. Johann D. Wiebe; daughters Barbara and Elisabeth. Elisabeth was partially crippled. The two young men and the young woman to the rear are unidentified. (Photo courtesy of Justina Wiebe Funk).

Jacob D. Wiebe (1865-1938)

By Helena Unger Peters

My grandfather Jacob D. Wiebe came from Russia to Canada along with his parents the Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe nee Elizabeth Dyck in 1875. He was nine years old at the time. They settled in Chortitz Manitoba along with other new settlers. In 1885 Jacob Wiebe married Helen Flemming of Minnesota, USA. After two years of their marriage his first wife Helen died in 1887. They had no children. His second marriage was to Helen Funk in 1888.

Jakob D. Wiebe bought a quarter section of land (NE 10-7-5E), which they could buy very cheap in those early years of settlement. Their first house was a small two room log cabin. A few years later another room was added on, to be used as a kitchen, which by this time was built of lumber.

As the family grew larger, Mr. Wiebe decided to build a much bigger house with barn attached. Like the others they had a small domestic chamber built in between the house and barn, which they used for the cream separator. They also used this room for churning butter, or making sauerkraut to ferment, etc.

One of the rooms was arranged to be used as the village Post Office. Later their oldest son Gerhard took over the Post Office and moved it into his home. Son Gerhard was also the village school teacher, which was situated next door to them.

Jacob Wiebe was the owner and operator of the first General store in the village of Chortitz, which was located next door to them. In time one of his sons took over. Jakob D. Wiebe was also one of the first ones to own a new Model T. Ford.

We lived next door to our Wiebe grandparents. I remember we had stiles in those days, a series of steps, made to climb over from both sides of the fence, between each of us neighbours' yards, instead of a gate, like we have nowadays.

During those early years in Canada they got word from the Government that a group of orphaned boys from England would arrive, and asking if anyone would want a foster boy until they were old enough to be on their own. Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe took heart and felt sorry for those homeless boys and didn't hesitate to add one more to their family, although they had four sons of their own, all around the same age, plus a couple of younger ones yet.

The lad they took in was called Edward Dudman. He was nine years old at the time. He always had a great sense of humour. Later he married a Mennonite girl. They always visited and stayed in touch with his foster parents.

The Wiebe children had nearly all married and most of them had settled in and around the Chortitz area. In 1927, Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe decided to sell their farm and move to Niverville and semi-retire. My dad, John

Jakob D. Wiebe

continued from previous page

R. Wiebe, the oldest son, moved all their belongings with a hayrack and a team of horses, which was eighteen miles to go.

I counted myself very privileged that my dad offered me to go along. But my, oh my, were those dirt roads ever so rough bumpy and full of potholes. I was lucky to come back all in one piece. I was only eight years old and vowed never to go along again. Poor dad, and he thought he was doing me a great favour.

After the Wiebes had settled down at their new home, Mr. Wiebe started a hobby with raising angora rabbits. He had them all separately caged in. He sheared the rabbits wool and sold it to a company in Winnipeg till his health failed.

The Wiebes had two daughters living at home with them. Gertrude the youngest one had been ailing most of all her life, and spent her later years in a wheelchair. Twelve times major surgery was done on her. She reached the age of fifty-eight years.

Their other daughter Helen worked in a killing plant till arthritis crippled her hands and fingers so badly so she had to quit working. But through all that, she took it seriously to nurse her sister and both her parents, the Jacob D. Wiebes. Mrs. Wiebe had been bedridden for about forty-five years because some of the necessary surgeries were not available in those days. Jacob D. Wiebe passed away peacefully at his home in 1938. Mrs. Wiebe quite suddenly passed away at her home in 1954.

Mr. Wiebe's last request was to plant a tree on his cemetery plot.

The Cornie W. Rempel's are now living on the farm where the Jacob D. Wiebes farmed for many years in Chortitz.

I would especially like to thank my aunt, Mrs. John (Mary) Steingart for all the help she gave me via telephone. She's the last and only one of my aunts and uncles from whom I could get a lot of very valuable information. Thank you.

Helen Wiebe who so faithfully looked after her parents for many years, is ninety-four years old now, and living in Steinbach in the Nursing Home.

Residents of Chortitz in the early twenties. Starting from Randolph school clockwise: The Randolph School; George F. Wiebes; Jacob D. Wiebe, the General Store, a Jew by the name of Mr. Sussman owned the store and had the living quarters in the back; Johann S. Rempel; Chortitzer Church; church caretakers; Henry Peters who moved to Paraguay; Diedrich D. Wiebe who moved to Paraguay; Mrs. Wall and son Jacob; David G. Hiebert; Abram Goertzen; Peter Funks; Johann F. Wiebe, lived in the back lane road; Jacob Penner and sister Susanna, lived on back lane road, moved to Paraguay.



1909 Jacob D. Wiebe (1865-1938) and Helena Funk Wiebe with daughter Agatha (b. 1905), Mrs. Cornelius Peters of Reichenbach. (Photo courtesy of John and Mary Steingart, Box 15, Niverville, Man.)



Jacob D. Wiebe and three daughters, 1935. L to r: sitting, Agatha, Mrs. Cornelius Peters, standing, Helen Wiebe, and to the right of Mr. Wiebe is daughter Katherine, Mrs. Johan Hiebert and later a Mrs. William Heinrichs. (Photo courtesy of Helena Unger Peters)



The Jacob D. Wiebe family. Starting from top row, left to right: Otto Rempel Wiebe, Jacob Heinrichs Wiebe, John Rempel Wiebe, Jacob Schultz Wiebe, Jacob Neufeld Wiebe, Peter Schultz Wiebe, Mr. George F. Wiebe.

Second row, couples with their spouses: Mr. Jacob and Mary F. Wiebe, Mr. John L. F. and Elizabeth Hiebert, Mr. John F. and Mary Wiebe, Mr. John and Mary Steingart, Mr. John P. and Catharine Hiebert, Mr. Henry F. and Susan Wiebe, Mr. Cornelius and Agatha Peters, Bishop Peter F. and Helen Wiebe.

Third row: Miss Helen F. Wiebe, Mary Hiebert Jordison, Margaret Wiebe Heinrichs, Miss Gertrude F. Wiebe, Mary Wiebe Hiebert, Miss Susan Hiebert, Gertie Wiebe Dziadyk, Helen Wiebe Unger Peters, Mrs (George F.) Elizabeth Wiebe.

Fourth row left to right: Lena Peters Falk, Hilda Wiebe Kroeker, Mary Hiebert Dueck, Dorothy Wiebe Fast, Elma Wiebe Bartel, Tina Hiebert Warunki, Helen Hiebert Balzer, Mary Wiebe Dziadyk, Mary Wiebe, Helen Wiebe Hiebert, Margaret Wiebe Thiessen

Fifth row: Peter Wiebe Peters, Peter Heinrichs Wiebe, Jacob Rempel Wiebe, Jack Wiebe Hiebert, Herman Rempel Wiebe, George Rempel Wiebe, Berhard Wiebe Hiebert, Paul Rempel Wiebe, Johny Wiebe Hiebert, Edwin Hiebert Wiebe, Bill Hiebert Wiebe, John Heinrichs Wiebe, Johny Wiebe L. F. Hiebert, uncertain, Henry Wiebe Hiebert, uncertain, Abe Wiebe Hiebert.

Mr. Jacob D. Wiebe at the far left of their whole family and Mrs. (Jacob) Helen Funk Wiebe sitting on the far right. This family picture was taken about the year 1935, at Niverville, beside the Jacob D. Wiebe's house where they last resided till they passed away. (Photo identification courtesy of Helena Unger Peters).

Autobiography of Jakob D. Wiebe (1865-1938) Chortitz and Niverville

Editor's note: This is an extract from an autobiography written by Jakob D. Wiebe in an allegorical form which he recorded in a Journal presently in the possession of his daughter Mary Steingart, Niverville, Manitoba. The text of this autobiography has been translated by Rev. Ben Hoeppner, and is to be published in its entirety in Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series.

A few notes of our life. Until spring we lived with mother's parents. As there was no mistress at my father's place, but only two brothers, I was persuaded to move to my father's home. Here we and my brother, Diedrich, could receive the half of the crop. This paid off, so that we were able to obtain a wagon, a rake, a grass mower, etc. At

that time we all travelled with the slow moving oxen. We had ample time to reflect about things. We were not in a hurry then as we are today. We had a simple contented life, helping one another in harmony.

We lived here for three years together with my brother, to the right side. One year we lived with father, who built a house for himself on his son Johann's yard. I bought a house from my brother-in-law, Abram Penner, and moved it into the village where we lived for some years, across the street near the church. Later I bought Peter Loewen's farm in Chortitz for \$500.00. I also had land one mile east of the village which I sold for \$300.00. Thus I owed only \$200.00.

Being a landowner now. I moved again into the village, where we lived until 1926. Here we also had to experience a good deal of difficulties. There is no place in the world where the sun always shines. Dark clouds

sailed over head.

During our last moving, mother took sick. She had to suffer much misery, pain and difficulties. Yes, she had to cross deep valleys, high mountain and steep gullies, so that she frequently was tired and desired to be with Christ.

And thus children, we are still on our pilgrimage and climb upward toward the crown of eternal life. But we first must go through the valley of humiliation, we must first deny self. This is one of the most difficult things in this life, as the way is so slippery and filled with thorns and hedges. In these hindrances many souls stumble and suffer shipwreck and drown and miss the way of life.

Therefore I would like to warn all who enter this valley of humiliation to be awake. It is a slippery and deceitful valley. Here the devil may storm upon every pilgrim, so as to drive him back into the world.

Diedrich D. Wiebe 1868-1930

By Diedrich F. Wiebe,
R.R.1
Ste. Anne, Manitoba

My grandfather Diedrich D. Wiebe was born in the Colony of Bergthal in southern Russia on August 8, 1868. He was the youngest child of Aeltester Gerhard and (Elisabeth Dyck) Wiebe. In 1875 he as a 7-year-old youth, together with his parents and siblings, came as part of the Mennonite migration and settled at Chortitz, in southeastern Manitoba. What used to be Chortitz is today known as Randolph.

On July 16, 1889 he was married to Margaretha Klassen (b. September 4, 1870). This marriage lasted only 13 years as Margaretha passed away on February 25, 1903 during childbirth, when their youngest son David was born. Altogether seven children were born to them: Gerhard (my father), Diedrich, Elisabath, three Margarethas and David. Of the three Margarethas only one (Mrs. Heinrich K. Funk) survived to reach adulthood.

On May 10, 1903 grandfather married



Diedrich D. Wiebe in Paraguay between 1927 & 1930. Died in Paraguay in September 1930 at the age of 62 years one month. He was the father of Gerhard K. Wiebe who was the father of Diedrich F. Wiebe. (Courtesy of D.F. Wiebe).



Relations: Back row, from left to right: Dietrich Wiebe, Wilhelm Priesz, Peter Wiebe and Abram Klassen.

Second row: Mrs. D. Wiebe, Mrs. W. Priesz, Mrs. Peter Wiebe, a daughter, Mrs. A. Klassen and daughter.

The four men are all brothers-in-law and three of the women are sisters to Wilhelm Priesz. Mrs. Priesz was born a Funk. Both of the families, Wiebe and Klassen went with the first emigration to Paraguay and settled in Chaco. Abram Klassen lived here in the East Reserve in Schoensee. Dietrich Wiebe was a minister and lived in Chortitz. Wilhelm Priesz and Peter Wiebe lived in Sommerfeld on the East Reserve. Abram Klassen served as auctioneer in the Wiesenamt in Paraguay.

The names of the children are unknown, but many in Paraguay will hopefully know them.
Submitted by C.F. Broesky. (Photo courtesy of D. F. Wiebe).

again, to Katharina Pries (b. March 3, 1883). Ten children were born out of this marriage. Jacob, Katharina (Mrs. Franz Giesbrecht), Johann, Justina (Mrs. Diedrich Toews)¹ (see footnotes) Maria (Mrs. Johan T. Dueck), Anna (Mrs. Peter B. Fehr), Peter, Wilhelm, Heinrich, and Getruda. Of these ten children eight reached adulthood.

Peter drowned when he was 16, Gertruda passed away when only two months old, having been born September 6, 1918 and dying November 4, 1918. Grandmother Katharina, passed away four days later, Nov. 8, 1918 as a result of complications from this childbirth.

After his first marriage in 1889 grandfather resided on the SW 10-7-5E² and farmed there till he, as a widower for the second time, joined the migration to the Chaco in Paraguay S.A. All his children except Gerhard, Margaretha (Mrs. H. K. Funk), and David joined him in this move.

In 1905 grandfather was elected as "Waisenvorsteher" of the Chortitzer Waisenamt in which capacity he served till he was elected as "Prediger" (Preacher) for the Chortitzer Mennoniten Gemeinde in 1917. Therein he then faithfully served till

the Lord called him to his Heavenly reward. He also served as school teacher at the private school in Chortitz.

My father often mentioned that, as there were four children still living from grandfather's first marriage when he married for the second time, they had never considered their new mother as a stepmother, or the following children as stepchildren.

This new mother had been so compassionate and kind that she had felt just like a real mother to them. I'm so thankful for the loving bond that my grandparents instilled in their family, because it carries on to this day, even amongst us cousins. There are no step or half cousins, and we felt this same family bond when my wife and I were in Paraguay in 1991.

I still have a briefcase full of letters of my father's that were written by my grandfather, and by my aunts and uncles. These letters date back to 1927, when they were on the trail to New York, on the ocean vessel to Montevideo, and from Puerto Casado, Paraguay, where they had to wait at the river port (living in tents) for a long time, due to the fact that the land they had purchased had not been surveyed yet. It is interesting to read

what all transpired in the month-long journey from southern Manitoba to Paraguay.

Also noteworthy is the fact that they had an extremely difficult time while in Puerto Casado. I will not go into detail here as several interesting books have been written on that already, one being *Die Mennoniten Bezwingen eine Wildnisz* by Martin W. Friesen Loma Plata, Paraguay. Another one is *Gaeste und Fremdlinge* (Strangers and Pilgrims) by Abe Warkentin, Steinbach, Man. I will though, relate a few incidents which must have been very traumatic for grandfather.

The group with which grandfather moved to Paraguay arrived at Puerto Casado on September 23, 1927.

On Christmas Day, 1927 his second oldest son Diedrich, who already had moved unto the land, passed away after a two week battle with typhus fever.³

In a letter written to my father on February 23, 1928 grandfather writes that in January ten people died at the port and in February so far nine have died, which makes it very busy and stressful for all concerned. He writes it is extremely hard conducting a funeral nearly every other day for two months in succession.

Apparently he was the only minister at the port by this time as the others had all moved to their homesteads by now. At the end of the letter he asks my father, "Is it true that you bought a car? How much did it cost?"

August 7, 1928 he writes that if all goes according to plan he hopes to move to the land next week, but plans must have changed because August 21, 1928 they brought him the tragic news that his 16-year-old son, Peter, had drowned in the river. His body was never recovered and was believed to have been devoured by alligators which had been seen in the river at various times.

As already mentioned grandfather, being the only minister at the port at this time, had to conduct his own son's funeral.⁴ It was not quite two months later, on October 17 that



Out building on what used to be grandfather Diedrich D. Wiebe's farmyard in Chaco, Paraguay. (Photo by Diedrich F. Wiebe March 1991).



House that Grandpa Wiebe was building in 1930. Shade roof and second storey were added on later. (Photo by Diedrich F. Wiebe 1991).



Diedrich D. Wiebe house in 1915 in Chortitz on SW 10-7-5E. (Courtesy of D.F. Wiebe).

his son-in-law, Diedrich H. Toews died of typhus fever at age 21.

From here on there is a long lapse till the next letter, perhaps my father misplaced them or maybe gave them to some other people to read. The next letter I found was written September 10, 1929 in which he states that he's living in a tent in the village of Blumengart and has started building the house but progress is very slow.

In a letter dated January 9, 1930 grandfather thanks my father for sending the papers he had requested, but, he writes it's too bad that those papers usually have reached half their expiry date by the time they get here. But he writes, "It's alright the way it is, I probably won't need them anyway."⁵

January 20, 1930. In this letter grandfather describes a bumper crop of watermelon. He writes if only we had more pigs we could feed

the melon to them, as the pigs seem to thrive very well on them. He also mentions that they had very good cotton, peanut, bean and sweet potato crops. If we only could get them to market easier he states.

July 22, 1930. This is probably the last letter that grandfather wrote to my father. In this one he does not sound as optimistic as in the previous one. He writes "the garden has been completely destroyed by frost, and if it wasn't for the good crop we had in January I don't know what we would do".

Apparently he is still living in the tent at this time as the boys are still sawing studs and making door and window frames for the house. It is very unlikely that grandfather ever lived in this house, because two months later on September 22, 1930 the Lord took him up, to his Eternal Home, a frail and tired person at 62 years of age.

Endnotes:

¹Mr. Toews died when they had been married only 58 days. Justina Toews remarried again on March 30, 1930 to Jacob T. Dueck.

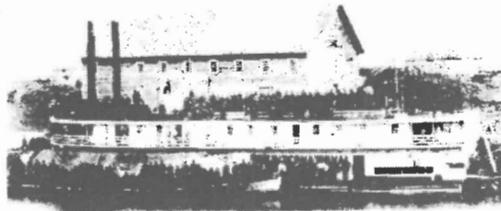
²He also owned some land on NW 1/4 2-7-5E.

³Uncle Diedrich's widow, nee Katherine Doerksen remarried again to widower Cornelius Funk.

⁴Gerhard K. Wiebe family records.

⁵This probably refers to a visa of some kind. Did he perhaps have thoughts of returning to Canada too as quite a number of people already had done.

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Dietrich D. Wiebe gravestone Blumengart Cemetery in Chaco, Paraguay. (Courtesy D.F. Wiebe).

*For a picture of the Dietrich D. Wiebe family in 1911, see "Historical Sketches of the East Reserve", Volume 3, page 695.

News and Announcements



Irene Enns Kroeker

New President.

Congratulations to Irene Enns Kroeker of Steinbach, Manitoba, who was elected as the third President of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society at its annual meeting on January 20, 1995. She is the first person of Chortitzer background to serve in the position. Irene is a teacher and mother. She has done extensive research on the history of the Bergthalerand Chortitzer people and contributed three major articles to *Historical Sketches*. Her writing has been much appreciated by her many relatives and neighbours.

Board Members.

The board of directors of the HSHS now consists of Irene Enns Kroeker, President, Orlando Hiebert, Vice-president, Doris Penner, Secretary, Delbert Plett, Treasurer, Royden K. Loewen, Henry Fast, Cathy Barkman, Linda Buhler and Jake K. Doerksen; Research director, John Dyck; *ex officio* members: Reeve Aron C. S. Friesen and Mayor Wes Reimer.

Old Photographs.

Many pictures dating from the 1920s and earlier are still extant in private collections that have never been published. With the passing of years it happens that the people in these old pictures can no longer be identified. The Board of the HSHS has adopted the goal of preserving as many of these pictures as possible. If you have some old photos that should be preserved, please call the editor or any member of the board. We would like to publish as many of these pictures as possible.

1995 Annual Meeting: Emigration.

The year 1995 is the 125th birthday of the establishment of the Province of Manitoba in 1870. This was also the time that the Mennonites in Russia first considered the idea of emigrating.

Accordingly, the HSHS executive has decided that emigration will be the topic of the 1995 annual meeting. We are calling for people interested in making a presentation at our annual meeting (usually held in January) dealing with an emigration story.

We are also calling for articles on this topic for the December 1995 issue of *Preservings*. Selected longer articles will be published in our forthcoming Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series.

The emigration articles can focus on any topic of your choice provided it is related to the Hanover Steinbach area. e.g. 1874, 1923, or 1945 immigrations from Russia, or the 1923, 1927, 1948 immigration from this area to Paraguay, Mexico, and elsewhere. Presentations about women pioneers are especially welcome.

1996 Annual Meeting: Steinbach - 50th Anniversary.

1996 is the Golden Anniversary of the incorporation of the Town of Steinbach. The Board of the HSHS has already decided that the history of the Town and its inhabitants will be the topic of the 1996 annual meeting.

Again, we are searching for people interested in presenting a paper at the annual meeting, and/or articles to be published in the June or December 1995 issues of *Preservings* and/or Volume Four of the HSHS Historical Series.

Presenters already committed and their topics are: Art Kroeker (Heinrich W. Reimer), Royden Loewen (Bishop Peter R. Dueck), Al Reimer (Mayor Johann R. Reimer), Ralph Friesen (Rev. Klaas R. Friesen), Harvey Kroeker (Mrs. Aganetha Barkman Reimer), Ernie Toews (Steinbach pioneer cemetery), and Harvey Bartel (Rev. Jakob M. Barkman).

There are many men and women in our community whose story and contribution needs to be recorded and documented. If you are not willing to take on the task, it will probably not get done. Please consider. You will find the task to be rewarding and a fulfilling experience.

Royden K. Loewen

Professor Royden K. Loewen and his family are back in Steinbach after an enjoyable and rewarding year at the University of Chicago where Roy was teaching and writing thanks to a Fullbright Scholarship. He is back at St. Paul's College at the University of Manitoba for the 1995-6 semester.

Orlando Hiebert.

In April 1995, HSHS Vice-President Orlando Hiebert completed his second trip to the Ukraine under the auspices of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture - Agricultural Institute of Canada as a technical advisor in the area of beet production.

Orlando has travelled extensively in the Ukraine, meeting new people and getting to know how they live. The areas he visited in 1994 were: Pryluki, a city of 80,000 130 km northeast of Kiev; Buchach, south of Trenopil, apparently the ancestral home of some of the Ukrainians living in Sarto; Tarashcha, population 12,000, situated southeast of Kiev; and Simla, a city 300 km northwest of Zaporizhya.

In 1994 Orlando was able to extend his tour by one week which enabled him to visit the Chortitzia and Molotschna colonies in the Zaporizhya region, as well as Bergthal, further east. See *Preservings* No. 4, July, 1994, pages 6-7, as well as Orlando's report on the Bergthal cemetery elsewhere in this issue. He states that "seeing these places which are part of our heritage and making new Ukrainian friends has been a moving and enriching experience."

In 1995, Orlando spent his time in the Kharkov region "and worked more with the actual planting of sugar beets." He reports that "staying in the villages of Barshawka and Belekalodya also gave . . . [me] a greater insight into how life goes on in the rural parts of the Ukraine."

We are hoping that Orlando will favour us with a more detailed report in our next issue.

Information wanted.

Anne Johnson would like to know if there are any Eaton's houses (ordered as kits through the catalogue) in the Steinbach area and where they are located if they are still standing. Please call her at 326-9030 evenings only.

1835 Molotschna Census.

Alan Peters of Fresno, California, is writing a series of articles about the 1835 Molotschna census, which are published in the *California Mennonite Historical Society Bulletin*.

These articles will be of interest to those members of the HSHS of Kleine Gemeinde (KG) background who originated from the Molotschna. The census was discovered in Russia by Dr. Harvey Dyck of Toronto. Our former President Henry Fast translated the census from Russian to English in 1993. He has made extensive use of these records in several articles published in previous issues of *Preservings*.

The 1835 census enabled Henry

Schapansky and myself to identify the Prussian ancestors of over 100 KG Molotschna pioneers, almost one-quarter of the total. The result of this research was published in 1993 in *Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde*.

We are glad to see that this important source is slowly becoming known to those interested in their Russian Mennonite roots. Articles such as the one by Alan Peters are helpful as they make people aware of its existance.

In his last article published in the No 32, June 1995 issue, Peters refers to KG-er Kornelius Duerksen (1794-1881), resident in the village of Alexanderthal. His son Kornelius later married the sister of KG Aeltester Peter P. Toews. Peters refers to the 1835 census to correct the previously held belief that Kornelius Sr. was the son of Johann when, in fact, the census shows that he was the son of David.

Peters also makes the statement that the census records the changes in family residence from 1816 to 1846. Although correct in part, it is my experience that the relocation of families after 1835 is only recorded for a short time around 1846. One should also be careful in using the census regarding relocations prior to 1835 as not all moves are recorded. This fact can be established and verified from independant family records found among the KG.

It should also be noted that people are sometimes recorded in "the Revision" (as contemporary writings refer to the census), in villages were they had only lived briefly.

This may be particularly true of post 1818 immigrants as opposed to the original Molotschna pioneers of 1803-4.

For example, Isaac Harder (1794-1870) is identified with Muntau, but is listed as the owner of a Wirtschaft in Schardov. Interestingly enough, a family journal states that Isaac Harder was recorded in the Revision for

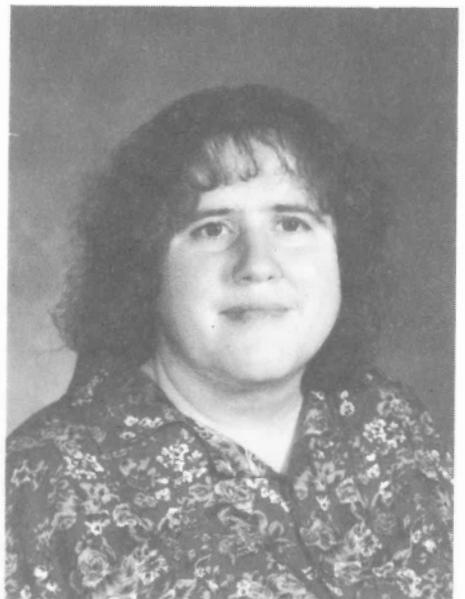
Schardov, a statement which did not make any sense until the discovery of the census by Professor Harvey Dyck. Another example is Johann Plett (1765-1833) who apparently built an Anwohner house in Blumstein where his daughter, Elisabeth, Mrs. Johann Harder, lived. But Johann Plett is listed as the owner of Wirtschaft #47 in Sparrau.

Board Member Profile

Cathy Friesen Barkman
by Linda Buhler

We are pleased to welcome Cathy Friesen Barkman to the Board of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society. Cathy has done extensive research on her families' genealogies and has already contributed to the work of the HSHS by adding comments to the Quebec ship lists, cross-referencing them to the Hamburg records and compiling the master index for the *Berghal Gemeinde Buch*. Her many hours of meticulous work have made the job of researching a lot easier for the rest of us.

Cathy works as a full-time Teacher's Assistant in the Southwood School. She and her husband Ron live in the Steinbach area with their three boys, Paul (age 13), James (age 12), and David (age 10). They are members of the Grace Mennonite Church where they are actively involved.



Cathy Friesen Barkman



Delbert Plett presents complimentary copies of Volume 3, Historical Sketches of the East Reserve to Hanover Council. L to r: standing Ed Hiebert, Sieg Peters, Les Schroeder, Norm Plett, John Hiebert, Pete Froese. Seated Secretary-Treasurer Charles Teetaert, Reeve Aron Friesen and Delbert Plett presenting books. The R.M. of Hanover has been a steady supporter of the HSHS since its incorporation in 1988 which has been invaluable to our work.

Steinbach Pioneer Cairn Memorial

By Harvey Kroeker

Steinbach has an enviable heritage derived to a remarkable degree from the 18 families who founded the Kleingemeinde village in 1874.

Many of these doughty pioneers came from the village of Steinbach in the colony Borsenko, Russia; now the Ukraine.

Most were related and belonged to the same clan, had an entrepreneurial spirit, causing the farming village to transform soon into a business community. They lived and died and many found their resting place in the Pioneer Cemetery on Reimer Ave near the center of Steinbach.

This cemetery was taken from the lot owned by John R. Reimer, market gardener for the city of Winnipeg and several times the mayor of Steinbach. The cemetery bordered a small slough and a stand of oaks on the west and John R. Reimer's cabbage patch on the east. The first people buried there in the fall of 1874 included two young daughters of Rev. Jacob Barkman. He himself was buried there in June 1875. He, together with Jacob Friesen drowned tragically in Red River while on a mission of mercy on behalf of the villagers.

The Town of Steinbach has begun a program of restoration for the cemetery in view of a commemorative celebration in the summer of 1996 when it will be 50 years since its incorporation. Among other festivities in cooperation with the Mennonite Heritage Village, there is planned a homecoming week in the beginning of August. An unveiling of



Cairn project committee left to right: Harold Unger, Albert Goossen, Harvey Bartel, secretary, Ernie Toews, chairman and Harvey Kroeker. Missing from picture John Henry Friesen. The men are standing beside a model of the cairn at the Pioneer Cemetery, May 1995.

a special cairn to honor the pioneers of 1874 is also on the agenda.

Donations from the descendants have

amounted to more than half of the \$15,000 that will pay for the cairn. Donations for the cairn are still very welcome.

Heritage Federation Award

By John Dyck

Steinbach lawyer/historian Delbert Plett, LL.B., Q.C., was honoured recently for his significant contribution to heritage preservation in Manitoba. The occasion was the first Annual Awards Banquet of the Manitoba Heritage Federation held at the Hotel Fort Garry in Winnipeg on Saturday, May 13, 1995.

The much deserved recognition follows on the heels of the publication of the sixth volume in Plett's Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde series.

Delbert Plett has had a long standing interest in heritage activities, starting with a book on the story of his own extended family in 1981. He has served as president of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. His efforts led to the founding of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, on whose Executive Committee he has served since its inception in 1988.

His six-volume Mennonite Kleine

Gemeinde Historical Series has added greatly to an understanding of the contribution made to the larger Mennonite community in Russia and in North America by Kleine Gemeinde people.

The prolific writing output of Delbert Plett is still growing and an additional volume is currently in preparation.

The award was one of several which will be given annually to recognize outstanding achievements in different categories of heritage work within the Province of Manitoba. The awards were given in honour of Manitoba's 125th birthday. The evening was chaired by Bernie Wolfe and among the dignitaries present were Lieutenant Governor Yvon Dumont and former Governor General Edward Schreyer.

The well attended banquet had good representation from the Steinbach area, including Reeve Aron Friesen and Councillors John J. Hiebert and Les Schroeder from the Rural Municipality of Hanover and Mayor Wes Reimer and Councillors Ken Friesen and



Heritage Award presentations: Karen Overgard, Manitoba Heritage Federation, and Bernie Wolfe, Chairman, look on as Delbert Plett receives the "Heritage Preservation Award" presented by Jack Watt.

Art Rempel from the Town of Steinbach. That participation confirms local interest in, and support for, heritage activities in general and the work of Delbert Plett in particular.

Annual Meeting Report

Who is my neighbour?

By Irene Kroeker

Drawing a crowd of over 200 people, James Urry held the audience captive at the annual meeting on January 20, 1995. Urry, author of *None but Saints*, revealed some of the aspects of his research, currently focused on the Grunthal area Mennonites.

Who is a neighbour to a Mennonite? Urry has come to some conclusions of who a Mennonite might consider to be his neighbour. Historically, a Mennonite did not have to ponder long over this question. Their origins were such that they were separated. This separation defined for them who their neighbour was — those like themselves and those that were ‘of the world’.

Coming to Canada changed the entire concept of who a neighbour was. Instead of being separated from the world and surrounded by their own congregational members, Mennonites now had other Mennonite congregations surrounding them, as well as other non-Mennonite people (such as the Polish, Dutch, and Jewish people). This then, alters the definition of what the term “neighbour” means.

To complicate the matter, many Mennonites entered the East Reserve in the 1920s. This migration brought people that had had new experiences — experiences the Kanadier could not identify with. Remaining in Russia, these Mennonites had not had their culture interrupted by the aspects of pioneer survival. They had had contact with art and music, post-secondary education and materialism. The Kanadier, on the other hand, had many years of experience in agrarian techniques and a hardiness that the new Russländer could not relate to.

The biggest problem for the Russländer however, was not the “other Mennonites”, but the other Russländer. This group had not emigrated as congregational communities; they came as separate people/families. They did not have the institutional infrastructure in place needed to elect ministers and form churches. They were different in religion and experience and had to come to terms with a new land, new language and a new way of life.

Urry’s stories of a Kanadier seen through the eyes of a Russländer brought ripples of laughter throughout the audience as they identified with the Kanadier or with the Russländer. By sharing these stories and background history with us, Urry shed light on one of the Mennonite’s most important cultural traits “Who is my neighbour?”



Entertained by the Hollis Brown musical group, the audience enjoyed Bluegrass music that included some Low German songs and gospel music.



James Urry, Jack Thiessen and Audrey Poetker compare notes while enjoying coffee and cookies during the break.



Perusing Mennonite literature, “Mennonite Books” offered a wide variety of material to those present. (Photos by Irene Enns Kroeker).

Articles

Berghthal Cemetery 1994

By Orlando Hiebert

The pictures (above right and page 19 top left) show what is left of the Mennonite cemetery in the former village of Berghthal in the Berghthal Colony in Ukraine. The round granite posts, some tilting at an angle, mark the boundaries of the cemetery.

I was deeply touched last April when I had the opportunity to visit this village that had been home to my great-grandfather. The villager who directed me to the cemetery discouraged me from going there because of the wet conditions. However, I persisted and was glad I had gone.

The picture (below right) shows the only headstone still standing on the cemetery grounds. The inscription reads "Hier ruhen die Gebeine das Peter Penner 1792-1849" (Here lies the body of Peter Penner 1792-1849). The barely decipherable date looks almost like 1791 but the church register and family records say he was born in 1792.

Peter Penner was the son of Gerhard Penner who, after the death of his first wife in Chortitzia, returned to Prussia to marry Helena Driedger in Klein Wickerau near Elbing in February of 1792. Gerhard Penner then returned to the village of Chortitzia, where Peter was presumably born.

Peter Penner and his wife Maria Doerkson were among the first settlers in the Berghthal Colony, having come from the village of Blumengard. Peter died here in 1849 and Maria in 1973, just prior to the emigration to America.

All eight married children of Peter and Maria Penner came to North America in the 1870s. Three of them pioneered in Osterwick and Hochfeld on the East Reserve in Manitoba and later relocated to the West Reserve. The Rudnerweide-Heuboden-Kleefeld area was settled by many members of this family.

A meeting of ministers (which included Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe) to plan the formation of the early Berghthal church on the West Reserve was held in a Penner home. The first Sommerfeld Mennonite Church in Rudnerweide was built on land donated by a member of the Penner clan, as was the first Rudnerweider/EMMC church.

Many descendants of these early families still live in the Altona-Winkler-Lowe Farm area while many more have moved to Winnipeg, to other provinces and to other countries. Their descendants include Henry D. Penner (1872-1973), who served for many years as Brandaeltester (manager) of Red River Mutual Insurance Company and became its first president after incorporation.



Berghthal cemetery southside looking west toward village. Original stone posts with hole through them.



Berghthal cemetery — the only identifiable Mennonite grave marker, Peter Penner.

(Photos by Orlando Hiebert)

The other five children of Peter and Maria Penner settled in the Mountain Lake area, from where they, too, have moved to other states and countries. Their descendants include P.A. Penner, the first General Conference missionary to India, and Albert Pen-

ner, who officiated the funeral of past president Calvin Coolidge.

All those descendants have roots in the Berghthal Colony in Russia and ancestors in the Berghthal Mennonite Cemetery there. I could not find markers for any member of

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Purpose and Membership



*Berghthal cemetery northside, looking west.
(Photo by Orlando Hiebert)*



*Road to Hueboden from Berghthal. Approximately 2.5 kilometres.
(Photo by Orlando Hiebert)*

my own family there. While only the one headstone is still standing in that far away cemetery we know that many of our ancestors are buried there, including my own. I feel privileged to have been able to visit the place which has such historic significance for so many Mennonites in North America.

Sayings by **Rev. Heinrich Friesen 1842-1921** **Hochfeld, MB**

It is a great mistake to forget the received blessing and to remember only the difficult days.

It is very harmful if some preachers feed their listeners with sweet cookies out of their own bakery instead of the bread of life.

Many a person thinks what he has giving away is lost. But everything you give with a willing heart you have gained.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society was organized in 1988 to research and write the history and heritage of the R.M. of Hanover and the Town of Steinbach. The emphasis is on the period 1874-1910. Through public meetings, writings and publications it seeks to foster an understanding and respect for the rich heritage of the community.

Many volunteers from this community have contributed information, collected old diaries and letters, written articles, entered data on computer, proofread data, and helped in other ways to compile material for books. The financial support of the R.M. of Hanover, the Manitoba Heritage Federation, the office of the Secretary of State, together with donations from private individuals has made it possible for the society to publish four books. One more is in stages of completion.

These efforts have rewarded participants with a greater appreciation for their heritage. Perhaps you would like to show your support for the work of the society by donating family records, old correspondence or diaries to the society. Any of our board members or John Dyck at the office would be glad to talk to you.

The society also requires your support financially in order to continue the above activities. Your donations will help to keep the society strong. All contributions of \$10 or more will be acknowledged with a charitable donation receipt for income tax purposes. We are presently levying an annual membership fee of \$10 per annum but will appreciate you giving an additional amount of \$10 or \$20 to support the work of the society. Thank you for your participation.

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society
Box 1960, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0

Enclosed is a cheque/cash in the amount of \$ _____ for:

Donations to society for
which please issue a receipt \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____

P.B. Reimer Residence

By Amanda Reimer

First section of the P.B. Reimer house was built in 1894-97 by Johann I. Friesen, part owner and manager of Steinbach Flour Mills (See Preservings, Issue No. 5). My mother Katharina, was three years when they moved in in 1897 from the shingled barn and house combination which was closer to the street. Plasterers came from Winnipeg to plaster all the walls. This was never redone. Linoleum was laid all over the first section of the building. The plastering and linoleum floor were still in good condition when we moved out in 1962.

Mrs J. I. Friesen died in 1919 and Mr. Friesen moved to Meade, Kansas. Dr. A. P. Friesen and family moved into the house. They moved to Newton, Kansas in 1923 and the P.B. Reimers bought the house and larger portion of the town block for \$10,000. Father eventually sold all the lots.

The first part of the house had four bedrooms and a large hall also holding one double bed. A living room across the front and two bedrooms towards the back. The smaller one became the bathroom in 1945.

The second part had a separate staircase. The upstairs was called "de yalla bane". It was a private suite for Katherine and Anne. The name came from the yellow floors. Most wooden floors were painted yellow in those days. Katherine and Anne painted and carpeted the rooms to make a lovely suite.

The summer kitchen was used for cooking and eating in summer and in winter it was our deep freeze. In the large kitchen and dining room we had an ice box instead of a fridge and C.T. Loewen made ice deliveries every other day.

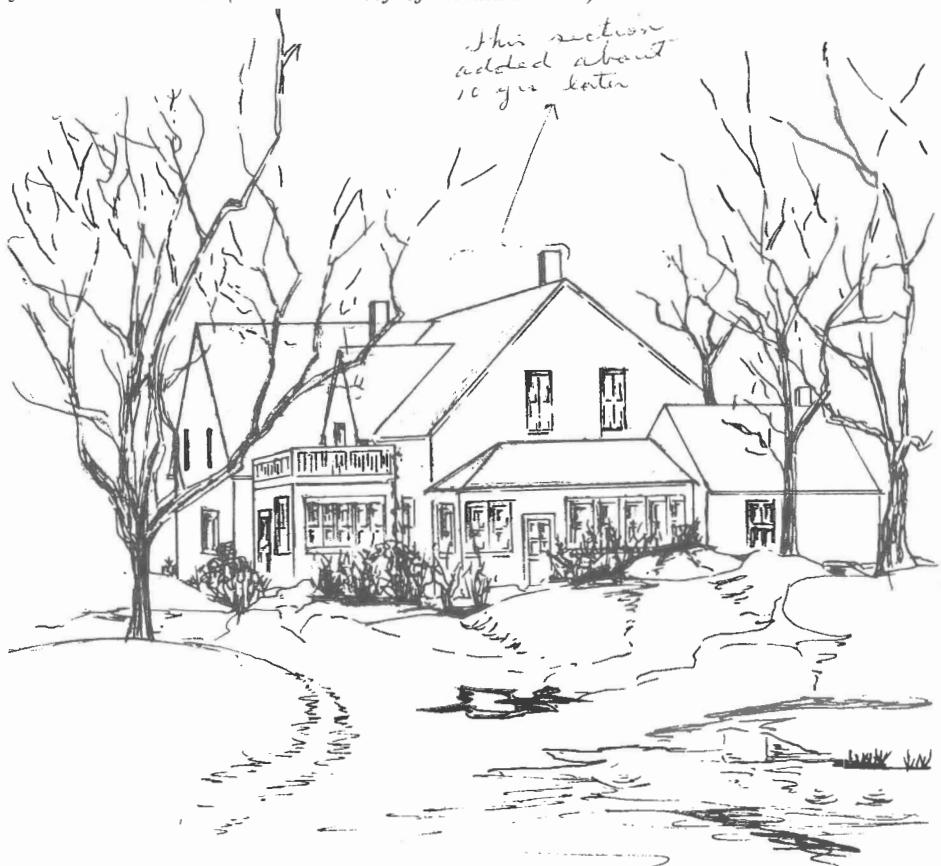
When all 14 of us were very young, being taken to the summer kitchen, most certainly meant that whatever our crimes were they deserved a spanking when father came home from work.

Cold running water was in almost from the beginning but hot water and a modern bathroom did not come in until after the depression. To take care of sewage we had a large disposal field.

The house was finished on the outside with board siding painted white. Thus far all houses in Steinbach had been built with shingles on the outside. Grandfather Friesen's modern trends were not approved of by the Kleingemeinde but he always remained a contributing member. Grandmother Friesen, on the other hand, was very upset when the elders reprimanded her for the white curtains, with frills, on her windows. She no longer attended church.



P.B. Reimer house on First Street (formerly Mill Street) in Steinbach, Manitoba. View from the northeast. (Photo courtesy of Alvina Reimer).



P.B. Reimer house - view from the northwest. An historic house, representative of houses built in the Steinbach area around 1900 by more well-to-do families.

Drama as Historical Reality

By Wilmer Penner

The evening of May 13 was a special time at the Fort Garry Hotel. The Manitoba Heritage Foundation was presenting its annual awards, and our Society had cause for celebration in that our HSHS founder Delbert Plett, received the award for outstanding contribution to local history. Among the highlights of the evening was a dramatic monologue presented as a speech by Louis Riel, in which 'Riel' defends his motivation and his mental health against the verdict of the courts of his time. The elegant Provencher Room, at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine and so already imbued with a sense of Riel's history, hushed for the impassioned speech.

I cannot tell how much of the speech was in fact in the words of Riel himself, but the effect of the speech on the Manitobans gathered that night was powerful and important. As surely as the Macbeth we picture is from Shakespeare and not from his historical source, the speech we heard by 'Riel' changes the image we hold of the man who was hanged in Regina in 1885. The emphasis has shifted from the event to the man, from fact to 'truth'.

Our Mennonite history needs this embellishment to make it live for the next generation. Several types of 'historical drama' are possible. The drama may present (as did the Louis Riel sketch mentioned above) the historical persons at significant moments of their lives. Some words are quoted directly; others are re-created. Henry Kasper did a fine historical drama with "De Kjeisa Kjemt", presented at the Museum for a dinner theatre on May 29, 1993. Here the actual words of Lord Dufferin, spoken at Eigenfeld in 1877, formed the core of a play which included fictional local Mennonite characters. The pat on the back that Dufferin gave the East Reserve pioneers adds a glow to our recollection of our grandfathers and grandmothers.

Equally useful is the dramatization of an actual event through fictional characters. An example of cooperation between history and drama came at our Landing Site dedication at the junction of the Rat and the Red last August. "A New Morning" tries to give a sense of the important event of August 1874 with a family disembarking into their new homeland as it might have happened 120 years ago. Historian Royden Loewen ensured the accuracy of the depiction from the historical standpoint; I took his factual outline and made it ready for the stage. Using the same blend of historical events with fictional characters, I have just finished a centennial drama for the celebration of the Altona Centennial this summer. With invented characters engaged in the actual histori-



1980 — "Valoare Op'e Stapp" musical adaption of Arnold Dyck's book. From left to right: Dennis Reimer, Ray Plett, Grant Plett, Finn Plett, Tom Koop, Gerald Reimer. (Photo courtesy of Wilmer Penner).

cal conflicts of this Mennonite town, I have tried to provide a dramatic understanding of the flow of history for the audience who is coming home to remember its own past.

A third type of historical drama is written to entertain, but puts on record the customs and manners of our people. The Low German plays of Anne Funk are superb examples of this indispensable form. Those who were at the museum on November 4, 1994 to see "De Aupelbaum" laughed a lot at the crotchety yet true-hearted ways that our early communities fostered, endured, and thrived on. For this the Plautdietsch seems eminently superior in capturing the tone in which the lives of our forebears were lived; but, as Stanford Penner has taught us

so clearly, English is a Low German language, and has retained most of our structures. In rehearsing "A New Morning" we were surprised how easily the actors could switch the script into Low German "in their heads". This was partly because I made a conscious effort to use only words of Old English (Anglo-Saxon) origin. And so as the next generation moves almost exclusively into the English language, this type of drama should be just as valuable in that once-Plautdietsch language. We oldtimers will of course miss the special quality of our mother tongue.

In celebrating its fiftieth anniversary next summer, Steinbach would do well to look at this way of enlivening a sense of history.

What's In A Name: Chortitza

By D. Plett, Q.C.

The Island of Chortitza in the Dneiper River is the jewel of the southeastern Ukraine, formerly Russia. It is three kilometers wide and 12 kilometres long, a beautiful nature preserve with many rare species of flora and fauna. The rugged shoreline and deep dangerous rapids added to its beauty.

The Island is the centre of the City of Zaporizhya, known as Alexandrowsk in Czarist times. Zaporizhya means "beyond the rapids". During the 1920s the Soviets built the Dneiper dam and hydro electric

power plant and developed the city into an industrial centre with a population in excess of 1,000,000.

In 1789 the area was reserved for settlement by Mennonites from Prussia who established some 18 villages in the area, which became known as the Chortitza Colony. Three of these villages are now completely absorbed by the City: Chortitza, Rosengart and Insel Chortitza; while the village of Einlage was flooded after the construction of the dam.

The Chortitza Island, however, has a his-
continued on next page

What's In A Name: Chortitza

continued from previous page

tory going back far beyond Soviet and even Mennonite days. During a recent visit in Zaporizhya, our tour guide Olga Shmakina, explained the ancient history of the island.

In pagan times the Dneiper River was the trade route connecting the Vikings to the north with the Greeks in the Mediterranean. The Island with its woods and other natural attributes, became a natural stopping place for the ancient sailors as they plied the waters of the Dneiper.

Before and after crossing the dangerous rapids they would stop on the Island to give thanks to Khorst, their ancient God. And

thus the Island came to be known as Khorstitzia.

In later times, the Island became famous as the headquarters of the Cossacks, the free men of the steppes. But that's another story.

And so the name, Chortitza, meaning 'place of God', has become Christianized, like so many other ancient names.

The name came to Manitoba with the Bergthaler people in 1874, and became the name of the main Bergthaler village and residence of the Altester Bishop Gerhard Wiebe. As the reader will quickly realize from the other articles in this issue, 'place of God'

or 'thanks be to God' was very much part of Gerhard Wiebe's vision for the Chortitzer Gemeinde, as his congregation came to be called.

During the Manitoba Government Anglicization program of the 1920s, the name — together with many other historic names in our area — was abolished and given the grandiose and meaningless English name, Randolph.

And so what's in a name? Thanks be to God?

Steinbach pioneer

Aganetha Barkman Reimer

b. August 4, 1863, m. March 19, 1882, d. March 5, 1938

by Harvey Kroeker

Aganetha Barkman was only 11 years old when she emigrated from Borosenko, Russia and travelled with her parents and family to begin life in Manitoba. They disembarked from the steamship at the juncture of the Rat and Red River near Niverville on Tuesday, September 15, 1874. They rode on an ox-cart to Kleefeld, at that time called Gruenfeld, the first Mennonite village in Manitoba. It took all day to go the twelve miles because of rain and the soft ground.

Here they spent the night in a very crowded tent, partly sitting and partly lying down in their wet clothes. The next day they rested because of the rain. The following day they proceeded to Blumenort which already had been established by previous immigrants. Finally three and a half miles south of Blumenort they cleared a road through a stand of popular along-side of a creek. Today this is the Main Street of Steinbach. The creek flowed in a northwest direction. The street was laid out parallel to the creek with eighteen sod houses or semilins built between the main street and the creek. These semilins became the temporary homes for the first winter.

Aganetha's father, Rev. Jacob Barkman, was the leading minister in the East Reserve since the bishop, Peter Toews, was still in Russia, planning to move with most of the rest of the Kleingemeinde members in 1875.

As soon as the sod houses were complete, services were held and the school lessons began. Rev. Barkman taught the children of the village in his own home. On Sunday, his home became the church whenever the service was slated for Steinbach. The three villages of Kleefeld, Blumenort and Steinbach would alternate services according to a schedule drawn up by the ministerial.

Rev. Barkman's first sermon in Steinbach was on the theme of thanksgiving as found

in Deuteronomy 27:6, 7. "Thou shalt build the altar of the Lord thy God of whole stones, and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord thy God. And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the Lord thy God."

Aganetha's four-year-old sister, Margaretha died in October and about a month later, her nine-year-old sister, Anna, died on Sunday, November 22. Because of this, Rev. Barkman was a little late setting out on his eight or nine mile walk in order to preach in Kleefeld.

The first winter was very difficult because of the severe weather and the primitive housing. In spring small patches of land were cleared and hand-seeded to await the first harvest.

At the end of May the village fathers decided that someone must go to Winnipeg to buy much-needed supplies of potatoes and flour. Rev. Jacob Barkman, Jacob Friesen and Peter K. Barkman were designated and left early in June for St. Boniface. Aganetha's older brother, Jacob (19) also accompanied them.

On June 4, early, at six in the morning an ox-cart slowly entered the yard at the Barkman home in Steinbach. As Jacob came into the house, his mother met him at the door and asked, "Where's Dad?"

"Dad is still on the ox-cart. He drowned with Mr. Friesen. They tried to cross the Red River in a boat."

Then he shared with the whole family the story of the tragedy. Aganetha was only twelve when she lost her father and she grieved for him for a long time thereafter.

When she was fourteen her mother remarried, but Aganetha found it very hard to adjust to a new "father". There were times when she rebelled against his authority and this brought disharmony and difficult times to the home. A guardian had been appointed by the church on the death of her father

in order to help Mrs. Barkman cope with the needs of her family.

One day, as Aganetha was occupied with some chore or activity in their yard, she saw her guardian turn in at their gate and enter the home. His son, somewhat younger than she, remained outside. Curious and perhaps feeling somewhat guilty, Aganetha asked him, "What does your Dad want here today?"

The boy impudent, and with a knowing smirk replied, "Nettie, you're going to get it for sure. My Dad's going to whip you good."

However, Aganetha had other ideas. Whether or not the rascal was telling the truth or just trying to scare her, she was not waiting to find out. Later when her guardian came outside to confront her with her disobedience, she was nowhere to be found. Eventually, he had to return to his home in Gruenfeld without resolving the issue. However, this episode had an ameliorating effect on her behavior. Aganetha wisely decided to cause less open rebellion against her stepfather.

Aganetha was glad for opportunities to work outside the home. One day she was asked by a widower, Mr. John R. Reimer to help him with his household chores and also to look after his four young motherless daughters. She gladly accepted the challenge because then she could work away from the tension in her home. Eventually Mr. Reimer proposed to her and Aganetha agreed.

Aganetha Barkman was baptized on the assertion of her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This happened on Monday, February 27, 1882 by Altester Abraham Friesen, Nebraska in the village of Blumenort. On Sunday March 19, after the regular service she was married to 33-year-old John R. Reimer.

Ten or eleven years later the church in Steinbach asked for a volunteer in the congregation to take a course in midwifery since

there were no resident doctors in the community. Despite the fact that Aganetha had given birth to four daughters and a son, she took on the challenge. A Mrs. Neufeld from Minnesota came to Steinbach and gave a three-week course to Mrs. Reimer and another woman from a neighboring community. Aganetha kept a book, recording the names of more than 600 babies that she delivered in Steinbach and the surrounding villages and farms. Her regular charge for the service was \$2.00. However a well-to-do and grateful husband and father would often give a little more. Her services would include bathing the little new born, baking biscuits if necessary or providing a pot of chicken noodle soup for the family, especially if the children were too young to fend for themselves.

One time when she was searching for the baking tins to provide biscuits for the hungry family, she looked out of the window. To her amazement she saw two little boys sliding down the snow covered manure pile. On closer scrutiny she recognized that their sled was also their mother's missing baking tin.

Aganetha had five more children, five girls and five boys in all, everyone of which survived to adulthood. During her busy life she also assisted in the duties of an undertaker for Steinbach. Whenever someone died, she was called upon to help in washing and dressing the departed one, making the body ready for burial.

One beautiful summer's day Aganetha was out picking pin cherries with her youngest daughter, Sara. Sara also had along her oldest child, a pre-schooler who soon had his fill of the cherries. He begged his mother to go swimming in the near-by sand pit. Its large expanse was filled invitingly with cool clear water.

Sara remonstrated, "It's too deep, Menno; you can't swim yet."

His grandmother interposed, "You know, there's nobody around to see us. I'll just take off my dress and I'll go in the water myself and teach him how to swim."

Sara was amazed. She had never realized that her mother, among so many other things, could also be an accomplished swimmer. Although Aganetha had never swum in Canada, she had been taught how to swim in Russia by the following amazing method.

As a small girl in Russia she had often seen her older brothers swim in the near-by River. One hot day she begged one of her brothers (maybe John who was now 15 at the time), "Please, teach me how to swim!"

"Sure, Nettie, take my hand."

John took her out to a deep part of the river supporting her all the way. When they reached a spot well beyond Nettie's depth, he let go of her and instructed her, "Nettie, now swim or you'll drown."

Nettie, in her determined way, decided she would learn on the spot. She flailed her arms and legs with all her might and eventually



Mrs Johann R. Reimer, nee Aganetha Barkman, 1863-1938. Photo circa 1935 (courtesy of Harvey Kroeker).

reached a shallow part of the river. That was her initiation to swimming and she became proficient enough later on, being able to enjoy the river on many a hot day of summer.

Menno says that he'll never forget his elderly grandmother in her late 60s, with her slip billowing out like a balloon, teaching him the rudiments of the wonderful skill of swimming.

Aganetha's husband died at the age of 69 worn out by his hard work of pioneering, homesteading and working his farm one mile east of the corner of Reimer Avenue and Main Street of Steinbach.

Aganetha continued to farm with her younger sons. She took a full and active part, preferring to do the outside chores, leaving the house keeping to her single daughters.

In 1936 she moved off the farm and moved into Steinbach on Hanover Street. She built a house and a small barn for her cow and her horse. The latter was her means of transportation whenever she needed to go someplace in her top buggy.

Aganetha's health had been consistently good all her life. But on the morning of March 5, 1938 she suffered a stroke. This did not affect her speech in any way. She was asked by her son, "Are you ready to die, Mother?"

"Yes, by God's grace I am," she replied.

Aganetha died that very night having been ill less than a day. She had attained the age of 75 years.

She is buried in the Pioneer cemetery on Reimer Avenue in Steinbach, where her body rests till the resurrection day. She truly was a most remarkable woman, a person of faith and a noteworthy pioneer.

Aganetha's many descendants included — Town of Steinbach councillor and historian Klaas J.B. Reimer, Rev. Peter J.B. Reimer, grandson Professor Al Reimer and many residents of Steinbach.

Bartel Watch

By Delbert Plett

In the July, 1994, issue of *Preservings*, we featured the story of Johannes Bartel (1764-1813), who gave his sweetheart Aganetha Quiring a beautiful valentine. The story caught the eye of Alma Regier, Box 784, Meade, Kansas, 67864, who told me about a similar tradition in their branch of the Bartel family regarding a gold watch.

According to the Meade Historical Museum, the watch was acquired in Holland in the latter part of the 18th century. The watch belonged to Johannes Bartel, who was the grandfather of Klaas Bartel Reimer (1870-1931) and Johann F. Bartel (1864-1937) of Meade and Jakob F. Bartel (1858-1929) of Jansen, Nebraska.

The watch was eventually inherited by Johannes' son Jakob of Neukirch and later Mariawohl in the Molotschna Colony where he belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde. Jakob's widow and his children emigrated from Russia in 1874 and settled in Jansen, Nebraska.

The watch was inherited by son Jakob Bartel (1858-1929). Eventually his family passed the watch on to Johann's daughter Anna (1908-1991) when there was no descendant named Jakob.

Today the watch is in the possession of the Meade Historical Museum. It is an important artifact of our culture and heritage and we are grateful for all who have had a part in its preservation.

Even more important is the preservation of the story of the watch, as without a history, even ancient artifacts lose a good part of their significance.

The stories of the watch and the valentine also show how material culture (the physical dimensions of our lives) can document and tell the history of a people.

The valentine stayed in Russia with one branch of the Bartel family and went through all the horrors of the Revolution, etc. The watch went to the Molotschna and from there to the United States in the 1870s with another branch of the family.



The Bartel Watch (Photo courtesy of Meade Historical Museum, Meade, Kansas).

Hermann Friesen (ca. 1750-1819)

by Henry Schapansky

One of the Friesen families with connections to the Bergthaler, Fürstenländer and Kleine Gemeinde in Russia is that of Hermann Friesen. He was likely born circa 1750 and was listed at "Tamm" (or Damm) in the 1776 West Prussian census. Although Schwartzdam (Ellerwald Gemeinde) was the most well-known of all the "Damms" in the Vistula Delta, it is possible that the reference is to another Damm, possibly in the Rosenort (Gross Werder) area, or alternatively near Neuteicherwald.

The name of Hermann Friesen's first wife is unknown at this time. It seems he had the following children from his first marriage: Helena (b. circa 1775), Anna (b. circa 1783) who married Abraham Giesbrecht, Peter, Eliesabeth (b. 17.7.1785) the first wife of Aron Südermann (b. 16.12.1792), Hermann (b. circa 1790) and Johann (b. circa 1792).

After the death of his first wife, Hermann Friesen married (26.12.1796) Anna Penner. During this period he lived at Altendorf, moving to Stobbdorf in about 1805, after his third marriage (19.2.1804) to Helena Klingenberg (the widow Klassen) of Fürstenau. The children of his third marriage include: Gertruda (b. 2.8.1805), Jacob (b. 4.3.1807), Dirk (b. 2.4.1809), Gerhard (b. 5.9.1812) and Helena (b. 27.6.1814). Hermann's children Eliesabeth, Hermann and Johann were among the first families to leave for Russia after the end of the European War in 1815.

Daughter Eliesabeth Südermann

Eliesabeth married Aron Südermann of Österwick in the Old Colony in 1816. Aron Südermann (b. 28.11.1792) was born at Pietzkendorf (Ladekop Gemeinde), son of Abraham Südermann who married Suzanna (nee Neudorf) Janzen and later Heinrich Dyck. (Suzanna Neudorf (b. 1754) was actually married four times, her last husband was Jacob Lehn). Abraham Südermann was the son of Anton Südermann, recorded in the census of 1776 at Schönsee (Ladekop Gemeinde) (and incorrectly as Luttermann), and came to Russia in 1796.

In 1814 Aron Südermann was living at Österwick with his stepbrother Heinrich Dyck, and later moved to Bergthal. Eliesabeth Friesen died in 1824 and Aron married Anna Lempky in the same year. The Aron Südermanns had two sons, Aron (b. 28.8.1818, d. 19.3.1850) and Abraham (b. 1.8.1822). Most of their descendants came to Canada with the Bergthalers in the 1870s.

The daughters of Aron Südermann include Helena (b. 14.6.1826) who married Jacob Thiessen, Katherina (b. 2.3.1832) who married Cornelius Bannman, Suzanna (b. 3.5.1834) who married Martin Friesen, Maria (b. 9.7.1837), Aganetha (b. 25.1.1840), and Justina (b. 24.1.1843), who married



Mr. and Mrs. Schapansky at their home in New Westminster, B.C. Henry has written extensively and is considered the leading expert on the Prussian roots of the Russian Mennonites.

Gerhard Wiens.

Sons Hermann and Johann Friesen

Hermann and Johann Friesen settled at Schönau in the Molotschna in 1816. Hermann's father-in-law Jacob Dolesky also immigrated to Russia in 1816. Jacob Dolesky (b. 1769), son of Jacob Dolesky, Neulangerhorst had intended to immigrate to Russia earlier and had signed up for a permit in 1806. He is therefore listed by B.H. Unruh as an 1806 immigrant. Circumstances may have delayed his departure, and by 1807 French troops were already in the area making a move to Russia impossible. The Doleskys' settled at Blumenort, Molotschna.

Hermann Friesen (b. 1790) and Maria Dolesky (b. 1792) were the parents of Heinrich Friesen (b. 12.4.1827, d. 1.7.1877) who came to Canada in 1875 and is the ancestor of many Friesens living in Manitoba today. Hermann died in 1828, his brother Johann in 1829.

The Friesens of Margenau, Molotschna

Shortly afterwards, in 1819, the senior Hermann Friesen along with his sons Jacob, Dirk and Gerhard decided to immigrate to Russia as well. The elderly Hermann died in 1819 shortly after arriving in Margenau, Molotschna. Jacob, Dirk and Gerhard took up homesteads in Margenau, where they are found in the 1835 census. (See Henry Fast article Preservings, No. 5, Dec., 1994).

Jacob Friesen (b. 4.3.1807, d. 1870) of Margenau, Molotschna, married Suzanna Neufeld (1809-1850) and had the following children: Anna (b. 1832, died young), Helena (b. 1834, d. 1914) who married Aron

Warkentin, Jacob (b. 5.2.1838), Anna (b. 26.11.1839) who married Gerhard Reimer, Sara (b. 22.1.1841) who married Abraham Isaac, and Gerhard, Johann and Peter. This family is discussed in the Kleine Gemeinde series of Delbert Plett. (Pioneers and Pilgrims, p.430).

Daughter Anna Giesbrecht

The Abraham Giesbrecht (1780-1830) who married Anna Friesen was the son of Abraham Giesbrecht, listed at Tiegenhoff in the 1776 census. Abraham's brother Bernhard (1775-1851) came to Russia in 1804 and settled in the Old Colony. Abraham had apparently no surviving children from his first marriage, and, it seems, married Anna Friesen circa 1810. Their eldest son Abraham (b. 1.12.1811, d. 5.11.1890) came to Russia between 1837 and 1848 and settled at Kronthal (his wife was Katherina Friesen (b. 9.9.1805, d. 26.6.1870). Son Hermann died in Prussia in 1833. Son Jacob (b. 4.8.1819, d. 1849) came to Russia and later moved to the Fürstenland Colony. Their children Jacob (b. 13.7.1842), Cornelius (b. 10.1.1844), Abraham (b. 28.2.1846), and Eliesabeth (b. 3.6.1848) all came to Canada in the 1870s with the Fürstenlanders and settled in Reinland and Blumenfeld, Manitoba.

David Giesbrecht (b. 4.7.1821, d. 9.12.1888) a son of Abraham Giesbrecht (b. 1780, d. 7.4.1840) also came to Russia and later left for Canada where he is found at Neuendorf, Manitoba in the 1881 census.

A Funeral Announcement/Invitation

by Cathy Friesen Barkman

My mother, Evelyn Friesen, likes to frequent auction sales and once in a while she stumbles over a "real find". One such find was the Gerhard Schroeder Bible. In the beginning of the Bible is a page on which is printed: Gerhard Schroeder in Bergthal 1868; Gerhard Schroeder in Eigenhoff on the 25th of January 1879.

In this Bible were a few goodies one of which I would like to feature in this article. Laid between its pages was an original funeral invitation of a woman who died in Russia.

It would appear that this invitation might have been brought over by Heinrich Penner, his daughter Margaretha or one of the other children and was placed in the Bible in Canada sometime after 1877.

The funeral invitation was written by Heinrich Penner from Heuboden on the 26 of February 1871, and referred to the death of his beloved wife Katharina.

The invitation is in good condition, on brown paper and is written in the old German script. As you can see once you have read the invitation, it was written in a way which leads one to believe that Heinrich was probably an educated man. The invitation reads as follows:

Worthy friends, how unfathomable and beyond comprehension are the ways of the Lord and so my soul cries out with the apostle. I am herewith providing you with notice of the death of my beloved wife Katharina, after a five week difficult sickness, who on the 25th of this month had achieved an age of 53 years, 9 months and 22 days. The following Sunday, being the 28th of this month, has been appointed as the time to bring the remains of my beloved wife to the grave of her mortal resting place and I invite you my friends who are named on the reverse hereof, together with your beloved spouses and children. I hereby extend my friendly greeting and if it would please you to attend at my home of sorrow on the above mentioned funeral day at 12 midday in order to take part in the Christian funeral and in order to bestow upon the deceased our last token of love and respect and to give her over to her place of burial and thereafter to allow yourself to be received by me in love to a small funeral lunch. For this love and friendship I will always be in your debt and honor you with my respect.

Heinrich Penner

Heuboden

26th February 1871

The cover/front of the invitation says: Firstly to the honorable Abraham Neufeld, who was a minister in the village. On the back of the invitation is a list of the friends of the family. As was the custom, one can safely assume that the invitation was passed from household to household. The list reads as follows:

Heuboden

Honorable Abraham Neufeld, Johann Reimer, Franz Banaman, Derek Gerbrand, Jakob Lemky, Johann Hiebert, Honorable Peter Klippenstein, Isaak Dyck, Heinrich Dyck, Johann Gerbrand, Wilhelm Giesbrecht, widow Wilhelm Giesbrecht, Andreas Flaming, Honorable Johann Bergmann, Bernd Wiebe, Bishop Gerhard Wiebe, Solomon Doerksen, Peter Schmidt

Schoenfeld - widow Jakob Schwarz

Why was this invitation in the Gerhard Schroeder Bible? His name does not appear in the list of village households, neither is it anywhere else on the invitation. Who is Heinrich Penner or Katharina?

Gerhard Schroeder married Anna Stoesz Harder in Russia. Gerhard and Anna came to Canada as a young married couple with two children on the SS Peruvian July 27, 1874. They settled in Blumstein close to Anna's parents, the Franz Harders.

After Anna died Gerhard married a second time to widow Jacob Derksen (nee Margaretha Penner) who was the daughter of the above Heinrich Penner and Katharina Thiessen. Margaretha had come to Canada as a 35-year-old widow with six of her children on the same ship as the Gerhard Schroeders. Gerhard and Margaretha settled on the East Reserve in Eigenhoff where Margaretha's father, the widower Heinrich Penner, was living.

This Heinrich Penner was the author of the above funeral letter. He had come to Canada together with his five unmarried and two other married children, Jacob Penner and Helena Penner along with their spouses and families on the SS Peruvian on July 27, 1874. Daughter Judith and daughter Katharina with their spouses came later.

It is recorded that Heinrich lived on the East Reserve in Manitoba on NE 2-7-5e and Gerhard Schroeder on NE 1-7-5e in Eigenhoff. This area was located a few miles west of Steinbach. For a more detailed account of these events read the chapter on *Eigenhoff* in *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874-1910*.

Heinrich was born November 11, 1810, baptized June 30, 1831 and died February 3, 1884. His parents were Heinrich Penner (born 1777) and Margaret Kroeker (born 1785) from Kronthal, Russia. Katharina Harder (1815-February 2, 1837) was Heinrich's first wife and together they had one child. His second wife was the above Katharina.

Sad to say I don't know very much about Katharina (nee Thiessen) Penner for whom the funeral invitation was written for. The *1843 Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, Family A127, records that Katharina was born May 18, 1817. The *1878 Chortitzer Church Records*, Family A21b, tells us that she was baptized in 1836 and confirms that she died February 25, 1871. She married Widower Heinrich Penner on March 16, 1837 and together they had 11 children.

I have not found any information as to who Katharina Thiessen's parents might be or which family line she originates from. Any help in this area would be appreciated.

To my knowledge, Heinrich Penner did not remarry after he arrived in Canada. Heinrich and his son Heinrich moved to Gnadenfeld on the West Reserve in 1882.

Heuboden, Russia

Heuboden was a village in the Bergthal Colony, Russia which was established in 1839 by 28 families. It was named after the abundant grass found in the Glubokaja River valley. Schoenfeld, also a part of the Bergthal Colony, was founded by 25 families in 1837. These two villages were approximately 1 1/2 miles from each other. When the families from these villages moved to Canada, Schoenfeld was bought by the Grunau Colony for the Lutherans and Heuboden was purchased by the Evangelische Separierten Brudergemeinde.

Credits: Thank-you to Delbert Plett for translating the Katharina Penner funeral letter from German to English.

References

1. *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch* published by The Hanover Society Historical Society Inc. - 1843 Church Register A, family number 127, page 56; - Ship Lists, pages 266-271.
2. *1878 Chortitzer Church Register A*, family number 21.
3. *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874-1910*, pages 125-129, article *Eigenhoff* written by Jacob Doerksen.
4. *Mennonite Historical Atlas* by William Schroeder and Helmut T. Huebert.

The Apple Tree

By Linda Buhler

**Anna Barkman - Gardener
1887-1986**

Second in a series of articles by Linda Buhler, featuring women's stories.

by Linda Buhler

Anna Barkman was born on September 25, 1887 to Steinbach residents Johann T. Barkman and Agatha Enns. After being orphaned at the age of 12, she was raised by her uncle Peter T. Barkman who was part owner of the flour mill. In 1905, Anna married Jacob D. Barkman, well-known for having been a long-time employee at the flour mill and whose engineering license qualified him to operate the steam boiler there which provided electricity for the town.

Jacob and Anna's house stood on the corner of what is now Main Street and Barkman Avenue with their property extending to present day Hanover Street. It was on this property that Anna indulged her love of gardening. Apple trees and plum trees were planted there as were cherries, currants, gooseberries, and raspberries just to mention some of the fruits that Anna grew and tended.

Her garden had a larger proportion of flowers than vegetables and it is said that the vegetable portion was sizeable indeed as she had a large family to feed. Fourteen growing children meant a lot of canning and preserving, not to mention the baking, cooking, sewing and knitting that was an integral part of a woman's job.

Jacob's aunt, Mrs. Aganetha Barkman Reimer, was the attending midwife for half of the Barkman children with daughter Nettie named after this well-known Steinbach woman. Children Anne, Agatha, Fred, Albert, Martin, Tina, Walter, Helen, Edward, Ted, Irwin, Nettie and Dorothy were all delivered at home but Ruth, the youngest, was born in the hospital in 1931. It is surprising that the Barkmans did not lose any babies to illness or disease as was so very common



Jacob D. and Anna Barkman circa 1905.



Jacob D. and Anna Barkman's house on Main Street (formerly Anna's parents residence).



Oldest Apple tree in Steinbach. Planted in 1906. The property is presently owned by George F. Kehler, Steinbach, Manitoba.

during those early years.

With W.W. II came the realization that six of her seven sons were enlisted in the Armed Forces. Since son Martin had not passed the physical examination because of his heart, he was the only son to remain behind.

One can only imagine what Anna went through as her sons left one by one to go to war. Mercifully, all returned from overseas and they, too, continued the legacy of hard work and community service that Jacob and Anna had so instilled in their large family. Son Walt shared his father's love of photography and opened his own studio which many local residents still remember well.

Anna is remembered as having a green thumb and a love of all gardening but especially flowers. She died on April 24, 1986 leaving the lasting horticultural contribution to the town that was her home. The 3½ foot

tall apple tree that she planted in 1906 has grown and flourished for some 90 years.

When bulldozers came to clear the overgrown orchard to make way for the construction of an apartment complex in 1961, this one tree was preserved. Year after year the tree bloomed alternately from side to side; the northwesterly side one year followed the next year by the southeasterly side causing local residents to believe that the tree had been grafted.

After it sustained considerable damage from a heavy wind storm in 1993 and was drastically pruned, the entire tree has begun to bloom again each spring. This tree is the oldest apple tree in Steinbach and is now considered a historic part of the town's heritage — thanks to Anna Barkman whose love of gardening resulted in a landmark which has graced our town with its beauty and its history.

Rechen Buch of Gerhard Doerksen

Second in a series by Garth B.P. Doerksen
Winkler, Manitoba

A handwritten arithmetic textbook numbering about 240 pages was found among the papers and documents of the late Henry P. Doerksen after his death in 1990. This text, written in German, includes arithmetic theory as well as problems divided into sections, each relating to a specific aspect of mathematics. The first page indicates who penned this book by stating: Dieses Rechen Buch gehoert dem Gerhard Doerksen, Fueschau, Anno 1844 den 16ten Januar.

According to historical data compiled by Delbert F. Plett, Gerhard B. Doerksen (May 20, 1825 - December 15, 1882) was the eldest son of Bernhard Doerksen (August 1, 1797 - February 2, 1874) and Maria Braun (January 3, 1804 - January 2, 1845) of Fischau, Molotschna. He emigrated to Russia with his parents and grandparents where they purchased Wirtshaft 6 in Fischau, as stated in the 1835 census when Gerhard was 10 years old.

Gerhard Doerksen began writing this book on January 16, 1844 at the age of 19 while serving as a teacher in the village of Fischau. He completed the different chapters of the book by 1849. Gerhard married Helena Dick (August 27, 1832 - June 5, 1910) on January 15, 1853. Together with their children they emigrated to Hochstadt, Manitoba (near Kleefeld) in 1874 where he died in 1882 after suffering a stroke.

The Rechen Buch was found among the papers of Gerhard D. Doerksen (son of Gerhard B. Doerksen) after his son Henry P. Doerksen passed away in 1990.

The Rechen Buch is not simply a mathematics text but a fine example of a man's artistic and creative genius. Its covers are detailed with multi-coloured 'fraktur art' and various mathematical theories are expressed in verse form. Numerous title pages/section headings are detailed with intricate calligraphy and art work.

The book contains the following: pages 1-28 Math theory and tables; pages 29-34 Addition of whole numbers; pages 35-40 Subtraction of whole numbers; pages 41-50 Multiplication of whole numbers; pages 51-65 Division of whole numbers; page 66 Poetic verse; pages 67-73 Addition of weights and measures; pages 74-80 Subtraction of weights and measures; pages 81-97 Multiplication of weights and measures; pages 98-109 Division of weights and measures; pages 110-130 "Detri" rules for whole numbers; page 131 End of Book I; pages 134-139 Addition of fractions; pages 142-147 Subtraction of fractions; pages 148-160 Multiplication of fractions; pages 162-173 Division of fractions; pages 176-179 Addition of fractions mit Kleinen Sorten; pages 182-185 Subtraction of fractions mit Kleinen Sorten; pages 188-209 Multiplication of fractions mit Kleinen Sor-

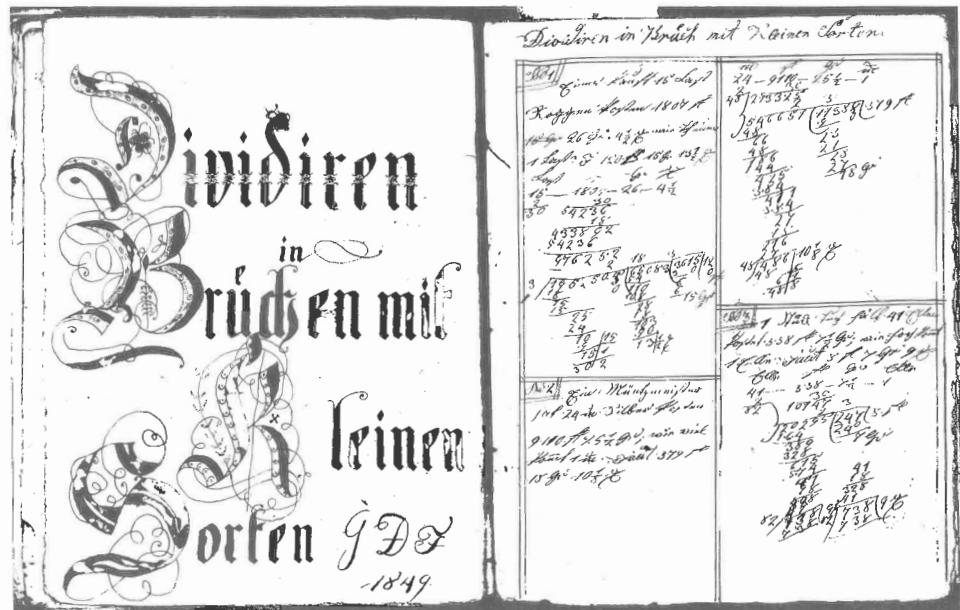
ten; pages 212-222 Division of fractions mit Kleinen Sorten; 224-240 Rules of mixed numbers.

This book is of particular interest of me

since I am a teacher like my great-great-grandfather Gerhard B. Doerksen appears to have been.



Title pages of G. Doerksen (Rechen Buch).



Title pages to "Division" section of Rechen Buch.

Schoenfeld Of Yesteryear

By John Dyck

The headline in *The Carillon* on May 3 proclaimed "Lost cemetery of settlers unearthed on Kleefeld farm." The article that followed identified the cemetery as part of the once prosperous village of Schoenfeld. Responses to the find from an anthropologist at the University of Winnipeg and local historian Ernie Toews helped make the story interesting and relevant to today's readers.

For Nettie Monkman of Richer the cemetery, although not marked, has never been lost. She remembers that it was still clearly identified in 1941 when she lived there with her parents, Abram and Aganetha (Friesen) Enns. In fact, the old cemetery was a frequent playground for Nettie and the other children with whom she grew up. She still remembers it from later visits to her grandparents Johann and Maria (Groening) Friesen, who lived there most of their lives.

The cemetery is also well remembered by Nettie's three aunts, Anna (Dyck) Friesen, Anna (Friesen) Krahn and Justina (Friesen) Broesky, all of Steinbach. They all grew up in the area that was once Schoenfeld. They remember fondly *de ohle Koat* (the old house), the artesian well, the "yellow house" and the other components of the large farm yard that made up the home of their parents and grandparents. They remember as well another cemetery, also long since plowed under, on the north side of the road from the gravel ridge where the current find was made.

The accidental uncovering of this graveyard has once more focussed public attention on some elements of pioneer history. Schoenfeld was a significant village in the pioneer Mennonite landscape prior to 1900. Twelve children attended school in Schoenfeld in 1878. While some villages still taught classes in private homes, Schoenfeld had a separate school building early on.

The ten families who lived in Schoenfeld in 1881 all belonged to one of three extended families in the village. The largest of these local clans was that of the widow Johann Groening, nee Helena Krause, who had married widower Heinrich Dyck in Russia. Five of her married Groening children homesteaded in Schoenfeld and still lived in the village at the time of the census (*Seelenliste*) in 1882.

Peter Groening (1842-1913) and his brother, Johann Groening (1839-1916), operated a successful retail business in the village for many years, starting as early as 1881. Johann remained single all his life. So it was practical for him to live with his brother Peter who had married Agatha Peters. Here he was known affectionately as "Ohm Je-haun," (great-uncle John).

Peter and Agatha had seven children, two born in Russia and five in Manitoba. Of these, only the youngest two grew to adult-

hood. Agatha (1880-1964) remained single and Maria (1884-1968) married Johann Friesen and continued to live on the old homestead.

Peter Groening was a successful farmer as well as a businessman. Tax records indicate that by 1886 Peter Groening owned the west half of section fourteen and the southeast quarter of twenty-three. He built a large house-barn on his homestead, when it was likely still part of the village. While the attached barn has long since disappeared, the remains of the house are still there and indicate that it was about fifty feet long by thirty-five feet wide. Grandchildren and great, grandchildren always referred to it as *de ole koat* (the old house) and still remember it as such today.

The married children, Johann and Maria (Groening) Friesen, built a separate two storey house west of the main building. This

house, while still large enough to raise their family, was not as large as *de ole koat*. It was always known as "the yellow house." A lean-to at the end of the yellow house served as the kitchen and dining area. A separate building nearby served as the summer kitchen, providing extra living space in warmer weather. Two separate detached barns, one for horses and the other for cattle and chickens, sheltered their animals.

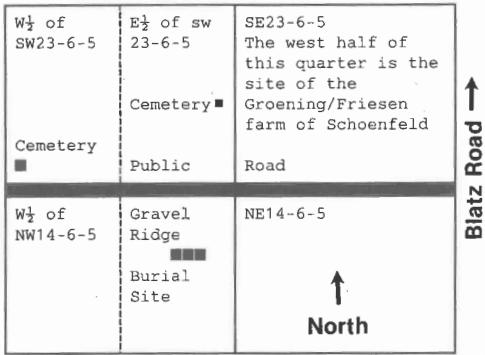
An artesian well, near the horse barn, provided plenty of good water for household use and also for all the farm animals. The water still trickles from the pipe today, creating a small stream which drains into the nearby creek.

In front of the house, closer to the road stood the retail store which provided grocer-

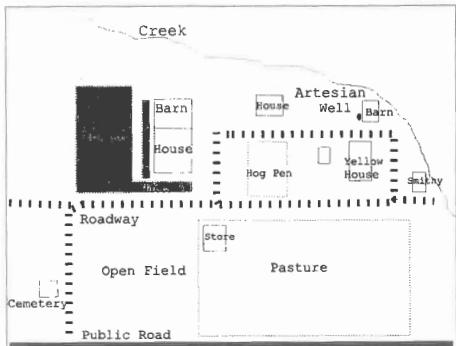
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Peter (1842-1913) and Agatha (Peters) (1845-1926) Groening immigrated to Canada in 1875 and were pioneer settlers in the village of Schoenfeld. Peter and his brother John operated a general store in Schoenfeld which served a large surrounding community for many years. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Nettie Monkman, Richer).



The original village of Schoenfeld was on the east half of SW 23-6-5 and extended to SE 23. Peter Groening farmed the south half of section 23 and the NE quarter of section 14. Together with his brother John he operated a store on his home quarter. The old village site was mostly on SW 23-6-5. Blitz Road runs along the east side of this section. The NE 14-6-5E and the east half of the NW 14-6-5E are presently owned by R.M. of Hanover Councillor Les Schroeder.



This farm on SE 23-6-5 was part of the three quarter sections belonging to Peter Groening in 1889 and forming part of the village of Schoenfeld. Later owned by John Friesen (1876-1955), it is now owned by David Plett.

ies and other needs to the surrounding pioneer farm community.

The anthropologist from the University of Manitoba was reported to have been intrigued by the absence of remains of children in the gravesite dug up on section fourteen. While children may not have been buried in this cemetery, they may well have been buried closer to the village. In fact, Anna Friesen remembers a graveyard closer to the village which she staked out many years ago, so as to identify individuals plots. She had planned to erect markers. Unfortunately that never happened and now the area has been long since plowed under.

Children were clearly buried in one of those two cemeteries for the epidemics that took five children of Peter and Agatha Groening also took the lives of many other children. Their records have survived even if their grave markers have not. Perhaps a marker may yet be placed to remember the

Schoenfeld of Yesteryear

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Johann P. Friesen (1876-1955) and Maria Groening (1884-1968) in Schoenfeld on their wedding day on June 5, 1902. (Photo courtesy of their granddaughter Mrs. Nettie Monkman, Richer).



Johann P. (1876-1955) and Maria (Groening) Friesen in their retirement years. They lived most of their married years in Schoenfeld. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Nettie Monkman, Richer).

deaths of adults and children alike and to remind all of us of the price pioneers paid for the bountiful life we enjoy today.

Conversation with Anne Krahm, Justina Broesky and Anna Friesen became quite animated as they recalled more and more details about life in "the yellow house," where Justina and Anna grew up. Discussions became more intense as they remembered stories about *de ole koat*. You could almost hear the little children running in and out of "the yellow house" and grandma calling from *de ole koat*, "Come, let's go to the store for some candy."

Several brothers and one sister of Peter and Johann Groening relocated to Lowe Farm and other points on the West Reserve. These included Cornelius Groening (1844-1907) who married Helena Hiebert, Abram Groening (1851-1917) who married Helena Loeppky, Jacob Groening (1853-1916) who married Aganetha Siemens, Maria Groening (1855-1922) who married Derk Reimer and Franz Groening (1858-1941) who married first Maria Fehr and later Margaretha Dueck.

Book

Book Review Editor

Please forward review copies of books of relevance to the history and culture of the Steinbach and Hanover areas to our book review editor, Irene Enns Kroeker, Box 20531, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2T2.

Book Notes

Gary Penner and Irene McDonald, *M. M. Penner Genealogy: A Genealogy and Address Book* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1994), 32 pages.

Mildred Ediger, *A Pictorial History of the Thiessen and Friesen Families 1752-1992*: Part One: *The Family of Johann W. Thiessen & Anna Friesen (First marriage)*; Part Two: *The Family of Johann W. Thiessen and Katharina Friesen (Second Marriage)* (371 Bethel # 10, Sanger, California, 1992), loose leaf binder, unpaginated, approximately 200 pages part one, and 200 pages part two.

Velma Dyck Jantzen, *Minister Johann D. Dueck and Margaretha (Hiebert) Dueck Family Book 1856-1993* (Box 47, Cimarron, Kansas, 67835-0047, 1994), 234 pages. \$25.00

As stated in the sub-title, the *M. M. Penner Genealogy* is strictly a listing of the descendants of Steinbach businessman Martin M. Penner who owned Steinbach Lumber from 1918 to 1950. Hopefully the small volume will be an inspiration for future editions which will incorporate more of the rich history of this influential southeastern Manitoba family.

The *History of Johann W. Thiessen* is a massive compilation of family information and photographs which serves as a update and extension of the "Thiessen" section of the *Von Riesen-Friesen Genealogy* published in 1966. Johann W. Thiessen was a Kleine Gemeinde farmer who lived for many years in Continiusfeld, Molotschna, South Russia, and moved to Jansen, Nebraska, in 1874. In 1885 he married for the third time to Agatha E. Kornelsen, and moved to Steinbach, Manitoba, where he died in 1888.

Although most of his family resided in Jansen, Nebraska, and Meade, Kansas, and is scattered about in various other America communities, his son Peter F. Thiessen moved to Manitoba after his second marriage in 1889 and settled in "De Krim" two miles northwest of Giroux. Peter's descendants are well-known in the Steinbach area including Dr. Arden Thiessen, minister of the Steinbach E.M. Church; Blumenort area farmer, Frank P. Thiessen; Dorothy Schinkel, wife of a Steinbach realter, and hundreds more.

Reviews



Johann W. Thiessen (1813-1888) in a photo taken about 1885 while he was a widower.

Although unfortunate that the book could not have professionally printed, the *History of Johann W. Thiessen* is a massive work which will be a rich source of reference material for decades to come. Mildred Ediger, who is 78 years of age, deserves an immense amount of credit for completing this work. From leafing through the pages, one realizes that she must have written hundreds of letters and made literally thousands of phone calls to Kansas, Nebraska, Manitoba, Belize, Mexico, and elsewhere to gather all the material.

The *Johann D. Dueck* family book is another loose-leaf compilation which records the story of Johann D. Dueck, son of K G deacon Johann L. Dueck of Alexanderkrone, Molotschna, and later Gruenfeld or Kleefeld, Manitoba (see *Leaders*, 345-6). Johann D. Dueck was elected as a minister of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite in 1884. In 1889 the family moved to Hillsboro, Kansas, where he served as the pastor of the congregation in Alexanderfeld, two miles southwest, until his death in 1918.

The volume provides valuable history as well as a listing of descendants complete with addresses and occupations, etc. The book is another resource in a growing list of volumes dealing with the Dueck family. Well known descendants in the Steinbach area include the minister Jakob F. Barkman and his son Leonard A. Barkman, long-time mayor, Member of the Legislative Assembly and auto-dealer. The majority of the family lives in Kansas, California, and elsewhere in the United States. The book provides a link to a prominent Holdeman family whose origins are firmly rooted in the soil and culture of Kleefeld (Gruenfeld), Manitoba.

Book notes by Delbert F. Plett

Subjects or Citizens?: The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925. By Adolf Ens. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994. xi + 236 pp. Tables, Maps, Appendices, Bibliography, Index, \$25.00)

Adoof Ens' book is an excellent contribution to a deeper understanding of Mennonite approaches to the problem of living 'in the world' and their struggle with being subjects and citizens. The study of the early years of Mennonite settlement after their migration to Canada in the 1870s traces the tensions and conflicts of a people who had to work out a new world view.

Ens examines this story chronologically and thematically, beginning in the 1870s and ending with the post World War I years. The main themes examine issues arising out of the period of initial settlement, problems of adjustment, the issues of the war, and the adaptation of those Mennonites remaining in Canada after large scale emigration in the 1920s.

Local government, education, and military exemption emerge as the most important arenas of conflict and Ens uses these issues to argue that the three Manitoba Mennonite groups understood their relationship to the authorities differently. Reinländer, Bergthalers and Kleine Gemeinde groups used different strategies to cope with a 'high' government that was a democracy unlike the previous Czarist monarchy.

Ultimately the pressures of the First World War resulted in the emigration of the Reinländer to Mexico where they again could resume a status of subjects. The other two Mennonite groups adapted themselves, and "were for the most part quite open to incorporation as full Canadian citizens" (p236).

The argument presented by Ens takes great pains to explain the benevolence of the federal government and contrasts this with the less accommodating provincial governments. Ens' apology for the violations of the education promises made to delegates in John Lowe's letter — while illuminating — exonerate the federal government too easily. The popularity of earlier history which accused the federal government of going back on its word seems to have resulted in an analysis here that excessively minimizes the genuine betrayal of an important reason for the Mennonite's choice of Canada as a place to settle.

On the whole, however, the study is well documented and pursues a complex subject with clarity and thorough analysis. The tensions between Mennonite theology and its practical application are presented provocatively but thoughtfully.

By Hans P. Werner
University of Manitoba
Graduate Studies — History

Melvin J. Loewen, *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen (1827-1893)*, Melvin J. Loewen, Beallsville, Md., U.S.A., 1994. \$25.00.

This book is a genealogical account of the descendants of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite couple, C.W. Loewen and Helena Bartel: specifically, the descendants of their two sons, Cornelius B. Loewen and Isaac B. Loewen. It covers the years 1827 to 1994.

The introduction provides the reader with the explanation for the migration from South Russia to North America in 1874, of which Cornelius B. Loewen and Isaac B. Loewen were a part. The introduction also describes the actual journey from Nikopol, South Russia to the junction of the Rat and Red Rivers in southeastern Manitoba, with the help of C.W. Loewen's diary. It also tells us that C.W. and Helena settled in Gruenfeld (now Kleefeld), Manitoba and that after Helena died, C.W. moved to Steinbach and married the widow of Rev. Jacob Barkman who had drowned in the Red River in 1875.

Towards the end of the introduction, the author, Melvin Loewen, describes his method of organization. He adopts a numbering system, for which he gives Dr. Solomon Loewen the credit, which enables the reader to easily locate the desired generation.

Loewen also includes some personal observations of the descendants of C.B. and I.B. Loewen. The author notes that the farmers of the first generation have mostly evolved into the professionals and business people of the present generation. He tells us too, that the descendants are to be found scattered throughout North and Central America: the Manitoba, Alberta and BC in Canada; in the northwest, south, and east coast of continental U.S. and in Alaska; and at Spanish Lookout, Belize.

The "family group sheets" make up the bulk of the book. The statistics included here are those expected in a genealogy: dates of birth, marriage and death. Where possible, current addresses are also given. Melvin Loewen has also made a valiant effort at incorporating a mini-biography of each descendant listed in the book. Those that responded to the author's request for these biographies helped to give to the book the element of human interest, which makes for interesting reading for historians and lay people alike.

Even I, a non-genealogist, found this book inviting. After I had checked out the pages that pertained to me, I made a more thorough perusal of the book, and became fascinated with the names of many people who I knew nominally that were now shown to be related to me. The frequent non-Mennonite names interested me, too; where marriage to a non-Mennonite had occurred to one generation, the successive generations seemed to follow suit.

I've been told (by my historian husband) that this book will be a particular interest to the descendants of C.T. Loewen, J.T. Lo-

continued from previous page
wen, A.T. Loewen and other "T. Loewens" of Steinbach, because it traces their ancestry.

This book identifies one of the 13 family lines of Deacon Isaac Loewen, that of his son, Cornelius W. Loewen. It therefore serves to complement previous volumes on Sarah W. Loewen and Jacob W. Loewen, both siblings of Cornelius W. Loewen, by Delbert Plett and Solomon Loewen, respectively. (We just need ten more to complete the set!)

By Mary Anne Loewen
Steinbach, MB

**Roy Vogt, Margaret Kroeker
and Elfrieda Neufeld
A Vogt Family History
(Winnipeg, 1995) \$25.00**

There are many ways that one generation can pass on its history to the next generation. Some place the most importance on monuments or markers. Others from time to time give a more living history. This was recently done by some of the descendants of Andreas Vogt (1854-1914) and Aganetha (Block) Vogt when they produced the book *A Vogt Family History*. To create a living history more than a name on a plaque is required. This has been done admirably by these descendants.

The book was created largely through the efforts of three of those descendants, namely, Roy Vogt, Margaret Kroeker, and Elfrieda Neufeld. It was published by Mennonite Genealogy Inc, Box 393 Winnipeg, MB R3C 2H6 from where the book can be purchased for \$25 (including postage).

Andreas Vogt and Aganetha Block mar-



Elfrieda Neufeld compiled the family information and pictures for the Vogt book. (Photo courtesy of E. Neufeld).

continued on next page

ried in southern Ukraine in 1879 and of their ten children 2 died there and the other eight eventually all settled and died in Canada. All of those ten children have now died, but they have left 152 descendants, mostly in Canada.

Some of their more well-known children include Peter Vogt who operated a grocery store in Steinbach for many years, Marie Vogt and Abram Vogt who together were instrumental in starting the Bethesda Hospital, and Anna (Tante Anna) Vogt who was a well-known known kindergarten teacher in Winnipeg.

The book contains a brief history of the start of the clan in the Ukraine, including some speculative history beyond that, and then continues the history of each child and the issue of each. The book is enlivened by anecdotes of each descendant. It is not just a bare dull recitation of facts and dates. My only criticism is that there is not enough of the dark side of each. This is no doubt a consequence of writing a family history from inside the family. There is a natural desire not to hurt feelings.

I am of course, biased, but I found the book fascinating and informative. It is a great gift from one generation to the next, and the creators and sponsors should be proud.

By John E. Neufeld

Reinländer Gemeindebuch. (Winnipeg, Man., Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society 1995) John Dyck, William Harms editors, 525 pages, \$25.00.

At last Mennonite genealogists have access to this valuable resource in a format that is legible and well indexed. As the title implies, this is the register of the church known formally as Reinländer, but in everyday usage always referred to as Altkolonier (Old Colony).

The origins of the families recorded in this register are in 19th century Russia in the oldest Mennonite Colony, Chortitza, and its daughter settlements of Gerhardsthal, Fürstenland, Yasykovo, and Nepluyevka. Families that migrated to Manitoba in 1875 and subsequent years, and were part of the group which looked to Elder Johann Wiebe of Rosengard in the West Reserve and formerly of Fürstenland, Russia for leadership, are recorded.

The earliest register probably begun in 1875, after the arrival of Elder Wiebe, cannot be located and may have been destroyed. The register now published was begun after an October, 1880 brotherhood meeting held in the church building at Reinland, Manitoba where a decision was made that all who wished to remain with the church should reregister.

The volume was organized by village of residence of that time. The last page recorded the page number of entries pertaining to the various villages. This is most useful to

day in determining where an ancestor resided. Typical information provided is birth, baptism, marriage, and death dates for parents' and in most cases names of their respective parents as well.

In the case of immigrant families, the latter did not emigrate, but the date is useful in tracing the family into Russia. The register continues with information about children including birth and baptism dates, and dates of death for those who died without having married. For those who married, the spouses name and reference page number are recorded.

If families moved to Saskatchewan or in some cases the Dakotas, this is duly noted. Those who left for other congregations are similarly recorded.

This volume records families formed by marriages prior to 1903. Thereafter a subsequent register was kept until 1930. Although new family entries ceased in 1902, the information about those already recorded in the first register was continued until 1922 in Manitoba. When the church leadership and a significant number of members moved to Mexico at this time, the register was continued in the Manitoba Colony for another six or seven years.

The now printed register is copiously cross referenced between parents and children in the same volume, and to same family's entries in the Swift Current and Hague settlements registers for those who moved to Saskatchewan. Page reference numbers in subsequent registers for children who married after 1902 in Manitoba or Mexico have been added. With this information one is now able to trace related families who migrated to Latin America.

Also included in the new publication is church membership statistics for the years 1881 through 1904, a list of ministers, and identification of families who arrived after 1880.

Although composed mainly of names and dates, this church register reveals information about infant mortality rates, ages of baptismal candidates, ages at marriage, village settlement patterns, families who founded daughter settlements, emigration to Mexico, etc.

This book will be an invaluable asset for the family researcher and those interested in the history of our Mennonite people.

By Bruce Wiebe
Winkler, Manitoba