“A people who have not the pride to record their history will not long have the virtues to make their history worth recording; and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great.” Jan Gleysteen

Feature Story

Pioneer Women of the East Reserve

by D. Plett, editor

Introduction.
Pathetically little has been written about the history of women and their role in society. This is also true for the Hanover Steinbach area settled in 1874 by Bergthaler (Chortitzer) and Kleine Gemeinde (KG) Mennonites from Russia and originally known as the East Reserve. Some of the best writing about local women is found in genealogies and family histories published in private editions and unavailable to a wider readership.

A new interest in women’s history is fuelled in part by the modern emphasis on social history, being the study of entire societies and the individuals within them. i.e. who cares what a few overweight Kings or tyrants may have done or decreed other than to the extent they affected peoples’ lives. The interest in women’s history is also articulated by common sense: since women make up half the population, half of our recorded history, theoretically, should be devoted to them.

Militant feminists have entered the fray using historiography as a tool to convince society that traditional gender roles were unjust and in need of restructuring. They have alleged that Christianity enslaved women and made them servient vassals of men. Karen Toole-Mitchell, a former United Church minister, has written that Christianity and other religions were “…a major source of sexism, oppression, and at the worst the execution and murder of women. The force in religion that threatens and destroys the feminine is called patriarchy…..” Rev. Toole-Mitchell also referred to the “…terrible destructive power of the patriarch that conditioned and supported ‘gendercide’ of women in the name of an all male Father God…”: Karen Toole-Mitchell, Free Press, March 1, 1997, Page C11.

There are also the Mennonite barnburners such as Di Brandt whose righteous and messianic fury against her dictatorial father fuelled the myth of the evil archetypical patriarch. Brandt used the imagery of Jesus Christ as her lover to portray how the Christian Church had raped, enslaved and subjugated women over the centuries (page 28). Although her point was not without some merit, her imagery was so elementary and unoriginal in the literary sense that her work rated scarcely a ripple within

Inside This Issue

Feature Stories......................................................pages 1 - 26
News and Announcements..................................pages 27 - 36
Articles .................................................................pages 37 - 84
Women’s Publishing................................................pages 58 - 65
Steinbach Main Street: Part III ............................pages 70 - 77

continued on next page
learned and academic circles. But it did achieve Brandt’s objective of scandalizing and shocking the parochial rural community from which she came, and quickly gained wide exposure for her work, especially within the feminist movement (Note One).

Preservings Part One

store their voice in the historical record they will naturally desire the same voice for the women of their denominations.

As in any field of study it must be recognized that the value systems of the present cannot be projected upon the past, and certainly the process cannot be changed. Epp pointed out that “it is important to study ....Mennonite women not in isolation but within the context of the culture around them.” The same principle applies to all cultural backgrounds within the Hanover Steinbach area. Scottish, Jewish or French males may have been patriarchs of their households during the 19th century, but this is no cause to condemn the entire Jewish, French or Scottish culture and heritage, as the same conditions applied in all societies at the time.

Historiography.

In reality many books purporting to be general histories are severely limited because they are merely political, confessional or economic histories. Standard textbooks of Canadian and Manitoba history, typically, recount the story of the political sphere, usually blissfully ignoring not only women but cultural and social developments, ethnic groups, natives, etc. There is nothing wrong with such histories except that greater care should be taken in labelling. If certain segments of the constituency are to be omitted, this should be reflected in the title of the book so that people are not misled.

The recently completed Mennonites in Canada, Volume III, for example, revolved around the history of institutions formed by Mennonite males who immigrated to Canada from Russia during the 1920s. In fact, the entire 3 volume series recounted its topic from the perspective of Russländer males, covering the years from 1786 to 1920 in half a volume with considerable inaccurate and misleading information, then finishing the account from 1920 to 1970 with the remaining two and a half volumes. In the process the work excluded not only the history of women but also marginalized the so-called “Kanadier” and “Swiss” Mennonites, both of whom had arrived years before the 1920s. The point, of course, is that in the face of double exclusion the voice of Kanadier women in history has become faint and only retrievable with great difficulty.

A labelling problem can also arise in so-called women’s history. Recently I purchased a book edited by Gloria Neufeld Redekop, The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women’s Societies in Canada (Waterloo, 1996), 172 pages. An excellent and interesting book, but I was flabbergasted when I started reading and found that what the book was really about was the “Russländer Women’s Societies of Canada.” What was probably even more amazing was the fact that nowhere in the introduction or elsewhere was there much indication that the author was even aware that she had deftly excluded two-thirds of Canadian Mennonite women as if they didn’t exist. She also missed an excellent opportunity to give her work more credibility and depth by doing comparisons between the three groups which make up Canada’s Mennonite population.

Herstorioraphy.

The mechanics of researching the history of women are different than for men. Male biographies are often defined by the “gun notch” methodology. i.e. So and so was elected to this or that position on such a date, acquired such and such property, baptised so and so many converts, etc. Since institutions tend to keep this kind of information, it becomes a quest of scouring the primary sources for such data.

By comparison women’s biographies or “herstories” are more dependant on other sources such as journals, letters and oral tradition. Such writings therefore require more careful focus on the character and personality of the subject. Arguably herstories properly written will be more meaningful as the biographer will actually be forced to delve into the substantive persona of the subject.

It is more difficult to obtain information for women’s history and biographies. The ability to write about any aspect of history is determined by availability of sources. It is perhaps trite to say, but no sources means no article. In this issue of Preservings, for example, the women chosen for an article were selected, firstly, by finding someone willing to do the writing. But, more importantly, the ability to generate an article was determined by the amount of material available.

In most cases, the existence of oral tradition is limited by the date of death of a person. Oral tradition, except for exceptional people, goes back 60, maybe 70, but not much more than 75 years. If a woman died young in childbirth, as my great-grandmother Elisabeth S. Friesen did in Steinbach, Russia, in 1873, at age 23, or during the early pioneer period in Manitoba, there is little that can be written in the absence of a journal or letters.

Women’s history can be written as biographical–by telling the story of a particular woman or group of women. Much of the content of this newsletter is of this genre, probably because it is the easiest to write and to relate to. Women’s history can also be written topically, namely, by taking one segment of these experiences—say, buttermaking or baptism, for example, and documenting that particular aspect or function. Presumably as more herstories are written and published, a greater interest and body of source material will develop in the latter genre.

Women in Russia, 1835.

By today’s standards the lot of women even in advanced countries such as England and Germany was deplorable. Historian Royden Loewen, one of the pioneers in writing about and describing the role of 19th century rural women, has referred to “Eugen Weber’s descriptions of French rural women as ‘beasts of burden seldom set to rest’ or Jerome Blum's depiction of female serfs forced to marry ‘to provide the proprietor with a natural increase in his labour force’” (Note Three). In other
societies one hears of seigniorial privilege where the Lord of the Manor was entitled to the bedroom indulgences of his vassal’s wives and daughters. In certain African societies young women were, and are to this day, physically circumsized as a rite of passage into adulthood.

Generally speaking Russia remained more medieval than Western Europe well into the 19th century. Serfdom in Russia was only abolished in 1861 and therefore the situation of women in general was significantly worse. Even today one sees squads of women on the streets of Moscow performing menial tasks such as sweeping, etc.

These descriptions did not hold true for Mennonite women. The first Mennonites emigrated from Danzig, Prussia to Russia in 1789 (Chortitza) and again in 1804 (Molotschna). Since they were invited into the country under a special Privilegium they lived within their own communities, sometimes likened unto a “commonwealth” functioning almost like a separate entity within the Czar’s Empire. Mennonite communities before and after the emigration from Prussia did not change significantly in cultural terms and presumably the role of women within that context remained relatively constant.

Over the centuries the Mennonite conventicles or Gemeinden developed strategies to ensure the conservation of their religious and cultural values in the face of emigrations, and rapid economic and social changes occurring around them. These strategies included maintenance of traditional languages and control over education of their children. An agrarian lifestyle was seen as essential to the survival and continuation of the Gemeinde, or religious community, and the goal of most family units was the provide farming opportunities to their progeny. Since most families routinely had 10 to 12 children the contribution of the women in the process was absolutely critical.

But the role of women in the Mennonite settlements in Russia was affected by the economic achievement of these communities, among the most prosperous in the Empire. The quality of life for the 25 per cent of women in Chortitza and Molotschna who belonged to the Vollwirt class, those who owned land in the Strassendorf village system, was reasonably pleasant. The primitive wooden and earthen structures built by the pioneers in 1789 and 1804 were soon replaced by housebarns made of kilned bricks, comfortable and relatively spacious for their day.

Of course, the 75 per cent of the Russian Mennonite population who were not land owners should not be forgotten. These were the Anwohner, with a basic cottage and lot at the periphery of the village, who either worked for wealthier neighbours or eked out a living as tradesmen or artisans. The women of these Anwohner households preformed the necessary domestic tasks and possibly much of the labour required in a subsistence farming operation, while the unmarried daughters were engaged to work out as maids contributing their meagre earnings to the household income. The women (and men) of this group are not written about at all by Russian Mennonite academics who prefer to write about the 90 wealthy Gutsbesitzer in Russia in 1910 and the grandeur of “the paradise lost” (Note Four).

The KG in Russia were known for their entrepreneurial abilities. Even Peter M. Friesen, who otherwise had only negative and pejorative things to write about conservative Mennonites, acknowledged that “The yards, fields, gardens and cattle of the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the best in the Colonies”: page 198. In fact, two-thirds of the KG and a third of the Bergthaler were of the land owning Vollwirt class, well above average among Russian Mennonites, and this article will deal mainly with women of that group.

An exposition of women’s lives within this context would include the rites of passage and life cycle experiences: birth, education, baptism, marriage, motherhood, grand-motherhood, relationships, Gemeinde, village, etc. It would also encompass all facets of daily life: cooking, cleaning, the various aspects of the household economy, from the supervision of domestic and farm servants (at least in Russia), to the planning and operation of the dairy, poultry, garden, orchards, etc.

The Household Economy.

Two millennia ago, women were an important part of the economic life of subsistence farmers and hunters as their work was essential to the survival of the family or tribal unit. Even the peasant women of the feudal period fulfilled somewhat of a similar role, as the labour of all family members was required for survival. These subsistence farming units were drastically altered by the advent of the Industrial Revolution, where men became wage labourers and women became housekeepers with no input in earning the household income.

In sociological terms the situation of the Mennonites in Russia was somewhat unique as they were neither peasants nor were they landed gentry. By the 17th and 18th centuries there were many free holding farmers (Landwirthen) in Prussia, who produced commodities for the commercial market. Commodity production within this context implied a household production unit as opposed to a strictly commercial enterprise or mere subsistence level farming. Among the Mennonites in Russia these commercial family production units were known as “Wirtschaften”. Such a household economy was “highly self-sufficient in labour and consumption, but one that must produce for the market place in order to secure the means to reproduce its mode of production”: Royden Loewen, pages 17-18. The concept of farm commercialization and the development of the household economy is helpful in understanding the experience of women both in Russia and later in the E. Reserve.

In the early days in Russia most of the farmers had to depend on their own labour and that of their family for the seasonal field work such as harvesting. If sons and daughters were still too small the mother with her babies in tow would take her place in the grain field and work all day, perhaps mowing, but more often fol- lowing behind and helping with tying the grain, which he cut with a scythe.

Flax was grown for the linen fibres. “The further preparation of the linen was very tedious, keeping the younger as well as older daughters, under the supervision of the mother, busy spinning the fibres almost the entire winter.” These fibres were then used to make the yarn which was woven into linen by weavers. Then after a long bleaching it was used not only to make shirts “but also the fine Sunday dresses of the wives and daughters, for which purpose it was dyed brown.” In later years cloth was purchased ready made and the women spent their time in tailoring, knitting, crocheting, and sewing: P.M. Friesen, pages 176-182.

According to P. M. Friesen the experience of the KG people in Russia was unique in that they were granted certain privileges by the all powerful Johann Cornies. They were allowed to paint the wood on their buildings blue instead of the gaudy colours used by others. Blue, and in particular “Himmel Bleeve”, was “the ‘duse’ or God fearing colour, which they also used to paint all of their wagons and furniture.” Their clothes had to be quite dark in colour instead of the usual brighter colours: P. M. Friesen, page 198. Johann F. Harms has written that the daughters of the KG were distinguished by “the simple black bonnets” which they wore in school: Storm and Triumph, page 20.

By the 1830s the grain-raising economy had become established in Southern Russia eventually replacing earlier attempts at commercial farming with sheep and silk production. With the grain growing economy came greater commercialization of the farming operation. Mennonite farmers started to hire labourers to do much of the manual labour.

Since the birth rate in Mennonite settlements was such that the population doubled every 25 years, land shortages developed. The Chortitza or “old” Colony was founded in 1789 and, therefore, the first to encounter the problem. Maintaining an adequate land base was one of the cultural strategies already referred to and one solution was to establish daughter colonies. In 1836 a new settlement called Bergthal was founded near Mariupol on the Sea of Azov by some 150 enterprising young families mainly from Chortitza. Contrary to what has generally been written, most of these families were the children of well-to-do Vollwirthen who had the financial means to establish their children on their own Wirtschaften in the new settlement.

By the 1840s similar problems were developing in Molotschna where new villages were established on reserved lands in the eastern part of the Colony. During these years, KG Vollwirthen established their sons and sons-in-law in these new settlements. By the late 1850s...
the teacher in Friedensfeld, Russia, who farmed on the side: “Father kept a servant, always a Russian, all year round and often also a Russian servant girl. During the harvest time an additional 5 or 6 reapers were hired to cut the grain... Everything was cut down with a scythe, and bundles were tied by hand which work Russian women were hired.” — History and Events, pages 93-94.

Numerous references to the hiring of maids are found in the Journal of A. F. Reimer whose children were in the baby producing stage. On Oct. 21, 1870, he recorded that “Kl. Reimer’s servant and maid left.” Five days later he recorded that “Kl. Reimer came to Rosenfeld with the new maid to our [Afr. S.] Friessens and took my wife home.” On Jan. 4, 1872, son “Kl. Reimer engaged a maid for a 100 rubles, Katharina by name.” Whether or not to have a maid was no luxury for Kl. Reimer given the mental health of his wife. On Jan. 14, 1872, she “...went out into the mud with only her underclothes on, without stockings and without a head covering.”

On Jan. 13, 1872, son-in-law “Peter Toews hired 2 maids for 40 ruble” because his wife was very ill. Even relatively poor people hired Ukrainian or German maids for household work. e.g. Abraham and Elisabeth Reimer, who received church charity for many years in the Molotschna, had a maid after 1869 when they lived in Steinbach, Borosenko.

All manner of peddlars came door to door selling their wares, and a variety of itinerant craftsmen and artisans such as watchmakers, tailors, shoemakers, etc. made the rounds from village to village annually. On Jan. 26, 1871, A. F. Reimer recorded that “A shoemaker, a Jew, was here and did some mending.” Again on May 8, 1871, “A Greek was here with his goods.” These itinerant tradesmen provided some of the specialized products difficult to manufacture in a household economy geared to commercial production.

Historian Royden Loewen has written that “women’s absence in the fields did not separate them from the farm.” Women played a crucial role in assuring the self-sufficiency of the household: “It was their duty to milk the cows, gather and set the eggs, and work the fruit and vegetable gardens.” In short, they were responsible for certain aspects of farm production such as dairy, chickens, eggs, vegetables, etc. In this way women controlled the household income which brought with it a degree of economic power while the men controlled field production and its marketing. It was Helena Bartel Loewen (grandmother of “C.T.” of Steinbach) who recorded the weekly butter sales in her neat handwriting, whilst her husband Cornelius documented the labourers and maids he hired, the goods and merchandise he purchased, and the loans he arranged and payments made.

Other than the itinerant tradesmen and peddlars referred to, very few household items were available for purchase at this time. Most foods and household goods other than perhaps coffee and salt had to be processed and prepared on the farm and thus a wife who was hard working and a good manager was crucial to the economic success and survival of a young couple. Since many families quite early had 10 and 12 children it was a massive obligation for a husband and wife whose dream was eventually to establish each one of them on farms of their own.

Perhaps the ultimate epitaph for a middle class woman of the 1850s was to see the day when the family unit was able to acquire a full Wirtschaft of their own. Peter P. Isaac (1846-1923), later of Gruenfeld, described the financial achievements of his parents Johann Isaac and Anna Plett of Schönau as follows: “Because he was not afraid of work and saving, with mother also contributing her share of the work without stint, they soon came to a better financial condition”: Pioneers and Pilgrims, page 189.

Elizabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93)

A hard working wife who had good management abilities was an essential requirement of a successful Wirtschaft in 19th century Russia. The truth of this statement is illustrated by the famous Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93): see R. Loewen, Preservings, No. 7, June 1995, pages 2-9, and D. Plett, Preservings No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 5-7. Elisabeth was not only the “matrarch of Steinbach” but also the ancestor of more than one per cent of Manitoba’s population. I would hope that in time every history book and school text would document her invaluable contribution to the settlement and development of our Province.

Born in Prussia, emigrating to Russia as a 5 year-old girl, Elisabeth Rempel, married Abraham, son of Klaas Reimer of Petershagen, Molotschna, founder of the KG, no doubt considered an excellent match. With good inheritances from both sides since both their father’s died in 1837, 2 years after their marriage, the young couple acquired their own property in Rosenort and optimistically set about their married life together. For the first 10 years or so Abraham undoubtedly acted as the senior manager, being 6 years older than Elisabeth, who was preoccupied with birthing a series of 8 babies, all of whom---surprisingly---survived.

The youngest child, Margaretha, later Mrs. Abraham Penner, was born in 1852, and by this time, it was painfully obvious that Abraham F. Reimer was no farmer. In fact, Abraham had acquired the nickname “Stargazer” Reimer which spoke not only of his interest in astronomy but also his lack of aptitude regarding the household economy. The family in the meantime had fallen upon the good graces of the Gemeinde, receiving a total of 1087.69 ruble in charitable assistance between 1847 and 58, funds which subsidized their farming operation and/or living expenses.

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In his book, *The Second Coming of Yeat Shpyansn*, Armin Wiebe, one of Canada’s premier writers, took the character of Oata from his first novel and further developed it. Oata, like Elisabeth, was somewhat on the meaty side, and not above considerable manipulation to get what she wanted. But that is where the similarity ended, for it was Elisabeth who like Oata’s husband Jasch became the dedicated manager of the Reimer household economy.

It was not Elisabeth’s nature to sit back and brood. Her prestigious work as a seamstress and production of all manner of garments has already been described in previous articles. Her natural gifts as a caregiver, already reflected by the unheard of survival of all 8 of her babies, were poured out in a whirlwind of community service as midwife, nurse, doctor, and undertaker.

While all this was going on, her husband Abraham was not only watching the stars but also his wife whom he obviously adored, and whose activities he recorded daily and in some detail. His journals show Elisabeth to have been a woman of incredible energy busy from dawn to dusk, traveling from village to village—now with a son, now with a son-in-law, visiting, helping with birthing and dying, and all the events of the season and life cycle, but above all, nurturing her immediate family whom she gathered about herself in Steinbach, Borosenko, like a clucking brood hen; regularly she was struck down and bedridden by a mysterious illness, always bouncing back, thriving on countless relationships and friendships upon which she gorged herself like some giant vacuum, fueling her visions and dreams which germinated and buzzed about in her brain, and guided her family through major life decisions such as the emigration in 1874.

While it may be true, as AI Reimer maintains, that fiction is more truthful than history, truth is also stranger than fiction, and in this situation, fact has superseded the expectations of fiction. Where Armin Wiebe assumed that the woman (Oata) would be the “sensitive artistic soul”, in reality Elisabeth thrived on all the stimuli of her harsh pioneer environment, and it was Abraham who was enslaved by the oppressive demands of 19th century agrarian life: see Wilmer Penner, “Armin Wiebe at the HSHS Annual Meeting” in *Preservers*, June 1996, Part One, page 35.

Hopefully, the reader will indulge and allow me to digress slightly to note that the creations of fiction are only valid and true to the extent that the conceptions of the author are somewhat cognizant of reality. In the case of Oata, the role reversal is not a major problem as Armin did not conceive her as a type for all pioneer women, nor would Elisabeth necessarily be typical. However, there are other cases, such as Pat Friesen’s “Shunning” where a single negative incident is cleverly structured to represent an entire cultural experience, with the unfortunate result that a hostile environment is thereby created for all further rational writing on the topic, whether fiction or history.

If one incident or individual is needed to represent historical truth within the Hanover Steinbach area, I respectfully submit that Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, “pioneer dream maker”, and Abraham F. Reimer, a.k.a. “Stargazer”, are much more representative than the pathetic Peter Neufeld of the “Shunning”, the truth of whose demise has in fact been recounted in Sarah’s Prarie. In another time and place, Abraham would, no doubt, have been an impressive Professor of Astronomy, or perhaps even a Professor of English like his great-grandson AI Reimer, another of Canada’s foremost Mennonite novelists.

Certainly Abraham was eccentric and a non-conformist and if the conclusions of the “Shunning” were anywhere near to reality, he would have been excommunicated and shunned a hundred times over. But to the contrary, the structures of the Gemeinde gave him the freedom so that like Oata, he could indulge in his stargazing and recording the feverish activities buzzing all around him. By the time of the emigration to Manitoba in 1874, Abraham had acquired another nickname, “Fula” or “Lazy” Reimer, which speaks for itself.

Like Oata, Elisabeth also had dreams buzzing in her head, but her visions were of an impending doom in Russia and the need to emigrate. A few years later she foresaw a prosperous home for her descendants in Steinbach, and stood alone to make a tearful appeal against moving away, convincing her hard-headed sons and sons-in-law, soon to be counted among the wealthiest men in Manitoba, to sink their roots down deep into the yellow clay under Steinbach’s sandy loam. Although older by now and having shed some 40 of her 205 pounds, Elisabeth continued to live life at an unbelievable pace for someone her age.

In another time and place it might well have been Elisabeth who founded Reimer Express Lines and not her great-great-grandson Frank, or it might have been Elisabeth who served as Canada’s Health Minister and not her great-great-grandson Jake Epp, or it might have been Elisabeth and not great-great-grandson Ray Loewen who would have founded the Loewen Funeral Group, etc., etc. One of Elisabeth’s legacies was the fierce loyalty to family and church which she instilled in her progeny. The perseverance and determination which she demonstrated in gathering her brood and furthering their interests is still impacting on the lives of her 10,000 plus descendants to the present day.

**Decorative Culture.**

Material culture refers to “the aggregate of physical objects or artifacts used by a society.” Decorative culture would be that aspect of material culture chosen, designed or created in some way by the individuals within that culture. Many aspects of decorative culture are generally recognized as folk art. Historically decorative culture was certainly one of the important aspects of women’s experience.

Notwithstanding that the settlers of the Hanover Steinbach area in the 1870s were people of the “plain” tradition it should be evident even to the casual observer that their decorative culture was artistic. And yet, almost nothing has been written about this aspect of pioneer life in the East Reserve. This in contrast to the Swiss or “old” Mennonites where a new book on Fraktur art, quilts, architecture, furniture, etc., is almost a monthly event. In the meantime the last remnants of the material culture that once existed are rapidly going lost.

Unfortunately most of the limited writing about Mennonite decorative and material culture is disassociative and generally no consideration or research has been conducted on the historical origins of a particular form or genre of decorative culture or folk art. Typically the writers seem blissfully unaware of any sense of historical consciousness or else assume that they themselves are at the threshold of an infant artistic tradition.

It is difficult to understand or explain this lack of interest: is it simply plain garden variety ignorance, or a form of cultural “ludditism”, or some peculiar manifestation of “modernism”? On a recent trip to Mexico I was struck by the great expense and effort made to preserve other ancient cultures such as that of the Maya many of which are no older than the Dutch-North German-Prussian-Russian historical tradition. Great concern is generally expressed over the potential extinction of any animal or plant species and it would seem equally important to preserve an indigenous cultural tradition such as found in the Hanover Steinbach area to the fullest extent possible.

The lack of writing about decorative culture is unfortunate for women as they played a major role in many aspects, from linens, quilting, food preparation and presentation, household decoration, Fraktur, and no doubt had considerable influence upon all aspects thereof, be it furniture, the decorative features used in the outside of buildings, planting and layout of orchards, etc.

A notable exception is the work of Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition* (1766-1910), 229 pages, whose analysis of the historical origins of the designs used in Mennonite furniture making—which she traces back to the artistic designs and architectural creations of the renaissance—is absolutely brilliant. Although furniture making was traditionally a male domain, her work illustrates the potential results of concerted research and scholarly analysis of almost any aspect of decorative culture.

Another excellent work—although lacking Janzen’s ground breaking analysis—is that of Elizabeth Abrahams, *Frakturmalen und Schönschreiben*, 158 pages. This work deals with Fraktur art and penmanship, which was taught to all students in the traditional private schools in the Hanover Steinbach area up to their abolition by the Manitoba government in 1916-19. The Elizabeth Abrahams book included a number of excellent examples of Schönschreiben by women, one being a beautiful bookplate drawn by Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg (1819-1905); see article elsewhere in this newsletter.

*A Splendid Harvest*, by Michael Bird and Terry Kobyashi, another work in this category, deals with the Germanic folk and decorative arts in Canada, with Russian Mennonite decorative culture as one section. It is complementary to that of continued on next page
Preservatives Part One

Elizabeth Abrahams as it included analysis and historical background, providing some information regarding the origins and evolution of the art form. It is helpful as a general reference covering a wider range of material culture including architecture, furniture, textiles, gravemarkers, even, possibly, mundane items such as cookie cutters, hinges, trinket boxes, etc.

In a recent survey of Mennonite and Amish folk arts, Ervin Beck has written that “one of the main benefits of the continued, sophisticated study of folk art will be to demonstrate that Mennonites have always been an artistic people”: M.Q.R., Jan. 1997, pages 69-91. This article provides an excellent survey of the historiography on the topic as well as a valuable bibliography. It will be invaluable as a starting point for anyone wishing to do research in the area. Although decorative culture was an important aspect of women’s experience in the Hanover Steinbach area, it is unexplored territory at the present time and ripe for anyone wishing to combine research into their own heritage with a Ph.D. or Master’s Degree.

Medical Services.

With one marked exception the life of women among the Russian Mennonites was restricted to the private sphere. The public sphere of church and village governance was patriarchal and controlled by men just like all similar institutions elsewhere in Western Europe. But in the area of medical services Mennonite women entered into the public realm and traditionally played a predominant role. With the exception of a few isolated medical doctors referred to from time to time in contemporary journals, women dominated the field of medical services, acting as Hebammen or midwives, undertakers, and even as Doctors.

Undoubtedly the most renowned medical practitioner among the Mennonites both in Russia and North America was the famous Dr. Bergensche, née Justina Loewen (1828-1905). She was the daughter of Dr. David Loewen, a poor Anwohner who had travelled to Danzig, Prussia, to obtain his medical training. When he returned to Russia he established a practice in Alexanderwohl. At the age of 14 Justina started to accompany her father on professional calls and was often sent to strange homes with medicines and the like. At the age of 15 she was serving as a midwife’s assistant. “Her sunny disposition made her an instant favourite in every home and her skill allowed no one to despise her youth”: Bernhard Baergen, A Baergen-Neufeld Genealogy, pages 70-71.

During this time she married Isaac Baergen and became known as the Dr. Bergensche. Poverty remained her lot both in the home from which she came as well as the home into which she married. But with the death of her father in 1865 a remarkable change took place. As if by magic she was transposed into the medical practice of her father and from this time forth her services were in demand day and night. “No darkness was too great, no storm too violent, no road so impassable, no work or family affairs so demanding that she would not go to the bedside of some sick person to help.”

Dr. Bergensche was well-known to the KG people. In 1867, Klaas R. Reimer, later pioneer merchant in Steinbach, Manitoba, took his mother’s young married daughter wife to Alexanderwohl, Molotschna, “to Frau Bergen, she being the best doctor.” When my great-grandmother Sara Enns Plett became sick of pneumonia in 1872, her husband, Cornelius L. Plett, took her all the way from their home in the village of Blumenhof, Borosenko, to the Molotschna Colony to seek the medical services of the Dr. Bergensche.

In 1875 Justina married for the second time to Gerhard Neufeld (1827-1916) a well-established widower from Fürstenau, who was also a minister. He was a nephew of Heinrich Neufeld (1791-1865), husband of Regina von Riesen, who was a sister of KG Bishop Abraham Friesen of Ohrloff and KG Prediger Klaas Friesen of Rosenort. Justina had not wanted to marry again but finally consented after Gerhard had petitioned many times and had agreed never to send away people in need.

In 1878 the family emigrated to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, mainly at the wishes of Justina. Here Gerhard became the first Bishop of the Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake. As soon as they were settled Justina became the medical practitioner not only for the Mountain Lake area, but also made many trips of mercy to Nebraska, Kansas and Manitoba. On at least one such trip to Manitoba she, among other things, conducted courses in midwifery for three KG women: Aganelha Barkman, Mrs. Johann R. Reimer, Steinbach; Margaretha Loewen, Mrs. Jakob B. Toews, Hochstad; and Anna B. Toews, Mrs. Peter B. Toews, Blumenort. Chortitzer Bishop David Stoesez has recorded that Dr. Neufeld made at least 2 trips to the E. Reserve: January 26, 1884, and again May 22, 1892.

Apparent Justina was a small woman and very fat. She carried a little stool or Benksje because she was too big to sit on an ordinary chair. “Her obituary reports that she brought over 11,000 babies in the world with her open arms.” She was much loved by her patients and community and over 1,000 people attended her funeral when she died in 1905.

The story of Justina Loewen Baergen Neufeld is relevant to the history of the East Reserve as it explains to some extent the almost complete domination of the medical field by women in the early days. Her story is also relevant because she is not mentioned in any publications such as the Mennonite Encyclopedia, Theron Schlabbach’s Peace, Faith and Nation, nor even in the local Mountain Lake history book published in 1986. It seems that Dr. Neufeld had two strikes against her: 1) she was a woman, and 2) she came from what would be called the “Kanadier” in Canada, or those Mennonites who emigrated from Russia in the 1870s.

This illustrates an incredible bias in Russian Mennonite historiography. Anyone who was an advocate for some brand of pietist or revivalist demagoguery and went about splitting up families and churches, roundly condemning everyone as unsaved and heathen, will surely find a full page write-up in the Encyclopaedia in their honour. But the Aeltesten who led and nurtured entire communities, through emigration and resettlement, “looking to the necessities of the saints,” the poor, the orphans and the widows, are usually overlooked completely or else given a few perfunctory lines of mainly incorrect and pejorative information.

And then, if the individual should be a woman yet, there is no chance that she would be recognized, though she might have assisted in birthing half the world.

Two other women of KG background emigrated to the United States with their family in 1876 where they became well-known medical doctors: Susanna Isaac (born 1860) and Elisabeth Isaac (born 1886). They were the daughters of Gerhard Isaac (1836-86), Kansas, a cousin to Rev. Abraham P. Isaac of Gruenfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba.

Another area where women entered the public sphere was education. Maria Friesen Radinzel (1844-1925), great-great-aunt to Gilbert Unger, current superintendent of the Hanover School Division, taught in the KG village of Neuanlage, Borosenko, Russia, in 1873. After emigrating to Canada with her family in 1874 she was the pioneer teacher in Rosenort. She was among the first group of teachers registered with the Protestant School Board of Manitoba in 1879. In 1880 she transferred closer to home replacing brother, Abraham R. Friesen, as teacher in Blumenhof, 3 miles north of Steinbach. She also taught in Grünfeld, now Kleefeld. Teacher or “Lehra Mitsche” stands as an excellent role model for thousands of Mennonite women who have since entered the teaching profession: for a biography, see Preservers, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, page 9.

Women’s Health, Borosenko

The Journal of Abraham F. Reimer provided considerable information regarding the medical treatments and health practices of KG women during their last years in Russia. It was in Borosenko that his wife Elisabeth carried on a busy practice as midwife, nurse and undertaker. The following entries are typical of her work as a midwife. Friday, Jan. 2, 1870: “Toward noon they got my wife from Toews to Kl. Reimers. At 4:30 a son, Johann, was born. My wife had the fever.” Baby Joham later became the father of John C. Reimer, founder of the Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach.

August 12, 1870, “My wife was taken from the senior Penners, Rosenfeld, to our [Abr.] Penners at 6 a.m. At 6:30 she gave birth to a daughter. It took 2 to 3 hours.” This baby girl, named Elisabeth after her grandmother, was the great-grandmother of Dr. Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair at the University of Winnipeg.

Almost daily, Elisabeth was picked up and taken to the home of one of her daughters or daughters-in-law, and also others, to assist with a delivery, visit or render other assistance. Almost daily she suffered from a fever, a sore finger or leg (diabetes?), with such regularity that her husband almost anticipated her condition. June 19, 1870, “My wife has a heavy attack of...”
fever. She shivered and her speech was incoherent, more so than usually.” On occasions, a neighbouring woman in the village, Elisabeth Barkman, Mrs. Peter B. Friesen, acted as a nurse. She tended to Elisabeth in her home on the 17th and 18th. On the 21rst, A.F. Reimer again recorded, “My wife had severe fever. She had to be at Mrs. Friesens’ from 3 to 6 a.m.”

The A. F. Reimer Journal revealed that other medical practitioners of various qualifications were consulted from time to time, including a Jewish doctor. On March 6, 1870, A. F. Reimer recorded that “The Jewish doctor was here...” And again on March 7, “The Jewish doctor was here again and gave my wife some medicine. She had a fever during the night.”

Other doctors were also available in the area. On Oct. 7, 1870, Johann R. Reimer, later the second mayor of Steinbach, Man., “came for Faspa in Blumenfeld to Dr. Loewens.” Nov 5, 1870, “My wife’s finger was aching very much, so that I had to get up at 2 a.m, and treat it. The Jewish doctor came. At 10 Peter [name not legible], a German doctor, came. He gave at once 2 different kinds of drops. That eased the pain.” Typically the next day Elisabeth joined her husband to catch a ride with son Klaas to go to Rosenfeld to visit “our Friesens” where daughter Katharina lay very ill, but where Elisabeth’s “condition improved.” There were others as well: On Nov 9, 1871, “A German doctor from Germany was here overnight.”

Others such as Abraham’s brother Klaas, well-to-do Vollwirt from Marienthal, Borosenko, formerly Tiege, sought medical assistance in Germany, sending his sons Jakob and Heinrich to Breslau, Prussia, for 6 months in 1874.

Being used to assisting in bringing life into the world, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer was also an active participant in the rituals surrounding its conclusion as an undertaker. Abr. F. Reimer included a record of her service, July 21, 1870: “My wife had to help dress Peter Harms. He was buried at noon.” Another example, Dec. 5, 1871: “We attended the funeral at Heinrich Brandt’s. In the forenoon my wife had to dress the deceased. My wife had a good deal of pain.”

I regret that I do not have access to similar source material regarding the Bergthaler/Chortitzer ancestors of the E. Reserve. It would have been exceedingly interesting to be able to compare the public health services in the two settlements.

With respect to burials, reference should be made to the work of Linda Buhler who has researched and written about “Mennonite Burial Customs”. This topic was important to pioneer women who traditionally prepared the body and performed other ritual aspects surrounding the burial: see Preserving, No. 7, Dec 1995, pages 51-52, and Issue No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 48-50. A third instalment of her study is found in Part Two of this newsletter.

The Ordnung.

“P.O.’d Mennonite” writers such as Pat Friesen have railed about the evils of the Ordnung. These were the rules, whether wri-

continued on next page
Preservatives Part One

Jenny and the Prayer Stool

Scotland, 1555.

Circa 1555, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, proceeded to bring Catholicism back to Scotland, which had adopted Presbyterianism in the aftermath of the Reformation. In the process many Protestants were burned as the stake, suffering the same fate as Mennonite martyrs in Holland.

The Archbishop of Scotland, Queen Mary’s appointee, implemented Catholic practices in the Cathedral in Edinburgh, such as the mass. One day, Jenny, a devout Presbyterian, was so upset as the rites were being preformed that she stood up during the mass, hurled her prayer stool at the Archbishop, and defiantly shouted out her opposition.

Prairie Rose, 1955.

In 1955, American Fundamentalism was being implemented in the Kleine Gemeinde church by young leaders who were replacing their ancestral faith. One Sunday morning Rev. Frank D. Reimer, one of the reformers, was preaching in the Kleine Gemeinde worship house in Landmark. His sermon centered around the new Fundamentalist teachings. One of the parishioners in the congregation that morning was his older sister, Mrs. Abe F. Penner, née Mary D. Reimer (1904-78) and her younger brother.

Mary was still faithful to the old ways as taught by her minister father Heinrich R. Reimer. As Rev. Frank continued with his sermon, Maria was getting more and upset at the heresy being preached. At a certain point, she could stand no more; she stood up, and audibly challenged her younger brother.

Mary also admonished her brother in private for his apostasy from “the faith once received”.

As recalled by son Wilmer Penner, Box 1305, Steinbach, Manitoba.
as it was based on a strict protocol that women participated fully in the inheritance process. The bureaucrats of Imperial Russia found it strange that their Mennonite subjects required equal inheritance for females. So odd, in fact, that sometime during the 1820s they requested an explanation for the protocol. The request may have been channelled via Johann Cornies, the famous social reformer, who, in any event, passed it on to his contemporary and neighbour in the village of Ohloff, Molotschna, Abraham Friesen (1789-1849). Friesen also happened to be the second Aeltester of the KG and a gifted writer and expositor of orthodox Mennonite theology.

Ohm Abraham’s response sheds some light on the origin and justification for the equal inheritance provisions of the Waisenordnung. He explained the Biblical concepts involved by referring to the allegory of Christ and his bride the Church [Gemeinde] and that “If the wife according to 1 Peter 3:7 is fully an heir of grace and the promises of life, then the promises just as equally apply to the provision of these [material inheritance] as well as the eternal and future inheritance....In view of the oneness of man and wife, this remuneration can be no less than full equality with respect to the possessions which are entrusted to our care by the Lord” (Note Seven).

Although the traditional Mennonite protocol of equal inheritance for females may have seemed unusual for the time it was quite significant. The old saying goes, “who pays the piper calls the tune” and so it was also with economic power. Ownership of property and control of financial resources resulted in economic power for women and consequently influence within family, village and church, the 3 paradigms of traditional agrarian life.

The protocol of equal inheritance for women was administered by an arm of the church known as the Waisenamt, “one of the oldest, formalized mechanisms of Mennonite mutual aid.” When a husband died the widow received half of the estate just like when the situation was reversed and for this reason a widow was frequently able to continue operating the family Wirtschaft. The age old practice of appointing a “Gutmann” or counsel for a widow (as well as a children’s advocate for the orphans), signalled to the community that she was not to be taken advantage of or trifled with. The process of settling an estate known as a “Theilung” was an elaborate process with each party or set of parties represented as well as the village mayor and district Orphans’ administrator. After all concerned were in agreement and the issues were resolved, the parties signed a “Theilungs-Vertrag” or settlement agreement. Hilda Hildebrandt, who has conducted a major study on the Bergthaler Waisenamt, has written, “The kind of attention given to the distribution of property reflects the importance the community placed on a consistent community standard for redistributing wealth as well as a strong commitment to ensure that the needs of the more vulnerable members of the community were met and their rights protected. The basic rights of every individual were clearly defined and a mechanism set in place to promptly administer them” (page 158).

Hildebrandt referred to the provisions in place to protect the less fortunate within the Mennonite community: “The Waisenamt...encouraged a wide range of services. They included a highly advanced child and family social service agency, the provision of a financial guardian to protect the property and rights of minors who had lost one or more parents, a protector of widows (at all stages of the life cycle) and their property, a personal savings and loans financial institution, and a public service lending agency” (page 190). Another important component of the Waiseverordnung was, for example, a detailed provision for “special needs” children. These programs were of great significance given the complete absence of any social services in either Russia or Canada at the time the Mennonite emigration (Note Eight).

The Waisenamt was but one means by which the Mennonite Gemeinden fulfilled their social policy objectives. The “Armen Kasse” or deaconry was another arm by which underprivileged in the community were assisted. The KG also had a loans fund from which members could borrow without interest to purchase property or deal with other needs. Hildebrandt has pointed out that the Waisenamt fulfilled a similar role for the Bergthaler.

Property rights were certainly one factor in the relative strength of extended matriarchies among the pioneers of the E. Reserve. See article on “Matriarchies of the East Reserve” elsewhere in this issue.

Pioneer Women, 1874.

The immigration process itself was inherently more difficult for women than for men. It was the women who were particularly vulnerable to the primitive conditions of the 6-8 week journey which covered several stretches by train and several by ship, including the 2 week crossing of the Atlantic: see record of the journey from the journal of Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelsen, feature article in Part Two of this newsletter. Basic human activities become difficult when normal resources are not available: cooking, washing, cleaning, not to speak of birthing, illnesses and death. The simplest of functions—e.g. going to the washroom or menstruating—became arduous ordeals under frontier conditions. These ordeals were only multiplied when the settlers arrived in the E. Reserve and set about to establish hearth and home in a rather bleak looking wilderness with only the barest of resources.

Historian Royden Loewen has written that the village of residence of each family was often determined by the women, an anthropological concept known as matrilociation: see article on matriarchies elsewhere in this newsletter. For a discussion of the concept as it related to the settlement of Steinbach, Manitoba, see Preservations, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 3-5.

While a few farmers such as Cornelius S. Plett and Johann M. Koop arrived in Canada with sufficient means to build modern woodframe buildings, purchase horses and generally replicate life in the old country, the majority had to improvise. The new arrivals also had to adjust to a new way of thinking: the North American frontier disdained the idea of having a stable hand harness his horses or acting as chauffeur as had been the case in Russia. An even greater shock for the new settlers was the complete lack of a labour supply. In Russia they had an unlimited pool of cheap labour situated in nearby villages available to work as and when required. In North America this was not the case: any man of some ambition was able to obtain his own Homestead, and labourers, if available, were many times more expensive (Note Nine).

As a result pioneer women in 1874 had to take up some of the field work and assist in the construction of the first primitive homes in addition to their previous duties in the household economy. In 1877 John Lowe, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture made a report to the Committee on Immigration and Colonization after a visit to the East Reserve 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” (Note Ten). Evidently this degree of involvement by women in the actual farming operations was not known among other cultures such as the Anglo-Saxon.

The goal of most pioneer families was to establish themselves in the comforts they were used to in Russia. By 1876 many farmers were somewhat established and reacted to the labour shortage by mechanizing on a far greater scale than their former neighbours back in Russia were doing. Reapers and threshing machines and other modern farm implements were purchased. By this means labour requirements for field work were substantially reduced thereby releasing women from field work.

Thus women could again devote more time and attention to their former responsibilities with the household economy. It quickly became painfully obvious even to the most expert wheat producers among the new settlers that Manitoba in 1874 was much too primitive to support commercial grain growing operations. But because of the proximity to Winnipeg the household production traditionally managed by women—dairy, poultry and vegetables, thrived. In fact, these categories of production were to become permanent features of the Hanover Steinbach economy which today produces anywhere from 20 per cent and more of Manitoba’s milk, chickens, eggs, swine, etc.

By 1876 sawn lumber also came into abundant supply as the sawmills of Abraham S. Friesen and other local entrepreneurs revved into high gear. This contributed to a building boom as the primitive semlins and sarais which most settlers had hastily constructed upon their arrival were replaced with wood frame house barns modelled after their former homes in
continued from previous page

Russia. Another more substantial building boom occurred in the mid-80s when the settlers, by now reasonably well established, constructed the housebarns in which many would live for the next several decades, providing reasonably comfortable homes for most women in the area.

Women of course still had all domestic and household chores to look after. In Russia maids were hired from the German and Russian neighbours. Since pioneer women of child bearing age were often pregnant on an annual basis all the while nursing babies and nurturing a string of youngsters to boot, this was one area where mechanization could not replace labourers. Frequently families were desperate in their need to hire a maid, but available girls were in short supply. Early diaries make mention of men sometimes travelling for miles having heard that a maid was available for hire in some distant village.

Correspondence.

One of the primary means of networking among pioneer women in different settlements was correspondence. The letters illustrate and define the relationships between women in different settlements, their feelings for each other, as well as for other family members. The letters also inform social scientists and historians regarding social, economic, cultural and confessional matters in these communities.

In a letter of December 7, 1874, Anna Klassen Goossen, young widow of KG minister, Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-72), wrote to members of her family still in Russia. The main purpose of her letter was to ask for information about several of her children who were placed with foster parents who remained in Russia an additional year. One can almost feel the pain in her heart when she asks, “is my dear Mariechen still alive? Is she well and healthy?” See article elsewhere in this newsletter.

Another series of letters by Sarah Siemens Janzen (1809-88) and her daughters in Jansen, Nebraska, were written to son Johann S. Janzen and daughter Mrs. Isaac W. Loewen living in Rosenort, Manitoba, at the time. After the opening salutations in her letter of December 23, 1875, Sarah inquires about the interest on the money which her son Johann owes her. She also inquires as to how her grandchildren are doing in school.

In a letter of June 25, 1877, Sarah’s son-in-law Heinrich Ratzlaff, reported regarding a church division in the Jansen KG. In a postscript his wife, nee Aganetha Janzen, added a short update regarding the crop. In a second letter written June 26, 1881, Sarah Siemens Janzen related about “Ohm [Cornelius S.] Plett from Blumenhof, Manitoba,” who had visited the KG in Jansen, Nebraska. She again referred to her grandchildren and encourages them to be obedient to their parents: Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 78-84.

Historian Royden Loewen has compared the letters written by men and women from this period as follows: “Men did write more about church affairs than did women, and women wrote more about children. Both, however, reported regularly on farm activities, the weather and the state of crops and animals. Only in their perceptions of the family farm did men and women differ. Men tended to speak of size, number of acres put to wheat, size of dairy herd, and configuration of buildings; women spoke more about the yield and health of crops. Men reported more often on cereal grains and cattle herds, while women described the gardens and nature of fall slaughters”: Family, Church and Market, page 105.

Some 50 letters were written by Maria Kornelsen Enns (1844-1913), Rosenthal, Jansen, Neb. to her parents and siblings living in Lichtenau, near Steinbach, Manitoba. In a letter of January 19, 1880, Maria described an interesting dream about her brother Gerhard E. Kornelsen, teacher in Steinbach, Manitoba: “Last night, I dreamt that we had walked to Steinbach; but the village had undergone so many changes, that we hardly found our way to you Kornelsens; but we finally arrived. Wm. Giesbrecht went in just ahead of me, and I asked him if you, my dear brother, still lived? He said, ‘Yes, yes now still’! When I came in, you lay in an American style bed and were covered with a white sheet. The dear sister-in-law sat by the bed; but you were hardly recognizable. You appeared so distressed and pitiful; and on your lap, you had little Aganetha, who had already grown much. The dear sister Friesen sat at the bed, head in her lap weeping profusely, nor did she look up. I pushed my way forward to the bed and asked you, beloved brother, if you were very sick. Then you spoke with a loud voice, yet subdued, saying, ‘Yes, I shall die soon, which I am glad to do, but I cannot yet.’ At this, I awoke, and the tears ran down my cheeks. I could scarcely say a word”: Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 84-92.

The dream speaks of the pain of separation...
from siblings and friends which frequently resulted from the emigration and provides a poignant example of letters by women pioneers.

The dreams of Maria, as well as those of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer and Anna Doersksen Barkman Kornelsen (see article elsewhere in this newsletter), speak of an interesting dream culture among the KG, “a culture that respected dreams and the expose of the dreamer without regard to gender”; a topic much in need of further exploration.

The letters written from the E. Reserve contained information about life and culture here. Unfortunately, we often have only the letters written to the E. Reserve which described life in the community from which they were written. One collection of letters from Hanover Steinbach which is extant is that of my great-grandfather Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935) who moved to Satanta, Kansas, in 1915. His siblings, fellow ministers, and other relatives, wrote many letters describing life back home which have been preserved and provide much information. Among these were some 20 letters by sister Maria Plett Reimer (1850-1934), which illuminated the relationship between the 2 siblings as they reached their golden years: see below.

Undoubtedly there were similar letter exchanges between the Chortitzer communities in the East Reserve and sister Bergthaler settlements in Altona, Manitoba, Rosthern, Saskatchewan and Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Unfortunately I do not have access to such primary sources and will have to leave the exploration of these exciting untapped areas of history to others. I would, however, extend a special appeal to all women of our community, of whatever background, to check around and search for letters and journals as the preservation of such primary source materials is absolutely essential to the development of women’s historiography.

Journals.

Journals are important sources for the history of pioneer women in the E. Reserve. A journal will usually provide the primary material necessary to complete at least a short biography. Journals also provided valuable socio-economic data and information regarding cultural patterns and practices in the E. Reserve. They also provided information on the extended social relationships of pioneer women.

The earliest known diary by a woman in the East Reserve is that of Maria Stoesz Klassen (1823-97) BGB38B, living in Ebenfeld, 2 miles northwest of Steinbach. She was of Bergthaler/Chortitzer background and a sister to the prestigious brothers Stoesz: David in Berghal, later the second Aeltester; Cornelius, in Blumstein, minister, and Jakob, Blumstein, Brandaeltester. Her excellent connections to the Chortitzer leadership make her journal all the more important. No doubt her influence within her community was comparable to and likely exceeded that of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer within the KG. Maria’s Journal provided information regarding the trading patterns of the Ebenfeld villagers; they do business both in Steinbach, the nearby KG village, and in Schoenfeld, the slightly more distant Chortitzer village. Maria’s Journal also contained valuable descriptions of a personal nature. For example, on Oct. 28th “Neufeld’s Heinrich came and said we should go to their place, his dear Mother is dead...We went there and found her in bed dead. She had been sick for 2 hours”: see Linda Buhler, “Ebenfeld,” in Historical Sketches, pages 121-122.

Maria’s family was prominent in the E. Reserve, which speaks for her matriarchal influence. Daughter Sarah was married to the Heinrich Neufeld above referred to. This family moved to Steinbach in 1906 and lived where the H. W. Reimer house was later located. They were the grandparents of Ernie S. Toews of Barkman Concrete, Steinbach, and the late Rev. Harry Neufeld: see Steinbach Post, March 30, 1965, page 10. Maria’s daughter Maria Klassen (1855-1921) married Abraham Kehler (1855-1929), of Blumengard. They were grandparents of Abe G. Kehler of formerly of Blumengard and President of Manitoba Mennonite Mutual Insurance Co. for some 23 years.

Occasionally a journal by another family and/or community member will provide valuable ancillary material. This is illustrated by A. F. “Fula” Reimer’s Journal which provided interesting anecdotes regarding the Holdeman division in Blumenort. On Jan. 6, 1882, Reimer reported an incident of a young woman, Mrs. Johann W. Reimer, nee Elisabeth R. Toews, who spoke out forcefully against Holdeman: “The young Mrs. J. Reimer, Blumenhof, was here a few minutes and lamented that she could not accept the second baptism, as she found that the first baptism had been good. But Holdeman tried to persuade her to the contrary in the services in the morning and afternoon.” Ironically, she was baptised in the Holdeman church on Feb. 12, 1882.

On March 18, 1882 Abr. F. Reimer recorded what was probably the first Mennonite brotherhood meeting in Canada where women were invited to attend. It took place in the infant Holdeman congregation in Blumenort: “Here at Peter Toews’ in the a.m. a big Brotherhood took place from 9:30 to 2:30. All women and baptized sisters could be there.” A “big” brotherhood meeting, like a “Grot Sindach,” involved the members of all the congregations in the region, namely, Steinbach, Blumenort and Gruenfeld.

On Feb. 20, 1883, Reimer described an incident in which Mrs. Peter Toews, presumably Elisabeth, Mrs. Peter B. Toews or “Grote” Toews, oldest child of Steinbach merchant Klaas R. Reimer, spoke to a group of men including her father, Franz M. Kroecker and A. Reimer, visiting at Reimer’s home. It seemed as if Abraham F. Reimer was quite astonished when his granddaughter, “Mrs. P. Toews spoke to us men from Scripture and of their church so that we were astonished. She argued with us without fear [and] with power.”

Another E. Reserve journal from a somewhat later period is that of Maria Plett Reimer (1850-1934), daughter of C. S. and Sarah Loewen Plett: see Preservings, No, 9, Part 2, pages 53-56. Maria was always a good student and was the first in her class of 100 in the school in Kleefeld, Mol., Russia, where her father had also served as village mayor. This interest was nurtured by her grandfather, the venerable Isaak
Loewen (1877-1873), who wrote her a long letter Oct. 8, 1871, encouraging her spiritually and to read the seminal writings of the faith. In 1873 she married the widower Peter R. Reimer and moved to Blumenort, Manitoba, where he became a minister in 1891.

Maria became a widow in 1915. In addition to being a letter writer, Maria maintained a journal, but only the volume from 1929 to 1932 is extant, courtesy of granddaughter Justina Reimer Penner, Mrs. Martin P. Penner.

In 1993 Maria’s grandson Dr. Gerhard Reimer, Goshen, Indiana, wrote her biography, in which he described his recollections of his grandmother as a young boy of 6 years old. By this time Maria was living in rotation with various of her children although most often with her youngest son David P. Reimers, the parents of young Gerhard.

Dr. Reimer noted that Maria recorded many details in her journal which might have seemed mundane but that “many are recurring themes.” Having 2 sons who were bishops and being either the ancestor, great-aunt or “Marieche Meum” of most parishioners, she was the undisputed senior matriarch in the Blumenort church district. She commented regularly on the church services—what she said, what theme, etc., she always mentioned the Bruderschaft “and sometimes a bit about the agenda—who was disciplined, a ban was lifted, etc.” Ironically she herself did not seem to attend church, possibly because of her age. There were always hosts of visitors and “sometimes they stayed overnight.” She mentioned sickness in the family and community, including friends in the English Clearsprings settlement.

Dr. Reimer has written that “Farm work and taking grain, potatoes and livestock to market occupy an important place; sometimes she mentions the market price, also calving, farrowing, once it was 8 piglets. Women’s work is mentioned, but much less frequently than man’s work.” Maria usually recorded details of communal work efforts, especially hog butchering....” She mentioned “trips to Kansas or the names of community men who went scouting for new settlement opportunities.” She made note of strangers who came to the door such as “the three Russians who are travelling by and cannot continue because of the blizzard and stay overnight.” She mentioned special events such as “an all-day outing to Whitemouth (she writes Weitmaut) she went on at age 79, to pick blueberries and afterwards to catch fish.”

Dr. Reimer noted that although Maria was at times quite sickly in her old age, she seldom mentioned “her own health, only twice, in fact.” Also her getting around in 1929 was mostly by ear, “although when the women would go by themselves she does mention going by horse” see Historical Sketches, pages 363-377, for the biography by Dr. Reimer.

Margaretha Fast (1889-1984) was another E. Reserve woman who maintained a diary, the volume for 1926-36 being extant. She was the sister of Aganetha Fast; see article by Nette Neufeld in Part Two of this newsletter. Like her sister, Margaretha was also a nurse and acted as the “Florence Nightingale of Landmark” when a typhoid epidemic struck that community in November of 1930. Courageously Margaretha nursed the sick and succumbed to the disease herself barely surviving herself. In 1939 she married widower Peter P. Reimer, KG Bishop of the E. Reserve. In 1948 she moved to Mexico with him and his family where he died the following year. In 1958 she returned to Canada. In 1969 she collected and published her family records under the title Familien Register von Witwe Peter P. Reimer geb. Margaretha Fast (Blumenort, 1969), 46 pages.

The “Familienbuch” or “family book” was another genre of journal maintained in most pioneer homes in the E. Reserve. These journals typically included a record of the family pedigree—births, marriages and deaths, and often some family history. The “Historical Collection” was another type of journal common in Mennonite homes consisting of anthologies of historical writings—usually letters and sometimes biographies, and always historical poetry—relevant to the history of the Gemeinde and church community. One of the most sophisticated examples of this type of journal was that of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) of Muntau and later Grünfeld, Manitoba, a well-preserved 371 page leather-bound journal, a combination “Familienbuch” and historical anthology of immense value: see Preservings, No. 1, Jan 1993, page 6.

These type of journals were also compiled by E. Reserve women. One of these was by Katharina K. Loewen (1874-1910), eldest daughter of KG minister Peter W. Loewen of Neuanlage, later Twin creek, started in 1888 when she was 14 years old. The journal included a 14 page account of the journey from Russia to America of the first group of immigrants to arrive in Manitoba on August 1, 1874 (published in Storm and Triumph, pages 330-332), 2 epic poems by KG theologian Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), a homily by KG Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), and an interesting short poem describing a young girl weeping by her mother’s grave. Since Katharina’s mother,nee Anna B. Koop, died in 1890 this poem may well represent her own attempt to deal with grief. Katharina was the grandmother of Helen Friesen, Mrs. Frank E. Plett of Landmark.

Another journal in this category was that of Maria F. Reimer, granddaughter of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) of Muntau, above. She married widower Abraham R. Reimer (1841-91), her mother’s second cousin, and was the mother to Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer (1876-1959) of Landmark: see Doris Penner article in Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 58-9. Maria’s journal consisting of 82 pages included letters and historical writings pertaining to the church and cultural history of the KG, several poems about leaving the old Homeland in Russia, a poem by Bernhard Harder, biographical poems about Aeltester Hans Buhler, Königsberg and Aeltester Kornelius Regehr, a poem about 4 Rosenorts who were murdered in 1811 (published in Storm and Triumph, pages 29-30), a story illustrating the evils of smoking from 1831, and a letter which her recently deceased husband had written to KG Aeltester Jakob M. Kroeker in Rosenthal shortly before his death. It appears that Maria compiled the collection for her children as a remembrance of their father.

Evidently young women, at least in the Blumenort area, were encouraged to compile historical anthologies as part of their socialization experience. An example of this was Blumenort school teacher Cornelius P. Friesen who had a close relationship with his daughter Anna (Mrs. Klaas P. Reimer) (1874-1963). Anna spent many evenings by candle light, transcribing her father’s historical writings into her own journals: see Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, page 57. Frequently copies were made for each child, as if the pioneers had a burning primordial instinct that their story should survive and that their voices and that of their culture and people should not be extinguished.

The most extensive “Familienbuch” by a E. Reserve woman was by Helena Friesen Jahnke, “Lineage of my grandparents, Klaas Friesens, born in West Prussia,” published in Profile 1874, pages 209-212, actually a sophisticated compilation of the Friesen family history. Helena (1858-1919) was the daughter of KG school teacher Kornelius F. Friesen (1810-92) who taught in various Molotschna schools as well as in Neuanlage in the E. Reserve. In 1904 the Janjke family moved to Herbert, Sask. together with a group of other KG families. Helena was the grandmother of the famous “Jantz Team” of Evangelists.

I have in my possession the “family record book” of my maternal grandmother, Katharina Plett Friesen (1886-1971), a later and more modest example of family record keeping. This journal contained a record of the both her maternal family, the Koops, as well as the Pletts, and some financial details of their early farming operation. She also kept a diary from her earlier married life until her death in 1971. In accordance with age-old tradition these booklets were divided among her children after she died.

Memoirs are a distinct type of journal, being reflective and autobiographical, as opposed to a diary which is a daily log of events. A journal in this category is the so-called “Granny Stories” written by Mrs. Gerhard Hiebert, nee Helena Penner (1874-1971). From 1878 to 1882 she lived in the village Tannenau, 4 miles north-east of present-day Kleefeld, when her father, the wealthy Berghandler pioneer Erdmann Penner, moved his burgeoning enterprises to Gretna. In her later life she compiled her memoirs, including her recollections of life in the E. Reserve. Her husband, also a Berghandler, graduated from McGill University Medical School in 1900 and served for many years as Chief Surgeon at the Winnipeg General Hospital, now the Health Science Centre: see article
by John Dyck elsewhere in this newsletter.

Another valuable journal of the memoirs category is that of Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelsen, see feature article by Ben B. Dueck, elsewhere in this newsletter.

A number of questions arise from a review of the available journals of the women of the East Reserve. Why are no journals by women extant from Russia, namely, pre-1874, while there are 4 by KG men? There is only one journal by an E. Reserve woman I am aware of dating from the 19th century. This is the journal of Maria Stoesz Klassen, a Chortitzer woman, who was educated in the much maligned (and unjustly so) school system of the Bergthal Colony, Russia—in fact, her brother David (later Aeltester) was a school teacher in Friedrichsthal. Did earlier journals by women simply go lost? There are many journals by men extant from the same time period.

After the turn of the century, journal keeping and maintaining the family pedigree or "Familienbuch" seemingly became common place for women. When I think of my maternal grandmother, her sisters and cousins, I hardly imagine there to have been one who did not keep a journal. These women were educated in the much maligned Christian private school system despicably outlawed by the Provincial Government in 1916-19 as opposed to the widely acclaimed Molotschna system in Russia in the case of the KG which had educated their parents' generation.

Was there anything unique about the curriculum or teaching methodology in E. Reserve church schools which articulated this change? was this a peculiarity of local teachers such as the brothers Cornelius P. Friesen and Abraham M. Friesen in Blumenort? did this change mirror the influences of changes in the surrounding cultural milieu? Hopefully some of these questions can be addressed by further research and study.

Women's Health, E. Reserve.

A study of pioneer writings such as Abraham F. Reimer's Journals, indicates that the level of health service did not change drastically after the move to Manitoba. The first tier of medical services, again, was provided by local women who had a gift for healing, compassion for others, and sometimes training in midwifery and nursing. Most often these services were provided without charge.

Elisabeth Rempel Reimer continued her career in midwifery but at a much slower pace.

May 15, 1879: "At 7 a.m. my wife was taken to Joh. Reimers, Steinbach, by Abr. Friesen with Reimers horses. At 2:30 a baby appeared. She was named Helena [later Mrs. Jakob E. Schellenberg]. From before noon until 8 p.m. she was critically ill so that it seemed she would die." Elisabeth was brought home to Blumenort the next afternoon by son-in-law Peter Toews after Mrs. Joh. Reimer's condition had stabilized. Another midwife call came on June 30, 1879: "... C. [Cornelius L.] Plett from Blumehof came here in the morning at 7:30 and got my wife. She was there the entire day and stayed for night. A son arrived during the night."

The story of local midwives such as Elisabeth Rempel Reimer is one of heroic service and selfless commitment to community and a gift for healing. A biography of a pioneer midwife, Helena Klassen Eidse (1861-1938) of Reserve, Manitoba, by Doris Scharenberg was published in Preservations, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, pages 51-54. The story of another pioneer midwife Aganetha Barkman Reimer (1863-1938) of Steinbach by Rev. Harvey Kroecker, was published in Preservations, No. 6, June 1995, pages 23-24. Two additional biographies of pioneer midwives, one a Chortitzer woman Katherina Hiembert (1855-1916), by Regina Neufeld and the other of a KG (Holdeman) woman, Anna Toews (1868-1933) by Cathy Barkman, are published in this issue.

It seemed pioneer women in the E. Reserve preferred medical services to be provided by female professionals. This helps to explain why the area's first woman medical doctor, Anna Shilstra, was quickly able to build up a loyal clientele when she came to Steinbach in 1909: see Mary-Lou Driedger's biography of this pioneer medical practitioner in The Carillon News, 1996.

The E. Reserve area was also served by a host of chiropractors, herbal practitioners and medical resource people of various kinds. The most noteworthy was the renowned Dr. Johann Peters of Grunthal who treated both humans and farm animals. Bishop David Stoesz recorded that on "July 23, 1891, he drove his wife to Grunthal to have the chiropractor set his wife's foot which had been injured by the cow stepping on it while she was milking." On June 12, 1894, Rev. Heinrich Friesen of Hochfeld recorded that "The herb doctor August Derung visited today": Historical Sketches, page 474.

There were also the wizened matriarchs who had absorbed the ancient folk remedies of centuries past, using their shaman-like powers to heal their own families as well as neighbours and friends. My great-grandfather Cornelius L. Plett recorded a Mrs. Funk in Schonhthal who treated his second wife, nee Helena Rempel, for cancer with a poultice or plaster. The poultice was applied 5 times, starting Sept. 17, 1895, and the last one on Sept 21. Evidently Helena was cured as she lived until 1913.

Katharina Hiembert (1855-1916) of Schantzenburg, was a pioneer midwife very knowledgeable in this area: see article by Regina Neufeld, in Part Two of this newsletter. Another woman noted for her skill in curing cancer was Mrs. Barkman of Reichenbach, nee Maria K. Friesen (1869-1933): see I. Kroecker, Historical Sketches, page 85; see also Preservations, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, page 47. Apparently my grandmother Elisabeth Reimer Plett (1870-1947) was also somewhat knowledgeable in folk remedies and the use of local herbs and other plants.

Although these healing arts are now lost to civilization with the exception of the odd folk remedy preserved in an old Journal here and there, I became an unwitting witness to the powers of these remarkable women by a unique set of circumstances. I was 3 years old when my parents went to visit my uncles in Mexico in 1951. I was seated on a hayrack when a snake beside the road spooked the horses, causing them to rear. I fell to the ground and the wagon ran over my back resulting in paralysis. Limited medical services were available in Quellen Colony at the time and certainly nothing for an injury this serious. After a day or two my parents became so desperate over my condition they took me to an ancient “Trajchtoanka” in a nearby “Old Kolonier” village. After several chiropractic treatments she had restored my spinal column and I was able to walk again.

Doctors were also available who made housecalls, so to speak. The first record of such an incident is recorded by A. F. Reimer on April 13, 1879: "The young Mrs. Johann Dueck from Gruenfeld [Kleefeld] has suffered much in childbirth for 3 days and 3 nights until she finally gave birth with the assistance of Dr. Schwartz." Of great importance were 2 local doctors Isaac L. Warkentin in Blumenhof and John Harrison of Niverville. Although they were not licensed practitioners they had considerable knowledge in their field. David Stoesz recorded that on May 23, 1890, he went to get Dr. Harrison to see a member of his family.

The first permanent doctor's office in the area was opened in Steinbach in 1895 by Dr. Graham: K.J.B. Reimer, Carillon News, "Historical Sketches," 1952. Others also went to Winnipeg to obtain various medical services. In must be remembered that medical science was extremely primitive during the 19th century so that many times local practitioners had better results than licensed medical doctors. The topic of medical services in the E. Reserve is a fascinating one and deserves to be dealt with in a special feature edition of Preservations.

The Chortitzer Waisenamt.

The Waisenamt or Orphans Trust Office of the Bergthal Colony was brought to Canada as a functioning institution. It had operated as the Waisenamt for the entire Bergthal Colony since its founding in 1836 and was much larger and more sophisticated than the KG Waisenamt already referred to. Since the inheritances of widows and orphans were usually paid into the Waisenamt which in turn lent these monies out at interest, it obviously impacted immensely on the day to day lives of women.

The example of Peter Kehler (1836-76), Bergthal, Russia, illustrates both the function of the Waisenamt and the operation of the devaluation of estates protocol. In 1866 Peter Kehler married Anganetha Groening, daughter of the well-to-do Groening family. They had three children, 2 sons and 1 daughter, when she passed away in 1870. The Waisenamt became involved and stipulated that Peter Kehler had to place half his property into the Waisenamt by Sept. 1, 1872, to be held for Anganetha's children, including daughter Helena: see Randy Kehler, “Peter Kehler (1836-76),” in Preservations, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 30-31.

These arrangements were formalized at continued on next page.
"Theilung" held at the home of Peter Kehler in Schönfeld, Bergthal Colony, on Feb. 3, 1870. In attendance were the Schulze of Schönfeld, Wiebe, and his assistants, Thiessen and Krahm, as well as "Vormünder" or children’s advocates, Jakob Wall and Kornelius Groening—Kornelius being Aganetha’s brother.

"Theilungs Kontrakt No 5" resulting from the meeting made detailed provision for the 3 children who were to share 160 ruble as well as receive 60 ruble each as their “maternal inheritance.” The 2 boys each received a horse and the daughter a cow. Kehler was allowed to pay out these inheritances in cash but in any case Helena was to receive an additional 20 ruble to equalize the value of the cow to that of the horses. Each child was to receive a blanket and 2 pillows as well as a new suit or outfit annually. And not to be forgotten, each child was to receive the traditional and much treasured Gesangbuch.

In 1872 Peter married for the second time to Margaretha Krahm and 2 more children were born. In 1874 the family moved to Canada, wintering in Ontario, and settling in the village of Blumenberg, 4 miles west of Blumenort, the following spring. Here Peter died in 1876. At this time his estate was settled and his widow received half and the children of his second marriage received the other half.

After his death Margaretha Krahm Kehler continued farming on a small scale registering the family Homestead NE 34-7-6E in her name. In 1880 she married for the second time to Abraham Wiebe, a wealthy farmer in Eigenfeld near Steinbach; see Peter D. Wiebe, "The Wiebes of Eigenfeld," in Preservings, No. 5, Jan., 1995, pages 6-7. At this point the 3 children of her first husband’s first marriage were given into foster homes.

The situation became even more interesting with the death in 1877 of Peter’s father Gerhard Kehler. At this time, Peter’s children, including Helena, inherited his share of Gerhard’s estate: see “Theilungs Kontrakt” No. 35, Chortitzer Waisenamt Archives. Thus Helena who had no parents by 1876, nevertheless, was protected by the protocol and received three inheritances, from her mother, her father and her Kehler grandfather. Helena later married Gerhard Falk and moved to Hochstadt, West Reserve, from where the family later moved to Mexico.

Elisabeth Reimer Plett 1870-1947.

Another example of an estate devolution resulting from the Ordnung is seen in the case of my paternal grandmother, Elisabeth Reimer Plett (1870-1947). She was the progeny of a number of influential and wealthy families. When her mother, nee Elisabeth S. Friesen, died in Steinbach, Russia, in 1873, her father, Peter R. Reimer, later senior minister in Blumenort, Manitoba, had to put aside half of his assets for her children. Since Elisabeth was the only surviving child, she inherited the entire amount of 425 ruble.

When her wealthy grandfather Rev. Abraham F. Friesen (1808-91) formerly of Neukirch, Mol., died in Jansen, Nebraska, she again inherited her mother’s share of his es-
tate. On April 1, 1890, her uncle Abraham S. Friesen, Steinbach, signed for the receipt of $376.18 on her behalf since she was not yet legal age.

But this was not the end of the story. Her husband Heinrich E. Plett (1870-1953) was also affected by the inheritance protocol. His mother, née Sarah T. Enns, died in 1872, and similar provision was made for him and his only full sister Sarah, later Mrs. Gerhard D. Doerksen. When Heinrich's grandfather, one-time KG Elder Heinrich Enns died in Rosenort, Manitoba in 1881, Heinrich and his sister again benefited financially.

Elisabeth and Heinrich married in 1890. Both would have received the traditional “poultas geschenk” or dowry advancement, generally consisting of 1 or 2 cows for the bride (depending on the wealth of the parents) and 1 or 2 horses for the groom, dowry chest, wardrobe, comforters, utensils—basically anything and everything the young couple required to set up their home. Often the young couple would establish their love nest with the bride’s parents for a year, possibly living in the family home or in the “Gemeinte Hus”, a secondary residence owned by most larger farmers.

Elisabeth and Heinrich raised a family of 10 sons and 2 daughters. They were hardworking and industrious and quickly parlayed their inheritances into an impressive dynasty, founding the widely known “Plettenhof” near Blumenort. By 1940 they together with their sons were running a host of businesses including a lumber operation which employed 100-150 men and farming well over 1,000 acres of land. By 1996, Elisabeth had over 2,000 descendents.

Elisabeth Reimer Plett serves as an example of how inheritance protocol impacted the lives of pioneer women of the E. Reserve.

**Modernism.**

The sociological concept of modernism is one way of studying the history of the 20th century. Modernism in its simplest form is defined as “a deliberate philosophical and practical estrangement or divergence from the past” at first applicable to arts and literature but often applied to almost any field of social study.

The concept of modernism is relevant to a study of women of the East Reserve. Disassociation from the past within ethnic groups is sometimes studied in terms of the “old order”, representing the traditional, and “new order”, representing the modern. The KG and Chortitzer, the 2 founding peoples—so to speak—of the E. Reserve, represented the “old” order.

The “new” order was manifested by tendencies toward assimilation, accommodation, and religious schism. It was represented at first by the adherents of John Holdeman, an American Revivalist preacher, whose Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, was established in the area in 1882. The so-called Bruderthal Church founded in Steinbach in 1897 was a second group in the “new” order category. The latter group was articulated to a large extent by the precepts of American Revivalism and later Fundamentalism which became convenient vehicles for those wishing to mainstream into what they perceived to be the wider North American religious life. Fundamentalism did not tolerate any culture other than its own nor the continuation of ethnic distinctives and thus became an oppressor, forcing its adherents to disavow their historical heritage and spurn its practice as symbols of “an old yoke of sin”.

The forces of modernism impacted on women very directly. Every woman had to make a decision whether to remain “old” or traditional, or to become part of the “new” and modern world. Different women made different decisions. Intellectual conservatives naturally tended to remain with the traditional Gemeinden, etc., going the route of accommodation, while others chose the easier path of assimilation.

The concepts of “old” and “new” order, relative to modernism and religious discord assist in understanding certain aspects of the history of the Hanover Steinbach area. Obviously they are not applicable everywhere. Certainly historians will not all agree on the interpretation of these events and their significance.

**Church, Children and Kitchen, 1945.**

The often heard phrase “Kirche, Kinder und Kochen” or “church, children and cooking” seems to reflect many people’s view of women’s role in society during the 1930s and 40s. Historian Royden Loewen has presented evidence that with the advent of secularization, assimilation, and commercialization of agriculture, women lost an important role in the financial operations of the household economy, and were relegated to domestic tasks and the kitchen.

At first glance it may appear that these innovations freed women from enslavement to much of the drudgery and mindnumbing work of pioneer life. By implication it also resulted in a loss of power, as he or she who “pays the piper, calls the tune.” Thus the process already completed for many women by the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century finally impacted inexcusably upon the women of the East Reserve.

Modern times also brought changes in inheritance practices. By the 1960s it became more common for parents to turn farming units and businesses over to 1 or 2 sons, while daughters received an inheritance from what was left in the parental estate, in this manner reverting to concepts somewhat like primogeniture.

By the 1930s the adherents of America Fundamentalism were making significant gains in the Hanover Steinbach area. In one sense this was unfortunate for women because it further eroded the traditional Gemeinden, matriarchies, and extended family units and resulted in a consequential loss of women’s power and status. The more well-to-do in the community were now liberated from the burden of having to share their wealth with their less fortunate neighbours, a function of the former Gemeinden rapidly being assumed by the modern welfare State.

Women were now allowed peripheral functions in the church such as teaching Sunday School and going forth as missionaries. But Fundamentalist clergymen quickly developed a whole litany of proscribed roles which were closed to women. Ironically making food for church functions and lots of it was never one of these. In short, women were often relegated to the “kitchen.”

**Social Conflict.**

It was the women who frequently were the casualties of social disfunction or interruption of normal conditions within society. Being physically weaker and historical more vulnerable they paid the price for decisions made within the political, ecclesiastical and economic spheres, such as emigration, church schism, war, etc. Of course, the impact which women had on the formation of these decisions still requires further study as their influence within traditional Gemeinden was much more significant than often thought.

Women were often the innocent casualties of war. This is evident in the tragic stories of the heroic women who immigrated to the Hanover Steinbach area as refugees in the aftermath of WWI and WWII: see articles about Russländer and so-called “DP” women elsewhere in this newsletter.

Often women were caught in the crossfire of another battle fought in Hanover Steinbach between the religious warlords of American Fundamentalism and the portion of the local populace who wanted to remain with the faith once received. Various superficial commonalities made it easier for people to abandon their traditional faith and lifestyle and adopt Fundamentalism as their religion.

This process could not take place without casualties. From time to time missionaries of various sects, some of whom have already been referred to, made strident forays into the area seeking to bring “light and truth.” Although rarely successful with the more well-to-do and conservative intellectuals, these operations did result in members of various Gemeinden being turned against families and communities.

It was proselytizers from a local congregation who took control of my 14 year old aunt, Margaret, in a rebellious phase at the time. They found her to be “unsaved”, in need of “conversion”, and baptised her by immersion on Sept 11, 1938. They did so against the express wishes of and over the tearful entreaties and frantic pleas of my maternal grandmother. To grandmother this symbolized the loss of her most precious possession, the love and respect of her youngest daughter, now lost to an alien culture and a religion of dubious integrity (Note Eleven).

The process of renewal movements and proselytizing among Christian denominations, while deplorable, is as ancient as the history of religion and will continue to be a fact of life as long as human nature remains what it is. The point is that there were casualties, and more often than not, they were women.

In the case of my aunt, it was not the proselytizers who affirmed her rebellion setting her on a tangential course, who were there to pick
up the pieces when her life fell apart. No, for they had already celebrated their victory and were long gone. As always the women bore the brunt of such well-meant but naive endeavours. It was the mothers who were left to patch up the pieces and salvage the human fall-out which resulted.

There are also numerous stories of women who made successful transitions to what “old” order mothers regarded as the religion of the world and became more fully assimilated. There were, no doubt, also many young women who were champing at the bit, eager to enter various new areas of endeavour and careers. Their stories of restrictive, conservative and authoritarian mothers and parents are interesting but not unique for this experience was common throughout all of North America and Europe as traditional communities everywhere were buffeted and destroyed by the “isms” of the 20th century: nationalism, socialism, individualism, fundamentalism, modernism, capitalism, etc.

Ironically, the nations whose economies were the most successful during the latter part of the 20th century and which appear poised to dominate the 21st century, are those which moderated such changes rather preserving traditional values and culture: Japan, Germany, Singapore, Taiwan, etc.

Conclusion.
The advances of women in the 20th century into areas traditionally reserved for men while applaudable and long overdue, should not obscure the achievements of women of earlier times whose accomplishments in their own time and place were equally remarkable, if not more so.

The articles and biographies in this special edition of Preservings tell a tremendous story. True, the pioneer women of the Hanover Steinbach area did not serve as Bishops, Brandordonnur or Orphans Trust managers, mayors or councillors. But they did dominate the medical field, they ran many of the finest farming operations, they lent money to the church, they raised families, they were school teachers, they corresponded with family and friends far away keeping alive powerful alliances and networks.

More often than not, the women were the conservative intellectuals with the backbone to maintain the “old” order in the face of all manner of calamity and outside interference. In short, they were vibrant and resourceful, finding some freedom from the drudgery of 19th century life under the umbrella of the traditional Gemeinden. Women instinctively preserved and nurtured their ancient communities, keeping alive traditions and social values which were their inheritance from times immemorial.

Pioneer women in the Hanover Steinbach area were integrally involved in the pioneering experience. By necessity and otherwise women were active partners in the household economy of the farms and Wirtschaften of 1874 and even further back in Russia and Prussia. Equal inheritance rights insured economic power and influence within a patriarchal society. Frequently as widows they not only continued their family enterprises but increased them successfully. They bore the brunt of the privations of pioneer life, in child birthing, domestic necessities, etc.

And yes, in addition, women were supporters, nurturers, and “helpmates”—a role which the women of Hanover Steinbach were extremely proud of, and not in the least apologetic. The foundation of life in the E. Reserve, as we know it today, was built on the blood, sweat and tears of these steadfast pioneers, many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice for its subsequent evolution and success through their suffering, toil and untimely deaths.

Certainly those who are hunting for witches will find them and those who wish to and feel the psychological need to “castrate their fathers” are free to do so, at least figuratively. Since the pioneers of Hanover Steinbach were just as human as any other group, I expect that there may have been isolated cases where this was justified. The experience of our local women was not always happy or even pleasant, but that does not detract from the value of their story.

But individuals willing to believe that their matriarchal ancestors were somewhat like themselves: intelligent, sensitive, industrious, nurturing, etc. will find this to be so—and how could it be genetically any different? They will berichly rewarded in discovering a vitally important part of their own persona and heritage, provided, of course, they are prepared to roll up their sleeves and do some serious old-fashioned research.

The material presented here is obviously preliminary, but draws attention to the need for further research and study of women’s history. It is hoped that this special issue of Preservings can serve as a modest beginning for such a quest. The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society is proud to present the stories of these wonderful and long overlooked founders and builders of our community (Note Twelve).

Endnotes:
Note One: Di Brandt, Questions I asked my mother (Winnipeg, 1987), page 28. Best selling heavily government subsidized poetry books of this genre typically sell about 300 to 700 copies.


Note Four: See my article “Emigration for Principle or Profit: Socio-Economic Considerations of the 1870s Russian Mennonite Emigration to Manitoba,” in Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 261-268. Statistics are sketchy, but Peter M. Friesen provided the information from 1910 that there were 270 estate owners holding anywhere from 18,000 to 100 acres: see also D. G. Rempel, pages 237-8. The majority of these “estates” consisted of less than 1,000 acres and were not regarded merely as substantial farms in the North American context: see Golden Years, pages 106-109 for a further discussion of this point.

Note Five: Ironically Patrick Friesen grew up within the context of the Evangelical Mennonite Church, dominated by Fundamentalist/ Evangelical ideas during the late 50s and 60s and desperately trying to shed its traditional Mennonite ethos. Evangelical/Fundamentalism during this time was extremely categorical and clearly the context in which the “Shunning” was formulated and written. It seems questionable, and at best uninformed, for Friesen to disparage traditional Mennonitism for the categorical nature of Fundamentalism which he experienced.

Note Six: The earliest written “Waisenordnung” I am aware of is that of the Chortitza Colony dated March 24, 1812. It was discovered in the Archives of the Waisenamt of the Chortitza Church, Steinbach, Manitoba, by Irene Enns Kroeker, 1992: see Bender, “Waisenamt,” ME IV, pages 870-872.


Note Nine: For a comparison of the farming operations of Mennonites in Russia and Manitoba during the 1880s, see The Golden Years, pages 106-109.


Note Eleven: This event, in fact, forms one of the story lines in my novel Sarah’s Prairie. In modern times, of course, the police would be called in to deal with matters like this. Traditional conservative Mennonites were always at a disadvantage in these situations as they took literally Christ’s command to turn the other cheek, evidently strictly practised even if their children’s souls were at stake. In Sarah’s Prairie, however, Jasch Koep says, “If they were my children, I don’t think my Wehlessness would stretch that far. That shotgun I have to keep coyotes and wolves away from my sawmill cookshack probably would work on other varmints as well” (page 156).

Note Twelve: It would seem most appropriate to recognize the vital and immense contributions of our E. Reserve women by naming streets, public buildings, or parks in their honour: e.g. Without the courage and steadfastness of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93), Steinbach as we know it today—as the major regional centre—would not exist.
Introduction.
The Hanover Steinbach area, originally known as the East Reserve, was settled almost 125 years ago by Mennonites from Russia. They were intellectual conservatives and their communities by and large preserved social traditions and cultural mores from time immemorial to the Werders in Prussia, to the steppes of Southern Russia, and carried them forward to the gently rolling prairie grass and burned-out poplar bluffs of the E. Reserve in Manitoba.

A case study of Kleine Gemeinde (KG) and Bergthaler, the two founding peoples, so to speak, of the East Reserve, can open windows upon the ancient cultures of Northern Europe as well as the “merchant societies” of the Hanseatic League which dominated the Baltic Sea and much of its hinterland in medieval times.

This is of interest to women’s history as the age-old and venerable matriarchies carefully nurtured over the centuries from Prussia to Russia were largely intact when the first pioneers arrived in Manitoba on August 1, 1874. It is even possible that these matriarchies were left over remnants of primordial “matriarchates”, somehow saved from extinction through five centuries of persecution and social assimilation by the stubborn survival instinct of these obstinate but courageous pioneer couples out to seek their fortunes and who had immigrated individually from many different places.

Matriarchies.
A matriarchy in its traditional sense is a “form of social organization in which the mother is head of the family and in which descent is reckoned in the female line, the children belonging to the mother’s clan.” Matriarchies within the context of the conservative Mennonites consisted of lines of power and influence, having all the facets of a traditional matriarchy, but running parallel to and in conjunction with patriarchal authority which controlled and articulated the official social institutions—Gemeinde, school, village, etc.—as was the case throughout Europe prior to 1900.

The system in effect during Soviet times in Russia, when a political commissar would be assigned to military units and factories, creating a parallel level of power which could countermand official civil authority, might be somewhat comparable. In the context of formerly male dominated occupations such as business or law, these spider web-like inter-connections would have been referred to as the “old boys” club or network.

This type of matriarchy is well-known in other cultures, such as the Scottish matriarch who ran her household with a loving but iron rule. There were also the proverbial Jewish mothers who micro-managed the minute details of their family’s lives, creating an eternal source of material for Jewish comics like Jackie Mason. Although they may vary in significance and influence, matri-linear patterns existed within all traditional communities and are worthy of study and analysis.

The powerful matriarchical networks of the “Kanadier” were unknown among the later 1920s refugees from U.S.S.R. The KG and Bergthaler were fortunate to have escaped the ravages caused by Separatist Pietism and accelerated assimilation into Russian society, which was significantly more patriarchal than that of the conservative Mennonites. Whatever was left of extended matriarchies after the church schisms instigated by Separatist Pietist missionaries from Germany, was devastated during the 1917 Soviet take-over, Machno ravages, the 1923 flight for freedom, etc.

Matriarchies as defined for the purpose of this article only flourished in societies which were stable, permanent, conservative and relatively prosperous. For example, sophisticated matriarchies were found within European nobility where many of them exercised extensive power, even to assuming absolute rulership in a number of cases: Queen Victoria and Katherine the Great, to name 2 prominent examples. Matriarchal networks did not exist in newly established frontier settlements which generally consisted of young single men and/or couples out to seek their fortunes and who had immigrated individually from many different places.

The Matriarch.
The discussion of a matriarchy presupposes the existence of a matriarch. What distinguished a clan where the grandmother or great-grandmother was soon blissfully forgotten, from one where descendants applauded her memory even distant centuries later? Anthropologist James Urry has referred to the concept of a reputation of the family clan which would apply equally to the reputation of a matriarch, “Lucky individuals were born into a clan with a good reputation and hopefully with the economic resources to back up this reputation. Reputation was derived from many sources: hard work, intelligence, humour, personal piety, and having supplied political or religious leadership in the past”—James Urry, “Chortitzer, Kleine Gemeinde and Ruszländer: conflicting views of life on the East Reserve, 1874-1940,” in Working Papers, page 117.

In the case of the matriarch the original source of her reputation and influence might have been a patriarchal several generations previous, or the wealth of a family properly managed and strategically preserved, or even a powerful matriarchal ancestor who skilfully implemented centuries-old strategies in the furtherance of the family well-being. In some cases the original source of the matriarch’s reputation is still treasured and preserved. In other situations, the existence of a matriarchal traditional can be used in an attempt to determine and reconstruct the source of reputation.

A successful matriarch was one who skilfully managed and enhanced her reputation, whatever the source, made it her own, and used it the furthance of her clan. They preserved and enhanced their power through the implementation of age-old strategies. Within the world of the orthodox Mennonites, the ancient matriarchs were often the most conservative and devoted supporters of culture, tradition and the Ordnung, since this was the fountain of their experience and the well-spring of their power.

Through extensive networking with family, relatives and friends, matriarchies developed which were far reaching in their influence and scope. It is trite to say, but the more extensive the matriarchal connections, the more powerful the matriarch.

In cases where cultural strategies were successfully employed, a new strain of matriarchy was created in each successive generation as a young bride raised her own family and exerted her influence, adding her voice to that of her mother-in-law and eventually superceding the same. In this way a new layer of matriarchy was grafted into the family by each new generation, novating the existing matriarchy, and typically strengthening and reinforcing the same.

The Gemeinde.
In order to maintain their power, matriarchies supported the continuation, growth and prosperity of the culture and society which was their experiential embryo, the seat of their power and authority. Among the Mennonites the major institution was the Gemeinde which defined and gave meaning to most aspects of life for its members. Other institutions such as village and colony government, Brandordnung and Waisenverordnung, were subservient to the Gemeinde.

Like all confessional and political entities of the 19th century, the ancient Gemeinden were patriarchal in nature, in polity and governance. Nonetheless, they were founded upon the concept of “one for all, all for one” and therefore served to protect the less fortunate, including the poor, orphans and women. The Gemeinden operated as micro socio-economic entities complete with all social benefits considered necessary at the time. They functioned as social equalizers providing a social safety net comparable to that of the modern welfare state.

The Gemeinden protected the interests of women, and therefore were foundational to matriarchal power. For this reason changes in the Ordnung, or in the way things were done were frequently opposed by the more intellectual conservative women in the congregation. Conversely the matriarchies would have encouraged and supported policies which improved

continued on next page
Preservings Part One

the strength of the Gemeinde. In a sense, the relative strength of a particular Gemeinde might be an indicator of the influence of the matriarchy within that community. For a discussion of how these concepts applied differently to the KG, Berghalter, and Reimlander, the 3 groups which settled in Manitoba in 1874-6, see below.

Tiegenhagen Gemeinde, 1776.

It is one thing to write about the conservation of traditions and preservation of values, but quite another to consider what those values were. Most readers will already be aware that the KG was unique among reform movements in Russia being restitutional in its theological perceptions. Its founding in 1812 was premised upon the restitution of the teachings and practices of the seminal writers of the faith, Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Peter J. Twiss and Peter Pieters, to name a few. The KG interpreted these writings through the eyes of 17th and 18th century leaders such as George Hansen, Hans von Stein and Peter Epp (father-in-law to KG founder Klaas Reimer) of the Danzig Gemeinde, and Gerhard Wiebe of Ellerwald, and others.

While the theological traditions of the KG may have been informed primarily through the Danzig Gemeinde, its cultural heritage and social tradition originated from another source. In my article “Prussian Roots of the Kleine Gemeinde” (Leaders, pages 41-82), the ancestors of 82 families identified as KG-related among the 365 in the 1808 Molotschna census were identified on the Prussian census of 1776. Of the 82 families identified, 12 or some 14 percent were of the “mittel maszig” (mm), or upper middle class category. This appeared to be about average for the Molotschna pioneers, the wealthiest of the Russian immigrants. This compared to about 25 percent who were “mittel maszig” among the 2442 Mennonite families listed in 1776 census in Prussia.

A dramatically different picture emerged when breaking out a category defined as “core” families, “being those families whose history from 1812 to 1874 was integrally involved with the KG.” Having identified 25 core group families, it was discovered that one-third of them were of the “mittel maszig” category, not only well above the average of emigrants to Russia but even higher than those remaining in Prussia. Of the 25 core families, half came from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde, the oldest and most established congregation in the Vistula Delta. The Tiegenhagen Gemeinde included villages such as Tiegenhof, Petershagen, Reimland and Tiegenhagen. The village of Tiegenhagen, for example, was founded c. 1350 by the Teutonic Knights and was the seat of the Mennonite Brandordnung or mutual insurance system founded in 1625. 19 KG-related ancestor families came from the 4 villages listed, and 12 of the 25 families in the core group were from the Tiegenhagen Church district.

It is concluded, therefore, that the social values and cultural heritage of the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde informed the KG tradition. These were the social values and customs which KG matriarchs considered normative and which they endeavoured to preserve. A study of KG history will provide information about the values and traditions of the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde, but the converse will also be true, so that a study of that community as it was in the 18th century will also shed light on the subsequent traditions and social patterns of the KG.

I venture to predict that comparable patterns will emerge for the Berghalter people, once such a study is undertaken.

Analytical model.

Conservative Mennonites such as the KG developed numerous survival strategies to maintain and preserve their culture and faith. These strategies included language, theology, culture, community or Gemeinde, etc. Many of the strategies such as education, confessional protocol, or land acquisitions were controlled to a large degree by the patriarchy within these communities. Some of these strategies were difficult or impossible to evaluate.

But there were other survival strategies such as kinship networks, matrilocality and marriage patterns which were articulated largely by women and which are capable of some form of objective assessment. There were some 20 major KG matriarchies whose origins can be traced to the 18th century in the Prussian Grosswerder, of which 3 will be considered in this article—the von Riesen, Siemens and Pletts. These matriarchies were chosen on the basis that each to some extent was unique and somewhat representative of a particular type of matriarch.

Hopefully such a survey will suggest an analytical model for further study. In the course of these evaluations, the reader will be introduced to a number of interesting contributions in their day. One of the problems in such a study is the amount of material which must be presented in order to provide a sense of the family history and matriarchal dynamics. I will try to keep family data to a minimum and hope that the reader will be forbearing.

Chortitzer Matriarchies.

A consideration of several Berghalter/Chortitzer matriarchies would be essential to determine whether comparative patterns can be observed. Being of KG background I am relatively unfamiliar with matriarchies among the Chortitzer of the E. Reserve. An interesting aspect of Berghalter matriarchies are a number of family traditions holding that the matriarch originated in some fashion from gypsies and other non-Mennonite cultures. e.g. Eva Glockman Loepkey. Ultimately, of course, all Mennonite families started out as something else at some point, but one wonders why this became a significant part of oral tradition.

Another interesting story relative to the power of Berghalter matriarchies is related by H. J. Gerbrandt in his book Adventure in Faith, “It was customary in those days to pay part of the teacher’s salary by providing the noon meal... If the women did not like the teacher who taught their children, they had a mysterious way of discovering what foods he disliked. By means of the old telegraph system of tele-bearers across the picket fence...this information was passed on from woman to woman. The unlucky teacher then discovered that the same unsavoury meal, which he did not like, was served every day of the week. The teachers who were appreciated were served all the good meals. This was a kind and feminine, yet persuasive was of getting the message across to the teacher that it was time to look for greener pastures,” page 32.

Unfortunately an informed study of the Berghalter/Chortitzer matriarchies is beyond the scope of my resources at this time and will have to await a further opportunity. My apologies to our Berghalter/Chortitzer readers. Hopefully this article can serve as an encouragement for such a study. I would suggest that the family of Peter Sawatzky (1760-1843) of Schönwiese, Chortitz Colony, whose family was enumerated by Henry Schapansky in Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 14-16, would be a good starting point for such a study.

Marriage.

Marriage alliances were an important aspect of preserving the culture of traditional Mennonite communities as well as the wealth and blood lines of individual family groups. In traditional societies of the 19th century and earlier marriages were typically arranged, a process largely influenced by women.

Strategic marriage patterns included marriage of young females to wealthy widowers as well as to eligible bachelors from other associated and/or prominent kinship clans. In other cases, matriarchs encouraged their children to marry back into their kinship circle, at an appropriate degree of consanguinity, usually 6 degrees or second cousins, although cousin marriages (4 degrees) and cousin’s children (5 degrees) were legal and also occurred. This practice was even clothed with a certain amount of Biblical authority, referring to the example of the patriarch Jacob who married his cousin’s daughter.

Matrilocality.

Matrilocality is an anthropological term defined as being “of or pertaining to residence with the wife’s family or tribe.” The concept has numerous applications in the context of this article. It was not unusual for young married couples to move in with the bride’s parents where the bridegroom would be given work. e.g. Peter P. Isaac married into the wealthy Warkentin family living on the chutor Hochfeld. Pioneers and Pilgrims, page 195.

More commonly matrilocality refers to the influence which pioneer women had over important family decisions such as which village they would settle in, etc. Theoretically, in many
socialized each new generation in their early childhood by passing on these stories and folklore. Peter P. Isaac, the leading folk historian in the KG, was largely informed by his mother and grandmothers: *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 179-224.

Major community events such as a religious schism also created a new matrix of social alignments, the result of which was comparable to the emigration in terms of its impact upon matriarchal patterns. This phenomenon is considered part of matrilineage as no physical relocation took place. The classic case was the Holdeman schism of 1882 which split the Manitoba KG down the middle. Again there were conflicting claims of loyalty which had to be resolved by each family and, with surprising frequency, matrilineal connections took precedence.

Margaretha von Riesen (1754-1810).

The most prominent matriarchy among the KG and possibly the entire Molotschana Colony was that of Margaretha Wiebe (1754-1810). In 1779 she married Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810). The couple lived in Tiegenhagen, in the Vistula Delta, where oldest son Peter was born later that year. By the mid-1790s the family had moved to Kalteherberg in the northern part of the Grosswerder where they farmed and Abraham was a Gutzmüller.

In 1804 they emigrated to Russia pioneering in the village of Ohrloff which was to become the cultural centre of the Molotschana Colony. The family was quite wealthy and arrived in their new home in Ohrloff, Molotschana, on June 15, 1805, with 4 wagons, 7 horses and 14 head of cattle, plus that of extended family consisting of 3 well-to-do son-in-laws and 1 married son.

A massive book would be required to recount all the accomplishments of Margaretha's 9 children, 64 adult grandchildren, 232 adult great-grandchildren, spouses, etc. Numerous levels of matriarchy can be observed in this family. e.g. The matriarchy of Helena von Riesen, Mrs. Klaas Reimer, for example, was grafted unto that of her mother, Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen, and in the next generation, the matriarchy of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, Mrs. Abraham F. Reimer, was grafted onto that, and so on, until the dismemberment of the matriarchies in the early 20th century.

Marriage.

The von Riesen daughters served as an example of how matriarchy preserved its power and that of the clan through strategic marriage alliances:

Daughter Margaretha (1784-1835) married Johann Friesen, a wealthy widower of Schoenau and later Rosenort. Johann was elected a Grosse Gemeinde (GG) minister in 1805 and was a sympathetic ally of the KG. Margaretha's sons from Neukirchen were prominent KG leaders—Bishop Johann F. Friesen, Prediger Abraham F. Friesen, and deacon Klaas F. Friesen; Daughter Helena married wealthy widower Klaas Reimer, KG founder in 1812; daughter Anna married Cornelius Sawatzky, a capable and wealthy young man (in 1808 he already had 6 horses and 8 cattle); daughter Regina married Heinrich Neufeld, another eligible bachelor from the prominent Muensterberg Neufelds. Heinrich was an intelligent and articulate man. He became an active member of the KG but not sympathetic to his KG brothers-in-law. Regina's children settled in Inman, Kansas, etc.

Strategic marriages were also arranged for the von Riesen sons: son Peter (1779-1847) married the daughter of a vinegar manufacturer. Peter was a wealthy estate owner in Rosenort, Prussia, and translator and co-publisher of Menno Simon's *Fundamentabuch*; son Abraham (1782-1849) married Catherina Wiebe, daughter of Heinrich Wiebe. But she was the step-daughter of Jakob Dueck, who settled on a double Wirtscha in Ohrloff and hosted a number of early GG brotherhood meetings. Abraham was the second Bishop of the KG; son Johann married Maria Lassen, daughter of Johann, a wealthy Vollwirt who settled on a double Wirtscha in Altona. Klaas's other daughter Susanna was married to Jakob Warkentin, GG Aeltester from 1824-42; son Klaas (1793-1870) married the wealthy widow Johann Friesen, niece Margaretha Mathies, and took over her Wirtschaft in Altona. Klaas served as a KG minister and later moved to Rosenort.

Since the family was so extensive, strategic marriages also included marrying back into the clan. Of 63 married grandchildren of the third generation, 12 married first cousins resulting in 6 sets of married grandchildren. Of 204 married great-grandchildren of the fourth generation, 37 married von Riesen relatives: usually a second cousin, but sometimes also a cousin or cousin's child or second cousin's child. A small number of these were second marriages.

It must be remembered that 2 of the 9 children of Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen were not KG-ers and none of their children married back into the family. Unmarried grandchildren and great-grandchildren were not counted for this example. By deleting the 2 family branches not KG, the ratio of intramarriage among cousins is 12 over 53 and 37 over 176 among second cousins (21% and 23%, respectively). A number of great-grandchildren married second cousins or some relatives in other family lines, possibly in areas where other matriarchs or other family clans were more powerful.

Most powerful matriarchs succeeded in arranging family marriages for a significant percentage of their children. In the case of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, “matriarch of Steinbach”, for example, 3 of her 7 children who remained in the KG tradition married second cousins or similar, and another child, Elisabeth, married a second cousin in her second retirement marriage. A 5th child, daughter Margaretha, married Abraham R. Penner, her second cousin on the Rempel side.

Matrilocality.

Matrilocality in its traditional sense was evident in 1831 when Jakob W. Friesen, son of Bishop Abraham, purchased Wirtschaft 3 in
made in 1869 when they chose to join the family-dominated Heuboden Gemeinde as opposed to the Toews, Plett and Loewen dominated Blumenhof Gemeinde. The relevance of this proposition is demonstrated by the secondary migration of 11 members of the von Riesen clan who had originally settled in Manitoba and moved to Jansen, Neb., within a few years: widow Klaas Friesen and her 5 children, Johann S. Friesen, Klaas Wiebe, Johann S. Harms, Peter S. Harms, Heinrich B. Friesen, and Peter R. Friesen. These families had already been counted in Jansen for the purpose of the above statistics.

The preponderance of von Riesen in Jansen signalled a family unity far more apparent than real. In fact, there were considerable differences of views among them (there were not really 69 distinct families as many had intermarried). This quickly became evident as many chose to join what later became known as the Bruderthalers, others the KMB, at least 1 the Herrites, and 1, Jacob Reimer, a group of conservative KG-ers moving to Mexico in 1926. Rapid dispersal generally occurred as individual families and small groups adopted American Revivalist ideas similar to Separatist Pietist teachings which they had disdained until recently.

In the case of daughter Margaretha there was a loss of power for the von Riesen matriarchy and authority and matriarchy were affirmed not only by her own tireless practice as midwife and undertaker, but by the burgeoning wealth of her 7 children.

Further distribution occurred in the E. Reserve, as 4 of Elisabeth’s children settled in Blumenort, and 3 in Steinbach. In Steinbach, it was daughter, Katharina R. Reimer (Mrs. Abraham S. Friesen), who became the senior matriarch, while in Blumenort it was daughter-in-law, Maria Plett Reimer, married to minister son Peter R. Reimer. By the next generation, post-WWI, extensive matriarchal power such as this had largely disintegrated. Nevertheless, there were some women of singular authority...
such as Anna Wiebe, a Chortitzer girl who worked as a maid for Steinbach's pioneer entrepreneur Klaas R. Reimer. She married son Heinrich, who became the local business tycoon of his generation. Within this context Anna wielded exceptional authority and her family came to be seen as economically elite in Steinbach and the E. Reserve during the 1920s. This was a rather remarkable achievement considering that Anna was a Bergthaler by birth and speaks for her tremendous matriarchal abilities: see article elsewhere in this newsletter.

Matrilinage.
The classic example of matrilinage within the von Riesen dynasty was seen in the case of daughter Margaretha's children, all 9 of whom were associated with the KG at some point, notwithstanding that their father was an influential and senior GG minister. In fact, Margaretha's children dominated the leadership of the KG from 1849 to 1866, with son Johann serving as the third Aeltester, son Abraham as a senior minister and son Klaas as deacon. These brothers were relatively prominent within the Molotschna Colony and became known collectively as the “Neukircher Friesens”, being the name of the village in which all three lived.

Matrilinage in the von Riesen matriarchy was observed in the 1882 Holdeman schism in the E. Reserve KG. The family of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, as one would expect, held firm, except for one granddaughter, Mrs. Johann W. Reimer. The family of cousin Jakob K. Friesen (1822-75), went completely with Holdeman, possibly reflecting the fact that he drowned in the Red River in 1875 thereby severing the immediate connection to the von Riesen clan. The sons of Prediger Klaas Friesen--Cornelius, Johann and Abraham, all remained KG. Thus although the preponderance of the family had settled in the United States, and particularly in Jansen, Neb., the majority of the von Riesen’s in the E. Reserve remained with the traditional faith.

Although small in number, the influence of the von Riesen contingent which came to the E. Reserve in 1874/5 in time far exceeded that of those who settled in Jansen, Neb., and the numbers and prominence of their descendents was exponentially greater as well. Undoubtedly part of this success can be attributed to conservative intellectual matriarchs such as Elisabeth Rempel Reimer who supported the continuation of the Gemeinde and nurtured the ancient traditions. They were obviously possessed of incredible emotional strength and wisdom as they strategically sought what was best for themselves and their families.

Certain sub-branches of the von Riesen matriarchy were continued into modern times in somewhat of their original configuration by aggressive implementation of traditional survival strategies resulting in the emigration of some 100 families of KG to the dry mountain valleys of Northern Mexico in 1948, and, subsequently, a secondary migration to Belize in 1958. Among these families was the matriarchy of my paternal grandmother Elisabeth Reimer Plett, who, herself, had died in 1947, a year prior to the move.

The Siemens Matriarchy.
Another important KG matriarch was Katharina Friesen, born 1768, daughter of Johann and Anna Friesen, 1766 census. On October 4, 1787, Katharina Friesen married Claas Siemens (1758-1834), son of Hans, Neustäterwald, Prussia, 1776 Census. In 1804 the family emigrated to Russia settling on Wirtschaft 15 in Rosenort, Molotschna Colony. The family was well-to-do and had a net worth of 1500 ruble when they arrived. In 1835 the family lived on their Wirtschaft in Rosenort, but Katharina was now a widow.

The Siemens matriarchy was unique as typically there was a prominent patriarchy or sons, possibly a Bishop or minister, who established the favourable reputation of the clan. Although Claas Siemans was a successful farmer, there are no other indicators of particular prominence. The matrilineal connections of Katharina’s descendants were also significant because the primary kinship networks within the KG were defined almost exclusively by her 4 daughters, whose families were all prominent.

The family of Katharina Friesen Siemens (born 1768) was much smaller than Margaretha von Riesen’s even though she was only 14 years younger. Two sons, Johann and Klaas, did not continue in the KG tradition and their families remained in Russia where all contact was lost. Son Gerhard Siemens (1805-77) married Gertrude Thiessen (b. 1805) whose family has not yet been identified. The Gerhard Siemens family lived in Grossweide, Mol. and later in Steinbach, Rosensenko, of which he was a co-founder, purchasing a larger block of land for resale to other settlers. The Siemens together with son Gerhard (1834-1908) settled in Rosenort, Manitoba, in 1874. Granddaughter-in-law Susanna Warkentin Siemens (1869-1943), became a wealthy matriarch in Rosenort: see article elsewhere in this issue.

Katharina’s 4 daughters married well and into KG circles. Daughter Elisabeth Siemens (born 1778), married Peter Brandt (1770-1819) of Blumenort, Molotschna, a wealthy young widower. The 1808 Revision showed the family to be prosperous. In 1818 the Brandt family moved to Tiege, Wirtschaft 18. After the death of Peter Brandt, Elisabeth married again to Heinrich Wiebe, a well-established Vollwitt and GG minister. Wiebe moved to his wife’s Wirtschaft in Tiege, and subsequently transferred to the GG, demonstrating typical matrilocal behaviour.

The Brandt children continued the tradition. Granddaughter Elisabeth S. Brandt (1813-56) married into the von Riesen clan, namely Abraham W. Friesen, son of Bishop Abraham. Her grandson, Jakob F. Isaac became Bishop of the KG in Jansen, Neb., in 1914; see article elsewhere in this newsletter. Grandson Klaas S. Brandt (1815-57) was a successful Vollwitt in Tiegenhagen, whose estate amounted to some 5500 silver ruble at his death. The emigration neatly dispersed his 5 children among all 4 KG associated settlements in North America. Granddaughter Aganetha S. Brandt married David Klassen (1813-1900), later the 1873 delegate to America of the Heuboden Gemeinde. Aganetha became the undisputed matriarch of the Rosenhof village in the Scratchings River Settlement near Harriston, Manitoba. Grandson Peter S. Brandt of Rückenau, Mol, remained in Russia where contact was lost.

Daughter Katharina Siemens (b. 1789) married Gerhard Fast, brother to KG patriarch Daniel Fast of Tiegenhagen and Bernhard Fast of Halbstadt, founding Aeltester of the powerful Ohrloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde in 1824. Katharina’s son Johann joined the Ohrloff Gemeinde and a grandson entered the Dutch Mennonite Mission in Java in 1888. Grandson Gerhard Isaac (1836-86) emigrated to Kansas where his 2 oldest daughters--Susanna (b. 1860) and Elisabeth (b. 1866)--became well-known medical doctors. Katharina stayed in touch with her sisters, corresponding with them. Three letters written by her in 1871 and 1872, datelined Grossweide, to her sister Sarah Siemers Janzen, are still extant. These are the earliest letters by a KG-related woman that I am aware of.

Daughter Sarah Siemens (1809-85) married Cornelius Janzen (1812-64), a more recent but wealthy arrival from Prussia. The family owned a Wirtschaft in Neukirch where Cornelius died. At the time of the emigration, Sarah chose to go to Jansen, Neb. with 3 of her daughters, where her progeny was prominent; see article on the pioneer letters of Sarah Siemens Janzen elsewhere in this issue.

Daughter Helena Siemens Friesen (1812-88) married Abraham F. Friesen (1807-91), of the prominent von Riesen clan. Like her sister Sarah, Helena and her family also lived in Neukirch where Abraham had a successful Wirtschaft and served as a senior minister of the KG. The Siemens women were feisty and not afraid to stand up against patriarchal authority and challenge the Gemeinde if necessary: see Ralph Friesen, “Totally indirect and Vain: Helena Siemens Friesen,” in Preservings, No. 7, Dec. 1995, pages 36-37.

Helena’s family included son Abraham S. Friesen, dynamic pioneer entrepreneur of Steinbach, Manitoba. Daughter Helena S. Friesen (1835-1911) married within the von Riesen matriarchy to her second cousin Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900). The family lived in Jansen, Neb. Several of her grandsons moved to Steinbach from Jansen in 1897 and after, including Abraham F. Friesen, first minister of the Bruderthal Gemeinde (EMB), Gerhard, Isaac and Johann. Helena later married another second cousin, widower Abraham L. Friesen, Bishop of the Jansen, Neb. KG. She did so notwithstanding the quite vocal protests of her sons who had adopted American Revivalist dogma and were upset that their mother would marry a conservative Mennonite leader even though he was a wealthy man, and very gifted, publisher of books, etc.

Another granddaughter Elisabeth F. Reimer (daughter of Elisabeth S. Friesen) married continued on next page
Johann’s famous response was, “Na, Liesbet, dann komm.” “Well, Elisabeth, then come.”

From this marriage was descended the well-known grandson Johann P. Harder (1811-75), Aeltester of the all-powerful Ohrloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde in the Molotschna from 1860 until his death.

Young Johann Plett was reprobate and served a 3-year stint with the Prussian Hussars, or mounted cavalry regiments. He refused to reconcile himself with his parents and only went back once while still in service as a Hussar in the Prussian Army. “Nobody thought of him as in uniform, so none of the household had recognized him. He later revealed this to them.”

Since both wives were of Lutheran background, all the children were baptised in infancy. Johann and his family lived in considerable poverty. This was possibly due to his own wishes, as grandson Peter P. Isaac has written. “One time, my mother told me, which I can remember very well, on occasions when great-grandparents had many guests and sumptuous and costly meals were served [by servants], he wished that God might keep him from such extravagant living as he had to witness it in his parental home. It is thinkable that God heard him.....”. Pioneers, page 214.

The Johann Plett family fled to Danzig during the Napoleonic siege where they almost starved. The head of a cat sold for a “Grosch”. Finally in 1827 they were able to obtain emigration passes and emigrated to Russia. Family tradition has always made much of the poverty of Johann Plett and thus it almost came as a surprise when the 1835 census showed that he had acquired a Wirtschaft in Sparrau. Evidently he repented for his errant spiritual ways in the later time of his life and also attempted “to redeem the day financially....”

After Johann’s death in 1833 his widow Esther Smit Plett lived for 10 years in a new house built by her husband just before his death. Later she lived with daughter Karolina, married to KG prediger Klaus Friesen, a member of the von Riesen matriarchy.

Esther Smit Plett (1778-1855).

Esther Smit Plett was unique as considerable information is available about her, most of it from the book by grandson Peter P. Isaac. One of Esther’s experiences of particular relevance to the fierce loyalty later found in this matriarchy revolved around step-daughter, Katharina B. Plett--Johann’s daughter by his second wife, Elisabeth Baer. The family was poor and the young girls had to work out as maids where they were treated very poorly. The step-mother had little pity for the girl and beat her. She told her to go back to work and not to come home again to complain. Unfortunately it happened that young Katharina disappeared and was never heard from again.

Later in Russia and perhaps influenced by strict KG protocols regarding such matters as child abuse, Esther repented over her harsh treatment of Katharina and went to incredible

Elisabeth F. Reimer (1870-1947). Mrs. Heinrich E. Plett, and her granddaughters Else, Clara and Katherine Plett, photo taken on Plettenhof 1940 by Gertrude Friesen Plett. Elisabeth F. Reimer was a double member of the von Riesen matriarchy as her parents were second cousins. She was also a member of the Siemens matriarchy, her grandmother being Helena Siemens Friesen (1812-88), Neukirch, later Jansen, Neb. She married Heinrich E. Plett and in this way was part of all 3 matriarchies studied in this paper. Elisabeth has over 2,000 descendants.

Katharina Friesen Siemens had 22 grandchildren from the 5 known family branches. Only 2 grandchildren married Siemens cousins, namely, Johann S. Friesen (1852-1920) who married Helena T. Siemens and were subsequently known as “Siemens” Friesens in Jansen, Nebraska, where they lived. 2 other grandchildren married a cousin’s child.

Of the 22 known grandchildren 18 emigrated from Russia in 1874/5. Of the 18, 2 settled in non-KG areas in Kansas although the Johann Suderman family settled in Inman, generally considered to have been KG-related. Of the remaining 16, 5 settled in the E. Reserve, 3 in Scratching River, and 8 in Jansen. Matrilocality is not observed in this family other than in Jansen, Neb., where half of the KG-related Siemens settled. In the absence of a certain amount of critical mass individual families evidently drifted into the orbits of other matriarchies.

An interesting factor of the Siemens matriarchy was that no one had ever heard of it until I started collecting information for a genealogy of my great-great-grandmother Helena Siemens Friesen. Any sense of matrilineage apparently dissipated soon after the emigration. And yet, research quickly demonstrated that it was a family of some distinction, particulary of its matriarchs. Nevertheless the Siemens clan had no family identity in contrast to the Plett or von Riesen matriarchies which had always boasted a pronounced and manifest sense of family connectedness with particular emphasis on matrilineage.

It would be interesting to do a more detailed study to try to determine if there were any reasons for the almost complete disintegration of the Siemens matriarchal tradition in the late 19th century.

Plett Matriarchy.

The Plett matriarchy was unique in several respects. Both Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen and Katharina Friesen Siemens were original 1804/5 pioneers of the Molotschna. They had emigrated to Russia as part of an organized community relocating to another country. Both families came to Russia with extended families intact and with long traditions of association with Mennonite culture and orthodoxy. Both families were well-to-do and quickly established themselves in their new homeland.

The Plett matriarchy within the KG originated with a Lutheran widow nee Esther Smit (1778-1855), who was a generation younger than the other matriarchs. Her second husband, Johann Plett (1765-1833), was the scion of a wealthy family in Fürstenwerder, Prussia. Hans Plett Sr. (c.1730-c.95) was a Landwirth owning 3 morgen of land (120 acres), about 3 times that of other landowners.

But the family was poor because young Johann had been disinherited at the time of his previous marriage to another Lutheran widow, Elisabeth Baer. She happened to be a maid in the parental home at the time. When the father discovered his son’s plans to marry the maid, he told him, “If you do that, I will disinherit you and you need not come to my house anymore.”
When Esther realized that all her efforts were for naught, she experienced a severe anguish of the soul and came under heavier and heavier conviction, “so that God had to say as he did of Job, ‘But spare [her]... life’.” A maid working at the home of her daughter Karolina, where Esther lived during some of her last years, later reported that at the worst Esther “came into such desperate anguish that she bit pieces of flesh out of her arms.” God did relieve her of her distress and she found peace for her soul—Peter P. Isaac, Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 212-14.

Esther was baptised in the KG Nov. 1, 1854, only a few months prior to her death. This seems odd given the incredible loyalty to the KG of her children and grandchildren. One would have expected that she would have wanted to join upon arrival in Russia or, even possibly, been pressured into such a decision.

Marriage.

The Esther Smit Plett matriarchy was unique in that all 5 of her children married strategically within KG circles: 1) Maria S. Plett (1811-95) married Johann Toews, an established widower of Lindenau and later Fischau; 2) Wilhelmina S. Plett (1815-64) married a career school teacher, Gerhard Goossen, and later to Heinrich Emms of Fischau, 4th Bishop of the KG; 3) Anna S. Plett (1813-87) married Johann W. Isaac, a prominent Tiege family, a cousin to the well-known historian Franz Isaac; 4) son Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) married Sarah Loewen, daughter of prominent KG deacon Isaak Loewen of Lindenau; and 5) youngest, Karolina S. Plett (1822-87), married Klaas Friesen, KG Prediger and youngest son of the von Riesen dynasty.

All but one of the daughters married older well-established widowers and all the bridegrooms had good family roots back to the Prussian Wéders. This explained to some extent why there were only 38 married grandchildren in the Plett matriarchy compared to 63 in the von Riesen. While the children of Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen illustrated marriage patterns among the KG people prior to 1812, marriages among the Siemens and, particularly, the Plett family, provided an example of marriages among the first and second generations of Kg-ers. The desirability of marriage to another KG-er had now been added to the strategies of previous generations of matriarchs. Since the von Riesen dynasty was one generation older than the Siemens or Plett clans, its higher rate of family inter-marriage, may reflect the fact that the KG was relatively small during the 1830s and 40s, resulting in a limited selection for marriage partners.

Of the 38 married grandchildren there was only 1 marriage between Plett cousins, namely, Johann P. Goossen, brother to KG minister Gerhard (1820-72), married Susanna P. Toews, sister to KG Archdeacon Peter P. Toews. This family emigrated to Gnadenau, Kansas, where they were associated with the KMB. By the second and third generation KG generation, marriage patterns had changed and young women now married to young eligible bachelors instead of older wealthier widowers. Matriarchs were evidently comfortable with the notion that inter-KG marriage was sufficient to guarantee preservation of family wealth and the cultural continuity.

By the 4th generation the Plett matriarchy was coming into its own with 187 married great-grandchildren, compared to 204 for the von Riesens. Of the 187, 14 married Plett second cousins or other degree of consanguinity, half of these in one family alone, namely, that of my great-grandparents, Abram L. Pletts, a wealthy large-scale farmer in Blumenhof. In other words, the rate of inter-family marriage among the Pletts was less than half that of the von Riesens, where 37 among 176 in the 4th generation had intermarried. There were also 4 great-grandchildren who married cousins or relatives from a different family line.

Matrilocality.

Of the 37 married grandchildren of Esther Smit Plett, only 2 remained in Russia, namely: Peter P. Goossen (1838-1922) of Lindenau, and Sarah L. Plett (1846-81), Mrs Jakob J. Thielmann, both of whom eventually joined the Brüdergemeinde. Sarah was ill when her parents emigrated in 1875, and always intended to follow, but died before this happened. Of the remaining 35, 24 settled in the E. Reserve. Of the other 11, 2 settled in Scratching River, 5 in Jansen, Nebraska, and 4 in Kansas—3 of them in Gnadenau. The settlement pattern was

Katharina K. Plett, Mrs. Martin K. Friesen (1886-1971), in 1905, my grandmother. She endeavoured to replicate the matriarchal strategies of her mother, Gertrude B. Koop, Mrs. Abraham L. Plett, and all 9 of her children married back into the Plett family line. Her family was well-to-do and each of 12 children was established on a quarter section of land, plus an inheritance of 80 acres or equivalent credit. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 99, and Mrs. Gertrude K. Plett.
normal given that most members of the family belonged to the Loewen, Toews and Plett dominated Blumenhof Gemeinde which had made a corporate decision to settle in Manitoba. Like the von Riesens, the Plett clan was so large that a contiguous settlement in one area was not feasible even if the families would have wanted to. The 24 grandchildren in the E. Reserve located as follows: 1) the Toews family was split with prominent brothers Bishop Peter and delegate Cornelius settling in Gruenfeld, and the 2 daughters with their widowed mother going to Kansas, against the express wishes of the sons; 2) the Goossens/Enns family was split with 1 in Gnadenau, Ks., 4 in Scratching River, and 3 in the E. Reserve; 3) the Isaac children together with their widowed mother settled in Grünfeld and Schönau, 2 miles south; 4) the Pletts settled in Blumenhof, a village consisting primarily of the families of Cornelius S. Plett and Johann W. Warkentin, whose wives happened to be Loewen sisters; and 5) the Friesens settled in Blumenort, but became separated when the widow Karolina moved to Jansen, Nebraska, to marry the widower Isaac Harms (1811-91), taking her youngest 5 unmarried children with her.

Matrilineage.
Matrilineage was important in the Plett family. Both grandsons Johann P. Friesen and Peter P. Isaac, recounted the maternal as well as the paternal lineage of the family genealogies. In fact, Friesen, went to great length to document the maternal connections in the Plett matriarchy. While the paternal lineage of the family genealogy was important in the Plett matriarchy. The situation of oldest daughter Maria S. Plett, Mrs. Johann Toews, illustrated matrilineal connections in the Plett matriarchy. While the Goossens and Enns, the Isaacs and Enns', the Isaacs and Toews brothers in Gruenfeld joined Holdeman. However, the family of daughter Karolina remained KG, possibly again reflecting the pull of the von Riesen matriarchy.

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Maria Plett Toews and her daughters settled in Gnadenau, Kansas, where she fellowshipped with the KMB and was persuaded to have herself rebaptised. However, her sons in Canada, and particularly Peter, the Bishop, were vehemently opposed to this, and “condemned this action.” But in 1882 when Peter P. Toews re-signed and led half his parishioners to join Holdeman, he insisted that his mother follow suit and be rebaptised again for the third time. When she returned to the KMB Church, she was banned by her son’s church.

However, Peter still owed his mother a sum of money and was either unable to or else felt he should not have to pay. After various family members had interceded as intermediaries to no avail, Maria finally let it be known, that if payment was not made, she would report the matter to her brother Cornelius S. Plett in Blumenhof, Manitoba, as if this was the worst threat she could imagine (probably with good reason): for a biography of Peter P. Toews, see Leaders, 819-909. Interesting, though, Peter did not remove his mother’s name from his “Genealogy Register”, a parish-type register listing all 134 KG families emigrating to Manitoba in 1874-6, with birth, marriage and death particulars: Profile, pages 5-59.

Maria Toews Doerksen Hildebrandt (1854-1918) was the youngest daughter of Maria Plett Toews (1811-95). She was the grandmother of Gordon Friesen, author of The Flame Throwers.
I grandson Martin Duerksen, a WWII war corre-
trespondent, wrote an autobiography, Dear God,
I'm only a boy. (Memphis, 1986). Kevin Ens-
Rempel, Archivist at M. B. Archives, Fresno,
California, is a great-grandson of Maria Jr.

Comments.

Of the 3 families under consideration, the
Plett matriarchy was the strongest on the E.
Reserve and its influence visible the longest.
Until recently almost every large farmer in
the Blumenhof district north of Steinbach,
prudently displayed the middle initial "P" on
the side of their farm vehicles, standing for
their middle name "Plett." This indicated that
their mother had been a Plett and spoke for
the preponderance of female children among
the youngest children Abraham, David, and
Jakob L. Plett whose descendants dominated
the Blumenhof area from 1900 until the
present day. In 1996 the Rural Municipality
of Hanover named a 10 miles stretch of road,
passing the grave and final resting place of
Cornelius S. Plett on SW25-7-6E, "C. S. Plett
Road" in honour of the family: see
Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two,
pages 53-56, for a brief biography.

The Toews and Isaac clans continue to have
a significant presence in Kleeefeld, Manitoba,
formerly Grünfeld.

In the end the Plett matriarchy also went
the way of all flesh. But in a few exceptional
cases, careful implementation of ancient
strategies such as emigration and nurturance
of the Gemeinde, preserved its power. To
this very day, one can travel through the jungles
of Belize and come across prosperous plan-
tations and dairies, where the largest and
most modern 4-wheel drive tractors and ra-
dio-dispatched refrigerated trucks delivering
processed foods to market, share common-
place with the happy lift of Low German in
village schoolyards and bonnet-wearing,
black-clad matriarchs singing Reformation
tribal chants from the Gesangbuch, echoing
the migration of 17th century religious val-
ues and culture from Tiegenhagen in the
Vistula Delta, Prussia to a land where once
only the haunting cry of ancient Mayan trum-
per broke the silence of the early morning
fog, while the men were still debating the
issue on the floor, the matriarchs of old dis-
needles while the men were still debating the
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Matriarchies and Gemeinden.

Earlier it was already intimated that the
strength of the ancient Gemeinden was directly
proportional to the strength of the matriarchies
within it. Weak matriarchy, weak Gemeinde,
and also strong matriarchy, strong Gemeinde.
No doubt social scientists can establish crite-
ria whereby such a proposition can be evalu-
ated and confirmed, but it does hold true in the
case of the 3 Gemeinden or Mennonite denom-
inations who settled in southern Manitoba in
1874-84.

I would suggest that KG matriarchies were
stronger and more developed than those of ei-
ther the Bergthal or Reinländer, also known as
the "Old Colonizers". The KG was the oldest of
the 3 denominations being founded in 1812 com-
pared to 1836 for the Berghalder and 1875 for
the Reinländer, who were only constituted as a
group after their arrival in Manitoba. The KG had
developed as a minority group in the Molotschina
and therefore its ma-

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As a result the Reinländer or Old Coloniers
in Mexico were more vulnerable to outside preda-
tors who seized upon their weakness and at-
tacked them seeking to dismember their com-
munities, telling them "their culture was obso-
lete and even evil." Notwithstanding that such
tactics have already proven to be bigoted and
racist in the case of Canada’s natives, these
predators even included some so-called fellow
Mennonites from Canada!

Further research might demonstrate, for
example, whether the principle of strong ma-
triarchy-strong Gemeinde, would also hold
true in other areas such as Kansas where the
majority of immigrants settled individually
and only 2 Gemeinden as entire communities:
KMB and Alexanderwohl. The concept of
course is affected by a whole host of factors;
relative wealth of the community, theological
emphasis, etc.

Observations.

Those who have condemned traditional
Mennonite culture as being patriarchal are cor-
rect as this was the situation of all European
societies during the 19th century. But it appears
that such critics have not seriously studied the
history of women in the E. Reserve, for had
they even attempted such an endeavour, they
would have encountered the ancient matriar-
chies, 3 of which have been considered above.
They would also have discovered the status of
"Meummi" within conservative Mennonite cul-
ture, the female equivalent of "Ohmi" for males.
These were designations of esteem and honour
referring either to a blood relative such as great
aunt or uncle or some prominent member of
the community.

Like Madame Lafarge and her co-Revolution-
aries in the gallery deciding the fate of
Royalist prisoners with a flick of their knitting
needles while the men were still debating the
issue on the floor, the matriarchs of old dis-
cussed and concluded issues at "Nai-Verrein"
and then convinced their men to support and
enact the same at Bruderschaft. But unlike
Madame Lafarge, the matriarchs of old were
builders and nurturers of their community and
not destructive anarchists, revolutionaries and
libertarians.

The matriarchs were also the worst night-
mare of the enemies of the ancient Gemeinden.
I can well picture a strong woman such as
Elisabeth Rempel Reimer tearing into some-
one like Eduard Wuest, out to seduce one of
her children away from family and faith, and
the results would not have been pretty. Eyes
flashing and hands planted firmly on her hips,
she would have made mince meat of anyone
foolish enough to encroach upon her turf. Her
opponents would have beat a hasty retreat, tail
between their legs, and gone elsewhere look-
ing for easier prey among the more recent and
impoverished Prussian emigrants living in the
eastern portion of the Molotschina Colony.

Conservative Mennonite males, by compari-
son, would likely have been more indulgent and
tolerant of such intrusions and might have stood
at hand, muttering something under their breath

(Caxton Press, 1936), the first work in the
“P.O’d Mennonite” genre of literature. Another
grandson Martin Duerksen, a WWII war corre-

about, "well they're human too, even if deluded," etc. The Berghalter Gemeinde, to its credit, developed communal strategies to distance such predators in Russia, where such protective measures were recognized by law.

The break-up and disintegration of the ancient Gemeinden and the matriarchies which functioned within them in the 1920s and 30s, liberated the well-to-do in the community from the burden of the Biblical teaching of "community of sharing" whereby they gave of their means to help the less fortunate—the orphans, the poor and the widows, a function soon to be taken on by the welfare state. This change came none-to-soon for some in the community who were delighted over the demise of the matriarchy, that amorphous community who were delighted over the

Conclusion.

Very little research has been done regarding the matriarchies of the East Reserve, how they functioned, and the impact they had upon their communities. The reasons for this are varied and have been alluded to throughout this article.

The identification of a matrilineal culture is a separate question from a description of its extent and power. A case study of 3 KG matriarchies, unscientific as it may be, does establish the existence of extensive matrilineal cultures going back to the 18th century and beyond, which survived with mutations and novations until the 20th century. Such matriarchies existed only in wealthy and upper middle-class communities. The functioning and strategies of these matriarchies were typical of similar patterns in other traditional societies and ethnically successful cultures: Scottish, Jewish, Inuit, etc.

Matriarchies fell victim to the forces of the 20th century: Fundamentalism, modernism, individualism, etc. Small shards of the proud matriarchies which once existed and exercised their power in the E. Reserve have survived and continue to function in the plains of Northern Mexico and the jungles of Belize, Paraguay, and Bolivia. In these communities, matriarchs continue to exercise their powers for the enhancement of the common good, unsung heroines, so to speak, whose immense contribution to civilization and humankind has yet to be recognized.

Hopefully this study will inspire others to take up the task of research and study required to come to a more complete understanding of matrilineal culture in the E. Reserve. Certainly, further study will affirm, and also disprove, some of the observations of this paper.

Susanna Warkentin Siemens 1869-1943

Family Background.

Susanna E. Warkentin, was the daughter of Heinrich Warkentin (1833-88), Pordenau later Lichteneau, Molotschna (Note One). Susanna's mother was Justina Enns, sister to Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau, fourth Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG). In 1874 Susanna came to Manitoba with her parents who settled in Rosenhof.

Marriage, 1889.

In 1889 Susanna married Peter H. Siemens, son of Gerhard Siemens (1834-1908). Susanna and her husband made their home in Rosenort, Manitoba, where he died at an early age in 1914.

After his death his widow farmed in a large way together with her children. A local history book describes the situation as follows: "Here Mrs. Siemens built a new house, which is still in use, and began to prosper after becoming indebted to friends. She bought more land and successfully farmed, with the girls pitching in alongside the sons. They had seen days of poverty when they lost 35 horses in one winter, with a contagious disease. Better times were on the way. She is remembered as a successful business woman, dealing wisely and finding right direction as a widow. One fall, she harvested three boxcar loads of wheat, and was launched into prosperous farming": Lenore Eidse, ed., Furrows in the Valley, 447-451.

Endnotes:

Note One: Heinrich Warkentin (1833-88) was the grandson of Martin Warkentin (1765-1853), a pioneer of the village of Blumstein, Molotschna, South Russia, in 1804; see "Martin Warkentin Genealogy," in Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 467-491.

Endnotes:

Gen Name Birth Marriage Death
5 Peter H. Siemens Dec 25,1869 Feb 2,1889 Jun 21,1914
m Susanna Warkentin Dec 13,1869 May 13,1943
6 Justina W. Siemens Dec 27,1889 Nov 1,1929 May 29,1969
m Peter T. Rempel Jun 21,1888 Jan 29,1973
6 Susanna W. Siemens Jun 27,1892 Jan 3,1987
m Heinrich F. Brandt May,1877 Nov 30,1947 Jan 1,1960
6 Peter W. Siemens Jan 2,1894 Aug 5,1990
m Helena K. Plett Jun 28,1893 Oct 11,1928
2m Margaretha K. Plett Jul 16,1890 Apr,1932
m Gertruda K. Plett Nov 29,1895 Oct 3,1921 Feb 10,1987
6 Maria W. Siemens Feb 27,1899 Oct 22,1922 Sep 16,1991
m Cornelius T. Friesen Apr 10,1899 Oct 24,1888
6 Johann W. Siemens Jan 27,1902 Aug 26,1977
m Maria F. Dueck Mar 31,1904 Jun 10,1923 Sep 21,1972
6 Anna W. Siemens Oct 5,1905 Nov 1,1931
m Johann Harms Mar 10,1905 Sep 28,1978
6 Elizabeth Siemens Feb 11,1908
m Abraham F. Friesen Feb 23,1912 Jun 18,1939 Apr 26,1993
6 Helena W. Siemens Nov 12,1910 Nov 12,1933 Apr 16,1987
m Jakob B. Loewen Feb 14,1909
6 Agnes W. Siemens Nov 12,1910 Oct 10,1946
m Johann B. Loewen Jul 12,1911 Jun 7,1990
News and Announcements

President’s Report

By Orlando Hiebert, HSHS President
Box 8, Tourond, Manitoba, R0A 2G0

The first quarter of 1997 has now come and gone. The winter has been long and the large amount of snow has made life for us a little more difficult in that we have to contend with snow drifts on our yards and on the roads. Now that the snow is melted we have to contend with the rising waters of the Red River and all its tributaries. It seems that by employing ever more technology and mechanical resources we seek to preserve our possessions and livelihood against the forces of nature.

As I look at the large earthen dike constructed in a few days around the west side of Niverville and the rising flood waters lapping at it’s base, I wonder how our parents and grandparents managed in similar situations. We now have almost endless flood data but when our forbearers settled here they had only their instincts to guide them as to where to establish yards and villages. I am sure that some times nature was not kind and the only alternative was to get out of the way and move what they could carry.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society was privileged to host a joint annual meeting with the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society at the Mennonite Heritage Village January 18, 1997. At the banquet following, the 230 guests were entertained by “Heischraitje and Willa Honich”. Dr. Al Reimer then recounted his memories and personal reflections on growing up in Steinbach during the early 30s into the 50s.

By Orlando Hiebert, HSHS president.

News - from the Editor

The HSHS Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) held at the Heritage Village Museum on January 18, 1997, was a resounding success. It was a full house with 240 tickets sold and almost that many sitting down for a traditional meal. The presentation by Dr. Al Reimer was insightful and humorous. But it was also an excellent introduction to the history of Steinbach during the 1930s and 40s.

The “Heischraitje & Willa Honich” were stunning in their performance, even though missing the vocals of lead singer Ray Plett and the piano stylings of “Willa Honich” (Pat Plett) who came back sick from their Hawaii vacation. The dead-paan humour of “Deeno” Dennis Reimer is always marvellous. The evening was also a landmark, being the first ever joint annual meeting of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society and a resounding success by all reports. See article on the entertainment portion of the A.G.M. elsewhere in this issue.

HSHS Board Elections.

After the “President’s Report” by Orlando Hiebert and a financial review of 1996 operations, the HSHS held its annual election of directors. The terms of Irene Kroeker, Cathy Barkman and Delbert Plett had expired, and Irene and Delbert were elected, Cathy having decided not to allow her name to stand again. New directors elected were Ralph Friesen, a frequent contributor to Preservings and Lynette Plett, presently working on a Master’s in history. See biographies below.

They join HSHS board members Lois Loepky, Randy Kehler, Cornie Martens, Doris Penner, Orlando Hiebert, Henry Fast, Royden Loewen, and Jake Doerksen whose terms expire at the end of 1997.

In this regard it is mentioned again that the HSHS seeks to be a resource and vehicle for all people interested in preserving and documenting the history and culture of the Hanover Steinbach area. If you are interested in serving on the board and/or contributing an article to either Preservings or Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series, please call the editor or any member of the board of directors.

I note in particular that I have talked to numerous people over the years begging, cajoling and encouraging, submissions with respect to the pioneers and history of both the Friedensfeld and Clearspings settlements; but to no avail. If you are interested or know of someone who might be, please let us know!

Ralph Friesen

Ralph Friesen was born and raised in Steinbach, being the son of Kleingemeinde minister Peter D. Friesen. He is employed with the Secretary of State in Winnipeg and has been responsible for various portfolios over the years. Ralph has always been a writer and one of his closest friends in his Steinbach days was poet Pat Friesen. Ralph has contributed numerous articles to Preservings and also wrote a lengthy biography of his great-grandfather Steinbach pioneer Abraham S. Friesen which was published in Historical Sketches of the East Reserve in 1994. With articles like “Totally Indiscreet and Vain: Helena Siemens Friesen 1812-88” the story of his great-grandmother who challenged the ecclesiastical authority of her time Preservings, No. 7, pages 36-37), Ralph has won a place in the hearts of our readers.

Lynette Plett.

Lynette Plett is the daughter of Jake and continued on next page
Cathy Barkman

We regret that Cathy Barkman has decided not to let her name stand for another term on the HSHS board. Cathy hails from Steinbach where she is a homemaker and also works as a teacher’s assistant at Southwood School. She has done extensive genealogical research and compilation on her family and husband’s family.

Cathy contributed immensely to the preservation of our heritage through her extensive work in cross-referencing various source materials for *The Bergthaler Gemeindebuch*, Volume Two of the East Reserve Historical Series. Her hundreds of hours of detailed checking and cross-checking of data helped to make this book one of the most valuable reference works for historical research regarding the Mennonites of Manitoba ever published.

As well, Cathy has contributed a number of excellent articles to *Preservings* including two family histories, the Schultz family and the Peter T. Barkman families, in our last issue, no. 9, to name two. Her invariably well researched articles have brought joy to those whom she interviewed as well as numerous family members and other readers.

Cathy has already documented and prepared many aspects of local history and culture. She has indicated that she will continue to contribute to *Preservings* and we look forward to her continued involvement in this important undertaking.

Preservings Part One

Anniversaries.

by D. Plett


It seems that suddenly there are all manner of anniversaries which the people of the Hanover Steinbach area can celebrate. In this issue we again draw attention to the Gdansk millennium taking place in 1997. Anyone planning to visit their ancestral homes in what were formerly the Danzig, Grosswerder and Kleinwerder areas in West Prussia should check out the millennial festivities happening in Gdansk this year.

Chortitz Worship House 1897.

This year is the centennial of the worship house of the Chortitzer Churches in Chortitz, also known as Randolph, which was built in 1897. This is an important milestone. I believe this building to be the oldest Mennonite worship house in Western Canada and certainly the oldest in uninterrupted use since it was built. Citizens of the Hanover Steinbach area as well as Christians of all denominations will take great pride in this event. Credit is also due to the members of the local Chortitzer congregation for preserving this valuable part of our local heritage. History has repeatedly affirmed the integrity and veracity of this congregation’s faith. We congratulate them upon this very significant and special achievement.

Bruderthaler, EMB, 1897.

1997 is also the centennial of the founding of the Bruderthaler Gemeinde in Steinbach, later known as the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church. We hope this event will also inspire historical research and writing on the early history of this vibrant and significant congregation.

Mexico, 75th Anniversary.

7,000 Canadian Mennonites were driven into exile during the 1920s when the Canadian Government heinously turned its back on the solemn guarantees given to their grandparents in 1873. Little could the 1874 pioneers have imagined that broken agreements, ruinous fines, imprisonments, and other ethnic cleansing measures would be their reward for choosing to settle in Manitoba because of these promises and proving for the first time that agricultural settlement in Western Canada was commercially viable.

In 1922 some 5,000 orthodox Old Colony Mennonites, exiles from Canada, found a new home in the State of Chihuahua in northern Mexico. Their settlements have generally been remarkably successful and are known throughout Mexico for their ancient culture and sense of peoplehood. They are also known for their dairy industry—particularly cheese, apple orchards and other business ventures. Ironically the total descendant of the 7,000 orthodox exiles from Canada in Latin America now exceeds 100,000 almost equal to the total Mennonite population in Canada.

One of the problems brought on by success and rapid growth is a serious land shortage with high prices. This means that not nearly all young people are able to acquire their own farms and continue in the tradition. This situation is almost the exact duplicate of the Mennonite communities in Russia in 1910 although the landless problem is not as severe as it was then.

Over the past 30 years 27,000 Mexican Mennonites have seen a brighter future in Canada and have returned to their former Homeland from whence their parents and grandparents were once exiled. Unfortunately instead of being met at the border by the Canadian Government with profuse apologies for its criminal conduct in the 1920s and with large damage cheques, the returnees have too often been greeted by condescending and patronising attitudes and by a racist perception in the Canadian population and, particularly, in the media.

Racism occurs when the misdeed or misfortune of one individual is attributed to an entire society followed by the belief that one race or community is superior to the other. These attitudes towards the Mexican Mennonites and towards returnees to Canada, in particular, are also found among the so-called reformed or “new-order” Mennonites. Like the Jewish people, Mennonites also have their orthodox, reformed and modern branches.

continued from previous page

Marie Plett of Steinbach. Lynette is currently in a master’s program at the University of Manitoba and is planning to do her thesis on a woman of significance to Manitoba’s early history. She is also working on a biography of her great-grandmother Elisabeth Reimer Plett (1870-1947), the matriarch of the famous “Plattenhof” near Blumenort.

We congratulate both of these new members of the HSHS board and hope that the experience will assist them in their own research and writing endeavour as well as furthering historical preservation in our constituency.
Racism among reformed Mennonites has a long proud tradition going back all the way to the 1850s in Russia when Zentralschule founder Heinrich Heese referred to the Old Colony or Chortitza Mennonites as “a lesser form of creature”, continuing in 1910 with Rev. Peter M. Friesen who condemned all Mennonites not within the pale of his own particular brand of Separatist Pietism as heathen, and continued, by Dr. Frank Epp in 1974 who referred to the 1874 emigrants to Canada “as the poor and simple pioneers ....” (This is not to mention the empathy among those who fled Russia during the 1920s for National Socialism.)

The Mexican Mennonite settlements are also attacked periodically by various religious sects from Canada, usually with all the cultural sensitivity of “Nazi Aktion Kommandos”, out to rid civilization of a culture which does not conform to their own and of which these predators generally have no understanding.

We in the E. Reserve, Hanover Steinbach area, have been the target of similar activities over the past century-and-a-quarter, and therefore can understand and empathize with our Mexican Geschwister.

1997 is the 75th anniversary of the Mennonite settlement in Mexico. We stand in solidarity with them and wish them well as they celebrate their anniversary.


Also of note is the upcoming 10th anniversary of the founding of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society in 1988. The charter members were myself, Dr. Royden Loewen, historian Henry Fast, Ernie A. Friesen, Mayor of the Town of Steinbach, Aron C. S. Friesen, Reeve of the R.M.of Hanover and Art Rempel, Chairman of the Hanover School Division, as they then were. I want to thank them publically for their faith in joining me as first directors of the organization.

I believe that the work of the society over the 10 years has demonstrated the veracity of our vision. It was appropriate that our first publishing project was John Dyck’s biography of Oberschulz Jakob Peters 1813-84, the man responsible for the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area.

In addition our newsletter Preservings has gone national with a current circulation of 1700 copies, probably one of the larger mailing lists of any historical journal in Western Canada. Including the current issue no. 10, we have put out some 600 pages (8”x11”) of historical material, with an equal number of early photographs, drawing on the talents of a hundred or more writers. Although we cannot sustain a double issue, semi-annually, on a permanent basis, it was definitely decided that the cutbacks should not start with the “women’s issue”.

We do hope that Preservings will continue to be published for some time to come. We also hope that new computer hardware, software, and other technological advancements will enable us to improve our format and reproduction quality even more. At the same time, readers are forewarned that beginning with issue no. 11, Preservings will return to a more manageable one volume format.

Readers no doubt have noticed a significant improvement in photograph reproduction in our last issue, No. 9, made possible by improved technology of our printer. We are indebted to Derksen Printers and their skilled staff for making this possible. Obviously, being a historical society with a mission of preserving historical photographs, quality reproduction is extremely important to us.

We have published three volumes of our “East Reserve Historical Series” a total of some 1200 pages of historical material. Our Research Director John Dyck is currently hard at work editing Volume Four of this series which will match Volume Three for length and content. The publication of this book in 1998 would certainly be a fitting anniversary present for all those who have worked so hard to document and preserve our local history.

It you can think of other ways that the HSHS can celebrate its 10th birthday, please let us know.

125th Anniversary, 1999.

Coming up in 1999 is the 125th anniversary of the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area in 1874. Within 3 years the arrival of 500 Kleine Gemeinde and 3500 Bergthaler/Chortitza increased the local population from about 30 (7 families in Clearsprings according to Homestead map) to about 4000 making it instantly once of the most densely populated rural areas in Manitoba, more or less equal to the population of Winnipeg at the time. In fact, for a few years, Mennonites actually made up over half the population of Manitoba.

The new settlers have been widely credited as establishing the viability of commercial farming in the relatively barren lands of Western Canada, thus opening the door to large scale settlement starting in the 1880s.

The R. M. of Hanover has already organized a committee to initiate appropriate ways of celebrating this anniversary. Some suggestions to date:

Books 1) A massive compilation of family histories along the lines completed for many Alberta and Saskatchewan municipalities when they celebrated their 75th anniversaries in 1980; 2) an anthology of more analytical articles on various facets of life and culture in the East Reserve, as the Hanover Steinbach area was originally known; 3) an anthology of women’s biographies; and 4) a concise readable history of the East Reserve suitable for use as a Junior High School text book; 5) a coffee table book featuring our finest pioneer photographs and local landscapes; 6) a coffee table type book of local Fraktur art and Schönschreiben.

Well, it is easy to conceive up book projects, but quite another thing to complete them and to find funding for them.

In terms of cultural events it would be a dream come true to see Wilmer Penner and his Landmark drama group reactivate some of the magnificent drama such as “H.M.S Pinfore”, a.k.a. Daut Schtraume Schalduek”. If this could ever occur we would certainly also hope that such performances would be preserved on video, so that they could be enjoyed by future generations who, alas, will have little idea, of the brilliant Plaut deitschjcher humour once spoken throughout all of southern Manitoba.

A Prime Ministerial visit to the Hanover Steinbach area would certainly be appropriate to honour the arrival of the first pioneers on August 1, 1874. The descendants of these settlers now make up almost 10 per cent of Manitoba’s population and have a significant presence in all of the Western Provinces as well as Ontario. I am certain there are numerous other ideas for celebrating this important milestone. In 1974, the centennial celebrations acquired a considerable base of support not only among the residents of Hanover Steinbach and Reinland Stanley (Altona Winkler), but also among the Mennonite community in Winnipeg and elsewhere, all of whom can draw great pride from this event and related accomplishments. We hope to hear from others with ideas on the matter.

Letters to the Editor

RR 5, Cambridge,
Ont N1R 5S6,
Jan.2, 1997

Dear Delbert:

Thank you, thank you, thank you for sending me those copies of “Preservings” which I received in the mail today. Two or three of those books together would certainly make a much better history of Steinbach than I was able to write.

I loved your “Steinbach: Feature Story” on the cover of the first volume. Your review of Patrick Friesen’s “The Shunning” deserves a much wider circulation than it is likely to get. Your comments on that play as well as those on the Winnipeg media, are “right on”.

When it comes to any understanding of Steinbach or of the people who founded it, those people are away out to lunch.

Not that I can pretend to that much understanding myself. I loved Steinbach the way it was when I first visited it. I loved its language and that for me was really the key.

I must be extremely eccentric in that respect, but I have found each time I learned a new language - or even started trying to learn one, it wasn’t long before I started loving the people who spoke it, and wanted to know their history as well. I did take a stab at Japanese, Norwegian, Cree Indian and Ukrainian, but the only languages with which I have persevered have been Hochdeutsch, Plattdeutsch, français and of course English......

continued on next page
But I still maintain my German by reading a bit each day and still speak it and Mennonite Low German quite fluently. I felt flattered to think you used the title of the 1991 history on your second-page article.

Thank you again for sending it.

sincerely, “Gerald Wright”

P.S. The photos are great too and rang a few bells. Vol 2, p. 65, the “Invalidenheim” on Hanover Street was directly behind the house on Home Street into which we moved in April 5, 1957. P. 47-top right, the house into which we moved was originally built by Albert Reimer for Rev. John Wittenberg whose mother-in-law’s casket is shown on the photo on P. 47 top right.

January 22, 1997

“THANK-YOU! Delbert. I really enjoyed the book “Sarah’s Prairie” over the holidays. Once I started, I couldn’t put it down and finished it before I had to return to work. It put me in a whole new world and stirred up new wonderful feelings of our history. Thanks. And to make things even more timely, I received my family tree from both my parents’ sides for Christmas. It goes back to the 1800s.” “Pat”

914 Chilliwack St.
New Westminster, B.C.
V2L 4V5
January 28, 1997

Dear Delbert,

I was reading the Preservings double issue December 1996 today and in particular Henry Fast’s excellent article on Heinrich and Charlotte Fast. (page 37)

H. Fast states that oral tradition indicates the Kornelius Lepp b. 1793, father of Charlotte/Maria Lepp who married Heinrich Fast, was of Evangelical Lutheran background.

That could be quite likely. However Kornelius Lepp was originally born into a Mennonite family. He was a son of Albrecht Lepp of Altendorf, later Junhertroyl in the “Grosses Werder”. The church records give the birthdate of Kornelius Lepp as August 3, 1793 in West Prussia. H. Fast gives a birthdate of July 22, 1793, which is exactly a 12 day difference, established also that H. Fast’s date is in the Russian style. I suppose it was Kornelius Lepp’s wife who was Lutheran. H. Fast doesn’t seem to know her name, nor do I for the moment.

The mother of Kornelius Lepp 1793 was Aganetha Kroeker, second wife of Albrecht Lepp. His first wife was Katherine Esau. Albrecht Lepp was probably living with his widowed mother at Altendorf in 1776 at the time of the census. He later moved to Junhertroyl....

Yours truly
Henry Schapansky

Preservings Part One

Tillie Van Sickle
35650 Florane
Westland, MI
USA, 48186

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society
Steinbach, Manitoba

To Whom It May Concern:

I am working on genealogy concerned with the Gerhard G. Doerksen born 12/2/1868 & Maria Braun family. I have purchased “Berghal Gemeinde Buch”. It’s wonderful! Many thanks to the authors. I know many long hours of labour were spent to save us time...

Also, in the above book the bibliography listed these items:......

Can you please tell me how I might obtain those books? None of these are available here in Michigan where I live. I will be most grateful for any help you can give me

Sincerely “Tillie Van Sickle”

Editor’s Note:

Re: Sources for Mennonite Books

We are often asked as to where people can obtain Mennonite Books and books of interest to people researching various topics regarding the Russian Mennonites who came to Canada and the American mid-west in 1874-76.

A good place to contact is Mennonite Books, 67 Flett Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R2K 3N3, who offer a book club service with a semi-annual catalogue mail-out listing many books currently available. They are also willing to assist people who are looking for a specific book which is out of print.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3P 0M4, and The Archives, Conference of M.B. Churches, 3-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R2L 2E5, are also good places to stay in touch. Both Conferences and their various committees publish books and may also have used books available as, from time to time, collections of old books are donated to them.

Another place worth contacting is the Mennonite Heritage Village, Box 1136, Steinbach, Manitoba, who have a book store offering various books of interest to the topic. Also keep in mind the Mennonite Post, Box 1120, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, which publishes the “Mennonitische Post” a German-language bi-monthly paper going to the Mennonites in Latin America. The Mennonite Post also has a book store with a good selection of Mennonite Books and sometimes also offers used books and privately published books for sale.

There are other sources for obtaining books of interest to the Russian Mennonites and their various diaspora throughout the world. But the places mentioned above will be a good place to start your search.

Editor, Preservings

Gdansk Millennium
997-1997

Many of the residents of the Hanover Steinbach area have roots in Gdansk, Poland, formerly Danzig, Prussia. This includes all those of Russian Mennonite descent as well as many German Lutherans. Most of these residents will have some ancestors indigenous to the lands formerly known as Prussia. As such these people will be interested to know that the City of Gdansk, formerly Danzig, is celebrating its 1000th year anniversary next year. A host of special activities and celebrations are planned to mark the occasion.

As a member of the Hanseatic League, Danzig was an extremely wealthy City and seaport in medieval times. The area boasts several beautiful cathedrals as well as the world famous Marienburg Castle in Malburg dating back to the 13th century. In the area east of the City there are numerous “Vorlaubhauser” and other material culture which attest to almost five centuries of Mennonite life in the Werders. And not to forget, Danzig/Gdansk has miles and miles of pristine beaches.

Anyone interested in obtaining more information about the 1000th Anniversary of Gdansk can write “Organising Committee of the 1000th Anniversary of Gdansk,” ul. Waly Jagiellonskie 1, 80-853 Gdansk, Poland or phone (0-58) 31 97 55,31 39 72.

Century Farm Awards
by Irene Enns Kroeker

If you are farming land that has been in your immediate family for 100 years, you are eligible to apply for the Manitoba Centennial Farm Award.

The Department of Agriculture invites anyone who owns land that they believe has been in their family for 100 years to enquire about the Manitoba Centennial Farm Award. If you are eligible you will receive a sign that may be displayed on your property and a certificate issued by the Department of Agriculture.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society will also issue a Certificate declaring the farm to be 100 years old. For further information please contact Irene Kroeker (326-2777) or phone the Department of Agriculture and ask for a Manitoba Centennial Farm Award Nomination Form.

Farmers whose families are of Mennonite background should be aware that if their ancestors held land in a Strassendorf village in the East Reserve and settled on part of the village lands when the village dissolved, the land previously owned in the village will be counted in determining the period of time of family ownership. In this way, many farmers in the Hanover Steinbach area are eligible for this recognition.
A.G.M. January 18, 1997


The banquet and entertainment sessions were preceded by the business meetings of the societies, which were well attended. Some 30 members attended the HSHS business meeting, and heard Orlando Hiebert deliver the President’s Report: see Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, page 10. Elections were held resulting in the Irene Kroeker and Delbert Plett being re-elected as directors and the election of new directors Ralph Friesen and Lynette Plett.

The guests enjoyed a banquet of ham, farmers sausage, fried potatoes, vereniki and bread, with rhubarb platz and ice cream for dessert. The delicious meal was served by the Museum’s women’s auxiliary. The banquet was held in honour of the Town of Steinbach’s 50th anniversary since its incorporation.

Al Reimer, retired Professor of English and presently living in Arizona during the winters, was the after dinner speaker. He charmed his audience by opening with a rousing replication of his Kehler uncles’ raucous and pulsating humour, much to the embarrassment of his prim and proper teacher father.

Al interspersed humorous stories of Steinbach’s many characters with poignant vignettes of life as he experienced it “growing up and down in Steinbach in the 1930s and 40s.”

“Uncle” Henry H. W. Reimer, was known for his passion for whole wheat bread. Inventor Isaac Plett always had “a slightly bewildered look on his face”. Harder’s Dirk was known as the “Smart dresser” who walked down Main Street on summer nights dressed totally in white. The temperament of pool hall owner George D. Goossen, varied with his degree of sobriety. Issukijche Hans “returned from military service with a stiff leg... His behaviour had always been a bit bizarre, but now he seemed a little mad. Every day he passed our place in a stiff-legged military march dressed in parts of his old Army uniform, while talking to himself angrily.” Gumshoe or rubberboots Jake Reimer was known as the non-tax paying citizen.

Al became more serious has he touched on how the years changed the town “when returning soldiers brought in a disdain for the old ways.” The town was becoming more commercialized and more open to non-Mennonite ways.

Reimer mentioned that as a youth he had wanted nothing else but “to escape Steinbach, his home and church...” but found that he could not escape his heritage “which had become [his] most precious possession.”

“Now I delight in the past,” said Reimer. “Steinbach was a wonderful place to grow up in, and I carry it in my bones for life.”

The entertainment for the evening was provided by the “Heischraitje and Willa Honich (Locusts and Wild Honey). Although missing lead singer Ray Plett and piano stylist Pat Plett, the group put on a stellar performance. Led by their fearless leader Dennis “Deeno” Reimer, whose stand-up comedy routines and dead pan delivery between songs are getting more deadly with age, the group played a variety of their much loved favourites as well as several new numbers. One of these, a Low German blues song enthralled the audience, especially the falsetto parts, sang by Gerald Reimer and Grant Plett.

The audience roared with laughter for many of the numbers and followed the beat of the rhythm with others. The audience was well attended by members of the MMHS from Winnipeg, some of whom were introduced for the first time, to Kanadier culture and humour.

Wilmer Penner, renown Low German dramatist, introduced both his old U. of W. buddy Al Reimer, as well as the “Heischraitje” (the Crickets), former neighbour boys from Prairie Rose. Wilmer brought down the house when he made the audience promise not to tell anyone about the Low German being spoken at the Museum that evening so as not to embarrass the Town’s Mayor.

continued on next page
A good evening was enjoyed by all. Organizers felt that the evening was a smashing success and boded well for closer relations between the two historical societies and future joint endeavours.

What a wonderful way to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Town of Steinbach’s incorporation effective 1947. It was heart-warming to see so many of the Town’s elite as well as friends and neighbours from the surrounding community, including representatives of the R. M. of LaBroguerie and Hanover, as well as business and professional people from Winnipeg and elsewhere, who were in attendance to share in this important milestone. The Town of Steinbach was ably represented by Councillors John Vogt and Art Rempel.

Please note: all photographs for this article are courtesy of Henry N. Fast, Steinbach. Manitoba.

Guests enjoying a traditional “East Reserve” meal: front row, Ron and Wendy Dueck and Reeve John and Ruth Giesbrecht of the R. M. of La Broguerie. In the rear, l. to r. we see John and Sadie Friesen, Niverville, Jake and Hildegard Adrian, Steinbach and Al and Eleanor Hamm, Steinbach. All photos for this article are courtesy of Henry Fast, Steinbach.

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Please note: all photographs for this article are courtesy of Henry N. Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba.

See also article by Doris Penner, “Steinbach great place to grow up: former resident,” in Carillon News, Vol. 52, No. 4, Jan. 27, 97, page one, for another report on this exciting evening.
Genealogy Meeting March 8, 1997

Over the past years the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach as put on an annual “Family History Day”, where various local genealogists and family historians exhibited their information and other interested participants were able to network and exchange information and ideas. This year the Museum had decided to drop the event and proposed that the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society (HSHS) step in to take it over.

We are grateful to our President Orlando Hiebert who rose to the challenge, inviting the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) to participate. The result was “Family Trees” which was held on Saturday, February 8, 1997, at the Heritage Village Museum, and co-sponsored by the Museum and both historical societies, the HSHS and MMHS.

The main forum for the genealogical treasures was the display of books, family trees, journals and charts in the Display Hall by some 15 exhibitors, including Marianne Janzen, Rudy Friesen, Alfred Wohlgemuth, Mennonite Books, Jake and Hildegard Adrian, Ernest and Henry Braun, M. B. Archives, and others. It is estimated that a total of about 200 people attended the event, which ran from 10:00 a.m. to 4 p.m.

As is always the case at any gathering of Mennonites, lunch was a delight, featuring good old-fashioned noodle soup, schnetjche, jam, brown bread, cake and coffee.

The highlight of the day was a presentation by John Dyck, research director of the HSHS, and Alfred Redekopp, archivist at Concorde College in Winnipeg, on behalf of the MMHS. The topics included “Basics for beginning on your family tree,” “Surfing the 'Net for cousins from California to Khazakstan”, “What's new from the St. Petersburg Archives?”, and “Grandma's on which C-D ROM?”. The talks were attended by some 60 people interested to hear about new information such as the 1789 land census and the 1727 Brandordnung (fire insurance) records from Prussia, and using new technology in computers and the Internet, to facilitate and enhance their research.

We acknowledge the work of Evelyn Friesen, John Dyck, Dianne Wall, Alfred Redekopp, Orlando Hiebert, in organizing this event. Special thanks are also extended to the Museum ladies auxiliary who prepared the lunch. It is good to see the cooperation of the three organizations in putting on the event and we hope everyone will be there again next year.
Chortitz Church 100 Years Old

By Jacob Doerksen, Box 154, Ile Des Chenes, Manitoba, R0A 0T0.

Introduction.
Saturday June 19, 1897 was an exciting day in Chortitz, Manitoba. People from all over the East Reserve and elsewhere gathered to celebrate the dedication of their new church building. Jacob K. Dyck of Hochstadt Post Office wrote in correspondence with the “Der Nordwesten”, a German language news paper printed in Winnipeg and read by many Mennonites, on June 22, describing the event. He wrote that people came from all directions and filled the church until it could hold no more.

Nor was Aeltester David Stoesz found lacking for words as he spoke on the text from Psalm 116: 12-14. After the message song number 345 “Es Ist Ein Koestlich Ding u. s. w.” (It is a Precious Thing to Offer Thanks to Him on High) was sung. June 19, of this year marks the 100th anniversary of the continual use of this building as a place of worship.

Construction, 1897.
The building was built in the spring of 1897 and completed on June 18 just in time for the dedication. The costs were covered mostly by free will offering. Gerhard Schroeder of Eigenhof served as master builder which probably meant he also was the designer and engineer (Note One). The building is of timber frame construction. It is built on a concrete foundation. The outside is finished with ceder siding and characterized by the “Prussian Crown” moulding over top of the windows, and wooden window shutters. The inside is also finished with painted ceder boards common to that time. Originally the inside arrangements were similar to those in the pioneer church at the “Mennonite Heritage Village”.

The road in front of the Church was on the north side when the building was built and therefore the front of the church was the north side. The entrance at the west end was used by the Ministers and song leaders for easy access to the “Ohms’ Schtaefjke”–Ministers’ room and also by the women.

The men entered through the door on the north side. The podium was located along the south wall with seating arranged so everyone, except those immediately in front of the podium, would be able to face it. The benches in front of the podium were parallel to and facing it. The benches in front of the podium were parallel to and facing it. The benches in front of the podium were parallel to and facing it. The benches in front of the podium were parallel to and facing it. The benches in front of the podium were parallel to and facing it.

Worship services, however, were not confined to being held in Church buildings only but were also held in various other communities utilizing schools or homes. Communion and Baptisms were, however, conducted mainly in the two worship buildings.

Introduction.
Saturday June 19, 1897 was an exciting day in Chortitz, Manitoba. People from all over the East Reserve and elsewhere gathered to celebrate the dedication of their new church building. Jacob K. Dyck of Hochstadt Post Office wrote in correspondence with the “Der Nordwesten”, a German language news paper printed in Winnipeg and read by many Mennonites, on June 22, describing the event. He wrote that people came from all directions and filled the church until it could hold no more.

Nor was Aeltester David Stoesz found lacking for words as he spoke on the text from Psalm 116: 12-14. After the message song number 345 “Es Ist Ein Koestlich Ding u. s. w.” (It is a Precious Thing to Offer Thanks to Him on High) was sung. June 19, of this year marks the 100th anniversary of the continual use of this building as a place of worship.

Construction, 1897.
The building was built in the spring of 1897 and completed on June 18 just in time for the dedication. The costs were covered mostly by free will offering. Gerhard Schroeder of Eigenhof served as master builder which probably meant he also was the designer and engineer (Note One). The building is of timber frame construction. It is built on a concrete foundation. The outside is finished with ceder siding and characterized by the “Prussian Crown” moulding over top of the windows, and wooden window shutters. The inside is also finished with painted ceder boards common to that time. Originally the inside arrangements were similar to those in the pioneer church at the “Mennonite Heritage Village”.

The road in front of the Church was on the north side when the building was built and therefore the front of the church was the north side. The entrance at the west end was used by the Ministers and song leaders for easy access to the “Ohms’ Schtaefjke”–Ministers’ room and also by the women.

The men entered through the door on the north side. The podium was located along the south wall with seating arranged so everyone, except those immediately in front of the podium, would be able to face it. The benches in front of the podium were parallel to and facing it. On the ends of the room the benches were so placed that they spanned the width of the building facing each other and perpendicular to those facing the podium. During the 1940s the internal arrangements were changed to its present format with the podium at the east end and all benches facing it. The Ohms’ Schtaefjke still remained and a Frueis Schaeufke was added.

When the building was built in 1897 it served as the main central place of worship for the Chortitzer Church. Only one other “House of Prayer” existed at this time. It had been built in Grunthal in 1886. Up to that time only Chortitz had a church building built in 1877. Worship services, however, were not confined to being held in Church buildings only but were also held in various other communities utilizing schools or homes. Communion and Baptisms were, however, conducted mainly in the two worship buildings.

Present Congregation.
Today, having succumbed to Church members living in greater concentration in larger centres with larger and newer buildings, it no longer serves as the church centre for the “Chortitz” but, never-the-less, it still serves a small congregation of aging worshippers who still conduct their services in the German language and worship in much the same way as their forefathers did 100 years ago.

The most important function that this building provided was that it served as a sanctuary for worship for our forefathers and us up to the present time. Often times we refer to Prussian-Russian Mennonites as an ethnic group which undoubtedly they are but without doubt the reason they stand out as a distinct group is because their religious customs and practices were manifested in everyday life. The worship house at Chortitz enabled a group of Christians to congregate and grow together to form one body with common goals.

Church History.
Over the 100 years that the building has been used, the Church has faced some very troublesome times. During World Wars I and II the leadership had to make sure that Church members and their children would not unwillingly have to breech their conscience and go into battle and partake in the terrible slaughter that took place in Europe. After World War I they had to fend off those who were determined to change the conscience of their children and future generations so they would be proud to fight for Canada no matter what, by taking over the education of their children forever. This caused great turmoil among the Chortitzer.

The Church was split, not in their stand on the issue, but as to the measures taken when a large portion relocated to Paraguay. After World War II more left for South America because of the force used by the Government in recruiting soldiers to do battle. Rev. Johann Schroeder’s chronicles contain many records of dates on which meetings were held in Chortitz and Grunthal on these matters. The Fire Insurance records also record meetings held in both these places. So by this we see that the building also served as a place to meet, discuss and decide those issues that affected the Church here on earth.

Preservings Part One

Roy Vogt (1934-1997)

Roy Vogt, former Steinbacher, passed away March 31, 1997. His untimely death was a shock to family and friends.

Since 1970 Roy served as Professor of Economics at the University of Manitoba and had written a widely used economics text now in its 4th edition. He authored many articles on economic planning and workplace democracy.

Roy served as a pastor of the First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg commencing in 1962. He will be remembered by countless people for his soft-spoken but genuine ministry.

Roy was always active in the Mennonite community serving on the boards of Westgate Collegiate, Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, and the Journal of Mennonite Studies.

In 1971 he and his wife Ruth founded the Mennonite Mirror, a monthly magazine which came to define much of the modern Mennonite experience in Manitoba during its 20 years of publication. Roy was also actively involved in the Mennonite Literary Society which published a total of 16 books by or about Mennonites. Roy was also a popular tour host and led a number of successful tours to the Soviet Union, and elsewhere.

Quoting from his obituary: “Roy had a zest for life. He loved people and he loved learning. He had a gift for laughter and a uniquely independent mind. He will be greatly missed.”

Roy Vogt (1934-1997)

Roy’s untimely death leaves an enormous hole in our Mennonite community. His numerous contributions have earned him a respectful place among the leaders of our Province.
Ancillary Buildings.
Over its 100 years of existence various support buildings shared the church property with the “House of Worship”. There was a caretaker’s house, barn, and later a separate house and barn for horses. Presumably in the early days the caretaker could keep his own animals. There was a Sunday School building which also served as a kitchen and dinning room for weddings and funerals. The kitchen and dinning facilities have been abandoned and the building removed but the Sunday School is still in operation. I might add that across the road from the church is the pioneer cemetery which is still in use today.

Name - Chortitz.
For a stranger travelling along P.T.H. 52 highway today, it may be hard to grasp that a church building with a few farms around it was at one time the main centre of a pioneer Reserve.

Upon hearing the name Chortitz, pronounced “Gortitz”, a stranger might also ask, as I have been on occasion, “What kind of name is that?”. The answer is that Chortitz became a Mennonite place name when our Forefathers settled on the Chortitza River where it empties into the Dnieper River in South Russia and also on the Chortitza River where it empties into the Dnieper at a point just above the rapids. The name Chortitz was chosen the name which portrayed troubled circumstances that surrounded these names, and have been abandoned and the building removed but the Sunday School is still in operation. I might add that across the road from the church is the pioneer cemetery which is still in use today.

The Chortitz Church view from the west, slightly towards the northeast. Photo courtesy of Jake Doerksen, Ile des Chenes.

Our Canadian forefathers, however, left the Chortitz Colony almost 40 years before coming to Canada. They lived in the Bergthal Colony but when they came to Canada they were joined by several families from the Chortitz Colony who came with the first contingent of Mennonite settlers arriving at the Rat and Red Rivers on August 1, 1874: Peter Redekopp, Johann Nickel, Johann Quiring, Abraham Klassen, Wilhelm Voith, Peter Esau, and Isaac Braun. They settled in the village of Chortitz and, presumably, gave it the name.

When Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) arrived the following year, he also made this village his home. Since the location of the village was fairly central to the whole Reserve and also the home of the Aeltester, it only made sense that the worship house of the church would be built here: see Preservations, No. 6, June 1995, pages 1-14, for a biography of Aeltester Wiebe.

In the early years, the people were referred to as Bergthaler but the Church was referred to as the “Mennonite Church at Chortitz” and it is from this that the name “Chortitzer Mennonite Conference” evolved. The name Bergthaler was moved to the West Reserve when many of the former Bergthal Colony people moved to the West Reserve and centred themselves around Aeltester Johann Funk who lived in “Alt-Bergthal”. They were a branch of the former Bergthal Colony Church but the Church at Chortitz remained the main body retaining all the civil institutions under its jurisdiction.

Name - Randolph.
Today when we refer to our church building we call it the Randolph Church. I think by calling it the Randolph church we are—probably without meaning to do so—ignoring the circumstances that surrounded these names, and have chosen the name which portrayed troubled times in our history.

The Chortitz Church view from the east, slightly towards the northwest. Photo courtesy of Jake Doerksen, Ile des Chenes.

When our Forefathers first settled on the Chortitz River in Russia they had found a new home where once more they would be able to live and worship God in complete freedom and also educate their children to this end. When they came to Canada they were guaranteed these freedoms. But the freedom to educate their children was taken away 45 years later, 1916-1919.

After the smoke of those tumultuous times cleared, and the victor was crowned, the name chosen for the school in Chortitz, by the Educator, foreign to the Chortitzer people, and against their wishes, was Randolph.

Yes the memories of Chortitz spell freedom. The memories of Randolph spell freedoms lost. But I guess none of this really matters when we compare it to our commitment to worship our Heavenly Father and it is for this purpose that the building was built and dedicated on Saturday June 19, 1897, 100 years ago.

Endnotes:
Note One: In my article “Eigenhof” in “Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874-1910” I stated that the Church building built in 1877 was bought by Gerhard Schroeder and moved to Eigenhof but this may not be correct because upon careful study of the Fire insurance records I discovered that Mr. Schroeder insured a new house on July 8, 1895 two years before the new church was built.

Oral tradition has it that the building built in 1877 was destroyed by fire. I have been unable to find any record of this but in the Fire Insurance records I found that it’s assessed value was lowered by $200 from $500 to $300 at the end of 1894. This indicates that the building may have deteriorated for some reason or other during the year. The insurance on the old building was cancelled on June 23, 1897 and the new building insured for $1200. A lightening strike has also been mentioned but that may have been some time later.

About the author: Jake Doerksen is a board member of the HSHS. He and his family attend the Chortitz Mennonite Church at Randolph where he also serves as a Sunday School teacher.
Over the past number of issues of *Preservings* we have featured several stories about the “Landing Site Memorial” established at the confluence of the Rat and Red River, where the 7,000 Mennonite immigrants arrived at the conclusion of their 6 week journey from Southern Russia: see *Preservings*, No. 5, Jan. 1995, pages 8-9; No. 7, Dec 1995, page 25.

Another interesting aspect of this story is that the landing site is also a Mennonite graveyard. At least 2 of the immigrants were buried there in the first hectic days after the arrival of the first contingent of 65 families on August 1, 1874.

In his biography of Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht (1849-1917), son Gerhard F. Giesbrecht writes, “When they arrived here in Manitoba, the wise Heavenly Father, in His all wise council, took the little orphan into His care. The small baby was immediately buried by the Red River.” The small baby referred to was little Gerhard H. Giesbrecht born April 4, 1874. The newborn was orphaned when his mother Elisabeth Harms died only four weeks later, on May 11: *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, page 23. The baby was an older-half brother to Gerhard F. Giesbrecht, also named after his grandfather, later pastor of the Holdeman Church in Steinbach. Baby Gerhard died on August 9, 1874, and was presumably buried right at the river.

Margaretha K. Esau was another newly arrived immigrant who was buried at the landing site. Margaretha was born in the village of Annafeld, Crimea, to Heinrich Esau and Anna Klassen, one of the 6 or 8 families who had not defected from the Kleine Gemeinde together with Bishop Jakob A. Wiebe of the KMB.

An accident occurred while the family was en route to America when “Unintentionally... Margaretha was pulled off the train by a conductor. She fell on her head and hit a stone so hard, it caused blood to flow from her nose and mouth. She took ill and remained in this condition until she passed away on the 3rd of August, while we were still at the Red River landing place.”

Brother Johann goes on to explain how the family, being quite poor, was able to make a coffin. “Some boys had gone swimming in the River, and lo and behold! a plank came floating along the river, and Peter Baerg [later minister of the Holdeman church in Swalwell, Alberta] got a hold of it and brought it to shore. His father, Peter Baerg [senior Kleine Gemeinde minister also from Annafeld, Crimea] made the coffin, rather a box, and my sister could be buried, the first one of our group to be buried in our new Homeland”: Johann K. Esau, *Profile*, page 195. Margaretha’s brother Peter K. Esau (1874-1935), later become one of the first Mennonite businessmen in Winnipeg, opening “an inn, serving meals and providing lodging also.”

Some 30 burials also occurred at the place of the so-called Immigration Sheds, situated on SW 20-7-4E, 2 miles south of Niverville: see Lawrence Klippenstein, “Jakob Y. Shantz and the Mennonite Immigration Sheds,” in *Manitoba Mennonite Memories* (Steinbach, 1974), pages 29-41.

One of these burials was that of Heinrich L. Dueck, son of Kleine Gemeinde school teacher Peter L. Dueck (1842-87) and Susanna Enns Loewen (1852-1918) of Blumenhof, Russia, and later Grunfeld (now Kleefeld), Manitoba: see article by Harvey Kroeker in Part Two of this newsletter.

The situation was described by Peter’s son Johann W. Dueck in 1904: “Brother Heinrich who already had been somewhat sickly during the journey became ill while we were at the Immigration Houses and also died there. He was buried here and was nearly one-and-a-half years old.” According to Bishop Peter P. Toews’ Church Register, young Heinrich died August 13, 1874.

Baby-boy Heinrich was the uncle of a number of prominent local individuals including: A. D. Penner, former Steinbach mayor; Emil D. Reimer of Blumenort; the late Rev. Ben D. Reimer, Steinbach; A. D. Kroeker of Kroeker Trucking, Steinbach.

Presumably there are other burials at the Landing Site as well as the 30 burials, already referred to, at the Immigration Sheds. The details of these deaths are locked away in private family memoirs and archives. The Landing Site Committee would appreciate hearing from anyone who might have such information. The Committee consists of President Bert Loewen (C.W.), Winnipeg, Secretary Royden Loewen, Steinbach, and Treasurer Orlando Hiebert, Souris, Manitoba. Please contact Orlando Hiebert, Box 8, Souris, Manitoba, R0A 2G0, if you have any information regarding such burials.

**Chortitzer Name.**

Did you know that the name Chortitza originated from the Island of Chortitza in the Dnieper River, Ukraine, formerly Imperial Russia? In ancient times, the Viking traders from the North country travelled south along the Dnieper River on their way to trade with the ancient Greeks. The Island of Chortitza with its beautiful woods and green meadows was always a natural stopping point.

The Island itself received its name from the traders who stopped to give thanks to God, known as “Chortz” in the ancient tongue, for safe passage over the dangerous rapids near the island. Thus the island came to be known as Chortitza or “thanks be to God”: see *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, page 25, for a more detailed story.
A Legacy - A Memoir
Memories of Anna Wiebe Reimer (1866-1932), Mrs. Heinrich W. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba - “A Legacy”: by
granddaughter Elisabeth Reimer Bartel, Courtenay, B.C., V9N 6K1

Snow-White.
At the age of six, I lived in the big yellow house with my grandparents and various aunts and uncles who drifted in and out of its many rooms, as the times and seasons dictated. I was there to attend Anna Vogt’s kindergarten for one more season, while my parents settled our family in strange surroundings. My father had succumbed to a great desire for independence and wanderlust, pulled up his roots and his place in the H.W. Reimer enterprises, to set up in business for himself in the predominantly Anglo town of Sperling eighty miles from Steinbach. There was much more than eighty miles that separated those two places.

“What about the store?” My father’s oldest sister Ennie, with anxious eyes, wrung her hands and bemoaned the fact of his going.

“How about Liesebet? Let her stay and finish at the kindergarten,” my grandmother said. She sat, round and soft and comforting, her chair rocking back and forth beside the long dining room table, as the uncles and aunts talked on and on about shares and legacies and other imponderable grown-up things. “Liesebet,” her hand lay briefly on my head where I sat beside her on the smooth hard-wood floor, that was warmed - as if alive - by the furnace in the echoing basement below. “Good girl,” she said on a short breath, her hand reached down and absent-mindedly turned one of the blocks I was assembling - each side of which illustrated a fairy tale, Red Riding Hood, Snow-White and the Dwarfs, Hansel and Gretel. The wolf’s nose had somehow got into Snow-White’s hair. “Those Englander... they won’t have a kindergarten.”

“What is a legacy?” I asked, but she had turned back to the aunts and uncles and did not hear. I looked again at the puzzle, flipped over a block so that a dwarf’s hat no longer protruded from the witch’s chimney. There! I turned back to the grown-ups, a more difficult puzzle.

They were all around me, in this room; they stood and sat above my head- a blur of aunts and uncles who came and went through my life. They were our family, Grozma had said, all her dear children. I believed her. She would not lie. I knew my grandmother to be a woman of substance for it was commonly known that our grandfather had endowed her with hundreds of acres of farmland. It must be the right thing to do, I thought. No one ever questioned his decision.

He was like God, stern and far-away, on His throne in His store across the street, everything under His control. ‘Come’ he would say and a clerk would come. ‘Go’ he would say with a wave of his cane and that one would go. I had as little to do with him as possible. Men were an enigma to me, like a foreign country. Except for my father, another distant figure hardly to be distinguished from the uncles, I lived entirely in a family of girls. It was no surprise to me, then, that my grandmother would rule her fiefdom in the big yellow house with a firm but gentle hand. I took for granted that I was one of her treasures.

His mother’s words would not hold my father, nor his sisters’ mournful eyes. He continued, stern in the face of the uncles’ watchful silence. The oldest uncle, Henry, still unmarried after all these years, shrugged and turned away, a small smile on his face. The many aunts clustered around my grandmother on the back porch by the summer kitchen. “Poor, Anna,” they shook their heads. How would my mother manage without our nursemaid, Suschie? Aunt-like, they chattered on, while our grandmother watched as we smaller cousins, each with a little tin can, scoured the back lawn for pieces of glass as if we were on a treasure hunt. Grozma paid us handsomely for every broken bottle and piece of glass. The land we roamed

continued on next page
on had once been the barn-yard and midden of our great-grandfather Reimer.

Suddenly my parents and my sisters were gone. Groszma and I were left in the big yellow house almost by ourselves. “Business,” the uncles said, when someone enquired in the store. “He’s gone into business for himself.” It was 1930 - my father had unknowingly gone into the teeth of the great depression.

“Tante Anna says...” My head was full of stories from the kindergarten - the three little pigs cowering behind their straw and brick, while the wolf huffed and puffed with all his might. I stomped through the front door in snowy boots, pulling the damp scarf away from my mouth. The thick opaque glass in the front door rattled as it closed. Groszma was in her favourite place on the bench beside the hot-air register in the dining room.

“Na Nu, Na Nu, Lieschen... come in,” she said, startled out of a nap. The door to the dining room stood open. I switched from the German we spoke, into kindergartener dialect that was programmed into my six year old brain, fixed there for ever - my mother tongue. I did not know then that the image of my grandmother and the language we spoke, would return to me upon recall throughout my life. Always the words, so apt in their meaning in one language, would lose power in another.

“Tante Anna? What is she saying now...??” Groszma sat up, yawned and pulled the shawl up around her shoulders, the dark wool of her long full skirt falling around her swollen ankles and tiny black-clad feet. The black ribbons on the lace cap she wore on her smooth white hair fluttered slightly as she picked up her knitting: shiny steel needles, dark wool.

“In kindergarten...,” I began.

“Russlander!... yearning for their Alte Heimat.” The needles flashed as her fingers flew along the stitches. I took off my soggy mittens. There was something in her voice, it made me uneasy. Didn’t she like Russlander, those exotic creatures, with their formalities, their foreign sounding speech? I wanted desperately for my grandmother to like Tante Anna Vogt.

“Liesebet gets overexcited at the kindergarten,” my mother had complained to Groszma, fearful that too much learning would overtax my brain.

“She’ll come to no harm,” Groszma assured her. So they had let me go my way. In the little house where we lived, across the street beside the store. My mother and Suschie were busy with my newest baby sister.

“Tante Anna...,” I began again and looked at the familiar figure of my grandmother. I could not remember a time when she had not been there with her stories and nonsense songs - Teep Heinatje, Rei Rei, Grefje. A Groszma with awesome powers.

Standing beneath the telephone, fastened high on the wall between the hall bench and the front door she would crank the handle with her short plump arm. RRRRing and if nothing happened, then again, RRRRing... “Ennie, Jac, Henry...”

Whoever answered her summons received a flurry of orders - Liesebet should have a banana, a figbar, candied popcorn.

At Christmas I knew I would choose from amongst the toys that the ‘Knate Klose,’ would bring. At her command, there he would be, as she promised me, coming down the steep ladder from the roof of the store, with the cousins and their smiling parents assembled below; all shivering with excitement in the chill, amongst the stored furniture, bed-springs and commodities, packing cases shedding excelsior. I wanted desperately to believe, but I had recognized my uncle in the red suit. Groszma had said! No matter, I thought, whoever the Knate Klose was, there would be dolls and tea sets, picture books, spinning tops.

My grandmother and Tante Anna, the two loves of my life.

Tante Anna was different. When she spoke I thought of birdsong. She insisted that we speak German: pure and sweet without the flat accents of our native tongue. The ring on Tante Anna’s long fingers sparkled as she coaxed one more note from my throat. The strand of pearls around her neck swung in an arc when she walked to my small red chair, took my hand and led me in a little dance. My heart would burn with joy.

I was six years old, already torn by divided loyalties.

“Tante Anna says the Bolsheviks took their houses,” I looked at my grandmother, who stared dreamily out over the geraniums in the dining room window.

“Bolsheviks?” I said again. That was an uncle Henry word. Would Groszma know about that? “Why...?”

“Nothing for you to worry about. She leaned down where I sat, warming my toes by the register, to take my cold hands into her own warm ones. “They’re far away,” she said reassuringly and released my hands to pick up her knitting again.

“We lived in a Semlin... a sod house... of
earth.” I listened to the needles click, click, click.
“You weren’t always here? In this house?”
“I came on a ship, from Russland... I was nine years old.”

“Was it farther than Winnipeg?” I knew nothing of ships or oceans then, or what feat she had been part of as a child.

She chuckled, her round little body jiggled and heaved with mirth. “It was warm in the semlin.... my mother let me play on the bed with my little brother. That winter it got so cold that we brought the cow in too.”

“So who built this house?” I took my eyes from the intricacies of the knitting in her lap and looked around... at the elaborate pattern of the stencilled border that ran around the room just below the high ceiling. From where I sat by the hot air register, I could see into the kitchen where Gerte, the current maid-of-all-work, stooped over the sink. I thought of all the rooms upstairs, my aunt’s bedroom where I slept now, the bed heaped high with fat white pillows like a pile of clouds; beside her room, the upstairs parlour, where the ghosts of courting days left behind by the aunts and uncles lingered; the big tub under the window of the bathroom; the huge medicine cabinet built into the corner, room for enough to stock a village - bottles of Wonder Oil, my grandmother’s favourite, of Alpenkrauter; bottles of Electric Oil, the labels marked with zig-zags of lightning. Below the shelves was a drawer that was always locked. Only Grozpa had a key. Once I saw him take out rolls and rolls of faded dollar bills. “For the store,” Grozma said and led me through the connecting door into the big bedroom and the smell of liniment and peppermints and sheets of newspaper— the Steinbach Post - scattered on the floor, beside the two narrow beds. “Only money from the store.” Who had designed the laundry chute, around the corner in the hall, that scary tantalizing shaft, big enough for a child to fall down? From up in the dim attic beside the cedar chest where they stored the family fur-coats - huge heavy pelts with thick dark fur that smelled of tanning and mothballs - you could toss things down the chute onto a distant square of grey cement that was the basement floor. At the door leading to the back balcony one could see the vine-covered summer kitchen, the garden, and the tennis courts beginning to look weedy and overgrown, now that the uncles and aunts were busy with families.

Hadn’t it always been like this?

“Grozpa built it?” I puzzled as the flashing needles in her short stubby fingers nearly made a heel in the sock; dark grey wool, it must be for someone old - my grandfather. When she knitted for her grandchildren; fat mitts, baby bonnets, long scarves and stockings, she used the brightest colours she could find in the store, scarlet, canary yellow, bright green.

“A fine house, built when your Papa was a boy,” Grozma’s fingers slowed. She looked around at the smooth white walls, the wide oak baseboard, the large windows, with the stained glass trim. “The Russlander... they smile at our glass of the school-yard where only the legs of boys could be seen kicking at a ball. Down behind the huge furnace with its hissing and clanking pipes, there were low tanks full of ancient water, where once they had stored the cans of milk the farmers brought in for trade before there was a creamery in Steinbach. Was that like living in a sod hut?

“What did you eat?” I was hungry. It must be nearly dinner time. I smelled bean soup, dill pickles from the large vat in the Koma deep in the basement. Gerte slammed the lid on the stove as she added a piece of kindling to the fire.

“Eat something... a bun?” Grozma pointed. I looked at the long dining room table, the twelve solid oak chairs set around it. The table would soon be set for a meal with platters of ham. And eggs, that Gerte would fry up in a cast iron pan. Tante Ennie would hurry from the store, where she spent most of her day, put on a big apron as if she was actually going to cook something, but never did, would bring buns from the ice-cold pantry in the corner. By then Grozpa would have taken his place at the head of the table, with Uncle Henry beside him. Tante Ennie would come running, to pour coffee into his cup and they would all bow their heads in a silent grace.

“Whose minding the store?” Grozpa would ask as he shifted his false teeth around until they were comfortable and poured coffee in his saucer to cool it. The store and its customers, presided over by the awesome cash register in all its chrome splendour, like some deity, I

continued on next page
Preservings Part One

Anna Toews Reimer (left) and John H. W. Reimer on one of their travels. John is holding his oldest daughter Naomi. They are accompanied by his sister Margaret, later Mrs. Henry T. Kroeker (right). Visiting Pike’s Peak, Colorado, 1921.

continued from previous page

knew, must never be left unattended.

“In the spring the frogs began to croak... Barkfeld was pretty then...,” her needles flashed again with the speed of light.

Barkfeld.

The road to Barkfeld is gone now. At the beginning of World War II, American interests bought up all the land around Barkfeld, fenced it with barbed wire, and it became a cattle ranch. Before the land was finally sold, I went with my parents and my sister to see, for the first time that I could remember where my grandmother had spent her youth. She had been dead for eight years. I hardly thought about her, my head full of youthful nonsense.

We drove along the highway, my mother still in her Sunday best, her new straw hat firmly pinned to her head. In the back of the car my grandmother had spent her youth. She had been dead for eight years. I hardly thought about her, my head full of youthful nonsense.

“Somewhere in here...” my father hesitated.

He was looking for a landmark. He waved his arm past the small clumps of willow and hazelnut, past heaps of stones some one had painstakingly gathered, which had long since been overgrown with grass. We could see a few timbers, the remains of what might once have been a building. Beside it, two rows of ancient poplars stretched out in parallel lines. “Come and see,” he said, got out of the car and began to walk through the tall grass towards the dying trees.

“That was the road--between those trees.”

His face lit up and he turned, a slight figure against the sky, his white hair ruffled in the wind. “They grew quite tall, once,” he pointed to the trees. “I seem to remember houses on both sides of the road.”

I came to stand beside him.

“Before 1922 when most of them went to Paraguay, this was a village,” he said. For a moment I could imagine my father, young and carefree.

“Why did we never come before?” I asked him. While the question hung in the air between us, I pictured the empty space before us, where my grandmother had lived, peopled with children and horses and women chatting over the fence. In my mind I could see the whitewashed houses and barns, vivid with blue doors and window frames. “Barkfeld blue,” it was now called in derision. It was easy to imagine a busy village, transported from the Russian steppes to this hinterland... the neat fences on both sides of the road, the orchards pruned and swept, cattle lowing in the barns, waiting to be milked. The quiet of a Sunday lying like a benediction over all, as the villagers worshipped in the stark simplicity of the church. Not even a dog would bark.

My father looked around at the empty land. The only sound was the wind that ruffled the grass. We stood for a long time like that, quiet; I listened for an echo of my grandmother’s voice. She had walked here, played games on this street. She knew the old games, had told me about the “Brum Tup,” when villagers would go from door to door on New Year’s Eve, banging on tubs and kettles and playing on a crudely fashioned instrument strung with horsehair--a game so old, it’s meaning lost in antiquity.

“What are they doing...?” I had asked her when “BrummTuppers” came to the back door of the house in Steinbach. She just smiled when the revellers, laughing and full of New Year’s cookies, departed.

Here, in Barkfeld, in one awful night, three of her younger brothers had strangled on their own phlegm, victims of diphtheria. Grozma never talked about it. It was my father who told me. Now, standing in this place, I thought of all the other babies that must have died.

I came out of my reverie and we walked over to the remains of a building, a few beams fallen over a cellar hole. They were weathered and splintered, the smell of cattle and horses had long since dispersed to the scurrying snow of seventy Manitoba winters, initials carved into the wood no longer legible.

“What happened?” I asked when we were back in the car, “Where did they all go?” My mother and sister were silent.

“Paraguay... it was the schools.” My father was back behind the wheel of a car where he felt comfortable, his fit of nostalgia over, almost before it had begun. He steered around a large boulder and continued. “They didn’t want to send their children to English schools.”

“So...what’s wrong with English schools?”

“They were afraid...,” my mother interjected. “If they lost their language,” my father said. He paused.

“Paraguay,” my mother said, “so far away.” She was fond of the near and familiar. She had just come back to live in Steinbach, an exile returned to the Promised Land, only fearful that her reckless husband would cart her off again to some godforsaken place.

“Did Grozma want to go?” I wondered out loud.

“No, never...” My mother answered and looked out of the window, satisfied at the landscape she saw, no thorn bushes, no snakes, no gauchos riding on horseback, their women and children at home digging out roots. I stared out of the window too and thought about Paraguay. Where if? My grandmother in Paraguay? The uncles behind the counter of a store in the Chaco?

I never did ask my father why he brought us to Barkfeld just as the last traces of the past were obliterated.

Church.

I opened my eyes to a new day in Tante Ennie’s bed, where I now slept each night. The previous evening, I had drowsed as I often did, beneath my grandmother’s shawl on the bench beside the register, while she and Groszpá sang their nightly devotions from the Gesang Buch that lay between them - long slow verses of Grozer Gott... Nun Danket Alle... I would wake to the slam of the front door as aunts and uncles came from the store to sit around the dining room table to drink coffee and talk over the day’s happenings before they went to bed. I would never know which uncle had carried me off to sleep in my aunt’s bed.

This must be Sunday. No cars or teams of horses could be heard outside. On weekday mornings the cow-herd sounded his horn as he ambled down the street, calling for the cows he would herd in the pasture at the far end of the village. He returned them in the evening, full of grass and bawling to be milked.

The silk tassel on the window-shade barely moved with the slight breeze across the sill;
the sheer white curtain over it, was still. Through the other window, across the oak floor, the sun shone full on my aunt’s bureau, immaculate with a starched white cover. I could see the comb and brush that lay there and the small flower decorated bowl, which had a hole in the top where my aunt put the loose grey hair she had combed from her head. The scent of plum blossom, wafted through the open window from the orchard. As I crawled out of the crisp white sheets on the high bed. It smelled like spring, I thought as I scampered along the hall in my nightgown, the floor smooth and cool under my bare feet, down the stairs and into the dining room.

“Is it today? The Easter Egg Hunt? Is it today?”

My grandmother smiled and nodded as she poured hot coffee from a big enamel pot over two well-toasted buns in a porridge bowl, and spooned sugar over it with a generous hand. From a blue jug she splashed milk over it all, and pushed the bowl across the table toward me. “Es begah sich das der Kaiser Augustus...,” I recited to my grandmother. And now to my aunt beside me, to the birds, where they chattered in the bare trees just beginning to leaf out along the road, to a friendly dog who happened by. Tante Ennie didn’t mind. She was not worried that I would overtax my brain with too much learning. Tante sniffed audibly and turned her head as if she didn’t want to look, when we reached ‘Butcher Reimers’. “At H.W... we have quality,” she said.

We passed the home of the Kreugers, three spinster ladies and their one brother, refugees like my Tante Anna, from Russia. “My friends...” my aunt said as we passed. Their place was painfully neat - no children ever played in that yard. I had gone there with my mother to be measured for a dress. The sisters - three smooth heads hovering over their sewing in the sunny work-room - had raised three pairs of dark eyes and looked at me, faces still, when my mother spilled the bright colours of her yard goods out on their high tables, a torrent of blue and green like a waterfall. “Well,” they eyed each other silently, and looked at me again. Then the tallest one said, “that should do for her.”

Worship Service.

At last we reached the church, a plain white rectangle with two doors at the end, one for the men and one for the women.

Grozma and Groszpa had arrived, chauffeured by their son; they climbed out of the back of the aging Plymouth, whose faded sides had seen better days. I walked with my grandmother down the long aisle of the church, and crowded in beside her and her sister, my Great Aunt, Leinjchemum, squeezed so tight in between them, I could feel the round hard peppermints in Groszma’s pockets pressing against my arm.

Silence that was almost visible descended like a blanket.

The church was full.

Silence, except for an exuberant fly that buzzed against the glass of a nearby window.

Far away a baby whimpered, then was hushed.

The ancient clock on the stark white wall softly struck the hour.

The song-leader rose and solemnly intoned the first lines of a hymn, the voices of the congregation followed one line behind.

I fidgeted.

Without a cue, the congregation rose as one body, like a big black bird, and like a bird on the wing, turned and sank to their knees in silent prayer.

I heard only the sibilant rustling of Sabbath dress.

Mystery.

God?

A shiver ran down my back.

The service continued, a voice droning, more chanting.

I was lost in reverie. The black clothes, the grey benches, the white walls blurred...

Sunday Dinner.

At last, out in the fresh air the many bodies that had been packed so close all morning exploded into separate parts and headed in all directions - home for dinner.

The whole family enough to fill all twelve chairs and more, sat down to cold ham, fried potatoes and Pluma Mousse. Just as we were ready to leave the table, I saw my older sisters peering through in sheltered places under the apple trees. When the scramble was over, our baskets overflowed with foil-wrapped chocolate and candy eggs.

In the house again, my father laid a gentle hand on my head. Judgment or Benediction? I never knew which it would be. Had I done... continued on next page
...something bad? I stood still startled into fear in the doorway of the parlour. Then he moved to stand in the bay-window jingling coins in his pocket. The uncles were spread about, drowsy after the heavy meal, all in dark suits and ties, hair ruffled from the antics of the Egg-Hunt. The merchant blood in their veins churned as the Sabbath stretched before them endlessly. The store was closed. Only Uncle Henry seemed content. He sat in the big arm chair, leafing through a book. My grandfather dozed on the leather-covered sofa, head leaning on his cane. From the kitchen came the sounds of dishes being cleared away. Grozma lay down for a nap on a couch in the corner of the dining room. “Just don’t poke me in the eye,” she said to her younger grandchildren running about. The sound of children playing did not disturb her. They went off, rumbling and bumping down the long flight of stairs to noisy shrieks of laughter, their faces flushed and smeared with chocolate. The sewing room was full of aunts in a gossipy huddle. They were all atwitter about Adeline, my oldest cousin’s wedding. I moved closer so I could hear.

I stood in great awe of my cousin Adeline. Pretty and charming to boot, the aunts all said, the sisters-in-law murmured inaudibly. Marie, the older sister, Tante Tene, very much at the strictures. Tante Tene, very much at all the strictures. Tante Tene could always be heard above her of the bride had the Reimer voice. It carried.

“And she’ll have a proper dress - ashes of roses, very pretty. No black for her.” Adeline’s mother said over the buzz of all the other voices, Tante Maria’s soft one, seldom used, my mother’s, barely above a whisper. The mother of the bride had the Reimer voice. It carried. Tante Tene could always be heard above her older sister’s. Tante Einnie’s voice just faded away then, especially when there was talk of marriage.

Adeline was still in the kitchen helping Gerte and Aunt Margaret with the clearing away. Tante Tene liked to exaggerate much to the frustration of her daughter, so now she hurried to say what she had to say before Adeline returned.

I heard again the story of the fringes that had to be removed from Grozma’s curtains- the elders had objected to such frivolity. Anna and Marie, the sisters-in-law murmured inaudibly to each other, when they heard such stories. One had been raised very strictly in the Holdeman Bruderschaft... Aunt Margaret laughed as she came from the kitchen wiping the tears of laughter from her eyes. Gerte and Adeline were still in the kitchen.

“Well, Margaret, one year in Gretna... what could they make of that?” Tante Tene said. She was only joking, I thought, not the least bit envious of her younger sister’s year at the academy in Gretna. She thought girls were better off married to a good man. School was for boys.

“I don’t know... I wonder...” Aunt Margaret glanced at me, with her keen blue eyes, where I sat Indian fashion on the floor in the corner, being as quiet as could be. Was what Liesebet picking up, with her pointy ears? “Listening, listening...” she laughed again.

“I feel a draft.” Tante Tene, said “What are those boys up to?” There was a thump from upstairs, the older cousins clowning in the upstairs parlour. They had opened the door leading to the balcony. There was a burst of laughter, then the door slammed shut. The women moved across the hall into the dining room where Grozma had awoke from her nap. Tante Tene picked up the guitar that stood propped up on one of the chairs, and plucked the strings balalaika style, humming as she did so.

“Now at Ben’s wedding...” Aunt Margaret began and I remembered my uncle. All spit and polish, at his wedding the previous summer. It was out in the country on a farm, with tables spread out under the trees in a well-swept orchard. That bride had not worn black, but lovely pale grey. Her soft blonde hair was finger-waved; she had a kiss-curl right in the middle of her forehead which I thought enchanting. She smelled of flowers, of cake and coffee of wedding. I moved closer so I could hear. What was Liesebet picking up, with her pointy ears? “Listening, listening...” she laughed again.

“The following September my grandmother died. There were no intimations of disaster. I did not know that the earth was shifting beneath my feet. We came through the darkness to Steinbach, my father pale with anguish. We girls slept with our cousins, all in a jumble on the floor of uncle Klaas and Aunt Mariel’s upstairs rooms. In the morning, I heard footsteps on the stairs. It was my father. He had tears in his eyes. Tears?... in my father’s eyes?

“Gone... Grozma’s with the angels now.” He said quietly, gazing at the others, still asleep. “They will know soon enough.” He came no closer. I could not look into my father’s face. What I saw there frightened me.

My grandmother’s bier stood in the dining room. Gerte had been out, ransacked the late summer garden to surround it with flowers; the scent of chrysanthemums and asters trailed through the room. The big table was pushed into the corner under the clock whose pendulum hung still between the brass weights. The shades were drawn. On Grozma’s couch, beside the register, sat several aunts. They were whispering to each other, “if only this... if only that.” I stared at the wash-tub, filled with ice, under the table.

Grozma lay still... so still. The folded hands I touched were cold and hard as rock. Something monumental, enormous, which I could not name, seethed amidst the tears around me. Tante Einnie, her face contorted with grief, wrung her hands endlessly. Aunt Margaret, her eyes unseeing, oblivious to the other mourners stroked the dead cheek, crouching, as if she was
the mother and Groszma the child.

Then came the endless train of mourners, through that day and the next. Tall and thin, short and fat, old and young--where did all the people come from? They said they had known my grandmother; that she had helped them once, when their child was very sick and they had no money for medicine or a doctor; that she had given their son, or uncle, or cousin a job when they most needed it, or had persuaded Groszpa to take them on in the store. They kept coming. I stopped looking and still I could hear their footsteps, the rustle of clothing, the low murmur of voices. Once I looked up to see a young woman with a face that was weather burned and hair the colour of straw. She stopped before Aunt Margaret. I heard her whisper, that once, when her father was beating her, my grandmother had come to the rescue, brought her to this house. Then I remembered; she was one of the long line of girls from the bush - Schrucke- who came to work in the big low house. Groszma's girls, snatched from stony acres where families struggled to exist, where children were pigeon-breasted from malnutrition and it was whispered, but we never spoke of it aloud, where fathers sometimes "mistrusted" their daughters.

On a warm September afternoon the uncles, aunts, and all the cousins followed the funeral procession down the street to the village church.

Yard and the family plot. The dust of harvest lay on the breeze and fluttered in our mourning ribbons; fallen leaves, dry and brittle drifted across the road, in little eddies.

Before the burial service, I saw Tante Ennie, turn away from the open grave and run back down the road as if by her flight she might reverse the tide of events that had overtaken us.

I mourned as children do, not knowing that I did, often deaf and dumb to the turmoil inside.

Imperceptibly, life carried me forward.

The Legacy.

One day, years and years later, I take out the cracked and tattered photo album, the black pages soft with age, the little triangles show where pictures are missing. I turn the pages. The Reimer family and their descendants are scattered across a continent. The store is long gone, the house I knew so well; the land - tied up in litigation that dragged through church and secular courts for twenty years - has passed into other hands. My grandmother's will, meant to consolidate a family, had torn it asunder. After almost a generation, the uncles and aunts have reconciled enough to place a marker on their mother's grave. Here, I see their faces, still young and fresh, the world spread out before them.

Tante Ennie, Aunt Margaret, Groszma: I have been shaped by strong women. It was never about Elders and Bruderschaft and who owned what land. It was about love and caring. I come at last to a picture of my grandparents. They stand together, two-doll-like figures behind a porch railing, still bare of the Virginia creeper that would cover it eventually. In harsh sunlight, humble in old country dress, not proud, not arrogant. Where is the stern autocrat that I feared with his big store and his land? He shaped me too. What force had beaten the natural affection out of him - that lack which was passed on to his sons? Groszma knew. She was the 'bridge'.

Without guile--innocently they smile at the camera. Groszpa is actually a small man, I realize; his eyes tearing in the brightness, teeth a little loose. Groszma has folded her plump hands comfortably over a black apron.

Love, love, your legacy is love, they breathe on me across the generations. And I reply: there is no darkness here. For a split second between one minute and the next, I see clearly the way it really was. There are no shadows.

Descendants.

The descendants of Anna Wiebe Reimer include: Wes Reimer, former mayor of Steinbach; Naomi Lepp, formerly Reimer's Dress Shop; Ken Loewen, Misty River Marine, Kleefeld; Bonnie Friesen, Hanger Farms, Rivers; Erdmar Reimer, Steinbach.

No. 10, June, 1997

My Grandmother's Song

Katherina Falk Braun 1890-1927: “My Grandmother's Song”; by Ernest Braun, Box 595, Niverville, R0A 1E0.

Family Background.

A plain, concrete gravestone in a small Catholic cemetery near the river-harbour town of Puerto Casado in the northeast corner of Paraguay, bears the name Katherina Braun, 1890-1926 and inscription. This is the final resting place of my paternal grandmother, born Katherina Falk, daughter of Peter T. Falk and Anna Abrams of Alt-Bergfeld, Manitoba. The story that ends here in this unusual place is short and poignant.

Katherina, born into the well-to-do Falk clan of Alt-Bergfeld on November 25, 1890, grew up at the turn of the century, attending the village school and being baptized on June 5, 1911 into the East Reserve Chortitzer Church. Alt-Bergfeld was truly a traditional village, transplanted from Russia; it was a place where the customs and distinctives cherished by Mennonites were conscientiously observed. The villagers made their living much as they had in the swamps of Prussia, breeding livestock and selling produce of every kind, and then supplementing their income with such small trades as could flourish in a reasonably self-sufficient agrarian settlement. The land was light, with the soil a thin layer above the gravel and the village itself just north of miles of scrub bush and slough.

The radius of travel was very limited; Katherina had probably never seen even Winnipeg before she got married. She attended the village school for a few years but as was the case for Mennonite girls, most of her training was in the home and on the meticulous Falk homestead. The Falk household was extremely hardworking, as revealed by the fact that Father Peter Falk did not say a table grace at mealtime, explaining to his family, that he did not have to thank for the food, for he had worked for it.

Marriage.

Three days after her 21st birthday (1911), continued on next page
Katherina Abrams Falk married Jacob J. Braun of Gnadenfeld. They lived with the Brauns in Gnadenfeld for some years and then purchased a property in Alt-Bergfeld across the street from Katherina’s parents. Here they lived and raised their family until the dissolution of the village in 1923/4. The firstborn (a son Jacob, 1913) died after just six days. However, soon a daughter Anna was born (1914) and then a row of boys: Jacob, Peter, David. A daughter Katherina, was born in 1920, but died at the age of six months. Then Maria (1921) and later Johann (1924) completed the family.

Character.

Although Katherina was a lively, vivacious woman with a sharp wit and ready word, she ran a tight ship at home. The picture that emerges now eighty years later is a composite of the hardworking farm wife who sang to her children as they watched her milk cows in the barn, of the disciplinarian who used her hand readily to curtail any backtalk from her children, of the free spirit who insisted on being on the first boat to Paraguay, and of the meticulous farm woman who made time to sweep the horse barn again when Sunday company was expected. Altogether, she was extroverted and flamboyant, with a great presence of mind. Socially, she was a witty and entertaining conversationalist, with just a touch of one-up-man-ship in her love of banter. For her, Low German was an art-form which provided the rich variety of idioms which she wielded with unusually pithy precision. She had a quick imagination and an outgoing, self-confident spirit that was not easily discouraged. She knew her own mind and often was prepared to share part of it.

Emigration.

While living in Alt-Bergfeld, the family farmed successfully, with Jacob eventually becoming a partner in a steam threshing outfit with his brothers-in-law. However, the turmoil of the First World War and the establishment of English District schools had created unrest among the Mennonites, who felt that the rights granted by the Government of Canada in 1873 were being revoked.

In the village of Alt-Bergfeld, this threat was felt most keenly, and already early in the 1920s the village (which was owned corporately and not individually) determined to pull up its roots and emigrate. Delegates from Manitoba were sent to Paraguay where a German-speaking President welcomed them and guaranteed them the privileges sought. From the reports brought back by the delegates, some Mennonites came to view Paraguay as the Promised Land, and several hundred families decided to make the pilgrimage. All this has been documented elsewhere and does not need to be detailed here.

Katherina took ownership of the move and, determining that the future of her children and their faith was at stake, she persuaded her reluctant husband to leave his comfortable farm and threshing business, even though it meant selling at less than market value without knowing the value of the land with which it would be exchanged. Here she had help in Jacob’s 72-year-old father, Jacob Braun Sr., who enthusiastically embraced the move for his whole family, practically vacating the entire village of Gnadenfeld and terminating the Braun connection with the village which that family had pioneered exactly fifty years earlier.

In the end, the immediate Falk family of Alt-Bergfeld and most of the Brauns of Gnadenfeld sold their land, homesteads, machinery and personal effects to the Intercontinental Land Company to be exchanged for land in Paraguay. Some of the land was sold to re-

continued from previous page
cent immigrants from Russia who then moved in and caused some dislocation since the emigration took longer than anticipated. As a result, by 1924, Jacob and Katherina had moved to the old Rempel farm where Johann was born that year.

Later, when emigration was delayed even more, the Brauns purchased some bush land from Jacob's father and built another barn and house. This temporary farmstead was home to them and several of Katherina's sibling and widowed mother until their departure in 1926. Here Katherina redeemed the time by helping with the construction of the buildings, taking complete charge of the building of the walls of the buildings. Accounts agree that she sang cheerfully as she mixed the clay herself and encouraged her children to help her by reminding them that they had to save their resources for the new start in South America. In summer Katherina would usually be found in the large vegetable garden where she grew vegetables for the new start in South America. In summer Katherina would usually be found in the large vegetable garden where she grew vegetables and for the new start in South America.

In just a few days, they were transformed, along with dozens of other families, from a comfortable farm family to that special category, the emigrant, saying good-byes, "forever", much as Jacob Braun Sr., her father-in-law had done in Russia in 1875. The younger children played and joked that they were "off to Paradise" and felt sorry for the stay-at-homes who couldn't go. On the day of the departure of the first group of emigrants, on November 23, 1926, Katherina, excited and determined, had to deal with a silent, somber husband who found himself caught in a chain of events beyond his control, and with Anna the eldest daughter who cried all the way to the train because she desperately did not want to go. The train left Carey in the darkest part of the night between November 23 and 24, 1926.

Puerto Casado, Paraguay.

Little information has survived about the train trip or the sea voyage, but some detail survives about Katherina's early weeks at journey's end, Puerto Casado. The settlers arrived at their destination on New Year's Eve, 1926, a date that in itself was symbolic of the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Upon arrival Katherina and Jacob moved into the immigration buildings erected by Carlos Casado in anticipation of their arrival but soon set up their tent in a row with their relatives and friends, for the next shipload of settlers was expected shortly. Here they received the depressing news that the new land was far from ready and that even the manner in which it was to have been settled had been misunderstood by the Mennonites. Casado, the Argentine landowner from whom the Chaco land had been purchased, was not prepared for large numbers of immigrants to come at once but had planned that about two dozen would come at a time, and each group would be settled before the next group came.

Furthermore, the narrow-gauge railway that was to have been extended to the settlement area had not been built, leaving the settlers with no way of getting to their land ex-
In fact, surviving accounts testify to her remarkable cheerfulness.

When the fourth boatload of settlers arrived (Feb. 14, 1927) with several of Katherina’s nieces and nephews, one of them predicted that the first person they would recognize on the wharf would be “Trientjimum,” and true enough, it was Katherina, a deeply tanned veteran of the camp, that they spotted waving as they disembarked, glad that they had come.

While Jacob worked as the engineer of the steam-engine that pumped the water to the settlement and occasionally obtained day employment in the quebracho industry, or as a freighter, Katherina adjusted to another temporary home, resourceful and hardworking as always, secure in the rightness of the move. The boys, perhaps in somewhat the same spirit as their mother, remembered that time as the greatest adventure of their lives.

Grandmother’s Song.

The story ends abruptly. One day in mid-March, Katherina visited her brother Peter Falk, who remembered that she seemed very depressed and sang a chorale to herself from the old Gesangbuch:

Welt, ade! ich bin dein mude, ich will nach dem Himmel zu,
da wurd sein der rechte Friede und die wahre Seelenruh.

Translated: “World, farewell! I am vanquished and yearn for my heavenly abode. Where there shall be true joy and rest for my soul eternally.”

Suddenly exactly on the vernal equinox, Katherina became very ill, and after only 48 hours, died on March 23, 1927, on the 83rd day of her new life in “Paradise.” She was 36 years old. The cause of death was ultimately the badly infected hernia (that she had steadfastly downplayed for years) complicated by an uneven row of primitive, red-clay bricks. Inside the brick border, the red earth wears a thin veil of lacklustre weeds. All around it are plastered, white-washed tombs. The inscription reads:

Hier ruht in Frieden
Katharina Braun geborne Falk
geb. Nov. 25, 1890-gest. Mar. 23, 1927
“Ruhe sanft in deine Gruft
Bis dir einst dein Jesus ruft”

Descendants.

Katherina’s descendants include Henry Braun, Secretary-Treasurer, Hanover School Division, Werner Braun, former owner of Green Valley Feeds and long-time mayor of Grunthal, and the author Ernest Braun, a teacher in Niverville. Daughter Anna Braun Janzen who cried all the way from home to the train station in Carey (St. Pierre), Manitoba, in November 1926, died on March 31, 1997.

Katharina’s coffin picture, March 24, 1927. Husband and children grieve for their beloved wife and mother. The photograph was taken to send to relatives back home in Manitoba, anxious for news about their recently departed loved ones in Paraguay.
Maria Fast Harms Klassen Barkman (1851-1937); by granddaughter Audrey Toews,
Box 991, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.
I have always enjoyed stories of pioneers, people who coped well with adversity. Both my
great grandmother, Maria L. Fast, and her
daughter-in-law, my paternal grandmother,
Helena Wiebe, were women like that. Both
outlived their husbands, and lost children and
were threatened with having to voluntarily give
up others. Here are their stories (Note One).

The Beginning.
Maria L. Fast was born on June 27th, 1851,
in the village of Lichtenau, Molotschna Colony.
Maria was the daughter of Heinrich Fast and
Maria Loepp: Henry N. Fast, Preservings,
Henry N. Fast, Preservings, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part Two, page 37. Maria and
he was the daughter of Heinrich Fast and
and Maria Loepp: Henry N. Fast, Preservings,
the Kleine Gemeinde Church, Scharlotte was
married to Gerhard Fast, possibly the son of
the family moved to Nicolalithal, a village in
a settlement known as Furstenland. Maria mar-
mried to Gerhard Fast, possibly the son of
Gerhard Fast of the same village.
The name Maria has a story of its own.
Heinrich Fast had married Scharlotte Loepp on
July 23, 1850. She was the daughter of a Ger-
mnian Lutheran emigrant to Russia by the name
of Cornelius Loepp. At some time, when
Heinrich and Scharlotte became affiliated with
the Kleine Gemeinde Church, Scharlotte was
asked to choose a more “Christian” name and
thereafter became known as Maria. Whether
or not they ever named their first daughter
Scharlotte, I do not know, except that she was
named after her mother and that the name Maria
Fast was passed on for at least two more gen-
erations after that.
The third Maria Fast was married to Nick
Brandt of Steinbach whose house still stands
at the corner of First and Friesen. They had no
children. The fourth Maria Fast, was the daugh-
ter of Gerhard Fast, a brother to Mrs. Nick
Brandt. She was my Dad’s (Jacob W. Fast’s)
sister and married Klaas R. Barkman,
Steinbach’s first mayor after incorporation. The
name Maria was also passed on to other grand-
children of Maria L. Fast.

First marriage, 1873.
Now to get back to my original story about
Maria L. Fast. She was married to Gerhard Fast
on December 4th, 1873. Gerhard was 19, Maria
was 22. The wedding invitation sent out on De-
cember 1, 1873, is still extant and was trans-
lated and published by Henry N. Fast in his ar-
ticle in Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two.

Emigration, 1874.
The following summer, this couple, together
with Maria’s younger sister Elisabeth, who had
married Jacob S. Friesen, emigrated to the
United States. The Friesen’s settled near
Halstead, Kansas.

Maria and Gerhard’s names have as yet not
been found on any of the ship listings, nor is there
any record of exactly where they settled. How-
ever, family history records that their oldest son,
Heinrich, was born on September 4, 1874, the
day after the family arrived at Bridgewater, North
Dakota. Other children followed: Maria Feb. 14,
1876, Gerhard July 28, 1877, Sarah Feb. 20, 1879,
Helena Sep. 10, 1886, Cornelius Oct. 7 1882, and
Peter April 27, 1885.

There is some discrepancy as to where the
family moved to from Bridgewater, but the
name Parker has been mentioned and because
there is one in South Dakota, it is assumed that
this is where they went.

On May 6, 1885, a letter in the Rundschau by
Jacob S. Friesen stated: “Gerhard Fast’s came to
Kansas in February and had a son this morning.”
This will have been Peter, born April 27th, 1885.

On January 11, 1888, another letter in the
Rundschau by Jacob S. Friesen reported: “On June 2, 1887, broker-in-law Gerhard Fast died
at the age of 33 years and 4 months.” They did
not live on their own farm, but in a house built
on rented land. "The church has asked Mrs.
Fast to sell her house and pay her debts. She is
presently staying at Friesens. The church ad-
vises her to distribute her children and go to
work. She has been staying at Friesens and has
the children with her most of the time.” I have
been told that Gerhard died of typhus.

For a photograph of Maria and her first hus-
band Gerhard Fast, see Preservings, No. 9, Part
Two, page 17.

Second marriage, 1887.
The person interested to marry this young
widow with seven children was Isaac Harms, a
man forty years her senior. One must wonder,
what kind of a man was Isaac Harms? Why did
Maria even consider marrying him?

To help answer these questions, I found sev-
eral paragraphs about him in the Kleine
Gemeinde Historical Series. Harms was a man
who had a heart for the less fortunate in the
Kleine Gemeinde and helped them by organiz-
ing land purchases on their behalf through the
church: “A number of older members of the
Kleine Gemeinde such as Isaac Harms 1811-91,
Alexander Kron [Lindenau], were actively in-
volved in the process of renting and purchasing
land for daughter colonies where the landless
could be resettled”: Leaders, page 408. In fur-
ther reading, I discovered that this practice ac-
tually caused considerable unrest in the church.

Isaac Harms’ first wife was Anna Sawatsky,
a niece to Klaas Friesen 1793-1870. His second
wife was the widow of Klaas Friesen, née Caro-
lina Plett 1823-87. Klaas R. Reimer, pioneer
merchant in Steinbach, Manitoba, has written:
“Throughout all of this [his early financial
struggles] I was frequently mindful of a man such
as the aged Isaac Harms and how he had often
put his entire property at stake for us poorer
brethren. But with the help of God, he was able
continued on next page
Preservings Part One

Helena Fast, Mrs. Jakob Klassen, and Maria Fast. Mrs. Nick Brandt, daughters of Maria Fast. The young women are dressed in very typical Sunday apparel. Photo courtesy of Audrey Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.

to persevere together with us poorer brethren, but only after much trouble”: Storm and Triumph, page 23. “Isaac Harms immigrated to Nebraska in 1874 and by 1882 was farming 640 acres together with his children, however, he rented his part to his sons at one third share”: Profile 1874, page 106. Harms together with his 3 sons and daughter-in-law lived in the northwest corner of Cub Creek Precinct called Blumenort, also known as “Harms Village.”

Isaac Harms was a wealthy farmer but it appears that he distributed his property among his children at the time of his third marriage. A letter is extant indicating that Harms incurred debts in Manitoba which were paid by the Kleine Gemeinde church in Manitoba. Harms was chided by his friend Steinbach merchant Klaas R. Reimer for marrying again at 80 years old, “that such a thing should rather not happen, as the consequences are seldom good”: Pioneers and Pilgrims, page 117.

Maria must have been an attractive, vivacious woman to not only have won Isaac’s affection, but also to persuade him to forsake his well-established family village, “Harms’ darp”, in Jansen, Neb., where his children and grandchildren lived, in order to move to far-away Steinbach, Manitoba, together with his young bride.

I am sure that Harms planned to move to Steinbach, Manitoba, but presumably Maria wished to be closer to her parents, the Heinrich Fasts, who had settled in Steinbach, Manitoba on Wirtschaft 18 in 1874. According to Kleine Gemeinde insurance records Isaac Harms insured a dwelling house in Steinbach for $50 on April 25, 1890, with $200 coverage for furniture, a substantial coverage for furniture for the time. The house coverage was increased to $100 on August 25 of the same year. On August 25, 1891, the coverage was cancelled and on Dec 24 of that year, the contents coverage was cancelled as well.

This marriage lasted four years, until the death of Isaac Harms in Manitoba, on September 4, 1891.

Third marriage, 1891.

Maria married for the third time to Diedrich Klassen, on November 17, 1891. She again married a man older than she; Diedrich was 62, Maria was 40. This marriage lasted 29 years. Maria’s oldest son, Heinrich was 17 years old at the time and Peter, the youngest, was 6.

Tragedy struck again three years later when Peter, only 9 years old, accidentally drank lye water and died twenty-eight hours later. These were also the years during which all Maria’s children, except Sarah, married and left home. Sarah, who was a beautiful young girl, later developed a condition that deformed her face.

One of Maria’s notations states: “daughter Maria married Nick Brandt on Nov. 11, 1894; there was a big snow storm.” The Nick Brandts lived on a farm in Rosenort for sometime and then moved to Steinbach.

Heinrich married Maria Weiland in 1899 and lived in New Bothwell until 1948 when the family moved to Paraguay. Two of the people helping me with this family history come from this family. One is their daughter, Sarah Fehr, who lives in the Senior Apartments in Grunthal and the other is their granddaughter, Betty, Mrs. John Janzen who lives in Niverville, Manitoba and in Paraguay.

Daughter Helena married Jacob Klassen, her step-father’s son, and lived in the Randolph area.

Gerhard married Helena Wiebe (my paternal grandparents) and lived in Steinbach. More heartache followed when this son also met an early death.

Cornelius married Molly Poersch and lived in Brunkhild, Manitoba.

During these years Maria and her husband farmed in the Randolph area. Diedrich Klassen was both blind and deaf for a number of years before his death in 1920.

Fourth marriage, 1921.

Maria married for the fourth time to Jakob T. Barkman, March 6, 1921. She was 69 years old, Jacob was 72 and had lost his first wife, Aganetha Giesbrecht, two years before. Jakob had been living in Heuboden close to one of his sons, but shortly after his marriage to Maria they bought a farm in Kleefeld. Jacob’s house was moved onto the property and they settled into a new life close to Maria’s brother Henry L. Fast, patriarch of the Kleefeld Fasts. This is where my beloved “Soytkeje Meumm”, Maria’s daughter Sarah lived when I knew her.

Maria was my father’s grandmother, but when she married Jacob T. Barkman, she became my mother’s aunt. (My mother was the daughter of Peter T. Barkman.)

Sarah Fehr remembers these grandparents coming to visit them in New Bothwell all wrapped up in their blankets on the sleigh in the winter time. Sarah tells me that grandmother could be a bit short with people, but that she was easy to get along with, always hospitable to visitors.

Jacob died at age 87 in 1935, and Maria at age 86 in 1937.

Endnotes:

Historic photograph of four couples: Back row l. to r Peter R. Reimer, Peter T. Barkman, Jakob T. Barkman and Nick Brandt. Front row, Helena Wiebe Fast Schellenberg Reimer, Sarah F. Fast, Katharina Reimer Barkman, Maria Fast Harms Klassen Barkman and Mrs. Nick Brandt, nee Maria F. Fast. The photograph is taken at Sarah F. Fast’s home in Kleefeld. Photo courtesy of Audrey Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba. Peter R. Reimer was the third husband of Helena Wiebe. Jakob T. Barkman was Maria Fast’s fourth husband and Peter T. B. was his brother. Katharina Reimer Barkman was the wife of Peter and a daughter of the famous pioneer merchant of Steinbach, Klaas R. Reimer. Photo courtesy of Audrey Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.
Helena Wiebe Fast Schellenberg Reimer
Helena Wiebe Fast Schellenberg Reimer (1875-1966), Steinbach, Manitoba; by granddaughter Audrey Toews, Box 991, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Beginnings
Helena was born in Chortitz, Manitoba on November 28th, 1875. Her parents, Jacob Wiebe and Katherina Penner had arrived in Canada in July of that year and had still not found suitable land to settle on. The following spring they moved to what is now referred to as Alt-Bergfeld. Helena’s mother did not recover from the birth of her last child and passed away 7 months later, on June 22, 1876. Helena was the youngest of 10 children.

I have noticed in Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874-1910, pages 10-12, that Jacob Wiebe, her father, kept record of when the cattle were put into the barn for the winter and when they were let out in the spring and other items pertaining to farming and their trip to Canada, but no mention is made of his new daughter or of the passing of his wife (Note One).

Early years
Grandmother often talked about her childhood as having been rather difficult. I imagine her as a cute little round-faced girl with lots of dark curls and bright smiles. Her father remarried to Katherina Hiebert in the summer of 1877 and due to circumstances at home, Helena spent much of her time away from home.

She remembered how lonesome she was when parted from her family. In her old age, grandmother was almost blind, and this was blamed on her having had to attend school even while sick with the measles. This may be true, but the fact that her father, the village school teacher, found it important that his daughters be educated as well as his sons, I find quite commendable.

The family was poor; grandmother described their dirt floors which were swept with sand to keep them clean. At my young age, I thought that all homes had bathtubs, and was shocked to hear that the only time they could have a complete bath, was in early summer when there was water in the creek.

Another job that Helena remembered from about this time was making hay. It was her job to stand on top of the wagon and put the hay in place while the men were pitching it onto the hayrack. She used to talk about how hard it was to not become covered with hay herself.

Later she went to work in Steinbach to earn a few dollars with which to help her parents. Here she was not as alone because her older sister lived there as well. Anna had married Steinbach entrepreneur, Heinrich W. Reimer, who owned a large general store. Later two of her half-sisters also married Steinbach men; Susanna to Jacob W. Reimer and Judith to Cornelius T. Kroeker.

First Marriage, 1896
While in Steinbach, Helena met and fell in love with Gerhard Fast. I once asked Grandmother to tell me of her “romance.”

“Well,” she said, looking down at her hands, “He said, maybe we should get married and I said maybe we should, and so we did.” Not the kind of romantic story I was hoping for!

The marriage, on May 3, 1896, took place in Steinbach where both had been baptized and received into membership in the Kleine Gemeinde Church. Helena had come from a Bergthaler background.

The young couple, Gerhard was 19, Helena was 20, began their life in a little known district called “Oak Bush”, between Prairie Rose and Isle des Chenes. They soon, however, moved to a homestead near Friedensfeld, two miles south of Steinbach, SW24-6-6E. Grandmother fondly remembered their trips home from church on Sundays. Two miles was a long trip by horse and wagon, so as soon as they were out of ear-shot of fellow parishioners, Gerhard would take out his harmonica and play to the delight of his wife and children who by now included Maria, born April 16, 1897, Jacob, born Sept. 26, 1899 and Gerhard (George) born Nov. 9, 1901: for a photograph of Gerhard Fast 1877-1904; see Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, page 17.

The accident.
Helena was pregnant with Diedrich (Dick) who would be born in April of 1904, when tragedy struck. It was winter and Gerhard had gone to work in the bush behind La Broquerie, cutting logs to earn extra money. Rumour has it a fellow worker was angry with Gerhard and caused a tree to fall on him. Perhaps he just wanted to scare him and didn’t warn him in time. The result, however, was that Gerhard was unconscious and had to be taken home by


Maria Fast, daughter of Helena Wiebe and Gerhard Fast. Maria married Klaus R. Barkman, first mayor of Steinbach after incorporation as a Town in 1947. Photo courtesy of Audrey Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.

continued on next page
Preservations Part One

He was followed by a little girl, Helena, named after grandmother, who lived only 16 months. This grieved grandmother very much; she had been so delighted to have another girl after so many boys, only to lose her. An infant son Erdman, also died. Because of these struggles, she was able to comfort others in similar circumstances. Helena and Gerhard had one more son, Peter.

Apparently Helena had kept her farm in Friedensfeld after Gerhard Fast died, but when Gerhard Schellenberg developed tuberculosis, the family moved into Steinbach. They had a house on Third Street, just north of Reimer Ave: see Preservings, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part Two, page 35. The houses designated as Friesen Ave. are actually located along Third Street. The first small house on the left, in the centre of the picture, was Gerhard Schellenberg’s.

Gerhard Schellenberg developed tuberculosis and passed away on Mar. 12, 1917, at the age of 31, only 8 1/2 years after their marriage. Henry was 6 years old and Peter only 9 months old.

Widowhood, 1917.

Helena was a compassionate woman, always feeling sorry for other people, seemingly putting their concerns before her own. Son Peter Schellenberg, in describing his mother, has written: “I remember when Mrs. R. Toews was on her death bed at home on the farm that I had to catch a nice fat hen so she (his mother) could cook noodle soup for her. I was still quite young so she helped me hitch the horse and buggy and I went three miles to deliver the soup. Then there was the large Unger family that was quite poor so for years mother knit all their stockings and mitts for the cold winters.”

“Mother did a lot of singing and had a tremendous memory when it came to singing out of the old song book from which she had sung since an early age. One of her favourite songs was No. 211 with 32 verses; she knew them all by heart. In the summer she used to go to the bush behind our building to pick up kindling wood. She always planted a row of raspberries herself. One day I was looking for her and I heard her talking and thought there was someone there. She was talking to herself.”

“I remember making hay a mile west of home when around 3:30 in the afternoon she would come walking through the bush to bring me faspa, fresh buns with jam, cookies or a piece of cake with coffee. We sat on the grass and enjoyed the food. She was a good walker. She had three sisters living in town whom she visited, walking all the way there and back and thought nothing of it.”

“All with her hardships and hard work she still had a good sense of humour and could laugh heartily. I remember the day when I had done something that did not please her and she was going to punish me. I was about six years old and I ran away. Instead of running to the open field where she could not catch me, I ran into the house, all the way to the bedroom and hid under the bed. That was no problem for her, she just got the broom out and gave me a few good pokes and I came out in a hurry.”

“She liked to pick berries in the bush and made lovely jams and preserves. Since I was the youngest, I liked to be around and watch as she prepared food. As I grew older, I had to stay inside on Saturdays and wash those huge floors on hands and knees. I also had to bake a three layer cake every Saturday for Sunday faspa. I guess one Saturday I must have planned something else and wanted to go out, but my mother said “You are going to learn something about making food. I don’t want you to be as ignorant as your father, all he knows about cooking is frying eggs.”

Third marriage, 1919.

Helena’s third marriage was to Peter R. Reimer, a man who at the age of 20 had married a widow with children who were his age. This created many interesting relationships when he married my grandmother. He brought with him a grandson of his first wife’s first marriage whose parents had died. This boy was Peter D. Brandt, the grandfather of Michelle Savatsky, our local Olympian. Another interesting relationship was that my grandmother now had children that were her age or older. One “daughter” who was a year older than she, became the mother of one of Steinbach’s future mayors, A. D. Penner.

Also of interest in this marriage was the fact that at one point Peter R. Reimer had an interest in a woman in the Holdeman church. Hoping to marry her, he joined that church, only to be rejected by her. As a result, after marrying Helena, who was a member of the Kleine Gemeinde church, he was banned from the Holdeman Church. During this marriage the family lived half-a-mile west of the present-day P.T.H. 12, being NE27-6-6E, on the south side of McKenzie Road. Later when son Henry Schellenberg took over the farm, the Reimers moved into a small house on Barkman Ave, now street number 162.

Peter Reimer died suddenly of a stroke on May 1, 1946.

Peter Schellenberg writes that two years later, his mother got what was then called sleeping sickness. “For six weeks she was more or less in bed and didn’t care for anything. She mostly slept as she had no energy. Then when she slowly came around again she was never the same; the happy go lucky nature she had, seemed to be gone.”

Widowhood

This time my grandmother did not marry again. Instead she lived in her small house on Barkman Ave. This is where I came to know her. Beside her house she always planted a row of petunias and behind her house was her garden. The kitchen floor was painted what I thought was a very ugly yellow/gold colour. There was a wood cook stove with the stove-pipes running up into and across the attic. On the rare occasion that we were allowed to go up the stairs to the attic, we were always warned not to bump “de Trumma.”

Grandmother kept her buns, which always seemed to be dried out, and other food stuffs.

Henry W. Schellenberg, son of Helena and Gerhard Schellenberg. Henry lived on the former Peter R. Reimer farm and served for some years as a Councilor for the R. M. of Hanover. Photo courtesy of Audrey Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.
The Schellenbers went away for the day leaving her at home. She had no cooking facilities, no phone, no radio. Her eyes were not good enough for reading. She was 70 years old, not old by today’s standards.

Reflections.

Soon after this, she came to live at our house. My mother always claimed that she could not have wished for a more congenial mother-in-law. Grandmother did not interfere. She arose at nine and spent the day in the arm chair in the living room, knitting or day-dreaming. After lunch she lay down on the couch for a nap and then spent the rest of the day back on the chair. Nine o’clock was bedtime again. At first grandmother and I shared a room. She had the bed and I had a small cot.

After my brother left home, we each had our own room. Evening ritual meant applying Wonder Oil to all her joints. Every other week her hair was washed and this is when I realized what a beautiful, thick, naturally curly head of hair she had. During the day grandmother always kept her hair braided with the braids wound around her head and her head covered with a black hairpin lace cap made by one of her nieces. Often she wore a black shawl over this with the peak pulled forward and folded in.

Grandmother was delighted whenever her daughter/daughters-in-law or one of her nieces would invite her for noodle soup. She also enjoyed going to funerals where she would visit with friends whom she seldom saw otherwise. A special treat that guests sometimes brought her was a coke-a-cola or a glass of wine.

During her stay with us, she was fit with her first set of false teeth. I remember her coming in the door after visiting the dentist and I said “Grandmother, show me your teeth”. I literally backed up when she opened her mouth, shocked to see so many teeth where before there had been next to none. What a change.

At Christmas we would help sort through all the socks and mittens that she had knit during the year, to decide who would get what. These were usually for the grandchildren. The daughters got fabric for an apron and her sons got a handkerchief.

This was grandmother’s life until her daughter decided that it was time for the Resthaven nursing home. I cannot remember that grandmother ever complained about the nursing home except that every once in a while when she came to visit us, she would tell us that she was sure someone had stolen her corset. Slowly her mind deteriorated and she would talk about her sons as though they were still young boys living at home. She worried about them. Her desire was that all of them would come to salvation in Jesus Christ.

Grandmother, Helena Wiebe Fast Schellenberg Reimer passed away on April 1, 1966, at the age of 90 years.

Descendants.

Marie W. Fast married Klaas R. Barkman. They spent the first years in Foam Lake, Sask., where he and brother-in-law Jacob W. Fast owned a flour mill. Upon their return to Steinbach, Man., in 1947 he began a plumbing and heating business which today has evolved into Barkman Concrete. The Barkmans had five children: Arnold, Edwin, Helen, Peter and Leona.

Jacob W. Fast married Anna Barkman. After spending some years in Foam Lake, Sask., they moved back to Steinbach where they purchased the local telephone office. The Fasts had four children, Gladys, Jim, Raymond and Audrey.

George W. Fast married Katherine Wiebe. They lived mostly in Niagara Falls, Ont. Their five children were: Bill, Helen, George, Eleanor, and Lorena.

Diedrich (Dick) W. Fast married Katherine (Katie) Heinrichs. They lived in Steinbach, Toronto area, and Winnipeg. They had four children: Clifford, Dennis, Joyce, and Dick (Richard).

Henry W. Schellenberg married Helen Wiebe. They farmed west of Steinbach on what is now McKenzie Road West. Their children were Edward, Jacob and Helen.

Peter W. Schellenberg married Winona Hiebert. Peter spent many years as a furniture salesman for Eatons in Steinbach, Winona. They had six children: Eileen, Betty, George, Dorothy, Marjorie and Carol. He presently resides in Steinbach and is married to Dorothy (Smith).

Endnotes:

Marigan Weiland Friesen Wiebe (1876-1957)


Family Background.

Marigan Weiland was only twelve years old when she came to Canada from Belgium with her widowed father, Dumnick Weiland; her sister, Maria and brother, Karl. What were the thoughts that went through her mind and the emotions she felt in her heart? This vast country with its few people in 1888 was so different from the small, densely populated country she had just left. Marigan’s mother, Margaretha, nee Klee, had died before the family left for Canada and was buried in Antwerp, Belgium. This will have added to the loneliness she will have experienced.

Marigan was born on June 6, 1876 in Antwerp, in Northern Belgium near the Netherlands. Little did she know upon her arrival in Canada that some years later she would marry the Russian born Peter T. Friesen and upon his death, the Canadian born Cornelius P. Wiebe.

The question arises how this family from Belgium come to live among the Mennonites in southeastern Manitoba? When they arrived in Winnipeg, Dumnick Weiland enquired about farm employment. The late John E. Doerksen of Niverville, explained how his father had met the Weiland family at the Immigration Building near the C.P.R. station and informed Mr. Weiland of the possibilities of work in the Mennonite settlement. Mr. Weiland found work on a farm in the Grunthal area shortly after this.

He decided to stay among the Mennonites even though there were groups of Belgians in St. Boniface and other parts of Manitoba by 1892. The Weiland family came from the Flemish speaking northern part of Belgium and were speaking Low German before too long. On August 12, 1905 at the young age of fifty-one years Dumnick Weiland passed away.

Marigan Weiland.

Marigan probably did not receive any formal education in Manitoba. During that time most girls were finished with their schooling at age twelve in the privately run Mennonite schools. The formal education given her in Belgium would have exceeded the very basic curriculum offered in the Prairie settlements of that day.

In those days many girls would work as a domestic helper on a farm. The work included much more than doing housework and caring for the young children. It often required helping with the chores, milking the cows and tending to the garden in the summer. Marigan was quite young when she started working as a domestic helper.

Baptism and Marriage, 1895.

During this time Marigan came to work for the Cornelius B. Friesen family in Osterwick, located on Section 25-7-4E in the R. M. of Hanover, close to where New Bothwell is now situated. Cornelius B. Friesen was the Waisenman for the Chortitzer Waisenamt and a large-scale farmer in his day. The Waisenamt, among other things, kept money in trust for widows and orphaned children: see article by Katherine Friesen Wiebe, Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, pages 36-40.

The Friesen’s son Peter began to see something special in Marigan. Even though Peter was nineteen years older than Marigan, the two fell in love. At this time, Marigan made one of the most important decisions of her life, to be baptized and become a member of the Mennonite Gemeinde of Chortitz. She was baptized on June 3, 1895 by Aeltester (Bishop) David Stoesz and accepted as a member into the Chortitzer Church. Shortly thereafter on July 7, 1895, she married Peter T. Friesen. The newly wed couple moved to the farmyard just north of his parent’s farm. Here the nineteen year old Marigan and her thirty-eight year old husband began their life together. They would stay here throughout their twenty-three years of marriage.

Marigan and Peter’s first home was a small log house with a lean-to for their cattle. Some years later they built a larger house, similar to the one at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, providing the much needed room for a growing family. Like so many pioneers, they were able to provide for the basic physical needs of their family through their mixed farming operation. Beyond that they also provided for the emotional and spiritual needs of their daughters and sons.

In a community where several people had the same given name and surname additional ways were used for identification, Marigan and Peter were affectionately known as the “Belgian Friesens”--for obvious reasons. Before his marriage Peter was referred to as Waisenman Friesen’s Peter. Peter died on November 6, 1918, when he was sixty-one years leaving Marigan a young widow at the age of forty-two years. Their youngest child, Sara, was only two-and-a-half years old. Their firstborn, Anna had passed away at the age of thirteen years. The marriage of Marigan and Peter had also been blessed by the births of two more girls, Maria and Margaretha; and four boys, Cornelius, Peter, Martin and John.

Widowhood, 1918.

When Peter died life for Marigan took on another dimension. As mentioned earlier she was forty-two years old at the time and her oldest son, Cornelius was only seventeen. Now she was the one who had to make the decisions and keep the farm productive. Together with her children of working age and a hired hand she was able to keep things going.
There were no widow’s pensions or other social support programs to give assistance. No doubt, people in the community will have given her much needed help at times.

Marigan was a woman with a lot of determination and fortitude. She was a source of encouragement to many in the community by the way in which she responded to the challenges of early widowhood.

Second Marriage, 1919.

On November 2, 1919, she married the widower, Cornelius P. Wiebe, who was two years younger than her. Cornelius was the grandson of Aeltester (Bishop) Gerhard and Elizabeth (Dyck) Wiebe. Aeltester Wiebe played a major role in the emigration of the Bergthal Colony people from Russia to Canada in 1874-76. Marigan and Cornelius decided to live in Osterwick. Cornelius moved his family to the village from his farm a mile-and-a-half southeast.

With this marriage Marigan became the step-mother to six children who were in the same age range as her own seven children. The two boys, John and Jacob; and the four girls, Barbara, Katherina, Agatha and Maria; along with the Friesen children will have brought many new challenges into her life.

Typhoid, 1921.

The spring of 1921, was an extra joyous time in their home when a son, whom they named Henry, was born on May 1. Little did they know at that time of the sorrow that would soon come into their home.

When the typhoid fever epidemic unleashed its toll of lives on many families it hit the Wiebe family hard. On October 16, 1921, 18 year-old John passed away. In December two more of her step-children and her second husband, Cornelius, succumbed to the dreaded typhoid fever.

Fifteen year-old Jacob died on December 10 and thirteen year-old Barbara on December 14. Two days later, December 16, her husband, Cornelius, passed away at the age of forty-three years. The sorrow and grief Marigan and her family experienced because of the loss of four members within two months must have been almost unbearable. Compounding the difficulties were the deaths of three members within one week in December. Christmas must have been very different for them that year.

Widowhood.

Once again Marigan had to provide for the family on her own. Henry, her youngest child, was only seven-and-a-half months old. Beside her other seven children there were the three surviving step-children who also needed love and care. Her faith in God and abundant inner resources sustained her and allowed her to carry on. The older children provided a lot of support and helped with the operation of the farm.

Two of her sons have shared with the writer how they took grain by horse-drawn wagons to Niverville and Giroux. Niverville had the first grain elevator on the prairies.

Helena Abrams Braun (1861-1919)

by granddaughter Anne Wiens, Grunthal, Manitoba.

Helena was born on May 6, 1861, in South Russia. She was the fifth child of a family of nine. The family consisted of two boys and six sisters. One of whom died in infancy: BGB 53.

Helena came to Canada on July 27, 1875, on the S.S. Manitoba, No. 36 at the age of 14 years.

Helena, with her parents, Johann and Maria Abrams settled on a homestead near Hochstadt. On April 4, 1880 Helena married Johann F. Braun. Johann and Helena settled at Gnadenfeldt, about 2 miles northwest of Grunthal.

In 1892 Helena with her husband and six children moved to the village of Grunthal where they launched out on a business career: see Preservings, June 1996, No. 8, Part One, pages 44-45.

I’ve been told, (as I cannot remember her) therefore I can only write what has been passed on to me by relatives, cousins and my mother.

And from these I understand grandmother to have been of a quiet nature with a cheerful and smiling outlook. She was a good cook and kept a clean house. She was always ready for company. When the natives came to collect their bounty for coyotes, they would also get a meal. My mother remembered that they would not come to sit at the table but sit on the floor, in a circle to eat. Her cooking was also enjoyed by many strangers too.

Grandmother was also known for her neatness, her bed was made high, with a white spread bordered with wide white lace and the children were not allowed to touch the bed. Grandmother also loved children, holding and feeding them. She also had a fun loving family. They loved music and singing. My mother played the harp and her brother Peter played a number of instruments.

Grandmother must have also had some lonely times too. Her parents had moved to the West Reserve, since travelling and distance made it difficult to see them. My mother also talked about grandmothers high blood pressure, she would get her blood relieved as was custom of the day. She would also readily fall asleep when sitting and doing her handwork. I have also been told that grandmother had a maid to help with the housework and family.

Grandmother and grandfather made a trip to Alberta to visit their son and daughter-in-law. While at their son’s place, grandmother observed that the potatoes did not taste right. When they got back to Grunthal, she asked her daughter Anna (my mother) to cook a pot of potatoes, surely the homegrown Manitoba potatoes would taste better. But later it was discovered that grandmother had cancer of the stomach.

Helena’s husband, Johann F. Braun (my grandfather) was a successful business man. He operated a store, flower mill, a creamery, an equipment agency, also the Grunthal post office and phone central, and served as Reeve of the Municipality of Hanover. Needless to say, behind a successful man is a supportive wife. In some of his business ventures, he was in partnership with his brother-in-law. He was a good provider for Helena and their family. She had borne eleven children, of which six grew to adulthood. Her youngest daughter (my mother) was born on Helena’s fortieth birthday (May 18, 1901).

Grandmother also took in grandfather’s parents, the Jacob Brauns, to take care of in their sunset years.

Our grandparents have passed on a rich heritage not only materially but also spiritually. Grandmother taught her family to pray and also passed her faith on to future generations. The generations to come produced preachers, (son Abram) missionaries, Sunday school teachers (daughter Anna), public school teachers (son Peter), nurses, farmers, business men, music groups, choir leaders, just to mention a few.

Helena (with her husband) were members of the Chortitzer Church in Grunthal.

Helena Abrams Braun died July 23, 1919 at the age of 58 years old. She was buried in the Grunthal cemetery.

By Anne Wiens daughter of Anna Braun Funk, Homemaker and helpmate of Peter F. Wiens.

continued on next page
According to a quote from the “Winnipeg Free Press” in the book, *Niverville: A History 1878-1986*, the first shipment of wheat from Niverville took place on March 8, 1879. One of her sons also mentioned taking cream to Niverville. From there it was taken by C.P.R. trains to Winnipeg. When the cheese factory was built in New Bothwell they, like most farmers in the area, delivered the milk to this co-operative venture. This cheese factory was established in 1936 and is still in operation sixty-one years later. At one time many other communities had similar operations in southeastern Manitoba.

Other co-operative enterprises by farmers in the New Bothwell and Niverville area did not occur, although the interest was there. Marigan’s son, Martin, a long time correspondent from New Bothwell for the now defunct German paper *Die Steinbach Post* wrote about this in a letter dated, May 28, 1941. He also mentioned a meeting he attended in the Prefontaine School on May 26, 1941 about further co-operative ventures.

One of Marigan’s sons recalled how she could look at the positive rather than on the negative aspects of the tasks at hand. She was one of those who saw the glass half full rather than half empty. He mentioned how they used to go to the Kleefeld and Grunthal areas to cut firewood in winter. On occasion when it had been extremely cold and blustering they hadn’t been to keen on going. The open sleigh didn’t give much protection from the elements. There were no radio or television stations to give up-to-date weather forecasts. And so they would rather have waited a day or so for better conditions. At times their mother had thought otherwise. As a rule it had worked out quite well for them because the weather had often improved later in the day.

**Family.**

When some of Marigan’s children got married and established their homes, Marigan was there in a very supportive role. She often helped with the household duties for awhile after a newborn child arrived. The interaction with her grandchildren was warm and loving. Some of them recall with pleasure the times grandmother spent in their homes when a new baby sister or baby brother had arrived.

One granddaughter, Maria (Friesen) Dueck in her book, *Roots and Descendants of Rev. and Mrs. C.W. Friesen* says: “I can still see her bustling about in her long billowing skirts, an apron tied around her waist; chuckling to herself as she tackled the many tasks. I sensed that she was a very industrious woman.”

Marigan enjoyed having the children and grandchildren getting together in her home. At Christmas, Easter and Pentecost these family gatherings were quite large since her children, including the step-children, lived near the village of Osterwick and were glad to take part. In 1948 when a fairly large group of Mennonites left for Paraguay, South America, her daughter, Margaretha and husband Jacob D. Wiebe and her step-daughter Agatha and hus-

...
**Introduction.**

In a recent issue of *Preservings* (No. 7, Dec. 1995, page 42) there appeared a photograph of my maternal great-grandmother, Mrs. Jacob (Susanna) Hiebert (1885-1949). On the photograph, an attractive Chortitzer maiden, dressed in her finest “Zindoshi Klida” stares at the camera, not smiling but silently contemplating the significance of the momentous occasion of having her picture taken with her older brother, David Hiebert (1883-1946), father of Ben Hiebert, a Chortitzer minister living at Niverville. Both David and Susanna were siblings to the late Mrs. Johann E. Doerksen and Mrs. Anna Klippenstein of Niverville, Manitoba.

During the 1930s and 40s, Susanna was a well known midwife and chiropractor, residing in the Heuboden-Seaton school district, north of Kleefeld, Manitoba.

**Family Background**

Susanna was born to Jacob S. and Katherina Hiebert at Schantzenburg, south of Niverville. They had immigrated from the Berghthal Colony, South Russia in 1875 and homesteaded 2.5 miles south of Niverville on NW18-7-4E: see “Jakob S. Hiebert cemetery,” *Preservings*, No. 9, Part 2, pages 50-52.

Great-great-grandmother Katherina (1855-1916) was a midwife and doctor to the Berghthaler, French and English folks in the area: see article by Regina Neufeld elsewhere in this newsletter. She had the unique ability of processing her own medicines from herbs and weeds and passed this interest and ability on to her daughter Susanna.

Susanna married her cousin, Jacob Giesbrecht Hiebert (1882-1939), the son of Abram Hieberts of Rudnerweide, near Altona. For the first few months after the wedding they lived with his parents. Four children were born at the next abode near Horndean, namely Jacob (1905-73), my grandmother, Katherina H. Kornelsen (1909-44), Peter (1908-13) and Abe (b. 1912). Jacob lived in Winnipeg where his son Earl Hiebert had a tire-garage business. Son Peter drowned in a dugout one Sunday afternoon and Abe lives in B.C.

**Ethelbert, Manitoba.**

The death of the five-year old Peter was a traumatic experience. In an effort to find healing from this blow, they left Horndean and homesteaded near Ethelbert, Manitoba. Life was hard in this rugged bush country; land was cleared for a garden, cows were milked and the children were raised. During the harvest times, great-grandfather would join the harvest crews for weeks on end, leaving Susanna to fend for the children on the lonely farm. But efforts were made to make life pleasant despite the poverty. A photograph taken at Christmas in 1913, shows the great-grandparents dressed in their Sunday best; behind them is a decorated Christmas tree with other Christmas decorations strung along the ceiling.

It was here at Ethelbert where Susanna

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studied the medical books that she had inherited from her mother. These years were busy; born here were William (1915-26), Helen (1916-93) and Peter (b. 1919). After some years, the isolation became too intense; there was no Mennonite church or school as they had hoped there would be.

Schönweisse, Manitoba.

The next move in the early 1920s was to Schönweisse near Altona. A farm was rented, crops were raised and financially speaking, progress was made until disaster struck again. The farm which they had rented was sold; a move was made to another rented farm west of Morden. Great-grandfather Jacob was unable to remove his harvested grain before the new owner, a newly arrived Russländer immigrant sold the grain as his own, throwing the family into financial ruin. This incident had its effects, i.e. creating a feeling of apprehension when contact was made with other innocent and honest Russländer.

Crop failures followed the next years; often they were forced to exist on root vegetables that survived the hail storms and the money earned from selling firewood.

Heuboden, E. Reserve.

Finally, Susanna’s relatively prosperous brothers, David (1883-1946) and Peter (1881-1974) helped the family relocate to Heuboden, a small Kleine Gemeinde settlement north of Kleefeld. Here, Susanna was near her sisters, especially Mrs. Johann E. Doerksen, Mrs. Anna Klippenstein and Mrs. Erdman Penner.

At Heuboden, her gifts and abilities as a midwife and “Trachmoaka” became well known. She was good diplomat; the Kleine Gemeinde (Holdemans too?) appreciated the caring manner with which she delivered their babies. In 1989, the elderly widow of the late Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester, Cornelius R.E. Reimer, Belize, related that her babies had been delivered by her.

Folks of all nationalities and every stripe and shade of Mennonite came to Susanna’s place for treatment of their sprains, breaks and ills. My mother, Eileen Loewen recalls Roman Catholic priests in long habits coming for treatments. Old Chortitzer women, dressed in dark dresses and big, black tasseled shawls with gold or silver wedding bands (which my partially blind grandmother Katherina H. Kornelsen. Her character was once overheard relating an incident to Mrs. Cornelius W. Kornelsen; son Ben had phoned, complaining of a severe cold. She had instructed him to place his feet in a bowl of hot water with mustard in it, instead he had used nutmeg.

When her teenage sons’ chinanigans distressed her, she lamented to them (in my mother’s presence) her concern for them, with dismay, “...Raimosh Junges zent uk freckt oha dann bicheri di zich an goani dann be Gemeinde” (“...Reimer’s boys are naughty but they at least get converted and join the church”). She was referring to boys of the Cornelius R. E. Reimer clan living in the Heuboden area. When a young Heuboden teenager passed away, she commented to the grieving mother, “Eck vird joa zraa zenna vann ekch uns ____ zoa kann oaf jave aus du deen zain kaus auf jave...” (I would be glad if I could give up our ____ as you have been able to give up your son.) The teenager had made his peace with God and died expectant of heaven. Being a widow with teenage sons was a taxing experience.

My mother remembered when parents

A former resident of Heuboden recalled Susanna “accepted only a small pay...money was scarce in the thirties.” She refused payment on Sundays but would accept a donation for missionary-relief endeavors; these donations were deposited in a small wooden box. Faspa was served to clients when seeking chiropractic treatments on Sunday afternoons.

Depression.

Life at Heuboden was perhaps pleasant in that it was more civilized, but it was hard in many respects. The Great Depression affected them tremendously. Twice during the 30s and 40s, a fire destroyed their house and belongings. The family was growing; the sons were active and behaviour not always the best.

In 1939 her beloved Jacob died and was buried in the graveyard across from the present Chortitzer Church in the village of Randolph. Two grandchildren, born out of wedlock, though dearly loved, did not lighten the emotional load for her. One son had a nervous breakdown and was admitted to the Selkirk institution for a short period.

Son David (1923-44) died in Belgium during WWII and was buried in Holland. My mother remembers the arrival of the telegram detailing his death in 1944.

On July 1, 1944, her eldest daughter, Katherina H. Kornelsen (married in 1933) passed away suddenly, due to a brain haemorrhage; a stillborn son Peter was buried with her in the casket, with the dead infant placed at her feet. My mother remembers her grandmother taking the death of her daughter very hard. Susanna was often heard to say, “Eck vite nich voa me doat zoa’oan Jeeti joamot”, referring to her dear son-in-law, Gerhard U. Kornelsen. Gerhard did remarry, but the relationship between his second wife and his beloved mother-in-law was to say, strained at best.

Susanna was baptized and accepted as a member of the Chortitzer Church as was my grandmother Katherina H. Kornelsen. Katherina joined the Kleefeld Kleine Gemeinde Church upon marrying a “Klein Gemeinde” as did my dear great Aunt Helen who married Uncle Pete H. Dueck in 1937. Great Uncle Pete Hiebert married a “Klein Gemeinde” as well. Being busy as a midwife and chiropractor, Susanna often found it convenient to attend the Kleine Gemeinde Church services conducted in the old Seaton school at Heuboden. Mrs. Elizabeth K. Friesen when asked, stated Susanna had no objections to three children joining the Kleine Gemeinde Church instead of the Chortitzer Church. The social relations between the KG and Chortitzer were warm in the Kleefeld-Heuboden area.

Today, none of her descendants are Chortitzer except for one grandson, Art. H. Kornelsen of Steinbach. Her grandchildren and great-grandchildren are found in the Kleine Gemeinde, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Beachy Amish Mennonite, General Conference Mennonites, Evangelical Free Church, Roman Catholic and Old Mennonite churches.

Her Character

She had a keen sense of humour. She was once overheard relating an incident to Mrs. Cornelius W. Kornelsen; son Ben had phoned, complaining of a severe cold. She had instructed him to place his feet in a bowl of hot water with mustard in it, instead he had used nutmeg.

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My mother remembered when parents

56  Preservations Part One

continued from previous page
brought injured, crying children to Grandmother’s for chiropractic treatments, often Grandfather Jac. Hiebert in his gentle way had to console and play with the child in order for Grandmother to do her treatment(s). Susanna’s demeanour was more serious than her husbands.

One person interviewed, described her as “a very loving person, a woman of faith...she pointed me to the Lord.” When their house burnt down in the 1930s, she was very thankful and appreciative of the goods given, especially of an old “Gesangbuch”, dear to the heart of devout Chortitzer and Kleine Gemeinde folk.

Testimonial.

“I remember her as a gentle, friendly and hospitable lady. She looked different than Aunt Helen” (Mrs Johann E. Doerksen)...”maybe more like your grandmother Katherine when she grew older... I remember my mother telling us how resourceful she was. She could cook up a good meal from almost nothing, like making delicious “moose” from dried saskatoon berries that she had gathered in the bush. They had many misfortunes.. In spite of that, I remembered them as pleasant, patient, kind and compassionate people.” by Regina Doerksen Neufeld, a niece.

Death.

Mrs. Regina Neufeld has written, “about her death I remember that she had gone to see a Doctor because of her heart condition. Her son Pete brought her home and just when they walked in, she collapsed and died quite suddenly.”

My mother recalls the Gerhard U. Kornelsen family received the news of their Grandmother’s death in Quellon Colony, Mexico. One person who cared and sorrowed with them was Mrs Cornelius R.E. Reimer, the Bishop’s wife. The following Christmas, the six ‘orphans’ received a simple granite (or ‘gerneat’) dish, as a token of her empathy and love. This token touched my mother greatly. When the estate was dispersed in 1949, Katherine’s portion was divided among the six children, Eileen, Art, Jake, Vera, George and Venus.

She died in 1949 of heart failure. One hypothesis is that the heart condition commenced in July, 1944, when she and her son-in-law, Gerhard (died in Feb. 1976) carried her beloved Katherine up the stairs of the old Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach. The physical and emotional strain was too much.

Susanna’s funeral was evidently held in the Chortitzter Church at Chortitz (Randolph) Manitoba. She was buried in the cemetery directly south of the church.

In February, 1996, I saw a photograph of her asleep in her coffin. She appeared much younger than she does on the photo where she weeps for her deceased daughter in July, 1944. The Lord will surely reward his Saint.

Children of Susanna Hiebert:
1. Jacob (1905-1973) lived in Winnipeg. Uncle Jacob had minimal contact with the rest of the family. His son Earl Ray (b. 1932) lives in Winnipeg. My mother Eileen Loewen recollects staying at Uncle Jacob for holidays in Winnipeg. Uncle Jacob was distant but his wife Sadie, was a “warm” person according to my mother’s recollections.
2. Peter (1908-1913) drowned in a dugout at Horndean, Manitoba.
4. Abram or “Uncle Abe” (b. 1912) was a trucker for many years and lived in Winnipeg later Kleefeld and in Vancouver area at present. He has two children, son Fred (b. 1939) and daughter Terri (b. 1959).
5. William (1915-1926) died of diptheria.
6. Helena or “Aunt Helen” (1916-93) married Uncle Pete H. Dueck (1912-1994) in 1937 and lived at Kleefeld all their married years. Their son Ron is a well known teacher and Principal, his wife Wendy has done some excellent research for ‘Preservations’. Lorna and Al Hiebert live at Caronport, Saskatchewan, where he is Dean of the Briercrest Biblical Seminary.
7. Uncle Pete (b. 1919) married Mary Thiessen (1916-90) and in 1996 married to widow Mrs. John K. Reimer. He moved to Mexico in 1949 and still resides at Quellon Colony. Son Reynold is a deacon in the Quellon Colony Kleine Gemeinde Church; son Peter is a missionary with the E.M.C. and daughter Emily and husband John Barkman live at Cuachtemoc.
8. David (1923-44) died in action during W.W. II in Belgium and is buried in Holland.
10. Uncle Ben (b. 1928) married Mary Neudorf (b 1926) and lived in Winnipeg. He was employed at the Manitoba Sugar Co. until his retirement. Son Timothy was killed in an auto accident in 1970. He was three years older than the oldest grandchild and often entertained the grandchildren at Grandmothers.

Acknowledgments.

Hiebert Heritage (Steinbach, 1993), articles written by Regina Neufeld and my late great-aunt Mrs. Helen Hiebert Dueck, deceased 1993.

125th Anniversary Announcement:

Readers are reminded that 1999 is the upcoming 125th anniversary of the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area. If you have any suggestions as how to celebrate this important event, contact any members of the Board of Directors of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.
Preservings Part One

Women’s Publishing
by Delbert Plett, Steinbach.

Elizabeth Esau Plett 1893-1976
Elizabeth Esau Plett 1893-1976: Landmark; by nephew Harvey G. Plett,
Box 1420, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

Pioneer life is difficult. The life of a foster child is doubly difficult. Elizabeth Esau Plett is a woman who experienced the difficulties of both, pioneer life and being an orphan and yet expressed a quiet confidence and joy in her faith. This is abundantly evident when one reads her, Von Unserem Eheleben seit 1910.

She wrote this pamphlet in 1957. The original is in German. Her children translated it into English and so there is an English translation as well. Her son Frank E. Plett, in Landmark Manitoba, still has a few copies of the English translation.

Family Background.

Who was this Elizabeth Esau Plett? Elizabeth, the youngest of seven children, was born to her parents, John and Maria (Unger) Esau, in Neuanlage (Twin Creek), Manitoba, April 11, 1893. Her mother was the daughter of Peter H. Unger of Blumenhof. For a fuller genealogical examination of Elizabeth’s mother, Maria, the reader is referred to the Unger book entitled, Peter H. Unger (1841-1896) Justina Friesen (1832-1905) Family-Record - 1765 to 1983, inclusive.

Her father was the son of Johann Esau (1832-1904), of Rosenfeld, Manitoba, who immigrated to Manitoba in 1874 and became well-known as the Brandtaetester or manager of the Kleine Gemeinde mutual insurance company, whose records are still being consulted today regarding the insurance coverage of the Kleine Gemeinde pioneers. The Esau genealogy is traced back to Cornelius Esau (born 1772), owner of Wirtschaft 19 in Fischau, Molotschina Colony, South Russia, in 1808: Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 329-335.

There are not many Esau’s and the Esau’s living in Kleefeld today are not related to Elizabeth’s father, John.

Growing Up.

When Elizabeth was 11 months old, her mother died, March 23, 1894. Of the seven children born to the Esau’s, twin girls, Margaret and Justina died in infancy and a boy, John, died when he was two years old, leaving four surviving sisters under the age of ten years. Since it was difficult for Father Esau to care for the small children, the children were separated and placed in various homes. The four girls were Margaret, Justina, Maria, and Elizabeth. It was not uncommon to use the name a second time if the baby had died. As the reader will note this is the case with the names of two of the sisters left without a mother, Justina and Margaret.

Margaret and Maria never married. Justina married a Martin Friesen from Rosenort. Martin died in 1947. In 1949 Justina married Heinrich H. Reimer from Kansas. They joined the Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde migration to Mexico which had started in 1948. Margaret also moved to Mexico where she died in 1967. The Reimers were also part of the group that moved from Mexico to Belize in 1954. Two sons of the Reimers, John and Jacob, have since moved to Nova Scotia where they are currently residing.

Elizabeth was taken in by her maternal grandparents the Peter H. Ungers of Blumenhof. Grandfather Elisabeth Plett, nee Esau, and David K. Plett, Prairie Rose, and daughter Helena, later Mrs. Abram J. R. Barkman of Blumenort, 1914 Grandfather Johann is standing. Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Erwin P. Reimer/Plett Picture Book, page 121.

58
Marriage, 1910.

In 1910, when she was 17, Elizabeth married a young man of 21 years from a neighbouring farm. The young man was David K. Plett, born to the David L. Pletts in 1889. After they were married they moved in with David’s parents and lived and farmed with them for two years. Since they got married in April and David turned 21 only in July, David worked for his father for no pay until he was 21. Elizabeth earned clothes and food and David earned the rest of the expenses and saved for a house. David’s father suggested that the bride was somewhat young. To this son David responded, “People grow older after marriage as well as before.”

After living with the parents for two years, Elizabeth and David bought a house from Mrs. Martin Barkman for $200.00 and moved it from “behind” Steinbach to a 3 acre lot next to David’s parents’ place. With hard work, taking odd jobs, the Plets slowly began to build the base for a farming operation. By 1915, they had two children, Helena and Katherina, and 4 cows. That was quite an achievement.

How did they manage this? Each had gotten a cow from their parents and Elizabeth purchased a second one from the Ungers with the wages they had given her during her five years there. Her wages were $25 the first year, $40 the second year, $50 the third year, $64 the fourth year, and $70 the fifth year. The fourth cow was purchased from the earnings of David.

It was time to move to a better situation. Father Plett sold them 60 acres and they established their own farm place west of the parents’ farmstead.

David continued to work at odd jobs but also for his father. He operated the steam engine for the threshing machine which meant long hours and threshing for people far and wide. This meant the men often did not come home for night. So Elizabeth with mother-in-law Plett would hitch Jessie to the buggy and go and pick up the men for the weekend. At times they would have supper at the place where the men were threshing.

Haying was an important part of the farming operation. Hay fields were found at considerable distances from home. The Pletts made hay in Prairie Rose. The hay would be cut and stacked in summer on the field, and then in winter they would haul it home by sleigh and horses. A winter trip would take 12-13 hours, leaving home at 4:00 a.m. and arriving home at 4 or 5:00 p.m.

Prarie Rose.

In 1915 or 1916 there was a brotherhood meeting in Blumenort where the question of colonization was discussed. Good farmland for a reasonable price was available in Prairie Rose (Landmark) some 13 miles northwest from Blumenhof. The first settlers, Abram and Peter Penner, moved to Prairie Rose in 1917. In 1918 Isaac Reimers, Cornelius Plett, and Frank T Kroekers moved to Prairie Rose. Mrs. Isaac Reimer and Cornelius Plett, were David’s sister and brother. In 1919 the David Pletts moved to the quarter section they had bought, SE 22-8-5E. Grandson Steve Plett is currently dwelling on the farmstead established by the David Pletts.

This was the fourth and final home for the David Pletts. Elizabeth lived here until she died in 1976.

As one reads Elizabeth’s story it focuses again and again the significant role women played in the life of the family and community. Husband and wife had to be a team in order to survive. David and Elizabeth were a team. While David was out clearing land, hauling wood or feed, or helping someone, Elizabeth milked and fed the animals and kept food on the table and clothes on the backs of the children.

Elizabeth planted large gardens, which, with the help of the children, were well kept and supplied a generous supply of vegetables for the winter. She raised chickens for home consumption as well for selling either eggs or meat. The children were in there helping as well. At age 7 daughter Lena milked a cow regularly, an easy milker true, but at a rather tender age. When one hears this the question of child labour pops into one’s mind. In those days the whole family pitched in to make things work. To interpret this as child abuse is totally wrong. Plets loved their children and would not hurt them.

That first year they lived in buildings not suited for Manitoba winters. Elizabeth speaks of living in a single-clad summer kitchen because their house in Blumenhof was only moved in winter on sleigh and with horses. She speaks of keeping all the clothes on when they retired for the night because it was so cold. She also speaks of manure freezing in the barn so it could not be hauled out.

Fall came early in 1919. One October morning when they got up the ground was covered with snow. For the next while they had to milk out on the snow since no shelter for the cows had been built. When the cattle shelter they were moving to Prairie Rose from Blumenhof collapsed in the process, David’s brothers came to the rescue and quickly built a shelter for the cattle.

Hospitals and doctors were not as available as today. This lack of access to medical help focuses the toughness of the pioneer women. Mary was born in January 17, 1920. When labour set in, her sister-in-law Mrs. Sarah (Isaac R.) Reimer came over while Mr. Reimer drove by horse and buggy to Ste. Anne to get the doctor. The road conditions were very bad and so the trip took longer than usual. By the time the doctor arrived Mary had been born,
Preservings Part One

What to do with the farm? The operation was too big for Elizabeth with her young family to carry on. As a result six milk cows, a number of heifers and horses were sold. The threshing machine, the hard starting Fordson tractor, crusher and other items were also sold. This was a very painful experience for son David. He lay down on the "Schoelp -Bank" and cried and cried. With this selling off of stock and equipment the family could manage.

In the spring of 1931, 16 year-old Lena and 11 year-old David did all the seeding. The “Geschwista” helped with the harvest. But after that the family did things on their own. As they adjusted to being without father and husband they did very well under the guidance of mother. They were an independent family and were happy to be on their own. Of course Elizabeth sought for advice from grandpa Plett. He was willing to assist but eventually suggested it to Elizabeth’s brother-in-law, Cornelius Plett, who lived about a mile from the David Pletts, become the advisor. Elizabeth accepted the suggestion.

In an amazing way the family continued to work and build the farm. They built a new barn and a new house. Friends and neighbours were helpful but they did this on their own initiative. Elizabeth had trained the children well.

The family operation was terminated In March, 1951, when by auction they sold everything and then divided it among the children. Elizabeth got one-third and the rest was divided equally among the children. Elizabeth also retained 74 acres of land, the buildings, and some cows. She sold her last cows to Frank in 1957.

In 1976 she began a planned visit to each of her children before settling into a home. She spent some time at daughter Helena’s place, the Abram Barkmans. She was visiting at her daughter Mary, the Henry Barkmans, when she passed away on March 10, 1976.

Conclusion.
The story of Elizabeth Esau Plett is a sample of the influence and role pioneer women played in the life of the Kleine Gemeinde (E.M.C.). It focused in the family and the family farm. It is very obvious that had Elizabeth not worked as hard as she did and with the positive spirit things would have been much more difficult and the family would not have turned out as well.

Elizabeth is a model of faith, for again and again she talks of her faith in her writing as well as about the joy of fellowshipping with other Christians.

Her influence, however, is exerted not from a public platform but in the quiet deep-running river of commitment and faithfulness whether seen by others or not. She was committed to being obedient to Christ and she did it the best way she knew how. That is why her children rise up and call her

Elizabeth says, “Thank God this baby came fast, my deliveries had been hard and slow.”

David went to the neighbours searching for someone to bathe the baby but found no one. Finally the next day Mrs. Frank Kroeker, the first neighbour to the west and a good friend, came to bathe the baby and do some washing. Some more help was given by Mrs. Isaac Reimer by baking some bread. After this, Elizabeth says, “...I looked after the baby and did the chores by myself. I soon became strong again and went milking. So we managed on our own.”

There is determination and strength that shines through. Again looking back from our very plush conditions we wonder how they did it. Where was David? In her words, “Papa was very busy, trying to get enough wood for heating the house, and straw and fodder for the cows and horses. The road conditions were very poor.” David was so much on the road because he had to haul most of the stuff from Blumenhof since they had just moved to Prairie Rose six months prior to Mary’s birth. One senses no anger towards neighbours or husband, rather a quiet acceptance.

Food is always important, especially is this true when people work hard. Threshing time involved hard long hours. Elizabeth’s resourcefulness as well as indicating that hard work during harvest was not only for the men but very much for the women as well, is illustrated by the following incident.

The threshing outfit had come to the David Pletts, a crew of 23 men. It was Sunday so the Pletts went to church which meant travelling to Blumenort. They stayed for the Communion service. When they got home the men had cleaned out all the food that she had prepared for the threshing crew. This included 2 large cans of Zwieback, 1 big box full of bread, a big can of cookies and a pot of meat. When the Pletts arrived at home, Elizabeth discovered the empty cupboard and the men waiting for supper to be served. What to do? Elizabeth headed out to the chicken barn, got a pail full of eggs, made pancakes and fed all 23 plus her family.

Tragedy, 1930.

A major tragedy occurred in the Plett family in 1930. It taxed Elizabeth to the utmost but in the process brought out her strength and determination to keep on going on. It was late September when Margaret got very sick to be followed by son David. After a week of nursing, son David was up again but then the family members who did the chores became so sick that they couldn’t do their work anymore. The Isaac Reimers and the Klaas F. Penners helped as well as David’s parents and family.

Then David got sick. After suffering for two weeks at home David’s brothers picked up David with bed and all and transported him to the church which was converted into a temporary hospital. A nurse had been obtained from Winnipeg at $6.00 a day but since she couldn’t do much more for the sick than what the family was doing, she was taken back to the home. The whole family except Elizabeth got sick. After the doctor’s visit it was established that the sickness was typhoid fever.

David, with children Lena, Tina, Elizabeth, Mary, Sarah, and Johnny were at the church where Margaret Fast, Margaret Goertzen, and Aunt Gertrude Plett cared for the sick under the direction of Uncle Isaac Reimer. Meanwhile son David, Peter, Margaret, Frank, and mother Elizabeth stayed at home. Elizabeth worked tirelessly at home and went to the church every day. At both places the children and husband were deathly sick. The doctor said Frank would die. David and daughter Tina asked for cold water again and again but none was given. The standard treatment for Typhoid at that time did not permit sponging or giving cold water to the sick. Even ice cream was denied. Temperatures soared to 108 F.

On the night of November 20, Elizabeth, grandmother Plett, sister Isaac Reimer and brother John Plett were at the bedside of David. He asked about the weather and when told it was going to storm he said “Oh my,” and turned his head to the side. Now it was time for Elizabeth to go home to inspect the sick at home. At 11:00 p.m. Tina passed away. Two hours later at 1:00 a.m., November 21, 1930, David died. He had been sick 24 days while Tina had not been sick quite that long.

The church was still a hospital for the sick family and so the funeral was held outside of the church. Before the funeral, the bodies were brought to the house so the children could pay their last respects to father and sister. Son David refused to look at them.

Winter set in and the sick began to recuperate though the children were very cranky and sensitive as to the food they ate. Thus the short nights continued for Elizabeth. As if that was not enough, when the children had just recuperated from typhoid, several got chicken pox, fortunately a mild case.

Amazingly only two people of the many who had helped care for the sick and do the chores, and thus had been in close contact with the germs, contracted the fever. Katherina Barkman caught it but recuperated. Aaron Unger, a young man who helped chores, caught it and died. Elizabeth also did not contract the fever.

Widowhood.

Elizabeth had to go on but how? God had blessed her with very supportive and helpful parents-in-law as well as other in-laws. These were very helpful, helping get ready for the funeral and with the work as well as sterilize the floors where the sick had lain. Also many of the neighbours helped.
Eva Berger Rieger (1883-1966)

Background.

Eva Berger Rieger was a determined and adventuresome person. This was especially noted when she left her family and home in central Europe, at age 20, to find a new life in America.

She was also very frugal and resourceful. Hard times were a challenge, but did not deter her from raising and caring for her family. As long as there were several bags of flour in the house and some eggs, milk and butter, there were enough ways to create variety in the dishes she could cook. Dairy and poultry products came from the cow and flock of chickens she kept. Vegetables were grown in her very long garden on the 1/2 acre lot Mother and Dad lived on. She saved Dad a lot of expense by providing for her family in innovative ways. A hard worker herself, she enlisted her children to help in various ways, at the same time teaching and instilling in them a solid work ethic.

She was reasonably successful in raising her six children by practical means. Mother possessed an entrepreneurial spirit, using her insight and ingenuity in many helpful ways. At crucial times, her advice to Dad led to success in his business endeavours and ventures. Her guidance and encouragement was often appreciated and followed. She possessed discernment and keen understanding.

Mother was born June 8, 1884 in Karlsdorf, a German town in Hungary, which was then part of the Austro-German Empire ruled by an Austrian King, Franz Joseph I. Her parents were of German descent and raised their children in the Catholic faith. She received her primary education in German.

The Book.

She grew up to be a young woman of courage and determination, which is evident from her own story of her life written and published in 1940, and entitled, Erinnerungen und Erfahrungen von Frau S. Rieger, Steinbach, Manitoba (“Memories and Experiences”).

In the foreword she wrote, “I have always felt the need of telling my children the experiences and occurrences in my life, including some of my spiritual battles. Many friends have indicated their interest in my trip to Europe in the year 1939. Therefore, I decided to write the booklet in four parts”.

1. Experiences as a young person and emigration to Canada.
2. Experiences in my faith life.
3. Trip to Europe in 1939.
4. Letters from my brother about his experiences in World War 1 and imprisonment in Russia for 5 1/2 years.

The story in her book unfolds as to how she left home and family at age twenty, and travelled alone to Canada. How she continued on next page
changed her mind aboard ship, while crossing the ocean, to go on to Winnipeg, Manitoba, instead of disembarking at Montreal as first planned. How she met her future husband, Sebastian Rieger, Sr., who was then living in Steinbach.

Her experiences during her trip back to Hungary in 1939, as told here in this article, are largely gleaned from her book. It was a shocking and heart wrenching story, and could just as easily have ended in disaster and separation from her family for the duration of World War II.

The last section in her book deals with the experiences of her next oldest sibling, brother Martin, who set out to accompany her to Canada but was refused passage, and sent back. He was drafted into the army during World War I and sent to fight in Russia, where he became a prisoner of war. He was spared the fate that befell many of his comrades who were executed at the hands of their Russian captors. Martin was spared largely because he was a very talented young man, being artistically gifted and used for the benefit of the Russians. He was also allowed to teach for some years and later returned to his family in Europe. This article will not deal with details of his war memories, but a sad sequel to his life was that after WW II, when the Russians overrun eastern Europe at the end of the war, he along with many other men of German descent, were rounded up, shot, and dumped into an open common pit for a cruel burial. And in his case, according to eye witnesses who later related the incident, was buried while not yet quite dead.

Coming to Canada, 1903.

The following is from mother’s book, describing her leaving Europe to come to Canada, the next two years in Winnipeg, and her marriage and move to live in Steinbach.

Emigration to Canada came about because Mother’s family was poor, and the political climate in the country was unstable. Mother and her brother wished to seek freedom and a better life, and the family could only afford to send these two on this venture, since their resources were limited. The plan was to blaze the trail that would see the rest to follow later. Mother was 20 years old at the time she left Hungary.

The two bade their parents and brother and sisters farewell and started out on their journey, not knowing what would befall them. They did not have visas, as these could be obtained only by those who were 24 years-of-age, and therefore, they decided to flee secretly. They travelled by train to the Hungarian border, where they left the train depot and stayed the night in a hotel. A police officer asked them where they were going. They stuttered, “to visit relatives in Austria”.

“Good”, he said, “I will watch out for you”.

Very early the next morning they put their bundles on their backs and walked on foot over mountains and hills, crossing the border into Austria. Here they took the train again and came to the travel agents who had promised (by correspondence) to help them.

But things turned out quite differently. Martin was sent back because he was of military age. Mother could go on if she wanted to. Alone in a strange city, she had to make a life altering decision. A lady who lived in the same town suddenly appeared before her. She was going to Canada to visit her children. Mother decided to go with this lady and thus said goodbye to her brother, sadly, not to see him for many years.

The trip took them to Hamburg where they found the ship overloaded with immigrants. They travelled on, via Antwerp, Belgium, and boarded a ship to cross the ocean.

Winnipeg.

In Quebec they took a train to Winnipeg, since this was the travel companion’s destination. Mother changed her plans and continued on to Winnipeg too, although she knew no one there.

Alone in a strange country with a strange language and foreign customs, she was overcome with loneliness and homesickness. With tears flowing freely, she composed a poem, perhaps the first of many more to follow throughout her life. Whenever some deep concern or experience moved her, she wrote a poem.

The poem (translated from German):

I went out into the world
And feel so utterly alone
Oh, where are you now,
My beautiful land of Hungary:
So dear to me - yet too far?
But I’ll wander on with the blessing
Which, I know, God gives to me.

In deepest melancholy
In life’s griefs and storms,
I left my precious parents,
To seek for a strange fortune.
But, as I turn about
To find elusive happiness
I find just this one thing -
Each one seeks nothing else
But only his own good!

Today I’m still a wanderer
A stranger in this pilgrim land
Until some day the morning dawns
In the blessed homeland above!

For two years Mother found employment as a maid in Winnipeg, while trying to learn English at the same time. Her employers were a retired army colonel and his wife, living on Wellington Crescent. They were kind to her, but language was a barrier. Sometimes instructions to her were misunderstood, resulting in tears flowing into the kitchen sink while washing the dishes. But a friendship was formed that lasted throughout their lives.

Mother made acquaintances with people from the old country who were living in Winnipeg, and weekend visits helped to ease her loneliness. Pinching every penny she earned, she chose to walk the many miles from her place of employment to the “north end” where acquaintances lived, rather than spend the nickel it would cost her to take the street car.

Marriage, 1907.

It was on one of these weekends that she went along with friends to visit some other compatriots who lived near Steinbach. This was to change her life. While on this visit she met the one who was to become her husband, Sebastian Rieger, Sr., who had come to Canada five years earlier (1900) at age 17.

Strange that she would find this person, who was born and raised in another German town in Hungary, not far from her own place of birth. Providence had taken over. This meeting resulted in their marriage in 1907, in Winnipeg, by a Catholic priest, as they were both raised in the Catholic faith. Mother’s “wandering” days were over when they travelled to Steinbach, by train and buggy, to live for the rest of their lives together.

Conversion, 1919.

But, her spiritual quest was yet to begin. It was not until 1918, after her first three children were born, that she gradually realized she was “blind, poor and destitute - without a church, without a living
faith”. The burning question was - “what must I do to be saved? and where should I lead my children?” Her soul cried to God, she wanted certainty - not from human beings, but from God Himself. She began to pray, and grapple with the problem. She felt a power exerted from above - the Spirit of God worked mightily in her.

One night she woke up and saw the empty grave of Christ. She saw her empty hands. She had nothing for the Saviour. She began to visit churches in Steinbach and could not understand that the people who called themselves Mennonites had so many different viewpoints. She cried to God for clear guidance and assistance. One Sunday, January 5, 1919, she came to the Bruderthaler Church, (E.M.B.) and the beautiful singing appealed to her, for she too was a lover of songs, and liked to sing. Some time later she wrote a beautiful poem of this experience.

It was that Sunday morning and the sermon from Phil. 4:4 that resulted in the turning point in her spiritual longing. It was on a winter afternoon, while on the way with horse and sleigh to visit friends in the country, that suddenly she felt herself surrounded with a beam of light. She felt lifted up and transferred to the heavenly kingdom. It was the most unusual blessing she had ever experienced. She determined that evening in the church service that she would yield herself to God, and she did. During prayer time she too stammered a few words publicly, and felt a great joy flowing into her heart. Some time later she wrote a beautiful poem of this experience.

During prayer time she too stammered a few words publicly, and felt a great joy flowing into her heart. Some time later she wrote a beautiful poem of this experience.

The ship was luxurious, with all the amenities, including a fine church service Sunday morning. On board Mother met another traveller who was also headed for Budapest. Coming to Cherbourg, France, they boarded a fast train which took them on through Switzerland to Vienna, Austria. It did not take long before they reached Budapest at 1:00 p.m., July 15th.

Due to a misunderstanding, not one of Mother’s family was there to meet her, so she took a taxi to the address of her family.

She knocked on the locked gate, and there, coming from the house was her dear mother. With emotions high, they greeted each other with tears of joy. Her mother had lost her speech some time before, yet at this moment of excitement she could suddenly use her voice again. Her younger sisters and brothers had all grown up and now they got re-acquainted, along with nieces and nephews never seen before.

One side trip took Mother to Yugoslavia to the town where she was born. What a change from Hungary! Rough and un-clean. A drunken Serb insisted on carrying her baggage for her and nearly succeeded in stealing it, had it not been for brother Martin, running after him and retrieving it. A happy reunion and visit followed for some days and weeks, with her brother and his family. (This was the brother that had been sent back to Hungary instead of going to Canada with Mother, so many years earlier.)

Return Journey.

It was here that Mother started to feel uneasy. Men were being drafted into the army and large military manoeuvres were being conducted. Arriving back in Budapest they heard on the radio that all foreigners were to get out of the country in 24 hours. Mother wanted to leave for home right away, but soon afterward the borders closed and travel became impossible, as war had begun. She was told by the travel agent to return to the office for a possible way to travel. A relative pledged to go with her wherever she needed to go. This was a great help to her. They went around to all the ship agencies and consulates, but it was in vain. Mother was told that 80,000 foreigners wanted to go home and also that Canadian tickets were not acceptable, nor was Canadian money - only American. She sent one telegram after another to her family at home, asking for help from there. They sent Italian lira for a ship ticket from Italy. That was refused; they wanted American dollars.

After much effort, repeated visits to the ship offices, a great deal of hassle, and telegrams home, she finally could show the officers that a passage had been paid for in U. S. dollars.

Mother’s health was severely threatened and all feared the worst. She nearly collapsed. After much pleading and begging, and upon seeing her exhausted condition, they found her a berth on a small Italian liner. After all the severe testings and hardships, she sat on the deck of the “Vulcana” and could begin to recuperate. The ticket had been paid for on a larger ship, but she was relieved to be on board this boat.

Due to many stops to pick up passengers leaving Europe, the voyage lasted 15 days, arriving in New York on November 4th. Thus a trip to Europe that was to be for 2 months, took 4 months instead.

What a reunion it was! Tears of joy flowed freely after being back in her home with her husband, children and grandchildren.

Widowhood, 1949.

Mother and Father enjoyed life together for another 9 1/2 years. Times were getting a little better right after the war. Together they could look back, reflecting on a modest measure of success in their lives, having found the freedom and blessing which they were able to enjoy in their adopted country of Canada. Like so many others who came to this country in those years, they were able to avoid the poverty and ravages of wars that followed after they left their Homeland.

In 1945 the last of their children left home and they lived alone in the house where all six of their children had been born and raised. In March of 1949, Father passed away, leaving Mother a widow for 17 years until her death in 1966, her 83rd year.

Mother’s life had seen hardships - emigrating to a new country, hard beginnings, poverty, the great depression, WW II, toil, and serious illness. As difficult as it may have been, Mother and Father remained honourable, honest and respectable; a good example to follow.

Trip to Europe, 1939.

It was not until her children were all grown up that Mother felt a strong desire to travel back to Europe to see her dear mother, brothers and sisters, before it would be too late. It had been 34 years since she left her former homeland, since Canada had become her adopted country, for which she often thanked God. She was very fond of the British monarchy and liked to read about them.

Things had changed in Europe. Her prior home country had been divided up after WW I. Hungary was broken up and the part where she was born and raised became Yugoslavia. Her brother still lived there, but most of the rest of the family, including her mother, had moved to Budapest.

Receiving the consent of her family, Mother made plans to go on this longed for trip. Arrangements were made with Canadian Pacific in Winnipeg. She received passage to go on the “Empress of Britain”, one of the country’s luxury liners, on July 6, 1939. The train took her to Montreal. In Ottawa she met another German lady who boarded the train. She for a time was on the same route as Mother, and they quickly struck up a friendship. Both now had a travelling companion.

The December 1997 issue No. 11 of Preservings will feature the Chortitzer Gemeinde in honour of the 100th anniversary of the worship house at Chortitz, Manitoba, (also known as Randolph), the oldest Mennonite Church in Western Canada still in use today: see article page 34, part one.

The roots of the Chortitzer Gemeinde of the East Reserve go back to the founding of the Chortitzer Colony in Imperial Russia in 1789, over 200 years as a vibrant and vital part of the Church of God.
Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984): Mennonite Pioneer

Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984): Mennonite Pioneer; by John J. Friesen, Professor of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4.

Introduction.

Maria Toews was one of few women in the Sommerfelder Mennonite tradition to record their life’s experiences. In this short booklet she wrote the story of her life, beginning with her birth in southern Manitoba near Gretna, recounting the incredibly difficult years in Paraguay, and concluding with her return to Manitoba.

Except for a brief section at the conclusion of the book, the story is based on memory and not on diaries. Despite this, her story is filled with copious detail, numerous dates, and keen observation of many aspects of community and family life.

Her language is simple, her comments are sparse, her descriptions are often brief, and she seldom lets the reader in on the emotions of the moment, and yet her story is powerful. The reader is swept along in a compelling story which unfolds simply, elegantly, and without pretension.

Throughout the booklet, Maria’s writing pulsates with a powerful faith in God. She had an unwavering faith in God’s goodness and in God’s leading, no matter how difficult the tribulations, how severe the diseases, or how unfair the circumstances.

Family Background.

Born 27 February 1889 in the village of Neuanlage, a mile east of Gretna, Manitoba, she was born into the Henry Wiebe family. She tells us that her mother’s maiden family name was Abrams, but her mother’s given name is not mentioned.

Maria was one of twelve children. Her family was poor, struggling to acquire land to support the growing family, and later, as the children grew older, to find land for the sons as they married.

It was in Neuanlage that Maria received her education. The community had a non-registered Mennonite school. Language instruction was bilingual, with instruction in German one day and in English the next. Like most Manitoba Mennonite children of her generation, she started school at about age seven, and ended her schooling when she was 14 years of age. Since Maria and her sister were the two oldest children in the family, they had to miss school frequently, even before they were 14 years old, in order to help with the farm work.

Baptism.

At age 18 Maria made the most important decision of her life. She decided to join the church. Her parents had moved to Saskatchewan, and she decided to remain in Manitoba, working as a maid for her uncle and aunt near Rosenfeld. She joined the catechism classes in the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church in Schoenthal and was baptized by the Aeltester of the church, Abram Doerksen. The class included 44 young people, an equal number of men and women.

Although Maria did not reflect on this decision in terms of personal decision or struggle, it was clearly a profound commitment which shaped the direction of her life. Faith in God meant joining a community, and living within its collective commitments, even if it meant deciding to move to Paraguay and pioneering in the most difficult of circumstances. Faith in God meant trusting God through all the difficulties of life.

Marriage, 1908.

Within the Schoenthal Sommerfelder Church, Maria became acquainted with Heinrich Toews, a native of the Weidenfeld area near Rosenfeld. Maria and Heinrich were married a year after her baptism.

For nineteen years Maria and her husband lived in a variety of places in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. They established a business in Altona, sold it and moved to Neville, Saskatchewan, near the Old Colony settlement. Here they established a new business, but lost it when the economy turned down. They tried farming in Manitoba, and again on a farm near Rosthern. Both attempts ended in failure, largely because of adverse weather. In each attempt at farming and business, the start was promising, but poor weather, economic downturns, and generosity with creditors spelled disaster. In the process though, Maria’s story provides insight into everyday life in three Mennonite settlements of the day.

Paraguay, 1927.

In 1926, a major portion of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church decided to emigrate. The Aeltester and a small portion of the church emigrated to Mexico and a much larger group moved to Paraguay. Maria and Heinrich joined the Paraguay group, departing in April, 1927, four months after the first group had left for Paraguay.

Almost two-thirds of Maria’s story deals with life in the Menno Colony in Paraguay. From the long trip by train, ship and ox cart from Manitoba to the Chaco, to the rapid return by plane in 1956, she recounts the stories of births, deaths, illnesses, building homes and villages, relating to the natives, helping the Fernheim Mennonites settle, being helped by MCC, travel and Buenos Aires, and struggling with the effects of the Chaco war.

Maria was observant not only of the people around her, she was also keenly aware of the flora and fauna. She included copious detail of plant life, of trials and error in trying to get vegetable gardens and crops to grow, and of the habits of the Lenqua Indians.

Cancer.

A large portion of Maria’s story about Paraguay deals with her illnesses, especially her struggle with cancer. This lengthy struggle, lasting about a decade, provides the reader not only with her incredible fortitude and unwavering faith, it also reveals the isolation, lack of medical resources, and poverty with which the whole Menno Colony in Paraguay had to contend. Maria’s story is not only personal history, it becomes community history.

Steinbach, Manitoba, 1956.

By 1956 Maria’s husband had died, a number of her married children had moved to Manitoba, and so she also decided to return to Manitoba. In the latter part of her story she lives in retirement in Steinbach, visiting family and friends in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Conclusion.

One of the impressions of this personal story is the incredible difficulties that she and her family had to overcome. Despite the difficulties, Maria survived. She did not despair. She did not blame others. She did not feel that life was unfair. Instead she gave thanks to God repeatedly for the blessings and recoveries from illnesses which she experienced. She was accepting of her lot in life.

Maria’s story is that of a woman. Most of the histories of her community, the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, and the Menno Colony, were written by men. Most of those stories deal with formal organizations, the organizational church, cooperatives, and leadership structures. None of these are Maria’s focus. She refers to all of these, but only marginally. Her focus is the everyday life of her family and her community. Her story thus supplements the official stories, and provides a human face to them.

Nowhere does Maria give the impression she was doing anything extraordinary, or that she was trying to carve a new role as a woman. She completely accepted her traditional role within the Mennonite community, but transformed it into something extraordinary in her strong, quiet manner. One gains the impression that she was likely not unique, but one of many women who had similar experiences. As the story unfolds, it becomes evident that the success of the Mennonite communities rested upon the efforts of many extraordinary women like Maria.

Descendants.

The descendants of Maria Wiebe Toews in the Steinbach area include son David Toews of Reimer Avenue and daughter Sarah Toews Fehr, Mrs. Henry B. Fehr, and her children Harry, developer and part-owner of Quarry Oaks Golf Course, and son Ernie Fehr. Sue Nikkel, a granddaughter of Maria Wiebe Toews, is part...
owner of Holiday Travel in Steinbach.

Genealogical Note.

Maria Wiebe (1889-1984) was the daughter of Heinrich Wiebe (1853-1945) and Maria Loewen Abrams (1862-79) of Neuanlage, West Reserve, Manitoba, and later Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Heinrich Wiebe was living with his brother David Wiebe in Rosenfeld at the time of the 1881 census: BGB 374-252. Maria was the daughter of Peter Abrams and Elisabeth Loewen living in Neuanlage, W. Reserve, at the time of the 1881 census: BGB 364-24. The families are not listed in the Bergthal Gemeindebuch, and evidently came from the Chortitz or "Old" Colony to Manitoba where they eventually joined the Sommerfelder Gemeinde.

Heinrich Wiebe's sister Aganetha (1837-1959) married Johann Quiring, and they settled in the village of Chortitz in the East Reserve, having emigrated with the first contingent of 65 Mennonite families who arrived at the Rat River landing site on August 1, 1874. Another brother, Issac Wiebe (b. 1851), emigrated to Manitoba in 1875 and was the great-grandfather of John Dyck, HSHS Research Director.

Heinrich Wiebe was the son of Gerhard Wiebe (1808-62) and Anna Redekopp (1814-61) of the village of Chortitz in the Chortitz Colony, South Russia. By 1860 the family had acquired a Wirtschaft in Nowowitesk, a village on the so-called Juden Plan. Here they were neighbours of Jakob Epp, whose journal was recently published.

Gerhard Wiebe came from "royalty" as far as Mennonite families go, being the son of Gerhard Wiebe (b. 1772) who grew up in Schwartzdam, West Prussia. Gerhard emigrated to Russia in 1795 and settled in the village of Chortitz, where he already had a brother Johann Wiebe (1766-1823), the Aeltester of the entire Chortitz Colony of 19 villages.

Gerhard (b. 1772) married Sarah, daughter of Heinrich and Judith Wiens Penner. When Heinrich Penner died, Gerhard and Sarah took over his Wirtschaft in the village of Chortitz. Heinrich and Sarah had another daughter Judith who married Jakob Dyck, Aeltester of the Chortitz Gemeinde for many years prior to his death in 1854.

The parents of Gerhard and Johann were Johann Wiebe and Aganetha Penner. Johann Sr. had a brother Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96) who was the famous Aeltester or Bishop of the Elbing-Ellerwald Gemeinde, Prussia, who maintained a journal and authored a Mennonite Confession of faith. He was considered as a true and loyal leader by the Kleine Gemeinde whose founders considered his writings authoritative.

Gerhard Wiebe (1808-62) also had a brother Johann Wiebe (1808-40) who moved to the Bergthal Colony where he was elected as a minister: BGB-A11. His son Jakob Wiebe (1835-1914), was a school teacher in Alt-Bergfeld, south of Grunthal, Manitoba: BGB-B158. Jakob was the founder of a dynasty including notables like son Abraham Wiebe, first E. Reserve person to obtain a doctorate and long associated with the Tennessee Valley Authority, daughter Anna who married Steinbach business tycoon Heinrich W. Reimer, and many others like great-grandson Roy Vogt, who passed away March 31, 1997: see Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, pages 10-11.

Another son Johann H. Wiebe (1831-1917), settled in Alt-Bergfeld, E. Reserve but had relocated to the West Reserve by 1891. He was the great-grandfather to Wm. Schroeder, Mennonite cartographer and author of the Bergthal Colony: see John Dyck, "Alt-Bergfeld," in Historical Sketches, pages 9-58.

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Aganetha Eidse Giesbrecht 1865-1959

Aganetha Eidse Giesbrecht (1865-1959), by Irene Toews 4716-51 Ave., Vermilion, Alberta, T9X 1T3.

Aganetha Eidse was born on July 3, 1865, at Fischau, Molotschna, to her parents Cornelius E. Eidse and Katharina Klassen. Her family later lived in the village of Neuanlage in the Borosenko settlement in Russia: Profile 1874, page 35. Aganetha had one brother who was two years younger. There were supposed to have been five children in this marriage, but no record of the others has been found. She also had a foster brother David Friesen. Aganetha's mother died on December 24, 1873 and on February 2, 1874, her father married Helena Loewen, daughter of Johann (1823-81).

In 1874 the Cornelius E. Eidse family emigrated from Russia crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the S. S. Austrian. Aganetha later recalled various anecdotes from this voyage: storms at sea, high waves, soup bowls sliding across the table and passengers being sea sick. Her family was one of the first group of 65 Mennonite families to arrive in Manitoba on August 1, 1874.

The Cornelius E. Eidse family settled in Rosenort, Manitoba, on the west side of the Red River where his in-laws also settled the following year. For the first years Aganetha lived with her grandparents, David Klassens, Rosenhof, where she received a minimal education.

On October 28, 1885, Aganetha married Gerhard R. Giesbrecht (1846-1907), a widower with seven children and twenty years her senior: see Preservings, Dec 1996, No. 9, Part One, pages 21-22. She was pressured into marrying him by her step-mother who said it was her duty and responsibility to marry this man and raise his children. She inherited some land that her mother would have received if living, her mother having died already in Russia. She said, "When we got married I got the children and he got the land."

They lived at Greenland, Manitoba, NW3-6-E, which is along Greenland Road, 3/4 miles west of P.T.H. 12 on the south side. Aganetha bore 12 children in the 20 year marriage, 6 of whom died as infants. She raised his children, then he died in 1907, leaving her to raise 6 children alone. She never remarried saying she did not want another widower with children. Later in her widowhood Aganetha lived north across the road on SW10-8-6E.

Aganetha supported her family with farming. She liked sewing, quilting, gardening and was generous with her gifts of garden produce. They were members of the Holdeman Church and were considered to be good Christians.

She was terrified of thunderstorms. When she saw one coming up, she switched off the telephone at the pole and went to the neighbours. She was also afraid of being robbed. She carried her money in a slip pocket and when she wanted money she had to lift her skirt to get it out.

Aganetha lived with various of her relatives in her old age, among them Neil and Esther Penner, who lived at Landmark, Manitoba, at the time. In her last years she lived at the Greenland Home in Greenland. She died at the St. Anne's Hospital on June 15, 1959, at the age of 94 years.

Descendants.

The farm where Gerhard R. Giesbrecht lived in Greenland NW3-8-6E was acquired by son Cornelius E. Giesbrecht in 1925 the "Greenland chicken king" and is presently owned by grandson John R. Giesbrecht.

Other descendants live at Whitewater, Landmark and Manitoba, Texas, Kansas, and other places more. Harold Giesbrecht of Whitewater, Dr. Wilbert Giesbrecht of Abbotsford, B. C., and Aron G. Penner, Landmark, are her grandsons.
**The Bergthaler Kählers/Kehlers**

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

**Introduction.**

In reviewing the family histories of Mennonite families of the Prussian and Russian period, one is often struck by various pairs of surnames which superficially appear very similar, but which are totally different in terms of origin, history and even cultural background.

One such pair of names is the pair Friesen/Fröse and another the pair Kähler/Kädtrler. In these pairs, there is often only a slight difference in pronunciation, and in writing these names, they are often confused. Yet otherwise, these names could not be more different. In the Friesen/Fröse combination, we can say the following: the Friesens were of Flemish church affiliation, the Fröses of Frisian church affiliation, in general. The name Friesen originates in Overijssel from the town of Ryssen; the name Fröse means a person from Friesland.

Likewise, the Kählers and Kädtrlers have nothing in common. The Kädtrlers were almost exclusively of Frisian church affiliation; the Kählers were all Flemish. But this is not surprising since there seems to have only been perhaps one family of this name in the West Prussian Mennonite community in the mid 1700s.

A look at the allowable variation in the writing of these names is instructive in speculation regarding the origins of these surnames. For Kädtler we have Kessler, Kähler and Kettler. For Kähler we have Kehler (the common Canadian writing), Köhler, Keller, Keeler, and Coeler. Except for spelling mistakes, Käädter and Kählers are as different as Schapansky and Plett, although interestingly enough, we have a record of a Kähler marrying a Käädter. Many writers, including B. H. Unruh do not appear to distinguish between the two names.

**Michael Kähler (b. 1732).**

This article will deal with some of the descendants of Michael and Philipp Kähler who are the ancestors of most Mennonite Kählers living in Canada and elsewhere. Michael Kähler was born in 1732 and lived at Klein Mausdörferwede at the time of the 1776 West Prussian Mennonite census. He is listed with two daughters, one of whom was Helena (b. 1768). Her first marriage in 1788 was to Isaac Penner (b.1766). They immigrated to Russia with the rest of the Kähler family and settled at Einlage, Old Colony. Her second marriage was to Abraham Hiebert, who is apparently the same Abraham Hieber (b. 1782) who later (second marriage) married the Gertruda Kähler mentioned below. Another daughter, Maria, was born in 1778 after the census.

Michael Kähler came to Russia in 1788, and likely first settled at Einlage. He gave his Einlage Wirtschaft to Kornelius Janzen, when he married the widow of Peter Penner of Chortitza after the death of his previous wife. This widow was a young lady of 18 and had probably not been married for long. After the death of Michael Kähler, she married Martin Schmidt.

**Gerhard Kähler (b. 1761).**

Michael Kähler also had a son Gerhard (b. 1761) who came to Russia with his father. He is not listed in the 1776 census, but it can be assumed he was perhaps already apprenticed out, or working for another family (possibly relatives). Gerhard Kähler is listed at Chortitza in 1795, Neuenburg in 1802 and Nieder-Chortitza in 1803.

He married Anna (b. 1768) (maiden name currently unknown) and had, it seems, the following children: Anna (b. 1801) who married Kornelius Friesen (1796-1885), Gerhard (1808-77) who moved to the Berghthal Colony, and a Michael, of whom we know very little.

**Gerhard Kähler (1808-77).**

Gerhard Kähler (1808-77) married Agatha Harder (1814-1874) in 1835, BGB A50. Their children all came to Canada with the Berghthalers where 5 of their children settled in the village of Berghthal, northwest of Steinbach. The family is listed as follows:

1. **Peter Kehler** (1836-76) married Aganetha Gröning in 1866; 2nd marriage to Margaretha Krahn, BGB B147. [He settled in Blumengard, Man., 1874, where he died; see Randy Kehler, “Peter Kehler (1836-76), Blumengard,” *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part Two, pages 30-31.] In 1880 Margaretha Krahn Kehler married Abraham Wiebe (1848-1910) who settled at Einlage, Man., where they are found in the 1881 census: see Linda Buhler, “Ebenfeld,” *Historical Sketches*, pages 113-4, and Peter D. Wiebe, “The Wiebes of Eigenfeld,” *Preservings*, No. 5, Jan 1995, pages 6-7. Margaretha’s Kehler children: Peter (b. 1871) and Bernhard (b. 1872) are listed with them in the census. Of the children of the first marriage, Gerhard (b. 1859) was living with his uncle Gerhard Kähler at Berghthal, E.R., in 1881 and Johann was living with his uncle Kornelius Gröning at Schönfeld in 1881.

2. **Gerhard Kehler** (1838-39);

3. **Agatha Kehler** (1840-86) married Peter Töews (1839-1914, BGB B220. The family settled in Berghthal, E.R. where they are listed in the 1881 census. [He served...}
as Reeve of the R. M. of Hanover for 15 years between 1883 and 1900; see sidebar story).

4. Gerhard Kehler (1842) married Maria Dyek and settled at Berghthal, Manitoba, where they are found in the 1881 census with daughter Aganetha (b. 1864) and Agatha (b. 1876), and nephew Gerhard.

5. Anna Kehler (b. 1844) married Johann Dirkens, BGB B46a. They are listed in the 1881 census in the village of Berghthal, E.R.;

6. Jacob Kehler (b.1846) married Katherina Penner, and then Aganetha Hildebrandt. They settled at Berghthal, Manitoba, as well, where they are found in the 1881 census;

7. Sara Kehler (b. 1848) married Peter Hamm, BGB B316. They settled in Berghthal, E.R. where they are found in the 1881 census;

8. Franz Kehler (b. 1852) married Helena Löppky. They settled at Blumengart with their family where they are found in the 1881 Manitoba census. Helena (nee Löppky) later married Gerhard Kehler, son of Peter Kehler mentioned above (her nephew-in-law).

9. Abraham Kehler (1855-1929) married Maria Klassen. He is also found at Blumengart, E.R., in the 1881 census.

**Philipp Kähler, Neustädterwald, W.Prussia.**

Philipp Kähler who lived at Neustädterwald at the time of the 1776 census was likely a brother of Michael Kähler. We have no dates for Philipp Kähler, except that he died before 1795. Listed in the 1776 census are his sons Philipp (b. 1770), Peter (b. 1772) and daughter Gertruda (b. 1774)--the Gertruda later married Abraham Hiebert, mentioned above. Later children include Michael (b. 1779) and Helena (b. 1782).

The census taker of 1776 spelt his name Coeler. Philipp Kähler’s wife died at Neustädterwald in 1781, and in 1781 he married Helena Braun. When the senior Philipp died, apparently at Rosenthal, South Russia, his son Michael inherited the Wirtschaft. This is somewhat mysterious since Michael seems to have been recorded only at Schönhorst and Einlage. Perhaps the senior Philipp Kähler was recorded in error under Rosenthal, where he should have been listed at Schönhorst.

Philipp Kähler (b. 1770) married Helena (b. 1747) the widow of Johann Neufeld. He is recorded at Einlage, Russia, in the various lists from 1795 to 1808. It is not known if he had any children of his own.

**Peter Kähler (b. 1772).**

Peter Kähler (b. 1772) married Sara (b. 1744), widow of Jacob Giesbrecht, and lived at Schönhorst, Russia. Likely he remarried. His second wife may have been Helena Löppky, daughter of Johann Löppky of Schönhorst. A biography of one of his sons, Gerhard L. Kehler (1825-1902) by Peter Peters is published in *Working Papers of the East Reserve.* Presumably more information is available in unpublished documents, so this conjecture would need verification against such sources.

I also believe that Jacob Kähler (b. 1812) and Johann Kähler (b. 1817) were sons of this Peter Kähler. The Pete Peters article in *Working Papers* indicates however that Gerhard was the only of his family to come to Canada, so again, what follows may need re-examination against other sources. Peter Kähler (b. 1772) had, in my view, the following children:

1. Philipp Kehler (no information currently available);
2. Jacob Kehler (b. 1812). He married Helena Klassen and moved to the Berghthal Colony, and later to Canada where he is found at Altona, Manitoba, in the 1881 census. His children include:
   a) Jacob Kehler (1842-66) married Eva Wiehler;
   b) Johann Kehler (b. 1844). He died before 1881 and his widow married Peter Hiebert of Berghthal, Manitoba. His children Jacob (b. 1866) and Johann (b. 1872) are found under Peter Hiebert’s name in the 1881 census;
   c) Martin Kehler (b. 1847) married Eva Wiehler, his brother’s widow. They are found at Neu-Berghthal in the 1881 census. Helena (b. 1864) and Maria (b. 1867) Kehler under this listing are children of Jacob Kehler.
   d) Helena Kehler (b. 1850) married Abraham Rempel;
   e) Peter Kehler (b. 1855) married Susanna Braun and later Agatha Hamm. He is found at Reinfeld in the 1881 Manitoba census.

3. Johann Kehler (b. 1817 or 1816) married Maria Schulz and moved to Berghthal. They moved to Manitoba and settled at Hochfeld where they are found in the 1881 census. [In the article “Hochfeld” by Irene Enns Kroeker, he is referred to as the “Alte Johann” who Homesteaded on SW30-7-6E, 4 miles west of Blumenort.] His children include:
   a) Johann Kehler (b. 1842) married Helena Wiebe, Sommerfeld, Manitoba 1881 census.
   b) Wilhelm Kehler (b. 1845) married Sara Penner. He died before 1881, his widow then married Franz Schröder, of Sommerfeld, Manitoba. His daughter Maria (b. 1869) is found under Franz Schröder’s name in the 1881 census.
   c) Jacob Kehler (1848-98) married Susanna L. Kehler, his cousin, daughter of Gerhard Kehler (1825-1902). He is also found at Hochfeld, Manitoba, in the 1881 census. [Jacob Kehler Homesteaded on NW30-7-6E, adjacent to his father. Their daughter Elisabeth married Jakob Goertz and continued the farm which is still in the possession of granddaughter Jacqueline Goertz: see Irene Kroeck, “Century Farm Awards,” Preservations, No. 4, July 1994, p. 4.]
Kehler served as Waisenvorsteher of the

Part One, pages 41-42. Son Gerhard U.

branches were published in the

Kehler was a wealthy farmer. His remem-

bride Helena Klassen, second mar-

Married to Helena Klassen, second mar-

married Johann Kehler’s name in the 1881 census. Aron’s son

married Sara Penner and is also found at Neu-Hoffnung, Man., in

the 1881 census under his own name, but

was living with his uncle in 1881;

b) Jacob Kehler (b.1833) married Hel-

ena Friesen, and later Maria Gerbrandt. When he came to Manitoba is not known and it may have been after 1881. His daughter Helena (b. 1869) married David Schulz;

c) Helena Kehler (b.1837) married Jacob Klassen;

d) Johann Kehler (b.1841) married

Katherine Penner, his brother’s widow as mentioned above. He lived at Neu-

Hoffnung, Manitoba, at the time of the

1881 census;

e) Abraham Kehler (b.1843) married Gertruda Funk. They are listed at Schönberg, Manitoba, in the 1881 census. Several of their descendants went to Paraguay in the 1920s

Conclusion.

There were still other Kählers/Kehlers who came to Manitoba and Canada at various times, who are likely connected with the families mentioned above. One such family is that of Isaac Kehler (1833-1900) who married Maria Fehr and is found at Hoffnungsfeld, Manitoba, in the 1881 cen-

sus. His parents are listed as Peter Kähler and Katherina (nee) Fehr. It is however difficult to determine to which of the

above mentioned families Isaac is most di-

rectly connected.

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Coming in next issue: Article by

Henry Schpansky on the various

Bergthaler/Chortitzer Friesen fami-

lies.
Peter Toews (1839-1914): Reeve of Hanover

Reeve Peter Toews (1839-1914).

Reeve Peter Toews of Bergthal (BGB B220) served as the Reeve of the Rural Municipality of Hanover for 15 years between 1883 and 1900. He was the second Reeve following Gerhard Kliewer whose term ended in 1883. Peter Toews was the second longest serving Reeve of the Municipality and his record was only surpassed by John Harms during the 1960s and 70s. Historian Lydia Penner has written that “the Councillors obviously trusted Reeve Toews, for they assigned many responsible tasks to him.”

Peter Toews was married for the first time of Aganetha Kehler who died in 1886. Peter married for the second time to Sarah Funk born May 23, 1836, who is listed as his wife in the 1891 census. The Peter Toews family always lived in Bergthal where he passed away in 1914.

Peter K. Toews (1865-1936).

Son Peter K. Toews (1865-1936) married Anna Sawatzky (1867-1947?) and also lived in Bergthal, E. Reserve. His house and barn was hit by lighting and destroyed by fire. Unfortunately the family records and photographs were also lost. Peter had a brother Jakob K. Toews (b. 1868) who was a cripple and got around in a wheel chair. Jakob served as a school teacher all his life.

Peter K. Toews’ son Peter T. Toews (b. 1887) served as a Waisenman of the Chortitzer Church together with Jakob Enns of Blumenberg. Peter T. Toews was a literate man who kept various records. Another son Gerhard was the father of Peter P. Toews who served as a Councillor of the R. M. of Hanover during the 1970s.

Information courtesy of Dora Toews, Apt 215, Box 3070, Steinbach, R0A 2A0.

Georg Hansensch, Danzig.

One of the venerable writers of the Mennonite faith was Georg Hansen who served as Bishop of the Mennonite Gemeinde in Danzig, West Prussia, from 1690 until his death in 1703. His best known writings were Ein Glaubens-Bericht vor die Jugend (A Confession of Faith for the Youth”) published in 1671 and Ein Fundamentbuch der Christliche Lehre (A Foundation Book of Christian Teaching”) published in Dutch in Amsterdam in 1696.

The teachings of the Georg Hansen were accepted as normative and frequently quoted in sermons by the ministers of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) as well as in the writings of lay people. Although the KG were the leaders in publication of Mennonite devotional books in Russia, publishing 6 different works between 1827 and 1875, they apparently continued to rely on older Dutch editions of Georg Hansen’s writings.

It was not until the 1890s that German translations of these popular devotional books were published: Ein Glaubens-Bericht in 1892, and Ein Fundamentbuch a year later.

Isaac Peters.

Although the books were printed by the Mennonite Publishing Co., Elkhart, Indiana, Isaac Peters (1826-1911) of Fürstenau, Molotschna, and later Henderson, Nebraska, has generally been credited as the publisher. Although Peters was a staunch promoter of orthodox Mennonite teachings, the church he founded later became the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren or Bruderthalger Gemeinde, largely founded on the precepts of Separatist Pietism and American Revivalism and anathema to the teachings of Hansen.

Nevertheless Peters shared many of the teachings of the KG and corresponded with their leaders prior to the 1874 emigration from Russia and also later in North America.

However, in 1878 Peters and his followers cleverly took advantage of some issues in the KG community at Jansen, Nebraska, to induce 38 believers to leave their ancestral church. Ironically Peters was completely unsuccessful in similar efforts to disrupt the KG community in Manitoba, whereas the situation was reversed with John Holdeman in 1881/2.

Peter R. Reimer, Blumenort.

A recent discovery among the papers of my great-grandfather Rev. Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915) of Blumenort, provides new insight into the publication of the 2 works of Georg Hansen in 1892 and 1893. Two pages of notes in Peter R. Reimer’s “Journal” establish that the Manitoba KG purchased a number of copies of the books and sold them to its members.

Peter R. Reimer was in charge of the distribution effort in Blumenort and maintained a list of some of the purchasers in his journal, the price of each copy being 30 cents.

“George Hansen Bucher”

“Abraham Friesen, 1.30 paid .30; Gerhard Kornelsen, Steinbach 30; Klaas Reimer, brother, Steinbach 1.50; Grunfeld A. Dück, brought 2 copies December. 10 and also took one of ours; Kornelius Loewen .30; Rosenfeld, Senior (Alte) G. Schellenberg; Blumenort Korn. Friesen.”

“One 16 Jakob Dück, Grunfeld, took 1 copy and paid .30; dito Peter Unger; dito Peter Dück; dito Jakob Wiebe; dito Johann Reimer, Blum.; widow Abr. Reimer 2.60; Alte Abraham Penner .30; Ohm Peter Baerg; Franz Kroeker; Kornelius Fast; Jakob Bartel and I for Johann Esau; Peter Loewen; Alte Kornelius Plett; Johann Reimer, Steinbach; Johann Janzen, Blumenhof; Peter Reimer, Blumenort.”

Conclusion.

The East Reserve KG (and possibly also the communities in Rosenort and Nebraska) were actively involved in the publication of the Georg Hansen works. They underwrote a portion of the printing costs by pre-purchasing a block of books and as such deserved to be credited as a co-publisher.

Evidently KG-ers had short memories when it involved the advancement of what they regarded as the seminal teachings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. In pursuit of these greater truths the KG (at least the E. Reserve Gemeinde) were evidently willing to overlook the treachery of Isaac Peters in his efforts to subvert and destroy the Gemeinde in Jansen, Nebraska, during the 1870s.

Sources:


Dr. Robert Friedmann, Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries (Goshen, Indiana, 1949), 287 pages.

Preservings Part One

Steinbach Main Street 1930: Part Three
by Ernie P. Toews, Box 75, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, continued from “Steinbach Main Street: Part Two,” in Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 56-66.

Introduction.
For about 50 years after the settlement of Steinbach in 1874 the area of Main Street south of the flour mill experienced very little commercial activity. The area referred to is presently bounded on the northwest by Barkman Avenue and on the southeast by Kroeker Avenue, which streets were not actually constructed until the 1930s, except for Barkman Avenue West which was constructed prior to 1920. These streets were named for the families who had owned the land where they were laid out and who continued as major local dynasties dominating their respective areas for a century or more.

The readers will notice a kink in Main Street just south of Kroeker Avenue, this being where the 20 Feuerstatten ended and where the road was realigned in a slightly more southeasterly direction in order to connect to the southeast corner of Section 35-6-6E. From here the road continued along the road allowance between Sections 36 and 25-6-6E on to La Broquerie and points south, such as Pine Hill, where the Steinbach lumbermen cut their timber.

Certainly, the southern and more agrarian part of Main Street must have been a beautiful and picturesque sight during the summer months, with cattle lowing and horses nickering in the neatly fenced paddocks in the back of each establishment. Rows of trees bordered the streets, and the front yards were beaming with flowers and fruit trees. Note the sidewalk, fence and telephone line along the east side of the street.

This stretch of Main Street was dominated by the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) Plett, Kroeker and Dueck families until well into the 20th century.

Circa 1925. Beautiful panoramic shot of Steinbach Main Street, taken from just north of the driveway to the flour mill (as it then was) circa 1925. To the left is the Vöglt Brothers store, originally started by Andrew S. Blatz in 1915. To the right is the KG worship house built in 1911. The access for Barkman Avenue is visible just behind the car parked on the right hand side of the road.

Another street level view of the Barkman to Kroeker block of Main Street taken several years later. The scene is October 7, 1933, the funeral of Abram T. Kroeker, grandson of Steinbach pioneer Franz M. Kroeker. To the right is the KG worship house and behind it, to the left, is the farm yard of Peter G. Toews. This was originally the farm yard started by Peter R. Dueck, before they moved to the “Brundt” Reimer farm on Section 26-6-6E. To the left on the photo is the C. F. Toews shoe repair shop. This photograph was taken from the intersection of Barkman Avenue West and Main Street. Note that Barkman Avenue East was not built yet at this time.
Circa 1925. Another panoramic view of the south end of Main Street, this one, from the top of the flour mill. The trees are full of leaves which would indicate that this photograph was taken earlier in summer. One of the fascinating subjects of the photo are the buggies and other horse drawn contrivances--some 40 of them--neatly lined along the rear of the church lot. An equal number of cars are parked along Main Street, demonstrating some form of peaceful co-existence between the owners of the horse drawn and motor driven vehicles. Immediately to the south of the church is the yard of Peter R. Dueck from 1888 until 1911. The sizable barn originally built by Peter R. Dueck, gives a good indication of the burgeoning success of his farming operations. Later the property was acquired by Peter G. Toews. Behind the barn, somewhat further to the right on Lot 20, is a steam-engine shelter/large hay-shed belonging to Cornelius P. Kroeker: Gerhard G. Kornelsen, Pioneers, page 259. Brother-in-law Johann R. Dueck lived east across the road from the worship house on Lot 18. Note Barkman Avenue in the foreground.

Circa 1930. Scene similar to photo four, some 5 years later. The Krueger house and blacksmith shop have now been built on the corner of Main and Barkman Avenue West, the cars parked on Main Street are now Model A type vehicles, but the horse park behind the church is still full, showing the ravages of the depression even in Steinbach. Note the driveways for the four original Wirtschaften or farmsteads which are visible on the left side of the photo.

A unique panoramic view from the top of the flour mill to the east, across Main Street. The man in the picture is H. P. Fast, pastor of the E.M.B. church. The Vogt Brothers store is visible just to the left of the man, and to his right is the house of Henry Coate (who came to the E. Reserve as an orphan when he was adopted by a Chortitzer family), and behind that is the barn of Jakob D. Barkman. Behind these buildings one can see how neatly the back yard and paddock of each of the Main Street premises was fenced. These were the original Feuerstatten. At the east end of the Feuerstatten are a few homes, evidently the first beginnings of Hanover Street.
Lot 17, East Side of Main Street.

The original settlers on Lot 17 (the first lot south of Barkman Avenue) were Johann S. Friesens. Mrs. Friesen, nee Anna T. Barkman, was the daughter of Peter K. Barkman, the windmill builder and part owner of the steam powered flour mill. See *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part Two, pages 41-6. Over the years all six of Johann S. Friesen’s siblings lived in Steinbach, but at the north end: e.g. Dietrich, pioneer teacher; Katharina S. Friesen, wife of Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht, long-time Holdeman pastor; Margaretha S. Friesen, wife of Johann G. Barkman, Steinbach’s longest serving mayor, and Jacob S. Friesen who settled on Lot 7.

But as was often the case, the Johann S. Friesen family had chosen to live close to her parents. Johann S. Friesen entered into partnership with his father-in-law Peter K. Barkman and Klaas R. Reimer in the Flour Milling Co. This partnership lasted only a short time. In 1883 Johann Friesens sold their Steinbach property, Lot 17, to the widow Mrs. Isaac L. Plett, nee Maria R. Brandt. At this time the Friesens moved to Hochstadt. Johann S. Friesen later raised donkeys and came to be known as “Eaasel” Friesen.

In 1877 Maria Plett purchased an Anwohner property in Steinbach, namely, a dwelling house on a lot without a farm. On May 20, 1880, she filed for a Homestead on SE2-6-6E in the Friedensfeld area. Very likely she moved into Steinbach to reside close to her late husband’s family. The wife of Franz M. Kroeker, the farmer who eventually owned all the land on Main Street south of Lot 17, i.e. 18, 19 and 20, was a sister of her deceased husband, and her brother Heinrich R. Brandt also resided in Steinbach, albeit at the other end of Main Street.

Maria Plett, with her only son Isaac B. Plett, lived together on Lot 17. In 1886 son Isaac married Elisabeth Dueck, daughter of Abr. L. Dueck of Gruenfeld, Aeltester of the E. Reserve KG. The young couple continued to live with her in the same household for a number of years. The mechanical genius of young Isaac soon came to the fore. Shortly after his marriage he set up a shop on the west side of Main Street directly across from his mother’s house, and began selling gasoline powered engines and farm machinery. This is considered to be the first farm machinery dealership in Steinbach.

After his death in 1933 and the death of his widowed mother six years prior, the property became the home of the sons, Isaac D. and Abram D. Plett. Both of the Plett sons were gifted with the inventive genius of their father. Abram moved to Rosenort, Manitoba and became the founder of the present Westfield Industries.

Isaac continued to live in the old premises of his grandmother and became one of Steinbach’s noted inventors. In his shop in the old shingle-clad building, he built a number of machines for the beekeeping supply industry in Steinbach. He also built an electric battery-powered bicycle with which he flitted around town in a silent ghost-like manner. Isaac D. Plett never married and after his death the old building was demolished to make way for the present M.C.C. Thrift Store.
“Baker” Toews, 1930.

Along the northerly side of Lot 17, a shoe repair shop and bakery was erected sometime around 1930. The operator of these businesses was Cornelius F. Toews, son of Johann F. Toews who had lived on SW26-6-6E in 1888 and operated a flour mill along Friesen Avenue sometime thereafter: see “Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908),” in Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, page 48. The Toews family had moved back to Steinbach from Stuartburn and soon become known both as “Schusta” Toews and “Backa” Toews.

The Toewses had a family of 8 sons and 2 daughters. The boys were all accomplished hockey players with the Steinbach Huskies in their day. Norman “Chuck” Toews became the owner of the bakery and later the “Grocer” convenience stores. The older of the daughters, Lydia, is married to Wm. Giesbrecht and is still a resident of Steinbach.

Lot 17, West Side.

As already mentioned, Isaac B. Plett started the first machinery dealership in Steinbach on Lot 17, the west side of Main Street, in 1886. He immediately put up signage which advertised the superior quality of his products which raised the ire of church leaders. The fact that he was married to the Bishop’s daughter probably made matters worse as the Aeltester could not be seen to be slack with his own children. As a result Isaac B. Plett was separated from the Church.

The inventiveness of Isaac B. Plett resulted in various mechanical improvements to the farm machinery that were not available at that time. He also built a helicopter but was not successful in getting it to fly, mainly because the engines of that time were too heavy and not powerful enough to handle his flying machine. Isaac was also into custom harvesting in summer and during the winter he was cutting and planing lumber in the forests east of Steinbach.

A noteworthy event in the life of Isaac B. Plett was his interest in the Yukon Gold Rush of 1899-1900. He attempted to make his way to the Yukon Territory but apparently never reached that destination: see biography of Mrs. Isaac L. Plett, nee Maria R. Brandt, following.

Krueger Blacksmith shop.

On Lot 17 on the west side of Main Street, a house was built by the Kreuger family in about 1930. John Kreuger also built and operated a small machine shop here from about 1930 till about 1955.

His sisters were dressmakers and seamstresses by trade and operated a sewing school out of their home for many years. At present the widely-known “M & J Restaurant” is located on this site at the corner of Barkman Avenue West and Main Street.

continued on next page
The next property to the south, Lot 18, was first settled by Heinrich and Charlotte Fast.

"Heinrich Fast Sr. arrived at this wooded site on September 25, 1874, with their meagre belongings. [Included among these possessions was a beautiful ‘kjest’ or trunk, which may well have been made in Prussia in the 18th century: see article by Henry N. Fast in Part Two of this newsletter.] As evening was rapidly approaching, Uncle Fast, as his first priority, took his hand-held scythe in order to clear enough area so that the blankets which they had brought along could at least be laid out on the ground....Heinrich L. Fast Jr, who was 9 years old at the time, recalled that a light frost was glistening on their blankets when they woke-up the next morning."

"The next priority was to build some form of shelter and to bring together some hay for the draught oxen. The hay, which was somewhat frozen by then, was found in the village ‘ritch’ (creek). That first fall they built a semlin together with their neighbours to the south [Franz M. Kroeker], so that each of them could live on their own yard.

"The winter was very hard for the settlers who were used to a more moderate climate in Russia. The team of oxen did not survive the winter because of lack of nourishment, Uncle Fast also recalled that the usually extremely shy wolves raced along the Main Street of Steinbach and acted as if the languishing cattle already belonged to them. Perhaps this also occurred because the new settlers were nonresistant Mennonites and did not own any weapons, and, certainly, the Gemeinde leadership earnestly admonished against it”-Klaas J. B. Reimer, Steinbach Post, June 8, 1965.

According to KG insurance records Heinrich Fast built a “Schofen” or shelter insured for $12.50, with $150 in inventory (equipment and cattle) and $150 in feed and supplies which was covered for insurance in 1875. In 1880 a new residence was built and insured for $200. On Dec. 25, 1882, coverage for the “Heinrich Fast dwelling house and barn for $200” was entered in the name of Franz Kroeker, and on the same date coverage was cancelled in Fast’s account. This transaction reflected the fact that the Fasts had sold their Main Street property to Franz M. Kroeker, their neighbour immediately to the south, resident on Lot 19: see Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 37-39.

In 1882 the Fast family, however, moved out of the village onto NW26-6-6E acquired from the Hudson Bay Company, where the SRSS and the Southland Park Subdivision are located today. In Aug. 25, 1883, a building was again insured for Heinrich Fast in the amount of $500.

The Johann Klassen family may have lived in this property for a number of years as there is one report which indicates the Kroekers bought the property later from Klassen. Johann Klassen was the brother to the third wife of wealthy Steinbach merchant Klaas R. Reimer.

Eventually the Kroeker family acquired all the land on Section 35-6-6E southwest of Barkman Avenue to Mckenzie Avenue.

Johann R. Dueck.

The Franz Kroeker family consisted on one son, Cornelius and two daughters. After their marriages, the children built their homes on the parents’ property.

A photograph of the Johann R. Dueck residence and barn located directly across Main Street from the Kleine Gemeinde church. The housebarn was built in 1887. The structure was built in an “L” shape, with a summer kitchen between the residence and the barn. This was somewhat unique, but fairly common among the Molotschina settlers of the East Reserve. The property was acquired in 1928 by Mrs. Susanna Siemens Neufeld who resided here for a number of years and who took this photo on December 8, 1935.
moved to a farm 2 miles north of Steinbach NE 10-7-6E, just north of where Clearsprings Shopping Centre is located.

Margaretha and Johann R. Dueck were the grandparents of Sid Reimer of Landmark Motors, and the great-grandparents of Reg and Garry Reimer of Reimer Farm Supplies. The former Johann R. Dueck premises. Steinbach.

In 1916 Gerhard F. Friesen was living in the former Johann R. Dueck premises. Friesen was the grandson of Herman Loewen, the former owner of “Loewen Chev” in Steinbach.

During the 1920s various Russlander families made their home in this property and eventually it was sold to Mrs. Susanna Neufeld, who lived here for some time. Apparently the building had been subdivided by this time so that a number of families lived there. It may well have been Steinbach’s first apartment block: see story in Part Two of this newsletter.

Lot 18 served as the home of various people until John Engbrecht built his Case farm machinery dealership on this site (1940). This building serves as the bus depot today and is located directly across the street from the E.M.C. Church.

Lot 18, West Side.

In 1910 the Kleine Gemeinde decided to build a new church building.

Klaas J. B. Reimer has written the story of how the Kleine Gemeinde came to the decision to build on this location:

“As far as I can remember, a large machine shed stood here on the north side for the sheltering of the equipment of the “Kroeker and Dueck” threshing outfit.”

“When the Kleine Gemeinde was considering the construction of a new church in 1910-1911, there were various different locations which came under consideration. One site which was very favourably considered was on the west side of Feuerstelle No. 10, close to the old village cemetery. This site belonged to my parents Johann R. Reimer, and was available for a very reasonable sum. Another possible place, was the one, at that time thickly covered with popular trees, where the slaughter house of Friendly Family Farms, stands today [1965].”

“But when the final decision was made to build on the present site on Lot 18, my uncle Abram S. Friesen, who had already been elected by a majority of votes to be the construction supervisor [Bauherr], withdrew completely from the entire building project. The other building supervisor, my uncle Abram Penner of Blumenort, then had to carry the burdens of this undertaking by himself. The master carpenter was Michael Wiesz of the Lutheran Confession. The building was 72’x36’ and the floor joyce of 36 feet went the full length. When a full basement was put under the entire building in 1942, many of these had to be replaced as the end had been damaged by the moist air”: Klaas J. B. Reimer, Steinbach Post, June 15, 1965.

The new worship house was built in 1911 on the west side of Main Street immediately to the north of the Peter R. Dueck buildings. This was part of the land which Franz M. Kroeker had purchased from either Heinrich Fast. Evidently Kroeker donated the land for the church site.

At a brotherhood meeting Feb. 5, 1911, “It was decided to construct a new church here in Steinbach 72 by 36 feet, and two Sundays were allowed for everyone to hand in a pledge, as to how much they would contribute: Peter R. Dueck—“Journal”. Feb 19: “It turned out that over $2,200 was pledged and this was considered enough to start construction”—Peter R. Dueck, “Journal”. Sunday, Nov. 12, 1911, “First worship service was held in the Steinbach church. Rev. Cornelius [L.] Plett presented the Thanks-giving sermon together with a small exposition regarding the Brethren Church.”

“In the beginning there were four entrance doors to the church. In 1931 the Kanzel (raised podium and pulpit) which for so long had taken up the entire long side of the church, was relocated to the south side. ...around this time electricity was put into the building”: Klaas J. B. Reimer, Steinbach Post, June 15, 1965.

The present Evangelical Mennonite Conference head office building is on the site of the old church which was destroyed by fire in 1960. The legacy left by Peter R. Dueck is the large and growing Kleine Gemeinde, presently, Evangelical Mennonite Church, and one of the largest church buildings in Steinbach.

This section of Main Street, formerly the site of the Kroeker and Duecks homes and farms, is today dominated by the Evangelical Mennonite Church and Conference head office. It seems fitting that the church which

continued on next page
Preservings Part One

articulated the emigration of the settlers and the founding of the Town in 1874, is still such a dominant feature on Main Street a century-and-a-quarter after its beginnings.

**Lot 19, East Side.**

Franz M. Kroeker (1927-1905), the original settler on Lots 19 and 20, was the son of Franz Kroeker (1799-1853) of Margenau, Molotschna, South Russia. Franz M. Kroeker was a progressive farmer, who had owned a Wirtschaft in Kleefeld, Mol. Also living in Kleefeld was Klaas R. Reimer, operating a small blacksmith shop and struggling financially at the time. Sometime during the 1860s Franz M. Kroeker moved to Steinbach, Borosenko, Russia. Klaas R. Reimer, who had moved to the KG settlement of Markusland in the meantime, also relocated to Steinbach, Borosenko, in 1869.

In 1874 Franz M. Kroeker and Klaas R. Reimer immigrated to Manitoba where they were the only two settlers in Steinbach with sufficient means to acquire double village farms. This meant that they each had two quarters of land and were also entitled to two 10 acre Feuerstatten on Main Street.

In 1876 the Kroekers built themselves a fine new housebarn combination in the style they were accustomed to in Russia. This building was insured with the KG insurance system for $400 on Dec 1, 1877, increased to $500 in 1879, and to $700 in 1884. This structure had a long and distinguished history. The KG worship services were held in the Kroeker home from 1875 until 1882. It was here in 1881 that Johannes Holdeman and Mark Seiler preached swaying many to join him, but not all. The Plett and Kroeker clans became stridently opposed to such a union. The Steinbach Pri-
vate School was initiated on this yard in 1911 and operated here for two years. The meetings and deliberations leading up to the establishment of the KG private school in Steinbach in 1911 are documented in some detail in Peter R. Dueck’s journals.

Franz M. Kroeker died in 1905. Mrs. Franz M. Kroeker, nee Margaretha L. Plett, continued to live in the premises until 1911 when she moved to her own small house on the yard of her children Peter R. Duecks. The property was acquired by son Cornelius P. Kroeker who used it as a “Gejmeinte Hus”, an extra dwelling house which wealthy KG farmers kept available for poor people, refugees, visitors, etc. In 1916 the property was home to the Cornelius Fast family and became the first health care facility in Steinbach, as Fast was paid by the church to look after Mrs. Peter B. Friesen who was mentally ill.

In 1925 Klaas J. B. Reimer reported that “…around 1918 grandsons Henry and Klaas T. Kroeker dismantled this building and tore it down”: Steinbach Post, June 22, 1965.

Lot 20, East Side.
In 1884 son Cornelius Plett Kroeker married Katharina Reimer Toews; see biography in Part Two of this newsletter. The young couple built their first house on Lot 20 on the south side of his parent’s house in 1887 and a larger more modern house in 1908. It was a large square 2-storey house of the style that was very popular at that time: see Preservings, Dec 1996, No. 9, Part Two, pages 65-66. The Texaco bulk station was later located on this site.

Cornelius P. Kroeker was the largest farmer in the Steinbach area seeding up to 500 acres of land. In 1896 he also went unto partnership with “Brandt” Reimer, operating a steam-engine and threshing outfit. In 1910 he together with his cousin, Peter B. Kroeker, bought a huge Rumely steam engine. He was a very progressive farmer and by 1922 it had already been replaced with a Titan.

Loc 19, West Side.
In 1888 Sarah P. Kroeker, second daughter of Franz M. Kroeker, married Peter R. Dueck (1862-1919), brother of Johann. The Peter R. Duecks built their home and farm on the west side of Main Street on Lot 19. According to KG insurance records, a new residence and barn were constructed in 1892 and insured for $300 on Feb. 23, with another $30 added on April 25.

Peter R. Dueck became the Aeltester of the KG in 1901 just after the turn of the century and served his congregation of 400 members faithfully until his untimely death in 1919: see Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 29-30; see article on Sarah Kroeker Dueck (1871-1951), following. Rev. Jac P. Dueck, the son of Peter R. Dueck served this congregation as pastor for many years.

During the 1910-1912 dissolution of the Steinbach village system, many of the farmers living in the village moved onto their land holdings outside of town. Peter R. Duecks were among these and so the move to their farm a mile south resulted in a change of residents in the building on Lot 19. Cornelius T. Kroeker, the son of Corn. P. Kroeker, lived on the site for a short time until it was sold to Peter G. Toews who moved into town from the Greenland area north of town.

Peter G. Toews (1882-1972) was a nephew to Peter W. “Schmedti” Toews, Steinbach’s pioneer blacksmith. Peter G. Toews’ wife, Katharina Reimer Toews, was a daughter to Peter B. “Grote” Toews, father of “Central” Toews.

Peter G. Toews farmed and was soon involved with a new business enterprise, Steinbach Hatchery and in the 1930s with the Steinbach Corn Dryer. Several of the Toews’ daughters still live in Steinbach: Mrs. Elma (Waldon) Barkman and Amanda, the widowed Mrs. Peter F. Barkman.

Lot 20, West Side.
Today the “Steinbach Dental Clinic” sits at the corner of Main Street and Kroeker Avenue on the site of C.P. Kroeker’s steam-engine shelter.


Jakob D. Barkman was a gifted and able steam-boiler stationary engineer and was commonly known as “Engineer” Barkman. The sign on his shop shows an anvil on it reflecting his abilities in that field. He also ran the electric light plant at the flour mill and was a capable electrician. He also was a capable blacksmith and saw sharpener.

The photo showing pastor H. P. Fast on the roof of the flour mill speaks for his support and association with the E. M. B. church which he joined in 1911. Some time during his retirement Mr. Barkman was honoured as “Mr. Sunday School” in the E. M. B. church in honour and recognition of his many years as a S.S. teacher. I remember him as the teacher of the senior mens’ class in the E.M.B. church during the 1950s.

In addition to his many duties he was also the father to 14 children, who all grew to adulthood, and he still found time for his photography in which he was quite talented.

The pictures for this section are taken exclusively from the photograph collections of Jakob D. Barkman (1886-1971). Jakob lived on Main Street, just across from the flour mill where he worked and so it was perhaps natural that he would photograph this area, being that he lived there and it was his daily life environment.

Jakob’s series of five photos of Steinbach Main Street south of the mill--two from street level and three from on top of the mill--are stunning and form a beautiful opening paragraph for this “photo essay”. His two famous panoramic photographs of Steinbach from on top of the mill to the north and northwest of the mill have already been published in several venues.

The residents of Steinbach owe a great debt to Jakob D. Barkman for his insightful photography work which has provided wonderful material for articles such as this: see Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, page 18, for a tribute to Mr. Barkman and his work. Jakob D. Barkman would have surely had much in common with his great-uncle, Peter K. Barkman, founder of the Steinbach flour mill, whose granddaughter he married.

The Cornelius Kroekers raise a family of twelve children, seven boys and five girls. All of them were well known in the community: son Klaas T. Kroeker became a field man for Manitoba Sugar; Corn. T. was the Texaco dealer and Heinrich T. farmed at the south end of town; John T. became a farmer in Landmark; Abraham T. was a mechanic and died at the early age of 37; Peter T. and Frank T. were farmers in Landmark and also died at a young age. The last surviving member of the family today is Mrs. Sarah (John K.) Barkman and resides in Woodhaven Apartments in Steinbach. Sarah is the mother of Marlene Barkman, Mrs. Milton Penner.
Maria Brandt Plett 1843-1927

Family Background.

Maria Brandt was the daughter of Klaas S. Brandt (1815-57) and Maria Reimer (1814-51) of Tiegenhagen, Molotschna. Her grandparents on both sides were original Molotschna pioneers in 1804/5. Maria’s father was a supporter of Johann F. Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, the third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), who was married to his niece, Elisabeth B. Klassen.

Klaas S. Brandt was also a wealthy farmer. According to the “Theilings-Verordnung” at the time of his death in 1857, his widow was obligated to pay his 5 children 10,000 ruble banko, or 2857 2/7 silver ruble. Mennonite inheritance laws required that the spouse receive an equal amount, which means that Klaas had an estate of over 20,000 ruble banko, a substantial sum during a time when a normal Wirtschaft was selling for 1500 to 2000 ruble.

The Klaas S. Brandt family was one where the teachings of the faith were affirmed and nurtured. On December 29, 1856, Maria received a Catechism book from her parents entitled Catechismus oder kurze und einfaltige Unterweisung aus der Heiligen Schrift in Fragen und Antworten für die Kinder zum Gebrauch in den Schulen. The Klaas S. Brandt family was one where the teachings of the faith were affirmed and nurtured. On December 29, 1856, Maria received a Catechism book from her parents entitled Catechismus oder kurze und einfaltige Unterweisung aus der Heiligen Schrift in Fragen und Antworten für die Kinder zum Gebrauch in den Schulen (Odessa, 1851), 76 pages. Maria was 16 at the time and probably received the book as a gift from her parents as she prepared for baptism.

Maria Brandt’s mother was the daughter of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), a wealthy farmer in Muntau, Mol. Heinrich was interested in the seminal writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and supported the KG publishing efforts in this regard. When the KG published a beautiful leather-bound 530 page edition of Die Wandelnde Seele the Dutch writer Johann Schalbalie in 1860, Heinrich purchased a copy for each of his grandchildren including Maria, presumably in honor of her baptism.

What was particularly special was the 4 page memorial that he wrote in the book plates for his granddaughter. Maria R. Brandt was baptised in 1861 and became a member of the KG. She remained true to her solemn vows all her life.

Marriage, 1863.

In 1863 Maria Brandt married Isaac L. Plett, son of Cornelius S. Plett, one-time mayor of Kleefeld, Mol., and later Blumenhof, Borosenko: see “Road renaming” in Preservings, June 1996, No. 9, Part 2, pages 53-56.

Ohm Heinrich Reimer loved his children and grandchildren dearly and on Sept. 10, 1865, he (his wife had died in 1859) invited them all to a grand meal which he put on for them at the home of his daughter Elisabeth (Mrs. Peter Rempel) in Paulsheim, with the words of the poet No. 344, “Du, Meine Seele Singe.” According to the invitation, Maria and her husband where still farming with his father in Kleefeld at the time.

The young couple soon established their own Wirtschaft in Friedensfeld, a new KG settlement of 5400 acres purchased in 1866. Like his father, Isaac L. Plett was a successful farmer.

On October 28, 1870, Isaac wrote a letter to his brother Cornelius, at that time resident in Fischau, Molotschna, in which he referred to the dying of his neighbour’s wife, Mrs. Peter L. Dueck. He described how the Separatist Pietists in the village were using terror tactics to frighten Mrs. Dueck regarding her salvation, which Isaac described as Satanic in nature (Note Two).

Death of Isaac, 1871.

But Isaac was not to be long for this world as he himself would fall victim to the ravages of typhus. In a letter of July 21, 1871, Peter L. Dueck wrote a letter to Aeltester Peter P. Toews stating that Isaac L. Plett was on his death bed and wished that some of his brothers or cousins Peter P. Toews or Gerhard P. Goossen might come to comfort him. Isaac died on July 27, 1871 (Note Three).

It was the practice during these times for the church to appoint advisors for a widow in such circumstances, presumably to give counsel and make sure that no one took advantage of her. Maria’s trustees or “Goutmane” were Franz M. Kroeker, married to her husband’s sister, and her brother Heinrich R. Brandt.

Some time after Isaac’s death Maria relocated to Neu Anlage, Borosenko, where she continued farming. Abraham F. Reimer recorded Feb. 16, 1873, “Mrs. Plett had an auction sale. The Feuerstelle [homestead village farm] she has rented [out]. The cattle and house articles netted 1000 ruble.” Four days later, Klaas and Heinrich R. Brandt picked up their sister and her belongings and took her to Steinbach, Borosenko, where she lived with her sister-in-law and husband Franz M. Kroeker.

Emigration, 1874.

In 1874 Maria Brandt Plett immigrated to Canada with her late husband’s sisters Maria and Margaretha and their families. She must have been quite wealthy as she had sufficient means to lend the KG treasury $600.00. These funds were used by the deacons to assist needy families. Of this loan
for the first year.

However, life as a pioneer widow—albeit a wealthy one—was lonely. It appears that Maria had developed romantic interests in young Heinrich Wohlgemuth whom she would have met as one of the employees of her former father-in-law Cornelius S. Plett. There was a slight problem: according to oral tradition Heinrich had fallen in love with his employer’s daughter Katharina and had taken leave of his mother and siblings in Liverpool in order to meet her in Manitoba when they came the following year.

However, a letter written in Blumenort on Dec. 5, 1874, stated that “Heinrich Wohlgemuth has promised to marry the widow Plett on the 8th of January.” The Verlobung was confirmed in a letter by Blumenort deacon Heinrich Wiebe on Jan. 9, 1875. The wedding never took place. Perhaps Heinrich developed second thoughts?

Steinbach, 1877.

According to one source Maria lived in Gruenfeld, Manitoba, for a time, although some confusion exists in this regard as she is not listed in the KG insurance records in either Blumenort or Gruenfeld. Possibly she lived with other family members only purchasing her own property after her son Isaac was big enough to help in a farming opera-

In 1877 Maria purchased an Anwohner property in Steinbach which was entered in the Brandordnung for $100.00. On May 20, 1880, Maria filed for a Homestead on SE2-6-6E. Sometime later either she or her son also acquired the NW3-5-6E.

In 1883 she purchased Feuerstelle 17 in Steinbach, Manitoba, from Johann S. Friesen, also known later as “Aasel Friese”. The house on this Wirtschaft was entered in the Brandordnung on April 25, 1884, for $300.00 and a barn for an additional $100.00. By 1884 she owned 320 acres of land of which 35 acres was cultivated, buildings valued at $500.00 and furniture worth $100.00. They had 2 horses, 3 oxen, 3 cows, 4 yearlings and 2 pigs. They had a grass mower, a plow, 1 wagon, 1 rake and a sleigh.

Steinbach historian Gerhard G. Kornelsen has written that Mrs. Isaac L. Plett farmed together with her son and “with toil and thrift soon had a debt free home” (Note Four). In later years she farmed in a small way, probably mainly to supply her own needs. Klaas J. B. Reimer has written that he “could well remember that the plums in her front garden, near the street, tasted especially good.”

Son Isaac B. Plett.

In 1886 son Isaac B. Plett married Elisabeth Dueck, daughter of KG Aeltester Abraham L. Dueck of Gruenfeld, Manitoba. Journalist Abe Warkentin writes that “… Isaac B. Plett became the owner of the creamery in Kleefeld”: Reflections, 114. Shortly after his marriage Isaac B. Plett also started a machinery sales business in Steinbach on the west side of Main Street: K. J. B. Reimer, “Neunzig Jahre,” Steinbach Post, June 1, 1965. According to one source this was the first machinery sales agency in Steinbach. He posted large signs advertising his products. These marketing strategies...
This house was built by Johann S. Friesen on Lot 17 in 1880. In 1965 it was the oldest dwelling in Steinbach. The property was acquired by Mrs. Isaac L. Plett in 1883. The barn and hay shed originally attached to the house had already been torn away when this picture was taken. The building was demolished in 1989 to make way for a new MCC building. Photo courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, “Historical Sketches of Steinbach.

Isaac B. Plett American Able 28 horsepower steam engine and threshing outfit. Isaac B. Plett is standing beside the left rear wheel dressed in a white shirt and jacket. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Abram D. Plett and Plett Picture Book, page 148. Each area or district from 1880 to 1930 had several threshing outfits. In Steinbach they were: Kroeker and Dueck, Isaac B. Plett, J. R. Friesen and C. B. Loewen.

Isaac B. Plett American Able 28 horsepower steam engine and threshing outfit. Isaac B. Plett is standing beside the left rear wheel dressed in a white shirt and jacket. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Abram D. Plett and Plett Picture Book, page 148. Each area or district from 1880 to 1930 had several threshing outfits. In Steinbach they were: Kroeker and Dueck, Isaac B. Plett, J. R. Friesen and C. B. Loewen.

Gen Name     Birth       Marriage      Death

5 Isaac L. Plett  Mar 15,1844  Nov 1863   Jul 27,1871
m Maria Brandt  Sep 22,1843  Jun 27,1871  
6 Child Plett    Aug 14,1867  Sep 24,1924  
6 Child Plett    May 28,1867  Nov 21,1886  Aug 20,1933
6 Isaac B. Plett May 4,1869   Dec 13,1869  
6 Elisabeth Dueck
6 Cornelius B. Plett

For many years Isaac B. Plett was separated from his wife and lived away from home working with his well drilling business and various other ventures. For a while he lived in Giroux with his friend, Fred Acres, operating a sawmill in the forests to the east. Isaac enjoyed drinking and socializing with like-minded friends, a lifestyle unacceptable within Steinbach society at the time.

Isaac B. Plett was a renowned inventor. He perfected a working model for a threshing machine self-feeder long before they were on the open market. In 1917 he even started the construction of a helicopter on his yard in Steinbach. In his younger years Isaac had an adventurous life including a trip to the Chicago World Fair in 1892, taking part in the Yukon Gold rush, well drilling and many travels.

Descendants.
Isaac B. Plett’s son Abram D. Plett founded Westfield Industries in Rosenort, Manitoba, a large manufacturer of augers and other farm implements. The business is now owned and operated by his four sons: Frank, Benjamin, Stanley and Oliver (Note Six).
Son Isaac D. Plett was also a renowned inventor and eccentric living in Steinbach. He remained a bachelor all his life. Daughter Elisabeth D. Plett married Gerhard W. Brandt, son of Steinbach pioneer Heinrich R. Brandt, and they were the parents of David P. Brandt, Blumenort, who assisted with this article.

Notes:
Note Two: Isaac L. Plett, 1871, letter in Storm and Triumph, 221-223.
Note Three: The death of Isaac L. Plett is described by Johann W. Dueck, “Histo-erie und Begebenheiten . . .,” 97;
Note Four: Pioneers and Pilgrims, 43 and 63.
Note Six: See Farrows in the Valley: R. M. of Morris, pages 356, 405-406, for additional information regarding this successful enterprise and its founder Abram D. Plett.

Attention Readers:
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continued from previous page

Isaac B. Plett was involved in the lumber business for many years with a sawmill at Pinehill. He also operated a steam engine threshing outfit. In 1906 he purchased a new 28 horsepower American-Able steam engine from “Friesen & Reimer” in Steinbach for $4000.00: Klaas J. B. Reimer, “Neunzig Jahre,” Steinbach Post, 1965.

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This house was built by Johann S. Friesen on Lot 17 in 1880. In 1965 it was the oldest dwelling in Steinbach. The property was acquired by Mrs. Isaac L. Plett in 1883. The barn and hay shed originally attached to the house had already been torn away when this picture was taken. The building was demolished in 1989 to make way for a new MCC building. Photo courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, “Historical Sketches of Steinbach.
Background.

My grandmother Katharina Reimer Toews was born in Borosenko, Russia in the village of Steinbach, to Peter and Elizabeth (Reimer) Toews on July 13, 1866. Her pre-school years in Russia were quite pleasant, though not luxurious. Her father Peter Penner Toews was rather sickly and not a progressive farmer. He worked as a teamster, so the work fell on the 15 year-old Teen and her 10 year-old brother, Peter. She often cried in frustration when the old oxen were balky, and the plough was too hard for her to handle.

Katharina had a strong character and a natural sense of humour that helped her through some difficult times in her life. Through her parents’ admonitions, and the moving of the Holy Spirit, she accepted Christ as her Saviour at an early age. She was baptized by Aelt. Abraham L. Friesen, and became a member of the Kleine Gemeinde (later E.M.C.).

Marriage, 1884.

Cornelius Plett Kroeker, son of Vormund Franz M. Kroeker, must have liked what he saw in the pert, brave, young Katharina. A courtship followed and he married her on April 1, 1884.

After she married Cornelius, son of one of the most prosperous farmers in Steinbach, her financial worries were over. Two children, a son and a daughter, died in infancy, which must have caused the young couple much sorrow at the time. Their first daughter, Margaret (named after her paternal grandmother, no doubt), was born in 1885, followed by Cornelius in 1888, and then in two year intervals by Katharina, Frank, Peter, Abraham, Elizabeth, Anna, Heinrich, Klaas and John and three years latter by Sara, and the family was complete with seven sons and five daughters.

Grandma and Grandpa Kroeker had a great big house with all the conveniences of that time (Note Three). This house was built in 1887 at a cost of $600.00: see Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, page 65.

My mother used to say grandma had such a well-equipped, well-stocked kitchen that she surely could not wish for anything more. This probably came in handy, not only to feed her own large family, but also for entertaining the many visitors, salesmen, refugees etc., who always found a warm welcome at the large house at the south end of town. It was also conveniently situated close to the church, so it was very handy to drop in for dinner right after the church service. Taunti Sara remembers the big pots of Plum moos (or any other fruit season, even gooseberries), potatoes and meat that were cooked in advance, to be ready to serve family and guests. I can imagine the amount of baking, all done with a wood stove.

Katharina’s Mother.

In 1892 Katharina’s mother, widow Mrs. Peter Toews married Heinrich L. Friesen, a widower from Rosenort. Friesen had eight children of his own and his new wife became a mother to them. After Heinrich L. Friesen’s death in 1910 grandma’s mother moved back to Steinbach, and right into a little house they built on their yard. Now mother and daughter could resume a close relationship again. Mrs. Friesen died in the flu epidemic on December 3, 1918, at age 75, having lived in the Kroeker household for some time already: see biography by Ernie Toews, Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 12-15.

Children.

By 1918 daughter Margaret had married Isaak W. Reimer in 1903, Cornelius married Judith Wiebe in 1912, Frank married my Mom, Maria Reimer in 1915, and Peter married Louise Reimer in 1917.

In 1918 some of her children moved far away, or so it must have seemed to her at the time. Frank and Peter, as young marrieds, moved to Prairie Rose, followed by Elizabeth (married to Abraham, Elizabeth, Anna, Heinrich, Klaas and John and three years latter by Sara, and the family was complete with seven sons and five daughters.

Grandma and Grandpa Kroeker had a great big house with all the conveniences of that time (Note Three). This house was built in 1887 at a cost of $600.00: see Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, page 65.

My mother used to say grandma had such a well-equipped, well-stocked kitchen that she surely could not wish for anything more. This probably came in handy, not only to feed her own large family, but also for entertaining the many visitors, salesmen, refugees etc., who always found a warm welcome at the large house at the south end of town. It was also conveniently situated close to the church, so it was very handy to drop in for dinner right after the church service. Taunti Sara remembers the big pots of Plum moos (or any other fruit season, even gooseberries), potatoes and meat that were cooked in advance, to be ready to serve family and guests. I can imagine the amount of baking, all done with a wood stove.

Katharina Toews Kroeker (1866-1938); by granddaughter Katie Kroeker Barkman, Box 25, Landmark, Manitoba.

Katharina Toews Kroeker (1866-1938), circa 1935. Photo courtesy of Norman Kroeker/Plett Picture Book, page 35.

Maria L. Reimer (1895-1961), 1915. Maria married Franz T. Kroeker (1892-1928) in 1915. Maria is dressed in very typical Kleine Gemeinde Sunday apparel. She was the mother of Katie Barkman author of this article. Maria was the daughter of Peter R. Reimer (1870-1946) of Blumenort, who married the second time in 1919 to Helena Wiebe Fast Schellenberg Reimer (1875-1966), see article by Audrey Toews in Part One of this newsletter.

continued on next page
Cornelius A. Plett in 1920) and Anna (married to Peter H. W. Reimer in 1922). The Isaak W. Reimer moved later in 1929, but by that time cars had come on the scene, and visiting back and forth was much easier. John (married to Adeline Giesbrecht in 1934) took over the farm of his in-laws, the John F. Giesbrechts, and moved to Prairie Rose in 1945.

The others Cornelius, Taunti Teen, Abraham (married Eva Reimer in 1922) Heinrich (married Margaret Reimer in 1928), Klaas (married Eva Penner in 1928), and Sara (married to John Barkman in 1933), all made their homes in Steinbach.

No article about grandma Kroeker would be complete without mentioning Miss Margaret Fast (later Mrs. Peter F. Reimer), who was always ready to help out, whenever needed, and worked tirelessly right beside grandma.

Sarah T. Kroeker (born 1909), Mrs. John K. Barkman, and her friend, possibly Mrs. Klaus T. Kroeker, new Eva Penner. Sarah Kroeker Barkman is the mother of Marlene Barkman, Mrs. Milton Penner of Penner International.

Memories.
When I asked some of the grandchildren what they remembered about grandma, Alvin Kroeker Plett mentioned that she would always have shaubel candy (jelly beans) in her apron pocket when they came to visit. These were so much better than the hard, round peppermints most grandmas carried. Later in our teens we liked the schreft candy with the romantic verses.

What Art Kroeker remembered most vividly was Taunti Teen marching into the big garden with her hoe, threatening to get rid of all that quack grass. Soon the clods flew, and the hoe was bent, but I imagine that quack grass just snickering and it kept right on growing. I remember at our place it was the thistles she took a big butcher knife to. She had the right idea that if she cut off the roots low enough, it would take that much longer for them to come up again. Good old Taunti Teen! I really loved her, and appreciated her visiting us, even after we were married.

I remember our grandparents’ “Golden Wedding” in 1934, when I was asked to recite a poem. On getting through it without getting stuck I just scurried off, to join the other cousins, even though I felt a tug on my skirt. Later grandma asked why I had rushed away. She had wanted to give me a hug and kiss. I was sorry, then, as that would have been a rare treat. People at that time did not often show their love in such sentimental ways.

Minna Kroeker Plett remembers that she had to baby sit her younger siblings a lot when her parents went to visit their parents in Steinbach and one time grandma had sent along a piece of dress material for her, to show her appreciation. She also remembers grandma’s last Christmas when she told Minna she had not had the energy to buy gifts, but she could pick two cups of saviours from her glaus schup (china cabinet). She always looked forward to grandma coming to stay a few days when her younger siblings were born; at home of course.

Reisebericht, 1929.
Thanks to Dave Schellenberg and his love for old books and papers, and modern technology of duplication, I have a copy of a Reise Bericht, written by grandpa (Note Three). This trip must have been a big highlight as Taunti Sara mentioned it too. Grandpa writes “On June 19, 1929 I, with my wife, son John as driver, and daughters Tien and Sara left, by car, to go as far as Golden, B.C.” It was a visiting trip, but for heath reasons they also spent some time in Banff Hot Springs. Mentioning some of the people they visited may bring back memories for some of you, as you follow their trip.

They stayed at grandma’s sister, the Corn. Ratzlaffs, in Herbert a few days. They also visited Gottlieb Janhkies, Klaas Friesens, Peter X Friesens, Heinrich Giesbrechts, Peter S. Reimers in the Herbert area.

Between Herbert and Levine they paid a surprise visit to their grandson Cornelius, son of Isaac W. Reimers, who worked on the railway, building bridges. He was quite overwhelmed to get visitors from home. Here they also met H. H. Hieberts and Corn. Barkmans.

In the Lethbridge-Coaldale area they were amazed at the huge beet fields, and found the irrigation farming fascinating. Here they visited the David Lepps, who had stayed with them awhile when they first came to Canada. In Swalwell they visited the John R. Barkmans and spent the night at John Penners.

They knew about “Mennoniting Your Way”, long before it got popular and organized later. They also visited John Riegers, but mostly stayed at Peter (Schmidt) Toewses, who were going to travel with them the rest of the way.

July 8 they packed up their clothes and food and were off to Banff.

After some days of soaking in the Hot Springs and mountain climbing they left for Golden, their last destination.

Preservings Part One

On the Sunday morning when they started their trek back east, he writes grandma is cooking fresh cherry moas, and Mrs. Toews is making pancakes for the days’ meals. They probably ate quite well, even though he doesn’t once mention eating in a restaurant.

I found it quite interesting that they visited my future in-laws, John D. Barkmans in Saskatchewan, as well as the PPR. Toews and the Reimer families.

In Hepburn they visited grandpa’s cousins, the Jak and Gerhard Thielmanns. In Foam Lake they stayed at the Klaus R. Barkmans for night, and at Jacob Fasts for dinner next day.

They came home on July 30, thankful for a safe trip, having covered about 4,500 miles.

Thanks to Dave Schellenberg I also have a copy of grandma’s original obituary (Note Four), and a day by day record of the time she was sick and died, from the writings of Mr. Isaak W. Reimer.

According to the obituary she was sickly a good part of her life, something I had not been aware of. The last time she had gone out was to her sister-in-law’s, Mrs. Klaas R. Toews funeral in November 1937. After that her condition got worse and pneumonia set in. She died Sunday, January 16, 1938, at the age of 71 years, 6 months and 3 days. She went home to her rest, where there will be no more pain, sorrow or temptation.

Sources:
Note Three: Steinbach Post, No. 33 August, 1929.
Note Four: Christliche Familienfreund.

82

Henry T. Kroeker and Margaret H. W. Reimer wedding photo, 1928. This marriage represented the union of two of Steinbach’s wealthiest families: Margaret, daughter of Steinbach retailing magnate Heinrich W. Reimer, and Henry, son of Cornelius P. Kroeker, scion of Steinbach’s foremost farming dynasty. Henry and Margaret’s son Art Kroeker is a well-known life insurance broker in Winnipeg.
Sara Kroeker Dueck (1871-1951): Bishop’s Wife; by son Cornelius P. Dueck, Box 20644, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2T2.

Introduction.

In the year 1874, my grandparents, the Franz M. Kroekers (nee Margaretha L. Plett), came to Canada from Russia. They settled down at the southeast end of the village of Steinbach, on the south side of the “Ritch” (creek). They brought their three children: Margaretha who later married Johann R. Dueck; Cornelius, who later married Katherine R. Toews; and Sara, age 3.

At the age of 17, Sara married Peter R. Dueck, 26, on Dec. 9, 1888. They settled across the street from her parents and farmed there until 1911.


Grandmother.

In 1911 my parents sold their farmyard in the village of Steinbach and moved to a bigger farm a mile south, being the former “Brandt” Reimer farm, SE26-6-6E.

Here, to the north of our house, they built a house for my maternal grandmother, with an attached barn to keep a cow, a hog, and some chickens. They did not get pension in those days, and she must have been ambitious enough to raise some income for her living. She also had a garden to raise vegetables, lots of flowers of different kinds, and fruit trees. The house with a lean-to and barn were covered with cedar shingles.

In 1915, when I was 5, my grandma’s brother, Cornelius L. Plett, had an auction sale before moving to Kansas. I remember, when he came to visit Grandma, I ran ahead to notify his coming. I also knew that Grandma liked me, because she opened her big cedar chest (brought over from Russia) with a compartment where she kept handkerchiefs, candy and other small things.

We did not have a phone at that time, so they rigged up a wire from Grandma’s house to ours, where a small sheep’s bell rang when Dad died. Frank was the oldest son at home, and he was only 16. There were 2 older daughters and 5 younger children. So much rested on Mother’s shoulders.

Mother raised her children and managed the farm courageously, but with many heartaches and struggles. She was a hard worker, though she was small of stature. I ask myself “Who in our day would do what she did?” I thank our dear, loving, praying mother, who found her strength in God. Her aim was that her children would know the Word, and to stand up for our faith. Mrs. Peter R. Dueck, nee Sarah Platte Kroeker (1871-1951), remained a widow from 1919 until her death in 1951. During these years she raised a family of 10 children, managed the large family farm and prospered. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Dietrich L. Reimer/Pllett Picture Book, page 37.

Widowhood. 1919.

My grandmother died on December 9, 1920, about 11 months after my Dad. All this was hard on Mom. My mother was 39 when I was born, the 10th child. She gave birth to 2 more children, and so, since 2 had died in infancy, there were 10 children living. The 2 oldest were already married when Dad died. Frank was the oldest son at home, and he was only 16. There were 2 older daughters and 5 younger children. So much rested on Mother’s shoulder.

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Mother showed us how to work, keep things in order, and be hospitable. She always prepared food on Saturday to have enough for family and friends on Sunday. She always kept a big garden to raise enough vegetables for the whole year: a lot of potatoes, beets for eating and also the larger beets for the cattle, cabbage, corn, sunflowers, radishes, watermelons, cucumbers, “vruki” (turnips) and what have you. Closer to the house were all the different kinds of flowers, and even some peanuts and grapes. She canned fruit from our own garden, as well as wild fruit such as chokecherries, pincherries, cranberries, and strawberries. Some years there were also many hazelnuts.

Mother had made herself a “schaldauk” (apron), which she put to good use getting weeds from the garden to feed the calves and hogs, bringing vegetables in from the garden, and gathering dry sticks from the woods around the farmyard to make a fire in the cookstove. I remember once when she came across the yard with a “schaldauk” full of sticks, she looked so sober, I wondered if I had done something wrong, and she might use them on me. I was relieved, but I felt sorry for her, when I realized she was very tired.

Sometimes when Mom had given me orders what to do or not to do, I was very forgetful, and had to be punished so I would remember the next time. I needed that. Blessed are the mothers who train their children, even if it means chastising them for not listening, or disobeying their parents’ instructions. Mother was always on the go. In winter, she’d spin our own wool, then knit, sew, and patch clothing for the family. She read, made meals, and looked after her children, making sure all the chores were done properly, and lunches were ready for the schoolchildren.

Horses.

Mother was fond of horses. Her favourite was a driver, a medium-sized brown mare, which she bought as a 3-year old. (It died in its twenties of sleeping sickness, of which 3 other horses on our farm died that year. There was an epidemic that year, and many horses died.) Mother could depend on this mare, easy to handle and a good runner. In winter we used her with another grey horse hitched together before a top sleigh. In summer Mom used her before a top buggy.

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Sarah Dueck Kroeker with her grandson Milton Kornelsen in the Quellen Colony, Chihuahua, Mexico. 1951. Photo courtesy of Rev. and Mrs. Jacob P. Dueck/Pllett Picture Book, page 38.

continued on next page
when the horse (her name was Birdy) was in the pasture, we cried “Birdy!”, and she would come to the gate. We would take her into the barn, give her a little oats, put the harness on to hitch her to the buggy, and away they went.

Mom also had a 1927 Ford Touring car, which she bought in 1928. She did not learn to drive it, but we children did, so we could go to other villages, like Rosenort, to visit the Bernard R. Duecks and others. My sister Elisabeth went with Mom many times, by car and also by horse and buggy.

Planting.
When spring came, Mother planned the garden and prepared the seeds. The equipment to work the garden, such as a hoe, rakes, garden cultivator, and lawnmower, had to be ready.

Planting potatoes was usually done with the help of 2 horses hitched to a 16" hand plow. The potatoes, which were cut so that each piece had at least 1 eye, were placed in the upper part of the furrow, every second round. (At about this time of year, we started going barefoot. We had permission at 12 Reamer) Then, too, there were preparations for putting in the field crops. Seeds, such as oats, barley, wheat and sometimes buckwheat, were cleaned. The seed drill was checked, oiled, and possibly repaired. The cultivation and harrows were sharpened. The harness was repaired and oiled. After seeding, we gathered stones. When all was done, we looked to God for His blessing upon our labour.

In spring, too, when the hens had laid a number of eggs, some became “broody” and stopped laying. So, Mother gathered 12-15 good-sized eggs, made a nest in a confined place, and set a “broody” hen on it to hatch them. She usually set enough “clooik” to hatch 100-150 chicks-hens for laying and roosters for meat. She always kept some of the better laying hens over for the second year, and the rest were killed for meat. The older hens seemed to be better for noodle soup.

Then there was summertime to cultivate, hay to make for the cattle and horses and sheep to be sheared. The work went on and on.

One year there was a lot of breaking to be done on the northwest quarter of section 26, on 6-6 east. I think Dad must have had the brush mower. Then, Mom saw to it that it was broken up and cleared of stones. There were some large stones that had to be blasted. I still remember how some hired men did it. They chiselled a hole about 7-8 inches deep with the special chisel. This took a long time. When the hole was deep enough, they put dynamite powder in it, then a cord and a seat were added to the stand. Now one person could sharpen a knife by pedalling like a bicycle, (keeping the stone wet at all times) only needing a hand toward the end—especially for the binder knife, which was 7-8 ft long.

1924. Daughters of Sarah Kroeker Dueck: Katherine, Mrs. Henry D. Friese; Mexico; Anna, Mrs. Bernhard U. Kornelsen, Mexico; and Elisabeth, Mrs. John B. Reimer, Steinbach. Photo taken on the south side of the Peter R. Dueck summer kitchen. Courtesy of Rev. Cornelius P. Kroeker, Steinbach/Plett Picture Book, page 38.

After the grass was cut, it had to dry a few days. Then it was raked with a 10' wide rake drawn by 1 or 2 horses, and raked into piles. These were hauled into stacks or the barn with a hay rack drawn by 2 horses. One man with a pitchfork threw it in and another tramped it down on the rack to make a solid load. We used to put 2 slings on the rack per load to haul it to the barn. We drove into the hay barn which had a hay track. On the hay track was a cart where a long rope came through with a lot of pulleys. This cart could be turned so the hay could be unloaded either onto the second floor, or into the haybarn. The slings had a latch onto which we latched a long thin rope. When the hay reached its destination, we tripped the latch, and the half-load was dropped. It took 2 horses to lift a half-load to its place.

After haying, we harvested the grain. At first, we used a 6 ft. binder drawn by 3 horses. The binder got old, and didn’t work on the heavy crop one year, so Dad bought a 7 ft. International binder with a cart in front which eased the weight on the horses’ necks. They put a seat on the cart for my brother Jac. to urge the horses on when the grain got thick. He used a whip to make them go faster. We used 4 horses on the 7 ft. binder; later, an 8 ft. and also a 10 ft. binder were used with the tractor.

Haying was usually done before grain harvest. The hay was cut by a grass mower drawn by 2 horses. The knives were about 5 feet long and had about 21 3" v-shaped knives riveted onto it. These had to be sharpened on both sides on a 20" 2" grindstone with a handle to turn it, mounted on a stand. It took about half-an-hour to an hour to sharpen. At first we children had to turn the handle, and it got pretty tiresome. It was a great improvement when 2 pedals and a seat were added to the stand. Now one person could sharpen a knife by pedalling like a bicycle, (keeping the stone wet at all times) only needing a hand toward the end—especially for the binder knife, which was 7-8 ft long.

The sheaves the binder made were stocked. After 3 days to a week of good drying weather, they were ready to stack or thresh. The stacks were made round, tapering to the top, so that the rain would run off. 3-9 loads made up a stack. One man on the hayrack pitched onto the stack, and one man was on the stack. I still remember my sister on the stack, and Dad throwing on the sheaves. Marie was good at making stacks. Once these stacks were made, they would stand a lot of rain, and could be threshed later in fall.

At first my parents shared a steam threshing outfit with C.P. Kroekers. Then the Kroekers bought a Titan tractor, and the steam outfit was sold (including our share). Much could be said of the olden days—threshing with the steamers, which was heated with straw. One man fed the fire in the steam engine, another one oiled. One man with a team hauled water, another worked as bagger. (All the grain was bagged on a wagon box). 4 men pitched sheaves into the threshing machine from the stack. For threshing sheaves from the field, 4-6 teams with racks were used, as well as 2-3 wagons with boxes for hauling the grain. After the fields were cleared, they chased the cattle on to finish what was left, as well as the new growth. The cows gained weight and gave more milk. The fields were now ready for plowing, which was all done in fall. The straw stacks were trimmed, and the screenings from under the threshing machines were cleaned up and fed to the sheep, or crushed and mixed in with the feed grain.

For winter, we had to cut about 12 loads of green poplar wood from our land. this was cut into 14 in. lengths with a crosscutting machine operated by someone who went around giving custom work. Sometimes we used our windmill when there was a lot of wind to create enough power. The wood also had to be split and piled to dry for the next winter.

Mother.
There was always work to do with the chores and everything else that had to be done. After Dad was gone, this was managed by our good, loving mother, training the family to help with the work, so the farm could prosper in good as well as lean years. If it wasn’t for the hard-working pioneers mothers, our country wouldn’t be what it is today. They did it not for fame, but as their duty to their families, and as it turned out, as servants for our country.

In the years 1923-24, when the Russian immigrants arrived, Mother accepted the Harders, turning our land into as it is today. They did it not for fame, but as their duty to their families, and as it turned out, as servants for our country.

We loved our mother. She was a great mom to all of us. I, for one, did not treat her as I should when I was growing up into manhood. But when I gave my heart to the Lord, we rejoiced together, praising the Lord.

In fall of 1948, she moved to Mexico with her 4 daughters, all married. Here she died on Feb. 10, 1951. (My family and I were able to visit her in the fall of 1949)

May the Lord bless our pioneer mothers.