Inside This Issue

- Feature Articles ................. 3-36
- President's Report ............... 37
- Editorial .......................... 38-42
- Letters .......................... 44-49
- News ............................. 50-78
- Articles .......................... 79-120
- Material Culture .................. 121-131
- Book Reviews .................... 132-140

“A people who have not the pride to record their own 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

The Ältesten - Faithful Servants of God

Since the time of the Reformation, the Ältesten of the Flemish Mennonite faith have stood valiantly as guardians on the battlements of Zion defending their flocks from the onslaughts of Satan. The courage and spiritual integrity of the Ältester was critical in a community continually facing persecution, flight and resettlement in search of religious freedom. The vital role of the Ältester holds prominent place in the cannon of Mennonite devotional literature.

In 1565, Ältester Matthias Servaes, Lord... Hence apply to them oil and wine, as did the true Samaritan to the wounded man... be faithful to Him that esteemed you faithful, and accepted you as His ministers, and stewards of His mysteries... Hence be diligent labourers of the Lord in His vineyard, and faithful builders in His house,” Martyrs’ Mirror, page 689.

In the words of Kleine Gemeinde theologian Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), Tiege, Russia, the Ältester “...strikes valiantly and courageously against the hellish dragon with the staff of the Godly word, and who calls out unceasingly to the poor lambs, and demonstrates how they are to guard themselves against the evil one in order that they will not be consumed, one who personally leads his flock in the face of rejection, who spares no endeavour nor exertion and who rejects all earthly gain, if only he might guard and preserve the poor embattled Gemeinde which is in danger of being overwhelmed and to tear them from the clutches of Satan’s revenge,” from “An Epistle to Heinrich Rempel, Altona, 1835,” The Golden Years, page 224.

We are proud to feature the biographies of two Ältester: Isaak G. Dyck (1847-1929), Chortiza, Rosenthal, Russia, and his cousin’s grandson, Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970), Eigengrund, East Reserve, Manitoba. They served their Lord and Saviour on two continents and over two centuries. Their valiant labours in the vineyard of Jesus Christ speak of the outstanding dedication, courage and steadfastness which has characterized the Flemish Mennonite “Ohms” over the centuries.

Isaak G. Dyck, Ältester of the Chortiza (Old Colony) Gemeinde, Russia, ca. 1890. Hebrews 11:37-39 speaks for the courage of this great man of God who pastured his flock in the midst of the most severe persecution known to mankind. Photo - Men. Martyrer: Band I, page 380.

Kottenem, a favourite writer of Kleine Gemeinde founder Klaas Reimer, wrote to family and co-workers from his prison cell while awaiting execution, encouraging “all those that are appointed to watch over the souls of men, exercise your office with diligence, that you may not be found slothful, drowsy or negligent in it; but that you may be faithful watchmen, who truly and honestly lead out and feed the flock of Christ, and this with all humility and meekness... give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to reproof, and this with all discretion, in the fear of the Ältester Menno Simons (1496-1561), the great Friesian reformer who gathered the despised and persecuted Anabaptists into a disciplined and Christo-centric church tradition, proudly bearing his name. Engraving, ca. 1608, by C. van Sichem, the oldest likeness of Menno. Photo - I. B. Horst, “De portretten van Menno Simons,” in Doopsgezinde Bijdragen, 1986-7, page 172f.

Peter S Wiebe, Ältester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde, Hanover, Manitoba, 1966. A man of deep integrity and prophetic faith. His leadership was characterized by progressive orthodoxy. Photo courtesy of grand daughter Mary Borkowsky, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Article courtesy of grand daughter Mary Borkowsky, Steinbach, Manitoba.
The feature story for this issue of Preservings is the “Ältester”, the most important ecclesiastical office among the Flemish Mennonites. The Ältester was referred to as the “oudste” in the native Dutch or Nieder-Frankisch. The term “Ältester” in the German language is translated as “elder” and sometimes also as “Bishop.” (The term “Ostfriis” was preserved and still in use among the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico in the 1930s, see Pres. No. 20, page 102).

Before the 1560s the “oudsten” travelled around serving several Gemeinden because the severe persecution made it unsafe to remain at one location. The Ältesten, in particular, were cruelly hunted down with bounties on their heads. Only after persecution subsided did they become stationary and associated with a particular Gemeinde: S. Zilstra, Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden 1531-1675 (Leeuwarden, 2000), page 250.

The Ältester had a function and role unique among Christian confessions. They were leaders but not rulers, always subject to the democratic vote of the brotherhood - the highest authority in the Flemish Gemeinden. “An elder, however, was supposed to be a constant example of unquestionable purity in spirit and behaviour and to show in the area of faith an infallible knowledge,”Verheyden, Anabaptism in Flanders (Scottdale, 1961), pages 23-24.

The office of Ältester is an example of the evangelical polity and organization of the communities or Gemeinden in Christo-centric faith. The ordination of the Apostle Paul to Titus, “to ordain Ältesten in every city” was the basis for their election and ordination for every Gemeinde. The duties, obligations and functions of the office and the office holder were defined in more than 200 passages in the Old as well as New Testament. The writings of seminal leaders such as Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Thielmans Jan von Braght, and others, as well as the protocol and traditions which developed from almost five centuries of God’s leading and guidance were respected and cherished.

Dr. James Ury, University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, has contributed the lead article, writing about the function and responsibilities of the Ältester in the Russian Mennonite experience and how the role changed under the influence of Johann Cornies and again later in Canada. The story of the Ältester is portrayed through the biographies of two Ältester: Isaak Dyck, Chortitza, Imperial and Soviet Russia, and Peter S. Wiebe, East Reserve, Manitoba, Canada.

An anecdote from the life of delegate Jakob Höppner (1748-1826) illuminates life during the first pioneer years on the Russian steppe. A reflection on the Eichenfeld massacre of October 26, 1919, by historian David G. Rempel fills in some important gaps in understanding that horrible tragedy.

Preservings continues its series on orthodox Mennonite faith and practice with Part One of an insightful article on conversion by Dr. John H. Neufeld, Winnipeg, Manitoba, “focusing on experience.” Rev. Neufeld has done an outstanding job of explaining the biblical teaching of conversion and placing it into a contemporary context, relevant to both conservative and assimilated Mennonites alike. We are delighted to present another article by Bluffton, Ohio, theologian J. Denny Weaver, “The Biblical Basis for Non-violence.” A look at the Anabaptist roots of Mennonites through the writings of Professor Arnold Snyder, Kitchener, Ontario, completes this section.

Evangelicals, and particularly American Fundamentalists, are in the midst of a major push for world hegemony. Several Mennonite leaders and educators have suggested that the future for Mennonites is Evangelical. The editorial addresses this question, taking the opposite view. The letters section again reflects the diversity of thinking among Mennonites and those of Mennonite background. The letters and sometimes vigorous editorial responses are intended to stimulate readers in their faith pilgrimage by moving beyond the stock rhetoric and superficial cliches of “pop” religious culture.

This issue of Preservings features a “super-sized” news section with stories of Russian Mennonites in various parts of the globe. We are pleased to feature the visit of Mexican President Vicente Fox to the La Honda Colony in Zacatecues, an important milestone for the Mennonite community in Mexico which has hardly received any coverage in the Canadian media.

Since the time of the Reformation, the enemies of the Flemish Mennonites have disparaged them by spreading falsehoods and untruths about their beloved Ältesten, portraying them as the “evil Ohms.” In modern times, Evangelical Fundamentalists have similarly targeted conservative Mennonites in Mexico and Bolivia in an unholy war. The article “The Lonely Ohm - Myth and Reality” explores the historical roots of the myth of “the evil Ohm”, the Biblical vision of Christo-centric faith, the role of the Lehrdienst within that religious culture, and illuminates the work of the “lonely Ohm” with accounts and testimonies collected across North and South America. Hopefully, this article will bring the heroic labours and remarkable accomplishments of the Ohms in the Kingdom of God into clearer focus for friend and foe alike.

After five years, we are finally able to publish the speech of Dr. Al Reimer, retired Professor of Literature, University of Winnipeg, “Growing up and down in Steinbach.” His often humorous presentation was enthusiastically received by those attending our annual HSHS membership meeting on January 18, 1997. A collection of three letters by patriarch Abraham “Fula” Reimer (1808-92), Blumenort, Manitoba, and the 1858 Berghthal census annotated by historian Henry Schapansky complete the articles section.

One of the enduring qualities of the Flemish Mennonites since the Reformation has been their linguistic abilities. Over the centuries they have maintained a trilingual discourse consisting of a colloquial language, a formal church language and the national language of their host society, changing and replacing all three a number of times as they fled from country to country in search of religious liberty. Since the late 18th century the colloquial language of the Russian Mennonites has been the Low German dialect originating in the Vistula Delta. Many readers may be surprised to learn that one of the significance influences on “Mennonite” Plautdietsch was the Russian language. The topic is explored through a number of letters written by linguist Walter Quiring and educator Peter Braun and published in Der Bote in 1927 to 1929. This is supplemented by a list of Russian words in Low German compiled by Adina Reger, Weißenhuth, Germany, and myself.

Another feature of our culture are the material items and traditions which have been adopted from various lands and transplanted with Mennonites as they migrated from country to country. Among these are the wonderful “trækja da klocke” (pendulum clocks) with their going back to Royal Poland and Flanders. These clocks once graced the walls of most Russian Mennonite homes. Mennonites were innovative people and soon they were manufacturing these clocks in a craft taken along to Russia in the 18th century. Tony Funk, Hague, Saskatchewan, has contributed an article on the Mennonite clockmaking tradition of Prussia and Russia. In our next issue we will feature an article by Arthur Knoeker, Winnipeg, on the family clock making enterprise in Rosenthal, Russia.

Brüdergemeinders have often distinguished themselves from Kirchliche Mennonites because of their view that the only valid salvation was a dramatic and instantly recognizable conversion experience. What impressed me when I opened my copy of missionary Jakob A. Loewen’s book Educating Tiger, was that he shared the more biblical view held by most traditionalist (Kirchliche) and conservative Mennonites, that the New Testament models various ways of coming to faith. Ken Reddig, past Director of MCC Canada and a former student of Dr. Loewens’, reviews this prophetic book on missions and evangelism.

More and more primary sources such as diaries and memoirs from the 19th century are being published. One of the more significant is the publication of The Diaries of Rev. David Epp, translated and edited by the prominent historian John B. Toews, Vancouver, B.C. It is important that such sources be correctly understood and nuanced as Russian Mennonites seek to understand their spiritual heritage in new and more meaningful ways. Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C., has contributed a book review essay examining some of the highlights of this recently published diary.

Enjoy, The Editor.

Attention Readers: Readers responses, critical or otherwise, are welcome: see “Letters” section for criteria regarding publication of letters and e-mails. The editor can be contacted at 1(204)326-6454 office, fax 1(204)326-6917, mail Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0. Website - hshs.mb.ca - e-mail delplet@mb.sympatico.ca
Historical Origins.

In a detailed consideration of the office of elder in Mennonite history, Cornelius Krahn noted that in many Mennonite congregations and conferences the position was the highest and most responsible ministerial office (Note One). The Anabaptist ancestors of Mennonites studied the New Testament closely for details on the early Christian churches attempting to understand congregational life and practice before the Emperor Constantine made Christianity an official religion. They discovered that the early churches had positions of leadership such as presbyter and bishop; these are mentioned for instance in Acts 14:23 and I Tim. 5:17 (Note Two).

In spite of an emphasis on the equality of believers and egalitarian forms of organization, the early Anabaptists also recognized certain people as leaders of the community. As the religious congregation and the social community was seen as coterminous, a fact illustrated with the double-sense of the term Gemeinde which meant both community and congregation - and the fact that community was seen as religious in form and purpose, then leadership was religious in nature. At first terms such as elder (Ältester in German and Oudste in Dutch) and bishop were used interchangeably, but Oudste and Ältester became predominant in Europe and the term bishop disappeared except among Hutterites. In North America many Mennonite groups of South German and Swiss background adopted the term bishop and continue to use it into the present (Note Three).

Servant Leaders.

Krahn quotes from a number of 16th century northwestern European sources, including from the Dutch Republic, which indicate that early Anabaptist Mennonites already had elders elected by a vote of the congregation from among their own members. Elders headed an ordained ministry involving a hierarchy of duties and obligations. Elders were authorized to perform “all functions” (voller Dienst) including preaching, the ordination of ministers, serving communion and performing baptisms within their own local congregation and in other congregations that recognised their authority.

A minister was ordained only to preach and was referred to as a “servant of the Word” (Diener am Wort) or as a Vermâner (“admonisher”); in the Prussian/Russian tradition they were often referred to as a “teacher” of the Word (Lehrer) before that term became associated with school instruction (Schullehrer). Finally there were also “deacons” (Diakonie) who were sometimes known as “servants of the poor” (Armendiener) indicating a more functional role in the community which also extended beyond the provision of social welfare to the enforcement of congregational discipline. In spite of the obvious hierarchy of positions, the terms used indicated that members of the ministry not only served their congregations, but were also seen as “servants” (Dienaar) who ultimately were answerable to the baptised members of the congregational community.

Lutheran, Reformed and Catholic authorities often claimed that Mennonite ministers and elders did not have the right to perform their religious duties, as they had not received their authority through apostolic succession. Some Anabaptists connected with Menno Simons could claim that he was an ordained Catholic priest and they were in a line of succession. But other Anabaptists rejected such arguments just as they rejected the beliefs of other groups and their claims to be the successors to the early church which the Anabaptists claimed to have rediscovered and to be putting into effect. However, succession within their own congregations was obviously important to Anabaptists and later Mennonites and elders played a crucial role in ordaining ministers and the crucial communal rituals of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Together the elder and preachers constituted a ministerial council to run the affairs of the congregation and admonish wrongdoers.

In Polish-Prussia and in Russia this council was referred to as the Lehrdienst. Elders also often represented the community in dealings with external “worldly” authorities unless they delegated this to a group or particularly skilled negotiator. Elders therefore potentially could both reign over and rule their congregations. They were appointed for life although the ministry or a majority of the congregation could demand that they stand down or if that failed, remove them from office. This occurred when it was considered that they had failed in their duties, made statements or acted in a way believed to be against the faith or that they or members of their family brought the community into disrespect.

If an elder refused to stand down, a schism could occur with supporters of both the old elder and of the new order claiming that they alone maintained the correct doctrines and practices. With the rise of evangelical ideas often informed by pietism and accompanied by revivalism, especially in the 19th century, elders might be left isolated by sections of their congregation. In some cases the elders adopted the new practices and abandoned their congregations.

Choosing Elders.

Like the rest of the ministry, Elders were chosen from within their community. The method of choosing was usually by a vote of congregational members although it appears that in some cases the lot was employed. Among some Amish where use of the lot still prevails, a slip of paper is placed in a hymnbook and candidates are asked to select a book. The person who chooses the book with the slip is considered “chosen” by the Lord (Note Four). Voting on the other hand reflects the involvement of more earthly and mundane forces.

Elders were usually chosen from among the ranks of the existing ministers. As there was often more than one candidate, voting included people in a public act. As candidates could be supported by different members of the community, often related to each other and/ or the candidate through ties of kinship, the failure of one group to secure its candidate for office might lead to a division of the congregation either through schism or by peaceful agreement. Divisions could occur for other reasons including differences in doctrine and also administrative problems. It was inevitable that over time congregations grew in size and although there was no ideal size, at some point it was convenient if a congregation divided, each having an elder to serve it.

If local politics and kinship connections were often involved in the selection of elders, the members of certain families were noted for supplying ministers and elders to their communities over several generations. In the Prussian-Russian tradition the most notable family in this regard was the Epps. From 18th century Prussia through the 19th and 20th century members of this remarkable family served as outstanding ministers and elders to the Flemish congregations in Khortitsa and its daughter settlements (Note Five). Other examples could also be cited.

No doubt growing up in a family where the head of the household was a minister or elder helped a person adapt to the responsibilities of the ministry. As ministers and elders were unpaid and their duties onerous, the holding of office placed a burden on the holder, their wife and offspring. Wives had to contend with entertaining visitors, often uninvited and like their children the absence on congregational business of the head of the household. The preparation of sermons, answering correspondence,
The Ohms.

Many elders did not reach old age and died young, exhausted by the work and responsibilities they had assumed. Some were permitted to retire if in ill health. Those who survived often developed into respected and much-loved patriarchs. The term elder suggests the importance of seniority in human affairs and the experience gained through longevity. As Krahn noted, an elder “incorporated in person both familial and ecclesiastical authority” and was addressed by the honorific Ohm.

This usage was often combined with the elder’s forename as in the form “Ohm Isaak” used to address the much-respected Khortitsa elder Isaak Dyck in the late 19th and early 20th century. In this case the usage extended to children and indicated that he was in one sense the entire community’s friendly “uncle.” A great deal, however, was dependent on the personality of the elder and history shows considerable variation in this and the degree of honour and respect shown by members of congregations. The same could be said of their success in religious and community leadership roles.

Community Authority.

In their prime, some elders became strong community leaders in more than just religious affairs, points of focus at times of crisis. It was a role to which many responded with considerable skill and ability, but others failed. During the first fifty years of settlement in Russia the position of elders was challenged by the development of new forms of authority in the Mennonite world. These included the position of District Mayor (Oberschulze) of a colony who was also voted into office by members of the community.

However, the power, authority and administrative rights and duties of mayors were defined not by custom or religious principles, but by Russian law. Not surprisingly there were numerous cases of conflict between the leaders of the congregational communities and those of the colony community backed by Russian officialdom. In the early years of the Molochna settlement conflict between the Flemish elder Jacob Enns and the first District Mayor Claas Wiens was a pointer to the difficulties in defining religious versus civil authority. The rise of Johann Cornies and his control over the economic development of the Molochna before his death in 1848 witnessed the most serious conflicts between civil and religious authority in the new colony environment of southern Russia. This resulted in the removal from office by Russian officials of two Flemish elders, Jakob Warkentin and Heinrich Wiens during the 1840s (Note Six).

These and other difficulties resulted in the creation of an organization where the elders of different congregations could meet to discuss matters of common concern and also resulted in the development of a clearer understanding of the powers and spheres of influence of the different forms of authority in Mennonite affairs. But by 1850 the religious leaders had in many ways surrendered some of their authority over areas of community organization and subordinated themselves to civil law and the power of the state.

In Russia, however, some congregations and individual elders viewed the position of religious authority in regard to civil authority differently. The problems some elders experienced could be seen as not so much an attempt to maintain total control over community affairs but more as seeking powers to which tradition gave them no right. The elders of the newly formed Kleine Gemeinde starting with Klaas Reimer and continuing under the strong leadership of Abraham Friesen, Johann Friesen and Peter Toews adopted a more traditional stance on the separation of religious from civil authority (Note Seven). They recognized the rights of the state but avoided close involvement with its functioning.

The crisis caused by the announced change to military service in the 1870s, however, provided a clear indication of the limits of accommodation with the state. The more conservative Mennonite groups, led by their elders, emigrated to North America. In North America, free of the Russian colonial system, the elders reassessed their authority. While the Mennonite settlers often continued the Russian system of village and district mayors, it is clear that these worked with the religious leaders and in crucial matters the authority of the elders was paramount. The relationship of Elder Gerhard Wiebe to the District Mayor Jakob Peters on the East Reserve in Manitoba is an interesting example of the re-creation of the Russian system with some subtle changes in the Canadian environment (Note Eight).

On the West Reserve the dispute between the elder of the Reinländer congregation Johann Wiebe and Mennonite civil leaders backed by the Manitoba government resembled earlier troubles in Russia (Note Nine). In time in North America, local and national politics would again challenge Mennonite principles. After World War One this would once more result in the migration of groups to Mexico and Paraguay under the leadership of their elders.

Changes.

Following the emigration of some groups of Mennonites to North America in the 1870s a new generation of ministers and elders emerged in the congregations of those who stayed. The office of “teacher” (Lehrer) gave way to that of “preacher” (Prediger) but the office of elder remained. The most significant change though was the increasing number of educated individuals involved in the ministry many of whom combined the role of teaching with preaching (the teacher-preachers). An increasing number of these went on to become elders. Elders Heinrich Epp of Khortitsa and Abram Götz in Molochna are examples of this.

The Mennonite Brethren, which had its origins in new religious movements in the 1860s, adopted a system similar to the other Mennonite congregations from the 1870s onwards. Few of the pre-revolutionary Russian Mennonite elders had received a theological training although Elder Heinrich Dirks of Gnadenfeld had been trained as a missionary and served in the Dutch East Indies before returning to his congregation in Russia. By 1914, however, a number of younger ministers attended seminaries in Switzerland and other western European centres. Although there were increasing calls for the opening of a Mennonite seminary in Russia, little was achieved before the outbreak of the First World War (Note Ten). However, the change to employing trained ministers occurred much earlier in the Netherlands and in Germany. Changes also took place which altered the structure of the ministry and the role of elders.

Professional Ministry.

Krahn points out that in the Netherlands during the 17th century conservative groups in principle were opposed to a trained ministry in part based on the views of the early Anabaptists. Richer and more progressive Mennonites recognized the necessity of a trained leadership and could also find justification in the writings of the early Anabaptists. The early Anabaptist leaders strongly denounced the misuse of learning by theologically trained ministers in the state churches but they said little against education and training as such. Increasingly progressive urban Mennonite congregations in the Netherlands felt the need for an educated ministry and they elected physicians or other professionals as ministers and elders. Krahn states that in-
ban Waterlander congregations from the end of the 17th century the distinction between elders (Dudste, Leerraar) and preachers (Dienaar, Vermaner) disappeared.

In 1737 the progressive urban Mennonites established a seminary in Amsterdam for the training of ministers. Here mostly young men were trained in theology and a range of other subjects and were appointed by members of urban congregations who wanted more intellectual leaders and preachers. The lay office of elder and preacher gave way to that of a salaried minister, who often came from outside the local community and did not necessarily stay for life. The congregation was now served by one minister ordained to fulfil the roles of both preacher and elder and thus performed all the religious roles in a congregation. By the end of the 18th century a majority of the Dutch urban congregations had accepted this change to trained ministers.

The new system spread from Holland to Mennonite congregations in neighbouring urban German states, such as Krefeld, Emden, Hamburg-Altana and later eastwards to Danzig and Königsberg. The first ministers appointed were often trained in the Amsterdam Seminary and later in German universities and their appointment created differences of opinion in congregations resulting in schism. Younger, more educated members favoured the changes and later rural congregations. The use of German in services rapidly declined although lay preachers continued in office to preach the German sermon. As the older generation of elders died or retired they were not replaced by their congregations, much to the regret of senior members of many congregations. The Mennonite Brethren abandoned the old structures and titles as an impediment to evangelization and contrary to the egalitarian, democratic society in which they were situated. The Prediger and Aeltester gave way to Pastors, Preachers, Ministers and even to “Reverends”.

Conclusion.

In 1956 Krahn stated that the old system where elders “still have charge of several congregations, assisted by a number of preachers, and are the only ones who administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper and ordain ministers” still prevailed among conservative Canadian groups such as the “Rosenort Mennonite Church, the Blumenort Mennonite Church, the Berghal Mennonite Church, the Schönwiese Mennonite Church, and others.” But he also commented “it is apparent that a change is coming.” His prediction has proved correct and most now have seminary-trained ministers.

Krahn also noted that among “more conservative groups, such as the Old Colony Mennonites (Canada, Mexico), Sommerfelder (Canada, Mexico, Paraguay), and the recent immigrants from Russia and Prussia to South America, the old system of eldership will likely prevail for some time to come.”

Endnotes:

Note One: In 1956 Cornelius Krahn wrote the entry on “Elder” for the Mennonite Encyclopedia, Volume 2, 171-181 and the text was republished with slight changes as “The office of elder in Anabaptist-Mennonite history,” in the Mennonite Quarterly Review, 30, 120-27. Krahn (1902-1990) was born in Russia and completed a doctorate on Mennonite Studies in Heidelberg in 1936. For most of his working life he was the Director of The Mennonite Library and Archives at North Newton, Kansas where he also taught history at Bethel College. His description of the role of elders is detailed and comprehensive. I have based my account largely on his supplemented with additional comments from other sources. Another useful account from a Mennonite Brethren perspective is Abe Dueck, “Church leadership: a historical perspective.” Direction 19(2), 1990, 18-27.


Note Six: I have discussed these and related issues in my None but saints: the transformation of Mennonite life in Russia, 1789-1889, Winnipeg, 1989.

Note Seven: The volumes on the Kleine Gemeinde edited by Delbert Plett contain numerous references to the work of Kleine Gemeinde elders especially Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874, Steinbach, 1993. For an overview see Delbert F. Plett’s Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia 1812 to 1875. Steinbach, 1999.


Note Eleven: A good account of one such elder, Franz Enns who had been ordained as elder of the Terek congregation and after emigration founded a number of communities in southern Manitoba can be read in F. F. Enns, Elder Enns: “Ohne Franz,” Winnipeg, 1979.
When the deputy Jakob Hoppner, leader of the Chortitza Mennonites during the immigration from Germany [Polish-Prussia] in 1789, settled on the Island of Chortitza, together with several other families, they had the intention to establish their farm Wirtschaften at specific distances from each other; indeed, following the method the way they had been accustomed in Prussia, and to live on their farms in the center. Jakob Hoppner also immediately built his house in the so-called cheery garden in the “Butendick”. However, all of them were not even finished with the houses when they recognized already the necessity of moving closer together, and of resettling into compact colonies in order that they might thereby be more secured against attacks by thieves. Hoppner had personally had to experience this and, in fact, in the following manner:

When he together with two companions returned from a business trip and arrived at his premises one dark, cloudy and overcast evening, they found it odd that nothing was to be seen nor heard from any of his household companions. The rain was streaming down, a crack of lightning torn the darkness for a moment, and allowed the immediate circumstances to be determined. Here Hoppner saw two murderers before him with the intention of ___ [text missing].

But the knife struck against the pants button, was deflected and only cut through his pants. The second robber had a musket aimed at him, and Hoppner would undoubtedly have become the sacrifice of death, if the thoroughly soaked primer had not failed. In that instant, while Hoppner was encouraging his travel companions to resist, he received a massive blow with the rifle butt which rendered him incapable of further battle. Immediately, he, together with one of his companions by the name of Abraham Friesen, were overpowered and tied up by the might of the robber-murderers.

The third companion, Peter Hildebrand, however, was able to escape. Even through masked, the six man robber gang were recognized. They were merchants from the nearby city of Alexandrovs, who had already invaded Hoppners’ residence during the day. They had tied up all the occupants of the house, packed together the most valuable possessions and armed themselves with Hoppners’ guns, in order to extort money, which in their view must not be there, but which they could not find. While they were forcing themselves upon their bound prisoners with vehemence, to give up the money, the above mentioned Peter Hildebrand rushed to the at that moment not too far distant watch post where an aged corporal and an elderly soldier lived as watchmen.

When he together with two companions returned from a business trip and arrived at his premises one dark, cloudy and overcast evening, they found it odd that nothing was to be seen nor heard from any of his household companions. The rain was streaming down, a crack of lightning torn the darkness for a moment, and allowed the immediate circumstances to be determined. Here Hoppner saw two murderers before him with the intention of ___ [text missing].

But the knife struck against the pants button, was deflected and only cut through his pants. The second robber had a musket aimed at him, and Hoppner would undoubtedly have become the sacrifice of death, if the thoroughly soaked primer had not failed. In that instant, while Hoppner was encouraging his travel companions to resist, he received a massive blow with the rifle butt which rendered him incapable of further battle. Immediately, he, together with one of his companions by the name of Abraham Friesen, were overpowered and tied up by the might of the robber-murderers.

The third companion, Peter Hildebrand, however, was able to escape. Even through masked, the six man robber gang were recognized. They were merchants from the nearby city of Alexandrovs, who had already invaded Hoppners’ residence during the day. They had tied up all the occupants of the house, packed together the most valuable possessions and armed themselves with Hoppners’ guns, in order to extort money, which in their view must not be there, but which they could not find. While they were forcing themselves upon their bound prisoners with vehemence, to give up the money, the above mentioned Peter Hildebrand rushed to the at that moment not too far distant watch post where an aged corporal and an elderly soldier lived as watchmen of the princes’ forest and from there to ___ [text missing].

[?]: immediately, armed with musket and sword, mounted on horses, and at a sharp trot, they proceeded towards the place of the assault. But - too bad - the robber-murderers were already gone by the time they got there. When they noted the arrival of the two rescuers, Unger and Hildebrand, the two invalids, Hoppner and Friesen, cried out with war-like arousal, “Ej, naschi sjuda!” [Translated: Ej, unsere hierher]. When the robbers became aware of this call, they realized with sudden fright that the third German had escaped, and so they hurriedly scraped together the most worthwhile goods and were gone in a cloud of dust. In their immediate perplexity, they even left behind the 14 ruble cash which they had previously found.

In shame, it must be said that the instigation for this robber attack can be blamed on the contemporary dissatisfaction of the settlers, that some of them had told the merchants in the city that deputy Hoppner had received money from the crown and did not pay it to them. The settlers on the island had now gained the insight, that to settle in the Prussian model, with the farm Wirtschaften in the middle threatened them with danger, and perhaps other circumstances as well, which made it necessary for them to settle in closed colonies. Thus 12 families founded the Colony Island of Chortitza in 1790, the way it still stands to the present [1914], only with the difference that another six Wirthen joined them.

Apparently in the search for protection, on the part of the settlers [text missing] Prince Kiril Grigorjewitsch Rasumowskij, was at that time the Hetmann of the Ukrainian Cossacks [Kl. Rus./Jk.]. But the Cossacks soon became more of a curse than a protection. A small example follows: After the robber assault of deputy Hoppner at his farm Wirtschaft on the Butendick, his courageous character was put to the test for a second time.

An officer came to the Island of Chortitza with many Cossacks to visit deputy Hoppner. While Hoppner was hospitably visiting in the Große Stube [large or guest room] with the officer, the Cossacks were robbing the household goods of Hoppner. Hoppner related this to his guest, the officer, and requested of him a friendly way, that he might wish to order the stolen articles returned. But the officer only laughed in response. Without wasting anytime, Hoppner grabbed the sword of the officer, which lay on the table, laid it in his kjist, and closed the door-bolt, with the authoritative statement, that the authorities had sent them here to protect the settlers and that he would hold him to that responsibility.

Enraged, the officer called his Cossacks, who were already in the process of riding away (some had already left). Upon his command, they then sprang to the scene, and threatened with blows. But Hoppner’s former travel servant, Abraham Friesen, who was also present during the first incident [text missing]. Since more settlers had arrived in the meantime, the officer - for better or worse - had to acknowledge that he had done wrong. He made everything right. Hoppner returned his sword to him and they rode in peace to Razumowka.

Since I am here sharing several episodes of delegate Hoppner, I can not do otherwise but to also make a small comment about the article “Ein Sittenbild aus alter Zeit,” in No. 60, of the “Botschafter”, 1913. There the author relates of the son of deputy Hoppner that he had carried the sceptre of the village Schultz (mayor), and that he possessed a fully trained hunting dog “Waldmann”. The “islander” Rempel also acquired such a dog. This one showed promise, that in time he might surpass the older Waldmann. The drama which then supposedly unfolded between Hoppner and Rempel, regarding their hunting dogs, seems simply implausible for the good-hearted Hoppner to his contemporaries still alive today. One remains sceptical regarding such a fable.

The author’s concern presumably was merely to paint a picture of a scene long since disappeared (The anecdote originated from a long ago departed settler of the Chortitza district, whose recollections went far back. Perhaps in his youth, he among ___ [text]. Please reread the article in No. 60 once more).

Gerhard G. Klassen, Insel Chortitza.
From the Botschafter, March 13, 1914, page 2. Courtesy of Dr. James Urry, University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.

Fmm Yellowed Papers.
From among the left behind documents of the former Brandltester of the Chortitza Colony, Peter Siemens. Copies from the Chortitza Volost Archive.

In 1789 226 families settled in Chortitza. In 1793 and ‘96 another 120 families arrived and Schönwiese and Kronsberg were established. Josephsthal and Hamburg were settled at the same time - 147 families. Altogether to the year 1800 they received 20,000 desjatien land. The Mennonites had received cash advances of 380981 R. and the Colonists 73603 R....
In 1846 the remaining debt was 19 R., 10.5 Kope. [per Wirth]. In 1820 the record of the Crown loans repaid to the kektenmesel district finance officers by the Chortitza Mennonites since the first repayments in 1805 was vigorously updated by the appropriate elected officials, such as Allister David Epp, Heinrich Penner, and the members of the Gemeinde, Isaak Tiws and Heinrich Heese, with the help of the Oberschulen Siemens and both Gebietsbeisitzer Abraham Koop and Peter Löwen, which showed that the Chortitza district had 313 families who had received crown advances and lands for the referenced year. There were 17 families in Schönwiese by Alexandrovs who had received crown advances and lands from the year 1809 to 1815. Altogether in crown advances and land interest, the amount of indebtedness to the above finance department and lawfully payable annually was 126056 R....leaving a balance of 600 R. 50.1 Kop. [per Wirth].
In expenses for the maintenance of the courts, posts, etc. the Chortitza Gemeinde - together with the Schönwieser Gemeinde - had paid in total from 1805 to the end of 1815, 9254 R. and 18.24 Kop....
Issued in the Gebietsamt in Chortitz, on the above date and year. Gebietsvorsteher: Siemens, Beisitzer: Koop and Löwen.
Submitted by Is. Lehmk, Kanzerowka.
Introduction.

Ältester Isaak Dyck was the Ältester of the Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde (Old Colony Church) in Chortitza, Russia, for 33 years. The Chortitza Gemeinde was the largest Mennonite congregation in Russia with 3570 members in 1910.

Ältester Isaak Dyck is widely recognized as a chosen servant of God who led his Gemeinde wisely under the most difficult conditions imaginable. His escape from the clutches of the Makhnovtsy and later the Communists are no less than miraculous. His many long years of service manifest the leading of the Holy Spirit and the protection and guidance of God. Isaak Dyck stands out as a hero of the Mennonite people and a martyr of the faith. His story is well worth recounting for posterity.

Family Background.

Isaak was the son of Gerhard Dyck (1809-87), Rosenthal, who had served as Ältester of the same Gemeinde from 1855 to 1885. Gerhard was the son of Peter Dyck (1760-1827), who came to Russia in 1788 and settled at Neuenburg (Wirtschaft 14, 1801).

The family of Ältester Gerhard Dyck was prominent in the Old Colony. Son Isaak, as already mentioned, served as Ältester of the Old Colony Gemeinde. Isaak’s brother Peter Dyck (1837-1907), served as Oberschulze of the Chortitz Colony from 1890 to 1893.

Gerhard’s sister Agatha Dyck (b. 1804) married Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58), and they were the parents of the well-known Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), the Moses of the Bergthal Colony, leading them to North America in 1874-76.

Another sister Helena Dyck (1807-59), married Jakob Friesen (1801-86), whose son Heinrich Friesen (1842-1921), Hochfeld, Manitoba, served as minister of the Chortitzer Gemeinde in the East Reserve.

Gerhard Dyck was married to Maria Dyck (1812-69), daughter of Johann Dyck (b. 1791), Nieder-Chortitza.


Biography.

Isaak Dyck was born December 9, 1847. He attended the village school and the Zentralschule (secondary school) in Chortitza, where he took the pedagogy program. He attended the Chortitz Zentralschule under Heinrich Epp, later his predecessor as Ältester. After completing the State exams, he became a teacher.

June 28, 1870 Isaak Dyck married Margaretha Hamm. As a young couple they moved to Grossfürstenland, a Chortitz daughter colony, southwest of Nikopol. He was a teacher in Michaelsburg for three years, 1873 to 1876. He then became a farmer by purchasing one of the many farms which were being sold cheaply by the owners emigrating to America. He was elected as minister on January 18, 1876, at age 28.

In 1882, he was called as a chaplain to the Anadol Forestry Camp, where young Mennonite men formed their alternative service. This was a completely new branch of Mennonite activity in Russia. He remained at this responsible post for six years.

In 1888–after a 15-year absence–Isaak Dyck returned to his home village of Rosenthal. After the death of Ältester Heinrich Epp, he was elected as Ältester in 1896. He served as a minister for 53 years and as Ältester for 26.

For three years, Isaak Dyck was president of the Committee which maintained and supervised the Forestry Camps. He was president of the board of the Chortitz Zentralschule and Mädchenschule.

He was repeatedly elected to the deputations sent to St. Petersburg to make representation to the Czarist Government on various matters. His intuitive sense and his clear, sound judgement usually assured him good results.

During the War 1914-1918, the Revolution, and Civil War following World War I, he felt that a younger person should shoulder the task and responsibility. He was also advancing in age and his hearing was declining. As a result, in 1922, he installed his successor, Peter Neufeld, as co-Ältester.

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 7
Golden Anniversary, 1889.

On April 21, 1889, the Chortitza community celebrated the 25th anniversary of its Ältester Heinrich Epp (1827-96). The event was reported in the Mennonitische Blätter in 1889. The participants met at the Chortitza factory school, owned by “Lepp and Wallmann”, from where they went to Heinrich Epp’s home. The Grotte Schtoave (large room or parlour) had been reserved for the singers. After 50 men had sung the “Angel’s Chorus” by Joseph Haydn, minister Isaak Dyck (later Ältester) greeted Epp with a stirring and heart-warming message. This address was reproduced by historian Peter M. Friesen, with the permission of Ohm Isaak:

“Honourable Ältester! Highly regarded celebrant! Twenty-five years have passed since by the will of God, you were called to the ministry of the Gemeinde. That is grace, God’s immense grace. I stand before you as one commissioned by this group, but also driven by my own heart’s desire, to congratulate you upon so much grace and to pray for God’s blessing upon you. We hope and pray that God, who so graciously loves and gives, will continue to shower His blessing upon you and strengthen you for your future ministry.

“I do not deem it my duty to describe the past 25 years and all that they entail with regard to your many-faceted activities, that is, the great worth of the many services you have rendered in Christ’s stead, in greater detail. The evaluation of services rendered with regard to this holy area is God’s domain. He will reward a thousandfold what you have done for us, be it for the poor, the suffering brethren, or in the area of the Gospel of peace. To be in God’s hand is reward enough for our deeds of love. Walking along life’s journey with one another in a saving, loving and forgiving way, caring for one another in a brotherly manner, will bear witness to the fact that we serve God. However, I do not wish to speak any further concerning these matters here.

“The matter that really touches our heart and burns upon our lips today, are the emotions and expressions of gratitude toward God and toward you. Today we wish to thank you for all your care and concern, your work and faithfulness, which you, worthy celebrant, have taken upon yourself in the course of these 25 years and carried as the ‘Lord’s burden’ without complaint. And you have always done it in the conviction: not that I do it, but I do it gladly and without remuneration; in a word, I do it because of Christ. Therein lies the glory of Christ’s priestly ministry. We wish to thank you that you did not tire in your enthusiasm, to go, to teach, to preach, to exhort, and to baptize in the name of Christ. In a word, we thank you that, in a loving and faithful manner, you always had the eternal welfare of your flock at heart, over which the Heavenly Father placed you as guardian, and made their care your first concern.

“Highly regarded Ältester, celebrant, friend, and brother in Christ! You shall be assured of the most devoted ‘thank you’ from the congregation – from us all – till that time fast approaching, when no earthly profession or brotherly love will any longer be practised, up to the grave and beyond the grave, up to the blessed world, created by God, where we shall see and find one another again and be reunited – in the land of the eternally living.

“When that time with its life will have begun (to which God in Christ help us all!) we will sing with you, and you with us, the glorious and heavenly song of praise sung by thousands and millions of saved souls to God and the Lamb.”

Ältester Isaak Dyck and family in happier times, 1908. According to grandson Paul Klassen, the photograph was taken under the “Krushtje Baum” (native pear tree) in the yard of the family home in Rosenthal. Standing from left - top row: Heinrich A. Dyck, Helena Dyck, Gerhard H. Dyck, Peter I. Dyck, Franz F. Epp, Peter H. Dyck, and Greta Dyck. Seat: Anna (Mrs. Johann Klassen) at about age 15, Maria Heinrichs (Gerhard’s wife), Margareta Hamm Dyck, Agatha Dyck Epp, Maria (wife of Peter Dyck), and Isaak Dyck. Identification courtesy of grandson Paul Klassen, Bluffton, Ohio. Photo courtesy of Quiring and Bartel, In the Fullness of Time (Kitchener Ont., 1974), page 39.
“Thereupon the male choir sang the dedicatory song to the tune of: ‘How will it be, when finally,’ which was followed by congratulations extended by Minister Johann Epp. Taking the group’s expression of joy and thanksgiving as his point of departure, he drew attention to the grace through which the celebrant as well as the congregation had been granted the good fortune to celebrate this day. He thanked the Altester for his sacrificial love and closed with the verse of Scripture: ‘The Lord has done great things for us; of this we are glad.’ Whereupon the male choir intoned: ‘Jehovah, Your Name!’”


School Board, 1894.

Isaak’s father, Altester Gerhard Dyck served as the first chair of the Chortitza school board when it was formed in 1869. Altester Isaak Dyck was the fourth chair of the school board, from the beginning of the 1890s, serving for 12 years. In 1910 the members of the school board were Peter Abram Koop, Jakob Dahl, Johann Johann Thiessen, Ekaterinoslav, Peter Johann Thiessien, teacher and minister David Rempel and Altester Isaak Dyck, representing the clergy. The church Altester was always the representative of the clergy on the school board even if a minister was the chairman.

Peter Dyck, son of the former Altester and brother to Ohm Isaak, through his influence as Oberschulze did much good for the secondary school and was a warm friend of the school. From P. M. Friesen, Brotherhood, pages 624-5.

According to grandson George Dyck, Newton, Kansas, the home of Oberschulze Peter Dyck located next to the Mädchen Schule in Chortitza was still standing as of several years ago. Email to author, December 20, 2001.

Coronation, 1894.

Isaak Dyck was sent to St. Petersburg to represent the churches several times: to bring greetings to the royal couple (Czar Nikolaj II), already representing the sickly Altester Heinrich Epp, under whom he functioned as special “helper” for a number of years. From Peter M. Friesen, Brotherhood, page 944.

Altester Elections, 1896.

Altester Heinrich Epp had already talked about electing another Altester: “However, on January 4, 1896, at a general brotherhood meeting, he named an approximate date for the election of a new Altester....April 25.”

Unfortunately, Altester Heinrich Epp died on April 11. “Minister Johann Epp held a short valedictory address in the home of the deceased....It took a long time for the many people, all of whom wanted to look once more into the loving face of their Altester, to file by the coffin. Among the mourners were Russians, Jews, and especially many non-Mennonite factory workers.”

“After Isaak Dyck (the present Altester) had given expression to all the emotions of the congregation in deeply sorrowful and moving words, Altester Peter Klassen (of the Kronsweide Gemeinde) preached the funeral message.”

From Peter M. Friesen, Brotherhood, page 808.

Isaak Dyck was elected as Altester of the Flemish Gemeinde at Chortitza in 1896. He was ordained by the Frisian Altester Peter Klassen of the Kronsweide Gemeinde who had been ordained by Isaak’s father, Altester Gerhard Dyck. In 1907, Isaak Dyck was the one chosen to ordain Johann Klassen, son of Peter, the new Altester of the Kronsweide Gemeinde.

Early Ministry.

Rev. Isaak Dyck enjoyed renown throughout Chortitza and Rosenthal as one of the most robust citizens, working to a point beyond his 80th birthday. He was a tall study individual who could frequently be observed walking along the village streets and who often would
visit the homes of the parishioners. Many if not most looked forward to his unannounced calls. His much acclaimed strong constitution led him to display rather unreasonable feats even in winter. Cutting a hole in the ice of the Dnieper River, he would take a dip just to satisfy a habit.

He was an extraordinary active worker attending many meetings; frequently representing the Chortitza church in Ekaternoslav and even in Moscow during World War I.

Before he became a minister in Chortitza he had been a school teacher in Michelsburg for three years and a chaplain for young men at the “Anadoler Forstei Camp.”

Altester Isaak Dyck conducted services in the Chortitza church regularly every Sunday. It was a solemn moment when he entered from the ministerial room (Ohm’s Stube) and stopped for a moment saying: “Friede sei mit Euch” (Peace be with you).

Although this was a routine, it nevertheless held special significance for many.

From N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages in Russia 1789-1943 Khortiza - Rosental (Vancouver, 1981), page 55.

Osterwick.

“The baptismal services in Osterwick were held on the third holiday of Pentecost. The Altester conducted and performed the baptisms. From 1896 to 1922, Isaak Dyck, Rosenthal, was the Altester of the Chortitza Gemeinde, to which also the Osterwick church district belonged. Those Osterwickers who emigrated prior to the end of the 1920s and many of those coming after the Second World War, will still clearly hold him in their memories.”

“Asaltester Isaak Dyck conducted all official functions, especially baptisms and communion services, in a very ceremonious manner. When he entered the worship house in Osterwick, although already with greyed hair but still in upright manly deportment, it became so quiet that one could have heard a needle drop. When he paused in the middle of the worship house and extended to the Gemeinde the greeting of peace, one clearly felt the presence of God.”


Taken From Life.

It was Sunday and the wide main street of Rosenthal lay deserted in the summer heat. A festive mood had spread throughout the countryside and tranquillity had descended on the homes and gardens. The warm air created a shimmering effect against the backdrop of the distant woods; the warm fragrant smell of the soil from the wide unending steppes drifted down into the village like a vitalizing stimulant. The arms of God, the Almighty, were spread over the landscape laden with heavy harvest treasure, manifested in the lush Dnieper hills and deep valleys of roses. Blessings surrounded us.

The elderly folks had retired into their cool rooms and were indulging in afternoon naps. The younger set had taken to the valleys surrounding the village or were rambling through the meadows on short excursions.

Only two lads were seen standing near the fence along the street that led to an affluent farmer’s property. Jakob, the older boy, mounted the upper beam of the picket fence at the spot where the pickets were missing. There he swung upside-down like a living figure four; back and forth he went. The yearning eyes focused repeatedly on the pear tree in the garden and it wasn’t difficult to surmise that the boy’s behaviour was part of a careful plan. Suspense built while they waited for the gust of wind that would surely arrive to dislodge the fruit. The early noon hour presented the optimal time for the realization of their plans.

“Fritz, kick ennoal auf wea kemt,” the suspended figure commanded. (See if someone is coming).

Ca. 1910, l. - r.: Jakob A. Koop, industrialist, missionary J. Thiessen, and Altester Isaak Dyck. Isaak Dyck’s son Heinrich was married for the first time to Koop’s daughter. Jakob Koop was the son of Abram Koop (1838-1920), founder of the mammoth “A. J. Koop” industrial works in Schönwiese (see Diese Steine, page 202). Photo courtesy of Quiring and Bartel, In the Fullness of Time, page 39.

Partial map of Rosenthal, Chortitza Colony, circa 1929, as recalled by Arthur Kneeger, Winnipeg, Manitoba. The plan shows Altester Isaak Dyck’s home and surrounding area where many of the events in this article took place. The map is based on one drawn by Peter Kneeger and published in a number of books, including Dietrich Neufeld, A Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine (Winnipeg, 1977), page 8.
Fritz scanned the neighbourhood including the curved street which partially obscured his view. Seeing no one, he replied self-assuredly: “Es kena zu sen.” (“Can’t see anyone.”)

Both continued as before, one hanging and the other leaning against the fence.

“Ohm Isaak!” Jakob suddenly exclaimed as he observed Rev. Isaak Dyck, the church Ältester, approaching around the bend.

On a moment’s notice both boys dropped into the grass, pushing their back into the fence corner with feet stretched toward the well-worn path. Although they sat very still and attempted to strike a nonchalant post an attentive observer could detect the guilty look of a chastised tom-cat in their blue eyes.

When the Ältester arrived abreast of their position he calmly reached for their feet and pulled first one and then the other off the path. With a mischievous look in his eye and no hint of distrust he continued his descent in a majestic gait. Half seated, supported by the propped elbows, the ruffled-haired boys stared in dumbfounded wonder at the advancing Salekha, with feet stretched toward the well-worn path.

He observed Rev. Isaak Dyck, the church elder to say so publicly.

“Waut...waut...waut menst du, Jash, kennt Ohm Isaak em Himmili?” (“What do you think Jakob, will the reverend make it to heaven?”) the bewildered younger boy asked.

“Ek...yle yo!” (“Yes I think so) the other answered with his face still turned in the direction in which the Ältester had disappeared.

For a short time they lingered, then got up and walked slowly across the street. “Ohm Isaak” had communicated a practical lesson in a harmless but effective way. From N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages, pages 56-57.

Forstei Affairs, 1903.

In 1903 Ältester Isaak Dyck and Johann Thiessen were delegated by the Mennonite Gemeinden to seek clarification as to the obligations of those who had withdrawn from one or another Mennonite congregation but who according to their confession of faith still belonged to the Mennonite fellowship and entitled to the privileges thereof, to pay their tax contribution for the operation of the Forstei.

The answer from the Minister of Agriculture and Crown Lands No. 18178, dated October 30, 1903, was that such individuals were legally obliged to pay these levies. From P. M. Friesen, Brotherhood, page 624-5.

Bundeskonferenz, 1907-1910.

In 1907, Ältester Isaak Dyck, together with Abram Goertz, was elected to represent the Mennonites of Russia in matters of faith. From P. M. Friesen, Brotherhood, page 944.

“A legislative project of the Minister of the Interior concerning those of another faith was brought to the attention of the authorized brethren, Ältester Isaak Dyck and Ältester Abram Goertz, by the member of the third Imperial Duma, Mr. Bergmann. This resulted in a trip of these men to St. Petersburg, and later to a consultation with all church-administrative councils of the Molotschna in Alexanderwohl on February 7, 1908.” From P. M. Friesen, Brotherhood, page 629.

The result of the consultation was a resolution passed by the Molotschna Gemeinden (not apparently by the Old Colony Gemeinde) “…that we abstain from any active propaganda among members of other Christian denominations, whether this is understood as imposing our distinctive teachings on others (in order to lure such into our fellowship), or as agitating by extolling our teaching at the expense of other Christian teachings, coupled with a defamation of the latter.” From P. M. Friesen, Brotherhood, page 629.

“…David Epp [was] elected to represent the ailing Ältester Isaak Dyck by …[the Mennonite Bundeskonferenz], and then after Dyck’s final withdrawal, [David Epp was] appointed by the Conference in Schönsee, October 26-28, 1910, as deputy with Goertz and Braun.”

Emigration, 1909.

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) and the subsequent revolution which shook up the empire, turned the thoughts of some Mennonite leaders in favour of a mass emigration. Historian Frank H. Epp provides the following account of a conversation with Ältester Isaak Dyck:

“In 1909 Elder Isaak Dyck, for instance, confided in Gerhard Enns, a former Russian Mennonite, then a Canadian citizen of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, and back for a visit, that he was in full agreement with the desirability of a general Mennonite exodus. The strength of popular opinion, however, made it undesirable for him as a church elder to say so publicly.” Der Bote, X, Nov. 8, 1933.


Nature Lover.

“Isaak Dyck, minister and Ältester of the Chortitza Mennonittenegemeinde, was an especially gifted and beloved man. He served for many years until his senior days all the Mennonittenegemeinden in the then existing Chortitza Volost. Ohm Isaak was known as a good swimmer; he was the first one to bathe in the Dnjepr in spring and the last one in fall. In addition, he also served Gemeinden which lay far distant from Chortitza: Orenburg, Arkadak and others.

“Ohm Isaak always came on foot from Rosenthal: along the deep Rosenthal sand walk up to Zarskaia Pristanj (harbour), then along the stone banks of the Dnjepr. From these banks one could view the interesting sights along the course of the Dnjepr: the Island of Chortitza and the quiet village of the same name; the Schwineskopf; Rosenthal; Alexanderbad; part of Alexandrowsk, the Wolfsschne; and the magnificent stone cliffs of both river banks. A nature lover had no choice but to halt here for a moment from one’s walk and to feast one’s eyes upon these delights.

“Perhaps Ohm Isaak purposely chose this route in order to avoid the tumult and everyday distractions. For in our life, we certainly need such times when we are alone with our God. Here along the green banks of the Dnjepr River, he may have sometimes stood at the roadside allowing the ship-clouds to sail over him.”

“Ohm Isaak was a great lover of catfish soup. As soon as the Dnjepr was free of ice, he announced his forthcoming visit at the home of my in-laws with a letter and casual visit, for my mother-in-law cooked the best catfish soup. Ohm Isaak was also a close friend of my father-in-law.

“The sandy Rosenthaler path, the long hill at the Zarskaia Pristanj and the fresh summer air had contributed to Ohm Isaak’s good appetite. After the coffee, he again walked the old familiar way, back to Rosenthal.

“Although the discussion with Ohm Isaak also had different topics, he always knew how to direct it back to the religious theme.”

Extract from a report by Johann D. Rempel in Der Bote, Nr. 17, May 1960/Diese Steine, page 79.
Storm Clouds, 1914.

“1914. The First World War had broken out. I had come back from Siberia for the summer holidays. On August 10 a brotherhood meeting was held in the venerable and aged Chortitza worship house. Brethren from the entire Old Colony were in attendance. The building was filled to the last place. An opening song was sung.

“Ohm Isaak called the meeting to order. He spoke of the love for our neighbour. Then he prayed, slowly and earnestly; it came from the depth of his troubled heart.

“We listeners were also deeply moved. For we certainly knew what was taking place. With his short meditation, Ohm Isaak wanted to inspire us, to find a quiet answer to the scripture which had been read. In his demeanour all of us saw what was coming—the world uproar. Our thoughts gained substance and bearing....After this brotherhood meeting, I never saw Ohm Isaak again.”

Extract from a report by Johann D. Rempel in Der Bote, Nr. 17, May 1960/Diese Steine, page 79.

War, 1914.

“With the onset of World War One, oppression of the German speaking Mennonites increased. Many difficult situations and serious problems were encountered and had to be dealt by the leadership. Teacher and later Volost Secretary, Gerhard P. Schroeder, recalled one such situation:

“A most glaring example of outrageous official arbitrariness, because it reached into the highest offices of the Ekaterinoslav gubernia, was the case of three important Mennonite leaders, namely, the head of the Old Colony church, Åläster Isaak Dyck, the president of the Volost (district) council, Franz Paetkau, and the secretary of this council, Jakob Klassen. The accusation against them was that at a large congregational meeting in the Chortitza church they allegedly had voiced pro-German sentiments, when in actuality the meeting was called for the purpose of raising money for the Russian Red Cross.

“Only by the intervention of other prominent Mennonite leaders, who had influence in various high places, were the three men released from prison, and then only after the Chortitza Volost had paid a fine of 3,000 rubles.

From Gerhard P. Schroeder, Miracles of Grace and Judgement (Lodi, Ca., 1974), page 19.

1918.

An example of the multi-faceted duties of Åläster Isaak Dyck is found in the diaries of Rev. Johann J. Nickel (1859-1920), Rosenhof, Schönfeld-Brazol.

In his journal entry for January 22 he refers to the funeral of a Mrs. Abraham Dyck in the village of Skelevataia, where Åläster “...Isaak Dyck gave a touching message of comfort to the family, for whom he held great affection, having boarded at the Dyck home for many years.”

Extract from John P. Nickel, editor, Hope Springs Eternal: A Legacy of Service and Love in Russia During Difficult Times (Box 1674, Battleford, Sask., S0M 0E0), pages 179-180.

Ransom, 1918.

Another entry by Rev. Johann J. Nickel for February 22, reports of the imprisonment of Åläster Isaak Dyck as an act of terrorism against the Mennonite people, presumably to show that even their esteemed and beloved Åläster was not above and beyond their tyranny.

“We were greatly alarmed to hear about the ransom of two million rubles for the release of our honoured and beloved Åläster, the Rev. Isaak Dyck, who had been arrested and detained. Of him the ruffians had said, ‘Since he is the God of the Chortitza people, we will take him.

Extract from John P. Nickel, ed., Hope Springs Eternal, pages 191.

On August 21, Rev. Johann P. Nickel visited the Chortitza Colony and recorded that “...he took supper with Elder Isaak Dyck.”

Extract from John P. Nickel, ed., Hope Springs Eternal, pages 237.

March 1: “The Chortitza residents still had not come up with the two million ruble contribution. The Alexandrovsk government demanded cash, not cheques. However, it refused to return the cheques now in its possession. This really created a hardship for us all as the Chortitza folks had given 190,000 rubles the day before yesterday. This money they tossed back to us with the arrogant demand that we pay the whole amount at once, and not bother them with petty payments. The six hostages, including 60 year-old Cornelius Hildebrand are languishing in prison. The Schönwiesers have been bringing food to them twice daily, but from now on, only bread and water will be allowed. They are treated as common criminals.”


Escape, 1919.

Isaak Dyck’s daughter, Mrs. Peter Klassen of Hanley, Saskatchewan related the following incident from the life of her dear father during those troubled times.

This episode occurred in 1919, when the Makhnov bandits occupied our villages.

A derelict German lad went to Makhnov and said to him: “Do you know why the White Army is so powerful against you? The Åläster Isaak Dyck is paying for them.”

This was oil poured on the fire. Armed men were immediately sent out to find this man Åläster Is. Dyck and to bring him to the bandit leader in the camp. However, they did not personally know Åläster Is. Dyck and the people who were questioned did not give father away. Warned by good friends, he went to his brother-in-law in a neighbouring village.

It was not long before the Makhnov riders were also frantically looking around in this village, searching for Åläst Is. Dyck. It so happened that he was standing on the yard observing all this turmoil exactly at the moment when a wagon filled with bandits came racing into the yard.

“That must be him, yes that’s him,” they shouted.

If you really like him, then you must put up the money to release him.’

“One farmer said, ‘I do not wish to have the death of our Åläster on my conscience, so I will hang over everything I own.’ Many were of the same mind, so they gave all they had. Besides that, a lot of children’s money boxes were emptied, women gave money saved to buy eggs, butter, and other foods, etc., and the money was turned over to the Committee. Large and small sums were donated; the poor gave a few rubles at a time, sometimes even kopeks (pennies).

Even Jews, as well as Russian factory workers came forth with cash, cheques, valuable documents, and the like. Yet on Thursday morning only 1,300,000 rubles had been raised. Seven hundred thousand more rubles is required, or...?”

“This fearful question was on everybody’s mind. However (all money questions aside), through the grace of God we were eventually able to get our Åläster released...”

“The villages of Chortitza, Rosenthal and Einlage had been especially terrorized. People were simply robbed blind of everything: groceries, clothing and even the beds they slept on. The widow of the wealthy Franz Dyck had been left with only a bed and the clothes she was wearing. (The recently released) Åläster Isaak Dyck was robed of all his clothes.”

Extract from John P. Nickel, ed., Hope Springs Eternal, pages 191.

Wood cut by Dietrich Neufeld. From 1917 and onwards, black death was the fearsome reality of the Mennonites in the Ukraine; the grim reaper overshadowed all facets of life, whether by war (the shifting front passed through Chortitza-Rosenthal numerous times), anarchists or typhus. From the cover of A Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine (Winnipeg, 1977), 142 pages.
Father quickly went behind the barn when a ruffian came running up to him from the other side. “Where are you man, where have you gone?” he screamed.

Altester Isaak Dyck was completely astounded and was about to ask, “Are you looking for me?”

He distinctly heard a voice call out to him, “Say nothing. I have blinded his eyes.”

Father observed him very closely and later related that the eyes of the bandit were rolling about crazily, like those of a wild animal, but that he had truly not seen him. This made father so confidant that he turned around and walked into the home, in spite of the bandits in the house.

The same incident was also recalled by the teacher and Volost Secretary Gerhard P. Schroeder who lived in the home across the street from Schroeder who lived in the home across the street. He quoted Schroeder as saying, “In the spring of 1919, I was able to find the elder Altester left last night. He had to be found. I always thought that he was definitely not be spared. I just hope he can get away without being seen.”

When this produced no results I was told to crawl through the window into the house and to open the back door from the inside. This I did, whereupon they came in and commenced systematically to search the place, to no avail. There was nobody inside.

They followed me outside, and just as we emerged from the house several men took note of a path and a series of steps leading up the hill into the orchard and thence through a gate to the residence of the art teacher. They demanded, “Where does this path lead?” My instant response, and I am sure the Lord gave it to me, was, “It leads only into the orchard.”

The bandits seemed to be satisfied with my answer and followed me back to my home. They entered the house, and then they noticed the piano they demanded to know if I could play the instrument. When I answered in the affirmative, I was asked to play something for them. This I did, and somewhat later they wanted to know whether I knew their favourite song ‘Yablochko’, a song to which I have made reference at an earlier place in this story. I played it for them several times, much to their delight and pleasure. Perhaps the Lord used even this to quiet them down and make them forget about the elder across the street.

Next morning I went to see an uncle of mine. Mr. John Klassen, where lived a cousin of mine who was married to Elder Dyck’s daughter, Helen. I appraised her of my experiences the preceding day of the great danger her father and family faced, and that she had better tell them of the urgency to find a safer hiding place. May I interject here that Reverend Dyck, during these terrible months and earlier in the year, had many narrow and, what seemed to me, miraculous escapes from the hands of the marauders.

From Gerhard P. Schroeder, _Miracles of Grace and Judgement_ (Lodi, Cal., 1974), pages 102-103.

**On the Run, 1919.**

Heinrich Neufeld (1886-1958), a teacher at the Teachers’ Seminary in Chortitza, was staying at the home of his colleague Henry J. Dyck, who lived up the hill, behind the house barn residence of Altester Isaak Dyck in Rosenthal. In 1921 Heinrich Neufeld recorded the following journal account of the elder’s escape from the culches of the Makhnovtsy:

“October 7, 1919. Last night the men billed with us departed for the front. The battle line has been established along the Dnieper. Even this otherwise disorderly crowd shows a certain ability to organize for battle. We hear the wild crackling of gunfire. Our sector in being shelled from the city of Alexandrovsk on the other side of the river. But that doesn’t frighten us even though a shell did explode close to our house with a deafening crash. The splinters are lying in front of our house door. We breathe easier because we believe the battle line may be shifting away from us.

“The Altester of the Gemeinde has been forced to leave his home. He was unable to save anything and was forced to hide. For a couple of nights I hid him in my room. He is hard of hearing and asked me to wake him should he fall asleep. This old man, who in his time has been a true spiritual servant, is now forced to sleep in my bed like a fugitive, bereft of home and comfort. He doesn’t even realize how intense the search for him is. We try to spare him. But tonight he has to go: we have to persuade him to leave. Outside it is dark, cold and filthy. He is being forced to abandon his congregation, and, like a thief in the night, steal away over hill and dale, but he can’t do us or himself any good by staying because his life will certainly not be spared. I just hope he can get away without being seen.”

October 8: The Altester left last night. He had to escape through the window as our house was filling up with looters again. The old man went out into the dark night, wallowing through the thick, almost knee-deep mud that has resulted from the autumn rains.”

Home Invasion.

Under the heading, “S. Pravda in Rosenthal” Gerhard P. Schroeder relates another incident where the Isaak Dyck home was in the process of being requisitioned for use by the Makhnovtsy anarchists.

“One morning during these bleak and despairing autumn days, I happened to be standing in front of a window of our home facing the main street of Rosenthal. Preoccupied with thoughts about problems at the office and the incessant danger facing all of our people throughout the Chortitza Volost, I was sort of aimlessly staring at what was going on across the street from us in the yard of the Mennonite Altester Isaak Dyck.

“I knew that he and his wife and the one daughter living with them had left their home to seek safety elsewhere, and that to the best of my knowledge the place was empty. And yet as I was standing there deeply troubled about our present helpless situation, I suddenly realized that a group of Makhnovtsy were obviously in the process of moving into the residence across the street.

“As I followed their activity more closely I began to see a number of familiar faces, those of friends, or should I rather say, acquaintances, from my Schönfeld days during the preceding winter and spring months. Among them were Bat’ko Pravda, Naumenko, and a number of others from the village of Liubimovka. I decided to go over and meet them and in some sort of way to welcome them by pointing out where my family and I lived. The reader may recall that I had had an extensive acquaintance-ship with this particular ba’ko and some of his henchmen, a relationship which on some crucial occasions had rebounded to the advantage of my family, friends, and other acquaintances.

“And so I went to the Dyck home to meet this motley assortment of comrades. The up-shot of the meeting was that Pravda and his staff decided to make their headquarters on my father’s homestead, namely in the building in which my parents and my sister Lena lived. The move meant that they had to give up two rooms to the self-invited guests. It can scarcely be said that neither I, or any other member of our extended family living in the several buildings of the parental homestead, were particularly happy with this decision of my ‘friends’.

From Gerhard P. Schroeder, Miracles of Grace and Judgement, pages 118.

Compassion, 1921.

Meanwhile two years had passed. In the meantime, the daughter, Mrs. Peter Klassen, with her husband, had moved in with the parents Is. Dyck, so that they should not be so alone. It was a winter evening when she and her sister Anna with the children were sitting in the “little room” (Kleine Stube) patching. The door opened quietly and in stepped the unkempt boy who had caused the wedded couple, Is. Dyck, so much grief at that time two years ago.

“Can I speak with Uncle Dyck?” he asked.

He was then brought to the elderly pair in their room.

A. K. then stood at the door and asked, “Uncle Dyck, will you give me a piece of bread?”

“Is that you, Abram?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“And you are coming to me for a piece of bread?”

“Yes, who else would give it to me?” he replied.

“Ohm Is. Dyck winked at his daughter and said, “Give him what he wants.”

But the daughter said, how even to this day, she saw his very sad countenance in the face of such shamelessness and heartlessness. Hunger hurts and the great deprivation had driven the lad to Is. Dyck. And Is. Dyck had not allowed himself to become embittered on account of his meanness. He probably thought of the words of Jesus, “If your enemy hungered, give him to eat…”

“Many of our men and women dealt with their torturers in this manner during these days disarming the beast, so that they could not carry out their evil intentions. And the Lord will certainly not allow such deeds to go unrewarded.”

As told by daughter Mrs. Peter Klassen, Hanley, Saskatchewan, 1919, recorded by Isaak Reimer, “Einlage - Kitschkas,” page 159(ii)/Aron A. Toews, Mennonite Martyrs, pages 71-72.

Birthday Party, 1922.

Altester Isaak Dyck was highly revered by his pashnicians. Gerhard P. Schroeder recorded in his diary for December 22, 1922, “Prediger Peter Johann Penner died a 8 o’clock in the morning. In the afternoon of this day there was a celebration in the Mennonite worship house-the birthday of Prediger Isaak Dyck.”

Friday, December 22nd there was a big celebration in the Chortitza Mennonite worship house, this being the birthday of their dearly beloved Altester, Isaak G. Dyck, who was our neighbour across the street and a dearly beloved man. This may seem to be a matter of little significance, but those who have gone through persecution in religious matters know what this means, just to gather in the church in honour of a dear servant of God…”

From Gerhard P. Schroeder, Miracles of Grace and Judgement, pages 169 and 235.

These words are particularly significant coming from Gerhard P. Schroeder who had converted himself into Separatist-Pietist religious culture whose adherents typically tried every means possible to work against those such as Altester Isaak Dyck who had remained faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and endeavoured in their weakness to follow Him. The Editor.

Retirement, 1922.

In April, 1922, Ohm Isaak ordained Peter Neufeld to replace him. “This was when Altester Isaak Dyck retired because of age and Neufeld was elected to that post.” From N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages, page 57.

MCC, 1923.

It is clear that Ohm Isaak retired only from the grinding responsibility of lead Altester and that he continued to serve his flock.

Christian Emmanuel Krehbühl, North Newton, Kansas, was one of the workers sent to Russia to aid the Mennonites during the 1922
famine. He was sent by a newly formed society which was to become Mennonite Central Committee. His journal entry for Sunday, August 6, 1922, included the following:

“I had arranged with Jacob Suderman, our clerk, that I go with him to Chortitza to hear the choir sing there and spend the day with Sudermans...I took the Ford truck as we did not have far to go. G. G. Hiebert who was sick after vaccination and injection decided to go with me instead of Slagel. I also had Miss Heinrichs, P. Cornies and others along.

“At the Chortitza church is Rev. I. Dueck, emeritus elder, and Johann Klassen, Lehrer, one of the ministers, long coat, well dressed. They took me to the Predigers Stuebchen [ministers’ room] where we met the ministers. Klassen at once said I must do the preaching today. I wanted him to share in the introduction, but he said he had two weddings, one right after the services and at one p.m.”

Courtesy of George Dyck, North Newton, Kansas, grandson of Oberschulze Peter Dyck.

Historian Frank H. Epp refers to a letter written by Ältester Isaak Dyck in 1923 which “revealed that even there the Board’s reputation had sunk to a discouraging low.” From Frank H. Epp, Mennonite Exodus (Altona, 1976), page 134.

Continuing Service.

Ohm Isaak continued to serve his flock as the senior clergyman of the Chortitza Gemeinde. His parishioners looked up to him in awe and inspiration.

A stirring example is found in the biography of Ältester Heinrich Winter, one of his successors: “In 1889 the Chortitza Colony erected a memorial monument in honour of the centennial of the settlement. Now the Communists wanted to place a bust of Lenin on top of it. This atheist was to crown the monument built to the glory of God! The proposal was tabled and therefore a congregational meeting was called.”

Everyone knew it was dangerous to say anything. There was painful silence. Then the old and respected figure of Ältester Isaak Dyck stood up; he was retired but his mind was still sharp. For many years he had served as a preacher and Ältester, and now he took the podium and said: ‘I have travelled from village to village to collect the money for this monument. Then, out of our thankfulness to God for His gracious leading, we erected this monument. It is a monument of faith; therefore I feel strongly that we should not place the head of an unbeliever on the top.’”

‘The gathered brothers of the congregation were relieved that their proven leader had spoken so openly, and so then they too had the strength to say “No”...’ Nothing resulted from this proposal of the Communists.


On February 20, 1924, Ältester Isaak Dyck, Ältester P. Neufeld, Ältester H. Epp, and 31 ministers and deacons published a letter in Der Mennonitische Immigranten-Bote, addressed “to the ministerial brethren in America” on behalf of the Chortitzer, Nikolaiapoler and Kronsweider Gemeinden, resulting from a bible course, pleading with them not to forsake and forget them, and thanking the “beloved Ältester and brother in Christ D. Tös” for all his ef-

Sons and/or sons-in-law of Ältester Isaak Dyck and Margaretha Hamm Dyck. Front: i.r., Peter Dyck and Gerhard Dyck. Rear: Peter Klassen (left) and Heinrich Dyck. Photo identification by granddaughter Marga Starzenegger, North Vancouver, B. C. Photo courtesy of N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages, page 59.

In Der Bote, March 11, 1925.

Extract from a letter of Ältester Isaak Dyck, Chortitza, to his children:

My last letter may not even have reached you yet, and now I am already writing again. And when I ask myself, why such a rush, it is nothing more than that I am following the testimony of my heart—yes, the witness of this poor and sick heart. Before this it beat so wildly, stormy and unregulated, and now—for some time—I do not feel its pounding anymore. It is possible that it will soon stand still for ever.

That would mean, going home! To my home! For neither America nor Russia has any meaning for those who have gone home. Was it not Hiller who coined the words, “Blessed are those, who are homesick, for they shall come home.”

But now you ask, “From where do these sad thoughts originate?”

To this I can only answer, “I suffer from shorthness of breath. I have sores in various body parts and self-denying experiences.”

But the sick often assess their situation completely falsely. Evidently I also belong among those. Therefore, I will break off here.

Mama is engaged in her thoughts with dying and departing. Yes, she always has a desire to depart and to be with Christ. But her physical strength and mental capability are very much declining. Sometimes she can not find her way about even in simple matters, but for the most part she does quite well. God be thanked!

Recently, she commented: “In the spring, we both want to die, and then that “America” [lament] will cease.”

To give up on the [to] “America” has occasioned her much contemplating and devising of plans. Still, we will see how and if, we survive the winter...I would dearly appreciate if my youth - and bosom friends, W. Rempels and my sister S. Loewen, might also hear something out of our writings. Until further notice I will feel relieved of conscience and friendship obligations...I am still awaiting a return letter from Ältester D. Tös. Only one letter—over time that seems to be too little; but in any case, it is still much more, then when my former Gemeinde members do not keep their word, given upon emigrating. But brotherly love will overlook this also....”

Der Bote, June 10, 1925.

A letter of Ältester Is. Dyck, Rosental, dated April 26, 1925.

Beloved Children and all of yours!

We have received your letter, Gerhard and Mariechen, with joy together with the poem for mother. We also received a loving letter from Neta, and likewise also from Jasch and Margaret Epp. Mica has written several times, only
Franz Heese has not. During recent times many writings rich in content have been directed towards us: from Is. Zacharias, from Rev. Joh. Rempel, from Hans and Anna, from Ms. Marg. Wieler, from Peter and Justina Warkentin, from Is. Lehm, and Ms. Kath. Lehm. All of them contain the evidence that the glorious Christian bonds of love keep us united; this resonates with us joyfully and thankfully. That not all of those have previously written from whom I expected such, and even those with whom I had shared everything here in joy, sorrow and labour, I will try not to attribute to them as debt, for I fully realize that everyone has worries and exertions in abundance.

At times the corresponding is getting difficult for me, the spirit becomes slothful. I also still have children and friends here, to whom I must minister; in fact, only recently, an acquaintance from Fürstenland, requested that I implement a solution to drive the hunger from his door. And I had to provide him with a negative answer, that neither we, nor anyone else here, has even the smallest surplus. This hollow-eyed guest, “hunger” again threatens many a house and home. It must be truly serious in Sergejewka, where already instances of death by starvation have occurred. May God in grace spare us.

What shall I say now! Only recently, Peter said that his children also feel some desire to emigrate. Franz Epps are already on fire with this for a long time. Marie and children want to as well, but not he. Ours [children] in the summer room, deport themselves completely apathetic to the question, and are deathly silent about it. For myself I know the least to be said in that regard with any certainty. As old as we are, we yield ourselves to the dilemma, the way it has been established from above, praying and singing: “Befiehlt du deine Wege” and Ihn, ihn laß tun und walten,” etc. Yet, I must add, that for mother, the desire to see you there is running in over my head, and I myself am not free [of it] during every hour.

Here, as well as there, it is by far not the way we might like it and the way we are accustomed. And the aged are not elastic and bendable, rather fragile and breakable. Speed and adaptability are the possessions of youth and the young people; they become accustomed to the new and forget about what as been.

Tired pilgrims, however, look up onto the hills, where they wish to rest, and where in the course of 136 years, so many have found their sleeping quarters and resting place after the short provesome 38 of this life.

Yesterday, an R. Abrams was buried on the Chortitzer graveyard, and five days ago, the aged and well-known army surgeon, Jampolsky. His death, apparently, drew upon him, while he was playing cards with his son, the doctor, Alas, the [plight] of the Jewish people in our times. What mocking and scoffing there is, and the Russian people follow them in everything. Then the mouth whispers, the way Isaiah opens his 64th Chapter. Beloved children, I will now close. For the oscillations of the spirit are declining. If the editor of Der Bote, friend Epp, might wish to accept my report regarding the received letters into his pages, I would be most grateful to him, for a weight would thereby be lifted from my heart and my conscience stifled.

Besides this, I bid you and the “Boten” to pass on a friendly greeting to all my former Gemeinde members. May God preserve and help everyone. Simply said, my greeting is for everyone—old and young, [those] whom we have seen and known. To be able to say this, was my heart’s most earnest desire. I hope that the circle of old friends—male and female—will not forget, now and again, to remember an old fellow pilgrim, and to lay a warm intercession down before the throne of God and the Lamb, without being reminded to do so.

May God preserve us all in His grace, and spread the shelter and blessing of His almighty hand over us.

In continuing true love: parents, siblings and friends, Isaak and Margaretha Dyck and the children.

50th Anniversary, 1926.

On January 31, 1926, the Chortitza Gemeinde celebrated the 50th anniversary of ministerial service of its Älteste Isaak Dyck. The event is recalled by Olga Rempel.

“I can still see him before me, how with his upright posture he would stride to the Dnjepr, in order to be the first in spring and the last in fall to swim in the Dnjepr. Since we lived almost as neighbours during the first years, we children learned to love and cherish him. He was always prepared to visit with us, and in summer he often sent us up into his tall pear trees, in order to shake off the pears.

“He was also a good speaker and no one slept during his sermons. He was a reasoned and righteous man, who did not refrain from defending his views. He still made his house visits, yet, his health was not the best.”

From Olga Rempel, Einer von Vielen Die Lebensgeschichte von Aaron P. Toews (Winnipeg, 1979), page 68.

Ältester Heinrich Neufeld.

When Ältester Peter Neufeld died on January 21, 1927, Ältester Isaak Dyck was one of the speakers chosen to eulogize him.

From N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages in Russia, page 57.

In 1927 the senior (Old Colony) Gemeinde again installed a new Ältester since Ältester Isaak Dyck had become quite elderly. February 20, 1927, minister D. Epp was elected as Ältester.

From Olga Rempel, Einer von Vielen, page 69.

TrIBUTES:

Ältester Isaak Dyck was probably the most influential Mennonite leader in Russia, as that land slipped into revolution, anarchy, civil war and sovietization. He was one of those courageous and gifted servants of God whose life and ministry touched and blessed all whom he encountered. Everyone who met him remembered him in some way, as is evident from the following testimonials:

“Of all the ministers in the Chortitza church he served it for the longest period of time. His total service was 53 years and 7 months which was longer than his father’s total of 39 years and Ältester Jakob Dyck’s 48 years. He had also served longest as an Ältester. Ohm Isaak had baptized 1730 persons in Chortitza and elsewhere.”

“His funeral took place on August 28, 1929. His wife Margareta (nee Hamm) survived him by two years. They had been married 59 years and had three sons and seven daughters, a number of whom immigrated to Canada. She died on June 2, 1931.”

From N. J. Kroeker, First Mennonite Villages in Russia, page 55.

“If Ältester Isaak Dyck had baptised 1730 souls, there were certainly thousands whom he had married. It was considered a great honour to have been married by Ältester Is. Dyck.”

“The Ältester of the Chortitza Gemeinde served not only the 18 villages of the Chortitza Volost, but also through many long years, the daughter colonies of Jasykovo, Orenburg, Arkadak. No wonder then that in the obituaries in the newspapers in Canada—Der Bote, Die Rundschau, even now, one reads, “Baptised by Ältester Isaak Dyck, baptised by Ältester Isaak Dyck.”

From Isaak Reimer, Einlage - Kitschkas, page 158(ii) and 160(i).

“Death in 1929 undoubtedly saved him [Ohm Isaak] from an equally terrible fate, either exile to the Arctic region of Russia this side of the Urals or to Siberia during the collectivization later that year.”

From Gerhard P. Schroeder, Miracles of Grace and Judgement, page 103.

“This year (1929) has demanded many sacrifices; many people died, especially children. What hit our Gemeinde hard, was the departure of the beloved aged Ältester Isaak Dyck. He had suffered a number of strokes, but always recovered. For considerable time already, he had not taken part in serving the Gemeinde, other than in visiting the sick. This left father (Aaron P. Toews) and Ältester D. Epp alone to minister to the large Gemeinde.”

From Olga Rempel, Einer von Vielen, page 74.

Conclusion.

Too often in Russian Mennonite historiography, petty agitators, predators and trouble makers have been idolized while major community builders such as Ohm Isaak have been quietly forgotten.

It is important that leaders such as Ohm Isaak Dyck and the Ältesten Heinrich Wiens (1800-72), Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Abraham Doerksen (1852-1929), Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969), and Heinrich Voth (1887-1973), be restored to their rightful place in the historiography, in order that their spiritual heirs and descendants may seize hold of and reap the harvest of faithful discipleship and goodness which they have sown.

16 - Preservations No. 21, December, 2002
In Memorium - Ältester Isaak Dyck 1847-1929

Obituary - Der Bote Sept. 4, 1929.
The telegraphed notice of the departure of the honourable Ältester Isaak Dyck of the Chortitza Gemeinde has also brought alive the loving memory of this beloved man to many—many, also on this side of the ocean. As the long-standing leader of the large Chortitza Gemeinde, very many were indebted to him in some manner of spiritual nurture. He also led many of those that are here in baptismal instruction, and many have received the baptism through him, and were received into the Gemeinde by him, he has blessed the marriage of one or another among us, and for many he has also been a friendly comforter and helper, when his house was severely afflicted by sickness or death or some other misfortune.

How often did we not see him walking along the streets of Rosenthal or Chortitza, this strong, elastic stature.

Where was he going now?
Somewhere someone was sick, or lonely or grieving, somewhere someone needed to be admonished and directed aright. He performed his duties not only out of obligation, but from his heart. This explains why he so often brought sunshine into so many homes, which manifested only sorrow and grief. On Sundays and holidays he preached the Gospel with joy, always directed towards the practical life, and he came to be a blessing to many of his listeners. Steadfast and sure of his goal, he lead the Gemeinde for many years.

Now he is no longer among the living. And when we now ask ourselves, who was he? we all seem to agreed. He was a servant of Christ and a householder of the Church of God, 1 Cor. 4. His entire long life belonged to the service of Christ through the Gemeinde.

His public service began when he became a teacher in the village school. In those olden days, the teacher was also often a real worker in the church. The religious indoctrination at that time was by far the most important assignment of the schools, and for this reason the calling of a teacher was a good preparation for the calling of a minister. Thus it came to pass that a good many were called as ministers from the teaching profession, which concerned the entire Mennonite community in Russia, they also sought to engage the teacher was also often a real worker in the Gemeinde.

He then felt, as a 74-year-old, that a younger person needed to be installed. His difficulty in hearing, which had set in over the last years, also hindered him, from full activities. He was no longer able to find his way right in the new circumstances, and thus, it came to the election of an Ältester. In the spring of 1922, minister Peter Neufeld was elected as his successor.

The new circumstances in Russia, the new spirit which now spread itself, the disorder and the acts of violence, tired him to the heart. It cost him no small contention, whether he also should not join himself to the emigration to Canada. The frailty of his wife and his love for the Gemeinde, persuaded him to remain behind, and to close his life there where he had laboured for so long.

At the age of 25, teacher Isaak Dyck was then also called for a special service in the Gemeinde. For a number of years, he now served simultaneously as minister and teacher, until a call as chaplain led him to the Forstei (Mennonite alternate service). Here he served as a confident and spiritual advisor to large numbers of youths, around 100, who were conscripted into the Forstei, while at the same time serving as manager of the farm operations attached to the Forstei. In how far he had won the trust of the detachments and the board, is manifested by the fact that he was later elected as the representative of all Mennonites in Russia in matters relating to the Forstei. As delegate he was not only responsible to lead in the economic side of the Forstei and to deal with large sums of money, also he all had to oversee the religious and cultural influences of the young Mennonite men, serving in the various Forstei camps.

This trust in him continued. Wherever something later arose, where something needed doing, which concerned the entire Mennonite community in Russia, they also sought to engage him. Repeatedly he was elected to various delegations which were to present themselves to the supreme government in Petersburgh, regarding any of a number of Mennonite concerns. His good vision and his sound judgement, for the most part, guaranteed him good results.

His strength and his love, however, belonged to the large Chortitza Gemeinde. At first he served as minister, after 1896 as Ältester. Over the course of years, he led the Gemeinde with firm hand, whereby he always sought to nurture wholesome and practical Christian living. He was hardly available for renewals which turned away from the faith of the fathers.

After always more daughter congregations were formed and serving them became always more difficult, he instituted their independence and that each had their own organization and their own Ältester. But the bond of unity was always preserved.

During the War (WWI), the Revolution and the Civil War, those who served in public office and who had influence upon the circumstances, especially had to suffer. He was likewise targeted, and during the great disorder, he was forced to be away for approximately half-a-year, and to remain in hiding. How hard this must have become for him, to remain away from the Gemeinde during this extremely difficult time for her, we can hardly even imagine.

Sufficient to say, that when he finally returned home after a half year’s absence, and saw the desolation, occasioned by the bandits and the raging epidemics, his strength was broken.

And now he has stepped down. The circumstances in Russia made the evening of his life difficult for him. But because of his faith in God and the Saviour and a holy life, they have not been able to steal from him. “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing,” 2 Tim. 4:8.

Ältester Isaak Dyck was born December 9, 1847. Since 1872 he was a minister and since 1896, Ältester. The day of his death is not familiar to me, he was buried on the 27th of August. He achieved the age of almost 82 years. It will be hard for his spouse, who was already ill long before he, to carry this lose. But her life also stands in the hands of the Lord. “J. J. Klassen” Dundurn [Sask.]
works do follow him.

How animated the beloved deceased stood before our souls, and with his powerful voice called forth his punishing admonishment or also his comforting word in the assembly! How bright his lively talks inspired his listeners? With what holy fervour, he admonished us, his fellow brothers, towards faithful service? Certainly his words struck into hearts, for they came from the heart, when time and again, he begged his listeners, “to walk in the shoes of the poor, to bring comfort, to suffer misfortune, and to dry the tears.”

With the support of God, he carried forward the leadership of the Gemeinde—the left behind work of the deceased Ältester H. Epp—with a sure hand until various infirmities and particularly his deafness, made it necessary, to place an assistant Ältester by his side.

He has faithfully followed the eulogy he spoke at the coffin of his predecessor, “To serve the Lord our God in the Gemeinde, to enlarge His kingdom, to serve the battle against sin and to zealously persevere and become strength in us, to righteously fight wishes live onward among us for a long time, to serve the Lord to the end; indeed, all peoples if possible.”

In closing, I commend to all of us, his own words from his funeral oration held for the deceased Ältester H. Epp: “May his work and wishes live onward among us for a long time, and become strength in us, to righteously fight the battle against sin and to zealously persevere unto all good! For the Lord will also maintain us further in His great Christian Gemeinde of all peoples and have the heart good will unto us all.” [By] “D. H. Rempel”

Áltester Isaak Gerhard Dyck, from *Der Bote*, Oct. 2, 1929.

Isaak Gerhard Dyck, Ältester of the Chortitza Gemeinde, died at 11 o’clock in the evening of August 24, at the age of 81 years, eight months and 15 days. The funeral service in the Chortitza worship house had called many participants together.


“The days of our years are three score and ten; and if by reason of strength they be four-score years, yet it is their strength of labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away,” Psalms 90:10.

These words of the Psalmist have been confirmed by the lives of our parents Isaak and Margaretha Dyck. Father died on August 24, 1929, at the age of 81 years, eight months and 15 days, and mother, nee Hamm, on June 2 of this year 1931, at the age of 60 years and eight months. They were allowed to share joys and sorrows in their marriage for 59 years, one months and 15 days.

Fifteen children were born in their marriage, 8 sons and 7 daughters. Of the 15, 3 sons and 4 daughters are presently still alive who with the exception of the oldest daughter and two sons are all here in America. Only the youngest son Heinrich with his family was able to be present at mother’s funeral which was held in the Chortitza worship house. Sister Marie and her husband P. Dyck are separated–banished, and brother Peter is supposedly sitting in jail, so that they were unable to be present.

A beloved and also loving mother has been buried. Since the office of Ältester of the Chortitza Gemeinde took all father’s resources and he often had to be away from home, all the difficult household work fell on the shoulders of our beloved mother. Indeed, her life has only been work and striving, and she did it gladly, out of love for father and us. After father had finally been able to die from his severe illness, consuming him almost beyond knowing, mother’s first words were: “Gott sei dank!”

When mother died, where also our uncle Ältester David Epp was present, his first words were: “Gott sei dank!” And us children, there as well as here, cannot say anything else but: “Gott sei dank!”

Our beloved and already infirm mother has been released from all the misery and sorrow; her innermost wish, to be with Christ, has been fulfilled.

Oh, how lovingly my beloved and faithful mother stands before me in my spirit, with her faithful and loving eyes, when I still see her sitting by the window looking out on the street, with her knitting or darning socks, which never wanted to last for long, or while reading the Bible, or in the garden with the flowers, which I must say—in honour of my mother, only bloomed so fully and magnificently in our garden.

Yes, a mother’s heart full of love has been hidden. She did not manifest her love to us children with many and magnificent words, but her beautiful eyes full of love betrayed it to us. How gladly and how often have we together with our children not been able to visit our beloved parents and younger siblings who were still at home! It was always a great joy. It consisted of genuine parental and childrens’ love.

How lovingly I still see my beloved mother in spirit before me, just before our departure here [America], since she had already taken her leave from us before we left Chortitza because of fatigue, how when she was still sitting backwards on a straw sack in the box wagon, she called out her last words after me? “Oba, Geat, daut sag eck die, vezoeg nicht!” (“But Gerhard, I say to you, do not yield in the faith”).

How often have I here not been reminded of these last words of my beloved mother. The beloved parents also wanted to emigrate together with us children, but in the last days before the departure, the beloved father was unable to separate himself from the Gemeinde at Chortitza which he had led and represented as Ältester for 33 years and ca. seven months, serving his fellowman. Truly, grace before God.

To see our beloved parents again here on earth is no longer possible. They are both resting on the once so pleasantly groomed Rosenthaler cemetery, together with four of our deceased children, awaiting the resurrection. No Stalin or his cohorts can do anything evil to them, or scare them further, they are fully sheltered and redeemed. And thank God, there will later be a reunion with our Lord and Saviour for those who live and die for Him in righteous faith and in His fulfilled work of salvation. For such, dying is gain.

When someone once told an impoverished child of God, “How poorly your room is furnished, why you need most everything;” the same answered, “May be, but what I have is sufficient for me, until I come home. And I may allow the promise to comfort me, that not only will I never want for bread and water here below, but indeed my crown of jewels awaits in the heavens.”

Do we have such faith? For then we here below are already partakers of the glory which awaits to be manifested. I wish such a faith for all of us, “in order to be able to gaze upon Him in His majesty,” and together with our beloved parents and children and united companions in all eternity, to be able to glorify and praise our Lord and Saviour,” in that they shall call forth, “Worthy is the Lamb...to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing...” Oh Lamb of God that was slain, for you have purchased God for us with Your blood and have made God our King and Priest!”

May the Lord in grace help us children unto this end; indeed, all peoples if possible.

May this be carried in their memory and also in the remembrance of our beloved scattered siblings here, and in the hope of a blessed reunion to appear in the light of Jesus.

With a heartfelt greeting of love, “Gerhard and Maria Dyck”

Acknowledgement:

Extracts from *Der Bote* are courtesy of Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.

Áltester Isaak Dyck was a giant in the religious life of the Old Colony. His determined and steadfast teaching of basic Mennonite values, beliefs and principles in his sermons was clear and down-to-earth.

His private life was exemplary, and yes, to a point of being austere and also somewhat odd: he admired and adhered to the Kreipp regimen (Sebastian Kreipp 1821-99 – Wasserheilverfahren). Achieving fitness by means of physical exercise and the Kreipp water cure - using only cold water for cleaning, bathing and swimming in the Dnieper River (only 20 minutes away). Walking barefoot in the due covered grass in the morning was one of the water cure exercises. A strong body housed a healthy soul. Áltester Dyck’s imposing stature inspired esteem; his mild manner earned him admiration. By Arthur Kneeger.
The Story of Anna Dyck Klassen

Memories of my Father Ältester Isaak Dyck (1847-1929) and Mother nee Margaretha Hamm (1850-1931): the Story of Anna Dyck Klassen, Rosenthal, Chortitza Volost, Russia, later Bluffton, Ohio.

Family Background.

Both my father and mother’s grandparents were among the first group of settlers that founded Chortitza, the first Mennonite village in Russia. Upon the invitation of Catherine the Great, they had left their homes in the Danzig area and had gone to this place along the Dnieper River in the Ukraine. When they got there they found only tall grass and greyhound dogs (Chortitza means greyhounds). There the group ate their first meal under the large oak tree by which my grandparents later built their home (When we left Russia in 1923, the house and tree were still standing).

On my father’s side of the family the names were almost all Dutch, but on my mother’s side they were mostly German. The story of my mother’s grandmother, Margaretha Suckau Braun, is rather interesting. She was one of the people in the group that founded Chortitza.

Margaretha Suckau, the daughter of a very well-to-do man, lived in the Danzig area. She and her family were Catholics, but nevertheless, she married Gerhard Braun, a Mennonite man. This brought strong objections from her family, and, upon her marriage, she was disinherited by her wealthy father. He must have at least partially forgiven her, however, because he gave her quite a large sum of money when she and her husband decided to go to Russia.

Margaretha gave and loaned much of this money to some of the (2) poor Mennonites that went on this trip. They were too poor to pay it back, however, so later, when her husband died, Margaretha and her children were also quite poor. Quite a bit later, she married again to a man by the name of Epp.

Margaretha had been a rather proud woman and had taken great pride in some fine dresses, gloves, tablecloths, etc., that she had brought along to Russia. These she left to her daughter, Agatha Braun Hamm, the wife of Gerhard Hamm. She too had taken great pride in these things and she left them to my mother, Margaretha Hamm Dyck. My mother, although she didn’t seem to be proud of these things, did have fine taste and used some of these things. This, of course, made her quite a bit different from the other Mennonite women, who thought it a sin if everything were not plain and simple. I remember the fun we girls used to have playing grown-up in those fine old clothes.

My mother’s father, Gerhard Hamm, is also significant in our family history because he was Russia’s first clock-maker. I believe the clock we brought home from Canada last summer was either made by him or by one of his apprentices. His clocks were among the finest and were very well-known.

My Parents.

Getting back to my mother, she was born in 1850. At the age of 19, in 1870, she married my father, Isaak Dyck, whom some people called the big Dutchman. He was six feet, two inches tall, and was a very strong, athletic man who especially enjoyed swimming and horseback riding. He was (3) three years older than my mother, having been born in 1847.

Of their 15 children, eight of us lived to adulthood: three boys and five girls. I was the youngest, the 15th. Until 1887, my Dad was a school-teacher in a new colony. (He had a high school education, which in that day was outstanding.) He had also been preaching since he was 28 years old, his first congregation having been the boys in the forestry service. He was a preacher from then on until he was an old man, but he never got paid for it. He was always respected and liked very much, so, even though he didn’t receive a salary, people were always bringing us loads of fire wood and food from their gardens, etc. (Other congregations did this for their preachers too.) Often, when we had enough and they still kept bringing more, he asked them to take the things to one of the poor families. This they always did, but not until they had first tried to give it to Dad.

We really were pretty well off, and the people wouldn’t have had to bring us things. Dad owned a farm, but, since he always disliked farming, his older brother, by far the best farmer around, farmed it for him. Even after Dad rented the farm out, this brother supervised the farming of it. Another good source of income was this same brother’s brick factory, in which Dad had invested some money.

Dad preached until 1895, when he was made an elder. (Both his father and grandfather had been elders in the Russian Mennonite church, too.) Our church services in Russia were much simpler than they are here in the States. First we (4) sang two hymns and then the preacher and the deacons all filed into the church. The preacher, my father, then said, “Peace be with you”, and went to the pulpit to preach the sermon, which was usually an hour long. Usually there was a prayer both before and after the sermon and we always knelt for one of these, if not for both. Then we sang some more hymns, always ending the service with the same hymn. (The whole service was always in German, the language the Russian Mennonites commonly spoke.) Everyone came to church, including all the little children that had shown that they could behave in church. (The children always thought it a great honour to be able to start going to church.)

In that time, preachers could only preach. They could not perform the baptism or communion ceremonies. Only the elders [Ältesters] had the authority to do that. (The preachers could perform the wedding ceremonies.) Therefore, after 1896, Dad had not only the preaching to keep him busy, but he had to do a lot of travelling to keep up with all the demands for an elder’s services. This left my mother with the bulk of the job of running the house and raising a large family. By this time, all of us children were born. I had been born two years before on May 6, 1893, and Gerhard, the oldest child that lived, was already almost 20.

Despite the fact that she had only had five years of formal education, my mother did a wonderful job in all that she had to do. She was a very efficient organizer and worker. We weren’t poor though, so she was able to hire same servants and other help. Dad was an (5) elder from then until Easter Sunday, April 16, 1922, the day after my first son, Herbert, was born. He resigned at that time because of his increasing deafness.

Rosenthal.

We lived in the town of Rosenthal, which was really Chortitza-Rosenthal. The population of these two adjoining towns was about 6,000, I guess. The towns could boast of two hospitals, three doctors, four grade schools (one for the Russians, one for the Jewish children, one for the Mennonites in Rosenthal, and one for the Mennonites in Chortitza), and two Mennonite high schools (one for boys and one for girls).

The Mennonites had also built three large factories and seven flour mills there. From Chortitza-Rosenthal, they shipped their products down the Dnieper River to the Black Sea, and from there it was shipped through the Mediterranean Sea to all parts of Europe. There were also three churches in our towns: one Mennonite, one Russian, and the third, a Jewish synagogue.

For protection, the farm homes of the Mennonites were always built in villages or towns, except for a few that had extremely large farms. Our house was likewise in town. We had a large house, which was connected to the barn, as they all were in those days. Our yard was large too, and in it we had many fruit trees (the same kinds we have here in Ohio, except for peach trees which didn’t seem to thrive very well there). In our barn we had two horses, three cows, and chickens, ducks, and geese. We also had a summer house which had been built into a hill. This was full of beds, in which (6) the families of my married brothers and sisters slept when they came to visit us. In the summer we also ate and sewed there because it stayed so nice and cool. It was a very pleasant place.

I went to grade school in the Mennonite grade school in Rosenthal. Our grade schools were set up on a seven-year plan, but I got through in six years. We studied the same subjects that you study here, except that we had Russian and German instead of English.

Also, since we didn’t have Sunday Schools, we studied the Bible for one hour every other day. At the time I was there, approximately 300 children were attending the school.

The Mennonite girls’ school that I attended in Chortitza was set up on a four-year plan. Although it was supported by the Mennonites, there were quite a few Lutheran and a few Russian
we were farther away so I could live in the boarding home with the out-of-town girls, some of whom came from as far away as Bessarabia. There were about 120 girls in the school then and we all had to wear the same kind of plaid dresses. After four years you can imagine how tired I was of that plaid! We studied all the regular high school subjects, plus Russian and German. The only thing they didn’t teach was chemistry, which they didn’t think girls would need.

I never did too much travelling when I was a girl, but once, when I was 10 years old, some of my family and I went down the Dnieper River until we were almost to the Black Sea (7). We were on the boat a couple days and nights each way, I think, so by the time we got home, I really felt like a world traveller. The occasion for the trip was the silver anniversary of my mother’s brother.

After I finished school, at the age of 17, I spent my time helping my Dad with the church work and running errands, etc., for him. My sisters also stayed at home until they married. My oldest brother, Gerhard, worked as a clerk until he married. Peter went to Petersburg to study in the Czar’s school for teacher-training, a tuition free school for parents’ sons. Once, at Christmas, the Czar himself visited the school and gave each boy an engraved watch. Peter was always proud of that watch and kept it until it was stolen during the Revolution. Both Gerhard and Peter later became landowners. Henry studied bookkeeping and worked as a bookkeeper until he was exiled.

Revolution, 1917.

Our family was not affected much by World War I. Only Gerhard was drafted. He worked in the Teachers’ Seminary in Chortitza, which had been converted into a hospital.

When the Russian Revolution came, however, no one was left untouched.

When the Revolution broke out in 1917 I was still at home with my parents. Anarchists (bandits) came to our house many times to rob us, and sometimes they came looking for my father, hoping to kill him. At other times, when he was there, they would leave him unharmed.

Whenever they came, I usually had to be the one to talk (8) to them. My father was too deaf by that time to understand them well, and this always made them angry. My mother could not speak Russian very well, and my sister Helena was always frightened and usually ran to hide.

It got so that we could almost tell when trouble was coming. One night when we were at the table I felt too uneasy to eat. Finally, I got up and went into the living room, looked out the window, and there they came. I counted them as they rode toward our house in single file. Eight! They came into the house with their guns and hand grenades, threatening us with every breath. When they demanded something to eat, Helena and I went to the kitchen to fix something. One of the bandits came into the kitchen and told us exactly what he wanted. We told him that we had been robbed so many times that all we could give them was potatoes and coffee. Of course that made him pretty angry, but that’s all he got. While they were eating I was standing by the buffet, not really very frightened. When one of the bandits started getting overly friendly with me though I did get scared, so scared that I shook all over.

After they had finished eating, one of the bandits told Dad that he should “contribute” 150 rubles, always threatening to blow us up with their hand grenades if we didn’t do what they told us to do. Dad had only 70 rubles, so they took that and left without any more trouble (9).

The bandits were so cruel, so inhumanly cruel. The father-in-law of one of Gerhard’s daughters, a Mr. Heese, was cruelly tortured by them. They even went so far as to cut his tongue out and then leave him to crawl home, where he died. My brother Henry’s father-in-law, a factory owner, was hung and left for dead several times. Each time when he was cut down, there was still a breath of life in him. It seems impossible the things some people will do. When anarchists were going to shoot a man by the name of Thiessen his daughter threw herself in front of him. Instead of him, she died.

The same thing happened at my brother Gerhard’s house. The anarchists were ready to shoot him when his daughter stepped in front of him, standing on her tiptoes in order to shield his head. Fortunately, in this case, the bullet went over their heads. Neither was killed, but my brother decided that it was time to leave that place. He packed up his large family and as much furniture, etc., as he could and came to Chortitza-Rosenthal, where they stayed with us until he rented a house there.

The bandits heard that he had stored a lot of furniture in our barn, so of course they came to see what they could steal. They didn’t tell us that when they came though. They said that they had heard that we had machine guns hidden under our floors and they had come to get them. Dad and Gerhard were gone, but I told the bandits that was the silliest thing I had ever heard of. Now Gerhard had brought a young (10) German boy and girl with him, and, while this bunch of bandits was talking to me, another bunch was out by the barn talking to the German boy. They were trying to get into the barn, so they asked him if he slept in the barn. He told them he didn’t, then all at once, he and one of the bandits came walking through the house. He went straight to the dining room, where we had set up a lot of beds, sat down on one of the beds and said, “This is where I sleep.” This wasn’t true at all, but it worked.

The whole bunch started getting pretty nasty though; I got tired of it and sassed them back. One of them grabbed me then and pushed me into my room, where he shoved me against the wall, put his gun against my forehead, and told me that he was going to kill me. The bandit leader, however, told him that he wouldn’t dare kill me. Then my Dad came back and they left. You can imagine that I must have been relieved, but you can’t imagine how relieved!

Another time when the bandits came they were looking for Dad and Gerhard. Nobody would tell them where they had gone, so they took one of Gerhard’s sons, a tall young boy, only 20 years old, into a room and locked the door. In the room they tortured him and lashed his back until it was all bloody, trying to make him tell them where his father and grandfather were. The poor boy couldn’t have told them even if he had wanted to because he didn’t know where they were. Several times the bandits stopped beating him for awhile and let Margaret Epp go into the room to wash and dress his back, but as soon as she left, they started beating him again (11).

After they finished beating him, they took him out into a field, where they shot him. His body wasn’t found for about a half year, when he was found lying, unburied, in the field. This cruel loss was too much for Gerhard mentally; it took him quite some time to recover. You can read about this and many other things in the book Russian Dance of Death, by Dietrich Neufeld (Endnote). This book is based upon the diary that Mr. Neufeld took while he was staying in a house not far from ours. He has written of many of the horrible things the Mennonites in Chortitza-Rosenthal suffered during the Revolution.

Danger.

Henry, his first wife, and their daughter Marga also came to live with us. At this time, the Reds and the Whites were fighting at the bridge, and we were feeding and housing 30 Reds. Twenty-eight of them slept in the summer house and two slept in our house. Helena and I each went to other houses to sleep and early each morning we would slip back home, sneaking through the hedges. One morning as I was coming through our hedges, I was startled to find my mother waiting for me. She was so glad that I had finally come.

That night, while I was gone, bandits had come and demanded the girl with the black hair and dark eyes. They had searched the whole house for me, and the soldiers, hearing the noise, had come to see what was the matter. When they found out, one of the soldiers told them to get out and leave me alone (12).

“She’s only 14,” he said, “and, anyway, if anyone is going to get her, it’ll be us.” (Since I was so thin and small, I did look more like a girl of fourteen than a woman in her mid—20s.)

Some of the Mennonite girls had been attacked, but not many. Usually, the soldiers who were staying in the houses left the girls alone because they knew they wouldn’t get fed if they didn’t. This soldier’s talk scared my brother Henry though and after that, everywhere I went he was my shadow. Fear was our constant companion in those days; we were always afraid - if not for ourselves, for someone else.

In 1919, when my parents had been married for almost 50 years, we were driven from our home. The anarchists had come again while my Dad was away on a trip. I was also away, staying with my sister and brother-in-law, Greta (Margaretha) and Peter Klassen. Knowing that my Dad’s safe probably contained church money, the anarchists tried to make my mother open it for them. She couldn’t, however, since only one deacon, Dad, and I knew the combination. (I still remember it. There were four knobs on the safe and they had to be set at G.L.A.S.) Mama knew...
that she would have to escape somehow, so she
told them she would go out and open the shut-
ters, so they could see better. Of course, as soon
as she got out of the house, she ran to the
neighbour’s to hide.

Meanwhile, Dad, on his way home, had also been (13) robbed. After the robbery, he was
continuing on his way home when a friend
stopped him and warned him not to go any far-
ther. Friends took my parents to the home of my
mother’s brother. They had only the clothes that
they were wearing, and, in my father’s case, those
clothes were now a handicap. He was wearing
the clothes of an elder, and, since he was such a
big man, no one could give him other clothes to
wear. This left him very easy to recognize.

The anarchists continued to look for Dad and
once came to the place where they were staying.
Dad saw them coming and ran to hide in a small
building near the barn. They saw him too, and
had their guns up to shoot him, but they were so
drunk they couldn’t keep track of where he ran.
They looked all over for him, but just couldn’t
find him. And all this time he was standing right
in plain sight because the door of the building he
had run into was stuck and he couldn’t shut it.

After that, my parents were secretly taken to
the house in Dnepropetrovsk (called
Ekatarinoslav before the Revolution) where my
brother Peter and his daughter had moved from
their farm home. When Peter Klassens had to
flee, I also went to my brother Peter’s big house.
Peter himself had been a widower since he was
26 years old and had only one daughter. (His
wife had died when giving birth to their second
child and he never married again.)

At one time, there were 30 people staying in
Peter’s house, most of them widows and chil-
dren. Included, however, (14) were Mr. & Mrs.
Bergmann, Peter’s parents-in-law. Mr. Bergmann
was a very rich man, one of the men that the
church always sent to represent the Mennonites
at the Duma.

During the Revolution, three armies were
fighting to get control of the government. The
White army was the old Czarist army, and we
were usually a little safer when they were in con-
tral of the city. The Red army was the Commu-
nist army, and the bandits, or anarchists, were
called the Blacks.

My brother’s house was near the Dnieper
River, right in between the Red and White armies.
One army was behind us and the other was across
the river. Whenever the shooting was very bad,
we went to the cellar. Once, when a lot of the
people in the house were eating in the dining
room, the terrific pressure from the shooting
blasted the large dining room window to bits and
knocked the people at the table all over the room.
I was working in the hallway at the time, and
when I looked in, they were lying on the floor
amidst all that broken glass. None of them was
seriously injured though and soon they all got up
and scrambled for safety.

At this time, there were some young students
hiding in a basement across the street. Part of this
basement was out of the direct line of fire, so
they asked us to come there. Everyone went ex-
cept my mother and father. I stayed and begged
them to go too, but they felt they would be safe
and made me go without them. I finally left, and
was just in the middle of the street when a shot
from across the river hit a loaded cannon near
me. It exploded and I was knocked (15) flat in
the dust. I wasn’t injured, but, hysterical with
fear, I ran as fast as I could to the basement.

There was a closet down there and I dropped
in, and that is how I escaped. There the building
had spread lice and diseases among the Menno-
nites. They had invaded the Mennonite homes,
eating all the food, stealing (17) everything they could, and taking all their clothes. The Mennonites, therefore, weren’t able to change clothes or keep their houses clean. An epidemic of typhus broke out, and when we got back, one-third of the people in Chortitza-Rosenthal had died from it. In our own family, we had lost seven. Gerhard’s boy had been shot. Helena and Henry’s first wife died of typhus. So did the wife and three sons of my cousin, Isaac Dyck, who had been brought up by my parents since the age of six, when his parents died. (For a long time, I had thought he was my oldest brother.)

Famine, 1923.

The years of 1921 and 1922 were years of severe famine. Not so many Mennonites starved to death, but many other people did. We Mennonites, too, had very little to eat, since a crop failure followed the period when everything we had was stolen. By that time, I was married and we were living with eight children whose parents had died. We had so little to eat that we had to turn down the starving people that begged at our doors. But afterward, we found that everyone, like us, seemed to have picked out one person that they would share their food with until there was none left to share. In our case, we shared our food with a little Russian girl who came to ask food for her little sister. We never could refuse to give her something. I have often wondered what has happened to that girl.

Escape, 1923.

I had married John Klassen, a brother of my sister’s husband, on Feb. 27, 1921. He had been released from Red Cross service by this time and was teaching art in the (18) Chortitza Teachers’ Seminary. Herbert, our first son, was born, as I have already mentioned, on April 15, 1922. The next year, we left Russia and went to Canada, as we have already mentioned, on April 15, 1922. The other son married the widow of his brother. One son, a doctor, never returned from the war. The other son married the widow of his brother. Now, in a round about way, we have heard that someone in Paraguay knows something about this couple. We are waiting for more news of them.

Those of us in our family that got out of Russia were indeed much more fortunate than those who stayed behind. During the 35 years that have passed since we left Russia, we have raised our families. All of us stayed in Canada, except my husband, son, and myself. In 1924, we moved to Bluffton, Ohio, where my husband has been teaching (21) art in the Mennonite college. Here four more sons and one daughter were born to us. All are now grown up and married, except one son, who died in infancy.

It has been a long time since the Russian Revolution, but I have never been able to talk much about the things that happened there. Our children used to ask us many times to tell them about Russia, but this is the first time I’ve done it, and it hasn’t been easy. A lot of old wounds have been opened again. There is much more to tell, of course, but this is enough for now.


Acknowledgement.

The readers are indebted to Paul Klassen, 426 S. Main St., Bluffton, Ohio, U.S.A., 45817, who forwarded his mother’s memoirs to Preservings. We also acknowledge his sister Anita who recorded this account as related by their mother Anna Dyck Klassen.
**A Granddaughter Remembers**

A Granddaughter Remembers, by Marga Sturzenegger, nee Dyck, North Vancouver, B. C.

I am writing about my grandfather, Bishop Isaak Dyck. I was three or four years of age when my father, Heinrich Dyck, moved from Chortitza, to my grandparents’ home in Rosenthal. I remember grandfather preaching in church and while I was little, I would always sit on the steps to the pulpit. I was so proud of grandpa and loved him very much. He was to me greater than life.

Grandfather was the one who took me to the Dnjepr and taught me how to swim. In our family we all became good swimmers and this was passed down to my children and grandchildren. On the way to the Pristanj, we always walked through the valley. In summer, horses would graze in the valley, and grandpa enjoyed giving them cubes of sugar. The horses would come and take the sugar from his hand and nuzzle in his pockets.

There came a time when grandfather found it physically difficult to go for his daily swim and the family felt he was no longer strong enough to go any more. I missed going swimming with him and I knew he missed it too.

One hot summer day, grandpa said to me and my cousin, Lenie Koop, that he wanted us to go with him to the Pristanj.

When my grandfather said this to us, we took it as an order, not a request! So the three of us set out. It was a long walk, with many stops for my grandfather to rest. All the way my grandfather held on to us for support. At last we saw the river.

When we got to the Dnjepr, grandfather went into the water and we stayed on the beach. He stood in the water of his beloved Dnjepr for a long time and just looked. It seemed to me that he was saying goodbye. Then at last he called for us to help him to get out of the water.

The way home seemed longer as we had to stop even more frequently to let grandfather rest. This would be his last time at the Dnjepr.

Once we got home we were told never to do this again and grandpa never asked.

I remember the evening grandpa’s long awaited wish, to go home to the Lord, came to pass. When I came home from swimming that afternoon, the family was gathered around grandpa’s bed. I was allowed to give him a kiss and was sent to bed. Much later I heard the family talking and knew that grandpa had gone to the Lord.

Altester Isaak Dyck’s wife, my grandmother, Margaretha Hamm (maiden name), was not well for as long as I can remember.

**Heinrich Dyck (son of Altester Isaak Dyck) and his bride Katharina Koop, daughter of Jakob Koop. Wedding photo. Courtesy of Marga Sturzenegger, North Vancouver, B.C.**

She might have suffered from arthritis, but I’m not sure. Oma could walk only a few steps and she could only do that with help. Most days she would sit in her comfortable chair in front of the window, facing her flower garden and the street. She had a smile for everyone and loved to laugh. Oma adored grandpa, loved her family and was always happy to have visitors. I was told that her flower garden had been the most beautiful in Rosenthal and that people had stopped in their carriages in the street to gaze at it. At my time, there were only perennials left and a patch of “Morgen rot abends tot”, which was a creeping plant with little red and pink flowers.

My best friend, Maria Toews, my cousin Lenie Koop and I loved to be with grandmother and tell her things that were only important to us. At meals grandpa would sit at the head of the table and grandma would sit on his right side. At breakfast I would make her her sandwiches, as her hands and fingers were too stiff. She used to say, “Now, Marga, remember, Wer gut schmert, der gut fahrt!” She like to have lots of jam, honey or even watermelon syrup spread on her sandwiches. Grandpa would say grace before our meal and it was always short. I think this was for the sake of the children.

After each meal my father would bring grandma to the chair at the window, where she would spend her time until the next meal.

The first vision grandma had, I was told, was one afternoon while she sat at the window. In her vision she saw the heavens open and she could see all her children, both the living and the dead. However, she did not see my father, Heinrich Dyck. I was told that she had cried out “Where is my Heinrich?” Then she could see him further back with a light illuminating him and my grandmother knew that my father would die a martyr’s death.

My father was arrested three times. Each time he was arrested he was jailed for a longer period of time. The fourth time that my father was arrested, he did not return and we thought that he had been sent to Siberia. We never knew what happened to him until my cousin, Peter Kroeger’s son went to visit the Ukraine in the ‘90s and found out there that my father and three of my uncles had been executed the same night that they had been arrested.

I witnessed Grandma’s second vision, which occurred at the breakfast table. She looked at her bedroom door and said “Ja Isaak, ich komme”. She said to me to call mama, who was in the kitchen. Then grandma said to mama, “Masha (Mariechen) put me to bed”, and with help mama did so. Then I heard grandma say “Turn me to the wall”. Those were the last words I heard her speak. Three days later, in the afternoon, she joined her beloved husband in heaven. I was very lonely and feared that my dad would follow my grandparents. At that time, I did not know that the Lord has not given us the spirit of fear. What a good God we have! Praise, honour and glory to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely, “Marga”

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 23
Maria Dyck, Mrs. Peter Dyck.

Maria was married to Peter Dyck. He was jailed and last seen in 1929. Maria died in Omsk, Siberia, in 1944. Nephew Paul Klassen, Bluffton, Ohio, writes that “I took a trip to Alma Ata, Kazakhsitan in 1970, and was able to meet their son, Isaac Dyck there.”

Peter H. Dyck.

“All the male persons in the family of Hermann Bergmann [the Duma representative], other than my brother Peter Dyck who was also a son-in-law, were murdered. Nonetheless, Peter Dyck was later also banished to Siberia. His second wife Marie [who escaped to] Germany as a refugee, died on October, 1943, of twisting of the bowels.”

Heinrich H. Dyck.

“My youngest brother, Heinrich Isaak Dyck, was banished to Siberia in the year 1937...The second wife of my youngest brother Heinrich, wife Marie, nee Hooge, and his daughter Marga Siemens, from the first wife, with her seven-year-old son, are in Germany, and hopefully--soon, to be able to come to Canada....”

Anna, Mrs. Johann P. Klassen.

Daughter Anna together with her art teacher husband left Russia in 1923 and eventually settled in Bluffton, Ohio. Johann Klassen served as art teacher at Bluffton College for many years. One of his works, a brass sculpture, “Dancing with Kobsar” was featured on the college campus.


Franz F. Epp was born in 1884 in Chortitza, Southern Russia. He taught for 23 years. He was ordained to the ministry in 1921. Four years later, in 1925, he immigrated to Canada and settled on the Sheldon Farm near Hanley, Saskatchewan. Franz Epp served as leader of the Hanley Church from 1928 until his retirement in 1962. He served this congregation unstintingly without financial remuneration. The spiritual welfare of the church and its members was his constant concern. He passed away on December 23, 1977. From Gerhard Peters, Remember our leaders, page 171.

Mrs. and Rev. Franz Epp (1884-1977), Hanley, Saskatchewan. Photo courtesy of Gerhard I. Peters, Remember our leaders: Conference of Mennonites in Canada (Clearbrook, 1982), page 171.

Isaak Dyck Children and Spouses.

The following list of children of Isaak Dyck and Margaretha Hamm has been provided by genealogy expert Henry Schapansk y, New Westminster, B.C.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Gerhard Dyck</td>
<td>Aug. 2, 1874</td>
<td>Aug. 15, 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Maria Heinrichs</td>
<td>May 6, 1876</td>
<td>Nov. 8, 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2m</td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Maria Dyck</td>
<td></td>
<td>ca. 1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Peter Dyck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Peter Dyck</td>
<td>Oct. 3, 1878</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Helena Bergmann</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Sep. 10, 1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2m. Maria Epp</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct., 1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Agatha Dyck</td>
<td>Mar. 20, 1883</td>
<td>Jan. 11, 1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Franz Epp</td>
<td>Dec. 9, 1884</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Heinrich Dyck</td>
<td>Aug. 31, 1886</td>
<td>Dec. 30, 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Katharina Koop</td>
<td>Nov. 25, 1892</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2m. Maria Hooge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Helena Dyck</td>
<td>May 2, 1887</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Peter Klassen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Isaak Dyck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Margaretha Dyck</td>
<td>Apr. 24, 1888</td>
<td>July 28, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Peter P. Klassen</td>
<td>Sep. 21, 1886</td>
<td>Aug. 6, 1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Anna Dyck</td>
<td></td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Johann Klassen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 David Dyck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eichenfeld

This was one of the four villages founded by the Chortitza settlement for its landless people in 1869 on land it had a year earlier purchased from the Duchess Koskul. To this was added another village founded in 1872 on land purchased by the settlement from an arm man, Captain Morozov. The complex was located approximately 20-25 versts to the north of Chortitza-Rosenthal. These five villages became a separate administrative district known as the Nikolaiopol settlement, from the name of the chief village, the seat of the district government and its educational center. Alternatively it was also known as the Yasykovo settlement.

It included a number of Mennonite hamlets and estates founded by individuals or groups of related families on lands purchased by them from Russian landed gentry who found it impossible to operate their inherited estates now that they had lost their former serfs due to the Emancipation Decree of 1861. The land was far more fertile than that of the mother settlement and in a relatively short time the five villages became very prosperous. In outward appearance and in their educational and other institutions the new settlement surpassed most any of the villages of its founders.

On the other hand its villages, hamlets and individual chutors were also a source of envy and resentment among many of the neighbouring peasantry who no longer were able to rent smaller or larger pieces of land from their former gentry landlords, or more often impecunious and absentee owners. During 1919, the height of the civil war after the collapse of the Tsarist empire, the village had a reputation of daring to protect the common people: God's punishment for the wickedness of its citizenry. To this judgement is added the reason for the supposed cruelty of its Selbstschutz. These explanations coincide with those advanced in Rev. Aron A. Toews compiler and editor of a two-volume work entitled "Mennonitische Märtzer der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart" (The Christian Press, Winnipeg, 1949), pages 130-131, in which the story related the fate of the Tent Mission. Here Rev. Toews points out that Eichenfeld distinguished itself especially through its organized self-defense unit, therefore Makhno singled it out for revenge. This is followed by the sentence: "Not a single believer was to be found in it" (Note One). In turn, it is alleged to be confirmed by a statement that some time earlier an outside person had purchased a farm in the village but that its inhabitants had not permitted the buyer to move in.

Julius Loewen.

Eichenfeld's tragedy has often been written about in Mennonite books and newspapers, especially in our Canadian press. One of the best accounts is contained in Julius Loewen's "Jasykowo. Ein mennonitisches Siedlungsschicksal an Dnjepr" (Winnipeg, 1967), page 122 (see Pres., No. 16, page 133). Loewen, an agronomist by profession (life span 1900-1965), escaped to Germany during World War II and eventually came to Canada. According to the book's preface, Loewen expressed a need for a written account of the settlement in question. He, in the late 1950s, commenced to gather materials through an extensive correspondence with former Jasykower and began writing his own recollection. But it was his widow, Mrs. Elisabeth Loewen who saw to it that the collected materials of her deceased husband had found their way into print.

It is an exceedingly well written booklet, especially valuable for its treatment of the events after 1928—delivering into collectivization of agriculture and the fate of the settlers up to late 1943 when all Mennonite survivors in the areas under German occupation during World War II were evacuated to Germany. The historical background is also well done, but does suffer from too much reliance upon recollections of other contributors and confusion of dates, place names and the activities of a particular state police agency—Cheka, NKVD, and GPU.

The Nikolaiopol settlement was the first Mennonite area of any consequence reached by German troops in the Ekaterinoslav gubernia at the end of March 1918. In our region, it appears to have been the first set of Mennonite communities to have organized self-defense units. It also had a reputation of daring to protect the communities from near and somewhat distant villages. Mr. Loewen's account describes these self-defense organizations in some detail, some of which I have not found anywhere else. Thus he states that the German commander of the local garrison directed the drafting of all Mennonite males between the ages of 18 to 35 in these communities and supervised their drills in marching and use of their weapons. He states that each village had a cavalry detail of 10 to 22 mounted men with orders to keep in touch with similar units of neighboring communities; that the rest of the males were organized as infantry men to defend their respective villages; that each village had received a machine gun with appropriate ammunition; and that all of the weaponry had been supplied by the German command.

Mr. Loewen pointed out that there had been opposition by a number of local people to this resort of arms. These included preachers of the main Mennonite church and also the Mennonite Brethren church, but neither of them dared openly to protest against it.

Recollections.

I am familiar at least with the major aspects of the self-defense organization in many of the 14 villages of the Chortitza settlement, but I know of no village which had this kind of conscription of males of certain ages, of having a machine gun as a matter of policy, or of cavalry and infantry units with specific duties. As far as drills are concerned, I observed the Chortitza-Rosenthal unit throughout the fall months of 1918 when on afternoons they would march down the main street of Rosenthal returning from field exercises. This was during the fall term of my second year at the Chortitza teacher seminary, but I do not recall whether these exercises took place on a regular schedule. While most Chortitza settlement villages did accept arms and ammunition, none of them had as large and organized a unit as Chortitza-Rosenthal, and this may not have been more than a 25 to 30 membership.

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 25
It is difficult to find, at this late date, a reason why the Nikolaipol self defense organizations appear to have been established along more military lines, and its membership possibly contained a larger number of hotspur youths ready to take matters into their own hands than seems to have been the case throughout the similar units of Chortitza settlement. At any rate that appears to have been the case, especially that of the Eichenfeld unit. And here, perhaps, we come to the nub of that village’s tragic fate.

In our village it was widely known that in the early months of 1919, a raid had taken place upon the Nikolaipol soviet headquarters and that the district’s chief militia, along with two of his comrades had been killed. Rumour also had it that the deed had been done by members of Eichenfeld’s Selbstschutz. It was no secret among my Rosenthal relatives, nor to myself (at that time boarding and rooming at my grandmother’s place while attending the teacher training seminar) that rumours about Eichenfeld’s self-defense units complicity in this act of revenge were true.

**Heinrich Heinrichs.**

It may have been late March or early April when a grandson, Heinrich Heinrichs (aged 20) appeared at grandmother Maria Pauls’ home seeking a hiding place against hot pursuit in the Eichenfeld area by soviet authorities and local partisans. For a number of weeks he managed to hide at grandmother’s home or that of our uncle Jakob Pauls. Both these homes were located off the mainstream of village traffic, and situated behind them were extensive wooded areas for hiding in case search parties made the rounds of Rosenthal.

Cousin Heinrich remained here until about the middle of May when the advance of the Denikin Army to Alexandrovsk brought us to the very front of a large Red Army. They were seeking to block the enemy’s crossing to our side of the Dnieper, either across the Einlage bridge or at the ferries of Nieder Chortitza and Razumovka. Here the two armies faced each other for about six weeks. The frequent shelling did considerable damage to village properties and killed several civilians. Occasionally fair sized patrols of each army made forays into the large Chortitza Island, the Whites from the left bank of the river, the Reds from the right bank. At Nieder Chortitza the river was shallow enough that one could easily wade to the island.

By the end of May the situation for Heinrich became highly dangerous. The Red Army troops had received substantial reinforcements from Bat’ko Makhno’s soldiers. Every private home had larger and smaller numbers of troops quartered on its premises. I do not know whether Makhno himself was stationed in one of our villages during that time, but one of his underlings who had the worst reputation for brutality, Bat’ko Pravda, spent most of the five to six weeks in Chortitza-Rosenthal, with occasional visits to nearby villages. I will comment below on Pravda’s visit to Nieder Chortitza and my brother John’s encounter with that brute.

About the middle of June the White Army patrols had pretty well taken over control of the Chortitza Island, and cousin Heinrich succeeded in escaping to it. Although almost at once he had fallen into the hands of the Cossack patrols, he managed to convince them that he was not a Bolshevik or a member of the Red Army. He was allowed to proceed to Alexandrovsk where he, at once, joined General Denkin’s force.

**Selbstschutz.**

Now let me return to Eichenfeld and Nikolaipol where authorities and members of bandit or partisan units (whichever designation one prefers to apply to them) appeared to have been pretty well convinced that the earlier execution of three militia men had been the act of the settlement’s Selbstschutz and most likely by members of the Eichenfeld unit. The commander of the main force of the Red Army in the Chortitza settlement region, Deviatka, spared the population from excessive demands for all kinds of provisions for his troops and maintained discipline among his soldiers. Even the Makhnovtsy components among them refrained from their accustomed manner of taking anything they wanted and mistreating our people.

Although there were frequent demands for delivery of weapons still supposedly kept by former members of the self-defense units and accompanying house searches, the hunt for members and their arrests, if found, were much less intense than they had been during January through March and April.

Of course, former members of the Selbstschutz had fled their homes and sought refuge with relatives in other villages. But the surprising thing was that so few were captured, and I do not recall that a single one was executed during the five to six weeks when many of our villages were at the very edge of the fighting front. Only during the last two weeks of occupation, when it became palpably obvious that the Red Army would be forced to retreat, did some maltreatment of arrested people take place. But from the behaviour of the Makhnovtsy when they returned to us in the late summer and fall of 1919, it was obvious that they had collected much intelligence during their earlier presence in our midst concerning families whose sons had been members of the once armed organizations or had during the summer joined the White Army.

Mr. Loewen, in relating the Nikolaipol self-defense story which included the execution of the three militiamen, does not mention the names of possible perpetrators of the deed. He does observe that the investigating authorities from the city of Eketernoslav established one thing: “that the trails of the deed did not necessarily lead beyond the Nikolaipol district borders.” He also states that during the summer of 1919 one more bandit attack was made upon Eichenfeld, but was beaten back by the village’s Selbstschutz. This attack, if it had indeed occurred, must be a confusion of dates, for that organization throughout this settlement had been disarmed and disbanded months earlier.

**Makhnovsky.**

It was a different situation when the Makhnovsky returned to our district in late summer of 1919. As part of the Red Army, these men had retreated northward after the White Army’s capture of Alexandrovsk in mid summer. Makhno’s large force retreated in the direction of Kiev; reaching Umahn, a sizable city slightly southwest of Kiev by early September. Here White Army units, including some former Chortitza-Rosenthal self-defense members, succeeded in encircling Makhno’s main force, but before they managed to inflict severe losses upon their enemy, Makhno, a superb military tactician, managed to break through the encirclement. At the head of his main troop were several thousand cavalry, and thousands more who were transported on horse drawn tachanki (spring wagons seized entirely from German colonists and Mennonites). They were without pieces of artillery but were amply supplied with machine guns also mounted on horse-drawn spring wagons.

Thus Makhno speedily raced through the unprotected rear front of the White Army in the direction of Chortitza-Rosenthal and the Einlage Bridge across the Dnieper and thence homeward bound to Guliai Polie. The advance reached our area in mid-afternoon, Saturday September 21. That important river bridge was guarded by two classmates of mine from Rosenthal—Andres and Kroeger.

Taken completely by surprise, both men were offered a choice by the Makhno leadership to either be shot on the spot or to jump off the center of the bridge, (a height of possibly 60-70 feet) and survive the jump. Kroeger’s body was never found, presumably killed when his body hit the water. Andres jumped, swam and managed to elude capture by the bandits during the succeeding weeks of Makhnovshchina and eventually joined the emigration to Canada during the early 1920s.

Once across the bridge, the Makhnovtsy reached Alexandrovsk that Saturday evening. They spent Sunday plundering and terrorizing the city, and then raced on to Guliai Polie without any serious opposition from White Army troops on either of its flanks. However the stay on home grounds was of short duration. The main body of the White Army was steadily forced to retreat from the north by a superior force of Red Armies, at first primarily all along the Dnieper and then homeward bound to Guliai Polie. The advance reached our area in mid-afternoon, Saturday September 21. That important river bridge was guarded by two classmates of mine from Rosenthal—Andres and Kroeger.

Taken completely by surprise, both men were offered a choice by the Makhno leadership to either be shot on the spot or to jump off the center of the bridge, (a height of possibly 60-70 feet) and survive the jump. Kroeger’s body was never found, presumably killed when his body hit the water. Andres jumped, swam and managed to elude capture by the bandits during the succeeding weeks of Makhnovshchina and eventually joined the emigration to Canada during the early 1920s.

Once across the bridge, the Makhnovtsy reached Alexandrovsk that Saturday evening. They spent Sunday plundering and terrorizing the city, and then raced on to Guliai Polie without any serious opposition from White Army troops on either of its flanks. However the stay on home grounds was of short duration. The main body of the White Army was steadily forced to retreat from the north by a superior force of Red Armies, at first primarily all along the Dnieper and then homeward bound to Guliai Polie. The advance reached our area in mid-afternoon, Saturday September 21. That important river bridge was guarded by two classmates of mine from Rosenthal—Andres and Kroeger.

Taken completely by surprise, both men were offered a choice by the Makhno leadership to either be shot on the spot or to jump off the center of the bridge, (a height of possibly 60-70 feet) and survive the jump. Kroeger’s body was never found, presumably killed when his body hit the water. Andres jumped, swam and managed to elude capture by the bandits during the succeeding weeks of Makhnovshchina and eventually joined the emigration to Canada during the early 1920s.

Once across the bridge, the Makhnovtsy reached Alexandrovsk that Saturday evening. They spent Sunday plundering and terrorizing the city, and then raced on to Guliai Polie without any serious opposition from White Army troops on either of its flanks. However the stay on home grounds was of short duration. The main body of the White Army was steadily forced to retreat from the north by a superior force of Red Armies, at first primarily all along the Dnieper and then homeward bound to Guliai Polie. The advance reached our area in mid-afternoon, Saturday September 21. That important river bridge was guarded by two classmates of mine from Rosenthal—Andres and Kroeger.

Taken completely by surprise, both men were offered a choice by the Makhno leadership to either be shot on the spot or to jump off the center of the bridge, (a height of possibly 60-70 feet) and survive the jump. Kroeger’s body was never found, presumably killed when his body hit the water. Andres jumped, swam and managed to elude capture by the bandits during the succeeding weeks of Makhnovshchina and eventually joined the emigration to Canada during the early 1920s.
I have no quarrel with the people who relate their nightmarish experiences and those of their relatives during these 10 to 11 weeks of virtual daily house searches and demands for money, food, clothing, horses, and other valuables, and seizing anything that took their fancy. These acts were almost invariably accompanied by brutal assaults on young and old, male and female alike, spreading epidemic diseases to which a large number of Mennonites succumbed during the months of December 1919 to March 1920.

**Massacre.**

It was on October 26, 1919 when Eichenfeld was made to pay the price for the slaughtering of the three militiamen. This act of revenge may have involved more than the regular members of Makhno’s army; it may have included representatives from neighbouring peasant villages now finally able to even the score with a resident who had insulted or injured them in past years. The very first victim happened to be Heinrich Heinrichs Sr. who was slain in the front yard of his farmstead. His first wife, a younger sister of my mother, had died in 1914. There were seven children from this marriage. He had remarried, and there were two offspring from this marriage. The oldest son, Heinrich, as earlier noted, was by now a member of the White Army. The next son, 19-year-old Cornelius, managed to elude the rampaging bandits who had gone to the neighbour to continue their drastically acts. The body was taken into the house. Later in the day another party of bandits visited the Heinrichs home. However, upon seeing the corpse of the slain man in the living room, they left at once. In several homes more than one male was killed during the day and night of October 26. As already observed, a total 84 people died in Eichenfeld (76 people on October 26, one suicide, and seven within the next two weeks).

Hochfeld was the only other village of this settlement which suffered the loss of many lives during the course of this day, namely 18. And so it was Eichenfeld which paid the terrible toll for an earlier action by revengeful youths for the immense suffering experienced by the district’s inhabitants. That was more than the proverbial “eye for an eye” and “tooth for tooth”, indeed a 20-fold exaction.

Heinrich Heinrichs Jr., after the late 1919 defeat of Denikin’s armies and retreat to the Crimea, joined General Wangel’s renewed attempt in 1920 to dislodge the Bolsheviks, an effort which also resulted in utter defeat of the counter-revolutionary forces, and this time for good. With scores of thousands of other White Army troops, including a sizable number of former Mennonite self-defense personnel then being evacuated by ships of Russia’s for merchant (France and England) to Constantinople. He spent many months in different camps in the vicinity until finally an American Relief organization managed to rescue the Mennonite ex-White Guardsmen and ship 62 of them to the United States.

Generally known as the “62 Group”, these men were placed for a time with Mennonite families and businesses in Pennsylvania and Ohio (Note Two). After repayment of their debt to their sponsors, the men gradually relocated to the eastern states, some eventually ending up in Canada. Cousin Heinrichs eventually landed in Detroit working for the Ford Motor Company. He died in Detroit in 1941. According to reports from a sibling of his, he left an interesting autobiography of his life’s exploits. For some details of this particular branch of the once very wealthy Heinrichs family, see Kornelius Heinrichs and his Descendants 1782-1979 (Altona, Man., 1980), pages 86-87, and 142-147.

**Conclusion.**

It had been a virtual unanimous verdict among Mennonites that the nightmarish experiences of Eichenfeld and the surrounding communities were part and parcel of the Makhnovshchina. That is, the deeds of unspeakable cruelty had been perpetrated by Makhno’s followers from the areas of his main strength in and around Guliai Polie, Ljubimovka, Pologi, and several other peasant villages. These were all places more than a hundred miles from and southeast of Alexandrovsk. Their presence in our area on the right side of the Dnieper during the late months of 1919 was explained above as being entirely due to the then existing confrontation between the Red and White Armies.

Actually it is safe to assume that many of the worst excesses in Eichenfeld, Hochfeld, Adelsheim and many of the surrounding hamlets and individual estates were carried out by peasants of the neighbouring villages. These are not necessarily to even the scores with former Mennonite employers, but were for the sheer lust and pleasure of easy loot- ing to their heart’s content. This is not to deny Makhno’s personal presence as well as those of a number of his bloodthirsty sub-lieutenants like Batko Pravda and the rank and file of his following from Guliai Polie. It was their encouragement and participation that resulted in murderous assaults and plunderers of our people. However, one must remember that the embers of such wanton acts of looting, raping and killing had for centuries persisted on Russia’s frontiers, inhabited as they might have been by Zaporozhie, Don, Kuban, Urals, Yak and other Cossacks hosts, running wars and other adventurers and political dreamers. Causes for riotous deeds and “plunder the plunderers” were there at all times and all they needed was to be fanned at any moment. The land and loot hunger of much of the neighbouring peasantry to Mennonite communities in the Nikolaipol and Chortitza settlements—as elsewhere in Russia—must be taken seriously when assessing our guilt or innocence for our fate during the Civil War Years. The mia culpa stand is more than applicable to us, but self-flagellation can also be overdone.

In talking with some survivors of the Yasykovo settlement’s experience many years ago I found persons who were firmly convinced that they had recognized familiar faces from nearby peasant villages among the looters and marauders. A cousin, Cornelius Heinrichs (brother of Heinrich Heinrichs Jr.) at age 19 had witnessed and survived the killing of his father and other brutal acts of October 26, 1919. He reported to me by another mutual cousin to have been of the firm opinion that responsibility for Eichenfeld’s nightmarish experience rested more with the neighbouring peasants than with the Makhnovshchina per se (letter to me from a cousin who lived through the Makhnovshchina in Rosenthal under the date of Aug 23, 1985).

**Acknowledgement.**

Reprinted with permission of Cornelia Rempel Carlson and Sonia Rempel Conly, daughters of David G. Rempel. Dr. Rempel’s posthumous memoir-family history will appear from the University of Toronto Press in October, 2002. Re-written by Cornelia Carlson, with an introduction by Dr. Harvey Dyck, Toronto, the book, in part, expands on the horrific period detailed in this article. Preservings readers are indebted to Marianne Janzen, Winnipeg, who edited and arranged for the publication of this article. The readers are referred to her article, “The Eichenfeld Massacre - October 26, 1919,” Pres., No. 18, page 25-31. Issues 1-19 of Preservings are accessible on the HSHS website: www.hshs.mb.ca

**Endnotes:**

Note One: In their convoluted nomenclature, this presumably meant that no one in the village had converted themselves to Separatist-Pietism. Quite possibly the typical “in-your-faith” religious arrogance of this religious culture offended the Makhnovsky and may well have sparked the actual massacre. The Editor

Note Two: These men were placed as follows: Ohio - 7, Penn. - 12, Va. - 2, Ind. - 3, Ill. - 4, Iowa - 2, Kansas 12, SD - 5, Minn. 3, Miss. - 4, Neb. - 4, Cal. - 3, and Rosthern, Sask. - 1, by Marianne Janzen, Winnipeg.

Further Reading:


Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 27
Anabaptist Spirituality

Anabaptism was a Greek word meaning “re baptism”. The term was not used by the Anabaptists themselves. It was a term of great approbation used against them by their enemies. It was a heresy warranting the death penalty. Anabaptism can be understood as a triangle with the early, original movement at the base. The first generation was pluralistic and diverse with rebaptism as one commonality. Switzerland became the cradle of the movement when Conrad Grebel (1498-1526), Felix Manz (1498-1527), and other radicalized followers of Zwingli celebrated the first adult baptism January 21, 1525. Michael Sattler (ca. 1490-1527), presided over a conference of Anabaptists at Schleitheim in Feb. 1527, which adopted the seven article Schleitheim Confession, the first systematic statement of Anabaptist beliefs.

Hans Denck (1500-27), a mystic-humanist, was one of the first leaders of South German Anabaptism, working in Augsburg and Worms. Thomas Müntzer (1488/9-1525), a religious socialist, was the leader of the 1525 Peasant revolt in southern Germany. Hans Hut (ca. 1485-1527) was an admirer of Müntzer and the most successful Anabaptist evangelist in southern Europe. He was the originator of almost all Anabaptist groups in Austria and Moravia. Pilgrim Marpeck (ca. 1495-1556), lived in Strassburg and Augsburg, becoming the leader of a group of congregations from Alsace to Moravia. Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528), was involved with the Zürich group in 1525 although he never agreed with Grebel and other Anabaptists on the state and non-violence. In Nicolshurst, Moravia, a pacifist party dissented from Hubmaier’s party (the Schwenter), acquiring the name Stäbler (staff bearers). The later group became the headwaters of the Hutterite movement. In 1528 they adopted community of property. From 1533 to 1535 they were led by Jakob Hutter who was burned at the stake Feb. 15, 1536.

The third major Anabaptist tradition developed in the Low Countries where it sprouted quickly in the soil well prepared by the sacramentarian movement - originating in the Devotio moderna and the “Brethren of the Common Life”. The founder of Anabaptism in the Low Countries was Melchior Hoffman (1495- ) who worked in Wolmar, Wittenberg, Dorpat and Strassbourgh in Southern Germany. Like other early Anabaptists, he held radical eschatological views.

Hoffman preached in East Friesland in 1529 and baptised 300 in Emden the following year. One of Hoffman’s converts, Jan Matthijs assumed a leading role and his messengers baptised many, including the brothers Obbe and Dirk Philips in Leewarden. In 1534 Matthijs and Jan van Leiden took control of the city of Münster resulting in its violent seizure. Obbe Philips became the leader of the peaceful, biblical Anabaptists. Menno Simons (1496-1561), Wittumars, Friesland, joined this group in 1536 giving his name to the non-resistant Biblical Anabaptists.

Early Anabaptism was a process, a diffuse and varied phenomena that developed over time, and ended with the consolidation of sectarian church boundaries. By the end of the 16th century, the soil of mysticism, socialism and radical eschatology, had evolved into the Christ-centered and peaceful Swiss Brethren, Hutterite and Mennonite traditions. The Editor.
The Biblical Basis of Nonviolence


Introduction.

I was blessed to live in southern Manitoba for one year a decade ago. I visited Steinbach then and I like Manitoba. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be here again and to worship with you this morning.

My invitation was to speak about the biblical basis of nonviolence. I fully believe that the Bible’s message is intrinsically one of nonviolence. Given that the Bible contains a lot of violence, including a lot of violence that would be far from suitable for showing on family-oriented TV programs, the belief that the Bible has an intrinsically nonviolent message is not immediately obvious to everyone. In fact, many folks appeal to that violence in the Bible to justify violence as a divine or sacred calling.

Seeing the Bible as an intrinsically nonviolent book is something of an acquired taste. It involves more than just picking out particular texts that appear to support nonviolence. It is a way of looking at the entire biblical story. This morning I will sketch how and why I believe that the Bible proclaims a nonviolent message. And part of understanding that the Bible proclaims a nonviolent message is to understand how to deal with the many violent stories in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament. I will show the Bible’s nonviolent orientation by reading a few stories from the Bible with you from a nonviolent perspective.

The Creation Story.

I start with brief comments on the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. The first story in Genesis 1 walks us through six “days” of creation—“days” that show progress from chaos to order and from simple to the complex. You may be familiar with the problems of reading this story as a scientific account: the age of earth; alternating light and dark without sun and moon; green things growing in day three, doing their photosynthesizing, although sun which powers photosynthesis does not appear until day four.

The creation story in Genesis 2 poses still more problems if we read these as literal scientific accounts. The two stories pose a quite different order of events—Genesis 1 has male and female created at the end, as the culmination. Genesis 2 has human beings as male created at the beginning on a bare earth, followed by plants and animals, with human being as female created at the end. We need to know how to deal with these issues, but dealing with them is only a minor element of seeing that these stories actually make the Bible’s nonviolence visible.

Let’s put these stories of creation in conversation with creation as told in the Enuma Elish. Enuma Elish is a long Babylonian epoch that dates from the same period as the early Old Testament. In the midst of Enuma Elish appears the story of a rebellion of young gods against the old gods. Tiamat, female god, fought against Marduk the head god. Marduk killed Tiamat—he forced the wind into her mouth and blew her up like a balloon. And when she was thus distended, he shot her with an arrow. And then Marduk took his sword and sliced Tiamat in two, and set up the upper portion of her distended belly to be the big dome that makes the sky, parallel to the dome in Genesis 1.6. Finally Marduk killed another rebellious god, and used his blood to make people. Note the violence in this story from Enuma Elish—the earth and humankind are both products of divine violence.

Now compare the violent story in Enuma Elish with the two accounts in the Bible. In Enuma Elish, creation originates in violence—the fight of Tiamat and Marduk—and divine vengeance—Marduk killing the god in punishment and using his blood to make humankind. When compared with the Enuma Elish, it jumps out at us that the Bible’s creation stories picture creation entirely without violence. We could develop the contrasts between the Enuma Elish and the Bible’s two accounts much further.

But for this morning, the main point is that posing this kind of nonviolent theological contrast to Enuma Elish is the real purpose of these creation stories, and that they should absolutely not be taken as scientific or literal accounts. When we know about the violent story in Enuma Elish, it certainly appears that the Bible intentionally begins in a very nonviolent way.

Ehud and Eglon.

Now let’s examine the two stories from Judges that were just read as the sermon text of the morning. One story is violent and one is not.

Judges 3.15-30 tells the story of how Ehud saved the Israelites from King Eglon of the Moabites, who forced them to pay tribute. This earthy and graphic story features some interesting details. One of the details is that Ehud, the man who carries the tax money to King Eglon, is left handed. Ehud made himself a double-edged sword about eighteen inches long and attached it under his clothes on his right thigh. He and his retinue carried the tribute money to King Eglon. After they had left the king’s residence, Ehud went back alone to see the king. When Ehud approached and said that he had a message from God for the king, the king sent his servants away. And when the king stood to receive the message, Ehud reached under his clothes and took the sword from his right thigh. Here we see where the detail of left-handed comes in. The right hand is the power hand, and the hand that would normally hold a weapon. If Ehud had reached under his clothes with his right hand, Eglon would have been suspicious, but the king was not suspicious when Ehud reached under his clothes with his left hand. Ehud pulled out the eighteen-inch sword and stuck it right into King Eglon’s belly. Eglon was very fat, and Ehud pushed the sword in until even the handle disappeared in the fat, and the “dirt” came out of the hole. Then Ehud left and closed the doors behind him. After a while the king’s servants returned and saw that the door was still closed. They assumed that the king was attending to his personal needs, so they waited. They waited until they got embarrassed about how long the king was occupied. Finally they broke the door open and found him dead. Meanwhile, Ehud rallied an army and massacred 10,000 of the leadest Moabites. That is a very violent story, both in the assassination of King Eglon and in the subsequent massacre.

Gideon.

Judges 7 contains the story of Gideon, who saved the Israelites from a big army of Midianites. Gideon took an army to meet the Midianites, but God told him that he had too many men, and that if that army triumphed, people would say that the victory was due to the number of troops rather than to God. Thus God charged Gideon to tell the men that all those who were scared could go home—and 22,000 went home and 10,000 stayed.

But God told Gideon that 10,000 was still too many. Gideon ran another test. He brought his troops down to the water to drink. All that got down on their hands and knees and put their faces in the water to drink were put on one side, and on the other side he put all those that scooped up water in one hand and lapped out of their hands like a dog. 300 scooped water up in their hands. Gideon sent all the rest home, and kept the 300.

Gideon gave instructions that each of the 300 would carry a trumpet, and a jar with a torch inside. Then in three clusters of 100, they surrounded the camp of the Midianites. At Gideon’s signal, they all broke their jars, so that the flames burst out, and they started blowing their trumpets. With the lights suddenly

Libraries and Researchers.

Do you need back copies of Preservings? We now have available a CD-ROM with Issues No.s 1 to 19 of Preservings (Note: No pictures included for Issue 8, only the script. Issues 1-7 are scanned only.)

Cost is $30.00 plus $5.00 for shipping and handling. To order send cheque or money order to Scott Kroeker, Box 21306, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2T3 (allow several months for delivery). Check it out first on our website - www.hshs.mb.ca
Engaging the Powers.

very few people can or should actually implement the real peace teaching of Jesus, which is resistance to evil. They are presumed to present an example of primarily nonviolent resistance through creative imagination.

The Story of Jesus.

The question is: if these two stories represent two attitudes toward violence in the Old Testament, what do these two stories tell us about nonviolence and the Bible? Which one of these stories more nearly represents or reflects the will of God? Which one of these stories should we adopt as a model? How do you justify that answer?

To answer these questions, I want to look at some biblical texts from the story of Jesus. And we will see how these texts about Jesus have the potential to shape how we understand these two stories of Ehud and Gideon. Even though you may guess the final conclusion, you may still be surprised by the analysis of Jesus.

One text to observe is how Jesus described his own ministry when he made a public announcement of it in Nazareth. Luke 4 contains the account. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61.1-2 and said that his mission included good news to the poor, release to captives, recovery of sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. Speaking of freeing prisoners, healing blind people, and liberating the oppressed is not just a “spiritual” or inner message; it involves real, external, visible social changes.

Another text from Jesus presents the famous sayings in Matthew 5.39-48, where Jesus talks about turning the other cheek, giving the cloak or inner garment as well as the coat or outer garment, and going the second mile. These well-known texts have become synonymous with “peace”—as a passive, self-effacing non-resistance to evil. They are presumed to present the real peace teaching of Jesus, which is deemed true but also an ideal way that only a very few people can or should actually implement.

Engaging the Powers.

In his book Engaging the Powers Walter Wink shows us a different understanding of these texts (Note One).

Matthew’s version of “turn the other cheek” emphasizes a strike on “the right cheek.” Look at me as I speak, and note very specifically which is my right cheek. And then, think which is your right and your left hand. As you face me, what kind of blow gets to my right cheek? Most of you are right-handed. Think where a blow with your right hand, your natural power hand will land—on my left cheek. You get to my right cheek with either a left-handed fist or a back-hand slap.

In the culture of that time, the left hand was considered the soiled, unclean hand, and it was very improper to use it in public. Thus the blow to the right cheek mentioned by Jesus in all likelihood was a back hand slap. One does not give a backhand slap with the intent to injure; it is done to insult, a supposed superior insulting an inferior.

The backhand slap mentioned by Jesus is an insult designed to provoke retaliation. And for the inferior to retaliate for the insult with a hit would be exactly what the person of superior status wants—it would constitute the legal justification for the superior to beat the person who retaliated. But by responding to the first slap by turning the other cheek—the left cheek—toward the one who made the slap, the person of inferior power can actually turn the tables and gain the upper hand. By turning the other, the left, cheek, he has taken away the superior’s power to insult by offering him a humiliating series of choices.

The superior has two options—a left-handed slap, which is out of the question, or a right-handed fist, which would be to acknowledge the equality of the person insulted and is thus also out of the question. Thus by turning the other cheek, the one slapped has gained the upper hand in the encounter, and the one who made the first hit has to withdraw, himself humbled.

According to Wink, the setting for giving the cloak along with the coat is the debtor’s court. In that epoch, many poor people were being victimized by abusive rents that they could not pay. The debt holder would haul these poor folks into court and demand payment. As long as the debtor could not pay, he had to surrender something as security. For the poorest people, it would be the last thing of value they owned, namely the coat on their back.

Surrendering that coat left a man wandering in the daytime with only his undergarment. However, the law did allow the poor person to regain his coat again at night for protection against the cold when sleeping—it really was his only possession of any value. Thus one envisions here the continuing spectacle of the poor man showing up in court every morning to surrender his coat—his only possession of any value—to the wealthy debt holder and then getting it back in the evening for sleeping.

In that culture, when someone was naked, the shame fell on the one causing or viewing the naked person rather than on the one who was naked. Thus to expose the exploitative nature of the economic system, Jesus suggested that when the the poor man was asked for his coat, he should just pull off his last remaining garment as well and hand both coat and cloak to the wealthy man—and stand before him naked. This act would show how the system allowed the wealthy to strip the poor naked—and embarrass the wealthy person who caused the nakedness. This statement thus constitutes another suggestion by Jesus that allows the person on the underside to turn the tables on an oppressor.

On going the second mile: Roman soldiers could always command a civilian to carry the heavy pack of military gear. But the Romans were relatively enlightened occupiers. To protect the population from the military, military regulations forbade soldiers forcing a civilian to carry the pack more than one mile. When Jesus says to “go the second mile,” he is telling the civilian how to turn the tables on the soldier who forces him to carry a pack. By going beyond one mile, the one carrying the pack puts the soldier in a position of having broken regulations. And now, rather than the soldier forcing someone to carry the pack, the soldier ends up begging him to put it down before the soldier gets in trouble. Again, Jesus has suggested how the exploited person can turn the tables on an oppressor.

Narrative of Jesus.

Past the Sermon on the Mount, other stories show Jesus in conversation with women when that is not expected—and in these instances his actions pose a contrast to some expected conventions. He raises the status of women. His stories confront the racism against Samaritans by raising their status. Jesus’ teachings show concern for poor people. I just note these items without describing them in detail.

Luke 6.6-11 has a story about Jesus’ healing a withered hand. The dominant feature of the story is that the healing occurred on the Sabbath day, a defiance of the conventional expectations. And it was clearly a deliberate defiance—Jesus had the man come to a prominent spot where everyone could see him, and Jesus looked “around at all of them,” making eye contact and drawing their eyes to him, before he acted.

A number of other stories have similar features. One of the most striking is often referred to as the cleansing of the temple. We do not need to engage the debate about the nature of the particular offense that Jesus encountered in order to know that he was upset with what he found. He made a whip and went in and knocked over tables and cracked the whip and chased animals and told the money changers to get out because it was supposed to be a house of prayer but they had made it a “den of robbers” (Luke 19.46). That very assertive act of chasing out the money changers and the people selling animals was the event that made the authorities so mad that they started plotting how to kill him.

Next consider the betrayal and arrest of Jesus (Luke 22.47-53). The text says that he had been in the garden of Gethsemane, praying
and trying to get the disciples to pray with them, but they kept falling asleep. Then the mob came, and Judas gave him the kiss to identify him. The folks with Jesus had their swords ready to defend him, and Peter actually got his sword out and started swinging away and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. But Jesus told Peter to knock it off—he’s people don’t act that way. And Jesus healed the wounded ear. Here Jesus directly forbid violent resistance.

And Jesus said another very interesting thing in this context. He chided the leaders who had come out with an armed mob to arrest him. Why did they come now, particularly with a mob armed with swords and clubs. After all, he said, “Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me” (22.53). He seems to be saying that if they had really understood him, they would have known that weapons were unnecessary because he would pose no violent resistance.

The following events are quite well known. Jesus was arrested, he was tried, convicted, and finally his death and resurrection. The very important third point is that this story of Jesus is the story of the nonviolent coming true in our time. Revelation was written in the first century. The very important third point is that this story of Jesus is the story of the nonviolent coming true in our time. Revelation was written in the first century. The important point is that this story of Jesus is the story of the nonviolent coming true in our time. Revelation was written in the first century.

The important third point is that this activism was nonviolent activism. Jesus’ activism did not cause bodily harm to people or destroy things. Rather it was activism that revealed the injustice of the status quo and posed an alternative to it. In the story of Jesus’ arrest, the activist motif is shifted. This time it is the mob that is active, active in promoting injustice. And in the face of this violent activism, Jesus charged his followers not to resist in kind, not to resist violently. He did resist—verbally—reminding them somewhat sarcastically that he was always available, unarmed, in the temple and, if they had understood what he was about, there was no need to come after him with an armed mob.

This is a nonviolent reading of the story of Jesus. This reading does not depend on the authority of a few, particular Bible verses. Understanding the Bible as a nonviolent book comes from understanding that the story of Jesus as a whole is an intrinsically nonviolent story. I am not talking about a few selected aspects of Jesus. Jesus’ story as a whole reveals and embodies the reign of God. And to read this story as a Christian is to believe that the nonviolent story of Jesus is the most full revelation of what the reign of God looks like. This is a Jesus-focused reading of the Bible, and it is a nonviolent reading of the Bible.

Now I take that insight about Jesus as the one who makes visible the reign of God back to the stories of Ehud and Gideon. And I ask which story reveals an understanding of God most like that revealed in Jesus. It should be obvious that the story of Gideon rather than the story of Ehud most reveals the God revealed in the event of Jesus.

Seeing how reading the Old Testament through Jesus reveals the story of Gideon as the story that most nearly reveals the will of God shows how we can accept the Old Testament as an authentic book but without seeing its violent stories as justification for contemporary violence. The Old Testament contains the honest story of God’s people trying to understand what it means to be God’s people. That understanding was not always clear to them. And as they tried to understand, they made competing and even contradictory claims as they tried, through time, to understand who they were as God’s people. A Christian, that is, a Christ-centered reading of that story, enables us to say which of their efforts most fully revealed the will or the rule of God, but without merely cutting out or abandoning part of the Bible.

I want to look at one more text—from the book of Revelation.

Revelation.

Revelation was written in the first century. It contains many symbols. Its symbols were meant to be accessible to readers in the first century—a fact that is fully and completely missed by the folks who want to see Revelation as a book that predicted the future 2000 years ahead of the first readers and is now coming true in our time.

Many people read Revelation as a violent book, as the book that seems to depict God’s violent judgment and vengeance on the wicked at the end of time. I want to look at one such text. It is Revelation 19.11–21, which has the image of the rider on a white horse with a sword coming out of his mouth. This text is frequently cited as a text of divine vengeance. But I think not—this text does not portray violent, divine vengeance at all. It can look like a violent text at first glance. The image of the rider on the white horse appears violent, and there is a seemingly violent culmination. The rider is depicted with eyes like fire; the robe of the rider is dipped in blood; the armies of heaven are lined up behind him; from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which he will rule the nations with a rod of iron; and treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God. Then the reader sees the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies, all lined up to make war on the rider on the horse and his army. According to a number of interpreters, this image presents the supposed last great battle at the end of time, when God finally, violently smashes the forces of evil once for all. The beast is captured and he and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire; and the rest of the evil armies are killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword coming from his mouth.

This language sounds violent. And that is a common interpretation. But that interpretation starts with violence and it assumes violence—and it misses the meaning of the text entirely. Recall what I described as the way Jesus’ life and teaching make visible and point to the reign of God, the nonviolent reign of God. And let’s look again at the rider on the white horse.

His robe is dipped in blood, before the big battle. The rider obviously lives, but has blood on his robe before the battle. And his name is “Word of God” (19.13). This rider is a symbol for none other than Jesus, Jesus who has been crucified and resurrected. Blood on the robe of the living Jesus means that this is an image of resurrected Jesus. And it even tells us that the image refers to Jesus when it says that he is named “Word of God,” which is a name for Jesus in the gospel of John.

And now consider the two-edged sword that comes from his mouth. Hebrews 4:12 says that the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. Here I think is a symbol that Jesus speaks the word of God. And when you have an opportunity to examine the text, you will notice that there really is no big battle mentioned. It just says that armies lined up, and then it moves to the capture of the beast and the false prophet. And then notice what slays the armies of the beast and the kings of the earth—the sword from the rider’s mouth, namely the word of God. This image does make Jesus triumph—but a triumph entirely without
violence. He triumphs by the Word of God.

The image of the rider on the white horse is not a violent text at all. It is a highly symbolic statement, in apocalyptic language, of the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This text says that the reign of God constitutes the ultimate force in the universe, which is already manifest in the life and teaching of Jesus. This seeming violent image of the rider with the double-edged sword is really another statement about the nonviolent reign of God, in which God reigns and achieves victory, not through violence—as the world does—but through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And what is more, there is no future, violent confrontation yet to come—the important “battle” has already occurred, in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If one simply reads the Bible as a “flat” book, with the assumption that every story and every saying speaks directly to us, one can find a lot of material that seems to justify violence. The assassination of King Eglon by Ehud followed by a massacre of 10,000 Moabites constitutes one violent example observed this morning.

But the Bible is not a “flat” book depicting violence alongside nonviolence as equally justifiable. Rather, the Bible shows the ups and downs in the story of the efforts of God’s people to understand their identity and their mission, with the culmination of that story coming in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And when one reads the entire Bible through the lens of Jesus, one can see that God’s reign is nonviolent. Nonviolence is biblical because the entire story of the reign of God in history, the story that begins with creation and culminates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is a story that presumes nonviolence.

We saw violence on September 11, but there was also violence on October 7, when the United States unleashed massive military reprisals on Afghanistan. Both dates are tragedies.

Nonviolent Reign of God.
The nonviolent reading of the Bible we talked about today speaks quite specifically to us and to the violence of October 7 as well as of September 11. This reading of the Bible says that if we want to be identified with Jesus, if we want to live in his story, then we need to live in a way that witnesses to and makes visible the nonviolent reign of God. Living in this way calls for imagination and for courage.

This morning I am a guest in Canada. I cannot speak for you. In the United States since September 11, there is much renewed, exaggerated patriotism. How do we as nonviolent Christians respond, when this war sharpens the line so dramatically between violence and our nonviolent theology? I will mention a few things from my immediate experience that I hope will stimulate your thinking about things that you can do.

What alternatives are there when one works in an office where every other person is wearing a patriotic flag pin and all desks sport a patriotic display. My wife, a nurse, works in such a setting. She put a candle for peace on her desk to occupy the place of a patriotic display, and I found a UNICEF lapel pin featuring all the children of the world to wear over any red, white and blue ribbons handed out for staff to wear. The Mennonite Church USA has been selling a pin that says “Pray for Peace.” A couple days ago, one of my friends related that she was approached by someone who thought that she was located by someone who thought that she was a good idea and wanted to know where to acquire one. Then my friend explained that she wore the pin as a symbol of peace and as a witness against the war. And the other person said, “Well, I don’t want one of those.” So we look for ways to pose an alternative witness to the prevailing war mentality.

Right now (Note Two), teachers in the United States have been under a lot of pressure, from the public as well as from some principals, to display patriotic symbols in support of the war. In my area, one school principal arranged for every student and every teacher to wear red, white and blue so that they could arrange themselves in a big flag showing that the school was 100 percent behind the war. The teacher agonized long and hard and finally called in and took a sick day on the scheduled red, white and blue day. Another teacher in my Sunday school class works for a school where the principal required every class to have a patriotic display in support of the war. After some stressful days she came up with a creative, peace-focused alternative. She had her class draw pictures of hands, which they could paint red, white and blue, but the important thing was that her hall display depicted hands that represented hands of children around the globe that were working for a better world.

Mennonite Colleges and Universities have values and actions that separate us from our state counterparts. I am a religion department faculty member at Bluffton College. How is Bluffton College making its mark for nonviolence?

It is not easy for teachers who do not support the war, but who need to keep their jobs and maintain good working relationships with principals and teachers who are vocal about supporting the war. The head of the education department of Bluffton College recently called a meeting of teachers from peace churches in schools around Bluffton, to give them a chance to get to know and support each other and to share ideas on how they have been handling this difficult situation.

At Bluffton College I am helping to edit a book that deals with “nonviolence across the curriculum.” We believe that nonviolence has the potential to impact all disciplines in the college curriculum. This work in progress speaks to that issue.

At Bluffton College we have a high percent of students who are not Mennonites. One young man I am thinking of comes from a strong military background. At Bluffton, through classes and discussions, he made the decision to embrace our nonviolent theology and become a member of First Mennonite Church. His decision has meant personal sacrifice—for a while it created something of a rift in his family and his mother advised him not to come home until his father got used to the idea.

Conclusion.
These are a very few ideas and examples from my small world of work. What do you do specifically to let others know that you live a peace theology? We need to keep talking together about how to make a consistent witness for peace in times of war. The important thing this morning is to know that it is our Christian calling to live in a way that makes God’s peaceable rule visible. May God inspire our imagination to live that witness, may God give us the courage to live that witness, and may we encourage and support each other in that calling.

Endnotes:
Note Two: This sermon was written in January 2002.

Subscription Reminder:
If you have not paid your 2003 membership fee, this may be the last issue you will receive. To avoid being taken off our membership list, send your membership fee of $20.00 to HSHS, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0.
Toward an Understanding of Conversion - Part One

Introduction.

Christian conversion is one of the topics about which there is continued controversy, confusion and uncertainty. All believers must come to grips with the questions surrounding this topic. In this article I want to examine the Bible as well as explore and reflect on our own experience and heritage in relation to conversion.

Some of the questions that continue to surface are these: Must I have a certain kind of conversion experience in order to be converted? Must all believers be able to tell a clear “before and after” story of their coming to faith? Must all believers use the same words, terms and concepts when they speak of conversion? Must I be able to give a date for my conversion? Does everyone’s conversion have to be a climactic or dramatic experience? What basis is there for the assurance that God has accepted me? Is there a correct way in which to become a Christian believer and experience salvation?

Some of the confusion and uncertainty we experience surfaces when some church, preacher or evangelist comes into our communities insisting that everyone must have the type of experience they believe in. They may also insist or at least give the impression that we must use their set of terms to describe our salvation or, we must follow the same number of steps in coming to faith. If we fail to use their language then we are suspected of being unbelievers. If we can’t follow a certain pattern or series of steps we may doubt whether we are in fact Christians. The preaching and teaching of some, causes many a great deal of pain, anxiety, uncertainty and fear.

Unless we become clear, on the basis of the Bible, about our own understanding of salvation and conversion, we may end up doubting our experience and even questioning whether or not we are real Christians. If we have been baptized already we may even wonder whether our baptism is valid. Some may even feel that in order to be genuine Christians they must leave the congregations in which they are presently members. If we fail to gain the necessary clarity and conviction then we will likely be “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine” as the Apostle Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:14.

Another area of confusion is in relation to children and the faith. Traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings regarding children are being challenged repeatedly by strange theologies that have developed during the past century. There are some groups, like the Child Evangelism Fellowship, that teach that all children are lost or soon will be and must be converted as soon as possible. Do we believe that children are lost and responsible and accountable and thus need to be converted?

Earlier in my life I had a struggle about these matters myself and it took me some time to come through the confusion to clarity and conviction that I believe is true to the teaching of Scripture and true to experience. I will share some details of my experience in this article and I invite and challenge each reader to reflect seriously and openly on his or her own experience.

This article is intended to deal with a range of topics related to the experience of conversion and salvation. It will not deal with the theories of atonement that try to explain how the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ make salvation possible. My focus will be on the experiential aspect of salvation, i.e. the human side, rather than on God’s side, who provides salvation for all by grace through faith.

Here’s what I would like to do in Part One: First, I will identify four foundational concepts that we want to have in mind as we explore this subject. Secondly, I want to identify the variety of memories/emotions we have about conversion. Thirdly, I want to share a variety of stories of conversion and reflect on them. This will bring Part One to conclusion.

Part Two will continue in the next issue of Preservings. Since we also “live by words” as well as by stories, we will consider the great variety of language used in the Bible to speak of salvation and conversion. Fifthly, I will identify a variety of expectations that people have when it comes to conversion, including the expectations that we may legitimately have in regard to children and young people who grow up in a Christian home and in the context of a nurturing congregation. In this section I will also share with you how I worked with young people and young adults in the context of pastoral work and a church membership or catechism class. Finally, I will conclude with a list of affirmations that we can make on the basis of the biblical evidence.

Four Concepts.

Before I move into the next section, I want to mention four concepts that we want to keep in mind as we explore this important subject: mystery, free will, opposition and patience. The first one is mystery, You and I are fallible and limited in our understanding. God is far above and beyond us and it is an awesome mystery to me that God, the creator and sustainer of the universe came among us in the person of Jesus, inviting each of us to respond to Him in faith and with obedience.

I agree with the question the Psalmist asked in Psalm 8:3-4, “When I look at your heavens the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” This remains a mystery to me – that the Creator of the universe is mindful of human beings. It is also a mystery how the Lord makes his presence known in our lives. It is a mystery how God gets through to us over the course of our lives. Let us admit that there is much in our world and in our lives that we do not understand and will never understand.

The second one is free will. Whether we are children, men or women, youth or adults, we enjoy the freedoms we have and the many options we have. We are thankful for this freedom of choice but we must also remember that the freedom to choose includes the freedom to make negative choices. We have the option of turning our backs on our upbringing; we have the option of saying no to the efforts of parents and church to have us receive the good news. This other side of freedom, the freedom to reject, to say no, causes us a great deal of pain and confusion. As parents, grandparents and churches we are then in the position of the father in Jesus’ parable (Luke 15) who permitted the younger son to make an unwise choice and leave for a far country. This is the painful reality of freedom: if we have the choice of saying “yes” we also have the choice of saying “no.”

This is right at the center of our Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the church as being a voluntary body. Everyone, as he/she grows up has the real choice of deciding to accept Jesus into their lives or to reject him. This suggests that when we do evangelism in our churches, we must present the invitation to believe clearly, with compassion and with conviction, but we can never force anyone to say “yes” to God.

In his ministry on earth Jesus never used emotional arm-twisting and pressure to make a person decide to follow him. The church, Jesus’ body, should also refuse to use such methods. Instead we should learn from our Lord how to relate to others, including non-believers, in gentle and compassionate ways. The Lord risked a great deal when he created human beings with free will.

The third concept that should be in our minds when we think about evangelism, conversion and salvation is the reality of opposition. The fact of the matter is that we are not the only ones attempting to have an influence in the lives of others. Certainly good seed is being sown in every person’s life, but just as certainly “the enemy” is also sowing weeds among the wheat. The weeds of opposition take many forms in our time. Sometimes the opposition to the good news of the gospel appears in the form of secularism, materialism, or sensualism. Sometimes the weeds of opposition take the form of indifference or a pathy, an “I can’t be bothered” attitude. These and other forces are at work in our lives and in the lives of everyone we are concerned about.

As Jesus put it, “someone has planted weeds among the wheat.” The soil of our lives, yours and mine, as well as the soil of every person we meet is being tilled by evil as well as by good forces. Certainly we believe that God and the Holy Spirit are at work in our lives, but we recognize that the forces of evil, in various expressions, are also at work in every one’s life. Let us never forget that the forces opposed to God and the good news of the gospel are at work in the world.

The fourth concept that should be kept in mind is patience. Patience is part of “the fruit of the Spirit” according to Paul in Galatians 5, but we seem to have a lot of difficulty with having it develop in our lives. Our tendency as parents and church leaders is to be impatient when things don’t...
go the way they think they ought to go, according to our hoped-for schedule. As parents we hope that our young people will make decisions for Jesus and the church now, rather than later. We hope that all those who attend our churches but are not really with it, will “get with it” this week, rather than next month or next year. We hope that the neighbour we have been getting to know would show some interest in matters of faith, now rather than later. But the reality is, that all too often, these hopes of ours are not realized. When there are few outer signs of commitment, when growth seems to be too slow, do we then have the grace to be patient? Can we be as painfully patient as the father in Jesus’ parable and as patient as the farmer who had to watch the weeds grow among the wheat until the time of harvest?

Patience in these important matters is difficult. One writer, Eugene Peterson, has suggested that we are much more inclined to go into people’s lives like a bulldozer, to clear away the debris and make things new. But God has not called us as parents, pastors, teachers or as churches to be bulldozers forcing our way into people’s lives and compelling them to become shaped in our image. No, the Lord has called us to a much more modest task—to tend the garden, to plant good seeds, to tell a story, to ask a question, to wait and to pray, to let our light shine, to give a word of witness here, and another one there. And then, to wait some more. Knocking at the door, but never using a battering ram.

The prophet Isaiah wrote the following, “a bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not quench:” These insightful and powerful words are spoken of God’s servant in Isaiah 42:3. They suggest that God’s servant will not break the person who is already at the breaking point, nor will he snuff out the flickering light that is left in someone’s life. Instead he will be gentle, caring and patient, affirming the flicker of light that is there, doing everything in his power to fan the flame, to maintain the life. When I read these inspired words of Isaiah, I cannot but think of the patience evident in Jesus’ approach as he worked with people, inviting them to believe in Him and to become his followers. It seems to me that we have much to learn from Him in this regard.

Let’s keep these four words — mystery, free will, opposition and patience—and the stories they evoke in mind, as we think about conversion, evangelism and salvation.

Evangelism.

I would like to begin by saying that the word “evangelism” triggers memories in each of our hearts and minds. Some years ago I stopped a few people and asked them, “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word, “evangelism”?”

I was saddened but not surprised by the responses I received: “not good,” “cynicism,” “negative all the way,” and “count me out, I have little use for evangelism.” Who was it that spoke this way? Were these people off the street or on the edges of congregational life? No, these were adults who were at the center of congregational life, persons who have studied the Bible and who are committed believers. What I read somewhere seems to be true for them: evangelism is a good word with a bad reputation.

I wonder what your response would be if you were asked the same question I asked those men and women. I mean your real response, what you really felt deep down, based on your experience or on the experiences of someone you know. What would your response be if you were brutally honest?

For some people, memories of evangelism revolved around evangelistic crusades. Perhaps it was George R. Brunk’s revival campaigns in southern Manitoba in the late 50s or one of Billy Graham’s open air stadium crusades, the Janz Brothers crusades held in many communities over the years, a Barry Moore Crusade in the Winnipeg Arena or the series of evangelistic meetings in many of our churches here and in South America by Evangelist A. G. Neufeld. We remember him imposing presence, his booming voice, those piercing eyes and the direct appeals he made. Another Mennonite evangelist was the blind J.J. Esau who came from the United States and ministered in many churches in Canada. I have experienced evangelistic meetings with all of these evangelists.

My recollections include memories of enthusiastic gospel singing, emotional preaching and an altar call while the congregation sang “Just as I Am.” Some of our younger people nowadays may never have experienced a crusade like that, but they may have seen TV evangelists ranting, raving and roaming across the podium, Bible in hand, tears streaming down their cheeks, asking people to come forward to receive Christ.

Many of us have gone to those kinds of services and when we think of evangelism we think of the evangelistic crusade. We attended those revival services and some of us were moved and went forward to receive Christ into our hearts, but others, turned away, never to come back. Maybe you know some like that too.

Are these our dominant images of evangelism? Surveys show that only a small percentage of Christians, only one-half of one percent come to faith via these kinds of mass meetings. The majority of church members have come to faith in other ways, through other approaches; yet, for many the dominant image of evangelism is determined by the big crusade and its results, some positive and some negative.

Some may recall becoming believers through the quiet influence of a Sunday School or DVBS teacher, a youth sponsor or the annual catechism classes in the church. These memories are mostly positive, reminding us of caring and friendship, open dialogue, patience, warmth and joy.

But for too many, “evangelism” stirs the emotions negatively and the memories are associated with guilt, discomfort, pressure, fear, manipulation, exploitation and arm-twisting, as well as shallowness and superficiality. What memories and emotions come to the surface as you reflect on your life and experience? Do you find yourself identifying with any of the things I’ve mentioned, either the positive or the negative?

Responses.

People respond in various ways to the memories associated with evangelism. Some would like to get back to “the good old days” with some fire and brimstone preaching and altar calls. Others recall their negative experiences and are simply paralysed, not knowing how to move beyond their feelings. Still others respond with a theological answer: We do not need altar calls or invitations any more. Let’s commit ourselves to peace and justice, service and discipleship, the important issues. Let’s avoid the superficialities.

Others may say, “I witness with my deeds. I don’t like to say too much. I feel uncomfortable verbalizing my faith. All that we do is evangelism.” But this attitude is probably little more than a half-truth. According to the New Testament, we do not really have the option of choosing between words and deeds. Both are essential. Certainly we are expected to translate our professed faith into deeds and attitudes of daily life, but we must also become explicit about the core of our faith and be able to put it into words.

I have both positive and negative memories when it comes to evangelism and I have come to the conclusion that the church must practice biblical evangelism. Every church and each believer is called to share the good news with the world. This is done in a wide variety of ways. All believers are called to be the salt of the earth and light to the world, to evangelize and to make disciples. The early church practiced this and grew by leaps and bounds according to Acts. And our Anabaptist-Mennonite forebears in the 16th century were also effective in sharing the good news of the gospel with others.

For a variety of reasons evangelism has fallen on hard and difficult times. Not too long ago, Christian Smith wrote this: “evangelism these days is rough: we make use of Christian jewelry, bumper stickers, padded pews, films and videos, yet people don’t seem to be listening. We present a weak and silly rendition of the gospel; it is simple but it is not simple! It’s deep and demanding; a message that calls us to be slaves of righteousness, to lay down our lives, to put to death the old nature within us. We need something that cuts through the glitter to where people yearn for that which is meaningful, difficult and challenging.” (Christian Smith, Going to the root: nine proposals for radical church renewal, Herald Press, 1992.)

Gentleness.

As I thought about my own and others’ memories I also thought about the biblical mandate to share the good news. I browsed through the New Testament and came across a surprising and insightful statement by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, “We were gentle among you like a nurse tenderly caring for her children.” This is how Paul described his own missionary/evangelistic activity. I find it amazing that Paul the former persecutor of Christians has become “gentle as a nurse.” As a non-Christian he had tried to force others to his point of view but as a Christian he became gentle as a nurse.

What a difference it would make if memories about evangelism would remind us of ‘gentle, tender and caring concern of others for us. Would there be memories of negativity, guilt and fear after a gentle sharing of the good news? As I think about this the image of “gentle as a nurse” reminds me of Jesus in his relationships with others, including...
ing the charge of his enemies that he was the friend of tax collectors and sinners.

In recent years, a Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, has written the following about evangelism. "Our task in evangelism is to clear away the weeds, to pull away the rocks, to allow the plants to grow." These words are often interpreted as a call to a life of Christian practice, to live a life that is distinctively different from the world's values. However, as Nouwen's words suggest, gentleness, patience and care are important qualities that should be present in evangelism. Nouwen goes on to say that "...it's not the words themselves that are important, but the way in which they are spoken."

Deciding for Christ.

One additional question comes to mind and it has to do with how long it actually takes to make an important decision. How long does it take to choose a life's partner? Would we rejoice if our sons or daughters came home one Friday and told us they had just met the most wonderful person and were planning to be married next week? Would we rejoice with them or would we speak a word of caution?

"I had heard my name, graciously repeated. The words 'persecution' brought back a stinging memory and I thought again of stones hitting human flesh and in my mind I heard Stephen's prayer again, asking for the forgiveness of those who were stoning him. I remember consenting to that innocent man's death. And now the same Jesus to whom Stephen had prayed was confronting me, not with a word of judgment but with a question."

"I was led to Damascus, because I was blind, and there a Christian brother approached me with the words, 'Brother Saul.' At that moment I knew I was a new person. I will never forget the day. I acknowledged Jesus as Lord, was adopted by a new group and I began to serve Christ."

Turning to Timothy, the interviewer asked, "Well, Timothy, I imagine you have had a similar experience, since I heard you were called Paul's son in the faith?"

"Well no," said Timothy, "actually I cannot give you a dramatic story like Paul's.

"But you are a Christian, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am, let me explain."

"I grew up in a believing home. The presence of God was something we were very much aware of. We were told of the sacred writings and I remember my mother Lois and my grandmother Eunice telling us the stories of faith."

"But when did you become a Christian?

"I find that hard to answer. I don't remember the day when I was converted. I accepted what I was taught as I was growing up. I believed it firmly and began to live as one of the disciples of the Lord."

End of the interview.

"Although there are real differences between these two stories, they do have some things in common. Both Paul and Timothy came to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Saviour and surrendered their lives to him. Both of them began to obey, to follow Jesus in life as best they could. For each of them, faith included three things: knowing, trusting and doing. Both of them, in spite of their differences were part of Christ's body, the church. Paul accepted Timothy's way of coming to the faith and Timothy accepted Paul's way of coming to the faith. They were now brothers in faith."

These two stories elicit memories of my growing up years and I am disturbed by what I remember. I heard evangelistic messages using Paul's story to illustrate the prescribed way of coming to faith. God is far more creative than that, don't you think? God is not limited in the number of ways he gets our attention or in the number of ways faith is kindled in our hearts.

When we invite others to get connected with God by faith, to experience new life, forgiveness, and a reorientation of life's direction and values, let us remember that no one's experience of "receiving Christ" has to be like ours. Let's share our stories openly and with vulnerability, saying "Look, I have found peace, meaning, hope, salvation and meaning this way. Would you like to explore the possibility of faith openly and see for yourself where it might take you?" What I am really saying is that getting connected with God through faith in Christ is personal and unique.

To illustrate this variety of experience further I want to share three stories taken from Hans Kasdorf's book, Christian Conversion in Context (Herald Press, 1980). Kasdorf is of Mennonite Brethren background and has served in Brazil and more recently at the MB Seminary in Fresno, California. He tells the stories of a Brazilian weaver, a Mennonite medic in Russia and a psychiatrist in Japan.

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 35
Brazilian Weaver.

I was standing close to a weaving machine, watching the intricate work of the instrument fashioning the warp and the woof until a sizable roll of fine cotton fabric was ready for release. The man on the chair was Mr. Adolf Stinshoff, the owner of the factory in Blumenau, Brazil. The Stinshoffs were regular participants in our worship services and Bible study meetings in the church where I was pastor.

“So it is with my life,” Mr. Stinshoff said, as we discussed the analogy between the work of the weaving machine and God’s work in a man’s life. “God is the Master Weaver. I grew up under the influence of godly parents,” he continued as we walked to the house to join Mrs. Stinshoff for morning coffee. “God spun and wove until I was prepared to consciously assume the role of discipleship.”

“But how did you experience conversion?” I queried. “Conversion? I don’t know,” he replied. “Then he added, “I know when I was baptized, but I know neither time nor place of my conversion. In fact, I don’t even know of an experience which I can call my conversion to Christ. What I do know is that I am a child of God through Jesus Christ my Lord and rejoice in His service.”

Mennonite Medicine.

I had spent three years as a Russian medic on the Turkish front during World War I. When I was released I went back to my home in Russia. Although my parents gave me a comfortable bed and food, I could neither sleep nor eat. The words of a dying soldier on the battlefield haunted me day and night: “Kardash su wirasim” (“Brother, give me water”).

Instead of giving him a drink I deprived him of it. I had my first encounter with Christianity, when I was a medical student at the university, on July 27, 1975. My girlfriend invited me to Christian meetings. Dr. Tetsuo Kashiwagi continued. “The Spirit blows where he wills.”

In the Next Issue.

In recent weeks I have found myself at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, reading the early editions of the Steinbach Post and its predecessor, the Volksbote. The faded Gothic print is hard on the eyes, and sometimes I struggle to figure out the difference between a capital “K” and a capital “R” (critical, if you are trying to identify an individual by his initials).

And it’s slow going. Thanks to the encouragement of the redoubtable Dr. Jack Thiessen, I took German in undergraduate school and even went on a student exchange to Germany in 1967. But that was a long time ago, and now I read rather slowly, with an English-German dictionary at hand. With practice, no doubt, the pace will pick up.

In my reading, I came upon an article by H. S. Rempel (1855-1926) on the front page of the October 6, 1915 issue of the Post. Rempel was a frequent correspondent to the Mennonitische Rundschau, a founding member of the Bruderthalger Gemeinde (EMB), and a school teacher.

The article is a report on the visit to Steinbach of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Schmidt. The Schmidts were missionaries to China. I am not sure which organization was sponsoring them; they might have been with the United States-based China Mennonite Mission Society. I was drawn to the Post headline partly because my wife and I are going to China this October, and, God willing, will be back by the time this gets into print.

I was also interested in knowing more about the emphasis on missions and evangelism at that point in the life of the village of Steinbach. I knew that the Bruderthalger began in Steinbach in 1897, and from the start had emphasized the importance of “saving the lost,” as opposed to the more traditional practices of their parent church, the Kleine Gemeinde, and the surrounding Berghaler and Chottizer. I knew that, before the Bruderthalger, the preaching of John Holdeman in the late 1880s was premised on the idea that people needed a spiritual renewal which would be evident by the emotion they experienced and expressed. Still, I was not quite prepared to find the rhetoric of “saving souls” on the front page of the Post in 1915.

Rempel writes that, on the last evening of a week-long series of meetings, Schmidt “gave a very earnest sermon on the work of saving souls,” with the result that “many an eye was made moist through the inner speaking of the Holy Spirit.” The task that Brother Schmidt laid before his audience was daunting. The part of China in which his mission was active was populated by two million inhabitants, part of China in which his mission was active. The mission had only 23 workers for the area, which only 300 have so far been converted.

How the readership of the Post in 1915 might have understood the word Seele (soul) is itself a subject worth exploring. Perhaps, for them, it still had the echo of “member of a community” which it seems to have had, for example, for the Mennonites in their accounts of the immigration from South Russia. If so, it could be said that Brother Schmidt had a burden for his fellow human beings, equal to that point in the life of the village of Steinbach.

I knew that the Bruderthalger began in Steinbach in 1897, and from the start had emphasized the importance of “saving the lost,” as opposed to the more traditional practices of their parent church, the Kleine Gemeinde, and the surrounding Berghaler and Chottizer. I knew that, before the Bruderthalher, the preaching of John Holdeman in the late 1880s was premised on the idea that people needed a spiritual renewal which would be evident by the emotion they experienced and expressed. Still, I was not quite prepared to find the rhetoric of “saving souls” on the front page of the Post in 1915.

Rempel writes that, on the last evening of a week-long series of meetings, Schmidt “gave a very earnest sermon on the work of saving souls,” with the result that “many an eye was made moist through the inner speaking of the Holy Spirit.” The task that Brother Schmidt laid before his audience was daunting. The part of China in which his mission was active was populated by two million inhabitants, of which only 300 have so far been converted.” Further, the mission had only 23 workers for the area, “on average 86,956 souls for each worker.”

This rather repellent quantifying of souls, a tendency well-documented by Calvin W. Redekop in his 1998 book, Anabaptism: From Evangelical Mennonite Brethren to Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (Pandora Press), was borrowed from the American fundamentalist movement. Chicago-based EMB evangelist George P. Schultz became its strongest proponent in Steinbach, conducting revival meetings there in 1911 and subsequent years.

How the readership of the Post in 1915 might have understood the word Seele (soul) is itself a subject worth exploring. Perhaps, for them, it still had the echo of “member of a community” which it seems to have had, for example, for the Mennonites in their accounts of the immigration from South Russia. If so, it could be said that Brother Schmidt had a burden for his fellow human beings, equal to the idea that people needed a spiritual renewal that was said at the meeting. Perhaps Brother Schmidt wanted to underline the radical lostness of the Chinese souls. The main impression that seems to have been left in the minds of the children, however, was that the Chinese were monsters.

Maybe my wife and I should be on the lookout for our visit for hungry-looking Chinese.

To be fair, Rempel’s account also contains information on an orphanage established by the missionaries, with almost 400 boys and girls who were “all given good instruction, both in school and in different kinds of work.” Their work included shoemaking and weaving, examples of which were on display at the meeting in Steinbach.

Today, as in 1915, the efforts of Mennonites abroad could be categorized as “saving souls” on the one hand, and Christian humanitarian aid (e.g., the Mennonite Central Committee), on the other. But it’s a tricky business, going across the sea with gifts in hand, whether those gifts be spiritual or material. It is very hard to avoid a superior attitude: “I have something better than you have, and I want to give it to you.” It is difficult to keep one’s mind open: “What do I have to learn from the other?”

I meet this same difficulty every day in my work as a counsellor and family therapist. We counsellors commonly suffer from a rescuer syndrome, “the idea that, through our interventions, we can ‘save’ people.”

We can’t. We can guide, coach, cajole, plead, pray. In the end, each soul, with God’s help, has to save himself. And this is never a one-time event - it is the labour of a lifetime.

The traditional Kleine Gemeinde insisted that no one can lay certain claim to his own salvation. There is wonderful wisdom in this “not-knowing.” We all experience anxiety at the thought of not knowing, even if it means not knowing the weather forecast for tomorrow. Many of us will rather make a prediction (usually negative, and therefore anxiety-producing in a different way) than to sit on the edge of not knowing. It is the mark of existential maturity and humility to acknowledge not-knowing as inherent to the human condition.
Is the future for Mennonites Evangelical?

“Is the future for Mennonites Evangelical?” by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.
In the spring issues of the Canadian Mennonite (Feb. 11, 2002), and The Mennonite (March 5, 2002), J. Nelson Kraybill, president of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, challenges Mennonites with the question “is our future Evangelical?” His answer seemingly is “yes.” In a keynote address to the third annual meeting of the Mennonite Church Canada in July, 2002, Dr. Kraybill is quoted as concluding with the statement that “our future is Evangelical,” (Der Bote, July 31/02).

In the March 5 article Dr. Kraybill recalls that in his youth he held proudly to the belief that Mennonites represented a third way between Catholics and Protestants. But in his first pastoral assignment in New England “he realized that neither I nor many in our Mennonite congregation knew how to invite others to faith in Jesus Christ.” When he looked for models he realized that the growing churches in New England were Evangelical and that they “immersed themselves in Scriptures, believed in sin and conversion, worshipped with heart and mind and invited others to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour.”

The article is well-written and makes a good point that Evangelicals have learned well and even mastered the strategies of growth, although how this translates into being a criteria of Christ-likeness or why this should be a reason for Mennonites to forsake a 500 year-old faith tradition, is left unexplained.

Similar sentiments were reportedly expressed by Dr. Kraybill in response to a speech by Professor Donald Dayton, a member of the Wesleyan Church (Methodist and Holiness), guest speaker at an AMBS conference Feb. 21-22, 2001 (Cdn. Men., April 9/02, page 18), indicating Dr. Kraybill has shared these views for some time. The expressed views of Dr. Kraybill are reiterated and affirmed by Dan Nighswander, General Secretary of the Mennonite Church Canada in an article “Our Future is Ecumenical” published in the Canadian Mennonite (Sept. 23, 2002), making one wonder whether some kind of wider agenda is being pursued.

Responses.
There are at least four possible responses to Dr. Kraybill’s thesis that the future of Mennonites is “Evangelical”:

First, one can say “yes”, he is correct. Mennonites are Evangelicals and they should acknowledge it. This answer in essence is to abandon Mennonites as a specific tradition with a specific vision or message, and to cast the Mennonite future with the big Evangelical camp.

Second, one can say “yes, but”. This response would list areas where Mennonites agree with Evangelicals, and then add Mennonite distinctives. This is where many liberal and/or assimilated Mennonites are today. It has a rather comforting feel of saying that Mennonites are still a specific tradition, but claims respectability by identifying with some other, larger identity that is presumed to have more credibility. In my critique this second view has several problems: i) it treats “Evangelical” as though it is a recognized, uniform entity, and ignores the fact that there are multiple versions and definitions of “Evangelical”; ii) it puts on the periphery the items that I think are central, starting with peace/nonviolence; iii) it ignores the possibility that the things on the periphery (which I think are really central) might change the way that we talk about the things that are in the center. Making this argument is much of Dr. J. Denny Weaver’s article on postmodernity and Anabaptist theology that was published in Preservings, No. 19, pages 3-18.

Third, one can say “no.” Mennonites are not Evangelicals. They are their own tradition. This position will be considered later in this essay.

Fourth, one might redefine Evangelicalism so that it has a Mennonite definition rather than the definition that it is assumed to have when one hears the term “Evangelical”. It can then be argued that Mennonites are the real “Evangelicals,” with the caveat that it does not mean what other people mean when they talk of “Evangelicals.” This appears to be the approach of Kraybill’s article.

Terminology.
Dr. Kraybill argues that to move in the Evangelical direction is nothing less than being faithful to our own historical tradition and that “Early Anabaptism was, at its core, Evangelical: Christ-centred, biblical, confessional and invitational.”

Quite frankly I am getting a little tired of the old shell game of playing with the words Mennonite and Anabaptist and using them interchangeably as convenient. It is commonly known that there were some 40 varieties of Anabaptists, including the violent, polygamous Münsterites (1534), the Naaktlopers (1535) running naked through the streets of Amsterdam, sundry spiritualists, mystics, social revolutionaries, etc. It seems to be a tactic of those promoting Evangelical religious culture to refer to Anabaptist instead of Mennonites when they look for Reformation precedents to support their cause. Because there was such a wide variety of Anabaptists--associated only by the commonality of rebaptism, anyone looking for spiritual roots in the Reformation can find some writer or leader who will express the views they are promoting. By this strategy, they can do an end run around the legacy of 500 years of Christ-centered spirituality and faithful discipleship of our Mennonite forebears, and actually claim to be the real true Anabaptists.

Dr. Kraybill makes similar use of the word Evangelical, using it now to refer to the Evangelical movement (a particular socio-religious culture in North American with a distinctive historical and ethnic tradition) and next using the word to refer to it’s intrinsic definition as “pertaining to the Gospels and its meaning.” By doing a backswitch routine with terminology, Kraybill is able to support his proposition, painting the tones as needed to make his case.

The peaceful, biblical Anabaptists were originally gathered as a community in Switzerland by Conrad Grebel in 1525 and in the Low Countries by Obbe Philips, Leewarden, in 1533, and then after 1536, by Menno Simons of Witmarsum. These communities were given the name “Mennonite” by themselves and their enemies specifically to distinguish them from the fanatical implications of the word “Tauffer” and the wide assortment of unsavoury Anabaptists referred to. It was Mennonites who persevered, who suffered persecution and who remained steadfast and faithful as followers of Christ for half a millennium. It was their faith which was Christ-centred at its core (I resist the temptation to use the words Evangelical) and continues to be so to the present-day.

Anecdotes.
Kraybill relates several anecdotes which in his mind support the argument that the future for Mennonites is Evangelical. I would suggest that his favourable experiences with British Evangelicals is an inappropriate com-

Attention Readers: The editorial opinions expressed in the editorial and/or elsewhere in Preservings, are those of the editor alone and do not reflect the views of the HSHS, its board of directors, and/or is membership.
Dr. Kraybill admits that his experience there, does “not immediately signal right-wing politics or knee-jerk conservative theology.” Is he implying or suggesting though, that after a while (not immediately) it does “signal right-wing politics or knee-jerk conservative theology”? Can the immediate response that the term “evangelical” evokes in North America and Europe ever be overcome? It seems somewhat cynical to take a handful of anecdotes and to weave them into a case for Mennonites to fold into Evangelical religious culture. I and many others could just as easily provide wonderful stories about Roman Catholic Christians (and believe me, notwithstanding the traditional hatred of Evangelical Fundamentalists against Catholics, there would be no shortage of inspiring spirit-filled Catholics to write about). But this does not in any way justify an immediate abandonment of 500 years of faithful Christian living and witness.

Pope John Paul II is undoubtedly the greatest Christian leader of the 20th century—he was instrumental in the fall of the Iron-Curtain and a revitalized Catholic Church. Catholics profess a Christ-centred faith, which makes me feel closer to them than to Evangelicals—especially those of the Fundamentalist variety, who are anything but Christ-centred. This is abundantly clear in the case of some 20-40 million Dispensationalists in North America (they unashamedly profess that Christ’s teachings do not even apply in the current time period), and less obviously, but equally true, respecting most other Evangelicals.

If leading other people to Christ is a concern for President Kraybill, he should attend an Amish or Old Colony Mennonite worship service and he will find the process clearly explained. If he feels that Mennonites have “…not immersed…[themselves enough] in Scripture” he will find that in conservative Mennonite congregations many lay people know large parts of the Bible by memory and also live by its teachings. Have they done a better job of teaching the Bible and the Mennonite faith in their confessional schools than Evangelical Mennonites in their Sunday Schools? If Dr. Kraybill finds such emphasis lacking, perhaps he should commit himself to instilling these values in his students—after all, I believe that’s what we pay our educators to do.

President Kraybill states he has “resolved to stop comparing the best of my Anabaptist [does he now mean here Mennonite?] heritage with the worst of evangelicalism.” It seems that President Kraybill’s experiences with Evangelicals have taken place at an academic and intellectual level, where everything is nicely-nice and where there is reciprocated respect for other Christian confessions.

Evelagicalism.
Dr. Kraybill is astute enough not to draw attention to the hundreds of Hutterite, Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonite communities across North and South America, which at this very moment, are under insistent attack by one branch or another of Evangelicals. Such predators think nothing of turning children against parents, alienating the marginalized against the church and splitting communities, if only they can seduce another convert into their fold. And what about Evangelists such as Jakob Funk, Winnipeg, and mission societies such as the Gospel Missionary Union, Winnipeg, who spread untruths and myths about Mennonites in Mexico and Bolivia, presumably to make their victim communities easier targets? The willingness of some Evangelicals to bend the truth and to teach only the partial Gospel, such as conversion by dramatic experience to the exclusion of the Timothy model (2 Timothy 1:5-7), is reprehensible.

Undoubtedly the most offensive characteristic of Evangelicals (especially among the Fundamentalist variety) is their extreme catagoricalism and the fanatical belief they alone possess all Christian truth—namely, their project of hyper-modernism. And this is not even to mention Evangelical associations with the KKK, slavery, Jonestown, Waco, snake handlers, PTL, Jimmy Swaggert, Gerald Paine, tongue worshippers, abortion clinic bombers, fraudulent scientific creationists, neo-justinianism, militant Orangemen, mili- tia survivalists, rabid homophobia, laughing Pentecostals, etc. And consider also the recent Barma study concluding there is no significant difference between members of the “born again” movement (presumably meaning Evangelicals) and the general population in 70 moral and social behaviours (including divorce).

The largest and most significant part of the Evangelical community—the Dispensationalists—openly profess their game plan is nothing less than total world supremacy with a physical kingdom headquartered in Jerusalem. A statement by James Quinter (1816-88), a Church of the Brethren evangelist, “that the church should avail itself of every lawful means” to win more converts (Longenecker, Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety, page 87), characterizes this ruthless and hyper-aggressive religious culture. Most Mennonites, I believe, feel that the means used to spread the Gospel must correspond with the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. How can a president of the most prestigious Mennonite Seminary refer to Evangelicalism as Christ-centred and Biblical when most Evangelicals do not even take seriously or literally Christ’s teachings on non-resistance or that His “Kingdom is not of this world,” John 18:36? To use Kristi Allee’s words in the movie “For Richer or Poorer,” that Dr. Kraybill sure “...must be from a very liberal Ordnung.”

Supporters of Dr. Kraybill’s proposal will accuse me of referring only to the worst aspects of Evangelicalism. But that is a red-herring, and entirely misses the the point that Dr. Kraybill’s recitation of positive experiences with the liberal and more enlightened wing of Evangelicalism, has brought forth not one single good reason to justify abandoning the Mennonite faith and heritage as suggested. Dr. Kraybill should realize also that, whether he likes it or not, the references above—and many others, are the unsavoury associations made when he offers to lead Mennonites into the Evangelical fold.

Evelagical Anabaptism.
Dr. Kraybill refers to early Anabaptism, which “was, at its core, evangelical” and presumably worthy of respect and emulation. This is the so-called “Evangelical Anabaptist” theory first raised by Ludwig Keller in the 1880s in an attempt to “to use his concept of ‘Old Evangelical Brotherhoods’ to bring spiritual renewal to European Mennonites,” (Abraham Friesen, History and Renewal, page xi). It was alleged that “Mennon Simons had defended ‘precisely the most narrow minded interpretation’... Not the post-Münsterite, but the pre-Münsterite epoch...” was the defining period of the Anabaptist movement. Hans Denck was embraced as the most important pre-Münsterite leader and it was his “position that was to be the cornerstone upon which Mennonite renewal was to take place,” (A. Friesen, pages 62-63). Denck was embraced as a “devout pietist, who earnestly heeds the voice of God in his breast,” (ibid., page 70), and who was linked through “…a kind of Baptist apostolic succession from the apostolic church to Reformation Anabaptism and the English Baptists through the persecuted medieval sects, especially the Waldenses,” (ibid., page 79).

Abraham Friesen suggests that Keller’s Evangelical Anabaptist theory found its way to the Russian Mennonites with the publication of P. M. Friesen’s 1910 history under the title of the “Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Russland (1789-1910)” Keller is not directly cited, possibly because Friesen “must have been aware of the devastating attacks on Keller,” (A. Friesen, ibid., page 4).

August Rauschenbisch categorically rejected “any such medieval antecedents of sixteenth-century Anabaptism,” (ibid, page 78), as did Theodor Kolde (ibid., page 90) and Walther Köller (page 133) “who told Mennonites to forget Keller’s theory since it had not stood the test of historical scrutiny.” But that has not hindered Baptist historians, and Mennonites who have converted themselves to Separatist-Pietism and/or Evangelical Fundamentalism, from shamelessly repeating these claims ad nauseum. Ironically for the argument being made by Dr. Kraybill, Keller also proposed that the German Mennonites change their name to “alt-evangelische Taufgesinnung” (Old Evangelical Baptism Minded), (ibid, page 95).
Evangelical Anabaptism allows modern-day Evangelicals to claim historical roots in the Reformation, for those embarrassed or not satisfied with their Calvinistic origins. Proponents of this view seek to project current dissatisfaction with their Calvinistic origins. The Reformation, for those embarrassed or not, progressively promote the use of the word "Evangelical" to replace the derogatory name "Fundamentalist" for their movement. Surely Bishop David P. Reimer and others like him would be extremely disappointed to learn that this is the meaning which the word "Evangelical" eventually acquired in their beloved church.

The experiences of both conferences after embracing Evangelicalism teaches that the end result has largely been an unfortunate and irreversible assimilation into Evangelicalism, mainly into the more fundamentalist wing. I do not see any evidence that the redemptive restorative process which President Kraybill seems to be dreaming about has taken place. Yes, there are superficial changes and more expressiveness, but the Christ-centredness, humility and genuine heartfelt piety—of the type one would find in a typical Old Colony or Amish Mennonite community—has undoubtedly diminished and in some cases disappeared altogether. While there is an increase in certainty about who is saved (they) and who is not (conservative Mennonites, Catholics, mainline Protestants, etc.), there is also a lamentable increase in ostentatious living and unbridled consumption for those who have the means. And the rest are scrambling to keep up.

By the late 1950s the E.M.M.C and E.M.C. were largely influenced by dispensationalism and other heretical teachings and both were linking themselves into the Protestant Fundamentalist master plan for total global domination. Both Conferences have adopted hyper-aggressive predator strategies relative to their conservative co-religionists—often pitting brother against brother and cousin against cousin. In later years there has been some moderation and more balance in the teachings of both Conferences. However, based on these two examples, I would certainly advise Mennonites not to convert to Evangelical religious culture and instead would encourage them to remain steadfast and true to the faith once received.

There is no need to invent some kind of pseudo-Evangelical Anabaptist theory for inspiration and guidance. There are thousands of genuine spirit-filled leaders in our history; the problem is that our churches do not teach their stories to our youths. There are thousands of Christ-inspired devotional works and treatises rightly dividing the scriptures, if only our students would be taught to read them, instead of the fables and doctrinal books of other confessions.

Etyymology.

President Kraybill may be pursuing an innocent campaign to reclaim the word "Evangelical" for its more esoteric meaning as being the Gospel. The word "Evangelical" may mean Good News in Greek, but for most North Americans it refers to a shallow superficial religious culture whose only consistent principle seems to be to increase its own numbers.

The colloquial meaning of "Evangelical" has evolved based on people’s experiences with and perceptions of Evangelicals. If that word has received a negative nuance in North American culture, it is because Evangelicals have not lived up to their own billing as the only true Christians. The word "Evangelical" itself was chosen by adherents of American Fundamentalism as a new name for their movement after the word Fundamentalism had become synonymous with bigotry, legalism and catagoricalism by the late 1940s. Let us pray that Evangelicals might experience a revival and truly come to understand what the word Evangelical really means.

Let us remember, also, that the word "Evangelical" was already claimed by Martin Luther in the Reformation, and that to this day, Lutherans in Europe are known as Evangelicals. A historically more correct "Evangelical Anabaptist" theory would understand Anabaptism in relation to and in dialogue with the ideas of the Evangelical reformers such as Luther. In the 18th century the word "Evangelical" was claimed for Calvinist Protestantism by George Whitefield, John Wesley and others. I doubt that even Dr. Kraybill would suggest that the theology of these religious leaders was Christ-centered.

The study of etymology is the study of word derivations or the history of particular words. As interesting as the etymology of the word "Evangelical" is, it is just a word—almost a word with lots of baggage. Let it go already. Languages are resilient, and there are alternate words and phrases which convey the same meaning—Christo-centric and Gospel-centric, to name two.

Dr. Kraybill’s position would be more acceptable as long as everyone in the conversation knows how “Evangelical” is being redefined. However, unless one gives the definition EVERY time it is used, the hearer will assume that it is being used in the conventional, dominant way, as in options 1 and 2 outlined above. Further, since it is supposedly necessary to redefine Evangelical with a Mennonite definition, why not just go with response number 3—that Mennonites are a separate tradition? Finally, the fact that Dr. Kraybill appears to reject option 3 and does want to keep the word, and thus allow it to be misunderstood as the common, dominant definition (proponents of this view have to face it)—most of the time, the non-Mennonites and even a lot of Mennonites are NOT going to recognize or know about the redefinition when they hear the term), makes it feel as though there is an unspoken agenda with position 4. That agenda would be to move Mennonites in the direction of response no. 2 (and eventually no. 1) even while claiming to retain Mennonites as a specific tradition.

Is it worth losing our precious young people just to make a point or to prove that the word means something else than the meaning it has acquired in “pop” culture?

Oxymoron.

Dr. Kraybill refers favourably to early Anabaptism in his apparent support for Mennonites to move into Evangelicalism. He should be mindful of what Conrad Grebel wrote to Thomas Münzer in September 1524, about "the Evangelical preachers" who “falsehood forbear and act and set their own opinions...above God and against God,” (quoted in Walter Klaassen, Anabaptists: Neither Catholic nor Protestant (Waterloo, 1973), page 37). These are words which could just as easily be directed to much of modern-day Evangelicalism.

Anabaptists repeated again and again that “if someone says ‘Lord, Lord,’ but does not do the will of God...one may assume their doctrine is false.” (Klaassen, page 46). Note what Menno Simons taught about war: “The regenerated do not go to war, nor engage in strife,” or Conrad Grebel, “True, believing Christians...neither use the worldly sword nor engage in war.” (Klaassen, page 46). As a whole, Evangelicals seemingly have little concern that war is contrary to Scripture and the nature of Christ; indeed, Evangelicals as a group are among the most warlike and aggressive of all Americans. Certainly there are some Evangelicals who take the words of Jesus literally, but the majority evidently find one device or another to circumvent His teachings.

Dr. Kraybill appears to be suggesting that Mennonites would be more faithful to their Anabaptist heritage by changing to Evangelicalism. The above quotations (and there could be thousands more) do not support this preposition. I can only conclude that Dr. Kraybill’s reading of Anabaptist primary sources must
be very selective. Sure, there were Anabaptists like Balthasar Hubmaier who did not profess non-resistance, but this merely illustrates further the problem of using the term Anabaptist instead of Mennonite.

In fact being Evangelical and Mennonite at the same time is an oxymoron: the two religious cultures are inherently incompatible, they cannot mutually co-exist together. The problem stems from Biblical interpretation. For Mennonites, “Jesus Christ is the word of God,...God revealed in the man of flesh and blood,” W. Klaassen, page 19. Biblical “ev- elation was the source of truth,...mediated by the scriptures,...[coming] primarily in the life and words of Jesus Christ and the apostles,...By this they established levels of authority within the Bible,” page 45.

Protestantism, on the other hand, started from Luther’s vision of salvation by “faith alone,” as if the attempts of medieval Chris- tians to earn their salvation by works had re- sulted in a problematic flood of good deeds. The point is that faith and theology for Pro- estants was not rooted in the narrative of Jesus Christ. Instead all parts of the Bible were held equal (“the flat Bible”). In the 19th century, Darby and Scofield focused on the beginning and end of the Biblical account, neatly dis- pensiong with the teachings and narrative of Jesus altogether.

The two interpretative paradigms, one rooted firmly in the canon of the Gospels, and the other, in Genesis and Revelations, each have their own theological paradigm. The two cannot co-exist. Since Evangelicalism is much larger, assimilation would inexorably move in that direction as has happened with the two Manitoba denominations already re- ferred to. Dr. Kraybill should be mindful of the lessons of history when he offers to lead Mennonites towards assimilation with Evangelicals.

Preserving the Faith.

Dr. Kraybill himself points out that “Some influential evangelical in North America are looking to Anabaptist [presumably meaning Mennonite?] models for inspiration on faith- ful discipleship in a post-Christian world.” This includes renown scholars such as Stanley Haverwas who are sympathetic to the Men- nonite faith and ideas. This, however, is not a reason for Mennonites to abandon their faith. In fact, the opposite should logically follow. If a manufacturer starts imitating a competitor’s products, the reasonable inference is that the products are superior and that they should be protected and promoted--not discarded.

If President Kraybill is genuinely attracted to Evangelicals so be it. He is free to join that religion if he so chooses. Thousands of Men- nonites have already done so and many oth- ers will as well. May they leave in peace and with our blessing. The work of the Lord is not counted in numbers or quantity. Just as with Gideon and the ancient Israelis (Judges 7), God works best with those who are truly commited. Having leaders in important posi-
the books would upset their Reformed and Lutheran (Evangelical) neighbours. The first step in replicating the German Mennonite experience would be to tone down our teachings, to try to fit unobtrusively into the comfortable - and supposedly, respectable - mould; the second step would be outright conversion to an alien religious culture.

In the face of what they term a threat to civilization, U.S. neo-cons and Religious right wingers (mainly Evangelicals) support suspension of civil liberties in matters relating to the War on Terrorism. These are the very arguments used to convince Germans to support the extreme measures taken by the Nazis in WWII, namely, of the necessity to protect western civilization from the evils of Godless Communism. Let us pray that Mennonites in the U.S.A. do not some day have to explain why their young men were involved in carrying out military measures contrary to the U.N. Charter of Human Rights and international treaties on treatment of war prisoners and unpopular minorities.

From our experiences in the Reformation, Polish-Prussia, Russia and in the Soviet Union, and even through the Anti-Pacifist, Anti-German hysteria in North America, during both World Wars, Mennonites know well the bitter cup of stereotyping, injustice, prejudice and racial hatred. These are unique experiences which should inspire Mennonites in promoting their ideals of equality, democracy, human rights and respect for the sanctity of life, at home and across the world - values which Mennonites gleaned from their Bibles two centuries before they were popularized in the great 18th century Enlightenment.

This raises the question: what is the cost of discipleship? of remaining true to our faith? Are our goals and objectives now defined and articulated by the North American God of success, progress and growth? In Nazi Germany, the New Testament was a gift from God. Why discard it now after all these years?

It seems hypocritical to claim historical Anabaptist precedent for Evangelicalism, when the overwhelming majority of Anabaptist writers clearly manifest teachings in direct conflict with the major communities in modern Evangelicalism. In fact, scholars such as Arnold Synder and Walter Klaassen have concluded that the heart of the peaceful, biblical Anabaptist movement was rooted in the Catholic monastic tradition of the late medieval period. Professor Abraham Friesen, Santa Barbara, California, has documented the connections to Erasmus (1467-1536) (Gerhard Geert or Goertzen) and the Christian humanists. Others point to Thomas a Kempis and the Brethren of the Common Life.

Dr. Kraybill’s presentation of “Evangelical” seems too accepting and not critical enough of the movement in North America. He has failed to adequately deal with the theological and cultural negatives attached to the label, “Evangelical”. It seems to be both futile and impossible to reclaim and refurbish the label “Evangelical” given its century-long development in North America. Perhaps the term “missional” as being used in Mennonite Church Canada’s Assembly and developed theologically by Jack Suderman would be a more acceptable term.

God has given Mennonites a particular role and mission in His plan for humankind. Like all Christians we are called forth to follow Christ and to live out and join battle for the social and cultural revolution which He proclaimed some 2000 years ago, that is, by taking up the cross and following Him. It is vitally important for Hutterites, Amish, Old Order and conservative Mennonites - as well as liberal and assimilated Mennonites - to testify to the truth of Christ’s life and teachings with their daily lives, whether it be in a colony settlement in Latin America or at Harvard University in Boston.

Among these and other important challenges, Mennonites also have a special calling to provide a sober witness to peace and restoration in a world where this is needed as never before. As a unified distinctive body of 1,000,000 adult believers worldwide, Mennonites can and are such a testimony. If we assimilate ourselves into one or another religious culture, this light and testimony to the narrative of Jesus and the power of genuine Christ-centered faith will be lost. What a tragedy for the world!

I would urgently plead that Mennonites should rather be true to the call once received from God. Their’s is a 500-year legacy of faithfulness, sacrifice and commitment in the name of Christ. As I learn more about the faith which God has given our people, I am convinced that being faithful to Christ, for me, means to be faithful and true to that testimony. I for one have no intentions of forsaking and abandoning their vision. I can only believe and trust there are others who share that commitment and that together, as a community, we can persevere and soldier on towards victory.

The Third Way.

The third response to Dr. Kraybill’s article is simply to say “no”. It is clear that Mennonites, just like Protestant Evangelicals, have their own distinctive religious and historical tradition. This does not mean we should not respect believers of other confessions and love them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Those who know and respect their own faith, history and culture, are far more likely to respect and empathize with someone from another confession. Someone who doesn’t even respect his own faith and culture is unlikely to respect another’s, or be tolerant of another person’s beliefs.

We also have important commonalities and resonances with other faiths. With the Catholics we share the focus on the narrative of Christ and its meaning in the daily pilgrimage of believers. With Protestant Evangelicals we share the free church tradition. In fact, Mennonites were the ones who bled and died to enshrine this tradition in western civilization. But the similarities to Evangelicalism are more casual and superficial than real. In any case, let us celebrate and rejoice over the connections and bonds we have with our fellow Christians of whatever tradition. Naturally, Mennonites can also learn from other confessions, be they Catholic, Orthodox or even Evangelicals. This must be done from a strong foundation grounded in our own faith and based on the accumulated wisdom of five centuries of Christ-centered living. Of course, “Mennonites have no monopoly on faithful discipleship.” Likewise we should not categorize the entire Evangelical movement “with simplistic stereotypes”.

That having been said, neither should we hide our heads in the sand, pretending that all will be well if only we adopt Evangelical religious culture. If it is wrong to look only at the positives, it is equally wrong to look only at the positive aspects of Evangelicalism as Dr. Kraybill has done. He has seen only a happy-smiley face which, I humbly suggest, is largely limited to academia and, possibly, a few of the more liberal, better educated Evangelical denominations. I am sorry to say that the pleasant picture painted by Dr. Kraybill bears little resemblance to the harsh and cruel reality out there in the trenches as it were.

We have a duty to use the intelligence God has given us to rationally assess other religions and evaluate current events: what are televangelists doing to scare and seduce the elderly and vulnerable in society? what is possible in the future in terms of neo-Jusitanism? are scientific creationists forcing their pervverted textbooks into public schools? what are dispensationalists doing to fan the fires of war and strife in the Middle-East? We are obliged to incorporate the facts into our assessment of the bigger picture. Some observers will like what they see and others will be horrified.

We do not need to abandon our faith and heritage in order to respect adherents of other religions. Mennonites have a tradition of respect and toleration for others going back to Erasmus (1467-1536), the father of the Renaissance. If the truth be said, respecting others is not the strong point of Evangelicals and the last thing Mennonites will learn from them is tolerance for others. In fact, the opposite will be the case.

I believe the survival of Mennonism is important because it represents a third way to the Gospel, neither Protestant (Evangelical) nor Catholic.

Conclusion.

As I read the article, it seems that Dr. Kraybill is suggesting we convert to another religious culture. For almost five centuries, Mennonites have believed, breathed, lived and been saved through their righteousness-working faith in Christ Jesus - a faith and tradition which was a gift from God. Why discard it now after all these years?
Guest Essay

End Times Lens Distorts


When something as unimaginably evil and breathtakingly destructive as the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11 occurs, we struggle to make sense of it. Who? Why? Could we have prevented it? Where was God?

Most of us are content to admit that we don’t know. But there are some people within the Christian community who have rushed to provide their own interpretations of the attacks to an emotionally traumatized public which is probably willing to believe just about anything. If terrorists can hijack passenger planes and crash them into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field, anything could be true.

So there were Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson claiming that the attacks are punishment for abortion, gay rights and the end of school prayer, among other things. Hal Lindsey says the attacks are punishment for America’s “great sin of pushing Jesus Christ and the Word of God out of our public consciousness.” He says the U.S. better kick butt because “if we act like wimps now, we will encourage far worse attacks.” Kenneth Copeland, on the other hand, claims “the Lord told [him], ‘This is an attack of the devil against God … against our stand with the Nation of Israel’.”

Then there were the prophesy “experts.” Jack Van Impe said he has been warning that “terrorists would soon strike America” and that “Jesus predicted this rise of ‘terrorism’ just before His return to set up His kingdom on earth.”

Hilton Sutton, who has offices in Texas and London, Ont. and claims to be “one of the world’s foremost authorities on the prophetic scriptures,” said, “We are now in the time of the end which identifies the conclusion of the Last Days and are witnessing an escalation of all the categories of peril and prophetic events set forth by the apostle Paul and Jesus Christ.”

An article on Endtime website, founded by Irvin Baxter of Richmond, Ind., who claims Endtime magazine is the “most widely circulated prophesy magazine in the world” (mailing list 30,000) said: “We believe we are presently living in the 5th Trumpet era. It is our opinion that the sounding of the 6th Trumpet may be imminent.”

For the uninitiated, Revelation describes seven trumpets sounding prior to Christ’s return, the sixth being a war killing two billion people. Endtime says that war will be between the U.S. and China over Taiwan, and that if the U.S. response “is weak” to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, “it will send a clear signal [to China] that Taiwan is ripe for the picking.”

So, the terrorist attacks are (take your pick): a punishment for wrongdoing, persecution for faithfulness or c-further evidence that Christ will return in your lifetime. And our response must be massive military retaliation.

It would be merely eccentric if it weren’t so unbiblical. Matthew 5:45 says God “makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Sometimes tragedy is neither punishment nor persecution. And last time I checked, the Bible wasn’t a weapon of social, political or international policy, but a document about how to love God and our fellow human beings. Our faith in God may inform our social and political views but that doesn’t mean God shares them.

The Bible also isn’t a glorified horoscope. The verses generically used to support claims that we’re living in the End Times (2 Timothy 3:1-5, Matthew 24:4-8 37, Luke 21:9, 31) describe “terrible times” and “wars” preceding Christ’s return – which describes just about every century since his death.

Elsewhere, Luke 12:40 and 1 Thessalonians 5:2 say Christ will come “when we least expect” like a “thief in the night.” Trying to predict when is inappropriate - and futile. We’ve had it wrong many times, each discrediting the Christian community. And time spent on that distracts us from our most important task: being God’s hands and feet in this world. We must live every day as if it’s our last - and that’s the only message we should take from the prophetic texts.

Sometimes the most faithful interpretation of tragic events is this: “I don’t actually know what God is up to. But I trust.”

Middle East Conflict.

It’s difficult to have a rational discussion about Israel and the Palestinians. Always has been, but each new round of terror and reprisals makes it even more difficult.

Two fellow journalists who participate in Vison TV’s media panel with me, one a Jew the other a Muslim, have all but given up writing opinion pieces on the topic. (And this is a shame. Both have extensive knowledge, and my Muslim friend even interviewed Yasser Arafat for the Globe and Mail years ago.)

So why avoid the topic, like a plague of locusts? You don’t win no matter what you say. A Jew who writes favourably of Israel is parroting a party line. Same with a Muslim who supports the Palestinians. A Jew who writes in favour of the Palestinians is a self-hating traitor. Same for a Muslim who writes in favour of Israel.

And as an evangelical Christian? I’m supposed to support Israel no matter what. Otherwise I’m accused of not knowing my Bible, especially the parts related to End Times prophecies. Israel figures prominently in such prophecies. It’s where the anti-Christ will arise and the final battle of Armageddon will take place, after the Jews return to Israel (seen to be fullfilled with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948) and the temple has been rebuilt. Fair enough.

Odd though, I’ve never found a verse that says it’s okay for Israel to invade a refugee camp (where at least one of the recent suicide bombers lived), bulldoze houses with people inside (if they happen to be next to suspected terrorist sites), make mass arrests (over 4,100 at last count), torture people for information and allow soldiers to loot homes.

But many evangelicals are prepared to discount, ignore or even condone such behaviour as self protection of the land God gave the Jews.

“Collateral damage” - deaths of civilians in the process - is to be expected. North Americans have talked this talk before, of course, most recently over the bombing of Afghanistan in the hopes of weeding out Sept. 11 terrorists. But maybe we’re wrong about that. Maybe the end doesn’t justify the means. And maybe killing is killing no matter who does it.

Adding to the problem in Israel, though, is the spiritualization of the conflict. One End Times web site called it a sin to divide the land between Jews and Palestinians to achieve peace. The rationale: God gave the land, all of it, to the Jews. End of story.

Even if we grant that God gave Israel to the Jews, who’s to say God meant that to happen in this century - or the last. Israelis have been returned to - and dispersed from- their land a few times in history.

Who’s to say this is the final time - unless you think we’re living in the EndTimes already.

Which many Christians do. The problem with that (aside from the inflexibility it breeds in negotiating peace) is that we don’t know for sure that we’re living in the End Times. Every generation since Jesus, including his own, believed the Messiah would return in their lifetime.

They were wrong. So might we be.

Another problem with reading the Middle East crisis through a focused End Times lens is that it tends to blunt criticism of Israel, even of behaviour that we’d quickly condemn if practised by the Palestinians.

And that not only breeds moral relativism but hinders evangelistic outreach to Muslims - or think of people of all stripes. If people see that Christians support behaviour and themselves behave in a way that is no different from anyone else, why would people want to follow the same God as us, and put themselves at great risk in some countries?

If being a follower of Christ does not mean condemning injustice wherever we find it, then our faith is hollow. If all it means, in this present conflict, is condemning our enemies, whatever their complaints, and supporting our friends, whatever their crimes, then we behave no differently than others. Even the pagans do that, says Matthew 5:47-48.

I support the existence of Israel - in some form. But I don’t support everything Israeli does.

Marianne Meed Ward is a freelance writer and broadcaster in Burlington, Ont. She can be reached at pward@ca.inter.net. These articles originally appeared in the April 23 and April 30, 2002 issues of ChristianWeek. Copyright Marianne Meed Ward. 2002. One time Canadian print rights only for Preservings.
Letters

We welcome letters to the editor and appreciate feedback from our readers and suggestions as to how we can fulfil our function better. We welcome criticism of articles and editorial commentary. We will assume that all letters and e-mails can be published, unless a contrary intention is indicated. We reserve the right not to publish any letter/e-mail or not to respond. We reserve the right to return, discard, edit or shorten letters/e-mails as deemed necessary. Emails should not contain attachments. All letters and emails should contain the writer’s name, address and home phone number, although a street address will not be published if this is requested. Letters should be short (preferably under 300 words) and to the point.

From: “John Klassen”
<jklassen@mb.sympatico.ca>
Subject: Re Plautdietsch
Date: Sun, 23 Jun 2002 17:52:47 -0500

In this last issue “must es ejie mej orp p Finjasch biete dauert daut Plautdietsch scwriew soo proost wea”. By now Plautdietsch writing has been standardized to the point where the spelling should be a little more accurate in terms of spelling it the way it sounds. For example: “Himmel Bleiw” should be written “Himmel Bleave”. Under the picture of the CD jacket of Andreas Dueck it should read “Fonn Fonndoag en Jisrte”. Note “Jisrte” is capitalized....

Generally I like the articles generated in the “Preservings” but am getting tired of the “quixotic jousting at windmills” that goes on re the so-called proselytizing by “pietist/separatist/fundamentalism”. Your genius shines through in your great productivity and knowledgeable ness but is somewhat eclipsed by this preoccupation. “Jack Klassen” Box 65, Altona, Man., R0G 0B0.

Editor’s Note: Regarding Plautdietsch spelling, I like the system used in the new periodical “Frind” (Pres., No. 20, page 73) which uses the English sounds instead of the German. Since English originates largely from Low German this seems to be more true to the original than using High German orthography. It speaks of our common Saxon roots.

We will be pleased to quit referring to predatory religious cultures as soon as they start conducting themselves in accordance with the Holy Scripture and cease their un-Christian attacks against our brothers and sisters in Christ in Mexico, Bolivia, and elsewhere. Perhaps we should all be praying for a supply of Plautdietsch scwriew soo proost wea. By now Plautdietsch writing has been standardized to the point where the spelling should be a little more accurate in terms of spelling it the way it sounds. For example: “Himmel Bleiw” should be written “Himmel Bleave”. Under the picture of the CD jacket of Andreas Dueck it should read “Fonn Fonndoag en Jisrte”. Note “Jisrte” is capitalized....

Generally I like the articles generated in the “Preservings” but am getting tired of the “quixotic jousting at windmills” that goes on re the so-called proselytizing by “pietist/separatist/fundamentalism”. Your genius shines through in your great productivity and knowledgeable ness but is somewhat eclipsed by this preoccupation. “Jack Klassen” Box 65, Altona, Man., R0G 0B0.

Editor’s Note: Regarding Plautdietsch spelling, I like the system used in the new periodical “Frind” (Pres., No. 20, page 73) which uses the English sounds instead of the German. Since English originates largely from Low German this seems to be more true to the original than using High German orthography. It speaks of our common Saxon roots.

We will be pleased to quit referring to predatory religious cultures as soon as they start conducting themselves in accordance with the Holy Scripture and cease their un-Christian attacks against our brothers and sisters in Christ in Mexico, Bolivia, and elsewhere. Perhaps we should all be praying for a supply of “Pariesa Grien” to dust off these predators who have been sapping the life blood and vitality of our conservative Mennonites for so long. forcing them to fight for their existence and to focus on defensive and preservation measures instead of growing stronger in Christ and evolving and developing in a normal and wholesome manner—a freedom and privilege which most other communities in the Western world are able to take for granted.

From: “Harry Loewen” <hloewen@silk.net>
Date: Mon, 24 Jun 2002 15 June, 2002

In my view, when you compare Marxism with Dispensationalism it is Marxism that comes out on top. This in no way is to suggest that we should buy into Marxism but only to suggest that Dispensationalism comes off as a poor second...

Both Dispensationalism and Marxism divide history up into segments that operate under different rules, though in the case of Marxism the segments overlap. But with Marxism it is indeed true that history has gone through different phases, thus slavery, feudalism,capitalism, and the like; these are indeed different ways that people have interacted with each other, for good or for bad. But the so-called “dispensations” of Dispensationalism are just fantasy.

It will be objected that Dispensationalism is somehow “Christian” whereas Marxism is not. But Marx was just ambiguous enough on the subject of religion that he has left an opening whereby today there are a lot of people in South America who try to be both Christian and Marxist, under the name of liberation theology. Dispensationalism of course looks Christian superficially, but you can search Jesus, the early church, Luther, Calvin, and in fact most of the two thousand year tradition of the church and not find one mention of the dispensationalist scheme. In the full Darby–Scofield dispensationalist scheme, which to some extent permeates all of fundamentalism, the Sermon on the Mount has no relevance for us as we are in the wrong dispensation for it to be applicable. This I find to be weird.

It will be further objected that Marx was a man of violence who wanted violent revolution, though in fairness Marx cannot be blamed for the regime in the Soviet Union as he expected his revolution to break out rather in such industrial societies as France, England, or Germany, not in largely peasant Russia. But are the Dispensationalists really any less violent? Show me a pacifist or non-violent Dispensationalist somewhere and I’ll admit that I’m wrong. Not only do they look forward to violence in the end times, and seem to justify violence in the Old Testament, but they certainly seem to have adapted themselves to the violence in American policy.

“Jay Delkin” Box 20252, Steinbach, Manitoba, ROA 2T1

From: “Corrie Reimer”
<correim@mb.sympatico.ca>
Subject: don’t fully agree
Date: Mon, 24 June, 2002

I hardly know you, you have sent us without our request, your “Preservings” Magazine. I have read enough in these Magazine’s that I find is interesting, to feel obligated to pay for it. At least some of it—up to here I did not take interest in it, because I was a bit tired of Mennonite fallacy, or deception. With much of it I do not agree, but that’s alright, you have the liberty in this country to express a freedom of speech. Which I too, am taking advantage of, with the following.

That article about the Jabez prayer I can quite well go along with. I have a similar write-up on it, with more of a Jewish insight. I got it e-mailed to me about a year ago, but I don’t think I can recall it to forward it, or I might do that, unless you were interested, I could get those people to e-mail it again. I am more of an Israel-ite minded person, although with Mennonite background.

I will be gone from the coming Friday for a week, going to a 2 house Union “Knowing Yahweh (God) Conference” in Kansas City. Look forward to hear from you. “Cornie Reimer” Rosenort MB

Contradiction on the Israel Arab conflicts

When I read things in the “Preservings”.... It saddened my heart, but strengthened my convictions that we Mennonites have really been off the track for a long time already. These different articles will shed some light on some of that sad truth. If you blame me for being harsh toward my own Mennonite background, do it with scriptural backing. I want to take that to heart. I do not want to criticize truth. (whatever is in red, or in brackets, by Corrie Reimer) (Editor’s Note: The rest of the 20 pages of attached articles and quotations is not published).
I have enjoyed Preservings even since my second cousin Helen Fehr gave me a copy where I read about my great-grandparents and my grandparents, the Bernhard Bergens were mentioned. My father Bernhard B. Bergen was born on Hoffningsfeld, Man., in Oct. of 1878. When he was two weeks old his father, B. Bergen was killed in a threshing accident. His mother Katherina nee Fehr, remarried to a Johann Giesbrecht...Enough of that. I am enclosing Katherina nee Fehr, remarried to a Johann Giesbrecht...Enough of that. I am enclosing

I appreciate your answer to Terry Tiessen (No. 20, page 60). However there are some words I do not understand. There is dispensationalism. What’s the difference from premillennialism? About premillennialism, I have read in other works, but dispensationalism is new to me. What’s the teaching of dispensationalists?...

Yours truly, Jacob E. Peters

Editor’s Note: This is an excellent question and I do not blame you for being confused. In my “History of Christianity” published in English in Old Colony Mennonites in Canada (at pages 40-42) and in German in Diese Steine (at pages 628-629), I have tried to explain the meaning of some of this confusing terminology. Premillennialism is the belief that Christ will return before the millennium referred to in Revelations 20:1-10. Dispensationalist religion links the seven days of creation with seven supposed millennia of human history each of which is supposedly governed by its own set of rules or dispensation granted by God. What all of this amounts to, in reality, is a fanatical attempt to impose their underlying dogma - namely, Baconian philosophy and Scottish common sense realism - upon the Bible and its interpretation.

In Matthew 18:3, Jesus told his disciples, “Except ye be converted and become as little children...” As you can readily ascertain, the Evangelical Fundamentalist doctrines of premillennialism and dispensationalism are anything but like unto the faith of little children. This is presumably why Protestant Fundamentalists had to create some 200 Bible Schools around 1900 to ensure that these falsehoods were securely drummed into the heads of innocent youths and to ensure that naive students would not suddenly stumble upon the truths of the Bible by their own diligent and prayerful study.

Keep up the good work.

Tena Wiebe

Box 443, Blumenort
Man., R0A 2A0

First the praise and then the censure. I received “Preservings” No. 20, June 2002 and I found it very interesting I have already read nearly all the contents. Now the censure. A big mistake has occurred in the description of the pictures of my parents and the parents of my wife (page 102). They are mixed up. Under the picture of Diedrich Tiessen and Susanna Penner, it says Aganetha Eins and Jacob Reimer and vice versa.

In Preservings” No. 19, December 2001 on pages 28-30 is a valuable article about “The Kingdom of God and the End Time” by Walter Klaassen. I am in full agreement therewith. I was shocked to read in No. 20 what M.J. Moll had to say about it. She makes the remark: “Is that what Jesus would have done?” This remark would fit her letter. I am delighted with the answer Walter Klaassen gave her. So matter-of-factly, without trying to run down his opponent, I am completely in accordance with his theology on how it should be understood.

I would like to ask the editor whether he has ever done an in-depth study of Jewish history dating back to Abraham in Genesis, the Old and New Testament, the secular Jewish history? Has he ever dialogued with Jewish believers or non-believers about the topic?

Can anyone call it a “bizarre teaching” before they have a good grip on Jewish history and the promises God did give the Jews? If not, is he qualified to make statements like the one above?

My contention is not with what the editor or Dr. Graham believe about Jewish rights concerning the Middle East but rather that a man of Mr. Plett’s calibre would make statements like the one quoted, using words which seems rather intolerant to me.

Sincerely, “Betty Loewen”
tory about being the advocate of the State of Israel and Jewish Zionism, you should be ready to explain what Dispensationalists intend to do with those Jews who would not mass convert to their religious culture at the point where they establish their earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Nancy Gibbons has written that “According to [dispensationalist] prophecy, the Jews must be in control of Israel for Jesus to return. But in the last battle, two-thirds of the Jews perish, and the rest either accept Jesus as their true Messiah or they must be damned, literally.” Gibbons quotes Gershom Gorenberg, a leading Jewish expert on the Christian [dispensationalist] endtime, “In my view, any theology that continues to deny the validity of Judaism and to fantasize about looking forward to the conversion or destruction of the Jews is one that should arouse a great deal of caution among Jews.” (From Time, July 1, 2002, page 38).

Upon critical examination, it becomes evident that the Dispensational religion, although it shares much of American “pop” Christian culture, is fundamentally Anti-Christian. In the Muslim faith, Jesus is at least honoured as a great prophet, but in Dispensational religion he has been morphed into a disembodied Wizard of Oz, called forth from time to time by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson and their henchmen (also known as the American Taliban in wait-
442 Castlefield Ave.
Toronto, ON M5N 1L5

Thank you for your detailed review of my village history, Rückenau, and for drawing my attention to the Peter I. Fast journal [Pres., No. 17, pages 129-131]. Your publications contributed significantly to my research. I would like to add some clarification to your excellent review. First, you suggest that John Staples and I collaborated in some areas. In fact, we did not collaborate in any way and have not discussed our work with each other. Secondly, contrary to your assertion, the story of the tent missionaries who were murdered in Eichenfeld is very much connected to the history of Rückenau. The team was dedicated in the Rückenau church and was strongly supported by its members. Jacob Dyck, the leading missionary, was a member of the Rückenau church and my aunt Elisabeth Huebert Sukkau, a team member who died in Eichenfeld, lived in Rückenau. The death of the tent missionaries had an intensely demoralizing effect on the village for these reasons.

I have Kleine Gemeinde connections. On my paternal side, I am a descendant of Jacob Thielmann (1810-62). On my maternal side, I am a descendant of the widow, Maria Kornelsen Hiebert (1815), who married Martin J. Barkman (1796) of Rückenau in his old age. Maria was the third wife of Abraham Hiebert (1790) of Neukirch, and I am descended from their oldest son, Martin. Maria’s sister, Eva Martin Kornelsen (1820), was a staunch Kleine Gemeinde member who was married to Johann Abraham Hiebert (1816) of Alexanderwohl and later, Kansas.

I am enclosing on a separate page a summary of the part of my Hiebert genealogy that connects to the Johann Siemens (1802) family from Rosenort. On page 437 of your Dynasties, you request information on this family. yours sincerely, “Leona WiebeGISLASON”

Editor’s Note: Sorry for the delay in publishing your letter. The tent missionaries, in my view, evidenced a very unChristian and spiteful attitude towards the Mennonites in Eichenfeld. Unfortunately this is typical of those who forsook religion culture. May God too, forgive them. May God too, forgive them. Unfortunately this is typical of those who forsook religion culture. May God too, forgive them.

I am enclosing my cheque for $20.00 to renew my membership for 2001 and also sending along some information regarding my family tree. You will recall perhaps when we were doing my mother’s estate Anna (Braun) Hildebrandt back in March of 1999 you gave me a complimentary copy of Preservings and when I received my copy No. 15. December of 1999 I noticed the article “The Krahn Letters 1870 to 1891”. Since the name Krahn was prominent in my family records I of course read these letters and found to my complete surprise that these documents were written by my ancestors. My Mother was the second generation granddaughter of Peter Dyck (1792-1872).

...Oddly enough, just before the December issue came I had remarked to my husband that it would be so interesting to know how these people lived and what their thoughts and feelings were and a week or so later I came across this article....

You will perhaps note that on the enclosed information, which was compiled by a Mr. R.P. Kerber of Saskatchewan in 1963, he has listed Peter Dyck’s birthdate as August 12, 1796 instead of 1792 and that is the only discrepancy I can find. I now have a lot more information to add to this register since there have been many more additions to the family since 1963....

A big thank you to you and your staff for your informative magazine – keep up the good work....Yours truly, “Nettie Wileman”

P.S.: Also got more information from your website: www.hshs.mb.ca

Editor’s Note: Thank-you for sending copies from R. P. Kerber. Familienregister der Nachkommen des Peter Dyck aus Neuenburg, Chortitza Kolonie, Süd-Russland (Saskatoon, Sask., 1963). This family book provides considerable information about Peter Dyck (1792-1872) (see Schapansky, Old Colony, page 296), and regarding the Krahn siblings who wrote the delightful Plautdietsch letters published in the article (Bernhard Krahn was the son of George (1772-1831), Neuenburg, 1801 census, Wirtschaft No. 7, Diese Steine, page 657, courtesy of H. Schapansky). I appreciate also the photography was not invented until 1827. In fact the first commercial Daguerreotypes and photographs were not made until the 1840s.

It was nice to see you at the MMHS meeting in Feb. Hopefully we’ll have a chance to talk in the near future.

“Glen” Glenn Penner, 306-27 Cardigan St., Guelph, Ont., N1H 7V6.
P.S. Thanks for the copy of Diese Steine. I was delighted to see that the often neglected colony of Fürstenland, birthplace of my grandmother, was included!

Editor’s Note: As always we appreciate corrections and additions of information. Glenn Penner is among our most knowledgeable Russian Mennonite genealogists. Are you suggesting the photo could be of Heinrich Penner and a second wife? ______

jakew@diemo.mb.ca
Box 425, Arborg Man., R0C 0A0
29 Jul 2002

In Preservings #20, June 2002 on page 68 you have a picture of Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, author of The Prayer of Jabez. Next to the picture its stated that he is the author of The Cross And The Switchblade. The author of The Cross And The Switchblade was Rev. David Wilkerson not Dr. Bruce Wilkinson. Regards, “Jake Wiebe”

PS attached are links to biographies of the two men in question. http://www.worldchallenge.org/ (click on David Wilkerson link) http://www.bible.org.za/About%20WTB/Profiles/Wilkinson.htm

Editor’s Note: Thanks for drawing the error to our attention.

First of all, I am not quite sure how the above article fits into the purpose of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society; supposedly it makes evangelicals look bad and by contrast makes Mennonites look good. I think that Randy had good intentions, but he seems to have missed the whole point of blessings.

Wilkinson emphasizes blessings for the purpose of serving God: “...you ask God to enlarge your life so you can make a greater impact for Him,” (p.30). If the blessings were intended for personal benefit, Randy’s criticisms would be justified.

In addition, someone else should have done a little more research. On page 68 there is a write up next to the picture of Bruce Wilkinson, in which he is credited with writing The Cross and the Switchblade. Actually this hook was written by Bruce Wilkerson.

I continue to enjoy the parts of Preservings that are related to our history.

Sincerely, “Henry B. Esau”

Editor’s Note: You have raised an excellent question. There are a number of good reasons for publishing material like the article on the “Prayer of Jahez”. Firstly, Evangelicals and particularly Evangelical Fundamentalists typically claim to be the sole repository of Christian truth. Mennonites should be made aware that many of their teachings and traditions are very unscholarly. It is helpful for our readers to be exposed to critical evaluations of these teachings. How can we adequately tell the story of our forefathers if we cannot or will not defend their teachings and faith?

Secondly, Evangelical Fundamentalism is a very shallow and superficial religious culture. I am amazed at the hucksterism and chicanery they are constantly duped into believing, usually at the hands of their own kind. As Christo-centric believers we have an obligation to bring forth something more substantial and genuine? The article on the prayer of Jahez was a well written piece, written by a bona fide Evangelical, and makes an excellent point that all Evangelicals would do well to heed. Surely we would be remiss in our duty to the truth of the Gospel if we did NOT publish this sort of material.

The third rational is that Evangelical Fundamentalists have seemingly set themselves the mission of imposing their beliefs upon the entire world. Mennonites are no exception and many of our communities across four continents are under constant attack and siege by diverse and sundry predators out to “expand their borders” at any cost and by any means. In the process they often try to deceive our youths and others with all manner of untruths and deceptions (e.g. Jakob Funk and the Family Life Network, see Pres., No. 19, page 77). Surely Mennonites like any other community in the world are entitled to defend themselves, in this case by pointing out some of the shallowness and superficiality of their attacker’s religion. Or are you suggesting that Mennonites should sit back with a pleasant smile while Satan’s agents run off with our youths and tear apart our families and church communities?

There is actually another rational for publishing such material. There are many Mennonites over the decades who have converted themselves to alien religious cultures but who may still be open to scriptural truth and may even yet be convicted by the Holy Spirit to return to the Gospel-centric faith of their forebears. We are aware of a number of such cases and can only imagine the rejoicing in heaven everytime a sain returns to the fold.

Sept. 8, 2002
Box 89, Warman
Sask., S0K 4S0

Thank you so much for the publication “Preservings”, the many articles that present wondrous evidence of a people of faith, their trials and their ultimate trust in God. So many of them are an inspiration to me. God has blessed us with a rich heritage.

I (with my wife) have recently returned to the church of my youth (Bergthaler, Sask). We are humbled for the gracious blessings we receive there.

We pray that you will continue to uphold the word of God in this publication, as well as remind us of “our people” who struggled and preserved as ones who sought a heavenly home. In this way many of our ancestors continue to bless and encourage us as we seek to walk as followers of Christ in our time.

Sincerely,
Peter Doell

ASSOCIACIO MENNONITA BENEFICENTE - AMB
Witmarshus, CX. Postal 67
Brazil, CEP 84130-000


Editor’s note: Many thanks for your kind words. May God bless you in your important mission.

Mon, 14 Oct 2002

This past spring was my first exposure to your Historical Society. I also received my first “Preservings”. I would like to compliment you on putting together quite a literary work. I enjoyed many of the articles on the history of my people as I have both Chortitza and Molotschna parents. I also found your comments that we are a people of culture very relevant. However, there were some issues raised that I found very lamentable.

In the editorial on page 49 of Preservings No. 20, 2002; at the top of the page you make the statement that Dr. Archie Penner has proven in his new book, “Scientific Creationism”, that scientific creationism is laughable at best and fraudulent at worst. I have just finished reading the book review “A Review of Dr. Archie Penners Scientific Creationism in Perspective, Biblical Creation Defended” by author Randy Brandt.

In this review, Randy Brandt, severely chastises Dr. Penner for writing this book because all but three creationist sources used were written before the 90’s; and these three were reprints; in other words, Dr. Penner’s research is obsolete. Mr. Brandt goes on to say that there are many prominent scientists, who he lists, that embrace Creationism.....

He concludes by saying, “I urge him (Dr. Penner) to withdraw this unfortunate book from circulation in order to avoid continued embarrassment and damage to his academic reputation”. (This review by Randy Brandt can be found at www.contend4thefaith.org).

I believe your comments about creationism being laughable and fraudulent are in extremely poor taste and very premature. Evolutionists have proven that they have every bit as much religious fervour as anyone else to prove at all costs that they are right. Sir, I want to believe only what is true. Let’s look at the facts and let them speak for themselves.

Just a further note. If the Bible is wrong about the beginning of earth, it is also wrong about Moses, King David or perhaps even salvation through Jesus Christ.....As I just mentioned, credibility suffers when one part is wrong.....I choose the Holy Scriptures as my source for life complete with creation because I trust its authority.

Sincerely, Peter Friessen, Box 27, Arnaud, MB, Canada, R0A 0B0

Editor’s Response: Firstly, a point of clarification: The review of Dr. Penner’s book on “Scientific Creationism” in Preservings, No. 20, pages 138-139, was done by Dr. Glenn Klassen, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, which was not noted with the review. My mistake. I respond as follows:

1. If it is relevant that there are many scientists on the side of scientific creationism, it should be noted that there are many times more scientists - probably 90-99 per cent - who would support the views of Dr. Penner.

2. You make the statement that “Dr. Penner’s research is obsolete”. In Dr. Penner’s research in 1996 he went right to the source, to the “Institute of Creation Research”, California (where Randy Brandt, Colorado, author of the critique was educated) and obtained their latest official publications, the same books which are still being distributed and sold by the thousands today.
Twice in his book, Randy Brandt acknowledges that these books are obsolete. He states “that I admit to sharing one concern with Dr. Penner, some of the older scientific creationist books such as Scientific Creationism by Henry Morris, have not been properly updated when reprinted. That is completely unacceptable” (page 6). This is exactly Dr. Penner’s concern. I am in full agreement with Dr. Penner that “it is both startling and incomprehensible” that the 1996 reprint of The Genesis Flood by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb originally written in 1961, still contains the paluxy claim. “This is unacceptable careless” (page 11). Thus, in reality, it is the so-called scientific research reported in the book which is obsolete and that is what Dr. Penner has brought to light. I agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Penner’s view that “this is downright foolish and completely unscientific.” A true scientist upon realizing error will acknowledge themself. Creation, in the words of Dr. Archie Penner, is absolute and sacrosanct in and of itself to verification and/or affirmation by science. The wrong and his book is precisely a defense of that. What has been claimed is that the fossils are actually evolutions of “creation”. The Bible is correct in its claim that the fossils are the remains of animals that lived after the flood. The scientific research reported in the book is a defense of that claim. The scientific research which supports this claim is based on the study of fossils and the dating of the earth. This is unacceptably careless.

3. Regarding your comment about the beginning of the earth...,

4. My overriding concern with scientific creationism Dr. Penner is promoting.

5. The issue of scientific creationism brings up the question of what is right and what is wrong. The Bible is the only authority for determining what is right and what is wrong.

6. In my mind the only genuine affirmation of Biblical truth is when believers manifest the teachings of Jesus and the narrative of His life in their daily walk. Those who have modelled this reality include the Apostles, St. Francis of Assisi (Pres., No. 18, page 58), Menno Simons (1496-1561), Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa, to name a few.

1526 Sycamore Court
Goshen, Indiana 46526
September 24, 2002

With information from the book reviews of the latest edition of Journal of Mennonite Studies, I became aware of the book Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1275 to 2000,...you included such a large section on the Jacob Wiens family including ancestors and posterity. Aganetha, older sister of Jacob (6/2/1816-7/9/1888), is my great grandmother, wife of Gerhard Sawatzky. Jacob mentions her—as a widow—living with my grandparents, Franz and Katerina Sawatzky in the village of Hofnungsfeld.

I learned much more about the Wiens family than I had ever expected to know and am very happy to discover this genealogical lode and I wish to express my heartfelt thanks. My father, Jacob F. Sawatzky, was born in Hofnungsfeld on September 19, 1881 and lived there with his parents and siblings until the village broke up. He spent his adolescence in the village of Rosenbach north of Winkler and also attended the school at Gretna led by H. H. Ewert.

While I was so pleased to discover so much about my family history (especially the fact that Jacob Wiens could foresee the downfall of the society in Russia and made a deliberate decision to immigrate to Canada), I was surprised that you included this family in your history of the Old Colony. The tradition that came down through our family was that Jacob Wiens was an evangelical. When my grandfather, Franz, suffered from doubt and depression in his early ministry in the Bergthai Church, his uncle, Jacob Wiens worked with him and converted Franz to the theology with a premillennial view. There was nothing in your quotes of Jacob Wiens which would indicate this belief, but I am interested to know how Jacob met your definition of a valid Old Colony Mennonite.

I would be interested in getting your reaction to this. You are probably more aware of where Jacob stood theologically and I wish to have your reaction to this. I have enclosed a copy of the book for you to read and to have your reaction to it. This is a very valuable book and I am grateful to you for sending it to me.

Sincerely yours,

Randy Kehler

Chortitzer CD-ROM

The Randy Kehler, “Chortitzer CD-ROM” with the 1878, 1887 and 1907, Chortitzer Gemeindebücher, tracing the Bergthaler people in the East Reserve, Manitoba, from 1874 to the Paraguayan immigration of 1926-27, is now again available direct from the author. Many of those whose ancestors emigrated to the West Reserve, Lowe Farm, Hague or Swift Current, Sask., between 1880 and 1910, or to Paraguay in the 1920s, will find the family information here. The Gemeindebücher include detailed documentation regarding births, baptisms, marriages and deaths, with complete cross-reference.

To order, send $50.00 plus $10.00 postage to Randy Kehler, Box 20737, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, ROA 2T2.

Menno Colony, Paraguay - 75th Anniversary


Loma Plata, Menno Colony - June 25, 2002.

75 years ago a group of Mennonites emigrated out of Canada to Paraguay. The “promised land”—soon to be designated by many as the “green hell”, was to become a new homeland for several thousand German-speaking—mostly Plaut-Dietsch—Mennonites. Although the goal, the land, was largely unfamiliar to them and notwithstanding that they were gazing into an unknown future, most of the immigrants preferred this option over that which they were facing in Canada.

Out of fear that the Canadian Government would meddle further in its internal affairs, they emigrated in 1926. In the middle of the sultry and basically uninhabited Chaco, some 450 kilometres from the closest major locality, they founded the Menno Colony. Prior to this, however, they had had to wait for almost a year in Puerto Casado, a small and unimportant harbour on the Paraguay.

An important part of the anniversary celebrations on June 25, 2002, consisted of a parade, which portrayed the historical development of the Menno Colony. To this also belonged the appearance of an ox team and wagon, as utilized by the pioneers of the settlement during the first years in order to provide transport within the colony and to cover the stretch of some 70 km. to the railway station. A journey during wet weather could easily take a week. This was the only means of transport during the first years.

Photo courtesy of Die Mennonitische Post, July 5, page 1.

The Paraguayan President Luis Gonzalez Macchi (left) together with Oberschulz of the Menno Colony, Cornelius B. Sawatzky. In the previous year, Mr. Sawatzky was elected to the position of Oberschulz for the fourth time. He has now served in this office for a total of nine years. Photo courtesy of Die Mennonitische Post, July 5, page 1.

Menno Informiert

Menno Informiert is a newsletter/magazine with information and news about the Menno Colony. It is published monthly by the Chortitzer Komitee and is distributed for free among members. For information and subscription rates, write editor Andreas F. Sawatzky, 10 C.d.C. 883 Asuncion, Paraguay, or email “gekome@telesurf.com.py”.

Telephone: 011-595-918-2770.

Menno Informiert was started around 1985 as a means of informing residents of the Menno Colony with news and information. With the exception of one year 1996 it has been published continually ever since. The first editor was Cornelius Wiebe. Current editor Andreas Sawatzky.
The hot, tropical climate, poor sanitary conditions, and above all, the dirty drinking water, resulted in a typhoid epidemic, which cost dozens of immigrants their lives. Through their determination and firm faith in God, the pioneers were able to overcome these supposedly insurmountable hurdles. Evil “mouths” said, that it was the incomparable stubbornness and pride of the Mennonites which kept them from a quick return.

Today the Menno Colony consists of over 9,000 residents. An active church and school life characterizes the community. The economy, which is largely dependent on agriculture (grain farming and livestock), has made giant steps forward in the last years....

In attendance were the President of Paraguay, many ministers, Governors of several Departamento (Provinces), Oberschulzen of other Colonies, visitors from other countries and thousands of observers from the surrounding area. In total close to 15,000 participants attended. The weather cooperated and provided for an ideal setting. It was somewhat cool in the morning, but sunny and pleasant throughout the day.

An abundant number of presentations were entered in the program as is customary for such occasions. Among others, presentations were made by the current Oberschulz Cornelius B. Sawatzky, a stimulating address by the Gemeinde leader Eduard Friesen, short speeches by the Governor of Boqueron, the President of Paraguay Luis Gonzalez Macchi, and a number of

The Memorial dedicated on June 25, in the form of a pioneer tent in the “Parque Pioneros” in the centre of Loma Plata, Menno Colony. The President of Paraguay, the Oberschulz of Menno Colony, as well as two pioneers who had immigrated from Canada to Paraguay in 1927, took part in the dedication proceedings. The following inscriptions are found on the two memorial plaques: 1) Dedication: Honour and Recognition to the Pioneers, who spared no labour, in order to build a new existence in the Chaco. From the thankful descendants of the Pioneers. 2) No one has worked for nothing on this day, if it has been done in faith for the Lord,” Ältester Martin C. Friesen. Photo courtesy of Die Mennonitische Post, July 5, page 3.

Aerial photograph of the administration centre of Menno Colony. The most important business offices of the Colony administration are situated here as well as the supermarket of the Chortitzer Cooperative, the post office, warehouses and much more. The buildings are still being built on one level, but as the parking space becomes always scarcer, future plans will have to take this into account and many additions will have to be built upwards on more than one level. Photo courtesy of Die Mennonitische Post, July 5, page 3.

Chortitzer Komitee LTDA

The Menno Colony is divided into the two organizations which are administered by the Oberschulze and 12 deputies. The Asociacion Civil - looks after schools, hospital, seniors, other social and welfare matters; also includes the Ordnung Amt (oversight of the national police, traffic police, etc.).

The second organization is the Asociacion Cooperativa Chortitzer Komitee LTDA. which looks after economic matters; in particular, it operates the co-op ventures such as Trebol (dairy products), Chorti Meats (sausage products), Co-op supermarket, transport section (import and export of products), cattle (80,000 head sold annually for Menno Colony).

Abraham W. Hiebert - whose pioneering work in representing the Chortitzer Komitee in Asuncion and internationally was of great significance for the development and growth of the Menno Colony (see Pres., No. 4, page 5). He is the uncle of Der Bote editor Isbrand Hiebert, Steinbach, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Menno Informiert, June 2002, No. 6, page 8.
T. Friesen prepared the vaudeville piece "Die Wüste singt", which presented much about the history of the Menno Colony.

Books were also written for the occasion and the administration of the Menno Colony is working to complete a one hour film. The book "Unter der heißen Sonne des Südens" has been published by the History Committee of the Colony Menno.

Certain parts of the festivities were also to take place at the exhibition at Rodeo Isla Poi, which, however, had to be postponed because of weather considerations and which tentatively were rescheduled to take place on the weekend of the 27th-30th of June. At this exhibition, the Menno Colony as well as exhibitors from the region and the capital, demonstrate the strength of their economy.

A thanks-giving service to God took place on the evening of June 25 which was attended by many Menno residents (some 2500), when one has lived for 75 years under the protection and blessing of God, this is sufficient reason to celebrate. Most of the worship services on Menno for the entire month of June were focused on this theme. Thus, for example, there was a traditional worship service in Osterwick on every Sunday, the way they were previously held. These were not intended to mock the former days, rather they were to show the younger generation, how God was worshipped, honoured and praised in earlier times.

Modern media (radio, computer, internet, etc.) made it possible to gather the information quickly. Thus we were able to follow "live" the presentations of the anniversary celebrations on June 25, on the internet. Radio ZP-30 carried the various speeches and presentations. A heartfelt thanks for this most worthy contribution (Abbreviated versions of the speeches by Church Conference leader Eduard Friesen and by Oberschulz Cornelius B. Sawatzky were published in Mennonitische Post, July 5, 2002, pages 2-3.

Mennonite Congregation of Haarlem, Netherlands

History, 1530-1784.

The first Anabaptists were to be found in Haarlem around the year of 1530. In those days some of them came to be martyrs of the faith, and the names of two of them, Ioriaen Simons and Anneken Ogiers, have been painted at the entrance-doors of two rooms in the present church building. Since Haarlem’s local government was tolerant, within a few decades the Anabaptists or Mennonites were allowed to meet and to take their places as respected citizens of the town. Therefore Mennonites from elsewhere (from Flanders and the so-called Waterland, north of Amsterdam) migrated to Haarlem.

As they were not allowed to take government offices, many of them became merchants, physicians, booksellers, artists or chemists and later bankers. In the 19th century, well-to-do Amsterdam Mennonites bought country-houses in the beautiful surroundings of Haarlem, and that explains the nickname of the Haarlem congregation: “The Mennonite heaven”.

That time however is definitely over! Unfortunately with the 17th and 18th century splits and divisions were rather normal among Mennonites (or Doopsgezinden as they prefer to be called in the Netherlands). Also in Haarlem, from 1600 onwards several different groups existed, at one time even six! Worse yet, in 1670 the city government had to use a Solomon’s ordeal by decreeing that in the so-called Flemish Mennonite building (at the Klein Heiligland) a wall was to be constructed in order to separate two quarrelling faction!

After several mergers the last remaining groups united in 1784. Hence the meaningful motto of this congregation: “Verenigd tot Enigheid” (Unified unto unity), a motto also found on the congregation’s seal.

Hidden Church, 1683.

The only church building that remains, belonged formerly to the so-called Waterlandse congregation. This was the hidden church between Frankestraat, Peuzelaarsteeg and Grote Houtstraat. This building was constructed in 1683. Originally the entrance was the one at Peuzelaarsteeg, but later on two other entrances were created after buying annexed houses.

In 1757 some members, e.g. the well-known merchant Peter Teyler van der Hulst (who also established several foundations and a museum which carries his name), saw to it, that the stylish entrance at the Grote Houtstraat was built. That was of course a sign of the important social status of the congregation at that time.

The inner part of the building underwent several changes in the succeeding centuries. The pulpit, for instance, dates from the end of the 19th century. In 1771 for the first time, an organ was placed in the church by the Utrecht organ-builders Bätz. It was replaced by a Flaes-organ in 1883, and the present organ was constructed by Ahrend and Brunzema (from Loga, Germany) in 1969.

Several meeting-rooms were added to the...
original building. Two of them are from 1902, and are typical examples of the Jugendstil.

Social Care.
The congregations always felt a responsibility towards the poor and oppressed in the Haarlem society. Hence the building of several courts, “hofjes”, (for which Haarlem is famous): almshouses for widows. Three of them are still operated in relation with the congregation: the Bruiningshofje, the Wijnberghofje and the Zuidershofje.

For a long period the congregation also had an orphanage, and from the end of the 19th century until the end of the sixties of the 20th century there were two Mennonite elementary schools. Far reaching changes within our society have put an end to the functioning of these schools. Another task was attention to the sick. Also in the 20th century, two modern Old People’s homes were built: “Spaar en Hout” and “De Oleijfak”.

Other plans to serve needs in society are being discussed.

Present.
At the moment, the Haarlem congregation has some 1100 adult members. Church services are held each Sunday in the central building. There is another chapel in the northern section of the town (the Mennokapel), the Kleine Vermaning in Heemstede, and regular services are held in at least three other places in the region around Haarlem.

Four full-time pastors and a social worker serve the congregation. Their ministries are in the areas of preaching, teaching, pastoral care, as well as in social service and evangelism. The congregation has contact with other Mennonite congregations in the Netherlands, with Mennonites in other European countries and the U.S.A. and also with other denominations in the city.

On weekdays members and other interested people can participate in a wide range of activities: regular bible courses (including an intensive, two year bible training course), a peace group, a group for those interested in Mennonite history, a choir and a theatre group, but also women’s groups, discussion groups and meetings for the elderly. Of course attention is paid to children and youth - the most difficult but a rewarding task of the congregation.

There is a valuable library with books about Anabaptist history, and the well-kept archives store a treasure of interesting and important information about the history of the congregation and its role in local society.

Herman Heyn is the pastor of the congregation and Sjoerd van der Galein is the sexton/caretaker. They can be reached by e-mail at: sjoerd-kiemje-klaas@planet.nl On weekdays the church can be visited after consultation with the church sexton. Worship services: every Sunday at 10:00 a.m.

Addresses:
Doopsgezinde Kerk, Frankestraat 24/Peulzelaarsteeg 3, 2011 SE Haarlem, Netherlands. Phone number: 023-5321883/5341722. Fax: 023-5312055. E-mail: vdgh@wxs.nl

Source:
Church pamphlet of the United Mennonite Congregation of Haarlem, 4 pages.

Further Reading:

Background.

Many Canadian Mennonites can trace their roots to what is now called Zaporizhzhya in the Ukraine.

Situated on the expansive Dnieper River, modern-day Zaporizhzhya encompasses Chortitza, the original settlement of Mennonites in the former Russian Empire. Although Mennonite were largely expelled from the region during the second World War, some have remained or returned.

A welcome decline in religious and ethnic discrimination accompanied the recent break-up of the Soviet Union. With this freedom, a few believers began to dream about rebuilding the faith and life of their childhood. With nothing more than their memories and some support and guidance from North American Mennonites and local Baptist leadership, these believers began to rebuild their Christian faith and Mennonite church life.

The foundation laid by the founders of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Zaporizhzhya was Jesus Christ. Now the congregation is building on this foundation with care so that its structure can withstand the tests they know will come. Jake and Dorothy Unrau, Mennonite Church Canada, Witness workers, serve as pastors of the congregation.

Building Faith.

Members of the church, like all other Ukrainians, are immensely challenged by the collapse of the economy and, even more by the deterioration of moral and legal codes. Pensioners eke out their survival on tiny pensions. Those in their middle years are already receiving unemployment despite their education.

In a society of bottomless poverty and pervasive crime, faith-based decisions can have critical consequences for individuals and their families. This is a constant reality for church members who hold positions of leadership in commerce or government. It takes a foundational faith to make honest and fair decisions, and risk offending the powerful. At least one member of the congregation faces threats of misery from others.

Seeking grace in matters of church discipline has tested the bonds within the congregation. Indicators suggest the search has prompted some members to align their relationships with their discipleship. Preaching on Paul’s letter to the Romans, complemented by Sunday School classes using the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective are deepening the understanding of Christian faith and life.

Building Membership.

Individual baptisms on confession of faith in Christ increase annually. But each year a dozen are currently studying in preparation for baptism; most attend consistently. The membership total could reach seventy on Pentecost Sunday, scheduled for June 23. Job requirements, illness and other distractions have reduced attendance in the winter months. Still, new people, both young and old, have begun attending worship services on Sunday morning and Bible study groups on weekdays. Sunday School is well-attended and there are youth who invite friends and acquaintances to worship and to the youth Bible study group.

Building Leadership.

Several elected committees have taken responsibility for the community’s affairs, with limited success. The Unraus work closely with the church council led by Boris Letkemann and Nina Sobenina.

A student at the Zaporizhzhya Bible College has been assisting in the areas of music, youth and preaching. The congregation will invite him to continue his work after graduation.

The congregation has the goal of finding new pastoral leadership to continue after the scheduled end of Unraus’ ministry in mid-2003. They struggle with critical questions. Can new leadership be found within Ukraine? How will a new pastor be supported financially? What languages should this new pastor know: Russian, Ukrainian, German?

Building Seniors’ Care.

With a significant number of ailing and aging members, the congregation has required a steady flow of gifts to assist members with emergency or chronic medical care needs. They are grateful for the many resources they have already received.

Several members have received care in their homes and others have received care-provider training through Ann Goertzen of Winnipeg, placed in Zaporizhzhya by the Mennonite Benevolent Society. One or two members will be employed in seniors’ care in the near future.

The congregation has dreamed of a Mennonite Family Center, now launched with the gift of a ten-storey apartment building from the city to the Mennonite Benevolent Society.
Such a prominent Mennonite landmark in the city will raise public awareness of the fledgling Mennonite congregation while providing a place for members needing special care.

**Building a Building.**

For several years the congregation has been seeking a building for itself. Its use of a classroom on the second floor of a school has been problematic and more recently crowded. Reclaiming the site of a former Mennonite church, adapting a larger residence, purchasing a vacant kindergarten, building anew and requesting space in the future Family Center have all been investigated.

Though the congregation has assembled a substantial building fund, a satisfactory building has not yet been found. The situation will become critical in a few months when the room in the Bible College will no longer be available.

**Building a Network.**

The Mennonite Church in Zaporizhzhya has two Mennonite sister congregations in Ukraine: in Mis near Kherson, and in Kutuzovka, a former Mennonite village...
Hanover Steinbach Historical Society
Annual Meeting- Jan. 18, 2003

Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) and Banquet of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

DATE: Saturday, Jan. 18, 2003

PLACE: Lion’s Centre, 94 Main Street, Grunthal, Manitoba

5:00 p.m. MEMBERSHIP MEETING - The H.S.H.S. will hold its Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) - election of directors, President’s report, financial statement, name change, etc. Members are encouraged to attend.

Banquet and Entertainment

6:00 p.m. RECEPTION
Come early. Enjoy the fellowship - get acquainted!

6:30 p.m. BANQUET
Enjoy a traditional Mennonite meal of ham, farmer sausage, Verenike, fried potatoes.

7:30 KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Presentation by John Driedger, Reeve of the R.M. of Hanover, on “The Mennonites of Grunthal - different roots, one community.”

8:00 ENTERTAINMENT

Tickets $20.00

Come out, meet your friends, and enjoy a fun evening. Tickets available from HSHS board members Orlando Hiebert 388-4195, Ernest Braun 388-6146, Ralph Friesen 284-8347, and D. Plett 326-6454.

Building a Future.
The critical challenges of building the Evangelical Mennonite Church community are very real; they desire to uphold their members, developing local leadership, find a building, and connect to a broader network.

For Mennonite Church Canada the challenge is to support their building with love and care.

Contacts:
Cliff (Steinbach, MB) and Natasha Dueck are Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers in Mis, Ukraine. Cliff is originally from the Steinbach Men.Church, Steinbach, Man. Jake and Dorothy Unrau are Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers in Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine. The Unraus have roots in Burn Lake, B.C.

Mennonite Church Canada Witness welcomes your prayers and contributions for their work and the work of other Witness workers around the world. The Duecks welcome your notes of encouragement. They can be reached at Box 147 - Kherson – 873008 Ukraine (email: cjdueck@tlc.kherson.ua). The Unraus also welcome your notes of encouragement. They can be reached by e-mail at “djunrau@djunrau.zssm.zp.us”.

* This article used the Ukrainian spelling for Zaporizhzhya.

Mennonite Church Canada is made up of 37,000 church members, 250 congregations and 5 area churches. For more information, contact Dan Nighswander, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4, (204) 888-6781, dnighswander@mennonitechurch.ca. (For additional information regarding the Zaporozhe Mennonite Church, see Pres., No. 19, page 65).

Further Reading:

* This article used the Ukrainian spelling for Zaporizhzhya.
Faith Watch - False Press Release Published

False Press Release.

Conservative Mennonite groups have traditionally been a popular target for predator religious groups, largely because their Gospel-centric teaching prohibits them from responding to such aggression in other than Christ-like ways.

A media outlet identified only as “DAWN-Friday fax” has reported of an alleged outbreak of some kind of religious activity among Amish and Old Order Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Apparently agitators from an organization called “PETRA Fellowship” are working to induce Amish and Old Order youth to depart from the Gospel-centric faith of their parents.

The news release carried by Brennpunkt makes the following claims: “Young people in an ultra-conservative region of the USA are meeting God in a new way,” reports the information service of Churisma News. A weekly revival worship service with more than 1000 teenagers and young adults attending, has arisen from a bible study which began four years ago, drawing from among the farming area of the Amish people....

“Our churches have吸纳ed themselves to target their young people,” said Matt Buckwalter, Pastor of the Old Road Mennonite Church....Now we realize, how the kids experience a new inspiration for Jesus and are suddenly sitting in the first row in their own churches....

“The outbreak has brought some divisions in the Gemeinden, but many are rejoicing over the development, such as [Mike] Stollius, [one of the founders].”

“Lester Zimmerman, Pastor of the sponsoring church PFC [Petra Christian Fellowship], said, ‘God uses the youths, to bring unity between Christian leaders and churches in the region.’

The press release was published in Der Bote, Dec. 12, 2001 and Die Mennonitische Post, Jan. 18, 2002.

Amish Response.

“My wife and I returned yesterday evening from a five-day church visit to a small Amish community in Maine. In the mail that came while we were away was a letter from a close friend in Lancaster County, PA to whom I had written about your enquiry [regarding the press release published in Der Bote, Dec. 12, 2001 and Die Mennonitische Post, Jan. 18, 2002]. This man is a bishop in the Old Order Amish church in Lancaster County, and I am confident he is well informed. Let me quote from his letter to me:

“The information in Der Bote sounds inaccurate. The concept of 1000 teenagers in a weekly Erweckungsgottes-dienst drawn from among the Amish people is unknown to me.”

“From what I know, Charity Fellowship is becoming less active because their type of charismatic movement is not as popular.”

“I am somewhat familiar with Petra Christian Fellowship, a new and growing church with an attraction to some Amish youth, but only on a small scale.

“Old Road Mennonite church is located two miles from our home, and I know nothing about Old Orders being attracted there, even though they have a ‘more-modern’ doctrine. I find there is more action amidst the differing Beachy Amish groups in Lancaster County and a trend for their youth to be attracted to modern ‘Mennonite’ doctrine. Maybe that is the point in the article.”

“I feel it would be known among us if even 50 Old Order teenagers would have an organized Bibel-Treffen, and I have no evidence that there is more than the usual amount of interest in modern Bible educational movements.

“We do need a revival, not toward modern Dietism, but to repentance and renewal of a new life in Christ, not only in profession but to commitment and growth.”

“So it appears very much as if the report in Der Bote was exaggerated, or that the youth are coming from other groups than the Old Order Amish.

“I trust this information may be helpful to you.”

Sincerely, 
Joseph Stoll
Low German religious broadcasting in Bolivia. Preparably they were targeting Old Colony Mennonites, the only Low German speakers in the area. If the editors genuinely believed that the promoters were intending to support and nurture these communities—some of which have been devastated by drought and a bad economy, I applaud them for assisting with such publiclicity.

On the other hand, it is possible that the promoters plan to spread Evangelical Fundamentalist heresy among our brothers and sisters in Christ in Bolivia and to promote sectarianism and to turn young people against the Christo-centric faith of their parents. This raises the spectre of Mennonites being duped into themselves funding an alien religious attack on our brothers and sisters in Christ.

What an abomination!

Conclusion.

The Apostles of the early church as well as the Anabaptist-Mennonite Evangelists in Reformation times, travelled about preaching, teaching and admonishing the faithful, a model faithfully continued to the present by the ministers of Hutterites, Amish, Old Order and conservative Mennonites. No genuine biblical Evangelists would operate by attacking other Christian communities and denigrating them with falsehoods and deception. An old proverb dating to the Reformation states, “That where the Lord our God establishes a Church, the devil builds a chapel beside it.” Let us not make Satan’s job too easy.

The media is a powerful tool, for good and for ill. Let us as Mennonites use it wisely and build other each up and learn from each other as we grow in Christ and in His community. The Editor.
Historical Mexican Mennonite Videos Available

Introduction.
In 1995 a group of men and women held a meeting to talk about getting started with preserving the history of the Mennonites in Mexico. To make a long story short, they decided on:
1. To start working towards eventually building a small Museum Village where the story of the Mennonites could be preserved (Pres., No. 18, page 68);
2. To get started with making preparations for a Celebration of 75 Years of Mennonites in Mexico in August of 1997 (Pres., No. 11, pages 22-27).
3. Compile and print a historic picture book of “75 Years of Mennonites in Mexico” to be released at the celebration in 1997 (Pres., No. 12, page 103).
4. To have G. E. Rempel (who in 1965 moved from Chihuahua, Mexico to Manitoba, Canada) ask Otto Klassen from Winnipeg, Manitoba to come and help them produce a historical video to be shown at the celebration. Otto consented to doing that free of charge, provided, that the proceeds of the video would go towards building a Museum Village in Mexico. In 1996 Klassen and Rempel went to Mexico three times. When they were done filming, they were so overwhelmed with the amount of footage that they decided to make two videos not one (Pres., No. 12, pages 103-104).

Video # 1. Old Colony Mennonites Emigrate from Canada to Mexico (30 minutes). This video portrays Mennonites (Anabaptists) originating in the Netherlands and Northern Germany and migrating to Prussia, Russia and Canada. And when their religious freedoms in Canada were revoked after World War I, they sought and found guaranteed religious rights and land for colonization in Mexico. From 1922 to 1927 more than 7,000 Mennonites left Canada in 36 specially chartered trains.

Video # 2. Pioneers in Mexico - Canadian Mennonites Colonize in Mexico (57 minutes). This video tells the story of the first migrants arriving at the train station San Antonio de los Arrenales (Cuauhtemoc), Chihuahua in March of 1922. They move directly onto the seemingly endless prairie of the Bustillos Valley and begin to plow and develop the prairie land for agricultural purposes.

This video also portrays the changes which have taken place with the development of manufacturing, apple orchards, etc. At the celebration of 75 years of Mennonites in Mexico on August 14, 15, and 16 in 1997, these videos were shown five times. More than 2,000 people viewed the videos. Otto Klassen filmed the event and produced a third video.

Video # 3. 75th Anniversary Celebration of Mennonites in Mexico (58 minutes).
This video begins with the singing of school children “Now Praise Ye All Our God”. Then followed a parade featuring the progression of transportation, vehicles and agriculture equipment 1927 to 1997 and the opening of the celebration. This is followed by the celebratory messages by dignitaries, local and visiting speakers and ministers, singing groups, choir and orchestra performances. Also shown are exhibits of agricultural equipment and manufactured machines, machinery parts, etc.

Video # 3 is available as it was recorded in a mixture of Spanish, Low German, and High German - 58 minutes long, or as a 36-minute version with an English narration.

Otto Klassen, Cinematographer.
Otto Klassen, Winnipeg, producer of these inspiring Videos: “I admire these people and their accomplishments....Their Anabaptist spirit, their strong work ethic and deep abiding faith still belong to the character of these people.” Comment from Otto Klassen (See Pres., No. 18, pages 103-106, for the story of the production of these videos).

Special Offer.
These videos have now been released by “Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita A. C.” for the purpose of assisting in raising funds for the museum in Mexico.

Special Offer: One video of your choice for a donation of $25.00 or more; Three videos for a donation of $60.00 or more; and four videos for a contribution of $80.00 or more. The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society will issue a tax-deductible receipt on request. Make cheques payable to M.M.H.S.

If tax-deductible receipt is not required, make cheques payable to Museo & Centro Cultural Menonita A. C. (M&CCM).

Videos #1 and #2 are available in Low German, High German, and English

Donation/Order Form
Name ____________________________________________
Address __________________________________________

Video: Low German □ High German □ English □
# 1. Old Colony Mennonites
# 2. Pioneers in Mexico
# 3. 75th Anniversary

Donation $ ________ Tax deductible receipt requested: yes _______ no _______

For tax-deductible receipt please make cheques payable to M.M.H.S. If tax-deductible receipt is not required, please make cheques payable to M&CCM. Shipping $6.00 extra per video.

Forward all orders to George E. Rempel, 804-325 6th Street, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, R6W 1G5. For information phone 1-204-325-0934.

Email: gerempel@res.mts.net

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 59
City of Winkler: Manitoba’s Second Mennonite City

By Ellie Reimer, reprinted with permission from the Winkler Times, August 12, 2002, page 1.

What a way to go!

Sunday, August 11, Winklentesses left behind a 48-year chapter of their lives and began a new chapter, as residents of a city. With a fireworks display planned to follow main stage ceremonies Sunday night, the Town of Winkler was set to leave the map in a blaze of glory, and the City of Winkler to arrive in the same way, festooned with coloured stars and sequins and reverberating to the boom of coloured rockets in the night sky. The 10 p.m. events in the Winkler Parkland followed a formal dinner for community leaders, dignitaries and other invited quests.

Well before the turn of the previous century, Mennonite settlers moved into the area, settling in village clusters, as their traditions dictated. Even as a settlement began to grow around the railway siding just north of their villages, village elders tried to forbid their members to live in what was becoming a town, not a traditionally Mennonite village.

In spite of the initial opposition, the settlement grew, and, on April 7, 1906, it was incorporated as the Village of Winkler. The first mayor was Dr. Nelson Cooper, and village councilors were William Graefer, Fred Penner, David Klassen, Frank E. Rietze, and Peter H. Neufeld, who was the secretary-treasurer.

Forty-eight years later, on April 7, 1954, the village became the Town of Winkler. Mayor at that time was George W. Neufeld, and town councilors were John J. Wiens, Jack Feide, Nick Wiebe, H. D. Dick, William Enns, and H. S. Friesen, who was secretary-treasurer. Another 48 years later brings us to April 7, 2002, which will go into the books as the date Winkler was granted city status. In fact, the March 12 release date of the 2001 census numbers which put the town over the required 7,500 city population mark prevented the town and the province from making the change to city status in time. History, therefore, had to be “backdated” to April 7.

Neil Schmidt, elected as mayor of the Town of Winkler in October 1998, will be completing his term this October as mayor of the City of Winkler. Around the table at council meetings are Dave Penner, Ron Neisteter, Roy Enns, Ron Neufeld, Herb Dick, and Marvin Plett. The position of secretary-treasurer has been replaced by that of chief administrative officer, and it is filled by Vince Anderson.

Many popular rumors to the contrary, Mayor Schmidt says nothing has really changed for Joe Citizen, with the change-over from town to city.

“All the laws are still in place, no laws have changed,” he said.

“Taxes won’t go up just because we’re a city. Nothing has really changed, except that we’re now the City of Winkler instead of the Town of Winkler…”

Editor’s Note: On October 25, 1997, Steinbach in the East Reserve became the first Mennonite City in Manitoba (see Preservings, No. 11, page 29). On behalf of all Russian Mennonite’s across four continents, we congratulate Winkler for obtaining City status. Winkler was founded to serve the Old Colony Mennonites in the West Reserve and this achievement recognizes the tremendous contributions which this community has made to the Province.

Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding issued a declaration at the end of May in Beirut, Lebanon, calling for the end of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and the lifting of economic sanctions against Iraq. “The Lebanon Declaration” condemns “political efforts, treaties to nations and repeated political efforts to label some as ‘evil’, to call others ‘men of peace’, and to use scripture for the purpose of waging war.” The declaration also calls for rejection of “any and all forms of violence, whether manifested as sanctions, occupation, terrorism or war.” Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding is a group of American Evangelical Christians led by Gary Burge, a professor at Wheaton College - Evangelical Press News Service, from Mennonite Brethren Herald, Oct. 4, 2002, page 20.

Heinrich Loewen Reunion, Gretna

Over 400 descendants of Heinrich Loewen (1823-1908) and Sarah (Toews) Loewen (b. 1829) gathered at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna July 12-14 to celebrate their kinship. The Loewen family came from the Molotschka but lived in Heinrichsfeld, Puchtin (later known as Schönfeld Brasso). In 1876 they settled in Grossweide, East Reserve, and shortly later, in Silberfeld, West Reserve. The family belonged to the Sommerfelder Gemeinde. Among the notable descendants is Bill Loewen, Winnipeg, founder of “Comcheq” (see Diese Steine, page 352).

The reunion concluded Sunday afternoon with the dedication of a memorial to Heinrich and Sara Loewen at the homestead site in Silberfeld, three miles northeast of Gretna, and a traditional Sunday afternoon meal (faspa) at the MCI.

Old Nazi Loses Citizenship.

New York: A federal judge has ruled that an elderly New York man participated in Nazi atrocities in Poland during the Second World War and has revoked his U.S. citizenship, according to papers made public yesterday.

The judge said federal prosecutors proved Jack Reimer, 83, a retired restaurant manager from Carmel, N.Y., was a member of a Nazi guard unit that carried out the mass murders of Jewish prisoners and the liquidation of the Polish ghettos.

In his ruling dated Tuesday [Sept. 3], U.S. District Judge Lawrence McKenna set aside a 1959 order granting Reimer citizenship. McKenna said the government established by “clear, unequivocal and convincing evidence” that Reimer had been a member of the guard forces at a Nazi training camp in Trawniki, Poland, from 1941 to 1945.


Heinrich Loewen Reunion, Gretna

Over 400 descendants of Heinrich Loewen (1823-1908) and Sarah (Toews) Loewen (b. 1829) gathered at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna July 12-14 to celebrate their kinship. The Loewen family came from the Molotschka but lived in Heinrichsfeld, Puchtin (later known as Schönfeld Brasso). In 1876 they settled in Grossweide, East Reserve, and shortly later, in Silberfeld, West Reserve. The family belonged to the Sommerfelder Gemeinde. Among the notable descendants is Bill Loewen, Winnipeg, founder of “Comcheq” (see Diese Steine, page 352).

The reunion concluded Sunday afternoon with the dedication of a memorial to Heinrich and Sarah Loewen at the homestead site in Silberfeld, three miles northeast of Gretna, and a traditional Sunday afternoon meal (faspa) at the MCI.

Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding issued a declaration at the end of May in Beirut, Lebanon, calling for the end of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and the lifting of economic sanctions against Iraq. “The Lebanon Declaration” condemns “political efforts, treaties to nations and repeated political efforts to label some as ‘evil’, to call others ‘men of peace’, and to use scripture for the purpose of waging war.” The declaration also calls for rejection of “any and all forms of violence, whether manifested as sanctions, occupation, terrorism or war.” Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding is a group of American Evangelical Christians led by Gary Burge, a professor at Wheaton College - Evangelical Press News Service, from Mennonite Brethren Herald, Oct. 4, 2002, page 20.

Old Nazi Loses Citizenship.

New York: A federal judge has ruled that an elderly New York man participated in Nazi atrocities in Poland during the Second World War and has revoked his U.S. citizenship, according to papers made public yesterday.

The judge said federal prosecutors proved Jack Reimer, 83, a retired restaurant manager from Carmel, N.Y., was a member of a Nazi guard unit that carried out the mass murders of Jewish prisoners and the liquidation of the Polish ghettos.

In his ruling dated Tuesday [Sept. 3], U.S. District Judge Lawrence McKenna set aside a 1959 order granting Reimer citizenship. McKenna said the government established by “clear, unequivocal and convincing evidence” that Reimer had been a member of the guard forces at a Nazi training camp in Trawniki, Poland, from 1941 to 1945.


Rev. John and Tina Peters, celebrated the beginning of their retirement with a meal in their church. He has served the Sommerfelder Gemeinde as minister for 34 years. On Feb. 12, he celebrated his 75th birthday. Photo courtesy of Men. Post, April 19, page 14.
Chortitz Cemetery Memorial Dedication

In a large open field - dotted with huge poplar trees that stand as sentinels of yesteryear - well over a hundred people gathered under a blazing sun to recall their links to the village of Chortitz, West Reserve. On Sunday, July 28th, a touching memorial service was held around a huge stone which now serves as a very significant landmark.

Adjoining main street, in the center of this small village in southern Manitoba, the site is the burial place of 292 early settlers. This number includes many very young children who died prematurely as a result of countless hardships endured following the immigration of these Mennonites from Russia. Only 20 of those graves were individually marked in any way. One of five attractive plaques on the new memorial now bears the names of 32 homesteaders who established the village of Chortitz in 1875. As well, the names of 288 people who are buried in the area appear on three additional metal plaques.

During the open air dedication, Bishop Peter Elias of the Old Colony Mennonite Church, Winkler, called on those present to reflect on the goodness that we enjoy today and urged us to be thankful for the foundations that were laid by “...those who are buried here - those who trusted God to give them direction in a strange new land.”

The beautiful harmony of “When the Roll is Called up Yonder” evoked visions of a great meeting again with our people who “went before”. It was indeed a moving moment.

Mavis Dyck - one of the organizers of this event - beamed with delight as she talked of her personal interests in the project and explained the beginnings of a village which holds numerous connections for her. She is part of a Committee that deserves recognition for pursuing a project which provides new dimensions to many a Family Tree.

It was the pilgrims of the pioneers era who were laid to rest in the old gravesite. After the reorganization of the Old Colony Church in Manitoba in the 1930s local funerals were held in the old Reinlander (Old Colony) worship house in Chortitz built in 1881. The original church building eventually needed to be replaced and now stands on the grounds at Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Man. where it is preserved as a reminder of the deep faith in God who led the Mennonites of Chortitz just as He had led the Israelites in times past.

Needless to say, I and many others were deeply inspired by the Memorial Service in Chortitz. The huge boulder which has been painstakingly placed in memory of both old and young speaks of a rich heritage for generations to come. It bears a fitting inscription that reads: “...A Reminder of the Past – A Memory for the Future.”

Submitted by Evelyn Letkeman Friesen, Box 2391, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.
Johann Barkman, Steinbach’s Longest Serving Mayor

A pocket park at the corner of Elm Street and Elmdale Drive was dedicated August 11, 2002, to honour Johann G. Barkman (1858-1937), Steinbach’s longest serving Mayor. 150 people attended. Posing with the memorial stone and plaque are the committee (all grandchildren): l-r.: Jonas B. Goossen, Mary Barkman Friesen, Jake R. Keter, Dan Barkman, Chair Albert Goossen, Donald Bartel and Rollie Barkman.

Czar Alexander I ate dinner at the home of Johann’s grandfather Martin J. Barkman (1796-1872) in Rückenau when he visited the Molotschana Colony in 1825. Martin’s wife, nee Katharina Regier (1800-66), was the granddaughter of Ältester Peter Epp (1725-89), Danzig, a major advocate of the Mennonite emigration to South Russia.

Johann G. Barkman was married to Margaretha Friesen, daughter of Jakob S. Friesen, Grünfeld, who drowned in the Red River in 1875. In 1878 Johann acquired Wirtschaft No. 2 in Steinbach from Cornelius Fast, the original owner. In 1882 the Barkmans joined the Holdeman church. In 1917 the Barkman family moved to Littlefield, Texas, but returned to Steinbach the following year. He started a small feed business on the location where Steinbach was no longer a North-European American style village. Johann G. Barkman has served with various youth groups, devotional evenings and Sunday School. The church has various outreach activities and is currently ministering to a group in Leamington, Ont. The ministerial consists of: Bishop George Buhler, Ed Martens, Abe W. Buhler, Corny Peters, Willie Buhler, Howard Peters, Frank Bueckert, Reuben Klassen, Martin Wiebe and Henry Janzen.

Over 700 people attended. They enjoyed the centennial celebration which included tasty meals and a historical presentation by Rev. Abe Buhler (see Pres., No. 18, page 66), as well as various special numbers. In the closing service, Pastor Rueben Klassen reminded the congregation that the key to building the church was sacrifice. He challenged the listeners with Hebrew 12:2.

Further Reading:

100 Years of God’s Goodness

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan marked 100 years of God’s goodness on July 2, 2002. The centennial event was held in three large tents at the site of the original Bergthaler worship house two miles east of Rosthern. The Bergthaler denomination was officially organized in 1902 although Ältester Kornelius Epp (1861-1936) had already been ordained in 1896. The original families had left the crowded West Reserve in Manitoba before the division caused by Bishop Johan Funk created the Sommerfelder split in 1894. Therefore, the Saskatchewan group retained the Bergthaler name although they always associated with and remained one confession with the Sommerfelder. The congregation currently has 700 members and five worship houses in the Hague Osler area. The young people are served with various youth groups, devotional evenings and Sunday School. The church has various outreach activities and is currently ministering to a group in Leamington, Ont. The ministerial consists of: Bishop George Buhler, Ed Martens, Abe W. Buhler, Corny Peters, Willie Buhler, Howard Peters, Frank Bueckert, Reuben Klassen, Martin Wiebe and Henry Janzen.

Over 700 people attended. They enjoyed the centennial celebration which included tasty meals and a historical presentation by Rev. Abe Buhler (see Pres., No. 18, page 66), as well as various special numbers. In the closing service, Pastor Rueben Klassen reminded the congregation that the key to building the church was sacrifice. He challenged the listeners with Hebrew 12:2.

Further Reading:
Evangelicals Write President Bush

Evangelicals write President Bush regarding misuse of the Bible in the Middle-East Conflict.

USA—Forty-nine prominent Evangelicals are in the process of writing a letter to President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell in which they petition for the United States to take an position for a just peace in the Middle-East. They definitely reject the impression in the media that all Evangelicals in America support the Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, regardless of how massively he suppresses the Palestinians. 

Led by the pen of Mennonite Ron Sider of “Evangelicals for Social Action”, these Christian leaders are raising their voices against the widespread impression that one of the grounds why President Bush has placed himself so un equivocally on the side of Sharon, is exactly the massive pressure from the American Evangelicals.

The signers of the letter, including Raymond Bakke, Leighton Ford, Peter Kuzmic, Gordon MacDonald, John Ortberg, and Philip Yancey, condemn the force used on both sides. They renounce equally the Arab suicide bombers and the occupation strategy of the Israelis and their “theft” of the Palestinian lands.

They declared that there are a significant number of American Evangelicals who denounce the uncritical acceptance of the decisions and actions of the Israeli Government on the basis of certain—in their view false--Biblical references. Very much to the contrary, the authors of the writing are of the view that the Bible—from beginning to end—sets forth the paradigm of justice.

Sider and other Evangelicals are seeking a meeting with President Bush.

As reprinted in Der Bote, Aug. 28, 2002, page 8. Translated from German. From Brennpunkt, a magazine published by MBMS International, to support German-speaking Mennonite Brüdergemeinden in their pursuit of spiritual renewal, building of the Gemeinde and worldwide missionary-deacon responsibilities, with indepth information and networking.

Freedoms are very easily lost.” Salman Rushdie, interview - Macleans, Oct. 7/02, page 35.

Question: “Are you concerned that the enemies of freedoms you hold dear may be transforming “us” into “them”?

Answer: “I think it’s something to be really worried about. Would it not be a dreadful irony if we would do this to ourselves: in the defence of freedom we would give up our liberties? Suddenly you don’t have to give people reasons why they are being swept off the street and held incommunicado, interrogated and deported. The ordinary rules of evidence don’t apply and this or that kind of kangaroo court will deal with issues in a summary way. Freedoms are hard won and easily lost. I worry that people in the U.S. and elsewhere - because there are similar problems developing in other Western States - aren’t upset enough yet about this threat. In the absence of that debate, the people who are trying to pinch those freedoms are just going ahead and pinching them.

Altona District Heritage Centre

A dinner in Altona, Manitoba, Sept. 28, 2002, raised funds for the newly established Altona & District Heritage Research Centre. The keynote speaker was Canadian bestselling novelist Rudy Wiebe. “He was often asked in the national media when he would get over being Mennonite,” Wiebe said. His reply, “when do we ask a Jew, or Irishman, or Englishman, when they will get over being Jewish, Irish or English?” Being Mennonite is simply who we are, that bundle of characteristics and shared history that makes us unique human beings - not better, simply it is our story. Wiebe’s presentation focused on the importance of archives in recording the story of people, serving as repositories of human language. Speech was a marvellous gift of God, a characteristic making humans unique. God said the world into existence. Wiebe discussed his experiences in researching the lives of Canada’s Eskimos and Plains Cree Indians of a century ago and how archives were often the only source of information. He held up the Martyr’s Mirror first published in 1660 by Thielmann Janz von Bracht as an example of the importance of archives, as it preserved the story of 4000 martyrs - 40 per cent of them women. He closed with an inspiring reading from Sweeter than all the World (pages 29-40). “Flour and Yeast” - the story of Trijntjen Claes, martyred for the faith by burning at The Hague on November 20, 1527 A.D.

Bestselling novelist, Rudy Wiebe autographing his latest novel Sweeter than all the World in Altona, Sept. 28, 2002. He was the guest speaker for a fundraising dinner for the recently established Altona archives.

Attention: High School Students

Family History Essay Contest

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society invites you to enter an essay contest presenting research in family history.

The Henry E. Plett Memorial Award for Family Histories consists of two cash prizes in the amount of $250 (first place) and $100 (second place) annually for the Manitoba high school students who are judged to have submitted the best writing and research in the area of their family history. The deadline for submissions is April 30.

Send entries to:

Henry E. Plett Memorial Award
Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Genealogy Committee
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB, R3P 0M4 or e-mail: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

New Director

Sue Barkman, Winnipeg, has been appointed as the new Executive Director of the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach. Manitoba to replace Gary Snider. Barkman, who had worked at the Carillon News, Steinbach, in the early ‘80s, has had an extensive career in various non-profit organizations. She was previously employed as director of campaigns at the Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg. Photo courtesy of Carillon News, Aug. 1/02, page 2.
Mennonites - Metis Share History.

A historical re-enactment of the first landing of Manitoba’s Mennonites and the Metis freighters was held on Thursday, July 25, 2002. The event was part of the “Red River Metis Journey”, a reenactment of the Metis trek by oxcart along the Crow Wing Trail (roughly Highway 75).

The re-enactment took place at the “Mennonite Landing Site” at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers, where the first Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite pioneers stepped off the riverboat S.S. International 128 years ago on August 1.

As part of the ceremony, a Metis fiddler and guitarist whipped up a lively batch of jigs. Four players dressed in traditional garments represented a Mennonite family arriving at the Landing Site, where the Metis freighters who had been hired by Jakob Shantz were waiting to help them unload and haul their goods and supplies. The historic 128 year re-enactment was organized by Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, and Orlando Hiebert, Tourond, Past President of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

The Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s - most of whom had experienced life outside the large mother colonies forcing significant immersion in the local population - had extensive experience in dealing with various ethnic populations in Imperial Russia (as well as earlier in Royal Poland/Prussia), where they lived in a rich multi-cultural mosaic, including, of course, Russians, some Ukrainians (known as “Little Russians”), Jews, Gypsies, German Colonists (Mecklenburgers, Würtembergers, Prussians, Kashubians, Swabians, Swiss, Swedish, etc.), Bulgarians, Cosacks, Molokans, Dukabours, Nogier, Tartars, Turks, Greeks, Italians, Serbs, Moldavians and Armenians and a great assortment of religions (see Urry, None but Saints (Wpg, 1989), pages 94-99). This pluralistic cultural immersion in Russia and earlier is also reflected in the foods, language, architecture and other social constructs of the Mennonites.

In terms of relating to various outside nationalities and ethnic groups, the experience of settling in Manitoba represented a gearing down or dumming down for the Mennonites. In Manitoba they would relate to only a handful of cultures including the natives, Metis, English (Scottish, Irish, etc.), French, and later also Germans and Ukrainians (Galicians).
Globe-trotting Pontiff - God’s Politician

“Hard Act to Follow - Globe-trotting pontiff known as God’s politician,”
by Michele Mandel, Toronto, from The Winnipeg Sun, July 28, 2002.

God’s Politician.

His face is rigid, his body bent, his voice fail and halting. And still the world hangs on his every word.

Pope John Paul commands a powerful aura that transcends his physical limitations and old age. Unlike any before him, Karol Wojtyla has taken his papacy on the road, criss-crossing the globe to personally deliver his pastoral message - a message that is often as political as it is theological.

“He’s accorded the status of an important politician or rock star,” says Chester Gillis, professor of theology at Georgetown University. “He’s made the church visible with his vibrance and willingness to go where the people are…evidence of that is his trip to Toronto - even with his very feeble health, he willingly does it.”

Where previous pontiffs remained secluded in Rome, John Paul shrewdly decided to use the media to deliver his globe-trotting message. “This is a Pope who mastered the art of communication in the 20th century,” says Prof. Michael Marrus, dean of graduates studies at the University of Toronto. “His charisma rests on his ability to reach out beyond a small circle of Catholics in the media age.”

As Time noted in naming him Man of the Year in 1994, he radiates an electricity “unmatched by anyone else on earth.”

But he is more than the popular pilgrim Pope Tommy, he is God’s politician. He is the Pope who brought down communism, the Pope who sought reconciliation with the Jews, the Pope who travelled to Cuba to criticize America’s embargo and to lecture Fidel Castro about the need to release 500 political prisoners. He is the Pope who has taken on capitalism as well as communism, globalization and the crushing Third World debt.

“He’s going to go down in history as the most important world leader in the second half of the 20th century.”

And yet for someone who has championed human rights and freedom from his world pulpit, he is an enigma. John Paul has proven to be an unyielding, ultra-conservative Pope who has silenced the demands of women and gays and ruled his church with a central, iron fist. This Pontiff, schooled in strict Polish Catholicism, has no time for married priests, abortion, euthanasia or the ordination of women and has called birth control a most dangerous enemy in the world.

“He’s a complex figure,” adds Gillis, author of Roman Catholicism in America. “I think historians will spend a long time analysing his legacy.”

But most agree that the former archbishop of Kraków’s greatest global role was his instrumental part in spurring the collapse of communism.

Historic dimensions.

“He’s going to go down in history as the most important world leader in the second half of the 20th century,” says Father Tom Reese, editor of America magazine and author of Inside the Vatican. “His role in bringing about the fall of communism in eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War is just of historic dimensions.”

Less than eight months after his 1978 inauguration, the Pope triumphantly returned to communist-run Poland, delivering 32 sermons in nine days which unleashed a revolution of spirit. His call for human rights and religious freedom lit the flame that would soon rage behind the Iron Curtain. “That was the detonator,” General Wojciech Jaruzelski, former head of the Polish Communist Party, told Frontline.

“He began a process of confrontation with Communist authorities which gravely aided the Solidarity movement and more broadly, the movement against communism in Eastern Europe,” notes Marrus of University of Toronto.

Pope John Paul II will be known for taking on communism, capitalism and poverty. Photo Wpg Sun, July 28, 2002.

The Pope’s power was soon feared as far as KGB headquarters. “The generals told me that the Vatican and the Pope above all was regarded as their No. 1, most dangerous enemy in the world.”

Mikhail Gorbachev later admitted they had reason to fear him.

“One can say that everything that has happened in Eastern Europe in recent years would have been impossible without the Pope’s efforts and the enormous role, including the political role, he played in the world arena,” Gorbachev wrote.

After the fall of communism, the pontiff turned his ire on the evils of capitalism and materialism, with language that could have been lifted from an anti-globalization protestor. “It isn’t right” he once said, “to be resigned to the immoral spectacle of a world in which there are still those who die of hunger, who don’t have homes, who lack the most elementary education, who don’t have access to health care in case of sickness, who cannot find work.”

During the church’s jubilee year of 2000, the Pope went so far as to demand the rich forgive the debt of the world’s poorest countries. “The Pope,” says McGowan of St. Michael’s College, “has demanded the world recognize, assist and make more equitable the relationship between rich and poor.”

Hard to Follow.

The Pope will also be long remembered for bridging rifts between Catholicism and other religions. After personally witnessing the destruction of the Jewish community in his native Poland, John Paul has done more to strengthen Catholic Jewish relations that any other pontiff in history, from his journey to Israel to his declaring anti-Semitism a sin against God.

“Centuries from now, when no one knows what a communist is, there will be Catholics and Jews who will look back at his papacy and see that he has done the most to improve relations between Catholics and Jews,” says Father Reese, a Jesuit scholar and author.

His political activism, his charisma and his determination even in the face of ill health have won him fans the world over, Catholic and non-Catholic.

“There’s no question,” Father Reese said yesterday, “this Pope will be a hard act to follow.”

Pope John Paul II greets the crown outside St. Peter’s upon his ascendancy in 1978. Photo Wpg Sun, July 28, 2002.
Toronto - Pope John Paul saw the future of his church last night [Saturday, July 27] in the smiling sunburned faces of 500,000 to 550,000 young Catholics camped out at Downsview Park.

In a song-filled, two-hour vigil, the 82-year-old Pontiff urged pilgrims to hold on to their faith as a beacon of light in a world of darkness.

“The future is in your hearts and in your hands,” the Pope said. “God is entrusting to you the task, at once difficult and uplifting, of working with him in the building of the civilization of love.”

The pilgrims – many exhausted from their earlier 8 kilometre hike to the former airbase – erupted in thunderous cheers when the first images of the Pope appeared on giant screens.

The loudest cheers came when the Pope spoke of Wadowice, his Polish birthplace, and greeted the crowd in his native tongue.

Visible amid the sea of pilgrims were giant letters spelling, “Viva Lolek,” the Pope’s nickname as a boy.

Two Canadian pilgrims, B.C.’s Analyn Perez and Quebec’s Remy Perras, welcomed the Pope to the vigil, thanking him for initiating World Youth Day.

“You have challenged us to not be afraid to make the personal decision to open our hearts and minds to Christ,” Perez said. “So we have come in the hundreds of thousands to tell you how much our ‘yes’ has transformed our lives.”

The two Canadians then knelt before the Pope, kissing his ring after their exuberant welcome.

Thibaut de Fraissinette, 17 of France, was one of the 1,050 pilgrims seated on stage near the Pope during the vigil.

“It was one of my dreams to be so close to the Pope. It’s really nice it’s come true,” de Fraissinette said.

Conversion of Jews.

Southern Baptists and Catholics are at odds regarding conversion of Jews.

Southern Baptists say yes and have criticized a committee of U.S. Catholic bishops that recently took a different track.

Jewish spokesmen, in turn, have accused the Southern Baptist Convention — the largest U.S. Protestant denomination of hypocrisy, arrogance and prejudice. One rabbi called a Southern Baptist official a “spiritual Neanderthal” on Phil Donahue’s TV talk show.

Southern Baptist relations with U.S. Catholicism, meanwhile, are as not good either. The Baptist denomination recently ended three decades of talks with Catholics, part of the conservative shift that also revived the Baptists’ Jewish evangelism efforts.

A joint statement by Jewish and Catholic leaders — by the National Council of Synagogues, representing Conservative and Reform Judaism, and the U.S. Bishops Committee for Interreligious Affairs was issued Aug. 12.

The key passage referred to “A deepening Catholic appreciation of the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people, together with a recognition of a divinely given mission to Jews to witness to God’s faithful love, lead to the conclusion that campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church.”

Southern Baptists disagree. Jim Sibley, co-ordinator of the denomination’s ministry to Jews, said that when it comes to Judaism, Catholics have got it wrong twice.

For centuries, he said, Catholics violated Jews’ religious freedom and tried to force them to convert, … with the end result being that persecution “hardened (Jews) against the good news of their messiah.” In recent years, Sibley said, Catholicism has moved too far the other way - excluding Jews from the Christian message. “There can be no more extreme form of anti-Semitism” than “withholding the hope of Israel,” said Sibley.

Eugene Fisher, the U.S. bishops’ staff expert on Jewish relations for 25 years, said that in practice, the Church no longer sponsors Jewish evangelism. He believes the August text merely expressed the implications of various official Catholic statements dating back to the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

For instance, during a 1980 visit to Germany, Pope John Paul told Jews that God’s covenant with them “has never been revoked.”

From an article by Richard Ostling, Associated Press, in Wpg Free Press, Sept. 7/02.
President Fox Visits La Honda Colony, Mexico


Introduction.

It was planned that the President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, was to spend one hour in La Honda, Zacatecas, but it turned into an hour and 45 minutes. His bodyguards said he had felt good and secure. It was estimated that two-thirds of the 5,000 residents of the colony were in attendance. An entire row of businesses closed their doors for the afternoon, as everybody wanted to at least see President Fox.

As the President was starting his visit of the Colony, I had the opportunity to speak with an official responsible for police security. I asked him, how the President himself had felt regarding his personal being and safety. He replied, that this had been one of the calmest public events which the President had attended. It was evident that he was completely relaxed while eating, without any thought that anyone might have any evil intentions against him. No cries of protest were to be heard and no protest placards were to be seen.

A military man of high rank demonstrated great interest to know something more about the Mennonites in Mexico. After a short discussion and after I had informed him that an estimated 45,000 Mennonites lived in Chihuahua, he quickly replied, that the people in Chihuahua should also invite the President. He had been so interested in the Mennonites in La Honda that he would most certainly also accept such an invitation.

Boots.

During a short discussion which I had with the President, I joked to him and said: He would like it among the Mennonites for the young Mennonite men gladly wear boots. He responded with a smile, and said, “Good. Then we already have something in common” and would understand each other.

To explain: The President enjoys wearing boots, which he also did in La Honda, as well as on trips to other countries and at meetings with important dignitaries. Many people in Mexico criticize him, for they say, it is not seemly for a President to wear boots. It is too lowly. He must wear nice shoes. I made the comments about the boots in order to make an affirmative statement to him, in order the he would quickly feel relaxed.

Weather.

It is said, that April does what it will. This also came true April 5, 2002. The sky was occasionally overcast and there were also some raindrops. But it was not windy and not particularly warm; other than perhaps while the sun was shining. As a result the thousands in attendance were able to enjoy the day.

Many well wishers (and obviously many young Mennonite men), accompanied the President while he walked from the helicopter to the Jakob Giesbrecht home. It was exciting for the boys to accompany the President. Photo courtesy Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, April 22, 2002, page 8.

A group of school children were lined up on each side of the cement path to the Jakob Giesbrecht home. The children sang a Spanish song which had been composed for the occasion. The President stood quietly and was moved as he listened while the children were singing. Photo courtesy Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, April 22, 2002, page 36.

Johnny Braun gave the welcoming speech on behalf of the hosts. He spoke clearly and with firm enunciation. Photo courtesy Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, April 22, 2002, page 7.
The Arrival.
During the days before the visit of the President, Governor Richardo Monreal visited the colony a number of times on his helicopter, to make sure everything was well planned. The wind from the helicopter can stir up an unbelievable amount of dust. For this reason the field in Campo 15 where the President was to land, was watered down everyday.

When the swarm of five helicopters finally landed there was only little dust, but many still held firmly on to their caps or hats. The President walked many hundreds of meters from the landing site by foot and greeted the many visitors, along the street. He reached out and shook many hands. It took almost a quarter hour until he arrived at the yard of Jakob Giesbrechts.

The Greeting.
A group of Mennonites stood at the gate along the street to greet the President. Since the Ältester Abram Friesen was away on a trip, Prediger Ohm Heinrich Wiens greeted the President in the name of the [Old Colony] Gemeinde. Jakob Giesbrechts, Johann Brauns and others greeted him.

Students were standing on each side of the cement walkway and sang a song as President Fox, Governor Richard Monreal and their entourage walked from the street to the house. After the President had reached the point between the rows of students, he remained standing while the students clearly and understandably sang the song:

Cantemos Bienvenido.
Le damos muchas Gracias
Senor Gobernador
Por invitar a Fox
A comer aqui
El senor Ricardo
Con el Presidente
Sean bienvenidos
A nuestra region.

Cantamos bienvenido
Senor Vicente Fox
Queremos Saludarle
En nombre de Senor
El Senor Vicente
En Rural La Honda
Sea bienvenido
Aqui a visitar.

Alzamos nuestras voces
Al Padre celestial
Nos Bendicid grandioso
Por este gobernal
Dios Senor bendiga
A nuestro Presidente
Y los de Zacatecas
En Mexico aqui
Y hoy le agradecemos
Somos mexicanos
Somos muy felices
Y les damos gracias.

While the students were singing the song and the guests were standing and listening, the photographers were taking many pictures. Even the television is to have shown this portion of the visit.

The President was invited into their house by the couple Jakob and Lies Giesbrecht so that he could wash his hands. At this opportunity he was presented with various gifts (a quilt, milk products, and others).

The Welcome.
On the yard of Jakob Giesbrechts (Mrs. Giesbrecht’s maiden name was Lies Braun) a canvas roof had been erected under which tables and chairs had been set up for some 1000 guests. Yet, these seats were not nearly enough and very many people remained outside on the street.

Johnny Braun gave the official greetings: “In the name of the Mennonite community and the
Group Pomas [cheese factory - see Pres., No. 19, page 77], I have the honour of welcoming the President here, where in so far as anyone can remember, a Mexican head of State has never before visited. For this, we congratulate ourselves. This demonstrates to us the clear intention of the Federal Government that they wish to involve themselves in all sectors of the land, in order to come to know more closely the progress and problems.”

“The well wishers waved goodbye as President Fox got into his helicopter. The was only the third time that a Mexican President has visited a Mennonite Colony. Photo courtesy Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, April 22, 2002, page 6.

“During these days the Mennonite community is celebrating the 80th anniversary of its arrival in this country of which we are proud citizens. We can share with you that with great energy and enthusiasm we always work along with the programs of your regime which are led by you. We are familiar with your methods of working, that every endeavour must be a joint effort of the people and the government. Therefore we do not doubt your support in our endeavours, which advance the development and create work in this country.”

“Various factors, such as uncertain weather and economy, have forced us to industrialize our agricultural production such as corn, beans, milk, feed, etc. Through experience we have gained the knowledge and restructuring, to manage with respect to prices and quality. In our region we have opted for alternative farming methods, which bring better results. We are also planning to erect green houses in order to produce chilies, tomatoes and other products of export quality. In order to achieve this we need good roads. We are thankful for the completion of the highway.” (This is the biggest part of the speech by Johnny Braun. The Braun family operates one of the largest and most modern dairy farms in Mexico with 1500 cows, see Pres., No. 13, page 50).

The Speech.

The women had fun serving the meals. A great effort had been made to serve the 1000 guests with a tasty meal. Greta Loewen and Lena Guenther were delighted to help. Photo by Abram Siemens: Men. Post, May 17, page 26.

After the speech came the lunch. The President gladly ate all the “Kompstborscht”, “Fried Wrenatje,” pancakes, etc. It was easy to visit with the President. He is a simple (that is to say, not an arrogant) person, is what

objects. It seems to me that our beloved Mexico will offer a story of success in this 21rst century. It will be a success because the entire community (all people) will take part in the building of our land.

We come as the government in order to place ourselves at your disposal, in order to support you in everything where we can, and to join with you in your endeavours. This is our duty and our conviction: to work together to build a worthwhile future for our children and our families. I thank-you from the bottom of my heart for the invitation which I treasure dearly.

I conclude by wishing you all the best, and I wish that in the 21rst century, we will achieve all the dreams which we have as a community and as a nation.

May God bless you and “Guten Appetit”.

“For us in Mexico you are a model in work, an example in family life, and a model in morals, which we value highly.” President Fox Lunch.

The following are some of his comments: First of all, many thanks for this wonderful welcome which you have given us. It is a demonstration of your love for Mexico. This is how we understand it. A manifestation of your appreciation of the land of Zacatecas, with which we concur.

We have had the opportunity to come to know the particulars of the development which you as a community have experienced and also, the ways and means by which--on the basis of work and dedication, you have been able to achieve all that you have accomplished.

For us in Mexico you are a model in work, an example in family life, and a model in morals, which we value highly. As President of this wonder-
Johann Braun explained to him the problem that so much cheese is imported and for so very cheaply and often even subsidized by the government. Fox provided good viewpoints to be able to help in the situation, especially regarding cheese imports from New Zealand, which should not take place.

Farewell.

After the meal, President Fox left his table and walked along the corridor under the tent, shaking the hands of numerous men and women. He really took his own time in order to truly greet a good number of people and also children. This can be interpreted that he not only felt their good wishes but that he was also genuinely interested in the Mennonite community.
Memories.

On the morning of April 5, two large trucks with soldiers came into the colony. The soldiers were stationed at various points in the colony as guards. They were respectful and the situation was peaceful. For the older folks this was particularly helpful, so that they would have positive memories of such an opportunity.

The previous time when there were so many soldiers in the community was 27 years ago, in order to deal with the problem of the Agraristen. The Agraristen wanted to take away the land of the colony, only 10 years old at the time. It seemed as if the President [at the time] Etcheveria was not interested in solving the problem. Nonetheless, when the situation became serious the soldiers came and gave the Agraristen a deadline by which to be gone. The time was counted down over the loud speaker: another 30 seconds, still 20, still 10, still 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. At this point the heavy machines [tanks] roared into life, but then the Agraristen left.

This time the loudspeakers were used to seat those in attendance, to announce the arrival of the President, and to broadcast the speeches and singing.

Approval of Visit.

Not everyone approved of the visit to La Honda. While eating dinner, I had the opportunity to speak with a pair of Mexican reporters. I had been told that some Mexicans were not pleased that President Fox had come to a Mennonite colony and not to them.

The reporter from Juan Aldama and Miquel Auza stated that this viewpoint was correct. Some did not like it even now that the Germans had land here. Others are jealous. But they believed that these feeling are not strongly advocated.

When one considers how little time the Mexican Presidents have spent on Mennonite colonies over the past 80 years, it does not appear as if anyone should be jealous. Six or eight hours over 80 years is not very much. Bram Siemens.

Photographs for this article are courtesy of Bram Siemens, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

Presidential Visit.

Today the President of Mexico will be visiting the Mennonites in the La Honda Colony and will be the guest at a public reception. In preparation a large tent was erected on a big open space on the yard of Jakob Giesbrechts. The President of a city brought the tent. During the last three days, the President of Zacatecas came again and again with a helicopter in order to make sure that all the preparations had been made satisfactorily.

Everyone coming to the reception must carry a small identity card. 800 of these have already been handed out, but not nearly everybody has received one yet. Over a thousand visitors are expected as well as very many Mexicans. No one is currently sure about the motive for the visit and people are waiting with anticipation for what is to come. The Mennonites wish to present the President with a petition for the construction of a road in the colony.

The Mennonites as well as several pickups full of Mexicans cleaned the roads and villages by gathering the garbage and sweeping the yards, etc. The village Schulzen (mayors) had announced that the women should prepare meals. The head women in charge were Mrs. Johann Braun, Mrs. Abram Braun and Mrs. Jakob Giesbrecht. Now they were divided into groups and each one prepared the food: potatoes with “Schmauntfatt”, baked “Schinkenfleisch”, “Komstborscht”, fried “Wrenetje, beef sausage, „Pflaumenmus“, Kringel, Zweiback and very many different sweets. The President of Miguel Auza is also bringing some food.


1990 Presidential Visit to Manitoba Colony

On May 25, 1990, the Mexican President visited the Mennonite Colonies near Cuauhtemoc. This meeting was held in Blumenort, Campo 22, Manitoba Colony. Front, l.-r.: Johan Banman Enns, Vorsteher of the Swift Colony; Fernando Baeza Melendez, Governor of the State of Chihuahua; President of Mexico Carlos Salinas de Gortari; his bodyguard; Heinrich Dyck Fehr, Vorsteher of the Manitoba Colony; Lic. Efren Roberto Romo Chacon President of the Cuauhtemoc Municipality. Rear, l.-r.: Prediger Diedrich Enns, Rosenort; Prediger Isaak Dyck, Rosenort; Prediger Franz Kneeker (presently Ältester of the Manitoba Colony, south end); Prediger Jakob Fehr, Waldheim; Prediger Abram Wiebe, Hamburg and Ältester Franz Banman, Kiefeld (also south end). Photo aus 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, Seite 307/Diese Steine, page 603.
Auction Sale Brings Money.

Auction sale for church brings money. On March 20, 2002, the Manitoba Colony Kleine Gemeinde congregation, held an auction sale where people were able to donate items, which were then auctioned off. Others brought larger items from which half the proceeds were donated to the auction. Quite a few people had turned up and the auction together with the donated food brought in over 20,000 U.S. The money is designated for the construction of the new Kleine Gemeinde worship house in Gnadenwald.

The church is not finished yet, but is already in use. But at the same time, work is rapidly proceeding on it. The benches are not ready yet. In the meantime, the 400-500 regulars in attendance sit on chairs. The loudspeakers are already set up but not yet built in. The song books and other items have been brought over from the old church in Lowe Farm, This church is currently not being used.


Spanish Mennonite Cookbook.

Spanish Mennonite Cookbook appears on the market. The well-known Katharina Rempenning together with various other individuals has compiled a cookbook in which many recipes from the Mennonite kitchen are to be found. But not only recipes of Mennonites, but also other popular recipes from Germany, Switzerland, Russia, Canada, and obviously also from Mexico. Many, when they hear about Mennonite food, think only of the famous cheese and butter of the Mennonites. The cookbook, however, contains much more variety and is divided into 27 parts.


Cheese Factory, Kronsgart.

In spite of the two giant milk processing plants (Campo 70 and Km. 26) which are under construction, many of the smaller traditional cheese factories are still anticipating a good future. The cooperative cheese factory in Kronsgart is too small and is planning to open their new factory in a month. It has the capacity to process 28 tons of milk daily and will be easier to keep clean. To finance the construction they are retaining 10 cents per liter milk; they are currently receiving 24 tons of milk per day..


Visit Our Web Site:

Do you need back copies of Preservings? One solution is to visit our HSHS web site: www.hshs.mb.ca

The web site includes Preservings, Issues No. 1 to 21 (Issues 1-8 are scanned only) of Preservings, Books for Sale, and the 125th Anniversary Booklet Celebrating Our Heritage East Reserve 125 1874-1999, 99 pages. All files are saved as Acrobat PDF files for easy viewing on screen and the ability to do text searching (Note no photographs included for issue No. 8, only script). Adobe Acrobat Reader is required to view these files.

Readers interested in “Books-on-line” can check out Delbert Plett’s, Saints and Sinners, E. K. Francis, Mennonites in Manitoba, and several other selections at www.hshs.mb.ca

Catholic Priests Visit.

“Catholic Priests Learn About Mennonites,” report by Peter Rempel. On April 23, 2002, 196 Catholic priests from Chihuahua and Torreon State visited the Mennonites in the Manitoba Colony, after their presentations in the Rotary Club in Cuauhtemoc. After the speeches of the priests, David Friesen gave a enthusiastic presentation regarding who we Mennonites are and what we believe. After this, the priests boarded five buses to drive to various places representing the lifestyle of the Mennonites, such as the Mennonite Cultural Center (Museum) at Km. 10, where the workers and the committee showed and explained to them various things about their customs and traditions regarding the exhibited items. The tour also included the cheese factory and the Old Colony worship house in Gnadenfeld. Many Ohms received the guests in the worship house as well as in the church at Blumenau, where the ministers greeted them, a student group sang a number of songs for them, and Rev. David Friesen answered their interesting questions in a very appropriate manner. They also visited the metal-mechanical factory “Del Norte” at Km. 7.

The priests had taken off their priestly robes for the occasion and were travelling in civilian clothes.

Why the interest?

Why are the Catholic Priests interested in the Mennonites? The Catholic Bishop Guillermo Lopez Soto of Cuauhtemoc was present at the dedication of the Cultural Center on November 23, 2001, and again when Municipal President Israel Beltran Montes invited the pioneers to an anniversary party on March 8. During these occasions the priests had perceived that the Mennonites regarded themselves as a small part of the world-wide Christendom and not as the only people of God. Thus is came about that they visited the Mennonites as part of their VI priest conference in order to learn something more about them. Certainly the Mennonites and the Catholic priests have come to learn and understand each other better.


Editor’s Note: It is good to see more active dialogue between Catholics and Mennonites who have much in common regarding their core beliefs and teachings. Certainly Mennonites have nothing to fear from Catholics as they do from some so-called Evangelicals who are constantly sending agents to attack their communities.
Credit Union Meeting.

The UCACSA, the Union de Credito, is getting bigger every year. This is shown by the statistics released at the annual meeting. From December 2000 to December 2001, the capital grew by 28 percent, from almost 27 million to over 34 million pesos. The number of members (UCACSA without savings), grew by 76, from 755 to 831. Credit facilities of almost 285 million pesos and 7.4 million dollars (U.S.) can be given out. In addition the various enterprises are becoming stronger. The insurance department insures much corn, beans, peanuts and cotton fields, and also vehicles. The milk processing plant LANOSA at Km. 26 is being energetically supported as is the project of developing greenhouses, to name a few areas of activity.

Jakob Heide, President, explains the importance of the Credit Union at Cuauhtemoc and its involvement in various projects important to the growth of the Mennonite community. Photo courtesy Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, April 22, 2002, page 3.

Many members of the UCACSA heeded the invitation to attend the Annual Meeting of the Credit Union. It is very important from a moral as well as legal standpoint that the members attend. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, April 22, 2002, page 31.

LANOSA Produces First Cheese.

LANOSA has produced its first cheese from pasteurized milk. Recently the ad to drink the “Leche de los Campos Mennonitas” because it is sanitary cow milk and therefore the best for health, has been heard regularly over the radio. Over 3000 litres of milk per day are presently being sold. The customers seem satisfied.

However, the milk which is being produced at Km. 26 is still only a preliminary step. They wish to bring the milk on the market in order to make it familiar and to win the confidence of the consumers. Full production will only begin after the building is completed. The construction has started. When completed the building with have an area of over an acre, namely 4300 square meters.

In the meantime, cheese production has also already started. On April 30, 2002, cheese from pasteurized milk was produced for the first time. For the immediate future 1000 litres of milk per day will be made into cheese. The cheese shall be uniform, it will taste like “Chester” cheese.

When using pasteurized milk the cheese can regularly be given the same taste all year round - something very important to many customers. Since this cheese also meets high standards of purity, it is hoped that the market of businesses and restaurants can also be gained, such as Sam’s, Pizza Hut, and others. There are many such businesses who only buy cheese if the factory can provide authentication that it’s cheese meets standards.

If these potential customers can be persuaded to buy the “Queso de los Campos”, then a new market has been created. More milk can thus be sold from out of the villages as the market has expanded. In the future the U.S.A. is also a potential market.

These measures of LANOSA and also the milk production facility at Km. 70, could have significant positive results for the farmers. If through and with these facilities the milk prices can be stabilized and improved, it would also make things easier for the farmers. Since the corn production is always getting more difficult, one could expect that many a corn grower, who is irrigating, would convert to the milk production, i.e. feed production.


Johan Peters, Campo 106, Saved By a Miracle

Johan Peters thought his hour had come after he was stuck underwater in his dump truck. It was a day like any other. He drove with his dump hauling earth out of a dugout, just as he had done many times previous. Jakob Kaethlers had made a dugout filled with water for fish. He now wanted to make another dugout nearby. Peters loaded the earth on the large dump and wanted to dump it to make a dam around the first dugout. As he realigned the truck near the dugout, a piece of ground broke away and the dump toppled into the water.

Peter was stuck in the cabin. One of his pants legs and boots was caught on some levers and shelves. He tried to free himself to no avail. This resulted in the thoughts that this would be his end. He prayed that God might receive him in grace. He swallowed water.

In an instant he was miraculously able to free his foot. The hem of his pants and boot had torn. The window glass had broken. It was simple for him to swim out of the window. He was so tired at first that he sat down on the dump and rested. Then he swam to the shore. It took four hours until the dump had been retrieved from the dugout.

Peters is especially thankful that God had extended his life by such a miracle.


Johan Peters Neufeld, Campo 106, discusses his miraculous escape with Hans Wiebe (right). They are standing underneath Peter’s large Dump.

Four heavy machines had to really exert themselves to pull the dump from the water. They were the excavators of Johan Peters and John Unger, as well as the tractors of Ernie Peters and Hans Wiebe. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, May 6, 2002, page 4.

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 73
**Museum Receives Gift.**

The Museum and Cultural Centre, Km. 10, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, has received a gift of 200,000 Pesos and an interest free loan of an additional 300,000 Pesos, from the insurance division of the Credit Union. 100,000 are to be spent to furnish and decorate the museum gift shop, and the remaining 400,000 for inventory for sale, such as keepsakes and souvenirs. There is a steady stream of visitors and groups coming to the museum, including many from Chihuahua and other States. The State Government is proud of the Museum and always sends them visitors.

The insurance division of the Credit Union is showing a profit since they took in more than what they paid out on crop claims. Such income cannot be paid into private coffers. For this reason the farmers always receive good discounts when they insure their crops and in addition, the division can do some good works such as supporting the museum.

As one official of the Credit Union put it, life does not only consist of the spiritual and the material, but also the cultural, including the language.


**Flemish Painting.**

The Russian Mennonite experience was the single most significant manifestation of the Flemish Mennonite faith. All descendants of the Russian Mennonites have significant genetic roots—35-45 percent—in the Flemish territories of the Spanish Netherlands in the 16th century, today part of modern Belgium. The work of Flemish painters is world renowned and part of the heritage of Russian Mennonites.

Recently a painting by the famous Flemish artist Peter Paul Ruebens (1577-1640), was sold at an auction sale for almost 77 million U.S., the highest price ever paid for a painting.


**New Bridge.**

After years of waiting and political wrangling, the new bridge over the Belize River on the road to Spanish Lookout, Belize, was finally completed and dedicated. Mennonites from the Spanish Lookout Colony assisted by government equipment and material, helped to build the bridge. The construction was commenced in February and within six weeks the bridge was finished. Traders will now have much easier access to Spanish Lookout. It will be easier in turn for the Mennonites to bring their farm produce to market.

In his speech the Belizian Agricultural Minister referred to Spanish Lookout (made up of settlers from Steinbach and Rosenort, Manitoba), as the “Bread Basket” of Belize. “For a long time, the bridge has been a dream and sometimes we have forgotten. And now it has become reality and that was only possible through the financial support of the Government. The bridge will have an impact on the surrounding area, for every minute, a vehicle crosses the bridge.”...

The cost of the bridge was 500,000 Belizian. From *Kurze Nachrichten*, July 5/02, in *Men. Post*, Aug. 2/02, page 12.
Water Preservation

Water Shortage.
Water shortages are affecting the Mennonites in the Cuauhtemoc area just like in most areas in the southern U.S.A. where extensive irrigation is being practised. American farmers are fortunate in that they can always take more water out of rivers flowing into Mexico or divert rivers further to the north. Such options are not available in north-central Mexico and so the Mennonites together with government authorities are starting to investigate ways and means of preserving water. Editor’s Note.

In Chihuahua, many parts of the city only have running water during certain parts of the day, other quarters have somewhat more. In Cuauhtemoc, one can expect to pay a fine, if one washes a car or sidewalk during the day. Why? Because the water supply is rapidly diminishing. The ground water level is rapidly sinking.

The residents of the city have no understanding, that so much water is running away on the fields. In fact, there are even accusatory feelings. Martin Vargas, from the National Commission for Water (Conagua), intimates how people feel: “When you have pumped all the water out of the ground, you may move to Canada and leave us here without water.”

This is exactly what the government wishes to avoid. They would like it if the farmers would be able to farm and that the people in the cities in this area would also have enough water for many generations. But this is not possible if the water consumption remains as high as it is.

Therefore, a solution must be found. There are people who ask: why is the government concerned about the preservation of water. The answer is very simple. No one has the right to take away from future generations the ability to live and work. A committee is to be formed to make suggestions how this can be done [see inset and photo]. Together with this committee Conagua will seek the best ways, how water can be used (for farming, industry, etc.) without crippling these activities....

At a hearing on May 7, 2002, in the Unipro Building at Km. 28, the government was asked whether the farmers could provide over half of the members of the committee, since 75 percent of the wells are in the villages. The answer is to be forthcoming. Farmers are concerned that the water wells in the villages may be more severely restricted than those of the apple growers. The great majority of those in attendance spoke very strongly in support of a decrease in water usage, but this must be implemented fairly and equally.

One farmers suggested that 40 percent less water be used, by fallowing land or by farming it temporarily [without irrigation]. Others suggested planting more beans since they require far less water. At the same time, the government needs to restrict the water usage of the apple growers, and at least, not allow any new wells to be made.

The leaders of the Manitoba and Swift Colonies indicated that the farmers should not wait until the committee is formed, to take action. They recommended that every farmer for himself already take the measures and use as little water as possible. Many farmers could decrease their water usage without making great changes. But in this regard everyone should look at their own possibilities for decreasing water usage and not at the neighbours. The government is looking at the best interest in the people not merely for this year, but for many years.
Cheese Factory, Campo 70.
When the milk prices at present fall so low, many dairy farmers impatiently observe the slow progress of the construction of the cheese factory at Campo 70 (Felsenthal, Ojo de la Yegua, Nord Colony) (see Pres., No. 19, pages 75-76).

The buildings themselves are more or less completed. The walls for the cooling room and a number of other such items still need completion, but this could easily be speeded up, were it not for the fact they were waiting for the machinery. Why are the machines not there?

Delays.
Johann Giesbrecht explained why the delivery had been delayed for so long. The pasteurization machine, the tower for pressing cheese, and the walls [of the cooler] and other apparatus were purchased from the company GEA from Germany, who wanted to be secure regarding payment. They required a letter of credit from the bank. The money was deposited into an account in the bank long ago already and can not be used for any other purpose. Sometime ago already the bank sent a letter of credit, but it was not written “good enough”. The bank had again sent a letter, which supposedly should be adequately worded.

If the letter of credit is acceptable to GEA, they immediately want to send the machinery by ship. As soon as the machines arrive here, they are to be assembled by factory engineers together with local workers. This could take a further four months. It could very easily take another half-a-year before the cheese factory is in operation.

Production.
At first the plan was to focus on cheese production, and particularly with the product names of the six cheese factories taking part in this project. Nevertheless they will also need to work with other recipes, since they will be working with pasteurized milk. A Mennonite from Canada has already helped with this form of new recipes, and has also promised to come to Mexico in a few weeks to help with the actual production of cheese, once the actual testing and proving of the facility is commenced.

Contact has also been made with cheese distributors, who wish to market the cheese. But the details still need to be worked out, especially the pricing structure and payment plan. It can be expected that cheese made from pasteurized milk will be more expensive than other cheese.

Km. 26 Cheese Factory.
Construction of the new milk processing plant (LANOSA) at Km. 26 near Rubio started on the morning of April 4, 2002. Representatives of the milk committee, the Governments of Cuauhtemoc and Chihuahua and the Credit Union, and others more, placed a stone with a plaque. Present were approximately half of the shareholders who listened to the various committee reports and other speeches. Later Rev. Jakob Heide led the dedication prayer in German and Spanish. Finally everyone was able to eat meat and pizza and discuss their views about the milk processing plant with friends. By-laws were approved which set protocols regarding the quality of milk and various rules regarding the sale of shares.

Facts: The shares which had a value of 6000 pesos, now cost 66,000; Since March 20 over 80,000 liters of milk have been sold; the goal is to achieve sales of 15,000 liters per day by the end of the year. The expenditure (investment) for the first phase of the project consists of 30 million pesos. The capacity of the facility will be for 80,000 liters of milk daily.


Photo Captions

The buildings of the new cheese factory at Campo 70 (Felsenthal, Ojo de la Yegua, Nord Colony) are almost completed. The inner walls of the cooler still need to be completed. The machinery from Germany has arrived and installation is almost complete. Photo Heinrich Loewen/Men. Post, Nov. 1, 2002, page 5.

Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau
Cuauhtemoc April 12, 2002. Photo courtesy the Government. He made his remarks after a
Cheese Factory, Campo 70 as well as the assistance received from
76 - Preservings No. 21, December, 2002
11 years of Instruction.

English teachers from various states of the U.S.A. have again come to Mexico this summer in order to teach English in the Manitoba and Swift Colonies. Eleven years ago, Rubi Yoder started with the instruction. In the meantime, she has died of cancer, but the work that she has started continues. Sarah Overholt from Florida is already here for the 10th summer and she still enjoys teaching others. There is a lot of singing in order to create a good atmosphere and in order to use the English. 200 students from the Manitoba Colony take part in the instruction, 85 in the mornings and the rest in the evenings. They are instructed by five [women] teachers. There are four [women] teachers in the Swift Colony.


Schools close for Holidays.

During these days with the conclusion of classes in the villages, many schools are also organizing something quite special, a retreat and picnic in the mountains (or even somewhere else). That is nothing new, but what is always becoming more the custom these last years, is that these events are being transformed into family celebrations.

Perhaps it started in Gnadenthal a number of years ago, when the teacher planted the idea that if at all possible the parents should assume responsibility for a school retreat. They then rented two buses with which the students and youths drove to Sainapuchic in the mountains, and the parents followed with their own vehicles.

For such celebrations which have now also occurred in other villages, the parents provide for the food, etc. The women and children, in particular, are happy for such a family/village celebration. Not only do they enjoy God’s nature, but also sing group songs and have a good time.

In some villages such a celebration is not so easily possible and then they find other ways with which to celebrate. e.g. they have a huge “Pizza Party” to celebrate the finishing of the school year. The children enjoy themselves and demonstrate their appetite.

In similar ways most schools have a joyous “fest” by one means or another. The teachers with their children from one school in Lowe Farm drove to the Old Folks’ Home, Straßburg Plaza, among other things, in order to sing a Plaut-Dietsch Easter song (which the teachers had composed) and to recite a High German Easter poem. It was a blessing for the school and the listeners.


Prison Visit.

The Amish and Old Colony teachers also try to assist in other areas of the local community. On July 24, 2002, they took part in a prison visitation at Cereso, where they served a vaspa to the prisoners and sang some songs. Later they also distributed some tracts. Just like in Canada, there are also some prisoners of Mennonite background. The prison visit was organized by Sarah Giesbrecht of MCC. Photo: Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, July 29, 2002, page 3.
Eighty Years in Mexico - Pioneers Honoured

Montes praised the Mennonites for their economic achievements, and declared that the entire region has benefited from their hard work and that because of them Cuauhtemoc has grown to become the third largest city in Chihuahua State.

“Mexico offered you the opportunity but you had to work for it,” he continued. “Continue the way I always said over the radio, ‘Auli Dietschi oppstonen en malkjen.’”

He referred also to the concerns of the Mennonites for the well-being of the Governor (see Pres., No. 19, page 75-76) after he was shot [in an assassination attempt] on January 17, 2001.

In his address, the Governor mentioned what the 90 year-old Abram Ens al ways said, “We must not fall back and give up.” Martinez quoted.

He related how as small boys, he and his friends had seen the huge horses and other animals being unloaded out of the railway cars and they thought, the circus had come to town.

They always found the Mennonites to be somewhat different but loved them anyway, and acknowledged their enormous contribution to Mexico’s development. Through the Mennonites, he said, Chihuahua had gained its cattle industry, land farming, industry and culture.

“Continue to be a good model for Chihuahua,” he declared and said, “I love you.”

Several Mennonites also gave speeches but the dignitaries had already arrived late and the time was short. The program concluded with singing the song, “Nun danket alle Gott.” Everyone a djourneyed to the Old Folks Home to eat dinner. Thereafter the dignitaries drove to Km. 26 where the Governor dedicated the first building where milk will be gathered and cheese produced temporarily.

The general meeting and the evening meal together with interesting presentations ended an important day in the Mennonite story for Mexico.

The coloured certificates of acknowledgement which had been prepared by the Mayor were beautiful. 146 such certificates had been made according to the report of the number of pioneers born in Canada and who were still living. Many Mennonites took up the responsibility to compile such a list and to forward it to the Mayor. The Mayor personally presented certificates to six pioneers; the remainder will receive their’s by different ways and means. These documents were highly treasured by those who received them. They were secured and photocopied in order to send copies to relatives, etc.

It had been possible for the dignitaries to extend an honour to the first Mennonite settlers on Mexican ground. After her experience on March 8, 2002, one lady said, “Daut haud eena nich jedoch, daut dee Gouverneea enem noch soo en leren hild.”


“Gondach Brodasch, Gondach Sestasch.”

“Oppstonen en malkjen gonen!”

With these words the Mayor Israel Beltran Montes [of the Municipality of Cuauhtemoc] greeted the Mennonite pioneers in Mexico at the Mennonite Museum, Cuauhtemoc, March 8, 2002. The event marked the 80th anniversary of the Mennonite settlement in the Cuauhtemoc region.

With conviction he believed that God blesses those who follow in his footsteps. There is certainly a blessing, for being obedient to God.

The Government gives the Mennonites the full recognition, that they had contributed a great portion of the development of this region. At first they build hammermills and threshing machines, now they build highway transport trailers and what all else will come forth from the large shops of the factories in the villages?

Through the zeal and hard work of the Mennonites, the Bustillos Valley has become one of the most significant regions of Chihuahua State for milk production and the raising of grains, especially corn and oats, but also wheat, barley, and also beans.

Articles

Ältester Peter S. Wiebe 1888-1970: Servant of God

“Ältester Peter S. Wiebe 1888-1970 and Justina Dueck Wiebe (1896-1967), Chortitz, Osterwick, and Eigengrund, East Reserve, Manitoba - Servants of God,” by daughter Justina Wiebe Funk, Box 112, New Bothwell, Manitoba, R0A 1C0 and Delbert Plett, Box 160, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Family Background.

Peter S. Wiebe, was born in Chortitz, Manitoba (now sometimes called Randolph) to Johann Wiebe (1853-1909) and Maria (Sawatzky) Wiebe. The parents of Johann Wiebe were Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) and Elisabeth Friesen (1828-76) (see Pres., No. 6, pages 1-14, and Diese Steine, pages 534-554).

Johann and Barbara established their Wirtschaft immediately to the east of the Chortitzer worship house which is still standing there. (According to the map prepared by Orlando Hibbert, the Heinrich Klippenstein family lived between the Wiebes and the church - see Pres., No. 6, page 3). They operated a farm and raised a big family.

According to the Bergthal Brandordnung, Johann Wiebe had premises (house-barn) valued at $200, furniture $50. On January 9, 1881, the coverage on the premises was increased by $120 and furniture by $30 indicating they may have built a new house. On April 21, 1882, the furniture was increased by a further $40, the house by $50 and a plow by $15, mower at $50, rake $25. A further increase of $30 to the buildings was recorded on April 26, 1884, wagon $60. Total coverage was $670.

Johann D. Wiebe was elected as a deacon of the Chortitzer Gemeinde on December 15, 1881, and served the office faithfully until his death.

Barbara died on August 4, 1884.

February 3, 1885, Johann married for the second time to Maria Sawatzky (b. 1866), daughter of Peter Sawatzky (1837- ) and Margaretha Friesen (1835-72), BGB C7, who emigrated from Russia in 1875 and settled in Grünthal, East Reserve, where they are listed in the 1881 census (BGB, p. 345). Maria’s brother Peter F. Sawatzky, wrote his memoirs which were published in the 60-jährige Gedenkfeier (Steinbach, 1936), pages 16-17, and again in Pres., No. 8, Part One, page 41.

Johann and Maria had 12 children, but several died young. Maria was Peter S. Wiebe’s mother.

Ohm Johann Wiebe was actively involved in the work of the Gemeinde. Ältester David Stoesz has recorded that on November 3, 1883, the two men boarded the train in Niverville for a journey of spiritual visitation in the West Reserve. Here they visited at the home of Johann’s uncle, Ohm Heinrich Wiebe, Edenburg (later counted among the first leaders of the Sommerfeld Gemeinde). According to son Jakob Wiebe, his father Gerhard Wiebe transferred his farm to sons Jakob and Diedrich and then “...built a house for himself on his son Johann’s yard” (Pres., No. 6, page 11). As the retired Ältester of the Bergthaler people on the West and East Reserves, in Mountain Lake and Fargo, U.S.A., and Hague, Saskatchewan, Gerhard Wiebe still received many visitors from afar, which must have been interesting for Johann and his family.

January 1, 1891, Rev. Abr. Klassen came to Franz Duecks in Schantzenfeld by train. He stayed at the home of Ältester David Stoesz in Bergthal until January 4, when Ohm Johann Wiebe took him back to Franz Duecks on his return journey to the West Reserve. March 2, 1891, Johann Wiebe and Ohm Peter Toews were asked by Ältester Stoesz to accompany him on a journey to the West Reserve to investigate reports of disunity regarding the schools and divisions among the people. This meeting resulted in the reorganization of the West Reserve Bergthaler as the Sommerfeld Gemeinde.

December 31, 1905, Ohm Heinrich Friesen, Hochfeld, recorded that he stopped in at the home of Johann Wiebe in Chortitz, where he met Martin Klassen from Herbert, Saskatchewan. On November 22, 1908, Friesen recorded that “Johann Wiebe was in church for the first time since a long illness. He was not completely re-

Johann D. Wiebe coffin picture 1910. L.-r,: Sons Heinrich, Jakob; Mrs. Johann D. Wiebe, daughters Barbara and Elisabeth. Elisabeth was partially crippled. The two young men in the rear and the young woman are unidentified. This photo was previously published in Pres., No. 7, page 9.
Ohm Johann Wiebe passed away on January 9, 1909. Heinrich Friesen recorded that “[he]...went for the night to Johann Wiebes but Ohm Johann Wiebe had died Saturday at 3:00 in the afternoon on the 9th, so the house was in mourning...[Jan. 13, 1909] Ohm Johann Wiebe was buried at age 56 years. Minister for 27 years. The funeral was in the church.”

According to the 1910 tax roll, Johann Wiebe owned the SW2-7-5E at the time of his death as well as the SW10 and NW2-7-5E together with brother Dietrich.

Johann’s wife, Maria Wiebe, was a widow until August 17, 1919, when she married Heinrich Peters. They lived in their premises in Chortitz until they emigrated to Paraguay, settling in the Menno Colony in the Chaco.

**The Early Years.**

Peter S. Wiebe was small of stature - only five feet, three inches tall. He was sometimes referred to as “Kleina” Peta S. Wiebe. He had a trim build and in his older years weighed about 170 pounds. As a young man, Peter S. Wiebe enjoyed music and played a fiddle. He was baptised upon the confession of his faith on May 31, 1909, and received into the Chortitzer Gemeinde.

Peter S. Wiebe married Justina Dyck on November 26, 1916, daughter of Abram Dyck (b. 1870) and Louise Wisznewki (1870-1962) (Note One) from Eigengrund (see *Pres., No. 16, page 84). Peter S. Wiebe went to Winnipeg to buy his bride a bracelet as a wedding gift. She also received a locket and a ring—he was a romantic man. As first the young couple lived with his parents in Chortitz.

Peter S. Wiebe served his community as teacher in the church confessional school for several years in Chortitz. During this time in Chortitz, two boys were born--Abram and Johann.

---

*Housebarn dwelling of Peter S. Wiebe’s parents, Johann Wiebes, in Chortitz, view to the west. The structure is a beautiful example of the medieval Lower Saxon/Frisian architecture preserved by the Flemish Mennonites as they migrated from Flanders and Holland to Friesland and across northern Europe to Prussia, to southern Russia in the Black Sea region, and then, finally to the prairies of southern Manitoba.*

*Housebarn dwelling of Peter S. Wiebe’s parents, Johann Wiebes, in Chortitz, view to the east. One of the rare photographs depicting the architecture of the early Mennonite pioneers who built up southern Manitoba. A sturdy, functional but austere Wirtschaft, presumably built in the 1880s.*
By 1920 the Peter S. Wiebe family had moved to Bergthal where daughter Justina was born. He was the teacher there for about a year.

Every winter for eight years P. S. Wiebe was a teacher in the confessional school system—seven winters in Chortitz and one year in Bergthal. During the summer months he would help on the farm. One of his last school children passed away only a year ago: Mrs. Margaret Bartel, nee Margaret Rempel, daughter of Johann Rempel from Chortitz.

The fact that a teaching career led to the highest office of Ältester (Bishop), demonstrates how highly Christian nurture and the education of the young was held in the conservative Mennonite culture. A similar career path had also vaulted Ältester David Stoesz, Bergthal, to the Ältestership: as a young man he had taught in the village of Friedrichsthal, Bergthal Colony in Russia.

Osterwick.

In 1921 the P. S. Wiebe family moved to the Osterwick area, a mile west and half-a-mile south of the New Bothwell School. They lived here on a rented farm. Four daughters (Maria, Elizabeth, Helena and Barbara) and two boys (Peter and William) were born here.

While living in Osterwick the Peter S. Wiebes devoted themselves to farming. They had a mixed farm with some cows, a few pigs and some chickens.

Emigration, 1926-27.

Peter S. Wiebe’s mother and stepfather Heinrich Peters and brother Jakob and sister Elisabeth lived in Chortitz and farmed there. They emigrated to Paraguay, travelling with the third immigration party, arriving in Puerto Casado on January 24, 1927. They emigrated together with three of her children: Heinrich, married to Agatha Sawatzky, Jakob (later married to Susanna Froese), and sister Margaretha, married to Aron Heinrichs. Sister Elisabeth was somewhat crippled and remained.

Peter S. Wiebe’s half-brother Johann P. Wiebe married but his wife and children died, and subsequently he sometimes stayed at Peter S. Wiebe’s place. Peter S. Wiebe’s half-sister Tina, Mrs. Jacob Thiessen, lived in Moose Jaw. Only one of her children is still living: Betty, the youngest. Another daughter Tina (Vera), the oldest, died Dec. 5, 2000 at age 90.

Auditor, 1928.

The ministerial journals of neighbour and fellow clergyman Johann Schroeder (1870-1956), of Ebenfeld (later Chortitz), covering the years 1922-1955, are a valuable resource for the study of the Chortitzer Gemeinde of the East Reserve (Note Two).

Rev. Schroeder has record of a brotherhood meeting of December 27, 1929, where Peter S. Wiebe and Cornelius W. Friesen were elected as auditors for the Waisenamt financial statements. Wiebe received 124 votes and Friesen 65 votes.

On January 31, 1929, Rev. Schroeder recorded that “All the Ohms attended the ministerial at our place: Rev. H. Doerksen, Rev. P. K. Toews, Rev. Peter F. Wiebe and Rev. A. P. Schroeder and in addition the Paraguayan Mr. Diedrich Toews, Jacob W. Harder, Cor. P. Funk and Joh. K. Klassen and others. Cor. W. Friesen, Kronthal, Pet. S. Wiebe, Osterwick, and Jacob B. Peters, Ebenfeld, Jacob W. Peters, Vollwerk, also Jac. G. Giesbrecht, Burwalde, came here.”

Eigengrund, 1930.

In March of 1930 Peter S. Wiebe bought the farm of Jakob Dycks in the Eigengrund area, NE26-6-5E. Jakob Dyck was the brother to Mrs. Peter S. Wiebe’s father, Abram Dyck (for photo, see Pres., No. 16, page 84), who also lived in Eigengrund, on the adjoining SE35-6-5E. A son (Franz) and a daughter (Eva) were born here.

Ca. 1903. L.-r., Cousin Peter F. Wiebe, Chortitz (later minister), Peter S. Wiebe, and Abram Klippenstein (father-in-law to Peter E. Penner formerly New Bothwell). All photos for this article except as noted are courtesy of Justina Wiebe Funk, Box 112, New Bothwell, Manitoba, R0A 1C0.

Peter S. Wiebe’s mother Maria Sawatzky Wiebe and her second husband Heinrich Peters, with her son Jakob and daughter Elisabeth Wiebe. They moved to Paraguay with the third immigration party arriving in Puerto Casado on January 24, 1927. Note the stylish shoes worn by Elisabeth. She was somewhat crippled being hunchbacked.
They had to struggle with drought and even grasshoppers one year.

Interregnum, 1927-1931.

The Chortitzer Gemeinde functioned without an Ältester after the departure of Martin C. Friesen with the sixth group of emigrants on August 23, 1927. The Sommerfelder on the West Reserve and the Chortitzer on the East Reserve were sister Gemeinden, with routine church transfers between members. In case of a vacancy, the Ältester of the sister Gemeinde automatically served both Gemeinden with communion, baptisms, elections, ordinations, etc.

The journals of Rev. Johann Schroeder indicate that the Chortitzer Gemeinde functioned relatively smoothly during this period. The ministerial met regularly, the poor and fatherless were cared for; church institutions such as the Waisenamt, Brandordnung, and Armenkasse, continued in their prescribed roles led by capable and resourceful leaders. It appears that Rev. Heinrich Doerksen, Schönthal, may have acted as interim leader as the Schroeder journals reveal he chaired at least some of the brotherhood meetings during this time.

Ministerial Election, 1930.

Peter S. Wiebe was a spiritual man and served in his church and community from an early age. He as well as Cornelius W. Friesen, Kronthal, were appointed as song leaders (Vorsänger) for the Chortitzer Gemeinde at a ministerial meeting held on August 28, 1930.

On August 28, 1930, Peter S. Wiebe was elected as a minister of the Chortitzer Gemeinde with 81 votes. C. W. Friesen was elected at the same meeting with 79 votes.

P. S. Wiebe and Cornelius W. Friesen were ordained as ministers in the vineyard of the Lord in the Chortitz worship house after a communion service held on October 28, 1930 attended by 280 communicants. In his “Antritts Predigt” Peter S. Wiebe has recorded that the election and ordination were conducted by the Sommerfelder Ältester Heinrich Friesen. In attendance were the Chortitzer Ohms: Heinrich Doerksen, Schönthal, Johann Schroeder, Chortitz, Peter K. Toews, Grünthal, Peter F. Wiebe, Reinland, and deacon Abram Schroeder, Chortitz. Also in attendance were Rev. Peter A. Toews, Rosenfeld, and B. Neufeld, from the West Reserve.

Antritts Predigt, Nov. 16, 1930.

Peter S. Wiebe presented his first sermon on November 16 and C. W. Friesen one week later. The first sermon of a minister was referred to as the “Antritts Predigt.” P.S. Wiebe chose an appropriate text from Matthew 20:1-7, the parable of the workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

The tone of P. S. Wiebe’s ministry is evident from his opening prayer: “May the grace of God and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, be bestowed upon this worthy assembly, which is my prayer today in my weakness for the first time.”

He opened his introductory sermon with some personal comments. He confessed that in his youth he had read voraciously and by his last school year had known almost the entire Bible by memory.

The sermon is an excellent exposition of Scripture in the Gospel-centric tradition. The sermon is also striking for its cogent appeal to the hearts of the listeners through Rev. Wiebe’s personal confession and testimony of chastisement, his spiritual journey in discipleship, and his inward struggle as he learned to experience the love, grace and boundless mercy of God. The sermon may well explain, at least in part, why Rev. Wiebe would be elected as Ältester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde less than a year later.

Ministerial Duties.

The journals of Joh. Schroeder illustrate the energy and devotion with which the two new servants in the vineyard of the Lord, P. S. Wiebe and C. W. Friesen, entered their service.

Two days after his maiden sermon, P. S. Wiebe attended his first ministerial meeting at the home of Rev. Joh. Schroeder in Ebenfeld. “In addition to the old Ohms there were the newly elected Predigers C. W. Friesen and P. S. Wiebe, the chair of the Brandordnung—Joh. Doerksen and Jak. B. Peters, the Waisenamt officials—H. Klippenstein and Jakob Enns, and Jak. F. Giesbrecht.”

On November 4, 1930, P. S. Wiebe attended a joint Sommerfeld and Chortitz ministerial meeting at the home of Ältester Heinrich Friesen in Sommerfeld, West Reserve.

On Nov. 9, 1930, P. S. Friesen and C. W. Friesen attended at the home of Joh. Schroeder regarding the church calendars (Kirchen=Tabelle).


Ministerial meeting March 26, 1931 at A. Schroeders. Joh. Schroeder and P.S. Wiebe attended. Rev. H. Doerksen had gone to Winnipeg and P. F. Wiebe was absent due to sickness.


April 6, 1931. Ministerial meeting at A. Schroeders. The Waisenamt officials H.G. Klippenstein and Jakob Enns were present. Of the ministers, only P.S. Wiebe had come. “In some cases, sickness is the reason.”

The pastoral work included frequent home visitations: June 14, 1931. Joh Schroeder recorded that Gerhard Schroeder, he and Jakob B. Peters visited the old H. Harder, where they met Rev. and Mrs. P.S. Wiebe. P.S. Wiebe also visited Rev. Joh. Schroeder a number of times from the time of his election as minister until becoming Ältester.


August 27, 1931. Ministerial meeting at A. P. Schroeders. Rev. H. Doerksen and Rev. P.F. Wiebe were absent.


Ältester, 1931.

On October 29, 1931, the new Sommerfelder Ältester Peter A. Toews from the West Reserve was called to conduct an Ältester election for the Chortitzer Gemeinde. The call of God fell upon Peter S. Wiebe with 76 votes.

The first meeting of Ohms was held November 5 at the home of Waisenman H. G. Klippenstein. The next ministerial meeting took place at A. P. Schroeders, Chortitz, but Rev. P.F. Wiebe and Rev. C. W. Friesen were missing. On Dec. 30, P. S. Wiebe went to Joh. Schroeders’ and together they went to G. P. Schroeders.


On April 15 he officiated at his first funeral for A. Hamm, Grünthal. He conducted his first baptism May 16, with 33 baptismal can-
under the steady hand of 3223 souls - 1448 members. It seems clear that - 2110 souls, 1932 - 2450 souls, and in 1944, 

According to an obituary, Louise Wiebe (1875-1962), parents of Mrs. Peter S. Wiebe, nee Auguste Jung, du kannst nich moel dien nohme schrieve? and stable leadership, his denomination was reporting slow but healthy growth.

War Years, 1939-45.

ältester P. S. Wiebe played an important role in the alternative service program negotiated by the conservative Mennonites in Western Canada with the Dominion Government. The leaders of the various Gemeinden formed an ältesten Committee regarding alternative service. It was said that P. S. Wiebe expressed himself freely at these meetings, and that the participants were often amazed at the depth and insight of his Biblical knowledge. At a meeting of Mennonite ministers on January 24, 1941, P. S. Wiebe moved adoption of the proposal to send another delegation to Ottawa which was unanimously adopted by the conference (D. P. Reimer, Erfahrungen der Mennoniten...währen des zweiten Weltkrieges, page 96).

May 4, 1942, ältester Wiebe proposed another delegation to Ottawa, again accepted unanimously (D. P. Reimer, page 120). At a meeting of October 27, 1942, ältester Wiebe reported on conditions at a work camp in B. C. which he had personally inspected. With most of the important organizational work done and the end of the war in sight, Rev. Peter F. Wiebe had replaced ältester P. S. Wiebe on the ältesten-Committee by the meeting of July 24, 1945.

Saturday Schools.

ältester P. S. Wiebe was also active in the area of education. During the war years, the Mennonites were not allowed to conduct the German religious instruction as they had previously—although the Rocky and Mitchell districts apparently somehow managed to maintain some instruction. The Chortitzer response was to organize Saturday schools so that the students could be taught more about Jesus and their Christian faith. The Cornelius Blatz boys, neighbours across the road in Eigengrund, attended the Saturday school conducted by the ältester in the Wiebe home. Dick remembers attending this school in 1939 or ’40.

No German instruction was allowed in the Twin Creek school, the school district where the Peter S. Kehler family lived. One Saturday in 1943 son Bill B. Kehler was visiting his cousins Peter and Andy Blatz in Chortitz. Together with them he attended the Saturday school where ältester Wiebe was the teacher. Bill recalls how the Bishop asked him his name when he entered the school. He replied, “Wilhelm”. The Ältester then wrote the name on the blackboard, “Wilhelm” but in Gothic letters and asked Bill if he could read it.

Of course, since Bill had received no teaching in German nor in Gothic letters he was not able to do so. The Ältester had commented: “Waut Jung, du kannst nich moel dien nohme schrieve?” This is a Saturday morning that Bill always remembered.

Smoking, 1940.

Many old-timers recall that ältester Peter S. Wiebe was a smoker as was common practice among Evangelical, Mennonite, Catholic and Orthodox clergy at the time. Among reform groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde and Old Colony (Reinländer) Mennonites the practice was preached against, although only the aesthetic Kleine Gemeinde made avoidance of smoking a boundary measure for membership.

In about 1940 P.S. Wiebe came to a different conviction about the practice of smoking and henceforth taught against it. Changes were made to the Chortitzer Ordnung so that smoking was preached against and people were encouraged not the smoke on the church premises nor even on the way to and from church.

ältester P. S. Wiebe was so convicted against the practice he wrote a small booklet entitled, “Warum das Rauchen Suende ist. Im Licht der Bible,” (n.p., n.d.), 12 pages.

“Even though smoking may appear quite harmless,” he writes, “it has arisen wholly out of human desire and has become an addiction” (page 1). He quotes the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1-2, for believers “to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God...” And Ephesians 4:22, “to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” He opened that smoking tobacco “...was an evil,...[and] de-filed the user” as something unclean. He compared the habit of smoking to slavery.

The booklet would make an excellent “tract” for any church or denomination dealing with the issue of smoking. The work displays ältester Wiebe’s sound Biblical exposition. It portrays again his openness and rugged spiritual character. It must have taken a great deal of courage to overcome personal humiliation to speak out on the issue given that he himself had been addicted to tobacco for so many years.
Emigration, 1948.

The turmoil of WWII had barely settled down when a second emigration movement swept through the Chortitzer Gemeinde in 1948. This time around 750 Chortitzers moved to East Paraguay establishing the Berghthal Colony. This was a loss of almost a quarter of the entire Gemeinde. Again Altester Wiebe achieved the seemingly impossible of keeping the denomination united and at the same time, supporting those who were leaving in Christian love and nurture.

Profession of Faith.

As the Altester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde, P. S. Wiebe was in charge of the instruction of the youths who felt the call to follow Christ and wanted to affirm their commitment by joining the Gemeinde. This was accomplished by “Jugend Unterricht” (Youth Classes) where they learned and memorized the Catechism. The articles of the Confession of Faith were read on two Sundays before the annual spring baptismal services. Those ready for this significant step met with the Altester who explained the articles and examined the candidates to make sure they were making a serious commitment and that they understood the teachings of Jesus and the Bible.

Bill B. Kehler, Steinbach, remembers attending the sessions in Chortitz in 1954 when he had made the decision to be baptised and to join the Gemeinde of God. These sessions were held on Sunday afternoon from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Bill was sitting with a bench full of others making their profession of faith. He observed that one of his fellow candidates seemed to be taking the matter carelessly and had not studied and memorized the Catechism and Articles as they were taught.

The Altester examined his pupils by explaining the text and then asking questions. Bill had sort of figured out which question he would be asked to answer when it was his turn. However when the day came the Altester changed the order of the questions and asked the question of the other student instead, who had not known the answer. The Altester then took extra time and foresight to make sure this student also understood the serious nature of the commitment the baptismal candidates were making and that he understood the teachings of the faith.

Anyone with even a passing knowledge of the Mennonite Catechism and Confession of Faith and of the commitment and dedication of Altester Wiebe could never with a straight face make the claim that these youths had not made a genuine commitment to follow Christ.

Ministry.

Peter S. Wiebe wrote all his sermons in German, the language used by his flock for worship services. He sometimes would sit up late in the evening at his writing desk as he compiled his sermon. As was customary they were recorded in sermon books and journals. His sermons are all stored away and form a corps of Gospel-centric teaching which remain to be studied by scholars of the Anabaptist tradition.

They had long services in those days. Peter S. Wiebe often said “I know I can never make the teachings of the Gospel too clear for the people.”

Altester Peter S. Wiebe always wore his “Prediger’s Rock” or minister’s frock which conservative Mennonites ministers all wore while conducting worship services, funerals and weddings. In this manner Peter S. Wiebe endowed the office of Altester with dignity and grace, reflecting the traditions with which God had blessed the Mennonite people.

Excerpts from Peter S. Wiebe’s sermons and journal entries were published in the 1970’s and 1980’s in the Mennonite History Society’s periodical, Mennonite Historical Review. Wiebe wrote on a variety of topics such as the role of women in the church, Mennonite immigration to Canada and the importance of attending Mennonite church services.

Farming.

Daughter Justina Funk has recalled some of the chores and activities on the P. S. Wiebe farm.

Peter S. Wiebe did some carpentry on the farm. When his daughters were still at home he made a small cupboard for them for their tea sets and four drawers where they could put their books into. He helped build a house for daughter Justina and her family in 1944 and also made the kitchen cupboards.

P. S. Wiebe made his own ropes from binder twine and his children always enjoyed helping along with this task.

He also made his own leather, probably from cow hide. It was soaked in acid and left for a while. This softened the leather. The hair that was left was scraped off. The leather was used for fixing the harness. The leather was prepared on a little bench with two boards but higher at one end on which it could be sewn together. He had a “als” that was used to poke holes into the leather. The tread he used was “pickdrouit” and he used two needles to sew like a sewing machine. The two boards were put together with clamps.

The well on the farm was located outside. It was an artesian well running all the time, winter and summer. To cool the milk P. S. Wiebe found time to take care of bees, making homemade honey. For winter the bees were kept upstairs in the house in a dark place. Somehow they survived. The Wiebes had a machine to spin out the honey from the cone.

The Wiebes always had pigs, some for shipping to Winnipeg and some for butchering for themselves. Butchering was started early in the morning and the sausage meat all had to be prepared with a hand grinder (wurst machine). It took all day to butcher three or four big pigs. Three or four neighbour couples would alternate helping each other with the fall butchering.

Farming wasn’t always easy as P. S. Wiebe had no tractor in the early days. That meant feeding the horses and making hay for winter.

P. S. Wiebe had some sheep which he would shear in spring with a shearing scissors. Some of the wool was used for making blankets and some for spinning. After the wool was spun Mrs. Wiebe and her daughters knitted mitts, socks and...
sweaters.

P. S. Wiebe also had a little blacksmith shop. If he had nothing else to do he would make the horseshoes ready or sharpen the knives for the binder. He had open hearth “hieth” where the coals were heated and used to heat the iron for bending and flattening.

Twister, 1937.

In May of 1936 lightning struck the P. S. Wiebe house. A little fire started at the north end of the house. With the neighbours help they managed to put it out. Not much damage was done.

On July 12, 1937, at 12 p.m. midnight, a twister took off the roof of the barn. They had a summer kitchen where they cooked in the summer and that was blown into pieces all over the yard. Across the road where Mrs. Wiebe’s parents lived, their barn was pushed slanted and the summer kitchen stood at the end of the house, pushed there by the twister. But nothing happened to anyone. The twister struck at around 12 o’clock at night. We only noticed what really had happened in the morning. We had help from the neighbours with putting a new roof on the barn and we had lots of boards to clean up, scattered all over the yard.

Word of Life, 1962.

The ministry of Altester Peter S. Wiebe is remarkable for how well he was able to hold the body of Christ together as “one bread and one wine”. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Chortitzer Church during his 31 years as leader, suffered only minor losses of members to other churches and even to the proselytizers of other religious cultures such as dispensationalists and tongue worshippers (Pentecostals), even through some local sectarianists specifically targeted his flock.

There was one significant departure from Chortitzer ranks which occurred at the end of Altester Wiebe’s ministry. During the late 1950s a small group in the Niverville Chortitzer faith community became united to seek a new direction in their church life. They were influenced by members of other Mennonite denominations who had already converted themselves to Protestant Fundamentalism. They conducted Bible studies and services where these teachings were promoted. It is worth noting that historically outside proselytizers have routinely used Bible studies and Bible Schools as an innocent sounding medium whereby they indoctrinated disaffected members of their targeted community with their heresies. Such underhanded tactics have given Bible Schools and Bible Studies a negative connotation for Mennonite leaders over the past century.

Chortitzer historian Gus Dueck, Mitchell, recalls that the secessionist group in Niverville wanted more of what they called “missions” and more activities for the children. They placed their trust on the conversion experience (as opposed to the Timothy model of coming to faith) and promoted the manmade doctrines of conversionism, assurance of salvation, etc.

Bishop Wiebe was open to consider their views to some extent, but he also had to consider the views of the majority of the Gemeinde who were earnestly committed to Biblical teachings and to salvation through obedience to the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ. From investigating those who still remember these events, it becomes clear that Altester P. S. Wiebe worked for reconciliation, the wholeness of the body of Christ, and for tolerance. Many years later even his opponents acknowledged that they had been convicted by his conciliatory manner and spiritual openness.

Although P. S. Wiebe was known as being quite strict in church polity, he was gentle and conciliatory when dealing with people one on one. The Altester was not prepared to precipitate a separation, unless absolutely necessary to protect the integrity of the Gemeinde. As a result he was accused by some as being too tolerant and as being incapable of dealing with the dissatisfied group. In the meantime P. S. Wiebe wanted to retire and was replaced as Altester without having the opportunity of resolving the issue with his methods of tolerance and personal persuasion. One of the first measures of Henry K. Schellenberg, who replaced him as Altester, was to separate the Niverville group including Aron Wiebe and Victor Hiebert, son and son-in-law of Chortitzer minister Peter F. Wiebe, who seceded to form what became the Word of Life Church with 125 men, women and children (some 200 members currently). Later the pentecostal Maranatha Church went out of the Word of Life with some 350-400 souls presently.

It was a serious loss for the Chortitzer Gemeinde, but even more so for those who felt they had no choice but to sander themselves from the body of Christ. By separating themselves from their historical heritage called forth by God, and cleaving away from their kinship networks and the rejecting the validity of the faith once received, they truncated their own spirituality and Christian life. Human beings are tremendously impoverished when they allow the integrity of their persona to be traumatized and truncated by Fundamentalist rhetoric and religious sectarianism.
Recollections.

It is recalled that Ältester P. S. Wiebe could be firm in the regulation of the Gemeinde. But he also looked at the bigger picture and had a heart of compassion. Rev. Peter Broesky, who was ordained as a minister by Bishop Wiebe, recalled an incident in Niverville where revival meetings were being held by an outside group and the Chortitzers were asked to participate. His reply was that on the one hand he could not say, “yes” but when he thought of the souls who might be lost if the meetings were not held, he could not say “no” either.

Rev. William Rempel, Niverville, recalls when their daughter was born in 1957, and they had to register her with the Bishop. When Rempel told Bishop Wiebe they had given their daughter the untraditional name “Rhonda Lee”, he had commented, “Na wo je ar uck kjanne wann sie aisch grott es?”

Chortitzer historian Gus Dueck recalled that Bishop P.S. Wiebe had a good sense of humour which sometimes helped him to keep members focused on the important things in life. At a ministerial meeting in Chortitz, a parishioner had apparently complained that some women were wearing slacks while hoeing beets. Bishop Wiebe’s response was the inquire as to how long the individual had studied the situation to come to that conclusion.

Another story is recalled of how one parishioner had come to the Prediger Sitz with a hard accusation against a brother, that he was in the “schenk” too frequently. The Gemeinde and the Ältester, of course, worked with such cases encouraging and admonishing people not to abuse or misuse alcohol. But this was to be done with love and circumcision and not categorical denunciation. Ältester had apparently replied, “Well, he had never yet met this particular individual in the ‘schenk’”. This, of course, would have been impossible as Ältester Wiebe did not frequent such places, but that was exactly his point.

The incidents reveal how Bishop Wiebe’s sense of humour sometimes relieved the tension in difficult situations and allowed the Church of Christ to focus on what was important and not merely on outwardly things. They demonstrate, also, Bishop Wiebe’s ability to maintain conservative orthodoxy and yet, be progressive even in sensitive areas.

Another contemporary affirms that P. S. Wiebe was a strong leader faithfully following the teachings of Christ and the traditions instituted by God. He was a man of deep biblical knowledge and conviction. His sermons divided the mysteries of the Gospel with depth and clarity of exposition. It was understandable that those in the Gemeinde whose thinking was drifting to the more superficial teachings of Evangelical Fundamentalism would not be particularly happy with his Christ-centered approach to faith and practice.

Retirement.

In 1959 Peter S. Wiebe had a stomach operation with good results.

In 1960 the Peter S. Wiebes, with the help of his neighbours, built a new house for themselves. In 1960 the Chortitzer Gemeinde had again been rebuilt with 1520 baptized members and 1647 young adults and children. By 1962 his hearing was not good so that he could not conduct the brotherhood meetings anymore. Consequently an Ältester election was held in May. The votes fell on Rev. Henry K. Schellenberg and he was ordained as Ältester by Peter S. Wiebe on May 6th 1962.

Peter S. Wiebe continued serving as a minister until the end of 1965. By this time he started getting sicker and weaker. On April 29, he was brought to the Steinbach Hospital because of heart and water on the lungs. On May 24, he was transferred to Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Here he underwent a serious operation and was grievously ill. He returned home on July 10, without any strength. Slowly he recovered some strength and eventually was able to serve several times with the Word.

Justina, Mrs. Peter S. Wiebe.

In the evenings Justina, Mrs. Peter S. Wiebe, would often help her husband with his writing work. But she did not like writing letters, such as the many letters which needed to be written to relatives and colleagues in Paraguay which Ältester Wiebe wrote himself. The children sometimes put little letters to their friends in Paraguay into the envelope as well.

Sometimes they had time after supper to sing a few songs. He always said, all the songs in the Gesangbuch were good songs. They were both good singers.

Mrs. Peter S. Wiebe always wore a black dress and a black shawl to church. The older women wore an attractive traditional head covering called the “Haube”. The making of these caps or bonnets was a great art. The bonnets were made with lots of lace and sometimes had small flowers. Daughter Justina Funk recalls that “My Grandmothers both wore caps like that.”

Mrs. Justina Wiebe died on April 30, 1967.

Death, 1970.

A year after the death of his beloved spouse in 1967 the family home was moved close to the road (now Blatz Road), which was more convenient (This house is presently standing along Blatz Road). Son John and daughter Barbara were still living a home with their father. John operated the farm until his death in 1978.

In 1969 Bishop Wiebe’s health improved enough that he could hold one last worship service in Chortitz worship house. In Fall of 1969, his strength started to wane again and he became always weaker. Toward the end he had to be waited on completely. He was patient in his suffering, notwithstanding that he often experienced great pain; but he did not complain.

Peter S. Wiebe died at home March 18, 1970 at 3:30 p.m. during the night. He fell asleep peacefully, surrounded on his deathbed by his loving family.
Auslander Wiebe had suffered for some time from heart trouble and water in the lungs.

Funeral.

The funeral for Ausländer Peter S. Wiebe was held in the two-story worship house in Chortitz on March 21, 1970. The eulogy was presented by Peter S. Wiebe’s successor Ausländer Henry K. Schellenberg. He spoke about the transitory nature of the human experience and the vital importance of having one’s house in order; to be ready to die. He also pointed to the great rewards for those who were faithful to Jesus unto the end.

In conclusion, Ausländer Schellenberg summarized Ausländer Wiebe’s ministry as follows: “For as Ausländer, he had many sorrows and burdens to carry. During the term of his ministry there were many precious times. There were many poor in the Gemeinde who had to be looked after with food and assistance. There was a massive World War during which many problems arose and advice had to be found for the young men who were being conscripted for military service. There was also a large emigration to Paraguay which required much planning and regulation. Indeed, he must often have felt the way Moses did with the children of Israel that he cried out to God for help. But he has also experienced that God always kept his promises, according to the Word as stated in 1 Corinthians 10:13.”

Schellenberg closed with the following characterization from Daniel 12:3: “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars from heaven.”

Note One: According to the 1891 census, Louise Wisniewski (1875-1962) was working at the home of Abram Dycks in Eigengrund as a domestic where she presumably set and married their son Abram Dyck Jr.

Note Two: The readers are indebted to HSHS board member Jake K. Doerksen, Ile des Chense, Manitoba, for his vigilance in redeeming the Johann Schroeder journals at an auction of their collection No. 21, December, 2002 - 87

Brotherhood meetings. He held communion 341 times serving 44113 believers and about 122 times in hospitals and in the homes for sick people. He also conducted 143 funerals and married 57 couples. He brought 1455 souls to Christ through the holy baptism. He ordained 14 preachers into the Chortitzer Gemeinde, the last one in 1963.

Ausländer Peter S. Wiebe led his beloved flock for a total of 31 years, the longest of any spiritual leader of the Chortitzer Gemeinde. During this time, he had to deal with issues both inside and outside the Gemeinde as no previous Ausländer--barring perhaps his grandfather Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) -- had faced. His leadership period encompassed rebuilding the Gemeinde in the aftermath of mass migration, not once but twice--after 1927, and again after 1948. He led his people through the travail of the Depression of the ’30s as well as the stand for nonresistance during the Second World War. During the entire period he faced the pressures of increasing assimilation and conformity with the Christendom of the world.

Ausländer Wiebe provided a firm hand at the rudder and a model of Biblical servanthood. He steered a balance between tradition--seeking to preserve the true and tried ways in which God had led his community, and the necessity to accommodate the world in various aspects, such as more progressive ways in farming, transportation, communications, etc. After three decades, P. S. Wiebe passed the leadership torch over to others, with a Gemeinde strong and confident in itself and in its teachings and leadership, ready to face the challenges of the future. His oversight of the Gemeinde was characterized by progressive orthodoxy in the long standing tradition of his grandfather Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), his great uncle Johann Wiebe (1766-1823), first Ausländer of the Chortitz Colony in Imperial Russia, and his uncle Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96), prominent Ausländer at Elbing-Ellerwald, Polish Prussia, and other blessed and saintly Ohms before them.

Endnotes:

The oldest son Abram lived in Pilot Mount. He was a Co-op fieldman, and spent lots of time away from home. He left at his passing a wife and three boys and she later had a daughter. In February, 1958 he passed away of a heart attack at home. He was only 40 years old. His widow stayed there until school was out and then moved to Arnaud where her parents lived. She was close to her parents and they had a store there. Abram’s wife moved from Arnaud to Winnipeg where she worked for Thiessen Bus Line. She passed away March 19, 1980.


Daughter Justina Wiebe married George Funk and they farmed all their life in New Bothwell. George passed away Dec. 24, 2000. They had just moved to Steinbach on the 2nd of Nov., 2000. He enjoyed the stay here but it was only short. Being sick as he was it was difficult, but now Justina lives in Steinbach as a widow.

Legacy.

Peter S. Wiebe was a hard working man and with his wife’s help they often had long days. Between 1932 and 1955 he conducted 100 resurrection in the peaceful halls of eternity; may he now have found his home in the land of light and peace where many a dark and painful earthly experience will now become clear and understandable. His journey was long and difficult. Now he no longer feels the plagues of this life...Let us all strive for the eternal blessing, through the help of God. For then our night of sorrow will shine as the stars of the firmament, and should death reach into our family, that we might then be lifted into the promised land - there where love does not diminish nor weep. May God grant this in grace.”

Descendants.

The oldest son Abram lived in Pilot Mount. He was a Co-op fieldman, and spent lots of time away from home. He left at his passing a wife and three boys and she later had a daughter. In February, 1958 he passed away of a heart attack at home. He was only 40 years old. His widow stayed there until school was out and then moved to Arnaud where her parents lived. She was close to her parents and they had a store there. Abram’s wife moved from Arnaud to Winnipeg where she worked for Thiessen Bus Line. She passed away March 19, 1980.


Daughter Justina Wiebe married George Funk and they farmed all their life in New Bothwell. George passed away Dec. 24, 2000. They had just moved to Steinbach on the 2nd of Nov., 2000. He enjoyed the stay here but it was only short. Being sick as he was it was difficult, but now Justina lives in Steinbach as a widow.

Legacy.

Peter S. Wiebe was a hard working man and with his wife’s help they often had long days. Between 1932 and 1955 he conducted 100 times serving 44113 believers and about 122 times in hospitals and in the homes for sick people. He also conducted 143 funerals and married 57 couples. He brought 1455 souls to Christ through the holy baptism. He ordained 14 preachers into the Chortitzer Gemeinde, the last one in 1963.

Ausländer Peter S. Wiebe led his beloved flock for a total of 31 years, the longest of any spiritual leader of the Chortitzer Gemeinde. During this time, he had to deal with issues both inside and outside the Gemeinde as no previous Ausländer--barring perhaps his grandfather Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) -- had faced. His leadership period encompassed rebuilding the Gemeinde in the aftermath of mass migration, not once but twice--after 1927, and again after 1948. He led his people through the travail of the Depression of the ’30s as well as the stand for nonresistance during the Second World War. During the entire period he faced the pressures of increasing assimilation and conformity with the Christendom of the world.

Ausländer Wiebe provided a firm hand at the rudder and a model of Biblical servanthood. He steered a balance between tradition--seeking to preserve the true and tried ways in which God had led his community, and the necessity to accommodate the world in various aspects, such as more progressive ways in farming, transportation, communications, etc. After three decades, P. S. Wiebe passed the leadership torch over to others, with a Gemeinde strong and confident in itself and in its teachings and leadership, ready to face the challenges of the future. His oversight of the Gemeinde was characterized by progressive orthodoxy in the long standing tradition of his grandfather Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), his great uncle Johann Wiebe (1766-1823), first Ausländer of the Chortitz Colony in Imperial Russia, and his uncle Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96), prominent Ausländer at Elbing-Ellerwald, Polish Prussia, and other blessed and saintly Ohms before them.
"May the grace of God and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, be bestowed upon this worthy assembly, which in my weakness is my prayer today for the first time."

"Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, I, weak and imperfect being, step out before you today for the first time as one who has been called, through the grace of God, to work in His vineyard."

"But where shall I begin? I who am full of misdeeds and imperfections? For when I gaze back upon the expanse of my life which I have laid behind me, I find nothing good in me; alas, God, grant me strength and wisdom from above, that I might do Your will in all humility and with a joyful heart. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, and grant me the salve of faith, that I might become strong in the spirit, so that at all times I would go on ahead leading in a righteous walk and not falling to the judgement of the scoffers. Oh Lord, help me, Amen. By the will of Jesus and His precious recompense, Amen."

"I wish to present my life’s story before your eyes, my beloved siblings; also that you know how weak I am. And thus I commence with my childhood years, when I was a child and learned to read and I had much pleasure and joy therein. Nor did it take a very long time before I could understand much from out of the Word of God and in my last school years, I learned with such a zeal that I knew almost the entire book of the Bible and I could recite many excellent stories; of the Creation, up to the enslavement of the children of Israel, and from the birth of Christ to the persecution of the Apostles. I learned by memory and always again, when I reread these accounts or repeated them by memories I learned something new again which I had not yet noted before."

"And when I read of the pious men of God, I always wished that someday, I too might become such a pious person, which also—through the grace of God—could have come to pass, if I would not have suppressed the spirit of good; but the evil subsists in the hearts of the youths. Shortly after my school years, I started to read other books and novels, and this frequently occurred in secret as my parents did not allow it, for they knew only too well that this poison would penetrate into my still tender heart, and so I lay helpless, and with twisted limbs before him."

"They were much concerned with regards to their duties as parents of the children given to them as a gift from God. I, however, was obstinate and no longer wanted to be obedient. And in this manner, I grew up into the years of youth and thus also grew the evil within me. I grew cold towards the Word of God—of the manna of the soul, just like the children of Israel in the desert. I suppressed the spirit of good which only too frequently admonished me. The world encompassed me with its desires and I could not stand against it, and thus I fell from one sin into another."

"All the admonition of my parents and the discipline of my father failed in its goal. For all my composing and endeavours were evil. I was like the prodigal son in Luke 15 who, after he had dissipated his inheritance, nourished himself with the husks that the swine did eat. I also dissipated the good which the Heavenly Father had planted in my heart, and nourished my poor soul with the husks of this world."

"Alas, God, when I reflected of how often I had angered You, and You, nonetheless, cared for me until this day with Your boundless love, I was persuaded to call out together with the tax collector, ‘God, be gracious unto me, unworthy sinner’ or when King David laments in his fifty-first Psalm, and says, ‘Be gracious unto me, O God, according to your loving kindness, and blot up my transgressions according to the multitude of your tender mercies. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.‘"

"And so O God, remember not the sins of my youth and my misdeeds. Remember me rather according to your boundless compassion and great goodness. Surely all my sins are fully known to You, and are written in my heart, and when so often I am mindful thereof, I grow anxious and fearful."

"For eight [years] I served during the winter months as school teacher, and during this period the opportunity was great, that I could have directed myself towards God, which I also did, but only with one shoulder—with the other I served the world. Alas, what a poor example have I often given to these small children who were entrusted to me. When I reflect on this, I must be ashamed and close my eyes. How much have I omitted in more and more directing their young hearts unto God and Jesus Christ; for in Mark 10:14, the Lord says ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.’"

"Here I would wish to ask one another of my former pupils, who have since grown up to adulthood, what kind of bad example I may have been? Alas, I wish to profess and also confess these my sins. We frequently read the Word of God and also sang spiritually rich songs, and instructed ourselves therein. This was also good. But how did I conduct myself in associations—and at that in the presence of the children entrusted unto me—where I prattled and participated in everything imaginable. For after all, it is written in the scriptures: Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth,. . .but know thou, that for all these things God will bring you into judgement."

"At that time, I had already entered into a covenant with God through the holy baptism, and before Him and the people, I had promised not knowingly to sin again."

"Behold! That is the fruit of a lazy tree.” [Rev. P. S. Wiebe quoted song no. 612, Gesangbuch] ‘Lord I have misstepped, O, the burden of sin weighs upon me,’ etc. The song concludes, ‘Unto you, I would release my burdens, cast them into the deepest sea, wash me of my sins, make me white as snow, may your spirit of goodness guide me, to remain with your forever, Amen.’"

"Yes, unto You, beloved Jesus Christ, I would also cast my burdens, and confess of all my misdeeds and transgressions, which are such a multitude that I can no longer count them. I must cast down my eyes and cover my mouth; my heart within me nearly fails when I think of how often I have angered the beloved God with my evil, and have trodden upon the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son.”

"Therefore, O Lord, forgive me; yes, forgive me: ‘Rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chastise me in thy hot displeasure.’ You have allowed me to feel your rod. Wherefore, I would thank and preach to the people of your chastening; yes, of your patience, forbearance, and love, with which you have already carried me for 42 years, and what good have I brought forth in this time? What have I done, to earn the right to breath this air? Have I done any great deeds? Or am I somehow so smart, that I am still alive?"

"No, also, no! It is only through the grace of God and His unspeakable grace, which still holds me. Wherefore, I thank you O God, through Jesus Christ, and will praise your goodness.”

"I have put before your eyes—beloved brethren and sisters, and you aged ones who could be my mothers and fathers—something about my fallen nature. But I do not wish to present myself in such a way that it appears as if I am seeking to arouse your sympathy; but rather that you acknowledge how very necessary it is, to support me with your prayers at all times.”

"God, our Shepherd, Who has allowed us to be, and Who has loved us so dearly; Him I have so often angered; He, who already in my years of youth made me aware of the difference between good and evil, I, however, did not want to do any good, and did only evil; He, however, loved me nonetheless, and called to me so often through my conscience, ‘Sinner, where are you?’ I, however, suppressed this voice inside me, and sinned anew. Indeed, I was fully immersed in sin, until one day it was pronounced, ‘Thus far and no further’. Here I shall cast off my proud will, and so I lay helpless, and with twisted limbs before him."

"But God, and His eternal love had compassion over me, and did not allow me to disintegrate in my sins. I confessed my misdeeds and also committed myself to doing better, but unfortunately, soon I had again forgotten.”

"O God, words fail me and my pen hesitates to write down my disobedience. After You have loved me so much and carried me with your patience, in that I always angered You more and more, until I was a completely unfutile tree. I, on the other hand, thought how well I presented myself, in that I created my own deeds which were proud. The proverb may be appropriate, the way it is stated in the song [Gesangbuch] ‘Alas, alas, where is the fruit, which we ’till now have carried? How oft hath God sought in vain? How oft hath He lamented? It pains Him deeply, when His hand, finds leaves instead of fruit.”

"This, my beloved, I have to say with truth, I have experienced. For certainly it says in the scriptures, He who sins against his Saviour, must fall to the bite of the axe. And thus he also laid me in my bed because of my many sins and misdeeds and permitted me to gasp for breath, one time and yet another, so that I bathed myself in sweat, as previously in impurity. I thought I must needs die, and in my desperation, I cried out to the Lord for help and for the
easing of my soul's suffering, for only now did I recognize how diseased my soul was. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour, God helped me and through His mighty hand He humbled me, and again enabled me to be strengthened.”

“But Satan, who scours about like a roaring lion, and seeks to ensnare as many as possible, did not so easily want to yield up this prize either, and crept up to me and said, What do you think, do you expect that you will also yet find grace? You already have so much on your conscience, and so often already you have tried and promised to better yourself, and how much better have you actually become? Surely you know that of yourself you cannot hope to think anything good, much less to actually achieve anything.”

“For the scripture certainly says, For therefore have I awaked you, that I can manifest my might to your: or Jakob I have loved, but I have hated Esau: or thus I have compassion over whom I have compassion, and strengthen him whom I will strengthen. How is it your fault that you are as unfruitful as you are? For God does what He wishes and you cannot change it. Therefore, write yourself off and make an end of everything. In this way, the gates of Hell opened before me, and allowed me to gaze into its depths, so that I stepped back out of fright and shock, and sought for deliverance, and also found it. For God does not want the death of a sinner, rather that everyone be converted and live.”

“But God who alone is wise, allows it to take place, that man for a time falls into temptation, so that he might learn to recognize that of himself he is nothing; and that he can overcome all temptation only through His unspeakable grace, love and mercy, so that he does not forget to praise His great goodness. Wherefore I concur with the poet, [Rev. P. S. Wiebe quotes verses 1, 2, 3 and 4 of song no. 498, Gesangbuch] ‘O, how great is His all-powerful goodness! is there a human whom it does not inspire? Who with hardened heart suppresses gratefulness? No! For to measure the depth of His love, is my eternal quest. Never hath the Lord forsaken me: may my heart also never forget Him.’”

“O, indeed, and how often am I not lacking in the love for my fellowman? How little love I find within myself! is there a human whom it does not inspire? For God does what He wishes and you cannot change it. Therefore, write yourself off and make an end of everything. In this way, the gates of Hell opened before me, and allowed me to gaze into its depths, so that I stepped back out of fright and shock, and sought for deliverance, and also found it. For God does not want the death of a sinner, rather that everyone be converted and live.”

“Now I wish to close with my simple opening remarks and direct myself to the words of the text. But before I proceed to do so, I request of the beloved assembly that they might pray for me, weak as I am; also that the beloved God might grant me strength for the exposition of the words of my text, and that He might enrich the same unto His glory and unto our salvation.”

“And, direct yourselves together with me in prayer, and pray with upright and faithful hearts.”

Now that we have prayed in faith, the Lord will also hear our prayers. And in this firm conviction, I will refer to the words of the text which I have chosen from Matthew chapter 20 verses 1-7, where we read as follows: ‘1. For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man who is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. 2. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. 4. And said unto them; go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive. 5. And he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. 6. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? 7. They said unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.’

“And from these words of our text, I, in my weakness, will venture to expostulate who and of whom these workers are, and where they are to work.”

‘O abundantly gracious Saviour Jesus Christ, with what am I poor one to work in your vineyard? How long have I miserable being also stood idle in the marketplace of this world?’

‘Now you speak, ‘Go ye also unto the vineyard, ‘O, so give me your instruments into my hands, and teach me the right way to use them, whereby I can henceforth be useful unto you, and not like the servant in Luke 19, who laid his pound in a napkin; rather grant me the grace that I might invest it as a true laborer, that I might learn to recognize that of myself he is nothing; and that he can overcome all temptation only through His unspeakable grace, love and mercy, so that he does not forget to praise His great goodness. Wherefore I concur with the poet, [Rev. P. S. Wiebe quotes verses 1, 2, 3 and 4 of song no. 498, Gesangbuch] ‘O, how great is His all-powerful goodness! is there a human whom it does not inspire? Who with hardened heart suppresses gratefulness? No! For to measure the depth of His love, is my eternal quest. Never hath the Lord forsaken me: may my heart also never forget Him.’”

“Here he compared the kingdom of heaven with a vineyard and its owner, who goes out in the morning to engage workers; for just like a natural garden, or any garden, or any other piece of land, cannot bring good fruits unless it is worked: it is the same with the vineyard of the Lord. There must always be workers in the vineyard, from early morning until the evening, namely, until the end of the world. The vineyard is Christendom; those who call themselves the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”

“Here it can be seen that the vineyard of the Lord shall be holy. And in this vineyard, I weak and infirm instrument, who for so long stood idle in the marketplace, am now to work; for I also am only an unfruitful branch and find within myself much that I do not know, how, or in what manner, I am to work on others, and although I feel myself so weak and unworthy for such an important work, the word in Ezekiel, chapter 3, tells me, “And now you child of man, I have placed you as the watchman over the land of Israel, therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: and if thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from the wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”’

“Alas, you faithful Saviour, Lord Jesus, do stand by me, miserable one, in this, such an important work which I am now to begin. Grant unto me your grace, that everything I do and conduct, might be done unto your honour and might be pleasing unto you.”

“It is further stated in our text: ‘And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And said unto them; go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.’”

“Indeed, they went their way, did not hold back, and although they knew how critical the work in the vineyard of the Lord was, for they also knew what remuneration they would receive, and did not procrastinate their dealings with the Lord, rather were willing to work in order to receive their penny.”

“We likewise, should not hold back from working in the vineyard of the Lord, and not long burden ourselves with our flesh and blood, for when I ask myself, whether my flesh and blood, I can think of nothing good, much less achieve anything. And so, I will engage myself for this work. But I must always be in a struggle with my flesh and blood, and have not yet conquered the lusts which live within me, for my flesh strives against the spirit.”

“When I see how highly critical it is, that more workers exert themselves to work on the fallen walls of Zion, which have already become so broken and full of holes, so that the evil one, without any particular effort can easily step over and is already stepping over the walls, my weak flesh also resists and struggles against the spirit. For I perceive that it is not a small matter to stand here at the council to teach others, who know as well as I or even better, what they shall do and avoid. But we know that not all of us can be teachers, and since the lot fell upon me, I do wish to also attempt, in so far as God grants me grace, to instruct you according to His holy will.”

“But you, however, my beloved siblings in the Lord, must know that I am only a very weak and sinful person; therefore, you—who are not ashamed to call yourselves disciples of Christ and you who call upon Him and your Lord and Master, do support me also with your prayers and do not delay yourselves in this, and in this intercession remember your teachers at all times, for they are the ones who shall watch over your souls, as those who shall give account for you, as already mentioned in the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 3.”

“Indeed, it is very necessary that at all times we remember each other in intercession, especially yet in this time, when everything is seemingly falling into confusion; support also the beloved brother who has been called at the same time with me (and I want to say about him, apparently in the third hour), and who has not long engaged himself with his own flesh and blood, rather is willing to lower his shoulder under the burdens of the day, and endure the heat that they might still encounter.”

“For we look sadly and darkly into the future, and know not what may all befall upon us; but we do know that in the last days, frightful things shall come, and how can we think other than that we are in the last days? For in Matthew 24, verse 12, the beloved Saviour says: ‘And because the iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. 14. And
this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come."

"From this we can see that the end is before the door. For the gospel of the kingdom is being preached to all the peoples and the unrighteousness is taking hold and the genuine love, it seems, waxes cold all over the world. For the gospel of the kingdom is being preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come."
Background.

My paternal grandmother, Margaretha Loewen (later Mrs. Jacob B. Toews), was born August 19, 1856 in the village of Lindenau in Molotschna, South Russia. Her parents were David and Anna (Reimer) Loewen, both born in Russia. Margaretha was the oldest of a family of eight that grew to adulthood; four boys and four girls.

Her father, David Loewen, was one of the organizers of the first group to emigrate from Russia to Canada, in 1875. He stayed on in their homeland to help settle the affairs and assist the organizers of the first group to emigrate from Russia to Canada, in 1875.

They settled on the east side of the Red River in Hochstadt, between Grunthal and Kleefeld, in 1875. They had a conversion experience. They often testified of Jesus. Grandpa Jacob had an experience in his youth in Russia. God in Christ, Mennonite through baptism. It was upon the confession of their experiences and of their faith, they became members of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite through baptism. It was their hearts desire to serve the Lord faithfully as long as they lived, to the best of their ability and that others might share in the joy of Christian living.

Pioneer Life.

The first 14 years of their marriage our grandparents lived in a small house on the yard of her parents at Hochstadt, where the first seven of their children were born. For 12 of these years, during the winter, Grandpa Jacob taught school at one end of their home.

In the spring of 1887 their daughter Margaret took sick and much to their sorrow died when she was just seven years old. She had been a very bright and helpful little girl and was very sadly missed, especially by her mother.

Grandpa Jacob B. Toews had a homestead at Blumenort near the Twin Creek school. In 1887 he sold this and bought three quarters of land from Minister Abraham Isaac at Schonau, one mile west and a quarter mile south of what is now Kleefeld.

Here he built a two-story log house. The trees were taken off his own land. Logs were taken to the sawmill owned by father-in-law David Loewen. The logs were levelled on two sides. Spikes made from the tamarack in their swamp were used to pin the logs together (This house was still used in 1950.) They moved into the partially finished house before the winter of 1890-91. Their third daughter Agnes was born here.

Our grandparents experienced true pioneer life. Their land was all covered with bush and coniferous trees. The trees gave themselves to this calling to the best of their knowledge, endurance, with God’s help, as long as she was physically able; in the Grunfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba area till 1910 and in the Swalwell, Alberta area, till approximately 1922.

Around 1900 Mrs. Reichal, a trained midwife from Hungary, immigrated to Steinbach, Manitoba. She became a close friend of Grandma’s. She introduced and taught many treatments in caring for the sick. Some of these home remedies are still good today. Herb medications were common, eg, Chamomile the weed or flower grown wild on our Canadian prairies, was used as a tea; Ergot, the black fungus growth found on seed heads of the rye, was used as medicine for haemorrhage. I remember picking it from the rye bin which Grandma used for medicine. There were no doctors in the near vicinity and Grandma would have on hand, a supply of special medicines used in those days.

Then someone would come to get Grandma she packed up her baby and went. In winter it was told she would wrap her baby in a large square feather pillow to keep it snug and warm, then carry it under her coat for protection from bitter cold, when driving with horses on an open sleigh. Many times Grandma was called away leaving the family to fend for themselves. Grandpa, as his children recalled, would make meals when the girls were too young.

Quite simply, my father related, Grandpa

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 91
would make a stiff noodle or dumpling dough, with eggs, flour and milk. He would cut little chunks with scissors into boiling water and they had their soup. In the evening the children would sit on the fence and drink fresh milk. They always had homemade bread and buns, butter and cream.

One French neighbour, Mr. Mesekot, said Grandma was better than a doctor, “I had to chore after fetching her. When I came in a few hours later, the baby had arrived and was smuggled beside it’s mother. Everything was cleaned up and she was busy in the kitchen getting some food ready her patient and for my supper.” She likely would be taken home for the night but was sure to check a day or two later to see that everything was in order. When going to a very poor home she would often take some necessities she found lacking instead of charging a fee.

Swalwell, 1910.

In 1910 they sold their farm at Kleefeld, Manitoba and moved to Swalwell, Alberta to live in the vicinity of their married children.

She continued her mid-wifery work until she was 65 and had lived in Alberta ten years or more. The local doctor at Swalwell, Dr. Elliott, said she had not spoken much English but they had always understood each other and Grandma had been a dependable and efficient person.

Grandma never learned to speak English well. Her family language was Plaut-Dietsch. She learned some Russian in Russia and picked up some French from their neighbours in Manitoba.

Being very hospitable, at one occasion in Alberta, some neighbours came on the yard and she went out to the wagon to greet the lady and even if you might not particularly enjoy eating sugar cubes you would accept it because it was a gift from her. At Christmas they liked to have all the family home. Each grandchild would receive a little bag of treats; with peanuts, a few candies, an orange or apple. Sometimes there would be a gift: often this was a handkerchief (the young children’s with a nursery rhyme picture on it), older ones might receive a pretty plate.

In the later years Grandpa and Grandma had a little house built for themselves in the garden. They had happy times going visiting in their Ford and entertaining visitors in their home. Grandma would always be ready to make a pot of coffee to serve with zwieback, sugar cubes and maybe some cookies. Besides that Grandma would read and Grandma would knit. She always had lovely flowers.

When Grandpa died in May 1938, Grandma was very lonely. They spent 62 years together. Before Grandpa died at 83 years, he consoled Grandma that she should not grieve for him too much because she would soon follow. During the next year she would always talk of when she would die. A year later she did become sick but she got well. Then she did not talk about dying anymore but did not die. I’m going to live for my children and grandchildren.

Widowhood.

Grandma stayed on living in her little house for some time. She usually had some of her grandchildren stay for night, sometimes young married couples living in. Grandma loved to give; her daughters thought it was useless to give her gifts because she usually saved them to give away. Eventually Grandma moved in with her daughter Susie and Henry L. Reimer in their old farmhouse. She was able to go up the stairs to her bedroom (except when sick) till the day she died.

In 1940 some of her children took a trip to Manitoba by car. She, at 85 years of age, had a keen interest to go back to Manitoba for a visit once more to see old friends. Her family, however, thought her to be too old and frail to take a long rough car ride because, “What if she would suddenly take sick and die?”

To this she remarked that would be okay if I die, “you could just send me home to bury me beside Grandpa.”

Son Henry, however, took her along to Grande Prairie in June 1941. After the rough ride home others wearily stepped out of the car stretching themselves. She stepped out nimbly remarking that she did not feel stiff, she had always known travelling was healthy. Grandma had a bout of pneumonia in 1946 but recovered physically, though mentally it left her to be forgetful and confused.

Recently I was working through a list of Mennonite burial entries in the Catholic church records of Teggenhagen in West Prussia. I came across what I am sure is the burial record of Heinrich Reimer, father of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837). The entry in Latin: “De 9 Septembris sepultus est Henricus Reimer 35 annor: mennonista de Peshagener” (1772). My rough translation is: “Heinrich Reimer 35 year-old Mennonite of Peshagen was buried on September 9 (1772).” This date fits between the birth of Klaas Reimer (Oct. 14, 1770) and the time when his wife, widow Heinrich Reimer is listed in the West Prussian Land Census (winter of 1772/1773). His age puts his birth at around 1737....I will eventually post these Mennonite burial records (1770-1782) on the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society website. They continue the 1757-1770 records I posted some time ago.

Research Memo by Glenn Penner, 306-27 Cardigan St., Guelph, Ont., N1H 7V6. e-mail “penner@chembio.uoguelph.ca”

Editor’s Comments:

Each tantalizing tidbit of information adds important new dimensions to understanding Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Petershagen, Molotschna, reformer and founder of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812. Preservings, No. 13, page 58, reported the conclusion of genealogist Henry Schapansky, that Klaas Reimer’s mother, Aganetha Epp (b. 1745) had married for the second time to Abraham Janzen (1747-1822), the most prominent settler in Petershagen in 1805. The Grandma III program has the information that Aganetha Epp was the sister to Peter Epp (1725-89), renown Alkenter of the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde and major promoter of the emigration to Russia. This means that Klaas Reimer was married for the first time to his cousin, Maria Epp (1760-1806), a rare but unheard of marriage among the Flemish Mennonites (see Pioneers and Pilgrims, page 304). It probably also explains the relative silence in the Kleine Gemeinde literary corpus regarding the ancestry of Klaas Reimer as later descendants were probably made to feel somewhat negative about such intermarriage.
My Little Grandmother.
Memories of My Little Grandmother, by Olive Toews Baerg, Linden, Alberta. T0M 1J0.

I called Grandmother, Margaretha (Loewen) Toews, my Little Grama, because she was a small woman. She was born in Russia and had a very friendly disposition, blue eyes and blonde hair. (I only knew them to be grey.) She usually wore her black headcovering with a fringe, a long dress with a full skirt, a long waist apron and black, high-ankle tie-shoes.

Whenever company came her habit was to first put on a clean apron and heat the water for coffee to serve with zwieback and sugar cubes. Grandma had a water tank in the entry room where fur robes, blankets and overshoes were kept. This tank held the snow or rain water to make coffee - this was a must as it held no rust or harmful minerals.

My first memory of Grandma was the time she was at our place when my younger brother Lewis was born. Grandma showed the little baby to me. She was a midwife at this time but retired shortly after.

As a small girl I had holidays at Grandpa and Grandma’s for a week at a time. Because transportation was not so easy in those days, this seemed reasonable. I have many happy memories of times I spent there.

Grandparents lived in a big two-story house which had a long stairway with a banister. We children thought this was a good place to slide! Grandparents slept upstairs.

When I visited, Grandma made up a bed for me on their long chest they brought from Russia. They had a little convenient closet up-stairs for my needs. They bought them for all their needs. They also furnished us with the “Green Drops” excellent for stomach ailments.

In her later years, Grandma sewed some beautiful baby quits. I was privileged to receive one and enjoyed using it for my younger babies.

Grandma taught me many things. After she was gone I often thought of her and appreciated the lasting influence her life had on me.

Acknowledgement:
These reminiscences about Margaretha Loewen Toews are reprinted with permission from Lottie Wiebe, Life Stories of Henry L. and Katie Unruh Toews (Box 623, Linden, Alberta, 2001), pages 154-155.

Further Reading:
Family Committee, Jakob B. Toews Family Register 1855-1938 (Linden, Alberta, 1982), 127 pages. This family book has an excellent biography of Jakob B. “Busch” Toews and Margaretha Loewen Toews, pages 2-18, based on his own journals.

Harlem Mission.

A New York Times article Oct. 10 featured Fred and Agnes Schrock, a conservative Mennonite couple doing mission work in Harlem. The Schrots, who came to New York City from Tennessee, belong to the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite sometimes known as the Holdeman Church, which has about [12,700 members in the U.S. and 4,300 in Canada and 1,300 elsewhere].

“We just try to make friends,” Fred Schrock said. “All our mission’s effort is to help people be saved, people living a life of sin to have a better life.”

The Lonely Ohm - Myth and Reality


The Evil Ohm?

Over the centuries the enemies of the traditionalist (Kirchliche) and conservative Mennonites have gone to great lengths to depict their leaders as evil, power hungry tyrants. Such biased descriptions have their roots in the Reformation polemics of Martin Luther and other Evangelicals as well as the Inquisitors who described Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders in the most cruel and despicable terms. During this era the vilification of the Ohms was supported by the full weight of Imperial law enforced by torture and cruel and despicable terms. During this era the formation polemics of Martin Luther and other leaders as evil, power hungry tyrants. Such biased descriptions have their roots in the Reformation.

As expected the myth of the “evil Ohm” finds pride of place in the historical works of those “Mennonites” promoting mass conversion to alien religious cultures. In his 1910 Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, P. M. Friesen described the religious training of the ministers in Prussia “...as little enough and inadequate for his high calling. Indeed, in later years he was too often a blind leader of the blind, void of any apparent education or theological knowledge as well as any spiritual life emanating from God. That which came to Russia was the product of Prussian Mennonism....The worst exceptions were drawn from the ranks of those intellectual and spiritual incompetents among the ‘Ohms’ of our earlier Russian Mennonite congregations who read their poorly-spelled and ill-understood sermons, borrowed and copied from others, inserting so many errors in the process as to make them virtually incoherent. Because of this, and to a certain extent because of their own awareness of the heavy responsibility which their office placed on them and their own total incompetence to meet these responsibilities, they often broke out in sighs and outright weeping....” (pages 54/57).

P. M. Friesen had the following to say about Ohms such as the Berghalter Altester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900): “Their entire exertion (more or less even unto today), is to hold firmly unto all things old in regards to church matters and to keep away the new, by the obstinate, harsh old methods, and to plant piety and ‘separation from the world’ by means of a severe church discipline.” (Part II, page 72). Of Gerhard Wiebe’s book History and Emigration, Friesen writes, “Characteristic is the great fearfulness of the author regarding anything new, and especially regarding any educational improvements.” (Part II, page 93). Of the Reinländer (Old Colonier) under Altester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), P. M. Friesen states “that in the person of this their Altester, they were if possible even stricter.” (Part II, page 72).

A more recent example of negative imaging of the Ohms is found in H. Leonard Sawatzky, author of They Sought a Country Mennonite Colonization in Mexico (Berkeley, 1971), 387, a history of the Mexican Mennonites. In an interview with Dr. Victor Peters, and published in Plaatsditiesen geschichten (Marburg, 1990), Dr. Sawatzky suggested the migration of 1922 was inspired by “...the Altester and the ministers and only ostensibly over the school issue.” (page 103). The entire emigration is explained as “...the Altester and the Prelicher believed they would lose their influence,” (page 104). When the government implemented its campaign of fining and imprisonments, the people gave in “...but then the Altester stepped in with the ban; in such matters they were stone cold—the Altester had no compassion. And this worked and thereby they were able to keep the people in their control,” (page 104). The organization of the land purchases in Mexico under colony deeds is attributed to “the desire of the church leadership...to take back the total control,” (page 108). A similar interpretation was suggested by Dr. Sawatzky in a letter to Preservings, No. 16, pages 54-55.

The foregoing represent instances of negative and pejorative stereotyping of the conservative and orthodox Ohms. P. M. Friesen’s work is an example of history written out of a desire to embrace and elevate alien religious teachings, while the writing of H. L. Sawatzky represents history designed to fit a nationalistic, academic historiography and its narrow Anglo-conformist agenda.

Historiography.

As expected the myth of the “evil Ohm” finds pride of place in the historical works of those “Mennonites” promoting mass conversion to alien religious cultures. In his 1910 Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, P. M. Friesen described the religious training of the ministers in Prussia “...as little enough and inadequate for his high calling. Indeed, in later years he was too often a blind leader of the blind, void of any apparent education or theological knowledge as well as any spiritual life emanating from God. That which came to Russia was the product of Prussian Mennonism....The worst exceptions were drawn from the ranks of those intellectual and spiritual incompetents among the ‘Ohms’ of our earlier Russian Mennonite congregations who read their poorly-spelled and ill-understood sermons, borrowed and copied from others, inserting so many errors in the process as to make them virtually incoherent. Because of this, and to a certain extent because of their own awareness of the heavy responsibility which their office placed on them and their own total incompetence to meet these responsibilities, they often broke out in sighs and outright weeping....” (pages 54/57).

P. M. Friesen had the following to say about Ohms such as the Berghalter Altester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900): “Their entire exertion (more or less even unto today), is to hold firmly unto all things old in regards to church matters and to keep away the new, by the obstinate, harsh old methods, and to plant piety and ‘separation from the world’ by means of a severe church discipline.” (Part II, page 72). Of Gerhard Wiebe’s book History and Emigration, Friesen writes, “Characteristic is the great fearfulness of the author regarding anything new, and especially regarding any educational improvements.” (Part II, page 93). Of the Reinländer (Old Colonier) under Altester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), P. M. Friesen states “that in the person of this their Altester, they were if possible even stricter.” (Part II, page 72).

A more recent example of negative imaging of the Ohms is found in H. Leonard Sawatzky, author of They Sought a Country Mennonite Colonization in Mexico (Berkeley, 1971), 387, a history of the Mexican Mennonites. In an interview with Dr. Victor Peters, and published in Plaatsditiesen geschichten (Marburg, 1990), Dr. Sawatzky suggested the migration of 1922 was inspired by “...the Altester and the ministers and only ostensibly over the school issue.” (page 103). The entire emigration is explained as “...the Altester and the Prelicher believed they would lose their influence,” (page 104). When the government implemented its campaign of fining and imprisonments, the people gave in “...but then the Altester stepped in with the ban; in such matters they were stone cold—the Altester had no compassion. And this worked and thereby they were able to keep the people in their control,” (page 104). The organization of the land purchases in Mexico under colony deeds is attributed to “the desire of the church leadership...to take back the total control,” (page 108). A similar interpretation was suggested by Dr. Sawatzky in a letter to Preservings, No. 16, pages 54-55.

The foregoing represent instances of negative and pejorative stereotyping of the conservative and orthodox Ohms. P. M. Friesen’s work is an example of history written out of a desire to embrace and elevate alien religious teachings, while the writing of H. L. Sawatzky represents history designed to fit a nationalistic, academic historiography and its narrow Anglo-conformist agenda.

Literature.

Novelists and other writers use the information found in the historical record in good faith to create their fictional representations of life. Considering the state of the historiography, it is to be expected that the myth of the evil Ohm would rear its ugly head as well. Rudy Wiebe was the founder of English Mennonite literature with his controversial Peace Shall Destroy Many, published in 1962. In the novel, Bishop Block is depicted as a cold self-serving leader, who used the authority of the office to manipulate his flock.

The novel can be understood by insiders as depicting a Bishop from the Friesian Mennonite tradition, a religious culture in which the Bishop or Altester acted arbitrarily and largely independent of the brotherhood. According to historian Henry Schapansky, Friesian religious culture was incorporated to some degree, or at least resonated in some ways, with that of the Brüdergemeinde community represented in the novel (Henry Schapansky, in Preservings, No. 19, page 125). But that having been said, it is clear that the novel was widely interpreted as speaking for Russian Mennonite culture in general and of the office of the Altester, in particular. In fairness to Rudy Wiebe, it is evident that his own understanding of the Russian Mennonite experience has undergone an immense evolution, as manifested in his most recent work, Sweeter than all the World. The novel goes far beyond anything previously published in terms of its balanced understanding and holistic portrayal of the life and culture of the Russian Mennonites and, indeed, Friesian Mennonite religious culture going back to the Reformation.

The negative portrayal of the Altester or Ohm in Mennonite literature was given an immense boost by Patrick Friesen in his poetic drama, The Shunning, published in 1980. Again the Altester is a monster who drives his parishioner to suicide for the simple reason that he holds some apostate views. “The Shunning” seems to be articulated by the extreme legalization and categorization of Protestant Fundamentalism which had overtaken the Kleine Gemeinde church.
in which Friesen grew up in the 1960s. Regrettably, he incorrectly attributes these negative experiences with Evangelical Fundamentalism to the traditional Mennonite community. Within the wider secular society the portrayal was regarded as normative for all Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites.

Since much of Mennonite historiography in the past was predicated upon such ideas - often failing completely to understand the complex socio-religious issues involved - it is natural that such themes and views have been given wide credence and respectability in Russian Mennonite literature. In recent decades, considerable progress has been made in achieving greater balance in the historiography and in providing a more just and fair voice to traditionalist and conservative Mennonites. It is only recently with the publication of works by Armin Wiebe, Al Reimer, John Janzen Koolstra, Sandra Birdsell, and, of course, Sweeter than at the World, already referred to, and others, that a more mature and holistic creative literature has emerged.

G.M.U.

Similar strategies and dynamics are prominent in the activities of predator religious cultures. An example is found in an article by Jeanette Windle, “New life for an ‘Old World’” published in The Gospel Message, 1998, Issue 4, pages 2-5. The Gospel Message is a publication of the Gospel Missionary Union, Winnipeg, a Evangelical Fundamentalist mission society. The article opens with an account of a young Old Colony lad in Bolivia being spanked for his transgression of having fallen for the lies of foreign proselytizers who had brainwashed him, evidently convincing him that his parents, elders, church and community were evil and unchristian. The article goes on to make the sweeping and false statement that “immorality, wife and child abuse, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other social problems were rampant in the colonies,” (Note One) Jeanette Windle cranks the myth of the evil Ohm to new heights with the following perverted characterization: “Colony leaders ruled with an iron hand. Their biggest weapon was excommunication. If one’s salvation was never certain, the colony leaders literally held the keys of heaven and could lock dissenters out through excommunication. For any rumbles of rebellion, there were the ‘enforcers’... The most common method was to tie offenders over a barrel and beat them into submission.” Not to be outdone, Windle concludes the denigration of her victim community with a reference to the “[whiteheaded] lowheads that dotted the nearby Indian villages,” (page 2).

With this article, Jeanette Windle and the Gospel Missionary Union have created a horrifically twisted and grossly perverse picture of Old Colony life and faith and the role of the Ohms within that society. Even if they were remotely close to being true in an isolated instance, the article slanders and libels an entire community of over 100,000 believers - presumably this being the intent. Should one now likewise conclude that all Evangelical Fundamentalist mission societies are engaged in the same sinister mission of eradicating and destroying genuine Christian churches, communities and families as part of their plans for global hegemony? Not only do these tactics interfere with the biblical functioning of conservative Mennonite communities, they also lay the groundwork for active fund raising in Canada, creating the bizarre scenario that Mennonites themselves are being duped into funding preda- tors to convert their brethren and sisters away from Christo-centric faith to the shallow and superficial “pop” religious culture of the day. What an abomination!

While the vision of conservative Mennonite communities and their leaders has been relatively clear and transparent this has not necessarily been so in the case of predator religious organizations although the destruction and eradication of the Gemeinden in some general way is held forth as the desirable longterm endgame. In some cases the avowed concern is that their victims have not converted themselves according to the tradition- alist and legalistic “dramatic experience” requirements of Evangelical Fundamentalism. In other situations their mission appears to be predicated upon modernization and assimilationist themes - and requiring a total makeover into North American Evangelical-style Christians (what a pity!). The only principle that the predators do agree on is the obsession to increase their own numbers and to “enlarge the borders” of their enterprises.

Secular Media.

The misrepresentations of the Ohms in some of the history books, literature, and in the polemics of alien proselytizers, sooner or later find their way into the secular media, always driven by the need for negative reporting. The textbook case was the 1992 Fifth Estate program which used the term “The Mennonite Mob” to refer to Mexican Mennonite drug smugglers: Quiring, pages 144-145. Instead of recognizing that the drug problem was no worse among the Mexican community than elsewhere in the world, Canadian Mennonites were stumped to stereotyping their brothers and sisters in Christ in Mexico. They themselves undoubtedly contributed to the position portrayed by the Fifth Estate because of the pronounced biases and prejudices already referred to. It seems that Canadian Mennonites have sometimes joined chorus with media reports such as the “Fifth Estate” piece, as a means of avoiding self-perceived embarrassment by being associated with their Kanadier immigrant coreligionists.

Numerous instances of the negative imaging of the Mennonite “Ohms” echoing in popular culture through the secular media could be cited. A recent example is an article published in the Stern magazine in Germany by Christine Krutschnit (Note Two) using photos and some information from the book, The Mennonites, by Larry Towell (Pres., No. 18, pages 144-5) as well as quotes from several MCC workers. The article deals with the return of the “Kanadier” to Canada, Ontario, describing their lives in stark and surrealistic prose. As tragic as the impoverished lives of some returnees may be, a rather pathetic picture created with the old shell-game - by using only negative examples to create a factually truthful, and yet, extremely harsh, one-dimensional portrayal. Any community in the world would look cubi, stilted and sallow when described in such brutal and savage terms.

The popularity of such articles as well as the drama, “The Shunning”, referred to above, is explained because this is what critics and mem- bers of the wider North American public want to hear about Mennonites, especially the conserva- tive variety. As David Weaver-Zencher has pointed out in his book, The Amish in American Imagi- nation, the Amish (conservative Mennonites) are seen in American “pop” culture as a saving rem- nant, as representing a simple and pious commu- nity way of life. He points out that if this way of life is really attainable it would be an “irrefutable call to change.” Hence moderns desperately need to know that the ideal is not really attainable. For this reason there needs to be evidence that the saving remnant is really a fallen people. This need to desecrate the Amish is answered by the game of “lets compare my highest ideals with your worst examples,” (Steven M. Nolt, book review, in Pres., No. 20, page 133).

As Dr. Nolt has pointed out, such views may even be cloaked in the language of pastoral con- cern for the conservative Mennonites. The game is played by using pieces of history, poetry, novels and drama as described above - in addition to whatever other bits of dirt happens to be available - to create the image of the fallen remnant. The myth of the evil Ohm is one of the most potent images in the repertoire of the fallen remnant, as it affirms the ultimate ideal of individualism in American culture.

Dr. David Quiring has commented that “The news about the Mexican colonies has been over-whelmingly negative for decades. One reason is that many news reports have focused on the fail- ures and ignored the successes of the Old Colono- nists, presenting a biased and inaccurate picture of colony life in Mexico. Few communities, in- cluding those of Mennonites in Canada, could withstand critical scrutiny without some nega- tive reports,” Quiring, page 135.

Positive stories such as the many Mennonite communities in Latin America that have pros- pered, the thousands of wholesome, fully func- tional families living contentedly in the colonies, the thousands of Mexican returnees in Canada who have become good citizens and very successful in a short time, or even the recent visit of President Fox to the La Honda Colony in Mexico, are never mentioned in the Mennonite media (presumably no Mennonites were smoking dope during the Presidential visit), and hence do not register on the radar of secular media.

The issue is an example of how history and news massaged and propagated among Menno- nites by those who often have a very specific agenda, seeps into the popular consciousness through the secular media. This, in turn, creates a hostile environment for conservative Mennonites within the public sphere. The result, sadly, is that when they deal with officialdom - social workers, police, children’s aid societies, etc., the prejudices against them have already been implanted long before they even come to deal with what- ever issues or problems are at hand.
The Vision.

The role and function of the Ohms cannot be adequately understood without some consideration of the vision which has inspired generations of believers to maintain and preserve the Christo-centric faith of their forefathers. At the heart of the traditionalist (Kirchliche) and conservative Mennonite tradition was a Christian culture premised on the restoration of the Apostolic church as prescribed and mandated by Scripture. Discipleship, community and an ethic of love were understood to be the foundations of the Gemeinden instituted by Jesus Christ and called forth by His apostles. Historically, such Gemeinden have successfully functioned both under the paradigm of physical separation modelled on the late-medieval monastic tradition as well in the context of volitional communities within the wider secular society.

The vision of the conservative Mennonite leaders who immigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s was nothing less than an attempt to create a life world for people where Christian teachings would permeate every facet of secular as well as spiritual life within that experiential embryo. It was a life centered on a utopian community which was carefully calculated and meticulously designed to incorporate and mirror biblical values and principles. Faith was “...not compartmentalized into only some aspects of life, but pervades and influences all of life...” (page 11) The concept of a community where all aspects of life are based on the Bible’s teachings, particularly on the teachings of Christ, sets them apart, in their minds at least, from others who call themselves Christians.” Quiring, page 34.

Arnold Synder’s description of the spirituality of early Anabaptist communities would apply to conservative Mennonite communities as well: “[They]...had an ascetic, monastic shape: baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of baptism as vow; discipline (the ban) as encouragement to growth and obedience; perseverance on the ascetic path; a Christo-centric piety of....” Quiring, page 57.

Servant-Leadership.

The organizational model of traditionalist and conservative Mennonites embraced the concept of “servant-leader.” The Altester, ministers and deacons were collectively referred to as the “Lehrdienst” or teacher-servant ministerial committee. A long and noble tradition of servant-leadership, based on the teachings of scripture and the precedent of the Apostolic Gemeinden, has evolved within the Flemish Mennonite faith.

The inner functioning of the Flemish Gemeinde, as the representative unit of the Church of God, is based on the apostolic polity and organizational model. Daniel Kauffman has provided an exposition of the apostolic church model and its evangelical basis. In his Doctrines of the Bible, Kauffman underlines that God is the author of church organization through the scripture: “He (God) supplies the overseers of the church, Ephesians 4:11-16, gives direction for its government, Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 20, 28, and Christ is frequently referred to as the ‘head’, ‘door’, ‘foundation’, etc., of the church. Church organization is a very prominent feature in the work of both Christ and His disciples”. Kauffman notes that the Bible also uses three suggestive figures or models of the church: 1) the Old Testament temple which figured the New Testament church and illustrates its functioning, 2) the body of Christ, 3) the bride of Christ.

One of the important aspects of church polity based on scripture are the offices of the ministry. Kauffman refers to the report of the apostle Paul that the offices ordained of God for the “work of the ministry” are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The calling, function, and service of each of these offices and their scriptural basis is discussed by venerable expositors of the faith such as Dirk Philips and Menno Simons. Both Philips and Simons were utterly opposed to a paid ministry for they saw the Gospel of the Lord as a precious gift of God, to be preached out of love and not to be dispensed for money by mere hirelings (M. Simons, Complete Works, page 443).

The highest office in the Gemeinde is that of the Altester (Bishop), meaning overseer, or supervisor. It is a scriptural word used in a definite sense. Jesus himself commissioned the Gemeinde with the awesome responsibility “to feed the church of the Lord, which he purchased with his own blood,” Acts 20:28. Mennonites generally understood the evangelical model to be that the Altester was elected by the democratic vote of the brotherhood. He was led by the spirit of God and was directly responsible to the brotherhood for his leadership. A conscientious leader was secure and could lead and institute changes and policies even though unpopular by a church board more concerned about the bad public relations or the onerous financial requirements of a particular action. Nor need the Altester worry that the contents of his sermons would not be favourably received, for he was elected with a biblical mandate to lead and admonish as required, provided, of course, he stayed within the democratic mandate of this office. Major actions and disciplinary measures were enacted by the brotherhood, acting as legislative assembly and as the highest repository of power in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Like the judges of ancient Israel, the Altester served for life, but they were leaders and not rulers. As indicated by Marsden, the ministries of Protestant Fundamentalists by comparison were typically focused on the personality cult-rule by one man or woman, so to speak, and comparable to the kings which the ancient Israelites demanded and eventually received from God. As Henry Schapansky has pointed out, the Flemish or traditionalist Mennonite “groups were more democratic and community oriented...[They] placed a stronger emphasis on the Mennonite community, the Gemeinde, and the connection between spiritual and secular life...[And] This is the reason they were always the first to consider immigration as a means of preserving the community and eliminating the menace of assimilation...” (Pres., No. 20, page 20).

A similar scriptural basis existed for the offices of minister, deacon, pastor, evangelist, missionary, and teacher. The ministry is a divine calling controlled by God. In a treatise “On the sending of Preachers or Teachers”, Dirk Philips set forth the evangelical position that a calling to the ministry can be manifested in two ways: 1) Those who are called directly by the Lord, such as the apostles whom he commissioned “to go into all the world.” 2) A call through the Gemeinde such as the call given to Matthias who was “numbered with the eleven apostles,” Acts 1:15-26. The call is recognized by the conviction of the individual conscience and the possession of the requisite qualifications.

In the turbulent days of the Reformation and its aftermath, it frequently occurred that individuals claimed to have been called by the Lord, but
who taught apostasy and heresy and sought to lead astray and to deceive whomever they could. It was necessary to take some measures so as to establish some integrity and order in the ministry. At a meeting in Wismar in 1555 it was decided that “no one should teach or preach of his own will if he is not sent or ordained by the congregation or the Elder,” Verheyden, Anabaptism in Flanders 1530-1650 (Lancaster, Pa., 1961), page 85.

In a small Gemeinde the moving of the spirit of God sometimes results in a unanimous consensus among the brotherhood. More often the moving of the spirit will manifest the divine calling through the casting of lots or by the majority vote of the members of the Gemeinde. Matthias, for example, was chosen by lot from among two ministerial candidates appointed from among the brethren of the Jerusalem Gemeinde. In the conservative Mennonite Gemeinde the call to the ministry was understood as twofold: a call from God and a call from the Gemeinde as manifested by the majority vote of the members assembled in prayerful meditation and led by the Holy Spirit. It was accepted as a responsibility by all the members of the Gemeinde that any individual without regard to stature or person was subject to being called to serve the community.

From Storm and Triumph (Steinbach, 1986), pages 62-63, with additions.

Further Reading:

Democracy and Equality.
Flemish Mennonite faith and practice is premised on the foundational principles of grass-roots democracy, equality, personal freedom and tolerance. As genuine Biblecitics they were informed by a Christ-centred vision that reformed societal relationships and which affected the rights of women, the plights of the poor and the hope of the dispossessed two centuries before such ideas were popularized in the 18th century Enlightenment. The vote of the poorest man in the Gemeinde is equal to that of his richest neighbour. Their loyalty and devotion arises not from some mysterious power of the “evil, manipulative Ohms” but because at every level and facet of their community—whether in the Gemeinde, cheese factory, schools, and even the village pasture service, they have a voice in its development and evolution. Because of their tradition of equality, grass roots participation and involvement in its decisions, they have a sense of ownership in the Gemeinde and other community institutions.

Horst Penner has described the functioning of the Gemeinde as follows: “The words of the ‘ruling’ Ältester did not issue forth as inviolate. He already ruled his flock with quasi-democratic methods and was concerned to differentiate the borders of a world in which - at the turn of the 18th century - the mantras of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity,’ were also impacting upon Rosenort and Teghagenen [Polish-Prussia].” H. Penner, Die ost- und westpreußischen Mennoniten (Kirchheimbolanden, 1987), page 62.

The members of the Gemeinde are loyal because it is their ark or refuge in the storm—the body of Christ to which they cling—their common point of entry and of experiencing Christ as a part of His faithful bride. Dr. David Schroeder has pointed out that “Because the church [Gemeinde] as a Corporate body speaks to the issues that confront people daily, there is more of a reliance on the Gemeinde and a dependence on the church in conservative churches...It is this [loyalty] that the more evangelical, individualistically oriented churches and persons can hardly understand.” Pres., No. 15, pages 47-48. In this context, the Ohms represent the Gemeinde having earned the loyalty of their parishioners through centuries of faithful and spirit-led service.

Those who are seeking to proselytize among conservative Mennonites, apparently see their cohesiveness and unwillingness to abandon their Christo-centric faith for alien religion as evidence of manipulation by their leaders, “the evil Ohms.” In reality it is those who are targeting conservative Mennonites in Paraguay, Bolivia, Belize, Mexico, and elsewhere, who are the autocratic ones, self-appointed demigods out to expand the borders of their own religious enterprises at any costs or by any means. They are not elected by the democratic vote of their victim communities, nor summoned by the invitation of anyone in legitimate authority in these communities: in short, they have no standing nor authorization by way of scripture, nor by calling from God, and certainly NOT from the Christian communities whose integrity they are maligning and whose very right to existence they are challenging.

Deportment.
The deportment of the Ältester and other Ohms was based on the concept of servant-leadership and embraced a tradition which prescribed the highest possible standards of ethical and moral behaviour. Many descriptions and references are to be found in the Mennonite canon of devotional literature. One such account is found in the Dutch book Der Weg Nach Friedenstadt (Elkhart, 1901), pages 38-40, by Pieter Pieters (1574-1651), Ältester of the Waterlander Gemeinde at Zaandam from 1625 until his death. The tender and gentle writing of Pieter Pieters was much loved and read among the Russian Mennonites and can be taken as representative of their faith and teaching.

Bishop Pieter Pieters writes as follows: “Peters the questioner has asked, whether the leaders of the burghers of Friedenstadt are also eminent and highly learned people of highest reputation?”

“With this Jan, the sage, replies: Yes, my friend, of that I also have something to say, for it is commonly said, that the subjects will be just like the ruler. Now hear this: firstly, their only shepherd, priest, teacher, Bishop, and head is Christ, whose life, teachings and holy example, is so beloved and pleasing unto them, that they only seek to follow it, and that their thoughts at all times are directed thereby (1 Tim. 4:10; Ezek. 34:13; Heb. 9 and 10; 1 Pet. 2:25). For this is the light which the patriarchs and pious people, the teachers and prophets, have hoped for, and which they have seen from afar and of which they have prophesied (Genesis 17:19 and 12:3; John 8:56; Luke 10:24; Isa. 64:13; Deut. 18; Isa. 7:13, 9:5, 11:1), but foremostly by those who were filled with His Holy Spirit after His ascension into heaven, those who with their own eyes saw His humble, suffering walk, as they have so richly described it in the Holy Gospels (Acts 2:1; Matt. 26 and 27; Phil. 2:6). Consequently your other teachers, those of the present and who were in times past, are therefore conformed to the life of their Lord, according to their talents, so that one could say about the ancient predecessors, “be ye followers of me, even I also am of Christ,” (1 Corinthians 11:1. Phil. 3:17). You ask: whether they are also learned people? To this I answer, yes. But not like many, who are only educated in words, for their studying is almost exclusively focused on bettering their life, to make it conform to the model of Christ, and with this language they teach the best (Rom. 8:29; 1 Tim. 4:16; Phil. 2:7). The first evidence of their learnedness is their lowness, for they are also humble, so that the most insignificant Christian brother can address them without fear, and counsel them, which they regard as highly as if one of the most prominent has spoken unto them; likewise they also gladly allow themselves to be taught, just as they teach another: one can also use them for all manner of service which works unto the honour of God. It does not oppress them to carry many burdens and sorrows on account of their sheep, and in all of which they desire no honour, rather they give all glory unto their most imminent shepherd, they endure and suffer everything through their love (1 Cor. 9:2; 2 Cor. 11:25; Psalm 115:1; 1 Cor. 13:7). They seek not their own advantage, rather that which benefits their neighbour. They are very long suffering and compassionate in punishing, and when they are addressed in evil, they answer with love. In short, their life and deportment teaches therefore, that they relate to all people in sobriety, peacefulness, and in patience, persuading all in modesty (2 Tim. 2:25). They are also well satisfied with the most insignificant food and drink, so that no one, therefore, would need to fear receiving them as a guest, for only too gladly they consider themselves as the very least. They are no wine drinkers, who furnish their bodies with much ornament and convenience, for they rather work themselves with their own hands, before they would lay such a burden and expense upon their fellow brethren. They also make themselves equal to the very least in their dress and apparel, not that they seek special holiness through clothing, rather that they evidence their teaching in all things with their lives (1 Cor. 4:12, 1 Tim 3:2, Tit. 1:8, Phil. 4:11, 2 Kor. 11:9, Acts 20:34, 1 Thess. 2:9, 2 Thess. 3:8). Together with their master they would want to be the footwasher of the most insignificant brother, rather than that they would sit above or that any man would do any honour unto them (Joh. 13:3). They also have such a reasonable manner in preaching that they slander no one, nor scold nor disparage, rather they warn the people truthfully against sin, and lay no pillows under their heads, nor kenschiefs under the arms, Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 97
they comfort no one in their sin, nor unto their destruction (Tit. 3:2, Eze. 13:18, Jer. 6:14). Nor do they preach unto their own gain, rather out of love for the poor people (1 Pet. 5:2). Nor do they begrudge their fellow teachers (ministers), with feigned speech, rather with a fatherly tempera-
mint they feel compassion for all people (2 Tim. 2:24, 1 Thess. 2:11), and seek to win everyone by a Christian means, in order that they might convert many people and bring them to the knowl-
edge of the truth (2 Kor. 9:12, 1 Tim. 2:4), so that all of them, through wholesome instruction, might become citizens of Friedenstadt."

The Lonely Ohm.

In a book review of *The Mennonites* by Larry Towell, Abe Fehr, former MCC worker in Lethbridge, Alberta, refers to the myth of the evil Ohm: "The ministers are portrayed as vultures just waiting for their next victim. Instead of tear-
ing down the ministers, he should have elevated them. It's a lonely life being a minister in Mexico. They often lose all their friends when becoming ministers. In Canada we have agencies to deal with problems—in Mexico all the problems be-
come the responsibility of the ministers. Does the writer know this and does he care?" (from *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*, Vol. VI, No. 2, pages 18-19).

In his comments, Abe Fehr has suggested a more truthful and accurate characterization of the conser-
vative Mennonite minister, namely, the narrative of "the lonely Ohm". An entirely differ-
ent view emerges from such a perspective. Those called as deacons or ministers, and possibly even as Alster, assume a grievous burden of respon-
sibility to preach and teach the Gospel, pasturing the flock, as well as a host of related and unre-
lated duties such as counselling parishioners in distress and helping them in a myriad of day-
to-day social and economic problems as arise in pioneer society. They are on call 24 hours-a-day, rou-
tinely facing issues of life and death. Often they even experienced the alienation of friends and rela-
tives, as they obediently carry out their calling of shepherding and pasturing the flock.

In many environments, especially in the more recently established colonies in Mexico and Bo-
livia, the Ohms are the food bank, the welfare office, the social services department, the coun-
selling service, the employment office, the lender of last resort—in short, the last point of refuge for anyone in trouble or difficulty in the community. In addition they are on constant call to minister to bereaved families, perform funerals, represent their parishioners to officialdom, etc. In German the deacons were known as the "Armen Diener" and the ministers as the "Diener am Wort". As their name implies, the Ohms were servant lead-
ers whose holy mission was to serve those whom they were called to lead.

Compare these duties with that of the typical pastor in North America: 35 hour weeks, cruis-
ing around in an air-conditioned automobile, checking stock portfolios, negotiating for retire-
ment plans, trading with team members for week-
ends off, travelling to conferences, etc. By com-
parison, the "Ohms" do not receive one penny for their labours, as they have heeded the call of

Jesus "to take up the cross and follow me." They take up their onerous responsibilities and unend-
ing duties not as hirelings or as a burden but out of love for their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. David Quiring has written that "...often being elected as a minister is not a time of joy, but of sorrow. Being a minister means separation from the rest of the community and accepting the burdens of controlling the colony and its future. Some have resisted ordination, finding for a while ... 'hop-
ing the church would change its mind.' Still, people dutifully serve as front line leaders in the battle to maintain the old ways. All too often leadership has come to mean fighting against those tearing down the walls, rather than concentrating on meeting the other challenges of life, a situa-
tion comparable to a country at war, which neg-
ecls all else while it concentrates on surviving the challenges from outside," pages 136-137.

The autobiography of Alster Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925) (RGB 70-2), Swift Current, Saskatchewan, son of Alster Johann Wiebe, confirms that elevation to ministerial office was not seen as a great glory or opportunity to control the reigns of power in the community as alleged by the enemies of the faith. Instead it was seen as a heavy burden and sacred responsibility that could only be accepted after prayerful meditation and petitioning for strength and courage and only as the fulfillment of God's will for their lives.

Abraham Wiebe described his spiritual struggle with respect to taking up the work in the Lord's vineyard in 1895: "I can yet still describe how I was disposed and how my emotions felt. And since I had not been present in the assembly as is required by the holy order, I drove to Rosenort on the following Sunday where the Alster and Ohms wished me much goodness. In this manner I have from one time to another struggled in disputation and strife so that at times the enemy brought me completely to reconsider and raised up various thoughts within me which were not good and which in any case sought to persuade me that I should not accept the calling because it was only made of men not of God, and which pointed out ways where I should go and to forsake everything, so that together with David, terror and fear unto death came over me. Hence I stood in battle, sometimes I was more overcome and at other times less so. And thus, through God's grace and support, I finally decided, on July 26, 1896, to make a beginning with teaching in the Reinländer Church, where a great number of brothers and sisters were present, and I think many a person will have had and felt a great compassion. And thus we carried forward our lives, from step to step, through grief, cross and sorrow."

Some time later in 1907, Ohm Abraham went through a similar struggle when he was chosen to go to the Saskatchewan to lead the scattered sheep in the new Old Colony Reserve at Swift Current. He described how he finally “yielded in so far that I did say that if they wanted to draw lots, I would also partake, and that if it fell to me, I would put things aside, and together with Peter, I would cast all my cares onto the Lord, and in all my great poverty I would face everything which the Lord allowed to come to pass, and together with the faithful Abraham, I would go where he would send me." (Pres., No. 20, page 98-99).

The same topic is addressed by another well-
known Ohm, Johann P. Wall (1875-1961) (RGB 17-3), Neuanlage, Saskatchewan, and later Durango, Mexico. In a letter to parents Peter Wall and Anna Vogt Wall, Neuhorst, Manitoba, shortly after his election as a minister of the Hague Osler Gemeinde, Ohm Johann expressed his anguish as he reflected on the great commission to which he has been called, but also expresses his love and commitment to his Lord and Sav-
vour, Jesus Christ.

Neuanlage, August 21, 1900

Beloved Parents and Siblings;

It is with a heavy heart that I take the pen to hand to write a few lines to you, even though in great weakness and imperfection—yet, with love towards you. Firstly, however, as a poor sinner who is lacking in everything good, I wish you the grace, compassion and the peace of God, our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Yes, beloved parents—dearest father and dear-
est mother—and also brothers and sisters: what shall I write you regarding the results of the Alster and teacher (ministerial) elections here. The dear father will certainly have informed you, namely, that for Alster if fell upon the faithful and beloved Ohm, Uncle Jakob Wiens, and for teacher [minister] upon me, such a weak and mortal being.

Alas, my beloved parents: I am almost ashamed to write these words down, for when I reflect somewhat of the life I have walked, then I must needs say: Lord, I am not capable to preach, and to proclaim Your pure and sacred holy words, for I am still so young and the multitude of the sins I have committed are so great; [for I have] the earnest desire to live according to Your words and will, O Lord, you know so much better than I of my weakness. Indeed, beloved parents and siblings when I sometimes think about this, I become afraid and alarmed about the talent that has been entrusted to me and whether, on that day, I will be able to stand before the judge of all flesh and not hear: You scoundrel and lazy serv-
ant.

O God, if it would not be Your most holy will that I should be your servant in this way, then change it even yet—for You it is possible. You know me so well—that I am completely decayed inside and outside, and there is no power or ca-
pability within me to fulfill this service for the honour and glory of Your Name. But O God and
lord of my life: if your will is otherwise for my life, that I should be a worker in your holy vineyard, then grant your poor servant power and the spirit that it may be for your name’s praise and honour and that it might suffice unto my salvation and that of many others.

Lord, if you do not stand powerfully beside us poor teachers with your help in these last days when everything holds itself contrary to your word and teachings, how then shall your gospel be maintained. Alas, beloved parents and siblings, pray for me—yes I say pray, and that without ceasing. And should it come to the time when I am to preach the word of God, that it may be done right before the Lord, your God, with a meek spirit and without respect of person; and that it may be done with a joyful opening of my mouth, without rest, yes, without being shy before the people, as is becoming, for straightforwardly it represents life or death.

Oh, how often since the lot fell upon me as deacon, has this election been upon my heart. When I reflected about my previous life and regarding my weak commitment to do good, then I thought, if only the entire Gemeinde—we and you, could truly humble ourselves before the heart’s proclaiming with prayer and supplication, for then he would send us the man he had chosen, and then surely it would not fall upon me. Indeed, it has often laid so heavily upon my heart, with that great weakness I prayed with the words of the Saviour: “Lord, if it be possible, take this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done, O Lord.” I will drink it.

This is what has now also come to pass. There is no turning aside now, neither to the right nor to the left, because the Lord speaks and commands: do not say I am still too young, rather you shall go. Yes beloved parents, he says you shall go wherever I send you. There [should be no] struggle against it. We have an edifying example of what that means in the prophet Jonah who was made willing in the belly of the fish. Woe be unto me, says Paul, if I do not preach the gospel.

The peace of the Lord be with us and with you all. Amen. “Johann and Anna Wall”


Credit:
The above letter was recorded in a booklet belonging to Heinrich Wall in Springfield, P.O. Wymark, Box 22, [Sask.]. Also in the booklet was the diary of Johann Wall that he kept on his trip to Brazil. Translated by J.K. Wiens. Courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.

Alt. Johann Wiebe (1837-1905)

The final section of this paper will consist of various accounts and testimonies of conservative Mennonite Ohms across two continents and two centuries. An attempt has been made to draw these testimonies as much as possible from the vibrant oral tradition of the conservative Mennonite people, but in the case of the earlier Ohms this has also been supplemented from their equally rich written literature. Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) was one of the most profound, spirit-led Mennonite leaders of the 19th century. He was elected as an altester of the Chortita “old” Colony Flemish Gemeinde at Füstenland in Imperial Russia in 1870 (see Pres., No. 18, page 24). In 1875 he succeeded in calling forth the scattered sheep of Old Colonists from various colonies and Old Country traditions to form the Reinarlander Gemeinde in Manitoba (“Rein” or purity of the Gemeinde “without spot and wrinkle” having been a consistent theme of the Flemish Mennonites since the days of the Reformation).

Rev. Peter Zacharias’s biography of Johann Wiebe (dating to his ground-breaking Reiland study of 1976) has been widely distributed and is well-known in Mennonite circles (see Pres., No. 14, pages 3-8). Several additional anecdotes from other sources will serve to illustrate the wide range of duties and far reaching impact of the ministry of “the lonely Ohm.”

The first incident dates to 1875 when a contingent of Old Colonists was crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the S.S. Peruvenian. On board were the Füstenland altester Johann Wiebe and his family. Altester Isaak M. Dyck recalled how his mother had often told the story of the ocean crossing. She had had such trust and confidence in altester Wiebe “that she had been so completely without worry or anxiety, and was of the view that since altester Wiebe was on her ship, it was impossible for the ship to go down. But one evening a great storm had arisen on the sea, so that the ship had started to shake—particularly at the bow— and they had all become worried and afraid. Then suddenly she had seen, the so dearly loved “altester—before he had reposed for his rest—going through all the cabins in which our people were to be found, and encouraging all of them to pray—both young and old—that the ship would not be allowed to sink in the raging seas. He had encouraged them with the story of how the disciples and the Saviour had also been covered with waves, and the people had said, ‘What manner of man is this.’ And thus my mother said also! They had all prayed very much that the beloved God might protect them and keep them safe. And when they had woken on the next morning, the storm was gone and the ship proceeded on calm seas,” Isaak M. Dyck, Auswanderung, pages 16-17.

On the same ocean voyage. Wiebe had asked one of his fellow passengers, Cornelius Giesbrecht, “whether smoking was not a sin to him?”

“No,” replied Giesbrecht.

In response the altester had explained how smoking had become a sin to him. Giesbrecht later joined the Holdemans Gemeinde but acknowledged he had never forgotten his interaction of a few words with Ohm Johann (Pres., No. 18, page 13).

The second incident comes from the early pioneer years when many people were struggling financially, especially widows and other marginalized folks. Altester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969) later recalled the encouragement which altester Johann Wiebe gave his mother, then a struggling widow: “At no time should we concern ourselves to become rich. But rather we should concern ourselves about being Christlike and for the maintenance of our physical being. For if we should need to sustain our life in our senior years and the difficulties of old age and failing health set in, and our life’s course proceeded with rapid steps towards the setting sun, that in our old age we would be able to eat our own bread and repose under our own roof and that we could pay to everyday his due; to be able to pursue such a wellbeing can be considered as a gift from God. Ecclesiastes 5:18,” as quoted by Altester Isaak M. Dyck, Hinterlassene Schriften, page 190/Old Colony Men. in Can., page 125.

The third anecdote is from 1902 during the final years of Ohm Johann’s ministry. His cousin’s son Heinrich Toews (1863-1927), a school teacher in Altona, Manitoba, had shot and killed one of his students. Heinrich then turned the gun on himself but survived the suicide attempt for several weeks. While in prison and awaiting trial for murder, Old Colony leaders Johann Wiebe, Vorsteher Franz Froese and Franz Dueck, paid the accused a visit in his jail cell in Winnipeg. Heinrich’s brother Bernard Toews provided an account of the visit: “He welcomed altester Wiebe and confessed to him that he had neglected the holy baptism for himself and expressed remorse at his generally sinful state. Altester Wiebe comforted him with various scripture quotations which seemed to brace my brother up considerable. With our assistance he [Heinrich] knelt and the four of us prayed together. A lengthy discussion followed during which altester Wiebe asked “what had prompted him to commit the terrible deed?” which Heinrich then answered in a repentive and trusting way,” (Pres., No. 19, page 99).

Mrs. Jakob Heide (nee Susanna Dyck), recalled that Johann Wiebe was a very forceful speaker with an extensive vocabulary. Many serious issues arose in the Old Colony Gemeinde, especially during the 1880s, but Ohm Johann was successful in holding the body of Christ together and steering a course of Gospel-centric teaching. He was usually able to persuade the brotherhood of the validity of such views (Note Three).

Ever the faithful Ohm, Johann Wiebe was concerned about an orderly transition of leadership in the Old Colony Gemeinde. Peter A. Elias describes the process: “The altester got ever more frail and at times sick, so that with the permission of the Gemeinde, he decided to elect an assistant altester. This was done on July 22, 1902, when his son Peter Wiebe was elected and ordained as altester on the 24th. On October 3, the next year—1903, another two ministers were elected, namely: Johann Friesen and Gerhard Friesen, both of Neuenburg. On July 5, 1904, there was a calling forth of the scattered sheep of Old Coloniers was crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the S.S. Peruvenian. On board were the Füstenland altester Johann Wiebe and his family. Altester Isaak M. Dyck recalled how his mother had often told the story of the ocean crossing. She had had such trust and confidence in altester Wiebe “that she had been so completely without worry or anxiety, and was of the view that since altester Wiebe was on her ship, it was impossible for the ship to go down. But one evening a great storm had arisen on the sea, so that the ship had started to shake—particularly at the bow—and they had all become worried and afraid. Then suddenly she had seen, the so dearly loved altester—before he had reposed for his rest—going through all the cabins in which our people were to be found, and encouraging all of them to pray—both young and old—that the ship would not be allowed to sink in the raging seas. He had encouraged them with the story of how the disciples and the Saviour had also been covered with waves, and the people had said, ‘What manner of man is this.’ And thus my mother said also! They had all prayed very much that the beloved God might protect them and keep them safe. And when they had woken on the next morning, the storm was gone and the ship proceeded on calm seas,” Isaak M. Dyck, Auswanderung, pages 16-17.

On the same ocean voyage, Wiebe had asked one of his fellow passengers, Cornelius Giesbrecht, “whether smoking was not a sin to him?”

“No,” replied Giesbrecht.

In response the altester had explained how smoking had become a sin to him. Giesbrecht later joined the Holdemans Gemeinde but acknowledged he had never forgotten his interaction of a few words with Ohm Johann (Pres., No. 18, page 13).

The second incident comes from the early pioneer years when many people were struggling financially, especially widows and other marginalized folks. Altester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969) later recalled the encouragement which altester Johann Wiebe gave his mother,
The life and example of Johann Wiebe models the all-encompassing role of a true servant-leader in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Whether it be a casual discussion with a fellow passenger (who remembered the incident years later), or encouraging a distraught widow unable to provide her children with all the material advantages of life, or showing compassion to a penitent felon despised and rejected by others, these incidents illustrate the stature and far-reaching influence of the lonely Ohm.

Historian Peter Zacharias has characterized Altester Johannes Wiebe as “A man of uncompromising principle! A man who agonized over decisions, but who, once he had made them, swerved neither to the left nor to the right. Johann Wiebe was a man who believed in the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the leading of the Holy Spirit. A man whose expectations of the church was high and who was often thwarted by the shortcomings of fallible human beings, and who included himself among the fallible,” as quoted in Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, page 48.

Rev. Zacharias concludes by citing the testimony for Ohm Johannes Wiebe by William Hespeler, the widely respected Canadian Government Immigration agent who had worked together with him for several decades: “He was a faithful shepherd and spent his energy, indeed, his whole life, for the welfare of his flock and as its example. I will always remember him as a personal friend and as the father of the Reinfeldl Mennonite Gemeinde.....I hope that his good spirit will remain an example to them.” *Ibid.*

Further Reading:

Peter Zacharias, Reiland: *An Experience in Community* 2d. (Winkler, 2002), 350 pages plus 16 page colour supplement. Order from Reiland Community Centre, R.R.1, Box 218, Winkler, Manitoba. $4.00 plus $6.00 postage (e-mail: csnf@mts.net).

**Altester Peter Wiebe (1861-1913).**

Peter Wiebe (1861-1913) was elected as the Assistant-Altester of the Manitoba Old Colony Gemeinde in 1902. The two-Altester system had a long-standing tradition in the “Old” Chortitz Colony in Russia, going back to the Altester election of 1794. Mrs. Jakob Heide (nee Susanna Dyck) recalled that Peter Wiebe took very seriously the heavy responsibility of his high office and calling from God. He always started his sermon with the expression, “Meine große Armut macht mich Schreien.” (My great [spiritual] poverty causes me to cry out...)

Another anecdote was recalled by a great-nephew. At some point Peter’s buildings in Rosengard had burned down. The sermons which had been handed down by his father were in the Eck Schaup (corner cabinet) and were only rescued after a heroic effort. The sermons were damaged, being somewhat charred around the edges. They were taken along to Mexico where many young ministers copied them (*Pres., No. 14*, page 7).

In his “Auswanderung von Canada nach Mexico,” Altester Isaak M. Dyck recalled how some of the Mennonites in Russia had referred to the 1875 immigrants and that they were sure to find only starvation and poverty in Canada. But after some 30 years the Old Colony Gemeinde in Manitoba started receiving letters from Russia asking for assistance “and that I personally remember Altester Ohm Peter Wiebe reading such letters to the assembly: ‘Help us, help us, so that we and our children do not need to die from starvation.’ I was 23 years old at the time when the petition from the beloved Altester for the suffering [coreligionists] in Russia was publicized and through sympathy and compassion I was also inspired - although only in relation to my modest means - to contribute a small gift. But only after the many letters of thanks started arriving after a long period of time, where the situation had been so extreme that many had already eaten their last bread, and did not know what they would eat the next morning, and how many tears of thanks for the help from America had been shed, I had to confess with humility, punishment and shame that I had given far too little. The much beloved Altester at the time, Isaak Dyck, wrote in that regard from Russia to our Altesten, Dyck, *Auswanderung*, page 9.

Ohm Isaak M. Dyck recalled the time in 1912 when “he was elected as the village school teacher and he had great difficulty in accepting the call. The beloved Altester Ohm Peter Wiebe had come to speak to him. Ohm Peter had asked him, ‘Why do you try to avoid this [the call], it really does not pay to resist it for our mortal life is really only so very short, idle, fleeting and perishable, and generally speaking the teachers do not serve that long.’ Ohm Isaak’s point was the if Altester Peter Wiebe had told him he would have to serve for ever or even for 50 years, he would have been far too discouraged to accept the calling. From *Hinterlassene Schriften*, page 58.

Altester Isaak M. Dyck recalls the last days of Ohm Peter’s last illness, and that he had gone to visit him Saturday night toward evening: “Everything on the yard was full of people, and the deep sorrow and grief written on the faces of the many guests already confirmed that the situation of the beloved Altester’s sickness must be very severe. And even as I was holding back somewhat in entering (since I felt myself completely shattered by the news; I had not yet allowed myself to imagine this), the beloved Altester Ohm Abram Wiebe from Swift suddenly came walking outside and said, ‘If you want to see Ohm Peter Wiebe then do not delay any longer in going inside, for I believe that he will soon die. And so I followed Altester Ohm Abram into the house...just into the door of the small room where he was lying in his bed, with his wife and children standing crying around him...Presently I noticed that he raised his right hand a little, and gave me a small signal, to come closer. And when I give him my hand in greeting, he grabbed me with both hands around my neck and embraced me to his sick breast. With sighing voice he said to me, ‘Oh, now always be very energetic and work for the Lord so that we can see each other again in eternity.’ After me, came an old father, taking his farewell, and asked him, ‘If he really would leave us and the Gemeinde.’ To this he [Ohm Peter] answered, ‘I am already reaching out my hand to meet the Saviour.’ These were the last words which I heard from him in this life. Around 10 o’clock in the evening he gave up the ghost, and entered into his eternal rest as a worn and weary pilgrim.” Isaak M. Dyck, *Auswanderung*, pages 21-22.

It was at Peter Wiebe’s funeral that Altester Jakob Wiens from the “old west” told of a vision he had when he was still living in Reiland on the yard now [1913] owned by Peter Harms. Altester Wiens told of his thoughts while working on the field, “as he surveyed the high grass and the waving ears of beautiful wheat. And it was as if a voice from above had spoken to him, ‘We will not be able to remain here for ever. Once more the Gemeinde will have to seize the hold of the pilgrim’s staff,” Isaak M. Dyck, *Auswanderung*, page 22.

Historian Peter Zacharias has written that Peter Wiebe’s “...tenure. 1906-1913, was a period of relative calm. The conflicts of the pioneer years were largely over, the church had been established, there was general prosperity and the war had not yet come. Peter Wiebe was a conservative elder and seems to have held a pro-status quo position. Wiebe was a strong supporter of church schools. He passed away suddenly in 1913,” Zacharias, *Reiland*, page 197.

**Further Reading:**
Additional accounts of the death of Altester Ohm Peter Wiebe are found in the journals of Peter A. Elias and in *Ein Reisebericht von Rüßland nach Amerika anno 1875 herausgegeben von Altesten Johann Wiebe* (Liberaei ‘Aleman’, Cuauhtemoc, 1994), pages 30-32.

Altester Johann Friesen (1869-1935).

Johann Friesen (1869-1935) (RGB 291-2) was elected Altester of the Old Colony Gemeinde in Manitoba in 1913 to replace Peter Wiebe, son of Johann. Chronicler Peter A. Elias, Grünfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba, documented the election as follows: “On November 4, 1913, a new Altester was elected, namely Johann Friesen, Neuenburg, and ordained on the 6th. 138 votes were cast for the Altester, although the [Manitoba] Gemeinde had 800 qualified men.”

Rev. David Janzen, Hines Creek, Alberta, recalled an interesting anecdote related by George Krahn of La Crete, Alberta. In his youth George had worked as a field hand for Ohm Johann on his farm in Neuenburg, West Reserve, Manitoba. When the Ohm came to check on his work, he would walk to the fence behind his Wirtschaft coming through the gate to talk with him. George never forgot how the family dog had followed at Ohm Johann’s heels and behind the dog came the bull, the cows, and other farm animals, all in a row. To George this was an example of how the brothers and sisters in the Gemeinde should support their Altester as he led them together in the
footsteps of Jesus.

George Rempel, Winkler, formerly of Blumenort, Manitoba Colony, Mexico recalled an anecdote about Ältester Johann Friesen: In Neuenburg where Ohm Johann lived it was customary that the village bull was boarded in rotation by the villagers. When the term of one farmer was completed, the next farmer was obligated to get the bull. It happened that one neighbour neglected to come for the bull and even failed to show up the following day. After the neighbour had not come even several days later, the farmer - in frustration - went and complained to the Ältester. After he had told his story, Ohm Johann nodded his head. "Oh, that was okay. Don't worry," he said. "Mrs. Friesen and I will come tomorrow and do it ourselves - I will pull in front on the bull's nose ring and she will push from behind, and surely we'll manage somehow." The neighbour was quiet for a few moments. But the message was understood. "Never mind," he said quickly. "I'll look after it myself." Ohm Johann had wanted to teach his neighbour something about going the extra mile.

George Rempel remembered another story from 1933 when his father Gerhard Rempel (1893-1988) was elected as Vorsteher of the Manitoba Colony. At first Gerhard Rempel had refused to accept the office. Finally Ältester Johann Friesen had gone to visit. "Can you tell me that you are not capable of carrying out the duties of the office?" he had asked. "Well, no," answered Gerhard. "No, I cannot say that I could not do it." "Well," replied Ohm Johann, "in that case it would be good if you accepted the position as the brethren have demonstrated their trust in you. Everyone is responsible to contribute the talents that they have for the sake of the community." In such a gentle way, Ohm Johann had persuaded Gerhard Rempel to take up the Vorsteher's position.

Susanna Friesen (b. 1922), Altona, remembered Johann Friesen as a young girl. He was a handsome man of medium stature with a trim build. Ohm Johann had no children of the first marriage but they adopted several orphans. The entire community rejoiced with him when he remarried and his second wife bore him a son, later a minister in Belize. Susanna heard Ältester Johann Friesen preach and remembered him as a good preacher. He was not quick to discipline offenders and admonished them in a loving way. Susanna remembered Ältester Friesen coming to visit her sick grandfather (her grandmother Mrs. B. Wiebe, née Hiebert, had remarried to a Froese) in Neuhorst, Mexico.

Isaac Reimer (b. 1920), Aylmer, Ontario, grew up in Gnadenthal, Manitoba Colony. He remembered Ältester Johann Friesen as a highly respected and Godly man. Isaac's maternal grandmother, Elisabeth, Mrs. Johann Froese, was crippled and confined to a sickbed for 35 years. Ohm Johan and other members of the ministerial regularly came to visit her. They would usually read something for her and pray with her.

During the 1918 epidemic Ältester Friesen "...fell very sick from the flu, so that he could not attend church for two weeks," Isaak M. Dyck, Auswanderung, page 35. It was during the war years that the English settlement of Deloraine had a total crop failure because of a grasshopper infestation. They pleaded for aid from the Reinhäuser Gemeinde which responded with typical generosity, providing $4000.00 cash and two railway carloads full of feed, Auswanderung, page 41.

Johann Friesen was the Ältester who led his people through the difficult times of the war years. "When an inspector visited Elder Johann Friesen of Neuenburg...and asked him whether the English language was not of God just as well as the German language, the elder answered, "The language is not the issue. But it is unthinkable for us to have our children educated under the flag and with militaristic implications to become citizens of the world," quoted in Zacharias, Reinland, page 198/Dyck, Auswanderung, page 40.

Ohm Isaak M. Dyck later also recalled that the beloved Ältester Johann Friesen had often lamented, "It is high time that we proceed in flight and seek to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God," Auswanderung, page 46. Ältester Friesen had "surveyed the situation in Mexico and had warned his people that it would be a difficult and dangerous move," quoted in Blumenfeld, page 38. "But when the question, whether we wanted to immigrate, was finally put to the brethren to a vote by Ältester Johann Friesen, the answer was unanimous," Auswanderung, page 47.

In 1922 after the first contingent of Old Colony settlers had already moved, Ältester Johann Friesen travelled to Mexico to provide spiritual encouragement and to serve with baptism and communion. Ohm Isaak M. Dyck later recalled Friesen's words of encouragement, "One day he was at Jakob Loewens' in Rosengart for the funeral of a little child. In his funeral sermon he referred frequently to the words of Jesus, "...blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." He laid these words very seriously on our hearts seeking to strengthen us thereby, although we could not yet see much good in Mexico - that is to say, in the material realm," Auswanderung, pages 118-119. Ohm Isaak also recounts what rejoicing there was when Ältester Ohm Johann Friesen arrived in Mexico the following fall with the rest of the immigrants: "Oh, that gave a joy, a strengthening and uplifting...and nonetheless, through the arrival of the Ältester many weeds were weeded out. Hardly had he put up his hut when he went to work together with us Ohms who were already here. Many dispositions were put aside and many missteps were rectified," Anfangs Jahre, pages 7-8.

Often times Ältester Ohm Johann Friesen would admonish his Ohms when they were all assembled in the "Ohmsstubschen" for "Dinnerstag": "That the Gemeinde would far rather have the Ohms that they would not seek to equal the brethren with respect to modern farm equipment and would rather remain in simplicity and humility in working for and achieving their physical sustenance," Dyck, Anfangs Jahre, page 50. Johann Friesen made the request from his successor Isaak M. Dyck, "that the schools and church should continue, that the seminal beliefs of the sects and the new-year celebration be preserved," Dyck, Anfangs Jahre, page 57.

Ohm Isaak M. Dyck described the death of Ältester Ohm Johann Friesen in 1935: "The multiple tribulations, the hardly bearable daily burdens and heat, which he had to carry as Ältester during the last years, had tired his spirit, and no longer could he cope with his life's strength. Already in the proving time regarding the schools, one observed in him serious occurrences of sickness. His blooming figure started to shrivel, and we had to realize what we did not want to believe. The beloved Ältester started to wilt like a flower in fall. Already on December 12, 1933, he required from the Gemeinde that an assistant Ältester be elected....How often in his sickness did he not weep and pray for the Gemeinde. His heart was convicted regarding the dark future which we were approaching. He humbled himself before God and man. The Lord heard his prayers and saw his tears," Dyck, Anfangs Jahre, pages 34 and 38.

German Counsel Walter Schmiedehaus has given Ältester Johann Friesen the tribute that he "was a pious, Godly-hearted man and without doubt also a very energetic one, whose later passing was a great loss to the Colony," Ein Feste Berg ist unser Gott (Cuauhtemoc, 1948), page 126. Johann Friesen is remembered as a loving and gracious leader. He was known for his simple philosophy and sage wisdom, inspiring his Gemeinde in unity and yieldness. His was to be the seemingly impossible mission of leading his people to a new homeland in Mexico, and of overseeing his flock as they established a new life for themselves in the Bustillos Valley.

Further Reading:

Ältester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969).
In 1933 Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969), Blumenfeld (Campo 16), Manitoba Colony, Mexico, was elected as Ältester to help the ailing Johann Friesen.

Ältester Isaak M. Dyck was married to Susanna Peters. She was a cripple and always walked with a limp. She was a God-fearing woman of amazing strength of character. During the flu time in Manitoba in 1918, Susanna Peters Dyck had been spared from the flu. She had remained healthy and actively assisted those who were sick. She had thanked God for sparing her, but also reflected that the Lord proves His own, and whether perhaps she was not considered worthy.

Isaak M. Dyck was a 33-year-old minister farming in Blumenfeld when the immigration to Mexico got underway in 1922. Rev. Peter Zacharias recounts the poignant story of how the Blumenfeld people met for a farewell service in the local school the day before the departure. "After the train departed from Haskell, Rev. Dyck stood at the window directing his gaze towards Blumenfeld and towards the house, yard and land that was left behind. When Blumenfeld disappeared from view, he turned towards Rosengard,

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 101
Finally the last of the villages melted from sight,” Zacharias, *Reinland*, page 201. Ohm Isaak M. Dyck himself describes his feelings at the time, “And after we had taken our leave with much sorrow, pain and tears, in that we did not know whether we would ever again in this life see all the friends, parents and siblings whom we had to leave behind. Suddenly, at approximately 8 o’clock in the morning, the train engine gave the signal for departure. Gently and carefully, he placed the large train into motion. Quiet and yielded and without much talking, we left our birthplace Manitoba....and then when our sighing and prayers were raised up to heaven!....” Isaak M. Dyck, *Auszwanderung*, pages 78-79.

Rev. Abram Rempel, Winkler, recalled several anecdotes about Mrs. Dyck. She supported her husband’s ministry wholeheartedly. Because of the great heat in Mexico which was hard on the horses, Ohm Isaak usually drove out in the late afternoon or even the evening to do house visitsations. Naturally it could get quite late by the time he got home. If he was driving through a village and a light was on in a house where Ohm Issuk felt spiritual encouragement was needed, he would stop in, regardless of the time. It was said that Susanna never scolded or complained. Her first question invariably was whether her husband had eaten.

George Rempel, Winkler, recalled that there was one positive quality about Altester Isaak Dyck that everyone agreed on: Ohm Issuk was always available when he was needed by his parishioners, rain or shine. If there was a death, there was no choice, he had to press onward. Finally he arrived at the bedside of the sick woman. He had time to pray with her and encourage her. Shortly thereafter she passed away to be with her Lord and Saviour, comforted and in peace. He had made it to her bedside before the men in the automobile. The moral was that in God’s plan the time is always right if only His servants are yielded to His will.

On another occasion, Altester Isaak M. Dyck was summoned to Mexico City on government business. He had responded that he was a poor farmer who only drove on steel wheels and hence could not come. The government official replied that their trains also drove on steel so this should not be a problem. Altester Dyck had gone to Mexico City and attended to the business. He had even taken a taxi ride.

Mrs. Abram (Eva) Friesen, Camp 47, Santa Rita Colony, recalled that Ohm Isaak had only had a earth floor in his house. Although a man of some means he choose to live frugally and sparingly, for which he was respected and admired by the parishioners whom he served. He choose to employ his time almost exclusively in the work of the Gemeinde, seeing to the spiritual nourishment of his flock. His dedication is revealed in an incident which occurred when he was already somewhat an older Ohm while on a journey of spiritual ministry to the Durango Colony 600 km. away. After preaching a full sermon in the morning his hosts had arranged for him to refresh himself with an afternoon nap. He had replied that such a luxury was not on his agenda and that by a certain time he had to be at the home of a certain family where they needed spiritual counselling and encouragement.

Ben Friesen (born 1939), Winkler, was employed by Altester Isaak Dyck in 1952. Isaak Dyck had a typical village Wirtschaft. He had four daughters and one son who died from a tragic welding accident. The Dyck family also provided a foster home to a number of orphaned children. His daughter and son-in-law Franz Guenther and children also lived with the Dycks and he worked on the farm. Isaak Dyck treated his employees well. He was almost never at home as his ministry constantly kept him on the road. Ben always ate with the Dyck family for meals even though he was only a servant. The discussion around the table was lively and friendly.

Susanna Friesen (b. 1922), Altona, was the daughter of Jakob Thiessens from Neuhorst. Her grandfather Bernhard Wiebe was the son of Altester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905). Her father was the grandson of Obervorsteher Isaak Mueller, Manitoba. Susanna’s parents lived in Neuhorst.

She remembers Isaak Dyck as a good preacher whose worship services stretched on up to three hours and more. He spoke slower and louder than Ohm Johann Friesen and presented his sermons in a singsong style which the people much appreciated. When Isaak Dyck came to Neuhorst to hold the worship services he always stayed and fed his horses at Jakob Thiessens. After church he came for dinner and drank five cups of coffee and had a hearty appetite which is understandable as he had gotten up early to get ready, driven with his horse and buggy for 20 km. and then stood while preaching for three hours. When Ohm Isaak went to minister in the Nord Colony he stopped off at Jakob Thiessens to change horses. The Thiessens always had fast horses which got him there much quicker.

Rev. Peter Thiessen (b. 1933), Port Rowan, Ont., was raised by foster parents Franz Fehrs. Franz Fehr was a school teacher and taught in Reinland, Hamburg and Neuhorst. Peter remembered Ohm Isaak coming there to inspect the schools. He remembered Altester Isaak Dyck as a very gifted man.

Ben Wall, Northfield, Nova Scotia, remembered an incident about Isaak Dyck dating to 1956 when Ohm Issuk had come to Durango on a journey of spiritual visitation and ministry. Ohm Issuk was a heavy, quite portly man. As he came walking into the sanctuary from the Ohm’s Stube and opened the service, one man, who possibly liked too much to poke fun at people, started chuckling. But Ohm Issuk was a captivating speaker and it was observed in a short time that the jester’s eyes were filled with tears as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. It was somewhat of a tradition among the Ohms from Cuauhtemoc that they presented their sermons in a singsong chant, thereby enhancing the Word of God for their listeners.

In his later years, Isaak M. Dyck got quite sick and needed to have a serious operation. The "...doctor Pedro Leal Rodrigues postponed the operation for four days. When Alteste Ohm Heinrich Dyck has asked him why, he had given the answer, “It was no small matter for him to operate on a Bishop who carried the responsibility for so many souls on his heart, and that if the results were not good he would carry the guilt for this as long as he lived,” *Hinterlassene Schriften*, pages 43-44. Finally the doctor had proceeded with the operation which required that Ohm Isaak’s lower body be anaesthetized. As the nurses were fastening his arms and legs, he had "...requested of the doctor that at least his hands not be fettered so that he could pray. The doctor has replied whether it would not be sufficient what he had prayed already; Ohm Isaak replied, ’No, because he was praying not only for himself but also for the entire Gemeinde bound
with me to my heart. Whereupon the doctor himself laid my right hand upon my breast, and said, 'If you can keep your hand still upon your chest we will release you from the straps.' Now I saw how the doctor together with his nurses steepled their hands and supplicated to God for help that all might go well; "Hinterlassene Schriften", pages 44.

During the entire recovery time of 17 days, Isaak’s wife Susanna sat loyally at his side, even though this was contrary to hospital regulations. She had said that she would not allow herself to be sent away from her husband’s side in such a need.

From his writings, and particularly "Hinterlassene Schriften" written in 1965, it is abundantly clear that Ältester Ohm Isaak Dyck loved his wife Susanna dearly and had a life-long love affair with her. He cites an occasion, for example, when Susanna had learned that a poor woman had sought refuge in their barn during a cold winter night. Even though she was already extremely ill, she had insisted “that the woman be summoned into the house. Then the woman immediately had to warm herself by the warm oven and she instructed that we should give her something to eat. And in this way she always had an open and sympathetic heart towards all poor people and reminded us frequently of the words of scripture in Hebrews 13:2, ‘Do not forget to be hospitable, for thereby some have embraced of scripture in Hebrews 13:2, ‘Do not forget to be hospitable, for thereby some have embraced angels.’ One time I said to her, how there was hardly any fear of God to be found among the Mexicans and even among us, how we could [have the opportunity] to host angels. To this she replied, this must apparently be in reference to the young innocent children, who so often had to go hungry and freezing outside.” (pages 50-51).

Ohm Ältester Isaak Dyck frequently gushed forth in his love and appreciation for Susanna’s courageous and selfless service to the family and the church community. She spoke only little during her final illness. When Ohm Isaak asked her about it, she replied “that she found speaking difficult, and what was there to say in any event, as she knew the heavenly Father loved her.” Ohm Isaak’s description of Susanna’s death and his leave taking of his beloved wife and life’s fellow pilgrim are heartbreakingly to say the least. See "Hinterlassene Schriften", pages 48-58.

Abram Neufeld, Campo 47, Santa Rita Colony, Mexico, recalled frequently hearing about Ältester Isaak M. Dyck as a young man and that he was held in high regard by his parishioners. When their local Ältester Bernhard Penner moved to Bolivia in about 1968, Ohm Isaak had compassion for the flock in Santa Rita and came and reorganized the Gemeinde there. Many people felt that Isaak M. Dyck was indispensable to the work of the Kingdom of God and were anxious for the day when he would no longer be there to lead the Gemeinde.

Over the centuries, “retreat and retreatch” has been one of the most commonly used - and amazingly successful - strategies for survival among traditionalist (Kirchlische) and conservative Mennonites. David Friesen, former MCC worker in Casas Grandes, Mexico, recently gave Ältester Isaak M. Dyck a glowing testimonial, referring to the fact that he did not resort to this strategy, opting rather to remain and to contend for the faith and for the integrity of his beloved Gemeinde. Ohm Isaak presumably knew only too well the pain and dislocation caused by “retreating and retrenching”. He opted, rather, to stand where he was, engaging the battle against the enemies of the Church of God. David Friesen was of the view, that in this way, Ohm Isaak has modelled an alternative strategy for younger leaders in the Old Colony church for many generations to come. This strategy will become ever more important as opportunities for immigration and resettlement become more restricted.

Ältester Ohm Isaak M. Dyck stands among the giants of the Mennonite faith, perhaps rising to equal in stature the esteemed Ältester Ohm Johann Wiebe who had founded the Reinländer (Old Colony) denomination in 1875. With his firm leadership and unyielding compassion as a soul caregiver, Ohm Isaak kept his flock united and together during the most difficult of times. In his testament written for his children, he himself describes his ceaseless struggles: “For so many nights, while you were lying asleep and slumbering, your spiritual caregiver was writing in this book with sighing and weeping or was on the road in the darkness of night during lighting, thunder, wind and rain, working for the well-being of the Gemeinde,” Anfangs Jahre, page 81. By 1946 his Gemeinde had increased to 8301 souls, one of the largest Mennonite congregations at the time.

Like Ohm Johann Wiebe, Ohm Isaak left a rich literary legacy. Several of his writings were published and have undoubtedly convicted and inspired thousands of earnest believers in the faith since his passing, thereby instilling and enshrining much of his spirituality within his denomination and beyond. His writings reveal a literary mind - although he himself would have denied that attribute; he was articulate and well familiar with the history of his people back to the Anfangs Jahre and the seminal writings of the faith. In his books Auswanderung and Anfangs Jahre alone, he quotes Menno Simons at least a dozen times with other references to Dirk Philips, Jan Philips Schabaeel (Die Wandelnde Seele), Pieter Pieters and the Martyrs’ Mirror; inspirational works representing a wholesome theological balance within the canon of Mennonite devotional literature.

The theology and philosophy of Ältester Ohm Isaak Dyck and other Ohms comes into clearer focus when viewed from the perspective of the late medieval monastic tradition, Erasmus and the Christian humanists, and Thomas a Kempis and the Brethren of the Common Life, many of whose ideals were humbly professed and carried forward within the blood veins of the Flemish Mennonites. Like the Brethren of the Common Life, Ohm Isaak believed that “…reading, writing, arithmetic, Catechism, singing and prayer, as well as the appropriate level of practice in grammar, shall always be taught, so that the children - when they later want to write theirs [relatives] in other lands - have learned the necessary distinctions of the letters and words.” Anfangs Jahre, page 57. Ohm Isaak referred his parishioners with particular approval to the admonitions and instruction of Menno Simons regarding child rearing and their Christian nurture: Anfangs Jahre, page 36.

Ohm Isaak understood life and salvation very much in terms of relationships: man relating to God and to fellow human beings - relationships which were to be permeated and articulated by God’s love. He professed a simple scriptural view of salvation: “But with respect to the Godly and heavenly wisdom, I - through the Lord’s grace - have been taught in so far that I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he who believeth in Him shall be saved. Through this wisdom - so little cherished by the world - I have received so much of the fear of God, that I have converted myself from the world to God, and it is to my heartfelt sorrow that I am [mortal]y unable to love my God and walk before Him in righteousness with all my power, and with all my senses, and with all my soul. I regard this Godly wisdom, which bringeth forth the fruits of the spirit, as the most essential and necessary,” Anfangs Jahre, pages 57-58.

Although Ohm Isaak believed that those who were healthy and capable should work to earn their own bread, he had a heart of compassion for those in poverty, which he himself had tasted during the early years in Mexico. He realized how poverty could hurt a family “And especially the wife, who manages the household and must prepare the table, has the most to suffer in this regard. Therefore I say to the poor - whether you must carry the cross of physical poverty from God because of sickness, misfortune or through rich blessing of children, that they might wish to take to heart the comfort of our precious Redeemer, when He says, ‘blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the kingdom.’ Therefore, live in quiet simplicity, and think only how we shall all strive for heaven, for there the poor as well as the rich will be endowed with the same glory,” Anfangs Jahre, page 69.

Just like with Mother Teresa, the Catholic nun in Calcutta who saved thousands through her mission of mercy, outside observers and critics did not always agree with the methods and vision of Ohm Isaak. But there is no denying the vibrancy of his faith and the integrity of his Christian witness. As biographer Peter A. Petkau has written, “[Isaak M. Dyck]...was a family man, but most of all, he was dedicated to the Reinnerlander church. He is remembered as the Ältester that struggled to make this Mexican landscape a spiritual home for this ‘pilgrim people’,” Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, page 128.

Further Reading:
Alt. Isaak M. Dyck, Hinterlassene Schriften vom Ältesten Isaak M. Dyck, Blumenfeld, Mexico (Jakob Klasiens Fehr, Campo 5, Apdo 120, Cuahtemoc, Mx., 31500), 123 pages.

Preservations No. 21, December, 2002 - 103
Altester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1968), Blumenfeld, Manitoba Colony, Mexico. Photo from 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexico (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 282/Diese Steine, page 597. A devoted servant of God, who always had time for those in need.


The readers are indebted to the Old Colonier publisher Libreria “Aleman”, Strassburo Plaza, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, who have published these and other books for the spiritual nurture and edification of their people.

Manitoba Colony.

Heinrich Dyck (1913-82), Reinfield, was a short and very friendly man well liked by everybody. He was elected Altester of the Manitoba Colony Gemeinde on October 2, 1962, originally as Assistant-Altester. Heinrich Dyck was an energetic leader who finally resolved the issue of rubber tires. He also instituted the two Altester districts in the Manitoba Colony with a separate Altester serving the north end and south end.

Isaac Reimer (b. 1920), Aylmer, Ontario, remembered Altester Heinrich Dyck very favourably. The Reimer family moved to Jagueyes in 1962. A year later Isaac had asked for their membership to be transferred to the Kleine Gemeinde. Some leaders might have resented the notion of losing a family but Heinrich Dyck had encouraged the Reimer family that they should commit themselves to a church community. The Reimers were pleased that they were able to move away in such a peaceful manner, with the blessing of the Altester.

The next Altester to serve the north end was Jakob Loewen of Hamburg, later of Rosenthal. He died in 2000. He was replaced by Johann Loewen, Einlage, Campo 11.

Johann Loewen was elected as the Altester for the south end. He moved to Paraguay. He was succeeded by Franz Banman, Kleefeld, in 1976. Recently Franz Kroeker, Kronsarg, was also elected and both are serving today. The Ohms around Cuauhtemoc sometimes used the Jakob Denners’ book of sermons, called Betrachtungen, to compile their sermons (Pres., No. 15, pages 142-143).

Swift Colony.

In his younger years, Bishop Peter W. Friesen, Leamington, Ontario, lived in Neuanlage (Campo 105), Swift Colony, Mexico. In 1963-64, he was a young married man serving as the village school teacher. Frequently he went to visit his neighbour across the road, Rev. Bernard Rempel, for advice regarding problems encountered while teaching. This was the time when the Old Colony Gemeinde on Swift was dealing with the issue of rubber tires on tractors. More and more young people did not have enough land and had to rent land farther away and found it very difficult financially to maintain their long distance farming operations using steel wheels. Bishop Friesen recalls that Ohm Bjent was sympathetic to their plight and recognized that these people were trying to survive financially and that it was not right that they be put into the “utschulz”.

Altester Jakob Wiens 1855-1932.

The Nuevo Ideal Colony (Patos) in Durango, Mexico, was founded in 1924. The first Altester was Jakob Wiens (1855-1932) (RGB 76-2), the leader of the group of Mennonite pioneers originating in Hague Osler. He was of medium height, a little under six feet and weighing 160-170 pounds.

In 1900 Jakob Wiens was elected as the first Altester of the Old Colony Gemeinde at Hague Osler, then known as the “Old West”. The Wiens family had no children of their own, but adopted a number of foster children including Franz Harder who also became an Old Colony minister. Jakob Wiens lived in Neuanlage, near Hague, Saskatchewan.

Historian Peter Zacharias writes that “In November, 1916, three Reinländer Mennonite Church elders, Johann Friesen of Neuenburg, Manitoba, Abram Wiebe of Swift Current, Saskatchewan and Jakob Wiens of Hague-Osler, visited Ottawa. The uneasiness of these leaders was temporarily allayed, at least to a degree, by the guarantee of Prime Minister Robert L. Borden that the 1873 contract would be observed to the letter” in Zacharias, Reinland, page 237.

Isaak Goertzen (b. 1919) is a retired Altester of the Old Colony Gemeinde currently living in La Crete, Alberta. Isaak grew up in Grinfeld, near Hague, and his father Benjamin became Vorsteher of the Hague Osler Reserve in 1907 (see Old Colony Men, in Can., page 123). Naturally Altester Wiens and his father would frequently visit each other in the course of their duties and Isaak remembered some things about Ohm Jakob from these visits.

Isaak was quite inventive when he was young and one time he had made some kind of a lock contraption. The next time Ohm Jakob was visiting, his mother had mentioned this to him. He had replied that such inventiveness did not necessarily always get channelled for the best purposes. Isaak remembered being a bit disappointed at this reply but as he got older he learned to understand the point he was making.

Isaak remembered one funeral where Ohm Jakob preached on humility and had reminded believers that they should not become too arrogant. They should be as little children in the kingdom of God. During his sermons, Ohm Jakob often added short special comments for the youth. The worship house was generally full when it was known that Ohm Jakob would be speaking there on a particular Sunday. He emphasized that there was only one way to the heavenly kingdom, and “that straight is the gate and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life;” Matthew 7:14.

Ohm Jakob spoke loud enough but when he got going his pace became a little faster and his voice a little higher pitched with a bit of a singsong chant. He enunciated his words clearly and loudly enough so that there was no other way, it struck and convicted the hearts of his listeners.

Helena Schmitt, Nuevo Ideal, Durango, Mexico, remembers Ohm Jakob Wiens, who was her grandmother’s uncle. One time he had returned from Mexico to serve the Gemeinde at Hague. She remembered Ohm Jakob visiting at her grandparents Jakob and Anna (Wiens) Wiebe in the “Grosse Stube” (parlour), and that now and again he had walked around the room talking, and her mother had cried. Her parents had already had their auction sale and she remembers how empty everything had seemed.

Helena Schmitt recalled that Jakob Wiens was also a gifted chiropractor. Her cousin Anna Loeppky (niece of Altester Johann Loeppky) had broken her foot and her parents had taken her to Ohm Jakob. It had hurt very much, but her grandfather Isaak Loeppky had told her to be quiet, “we only want to fix your leg.” The foot had never bothered her again.

Helena’s husband Peter Loeppky had also related of a Peter Wall who had had his foot “made right” by Jakob Wiens. It turned out that he had a corn which was attached to the bone. The Altester had removed it.

Altester Jakob Wiens had a servant. The servant had received permission to take his horse and buggy to drive to Kronsthal. The next Sunday, it was unde Wiens’ turn to preach in Edenburg across the Saskatchewan River. At a certain place near a willow bush, the horse had run around.

Olga, he thought to himself, my servant has been here. He has made himself a whip.

When he returned home, he said to his servant, “You have been in Edenburg?”

The servant reflected for a while, thinking that someone had betrayed him.

“No,” said Ohm Wiens, “The horse told me everything along the way.”

Peter Loeppky, himself a minister and a minister’s son, had also related that Ohm Jakob Wiens could read people when he looked them in the eye.

Abram G. Janzen, Hague, Saskatchewan, remembered that “Jakob Wiens was very popular not only as a church leader, but also as a veterinarian and as an agriculturalist. His advice was asked often in how to fatten cattle, or how to raise vegetables and grain crops, etc. In his later years, he was rather slow born in certain areas, though he had a soft spot in his heart for the poor farmers.”

104 - Preservations No. 21, December, 2002
Goertzens. Isaak recalls that again. But a week later the bandits did come again and that surely they would not strike come to comfort his parents saying that the worst had happened and that surely they would not strike

home of Isaak Goertzen lage called Neuanlage. In 1929 bandits struck the Durango, Mexico, where they also lived in a village called Neuanlage. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague Osler Mennonite Reserve (Saskatoon, 1995), page 580/Old Colony Men. in Can., page 144. Ältester Wiens died May 12, 1932, a great servant of God.

people who could not move with him to Mexico because of financial difficulties. Rev. Johann P. Wall had much influence on him regarding ‘Die Auswanderung’ ‘...Rev. Wiens was more in favour of remaining united with the Gemeinde left behind here in Saskatchewan.’

In 1926 the Jakob Wiens family moved to Durango, Mexico, where they also lived in a village called Neuanlage. In 1929 bandits struck the home of Isaac Goertzen’s parents in Grünfeld, Durango. The experience was terrifying for the family. Isaak recalls that Ältester Jakob Wiens had come to comfort his parents saying that the worst had happened and that surely they would not strike again. But a week later the bandits did come again and stole all the halter, bridles and reins from the Goertzens. Isaak recalls that Ältester Wiens had come again to comfort his parents, and had felt obligated to pay for their loss as he had assured them that the stealing would not reoccur.


Ohm Johann P. Wall (1875-1961), Neuanlage, Saskatchewan, and later Durango, Mexico, has already been referred to. Isaac Goertzen, LaCret, Alberta, remembers him as a medium-sized man under six feet tall and weighing 180-190 pounds. Wall frequently came to the home of his parents to discuss various matters, both in Saskatchewan and later in Durango. He remembers Wall as a good minister who presented his sermons in such a way that the words of the Gospel struck to the hearts of his listeners. He spoke in a very loving manner. He was concerned that some of the poor people in the Hague area did not have the means to move and it was proposed that the wealthy members provide some assistance. But this was not completely implemented.

Johann P. Wall and Johann Loepky did not agree on everything regarding the immigration to Mexico. Wall felt that the entire Gemeinde should immigrate as a corporate body and that the full authority of the Gemeinde should stand behind that endeavour, as a means of keeping the body of Christ united and harmonious. Loepky was less convinced regarding the move and in the end, did not even decide to immigrate himself.

Durango, Mexico.

Peter Wiens, Blumenhof, Durango, was elected as Ältester after the death of Ältester Jakob Wiens. Helenna Schmitt, Nuevo Ideal, Durango, Mexico, recalls Peter Wiens who was the brother of her great-grandmother, Mrs. Jacob Wiebe, nee Anna Wiens (Note Four). Helenna remembers visiting Ohm Peter in the early 1950s when they still lived in Grünfeld, Durango. He was a widower at the time. He had related all kinds of stories of their experiences in the early years.

Helenna had asked the Ältester, “I thought only good people had immigrated here.”

“Oh, no!” replied Ohm Peter. “Do not believe that the evil enemy was not also here. He was already here to welcome us even before we got off the train.”

Ben Wall, Northfield, Nova Scotia, recalls a moving experience he had involving Ohm Peter Wiens. He was almost a stranger in Durango, because his parents, Henry and Anna Wall, had moved to Los Jaqueyes, Chihuahua, in 1948. In 1952 some of Ben’s siblings moved to Durango, and he went along because their mother had died and their father had returned to Manitoba. Presently the time had come that Ben wanted to join the Gemeinde. As was the custom he had to speak to the Ältester. There were two at the time: the old Ohm Peter Wiens and the younger Ohm Johan Wiebe who was the leading Ältester and the most responsible. So here was a 19-year-old boy once from Saskatchewan, Canada, then later from Los Jagueyes, Chihuahua, not knowing what to say, or even how to speak. He was also feeling shy and much concerned regarding what might happen this evening. He no longer recalls the start of the conversation with dear Ohm Johan Wiebe, but they did not seem to come to an understanding, or at least they came to a dead end, so to speak.

The Ohm saw Ben’s disappointment and advised him to go and see Ohm Peter Wiens. So he went to the Wiens’ home in Blumenhof that same evening. He was invited into the room of the dear old white-haired man. From the very beginning he felt his love. It warmed his heart. Gone were his fears; Ohm Peter knew just what Ben needed. He treated Ben as though he was important, and as if he was happy to have him as a guest. He felt so unworthy, but as he went home his burden was gone. Someone had understood his plight. Thank God for such a godly man. Ben Wall says he has a great desire to meet Ohm Peter some sweet day in heaven.

Later Ohm Peter Wiens remarried. He ran into difficulty with the Gemeinde in Durango and moved to the Shipyard Colony in Belize where he took over the leadership of the Gemeinde. Isaak Goertzen visited Ältester Wiens at his home. The Ohm came to greet Isaak wearing his rubber field boots. It was a very hot day and Ohm Peter was sweating profusely. He had been working hard all day weeding corn. Ohm Peter was quite an elderly man and Isaak was surprised he was still working so hard in his fields.

Helenna Schmitt recalls visiting Ohm Peter Wiens in British Honduras (as it then was) when he was already sick. She had really felt sorry for him, in the heat with only a small wooden house and among all those small children. He had moved away from Durango, because something among the leadership was not united. His son Peter Wiens was also a minister and had already moved away earlier to Costa Rica and others more, and this resulted in disagreements. This was done somewhat in secret, outside of the Gemeinde. Later while Helenna and her family were living in British Honduras (1961), the young Peter Wiens’ also moved there, where both of them died. The elder Peter Wiens’ only had two children, the other was a Mrs. Jakob Redekopp also in Belize.

Johann Wiebe (1898-1968), Grünthal, was elected as Ältester of the Gemeinde in Durango in 1961. He was the brother-in-law to Isaak Goertzen. Ohm Johan was a medium-sized man of about 180 pounds. He preached with a clear voice. When visiting his voice was quite dry. He was considered to be a man of his word and his “yes” meant yes and his “no” meant no.

Ältester Wiebe is remembered as a strict leader and a Godly man. He maintained good order in the Gemeinde and preached a sober faith and sound moral teaching. He was firmly committed to the use of the German language and the importance of the church schools. During a visit, Ohm Johan warned his brother-in-law, Isaak Goertzen,
at that time living in La Crete, Alberta, about the dangers of forsaking the confessional schools.

Ben Wall, Northfield, N. S., remembers being invited to the Johann Wiebe home for vaspa. This was an honour but parishioners were naturally somewhat nervous at dining with such a man of God. Ben remembered that during the conservation Ohm Johan had mentioned that his wife had not been happy that so many of their daughters were marrying widowers. But, he added, she often forgot that she too had married a widower and with this Ohm Johan Wiebe broke into a smile, which he seldom did, at least not in public.

Ben Wall, Northfield, Nova Scotia, has many memories of the Old Colony Ohms. One day in 1950 he was working in a field of wheat in the village of Hochfeld, Durango. Looking up, and along the road, Ben saw a fairly common sight - two ministers driving along in a buggy. How he wished they would pass on by. He did not want to talk to them. He knew when they went into the Colony or village, they had a reason. Maybe they knew something about him he did not want them to know? But here they were stopping beside the field. They called Ben to their buggy! He felt he had to go. His heart was beating faster, but they greeted him in a friendly manner and they were so kind. All they wanted was to challenge Ben to turn to the Lord and make a commitment by being baptised and joining the Gemeinde. Ben's fear vanished and his love for the Ohms grew, and is still there. The names of the two Ohms were Abram and Isaac Wall now in Paraguay.

Peter Friesen, Reinland, the man who made citizenship papers, had passed away, and help was needed to work with Canadian papers. Ben Wall's English from the lower grades in a Canadian prairie public school did not quite suffice to apply for passports, citizenship, birth certificates, etc. So he had to go to Diedrich A. Braun, Grünfeld, who was looked upon as a man of great ability. Braun was supposed to be able to help him. But Braun said, he did not know the English at all, and that Ben should go to Prediger Johan P. Wall, Neuanlage. That was a scary thought. Johan P. Wall was a senior Ohm and had served as a delegate to Brazil for the Gemeinde in 1919. He was a strict leader who expected good order and not someone to play with. And now Ben was supposed to ask him for help in working through his Canadian papers? Should he go, or not? Ben expected to get a scolding, or at least a lesson he would not forget. But one day he gathered his nerve and was on his way.

Ben Wall arrived and stopped in front of Ohm Johan's house. At that movement Mrs. Wall, who was mentally weak, came out.

"Is Ohm Johan at home?" asked Ben.

"Yes, he is. I'll call him. But he's taking a nap."

"Oh," said Ben, "then leave him alone."

But to no avail. She was already gone. Ben knew this would make things worse. Ben felt Ohm Johan was not a man to be bothered. But even as Ben was standing there quite anxious, there was Mrs. Wall again, inviting him into the house. Ohm Johan was sitting up in bed with his feet on the floor. He seemed to be friendly and there was no need for Ben to wonder how to start with what he had in mind. Ohm Johan asked for the reason why he had come. Ben told him that the English he knew was not enough to fill out the forms and he was advised to seek help from him.

"Oh," said Ohm Johan. "I'm working to keep the Gemeinde together and you want to scatter the church by moving away?"

Boy, Ben was ready to leave! It was just as he had feared.

But what was Ohm Johan saying now? Had he heard right?

"Show me what you need!" he said. Ben did so and got everything explained. Ohm Johan also gave him many forms and envelopes, and said, "I won't need them, you take them."

What a relief. Then Ohm Johan united an interesting conversation, regarding how he and Ben were related. He started from far back in Russia. How interesting. He went on and told Ben about the journey from Russia to Canada. Next came the move to Mexico. And when he came to where President Obregon died, tears were running down from the 80 year-old man's eyes. He said, "It did hurt me more than when my father and my mother died."

Again Ben's concerns and doubts had been turned into love.

Maria Wall Braun, Kleefeld, Manitoba, recalls her baptism in 1963 and taking the catechism instruction from Ohm Peter W. Wall, later the Ältester in La Honda. Ohm Peter was very friendly and took his time instructing the baptismal candidates so that they understood the teachings of the faith and their commitment to follow Christ. The teaching was done during the worship services before the baptism and all the candidates had to sit in the front benches. There were seven males and seven females in her group.

Johann Wiebe was followed as Ältester by Abraham J. Wall, Blumenhof, son of Johann Wall, the 1919 delegate who had died in Brazil during the delegation. Abram J. Wall was also the stepson of Rev. Johann P. Wall, formerly of Neuanlage, at Hague, Sask.

Deacon Henry Friesen, Wheatley, Ontario, was born and raised in Durango. He remembered Ältester Johann Wiebe as a good speaker with a soft voice. In 1968 Ohm Johann passed away and Abram J. Wall was elected as Ältester. By 1970 Henry's family was working in Ontario but father and sons travelled back for the winters. In 1972 Henry had committed himself to the Lord and felt the call to be baptised and to become a member in the Gemeinde. He felt he should go and discuss his concerns with Ältester Wall but some of his friends and family had advised him against it, perhaps thinking that the Ältester might be upset because the family was moving. Eventually Henry did talk to Ältester Wall who, -as it turned out,- was genuinely pleased with his intentions. He also asked him to greet his parents. As it turned out, it was more convenient for Henry to take his catechism in Ontario and join the Old Colony Gemeinde there.

Ältester Abraham J. Wall was married to his stepmother Helena Wall, daughter of Johann P. Wall. In 1979 Ältester A. J. Wall moved to Para-guay with a group of his parishioners where they established the Durango Colony in East Paraguay.

Nord Colony.

The Ojo de la Yegua Colony (also known as the Nord Colony), was founded in 1948, the first daughter Colony among the Mexican Mennonites. Franz Dyck (1884-1964) was elected as the first Ältester in 1951.

Susanna Friesen, Altona, remembers that Franz Dyck was of trim build and a very personable man. It was a joy to visit with him. He lived in Springthal and they lived in Rosenheim, Campo 47 (also referred to a Celetrei, the name of the ranch that was purchased). Susanna recalls that the Ältester and the ministers always inspected the schools, making sure everything was in order. Ohm Franz was strict in maintaining the Gemeinde Ordnung but was loving and kind even with those who needed admonishment.

When Susanna Friesen's daughter died, Ältester Franz Dyck came to comfort and pray with them. He also performed the funeral service. When her husband, Johann Friesen, was shot by a Mexican in 1959, Ältester Dyck came to visit him in the hospital in Rubio. Sometime later he came and said the Gemeinde would help them with the hospital expenses. He could see that they had no means and needed help and volunteered the assistance.

Rev. Peter Driedger, Ontario, was baptised by Ältester Franz Dyck. In Mexico, each minister was assigned a worship house for the spring church during which the articles were presented to the congregation for the first two Sundays and the young people took the catechism the next two Sundays. During the Catechism those who had declared their interest in baptism sat in the front benches. Many already knew the catechism by memory as they had studied it in depth in the church schools. The first worship house built in the Nord Colony was Lichtfelde (Campo 62) where Peter Driedger also took the catechism. Ältester

Franz Dyck was the presiding clergyman. He asked questions of the candidates which they answered. In between Ohm Franz explained the various teachings and elaborated on their meaning.

The Nord Gemeinde was a large congregation and Ältester Franz Dyck also had to deal with many problems. Brotherhood meetings were held on Sundays after the worship service and usually two or three of the Ohms who were not preaching somewhere else that Sunday, were also present to assist.

In 1956 Peter Driedger’s foster mother died and Ältester Franz Dyck came to comfort the family and also performed the burial service.

Ältester Bernard Peters was a very good speaker. He spoke clearly and quite loud. He moved to Bolivia in 1968.

Ältester Peter Peters (1930-2000) lived in Campo 67 and later in Campo 62. He died on December 31, 2000. He was the son of Jakob Peters, originally of Neuhorst but later of the Nord Colony. All the Jakob Peters children were well brought up and well behaved. As youths they had to stay at home in the evening helping their mother with darning socks or whatever and were not allowed to hang around with the village bangaels. Peter Peters is remembered as a pious young man. He was of medium height and of trim build.

Like so many other leaders in the conservative Mennonite faith, Peter Peters served as a school teacher while still a young single man. He was of medium height and of severe physical suffering. He had shared with his sister that he felt God had not yet called him home because his work was not yet completed and that he had one more mission for him here on earth.

In his last years, Ohm Peter also made a heroic effort to provide baptismal and communion services to three colonies in Casas Grandes where the leadership had emigrated. He worked extremely hard to elect and reestablish the ministry. He did so in spite of serious illness and severe physical suffering. He had shared with his sister that he felt God had not yet called him home because his work was not yet completed and that he had one more mission for him here on earth.

A number of years before his death, one of the outside “Evangelists” working the local turf had stamped Ältester Peter Peters as “not Christian” during a series of “deeper life” services in the Cuauhtemoc area. On another occasion, a visiting minister - presumably out of spite - had attended at Peter Peters’ home and tried to convert him to Evangelical Fundamentalist religious culture. Ohm Peter had replied that was impossible as he had already come to follow Jesus as a young man. One wonders what Bible Schools such predators are attending or where are they learning such hatred and total disrespect for devoted and genuine Christian brothers like Ohm Peter?

Ältester Peter Peters was a much loved leader of the Nord Colony. David Friesen, former minister of the Blumenau Gemeinde at Cuauhtemoc, paid tribute to Ältester Peter Peters that he was willing to accept some change and still maintained the traditions given to his people by God. Ohm Peter is remembered as a dedicated and committed worker in the vineyard of the Lord.

La Honda, Zacatecas.

The La Honda Colony in Zacatecas was founded in 1966. The original settlers came from Durango. The first Ältester in La Honda was Peter Wall from Durango. In the early 1990s Ohm Peter and a group of parishioners moved to Sabinal, near the Texas border where they established a new colony and where he died.

In 1994 a new Ältester, Abraham Friesen, was elected in La Honda. Deacon Henry Friesen, Wheatley, Ont., remembers Ältester Friesen as a compassionate man with a concern for his people. In 1994 the Friesen family drove to Mexico to consult and seek the advice of the Ohms regarding a family from La Honda now living in Ontario and requesting to join the Old Colony Gemeinde there. From Cuauhtemoc the Henry Friesen family drove the 700 km. to La Honda. They were hosted in the home of the new Ältester Abram Friesen. By coincidence two other visiting ministers were guests there at the same time. After the general greetings, Henry Friesen explained the purpose of his coming and their concerns about the La Honda family who were asking to join the Ontario Gemeinde. He was here to ask for advice as to what they should do. Ohm Abram’s advice was the same as that of Ohm Peter in the Nord Colony: to help the family and to receive them as members. They were given official permission to revoke the ban and to receive them as members. Ohm Abram also expressed keen interest in their church school system in Ontario.

Hague-Osler, Sask.

When Ältester Jakob Wiens moved to Durango, Mexico, in 1926, the intention was that no Old Colony Gemeinde was left in Manitoba or Saskatchewan. But the Old Colony members that remained in the Hague area continued to worship as a community and decided to elect their own Ältester. The Ältester election was held on March 16, 1930, with Berghalter Ältester Cornelius Hamm officiating. Johann Loepky (1882-1950), Neuanlage, was elected with 151 votes from Hague, 67 votes from Manitoba and eight votes from Swift Current. Ältester Loepky was a half-brother to Ohm Issuk M. Dyck in Mexico.

Isaak Goertzen, retired Old Colony Ältester, currently living in La Crete, was baptized by Ältester Johann Loeppky. Isaak remembered Ohm Johan as a loving man. He was a fair-sized man, about 200 pounds with white hair. Ohm Johan always spoke in a real loving manner. He would preach with tears running down his cheeks and through him the words of the Gospel struck deep into the hearts of even the most hardened sinners. In his youth, Isaak thought that Ohm Johan must surely know the entire Bible by memory. He was always able to bring something new across and Isaak never tired of listening to him preach.

The Benjamin Goertzens had a brand new halter for one of their teams of horses. It happened when the Loepkys were visiting the Goertzens, that their used halter was somehow exchanged for the Goertzen’s new one. The next...
day, son Isaak and his brother were send to Neuanlage, to straighten out the mix-up. Isaak recalls that the Loepkpys were busily threshing but that Ohm Johan have been so friendly. When the boys had explained their mission, he stopped the team with the halter, took it off, gave it to the boys, and they were on their way.

In 1939 Isaak decided that he wanted to be baptised and join the Gemeinde. The baptism was always held on Pentecost (40 days after Easter). At that time the Old Colony congregations did not have the evening schools as now but all those interested in baptism were personally interviewed by the Ältester to examine their faith and commitment to Christ. There were 14 in Isaak’s group: 8 males and 6 females. They were summoned to the home of Ältester Loepkpy and waited patiently (and somewhat nervously) outside on the yard. From here they were individually invited inside where they were to give their testimony of faith. Isaak remembered that Ohm Johan received him in the “Grote Schtouke” where he was sitting beside the Ajskchaup and his table where his papers were spread. Isaak was seated on a chair nearby and was asked to testify.

Abram G. Janzen, Hague, Saskatchewan, recalls Johann Loepky and that “His wife died at the time he was elected to the ministry leaving him with four young children, two sons and two daughters. My parents were the neighbours in the village of Reinland, and my mother took the two sons into her care and kept them until he found a mother for them. The eldest son John was adopted by Mrs. Jakob Neufeld and raised by her. Before his call to the ministry, Johan Loepky was a Vönsänger in the worship house in Neuanlage. He had a very powerful voice.

Swift Current, Sask.
Rev. David Janzen, Hines Creek, Alberta, grew up in the former Old Colony Reserve at Swift Current, Saskatchewan. In 1924 Ältester Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925) moved to Mexico to establish the Swift Colony. Most of the Old Coloniers remaining started attending the Sommerfelder Gemeinde. David’s parents David Janzens lived on a farm near Chortitz. David Wall who lived behind Reinland was the Sommerfelder Ältester at the time.

David Janzen remembers one anecdote from about the mid-1940s when Ältester Wall came driving onto their yard with his cutter and two horse team during a severe snow storm. His face was all frozen and covered with icicles. But Ohm David had a big smile for the young boy when he ran out to greet him and take his horses into the barn to be fed and to warm up. David’s mother greeted Ohm David at the door and invited him in for a vuspa. After his repast and a cup of coffee, Ohm David was back on the road, off to Schönfeld where he was serving in the worship that day.

David Janzen remembers another occasion when his parents and his uncle and aunt, Wilhelm Janzens, were travelling together and had stopped (“aufjefoare”) at their friends Abram Fehrs in Chortitz for a meal and rest. It so happened that Ohm David Wall was also there. During the conversation Ohm David revealed that he had felt a desire to visit a neighbour in the community who was very dissatisfied with the Gemeinde. But he did not want to make the visit alone and asked David and Wilhelm Janzen to accompany him so that there would be some witnesses. He made it clear, however, that if serious accusations were made that he alone took these upon his shoulders. As the Ältester he was the spiritual caregiver for his flock and this was his responsibility.

Conclusion.
The portrayal of the traditionalist (Kirchliche) and conservative Mennonite Lehrdienst as the evil Ohms is a persistent myth with roots in the hatefilled descriptions of Anabaptist-Mennonites found in the polemics of Reformation persecutors - both Catholic and Evangelical (Lutheran). The negative stereotyping found in some of the historiography, literature and secular media has been nurtured by predator religious cultures combining to create a hostile environment for conservative Mennonites, especially when they return to Canada as indigent immigrants. It is one of the greatest tragedies of our history that far too often Canadian Mennonites have been influenced by such voices instead of extending the hand of Christian fellowship and charity as their Dutch ancestors once did three centuries ago to aid the persecuted and impoverished Swiss Mennonites by resettling them in Pennsylvania.

The myth of the evil Ohm illustrates the powerful force of historiography when used as a tool in an agenda of religious triumphalism and imperialism. It underlines how absolutely critical it is for Hutterites, Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites to inscribe their own historical and spiritual narrative, to avoid being negatively typecast and denigrated by aggressive predator cultures. They fail to do so at their own peril, for in the absence of a truthful and accurate historical literature, their children will hear only the lies and falsehoods disseminated by their enemies.

“Shine as the firmament” (Daniel 12:3) is a fitting description of the record of the thousands of orthodox and conservative Ältester who have served the Flemish Mennonites over the centuries, establishing a long and noble tradition of “servant-leadership”. They have served, not as hirelings, but out of love for their Lord and Saviour. When Jesus looks down upon creation and sees venerable leaders such as Ohm Isaac M. Dyck traversing the Mexican highlands in the blinding heat and choking dust, slumped into the seat of a buggy in prayer and mediation, as he journeyed to bring the Gospel or spiritual comfort to some needy soul, His arms will surely open in love and compassion. Hebrews 11:36-40. A careful review of their seemingly impossible duties and holy calling, determines that they are more appropriately characterized as “the lonely Ohms”.

As historian David Quiring has observed, “Pointing out that other Mennonite churches have too might eventually come to a saving knowledge of God’s grace and love.

The testimonies collected provide an alternative narrative of the role of the Ohms among the Flemish Mennonites. Just like leaders in other confessions, they were and are fallible mortal human beings with feet of clay. Only by the grace of God were and are they able to fulfill their calling. The task of documenting their heroic and noble pilgrimage has only just barely begun. Their stories serve as a source of inspiration for those seeking to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. This is particularly important for young people who need appropriate role models and servant-leaders whom they can look up to and respect. The valiant steadfastness of the Ohms in directing their flocks to the boundless love and mercy of God, affirms that all genuine believers need to respect those whom God hath called forth to serve in His vineyard: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which among you are labourers among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you: And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake...” 1 Thess. 5:12-13.

Endnotes:
Note Two: The article was sent to me by someone but unfortunately did not include the publishing dates. Regretfully, I failed to note the name of the donor.

Note Three: As recalled by son Peter Heide, Blumstein, West Reserve, Manitoba, Sept. 19/02.


Suggested Reading:
Daniel Kauffman, Doctrines of the Bible: A Brief Discussion of the Teachings of God’s Word (Scottsdale, 1928), 639 pages.
When Del Plett suggested I talk about growing up in Steinbach, I thought it would be easy and enjoyable to talk to prepare. With so many memories and materials to draw on, however, it wasn’t easy to decide what to include and what to leave out. Del had one other suggestion, “We want the Kehler side of your personality,” he said, “not the Reimer side.” I knew what he meant, of course. He wanted me to be lively and funny like my eight Kehler uncles, tell outrageous stories (Schnetteriere) and get you all rolling in the aisles.

The trouble is, I’m not as funny as my Kehler uncles were (may be there’s too much sober Reimer in me) and, also, they told their hilarious stories in private and opp Plautdietsch. So far as I know, none of them ever made a public speech, while I’m addressing a large, sophisticated audience and have to do it in English, which for a Mennonite of my generation is not nearly as good a language to be funny in as Low German is.

My talkative and colourful Kehler uncles are all, alas, gone now, but I still cherish their memory. The Kehlers liked to say: “Wann e Kjalla stoaff, motte se am noch oppoat de Frat dotschlon.” Loosely translated, “When a Kehler dies, you have to make sure his mouth is dead too.” The Kehler brothers came to our house often because their mother, my Kehler grandmother, lived with us when I was a few years ago. They were all hand-working farmers or manual labourers at the time and enjoyed teasing my dignified father for making his living as a “lazy” schoolteacher. I expressed my feelings for my uncles in a poem I wrote after the last of them passed away a few years ago.

Song for my Kehler Uncles
Oh, they were lively sticks of dynamite, my eight lusty Kehler uncles:
When they lit the short fuse of their mirth
the exploding tall tales moved down all over the world, sobersides helpless in laughter.
They could make the local wellkin ring
the Low German air turn blue
for miles around with their crackling salvos
of comic gusto.
They needed no wine or beer or schnapps
to lubricate their verbal bearings. Peanuts, sunflower seeds and strong black coffee machine their jaws and greased their vocal cords.
A howling, irreverent pack of garrulous brothers
they raised up the roof and buckled the walls
of my father’s house when they came haw-calling
on Sunday afternoons and shuttered the sober
sabbath air with coarse jokes and windy yarns,
splutter exuberantly over the little fence
of decorum my studious schoolteacher father had built out of book-words and self-esteem.
There he sat, my well-mannered sire, at bay,
trying in vain to match wits with the grinning invaders gleefully closing in on him behind thick barricades of spat-out sunflower husks
and piles of smoking peanut shells.

Shell-shocked, my father surveyed his teetering abode
through smoke-reddened eyes, yearning helplessly
for Monday morning and the parade-square order
of his classroom.
Meanwhile my Grossmama, the tiny wizened lady who had spawned these droll anarchists, these wisecracking freebooters, sat corner-quiet in her black-lace Huw looking dazed and fragile and disavowing.

While my mother, sharing her brothers’ raucous genes, would bustle and banter, loudly enjoying it all including, it seemed, the discomfiture of her earnest, well-bred husband.

So long ago.
One by one my uncles took their leave,
having, like Falstaff, landed
the lean earth with their sweat,
their brazen voices stilled at last.
And I am left to mourn and call in vain,
“Najo, komt wada, wie se’ je tus.”

You know, all my life I’ve had trouble telling the truth—I mean the literal, factual truth (you’re probably thinking that’s the Kehler in me). It’s not that I’m a real liar out to deceive people or gain an advantage. No, the truth is I can’t tell the literal truth about anything that interests me because my imagi

We like to think of memory as a kind of tape recorder providing us with an accurate, reliable transcript of the past, but it’s really more like a movie camera that selects sights and sounds from a certain perspective and provides us with a highly selective film of the past. No two people will ever tell stories based on similar incidents and experiences in quite the same way.

So this is my personal memory film of growing up in Steinbach in the 30s and 40s, a world I didn’t choose but which chose me. For me this was a wonderful place to be a boy in but, as my title suggests, a somewhat less wonderful place to be a teenager in, especially during the sombre war years.

But this I know: although I left it a long time ago, I carry Steinbach in my bloodstream for life.

The Steinbach I was a boy in was still a quiet, somewhat remote rural village perched on the harsh Manitoba plain, its Main Street cutting boldly across the township square alongside the twisted little creek that came miraculously alive with runoff water every spring. For years there was a road sign at the northern end of Main Street which read: “Welcome to Steinbach: pop 1052.”

One year a local man was killed in a car accident, as I remember it, and some wag crossed out the “2” and put in a “1”. That’s the kind of peaceful, stable place it was then.

On summer mornings in the thirties I awoke to two very different sounds. The one I loved in all its raucous, sleep-piercing suddeness was the shrill, quavery blast of the cowherd’s horn as he drove the village cows along Main Street to the common pasture west of town. The second sound, less dramatic but much more persistent, was the industrial hum coming from C.T. Loewen’s bee supply factory a block away on Main. These two sounds have come to symbolize for me the two contrasting Steinbachs I grew up in. The cowherd’s horn was sounding the last defiant squawk of the old Darp against the smoothly efficient technology of the developing business town.

Main Street was where it all happened even then. From the beginning its broad mile was the backbone that held together the anatomy of the community. It was also the town’s central nervous system. Main Street has always set the pace and rhythm for Steinbachers. The whole town takes its character from the street, and as it has grown and prospered so has the town. Even during the lean Depression years of my boyhood, there was always something vital and expectant about Main Street, as though it were already waiting for the smart new commercial buildings and crowded car lots with their thrusting neon signs we see today.

In the thirties Main Street was homely enough with its dingy false-fronted buildings and gravelled surface. Only the central blocks had paved sidewalks, with wooden sidewalks at each end and on the principal side streets. You always walked on the wooden sidewalks with your eyes down looking through the cracks in the hope of catching the glint
of a lost coin. There were still almost as many horse-drawn conveyances around as there were cars and trucks, and even more in winter when most cars were put on blocks.

I learned early on that nearly everything exciting or important happened on Main Street, including the big fires that broke out from time to time, usually in winter. Two that I remember vividly were the spectacular fires that devastated the old Flour Mill and J.R. Friesen’s garage. And I can just remember the fire that destroyed the Schwarz Bros. store at the corner of Main and Reimer, a site later filled by the two-story building that housed McBurney’s Drug Store and Dr. Whetter’s office in my time.

When I started kindergarten in 1931, I was allowed to walk down Main Street, usually with a friend or two, to Tante Anna’s little shed of a kindergarten situated behind what was then called simply the Printery. Sometimes we had “lunch” pennies to spend and would look eagerly through the window of the Central Store (where Steinbach Place stands today) to see if jolly Mr. Benjamin Janz was behind the candy counter. Every kid in town knew that Mr. Janz, beaming with pleasure, would give you a nickel’s worth of jelly beans or mixed candy for your kindergarten penny. When he wasn’t there our greedy little hearts sank as we proceeded to the Vogt Bros. store down the street and settled for a paper tube of coloured popcorn.

I loved kindergarten and dynamic Tante Anna from the first day. Her sprightly, fluent High German made my head spin, but she taught us songs and games with such infectious warmth that we understood her perfectly even when her elegant German danced beyond our comprehension.

When I started school two years later, I was again lucky to come under the inspired tutelage of Miss Mary Kornelsen. I’m proud of having been in the very first class this brilliant teacher taught in Steinbach in a career that was to make her one of the most admired teachers in the province. Nervously excited that first morning, I was mesmerized by the dramatic clicks of Miss Kornelsen’s tiny spiked heels as she strode briskly around the classroom. And I was so enraptured by her musical “English” voice that it became for me then and there—and for a long time afterwards—a touchstone for the great “English” world of learning and culture that lay so mysteriously beyond my ken.

Church was another matter altogether. It was a tedium stretching unbroken across every Sunday morning of the year. We belonged to the conservative Kleine Gemeinde (now the EMC) church on Main (then usually referred to as the South-end Church). My father Peter J.B. Reimer was the Sunday school superintendent and choir leader. Sunday school began at 9:30, followed by the regular service, which consisted of one long German sermon and two shorter ones and usually lasted until 12:30 p.m and often well beyond that.

There were also interminable German hymns led by a Faasenja who called out the line just before the congregation got to it. The Faasenja droned nasally from one line to another without a break while the congregation drew a much-needed breath. There were no musical instruments and very little, if any, part singing.

In fact, of the four churches in town in the thirties, only the EMB church (then known as the Bruderthaler church) allowed musical instruments, I believe. It was regarded as the fashionable church which had all the leading businessmen and their families as members, with the prominent exception of the C.T. Loewen family. The other churches were the Holdemann church on north Main and the small MB church not far from the EMB. Everybody in town attended the EMB Jugendverein on Sunday evenings and there you could hear everything from barbershop quartet gospel singing to the playing of hand saws with fiddle bows.

The EMB was also the first church to hold revival meetings, I think, and I can still hear the incredible vocal thunder of Rev. George Schultz from Saskatchewan. When he let out his full decibels I was terrified and already saw the skies opening up for the Last Judgement. These meetings were the forerunners to the much larger revival campaigns

Elmer (Al) Reimer in his little garden behind his parent’s house in Steinbach. Al Reimer as a young f-her ca. 1935. All photographs for this article are from the private collection of the author Al Reimer.

Seeing King George IV and the Queen in Winnipeg, Polo Park, 1939. The photo shows a group of locals gathered under the Steinbach banner. Does anyone recognize anyone? Al Reimer’s father, Rev. P.J.B. Reimer, Steinbach, is visible in the middle, somewhat to the right.

Elisabeth Kehler Reimer and son Elmer, in front of their house in Steinbach. 1928. Her biography written by son Al was published in Preservings, No. 10, Part Two, pages 28-30. Al was born May 30, 1927.
Much has been said and written about the lack of entertainment and sporting facilities in Steinbach in the old days, but we boys, summer or winter, never lacked for entertainment or things to do. In summer no self-respecting boy wore shoes or went anywhere without his Stiaraut, a metal hoop or small wagon wheel propelled with a T-shaped stick.

It’s true we had no regular swimming pool and had to make do with substitutes like the swollen creek in late spring or the mud-bottomed ice-making pool behind C.T. Loewen’s factory. As we got older we also had a kind soul like Mr. P.A. Vogt, who would take a whole truckload of us boys to the sand pit or to River Bend Park at St. Anne on Sunday afternoons.

Our most exciting summer game was playing war with homemade rubberband guns, using rubberbands cut from inner tubes. That boys growing up in the nonviolent, anti-military atmosphere of a Mennonite town should be so fanatically addicted to war games is one of those puzzles that can’t be explained, I suppose. The highlights of this toy warfare came on Sunday afternoons when dozens of heavily armed boys of all ages from all over town gathered, at the invitation of the Vogt twins John and Ewald (Ed), at the rickety old livery barn behind the Vogt Bros. store off Main. Its wonderfully dilapidated condition made it an ideal “fort” to defend or attack. If you could survive an afternoon of warfare on the winning side you were an instant hero, especially if you were one of the younger guys. Ironically, within a year or two some of these older mock-soldiers would be real soldiers in a real war.

The big summer event was Sports Day on July 1st. Everybody in town and surrounding district flocked to that. There were always games of chance, a big baseball tournament, and concession tents where you could buy refreshments if you were lucky enough to come with anything between a nickel and a quarter. Only a day of rain could spoil Sports Day and you prayed for weeks before that no rain would fall. For years there was also the so-called Air Tour with a dozen or more light planes flying in for the day, giving rides (which we boys could never afford) and doing daring stunts. Our hero was Nick Czun, a parachute artist who thrilled us year after year with his low-level jumps. One year in the mid-thirties a plane from Winnipeg crashed trying to do a loop-the-loop too close to the ground. Miraculously, the pilot walked away from his badly damaged craft with only minor injuries.

A few years later Nick Czun brought a balloon...
which suddenly exploded in a tremendous whooshing fireball while he was inflating it with hydrogen gas. Many of us were no more than a hundred yards away and we all stampeded in terror. No one was killed, but one man was severely burned. Our three swashbuckling local pilots Frank Sawatzky, Bill Wiebe and Ed Friesen were also part of the Air Tour with their home-built little Pietenpol and the larger Corben Jr. For us boys Frank Sawatzky, in his black leather flying jacket and goggled helmet, sporting a natty Clark Gable moustache, was by far the most glamorous figure in town.

In winter our lives focused on hockey--street hockey on shoes, often with a “roadapple” or sponge ball as puck and twenty players per side. We also had marathon Saturday afternoon games on skates on the creek. And of course, there was the open-air rink (where the curling rink is now) with its high outside walls of warped, grey boards and a run-down rink shack at one end. When your toes froze, as they frequently did, you wobbled into the shack, tore off your skates and held your stockinged feet to the red-hot old drum stove until they smoked. Then you dished outside for a handful of snow and rubbed your bare toes until they came stingingly alive and started to swell. And then you screeched to the red-hot old drum stove until they smoked. Pored over the Eaton catalogue trying to decide what you wanted most and could reasonably expect to get. At noon recess and after four you haunted H.W. Reimer’s store, which every year set up a tantalizing toy display just inside the broad front entrance. This little fortress of toys and games was zealously guarded by “Taunte Auntje” the somewhat eccentric spinster sister of “Uncle” Henry, Ben and Klaas, the three brothers who ran this emporium. Auntje took no nonsense from awe-struck children who came to ogle this cornucopia of Santa’s wares. She allowed no stealthy touching, and no demonstrations of anything unless she deemed you a potential customer. And then at last there. That was a little less risky but you were exposed out there and there were usually rink guards on patrol.

One night one of these cunning brutes found the ultimate weapon to get us three or four illegal fans off our perches. Engrossed in the game we didn’t notice him sneaking up with the big flooding hose until a blast of icy water hit us. Numb with shock, we slipped and slithered down the tree and lurched into the darkness. I headed for the creek and home but within minutes my pants were frozen stiff as stovetops. Trying to get through the barbed wire fence that ran along the back of the rink I got badly hung up and might have frozen helplessly to death if an older boy hadn’t come along and released me. The good thing that came out of that dreadful experience was that from then on my father let me go to games only as a paying fan.

And then there was Christmas. For weeks you pored over the Eaton’s catalogue trying to decide what you wanted most and could reasonably expect to get. At noon recess and after four you haunted H.W. Reimer’s store, which every year set up a tantalizing toy display just inside the broad front entrance. This little fortress of toys and games was zealously guarded by “Taunte Auntje” the somewhat eccentric spinster sister of “Uncle” Henry, Ben and Klaas, the three brothers who ran this emporium. Auntje took no nonsense from awe-struck children who came to ogle this cornucopia of Santa’s wares. She allowed no stealthy touching, and no demonstrations of anything unless she deemed you a potential customer. And then at last Christmas Eve was there and you would receive your first present at the church programme in the form of a large brown Tut filled with nuts, candy and an apple or orange. Then you rushed home with eager anticipation to set up your Schiev or bowl on the kitchen table or under the tree.

By the late thirties Steinbach had close to fifty business places, including six stores, two lumberyards, two machine shops, two truck transfer companies, four car dealers, three barber shops, two cafes, a telephone exchange, a light and power plant, a drug store, a hospital with two or three doctors, a bank, a funeral parlour, two body shops, a creamery, a clothing store, a newspaper and printery and several other businesses.

It also had five churches serving six Mennonite denominations, two schools, a bus service with snowplane service in winter, and a local police constable with an unerring nose for finding illicit stills. Steinbach even boasted two “suburbs”--Hungawaadie south-east of town, where mainly poor people lived then, and Nie Moscow at the south-west end, where the so-called Russkileda lived and grew early commercial potatoes.

There were a number of successful family-run businesses, but the most prominent business family were the five Loewen brothers, who together came close to forming a sort of business monopoly in town. Steinbachers liked to say--with pride or with envy, as the case might be—that C.T., I.T., J.T. and A.T., with their five different business establishments, could take care of you almost from the cradle to the grave. When you got ready to build your first house you went to C.T. Loewen’s lumberyard for the materials. If you couldn’t afford a new home you could always buy a used home or shack somewhere and have J.T.’s moving truck take it to your lot. When you got ready to buy your first car what better place than P.T.’s Chev dealership. If you bunged up a fender or worse you took your car to J.T.’s body shop for repairs. Finally, when your time came to depart this vale of tears for a better world, A.T.’s funeral parlour would fix you up and take you to your final resting place. And where were A.T.’s caskets made, at least in the early years? You guessed it. At brother C.T.’s lumberyard. And so the five-spoked Loewen business wheel came full circle.

The quiet thirties and my sunny boyhood ended together with the coming of the War, and gradually the world seemed to become a darker, harsher place. Having my adolescent years coincide with the war years was not the luckiest thing that ever happened to me. I was too young to get into the War but old enough to be deeply affected by it. It’s difficult to describe the atmosphere of a world at war to people who haven’t experienced it. And don’t forget that for the first three or four years things looked bleak for our side. Hitler looked pretty unbeatable for a while. At first the War seemed far away. For me it became a vivid reality one Sunday morning in 1940 when local boy Steve Friesen, a raw recruit at the time, came to our Southend church in full uniform complete with a wicked-looking dress...
After the P.B. Reimer store burned down in '43, Frank Reimer, soon to be nicknamed “Carload” Frank for his innovative marketing, took over the family business and developed the techniques that he and son Don would parlay into the fantastically successful Reimer Express Lines. The Penner brothers, Abe and John, were already in high gear as car dealers and no longer laughed at in local business circles as naive dreamers from the farm. They were in the process of becoming the legendary A.D. and J.D., with initials being regarded in Steinbach as badges of business success. Other businesses were expanding as well.

A new business which became a local institution was Pete’s Inn, which began as a little two- booth shack next to Reimer’s Bargain Store on Main in 1940. When the new Pete’s Inn opened nearby a few years later it became our after-school hangout. Genial Pete Kehler was our friend and father-confessor who would listen patiently to our complaints and problems and then, his eyes snapping roguishly, would entertain us with a non-stop flow of Low German jokes and stories that would always put us in a good mood.

Usually his brother George was there as well and he was equally good on Plautdietsch. They always began by saying, “Junges, etw woaj mol waut fetale,” and then they would take turns in a kind of integrated repertoire of hilarious yarns and anecdotes.

Another favourite hangout for us was George Goossen’s barber shop and three-table pool room, which drew us like a magnet. In those days you had to be eighteen to play pool, but we highschool boys ignored that rule whenever possible. Most of the time “Uncle” George, as we called him behind his back, didn’t bother us even though he knew we were underage. But Goossen was a binge drinker and every couple of weeks at least he went on a one- or two-day bender and then things could get ugly as he went into sudden rages and tried to throw us bodily out of his poolroom amidst loud curses and threats. Several times, I remember, he chased me around the pool tables hollering terrible threats before I could slip out to safety. Once or twice he cornered me in the back and started whacking me with a pool cue before I made my escape. When his binge was over Uncle George was his usual calm, friendly self and seemed to have no recollection of the hard time he had given us the day before.

When he was in his cups he was also a pretty erratic barber. Once, when I was eleven or twelve, my mother sent me for a haircut at what proved to be the wrong time. Looking balefully at me, Uncle George ran his electric razor right down the middle of my skull, giving me a kind of reverse Iroquois cut. My mother took an angry look at my mutilated scalp and sent me back next day for a complete and very short brushcut.

We certainly had our share of colourful, odd, eccentric characters in Steinbach in those days. “Uncle” Henry Reimer, the oldest of the H.W. brothers, was one of the more prominent ones. He was a bachelor who lived in the big Reimer house across Main from the Reimer store. He was a business visionary whose brain teemed with schemes and plans and innovations. One I recall was his scheme to build a skywalk across Main from his house to his store. Later he became a dietary health nut and when he went to Pete’s Inn for lunch or dinner he would always take a loaf of his special whole wheat bread for the kitchen to make his sandwich with.

Another interesting bachelor who was as shy as Uncle Henry was brash Isaac Plett the inventor. He had a machine shop at the south end of Main where he lived and puttered around inventing things. His father had been an inventor as well, as was one of his brothers. In 1937 Isaac invented a machine for imbedding the wire in the wax frames used in the honey indus-
try. The machine enabled C.T. Loewen’s to stay competitive in the field for decades. How much Isaac benefited from his inventions I don’t know, but he always had the slightly bewildered look of a man who isn’t sure what the world expects of him next.

One of my favourite characters was Dirk Harder, known to locals as “Haudasch Derti.” Derti was a little simple but very friendly and fancied himself as a stylish dresser. With his crooked smile and slicked-back yellow hair (which I seem to recall he dyed red or black on occasion) he had the ingratiating but wary look of a stray dog trying to curry favour. Derti never had what you could call a regular job, but you could usually find him around the Tourist Hotel where he polished shoes for travellers and did odd jobs around the pub.

What Derti lived for, though, was dressing up, usually like someone from the twenties, including spats, as I recall. In summer he liked to dress in all white—white dress shirt with rolled up sleeves, stiff white cotton or canvas pants with a white belt and heavily polished white shoes. It was said that Derti’s mother, who looked and sounded like a Low German Ma Kettle, kept up a steady barrage of loud complaints at having to wash her son’s summer whites so often. Derti was a bachelor at that time (I wonder why almost all our colourful characters were bachelors?) but he did have the odd girlfriend—and I do mean odd—usually some rustic type from out of town, whom he would squire around with great pride on Saturday nights, take to the movies, maybe, and even buy her a banana split at the Fruit Store next to the hotel.

Another odd character (another bachelor) who always remained a bit of a mystery to me, and to most others, was John Isaac, “Isaake Hauns”. He lived with his widowed mother up the street from us on Hanover. Hauns joined the Army and I believe saw action in Europe. In any case, he came back from military service with a stiff leg, or even an artificial one—I never knew exactly. His behaviour had always been a bit bizarre, but now he seemed a little mad. Every day he passed our place in a stilt-legged military march dressed in parts of his old Army uniform, while talking to himself angrily. We boys were intrigued by his behaviour but stayed well beyond his reach, afraid of what he might do if we teased or accosted him.

The most conspicuous and durable town character was Gumshoe Jake Reimer, who loafed his way through life without a care, it seemed, except pleasing his own simple tastes. His gap-toothed moon face cracked and lined like a relief map, Jake greeted the world with a carefree grin that always reminded me of a jack-o-lantern, without the lighted candle inside. His heavy body slack from idleness, Jake sat in the pub and the local cafes day after day, wearing his black rubber boots and smoking from his nickel pack of Turret cigarettes, which never contained more than two or three roll-your-owns, as protection against moochers.

Gumshoe Jake had honed not-working to such a fine art that most people regarded his free, idle life as a natural state, as a kind of special dispensation enabling him to saunter through life with the impunity of the village idiot in medieval times. Not that Jake was an idiot—far from it. And he certainly didn’t regard himself as a bum, but liked to describe himself as “a non-taxpaying citizen.” I believe he even owned a quarter section of stony land at one time. Jake had pronounced views on just about everything. When the new town hall opened, he was quoted in the Carillon saying: “I was against the project when it started, but now that it’s there I’m all for it.”

When he was in a beer-mellow mood, Jake liked to turn serious and would urge us boys sitting around the cafe to “grow up straight and don’t let the old Adam get you by the tail, like me”—or words to that effect. “You boys,” he would add, “you still have a chance. Grab it while you can.” And we would laugh self-consciously, feeling a little sorry for the old guy, but also a little guilty for our own waywardness.

In fact, spiritual revival was very much in the air during those apocalyptic war years. The mass evangelical campaigns which were conducted periodically at the Tabernacle were as carefully planned and executed as any military assault in Europe. These often-week-long events made the church revival meetings, the street meetings on Main Saturday nights, and even the well-known evangelizing Dalzell family look pale by comparison. The Dalzells were an Anerican family from south of the line who came to Steinbach regularly and conducted hot gospel sessions from the back of their truck with the whole family playing and singing and Father Dalzell doing most of the preaching. They became an institution in town during the late thirties and forties and were regarded with curiosity and affection by those who gathered to hear them, including those who occasionally scoffed or mildly heckled them.

Opened in 1942, the Tabernacle seated over a
1000 people and was built in the shape of a hockey arena. I was by that time in my rebel-with-a-cause phase and attended the campaign meetings only because I was ordered to do so. Too stubborn to surrender to the altar calls, I quaked with fear and guilt over my own brazen resistance. One of the most traumatic of these campaigns was conducted by an American evangelist called Dr. Hyman Applemann, who made the end of the world so compelling that he scared me and a lot of other sinners, young and old, half to death.

But a few weeks later I felt vindicated for not capitulating to him when I read in Time magazine that this man had been charged in California with stealing campaign funds. But when I showed the item to my father he seemed less concerned with Dr. Applemann’s crime than he was with what he saw as my growing scepticism. Looking back, I can’t help thinking that the war hysteria helped to make these campaigns in the Tabernacle so sweepingly effective. There certainly was an edge-of-doom, end-of-the-world feeling that gripped many of us in that grim period of world war.

One wartime innovation which I welcomed but the town as a whole did not was the movie theatre built in 1940 at Main and Kroeker by a man everyone knew simply as Tarnopolski. How this man got away with his daring act is anyone’s guess. By the time the churches woke up to this evil threat and got up a petition, the den of iniquity already stood there beckoning. I wasn’t allowed to go as long as I was under parental control, but by the time I was in my mid-teens I would boldly take my girlfriend to the movies on Saturday nights. But getting in wasn’t always so easy.

Patrolling the front entrance there was always, even on the coldest days in winter, a small, well-meaning but very militant group of Christian vigilantes trying to dissuade people from going in to this sinful place. These self-appointed do-gooders were mostly from our own Kleinegemeinde church just down the street—one family in particular. If their pleas failed to prevent us from going in they would even resort to grabbing our arms and trying to restrain us physically. As for Tarnopolski, he committed suicide within a year of opening his theatre and many people in town were convinced it was a bad conscience that drove him to it. The theatre, however, remained in town for years even against strong organized opposition.

By that time I was having personal problems both at home and in school. I was far from being a juvenile delinquent, although in the Steinbach of that time a reluctance to conform branded you as one very quickly. But there’s no denying I was headstrong and independent-minded and displayed more than a touch of arrogance towards my elders and betters. I was also an avid reader of serious books, which I found readily in my bookloving father’s extensive library at home, and which were changing my views on society and religion rapidly.

I didn’t want to be a Mennonite and I was developing a disdainful attitude towards the rather strict church we belonged to. When I came down from my room for dinner, my mother, who never read anything but was very shrewd, would take a long look at me and say: “Jung du kijstj aul wada soo diesta uUage. Last du aul wada schlaichte Beatja?” “Son, you’ve got that dark look in your eyes again. Are you still reading those bad books?”

The end of the War came just before the end of my troubled adolescence. The war years had changed Steinbach from a cosy, puritanical, inward-looking Mennonite “Darp” to an enterprising town receptive to change and expansion, including a greater receptivity to non-Mennonite influences, especially in the economic sector. In 1946, that change in identity was formalized when Steinbach was officially incorporated as a town.

Personally, I was as ready for change and expansion by this time as the town was. I had grown up in the thirties as a happy-go-lucky Kehler, you might say, and grown “down” to become a headstrong and cocksure Reimer. Now I was ready to escape from what I considered the much too narrow and rigid confines of home, community and church.

I was to learn, however, that getting away and escaping completely are two very different things, and that wherever I went I would be compelled to take the baggage of my Steinbach past with me. It took me some years to realize that I had grown up with a heritage that was my most precious possession and that by denying that heritage I was damaging the very tap-root of my existence.

Nowadays I take great pride and a Kehler-like delight in my Steinbach past and have shaped and edited my memories of that past into a version I feel very comfortable with. And if my version doesn’t always coincide with that of other Steinbachers of my generation, so be it. We all take different home movies of our past lives. As Haudasch Dertj used to say in his fractured English as he pranced down Main Street all in white on Saturday nights: “Okay, boys, I’m from here too. Whaddaya say we overtake the neighborhood?”

Well, I’m from here too, but I’m content to “over-take” my town in memory only.

Further Reading:

Steinbach high school boys at play: l.e., Frank Klassen, Erich Vogt (at piano), Pete Barkman, Reg Heidman and Edgar Reimer (brother to Wes).

Parents’ Day at Tanta Anna’s kindergarten, ca. 1933-1934. Tanta Anna is seated on the chair to the left. The kindergarten was held in an old building but on a nice day, the classes were moved outside. Can any reader recognize the girl sitting in front facing the camera is Al’s sister Louise. Seated in the center, facing the camera, is Rod Toews, son of A. P. Toews. Identification courtesy of Ernie P. Toews. See Pres., No. 8, Part One, pages 26-27, for an article in Anna Vogt: Kindergarten Pioneer.

Steinbach high school boys at play: l.e., Frank Klassen, Erich Vogt (at piano), Pete Barkman, Reg Heidman and Edgar Reimer (brother to Wes).

Parents’ Day at Tanta Anna’s kindergarten, ca. 1933-1934. Tanta Anna is seated on the chair to the left. The kindergarten was held in an old building but on a nice day, the classes were moved outside. Can any reader recognize any faces? The girl sitting in front facing the camera is Al’s sister Louise. Seated in the center, facing the camera, is Rod Toews, son of A. P. Toews. Identification courtesy of Ernie P. Toews. See Pres., No. 8, Part One, pages 26-27, for an article in Anna Vogt: Kindergarten Pioneer.
Pioneer Epistles - 1888, 1889 and 1891

Introduction.

Abraham Reimer (1808-92) was born in Petershagen (Kutuzovka), Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, son of Altester Klaas Reimer, founder of the Kleine Gemeinde. Abraham “Fula” Reimer has become well-known as an important chronicler of the Russian Mennonite experience and the early settlement period in Manitoba.

“Fula” Reimer and wife Elisabeth Rempel moved to Rosenort, Molotschna on May 11, 1836. They received various financial assistance from the Gemeinde. In 1837 they moved Kleefeld, which had a large Kleine Gemeinde fellowship of 6 or 7 Vollwirthen. Sons Abraham and Klaas established blacksmith shops here.

Oct. 18, 1859, Reimer was admonished because he had not kept his word in payment of debts (at this time the Kleine Gemeinde assumed full responsibility for the debts of its members much like the Holdeman church still does today) and for his “daughters embellishments with her clothes”. This could have been Elisabeth (later Mrs. Peter P. Toews, Steinbach), age 16 at the time. Because of his eccentric interests “he ran into difficulty with the Gemeinde and was dismissed in 1860. He was lovingly received back as a penitent brother, having learned from the experience and his name is not mentioned in such a connection again.

The 1861/62 school records list daughter Katharina (later Mrs. Abraham S. Friesen, Steinbach), age 12. She missed 68 of 134 school days, probably because her parents were poor and she had to help at home or work elsewhere as a maid. Note: Kleefeld was known to have a good elementary school.

In 1864 the Reimer clan moved to Markusland (north of Alexandrovsk) and in 1869 to Steinbach, Borosenko, Imperial Russia. In 1874 the Reimer family emigrated to Manitoba, Canada. He and three of his children settled in the village of Blumenort, and another four children settled in Steinbach, quickly becoming among its most prosperous pioneers and prominent citizens.

Abraham was probably called “Fula” or “lazy” Reimer because he had little aptitude for being a hard working village farmer like all his neighbours. His interests were in chronicling the vibrant life all around and especially that of his vivacious wife. His writings show his fascination with all manner of technical details and information. His journals exude a century-old language and voice, providing an intimate look at a long-ago forgotten people and their culture. He was also known as “Star-gazer” Reimer because of his penchant for astronomy.

Abraham’s beloved wife, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93), is recognized as one of the most vivacious Mennonite women of the 19th century--she served as midwife, funeral direc- tor and loving overseer of an extended family clan. It was a credit to Elisabeth that their children and their descendants include some of the most successful pioneers in Manitoba and modern business people and community leaders. From Plett Dynasties, pages 598-602.

The Letters.

The following three letters by Abraham “Fula” Reimer provide further insight into the personality of one of Manitoba’s most amazing pioneers. The letters were written in 1888, 1889 and 1891.

The first letter was undated but from internal references it can be dated to 1888. The letter illuminates “Fula” Reimer’s interests during the immigration journey which were focused on technological features and architecture along the route. Note that Abr. Reimer incorrectly refers to crossing Ireland when in fact the immigration group was crossing England. The Mennonite emigrants disembarked in Hull and crossed England to Liverpool from where they embarked on the ocean journey. They may have been able to see the cliffs of Ireland to their right from the ship which might explain the confusion. The account, after all, was written 14 years after the fact. In understanding this letter it is helpful to recall the anecdote related by his grandson, Altester David P. Reimer, Blumenort, that “Fula” had missed the train in Montreal because he was too busy window shopping. He had to board a later train to catch up with his family (John C. Reimer, Familienregister, page 17).

The second letter was written to Abraham Reimer’s brother-in-law Martin Barkman, from Rückenau, Molotschna. Barkman had settled in Jansen, Nebraska, in 1874, the same year that his first wife, Margaretha Reimer, sister of Abraham, died. Barkman was a successful Vollwirt who in 1881 was among the first to return to the former homeland in Russia to visit friends and relatives.

---

Elisabeth Reimer saves Steinbach, 1876.

Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93) makes an impassioned speech at a Reimer family war council in Steinbach in spring of 1876. She persuaded her industrious sons and son-in-laws not to move south to Nebraska and that they would eventually overcome two years of crop failures. Her tearful plea single-handedly saved the infant community from dissolution and extinction. She articulated her vision that the immigration from Russia in search of religious freedom was an act of obedience to God, and that their present time of proving and testing would be followed by prosperity for those who remained steadfast in the faith. Her story embraces the founding myth of the Flemish Mennonites - theirs was a search for religious freedom and a narrative of unceasing obedience to the call of God. Elisabeth’s noble plea to her family also speaks to the empowerment of women within the sophisticated, traditional culture of the Mennonite pioneers of southern Manitoba. Most communities in North America would gladly pay millions if they could invent or claim such a courageous defining narrative as their own. Sketch courtesy of Ron Kroeker, Country Graphics, Rosenort, Manitoba.

---
The division of estates among Mennonites was the protocol that all property was divided equally among the heirs--male and female. This tradition of equality of gender, originating from the Flemish regulations of medieval times (see Royden Loewen, in Preservings, No. 12, page 101) was extremely unusual in 19th century Europe. Personal items such as journals and letter collections were also divided equally without regard to gender. The letters published in this article were evidently inherited by “Fula” Reimer’s daughter Katharina, wife of Abraham S. Friesen, Steinbach pioneer and proprietor of the famous Steinbach windmill built in 1877. They were passed on to her youngest daughter Elisabeth, wife of Steinbach notary John D. Goossen, and then inherited by her son Ernest R. Goossen, Steinbach attorney (for a description of the known extant journals of “Fula” Reimer and how they were divided among his children see “Peter R. Reimer Biography,” in Historical Sketches of the East Reserve (Steinbach, 1994), pages 369, footnote 4).

Extracts from the Abraham Reimer journals of 1870 to 1874 in the original German have been published in Diese Steine, pages 385-391. Extracts of the journal for the year 1879, translated into English, have been published by Dr. Royden Loewen in From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863-1929 (Winnipeg, 1999), pages 89-114. Further extracts for the years 1888 to 1889 were published by Dr. Loewen in Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition (Blumenort, 1983), pages 638-643. Perhaps someday a complete compilation of Fula Reimer’s writings can be published together with an appropriate biography for him and his energetic spouse and life’s companion, Elisabeth.

Letter One: The Emigration Journey, 1874. [1888]

Much beloved and acquainted dwellers on the Beiluk [Basavul] in Russia in Steinbach. I already along ago wanted to write you something about how we are faring here in America in the region of Manitoba and in the village of Blumenort. It is our wish that this imperfect writing would find you in good health. For according to our own measures we are reasonably healthy, although we are completely old I am already 80 years old and my wife is 74 years old, and we have been married for 54 years. But through all this I have gained six pounds. My wife has apparently lost an equal amount. But nonetheless she still works as much as her strength permits, for she has made 24 fur coats with their coverings and made many man’s __________ (ride?) and all sorts of underclothes and many peaked caps [Schlitzmützen]; in one year she made 150 caps, and for a number of years about 100, and some 70-80 caps ______ (Studig?) and winter caps up to 70 per winter.

But now I want to write something of the journey, a few things. The first night we were in Cherson. But there we could hardly sleep because of many mosquitoes. The next night we were in Oder [Odessa], where we had excellent quarters. We left there at noon on the departing railway. There was a storm on the Black Sea and the water was very turbulent. From here we travelled day and night on a railway which had the small gauge [Mäter],. I have forgotten some details. This is how we travelled through Poland and on another [gauge] through Austria and Galacia [Galizien].

[pages 2] And then finally we arrived in Breslau, more or less in the morning, and until evening we toured the city. There were already strange things to see. We climbed up some stairs made of marble stone, some 16 steps. Here there was a level plaza some 50 feet long by 20 feet wide and it was covered with marble stone. There were three wells from five to six feet wide and full to the top, from which water poured--a stream the thickness of an arm--10 feet high, spraying loosely at the top. But the ______ was like a [mamdlein?] thick on top and two feet high, and on top the water fell into drains. Around the fountain it was full of roses; and then still more stairs, and which then the will also fuller, also not ______ [?].

Nearby was a tower some 80 feet high which we entered and climbed to the top. From here we could look out on four sides over the city. Towards the southeast we could see the high Alps of Galacia with a telescope.

From here we drove further through many cities towards Hamburg. Arrived towards evening, and the next day we saw that it was a big city. There were seven-storey houses, many churches and one domed church about 300 feet long by 80 feet wide and 520 feet high, with polish marble stone in the entrance. It had many ______ [gesingen] and high arched windows. Hardly any joints were visible. For one in 35 ______ [angeleite] ______ [Ochien] the foundation.

From here we drove over and through Prussia to Berlin. We arrived in the evening and stayed until evening of the next day. I read the inscription on the marble memorial. It was polished and joined so finely as if seamless. On top stood the Queen of Spain as large as the largest humans [page 3]. This statute was of pure gold and the entire work had cost a million dollars.

And I also went through the Brandenburger Gate. This has 12 pillars about four feet across in diameter and 90 feet high, and on top stood the Royal chariot with four horses harnessed with ______ [nusen] from the feet to the ears--11 feet, as it was said there, and the entire vehicle was made out of marble and the king was completely polished, but how many millions this all has cost, I do not know. Presently we came from Berlin to Hamburg and from there we went across the North Sea; there was much wind. From there we came to Ireland. But in Hamburg, I must say yet, that we were at a German nearly a night and a day. The house was right on the Elbe River. It was six storeys high and we had our quarters on the fifth. The dikes on the Elbe River were 20 feet also up to 25 feet high and within six hours the water completely ran away into the North Sea and it was dry so that one could walk all over with shoes. Small ships loaded with all manner of wares then came but apparently they could not stay longer than one hour, then they quickly had to move on.

But now I want to relate again that when we had crossed the North Sea and were in Ireland, which also belongs to England, the train went through 13 tunnels and some also counted up to 15 tunnels. They drove through underneath, they were in darkness, some were three verst and five verst or more, but one tunnel was 12 verst long. Later and they drove often one verst per minute. It also happened that there was one train driving on top and another one at the bottom, namely, 150 feet below.

And so we arrived in Liverpool around vesper, I drove through the large city. [We were] there the next day until noon. ______ [Page 4] At the railway station where we boarded, it was said to be the largest in the world, for in all the three resident cities we had not seen such a great and costly [station], not in Breslau nor in Berlin nor Hamburg as in Liverpool. The railway stations seemed to get ever bigger and more expensive, for the one in Hamburg was already so large and costly that some surmised that there would evidently be none greater nor better in all of Europe.

But the Liverpool station was more than twice as large and expensive than this last one. For as far as I could calculate by striding across, the railway station was over 1200 feet long and about 80 feet wide. And then there were five sets of tracks, so that five trains at one time could drive in and between each train there were wide platforms so that the people everywhere could embark on the cars. A tunnel was dug across the middle of the railway station, the length of the tunnel reached across and up to the roof about 20 feet high. There were hardly any windows in the entire railway station--nor did it have many doors, but it was nearly as bright inside as outside. Alongside the railway station there were iron pillars with lamps and adjacent, about half the width--about 30 feet wide, that was the round glass. In about the middle of the railway station there was a huge round dock [bridge] so that one could cross with wagon and horses. I went across together with our interpreter. In the highest place in the middle it was about 50 feet high. I would gladly have known how many millions of dollars the station might have cost. There were also huge and costly houses in the city up to eight storeys high.________.  

Editor’s Note: The remainder of the travelogue report is missing.
Letter Two:
[1889]
Dearly beloved brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Martin Barkman, in Nebraska. Since for a long time already I had wanted to write a few lines to you, but which has always remained postponed, but for which, in fact, the fault will be that I have so little energy or drive for the task, and because I am also a poor writer. Nonetheless I now wish to write a few lines to you. And I would also wish that it might find you in good health, physically but foremostly also spiritually.

I am physically quite well in body, the way I was then when you were here, but regarding the soul I have hardly any well-being. My wife is physically weaker, even less than when you were here. But she still enjoys the sewing almost as much as when you were here. Now I would really just like to know whether you there are all doing okay physically and are well?

That the Abr. Friesen, who came from Rückenau has died [we have heard] but we have not heard on what day, or how old he got. Here in Steinbach the Heinrich Brandsche, who reached the age of 38 years and seven months, died on August 6. On that same day after vespers, the elder Korn. Loewensche in Steinbach also died. They were both buried on the 7th of August after midday. The Korn. Loewensche reached the age of 59 years and seven months. The Heinrich Brandsche was brought to the elder Korn. Loewenscne and from there to [page 2] the cemetery and here the mother and daughter were buried each in their own coffin but in one grave. I have never taken part in such a funeral as this one.

But now I will now shorten my humble lowly writing and will ask you, beloved brother-in-law, whether you might also be so good, and that at the first opportunity when you come to the city, that you would inquire about a gardening book, like you talked [to me about] in Steinbach, just before you wanted to travel home; such a gardening book where also all the fruits are pictured as you have seen, which will apparently be quite expensive, as I understood around 30 to 35 cents which they were asking, and even at most, up to 50 cents. You would be doing me a big favour if you would want to buy such a book and then in fall you can see, the money there what it will cost, I would send it along to you this fall yet at the first opportunity.

Also I have sent two flower cuttings and such rare flowers as I have sketched on the paper. The simple one I gave to Abr. Friesen in Steinbach. He has grown the simple one in his garden. But no one has so far grown the double [flower] in their garden. And then I also have to sent you an empty [Lehr grifen]. But this you will probably want to keep as a momento. I have very poor and dirty ink. [Last line intelligible].

January 26, 1889.

Letter Three:
[1891]
Much beloved friend or Martin in Nebraska! Since for a long time already I wanted to write you something, which has not yet occurred, then I would like to wish that these few lines might reach you in good health. For in the physical realm we are quite well, but regarding the soul, fairly weak and sick. But my wife is sick and weak. She is still losing [weight] every year, so that those who have not seen her for three or four years would not know her. Although she has decreased physically, but I am now again quite healthy, for which I cannot thank the Lord enough.

About three weeks ago I was quite sick, but not so ill that I had to lie in bed. The various kinds of food did not really want to taste at all.

But my wife, sews yet every day. She lies down about two or three times on the sleeping bench (Schlaf Bank) for about half an hour, so that her head gets lighter. For she is also not young anymore, this month she will already be 77 years. But I am even over six years older than she.

Now I will write something about Abr. Reimer. You may have already heard that he died this past summer. He fell sick about four weeks before he died; after a very sore leg, so that he had great pain in his thighs. Some days he hardly could walk around on the yard. But he persisted in so far as he made it to the smithy. For two weeks he did some blacksmith work; such [work] as the people brought to him.

On Friday he had driven to Steinbach yet with a load of [page 2] grain to the steam mill. He himself carried [the bags] up the stairs into the mill. He was well when he came home, but while going to sleep he got very sick, so that he apparently hardly slept at all. The next day, Saturday, Joh. Reimer sent his son-in-law for the doctor and brought him along. He apparently did his best and gave him some arsenic [?] drops and it seemed as if it might help or provide some relief. But there were certainly no thoughts of getting up, and during the night he was very sick; and Monday very sick, so that it looked like dying, and then during the night until Tuesday he was so sick, so that none of the children or grandchildren will have had any thought about sleeping. And so [it went] until about 11 p.m. when the sickness increased greatly; from 11 to 12 he had very great pain in his chest, so that he hardly knew where to stay. But at midnight he departed from this world.

She [his wife, Mrs. Maria Reimer] nearly collapsed because of bereavement and sorrow. On the 20th of May, on Thursday, he was buried. But we have the steadfast hope that he will have gone into eternal joy and rest. He reached the age of 49 years, 9 months and 14 days, and lived in wedlock for over 23 years. For about a week she hardly ate and drank anything, and slept very poorly. The next day, Saturday, they went to the doctor again. He was again hardly slept at all. The next day, Sunday, they went to the smithy, where he exerted his best efforts. She was also always up at night. [page 3] He also was here until almost noon, when they drove him home, as she could already speak a little. But there were many guests here, as they apparently thought that this could well be the end for her.

Now I will ask yet if I may, how you there are doing or making out. Undoubtedly you have sometimes written your beloved brother Joh. Reimers, but cannot remember that you have recently actually written to us. It would please us very much, if some of you there would come here this summer, for I cannot say that anybody from here will come there [to you], and regarding us old people you need not expect that we ever would come over. But if my wife was still as strong and healthy as she was 20 to 30 years ago when she was at her best, and we would have money for it, then I would so gladly visit you all there. But now I cannot state that it could ever come to pass, as my wife is too weak and unhealthy, so that she sometimes cannot even go to Abr. Penners’, which is only two Feuerstellen to walk by. But if I could follow my nature, then I would dearly love to visit you all.

Also because you have such fine fruit gardens, for which I have always had a love since my youth. Since I am now exactly thinking about it, I would wish that if anyone of you there next goes to the city, that you might want to do me the favour and might buy me a German gardening book. The way Martin Barkman has related it to me, he has seen such a gardening book with pictures there in the city and for which he wanted some 118 - Preserving No. 21, December, 2002 30 [page 4] to 35 cents. And even if the book is not completely new—only that it is fully complete, and that nothing has been torn out, and even if it would cost from 50 to 70 or at most 80 cents, if it would then be bigger and more complete and with pictures, than a book which I borrowed when I was in Russia about 37 or 38 years ago, in which I read about probably all the [varieties of] fruits. And as I have heard here of apples which are to be bigger than any I have seen in Russia, and plums here which apparently are over half a pound, I would ask that with the first opportunity you might have it sent here this summer, or even that you might send it by post as quickly as possible, and the money I will also send there at the first opportunity.

And now, with this, I will conclude my humble and poor writing, for at this time I do not know much of any importance to write other than that we here are all well, as are also the children, and grandchildren in Steinbach. And thus we, my wife and I, and all our children, greet you very much.

Blumenort, on 1891, 23 July
"Abram Reimer Senior"
And likewise also greet there all friends.
### Schönfeld Colony (Village).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revisions-Liste</th>
<th>Age 1850</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gerhard Isbrandt Wiebe</td>
<td>49 (d.1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jacob Jacob Dirksen (Note 2)</td>
<td>45 (d.1853)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jacob Anton Hoppner</td>
<td>58 (d.1857)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dirk Dirk Tows</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Franz Abraham Harder</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bernhard Bernhard Dyck</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Jacob Jacob Dirksen</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Gerhard Jacob Wall</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Peter Peter Funk</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jacob Peter Heinrichs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Johann Johann Gröninger</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Kornelius Peter Epp</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Abraham Johann Hiebert</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Jacob Abraham Friesen</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Abraham Abraham Dyck</td>
<td>40 (d.1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Johann Johann Krahn</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Gerhard Gerhard Kähler (Note 3)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Jacob Wilhelm Thiessen</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Johann Johann Löppky</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Dirk Dirk Reimer</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Bernhard Peter Friesen</td>
<td>44 (d.1854)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Jacob Peter Reimer</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Johann Gerhard Penner</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Peter Jacob Harder</td>
<td>63 (d.1853)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Jacob Jacob Funk</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Jacob Johann Schwartz - 1852 from Niederchortitz</td>
<td>33 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Peter Erdmann Buhr - 1852 from Niederchortitz</td>
<td>40 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Simon Jacob Schröder - 1852 from Schönhorst</td>
<td>42 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Abraham Johann Friesen - 1852 from Schönhorst</td>
<td>34 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Jacob Phillip Dyck - 1852 from Neuendorf</td>
<td>33 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Johann Peter Abrams - 1853 from Molotschna</td>
<td>died 1856 (Tiegerweide)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 2: Transcription error - should be 1853 not 1883. Note 3: Transcription error – age. Should be 41 not 44. The 1858 list gives the age 49, correctly.

### Berghthal Colony (Village).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revisions-Liste</th>
<th>Age 1850</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gerhard Abraham Janzen</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Peter Martin Friesen</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wilhelm Wilhelm Rempel</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bernhard Gerhard Penner</td>
<td>45 (d.1854)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Heinrich David Falk</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. David David Falk</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Johann Peter Funk</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. David David Driedger</td>
<td>29 (d.1855)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Missing (No entry)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Philip Michael Kahler</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Johann Johann Leycke</td>
<td>25 (d.1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Jacob Peter Martens</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. David Peter Penner (Note 1)</td>
<td>29 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Peter Klas Wiens</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Johann Johann Wiebe</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Wilhelm Wilhelm Rempel</td>
<td>60 (d.1850)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Gerhard Gerhard Wiens</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Peter Peter Harder</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Johann Peter Sawatsky</td>
<td>46 (d.1854)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Martin Jacob Friesen</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Heinrich Peter Ens</td>
<td>20 (d.1854)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Peter Heinrich Unger</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Peter Karl Winter</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Martin Martin Klassen</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Heinrich Kornelius Siebert</td>
<td>58 (d.1851)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Kornelius Peter Sawatsky</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Jacob Peter Siemens</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Johann Peter Funk</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Peter Peter Sawatsky</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Abraham Martin Friesen</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Johann Bernhard Klippenstein</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Peter Johann Funk - 1852 from Niederchortitz</td>
<td>59 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Abraham Abr. Friesen - from Niederchortitz</td>
<td>42 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Jacob Jacob Harder - 1852 from Schönhois</td>
<td>46 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Johann Johann Löwen - 1852 from Neuendorf</td>
<td>41 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Johann Johann Schröder - 1852 from Kronsthal</td>
<td>50 (1858)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Daniel Abraham Ens - 1853 from Molotschna</td>
<td>31 (1858) (Rückenauf)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 1: The 1853 and 1858 ages are in obvious disagreement. The entry refers to David Penner (1819-86). Note the 1858 column of ages was deleted as they merely repeated the ages in the 1850 column.

### Annotation to 1858 Berghthal Census by H. Schapansky

Recently, Delbert Plett forwarded to me a Russian transcription of the 1858 Revisions-Liste for the Berghthal Colony villages of Berghal and Schönfeld. Along with the 1858 Revisions-Liste data previously published (in summary form – Preservings, No. 13, page 57) for Heuboden and Friedrichsthal, we now have additional information on four of the five Berghthal Colony villages, complementary to the material in the Berghal Gemeinde Buch (Note 1). In some cases there is additional family information, particularly on families (very few) who remained in Russia.

Of particular interest are the patronymics of the 1858 Revision (census) lists, given for both married men and women. There are generally few surprises, with the information generally agreeing with information or research published elsewhere, as for example, in my own Preservings articles or in my recently published book. I was however particularily struck by four entries (although there may yet be one or two items in the female patronymics requiring further study). I would like to comment on these four briefly as follows:

1. **Margaretha Breüll, b. 1806.**

   She is found under entry No. 32 for Berghal and her patronymic is given as Peter (Petrovna). Now there were not a great many Breülls in Mennonite Russia at that time, excepting brothers Jacob, Johan and Peter Breüll. Johan Breüll died in 1802. We have a listing of Jacob’s family at Burwald in 1808, in which a Margaretha (b. circa 1806) appears. We also have a listing of Peter’s family at Neuendorf in 1808 in which no Margaretha appears. It seems there may, indeed, be a mistake in the patronymic here (Note 2).

2. **Simon Schroder, 1817-76.**

   He appears in Schönfeld entry No. 28 with a patronymic of Jacob (Jacobiev). Other sources seem to indicate Simon’s’ father was one Bernhard Schröder. (Note 3). Again we may have an incorrect patronymic here, although further investigation seems required.

3. **Johann Funk, 1786-1858.**

   He appears under Berghal entry No. 28 with a patronymic of Peter. Up to this point, it was difficult to make a reasonable conjecture as to his background. In 1808, he was working at Karl Jägers at Rosenthal, Old Colony, (Note 4).

   Now, there was a Peter Funk, listed in the 1776 census for West Prussia, at Kerbhorst: 1 wife, no children listed. This Peter Funk appears to have
moved to the Ellerwalde region of the Tragheimerweise Gemeinde between 1783-1788. In that year, two sons Heinrich and Peter were baptized. The Kerbshorst Peter Funk and the Ellerwalde Peter Funk may not be the same, since the latter did have children who should have appeared in the 1776 list. However, I believe they are the same and the children may have been with relatives. This Peter Funk may well be the father of the above Johann Funk. In that case, Peter Funk would have been part of the Kerbshorst-Kerbwald group I described in my *Preservings* article of June, 2002, page 21 (and in my book) as having Lithuanian connections.


He appears under Schönfeld entry No. 1 with a patronymic of Isebrandt. This would make him a son of Isebrandt Wiebe (b. 1761) of Chortitza and Johann Wiebe, in turn, was a nephew of the prominent Ältester Johann Wiebe (1725-96) of Ellerwald-Eibel in West Prussia.

There seems to be no reason to question this patronymic. In my *Preservings* article on the Bergthaler Wiebes (No. 13, pages 60-61), I had proposed that this Gerhard was the same as Gerhard Wiebe (b. 1800), son of Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1746) who had come to Russia in 1802 (Note 6). According to B.H. Unruh, Heinrich had moved to Einlage by 1816. It therefore appears that the above Gerhard Wiebe, father of Bergthaler Ältester Gerhard Wiebe, was the Gerhard who was the son of Isebrandt, and not Heinrich, as I had thought.

This re-opens the question of how Bergthaler Ältester Gerhard Wiebe and Fürstenlander Ältester Johann Wiebe were related, since they were reportedly cousins. The parents of Ältester Gerhard Wiebe were: Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58) m. 1821 Agatha Dyck (b. 1804), (Note 7). The parents of Ältester Johann Wiebe were: Bernhard Wiebe (1796-1852) m. 1817 Helena Wiebe (?), (Note 8).

Unfortunately, the data available does not allow an easy answer to this question. Discounting a connection on the Dyck side, for which there is little evidence, and which would be difficult to support, the logical conclusion is that Helena Wiebe was a sister of Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58), as indeed I had previously suggested.

Unfortunately again we are faced with the possibility of a transcription error. In the 1801 census, where Isebrandt Wiebe’s wife and only daughter (up to 1801) are listed as “Diana” (?) we appear to be dealing with two different names. While most of the “Dianas” in the 1801 census transcription may be identified as “Annas” some are Helenas (and not only in the case currently under discussion).

My conclusion is that Isebrandt Wiebe, while married to Anna Isaac, did have a daughter, Helena (b. 1795), who was the wife of Bernhard Wiebe. Perhaps some additional information will become available however, to shed more light on this interesting question.

Annotations by Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C.

---

**Mennonite Industry in Russia**

In 1911 the eight largest Mennonite factories producing agricultural machinery and implements accounted for 10 per cent of the total of such output in South Russia and 6.2 per cent of the output of all Russia. The following table lists these factories showing total annual production in terms of ruble and personnel employed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Annual Production</th>
<th>Total Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lepp and Wallmann</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. J. Koop</td>
<td>610,000</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. G. Niebuhr</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.J. Neufeld &amp; Co.</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.A. &amp; W.J. Classen</td>
<td>241,000</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.A. Klassen &amp; Neufeld</td>
<td>200,442</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Jansen and K. Neufeld</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A. J. Koop (1838-1920) was one of the founders of the Mennonite manufacturing industry in Russia, who provided 10 per cent of all the agricultural equipment in the Ukraine. *Photo - Men. Life, Jan. 1955*, page 21. See *Diese Steine*, pages 108 and 202.

---

**Endnotes:**

3. For example, see *Mennonite Historian*, June 2002, page 6.
Material Culture

Russian Loanwords in our Word Treasury

“Russian Loanwords in our Word Treasury,”
by Jakob (later Walter) Quiring, Der Bote, September 19, 1928, page 1, with a reply by Peter Braun.

Editor’s Foreword.

Like other aspects of Russian Mennonite life and culture, language is an incredible repository of the priceless treasures of our collective journey in time. Through five centuries of pilgrimage, sojourn and flight from one land to another, we are connected by language, food, decorative arts, customs and tradition, as with many as 20 nations and many regions across four continents.

Etymology is the study of word derivations or the history of particular words. Such a study goes to the next step in language research determining the origins of words. The etymology of Mennonite Plautdietsch tells the history of our people. Two hundred years of life in Russia was among the more significant of the various influences upon Mennonite life and culture. Nowhere is this more evident than in our beloved Plaut.

A valuable beginning in compiling an inventory of Russian loanwords was made by Jakob (Walter) Quiring and Peter Braun, in several letters in Der Bote, published in 1928 and 1929. These letters provide an extensive list of Russian words in Low German and also valuable introductory commentary on the topic of loanwords in a language, their background and significance and discussion of the etymology of a number of specific examples. These letters constitute an excellent introduction to the topic of Russian loanwords in Plaut-Dietsch.

The rich nuances of our culture and language create a veritable mini-United Nations, providing a human cloak of many colours connecting us to most communities in the world in diverse ways. This explains how Russian Mennonites can seemingly relocate anywhere in the world and in short order establish a new home, feeling relatively comfortable within an alien environment. Over the centuries they have been forced to develop the skill of interacting with multiple communities and religions into a high artform - a reality reflected in the rich diversity that is Plautdietsch. This is a gift shared among the Russian Mennonite diaspora to the present, be it a Professor at Harvard or a humble farmer in the jungles of Bolivia.

The rich diversity of Mennonite Low German also speaks of the linguistic genius of a people who since their first flight from the martyr fires of Northern Germany and Friesland, a dynamic still active and vigourous among conservative Mennonites to the present and spanning four continents.

This also speaks for the multi-dimensional cosmopolitan life world of Mennonites long before jetsetters and globalization became fashionable - whether Flemish artisans in 16th century Danzig, 17th century Dutch shipping magnates in Amsterdam, modern Old Colony settlers in Bolivia or Umseidler in Germany - our people have always related to communities and life worlds which straddled and crossed international boundaries and have developed vibrant intellectual and rich cultural communities whose horizons and vistas extended far beyond their local village and immediate family. Who among us, for example, does not have cousins or at least some distant relations in Germany, Russia, Paraguay, Mexico or Bolivia?

During the late medieval period, Low German was the dominant language of northern Europe and was the working language of the Hansa League, the commercial union which monopolized trade and commerce in the regions of the North and Baltic Sea in the 14th and 15th centuries. The genius of Low German, has been its ability to survive in a post-Hanseatic League world, after which it became the language of minorities and the marginalized. Like “Yiddish”, its Jewish counterpart, Plautdietsch was incredibly enriched by numerous borrowings from a variety of host cultures. If our literature - both religious and creative - became the only homeland of the Mennonites, as has often been said, then the “Plaut” certainly has become its heart.

With three excellent Low German dictionaries completed through the dedicated work of Herman Rempel, Morden, Manitoba, Reuben Epp, Kelowna, B.C., and Jack Thiessen, New Bothwell, Manitoba, and another expanded edition by Dr. Thiessen on the way, an extensive inventory of the Mennonite Plaut has already been created. Their work in turn was predicated upon that of earlier researchers and writers including B. H. Unruh, Walter Quiring, Henry D. Dyck, Dr. Ulrich Tolksdorf, editor of thePreußisches Wörterbuch, and Walter Ziesemer, originator of the Prussian dictionary, to name a few.

In his Der Bote letter of September 19, 1928, Walter Quiring made a worthy proposal, namely, preparing an inventory of loan words for posterity. Perhaps it is time now to proceed to further define the etymology of the word treasury preserved in the three works mentioned. Perhaps it is time that the task suggested by Dr. Quiring almost 75 years ago, be continued and carried to fruition.

The Editor.

Acknowledgement:
The Editor is indebted to Dr. Reuben Epp for forwarding copies of the first two letters in this exchange.

Reading Suggestions:


Gerhard Wiens, “Russian in Low German,” in Mennonite Life, April 1958, pages 75-78.


Low German reading suggestions, courtesy of Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, telephone (204)888-6781.
Russian Loanwords, by Walter Quiring

From an observation of our people, non-Mennonites interested in language, are always advantaged to recognize that so many foreign loanwords manifest themselves in our vocabulary. If they are unfamiliar with the stages we have experienced during the course of our long wanderings over the past 400-500 years, they will exert themselves in vain, to explain these occurrences.

Should he know, however, that we once called Holland our homeland, that for several centuries we had to trade this for Poland, that there among German colonists we yielded up our mother tongue in favour of Low German, and that we then emigrated further to Russia, and there adopted many a Russian word in 150 years, that one part of our colonists finally emigrated to Canada, where even they were preserved from the international melting pot (Schmelztiegel) of all encompassing de-Germanization; should he know all that - the language researcher - then he will have more success in the brain-smashing in determining the origins of a word such as “opkoldüfen” or “plüslic” or “pans”.

We have not been able to bring all the words which we have borrowed in one country to another. All superfluous words were thrown overboard and forgotten in the new environment. Thus, the Hollander in Poland no longer had any need for the words dealing with fishing and shipping and they have apparently disappeared without exception. The Mennonites from the Vistula Delta on the Russian steppes, no longer used the subject expressions for dice building, dam breaches, draining of swamps, etc., and they were forgotten.

In Siberia and in our eastern-Russian colonies, the horses in winter were hitched one in front of the other: one drove “hussem” from the Russian, “Gusjkom”, from “Gus” - “Gans”, “Gänsemarch” [goose stepping]. In the Ukraine, where one did not drive “hussem”, this word was not known, and those Siberians who settled over to Canada will undoubtedly soon forget the word.

In Russia, the Mennonite villages, especially in the younger settlements, mostly lay nicely close together, so that the colonists lived separated by breaches, draining of swamps, etc., and they were forgotten.

Some 150 Russian loanwords have been identified to date in our lingua franca, meaning that we have only - so to speak - adopted one word per year. The Volga German colonists, who only immigrated to Russia a few years before we did, absorbed 800 words during this time, which among other things also speaks for their much more rapid Russification. Only the words are recorded here that have unequivocally gone over into the possession of our word treasury and which apparently are used in all Russian colonies.

Farming:


The Household:


d) Relatives: baukte - father, little Russian (Uk.) “batjkì”; did - old man, little Rus. (Uk.) - “djid” (grandfather); plemenik - nephew, Rus. “pljenjamik”; swaut - friend, Rus. “swat” (free, in-law).


f) Krankheiten: solotucha - tuberculosis/lymphatic disease (Skrofel), Rus. “solotucha”; swinka - bumps (Ziegenpeter), Rus. “swinka”.


Reply by Peter Braun, from Der Bote, Nov. 15, 1928, No. 46, page 1.

In his article in Der Bote, No. 38, Mr. J. Quiring has provided a very worthwhile inspiration. The question regarding the origins of many words of non-German origins in our vocabulary, is of interest - not only to our linguists and historians, but also among a wider circle within our Mennonite people, which is also being begun to be characterized as a distinct branch of the German people within scientific knowledge. Many
very common words remain a puzzle to us when it comes to their origins. From where, for example, do the words, japs, schleif, schrug, klemp, zoagel, plesta, schuetereile, jankre, krukebet, raubelke, lachel, etc. This is no casual question, for in its answer lies the solution to further important questions. In our writings, which generally speaking is a Low German dialect, there are many words of Russia, Polish, Hollandisch, French and English origins, and certainly also others. A word in our situation can only be regarded as a loanword, when it does not arise in the German language, and when it is more or less in general use.

It is almost impossible for an individual to establish all the loanwords of a district and their origins. 1) Because seldom would he master all the relevant languages; 2) Because not all words would occur to him that he knows; 3) since he only knows the loanwords which are used or have been used in his own particular area. The lists of any individual, therefore, will be mostly incomplete. It is much easier for a larger community, such as presented, for example, by the readership of “Der Bote”, since interested persons help each other out, and can add to and correct each other.

For this reason I would like - naturally with the good permission of our treasured editor - to make the suggestion that we follow up the question brought forward by J. Quiring in “Der Bote” and to firmly establish all possible loanwords in our vocabulary, and, indeed, in an established order. Since the beginning with the Russian words has already been made, it follows logically that these come next in the row, then the Polish ones can follow, further the Holandschen [Dutch], French, English, etc. Since we come from Russia, almost all of us master the Russian; only a few will know Polish. But undoubtedly “Der Bote” has subscribers among the Polish Mennonites and also in West Prussia, who can help out. Likewise there will also be readers, who can speak “Pflut” and Dutch (Hollandsch), Pflut and French, etc. In this way, “Der Bote” can make a very worthwhile contribution to the knowledge of language and language study and thus provide a service for scientific knowledge.

(Bote Note: Gladly we place the pages of “Der Bote” at service. There will be no lack of linguistically knowledgable readers, who can provide the mentioned contributions. It will, therefore, depend on the good will of the invitees regarding the topic under investigation, whether more of this nature will be offered in the paper. I assume that the renowned writer has forgotten that relevant articles have already appeared, which he did not mention: they are “Polish influence in our Plaut-Dietsch,” by J._ _ (No. 49, Der Bote, Dec. 1927. and “Influence of the French language on Plaut-Dietsch,” by J. Bleu (No. 11, March 14, 1928) - The Editor).

Such determinations can always only encompass a restricted area. Different locals each have their own unique peculiarities, which also applies to their loanwords. Villages, which had Russian neighbours, will manifest more Russian loanwords, than such villages which have only little interaction with Russian. One uses more loanwords on the estates (Ökonomien) than in the villages, since more Russian is being spoken there. If we now actually want to include also the widely separated daughter colonies such as the Crimea, Sagradowa, Memrik, Kuban, Samara, Orenburg, Turkistan, Barnaul, a confusing multiplicity will result. I would therefore suggest, that we firstly remain standing with the two large mother colonies - the Old Colony and the Molotschna. The language peculiarities of the daughter colonies can then later be added as additions.

But even the Old Colony and Molotschna are not uniformly one whole. The Old Colonies and the Molotschnaers, came from a common homeland, emigrated to Russia at almost the same time, and do not live at all that far apart, and still, we find among them, quite recognizable differences, and actually also in the language form. Thus the Old Colonies end their verbs with a “en” (he says, “lesen” and “Schieven”); among the Molotschnaer the “en” is missing (he says, “lese” and “Schrive”). The same also applies to nouns. As a form of address among strangers, the Old Colonist mostly uses the “Ihr” - the Molotschnaer “Sei”. Earlier there were also individual families in the Molotschna, where the verbs had the “n”; also one could now and again also hear “je” or “ju” as a form of address. But at present, these forms only occur there very rarely. Also the loanwords here and there, as we shall see later, are no longer the same.

Naturally the process of loanwords is not yet concluded, rather continues further. Each living language is everywhere subjected to change - certainly a written language generally speaking less so than a language such as our dialect that is only spoken. Consequently we also have loanwords of recent date. During the first war, for example, the fine word “pulemata" (for machine gun), became common in the Molotschna, which would be completely un-understandable if we did not know that it came from the Russian, “pulemnot”. Presently, after the Revolution, when almost all villages are filled to a lesser or greater degree with Russians, the acquisition of Russian words will apparently accelerate rapidly.

It is not always sufficient to know the requisite language to establish the origins of a loanword. With related languages or words which arise in several languages, it is difficult to answer the question regarding the origin of a word. Thus, for example, the word, “kobel” (mare), can just as easily come from the Russian as also from the Polish. It must therefore be determined whether the Mennonites already knew the word when they moved to Russia, or whether they already also used it in their former homeland in West Prussia.

The written form of the Plautdeutsch words also offers a certain difficulty, since the German alphabet does not have a distinct writing sign for all sounds. There is needed a character for the “A”-sound in “Obumri” (Abraham) and for the soft “J” such as “Journal”. In addition the various “e”-sounds and the long and short vowel must be signified in some way, otherwise only those will read the words right who know the Plaut. But that might well cause difficulties for the printers of “Der Bote” (End of Bote No. 15, 1928, No. 46, page 1).

[Der Bote, Nov. 22, 1928, continuation].

After this somewhat lengthy introduction I return to the article mentioned at the beginning. The record compiled by Mr. Quiring has 134 loanwords. But when he assumes that these words are being used in all the Russian colonies, it is not quite sufficient. I can only judge regarding the Molotschna, which within itself is also not uniform, but in the more centrally located villages some words (14) are not used at all and others very seldom (9). On the other hand, there are in addition to the words mentioned, another quantity of other loanwords, that are commonly being used there.

The words not being used in the Molotschna as far as I know are: buhor (one says “mohil”), kowil (known as “schnittapatle”), raschke, lapke (“pereske”), solutucha, swinka, bubne, krutsch, muster, pristaum (for lumberyard; but for harbour pristand is also used), also I have never heard the names - Osip, Polja, Filja and Natascha - among the Germans. In addition to Jehor, Grisa is also used for Gerhard.

Only seldom used: podkladek, schornik, sejanka, tobrekta, scharf (schauf), deßnànik (10th man), kuschorke, proschenje (instead “prolkven”), prowantje.

Certain words are used conditionally. For example, boltitsa (a Russian hospital is called “bolnitsa” or a German hospital is called Krankenhaus), storusch (if a watchman is a Russian he is called “storosch”, but not necessarily always. For example, a bestanwachta, or if it is a post, that is usually filled by a Russian), knut (is not used for “Peitsche” (whip) but only for a stick with a globe or other enlargement at the end [cudgel]), kuchne (on the estates, the building where the workers’ kitchen was, where the workers ate, was the “Kuchne”; but among the farmers in the village the “küche”, if it was located in an addition or free-standing building, was the “sommateak”).

Certain words are spoken out somewhat differently: chomot (not chomut), bokleschaun (not bólleschaun), borscht (not boahrsch), pekiba (not sapibô), in the berstaund the letters “y” and “d” are usually not used, the trader [dealer] is lauschnik (not lauwschnik). The word obejuana has it own peculiarity. Certainly the Russian calls this wagon “obojanka”, but it seems unlikely to me that the word originates from the Russian. I would sooner believe that the opposite would be the case, and that the Russians have borrowed the word from us. The Russian did not have this type of wagon earlier, and instead first came to know it from the German colonists, and therefore they could not have possessed the word earlier than the Germans. A Russian who has never come in a German village, absolutely does not know the word since it is not known in the Russian_. _[line missing]

As already said, an entire quantity of loanwords are missing. An additional 85 have come to my mind, which would not even be all of them. Some of them might well
be of Polish origins, but which I cannot defe-
nitely establish. The derivations of some of the others are questionable. Corrections are there-fore desirable. The name of the Russian police officials such as stanowoj, uradnik, etc. will natu-
rally also disappear from the colloquial usage now that these officials no longer exist.

(Conclusion).  
[From Der Bote. Nov. 29, 1928]
I will allow the words to follow in alphabi-
etical order, with the loanwords first, followed by the meaning and then, finally, the original Rus-
sian word.
bustuje - strike, "bestowatj"; baud - farmer's wife, "Tata"; berisch - winning, "barysch" (from the Tatar); berischsnik - trader, especially a horse trader, "baryschnik"; blot - mud (after the rain) - von boloto (quagmire); budke - watchman's hut (especially on the railway); budka; charschewne - simple restaurant, "charchschnija"; deljatskic - low ranking policeman, "deljatskij"; djadja - uncle, "djadjja"; drog - a low wagon, "drogi"; druschna - interj. valiant, energetic, from "druschno" (united); dumeje - think, ponder, "dumaytj"; durak - idiot, "durak"; dutke - interj. nothing, "dudki"; dwornik - house servant, "dwornik"; furhon - covered carriage, "furgon" (Furgon is not originally a Russian word, but we have apparently adopted it from the Russian); gorodowoj - protector, "gorodowoj"; hornize - elegant house on an estate, "gorniza" (the good room); howie - to prepare oneself to receive com-
munication through fastening and attending church ser-
dices, "gowej"; ispраwnik - district police chief, "isprenknik"; kerlosche - rubbers, galoshes, "galoschi"; kibit (wagon) - wagon with a curve-
shaped cab, "kibitka"; kobel - mare, "kobylna"; konewaul - lay horse doctor, "kownual"; konscheje - to end, "konschatj"; konwoj - mili-
tary accompaniment - "konwoj" (convoj is origi-
nally not a Russian word); kortschewatj - digging out tree stumps, "kortsewatschnja"; kruschke - small berries (also a spritely maiden), "gruschka"; kukerus - corn, "kukurus" (from the Turk.; kul (sack) - large flower sack, "kuli"; lom - crowbar, cowfoot, "lom"; magirenisch - drinking money, treat at the conclu-
sion of a transaction, "mogarytsch"; obrok - land tax, "obrok"; objeschik - boundary patrol, "objetshchik"; pereske - skin shoes, "from poryskatj" (running around) ?; peschol - interj. for defense against dogs, "poschol" (scram!); polkownik - superior/ chief, "polkownik"; potak - five kopek coin, "pjtakj"; post - to fast, "post"; postoj - interj. wait!, "postoj" (stand still!); paschnik - holiday, "praschnik"; predfledatel - chair of village coun-
cil, "predfledatelj"; prigowor - corporate (Gemeinde) undertaking, "prigowor"; prijomschik - recipient or acceptor, e.g. the grain in the mill, "prijomschickij"; profika - request, "prosij"; prosjt - simple, common, untrimmed, "prost"; prosjyk - simple, not a proud person, "prostjak"; prowoscchie - accompany, "provoschtch"; pulemeta - machine gun, "puljemnij"; rasbojnik - wild lad (as a well mean-
ing reproach), "rasboknij"; ratnik - militiaman, "ratnik"; rox - to work, "robotatj"; rochoschke - bast-m., "rogoschascha"; sabastorke - strike, 
"sabastowska"; sakuske - repast, "sakuska"; šamohon - homemade schnapps, "šamogen"; semski natschalnik - governor/sheriff, "semjskij natschaljanik"; semswto - district government, "semswto"; Belenka - soup with mutton, "Beljanka"; Bemetschke - sun flower seeds, "Bemajtschik"; bėryanjanka - thin material, "bėryyanka"; širak - coat from coarse material, "širajk" (simple farmer); bowjet; Bud - judgement, "Buđ"; Budika - lawful process, "Büditsja"; ūmke - back pack or clothes bag, "ūmka"; stanowoj (pristaw) - dis-
trict police official, "stanowoj pristaw"; starski - superior in the Forstei, "starschij"; stranschnik - police guard, "stranschnik"; strok - term of service, "širok"; schachte - shells (measure for sun-
flower seeds), "tschascha"; tebun - livestock herd, "tabun" (horse herd); tjtja - aunt, "tjtija"; tjrke - threesome, "tjraka"; uradnik - head of local police guard, "uradnjik"; vedue - to beat up, "from dutj" (daj jewo - hit him!); wolost - dis-
trict, "wološtj"; zuk - (or zag) (the ball, the dough block in play); zuk - (or zag) - female dog, "Buka"; zenofke - bast-mat, "zenofke"; chotsch - at least, "chojtj"; klötte - cage, "kletja"; kuple (and from this a couple wife (Kupelwifj) - trading, dealing, "kupla" (buy-
ing, trade); pomoschin - assistant, "pomoschtschnik". P. Braun. 29. November 1928.

Reply, by J. Quiring.
The Russian loanwords shared by Mr. P. Braun in Issue No. 48 in our magazine of the previous year, are a very valuable addition to the collection initiated in Der Bote. Certainly, a number of words must be distinguished as not origi-
nating from the Russian, and among these are blot, drog, kobel, kruschke, post, prost, tsuk, kloate, kukurus, and kul, which originate from the Polish (Compare with my article, "Polish in-

"Margirischt" is of Lithuanian origin - "magarnicos".
Also the word "pereske" is not of Russian origin; it was brought along from West Prussia by our forebears, where it was also used by the Mennonites for bast (jute) shoes and old worn out house shoes. Even until today, the ultimate origin of this word, which is most definitely not German, has not yet been definitely established. (For many years already, Professor Walter Ziesemer in Königsiel has been work on a Prus-
ian dictionary, which already includes over a million entries. All words, regardless whether High- or Plaut-Deutsch, Russian, Polish, or Hollandisch (Dutch) which are found in Prussia are to be declared and registered.)
That our word "serok" - a coat (made out of coarse, self-woven material), originates from the Russian "serjak" - a simple farmer - is quite doubtful. The word "serjak" is also used rarely in Russian and it is not well known among the practitioners of our dialect. The supposition, that it is a good German word, and comes from "russerok" - a Russian coat - is much more likely. The first syllable is dropped, as is also generally quite common in the language (Aphärese), leav-
ing "serok" or "sirok".
Also our numerical word, "tachtentich" origi-
nates from the Old-Saxon "antachtoda"; the "an" has fallen away earlier, for in Middle-Lower-German it already is called "tachtentich".
"Tabun" is also known in the West Prussian vocabularies, and therefore does not originate from Russian either.

"Kupehn" is a German word, which has not somehow been re-borrowed from the Russian either. Certainly it is only sparingly used in Ger-
am, e.g. Kuppler, Kuppler, Zuhalter, etc. (cou-
pling, coupler, concubine). It can be traced to Middle-High-German from kuppen, koppeln, to lay on the Koppel, binding, to chain, and origi-
nates from the Latin, "copulare".

The words "starschi" and "kortschujen" do not belong to the category of words of commonly used loanw ords. Together with other words, e.g. postel - bedstead, trabujen - stamping, machuj - overseer to the Russian "machajtj" - winking, rasorejen - not to get excited, Russian "rasorjajj" to become impoverished, but also to get excited, jegromij - capable of writing, educated from the Russian "gramoten", they were borrowed or coined on the Forstei [Men, Forestry Camps]. An entire row of other Russian words had become housed in the speech of the barracks-boys, who during the passing of years had basically developed their own jargon. However, these words could not get established in the colonies, since in all likelihood, the designation that they served in the Forstei, was not practised in the villages. It would be a much appreciated assignment for the former Forstei sol-
diers among us, to gather these words and to also publish them in Der Bote. The words polkownik, semske, semstwo, stanowoj, uradnik, gorodowoj have also not be-
come firmly established in our vocabulary. The Mennonites that have emigrated to Canada will undoubtedly soon forget these words.

Of more recent date are pulemeta (not pulemota?) and likewise predfledatelj and sovet, which however, will again disappear together with the Bolsheviks.

Likewise Konwoj - accompaniment with guards, from the French "Convoi". Ferhon has come via the French "tourgon" to be borrowed from the Russian.
The word tsujke (the ball or dough block in the familiar game) apparently does not come from the Russian or Polish szuka - or bitch, for then it would have to be pronounced "tsuk-ke". In would sooner come from the interjection "tsiuj", a call with which the pigs are enticed. Tsenowka is not a Russian loanword (per-
haps from Little Russian [Ukrainian]. Who can help?).

Budke is a German word, and is actually found in Russian as a German loanword; that it may have been borrowed from the Polish or Russian by the West Prussian vocabulary is quite un-
likely. In Middle High-German it is called boude, and in Middle Low-German bode, Middle Netherlandisch [Dutch] boede. The ending "ke" can also be the High-German diminutive ending "chen".

The word kalosch - rubber shoes - is not borrowed from the Russian, it was imported from
Russian Words in Mennonite Low German

“Russian Words in Mennonite Low German,” compiled by Adina Reger, Weißenthurm, Germany, and Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada.

Introduction.
One of the most exciting attributes of the Flemish Mennonites since the Reformation, has been their amazing linguistic ability. Over the centuries they have maintained a trilingual discourse consisting of a colloquial or household language, a formal religious language, and a business language adapted from their host society, changing and replacing all three at various points in their history.

Starting with Flemish (Nieder-Frankish), they learned a variety of languages as they fled from country to country in search of religious freedom - Dutch, Friesian, Low German (Saxon), Prussian Platt-Dietsch and Danziger High German, to name a few. Along the way they learned various dialects and also absorbed and adapted words and ideas from the different host countries in which they lived. By the late 18th century in Royal Poland-Prussia, the Flemish Mennonites had adopted the Low German dialect spoken in the Vistula Delta region as their colloquial or household language. Prussian Platt eventually became the standard household language - the discourse of the private and family domain. This “Mennonite Platt”, as it came to be known, was carried along with the Delta Flemish pioneers who settled in the steppes of Chortitza and the Molotschna Colonies in 1789 and 1804.

The Danziger High German was also adopted by the Mennonites in the 18th century. With its archaic pastoral vocabulary and expressive poetic phraseology, it was ideally suited to replace their earlier Dutch as their “high” or church language, used in the realm of “higher” discourse in their spiritual and ecclesiastical life. The Mennonite love of languages continued in Canada and the U.S.A. where they learned English and in Latin America where they learned Spanish as their language of business and wider social discourse. All the time, of course, they retained their basic Prussian Platt and Danziger High German. The five major social languages currently in use among the diaspora of the Russian Mennonites are Dutch, German, Russian, English and Spanish with Plattdeutsch as the common unifying language. This is a rare moment in history which will not last for long.

From the correspondence of Walter Quiring and Peter Braun (see preceding article) the reader is already aware that the Russian language was one of the significant influences on “Mennonite” Low German. Through their colloquial language each speaker commands a small core vocabulary of Russian consisting of around one hundred words in the case of the Kanadier (those Mennonites immigrating to Canada in the 1870s) and two hundred words and more for the Russländer (those Mennonites immigrating to Canada in the 1920s), depending on the linguistic prowess of the individual. At the least, it should be a great help for those travelling in Russia or seeking to achieve a better understanding of Russian culture, and at the best, it actually forms a foundation for learning the Russian language for those linguistically inclined. This is an incredible treasure in a world ever more dependent upon international trade and global communications.

The words compiled by Adina Reger and myself were never intended to be a complete listing and surely many words are not included. It started largely as a novelty of discussing various words that seemed to sound Russian or Slavic, and then analyzing them as to whether they really came from the Russian or from some other language. Because the Russian Empire itself was a polyglot of cultures and ethnic communities, much like the British Empire at its peak, the goal was quickly established as gathering words which originated from the Russian environment, not necessarily restricted only to Russian words.

The number of words which Mennonites adopted in their Russian milieu which are Turkish, Tatar, Latin, Greek and Arabian in origin, for example, demonstrate that their’s was not a fragile culture, sequestered meekly in hopeless isolation. It was a living vibrant society that interacted vigorously with all components of their newly found homeland. The word treasury of Russian in Low German defines the experience of Mennonites in Imperial Russia - it was pastoral, pristine, unperturbed, rural, earthy and agrarian.

Our treasury of loanwords also tells us that the surrounding world (“umwelt”) of the Mennonites in the Black Sea region in the 19th century was largely Russian as opposed to Ukrainian, as some recent writers appear to be suggesting. The lands along the lower reaches of the Dneiper River

Prussia where it is still in use today. It originates from the French kaloché, which for its part has borrowed it _______ from the Latin (medieval root word calopia - wood shoes) calopus - shoemaker.

J. Quiring

Our Plattdeutsch.

"If we would study our Plattdeutsch more extensively, we would speak a better High German." I would like to double underline this statement from D. F. Swatzky, and thereby to heartily endorse it. For our High German is not nearly perfect, particularly in speaking it. An entire quantity of unseemly linguistic instances have borrowed themselves in, which are partially due to ignorance and partially originate in the Plattdeutsch. Perhaps I can return to this topic on another occasion.

I have regrettably not read the Bote in the year 1927. The article “Polnischer Einschlag in unserm Plattdeutsch,” is therefore not familiar to me. But in the meantime, I have received the extremely valuable dissertation from Dr. J. Quiring regarding the “Mundart of Chortitza”, from which - as an aside - all those who are interested in our Plattdeutsch can learn a great deal. It is a very detailed work regarding the Chortitza dialect. It also includes a listing of Polish loanwords, and now I see myself forced to make some corrections to my list of Russian loanwords in No. 48 of Der Bote from Nov. 29, 1928. The following 12 words in the listing should be struck out, since they are not Russian but rather of Polish origin: blot, budke, klotke, kobel, kruschke, kukerus, kul, mageritsch, podwode, post, prost, zuk. In addition I would wish to add two words, which only occurred to me in hindsight: burjaun - high weeds, Rus. burjan; holuschke - large blocks, Rus. "galuschki".

Now we come to the Dutch (Holländischen), and here the matter is particularly difficult and they are related languages. There are almost 150 words, which are spoken exactly or almost the same in Dutch and in the Plattdeutsch. e.g. the words: kaneel, knif, kriderie, kwil, mauw, schwald, drock, grotsch, eekennig, gremlich, beschwemse, glupe, etc. are also found the same or similar in Dutch. But this is, of course, not at all to say that they are only loanwords since the Dutch and the Plattdeutsch belong to the same linguistic family, and thus, it is quite natural that they would have many common roots. In order to be able to determine the actual loanwords, one must trace the historical development of both languages and must also compare the dialect of the Mennonites in Prussia with that of their neighbours in West Prussia. When one considers that Mennonites still spoke Dutch for 200 years after their immigration to West Prussia it is to be understood that the Dutch loanwords will not so unnecessarily. Who will take on the task?

I would like to present an example of how arbitrarily the language sometimes miscarries in the process of adopting loanwords. Already as a child, I was always very interested why the “Johannesbeere” (black currants) amongst us was called “olbäflem”. The word seemed completely unreasonable to me - it made no sense, for sure the “Johannesbeere” had nothing to do with the “Besen”. And in addition, there was the first syllable “ol””. Only after I got to learn the Dutch (Holländische), did a light go on for me. The “Johannesbeere” there was called “aalbezie” (“z” pronounced as a soft “s”). Now, the “Johannesbeere” is smooth, and the branches, in contrast to gooseberry bushes, have smooth stems; for the Hollander the association with fishery is very dear and through this came the comparison to the eel (perhaps there are also other connections). And “bezie” means “Bagere” (berries). The meaning of this word must have been forgotten among those who emigrated from Hol- land, whereby the word became ununderstandable and eventually “bafllem” was made out of it. And so the Holländischen “aalbezie” became our “olbäflem”. P. Braun. 10. April, 1929.
were part of the Russian Empire during the Mennonite presence there, and under Soviet Russia after the Revolution. In 1922 the Imperial Provinces of “New” Russia - Ekatherinoslav, Kherson and Taunus - were placed under the Ukrainian S.S.R. for administration purposes. Even today, over half of the population of the Zaporozhe region remains ethnically Russian.

One of the interesting aspects of the Russian word treasury of Low German Mennonites is the distinction between words already adopted by the 1870s immigrants to Canada (the so-called “Kanadier”) (List One) and another set of words adopted by the 1920s immigrants to Canada (the so-called “Russländer”) (List Two). Of course, the Umsiedler, who have resettled to Germany during the past two decades, would warrant a third, and much more sizeable, list of Russian loanwords but this is because these recent immigrants were completely immersed in their Russian environment, almost all of them speaking Russian fluently as their working language. The Umsiedler list will remain for others to compile and would be of direct interest mainly to the Umsiedler themselves and not the entire Flemish Mennonite diaspora.

The inventorying is made more difficult because Russian itself - like all major languages - incorporates many foreign loanwords (List Three). The problem lies in establishing whether the word was adopted within the Russian kontext or earlier, e.g. The French language was quite influential in 18th century Russia, being the international language of letters and also used among the nobility and by many civil servants in the Czarist Empire. These influences resulted in the incorporation of a number of French words into Russian, and, presumably, from there into Low German. But some French words may also have been adopted earlier in Flanders, Holland, Poland, etc. I am sure that research will demonstrate that a number of the Slavic words on Lists One and Two were Polish and already adopted in Royal Poland/Prussia in the 18th century and earlier.

A fourth category - although somewhat unrelated - are Russian words which have been incorporated by other languages such as English and German (List Four). This list of some 30 words will be familiar to most Mennonites who are relatively widely read. List Five provides phrases and words helpful to the tourist. This list was developed by Ardia Reger and myself in planning a “Heritage Tour” last June and may be of interest to other tour operators and those planning to visit their former homeland. The entire presentation provides a combined Russian vocabulary of around 250 words, many already familiar to the reader.

In 1999, *Preservings* published the delightful article “The Mennonite Low German Dictionary: A Mirror of the Mortal Soul.” (No. 15, pages 131-136) by Dr. Jack Thiessen, New Bothwell, Manitoba. *Preservings* is interested in ongoing publication on the topic of our vivacious and sparkling Mennonite Plautdietsch. The June No. 22 issue will include a seminal article “The story of Low German,” by linguist Reuben Epp, Kelowna, B.C. In future issues we hope to publish material on Polish, French and Dutch influences in Mennonite Plaut and possibly even an article about Russian and then the German and English meaning. Word origins are signified with the following code: English (E), French (F), Spanisch (S), Greek-Latin (G-L), Hungarian (H), Arabian (A), Latin (L), Italian (I), Netherlands (N), Arabian-Spanish (A-S). Compiled by Delbert Plett and Adina Reger.

**List One: Kanadier Words**

Words originating from the Russian milieu which the Mennonites adopted in Plautdietsch and known to the “Kanadier” (those Mennonites immigrating to America in 1874-78). Kanadier words can often be indentified by reviewing old journals and other contemporary writings. The following lists are alphabetized according to the Low German word, followed by the Russian word and then the German and English meaning. Word origins are signified with the following code: English (E), French (F), Spanisch (S), Greek-Latin (G-L), Hungarian (H), Arabian (A), Latin (L), Italian (I), Netherlands (N), Arabian-Spanish (A-S). Compiled by Delbert Plett and Adina Reger.

- Arbuz, Rus. arbus - Wassermelone/watermelon;
- Arschien, Rus. arschin - Elle, Arschin=0.71 m/unit of measure;
- Bekslechuela, Rus. pomidory - Tomaten/ tomato;
- Bestaun, Rus. baschtan - Wassermelonenfeld;
- Blott, Rus. bolt - Sumpf, Kot/mud, quagmire;
- Borsch, Rus. borschch - Kohlsuppe/cabbage soup;
- Bultje, Rus. bulka - weißes Brot/white bread;
- Burnus, Rus. burnus - Mantel/parka;
- Chortitza, Rus. Chortitza (Nogai-Tatarisch) - Gotttheit/deity, thanks be to God;
- Destien, Rus. desjatina - Desjatine (Zehntel)=1.09 ha/(a tenth), unit of acreage;
- Diesel, Rus. djavol - Teufel/devil;
- Droschtje, Rus. droshka - leichter Wagen/buggy;
- Gnoj, Rus. gnoj - Eiter, einfacher Schnaps/crude simple liquor;
- Greuel, Rus. grawij - Kies/gravel;
- Halva, Rus. chalva - gepresste Sonnenblumenkörner/crushed sunflower seeds;
- Holopzee, Rus. golubzy - Kohlrouladen/cabbage rolls;
- Jegrommt, Rus. gramotnyj - gebildet/educated;
- Kepitje, Rus. kopejka - Kopeke/copeck;
- Kibit, Rus. kibitka - gedeckter Wagen/covered vehicle;
- Knutt, Rus. knutt - Feische/whip;
- Klopas, Rus. kotleta - Kotlett/hamburger patties;
- Kloetje, Rus. kletka - Käfig/cage;
- Knaut, Rus. kanat - Strick/rope;
- Kobbel, Rus. kobyla - Stute/mare;
- Koh, Rus. chata - Hütte/hut;
- Kos, Rus. kosa - Ziege/goat;
- Kruschtsje, Rus. gruscha - Wilde Birne/wild pears;
- Kul (Sack) (see *Pres*, No. 15, pages 23-24), Rus. kulj - ein Sack Mehl (Bastsack)/bag of flour;
- Kuraj, Rus. kuraj - dormiges Unkraut/thorny weeds;
- Kurgan, Rus. kurgan - Grabhügel/burial mound;
- Kota, Rus. chutor - Landgut/estate;
- Kwauss, Rus. kwas - gegorenes Getränk/Russian cider;
- Laufitje, Rus. lawka - Laden/store;
- Molosch, Rus. molotschnaja - (bestehend aus) Milch/milk, the Molotschna Colony;
- Moroscha, Rus. moroschennoje - Eiscreme/ice cream;
- Moschke, Rus. moschka - kleine Fliege/small-fly;
- Nippa, Rus. Dnjep - Dnieper River;
- Pastje, Rus. paska - Ostergebäck/Easter bread;
- Pereistjes, Rus. - Lederschuhe/moccasins;
- Petklatje, Rus. podkladka - Unterlagscheibe/washer;
- Pietsch, Rus. petsch - Schlafoten/sleeping oven;
- Pirofski, Rus. pinschki - Teigtaschen/doughpocket;
- Plawi, Rus. plawni - Überschwemmungsgescheit/floodplain;
- Prorosl, Rus. plemjannik - Neffe/nephew;
- Plemmenitje, Rus. plemjanniza - Nichte/niece;
- Podwodd, Rus. podwoda - Fuhrwerk/cart, vehicle;
- Priestanj, Rus. Pristanj - Hafen/harbour;
- Prohim (proim), Rus. parom - Fähre/ferry;
- Prosch, Rus. ? - Krabelbett/crib;
- Prost, Rus. prosto - einfach/ crude;
- Redistje, Rus. rediska - Radishes/radishes;
- Ritsch, Rus. retschka - Fluss/creek;
- Russ, Rus. russkij - Russ/Russian;
- Russ, Rus. russkij - Russ/Russian;
Samawoa, Rus. samowar - Teemacher/tea maker;
Schirkj, Rus. Schuk - Käfer/cricket
Sekret, Rus. sekret - geheimer Orter/toilet;
Semin, Rus. semjanka - Erdhütte/earth hut;
Seraj, Rus. saraj - einfacher Stall/crude barn;
Stapp, Rus. stepj - Steppe/grasslands;
Tabun, Rus. tabun - Pferdeherse/horse herds;
Tsetheriert, Rus. tschsetherik - Getreidefaß; grain measure;
Tschenitj, Rus. tschenschnok - Knoblauch/garlic;
Tschumaken, Rus. tschumaken - Fuhrleute/teamsters;
Wanitj, Rus. watinjka - Wattjacke/wool jacket;
Wendel, Rus. weledel - Obsttaschen/fruit pockets;
Zejoon, Rus. zygan - Zigeuner/gypsy;
Zuck, Rus. suka - Hündin/bitch.

List Two: Russländer Words

Words from the Russian milieu which the Mennonites adopted in Plautdietsch and known to the "Russländer" (those Mennonites immigrating to America in the 1920s). Most of the words in List Two are found in Jack Thiessen, Mennonitisch-Plautditsches Wörterbuch (Mennonite Low German Dictionary) (Steinbach, 2000), 518 pages. Compiled by Adina Reger and Delbert Plett.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balalajka, Rus. Balalajka</td>
<td>Saiteninstrument/stringed instrument;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baraban, Rus. baraban</td>
<td>Trommel/drum;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baschlitj, Rus. baschl tyk</td>
<td>kaukasische Wollmütze/touque;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braschtje, Rus. braschka</td>
<td>selbstgebrannter Schnaps/homebrew;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burjaun, Rus. burjan</td>
<td>Unkraut/weed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burak, Rus. burjak</td>
<td>rote Beete/red beets;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelodne, Rus. cholodnyj</td>
<td>kalト/cold;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chochol, Rus. chochol</td>
<td>Spaßröcke/apron;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chomut, Rus. chomut</td>
<td>Hocke/hay stack;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubina, Rus. dubina</td>
<td>Knüppel/club;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germanzy, Rus. Germanzy</td>
<td>Deutscher/German;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospodin, Rus. Gospodin</td>
<td>Herr/Mister;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komoud, Rus. komut</td>
<td>Halsjoch/yoke;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalitje, Rus. kalitja</td>
<td>Pförtner/gate;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalotje, Rus. kalotje</td>
<td>Pförtner/gate;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kastorka, Rus. kastorka</td>
<td>Rizinussöl/caster oil;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koschuch, Rus. koschuch</td>
<td>Schafpelz/sheepskin jacket;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klersch, Rus. klersch</td>
<td>Haushalter/housekeeper;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klerschik, Rus. klerschik</td>
<td>süßes Gebäck/sweet baking;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korschik, Rus. korschik</td>
<td>süsses Gebäck/sweet baking;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korschik, Rus. korschik</td>
<td>Klopsteins/whiskey;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottschik, Rus. kottschik</td>
<td>Einkaufstasche/Shopping bag;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotscheroschka, Rus. kotscheroschka</td>
<td>Schureisen/poker;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotscheroschka, Rus. kotscheroschka</td>
<td>Schureisen/poker;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottes, Rus. kottes</td>
<td>steiler Abhang/ravine;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leschak, Rus. leschak</td>
<td>Liege/divan;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobogreika, Rus. lobogreina</td>
<td>Mähschneid/mower;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luak, Rus. luak</td>
<td>Zweibel/Onion;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machnowzy, Rus. machnowzy</td>
<td>Anhänger des Maschins;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makuch, Rus. makucha</td>
<td>ausgepreßte Sonnenblumenkorner/crushed sunflower seeds;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamalyga, Rus. mamalyga</td>
<td>Maisbrei/cream chowder;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechorje, Rus. mechorja</td>
<td>Tabak/crude tobacco;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minischte, Rus. minischka</td>
<td>Hemdbrust/dickey;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modolodts, Rus. modolodz</td>
<td>braver Junge/brave Person;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muschik, Rus. muschik</td>
<td>Mann/Man;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemetz, Rus. nemetz</td>
<td>-deutscher/German;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowobranz, Rus. nowobranz</td>
<td>Rekrut/recurit;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otscherejd, Rus. otscherejd</td>
<td>Warteschlange/cue; lineupp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parin, Rus. parin</td>
<td>Treibkasten/hot bed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasholl, Rus. poscholl</td>
<td>-Weg!-/scram;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peltoo, Rus. paljto</td>
<td>Mantel/coat;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirog, Rus. pirog</td>
<td>süßer Platz/Kuchen/pastry;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plischtje, Rus. plischiki</td>
<td>Milchbrötchen/roll;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possiltje, Rus. posylka</td>
<td>-Packen/package;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pohone, Rus. pogony</td>
<td>Schuterkappe/epaulets;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pojas, Rus. pojass</td>
<td>Gürtel/belt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppean, Rus. paperiosa</td>
<td>Zigarette/Cigarette;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postjauls, Rus. postojalj</td>
<td>-dwor/Herberge/hotel;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powestje, Rus. powestka</td>
<td>Benachrichtigung/notice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pranitj, Rus. prannmjk</td>
<td>Pfefferkuchen/pepper cookies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praniitj, Rus. pransdmk</td>
<td>Fest, Feier/feast;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prekochschik, Rus. prikochschik</td>
<td>Gutsverwalter/estate manager;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samogon, Rus. ssamogon</td>
<td>selbstgebrannter Schnaps/homebrew;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saula, Rus. ssalo</td>
<td>Speck/bacon;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlichtje, Rus. schischka</td>
<td>Zapfe/pine cone;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schmatok, Rus. schmatok</td>
<td>- (umgangsprachlich) ein Stück (Papier, Fleisch); (colloquially) a piece (paper, meat);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanewjow, Rus. stanowyj</td>
<td>Polizeihauptmann/police commissioner;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starchei, Rus. sstarchei</td>
<td>Oberst/captain;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroho, Rus. strogro</td>
<td>streng/strict;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soba, Rus. ssoba</td>
<td>Hund/dog;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surje, Rus. ssutki</td>
<td>-24 Stunden/24 hours;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaut, Rus. swat</td>
<td>Freund, Freier/suitor, friend;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swotschik, Rus. iswotschik</td>
<td>Fuhrmann/driver;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas, Rus. taz</td>
<td>Waschbecken/handbasin;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taulje, Rus. taljja</td>
<td>Taille/waist;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terkauna, Rus. tarakan</td>
<td>Kuchenschabe/cockroach;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teworisch, Rus. towarisch</td>
<td>Genosse/comrade;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tormus, Rus. tormos</td>
<td>Bremsen/brake;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tschaduk, Rus. tschudak</td>
<td>verschrobene Person/eccentric;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uchazhor, Rus. uchaschhor</td>
<td>Vehreher/suitor, lover;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uradnitj, Rus. uradnik</td>
<td>Landpolizist/village policeman;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widma, Rus. wedjma</td>
<td>Hexer/witch;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrenj, Rus. wrenje</td>
<td>Marmelade/Jam;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zyreen, Rus. sirenj</td>
<td>Fließer/flic;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List Three: Foreign Words

Foreign words in the Russian language incorporated into Mennonite Low German. Kanadier words are signified with a (K) and Russländer words with (R). Compiled by Delbert Plett and Adina Reger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abakus (K), Rus. stschioty (G-L)</td>
<td>Rechenbrett/counting board;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adje (K), Rus. adeui (F)</td>
<td>adeui/good bye;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akotzje (K), Rus. akazija (G-L)</td>
<td>Akazie/acacia;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banja (R), Rus. banja (S)</td>
<td>Badeladen/bathroom;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bensintje (R), Rus. bensinka</td>
<td>Feuerzeug/lighter;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burschuj (R), Rus. burschuj (F)</td>
<td>reicher Bürger/bourgeoisie;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flitzeped (flitzen+ped) (K), Rus. welosiped (F)</td>
<td>Fahrrad/bicycle;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmoschtje (K), Rus. garmoschka (G)</td>
<td>Ziehharmonika/mouth organ;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohma (K), Rus. kamera (G-L)</td>
<td>Abstellturm/pantry;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutschka (R), Rus. kutscher (U)</td>
<td>Kutscher/chuffeur;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komoud (K), Rus. komod (F)</td>
<td>Kommode/dresser;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kostuntje (K), Rus. kaschten (G-L)</td>
<td>Kasten/strengths;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krawatte (K), Rus. kravatte (F)</td>
<td>Schlippe/neck tie;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack (R), Rus. lak</td>
<td>Lack/shellack;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konwart (R), Rus. konwert (L)</td>
<td>ein Platz;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marzipan (K), Rus. Marzipan (F)</td>
<td>Marzipan/candy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazin (R), Rus. magazin (A)</td>
<td>Laden/store;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opptajt (R), Rus. apteka (F-G-L)</td>
<td>Apotheke/pharmacy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papagei (K), Rus. papagei (F-A-S)</td>
<td>Papagei/parrut;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patroon (K), Rus. patron (F)</td>
<td>Patroon/bullet;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospekt (R), Prospekt (F)</td>
<td>Straße/street;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmanye (R), Rus. portmane (F)</td>
<td>Geldbeutel/Wallet;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prowaunte (R), Rus. prowaint (L)</td>
<td>Lebensmittel/food;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prucz (R), Rus. prucz (L)</td>
<td>Perücke/wig;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remur (K), Rus. Reumur 1683-1751 (F)</td>
<td>-temperature system adopted by the Kanadier, presumably in Russia;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preservations No. 21, December, 2002 - 127
List Four: Russian in Foreign Languages

Words which are familiar in foreign languages (English, German, French, etc.). The Plautdietsch word is on the left hand side, followed by the Russian and then the German. Compiled by Adina Reger and Delbert Plett.

Apparatishik, Rus. apparatishik - Regierungsmitarbeiter/bureaucrat;
Baba, Rus. baba - Steinkulpturen/stone sculptures;
Babuschka, Rus. babushka - ältere Frau/old woman;
Besoa, Rus. bazar - Markt/market;
Bolschewik, Rus. bolschewik - Kommunist (von „bolsch“ groß);
Communists, from „Bolsch“ great;
Boljschoj, Rus. boljschoj - groß/great, big;
Borsch, Rus. borsch - Kohlsuppe/cabbage soup;
Cossack, Rus. kozak - freier Mann/free man;
Datscha, Rus. datscha - Wochenendhaus/cottage;
Duma, Rus. duma - Parlament/Parliament;
Glasnostj, Rus. Glasnostj - Freiheit/freedom;
Gulag, Rus. GUlag - Gefängnis/imprisonment;
Hetman, Rus. getman - Hetmann/Cossak chief;
Kolchos, Rus. kolchoz - Kollektivfarm/collective farm;
Kopeke, Rus. kopejka - Kopeke/copecke (cent);
Kreml, Rus. kreml - Burgstadt/fortress, Kremlin;
Kulak, Rus. kulak - Großbauer/rich farmer;
Kurgan, Rus. kurgan - Grabhügel/burial mound;
Kulak, Rus. kulak - Großbauer/rich farmer;
Kurt, Rus. kurt - Grabhügel/burial mound;
Matrioschka, Rus. matrjoschka - Puppenwagen/sidewalk;
Nemetz, Rus. nemets - Deutscher/German;
Perestrojka, Rus. Perestrojka - Umbau/reform;
Polka, Rus. polka - ein Tanz/a dance;
Prawda, Rus. prawda - Wahrheit/truth;
Rubel, Rus. rublj - Rubel/ruble;
Russe, Rus. nsskij - Slawe, Russe/Slaw, Russian;
Samovai, Rus. samowar - Teemaker/tea maker;
Sowjet/Sowjet, Rus. sowjet - Rat/committee;
Sputnik, Rus. sputnik - Satelit/satellite;
Stapp, Rus. step - Steppe/prairie;
Starets, Rus. starez - alter Mann/old man, elderly priest;
Towarisch, Rus. towarisch - Genosse/comrade;
Trocka, Rus. troika - Dreige span/threesome;
Tschek, Rus. tscheka - Sonderkommission/special commission;
Vodka, Rus. wodka - Schnaps/brandy;
Zar, Rus. zar - Kaiser/Emperor;

List Five: Russian for Tourists

Russian words and phrases commonly used by tourists. The English word/phrase is followed by the Russian and then the German. Compiled by Delbert Plett and Adina Reger.

Phrases:

To your health, Rus. Na sdrawstwujte - Hallo;
Good Morning, Rus. dobroje utro - Guten Morgen;
Good Day, Rus. dobryj den - Guten Tag;
Good evening, Rus. dobryj wetscher - Guten Abend;
See you again, Rus. Doswidjaj - aufwiedersehn;
Thank you, Rus. spasibu - bester;
How are you, Rus. kak dela - wie geht's;
I dont know, Rus. ja ne snaju - ich weiß nicht;

Words:

Bad, Rus. nolj - null;
One, Rus. odin - eins;
Two, Rus. dva - zwei;
Three, Rus. tri - drei;
Four, Rus. chetrye - vier;
Five, Rus. piatj - fünf;
Six, Rus. schest - sechs;
Seven, Rus. semj - sieben;
Eight, Rus. wosemj - acht;
Nine, Rus. dewjatj - neun;
Ten, Rus. desjatj - zehn;

Numbers:

Zero, Rus. nolj - null;
One, Rus. odin - eins;
Two, Rus. dva - zwei;
Three, Rus. tri - drei;
Four, Rus. chetrye - vier;
Five, Rus. piatj - fünf;
Six, Rus. schest - sechs;
Seven, Rus. semj - sieben;
Eight, Rus. wosemj - acht;
Nine, Rus. dewjatj - neun;
Ten, Rus. desjatj - zehn;

Conclusion.

The “Rechnenbücher” of teachers in the Mennonite confessional school system in Poland-Prussia and in the early 19th century in Russia, reveal that poetry was routinely used as a tool for teaching subjects such as mathematics and geography (see Pres., No. 17, pages 22-23). The same pedagogical technique was used in the linguistic field. The Mennonites composed rhymes which became educational aids for learning the Russian language.

The following poem contributed by Arthur Krueger, Winnipeg, Manitoba, provides an excellent example of this genre:

Schto takoj - was ist das? - What is that?
Masslobojka - Butterfass - Butterfat
Noschik - Messer - knife
Lutsche - besser - better
Ljudojed - der Menschenfresser - the people eater.

Hopefully the descendants of the Flemish Mennonites will learn to take pride in their rich multilingual heritage and continue their proud trilingual tradition. The Russian Mennonite diaspora can only benefit from the human interactions and social and economic advancements made possible through their outstanding linguistic prowess.


128 - Preservings No. 21, December, 2002
Oh My Grandparent’s Clock!

“Oh My Grandparent’s Clock!' The Mennonite Clock Making Tradition, in Prussia and Russia,”
by Tony Funk, Box 354, Hague, Saskatchewan, S0K 1X0.

**Introduction.**

While growing up at Hague, Saskatchewan, during the 1940’s and 1950’s, I frequently accompanied my parents and brothers as we visited my maternal grandparents, Peter J. and Sarah (Dyck) Elias at Rosthern. Other than the pleasure of meeting other members of the extended family there, they also had numerous heirloom articles to enjoy. One of those treasures was an old “Russchi Kluk”.

It was hanging on the west wall of their “Grote Shtov”, with its long exposed pendulum hypnotically swinging back and forth, thereby keeping the timing mechanism functioning. As a youngster I found it difficult though, to figure out what time it showed since it had only an hour hand. No minute hand. Eventually I learned that if the single hand was three-fourths of the way between the II and the III, then it must be about 2:45.

**1729 Clock.**

Only much later in life did I realize the full significance of this clock. On the top crown portion of the faceplate is the date 1729. That predates the movement of Mennonites to South Russia by about 60 years, making it a certainty that this clock was made in the Vistula Delta region.

Having made a hobby for the last 10 years to study these Mennonite made clocks, and securing data on close to 100 of them, I know that it is difficult finding any that are older than 1830, and virtually impossible to find any made in the 1700s. The aforementioned clock is amazingly dated 1729!

Can I definitively prove it actually is that old? No. However having studied many of these heirloom timepieces, I am certain it predates the 1790s Mennonite movement to South Russia. Also, as a young woman in the early 1930s, my mother, who is still alive, repainted the faceplate, including the marked date, all as it had been. Unfortunately, the colours, as well as the decorative scheme, is almost certainly different than the original was. The original decor presumably was already lost at an earlier repainting exer-

**Clock #1 – 1729 Elias.** Perhaps the oldest known piece of Mennonite furniture of Vistula Delta origin in North America. A 1729 clock. Manufacturer unknown. Note the circular face topped with a crown. Hour hand only, cord driven, repainted face. Moved from Prussia to Chortitza Colony about 1790, then to the West Reserve, Manitoba, from 1875 till later 1890’s, when it was moved to Rosthern, Saskatchewan.

**Clock #2 – 1836 Schmidt.** 1836 Kroeger clock with original face décor. Original owner signed by “C G” monogram on top of crown, is unknown. Believed brought to Canada in 1876 by Schmidt family.

**Clock #3 – Warentin.** 1848 Kroeger, cord-driven, hour hand only, décor featuring both tulips and roses. Note square face topped with a dome. Brought to Mountain Lake Minnesota in 1877 by Anna (widow of Rev. Heinrich) Warentin. Clock then moved to Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, in 1903. Subsequently to Abbotsford B.C. then St. Catherines and Virgil, Ontario. Eventually to the great-great-granddaughter of original owner at Hague, Saskatchewan, in 1990.

**Clock #4 – 1858 Mandtler.** Square-domed face, cord-driven, hour hand only. Face repainted but close to original.
Clock #6 - 1890s Kroeger. Chain driven, hour and minute hand, repainted face. Moved extensively in Soviet Union mid-20th century then brought to Germany with the Umsiedler (Aussiedler) movement in late 1980s. Given by an aunt to a present Calgary, Alberta, resident. 

Clock #7 - 1900 Kroeger. Original face decor. Has hour and minute hands, plus alarm set at center of dial. Needs six weights to activate time train, chimes, and alarm. Most of its life has been in authors paternal Lethkeman bloodline.

130 - Preservings No. 21, December, 2002

are frequently referred to as clocks have a naming problem. They needed cream separator at a small run- 

were the original 1729 was, as well as four of the reproductions. I knew where the original 1729 was, but if you can’t handle that language then “Men-

morn watches or clocks with Roman numerals you will find that practically all use III. Very puzzling.

There is no particular balance between the I and XI, or V and VII, so why be concerned about the III and VIII balancing?

Oh, by the way, if you check modern watches or clocks with Roman numerals you will find that practically all use III. Very puzzling.

When I have opportunity to inspect someone’s “Russchi Kluk” I pay attention to the shape of the face, cord or chains, hands, visible dates or initials, plus some other clues. If I’m allowed to check the clock interior I carefully look for any markings like initials, dates, or serial numbers which are frequently found on the clock frame, an exposed gear, or on the back of the pendulum bob. These mark-

ings are very helpful in determining age and manufacturer.

The Kroegers, who made more clocks then the other manufacturers combined, did a much poorer job of marking their pieces than the smaller manufacturers did. The latter often have their initials, date and serial num-

ber all marked. Kroegers frequently have nothing.

Family Connections.

These clocks are especially impor-
tant to me if they have family connec-
tions. Hopefully that holds true for 
you also. My father, Henry J., son of Jacob and Helena (Lethkeman) Funk, left Neu-Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, in July, 1923, as an 11 year-old boy. He had lived on England Strasse, across the street to the east from the Schultz Fabrik. A photo, taken in May, 2000, of his parental home can be found in Preservings, No. 17, page 27. (Diese Steine, page 183). It is the smaller home toward the left of the photo.

Father used to tell us they had two “Russchi Kloken”. A darker more ba-

sic model in the kitchen area, and a fancier one in the living room. Was it common to have more than one per household? I don’t think so. They certain-

ly were not of the village elite so the two clocks puzzles me.

Unfortunately they both stayed behind and I don’t even have pictures of either. In July, 1997, my wife and I were able to find this house and were allowed to go inside. Not surprisingly there were no signs of heirloom clocks, or for that matter anything else distinctly “Mennonite” The clock com-

ing through my paternal grandmoth-
ers (Lethkeman) lineage I have found. It involved a spinster who married late in life, actually three times, who had given it to a stepson who also died childless. After some vigorous bidding at an auction, it is again in the Lethkeman bloodline.

My wife Jacqueline’s maternal ancestors, Heinrich Warkentin (1828-73) and Anna Friesen (1826-87) lived in Münsterberg, Molotschna Colony.

They had an 1848 Kroeger clock which Anna brought with her to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1877. The next generation Heinrich Warkentin (1853-1944) and Maria Balzer (1859-1926) brought the clock to Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, in 1903. Eventually it went through three more generations wandering to Abbotford B.C., then St. Catherines, Ont, and eventually Vigil, Ont.

For Further Reading:


Interestingly, Janzen and Janzen, in their book Mennonite Furniture state on page 86 and 87, “The oldest known piece of Mennonite furniture of Vistula Delta origin in a North American collection is a chair made in 1776.” There just may be a clock that is older! (Endnote)

After leaving Prussia, this clock would than have been in the Chortitza Colony from about 1790 till 1875, than in the West Reserve, Manitoba till the late 1890s, and in Saskatchewan ever since.

In the 1930s Grandfather Elias, plus two sons, who were then in their upper teens, reproduced five clocks using the 1729 model as a basic pattern. They were not all identical as there were no signs of heirloom clocks, or for that matter anything else distinctly “Mennonite” The clock com-

ing through my paternal grandmoth-
ers (Lethkeman) lineage I have found. It involved a spinster who married late in life, actually three times, who had given it to a stepson who also died childless. After some vigorous bidding at an auction, it is again in the Lethkeman bloodline.

My wife Jacqueline’s maternal ancestors, Heinrich Warkentin (1828-73) and Anna Friesen (1826-87) lived in Münsterberg, Molotschna Colony.

They had an 1848 Kroeger clock which Anna brought with her to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1877. The next generation Heinrich Warkentin (1853-1944) and Maria Balzer (1859-1926) brought the clock to Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, in 1903. Eventually it went through three more generations wandering to Abbotford B.C., then St. Catherines, Ont, and eventually Vigil, Ont.

For Further Reading:


There is no particular balance between the I and XI, or V and VII, so why be concerned about the III and VIII balancing?

Oh, by the way, if you check modern watches or clocks with Roman numerals you will find that practically all use III. Very puzzling.

When I have opportunity to inspect someone’s “Russchi Kluk” I pay attention to the shape of the face, cord or chains, hands, visible dates or initials, plus some other clues. If I’m allowed to check the clock interior I carefully look for any markings like initials, dates, or serial numbers which are frequently found on the clock frame, an exposed gear, or on the back of the pendulum bob. These mark-

ings are very helpful in determining age and manufacturer.

The Kroegers, who made more clocks then the other manufacturers combined, did a much poorer job of marking their pieces then the smaller manufacturers did. The latter often have their initials, date and serial num-

ber all marked. Kroegers frequently have nothing.

Family Connections.

These clocks are especially impor-
tant to me if they have family connec-
tions. Hopefully that holds true for you also. My father, Henry J., son of Jacob and Helena (Lethkeman) Funk, left Neu-Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, in July, 1923, as an 11 year-old boy. He had lived on England Strasse, across the street to the east from the Schultz Fabrik. A photo, taken in May, 2000, of his parental home can be found in Preservings, No. 17, page 27. (Diese Steine, page 183). It is the smaller home toward the left of the photo.

Father used to tell us they had two “Russchi Kloken”. A darker more ba-

sic model in the kitchen area, and a fancier one in the living room. Was it common to have more than one per household? I don’t think so. They certain-

ly were not of the village elite so the two clocks puzzles me.

Unfortunately they both stayed behind and I don’t even have pictures of either. In July, 1997, my wife and I were able to find this house and were allowed to go inside. Not surprisingly there were no signs of heirloom clocks, or for that matter anything else distinctly “Mennonite” The clock com-

ing through my paternal grandmoth-
ers (Lethkeman) lineage I have found. It involved a spinster who married late in life, actually three times, who had given it to a stepson who also died childless. After some vigorous bidding at an auction, it is again in the Lethkeman bloodline.

My wife Jacqueline’s maternal ancestors, Heinrich Warkentin (1828-73) and Anna Friesen (1826-87) lived in Münsterberg, Molotschna Colony.

They had an 1848 Kroeger clock which Anna brought with her to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1877. The next generation Heinrich Warkentin (1853-1944) and Maria Balzer (1859-1926) brought the clock to Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, in 1903. Eventually it went through three more generations wandering to Abbotford B.C., then St. Catherines, Ont, and eventually Vigil, Ont.

For Further Reading:


are frequently referred to as clocks have a naming problem. They are frequently referred to as “Kroeger Clocks” after the numerous genera-
tions of Kroeger family who made them, primarily in Rosenthal,
Abraham L. and Gertruda Plett’s Kjist

Abraham L. Plett (1859-1934) and Gertruda Koop Plett’s (1861-1943) Kjist, by grandson Rev. Henry P. Friesen, Box 134, Arborg, Manitoba, R0E 0A0 (364-2297).

Introduction.

My grandfather Abraham L. Plett was born in Kleefeld, Molotschna, Imperial Russia, son of Cornelius Plett (1820-1900) and Sarah Loewen (1822-1903). My grandmother Gertruda Barkman Koop, was born in Mariawohl, Molotscha, daughter of Johann Koop (1831-97) and Katharina Barkman (1832-1923). The families on both sides were from the Vollwirt farming tradition. They were members of the Kleine Gemeinde, a reform movement in the Molotschna Colony founded in 1812. In 1874 the Koops emigrated to Manitoba, part of the first contingent of Mennonites to arrive at the Forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers on August 1. The Koops settled in Blumenort, East Reserve, relocating to Neuanlage (Twin creeks) in 1879. The Pletts followed a year later, settling in Blumenhof, East Reserve, Manitoba.

My grandparents Abraham and Gertruda were married at the home of his parents in Blumenhof, East Reserve, Manitoba, on November 20, 1879. Among the 30 to 40 families attending was “...an English doctor.”

The Kjist.

My grandfather was killed in a tragic auto accident on October 15, 1934. My grandmother continued for live in the family home in Blumenhof for some years. After her daughter Anna married, grandmother lived with various of her children. But during the last year of her life, she lived with my parents, Gertruda Plett and Johann E. Friesen in Blumenort where she died on June 2, 1943.

The Kjist belonging to Gertruda’s parents had been sold at an auction sale of son Isaac’s estate in 1965 (Pres., No. 11, page 46). Thus it is concluded that the Kjist owned by Abraham and Gertruda Plett must have been inherited by Abraham from his parents Cornelius and Sarah Plett or else acquired in some other way. This proposition was confirmed by my brother Cornelius P. Friesen, presently of Steinbach, Manitoba (telephone call with D. Plett, Jan. 15/00).

By the time of her death, most of grandmother’s possessions had been sold or divided among her children. Among her remaining treasures which she still possessed was a marvellous old Kjist. It is of the style and make of “Kjist” manufactured by Mennonite craftsmen in Prussia and brought along to Imperial Russia in the immigrations of 1789 and 1804 (see Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen, in Pres., No. 12, pages 87-92).

Upon the death of my parents, their possessions were divided among the children and my sister Tina, Mrs. Isaac Reimer, received the Kjist.

Later I, Henry P. Friesen, was privileged to be able to purchase this priceless ancient Mennonite chest at their auction sale in Fisher Branch when L. and Gertruda (Koop) Plett were shared at a family gathering held at the Morweena E.M.C. Church in Arborg, Manitoba, on August 24, 2002. Grandson Norman Penner, Arborg, Manitoba, related that as a young girl his mother Anna, had suffered various illnesses and nervousness. Her parents tried to do what they could to help her when she was suffering and many times her father, Abraham L. Plett, would go with her to the chiropractor or doctor. Sometimes her nervous tension became difficult to bear and then her father with take her by train from Giroux to Winnipeg for medical assistance. In later life daughter Anna (Mrs. Isaac C. Penner), often related about this to her son Norman when he had similar problems, and it helped him knowing that his mother understood what he was going through.

Grandson Clarence Plett (son of Peter S.), Mapleridge, B.C., related various anecdotes in an e-mail to Delbert Plett, Steinbach, dated January 20, 2002; I remember being in the living room with Grandma A. L. Plett and two of my young er aunts. Grandma showed me where the lightening had burned a black streak on the wall, going from nail to nail. She said that Grandpa was in the yard when the lightening hit it and it knocked him to the ground. But he got up and walked to the house (see Abraham L. Plett family book, page 46).

And when Grandpa was a little boy in Russia, he and some other boys were playing outside when they happened to bump into a bee’s nest. The bees came out and started to attack the boys. The boys ran away as fast as they could, except for grandpa who stayed behind. The boys yelled, “Rann Obrum rann!” But grandfather, he yelled back, “Ein Platt ranih!” He got badly swollen up and was sick for several days, but he hadn’t run.

The story I was told about Grandpa’s accident was that he was driving - the car rolled over and landed on its wheels, but with a broken neck. I don’t think he [Grandpa] was the kind of person who would let somebody else drive his car. He use to set his throttle so the car would drive 25 miles an hour. When he came to a corner he would apply the brakes till he was around the corner and then he would let it speed up to 25 miles per hour again (for a detailed account of grandpa’s fatal accident, see A. L. Plett book, pages 70-77).

Recollections.

Various recollections of grandparents Abraham L. and Gertruda (Koop) Plett still out there among the grandchildren.

Reference.

For an extensive biography and family history, see Leslie Plett, Family Register of the Descendants of Our Grandparents Abraham L. and Gertruda (Koop) Plett # 14, (Calgary, Alberta, 1997), pages 28-88.

Preservings No. 21, December, 2002 - 131
Books


Tiger Jake is what we called him. I never knew why, initially. But later I came to understand that some Aboriginals in South America had given him the name.

But what we as young boys in Hillsboro, Kansas all knew was that when Tiger spoke, we all listened. You see, Tiger Jake was a member of my home church. He was a missionary and a professor at Tabor College—the small Mennonite Brethren school in our community. Tiger Jake from time to time was called upon to speak. Whereas with almost any other speaker or preacher we would mostly sleep, draw pictures or otherwise try to sit with our friends in some back corner of the balcony fooling around, when Tiger Jake spoke, we came to listen.

We would move from the balcony to almost the front row of the church. For here was a person who spoke our kind of way. He had fascinating stories, could almost use bad words in a sermon, could tell stories about sex, customs, issues and never seemed to back away from controversy. Sometimes what he said would be digested by the elders in the church as almost heresy, but they too were fascinated by the guy with his wonderful honesty. And so Tiger Jake had an audience and following—though I doubt he knew that this following even included the young kids in church.

Over the years I followed Tiger Jake's work. I read some of his anthropology articles and certainly many of the other articles he contributed in church papers. So it was a delight to be given the opportunity to review his book, Educating Tiger. Though, from the outset, I must say, I can hardly be impartial.

The book begins with a brief biographical sketch of Jake Loewen's life. It begins in a village in Russia and brings him to Canada.

Overall the book is hard to describe. In part it is biography, but the other part is largely a journey of self-discovery, that digresses into the didactic. The sub-title he has given the book is My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey. I think the book is much more than that.

Throughout this review those who have read the book will note items that I have missed that they thought were more important than what I am mentioning. This is indicative of the fact that this book is so multi-faceted, covering numerous topics and issues of relevance to one's personal journey, spiritual journey, the church, missions, MCC and education. If I have failed in properly representing this book in its essence, I humbly apologize.

To begin with, at several points in the book, Jake implies the purpose he had in writing the book was to impart lessons learned. But, at the same time he tempers that comment with statements noting that his conclusions are interim. This is the first important point of the book and of understanding Tiger and his message. What he is saying is that life for him is a constant learning process, a journey of learning if you will. We are also so eager to think and reconsider our pet ideas, I believe our congregations, conferences, churches and our missions would be totally different and have made a far greater impact on civilization around us.

One example of his learnings as a missionary is from his time in Panama. A certain medicine man/drunkard came to make a commitment to Christ. Before long he presented himself to the church and requested baptism. The church people rejoiced that the gospel had overcome one of the church's most sworn enemies in the community so they baptized him.

Then one day Jake was walking through the village when he sees the man lying dead drunk in the gutter of the village. Jake asked the church leader what the church was going to do about this. What kind of discipline would they use.

One of the church elders put his arm around Jake and said, "Tiger, stay out of this one. You have never been a slave of hard liquor like some of us have been, and we know how hard it is to break a life-long drinking habit. You have to recognize, Tiger, that it takes time for a conversion to reach the stomach of a drunkard. We are praying for the man, and we are telling him that one of these days the conversion is going to reach his stomach, and when that happens he will not be able to tolerate strong drink anymore. His system will rebel against it and he will be freed from his habit. His stomach will have been converted."

Jake notes that these young Aborigine Christians were teaching him an important life-long lesson. Conversion is a process. With patience they were working to help this man become totally converted. A year later, Tiger writes, he visited the congregation again and the man stood up in church and testified that after many defeats his stomach was now totally converted. One can only wish, hope and pray that our present-day congregations would have the depth of spiritual wisdom and understanding that these young Panamanian Christians had.

Further to this understanding of conversion, Tiger notes that conversion is much like a house with many rooms. We invite Jesus into one room first, but over the years we discover we have many more rooms in our house that Jesus needs to be invited into. Newly discovered "unconverted" rooms. Sometimes it takes years to turn over a specific room to God. Change, Jake admits, comes slowly and even late in life. Conversion is a process, not a one-time event.

Another important point relates to listening. From those early years of hearing Tiger Jake tell stories in the Hillsboro MB Church I remember him talking about listening with the third ear. This is perhaps central of all of the learnings in the book, and in Jake's life.

Jake attributes the idea to Theodor Reik's book, Listening with the Third Ear. Reik w as a psychiatrist and compares the third ear as a kind of inner radar system to locate the actual problem of a patient.

Jake extrapolates that the third ear is something every Christian should use and practice. Among young Christians on the mission field the Aboriginals often had the ability to listen with the third ear that he, as a know-it-all missionaries, did not. Throughout his life he worked at tuning his third ear to hear what was really being said.

Through story after story he tells how the third ear has two dimensions. The one is to be able to hear calls for help from people with whom one has contact. The second dimension is to know what is "good news" for a specific individual. People need different messages, different good news. One version of good news does not fit all.

What an amazingly simple idea that could profoundly change our Christian lives. Our churches and their evangelism efforts certainly need to read and study these chapters.

Along with his "Third-ear" theology comes his learnings of personal encounters. He notes that if we really want to enter into any intimate relationship, as Christians, with other human beings we should do so through self-exposure. By this he means becoming the first sinner. To know others, we have to be willing to first become known. Values are always best taught in the drama of daily life, not in preaching. For as we practice self-exposure, we will also become aware of the work of God in others who are willing to be known. He emphasises that self-exposure helps us to operate on the principle of "heart of flesh" rather than the "heart of stone." It prevents us from casting the first stone at the person caught in shortcoming, because we will already be the first sinner kneeling at the cross in repentance for our own weaknesses and shortcomings.

It is in his sections (themes) on missions that Tiger Jake is most eloquent. He notes that at the beginning he was a dyed-in-the-wool non denominational soul-winner. He moved to becoming a denominational missions person and then a church transplanter. Eventually he saw how artificial such transplanting often becomes and notes that what is really needed is an indigenous church that lives and develops its own theology within its own cultural milieu. This led him to realize that the only viable task for a missionary is that of catalyst. But even this he does not see as the final goal of missions. Missions he sees as an ongoing process with many lessons to be learned. Like all of life's business, our awareness of what the tasks of mission are is never finished.

His section on forgiveness cannot be excluded. In essence he takes the reader through the guilt and forgiveness that we as Mennonites often battle with. But his main point is that we have permitted forgiveness to be secularized. He suggests this is because scientific specialization has developed.
within the western world an “awe of expertise”. This has led to the “doctor” figure replacing the minister and the brother in people’s quest for forgiveness.

There is much more that could be said about this book and its contents. Suffice it to say that I trust the very few tidbits I have noted in this review will, I hope, entice people to read the book. I cannot emphasize enough how important I feel this book is. Whether or not you will agree with all its contents, it definitely hits the itchy areas of our lives and for that reason alone needs to be read. I also suggest that every MCC worker, every pastor, every missionary, should read this book thoroughly. Don’t dismiss it lightly just because its subtitle is described as one person’s spiritual journey. Rather, read with your third ear.


For J. Denny Weaver’s review of Dr. Jakob A. Loewen’s earlier book, Only the Sword of the Spirit (Wpg. Man./Hillsboro, KS., 1997), 346 pages, see Pres., No. 18, pages 140-141.


The Gemeinde in Hamburg-Altona was 400 years-old in 2001. The 142 pages of the book Zuflucht und Koexistenz by Michael D. Driedger and Peter J. Foth, expost the theme of the history of the Mennonite congregation in Hamburg-Altona. On page 13, Driedger writes that “the concepts of ‘Zuflucht’ (refuge) and ‘Koexistenz’ (co-existence) in the title of the book, played a fundamental role in the story of the Mennonites.”

The book is organized in a chronological manner and every chapter has a focal point: refuge, division, confession building, economic progress, assimilation, and changes after the Second World War. The organization makes the book easily digestible for every level of reader in spite of its academic orientation. Driedger brings his enormous historical knowledge about the congregation at Hamburg-Altona to bear in his excellent presentation. In the process, he uses valuable sources such as Ernst Schepansky, Mennonitische Lexikon, the chronicles of the Roosen and van der Smissen families, and many others. The book also has a special value because it is written with reference to many archive and Gemeinde records. But sometimes while reading, one has the impression that the story is far deeper than that which is presented. The history of this Gemeinde is actually extremely fascinating and one would have preferred to read 1000 pages (with photos) about it.

The Mennonites in Hamburg-Altona came from foreign lands. Their story commenced in 1601 when Prince Ernst Schauenburg granted them a-in part quite limited--Privilegium. They came from Holstein and the Low Countries. The first refugees came in the middle of the 16th century and later they were also joined by Mennonites from Brabant and Flanders. At this time Altona and Hamburg were “secure places of refuge, in which foreigners among them also Mennonites, could establish themselves.” The community was treated here as a Netherlandic group and not as a confessional minority. In the year 1655 the Gemeinde consisted of 200 members; because of the horrible reputation of the Münsterites, the Gemeinde only grew slowly.

The Gemeinde was of the flämische Ordnung, and for many years it was associated with the congregations in the Netherlands. During the great “War of the Lambs” from 1650-70, the Altona Gemeinde sided with the Sonnists. It contributed to the valiant efforts of leaders such as Thielsmann Janz van Bragh to consolidate and advance the conservative cause by the publication of works such as the highly influential Martyrs Mirror, particularly through the writings and leadership of Gerhard Roosen (1612-1711) (pages 39-48).

The story of a Mennonite Gemeinde appears before us in a completely different manifestation than what most readers, particularly those who are Russian Mennonites originating from Danzig, have known and experienced. The story in Hamburg-Altona differentiates itself from that of the Mennonites in Prussia. Deacons and ministers in Hamburg and Altona were well-to-do business people: doctors, merchants, craftsmen, traders, etc. Sometimes they were educated theologians. Of 276 trading ships (during the 18th century) in Hamburg, 50 or 18 percent) belonged to Mennonites--an amazing statistic especially when one considers that the Mennonites only constituted one percent of the total population of the city. By the end of the 18th century the family van der Smissen was among the wealthiest in Altona.

During this century the Mennonites contributed immensely to the well-being of the city, endowing charities and contributing to many good works without regard to the religion of the recipients. The Mennonite elite also played an important role in the public life of the city. They were members of the first patriotic society and established an endowment to rescue people “from the dangers of drunkenness”. Nonetheless, the great Enlightenment of the 18th century passed most Mennonites by. Poverty and wealth were themes that members of the congregation had to struggle with. The Gemeinde always had a “Armenkasse” (“poor box”).

In 1819 the confessional minorities, including the Mennonites, received the right to vote and also the right to serve in public offices. Many changes were implemented in the Gemeinde because of the discontinuance of the Dutch language in worship services; the Dutch lost their preeminence in trade, the connections between Altona and the Low Countries became weaker, and the Gemeinde lost its inner bondedness. They adapted themselves to the society within which they lived. When the German Reich (Empire) was founded in 1870, the Mennonites faced a turning point: “How does the idea of nationalism relate to the principle of nonresistance”? Much was debated on this theme, but the tension did not become less in the 20th century.

A detailed description of life of the congregation after 1945 to the present by its current pastor, Peter J. Foth, takes up a significant space in the second part of the book. During and after the Second World War the members were scattered and the congregation itself was also exterminated. After the war, the Hamburg congregation was a haven for many refugees from East and West Prussia. The membership grew from 300 before the war to 900 after the war.

It was not easy for the Mennonite refugees to integrate themselves into a congregation such as the one in Hamburg. Because of the differences from their home congregations many did not want to join the congregation in Hamburg. Only after the public appeal of Pastor Otto Schowalter did many refugees actually become members of the congregation. In spite of this, the integration of the refugees and locals (“Einheimischen”) in the congregation was not simple and took a long time.

After 1960 the congregation no longer grew. It experienced many changes and continues to experience them to this day.

In the last section of the book P. Foth also deals with the sad part of the congregational story-the slumping membership, and poses a question which is not only relevant to the Hamburg congregation, rather to all Mennonite congregations: “Does one become Mennonite by birth?” “This will not be sufficient for the future of the Mennonite people,” responds Pastor Foth.

He closes the book with the words, “Loyalty and tradition and responsibility for its own path.
Mennonite minister and trader Gerrit Karsdorf the Younger (1729-1811). He had a positive view of Pietism and the Enlightenment. His personal library consisted of 9,000 volumes, the largest private collection in Hamburg. Photo - Zuflucht

It is a take already all too familiar among Russian Mennonites. Heinrich Hildebrandt is a pietist and supports their endeavours among Mennonites. Pietism is incorrectly portrayed as a superior religion and traditional Mennonite society "[has]...become bogged down in our traditions, the outward form, devoid of commitment," (page 77). The worship services of the Brüdergemeinde are described as "sober, strict, and long, but the leaders preached the true word," (page 139). Relating to God is characterized by Johann as "I've leaned to know him personally," (page 144), and not as a "true" believer committing himself to follow Jesus and His commandments within the community/Gemeinde.

In short, this novel not so subtly portrays a certain form of religiosity with little connection to biblical teachings or even to real life among the Russian Mennonites - 80 per cent of whom were "Kirchliche" in 1920. Would the resources of our largest Mennonite publisher not be better spent promoting material modelling a more historically correct and scriptural faith and practice?

The Editor

Frank and Nettie Dyck, Celebrating the first twelve years of Our Retirement(4028 Vincent Place N.W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2A 0H3, 2002), 224 pages. Spiral bound. Available from the authors.

This is a fascinating personal account of a missionary couple who devoted their lives to spreading the Gospel in Europe and the Ukraine. Frank and Nettie are well-known in Mennonite circles for starting the Mennonite Church in Zaporozhe, Ukraine, in 1994 and later also in Petershagen, Molotschna (the birthplace of the Kleine Gemeinde).

The Editor:


Introduction: The publication of John B Toews' translation of the David Epp diary is a significant addition to our information on the history of the Russian Mennonite Communities. The diary was begun by Minister (Lehrer) David Epp (1781-1843) at the age of 56 and covers the period 1837 to 1843, the year of his death. There may have been earlier diaries, but these appear to have been lost. His son Jacob Epp, also a Lehrer and diarist, maintained a set of diaries and both the Jacob Epp diaries and the one David Epp diary were taken to Canada in 1893 by the family after Jacob Epp's death. Regrettably, only an edited portion of the Jacob Epp diaries has been published.

The publication and translation of the surviving David Epp diary is a tremendous achievement. As is evident from the facsimile page reproduced in the book, David Epp's gothic German handwriting cannot always have been easy to decipher. This publication makes the diary readily available to those unable to access the original at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, or having accessed the original, been unable to decipher the material.

This book is of value for several reasons. Firstly, there is very little original material dating for the period covered by the diary, so that anything from this period is of value. Secondly, the diary chronicles various events which add to our knowledge of the individuals and the Mennonite community, including the Molotschna Colony as well as the Old Colony. The events described can be grouped as follows:

(a) Vital statistics. These involve deaths and marriages, generally where David Epp officiated, either at a funeral or marriage. In some cases, births, generally involving close family members, are mentioned.

(b) Disciplinary measures taken by the Gemeinde involving errant members.

(c) Ministerial affairs (other than disciplinary actions). These involve resolutions of ministerial (Lehrdienst) councils, Lehrdienst elections, documentation on sermons given, with information on the place and minister, as well as the text of the sermon.

(d) Visits by David Epp (and family) or at David Epp's residence.

(e) Documentation on events within the general Russian Mennonite community, including the struggle of the Gemeinde to maintain traditionalist values, and including events of interest, but not necessarily witnessed personally.

(f) David Epp's personal comments on some of the events chronicled.

Finally, the diary allows us to make an assessment of David Epp himself and his own role in the various events he documents.

Editing: We need to begin, however, with the translation and editing itself, which, although outstanding, could include some revision and correction in any future second edition. One of the enjoyable aspects of this edition is the lack of editorial comments, and Toews allows Epp to speak for himself. This, however, is a work which does seem to require additional editorial comments. Some of the terms and words used require elaboration and correction as the original meaning may be unclear or incorrectly translated.

One of these words which appears in the diary is "sodomy". In our time, this word has come to acquire a lurid and generally homosexual connotation. In David Epp's time however, this word refers to the thoughtless activities of young teenage boys in sheep herds. Instances where confessions are made in respect of such activities refer to the thoughtless acts of youth. Harvey Dyck, in his translation and editing of the Jacob Epp diaries, provides a useful editorial comment in this respect (Note One). A similar editorial comment should have been made in this book, to avoid misleading the casual reader.

The only non-biblical editorial insertion in the book is, in fact, incorrect and misleading. On pages 157 and 186, reference is made to one Peter Epp. The editorial comments indicate this Peter Epp was from Heubuden in West Prussia, as both Revered and teacher. The correct reference appears to be Peter Epp (1807-52) of Heuboden, Berghal Colony (not Heubuden, West Prussia), Lehrer (Minister-not teacher) of the Berghalder Gemeinde, who was visiting either his father Kornelius Epp

Janice L. Dick, Calm before The Storm (Waterloo, 2002), 365 pages. $23.49

This book is evidently someone's idea of antebellum life in pre-Revolutionary Russia, including the Hildebrandt estate called "Succoth" (page 170). The book including the cover resembles a Harlequin romance.

The novel - and I use the term loosely - evolves around Katya, the daughter of a rich Crimean estate owner, Heinrich Hildebrandt, and Johann Sederman, a teacher hired as the tutor of his children. It seeks to explore the experiences of the Mennonites as Russia bumbles into war and the Revolution. The plot is weak and limited largely to artificial manoeuvring of characters as needed to fill the gaps.

Hubert D. Nett, Calvin and Koexistenz. Ein Bild aus der Geschichte der Mennoniten in Preussens Westen (Groß Freiheit, No. 16, page 128), as Pres. Calm before The Storm (Waterloo, 2002), 365 pages. $23.49

Historical depiction of the old Mennonite church on the "Großen Freiheit" in Altona (see map by Wm. Schroeder, Pres., No. 16, page 128), as sketched by Hamburg artist Max Stobbe (1883-1963). It was built in 1717 to replace the one destroyed in great fire of 1713. Photo - Zuflucht und Koexistenz, page 65.

must be brought into a new balance by each generation for itself.

The book is lacking an index which will make its use as a reference work more difficult.

Book Review by Adina Reger.

Janice L. Dick, Calm before The Storm (Waterloo, 2002), 365 pages. $23.49

This book is evidently someone's idea of antebellum life in pre-Revolutionary Russia, including the Hildebrandt estate called "Succoth" (page 170). The book including the cover resembles a Harlequin romance.

The novel - and I use the term loosely - evolves around Katya, the daughter of a rich Crimean estate owner, Heinrich Hildebrandt, and Johann Sederman, a teacher hired as the tutor of his children. It seeks to explore the experiences of the Mennonites as Russia bumbles into war and the Revolution. The plot is weak and limited largely to artificial manoeuvring of characters as needed to fill the gaps.

Hubert D. Nett, Calvin and Koexistenz. Ein Bild aus der Geschichte der Mennoniten in Preussens Westen (Groß Freiheit, No. 16, page 128), as Pres. Calm before The Storm (Waterloo, 2002), 365 pages. $23.49

This book is evidently someone's idea of antebellum life in pre-Revolutionary Russia, including the Hildebrandt estate called "Succoth" (page 170). The book including the cover resembles a Harlequin romance.

The novel - and I use the term loosely - evolves around Katya, the daughter of a rich Crimean estate owner, Heinrich Hildebrandt, and Johann Sederman, a teacher hired as the tutor of his children. It seeks to explore the experiences of the Mennonites as Russia bumbles into war and the Revolution. The plot is weak and limited largely to artificial manoeuvring of characters as needed to fill the gaps.


This book is evidently someone's idea of antebellum life in pre-Revolutionary Russia, including the Hildebrandt estate called "Succoth" (page 170). The book including the cover resembles a Harlequin romance.

The novel - and I use the term loosely - evolves around Katya, the daughter of a rich Crimean estate owner, Heinrich Hildebrandt, and Johann Sederman, a teacher hired as the tutor of his children. It seeks to explore the experiences of the Mennonites as Russia bumbles into war and the Revolution. The plot is weak and limited largely to artificial manoeuvring of characters as needed to fill the gaps.


This book is evidently someone's idea of antebellum life in pre-Revolutionary Russia, including the Hildebrandt estate called "Succoth" (page 170). The book including the cover resembles a Harlequin romance.

The novel - and I use the term loosely - evolves around Katya, the daughter of a rich Crimean estate owner, Heinrich Hildebrandt, and Johann Sederman, a teacher hired as the tutor of his children. It seeks to explore the experiences of the Mennonites as Russia bumbles into war and the Revolution. The plot is weak and limited largely to artificial manoeuvring of characters as needed to fill the gaps.


This book is evidently someone's idea of antebellum life in pre-Revolutionary Russia, including the Hildebrandt estate called "Succoth" (page 170). The book including the cover resembles a Harlequin romance.

The novel - and I use the term loosely - evolves around Katya, the daughter of a rich Crimean estate owner, Heinrich Hildebrandt, and Johann Sederman, a teacher hired as the tutor of his children. It seeks to explore the experiences of the Mennonites as Russia bumbles into war and the Revolution. The plot is weak and limited largely to artificial manoeuvring of characters as needed to fill the gaps.
(Chortitz) or his brother Kornelius Epp (Chortitz, later Rosengart). This may appear a minor point, but involves the larger issue of David Epps’ circle of acquaintances: were they relatively broad or narrow in scope? In fact, most of David Epp’s visiting involved family members or acquaintances in the Old Colony. [The David Epp in Heuboden, Prussia, was a radicalized pietist and possibly this is why the translator assumed the connection (see The Golden Years, page 227).]

H. Thiessen, Ekaterinoslav: In this regard, some editorial comment is required on the use of the term “brother-in-law” in the book. While technically probably correctly translated, in perhaps the majority of instances, this word refers to a cousin-in-law, that is, a cousin of his wife, Helena Thiessen. Indeed, there are a great many references to the extended Thiessen family throughout the diary. Some of David Epps’ Molotschna visits may have been initiated by his wife, since a great many of the Molotschna residents mentioned are Helena Epp’s relatives. A slight digression here on this Thiessen family may be appropriate since this will undoubtedly assist in the understanding the nature of his contacts, the identity of the individuals involved, and the use of the term “brother-in-law.”

The children of Abraham Thiessen listed at Ellerwald in 1776 (3 sons, 2 daughters, 1 female person) include the following: 1. Anna (1748-1811) m 1773 Kornelius Stoetz (1731-1811); 2. Abraham (1750-1822) m 1783 Katherina Lowen (b. 1759); 3. Gerhard (no dates); 4. Heinrich (1755-1838) m Maria Wölke (1766-1833); 5. Jacob (1759-1816) m 1788 Judith Fast (1748-96), 2m 1796 Margaretha Martens (1775-1829); 6. Helene (b. circa 1762) m 1784 Jacob Dirksen (b. 1744); 7. Margaretha (1767-1807) m 1784 Johann Warkentin (1760-1815). In 1786 Heinrich Thiessen purchased the treadmill of his brother-in-law (Grütz-Müller) Kornelius Stoetz in Krebsfeld, and began a career as a miller (Note Two). Later, in 1804, he moved to Russia with his brother-in-law Johann Warkentin. While Warkentin settled at Blumenort, Molotschna, Thiessen set up a treadmill in the city of Ekaterinoslav, perhaps one of the first commercial enterprises in that city. He also engaged in other enterprises, and purchased land in the area which was, at least for some time, rented out. At the time of his death he had had considerable economic success.

His children included: 1. Dirk (1785-1831) Tienegenhagen, later Altona, Molotschna; 2. Katharina (b. 1788) m Nicholas Hiebert (1785-1858) Münsterberg, Molotschna; 3. Maria (b. 1791); 4. Heinrich (1794-1859) m. Margaretha Siemens (1799-1881); 5. Helena (1797-1864) m 1816 David Epp (1781-1843) Minister and diarist; 6. Jacob (1801-34) m 1822 Helena Siemens (1805-87); 7. Anna (b. 1802) m Nicholas Hiebert (1785-1858) above.

Now, among the various brothers-in-law (cousins-in-law) mentioned by David Epp are the various Warkentins, Hieberts, Dirksens and Thiessens, mainly in the Molotschna, as well as the Bergthalter Stoecz’s. Epp does not appear to have always had warm relations with all of these Thiessen relatives. He is particularly critical of Heinrich Thiessen’s (1794-1859) alleged drinking (more on this below) There are also Friesens who are twice connected to the David Epps, namely the Heinrich Friesen (1784-1842) who married his wife’s cousin Justina Warkentin (1789-1855) and whose son Bernhard (1810-1866) married David Epp’s daughter Maria (1815-46). [Given that little is known about David Epp, the diarist the reader might well have found helpful an editorial reference to the recollections of Maria’s son Heinrich Friesen (1837-1926), later of Inman, Kansas, of his grandparents (see Pioneers and Pilgrims, page 310, and Dynasties, page 696).]

Errata: There are a number of possible mistranslations or possible typographical errors. These include: Jacob Penner (page 33) – possibly Johann Penner; Bernhard Thiessen (page 32) – possibly Bernhard Friesen; Ältester Jacob Warkentin (page 33) is referred to as David Warkentin; Ältester Jacob Dyck (page 34) is referred to as Ältester Jacob Rempel; Neu-Chortitz (page 29) should be Nieder-Chortitz; Benjamin Wedel (pages 76 and 149) should be Peter Wedel; G. Schreiber (p. 161 and p. 185) is undoubtedly Gebietsdziechter (referring to Gerhard Penner); Mr. and Mrs. Claas Hildebrandt from Münsterberg (page 59) – are probably Mr. and Mrs. Claas Hiebert; Peter Bloch (page 132) from Kronsgarten is Peter Block; and Johann Leydig (page 144) of Berthgal - possibly Johann Leyke of Berthgal. I think it would be also worthwhile to check Glenn Penner’s published translation of the marriages, since, in a few instances, Penner translation may be superior to that of Toews (Note Three).

I am not convinced that every pub or pub- owner listed in the book is indeed a pub or pub- owner. It is likely that there were pubs and taverns in the Old Colony. It is however a common error to translate the multi-faceted words “Wirt” and “Wirtschaft” incorrectly. In a Mennonite context, these generally refer to farm and farmer. In doubtful cases, the better translation is the latter, even if some drinking occurred there on occasion. If the context is not clear, I would think “clockmaker” is a better translation for “watchmaker” (the original word is probably “Uhrmacher”).

One editorial comment missing which I think would have been appreciated by some readers concerns the visit of H. Hiebert (page 32) of Münsterberg to the Old Colony. This Heinrich Hiebert (1810-95) was not only, again, a relation of his wife (son of Nicholas (Claas) Hiebert), but was also the future first Ältester of the Brüdergemeinde movement in Russia. I have discussed some of these items of translation and editing, because I believe they affect how we view both diary and the diarist.

Turning to the diary events themselves, I would like to comment on these in the order of their occurrence. Turning to the diary events themselves, I would like to comment on these in the order of their occurrence.

I would like to comment on these in the order of their occurrence. Discipline: How we view both diary and the diarist. They transgressed, except in leaving the community, although in one case the abuse is verbal only, and possibly, the case of a planned and executed seduction.

Other interesting cases include those of approximately two men and one young lady who leave the Mennonite community. The young lady had fallen in love with a Ukrainian lad, became pregnant, and then joined the Orthodox church. In the case of the two men, it is not totally clear how they transgressed, except in leaving the community (although an “immoral lifestyle” is indicated). What can we conclude from a review of the transgressions reported in the diary? Nothing more I think, than that Epp’s contemporary Mennonites were human beings of flesh and blood, with emotions and passions, strengths and failings, rather like Mennonites of our time. It is interesting that women sometimes participate in physical assault and appear as repeat offenders, while men sometimes appear as spreaders of unfounded gossip. Wealthy or influential people are also among those named to task by the Lehrdiest. A relatively equalitarian picture of Old Colony society emerges.

Preservations No. 21, December, 2002 - 135
More interesting perhaps is the manner in which the offenses are dealt with by the Lehrdienst. Generally, they are dealt with through the process of the ban, and later readmission. Counselling also takes place for couples with marital problems, and for persons with drinking problems. The individuals who left the community are likewise sought out with a view of returning them to the community. The manner in which the sexual assault is dealt with seems somewhat unsatisfactory to us perhaps, but then we do not necessarily have all the details.

The case of infanticide, mentioned above, was not dealt with solely by Altester Jacob Braun and the Berghal Lehrdienst, but required the assistance of Altester Jacob Dyck and the Old Colony Lehrdienst.

(c) Ministerial affairs: These include Lehrdienst elections, details of preaching duties (giving the minister’s name, place, date and text), and more general meetings and resolutions. Many of the meetings involve general community affairs and indicate the Gemeinde and the Lehrdienst were the most important institutions in the Old Colony at the time. The Lehrdienst and Gebietsamt (local civic government) worked in close harmony.

Indeed, the Lehrdienst and Jacob Dyck, personally, were actively involved in obtaining more land for Old Colony settlers.

Included among the resolutions passed by the Lehrdienst are warnings against inappropriate behaviour at annual fairs, admonitions to refrain from drinking strong liquor (brandy and vodka), and proposals to correct naughty behaviours of youngsters by means of corporeal punishment (the rod).

(d) Visits: During the period of the diary, Epp was already in his fifties, and possible entering a semi-retirement mode. Most of his visiting involves relatives, particularly his Thiessen relatives (both in the Old Colony and Molotschna), or acquaintances and friends from the Old Colony. Two Molotschna trips are mentioned: Sept. 5-Sept. 20, 1838 and Jan. 12-Feb. 2, 1839. The last trip was motivated by the need to obtain German and Russian lessons for his son Heinrich, in part, and in part to visit friends and relatives. The first trip may well have been prompted by his wife.

Epp also receives two visits of interest from non-Mennonites in this period: July 19, 1838 - an unnamed missionary (from the Basel Missionary Society - a Pietist group); and July 22-27, 1842 - John Melville (from the British Bible Society).

(e) General events: These are events of a general nature and in which Epp had either no personal involvement or no personal knowledge. These could include unusual natural events and weather, commodity prices, visits of Russian officials in the Colony and news from the Molotschna Colony. Of interest in this category, could be included the fire at Jacob Dycks - Rosenthal (also reported by diarist Jacob Wall), the brief visit of Grand Duchess Helena Pavlovna (Oct 2, 1841) and the trip to Ekaterinoslov to see the Tzarina and Grand Duchess Maria (Oct 6, 1841).

One very important set of events is recorded, generally at second hand, by the diarist. These events involve the great struggle between the traditionalist and assimilationist Gemeinden in the Molotschna. While valuable as a chronicle of events, Epp's diary entries offer very little insight into the nature of the conflict.

As documented elsewhere this struggle involved the traditionalist Flemish Gemeinde, led by Altester Jacob Warkein, and the modernist-assimilationist Gemeinden, represented by the Ohrloff Gemeinde (led by Altester Bernard Fast), the Rudnerweide Gemeinde, the Alexanderwol Gemeinde and the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde. The traditionalist Gemeinde was the largest Gemeinde of the Molotschna, while Johann Cornie was a member of the Ohrloff Gemeinde. The last three Gemeinden were composed of post-1815 immigrants to Russia, many leaders and members of which held pietist, pro-tzarist and assimilationist views. The Alexanderwol Gemeinde (in its origins dating back over 200 years, originally a Flemish Gemeinde) may not have fully supported their Altester, the pietistically-minded Peter Wedel, since Epp records that Wedel was abandoned by his Gemeinde in 1837.

The main event reported (in 1838) by Epp, occurred in October 1837, when the Altester of the four minority Gemeinden, namely, Bernhard Fast (Ohrlof), Bennojcat Ratzlaff (Rudnerweide), Peter Wedel (Alexanderwo) and Wilhelm Lange (Gnadenfeld), along with Johann Cornie, presented a petition to the government to affirm the Privilegium. This action took place without consulting Warkein and the majority Flemish Gemeinde. In essence, the leaders submitting the petition were casting themselves as leaders and representatives of the entire Russian Mennonite community. The significance of this seems to have escaped Epp.

In fact, it was nothing less than an attempt of Cornie and the assimilationists to weaken and destroy the majority traditionalist Gemeinde, and to assume a leadership role not justified by normal democratic criteria.

Some Old Colony Lehrdienst members, as well as Warkein, did however realize what was happening. The following events are revealed in the diary relative to the above.

- 1837: Peter Wedel is abandoned by his Gemeinde;
- October 1837: the petition above is prepared and sent;
- Sept. 1838: unrest in the Gnadenfeld and Rudnerweide Gemeinden;
- Feb. 1839: Altester Jacob Dyck, Altester Jacob Hildebrandt (Kronsweide Gemeinde), and Lehrer Heinrich Penner visit Warkein in the Molotschna. Epp learns that Dyck wishes to protest against the actions of Oct. 1837;
- June 16-July 31 1839. Dyck and Hildebrandt travel to Odessa for several reasons which include land grant questions, hymn-book importation, and the Privilegium affair. (The Fürsorge Committee head Inzov is ill, and von Hahn appears to be in charge);
- Aug 4-5, 1840: Warkein, Heinrich Wiens and Abraham Peters from the Molotschna visit Dyck in the Old Colony;
- April 6 1841: Warkein and Diakon Johann Klassen visit Dyck;
- May 1842: Dyck received a copy of a letter from Cornies to Fast (on orders of v. Hahn) to cease involvement in Molotschna church affairs.

Warkentin is threatened with imprisonment;
- July 14 1842 Altester Heinrich Wiens visits Dyck;
- March 27, 1843: several days previously, Dyck receives a sealed envelope from v. Hahn. Epp’s own position somewhat unclear. While generally critical of Johann Cornie, he comments on the unwise actions of Warkentin, and attributes motives of jealousy and fanaticism to Dyck. Otherwise Epp provides no analysis, except a general lament on the state of affairs.

It does however become apparent, that Altester Jacob Dyck and Epp are not working closely together on this issue.

(f) Personal commentary: As one would expect, the commentaries not only provide Epp’s opinions and views relative to some of the events described, but also help us better understand David Epp, the man himself.

From the diary alone, what can we say of the diarist himself? First, the diary indicates that Epp was a very conscientious, pious and God-fearing person. He tried hard to grapple with the issues of his time.

The solutions to some of the major issues of the day, according to Epp, appear to be a stricter church discipline and a more spiritual inner faith. Beyond this, the diary provides no concrete or tangible ideas on how this is to be achieved, except possibly through better church leadership.

It does in fact seem that Epp, and the other Lehrdienst members, including Altester Jacob Dyck, did not always see eye-to-eye. In fact there is some veiled criticism of Dyck. Dyck, on the other hand, it seems, had little confidence in Epp, and so did not involve Epp extensively in the Privilegium affair, mentioned briefly above.

In disciplinary matters, Epp feels Dyck (and the Gemeinde) is too forgiving of human error. He feels apologises and public confession of wrong doing and repentance are too often accepted at face value. One wonders, what exactly would Epp have Dyck do otherwise? Epp is looking for the true spirit of repentance, but who can look into someone else’s heart and mind? I think Epp displays a certain narrowness of mind in regard to the issue of discipline. A primary example is that of broken engagements. Epp accuses Dyck of being uncritical when a marriage engagement is broken. Epp would have these people, perhaps, placed under the ban. Yet, we, and no doubt Epp’s contemporaries, would probably feel it much better to break an engagement than enter into an unhappy marriage. Here Epps, I think, promoting what he himself condemns, a legalized ritual of discipline. As another example, he criticizes Dyck in accepting a widow from the Kronsweide Gemeinde into the Chortitza Gemeinde “without the customary question(s) being asked.”

Epp appears somewhat confused by the issues in the Molotschna. He is too ready to cast the blame on Warkentin, Dyck and others, and does not have a vision of the broader issues.

In this, both in regard to disciplinary measures, and in regard to the more general issues in the Molotschna, I think Epp’s views are narrow in scope. This narrowness probably affected his relationship with the other Lehrdienst members including Dyck, and made him a somewhat isolated...
pessimistic person. In the last analysis, David Epp remains a minor figure, overshadowed by his contemporaries, his prominent descendants, and his diary.

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

Endnotes:
Note One: Harvey Dyck, A Mennonite in Russia (Toronto, 1991), page 68.
Note Two: “Di-Grosseltern Com. Stoess Familien Register,” Jakob Stoessel copy made available to me by Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, Manitoba.
Note Three: Chortitsa Colony marriages in the diaries of Jakob Wall, Neuendorf, and David Epp, Chortitsa, in Mennonite Family History, April 1997.

Neu-Samara: A Mennonite Settlement East of the Volga, compiled by Jacob H. Brucks and Henry P. Hooge (Clearbrook, B.C., Fraser Valley Printers, 1964), translation from German by John Isaak, editing and epilogue by Tena Wiebe (Edmonton, Alberta, Jackpine House Ltd. 2002), 196 pages. $21.95 softcover.

This book is a reincarnation, in an expanded form, of an earlier publication, and as such, a wonderful example of history being kept alive and made accessible to successive generations through the care, diligence and integrity of those passing on the Mennonite story.

Tena Wiebe, grand-daughter of one of Neu-Samara’s early settlers, along with her brother and translator John Isaak and others mentioned in the “Foreword” (p.9), have produced a handsome book that embraces and enhances with editorial integrity, all that was contained in the humble 1964 German edition of “Neu-Samara Am Tock”.

A new colourful cover features a 1997 Russian map and a panoramic photo by Alan Isaak, along with D. Loewen’s nostalgic description of the view overlooking the Neu-Samara he left behind. “Before me as far as the eye can see, a green carpet, broadens to the horizon dotted by seven groves of trees like pearls on a string. These are the villages...” (p.23).

All of the photographs have been reproduced, this time with captions and a more successful layout. Chapters are numbered and superimposed over black and white reproductions of the scene on the cover, with the contributors’ names appearing under well defined sub-headings. (Here, a small editorial error gives P. Riediger credit for writing “Our Language” (p.116), where P. Kornelsen (1964, p.4) is credited in the original.)

Added to the original is: a glossary, several maps, a floor plan of a typical Mennonite home, additional reading suggestions, a foreword by Tena Wiebe explaining how this new book came to be written, a “Translator’s Preface” by John Isaak providing the reader with insight into the translation process, and a 37 page “Epilogue” by Wiebe.

At the heart of this book are the first-hand accounts, photographs and maps of people who lived in Neu-Samara. They describe the founding and development of the settlement, and provide glimpses into its customs, climate, traditions, economy, administration, education, cultural achievements and some of its people’s responses to war and revolution. All of these accounts are set against the backdrop of the historical explanations provided by Henry P. Hooge in the “Introduction” (pp. 12-18) and Jacob H. Brooks in his “Grateful Recollections of Russia” (pp. 19-21).

Translating a work with so many contributors has its special challenges, as John Isaak readily admits. There are story overlaps, apparent discrepancies, and a variety of writing styles. He has chosen “to let the discrepancies stand while attempting for the sake of clarity to use standard measures or provide an explanation of each” (p.6). This is helpful to the reader. Also the individual’s “interpretation of political forces and events” (p.6) has been respected.

Isaak states that he has attempted to carefully follow the writing style of each writer. He is to be credited for an exceptionally fine and very readable translation. In just a few instances, one might question the outcome. For example, a frustrated worker responds to an angry farmer with the words, “Was soll ich machen? Es kommt, es kommt!” (p.29 c.1964). This is translated, “What am I to do? It just keeps on coming!” (p.39). Here the implied crescendo of the repetition is lost. In several other examples, the long, complex sentences of one writer are rendered in several shorter sentences, altering the flow and momentum of the text.

Isaak has chosen to use a “somewhat looser translation” (p.6) of the poetry to maintain rhyme and rhythm rather than providing a direct translation of the words. This results in pleasing poetry that reflects the meaning, if not always the subtleties of the form of the original. Several of the original German poems have also been included. In both the German and the English publications, the source of some of the poetry remains a mystery. The reader is left to wonder if they were, in fact, penned by the original contributors.

Those who first took on the task of compiling the Neu-Samara stories, did so with a sense of urgency “to preserve some of the knowledge of the past before the last of those who experienced these things (were) gone” (p.9). This sense of urgency is mirrored in Tena Wiebe’s writing. “Neu-Samara no longer exists”, she writes in the Epilogue. “All that is left of the Mennonite people, now called Germans, who formerly lived in this settlement, are a few descendants married to Russians. Many different people from the former Soviet Union regions now live there” (p.160).

Wiebe’s beautiful colour photographs on the next 11 pages show the lushness of a countryside that by 1917 was home to some 3670 Mennonites. Well-known landmarks: a train station, a hospital, churches and schools, a general store, and a family home continue to stand as silent monuments to a Mennonite people whose story has been all but forgotten. To those silent voices Wiebe adds photographs of more recent monuments, further testimony of the tragic history of this, once idyllic place.

Wiebe then traces her own Neu-Samara roots, including letters, photographs and stories. One of those who survived and continued to live there was her cousin, Margareta (Gretha) Martens (1924-2001). Wiebe adds her story to the others collected earlier.

By now, some 38 years after the publication of the first historical account, those who lived the stories are all gone, and for many in the next generations, the language in which they told it is gone too, but because of this fine publication the story of “Neu-Samara” will continue to be told.

To all those who have had a part in preserving this story for future generations, we, the English speaking “children” of Neu-Samara, own a debt of gratitude.

Reviewed by Hilda Riediger Dueck of Tofield, Alberta, teacher, writer, and grand-daughter of Peter Riediger, a contributor to the original “Neu-Samara am Tock”.


In 1942 a German woman, Mrs. Birkle, an acquaintance of the Heinrich Voth family, was summoned into forced labour in the Trud Army (“slave labour battalions”). She was standing there crying and holding the hand of her five-year-old daughter whom she could not take along. A bleeding mother heart in despair. She did not want to turn her daughter over to an Anti-Christian children’s home. The somewhat sympathetic commandant suggested she hand the girl over to the Heinrich Voths, where she would receive good care. He knew the Voths a little and had shown them some favours previously. How relieved the torn-asunder mother’s heart must have felt. So many German mothers had to give their children away under the ungodly Communist regime, never to see them again.

Like many others, the Voths were in a concentration camp in the northern Urals mountain. They had already lost two daughters and now they had a little Lenchen back in their family. Even in their destitute condition they gladly cared for her. After three years, when Mrs. Birkle was able to return, she got her young daughter back into her arms, well cared for and healthy.

This Heinrich Voth was no other than the last Ältester (Bishop) of the Mennonite Gemeinde in Sagradowo. He was born in 1887 in Waldheim, Molotschna Colony, but shortly thereafter his family moved to the newly founded Sagradowo Colony.

For those readers unfamiliar with the background, Hermann Heidebrecht introduces the book with a short introduction to Mennonite history. I must say he did his research well.

Heinrich enjoyed a relatively good childhood and youth. He attended the village school and then the Zentalschule in Neu-Schönsee. He was a good student and continued his studies at a teachers’ seminary. He became a well-liked teacher. The teachers’ society of Sagradowo elected him as their chairman; a position he served well, using the opportunity to improve the educational system.

At a young age he turned his life over to God and tried to be an obedient follower of Jesus, his Saviour in all his ways. He was well read, especially in religious literature. He was well versed with the different movements in the Christian Church as well as with the various Mennonite denominations. That having been said, he always

Preservations No. 21, December, 2002 - 137
remained a true and loyal son of the Mennonite faith. In 1920 he was elected as a minister and a few years later, in 1925, as Ältester of the Sagradowska Gemeinde, with over 1200 members. He was a man of peace and worked for reconciliation. Voth tried with some success to bring about a unity between the different denominations in Sagradowska. The issue of baptismal mode was a sore point: immersion baptism or baptism by pouring/sprinkling. Those baptised by immersion looked down on those baptized by other methods as unchristian. The Baptists in Russia particularly held this view. But Heinrich Voth has a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, and demonstrated the instances where the early Church clearly modelled the pouring or sprinkling mode. Since their beginnings in the 16th century, the Mennonites had practised the pouring/sprinkling method. The conviction to practice and live out what the Bible taught brought Ältester Voth and the Mennonites much grief and sorrow. Hermann Heidebrecht writes quite openly how some Baptists used the baptism issue to belittle and to hinder the Kirchliche communities in the Soviet Union.

The writer goes through the stages of marriage and other family events such as death, etc. He describes the sufferings of WWI. The Voth family was not spared and they survived with some deep lasting wounds. In 1931 the forced compulsory banishments started. In the winter wilderness of the northern Ural Mountains, they had to move from one concentration camp to another, always under strict control, suffering in hunger, sickness, prison and death. In the course of this misery most of the banished sufferers died, including some of the Voth family. But through all these horrors, God was always present, helping these martyred souls. For Christians beset by suffering these were visible wonders. Through all their trials these miracles showed them God’s love for his children.

In 1945 to 1947 many Christians, were forcibly returned to Soviet Russia, but not to their homesteads as promised, but to the workcamps into the northern wilderness camps (Archipelagos) to endure more suffering. These were mostly former German colonists from the Ukraine. Under German protection, they had tasted some religious freedom from 1941-1943, and were now brave enough to congregate in their barracks for bible studies, and to proclaim the Good News to family and friends. Ältester Voth had a great mission field here, to help in a quiet way with counselling, encouraging and other spiritual succour. These were mostly women and children; the men were almost all taken away in brutal ways and many were murdered. These congregated small groups of Mennonites were joined by believers, mostly Germans, of other denominations, everything went peacefully. All were fellow sufferers.

After WWII and the death of the tyrant Stalin in 1954, the terror finally eased a little. The earnest prayers of Ältester Voth and others were finally answered to a certain degree and in 1956 the anti-Christian regime was loosened as the Soviets thought that religion had been exterminated. Ältester Voth was able to travel and visit the scattered little flocks and minister to the hurting and searching souls. He travelled extensively through eastern and northern Russia, often weeks and months away from his family. The people were desperately waiting for him, often gathering in small houses. He was a good preacher who had suffered with them. When he came, the flock was waiting for him to serve them in preaching, Bible study, Bible teaching, catechism, baptizing, officiating at the Lord’s Supper, counselling, mediation, peacemaking, etc. Sometimes people from other denominations, mostly Lutherans, wanted to join without being rebaptized. If they were believers, they were accepted after an instruction course. New congregations were founded in many scattered regions. Some Baptists tried to work against him and placed obstacles into his path. God blessed this humble man greatly and he could serve in grace, in spite of age and health, to the end of his days.

One can not read this book without personal spiritual gain and the reader will experience a deeper relationship to Christ. May the Lord give all readers a personal desire to serve Him more faithfully in the Mennonite community and in His Church in general.

The only thing I missed was a table of contents and an index.

Reviewed by Jakob Pries, 1166 De Graff Place, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2G 1Y6.
Available at: Christlicher Missionsverlag, August-Bebel-Str. 51, 33602 Bielefeld. Germany. Price 8.80 DM plus shipping and handling.

Georg Hildebrandt. Why are you still alive? A German in the Gulag (NDSU Libraries, Box 5599, Fargo, N.D., 58105-5599, 2002), [Enlarged and Revised Edition], 266 pages. A translation of Wieso lebst du noch? Ein Deutscher im Gula g. – Factory worker (free in the sense that he was not behind barbed wire, yet he possessed none of the basic civic rights of an ordinary Soviet citizen) in the city of Krasnoturinsk. One day, the factory administration needed to send him on a business trip. Before he could go, however, he had to get travel permission from the local KGB office. When he entered the office of Captain Kisseliov he immediately recognized him as the same KGB officer who had arrested him some eight years earlier on 14 September 1947 – for Hildebrandt it had been the fourth arrest of his life. Kisseliov also recognized Hildebrandt and reached for his pistol. “Why are you still alive? How did you get here?” he had shouted, in an agitated tone of voice.

After his arrest, Hildebrandt had been sentenced on 20 January 1948, to seven years in the labour camps. At the trial, the presiding magistrate had encouraged the “witnesses” – two German “informers” named R. Springer and J. Vogt – to speak freely in their denunciation of Hildebrandt: “go on, he will never return. We will hide him in such a way that he will croak.” After the trial Hildebrandt was first sent to a correctional labour camp (ITL) in nearby Severouralsk for 1½ years; then, in June 1949 he was transferred to the Kolyma – the most feared of all the GULag archipelagos. All believed that he would die there – in fact most people did – and Hildebrandt later learned that the authorities had indeed ordered one of his fellow inmates to murder him.

Meeting Georg Hildebrandt personally several months ago, I also asked myself the question, “Why are you still alive?” How had this gentle, soft-spoken 90-year-old man, with the firm handshake of a person half his age, survived 25 years of fear, flight and imprisonment during Stalin’s reign of terror in the Soviet Union? During the collectivization campaign of 1929/30, Hildebrandt, his father Isaak Hildebrandt and all the other men and boys over 16 of the village Kondratievka (Borissova Settlement) were arrested and jailed as “kulaks.” In March 1930, they and their families were exiled from the village and forced to resettle under the most primitive conditions in a “kulak” settlement some 30-40 km away. Young Isaak Hildebrandt (he changed his name to Georg in 1985) fled and went to live with relatives. During the next year he earned a diploma as a technical draftsman through correspondence school. When he returned a year later to visit his parents, Hildebrandt was arrested and imprisoned for the second time.

Again, he was able to escape his guards and flee to Dnepropetrovsk, where he found work as a technical draftsman. He moved several times, first to Krivoi Rog and later to Nevyansk in the Urals to escape the prying eyes of the NKVD. Hildebrandt then worked at various locations in Siberia before being “taken” into the Trudarmia in March 1942. Six months later, he was arrested a third time and sentenced to three years in a labour camp. His sentence was a mixed blessing – conditions in the labour camps were no different than in the Trudarmia, except that he received better food and health, to the end of his days.

Meeting Georg Hildebrandt personally several months ago, I also asked myself the question, “Why are you still alive?” How had this gentle, soft-spoken 90-year-old man, with the firm handshake of a person half his age, survived 25 years of fear, flight and imprisonment during Stalin’s reign of terror in the Soviet Union? During the collectivization campaign of 1929/30, Hildebrandt, his father Isaak Hildebrandt and all the other men and boys over 16 of the village Kondratievka (Borissova Settlement) were arrested and jailed as “kulaks.” In March 1930, they and their families were exiled from the village and forced to resettle under the most primitive conditions in a “kulak” settlement some 30-40 km away. Young Isaak Hildebrandt (he changed his name to Georg in 1985) fled and went to live with relatives. During the next year he earned a diploma as a technical draftsman through correspondence school. When he returned a year later to visit his parents, Hildebrandt was arrested and imprisoned for the second time.

Meeting Georg Hildebrandt personally several months ago, I also asked myself the question, “Why are you still alive?” How had this gentle, soft-spoken 90-year-old man, with the firm handshake of a person half his age, survived 25 years of fear, flight and imprisonment during Stalin’s reign of terror in the Soviet Union? During the collectivization campaign of 1929/30, Hildebrandt, his father Isaak Hildebrandt and all the other men and boys over 16 of the village Kondratievka (Borissova Settlement) were arrested and jailed as “kulaks.” In March 1930, they and their families were exiled from the village and forced to resettle under the most primitive conditions in a “kulak” settlement some 30-40 km away. Young Isaak Hildebrandt (he changed his name to Georg in 1985) fled and went to live with relatives. During the next year he earned a diploma as a technical draftsman through correspondence school. When he returned a year later to visit his parents, Hildebrandt was arrested and imprisoned for the second time.

Meeting Georg Hildebrandt personally several months ago, I also asked myself the question, “Why are you still alive?” How had this gentle, soft-spoken 90-year-old man, with the firm handshake of a person half his age, survived 25 years of fear, flight and imprisonment during Stalin’s reign of terror in the Soviet Union? During the collectivization campaign of 1929/30, Hildebrandt, his father Isaak Hildebrandt and all the other men and boys over 16 of the village Kondratievka (Borissova Settlement) were arrested and jailed as “kulaks.” In March 1930, they and their families were exiled from the village and forced to resettle under the most primitive conditions in a “kulak” settlement some 30-40 km away. Young Isaak Hildebrandt (he changed his name to Georg in 1985) fled and went to live with relatives. During the next year he earned a diploma as a technical draftsman through correspondence school. When he returned a year later to visit his parents, Hildebrandt was arrested and imprisoned for the second time.

Meeting Georg Hildebrandt personally several months ago, I also asked myself the question, “Why are you still alive?” How had this gentle, soft-spoken 90-year-old man, with the firm handshake of a person half his age, survived 25 years of fear, flight and imprisonment during Stalin’s reign of terror in the Soviet Union? During the collectivization campaign of 1929/30, Hildebrandt, his father Isaak Hildebrandt and all the other men and boys over 16 of the village Kondratievka (Borissova Settlement) were arrested and jailed as “kulaks.” In March 1930, they and their families were exiled from the village and forced to resettle under the most primitive conditions in a “kulak” settlement some 30-40 km away. Young Isaak Hildebrandt (he changed his name to Georg in 1985) fled and went to live with relatives. During the next year he earned a diploma as a technical draftsman through correspondence school. When he returned a year later to visit his parents, Hildebrandt was arrested and imprisoned for the second time.
his family, also living in exile in the Urals. In 1961 he and his family, like so many other Germans, moved to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan – where he worked until his retirement in 1971. It then took another three difficult years to obtain an exit visa to emigrate to Germany. On 16 November 1974 he and his wife finally landed in Frankfurt.

Hildebrandt’s first purchase in Germany was a copy of Volume 2 of Solzhenitsyn’s The Gulag Archipelago. After reading a few pages, Hildebrandt put the book aside; he had already decided to write a book describing his experiences in the Gulag, and did not want Solzhenitsyn’s descriptions to colour and influence his own memories. (Solzhenitsyn himself had been exiled from the Soviet Union that same year and chose to spend the first years living in Zurich). Shortly after arriving at the Refugee Processing Centre in Friesland, Hildebrandt purchased a notebook and wrote on the cover: “What I may not forget.” For the next 15 years he filled the notebook with his memories and toiled at organizing them into a manuscript.

Family and friends gave him little encouragement. His wife, for example, said: “you are not sleeping well – it will ruin your health to dwell on these horrible memories – who will want to read these terrible experiences? Who will believe you?” Among those who did encourage him was Dr. George K. Epp of Winnipeg – the two met for the first time in 1989 – who also encouraged the idea of an English translation.

The manuscript was completed in 1987 and Hildebrandt spent several years looking for a publisher. It was finally accepted by the publisher Dr. Bernhard Abend of Stuttgart and published in a hard cover edition in 1990 to critical acclaim in the German press. The book was later published by Ullstein Verlag in a paperback edition in 1993.

The Germans from Russia Heritage Collection in Fargo is to be commended for making this powerful story available to an English speaking audience. Most of the stylistic and linguistic errors of the first edition (2001) have been smoothed over by Katie Funk Wiebe in this revised edition. However, countless typographical and grammatical errors still persist – a testimony to sloppy editing. Hopefully, the thoughtful reader will not allow this to detract from Hildebrandt’s moving memoir.

The reader should be warned, however, that the book requires strong nerves and – recalling George Epp’s comments – probably should not be read before bed time. The author himself still suffers occasionally from nightmares of that traumatic period in his life. It was not an easy book for him to write and is not an easy book to read: drawing on his remarkable memory (he had no documents or diaries to draw on), Hildebrandt relates events with amazing detail, clarity, honesty and objectivity – he “pulls no punches.” He had to write his painful experiences from his soul; confronting them on paper was a form of therapy. Yet he wrote the book not only for himself, but also for all those who perished in the camps and were never allowed to tell their story. However, he does not “dwell” only on the horrible situations encountered in the camps, in fact, he told me that he left out many of the worst stories – they were so terrible “that people would not have believed them.” He also writes of the “humanity” he encountered in the Gulag, which itself recognized no rule of humanity. Hildebrandt survived not only physically but also spiritually and emotionally, with his humanity intact.

Hildebrandt’s account can easily be compared with the works of Solzhenitsyn and other Russian writers on the subject. Unlike their accounts, however, Hildebrandt’s memoir is significant for his revelations of the “special” treatment accorded to Germans in the Soviet Union. From the 1930s to at least the 1980s, Soviet Germans were labelled not only as “enemies of the people,” but derisively as “fascists” – and treated accordingly. Yet Hildebrandt does not write with Solzhenitsyn’s passionate anger. He can feel his pain, yet there is no sense of revenge. Many reviewers have commented on the author’s positive attitude – Hildebrandt is not an embittered, grumpy old man; he is open, good-natured, lives his life to the fullest, and certainly does not look his 91 years. He himself attributes his psychological survival in large measure to his happy childhood years in the Mennonite village of Kondratievka.

Hildebrandt has been accused by various reviewers and readers of denying his Mennonite roots. Nothing can be further from the truth! He opens his account with a nostalgic look back at these idyllic days before the Revolution. He also elaborated eloquently on these years – describing vividly the everyday life of a young boy in a typical Mennonite village – in a radio documentary entitled: “So war das!” – broadcast over Radio Free Berlin on 24 September 1992 (A copy of this broadcast can be found in the Mennonite Heritage Centre). After his second arrest in 1931, however, he had no further direct contact with the Russian Mennonite community; in fact, he chose to live in large towns and cities far removed from the Mennonite villages in order to hide his identity and escape detection and arrest. In the camps he encountered no other Mennonites. Finally, throughout his life Hildebrandt (and most other Soviet Mennonites) was persecuted not because he was a “Mennonite”. He was first arrested as the son of a “kulak” and subsequently suffered because of his “German” ethnic origin – thus the subtitle: “A German in the Gulag.”

Yet the honesty, integrity and unswerving ethical stance that Hildebrandt exhibits in numerous difficult situations throughout the book, his positive outlook on life – in short, his “humanity” – can be attributed to the Mennonite upbringing he received at home.

Reviewed by Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg.
President Fox Visits Mennonites

On April 5, 2002, President Vicente Fox visited the La Honda Mennonite Colony, in Zacatecas, Mexico. President Fox demonstrated his love for children during his visit taking extra time to greet them. Photo: Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, April 22, 2002, page 1.

In Russia the Mennonites were visited by Czar Alexander I on May 2, 1818 (Huebert, Events and People (Wpg., 1999), pages 14-18) and in 1825 (Good, JMS, No. 7, pages 123-130). When they immigrated to Manitoba in 1874, they were visited in 1877 by Governor-General Lord Dufferin (see Pres., No. 19, pages 88-92). When the Mennonites in Manitoba marked their 125th anniversary in 1999, Prime Minister Chretien refused to attend their main event even though he was in Manitoba that day.

November 17, 1925, “the olive-coloured special train” of General Plutarco Elias Calles, President of Mexico, arrived in San Antonio, Mexico, the first Presidential visit to the Old Colony settlements. “The tour was exceptionally satisfying. It was exactly at harvest time, and thus the President saw the [Manitoba] colony at its most industrious productivity; everywhere the high harvest wagons and threshing machines, the full sacks and the firm working together of the [Mennonite] colonists and the richly blessed work of the entire people....President Calles was so inspired by his visit, he confided to his retinue that, “it was lamentable that it was not possible to first send every Mexican Agrarist here to learn as an apprentice, before he would receive his own piece of land,”” Schmiedehaus, Ein Reste Berg ist unser Gott: Der Wanderweg eines christlichen Siedlervolkes (Cuauhtemoc, 1948), page 178.

May 25, 1990, President Carlos Salinas de Gorari visited with the Ohms of the Old Colony Church and the Vorstehers of the Manitoba and Swift Colonies in Blumenort, near Cuauhtemoc (see Diese Steine, page 603). April 5, 2002, President Vicente Fox visited the La Honda Colony in Zacatecas. In his speech, President Fox told local Mennonites: “You are a model, an example in family life, and a model in morals, which we value highly” (see News Section for the full story).

Like people everywhere in the world, the Mennonites in Mexico are not perfect, and yes - just like you and me - they have their faults. Some of them are experiencing poverty. But, certainly, they are deserving of our respect as fellow human beings as well as our affirmation of them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Editor.