The Goossen House, 1917 - 1992
75th Anniversary

This two-storey, 1700-square-foot house, built in 1917 by John D. and Elisabeth Goossen, is situated on Friesen Avenue in Steinbach. It stems from the era of World War I when Steinbach was a booming service center. As a land conveyancer and real estate agent, Goossen oversaw the sale of 10s of 1000s of acres of land in the Landmark district. The commission from those sales, no doubt, paid for the construction of the house. Other Steinbach houses owned by C.T. Loewen and H.W. Reimer resembled this one, but as they were located on Main Street they were moved to make room for retail outlets. This house was saved by virtue of its location on one of Steinbach’s side streets. In fact, it was built on the property “behind” the Friesen Machine Shop. This property was possibly inherited by Mrs. Goossen, née Elisabeth Friesen. The house was built seven years after the Goossens married. In 1926, two years after the birth of the Goossen’s fifth child, Ernest (later a Steinbach lawyer), a single storey addition was made to the back.

The house is still standing. The exterior is still graced with the pillared upstairs and downstairs verandas. The interior is still fitted with the original staircase, transoms above doors, sliding partition doors, chandeliers, baseboards and mouldings, and a cut-glass bay window. It was purchased in 1966 from the John D. Goossen estate by C. Wilbert and Xae Loeven. Subsequent owners Don and Evelyn Thiessen maintained the old structure and character, except for renovations of an additional bathroom and a modern kitchen. The house is presently owned by Wilbert Loeven’s daughter Mary Ann, and her husband Roy.

Beginnings carry enthusiasm, and a promise of what is to come. Even the modest beginning of a newsletter serving a modest historical society. And your faithful response - everyone kept their commitment! - is a fine omen. Thank you.

The primary purpose of this newsletter is to publish the work-in-progress of its members. This serves as your visible commitment to carry on the research, and is an encouragement to others to make the extra effort. You will sense from these articles how much important research is already under way. Now we ask that you begin today to plan your contribution for the next publication. Being local in our mandate and ambition means that we will be able to accommodate very personal aspirations.

I hope that this paper will become a medium to articulate a unified vision of what we hope to accomplish as an historical society. Some challenges:

• We are a regional rather than ethnic society. It is important therefore that we encourage research in the historical roots of the Clarkspring settlement, the Friedensfeld im-

continued on page 2
The Public Schools

During the Twenties there was a drastic change in the Mennonite population of Canada. Many of the original conservative Russian Mennonite settlers left Canada to start all over again in a Latin America. At the same time they were replaced by the devastated, highly cultured, Mennonites from communist Russia. The reasons for this wholesale change have many times been given. Those who left did so because they were forced to give up their private schools. Those who came, came because of the suffering they had endured during the Russian revolution and now they were unable to cope with the new Russian life. For those who left, Walter Schmuedehaus wrote about the Mennonites who moved to Mexico; Martin Friesen wrote about the Mennonites who moved to Paraguay. But no one has told the story about original Russian Mennonites who stayed in Canada. Many researchers have written about the reorganization of the Rural Schools in Manitoba including the Mennonite schools. They have all outlined the inadequacy of the schools by the British standard, but none have dared to write the story of those who suffered loss. I want to tell the story of the change in education among the Mennonites known as the "Mennonite Church at Chortitz" and how it affected them.

In order to fully understand the whole story, I want to try to take the reader back in time and get him to understand these early people and how the change in education affected them. How it created a generation gap felt as late as two generations later.

Many interesting facts have surfaced in my research. Some interesting things as: what were the motives of those in charge of public education, and were they always justified in what they were doing? Or who was Dr. Bryce, and what were his motives when he helped bring H.H. Ewert to Manitoba? Was it government generosity or was he a "Salesman of Doom"? Was it only old stubborn tradition or were there just reasons for the split in the church on the West Reserve at that time? When push finally came to shove, why did all other Manitoba Mennonite Churches, even those who at first favored Public Education, join with the Church at Chortitz in its battle to retain control over the education of their children? There are many other interesting facts which no one has dared to touch.

If anyone has some input to this story please contact me so together we can tell the story as we find it to be. Jacob Doerksen, Box 154, Ile des Chenes, Manitoba R0A 070, phone 388-4127.

Jacob Doerksen

Society focuses on material culture for annual meeting

Since the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society has increasingly become interested in the material culture of the Mennonites in Manitoba, the society executive decided to invite Dr. Reinhold Janzen, curator of Material History at the Mennonite Historical Society in Bethel College, Newton, Kansas to be the guest speaker at the annual meeting February 12 and 13. Dr. Janzen has done extensive research on the emergence, the florescence and the transformation of the domestic furnishings and related material culture of the immigrant Mennonites of the North American prairies.

Although she has focused particularly on the Mennonites who settled on the plains of the United States, we feel an account of her research will prove to be a fascinating subject to Mennonites in southeastern Manitoba. As well, in a workshop setting Dr. Janzen will provide information on how research on the material culture of Manitoba Mennonites might be carried out, based on her vast experience and research.

The question might well be raised, "Of what use is a concentrated study of material culture (e.g. basically furniture and related articles crafted by the people)? As Dr. Janzen notes in her book Mennonite Furniture: a Migrant Tradition the North American prairie immigrant domestic furniture (although now an extinct tradition) continues to provide a kind of mirror of the conditions that prevailed at the time the tradition emerged 250 years ago in the vilta Delta region of Prussia. Furniture and the domestic layout offer a way to "rediscover the characteristics of family life in former times on the basis of what is known of the material environment" (pg 9).

With this also comes a study of the ways in which the cognitive dimension of the tradition (beliefs and principles) interacts with and inspires the material dimension of the tradition.

I feel there is a wealth of information that could be gleaned about our people when we begin to explore their material culture—a field of study so far largely untapped.
Readings...

Readings #1

Grant Loewen, a Steinbach native now at Concordia College in Montreal, came by the school a few weeks ago to talk to Grade 12 English students about the craft of writing. A concern of the HSHST? Well, it is certainly true that history is recorded in many ways, including the literary. Where a sensitive artist can give a novel set in the town of his growing-up "a strong sense of place" (from the jacket), we can expect to find an eye to help us understand our familiar in a new way.

There is certainly a familiarity in its names. These are Kornelson and Schalla and Townline Road; the Collegiate paper is christened the Saibu Truth; the town has become St. Einbach. We have no problem recognizing the Bible School a mile from town. The characters do what we expect Steinbachers to do: go to Young People’s support the local sports and school institutions; their young people take their pleasures flirtily.

Grant admits that some events were borrowed from his Steinbach years, but it is more in the dominant ethos that we will recognize ourselves than in the events. Jake Epp will understand the agonizing conflict over working for a defence contractor; we will all recognize the prototype of the politician-businessman-preacher who is well equipped with Bible verses, jokes, and a sales pitch - not necessarily in that order. Some unsettling situations do reflect our attitudes to the participation of women in our public lives.

I was impressed that Grant, in this "identity-seeking" first book was able to overcome the flatness of style that often comes with first novels. The style is always evocative.


Readings #2

Derksen Printers has published a new pictorial history of Steinbach that many of us will appreciate. Using the vast storehouse of photographs in the Carillon files, we are given a glimpse of the decades rolling on. This is the different perspective provided by the commentary of Gerald Wright, who has immersed himself thoroughly in our culture while not being to the manner born.

(Wright, Gerald. Steinbach: is There a Place Like It) Available at Derksen Printers. Soft cover, $24.95)

Readings #3

Historian, author, and political science teacher Edward Brandt, now of Minneapolis but a native of Blumenort, presented several lectures at the Museum on November 23.

Because of his local origin, the tracing of the roots of his ancestry in the Old Country will be of interest to many of our members. An added feature is that it covers the Prussian communities rather than the usual Russian period. His book Where Once They Toiled: A Visit to the Former Mennonite Homelands in the Vistula Valley, published by Mennonite Family History (1992), is available at the Evangel Book Shop and the Museum.

What’s in a name? (I)

Judging by historical accounts, quite a lot. During the last decade we have instances of populations discarding a name imposed on them by others and replacing it with their own. Zimbabwe was formerly Rhodesia; the people of St. Petersburg discarded the communist-imposed Leningrad and took back the city's old name.

So what has all this to do with us Mennonites here in south-eastern Manitoba? It seems we have our own little Leningrads here on the East Reserve. I will confine myself to only one.

There is the village of Chortitz, now known as Randlehp. I feel that the importance of the name "Chortitz" carried in Mennonite circles in Russia was in some measure transferred to their newly-adopted land. Certainly this was true in terms of the spiritual side of the life of the new settlers from the Bérgthals group. Chortitz - with its church, bishop's residence, store, post office, and later the municipal hall - was a 'haupstadt.' In fact, according to Abe Warkentin in his book Reflections, in 1882 Chortitz had eighteen homesteads to Steinbach’s nineteen, and for a time was the unofficial capital of the East Reserve.

In light of these facts and events, it would be a tragedy if the name Chortitz and all that it stood for were to become a fading memory for those over forty, and a complete unknown for those of the present generation. The R.M. of Hanover, in their Centennial heritage road program, missed a real opportunity to give Chortitz the prominence it deserved when they failed to name a road after this principal village. The road one mile north of Hwy. 52 and parallel to it from the west boundary of the town of Steinbach to the western boundary of the municipality was in fact popularly known as the "Chortitz Road." This would not have meant imposing a name on this road but it would have restored a name it carried through common usage for over half a century. The people of St. Petersburg have seen the light; maybe there is yet hope for us.

- Orlando Hiebert

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society ANNUAL MEETING
April 3, 1993 • 7:00 p.m.
CMBC
600 Shaftesbury Blvd. Winnipeg, Manitoba
Exhibition and discussion of the archival resources of Odessa and St. Petersburg

Hanover-Steinbach Historical Society ANNUAL MEETING
February 12, 1993 • 7:00 p.m.
February 13, 1993 • 2:00 p.m.
STEINBACH BIBLE COLLEGE
#12 Hwy. North Steinbach, Manitoba
Featuring Reinhold S. Kaltenhoven Janzen
"Mennonite Furnishings, The Dynamics of a Migrant Cultural Tradition"
A Search for Cemeteries

As research has continued for the village histories and historical sketches for the upcoming publication of the next HSHS book, many unmarked cemeteries and family plots have been discovered. Some were located through interviews with people who remembered the area, some were recorded in journals, while others have never been found as landmarks such as trees or driveways in the area have been changed.

Each little plot has its own story to tell. Some of these stories have been preserved by nothing other than oral tradition and it leads one to wonder how many stories have been "buried" along with the graves.

Because people moved on to better land or left the country many plots remained unmarked. Subsequent land owners, unaware of their location, either tilled the land or constructed buildings over them.

An outdoor pig pen was built on top of an unmarked cemetery in the Neuhoffnung area but a passerby who had known the previous owners and of their graveyard asked the farmer to relocate the pigs. The farmer obliged but this plot remains unmarked. The only trace left of the garden where these graves were once situated is the asparagus that still grows there in the middle of the cow pasture.

In nearby Kronsgart where a committee worked at preserving and reconstructing the cemetery there, the story is told of a budding that decided to make its home there. Action was taken to get rid of the bader after a long braid and some fabric remnants were unearthed from a recent grave but local residents still feel leery of using the burial site thereafter.

Apparently there were graves located on a gravel ridge south of Reichenbach. These graves were unknowingly removed along with the gravel as the area was later developed.

In another family plot, twins born into the family were buried together in one grave as were the triplets born several years later. Who would guess that two graves hold five newborn babies?

Some of these Chortitzer cemeteries were registered with the "Waisenamt" but this meant that the church office was aware of the location of these cemeteries but not necessarily that the names and/or dates of those buried there were recorded. The Chortitzer Church is now working at identifying these unmarked grave sites on the East Reserve. In some areas, this means a possible family plot on nearly every section of land. Jake Klassen has been appointed by the Chortitzer Church Conference to record these cemeteries so that an index will be available at the Conference Office.

If you recall your parents or grandparents referring to a family plot, if you remember seeing some graves in a pasture, or if your ancestors had the foresight to record their family plot in a family Bible or a similar document, please contact the HSHS or Jake Klassen, Box 211, Kleefeld, Manitoba, R0A 0V0.

— Linda Buhler

The Bergthal Gemeinde Buch

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society is planning to release its latest publication under the above title at its annual meeting on January 12. This will be the second volume in the East Reserve Historical Series and the third book to be published by the society. The Bergthal Gemeinde Buch includes four significant Manitoba Mennonite pioneer documents which have previously been available only in private and archival collections. Section A consists of the Bergthal Gemeinde Buch, one of only a few church registers to have come out of Russia. The original register was started in 1843 and lists members of the Bergthal community from its founding in 1836 until the last residents left for Canada in 1876. Annotations to the original record provide background information on many of the families. This section comes with a comprehensive index.

Section B provides indexes for three early Chortitzer church registers of the East Reserve. The register started in 1878 lists the Bergthal families who came to Canada, including those who later went to the West Reserve. After the relocation to the West Reserve had subsided, a new register was started in 1887. The third register was started in 1907 after many families had moved to Saskatchewan.

While Sections A and B provide information mainly for families and descendants of Bergthal Colony residents, Sections C and D offer data that will be of interest to the entire pioneer Mennonite community.

Section C consists of the Québec Passenger List of Mennonite families arriving in Canada between 1874 and 1880. A detailed comparison with the Hamburger Passenger List offers improved spelling of names; annotations identify families with church registers. This section has received the support of Cathy Priesen Backman’s extensive knowledge of pioneer Mennonite families on both sides of the Red River.

Section D provides the 1881 census of the East Reserve, the West Reserve and the Scratchings River settlement, which includes the name and age of every person living in those communities that year.

A final index identifies the names of heads of households on the passenger list with their appearance in census records and church registers.

— John Dyck

What’s in a name? (II)

People—elder people, that is—were usually named after one of their forebears. This is true of many, if not most ethnic groups. (I was named after my maternal grandfather, for example.)

But what about names of towns and villages, roads and districts? Very many were named after someone or something that was important to the person doing the naming.

If you live somewhere in south-eastern Manitoba, you probably have heard the following names at one time or another: Old Tom Road, Cresspring, Hanover, Bristol, Spencer, Hespeler, Reichenbach, Gnadenfeld, Kransthal and so on.

If you live in Yant-Sled, you would be familiar with a different set of names.

Now where is all this going? The historical reasons for names is a matter of great personal interest to me. I am concerned that if someone will not soon do the necessary research and put down their findings on paper, a lot of this history may be lost.

Who will write an anthology of place names and their historical roots?

— Herman G. Kasper

— 4 —
Dear Wilmer,

Just recently I picked up a copy of the December, 1991 Reader's Digest and was pleased to read that in a certain aboriginal community in Manitoba, a community that is working hard, and successfully so, at improving conditions for its residents, the school in devoting 40 minutes each day to the teaching of the Cree language.

This is very different from what happened years ago when the uttering of a few Indian words at school by some innocent youngster might have brought down the wrath of the school similar to what happened to Oliver Twist when he asked for "more."

And I was reminded of my early school days at Landmark, a rural Mennonite community, where, once we were through that fence and officially on the schoolyard, no Low-German word, at threat of something dreadful no doubt, was to escape our lips. Low German had served us well at home but now at school it seemed to be a sort of bad and worthless language and Inspector Connolly wanted none of it. (In my years of teaching and of studying the English language I have found, to my surprise, that the Angles and Saxons were Low German tribes so that English actually comes from Low German (see below) and, thus, obviously, our Inspector himself used much of my mother tongue. We innocents were never told this.)

Times change and people change. Native people realize that their language is a treasure to be preserved and used and that their young people become better people all around when there is pride, not hate, in the use of their native tongue. And the powers that be have mellowed so that languages other than English can now also be part of the daily school curriculum.

What about our Low German? Are we simply going to lose it? It is said that first and second generation immigrants are often ashamed of their mother tongue but, by the third generation, proficiency in the language of the country has been gained, pride in one's native language again crops up.

I believe that many of us, and not just the middle-aged and older, are in this camp. We know our English and like to use it but we love to use our Low-German here and there too. I think that many of us certainly don't want to lose it.

Can anything be done or even should anything be done to preserve our heritage language? We know that numerous people still speak Low German at home and we have seen that the Low-German drama evenings put on by Wilmer Penner and his cast (some others too) are very successful. Language, whichever it is, bands people together and Low German, of course, is no exception. And it would seem to me that the more languages one knows, the better.

I am writing this letter (with encouragement from some other like-minded people) to see if there might be any ideas out there in "Mennonite Land" as to how we can do more to keep and use our language. Should we simply encourage our children and grandchildren, etc. to do their best to learn it? Should we keep supporting the High German program in schools and hope that this will help with the Low German? (Even though I appreciate the High German, it certainly never was my mother tongue, also, I like it that French is being taught but this does not replace my home-learned language either.)

Should we perhaps be bold enough to ask that Low German be introduced into our schools as other groups have done and are doing with their particular languages? I have talked to a few local high school principals and they say that they could easily set up what is called a School Initiated Course (SIC) and teach Low German as a Heritage Language (LGH/L?) and thus for proper credit. (Maybe a half credit for a start.) What would be very important here would be enough student interest to have a class. The curriculum branch of the Department of Education approves such courses as long as there is enough local interest and, of course, as long as the School Board gives its approval.

So what say we? Should you wish to give suggestions, share ideas, information, etc., please call me at 355-4003 or kindly send me a note to Box 53, Landmark, Manitoba ROA 0X0.

Yours sincerely,
Sten Penner

Reimer be contacted as a board member in place of Ernie Friesen. Delbert to make the contact.

3. Report re: Annual Meeting by Doris Penner: Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen has consented to be here February 12 and 13, 1993 and will be present on Friday and Saturday. She has indicated that she is willing to stay in a local home.

The annual meeting will be held Friday at 7:00. The presentation will be on her book (in lecture form) for 40 minutes. Saturday she will present material culture as related to the local area, East Reserve/Canadian beginning at 2:00. Suggestion for her to give a workshop. Lecture format first, break, then workshop session.

John to contact the museum regarding place.

4. John presented the book for publication. Changes as to pagination need to be made. Index cross-referencing Berghof Buch und Passagier List is done. Proofreading and editing need to be done. Title: Berghof Gemeinde Buch. Proofreading as to dates and names have been done. Projected date for printers: two weeks. Launch in to take place at our annual meeting. Suggested price: $20. Cost of printing: $9,000 per 1,000 copies. Board members and significant contributors to receive complimentary copies.

5. Report re: Newsletter by Wilmer Penner: Question: Circulation/audience is 200 mailing membership plus 300 more to be used for handouts and for displays. Newsletter to be used as promotional material and as a communication tool. It will also be used as a vehicle for sharing information under a separate section/heading ie. anyone researching particular topics as well as any published material. Research updates would be important ie. report by John Dyck, reports on speakers. Suggestion: Doris to provide article on her research in material culture and John to report on book and work of society. President's report to be submitted by Henry Fast. Another section identifying our holdings; Linda (to submit a story re: oral history; Chorlitz road by Orlando Hiebert; Jake Doerksen on his work; Delbert on his involvement; Irene on the Waisenamt. All articles to be submitted to Wilmer Penner, Box 1305, Steinbach, Manitoba, ROA 2A0 phone 335-4117.

6. Three computers have been donated to the HSHS. They have now offered 286 to us for a small price. We require two high density drives with a hard drive. One computer is needed at the College. Suggest to offer $200 with a donation receipt. Authorization for John to increase cash to $300 if necessary. John to check with other researchers if there is a need to acquire more. Delbert - Irene Carried.

Meeting adjourned 8:00.
Working on Volume Six

I am presently working on Volume Six of the Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series which will be called Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde 1812-1882. The book will contain biographies of 14 leaders such as Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Heinrich Balzer (1800-1846), Isaac Leewen (1787-1873), Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), and, of course, Peter F. Toews (1841-1922).

The book will contain some or all of their translated writings as well as papers on various topics by 10 scholars including Dr. John Friesen, Adolf Ens, Harvey Plett, Archie Penner, James Urry, Leland Harder, Harry Leewen and Al Reimer. The book will be some 600 pages in length.

One of the papers that I am working on in collaboration with Henry Schapansky, Burnaby, British Columbia, is entitled “Prussian Roots of the Kleine Gemeinde.” The paper will seek to identify the Prussian ancestors of some 80-100 Kleine Gemeinde related families who immigrated to Russia between 1803 and 1840. In many cases these families can be identified on the 1776 Konsignation which was a census of the Mennonites in Prussia and which provides some socio-economic data.

It is fascinating to see the identity of this earlier 18th century generation come to light. Each week or so I receive a letter from my co-worker, Henry Schapansky in B.C., with information regarding additional Prussian antecedents; then I add the names and supporting citations to the manuscript. It is interesting to see social, economic, geographical and religious patterns emerge as the research continues. Publication is slated in 1993/94.

One of the interesting events of my research during this year occurred on November 9, 1992, when Milton and Margaret Toews, Abbotsford, B.C., came to our home in Steinbach, for a visit. Milton is a grandson of Aelster Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) and many of his writings have been left in their custody. They brought some 200 sermons written by his grandfather, as well as a “Familienbuch” by Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) which is one of the best developed examples of the genre I have seen to date. It contains some previously unknown details of the Reimer family and his successful wirtschaft in Manitoba, Molotschna.

The ledger book also contains some 200 pages of personal letters and historical writings which Reimer collected during his retirement years. e.g. There are four poems and biographies of Prussian Mennonite Bishops of the 18th century. There is a letter and a poem written by Aelster Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) dealing with the drought which afflicted the Molotschna colony in South Russia in 1833. The journal also contains several short personal letters written by Heinrich Reimer, which provide a poignant picture of a Kleine Gemeinde farmer-philosopher of the 1860s. It is coming across documents such as these which makes history come alive and the research process fun and exciting.

— Delbert F. Plett
Box 1960
Steinbach, MB
R0A 2A0

The Paraguay Emigration of the ’20s

Early one morning, as I was preparing my article on the Paraguay emigration of 1926 and 1927, I came across a document addressed to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture in Ottawa. It was signed by eight prominent members of the Charterizer Church, carefully explaining their reasons for leaving the country. Painstakingly written and worded so as not to offend, it described their unhappiness about the educational system and their desire to educate their children in their own way based on their own traditions and values. It focused on the need to conduct their own religious exercises in their schools.

Written in the German Gothic script, I laboured through each phrase, trying to grasp the content and piece together the information. I compared this document to some of the other materials in my possession: correspondence to lawyers in the USA, massive contracts with a shipping line, endless lists of passengers, amounts of money sent with them, legal documentation required of each individual, copies of passports and hurriedly written notes by the organizers explaining the procedures and the frustrations encountered by the monumental task of moving such a large number of people to another continent.

Greetings!

On behalf of the board of directors and management of Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV), I congratulate the members of Steinbach-Hanover Historical Society on their new venture in publishing a newsletter for its members.

The aims of our two organizations are very similar, but our medium and scope differ. MHV grew out of an organization such as your newly-formed historical society, to become a major historical and educational institution in this province. Who knows what your mandate of researching, recording and publishing the local story can lead to? MHV would want to work closely with your organization as we too seek to stimulate an awareness and appreciation of our past.

Allow me to share briefly a few of the events of 1992 at MHV. We began our major fund-raising drive in January, 1992, with the main canvassing done from March until July. In a year labelled as recessionary, we were awed at the generosity of so many faithful supporters who made possible the achievement of our minimum goal of $1,250,000 of pledges and donations aimed at elimination of our mortgage on the new Village Centre. Then in the fall, we received notice that our long-time executive director, Peter Goertzen, would be leaving his position at the end of January, 1993. The museum has made great strides forward under Peter’s management, notably in the development of our volunteer participation, in the education program, in the facilities expansion, and in the professional care and cataloguing of artifacts. Peter will be greatly missed. Replacing Peter will be Harvey Klassen, presently in management with the Willmar group of enterprises in Winnipeg.

We will look forward to the publication of your newsletter which will add to the historical records to our community and highly commend you for your efforts.

— H.K. Friesen
Board Member, MHV