

Education in the East Reserve 1874 - 1920

by Delbert F. Plett

Introduction.

Within weeks of the arrival of Mennonite immigrants in Manitoba in July and August 1874, a Christian private school system was established in the East Reserve, now the R. M. of Hanover and Town of Steinbach. Within two years a Church operated educational program was completely functional with some 35 schools and teachers serving a population of approximately 3,500.¹

The system was established without government assistance of any kind and was the equal to any other operating in the Province of Manitoba. The purpose of this paper is to describe in summary form, the school system of the East Reserve, 1874 to 1920.

Historical Origins.

The East Reserve was settled in 1874 by two denominations of Mennonites or Gemeinden. They were orthodox or conservative Mennonites who continued to practice the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith of their fathers as the same had evolved over the preceding two centuries in Prussia and Russia.

The Bergthaler were the larger of the two groups with some 500 families totalling 3,000 people. The Bergthal settlement had been established near Mariupol, South Russia, on the Sea of Azov in 1836. Bergthal was a daughter colony of the Chortitza Colony which had been established in 1789 along the banks of the Dnieper River, near what is today the City of Zaporizhyya in Southern Russia, today Ukraine. Since it was the first of the two major colonies established by Mennonite emigrants from Prussia, it was referred to as the "Old Colony" and its inhabitants and descendants as "Old Coloniers".

Under the leadership of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) (*Preservings*, No. 5, pages 1-5), almost the entire Bergthal population relocated to Manitoba in 1874-6, settling in the East Reserve. Within a few years approximately half of the group moved again to the so-called West Reserve, settling around Altona. By the 1890s most of the Bergthalers in the West Reserve were referred to as Sommerfelder and in the East Reserve they were referred to as Chortitzer.

The second group, the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), originated in 1812 as a reform movement in the Molotschna Colony, the second and largest Mennonite settlement founded in 1804 in Southern Russia. The KG was smaller than the Bergthaler with 150 families coming to Manitoba of whom 30 settled on the Scratching River near Morris, establishing the villages of Rosenort and Rosenhof. The first group of KG arrived in Manitoba on July 31, 1874. They established a group of villages and a church dis-

trict centred around Grunfeld, now Kleefeld. Other KG settled in the eastern part of the Reserve establishing church districts and clusters of villages in Blumenort and Steinbach.

The KG people were a minority of three per cent in the Molotschna Colony and only one of a dozen Mennonite churches or Gemeinden. They were used to participating in a school system which was neither operated nor controlled by them. In the Molotschna, many of their members had served as teachers in the Colony school system with considerable distinction.²

In the Bergthal Colony, by comparison, there was only one Mennonite church and so the Bergthaler or Manitoba Chortitzer came from a tradition in which one church, Gebietsamt or local government authority, and the school system were co-terminus. The three institutions served the same constituency and were contained within one common geographical boundary. Ultimate authority, of course, was vested in the Church or Gemeinde.

Philosophy of Education.

The philosophy of education of the orthodox Mennonites who came to Manitoba in 1874 was most eloquently articulated by KG minister and theologian Heinrich Balzer (1800-46) of Tiege, Molotschna, in his famous 1833 treatise entitled *Verstand und Vernunft* or *Faith and Reason*.³ Dr. Robert Friedmann has written that this was one of the most stimulating statements in Mennonite literature.⁴

Balzer was of the view that "under the rubble" of many centuries of error, Menno Simons had "rediscovered the simple teachings of the Lord." Balzer exalted the first century church as the classic model of Christianity. The early Christians had been convicted by the Holy Spirit, "that they would live more happily in this world by giving themselves completely to the simplicity of Christ. ... Brotherly love made them like a great family and no one wished a privilege for himself at the expense of another."

"When in a reborn heart the Holy Spirit exclaims the 'Abba, our Father,'" wrote Balzer, "divine gifts effuse into the believer and enter his *understanding*. They fill him with a new wisdom and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The more and freer the heart of man is opened to the Spirit the more knowledge will he gain, the greater riches of divine gifts will he receive, and the more his heart will be prepared as the abode of the Triune God."

Balzer dealt at length with the dichotomy between "faith", a subconscious, existential state of being in Christ, and what he called "reason", whereby logic and self-avarice took hold of a one's heart and articulated one's actions. He felt that Christians "should be satisfied in finding

food and clothing; striving after great wealth or a position of high distinction in this world ... certainly entails a restriction in spiritual benefits. What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul. Matt 16:26."

Such a philosophy had great ramifications in every aspect of life and particularly in education. The training of children was of the utmost importance least "the young flowers of our church become biased against our principles." Farming was seen as the way of life most conducive to a genuine Christian lifestyle. To support his view, Balzer referred to Romans 12:16, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate."

Genuine faith must be instilled in the young before the forces of reason take hold and prevent a true understanding of "simplicity in Christ." It followed that the purpose of the school system was not to prepare people for higher education or to be successful in business and the acquisition of wealth, rather it was to prepare the youth to live an existential Christian life of piety and reverence for God based on simplicity and love for fellowman. A good education opened a child's heart to allow a knowledge of Christ to take root.

Balzer stressed a sound elementary education which was necessary to achieve understanding. But whatever belonged to higher learning "brings forth nothing but sophistry, unbelief, and corruption of the church; for knowledge puffeth up (1 Cor.8:1)". It was necessary to be articulate and literate in order to understand and truly experience the power of the Gospel. The voluminous journals, letters, sermons and other writings of the East Reserve pioneers certainly reveals that they were both articulate and literate.⁵

Education as Historical Experience.

Education was a sensitive issue with a long history among Mennonites. In 1536 a young priest, Menno Simons (1496-1561), took issue with the Reformation Church for misinterpreting and subverting the plain meaning of the Gospels. How else was it possible for a millennium of killing, persecuting and oppression of the poor to have taken place in the name of Christ. The learned Doctors of Philosophy and leaders of the Church always devised some sophisticated doctrine to circumvent the simple command of Jesus, "Love your enemies as yourself, thou shalt not kill."

Persecuted by Church and State, Menno's followers fled eastward settling in the Vistula Delta in Prussia, modern-day Poland. By the 1780s orthodox Mennonites again felt threatened, this time from fellow believers who were turning for renewal to Separatist Pietism, a reli-

ister. Peter Unger, Johann Janzen, Isaak Warkentin, Joh. Warkentin, Korn. Plett, the Elder, [from Blumenhof], and my father from Blumenort, attended. Monday the 24th of April, in the afternoon, examinations were held in Blumenort. School examinations were held in Steinbach and I also attended."¹⁷

By 1876 the main pioneer villages were established complete with a teachers and school facilities of their own or in conjunction with a neighbouring village. Many villages already had built separate school buildings and others still were using private residences. At the peak some 36 schools were in operation: 6 were KG and 30 Bergthaler or Chortitzer.

Chortitzer Consolidation 1876-78.

By the end of 1876 both the KG and Bergthaler (Chortitzer) Gemeinden were firmly

established in their new homeland. Steps were now taken to provide more leadership and direction to their respective school systems.

A school constitution was drawn up for the Chortitzer and signed and approved on behalf of the Gemeinde by Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe and ministers Cornelius Stoesz, David Stoesz and Heinrich Wiebe around 1878. The Gemeinde appointed two ministers each year to inspect the schools.¹⁸

The full text of the Chortitzer "Schulverordnung" was published in 1990.¹⁹ It is evident that the main thrust was the training of children in Christian virtues and Bible knowledge. Quoting 2 Timothy 3:15 and Genesis 18:19 the teaching philosophy and entire purpose of the school system is summarized as follows, "To impress this upon our future generations that it is of the utmost importance that our school system shall be based on the teachings

of Christianity."

Some salient features: the teacher "shall be a member in good standing of the Gemeinde"; must be "of a reputable character. . . sober and well-behaved"; "shall teach reading, writing and arithmetic"; "the main objective shall be to instruct religion". Teachers "shall discipline the pupils . . . [but] not too harshly or applied in anger or vengeance." The school regulations provided for three annual teachers conferences, "December 20 in Pastwa, January 20 in Chortitz and February 20 in Grunthal. . . to discuss mutual problems . . . and the general improvement of the schools." All parents were to pay a share of the costs even if they did not have children in school.

The election in 1879 as Assistant-Aeltester of David Stoesz (1842-1903), a competent sen-

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Chortitzer School Teachers 1879-81

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"Any teacher must be a member of good standing of a church, of reputable character, and a good example to his pupils. It is of utmost importance that he act in a sober and well-behaved manner when he meets his pupils outside the classroom, so as not to undo the benefits of the good lessons he taught them during classes. It is the duty of the teacher to act in a manner to deserve the love and respect of the pupils. That would be fertile dew on the seed he has sown". Point number 1 of the school regulations of the Mennonite Church at Chortitz, Manitoba, circa 1880.

It is 122 years since the Bergthal Colony left South Russia to migrate to Manitoba. One of the main reasons for emigration was maintaining control of the education of their children. They based their educational system upon the didactic system. They had rejected the pedagogic system promoted by Johann Cornies in the 1840s. When they came to Canada they continued the old system.

By 1880 they had drawn up a set of regulations which included the above statement regarding teachers. Many teachers served in the church run schools before they became public schools in 1919. David Stoesz mentions names like Heinrich Wiens as a teacher in 1875. In 1887 Jacob Hiebert is mentioned and from 1892 to 1897 Dietrich Dueck taught in Bergthal. He quit teaching to embark upon a new career as municipal secretary for which he received his title as "Schrieva Dueck".

The "Brot Schult" records list the old school teacher Peter Hiebert in Gnadefeld and Jacob Hiebert school teacher in Ebenfeld. The 1875 *Gedankfeier* refers to Heinrich Harder and Jacob Hiebert as the first and second teachers in Bergfeld and I am sure many others could be mentioned.

In 1878 a change took place in the East Reserve Mennonite school system which greatly effected the teachers. Both East Reserve churches--the Kleine Gemeinde and Chortitzer--registered their schools with the Department of Education, in the case of the Chortitzer, at the prompting of the teachers and Mr. Wm Hespeler. This allowed the Government to examine the teachers after which they issued licenses for one year terms and gave financial assistance to operate the schools. This only lasted for two years for the Church at Chortitz but the Kleine Gemeinde / Holdeman Church continued until the flag issue in 1907.

In total 31 teachers were licensed in 1879 and, after a major exodus to the West Reserve, 22 in 1880. The first to be licensed in 1879 were the following: Maria Friesen, Peter Dueck, Cornelius Friesen, Abraham Friesen, Gerhard Cornelsen, Jacob Toews, Dietrich Friesen, Jacob Hiebert, Isaak Bergen, Johann Wiens, Heinrich Dueck, Heinrich Klippenstein, Peter Wiens, Klaas Peters, Johann Peters, Wilhelm Hiebert, Franz Dueck, Franz Kliever, Heinrich Abrahams, Heinrich Gerbrand, Jacob Neufeld, Franz Rempel, Abraham Neufeld, Johann Friesen, Julius Toews, Peter

Neufeld, Heinrich Friesen, Jacob Funk, Jacob Harder, Gerhard Dueck, and Heinrich Harder. The first seven seemed to have belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde Church and the rest to the Church at Chortitz including those who came from other colonies in Russia and joined the Church in Manitoba. The following names appear on the 1880 list while many of those listed in 1879 are deleted: Cornelius Kehler, Jacob Wiebe, Peter Wiens, D. Hiebert, Diedrich Penner and Peter Egan (Note One).

Since the same names are used over and over again in early Mennonite families it is almost impossible to identify most of the teachers as to where they taught or who they were. One who can be identified is Klaas Peters who taught in Blumstein. Klaas wrote "Die Bergthaler Mennoniten und deren Auswanderung aus Russland und Einwanderung in Manitoba" a short history of the emigration to Manitoba. Franz Rempel was the son of Johann Rempel and Magareta Sawatzke. They came to Canada in 1875 and settled in Gruenthal. Franz operated a book dealership together with Klaas Peters and probably taught in Gruenthal.

Julius Toews appears in the 1881 census as living in Osterwick. He is the son of Julius Toews and Katharina Harder of Bergfeld. Franz Kliever and Heinrich Abrahams both came from other parts of Russia and not from the Bergthal colony. Franz Kliever came to Manitoba in 1878 and served as a teacher among the Chortitzer. He then moved to Neuanlage on the West Reserve and finally to Oregon. He together with Erdman Penner, Peter Abrams, David Peters and Gerhard Rempel were the first elected members of the committee of the Mennonite Educational Society who were responsible for building the "Fortbildungsschule" in Gretna which opened in the fall of 1889.

Heinrich Abrahams, son of Jacob, lived in Schantzenberg until the spring of 1882. Among those licensed in 1880 Cornelius Kehler may stand out. He was the son of Gerhard L. Kehler of Hochfeld. He suffered from an infirmity and died a young man in his mid-thirties. He had a reputation as a teacher with exceptionally nice penmanship. The last name on the list, Peter Egan, is probably a spelling error and can not be identified.

After its brief experiment at having the Government licensing the teachers, the Church at Chortitz continued to operate their own Private schools with their own self-trained teachers for another thirty-eight years. In 1919 the Manitoba Government started taking over Mennonite schools. By 1928 the takeover was complete and the Chortitzer teacher in Manitoba existed no more.

Note One: The teacher's lists come from the Manitoba Legislative Journals 1879 and 1880.

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was a cousin to Bishop Toews, and had received his pedagogical training as the personal protege of another cousin Rev. Gerhard P. Goossen (1832-72) who had taught in various schools in the Molotschna for 17 years.

Jakob Friesen (BGB B122) had served as the Gebietschreiber of the Bergthal Colony in Russia since 1856. He came to Manitoba in 1876 with the last group of Bergthaler immigrants and settled in Tanennau, although he is listed with the village of Schönwiese in the 1881 census. The constant writing and study required by the position made him an excellent candidate as an examiner. Later he moved to the W. Reserve where he belonged to the Bergthaler Gemeinde.

Of interest at this juncture was the formation of the Clearsprings School District No. 85, by the Scottish, Irish and English neighbours of the KG between Blumenort and Steinbach on March 12, 1880.

Teachers of 1879.

The committee conducted their examination in Chortitz on March 10, 1879 with the Bishops Wiebe and Toews present. The committee examined and issued licenses to 31 teachers.²⁴

The Chortitzer teachers were as follows: Jacob Hiebert, Isaak Bergen, Johann Wiens, Heinrich Dueck, Heinrich Klippenstein, Peter Wiens, Klaas Peters, Johann Peters, Wilhelm Hiebert, Franz Dueck, Franz Kliewer, Heinrich Abrahams, Heinrich Gerbrandt, Jakob Neufeld, Franz Rempel, Abraham Neufeld, Johann Friesen, Julius Toews, Peter Neufeld, Heinrich Friesen, Jakob Funk, Jakob Harder, Gerhard Dueck and Heinrich Harder. For biographies of some of the Chortitzer teachers listed, please see article by Jake Doerksen elsewhere in this issue.

The KG teachers were the following:

Maria Friesen (1844-1925) daughter of veteran KG pedagogue Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-92) who had taught in Margenau and elsewhere in the Molotschna for many years. Maria Friesen Redenzel was a pioneer for hundreds of women teachers who would follow her in the teaching profession in the Hanover Steinbach area. See article elsewhere in this issue.

Peter L. Dueck (1842-87), veteran KG teacher from Gnadenfeld, Molotschna. He settled in Gruenfeld, Manitoba, in 1874.

Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), son of KG minister Klaas Friesen (1783-1870), Rosenort, Molotschna, served as the first teacher in Blumenort, Manitoba, in 1874: see article elsewhere in this issue.

Abraham R. Friesen (1846-84), a veteran school teacher from Lichtenau, Molotschna, came to Canada in 1875. He was the first teacher for Blumenhof. He was a brother to Maria, above. His "Journal" provides useful detail regarding the teacher's conferences and seminars conducted among the KG teachers. He was married to the daughter of Gerhard S. Kornelsen.

Gerhard E. Kornelsen (1857-1933) was the

son of veteran Molotschna teacher Gerhard S. Kornelsen from Lichtenau, who founded a KG teaching dynasty which included four generations. Gerhard E. Kornelsen's letter collection, teaching notebooks and journals provide valuable insight into the world of a 19th Century pedagogue. Gerhard E. Kornelsen taught in Steinbach for 33 years.

Jakob B. Toews (1855-1938) was the son of Peter W. Toews of Blumenort, the second KG Brandaeltester in Manitoba. Jakob was "a scholar at heart" who founded the school in Hochstadt in 1878 and taught there for 12 years. In 1890 they moved to Gruenfeld and in 1910 to Stern, Alberta.

Dietrich S. Friesen (1849-1901), another veteran teacher from Russia having taught in the village of Rosenfeld, Borosenko, was the son of Jakob K. Friesen who drowned in the Red River in 1875. Dietrich came from the so-called "Ohrloff" Friesens. His uncle Johann K. Friesen had served as a teacher in Pordenau, Molotschna and elsewhere. Dietrich was married to the sister of Abraham R. Friesen, above. He was the first teacher in Gruenfeld and taught in Steinbach from 1880 to 1884.

Licensed Teachers 1880-81.

For 1880 the examining committee for the Mennonite schools registered with the Protestant School Board consisted of the Aeltesten Gerhard Wiebe and Peter P. Toews. On June 15, 1880 the Protestant School Board appointed William Hespeler as the School Inspector for Mennonite Schools. This appointment probably anticipated that the high esteem in which Hespeler was held by both the Mennonites and the Provincial Government might enable them to work together in some fashion.

Nevertheless, only the seven KG teachers were examined and licensed for the 1880-81 school year. They were the same as 1879 except that Peter L. Dueck in Gruenfeld was replaced by Abraham Isaak; Gerhard E. Kornelsen was replaced by Dietrich S. Friesen in Steinbach; Abraham R. Friesen was replaced by his sister Maria Friesen in Blumenhof; Maria in turn was replaced by Johann Friesen in Rosenhof; and David Hiebert taught in Rose-nort.

Chortitzer Retraction 1880-81.

Sometime during 1880 the Chortitzer had decided to withdraw from the District School System. The incident which sparked this occurred during a meeting when Hespeler asked the Bishops to list their teachers in three categories as was done with all the teachers in the District School system. Wiebe regarded this as the first government intrusion into regulating what he considered to be solely within the jurisdiction of the Gemeinde.

The Chortitzers reasoned that by accepting financial assistance they would jeopardize their position of independence in matters pertaining to education. As already noted, for orthodox Mennonites control of education was equated with control over the souls of their children. They could hardly accept financial assistance

and then take a position later that the government should not get involved in how and what their children were being taught.

By this time Ohm Gerhard Wiebe had delegated much of the work regarding schools to his Assistant-Aeltester David Stoesz. On November 12, 1880, Stoesz recorded that he intended to drive to Niverville to meet with Hespeler "regarding the teachers and the school issue."

On March 6, 1881, Ohm Gerhard left for Berlin, Ontario, a journey from which he would not return until the 24th of that month. In the meantime, Stoesz was in charge and on March 15, 1881, he went to Winnipeg by train to meet with Hespeler regarding the schools. On March 19 Hespeler brought the final payment of school money to Niverville but Stoesz did not meet him in person and had the monies delivered to him.

The reason that Stoesz did not meet personally with Hespeler may well have been that the Chortitzers had already decided to withdraw their schools from the Protestant School Authority as of the end of the 1880-81 school year. By the fall of 1881 they had reverted to their own privately funded village schools.

One wonders what might have been accomplished had the KG and Chortitzer been willing to amalgamate their resources and take a united position. Bishop Gerhard Wiebe later lamented about the lack of KG support, "Oh, how much we would have liked to see the Kleine Gemeinde do likewise and support us in this matter. How much stronger the churches would have been! ... But the money has so dazzled their eyes, that they no longer see the false teaching in the schools."²⁵ In fairness to the KG it must be remembered that in 1881 they were in the midst of a devastating church schism. The result was that in the following year, Bishop Peter P. Toews with half of his parishioners seceded to join the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, known as the Holdeman church.

By the 1881-82 school year the Chortitzer education system had decreased from 28 to 16 schools. A major reason for the reduction in numbers was the extensive out-migration that had taken place in the years 1878 to 1880. Over half of the Bergthaler people had moved or were intending to move to the Altona area in the West Reserve by the end of 1881.

Curriculum.

The curriculum of both the Chortitzer and KG schools was determined by their mission statement which was to inculcate Christian values and beliefs into the children. There was probably little difference between the two denominations in the basic format and day to day operation of the schools.

All females aged 6 to 12 and males aged 6 to 14 were required to attend school which ran from October 1 to April 1 and from May 1 to July 1 of each year. Instruction was in German although there were instances where individual teachers also taught English.

The main emphasis of the curriculum was to teach the students the Bible, Catechism and Bible history or *Biblishe Geschichten*. Dennis

First Woman Teacher

Maria Friesen Redenzel 1844-1925

by D. Plett

Maria Friesen was born on February 21, 1844, in the village of Wernersdorf, Molotschna, South Russia (now Ukraine), where her father Cornelius Friesen (1810-92) was the teacher. Maria was baptised into the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) on May 12, 1863. Her mother, Maria Rempel, was the daughter of Abraham Rempel (1798-1878), a wealthy KG Vollwirt from Margenau, Molotschna.

Maria came from a truly pedagogical family. Not only was her father a career teacher, but also her brother Abraham, who taught in Lichtenau, Mol. for many years and then as the first teacher in Blumenhof, Manitoba in 1875. A sister Katharina was married to Dietrich S. Friesen who taught in the Borosenko village of Rosenfeld and then was the first teacher for the village of Gruenfeld, Manitoba in 1874. The journals of both men reveal that they were professionals in their field.

It is said that Maria had already taught school in Russia before coming to Canada. If this was the case, it was probably in the village of Neuanlage, just to the north of Borosenko, northwest of Nikopol. On April 19, 1873, brother-in-law Dietrich S. Friesen recorded that, "... Maria took her leave from us." On October 20, 1873, Dietrich writes that "Maria from Neuanlage was here." At the age of 29, Maria would have been considered a spinster at the time.

In 1874 Maria immigrated to Manitoba together with her parents who settled in the village of Blumenort. She was a faithful and dutiful daughter. Emigration records show that when Jakob Barkman assisted her parents by paying their travelling costs to Canada in the amount of \$412.25, Maria contributed \$14.00 of her own hard earned money to help reimburse the church for this assistance: *The Golden Years*, 351.

Maria Friesen is listed as the first teacher in the village of Rosenort, Manitoba, where she taught for a few years. One can hardly imagine how she must have felt being not only a "woman" teacher in a pioneer community but also living more than thirty miles away from her parents and siblings. Maria kept some of her property at home in Blumenort as Brandordnung records show that when her parents' house burned down on March 16, 1875, she also received insurance coverage of \$3.67.

Maria is also listed as the first and only woman teacher in the list of Mennonites licensed by the Protestant School Board of Manitoba for 1879. Presumably she was still teaching in Rosenort at the time. It seems that she transferred to Blumenhof for the 1880-81 school year. She is listed as the teacher in Blumenhof, Manitoba, for the year 1881-1882. Sarah Friesen, a second woman teacher, is listed in the hamlet of Neuanlage, later Twin creek, Manitoba, sometime between 1888-1891.

In 1884 Maria married Julius Redenzel. It is

possible that she met him while teaching in Gruenfeld (Kleefeld) where he is listed as an Anwohner in the 1883 and 1884 tax rolls. Redenzel was born in Prussia and baptised as a Lutheran. During the 1870s he and his brother-in-law Johann Broesky had moved from Poland to Russia where they found employment among the KG farmers in Borosenko. In 1875 he accompanied the KG to Manitoba.

In 1886 Maria taught in Gruenfeld as Mrs. Redenzel. She was commonly known as school teacher "Mitschke." She is remembered as a very intelligent woman who had a great gift with children. She was also known to be somewhat eccentric. It is reported that at some point she had a nervous breakdown which may have been the reason for her retirement from teaching, something which modern-day teachers can certainly identify with.

By 1900 the Redenzel family was living in Blumenort although they are not listed in the tax rolls, probably a sign that they did not own any property. Historian Royden K. Loewen writes that the Redenzels were always poor and lived as Anwohner at the east end of the village of Blumenort. The Redenzel family belonged to the Holdeman church. They never had any children.

Elizabeth Penner (b. 1904), daughter of Klaas P. and Anna Reimer, grew up as the next door neighbour to the Redenzels, by then an elderly couple. The Redenzels had a small old house just at the east end of the Reimer farmyard. Originally they had a big yard and garden. Maria did a lot of sewing for other people in her older days. She was a small woman but by this time she was old and bent.

Elizabeth remembers Maria as a friendly good-natured person, but her husband had a quick temper. Unfortunately this also proved an attraction to the neighbourhood boys who delighted in testing his character. Sometimes they would bang on the outside wall of Redenzel's abode and wait until he came storming out.

Things got a little more serious when Redenzel acquired a gun. The Reimers had a custom that on Sunday the horses stayed in the small paddock just to the south of the road instead of being put out in the more distant pasture. Late one Sunday evening son Peter took his lantern and went to get the horses, swinging his lantern from side to side to be able to see where the horses were sleeping.

All of a sudden he was startled by a gun blast. He ran back towards the yard only to discover Redenzel standing there with a smoking gun. Redenzel explained that he thought he had seen a ghost and of course had to shoot at it.

Peter's father Klaas P. Reimer was not too pleased and went to talk to the deacons of the Holdeman church in Greenland where the Redenzels belonged. He told them that the Redenzels could gladly continue living where

they were but not if he had a gun. The Redenzels were the only Holdeman family living in the old Blumenort village at the time.

The Holdeman deacons agreed that something had to be done and came and took the fire arm away from Mr. Redenzel while he was out of the house. This way they were able to avoid a commotion.

Once a year the Blumenort school children were allowed to sing at the Redenzel's residence. Redenzel appreciated this greatly and always asked them to sing his favourite, "Wenn ich Jesu schaflein bin."

In 1915 the Redenzels moved to Steinbach where they were looked after by the aged Cornelius Fast and his wife. Julius Redenzel died in 1919. After his death, Maria moved to Altona. She lived in the old folks home there until her death in 1925.

Maria Friesen Redenzel left an important legacy to her community. She was the first woman teacher in the Hanover Steinbach area, and certainly one of the first under the jurisdiction of the Protestant School Board. She was also truly a pioneer by virtue of serving as the first teacher for the community of Rosenort in 1874.

Although Maria had no children of her own, numerous members of her extended family have followed in her footsteps and that of her father and brother as career teachers. The present-day Superintendent of the Hanover School Division, Gilbert Unger, is a great-great nephew as is school principal John Unger. Karen Penner, presently head of the Hanover Teacher's Society and recently appointed principal of the Woodlawn School, is a great-great niece.

There are numerous woman teachers in Hanover and elsewhere in Manitoba who can claim the rich pedagogical heritage that Maria Friesen Redenzel has left them and be proud of her courage and success.

It is unfortunate that no photograph of Maria Friesen Redenzel has been found, even though various members of the Holdeman church were among the pioneers in photography in the East Reserve in the early years. Anyone with knowledge of such a historic photograph of Maria Friesen Redenzel is asked to contact the Editor or any member of the HSHS.

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John C. Reimer, "Our Schools," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 242.
Royden Loewen, *Blumenort*, pages 151 and 301-2.
Lenore Eidse, ed., *Furrows in the Valley*, page 368.

Interviews: Mrs. Elizabeth Penner, Steinbach, March 2, 1996; and Mrs. Helena Unger Loewen, March 14, 1996.

Jacob Wiebe (1835-1914) Rechenbuch

by John Dyck, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Jacob Wiebe (1835-1914) was one of the first settlers and an early school teacher in the village of Bergfeld, southwest of present day Grunthal. In 1857 he married Katharina Penner (1837-76). The family lived in the village of Berthal, in the Bergthal Colony in Russia where he served as the village school teacher. His personal journal starts with arithmetical lessons on the north side of the street, just across from the school house. On April 18, 1876 they started to plow and on the 25th they were able to take the cattle out to pasture. Wiebe notes that from their first harvest that year, and presumably after setting aside enough for their own consumption for the following winter, he sold twelve bushel wheat. The

20 bushel oats, 20 bushel flax, 20 bushel barley and 13 bushel rye. Recorded entries of additional sales that year have faded beyond recognition.

Jacob Wiebe's first wife died in 1876 and on August 19, 1877, he married for the second time to Katharina Hiebert (b. 1859), daughter of Abraham Hiebert (1806-74).

According to the 1883 tax assessment records Jakob Wiebe was one of the wealthier settlers in Alt-Bergfeld with 4 oxen, 3 cows, 3 heifers, 3 calves and 4 sheep, and property and equipment. The total assessment was 699. According to the records of the Chortitzer Brandordnung he carried total insurance in the amount of \$750 allocated as follows: house \$100, furniture \$200, shed \$50, barn \$100 and new house \$225.

In later pages in the handwritten lesson book Jacob Wiebe entered a number of riddles, a ballad entitled "The King and the Abbott" and other items of interest.

The following two examples of items appearing in the journal give us a glimpse into the diversity of his interests.

1. Dislike of Tendency Toward Long Words in German

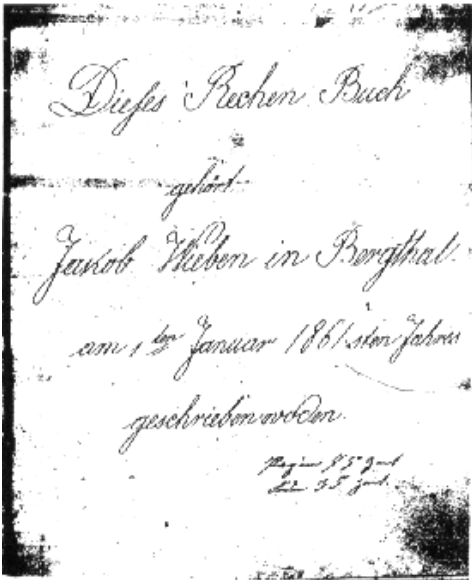
"Bei der hiesigen Bezirkshauptmannschaft ist ein Schriftstueck eingelaufen, welches die stolze Ueberschrift: Personaleinkommensteuerschaetzungskommissionsmitgliedsreisekostenrechnungsergaenzungsrevisionsbefund" trug. Das ist doch the hoechste Bluethe unseres Amtsstiles. Kennzeichen: Ist Herr Mueller noch immer Meliorationshauptbankassensverwaltungshilfsarbeiter? Ich glaube er ist inzwischen evoniert. Sein Titel ist bereits um ein paar silben kuerzer."

2. Mathematical Curiosity.

"A mathematician who died towards the end of the 1840s has calculated the following. A penny invested at 5% annual compound interest at the time of the birth of Christ would have increased by the end of 1835 to the sum of 2 septillion, 118,000 quintillion, 123,525 quadrillion, 548,395 trillion, 390,626 billion, 405,395 million, 557,169 dollar, 13 silver groschen, 14 pennies. The article goes on to calculate the height which the money would require if it were placed on the surface of the entire earth."

Jacob Wiebe was the son of minister Johann Wiebe (1804-1840), who died in the Bergthal Colony in Russia after a brief period of service as a minister. Johann Wiebe, in turn, was a brother to my great, grandfather Gerhard Wiebe and a nephew of Johann Wiebe (1766-1823), who served the Chortitz Colony in Russia as Aeltester from 1791 to 1823.

Jacob Wiebe served as the first school teacher in the village of Bergfeld and some of

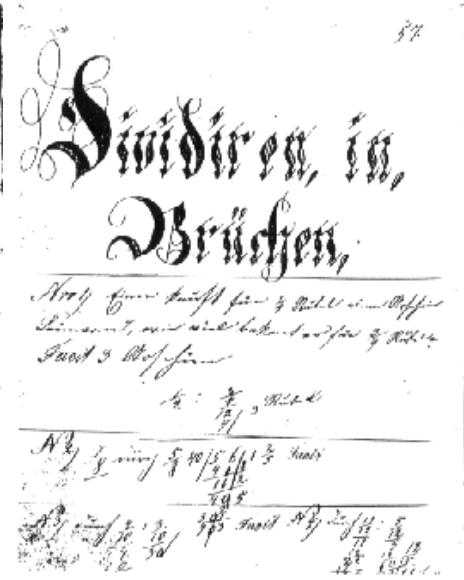


Title page of Jakob Wiebe's "Rechenbuch" or "Arithmetic Teacher's Manual" written in Bergthal in 1861.

recorded in 1860 and 1861 for the elementary class which he taught when he was twenty-five years of age. In the pages that follow he recorded notes about the trip from Russia to Manitoba and about settlement in the village of Bergfeld (later Alt-Bergfeld) in Manitoba.

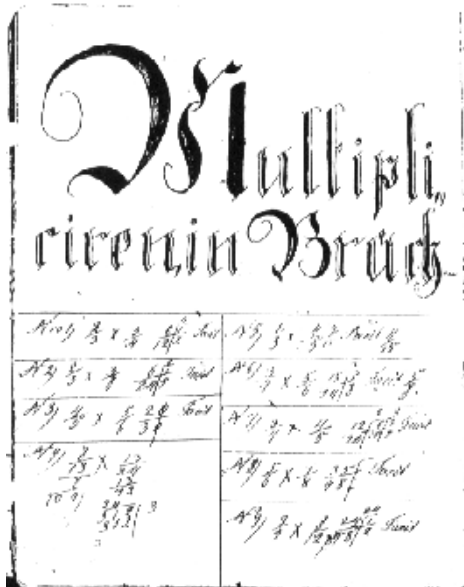
Wiebe has left a record of highlights (as well as some details) of the journey from Russia to Manitoba, starting with the departure from Bergthal at 3:00 a.m. on May 22, 1875. Upon arrival in Manitoba he wrote, "Thank God for his grace. For without the Lord's help we could not have remained so protected throughout the journey. If God had withdrawn His gracious father's arms, what would have happened to us. Therefore let us multiply His glory and honour, laud, praise and thank Him." Those sentiments reflected his gratitude for having safely crossed the ocean on the S. S. Moravian on the journey of which Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe wrote that they barely averted striking a huge ice berg.

Soon after their arrival in Manitoba in June of 1875 Wiebe walked to Winnipeg to make his initial cattle purchases. On September 21, 1875, he filed for a homestead on NE 7-5-5E. On October 25 they brought the cattle into the barn for the winter. The following spring he settled his family into their home in Bergfeld. According to a map of the village Jakob Wiebe lived



The "Division" section, page 57 of the manual.

following year he sold 84 bushel. In 1878, the third summer in which they broke new soil with plows pulled by oxen, he sold 150 bushel wheat,



Each section in Jakob Wiebe's Arithmetic Book has a title page done in beautiful Fraktur. Here we see the start of the "Multiplication" section page 51

the later teachers came out of his classroom (Note 1). In September of 1880 *Rundschau* correspondent Heinrich Harder reported that the German school in Bergfeld had not missed classes one winter since they arrived here and classes were to start again on the 20th of that month. Those early classes were likely conducted in homes.

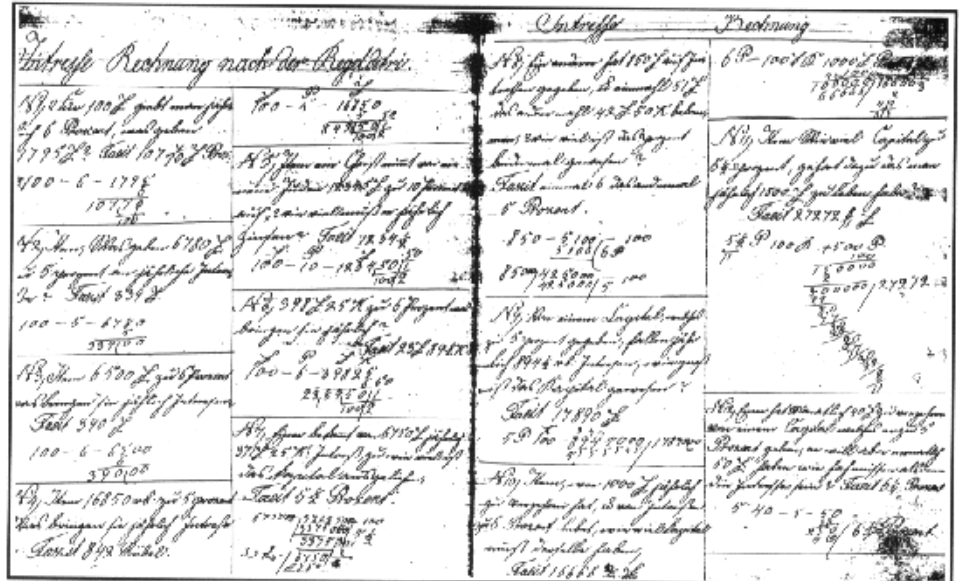
By October of 1880 classes had moved into a new school building in the middle of the village. When the Woolwich School District was formed in 1919 it made use of the Bergfeld school building for a classroom till 1939. When a new school was built that year, the old school building became a teacher's residence and was used for that purpose till 1960. It appears that Jakob Wiebe sought to make his classes meaningful and interesting to his students.

In 1910 a number of members of the Jakob Wiebe family died in a influenza epidemic. In later years, Mrs. Wiebe, nee Katharina Hiebert, also served the community as a midwife after Mrs. Julius Toews from the same village had retired.

Jakob and Katharina Hiebert Wiebe also left a rich legacy of descendants including: son Johann P. Wiebe who followed his father's footsteps as a teacher; see following article by Cathy Barkman; son Jakob P. Wiebe (1858-1909) a wealthy farmer in Kronsart; son Peter P. Wiebe (1867-1910) lived in Kronsart and was elected as a minister of the Chortitzer church in 1890; son Abraham H. Wiebe (b. 1892) attended University at Bluffton College (1919), and was the first from southeastern Manitoba to receive a Doctoral Degree in 1929. He worked for many years for the Tennessee Valley Authority; four of the Wiebe daughters married into Kleine Gemeinde families from Steinbach: Anna Wiebe married Heinrich W. Reimer (see Linda Buhler article on "Funeral Customs", Part Two), Helena Wiebe married Judge Gerhard Fast; Susanna Wiebe married Jakob W. Reimer (grandparents of Dr. Roy Vogt), and Judith Wiebe married Cornelius T. Kroeker. The story is that the Wiebe girls each took a turn working for the Steinbach businessmen who needed maids and since they had sons of marriageable age and the Wiebe girls were very pretty, the rest is history.

Judith Wiebe Kroeker was also a writer and according to the *75 Gedenkfeier*, pages 161-164, had prepared a manuscript regarding the history of Alt-Bergfeld a summary of which was published by Gerhard G. Kornelsen at that time. This summary was republished in *Historical Sketches*, pages 54-56. It appears, however, that these valuable writings have been lost by her family.

Note 1: This is oral tradition as recalled by several individuals I interviewed for my article on "Alt-Bergfeld", in *Historical Sketches*, pages 9-58. It is noted, however, that John C. Reimer in his article "Our Schools" writes that Heinrich Harder was the first teacher and that Jakob Hiebert was the second teacher: John C. Reimer, "Our Schools," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, 239. Obviously more research is required to clarify the matter.



Pages 70-71 of Jakob Wiebe's manual, sample pages showing math problems dealing with the calculation of interest.



In this photo we see the oldest dwelling of the village of Alt-Bergfeld (as of 1949) southwest of Grunthal. Here lived pioneer Jakob Wiebe and his family. Photo courtesy of 75 Gedenkfeier, page 162.

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A special memorial service will be held for the victims of the Steinbach, Ukraine, massacre of Dec. 7, 1919.

Johann P. Wiebe (1862-1922)

by Cathy Barkman, Box 3284, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Education is a important component of the Mennonite people. Many of our families have teachers somewhere in our backgrounds. Three generations of teachers in the Wiebe family are as follows: Jacob Wiebe (1835-1914) Bergfeld; Johann P. Wiebe (1862-1922) Neu-Bergfeld; and Jacob T. Wiebe (1889-1973) Barkfield. What is the background behind these Wiebes. Where did they come from and just as important--might you connect into this family?

Gerhard Wiebe was born in 1772 to Johann Wiebe from Schwartzdam, Prussia who was a member of the Ellerwald Gemeinde. Johann Wiebe was the brother of Gerhard Wiebe (1725-1796) who served as the Aeltester of the Ellerwald Gemeinde in West Prussia from 1778

until 1796 and who maintained a valuable journal and also drafted a Mennonite Confession of Faith and a Catechism.

Gerhard Wiebe (b. 1772) came to Russia in the year 1793-94 from the Zeyersvorderkampen area in Prussia. He married Sara Penner and together they settled in the village of Chortitza where they took over his father-in-law's Wirtschaft. Gerhard and Sara had a son Johann, born November 30, 1804, who moved to the Bergthal Colony where he married Katharina Hooge on September 4, 1830. Katharina (born 1811) was the daughter of Johann Hooge (born 1770) of Niederchoritza, Russia who came from Schoensee, GW, Prussia. Johann Wiebe died in Russia on July 10, 1840 and Katharina married

again to Jacob Harder (1810-1860).

Johann Wiebe and Katharina Hooge had at least five children according to the Bergthal Gemeinde Buch: Johann (1831-1917) married Margaretha Funk (born 1836); Gerhard (1832-1853); Jacob (1835-1914) married Katharina Penner (1837-1876); Anna (born 1838) who it appears remained in Chortitza, Russia; and Peter (1841-1860). Only Johann and Jacob came to Canada. Jacob and Katharina came to Canada with their nine children on the S.S. Moravian which arrived in Quebec on July 1, 1875. Johann and Margaretha came with six of their children on the S.S. Sarmatian which arrived in Quebec on July 6, 1875. Both families are recorded in the 1881 Federal Census as having settled in



Johann P. Wiebe (1862-1922) poses with his school children in front of the private school which was located on the south end of Grunthal. His own daughter Helena Wiebe (1900-1974) is on the top row third from the left. This picture was taken in 1910.

The pupils names are from left to right: girls first, Sarah E. Hiebert, Katharina R. Funk, Helena Wiebe, Katharina R. Sawatzky, Anna A. Braun, Greta B. Krahn, Katharina W. Kauenhowen; Second and Third row: Agatha W. Kauenhowen, Aganetha R. Funk, Maria G. Funk, Maria F. Krahn, Agatha C. Sawatzky, Maria C. Sawatzky, Aganetha G. Funk, Helena B. Doerksen, Susanna W. Kauenhowen, Anna B. Krahn, Maria R. Sawatzky, Aganetha F. Krahn, Agatha B. Krahn. The teacher Mr. Johann P. Wiebe. Back row: Johann C. Sawatzky, Cornelius R. Funk, Franz R. Funk, Cornelius C. Sawatzky, Johann E. Hiebert, Bernhard R. Funk, Jacob E. Hiebert, Franz R. Sawatzky, Johann F. Krahn, Johann R. Sawatzky, Jacob F. Krahn and in front with the hat, is Peter G. Funk, today Rev. PG. Funk, Paraguay, S.A. The school building still stands in Grunthal but was moved to Main St. a number of years ago and is being used as a family dwelling (This was written at the time of the publication of the Grunthal history book in 1974). Photo identification is courtesy of Grunthal History, page 92. Photo courtesy of Cathy Barkman.

the village of Bergfeld on the East Reserve in Manitoba.

It appears that Johann and Jacob's mother, Katharina (nee Hooge) Wiebe Harder came to Canada as well. Widow Harder, age 64, is listed as coming to Canada on the S.S. Sardinian arriving in Quebec on July 30, 1876. Katharina is recorded as living with her grandson Johann Wiebe and his wife Margaretha in Bergfeld on the East Reserve in 1881. In the Seelenliste of 1882 she appears with her son Johann Wiebe as having moved to the West Reserve. (For more information on the Johann and Margaretha Wiebe family see *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve*: Chapter One, "Alt-Bergfeld" by John Dyck and *The Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, "Register B", family #135 as published by The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc.)

Jacob Wiebe (1835-1914) married Katharina Penner (1837-1876) on December 3, 1857. Katharina was the daughter of Heinrich Penner (born 1810) and Katharina Harder (1815-1837). According to the Chortitzer Gemeinde Records, Jacob and Katharina had ten children. Katharina died May 27, 1876, shortly after arriving in Canada. Jacob married for a second time to Katharina Hiebert on August 19, 1877. The 1907 Chortitzer Gemeinde Buch records that 15 children were born to Jacob and his second wife, eight of which died in infancy or early childhood.

Jacob Wiebe (1835-1914) was a teacher in Bergthal Colony, Russia before coming to Canada. In Canada he was the first teacher in

Bergfeld on the East Reserve in Manitoba located a few miles southwest of what is now known as Grunthal. [See Note 1 to John Dyck's article on Jakob Wiebe.] It was important to the settlers that their children received an education. The Bergfeld school started off each morning with a hymn and a prayer. The next hour was spent working on the children's ABC's and/or spelling followed by a 15 minute recess. After recess was penmanship, closing hymn and prayer. After dinner another hymn, prayer and then they studied the German Fibel which was a primer. After recess they had Arithmetic, hymn and prayer. The books that they studied were ABC, the Fibel and then Catechism followed by the New Testament and then Old Testament studies.

Jacob and Katharina's son Johann was also a teacher. Johann was born May 5, 1862. He married Helena Toews on November 1, 1885. Helena was the daughter of Julius Toews (October 8, 1831-August 13, 1897) and Katharina Harder (March 19, 1835-August 7, 1901). She was born on July 24, 1864 in Russia. Johann and Helena had ten children, seven of which died in infancy or early childhood. Johann was a school teacher in Neu-Bergfeld after 1902 and was still teaching there in the year 1905-06. In 1902 he was teaching at the Burwalde school. In 1910 Johann P. Wiebe was teaching in Grunthal.

After the death of Johann's wife, Helena on September 25, 1903, Johann married for a second time to Widow Johann Heinrichs nee

Getruda Esau born March 5, 1878. Together they had one son Gerhard born in 1907 and a still-born child in 1913. Getruda brought to the marriage two children from her previous marriage, Aron Heinrichs (born 1898) and Maria Heinrichs (born 1900). Johann P. Wiebe died October 4, 1922. Getruda remarried for a third time to Jacob S. Martens born 1879.

Johann and Helena's eldest son Jacob T. Wiebe (1889-1973) married Maria Wiens (June 19, 1887-1973) who was the daughter of Jacob Wiens (1847-1921) and Susanna Hoepfner (1857-1925). Jacob was also a school teacher in Barkfield about 1920.

Other descendants from the Wiebe families have gone on to become teachers. For example, Johann and Helena's daughter Helena (1900-1974) married Jacob R. Barkman (1897-1974) from the Kleine Gemeinde Church. Jacob and Helena had children who went into the teaching profession: Lawrence Barkman (deceased) was a teacher; Pete Barkman also taught for a short time; John Barkman, who is married to Joanne Penner, has been and is still involved in teaching and administration at the Briercrest Bible Institute in Caronport, Saskatchewan; daughters Rose Barkman Peters and Betty Anne Barkman Funk both taught for a short time but have since changed their occupations.

I am sure that there are other descendants from these families who have chosen the field of education as a career. Many will have unknowingly followed in the foot-steps of their Wiebe forefathers.

Education

continued from page 8

Stoesz writes that the reading program was divided into four classes or levels instead of grades: *Fibler* (primary class), *Katechismer* (Catechism class), *Testamentler* (New Testament class) and *Bibler* (Old Testament class).²⁶

For these subjects the teaching materials consisted of the Bible, the Catechism, a book of bible stories (*Biblische Geschichten*), the *Gesangbuch* (the traditional Mennonite songbook with a history going back to the reformation martyrs of the faith), and the *Choralbuch* (a smaller songbook with *ziffern* or notes). In many cases the churches themselves reprinted these materials.

The instruction was carried out by reading from the Bible, Bible stories, and Catechism. The students memorized Bible verses, Bible stories, songs from the *Gesangbuch*, and the Catechism. John C. Reimer writes that it was not unusual for a student to be capable of answering from memory all 212 questions in the Catechism.

For example, the teacher might read a Bible story which was later "reinforced by posing questions to the children. Further a Bible verse appropriate for the story was memorized. Song lyrics were composed to be sung with each story." The children learned to sing using the *Choralbuch*, but only those melodies which

were suitable for singing with the lyrics in the *Gesangbuch*.

Songs with up to 70 lines and poems of 100 verses were memorized for Christmas. These items were then presented at the large extended family gatherings which were traditional among the Mennonites. The children were taught to write a thank-you card to their parents for the kindness which they had bestowed and expressed their desire for eternal salvation.

The basic instruction in addition to religious exercises concentrated on reading, writing, arithmetic and geography. Reading exercises started with the *Fibel*, a traditional reader used by the Mennonites which had a picture of a red hen on the cover. John C. Reimer writes that "This *Fibel* with the sober looking red hen on the cover was in such general use that I expect that there was no true Mennonite to be found during the first 30 years in Manitoba who had not learnt to read from the "Red Hen Fibel."²⁷

John C. Reimer writes that the second reader in most cases was the Catechism although some teachers also used the New Testament. The last reader for the upper class was the Bible. Around the turn of the century other "Fibeln" and readers became available and were used in some schools.

The teachers often also had their own personal handwritten collections of stories which were usually moralistic in nature and presumably read to the class or used as material for writing and reading exercises. A "Journal" belonging to veteran Molotschna teacher Cornelius

F. Friesen (1810-92) is still extant. A study of the material included in these collections provides a picture of the personal interests and attitudes of the teachers.

Writing skills and grammar were taught through writing exercises. Good penmanship was encouraged through the art of Schönschrieben or Calligraphy. The students kept a collection of their better work which the teacher bound into a little booklet using thread. Other times a booklet would include a piece of work from all the students in a class or school. Many samples of these exercises are still extant and serve as wonderful mementos and keepsakes of the pioneer days.

Dennis Stoesz refers to an 1882 notebook from the village of Blumstein which showed six students in attendance ranging in age from 9 to 13. All the students were children of the four families who made up the village. Each student copied a piece of work assigned by the teacher. One student named Heinrich Stoesz wrote, "Humility thinks often and gladly on those who are weak; never boasting of its own merit, it makes itself fair and reasonable as towards others. Blumstein, 4 December 1882."²⁸

Some teachers expressed their creativity by teaching their children *Fraktur*, a traditional art form originating in Northern Europe. *Fraktur* consisted of artistically formed letters or designs which were then coloured. Another variation was the *Irrgarten* which was a puzzle or maze in the form of a paper cutwork and *Fraktur* combination.²⁹ The students would have fun work-

W. Thiem-White's Report 1888

by Jacob Doerksen, Box 154, Ile des Chenes, Manitoba, R0A 0T0

In 1878 the Protestant Board of Education invited the Mennonite Churches on the East Reserve to register their schools with the Board. The promise that accompanied the invitation read "that you shall hire teachers from your own people, and teaching shall remain under control of your Churches, and your rights and privileges shall in no way be hindered, and instruction shall be in your language or as you choose."

The Church at Chortitz group dropped out of the agreement offered after two years of participation. The Kleine Gemeinde and wherever joint Kleine Gemeinde / Holdemann schools operated remained under the Board until 1907. Greenland was formed in 1896 and remained under the newly formed Department of Education throughout. At the end of the school year 1888 twenty Mennonite schools were registered with the Protestant Board of Education. Seven Kleine Gemeinde and thirteen West Reserve schools. After the following sequence of events only seven Kleine Gemeinde / Holdeman schools were left to accept the government grant. The Mennonite Education Society was formed in November 1888. The Gretna School on the West Reserve opened in the fall of 1889.

The report of W. Thiem-White is noteworthy for two reasons: Firstly, it illustrates that as early as 1888 the Manitoba Government already had a view that the Christian educational system of the Mennonites was without merit and that the educational system had to be changed in favour of a public school system which would indoctrinate the values of the State. The second interesting point is that Johann Funk, Aeltester of the Bergthaler in the West Reserve, declined the services of W. Thiem-White in 1888.

From the Protestant Board of Education Minutes Book "D"

(Provincial Archives of Manitoba G955)

February 2, 1888

The committee consisting of the Superintendent and Wm. Hespeler appointed to a Committee consisting of this Board to examine into the condition of the Mennonite Schools with the view of suggesting means of improvement, reported separately and verbally as follows:

The Superintendent states that from information obtained from Wm. Hespeler's visit to the Mennonite Schools in June last and from the reports of inspector Wm. Remple, they were convinced that these schools were almost utterly useless and were of the opinion that this Board could no longer avoid the alternatives of refusing further payments of the Legislative Grant for these and or taking immediate steps for their improvement.

Wm. Hespeler described the peculiar manners and customs of the Mennonites and reported their schools to be inferior today to those they established upon arrival from Russia, because they brought fairly well qualified teachers with them when they emigrated but had not

been able to replace them when they ceased teaching.

He stated that Normal School instruction for the Mennonite teachers was needed and that this could only be done by a person able to speak the German language and familiar with the best methods of teaching. He reported that the committee had agreed that Mr. Thiem-White a graduate of the last sessions of the Normal School possessed the required qualifications and recommended his appointment.

The report of the committee was adopted and Mr. W. Thiem-White was appointed as Normal instructor of Mennonite Schools for One year from the present date: his duties to consist of visits from school to school; his stay at each school to last a week or more at the discretion of the committee; his time at each school to be employed in giving all the instructions in his power to both teacher and pupils; the months of July and August to be occupied by sessions of a month each at the two reserves for instructions of Mennonite teachers only; and special attention to be given at all visits to induce teachers and pupils gradually to learn the English language.

March 1, 1888

A report was received from Mr. W. Thiem-White inspector of Mennonite Schools that his services had been declined by the Bergthal Community and a letter from Mr. Funk Elder for this community was also received to the same effect.

It was resolved that Mr. Thiem-White be instructed to proceed to visit all schools of the Mennonites who have received Government Grant and tender his services as inspector in each case, and the Committee consisting of Mr. Hespeler and the Superintendent was continued and empowered to direct the movement of Mr. Thiem-White.

March 15, 1888

Mr. Hespeler presented verbally a report of the Committee on Mennonite Schools that the New Inspector, W. Thiem-White had already been welcomed by several Mennonite Board of Trustees and was proceeding to visit the schools as directed.....

August 1, 1888

Wm. Hespeler reported that he attended the examination of Mennonite teachers at Altona to assist Mr. Thiem-White, at the request of the Superintendent.

March 9, 1889

Report of Committee

The Mennonite people have during the last few years kept a number of their schools; varying from 12 to 20 under the control of the Board. This number of schools; however is not more than half the number sufficient to accomplish the Mennonite children; and a number of the

other schools under the control of the Mennonite religious bodies have also been kept in operation.

In Mennonite schools under the control of the Board the character of the teaching has never been satisfactory and your Committee has reason to think that in the other Mennonite Schools it has at least been no better. But the Board has continued to accept and aid such schools as have been placed under its control, in the hope that gradually the people and teachers would aim at the accomplishments of better results.

With this object in view the Board in February 1887 (should read 1888) appointed a person acquainted with the German language and trained in the Provincial Normal School to inspect the schools, aid the teachers and encourage the people to support their schools more liberally. Owing to prejudices that have proved difficult to remove, some of the Mennonite people refused from the first to avail themselves of the aid thus provided; and after a years trial of this method your Committee cannot find that the efforts made towards the improvement of their schools have been appreciated by the Mennonite people or that their schools are sufficiently improved to justify a continuation of this special expenditures. Your committee feels bound to say in the connection that they cannot attribute this to any unfaithfulness or neglect on the part of Mr. Thiem-White who undertook the work assigned him energetically and hopefully, and continued at it under numerous discouragements.

The report of Mr. Thiem-White shows the condition of these Schools at the present time. It is sufficiently discouraging to all true friends of the Mennonite people. The teachers are illiterate and without ambition toward improvement, their work in the school room is useless or nearly so, and the course of study - if it may be called, consists in many causes almost wholly of religious exercises. The teachers are in some instances paid only the amount of the Legislative Grant received by the school and in no case is the salary offered a teacher sufficient to induce any qualified person to accept it.

The Board has continued to aid these schools with the desire to encourage efforts towards improvement and with the hope that the example of some of the schools might stimulate the others, but these hopes have not been realized and in the opinion of your Committee the Board should now consider whether in justice to the cause of education in the Province, the liberal Legislative Grant of \$150.00 should be paid annually to any school which makes no use of it towards effecting the legitimate objects of a school.

All of which is respectively submitted. **B. Sommerset, Committee**

(Mr. W. Thiem-White Report)

A Normal session of one month was held in

June 1888 which 10 scholars attended, 5 of which are teaching to-day in district schools; the remaining 5 are not teaching at present.

I have inspected all schools in operation, some of them twice, for a week more or less, as the session and circumstances permitted. My inspector's work has been accounted with great difficulties at some schools, as I was not able to give the full necessary instructions because the Trustees and teacher did not readily fall in with the new system. My impression is that besides the inspecting more time should be devoted for the Normal work in future.

The Normal session of 3 months at some central point, I think, would be well attended; but as we cannot get a district school for longer than a month there remains the difficulty of finding a suitable building.

The ignorance among the present teachers is very great, the majority of them cannot read,

write or spell correctly in German - the language they are assuming to teach - nor have they efficient knowledge to the elements of English which few are attempting to teach.

To train a Mennonite teacher means to give him a Public School education upwards from Standard II and give him instructions in the art of teaching. It will take considerable time to make effectual progress as it is not the ignorance of the individual teacher alone I have to contend with. The Trustees, teachers and parents have been accustomed to the Old Mennonite strictly sectarian school while I endeavour to introduce the Canadian School System.

I have tried to make a gradual change in the system without interfering with their religion. But as in some schools very little but religious exercises are practised, I had to advocate that a larger portion of their time be allowed for general instructions. I beg to enclose a pamphlet

written by former Mennonite School inspector Mr. Wm. Remple, which I have translated into English for your Perusal. This pamphlet shows how a portion of the Mennonite communities desire to conduct their schools.

Comments.

The report of the Committee on Mennonite Schools was adopted and it was resolved that the Superintendent be instructed to notify the Mennonite Schools that the payment of the Legislative Grant after June next shall be made only upon the fulfilment of the conditions required for such payments by law and the regulations of the Board unless the case of any school showing a desire and intention of fulfilling these conditions; and in that case the Board will continue to afford every aid and encouragement in its power.

Education

continued from page 13

ing through the maze and following the story and lesson which it contained, usually of a moral or Biblical nature.

Fraktur had been discouraged by Johann Cornies, the great Mennonite social reformer in Russia, on the grounds that it was sissified. The KG had always been enthusiastic supporters of Cornies' reforms, but obviously he had not been able to convince everyone in the KG of the validity of his views with respect to *Fraktur*. e.g. Cornelius P. Friesen a very orthodox teacher in Blumenort was known for his fine *Fraktur* work.³⁰

Arithmetic was an important subject that was taught by way of teachers' manuals which had been brought over from Russia. These manuals were usually handwritten by each individual teacher and sometimes decorated with beautiful *Fraktur* work.³¹ The Arithmetic manual of Jakob P. Wiebe (1835-1914) of Alt-Bergfeld, who had already served as a teacher in Russia, provides a good example of such a manual of a Chortitzer teacher.³² See article by John Dyck elsewhere in this issue.³³

John C. Reimer has outlined the daily school schedule before the turn of the century:

"The daily schedule before the turn of the century was quite standard, and fairly firm, somewhat as follows: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings: 1. Bible History, 2. Reading, 3. Writing. Tuesday and Thursday mornings were the same, except that language studies were substituted for Bible History in all the various levels. After dinner for the first 4 days of the week, came arithmetic, whereby the greatest part of the afternoon was occupied, and the remainder of the day was utilized with various other subjects, such as geography, and later also the English Language, singing, etc. Fewer subjects were taught in the schools in those days and therefore there was more time available, much of which was used for memorization. Friday afternoon was utilized for the reciting of Cat-

echism, free hand drawing or according to a model, locating Bible references, practising singing, reading out stories to the class, etc."

There were no breaks or recesses during the day but the children were allowed to go outside, first all the girls and then all the boys. In many schools the teacher was creative and innovative and learning progressed well. As in all school systems there were also schools where everything was done by rote so that the students were no longer challenged.

The best students were allowed to sit in front according to the level of their ability. Bad behaviour meant that the student would have to move to the back. The writing was done on tablets which were wiped clean with a rag and soap water. The opening and closing of the school day was made by a song which everyone stood to sign and a prayer recited by the teacher.

One of the poems which was memorized and recited extensively was called "The School Regulations". The poem had 28 verses which depicted how a model child or student was to act. John C. Reimer has written that in many schools this poem was recited every morning as routinely as "Oh Canada" was sung in later schools.

The first stanza of this poem provides a good parting look at the daily operation of the private school:

Das erste was du tust;
When du aufstehest fruh;
Ist ein Gebet zu Gott;
Kind, das vergesse nie;

The first which shall be done
Each day when you arise,
To make a prayer to God
Child, forget this ne'er.

School Inspectors, 1882-84.

As already mentioned, the Protestant School Board had appointed William Hespeler as the Inspector for the Mennonite schools in 1880. The intention was that Hespeler, who was highly regarded by both the Mennonites and the Gov-

ernment, would smooth the way between the two on this delicate issue.

Dr. Adolf Ens writes that "during the third year of his inspectorship, the actual visiting of schools was done by Jakob Friesen, who also wrote the Inspector's Report to the Superintendent and signed it for Hespeler."³⁴

In 1882 Jakob Friesen, the former teacher examiner, was appointed as the first Mennonite School Inspector. The number of district schools actually increased slightly, from a low point of 7 in 1881, to 9 in 1882 and 13 in 1883. For the first time a number of schools on the W. Reserve were registered and included in these statistics. One of the first district schools was in Reinland where it operated against the wishes of the Church authorities. The teacher was Wilhelm Rempel.

The Inspector's Reports always provide an interesting view of how the E. Reserve educational system was faring. For example, in 1882 Jakob Friesen's report includes the following comments about Steinbach: "I found 22 students present. The school was administered well and the teacher very competent. The students have advanced well ahead in their studies such as reading, arithmetic and geography, in addition to religious instruction."

Wilhelm Rempel was appointed as the second Inspector for the Mennonite communities in December 1884. Adolf Ens refers to him as "one of the best educated and most capable teachers in the Mennonite community."³⁵ On the other hand, this can be seen as the beginning of a series of Government appointments of individuals who did not have the general support of the constituency they were to represent.

Municipal Government 1884.

An important new factor in relations between the Provincial Government and the Mennonite communities was the *Municipal Act* of 1883 which created a new form of local government called Municipalities. Since 1874 local government in the Reserves had been functioning under the Gebietsamt system which the Mennonites had brought over from Russia.

Instead of enacting enabling legislation

Cornelius C.F. Toews (1867-1928)

by granddaughter Elma Peters Plett, Box 116, Landmark, Manitoba, R0A 0X0

My grandfather Cornelius C.F. Toews together with his parents Cornelius and Justina Toews immigrated to Canada in 1874, and settled in the village of Alt-Bergfeld southwest of Grunthal: see John Dyck, "Alt-Bergfeld," in *Historical Sketches*, pages, 9-58, for additional information regarding the Toews family. The extended Toews clan was one of the prominent families in Bergfeld.

At a young age Cornelius C. F. Toews moved to Strassburg (near Niverville) to teach. There he met his future wife, Katharina Friesen, daughter of Aron and Anna Friesen, who also immigrated to Canada in 1874. He filed for a homestead on SW 4-7-4E on August 26, 1890. Together they started farming also raising a family of 3 sons and 5 daughters. One son and one daughter died at a young age. The farmland here was quite rolling, so they chose a small hill to locate their farm yard. According to the R. M. of Hanover Tax Rolls he owned the entire south half of Section 4-7-4E (320 acres of prime land) by 1910.

Cornelius taught school in Strassburg for a number of years. The Strassberg school house was located on Section 5-7-4E. Some of his students included three daughters of Peter T. and Katherina Loepky: Katharina Leppky (deceased), who later married Jake Klippenstein; Susie Leppky (b. 1902) who attended school in 1908. Later she married David Klippenstein. She is now 94 years old and residing at the Personal Care Home in Steinbach; and Helena Leppky (deceased) who later married Abram Kehler. Others students included Abram and George

Friesen, sons of Peter Friesen.

My grandfather (as I have been told) was a neat meticulous person and this showed on his yard. The grass was kept short, the buildings painted and lots of trees shaded the farm house. Strassburg was known for its artesian wells so there was never a shortage of good water. The wells were hand dug and lined with a wooden cribbing which protruded about 3 feet above the ground, then covered with a wooden lid. The water was drawn with a rope and bucket. This well overflowed year round. The pipe that was connected to the well led the overflow water to a trough to water cattle and the rest of the water flowed on.

As I was told my Mother and her younger brother Aron, who liked to experiment with his ideas, had fun plugging the overflow pipe in summer with the right size carrots, then watch the water rise in the well, then removing the stopper and watch the water squirt far into the field. This particular time Uncle Aron was going to plug the pipe with a wooden stopper and my mother and Uncle Aron both forgot about pulling the plug. By this time the stopper had enlarged so that they were unable to pull it out. When Grandfather came home late that evening there was water and mud all around the well. Being a person of a short temper (as I have been told) this incident did not go over too well.

Grandfather had a musical talent and he played the violin and together with his daughter Anna, who played the harp, they played in

harmony.

My grandparents must have had a prosperous farm. In 1916 they built a new house. It was a large two storey house, a model very well-to-do couples could afford. This house burned to the ground approximately 5 years ago in 1991.

Grandfather was not only a person of neat character, he was also concerned about the well-being of his family. He had very strict curfew hours, (as I have been told) he knocked at the wall or on the floor when it was time for the visitors to leave. He checked up if every child and later every young adult was in bed at a certain hour. Grandfather also reprimanded his daughter when she tortured an insect and he handed her this verse and asked her to memorize it and recite it to him:

Qualle nich ein Tier zum schertz
Denn est fuht wie du den Schmertz.

My Grandfather died at an early age of 61 years after a few weeks of illness. He was buried in the cemetery in Strassburg.

After that my Grandmother kept up farming together with her 3 youngest children. My memories of her are that she was a happy ambitious person. I remember the warm welcome we got when we came to visit her in Strassburg. It is understood that we did not go to visit her very often since it was a 2 1/2 hour drive with horse and buggy and she must have missed us. She came to visit us, all by herself with horse and buggy. My mother thought she was a brave woman. I remember the delicious chicken noodle soup she cooked for us.



Farmyard of Cornelius C. F. Toews situated on SW 4-7-4E. Photo courtesy of Elma Peters Plett



New house built by Cornelius C. F. Toews in 1916 which burned down in 1991. Photo courtesy of Elma Peters Plett.

As a ten year old, her house was very special to me. The large enclosed veranda served as a porch. Then coming into the kitchen I remember the large cook stove which served the dual purpose of heating the room and cooking and baking. There was a kitchen cabinet and a chair without a back with a wash basin on it. The second room with a small table and chairs, nowadays would be called a kitchenette. In this room was a stairway leading to the upper floor and also a stairway to the basement. The cover (or Kalla Look) was usually open because it was too heavy to open and close every time someone went down to the basement. I was warned not to fall in. Then to my left was a dining room—at least it had a dining room set in it.

Opposite that room divided by an arch was a parlour—nowadays called a living room. I was fascinated by this room. It contained a chesterfield and chair, an area rug on the floor, and in one corner a big leather chair (nowadays called a recliner). In front of this chair was a rug made of the fur of a black dog. I do not remember ever visiting in this room, but I always took the opportunity to look in. Also very special to me was the fact that Grandmother had a record player or gramophone as it was called then. It was an Edison and it had cylinder-shaped records.

Outside I remember the well. When I looked in, I could see my reflection in the water. How scared I was that I would fall in.

In 1946 Grandmother decided to sell the farm and move to Steinbach. She bought a house on Reimer Avenue. She could not have chosen a more suitable spot as this was close to her son Aron and also to the H. W. Reimer store and opposite the Kornelson school. She sat and watched the school children. Even though she did not know each child by name, she knew them

by face and clothes. Grandmother got very upset if that certain child was mistreated by someone. Grandmother also had a small garden in which she took great pride. In it grew raspberries and enough cucumbers for dill pickles and other vegetables. She kept her lawn short and I presume it was cut with a rotary push mower.

Grandmother came to visit us on the farm from time to time, but after a few days she wanted to go home. When my mother would ask her, why so soon, she would say, she missed the school children.

As a hobby Grandmother made rugs (floacki) and knitted socks. I once asked her how many rugs she had made and she answered that she had never counted, but she was sure if all the rugs would be put end to end she would be able to walk to the H. W. Reimer store (located where the Post Office now stands) on rugs.

Grandmother had many friends and she entertained many and served them with vassa, which was, raspberry preserve, brown bread and dill pickles. As I was told, Grandmother had a special friend, Mrs. Ben Kehler. While visiting one evening they forgot to watch the clock and way past midnight they became aware of how late it had got to be. The worried daughter was ready to go look for her mother.

When Grandmother got sick, she was cared for in her home by her daughters till she passed away in April, 1946. She was buried in the Strassburg cemetery.

When I think of my Grandmother, I wish I could make my children and grandchildren and friends feel as welcome in our home, as I was made to feel when I visited my Grandmother. My Grandparents have left us a memorable heritage. A legacy of love, hard work and exceptional honest character. But most important of all, a heritage of faith.



Cornelius C. F. Toews and Mrs. Katherine Toews, nee Friesen. Photo courtesy of Elma Peters Plett.

Some of the grandchildren of Cornelius C. F. Toews and Katharine Friesen still living in the area today are Ernie Toews, Barkman Concrete, Lloyd Dueck, Steinbach Credit Union Ltd, and Alvina Loeppky and Jac Loeppky in Niverville.

About the author: Elma Peters Plett is a homemaker. She and her husband Ben K. Plett farm in the Willowridge area west of Landmark.

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Education

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which would have provided legal recognition for long-cherished and smoothly-functioning institutions such as the Gebietsamt, the provincial government imposed a completely foreign system upon them. Thereby the provincial government also demonstrated that it would emulate the lack of sensitivity and governing ability which had so endeared the federal government to the Metis only a decade earlier.

Four municipalities were created in the Reserves as of January 1884: Reinland and Stanley in the West and Hanover and Hespeler in the East. However, the two Municipalities in the East Reserve always functioned as one, under the name Hanover.

Major conflicts arose in the West Reserve, when dissidents used the system to circumvent the governance of the Gebietsamt and the authority of the Reinländer Gemeinde or "Old Coloniers" as they were frequently called since they originated in the Chortitza Colony in Russia. Almost surprisingly these conditions did not prevail in the East Reserve where the Municipality quietly took over the functions of the Gebietsamt and continued operations practically the same as before. It seems that the East Reserve did not have the same degree of differences of view that often led to difficulties in the West.

School Inspectors, 1885-88.

The inspector's reports for 1885 and 1886 reveal how the E. Reserve educational system was faring from the standpoint of the Protestant School Board. From inspector Wilhelm Rempel in the year 1885:

"Twenty-Two schools. Villages having school houses: Kronsthal, Bergthal, Schoenthal, New Bergthal, (West) Edenberg, Reinland, Gruenfeld, Steinbach, Blumenhof, Blumenort and Rosenort. Ten had rented buildings. Maps, eastern and western hemispheres in Reinland; Manitoba, and North West Territories maps in Hochstadt (East). The discipline in some of the schools is a little too faint, in others a little better and just a few schools are excellently guided in this respect."

"Most of the teachers are willing to conduct their schools in the most successful way, but unfortunately, fail for lack of method. There is some fault with the parents of children attending school, and also with some of the trustees, too; hindering the free progress of their schools, being under the impression as if an advancing of the school would lead the Mennonites into inconvenience and difficulties of conscience. Under such circumstances it might be advisable to drop the school districts rather than doubtfully stick to them. Still I hope some favourable change will take place soon."³⁶

From Inspector Wilhelm Rempel in the year 1886.

"It is with pleasure that I say there are several of the teachers employed who try hard to fill their position honestly, and indeed, they have succeeded considerably. This principally applies

to the teachers in the Eastern Reserve, but at the same time, I am glad to state there are some five or six of these on the Western Reserve, and at Morris, who are going to rival their colleagues. But it is not only the teachers whom I would hold responsible for the defects in conducting their schools, for there is a great deal of indifference amongst the farmers as to properly educating their children and even opposition as to several of the subjects to be taught, and it seems to me as if we will have to wait for years to come till our wrongly informed people surmount that aversion prevailing amongst them regarding the better education of our rising generation."³⁷

Rempel served as Inspector until January, 1888, when his appointment was not renewed. Adolf Ens states that the reason was "a new system by which all inspectors were to hold full-time year round appointments."

His replacement was W. Thiem-White who had normal school training and knew the German language. He ran into more opposition than his predecessor and would serve for only one year. The lack of insight of this gentleman is evident from one of his reports which stated that "teaching in Mennonite District Schools is nearly useless and too religious."³⁸

Serious concerns regarding the Mennonite schools were also being raised by the Board of Education. Adolf Ens writes that "A special committee . . . found conditions in the . . . district schools so inadequate that it wondered if the annual legislative grants of \$150.00 should continue to be paid to such schools."

Gretna Training School, 1889.

In the view of Inspector Wilhelm Rempel, the training of the teachers under his supervision was inadequate. In 1885 he had already initiated discussions with others who shared his views, particularly in the West Reserve Berghthaler Gemeinde.

In 1888 a committee was established to create a Mennonite teacher training school. This was supported by Johann Funk (1836-1917), Aeltster of the Berghthaler on the W. Reserve. As will become evident later, this had serious consequences for Funk who was not acting with the mandate of his constituency.

Nonetheless, a school society was formed in 1889 with Wilhelm Rempel as teacher to begin instruction in fall. This action had the support of the department of education and so the teachers in the registered district schools in the E. Reserve attended in order to obtain an up-graded teacher's certificate. Rempel was not really qualified as a teacher instructor as he had only taught at the elementary level and resigned after one year and the school closed.

At least one KG teacher attended the teacher's training course in Gretna in the first year, namely, Cornelius P. Friesen of Blumenort. He was a professional teacher who could just as easily have taught the course as attended.

Public Schools Act, 1890.

The *Public Schools Act* of 1890 heralded a new era in education in the Province of Manitoba. Already during the 1870s forces had

been at work to abolish the denominational schools and to make them more uniform and more English.

By 1888 population increases insured the English domination of provincial politics. Adolf Ens writes that "The new Liberal government of Premier Thomas Greenway no longer had faith in the quality of Catholic schools..." Accordingly it was decided to abolish the denominational schools.

The result was the *Public Schools Act* of 1890 which provided for a system of district schools operated by locally elected boards, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education and the Minister of Education. Also abolished was the right of the French and Mennonites to use French and German, respectively, as the language of instruction.

In one sense the new system had only minimal effect on the E. Reserve, as the majority of the schools were not registered as district schools and were not receiving financial support from the government. But the Manitoba schools question became a national issue and eventually brought down the Conservative Government in 1896.

A compromise was worked out between Greenway and the new Liberal government of Sir Wilfred Laurier in Ottawa. Rural schools where ten or more pupils spoke a language other than English were permitted to use that language for instruction under a bilingual system.

The revised legislation of 1897 was satisfactory to the public school advocates among the Mennonites as it allowed them to keep German as a language of instruction. The majority who retained their privately funded church schools were allowed to continue unmolested.

Heinrich Ewert 1891-1893.

The *Public Schools Act* of 1890 did impact on those Mennonites who believed in the public education system. New life was given to the movement when the School Society made a deal with the provincial government that the teacher of the Gretna School would also be the Inspector of Mennonite schools for the Department of Education.

At this juncture a fateful decision was made. Heinrich Ewert (1855-1934), a Mennonite from Kansas, was recruited taking up the position in September 1891. Although Ewert was born and raised in Prussia, he could not even speak Low German, the working language of his constituents. At the same time he was influenced by the teachings of German Separatist Pietism, which were not recognized as Biblically-sound by the vast majority in both the East and West Reserve. Furthermore Ewert was identified with the American Mennonites who were seen as having "made a fundamental compromise in their faith." His attitude towards the Mennonites of Southern Manitoba was that [they] . . . were in as much need of help as the heathen in Africa."³⁹

This was obviously not a good formula for someone who needed to interact positively with his constituents and encourage them in their educational endeavours. While this may have appeared to be a good decision from the standpoint of a small minority who were proponents

of secular State-controlled schools, it was a terrible misjudgment on the part of provincial educators who obviously had no knowledge of the intricacies of the issue with which they were dealing. Their actions indicated that they were also certainly too arrogant to make any efforts to learn to know about their constituency and its concerns.

The decision was also fateful to Johann Funk who, in supporting the School Society, was specifically acting against the wishes of his parishioners. They saw his adoption of American Revivalist (and later Fundamentalist) forms of religiosity and social acculturation as treachery and fundamentally in conflict with their faith.

In 1893 the majority of the W. Reserve Bergthaler reorganized themselves under the leadership of Abraham Doerksen (1852-1929) of Sommerfeld and became known as the Sommerfelder Gemeinde. Doerksen was a brother to Rev. Heinrich Doerksen (1855-1933) of Schönthal in the E. Reserve, a relationship which would impact positively upon their respective Gemeinden for the next two decades.

KG Schools 1892-1902.

In 1892 the trustees of the Steinbach school were Johann T. Barkman, Pet. T. Barkman and Johann R. Reimer with 46 students attending. Jakob S. Friesen served as the Secretary-Treasurer.

The KG supported the Gretna training school and Ewert to the extent that its teachers attended in order to obtain their upgrading certificates. John C. Reimer writes that Ewert "established short teacher's courses, in order to thereby enhance the subject knowledge of the teachers. For this the teachers had to travel to Gretna, mostly with horses, and remain there a few days. Here something more was taught of the secular language and the teachers were familiarized with more subject matter."⁴⁰

In 1893 Steinbach teacher Gerhard E. Kornelsen attended an "upgrading" course at the Teacher Training Institute in Gretna. He recorded the experience in his notebook: "On June 26, 1873, I and C. P. Friesen teacher [in Blumenort] drove to Hochstadt, where Heinrich Rempel joined us, and then after we had eaten dinner, we drove along with Franz K. Goossen to Gretna, where we arrived on the 27th a little after midday." Kornelsen then recorded the standards for teachers which Heinrich Ewert enunciated during the session.

Other KG teachers who attended the teacher training school in Gretna during the 1890s included the brothers Johann W. Dueck and Peter W. Dueck; Abram K. Friesen, the son of pioneer teacher Abraham R. Friesen; and Heinrich R. Reimer, who would later be the "father" of Prairie Rose, or Landmark, as it is known today.

During the mid-1890s Ewert held a series of teacher training courses in Steinbach which were supported by the teachers of KG background. Gerhard E. Kornelsen writes in his diary of a course he attended on November 28, 1897, in Niverville where Ewert "conducted an examination in the waiting room of the train station,

where difficult questions had to be answered."⁴¹

The KG teachers also continued their own teacher's conferences rotating between the various school districts. Kornelsen provided a record of these conferences for the 1895-6 term. It appears that Cornelius P. Friesen of Blumenort acted as a "senior" teacher or examiner for the KG teachers as he signed the majority of the ten conferences reported. For example, on December 28, 1895, the conference took place in Hochstadt where the lesson consisted of "66-77 words while reading; the text was the Book of Job." C.P. Friesen signed the minutes with the comments that "style work very necessary" and "to stand up while reciting lessons."

A general comment at the end of the report deals with the teaching of geography: "Methods for Geography. The material in the text must be divided into one hour segments, and for each designated geography class (hour) one lesson has to be learned by memory, and the places, cities, or rivers which are studied must naturally be pointed out on the map (C.P.F.). It is extremely necessary to practice a lot of conjugating and declension in order to learn to speak correctly (C.P.F.)."

The Secretary-Treasurer for the Blumenort school for the 1899-1900 term was Johann R. Reimer. The trustees for 1901 were Abraham Penner and Klaas P. Reimer. The wages for the Blumenort teacher were roughly \$1.00 per day. During the school year of 1901-2, Peter W. Toews (Schmedt Toews), Peter T. Barkman and Johann I. Friesen were trustees in Steinbach. The school principal was Gerhard E. Kornelsen and the "small room" teacher was Heinrich Rempel.

Chortitzer Schools 1883-1903.

The Chortitzers were largely unaffected by the activities of the School Inspectors as they remained aloof from both the district school system as well as the teacher training facility. By 1882 the Chortitzer school system had decreased from a high of thirty schools in 1878, to fifteen or sixteen. These school facilities served thirty-three Chortitzer villages.

The operation of a private school system of some fifteen schools without government assistance of any kind, was a considerable undertaking. The Chortitzers set about the task in their usual low-key and unassuming manner. Teachers were hired, curriculums developed and approved, village school taxes levied and collected, school buildings erected and maintained, schools inspected, etc.

A major change for the Chortitzer was the withdrawal of Ohm Gerhard Wiebe as Aeltester and titular head of the school system in April of 1882. His position was filled by Assistant-Aeltester David Stoesz, himself a former teacher.

One of the first issues which Stoesz had to deal with was the establishment of an independent Gemeinde for the Bergthaler who had relocated to the West Reserve and the resulting severing of financial and other ties which this entailed.

On January 18, 1883, he recorded that a meeting was held to settle the school accounts between the Bergthalers who had relocated to

the Altona area of the West Reserve and those who had remained in the East. Present were the ministers, the Waisenamt leaders and the Reeves of Hanover and Stanley. The result was to confirm the financial independence of the schools on the West Reserve even though the Chortitzer must have been extremely hard hit by the loss of half of their population and financial base.

At the same time, a few of the Chortitzer continued in district schools. The Niverville School District No. 315 founded in 1884 although largely made up of English and Scottish people also included Mennonites such as Gerhard Kliever, first Reeve of the R. M. of Hanover, G. Hiebert and Penner.⁴²

The Aeltester of the Gemeinde functioned as head of the school system and on Tuesday, March 4, 1884, David Stoesz conducted a meeting with all the teachers at his home in Bergthal.

Although not under their jurisdiction, the Public School Inspectors did sometimes look at the Chortitzer schools. In a 1885 Inspector's Report, H. H. Ewert noted "that the salaries of the Chortitzer teachers were incapable of supporting them or of allowing them to obtain more education." Comments such as these must be taken with a grain of salt as Ewert was in the employ of the Department of Education and advocating the extension of district schools at this time. His implication no doubt was that if the Chortitzer would bring their schools under his jurisdiction they would receive the legislative grants and thus have more money to pay their teachers.

Aeltester David Stoesz was also called upon to assist his brethren in the West Reserve from time to time. On Monday, March 2, 1891, he records that he "took Ohm Peter Toews and Ohm Johann Wiebe [Son of former Bishop Gerhard Wiebe] with me to the West Reserve to look unto the problem about the school. It was truly a sad story we heard about the divisions among the people." Stoesz was referring to the Bergthaler Aeltester Johann Funk who had chosen to act against the wishes and faith of his parishioners in the matter of district schools and the teacher training facility.

Aeltester David Stoesz makes few references in his diary about the functioning of the schools during these years. He mentions a school teacher in his village of Bergthal in August 8, 1886. On November, 1889, "Gerhard Schroeder [later Reeve] brought his school children here [Bergthal]." He notes that teacher Abraham Friesen was a guest for dinner on December 18, 1891. Stoesz also records that from 1892-95 he provided the teacher with 3-4 bushels of wheat in each year.

Some time prior to the 1893 school year the Chortitzer schools had been divided into two districts for the purposes of school inspections: a northern and southern district with two ministers responsible for each. This reduced the time involved from the eight days it took Ohm Gerhard Wiebe and David Stoesz in 1879 to three days as they no longer had to traverse the entire East Reserve, a distance of some 20 miles, to get to all the schools.

Heinrich Friesen (1842-1921), a Chortitzer minister from Hochfeld, makes reference to the

Heuboden - Seaton

by Orlando Hiebert, Box 8, Tourond, Manitoba, R0A 2G0

Introduction

The village of Heuboden, usually considered part of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) group of villages, was situated on NE1-7-4E. David Unger registered for homestead on this quarter of Aug 26 1874. Abram Kornelsen filed for homestead on NW 6-7-5e and Kornelius Kornelsen on SW 6-7-5e the next day. Judging from municipal tax records of 1886 and 1910 this village did not thrive and the only people who seem to have stuck it out were the Kornelsens and to some extent also the Friesens and the Reimers. This perhaps is not surprising because the soil in this area suffers from a high water table and the resulting salinity and "siep plaki" made the soil unsuitable for anything other than hay. Even though the J.Y. Shantz village list puts Heuboden on Section 1-7-4e it later evolved into a district which encompassed parts of Sections 1, 12-7-4e and Sections 5,6,7,8 of 7-5e.

Education.

The KG were much less reluctant to send their children to the public school and as a result were for the most part able to name their own schools but the Bergthaler resisted. As a result the government appointed John F. Greenway as trustee to look after the building and attendance of these schools. Greenway named these schools after British noblemen and so you have names like Seaton, Carmichael, Bothwell, Shakespeare, Randolph in Bergthaler areas and Gruenfeld, Hochstadt, Blumenhof in KG areas. That begs the question, why did Heuboden, a KG settlement, have a school named Seaton?

School (private) enrolment records for Heuboden show: 1878-9 male, 2 female, total of 11; 1879-9 male, 1 female, total 10; and 1880-9 male, 1 female total 20 (Note 1).

The private school at least toward the end of the 1920s was located in Jacob R.E. Reimers former house which can still be seen today standing about 3/8 of a mile west of PR 216 near the south end of the NE6-7-5E. It seems that Mr. Reimer's former house, besides housing the school, also contained a blacksmith shop and a little room that was used as a granary.

The last private school teacher was Cornelius R.E. Reimer, brother of Jacob, in whose house the school was located, and Pete who operated the store in the village. Mr. Andrew Kornelsen remembers that in 1928 Cornelius Reimer conducted evening classes lasting half to one hour at which he taught English as best he could to the students.

Although the Seaton school district was officially formed (along with most others) in 1919 the first year that classes were conducted in English was 1928. The area of Seaton school district as it was first formed included Sections 1,2,11,12,13,14 of Township 7 range 4E and Sections 5,6,7,8, 11,17,18 of Township 7 Range 5E. In later years some of the fringe areas to the

west and north were transferred to adjacent school districts.

On Jan. 1 1968 the Seaton school district was dissolved and became part of the Hanover Unitary School Division although students from Seaton had already attended the Bothwell school from Easter of 1967 because the teacher was dismissed. The first public school teacher was Mr. Ernest Reimer but classes at this time were still held in Jacob Reimer's former house. Mr. Ernest Reimer taught classes in English in this house-school in the years 1928-1929. It seems that it was run as part of the public school system administered by the government-appointed public trustee John F. Greenway.

Mr. Reimer recalled to me how as a young lad of 18 with a grade 10 standing, which he received from a school in Steinbach, he found himself standing barefoot, wearing bib overalls and straw hat in his mother's garden when a well-dressed stranger drove up and approached him. This stranger asked him if he was Mr. Ernest Reimer (he had never called Mr. before) and would he like to substitute for a teacher at Barkfield for the month of September.

After completing this assignment he returned home to find a note from a Mr Greenway. In a subsequent telephone call Mr. Greenway asked him if he would take on the teaching position at the newly-formed school district of Seaton. Mr. Reimer consented with some trepidation but fortunately for him he said with a chuckle the students know a little less than he did. Since both he and the students were learning they were able to laugh at each other's mistakes.

During the first year he boarded at the John D. Fasts for \$15 a month out of a salary of \$75 a month which was paid by the government. During the second year he stayed in a room above the schoolroom in the old house-school. During his 2 years at Seaton he completed his grade 11 studies and went on to teach at Clover Plains near Mactavish.

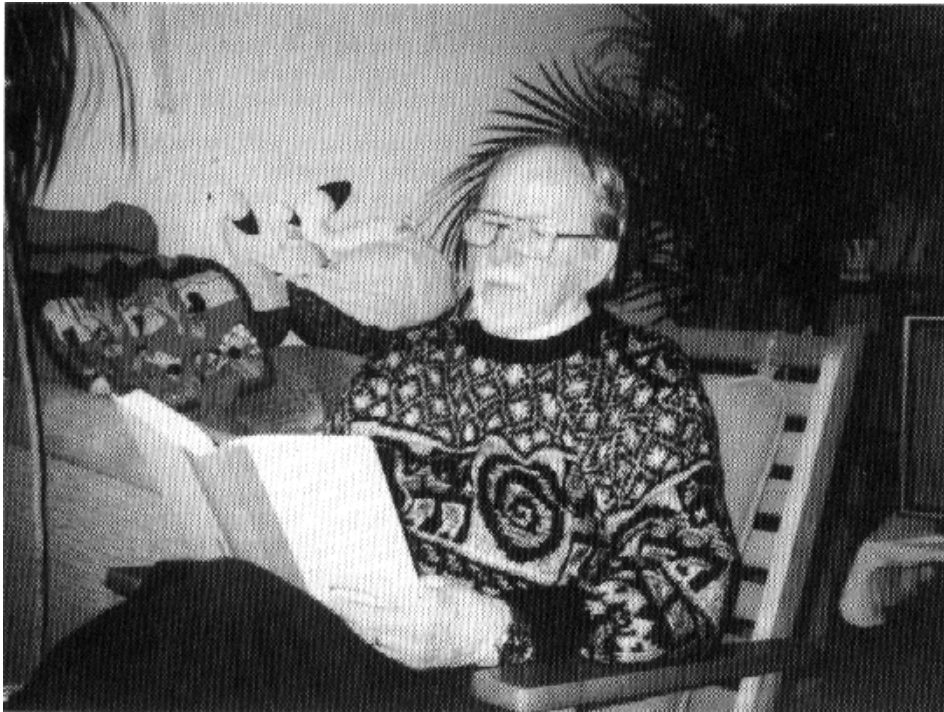
Mr. Reimer still fondly remembers those first students and the district of Seaton. Mrs. Albert Friesen of Kleefeld remembers being sent along with Inspector Harriot by the teacher to open and close the fence gate at the road. This was her first ride in a "glass car" (a car with glass side windows) and she was intrigued by the sight of the trees flashing by the side windows. Mrs. Friesen also remembers that the teacher Ernest Reimer boarded at the Jacob Reimers in a small room above the schoolroom. Ernest Reimer is still active today at 86 years reading and until recently was also taking two courses at the University of Manitoba. He and his wife live in St. Vital.

The public school was built approximately 1930 and was named Seaton. John R. Dueck was the first teacher in the newly-built Seaton school. My father remembers that Mr. Dueck organized a district choir to promote singing but the conservative KG were not at all enthused about singing in four-part harmony. Mr Dueck, when asked where Seaton was, jokingly replied "that's where the tomcat turns around".

Teachers in the public school are the following: Cor. R. Reimer 1925 - 1927 (private school), Ernest Reimer 1928 - 1930, John R. Dueck 1930 - 1936, A. P. Janzen 1936 - 1942, Lena Penner



The remains today of the Jacob Reimers house-school as seen from the south. Photo courtesy of Orlando Hiebert.



Mr. Ernest Reimer teacher at Seaton. Photo courtesy of Orlando Hiebert. For additional information about the Seaton School see: Heritage Collection 75Years, pages 11-18.

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1942 - 1945, Cor. L. Toews 1945 - 1949, Henry E. Toews 1949 - 1951, Harry Topnich 1951 - 1956, Cor. Martens 1956 - 1960, Richard Martens 1960 - 1966, John Wiebe 1966 - 1967 (Easter). I apologise if this teacher list is incomplete for it is not my intention to omit anyone.

Men who served on the school board were: C.R. Reimer, J. Rempel, Abe W. Kornelsen, Peter W. Kornelsen, Isaak W. Friesen, D.D. Penner, C.K. Banman, Art Schwartz, Ben Friesen, John D. Fast, Jacob J. Hiebert, Abe J. Kornelsen, Abe G. Klippenstein, Isaak U. Kornelsen, W B. Isaak, D J. Hildebrand, E.D. Klippenstein, Peter E. Penner (Note 2).

The school question may have played a minor role in the decision to emigrate but perhaps of greater importance to the Reimers and Kornelsens and Friesens of Heuboden was what they perceived as a worldliness and liberal attitude that was gaining influence in the KG. The emigration of these three groups of families to Mexico in 1948 meant that the existence of Heuboden as a KG village had come to an end.

From 1930 -39 church services were held once a month in the Seaton school. Abram Kornelsen of Heuboden was one of the first elected as minister. He died at the age of 40 as a result of being kicked by a horse.(3)

When the Piney Highway (later know as the

#52 Hwy) was built in the 30s it not only cut through the Gruenfeld-Heuboden enclave geographically but it took on a religious significance as well. The Heubodners tended to be more conservative than the Gruenfelders and felt increasingly more alienated and this culminated in the move to Mexico in 1948. Cornelius R. E. Reimer served as a minister during the 1940s and later became the Bishop of the Kleine Gemeinde in Mexico.

Perhaps it is of some significance that a group of 17 families (some of whom thought that the Chortitzer Gemeinde of which they were members was not adhering closely enough to the beliefs and form of worship of their forefathers) bought the Seaton school in 1972. Volunteering their time these families tore down the school building and then using this salvaged lumber built the Summerfelder church in 1973. This church stands near the southeast corner of Section 6-7-5E was dedicated on Nov. 11, 1973. The congregation out-grew the church building within a few years so that the building has been extended two times since it was built.

Sources:

1. *East Reserve Village Histories* P. 183
2. *Schools Our Heritage* - Schellenberg
3. *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874* p. 45 - Plett

On March 16, 1896, another round of school inspections was undertaken by Ohm Heinrich and K. Friesen: Hochfeld and Blumengard; March 17th Bergthal and Chortitz and on March 18th Osterwick and Strassberg. Ohm Heinrich notes that no school was being held in Schönthal.

The record for 1897 is missing. On March 14, 1898, he and K. Friesen again start their school inspection visiting the same schools, namely, Hochfeld, Blumengard, Bergthal, Chortitz, Strassberg, Osterwick and Schönthal over the next three days.

Dennis Stoesz writes that by 1903 the Chortitzer had shortened the school term from eight to seven months, there was only one month of school after spring seeding instead of two as was the case previously.

District School System 1903-1905.

Major advancements had been made with the District Schools since 1891 when Heinrich Ewert was appointed as School Inspector. From eight district schools in 1891 (of which six were KG), the number had grown to forty-one by 1902.⁴³ The task was made easier by the Laurier-Greenway Compromise of 1897 which allowed bilingual school instruction in any district where at least ten parents requested same. The *Manitoba Schools Act* also permitted a half hour of religious instruction each day.

Thus the KG schools continued to function practically as church private schools as their members made up most of the population in their districts. Their church members were elected to the school board who hired KG teachers and set out acceptable teaching material, etc.

Some writers have mentioned that a deterioration in the quality of school teacher had taken place. During the pioneer period the KG schools were staffed by a cadre of career teachers many of whom had earned their credentials in the Molotschna school system in Russia, which was not always the case any more. Historian Royden Loewen, for example, mentions two teachers John R. Reimer and Gerhard Giesbrecht, who taught because they were physically unable to farm.⁴⁴ A physical handicap of course would not in any way imply that they were not excellent teachers.

However, Ewert had played no role in the relatively successful relationship between the KG and the Protestant School Board at first and later the Department of Education. This relationship was really articulated by the particular historical experience of the KG. In fact, Ewert had worked so zealously for more public schools that he occasioned a backlash among his constituency.

Historian Royden Loewen writes that "On March 30, 1903, at a Schultebut meeting in Blumenort, it was questioned whether or not the village should forfeit the legislative grant and hire a teacher with its own money. No final decision, however, was made at this time."⁴⁵ On March 21, 1903, KG ministers Peter R. Reimer, Cornelius L. Plett and Peter R. Dueck attended a school conference called by Ewert where they "talked about religious instruction in the schools." The matter "whether we wish to work with Ewert any longer or whether we should decline the government money" was again dis-

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school inspections in his diary. On December 19th, 20th and 21st, 1893, he and Ohm Cornelius Friesen went to visit the schools. On March 14, 15 and 16, 1894, he and Ohm J. vis-

ited schools. From December 16 to 19, 1895, Ohm Heinrich and Jakob Neufeld visited schools; the 16th to Blumengard and Hochfeld, the 17th to Strassberg and then Chortitz for night; the 18th in the morning in Chortitz, afternoon in Osterwick, then to Schönthal for night, and the 19th in the morning in Schönthal and Bergthal in the afternoon.

Chortitz - Randolph - School Days

by Helen R. Unger, Abbotsford, B.C.

Chortitz, "A German School".

In the very beginning when the village of Chortitz was born [1874], the settlers knew they had to establish a school. The school was built beside the Chortitzer Church. This is where our parents, aunts and uncles started their education in the German language.

I remember my mother telling me that her father Johann S. Rempel was one of the first private school teachers in Chortitz. Diedrich F. Wiebe has written that his grandfather Diedrich D. Wiebe was also a private school teacher in Chortitz. Aeltester Peter S. Wiebe also served as a teacher in the German school. Mr. John Wiebe came after him. He was also caretaker of the Chortitzer Church.

The list of teachers in the private church school should read as follows:

1. Johann S. Rempel (born 1853)
2. Diedrich D. Wiebe (born 1868)
3. Johann P. Wiebe (born 1876)
4. Aeltester Peter S. Wiebe (born 1876)

Randolph, First English School.

In about 1917, the first English school started at Chortitz, Randolph. [It was given the name Randolph by the Manitoba Department of Education when the Provincial Government passed a law making the private church school illegal. Parents were fined and thrown in jail for sending their children to the church school.]

The teachers in the English public school were as follows:

1. Gerhard F. Wiebe (born 1888), was the first teacher in the new Randolph school in 1919.

Two terms. He quit because of his Post Office duties and farming. It was too much for him to handle.

2. Peter S. Guenther, two terms.
3. Peter J. B. Reimer (born 1898), one year. He went back to school to get higher education.
4. Johnny S. Guenther (born 1900), 1 3/4 years.
5. Fred Guenther, 1/4 term.
5. Catharine Doerksen, 2 years.
6. Lily Goertzen (born 1928), 2 years.
7. Peter J. B. Reimer, for nine years.

The School.

Our old school building is not there any more, but we still all love to reminisce about the good old times we spent together there. The old Randolph school [the new public school] consisted of one main big classroom for the first eight grades of up to forty-five pupils, the teacher's small one-room bachelor suite, and a small woodshed in another corner. My father was the school trustee for many years, so my sister and myself had to keep all those big windows clean. There was no janitor in those days.

We had a huge, round furnace about six feet high. It took till noon to warm up the school-room. Our feet were so cold. We would all go up on benches and at least warmed up our hands above the furnace. Some of the children had to walk up to two miles to school or some even more.

In the winters the boys at school would build up big snow slides or make tunnels through the big snow drifts. I also remember how we girls would make beautiful borders along the top of

our blackboards with coloured chalk, while standing on benches.

Every summer we would walk two and two abreast to form a long row along the roadside with our teacher following. On we marched to the William Reimer's bush farm. There was a big open space with an artesian well on it. Whether it was a "field day" or picnic, we played all kinds of games and had ice-cream. That was always a big day for us. It was almost a mile to walk to the Reimer farm.

Mr. Peter J. B. Reimer.

Mr. P.J.B. Reimer, who was the teacher in my time, later became a minister of E.M.C. Church and was known far and wide. Mr. Reimer, I must say, was a born school teacher. He cared about us like we were his own family and taught us to be good and descent citizens. He fervently taught us to greet all passers-by with a hand wave and also to have good manners while eating, etc.

He often said he wanted to be proud of us as his school children, which made us feel worthy, so we respected and honoured him. I'm sure all my fellow schoolmates will agree to that. Every year on October 18th--our teacher's birthday--we his pupils surprised him and showered him with gifts of all kinds, like all sorts of fruit, even a big smoked ham and lots of jams and jellies, you name it, something of everything. And of course a real big pan of birthday cake came out of hiding too.

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Chortitz school class picture, 1920 or 21. Back row left to right: unidentified, David Hiebert, David F. Rempel, Bernhard P. Rempel, Mary F. Wiebe, Mary P. Wiebe, Agatha Wieler, Margaret Doerksen, Anne P. Wiebe, Margaret F. Rempel, Sarah Goertzen; Middle row: Jakob G. Hiebert, Abram K. Funk, Jakob P. Funk, Peter P. Wiebe, Peter Funk, Aganeta Wieler, Gertrude F. Wiebe, Elizabeth K. Goertzen, unidentified; Front row: unidentified, Hein Wiebe, Abe G. Hiebert, Jac P. Doerksen, Abram R. Funk, John R. Wiebe?, Willie P. Wiebe, George G. Hiebert, Otto Wiebe ?, unidentified, and Agnes Wiens. Teacher is Peter J. B. Reimer. Photo courtesy of David G. Hiebert, Box 1151, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0. Photo identification courtesy of Eunice Mantie, Box 325, Manitou, Manitoba, R0G 1G0.



An adult night class 1926-7. The elders in Chortitz soon realized that they had to turn their schooling into English. Then later on they also realized the need to teach English at night school for those who had missed it. This is a picture of the English night school class. Top row from left to right: teacher Lily Goertzen, later Mrs. Jakob P. Rempel, Margaret Rempel Bartel, Helen Rempel Kroeker, Nettie Rempel Hiebert, Anna Rempel Heinrichs; Sitting - first row: unidentified; second row: John F. Rempel, man partially hidden is unidentified, and Gerhard Baerg; Third row: Pete Peters; unidentified, unidentified, Fourth row: Jakob Wieler? next is Jakob G. Hiebert; fifth row: man on the left may be Nick G. Hiebert, the man on the right is William "Willie" Reimer.

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We surely had our fun days too. One day when most of the children were outside and gathered at the school's front door, they had planned that one of the boys would go in and ask our teacher if he would come out and tell him that somebody at the door wanted to see him. I just happened to be inside not knowing what was going on. I believe it was Dan Warkentin who asked him to come out to meet the gentleman who wanted to see him.

I noticed the teacher quickly straightening out his tie and carefully grooming his hair. Anxiously I followed to see who this new visitor was. When Mr. Reimer, our teacher, opened the door, the whole crowd of kids screamed, "April Fool". He enjoyed a good laugh and took it very calmly and walked back in smiling.

Mr. Reimer would never sit idle. In the evenings he would give music lessons to all that were interested. For half an hour after school, he would teach us from the book of German Bible Stories, of which we each had one, and to memorize the "Katechismus" off by heart.

Our teacher did not allow us to eat sunflower seeds in school, which was very prevalent in those days in homes. He always kept the floor immaculately clean. We had wooden floors that were being oiled from time to time. Linoleum and tiles were unheard of in those early years.

One sure thing was of course that nobody dare look into his desk of drawers, where he also kept the strap. He used it only once during the years I went to school, as I recall. But for punishment off and on, some had to stand in the corner for an hour or so.

Every year on Valentine's Day it also happened to be Peter Dyck's birthday. Mrs. Re-

imer, our teacher's wife, would come along and help us celebrate this double celebration. She would surprise us with a big beautiful decorated combined Valentines Birthday cake. I remember Mrs. Reimer as being a very charming and cheerful lady.

In the twenties, thirties, and forties, we would have a Christmas program in school every year. We all had our parts to bring that we memorized. In those days our Christmas tree was lit



Chortitz School 1890. (Manitoba Archives Photo) Courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 118.

with candles. Sometimes a fire had started from the candles so they stopped using them. Later on when electricity came in, electric lighting was used.

The teacher then gave each of us a very nice gift and a big bag of candy, peanuts, nuts, a bar, an apple, and an orange. I'll never forget what a great treat that was for us. We could hardly wait to open our gifts and bag of goodies. But we had to wait till we would get home.

The School House as Chapel.

Our school was also being used as a substi-

tute for a Chapel. It was during the 1920s when a number of Mennonites emigrated from Russia to Canada in the early twenties. Most of them were from the Conference Gemeinde, [then known as the "Kirchliche"].

About ten of these families and a group who left the Chortitzer Gemeinde, amalgamated together and had church service in the schoolhouse. We had two pastors, the Rev. Wilhelm Peters who was our main pastor and Rev. David Fast who was our associate pastor. We also had a choir and a big orchestra of which some MB'ers were part of it.

Most of the time we had guest speakers in the evenings and also Bible studies on week nights, which most of them came from the E.M.B. Church from Steinbach. Among the pastors that came were Rev. Henry P. Fast, Rev. Benjamin Janz and Johnny S. Guenther and others took part. Misses Susie and sister Helen Hiebert were our Sunday-School teachers. Later on Master Gerhard Baerg took over and taught for a number of years. He was great with children and a great story teller. As he was also a recent immigrant from Russia, it made our Sunday School very interesting and rewarding spiritually.

For all those past years Randolph was a multi-purpose school building, and has been known for its many different uses including different meetings, etc. We were a multi-cultural society, all working together in one accord. This all helped the name of Randolph stay rooted in all of our hearts and minds that had a part in it.

More About Randolph School.

Like all boys, the boys [in Chortitz] enjoyed having fun too. So this time they were planning

on hiding the school bell. But nobody could figure out how and who would sneak it out of the teacher's room unnoticed. They all knew that this was forbidden.

When we were around the ages of 12 and 13 years we would get allowances from the Government to take leave from school, so we could help our parents on the farm; up to six weeks if needed. I felt like a complete stranger when I came back after being away for six weeks.

My books were all put away and had to be looked for. And I had also missed out so much on all my subjects and did not know where to start again. Our Government had good intentions of helping our the farmers in this way. The farmers in those days could not afford to have hired help. But this was not fair for our future generation either. Most of us only made Grade Six by the time we turned 14. At that age we were allowed to quit school.

There were very few that could go into High School. I know of only one pupil who could make it for one year with our teacher's help. He helped her find a place with a reasonable price for board and room.

During the summer months sewing courses were given at our school. I was nine years old at that time when with the help of my mother I learned to sew my first dress. A variety of sewing and embroidery was being taught.

We took great pride in inviting the teacher to our homes for supper with our parent's permission. We felt very uneasy to have the teacher in our home. We knew we sure had to use our manners the way he had taught us. "Sorry teachers".

But the seed fell on good ground. We had a large pegboard on the wall. On it were many hooks, enough for every child to hang up all our enamel mugs. We had to drink water from a large container which was standing on a small desk. Sometimes someone would accuse another of using his or her cup which could end up in a big fight.

One day our teacher had put on a contest for all of us in the higher grades to write on the blackboard for two weeks and dictated to us what to write. He did not tell us why he was doing this, except that we should do our best in handwriting. At the end of this contest he announced that John F. Schroeder would get the first prize because he had made the biggest improvement with his writing.

Opening and Religious Exercises.

Every morning we would watch our teacher hoist up our Union Jack to the top of the flag

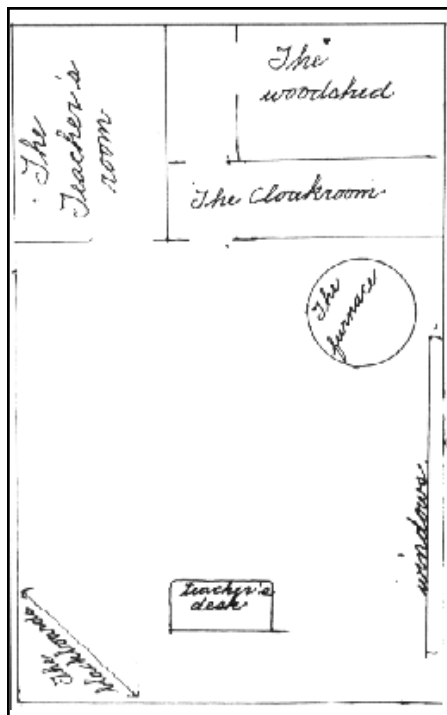
pole and at four o'clock take it down.

For our school opening in the morning the teacher would sing "God save the King" with us--the King being George the Fifth and later George the Sixth. And then our teacher prayed "The Lord's Prayer" with us either in German or English.

And before lunch he would pray, as I very well still remember, "Komm Herr Jesu, sei du unser gast und segne was du uns aus gnaden bescheret hast. Du tuhst deine milde Hande auf und saetiart alles was da lebet mit wohlgefallen. Amen."

After school, at four o'clock, we had our studies in German for half-an-hour. The subjects were learning the Catechism off-by-heart and *Biblische Geschichten* or Bible history with the pictures of the Old Testament times, like Daniel in the lion's den and Joseph being sold off to Egypt, etc.

In those days there were no higher authorities dictating to us whether we were allowed to pray in school or even in the school yard or not like it is now-a-days with all the new restrictions.



Floor plan for new school built by authority of John F. Greenway, official trustee, in 1919. Floor plan drawing by Helen Unger. The floor plan is typical of the schools built by the government to replace the outlawed Christian private schools.

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cussed at a brotherhood meeting on March 29, with the decision being "to be patient." On April 10, 1903, the issue was considered at another meeting in Steinbach, and again on May 10, they discussed "whether we still wish to have . . . the legislative grant."⁴⁶

Even on the West Reserve, Ewert's success

was more apparent than real. Ewert was a minister of the recently formed Bergthaler Gemeinde under Johann Funk (resulting from the Sommerfelder split of 1893) which adopted Revivalist and later Fundamentalist forms of religiosity such as millennialism, etc. As a result Ewert was viewed with apprehension by many Sommerfelder and Reinländer who saw him as an "traitor" attempting to subvert their faith. It is recorded, for example, that people would stomp out of his sermons evidently because of

the foreign influences already referred to.⁴⁷

Ewert's undoing would come not from this direction but rather from fellow supporters of the Mennonite public schools movement. Some of "his opponents supported the conservative party in the provincial election of 1903."⁴⁸ When the election was won by Roblin and his Conservatives, these opponents lobbied for Ewert's dismissal with the result that he was fired by the Roblin government. The underlying problem was growing dissension within the School Society. The result was the formation of another School Society and the establishment of a second teacher training facility in Altona in 1908 while Ewert continued as principal of the school in Gretna.

The Flag Issue, 1906-8.

Ewert's position as Inspector was given to Henry Graff who served from 1904-1905. Graff was the first non-Mennonite Inspector since Hespeler. Graff's successor was John M. Friesen (1865-1932), the son of Martin Friesen (BGB B-213), who would serve until 1909. Like Ewert, he was an ordained minister of the Bergthaler Gemeinde which made them both suspect in the eyes of the orthodox majority.

One of the first difficulties Friesen faced was the announcement in September of 1906 that all schools would have to fly the Union Jack. The law was to take effect January 1, 1907. This policy heralded a solidification of the view among the British, Anglo-Saxon population in Manitoba, who dominated the political dimension at the time, that education should be controlled by the State for the purpose of instilling into the minds of immigrant children loyalty to the British empire and the values and beliefs of English culture.

Premier Roblin explained the government position as follows: "I think a man who comes from a foreign country in order to benefit his circumstances, and who objects to perpetuating the glories of our flag and declines to have his children infused with British patriotism, is a man that is undesirable."⁴⁹ By now most government officials had conveniently forgotten that the Mennonites had been invited and solicited to come to Manitoba for the purpose of demonstrating that large scale settlement and commercial agriculture were feasible. They had fulfilled their part of the bargain and now they were expendable.

The government policy of course was abhorrent to the citizens of the East Reserve where flag waving was equated with militarism and directly opposed to their pacifist beliefs. The KG held a brotherhood meeting in December of 1906 where the matter was debated. The issue was raised whether a believer could give allegiance to both the flag and to Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ Peter Toews of the Holdeman church shared these concerns and both groups decided to take their schools out of the public school system if the policy would not be reversed.

On December 30, 1907, representatives of the KG, Holdemans and the West Reserve Bergthaler met with government ministers in Winnipeg to present their petition. The response of the government was that the Mennonites would have to obey the law like any other citi-

zens. The result was that all the KG schools, which were conducted jointly with the Holdemans, were taken out of the public school system and the legislative grant turned down. The Chortitzer were not directly affected by this issue as their schools were already private and not in receipt of government support.

Dissolution of Villages, 1909-10.

The period 1909 to 1910 was a time of immense change for the East Reserve. The majority of the villages were in the process of disbanding the *Strassendorfer*, where all the lands within the village boundary were farmed in the traditional open-field method.

This meant also that the villagers relocated their buildings and farmyards to the actual quarter section of land registered in their names. For some this was seen as a major setback for the Gemeinden who would thereby lose a prime means of control over their parishioners. However, the issue never became one of Church polity as it did for the Reinländer in the West Reserve. For the most part the transition went smoothly.

The impact on the schools was also minimal. In most cases the schools remained in their previous locations. In other situations the school buildings had to be relocated as they now stood on private lands. Certainly most parents now lost the convenience of having the school located just down the street in the village. Children now had to walk up to two miles to attend school.

Growth of Public Schools, 1910-14.

In 1910 A. A. Wiedenhammer was appointed as the Inspector of Mennonite Schools, the second non-Mennonite since William Hespeler. He was an ethnic German who spoke the language fluently. During his term as Inspector the number of registered district schools increased from thirty-seven when he started to sixty-three in 1913. This confirmed that the appointment of Mennonite sectarians such as Ewert had been a tragic mistake since by so doing they were associating government policy with a faction among the Mennonites widely viewed with great suspicion.

Adolf Ens quotes statistics that by 1915 enrolment in German bilingual schools was up to 2800, which included 2600 Mennonite children as opposed to only 1100 in 1908.⁵¹ On the surface it appeared as if the policies of the Provincial Government were finally bearing fruit. Like his predecessors Wiedenhammer had made zero progress among the Reinländer and Chortitzer.

The War Years 1914-18.

Other factors were conspiring against the Mennonites. With the onset of World War One in 1914 all things German were seen as foreign and alien. Public sentiment turned very sharply against the Mennonites and anything to do with pacifism. Inflammatory newspaper reporting and public speeches by politicians were widespread and very popular with the Anglo-Saxon population.

Although the Anglo-Saxon population had decreased to one-third of the provincial total by 1915, the group still controlled the political sys-

tem. The perception was that strict measures were necessary so that the school system would produce graduates who would mirror the values and thinking of the ruling group.

The question of how to respond to the new political reality was taken very seriously by the Chortitzer. At a brotherhood meeting in Chortitz on July 23, 1914, the school issue was discussed and it was "decided to remain with private schools and to retain the German language for the same." The matter was on the agenda at another brotherhood meeting at Chortitz on July 16, 1915, "where [we] took counsel regarding the schools and decided that we wanted to retain the same." The issue was again dealt with at a third brotherhood meeting in Chortitz on November 19, 1915, and a letter was read to the assembly from the School Society in Winnipeg.⁵²

Roblin's government was defeated in August of 1915 and replaced by T. C. Norris and the Liberals. Various representations were made to the MLA Valentin Winkler from the West Reserve which formed part of his constituency. Winkler was able to arrange an audience with members of the Norris cabinet for February 16, 1916, to which representatives from the East Reserve were also invited. The Chortitzer were represented by Bishop Johann K. Dueck, the KG by Bishop Peter R. Dueck, the Brüderthaler by Peter Schmidt and the Holdemans by Jakob T. Wiebe.

Ironically it was Heinrich Ewert who made a presentation on behalf of the assembled delegation of some twenty-five Mennonite leaders. Presumably he argued that the Government should allow bilingual instruction in the schools as it had before. It was almost sad that the man who had campaigned so zealously for state controlled schools had now changed his mind and had become a champion of the traditional Mennonite schools and retention of the German language.⁵³

The government officials assured the delegation that it was still permissible for their children to attend private schools and that these would remain unmolested. But no assurances were given regarding the bilingual schools.

Abolition of Bilingual Schools, 1916.

In fact, popular sentiment in the province was turning more and more against the Mennonites. Mass hysteria would probably be an apt description. The government was committed to act and on February 29, 1916, the Legislature repealed the bilingual legislation of 1897.⁵⁴ As a result, it was "illegal" to use any language other than English in the district schools. The law, of course, applied to schools of all non-English communities in the Province: French, Ukrainian, German, etc., and not just to the Mennonites.

The immediate effect in the East Reserve was minimal as the Chortitzer were operating their own private church schools. However, the changes did affect the KG. Although its schools had been de-registered in 1907 over the flag issue, by 1914 all except Blumenort, Blumenhof and Gruenfeld had become public schools again.⁵⁵ Since the meeting of February 1916 had been assured that the private schools would not

be molested, other groups made plans to de-register their schools as well. In the West Reserve the Sommerfelder acted quickly to follow suit. The Berghthaler Gemeinde to which Ewert belonged were the slowest in this regard, as they were presumably hoping for a return of conditions whereby Mennonite public schools would again be allowed.

The response of School Inspector Wiedenhammer could probably be anticipated by the fact that this fine gentleman had recently Anglicized his surname to Willows. His report for 1916 reflected his new-found Anglo-Saxon superiority. He wrote that the Chortitzer and Reinländer schools were not teaching any English and "very little of anything else." His evaluation of the KG and Sommerfelder schools was only slightly more positive.

It must be remembered that repressive measures regarding the Mennonites were being implemented in other areas as well. In 1917 Mennonites were disfranchised and Mennonite boys were warned to stay away from public places for fear of physical injury from the WASP population. Press censorship was established at the beginning of the war and by 1918 the Steinbach *Post*, which published mainly "Ma and Pa" letters from subscribers across Manitoba, was shut down as an "alien threat" and forced to publish in English.

Zwangsschulen, 1918-21.

As the war continued pressure was building to take even stricter measures. It was the perception of many that the Mennonites were thwarting government policy by reverting to private schools at this juncture. In the face of mounting public opinion the government took decisive action. Legislation was enacted allowing the government to establish public schools in areas which were not served by adequate educational facilities.

Since the government now deemed the East Reserve private schools to be inadequate the stage was set for further action. Public schools were superimposed on Mennonite districts which did not cooperate. John F. Greenway, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, was appointed Official Trustee to operate the "new" public schools which quickly became known as "Zwangsschulen" or compulsory schools.

The government proceeded in two stages. First to be dealt with were the schools which had at one time operated as public schools but which had reverted to private school status either in 1907 over the flag-flying policy or later. These schools were reopened as public schools through a series of Orders-in-Council adopted between 1918 and 1919, whereby John F. Greenway was appointed as Official Trustee with powers to operate the same, namely, Blumenort, Gruenfeld, and Blumenhof--all KG schools.

The second category to be dealt with were the Chortitzer schools which had never been registered as public schools, except for a brief period in 1878. The government obtained a further amendment to *The Public Schools Act* allowing it to create public school districts in such areas. The Orders-in-Council were passed on the basis that "no provision has been made for

Anna Vogt: Kindergarten Pioneer

by Elfrieda Neufeld, Steinbach, Manitoba

A woman ahead of her time, Anna Vogt established Steinbach's first Nursery School/Kindergarten in the mid 1920s, many years before such facilities were in vogue. Anna Vogt, who through most of her adult life was known as "Tante Anna" (Aunt Anna), was born September 16, 1883 in the southern Ukraine to Andreas and Aganetha (Block) Vogt: see *Preservings*, No. 7, December, 1995, pages 6-7.

Anna received her early education in the village school but was pulled out of formal schooling to share household duties with her two older sisters. Education for his children was a high priority to her minister father and so when Anna's sister Maria persuaded him to allow her to pursue studies in Germany, it paved the way for Anna as well.

A rich mill owner from a neighbouring city offered to help sponsor Anna in a two year teacher training course in the famous "Pastalozzi-Froebel Haus" in Berlin. In 1912, she and her sister left for Germany: Anna for Berlin and Maria to Wiesbaden to study nursing. This unusual venture raised quite a few eyebrows in the community.

Because of Anna's limited education she found studies difficult but received her teach-

ing certificate in the summer of 1914, a month before the outbreak of W.W.I. She returned home where she accepted a position as private tutor and care giver to the four orphaned children of the benefactor, J.J. Thiessen of Dnepropetrovsk for whom she then worked for five years.

Just after World War I, she established her first Kindergarten in the village of Nieder-Chortitza, across the Dnieper River from Schoenwiese, her parental home. She had over one hundred children enrolled. However the Civil War swept through the area and she was forced to move to other villages. For a short time she taught in a new teacher-training institution in Nikolaipol.

In July 1923, she emigrated to Canada along with her mother (father had passed away in 1914), six siblings and their families. The family settled immediately in Steinbach, Manitoba and shortly thereafter Anna established her own private German Language Nursery School/Kindergarten. Her modest but well run facility was located on what is now Elmdale Drive (Approximately behind Derksen Printers). She began by housing the children in her home and later having a separate building constructed at the same site.

Children from 3 to 6 years of age attended classes from 9:30 to 12:00 noon, Mondays to Fridays, from March through to Christmas (including July and August since they were closed in January and February due to severity of weather). Enrolment was never less than 25 or 30 children and sometimes as high as 50 or more. Routine was strictly adhered to and at exactly 10:30 a.m. the familiar alarm clock would go off causing absolute silence to rule as this meant snack time. Daily activities included story telling and simple nature study. After snack, children remained at tables to do colouring and other craft work.

Though a sound disciplinarian, Anna was warm and loving and believed that there should be few rules, but those few should be consistently enforced. She would at times drop a pin on the floor and if the pin could not be heard, the children were reprimanded. But there were also times when they were allowed to visit and chatter among themselves.

She fostered memory work and encouraged her pupils to speak and sing loudly and clearly. Her Christmas programs were especially cherished because of the enthusiastic participation of her children. Parents were charged \$1.00 per



Anna Vogt's Kindergarten class in Steinbach July 1937. Back row, left to right: the toddler in the arms of Anna Vogt is her nephew Roy Vogt, presently Professor of Economics at the University of Manitoba; Eric Vogt, Dennis Barkman, Katherine Reimer McNeil, Erma Vogt Peters, Peter Norman Reimer, Anna Wiens West, Viola Reimer Stewart, Romelda Reimer Kroeker (deceased), Velda Unger Goulden, Elaine Kroeker Peters, Connie Barkman Ketler, Sam Wiens and Art Vogt; middle row: Susan Giesbrecht Kehler, Betty Berg, Sydney Reimer, LaVerna Reimer Klippenstein, Aubrey Reimer, unidentified, Virginia Friesen Woodard, Ruth Reimer Funk, Ramona Loewen Klassen and unidentified; front row: Neta Reimer Hogue, Gerald Rosenfeld, unidentified, Jim Frey, Kenneth Toews (deceased), Don Reimer, Jeff Wiebe, Gordon Penner, Lorraine Neufeld Hiebert and Rod Toews. Photo courtesy of Frieda Neufeld, Steinbach, Manitoba. Photo identification courtesy of Velda Unger Goulden.

child per month with an extra 50c for an additional child if they were able to pay. No child was refused because of economics.

When in the later 1930s the community asked her to conduct the classes in English, she not only was not able, but refused to comply. In 1937 she moved to Winnipeg after accepting an invitation from the German speaking community in North Kildonan to start classes there.

Throughout the years, she taught without assistants with the exception of perhaps a niece who would help in the summer holidays or with Christmas presentations. It was only during the last ten years or so when Anni Dyck became her official assistant; she eventually carried on Anna's work after her retirement in 1966 at the age of 82.

She spent her last declining years in the Bethania Personal Care Home, founded by her sister Maria Vogt and her brother Abram Vogt. She died peacefully at the age of 91. The sickly child her parents believed would not see adulthood, outlived in years all her nine siblings.

Anna Vogt was a forceful visionary with a hearty laughter who left a legacy of love for children. She is even today remembered by many whose lives she touched.



Anna Vogt, right with sister Maria in Russia. Photo courtesy of A Vogt Family History, page 65.

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the proper education of the children resident on these lands in accordance with the provisions of "The Public Schools Act."⁵⁶

Eleven new school districts were created under this legislation in the East Reserve, namely, Spencer (Kronsgart), Woolwich

(Bergfeld), Aldershot (Grunthal), Barker (Gnadenfeld), Mitchell (Reichenbach), Randolph (Chortitz), Moray (Blumengart), Seaton (Altona and Heuboden), Bothwell (Kronsthal), Arran (Osterwick), Carmicheal (Schanzenberg) and Bristol (Neuendorf and Neuenburg).

The action of the Department of Education as astounding to say the least. Even more astounding was the fact that a set of completely foreign names was imposed on the populace to replace names which had traditions associated with the communities, in many cases going back centuries. Chortitz, for example, meant "giving thanks to God," and was named after the Island of Chortitza--the jewel of the Southern Ukraine--where ancient traders stopped to give thanks to God after surviving the tumultuous rapids in the Dnieper River.⁵⁷ Randolph, the name which replaced Chortitz, somehow seemed more appropriate for a pet dog or hamster.

Adolf Ens provides the example of Grunthal which was called "Aldershot", the name of a Canadian Army training base. This was considered a slur against the community as the name had a connotation contrary to the non-resistant beliefs of its citizens. In this case the rigidly inflexible government actually did give ground changing the name to Goodwill in 1921.

When private school facilities in a district were not made available to the public schools or when they were deemed inadequate, the Official Trustee made an agreement between himself as the head of the Department of Education and himself as the trustee of the public school district to borrow money to build a new school building. A total of thirteen Orders-in-Council were enacted between 1919 and 1921 on behalf of ten school districts in the East Reserve, namely, Gruenfeld, Randolph, Arran, Barkfield, Moray, Carmicheal, Spencer, Mitchell, Blumenort and Grunthal.

Fines and Imprisonment, 1918-20.

The government appointed teachers and requisitioned schools for the new schools. Not surprisingly, there was open resistance to these measures. Parents refused to send their children to attend. The government again acted decisively and parents were charged under *The School Attendance Act* and fined.

Determined to crush all resistance, the Manitoba government started to enforce its school attendance legislation following the example of the Saskatchewan government which had led the way by charging fourteen Mennonites in April of 1918. The government went even a step further by laying charges against ministers who counselled their parishioners to hold the government to the solemn promises it had made in 1873.⁵⁸

In September, 1918, eleven Mennonites were charged in Manitoba in the school district of Wakeham. In July of 1919 nine charges were laid in the school district of Houston. The topic of fines, imprisonments, and property seizures which were imposed against the Mennonites during this period would fill a book all of its own. At a time of pogroms and late-night executions in their former homeland Russia, one can imagine the fear and anguish that must have

filled the hearts of many God-fearing mothers as Sheriff's Officers and armed police stormed onto their yard to arrest fathers, husbands and sons. Such a book would be an expose of a government gone berserk and acting in a tyrannical manner against its most upstanding citizens.

Legal Challenge 1919-20.

The Sommerfelder Mennonites appealed the subsequent convictions to the Manitoba Court of Appeal on the basis of Paragraph 10 of the *Privilegium* letter of 1873. But in August 1919 the Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal, ruling that under the *British North America Act* the Federal Government had no authority to promise the Mennonites control over their own schools as this was a matter of provincial jurisdiction. The matter was closed in July 1920 when the Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear a further appeal.

Armed with this ruling the Department of Education now proceeded with "an epidemic of fining." One source mentions that at one point six Mennonite ministers were in jail in Winnipeg. Fines were reported in the Spencer and Goodwill districts in the East Reserve.

Petitions and Emigration 1919-20.

The strongest opposition to the "Zwangschulen" occurred in the West Reserve where the Reinländer quickly decided in favour of emigration. They were able to begin their move to Mexico by spring of 1922.

Opposition was also strong on the East Reserve. After the public school districts were created by Orders-in-Council in the summer of 1919 a delegation from the Chortitzer met with the Minister of Education. The three Chortitzer representatives were Aeltester Johann K. Dueck, Johann Braun and Heinrich Doerksen.

The result of this delegation was another meeting with members of the Provincial Cabinet together with representatives of the KG. The Mennonite petition dated October 21, 1919, was signed by Aeltester Johann K. Dueck and minister Heinrich Doerksen for the Chortitzer and by Aeltester Jakob R. Dueck and Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer for the KG.

The meeting proved futile and the delegation was curtly assured that the punitive legislation applied to all Manitobans. The KG at this point decided to accommodate themselves to the situation.

The Chortitzers had a much stronger tradition of operating their own schools and were not yet so inclined. A further petition was presented to the government on January 13, 1920. The petition emphasized that they were unable "to delegate to others the all important responsibility of educating our children." The Chortitzers offered to voluntarily upgrade their schools to Department of Education standards and to introduce English instruction. They wanted to do so with their own teachers and requested government indulgence as it might take some time until properly qualified teachers were available. They declared their readiness to bring their schools more into line with the Governments agenda, "to intensify the training of Mennonite teachers; to facilitate inspection by the Department of Education; in short

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to place our schools beyond just criticism."⁵⁹

The government did not budge. It was committed to completely crushing Mennonite resistance and to nothing less than total victory. The issue was not the qualifications of the teachers or the particulars and quality of the instruction. The real and only issue now was who would control the hearts of the children attending the schools, the government or the church.⁶⁰

By now the Chortitzer and Sommerfelder had considered emigration. At a joint meeting in September of 1920 the two denominations decided to make one final appeal to the government. This petition was dated October 14, 1921. It reiterated again the holy duty of parents to raise up their children in the Christian faith. It noted that the new school laws of 1916 had made a mockery of the promises made by the Federal Government in 1873. "If the right to our own schools is taken away from us, we know full well what our future will hold, for as the schools are, so is the church."⁶¹

The petition also announced for the first time the decision to emigrate. But it would take five years before this would come to pass. In the meantime some of the private schools such as Halpstadt (Silberfeld), Reinland (Prefontaine), Bergfeld and Rosengard, managed somehow to continue functioning until 1926.⁶² Between 1926 and 1927 1156 Chortitzer--men, women and children, including some of Canada's finest farmers, emigrated to Paraguay (see *Preservings*, No. 6, pages 10-14).

Accommodation 1919-20.

After the failure of the joint petition to the Manitoba cabinet October 21, 1919, the KG accepted what they saw as inevitable and resigned themselves to living with the public school system. An important factor in the KG change of direction was the death in 1919 of Aeltester Peter R. Dueck of Steinbach who was always a very strong proponent of orthodox faith and teaching.

The story of the Mennonites who decided to remain in Manitoba and to accommodate themselves to the situation is another fascinating chapter in the history of Provincial Government dealings with its citizens who were not of WASP extraction. These dynamics are illustrated by the following incident.

In many districts in the E. Reserve the government was forcibly constructing new school facilities as the former private schools were either not being made available or were deemed unsatisfactory. In Blumenort the situation was reversed in that the local school board wanted to build a new school but for some reason Greenway, the Official Trustee, would not give his approval. Perhaps this was his way of punishing the Blumenorters for their "insubordination."

However, Greenway had not reckoned with local ingenuity. Chairman of the Blumenort school board at the time was Heinrich E. Plett, a large-scale farmer and businessman, whose great-grandfather had served in the Prussian Hussars (mounted cavalry) during Napoleonic times and whose grandfather had dealt with

Russian officials such as Governor-General Tottleben during the emigration in 1874.

Plett, evidently, was not intimidated by the arrogant Englishman. In 1919 he led a delegation to Winnipeg to visit the Department of Education to seek approval of their plans. Apparently Greenway was not in his office at the time, and his deputy was understood to have told the Blumenorters to go ahead. The ten sons of Heinrich E. Plett promptly went to work and in no time at all a fine new school building was ready for use.

Historian Royden Loewen writes that by some "turn" of events Greenway had never been made aware of these plans. When Greenway "visited Blumenort in spring, he discovered to his dismay, that the independent Kleine Gemeinders were building a school without his official approval, and even without bothering to consult him about the plan. It is claimed by some that when Greenway saw the new school-house, he became so angry he threw his hat off and stomped on it."⁶³

Numerous similar incidents could be recorded from each village school district in the Hanover Steinbach area. The local citizens would survive but not without untold suffering and anguish. Had the Provincial Government acted with sensitivity and consulted with its citizens instead of imposing foreign overseers upon them, much of the wished for Anglicization would have happened naturally over the next decade or two without any hostility.

East Reserve Schools 1874-1920: Evaluations.

In 1949 the sociologist E.K. Francis came to the following conclusions regarding the Mennonite school question. He writes that it was "no more a question of educational standards which prompted the authorities to destroy the Mennonite private grade schools once and for all, and to replace them with English public schools. It was part of a consistent national policy aimed at assimilation of ethnics to safeguard national unity and cultural uniformity. In this policy the school figured prominently as the most effective means to wean the children of immigrants away from the traditions of their group and to indoctrinate them with the ideals and values of the dominant majority."⁶⁴

Another outside evaluation of the private schools of the E. Reserve is provided by C.B. Sissons, *Bilingual Schools in Canada*, who writes as follows: "Anyone who has visited these people in their own villages cannot entirely condemn their attitude. They believe in education, all their children are trained in schools. Their teachers are not mere slips of girls, but men of character and mature judgment. Nearly all of them are married and have teacherages provided for them... If they teach only German in their school it is not from any sinister nationalistic design that they harbour darkly in their breasts but because they consider one language sufficient for intercourse among themselves and they wish to have as little discourse as possible with the wicked outside world. The difficulty of bringing English schools to the more conservative Mennonites is

primarily one of religion, not of language."⁶⁵

Sissons writes further that "among the progressive Germans of Southern Manitoba . . . were found real bilingual schools, that is, schools in which the pupils learned to read, write and speak two languages. The method to achieve this end was scientific."⁶⁶

Even historian Frank H. Epp, who was generally prejudiced against conservative Mennonites, writes that "The private Mennonite schools were not that broad in their objectives and in their curriculum, but neither were they as narrow and inferior as the critics often suggest." Epp pointed out that not all was well in the public school system either, because of "unwieldiness of bilingual instruction and the inadequate knowledge of English acquired by students in French, Ukrainian, and Polish districts in particular, [and] the poor quality of teaching." Epp made reference to the Foght report which highlighted "everything from the low level of teacher training to the narrow curriculum to the neglect of hygiene to the dearth of proper teaching aids [in the public school system]."⁶⁷

Steinbach historian John C. Reimer, Steinbach, writes as follows about the school issue which he had experienced personally both as student and teacher: "From the history of our people, it is evident that the Mennonites have always paid special heed to the nurturing of their children. They perceived the opportunity in a child, if only its character could be influenced, at an early age. They shared this outlook with the leaders of many progressive nations. The private school system presents clear evidence that the Mennonites were not negligent in the education of their children. For this reason they insisted on autonomy in the administration of their schools and in this regard the Gemeinden were articulated by very definite principles. Nor were they inclined to seek government administration or assistance for their schools, since the emigration privileges provided sufficient freedom, in order that they might remain autonomous regarding educational matters."⁶⁸

One thing is for certain, that the level of literacy and articulative skills dropped dramatically among the residents of the East Reserve in the aftermath of the implementation of district schools in 1918. This conclusion is reached by careful study of journals, diaries and letters written prior to and after this event. In fairness it should be noted that this is probably due more to the fact that local residents were now being taught in a different school environment and culture, than that the district schools were inferior to the earlier private schools. The students were caught in the throes of a cross-cultural transition. It would probably take until the 1950s before the cultural transformation had sufficiently been completed and students would again have the level of literacy in English as had been the case in German prior to 1918.⁶⁹

Conclusion.

The Mennonite "education" issue demonstrated a lack of competence on the part of both the Federal and Provincial governments in dealing with ethnic and religious minorities. Canadian society was shown at its worst whenever

the WASP element came into dominance and tried to impose its will on other citizens, namely, the British Empire and Orangeman types whose world was so narrow that any other form of culture or lifestyle threatened their very existence. It is this wild card in Canadian politics which may well ultimately lead to the disintegration of the country.

The federal and provincial governments clearly won the battle in its pursuit of national policies with respect to education and other cultural matters and crushed minority groups such as the Mennonites, Ukrainians and Japanese, not to speak of Aboriginals and French people. Moral laws, broken promises, subjugated and devastated people, are not a concern when governments act in pursuit of the "greater" good. Recent events such as the 1995 Quebec referendum reveal that the seeds sown by the Colonial mind-set of government leaders and administrators in the past are "reaping the whirlwind".

Although the actions of both the Federal and Provincial Governments are defensible from a public policy standpoint, they were reprehensible from the perspective of modern ethical and moral standards.

As already mentioned it was not the quality of the education which was at issue. The whole matter came down to a battle over the hearts and minds of the children. The citizens of the East Reserve wanted to instill Christian beliefs and values, and the government wanted to make "little" Englishmen out of their children.

In another sense it must be acknowledged that the Provincial Government was correct in its assessment that the church private schools were inadequate. These schools were designed to produce graduates who were honest, hard-working, respectful of authority, sensitive to the needs of others, and equipped for a lifetime of spiritual growth.

The public school system in many parts of Canada on the other hand evolved to promote the opposite values: children are taught to think only of their own "rights" and not that of their neighbours or communities, school yard bullies are encouraged in their future careers as car thieves and gangsters by lack of discipline and respect for authority, religious and spiritual life is outlawed. Integrating everyone has unfortunately resulted in the adoption of the lowest common denominator and graduates who only too often are illiterate, unmotivated and unemployable.

With the hindsight of history it seems that the Department of Education might have done better by sending its officials to the East Reserve to try to understand and replicate the school system elsewhere. By choosing to proceed in a "fascist" manner, the Provincial Government in 1918 deprived Canada of a very precious part of its history and culture forever.

Endnotes:

1 . I acknowledge with thanks Professor Adolf Ens, CMBC, Winnipeg, for reading this article and for his helpful suggestions and advice. Also he has kindly given me permission to quote freely from his book: Ens, *Subjects or Citizens: The Mennonite Experience in Canada 1870-1925* (Ottawa, 1994),

266, the major work on the topic.

2 . See my chapter on education, *The Golden Years*, (Steinbach, Man.: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), 120-144.

3 . The church-related writings of Heinrich Balzer were gathered together by Bishop Peter P. Toews and included in his *Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde der Mennoniten* ("Collection . . . for the History of the Kleine Gemeinde of the Mennonites"; unpublished manuscript, Blumenhoff, South Russia, 1874), 475 pages. These documents have been translated into English and republished in Plett, ed., *The Golden Years*, 210-47.

4 . Robert Friedman, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries, Its genius and Its Literature* (Goshen, Ind., 1950), 259.

5 . See my article, "Print Culture of the East Reserve 1874-1930," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (October 1994), 524-550, also reprinted with illustrations in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1994), 686-715.

6 . Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981), 13-14.

7 . Heinrich Heese, "Autobiography," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, April 1969, Vol. XXIV, Number 2, page 67.

8 . In fact, if there is such a thing, the conservative Russian Mennonites and their descendants in Canada, Latin America and elsewhere, probably deserve a mention in the Guinness Book of World Records for having been the subject of the world record number of proselytising endeavours of all manner of pietist and baptist sectarians over the centuries. The toil in terms of broken homes and emotionally devastated parents, whose children are lured away by do-doubt well-meaning but thoughtless people, is beyond comprehension.

9 . Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, page 280.

10 . A similar document had been negotiated during the emigration to Russia during the 1780s and had later been enshrined in Russian law. Quoted in Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889*, (Winnipeg, 1989), Appendix I, pages 282-284.

11 . Royden K. Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Blumenort, Manitoba, 1983), 149.

12 . Gerhard E. Kornelsen, "Die Schule in Steinbach, erte Winter," unpublished journal, 31 pages. This is a summarized history of the schools of Steinbach from 1874 until 1914. It is undoubtedly the source for the statement quoted here about the school during the first winter and others which have been quoted extensively, but without crediting the primary source.

13 . Abraham T. Friesen was an intellectual man who submitted Balzer's *Faith and Reason* to an American religious journal, *Die Gemeinde Unterm Kreuz* for publication in serialized format in 1887.

14 . John C. Reimer, "Unser Schulen," in John C. Reimer, ed., *75 Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada, abgehalten am 8. Juli 1949 in Steinbach, Manitoba* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1949), 70, as translated and published in D. Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1990), 239. All quotations from this source henceforth will cite the English translation. The article by John C. Reimer was also published in Peter J. B. Reimer, ed., *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee Evangelical Mennonite Conference 1812-1962 - 150* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1962), 156-168, in a slightly condensed and abridged version.

15 . David Stoesz, "Journal," in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches* (Steinbach, 1994), pages 410-455.

16 . Abraham R. Friesen, "Diary Book II, February 18, 1876 - May 28, 1884," unpublished journal, courtesy of grandson Harry S. Friesen, formerly of 250 Waterloo Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba. An extract from these diaries was published in "Abraham R. Friesen: A Diary Excerpt from Russia," in *Mennonite Historian*, Volume 5, No. 2, June 1979, pages 1-2.

17 . Abraham R. Friesen, "Diary," quoted in Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, page 8.

18 . Dennis Stoesz, *A History of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church of Manitoba 1874-1914* (Master's Thesis, 1987), 132.

19 . "Schulverordnung: General School Regulations of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church ca. 1880." in John Dyck, ed., *Working Papers of the East Reserve Village Histories* (Steinbach, 1990), 125-6.

20 . The KG school regulations are published in John C. Reimer, 237-8.

21 . Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada 1870-1925* (Ottawa, 1994), 62.

22 . Jake Doerksen, "Gerhard Wiebe: Correspondence with the Protestant Board of Education" in *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, pages 5-6.

23 . Adolf Ens, 63.

24 . Manitoba Legislative Assembly, *English School Reports 1872-1883*, "Report of the Superintendent of Protestant Schools in the Province of Manitoba, 1879," appendix p. 20.

25 . Gerhard Wiebe, 55.

26 . Dennis Stoesz, 131.

27 . John C. Reimer, 214.

28 . Dennis Stoesz, 144.

29 . See Jake Doerksen, "Jakob Doerksen, Schönthal, Irrgarten," *Preservings*, No. 7, December 1995, page 47, for a sample of this kind of work.

30 . Royden K. Loewen, 158.

31 . See Garth B. P. Doerksen, "Rechen Buch of Gerhard Doerksen," in *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, 28, for a sample of such a manual.

32 . John Dyck, "Alt-Bergfeld," in Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches* (Steinbach, 1994), 20.

33 . For a sample of a Bergthaler "Rechen buch" embellished with *Fraktur* art of exceptional beauty, see Jakob Peters, *Mennonite Private Schools: In Manitoba and Saskatchewan 1874-1925* (Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, 1985), pages 17-19, who reprints 10 colour plates from the "Rechen buch" of Peter Klippenstein of Bergthal created between 1846 and 1849.

34 . Adolf Ens, 65.

35 . Adolf Ens, 65.

36 . As quoted in John C. Reimer, 244.

37 . John C. Reimer, 244.

38 . John C. Reimer, 244.

39 . Gerhard J. Ens, "Die Schule Muss Sein: A History of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute (Gretna, 1990), 21-22.

40 . John C. Reimer, 243.

41 . John C. Reimer, 243.

42 . Dennis Stoesz, 146.

43 . See Table 3, "Number of Mennonite Public School Districts, 1891-1902," Adolf Ens, 110.

44 . Royden K. Loewen, 157.

45 . Royden K. Loewen, 157.

46 . Peter R. Dueck, "Diary," unpublished journals—courtesy of Royden K. Loewen, Steinbach, Manitoba.

47 . Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona, 1970), 87.

48 . Adolf Ens, 109.

49 . Quoted in Adolf Ens, 111.

50 . As quoted in Adolf Ens, 111.

51 . Adolf Ens, 113.

52 . Heinrich Friesen, "Journal," trans. and published in *Historical Sketches*, 394.

53 . Gerhard J. Ens, *Mennonite Collegiate Institute*, 42.

54 . Adolf Ens, page 121.

55 . It should be noted that Steinbach had both a private school and a registered district school during this period. I am indebted to Jake K. Doerksen, Ile des Chenes, Manitoba for providing this information to me: telephone call March 27, 1996.

56 . As quoted by Adolf Ens, 127.

57 . Plett, "What's in a name: Chortitz," in *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, 22-23.

58 . E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 185.

59 . J. H. Doerksen, *Geschichte und Wichtige Dokumente der Mennonite von Russland, Canada, Paraguay und Mexico*, (Giroux, 1923), pages 102-4. The letter is not dated in Doerksen's book.

60 . E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 186.

61 . J. H. Doerksen, *Wichtige Dokumente*, 107-109. The petition was signed by the Sommerfelder Aeltester Abraham Doerksen and the Chortitzer Aeltester Johann K. Dueck as well as 19 ministers of the two Gemeinden.

62 . I am indebted to Jake K. Doerksen, Ile des Chenes, Manitoba, for passing this information on to me: telephone call March 27, 1996.

63 . Loewen, *Blumenort*, 396.

64 . E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 185-187.

65 . John C. Reimer, 244.

66 . As quoted in E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 183.

67 . Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, 104-5.

68 . John C. Reimer, "Our Schools," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, 239.

69 . The reasons for these changes are not entirely clear. Even in the 1950s older people seemed to be more reticent to write journals and I am not aware that there is the same amount of activity in terms of recording personal events and collection of documents as was previously the case. Of course, books and writings from other sources are now much more available so that people possibly no longer feel the same need to gather the type of personally significant religious material as previously.

within the Rural Municipality of Hanover in the area from Steinbach to Chortitz to Grunthal. Not all had farm experience, however, and many found that life difficult. Some were soon able to find occupations in towns.

From that beginning the extended family of Aganetha Vogt left their mark in this community and elsewhere in their new homeland. A daughter, Anna, started a German language kindergarten. Another daughter, Maria, was a nurse and was instrumental in the development of a

local hospital. A son owned a local general store. Another son was an active genealogist and accumulated a considerable amount of records and old documents which are still serving the community. Son-in-law Arnold Dyck acquired the local printing press and continued to publish the local Steinbach Post. He also wrote and published a wealth of materials, including stories in low- and high-German.

Today the family of Andreas and Aganetha (Block) Vogt are scattered across Canada and

the United States, serving the public in a wide variety of occupations. In addition to the roles given above there are now teachers, professors, pastors, sales and management people, lawyers and a broad range of other professions.

In the years that followed, the experiences of that one family were multiplied a great many times. When Canada closed its doors to further immigration in 1929, some 20,000 Mennonites had left Russia and made their home here.

Armin Wiebe at the HSHS Annual Meeting

by Wilmer Penner, Box 1305, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Bringing a Mennonite author to our historical society's annual meeting was an inspired choice. It is easy to think of historical fact and literary fiction as antitheses. But Picasso said that "art is a lie that makes us realise the truth", and this evening was a demonstration of that. Armin Wiebe, like the despised "Fula Reima" of Roy Loewen's history who had written down the saga of Blumenort while others toiled ceaselessly on the land, has written the story of our people in his novels. This he shared with us on January 26 at the SBC.

Roy began the evening with a strong case for the "matri-local" nature of Mennonite settlement - that is, the women chose to settle close to their own families. This gives us insight into the dignity, and the power, of Mennonite women in a patriarchal context. As Elfrieda Neufeld so aptly said, quoting from the Vogt family recollections of a mother: "The man may be the head of the house, but the woman is the neck that turns the head."

And so, Armin tells us, it is with the insignificant Oata. He chose as his first reading a chapter not published in *The Salvation of Jasch Siemens* (it would have appeared between Chapters IX and X had it been included). In this first reading titled "Mouse Lake", she has little stature. Jasch married her on the rebound from "Schups", whose husband makes up the fourth in an undignified excursion they all together make to the lake. In fact, he has done a shrewd calculation of the chances of an early inheritance of her inherited forty acres due to her great weight. But as the novel progressed, she came into an imaginative life of her own so impressive that, to Armin's surprise, the sympathy of women readers of the novel were with her.

So although Armin had not intended this, her success taught him to trust his own creative imagination. By his third novel, *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst*, Oata has become the



Doreen Klassen chats with Armin Wiebe whose readings from his novels highlighted the evening's events. Photo courtesy of Doris Penner

heroine. She is the sensitive artistic soul whose vision rises above the oppressive demands of pioneer life. Our heart is now with Oata as she struggles to overcome a childhood where she was jeered with vicious name-calling. Even in the golden harvest time she has to put the words - those "mosquito words that just keep buzzing" - into the Farmers Union notebook. Let the combine wait while she writes in the truck! Jasch it is who now seems pathetic, when the poetry in which she carries the pain of our human existence is contrasted to his grubbing the fields for more to sell.

This is one example of how literature illu-

minates history. From Armin we learned much about the creative process. His literature is rooted in the life on the beetfields of southern Manitoba, in the evening shift at Versatile with Bruce Peters, on the farm where Grandma makes Grandpa take back the new 4010 tractor.

Armin shows us that literary reality is not invented reality. The lives our parents lived had laughter and loneliness and passion. History is lived by men and by women, together and apart. Armin helps us to feel what it is to have lived our history, our lives.

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Articles

Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen

by granddaughter Katherine Friesen Wiebe, Box 60, R.R.1, Ste. Annes, Manitoba, R0A 1R0

Introduction.

Cornelius T. Friesen was born Aug. 20, 1860 in the village of Bergthal, located in the Bergthal Colony which was newly founded in 1836, about 212 kilometers east of the Chortitza Colony, south Russia. According to oral tradi-

tion the children of Bergthal were considered fortunate having interesting playgrounds near the village. The older children or youth spent time in the fabled Kamennaja Mogila which was a wild life and bird sanctuary. The young children had fun playing on the slopes of the hill

between the villages of Bergthal and Schoenthal. We can well imagine grandfather as a boy of 15 also enjoying this place together with the other young people.

To record something about the lives of our ancestors it is clear that we are able to go back



Cornelius T. Friesen Family 1911

On this picture are Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen and Gertruda Dyck Wiebe Friesen. She was the widow of Heinrich D. Wiebe, son of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900). Cornelius and Gertruda were married on February 28, 1909. The date on the picture is confusing as it may be a date when the picture was developed. Martin C. Friesen married his step-sister Elisabeth Wiebe on July 18, 1911. From left to right: back row, Gertruda D. Wiebe, Elisabeth D. Wiebe, Peter D. Wiebe, Martin C. Friesen and Heinrich C. Friesen; Middle row: Johann D. Wiebe, Jakob D. Wiebe and Jakob C. Friesen (still living today in Colony Bergthal, Paraguay); Front row: Helena D. Wiebe, Mrs. Gertrude Dyck Wiebe Friesen, Abram D. Wiebe, Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen and David C. Friesen. Photo courtesy of Mrs. David C. Friesen.

some 150 years. It is worth noting that this early information was recorded years before our early forefathers left the old country. Some people may raise the question of how this information has been preserved for such a length of time. We could well say that this is through early church records that were kept to date. Another worthwhile thing was that some people kept diaries which served as a great resource in later years on dates for births, marriages, and deaths, plus events of significance. In those days there were also more reminiscing amongst siblings year after year at their gatherings of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and Ascension Day. These Holy days were celebrated for several days and gave them the opportunity to talk about the past and hold onto their memories.

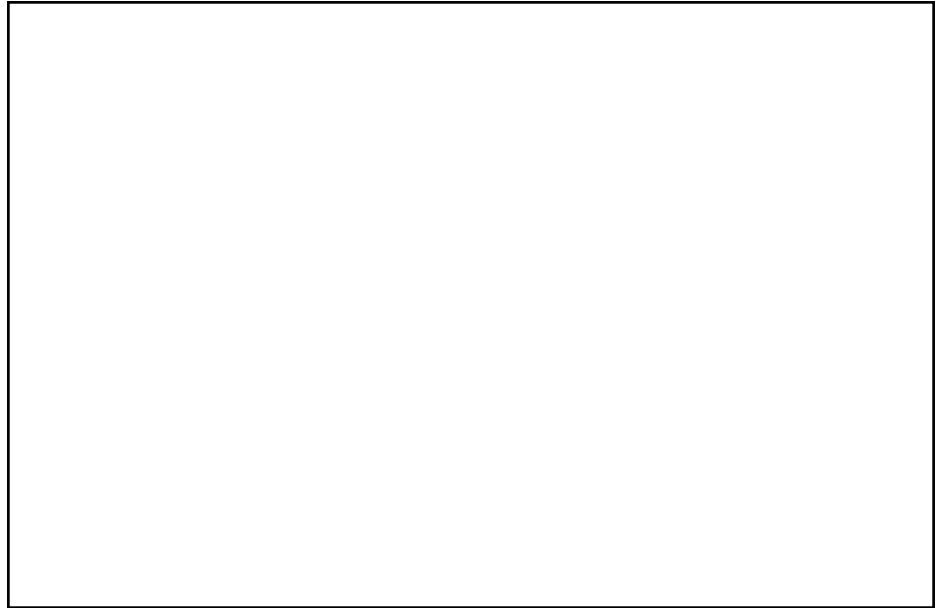
Ancestors.

Our earliest known ancestor according to available sources is Peter Friesen (1812-75). His place of birth in all likelihood was in the Chortitza Colony, South Russia. Peter Friesen met and married Anna Banman in 1832. She was born in 1808 and probably lived in the same area. A few years later Peter and Anna moved to the Bergthal Colony. In 1843 Peter was elected as Waisenman for the Bergthal Colony, a position which he executed for most of his life. My dad Peter C. Friesen wrote in his Family Record book, "Our great-grandfather Peter Friesen, Russia, served for 32 years, 8 months in the Bergthaler Waisenamt."

Peter Friesen (1812) and Anna Banman Friesen had eleven children of which four passed away; two in infancy and the other two when older. Peter Friesen (1812) passed away in June, 1875 just prior to the huge trek to the new land of Canada. The entire colony emigrated, and all, whether rich or poor, were helped along to be able to make the voyage. When Peter Friesen had passed on, his widow Anna and the children all came over from Russia via Hamburg, Liverpool across the ocean on the S.S. Sardinia, arriving in Quebec, July 30, 1875 and finally settled in the village of Osterwick, Man. 5 miles east of Niverville. She must have been a woman of stamina, courage, and deep faith to have been able to bury her husband of 43 years and then move alone with the children to a strange land.

Second Generation.

Kornelius B. Friesen (1833-1909) was the oldest son of Peter Friesen (1812-87). He married Anna Toews in 1855 and lived in the newly-founded Bergthal Colony, Russia. Kornelius followed the footsteps of his father as the Vorsteher of the Waisenamt while still in Russia. When the migration was planned he was very busy with all the paperwork. He and his family moved to Canada in 1876 with six children. They were among the last to leave the colony because of his position as Waisenman. Kornelius B. Friesen had to remain in Russia until all final transactions were completed. Upon their arrival in Canada, they also settled in the village of Osterwick, where he continued his work in the Chortitzer Waisenamt as it was a direct continuation of the Bergthal Colony Waisenamt in Russia.



Sample letterhead of the Chortitzer Waisenamt dating from 1921. Recorded on the form are some old financial statistics relating to the settlement in Manitoba.

Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen was the third oldest son of Kornelius B. and Anna Toews Friesen when they lived in Bergthal Colony, Russia.

Our early forefathers were individuals who lived according to their profession of faith and who migrated from one place or country to another striving to keep their spiritual principles in lands where they could live and work in peace and harmony all in the fear of God. That is what motivated the Mennonites to take heart and be of strong courage when they saw no other way than to migrate. It took a lot of planning and undertaking to get the whole congregation of the Bergthal Colony to get ready for the big Trek to Canada. It was no small matter for the Elders, ministers, and deacons who had the hard task of looking after every detail in writing and all the meetings they had, including meetings with the head statesman of the Russian Czar. They worked diligently at their plan, though progress was slow. Eventually, with diligence, hard work, and much prayer the first Russian Mennonites took the long ocean voyage in summer of 1874 and all went well.

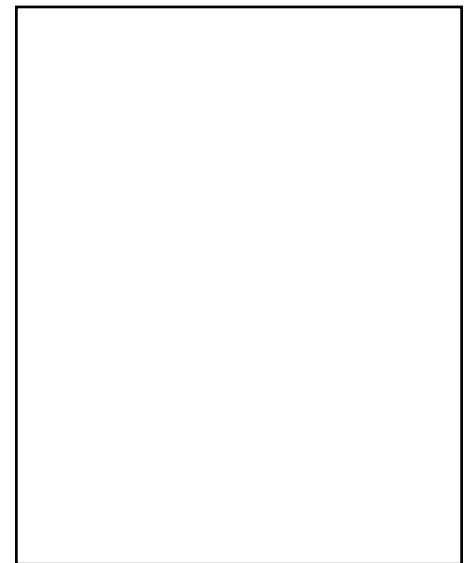
During this time, Cornelius T. Friesen was a young lad of 15. As boys at the time were considered mature at an earlier age than in today's world, he would have been involved in a lot of the activities going on. To him it must have been an exciting and adventurous trip as it would to most boys.

Life and Marriage.

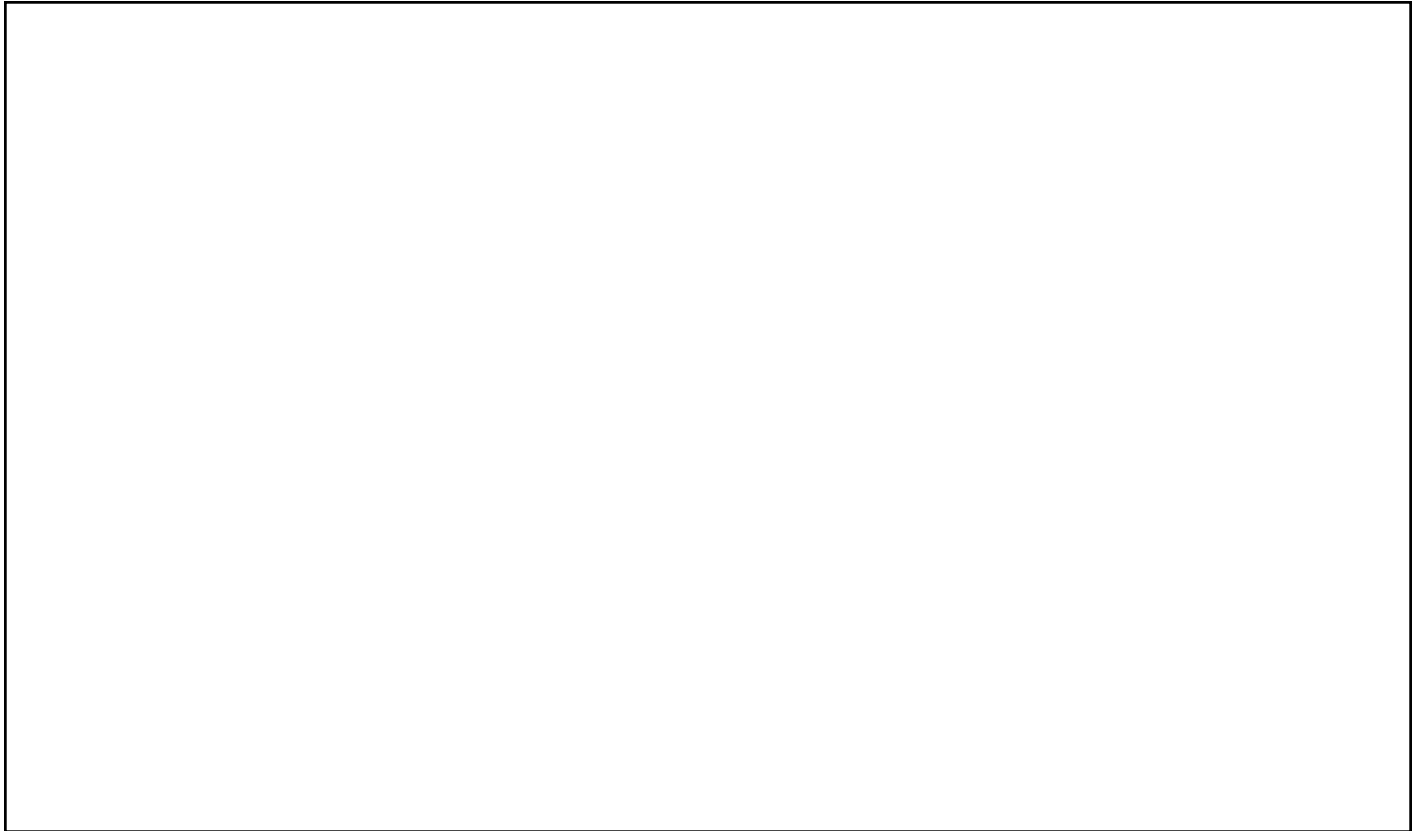
Cornelius T. Friesen grew up on the parental farm in Osterwick and entered into family life tending stock, helping to grow crops and entering into the social life of the community. One of grandfather's oldest granddaughters Tina Reimer who lives in the town of Herbert, Saskatchewan, describes him as follows. "He was a cheerful man, well built and in generally good health. He had blue eyes. His son Peter C.

Friesen resembled him closely." Waisenman Friesen was also a man with a sense of humour which had also rubbed off on his sons for they could make roars of laughter whenever they got together.

Cornelius T. Friesen married a minister's daughter from the village of Schoenthal just a few miles east of Osterwick. She was Katharina Friesen, daughter of Cornelius and Aganetha Friesen. He was a very busy minister who brought the Word of God going on a sleigh, cutter, buggy, democrat if need be when the roads were bad, he went many a time on foot, walking for miles. There were many churches in those days, for there were many villages like Schoenthal, Gnadenfeld, Bergfeld, Burwalde, Pastwa, Reichenbach, Rosengardt and maybe



*Abacus
The Abacus used by Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen during his service in the Chortitz Waisenamt. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Katherine Wiebe.*



Cornelius T. Friesen Family 1935.

Photo of Cornelius T. Friesen family taken in summer of 1935 when Mrs. Gertruda Dyck Wiebe Friesen was honoured at a farewell when she left for Paraguay to live with her daughter Elisabeth, Mrs. Martin C. Friesen. Left to right back row: Cornelius C. Friesen, Peter C. Friesen, Henry C. Friesen, Jakob C. Friesen holding their daughter Trudy, and David C. Friesen; second row sitting: Maria Friesen, Agatha Friesen, Gertruda Dyck Wiebe Friesen, widow of C. T. Friesen, holding her grandson Levi Goertzen, Mrs. Henry C. Friesen, Marigan Weiland Friesen, Mrs. Jakob C. Friesen holding daughter Margaret, Mrs. Helena Goertzen holding the youngest infant; front row: Jakob Goertzen, Henry Goertzen, beneath on grass Trudy Goertzen, Maria Goertzen, Sara Friesen, Katharine Friesen holding one unknown, Helen Friesen, Helen Goertzen, Nettie Goertzen with long hair, and Tina Friesen. Photo courtesy of Katherine Friesen Wiebe.

even more. He served faithfully as a minister for 52 years and reached the age of 83 years, 9 months, and 23 days. He was first elected as deacon Nov. 1869 and as minister in 1871. He passed away in 1922 of lip cancer.

Cornelius T. Friesen had a mixed farm which he worked together with his sons Cornelius, Peter and Martin. The 1904 R.M. of Hanover Tax Records show that Cornelius T Friesen farmed 731 acres of land around Osterwick including his homestead in the village.

Cornelius T. Friesen also followed the tradition established by his grandfather Peter Friesen and father Kornelius B. Friesen of serving as Waisenman. Cornelius T. Friesen was first elected as Waisenman in 1905 for the Chortitzer Waisenamt and in 1917 he was again elected. According to his diary he stayed with the Waisenamt in one way or another till his time of passing.

In addition to administering the funds of widows and orphans it was also their utmost duty to give them true and special care with total sincerity. The Waisenvorsteher also looked after the filing of adoption papers, which must have occurred when my mother was adopted by Peter B. and Margaretha Loewen Friesen who was an aunt to my mother and who had no children of their own, only adopted or foster children.

Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen was involved in the Chortitzer Waisenamt for many years and it required a lot of mathematics to keep all the records in correct order. In those days where there were no adding machines, calculators or computers it all had to be figured out the hard way. Grandfather Cornelius T. Friesen had purchased an abacus and he had some help with this when he did addition or subtraction. Grandfather was noted for his sharpness in arithmetic.

Later my dad had the abacus in his writing table and when they had their auction sale in Altona this abacus showed up. People were not greatly interested in the abacus or knew what an abacus really was, so it ended up in my possession. We heard many stories from our dad about the abacus and how it had been used in the Waisenamt, especially by Waisenman Friesen.

During the years that Cornelius T. Friesen was in service of the Waisenamt, the business office was in his home. The people who came on business never came by appointment, for telephones were not in service in the country at that time. People just came whenever it suited them. The customers were always served with a lunch, fropa, or supper depending on what time of day it was. Many times even overnight accommodations were provided when a storm

came up or in winter when the days were short and they couldn't get their business finished.

Since my parents later bought this property we knew well where the big safe had stood and the huge roll-top desk with its many unique compartments, little drawers were locked automatically. This old, unique, beautiful writing desk has now been partially disassembled and stored away for the time being in the Chortitzer Church in Steinbach until they come to a decision on what the future holds for it.

Martin W. Friesen, who is a Mennonite Historian living in the Chaco Paraguay, had these words to say about his grandfather Waisenman Friesen; "Viele Jahre war er Waisenvorsteher, und waltete treu und verantwortungsvoll seines Amtes." ("For many years he was administrator of the Orphan's Trust and discharged his duties in that office faithfully and responsibly.")

Over the years that he served as the Waisenman he became known as Waisenman Friesen. Since his father and grandfather had served in this capacity before him it may be that this is why the people chose this title for him.

In his diary, Cornelius T. Friesen writes that the total period that the Friesens had served in the Waisenamt office added up to 71 years. Years later, his grandson Diedrich M. Friesen formerly of New Bothwell area (now in Steinbach) served in this same position for eighteen years. After

that, my husband, Diedrich F. Wiebe, Ste. Anne, also served in this capacity for eighteen years. This would bring the total years of Waisenvorsteher in the same line of Friesens to 107 years.

The Emigration Years.

In 1923 grandfather Friesen's daughter Aganetha, together with her husband and family, moved to Mexico. Cornelius T. Friesen was very involved in helping his daughter move even though it was somewhat complicated with her living in the West Reserve (Winkler-Morden area). At that time the drive from Osterwick to the West Reserve would have taken most of a day. In spite of this he felt he had to do everything he could to help her. In those days when someone moved to Mexico it likely meant they would never see each other again.

In 1926-1927 when the Mennonites made another move to keep their faith without hindrance, this time they chose Paraguay. It was a great ordeal for them in decision making, selling what they had and what to take along. They also had to spend time in getting their papers and passports ready. Waisenman Friesen was helping in every way he could. He writes in his diary that his son, Martin C. Friesen, was elected as Bishop of the Gemeinde who would also lead the people to their destination. All this took a lot of patience. The roads were in poor shape and therefore, he had a hard time attending all the meetings and a difficult time with all the other driving that had to be done. It was a couple of years that were spent in getting ready which must have been a real strain to both grandparents since it was their son and daughter who were at the helm of the move.

Finally, the day came when they formed a long motorcade of Model T's with people, then trucks with baggage. There might have been some wagons but from what Grandfather writes in his diary it is not mentioned. They made their way to little town of Cary (St. Pierre), Manitoba, where the train was waiting for them. The people said their good-byes with sadness, weeping and much prayer for they were not expecting to see each other again on this earth, just some day in heaven. Those were their last words in parting from each other. Cornelius T. Friesen wrote in his diary about all that went on the last day and that they were together with their family and friends. After all the good-byes, well wishes and tears, the long voyage to Puerto Casado began. The trip itself went well, but from then on in it was an entirely different story.

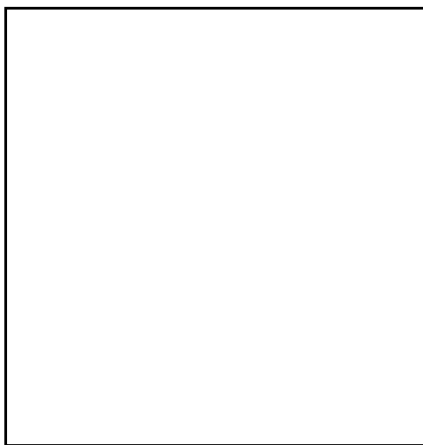
Retirement Years.

During the late 1920s when grandfather Friesen was in his retirement years, we, the Peter C. Friesen family, were living in Rosetown, Manitoba, near Gretna. The distance between Rosetown and the village of Osterwick was about seventy miles one way. Travelling such a distance was not so easy in those days. For this reason our grandparents did not come over all too often. My impression therefore, are based to some extent on conversations I overheard many times between our relatives at our Sunday dinners when they would come back from

the little church that stood in the back of our little fruit garden. I also interviewed individuals, family members and friends. Mostly, I have relied on what my dad told us over the years.

Cornelius T. and Katherina Friesen did a lot of visiting in their married life. They often visited their children close to home, and relatives, neighbours, and friends all over such as Grunthal, Niverville, Schoenthal, Blumengardt, and more. They did this travelling by horse and buggy or democrat, sleigh or cutter. They also would go to Niverville and take the train to the West Reserve to see their children that lived there in the towns or villages of Altona, Plum Coulee, Gretna and more.

The many visitors they had over the years was also due to the little church that stood on their yard. After attending the Sunday morning church service the minister and other relatives or friends would usually stay for the noon meal. The little church had been used as a private school before the public schools were opened in 1919. Later this small church was abandoned when a bigger church was built in the Silberfeld area in 1944.



The Seal of the Chortitzer Waisenamt. The Chortitzer Waisenamt had an official Seal which was used on all legal documents.

Children.

Cornelius T. and Katherina Friesen had 12 children of which 2 died in infancy and one passed away at the age of 15 years. Nine of them grew up to adulthood of which one is still living in Paraguay. He is Jacob C. Friesen, a retired minister who will be 96 years old in August, 1996.

The Cornelius T. Friesen's daughter, Anna Schultz, her husband and children, had moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan, while their youngest daughter, Aganetha Harder with her husband and children had children had gone to live in Mexico. That left the oldest daughter, Katherina who stayed in our area and is the only Auntie that I knew quite well. In winter-time I would stay with her and her husband Henry F. Toews for a few days and she would sew dresses for me to go to school and sometimes one or two Sunday dresses. In the summertime I loved to help her make food. She would bake the widest and tallest of white and brown bread in a home-

made bake oven which she had built herself of bricks, loam and mortar. I can still remember the Christmas cookies she made once. When we had fancied them up they looked more like Ukrainian Easter eggs than Christmas cookies!

One more thing Auntie Katharina did very artistically was decorating her floors. After she had painted the wooden floors in the house she would go to great lengths spending a lot of time and effort drawing flowers, designs in squares and circles. When she was finished it was the most beautiful "carpet" ever! She was a great lady with may skills and talents.

The children and grandchildren of Cornelius T. Friesens' family are spread from Manitoba to Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Paraguay, Uruguay, Mexico, and Los Angeles, U.S.A. The descendants possess a variety of occupations from farmers, to teachers, nurses, M.C.C. workers, Insurance Agents, physicians, dental hygienists, respiratory therapists, historians, ministers, deacons, security guards, carpenters, and to Eastman Feeds owners, operators, and managers, as well as Fehr Sheet Metal owners, etc.

Death and Remarriage.

Cornelius T. and Katherina were life-long members of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church which they attended regularly and lived up to its precepts as devout Christians. It was in September of 1907 that grandfather Friesen went into mourning when his wife Katherina passed away at 45 years after a brief illness. The funeral was held at their home and the burial at the Osterwick cemetery, south of their place where the cairn is standing today.

In grandfather's days the men did not stay in mourning too long after their spouses died. Perhaps it was something like David in the Old Testament. When his young son had passed on, David grieved bitterly for 3 days, then got up, washed, cleaned himself up and was ready to move. on. It seems that is what grandfather Friesen did too.

Cornelius T. Friesen got engaged to Gertrude Dueck Wiebe February 20, 1909, and they were married February 28, 1909. In her first marriage she and her former husband Heinrich D. Wiebe, had 10 children (4 daughters and 6 sons). The first son passed away in 1894 and the oldest daughter left home when she got married to Gerhard Pries. The one son died 3 months after C. T. Friesen's were married. That left her with 7 children and grandfather Friesen had four young boys which they brought together to live on his farm in Osterwick.

According to Waisenman Friesen's diary which he kept in his latter years, life seemed to continue on as usual. The life style they settled into was very much the same pattern as it had been with his first wife Katherine. Maybe the overnight "full house" could have seemed somewhat strange for the newlyweds.

For Waisenman Friesen it was business as usual in his Waisenamt office and taking care of his horses. My dad used to say, "He had great pride in his horses.." He had also kept busy taking care of the other animals with his boys and helping while grandmother was taking care of

her young children and housekeeping. In reading his diary, it is clear their pattern of going places to visit looks identical with the visiting he had done in the days when he was married to Katherine. Life went on, the children grew up and got married and soon the house was empty. Cornelius T. and Gertrude Friesen had their home to themselves for a few years before grandfather passed on.

Death 1929.

Gertrude Dueck Wiebe Friesen was left to mourn her husband's passing on, January 21, 1929 after a brief illness at their residence. The funeral was at their place. It had been extremely cold weather at that time. My mom and dad, who lived in Rosetown in those days did not come to their father's funeral because their daughter Margaret had died while the Friesen families were at Cornelius T. Friesen's funeral in Osterwick.

Cornelius T. Friesen was laid to rest on the Osterwick cemetery south where his first wife Katharina is also buried.

Gertrude moves to Paraguay.

Grandmother Gertrude Friesen kept on living in the farmhouse at Osterwick for about four

years together with his children, Jacob C. and Margaret Friesen. In 1933, when my dad bought the farm and uncle Jacob bought his own place, Grandmother Friesen moved to her daughter Helena's (the Jacob Goertzen's homestead) north of Osterwick. We met with Jake and Adina Goertzen who is a grandson to grandmother Gertrude Friesen, and Jake was telling us that the land they lived on had been on Indian territory already and he could remember his grandmother and that she had lived with them for awhile.

In 1935 grandmother Friesen decided to go live with her daughter Elizabeth (married to Martin C. Friesen) in Paraguay. A farewell was held in her honour to say good-byes and wish her well. She lived her last years at her daughter Elizabeth's place in Paraguay until the time of her passing.

Conclusion.

This concludes a short biography of Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen who as a curious, excited boy of 15, came over from Russia to Canada in 1875. It is noteworthy that spiritual matters were always first in the minds of these early pioneers no matter what came up, the tedious tasks they faced, or what they did in

the church or in the community. Cornelius T. Friesen had lived a life of joy and sorrows and kept his faith. His life shows how he and the church had to respond to several major events such as Gemeinde debts, the emigration to Canada, the distribution of land, handling of titles and deeds, funding and operation of private schools, plus many other matters pertaining to the Church or Waisenamt.

When we look at the life of Waisenman C.T. Friesen, we can see that we have a rich heritage. May we all continue, without hesitation, to pass it on from generation to generation. Here the words of apostle Paul come to mind that my dad said were often quoted by Cornelius T. Friesen. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:7.

submitted by Katherina (Friesen) Wiebe

Sources:

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Pioneers Remember

by D. Plett

In 1934 the citizens of the East Reserve held a *Gedenkfeier* to commemorate the 60th anniversary of their settlement in the area in 1874. The actual gathering was held in Steinbach on August 1, 1934. Over 2,000 people attended the event of whom some 200 had taken part in the actual immigration.

A 50 year *Gedenkfeier* had been held in 1924 in what is Vollwerk, today known as Mitchell. This event was nearly rained out. A 75th year *Gedenkfeier* was held on July 8, 1949, in Steinbach.

A total of nine of the presentations made by East Reserve pioneers at the 60 year *Gedenkfeier* were later published in a book by local printer Arnold Dyck under the title *1874 60 1934 Das 60-jährige Jubiläum der mennonitischen Ost-Reserve* (Warte-Verlage, Steinbach, 1935), 44 pages.

The book was edited by a committee consisting of Chairman Klaas J. B. Reimer, Gerhard G. Kornelsen and J. G. Toews principal of the Steinbach school at the time.

Of the presentations, seven were by individuals descendant from the Kleine Gemeinde, and these articles have already been translated and published in 1987 and 1990 in the "Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series". Two of the presentations were by pioneers of Bergthaler background, later known as Chortitzer, and the same are reproduced here.

The first article by Grunthal pioneer Peter F. Sawatsky, provides a look at the first public

works projects in southeastern Manitoba. The next article, by Hochfelder Gerhard K. Kehler, provides a look at the living conditions of the 1874 pioneers and some of their struggles.

At the time of the Manitoba Centennial in 1974 there was a revival of interest in the history of the Province. This interest extended to the Mennonite community as well and a "Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee" was formed.

One of the projects of this committee was the publication of a collection of articles entitled *Manitoba Mennonite Memories* (Altona, 1974), 354 pages edited by Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius G. Toews. The book proved so popular that a second slightly revised edition was published.

Mennonite Memories includes an article by the widow Johann Peters, nee Maria Wiebe, daughter of Cornelius Wiebe (1821-1896) who settled in the village of Schoensee near Grunthal in 1875. The article in *Mennonite Memories* was written by Elizabeth Bergen of the Red River Valley Echo of Altona. She had taken the information from an interview with Maria Peters done by the *Echo* in 1949. The article provides a woman's insight into the pioneering experience.

Mennonite Memories included an article by Chortitz farmer, teacher, banker, postmaster and Municipal Secretary Johann S. Rempel (1853-1929) describing the ocean voyage of a group of Bergthalers in 1875 and subsequent experi-

ences in their new homeland. Johann S. Rempel presented this paper at a 50th Jubilee celebration held in Vollwerk (today known as Mitchell) in September 1924. The article was translated and first published in *Mennonite Memories* in 1974. It provides invaluable detail of the ocean crossing and the early years.

In reading recollections such as these it should be remembered that it was the style at the time to emphasize the poverty of the pioneer days. It was considered bad form or "pride" to say anything which might indicate wealth. e.g. A review of the fire insurance and tax records reveals that by 1883 Gerhard L. Kehler, father of Gerhard K. Kehler, was one of the four more well-to-do farmers in Hochfeld and definitely in the upper middle class in the pioneer society of Manitoba at the time.

I suppose the modern-day equivalent would be the "We were so poor . . ." stories told by politicians and successful businessmen to establish that their roots are of the "common folk".

Peter F. Sawatzky

Peter F. Sawatzky was born in Bergthal, South Russia, on April 11, 1862, and came to Canada with his parents Peter Sawatzky and Anna Neufeld where they became pioneer settlers in the village of Grunthal (see *Bergthal Gemeindebuch*, 153). He was a great-uncle of Frank W. Sawatzky, well-known as the founder of "F. W. Sawatzky Construction" of Winnipeg.

In 1935 Peter F. Sawatzky was resident in Kronsgart, a village on the banks of the Joubert Creek, two miles south of Grunthal.

The presentation by Peter F. Sawatzky, although short, provides a fascinating look at some of the infrastructure problems in terms of roads and drainage that the East Reserve leaders had to contend with during the early years. Introduction and translated for publication by Delbert Plett. Courtesy of *60=jährige Gedenkfeier*, pages 16-17.

My parents arrived here in Canada in 1876. They took out a homestead in Grunthal [the village plan] and settled there. It was a difficult beginning: my parents were very poor.

I still remember it very well for I was only 14 years old at the time. I still remember that we acquired a bag of barley flour. We picked wild plums which were salted in and this was our nourishment while we were making hay.

But matters soon started to improve and by the next year circumstances were already much different. We harvested some fine grain.

But during the first years we received very much rain so that much land was under water. Where the best farmland is today, it was completely under water then.

I believe it was in 1878 or 79, when a canal was constructed from Heuboden up to the railway track at Otterborne. But this was not done the way it is today, with bagging machines: no! It was done with spades and the workers had to stand in water two feet deep while they worked. The dirt was piled on the north side.

I myself worked on the canal for two years for \$1.25 per day. The first year the supervisor was a certain Kliever and for the second year a Kornelsen. They were both good men. They believed that the crew should work hard.

Then we started growing more grain. The grain was delivered to Niverville which was 20 miles away from Grunthal. We would drive with oxen for 24 hours straight without a break.

And then the time came that we started to drive to Winnipeg. The road from Kronsthal [New Bothwell] to Grandpoint was so poor, there were so many swamp holes, that the people always got stuck.

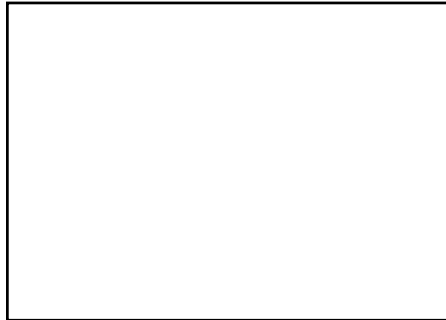
And then one would drive [around the hole] here and the other there, or the people would carry their loads through [the wet spot]. Finally a decision was made and the road was properly rebuilt, I believe in the year 1881 and 82.

Many people then went there to work. I also worked there for 2 years and some days. The

earth was dug loose and thrown onto wagons with a spade and then it was hauled into the water. This is how the grades were constructed. Round logs were brought along from home and used to build bridges.

I still know how the last grade was built up. The brush for the purpose came from a spot near Grandpoint. The last time we drove there was in the same year that the hurricane went through Schönthal and wrecked havoc.

I travelled a lot from my earliest days of youth and always without a Peltz [fur coat]. I



Peter F. Sawatzky and Maria Toews Sawatzky and their children Peter, Maria, Johann and Cornelius with daughter Anna in the back row. Courtesy Grunthal History, page 49.

only had a cloak in winter. I acquired my first underwear only in 1884 when I got married as my parents were too poor.

How wet the land at the time really was can be seen from the following episode. In 1878 or 79 my father sent me to Reinfeld [a pioneer village 2 1/2 miles south of present-day New Bothwell] to the Steam mill where I was supposed to pick up a load of bran.

This occurred in March and the snow was already all thawed. There was water where Johann S. Rempel lives today, and it had frozen overnight. I left there [Reinfeld] at nine o'clock and all-of-a-sudden the oxen were on the ice and also fell down right-a-way.

Alone as I was, I tried to free the oxen in the course of which the vehicle [sleigh] tipped over and my load fell into the water. When I finally had everything loaded again, I had to lead the oxen for two miles around the spot. And that is where the best farmland is today.

Editor's Note:

The following article appears in the Winnipeg Free Press, July 1, 1878

"A BIG JOB. The Mennonites have recently completed one great work, having constructed a road through the St. Norbert swamp (now Grande Point area), eight miles in length, to their own reserve. The total length of the road is sixteen miles, and through the swamp it is graded four feet high and broad enough for two teams to pass easily. The road is solidly built, with timber and brush foundation, and 380 teams and 500 men were engaged for six days on it--their only remuneration being the securing of a good outlet to market."

Gerhard K. Kehler

Another article published in the *60=jährige Jubiläum* was the recollections of Gerhard K. Kehler (1861-) who was born in the village of Hochfeld, Bergthal Colony, South Russia in 1861. He came to Manitoba with his parents Gerhard L. Kehler (1825-1902) and Susanna Kehler (1828-1894) and settled in the village of Hochfeld situated on Section 30-7-6E, some two miles west of Blumenort. By 1881 Gerhard K. Kehler had married Helena Klassen and was resident in Bergthal where he still resided in 1935. Introduction and translated for publication by Delbert Plett. Courtesy of *60=jährige Gedenkfeier*, pages 14-16.

I will restrict myself in the following to report only that which I have personally experienced. I wish to tell what my beloved parents and their large family encountered on the long difficult journey from Russia to America. Indeed, many a Father and many a Mother must have looked into the future with anxious dismay and fear as they did not know what kind of a country they were entering and whether they

would actually be able to nourish their families there.

This was also the experience of my parents: they had a large family and also poor. They had only enough assets to bring their family over here debt-free. Only little was left over to make a new beginning here in America. I believe it was only about seventy-five dollars which my parents had left over for this purpose.

Now, for this money they subscribed for a quarter section of land, a cow was bought, and a few bags of flour, salt and a cut of pig meat were bargained for, and that was their complete inventory. Added to this was the misfortune that the cow kept back her milk. As a result of this we had no milk, which we really needed for our nourishment.

As already stated, we were a large family: thirteen souls counting the parents.

But no cent was to be earned at the time in order to make a living. Nor did we have any vehicle whereby we could transport the wood we needed to build. But fortunately our friends allowed us the use of a dwelling for a time so that we had a temporary roof over our heads.

These friends had already immigrated in 1874 and were therefore able to assist us in this way so that we did not have to camp out under the open skies. This was worth a lot. But now, how could we acquire a dwelling by the time winter came. The answer was hard to find, for everyone had only a small structure for themselves and were completely unable to take a second large family under their roof. Good advice was hard to find.

And yet, an answer had to be found. And it was found, as we helped our friend Peter Hiebert complete the construction of his house in exchange for which we were able to live with them for one winter. In this manner then a dwelling and a warm room was secured for one winter. But it was only one room, and a room which was not big. I believe it was sixteen feet by sixteen feet, which was only very little for a family of thirteen souls.

Only the parents had a bed which was made of red wood. We children had to conduct our sleeping on the floor boards. There would not have been enough room for so many beds in such a small room.

Likewise we only had a small table which was too small for the entire family. For this reason we did not all eat at the same time and had to eat in turns.

But this would not have been the worst if only good food would have been generally available. Unfortunately this was not the case and we had to be satisfied with good or bad and we had to submit ourselves to the food as it was without complaint. Indeed, our experience was comparable to that of the children of Israel who longed for the fleshpots which they had left behind them in Egypt. But the Lord gave them meat to eat so that their needs were fully satisfied for so long as they had to wander through the desert. Likewise He also saw to our needs which were necessary for the continuation of our lives, for which we give Him the glory.

As already mentioned, we had only little room, but my parents had provisioned themselves with an ample supply of clothes and fur coats so that we would not need to have any concerns about lack of clothing if conditions here would be very poor.

But they were to be robbed even of this provision of clothing in that after a hard winter, on the second day of Easter, their dwelling was destroyed by fire and all our clothes and most of our bedding were destroyed. No fur coats or jackets survived with which we could protect ourself from the terrible cold. Our insurance coverage with the *Brandordnung* [Mennonite mutual fire insurance company] was so limited that we could expect to receive only a small settlement with which to provide ourselves with the necessary clothing. We had only saved what we were wearing.

Nor was there any expectation that we would be able to obtain such clothing as the *Brandgeld* [insurance money] had to be used to purchase draft animals. By this means we were able to acquire our own team and thereby to bring in the necessary wood so that we were able to build our own house the next spring.

Father was able to borrow a wagon from a

certain Mr. Shantz who sent a supply of wagons here from Berlin (Ontario) and gave them to poor people on credit which were to be paid for in a number of years. In any event, it was a great help to us, that this beloved man came to the aid of our poor people. By this means and with the help of God we were able to make sufficient progress that we acquired our own house.

Our circumstances were improved somewhat with this, but not nearly completing ameliorated—for as already stated our cloths were all burnt. Money was required to obtain new ones, and so we were able to cloth ourselves with only the barest necessities.

To buy on credit at the store—there was at the time only one store in the entire Gemeinde, and if something was purchased there on credit it had to be paid back double. My parents had borrowed twelve dollars worth and for this the storeman took a very good sow which had a value of thirty dollars at the time.

From this time forth there were very significant changes came to pass in the family. Three of my sisters entered into the state of matrimony in that year and the fourth in the following year so that our family was already four souls smaller.

But the debt which we had incurred during the four years fell upon us young ones as the

parents were already too old to work very hard. And so we three brothers always gave our service for our “bread debt” until every farthing and penny was paid in full. Peter, the oldest, remained at home in order to look after the farm. Thereby our parents got rid of this debt which had caused them much sorrow and worry.

Cornelius, the very oldest, was a cripple. However he had received a good education and was able to earn his bread as a school teacher. With the exception of one year he also served in this profession for his entire life. He was, therefore, not at the mercy of assistance from the parents or siblings.

As already stated, there were difficult times and it was not easy to make a living. Yet, the beloved Lord directed all things in such a manner that we survived the difficult years and that we did not have to suffer. Yet, our life was made up of many difficulties of which our contemporary youth as no real comprehension.

[Editor's note: After making some inquiries, I am still unsure as to the identity of the family of Gerhard K. Kehler (b. 1861). If anyone has this information I would appreciate the reference.]

Maria Peters (1870-1952)

Maria Wiebe (1870-1952) came to Canada with her parents Kornelius Wiebe (1821-1896) and Helena Klassen (b.1832)(BGB A176) who emigrated from the Bergthal Colony, South Russia, in 1875. The family is listed in the “Seelenliste” for the village of Schoensee in 1882/3. See *Working Papers*, page 157. Maria married Johann Peters, probably the son of Johann Peters of the same village. According to a family history the couple made their first home in the nearby village of Grunthal.

Next they took up a homestead at Rosenheim and then they purchased a farm at Wiedenfeld near Altona. Johann Peters died here in 1925. Maria, however, continued farming until she retired to Altona in 1935. She maintained her own home for many years and then lived with her children the Peter E. Brauns. She died in January 1952 at the age of 83 years. Courtesy of *Mennonite Memories*, (Second ed.), pp. 233-4.

We were a happy family, if not happier than people are today! We didn't have many clothes or wealth, but we didn't expert much. My father made our shoes, which he carved from wood. When we children became ill with measles the first winter we were here and, with food and living conditions not being the best, other complications set in so that I was ill for a long time. Doctors in those days were few and far between.

Our home was a crude structure, but we managed to keep warm during the winter months. As for furniture, it was very plain and consisted only of the bare necessities such as stove, chairs and “Schlafbenken” beds that were pulled out to sleep two persons and during the day, served as seating space.

The food we ate was simple and consisted chiefly of beans, which we brought from Russia, macaroni, bread and milk. We had a cow that provided the family with milk, though not as much as we would have liked to have had.

After a few years we also had a few sheep so mother spun the wool and knit us stockings. This also meant that more meat was on the daily menu. I remember the first time we had bacon for dinner. That was quite a treat! Our beverage consisted of “prips” brewed from roasted wheat - this filled the place of coffee.

We had a pair of oxen that served us in various ways. They plowed the fields, took us to Emerson, which was our trading centre the first while, and took us visiting. Though stubborn as could be, the pair always got us to where we wanted to go, but they frequently lay down for rests and once down it took much prodding to get them up on their feet.

Johann S. Rempel

Johann S. Rempel was born in the Heubodon, Bergthal Colony, Russia in 1853. In 1875 he came to Manitoba and settled in Grunthal with his parents. Shortly thereafter he served as a school teacher in Tannenau and then settled in Chortitz, Manitoba. He became a wealthy farmer and much respected community leader. See Helena Wiebe Unger and Cornelius Rempel, *Preservings*, December, 1995, No. 6, pp. 30-31, for biographies and family photographs. Courtesy *Mennonite Memories*, (Second ed.), 20-27.

Preparing to Emigrate.

When our delegates had completed their assignment in a manner satisfying the church, and after the emigration had been decided upon, our leaders began a period of hard work. It was necessary, as a first step, to produce the emigration visas, something that brought with it many difficulties and delays. Although the Mennonites had received permission from the Czar to emigrate, there were obstacles created by the Russian officials. Repeatedly they rejected the applications for the visas, alleging that they had been improperly filled out. It appeared, however, that this was in fact designed to secure more bribe money, since one can accomplish little with Russian officials without a bribe; one simply must "grease the palm" (es muss geschmiert werden). This had been done on numerous occasions, but things seemed to be at a standstill nevertheless.

When the patience of our delegates had been exhausted, several men, i.e. Abram Doerksen of Schoenthal, and Jacob Peters, from Heuboden, were commissioned to make direct contacts with the governors of Ekaterinoslav to see how the affair was coming along [Note 1]. Peters, my wife's uncle, was a determined individual, having been Oberschulze (Reeve) for many years, and hence familiar with higher officials. On this occasion Peters dared to secretly slip a 100-ruble bill to the governor while greeting him.

It seemed to do the trick. Peters related the incident to me in these words, "After I placed zero over each of the governor's eyes, he no longer could see any errors in my application papers, and with that the difficulty had disappeared."

Peters had, however, travelled to America without proper leave, and was for that reason relieved of his office, with a certain Johann Braun taking his place. This enabled Peters to give more time to the details of the emigration, and I believe I may assert that our leading Aeltester of the church, Gerhard Wiebe, and Mr. Jacob Peters have been the soul (die Seele) of the entire migration to Canada.

Paying Expenses.

In the meantime the first contingent of emigrants had been formed, and it was now necessary to secure the needed funds to pay the ex-

penses of travel and related matters. For most of them this was no easy matter since they were still unable to sell their farms inasmuch as Mennonites did not have titles to their lands, not being citizens, legally, of the country. Later a way was found to alleviate the problem, so that the farms could be sold.

Also there were many debts among us, although mainly within the Waisenamt. Since almost the entire church emigrated (fifteen families remained behind) it was possible to take the debts along to Canada.

The Bergthal Church was comprised of about 500 families with five villages of 145 owners of full farms, several smaller farm owners, and perhaps twice as many families of landless folk who lived in the villages, or in the chutors (estates) on rented land. Most of them could be considered poor, and many of them went into debt for part or all of their trip. Each family had, however, to carry the cost of the trip to Hamburg, Germany, set as I recall at 34 rubles per adult. The journey from Hamburg to Winnipeg cost \$30.00. For this portion of the passage fare it was possible to receive credit advanced by the Canadian government.

The sale of our movable properties also presented a problem. Initially the goods could be sold for a reasonable price, but soon the matter dragged. Our neighbours knew that we could take only a few belongings with us, and so they would pay as little as possible. Many items were consequently just given away, or simply left behind.

Departure of the First Groups

On June 15 of the year 1874 the first group of about fifty families began their journey to America. I was 21 years old at the time, so I can still recall a good deal about that experience. I was staying with Rev. Franz Dueck, the father of our deceased bishop Johann Dueck, who was living with an estate owner (Gutsbesitzer) by the name of Cornelius Buhr, located 80 miles west (sic) of Bergthal. An assistant elder, Mr. Dueck, was obliged to reside for a time at Bergthal. The first group also stayed with this estate owner during the first night after a day's journey to the railway station. Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe accompanied the group as far as Hamburg, in Germany.

A second group of 28 families departed on September 28. The first group reached Manitoba on August 1, according to the "New Style" (i.e., Canadian calendar-Ed.) The first group of the Kleine Gemeinde had arrived approximately at the same time.

Beginnings in Manitoba.

The immigration authorities had erected barracks inland at the site of the present location of Martin Friesen's farm not far from Niverville. Here the immigrants could find temporary shelter till they had selected a homestead.

But what did they find? Dissatisfaction, a desert wilderness, no railroad, roads or bridges,

no settlers for miles around, other than scattered Metis along the river. The only avenue of communication by which Manitoba could obtain its necessities was the Red River. The closest source of supplies was Fort Garry, now known as Winnipeg. To go there required three or four days' travel with oxen, since no one had horses as yet.

Soon a deep dissatisfaction became evident. A number who were able found their way to the United States, namely those who received assistance from the Ontario government. Since development needs, other than our trip expenses, were not covered by the sum, the Canadian government had loaned us \$80,000 so that the poorest settlers could make their payments for cattle, seed grain, and living necessities. Our brothers of faith in Ontario had provided security with the Canadian government for this.

Our trip - 1875

Now I want to make a few comments regarding the trip of the group with which I came, since I feel that what may be said about one group could be applied more or less to all the others.

Another group of about fifty families, and including my parents and myself, left on May 22, i.e. Ascension Day in the year 1875. I believe it was at Balta, not far from the Austrian border where we met up with an equally large group of Mennonites from the Fuersten (land) Church (Old Colony).

Our train was unusually long for the conditions of the time, and hence there were many delays. On the North Sea we faced stormy weather, as we did on the ocean on which, I believe, we travelled for 12 days. Our captain lost his bearings on the banks of Newfoundland, and we faced grave danger. I recall how the captain petitioned for prayers of assistance through our Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, who was also travelling with the group.

Here we experienced how God answers prayers; soon after this the fog lifted, and we could see tall rocky cliffs very close to the ship, revealing the grave danger we had all been in.

At Toronto we received a report that grasshoppers had consumed everything in Manitoba, so that it would be best if the poorest could remain in Ontario, a suggestion we accepted gratefully. Most of us were taken to the Waterloo area. On the 6th of July, I believe it was (New Style), we were taken in all direction from the station at Berlin (now Kitchener), just as we have recently received our brothers in the faith from Russia.

Thus we had a chance to earn something, even if not much, as well as to become better acquainted with the American style of farming, something that was most advantageous to us.

In Danger - 1876

Now a brief comment on our trip from Ontario to Manitoba. We left Berlin on May 9, 1876, in order to complete the rest of our jour-

continued from page

ney. As far as I know, we were more than 80 families. Our route took us across the Great Lake. The following day we cheerfully boarded the ship at Sarnia, hoping to reach our destination in a few days.

But man proposes and God disposes. It was to be quite different. The trip across Lake Huron was smooth sailing but after passing the locks into Lake Superior, we encountered heavy floes of ice. After that travelling was better again. But in front of us strong winds had driven the ice floes into the bay at Duluth, so that we could not pass through. Our ship had, however,

penetrated the ice field so deeply that it was impossible to turn back.

Here, on a ship that was to have taken us to Duluth in four days, we remained for fifteen days. We even received a little taste of what going hungry meant. If the brethren in Ontario had not supplied us so liberally with food, we would have been in sore straits indeed; we were about 800 persons on board, and everything was consumed. The oil for lamps and kitchen stoves, as well as coal for the steam engines were all gone. We were nine miles from Duluth, and about eight miles from the nearest shore. Almost daily an additional ship would move in, so that finally seven or eight ships were stuck

in ice at the bay. All finally reached Duluth on the same day.

There is not sufficient time to describe the scenes which passed by on board ship, but I will never forget them. The rest of our trip transpired without any special interruptions, and on May 31 we arrived at our destination in Manitoba.

Note 1: J. H. Doerksen in his book *Wichtige Documente . . . Kanada, und Paraguay* (Giroux, 1923), 156 pages, mentions the names of Abraham Doerksen and Johann Heppner as the two representatives of the Bergthal Colony responsible for working out the immigration passes in Russia in 1873.

Johann (Funk) Braun (1857-1925)

by Al Hamm, Steinbach, Manitoba

Johann F. Braun was born April 26, 1857 in the village of Friedrichstal, Bergthal Colony, South Russia. He was the fourth, out of eight children born to Jakob Braun and Katharina Funk Braun. At the age of eighteen, he together with his parents, one older brother Jacob, younger brother Abraham and younger sister Katarina, came to Canada. They arrived on the S.S. Manitoba No. 36 in Quebec on July 27, 1875. An older sister Helena (married Jacob H. Harder) had preceded them, arriving in Quebec on July 1, 1875 via the S.S. Moravian No. 25.

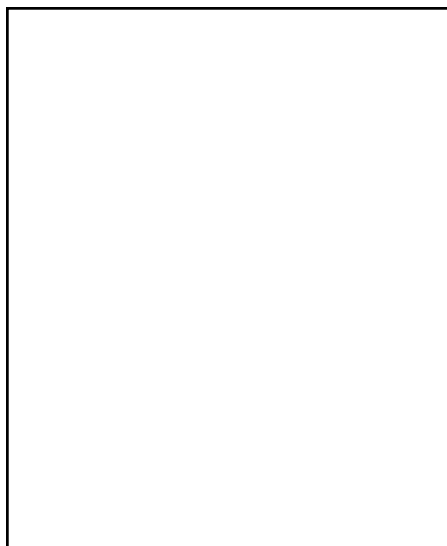
The family settled on a farm at Gnadenfeld, two miles northwest of Grunthal. After about a year, Johann who was obviously a man of motivation, filed for his own homestead on the NW 22-5-5E. In the late 1870s he purchased a Massey binder with his father and two brothers, and by persuading two or three neighbouring farmer to also buy implements from the Massey company, he was made agent or salesman for the company. The family is listed in Gnadenfeld in the 1881 census as well as the 1883 "Seelenliste".

On April 4, 1880, Johann married Helena S. Abrams, who was born May 18, 1861. Her family had arrived on the same ship as the Brauns, and had settled on a homestead near Hochstadt. They continued the traditional call of farming, however, Johann found this increasingly difficult because he was suffering from a particular intestinal ailment. This medical disorder was apparently common within the Braun families, and eventually prevented Johann from working in the field, and forced him to seek a different livelihood.

In 1892 Johann moved to the village of Gruenthal (now Grunthal) and together with his brother-in-law Johann F. Krahn, formed the partnership of "Braun & Krahn". By this time, the settlers had already experienced their worst pioneering difficulties, and the reputation and fortunes of this new enterprising firm grew rapidly. They first built a new building and bought the only store in the village of Grunthal from the well-known "Dr." Johann D. Peters, who

wanted to concentrate primarily on his practice.

Although dates are not certain, the two businessmen also built a saw mill and grist mill powered by a steam engine around 1892. They took over the McCormick machine agency in 1894, and with increasing sales of such items as the Emerson Gang plows and the Fish-Chatham wagons and sleighs, established the village as one of the three main trade centres in the East



Johann F. Braun and Helena Abrams Braun. Photo courtesy of Reflections on our Heritage, page 326.

Reserve. They also operated a cheese factory from 1895 to 1900. Also, upon application of the people in the district, a Post Office was established in 1894, and Johann Braun became the first postmaster of Grunthal holding this position until his retirement from business in 1922.

The many business and government connections afforded Johann a good opportunity to learn the English language. Since it was rather impractical in those days of slow travel to go to

Winnipeg to have land deals and other transactions completed, he was urged by the late Member of Parliament Albert Prefontaine to apply for a commissionership so he could do a certain amount of that work for the people at home and save them much time and money.

Thanks to the kind, full and free assistance he got from the late Judge Prodhomme of St. Boniface, he was able to help his neighbours with many of their legal affairs. In his own words, "I hate to go to, or have anything to do with lawyers, but there is one firm you can trust, and I have no hesitation to put my affairs in the hands of Pitblado Hoskins--they are honest men". And so, Johann Braun was a Commissioner of Oaths and Conveyancer of the Province of Manitoba for many years. He handled many diverse cases, not only purchasing and transferring of land, but also mediated and helped to reconcile friction between neighbours plus domestic differences, as well as marriages, thus resolving issues that often would have necessitated journeys to St. Pierre or Winnipeg.

The arrival of the Ukrainian settlers to the Sarto area, east of Grunthal, in 1900 had a favourable impact on the community of Grunthal. The Ukrainians came to Grunthal for trade and gave the village a very definite economic lift. And since Johann Braun had some knowledge of the Ukrainian language from the old country, this became very useful in dealing with these new settlers. These people made Grunthal their place of business and also received their mail here. Johann made many life-long friends among these humble and friendly neighbours who learned to respect him, and on many occasions also depended on him for advice and to settle disputes. They trusted him, and some made him executor of their wills.

During this time, in 1901, Braun & Krahn sold their store, and it subsequently changed hands several times. It burned to the ground in 1904, was rebuilt, burned again in 1907 due to lightning and rebuilt again in 1908. However, it never realized its full potential after that due to

two reasons. A whole new business community was being developed on a street east of the old village, and secondly a group of residents and businessmen (including Braun & Krahn) formed the Grunthal Milling Company and built a large competitive store in 1911.

This 50 barrel, steam-powered mill and large store was a big venture. But it was kept busy and in that same year, Bruno Hamm, a German - Mennonite, was hired to be its miller. In June 1912 he married Johann Braun's daughter Katharina. Johann Braun was the general superintendent and secretary, serving in that capacity until they sold out in 1922. The mill was renovated in 1922 and a portion of the east side was removed. The Company was sold in 1928 to "City Dairy" in Winnipeg which later became "Silverwoods Dairy". The large store that was owned by the Grunthal Milling Company became the first government school in the district, later known as Goodwill School.

Not only did Johann Braun establish himself as Grunthal's first prominent businessman, he also served as municipal councillor in Ward 6 for a few years, and later as reeve of the Municipality of Hanover for 11 years. His contribution and influence played a significant part in establishing the Town of Grunthal in those early years. In all his dealings, he was known as a man of principle and self-control; he was a man who was organized and compassionate.

Johann Braun was one who would not force his ideas on others but because of his character and personality, many came to him to seek advice. Although he was kept busy with many business contracts, he is remembered as visiting the sick in hospitals, and in one case even paid for the hospital fees when the patient was unable to pay for his bill upon release. When he was aware of those in need, his compassion was instinctively transformed into deeds of kindness. At the time of his death, he counselled his sons and son-in-laws about some long-standing debts that were still owed to his business ventures, saying, "take whatever they give you, however, do not use the law or any other coercion."

It is told, that one day when a B.C. apple dealer came to collect from Johann Braun for a carload of apples which had already been paid, and when the dealer began using some unbecoming language, son Peter was about to assist his father in the confrontation but was quickly reminded, "Peter, this is my business, and you better not interfere." Apparently, in later years Johann Braun had a problem with temporary blackouts. On a trip to Winnipeg he ran into a telephone pole in the city, possibly a result of this problem. All he did was get someone to tow him to the Ford Motor Co. where he had the damages repaired, and no more was said.

Johann Braun died of cancer on June 25, 1925 at the age of 68 years, 1 month and 9 days. Johann Braun and Helena Abrams were married for 39 years, 3 months and 19 days. To them were born eleven children, six of whom grew to adulthood, the other five died as infants or in their younger years.



The Grunthal Milling Company's flour mill, built in 1911. Photo courtesy of Otto Hamm.

About the author: Al Hamm is Assistant Manager of the Steinbach Credit Union Ltd and a direct descendant of Bruno Hamm who married Katherina Braun, daughter of Johann Braun.

Sources:

Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Johann Braun," in Caril-

lon News, May 2, 1952, page 10, also published in *Grunthal History*, pages 34-35.

Abe Warkentin, *Reflections on our Heritage* (Steinbach, 1974), pages 326-327.

Interview with grandson Walter F. Braun, Sinclair, Manitoba.

Kleine Gemeinde Rempels

By Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B.C., V3L 4V5

The Kleine Gemeinde (KG) Rempels are descendants of a certain Bernhard Rempel, who, until now has been difficult to trace, owing to confusion regarding his wife's name. Bernhard Rempel was the son of Johann Rempel who is listed in the 1776 census at Petershagen, West Prussia: (three sons, one daughter) [the same village where KG founder Klaas Reimer was born in 1770].

Johann Rempel was a landowner and died before 1795. It seems likely his eldest son Johann assumed the family Wirtschaft after his father's death. Bernhard was born circa 1762 and had siblings: Dirk (b. 1769), Kristina or Justina (b. 1771), Gerhard (b. 1775) and Kornelius (b. 1780).

Bernhard Rempel married Eliesabeth Fast (circa 1766-1818), on December 8, 1789. Eliesabeth was the daughter of Peter Fast of Orloff, listed in the 1776 census as having two sons, two daughters. There is some confusion regarding the name of his wife. Some sources indicate that her name was Barbara Fast, but the above is certainly correct. The family lived at Reinland until Bernhard's death circa 1806. They were likely members of the Rosenort Gemeinde.

The widow of Bernhard married Johann Janzen (1777-1822) of Fürstenau on July 7, 1806, the son of Johann Janzen. After her death, he again married Eliesabeth Joost on January 30, 1819. Shortly afterwards the combined Rempel-Janzen family emigrated to Russia. [They settled on Wirtschaft 39 in Margenau, Mol.]

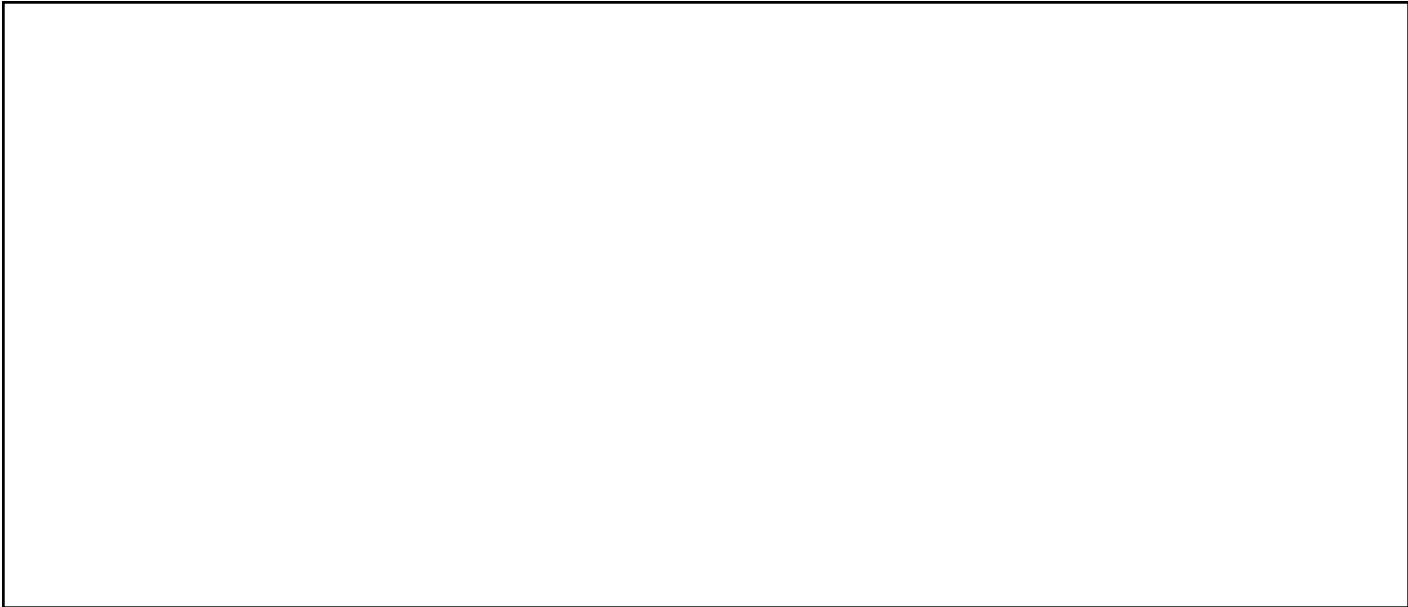
[Johann Janzen it might be added was the

father of Cornelius Janzen (1812-64) of Neukirch who married Sara Siemens (1809-85), daughter of Claasz Siemens of Rosenort, Mol. Two letters by Sarah Janzen were published in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, 78-79. Sarah and Cornelius were the parents of Johann S. Janzen (1840-1905) of Blumenhof, Man. See *Preservings*, no 7, page 55.

The children of Bernhard Rempel include:

1. **Peter Rempel** (1792-1837). He married Katherina Berg, the widow of Jacob Wall in 1813. When he came to Russia in 1818, he first settled at Ohrloff, Molotschna, but later moved to Lichtfelde where he is found in the 1835 census as the owner of Wirtschaft no. 7. Peter married for the second time to Margaretha Sawatzky (1808-92), daughter of Cornelius Sawatzky and Anna von Riesen from Ohrloff, Mol.

Peter's children include: Peter (1814-72) [Peter was a short heavy-set man weighing 300 pounds. They had a Wirtschaft in Paulsheim, Mol. His daughters Maria and Elisabeth married brothers Jakob L. Dueck and Abraham L. Dueck, later of Gruenfeld, Manitoba. Peter's son Peter (1844-1914) emigrated to Hillsboro, Ks. in 1904 where his son Peter was the pastor of the MB church. Heinrich R. (1855-1926), youngest son of Peter (1814-72), emigrated to Grunfeld, Man. in 1886 and served as a school teacher.]; Eliesabeth (1814-93) married Abraham F. Reimer, see *Preservings* no. 7; Johann (b. 1815); Gerhard (1816-88) had a Wirtschaft in Mariawohl and emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska in 1876; Bernhard (1819-19); Bernhard (1820-91) was a building contractor who lived in Lichtfelde and later



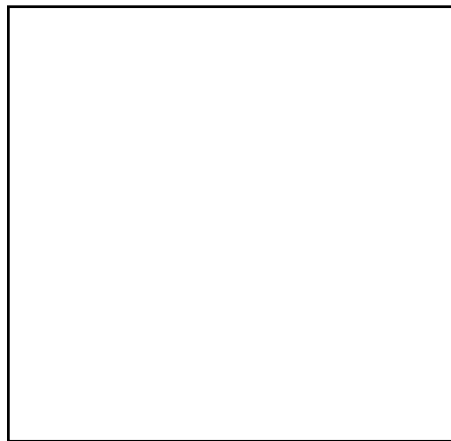
Th e Penners, Duecks and Reimers of Blumenort - 1940. Seated in front, left to right: Peter R. Reimer (1870-1946) and his second wife Helena Wiebe Schellenberg; Mrs. Isaac J. Loewen, nee Elisabeth R. Penner (1870-1944); Mr. and Mrs. Abram R. Reimer, nee Susanna I. Dueck (1876-1980); John R. Penner; and Rev. and Mrs. Heinrich R. Reimer, nee Helena L. Dueck (1878-1950); see article by Doris Penner elsewhere in this issue; Middle row: Mr. and Mrs. John A.K. Plett, nee Marharetha Penner (1884-1978); Mr. and Mrs. Aaron R. Reimer, nee Mararetha L. Dueck (1885-1968); Rev. and Mrs. Peter B. Kroeker, nee Elisabeth L. Dueck (1879-1963); see article by Rev. Harvey Kroeker in Part one of this issue; Mrs. Peter R. Penner; nee Anna Wiebe (1878-1958); Mrs. Cornelius R. Penner, nee Gertruda K. Loewen (1884-1950); Mr. Peter R. Penner; Rev. Cornelius R. Penner: Back row: Mr. and Mrs. Abram L. Reimer, nee Maris S. Freisen, and Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Unger, nee Maria L. Reimer whose first husband was Frank T. Kroeker. The "R" Penners were double Rempels as they were the grandchildren of Katherina Rempel Penner (1825-1856-) and Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1844-1893) who were first cousins. The "R" Reimers were also grandchildren of Elisabeth Rempel Rempel. Peter R. Reimer was the step-father of the Dueck girls who were the daughters of pioneer school teacher Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887) of Gruenfeld.

Alexanderwohl, Mol.; Katherina (1833-75) married Gerhard Willms who moved to Mountain Lake; Anna (1833-85) married Jakob Wiens and moved to Inman, Ks.; and Kornelius (1836-65).

2. **Bernhard Rempel** (b. 1792). He may have been a twin brother of Peter Rempel. The name of his wife is not know as yet. He too settled at Ohrloff, but moved to Muntau in 1821 where he had acquired his own Wirtschaft by 1831. His children include: Maria (b. 1820), Johann (b. 1821), and Bernhard (b. 1829).

3. **Gertruda Rempel** (b. 1793)

4. **Johann Rempel** (1797-1831). Historian



Mr. & Mrs. Heinrich Rempel (1855-1926) and son Gerhard S. Rempel. Heinrich came to Manitoba in 1886 but later moved to Steinbach, Man. He was a frequent correspondent to the Rundschau, thereby creating a valuable source of information about the community. Photo courtesy of God, working through Us, page 12.

Delbert Plett has concluded that Johann died of an illness contracted during the "false-humility" days of the KG in the late 1820s.

5. **Abraham Rempel** (1798-1878). His first wife was a Maria Hamm (b. 1795), daughter of Martin Hamm of Tiede, Molotschna. His second wife was Anna Martens (1805-1866), widow of Johann Koop of Muntau. Abraham acquired Wirtschaft 21 in Tiede, Molotschna, in 1818. [Later he moved to Margenau. He was a successful Vollwirt. On June 6, 1865, he was admonished by the KG brotherhood because "he struck his herdsman. He was forgiven." Abraham Rempel settled in Blumenort, Man. in 1874.] Their children include: Maria (1819-97) who married teacher Kornelius Friesen of Margenau and later Blumenort, Manitoba; Abraham (b. 1822); Martin (1833-74) married his step-sister Katharina Koop who emigrated to Rosenort, Man., with their sons Martin (b. 1845), Johann (b. 1851) Jacob (b. 1856), Peter (b. 1858), Gerhard (b. 1867) and Heinrich (b. 1871); Eliesabeth (b. 1825); Katherina (1828-56), the second of the five wives of Peter Penner (1816-84) of Margenau and later Blumenort, Man.; Anna (b. 1831); Margaretha (1833-1907) married Johann Esau (1832-1904) of Fischau, Mol. and later Rosenfeld, Man. where he served as the second KG Brandaeltester; and Helena (1843-1913) married Rev. Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935) of Blumenhof, Man. and later Satanta, Ks.

6. **Eliesabeth** (b. 1800)

The descendants of Peter Rempel (1792-1837) and Abraham Rempel (1798-1878) were members of the KG and their history is outlined in more detail in the works of Delbert Plett. Many Manitoba Rempels are descendants of

these families. Bernhard Rempel (b. 1792) and Johann Rempel (1797-1831) were involved in the "false-humility" movement of the Kleine Gemeinde in the late 1820s. The "false-humility" movement, as described in the works of Delbert Plett, was a reaction against worldliness, and involved the rejection of worldly comforts, to an excessive degree.

References

West Prussian Church Records.

1835 Molotschna census: transcribed by H. Fast. Plett, D. Vol. I-VI of the Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series, Steinbach, 1982-93

Plett, "Bernhard Rempel Genealogy," unpublished paper, 1994, 22 pages.



Peter Rempel (1865-1937), grandson of Peter R. (1814-72), and his family. Peter had attended Bible School in Basel, Switzerland. In 1908 he joined the faculty of the newly-founded Tabor College, Ks. In 1908 he became pastor of the MB Church at Hillsboro. Photo courtesy of Orlando Harms, Journey of a Church, page 64.

Peter Rempel of Bergthal

by Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B.C., V3L 4V5

Prussian Roots.

One of the Rempels who came to Canada in 1874 was Johann Rempel (1830-99). This family has been described in several works, but the ancestry of this Johann Rempel has never been clearly delineated.

According to Dr. H. Penner, whose intuitions are generally reliable, most of the West Prussian Mennonite Rempels can be traced to three Schwenkfelder families, who were driven out of Silesia in the early 1700s, and settled for a short time in Hamburg. All of the Rempels, up to perhaps 1776 joined the various Flemish Gemeinden, although there is evidence of at least two Rempels marrying into Frisian families after 1776.

The ancestor of the above Johann Rempel appears to be the Gerhard Rempel listed at Furstenauerfeld, West Prussia, in 1776, with one son and two daughters. He was likely a member of the Rosenthal Gemeinde. Gerhard Rempel likely came to Russia circa 1796-98 and settled at Schonwiese. He later apparently moved to Niederchortitza where he died December 7, 1837. His first wife was, it seems, an Anna Letkemann and his second wife Eva (b. 1759), was the widow of Johann Janzen of Schonwiese, Russia.

Gerhard Rempel Children.

The children of Gerhard Rempel appear to be as follows:

1. **Maria** (b. 1771), married Martin Hamm (1769-1828). This family came to Russia in 1804 and settled at Tiede, Molotschna. [Their daughter Maria married Abraham Rempel (1798-1878) of the KG Rempels.]

2. **Johann** (b. 1772), who likely came to Russia with his father and settled at Burwald, Old Colony. His wife was a certain Helena (b. 1776).

3. **Katherina** (b. 1774).

4. **Jacob** (b. circa 1776).

5. **Gerhard** (b. circa 1778, d. 28.1.1847). He married Eva Janzen (1780-1809) in 1801. His second wife was apparently Anna Rempel (b. 1764), widow of Peter Peters of Insel Chortitza. Gerhard Rempel Jr. likely came to Russia with his father and lived at Niederchortitza.

Johann Rempel (b. 1772) children.

Johann Rempel (b. 1772) had the following children:

1. Maria (1796-1827) married Jacob Friesen (1793-1843) (BGB A 15). [They were the parents of Johann Friesen (1833-60) whose son David Friesen (b. 1856) came to Manitoba during the 1870s and settled in Schoensee, near Grunthal. In 1893 his son David W. Friesen, who was born in Schoensee in 1879, moved on to Altona, W. Reserve, where he founded the firm of "D. W. Friesen & Sons". BGB B137 and "Seelenlisten," *Working Papers*, page 157.]

2. Katherina (1799-75) married Jacob Thiessen (1797-1862). (BGB A 46)

3. Johann (b. 1802)

4. Isaac (b. 1804)

5. Peter (1807-56). His first wife was Anna Bergmann (1808-44) and his second wife Katherina Kauenhöwen (b. 1822).

6. Helena (b. 19.10.1809)

Peter Rempel 1807-56, Bergthal, Russia.

Peter Rempel (1807-56) was the father of Johann Rempel (1830-99). The other children of Peter Rempel included Helena (b. 1828), Peter (1833-49), Anna (1835-41), Franz (b. 1842), Johann (1844-95), Bernhard (1846-46), Katherina (b. 1847), Abraham (1849-53), and Maria (b. 1852).

Johann Rempel (1830-99) married Margaretha Sawatzky (1833-1914), daughter of Johann Sawatzky and Maria (nee) Penner, on February 12, 1853. They came to Canada in 1874 with other members of the Bergthaler Gemeinde, and settled at Grunthal, Manitoba, where they are found in the 1881 Manitoba census.

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Bergthaler Gemeindebuch, HSHS, 1993, 439 pages.

Rempel, Hermann. *Johann S. Rempel (1830-1899)*. Morden, 1988.

Penner, J. *Die Ost und Westpreussischen Mennoniten*. Weierhof 1978.

Johann Rempel 1830-99, Grunthal

by Herman Rempel, Box 901, 770 Wardorp Ave., Morden, R6M 1L1

Biography

Johann Rempel (1830-99) and his wife Margaretha Sawatzky Rempel (1833-1914) came to Canada from the Bergthal Colony in Russia. They arrived at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers in July 1875 on the river boat International from Fargo, North Dakota. They came across the Atlantic, together with many other Mennonites who were emigrating to Canada at that time, on the S.S. Moravian. Previous accounts that indicated that they came

over on the Sarmation and that Johann are born in Tiegenhagen are wrong.

The family consisted of 7 boys and 3 girls: Johann, 1853-1928, Peter, 1855-1927, Jacob, 1857-1937, Franz, 1859-1933, Margaretha, 1861-1930, Helena, 1863-1865, (killed by lightning), Cornelius, 1866-1939, Maria, 1868-1937, Katherina, 1870-1948, Abram, 1872-1945, Bernhard, 1874-1932, Anna (born in Canada) 1875-1933.

Johann's parents were Peter Rempel 1807-

Johann Rempel (1830-99) and Margaretha Sawatzky (1833-1914). Photo courtesy of Herman Rempel, Johann Rempel and Family, page 26.

56 and Anna Barkman 1808-44 Rempel. They were both born in the settlement of Chortitza. Peter married for the second time, Katherina Kauenhofen, born 1822. He had 7 children from the first marriage and 6 from the second.

The Johann Rempels settled in the Grunthal area and according to the writer's grandfather, Peter S. Rempel (1855-1927) things there were very difficult. During the first few years they were plagued with very cold winters, early frost and grasshoppers. The land where they settled was not very productive. Johann Rempel died at the home of his son Johann S. Rempel in Chortitz (now Randolph), Manitoba, northwest of Steinbach and is buried there in an unmarked grave. His wife Margaretha spent her last days with her son Peter S. Rempel in Edenburg, where she died and is buried in the Edenburg cemetery.

Children

Consequently sons Peter, Jacob, Franz, Cornelius, Abram and Bernhard decided to move to the West Reserve to a community know as Edenthal. This move happened circa 1890. Edenthal is located 4 miles east of Gretna along the Post Road. Peter and his family and Jacob and his family settled here. About 15 years later Peter moved his family to Edenburg, about 2 miles west along the Post Road from his first home in Edenthal. Jacob remained in Edenthal.

Franz S. Rempel found greener pastures in Didsbury, Alberta. His descendants are spread throughout Alberta. He farmed 18 miles south of Didsbury and was a respected leader of the Didsbury Bergthaler church.

Margaretha Rempel married David T. Falk, but the couple had no children of their own. The youngest child of Cornelius Rempels was adopted by them when Mrs Cornelius Rempel died in Edenthal in 1893. It has been reported that this child stayed with them until adulthood.

Cornelius S. Rempel moved to Edenthal circa 1890 together with his brothers. From there they moved to Lowe Farm where they farmed until his retirement. He is buried in the Lowe Farm cemetery. His wife Annie Wiebe is buried in the Edenburg cemetery. See *Furrows in the Valley*, 720-22.

Maria married Peter T. Funk and they had 12 children and moved to Paraguay in the 1920s. Katherina married Jacob K. Funk and they had 14 children and also moved to Paraguay in the 1920s. Anna married Franz F. Sawatzky and they also had 12 children and moved to South America in the 1920s. Together these three sisters had 38 children. Reports from Paraguay indicate that the descendants of these three sisters held a Rempel reunion in Paraguay in 1993? with many hundreds present but apparently no one by the name of Rempel was present.

Abram S. Rempel farmed in the Altona area and Bernhard moved to Swift Current, Saskatchewan. More detailed information is available in the *Johann S. Rempel Genealogy*.

Rempel Reunions and Cairn.

Following is a chronological list of Rempel Reunions held in recent memory:
1962 at Burwalde School Yard - Ref: Henry

Rempel, Altona; 1970 Morden Stanley Park; 1975 Lowe Farm; 1976 Kleefeld; 1978 Steinbach Bible College; 1980 Gretna MCI; 1984 Steinbach Bible College; 1986 Winkler Bible College; 1991 Winnipeg CMBC; 1994 Gretna MCI. It is evident that the Rempel clan has not been idle. Johann Rempel's grave in Chortitz, Manitoba, was never marked so the exact location in the cemetery is not known. Because the location of Margaretha's grave is known, the committee decided to erect a cenotaph near her grave site. The erection of this cenotaph took place on August 7, the last day of the three day Rempel reunion in 1994. This was a stirring and emotional event while Andy Funk and his crew were building the cairn many relatives stood around singing songs, making speeches, taking pictures and giving Andy a hand. Tears flowed freely.

A compartment within the cairn contains a number of items of memorabilia including a copy of the Rempel genealogy. A stone was brought by many of the Rempel clan from all over North America and those were used to build part of the cairn. A VCR could be made available to anyone who is interested.

A bronze plaque on the face of the cairn read: "This cairn is dedicated to the glory of God and the memory of Johann Rempel 1830-1899 and Margaretha Sawatzky Rempel 1833-1914". They emigrated to Canada in 1874, settled in the East Reserve near Grunthal. Johann is buried in the Chortitzer cemetery (East Reserve). The death notice circulated when Johann died contained the following message: "Release yourself, soul, from the bonds of this mortal dwelling and go to your rest. A most beautiful lot has befallen me and I have received a good inheritance." At the turn of the century the family settled in the West Reserve. This cairn is erected by their descendants in gratefulness to God for the legacy of faith they left us."

Rempel Family book.

The *Johann Rempel* Family Book is available from the author at \$8.00 hard cover or \$6.00 soft cover, plus postage. It contains about 6200 direct descendants. See review by Rev. Cornie Rempel in Book review section in Part Two of this issue.

Johann S. Rempel (1853-1928) Chortitz

by granddaughter Margaret Rempel Bartel, Kleefeld

Johann S. Rempel (1853-1928) was already a teacher in Russia before he came to Canada with his parents in 1875. [See Johann's description of the journey to Canada elsewhere in this issue.] His parents settled in Gruenthal, Manitoba, where they farmed.

But Johann was not a farmer by nature. He had stayed behind in Ontario where he worked for a farmer and also learned the English language. When he came to Manitoba in the spring of 1876 he was the school teacher in Tannenau, a little village where Aron C. S. Friesen, Reeve of Hanover Municipality later lived.

Johann had a girlfriend Katharina Peters from Reichenbach (Vollwerk) whom he married May 3, 1878. [In 1881 and 1883 the Johann Rempel family is listed as resident in

Reichenbach/Vollwerk. Sometime thereafter they settled on a farm in Chortitz.]

Johann loved music and served as a song leader (Vorsänger) in the church. He introduced into the church the Gesangbuch (Songbook) with Ziffern or numbered notes which caused quite a controversy at the time. He also bought musical instruments for his family like an organ and guitar.

Johann was a blacksmith and an inventor (so is our son Norman). But he was very strict with children. We were scared of him. We would not go close to him. His motto was "children must be seen not heard."

Johann died at the age of 75 years in the barn after he had helped a cow to calf.

by Margaret Rempel Bartel

Armin Wiebe Ancestry

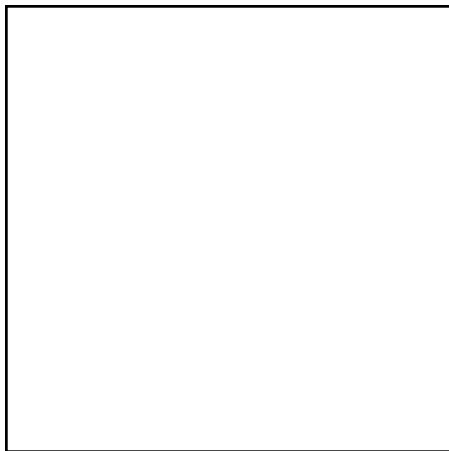
by D. Plett

On January 26, 1996, renowned Manitoba writer Armin Wiebe came to Steinbach to do a reading from his first novel *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* before a crowd of 200 people. Shortly prior to this event HSHS research director John Dyck did some checking on Armin's genealogical roots to see how he fit into the Bergthaler/Chortitzer scheme of things.

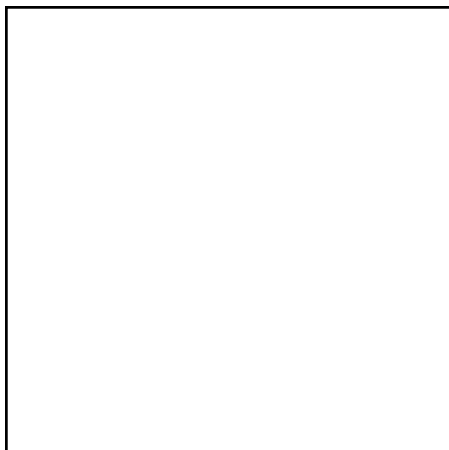
It turns out that Armin is the great-great grandson of Kornelius Wiebe (b.1826) who moved to the Bergthal Colony with his family as a young lad. (See BGB 78) In 1875 Kornelius

and brother Peter (b.1821) emigrated from Russia and settled in the village of Eigenfeld just to the north of the modern-day Homestead Crescent, a mile west of Steinbach, Manitoba. Actually Eigenfeld (also Neuendorf) was a joint Chortitzer and Kleine Gemeinde (KG) village with the KG part referred to as Lichtenau after the village of origin of the Kornelsen family in Russia.

A year later Kornelius and Peter were joined by older brother Abraham Wiebe (b.1819) who took out a homestead on SW 33-6-6E. This is



Dick and Wendy (Falk) Wiebe 1990. They are farming on the SW 33-6-6E 1990. Dick is the direct descendant of Peter Wiebe (b. 1821) one of the 1875 pioneers.



Heinrich Wiebe and wife Katharine, who served as a midwife. They were the great-grandparents of Armin Wiebe. Photo courtesy of Furrows in the Valley, page 716.

the family line of former Hanover school board trustee Peter D. Wiebe of New Bothwell and his niece, nationally-renowned poet Audrey Poetker: see article by Peter D. Wiebe, "The Wiebes of Eigenfeld," in *Preservings*, No. 5, January, 1995, pages 6-7.

Abraham Wiebe (1881-1951), the grandson of Peter Wiebe (b.1821), resided on the SW 33-6-6E and became a large-scale farmer. His great-grandson Dick Wiebe is still farming there today.

Kornelius Wiebe (b. 1826), had a son Heinrich (b. 1866) who is listed as resident in the East Reserve in the Chortitzer Gemeinde records in 1887. In 1901 the family moved to the St. Peters district in the Lowe Farm area. He was a storekeeper and chiropractor. His wife, a midwife, delivered 400 babies in 22 years.

Heinrich's son Abram (1899-1968) married Anna Friesen, a school teacher in the district. After difficult times during the depression the family bought a farm in the Heabert district where they farmed until 1962. The family be-

longed to the Bergthaler Church. Anna's sister was married to Bishop Schultz of the Bergthaler Gemeinde. Anna's brother Peter was a minister of the Bergthaler congregation at Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan.

Abram H. Wiebe's son David (1925-79) married Dorothy Kroeker and they are the parents of Armin. David F. Wiebe was a school teacher who taught in various West Reserve villages during the 1950s. A brother Ernest Wiebe

served for a time as minister of the Home Street Bergthaler Church. See *Furrows in the Valley*, pp. 716-7.

Armin claims that he comes from the "Schtelle Wieb'e", whatever that means. In any case, the HSHS appreciates that Armin took the time and trouble to come and do a reading for us here in Steinbach. We are proud that we can claim him as part of our Hanover Steinbach heritage.

Womens' Rights 1820s

by D. Plett

Womens' Rights Historically.

Historians and anthropologists have remarked upon the strong matrilineal influences within the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) and other conservative Mennonite groups. At a time when women in other cultures were often glorified chattels there merely to serve their masters, Mennonite women were integrally involved in many of the life-defining decisions of their families and communities.

In some communities women were little more than slaves to their husbands and men beat them at will. Apparently this occurred even in the general Mennonite community in Russia: see Prieb and Loewen, "The abuse of power among Mennonites in South Russia 1789-1919," in *JMS*, Volume 14, 1996, page 37.

However, within the KG such actions were strictly prohibited and quickly punished by the Gemeinde. Discipline among the KG was extremely strict in such matters. On October 5, 1858, the KG brotherhood dealt with "Joh. Friesen from Marienthal as he had been physically hitting his wife. He was dismissed from the Gemeinde"--Johann Dueck, "Journal," *Leaders*, page 484. The strict discipline must have worked as this was the only incident of the like recorded during the 14 years covered by the journal.

Respect for wives extended to women in general. When my great-great-grandfather C.S. Plett (1820-1900) "treated an adult servant girl too strictly and had also struck her" in 1849, his father-in-law Isaac Loewen of Lindenau was removed from his office as KG deacon because he had not informed the Lehrdienst of the event. Evidently Ohm Isaak felt that it was not that important. On August 1, 1854, Jakob Fast from Ohrloff was dismissed from the Gemeinde for "unacceptable striking of his step-children and servant girls"--see Johann Dueck, "Journal", *Leaders*, pages 450 and 471.

Matriarchal influences were highly valued and celebrated within KG families. For example, descendants of the prominent Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) family that settled in Ohrloff, Molotschna, in 1805, prided themselves as being part of this family often tracing through numerous matriarchal generations to make the connection.

When I started my historical research in 1978 I wondered why six ministers (including phi-

losopher and theologian Heinrich Balzer (1800-1846) of Tiede) joined the KG from other Molotschna Gemeinden between 1818 and 1850 even though there was no apparent reason other than spiritual conviction. As my study progressed it came to light that in several of these cases, the ministers had mothers, grandmothers or wives who were connected to the KG.

In a paper presented at the HSHS annual meeting January 26, 1996, historian Royden Loewen noted the significant influence which pioneer women had on major decisions such as where to settle, in what village, etc., an anthropological concept known as "matrilocalty". In the North American mid-west where labour was always in short supply, Mennonite women had another source of influence in that they were often farm managers in charge of producing part of the family income, such as dairy or poultry operations and even field production.

After a visit to the Reserve in 1877 John Lowe, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture made a report to the Committee on Immigration and Colonization" stating that, "Every man, woman, and child on the settlement is a producer. Women were out ploughing in the fields, thatching roofs and girls were plastering houses. They would go and work before the morning was grey and continue until dark in the evening"--quoted in John Warkentin, *Mennonite Settlements in Southern Manitoba*, pages 91-2.

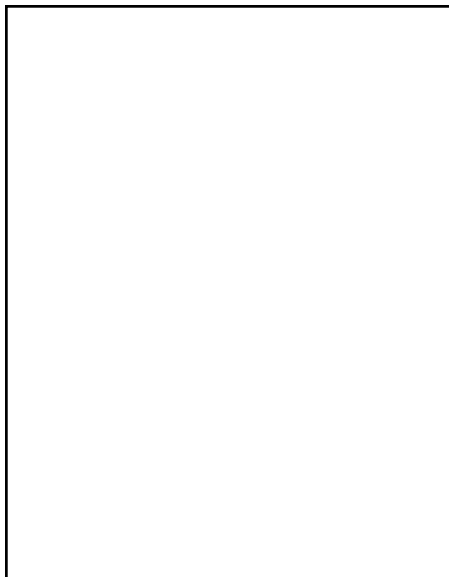
Property rights.

Therefore, one asks the question, "What was it that made conservative "old order" Mennonite culture different with respect to the woman's role within their society?" than say in the WASP community where such activities would never have been permitted.

One answer lies in the area of property and inheritance rights. The saying that the one who "pays the piper calls the tune" holds true also in this regard. A woman who owned property automatically had an important role, as "wealth begets power".

In many cultures women were not only disenfranchised from the "official" power structures of their community such as church, government, etc., but were not allowed to participate in property ownership.

English common law, for example, had the



Abraham F. Thiessen (1832-1889). Picture taken in Petersburg, Russia, during one of his trips there to lobby senior government ministers for justice on behalf of the "voiceless" and challenge corruption and fraud in the Molotschna. In 1873 Abraham was exiled to Siberia for his advocacy on behalf of the "landless." Photo courtesy Cornelius Krahn, "Abraham Thiessen: A Mennonite Revolutionary?" Mennonite Life, 1969, April, page 74. The photograph was originally made available to Dr. Krahn by Mrs. A.A. Dick, a niece of Abraham Thiessen.

concept of the "entail" whereby the devolution of property was limited to a particular class of heirs, usually the eldest male of each generation. By this means, the integrity of the family wealth was maintained and not dissipated amongst numerous descendants. It also served the purpose of keeping property within the male bloodlines.

A comparable system existed in Russia during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Abraham Friesen 1782-1849.

The bureaucrats of Imperial Russia must have found it odd that their Mennonite subjects had strict protocols amongst themselves that women participated fully in the inheritance process. So odd, in fact, that sometime during the 1820s they requested Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) of Ohrloff, Molotschna, to give an explanation as to why the Mennonite people followed such a peculiar system.

Friesen was the son of the already mentioned Abraham von Riesen of Ohrloff. Oral tradition has it that the sons of the patriarch dropped the "von" and changed their name to Friesen, because the "von" was indicative of nobility which the KG rejected as inconsistent with their belief in a simple existential Christianity.

Abraham Friesen Jr. had been elected as a deacon for the progressive Ohrloff community in 1817. A year later he joined the KG.

In 1820 Friesen took a very strong position with respect to womens' rights in the infamous "Franz Thiessen" incident. Franz Thiessen and his daughter Anna had committed incest. The

response of the Grosse Gemeinde to which Thiessen belonged was to have Thiessen and his daughter imprisoned in Orechov where he died on account of the horrible conditions.

Evidently the community leaders took the position that Anna Thiessen had no rights because of the sin which she had committed. The KG attempted to support Anna as best they could visiting her in prison, corresponding with her, etc.

Notwithstanding that the "little" KG was itself in danger of exile to Siberia, Abraham Friesen interceded on behalf of Anna writing a moving appeal for her release to the ministerial of the Grosse Gemeinde on June 23, 1821. When this failed, he wrote another appeal on December 21, 1821, to the Gebietsamt. This too failed and in 1824 Anna was exiled to Siberia.

The document, 1820s.

Within this context the following document provides a unique look at women's rights within the "old order" Mennonite culture of the 1820s. It consists of a question put to Aeltester Friesen together with his reply. Although undated, I venture it to have been written shortly after the incident above referred to.

Question.

"Question: Why are half of all temporal possessions to be distributed among the female gender? My beloved honourable Mr. Friesen! Prepare an answer for me--from your fellow church leaders, and if possible, with the appropriate [Scripture] references for the same--and an explanation as to why married couples among the Mennonites are fully equal in the law regarding inheritances and acquired property, in respect of which equality in the law, the devolution of half of the estate to the surviving spouse must take place."

"I seek to support the eighth point of [Czar] Paul's Privilegium through the provision guaranteeing the highest measure of religious freedom. [Please answer], if possible, for it is necessary!"

Answer to the forgoing question:

"Although according to the Word of our Saviour in Luke 12: 13,14, it was not His intention to implement civil laws, I believe nonetheless that our traditional equal rights for wives regarding temporal possessions has its foundation in the official pronouncement found in Matthew chapter 19, verse 6.

"He who wishes to be a disciple and follower of Christ must also seek to bring into reality within his marriage the full and definitive community of property of Christ, which He has with His bride--the church--which is a partaker of all heavenly property. If the wife, according to 1 Peter 3:7, is fully a heir of grace and the promises of life, then the promises just as equally apply to the provision of these as well as to the eternal and future inheritance.

"And just as a wife, according to Genesis 2:18, is placed beside her man as a helper, she is, according to 1 Timothy 3:18, also worthy of her due remuneration as a labourer. In view of the oneness of a man and wife, this remunera-

tion can be no less than full equality with respect to the possessions which are entrusted to our care by the Lord.

Abraham Friesen

Copied by Peter Friesen, Hierschau."

History of the document.

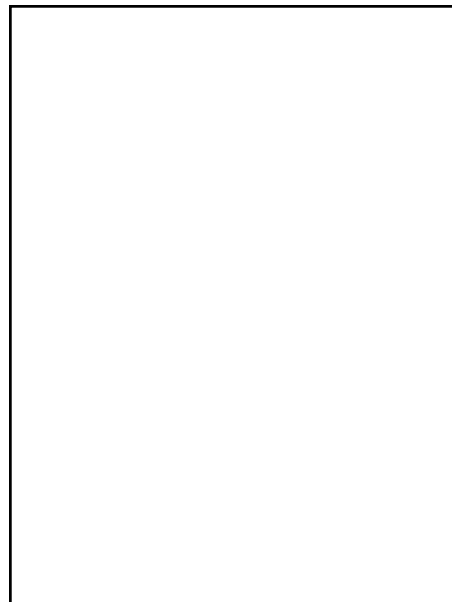
The above document was found among the papers of Abraham's nephew Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908) who settled in Blumenort, Manitoba, in 1874. His son Steinbach businessman Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941) was a collector of historical material. After his death in Kansas, his son Dr. Abram Friesen donated at least some of this material to Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas, from where copies made their way back to Steinbach, Manitoba in 1993. See my article "New discoveries: Part Two", in *Preservings*, No. 4, July, 1994, pages 10-11.

The above document was translated and published in *Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia 1812-1874*, pages 253-254.

It seems to me likely that Peter Friesen of Hierschau who originally copied this article was the first husband of Anna Bartel (1838-1918) who married for the second time to Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908) who served as one of the KG delegates to America in 1873.

Abraham Friesen's career.

In 1823 Abraham Friesen was elected as a minister of the KG. In 1827 he translated and published the first book among all the Russian Mennonites, namely, *Spiegel der Gierigkeit* ("Mirror of Greed") by the Dutch Elder Peter Pieters. The publication of this devotional work was intended to respond to the growing greed and pursuit of wealth and land in the



Isaac F. Friesen, Steinbach, Manitoba, in approximately 1920. Isaac F. Friesen (1873-1953) was the son of Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900); see *Preservings*, 7, December 1995, page 36. Heinrich B. was a grandson of Aelt. Abr. Friesen (1789-1894). Photo courtesy of Ray Rempel, Steinbach, grandson of Isaac F. Friesen.

continued from previous page

Molotschna. In 1838 he was elected as Aeltester to replace his brother-in-law Klaas Reimer. Abraham soon became one of the most prominent church leaders and statesmen in the Molotschna Colony. His extensive writings and scriptural exegesis provide a tremendous legacy of faith and heritage for the Christian Church.

Descendants.

Aeltester Abraham Friesen also left a rich legacy of descendants. His son Jakob lived in Blumstein where he served as village Schulz during the 1840s. Later he became a KG deacon and his wife Aganetha Loepp was a midwife. Son-in-law Peter Thiessen of Schoenau also served as a KG minister. Son Peter lived in Tiege and was also a KG minister. Son-in-law Klaas F. Reimer Jr. of Tiege also served as deacon. Son Abraham lived in Rückenau. Each of the children had a successful *Wirtschaft* at a time when only one in three Russian Mennonite families owned any land at all.

Other descendants included grandsons: Abraham F. Thiessen (1832-1889) of Neu-Halbstadt, Mol. famous land reformer during the 1860s; Johann P. Thiessen who later served in the House of Representatives in Nebraska; Peter P. Thiessen (1832-98) flour mill owner of Neu-Halbstadt and later a K.M.B. minister in Nebraska; Abraham L. Friesen led the Heubodner KG from Russia in 1874 where they settled in Jansen, Nebraska, and where he published a number of devotional books; Heinrich L. Friesen who settled in Rosenhof, Manitoba, in 1874, where he served as Brandschulz.

Descendants of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) in the Steinbach area included grandsons Peter B. Friesen who settled in Neuanlage, today Twin creek, in 1874; and Johann F. Reimer, see *Preservings*, no. 7, Dec. 1995, page 46; as well as great-grandchildren Isaac F. Friesen (son Jonas founded the Steinbach lumber yards); brother Abraham F. Friesen (first minister of the Brüderthaler Gemeinde (E.M.B.) in Steinbach); brother Gerhard F. Friesen, grandfather of Herman Loewen, former owner of Loewen Chev; and Maria S. Friesen, wife of Abram L. Reimer, whose son Walter founded "Reimer Overhead Doors" in Steinbach.

Postscript.

Communities, no matter how isolationist, are affected by the culture and society within which they live. In 1874 one-third of the Mennonites left Russia and settled in North America.

Those that remained continued to live and interact within a culture that was extremely patriarchal, even within the European context. They were also very influenced by German pietist missionaries who frequently broke-up families thereby devastating the matriarchal networks which existed within the traditional or "old order" communities.

I suppose in this sense, "new order" religions such as German Separatist Pietism and American Revivalism (later Fundamentalism) contributed to the loss of women's rights within Men-

nonite and other traditional communities. It would be interesting to see how anthropologists and sociologists would explain such social developments.

The result in any case was that the Mennonites who fled Russia during the 1920s were more patriarchal in nature than the earlier wave of emigrants had been. One example, children

of the 1870s Mennonites were given their mother's surname as their second name, a practice of which many were and continue to be extremely proud. The so-called *Russländer*, however, had adopted the Russian patronymic system where the second name of children, including daughters, was the father's given Christian name.

Helena (Klassen) Eidse (1861-1938)

by Lorilee G. Scharfenberg, Box 10, Group 1, R.R. 1, Morris, Manitoba, R0A 1K0. Lori is a great-granddaughter of Helena Klassen Eidse.

Birth and childhood.

On December 18, 1861 in the village of Margenau in the Molotschna Colony of South Russia, David and Aganetha (Brandt) Klassen were blessed with the arrival of a healthy little baby girl whom they named Helena.

Helena's father was a patient, determined individual with strong leadership skills and great foresight, while his wife Aganetha was a rather quiet, easy-going lady who preferred to serve rather than to be noticed. David and Aganetha shared much in life including the joys of having nine healthy children: 5 girls and 4 boys, and the sorrow of burying 5 children in infancy. They both were devoted to the Lord and the preservation of the Christian faith.

At the time Helena arrived, her oldest two sisters, Elizabeth and Maria were already married: Elizabeth to the twice-widowed Aeltester Johann Friesen and Maria to Jacob M. Kroeker who was later to become both a deacon, minister and Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) at Rosenort.

In 1866 David Klassen sold his *Wirtschaft* in Margenau and with his family, including Helena, moved to the village of Heuboden on the Borosenko Colony. Many of the KG congregation had made a group purchase of land in that location in 1865 already. It seems this coincided with some spiritual divisions among the denomination and the Klassens, together with other families, belonged to the Heubodner Gemeinde, so-called because its Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen also lived in that village.

The village lay close to the Solenaya River and the Klassens farmed successfully and also had beautiful, bountiful orchards and gardens. This is where Helena spent her childhood years until the age of 12. In 1871 her oldest sister Elizabeth passed away and within two years husband Johann died as well so Helena's parents adopted 3 of the 4 grandchildren left behind. Helena grew up with two nieces only slightly younger than herself in her home. She learned about responsibility, sharing and hospitality at a young age.

Emigration.

In 1873, while the Russian government was in the midst of revoking the privileges of freedom from military service granted to the Mennonites, the British government invited them to settle in America. Several delegates were cho-

sen and sent and among those to go was Helena's father David Klassen. The delegation left on April 15th and returned on August 7th with the recommendation that emigration should take place in 1874. Another of Helena's sisters, Katherine, passed away on Christmas Eve, 1873 and her husband Cornelius E. Eidse later remarried and emigrated to Canada with the two children.

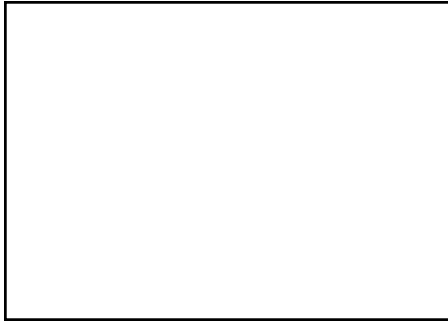
The Heubodner KG decided that emigration to America was the best choice for the preservation of their faith and their families and so they began to sell their belongings, farms and homes to prepare for the journey across the ocean to a foreign and strange land. This was not going to be a vacation and life on the Borosenko Colony was a hub of activity.

Mealtimes at the Klassen's must have been very lively with discussions about this great venture. Which tools should be kept and which sold? How much clothing and what kind should they pack? Should they take along all their cooking and sewing utensils or purchase them in the New Country? Organization was the key. Horses and other livestock had to be sold at the best price so that they could be purchased again in Canada. Certain days had to be set aside for slaughtering the pigs and the meat had to be smoked to give the families sustenance on their journey.

Young Helena and her Mother had to mix and bake and toast many *zwieback* for the journey while packing all of the basics. Since David Klassen had already seen the goods available in Winnipeg and also the area they were to pioneer and settle he probably dispensed fairly wise advice as to which items to take and which were better purchased in the new country.

When the last of the goods were packed into huge wooden and steel trunks and the farms had been sold at a fair price the families were ready for the journey. Helena and her two brothers Peter and Jacob were the only single family members at the time of emigration. The Klassen family left Russia on June 4th and arrived in Winnipeg on July 31st. A photograph was taken of them and the ship they arrived on in Winnipeg but other than that not much is known about their particular journey across the ocean except what has been written by others.

The Klassens stayed in Winnipeg for a few weeks to purchase supplies and then travelled by oxen to the banks of the Scratching River to



Helena Klassen Eidse. Photo courtesy of Lori Scharfenberg, R.R.1, Morris, Manitoba.

the place known as Rosenhoff. It was August 14th, 1874. When Helena's dad announced that they had arrived at their new home all the ladies of his family began to weep uncontrollably. It was unbearably hot and the mosquitoes were attacking them ferociously. David Klassen was patient for about twenty minutes and then in his decisive voice he told them that they had cried enough. He firmly told his wife and the girls to make a waffle mix and directed his boys to build a fire and cover it with stones so that the waffle irons could be heated on them. While the women made the meal, he and the boys took the livestock down to the river for water and to check on available feed. One can only imagine what was said in the silent prayers sent up to the Lord as they bowed before their first humble meal of waffles in this wild, flat area known as the Red River Valley.

Winnipeg.

The Klassens settled in tents for what was left of the summer and began to gather feed for the livestock. As the snowflakes began to appear on the ground Helena's father made the wise decision, along with some other men, to spend the first winter in Winnipeg with their families. David Klassen rented a home near what is now Old Market Square, purchased some dairy cows and feed, put up shelters in the Market for them and organized a delivery route. Helena, a young, outgoing girl of 12, and her nephew David Kroeker sold and delivered the milk to their many customers.

Helena was very determined to do her part to help her family and was a very successful salesperson. When she delivered her milk to the customers she eagerly tried to learn the English language and seemingly this also charmed them because she always sold all her milk very quickly. She and her nephew seemed to have a little friendly competition between them to be the best. Children at that time seemed to know how to combine work and play so that they complimented one another. During that first winter her brother Peter got married to Katherina B. Koop of Blumenort.

Rosenhoff.

In the spring of 1875, Helena, her parents, brother Jacob and her adopted siblings moved back to Rosenhoff. Helena could truly tell why it was called yard of roses. The scent of the

beautiful, wild pink roses seemed to give life new meaning. Many of the families who had wintered in the riverbanks of the Scratching River had suffered greatly and decided to search for land in the United States. David Klassen thought it was a foolish idea because he believed that a country under a monarchy would not change its laws regarding freedom from the military as quickly as a democracy would. He was determined to make this land his own and set about the task vigorously. The Klassens lived in a tent again while they built a decent farmhouse and plowed the land to make gardens and fields. They built their farmhouse with lumber that was available at a sawmill in Morris at a reasonable price. Helena's father was kept very busy as he also served as the first *Schultz* or "mayor" of Rosenhoff.

Dr. McTavish.

It was at the age of thirteen that Helena's life took a unique turn that was to determine much of the course of her life. With so many new pioneers moving into the Morris area a doctor by the name of McTavish was almost overwhelmed with work. There were always babies making their way into the world and many diseases such as typhoid fever and cholera to try to combat. Not only was the workload overwhelming but there were also difficulties involved in language barriers. When Dr. McTavish discovered that Helena knew English, he quickly engaged her as an interpreter when he worked among the Mennonites. Some women weren't pleased with having a 13 year old girl around when they were giving birth and so Dr. McTavish solved the problem by teaching her some of the basics of medicine and introducing her as his nurse.

Dr. Robert McTavish worked together with Helena for approximately 35 years. During the early years he picked her up with his horse and buggy and they would make house calls together. He taught her many things including the importance of sterilization to guard against infections in women, how to deliver babies into the world safely, and which drugs and medicines would cure or aid various illnesses. She learned quickly and thoroughly from the doctor as he gave her a chance at hands-on training.

Marriage.

Helena also grew in her Christian faith and was baptized on January 31st of 1879 by Peter Toews. In spring of the same year on April 6th she married Abraham E. Eidse, a dark-haired, blue-eyed young man, who attended the Rosenhoff Church as well. Abraham was born on April 10, 1857 and was 17 at the time of emigration. As a young man in a new country he helped with the family farm and also had been employed by the government to build up a railroad bed through Riverside for several summers. To his great disappointment the railroad was established through Morris instead.

Shortly after Helena and Abraham were married they established their own home and

began farming on the NW16-5-1E in Rosenhoff. They lived in a small cabin with a lean-to attached. Abraham was a successful farmer and supplemented his income with a blacksmith shop. Later he also owned and operated one of the first steam threshing machines. In 1882 Abraham was elected to serve as a deacon in the Rosenhoff KG church and two years later he was ordained as a minister.

Both Abraham and Helena were kept very busy between preaching, farming, raising their children and delivering babies. Rev. Eidse often preached his sermons by memory rather than in the traditional style of reading them. Because he suffered hardening of the arteries and anaemia he sometimes delivered his messages sitting in a chair. Thirty perfectly preserved sermons that were handwritten, dated and preached by Rev. Abraham Eidse in the 1900s are still in existence and owned by the Abe Bartel family of Riverside.

Another interesting part of Rev. Eidse's life was that he and Helena were firm believers in mission outreach at a time when preservation rather than the propagation of the gospel was stressed in the KG churches. As early as 1910 Abraham and Helena were financially supporting a missionary couple (Penners) in India and in the early 1920s Rev. and Mrs. Eidse also actively encouraged the beginnings of the Mennonite Central Committee.

Children.

Helena made many other women's lives easier by coaching them in their childbirth however she had 8 extremely difficult pregnancies herself. Abraham and Helena's first child was a daughter named Aganetha who was born November 27, 1880 and to their sorrow died six weeks later. Next came a son, Abram, who was born on July 7, 1882 and survived to adulthood. He married Annie I. Bartel of Rosenfeld and they enjoyed farming in Riverside together. The next two children were boys, both named David. The first David was born on December 15, 1883 and died 7 days later while the second one was born on June 9, 1885 and brought joy to their lives for his short lifetime of 1 year and 9 1/2 months. He died on March 25, 1887.

On August 27, 1888 their fourth son was born and named David and he survived to adulthood. He married Elizabeth W. Friesen and became a successful businessman and farmer in the Riverside area.

Their sixth child was a daughter named Aganetha and she was born on November 5th, 1887. She died at the age of 5 years. Abram, the oldest son remembered her clearly as a girl with a physical disability that made her unable to walk. She was very intelligent and had a great memory. She helped her father remember in spring where he had mislaid his tools in fall. Aganetha was very spiritually-minded but the family considered her "too good for earth and made for heaven". Helena and her husband drove to Winkler to try to get medical help for her but there was none available. She was ill for the last three years of her life. She lies bur-

ied at the site of the new memorial cairn in Riverside along with her grandparents, David Klassen (1813-1900) and Aganetha Klassen (1816-1904). Abraham and Helena had two more children that survived to adulthood: Cornelius born on October 27, 1898 who married Mary D. Loewen and went into large scale farming with his brother D.K. Eidse: see *Furrows in the Valley*, pages 458-464. Daughter Lena was born on August 1, 1901 and went on to marry George I. Bartel. They took over the Rev. A.E. Eidse's farm in later years and operated it as a mixed farm.

Helena and Abraham shared their home with her mother Aganetha for four years after her father had passed away. In 1910 Abraham, Helena and their daughter Lena travelled to Kansas and Nebraska together. It was a cherished memory. Rev. Eidse travelled to Nebraska more times to minister in the KG church there and told many hilarious stories of his adventures in America.

Medical Service.

During Helena's 63 year career she became an excellent midwife and delivered children by the hundreds in the Rosenhoff (Riverside) area. Many of these were her own grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She attended many births both in English, Holdeman and local Kleingemeinde households. She was on call day and night and whenever a nervous father would come on the run with his horses in a sweat and a buggy rattling behind she would pack up her brown leather medical bag and venture along to attend to the woman in need.

When Helena began to do deliveries on her own she charged twenty-five cents and in her latter years the rate was two full dollars. Sometimes she received vegetables when the couples were too poor to give cash and often people forgot to pay altogether. She was always a little indignant when she was criticized for taking money for her time and effort and dryly remarked that it seemed that "babies aren't worth salt on an egg." She was extremely protective of all "her" babies but showed a special sentimentality whenever babies were named Helena and gave each one a little dress. She never lost an infant nor a mother due to infection, however one mother did haemorrhage to death. The last known baby she delivered was Abe D. Friesen on August 23rd, 1938, only 2 1/2 months before she passed away.

The Rosenhoff South School was built just across from Abraham and Helena's yard in Riverside in 1926. This proved to be truly convenient for school children who simply ran across the road to Mrs. Eidse to get one of her homemade Band-Aids for scratches and scrapes. Often even children from the North School (which was a mile away) would also come to have their hurts taken care of. Helena also set broken bones and massaged many a sprained ankle or hand as she served the community as a chiropractor. When people in the area passed away she was

often there as a nurse and also served as the undertaker.

During the winter of 1917-1918 Spanish influenza hit virtually every family in the Rose-nort-Rosenhoff area. Dr. Ross gave out a serum to protect people from it but it didn't seem to take proper effect. Helena battled with the 'flu herself but recuperated early. Since her husband Abraham and P.U. Brandt seemed to have high immunity against it the three of them worked diligently to battle the bug. Abraham and Mr. Brandt made rounds at all the farms and tended to all the daily chores such as milking and feeding the livestock when the other men were all sick in their beds.

Helena was kept busy instructing families how to keep the fevers down with plenty of liquids and that it was crucial to keep the sick covered with warm blankets to stop them from getting pneumonia. Other nurses who had aided in the area when she had been sick had unwisely allowed families to open windows to cool themselves off and as a result in one family 4 members passed away. It was a tragic time because of the loss of so many lives and made especially difficult because bodies of loved ones were just put outside to freeze until the rest of the family was well enough to hold a funeral.

Gardening.

All through Helena's years she kept up a busy pace as a midwife and still managed to find time to put in a large garden. If midwifery was her career perhaps gardening was her passion. Within the walls of her farmhouse she nurtured a host of house plants including 15 different varieties of cyclamen. When the frost would finally leave the ground in spring she would be eagerly putting in her seeds so that she would have the first potatoes, tomatoes, watermelons and cucumbers. The most fertile soil was always reserved for her watermelons and she knew how many she had and where each one lay so that when community boys would help themselves to one she would know it immediately.

Abraham and Helena's farmyard was graced with long rows of lilacs in spring and hedges of scented roses later in summer. Raspberries and strawberries were harvested by the bucketful and preserved for winter use. This delight in nature was definitely passed on to her from her father David Klassen who took great pride in designing his gardens in Russia. He taught her well as her crops came in bountiful and early. She laughingly retold one of her father's favourite gardening quotes regarding the moon's placement in the heavens as a determining factor as to when to plant. "I plant in the earth, not in the moon." This common sense wit was evident both in Helena and in her father David. Helena was as particular about her garden as she was about childbirth. To her wild portulaca was an infectious disease just waiting to destroy her garden and she refused to take any plants that came from "diseased" gardens and would always wash her shoes after she had walked in them.

Abram and Helena.

Abraham and Helena were pioneers and in some ways aged earlier than men and women seem to today. Reverend Abraham Eidse was described as being about 5'10 with striking blue-eyes set off by his white hair, high, large cheekbones, mustache and white full beard. During the 1900s he wore dark three piece woollen suits brightened with a golden pocket watch and chain and when outside covered his hair with a grey cap. He enjoyed story-telling and practised and honed this art on Sunday afternoons when he and his wife received company. He loved little children and spent time with his grandchildren teasing them and swinging with them.

Helena's hair turned gently grey in her later years and was tucked neatly under a black-fringed shawl. Although her face grew wrinkled she always seemed to have a smile in her blue eyes for any of the little ones she brought into the world. She typically wore dresses with a gathered skirt covered with clean apron. She was intelligent and very energetic. Grandchildren enjoyed staying with the grandparents because of the chance to be tucked in for night in Grandma's deep, soft featherbeds.

Abraham and Helena had a unique practice for the KG at that time in that they would pray out loud during family devotions. In the morning before breakfast Rev. Eidse would read the Bible, he and Helena would sing some songs and then he would pray out loud in German. Although silent prayer was the norm at that time they always said table grace out loud. This left a deep impression on their children and grandchildren.

The main highlight of the year for all the children and grandchildren was the Christmas gathering at the Eideses'. Grandma Helena would send her sons, Dave and Corrie, out to shoot pigeons or she would purchase them for 5 cents apiece from a neighbour and then she would clean and stuff between 60-70 pigeons to serve to her family for Christmas dinner. The Eideses had a large home and somehow managed to find room for everyone. After this unique and wonderful dinner the grandchildren recited *Wunsche* and presented short German plays. They would all sing together and the scene was always filled with laughter and merriment. After the program Grandma and Grandpa Eidse would hand out *tutjes* for the little ones and then each grandchild also got a larger present. For the boys there were gifts like Radio Flyer sleds and for the girls porcelain tea sets or dolls.

In 1929 Helena and Abraham celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary together with many friends and family at the Rosenhoff South School. It was a rare occasion since very few couples spent that many years together at that time. The grandchildren recited poems nervously and then the large gathering of people shared *faspa* together.

Death.

Helena's husband Abraham E. Eidse suffered from a blood disorder (anaemia or leuke-

mia) for many years and in spring of 1930 was beginning to become very ill. Even on a very warm day he would be all bundled up in a wool cap with ear flaps, a heavy coat and overshoes because he felt so cold. His sons Dave and Cornie took him by car to seek treatment for his illness at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota but his illness was too advanced and he returned home with his sons. He died later that summer on July 16, 1930 in his home reaching the age of 73 years.

After Abraham died, Helena continued to aide the sick in the area but there were already several other midwives in the area who took

over the brunt of the workload. She continued to live in a farmhouse on her homestead even though her daughter Lena and husband took over the farm. Grandchildren took turns staying with Helena for night and she began to do a lot of story-telling in her later years. In 1935 she took a trip to Alberta with her children, the Bartels, to Alberta to visit her brother Abram B. Klassen.

Helena began to complain of pain in her chest down to her abdomen on August 27th, 1938 only a few days after making her last delivery. Several doctors were called upon to treat her but it was too late. She had battled chronic

heart problems most of her life and pneumonia set in and took its toll and on November 5th at the age of 76, she passed on to meet her Saviour, The Great Physician, just before the outbreak of World War II.

About the author: Lorilee G. Scharfenberg is a homemaker with a long standing interesting in the history of her people. She has edited and published her father's memoirs C. B. Loewen, *I Remember Riverside and the Regions Beyond* (Rosenort, Man., 1996): see Book Review Section of this issue in Part Two.

Klaas I. Friesen 1868-1927

by Mrs. Peter D. Reimer, nee Maria P. Friesen

If the neighbours said in their low German, "Daut es en stelle fromma christ," all of the Klaas Friesen family agreed that it was a good character sketch of father.

Mr. K. I. Friesen was of medium build, somewhat stout, red hair and at times a beard, never in a rush, but steady working and what he did was well done. He could sit for hours and talk about all the different breeds, the leading race horses and any information available was read and studied. During the many years when he served Steinbach, Manitoba as the leading teamsters, hauling gravel for the town and possibly thousands of loads of goods from the C. N. R. station at Giroux, eight miles from Steinbach he was nearly as regular as the sun, but he would never overload his team if he could possibly help it. He taught his second son Paul the care and treatment of horses when they ran two rigs.

Since it was an impossibility for him to get a schooling, for he should have been a teacher or professor and not a teamster, he did the next best and that was read during the long winter evening or tell the children and neighbours of his store of knowledge because he was one of the best read up men in the area. Neighbours and children loved to hear him. His knowledge of geography, history and other subjects soon revealed that he had been a lover of many books, with an excellent memory. Some of the young people of the neighbourhood would bring a pail of delicious apples in order to spend an evening to hear Klaas Friesen tell stories of vital interest. And as a lover of his own fine family he would thrill the children with stories of adventure, over a bowl of porridge. Every story was given in detail, they unfolded like a movie.

The very severe winter storms, and Klaas I. Friesen encountered many of them, began to tell on his health. He thought it was asthma. For this reason three oldest sons-in-law in 1920 bought a farm at the newly developed Prairie

Rose settlement with the intention of possibly making an easier livelihood for him. But real pioneering on the lone prairie proved even harder. Inadequate buildings and facilities during the hard winters, when all the water had to

to the heater, made conditions even worse. Mr. Friesen was at all times troubled with poor circulation, constantly cold hands and feet did not help the situation.

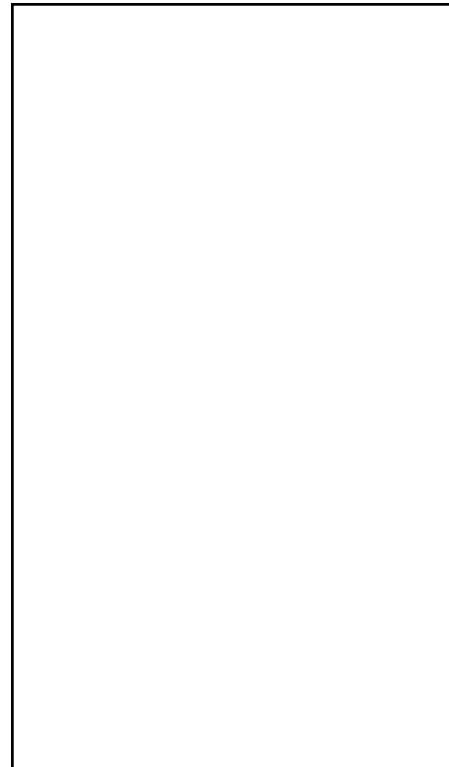
Mr. Friesen never owned a car but had an excellent team of Hackney ponies which were a great help to make their needed twenty-two mile trips back to Steinbach. On a dark night when the children returned, a car without lights caused a severe accident. The buggy was wrecked; the horses ran away. When Paul and Mary were brought home shaken up and bruised, father was happy to see them safe. All he said in his quiet way, "Too bad you could not bring the horses home." Early the next morning he started out by foot, walked fourteen miles only to find that one of his ponies had a broken leg and had to be shot.

One thing is sure that Mr. K. I. Friesen never complained in spite of all his hardships.

In the early years of his married life poverty was his lot. Although the highest and lowest ebb in ones life never lays itself bare. One of his hardest experiences must have been when his oldest children gave him the 50 cents which they had received for Christmas, from saying "Wenshi." He harnessed the horses to the sleigh and went the seven miles to buy flour with the coins.

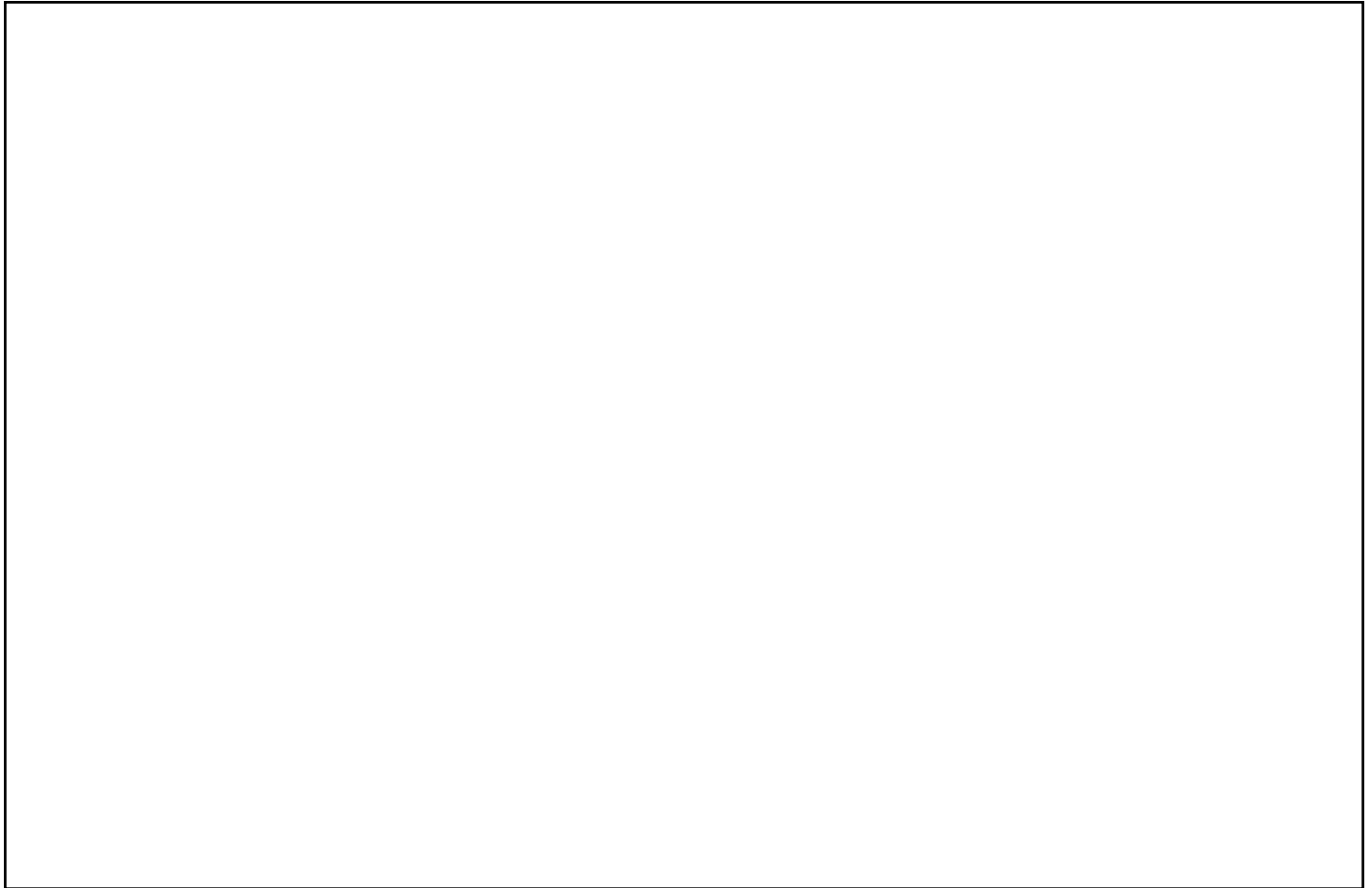
Whenever Mr. Friesen was at home he spent much of his time fixing harnesses for the horses. As he worked he would, in his quiet way, sing or usually whistle in the most fascinating trill the melodies out of the old "Gesangbuch." The one he loved so well was "O Ursprung des Lebens, o ewiges Licht, da niemand vergebens sucht was ihm gebracht." When the noonday sun and the heat of the battle was greatest, he said one day to his sixteen year old daughter: "Maria, wir haben hier keine bleibende Stad."

When he finally went to see a doctor about his asthma, which was always thought, was the cause of his shortage of breath, it was diagnosed



1912 Klaas I. Friesen (1868-1927) and Mrs. Katharina Friesen, nee Penner (1871-1952). Photo courtesy of LaVerna Klippenstein.

be carried to the barn in pails, ice would pile up at the pump, everything in the house would freeze solid except that which was right close



Klaas I. Friesen Family 1912.

Standing left to right: Anna Friesen (Mrs. John R. Barkman), Katharina Friesen (Mrs. Cornelius K. Friesen), Margaret Friesen (Mrs. Jakob T. Loewen), Maria Friesen (Mrs. Peter D. Reimer). Seated son-in-law Cornelius K. Friesen, holding Pauline Friesen (Mrs. Heinrich D. Reimer), and Katharina Penner Friesen (Mrs. Klaas I. Friesen), mother to the Friesen children, holding her son Alfred. Missing from the picture are children Helena Friesen, Mrs. Cornelius T. Loewen, and sons Frank P. Friesen and Paul P. Friesen. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Memories, page 198.

as a weak heart. He died in the home of C. K. Friesens in Steinbach. His last words, as he passed away were “Der Herr kommt.” “The Lord is coming.”

Now, as we look back into Klaas Friesen’s school of experience we praise our heavenly

Father who has given us this heritage: and are reminded of the testimony that God gives on one of His saints in Heb. 11:4, applying it to Mr. Friesen: “By faith... he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying... he being dead yet speaketh.”

Reprinted from an article first published in Abram P. Friesen, et.al, editors, *The Von Riesens - Friesen Genealogy 1756-1966* (Steinbach, 1967), pp. 145-6.

A Notable Pioneer Woman Elizabeth Dueck Kroeker (1879-1963)

By Rev. Harvey Kroeker, Steinbach, Manitoba, a grandson of Elisabeth Dueck Kroeker

“Lizbeth, Lizbeth”, called her mother Susanna. Mrs. Peter L. Dueck. “Your father wants his feet washed!” Lizbeth heard and she eagerly responded. She was only five and she didn’t want her older sisters, Susanna 8, or Helena 6, to be asked. Her father Peter L. Dueck, was not a tall man but still very big, weighing at one time as much as 350 lbs. This made it very difficult if not impossible for him to bend over far enough to wash or soak his feet or tie his own shoes. Yet his feet often needed a respite in hot water.

Elizabeth, one of his five daughters, was a favourite for this welcome activity. She was affectionate and had a puckish sense of humour

which may have resulted in the tickling of his toes or the soles of his feet. All of Peter’s daughters were the result of his second marriage to Susanna Loewen in the Ukraine on January 1, 1870. His only sons that survived infancy were from his first marriage.

Elizabeth’s father and mother and their family had been among the first group of Kleine Gemeinde settlers that arrived in Manitoba in 1874. It was in early August that the very first Mennonite village named Gruenfeld (Greenfield, now known as Kleefeld or Cloverfield) was established.

Elizabeth’s father was hired as a school teacher for the five months of school in the winter of 1875-

1876 for the salary of \$60.00, 10 loads of building wood and all the firewood that the family needed. He also had a small acreage for farming but this yielded only a little income, selling butter. He hired himself out as a teamster, freighting building wood from Winnipeg. Aside from the teaching, Peter’s main business was books. He ordered books mainly in German from Germany and from Mennonite Publishing Co. in Elkhart, Indiana. Peter would sell Bibles, Catechisms, Song Books, A.B.C. Readers and Calendars or Almanacs to his Kleine Gemeinde constituency, and to Berghthaler people in both the East and West Reserve.

Peter read extensively and was one of the bet-

ter educated men of the church. He also wrote down many of his thoughts about the Christian faith. He stressed that a Christian could know that he was saved on the basis of the Word and promise of God in the Bible and that one could share this assurance with others. When the Holdeman schism occurred, he staunchly wrote in defense of the Kleine Gemeinde.

As Elizabeth grew older in this home of many books she acquired an interest in reading which never left her. She learned to read both in German and in English. Her father's Christian teaching and example also influenced her profoundly and caused her to respond to the call of the Saviour.

Her beloved father was the youngest in his family but the first to die. On January 1st, New Year's Day, 1887, returning from a visit to the neighbours', he became quite ill on his way home and had to go to bed. His condition worsened, so that eventually a doctor was called, who gave the family hope for his recovery. However this was not to be. After an illness of two weeks, Peter L. Dueck died on January 15, 1887. He had reached the age of 44 years and three months.

Elizabeth was devastated. She was only seven years old and needed her father very much. Her two half-brothers John, aged 21, and Peter, age 16, had to take charge of the farm for the time being.

Susanna, her mother, had the help of Elizabeth's older sisters. Susanna was ten years old and Helena was nine. Elizabeth had also two younger sisters: Anna, age 3 and Margaretha, age 1.

A few years of hardship passed but there came a time of radical change. Mrs. Dueck received a proposal of marriage from a man about fifteen years older than she. Being optimistic she declined. She said to her family, "I believe that younger men are available. I have only to be patient." Had she spoken too soon?

More than two years after her father died, Elizabeth heard the exciting news. Her mother was engaged. But to whom?

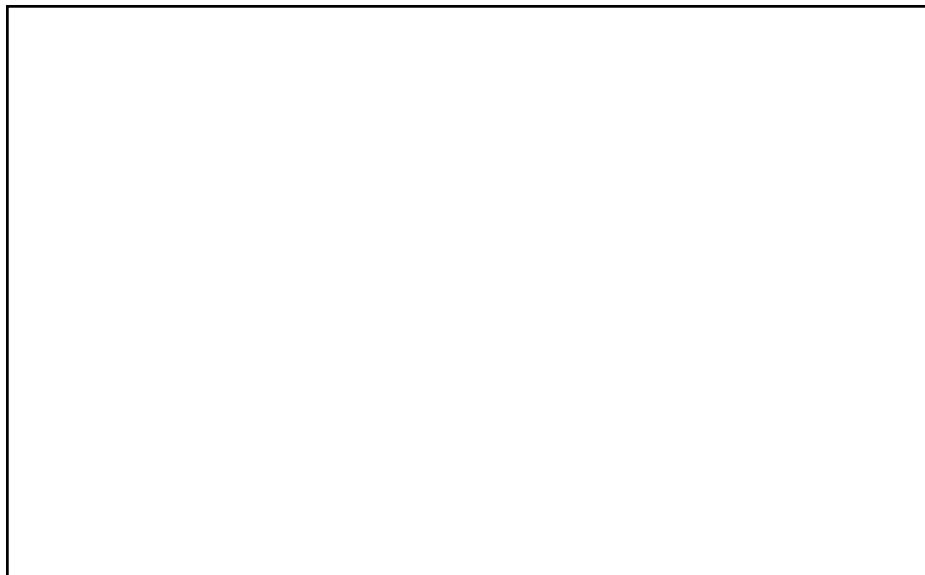
"Do you remember that boy, that teenager from Blumenort, who was here the other day?"

Her sisters were all excited. "We thought he might have come to visit Susanna", one girl said with a snicker.

Now Susanna was a precocious 13 year old, but surely she was too young to receive boy visitors. To their astonishment and joy, their mother said, "Peter Reimer wants to marry me. He is the son of the deacon from Blumenort, Abraham R. Reimer. What do you think of him?"

The girls were enthusiastic. "He is much more handsome than that older man. Please, mother, marry him. We'd like him for our father."

Peter, although two years short of 21, had told his father that he was definitely old enough to get married. In those days fathers did the asking around for their marriageable sons and so it was that Abraham Reimer had finally talked to a young widow from Gruenfeld, who needed a husband to help her raise her flock of five girls. She was still young and attractive at 37. And so it was that on Nov. 10, 1889, a 19 year old man married a woman with a family who was nearly twice his age. That was not the end of the unusual, because two of her sisters, Helena and Margaretha later in life married the brothers of their step-father by the name of Heinrich and Aron.



Rev. and Mrs. Peter B. and Elisabeth Dueck Kroeker in their retirement circa 1950. Photo courtesy of Harvey Kroeker.

The family moved to Blumenort where Elizabeth continued to develop and grow up. Her older sister Helena went to work in the household of Peter M. Kroeker, a minister in Rosenort, west of the Red River. Sometimes Elizabeth took the opportunity to visit her on weekends, for her step-father was a kind man and allowed her to go. Now the oldest son of the minister, also named Peter, was nearly seven years older than Elizabeth but still single and he was hired by his father to help him with the farm work.

Young Peter was attracted to Elizabeth's good looks, her whimsical sense of humour and her positive and optimistic outlook on life.

Peter's father gave him more opportunities to get acquainted with Elizabeth. There was hardly any wooded area for lumber or firewood near Rosenort. So in the winter time, Peter was sent a few miles east of Blumenort for this commodity. He would take his horses and sleigh, cut the wood and return. It was too far to go in order to return the same day, so Peter would stay overnight at his Uncle Franz Kroeker's home in Steinbach. Sometimes he took this opportunity to rest his horses at his uncle's while he walked so as to visit the Peter Reimers, but especially to see Elizabeth and listen to her interesting and humorous conversation. Elizabeth liked the staid and steady, mature young man and when he finally asked her step father for permission to marry her, she was glad to become his bride.

They were married on March 10, 1898. For the first summer they lived at Peter's parents in Rosenort. In the fall they moved to Elizabeth's parents in Blumenort. There their oldest child Peter was born, as I have often been told, in a walk-in closet or pantry.

Sister Helena Dueck had married their young step-father's brother Heinrich Reimer and was living in the Clearspring area. The farm adjoining theirs was now for sale and Heinrich urged Peter B. Kroeker to buy it--NE9-7-6E. Since Peter at 25 had saved up a substantial amount of money he was able to purchase the quarter section. So the two sisters Elizabeth and Helena were close neighbours, only separated by a small creek flow-

ing between the two farmyards. The Dueck girls seemed to be fortunate to have married husbands who catered to them. Elizabeth's oldest sister Susanna (Mrs Abram R. Penner) and her youngest sister, Margaretha (Mrs Aron R. Reimer) lived as neighbours to each other with their farmyards separated only by a stone's throw. The two sets of sisters lived within three miles of each other which made it very cosy and companionable, indeed.

Both Elizabeth and Helena had large families. Elizabeth had nine sons and three daughters that reached adulthood. One daughter, Susanna died a few days after her birth.

The oldest was Peter D. Kroeker. The second oldest Frank D. Kroeker. Both men were farmers their entire life. The third child was Margaret, a God-send for Elizabeth because the next six children were all boys: John, Jake, Ben, Abe, Henry and Andrew. Margaret never married so she was a tremendous help to her mother till her two sisters, Ann and Katherine arrived on the scene. Last of all came Richard who was only half a year older than his oldest nephew Menno.

Today the only living members of her children are: Abe, Ann (Mrs Arnold Fast), Kay (Mrs Lee Toews) and Richard, who still enjoys bowling and working on the green of the Steinbach Fly-In Golf Club.

Helena her older sister, Mrs. Heinrich R. Reimer, had seven sons and six daughters who reached maturity.

Elizabeth had a tremendous sense of humour which helped her in the raising of the large family. She didn't laugh out loud. That was not the Kleine Gemeinde style. However, her son Abe remembers that on occasion at a meal, he would feel the long ten-foot table begin to vibrate. He would look at his mother and sure enough, her round form was shaking quietly and uncontrollably. Of course if pressed for it, she would be able to share with her family what it was that triggered such a reaction. Uncle Abe never mentioned the fact that he himself is afflicted or blessed, as the case may be, with that very same sense of humour.

She may have laughed at the following episode. One morning she phoned Sara, the wife of



Sons of Elisabeth Dueck Kroecker at an Easter Gathering, 1937. Left to right: John, Peter, Frank, Abe, Ben, Henry, Andrew, Jake and Richard standing in front. Photo courtesy of Harvey Kroecker.

Peter, who had bought the farm of Heinrich Reimer's after the latter had moved to Landmark. She told her daughter-in-law, "You had better look at your garden. The pigs are in there." Sara looked and then replied, "Those are just my children weeding the garden."

Both brothers-in-law were elected to the ministry of the church. This meant added responsibilities for the wives. Elizabeth often had to entertain guests at short notice. This would not faze her in the least. She would ask one of the boys to take the axe to a member of the fowl family: chicken, duck or goose. The bird would be plucked and then tucked into a big roasting pan and into the hot oven it would disappear. On shorter notice she would rely on the goods that were already baked.

Elizabeth was a well-organized and practical woman. She baked and cooked without recipes or cook books of any kind. All the measurements were in her head. She would bake a dozen pies at one time. While the pies were baking in the oven, she might also put a couple of waffle irons on top of the stove and proceed to make mounds and more mounds of delicious waffles. It was the same fire that heated the oven and the top of the stove. She baked huge tins of cake in pans 2 feet by 2.

She had a sweet tooth and loved many different fruits. In her garden she grew gooseberries, currants, plums, raspberries and strawberries. She even had two long rows of sweet chokecherry trees in her orchard. Her oldest grandchildren had to be warned not to break off the little branches when the fruit was ripe. Menno and Harvey were quite dismayed to realize that stripping the trees in this manner and not bothering to pick the cherries into buckets was not the proper procedure.

But the strawberries were everybody's favourite. No dessert seemed more delicious than fresh strawberries with rich cream and sugar. Elizabeth's round figure did not equal her father's

but a grandchild was heard to complain, "Grandma has no lap. I can't sit on her knee."

Elizabeth had no greater joy than her garden. In spring she could be found there at dawn hoeing, weeding and mulching the soil with the hoe. On Monday mornings her husband Peter would call up the stairs to his boys on the second floor.

"Boys, your mother has already been at work in the garden for two hours. The day after tomorrow is the middle of the week and you have not done a lick of work yet. Get up, and get going."

Elizabeth had a few idiosyncrasies. Although she loved flowers and grew them in abundance, she never planted or seeded yellow flowers. She said, "They remind me too much of wild mustard, sow thistles and dandelions." Another quirk of hers was to throw away all dishes, plates or cups that had even the smallest crack in them. On one occasion she was visiting the home of a close relative. At meal time she noticed a plate in front of her that had a crack in it. Without any hesitation she picked it up in her hands and broke it in two so that it could never again be used. She felt it was quite unnecessary to ask the host first for permission to do this.

She would often baby sit her grandchildren. On one of these occasions she noticed one grandchild had ears that stuck out a little too far; at least in her estimation. When the child was reunited with its mother the latter asked, "My goodness, child, whatever happened to your ears?" The little tot replied, "Grandma said that my ears stuck out too far. So she took some adhesive tape and taped them close to my head. Grandma said that if I did this for a long time, the ears would not stick out so far anymore." I won't repeat what the mother said.

She was more practical at another time. Their oldest son Peter had arrived at the age of 21 years. This meant he could keep whatever he earned even if he worked for his father on the family farm. Peter's great dream was to buy a car. In the fall of

1920, he achieved his goal. In his very first ride home, he proudly drove his Model T Ford right onto his father's yard. When he got to the barn, in his excitement he forgot how to stop. However he made a last ditch effort. He yelled, "Whoa!!!" This was not immediately effective but only a second or two later, the barn accomplished what his voice did not. Fortunately there was little damage to the car or the barn.

However there was another kind of damage when he came inside the house. His father was a minister of the church; he had a standing to maintain on behalf of the members, and a responsibility towards his worldly son. The first thing the older Peter said to the younger Peter was, "You cannot park your car on my yard. I cannot have the people of the church think that I sanction or support the use of that new fangled contraption. You will have to park it on the road." But Elizabeth knew how to defuse the situation; she quite matter-of-factly said to her husband, "But Peter, don't you realize that then all the people that come past here will notice our son's car? Suppose he parks it behind the barn, or other farm building where people won't notice it; wouldn't that be preferable?"

Rev. Peter B. Kroecker sighed and capitulated. Hopefully his son would mature or would eventually become more aware of his spiritual needs in spite of his use of the car. A few years later he would himself buy a car and learn to drive it.

As has already been mentioned earlier, Elizabeth liked to read. She also liked to challenge other people. A neighbour relates a remarkable occurrence. "One year, as was the custom, at harvest time, when I and other young men helped the neighbours at threshing time, the whole crew were busy eating a very ample and delicious meal at the Peter B. Kroecker home. While we were gorging ourselves, Mrs. Elizabeth Kroecker entertained us all by reading the account of the tragic sinking of the luxury liner, the mighty 'Titanic'. I was really impressed. I had no idea that a minister's wife had such an interest in the event and also in us. I admire her even today for doing something like that."

The great love of Elizabeth's life was singing. When travelling in a car on a long trip, she would suggest a spiritual song. When visitors came to their home she would suggest a hymn to end off the visit. When her grown-up children came home for a visit she would suggest that they sing some songs. Most of all she enjoyed four-part harmony in singing. Since her many children inherited her love of singing, they never disappointed her. And of course whenever Christmas or Easter was celebrated, and this happened every year, there had to be a time set aside for carols and gospel songs. If possible she would have them done in four part harmony. There was also one other special time for singing a song. The women of the family would periodically and regularly get together for a "sister circle". Her daughters and daughters-in-law would alternate in offering their homes for this event. Eventually this would even include married grand daughters. The hostess of the day would decide as to what activities would be included. It might involve some sewing, patching, darning, or quilting or something quite different. However, one activity was totally anathema to Elizabeth. If at any time one or more of the ladies began to indulge in any gossip, Elizabeth would put a stop to it immediately. She did this by proposing that the group sing a spiritual song.

Russian Census 1795-1858

“Russian population census material as sources for the history of the Mennonites 1795-1858,” by Alexander Tedeyev, Publication and Use of State Archives, Documents Department Manager, Zaporozhye Region, the Ukraine.

During 150 years of Mennonite life in the southern Ukraine, their activity became an important factor of economic and social-cultural development of the region, and impacted positively upon the population. Therefore the interest in their history and culture from the side of researchers is well warranted.

Important but scantily explored sources on this theme are the materials of the population census in the period from the end of 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. The census or “Revision” was the basic form of tax and non-tax population registration in Russia. The main kind of population census materials are census lists (“revizyskiye skazky”). From census lists we can determine the surname, name, patronymic, class affiliation of the person, the age, residence; number of children--male and female--their names, ages; and other important information. All census but the 6th, registered women as well as men.

Mennonites registers of births, marriages and deaths from the end of the 18th century and the first half of 19th century are lost from archives. Therefore, census lists are of even greater value for genealogy and demographic investigations.

At the same time it is necessary to note that these documents counted not the whole population, but only those registered. In particular, there was no information about foreigners living in Mennonite districts. One more difficulty is that census lists on Mennonite settlements only survived partially. They do not form a separate complex of documents and are kept in different state archives in several districts of the Ukraine.

A total of 10 Revisions or census (population census) were conducted in Russia. Information on Mennonites is found in the last 6, numbers 5-10. The 5th revision (1795) remains in the State Archives in the Dnepropetrovsk region (herein SADR) in the Deposit of Novorossiysk foreign settlers Tutorial office (Note 1). The 1795 census contains information on the 9 earliest settlements in the Khortitsa district. The lists contain information about the date of arrival of Mennonites to Russia and their former residence. These documents are already familiar to researchers because they were published in the well-known work by Benjamin H. Unruh (Note 2).

The 6th census was held in 1811 and was speeded up. Unfortunately, the revision lists of the census on Mennonite settlements are not found in archives, though we can assert that a revision was conducted there. This information is confirmed by the 1816 year revision list on the settlement (village) Schoenwiese in the

Khortitsa district. This census is found in Aleksandrovsk district Treasury Fund of State Archives Zaporozhye region (herein SAZR) (Note 3), and contains information on this settlement and the previous revision of 1811.

The absence of the documents of the 6th census is compensated for by the preservation of materials of the 1808 census on 18 Moloschansk Mennonite settlements (1901 persons) as well as on Khortitsa settlements, including new ones (Burwalde and others), founded after 1795. The 1808 census, kept in SADR, also contains interesting information on the property status of settlers. Materials from this census are also published in the already mentioned work by Benjamin H. Unruh.

Though the basic year of conducting the 7th census was 1815, it was conducted in the spring of 1816 in the Mennonite settlements.

Census lists for 1816 are extant only for the settlement of Schoenwiese. The population of the settlement at this time was 156 persons--78 male and 68 female. According to the 1795 year census, there were 136 persons in Schoenwiese. Only alphabetic indexes to census lists remain for the other Khortitsa settlements. The same are consequently of great value for researchers.

The 7th census on the Molochansk settlements is lost. To compensate to some degree for the absence of these documents, similar documents are extant regarding the Molochansk Mennonite district from 1835 (8th census), containing information on the previous census. They are kept in the State Archive of Odessa region (herein SAOR) in the Deposit “Mennonites Community of Berdyansk district” (Note 4), also known as the Johann Kornies Archives and in Canada as the Peter Braun Archives.

Lists kept here on 41 settlements contain rich material about the foundation of new settlements in the district between 1816 and 1835, and about the migration of population in this period. These documents contain information about the creation of new settlements and migration to them of Mennonites from 1835 to 1849 (e.g. to the settlement Grishau created in 1848), i.e. until the time of conducting of the 9th census in 1850. Materials of this revision have since been translated into English and published in Canada and are available for a wider audience.

The 9th all-Russia census was done in 1850. Unfortunately, of all Mennonite settlements whether Khortitsa or Moloshansk, only the lists on the settlement of Schoenwiese are known to be extant as of the present time. The revisions regarding other Khortitsa settlements may be in Germany. Archival material was removed from the Zaporozhye State Archives and taken to Germany in 1943, including materials regarding the Khortitsa district and Khortitsa administration. Johann Epp, former Oberschulz of the Khortitsa district during the period of Fascist occupation, confirms the fact of the transmission of Khortitsa Archives to the Archives in Frankfurt-on-Oder. But Epp does not know what

happened to the documents later and their contents.

Census lists and extracts from revision lists remain in the SAZT and contain information regarding Mennonite families which migrated in the 19th century to the newly-created Mariupol Mennonite district, on migrants from Khortitsa to the Molochansk settlement and vice-versa, and about families changing their village of residence inside the Khortitsa district. There are a small quantity of such documents, but they, nevertheless, enable the study of the process of creating daughter settlements.

The census for the settlement of Schoenwiese shows a further increase in the population of the village: 159 male and 161 female, 320 persons in total. The census list reveals that important changes took place in the structure of population in the settlement.

The revision list of the 10th census for the Moloshansk settlements were kept only in SAOR prior to World War Two. During the Fascist occupation an effort was made to remove the Archives on German Colonization to Germany. The main part of the Odessa Archives was not removed. But documents of the 1858 census on Mennonite settlements were not found after the war and nothing further is presently known about them.

1858 census lists for the Mariupol Mennonite daughter settlements (Bergthal) are of great value for studying Mennonite daughter settlements. Documents on 2 of the 5 settlements (Heuboden and Friedrichstahl) remain in the Deposit of Aleksandrovsk Town-hall SAZR (Note 5). Another part of the revision is contained in the Deposit of Mariupol district treasury in State Archives of Donetsk region (SADoR) (Note 6). Summary lists of the 9th and 10th census on Mariupol Mennonite district have also survived. These census lists remain largely unknown to specialists.

Even a superficial evaluation of basic information contained in these census lists confirms the great importance of these sources for studying problems of foreign colonization in the Southern Ukraine. Serious analysis of the census lists together with church and police materials of population registration, enable a much deeper study of the social, economic and demographic processes which took place in the Mennonite communities of the Southern Ukraine from the end of 18th century through the first half of 19 century.

Endnotes:

1. SADR, f. 134, in 1, file 18.
2. Unruh Benjamin. *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde der mennjnitischtn Ostwanderungen im. 16/18. und 19. Jahrhundert.* Karlsruhe, 1955
3. SAZR, f.12, in 2, file 101.
4. SAOR, f.89, in 1, file 357.
5. SAZR, f.1, in 1, file 752.
6. SADoR, f. 131, in 1, file 115.

Chortitz Map ca. 1830 - Bergthal Name

by John Dyck, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg

The Bergthal Colony and its main village were so named by the Chortitza Oberschulze Bartsch. The name appropriately describes “the geographical setting of the village” as author William Schroeder writes in *The Bergthal Colony* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1986). The high hill just north of the village and the nearby Bodena Valley combined to make Bergthal a suitable name. The impression has been left by earlier historians that the name Bergthal was coined by Oberschulze Bartsch specifically for this occasion.

Some years ago, when I did research for the book *Oberschulze Jakob Peters 1813-1884: Manitoba Pioneer Leader* (Steinbach: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 1990), I discovered an 1827 mileage chart (footnote 17, page 23 of the book) for Chortitza in the Mennonite

Library and Archives in Newton, Kansas. The chart showed the mileage from the village of Kronsthal in the Chortitza Colony to each of the villages in the colony and to some nearby towns. Among those place names appears the name Bergthal, nine years before the Bergthal Colony was established. The chart enabled me to calculate that Bergthal was near the twin villages of Kronsthal and Osterwick but there was no clue on the chart as to the nature of that Bergthal.

Recently that mystery was solved when Bruce Wiebe of Winkler discovered an old coloured map of the Chortitza Colony in a private home in the Winkler area. The map shows eighteen numbered place names, including “No. 18 Schäferei Bergthal,” plus Schönwiese. The latter is shown with fourteen landowners, indi-

cating the village at a level close to its initial organization. The map identifies Bergthal as a community sheep pasture, rather than a village, and shows its location adjoining and just south of the villages of Kronsthal and Osterwick.

Bruce Wiebe first noticed the map a few years ago in the home of Henry W. Enns of Winkler. Mr. Enns, who has since passed away, had received the map from his father, who in turn was a son of Cornelius Ens and Elisabeth Rempel, who immigrated in 1877 and are buried in the cemetery at the former village of Hoffnungsfeld, south west of Winkler. According to William Schroeder the map was drawn before 1833, when the village of Kronswiede was moved to a new location. It is published here for the first time.



1830 Map of Chortitza Colony, Russia

The map is in reality a work of art, almost like Fraktur, being coloured with vivid colours which unfortunately cannot be reprinted here. Map courtesy of Henry W. Enns family and Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, Manitoba. The map has been donated to the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, who graciously allowed its use for publication in Preservings.

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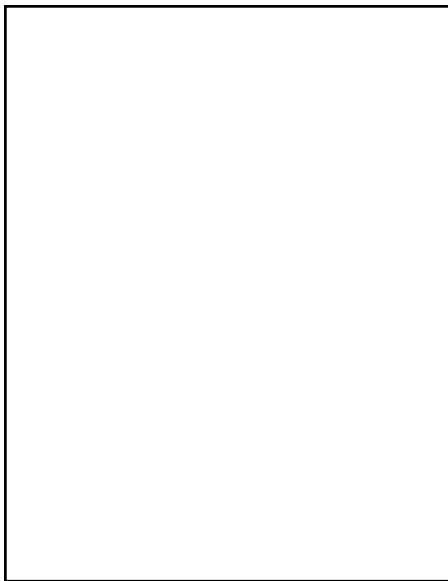
Peter and Elizabeth lived on their farm till Peter suffered a series of strokes and he died in the fall of 1955. Elizabeth stayed on the farm a few more years but eventually she too was stricken and she entered the Steinbach Resthaven, a Christian nursing home. Here she was a number of years, eventually totally bedridden. She could barely speak, but she could say a few words. These words were unfailingly positive and optimistic. When her grown-up grandchildren came to visit her, she would smile and ask about their children specifically. She always remembered their names and their ages. She would remember what they told her about them, and she would pray for them quietly on her own when her visitors had left.

She prayed faithfully for all her children, her grandchildren, and her great grandchildren by name and according to their needs her entire life. She had taught her children the gospel and how to pray and she taught them how to live by her Christian example. She died peacefully February 19, 1963.

Descendants:

Many of the children of Elisabeth and Peter B. Kroeker stayed in the Steinbach district. Sons Peter and Frank D. Kroeker farmed in the area. Peter was a song leader in the Steinbach Kleingemeinde. Frank took over the family farm on NE9-7-6E, where his son Clarence is still farming to this day. The saying arose with the names of the oldest four children; "Peit and Franz, Griet and Hauns."

Son Ben D. Kroeker was part-owner of MacLeods in Steinbach for many years. Son Abe was a trucker in the Steinbach area and his son Dave still operates the family business as "Kroeker Trucking." Son Henry D. Kroeker was a farmer and furniture salesman. Son Richard worked for the Town of Steinbach for many years. Daughter Ann married Arnold Fast, pastor of the Steinbach E.M.C. church from 1965-75. Daughter Kay married Lee Toews, a salesman and deacon in the Braeside E.M.C. Church.



Daughters of Elisabeth Dueck Kroeker. Left to right: Anne (Mrs. Arnold Fast), Kay (Mrs. Lee Toews) and Margaret. Mrs. Elizabeth Kroeker; is seated in front. Photo courtesy of Harvey Kroeker.