

Preservings

-being the Newsletter/Magazine of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc.



Price \$10.00

No. 12, June, 1998

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

Chortitzer Diaries of the East Reserve 1874-1930

By Dr. Royden K. Loewen, Chair of Mennonites Studies, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba, presented to the Annual General Meeting of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc, Vollwerk (Mitchell), Manitoba, January 17, 1998.

Introduction:

The study of Mennonite diaries is a new way of looking at history. The fact is that many readers of Mennonite history have until recently been unaware of their existence. I am reminded of one local Mennonite history book that was essentially a compendium of pictures since World War II; a brief introduction noted that the pioneers had been too busy building farms on the frontier to do any writing and therefore virtually nothing was known about the early years.

We now know that diary keeping was in fact a common practice amongst Mennonites, without regard to church denomination, place of residence, age, gender, wealth or education. There are diaries

by Old Mennonites in Ontario, written in English, and kept by teenagers and the elderly, by men and by women, by preachers, merchants and farmers. It is a similar case in Manitoba: there are diaries by the Kleine Gemeinde at Morris, by the Old Colonists of the West Reserve, by the Bergthalers, later known as the Chortitzers, of the East Reserve. Fortunately the children and grandchildren of the pioneers here have treasured and preserved these writings. And the translations of Irene Kroeker, John Dyck, Jake Doerksen, Henry Stoesz, Ben Hoepfner and others and the remarkable publication efforts of Delbert Plett have also made the diaries well known.

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Mennonite housebarn, Gdansk, Poland.



Ancient Mennonite housebarn in Neunhuben, Prussia, today Gdansk, Poland, adjacent to the cemetery, view towards east. The house part is built of logs and is still in use. The standard form of construction in the Werders near Danzig was the "Vorlaubhaus" or arched house, making this structure which emulates the Lower Saxony/Friesland housebarn unique. The quaint structure dates back to the 18th century when Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the Kleine Gemeinde lived in this village. In 1798 he married Maria Epp, daughter of Peter Epp (1725-89), Aeltester of the prestigious Danzig Gemeinde. Reimer and his wife acquired a half Wirtschaft from her uncle in Neunhuben. In 1801 he was elected minister and started his controversial career advocating the restitution of the New Testament church. Photo by D. Plett May 17, 1998.

Chortitzer Diaries -- Dr. Royden Loewen (continued)

Section One:

We now have access to diaries by older women like **Maria Stoesz Klassen** (Mrs Johann Klassen) of Ebenfeld near Mitchell who kept a diary for years, although only a section of 1887 when Maria was 64 has been preserved; there is also the diary of **Judit Klassen Neufeld** (Mrs. Peter B. Neufeld) of Ebenfeld, 1869-1952, whose first known diary begins in 1911 when she is 42 and continues through to 1948 when she is 79. Then, too, we have access to diaries by leading men: **Bishop David Stoesz** from Bergthal whose 15-page diary spans 1872-1896, or from the time he was 30 to age 54; **Rev. Heinrich Friesen** whose diary spans 1893-1919, begun when he was 51, it continues till age 77; finally, there is the journal of **Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen** of Osterwick, and his diary covers much of the 1920s when he was in his 70s (Note One).

We know from other Mennonite communities that diaries were also kept by younger members and by members who were not at the centre of power. For example, **Marie Schroeder**, who was born on the East Reserve and raised in Alt-Bergthal and within the Sommerfelder Church community around Lowe Farm, kept a diary when she was 19; it is a diary obviously by a teenaged Mennonite for in it she offers her resistance to joining the church just yet, her fascination with a young man browned by the Mexican sun, her joy at capitalizing on the one cent sale in Morden, and her "secret hope" for "the future when...I hope that I may write things that have a real worth...; things that are worth printing, and things that other folks would love to read and pay for."

And there are diaries by the disenfranchised: one of the most detailed diaries I have

worked with is that of **Abraham F. Reimer** (1808-92) from the Kleine Gemeinde village of Blumenort on the East Reserve. He kept what is probably the most detailed diary of any Kleine Gemeinder. Reimer was one of the least prominent of the villagers, someone who was called "Foula Reimer," a designation that becomes obvious from reading the diary; clearly he gets little work done because he spends so much time observing others at work (Note Two).

We can assume that there are many other Chortitzer diaries around; those kept by its youth and elderly, members on the centre and on the periphery. However, having established the common existence of the daily journal, we as historians face another problem. That problem is the idea that diaries are not worth a great deal, only elaborate notes on weather patterns as one prominent Mennonite historian recently offered. Mennonite historians seem to have followed the path of one of the world's most renowned historians of the diary, Robert Fothergill (Note Three). His blunt view is that the "the great mass of diary writing is poor stuff" and hence he chooses only the "marvellous[ly] rich...and vital..." diaries, those kept by "remarkable human beings [who] communicat[ed] their natures abundantly."

The few Mennonite diaries that have indeed been published by the major presses in Canada follow Fothergill's agenda: James Nyce's 1982 edition, *The Gordon C. Eby Diaries: Chronicle of a Mennonite Farmer, 1911-1913*, and Harvey Dyck's 1991 translation and edition, *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880*, both contain the accounts of extraordinary Mennonites: Eby, a young, unmarried Ontario farmer, frequently analyses personal relationships and is enthralled with his camera, organ and car; Epp, lives in a Jewish settlement and has a string of "intensely personal" faith experiences" (Note Four). Clearly, neither Eby or Epp are typical Mennonite farmers.

The diaries before us are not "intensely personal" and the writers do not divulge their "natures abundantly." They are in fact often what Fothergill calls the "poor stuff" of diary keeping. Emotion is in fact rarely described. Bishop David Stoesz records the death of no fewer than seven children, four within a single week, on his group's migration from Russia to Manitoba in 1874, but there is no record of grief. Judit Klassen Neufeld of Ebenfeld notes that in 1922, a year of depression, she and her husband sold the family farm, including son Aron's land, to Winnipeg buyers and that after a considerable search they finally rent a small house in Niverville that requires a day of cleaning before it becomes inhabitable; but her diary offers no utterance of despair or fatigue or disappointment, just the short quip that on the 22nd, a day in which "it is very hot," "we moved from our farm."

Judit's tone does not change, even at times of shock, of joy and of impatience. A tragedy in October 1922 is recorded as matter-of-fact: "Peter K Friesen got killed in Steinbach while cutting down a tree. A piece of iron struck his head. He lived until the next day. He died at 7 a.m." A moment of obvious joy at the end of January of that year receives the same short shrift: after the opening note that on this day "Papa and Johan went to the river to get wood" follows the simple phrase: "in the p.m. the children were blessed with a infant son." Judit even lets us into a bit of youthful indiscretion with her record that on October 30, 1922, unmarried son Jacob "sleeps until noon, as he attended the wedding last evening [and] came home at 6 a.m." But she does not let on how she felt about it.

Only two occasions bring expressions of emotion in these diaries, times of division and the passage of time. It is with some bitterness that the young minister, David Stoesz, writes in 1872 that the Chortitza Colony bishop has given up in his struggle to "work for the continuance of our religious freedoms" and has turned down an opportunity to travel to St. Petersburg, the capital. The result is that "God may be trying to purify us further" and that "there is not much confidence in the first named person."

Twenty years later and now a bishop, David Stoesz travels to the West Reserve to try to stop what is quickly becoming the Sommerfelder/Bergthaler schism; his note is short, but poignant: "it was truly a sad story we heard about the divisions among the people." Then, too, there is pain of division apparent in Cornelius T. Friesen's description of events surrounding the 1924 decision of many East Reserve Chortitzers to relocate to South America. Among many complicating factors is an emotional pitch through a series of "serious sermons" by Saskatchewan Bergthal bishop, Aron Zacharias. Zacharias apparently pleads for "a united decision to draw all into a brotherhood" that will unitedly relocate to Paraguay. Unfortunately for Zacharias, Friesen's diary notes that "the brethren were disinclined." Finally, at least one of the diarists, Rev. Heinrich Friesen, ends his entries for specific years and sometimes even of specific months with a poem of thanksgiving and a prayer for God's continued grace.

Aside from such utterances, there is little in these diaries that comes close to "intensely personal" reflection. The fact of the matter is that Bergthaler and Chortitzer diaries are not about "unique" Mennonites; they are by ordinary men and women, they contain the story of routine, even mundane, moments of daily farm-based life.

Why then study them? For this very reason! They are of value if one is interested in the mindsets of ordinary Mennonite farm men and women and in the dynamics of their everyday lives. They reveal what was impor-



Royden K. Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, speaks on Chortitzer journals. Dr. Loewen is widely recognized as one of Canada's leading rural social historians. Photo from *Preservings*, No. 11, page 10.

tant to them. They reveal the nature of social relationships of ordinary Mennonite men and women, the fundamental importance of the farm household, the social boundaries of their

“...we study these diaries with the knowledge that many other farm immigrant groups did not keep diaries. Social historians for other groups have often expressed envy to me that we as Mennonites have the documents of the everyday.”

communities, their rich networks of kin and congregation. More specifically, the diaries show how concerned the early pioneers were with the economic welfare of the farm household with its tie to the marketplace and its absolute dependence on getting seasonal work done; the diaries show too, just how closely tied to nature the pioneers were, how vulnerable they were to the immutability of nature, its weather patterns and seasonal changes.

Finally, we study these diaries with the knowledge that many other farm immigrant groups did not keep diaries. Social historians for other groups have often expressed envy to me that we as Mennonites have the documents of the everyday. Most historians of farm immigrant groups are restricted to census records, newspaper accounts, church baptismal and marriage records, or court documents, that frequently don't reveal the brightest side of community life. “Very few ordinary men and women left behind diaries and correspondence,” writes Tamara Hareven, America's leading family historian, in a recent article that outlines problems facing family historians (Note Five).

Fortunately, for us who are interested in the early years in Manitoba, Mennonites have a strongly cultivated literary tradition that dates to the sixteenth-century. At this early date written documents - the hymnbooks, martyrologies, pastoral letters and catechisms - became the way in which Anabaptists, persecuted and driven out of the cities, eventually regrouped and organized into the Mennonite church.

This level of literacy, linked to a strong sense of belonging to a minority group and encouraged by successive migrations that stirred a strong sense of the passage of time, may well have worked together to foster the act of diary writing. There was at least another factor that may have led Mennonites to diary keeping. Walter Ong, another scholar of literacy notes, that very act of diary keeping, leads people in a process of “backward scanning,” a mental exercise in which “time is seemingly tamed....[and] reduced to space,” making time “seem...more under control” (Note Six). Memory now becomes preservable. Hence there is the possibility to return to it time and time again, whether in the search for God's leading, for self assurance, for economic

stability, or for simply the pleasure of recounting past times. The diary was a crucial tool which Mennonites used to develop a sense that life was predictable, under control, and ultimately, working out for the good.

Section Two:

The highest degree of this self-consciousness seems to have been located at the point of a major relocation, from Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s, and from Manitoba to Paraguay in the 1920s. David Stoesz's diary begins at the time that military privileges end in Russia; Cornelius T. Friesen's during the school crisis in Manitoba in 1919 and the early 1920s. The specific beginning point of Stoesz's diary comes on January 23, 1872, when he witnesses what appears to have been an especially rich display of Northern Lights; he describes brilliant colours of “blood and fire” moving about “as clouds rolling in great speed.”

It is a startling event. And Stoesz has no doubt that it signals the “coming day of Judgement” and reveals that within the spiritually cold Russian Mennonite colonies “the light of the [Gospel] was still alive,” alive enough it seems, to ensure him that many Mennonites will take the purifying act of leaving their homeland and migrating to Manitoba. What follows is the diary's richest and most de-

tailed description, the act of migrating to Manitoba. And here are other rare descriptions of at least some emotion; when on June 16 Stoesz's contingent leaves Nickoleiofsky, it also leaves friends, waving a final goodbye, “standing there with suppressed tears in their eyes”; and when on July 6 “seasick” ship-bound folks finally find a calm Atlantic they stand on the decks “more cheerful than yesterday.” The travelogue is also filled with the romance of new sites: the “high mountain peaks” of Ireland, the “great rocky shores” of the St. John harbour in Newfoundland, the “astonishing redness” of the upper Mississippi River.

What follows the excitement of migration is a persistent, regularly maintained, journal of daily life. And for the pioneers, the most pressing concern was the establishment of the farm household on the frontier. Thus the diary becomes the record of those patterns of life that were the most important to the fam-

“... Abraham F. Reimer (1808-92) from ... Blumenort...kept...the most detailed diary...[he was] called “Foula Reimer”... he gets little work done because he spends so much time observing others...”



Prediger Heinrich Friesen (1842-1921), Hochfeld, E.R., was the grandson of Abraham von Riesen (b. 1769), Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. In 1874 Heinrich settled in Hochfeld, two miles southwest of present-day Blumenort. He was a first cousin to Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), their mothers were sisters. Heinrich Friesen preached 998 times, served at 71 funerals and 25 weddings. He maintain a series of valuable journals some of which are extant and have been translated and published in Historical Sketches, pages 465-595. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 5, page 13.

ily farm - weather, seasonal changes, community networks, work routine, and household relationships. These are certainly the concerns of the middle-aged, male, farm household. The Manitoba male diarists of the 1880s and 1890s - David Stoesz, Heinrich Friesen, Cornelius T. Friesen - were all respected, land-owning married men and fathers, spanning the ages of 30 to 77 when they wrote. The diaries of these men differ only to the degree that their families were at different points in their life cycles. They are similar in the sense that they live according to the rhythm of Manitoba's harsh and varied climate, and its relatively primitive agrarian economy.

Rev. Heinrich Friesen's diary for example is a veritable record of weather and work. The routine of work on the Friesen farm was marked by Manitoba's harsh continental climate and short growing season. January and February marked the time on the Friesen farm when the teenaged boys hauled hay from the fields and wood from the forest. In April, once the water was down at the dam by Bergthal and the boys had drained water from the ploughed fields, the next season could begin. The lambs were branded and the seed wheat cleaned, and a short time later, the sheep were let out onto the pasture and the seeding of wheat, peas and oats was started.

After the garden too was seeded, attention turned to fencing and renovations. By July it was time to pull the mustard and thistles in the grain field and cut the hay. August saw the entire Friesen family in the field, cutting grain and beginning the task of hauling home the sheaves. Then attention turned to helping the



Cornelius T. Friesen (1860 - 1929), Osterwick, Manitoba, served as Waisenman of the Chortitzer Waisenamt, East Reserve, the third generation in his family to hold that prestigious position. He also maintained a valuable private journal which provides considerable information regarding the emigration

to Paraguay and related events. Photo from Preservings, No. 11, page 35.

neighbours with the threshing; in 1894 first at Aron Schultzes, then at Peter Harders, and finally on October 6 and 7 at Friesens; on the 15th, the entire village had completed threshing. November was the month at Friesens and at other village households for successive days of hog butchering. By December there was time to haul the first of the wheat to the elevator in Niverville.

Such records clearly indicate the range of opportunities and of restrictions that shaped the world of the average farmer. Of the various restrictions, weather patterns and changing seasons were the most immutable to human agency. The whole of life was shaped by temperatures, wind velocities, precipitation

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and degrees of sunniness. Daily weather entries and the signs of seasonal changes were not simply records maintained by idle minds; they were a crucial feature of all household diaries because they were critical aspects of life.

David Stoesz’s 1890 diary is illustrative. His entries reflect feelings of resignation, anxiety, hope and ecstasy as weather buffeted or smoothed his plans and his hopes. Stoesz’ entry for May 22, noting that “the weather has [finally] become milder...and now at 3 P.M. we are receiving a nice rain,” was written in the same vein as his note for 13 October, “now at 10:30 A.M. everything is snow covered and the cattle are coming back from the pasture.” Both entries reflect an almost stoic resignation to the inevitability of seasonal changes, and the constraints and possibilities they signalled. It was with a greater degree of emotion that Stoesz noted damaging weather aberrations. The frost of 23 May was so severe that “the ice in the buckets outside did not disappear before midday” and the hail of 1 August so intense that “we figure that about a third of the oats is lost.” What is important about these entries is that Stoesz was preoc-

cupied with the immediacy of his physical environment. The sound at night of “rain on the windows,” the sight of “my wife wearing only a shawl about her shoulders” in November, the feel of “earth frozen hard,” and the smell of nature “refreshed and beautiful, wet with a light fog,” are the perceptions of a man deeply in tune with nature.

If weather patterns marked the limits of human agency, the economy of the household marked the attempt to manipulate and secure the fruits of nature. Interwoven in the descriptions of work and weather were the numerical aggregates, numbers that marked the economic strength of the farm; labour costs, harvest yields, and market prices were recorded with precision. Maria Klassen’s diary, for example, notes that on his October 9 trip to Winnipeg “father went [with daughter Lisa]...at 5 in the morning with 14 bags of wheat” and notes that when he returned that he had received “54 cents” a bushel for it. She notes that on October 18th they sold a half share in an old stove to Gerhard Unger, but adds that he paid for it with two sheep, which should be compared to the \$10 that “Penner” received for his. When on November 21 they slaughter a cow with neighbour “Hiebert and J. Rempel and Mrs. Peters” the yield is evaluated by noting that it “was nice and fat”, measured by the fact that “we got two pounds tallow.”

These diaries capture the immediate world of the Mennonite farmers. The household, however, was only the most important of the different social spheres that the ordinary Mennonite encountered; important, as well, according to these diaries, was the social network that spread out from the household into the kinship group and the Mennonite congregation. Each of the diaries was a veritable road map of kin networks and church ties: they detail the comings and goings of parents, married siblings, married children, uncles, aunts and cousins; each recorded the variety of church meetings, the brotherhoods and many religious holidays, that bound together the Chortitzer community.

Usually these social interactions were recorded as a matter of fact. Visits by kin were recorded and not described; travels from a far noted but without emotion. But what the diaries do is give witness to the incredible richness of social interaction. Cornelius T. Friesen, for example, receives visits from Otterburn and Chortitz and Niverville east of the river, from Morden and Altona and Plum Coulee west of the river, from Herbert and Rosthern and Main Centre in Saskatchewan.

There are multiple visits on the Sunday when his district hosts the service: married children and fellow Chortitzers visit on March 29, 1922, including: H.F. Toews, C. C. Friesens, H. C. Friesens, Jacob C. Friesen, Jacob G. Goertzen, Widow H. Goertzen, Abram F. Hieberts, Peter F. Hieberts and Peter Toews. Sometimes as on April 30 the visits relate to the work of his office when he notes that “both Waisen representatives vis-

ited us.” And in turn, Cornelius Friesen and his wife, visit others; there are frequent stops at the homes of married children, weekly visits to other villages, and occasional crossings to the West Reserve; on one week-long trip Friesen notes in dizzying detail visits to 32 different households.

It is not only within the narrow confines of the Mennonite community, however, that the Chortitzer live. Notwithstanding the migration from Manitoba to Latin America which necessitated a great deal of knowledge with the outside world there are many instances of crossing the Mennonite boundary. There are, of course, the frequent trips to Winnipeg: an infected lip, a ruptured appendix, a broken leg, a land transaction and the perpetual market to sell eggs, butter and wheat compel Mennonites to head northeast to the provincial capital.

And non-Mennonites visit the East Reserve villages: a Jewish peddler visits the home of Judit Klassen some 25 times in 1925, usually taking a meal, often remaining the night. On a stormy 10th of December 1922, for example, Judit notes that “the Jew came here and wants to stay over Sunday,” but then because of stormy weather remained till Tuesday, but not before giving “us 4 fish.”

Indeed, Mennonite benevolence, although

“...[Aeltester] Stoesz was preoccupied with the immediacy of his physical environment, the sound at night of ‘rain on the windows’,...the feel of ‘earth frozen hard’, and the smell of nature ‘refreshed and beautiful, wet with a light fog’, are the perceptions of a man deeply in tune with nature.”

most often directed to the village poor, also entailed boundary crossings: in June 1892 David Stoesz collected and sent \$166 for relief hunger in Russia; in June 1894 Heinrich Friesen was visited by the “bishop of the [Herrnheuter Gemeinde], Andreas Lilge” who came to “collect money for his [members] in the faith who were coming from Russia” to settle near Edmonton.

Sometimes boundary crossing were made for sheer pleasure: on November 19, 1895, David Stoesz’ brother Johann came to visit from Minnesota, and after taking him to visit many relatives over the course of a week, David notes that on the 27th “I took him to Winnipeg to see the sights” and notes with an obvious sense of satisfaction that “he was amazed to that such a great city was to be found in this north country.” The frequency of such crossings, whether driven by market, benevolence or even pleasure, suggests from within their homes and villages, Chortitzer Mennonites contemplated a broad world.

Section Three:

The pattern of their world, structured by farm family, then extending to kin and community, and to the wider world, was clearly shared by both men and women. The diaries of Judit and Maria do not differ greatly from

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those of David, Heinrich and Kornelius. On one level, women, like men, were less concerned about their individual identities than with that of the family and church. Ironically, those concerns seem to have provided women with a degree of status and even power. Margaret Conrad’s study of twentieth century rural Canadian east-coast farm women suggests that the female diary reflected “the real power of women in rural families,” revealing a “remarkable...sharing of jobs” and of social concerns with men (Note Seven).

There are some basic differences between men and women’s diaries. Women had their unique perspective on the family, one, for example, that came from within the house. Maria and Judit’s diaries reflected a preoccupation with children, grandchildren, health, the comings and goings of other women, and the domestic duties. Typical of Judit Klassen’s entries are those that marked the first week in April 1922 with laundry on one day, ironing on another, the baking of cookies on the third. Or the work in the third week in which she cooked a batch of beans one day, did laundry on another, and made soap on a third day. The routine was of course broken by the season: in August she canned cucumbers she picked in her garden and made preserves from four pails of cherries bought in the village of Chortitz. Sometimes the routine was broken by an accident such as the time on August 31 when she “scalded [her] foot with boiling lye” resulting in “much pain until evening”; it was a “burning sensation” that abated only with the application of a mixture of a sweet substance mixed with the white of an egg.

The female-written diary, however, also reveals women fully in tune with village society. Maria and Judit are clearly assertive women, fully knowledgeable of their place in the community. After her daughter-in-law Anna has an infant son on January 31, 1922,

Judit visits Anna frequently. On February 3 she notes that “for night I must again be there” and on the sixth that “papa has to take me to Aron’s.” She also readily evaluates the progress of farm work, noting each time that neighbour “Peter Kehler” comes “to crush grain” without any “thing coming of it” or each time that “they...saw...wood at our place” when “it does not really works well.” Her world also stretched into specific areas of the

“The female-written diary, however, also reveals women fully in tune with village society. Maria and Judit are clearly assertive women, fully knowledgeable of their place in the community.”

farm.

On April 9, after attending church in the village of Reinland, located just north of the East Reserve boundaries, and hosting “our children, Jacob Wiebes,” she records that “one sow had a litter of five piglets and another of five.” On April 27 after other visits, comes the note that “we set 4 hens.” And on the 1st of September when villager “Peter Friesen’s” threshing “machine went to our childrens’, Jacob Wiebes” she adds that “I and Anna also went there. Similarly the world of the men stretched into hers. Thus on the 1st of November when Papa went for straw, Judit notes that “I and Jacob and Heinrich preserve cabbage” and adds that married son “Kornelius came here to saw wood.”

Conclusion:

Few things seem to have changed between 1872, our first glimpse into David Stoesz’ diary, and 1924, our glimpse into that of Cornelius Friesen’s. The simple passage of time did not change the focus of the diarist: the family and the community were more important than the person’s individual sense of status or identity. The diaries are not personally intense, but they are tributes to the strength of community ties and kinship links. Some may call this the “poor stuff” of Mennonite literature, for others they offer an invaluable glimpse into the everyday life of rural Mennonites. The diaries themselves reflect their authors’ thinking as they chose the things to record and sought a sense of order in a frequently difficult time of life.

Endnotes:

Note One: The most important contributions have been made by the families who have preserved these diaries. For translated repro-

ductions of parts of these diaries see: Royden Loewen, ed., *Inside Out: Everyday Life According to the Canadian Mennonite Diarist, 1860-1930*, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Records Society, forthcoming). They include Maria Stoesz Klassen, “Diary, 1887” trans. Marie Enns and Irene Enns Kroeker; Judit Klassen Neufeld, “Diary, 1922” trans., Ben Hoepfner; Cornelius T. Friesen, “Diary, 1922,” trans. Ben Hoepfner; David Stoesz, *Diary, 1872-1880*. For full reproductions of the Stoesz and Heinrich Friesen diaries see: “Aeltester David Stoesz Journal [1872-1896],” trans., Henry Stoesz, *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve, 1874-1900*, ed., John Dyck (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 1994): 322-328; “Rev. Heinrich Friesen Journal, 1893-1919,” trans., Irene Enns Kroeker, *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve*, pp. 465-596.

Note Two: See translated selections by Irene Enns Kroeker and Ben Hoepfner in Loewen, *Inside Out*.

Note Three: Robert Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London, 1974), page 2.

Note Four: See: James Nyce, ed., *The Gordon C. Eby Diaries: Chronicle of a Mennonite Farmer, 1911-1913* (Waterloo, ON, 1982); Harvey Dyck, ed. & tr., *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880* (Toronto, 1991).

Note Five: Tamara Hareven, “The History of the Family and the Process of Social Change,” *American Historical Review* 96 (1991), p. 116.

Note Six: Walter Ong, *Orality and Language: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York, 1982), p. 42.

Note Seven: Margaret Conrad, “Recording Angels: The Private Chronicles of Women from the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1750-1950,” *The Neglected Majority*, eds, A. Prentice and S. Trofimenkoff (Toronto, 1985), pp. 52 & 58.

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“Preservings” is the magazine/newsletter of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, published in June and December, semi-annually at Steinbach, Manitoba. Editor Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, Phone 1(204)-326-6454, business and 1(204)326-9022, residence. The publication of the magazine/newsletter is funded in part by the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc. We are always looking for more individuals who may want to contribute articles and/or photographs. Please send manuscripts, articles and/or photographs to HSHS c/o Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0. Annual subscription/membership fee is \$20.00, individual issues \$10.00 each. American, European, and Latin American memberships and/or subscriptions are payable in U.S. currency to cover the higher mailing costs.

President's Report

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

By the time you read this we will likely be well into summer. The reason I am saying this is that I along with our Hanover Steinbach Historical Society hope that by this time next year you as individuals and as part of a larger group will have finalized plans for celebrating the 125th year of settlement of the area known as the East Reserve, Hanover Steinbach area. The Society is actively involved in these

activities and is participating in the planning by the 125th Celebration Committee through our representative, Delbert Plett.

Other groups that are celebrating an important anniversary are the Bergthal and Sommerfeld Colonies which have been in existence for 50 years and the Tres Palmas Colony which was founded 25 years ago. In February of this year I had the opportunity to see first hand some of



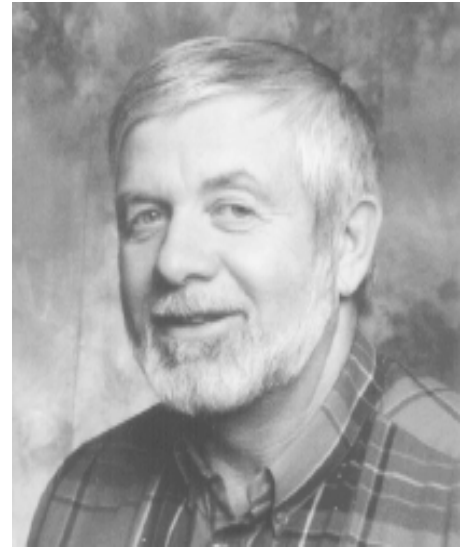
Wheat silos and flour mill at Camp 9 Sommerfeld Colony.



Diesel power plants at Gruenau South Menno that will soon be replaced by the arrival of Federal power from the Itapou power station on the Parana River.



The early results of recent heavy rains in South Menno



Orlando Hiebert, President of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society

our Mennonite settlements in Paraguay. One always imagines how things will be and what they will look like. From the tall trees and dense bush of Tres Palmas to the more open fields of Bergthal and Sommerfeld with their reddish soil to the low thorn bush with thorns 6-8 inches long hiding the fields, pastures and cattle behind them of the Chaco, I was told that things had changed a lot already. I can only imagine the hardships that those first Mennonites in the mid-twenties faced in a strange land with no infrastructure. With perseverance and faith our people have created families, built homes, farms, churches, factories and by and large have prospered.

Announcement

I would like to announce that we have two new members on our board as of our last annual meeting and welcome Ken Rempel of Winnipeg and Hilton Friesen also of Winnipeg. At our HSHS board meeting of April 21, 1998, we discussed a number of house keeping items. After having been reminded in a good natured kind of way by our readers that *Preservings* in its present form no longer resembles a "news letter" we have decided that it will be called a "news magazine",

Editorial

D. Plett, Editor

East Reserve Ethos.

As editor, I am aware of criticism of some of the positions and views expressed in *Preservings*, both editorially and otherwise. Some readers may feel in the dark as to why stating certain things should cause controversy, or disagreement. Is not every culture and community entitled to have its own history, legends and mythologies?

In actual fact, however, these responses come as no surprise given the premises upon which the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society (HSHS) was founded in 1988. The charter members of the HSHS were of the view that the founding peoples of the East Reserve in 1874 were caring sensitive, wholesome human beings, literate, middle class, articulated by a spiritual ethos which was valid, redemptive and soteriologic, with an indigenous historical tradition dating back to the Hanseatic League in medieval times and earlier and possessed of their own unique culture and languages--the Low German Plaut-Dietsch and the ancient Danziger High German dialects.

This historical ethos is controversial because over the past century various historical interpretations were developed by those who found it advantageous to regard the East Reserve pioneers, racially and culturally inferior.

The most prominent of these was the interpretation traditionally found in Canadian historiography known as "Anglo-conformity" whereby all cultural groups, including Aborigines, French, Ukrainians, Jews, etc., other than Anglo-Saxons, of course, were considered racially inferior with their relative desirability judged in terms of how quickly and how well they became Anglicized. A sociological concept known as "modernization" was often used to support Anglo-conformity. Modernization typology judged immigrants in terms of how quickly they discarded their own cultures and adopted that of their host society.

The most significant event promoting Anglo-conformity among Mennonites in Manitoba was the ethnic cleansing pogrom implemented by the Provincial Government in 1916-9 which "cleansed" the traditional culture of the East and West Reserves resulting in the exile of 8,000 of Canada's most progressive farmers to Paraguay and Mexico.

But the East Reserve ethos was also assailed from other sources, including from amongst the Mennonites themselves. Mennonites who adopted the religious culture and language of Separatist Pietism and/or American Fundamentalism were typically of the view that traditional Mennonite religion and culture was evil and to be eradicated as quickly as possible. See article following on "Separatist-Pietism". This resulted in the so-called "Mennonite Disease" whereby Separatist-Pi-

etist and/or Fundamentalists attacked conservative communities, as well as each other, seeking nothing less than their dismemberment and destruction, tearing apart family clans and Gemeinden.

A further assault came from the so-called Mennonite intelligentsia during the 1950s and 60s. This one is hard to explain--one would think that those attending Universities and earning Doctoral Degrees, etc. (our "intelligentsia") would have had some empathy and appreciation for the culture of their grandparents and great-grandparents, etc. In University these aspiring scholars were inundated with small "I" liberal philosophy upon which much of Western European social, political and economic theorizing was premised, which found the communitarian thinking of conservative Mennonites inherently repugnant and distasteful.

Possibly because they were a minority group seeking acceptance within the wider community, and faced with discriminatory attitudes which were all pervasive at the time, it became the goal of many intellectuals to Anglicize as quickly as possible. Some could not resist the temptation to join the braying chorus of condemnation of conservative Mennonites and other traditional cultures, presumably to win acceptance and recognition from colleagues most of whom, ironically, were undergoing the same experiences relative to their own cultures, be it Jewish, Ukrainian, etc. This was reflected in the historical works they produced as well as in the so-called Mennonite literature of the time which--with some notable exceptions such as Al Reimer's, *My harp is turned to mourning*, Armin Wiebe's, *Salvation of Jasch Siemens*, and a few others, was mainly obsessed with negating the validity and wholesomeness of traditional Mennonite culture and its various social constructs.

Those who feel uncomfortable and offended by such ideas can always notify us to delete their names from our mailing list. There are always plenty of magazines and organizations, invariably government funded and/or subsidized, which support one of more of the historical interpretations referred to, who would be delighted to have a few new subscribers. And then, of course, there's all that wonderful literature.....!

Eugene Derksen (1916-94)

In this issue we proudly feature a short biography of Eugene Derksen (1916-94), publisher and devoted promoter of the Hanover Steinbach community. In a biography of Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, page 9, I wrote, "Where certain later entrepreneurs found it easier to send money to save souls across the ocean, Klaas knew no other way than to live his faith among his people, finding his salvation in the betterment

of their lives. He was truly a renaissance man, with the ability to apply old world values to new world situations."

I believe these words would apply to Eugene Derksen equally as well. For this reason I asked Gerald Wright, a well-known journalist and former employee, to write an article celebrating Eugene's life and influence upon our community.

The article underlines the grim reality that we need to document more carefully our current history, so that future historians are not caught in the same logjam. Too often we spend weeks and months trying to grub together a few titbits of information about some historical personage whose story could have been written in a few hours had someone sat down and simply recorded what was common knowledge 50 years ago. Now that a base-line of information regarding the 1874 pioneers has been written and established, we need to start documenting more current history so that we can get out of this grid lock where we are constantly at the periphery of oral tradition and at the mercy of the living memory envelope.

Articles.

I refer also to a complaint we received after the publication of *Preservings*, No. 11, the Chortitzer issue. The complaint was by a grandchild upset that certain names of grandchildren had been mentioned in an article and others not.

I wish to explain that the purpose for listing the names of some descendants with an article about pioneers of our community is to provide a reference to people presently known in order that readers can make some association and a connection to the story being told. The purpose of listing names is not to provide a list of descendants or a family tree. That is each family's own responsibility. If they can not exert the energy required to collect the information or gather the few dollars required to publish such a work themselves, that is too bad--possibly they don't deserve to have such a history.

But the individual family tree is not the historical society's responsibility. We are interested in preserving the stories of the pioneers. As already mentioned, if these stories are not recorded and documented within the next couple of years, they will go lost. That is the point of the biographies and other articles that we are publishing. Are you writing your stories?

125th Anniversary.

Plans for the 125th anniversary celebrations of the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area are moving ahead. A steering committee has been struck with school board trustee Karen Peters of Randolph (Chortitz)

as chair. Her appointment was an excellent choice. Congratulations, Karen!

With her background in education and exceptional leadership skills, Karen has already imbued the committee with a sense of enthusiasm for the project. See articles elsewhere in this newsletter.

Those wishing to contact the committee or any of the individual portfolios can write "125th Anniversary Committee" c/o R. M. of Hanover, Box 1780, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, or phone 1(204)326-4488 to speak to any of the office staff.

We look forward to an exciting 1999 with thousands of visitors coming to celebrate this important milestone with us. Those coming from a distance to attend various events will need to know times and dates well in advance in order to make the necessary plans, bookings and reservations. I understand that by the next issue, No. 13, a preliminary schedule of events will be available.

One would hope, in particular, that the churches in the Hanover Steinbach area would take up the challenge and opportunity to tell the story of faith which brought the settlers to this area and empowered them to survive and overcome the hardships and privations underlying our current prosperity. This is a responsibility not only for churches which still have the word "Mennonite" in their name, but for all churches which have people of that background in their congregations. Off hand I can not think of any church in the area, be it Pentecostal, United, Catholic, Lutheran or Free Church, which does not have a significant membership of local people.

I challenge our local ministerials to emphasize the importance of the story of the 125th anniversary during the balance of 1998 and during 1999, and how God led and guided His people through adversity and misfortune until the present day. I trust that they would not want to deny their parishioners the spiritual fulfilment and personal enrichment of knowing their "own" faith story.

Mexico and Belize 1948-98.

In the meantime there are other anniversaries of significance to the East Reserve. Of particular note are the 50th anniversaries of the 1948 immigrants from Hanover Steinbach. The Chortitzer people immigrated to Paraguay where they founded the Bergthal Colony, today one of the most prosperous communities in all of Paraguay. The Kleine Gemeinde immigrated to Mexico where they founded Quellen Colony, today known as Jagueyes.

The Kleine Gemeinde in Mexico have planned their 50th anniversary celebrations for August 15, 1998. Hopefully we will be able to feature stories from both of these important communities.

From Mexico, a group of 89 Kleine Gemeinde families moved on the Spanish Lookout, Belize, in 1958, where they celebrated their 40th anniversary on March 14 and 15th, 1998. In a letter to the *Mennonitische Post* of February 10, 1998 (No. 20, Jahrgang 21, Feb-

ruary 20, 1998) friend Gerhard S. Koop, Spanish Lookout, Belize writes "that of these original families, there are still 19 couples where both spouses are still alive."

Congratulations Kleine Gemeinde and Old Coloniers of Belize!

Brüderthaler 1897-1997.

We continue to be interested in other anniversaries of relevance to the East Reserve including the centennial of the Brüderthaler later known as the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church, which took place in 1997. I have talked to a number of people in terms of contributing articles for *Preservings*, but have not received any to date. So for those people who may have noticed the omission, please be aware that this is not because we do not wish to carry the stories. Rather we have not to date found people willing to write the articles. If someone would give us a million dollars we could hire a university student to do the writing, but in the absence of such a miracle, we are dependant on volunteers.

Paraguay.

Congratulations to HSHS President Orlando Hiebert on his February trip to Paraguay, visiting the Menno Colony in the Chaco and Bergthal Colony in East Paraguay, which originated from the Hanover Steinbach area in 1926 and 1948 respectively. These communities have been successful to a large degree in preserving the faith and heritage of the indigenous culture of the East Reserve pioneers. A visit to these settlements always provides a poignant reminder of life as it once was on the East Reserve.

Ethnic Cleansing, 1916-27.

Many readers are not comfortable with the concept of ethnic cleansing relative to the Mennonite experience in Manitoba 1916-27. On the other hand, Mennonites are obviously not comfortable with these events at all and have seemingly developed a mass amnesia. These matters have hardly been written about at all, notwithstanding, they were the most devastating ever to befall the community during its 125 years in Manitoba.

On April 7, 1998 I presented a paper, "Ethnic Cleansing on the Prairies 1916-27: The Mennonite Experience" to the Annual "ethnic" Meeting of the Manitoba Historical Society, Winnipeg, Manitoba. As expected, the paper encountered vigorous challenge by several members of the Winnipeg academic community but also received support from at least a few Mennonites present.

Readers should bear in mind that ethnic cleansing is nothing more or less than the abrogation and eradication of one culture by another, at least when that eradication is against the wishes of a people. If government policies provide incentives favouring one culture at the expense of others, ethnic cleansing is taking place. Such policies cannot work in a vacuum and something else is expunged when a new cultural paradigm is imposed. Often

this is accomplished with the consent of the people involved and, in that case, the measures are appropriate.

In some cases ethnic cleansing measures are carried out by murder and/or rape as in Bosnia or the Natives in Canada in the 17th and 18th centuries. In other cases, such measures are implemented by the revocation of civil rights, imprisonments, and harassment. When the majority population is hysterically prejudiced against a particular group it can be a very intimidating experience. The two examples are in the same genre of human activity, they both originate from intolerance and racism.

Ethnic cleansing can also take milder and more benign forms, such as when a society is predicated upon the principle that being of a particular ethnic background, be it Jewish, Ukrainian, French, Mennonite or native, is not advantageous for social and economic advancement, a principle universally accepted in Canada prior to the 1970s. This systemic racism in Canadian society was based on the concept of "Anglo-conformity", an idea first espoused by "social gossellers" such as J. S. Wordsworth in his 1909 book, "Strangers at our Gate" putting forth the notion that Canadians of Ukrainian, Jewish, Mennonite, or ethnic German origin, were racially inferior, even though they arrived on the Prairies long before most Anglo-Saxons. Wordsworth espoused the view that these--in his mind--lower class people, could be elevated to almost, but never quite full, equality with the Anglo-Saxon majority by "proper" education and social conditioning, etc.

"Cleansing" can also take more insidious forms such as a university professor advising his student to do possibly the 500th thesis on love triangles in Chaucer instead of writing about some Ukrainian poet, if that happens to be their background, or about some 19th century Jewish rabbinical scholar in Poland, as the case may be. I have seen this happen a number of times in the past year or so and it is particularly frustrating because the student generally does not have the experience to realize that doing the "Anglo-conformity" acceptable study is probably a complete waste of time and merely catering to the professor's whims, whereas the other--not so politically correct--option, could launch the student into ground breaking and internationally recognized research and writing, in short, laying the foundations of an academic career and entrance into academia at a time when this is generally close to impossible.

The same dynamics are in evidence when only two out of 90 or so judges in the Manitoba Courts are of Mennonite background when they constitute six or eight per cent of the population, and so, Attorney General Vic Toews, please take note.

In the case of Mennonites, the Canadian government specifically guaranteed them the right to their own culture, particularly the confessional nature of education and language rights. These rights were confirmed in a letter

by John Lowe, Secretary of Agriculture dated July 25, 1873, which responded to specific written requests respecting available religious and language freedoms presented by both the Bergthaler and Kleine Gemeinde and which induced them to come to Manitoba instead of the United States. Once the Mennonites had accomplished their task of demonstrating that commercial agriculture was feasible on the Prairies, they were expendable. After a few changes in government, coupled with the added invective of anti-pacifist, anti-German mass hysteria in 1916-19, the time became expedient for Government to revoke these rights and to suppress with all the force of law, any attempts to exercise those rights.

I do not think historians and/or lay people should feel guilty or uncomfortable in writing about the events of 1916-19 and about governments that do not keep their agreements. It is the governments that should be ashamed and feeling uncomfortable not the victims. It is probably healthy for the issue to be opened up and discussed. Unfortunately it is too late for the victims of these fascist actions as they are all deceased, not to mention the hundreds who died from disease in exile in Paraguay as they set upon the daunting task of turning the "Green Hell" of the Chaco into an agriculture marvel.

Even today, minority groups such as the Ukrainians, Mennonites and Jews are apparently not yet sufficiently "cleansed", judging by the standard Manitoba history text by W. L. Morton. Morton accords these groups with 20 citations out of 1300 in his index, notwithstanding they make up over a quarter of the Province's population. The suggestion that Jews, Ukrainians and Mennonites have contributed only 20/1300th of events in Manitoba worth documenting is hardly believable even for the most xenophobic anglo-conformist. Something smells fishy here.

The existence of Anglo-Saxon names imposed upon Hanover Steinbach communities during the Provincial Government pogroms of 1916-19 are a continuing monument to bigotry and racism inherent in Canadian culture.

Feature Issues.

Now that we have had a feature issue of *Preservings* which focused on the Bergthaler Chortitzer people, No. 11, December 1997, it has been suggested that we also have an issue featuring the Kleine Gemeinde, the second and smaller group founding the East Reserve in 1874. Perhaps in the year 2001?

The feature story for the December 1998 issue will be the so-called 48-ers, the Mennonites who escaped from Soviet Russia after WWII and arrived in the Hanover Steinbach area in 1948 and after. Refugees at the time were frequently referred to as "DP's", short for displaced persons, but I think that "48-ers" sounds better. Hopefully we will be able to solicit a few stories featuring individuals who came to our community from that particular migration.

How about trucking as a feature story for a future issue of *Preservings*? Even during the days when the Kleine Gemeinde lived in Steinbach, Borosenko, Imperial Russia, teamsters such as Peter Toews (1838-82) played an important role by hauling wheat and other products to the seaports of Nikopol and Berdjansk. The situation in the Bergthaler Colony was the same as teamsters such as Johann Schroeder (1807-84), of the village of Bergthaler, hauled winter wheat to the seaport of Mariupol.

The role of teamsters became even more important in the East Reserve, Manitoba, as the settlers were more "distant" from their market and the market much less sophisticated. Farmers from the west side of the E. Reserve hauled their grain to the railway in Niverville after 1879 and shortly thereafter along the fabled "Winnipeg-scha Wajch" when marketing their produce in Winnipeg. Those in the eastern part of the Reserve hauled their products to Winnipeg until the construction of the railway through Giroux in 1897. Thereafter "Steinbach Station" became the main shipping and receiving point for businesses and farmers alike. It was natural that trucking would become equally important after trucks replaced trains of horses and wagons. Numerous local transfer companies as well as three national trucking firms have come out of this paradigm.

Another suggestion for a future feature story is "millennialism." Millennialism has been one of the most important theological issues dividing Mennonites since the 18th century. The conservative Mennonites, of course, were always firmly and strictly amillennialist, while the reformed Mennonites, namely those adopting the religious culture and language of Separatist-Pietism and later American Fundamentalism, were passionate premillennialists.

The idea would be to publish a number of articles presenting various viewpoints, and of course, those of the 1874 East Reserve pioneers. Few other theological issues have impacted on the Hanover Steinbach area to the same degree. It would also be helpful for students from our area who attend Bible Colleges and Seminaries elsewhere to have at least

some knowledge of what their ancestors once believed, particularly considering that their understanding of millennialism continues to be as valid today as it was then, in contrast to that of their enemies, whose endtimes scenarios were based on fantasy and fables.

It has been suggested that the year 2000 would be an appropriate year for a "Millennium" issue. Certainly there will be those who will make fools of themselves with various endtimes predictions over the next year or two. At the same time this will also create genuine interest about the topic.

Letters to the Editor.

One of the parts of *Preservings* I enjoy most is the "Letters to Editor" section. It is nice to have feedback from readers, some positive, some critical, and in other cases, simply providing readers the opportunity to share information and sources. By enabling a dialogue with the readers, the Letters to the Editor are essential to the concept and mission of our newsletter.

The "Letters" section in this issue is rather voluminous and in the future we will not be able to publish long letters. A number of letters came expressing strong viewpoints on several key issues and I felt it important that these contrary opinions be heard. Please keep the letters coming, but keep them down to 300 words or less. Please be brief and to the point. Even a short note to acknowledge an article or to add a titbit of information, and encouragement or critique, is always welcome.

Biblical Feminism.

One of the most fascinating things about traditional culture of the conservative Mennonites was the important role played by women within those communities in Imperial Russia. The women of the Vollwirt societies of the 19th century played significant roles in the operation of the household economy, typically with responsibility for dairy, poultry, garden and orchard production. These functions were significantly enhanced after the immigration to Manitoba, where the pioneers

Coming in Next Issue:

Our feature story for Issue 13, December 1998, will be the 48-ers, the Mennonites who survived the inferno of the Soviet holocaust and came to Canada after WWII. The feature article will be written by Professor Harvey Dyck, University of Toronto providing glimpses into the Mennonite experience during the Soviet Holocaust and an up-date on the archival legacy of Mennonites being discovered in the Ukraine and Russia.

John R. Giesbrecht Recollections.

During the 1930s there was one millionaire in the Church of God in Christ Mennonite, a man named Doerksen who lived near McPherson, Kansas. Some ministers in the church said that a millionaire could never go to heaven. But when the depression came Doerksen helped a lot of people in Western Kansas who were losing their land to the mortgage companies. Doerksen would pay out the mortgages and let the former owners keep farming the land. When they were able, they paid Doerksen out, and bought their farms back at cost without charging them any interest.

had to downgrade their farming operations for the primitive economy existing here at the time. This required a restructuring of farming strategies focusing on mixed farming, dairying, poultry, and market gardening, exactly the areas managed by women. For a further discussion of these points, see "Pioneer Women of the East Reserve" and "Matriarchies of the East Reserve," in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 1-32.

In this regard Kleine Gemeinde and Berghaler women certainly were more empowered than comparable women in other cultures. But what is even more interesting is the fact that this early flowering of feminism in Imperial Russia was not based solely on the necessities of running large *Wirtschaften* and of raising families of 12 and more children. It seems clear that this early feminism for conservative Mennonites was based on their understanding of Biblical teachings. In a letter circa 1820-30, Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, later Aeltester, justified Mennonite inheritance practices which required strict equality for women on Biblical grounds. Friesen was responding to Russian bureaucrats who were so amazed by the practice that they had solicited an explanation. It must be remembered that primogeniture was still the standard mode of estates devolution, namely, inheritance through the male line only.

Thus we see the development of what I call Biblical feminism among traditional Mennonites in Imperial Russia long before feminism became a household word in Western civilization. The fascinating story continues with the abrogation and diminishment of Biblical feminism, first of all, because of the ethnic cleansing measures implemented by the Manitoba government in 1916-19, and secondly, the inroads of Separatist-Pietism, and

Black Kerchiefs.

I was fortunate recently to hear the story of how Kleine Gemeinde women joining the Holdeman movement in 1882 decided on the form of their head covering. John Holdeman came out of the Swiss "old" Mennonite tradition where traditional head covering for women consisted of a white bonnet. However, Kleine Gemeinde women always wore a black kerchief usually adorned with tassels traditional in the Russian-Prussian-Dutch faith community.

When the form of head covering became an issue, Aeltester Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) informed Holdeman that Kleine Gemeinde women would have difficulty in switching over to wearing the bonnet. A compromise was reached whereby they would continue to wear their black kerchiefs without tassels as prayer coverings during worship services and the black bonnet elsewhere. But many older women kept a black kerchief with tassels which they wore out of respect when visiting non-Holdeman relatives and friends.

later American Fundamentalism, which articulated the much more paternalistic religious cultures of the Rüssländer and later the so-called Evangelical Mennonites, such as the Rudnerweiders. These factors combined to undermine the tightly knit communities and extended kinship networks necessary for the successful functioning of the ancient matriarchs resulting in rapid assimilation and secularization.

With the adoption of "pop" religious culture also came many problems of contemporary society such as spousal abuse, etc. Abuse of women and children was strictly prohibited within conservative *Gemeinden* such as the Kleine Gemeinde, a fact well documented by journals and minutes. Family violence was so abhorrent to traditional Mennonite communities that it was one of the few instances where they implemented the most severe punishment, separation and shunning.

Hopefully more will be written about this. The reader will find some of these ideas intertwined in several articles under the material culture section of this issue.

Material Culture.

Ever since its founding by Low German guru Wilmer Penner in 1993, *Preservings* has promoted and encouraged people to be aware and conscious of their material culture heritage. We have featured a number of articles of various chests, *Fraktur* art, etc. It has taken people a while to realize the immense value of some of the artifacts, keepsakes and memorabilia carried from generation to generation and from continent to continent by our people, in some cases from 18th century Prussia, to Russia, and then to the plains of North America, and then to the jungles of Latin America. Very often these treasures were preserved in the face of adversity and the economic extremity of pioneering only by the vision and iron will of the ancient matriarchs, who in more ways than we realize were the architects of many of these moves.

What people need to realize is that these artifacts are meaningless without their stories, their pedigrees. Without a historical context they become little more than "old junk" fit for the garbage heap once the current owners die, as their children will not realize their value. It is sad when these stories are lost as in so many cases these artifacts represent the last evidence and vestiges of Biblical feminism found among conservative Mennonite groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde, Berghaler and Old Coloniers.

In this issue the readers are in for a special treat. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, the world's foremost expert on Mennonite material culture has honoured us by preparing an article setting forth the canon of the Mennonite furniture tradition. Reinhild has compiled this survey article from her ground breaking and brilliant work on the topic published as: Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John M. Janzen: *Mennonite Furniture, A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)*, Good Books, Intercourse,

PA, 1991, 231 pages.

The article will be of immense value particularly for people like guides at the Heritage Village Museum who have often lacked resources such as provided by this paper, which will enable and equip them to inform tourists as to the proud and noble material culture traditions which go with many of the artifacts in the museum's holdings.

The Barkman Family Letter.

I received another issue of "The Barkman Letter" Volume 1, No. 2, October, 1997, courtesy of editors Jerry Barkman, and Jo Ferguson. Of particular interest in this issue was the story of Anna Barkman (1866-1929), who reputedly picked "out the largest, plumpest kernels of Turkey Red winter wheat that had been stored in the hot loft above the house." The trunk which brought the wheat to Kansas is presently on display at Tabor College Historical Library, Hillsboro, Kansas: see *Preservings*, June 1997, No. 10, Part two, page 77. Anna was a first cousin to Johann G. Barkman, mayor of Steinbach, Manitoba--see story elsewhere in this issue. Evidently Anna died without leaving any issue surviving as her children all died childless. She has certainly become a legendary figure in our history.

The other item of particular interest in the October 1997, issue of "The Barkman Letter" was the report by John and Mary Barkman, South Pasadena, California, on their visit to Annenfeld, Crimea, the home of a Kleine Gemeinde congregation in the 1860s and birthplace of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren in 1869. Annenfeld itself was only one of at least five villages in the area with Kleine Gemeinde connections, including Johannesthal (home of the Wohlgenuths), Bruderfeld, Schwesterthal (home of Rev. Peter Baerg (1807-1901), and Hoffnungsberg (home of Abraham E. Kornelsen). Some of these villages have not yet been identified although when the "Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour" was there in 1996, we were told about other "German" villages in the area but did not have time to pursue them.

In his report John Barkman provides a good description of the area and the village:

"Annenfeld is of special interest because it is the birthplace of both Peter G. Barkman as well as Katharina Krause, the parents of my father. At most, they lived in this village for 9 years which explains the lack of Mennonite structure here. Even though no Mennonite buildings remain in Annenfeld, it was good to walk on the streets where our Barkman clan lived before coming to the United States. The KMB church was organized in September 1, 1869, in Annenfeld and Jakob A. Wiebe was the first Elder....The village of Annenfeld probably has not changed much in the past century. There is one main gravel street with a double row of trees on either side. Various animals (mainly goats) are staked in this area for feeding in the day time. The houses made of stone or brick are very modest (about 3 or

4 rooms). People have very large gardens which is probably their primary source of food. Ukraine has a very high rate of unemployment and persons with jobs often don't get paid for months because of lack of money. The country side around Annenfeld as well as the other Mennonite villages seems fertile and is very flat. Wheat and sunflowers and corn seem to be the primary crops. Production is low because there is not money for fertilizer."

Mennonites have buried gospel treasure?

"Mennonites have buried gospel treasure" reads a headline in the *Canadian Mennonite*, May 11, 1998, Volume 2, Number 10, pages 16. The article is a report of a mission leaders conference April 18-21, 1998, Colorado Springs, Colorado. The climax of the conference occurred when 60 mission leaders "joined in prayers of repentance about the historic 'compromise' made by their ancestors." Someone by the name of Jim Egli evidently informed the meeting that "...the Prussian Mennonites accepted Catherine the Great's offer to come into Russia as farmers so long as they didn't share their faith."

It needs to be pointed out that the information these mission leaders were given was false and little more than blatant misrepresentation.

Perhaps someone might inform Mr. Egli that the primary reason for the immigration to Russia in 1788-1805 was to escape being enslaved by the militaristic regime of Prussia. To my knowledge all European governments at the time had laws protecting the integrity of their respective State Churches. To accuse Mennonites of abandoning the integrity of their faith, when their very move was articulated by that goal, is deception at its worst. It is about as truthful as condemning a woman for crossing a street against a red light when she is fleeing from assault.

Egli also misses the point that wherever Mennonites have lived as "quiet in the land" as he puts, i.e. when they have been true to their traditional ethos of restoration of the New Testament church, their witness has shone brightly as the firmament.

According to Professor Harvey Dyck, Toronto, so-called evangelicals, Baptists, and charismatics were the first to break rank in Soviet Russia and quickly accepted their designated places in the new communist world order. It was the traditional Mennonites ridiculed by Egli who did not break under the worst oppression ever experienced by humankind. They paid dearly for that intransigence—they were targeted for eradication by the NKVD, suffering 30,000 fatalities out of a population of 100,000.

In North America, the Amish and "old" order Mennonites still seek to live out their vision of "being the people of God" and testify to millions every year who come as tourists to see a community which has not yet compromised its faith for the shallow "pop" religious culture of the day. As a result at least 10,000,000 curious tourists annually are ex-

posed to genuine Christianity, far exceeding what all the so-called "evangelicals" in North America together could ever dream of reaching with their artificial marketing gambits and truncated "gospel".

If people like Egli are supposed to be part of the Mennonite church perhaps they should do some research and prayerful study next time before disseminating false information. Perhaps they should be forced to go on a tour of Russia and see the Gebietsamt building in Halbstadt where the touch of cold gun barrel steel on their necks was the last living sensation of many Mennonite leaders, husbands and fathers, as they fell victims of the blackness of the Soviet holocaust.

Too often so-called Evangelicals have been ready to sacrifice truth in order to disparage other Christian denominations in favour of their own religious culture. Perhaps this too calls for a prayer of repentance.

Errata

The readers are asked to note the following corrections with respect to *Preservings*, Issue No. 11, December 1996:

1) On page 46, the photograph at the bottom right hand corner is of Peter N. Koop and his first wife, Helena Schoen, and not of Johann N. Koop and his bride Aganetha Siemens, as stated. Helena Schoen was the daughter of Mr. Schoen, a painter in Steinbach.

Notation is also made of an error in the caption to the photo of the Koop children on page 44. Peter N. Koop who is listed as being in the photo is not in the photo as he was not present at the time. A picture of him was inserted in later reproductions of the photograph and hence the confusion.

I am indebted to Peter S. Koop, Steinbach, Manitoba, to drawing these errors to my attention.

2) In the caption to the photograph "Young Peoples' Group at Kleefeld, circa 1908" page 55, an appeal was made for readers who might be able to identify other people in the picture. We received a letter from Mrs. Peter W. Friesen, nee Anna Bartel Toews, Crooked Creek, Alberta, daughter of Elisabeth Bartel (1891-1975), who married John W. Toews, son of Peter Toews, Elder of the Holdeman Church and formerly Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Mrs. Anna Toews Friesen provided the following corrections: The woman seated to the right of her mother, i.e. in the middle of the front row is Nettie or Agnes Toews who became the second Mrs. Jakob R. Loewen, and the woman behind her, i.e. in the middle of the second row was her sister Margaretha, the first wife of Jakob R. Loewen. The Toews sisters were the daughters of Jakob B. Toews (1855-1938), who moved from Hochstadt, Manitoba, to Stern, Alberta, in 1910. Anna Toews Friesen has identified the man in the back row, second from the right, no. 6, as Gerhard de Veer.

We appreciate Anna Toews Friesen for drawing these corrections and additions to our

attention. The family of Gerhard de Veer and many other readers will be immensely grateful.

3) In the caption to the photo, "Gnadenfeld School Children 1894" in *Preservings*, No. 11, page 90, we asked whether anyone could identify the names of the students in the picture. This is the oldest class picture of a Mennonite school that I am aware of and so any information is of historic value. Bill and Trudy Harms were able to identify everyone by interviewing Mrs. J. J. Enss, nee Helen Friesen, now in her '90s which they published in the West Reserve Village Atlas. The following are the names: Top row: l. to r: Annie Friesen, Tina Hiebert, Greta Harder, Sara Friesen, Maria Hiebert, Tina Penner, Annie Wiebe, Sara Harder, Peter Friesen, Jakob Loewen, Henry Penner, Peter Loewen, Abram A. Friesen and Abram J. Friesen. Bottom row, l. to r.: Justina Winter, Margaretha Berg, Cornelius Wiebe, Helena Berg, Margaretha Loewen, Nete Winter, Peter C. Kroeker, Johann Loewen, Johann Winter, Bernhard Penner, Jakob B. Wiebe, teacher D. M. Stoesz.

3) John R. Giesbrecht, formerly of Greenland drew to my attention that the place where his grandfather, former Steinbach mayor Gerhard R. Giesbrecht (1846-1907) settled when he moved to Greenland was on NW3-8-6E. After his death, his widow, nee Aganetha Eidse, moved north across what is now known as Greenland Road and lived on SW10-8-6E, where son Abram had already started a yard. This sequence possibly was not clear in the article by Irene Toews published in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 65-66. As a further note of interest, John R. Giesbrecht recalled that his grandfather had been left handed, e.g. he used his left hand when he disciplined his horse. Gerhard's sons were also all left handed. John remembered his grandmother as a very determined woman. Even in her senior retirement days she could run as fast as her grandsons, when they had to chase the cows out of the grain.

Pioneers in Democracy.

The ancient Mennonite Gemeinden broke new ground in the 16th century by adopting a democratic form of governance based on the sovereignty of the membership, 400 years before such concepts became popular in Western Europe. From the earliest times, the most significant decisions of any community, the acceptance of new members, were made by entire Gemeinde, including women. In 1882 the Holdeman congregation in Blumenort, Manitoba, became the first Mennonite church where women participated fully in business meetings. It is not known how long this practice continued.

Separatist Pietism

“Separatist Pietism”, an editorial essay, by Delbert F. Plett, editor,
responding to Abe Dueck, Winnipeg, letter to the editor, received December 18, 1997.

The Two Solitudes.

Among the letters to the editor was one by Abe Dueck objecting to the use of the term “Separatist-Pietists” and to the characterizations of P. M. Friesen as “fanatically opposed to orthodox Mennonites” in the photo captions and article by Henry Schapansky and presumably in the lead article and elsewhere in the last issue No. 11, of *Preservings*. Please refer to the “Letters Section”, following, for the full text of the letter. First of all, I must take the rap for the caption to the P. M. Friesen photo on page 38, which I inserted and for which I take full responsibility.

The letter raises an important issue and deserves a response. It must be recognized, firstly, that there are two separate traditions, or solitudes, within the Russian Mennonite community, each with a distinctive history, literature, and culture: on the one hand, the orthodox and conservative Mennonites, including the pioneers of Hanover Steinbach (originally the “East Reserve”). On the other hand, the reformed Mennonites, who adopted other religious cultures and languages such as Separatist-Pietism and later American Fundamentalism, yet retaining certain cultural and ethnic characteristics. Since the latter have questioned and challenged the veracity and validity of the spiritual ethos of the former, this question is foundational to the history of the East Reserve.

Mr. Dueck also asked the question what are “orthodox Mennonites”? In *Preservings*, No. 11, page 12, I provided some terminology based on a comparison with the Jewish culture which may be useful. An Orthodox Jew, for example, is defined as “a Jew who adheres faithfully to the principles and practices of traditional Judaism” By comparison an Orthodox Mennonite would be defined as “A Mennonite who adheres faithfully to the principles and practices of traditional Mennonitism....” Both orthodox Jews and Mennonites have adopted certain aspects of 18th and 19th century life and culture as normative, manifested in dress and lifestyle.

The Anabaptist movement within the Reformation consisted of thousands of individuals and represented a wide range of beliefs and theology, from theocratic, polygamous Münsterites, social revolutionaries, to “community of property” Hutterites. It has become popular for modern-day scholars to find a Reformation-era Anabaptist personage whose beliefs in some general way mirror their own and then to argue that he/she represented normative Anabaptist-Mennonitism. But orthodox Mennonites accepted as normative the teachings of the seminal writers of the faith--Menno Simons,

Dirk Phillips, Peter J. Twisk, etc.--as they in turn were interpreted by the leaders of the Danzig and Grosswerder Gemeinden in Prussia--Georg Hansen, Hans von Stein, Peter Epp, etc. These teachings and their practice defined “traditional” Mennonitism within the Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonite tradition from the 1550s to the 1850s. Orthodox Mennonites within this context are a phenomenon of the 20th century.

A conservative Jew is defined as “A Jew who adheres for the most part to the principles and practices of traditional Judaism with the reservation that, taking into account contemporary conditions, certain modifications or rejections are permissible.” Conservative Mennonites would typically share the theological belief of orthodox Mennonites but have not rooted their faith in the culture and physical environment of the 19th century and basically accept modern-day life and culture where it does not directly conflict with their faith.

Conservative and orthodox Mennonites practised their faith within the context of the Gemeinde, which really means community. Their faith was holistic addressing all aspects of life, not merely spiritual edification. A functioning Gemeinde in the 16th to 19th centuries provided a full range of social services, comparable to the modern welfare State. In terms of social consciousness and community ethos, in looking after its weaker members and by provision of a social safety net, the Gemeinden as social entities were centuries ahead of their time. They were also pioneers in democratic forms of governance by virtue of the sovereignty of the membership, a form of grass-roots democracy not widely accepted in Western Europe until 400 years later.

Reformed Mennonites.

The Jewish analogy is less applicable with the category of Reformed Jew, defined as “A Jew who adheres to a system of religious worship adapted from Orthodox Judaism to meet the demands of contemporary life, frequently simplifying or rejecting traditional religious law and custom.” Within the Mennonite community, Reform Mennonites are defined as “Mennonites who have rejected traditional Mennonitism and have adopted the religious culture and language of other confessions such as Separatist-Pietism and/or American Fundamentalism, but who retain some degree of ethnic identity.”

Secular Jews are those Jews who do not follow traditional Jewish teachings and yet identify themselves as members of the ethno-cultural group. A similar category exists within Mennonite culture, covering both

those who are non-religious, as well as those who have adopted other religious cultures and languages, but who are no longer formally associated with the Mennonite faith. Secular Mennonites continue to identify themselves in some fashion as “Mennonite”--possibly they still enjoy certain ethnic foods, etc. and continue to be articulated to some degree by their ethno-cultural identity--perhaps they hate their background and heritage.

Often secular as well as reformed Mennonites are embarrassed by orthodox Mennonites because they dress and act differently and/or by various teachings of the traditional faith, such as the peace position, the emphasis on community ethos, etc. and endeavour to disassociate themselves from their past. In some cases churches have changed their names to hide any connection to an ethno-cultural identity. This type of behaviour, of course, is not unusual and is found to some degree among all ethno-cultural groups, although it does not appear to be the case within the Jewish culture who seemingly have more pride and self-respect as a people and faith community.

The foregoing categorization provides a helpful nomenclature for those interested in the culture and heritage of Hanover Steinbach since it was originally founded by two groups of conservative Mennonites, the Bergthaler and Kleine Gemeinde. They represented the moderate and rational spectrum of the twin solitudes within the Mennonite world.

Pietism.

Separatist-Pietism was the religious culture and language adopted by many Mennonites in Russia during the 19th century. Mr. Abe Dueck has objected to the use of the term “Separatist-Pietist” which he regards as pejorative. In order to examine the validity of this statement it is necessary to consider first the historical roots of “Pietism” and “Separatist-Pietism,” its more radical offspring.

“Pietism” was a 17th century renewal movement which came into being in the midst of Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy, which had become rigid and formalistic. Pietism emphasized a more spiritualized, inward and emotional religion. Spener (1635-1705), Franke (1663-1727) and Zinzendorf (1700-60), were among the early leaders of the movement. Early adherents met in small groups or conventicles for fellowship and edification within the existing church.

Some aspects of early pietism were comparable to the warm and spiritually embracing faith of the Waterländer Mennonite denomination in 16th century Holland, whose

writers such as Pieter Pieters and Pieter J. Twisk were loved and frequently published by the KG. But with the latter, inward or emotional edification came as a result of "Nachfolge" or discipleship, whereas with Pietism, the inward emotional life became the end in itself, with a whole set of religious programs and legalistic rituals developed to foster and promote inward spiritualization of religion (Robert Friedman, *Mennonite Piety*, page 85-86).

Separatist-Pietists.

In time the more radical pietists came to regard the Lutheran Church as fallen and of the Beast. They separated to form their own churches, conventicles of worship not socio-economic communities: Toonie's "Gesellschaft" versus "Gemeindschaft" typology. They regarded themselves as the one and only true church. The term "Separatist" or "Separatism" came from the notion that the "old" church was of the devil and beyond redemption, a new start had to be made, by separation from the old.

Separatist-Pietism developed its own religious language and culture. Admission required rigid entrance rituals including a legalistic conversion experience and mode of immersion baptism before a believer could be "saved". This meant that an individual was now chosen and one of the elect. The particulars of each group's requirements for salvation varied, so that members of one denomination frequently could not fellowship with another or accept as valid their "salvation".

The teachings of Separatist-Pietism included premillennialism which held that the Second Coming of Christ would occur in the East, that Russia would be a haven for the "true" church during the tribulation, that Napoleon was the Anti-Christ, and that the Russian Czar would be the Saviour of the Church in the end times. The movement was profoundly influenced by Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), a Professor in Württemberg, and by his disciple, Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), who proclaimed that "the thousand year kingdom of peace would appear in the east either in 1833 or 36"--Stumpp, page 27-28.

As a result of these beliefs many thousands of Germans emigrated to Imperial Russia at the beginning of the 19th century at the same time as conservative Mennonites from Danzig were founding the Chortitza (1789) and Molotschna (1804) colonies in Russia. Here they quickly became targets of proselytization by Separatist-Pietists, condemning them as "unsaved" and in need of conversion to the religious culture and language of Separatist-Pietism. The success of these activities is reflected in the claim by one source that by the end of the 19th century, the novels of Jung-Stilling were found in almost every Mennonite home in Russia. These beliefs influenced many to remain in Russia in 1874 as "Russia lay close to the 'east' [and] was thus the promised place of

refuge whereas America, situated in the 'west', was doomed (Urry, *None But Saints*, page 227).

The foundational teachings of the religious movement subscribed to by Peter M. Friesen and his co-religionists were those of "radical" Pietism which gave it birth, including the notion that the traditional or conservative Mennonite church was fallen and beyond regeneration. Like their religious mentors the adherents of this movement also professed the necessity of a separation on the part of those seeking redemption. For these reasons I continue to believe that "Separatist-Pietism" is an appropriate term to describe this religious movement and those who propagated it.

Reformed vs. Conservative.

It is understandable that the term "Separatist Pietist" will have some pejorative connotations to the descendants of those whose communities and families were attacked and sometimes torn apart by these actions. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an easy solution to this. You cannot tear apart communities or tell people that their faith is of the beast and not have at least a few people upset. Ultimately some word has to be used to describe a movement and events which did take place. In my mind Separatist-Pietism is the most appropriate term available, being largely descriptive with minimal judgemental connotations.

To the descendants of Separatist-Pietists such as Peter M. Friesen, the word will have positive connotations as in their minds the switch to the religious culture and language of Separatist-Pietism brought salvation and cultural redemption.

The East Reserve was settled by two denominations of conservative Mennonites, the Bergthaler/Chortitzer and the Kleine Gemeinde. It was natural that these pioneers would not have a positive view of having their spiritual ethos and faith condemned as worthless and of the beast. Such characterizations generally do not contribute to a spirit of Christian love, unity and mutual edification.

Peter M. Friesen (1849-1914).

In 1910 Peter M. Friesen published his 1,000 page *magnum opus*, in which he presented and interpreted Mennonite history in Russia from a Separatist-Pietist perspective. His writing reflected the views of Separatist-Pietists among Mennonites in Imperial Russia in his time.

Of Menno Simons, whose teachings were considered normative by conservative Mennonites, Peter M. Friesen wrote, "[his] polemical writings do not belong to those one reads with spiritual pleasure" (page 18).

Of Klaas Reimer, founding Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia in 1812, he wrote as follows: "[His] religious disposition...was devoid of any joyous knowledge of God's grace, while his confes-

sional stance was indescribably narrow..." P. M. Friesen referred to Klaas Reimer as "that very pious soul" (page 93). Of the Kleine Gemeinde, Friesen said: "[They] did not

Abraham F. Thiessen (1832-89)



Abraham F. Thiessen (1832-89). Picture taken in Petersburg, Russia, during one of his trips to lobby senior government ministers for justice on behalf of the disenfranchised and "voiceless" Anwohner in the Molotschna Colony and to challenge corruption and fraud, 1866-73. In 1873 Abraham was exiled to Siberia for his advocacy on behalf of the "landless". In 1887 he returned to Russia out of his concern for the plight of the landless Mennonites "to speak for the poor and oppressed". This time he was exiled, before he could accomplish his mission. Thiessen represented the continuation of a Kleine Gemeinde concern for justice on behalf of the underprivileged which can be traced back to his grandfather, Aeltester Abr. Friesen (1789-1849), and his defense of the unfortunate Anna Thiessen, banished to Siberia in 1821 for the "offense" of incest. In 1860 it was Kleine Gemeinde Bishop Johann Friesen who intervened to stop harassment and possible banishment of the infant Brüdergemeinde. As a reward for his lifelong advocacy of justice for the poor and disenfranchised among Russian Mennonites, Abr. F. Thiessen was called an "atheist" by Peter M. Friesen. The late Dr. Cornelius Krahn provided a different interpretation of Thiessen considering him to be "Among the prophets and fearless fighters for the new dawn... who did influence the cause of justice and Christian love in a community that had almost forgotten what that ingredient was..." This was probably a subtle play on words and a reference to P. M. Friesen's concluding statement in his work (page 976). Cornelius Krahn, "Abraham Thiessen: A Mennonite Revolutionary?" Mennonite Life, 1969, April, page 77. Abr. F. Thiessen's views on social justice and that of other KG leaders before him, in many ways pre-dated those espoused, albeit a century later, by modern organizations such Mennonite Central Committee.

achieve joy in the faith" (page 281). And again he states "In the 1860s the Kleine Gemeinde fell into complete disarray" (page 94). On yet another occasion he has written "the devil took advantage of the opportunity and led them to build upon their own works" (page 268).

P. M. Friesen also made the assertion that Abr. F. Thiessen (1838-89), the Kleine Gemeinde revolutionary and land reformer in the Molotschna, "was driven into atheism and that he later destroyed the Kleine Gemeinde" (page 591). This is an interesting comment to make of someone who suffered exile to Siberia in 1873 for the strength of his convictions and who admonished his co-religionists in three separate published books to leave Russia so that their children would not one day say, "Father, out of fear of losing a few ruble you have sold us to these barbarians"--*Die Lage der Deutschen Colonisten in Ruszland* (1876).

However little reformed Mennonites might think of conservatives such as the Kleine Gemeinde, to call one of its members an atheist stretches the bounds of reason. Certainly, the Kleine Gemeinde was not "destroyed" and still exists to the present-day with over 2000 members in Canada, United States, Mexico, Bolivia and Belize.

Kleine Gemeinde.

P. M. Friesen and the writers he quoted with favour routinely used pejorative terms to describe the Kleine Gemeinde and others in the conservative faith tradition, including the following: "pious soul", "devoid of joyous knowledge", "indescribably narrow", "narrow-minded", "extreme severity," "too frightened", "too isolationist", (all on page 93), "stubbornness" (page 131), "unhealthy Mennonite narrowness and severity", "small-minded religious concerns" (page 198), "written fearfully and with reticence" (page 238), "the devil ...led them" (page 268), "Separatist church" (page 264), "ingrown, fearful, and intolerant in thought and lifestyle" (page 457), "puritanical... melancholic and formalistically-ascetically pious" (page 443), "zealously and fanatically propagandized" (page 591), "the totally dead members of the Mennonite church" (page 977), "puritans" (page 1008), "vehement and inconsiderate" (page 1027).

One of the writers whom P. M. Friesen quoted with approval referred to the conservative Mennonites as "the most extreme element, incapable of a God-willed and God-permitted closer association [with Russia] using the pretence of the inviability of the religious conscience...." when they left in 1874 stating, "The Mennonite sheepstall, which is far too low, too narrow, and too confined, is set in motion and ventilated.... we, here, receive impetus for new life from this fresh air...Thank God that they left!...for America.... [where they] came in contact with a Christian culture which could not have happened in Russia..... and it was good for Rus-

sia which is now free of these unmanageable, pious foster children whom it was impossible to satisfy no matter how hard [Russia] tried" (pages 592-94). These are some references from the Part One of Peter M. Friesen's work which was translated and published in English. The references to conservative Mennonites in Part Two of P. M. Friesen's work dealing with Mennonites in America, which was not translated and published, are even less cognizant of reality.

The foregoing statements and many others more were and are not only pejorative but also patently false. This will be evident to anyone even casually familiar with the history of the Berghthaler and Kleine Gemeinde and/or spending 15 minutes perusing Klaas Reimer's published sermons and letters, and/or the 3000 pages of historical material in the "Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series", and/or the 1400 pages of material published in the "East Reserve Historical Series" and in particular, the sermons of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Berghthal, who gave up landed estates and noble rank to save his people from forthcoming destruction.

Fanaticism.

What is remarkable is that these conclusions were put forth by someone whose spiritual movement was premised on the belief that the Second Coming would occur in Russia in 1881 and that the Russian Czar would be the Saviour of the church in the end-times. Such delusions would normally be diagnosed as "fanatical" or psychotic. By comparison the sermons of Klaas Reimer and Gerhard Wiebe are as genuine and relevant today as when they were written, studded with jewels of Biblical allegory, remarkable for their fresh and crisp application of evangelical teachings, a pretty fair litmus test for someone's beliefs.

The documents referred to above were readily available in the last quarter of the 19th century when P. M. Friesen was writing his book. He either purposely chose not to ask or was of the "fanatical" view that the religious culture and language he had adopted represented ultimate truth, in which case there was no need to obtain further information or input from the people he was writing about. Ironically, P. M. Friesen actually made the claim that he was writing a history of all Mennonites in Russia and not merely of Separatist-Pietists, and that his soul was "...full of sympathy and interest `for` our little flock spread over the whole world.... nor did I wish to leave even the most meagre, the most distant, the most insignificant, or the most estranged member of our `Menno` family unmentioned or unknown" (page xxix-xxx), and then he concluded with the admonition "...not to judge your brother for whom Christ died" (page 980).

Fanaticism is defined as "motivated or characterized by an extreme, uncritical enthusiasm or zeal as in religion or politics." I readily acknowledge that Peter M. Friesen

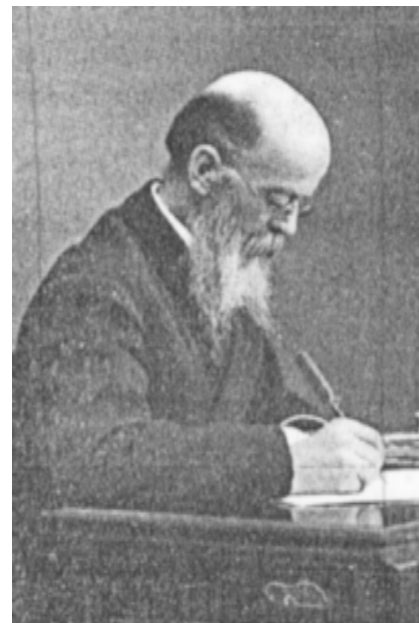
genuinely believed what he was writing was true. However, with the hindsight of history it is evident that these statements were not true. It is also evident that rational and logical people at the time realized that these statements were not true as evidenced by the fact that the E. Reserve pioneers had the clarity of mind to emigrate in 1874. Certainly they had the clarity of mind to discern which of the religious spirits sweeping across the steppes were truly of God and which were based solely on fantasy and fables. Accordingly, the term "fanatical" does not appear to be an unfair characterization.

P. M. Friesen's background?

A comment regarding the statement made by Henry Schapansky that Peter M. Friesen's references to his own background were "not straight forward". A straight forward statement would have been to say, "my parents were so and so, and my grandparents, etc." Anyone going through Friesen's *magnum opus* and trying to decipher anything about his family background will agree with Henry's statement that these references "are not straight forward". See pages 182, footnote 93, page 996, page 1014, footnote 239, page 1016 footnote 266, for example.

Such an attitude was not unusual among Separatist-Pietists: if a person believes that they have left a church, community and family, which is decayed, of the beast, and without redemptive value, they will likely regard

Peter M. Friesen (1849-1914)



Peter M. Friesen (1849-1914) wrote the Separatist-Pietist historical work, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, 1065 pages in which he wrote mainly disparaging and untrue things about conservative Mennonites. Over the decades he became the guru of the Separatist-Pietist movement among the Russian Mennonites. Photo courtesy of Menn. Brotherhood in Russia, page 982.

their background and past history within that context in a negative way.

It is interesting, for example, that Peter M. Friesen made no reference at all to the history of the Bergthal Colony, notwithstanding that it represented the most successful example of the colony settlement system among Russian Mennonites. He, himself, apparently, had two uncles living there, one of whom, Abraham Friesen, was a minister of the Bergthaler Gemeinde from 1849 until his death in 1871. P. M. Friesen does actually mention this Abraham Friesen (page 886) with the notation that he came from Sparrau, but nothing more. The silence speaks volumes.

Whatever one may think of Peter M. Friesen, he was certainly smart enough to realize that the KG was the flash point in the Separatist-Pietist agenda to eradicate the conservative Mennonite faith and culture in Russia. The KG represented the fullest embodiment of the restitutional vision of this faith and culture, and Friesen realized that if the KG could successfully be disparaged and brought into disrepute, the other denominations in the conservative tradition could readily be disregarded and marginalized as reactionary arch-conservatives, witlessly clinging to outmoded traditions and mores of the past.

On the other hand, we should not judge P. M. Friesen too harshly. We should recognize that the attitudes reflected in his work were the conventional wisdom of his particular life-world. How was he to know that the descendants of the 8000 conservative Mennonites who settled in Manitoba in 1874-6, and whom he so despised, would be blessed of God and grow to equal and exceed in number the descendants of the 100,000 Mennonites who remained in Russia in 1910.

Historical truth.

The forgoing leads us upon the horns of a genuine dilemma. It is evident that reformed Mennonites, in this case those who adopted Separatist Pietist teachings, and those in the conservative faith tradition, will not agree on "historical truth". Both "solitudes" quite properly have their own stories, traditions, legends and folklore. Both groups are entitled to preserve and document their own history and perpetuate their own pedigree, mythology and culture.

But in so doing, how can one group describe or write about its own history without hurting or offending the other? Is it even possible? I would certainly appreciate Mr. Dueck's input to this question.

There is another more serious aspect of the dilemma. Whether rightly or wrongly, and at least partially as an accident of history, the views of Peter M. Friesen toward conservative Mennonites have been adopted as normative in much of historical literature. These untruths and misrepresentations have been repeated and republished *ad nauseam*, until they were accepted as true. This has

resulted in immense damage in reputation to conservative Mennonites and their descendants. Based on these statements, thousands have unnecessarily developed negative views of their own background and themselves. In this sense, many people in Hanover Steinbach have been victims of an enormous injustice.

As a historical society for the E. Reserve founded by the people affected by these statements we cannot avoid dealing with the "two solitudes" within our past. We are obligated to tell the story as our pioneers would have known it. We owe it not only to them but also to ourselves and our descendants. We know from personal knowledge the truth of their vision and believe in the veracity of their spiritual ethos. Were it not so, the entire E. Reserve culture and subsequent historical tradition of Hanover Steinbach would by definition be foundationally flawed and deficient.

Our great-grandparents knew the truth, but--with the exception of Aeltesten Abr. Friesen, Joh. Friesen of the Kleine Gemeinde and Gerhard Wiebe of the Bergthaler and, perhaps, a few others--they did not respond as strongly as they should have. They did not consider that by failing to respond, only one version of truth was available to their descendants, the one written by those committed to their destruction.

They may have considered it unchristian to respond, to resort to such tactics, but by not responding, they were condemning their descendants to be enslaved by the only version of historical truth being offered. They did not realize that as a result of their omission many of their descendants, in time, would be socialized to think of themselves as a lesser genetic and racial species (Frank H. Epps, *Menn. in Canada*, Vol. 1, page 195). Untold damage has been done to our young people who have turned against parents and communities, developed inferiority complexes, mental problems, and other life failures, because of this.

If we as members of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, knowing the historical truth, do not respond, we ourselves become culpable participants in this process.

Conclusion.

There is a final horn to the dilemma. What responsibility does one group have to another which has been victimized by its actions. In the case of Canadian natives, Anglican and Catholic Churches have sought to seek reconciliation in a spirit of love and respect. Would a public apology not be in order?

Must the descendants of the founding people of Hanover Steinbach now feel guilty about bringing forth the truth? This would be typical victim behaviour. Do we deserve admonition for seeking the truth? I do not think we should allow ourselves to feel uncomfortable for the natural urge within us to listen to the voices of our elders, our great-

grandparents, crying out from the darkness of the past with their journals and letters, to tell us their story.

In a spirit of peoplehood, I am prepared to replace "Separatist-Pietist" with a different term, provided it is descriptive and historically correct. But I am only prepared to do so in a context where Reformed Mennonites stop using terms such as "unsaved", "heathen", "of the devil", "reactionary", "unprogressive", "spiritually dead", and a host of similar pejorative adjectives, to describe their conservative and orthodox brothers and sisters in Christ, the East Reserve pioneers and their various descendancies and diaspora throughout the Americas.

In a sense Peter M. Friesen and Abraham F. Thiessen speak for the two solitudes within the Mennonite world. Thiessen's faith challenged existing social constructs and called the followers of Christ to participate in a new world order based upon the ethos of the Sermon of the Mount, which radically reformed and reconstituted all social relationships. The ethos of Peter M. Friesen, on the other hand, affirmed the existing social structures of the day, calling people to worship the Deity while postponing the paradigm of the Kingdom to a future time.

While the E. Reserve pioneers had feet of clay like everyone else and fulfilled their teachings only imperfectly, most of their descendants recognize their vision of being part of the people of God. If that is "ignorance and poor judgement", I guess I stand guilty as charged.

Recently I read in the *Mitteilungen* (pages 5-6) of Martin B. Fast, editor in Elkhart, and a child of the KG who were so disparaged by Separatist-Pietists, how he sent food drafts to Russia in the 1920s to keep alive P. M. Friesen's widow, Susanna, nee Fast, childhood friend. I sometimes wonder--would Peter M. Friesen have changed his views in any way had he lived to see his idealized world disintegrate in a "Gottterdamung" of unspeakable proportions 10 years after he finished his book? Might he possibly have allowed that even the novels of Jung-Stilling did not contain all the truths of Christendom?

A final question: Will there be peace in the garden? Will the two solitudes ever join as one in peaceful repose? The answer my friend, as Peter, Paul and Mary used to sing, "is blowing in the wind", but it ain't likely.

I appreciate that Mr. Dueck has brought this issue forward. I am afraid that he and I will have to agree to disagree. Nevertheless, I will continue to regard Abe as a wonderful Christian and friend, motivated only by the most noble of pursuits, the furtherance of historical truth.

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. Contrary to those who decry and condemn vigorous critique and passionate debate which has characterized Mennonite culture since the Reformation, we celebrate and applaud the same as evidence of genuine spirituality and personal integrity and as a process essential to the advancement of historical truth and true grass-roots democracy. We will assume that all letters can be published, unless a contrary intention is indicated. We reserve the right not to publish any particular letter and/or not to respond to a letter, particularly if it refers to an issue already previously dealt with. Please keep all letter short (under 300 words) and to the point. We reserve the right to return, discard, edit and/or shorten letters as deemed necessary.

Editor,
Preservings
Box 1960,
Steinbach, Mb R0A 2A0

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on another fine and substantial volume of "Preservings" (No. 11).

My eye quickly focused on the Friesen article by Henry Schapansky and then on the photo and comments on p. 38. Such deprecating comments concerning Friesen are hardly worthy of your publication. I am dismayed that anyone would use such pejorative terms as "separatist-pietist" and refer to P. M. Friesen as "fanatically biased against the orthodox Mennonite church." It is time to stop hurling epithets like "separatist." Furthermore, what is the "orthodox Mennonite church?" Mennonite Brethren may well have lauded P. M. Friesen much too much, but such descriptions are blatantly false and unsubstantiated. The author also speculates that Friesen came from a conservative background which explains his reaction and that he "must have had some sort of a falling out with his family." In section 5.1.4 the author states that the references to Friesen's personal life are "not straightforward". What is this supposed to mean? A good historian would never write in such a manner, regardless of whether he appreciated P. M. Friesen or not. It simply demonstrates ignorance and poor judgement.

Abr Dueck, Director

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies Received Dec 18, 1997

Editor's Note: Mr. Dueck has raised an issue of foundational significance to the history of the E. Reserve/Hanover Steinbach. If our pioneers were what P. M. Friesen said they were, i.e. they did not have a valid spiritual ethos, all subsequent history of our community is fatally flawed and deserves the ignomy to which it has been relegated both within Mennonite literature, in Canadian historiography, and by official government policies of Anglo-conformity (see the editorial section for a response).

I find the articles in your *Preservings* magazine very interesting and look forward to receiving more. Enclosed is my cheque for \$30.00 - \$10.00 for membership renewal and \$10.00 donation.

There is a little error in your article on Katharina Barkman Koop (1832-1923) by Delbert F. Plett, No. 10, June 1997. In the "Descendants" section it says that Jakob B. Koop

of Koop's Nursery, Kleefeld, passed away in Jan. 1997. I believe this must refer to another Jakob Koop. My father Jakob Baerg Koop, who founded Koop's Nursery, died on Aug. 13, 1979. Thank-you for your interesting magazine.

Yours truly "Susan Eikanger"
Box 1092, Killarney
Manitoba, R0K 1G0
Received Dec 19, 1997

Editor's Note: We appreciate errors being drawn to our attention. It is an appropriate and appreciated part of the process of research and writing.

Henry and Katharine Plett
Box 509, Arborg
Mb, R0A 0A0

We love reading the *Preservings*. Thank-you.
"Henry & Katherine Plett"
Received Dec 19, 1997

Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3T 2N2
December 15, 1997

HSHS

Friends:

I am impressed with your impressive research in your area. Enclosed please find my \$10. membership fee. Best wishes.

Sincerely "Leo Driedger" Professor

Editor:

Here is a list of older people that would like to receive*Preservings*. We enjoy it very much.

Sincerely, [Rev.]"Jac. Doerksen"

Tourond

Received Dec 22, 1997

Dec 20, 1997

HSHS

Dear Del:

I have enjoyed reading "*Preservings*" more than I even thought I would. Enclosed is my \$10.00 membership fee.

"Tim Friesen"

Box 10, Niverville, R0A 1E0

2130 Mt. Lehman Rd.
Abbotsford. B.C., V4X 2L6

Dear Mr. Hiebert:

I have enjoyed the article on "J. & E. Regehr" in the No. 10, December 97, issue of *Preservings*. The article refers to issue No. 9, December, 1996, for additional information about Prussian roots. Could you please send me a copy of that issue as my parents were born in Prussia in 1923 and 1932. This would be of great interest to me.

"Ralph Regehr"

Received Dec 23, 1997

Editor's Note: Unfortunately we have no back issues.

Dear Del:

What a nice surprise! Thank-you very much for your notes and for the 2 copies of "*Preservings*". I have just begun to dip into them and find them fascinating. What a lot of work must have gone into them! God bless you and yours.

"Katherine Enns"

425W Ave., B#6,
Buhler, Kansas, 67522
Received Dec 23, 1997

Agatha C. Enns Ratzlaff
31861 Beech Avenue,
Abbotsford, B. C., V2T 1G8
Dec 17, 1997

The Editor
Preservings

Dear Sir:

Thanks for the December 11, 1997, copy of *Preservings*. I particularly appreciate Henry Schapansky's article, "Bergthaler/Chortitzer Friesens" (pp. 33-40).

No. 1. Jakob Friesen of Lindenau 1776 was my 4th great-grandfather. His daughter, No. 1.3. Aganetha (b. 1765) and her third husband, Isaac Ens (1773-1794), were my 3rd-great-grandparents; and their son, Isaac Ens (1794-1839) and Maria Lehn (1794-1855) were my 2nd great-grandparents.

Aganetha (nee Friesen) had a daughter, Aganeta Dyck (b. 1789) from her first marriage to an unknown Dyck; and a daughter Susanna Dyck (b. 1808) from her fifth marriage to Nicholas Dyck. I am very interested in hearing from anyone who has information on these two daughters.

Sincerely, "Agatha C. Enns Ratzlaff"

Leland Harder
Box 363, North Newton
67117-0363

Dear Friends;

Sorry we've run out of photos, but we send our note to say thanks for the latest *Preservings*. What a comprehensive NEWSLETTER, which is almost a misnomer. I fast read it page by page, and enjoyed it greatly. Being no expert on any of the subjects covered, I could read it with pleasure. Especially enjoyed the letters by James Urry, et al. Jack Thiessen was par for the course.
Love "Leland Harder"

701 Patricia Avenue
Winnipeg, MB
R3T 3A8
December 15, 1997

Dear *Preservings*;

I have enjoyed reading some of the first person stories of families in *Preservings* and was pleasantly surprised to find two stories, Alfred van Vogt: Science Fiction Master, and Henry Abrams and family, respectively fit into my maternal and paternal family trees. I was also pleased to read a favourable review of *In Her Own Voice, Childbirth Stories from Mennonite Women* in the latest issue.

I recently read Di Brandt's latest book *Dancing Naked* to see whether I had missed something crucial before I responded, in my most strident feminist voice. (Harry Loewen's reference to "our strident Mennonite feminists" in *Preservings*, No 11, December 1997). I was not aware that Di Brandt was trying to write history but assumed that she, being first and foremost a poet, was speaking from her own experience. I was also not aware that she was a barn burner (*Preservings*, No. 10, p. 1, June 1997). Was that perhaps a typographical error and what you meant to say was bra burner? Bra burning has a long and distinguished association with militant and strident feminists. My dictionary defines strident as having a shrill sound or creaking, grating sound. Every one knows the definition of feminist or do they? It is anyone, man or woman, who is for women. Now what possible reason would women have for being strident or for that matter to be for women? Does a woman who dares to speak her own truth sound strident because she is speaking, not only with her own stifled voice, but also with the memory of voices of her mother, her grandmother and great grandmother--the generations of women since the burning times who whispered their stories in the kitchen and dared not step out of line. When her throat finally opens her voice creaks and grates on the mild-mannered "masculinist" ears it falls on. It may help if you understand that women writers are speaking from the perspective of a woman's body and mind. Before you stereotype women as "strident" and "militant" try listening with your heart as well as your mind. But that would not create controversy would it?

Yours truly,
"Katharine Martens"

Editor's Note: The politically correct rhetoric is all there, evidently, but based upon the 30 or 40 or so biographies of women published in Issue 10 *Preservings*, June 1997, (many of which were written by women), the women Ms. Martens is speaking of must be from Mars or some other exotic place. We may be from the sticks here in Steinbach but we do require at least a modicum of research before condemning an entire culture and thereby also the women within it, based solely upon one individual's experiences, particularly, if those experiences were within an entirely different culture, that of American Fundamentalism/Evangelicalism.

"The memory of voices ...of the generations of women since the burning times..." simply will not suffice in the face of an abundance of evidence to date indicating that women within conservative Mennonite culture were significantly more empowered than comparable women in other contemporary cultures. It would seem imperative to study the reasons for this unusual empowerment rather than condemning them. It would be worthwhile to research and identify the roots of Biblical feminism within the conservative faith tradition and to understand why it flourished among the Kleine Gemeinde, Berghthaler and Old Colonier, which continued to treasure the old ways, and also to document the rapid decline of Biblical feminism after WWI.

A culture should not be condemned solely on the basis of recaptured memory by people living several generations later, or on the basis of one person's experience particularly when they already state that they have done no historical research and are not historians. Ironically, the Rudnerweider, within whose bosom Ms. Brandt grew up, shared her belief that traditional Mennonite faith and culture was evil and to be eradicated as quickly as possible, although for different reasons, of course.

I conclude my comments on a positive note and encourage Ms. Martens and Ms. Brandt to use their significant energies and talents to marshal and document the amazing matriarchal component of their culture and heritage, something we should all be proud of and celebrate. Perhaps they could get a government grant to translate and publish the Abraham ("Fula") Reimer journals which consist of some 500 pages, half of which documents the life-world of his wife, the irrepressible Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, matriarch of Steinbach. Her story at this time represents the most fully documented 19th century Mennonite woman I know of, but I am sure there are more. It is desperately important that these stories and whatever oral tradition still exists be collected and documented.

As far as bra burners are concerned, I must confess I always kind of liked the idea, the act certainly demonstrated more intelligence than barn-burning. Possibly some individuals somewhere misread the instructions from headquarters or the type was faded, resulting in the wrong victim getting burned, in this case the ancient matriarchs. I know I will be criticized for this, but I don't think they deserved it.

Jerry & Margery Barkman
137 NW Reed Lane,
Dallas, OR 97338
January 2, 1998

Delbert Plett, Editor
Preservings
P.O. Box 1960
Steinbach, Manitoba
Canada ROA 2A0

Dear Delbert,

Thank you for the recent contacts we have had. I did receive the last copy of *Preservings* and read with interest the article on Dennis Reimer. I also noted the brief article on John Denver. I attended Tabor College with David Deutschendorf from Corn, OK. I don't know if Dave was a brother or a cousin to John Denver. I haven't completed my research on Dyan Cannon but will send you the information as soon as I confirm it. Thank you also for the promotion of our Barkman Letter. I am enclosing a copy of Issue 2. Your comments will be appreciated.

I am continuing my research on the beginnings of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. It is clear to me that more research needs to be done on the connection between Elder Jacob A. Wiebe and the Kleine Gemeinde. Your short section on this connection in Volume 6 of your books is intriguing. I am trying to make contact with Leland Harder in Newton, Kansas to see how I might access more material on Elder Wiebe.

I am also interested in how my great-grandfather, Peter M. Barkman, moved from the Kleine Gemeinde to the KMB. I suspect a strong personal contact with Elder Wiebe since Peter M. and his family emigrated to Hillsboro, Kansas as part of the Gnadenau KMB Church. The problem is that although Peter M. kept a diary, he makes little or no reference to his spiritual pilgrimage. Why did he move from Rückenau, Molotschna and exactly when? We suspect it was somewhere around 1869 based upon the birthdates of two of his children. All of these questions will probably have to go unanswered since we simply don't have the information available.

What access do you have to materials about the question I outline above? In particular, I am interested in the connection between Elder Wiebe and the Kleine Gemeinde. Any help you can give will be appreciated.

Keep up the good work in Steinbach. I look forward to your periodical and appreciate your love of the history of our people.

Your Cousin and Friend, "Jerry Barkman"

Editor's Note: Additional information can be gleaned from Volumes 3-5, "Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series". What it needs is someone to start collecting all the documents and information regarding the Crimean KMB and its roots in the KG and Molotschna. I am glad you are interested in the topic and will try to help you in whatever way I can.

Dr. Milton K. Reimer
507 Central Ave.
New Rockford, ND 58356

Thank-you so much for the valuable service which you are preforming in documenting our heritage. I appreciate receiving the *Preservings* and would like to stop in for a visit with you on my next trip to Steinbach.

Sincerely "M. K. Reimer"

January 1, 1998

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am with this correspondence requesting to become a member of the HSHS. I have enclosed \$10.00 for the new issue of *Preservings* and \$10.00 for the first part of the Special Double Issue dated June, 1997. Del Plett has recently sent to me Part Two. I found the feature article on Anna Doerksen to be very interesting in that she is a distant relative of mine. If you have a listing of other published materials other than those on the enclosed brochure, please let me know.

My address is: Jim and Karen Doerksen,
3917 Stanton St., Colorado Springs, CO. 80907.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely, "Jim Derksen"

Theodore (Ted) E. Friesen
Box 720, Altona,
Manitoba, R0G OBO
January 5, 1998

Delbert Plett, Q.C.
Box 1960
Steinbach MB ROA 2A0

Dear Delbert:

Attached is my membership fee for the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society for the coming year.

I very much appreciate the paper *Preservings* that comes out quarterly [actually its biannually]. It amazes me at the prodigious amount of work that you do personally, Delbert, in recording the history of Mennonite society in the East Reserve. Most commendable!

We missed you at the last Advisory meeting in Winnipeg on December 18th [regarding the Public Prairie Television Video, "The story of the Mennonites in Manitoba"]. There were only three people there, namely Lawrence, Royden and myself plus John Condra and George Simandas. However, I do believe we did get some work done and gave George direction for the completion of the video. He thinks it may be finished by spring of 1998. We shall see.

Wishing you and your family a Blessed New Year.

Sincerely,"T. E. Friesen"

TEF:wm

P.S. Of particular interest in *Preservings* was the article on the Bergthaler/Chortitzer Friesens. I stem from part of that clan. What made it even

more valuable was that it contained information I did not have. So I am grateful indeed to you and Henry Schapansky. Altona now has 2 Q.C.'s. Still checking on plans for the 125th commemoration with the Town of Altona.

Editor's Note: The significance of the moral and financial support of Ted Friesen and his printing firm to innumerable cultural endeavours within the Mennonite community is beyond reckoning. I always feel privileged to be counted among the friends and acquaintances of Ted Friesen.

3105 Holman Court
Midwest City, Ok, 73110
January 7, 1998

Dear Delbert;

.....I have sent Mr. Reimer [Walter, the father of Major-General Denis J. Reimer] the copy of *Preservings* you sent me for him. I have not talked to him since the interview. I am sure he will enjoy the copy. Thanks for sending one.

The Mennonite Church (the former KMB) in Hillsboro, Kansas will be celebrating the 125th anniversary of the migration of the Gnadenu church in 1874. I have been asked if I will help with some of the typing, etc. I have typed up the Gnadenu Cemetery listing as it was done in 1980, and I will send you a copy. They are planning to do an update to get everyone who has died since then on the list. Will also send you a copy of that for your records. Will send more as I get it.

Best wishes for the New Year. "Jo Ferguson"

Editor's Note: We appreciate the news from Hillsboro that the descendants of the KMB settlers are also planning a 125th anniversary celebration. Please keep us updated as this is an encouragement for us and, no doubt, will also provide ideas.

I have a personal interest in the KMB story as my great-great grandfather, Martin Klassen (1822-ca.82) settled there in spring of 1875, although much of his family assimilated so fast that they sort of disappeared.

Jo Ferguson also shared with us the sad news of the death of Rebecca Esther Reimer on January 31, 1998, at the age of 85. She was the mother of Major-General Dennis Joe Reimer featured in *Preservings*, Issue 11, December 1997, page 20-21. Our condolences to the family. Funeral services were held in Melford, Oklahoma. *Enid News and Eagle*, February 2, 1998.

13 - 27th Ave. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55414-3101, USA
Jan. 22 1998

Delbert Plett, Editor
Preservings
Box 1960, Steinbach
Canada, ROA 2A0

Dear Delbert,

Hearty congratulate you on your prodigious and purposive scholarship. I am delighted to see broadening horizons: from *Kleine Gemeinde* to East Reserve Mennonites as a whole, from there to all of the groups and people in the area, and from there to a still larger community, e.g., Low Germans, including non-Mennonite East Frisians, as a group sharing a linguistic heritage, and to the broader geographic horizon, including Latin American Mennonites with a shared religious heritage. The last issue of *Preservings* alone provided sufficient stimuli to occupy me for months, nay years, if I was capable of following up on all the research, writing, correspondence, etc., which it causes me to want to do.

However, I also have some concerns about both the editorial tone and the content of some of the material. I assume--at least I hope--that the use of such extreme terms as "ethnic cleansing" and "holocaust" is meant to stimulate reflection and debate, because playing the devil's advocate and making provocative statements is indeed sometimes necessary to promote serious reflection. I hope that your readers will view the terminology in that light.

It is, however, inevitable that some of this will seep through to a broader public, which is likely to get only a brief, second-hand account of your statements. What are the implications of this?

How would Bosnian Muslim refugees feel about reading terms like "ethnic cleansing" to describe events which few people living today experienced and which could not possibly be regarded as one-billionth as important or traumatizing as what has happened in recent years in their homeland?

How would Jews feel about the use of a term like "holocaust" to describe the very real horrors perpetrated on tens of thousands of Soviet Mennonites, but primarily as a part of an overall reign of terror which killed millions of Russians and Ukrainians as well? Where is the sense of proportion?

Your repeated use of "proselytizing" strikes me as very self-defensive. The real problem is that the vast majority of adherents of all churches and faiths, including the Mennonites, unthinkingly accept the indoctrination to which they have been subjected without the serious reflection which is necessary to make an inherited creed a personal conviction.

"Proselytizing" can have the healthy effect of forcing people to think. If it results in a change of religious affiliation, there was a lack of personal conviction to begin with. If it leads those who are "tempted" to reaffirm their previous beliefs, it has the very positive effect of changing superficial acceptance of what one has been taught into true personal conviction. Menno Simons did not preach or practice isolation. He engaged in vigorous debate with those of opposing views. The very essence of his principles was the idea that each person should draw his or her own conclusions as to right and wrong, truth and falsehood, what to believe and what not to believe.

Were the Mennonite soldiers who fought in World War I and later wars "heroes or dupes?"

They were heroes if they fought in accordance with their own personal convictions, in spite of overwhelming community disapproval. If they fought contrary to their own personal beliefs, giving in to pressure from outsiders, they were not. At the time of World War I (and much longer), the Mennonites in the East Reserve lived in a very insular world. Community pressure was strong; pressure from outsiders, negligible.

Should *Preservings* devote a special issue to the “cultural rape” perpetrated by the Norris government?

No. It ill behooves a privileged group to dwell on real or perceived mistreatment of their ancestors in an orgy of self-pity. (When you look at the disproportionate number of Mennonites in the upper circles of the political, business and academic world in Canada today, and when you look at relative prosperity, can anyone deny they are privileged?)

When I attended school, there was no course on provincial or local history, nor even more than the briefest passing reference to it in Canadian history courses. That was a deficiency of the educational system and should be remedied. An objective account of the historical past would be a beneficial contribution to knowledge, but not a polemic written from the perspective of self-perceived victims. And if you are representing today’s generation, victimization can only be a self-delusion.

If you can really find people who are still alive and who suffered serious personal trauma because of the unwise policies of a long-gone day, by all means interview them and publish the interviews. But nursing the grievances of our ancestors is one of the world’s biggest problems today.

That the Mennonites still retained a collective memory of the horrors their sixteenth-century ancestors experienced was beneficial, at least if this led to the same kind of concern for others as that of the Mennonite refugee who saved his pursuer from drowning, despite his knowledge that this would lead to his own execution. The fact that these events still coloured Mennonite perceptions of today’s Catholics was bad. (I use the past tense, because I know it was true in the 1940s.)

While I have limited knowledge of public policies toward the Mennonites in World War I, at least insofar as it may have differed from that of other German-Canadians, I am old enough to be able to speak from personal experience about what happened in World War II.

The notion that the government gave Mennonites any reason to emigrate to Latin America after World War II is false. Religion was still taught in the school I attended. German was taught as early as the third grade. I still briefly attended supplementary Saturday morning German classes.

If you want to talk about governmental “interference,” let me relate one incident, so you can judge for yourself whether the government did anything improper. One year the public inspector visited the school on Pentecost Monday and found it closed. The next day our teacher, the highly respected late George K. Reimer,

asked whether there had been worship services that day. Either he or the inspector, or both, obviously felt that this would have been a justification for closing the school. There had been no such services. Taking the day off had simply become a matter of custom; it had no religious significance. Is questioning such a custom “unwarranted interference” with religious freedom?

The real reason why the Mennonites migrated to Mexico and Paraguay after World War II is that they were scared about the exposure of their youth to outside contacts, a “danger” in which the government played virtually no role. They wanted more isolation, because they subconsciously recognized that often there was no depth of conviction strong enough to compete with other beliefs. In this respect they were the opposite of Menno Simons, who welcomed such a competition of ideas.

Let a predominantly Mennonite journal concentrate on the wrongs which have been done to others, whether or not the Mennonites were among the victimizers, but especially when they were. Wasn’t the Ukrainian perspective of farmhands and housemaids who worked for Mennonites rather mixed? Was anything the Norris government did to the Mennonites even one-tenth as inhumane as the treatment of the Mennonite landless by Mennonite property-owners in Russia?

We all have a heritage which includes things of which to be proud and things of which to be ashamed. Preserve the former; learn from, and compensate for, the latter. I don’t see where an emphasis on the idea that we are victimized because of what others once upon a time did to others, who just happened to be our forebears, fits into the picture--especially in the case of members of a church whose most basic doctrine is proclaimed to be that if someone smite thee on the cheek, turn the other cheek to him.

As ever, the double dissident,

Edward R. Brandt

P.S. I know this is much too long for a letter to the editor. In part that is due to the verbosity of being a professor. Do with the letter what you like: print it, print excerpts or simply treat it as feedback.

Editor’s Note: Dr. Brandt’s negative views regarding his Kleine Gemeinde ancestors and heritage are already well-known and abundantly demonstrated in his review of *Leaders*, Vol 6, Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series, 932 pages, in *Menn. Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1995, pages 129-132. Dr. Brandt used the review as a vehicle for a polemic about the evils of his home community of Blumenort where he grew up in the 1930s. I understand from Dr. Brandt’s classmates that he already possessed these views when he started school there. I always feel sorry for people that are so driven by negative feelings, for they are the ones shortchanging themselves. I realize also that these people are the inheritance of all cultures. Within southern Manitoba Mennonite culture, it has become desirable conduct to deprecate whatever is traditional and old, seemingly often an excuse for those too lazy to do some actual down and dirty

research.

Dr. Brandt does make many good points so that I decided to publish the entire letter. In terms of a response, I will restrict myself to one comment: I fail to see where the writing and documenting of our history is or can be construed “as a self-deluded victimization.” First the Provincial Government “kicks butt” in southern Manitoba, and now we’re supposed to feel bad, guilty, or dirty for writing about these experiences? I don’t think so! Furthermore, if exposure to different views is so beneficial for conservative and/or orthodox Mennonites, presumably it is equally beneficial for Reformed and/or Separatist-Pietist Mennonites to be exposed to the truth, not so?

Beyond this, there is no need to respond to each issue raised. I am confident our readership is intelligent enough to form their own conclusions.

Stan R. Harder
1047 North Waco Ave.
Wichita, Kansas, 67203
(316) 267-4926
Jan. 15, 1998

Henry Fast, President
HSHS, Box 1960
Steinbach, Manitoba ROA 2A0

Dear Mr. Fast:

Some years ago I had the privilege of visiting the Mennonite Heritage Centre and speaking with Peter Rempel about my ancestors, about whom I knew very little at the time. Thanks to his help and direction I bought and studied the *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, in which I discovered that my ancestors are: Franz Harder, (25 Oct., 1805-9 Apr. 1874) in the *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch* A34, and son Franz Harder (25 Apr., 1829-17 April 1894) BGB B65. Contrary to the note in the translation in the BGB, the second Franz Harder died and was buried at Henderson, Nebraska. His obituary is by H. P. Penner, “Henderson,” *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 4 Ag. 1894. In other words, although it is true that Sara Harder Warkentin, and later the mother Elisabeth Harder moved to Oregon, the comment is wrong in the implication that the family moved to Oregon. The eldest son Martin, the rest of his siblings and his descendants, including myself, remained, largely, in the Midwest U.S.

It occurs to me that the Canadian descendants of related families, also, may not know whatever happened to Franz Harder and his children. Likewise, because of the separation of the family in the 1870s there is a substantial gap in our understanding, as well. We do not know what became of the 42 family members, all siblings and nieces and nephews of Franz Harder, who went with Gerhard Wiebe to Canada. Namely:

1. **Anganeta** b. 11 Sept 1827, d. ?, Bap. 26 May 1846, m. 16 May 1848 **Jacob Hiebert**: BGB A14 and B64. The Jacob Hiebert family had 11 children: Jacob; Heinrich; Franz; Peter;

Johann, Kornelius; Katarina; Aganeta; Peter; Abraham; Jacob. The family settled on the East Reserve in Manitoba.

2. **Franz Harder (II)** (above)

3. **Abraham Harder** b. 6 Nov. 1830, d. ? Bap. 19 May 1852, in 9 Nov. 1852 Wife: Anna Falk. The Abraham Harder family had 5 children: Peter; Anna; Abraham; Katarina; Heinrich: BGB B93. They moved to Canada in July 1874 on the S.S. Peruvian. However, son Peter is not on the passenger list and may have been married and stayed in Russia. Daughter Anna was married to Johann Hiebert (BGB B388) and came to Canada on the S.S. Nova Scotian No. 46, which arrived in Canada 27 July 1874.

4. **Kornelius Harder** b. 15 Sept 1833, d. ? Bap. 31 May 1854, m. 21 Nov. 1854, Wife: Anna Hiebert. The Kornelius Harder family had 12 children: Elisabeth; Anna; Franz; Elisabeth; Helena; Katarina; Heinrich; Abraham +; Sara; Maria: BGB B129. They left for Canada on the S.S. Quebec, and arrived on July 20, 1875.

5. **Katarina** b. 7 Mar. 1835, d. ?, Bap. 31 May 1854, m. 1 Feb. 1859, Husb. Peter Sawatzky. BGB C6. This family may have stayed in Russia. There are no entries for Peter Sawatzky in the passenger lists going to Canada, the 1881 Canadian Federal census, or the Canadian church books.

6. **Peter Harder** (twin) b. 26 Jan. 1837, d. ?, Bap. 4 June 1856, m. 12 Sept. 1858, Wife: Elisabeth Krahn. Peter Harder had seven children: Anna; Elisabeth; Peter; Peter; Anganeta; Maria; and Helena: BGB B165. They emigrated to Canada on the S. S. Nova Scotian No. 90, arriving Oct. 22, 1874.

7. **Jacob** + (twin) b. 26 Jan. 1837 d. prob. died as infant.

8. **Anna** b. 23 Dec. 1840, d. ?, Bap. 1 June 1859, m. 25 Sept. 1860, Husb.: **Peter Funk**. They had 6 children: Anna; Peter; Anganeta; Elisabeth; Jacob; and Magareta. The family stayed in Russia: BGB B207.

Do you know if the descendants of any of the above family members have undertaken to work on their genealogies in Canada? Likewise are you aware of the whereabouts of any of the descendants of these people? Are you aware of where the death dates could be for these people? I am also writing the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Do you have other suggestions?

Your help will be very much valued. Sincerely, "Stan R. Harder"

Editor's Note: We will appreciate a letter or call from readers with information and photographs regarding these families.

Regina Neufeld
Box 1034, Niverville
Manitoba, R0A 1E0

Dear Mr. Plett:

Enclose is the letter received from K. Nairne. I hope the enclosed address to England will reveal some information.

Sincerely, "Regina Neufeld"

Editor's Note: Here follows the letter. Some of our readers may wish to obtain additional information regarding the "Dr. Bernardo orphan boys" placed with Chortitzer homes in the 1890s.

22 December 1997
Ms. Regina Neufeld
Box 1034
Niverville, Manitoba
R0A 1E0

Dear Ms. Neufeld:

The December issue of *Preservings* was forwarded to me because of my interest in Clarence New who was placed with a Niverville family in 1898 by the Dr. Bernardo Homes.

In 1898 Clarence was placed with Peter and Anna Penner (DOB 12 October 1838 and 26 April 1838). The 1901 census lists Clarence, born 02 February 1884, as living with Mr. and Mrs. Penner and their son Abraham (DOB 19 September 1877). I have information from Bernardo's in England that Clarence moved in 1907 to Lamber Mill, Grandview, Manitoba.

I'm doing genealogical research for a friend whose father (also sponsored to Canada by Bernardo Homes in 1913) was Clarence New's cousin. I would deeply appreciate any help you can be in locating any descendants of the Penner family to obtain any references or information about one Clarence New in your area.

You are undoubtedly aware of the extensive records the Bernardo Homes kept on children placed in Canada. If you have not already done so, you can write for information on your uncle, Edward Dudman, at the following address:

Bernardo's Reg. Office
Tanner's Lane
Barkingside, Ilford
Essex, England
IG6 1QG

They will provide a brief history as well as pictures. Dr. Bernardo was (in)famous for distributing pictures of children when they came into care and after they had been in foster care for a while. My friend sent a small donation of about \$20.00 to offset Bernardo's costs.

Thank you for your time. If you can be of any assistance, your help will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely, Ken J. Nairne
#9 Elderwood Dr.
Brandon, Manitoba, R7A 2J3
Tel.: (204) 726-4162

Jake Fehr
Box 64, R.R.#4
Saskatoon, SK
S7K 3J7
January 6, 1998

Dear Orlando:

First of all I want to thank the Historical Society for sending me a copy of the #11 December 1997 *Preservings*, since my ancestors moved to Swift Current from the Winkler area

in Manitoba, and then a lot of them moved to Mexico. The article on Mexican Mennonites (page 22) interested me since all the church records were taken to Mexico. Would you know if there is a Gemeinde Buch available? I would be interested in the Swift Current Colonia.

The Cornelius Banman could be related to me (the one mentioned on page 24). My grandfather was Franz Banman (as you can see on the enclosed copy). He did not move to Mexico, but I think his brother or brothers did.

My cousin Viola Beck also is very interested in family history. If she is not presently on your mailing list, I would suggest you send her a copy of #11 *Preservings*. I believe she would apply for membership.

Is there an English version of *75 Jahren Mennoniten in Mexiko*? Is it available in Canada? What is the price?

Yours truly,
Jake Fehr

Editor's Note: There is the Reinländer Gemeinde Buch published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in 1994 and also the *West Reserve Settlement Registers 1880* published in March 1998. Together these books provide the "Old Coloniers" with just about the best documented genealogical background of any Russian Mennonite denomination. These books can be ordered from the MMHS, c/o Menn. Heritage Centre, 800 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4. You may also wish to contact the Mexican Mennonite Historical Society, c/o George Rempel, 804-325 6th St., Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, R6W 1G5.

6501 Springhill Drive. N.W.
Albany, OR 97321
U.S.A.
January 12, 1998

Greetings, Mr. Plett!

Just a note to say thank you for the December issue of *Preservings*. On page 17 I noted the question in my letter, and found at least part of the answer on pages 22 - 27; a very interesting and quite comprehensive article. Very quick service, I would say, and knowing the right source must be a factor.

I am well into the issue, and find it makes for a good way to spend part of a winter day. Weather is quite mild here, but seems severe in some areas.

It was news to me that broken agreements by the Canadian Government played a part in the decision to emigrate to Mexico. I salute the courageous leaders and people, of such an undertaking, and am happy for any, or all mended relationships. We all stand debtors to God's grace.

Regards, Clysta Buerge

* A nephew (by marriage) works for a Seed Co. with headquarters in Holland. He made two trips there in this past year. I asked him to bring me some of these commemorative stamps, which he was able to do - again "finding the right source"! Enjoy.



A special stamp commemorating the 500 birthday of Menno Simons was issued by the Dutch Postal Service in 1997. Courtesy of Clysta Buerge.

[The article] *Preservings* No. 11, Dec. 1997. My grandfather Franz Froeses', Menno Simons Book, plus the added information of the Froese family background is all very interesting and helpful for our records.

Preservings No. 11, 1997, page 54-57: This Elizabeth Hiebert Regehr's mother's maiden name was Margaretha Friesen, her parents died within a year of one another. The Franz Froeses took this young orphan of 2 1/2 years into their home. In Sept. 1873 she was married to David Hiebert. In the year of 1874 they emigrated to Manitoba, settling in the Rosenort area, where the Franz Froeses resided. But they were later informed that the winters further south were not as long and harsh. They with others moved to Plymouth, Nebraska. David Hiebert shepherded the small congregation until his somewhat sudden death July of 1900. Shortly after the death of her husband David, Margaretha Friesen Hiebert returned to Hochstadt, Manitoba. She passed away March 13, 1909. 12 children were born to them of whom four preceded her in death.

"Dave and Elma Goossen"

I find reading the *Preservings* very educational and rewarding. To get all this material together must take hours and hours of work. I appreciate the good work you are doing and I am sure were my father still living he would be enthralled with each issue. In honour of my father, Mr. John C. Reimer, I would like to support the *Preservings* with \$_____.

Yours truly "Almon Reimer"
Box 1026, Steinbach, R0A 2A0

Box 20, Grp 20, R.R.1
Lockport, Manitoba
R0C 1W0

Dear Sir:
Re: Letters-to-the Editor

Having received gratis several editions of "Preservings", I would now like to send you my membership fee and a small donation, so that I can feel free to offer advice, praise or criticism. The "family" submitted articles and pictures are priceless treasures. "Preservings" is an outstanding Historical Society Newsletter, and far surpasses any others that I subscribe to or have seen in libraries. Keep up the good work.

Far be it for me to try to curtail freedom of expression, or to deny your right as editor to your personal perceptions, prejudices and biases in the Editorial section but I am somewhat uneasy with your style of editorializing in other areas of your newsletter.

For example in the No. 11 issue on p. 22-27 your report on the Mexican Mennonite 75th Anniversary you frequently resort to editorializing. All my positive feelings of joy and pride in the Mennonite accomplishments in Mexico was tarnished by the frequent dredging up of your negative, emotional prejudices and biases on the Manitoba school issue and your references to certain present day Canadian Mennonite attitudes. It would have been acceptable for you to have given a brief historical background of the colony; but all that emotional/judgmental pros and cons of the political diatribe detracted from your report. Those aspects belong on the editorial pages.

Again in the same issue, in the feature article on the front pages, you quote a beautiful excerpt from Balzer's "Faith and Reason" which paraphrases the concept that those that strive after great wealth and high distinction in this world are restricted in spiritual benefits. You use this argument to justify the migration to the Americas by the Mennonites in the 1870s and implying that those who remained in Russia as people who were not willing to give up their wealth (although in another section of the newsletter you state that 80% of them were landless and poor and needed help from America). Again that is a debatable issue. You are entitled to your opinion. But I am somewhat baffled by your "so-called" philosophy of an admiration for a rejection of wealth, on the one hand, but on the other hand many of your articles are about people who have acquired [dubious] fame or wealth. e.g. John Denver, Major-Gen. Dennis Reimer, wealthy business entrepreneurs, etc.

Dear Friends,

Thanks so much for sending me the December '97 copy of "Preservings". It is most interesting since I know many of the families mentioned in the issue.

Enclosed is my cheque for \$20.00 - \$10 for one year membership and \$10 contribution. I did not want to tear out the page in the "letter" so am sending this note instead - why not enclose a separate order form next time? (not part of the issue).

Sincerely,
Minnie Braun
Box 423
Reston, Manitoba
R0M 1X0

Editor's Note: There is supposed to be an insert in each copy of *Preservings* that goes out, with an order form, etc. Sorry.

Feb. 17, 1998
Box 97, Rosenort
Mennonite Heritage Village,
Box 1136 Steinbach, Man.
ROG IWO, Man.

Dear Sirs or Madam:

Enclosed please find a cheque of \$25.00 as payment for the *Preservings* books received.

We find these interesting and informative. I will just touch on a few points. *Preservings* No. 10 June 1997 page 17. A letter from my grandmother Anna Klassen Goossen to Isaac Warkentin "... is my Mariechen alive, is she well and healthy?" This little girl was my father's youngest sister. She was married to John K. Esau in 1893. "The only child that is yet with grandma is son Peter", who was my father. I am enclosing a few family pages which might be of interest to you.

March 11, 1998
Box 37, Kola
Manitoba, R0M 1B0

Dear Editor *Preservings*

I was appalled at the suggestion that the Mennonites should lobby the government for redress because of the governments' ethnic cleansing back in the 1920s. Is this the Mennonite way? Are we carrying a grudge?

You cannot rewrite history! It happened, so it happened. No amount of money (or anything else for that matter) will change that. The current government is not guilty and no one can apologize for someone else nor the dead. Christians being scattered is one way that God uses to spread the Gospel.

Sincerely Mrs. Agatha Rempel

Editor's Note: Many cultural communities in Canada have suffered from ethnic cleansing measures, including the Natives, French, Jews, Ukrainians, Japanese, Chinese, etc. One of the points of my editorial was that these communities and particularly those individuals who suffered because of these measures should not have to feel guilty because they were the victims of what I refer to as "xenophobic Anglo-conformity psychosis" within Canadian culture. I am thinking in this regard of the hundreds of Chortitzers and Sommerfelder who died from disease in Puerto Casada, Paraguay, or the Old Colony ministers imprisoned in Winnipeg jails in the 1920s, suffering persecution for their faith. Do their voices not need to be heard? How can Canadian society ever come to a more honest appraisal of itself if their stories are not heard?

Feb 14, 1998

Dear Sir:

Your articles are littered excessively with adjectives, such as-----prominent, wealthy, etc. I do not object to your use of these articles, but I do question your criteria of their worthiness, which seems based on their wealth or prominence.

My general impression of you is that you are not secure in your own belief of what is meant by the----what you call the "true Anabaptist vision" or of your concept of the "evil of pietist/separatist/fundamentalism". To me your articles are often contradictory. You come across as sometimes admiring simplicity and on the other hand ostentatious wealth. It often seems to me your rhetoric is used to fit your prejudices. For example in your assessment of the story in *Das Verstossne Kind* you selected the action of one family to illustrate the true "anabaptist vision" of the community, whereas I was shocked by the "unchristian" attitude of that community in general.

In your editorial you pose the question if there would be an interest in a study of the impact of the 1916 Manitoba School Question on Mennonite history. I have often meditated that question and regretted my lack of background knowledge on that issue and I would be very interested in such a study. But the way you word your question on p. 12, No. 11 would lead me to express a desire that this issue should be examined by people trained in the art of historical research and not by "myopic Orangemen" or by someone like you Mr. Plett, who calls it "heinous ethnic cleansing rape."

A small comment on the picture p. 12 of the No. 11 issue of the two young men from the Steinbach area who served in WWI, why is it headed "Heroes or Dupes?" maybe they were neither. Maybe they enlisted for a thirst for adventure, or maybe they rebelled against their stifling boring existence in a strict family or community environment.

Let me again express my admiration for the excellent job you and your staff are doing. Even your "soap oratory confrontational editorial style" I admire----it takes guts-----and it certainly jolts me out of drifting into an apathetic state of indifference. Helen Johnson, Lockport, Manitoba



HANOVER STEINBACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Please note that your annual membership subscription for HSHS is due January 1, 1999. No other notice or reminder will be sent.

Yes, I wish to become a member of The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society (or renew my membership) and receive the HSHS newsletter twice a year. Enclosed is my \$20 membership fee.

ORDER FORM

- Please send me Vol. 1: Working Papers. I enclose \$10.00 plus \$2.00 postage.
- Please send me Vol. 2: Bergthal Gemeindebuch. I enclose \$20.00 plus \$3.00 postage.
- Please send me Vol. 3: Historical Sketches. I enclose \$30.00 plus \$4.00 postage.
- Please send me Obershulze Jacob Peters. I enclose \$10.00 plus \$2.00 postage.

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I enclose my cheque for \$ _____ as a donation. Please send me a tax deductible receipt.

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Send to: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc.
Box 1960
Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0

News

A. G. M. Jan. 17, 1998: A Smashing Success

Banquet and Entertainment.

An enthusiastic crowd of 160 people turned out for a banquet and evening's entertainment in Vollwerk (Mitchell), Manitoba, for the A.G.M. January 17, 1998. The theme of the evening was to celebrate the history of the Chortitzer/Bergthaler Gemeinde, one of the two founding peoples of the East Reserve in 1874. Those attending the banquet were served a delicious meal of borscht, ham and farmer sausage and fried potatoes.

The audience was enthralled by the after dinner speaker, Dr. Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg, speaking on the topic of Chortitzer journals and diaries and their significance in the life world of the early pioneers. See feature story for the full text of Dr. Loewen's presentation.

The evening's entertainment started with "Op Dietsch Lach'e", a drama group directed by Grunthal playwright Anne Funk, with two performances. The first play, "Ella kjemmpet nich met Gjemach, literally "aging does not come without some pain", was a Plaut-dietsch skit about two sisters who get involved in telephone scam, featuring Anna Funk and Elfrieda Unger. In the story the two women are reading an ad in *Chatelaine* magazine offering an opportunity to earn \$1000 by telemarketing. When they dial the number listed, it turned out to be in Hong Kong and the wonderful marketing opportunity involved selling "U. F. O. abduction insurance."

John Toews joined Elfrieda and Anne for the second play in English, "Songs of the heart" about an opera singer star and an up-and-coming country western singer who come into conflict over their differing musical tastes. The opera singer detests country music and the country western singer does not recognize the opera star's musical prowess and fame. The audience rocked with laughter as the hilarious drama's unfolded. Anne Funk deserves our continued appreciation for her brilliant plays as does also her drama group, including Elfrieda Unger, John Toews and others, whose dramatic abilities have thrilled thousands in Manitoba and elsewhere.

The last item on the agenda was classical music with a Paraguayan guitar by Willie Wiebe, a great-grandson of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), leader of the Bergthaler people who settled in Hanover in 1874. Willie is an accomplished guitarist who is currently teaching at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg.

His medley of Paraguayan classical guitar music was a nice finishing touch to the evening, with pieces ranging from the serious--with a devotional theme written for the guitar by the composer Agustin Barrios after walk-

ing by an ancient Paraguayan cathedral and hearing a beautiful piece being sung, to a faster, and a more upbeat piece--a romantic movement written by the same composer after listening to the lively folk music played in the town square.

Equally enjoyable were Willie's introductions of the different pieces which he *ab libbed* in a beautiful flawless Plaut Dietsch. If Willie's great-grandfather, Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), was equally gifted it helps one to understand how he was able to orchestrate the transplantation of a community of 3000 people from one continent to another, and to accomplish the task with harmony and unity still prevailing, which stands to this day as a miracle of grace and Holy Spirit inspired leadership.

Annual General Meeting.

The business meeting chaired by President Orlando Hiebert was held just prior to the banquet. The meeting was informed that Doris Penner was not able to let her name stand again because of time restraint. Her valuable work in the HSHS was acknowledged and noted with thanks.

The A. G. M. saw the election of two new directors, Ken Rempel and Hilton Friesen.

Hilton Friesen is a Winnipeg businessman, owner of "Hilton House Interiors". He has been involved with genealogy and family history for many years. He is collaborating with

HSHS board member Ralph Friesen on a family history of Steinbach pioneer Abraham S. Friesen, his great-grandfather. He has also been actively involved in the "Family Tree Day" at the Heritage Village Museum sponsored by the HSHS.

Ken Rempel, Winnipeg, is employed as an agricultural consultant with Landmark Feeds. He is the son of Rev. William Rempel, Niverville, well known to *Preservings* readers for his writings about Chortitzer minister Heinrich Doerksen. Ken Rempel has an abiding interest in the history of his family and church background. He has indicated he will be undertaking a study of agriculture in the East Reserve, hopefully leading up to a paper which can be published in Volume Four of the ERHS or some future anthology of East Reserve articles.

We welcome Hilt and Ken to the board.

Reelected to the board for two years terms were Orlando Hiebert, Lois Loeppky, Randy Kehler, Cornie Martens, Royden Loewen, Henry Fast and Jake Doerksen. Other directors whose terms are up at the end of the 1998 term are Ralph Friesen, Lynette Plett, Delbert Plett and Paul Loewen.

Symposium.

The afternoon symposium was well attended with about 100 people taking part. The presentations were chaired by Dr. Adolf



An up-and-coming opera star (Frieda Unger) flanked by her companion (Anne Funk) cannot abide the singing of country music star Garth Brooks (John Toews) in an hilarious skit presented by Op Dietsch Lache. Photo courtesy of Doris Penner/Carillon News, January 26, 1998, page 8B.



Ken Rempel, new member of the HSHS board.



Hilton Friesen, new member of the HSHS board.

Ens who opened the meeting with a review of Chortitzer/Bergthaler historiography and recent developments in that field.

Bergthaler Historiography.

Dr. Ens stated that the Bergthaler were barely mentioned in the historical works of D. H. Epp and Peter M. Friesen. Consequently, the semi-autobiographical memoirs of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung* published by son Dietrich D. Wiebe in 1900, and translated and published in English in 1981, continues to be one of the more significant sources of information. Wiebe's book is supplemented by the memoirs of Klaas Peters, Grunthal, Manitoba and later Saskatchewan.

The main source for the average reader is Bill Schroeder's *Bergthal Colony* now in its third edition, serving as the standard text on the Bergthaler.

The formation of the community in Manitoba has received considerable attention, and various individual aspects have been written about and interpreted such as Dennis Stoesz' M. A. thesis and Lydia Penner's Hanover book, but there is no one single source. There are also some more general sources such as E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, the standard text on Mennonites in Manitoba, as well as local histories like Abe Warkentin's, *Reflections on our Heritage*, the New Bothwell book, Grunthal history, Niverville history, a biography of Oberschulz Jakob Peters, a collection of documents by J. H. Doerksen, and a number of excellent family histories published in recent years.

There are also topical studies such as Jake Peter's book on the Waisenamt. Recently the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society has pub-



HSHS board member Jake Doerksen and Rev. Cornie Rempel, Chortitz, visit during the break. Jake presented an important paper regarding the issue of education and the Mennonites 1916-19. Rev. Rempel has contributed several papers to Preservings over the past years.

lished a large variety of material in the "East Reserve Historical Series" Volumes 1, 3, and 3, 1300 pages in total. A considerable quantity of material has also been published in *Preservings*, the HSHS newsletter.

Dr. Ens concluded that "the pieces are there and the study of the Bergthaler, also known as the Sommerfeld and Chortitzer in Manitoba, is ready for the overarching analytical historical integration which will pull it all together."

H. Doerksen and the Sask. Sommerfelder.

The next speaker was Rev. William Rempel, Niverville, speaking about his great-grandfather Heinrich Doerksen (1855-1933), Schönthal, E. Reserve, and the formation of the Saskatchewan Sommerfelder Gemeinde. Rev. Rempel opened with an appropriate Biblical theme "Remove not the ancient landmark which Thy fathers have left."



Four speakers Adolf Enns, chair, Rev. William Rempel, Jake Doerksen and Conrad Stoesz presented papers during the history symposium starting at 3 p.m. In this photo we see Conrad Stoesz, presenting his paper on his great-grandfather Rev. Cornelius Stoesz (1836-1900).



The Reimer and Penner double-cousins visit: Wilmer Penner, Low German Guru, Sheila Reid, author, Doris Penner, journalist and Elaine Penner Rempel, visit during the break. In the background, over Wilmer's shoulder is Lynette Plett, HSHS board member, and behind her are HSHS board members Jake Doerksen and Hilt Friesen, "neighbouring".

The Sommerfelder Gemeinde in south-western Saskatchewan, in the Herbert area, was founded in 1904/5. Rev. Rempel used the journals of Heinrich Doerksen to outline the story of the founding of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde and its early history. The first problem encountered by those moving was that no ministers were found among the pioneers. The West Reserve Sommerfelder and the East Reserve Chortitzer, sister Gemeinden at the time, agreed that their ministerials would alternate in visiting the members there. Rev. Heinrich Doerksen, Schönthal, was to have oversight for this ministry and was to visit Herbert at least once a month.

The membership in Herbert sent a petition to the mother church on Feb. 1, 1906, to Abr. Doerksen, Sommerfeld, "...to send a minister brother to do the work of the Lord



President Orlando Hiebert chaired the business portion of the A.G.M. with Corporate Secretary Lynette Plett, recording the minutes. To the right hand side, front, is another frequent contributor Ernest Braun, and past the gentleman sitting beside him is HSHS board member Ralph Friesen, and to his left, brothers William C. S. and Cornie C. S. Friesen.

amongst us." The letter was sent by Heinrich M. Klassen.

During the period 1905-1911, Heinrich Doerksen went to Herbert at least two times a year. He made his first trip in April 1906. In June 1906, he and brother Abr. Doerksen, Aeltester of the larger Sommerfelder Gemeinde went to Herbert together and conducted the first baptism there. 160 people attended the communion services.

Some other significant events recorded in Heinrich Doerksen's diary regarding the Herbert Gemeinde: June 1908 11 souls baptized 241 at communion; July 25, 1910 new worship house dedicated; Aug. 13, 1910 automobile mentioned for the first time; 1911 brother David Doerksen elected as Aeltester. David Doerksen moved to Paraguay in 1948 and back to Canada in 1949.

The election of David Doerksen signalled the end of the active involvement of Heinrich Doerksen in the formation of the Saskatchewan Sommerfelder Gemeinde. But a great deal of ministerial interaction continued. The Manitoba Chortitzer and



The book table of "Mennonite Books" is always a popular browsing point for members of the audience as they check out the latest publications. Here Gilbert and Susan Brandt, explain some of the books they are featuring to David Voth, retired teacher.

Saskatchewan Sommerfelder worked hand-in-hand, a mutual cooperation which lasted into the 1970s.

Heinrich Doerksen has recorded all the messages he preached between 1881 and 1930, weddings and funerals he officiated, etc.

We thank Rev. Rempel for allowing us this valuable insight into the life and times of Heinrich Doerksen and the outreach to the church in Herbert, Saskatchewan. We also appreciate him sharing with us another glimpse at the journals of Heinrich Doerksen which from all appearances, may well be the most extensive journal or set of journals in the history of the East Reserve. We understand that Rev. Rempel is planning to publish these journals at some point and know that many historians, family researchers, and others, are anxiously awaiting an opportunity to start using this invaluable primary source, which may well totally alter our perceptions of the Chortitzer people.

Cornelius Stoesz.

Conrad Stoesz traced the history of his great-grandfather Cornelius Stoesz (1836-1900), Blumstein, E. Reserve. Cornelius was a brother to David Stoesz, Bergthal, who took over as Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde from Gerhard Wiebe, Chortitz, in 1881, and to Jakob Stoesz, Chortitzer Brandaeltester.

The Stoeszs' were obviously well-connected within Bergthaler circles, but Cornelius and David also had important family networks through their wives--sisters Aganetha and Maria Wiebe, respectively, whose sisters Katharina and Helena were married to the sons of Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84).

Conrad explained how these networks often seemed to associate Cornelius with important events in the Bergthaler story.

Cornelius played a significant role in the unfolding events. Conrad used journals and other early sources to illustrate these developments. He also expanded on the personal lives of Cornelius and Aganetha, adding a great deal of the human interest element.

Vollwerk, Manitoba.

It was rather appropriate that the A.G.M. of the Historical Society was held in Vollwerk, Manitoba, the family hamlet founded in 1875 by the sons of Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84), District Mayor of the Bergthal Colony in Imperial Russia who led his people to Manitoba. "Vollwerk" literally means "complete" or "fulfilled", symbolizing the significant fact that Peters, after being elected as Oberschulz in 1854 and serving as leader of his people for 22 years, completed his life's work by the resettlement of his entire community in Manitoba.

"Vollwerk" also means a country estate or a landed estate, and symbolized the influence and prestige of the Peters family who were sufficiently wealthy to be able to establish their own hamlet by that name.

The "Vollwerk" area was interspersed with bluffs of oaks and aspen and soon became a popular building site for local residents. The hamlet has grown to include parts of two other pioneer villages, Reichenbach and Ebenfeld. It has now become a community of 1200 inhabitants, considered one of Manitoba's fastest growing thus affirming the vision of the "venerable" Oberschulz in a new way.

In 1919 the Provincial Government imposed the name Mitchell on the Vollwerk community symbolizing a period of repression and ethnic cleansing.



The audience frequently roared with laughter as the drama group, Op Dietsch Lache, presented their plays. The after dinner crowd of 160 enjoyed both the drama and the humorous side of life in the E. Reserve.

Education 1916-19.

Jake Doerksen, HSHS board member, was the last speaker of the day. He started his topic by referring back to the Reformation and the tradition among Mennonites that a sound elementary education was important as all believers needed to have the ability to read and interpret the Bible. At the same time, conservative Mennonites also developed a suspicion of education, and in particular, higher learning or what they called "Hochgelehrsamkeit" an often shallow education resulting in disdain for traditional culture and faith.

Jake put the issue of education among the Manitoba Mennonites into a broader perspective, outlining the conflict over education between the French and English in eastern Canada and, of course, in Manitoba. By use of contemporary newspaper reports, parliamentary speeches, and other sources not usually referred to, Jake brought out the reality that the real battle was between the French and English and that the Mennonites in Manitoba had the misfortune of being caught in a turf war between the two dominant cultures. The 1891 compromise and the appointment of a Mennonite inspector only delayed the government's agenda to crush the will of

the Mennonite people, in direct breach of the guarantees granted to them in 1873.

Jake is to be thanked for his research and writing on this topic. He has brought forth much useful material and provided new insight to the question of why the Provincial

Government in 1916 acted so despotically, implementing harsh ethnic cleansing measures against a peaceful people whose only wish was to educate their children with the values and principles of the Bible.

Volume Four.

We thank the speakers for their research and taking the time to make their presentations: Adolf Ens, William Rempel, Conrad Stoesz and Jake Doerksen. Both George Rempel and John Dyck were unable to attend because of personal reasons.

All the presentations were excellent and important advances in the research in their respective fields. The HSHS is planning to publish these papers in the forthcoming Volume Four of the "East Reserve Historical Series" which, hopefully will be out in 1999, in time for the 125th anniversary celebrations. Thank-you again, Adolf, Conrad, Bill and Jake for your important contribution. See article by Doris Penner, "Chortitzer Journals offer valuable look at farm life," in *Carillon News*, January 26, 1998, page 8B, for another write-up of this wonderful evening.



Those attending the A.G.M. and banquet enjoyed a wonderful traditional Mennonite meal "buffet style" consisting of ham and farmer sausage and all the trimmings. Peter K. Reimer, Anna Epp Ens, Adolf Ens and classical guitarist Willie Wiebe discuss some of the presentations as they wait for their turn to get into the line, to dish in their supper.

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“Family Trees” Day March 7, 1998

Organizers reported another successful “Family Trees” at the Mennonite Heritage Museum, Saturday, March 7, 1998.



The “scrum” at the family tree day, March 7, 1998. Alf Redekopp, Mennonite Heritage Centre, brought a box full of reference books which attracted a table-full of eager researchers and family historians.

Some 300 people took advantage of the “Family Trees” day, March 7, 1998, at the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, sponsored by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. By about 11 a.m. at least a hundred people were browsing through and enjoying some 15 displays by various exhibitors, discussing mutual genealogical problems and just plain “neighbouring”.

One of the more important exhibits was the display of the Judith Klassen journals, which form an important source of historical information regarding the East Reserve. The Judith Klassen display was put on by Ben Rempel, Steinbach, and John Neufeld. Al Hamm, Steinbach Credit Union manager had a unique display with a 10-generation ancestral fan chart, a popular way of showing the totality of genealogical roots in one visual form.



Another view of the activity at the “Family Tree” day. At the bottom right is Richard Thiessen with the M. B. Archives display, demonstrating modern computer technology, such as the “Grandma” CD-ROM. At the top right is the display of William Schroeder, well-known author of *The Bergthal Colony* book. In the middle of the picture are John Dyck, HSHS research director and William Harms.

Jake and Hildegard Adrian displayed various genealogical books and particularly the Warkentin family that Hildegard has worked on for decades. William Schroeder again displayed photographs and ariel maps of the village of Alt-Bergfeld where his Wiebe ancestors once lived. Alt-Bergfeld was one of the most picturesque and pastoral villages in the entire East Reserve. Alf Wohlgenuth from Hadashville was back again with his display of various genealogical books and records. Ernest and Henry Braun displayed important items from their Braun book, publication forthcoming.

Gil and Susan Brandt of Mennonite Books, Winnipeg, again made an important contribution with a large display of family and historical books available for sale. Their table is always a popular browsing point for researchers and amateur historians who do not always have easy access to such histori-

cal sources.

Technology such as computers and various software programs, CD-ROMs, etc. are becoming standard items among family historians and genealogists. The live computer display of Hilton Friesen, new HSHS board member, was extremely popular. Hilt demonstrated the use of the computer for a variety of things such as “cleaning up” and enhancing a photograph, as well as for tracking and digesting huge amounts of data and genealogical connections. Hilt and cousin Ralph Friesen are still completing their history of the Abraham S. Friesen family.

One of the popular new resources in family history is the “Grandma” CD-rom produced by the West Coast Mennonite Historical Society, Fresno, California, which now includes several 100,000 names of Russian Mennonites, as well as other sources. Not to be outdone, HSHS board member Randy



Evelyn Friesen displays her collection of family photographs and genealogical treasures. In the rear left corner is the exhibit of Ben Rempel displaying the Judith Klassen Neufeld journals.



Al Hamm, Steinbach Credit Union manager, with his 10-generation family tree panorama. Here he explains some of his historical research on the Funk family.



John Dyck, HSHS research director and William Harms, who have recently completed editing the invaluable 1880 West Reserve Settlement Register published by the MMHS. John Dyck has spent some time in the hospital this winter and it was great to see him around and looking better!

Kehler, has spent the better part of the winter, scanning the almost 5000 pages of the Chortitzer Church Registers and putting the information on a CD-ROM. Randy is planning to produce a dozen copies of the CD-ROM. A number of these are not yet spoken for and so if anyone is interested in purchasing a copy please contact Randy at 346-1435. The cost will be \$60.00 plus postage.

The symposium session was well attended with a full house audience who came out to hear Richard Thiessen and Alfred Redekopp speak on various topics regarding new sources available. See news report attached.

William Schroeder did an excellent presentation regarding his Wiebe roots in Alt-Bergfeld.



Randy Kehler, HSHS board member, demonstrates his computerized version of the "Chortitzer Church Registers" which he is placing on a CD-ROM.



The symposium. William Schroeder did a presentation on the "Wiebes of Alt-Bergfeld". His written paper is to be published in Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series, publication forthcoming. To the far right, leaning against the wall, is HSHS President Orlando Hiebert, who chaired the symposium.



Lunch is always the highlight of any Mennonite gathering. In the middle, facing the camera are Henry and Mary Plett, Blumenort. Ben and Elsie Dueck, at seated at the left end of the table. Gil and Susan Brandt, Mennonite Books, are at the rear table, left end.



HSHS board member Lynette Plett and friend study the latest issue of Preservings as they enjoy their noodle soup and buttered bread.



Enjoying lunch at the "Family Tree" day, March 7, 19889. Alfred Wohlgeomuth, left, visiting with friends.

Bible School Veteran Retires



Henry Fast, will miss friends and colleagues at the College, but hopes to complete his "Kleefeld" history book.

Editor's Note: The major project which Henry Fast has worked with for the past 15 years, albeit only as a sideline as time permitted, is researching and gathering material for the compilation of a history of the community of Kleefeld, originally known as Grünfeld. The original pioneers in the Grünfeld and the neighbouring villages of Rosenfeld, Heuboden, Schönau, Hochstadt/Gnadenort, which made up the church district, were very literate people. Henry has amassed an incredible amount of material which surpasses even the abundant documentation which Royden Loewen gathered to write the Blumenort history. Through his diligent and tireless quest for sources Henry has read the *Mennonitische Rundschau* through three and more times, from 1878 to 1930 and has travelled to Jansen, Nebraska, and Meade, Kansas.

Although he will miss teaching and his many friends at the College Henry is looking forward to his retirement to give him the time he needs to put all this material together into a history book. We wish you well Henry and look forward to seeing the "Kleefeld" book in print, hopefully sometime in the next few years. Those readers who may have additional material regarding these communities are asked to call Henry, sometime after the completion of the school year.

Henry Fast, a 25 year veteran teacher at the Steinbach Bible College has announced his retirement.

In a news item in the *Family Bulletin*, Steinbach Christian High School, December 12, 1997, Volume V, Issue 16, editor Randy Dueck made the following announcement:

"It is with great respect that I announce the impending retirement of **Henry Fast**. Henry submitted a letter of resignation effective June 28, 1998.

"For 31 years Henry has served faithfully in

various roles at our high school. He has worked as principal, maths department head, teacher and landscape designer. Teaching courses in maths, science and Bible unitized his skills, but when he was asked to teach Mennonite history he found a new and exciting subject which has taken him on many interesting trails. God's richest blessings to you Henry as you complete this year. May you experience much joy in the finishing of the present chapter and in the beginning of a new chapter in your life."

Museum Appoints New Director

The board of the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, has appointed Gary Snider of Chilliwack, B. C., as the new executive director effective March 1 next year.

Snider replaces Harv Klassen who has been with the Museum for five years. Klassen will stay on until shortly after his replacement arrives.

Snider has been director of Mennonite Central Committee's Ten Thousand Villages (formerly Global Crafts) in British Columbia for the last six years. He also worked as executive director of the food bank of the Waterloo region of Ontario and acted as national coordinator for the Canadian Association of Food Banks.

Snider holds a degree in business administration from the University of Windsor with a major in marketing and a secondary concentration in personnel management.

Snider, his wife Donna and their four children expect to move to Steinbach in the new year. [From the *Carillon*, December 5, 1997].

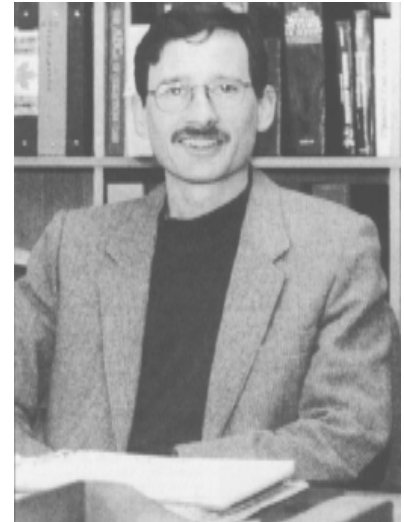


Photo from *Carillon*, March 16, 1998, page 4A.

Genealogy Seminar at Mennonite Heritage Village (Steinbach)

by Alf Redekopp

Genealogy and technology was the focus of a seminar at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum on March 7th, 1998 as Alf Redekopp, archivist from the Centre of MB Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre, and Richard Thiessen, Concord College Librarian, spoke to a full house of interested participants.

Richard Thiessen outlined the ways in which the use of the computer has changed the genealogists' work--from using word processors to type out family records to using genealogical designed software which links and tracks relationships, and greatly enhances the speed of searching for information in the large collections. He demonstrated one such program entitled, "Brother's Keeper", a shareware program.

Alf Redekopp spoke about using computers and the internet in doing family history. Some of the applications which he has found most useful were e-mail, list servers (discussion groups) and web browsing. His presentation included a demonstration showing a number of internet web sites of interest to Mennonites. These sites were divided into three groups: sites of institutions or organizations, topical sites and personal sites.

In the final part of the seminar, Richard Thiessen highlighted some of the significant documents which the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society has mounted on its web site (<http://www.mmhs.org/mmhs/gen.htm>). These included such documents as *Brandregister* of 1727, 1776 Prussian Mennonite Census, Mennonite Land Census of West Prussia 1789 and the 1811 Elbing West Prussian Census, to mention only a few.

Another feature of the seminar was an update on recent acquisitions from Russian archives relevant for Mennonite genealogists. Alf Redekopp spoke about the wealth of material dealing with the migration of Mennonites from Prussia to Russia during the first three decades of the 19th century which is becoming available from research in archives in St. Petersburg. These materials will significantly supplement the weaker areas in the B.H. Unruh lists which genealogists depend on so heavily.

Dyan Friesen Cannon, a Bergthaler!

By Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

In *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec 1996, page 21, I mentioned a story regarding Dyan Cannon, the movie actress, a Friesen by birth. I also indicated my impression that she was a descendant of Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900) who settled in Rosenort, Manitoba in 1874 and then moved to Jansen, Nebraska, in early 1875.

I received a tip from Rev. Jerry Barkman, Dallas, Oregon, that Dyan Cannon's brother David Friesen, an accomplished classical musician, played frequently with the Oregon Philharmonic. After a few more phone calls, I was able to make contact with him in Portland, Oregon. On December 8, 1997, I spoke to David who referred me to his father, Ben Friesen, and mentioned that his father had done research on their Friesen family roots and would be able to give me some information.

So far so good. First of all I had to wait until after Christmas to talk to Ben Friesen who was on a trip to Australia and not returning home to Seattle until after Christmas. I did finally talk to Ben on January, 2, 1998, and found out that he was born in Saskatchewan in 1907, his family having moved there from Plum Coulee, Manitoba, shortly after the turn of the century.

The Friesens.

I also quickly discovered that my information regarding Ben's Friesen roots was totally wrong. He was not from Kleine Gemeinde background, at all, as I had been informed. In fact, the family was of Bergthaler origin.

Ben Friesen's great-great grandfather was Peter Friesen, born 1751, who emigrated to Russia in 1788-89 settling in the village of Neuendorf, Chortitz Colony, Wirtschaft 35--B. H. Unruh. By 1802 Peter Friesen had retired and was living as an Anwohner in the same village.

Son Kornelius Friesen (1790-1868) married Agatha Thiessen and lived in Osterwick in 1814. Kornelius Friesen later moved to Bergthal, a new settlement north of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov established in 1836. Kornelius died in Bergthal in 1868.

Kornelius was the father of Peter Friesen (born 1829) who married Maria Buhr (b. 1830) in 1850. They had a family of twelve of whom two died in childhood (listed in the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch* B96). The family emigrated to Canada July 1874 on the S. S. Peruvian (Note One).

The Buhrs.

Margaret Kroeker of Mennonite Genealogy Inc, Winnipeg, Manitoba, was kind enough to do a little research about this family in their voluminous holdings. She came up with the family book by Helen R. Regier, *Jakob Buhr Family 1805-1977*. It turns out that Maria Buhr, born in 1830, in Nieder Chortitz, Old Colony, Russia, was the

ready had a Peter named after the father, and a Cornelius, named after his father. Also emigrating at this time was Jakob Buhr (1833-1908), brother of Maria Buhr Friesen, who settled in Edenburg, West Reserve, near the modern-day town of Gretna.

The Peter Friesen family did not stay in Canada, however, and moved to the Fargo area in North Dakota where the family was listed in the Cass

County census in 1880, six-year Jakob is listed with the family. A letter from Maria, datelined Fargo, was sent to brother Jakob Buhr. Later letters datelined Mountain Lake, were also received by Jakob's family.

Maria evidently was not a frequent letter writer as letters were written to brother Jakob Buhr in Edenburg, Manitoba, inquiring about their whereabouts. Helen Regier actually travelled to the Fargo area in June of 1976 to try to find some trace of the Peter Friesen family, to no avail.

From a letter written by Maria and Peter Friesen, dated Dec. 2, 1874, it appears that they settled in Fargo that same fall. Maria reported that "We in our family are well, thank God, and also are in a warm room, and my husband works diligently in the blacksmith shop. We have a warm stable for the cattle... We have acquired 160 acres of land.... And we are already 23 families here and have church services every three weeks. A minister from Linstabet [West Lynn?] comes and holds services here."

Helen Regier also referred to some interesting correspondence regarding the estate of Maria's mother Maria Neufeld Buhr, who died in 1876. Evidently the step-father did not forward their inheritance. Maria's youngest sister, Katharina, and her husband Jakob Rempel, had bought half the

Wirtschaft (village farm) in Russia, payable over three years. There is some question as to whether Maria and Jakob ever received their full inheritance.

Helen Regier concluded her section on the Maria Buhr Friesen family with the plea, "Where are the Peter Friesens?" I know she will be glad to here that the family of one of their sons has been located. Hopefully this article will stimulate further research so that the others can be found as well.

Jakob Friesen (1875-1941).

Jakob P. Friesen, born December 25, 1875, possibly in Fargo, North Dakota, was the youngest son of Peter and Maria Friesen, evidently born a



Jakob Friesen (1875-1941) and Maria Klassen Friesen (1875-1968), circa 1930.

oldest child of Jakob Buhr (1805-48) and Maria Neufeld (1808-76).

In her book, Helen Regier quoted some interesting details during the ocean voyage of the Peter Friesen family when they immigrated to Canada. "A two year-old daughter of Peter Friesens died [on board ship on July 12, 1874]...at eleven a.m. She was lowered into the water at one p.m." The family arrived in Halifax harbour at 1:30 p.m. A son Jakob died at Collingwood, Ontario, on July 21, 1874, and was buried the next day, together with another young lad who had died.

On December 25, 1875, another son was born to Peter and Maria Friesen whom they again named Jakob in honour of Maria's father since they al-

year after the family completed the gruelling trek across Eastern Europe and crossing the stormy Atlantic. There is some uncertainty here as son Ben recalled the very definite family tradition that his father was born in Russia. Given the separation of this family from the Mennonite community, is it possible that the family legends eventually confused the story of Jakob with that of his older brother who was born in Bergthal in 1873?

Jakob P. Friesen married Maria Klassen, born January, 1875. According to family tradition, she was born in Germany. In all likelihood this would mean that she was born during the emigration journey from Russia to America. A search of available ship records of Mennonite emigrants to Canada and the U.S.A. revealed several Klassen/Classen families with a daughter Maria of the appropriate age. But one family in particular, that of Abraham Classen age 24 and Elisabeth Classen age 25 who arrived in New York harbour on the S. S. Nederland on July 25, 1875, might be worthy of further study.

However, John Dyck, HSHS Research Director, recently mentioned another possibility, the family of Abraham Klassen who was elected as a deacon of the Mennonite settlement in Fargo. His family later returned to the Altona/winkler area in Manitoba, where all of them, except a daughter Maria, are listed in the Sommerfelder church registers.

Apparently the Jakob Friesen family moved to Canada in the 1890s, or was his fiancée Maria Klassen possibly from Manitoba? In any case, they had settled in Southern Manitoba by 1893 where their first child was born. They had a family



Ben Friesen, with daughter Samille Diane Friesen, 1938.



Dyan Cannon as a young woman, 1970s.

of ten children and their places of birth illustrate the families movements: son Peter K. Friesen born April 1, 1893, Friedensberg, Manitoba; son Henry Friesen born December 18, 1894, Plum Coulee; Mary born January 12, 1897; Katie born October, 1898, in Lowe Farm; Jake born Feb. 14, 1901, Winnipeg; John born April 1, 1903, Sask[atoon?]. Sask.; Joseph born June 6, 1905, Langdon, Sask.; Ben born Dec. 28, 1907, Delmeny, Sask., Minnie born May 17, 1910, Nakusp, B. C.; and William born May 25, 1912.

In 1906 the family moved to Delmeny, Saskatchewan, where Jakob Friesen owned a grocery store, livery stable and bakery. However, his enterprises were destroyed by fire around 1911 which ruined him financially. In 1912 the family moved on to Nahusp, British Columbia where Jakob purchased a 19 acre fruit orchard, but it took time to develop the orchard before income could be produced. In the meantime, Jakob and his older sons went into lumbering, cutting telephone poles which were shipped as far east as Toronto. Son John died of an accident in early life.

By 1917 Jakob had enough and moved on the

Vancouver where he obtained a variety of work as a labourer. In Vancouver the family belonged to the Apostolic Faith Mission but prior to that they were Mennonite. Jakob P. Friesen died in Vancouver in 1941. His wife, nee Maria Klassen, lived as a widow for many years and died in 1968 at the age of 94. We are very interested in obtaining more information about Maria's family, and hope that any of our readers with information will contact the editor. Only Ben, Minnie and William, are alive today.

Ben Friesen.

Given his father's declining financial prospects, son Ben learned to depend on his own resources and ingenuity at an early age. By age 11 he was selling newspapers in the bars of Vancouver and quickly learned that good tips could be earned by a bright young lad from customers who were enjoying a drink or two. Ben, was quick to point out, that his parents were not aware that his suddenly lucrative newspaper route had diverted into a new market.

But marketing is exactly what Ben Friesen made into his life work when he went into the life insurance business. Ben left Vancouver in 1930 moving to the Seattle/Tacoma area in Washington State, where he was employed by the California Western State Life Ins. Co. In 1943 Ben was promoted to management and transferred to Spokane. After seven years he moved back to Seattle as Regional Sales Manager for the Franklin Life Ins. Co. Although he never said so, my sense was that Ben had been very good at his life long profession.

In 1932 Ben Friesen married Clara Tortnay, born in the Ukraine, of Jewish descent. Ben retired in 1985. Clara passed away in 1992 after 60 years of marriage. In 1996 Ben remarried and is still resident in Seattle.

I must say it was my very great pleasure to talk to Ben Friesen several times in the course of doing this story. Of course, I had to fit my calls



Ben Friesen, with daughter Dyan Cannon (Friesen) and son David Friesen, 1990.



Ben W. Friesen with sister Kathleen and brother William, circa 1990. Kathleen passed away at age 95 in 1995.

into his busy schedule. When I first phoned in December I had to wait until he returned from Australia in January. When I phoned on January 30, he made the effort to spare me ten minutes, because he and his wife of two years “were going out for supper with friends.” Although ninety-two years young, Ben’s voice is still strong. He answers the phone with a warm, “Hi Del!”

Dyan Cannon.

Daughter Dyan Cannon was born Samille Diane Friesen in Tacoma, Washington, in 1937. She grew up in Seattle, Washington. As a young girl she was always interested in drama and took parts in various school plays in High School. After eighteen months of drama courses at the University of Washington she left for Hollywood. She attended University of California Los Angeles where she studied drama and acting. She was involved in acting doing summer stock. This was where film producer Jerry Wild of Werner Brothers saw her in a restaurant in 1967 and called her in for some screen tests. She received her first movie parts shortly thereafter.



Dyan Cannon in “Such Good Friends”.

In an interview with Richard Shull in 1978 Dyan explained how she got her acting name: “My name was Friesen, but he said, ‘I see an explosion when you enter a room. Your name is Cannon.’” And so Diane Friesen became Dyan Cannon. Her father, Ben Friesen told me that she has frequently been sorry that she did not keep her real name “Friesen”. But those were the days when even movie actors had to shed their cultural identity to achieve success which is different in the modern day when an “ethnic” or non Anglo-Saxon name is often taken as a sign of culture and elegance.

The Richard Shull interview also included an interesting anecdote about Dyan Cannon’s nose:

“When Jerry Wild gave me a screen test in colour, then he reported back, ‘Your nose is too flat.’”

“I wrote home to my mom and dad in Seattle and said, ‘I don’t want a mink coat. I want a nose job.’”

“They said they’d pay, so I went to a famous



Dyan Cannon with Omar Sharif in “The Burglars”.

plastic surgeon. He told me to get out of his office; that my nose was what made me different. So I got a good lighting man instead.”

When she married Carie Grant (his fourth marriage) in 1965 many people did not take her acting career seriously. But her credentials are awesome. That marriage ended in divorce in 1968 but a year later Dyan received an Oscar nomination for “Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice.”

A story in “Time” magazine in 1972 reveals America’s fascination with the stars and the actors they love. The writer describes Dyan’s physical appearance, “At first glance everything seems wrong. The lips are too thick and the nose is too flat, a porcine little button. For a woman who stands only 5 ft., 5 in. tall, the bust is perhaps too heroic, while the stomach is--well--flabby. Yet somehow all the parts work together to make Dyan Cannon Hollywood’s newest sex star...Her usual role is that of the good hearted slattern.”

Her acting and creative abilities were obviously much more substantial than the “Time” story indicated. This was followed by a string of credits. Between 1971 and 1993 Dyan Cannon starred in 18 movies. In 1990 she starred in and directed the movie “The end of innocence.”

Dyan currently lives in Los Angeles. She has one daughter, Jennifer, born in 1966. Jennifer is the only child of actor Carie Grant. Dyan’s life and career are still of considerable interest to her many fans. She was interviewed on the David Letterman show in July or August, 1997.

David Friesen.

Brother David Friesen, Portland, Oregon, is a renown classical musician playing a “stand-up bass”, an instrument somewhat like a bass fiddle. He was interviewed by Johnny Carson on the “Tonight Show” some six years back. David frequently plays with the Oregon Philharmic and has a busy life, flitting back and forth between Seattle and Oregon.

“David is an accomplished musician who has held concerts practically all over the world--Japan--Russia--Australia and most of the countries



Ben Friesen age 90, with bride, Betty Darland Morris Friesen, age 77, married April 27, 1996.



"An Evening with David Friesen", from a play-bill, for a concert at the Berg Swan Auditorium, Portland, June 29, benefit for the Portland Art Museum.

in Europe. He conducts three or more tours of Europe each year in addition to concerts in the United States. He also teaches jazz in many of the Universities of the U.S.

Conclusion.

If you are or think you might be related to this family, please contact me at the address above provided as I am still looking for additional biographical information and photos for the nieces and nieces of Jakob Friesen (1873-1941).

In a way, I thought it was rather appropriate for *Preservings* that Ben Friesen and his famous children Dyan and David turned out to be of Bergthaler background. It means that we have now had diaspora stories involving Alfred van Vogt, of Old-Colonier background, of John Denver and Major-General Dennis Reimer, with Kleine Gemeinde roots, and now Dyan Cannon, with Bergthaler roots. This demonstrates that the gene pool of all three "Kanadier" denominations coming to Canada in 1874 included genius and talent equal to anything in the world. It also exposes suggestions by various Russian Mennonite historians that the Kanadier groups were from a lower genetic stock as the preposterous lies and racist rubbish that they are.

Endnotes:

Note One: This family is included in Henry Schapansky's article "Bergthaler- Chortitzer Friesens," *Preservings*, No. 11, December 1997, pages 36.

Sources:

Telephone interviews with David Friesen, Portland, Oregon, Dec. 13, 1997; Ben Friesen, Seattle, Washington, Jan. 5, 1998; Jan. 30, 1998; and March 4, 1998.

"Show Business," in *Time*, January 17, 1972, page 46; and Richard Shull, "Call her Madam In This Biography," in *The Indianapolis News*, Wednesday, July 5, 1978. Courtesy of Margaret Kroeker, Mennonite Genealogy Inc., Box 393, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 2H6, letter February 27, 1998.

Scenes from Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony, Ukraine, May 12, 1998.

Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony, Ukraine, the ancestral village of Dyan Cannon where her great-great-great grandfather Peter Friesen (b. 1751) settled in 1789 resident on Wirtschaft or village farm no. 35. Neuendorf is a picturesque village nestled peacefully in the valley of the Tomakovka River in the northeast quadrant of the Chortitza Colony. It seems that Neuendorf was the home village of many other Bergthaler families. In fact, the deep valleys and general landscape of the Bergthaler villages suggests that the Bergthaler settlers were trying to recreate the environment of their former homes in the Old Colony. Such nostalgia is evident in at least three villages, Bergthal, Schönthal and Friedrichsthal, which were also named "thal" or valley in recognition of their physical setting.



Two of the gravestones of the "new" Neuendorf cemetery, view towards the west. Mennonite cemeteries were often located outside the village, a tradition dating back to Prussia where they were not allowed to have their cemeteries in the village, a privilege reserved for members of the official State churches, Catholic, Lutheran and sometimes Reformed. The gravestone in the foreground is that of Johann Hildebrand. Unfortunately I did not write down the dates, but as I recall he was born sometime in the late 18th century and died prior to the middle of the 19th. The Hildebrand family was rather prominent in Neuendorf.



Village scene of Neuendorf from the "new" graveyard looking west.



South end of Neuendorf, near the "old" cemetery presumably shared with Schönhorst, looking northwest. The old cemetery was laid out behind a Scythian burial mound or "Gorgany" and covered some six acres. It was one of the few Mennonite cemeteries still relatively intact, possibly spared by its somewhat remote location. In many cases local people are simply burying their dead over the Mennonite graves. This is a matter of serious concern. Perhaps Canadian authorities need to take this up with the Ukrainian government.



Neuendorf, approximately the middle of the village. Photos by D. Plett, May 12, 1998.

Harder Family Reunion July 23-26, 1998

The descendants of Johann Plett Harder (1811-75), Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, are holding a "Harder Family Reunion" in Winnipeg, from July 23 to July 26, 1998. The event will take place on the campus of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 600 Shaftesbury Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Those seeking further information should call Alice Funk (204)-489-4647 or Wilma Poetker (204-896-1354), members of the Planning Committee.

The Harders are related to all the Pletts in the East Reserve as well as the descendants of Johann Toews (1793-1873) and his first wife Elisabeth Harder (1800-34), who was the aunt of Aeltester Harder. Their many relatives wish the Harders well as they enjoy their reunion.



Johann Harder (1811-75), Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde and Johann Friesen (1808-72), Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, were the saviours of the infant Brüdergemeinde, when they were threatened with exile to Siberia in 1860. Johann Harder was a first cousin on the Plett side to Peter P. Toews (1841-1922), Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, and Abraham, David and Jakob L. Plett, farmers in the Blumenhof area north of Steinbach. Photo courtesy of Peter M. Friesen, Mennonite Brotherhood, page 161.

News Release MMHS

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society would like to bring to your attention a project for which it is raising funds. The project has to do with the publishing of a number of documents relating to the migration of the Mennonites from Prussia to Russia in the early part of the 19th century.

In the last several years, people like Peter Rempel of Moscow have carried out archival research relating to the history of the Mennonites in Russia. A number of documents have been compiled relating to the movement of the Mennonites from Prussia to Russia in the first three decades of the 19th century. These items significantly augment the information we currently have regarding the migration of the Mennonites from Prussia to Russia in the first three decades of the 19th century. The migration lists in B.H. Unruh's book contain only a portion of the names found in these newly transcribed and translated documents. Thus this collection of materials would be of great interest to anyone carrying out genealogical research amongst the Mennonite immigrants to Russia in the early 19th century.

Peter Rempel's documents include the following: 1) Lists of Mennonites transferring to Russia through Grodno 1803-1809 (46 lists totalling 405 families); 2) Lists of Mennonites receiving passports in Danzig from the Russian Consulate 1819-1828 (11 lists totalling 967 families); 3) lists of newly arrived Mennonites in Chortitza and Molotschna detailing their assets 1797-1828 (16 lists totalling 1449 families). Rempel's work is thorough and carefully done, with attention paid to detail and the citation of sources.

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society also has other documents from the St. Petersburg archives that it has translated which also relate to the settlement of Mennonites in Russia in the first part of the 19th century, particularly the first decade.

The society is currently soliciting funds from individuals to add to the money which it has already set aside for this project. The society needs to raise several thousand dollars to complete the purchase of the publishing rights to these documents and to produce the proposed volume. Since the society has officially adopted this project as its own, it is able to provide donors with charitable donation receipts for income tax purposes.

Anyone who may wish to donate to this project is asked to contact Richard Thiessen. I can be reached by e-mail at rthiessen@concordcollege.mb.ca, by phone at 204-669-6583, or by mail at 169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg MB R2L 2E5.

Richard Thiessen, Secretary, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

The 48-ers: Fiftieth Anniversary 1948-98

1998 marks an important anniversary for many Mennonites who came to Canada from Russia in the 1920s as well as in the late 1940s.

75 years ago, on June 22, 1923, a group of 738 left Chortitza to make their way to Canada. They had experienced Revolution, famine and much suffering after the Bolsheviks took power in 1917. They arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, on July 21, 1923, after a lengthy railroad trip across Canada. On August 20, 1923, the first group to the Hanover Steinbach area arrived by train in Giroux "...where they were forthwith provided with board and quarter". That will be 75 years ago this summer. In the years between 1923 and 1930 over 20,000 Mennonites arrived in Canada and settled in various Provinces.

50 years ago a similar story unfolded. After severe hardship during World War II many Mennonites made a difficult trek westward with the retreating German "Wehrmacht". Some could not escape the Soviet armies and were forcibly returned and exiled in remote regions of the Soviet Union, far from their former homeland. But close to 8,000 Mennonites were able to find a new home in Canada between 1947 and 1951. Others made their way to South America, particularly Paraguay and Brazil.

The first group to come to Canada arrived in Halifax aboard the "General Stuart Heinzelman" on October 16 1947. Among the approximately one thousand refugees aboard the ship was a group of approximately 120 Mennonites. The peak post-war immigration occurred in 1948 when almost 4000 Mennonites, almost one-half of the total arrived. That was 50 years ago.

An anniversary gathering took place at Concord College on October 17, 1997 where many of the original group aboard the Heinzelman were present (see "Danke Gott, Für Canada!" in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, February, 1998, p. 17).

An important celebration is being planned to take place in Winnipeg on August 15-16, 1998, which will focus on the immigration experience of those who came to Canada between 1947 and 1951. Jacob R. Wiebe is chairing the planning committee.

Preservings, published by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, would like to feature at least a few articles in our December, 1998, No. 13 Issue, about the families who came to the Hanover Steinbach area with this emigration. Accordingly we are inviting readers to contribute articles, stories, photographs, etc. to help us in this venture. Readers can submit articles and are also encouraged to contact the editor at 1(204)326-6454, or Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, to discuss their ideas for an article, biography, etc.

East Reserve 125 Steering Committee

by Hildegard Toews, Box 317, Grunthal, Manitoba, R0A 0R0.

The East Reserve 125 Steering Committee is enthusiastically busy planning for the 1999 celebrations of the settlement of the Hanover area which began in 1874. The committee is preparing to promote activities in conjunction with this anniversary milestone and expect most communities in the Hanover municipality will be celebrating in their own special way. It is suspected that the majority of the communities will combine this celebration with their regular Fair Days, Festivals or whatever each community plans for festivities in summer.

The Steering Committee would like the public's cooperation in publicizing these events and are asking that communities provide us with the dates of their special events and any activities that are planned in connection with this celebration. Dates and information should be sent to the R. M. of Hanover office at Box 1720, Steinbach, MB, R0A 2A0, c/o Edna Vogt. It would be greatly appreciated if this information was submitted by October 1, 1998 as many communities know their summer activity dates a year in advance.

The Committee is planning to publish an educational pamphlet about the history of the settlement of the Mennonites in Manitoba, especially in the Hanover area and will be making these brochures available to the communities along with mementos and other anniversary related paraphernalia.

Several of the events being planned by the committee include a historical bus tour, a visit from the Prime Minister, radio and newspaper historical sketches, a possible school history



Members of the 125 East Reserve Steering Committee are back row: Henry Kasper (fund raising), Delbert Plett (historical society), Helen Penner (mementos), Hildegard Toews (media); front row Henry Friesen (City of Steinbach/Museum), Norman Plett (RM of Hanover and Secretary), Karen Peters (chair/Hanover School Division) and Verna Wiens (treasurer). Photo by Shelly Bialek, courtesy of Carillon News, April 20, 1998, page 5A. Missing from the picture is Edna Vogt, in charge of events.

textbook, and a special low German program featuring plays by local playwrights during 1999's Pioneer Days.

It would be of great help if the public would contribute to our planned historical sketches idea. We would appreciate any suggestions of names of people we could interview on memories of their childhood or stories related to them by their parents and grandparents. Anyone with an interesting story or diary excerpt could also forward it to us. Pictures as well would be of great help in preparing articles for the Carillon. Any information dealing with the historical sketches should be sent to the above address c/o

Hilde Toews.

Information and suggestions are always welcome and can be sent to the above address.



Logo of the 125th East Reserve Anniversary Celebrations. "Celebrating Our Heritage".

125th Steering Committee Mission Statement - "The East Reserve 125 Steering Committee exists to raise awareness of the 1874 settlement of the Hanover area, known as the East Reserve, and to promote and celebrate the 125th anniversary of this historical event in 1999."

125 Anniversary Community Contacts

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Blumenort | Mel Penner | 326-1665 |
| Clearspring | Ed and Alice Laing | 326-9972 |
| Friedensfeld | Alvin Fender | 326-3156 |
| Grunthal | Peter Froese, | 434-6473 |
| Kleefeld | Lorne Peters | 377-4242 |
| Landmark | Stan Penner | 355-4003 |
| Mitchell | Elmer Martens | 326-1951 |
| New Bothwell | Edna Vogt | 388-4573 |
| Pansy | Carla Gresniuk | 434-6767 |
| Randolph | Karen Peters | 377-4409 |
| Ridgewood | Wally Doerksen | 326-9444 |
| Sarto | Myron Smuk | 434-6531 |
| Steinbach | Henry Friesen | 326-3868 |
| Tourond/Niverville | Orlando Hiebert | 388-4195 |

East Reserve 125th Anniversary (1874-1999): Celebrating Our Heritage

Submitted by Karen S. Peters, Box 29, Randolph, Manitoba, R0A 1L0, East Reserve 125 Steering Committee Chairperson and Hanover School Division Representative.

The Manitoba Mennonite East Reserve, now mainly referred to as the Rural Municipality of Hanover, was settled in the 1870s. The establishment of East Reserve villages were due to the attempts of the Canadian government to secure this centrally located, youthful province. The Mennonites in Russia were invited to settle in southern Manitoba, and to establish the viability of commercial farming in the prairies of Western Canada. During the years of 1874 to 1878, seven thousand Russian Mennonites responded to the invitation and immigrated to Canada.

The first shipload of 65 families arrived at the East Reserve on August 1, 1874. The 125th anniversary of this date will arrive in 1999.

The commemoration of this event is important for several reasons. "...In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them..." Joshua 4:6,7.

Our ancestors experienced austere difficulties as they settled in a new country. It is up to us to tell future generations about the origins of their life in Canada and Manitoba. Memorials will remind us that life in this country, which allows freedom of religion, should never be taken for granted. We can learn so much from the innumerable accounts and memories still alive among us today. It is important to receive and record these stories before all of the original descendants of these pilgrims have gone on to their just reward. Each family history has its unique stories of sadness and joy. Rummaging through people's memories is a healthy, rewarding activity for the participant as well as the recipient!

Marking this anniversary should also award us an understanding of the events that shaped the lives of our parents and grandparents. It affords us an opportunity to note some of the many changes that have evolved in the customs of our people, and there are so many examples! The large Mennonite families of yesteryear have become a mere memory. The status of women has changed drastically! A high percentage of Mennonites now receive a post secondary education, and this certainly includes the female gender. Mennonite occupations have shifted dramatically from farmers and land owners to virtually any vocation.

Every milestone along the journey of one's collective existence is a rich opportunity to take stock. It is important to find out where we came from, where we are currently at, and what the future looks like. It is certainly cause for celebration, analysis, and planning for the future!

A celebration of this type creates awareness in the community at large. It communicates a message that includes thankfulness, peace, good-

will, justice and communal harmony. Many people in Manitoba have been and continue to be affected by the Mennonite presence. Public celebrations proclaim our message to everyone. The settlement of the East Reserve also included people of other ethnic backgrounds and origins. It is imperative that we acknowledge their valuable contribution and the assimilation that gradually took place.



Karen Peters, Chair of the 125th anniversary committee.

When approximately one-third of all Mennonites in Russia, generally the more conservative and orthodox, heeded the call to immigrate from Imperial Russia, almost half of them settled in Manitoba. Mennonite settlers also established themselves in the West Reserve, now known as the Rural Municipality of Stanley and the Rural Municipality of Reinland, including Winkler and Altona. The Red River was considered to be the dividing line between these two areas, and, depending on which side of the river you were on, you were always on *dit Sied!* A fascinating East West Reserve dichotomy developed, which actually seemed to take on a homogenizing effect. Internal fragmentation within the East Reserve and the West Reserve generally stemmed from differences between the progressives and the conservatives, and the origins of the *Kanadier*, *Rusländer*, and *Neueingewanderte*. I would like to see the entire community of southern Manitoba join together in celebration of this important milestone!

As we accept and begin to value our roots, we will redefine our identity. A greater historical consciousness begins to evolve as we struggle to cope with a technological society. I

believe the uprooted immigrants deserve recognition for their foresight and fortitude! Just as the commemoration of the Centennial of Mennonite settlement in southeastern Manitoba was celebrated in 1974, we also wish to mark the passing of another block of time. The first-generation and second-generation immigrants were agents of assimilation, cutting across the dividing lines, and integrating with surrounding societies. Though the East Reserve sometimes views itself as an ethnic minority, it has made substantial contributions in all aspects of commercial, social and cultural life. As our identity, influenced by internal change and external forces, continues to evolve, it is important that we celebrate significant events in our history.

Activated by the Rural Municipality of Hanover, a working group of interested folk began meeting early in 1997 to plan celebrations. After tossing many ideas on the table and surviving the flood of the century, a Steering Committee was finally established at the January 19, 1998 meeting. Representatives of some of the key players were included in the list of nine dedicated people. With each committee member carrying a specific portfolio, the committee decided to meet once a month. We began by establishing a Mission Statement that defines our purpose. We keep it in focus as we make decisions: *the East Reserve 125 Steering Committee exists to raise awareness of the 1874 settlement of the Hanover area, known as the East Reserve, and to promote and celebrate the 125th anniversary of this historical event in 1999.* The committee also established a list of fourteen "East Reserve 125 Community Contacts", and held a meeting with them to exchange information and ideas. These people will provide a vital link to the many former and current communities of the East Reserve. As the Chairperson of the Steering Committee, I have a vision of a year filled with a variety of community celebrations and public events. I expect a lot of stories will come out of the attics - literally and figuratively. I am also optimistic that this anniversary will give us a new focus for our collective future in Manitoba and in Canada!

The Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Jean Chretien, has been invited to the Mennonite Heritage Village to mark the occasion. The letter of invitation for August 1, 1999, states: "Your attendance at this special event would reaffirm that the Government of Canada is still proud of its decision to include Mennonites as a part of the multicultural society of Canada." Since the descendants of Mennonite pioneers now number 60,000 in Manitoba, a Prime Ministerial visit to southern Manitoba would recognize the considerable contribution the Mennonite settlers and their descendants have made.

Wood Engravings East Reserve 1877: A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

by Jake K. Doerksen, Box 154, Ile des Chenes, Manitoba., R0A 0T0.

The Steering Committee has been working hard at putting handles and wheels on many of the ideas that have come forth. A competition was held, and a suitable design evolved, incorporating the logos and slogan chosen by the committee. It includes an outline of the East Reserve map, as well as symbols of pioneer life surrounding a large cross. We are pleased to offer a number of mementos that will be available for purchase in most East Reserve communities. The t-shirts, sweatshirts, coffee mugs, lapel pins and spoons will be ready for Christmas giving in 1998. Items such as cloth shopping bags, buttons, balloons, pens and pencils will be available in 1999. We have also budgeted for a banner and flags, as well as an educational pamphlet. The possibility of bus tours to historic sites is still alive. A Low German play is in the early developmental stages, and arrangements regarding a mural in Steinbach are still in process. We are pleased that Delbert Plett has consented to consider writing a history book in honour of this anniversary.

The committee has researched a variety of available grants, and we look forward to continued financial support from a number of sources. Our "Events Coordinator" is seeking to compile a comprehensive slate of all East Reserve events that relate to the 125th anniversary. We encourage individuals and communities to focus on this theme during the next year, and incorporate it into their existing annual events. Our "Media Coordinator" is eager to collect stories and historical sketches for vignettes that will appear in newspapers and on the radio during 1999.

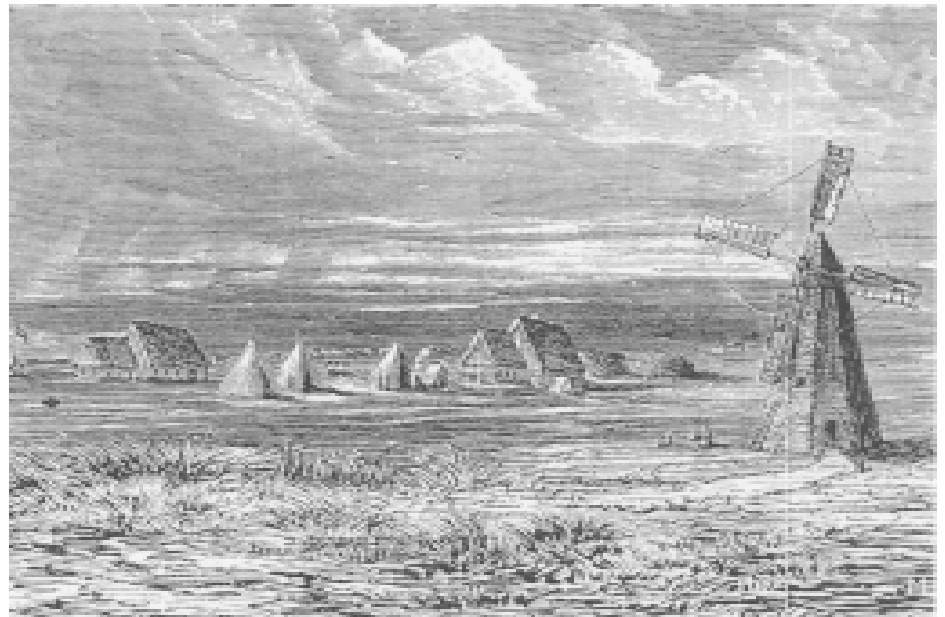
We invite individuals, organizations and churches to assist us in spreading the word! Join us in honouring our pioneers as we prepare to step into a new millennium!

"Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you." Deuteronomy 3 2:7.

Mennonite Books?

Are you looking for Mennonite Books? If you do not live near a large centre with a Mennonite Book Store, this can be a challenge. Solution: contact Gilbert G. Brandt at "Mennonite Books", 844-K Mcleod Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R2G 2T7. They offer a book club service with a **FREE** semi-annual catalogue mail-out listing many books currently available. This is also a good way of keeping up with new publications. Phone 204-668-7475; fax 203-661-8530; e-mail: mennonitebooks@brandtfamily.com

The above picture of an engraving titled "Scene on the Rat River Mennonite Reservation, Manitoba" appeared in the March, 1998, issue of "Mennonite Historian". It was said to have been cut from a sketch done by Lord Dufferin Governor General of Canada. The editors posed the question to the reader if anyone knew anything about the picture. If the engraving had ever been published and where if so. I don't have the answers but I can share some other facts which may of interest to the reader.



Drawing of Eigenhof, East Reserve 1878 by Lord Dufferin. This is possibly the earliest real life depiction of life in the East Reserve extant today.

Firstly I would like to say something about Lord Dufferin. He did do a fair amount of sketching of scenes in Canada while he was here. The scene above is a picture of the village of Eigenhof located about four miles west of Steinbach. The scene is the Viceregal visit on August 22, 1877 as seen through his eyes. I'm not sure of what Lord Dufferin thought of his visit to the Mennonite Reserve but the Free Press writer wrote "Perhaps of all that the Governor General and party will see and hear during their visit to Manitoba their experiences in the Mennonite settlements, upon the Rat River reserve, will be the most interesting". The sketch may have been drawn to serve as a reminder of this experience.

The village and event are quite recognizable. As a child we used to play in the village whenever my parents when to visit my aunt and uncle. When I look at the picture I see the windmill which housed the millstones which we used as home base while playing hide and seek. I see the original Schroeder residence before the new house was built in 1896. The house my aunt and uncle lived in. On the left I see the Wieler house barn where we went to purchase the saddle. This is

where Peter Wieler the lone bachelor son of the original pioneer Jacob Wieler lived. For me the picture adds great detail to something I already knew existed.

Then I turn to the historical event that the picture displays. Both residences in the village, the Wieler and Penner, Doerksen, Schroeder residences are displayed with the village of Chortitz between them in the background. The windmill which was destroyed by strong winds a few years later stands in the foreground. The "Willkommen

(Welcome) Arch" and one of the two flags, probably the Union Jack, which the Free Press writer wrote about, are seen on the extreme left. And then finally the tents making up of one of the camps of the Government entourages, probably the Hespeler camp. Lady Dufferin wrote that their own camp was about a quarter mile away and it's probably from this vantage point that the scene was sketched.

Other engravings from sketches on early Mennonite life were drawn by W T. Smedley. They were originally printed in "Picturesque Canada" and reproduced in "Reflections of Our Heritage"-on the dust jacket and at pages 181 and 204. They were produced in the 1880s during the artist's visit to the Mennonite West Reserve. I'm not familiar enough with the area and scenes they portray but after seeing the sketch by Lord Dufferin I've learned to appreciate the detail and accuracy they contain. As for Lord Dufferin's sketch it adds great meaning to an event which was so near yet so far away and in a another time. It serves to direct me to look for more meaning in something I'd viewed as a scene lost forever and visible only to the imaginative. See also Wm. Schroeder, Mennonite Historian, Vol. XXIV, No. 2 June 1998, page 8.

Belize

“Belize” February, 1998, by Wilmer Penner, Box 1305, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

History is lived forward, but understood backward. It is rare to have the opportunity to see what your life might have been had different choices been made. For those of my generation growing up in the **Kleine Gemeinde** of the East Reserve, Belize provides this rare view of ‘what-might-have-been’. I took this step into the past in February, on a trip with our editor, Delbert.



A Brahma bull hams it up beside the driveway to the home of Elizabeth Plett Reimer, Spanish Lookout, Belize, symbolizing the multi-cultural society of Belize. Spanish Lookout, located in the San Ignacio district in central Belize, also known as Cayo, is only 30 kilometres from the Guatemala border. Approximately 50 kilometres into Guatemala are the Mayan ruins of Tikal as well as the regional business centre, Flores.

Our host, Gerhard R. Penner, had lived in Hochfeld within a mile of my present home until he was fourteen. He attended the old Moray School (Blumengard) while I was in the Landmark School (Prairie Rose, also called “Krauje Launt” by “Bloomeneada”)--no doubt we battled in the bitter baseball rivalries of the time. My future became that of the typical Hanover modernite--a profession with a full secular education while around me, commercially, Steinbach became ‘worth the trip’. But Gerhard’s future was quite different. In 1948, his family decided to join the emigration to Mexico, then to Belize, so that a simpler life style could be preserved.

The price the emigrants paid to preserve their ideals was high. Mexico with its arid farming lands and corrupt government prac-



A typical scene in the Shipyard Colony, a successful settlement of 2500 Mennonites in northern Belize. Cattle farming and dairy are major industries in Shipyard.



The buggies of the “old” Coloniers are famous for their ultra-smooth ride and precisely machined suspension systems, apparently using V-W springs/shock absorbers.

tices soon drove many to new hardships in the jungle conditions of Spanish Lookout and Blue Creek, Belize. But to these courageous pioneers, restoring the earlier values of our forebears was worth the blood, tears, arid sweat. While Hanover joined the march of ‘progress’ in public-school education and commerce, the values these emigrants tried to preserve were intended to bring them back to an earlier time. The colony returned to communal title of land, thus again making it possible to enforce the authority of the church and its bishops in the colony.

Having control of the schools--threatened in Canada and Mexico--was of first importance. Spanish Lookout has a thriving educational system, but it is completely under the



Mother and children at the store. The question remains, will the “old” Colonier Mennonites be able to maintain their traditional lifestyle in the face of modern challenges. These include a plague of missionaries unable to countenance the existence of communities which still endeavour to regulate themselves according to the New Testament.



Lower Barton Creek is unique in being the only "horse and buggy" settlement offshoot of the Kleine Gemeinde. Its setting in a semi-tropical valley is more reminiscent of a tourist paradise than a place where people actually live and work. Although Spanish Lookout controls much of agricultural production in Belize, Barton Creek produces most of the country's potatoes.



My favourite photograph. The carefree life of a young lad. Will the world allow him to grow up in the lifestyle of his parents? It is fortunate for the Barton Creekers that they live so far removed from the population centres of North America. If they were still living in Manitoba they would be besieged by millions of tourists annually much to the chagrin of former Manitoba Premier T. C. Norris who exiled their parents from Manitoba in 1916-27 for the "crime" of wishing to educate their children using the Bible as textbook. Photos by Doreen Plett, February 1998.



The "scrum" at the store, Barton Creek. Kleine Gemeinde religious ideas have been combined with the Old Colonier genius for innovation in crafts and industry to create an idyllic lifeworld. Photo credit pages 38-39 Doreen Plett, February 1998.



Three visitors pose on the driveway of the Walter Friesen farm, Lower Barton Creek: l. to r. Tina Plett, Doreen Plett and Sheila Reid. To the right, the fabled Barton Creek which meanders through the valley, between orange groves and "bat and board" farm buildings.

supervision of the Colony.

The attitude to affluence was well-expressed by Walter Friesen in Barton Creek: "Others seek for more and more--we try to need less and less".

And so the life we encountered was very like ours had been in the Forties. Amusements were frowned on--radios were used for CB communication but not for entertainment. TV was banned. Cameras were often suspect. Indeed, in an Old Colony settlement, Delbert was told that with his movie camera he was 'stealing' from the people present, and in a Kleine Gemeinde home in Barton Creek, we were clearly told: "Bie ons näm wie nijch Blida auf" (By us we do not take pictures). After a rousing farewell evening at Denver Pletts', Gerhard reminded us that life was not just a matter for foolish jesting. In the same way, my Grandfather forbade any laughing or idle conversation at table as unseemly.

In church, the men and women sit on opposite sides of the aisle. The kiss of brotherhood is still common. The singing is in German, the sermon Plautdietsch. Personal conduct becomes subject to public review in ways most of us now would find uncomfortable.

But the Colony lives a rich communal life.

1997 Spanish Lookout Statistics

8,606 cattle, hens 97,000, pullets 34,000, broilers 501,000, tractors 209, automobiles 549, cultivated land 6580 acres, pasture 16990 acres, jungle 23662 acres, total owned 52,000 acres, corn planted first 1/2 9590 acres, red kidney beans 3827 acres, black eyed beans 3463 acres, rice 3303 acres, population 1640.

They have time to visit both as duty and as relaxation. Large families share life's sorrow and joy. When Ray Plett made a surprise visit to Spanish Lookout, he met five first cousins in no time at all! Those in need are helped not by an abstract welfare agency but by their brothers and sisters in family and faith.

"To keep our sense of self, we need to know our history." Believing this, Delbert held a service at the main church (Schöntal) which was attended by over 500. He sketched our beginnings in the Holland of Menno Simons, through to Prussia and Russia. He sees the Kleine Gemeinde revival of Klaas Reimer, so often misrepresented in Mennonite history books, as an effort to return to the 'true faith' of our forefathers. He encouraged the Colony to hold fast to this 'true faith': a way of life based on discipleship (Nachfolge) rather than the emotional experience emphasised in some evangelical approaches. A lively question-and-answer period followed Delbert's presentation. The respondents showed a wide knowledge of the larger picture: from Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* to the Kleine Gemeinde history of education and publication.

Will the Mennonite colonies in Belize keep their traditional ethos? The same affluence that changed Steinbach from a town without the worldly contamination of a railroad to the Automobile City is at work in Belize. Land in Spanish Lookout is already worth thousands of dollars an acre. Industry is booming. The religious influences that changed the Kleine Gemeinde to the Evangelical Mennonite Conference are very present on the Colonies both within the congregations and from foreign missionizing churches.

Even those who see themselves as 'progressives' may well be nostalgic at these threats to a way of life that has given us wonderful communities.



"Our" Delbert, after his speech in the "big" church in Schöntal. Visiting with Gerhard and Susie Penner and Rev. Abe P. Thiessen, right.



The "big" farewell with the Plett cousins at Denver and Tina Pletts. Left to right: Almon Plett, Anton Plett, Gerhard Penner, Doreen Plett (at the end of table), Tina Reimer Plett, Maria Wolfe Plett, Tina Wolfe Plett, and Sarah Plett Loewen. In the rear, right, Mrs. Linda Dueck Thiessen.



Visiting after Sunday worship services in the Rosenort congregation, Spanish Lookout. The visiting after church is an essential part of the worship experience, reaffirming the sense of community.



Gerhard Penner with an embroidered wall-hanging listing the names of their grandchildren. Now retired, Gerhard was a successful school teacher dearly loved by several generations of students.



Another face of Belize. Surfing in the Caribbean Sea at Hopkins Village, southern Belize, February 1998. Jean Froese Barkman, originally from Steinbach, Manitoba, surfing at her sea side resort, "Jungle Jeannies". San Pedro on the Ambergris Ceye off the Barrier Reef in northern Belize is another popular destination for scuba divers and fishermen. Photos on page 40 by Will and Sheila Penner.

Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour, May 3-23, 1998

The 1998 "Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour" is now history. One of the members of our group, Gerald Wright, Cambridge, Ontario, a professional writer, has written a travelogue, see article following.

Although this was my third visit to the Ukraine, I had not realized the vast extent its fertile lands until now. For the first time we landed in Odessa instead of Simferopol/Yalta. In Odessa we were met by our guide Olga Shakina. We drove by bus 450 kilometres through Cherson/Nikopol arriving in Zaporozhe on May 7. The following Monday we drove another 450 kilometres east to visit Bergthal, the home of Manitoba's Chortitzer and Sommerfelder congregations, traversing almost 1000 kilometres of the eastern Ukraine, mile after mile of beautiful soil, rich black chernozem.

The 100 kilometre band along the Black Sea and Sea of Azov was among the wealthiest regions in Europe during the second half of the 19th century--the "bread basket of Europe". After 70 years of Soviet incompetence the region is almost devoid of agri-business infrastructure and barely able to feed itself. Modern farm leaders such as Viktor V. Kovdryo, manager of the Schoors Kolkusz (Collective Farm) are working hard to develop the markets and production needed to turn things around. One of the difficulties leaders such as Kovdryo encounter is the lack of reliable farm machinery. To deal with the situation, the Schoors Kolkusz purchased a John Deere 9600 combine in 1996 and credit the machine with saving their last year's crop for them. They are very proud of this piece of equipment which is stored under lock and key in its own machine shed.

The Schoors Kolkusz consists of the territory once belonging to the Molotschna villages of Pastwa, Grossweide, Rudnerweide and Sparrau. Sparrau was the village where Johann Plett (1765-1833), ancestor of the Pletts in Western Canada owned a Wirtschaft after his immigration to Russia in 1828. Pastwa was the home of Abraham Friesen (1816-71) who later moved to the Bergthal Colony where he became a minister. His descendants in the Steinbach Niverville area include Helen, Mrs. Eugene Derksen, Steinbach, Cornie L. Friesen, Tourond, John K. Friesen, Niverville, and Dr. Reinhard Friesen, Winnipeg, see *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, page 12.

Each time I do the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) heritage tour I see various improvements which can be made, not only in the itinerary, but also in how each area is best surveyed. On Friday, May 8, we visited the Molotschna Colony entering by way of Tokmak and travelling south. The first village along the route was Petershagen, home of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), and birthplace of the KG reform movement in 1812. It immediately struck me how appropriate this was, in terms of a KG heritage tour. After a short historical vignette we stopped and toured the site of the worship house built in 1892 to replace the original church constructed in 1831.



Welcome to the Ukraine! The members of the "Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour" are given a Ukrainian welcome in the village of Friedental near Odessa, a German village established in the late 18th century, now a collective farm. The Kolkusz leaders were proud of the 200 year history of their settlement. The bread is a traditional welcome, a symbol of friendship and hospitality. After touring the school, the group was also showered with flowers. Left to right: rear - Elma Reimer, Walter Reimer, Ernie Harder, Elma Harder, Ivan and Betty Unruh, John Bergen, Bill Plant; middle row: our two hosts, Leah Reimer, Milton and Margaret Toews, Gerald Wright, Margaret Bergen, Lydda Regehr, Walter Regehr, Russ Penner; and front row: School principle, Delbert Plett, group leader, three girls wearing traditional Ukrainian dress, and Martha Penner.



The Heuboden cemetery located half a mile east of the village situated beside a "Grogoney" or Scythian burial mound. The village lies perpendicular to the river road, to the right of the photo. This photo taken from on top of the burial mound shows the original portion of the cemetery used by the Mennonites. It is assumed that the KG made the decision to establish the cemetery beside the "Grogany". Presumably those who bought the village from the KG continued the practice. After the massacre of 1919 Ukrainians were settled into the area and continued to use the cemetery, burying their dead on top of the Grogany. This cemetery is believed to be the last resting place of the venerable Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), patriarch of all KG Loewens and Pletts.

We then drove south along the east bank of the Molotschna River, touring the first and original Molotschna villages almost all of which were home to several KG families in 1804/5. After visiting Münsterberg in the southeast corner of

the Colony, we turned east in Blumstein, and travelled through Ohrloff, Tiege, Blumenort and Rosenort, all villages important to the Kleine Gemeinde story. From here each tour will have to decide which villages they want to visit, it



The former village school and worship house in the village of Heuboden, home of KG delegate David Klassen (1813-1900), who later settled in Rosenhof, Manitoba. The buildings probably date to the 1890s.



Blumenhoff, view towards the south from just northwest of the cemetery. The overgrown brush covering the cemetery is visible to the left of the photo. The location of the photographer was the site of a Mennonite flour mill, destroyed years ago, visible by a scattering of small rock debris. The view is more or less down the former cross street. The building in the centre is located on the main street/river road, roughly in the centre of the village. In the rear can be seen the hill/plateau lying south of the Solenaya River where extensive open pit mining operations are in progress.



Another panorama of Blumenhoff. Photo taken from just south of the cemetery towards the southwest. Members of the KG Heritage Tour are walking along the former village cross street, now little more than a trail leading to the village cemetery. In the rear can be seen a huge Kolkusz barn, now empty. Behind the barn is a lower section of land believed to be where a perpendicular street--s dog leg--was laid out in 1865/67. i.e. just north of a small stream tributary of the Solenaya.



Another photo taken from the site of the former flour mill in Blumenhoff. Frank Dyck, pastor of the Mennonite Church in Zaporozhe points out the huge ravine running north perpendicular to the river road.

being impossible to visit all 60. We again visited my “cousin” Margaretha Plett Kravetz in Hierschau, and then, the Schoors Kolkusz (see above).

One of the more touching moments on the Molotschna tour was to be shown the doors to the basement of the Municipal offices (Gebietsamt) in Halbstadt where hundreds of Mennonite leaders were taken in 1937/8 by the NKVD for execution, by bullet in the back of the head.

On Saturday, May 9, we did our tour of the Borosenko Colony, 80 kilometres west of Zaporozhe and Chortitza Colony. We had the good fortune of being accompanied by Frank Dyck, pastor of the Zaporozhe Mennonite Church, who grew up in Nikolaithal, Borosenko. He showed us a new way to get to Borosenko, by turning northwest at the outskirts of Nikopol, instead of going through the City. The new route went past the meteorological factory north of Nikopol. It was not only much faster, the scenery was far more pleasant, avoiding the area of open pit ore mines found further west. I believe the new route is also more historical in the sense that it was probably the route used by our forebears when they lived in the region.

We turned in a westerly direction to cross the Solenaya River to enter Borosenko, traversing an elevated plateau along the south side of the Solenaya, which provided a beautiful panorama of Borosenko and the river flats to the east. On the north bank of the Solenaya, we turned left, passing through a small village called “Taspyeckoe”. I probably have the spelling wrong but hopefully its close enough to assist future visitors to find the correct route. We almost went the wrong way, turning right, which would have taken us to “KnpoBo” and eventually to Grünfeld and Friedensfeld, but we had other places to see first.

Four kilometres east lies the village of Heuboden, perpendicular to the river road. An old man came to our group and told us that a friend of his, Jakob Funk, had eventually managed to get to Germany where he still corresponded with him. He also identified two buildings parallel to the street in the centre of the village, east side, as being the school and worship house, respectively.

Three kilometres further east and we were in Blumenhoff, now called Alexandrovka, and not to be confused with the large town of the same name at the confluence of the Solenaya and Baseluk River, which was known to the Kleine Gemeinde as Stallach. The locals told us again that Blumenhoff was originally called Borosenko, meaning that it may have been the site of the nobleman’s estate. A huge Kolkusz barn still stands, empty and unused at the east end of the village. We were told that it had replaced two older buildings located on each side, and that these older buildings had been torn down and the bricks reused to build the barn. I believe that the worship house built by the Kleine Gemeinde in 1872 may have been one of these buildings. The locals also confirmed that the solid looking building at the west end of the village, north side, was the school, but it is obviously a later

construction, and must have been built by the Mennonites who bought the village from the KG.

One of the noteworthy things of our Borosenko visit was that in almost every village, one or more of the locals came forward to share their experiences of the Machnov massacres of November 1919. In Blumenhoff we were told that the village had received a secret warning and that the men and boys had fled thus escaping the bandits. It was said that Machnov himself stayed the night in Blumenhoff, in a house situated on the cross street, just south of the cemetery--a building no longer in existence.

We went on, west, then north, to the road west of Nikolaithal, and then west to Ebenfeld. We had already decided to hold our memorial service for the victims of the 1919 Machnov massacres in Ebenfeld for fear that we would not actually be able to get to Steinbach because of difficulties with the bus and driver. The first place we stopped, Olga was given the location of the cemetery, located south of the southerly street of Ebenfeld (it has a street along each side of the "drang"), towards the east end.

Stopping at the approximate place, Olga obtained permission for us to go across a private yard to the cemetery about 300 feet south. Here we held our worship service. It was especially moving as Margaret Bergen and John Bergen from our group had an uncle who was murdered in the massacre and buried in this cemetery. Margaret Penner Toews favoured us with a poem written especially for the occasion.

A man, born in 1920, came forward and told us he owned the property on which the graveyard was located. His mother had told him about the massacre and the Mennonites who had once lived there. The local folk lore was that Machnov's men demanded money from the Mennonites and that they had refused to pay, and consequently were massacred. Apparently one woman had hidden all night in a chimney and managed to escape. He showed us the exact place on the east side of the cemetery where the mass grave for the victims of the 1919 massacre was located, originally marked by a cairn of small boulders some of which still lay strewn about.

We were also informed that the gravestones from the cemetery had been used to build a Kolhkusz barn at the corner, at the easterly "drang" crossing. The building had recently been bulldozed down and we could see gravestones and parts of gravestones littered about where the bulldozer had spread them out. Hopefully they will remain there so that the next tour can attempt to do some inventory of these stones.

We had to go on, the day was short and there were many more villages to visit. We drove west out of the village, and turned north, arriving in Mironovka 15 minutes later. Sometime after the Steinbach massacre of December 7, 1919, the entire village was levelled and all the inhabitants resettled east across the river to Mironovka. Flooding was a perpetual problem, even in the days when the KG lived there, as evidenced by the journals of Abraham F. ("Foula") Reimer. I suspect this may have been one reason why



Pastor Frank Dyck shows us the cemetery at Ebenfeld. The corpses of the 67 victims of the December 7, 1919 massacre were buried on the east end of the cemetery, to the left of the photo.



Walter Reimer leads the memorial service commemorating the memory of the 67 victims of the Ebenfeld massacre as well as the 54 victims of the Steinbach massacre of November 7, 1919. The gravestones were removed from the cemetery by the Soviets to build a Kolhkusz barn.



View towards the northwest, the site of the original village of Steinbach. In the foreground, a corral with 60 head of cows, being milked by hand.



Steinbach was not a traditional name among the Russian Mennonites nor was it known among the Prussian Mennonites. This photo of the members of the KG Heritage Tour enjoying their lunch along the banks of the Baseluk River explains beyond any doubt the historical origin of the name, a "stony brook". Boulders were strewn along the east bank of the river at this point, extremely rare in the Ukrainian steppe. According to Gerald Wright who did some research on the topic during the 1960s there are six or so Steinbachs in Germany. Steinbach, Manitoba, founded in 1874 by seven KG families from Steinbach along the Baseluk River, has now become a City, the eighth largest in the Province.



The village of Grünfeld, north of Borosenko. Like most villages on the steppe, it was laid out in a river valley. Grünfeld was the home of notable settlers such as Cornelius Loewen, Abraham P. Isaac, Gerhard P. Goossen, etc.

some KG leaders refused to follow David Klassen of Heuboden to settle on the west side of the Red River.

We stopped at the village corral on the east side of the Baseluk and just across the river from the east end of Steinbach. A gentleman, by the name of George, came forward and told us that his parents had been servants for David Abramovich Penner from Steinbach. They had tried to save them and I believe he said they were able to help Mrs. Penner escape. But Mr. Penner was captured and executed and his parents buried him secretly in their garden, in fear of their lives. George also told us there was a crossing or fiord to get across the river, located about a half a mile from the village corral.

About 60 red cows, a breed originally known as the German red cow and introduced to the region by the Mennonites, were being milked in the corral by women. They were milking by hand, probably a private herd as opposed to belonging to a Kolhkus.

We had our lunch here sitting on the riverbank, basking in the sunshine. It was a gorgeous afternoon, with geese and several young boys swimming in the river. Thousands of crows were roosting in the row of trees, almost the only visible sign that a bustling village of twenty farmers had once nestled sedately in the lee of the plateau across the river. On the western horizon, far in the distance, we could make out the Scythian burial mound or "Gorgany" standing as a ghostly sentinel over the deserted graveyard below, where the victims of the 1919 massacre were buried not far from KG-ers such as my great-grandmother, Elisabeth Friesen Reimer (1849-73), Helena Born Fast (1838-73) and Anna Plett Siemens (1848-73).

It became particularly clear to the members of the tour, why the village had been named Steinbach. The east bank of the Baseluk at this point around the corals and further south was littered with huge boulders, something quite rare in this part of the country.

As we had suspected, the bus was unable to take us around so that we could actually walk the land of our forebears, and so--although disappointed--we had to leave this for another time. We were also unable to get to Annafeld, two miles northeast of Steinbach, for the same reason. We turned back, through Ebenfeld, and east to Nikolaithal. Along the way, Frank Dyck showed us the spot along the road where we could see the big ravine at the east end of Blumenhoff, a view even more clearly visible from the former village of Rosenfeld, of which no buildings are left.

Frank Dyck gave us a tour of Nikolaithal/Schöndorf, where he had grown up. He showed us the house which was his boyhood home and the school where he got his education. During the drive to Borosenko, Frank shared with us the tragic story of how his father was "represiert" and taken away by the NKVD in 1937. The group requested he write the story for the next *Preservings*, the December issue. I realize how difficult it is for survivors to talk and write about these experiences but hope that Frank will be able to provide us this account. It will be an inspiration to many. Frank also showed us the dirt road leading to Rosenfeld, four kilometres west. The road starts just north of the last house on the west side of the village street of Nikolaithal. Three kilometers east of Nikolaithal is a Ukrainian village and just east of there is a "Kolkusz" which might well be worth a visit for a further tour.

Two kilometers before Nikolaithal, the road turns north. Approximately two kilometers north those going to Nikolaithal, turn east another two kilometers. Those going to the northern part of Borosenko, keep going north to Felsenbach where a large mill, originally built by Mennonites, is still standing. Eichengrund which also suffered the Machnov massacre would be in the same area. Turning east six or so kilometres and then north, one comes to Rosenthal, featured in the "1995 Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour" pamphlet. A few kilometres back east and one is back on Highway 56 and only six or so kilometres south of Grünfeld. We were able to drive up to Grünfeld but not into the village because of the same mechanical difficulties. We were likewise unable to visit Friedensfeld.

Sunday, May 10. The significant experience in Zaporozhe was attending the worship service in the Mennonite Church. Walter Reimer was in charge of our worship services and Milton Toews our Low German preacher. After hosting the 80 or so members of the local church to lunch in the Zaporozhe Hotel, we sat and cried as six members of the church shared their life stories with us. I will let Gerald Wright write about these events in more detail.

Monday, May 11, we went to Bergthal, apparently the first tour group to go there as an official part of the itinerary. I will leave it for others to write about Bergthal, but I will say my first impression was there is much work left to be done here in terms of historical research and documentation. As the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society we are extremely pleased that Alexander Tadaye, Zaporozhe Archives, was able to make available the 1858 census records

for the villages of Bergthal and Friedrichsthal. It will take some time to get these documents translated from Russian, but I already know that they will provide a major boost to Bergthaler studies. The Bergthaler make up some 15 per cent of the entire Canadian Mennonite population.

Tuesday, May 12, we visited Neuendorf where I realized again how valuable Rudy Friesen and Sergey Shmakin's book *Into the Past* can be for tourists, visiting the ancient Mennonite villages in the area. Time and time again, I and other members of the tour found the book an absolutely invaluable guide and source of information. That afternoon we were off to Moscow.

Friday morning, May 15, we flew to Warsaw by Aeroflot. In Warsaw we had a change from our previous itinere, taking a bus instead of flying to Gdansk. This was a great improvement and also enabled the members of the tour to get a much more historical sense of the extent of the Mennonite settlement in Prussia/Poland, which extended all the way along the Vistula River, almost to Warsaw. The roots of most of the Russian Mennonites, however, are found in the delta area, bordered by the Marienberg, Elbing and Danzig triangle.

We stayed the night at the hotel Zamic, at the historic Marienburg castle completed by the Teutonic Knights in 1266. The next morning we toured the castle and then started our tour of the delta with a visit to the Heuboden cemetery. Then we headed northeast towards Elbing, stopping on the way to visit the Fischau cemetery. Evidently, the area had considerable water for some time during the draining process and hence the name, meaning literally, "Fish in the pasture". We toured Elbing, where we had lunch, and then through Orloff, Ladekopp, Schöneberg, and Fürstenwerder, home of the Pletts, where we also visited the locks built by the Mennonites years ago.

The next morning, Sunday, May 17, some of us attended mass at the "Maria Kirche", a large cathedral built during the 13th century. Then we toured to Tiegenhagen, where we held our own worship service in the remnants of the cemetery of this village founded in the 1300s. Hundreds of our ancestors lie buried here in this cemetery situated on the banks of the placid Tiege River where fishermen were casting their hooks for



Our famous and highly appreciated guide, Olga Shmakina with Alexander Tedyev, Archivist Zaporozhe Archives.

some early Sunday morning action. I regard the village of Tiegenhagen and the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde centred there for several centuries as the heartland of the KG.

After the worship service we toured the concentration camp at Stutthof, and for those of us who could still eat after that experience, we went on through Steegen/Stegna, to a resort on the shores of the Baltic Sea for lunch. On the way back to Gdansk we visited Neunhuben, home of Klaas Reimer (770-1837) founder of the KG--see front cover photograph. One of the features in this village is the shell of an old windmill built in 1792 only six years before Klaas Reimer married Maria Epp and moved from Petershagen, two kilometers south of Tiegenhagen, to Neunhuben. Isaac Regehr (b. 1774) was another KG patriarch originating in Neunhuben and one of the candidates for ministerial election of 1801 together with Klaas Reimer. Isaac Regehr was the great-grandfather of historian Ted Regehr as well as Walter Regehr, member of our tour group and our faithful "wagon master".

Our guide in the delta, Dr. Arkadiusz Rybak, deserves a special mention for his passion and devotion to the history of the Mennonite/Hollander settlement in the Delta. Although retired, he works hard, attempting to preserve old grave-stones and trying to do at least some maintenance--personally cutting grass in the cemeteries with a hand scythe. Single handedly he has embarked upon the almost hopeless task of watching over more than 30 large Mennonite cemeteries, as well as a bounty of four centuries of material culture, trying vainly to stave off rapid deterioration and local indifference. Dr. Rybak is owed a great debt of gratitude by all Mennonites of Prussian/Russian origin in North and South America. It is a shame for Mennonites that they have so little pride in their background that they allow such a travesty to continue, and, meanwhile, so many find ample money to fund the often dubious endeavours of American Fundamentalists.

From Gdansk we took a day train to Berlin, an enjoyable experience, being able to see a lot of the former Prussian territory. After two nights rest in Berlin we boarded our beautiful Mercedes bus, driven by Gerlind and Uwe Jähn and toured to Bielefeld, staying the night in Lippstadt. Gerlind originally hailed from Mecklenburg and hence able to understand some of our Plautdietsch. The next day, Thursday, May 21, we attended the Ascension Day service in the All-Mennoniten Gemeinde in Bielefeld. We were again moved to tears as we listened to 12 testimonies of baptismal candidates who shared their personal experiences of growing up in Soviet Russia and finding the Lord. After the worship service Bishop Peter Rempel met with our group and took time to explain their history and church activities. After a guided tour of the City we left for Lewwarden where we stayed the night.

The next morning, May 22, 1998, we visited Harlingen on the North Sea and then Witmarsum where we held our last worship service in the Menno Simons "Memorial Church". It was a moving experience as we saw how our pilgrimage tracking five centuries of migration and per-



Current road map of the Borosenko area. Nikopol is in the bottom right hand corner. Route 56 goes north along the right hand side to Zeylonoye (Grünfeld) and Miropol (Friedensfeld). Just north of the Solenaya River we followed the river road through Heuboden and Blumenhoff, turned northwesterly towards Ebenfeld and Steinbach (west across the river from Mironovka). More or less north of Blumenhoff is the combined village of Nikolaithal/Schönfeld. Hopefully this map will help others touring the region.

secution all came together in this place and in Pingium where Menno was the pastor of the Roman Catholic Parish in 1536 when he first joined the Anabaptists.

Here it was also time to say goodbye. For three weeks we had been like a family, a small "Kleine Gemeinde". We carried each others baggage, exchanged medicines, heard about each other's aches and pains and shared joys and sorrows. By the end of the trip we were like a well-

trained team--Walter Reimer (descendant of Klaas) our Aeltester, Milton Toews prediger, Walter Regehr wagon master, Margaret Penner Toews poet laureate, Lydda Regehr personal chiropractor/physician, Ernie Harder video recorder, Gerald Wright scribe, and Martha Penner head giggler.

To the members of the group, it was great tour--I'll miss you all!

From the Sheriff

“Heros of the Faith”

by Gerald Wright

“Heroes of the Faith: The Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour to Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Germany and Netherlands 1998,” by Gerald Wright, R.R.#5, Cambridge, Ontario, N1R 5S6.

I’m not really a Mennonite but I’ve had so many connections with Mennonite language, history, culture and faith that I often feel like one. If that makes me an oddball, so be it.

Normal people don’t answer ads these days for something called a “Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour.” And normal people don’t go on tours that take them to doubtful places like Russia and the Ukraine where worn-out tour buses wait to shake the liver out of them on unpaved roads with more potholes in a single kilometre than there are mountains on the moon. Normal people don’t, but I did.

And for absolutely sure normal people don’t go on tours that cost enough money for a husband and wife they could have used it to make a good down payment on a new home.

Normal people don’t, and yet after I had signed up for this tour I found that 17 other people had done the same thing and almost half of them were from Steinbach, Manitoba, a place where I still feel at home when I go to visit.

And if you think I’m an oddball I don’t know what you’d call our tour leader and organizer, Delbert Plett. When I used to be a news reporter covering the police courts I met a lot of lawyers, but Delbert was the first one I had ever met who spent all his spare time (and probably money) translating from German to English obscure letters written by his remote ancestors, and publishing them in book form at his own expense.

He gets as excited about finding an old gravestone in a Russian village as a lot of people would if they discovered one of those new diamond deposits in the Canadian arctic.

Now that we’re all back home again I can tell you that this kind of tour doesn’t attract your ordinary Canadian. Ordinary Canadians spend their holiday money on a day at the beach or maybe a couple of weeks in a warmer climate.

Mind you, the Ukraine has its beaches too - down on the Black Sea. But if you go to one, somebody may steal your clothes while you’re in swimming. A 10 year-old pickpocket stole my expensive sun glasses out of my right pants pocket while he was walking beside me on the street in Odessa, and he did it so skilfully that I didn’t miss the things until two or three hours later.

Our tour group aimed at visiting as many of the former Mennonite colonies in Russia and Poland as we could. I say former because these colonies no longer exist. What we really visited were the Russian or Ukrainian and Polish villages which stand now where these former colonies used to be.

I had heard plenty of stories about the grue-

some Stalinist repression of not just Mennonites, but minorities of every kind. Besides wanting to show some solidarity with the Mennonites I think it was a morbid fascination with the grim but true stories of those days that drew me to go and see the site of this macabre regime’s inhuman crimes.

During the 15 years that followed the communist revolution the Soviet regime managed to liquidate by one means or another about one-third of all Russia’s 100,000 Mennonites. The rest they drove into emigration or exiled them in slave labor camps in remote Siberia or Kazakhstan where they died slowly of brutal treatment, starvation and disease.

The Mennonite farming villages in an area stretching for 400 or more kilometres north from the Black Sea were all given new Russian names and turned into collective farms. We drove through and stopped briefly in dozens of these villages and paid official visits to three or four collective farms.

The same people who ran the Russian communist party and the security police for so long are still there, only now instead of running the KGB they are running Russia’s organized crime. And these people are experts at organization. That’s why crime is so rampant in Russia. There are perhaps altogether a few hundred thousand people who previously had jobs they got through their party connections who now have all the money and drive Mercedes cars in the big cities, and the vast millions who make up the rest of the population are dirt poor. This is the same all over the former Soviet Union.

Officially there is religious and political freedom, but people lived so long under communist terror that many things there still remind you of a police state.

You run into long holdups and you’re kept standing in line at airports while one official after another scrutinizes your passport and your visas. There are the suspicious looking plain clothes guards (not just one but two or three of them) standing just inside your hotel door and watching every person who steps over the threshold.

When you book into the hotel you have to surrender your passport. If you go to a bank to cash travellers’ cheques, two uniformed guards meet you in an entrance lobby, then one of them personally escorts you up a stair to the second floor where you can transact your business. And the simple act of cashing a traveller’s cheque can take up to half an hour while the girl behind the counter first scrutinizes with infinite care your passport and your travellers’ cheques, then takes it over to a higher-placed bank officer for him to check. When the transaction is finally approved the girl’s computer spits out a document with five or six copies. She has to sign every copy and you then have to do the same before you get a single grievena. Grievena is the present name for the Ukrainian currency which has changed names no fewer than five times since the country voted for independence from Russia in 1993.

Mind you there is nothing unfriendly or impolite about these girls or even about the guards at the door. It’s just the way things are done in

In Remembrance: the massacre at Ebenfeld and Steinbach, Russia, December 7, 1919.

We pause a moment here in Ebenfeld on this wide emerald plain
To think of those, our kith and kin so rashly slain.
A crimson stain has spread across the land
An abel’s blood is moaning from the sand.
List’ning with our hearts we hear each scream and wrenching prayer -
Can we hear them? Hear them in the air?
The crackle of the well-aimed shots, the whine of bayonet
We dare not close our ears - lest we forget.
how fathers fell with sudden thud, and anguished mothers quailed
And sighing died, and babies cried silenced in mid-wail
And grown young sons wept ashen-faced
As did the sweet lithe daughters
Ravaged, dead or living amidst the gory, slaughter
How can it be that human hearts so viciously have hated
Become so etched with venom, souls that God had once created.
That they would fell their neighbors,
Leave them twitching in the dust,
Gorging in their thirst for blood, blackened by their lust?
O Father, wash all bloodied hands within the crimson sea
Made by a gushing river from a cross on Calvary,
And wash our very hate away so we’ll have no regret
When once we’ll face a Righteous Judge lest we forget, lest we forget.

- Margaret Penner Toews (May 1998), in memory of those who died.

the former Soviet Union. With all of the organized crime there are probably so many forged passports and travellers' cheques, that all these precautions are from their standpoint, quite necessary. Nevertheless if you come from a free place like Canada, it feels pretty strange having to go through all this.

It's as though the Russian people don't really believe that this kind of freedom can last anyway, so what's the use getting all excited about it. The sad truth is that many of them are economically worse off now than they were under communism and there are a great many poor people who would like to see things return to what they were before communism collapsed.

In the Ukraine which since 1993 has been a separate republic, the average income of a retired person is 47 grievenas a month. It takes two grievenas to make one U.S. dollar. In Moscow a pensioner gets the equivalent of 35 U.S. dollars a month, but five antibiotic tablets cost \$25.

On a large collective farm we visited at a place called Prostora on the site of a former Mennonite community, the farm boss told us his machinery is in such poor condition he sometimes feels like crying.

It takes most of the crop the farm produces just to trade away for gas and electricity. When we were there, workers had just been paid their wages for the previous year, and payment is not in cash but just in barter items like food or clothing.

Since the Ukraine separated from Russia, Russia has either cut off or drastically reduced the oil it will allow the Ukraine to have. At the Odessa airport where we landed, there are what I estimated to be about 100 planes just parked on the ground in long lines. Most of them haven't flown for three or four years. The only planes moving are foreign planes coming in and out.

Later on at the airport in Moscow it was a different story. There was lots of activity there. In many ways it was like a Canadian airport except that the scrutiny of passengers' documents seems to be a lot stricter and takes a lot longer.

At Odessa the grass in the parks is a foot high in places. Presumably there's no fuel for lawn mowers, to cut it. We saw lots of cows and goats tethered in these parks with their owners guarding them to make sure nobody steals them. One of the first things I noticed when we arrived was an older lady in a city park milking a goat.

For four days altogether, in the beaten-up Intourist bus we hired to take us around, we visited one Russian village after another where Mennonites had formerly lived. In a couple of villages we met old women who were born Mennonites but had their lives spared because they were married to Russians.

I can remember at least three of these women who were so glad to see us they cried. They could still remember some German from their youth so we were able to speak to them. The Bible was a forbidden book in the former Soviet Union for 70 years. There are still lots of people who never saw one, so I had bought some plastic bags in Zaporozhye and into them I put some little gifts - mostly small chocolate bars and other candy for the kids and a bar of soap for women



Our worship service in the Tiegenhagen cemetery Sunday morning, May 17, 1998. It was an eerie feeling to stand on the spot where possibly hundreds of our ancestors were buried. Third from the right is Dr. Arkadiusz Rybak, from Stare Pole (Altfelde).



Arcaded house, traditional Mennonite "Vorlaubhaus" in Orloff, southwest of Nowy Dwor Gdanski (Tiegenhof). The barn must have been added at a later date.



Arcaded house Fürstenwerder, the best preserved example of the style I have seen in the delta area. Front left, Walter Reimer. This building has been designated as a historical building by the Polish Government.



The placid waters of the Tiege River, flowing north towards the Baltic Sea, view towards the northeast. The village of Tiegenhagen founded in 1300 was located just to the north of this spot. The village cemetery was situated along the banks of the Tiege, just behind the photographer.

or some plastic razors for men along with a gospel of John in Russian in each bag.

It was one of my greatest pleasures in Russia to have been able to learn enough Russian to give a short speech every time I gave someone a bag.

On Saturday May 9 we visited a village whose Mennonite name was Ebenfeld in the former Mennonite colony of Borosenko. There, in a single day in 1919 all the people in the village who were unable to escape, some 50 or 60 of them, were shot, raped and hacked to death by members of the Machnov bandit army hired by the Bolsheviks to help them wipe out the Mennonites. Their reward was any loot they could take from the people they killed.

An old villager took us out across a plowed field to the grove of grass and trees which was once the Mennonite cemetery - but from which all the gravestones were long ago removed, and he showed the spot where in an unmarked mass grave the massacre victims were buried.

There among the trees in nearly perfect weather our little group held a very moving service. We sang two hymns in German - "Grosser Gott, Wir Loben Dich" and that all-time favorite Mennonite anthem, "Gott Ist Die Liebe". Then in English we sang "Amazing Grace" and "Faith of Our Fathers". In our group were two people, John and Margaret Bergen, brother and sister, both retired Canadian school teachers, who lost their grandparents and all of their aunts and uncles in that massacre.

We prayed as a group and one of our number, Margaret Toews of Neilburg Sask, a very gifted poetess, read what I thought was an almost inspired poem she had written for the occasion. It wasn't very long and if I had not unfortunately misplaced my copy, I would use it here. Perhaps "der lieber Schriftleiter" will do that for me.

Sunday, May 10 was for me the most exciting day of the tour. I had vaguely hoped before we left to meet some Christians who had spent time in prison because of their faith. On that Sunday all my wishes came true.

We gathered on Sunday morning in a little believers church which meets in a large room in an apartment building in the centre of Zaporozhye.

The pastor is Frank Dyck who grew up till age 16 in a Mennonite farm village not far from Zaporozhye. When he was 16 he saw his own father, a layman preacher of the gospel taken out of their home by the secret police who came knocking on the door at midnight. He was shot the same night in the prison in Zaporozhye.

Frank was the only one of his family who escaped eventually to the west because of the war, managing to get to Canada where he worked his way first through Bible school and then through teachers' college. Through all the years that he taught school he pastored a church at the same time. During that whole time, he told me, he had one ambition, to return to Russia some day and give people the word of God. And when he retired from teaching, that's what he did.

He has been working in and around Zaporozhye now for five years and he told me

those have been the happiest and most satisfying years of his life. He has taken the Bible into many many Russian homes and preached and held services in the city and in the villages. Many of the younger people in his congregation have become believers through his ministry.

Pastor Dyck's mother was left with eight children after her husband was shot. He told me how she would work all day to support the family then patch their worn-out clothing all evening. He told me how brave she was, never complaining or grumbling, telling her children stories from the Bible, and making as he said, a very profound impression on him. It was her



An abandoned windmill at Neunhuben, the place of residence of KG founder Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) after he married Maria Epp, daughter of the esteemed Danzig Aeltester Peter Epp. The building is now used as a storage house for the adjacent cemetery--see also cover photo. Here Milton and Margaret Toews, and Gerald Wright inspect the writing in a concrete pad poured by the front door.

life and example, he told me, which convinced him to give his own life to Christ. Later, after Frank's escape, she and four of her sons was sent to a forced labor camp where they spent many years enduring incredible hardships.

The preaching on that Sunday morning was in German which all but one or two in our group understood and it was translated into Russian by a woman translator. After the service, by paying \$20 U.S. each, the members of our group were able to invite all the adult people in the church - about 60 or so on that Sunday - to the noon meal in our hotel dining room.

After the meal, one after another, older believers, most of them women because their men were all killed, people who spent many long years imprisoned in slave labor camps, got up and told their stories.

Even as you hear them tell it you can hardly imagine that any human being could survive the kinds of things they did. Women and half-grown children had to walk 10 kilometres to work every morning, chop huge logs out of the river ice with just anything they could improvise for a

tool. They had to load those logs onto railway cars again with only tools they improvised themselves.. After doing this work all day long, they then had to then walk 10 kilometres back to camp. And they did this in many cases for 10 years till the authorities relented a bit. No wonder they look old beyond their years.

I sat at the table with a man named Henry Wiens who is eight years younger than I but looks eight years older. He told me how he and his family were exiled to Kazhakstan where he was put on a collective farm run by Cossacks.

His job was to fatten a herd of cattle but he was forbidden on pain of death to milk one drop of milk from a cow. Meanwhile his wife and children were starving. He risked his life for them by climbing onto the barn roof at night, making an opening big enough that he could get through it, then letting himself down by a rope, into the barn



A photograph of the wood structure inside the old wind mill building. The basic frame of the building consisted of four huge beams 20 inches square. Each beam had a wooden inscription carved into it. One of them read: "Anno 1792 is dieser Thurm gebaut, der Bauherr ist gewesen, Isaak Quapp, Schulz auf Neunhuben" ("The tower was built in 1792, the construction supervisor was Isaac Quapp, Mayor of Neunhuben").

with a can or pail, milking a cow, and shinnying back up the rope and closing the hole again.

I will never forget one woman who was just a girl when their whole family was sent to Siberia. One after another her brothers were taken away, never to be seen or heard from again. Except for one. One day there came a knock at their door and the mother went to the door. There was a dirty, emaciated, bearded skeleton of a man with wild staring eyes. Her mother was just slamming the door shut when the fellow said, "Mama. Mama."

It was one of her sons, a brother to the woman who was speaking. His back had been broken in



Our final worship service in the "Menno Simons Memorial Church" in his birthplace, Witmarsum, Holland. On the wall to the left hangs a portrait of Menno. On the beam overhead the words, "hear God's Word, believe God's Word, and do God's Word." And then it was time to say goodbye.

a slave-labor camp and he had come home to die. There was an emotional reunion as his mother and sister pulled him into the house, but his health was so far deteriorated that he lived only a few months.

Harvey Dyck, is a Mennonite himself but he's also a professor of history at the University of Toronto and a specialist in Russian studies. When we were in Zaporozhye he was just completing two months of research into the Communist party archives there which he described to us as the best and most complete in the former Soviet Union. It was his 12th visit to Russia to do this kind of research.

He told us about his findings in the archives in a 45-minute talk he gave us one evening in our hotel dining room. He said, and this is a direct quote, "The records of the communist party are very well preserved and they show beyond any doubt that of all the minorities in the Soviet Union, it was the Mennonites who put up the stiffest resistance to sovietization and it was 100 per cent because of their Christian faith."

He told us the Soviet authorities tried as hard as they could to make a deal with the Mennonites. They offered them all sorts of enticements - land for their landless, new schools, good educations for their children and the right to keep their own German language.

Of course there would be a price to pay. They would have to forget this foolish religious superstition in the new atheist society. They would have to forget their lay preachers and ministers and forget those among them who had been big landowners and factory operators. They would be dealt with appropriately when the time came.

To their everlasting credit, not more than two or at the very most three per cent of all the Mennonites in the Soviet Union succumbed to the blandishments of the regime. And for that

they suffered terribly.

One third of the 70,000 Mennonites in the Ukraine were killed outright or hounded to death by forced labor, exile and starvation. For 70 years, Prof. Dyck told us, a curtain of silence has hidden the full extent of this brutality from the world, and only now that the party archives have been opened to foreign researchers, are the real facts becoming more fully known.

These heroes of the faith lie today in unmarked graves. All mention of them has been forbidden and is still being forbidden in the history books studied by children in the schools of the former Soviet Union.

Olga Shmatkin was the best of the several tour guides we had in Europe. She is partly of Jewish descent. There were and still are many ethnic Jews in the FSU. She speaks very good English and she's about 43 years old. She accidentally gave away her age in something she said one day.

She told us that it's not just the truth about the Mennonites which has been suppressed and kept out of the history books. It's common knowledge among students of Russian history everywhere that some seven million people died of starvation during the artificial famine brought on by Stalin's campaign to wipe out the "kulaks" or small landowners.

But in the SU where all this happened, she said people of her age had never heard of it. It was all suppressed and hidden in the files of the KGB and the Communist party which only became open to historians and researchers after the fall of the communist government.

Fifty per cent of couples in the FSU are now divorced. Olga also told us, somewhat wistfully I thought, that among Russia's Baptists she has never heard of a single divorce. That was once I felt rather good about being a Baptist.

Our group included two couples from the

so-called Holdeman Mennonite Church, more properly called Church of God in Christ (Mennonite). One of these men, Milton Toews from Neilburg, Sask. gave us two short but to me very memorable devotionals in the little services we held here and there.

He likened the call felt by their Mennonite forefathers to God's call to Abraham in Gen 12. He said he was sure that had they not been so confident that they were obeying the voice of God, they would not have had the inward spiritual strength to endure the trials and sufferings they had to go through, and "it is the enduring and unseen things that sustain us still." Even a Baptist like myself can identify with that.

I felt I learned something from those believers in Russia about how Christians should behave under the kind of conditions which Russian believers had to face for 70 years under communism.

Later on in Poland and Germany we saw many unforgettable sights. Among them was the notorious Stutthof concentration camp east of Gdansk in Poland where the Nazis murdered some 65,000 people, men, women and children, between 1941 and 1945.

It has all been perfectly preserved as a museum up to and including the gas chamber, crematorium and a large quantity of the victims' shoes and even piles of half-charred human bones and skulls.

In and around Bielefeld in Germany there are living some 15,000 Mennonites, survivors of Soviet persecution who have gotten out of Russia since the fall of communism.

On Ascension Day we attended a service in one of the six churches they have built there. We heard testimonies of about 10 people who had come to faith in the past few months.

Four or five were teenagers. Some of them were middle-aged people who were never allowed to hear the Christian Gospel because of the prohibitions against preaching when they lived in Russia.

The church where the meeting was held seats 500 and it was packed. Their largest church seats 700 and they are building a seventh church. They also have a Bible school which operates on a zero budget because all the teachers are volunteers, the classes are held in the evenings, and the students are all people who work during the day and live at home.

The Soviet persecution has been good for their spiritual lives and stimulated a desire to preach, pray and worship where and when they have the chance.

At Witmarsum in Holland we visited and held a short service in the building dedicated to the reformer Menno Simons. Outside the town we visited his monument by the former "Scheinen kirch" where he had preached, which has inscribed on it the verse that led to his conversion and life-long ministry. (1 Cor. 3:11) "For out foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

It wasn't everyone's idea of a holiday, but most of us wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else.

Articles

Johann G. Barkman (1858-1937): Pioneer Mayor

gathered by grandson Roland Barkman, Box 98, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Family Background.

Johann G. Barkman was the son of pioneer Prediger Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75) of Steinbach, Manitoba, who drowned in the Red River in 1875: see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 1-10. His mother was Elisabeth Giesbrecht (1830-58) an aunt to the other Giesbrechts in Steinbach: see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 21-22.

Johann G. Barkman (1858-1938)

Johann was born in Waldheim, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia in 1858. When he was about 9 years old the family moved to a new Kleine Gemeinde (KG) settlement called Friedensfeld, situated some 30 miles north of Nikopol. In 1874, when Johann was 18 years of age, the Barkmans immigrated to Manitoba, where they were 1 of 18 pioneer families who settled the village of Steinbach.

On January 6, 1878, Johann married Margaretha, daughter of Jakob K. Friesen (1822-75), who had drowned in the Red River together with his father in 1875: for additional information regarding the Friesen family, see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 25-6. In this respect Johann went ahead of older brother Jakob, who married Margaretha's sister Maria on Sept 8, later that same year. The wedding ceremony for Johann and Margaretha was preformed by Rev. Peter Baerg of Grünfeld, the senior minister in the KG at the time.

Steinbach, 1878.

Johann was an enterprising young man and in 1878 he purchased Wirtschaft 2 on Steinbach's Main Street from the village association for \$200.00. This property had previously been owned by Cornelius Fast, one of the original pioneers who had moved to the Winkler area. The Barkman family farmed on this property, approximately where Penner Chev is located today, for many years. Living next door was brother-in-law, Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht, who acquired the adjacent Wirtschaft 3 from Gerhard Warkentin in 1879. The two families were neighbours here for 35 years. For a picture of sisters Mrs. Johann G. Barkman and Mrs. Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht, see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 23-24. The yards and houses of the 2 sisters even resembled each other: see Ernie Toews, "Steinbach Main Street - Part Four, Photo One, elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Barkmans were only a young couple at the time and their circumstances were occasionally quite meagre. As the family grew their financial situation improved as well. During



Johann G. Barkman (1858-1937). Courtesy Reflections, 71.

the 1880s Maria's sister, Susanna S. Friesen and her husband Aaron W. Reimers, lived on the Katstelle across the street from the Barkman home. The Reimers "also planted the acorn trees with which the village boys later became quite familiar." Peter S. Rempels later lived on this property. In about 1955 Jake Banman built a service station on the site.

Farming on Main Street, 1878.

In 1882 the Johann G. Barkmans were rebaptized and joined the Holdemans Gemeinde together with most of Mrs. Barkman's siblings as well as Johann's brother Jakob.

According to the 1883 assessment records Johann owned 80 acres of land with 15 acres

cultivated, and other property assessed as follows: buildings \$25, furniture \$25, 2 horses, 2 cows and a yearling, and a line of farm equipment for a total assessment of \$273. Johann was a community man and by the next year he is shown as the owner of a threshing machine valued at \$500. Possibly this is the community threshing machine purchased by the village of Steinbach in 1882: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, page 6.

In 1886 the Barkmans' built a new barn for \$70 and in 1889 they added a new house for \$150. Johann was a progressive farmer and added new equipment as it became available. The 1896 assessment records show Johann's farming operation as follows: SW36-6-6E, 60 acres cultivated, with buildings, \$850, personal property \$489, including 5 horses, 7 cows, 4 yearlings and 2 pigs.

Johann G. Barkman enjoyed travelling and on October 23, 1904, he left on a three week visit of relatives and friends in Nebraska and Kansas. The Barkmans were very hospitable and frequently received visitors from these places and elsewhere.

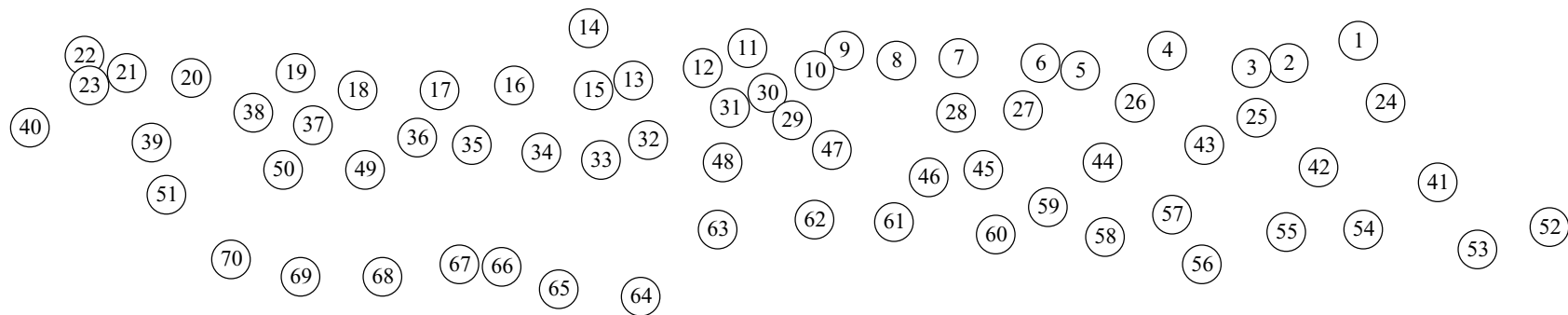
In 1905 they had a windmill installed, probably mounted on the barn and used for water pumping, feed crushing and other similar tasks. By 1910 Johann and Margaretha had a telephone installed in the house.

Mayoralty, 1884-1912.

Johann G. Barkman served as Mayor or Schulz of the village of Steinbach for 25 years, an unrivalled record of service in the community.



Johann G. Barkman and Margaretha Friesen Barkman, courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Historical Sketches of Steinbach," *Die Post*, January 19, 1965, page 6.



Johann G. Barkman Family Picture 1930.

1. Peter F. Barkman; 2. Vernon Barkman; 3. Walter Barkman; 4. Martin F. Barkman; 5. Bernard Barkman; 6. John D. Bartel; 7. Albert Goossen; 8. Waldon Barkman; 9. Peter I. Reimer; 10. Art Reimer; 11. Jacob F. Barkman; 12. Herbert Barkman; 13. Elizabeth Bartel (Mrs. John); 14. John F. Barkman; 15. Margaret Reimer (Mrs. P.I.); 16. Agnes Barkman (Mrs. Martin); 17. Minna Reimer; 18. Elma Barkman; 19. Mrs. Esau; 20. Sarah Barkman (Mrs. C.F.); 21. Helen Reimer (Mrs. K.B.); 22. Martha Barkman; 23. John S. Friesen; 24. Leonard Reimer; 25. Frank P. Wiebe; 26. Arnold Reimer; 27. Harold Barkman; 28. Margaret Barkman (Mrs. Jac. F.); 29. John K. Barkman; 30. Klaas B. Reimer; 31. Annie Wiebe (Mrs. Frank); 32. Mathilda Barkman; 33. Elda Barkman; 34. Emma Reimer; 35. Doris Barkman; 36. Maria Goossen (Mrs. Frank D.); 37. Amanda Barkman (Mrs. Peter F.); 38. Mathilda Barkman (Mrs. John F.); 39. Lena Reimer; 40. John G. Barkman; 41. Levi Reimer; 42. Leonard Barkman; 43. Daniel Barkman; 44. Herman Barkman; 45. Clarence Reimer; 46. Esther Reimer; 47. Martha Barkman; 48. Mary Barkman; 49. Linda Reimer; 50. Elvina Goossen; 51. Margaret Barkman (Mrs. John G.); 52. Harvey Bartel; 53. Roland Barkman; 54. Jonas Goossen; 55. Alvin Bartel; 56. Ervy Bartel; 57. Ronald Wiebe; 58. Gladwin Barkman; 59. Herbert Reimer; 60. Vincent Barkman; 61. Rowena Wiebe; 62. Lena Goossen; 63. Connie Barkman; 64. Dennis Barkman; 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70. Ernest Reimer

Photograph by Cornelius F. Barkman, son of Johann G., a well-known photographer who took a number of pictures around Steinbach during the 1920s and 30s. Photo identification courtesy of grandsons Jonas Goossen and Roland Barkman, Steinbach, Manitoba, January 1997. Subject to correction.

Four mayors are known to have served during what is considered the *Strassendorf* period of Steinbach, i.e. while it functioned as an “old” world village with all the properties held in common and divided among the villagers in *Gewanne* or field plans. The first mayor was Abram S. Friesen (1848-1916); the second, Johann R. Reimer (1848-1918) being elected 1880; the third, Gerhard R. Giesbrecht (1846-1907) served in 1883; and fourth, Johann G. Barkman. Johann R. Reimer served a second term sometime around 1895.

Assuming that Johann retired from the mayoralty around 1910-12, and that his term was interrupted by Reimer’s term of 3 years, he would have started his 25 year stint as mayor in about 1884.

Johann’s major achievement as mayor was the dissolution of the *Strassendorf* village plan. Up to this point title to all 22 quarter sections belonging to Steinbach was held by the owners in trust, so-to-speak. The village assembly (*Schultebut*), in turn, divided the land among the landowners according to age old custom whereby each Vollwirt or landowner had part of the pasture, part of each parcel of arable land and so forth. For a description of the Steinbach village plan, see John C. Reimer, “Steinbach village plan,” in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, 249-253. A map of the field plan by John C. Reimer is reproduced in *Reflections*, page 68.

The process of dissolving the *Strassendorf* plan was long and tedious with numerous meetings which Johann chaired assisted by pioneers Abram S. Friesen and Peter T. Barkman. Each land owner negotiated with the committee and eventually agreed to surrender title to the quarter section registered in their name in exchange for alternative property which they would now own in typical North American fashion. Much to the credit of the early citizens of Steinbach this process was settled peacefully and without rancour.

The result of the process was an official survey of the village landholdings along Main Street and the registration at Winnipeg Land Title Office of survey Plan 1711 on October 28, 1911. Each property owner along Main Street was now able to receive a title to their property. This was a significant achievement. The lack of individual titles had already cost the village at least one successful entrepreneur, namely, Peter W. “Schmet” Toews, who gave this as one of the reasons for leaving his successful blacksmith shop and other ventures to move to Linden, Alberta, in 1905.

The dissolution of the village plan also heralded the fact that a younger more assimilated generation of leaders was in control in the village. Where Abraham S. Friesen and Johann R. Reimer were of the “old” order and remained KG, Johann G. Barkman belonged to the Holdeman Gemeinde which was much more open to adoption of North American cultural ideas and assimilation into society at large.

Johann G. Barkman deserves much credit for Steinbach’s development as the growing

commercial centre for southeastern Manitoba. Ironically, while the City now has several parks worthily named after mayors who served terms during the 1980s and 90s and a hockey arena named for Mr. T.G. Smith who organized little league baseball and sports facilities, no civic recognition has been given to Johann G. Barkman whose quarter century record as Mayor and his dramatic achievement in changing the organizational infrastructure of the pioneer village is not likely to be rivalled any time soon.



Johann F. Barkman (1879-1942) married Matilda Kneller (1883-1966). Photo courtesy of Steinbach Post, January 19, 1965.

Texas, 1916-17.

In 1913 the Barkmans sold their property along Main Street to son John F. Barkman and moved across the creek where they built up a new farmyard.

In 1916 Johann G. Barkman, together with a number of fellow members of the Holdeman church, developed a yearning for the distant south. In May of that year, Johann travelled to Littlefield, Texas, to inspect settlement opportunities there.

Things must have looked okay and they made the decision to sell out in Steinbach and move south. In October of that year they moved to Littlefield, Texas. Others from the Hanover Steinbach area who joined the Barkmans in their move included Franz K. Goossens, Johann W. Reimers, Isaac W. Reimers, [Dr.] Isaac L. Warkentins and Johann K. Esaus.

Little is known about their physical circumstances in Littlefield. However, these were the war years and war hysteria was strong everywhere in North America, but particularly so in the U.S.A. Stories abound of Pacifists who were tarred and feathered and otherwise harassed.

Evidently this inspired the fast decision of the Barkmans to return to Manitoba. Al-

though a similar mass hysteria existed in Manitoba, the Mennonites here had received a written commitment from the Federal Government that their nonresistant beliefs would be respected. For the most part these rights were recognized during WWI although the basic integrity of guaranteed cultural and religious freedoms was not honoured. Fortunately the population of the E. Reserve area was almost exclusively Mennonite at the time, sparing the local population from much of the day to day harassment common elsewhere.

In August of 1917 the Barkman family returned to their old home town. Son Jakob F. Barkman and in-law Klaas B. Reimer picked up the family in Winnipeg on the return to Steinbach (not by limo). Here they established their home on a more permanent basis. “They bought a building site from[Johann R. Reimer] on Hanover Street, where it crosses the modern day Elm Avenue”: K. J. B. Reimer, “Neunzig Jahrige”.

Feed and Flour Business.

The move to Texas and having to dispose of property there under adverse conditions had been costly and resulted in serious financial losses for the Barkman family. In retrospect, Johann G. Barkman said, “Man thinketh but God directeth”. But the industrious pioneer soon recovered from his losses setting up a small but profitable feed and flour business on Main Street, approximately where “Steinbach Furniture” is located today. Next door was the bicycle and hardware store of son Johann F. Barkman; see *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 15-17.

Grandson Vernon Barkman recalled that Johann G. Barkman bought flour and feed which had to be picked up from the Giroux elevator eight miles from Steinbach. He was a Robin Hood flour agent. The flour came in 10 pound bags and 100 pound size, which he carried. Their brand name was “Purity flour” with exclusive rights which they sold in competition with Steinbach Flour Mills along with some others. Vernon remembers that son Jakob F. Barkman “brought in the flour by horse and sleigh, and when uncle Peter could not make the trip to Giroux (or Steinbach station as it was known), he would.

Grandson Albert Goossen, now aged 80, remembers Johann G. Barkman making deliveries with the steel-wheeled wagon with the “Purity Flour” sign on the side. Sometimes he helped his grandfather and made the deliveries for him. All sidewalks in those days were made of wood and so the noise would go out far-and-wide, if the wagon was empty.

Johann G. Barkman had two horses, Bob and Holly, a buggy, and a sleigh for winter time. Grandson Vernon Barkman remembers that when he was 14 years of age he made several trips to Giroux to pick up flour and received 50 cents per trip. Grandson John K. Barkman, now age 92, remembers that he made house-to-house deliveries one bag at a time with a small, steel-wheeled wagon.

Retirement.

All the grandchildren who remember Johann G. Barkman recall that he loved fishing and were thrilled when they were occasionally allowed to go out fishing with him when his regular partner--son Peter F. Barkman, was not available.

Johann G. Barkman soon retired in a reasonably good financial position. In his latter years, he experienced a lot of heart trouble, particularly being weak and with irregular pulse. Heart trouble in the end was the cause of his death.

Johann G. Barkman passed away peacefully with the living hope to be forever with the Lord.

Grandson Vernon Barkman, now age 86 remembers "Grandpa as quiet and sincere, but a very friendly man."

Journal.

Johann G. Barkman was a literate man who maintained a journal for many years of his life. In his journals he made constant reference to the weather. He had a wide interest in life around him, noting for example, the deaths of King George the V, John Eaton, and other similar events, revealing a keen intelligent and understanding. He also kept record of his own health, sometimes recording in the morning angina pains, and by the afternoon, that he and son Pete and sometimes C. F. Barkman, had gone fishing, "feeling much better". Johann G. Barkman noted, for example, on April 15, 1912, "that the biggest ship in the world known as the 'Titanic', carrying 15-1600, sank, when only about 700 were rescued."

Margaretha Friesen Barkman (1858-1946).

Grandmother Margaretha Friesen Barkman lived for many years as a widow in the family home on Hanover Street, north across the street from where grandson Waldon Barkman lives today. She was of medium height approximately 5'6" and strong build. Grandmother had a quiet disposition, loving and kind. She always had peppermint candies to hand out to all her grandchildren. She liked good order among her grandchildren.

Conclusion.

Johann G. Barkman served as mayor of Steinbach for a record twenty-five years, almost a fifth of the time since the founding of the community in 1874. This is a feat unheralded in Steinbach's history which no one has even come close to challenging. It was during his years of leadership that the foundations of Steinbach's current prosperity and preeminence as regional centre were laid and established. Had it not been for Johann G. Barkman's progressive and proactive leadership, Steinbach would undoubtedly have been doomed as just another rural backwater lost in the march of time.

Descendants.

Johann and Margaretha Barkman raised a family of five sons and six daughters. All their children became well known in the community for their services to the public in both church and civic life.

The oldest son **Johann F. Barkman** (1879-1942) married Matilda Kneller. They bought the parents farmyard along Main Street in 1914. Two years later he sold it to Peter C. Toews. For the first years after their marriage the family lived in the so-called "Oak Bush" or Ile des Chenes area, half-way to Winnipeg, and later they lived in Steinbach where they operated a hardware store for some years. They are the grandparents of Marlene Barkman, Mrs. Milton Penner, Penner International.

Daughter **Katherine Barkman** married widower Klaas B. Reimer, a Steinbach businessman. They were the parents of Mrs. John D. Penner of Penner Tire, and the grandparents of Beverly, Mrs. Jim Penner of Penner Foods, Steinbach.

Son **Jakob F. Barkman** was a well-known minister of the Holdeman Church. He is remembered as the supporting preacher of many young Mennonite conscientious objectors in WWII. He and his family lived on SW 2-7-6E, approximately where Albert Street is located today. He was the father of one-time Steinbach Mayor and Member of the Legislative Assembly, Leonard A. Barkman.

Son **Cornelius F. Barkman** was the Steinbach Post Master for many years and a local photographer. His daughter Connie married Jake Ketter formerly of Fairway Ford.

Son **Martin F. Barkman** married Anna Goossen. They were the parents of Dan Barkman and Martha Wohlgemuth, Clearsprings, and Dr. Bernhard Barkman, B.C.

Daughter **Margaret Barkman** married Peter I. Reimer who farmed in Greenland, parents of Levi and Herbert Reimer.

Daughter **Maria Barkman** married Frank D. Goossen. They farmed on NE12-7-6E in Clearsprings. They were the parents of Jonas Goossen, long-time Secretary-Treasurer of the R. M. of Ste. Anne.

Daughter **Elisabeth Barkman** married John D. Bartel. They farmed on SW13-7-6E in Clearsprings. They are the parents of Don Bartel of MJ's Restaurant, Steinbach, and Harvey Bartel, frequent contributor to *Preservings*.

Daughter **Anna Barkman** married Frank P. Wiebe. They lived in Steinbach and British Columbia where he served as a minister of the Holdeman Church and did accounting.

Son **Peter F. Barkman** owned and operated the Steinbach Hatchery for many years. He was one of founders of the Bethesda Hospital, Steinbach, and its guiding light for many years.

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Purpose and Membership

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc. (HSHS) was organized in 1988 to research and write the history and heritage of the Hanover and Steinbach area, originally known as the "East Reserve". The emphasis is on the period 1874-1910. Through public meetings, writings and publications the HSHS seeks to foster an understanding and respect for the rich heritage of the community.

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

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

The society also requires your support financially in order to continue the above activities. Your donations will help to keep the society strong. All contributions of \$20 or more will be acknowledged with a charitable donation receipt for income tax purposes. We are presently levying for an annual membership fee of \$20 per annum but will appreciate you giving an additional amount of \$20 or \$40 to support the work of the society. Thank you for your participation.

| | |
|---|---------|
| Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Box 1960, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0 | |
| Enclosed is a cheque/cash in the amount of \$_____ for: | |
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A tale of two Cities

A tale of two Cities: The “old” and the “new”—Zen and the art of civic names in Steinbach, Manitoba, 1874-1998:

by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

It has recently been pointed out that no civic recognition has been extended to the early pioneers of the community of Steinbach who laid the cornerstones of its current success, other than, perhaps, generically via the four major cross streets, Friesen, Reimer, Barkman and Kroeker Avenues. It is interesting to reflect over this lack of civic pride, particularly with respect to someone like Mayor Johann G. Barkman (1858-1937), who served the community tirelessly for 25 years, missing only one term between 1885 and 1912: see article elsewhere in this issue.

The omission reflected the dualism of Steinbach society, existent from the very first beginnings of the settlement in 1874. On the one hand, there was the “old” order—represented at first by the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), and on the other, the “new” order, represented at first by the Holdemans, established in Steinbach in 1882 when approximately one-half of the KG joined the movement.

With the exception of the first decade after 1874, civic leadership was held by members of the “new” order such as Johann G. Barkman. This, notwithstanding that Steinbach was a KG settlement and that the KG continued to be the majority group and socio-economic elite into the 1920s and 40s. As conservative intellectuals one would have expected that the KG would have seen the *Strassendorf* system as part of their cultural and social ethos, consistent with teachings emphasizing community values and mutual support.

However, the KG did not oppose the dissolution of the village in 1910, a process completed by the survey of the village and acquisition of individual titles by its inhabitants in 1911. This appears to be an anomaly but there may be an explanation. Firstly, the denomination had originated in the Molotschna Colony, South Russia, where they were used to working in cooperation with adherents of other churches in civic and school matters. Secondly, the majority of businesses along Main Street were owned by members of the KG who undoubtedly recognized the advantages of the move. Thirdly, the KG tendency to avoid civic office already evident on the regional level in the Rural Municipality of Hanover, where they were content to allow the Bergthaler/Chortitzers to run things, was slowly transferred to the village level as well.

In the meantime, the Holdemans, by now in their third generation in Steinbach, in their own way were becoming part of the old order. Their role as leaders in cultural and social assimilation was being taken over by the members of another new group, the Brüderthaler founded in Steinbach in 1897. The charter members of the infant congregation were not from the socio-economic elite, nor even from the middle class. Nevertheless, they quickly attained new adherents, principally, the sons of pioneer Abraham S. Friesen. The Friesen boys’ choice was perhaps made easier by the fact that the first local minister of the group was cousin Abraham F. Friesen, from Jansen, Nebraska.

By the time that the dissolution of the village plan was completed in 1911, civic leadership was

being assumed by the Brüderthalers. This group came to dominate civic affairs during what could be considered the “village” period of Steinbach, lasting from 1911 until incorporation in 1947. When the village was formed into an Unincorporated Village District on March 20, 1920, the first U.V.D. committee consisted of John D. Goossen, Klaas B. Reimer, and Klaas R. Barkman, all Brüderthalers.

The Brüderthaler Church by this time had largely adopted the religious culture and language of American Fundamentalism. Although it provided a convenient vehicle of assimilation into wider North American society, Fundamentalism during the 1920s and 30s was very categorical in nature. Members of traditional or “old” order Mennonite churches such as the KG were characterized as “unsaved” (Fundamentalist religious language meaning they were not chosen and would not go to heaven) and subjected to proselytising.

Civic leaders articulated by such beliefs were not likely to name community achievements or physical establishments such as public buildings, parks, schools and drains, in honour of predecessors who were from the “old” order. This religious mantra was also adopted by each succeeding novation within American Fundamentalism, so that the Brüderthaler would not recognize the Holdemans, the “Free Churchers” would not recognize the Brüderthaler, and the Pentecostals would not recognize “Free Churchers”, etc. Each new wave of “popular” religion in its turn was eclipsed and challenged by its successor, creating an intriguing social dynamic of religious schism and retrenchment typical of North American Evangelicalism. It was acceptable, however, to recognize and take pride in the economic achievements of the early pioneers.

All the while, the members of the “old order” eschewed any recognition or aggrandizement, which was contrary, in any event, to their understanding of Biblical humility and “servant” leadership. One suspects that “old order” Kleine Gemeinde pioneers such as Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, Klaas R. Reimer, Abraham S. Friesen, Peter K. Barkman, Jakob M. Barkman, and Franz M. Kroeker, and others, to whom the community owed its existence, would have scoffed at the idea of anything being named in their honour.

As a group, they acquiesced contentedly as others took over the helm, sure in their knowledge that they had done what needed doing and having done so in pursuit of the noblest of ideals—the betterment of their fellowmen. Their actions were not articulated by avarice or empire building. Rather they were inspired by a deep abiding faith and a community ethos based on the paradigm of kin, village and church. Being a part of this experiential embryo had abundantly enriched their lives, not only in the material but much more so in the spiritual realm, and thus rewarded, they faded happily into the darkness of unrecorded history.

Inside a Writer’s

Inside a Writer’s Private Life, the story of Gerhard F. Wiebe (1888-1974), Chortitz, Manitoba, “Steinbach Post” correspondent, by daughter Helen Wiebe, 104-2487 Countess St., Abbotsford, B. C., V2T 5L9.

Introduction.

My father, Gerhard F. Wiebe (1888-1974), was the son of Jakob D. Wiebe (1865-1938) and Helena Funk (1876-1954), Chortitz, Manitoba: see biography in *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, pages 9-11. My father was the grandson of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), the Moses of the Bergthaler and Chortitzer people.

My parents, Mr. and Mrs. Gerhard F. Wiebe, nee Elizabeth Rempel Wiebe, started their married life together in 1917. My father started his working career as a school teacher in Chortitz where they had made their home. He also started up a hobby farm which years later developed into a big farm, SE1/4 15-7-5E, one mile north of Chortitz and then to the left, on the north side. The Cornelius



Gerhard F. Wiebe, circa 1908. Photo courtesy of Helen R. Wiebe, 1998.

T. Peters farm was first and then the Gerhard Wiebes, who were in-laws as Mrs. Peters was a Wiebe.

About our farm.

Our grandfather Jacob D. Wiebe strictly insisted that all his children should become farmers. Not even half of them went into farming. My father’s interest proved to be very different, although he went into farming for his sons’ sake so they’d have work to do. We had our house moved one mile north of Chortitz onto, I believe about eighty acres, bought from Abram Goertzen of Chortitz. My father rented a parcel of land 1/2 mile east of us from a Holdeman. Peter R. or P.

Private Life: the story of Gerhard F. Wiebe

Penner. We were haying and had grain harvested from that farmland. There were lots of jack rabbits around to snare. On our number one farm we had grain, corn, and beets for the cattle which had to be cut up. We also had sunflowers in our huge garden.

We had about 22 head of cattle, four horses, pigs we butchered, three of the big ones. A barn full of chickens -- we couldn't do without them either. Father built all their buildings including the house and barns himself.

One day when we kids were playing outside in the hay, I remember when my mother came running out of the house, covering her eyes with both her hands, she cried out, our baby is dying, our baby is dying, our mother went into great grief and sorrow, like I hadn't seen before. As a seven year old, I remember when I ran into the house to see if it was true.

In those days the home also served as a Funeral Parlour. My parents were both comforted in their bereavement by their loved ones. The coffins were homemade. The inside of the top part was decorated with flowers. A word from the Bible was said with prayer following. The viewing would follow, then almost everybody would leave. The funeral was over.

Newspapers.

But most of all my Father became engulfed in newspapers. When we kids appeared on the scene we marvelled at all the newspapers my father possessed. We kids would at times count them. My parents operated the Post Office, and the mail would come right into our home. Mr. George D. Goossen, always full of humour, as I remember very well, delivered our mail from Steinbach. We still remember how we kids were enjoying ourselves, some sitting on the "schloape benk", on chairs, or spread out on the floor, reading cartoons, like The Katzen-Yammer Kids, Little Orphan Annie, etc. My father was a staunch and well-known letter correspondent for the *Steinbach Post* for a number of years as far as I can recollect.

I know that occasionally he'd contribute to some of the Christian tabloids and papers like *Der Nordwesten*, *Mitarbeiter*, the *Rundschau*, *Botshafter Der Wahrheit*, and others.

I counted all the newspapers. They were: *Der Nordwesten*, *Der Bote*, *Steinbach Post*, *The Christian Herald*, *Der Courier*, *The Country Guide*, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, *The Saskatchewan Farmer*, *Der Familienfreund*, *The Post*, *Free Press Weekly*, *The Farmers Almanac*, *The Western Producer*, *Family Herald and Weekly Star*, *Botschafter der Wahrheit*, *The Country Gentleman*, *Der Mitarbeiter*, *Das Deutsche Blatt*, *The Chronicle*, *Die Flügelzüchter*.

The *Steinbach Post*

The *Steinbach Post* was his main priority to serve. Then there were the tabloids and his other newspapers, like the secular ones where he sent in his reports. Several times a week he would go to nearby brother Henry F. Wiebe's General Store to fetch his news, plus a number of other places,

from people he would meet, even those that sometimes came for miles to shop around and chat. I haven't specifically watched him exactly what and where all his correspondence, write-ups and reports went to. I mostly remember in general the work he was doing.

He looked after his regular clients to renew the *Steinbach Post*. I've often overheard the familiar topics, "Wusht du owlvada fe me de Post beschtali?" or "Es deeni Post oul meist utyerant?"

My father had an excellent handwriting. Although he attended an English speaking college, he vehemently loved the German language. He even bought a German songbook for me, to make sure I wouldn't lose the German language.

Letter Writing.

My father was excellent in writing letters. At least once a month we in B.C. would receive a letter from him. It was like getting a newspaper from our hometown Steinbach. When he passed away on June 26, 1974, the news passed away too, as it were. After two years of teaching he resigned and took over being a school trustee, which he did for many years. He also worked for The Dominion Bureau of Statistics, with facts and figures collected and arranged to send in to Ottawa. He did this for six years.

Elisabeth Rempel Wiebe (1892-1939).

My mother Elisabeth Rempel Wiebe, was born in 1892, the daughter of Johann S. Rempel (1853-1928), and Margaretha Peters, Chortitz, Manitoba: see article by Helen Unger, *Preservings*, no. 7, Dec 1995, pages 30-31, and Johann S. Rempel, *Memoirs, Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, pages 43-44.

Writing was not up our wonderful mother's alley, Elisabeth Rempel Wiebe, but she was the best homemaker and cook. She was full of zest and life and loved her work. She had a big garden and did a lot of canning and making sauerkraut, of course. Mother and myself, every season, went on horse and buggy to pick berries in the



Gerhard F. Wiebe and his bride, nee Elisabeth Peters Rempel, 1917. She was the daughter of Johann S. Rempel, Chortitz, long-time Secretary-Treasurer of the R. M. of Hanover. My father has told me time and again that he courted our mother in grandfather Rempel's big machine shed. He had been very shy when he had asked for her hand. They dearly loved each other to the very end. Photo courtesy of Helen R. Wiebe, 1998.

Rosendolshi bush, even if we got stung by bees. My mother used to do a lot of sewing. Later on I pitched in too. We also sewed the men's shirts, fourteen of them each summer. There were a lot of buttonholes to stitch by hand, ninety-eight of them on fourteen shirts. My mother always cleaned,



The Gerhard F. Wiebe farm on SE1/4 Section 15-7-5E, probably the westerly part. The buildings and yard are completely gone. Photo courtesy of Helen R. Wiebe, 1998.

oiled and fixed her own sewing machine herself.

Mother learned to use the spinning wheel and darn the socks and knit for all the members of the family. The men wore lumber socks, up to the knees they were.

She was excellent with manual work. She seemed to be the jack of all trade. One time she built a small lean-to for a summer kitchen. Not much more than a cookstove had room in there, but at least she could cool off herself. While our family grew up fast our mother decided to finish out another room upstairs. She meant business to go ahead and do it. She chose two of the oldest boys to help, John (11 years old) and Otto (9 years old), with carrying mixed clay upstairs. Dad had already nailed on the laths. Then mother would plaster on the clay, unto the ceiling and four walls. After it had dried mother brushed it over with white caulk, and that became the four oldest boys' room.

Mother also was a very feminine woman. She loved being a seamstress and loved to sew beautiful delicate dresses. My sister, Margaret, and myself took great pride in Mom's sewing, as we both later on followed her in her footsteps. There were those dresses she made that we'll always remember.

One day my parents along with Uncle Frank and Helen Rempel were invited to Uncle Jacob and Lily Rempel's in Sarto, some twelve miles south of Chortitz, Manitoba. In those days Sarto seemed to us like a far distant country somewhere. They had put me, 10 or 11 years old, the second oldest in charge of seven brothers and sister. While coming back after their two night's stay my mother got very worried, that could be our house had burnt down. So three miles from home they saw our house was still there. Instead they were pleasantly surprised with my freshly baked buns.

Mother's building project.

We looked in awe when our mother just announced her building project. It was fascinating to see how she did it. She had built a lean-to, about six



Family Portrait circa 1935. Gerhard F. Wiebe and Elisabeth Rempel Wiebe with their two youngest children, Paul (b. 1926) and Herman (b. 1929). Herman died in 1995 in Texas where he lived. Paul is living in Winnipeg.



Gerhard F. Wiebe (1888-1974), circa 1950. Photo courtesy of Helen R. Wiebe, 1998.

by eight summer kitchen, only enough room for her cookstove. She built it on the west end of the granary where it would not be visible from the road, not even we did notice it while she built it, or they would have pitched in. She also knew that, that maybe would be a no-no, as it looked too shabby. Behind the barn she found ends and pieces of leftovers of 2 by 4's and enough of tin for roof and the siding to finish it off. "By the way," she omitted the "Ribbon-Cutting". Sorry!

In former years she had always found room partitioned off for her kitchenette in the granary building, but now too big a crop was still in storage.

Death.

Our mother passed away in 1939, April 26, in Winnipeg Concordia Hospital. She was only 47 years old, and died after having a goitre operation.

About the author: Helen Wiebe Unger is the daughter of Gerhard F. Wiebe. She married John Unger, Blumenort, who was employed with "Plett & Co.", Blumenort, and "L.A. Barkman & Co.", Steinbach, for many years. In 1965 Helen and her family moved to Abbotsford, B. C. where John founded the "Unger Furniture Enterprise" which soon burgeoned to five stores in various centres throughout the lower Mainland. John Unger died in 1973. Their son Eldon Unger is widely known as a land developer and entrepreneur in the Abbotsford area.

Helen enjoys writing and has contributed several articles to *Preservings*, including "Chortitz - Randolph - School days," No. 8, June 1996, Part One, pages 22-24; "The Coming of the Russländer," No. 7, December 1995, pages 14-15; and "Trip to Steinbach 1925," No. 9, December 1996, page 54.

Two Worlds Meet, 1874

Ontario Mennonite Meets Immigrants in Toronto, July 1874

On July 18, 1874, Elias Eby, a Berlin, Ontario merchant, accompanied by a Waterloo County delegation of Mennonite leaders, travelled to Toronto to meet the first train full of Manitoba-bound Mennonite immigrants. The following excerpts are from Eby's diary of July 18 and 19. He not only describes the event, but offers his analysis of the immigrant's character. Eby's diary will be published in a forthcoming book published by the Manitoba Records Society and edited by Royden Loewen and tentatively titled, Inside Out: Diaries of Manitoba and Ontario Mennonites. 1860-1940.

18. This afternoon I went to Toronto to meet the Russians who are on their way to Manitoba. G. Schmitte, D.Y. Schantz, E. Schneider, John Schuh, Sem Schantz, I.E. Schantz, Andreas Weber, and D. Scherg also went along.

19. At 8:30. 320 souls came to Toronto on the cars, where they unloaded at the immigration sheds and stayed until Tuesday afternoon at 2 o'clock, July 21. From here they went by cars to Collingwood. Then per Allen Line by steamers to Duluth, etc. This company is from southern Russia; consists of 69 families. Among them is one man of 76 years, down to children of 25 to 16 days old. They seem to be innocent, peaceful and modest people. In the large dining hall an afternoon worship service was held. For the opening they sang a hymn in soft and humble tones. Schmitt made a suitable introduction. Scherg then spoke further, and Heinrich Berg, a pediger of their party, concluded the service with well-chosen remarks. Monday, some men chosen among us are gathering 60 hams and other provisions. From Collingwood on they have to support themselves. They are cheerful and seem healthy. Weigh from 180 to 220 an 250 lbs. They have close to \$60[000].00 cash along altogether. Some have as little as \$25, but they help each other. From 2 to 9 children per family. Another good point they have: they use no tobacco!!

Submitted by Dr. Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba. _____

Russian Mennonites meet Ontario Swiss Mennonites, 1874,

At the same time as Elias Eby was recording his views of the new Mennonite immigrants, many in the immigration party of 65 families were impressed enough by their first meeting with "old" Mennonites

who had settled in southern Ontario in 1788, to make note of their views as well. Submitted by Delbert F. Plett.

"The next day there was a ministerial visit and they conducted worship services. An elderly pastor took a big piece of chewing tobacco out of his mouth before he started to preach. We were also offered ham, beans,



1897. Jakob B. Koop (1858-1937), Neuanlage, Imperial Russia, to Neuanlage (Twin creek), Manitoba. He was the author of the most complete record of the immigration journey written by Mennonites during the 1874-76 immigration to Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 11, Dec 1997, page 43.

dried apples to take along on our trip but our leader David Klassen, declined the same with the comment that the group was well endowed and that they could give it to the next group that would come as they were poorer. Many felt this was unfortunate as they were already being assisted by the Gemeinde and felt that they were poor."

From the "Autobiography" of Heinrich Ratzlaff (1848-1922), in *Profile 1874*, page 189. _____

"Now my beloved, I have only little energy to write, since we arrived in Toronto at 9 o'clock in the morning of the 19th. We had not yet alighted from the train when already our dear friends came to escort us. A number

of ministers came, including Schantz's brother. These beloved friends wanted to be of assistance to us. They paid great heed to our necessities. How the matter will proceed we do not know."

"We held worship services towards evening when the senior minister [Aeltester] of 73 years, earnestly admonished us, that the evil one would not in any way spare us in the new land. This is very true as I have had to experience personally; at times to keep up courage, at times with others. It is very necessary that we are diligent and make sure of our faith and calling. The apostle says, "I am near to all people so be it that everyone shall persevere." But who among us shall strive for the goal, only to become faint [?]."

From a letter by deacon Peter Wiebe (1835-1902) to Aeltester Peter Toews, Blumenhoff, Russia, dated July 20, 1874, published in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 26. _____

"From Quebec we drove to Montreal where we arrived 45 minutes before 8 o'clock on Saturday, July 18. Here we changed trains and then travelled throughout the night arriving in Toronto at 8 o'clock in the morning of July 19. Here we alighted from the coaches and because it was Sunday we also had to unload our own crates. We remained in Toronto until Tuesday the 21st of July. The reason was that a decision had to be made as to whether we would continue by the Dawson route or through Minnesota. The Canadian Mennonites advised us against travelling by the Dawson route. Consequently telegraph dispatches were exchanged with the government in this regard during these two days. Finally on Tuesday at noon, the news came that upon payment of a supplement of \$2.00 per adult person we would be able to avoid the difficult route."

"Quickly the crates were loaded and we entered the coaches taking our hand luggage. Then we were on our way and in six hours we were in Collingwood. In Toronto we had been assisted in all our matters by six Canadian Mennonite brethren. Among them was an Aeltester and a minister who also served us with the Word of God on Sunday. Ohm Baerg also preached."

From the Journal of Jakob B. Koop (1858-1937), Neuanlage, Imperial Russia, Neuanlage (Twin creek), Manitoba, published in *Storm and Triumph*, page 332, see *Preservings*, No. 11, pages 43-46.

Eugene Derksen 1916-94

Eugene Derksen 1916-94, Publisher and community benefactor, by Gerald Wright, RR 5, Cambridge, Ontario, N1R 5S6.

Introduction.

The late Steinbach publisher Eugene Derksen published a lot of books in his time, but never published one about himself.

The old Shakespearean saying, "Ill blows the wind that profits nobody", summarizes in a particularly suitable way the circumstances surrounding his life story. Speakers of modern English sometimes puzzle over what Shakespeare meant by that saying. About the best interpretation seems to be, "Few disasters are so complete that someone somewhere doesn't profit from them."

No more disastrous wind ever blew across the Mennonite colonies in Russia than the Bolshevik revolution, yet even out of that horrendous inferno of injustice and human suffering there blew a few success stories, and Eugene Derksen's was one of them.

Family History.

His family history shows that his great-great-grandfather Isaac Dirksen, headed one of the 288 families that left Danzig in West Prussia (now Gdansk, Poland) in 1787 to found the original Mennonite colony of Chortitza on the Dnieper River in southern Russia.

In 1923, more than a century later, Eugene's parents Gerhard and Maria were among those fortunate enough to escape the claws of the Bolshevik tyranny before the dark gates of the Gulag could close around them. With their children, Anna not quite 11, and Eugene soon to turn eight, they stepped off the steamship at Quebec City on Aug. 24, 1923.

Quebec City, 1923.

What happened next imprinted itself so indelibly on the memory of eight year-old Eugene that even 62 years afterward, he recalled most of the details. Here, in his own words as he wrote them for his newspaper in August, 1985, is the story.

"Normally we should have boarded a train and gone on to Saskatchewan ... but on our long journey halfway across Russia and the Atlantic, I had contracted trachoma, an eye disease, and when the doctor examined me, I was not allowed to go on.

"What a terrible blow that must have been to my parents ... finally it was decided that father and my 11-year-old sister were to go on but mother would stay with me in the immigration hospital. Everybody had heard that 'incurable' people were sometimes sent back to their country of origin. After a short while mother transferred to another place from where she could see me once in a while to comfort me, but before long she too went on west when it was realized I would have to remain in hospital for a longer period.

"That left me, an eight-year-old, alone in a new country with a new language in the immigration hospital. I don't remember how it came about that another chap a year or two younger than I, but speaking the same language, came into a room with me. That took a lot of the loneliness out of our lives.

"Before Christmas we were transferred to an immigration institution in Montreal. Once or twice a week we were marched into the doctor's office where our eyelids were turned inside out, then cauterized with a blue-stone pencil. My friend Abie and I told our-



Eugene Derksen (1916-94), 1955. Eugene became President of Derksen Printers following his father's death in 1957. In 1946 he founded the Carillon News, which became the largest rural newspaper in rural Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 121.

selves that we were now big boys and would not cry when this medication was applied, but there was a lot of moaning and many tears were spilt after these sessions.

"I remember receiving a parcel from home a few days before Christmas. The parcel contained peanuts and oranges, the first I had ever tasted. I also remember that I answered mother's letters as I had received some schooling in Russia despite the revolutionary times and the famine.

"Then one day in March, 1924, a nurse told me I was going home but I was not to tell Abie. A man would come in to pick me up at 4 a.m. ... By this time I understood everything in English ... that evening I couldn't take my clothes off because I had to

be ready when the man called.

"This fact did not escape my young friend. I still remember his shrieks of anguish when I left and the door closed on him. There was no one to comfort him. We later heard that he was released a month or so after, but he went to another province, so we lost all contact.

"I was put on the train with a big bag of sandwiches which sustained me until I got to Herbert, Sask. There at the station my sister Anna awaited my arrival. When I got to our new home, my mother greeted me with a little baby brother in her arms. His name was Bruno and many years later he became my partner in this newspaper enterprise."

This experience in the immigration hospital coupled with what he learned in the following nine years went a long way toward shaping Eugene's future character and attitudes.

Saskatchewan.

In Russia his father Gerhard had been a respected high-school teacher in what was essentially still a rather aristocratic and class-conscious society. Nothing in his training or experience had prepared him or his family for what they now faced.

In return for the federal government admitting them to Canada, the Mennonite refugees had to agree to live and work on farms for a certain period after arriving in the country. Even for people who had farmed all their lives in the relatively rich soil of southern Russia, scratching a living from the dry land in southwestern Saskatchewan was a challenge. For the senior Derksens who had neither the experience nor the aptitude, it seemed a dead-end road. Still, it was infinitely better than what they could have expected had they stayed in Russia.

Having youth on their side, Eugene and his siblings Anna and Bruno and later on George and Irene, adjusted far quicker their parents. The mere fact that they were free and in a free land sparked a mood of contagious enthusiasm among the immigrant children who made up a good percentage of students in their rural one-room school. Being poor, they found, is a relative thing. It may not be fun but when everyone else is just as poor as yourself, it's at least bearable.

If you measure the time the Derksens spent on the farm in terms of economic progress, you'd have to say their first nine years were largely wasted. However, Eugene later on said he learned lessons from that period which he could never have learned in any college or university. He learned how people in rural Canada thought, and he learned how to feel with and for ordinary people. He learned what it was they admired

and what it was they couldn't stand. More-over he developed an appetite for reading all the news he could get and he came to identify himself above all else, as a Canadian.

Steinbach Past.

The name Arnold Dyck is not well-known in Canadian fiction-writing circles but among those who can read the Low German dialect of the Russian Mennonites he is both well-known and appreciated.

He was the creator, among other things, of the two characters Koop and Bua, a couple of country bumpkins whose hilarious antics unfailingly reminded readers of people they knew in their own western farming communities. Dyck was also a gifted visual artist who sketched all the illustrations for his own books.

Back in Russia he had taught school with Gerhard Derksen and they were close friends. They had also served together as Red Cross orderlies in the Russian Army during the First World War. Dyck apparently escaped out of Russia ahead of the Derksens because by 1923 he was able to buy and begin editing Steinbach's only weekly newspaper, the German-language *Steinbach Post*.

Nine years later he was sufficiently free of debt he could buy a car. He and Mrs. Dyck set off across the prairie to visit their old friends the Derksens in Saskatchewan. That was a considerable journey for those days and what fiction-writer Dyck encountered on the trip registered unforgettably in his mind. He used some of the details to later on write one of his famous books called "Koop en Bua op Reise" (Koop and Buhr Take a Trip.)

Steinbach, 1933.

For young Eugene, by this time 17, that trip was the beginning of the rest of his life. In 1990 he described for this writer exactly how it happened.

"My parents had gone by horse and wagon to Herbert (the nearest town) to get free potatoes. I had been out working on the road doing statutory labour in lieu of taxes, and had only just been home a few minutes. I was still watering our four horses when this couple in a brand-new 'glass' car drove into the yard. Out there at that time people called a car with glass windows a glass car.

"They wanted to know if this was where Derksens lived and I told them it was. We were living at the time in an old railway pump house which we had moved in from Rush Lake the previous winter on sleighs. It was the only house we could afford. Mrs. Dyck just looked at the place and I remember her raising her hands toward heaven and all she could say was, "Mein Gott".

When Eugene's parents arrived home there was a great reunion and the two old friends talked and visited far into the night.

"By morning," Eugene remembered, "it was decided we would move to Steinbach to

help Mr. Dyck with his print shop and newspaper. That's how it happened. We didn't even sell the place. It just stayed there. Nobody wanted the land."

Neither Eugene nor his father knew anything much about printing but they realized this was their big chance. Eugene did everything from sweeping the floor, carrying fuel for the stove and learning to set type and operate a press. His father helped write and edit the paper.

By 1936 the Great Depression was in its sixth year and Arnold Dyck was ready to move on. He sold the newspaper and the printing business that went with it to the Derksens for \$5000 - entirely on credit.

Community Involvement.

The financial difficulties of trying to operate a business without any available funds for expansion so frustrated Eugene that finding a way to borrow some money began to obsess him. This obsession played a big role in the founding of the Steinbach Credit Union which a couple of decades later became one of the most successful institutions of its kind in the country.

Later on, after the business became successful, one of Eugene's favourite stories was about a man who had managed the local bank during those moneyless years. According to the story, when anyone came in to his bank to apply for a loan, this man would set them down and offer them a cup of coffee. If the applicant accepted the coffee, the manager tended to view them as a questionable risk. If they took cream in their coffee the likelihood of their receiving a loan was further worsened, but if they took sugar as well, they didn't have a hope.

A brochure put out by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool about this time offered a set of instructions to anyone who would write for them, about how to set up a local credit union. The brochure came to Eugene's attention and he wrote for the instructions. He got them, studied them, talked them up among business cronies and the upshot was the founding of Steinbach's Credit Union. Eugene became its first president and the holder of Passbook No. 1.

The great dream of his life became the establishment in Steinbach of an English-language newspaper that would extend beyond the Mennonite community to all of south-eastern Manitoba from the Red River to the Ontario border and the U. S. boundary north to the CPR main line.

With the help of a modest loan from the Credit Union he got out the newspaper's first copy on Feb. 21, 1946. It was tabloid in size and had only six pages. It had no photos because its young publisher could not afford the equipment needed to produce them.

"As soon as we made something that looked like a newspaper," he later recalled, "people all over the Southeast gave it a good reception. In those days we would put a

wedding report or just anything that came in, right on the front page. We found that people wanted the paper and they needed it so they could buy and sell things."

From a few hundred subscribers at first to some 10,000 four decades later the paper grew, and with it the once-quiet Mennonite "darp" of Steinbach.

The one-time immigrant boy never forgot his beginnings and his interest in preserving the memory of the past made him one of the prime movers in the founding of the Mennonite Heritage Museum. After it opened he became one of its keenest supporters and volunteer workers.

The sale of the newspaper and printing business to his son Erich (Rick) in 1983 gave him more leisure time, but he continued to write a column in his beloved newspaper. He spent the last day of his life on July 16, 1994 working as a volunteer at the museum and passed away quietly at his home that evening.

Eulogy of Eugene Derksen, by Gerald Wright, Cambridge, Ontario, originally published in the *Carillon News*, July 20, 1994.

Golden deeds live on after those who do them, and Eugene Derksen did some golden deeds for me.

The unexpected news of his sudden passing brought the memories of these benevolent gestures flooding back.

More than he probably realized himself, he was responsible for my becoming a newspaperman. Early in 1950, in the weekly paper he had started on a shoestring four years earlier, he printed the first news I ever wrote for publication.

It consisted of a few hand-written jottings about life in the little school district of Dover, a community of Norwegian pioneers situated about 10 miles due north of Vita. In this community my wife Esther and I lived out the first 18 months of our married life in a two-room cottage with no hydro, no telephone and no running water, but with lots of blueberries, saskatoons and mosquitoes, and lots of wonderful neighbours.

Seven years later I was in my fifth year of employment in a large mental hospital in Weyburn, Sask., a place where I served meals to patients by day, then went home and wrote articles for various publications half the night.

One day I developed an overwhelming urge to be done with the mental hospital forever. At that point I remembered Eugene Derksen and his pioneer newspaper. On a sudden impulse I sat down and wrote him that I was looking for a full-time newspaper job.

A few days later, I got his reply. I still have it and I'm looking at it as I write these lines. Among other things it says, "Your letter came at a time when we are looking for a person like you."

The next paragraph is to me an eloquent comment on Eugene's character. It says, "Now I realize that pulling up stakes and going to a new outfit is not so easy, and conversely I believe that acquiring a new man is a very big responsibility."

In that paragraph I see reflected the proprietary and almost paternalistic interest Eugene took in the people he hired. It's only speculation on my part, but I always imagined that was some sort of old-world tradition he had learned from his parents during the first 10 years of his life when the family still lived in a Mennonite colony in southern Russia.

By my own reckoning, I had worked at 32 different jobs between leaving school and coming to work for Derksens, but Eugene was the first and only employer I ever worked for who treated all his employees as though they were his children.

We got our first example of this before we even arrived in Steinbach. Eugene actually helped us choose a house we could afford, advanced the down payment out of his own pocket, and guaranteed the mortgage.

We arrived in Steinbach as a family of five at the end of March, 1957, and almost the first thing we did was get stuck in a gaping mudhole on Hanover Street where a contractor was installing sewer and water lines.

It was after dark when we got there, but Helen Derksen gave us all supper at her dining room table. Apart from a couple of farmers, nobody else I had ever worked for before - or since - would have done that.

After supper Eugene, who had the key, conducted us to our new residence on Home Street. There was even a fire burning in the furnace and a load of coal in the basement.

That was a golden deed that neither of us ever forgot and my wife just mentioned it again the other day. Working for Derksens, certainly in the years when I was there (from 1957 until 1966) was more like being part of a family than working for a company.

Everybody went to everybody else's weddings and anniversaries. The Christmas banquet was a sort of family affair and I remember at least once we all had a picnic at the Derksens' cottage at Falcon Lake. Although Eugene would not have said so, this paternalistic treatment all had its origins I am sure in the Christian doctrines which were part of the Mennonite heritage. When I compare the atmosphere which reigned at Derksen Printers with the cold knife-in-the-back hostility that permeates some of the union shops with which I have since become familiar, I have no trouble understanding why most of Eugene's employees never wanted to leave, and why one or two who did leave were glad to be accepted back when they later wanted to return. I was one of those too.

In the late fall of 1962 the wanderlust struck me with great force and I applied for and secured a job at the late, now defunct, Winnipeg Tribune. By the end of three

months the daily 40-mile commute which began never later than 7 a.m. and most of the time ended around 10 p.m., often in very sub-zero weather, had me on my knees.

Things reached a head when the man who was then Tribune city editor began giving me a hard time because I wouldn't go along with some of his orders which I considered to be unethical. I waited a couple of days till I had my pay cheque in my hand, then went in and bade the management a permanent goodbye.

I had no idea where I was going for my next job, but I knew where I was going to try. In a sort of prodigal-son homecoming, I walked over to Eugene's place that night after supper and told him I would come back if he still had a place for me.

Under the circumstances, who could have blamed him if he had simply said, as many employers would have, "Sorry. Nobody who quits here can come back." Instead he welcomed me with open arms and I was back at Derksens the following day.

Thrown in with the job as an extra bonus was the chance to learn a couple of new languages - High and Low German - all instruction gratis. The company still printed a German newspaper and the principal language used around the shop and even the office, was Plattdeutsch. It was like getting a free trip to Europe. Being a bit of a language nut, it was to me always one of the big attractions of working there.

Even after we had left Derksens and moved to Ontario, leaving a house in Steinbach on which we held a large mortgage, and even after Eugene had ceased to be my employer, he didn't cease being our benefactor.

As things turned out the house burned

down within a year or two of us leaving. Because of a technicality, the insurance company didn't want to pay, and we were faced with the probable loss of our life savings.

Then a letter from me to Eugene Derksen changed the whole situation. He knew the insurer personally, and after a few words from him we had our insurance cheque in the mail.

Three weeks after my debut at The Carillon in 1957, Eugene's father, the late, G.S.Derksen, went home from the office one evening, ate his supper, lay down for a short nap, and in a few minutes slipped quietly over the great divide.

In the emotion of the moment, none of the family wanted to write his obituary, but the paper was going to press in just a few hours. I was called in to a family conference, given all the needed information, and within a few hours the story was in the paper.

Now son has followed father, passing quietly from this earthly scene in an almost identical scenario.

My theology will not permit me to believe that what happens to people in the life hereafter - a life in which I implicitly believe - depends on the brownie points we chalk up in this one.

All that aside though, in the 50 years that I was part of the full-time Canadian work force, I never worked for a more benevolent employer than Eugene Derksen, and I find it hard to imagine that a better one exists anywhere.

Editor's Note: See also obituary of Eugene Derksen published in *Carillon News*, July 20, 1994.

EnGendering the Past Women and Men in Mennonite History

A Symposium at The University of Winnipeg

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Keynote Speaker: Katie Funk Wiebe

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David S. Doerksen (1845-1928), Schönhorst

David S. Doerksen (1845-1928), Schönhorst, Manitoba,
by great-grandson Frank B. Doerksen, Box 21, Grunthal, Manitoba, R0A 0R0.

Family Background.

My grandfather, David S. Doerksen (1845-1928), BGB 309, was the son of Jakob Doerksen (1804-53) and Helena Sawatzky. According to the research of Henry Schapansky, Jakob was the brother of Abraham Doerksen (1805-71) whose son, Abraham (1827-1916), BGB A86, was the father of the Schönthal Doerksens: see article by Regina Neufeld, in *Preservings*, No. 11, Dec 1997, pages 73-75, also known as the "Schwoate Derkses." Jakob and Abraham were the sons of Jakob Derksen (1767-1806) and the grandsons of David Dirksen (b. 1740) of Ellerwald III (1776 census) who came to Russia in 1788 and settled in Neuendorf, Wirtschaft 4 (Note One).

David S. Doerksen (1845-1928)

My grandfather David S. Doerksen married Helena Bueckert, daughter of Jakob Bueckert (1808-53), BGB A128. In 1875 David and Helena came to Canada with their young children--David age 6, Jakob 1 and Helena 4, arriving in Quebec City on July 20.

They settled in Schönhorst, a small hamlet 2 miles east of Grunthal. The "Brot Schult Registers" 1876-78 list 9 families in the village: 1. Widow Bueckert, 2. Alte Johann Funk, 3. Jakob Harder, 4. Abr. Kauenhauen (Junge Bernd), 5. Johann Penner (Joh.), 6. Alte Jakob Rempel, 7. Junge Johann Schroeder, 8. Heinrich Wall, 9. Heinrich Winter. The widow Bueckert is probably Helena's mother and the Johann Penner and Heinrich Wall families are Helena's sisters. Ironically the David Doerksens are not listed.

The most interesting story David S. Doerksen used to tell his grandchildren "was about when he and four other pioneers started out very early one morning in March on foot to buy horses in the village of Tannenau. It was a very nice morning but suddenly the weather changed for the worse. It got so bad they could not walk any further, so they huddled in their big Russian fur coats and tramped through the snow to keep warm, not knowing where they were going. By the next morning the weather had settled down and all were able to make it back home safely" (Note Two).

Tragedy, 1879.

Tragedy struck the pioneer community in 1879 when two of the sons of David's older brother, Jakob Doerksen, BGB B62, drowned in the Red River on June 25. According to the "Brot Schult Registers" it appeared that Jakob BGB B62 (as well as cousin Jakob Doerksen BGB B197) had settled in Schönberg, several miles north of



1926 Grandfather David S. Doerksen with son Abram's children which were orphans: Abram, Aganetha, Peter, David. Grandfather died on the ship on the way back from Paraguay and was buried at sea. The Captain did the eulogy and spoke on Revelations 20:13, "and the sea gave up her dead." Photos for this article are courtesy of Frank B. Doerksen, Box 21, Grunthal, Manitoba, R0A 0R0.



The farm of Franz B. Doerksen on NW22-5-5E where Abram Driedger later farmed. The house and barn are still standing today much as they were in 1926. My dad hauled most of the lumber for these buildings from the bush with a team of horses and sleigh from Cootie's saw mill, 12 miles east of Marchand. This farm was later purchased by John A. Driedger, brother of Albert Driedger, MLA and former Provincial Cabinet Minister.

Schönhorst.

The Jakob Doerksen family had decided to move to the West Reserve and had selected a new farmstead in Blumenhof, near Gretna. Jakob and his sons, Jakob and Peter, had been making preparation at the new site

when they returned home on June 25. "When they reached the Rat River they saw that recent rains had transformed the usually placid river into a treacherous torrent. Jakob attempted to drive his team of oxen and his wagon through the swollen river. However,



The Franz B. Doerksen family. Top row l. to r.: Katharine Doerksen Funk, Frank R. Funk, Mary Doerksen and David Doerksen, John Doerksen; Middle row: Helena Doerksen Klassen, John D. Klassen, mother Maria Braun Doerksen, Franz B. Doerksen and son Frank B. Doerksen; bottom row: new baby Frank Klassen, Mary Klassen, Jakob D. Klassen. This family photograph was taken by Tobias Janz, who came to Canada from Russia after the Revolution. Many people had their photographs taken by him in 1926-7 preparation for their move to Paraguay.

the current swept parts of the make-shift wagon box off its base. Peter, age seventeen, waded into the river in an attempt to retrieve the boards, but the current pulled him away too. When his older brother, Jakob, age twenty-six, saw what was happening, he made a desperate attempt to rescue Peter, but without success. Both the Doerksen brothers drowned" (Note Three).

Farming in Schönhorst, Manitoba.

On May 20, 1880, David S. Doerksen took out a homestead on SW14-5-5E, where Herman Froese lives today. The 1881 tax records list five farmers in Schönhorst: Peter Loeppky - NE17-7-5E, Jakob Rempel--NE17-5-5E, Aron Schroeder-NE17-5-5E, Isaac Buekburt-NE17-5-5E and David Doerksen-SW14-5-5E. By the time of the 1881 census (BGB 125-344) only 2 families are listed in Schönhorst, namely, David S. Doerksen and Aron Schroeder.

In the 1883 assessment records, David S. Doerksen, is listed with Grünthal and owned the following property: 100 acres of land, 12 acres cultivated, buildings \$25, furniture 50, 1 horse, 2 oxen, 1 cow, 1 yearling, 1 calf, 1 pig, a wagon, plow, harrow and sleigh, total assessment 376. David S. Doerksen was a farmer of moderate means but by January 8, 1891 his circumstances had improved enough that he could acquire the adjoining northwest quarter as a pre-emption purchase.

In the Fall of 1890, Mrs. David Doerksen, nee Helena Bueckert, fell ill. She did not re-

cover and died. Aeltester David Stoesz recorded that "Nov. 19, on Wednesday, we drove to Schönhorst, past Grünthal, to officiate at the burial of the wife of David Doerksen, who had passed away after a 13 week seige of illness (Note Four).

Franz B. Doerksen (1881-1945).

My father, Franz B. Doerksen (1881-1945), married Maria Braun (1882-1964), daughter of Johann Braun (1857-1925), businessman of Grünthal and Reeve of the R. M. of Hanover: see Al Hamm, "Johann (Funk) Braun," in *Preservings*, No. 8, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 44-45.



A log building on the yard of Dr. Peters in the pioneer years. Possibly the original housebarn? Grunthal History, page 30.

After the marriage Franz and Maria acquired the south 1/2 NW22-5-5E at the east end of Grünthal where they established a farmyard and buildings. They also acquired the SW22-5-5E for a total of 240 acres. The land was acquired with the assistance of father-in-law Johann Braun.

Frank B. Doerksen Sr. also had a share in a threshing outfit with a Waterloo-Boy (forerunner of John Deere) kerosene tractor, 12/20 horsepower. The other owners were David Falk, Neu-Hoffnung, and Jakob Kauenhofen and Jakob Thiessen, from Edenthal south-east of Grunthal. These families later moved to Paraguay.

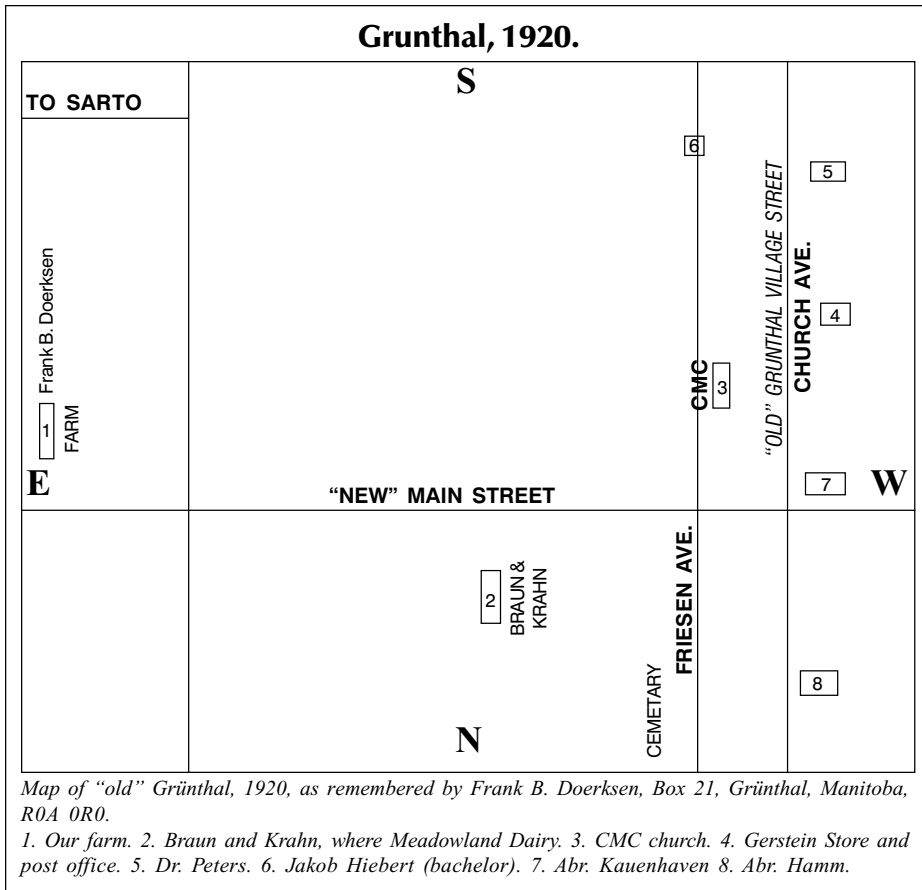
"Old" Grunthal.

The original village street of Grünthal ran north and south past the Chortitzer Church which stood about in the middle of the original village. The street ran north to the graveyard on the ridge at the north end of Church Street. The Chortitzer church still stands along this street where the original worship house was built in 1886. The flour mill and the "Braun & Krahn" store were already located where "Meadowland Dairies" is today. The graveyard at the north end of Friesen Street is still in use today--see map of Grunthal, 1920.

The Abraham Kauenhauen house barn built in the 19th century stood at the corner of the "old" Main Street and "new" Main Street for many years finally falling victim to a fire during the 1980s. See *Grunthal History*, pages 30 and 31 for photos of the original Dr. Peters housebarn and the Abr. Kauenhowen premises.

Retirement.

David S. Doerksen lived with his son Franz B. Doerksen in Grünthal in his retirement. He was a gifted woodworker and basket weaver. The grandchildren would accompany him into the woods where they would cut willows and dry them out. He would then weave them into baskets ("kjiép").



York Harbour, which took us to Buenos Aires. From there we took a smaller vessel, "Apipe", to Asuncion. Here we boarded the "Alto Parana" which took us up river to Puerto Casado where we arrived November 15th, 1927.

At first we stayed in immigration houses. Soon the immigrants had set up a tent village consisting of tents covered with a roof of corrugated tin. Dad had brought some blacksmith tools from Canada. He did some work for a neighbouring rancher. He also bought 2 cows, 2 steers and some chickens.

My grandfather lived with us in Canada and also moved with us to Paraguay and lived with us. He also made a garden, carried water from the river with a shoulder yoke, a pail on each side and he grew lovely watermelons.

An incident which I remember while we lived at Puerto Casado occurred when cattle were being driven past our tent. Grandfather was sitting in front of the tent when a cow left the herd and charged him. He was unable to get away in time and was caught between the horns of the cow. A neighbour woman saw what was happening and screamed. She succeeded in detaching the cow. The cow released grandfather and chased after her.

Return to Canada, 1928.

My father took a trip to the Chaco with a few other men to check out the land where we intended to move. But on their way back, my father took sick with the tropical fever. After the fever left, my father had no desire to stay there in Paraguay. So we sold our belongings and moved back to Canada.

Being in that heat somehow revived my mother's health. She came back to Canada much stronger. We boys did a lot of fishing, played "cowboys" and learned to lasso. Close by was a tannin factory in Puerto Casado. The wood from the Quebracho tree was processed (boiled) into tannin oil. My sister, Helen got the same tropical fever and was very sick. She had a baby there and it died. The village only had a military doctor.

After the fever left, my dad was very weak and lost the will to continue. Consequently we decided to come back to Canada.

Son Franz B. Doerksen had a workshop. Grandfather David S. Doerksen would spend much time here working on the work bench doing various woodwork such as sleighs for his grandchildren. He also enjoyed gardening and kept the garden clean of weeds for his daughter-in-law.

David S. Doerksen used chewing tobacco and also planted his own tobacco in the garden which he used as chewing tobacco, called "Preim'e" in Plaut Dietsch. His friend, Jakob H. Martens (grandfather to my wife, Mary), also raised his own tobacco and the two men helped each other out with supplies when needed.

When David S. Doerksen was working in the shop he would spit on the floor, which was painted green. The stuff was so potent it ate the paint off the floor. Inside the house, of course, he used a spittoon.

To Paraguay, 1927.

My mother, Maria Doerksen, wanted to go to Paraguay. Father, Franz B. Doerksen, was not at all interested. But when he heard that the farmland there had no stones, his interest was peaked. It seemed that Mother was always sickly here in Manitoba. Her main concern was for the private schools which would be preserved in South America. In Canada the government was forcing children to attend public schools.

The Doerksen farm, machinery and livestock was taken over by National Trust un-

der a deal with the Chortitzer Gemeinde. The Abram Driedger family bought the farm. The Driedger and Doerksen families shared the accommodations for several weeks. After disposing of their property, the Doerksens had enough money for a one-way trip and 500 acres of land in the Chaco.

I was 9 years-old at the time. A large group of families joined us in the emigration group, including my parents, brothers, David, John, sisters, Mary and Helen with husband John Klassen with their 2 small children. We left Carey train station on October 11, 1927. This train trip to New York lasted several days. We boarded the ocean liner, "S.S. Voltaire" Lamport and Holt Steamship Lines. at New



The Abraham Kauenhaven housebarn which stood at the corner of the "old" and "new" Main Streets in Grunthal. It was one of the "first buildings in Grunthal. Grunthal History, page 31.



The farmyard on NE33-4-5E where Franz B. Doerksen settled upon his return from Paraguay in 1928. This photograph was taken around 1967 when son Frank B. Doerksen had already taken over the farm.

Father now had to borrow money from his step-sister, Maria Klassen, (Mitzyimum) to bring the whole family back.

On October 5, 1928 we left Paraguay. Again we boarded the "S.S. Voltaire" which took us to New York. My grandfather, David S. Doerksen, became sick on the ship. The ship doctors could not help. He died as a result of prostate problems. He was buried in the ocean. Before he was lowered into the water, all engines were cut and the captain presented the eulogy. He spoke on Revelations 20:13, "... and the ocean gave up their dead." A bugler played, "The Last Post".

Farming in Grunthal, 1928.

We arrived back in Grunthal, Manitoba on November 18, 1928. My dad purchased a parcel of land, NW & NE 33-4-5E, 240 acres for \$250.00, and started all over again, 4 1/2 miles south of Grunthal in the R.M. of DeSalabery. The area where we settled originally belonged to the village of Kronsgart, but now came to be known as the "Chaco" because so many returnees from Paraguay settled there.

Frank B. Doerksen Sr. was an experienced steam engine engineer having worked in that capacity running the steam engine threshing outfit for his father-in-law Johann Braun in the early 1900s. When he returned from Paraguay he got a job working for Toews Brothers from Alt-Bergfeld, running the steam engine for their sawmill. Instead of paying him wages they broke land for him on his new farm.

Next came the depression years of the 1930s. A new set of buildings had to be built and they were constructed very economically because of the Depression. They milked about 12 cows and sold the cream, They also had pigs and chickens.

Conclusion.

All the field work was done with horses. Frank B. Doerksen Sr. never had a tractor after he returned to Manitoba. He must have

often felt discouraged especially when he drove by his former farm on the outskirts of Grunthal.

"Man thinks but God directs".

My father died on the farm on June 10, 1945. My mother continued farming with me as the youngest son still at home. She died on July 16, 1964.

After this I took over and farmed there until 1979 when I sold it to my children. At this time our children, Donald and Esther Doerksen still are on the farm. We have retired on a five acre property a mile north of the farm, Section 4-4-5E.

Descendants.

The descendants of David S. Doerksen include: HSHS board member Jakob Doerksen, grandson of Abr. Doerksen, one of the grandchildren of David S. Doerksen shown on Photo One.

Endnotes:

Note One: Unruh, *Ost-Wanderung*, page 240.

Note Two: Story as recalled by Mrs. John D. Klassen and published in *Grunthal History*, page 14.

Note Three: Wm. Schroeder, *Bergthal Colony*, page 112; see also Franz K. Goossen, *Reflections on our Heritage*, page 25.

Note Four: David Stoesz, Journal, in *Historical Sketches*, page 348.

Sources:

Abr. A. Braun, Loma Plata, Paraguay, and P. A. Braun, Mt. Lehman, B. C., *Family Tree Jakob Braun 1826-1919* (Rosenort, Manitoba, 1971), 11 pages, herein referred to as the "old" Braun book.

Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis by Martin W. Friesen.

Kanadische Mennoniten Bezwingen eine Wildnis, by Martin W. Friesen.

Die Ersten Mennonitischen Einwanderer in Paraguay compiled and edited by Abram B. Giesbrecht, 1995, page 56.



Coming in the next issue.

"Murder in Chortitz, Kolonie Menno, Paraguay, Feb. 1-2, 1934"

During the evening of Feb. 1, 1934, a group of soldiers seized the daughter of Abr. F. Giesbrecht. In his desperate attempt to save his innocent daughter from gang rape, Giesbrecht was murdered. Story submitted for publication by Rev. William Rempel, Niverville, Manitoba.

The Abr. F. Giesbrecht murdered in 1934 was known as "Kleine" Giesbrecht and had formerly worked at the "Braun & Krahn" store in Grünthal. He should not be confused with Abr. J. Giesbrecht (page 67, "old" Braun book), whose son Abr. B. Giesbrecht was the historian who provided much of the information for the village histories published in the *Grünthal* history book and the author of the book *Die Ersten Mennonitischen Einwanderer in Paraguay* listing the names of the 1926-7 exiles from Hanover Steinbach to Paraguay.

Heinrich R. Brandt (1838-1909), Pioneer farmer

Heinrich R. Brandt (1838-1909): Pioneer farmer, from Steinbach, Russia to Steinbach, Manitoba, from a family history of the Claasz Siemens family by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, publication forthcoming.

Family Background.

Heinrich R. Brandt was the son of Klaas S. Brandt (1815-57) and Maria Reimer (1814-51) of Tiegenhagen, Molotschna. His grandparents on both sides were original Molotschna pioneers in 1804/5. Klaas S. Brandt was a supporter of Johann F. Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, the third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), who happened to be married to his niece, Elisabeth B. Klassen.

Klaas S. Brandt was a wealthy farmer. According to the "Theilings-Verordnung" at the time of his death in 1857, his widow was obligated to pay his five children 10,000 ruble banko, or 2857 2/7 silver ruble. Mennonite inheritance laws required that the spouse receive an equal amount, which means that Klaas had an estate of over 20,000 ruble banko, a substantial sum during a time when a normal Wirtschaft was selling for 1500 to 2000 ruble silver (Note One).

Maria Brandt's mother was the daughter of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), a wealthy farmer in Muntau, Mol. Heinrich was interested in the seminal writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and supported the KG publishing efforts in this regard. When the KG published a beautiful leather-bound 530 page edition of *Die Wandelnde Seele* by the Dutch writer Johann Schalbalie in 1860, Heinrich Reimer Sr. purchased a copy for each of his grandchildren including daughter Maria, presumably in honour of her baptism.

Youth.

Son **Heinrich R. Brandt** was sickly from his youth having a lung condition and a chronic cough. He experienced the Crimean War which took place in 1854-56. He was between 16 and 18 years of age and had to haul military supplies for the Imperial Army, known as "Podwodden". He later told his children of some of his experiences: "... one night when a bomb had rolled into camp the whole camp got up and fled in short order. Often while coming into camp with provisions he had seen scattered boots, a hand or other parts of fallen soldiers. He had to get used to seeing such things." Heinrich was 19 years old when his father died. "At that time he must have been especially

sickly, because his father made mention that likely Heinrich would be the first to follow him" (Note Two).

Marriage, 1858.

When he reached manhood he became converted and was baptised upon his faith in May, 1858. Heinrich married Anna Warkentin on Oct 5, 1858. They were both referred to as being "from Prangenau" at the time of their marriage (Note Three). By 1870 the Heinrich R. Brandt family lived in Steinbach, Borosenko Colony, 30 kilometers northwest of Nikopol.

were accepted in the Grünfeld Gemeinde of the KG. Together with several other Steinbach families they had stuck with the "Friesens" Gemeinde of Aeltester Joh. Friesen, and changing now only because Ohm Johann was terminally ill and not expected to live. There was also a family connection as Ohm Johann was married to Heinrich's cousin which no doubt reinforced the bonds of loyalty.

On May 22, Tuesday, Abr. Reimer, Blumenhof, offered H. Brandt 2,000 ruble for his Feuerstelle. Apparently Heinrich did not accept the offer. Sept. 22, 1872, Reimer, Toews and H. Brandt went to the Molotschna.

But trouble was brewing. April 6, worship services for Steinbach were held at Franz Kroekers instead of Siemens because their maid, Elisabeth, had the pox. Mrs. Heinrich Brandt and some of the children also fell victim to small-pox. She died at 6:30 p. m. May 31, Thursday, 1873. She had been sick for 15 days, and could not speak for seven days. She was buried on June 1, 1873. Very few people attended because the entire Borosenko commu-

nity was in the midst of a small-pox epidemic.

Abr. F. Reimer recorded that on Sunday, June 17, 1873, Heinrich Brandt published bans for engagement without the presence of his bride. She was Katharina Warkentin, daughter of Peter Warkentin and Katharina Thiessen (1829-89). Heinrich R. Brandt's second wife was a cousin to the first (Note Five).

Heinrich R. Brandt worked for many years building wagons in association with his brother-in-law, Klaas R. Reimer, later a pioneer merchant in Steinbach, Manitoba. Brandt "had already in Russian been an experienced worker of wood and maker of wagons while brother-in-law Klaas R. Reimer who was a blacksmith did the iron work." The two men were married to Warkentin sisters. Heinrich was also a farmer.

Emigration, 1874.

In 1874 the Heinrich Brandt family immigrated to Canada where they settled in Steinbach, Manitoba, Wirtschaft 4. They arrived at the landing site at the confluence of the Red and Rats Rivers on Sept. 15, 1874.

Heinrich took out a homestead on NE24-6-



Left: Son Cornelius W. Brandt (1877-1933), farmer and cabinet maker. Photographs for this article are courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Nuenzig Jahre...", Die Post, February 2, 1965.

Middle: Son Klaas W. Brandt (1876-1954), farmer, well known for building large mechanical dredge used on the Winnipeg Water Way. In later years he was busy building machinery and in plumbing and heating. As a youth he was an active photographer.

Right: Gerhard W. Brandt (1887-1948). Contractor and farmer.

Heinrich must have had an astute way of dealing with people. The story is told that for some inexplicable reason wood was always disappearing from his wood pile. Not one to be excited he calmly decided to insert a "patron" (bullet) into one of the blocks of wood in the wood pile to see if the culprit would be exposed. Several mornings later Heinrich noticed that his wood pile had again diminished in size. Brandt calmly waited. Sure enough, a few nights later the bullet employed in a neighbours' home nearby and the mystery was solved (Note Four).

Heinrich Brandt was an enterprising and busy man. Abraham F. Reimer, a neighbour in the village, made occasional reference to the Heinrich Brandt family in his journal. On April 22, 1871, Kl. Reimer and H. Brandt went to Nikopol returning the next day. On April 22, H. Brandt went to Nikopol again this time with another neighbour Joh. Reimer, returning on the 30th. On August 7, H. Brandt went to Nikopol again with Pet. Reimer, another Reimer brother and neighbour from the village.

An important event took place on Nov. 21, 1871, when the H. Brandts and Joh. Reimers

6E on Oct. 3, 1874. In 1875 Brandt was insured for "Schopen" \$25, equipment and live-stock \$200, and feed \$100. Oct. 24 he added coverage \$300 for a barn and \$100 on cattle and equipment. According to the 1883 assessment records, Heinrich R. Brandt had 40 acres cultivated and 120 acres pasture land. He had 2 horses, a total of 9 head of cattle and a line of farm machinery. He was a farmer of medium wealth. Heinrich increased coverage on the dwelling by \$50 in 1882 and again in 1883. In 1884 he added coverage of \$250 for feed. On August 27, 1887, he added \$300 coverage for a new dwelling house.

Life in Steinbach.

The journal of Abraham "Fula" Reimer, Blumenort, father of the Steinbach Reimers, provides additional information regarding Heinrich R. Brandt and his family. On Tuesday, August 10, 1880, Reimer's wife, the vivacious Elisabeth Rempel Reimer visited at the Brandt home for dinner where "...Mrs. Brandt was very sick for seven hours." On August 14, 1880 Abraham F. Reimer visited at the Brandt home for the funeral of their six month-old daughter Katharina. "They had invited the entire village."

The next day, Sunday, August 15, 1880, Brandt was embroiled in dispute with a neighbour Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), a large scale farmer in Blumenhof, three miles north of Steinbach. Evidently Brandt's horses had gotten into Plett's wheat field, which had not been appreciated. The matter came before the brotherhood, and presumably raised tempers as the debate lasted for three hours, finishing at 4 p.m. "[Plett] had spoken too harshly with some people. He, however, denied that he had spoken harshly to Brandt. He had laid hold of him because he had permitted his six horses to be sometimes in his wheat field." The next day, Aeltester Peter P. Toews went to visit Plett, who also happened to be his uncle. The matter was not mentioned again by Reimer, and one would conclude that an amiable settlement was reached between the parties.

On March 21, 1882, brother Klaas R. Brandt from Rosenort was visiting his brother Heinrich in Steinbach.

Abraham F. Reimer evidently was quite close to the Heinrich R. Brandt family as he frequently mentioned their comings and goings including the marriages of the children. March 31, 1882, 5 degrees above, presumably reamur, the Russian thermometer similar to celsius. Klaas, son of Kl. Reimer, and Maria, daughter of Heinrich Brandt, were married at the Kl. Reimer home. The entire village had been invited but the Holdemans did not attend.

May 10, 1882. H. Brandt, A. Friesen and Kl. Reimer made the coffin for Peter Toews.

September 26, 1882, 22 degrees above, A. Friesen and H. Brandt went to Winnipeg to get the steam engine, to Niverville actually. October 29, 1885, Gerh. Giesbrecht went to the West Reserve (meant is probably Rosenort

where the Steinbacher's relatives lived). Brandts and A. Penners went along. December 11, H. Brandts again went to West Reserve...Returned home on December 30th. December 31, Mrs. H. Brandt from Steinbach has been sick for three days due to the trip with J. Reimers.

H. Brandt evidently had the skills of a finish carpenter and was occasionally called upon to build a coffin. October 10, 1887, H. Brandt made a coffin for Mrs. H. Friesen (Fast?) from behind Steinbach, Schönau [?]."

December 25, 1887, H. Brandt's son Klaas was admonished at a brotherhood meeting for buying a revolver in Winnipeg and had stolen the money from his father. October 5, 1888, brothers Peter Brandt, Nebraska, and Kl. Brandt, Rosenort, were visiting at H. Brandts in Steinbach and together the three brothers went to Abraham F. Reimers, Blumenort, for dinner.

March 25, 1889, H. Brandt, Steinbach, hired a servant for \$50 per year.

Tuesday, August 6, 1889, Mrs. H. Brandt died at 5 a.m. She was 38 years, 7 months, and 22 days old. Her mother died one day earlier. "The old Mrs. K. Loewen was 59 years old and seven months. "The funeral was held on August 7 and mother and daughter were buried in the same grave. "It was a big funeral and sad to behold."

Life went on and with a houseful of young children Heinrich Brandt quickly realized that he needed another wife to help him survive. On the August 24, 1889, he proposed to Mrs. P. Dueck, Grünfeld, "but she refused."

Recollections.

Heinrich Brandt married for the third time to Justina Unger, daughter of Peter F. Unger of Blumenhof, Manitoba. Klaas J. B. Reimer was 15 years of age when Heinrich Brandt died and remembered him very well, when he was "three cheeses high".

On one occasion Brandt had asked young Klaas whose son he was?

"Ours," Klaas answered innocently.

Well in that case, Brandt had insisted that he come along with him. But this is not how young Klaas had meant it.

Heinrich Brandt suffered much during his life-time from sore eyes. During the 1890s he had to be admitted to the St. Boniface Hospital where one eye was removed. But the scientific knowledge was not yet advanced far enough to put in a glass eye. Because the travelling conditions were so primitive at the time and also poverty, his wife did not get to see him for the entire two months that he was in the hospital.

Heinrich did cabinet making and carpentry work. Klaas J. B. Reimer has written, "Uncle Brandt was a skilled builder and his name was engraved into the barn of my uncle, Klaas R. Reimer, where I frequently saw it, until the large barn fell victim to a fire sometime during the 1920s" (Note Six).

After the death of the father, the surviving widow, Justina Unger Brandt, farmed for a

few years with the adult sons. Then she moved over the old village creek, more or less into retirement. In 1916 she married for the second time to widower Peter W. Loewen from Neuanlage, who died shortly thereafter. Shortly thereafter the Wirtschaft on Main Street was sold to Franz K. Goossen.

Descendants.

Heinrich R. Brandt was the father of Klaas W. Brandt (1876-1954), a Steinbach entrepreneur who together with his brother-in-law Klaas R. Friesen, built and operated a huge 60 ton dredge (Note Seven). Among Heinrich R. Brandt's well-known descendants was son Cornelius W. Brandt, Blumenort, whose grandsons, Cliff and Leo Braun, own Braunsdale Dairy, Blumenort, largest dairy in Manitoba. Another well-known descendant is Steinbach Olympian Michelle Sawatsky. Steve Brandt, great-grandson of C.W. is the owner of Steve's Livestock Hauling, Blumenort, and Bob Brandt owned "Double R Farm Equipment" who just built a new shop on P.T.H. 12 just north of the City of Steinbach. Steinbach lawyer Randy Brandt is another great-grandson.

Heinrich's younger son, John U. Brandt was well-known in the Blumenort area where he subdivided his pastureland to become the modern community of Blumenort where son Leonard P. Brandt is still residing.

Heinrich R. Brandt's brother Klaas in Rosenort was the father of Jack Brandt founder of the widely-known "Brandt Construction", Steinbach, and later of Omaha, Nebraska and California. For a biography of Heinrich's sister Maria who married Isaac L. Plett and was the grandmother of Abram D. Plett, founder of Westfield Industries of Rosenort: see *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, pages 78-80. Another brother Peter R. Brandt, was a well-to-do farmer in Jansen, Nebraska, and later in Garden City, Kansas.

Sources:

Abr. F. Reimer, "Journals."

Endnotes:

Note One: I am not sure of the exchange value between the two kinds of rubles, banko and silver. Banko was obviously worth a lot less.

Note Two: David P. Reimer, *Brandt Reunion*, page 14-15.

Note Three: Johann Dueck (1801-66), "Journal," in Plett, ed., *Leaders*, page 484.

Note Four: Story as told to Arnold Brandt by Henry T. Braun, formerly Blumenort, deceased.

Note Five: David P. Reimer, *Brandt*, 15; cf. Plett, "Martin Warkentin 1764 Genealogy," in Plett, ed., *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, 479.

Note Six: Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Neunzig Jahre Steinbach in der Ost reserve," *Steinbach Post*, Feb. 2, 1965, page 6.

Note Seven: Abe. Warkentin, *Reflections on our Heritage*, 116-7. See also Ralph Friesen, "Entrepreneurial Legacy of Abraham S. Friesen," in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 74-75.

Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900)

Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900) and Helena S. Friesen (1835-1911), Rosenfeld, Russia, to Rosenort, Manitoba, to Heuboden, Jansen, Nebraska by Delbert F. Plett, from a history of the Abraham von Reisen family, publication forthcoming.

Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900), was the son of Abraham W. Friesen, Rückenau, Molotschna Colony, and later Jansen, Nebraska. Heinrich came from good family roots as he was the grandson of the renown Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, the second Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. Heinrich's mother was Elisabeth Brandt (1813-ca.56) making him a first cousin to Heinrich R. Brandt (1838-1906), Steinbach pioneer--see article elsewhere in this issue.

In 1856 Heinrich B. Friesen married his second cousin, Helena S. Friesen, sister to Steinbach pioneer Abraham S. Friesen. They lived in Rosenfeld, Borosenko. Oral tradition as recalled by great-grandson Louis E. Reimer, former navy pilot, is that Heinrich served as a school teacher in Russia. Heinrich Friesen was concerned regarding the threat of military service as on January 3, 1873, Abraham F. Reimer of Steinbach, Borosenko, recorded "that Heinrich Friesen of Rosenfeld was there and had two printed letters along regarding the laws which had been enacted in Petersburg in 1871."

Heinrich and Helena immigrated to Manitoba in 1874. "There is reason to believe that the family remained in Fort Gary for a certain length of time as ...[one of the older sons] in later years related how they herded the town milk cows on vacant lots and occasionally even on the Main Street of Winnipeg that first fall" *Reflections*, page 37. The family eventually settled in Rosenhof, Manitoba, a village founded by David Klassen (1813-1900), married to Heinrich's aunt.

As was normal in a settlement period, Heinrich "was somewhat sickly but it seemed ... his discouragement, was his main illness. He declared himself with tears that he did not wish to allow any party spirit to remain within himself" (Note One). The Heinrich B. Friesen family left for Jansen, Nebraska, by ox teams and sleigh on February 4, 1875, in the middle of a raging blizzard heading for

the railhead at Moorhead, "under auspices that they need to look after his parents-in-law, or so he says" (Note Two).

The Heinrich B. Friesen family settled in the village of Heuboden near the town of

Fast as "well-driller" Friesen. He died in Jansen, Nebraska (Note Three).

After the death of her husband, Helena S. Friesen, moved to Steinbach, Manitoba, where she was resident in 1904 when she married for the second time to Abraham L. Friesen, Aeltester of the KG at Jansen, Nebraska. This caused some controversy at the time, as her sons seemingly objected to her marriage to a conservative Mennonite, even though Abraham L. Friesen was a wealthy and gifted man. After the marriage, Helena moved to Jansen, Nebraska, to live with her husband and in 1906 she moved with him to Meade, Kansas, where a new KG settlement was being founded.

Children:

Son **Abraham F. Friesen** (1857-1935) listed in the Cub Creek census (presumably Heuboden) for 1880 and in the property listing as the owner of 40 acres cultivated land with a farm property worth \$1000, raising the possibility that he took over the farm of his grandfather, Abraham F. Friesen Sr. On Feb. 24, 1885, Abraham F. Friesen Jr. was elected as a deacon of the KG. On June 23, 1891, he inherited his grandfather's 1756 edition of *Die Wandelnde Seele*. On August 6, 1891, the family moved to Hamilton County, Nebraska. In 1893 they moved to Colorado. Something must have happened as around this time as Abraham F. Friesen switched over to the religious culture and language of American Revivalism turning against the faith of his parents. Abraham F. Friesen was the first minister of the Brüderthaler Church in Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1898 (Note Four). In 1905 they moved to Lanigan, Saskatchewan, and in 1912 to Dallas, Oregon (Note Five).

Daughter **Helena F. Friesen** married the widower Johann S. Harms of Jansen, Nebraska. He was a minister of the KG. After his death she married for the second time to Franz K. Sawatzky, son of Abraham F. Sawatzky of Jansen, Nebraska. The Franz



Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900) and Helena S. Friesen (1835-1911), and their two children Helena (b. 1859) and Abraham (b. 1857). Accordingly the photograph was taken in 1861 or so making it the oldest Kleine Gemeinde photograph that I am aware of. The oldest Bergthaler photograph to date was of Franz Thiessen and Elisabeth Hamm and son Franz, taken circa 1859--see Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, page 32. This picture is also historic as an excellent portrayal of traditional styles of clothing and apparel as worn in the 1850s and 60s. Photograph courtesy of great-grandson Louis E. Reimer, Apt 607-175 Woodhaven Ave., Steinbach, Manitoba, ROA 2A0.

Jansen. In 1880 Heinrich and Helena Friesen owned 85 acres cultivated land and a farm property worth \$2000. Helena's parents, Abraham F. and Helena Siemens Friesen are listed as resident with the Heinrich B. Friesen household at the time of the 1880 census. Heinrich is referred to by Martin B.



Two daughters of Helena and Heinrich B. Friesen, circa 1930: daughter Helena F. Friesen Harms Sawatzky, seated bottom right, behind her is her second husband, Franz K. Sawatzky, whose brother Abraham lived in Steinbach after 1900. Oral tradition has it that the woman on the left is Helena's sister, which would have to be Elisabeth born 1876, and her husband, name unknown. Photo courtesy of great-granddaughter Marjorie Harms Leeb, 5412 Shallows Pl. W., Santa Rosa, California, 95409.

Sawatzky family lived in Jansen. In 1913 Abraham S. Friesen visited his niece Helena Friesen Harms Sawatzky in Jansen. At the age of eighty, Helena Sawatzky moved to Dallas, Oregon, where she lived with her grandson Isaac H. Harms. She was a second cousin to both of her husbands.

Son **Heinrich F. Friesen** married Maria B. Friesen, daughter of KG deacon Klaas F. Friesen of Neukirch, Molotschna. In 1913 Abraham S. Friesen visited his nephew Heinrich F. Friesen in Reedley, California. Several of the Heinrich F. Friesen children lived in Reedley and other parts of California.

Son **Peter F. Friesen** married Anna Harms, daughter of KG minister Johann S. Harms of Jansen, Nebraska. Abraham S. Friesen visited nephew Peter F. Friesen in Meade, Kansas, in 1913. Later they moved to Dallas, Oregon.

Son **Johann F. Friesen** lived in Texas for a while. He was a good horse doctor. He lived in Steinbach, Manitoba, for four years but left in 1906 for Saskatchewan to homestead.

Son **Gerhard F. Friesen** married Margaretha Harms, a sister to Anna who married Peter. The Gerhard F. Friesen family lived in Jansen, Nebraska. They moved to Steinbach, Manitoba, as a young married couple, where they were living by the turn of the century. In 1916 the family was rent-

ing the yard and buildings belonging to the widow Mrs. Johann R. Dueck, nee Margaretha P. Kroeker (Note Six). In 1921 the Gerhard F. Friesen family moved to Dallas, Oregon. They were the parents of Mrs. Bill Hiebert, nee Elma Friesen, who lived in Dallas, Oregon, in 1986. They were also the parents of Margaret Friesen who married Peter T. Loewen, founder of "Loewen Chev" in Steinbach. Another daughter Marie Friesen married Aaron Warkentin, the brother of genealogist Sol Warkentin (Note Seven).

Son **Isaac F. Friesen** married Anna Quiring, daughter of Jonas Quiring. Their son Jonas Q. Friesen purchased "Steinbach Lumber Yards" in Steinbach, Manitoba, from the Martin M. Penner family (Note Eight). For a Photo circa 1920, see Preservings, No. 8, Part One, page 50.

Endnotes:

Note One: Heinrich Reimer to Peter Toews, Dec. 5, 1874, in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 42.

Note Two: Jakob M. Barkman, Letter to Peter Toews, Feb. 3, 1875, in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 66.

Note Three: For a picture of Heinrich and Helena Friesen in their older years, see Ralph Friesen, "Totally indiscreet and vain," in *Preservings*, No. 7, Dec. 1995, page 36.

Note Four: Linda Peters, et al., eds., *GOD, Working Through Us . . . : Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church 1897 - 1972*, (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1972), at page 13, has a picture of Abraham F. Friesen and his family; and at page 19, a picture of Abraham F. Friesen and his brothers George, Peter and Isaac.

Note Five: Elisabeth Ratzlaff Friesen, "Abram F. Friesen Family Tree May 1, 1968," unpublished genealogy, n.p., 1968, 21 pages, provided a listing of the descendants. This work was updated in 1989 by Helen Friesen Hasselblad, "Abraham F. Friesen Family Tree update," unpublished genealogy, 1989, received courtesy of Sherill Grisham, 515 NW Wallala, Grisham, Oregon, 97030, 1990; see also Carl Bangs, "Four Hundred Years of Friesen," unpublished paper, an address given at the gathering of the descendants of Heinrich Friesen (born May 2, 1836, in South Russia) at Turner, Oregon, July 3, 1971.

Note Six: Gerhard G. Kornelsen, "Steinbach, then and now," trans. by Henry N. Fast, in Plett, ed., *Leaders*, 256. These buildings originally belonged to Wirtschaft 3 in the Steinbach village plan which had been settled by Heinrich Fast in 1874.

Note Seven: The Aaron Warkentin family lived in Dallas, Oregon, where their daughter Elma married David Kroeker, whose daughter Phyllis Mack has completed a book about the Gerhard F. Friesen family. Telephone interview January 4, 1995, with Phyllis Mack, 4800 S. Maryland Pkwy, Las Vegas, Nevada, 89119.

Note Eight: Interview with grandson Ray Rempel, Steinbach, Manitoba, January 12, 1994. Bert Friesen, "Isaac F. Friesen Family Tree September 15, 1971," unpublished paper, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1971, provides a listing of the descendants of Isaac F. Friesen: see also Abe Warkentin, *Reflections on our Heritage: A History of Steinbach and the R.M. of Hanover from 1874* (Steinbach, Man., 1974), 37-38.

| Gen | Name | Birth | Marriage | Death |
|------------|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 4 | Heinrich B. Friesen | May 2,1836 | Apr 22,1856 | Dec 11,1900 |
| m | Helena S. Friesen | Oct 7,1835 | | Feb 26,1911 |
| 5 | Abraham F. Friesen | Jan 7,1857 | | Dec 26,1935 |
| m | Sarah Sawatzky | Jan 10,1858 | Dec 3,1876 | Aug 4,1895 |
| 2m | Maria Kroeker | Jan 13,1877 | Nov 9,1895 | Dec 2,1937 |
| 5 | Helena F. Friesen | Jul 7,1859 | | Nov 18,1949 |
| m | Johann S. Harms | Dec 3,1839 | | Dec 5,1884 |
| 2m | Franz K. Sawatzky | Jun 9,1865 | Jan 15,1887 | Feb 19,1934 |
| 5 | Heinrich F. Friesen | Sep 2,1860 | Jan 9,1881 | Jan 30,1950 |
| m | Maria B. Friesen | Nov 11,1861 | | Jun 8,1924 |
| 5 | Peter F. Friesen | Jun 21,1863 | | |
| m | Anna Harms | Feb 17,1864 | | |
| 5 | Johann F. Friesen | Jan 20,1866 | | |
| 5 | Jakob F. Friesen | Nov 25,1868 | | |
| 5 | Gerhard F. Friesen | Jul 12,1871 | | 1942 |
| m | Margaretha Harms | Dec 29,1869 | | 1952 |
| 5 | Isaac F. Friesen | Nov 20,1873 | | Jun 12,1953 |
| m | Anna Quiring | May 3,1871 | | Oct 18,1927 |
| 2m | Agatha Barkman | Jun 15,1894 | Jun 3,1928 | Jan 28,1984 |
| 5 | Elisabeth F. Friesen | May 28,1876 | | |
| 4 | Helena S. Friesen | Oct 7,1835 | | Feb 26,1911 |
| 2m | Abraham L. Friesen | Sep 13,1831 | Jun 29,1904 | Mar 14,1917 |

Abraham P. Isaac (1852-1938)

Abraham P. Isaac (1852-1938), Grünfeld, Borosenko, Kleefeld, Manitoba: Pioneer Educator and Preacher:
By great-grandchildren Roger and Dawn Penner 2284-21 Ave. S.E. Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 3Y4. Phone 403-526-5091.

Introduction

A little over a year ago I read "Mennonite Burial Customs Part Two" by Linda Buhler printed in the June 1996, Issue No. 9, *Preservings*, and the sentence, "But because the Kleine Gemeinde and the Holdeman were officially against taking of photographs, the pictures that are still around are usually from the Chortitzer Church (and from the 1920s migration)", reminded me that my Mother, Margaret Bartel Penner had a coffin photograph that is in excellent condition of her Grandfather, Abraham Plett Isaac (1852-1938). I wrote Delbert Plett about this, mentioning that I would be willing to submit this picture, as well as do a short write-up on this man, my Great-grandfather.

I started this project with Abraham Isaac's obituary, which I felt would be fitting to go with the picture. There is also a considerable amount of information available about this man from a number of sources. I am happy to report also, that several other pictures have surfaced featuring him while still alive. Credits and information sources are included in the "Endnotes".

Obituary.

The following is the translated obituary of Abraham P. Isaak taken from the *Botschafter der Wahrheit* (Messenger of Truth). This obituary was supplied courtesy of David Penner, Kleefeld, Manitoba. It was translated with the help of Albert and Daisy (Isaac) Penner and my father Alphae Penner.

"Our beloved father, Abraham Isaak was born December 31, 1852 in the village of Schoenau in South Russia. After he finished his schooling he was a school teacher for 5 years in his home village. On December 26, 1873 he married Margaretha Loewen who was also born in Russia.

"The marriage ceremony was performed by Aeltester Peter Toews in the church in Blumenhof, South Russia. On June 4, 1874 the parents left their homeland and travelled to Manitoba, Canada, arriving there on August 2. Here, while facing many hardships and deprivations they established their new home. On January 5, 1882 father was elected as a Minister, and with God's help as far as his health would allow, he served the church.

"September 27, 1930 our loving mother passed away leaving father lonesome. They were married for 56 years and 9 months. February 18, 1931 father had a stroke, leaving his right side paralysed and his speech impaired, but he recovered sufficiently to assume his ministerial duties for 3 more years. On February 3, 1935 he preached his last



Four generation picture 1936. Front left, great-grandson Jim Isaac (born 1931), back row, left to right, father Daniel Isaac (1905-1976), grandfather Abram L. Isaac (1881-1962), and great-grandfather Abraham P. Isaac (1851-1938). Photo courtesy of Irene Wiebe, High River, Alberta.

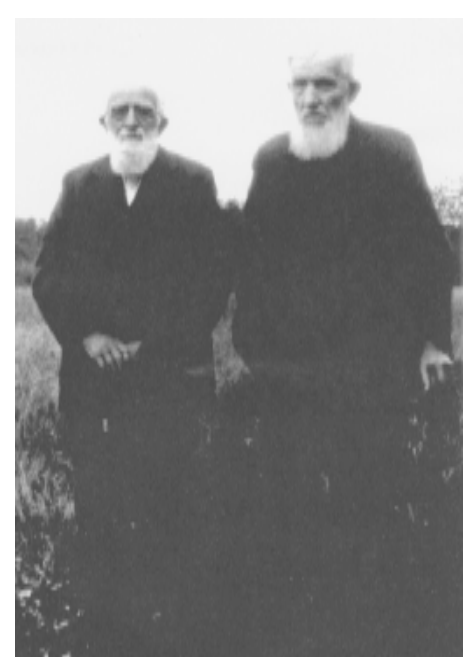
sermon. After that his strength deteriorated slowly. He became a shut-in in his own home.

"During his last two weeks he had problems breathing to the extent that he had to sit up for a few hours nearly every night.

"His condition worsened. The last two days and nights before his death he could not lie down at all because he was short of breath. Wednesday evening on March 9, when his plight worsened, the doctor was called. After examining him the doctor stated that his heart would soon fail. The doctor was able to make him more comfortable so that by 2:00 AM he could go to bed. When asked how he felt he said "much better, now I can rest." At 2:30 Thursday morning father lapsed into a coma. At 8:00 AM he breathed his last. "Finally he comes softly, takes us by the hand, leads us on our journey home, to the promised land."

"The funeral was held Monday, March 14. At home, Minister C. Wohlge-muth gave a short message, then in the Kleefeld church Minister John Penner opened the funeral service and led in prayer.

"For the text Minister Peter A. Penner chose Philippians 1:21 and Hebrews 13:7, then all Ministers present followed with short tributes. At the interment at the church cemetery Minister J. F. Barkman spoke words of comfort and closed with a prayer.



The two great-grandfathers of Jim (James) Isaac. On the left is Johann S. Friesen (1853-1937), also known as "Asel" Friese, because he had mules or donkeys. On the right side is Abraham P. Isaac (1852-1938). Their children Katharina Friesen (1879-1969) and Abram L. Isaac (1881-1962) were married. Photo courtesy of Irene Wiebe, High River, Alberta.

"Left to mourn his departure are: 4 sons, 3 daughters, 40 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and 1 sister who lives in Alberta. Preceding him in death were: 1 son, 1 daughter, 1 daughter-in-law, 3 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. Father reached the age of 85 years, 2 months and 10 days.

"The long awaited peace has finally come for our beloved father. We are mourning, but are thankful that he has gone to his eternal rest. He was very patient, he didn't complain and he often told us he was looking forward to the day he'd be released of his suffering."

Life in Russia.

Abraham Plett Isaac was born on December 31, 1852 in the village of Schönau, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia. Abraham's father Johann W. Isaak (1809-64) died when Abraham was only 12 years old. Abraham completed his schooling in his home village. By his own admission he did not feel that he was endowed with a special talent, but learning, instead of being a burden, gradually became more of a pleasure.

As a teenager young Abraham worked briefly for his Uncle Cornelius Plett (1820-1900), Kleefeld, Molotschna. After that he was hired by cousin, Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-72), Lindenau. Both these villages were located on the Molotschna Colony, South Russia. Before his year of employment with Gerhard Goossen ended they moved about ninety miles north to a place they named Grünfeld, near the Borosenko Colony. When his year of employment was up he worked for Franz Froese, Heuboden about fifteen miles south from Grünfeld for one year.

After this he was approached by the elders of the Kleine Gemeinde Church and asked to serve as a school teacher and taught there for four and a half years. He related how humble he felt to be promoted from stable hand to school teacher. He took his teaching very seriously, studied diligently, and in his own words, almost totally denying himself association with other youth, made his school life his sole activity (Note One). He was grateful to his cousin Gerhard P. Goossen, an experienced teacher who acted as his mentor and advisor (Note Two).

The following is a quote from Johann F. Toews (1858-1931): "Shortly thereafter, my parents together with all the other who had moved with them to Markus a few years earlier, relocated to Borosenko, which lay 25 miles verst north behind Nikopol on an estate which had previously belonged to the nobleman Borosenko. Our school teacher here was a certain **Abraham Isaac**, with whom we also had to learn Russian."

"[Abraham Isaac] ...taught us that the earth rotated and the sun stood constant. Nobody believed this in our house. David, the son of Johann Hiebert, who was at our house to learn the art of saddle making from

my father, said that I should tell the teacher, that if this was true, his brandy flask would tip over in the cabinet during the night. I did not pursue the matter, since I was scared that my skin might thereby come in too close an acquaintance with the teacher's bamboo rod" (Note Three).

On December 26, 1873 Abraham married Margaretha Loewen, daughter of Peter Loewen (1825-87) and Susanna Enns (1824-57). Abraham "Fuela" Reimer has recorded "December 26, 1873, Wednesday. -2, later +1. Cloudy. Abr. Isaak from Grünfeld and



Coffin picture of Abraham P. Isaac. The photographer was P. K. Schwarz, Kleefeld, Manitoba. The picture was taken the day of funeral at Kleefeld, Manitoba, from on top of a small building beside the Kleefeld Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman) that was used for storage. The viewing of the body was held outside because the church was too small to accommodate all the mourners. In the picture, from left to right, are three granddaughters: Amanda Isaac (Mrs. Henry E. Toews), Emily Isaac (Mrs. Winston Wohlgenuth), Margaret Bartel (Mrs. Alphae Penner), and Mrs. Jacob Friesen, nee Anna T. Barkman, partially off the picture. My Mother, Margaret (Bartel) Penner as well as a number of other grandchildren were at their Grandfather's bedside when he died. They had stopped in to see him on their way to school, when he passed away.

Margreta, daughter of Peter Loewen, Sawitzki, were married by Rev. Toews in Blumenhoff." On the 27th her father and Corn. Fast, Steinbach travelled to Kronsthal, Old Colony, where Peter Loewen became engaged.

With his marriage, Abraham's teaching career came to an end. However, his thirst for knowledge and his interest in the Mennonite educational system continued.

Manitoba 1874.

In 1874 the Isaacs joined the emigration to Canada. Abraham Isaac's own memoirs contain a detailed account of their trip from Russia to Canada. His mother nee Anna S. Plett (1813-87) came with them and stayed with the Abraham Isaacs in the small hamlet of Schönau, Manitoba till her death in 1887. This village was located approximately 1 1/2 miles northwest of present day Kleefeld.

Their first winter in Manitoba, Abraham Isaac and his wife Margaretha, his brother Peter (1846-1925) with his wife and two children, Peter and Abraham's younger sister Helena (1858-1945), and their mother nee Anna Plett (1814-87) all stayed together in a hut built of reed grass. Abraham and Margaretha's first son Peter (1874-1932) was born that winter while the temperature under the bed was below freezing. In the spring Peter and Abraham built a 16' by 16' poplar log house. Later that summer they built another larger one as well, so that both families would be more comfortable.

Their first planting (1875) of grain, potatoes and vegetables was a total loss because of grasshoppers. 1876 yielded a good crop. The wheat which was hauled to the city of Winnipeg with oxen, sold for fifty cents a bushel. Only twenty-five cents a bushel was received in cash and the rest they had to take in supplies.

A Blizzard, 1876.

December 13, 1876 Abraham took a half a cord of fire wood to a sawmill so that he could buy a gallon of kerosene for their lamp. Kerosene cost between seventy-five cents and one dollar per gallon. On his way home at about 6:00 PM a severe blizzard enveloped him. He unhitched his oxen, trampled down some snow, lay down and let the snow cover him. His upper body stayed warm because of his Russian fur jacket but his legs, neck and face became very cold. He fought sleep, but love and sympathy for his wife, if he should die, kept him determined to stay alive.

At about 2:00 AM the wind abated and he got out of the snow. After running in several directions frantically he saw a light. It was the storekeeper Erdman Penner's house in the village of Tannenau. His frozen nose and ears were washed with turpentine to thaw them out. In the morning he was taken to his brother Johann Isaac's house in Grünfeld. Johann had already been looking for him, since both of his oxen had shown up in the village. Johann had talked to Abraham's wife Margaretha, who was somewhat prepared for news of his death in the blizzard. Even though Abraham's mother and sister Helena insisted that Abraham was sitting on the sleigh as it drove into the yard, she did not believe he was alive till he stepped into the room. What a joyous reunion that must have been.

Teacher Examiner, 1879.

Though Abraham Isaac now occupied his life with farming he still had an interest in the denominational school system. On March 10, 1879 he was part of an examination board at a general teachers conference in Chortitz. The panel consisted of Mr. Wm. Hespeler, the Kaiser's German Consul from Winnipeg and Canadian government immigration agent who had acted as a facilitator for the Mennonite emigration, Aeltester Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) representing the Kleine Gemeinde and Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) representing the Bergthaler Gemeinde. Teachers Abraham P. Isaac and Jacob Friesen (born 1828) of Tannenau (Note Seven) represented these churches respectively. All 36 teachers from the East Reserve were present at this conference. From this we can surmise that Abraham had the respect of the school authorities, the church (KG), as well as his peers, to be appointed to serve in this capacity (Notes Four and Seven).

Election as Minister, 1882.

In January 1882 Abraham P. Isaac along with Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) and Martin Penner (1849-1928) were ordained as ministers in the newly founded Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman) (Note Five). He served the church faithfully in this capacity for 53 years. His pastoral work involved much travelling. On March 27, 1883, "Martin Penner, Abr. Isaak and Peter Toews, three ministers, travelled to Pembina (West Reserve)"--from the journal of Abr. F. Reimer.

Recollections of Jakob I. Bartel.

Abraham P. Isaac was a studious young man who enjoyed learning. In 1980 his son-in-law Jakob I. Bartel related an interesting episode of Abraham Isaac's years of youth: "Abram's father died when he was only 12 years old and so he was hired out [vemieth] until the age of 18 with his uncle Cornelius Plett. One day the Ohms came to him while he was working and asked him if he had ever considered the occupation of a school teacher. He had replied that he had never considered this and that in any event he was bound to work for his uncle for another year. A few weeks later the Ohms came back again and asked him if he had given the matter any further thought. When Abram again gave the answer that he was still bound for another year the Ohms asked if it would make a difference if he would be released from this obligation?"

And so it had been, for when they asked uncle Plett, he replied that if the Ohms could arrange for Abram to teach and if this was satisfactory to the Gemeinde, he would gladly release him.

Some time later Abram was walking along the road when his uncle Abraham Isaac (1827-90) of Pordenau, who was not a member of the KG, came by and gave him a lift. Uncle

Abraham questioned him whether the Ohms had been to see him already and what they had said? When Abram finally admitted that the Ohms had indeed been to see him, his uncle wanted to know what they had wanted. Finally Abram admitted that Ohm Friesen and Reimer had been quite satisfied with his teaching but that Ohm Toews and Goossen had said that he should first be born again



Abraham Isaac's grave marker located at the Church of God in Christ Cemetery at Kleefeld, Manitoba.

and join the church. Apparently Abram at this time was still not a member and errant in his ways, although he read much in the Bible using it as a reading book in his schooling. To this his uncle replied that anyone could see that one should be born again".

Recollections - by Ted Wiebe

In the early years after the Mennonites had come to Manitoba, butter cream and milk was sold in Winnipeg. One time Abram P. Isaac delivered butter to his customers in Winnipeg. The man wanted to tease Abram and so he asked him, "Yeah, you Mennonites, I guess you make your women and children stomp barefoot through the milk to make you butter, eh?"

Abram was a friendly and out-going man and not at all flabbergasted by the remark. He replied, "No, that takes far too long, we do this by chasing our oxen through the butter."

Abram P. Isaac was always a well-liked man and so it was perhaps to be expected that he was elected as a minister.

One day, he was to preach the main sermon in the Greenland Church with the local minister Isaac Penner giving the introductory sermon which was usually only a short devotional. But this particular Sunday, Penner's sermon went on and on and on. When he was finally done it was almost time to end the two-hour long worship service. Never nonplussed, Abram got up and went to the pulpit. With his dry voice he said, "Well, we've already heard the sermon, now I will make the closing [Schlusz] and we can go home."

Recollections by Peter A. Plett.

In his later years Abram P. Isaac had a big white beard. Peter A. Plett grew up in Blumenhof, Manitoba, where the KG and Holdemans took turns having church services in the school house. Peter Plett recalled attending the service one Sunday when Abraham Isaac was preaching and how Mr. Isaac had stopped to talk to him after the service and had told him the whole story of the Plett genealogy and that he also was a Plett--of which he was very proud (Note Nine).

Farming.

After a number of very difficult pioneering years things gradually improved and the Abraham Isaacs farmed successfully and raised a large family. Abraham and his wife Margaretha lived at the same location (Schönaue) all their lives. They eventually owned all of Section 30-6-5E except for the northwest quarter, originally owned by

| <u>Gen</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Birth</u> | <u>Marriage</u> | <u>Death</u> |
|------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 5 | Abram P. Isaac | Dec 31,1852 | | Mar 10,1938 |
| m | Margaretha Loewen | Mar 16,1855 | Dec 26,1873 | Sep 27,1930 |
| 6 | Peter L. Isaac | Nov 20,1874 | | Mar 12,1932 |
| m | Maria S. Reimer | Sep 27,1878 | Oct 23,1901 | Sep 15,1930 |
| 6 | Johann L. Isaac | Feb 25,1877 | Mar 20,1911 | Dec 17,1960 |
| m | Caroline Schmidt | Mar 17,1885 | | Mar 28,1972 |
| 6 | Anna L. Isaac | Jun 16,1879 | | 1886 |
| 6 | Abram L. Isaac | Oct 11,1881 | Nov 26,1904 | Apr 13,1962 |
| m | Katherina Friesen | Nov 25,1879 | | May 12,1969 |
| 6 | Margaretha L. Isaac | May 10,1885 | Nov 9,1905 | Nov 20,1958 |
| m | Jakob B. Wiebe | Feb 5,1884 | | Sep 29,1947 |
| 6 | Susanna L. Isaac | Mar 12,1887 | May 24,1915 | Jan 2,1951 |
| m | Jakob I. Bartel | Mar 15,1891 | | Jun 4,1982 |
| 6 | Maria L. Isaac | Dec 13,1889 | | May 7,1977 |
| 6 | Franz L. Isaac | May 16,1894 | Oct 4,1918 | Aug 28,1979 |
| m | Elizabeth Penner | Mar 22,1896 | | Mar 29,1979 |
| 6 | David L. Isaac | Dec 28,1896 | Nov 4,1921 | Apr 17,1967 |
| m | Justina Bartel | Apr 3,1900 | | Aug 22,1963 |
| 2m | Helen de Veer | Sep 26,1917 | | |

brother Peter, the renowned KG folk historian. After Abraham's retirement, youngest son David (1896-1967) married to Justina Bartel (1900-1963) took over the farm. Later, their youngest son Alfred (born 1934) married to Lorene Penner (born 1932) farmed there as well.

Character.

From the above story we can draw several conclusions. Abraham P. Isaac was a man with a thirst for knowledge, therefore he took his studies and school teaching life very seriously. This is illustrated through his own admission of forsaking the frivolities of teenage life and devoting himself to studies and teaching when he was promoted from stable boy to school teacher in Russia. He must have kept a number of his books as his granddaughter Adina (Bartel) Penner Kleefeld, Manitoba, remembers one of her brothers borrowing a book on astronomy in the 1930s for a school project.

We can also conclude that Abraham had a love for God and the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman). This is clearly illustrated by the fact that he served God and this Church faithfully for over 50 years. He served as one of the leaders of this newly founded Church, which shows that he held the respect of its members for a half a century.

Cornelius T. Penner (Kleefeld) remembers Abraham Isaac, as a minister always wearing his hat and winter coat as he walked through the Church to his position in front. He had a hook on the wall where he would hang them prior to the start of the service. C. T. Penner also remembers being told of an incident when Abraham felt his parishioners were dozing off or not paying enough attention to his sermon. One Sunday, Abraham did not use a Bible text prior to his sermon as was his custom. After the service, he asked the Church members what text he had used, and was surprised to find that many of them knew his sermons well enough that they could pick out the Bible text that his sermon had been based on.

Abraham also had a keen sense of determination and dedication. Again this is shown by the fact that he took his early school teaching career and ministry very seriously. He devoted a lot of his time to studying and reading to improve his knowledge, becoming a well-educated man, though largely self taught. C. T. Penner remembers being told of Heinrich Ewert (1855-1934) from Gretna coming to visit Abraham Isaac. The level of conversation between these two would be on a much higher plane than his usual conversations. Heinrich Ewert served for several years as a school inspector in southern Manitoba and he devoted a number of years of his life to improving the quality of teachers in schools on the East and West Reserves

Physically Abraham Isaac's determination is shown by the impressive improvements he made in his farming operation owning up to three quarters of land. Grandson, Bill Isaac (Camrose, Alberta) remembers how his grandfather tried to rehabilitate himself after his first stroke in 1931. He would walk daily the nearly a quarter mile south through the bush to his daughter and son-in-laws (Susanna and Jacob I. Bartel) farm. He had a chair half way where he could rest. This farm is currently owned by Lester and Penny Bartel, Kleefeld.

Abraham Isaac also had a sense of humour. Bill Isaac recalls that as a young boy he was practising his reading from "Grimm's Fairy Tales" with his Aunt Maria Isaac (1889-1977). After listening intently to a story about the usual prince, princess, dragons, etc., Grandpa Isaac dryly commented, "And that story probably isn't even true".

Historical Consciousness.

Abraham P. Isaac was interested in history and had a sense of historical consciousness. He contributed an article to the *60 Jährige Gedenkfeier*, the history book commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Mennonite settlement in Manitoba celebrated in 1934. His writings were quoted at length in the *75 Jährige Gedenkfeier* by Gerhard F. Wiebe in a paper on the economic development of the East Reserve.

In 1930 at the age of 78, Abraham P. Isaac also composed his memoirs which have been published in the Abram P. Isaac family book as well as in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*. The book by his brother Peter P. Isaac "Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern" written in 1916 also contains a considerable amount of historical information about Abram P. Isaac.

Ancestry of Abraham P. Isaac (Endnote Six).

Abraham's father, Johann W. Isaac was born on June 13, 1809 in Tiede, South Russia. In the summer of 1831, he married Anna S. Plett, born in Fürstenwerder, Prussia, November 24, 1813. After their marriage they lived in Altonau, South Russia, on a rented place for eight years. In 1840 they bought a farm in Blumstein, then in 1852 they bought a different farm at Schoenau. Johann died here February 8, 1864 at the age of 54.

Abraham's paternal grandparents were Franz Isaac (1784-1853) married to Margaretha Warkentin (1788-1868), Tiede, Molotschna, Wirtschaft 13. Abraham's maternal grandparents were Johann Plett (1765-1833) married to Ester Smit Merker (1778-1855), Sparrau, Molotschna, Wirtschaft 47.

The Johann W. Isaac (1809-64) and Anna Plett (1814-87) family consisted of the following:

1. Anna P. Isaac (1832-96) married Jacob Wiebe (1827-1901);
2. Margaretha P. Isaac (1833-1920) married Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908), parents

of the well-known Johann I. Friesen, Steinbach flour mill owner and Klaas I. Friesen, Steinbach teamster;

3. Johann P. Isaac (1836-1921) married Elizabeth Wiebe (1846-1926);

4. Franz P. Isaac (1838-1910) married Maria Friesen (1843-1910);

5. Maria P. Isaac (1840-1908) married Peter R. Friesen (1842-?), son of Kleine Gemeinde minister Peter W. Friesen. They lived in Jansen, Nebraska, where they farmed very successfully;

6. Peter Isaac (1846-1925) married Katherina Warkentin (1847-71), married Katherina Friesen (1848-1900), and married Susanna Ratzlaff (1846-1905);

7. Abraham Isaac (1852-1938) married Margaretha Loewen (1855-1930);

8. Helena P. Isaac (1858-1945) married Abraham T. Loewen (1856-1944).

Descendants of Abraham Isaac and Margaretha Loewen (Endnote One).

Many of the Abraham P. Isaac descendants still live in the Kleefeld area today. Son **Peter L. Isaac** lived on a farm near Hochstadt, Manitoba. Son **Johann L. Isaac** lived on a farm near Aberdeen, Saskatchewan. Son **Abraham L. Isaac** farmed in partnership with his brother Johann. Daughter **Margaretha L. Isaac** married Jakob B. Wiebe, son of her cousin Johann I. Wiebe. In 1916 they lived on the farm which had belonged to his uncle Franz P. Isaac. Daughter **Susanna L. Isaac** married Jacob I. Bartel. In 1916 they were living with her parents. Jakob I. Bartel later married for the second time. In his retirement years they lived in the Maplewood Manor, Steinbach, Manitoba. Son **Franz L. Isaac** lived in the Kleefeld area. Son **David L. Isaac** farmed in the Kleefeld area.

The reader is asked to refer to *Preservings*, December 1997, Issue 11, page 55, "Young Peoples Group at Kleefeld, circa 1908". Three of Abraham P. Isaac's children are identified in this picture. Front row, second from right Maria Isaac (1889-1977). Second row on the left Mrs. Jac Bartel, nee Susanna Isaac (1887-1951). Back row, second from the left Frank L. Isaac (1893-1979).

Endnotes:

Information for this article as well as wealth of other information on this remarkable man may be obtained from the following:

Note One: "The Family Tree of Abraham Isaak" printed in 1970 and updated in 1985 and 1995 contains Abraham Isaak's own memoirs "Reminiscences Of The Past" which have been translated to English from German. The translation by Abe J. Unruh is also found on page 171 of "Pioneers And Pilgrims" printed in 1990 by D.F.P Publications.

Note Two: "The Golden Years" page 132 by D.F.P. Publications 1985.

Note Three: This excerpt taken from "Re-

membrances of Johann F. Toews" page 157 of "Pioneers and Pilgrims" published by D.F.P. Publications.

Note Four: "Pioneers and Pilgrims" page 243.

Note Five: "Leaders Of The Kleine Gemeinde In Russia, 1812 to 1874", page 844 published by Crossway Publications 1993.

Note Six: "Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern" written by Peter P. Isaac, a brother to Abraham P. Isaac contains a wealth of information on the Isaac family, as well as a considerable amount of information on many other families related to, or married into the Isaac family. The latest translation was published in 1981. This book is also included in "Pioneers And Pilgrims" published in *Storm and Triumph*, pages 179-224.

Note Seven: "Education in the East Reserve," in *Preservings*, June 1996, No. 8, Part One, page 8.

Note Eight: Based on an interview by Delbert Plett with Jakob I. Bartel, Maplewood Manor, Steinbach, Manitoba, November 10, 1980.

Note Nine: Based on an interview by Delbert Plett with Peter A. Plett (1898-1990), Landmark, Manitoba, 1980.

Sources.

Abraham P. Isaac, "An Autobiography of our grandfather, Abraham Isaac, at age of seventy-eight," in F. L. Isaac and Dan F. Isaac, *Family Tree Abraham Isaak 1852-1938* (Kleefeld, Manitoba, 1985), 51 pages, and

republished in Abram P. Isaac, "Reminiscences of the past," in Plett, ed., *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, 171-177.

Peter P. Isaac, *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern* (Stern, Alberta, 1916), 96 pages, and republished in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 206-207.

Klaas J. B. Reimer *et al.*, eds., *Das 60-jährige Gedenkfeier des ersten Einwanderung von Mennoniten in Manitoba, Canada, gefeiert am 1. August 1934 in Steinbach, Manitoba* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1935), 8-9.

John C. Reimer, ed., *75 Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada, abgehalten am 8. Juli 1949 in Steinbach, Manitoba* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1949), 107-110.

Margaret Loewen Isaac (1855-1930)

by granddaughter Daisy Isaac Penner, Box 116, Reston, Manitoba, R0M 0B0

Grandmother Isaac was born Margaret Loewen, daughter of Peter Loewen (1825-87) and Susanna Enns (1824-57) in Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, on March 16, 1855. Margaret had an older sister, Susanna (1852-1918), married to Peter L. Dueck, teacher in Kleefeld, and for the second time to Peter R. Reimer.

Family legend holds that Grandmother's branch of the Loewens held themselves socially a cut or two above their neighbors, because there was by all accounts a baron or baronetcy back in their family line which lent them definite distinction. So there weren't hints lacking that young Abraham Isaac was rather audacious in seeking the hand of grand Margaret Loewen.

Margaret Loewen married Abraham Isaac December 26th, 1873. June 4th, 1874, the two of them along with 60 other families left their pleasant homeland and set out for Canada. Married only five months, young and carefree, the voyage was to them as Grandfather declared a "wedding honeymoon trip".

However, once arrived in the new land, all the rigors, privations, and hardships of pioneer life in a strange country were theirs. Their first dwelling was built of reed grass, which was plentiful in the flats, tied in bundles on rafters and nails. The underside of the rafters were lined with unplanned boards. Paper was stuck over the cracks which tore as the boards dried. Such was their first winter abode. The honeymoon was over. Here Grandmother had her first baby on the 20th of November, a healthy son. Though they had a cookstone in the place, heating to full capacity with wood, the temperature under the bed Grandmother was lying in was minus seven degrees Celsius!

Their first meagre planting of grain, vegetables, and potatoes was totally devoured

by grasshoppers that first summer. This meant they were compelled to live out of their depleted pocketbooks a second winter. Fortunately, Canadian Mennonites and the government came to their aid with money and provisions. The second summer planting fared better, the grasshoppers having departed when nothing was left for them to eat the year previous.

We remember Grandmother Isaac only in her later years. She must have been dark-eyed and dark-haired then, sturdy and hard-working. She planted maples around their homestead house, which grew into huge spreading trees around which her grandchildren revelled in their growing up years. She also planted red and yellow currant shrubs, gooseberries, plums, cranberry bushes, and rhubarb, chives, and sorrel. All were there for us to enjoy in our childhood. She was an avid gardener, loving her plants and flowers and preferred staying home to look after them to going visiting.

We remember her as a small woman, her dark hair streaked with grey, her face soft and wrinkled. She was our grandmother, and we ran to her first with our small scrapes and hurts, always sure of sympathetic loving arms. She told us Bible stories and scared one small grandchild stiff, when after telling the awful story of the Flood, she added that one day the world would "melt with fervent heat".

Grandmother was as neat and tidy in her person and appearance as if stepped out of the proverbial handbox. She was also very particular about her home, her meals, and her children. And having a strong mind of her own, could pronounce definite opinions about people who didn't come up to her standards. Though once when her minister husband suggested it to be her duty, as the minister's wife, to reprove some lady church member's slovenly housekeeping, she quickly softened and said she didn't want to hurt anyone's

feelings.

She was also a good singer, her family being noted for that. She had no trouble starting a song, or carrying the tune, if the song leader faltered because he happened not to know it well.

Going for a mile long walk to visit neighbor Toews (Naba Toewse), was most enjoyable for a small granddaughter. It was so special, the privilege to "go along". Grandmother explained all about Western Red lilacs (wilde Tulpe) and red-winged blackbirds (Spree) which nested among the reeds along the creek. And she didn't laugh when what the childish imagination fancied were two rabbits sitting up straight opposite each other far down the road turned out to be the side rails of the wooden bridge spanning the creek.

After Grandparents retired, they moved to a snug little place back of their original farmstead. Grandmother had a whole new place to fix up and garden in. This day she was planting small elm trees on either side of their garden gate. The aforementioned grandchild was on hand to watch and ask questions. "Will those little trees ever grow tall?" "Yes, they will," was the answer. Pointing to the magnificent maples across the driveway, "as tall as those?" "Yes, as tall as those, but by that time, I will be gone," she replied. They did and she is.

Grandmother died quite suddenly of a supposed brain hemorrhage, September 28th in 1930, after turning seventy-five the previous March.

On our mantle now sits their old clock that sounded out the hours with mellow chime tone, and ticked away the minutes of a brave, courageous, pioneer woman, secure in the love of her God, her husband, children and grandchildren.

Anna Wiebe Loewen Kran (1910-1988)

Anna Wiebe Loewen Kran (1910-88): Episodes in the Life of a Mennonite Woman and Mother, by son Harry Loewen, 4835 Parkridge Drive, Kelowna, British Columbia., V1W 3A1.

Introduction.

My mother, Anna Wiebe Loewen Kran, was the daughter of Jakob Wiebe and Maria Thielmann of the Thielmann estate "Independence," near Kudashevka in southern Ukraine. Of the ten children born to Jakob and Maria Wiebe, the twins Anna and Olga, born in 1910, were the youngest. I remember well the two-storey estate residence, the large steam mill with the towering chimney, the surrounding orchards, and the railway station close to the mill. Mother's family was spared the Makhno terror in 1918-19. The estate workers told their employers not to worry about the roving robber bands, for the Thielmanns and Wiebes "had always treated their Russian workers well." The same could not be said of all Mennonites.

During the German occupation of Ukraine in the Second World War, our family--that is my mother and her three children, John, Helen and myself--moved from Friedensfeld (Miropol), fifty kilometers west of Nikopol, to Kudashevka. We lived there briefly until 1943. Mother worked at the Kudashevka train station as a Morse code operator. She loved her work, for it made her forget at least for awhile the pain and longing for her husband whom she had lost in 1937. Men found Mother attractive as a woman, but she never entertained the thought of a second marriage, for she hoped that Father might return some day.

Friedensfeld.

My mother once told me the humorous but true story about how she tried to dissuade Father from wooing her. According to her story, in 1929 young Nikolai Loewen had come from Friedensfeld to ask for her hand. All dressed up, Nikolai waited in the living room for Anna to meet him. She let him wait for a long time. When she eventually appeared, Nikolai was shocked, although he did not show it: Anna came in dressed in an old, shabby dress, carrying an old shovel and a large barn broom. Without saying a word, Anna swept the floor, gathered up the dust, and left the room without even a glance at the young man. If Anna thought this would put Nikolai off, she was mistaken. He persisted and in the end the two were married in Friedensfeld.

The young couple moved in with Nikolai's parents, Johann J. Loewen and Helene (nee Friesen). Johann Loewen was a farmer, orchardist, published poet, and choral conductor. Helene was a niece of the historian P.M. Friesen. Friedensfeld had been in mid-nineteenth-century a predominantly Kleine Gemeinde community. During the 1870s it became Mennonite Brethren and the Loewens belonged to this congregation, although my father, born in 1910, was never baptized. With the Revolution of 1917 organized religious life was slowly coming to an end and in the early 1930s the church in Friedensfeld was closed altogether. I never attended a Mennonite church in Russia.

In 1929 many Mennonites travelled to Mos-



Jakob and Maria Thielmann Wiebe and children. Anna is the twin to the right (1912).

cow, hoping to obtain exit visas to emigrate to Canada. My parents also decided to leave. Father's family had not left Russia earlier, believing that things would eventually improve. My parents boarded the train for the capital but half way there they were turned back. Back in Friedensfeld my father worked as an assistant to a veterinarian and then studied in Nikopol and Kharkov to become a trained veterinarian himself. Due to poverty and the unsettled times, however, he was unable to complete his training. Musically gifted, Father loved to play the violin. I remember how he and Mother played and sang German hymns and Russian folk songs. As a young boy I loved especially the haunting Russian tunes, tunes filled with melancholy and longing. My parents' happiness together did not last long, only seven short years.

NKVD.

I will never forget the dark night of September 15, 1937. I was rudely awakened by loud knocking on the window. My parents stirred in their bed and I heard my mother saying in whispered tones: "Now they have come to take you." Just three months earlier the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, had arrested my grandfather Johann J. Loewen. They had taken him to a Nikopol jail where they interrogated and physically tortured him until he signed the trumped-up charges against him, namely that he had destroyed orchards on the Friedensfeld kolkhoz (collective state farm). Now the police had come for his son Nikolai.

My father and mother got up, dressed and lighted a lamp. Father went to open the door. Two NKVD officers in plain clothes entered the house. They searched drawers for letters and documents and told Father to get ready to go with them.

Mother cried uncontrollably, pleading with the officers not to take her husband, the father of her three young children. One of the men turned to her and with a sneer said: "Don't cry so much, your husband will soon come back." I can still see and hear my mother snapping angrily at the officer: "Don't give me that! I know how he'll come back. He'll never come home!"

As Father was led away between the two policemen, Mother, still crying, picked up Father's overshoes and rushed after him. "Kolja," she called,

Editor's Note: Harry Loewen is the former Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, Manitoba. *Preservings* is hoping to publish a number of articles about those Mennonites who experienced the holocaust of the Soviet inferno and were able to flee to the West after WWII. The story of Anna Wiebe Loewen Kran is relevant to the history of Hanover Steinbach because the family's ancestral village of Friedensfeld was founded by the Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia in 1867. Johann Thielmann (1845-1912), founder of the estate "Kudashevka" grew up in a Kleine Gemeinde home in Alexanderkrone, Molotschna, and married Maria Loewen (d.1865), granddaughter of Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), Lindenau, venerable Kleine Gemeinde patriarch. Johann Thielmann's daughter Maria (1874-1919) married Jakob Wiebe and they were the parents of Anna Wiebe Loewen Kran (1910-88). As such the story speaks for the experience of many families of Kleine Gemeinde descent who opted not to emigrate to America in 1874-75.

“you have forgotten your galoshes.” Father turned, came back and embraced his wife one last time. He also came to my bedside, put his hand on my head and said: “Harry, I may not see you again. Be good to Mother and help her as much as you can.” Crying myself, I soon heard a motor start outside and the “black raven,” as the police cars were called, driving off. I never saw my father again. I was only six years old.

For the next few weeks Mother visited Father and Grandfather in prison. She brought them food and hoped to hear news about what might happen to them. Like his father before him, Father had to sign false charges against him. As a veterinarian he was accused of having poisoned cattle in Friedensfeld and other kolkhoze. He was physically tortured until he signed the false charges. One day Father returned a pair of shoes. When Mother examined them closely, she found that they were soaked with blood. Before long the prisoners were removed from Nikopol, transported either to Siberia into exile or to a place of execution. What happened and where and how Father died we never knew for certain. Some twenty years later in Canada, Mother received word from the Red Cross in Moscow that her husband had died in 1942.

Difficult Times.

If there was some comfort in her tragedy, it was the fact that Mother was not alone in her suffering. Many women—in Friedensfeld almost all women—experienced the same fate during Stalin’s purges. Left to work on the kolkhoz and care for their children, these women endured countless hardships. For Mother too difficult times began. She had to work hard to keep her three children and her mother-in-law fed and clothed. When she came home tired from the day’s work, she still had to do the work at home, although my sickly grandmother helped as much as she could. And the two women found time to teach us children to believe in God and pray. In school we were taught that religious faith was old-fashioned and had to be discarded. In fact, we were questioned in school whether we received religious instruction at home, which was forbidden and punishable.

In spite of her loss and hard times, Mother continued to love life. Occasionally I even saw her laughing, especially in the company of friends. One evening she had invited a number of women to our house. With a kerosene wall-lamp shedding a mellow light in the room, the women talked about their work, told jokes and discussed the village gossip, laughed loudly, and of course cracked the much loved sunflower seeds till late in the evening. The floor was soon covered with a thick layer of shells. Suddenly the door to Grandmother’s bedroom opened and the elderly woman, half asleep, entered the room. She took the lamp from the wall and slowly walked toward the hall. “Mama, waut deist du?” (Mother, what are you doing?) my mother asked. “Ekj docht de Jast wulle aul noh Huus gohne,” Grandmother said seriously, “un ekj wull ahn lichte” (I thought the guests wanted to leave and I wanted to show them out.). The women broke out laughing, with Grandmother joining in as soon as she realized what she had done. Shortly thereafter the guests left amidst great merriment and laughter.

Invasion, 1941.

In the summer of 1941 the German military invaded the Soviet Union, occupying southern Ukraine, including Friedensfeld. Two communists of our village who tried to flee, were apprehended by the German military and tried for human rights violations. All knew that they were responsible for the arrests and exile of the men in our village. Mother was pressured by the German military police to act as a witness against these men. She refused, saying that she would not become responsible for the death of human beings, no matter what they had done. There were other women who were happy to testify against these collaborators. Found guilty as charged, the two communists were executed outside the village. Mother did not allow me to join my friends to watch the shootings.

The German military also rounded up Jews as early as 1941, confiscated their property, and took them to places of execution not far from Friedensfeld. One of my Jewish friends in school and his mother were among the victims. Both my mother and grandmother were most disappointed in the German “liberators.” I remember my grandmother telling me: “We are grateful to the Germans for liberating us from the communists, but what the Germans are doing to the Jews is terrible. This will come back one day to haunt them.” The example and words of these courageous women helped me to recognize the evil of racism and to sympathize with the victims of state terror during those war years. When we moved to Germany in 1943 my mother told our German neighbours about what the German military were doing to the Jews, but they would not believe her. “Our Fuehrer,” they said, “would never do such things.”

The Trek, 1943.

Mother was happy to move to her ancestral home in Kudashevka, perhaps because of her difficult experiences in Friedensfeld. We children too looked forward to a more stable existence, includ-

ing schooling in German and the beginning of a more organized religious life. But Kudashevka was only the first station on our long journey to the West. After the battle of Stalingrad in 1943 the German armies were forced to retreat and we too, with many others, left our homeland for ever. Fortunately, we did not have to endure the difficult trek by horses and wagons like many other Mennonite refugees. Since Mother was employed at the Kudashevka railway station, her family and the families of her siblings were able to leave by train for German-occupied Poland. We came to reside for a short time in Litzmannstadt (Lodz).

Mother was still young during the war years and she loved life in spite of the tragedies that had overtaken her. She read books, mostly novels, and attended the occasional concert to which she took me as well. One day she even took me along to a movie, a film called *Elisabeth*. It was a love story which ended tragically. During the showing my mother sobbed quietly, trying to hide her tears from me. On the way home she did not talk much. After a prolonged silence, she sighed deeply and said, “I wonder where our Papa might be now.” She stroked my cheek and I felt like crying.

Germany.

As the war was drawing to a close, Mother’s greatest concern was the survival of her children. The bombing of German cities and towns increased and the Soviet front came closer every day. One day while Mother and I returned on foot from a nearby village in eastern Germany, the alarm sounded and we had to dive for cover in the ditch along the highway. I fell face down and Mother fell on me, covering me with her body. The low-flying British fighter planes strafed the highway, shooting at everything that moved. When we got up Mother had a torn sleeve from a bullet but was unharmed. We were both shaken, but all she said was, “God protected us, let’s go home.”

At the end of the war in the spring of 1945 we found ourselves with many other refugees at the Elbe River in central Germany, hoping to cross to



Anna Wiebe Loewen and children: Harry, John and Helen (Germany, 1947).

the British side before the Red Army arrived. It was too late. One day Cossacks on horseback appeared and ordered us to leave the river side immediately. In desperation some people and German army personnel tried to swim across the wide swollen river. They were shot at and some were killed, while others drowned. We had no choice but to obey orders and leave the river.

Walking along the road, Red Army soldiers, some of them very young, taunted us and threatened to kill us. Mother decided that we should get off the road, rest for awhile in the ditch, and eat what might be our last meal. She spread a cloth on the grass, poured some juice and distributed the few pieces of dry bread and sausage we carried with us. She said, "Children, let's pray and thank God for the food." She prayed and with a faint smile said, "Eat, children." While we ate I was still afraid, but there was something in Mother's eyes that filled my heart with hope that all would be well.

For the night we found an abandoned farm shed. Just before going to sleep the door was thrown open and a young German woman rushed in. Gasping, she said, "Please help me, they're after me." Mother quickly helped her into the hay loft, covered her up, and told us children to lie still. A minute or two later two young soldiers entered, asking whether a girl had come in. Mother got up slowly and said in Russian, "As you see, we are trying to go to sleep. There's no one here you're looking for." To my amazement they believed her and left. When the young woman came out of her hideout, she thanked my mother for saving her honour and possibly her life, for in the first weeks of Soviet occupation many German women were raped and killed.

According to the agreement between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin (Yalta, February 1945), all former citizens of the Soviet Union were to be repatriated. We too were ordered to return to our "home land," but Mother was determined not to return ever to the "land of terror" if she could help it. Together with her twin sister Olga, she travelled to Wittenberge, a town on the Elbe River, hoping to obtain tickets for Detmold, Germany, where a brother of theirs lived. Fortunately, the ticket agent was in a hurry to close for the day so that he did not ask many questions and sold them the desired tickets.

When we travelled to the Wittenberge train station, the Soviet authorities assumed that we were on our way to our "motherland." Waiting for the westbound train to arrive, we worried about whether we would get in, for there were thousands of refugees wanting to escape to the west. Fortunately, my mother was able to persuade two young men to help us. When we arrived at the Soviet-British border, our fear of being detected and sent back was almost unbearable. But when the British border guards and nurses welcomed us with smiles and refreshments, we knew that we were safe at last. Mother hugged us children and said, "Now we are free. Let's never forget to thank God for what he did for us."

Church Life.

In West Germany MCC helped Mennonite refugees to emigrate either to Canada or to Para-

guay. During the waiting period we lived and worked on a German farm near Ahaus, Westphalia, close to the Dutch border. Some of the returning Mennonite men--some had served in the Soviet or German army-organized house churches and Bible studies, preached again, and conducted "church discipline" as they had done prior to the collapse of organized religious life in Russia. They were in control again, and some women were no doubt happy to see men lead again. But these men did not treat well the women who with their children had survived most difficult times. I remember how my mother and other women were "admonished" by the newly installed leaders and made to appear before the congregation to ask for forgiveness for the "worldly life" they presumably had led during the war years. I don't know whether Mother felt guilty, but she submitted to these leaders and did not question the wisdom of their quest for a "pure church." She must have been hurt by the way they treated her, but she never complained nor did she



Anna Wiebe Loewen (Lodz, 1944).

criticize the church leaders.

Mother was especially happy when my brother John and I, just before emigrating to Canada, found our way to the faith of our people and were baptized. It was at this time that we were introduced to the history and faith of Mennonites: an MCC representative handed us a copy of Cornelius Krahn's book on Menno Simons. Mother too, for the first time, read the story of Menno Simons and the Anabaptists. Mother's joy was complete when our sister Helen was baptized soon after coming to Canada. Her prayers for us children had been answered, she told us.

Remarriage, 1968.

In Canada Mother worked as head cook in a Mennonite private high school in Winnipeg and in Tabor Home, Abbotsford, British Columbia. Students and seniors loved her cooking and baking,

her generosity, and her friendly disposition. Her loneliness and longing for love, however, never really left her. In 1968 she once again fell in love and married John Kran, a widower in Abbotsford. It was most unusual for me to see Mother in a romantic relationship, holding hands with a man, and preparing for her wedding. I had the exceptional privilege and honour of officiating at my mother's wedding.

Mother was happy and she loved her second husband, but on one occasion she told me that she thought of Father often and continued to love him. She sometimes also talked about dreams she had about the past. In her dreams she relived her difficult years, but also the good times she had as a woman, wife and mother. As children we were happy to see Mother secure and cared for during the last twenty years of her life, but we also noticed how her outlook on life and habits changed.

It seemed that from the time of her "confession" about her alleged "worldly living," Mother became overly sensitive with regard to church rules, and she adapted to the conservative religious and social climate of the Mennonite community. Did she perhaps feel guilty about her past life? Was there reason for guilt feelings? She read less and less, except the Bible and edifying literature, she supported financially evangelists like Billy Graham, and she never again attended "worldly" concerts or movies. She submerged, as it were, among the older folk of the Fraser Valley whose main activity was housekeeping, attending church, and visiting older people. When I on occasion expressed what she considered "radical views" about the church, she would say with a twinkle in her eye, "Harry, ekj jleew du best schlaicht jeworde" (Harry, I believe you have become bad). Mother had retained a sense of humour, but she no doubt meant what she said. We never doubted her love for us children.

The End, 1988.

In her declining years my mother suffered from what appeared to be Alzheimer's disease. She was confined to Tabor Home in Abbotsford, the institution she had served as head cook when she was strong and well. When John Kran, her second husband, decided to visit his relatives in Germany without her, she was confused and frightened. She tried to escape from the Home and look for her husband. As they tied her down she struggled to be free, but in vain. In her weakened state she submitted again to those who would control her. Symbolically, her bondage seemed complete. When my wife and I saw Mother shortly before she died, she sat in a chair, head bent, as if preoccupied with her memories. When we called her name, she looked up and immediately recognized us. "Harry und Gerdi!" she exclaimed. There was happiness and love in her eyes. Her mind clear, she asked about us and our children and spoke of times past.

Death came quickly and mercifully. She died on March 4, 1988. In a narrative poem, "A Woman and Her Children," I wrote about my mother: "in death she appeared to smile / the smile of a victor / after a hard-won battle / she had overcome life's trials / escaped her prison walls / she was free at last." Mother was buried in the Abbotsford cemetery. In the summer of 1996 her three children and

their spouses placed a simple marble stone with the words "In loving memory of our mother and grandmother" at her grave site and held a memorial service.

My mother lives on in the hearts of her children and grandchildren and in the memory of those who knew and loved her. They remember her for what she was and did. To forget is to die. Because she loved and was loved, Mother will not be forgotten but will live on among those whose lives she touched. The mother I remember is the young woman whose heart almost broke when her husband was torn away from her; who courageously talked back to the police of a terrorist state; who

suffered loss and pain but refused to despair; who defied an atheistic ideology and taught her children to believe in God and to pray; who put her health and life on the line so that her children could survive war and hard times; and who taught us children to respect and tolerate other people, to value justice, and to love the short life, however good or tragic, God has given us.

Note on the sources.

Some of the above information comes from the notes of my grandmother, Helene Friesen Loewen, some published in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in the 1960s, and from her account of "Johann J.

Loewen" in A.A. Toews, *Mennonitische Maertyrer*, Vol. 2 (1954), pp. 121-123. For the Kudashevka estate, I have consulted J.H. Zhukov, *Description of J.J. Thielmann's Estate "Independence"*, trans. from the Russian by George G. Thielmann, edited by Alfred Redekopp (Winnipeg, 1986). A copy of the Russian original, published in 1910, is in my possession. On the Thielmanns, Wiebes and their marriages and descendants, see Alfred Redekopp, *Jacob Thielmann and Helena Kroeker. A Family History and Genealogy of their Descendants* (Winnipeg, 1987). The rest comes from what my mother told me and from what I remember about her. (H.L.)

Cornelius P. Kroeker (1862-1942), Steinbach

Cornelius P. Kroeker (1862-1942), Steinbach, Model Farmer, by granddaughter Katie (Kroeker) Barkman, Box 25, Landmark, R0A 0X0.

Background.

My grandparents. Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius P. Kroeker, both came to Canada in 1874 with their respective parents, Franz M. Kroekers and Margaretha L. Plett and Peter P. Toews and Katharina R. Reimer. I found the article by Ernie Toews in *Preservings* No. 8, June 1996 very interesting as it portrayed my great-grandmother's life in some detail. It stirred memories of stories I had heard my grandmother tell of the hardships of pioneer life, especially after her father died. I could empathize with her as my father, Frank T. Kroeker, also died when I was quite young; only seven years old.

While reminiscing with different family members, we came up with some interesting stories, and yet I was kind of disturbed by how soon history is forgotten, and cannot be recalled. We all remembered the big house, some as a mansion, some as a castle, but all as a grand old house, but that's a different story.

Franz Kroeker (1827-1905).

My grandfather came to Canada as the 12 year old son of a well-to-do farmer, Franz M. Kroeker, who started off with Lots 19 and 20, at the southeast end of the village of Steinbach. This prosperity carried over to the next generation in his oldest son Cornelius, my grandfather, who later farmed about three sections of land, including the old farm and home place. Being the only surviving son of a prosperous farmer probably was in his favour.

His father, Franz M. Kroeker, had been appointed advocate (Veahmund) for the Peter Toews children when their father Peter Toews died in 1882, after being in poor health most of his life. Grandpa probably got to know the 15 year old Tien quite well. Tien, together with her 10 year old brother, Peter, carried a major part of the family responsibility on her shoulders. I can imagine her as a vivacious, courageous young woman, with a good sense of humour. She occasionally had a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, even when she was quite old.

Marriage 1884.

After Tien married Cornelius P. Kroeker in

1884, her financial worries were over, though raising their twelve children will often have been cause for worry, when they had to rely on their faith in God to see them through. Grandfather was a sys-



Cornelius P. Kroeker (1862-1942). Photo courtesy of Norman Kroeker, Landmark, Manitoba.

tematic, meticulous man, and what he did, he did well. His house and farm buildings were among the best built and kept in all of Steinbach. My brother Walter Kroeker, remembered helping grandpa clean up in the big barn, though on looking back, he thinks he probably was more hindrance, than help.

I remember my grandfather as a fairly big, austere man, but he must have had a sympathetic heart, shown by the many people that found shelter under his roof. His wife's mother, Mrs. Elizabeth (Toews) Friesen lived with them from 1910 to 1918, first in a little house on their yard and later in their house. She died in the flu epidemic in 1918.

My grandparents were hospitable people, which friends, salesmen and business people soon found out, and arranged their schedule so they would get to the big house at the south end of Steinbach approximately at dinner or supper

time. Usually they were not disappointed and were invited to stay.

All the people I talked to agreed that Grandpa was a very quiet man, but had a kind, compassionate heart. John K. Reimer, who worked for them for sometime, could not remember him ever saying a harsh word to him or putting him down for something he had done wrong.

Family.

Grandpa and Grandma had seven strapping sons, Cornelius (m. Judith Wiebe), Frank (m. Marie Reimer), Peter (m. Louise Reimer), Abram (m. Eva Reimer), Henry (m. Margaret Reimer), Klaas (m. Eva Penner), John (m. Adeline Giesbrecht).

To keep his sons occupied, Cornelius P.



Son John T. Kroeker (1906-96).



Grandsons Norman and Vernon Kroeker, at the side entrance of the Cornelius P. Kroeker home in Steinbach.

Kroeker bought a steam engine and threshing outfit, and threshed for farmers for miles around. In 1896 he and "Brandt" Reimer bought a Case 15/30 Steam Engine. In 1910 he and Peter B. Kroeker bought a huge Rumbly Steam engine. In our reminiscing the story came out that that is how my parents Frank T. Kroeker of Steinbach, and Maria L. Reimer, of Blumenort met, and later got married in 1915.

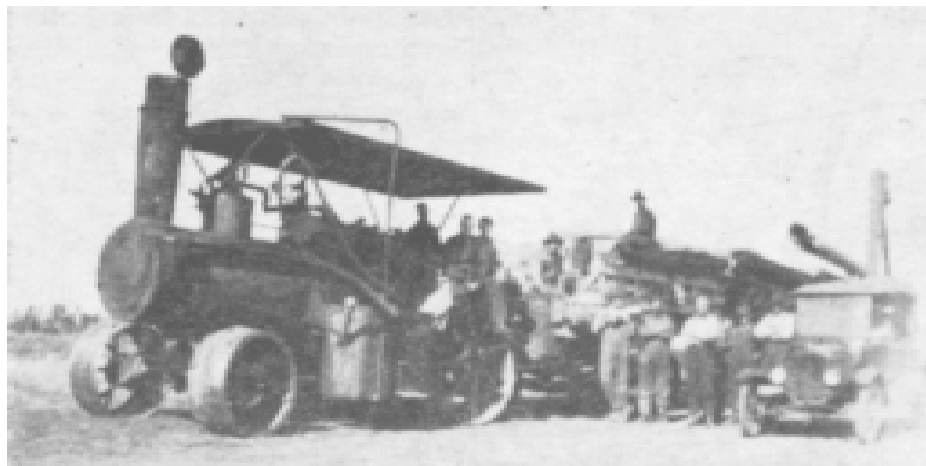
All five girls, except Katharina got married and settled in Steinbach and Prairie Rose. Margaret married Isaak W. Reimer in 1903, Elizabeth, Cornelius A. Plett in 1920, Anna, Peter H.W. Reimer in 1922, and Sara, John K. Barkman in 1933. One incident I remember about Aunt Sara's wedding, probably by eavesdropping, was how grandma insisted on serving Dwoag at the reception, much to the chagrin of the fashionable young bride.

Recollections.

I remember my grandparents visiting us during the time my mother was a widow and running the farm alone, with us teenagers. Grandpa always made a thorough tour of the farm, and I'm sure found many things to shake his head over, but he would never make us feel bad, but rather encouraged us.

My sister, Olga, remembered grandpa taking her and little Betty, to watch the huge dredge, making the Youville drain across our land. Betty dropped her soother right under the big bucket, and Olga jumped down to retrieve it. Grandpa was pretty shook up that time.

Martha Reimer Schellenberg remembers the time she spent with them when she took Grade 7 in Steinbach. She especially remembers the evenings when Grandpa would read aloud to Grandma, and they would ask her to join them.



In 1910 Cornelius P. Kroeker and Peter B. Kroeker bought a huge Rumbly Steam engine. Frank T. Kroeker was usually the engineer and Peter T. Kroeker ran the threshing machine. In 1922 Cornelius P. Kroeker replaced the large unwieldy behemoth with a new Titan. This photo was taken in the 1920s after the Rumbly had been sold to Streich Brothers of Niverville. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 148, also see Steinbach Post, June 22, 1965.

Being a bookworm, she did not mind staying up in her room reading, but Grandma had a pretty strong work ethic, so got her some embroidering to do instead. She remembers them as being very kind to her. John Reimer remembers Grandma giving him some raspberry juice one day that kind of went to his head. Grandma was a frugal woman and would not want to waste good juice, even if it had become a bit more than just juice.

My grandfather must have been a healthy, robust man as no one mentioned him being sick. A few grandchildren remembered him cracking nuts for them with his own teeth well into his seventies.

The Depression.

The depression crash hit Grandpa hard. He had many possessions, but not much cash. The market dropped, but people could not afford to buy, even at deflated prices. Most of his sons chose other than farming careers. Grandpa was getting older, so in 1929, after having moved in with us for the winter after my dad, Frank T. Kroeker, died, Peter Kroeker moved in with Grandpa and Grandma and took over some responsibilities. When they moved back to Prairie Rose after about five years, grandson, John K. Reimer, as a 16 year-old helped out with the farm work. By this time, some land had been rented and sold and soon Grandpa retired. A park is being worked on at the site of the original garden and will be dedicated on August 1st, later in 1998, so his name will be remembered for posterity.

Remarriage.

Grandpa married Mrs. Peter T. Barkman after grandma died in 1938, but they only shared a few years together. Grandpa died September 6, 1942.

In the end there was no one in the family to take over the farm, as they were all settled on their own farms, or had other careers, so the land was divided and the house sold. I always felt sorry that it could not have been kept in the family.

Obituary

With the kind efforts of Mr. David Schellenberg, I have a copy of Grandpa's obituary, *Christlicher Familienfreund* September 1942. Here it mentioned his birth on June 28th, 1862 (alten Stils) in Kleefeld, South Russia and his immigration to Canada as a 12-year-old boy with his parents, Franz M. Kroekers. At 20 year, he gave his heart to the Lord and was baptized by Elder Abr. L. Friesen and joined the Kleine Gemeinde (now E.M.C.). He married Katherina Toews on April 1st, 1884 and shared joy and sorrow with her for almost 54 years.

He was seriously ill with typhoid fever in mid-life; otherwise he always could do his work on the farm.

One time when visiting down south, he was called home for an emergency and could only look on the face of his dead son Abraham.

On January 16th, 1938, our mother died after a month's illness and left Father and children in deep sorrow.

After ten months, he married widow Mrs. Peter J. Barkman, who was a true companion for him for one year and ten months, when she also died in September 1940 and left Father very lonely again.

During the last years, he was very concerned that all men would live in peace and especially would forgive him where he had failed. God gave grace that his faith was strengthened, and he was anxious to go to be with the Lord. After spending three days in the hospital, his desire was granted. He reached the age of 80 years, 1 month, and 25 days.

Children born were 14, of whom two died in infancy and two, namely Frank and Abraham, as young men. Grandchildren born were 54, of whom seven died. Great grandchildren born were 24, of whom three died.

We sorrowed, but not as those who have no hope and rejoice that our father is released from all suffering and has entered his eternal rest.

-The Children

Steinbach Main Street - Part Four

“Steinbach Main Street, 1930 - Part Four”, by Ernie P. Toews, Box 75, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, continued from “Steinbach Main Street: Part Three,” in “Preservings”, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 70-77.

Introduction.

This article continues the story of Steinbach's Main Street circa 1930 covering Lots 1 to 6. In the modern-day this section stretches from Elm Avenue northward up to and including Victoria Plaza.

When the Steinbach pioneers arrived on September 23, 1874 they determined the right spot to lay out a village was alongside the creek that flowed diagonally from southeast to northwest across Section 35-6-6E. The creek makes a 45 degree turn to the north after it crosses onto Section 3-7-6E and then flows due north. This

fields (“Gewanne”) and subdivided further into parcels (“Kagels”), a block of which were allocated to each farmer (“Vollwirt”). A traditional North European “Strassendorf” village layout was superimposed upon the Dominion Government Survey completed in 1873 and without regard to same.

When the villagers agreed to dismantle this “old world” system in 1911 in order to revert to individual title holdings in North American fashion, the village plan lay at a 45 degree angle across Section 35 and spilled over the road allowance between the adjoining section 34 to the

of early settlement customs. However, this was not to be. In 1960 it was demolished by a bulldozer and hauled to the dump, as worthless garbage, to make way for a commercial development.

The Klaas B. Friesen family lived in this housebarn until 1908 at which time they sold the northwest half of the yard, complete with housebarn, to Gerhard W. Reimer. The Reimer family stayed only about one year and in 1909 sold it to Gerhard G. Kornelsen.

Mr. and Mrs. Friesen built a house on the southeast portion of Lot 1 the following year.



The north end of Steinbach Main Street looking southeast is shown on this extremely rare photograph dating from 1900: see Ralph Friesen, “Early Perspectives on Steinbach,” in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, page 7. The first *Wirtschaft* on the east side (left hand side) belonged to Klaas B. Friesen: see *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 10-15. The next property along the east side going south, *Wirtschaft* 2, was originally owned by Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), school teacher. In 1878 the property was acquired by Johann G. Barkman, mayor of Steinbach for 25 years. The next property, *Wirtschaft* 3, originally Gerhard Warkentin, was acquired in about 1878 by Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht (1849-1917), later a pioneer minister of the Holdeman Church. The next property, *Wirtschaft* 4 (a traditional housebarn), was owned by Heinrich R. Brandt. The next property, *Wirtschaft* 5, (barely visible behind the trees), was originally established by minister Jakob M. Barkman. In 1877 Barkman's widow married Cornelius W. Loewen (1827-93), Grünfeld, who took over her farming operations. The housebarn visible on the west side of Main Street, *Wirtschaft* 6, was built in 1883 by Abraham P. “Brandt” Reimer: see “Abraham P. Reimer 1862-1933,” in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1997, Part One, pages 53-55. The house standing to the north of the housebarn, on the “katstelle” for *Wirtschaft* 2 owned by Johann G. Barkman, belonged to his brother-in-law Aron W. Reimer, who lived there during the 1890s.

bend of the creek determined the most northwesterly limit of the lots. From this point, a block of 20 yardsites, 220 feet wide was laid out along the course of the creek in a southeasterly direction.

The village was planned and laid out in accordance with age-old traditions and previous experience in Imperial Russia where the original village of Steinbach was laid out parallel to the Bazavluk River. The Main Street of the new village in Manitoba was sited about 200 yards to the west of and parallel to the creek so that every homeowner along the entire stretch of the village had access to the water flowing across the properties. Every homestead was comprised of property on both sides of the street, about five acres on the east side and ten acres on the west side. The first farmyards were on the east side of Main Street (“Feuerstätten”) and the gardens and fields were on the west side across the street (“Katstellen”), well away from the small herds of sheep and cattle in the paddocks behind the house-barns on the east.

All the villagers initially pooled their land in common within the village community (*Gemeinschaft*) which was then divided into

west. At the north end of Lots 1 and 2, the northerly road allowance, which came to be known as the “Townline” (today Loewen Blvd.), crossed over these properties and shortened them somewhat. At the westerly edge of the “Katstellen” (the village lots on the west side of Main Street), Lots 1 to 6 ended up having the road allowance between Sections 35 and 34 across these properties: see map of north half of Steinbach Main Street, in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, page 16.

Lot 1, east side.

The original owners of Lot 1 were Klaas B. Friesens. They built a housebarn much like the other settlers in the village. The first structures were meagre and in 1889 they were replaced by an up-to-date full-size housebarn, located lengthwise along the western boundary of the lot: see Evelyn Gerbrandt, “Klaas B. Friesen (1838-1922),” in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 10-13.

The Klaas B. Friesen housebarn stood as a landmark at the north entrance of Steinbach, and could well have become a historical structure to be preserved for future generations as a display

After about five years Mrs. Friesen passed away and Mr. Friesen went to live with his children, Klaas F. Friesens, who lived four miles south.

In the 1920s a newly-wedded couple, Mr. and Mrs. Peter K. Neufeld, moved into this dwelling. Mr. Neufeld was the grader operator on the Piney highway during 1930s and 1940s. During the depression years of the 1930s Mr. Neufeld constructed a swimming pool, no doubt Steinbach's first, in the creek at the northeast end of the lot. It was a modest 1000 square foot affair with wooden sides and a sand floor, but it served the purpose and for a nickel anyone could cool off on a hot day. Mr. Harry Neufeld, the owner of Southeastern Farm Equipment in later years, was the oldest son of the Neufelds.

Gerhard G. Kornelsen, now the owner of Lot 1, was a well-known school teacher in the area for many years and a daughter, Mary Kornelsen, taught the grade one class in Steinbach for several decades. The Kornelsen name was associated with education in Steinbach for so long that the first public school in town bore the name “Kornelsen School” and when it was demolished the former Steinbach Collegiate inherited the name. When G.G. Kornelsen gave up

teaching, he took on the Watkins Dealership travelling the area with horses peddling his wares. He was always welcome when he appeared on farmers' yards with his satchel of medicines and spices. He was a renowned storyteller and long-time correspondent to the *Steinbach Post*. He also served as secretary to a number of organizations and community groups.

When the new P.T.H 12 highway was built in 1950 it was constructed directly along this and P.K. Neufeld properties. The present Victoria Plaza parking lot is where the original Friesen housebarn stood. When the Town of Steinbach closed the roadway (road allowance) on the west side of this property, from Main St. to Loewen Blvd., it became a parking lot on the north side of Victoria Plaza.

Lot 1, west side.

The road allowance between Section 35 and 34 affected Lot 1 west of Main St. very negatively when a lot of development, around the turn of the century, was taking place in the rest of the community. The area remained pasture land until well after 1900. In these years a small hut stood on the site which the town herdsman used as a summer home. In the first 75 years after settlement of the village, most of the families owned from one to five cows. The custom from the old country was that the village corporation owned a pasture. The Steinbach pasture was at the south end of the village on Section 25.

All the homeowners would milk their cows before 7:00 a.m. and the cows then wandered to the street to be herded together and taken to the community pasture by the public cowherd. Toward evening the cattle were returned to their respective owners. Early morning when the herdsman began his chores, from the hut at the north end of town, he blew a few blasts on a brass trumpet to call the cows together. At evening he again used the horn to let the farmers know their cows must be stabled and milked.

The west side of Lot 1 was occupied by the J. R. Friesen "BA" oil dealership built during the 1930s. Today a "Petro Canada" station is located there.

Lot 2 east side,

Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Fast were the first to settle on this plot in 1874. Mrs. Fast's parents lived on the West Reserve close to Altona and because her mother was sickly the Fast family moved to the parent's home in 1878. After some 15 years Mr. and Mrs. Fast returned to Steinbach and lived east of the town on the gravel ridge where Alex Borland and sister Maggie farmed until about 1960. Today two grandsons of Cornelius Fast, Cornie and Edmar Fast, are residents of Blumenort: see *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 22-23.

Johann G. Barkmans purchased the Main Street property from the village in 1878 and built a farmyard there. It is noteworthy that they did not build a housebarn as was the custom of the other settlers. This house, and a separate barn, are clearly visible on the picture of Main St. circa 1900. The house continued as a residence until about 1955.



*Klaas B. Friesen housebarn built on Lot One in 1889. This is the finest photograph of an early pioneer housebarn in the entire East Reserve. This photograph is taken from the north, view to the southeast, circa 1897. Photo courtesy of Evelyn Goertzen, Box 202, Niverville, Manitoba. See story on Klaas B. Friesen in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, page 11.*



The same housebarn as it appeared during the 1920s now owned by teacher G. G. Kornelsen. View from the south toward to the northeast. Photo by Jakob D. Barkman.



1960 The "G. G. Kornelsen housebarn" being torn down by a developer to make room for a commercial development. In the photo the developer A. D. Penner receives a mock spanking from his mother for being so naughty. Photo courtesy of Steinbach: Is there any place like it? (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1991), page 192. According to writer/historian Gerald Wright "the destruction of the buildings helped shock local preservationists into taking action that led to the establishment of Steinbach's new \$4 million Mennonite Heritage Museum." Mr. Penner evidently did not much favour preservation of local culture and heritage and at one point boasted that "I have not spoken Low German now for years"--



Dwelling house of Peter C. Toews (1874-1935) located on Lot 2, eastside of Main Street. Peter was the son of Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908), an immigration delegate to America in 1873. Peter Toews and wife Carolina Eck, who hailed from Kansas, were the parents of four sons and four daughters. Three sons Ben, George and Dan lived in the Steinbach area. Daughter Lil married John K. Schellenberg, former Secretary-Treasurer of Hanover School Division. Daughter Agnes married William K. Kornelsen and was the first hairdresser in Steinbach: see article by Linda Buhler, Preservings, Issue 5, Jan 1995, page 12.

These premises were built by Johann G. Barkmans after they acquired the property in 1878. Barkmans resided here until 1916 when they sold to Peter C. Toews and erected a house on Hanover Street. Barkmans moved to Texas in 1917, but returned to Steinbach a year later and built another house at the corner of Hanover St. and Elm Ave. Photo by Peter T. Friesen and courtesy of Mrs. Gertrude Friesen, Steinbach.

Johann was the son of Rev. Jacob M. Barkman who drowned in the Red River at Winnipeg in June 1875, together with Jacob Friesen. The village of Steinbach system of communal land sharing and ownership was ended in 1911 during Johann's terms as mayor (Schultz). The amount of work and effort put forth by him in those years was almost endless, and yet to date he is an almost forgotten man. Maybe, in the near future, the City of Steinbach will recognize his service to his beloved village and name a park in his memory. (See article by Roland Barkman, "Johann G. Barkman: Pioneer Mayor," elsewhere in this newsletter.)

The Peter C. Toews family became the owners of Lot 2 in 1916 when they moved into the village. Peter C. Toews (1874-1945) was the son of Cornelius P. Toews, who had served as a delegate in 1873 to evaluate North America as a future home for the Mennonite emigrants. Peter's wife was the former Caroline Eck from Kansas. Peter C. Toews grew up in Grünfeld (Kleefeld) and Steinbach. He homesteaded at Herbert, Saskatchewan, before returning to Steinbach in 1916.

The Toews family farmed in a small way and he worked at various tasks such as harvesting and sawmilling. He passed away in 1935. His widow continued on with the children until the mid 1950s. The firm of Penner Dodge Chrysler relocated to the north end of Steinbach in 1957 and the dealership showroom and garage are on the very spot where the old Barkman and Toews residence stood for 75 years. Dan, one of Peter C. Toews' sons, was a colourful man and is remembered as the star catcher of the Steinbach Millers baseball club of the 1940s and 50s. Daughter Agnes Toews married Bill Kornelsen, son of G.G., and was Steinbach's premier hair-

dresser: see Linda Buhler, *Preservings*, No. 5, Dec 1994, page 12. Daughter Lil married John K. Schellenberg, the first Secretary-Treasurer of Hanover School Division.

Lot 2, west side.

For a number of years, just before 1900, Aaron W. Reimers (Mrs. Reimer was a sister to Mrs. John G. Barkman) lived on this property. Various other residents used the premises until Mr. & Mrs. Peter S. Rempel, then the owners, erected a new house there in the 1940s. Mr. Rempel served as a Councillor in the R.M. of Hanover during the 1930s.

The Rempel family consisted of four girls and ten boys. All the sons are remembered as baseball players. Their son Arnold Rempel founded Southeastern Insurance Agencies which his son Jack operates today. Mr. & Mrs. P. S. Rempel both passed away around 1950 and the property was sold to Jac. G. Banman. In 1953 Jake Banman built an Esso Service Station and Volkswagen Dealership on the premises. This building, somewhat enlarged, today houses the Sears Mail Order office.

Lot 3, east side.

A young man by the name of Gerhard Warkentin was the first owner of this property. He was the older half-brother to Katharina, second wife of Heinrich R. Brandt, and to Helena, second wife of Klaas R. Reimer. Gerhard Warkentin spent the winter of 1874-75 in Ontario among the Old Order Mennonites. He had been married in Russia in 1872 and shortly before the resettlement to Canada his wife passed away. After coming to Steinbach in the spring of 1875 he remarried and moved to Rosenort. The property in Steinbach was sold to Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht in 1878. Gerhard Warkentin's son

Abraham had a hotdog stand in Steinbach during the 1940s.

Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht was married to Katharina Friesen (1855-1938), sister of Mrs. Johann G. Barkman, nee Margaretha Friesen, resident on Lot 2. Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht was elected to the ministry in the newly-established "Holdeman" Church in 1884: see biography of Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 23-24. Son Gerhard F. Giesbrecht followed in his father's footsteps and served the Holdeman Church as pastor and minister.

After the death of Rev. Wm. T. Giesbrecht, his widow lived on the property with son David F. Giesbrecht. She passed away in 1938.

In 1938 son David married and built a new house on the property whilst his unmarried sister, Katharina, continued to reside in the old house. These buildings were both removed when A.D. Penner built his "Penner Dodge" Dealership on the site in 1958.

Lot 3, west side.

Aron W. Reimer from Blumenhof built a house on Lot 2, west side, where he had acquired a building lot from his brother-in-law Johann G. Barkman. Aron W. Reimer lived here during the 1890s. Thereafter they farmed in Blumenhof but later moved to Crooked Creek, Alberta.

After the formation of the Holdeman Church in Steinbach in 1882, two congregations, Kleine Gemeinde and Holdeman, jointly used the village school located in the middle of the town as their place of worship.

In 1911 when the village system was dissolved the community experienced construction of several church buildings. This activity was articulated by the desire of the more assimilated Brüderthaler and Holdeman churches to change the private school in the village into a district school registered with the Provincial Government. Since the school site was now public property it could no longer serve double duty as a house of worship.

In the following two years the Kleine Gemeinde erected a house of worship at the south end of town, and likewise, the Holdeman Gemeinde built a meeting house on Lot 3, west side of Main Street. The land was donated for this purpose by Rev. Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht. The new church building was constructed on this site in 1912 and served the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman) until 1962. They also maintained a residence on the property for use by members of the congregation who were in need of housing from time to time.

The northerly edge of Lot 3 was sold to Peter E. Harder in about 1925. The Harders had resided in the Grunthal area and after the move to Steinbach Mr. Harder built a residence and blacksmith shop. Peter E. Harder was a skilled artisan and for many years built almost all of the truck bodies that were used by the trucking companies in the community. At any time the Harder establishment had one or two of these truck boxes under construction. The blacksmith shop was quite modest in size and thus Harder built them outdoors and the handiest place for this

was directly in front of the shop. Because the shop abutted the town sidewalk the truck bodies were built on the street and so the community could watch the progress of these projects as they drove by on Main Street.

Today Lot 3 is occupied by the A & W Restaurant and a bowling alley facing P.T.H. 12, with a used car lot, owned by Penner Chev, facing Main Street.

Lot 4, east side.

Heinrich R. Brandt was the first owner of Lot 4. The oldest of the Brandt sons, Klaas, was born in 1876 and found his life's partner just down the street at the home of Abram S. Friesens. In later years Klaas entered into partnership with his brother-in-law, Klaas R. Friesen, and together they built a dragline and worked with it on the construction of the Great Winnipeg Water District aqueduct from Shoal Lake to Winnipeg.

Heinrich R. Brandt was a capable carpenter besides being a farmer and worked on many early pioneer buildings. Mrs. Brandt passed away in 1889 and Mr. Brandt married for the third time and passed from this earth in 1909. His widow lived in the family residence with her children until she remarried to Peter W. Loewen in 1916 and moved to the farm of her new husband in the Blumenort area.

In 1917 several families who had moved to Texas a year earlier returned to Manitoba. One of these were Mr. & Mrs. Franz K. Goossen. The Goossens had farmed in the Clearsprings area before moving to Texas and upon their return they purchased Lot 4 on the east side of Main St. from the Brandt family.

The Goossens made their living by farming in a small way with cattle in the village. Franz K. Goossen was a teacher by occupation and took on various employment in that capacity. He passed away in 1928. Mrs. Goossen continued to live in the house they had built until her death in 1944. The house was removed from the site sometime around 1960 and moved to Barkman Avenue. There it became the residence of Mrs. Corn. F. Toews, the former owner of Steinbach Bakery and Shoe Repair Shop.

The Goossen's had four sons, John D., Secretary-Treasurer of the R.M. of Hanover for many years; George D. Goossen, barber and poolroom operator in Steinbach; Peter D., farmer in the Greenland area and Frank D. who passed away at a relatively young age as a farmer in Clearsprings. Well known grandsons of the family were Ernie Goossen, lawyer; Jones Goossen, Secretary-Treasurer of R.M. of Ste. Anne; Dr. Erwin Goossen, veterinary with the Federal Dept. of Agriculture and Albert Goossen, implement dealer in Dominion City.



Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht premises on Lot 3 as they appeared during the 1920s. The top photo is a side view, probably from the southeast to the northwest. This is the white house in the left side of Main Street, clearly visible in the 1900 photo page 79. The middle photo is taken from the south, view toward the north. The bottom photo is the street view, taken from the west, view toward the northeast. Photo courtesy of Dolores Pankratz, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

After the removal of the residence the property became the site of Mother's Bakery and Dave Letkeman's Electrical Contractor Shop during the 1950s. Manitoba Mennonite Mutual Insurance Co. built their office building there later which today houses Klippenstein's Management Services.

Lot 4 west side.

A family by name of Dalke were resident here during the years after 1900. Mr. Dalke was a drayman of freight and milk from area farmers. They moved west after a few years. In the 1950s this site became the home of Steinbach Cold Storage. This building was renovated by John J. Giesbrecht into a furniture store today owned by Dennis Loeppky, known as "Furniture Plus".

Lot 5, east side.

The first settlers on this property were Rev. Jakob M. Barkman and his family. Jakob was a minister of the Kleine Gemeinde Church and the spiritual leader of the community. He drowned on June 3, 1875, while on a trip to Winnipeg: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part two, pages 1-10.

After the death of Rev. Barkman, his widow, nee Katharina Thiessen, pioneered on with her family until she remarried in 1878 to Cornelius W. Loewen. Loewen was a widower from Grunfeld (Kleefeld) where he had homesteaded on NE32-6-5E. He moved into the residence of his new bride in Steinbach and took over the farming operations.

Cornelius and Katharina Loewen resided on this site until the death of Mrs. Loewen in 1889. At that time Loewen moved to the home of his children, Cornelius B. Loewens, who lived on Main Street where Rieger Clothing is today. Around the turn of the century the property was purchased by "C.T." Loewen, a grandson of C. W. Loewen, and Gerhard F. Giesbrecht, his brother-in-law who was married to C.T.'s sister Elisabeth: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 23-24. Gerhard Giesbrecht built a house on the south half of the property and lived there until 1907 when they left to homestead at Lanigan, Saskatchewan. During the 1930s Jacob T. Loewens, another grandson of C.W. was resident in this house.

In about 1925 the north half of Lot 5 became the property of Mr. and Mrs. Doerksen, the parents of Mrs. Peter E. Harder, (the blacksmith on Lot 3). This elderly couple lived here until about 1932 when Peter K. Funks moved into the house. The Funk family were new residents in Steinbach and had founded a trucking firm that became known as "Southeast Transfer". Mrs. Funk passed away in

the late 1930s and after some years Mr. Funk remarried and the family moved to Kenora, Ontario, where they operated a tourist resort and pulpwood hauling business.

The Funk house as well as the Loewen residence next door were removed to make way for business ventures during the 1950s. Today the Mazda car dealership and the CIBC are located on this property.

Lot 5, west side.

Lot 5 on the west side of Main Street seems to have remained largely vacant until well after 1900. Sometime in the 1930s Abraham T. Kroeker was resident in a house on the northerly portion. When William Ave. was opened in the 1940s the Kroeker house was immediately to the south of the new street. Mr. Abraham T. Loewen began a funeral home on this site during the 1930s. This was where the Loewen Funeral Chapel enterprise was launched before it was located on Hanover St.

On the southerly half of Lot 5 the elderly Wilhelm Vogts resided in a one-and-a-half story house during the 1930s. She was a daughter of delegate Cornelius P. Toews. This residence be-

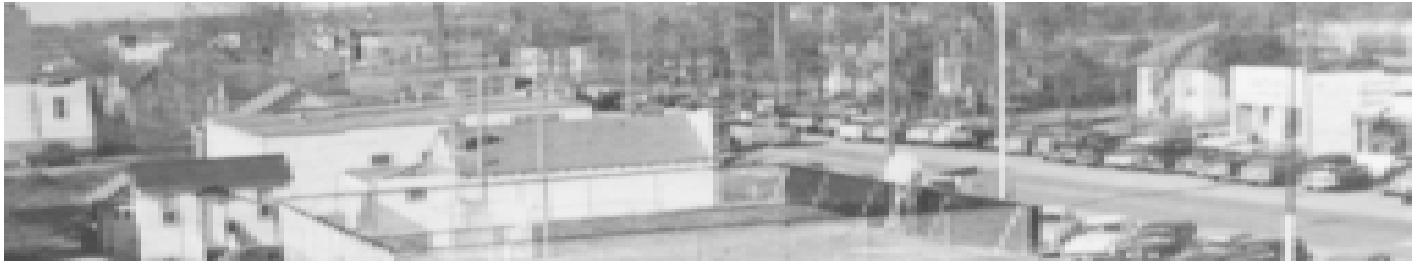


Photo of "Penner Motors" car auction lot 1955, view toward the north. What is interesting about this photo is that it shows some of the early construction in Steinbach still standing on Main Street. Immediately to the north of the car lot is the Peter Harder house and blacksmith shop and immediately to the left and above same is the original Holdeman church, known as the "northend" church. One the east side of Main street, from right to left: the Franz K. Goossen house. Photo courtesy of Reflections on our Heritage, page 109.

came the office of the John Deere Dealership owned by Ben D. Penner in about 1945. Mr. Penner also took on the Meteor & Mercury automobile dealership and the business was known as Hanover Motors.

Mr. John D. Penner, who had been in partnership with his brother Abe D. Penner in the Dodge Dealership, left that company and bought the Meteor Mercury outlet from Ben D. Penner in January, 1953. In the next year he remodelled the building and today a modern car dealership, Steinbach Dodge Chrysler, is located here. The car display lot of the dealership was expanded to the north across the original Lot 5 up to the present William Ave.

Lot 6, east side.

Cornelius Goossen was the first settler on this site. His second wife, nee Katharina Barkman was a daughter of Rev. Jacob M. Barkman (Lot 5) by his first marriage. Between the years 1876 to 1895 the Goossens had seven children born to them, however, only three lived to adulthood. The youngest in the family was Peter B. Goossen who operated a small book and medicinal supply store in later years at the south end of Steinbach at the corner of Main Street and Barkman Ave.

In 1921 Peter B. Goossen married the widow Anna Guenther, whose son Peter Guenther operated Steinbach's first radio shop out of the same building after WWII. Peter Guenther and Mrs. Goossen's daughter, Mrs. Ben B. Unger are resident in Steinbach at the present: see *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, page 17, for a photograph of Peter B. Goossen, which, however, was incorrectly labled as being Peter D. Goossen, son of Franz K. Goossen.

In 1905 Goossens sold their property to Heinrich Sobering, who came to Steinbach in 1900 via Hungary from Holland. He was married to Magdalena Rieger, sister to Sebastian Sr. founder of the clothing store. The Soberings built a new residence on the site which stood until about 1975. Son Henry served as the Steinbach policeman for many years as did grandson Ben Sobering: *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, pages 44-46.

In 1946 the firm "Loewen Body Shop" relocated from the south end of Main Street. They purchased the Sobering property and built a shop in front of the residence. The building was destroyed by fire in 1962 and a new concrete block building was built on the site of the former structure. To the south of the body shop a cafe known as "The Coffee Shop" was run by Miss

Margaret Sawatsky.

When Elm Ave. was opened in the 1930s it was located on the lot line between Lot 6 and 5. Today the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce is on the north corner of Main Street and Elm Ave. and Loewen Body Shop on the south corner.

Lot 6, west side.

In 1882, 20 year-old Abraham P. Reimer, a nephew of Steinbach merchant Klaas R. Reimer, came from Blumenort and married Anna, daughter of Heinrich R. Brandt, Lot 4. Another Abraham Reimer (cousin, Abraham W.) lived in Steinbach and, therefore, he soon acquired the nickname, "Brandt" Reimer. A year after their marriage, the Reimers purchased Lot 6 on the west side of Main Street and established a farmyard, complete with housebarn and small sheds. The structure is clearly visible on the photo on page 79.

"Brandt" Reimer prospered and soon acquired the east half of Section 26-6-6E, originally Hudsons Bay land. In 1906 they moved out of the village onto that property and began building a new farmyard: see article by Peter K. Reimer, Abraham "Brante" Reimer in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 53-55. Several years later, in 1910, Mrs. Reimer passed away. Mr. Reimer sold the farm on Section 26-6-6E to Peter R. Dueck in 1911 and in 1912 Mr. Reimer married again. His new wife had also been widowed and they stayed in the Steinbach area for several years, sold off their assets and moved to Meade, Kansas in 1915.

During the years after the sale of Lot 6 by Reimer the buildings were inhabited by various people. The Gerhard F. Friesens operated a dairy here for some time and in 1927 when Jacob E. Regehrs moved to Steinbach from California they made their home in the premises for the next 10 years. When the Regehrs took up residency the barn portion of the house-barn had already been dismantled and only the cedar-shingle clad house section remained. In about the year 1938 the last portion of the building was torn down to make room for the Hanover Municipal Office which was to be relocated from Chortitz to Steinbach the following year. The present Municipal Office is located immediately to the north of the old Reimer housebarn.

Peter T. Toews, the son of "Grote Toews", a newly married man had become the owner of the Steinbach Telephone Exchange office in 1915. Soon a telephone switchboard was oper-

ating out of a new residence on the south half of Lot #6. Some 15 years later, in 1931, Peter Toews then communally known as "Central Toews", sold the building, land, and telephone switchboard to Jacob W. Fast. The building that housed "Peter's Barber Shop" stood directly in front of the Telephone Exchange Office until it was moved to the Tourist Hotel site about a block south on Main Street (Photo One, *Preservings*, June 1996, No. 8, Part Two, page 15).

In 1958 when Manitoba Telephone Systems purchased the Steinbach Telephone System and erected their modern telephone exchange on the exact site of the Steinbach System exchange, the old Toews/Fast "Central Office" was moved to East Steinbach where it still serves as a residence.

Peter K. Penners, the owners of Penners Transfer, that was founded in 1923, moved into Steinbach from Blumenort in 1930 and became the owners of a residence on the western end of Lot 6 along First Street. Penners also erected a truck storage shed on the property, set back about 100 yards from Main Street.

Conclusion.

The first eight years after 1874, the year of Steinbach's settlement, the Kleine Gemeinde was the only congregation in the village. In 1882 the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman) was formed. The village schoolhouse was originally built by the Kleine Gemeinde for dual use as a worship house and school and continued to be used for that purpose after the Holdeman schism with worship services being held on alternate Sundays. A third congregation, the Brüderthaler Gemeinde, had formed in the village in 1897.

Steinbach Creek.

Helen Bergmann of Steinbach boarded with Mrs. Abram W. Reimer (1859-1955), nee Aganetha T. Barkman, while she was attending Bible School during the 1940s. Helen recalled Mrs. Reimer telling stories of how she had come to Steinbach as a 14 year-old girl, about the creek and the buffalo trail running along side it. Occasionally Indians came along the trail, noteworthy for their colourful blankets. Evidently the creek in the early years was a blaze of native flowers, with blooms of various colours as spring changed to summer and summer to fall.

In 1911 the more assimilated Brüderthaler and Holdeman congregations insisted that the local school be registered as a government district school which meant that it could no longer be used as a private house of worship. As a result all three congregations in Steinbach proceeded to build their own church buildings.

In 1912 the Brüderthaler built a house of worship at the corner of Mill Street (now First Street) and Reimer Avenue. The Kleine Gemeinde responded to their losses at the north end and centre of the village by consolidating at the south end of Main Street. Its stronghold here was solidified at the beginning of the 20th century when

Aeltester Peter R. Dueck resided there, and by the construction of the Kleine Gemeinde worship house on property adjacent to his premises in 1911.

The Holdeman Church built their meeting-house at the north end of town on the property of their leading minister Rev. Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht on Lot 3, west side of Main Street.

The three churches were known as the South End, North End, and Central Churches for many years until a number of other congregations appeared in the 1920s and 30s. The Brüderthaler, now known as E.M.B., and the Kleine Gemeinde, known as E.M.C., are still on their

original sites. The Holdeman Church, however, relocated to a more suitable location on Loewen Boulevard in 1965 and today also operates a seniors care home, Maplewood Manor, adjacent to the church.

The original Main Street section from the north end of the village to Elm Avenue was the hub of Holdeman culture and activities until about 1955 when the area became commercialized and the catch-word in the business community was "The Swing Is To The North". Today the entire area is abuzz with automobile dealerships, car display lots, a furniture store, a bank and a strip mall.

Peter K. Funk: Itinerant Pioneer

Peter K. Funk: Itinerant Pioneer, by great-grandson Al Hamm, Box 755, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

The Story of Peter K. Funk.

On August 4th and 5th, 1978, the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of the late Peter K. Funk gathered at the Westbank Bible School near Swift Current, Saskatchewan. This coming together of many relatives, some who had never met each other, was not only a commemoration of Peter K. Funk, but it was also a festival of thanksgiving to God for having led our people to Canada, a land of freedom and liberty, and that God continues to be good to us. It was also during this reunion that much interest was shown in producing a "family tree" book, which would indicate all the descendants of Peter K. Funk. It fell upon this writer to gather the information, and a year later a booklet was printed to record the various dates and descendants (Editor's Note: See book review section elsewhere in this newsletter.)

It was no doubt appropriate that this reunion occurred on the prairies of Saskatchewan because the Peter K. Funk family had lived there for approximately 17 years. During this time, some of the children of the Funk family grew up here, went to school, got married and settled in the Herbert area. Consequently, many in their family had their roots in this area. However, the story did not begin, nor did it end here, but as the reader will notice, most of the story about Peter K. Funk deals with life in Saskatchewan.

The story of Peter K. Funk has been told by his grandson John F.W. Funk and by his son-in-law P.W. Epp, and printed in "The History of Gouldtown and Districts" published in 1973. Another version of John F.W. Funk write-up appears in the *Excelsior Echoes* published in 1982 (p. 706). It is from these two publications, as well as personal interviews that this writer has had with the youngest child of the Peter K. Funk family, Mrs. Anna Thiessen, and grandson Peter B. Funk in Abbotsford, B.C., that this article has been compiled. It was a special opportunity



The Peter K. Funk family: L. to r: Bernard W. Funk, Mary Funk, Peter W. Funk, little girl in front is Agnetha W. Funk married Penner, mother, Mrs. Helena Wiebe Funk, daughter Helen, son Henry W. Funk, and father, Peter K. Funk. Photos for this article are courtesy of great-grandson Al Hamm.

to visit with Mrs. Anna Thiessen on December 12th, 1997. She was the last (No. 17) child, and the only family member still living today. She is a resident at Resthaven Nursing Home in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Birth, 1860, Schönfeld, Russia.

Peter K. Funk was born February 23rd, 1860, the fourth child out of a total of nine children, in the village of Schoenfeld in the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia to Peter S. Funk (1833-1903) and Maria Krahn (1835-1907). When the Russian government began to introduce possible military changes, as well as educational ones, many Mennonites be-

came quite disturbed about this and decided to immigrate to Canada. The Peter S. Funk family was part of this immigration, and consequently, young Peter, at the age of 14 moved to Canada with his family. They arrived in Quebec on the S.S. Peruvian No. 27 in July 1874 (according to the Quebec passenger lists in the *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*, page 268). Grandson John F.W. Funk writes that they arrived in the S.S. Sardinia, but perhaps he may have been confused in that the Bernhard Wiebes' arrived on the S.S. Sardinian No. 39. Wiebes' daughter Helena was later to become Peter's wife. The Funks' took a homestead just northwest of Grunthal, close to



"Best Wishes from Smilin Dick".

Gnadenfeld, NE 20-5-5E (date of Application for Letters Patent, January 20th, 1876).

Marriage 1880.

On October 10th, 1880, Peter K. Funk married Helena Wiebe (born April 7th, 1862). Wiebes family had arrived two years later in 1876 on the S.S. Sardinian No. 39 (as mentioned above). The wedding took place at his parents' house in Gnadenfeld, and they were married by Pastor Stoesz. It seems that they lived at various places in Manitoba. The life story of one of Peter K. Funk's son, Bernhard, states that farms were sometimes traded like horses.

Immediately after their wedding, the Peter Funks continued to live in Gnadenfeld, moved to Kronsgardt in 1884, to Schönsee in 1886, to Grünthal in 1891, and back to Kronsgardt in 1893. They continued to live in Kronsgardt until 1903 at which time they moved to Saskatchewan. During this 23-year period, 15 children were born to them, however, eight of them passed away as infants or at a very young age.

Herbert, Saskatchewan, 1903.

In 1903, the Federal Department of the Interior, under Minister Clifford Sifton and the C.P.R. were anxious to see the Herbert, Saskatchewan area populated with good agricultural settlers. The C.P.R., who had built their railway through Herbert in 1885, offered the would-be homesteaders a package deal they could not refuse. With all the encouragement and inducements offered in the advertising blitz put on by Ottawa and the C.P.R. too good to turn down, a group of 103 Mennonite men from southern Manitoba made the trip to the Herbert area in the fall

of 1903. I.S. Wiens, a school teacher, was with the group as a land locator or real estate agent. He could record homestead claims immediately if any of the 103 men wished to file.

The fact that 70 homestead claims were filed in the Municipality of Excelsior alone in 1903 indicates that the men liked what they saw. What they saw was a vast expanse of bold prairie broken only by the railway track and the box car with the name "Herbert" on it, acting as a railway station. As far as the eye could see, there was not a building of any sort; only the waving prairie grass which was particularly lush that year. During the 1903 growing season, May to August, the Swift Current area had received 13.64 inches of rain; 4.2 inches more than the average. The 103 men from Manitoba who saw this area in 1903, saw it at its very best. They were understandably impressed as they criss-crossed the prairie north and east of the town site of Herbert with the horses and wagons provided for them. At night, they slept in a large tent, lulled to sleep by the hum of mosquitos. They had been provided with pots, pans, and food, so they cooked their meals in the great, wide open spaces of fertile farmland just waiting to be broken into sods and seeded to hard spring wheat.

The Funk Homestead.

Among these 103 men who arrived in Herbert in 1903 and who were prepared to claim a homestead, were Peter K. Funk and two of his sons, Bernhard and Peter. Next spring they packed as many belongings as possible into a boxcar "headed for the Wild West" and arrived in Herbert June 23rd, 1904. This included his family of seven children, lumber, seven horses and all their worldly

possessions. The cost of moving was \$60.00 for the freight. Their arrival was not without incident. They had arrived during the night, and the next morning they noticed that their horses had disappeared. After paying \$20.00 to someone who knew the area, the horses were returned to them the next day.

The homestead that had been chosen was 18 miles northwest of Herbert on NE 20-19-10, and they were overjoyed by the good prairie land. There was no bush as there was in the eastern part of Manitoba. The first week lumber was brought to the farm and immediately buildings were being built. Peter K. Funk was known to be a very capable carpenter, and it was said that he was so good, he didn't even require a level. He was also a big, strong man prepared to tackle anything and worked very hard.

Lobethal, Saskatchewan.

The house had an extra addition built on for a post office, which he named "Lobethal". This name has a biblical reference. It was Mennonite Brethren Deacon Abraham Quiring who in 1905 preached a German language sermon in the Main Centre church, and the text was taken from II Chronicles 20:26 where a "valley of praise" called Lobethal is mentioned. At an organizational meeting of the district the next day, the decision was made to adopt Lobethal as the name of the school.

The name was fitting. From a rise 1 mile north of Main Centre, the district appears as a fertile valley bordered on the far side by the river hills. Obviously, Peter K. Funk thought this name was most appropriate and decided to call the post office by that name as well. He was also the "senior trustee" at the time of the incorporation of the Lobethal

The Car My Daddy Bought

My daddy bought a brand new Ford, and drove it home one day,
 He never drove a car before, here's what we heard him say;
 I do not think that I can learn to drive that car, by heck;
 She spits and jerks goin' up a hill and makes my mind a wreck.
 One day he drove it down to friends and on his way down there,
 He drove the bus into a slough you should have heard him swear;
 I never knew my dad was strong but in that slough that day,
 He took his shoes and socks right off and pushed it out, I'll say.
 Another day just Dad and Ma came home from driving 'round,
 And visitors were waiting there for they were homeward bound.
 He drove the bus into the yard and right up to the door,
 Of the garage and then he did what he'd not done before.
 He drove that car right through the door and there made it a wreck,
 The fender, doors and everything broke with an awful crack;
 He holler'd "Whoa", but still it went right on it's wayward hike,
 And Daddy could not stop for once although he would have liked.
 It cost him many dollars e'er he had it fixed again,
 He drove it till that winter then he put on it a ban.
 A man came 'round and dickered him a horse, a cart and cow,
 For Daddy made it clear that he'd get rid of it somehow.
 His fondest dreams had been fulfilled he'd bought a brand new car,
 And after that another hope came out just like a star.
 This new hope was, that after this he'd leave a car to those,
 That wouldn't get excited when the garage doors would be closed.



Peter Funk, Family Bible 1805. Courtesy of Peter Funk, MacGregor.

School District.

A history of the Lobethal School District No. 1290 appears in more detail on page 164 of the *Excelsior Echoes*, including lists of parents, school children, and teachers. The last year that the school operated was 1958, after which students were bused to Main Centre School, and the building was sold.

Church services were also held in the Funk's home every Sunday morning at 10:00 a.m. in German. Later a new church was built 2 miles west and was also called "Lobethal". A history of the Lobethal Sommerfeld church, and the cemetery list appears on page 218 of the *Excelsior Echoes*.

Pioneer Life.

Pioneer life in the new surroundings was not easy. In 1905, seven horses were stolen and had to be replaced. A team of horses were bought for \$650.00. The winter of 1906-07 was very cold and these early farmers and ranchers lost a lot of cattle. They had not been prepared for the harsh weather because the previous winter had been mild.

In spring of 1909, a prairie fire was started by a farmer 6 miles north of Swift Current. It jumped the Swift Current Creek east of Stewart Valley, and with a strong west wind it widened out and was finally stopped at Regina.

Travel was done by wagons leaving unbelievably deep trails. Before the ferry was built, the river had to be crossed by cable in a basket. They had to haul their wheat to Herbert in order to buy flour, lumber, coal, groceries, and other supplies. A big house which was used as a hospital in Herbert burned, and one 18-year-old Frank Funk perished in the fire.

It must have been hard work plowing the sod of the prairies. They used a wooden walking plow which meant they had to walk and hold the plow by two wooden handles in order to balance it. For fuel and heat in the house, they had to go to the coulees or to the islands on the South Saskatchewan River (about 6 miles away) for poplar or cottonwoods.

In 1910, they sold the homestead to a neighbour Mr. Jacob Martens and bought a half section of script farm northeast of Herbert from a Boer War veteran for \$200.00 (one article indicated \$600.00), where they built a new house and barn. A Mr. Diedrich

Klassen took the post office and was postmaster until it was moved to Main Centre and changed its name from Lobethal to Main Centre. Then in 1913, they sold the place and got a pre-emption from their son Henry. They again built a nice new house and barn with a Mr. Ben Roset doing most of the building. This quarter is just south of Gouldtown and the C.N.R. track runs across the north-west corner of this land.

Morden, 1920.

In 1920, they sold the property to Ben Roset for \$6,000.00 and moved to Morden, Manitoba. While living in the Herbert area, two more children had been born to them; Diedrich in 1904 and Anna in 1907. The oldest two sons Bernhard and Peter took homesteads not far from where the parents lived (NE 18-19-10 and NE 28-19-10 respectively). Seven of the Peter K. Funk family married and continued to live in the Herbert area after the parents moved back to Manitoba.

Smiling Dick.

Although Peter K. Funk had established himself as a big, hard-working, community-minded, capable carpenter, one who loved horses, as well as a religious person, it was one of his sons who obtained some measure of fame. Diedrich (Dick) learned how to play the guitar as a young boy and went on to sing and play on a Saskatoon radio station and performed in a travelling show called the "Stella Dallas Show". Composing his own songs, it is believed that he recorded six records on the Bluebird label; three secular and three gospel.

Unfortunately, these records are nowhere

to be found any more, and this writer considers himself lucky to be in possession of one of these records. The trade name that he used was 'Smiling Dick: The Saskatchewan Roamer'.

One particular song that he composed, and one most remembered by family members is "The Car My Daddy Bought". It seems that Peter K. Funk bought a car one day, but had some problem adjusting to the mechanics of it preferring a team of horses instead. This prompted his son, Smiling Dick, to write a song about the episode, see page 85.

Death.

Shortly after moving to Morden, Manitoba, Helena Wiebe Funk died on January 26th, 1921, and she was buried in Morden. She died of sleeping sickness and had only been sick for 11 days.

On September 25th, 1924, Peter K. Funk died at the age of 64 years and 7 months and was buried in Plum Coulee. Peter K. Funk and Helena Wiebe had been married for 40 years and 3 months. To them were born 17 children, nine of whom grew to adulthood, the other eight died as infants or in their younger years.

Funk Bible.

An interesting side story for relatives reading this article centres around the "Funk Bible". Apparently, Peter K. Funk's great grandfather, Peter Funk (born 1776) bought a family bible in 1805. This bible was to be passed on to the "Peter" of the next generation, and this has been done. The bible is now in the possession of the sixth generation of Peter Funk.

Mennonites In The Soviet Inferno

Harvey L. Dyck and Anne J. Konrad, editors,

A multi-authored book serving as a tribute to the Mennonite victims of the suffering and death in the Soviet Union. The volume is part of an international remembrance scheduled for 1998, the 60th anniversary of the worst year of the Soviet terror, 1938. The book is pioneering in its scholarship, comprehensively telling the story of individual, family and community suffering in a narrative history addressed to a popular audience. Events are set carefully within their larger international and Soviet contexts.

Chapters by: Harvey L. Dyck, Marlene Epp, Terry Martin, Colin Neufeldt, Peter Letkemann, John B. Toews, Walter Sawatsky.

**Order from
Pandora Press, 51 Pandora Ave. N., Kitchener, ON, N2H 3C1**

Material Culture

The Canon of Mennonite Furniture

The Canon of the Vistula Delta: Russian Mennonite Furniture Tradition,
by Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, 17610 NW Prairie Creek Road, Newton, Kansas, U.S.A., 67114-8004.

I. Mennonite Furniture: the Canon of the Vistula Delta/Russia Tradition.

The distinct furniture tradition discussed here has its historical roots in northern Poland's Vistula Delta and in south Russia's Mennonite colonies. From there it was brought by Mennonite emigrants to the North American and Canadian prairie states and provinces in the 1870s, and again in early 20th century migrations. This tradition is different from Pennsylvania German Mennonite and Amish furniture, which has its roots in Switzerland and south Germany. By "canon" is meant the core furniture types and typical forms that represent this furniture tradition.

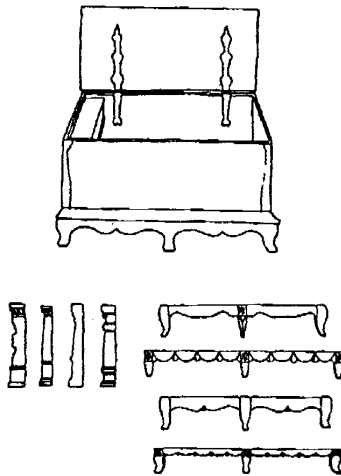
II. The Historical Sources of the Vistula Delta Tradition: The Mennonite furniture story begins in the Vistula Delta.

The furniture tradition that immigrant Mennonites brought to North America and to Canada had its origin in the delta of the Vistula river in northern Poland. The common culture of the Vistula Delta was formed from five different sources: the Kashubians, who were Slavic peasants living in riverside villages and specializing in fishing; the Teutonic (German) knights who were former crusaders, who built fortified castles (i.e. Marienburg Castle in today's Malbork), began to drain the swamplands in the Vistula Delta, and encouraged Germans to settle the region (13th century); the free cities of the Hanseatic League with trade among Amsterdam, Bruges, Antwerp, Danzig, Elbing and others, which fostered fine craftsmanship in architecture and household furnishings (1300-1600), and the participation of northern European Mennonites in this crafts and trading activity; the Polish Renaissance which provided political stability and economic prosperity that led to the introduction of Italian architectural and furniture styles, including the technique of inlaid woodwork (15th-18th centuries); the Polish kings who invited refugees, including Mennonites and Jews, to settle the Vistula Delta; the Prussian state under Frederick the Great, which took control of the Vistula Delta in 1772 and cancelled special privileges, such as land grants; with increased competition for land, some Mennonites became craftsmen.

III. Making the Tradition Mennonite: Mennonites adopted the architecture and furniture of the Vistula Delta.

The Mennonites who found refuge in the Vistula Delta of Poland were primarily from the Netherlands. Some returned to the Netherlands for baptism and education. Vistula Delta Mennonites worshipped in the Dutch language or the Dutch-influenced Low German until they changed

to High German in the Prussian period (ca. 1790). The Netherlands style can be found in the longhouse (or housebarn), which Mennonites continued to build for themselves in the Vistula Delta, and later in Russia. But Mennonites also came into contact with the architecture and furniture of Vistula Delta cities and villages. As Mennonites built prayerhouses and dwellings, they were influenced by the form, the styles of ornamentation, and the use of space in the buildings and furniture of their neighbours. Thus elements of the Vistula Delta tradition became Mennonite.



Drawing 1a: chest, Kjist

IV. Furnishing a New Home: marriages were marked by gifts of furniture.

Prior to marriage, a decorated chest was made for or given to a young woman. The chest commonly held the woman's dowry, a lifetime supply of bed and table linens, undergarments, and silver or pewter flatware. The chest and many of the textile items were marked by the date and the owner's initials, to represent her right to this property. Wardrobes, chairs, and other furniture were given as wedding presents, along with land and money. A new couple established its own household furnished with these gifts and items from the dowry chest. Floral designs, symbolizing betrothal and marriage, were prominent decorative motifs.

V. The Canon of Immigrant Mennonite Furniture: the basic furniture types built in the Vistula Delta style tradition.

The typical forms that represent this furniture and furnishings tradition include:

(1) the chest (*Kjist*), for the dowry (of the women in particular) and for other storage needs;

(2) the hanging corner cabinet (*Akjschaupt*), for the personal effects, money and devotional books of the household head;

(3) the pullout bed (*Bad, Loaga* or *Bocht*), a space-saving double bed which stood in the "large room" or the "corner room" piled high with bedding - also called *Himmelsbad* because of the cloud-like appearance of the feather pillows;

(4) the cradle (*Waej*), a basic archaic form reflecting derivation from sixteenth century cradles;

(5) the common backless bench (*Benkj*), designated for varied seating purposes, such as "stove bench" (*Ofenbenkj*) or "milk bench" (*Melkbenkj*), according to use;

(6) the sleeping bench (*Schlopbenkj*), which was used for children to sleep in and doubled as a daytime couch;

(7) the couch or settee (*Ruebenkj*, literally "resting" bench), for daytime sitting;

(8) the chair (*Schtoul*), a sewing or spinning chair, reflecting a Netherlandish influence;

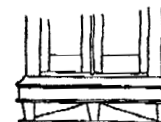
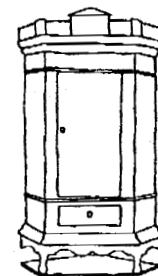
(9) the wardrobe (*Kjleedaschaupt*), for clothes storage, an eighteenth century furniture type that expanded the function of the chest;

(10) the built-in wall cabinet (*Miaschaupt*) or glass cabinet (*Glasschaupt*) for display and storage of china;

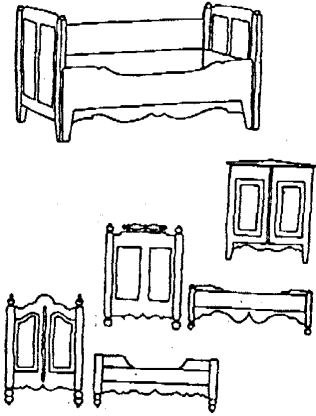
(11) the table (*Desch*), an all-purpose functional type;

(12) the utility cupboard for varied storage purposes, such as *Melkschaupt* (literally, "milk shelf") near the barn entrance for milk and milk-product containers or *Aeteschaupt*, in the kitchen for food and utensil storage; and

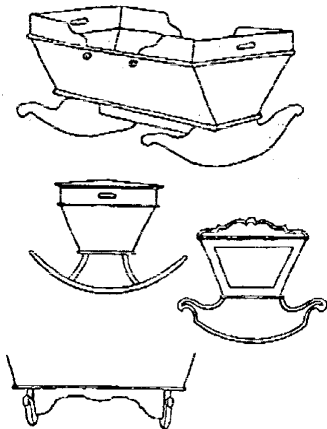
(13) the wall-hung pendulum clock (*Klock*), reflecting English-Netherlandish clockmaking specifically manufactured by Mennonites and expressive of a high sense of time-consciousness.



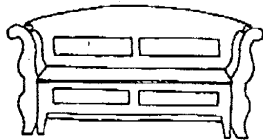
Drawing 1b: hanging corner cabinet, Akjschaupt



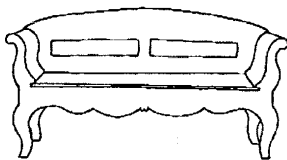
Drawing 1c: pullout bed, also called a "Himmelsbett," Bad, Loaga, Bochi



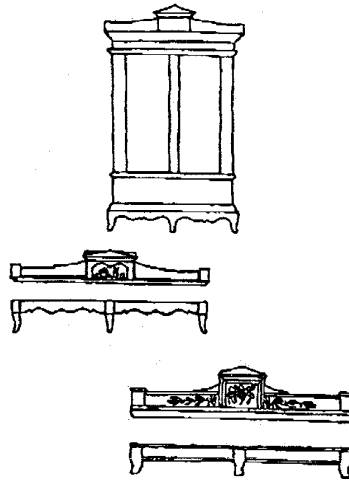
Drawing 1d: cradle, Waej



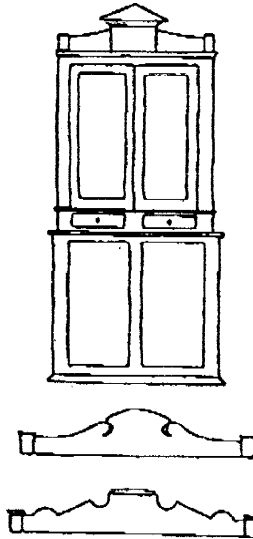
Drawing 1e: sleeping bench, Schlopbenkj



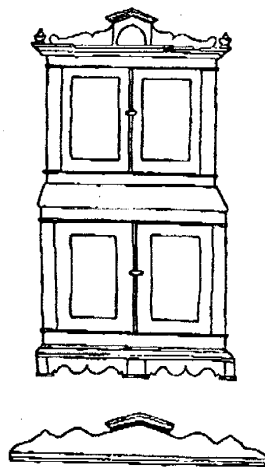
Drawing 1f: settee, Ruebenkj



Drawing 1g: wardrobe, Kjeleedaschau



Drawing 1h: built-in storage/display cabinet, miaschau



Drawing 1i: glass cabinet, Glassschau

VI. Construction, Decoration and Style Characteristics of the Vistula-Delta Mennonite Furniture Tradition.

1. The Chest:

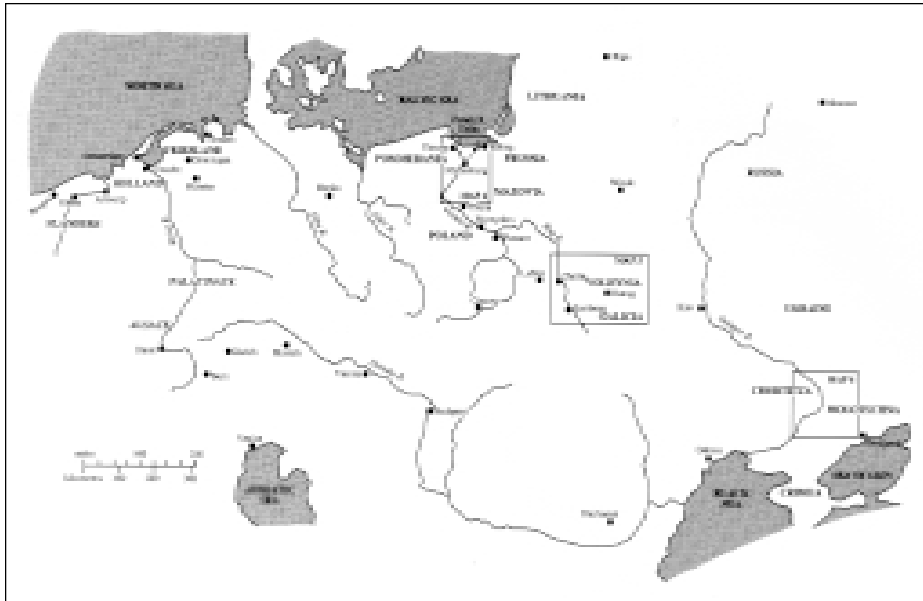
Most Mennonite chests from the Vistula Delta and South Russia use the same determinants for their proportions; height, including the base, and depth are equal while the width is twice that measurement. Despite being detachable, the bracket base is included in these proportions. The dimensions of chests brought by Mennonite immigrants are very consistent. In contrast to framed and paneled chests, Mennonite chests are board chests, with tongue-and-groove or dovetailed joints, resting on separately constructed footed bracket bases.

Many chests employ dovetail joints with very narrow wedges inserted in the dovetail. The corner joints of the lower cases of wardrobes also feature wedged dovetails, a joining technique that craftsmen continued to use in North America. This technique results in the strongest joint corners possible and is one reason why these chests survived time and major migratory journeys. The boards which form the lid of the chest are framed on the front and the sides with moulding strips which serves to stabilize the lid, as well as to provide a finger grip that facilitates the opening of the chest. This moulding also functions aesthetically in that it articulates the form of the chest. Moulding strips are also fastened with mortise and tenon joints to the front and sides of the bottom of the chest.

On the left side inside the chest, there is always a till with a hinged lid, sometimes with several false bottoms serving as secret compartments for valuables. Chests never rest directly on the floor. The construction of chests, as well as wardrobes and other case furniture, always provides a separately constructed bracket base to raise the bottom of the chest off the floor in order to avoid absorption of moisture and to allow air circulation. The legs of these bases are either curved in cabriole fashion or they are square, straight and tapered. Both types of legs occur in Biedermeier furniture of about the 1820s to the 1860s. The skirts (also called aprons) of these bases are either straight, or they are variations on a scalloped or swagged motif. They are sometimes given a cut or carved relief profile as well as an accent with contrasting paint for visual emphasis. If a Vistula Delta or South Russian chest appears without a base, one must assume that the chest is incomplete, that its intended, original base has been lost.

2. The Wardrobe:

Characteristic of Mennonite wardrobes is their collapsible construction, which was a general practice for most wardrobes of the early to the late nineteenth century. The two-door wardrobe, which is generally about 90 inches tall or taller, needed to be constructed and assembled of separate components in order to facilitate moving such a large piece of furniture through narrow doors, hallways and sometimes up stairways to its designated place in the home. Such Mennonite-made wardrobes have strongly articulated bases and equally prominent cornices, the whole resting on independent five-footed bracket bases.



Mennonite settlements in central and eastern Europe, sixteenth to nineteenth century, map by John Janzen, Mennonite Furniture, page 11.

This base, the lower case, the upper case, the cornice and the pediment are each constructed as independent elements. The base and cornice, which have dovetail joints just like the chests, are joined to the upright elements of the wardrobe—the doors, the sides and the individual boards which make up the back—with mortise and tenon joints. Especially important for stability of the assembled wardrobe is the wedged pin connection, found on the lower and upper end of the uprights forming the sides. The wardrobe's pediment above the cornice evokes architectural pediments adapted by the Biedermeier furniture style. This pediment became the “hallmark” or signature of most of the wardrobes and cabinets, including corner cabinets, built by Mennonite immigrant cabinetmakers after the 1870s on the North American Plains.

3. The Cradle:

Characteristic of Mennonite cradles is the simplicity of their construction. The tapered box has dovetail joints and applied bead moulding strips which define the horizontal form. Simple identical galleries, also called “pillow boards,” at the head and the foot often feature cutout finger holes.

Mennonite cradles do not differentiate between a “head” and a “foot” board. Two small handcarved hooks, knobs or ceramic drawer pulls, fastened to each side of the cradle, secure the ties which hold the infant's blanket, as well as the child itself, in place. Slightly rolled rockers are usually attached to the bottom board with mortise and tenon joints. The slight counterscroll at the tip of the rockers prevents the cradle from tipping over. Some cradles sit on a platform, probably to prevent the action of the rockers from damaging the floor.

4. The Resting Bench or Sleeping Bench:

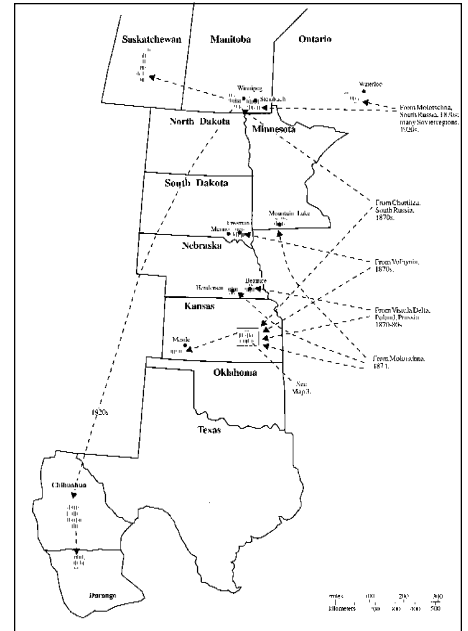
Mennonite resting or sleeping benches, some featuring a pull-out bed, are characterized by the continuous upright which is always cyma-shaped - the legs invert the curve of the upright.

Typically the arms replicate the curve of the legs and end in a scroll. Backboards are sometimes

shaped with scroll work, sometimes plain and sometimes have a slight rise or pediment toward the centre. Backs always have two inset panels. Skirts of resting or sleeping benches may be scrolled or straight. Some benches have armrests which are integrated with the end panels while others have armrests which are either fancifully turned or are plain. Armrests not integrated with end panels may be stationary or revolve for blanket rolls. The board seats of the sleeping benches can be lifted on a hinge. Sometimes the seats are not hinged but simply lie across the bedbox.

5. The Table:

Characteristic of the Mennonite table is the dovetailed cleat running across each end of the table top to prevent warping of the boards that form the surface. Often the table has a single drawer. Legs are square and tapered, often with a curved bracket for additional stability. An applied horizontal bead mould around the straight skirt adds definition. This form was built in vary-



Mennonite settlements from Russia, Prussia and Poland to the North American plains, 1870s-1920s, map by John Janzen, Mennonite Furniture, page 10.



Cradle, ca. 1880-1900. From the Moundridge, Kansas Mennonite community. Pine, painted graining, painted pink roses, dovetailed joints. Two carved hooks on each side were used to hold ribbon fasteners. McPherson Historical Museum. Mennonite Furniture, page 24, figure 14.



Sleeping bench, ca. 1890. Probably by Mr. Becker of Goessel, Kansas. Pine, painted graining, wooden peg joints, few screws, turning “roller” armrests which are said to have been used for covers. “Covers were put over the rollers and thus easily pulled.” Recessed back panels are bevelled on the back side of the bench. Mennonite Furniture, page 25, figure 16.



Wall cabinet, ca. 1880. Originally built into the kitchen wall of the Peter Voth home, Gnadensfeld village one mile east of Goessel, Kansas. The cabinet is said to have been painted by Emil Kym. Separately constructed gable, butt joints. The glass cabinet has two shelves and two drawers with porcelain pulls. The lower cabinet is fitted with shelves. Pine, painted graining, painted roses and forget-me-nots. Mennonite Furniture, page 27, figure 18.



Corner Cabinet, ca. 1880. From the George B. Neufeld family, Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Pine, painted graining, black paint. Cabinet features an independent swagged skirt bracket base with two legs, shaped like the base of dowry chests and wardrobes. Standing on a wall-mounted shelf. Heritage House Museum, Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Mennonite Furniture, page 34, figure 29.

ing sizes, depending on the function of the particular table in each home.

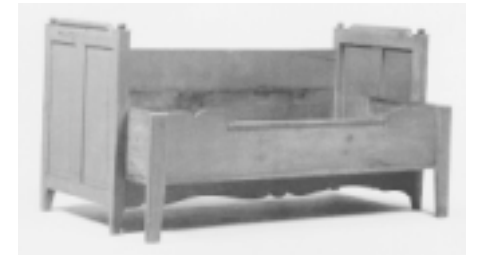
VII. Style and Sources of the Tradition.

The sources of the Mennonite material culture tradition are manifold, as was stated in the introduction, with elements from Slavic and Germanic traditions, from both the upper class and the common cultures in the southern Baltic region from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The stylistic characteristics of “Mennonite furniture” reflect a blend of popular or vernacular and mainstream European art historical periods from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

The styles also reflect the range of the socio-economic standing of Mennonite families. Mennonite furniture of Flemish, Dutch and German derivation cannot be defined as folk art, precisely because of its pluralistic sources and its high culture orientation. This becomes very clear the moment one compares a Mennonite dowry chest with a Flemish, Kashubian, Danish, Swedish or



Table with Drawer, ca. 1876-1880. From the Isaac B. Fast family, rural Goessel community, Kansas. Pine, red-orange paint. Drawer has dove-tailed joints and wooden pegs; dovetailed cleats run under the table top; horizontal moulding accents the skirt, tapered legs. Mennonite Furniture, page 42, Figure 40.



Pullout bed, ca. 1875-1880. Voth/Unruh/Fast house. From the Isaac B. Fast family, Goessel community. Pine, painted orange-red. Pullout section makes this into a double bed. Mennonite Furniture, page 44, figure 42.

Ukrainian painted peasant chest from the same period.

The most dominant stylistic features of Mennonite furniture echo those of the early nineteenth century northern European furniture style called Biedermeier. The repertoire of classicism with which furniture makers had been familiar from the time of Louis XVI continued to provide decorative motifs. In Mennonite furniture the classical motifs that filtered through the Biedermeier mode were the Greek urn, the Grecian pediment gables of the corner cabinets, wardrobes and glass cabinets, the decorative motifs of the column, Greek key framing motifs and stemmed shallow vessel filled with flowers on dowry chests, wardrobes and related furnishings. The spirited cyma-shaped curves of the upright armrest supports and of the legs of Mennonite resting and sleeping benches also took their cues from Empire-style derived Biedermeier furniture, particularly the sofas of the Biedermeier era (ca. 1815-1860s).

While some of the furniture pieces of this canon were built with hard woods such as ash, sometimes decorated with contrasting veneers, most Mennonite immigrant furniture is painted, as it is made of less expensive softer woods, such as pine, fir and spruce. The painted finish, in



Dowry Chest, 1866. From Krebsfelde, Vistula Delta. The initials SS probably stand for Sara Schulz (born 1844, Vistula Delta, died 1908, Newton, Kansas). According to the inscription on the back of the chest, this is the 69th chest painted in Krebsfelde, Vistula Delta, by painter Schuetz. It stands on a separate five-footed bracket base with scalloped skirt. The painted graining on pine imitates the colour and grain of ash, and the painted flower bouquets and zigzag border imitate similar chests of inlaid hardwood. Brass keyplate and key, ornate tinned iron handle plate, cast iron handle, plain hand forged iron hinges. Mennonite Furniture, page 82, figure 82.



China Cabinet, ca. 1879, Franz Adrian. For the south room of his adobe house. Pine, narrow red strip of moulding around the cornice, separately constructed five-footed base and pediment. Two glass doors and five drawers. Back is commercial wainscotting. Painted graining, painted white wild rose blossom with five buds, garland of leaves and stylized white flowers along the gable. Painted graining on the facade imitates burl grain of bird's eye maple. Sides show very bold graining in large swirls. Drawer fronts outlined with a narrow red painted line. Mennonite Furniture, page 140, figure 139. Notice how the arched entrance to the Vistula Delta "Vorlaubhaus" "echos the scalloped skirting of bases of dowry chest and wardrobes, and the motif of the column or pilaster found on the chests", page 102.

addition to being decorative, lent protection to the surface of the wood, and it was done in three different modes: (1) Solid colours such as ochre blood red or a warm yellow, (2) graining in imitation of hardwoods, (3) graining with floral decorations.

VIII The Migration of the Tradition: Mennonites took the Vistula Delta furniture tradition to central Poland, South Russia, and then to North America and Canada.

Heavy taxes, land restrictions, and the lack of religious freedom led some Mennonites to migrate in search of a better life. Nobles in central

Poland and Russia sought industrious farmers to clear forests and develop the land for farming. Promises of land and religious tolerance attracted Mennonites from the Vistula Delta as well as Mennonites whose origins can be traced to Switzerland.

When the Vistula Delta was taken over by Prussia in 1772, the Emperor Frederick the Great cancelled special privileges, such as the leasing of blocks of land to Mennonites and their exemption from military service. Mennonites seeking economic opportunity and religious freedom accepted the invitation of Empress Catherine the Great of Russia to colonize the newly conquered area along the Dnieper River. From 1789 to 1802, some 460 Mennonite families on the Vistula Delta moved to Chortitza in south Russia. Many of these Mennonites were poor and landless.

A second migration of Vistula Delta Mennonites from 1804 until 1835 formed the Molotschna colony. This Mennonite settlement included a wealthier group that could support the work of full-time craftsmen. As Mennonite families expanded, these two settlements established daughter colonies across Russia, such as the five villages of the Bergthal Colony, where Mennonite craftsmen also continued to build furniture in the Vistula Delta tradition.

Mennonite settlements in the 19th century were mainly self-sufficient and separate from their Polish and Russian neighbours. In these closed groupings, Mennonites maintained the longhouse form and furniture in the Vistula Delta tradition.

The growth of nationalism and militarism in the mid-19th century placed new pressures on Mennonites. The new requirement of military service and the shortage of farm land prompted some Prussian, Polish, and Russian Mennonites to consider emigration. The promise of good farm land at low prices attracted some 18,000 Mennonites to the plains and prairies of North America between 1873 and 1884.

In their luggage, Mennonites brought clocks and furniture that could be disassembled into packable pieces. Dowry chests were used as shipping trunks. The Vistula Delta furniture tradition was primarily imported in the minds and hands of immigrant craftsmen.

IX. The Waning of the Tradition: Factory-made furniture in mainstream American and Canadian styles gradually replaced hand-made furniture of the Vistula Delta Tradition.

A century-old tradition of Vistula Delta furniture was continued by immigrants to North America. Yet within 35 years of settlement on the North American Plains, this furniture was considered old-fashioned.

American-made furniture was purchased in St. Louis, Kansas City, Topeka, or Omaha, or Winnipeg by Mennonites on their way to their new farmlands. Well-to-do immigrants furnished their homes with purchased pieces built according to mainstream taste. Wardrobes were no longer required in new houses built with walk-in-closets.

Mass-manufactured furniture was readily available in general stores or through mail-order

catalogues. Skilled Mennonite craftsmen creating commissioned pieces could not compete with the low prices of factory-made furniture. The time, energy, and skills of craftsmen were directed toward farming, construction, or small business. However, furniture types from the canon, such as chests, cradles, wardrobes, continued to be made by Mennonite hobby craftsmen in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Paraguay and Brazil as miniatures and as toy furniture for grandchildren and great-grandchildren well into this last decade of the twentieth century.

However, recently a Mennonite furniture maker in Golden, Colorado, descendent from a Rudnerweide family in the Molotschna Mennonite colony in Russia, has begun to build Vistula Delta style furniture of the canon, starting with its archetype, the dowry chest. If he finds sufficient patronage, his fledgling revival of the tradition may indeed become a Renaissance.

Sources:

The findings presented in this article are based on the following sources: Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John M. Janzen: *Mennonite Furniture, A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)*, Good Books, Intercourse, PA, 1991, 231 pages; *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition, 1766-1910*, exhibition brochure, Kauffman Museum, North Newton, Kansas, 1991; Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen: "Mennonite Furnishings: The Dynamics of a Migrant Cultural Tradition", *Kansas Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2 pp. 31-45, 1994. For further discussions of this topic see, also by Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, "Sources and Styles of the Material Culture of the Mennonites in the Vistula Delta," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* Vol. LXVI, No. 2, 1992, pp. 167-198; and "Mennonitische Moebel, Zeugnisse einer wandernden Gemeinschaft," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 51. Jahrgang, 1994, pp. 54-73.



Pendulum clock, ca. 1800. The artwork features The story of Hezekiah. 2 Kings 19:9-14. Mennonite Furniture, page 99, figure 102.

About the author:

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Drawings of Principle Furniture Types in the Canon.

Drawings of Principle Furniture Types in the Canon. The illustration 1 drawings, by Gesine



Resting bench, ca. 1875-1895, Heinrich Schroeder. Pine, painted graining on yellow ground, black paint to accent recessed back panels, black turned armrests, black seat. Note the unusual scrolled feet. A "secret" shelf is mounted under one end of the bench. Mennonite Furniture, page 150, figure 151.

Janzen, represent typical forms from the canon of immigrant Mennonite furniture, in their general appearance, and variations of form within the type.

Klaas Reimer's Kjist?

Klaas Reimer's Kjist?, by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

Like the Ark of the Covenant the "Kjist" or dowry trunk of Klaas Reimer, (1770-1837), founder of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) in Imperial Russia in 1812, sits sedately in a secure position in the home of Gerhard and Susie Penner, Spanish Lookout, Belize, only a few hundred yards from rain forest jungle where Howler monkeys nightly raise their voices in haunting chorus, as if serenading the ghosts of those whose hands have carried the Kjist from continent to continent and from generation to generation.

Like Indiana Jones and "The Raiders of the Lost Ark," the Kjist and certainly the culture and faith it represented have been assailed by numerous enemies over the centuries. Through the leading of God and the interdiction of providence, the Kjist as well as the faith and culture of those carrying it forward have survived repeated calamity and adversity. In 1958 the KG people found a new home in Spanish Lookout, Belize, jungle rain forest at the time. Here the Kjist provided a visible and material symbol of a culture and people whose history can be traced five centuries to the martyrdom and flowering of the faith in the Reformation in 1525.

The Kjist.

The Kjist itself appears to be in excellent condition and still stands on the original five pedestal base. It was stained a dark reddish colour and the till at each end for the preservation of valuables are fully functionable. The only added features are two braces for the inside of the lid clearly visible from the photograph. From the little I know of the canon of the Mennonite furniture tradition, this "Kjist" fits all the protocol of construction, and may

well have originated in Prussia.

The comparison of the Kjist to the Ark and Indiana Jones is not as far fetched as it may sound. The Biblical ark carried the important manifestations of the Israelite religious culture, the relics and icons of the Hebrew God. Among conservative Mennonites the dowry chest carried the treasures of a young woman, preparing for the man whom she would treasure in her heart and marry and live her life with, fitting the allegory used among Mennonites of the church being the bride of Christ. The Ark was also an allegory for the Gemeinde, instituted by Christ, the haven and refuge of those who would follow Him.

The Kjist became enshrined as a furniture form in Mennonite tradition when they moved from Prussia to Russia in the late 18th century. It was an ideal construct for a people on the move--not only could the Kjist be used to transport the family heirlooms, but also served as functionable furniture in the new homeland, and thereafter, as a consistent reminder of the old. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen has informed us that the design of the Kjist had its origins in the works of Renaissance architects and artists, and therefore, it provided a visual symbol of the past, both elegant and dignified.

When Mennonites were preparing to move, the chest was filled with the family linens, fine pottery, dishes, jewellery, and other valuables. Among the KG, of course, one would not find jewellery, but in its place was the family library, first and foremost, a Bible, and the ancient writings of the faith, a *Martyr's Mirror*, Menno Simon's *Fundamentabuck*, Pieter Pieters, Dirk Philips, George Hansen, *Die Wandelnde Seele*, and other books included in the KG canon of devotional writing.



Tina Reimer Plett (right) and Susanna Reimer Penner (left) pose with the Reimer "Kjist". The end view, showing the metal hardware and the standard five pedestal base.

Also included in the Kjist would be a few sermons, handwritten by a recently deceased and honoured Ohm, or a daybook or journal kept by a venerable "Meum", or matriarch, keeping record of her household economy accounts. It would also contain the traditional "Familienbuch" setting out the family pedigree

Like the Ark of the Covenant, the Kjist of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) travelled the world from Prussia, to Russia, to Manitoba and Mexico, coming to rest in the jungles of Belize, a material symbol of the canon of faith transmitted from century to century

and a personal anthology of historical writings of the faith. Thus the Kjist in a very practical way, became the vehicle for transmission of traditional values and the belief system of an entire people over the centuries.

Klaas Reimer Artifacts.

On August 23, 1804, Klaas Reimer and his group of 30 adults departed their homes in Prussia for an uncertain future in Russia, where he settled in the village of Petershagen, Molotschna Colony. As he was preparing to leave his comfortable *Wirtschaft* in Neunhuben, Prussia, he would have carefully packed these books and valuables into the Kjist.

A number of artifacts have come to light in recent years which Klaas Reimer would have packed into the Kjist: 1) a walking cane handed down to Klaas F. Reimer, Johann F. Reimer and to his youngest son Peter R. E. Reimer: see "Klaas Reimer's cane," *Preservings*, No. 7, Dec 1995, page 46; 2) an ancient Bible and *Gesangbuch*, handed down through daughter Margaretha F. Reimer (1819-74), married to Martin M. Barkman, the wealthy sheep farmer of Rückenau, Molotschna, and later Jansen, Nebraska (Note One); 3) another "Gesangbuch" was passed on to son Peter F. Reimer (1826-54), Tiegge, through his wife's second marriage, to Margaretha L. Plett, Mrs Franz Kroeker in Steinbach, who passed it on to her nephew, Bishop Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949) of Twin creek, named after this great-uncle who had died not leaving descendants: *Reimer Familienregister*, page 15; 4) the only item which may have been handed down through son Abraham "Fula" Reimer, to my knowledge, is a hand carved pencil box donated to the Museum I believe by John C. Reimer, presumably being passed down through Abraham F. Reimer, via his son Klaas R. Reimer, pioneer Steinbach merchant.

Cornelius R. Reimer (1906-59).

The history of the Kjist is intrinsically intertwined with the continuing story of the KG in Mexico and Belize. Its immediate ownership is traced back to Cornelius R. Reimer (1906-59), son of Elisabeth R. Reimer (1867-1936) and Johann F. Reimer (1860-1947), Blumenort, Manitoba. Cornelius R. Reimer was a passionate defender and promoter of the ancient evangelical teachings as reconstituted by the KG in Imperial Russia. For two decades Cornelius fought a valiant but losing battle for the preservation of these beliefs in Manitoba. But he was out maneuvered by his cousins,

Ben D. Reimer and Frank D. Reimer, working equally zealously for the adoption of the religious culture and language of American Fundamentalism and eradication of the old (Note Two).

The result was the emigration of 100 KG families from Blumenort, Heuboden, and Rosenort, Manitoba to Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1948 where they established the Quellen Colony, today Jagueyes. The group was led by Bishop Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949) and of



Tina and Susanna posed with the "Kjist", lid open, showing the till at the far end. The photograph also shows the braces which have been added to support the inside of the trunk lid. The brightly coloured artwork or photographs typically found in these ancient trunks had already been removed prior to Susanna's recollection.

course, Rev. Cornelius R. Reimer, as his right hand man. In 1950 Cornelius R. Reimer was elected as Bishop serving until his death in 1959. In 1958 a group of 87 families from Mexico moved on to Belize where they founded the Spanish Lookout settlement. Cornelius R. Reimer's story is one of great importance to the history of the East Reserve, as it speaks for much of the dynamics which articulated religious events in the Hanover Steinbach area from 1874 to the present: see book review section.

Susanna Kornelsen Reimer (1906-96).

After the untimely death of Cornelius R. Reimer in 1959, his wife Susanna Kornelsen Reimer (1906-96), became family head, a role she was already used to having successfully managed the family farm and raised 13 children while her husband was occupied with the grievous responsibilities of his ministerial and pastoral office.

Susanna Kornelsen Reimer was the daugh-

ter of Susanna Penner Kornelsen (1879-1969), an outspoken woman of Bergthaler origin, who became the matriarch of Spanish Lookout, Belize, during the first decade of its existence. We hope to have an article about this amazing woman by her grandson Henry K. Reimer in a future issue of *Preservings*.

Upon her death this role was assumed by her daughter, Susanna Kornelsen Reimer, a woman of wisdom and charisma. As a widow for the last 35 years of her life, she exerted great influence upon the Colony, not only in her own right as a highly respected personage—a "Meum" in the best sense of its ancient meaning, but also through her children including Abraham, long-time Bishop, and John K. Reimer, founder of "Reimer Feeds" its largest business.

Susanna Kornelsen Reimer taught and encouraged her family to follow in the footsteps of their father Cornelius, and to preserve the faith and cultural values, as she herself had done: we hope to have an article by Henry K. Reimer with her biography in a future issue of *Preservings*.

Matriarchy.

An amazing part of this story is the role played by the matriarchy in preserving the "Kjist" from generation to generation. It is presently guarded carefully by two sisters at Spanish Lookout, Belize, Susanna Reimer Penner, age 60, and Tina Reimer Plett, age 47, only daughters of Cornelius R. Reimer. When Susanna died in 1994 the Kjist was inherited by daughter Susanna, in whose home it still stands today, carefully preserved. Living next door is the Reimer's only other daughter Tina, the wife of Denver Plett, who happens to be one of the Vorsteher of the Colony.

The matriarchal connections do not end there: Susanna married her second cousin, George Penner, being the grandson of Maria R. Reimer, Mrs. Klaas F. Penner, sister of Elisabeth, Mrs. Johann F. Reimer, and so the circle was joined again. Younger sister Tina also married a Reimer relative, namely, Denver P. Plett, a great-grandson of Rev. Peter R. Reimer, Blumenort, brother to her great-grandfather, deacon Abraham R. Reimer.

In many ways, Susanna, Tina and another Tina, her sister-in-law, married to Almon Plett, brother of Denver, exemplified the workings of the Biblical feminism which thrived in Imperial Russia in the 19th century. The two Tinas, together with their husbands, both have traditional families of 8 and 13 children respectively. They own large commercialized farming operations and agri-business holdings.

I found it fascinating during two recent visits to observe the two Tinas, noting how the ancient functions of the household economy and socialization of children are still the ruling paradigm. The roles have been adjusted slightly for modern-day conveniences such as 2-metre radios and cel phones, but remain essentially unchanged. If anything, technological advances have enhanced their roles as they now function as dispatchers, coordinators and facilitators not

only for their previous enclaves but for the wider agri-business interests and community leadership as well.

Just as the dignified lines and elegant forms of the Kjist portray the aesthetic values of another age--that of the Renaissance, and the books it once carried from homeland to homeland contained the spiritual insights of the Reformation, the women into whose oversight the Kjist has now come, represent the empowerment of the ancient matriarchies dating back to medieval times and the Low-German/Plaut Dietsch hegemony of the Hanseatic League in Northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea and possibly even further to pre-Christians times (Note Three).

The two sisters, Susanna and Tina Reimer, are also closest friends and have a firm belief in the preservation of traditional values, the ties of kinship, and the sovereignty of the Gemeinde as taught in the Gospels. Tens of thousands of Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) and Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) descendants across the North and South American continents can rest easy knowing that the Kjist and everything it represents, will be preserved in the future as it has in the past.

The Pedigree.

The Kjist was inherited by Cornelius R. Reimer from his parents, Johann F. Reimer (1860-1941) and Elisabeth R. Reimer (1867-1936). Family lore holds that they had inherited it from their parents although it is not clear from which side. They were both Reimers--Johann was a first cousin to Elisabeth's father, Abraham R. Reimer, Blumenort deacon and farmer, and so the Kjist undoubtedly originated from the Reimer family, either through Abraham F. Reimer (1808-92), the well-known "Fula" Reimer, or through his younger brother Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74) of Tiege, deacon of the KG and unlike his older brother, a well-to-do Vollwirt.

The family connections go much deeper. Johann's parents were first cousins, his father Klaas being the son of Helena Friesen/von Riesen, Mrs. Klaas Reimer, founding Aeltester of the KG, and his mother Katharina W. Friesen (1817-64) being the daughter of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), second Aeltester of the KG. There is another connection in that Elisabeth's parents Abraham R. Reimer (1841-91) and Maria F. Reimer (1847-1916) were second cousins on the von Riesen side, Abraham being the grandson of Helena von Riesen/Friesen (1787-1846), Mrs. Klaas Reimer, Petershagen, and Maria being the granddaughter of sister Margaretha von Riesen/Friesen (1784-1835), wife of Grosse Gemeinde minister Johann Friesen, Rosenort.

In this way it can be calculated that Cornelius R. Reimer was a double Reimer descendant and a quadruple von Riesen/Friesen descendant, rather appropriate blood lines for someone possessed of so important an artifact.

I believe it more likely that the artifact was passed down through the Klaas F. Reimer fam-

ily, to son Johann F. Reimer. First of all, "Fula" does not strike me as one particularly prone to collecting such items. He was too busy keeping journals and recording the comings and goings of his vivacious wife Elisabeth Rempel Reimer. As already mentioned, in either case, the Kjist probably originated with Aeltester Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), likely coming from Neunhuben, Prussia, where he lived prior to emigration to Imperial Russia in 1801.

Significance.

The transmission or inheritance of artifacts such as the Kjist from one generation to another among conservative Mennonites illustrated the powerful role played by the matriarchs of old. Frequently they articulated what was taken along in one migration or another, or what was passed on to whom in the event of an estate distribution. As such these artifacts provide valuable insight into the aesthetic and religious values of the ancient matriarchs, making up to some extent for the fact that often little other information is available.

Like the Ark of the Covenant, artifacts like the Kjist of Klaas Reimer sometimes became real life symbols of a heritage and faith long after the intellectual and rational components had faded into distant memory. Its story is comparable to the Kjist of Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Moses of the Bergthaler people, which went to Paraguay with his son Dietrich in 1926 (Note Four).

For those resident in the Hanover Steinbach area artifacts such as the "Reimer" Kjist are important as they symbolize the vision of the 1926 and 1948 emigrants of preserving their faith and culture. In this way they have preserved part of that which once was ours, an indigenous tradition and heritage going back a thousand years or more, and for this we should be grateful.

Conclusion.

The purpose for the founding of the KG in 1812 was to recapture the "Anabaptist vision", nothing less than the restitution of the New Testament church.

The KG was reconfigured after the emigration in 1874 by a series of events: the Holdeman schism, ethnic cleansing by the Provincial Government 1916-19, and assault by American Revivalism and later Fundamentalism. In some ways the vision was lost and diminished as the KG, like Indiana Jones, fought its way through various adversities and the temptations of people to capitulate and assimilate. In time various writers started referring to the denomination as the "Kleingemeinde" and not the "Kleine Gemeinde", perhaps symbolical of the changes which had taken place.

But items of material culture such as the "Kjist" do not change and perhaps provided a comfortable permanence and presence for those who still honoured the vision of the past. In the meantime the guardians of the Kjist have emigrated twice more, in 1948 to Mexico and in 1958 to Belize. From all appearances the privations of pioneer life have largely been

put in the past, and Spanish Lookout can anticipate a prosperous future.

The question will be, will its inhabitants once again seek to claim as their own the vision of their Reformation antecedents, symbolized by the "Kjist"?

If so they only need to study the books once packed carefully into the Kjist by Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) in 1804 and thereafter, each time his descendants departed from one Homeland to seek another. These writings explain why the emigrations took place and what was so important that hearth and home was uprooted--not once, not twice, but four times, over two centuries.

If these questions are not addressed, the dream of 87 families who founded the settlement--those who suffered and died for that vision--would be unfulfilled and empty, without purpose. And that would be a true tragedy.

Endnotes:

Note One: Henry Fast, "Klaas Reimer's Bible," article in *Carillon News*, 1992, around July 6.

Note Two: The religious culture and language of American Fundamentalism included millennialist ideas proven false by the effluxion of time in the sense that the various individuals identified as the Anti-Christ during the 1940s and 50s turned out not to be the Anti-Christ, and the times which were repeatedly designated in the name of God as the time for the Second Coming, turned out not to be the actual time--Deuteronomy 18,20-22. There was also an important story here of familial and religious fratricide between, first of all, the two brother-in-laws, Johann F. Reimer and Heinrich R. Reimer, and later, between their children. Their battles and skirmishes, repeatedly articulated at brotherhood meetings, and eventually embroiling the entire "Kleingemeinde", had all the elements of high stakes drama. Perhaps someone will write it up for a future issue of *Preservings*, or use it as a story line for what could have all the makings of a suspense thriller novel. It is noteworthy that nowhere in the historical literature has there been any writing about these religious wars of the 1930s and 40s except recently by Dr. Royden Loewen, "Mennonite Repertoires of Contentment": Church life in Steinbach, Manitoba, and Quellenkolonie, Chihuahua, 1945-1975," in *Menn. Quarterly Review*, April 1998, pages 301-319 wherein he argues that the conflict inherent in such disputes in healthy and reformative.

Note Three: See my articles "Pioneer Women of the East Reserve" and "Matriarchies of the East Reserve," in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 1-26, for a more detailed discussion of matriarchy and the role of women within the KG.

Note Four: See article by Dick Wiebe, "Dietrich D. Wiebe 1868-1930," in *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, pages 12-14. Reinhold Kauenhoven Janzen saw the Gerhard Wiebe Kjist when she was in Paraguay but was not able to photograph it.

Sarah Reimer Barkman 'Kjist'

Sarah Reimer Barkman's 'Kjist', by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

On July 25, 1993, the descendants of Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915), a grandson of Aeltester Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), held a family reunion at the Steinbach Bible College, Steinbach, Manitoba. Peter R. Reimer was married for the second time to Maria Loewen Plett (1850-1934) (see article on Sarah Loewen Plett following).



The miniature "Kjist" received by Sarah Plett Reimer (1887-1971) from her furniture maker father, Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915). The chest is proudly displayed by its current owner, granddaughter, Mary Barkman Plett, together with one of the kerchiefs which her mother stored in it. Photo courtesy of Mary Barkman Plett, Arborg, Manitoba.

Among the family heirlooms displayed at the reunion was a miniature chest, comparable in size to the popular North American "hope chest". The miniature "kjist" was displayed by Katherine Barkman Plett, daughter of Sarah P. Reimer (1887-1971), Mrs. Johann G. Barkman. Sarah Reimer Barkman received the Kjist from her father, Peter R. Reimer, who built it so she could store her "Shleiduik" or kerchiefs. In this way he approximated the function of the original dowry chest in Prussia which served as a receptacle for the gifts and treasures collected by a young woman in anticipation of marriage.

Peter R. Reimer was the son of Abraham "Fule" F. Reimer, Kleefeld, Molotschna, and later Blumenort, Manitoba. Since the family was poor the children were engaged to work for others at an early age. Peter was apprenticed as a carpenter. Not only did he learn to build houses he also became an expert furniture maker, learning the art of the Mennonite furniture tradition which originated in Renaissance times in ancient Prussia.

Although I am not aware of other samples of his work, Peter R. Reimer's "Account Book" covering the years 1892 to 1915, as well as his

father's journals, provide a listing of many pieces of furniture he produced. As a minister Peter R. Reimer was committed to the conservative faith tradition and apparently applied the same philosophy to his day-to-day life. He was also a successful farmer and builder, constructing many homes in the Blumenort area. The construction tradition has been continued by his great-grandson Ernest G. Penner, President of Penco Construction, Blumenort, one of North America's larger builders.

With his interest and passion for woodwork Peter was not altogether different from his famous grandfather, Klaas Reimer, whose exceptional skills in woodworking were demonstrated by the walking cane and pencil box he carved in 1792 while herding cattle in the Gross Werder. Although the Reimer "Kjist" in Belize (see adjoining article) may not necessarily be built by him there is no doubt that he possessed the skills and craftsmanship necessary to construct fine pieces of furniture. Ohm Klaas himself wrote in his "Ein Kleines Aufsatz", that he "...was engaged with the carpenters."

In her groundbreaking book, *Mennonite Furniture*, Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, discusses a phase in the Mennonite furniture tradition where it is remembered "in nostalgic, miniature renderings of the standard pieces." The present owner, Mary Barkman Plett estimated her mother's Kjist was constructed in the early 1900s. Her mother was married in 1913 at age 26. It seems possible that the miniature Kjist was Peter R. Reimer's attempt as an older man to pass on something inherently valuable to his beloved daughter.

In 1913 Sarah married widower John G. Barkman (1887-1982). "He had to wait for her for four years as a widower as her parents consider her too sickly." In 1926 they moved to Satanta, Kansas. John was elected as a minister of the KG in 1933. In 1937 they returned to Manitoba to escape the Kansas dustbowl, and settled in Blumenort.

Over the years many descendants of the 1874 pioneers developed what Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen calls cultural amnesia; sawing legs off benches, placing wall-hung corner cabinets on the floor, and dowry chests were painted enamel over metal fittings, stripped to the bare wood and cleaned up by removing pictures inside lids, or placed in a barn or granary where they simply rotted (page 197).

Sarah's miniature Kjist provides an intriguing postscript to the story of the "Reimer Kjist" in Belize. Obviously Peter R. Reimer was successful in transmitting something marvellous to his daughter, a respect for the past, and the aesthetic tastes to be able to recognize the elegant but simple beauty of the renaissance designs represented by the Kjist. By so doing, father and daughter have passed on a wonderful inheritance not only to their descendants but to all residents of Hanover Steinbach who are thereby

admitted upon a window to the past only rarely seen, namely, the indigenous furniture tradition of the East Reserve pioneers of 1874.

We are grateful to the present owner Mary Barkman Plett for her generosity in sharing this treasure with our readers.



Sarah Reimer Barkman (1887-1971), in 1926. Passport picture taken before the John G. Barkman family immigrated to Satanta, Kansas. Photo courtesy of the Plett Picture Book, page 69, and the late Rev. Bernhard P. Doerksen, Blumenort, Manitoba.



Maria Plett Reimer (1850-1934), matriarch of Blumenort, and mother of Sarah Reimer Barkman. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Books, page 63, and Preservings, No. 10, Part One, page 11.

Sarah Loewen Plett 1822-1903: Cream Pitchers

Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1923), Lindenau, Molotschna, Imperial Russia to Blumenhof, Manitoba, Canada: Cream Pitchers, by great-great-grandson Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

We know far too little about pioneer women such as Sarah Loewen Plett. She was born in 1822, daughter of Isaac Loewen (1787-1783), Lindenau, a Kleine Gemeinde (KG) deacon, Vollwirt, and prolific writer: for a biography and translation of his writings as well as a short commentary by great-great grandson Dr. Harry Loewen, currently of Kelowna, B. C., see *Leaders*, pages 509-590.

Through the marvellous journals of Abraham ("Fula") Reimer, Steinbach, Borosenko, we have a detailed description of the life-world of one KG woman, the irrepressible and vivacious Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93), whose experience speaks for many others. It is ironic that the Biblical feminism which Sarah and other KG women reflected, flowered among conservative Mennonites in Imperial Russia, only to be destroyed and attacked by the forces of pietism and later American Fundamentalism, resulting in much more patriarchal, authoritarian religious cultures among Russländer and later among so-called Evangelical Mennonites, such as the Rudnerweider.

It is clear that the typical KG matriarch was significantly more empowered than equivalent women in other cultures. Pursuant to tradition among conservative Mennonites, KG women managed and operated important components of the household economy including dairy, poultry, garden and orchard production and played a critical and integral role in the operation of the successful *Wirtschaften* for which the KG was known (Note One).

Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903).

Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903) was baptised upon the confession of her faith in the KG in 1841. Later the same year she married Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900). Assisted by her father the couple started out building wagon wheels on an *Anwohnerstelle* in Lindenau, near her parents. By 1848 they were doing well enough to have a maid, and Cornelius had the misfortune that his actions were scrutinized by the church leadership, when he had "treated their adult serving girl too strictly and had also struck her." In fact, Sarah's father, Isaac, was removed from his position as deacon over this incident, as "he had not been vigilant enough". This demonstrated that the Gemeinde stood behind its policy of prohibiting any mistreatment of women, a century-and-a-half before such provisions were deemed necessary by society in general.

The family fortunes continued to improve and by 1854 they took up a full *Wirtschaft* in a new village Kleefeld, established that year. During the 1860s they also rented additional Crown land and by 1871 they had 270 acres in wheat crop. Their's was apparently an exceptionally successful enterprise which defined and articu-

lated Sarah's life world. Obviously she was a busy woman, dealing with domestic servants, harvesters, socializing her large family of twelve children--the Biblical dozen, and managing the traditional part of the household economy.

Sarah and her husband, Ohm Kjnals, enjoyed travelling and were frequently seen on the roads linking Annafeld in the Crimea with the Molotschna and Borosenko, located in yet another direction, westerly, past the Old Colony. It seems clear that she had an expansive world view, in terms of dealing and interacting with the wide range of ethnic groups and cultures found in that part of Imperial Russia.

Bishop David P. Reimer gave his grandmother Sarah Loewen Plett the testimony that she had conducted herself in a calm and peaceful manner during her life's journey so that her descendants could remember her as the likeness of Sarah in accordance with 1 Peter Chapter 3.

When I think of Sarah Loewen Plett I think of a quiet person, but one of undisputable authority, her power constituted by years of unselfish devotion to her family, working alongside her husband "without stint". I picture her as a woman who did not have to shout to have people hear what she was saying. Rather a loving smile or an encouraging nod was enough to inspire those near to her.

Like her mother, Margaretha Wiens Loewen (1790-1861), Sarah became the matriarch of a huge extended family which included 70 grandchildren and 56 great-grandchildren at the time of her death in 1903. She is buried in the "old" Blumenort cemetery, Section 22-7-6E, on the hill just behind where great-grandson David P. Loewen has his turkey farm today. I am sure her descendancy by the present-day exceeds 10,000 souls.

Writing Tradition.

Sarah must have enjoyed writing and reading. In a letter of March 18, 1926, daughter Maria Plett Reimer (the mother of two KG Bishops) waxed nostalgic when she thought back to her mother and childhood days: "But I am so weak and I still miss so much and long to return to all that which once was mine. When I think of that which I had and my family; oh how dearly I would once again long to sit at the writing table where Mama's books would still all be lying" (Note Two).

It was clearly Sarah that the strong writing tradition among her children came from and not from her husband, Ohm Kjnals, who had grown up in poverty in Danzig and had experienced both lack of stability in his childhood, and presumably little or no formal education. He might well have been one of the best wheat producers in the Molotschna Colony, but it was Sarah who grew up in a stable home in Lindenau, Molotschna, socialized by her father who loved writing. Sarah's daughters Margaretha (Mrs. Franz M. Kroeker), Steinbach, and Maria (Mrs.



The copper lustre ware cream pitcher I inherited from my parents and which they in turn had received from my paternal grandparents, Heinrich E. Pletts, Blumenort. Note the band around the middle which is a deep blue, too dark to be "Kleingemeinsch blaev" but possibly close enough to be one of the reasons it was preserved. On each side of the pitcher are portrayals in relief of a woman sitting in a park setting. Quite frankly, I did not notice these particularities until Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen pointed them out. At first blush, it did not make sense; it seemed to contradict the canon of Kleine Gemeinde aesthetics, beliefs and philosophy. Upon reflection, however, I realized that conservative groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde, representing a 500 year-old tradition, have always found ways of facilitating individual intellectual expression where it was not threatening to the mores of the community as a whole--after all, the constant debate within the community since Reformation times evidences a genuine grass-roots democracy. This was necessary in groups such as the Bergthaler, Kleine Gemeinde and Old Coloniers who attracted intellectual contemplative people, not the sort running around throwing themselves after every new religious fancy and social whim floating around. The conservatives were articulated by a consistent vision of being the people of God and had much better things to do: communities to build and matriarchies to nurture, etc. The individual intellectual expression found in groups such as the KG will not be evident to those who have not done any research or reading in the massive KG Schriftentum, nor to those looking for superficial blemishes to use in disparaging their own culture.

Peter R. Reimer) both maintained journals--Margaretha's being the oldest journal by a woman in the East Reserve KG dating from 1892, and Sarah's sons Cornelius, Abraham, David and Jakob all maintained significant journals and/or letter correspondence.

Description.

I picture Sarah as a slightly heavy-set woman, not fat, of pleasing proportions. I make this presumption based on photographs of nephews and nieces. I assume that her father-in-law Johann Plett was a wiry, lithe man, like her sons, Johann, Abraham and Jakob L. Plett, later in Manitoba. Sarah's sons Cornelius and David, on the other hand, were slightly heavier men and I assume that came from the Loewen side. Sarah Doerksen Penner (1892-1994), whom I interviewed in 1985 who personally remembered both Sarah and Ohm Kjnals, recalled that neither of her great-grandparents were very big physically, that Cornelius was somewhat stout but not fat. Sarah and Cornelius were known as the "old grandparents" to distinguish them from her actual grandparents, Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935), Sarah's son.

I picture further that Sarah was resembled by her daughters Maria (Mrs. Peter R. Reimer) and Margaretha (Mrs. Franz M. Kroeker), who were remembered as attractive and intelligent women. A photograph of Maria taken in 1931 showed her to be a slight woman, 5' 6" in height, with a rounded face, an expansive gentle smile. Recently I had occasion to review the notes I made while researching the *Plett Picture Book* in 1981, and came across a note that Sarah Loewen Plett had a wide mouth and pleasant smile, certainly consistent with the picture of daughter Maria.

Personality.

Much of what we know about Sarah must be painstakingly teased out from the darkness of the past by reconstructing her life-world, her experiential embryo, as it were, and by comparison with other women of her period. One such woman was the irrepressible Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93), only nine years her senior, representing the most fully documented woman of her contemporaries, at least that I know of.

Sarah's personality stands in interesting contrast to that of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, an extroverted and outspoken person. Where Elisabeth rushed to and fro, her insatiable curiosity never quenched, Sarah was more the quiet intellectual. She was happy to allow her husband centre stage, but nonetheless orchestrating her life-world and that of those around her according to ancient ways and traditions which she preserved and managed carefully and strategically. Sarah would have been quiet and contemplative--but do not kid yourself--one who knew very precisely and exactly what was going on in her domain, and who had a sense of historical consciousness, committed to preserving the social constructs of the past which has served well her mother and mother's mother before her.

Sarah's personality to my mind is illustrated by the following story. When Johannes Holdeman, the feisty American Revivalist evangelist, arrived in the East Reserve in Manitoba in 1879 to "save" the Mennonites here, he quickly realized that Cornelius S. Plett was one

person he would have to deal with. He would have to convince Plett of the necessity of adopting Revivalist religious culture and language for salvation if he was to succeed in his mission of converting the KG community.

Unfortunately for Mr. Holdeman it turned out that Ohm Kjnals was also an enthusiastic Bible aficionado, who it was said, knew almost the entire New Testament off-by-heart. One grey afternoon, Ohm Kjnals sat in the "grotte schoave" with Holdeman debating him to a crisp on point after point. Finally, after he had been cornered again on a point vital to his theology, Holdeman stood up in exasperation, stomped his feet, and exclaimed, "Dieses Haus werden wir müssen Gott überlassen" and walked out.



Cousin Abe P. Plett, wife Helena, with their oldest 2 children pose proudly with the cream pitcher he inherited from his maternal grandparents, Gertrude Koop Plett and Abraham L. Plett, Blumenhof, Manitoba. A visible symbol of the heritage and culture passed along from Russia, to Manitoba, to Mexico and finally Belize.

Although it was Cornelius who did the debating, I see Sarah in the kitchen, pausing from time to time in her work to listen carefully to everything being said, proud of her husband's eloquent defense of their faith and culture, and smiling to herself when she heard Ohm Kjnals mouth the very words he and she, had discussed during Bible reading the night before (Note Three).

Cream Pitcher.

One of the treasures I inherited from my father's side of the family is a copperware cream pitcher, of the type manufactured in England and sold in Southern Russia during the mid-19th century. It has a blue band around the middle and a portrayal of a young woman seated in a garden. The picture projects out in relief and is hand painted as is the blue band around the middle. The handle was broken off already before the cream pitcher came into my possession.

On February 12-13, 1993, Reinhild

Kauenhoven Janzen came to Steinbach to address the A.G.M. of the HSHS. Reinhild presented several lectures regarding the Mennonite material culture tradition. Being President at the time, I pulled rank, and had the privilege of hosting Reinhild at our home for the weekend. It was a double pleasure as I got the opportunity to show Reinhild the copperware cream pitcher. She was kind enough to send me a written evaluation as follows:

Feb. 15/93

"It seems to be copper lustre ware of the kind produced by the British pottery/porcelain makers "Staffordshire" as early as the 1850s--and later too. So this little treasure could have been purchased in a store in Russia, as much British china was exported to Russia. It could also have been obtained in Canada before the turn of the century. To be really sure on this I would need to do actual research on this type of "Staffordshire" ware. Any good library would have a Dictionary of Pottery and Porcelain.....Best wishes."

Belize, 1987.

The scene changes to Belize, February 7, 1987. It was my first visit to the Spanish Lookout, a prosperous farming district with cattle grazing on lush green hillsides reminiscent to British soldiers of the countryside in Wales and England. The settlement had been hacked out of the jungle a mere 30 years earlier by 87 families originating in Blumenort and Rosenort, Manitoba. Among these sturdy pioneers were also descendants of Sarah Loewen Plett, including my paternal aunt, Elizabeth, Mrs. Abraham J. Thiessen, and my paternal uncle Peter R. Plett, who had married my maternal grandmother's sister, Helena.

While visiting cousin Abe P. Plett, it came up in the conversation that he still had some family keepsakes including a cream pitcher his mother had inherited from her father, Abraham L. Plett, son of Sarah, which had been brought over from Russia. Consequently I took a picture of Abe and his lovely wife, Helen K. Reimer, and their two children, posing proudly with this treasured artifact. Helen, herself, is also a descendant of Sarah, being the great-great granddaughter of Maria L. Plett already referred to.

This cream pitcher differed considerably from the one I had inherited which came from my paternal grandparents, Heinrich E. Pletts, apparently brought along from Russia by his father Cornelius L. Plett. The former was plain but good quality porcelain. The latter was shiny, with a deep blue band hand-painted around the middle.

Sarah's Prairie.

The transmission of material culture within conservative Mennonite communities informs us about the value structure and aesthetic views of the women, as what was preserved or handed down, or taken along on one migration or another was largely a matriarchal decision.

In my 1995 novel *Sarah's Prairie*, a character also named Sarah inherited a cream pitcher from her father, with a colourful scene of a couple

embracing in a garden. Her father, Ohm Issuk had acquired the cream pitcher prior to there being a protocol on such matters. As with many women of Sarah's community, she was more conservative than her husband. Yet, she could not bear to part with the precious cream pitcher, a memento of her father whom she had loved dearly and so she sanitized it, scratching off the images of the couple embracing which might have offended her sense of rightness.

The story, of course, is merely fictional, and by definition speculative, but it does illustrate the power possessed by KG matriarchs in Russia. True, they were living in a patriarchal society, but it was a society significantly more matriarchal than other cultures of the 19th century. The power wielded by women of Sarah's life-world was probably mainly attributable to the necessities of running commercial farming enterprises. Within this context women traditionally managed the household economy, including the dairy, garden and orchard production. This power was enhanced when the KG came to Manitoba in 1874-5, where they had to shift into a mixed farming mode, precisely the areas traditionally managed by the women.

But this is not the complete story. KG theology called for strict equality for women in inheritance and in other matters. Abusive behaviour towards women, whether spouses,

servant girls, or otherwise, was strictly punished. In this respect they were a century ahead of the rest of society. But the KG was unique and differed significantly from other Mennonites in the Molotschna who did not hold to such policies. Therefore, these policies did not merely reflect cultural values but something deeper and more significant. Upon reviewing the writings of the KG, such as the epistle of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff, circa 1820s, justifying equal inheritance rights for woman on scriptural grounds, it becomes clear that in their view the empowerment of women was mandated by scripture. In essence, it was a form of Biblical feminism, long before feminism became a household word within Western Civilization in the late 20th century (Note Four).

Conclusion.

It is unfortunate that so little information is available about pioneer women such as Sarah Loewen Plett, who played an indispensable and vital role in the development of our Province and Nation. Let us all remember it as a solemn duty to preserve and document the memory of our mothers and grandmothers, that in the future they might receive the recognition which they so richly deserve.

But the story of Sarah Loewen Plett and her cream pitchers does provide us with a view of

her attitudes and experiential embryo, her life-world. The fact that these items have been preserved as precious artifacts, surviving the migration from Russia to Canada, and in one case, two additional migrations to Mexico and Belize, speak volumes for the love and devotion which her family held for their beloved matriarch Sarah Loewen Plett, whose intelligence, survival strategies and genuine devotion had once guided the family to good fortune and the blessing of God.

Endnotes:

Note One: See my articles "Pioneer Women of the East Reserve" and "Matriarchies of the East Reserve," in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 1-26, for a more detailed discussion of matriarchy and the role of women within the KG.

Note Two: Maria Plett Reimer quoted in Plett, "Peter R. Reimer Biography," in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1812-1874* (Steinbach, Manitoba., 1994), 364.

Note Three: Story as told by Dick P. Loewen, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1998. Those readers interested in more about Sarah Meum and Ohm Kjnals can read my biography of them to be published in Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series.

Note Four: The letter by Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) is published in *Leaders*, pages 253-254.

Dish of the Centuries

"Dish of the Centuries", the Porcelain Dish/Dinner Plate of Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903), Kleefeld, Russia and Blumenhof, Manitoba, Canada, by great-grandson Leslie Plett, 923 Midridge Dr. S.E., Calgary, Alberta, T2X 1H5.

As has been the practice for so long in the past when the last parent in a home has passed away, the Last Will and Testament is reviewed and the family's assets are divided according to the dictation of the will. often among the next generation. The children then have the choice in what they want to do with these possessions. If they are large items, they often deteriorate and are discarded. However when these items are well cared for and maintained properly they can last for a long long time and are often handed down from generation to generation for others to



The Sarah Loewen Plett dinner plate, presumably part of a dinner setting, reveals the aesthetic values of a *Kleine Gemeinde* woman of means of the 1840s and 50s.

enjoy. When they are properly looked after and handed down they can acquire a great degree of value, prestige, and nostalgia.

I am sure when our great-grandmother Sarah Plett (1822-1903) packed up her lifetime belongings in the village of Blumenhoff, Borosenko in Imperial Russia in the spring of 1875, she knew that those pots, pans, plates and dishes she so carefully placed into boxes and trunks, would be needed when they eventually got to their new home in Blumenhof, Manitoba, Canada, located two miles north of the Village Museum in Steinbach. They would be needed on a continual daily basis as she would be cooking with them looking after the meals, critical to the diet and health of her husband, children and friends. As she had always done so faithfully in Russia, so it would also be in the new land.

Sarah packed her dishes carefully with crumpled paper and whatever packing material she could find to keep them well protected on the long journey to America. She knew that their baggage was being sent by wagon, train, ocean vessels, boats and ox carts, and would be handled many times over when moving them from load to load. Breakage was a good possibility. We don't know how many of the dishes and china did sur-



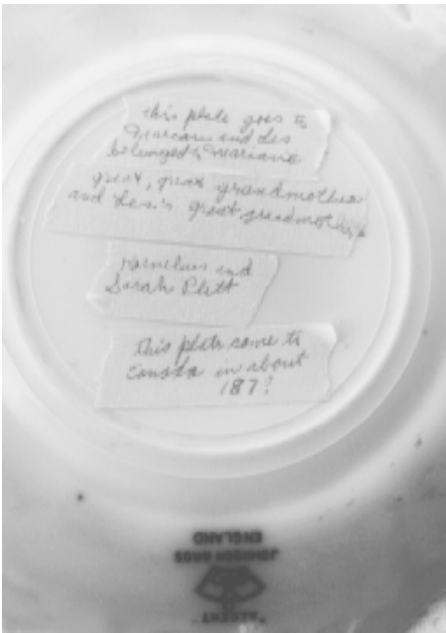
This picture shows a clear view of the manufacturer's logo. This dish has been made in England by Johnson Brothers, "REGENT" was the name of the pattern of the set that this dish comes from.

vive, however we do know of some items that did get here, and are still in existence today.

I understand that after our great-grandmother Sarah Plett's death in 1903, her kitchen items were divided among her children and that several items are still treasured



The back view of the same dish, where one tiny chip is shown on the rim and two spots where the paint is fading, you can see it is in reasonably good condition 123 years later. This is an indication that it has been well made, served a good purpose and been treasured by the descendants whom it has been entrusted to.



Tape has been placed on the back side of the plate, to indicate its origin and the fifth descending generation in Canada to whom it is being willed. We do not know how old it was and how long it had been used in Russia before it came to Canada, but likely it dates to around the 1840s or 50s. It may have been a present from Sarah's parents, possibly a wedding gift.

among her descendants today, as is the dish shown here.

I would like to thank Delbert Friesen of Wawanesa, Manitoba, who took the time and did such a remarkable job in making these pictures available. Showing the plate from all views and not missing a thing. Delbert, the second son-in-law of Ellen Plett is married to her second daughter, Shirley.

This plate has been standing on display in my mother-in-law, Ellen Helen Plett's china



A close up view of the blue floral design decorating the rim. A simple floral pattern, a pleasant reminder of nature at its most pristine and elegant, reflected in Kleine Gemeinde aesthetic values, and of course, the colour blue, a little darker than the traditional "Kleingemeinsch bleave" also known as "himmel bleave", a decorative acknowledgement of the supremacy of God in all matters great and small. In the centre of the plate, a five point floral pattern encompassing a circle with another five pointed flower.

cabinet in Wawanesa, Manitoba, for years. In fact she, must have been in possession of this plate as long as I have been part of the family. But I have only known that this plate came from Russia for the last several years. This plate was passed down from great-grandmother Mrs. Sarah Plett's kitchen to her 15th child, son David L. Plett and his wife, Helena Koop Plett, who lived in the community of Blumenhof, Manitoba. After that it was

passed to their 5th child Cornelius D. K. and Susanna Reimer Plett who farmed in Landmark, Manitoba. Later it was passed down to their oldest living child, Ellen Helen Plett, later Mrs. John K. Plett of Landmark. They farmed in Landmark for some time and then moved to Wawanesa, Manitoba in 1965 where she still lives today. I, Leslie Plett, am married to her oldest daughter, Marian.

Is there is anybody else who also is in possession of some of great-grandmother's kitchen items or other household articles or oven outside items from grandfathers shop or yard? It would be interesting and greatly appreciated if we could also know about these items and maybe even exchange photos as well.



Ellen Plett now age 77 displays the plate while sitting in a rocking chair in her apartment in Wawanesa, Manitoba, in February, 1998.

Notice to Subscribers.

The annual HSHS membership/subscription fee for *Preservings* has been increased to \$20.00 effective immediately. This increase is made with the intention of bringing the subscription/membership fee into line with printing, production and mailing costs of our news-magazine.

J. R. Friesen House

J. R. Friesen House, Steinbach, Manitoba, by Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1T4.

Only two years after Henry Ford consented to Jacob R. Friesen's request to start a Ford dealership in Steinbach in 1914, Jacob (or "J. R." as he was popularly known) decided that financial prospects were good enough to invest in a large new house on Main Street. Jacob and his wife Maria (eldest daughter of the merchant Klaas W. Reimer) had six children by then, and more room was needed for the growing family. The house would be a statement of magnificence and style, befitting one of the leading families of the community.

Located next door to the J. R. Friesen garage on the corner of Friesen Avenue, the house was constructed in 1916. It was a two-storey, 13-room structure with electricity, modern plumbing and heating. Thick, square pillars framed the entrance way. Curlicue carved decorations were added to the gables, and left there despite the request of church elders, unhappy with this

worldly display, that they be removed.

Outside, Virginia creepers grew on the south-facing wall. A double row of Manitoba maples, planted by Jacob's father, the pioneer Abram S. Friesen, stood in the front yard. The trees took up so much water that the lawn was rather scruffy, to Maria's chagrin. Once she thought she would plant flowers in the front and suggested to Jacob that one of the trees could be cut down to make some more growing room. Jacob, with a stubborn decisiveness reminiscent of his father, would have none of it: "Not one tree, not one branch and not one leaf!" he declared. The trees remained undisturbed.

The house had a porch running right along the front and one side, hardwood floors throughout, and all the modern conveniences of electricity and indoor plumbing. Upstairs there were five bedrooms and downstairs was the kitchen, dining room, living room and a parlour with bay



Rear view of "J. R. Friesen" house. Photo courtesy of Helen Zuchowski, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

windows. Later Jacob's brother-in-law K. W. Brandt built an addition on the second level, a screened-in verandah where the children slept in summertime. As well, a sun room and a laundry room were added on the first floor, and the family soon developed the practice of having their meals in the sun room all summer long, from May to October.

There was dark mahogany woodwork throughout the house and an ornate rug graced the living room, which was separated from the parlour by sliding doors. The furniture in the living room included a black mohair chesterfield trimmed with a flower pattern, bought from a Winnipeg wholesaler Jacob knew, named Harry Schwartz. From the ceiling hung a splendid chandelier. In the parlour were a black leather settee, two leather chairs, and a piano. This was also the music room, containing a gramophone, a guitar, and a banjo. In the dining room, a plate rail ran along the walls, supporting Maria's special china.

Maria even commissioned a mural for the master bedroom, at the head of the bed, depicting a path through woods. It was painted by Mr. Schnoor, a German immigrant who had a reputation as a house decorator in the village. On the opposite wall of the bedroom hung a large, retouched photograph of Jacob's parents, in an oval wooden frame.

Maria took great pride in the place and delighted in making it beautiful. She subscribed to *Die Hausfrau*, a German home-makers' magazine published in Milwaukee, from which she derived ideas for decorating, sewing, and recipes. There was a strict division of labour between herself and her husband: she did not par-



Painting of "J. R. Friesen" house painted by Helen Zuchowski, daughter of J. R. and Maria Friesen, during the 1950s.



The J. R. Friesen house as it originally stood just north of the "J. R. Friesen" garage. This photograph by Jakob D. Barkman, Steinbach, is the only one available to date of the house in its original location. Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 7, December 1996, page 50.

ticipate in the running of his business in any way, but the house was her domain. Their two sons, Edwin and Bill, were expected to help their father in the garage, but the five daughters were recruited to help run the household. Maria made a point of teaching them all she could about house-keeping and cooking. The second-oldest of the sisters, Catherine, helped her mother with organizing the younger ones to do their share of the housework, an assignment that she took very seriously--"woe betide anyone if they didn't do it," as the surviving sisters recall today. Catherine was especially concerned that the woodwork be kept shiny. Once she broke out crying because her less fastidious sisters left their fingerprints on it right after she had polished it.

Upstairs, the children shared the bedrooms, except for the oldest girl at home, who would get a room to herself. In the summer, the sun shone in through the screens of the sleeping balcony while the orioles and robins sang in the trees. The orioles, the children said, sang "Peter, Peter, Peter," calling the name of their uncle Peter Reimer, who boarded with them for a while. One of the sisters, Helen Zuchowski, recalls that when she was a young girl she woke up one morning to the singing birds, and the sunlight filtering through the green leaves, and wondered where she was. "Maybe this is heaven," she thought.

The attic, empty at first, gradually filled up with stuff as the years went by. All the storm windows were stored there, but many less practical things as well: multitudes of shoes, old clothes, back copies of *Die Hausfrau* (the covers of which had been torn off to decorate the rafters), an old cradle which had held each of the babies in turn. There was a bookcase, jammed with old volumes. It was a place of wonder.



Wedding picture of J. R. and Maria, 1903. This marriage represented the union of two of Steinbach's most powerful families. Photo from *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, page 73.

As the years passed the house was slowly emptied of its inhabitants. When Maria died of a stroke on Good Friday, 1938, she seemed to take some of the warmth of the house with her. The children grew up and established households of their own, and by 1949 Jacob, who by that time had remarried, moved out of the house. Its rooms were rented out for a number of years until it was sold in the mid-50s, about five years

after Jacob's death. The board of the Kleine Gemeinde nursing home purchased it at a very low price and moved it to Hanover Avenue where it served as an "Altenheim" for a number of years. Subsequently resold and renovated, it still stands as a private residence at 255 Hanover Street today, previously owned by Wil and Sheila Penner and currently owned by Jerry and Bev Friesen (no relation to the J. R. Friesen clan).

Mennonite inheritance practices recognized equality of sexes

Inheritance has not often been a topic of study among Mennonites, said Royden Loewen in a February 28, 1998, lecture to the B.C. Mennonite Historical Society, Abbotsford. Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, said Mennonites have an uncommon inheritance tradition developed in Flanders and Friesland.

In this system, "both sexes, not only boys, inherited equally," and farms were partitioned at the death of the first spouse between survivors. This is unlike the English system in which the eldest son inherited the whole farm, or the Russian system in which the youngest son inherited.

"It was uniquely Mennonite in the sense that all Mennonites practised it, Dutch and Swiss, and unique in that only a minority of Europeans, small pockets here and there, did," said Loewen.

Our Mennonite forebears saw religious and economic issues as inseparable, said Loewen. When Dutch Mennonites moved to Danzig, one of the concessions they received was that "even rented land could be passed on to children and divided into small parcels."

The Russian government offered Mennonites military exemption and autonomous colonies but there was disagreement on inheritance practices. In 1810, the Chortitz colony stated that "the operating principles of Mennonite inheritance are biblically based." The surviving spouse "retains one half of the other half goes to the inheritors (children) in equal amounts."

This practice of sexual equality was brought to Manitoba. This was a radical departure from the larger society, since prairie women had no property rights until the 1918 Dower Act.

Loewen described a 1902 Manitoba surrogate court action in which Sommerfelder elders argued that inheritance had to recognize both men and women because if, as the Apostle Peter writes, men and women are "joint heirs of the grace of life, how much more of the temporal good."

"We consider it right that...all children, both sons and daughters, shall be joint heirs and share alike of the...estate," the Mennonites told the court.

This practice did not continue, said Loewen, because of church schism, farm commercialization, and the Depression. The greatest chal-

lenges to a 400-year inheritance practice were the provincial laws which the church began to follow.

By the middle of this century, "the scriptural rationale for ordinances shifted from a social imperative of 'justice' and 'protection' to moral virtues of 'guarding against avarice' and 'avoiding the law courts of the unjust,'" said Loewen.

Recent strategies encourage making wills and bequests to church organizations, and avoiding succession duties.

Loewen examined over 100 wills probated in Manitoba between 1936 and 1962. "Rarely was there a hint...of privileging sons over daughters," said Loewen. If gender played a part, it was to repay daughters for services to elderly parents. But increasingly, wills dictated that "the widow was to receive considerably less than half the estate as in Mennonite tradition."

"A new view of women as the wards of men has seemingly arisen," said Loewen.

Henry Neufeld

Reprinted from the *Canadian Mennonite*, April 13, 1998, Volume 2, Number 8, page 14.

Osterwick South Cemetery

Osterwick South Cemetery, 1874-1998, Section 25-7-4E, by Rev. Martin Friesen,
1022 Prince Rupert Ave, Winnipeg, MB, R2K 1X1.

Introduction.

On a gentle rise, just a little over one and a half miles west of New Bothwell, Manitoba, a four foot high cairn helps to recall the people who once were a part of the village of Osterwick and surrounding area. Like many older cemeteries most of the original markers are no longer there, having succumbed to the elements.

With the arrival of the Mennonites from Russia in 1874, Osterwick was one of the villages established in the East Reserve. It was situated on Section 25-7-4 east in the Rural Municipality of Hanover. Its inhabitants came from the Bergthal Colony, a daughter colony of the Chortitza settlement in Russia.

The Village, 1874.

Osterwick was the home of Mrs. Anna (Banman) Friesen (1808-86) and several of her children and their families. Her husband Peter (1812-75) died the year before she moved to Canada. Katherine Friesen Wiebe in the book, *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874-1910*, edited by John Dyck, refers to Anna Banman Friesen as the matriarch of the village of Osterwick. Mrs. Wiebe states that three of six Osterwick family heads listed in 1881 were Anna Friesen's sons and another was married to her daughter. Mrs. Anna Banman Friesen was my great-great grandmother.

Osterwick was also the home of the first two Waisenmaenner (administrators) of the Chortitzer Gemeinde Waisenamt. The Waisenamt, a mutual aid institution, among other things, kept money in trust for widows and orphaned children.

Cornelius B. Friesen (1833-1909), like his father Peter had done in Russia, served the church with dignity and respect. Following his death Cornelius T. Friesen, his son was elected to administer the Chortitzer Waisenamt. In the article referred to above, Katherine Friesen Wiebe quotes the historian Martin W. Friesen from the Menno Colony, Paraguay in reference to Cornelius T. Friesen, "For many years he was the administrator of the Orphan's Trust and discharged his duties in that office faithfully and responsibly."

Martin C. Friesen (1889-1968), son of Cornelius T. Friesen (1860-1929) and Katherina nee Friesen (1863-1908), taught in the private village school in Osterwick for many years. His gifts were further recognized when he was elected to serve as a minister in the Chortitzer Mennonite Church in 1924.

When the Arran School District #1960 was formed by an Order-in-Council of the Province of Manitoba on April 8, 1919 the traditional education program changed drastically. The new one room school was situated on the same section just half a mile west of the village. Many people were unhappy about this change. This

was one of the reasons that led to the migration to the Chaco in Paraguay, South America in 1927. Martin C. Friesen took an active part in the move from Manitoba to Paraguay, who now was the Aeltester (Bishop) in the East Reserve having been elected to this office in 1925 at the age of 36. Fifty-three years after the first Mennonites from Russia had settled on Canadian soil, some were on the move once again to another continent.

One could include many others who once were a part of this thriving village -- a village, like so many in the East Reserve, no longer in existence. The one farmyard left is that of Stan and Mary Toews, less than half a mile north from the cemetery. It was on the southern end of Osterwick and has none of the original buildings standing today.

The South Cemetery.

The village of Osterwick had two cemeteries. In this article we are looking at the Osterwick South Cemetery. The Osterwick North Cemetery is on Provincial Road 311 on Section 36-7-4 east. Like some other cemeteries, the Osterwick South Cemetery was not always receiving the necessary upkeep and maintenance. It is unfortunate that when the original markers of the earlier burials began to deteriorate efforts

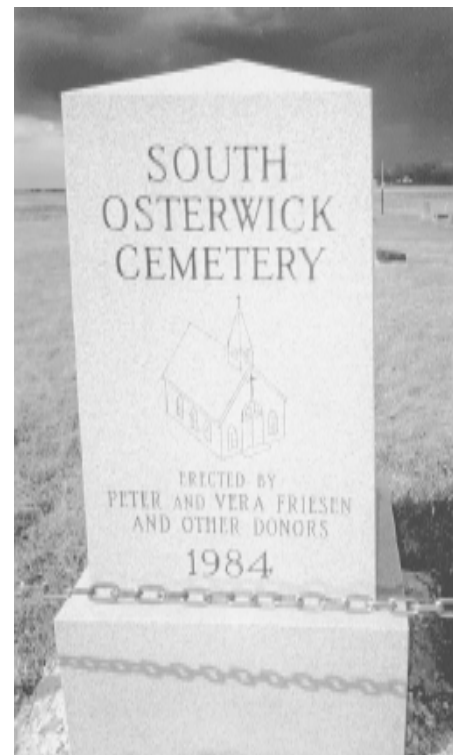


West side of the memorial cairn at Osterwick South cemetery: Mr. Cornelius B. Friesen and Mr. Cornelius T. Friesen were the first two Waisenmänner of the Chortitzer Waisenamt in Manitoba. Mr. Peter T. Friesen was my paternal grandfather and Cornelius B. Friesen was my paternal great-grandfather. Please note the inscription at the bottom, "18 unknown names". I expand somewhat on this in my article.

were not made to restore or replace them. The only one still standing and with fading inscriptions is the one at the grave of Peter B. Friesen (1844-1909). He was the original owner of the farmyard now owned by Stan and Mary Toews.

The records of the burials are incomplete because of loss or misplacement. The memorial cairn lists the names of forty people and also gives recognition to eighteen people who are buried in the Osterwick South Cemetery whose names are not known. In all likelihood Mrs. Anna (Banman) Friesen, the matriarch of Osterwick is buried in one of these graves.

In 1984, Diedrich A. Hiebert (1914-92) who was born in Osterwick and farmed just east of the village for many years was instrumental in getting a group of local residents together to help in restoring the cemetery. The whole area received much needed attention and a chain link fence replaced the many broken wooden posts and rusted barbed wire. Mr. Hiebert also solicited for funds from former residents of Osterwick



South side of the Osterwick South Cemetery. You will note that the cairn has "south" first. From the information I received it appeared that Osterwick South was used as well. I have used this designation in my article. (To me it makes more sense, since the designation "South Osterwick" and "North Osterwick" could be interpreted as two separate villages. That was not the case, since the "north Osterwick" cemetery belonged to the same village.) Less than half mile north is the farmyard of Stan and Mary Toews, the only one left of Osterwick. None of the original buildings are left.

and descendants of those buried there in order to erect a memorial cairn.

When the funds were difficult to obtain he talked to Peter H. Friesen a former resident of Osterwick and founder of East-Man Feeds. Peter and his wife Vera very generously donated a large portion of the costs. Mr. Friesen has many relatives and ancestors buried there including his parents Peter C. (1888-1982) and Agatha (Hiebert) (1889-1943) Friesen.

Memorial Cairn.

The names of those inscribed on the memorial cairn, as one would expect, includes many Friesens. For some reason or another the first names of the deceased women who were married are not listed. Beginning on the west side of the cairn they are: Mr. Cornelius B. Friesen, Mrs. Cornelius B. Friesen, Mr. Peter B. Friesen, Mr. Cornelius T. Friesen, Mrs. Cornelius T. Friesen, Mr. Peter T. Friesen, Mr. Martin T. Friesen, Mrs. Peter F. Hiebert, Abe Hiebert, Mrs. Cornelius C. Friesen, Mrs. John W. Friesen, Martin T. Friesen, Agatha T. Friesen, Marie Friesen. This side includes the inscription "18 unknown names".

The names on the north side are: Jacob F. Friesen, Marie F. Friesen, Johan Friesen, Peter Friesen, Miss Susie Friesen, Miss Marie Friesen, Miss (not even an initial is listed) Friesen, Henry Hiebert, Jacob H. Friesen, Mr. Cornelius Friesen, Mr. John N. Harder, Miss Maria Harder, Mrs. Diedrich Hiebert.

On the east side the following names are inscribed: Mr. Cornelius Wiebe, Johan G. Wiebe, Barbara G. Wiebe, Jacob G. Wiebe, Heinrich G. Wiebe, Mr. Peter C. Friesen, Mrs. Peter C. Friesen, Cornie H. Friesen, Jacob H. Friesen, Heinrich H. Friesen, Johan H. Friesen, Martin H. Friesen, Peter H. Friesen.

Tragedies.

The name Cornelius Wiebe on the east side of the cairn is in remembrance of my maternal grandfather, Cornelius P. Wiebe (1878-1921). He was the grandson of Aeltester (bishop) Gerhard (1827-1900) and Elizabeth (Dyck) (1828-1876) Wiebe. When Cornelius Wiebe's first wife Agatha (Gerbrandt) (1881-1918) died, he married my widowed paternal grandmother, Marigan Weiland Friesen (1876-1957). Her first husband Peter T. Friesen (1857-1918) was the son of Cornelius B. Friesen, mentioned above, and Anna Toews (1834-1899) and is also buried in the Osterwick cemetery.

Upon his marriage to Marigan Weiland Friesen, Cornelius P. Wiebe and his six remaining children became residents of Osterwick as well. Six of his offspring had already died. When the typhoid fever epidemic struck the community in late 1921, three more of his children and he himself passed away within a three month period. The names of these three are engraved below their father's name on the east side of the cairn. They were aged between thirteen and eighteen years.

Tragedy also befell the family of Peter C. and Agatha Friesen who were referred to earlier. Four of their sons succumbed to the diph-



This is the gravestone of Peter B. Friesen. See notes for photo below for more information. The inscription is hard to read. I was, however, able to record the information. All photographs for this are courtesy of Martin Friesen, the author.

theria epidemic within three weeks in the spring of 1920. They were between five and ten years old. A brother of these three had died in infancy three years earlier and another brother died a few years after their deaths. The east side of the cairn also bears their names below those of their parents. Several other people who died quite young are also buried here. Although one is aware of the higher mortality rate of children and youth in the past, there seems to be a larger number of younger people buried at the Osterwick South Cemetery in proportion to the total number at this site, even for that time.

Conclusion.

For a number of decades now, very few burials have taken place at the Osterwick South Cemetery. Many who had connections with the village of Osterwick are buried in the Niverville or Chortitz (Randolph) cemetery. Since the cairn was erected, only half a dozen or so burials have taken place.



Looking south. The cairn in the centre, of course. To the right is the only gravestone left of the earlier burials. It marks the grave of Peter B. Friesen, son of Anna Banman Friesen who has been referred to as the matriarch of Osterwick. Peter B. Friesen was the original owner of the farmyard were Stan and Mary Toews now reside. The inscription is faded and hard to read. It says, "Hier Ruhen die gebeine des Verstorbenen Peter B. Friesen geboren den 26 Dez 1844 gestorben den 10 Okt 1909". Then follows a poem and I write it the way it is inscribed: Du gingst dem Tode froh entgegen. Zum Himmel war Dein letzter Blick. Dort lohnest Dich des Vaters Segen. Dort blühet dir das ew'ge Glück.

The last one, at the time of this writing, was the interment of my Uncle John W. Friesen (1910-77) on January 16, 1977. He was the son of Peter T. and Marigan (Weiland) Friesen, referred to earlier. His first wife Anna (Toews) (1908-46) and two of their children are buried here as well. Their daughter, Agatha, died in infancy in 1945 and their son, Martin, passed away in 1942 at the age of three and a half years. A tragic farm accident in which a horse kicked him, resulting in serious head injuries, claimed his life.

It is my hope that this article will help us to remember and to reflect on the lives of those who have gone before us. For some they were but a few short years or even only days and for others it was a longer journey. They all touched the lives of others and helped to shape and mould their time. With gratitude we thank God for the rich legacy they have left for us. May we also be willing to do our part in our time.

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of Wisdom." Psalm 90:12 N.I.V.

Sources:

According to my information the Osterwick cemetery was (is) known by both South Osterwick and Osterwick South Cemetery. I have used Osterwick South in my article. This makes more sense to me, since the designation South Osterwick and North Osterwick could be interpreted as two separate villages. That was not the case, as you know, since both cemeteries belonged to the same village.

Besides using *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874-1910* as a source, I also used the *Bergthal Gemeindebuch*, published by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society and my own records. And the cemetery records, of course.

It might be of interest to you that my records agree with Katherine Friesen Wiebe's as they pertain to Peter and Anna Banman Friesen. It appears that the Gemeindebuch has their birthdays reversed. Their dates of death certainly are reversed since it was Mr. Friesen who died in 1875 in Russia before his wife moved to Canada.

Johann Esau, Fraktur, New Year's Wish 1836

Submitted by Elizabeth Reimer Friesen, Box 21,562, Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1B3.

Johann Esau (1828-1906) who grew up in the village of Fischau, Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, left some *Fraktur* art for posterity. He was the son of Peter Esau and cousin to Johann Esau (1832-1904), later of Rosenfeld, Manitoba, and KG Brandaeltester and thus a relative to the family of Elisabeth Esau Plett (1893-1976), see article by Dr. Harvey Plett, *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, page 58-61.

Johann Esau's (1828-1906) grandfather Cornelius Esau (b. 1772), settled on Wirtschaft 19 in the village of Fischau, Molotschna Colony, in 1804-- see "Cornelius Esau Genealogy 1772," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 329-333.

Johann Esau (1828-1906) had moved to Annenfeld, Crimea, from where he came to Canada in 1875 settling in Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba. He was a bachelor. In the last years before Johann's death, he was looked after in the home of Jakob T. Barkman (1848-1936), Heuboden, and gave this beautiful piece of *Fraktur* art to their daughter, Margaretha Barkman (1892-1975), who married Jakob R. E. Reimer. They were the parent of Elizabeth Reimer Friesen, current owner of the 1836 New Year's wish.

Though the KG went to considerable pains to cooperate enthusiastically with the reforms of their mentor, Johann Cornies, they were evidently not prepared to abandon their traditional artform, *Fraktur*, which he had prohibited in the school system on the grounds that it was too sissified. A number of samples of *Fraktur* have survived and at least two teachers are known to have taught it to their children in the post-Cornies period.

The New Year's Wish of 1836 is a remarkable piece of artwork for an 8 year-old boy. We are grateful to the Barkman/Reimer/Friesen family for preserving this valuable artifact for posterity. See article on Cornelius P. Friesen, "Irrgarten", *Preservings*, No. 8, Part One, pages 55-58, for an explanation of how artwork like this was used by teachers to instruct various subjects as well as passing on a thousand year-old artform.

-by Delbert Plett



Johann Esau (1828-1906), New Year's Wish 1836. Unfortunately we are unable to reproduce this beautiful piece of artwork in colour which would so much better portray and illustrate the aesthetic tastes of conservative Mennonites. The flowers at the top are coloured red and rose-pink and the border around the wish itself is in yellow-gold.

Book Reviews

Please forward review copies of books of relevance to the history and culture of the Hanover Steinbach area to the Editor, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, phone Steinbach 1(204)-326-06454 or Winnipeg 1(204) 474-5031.

John Dyck and William Harms, editors, *1880 village census of the Mennonite West Reserve* (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1998), 500 pages, \$30.00.

The eagerly awaited Volume Two of the "West Reserve Historical Series" is now available and provides much information about early settlers of that area. The first volume, "Reinlander Gemeinde Buch," is the church register of the group referred to as the "Old Colony" beginning in 1880 in Manitoba. This new publication is firstly a reproduction of an internal settlement administration census of the same year by village. Family units with names, birth dates, and village lot numbers recorded.

The second section is a reproduction of settlement administration taxation records, mostly for the year 1881, again by household heads within each village. Information given include assessed value of buildings, cultivated acreage, livestock numbers, individual farm implements, total assessment, taxes due, and a cross reference to the village lot number. From this one obtains a view of agricultural progress and the individuals economic situation six years after arrival of the first settlers on the Reserve. For the most villages, a sketch is included showing location of lots and names of owners. This is a valuable addition to our knowledge of settlement patterns. For those unfamiliar with the Reserve, a helpful map showing orientation of the villages themselves is included.

Section Three is the section most readers will consult first. It is an alphabetical listing of the families in Section One. To this has been added much data which will assist in family research: Lot number and village, homestead location (quarter, section, township range), month and year of arrival in Canada and name of ship, reference to church registry, names of parents and cross reference to them if included in this census, further genealogical data for several generations of ancestors where this information was available, colony and village of origin in Russia, reference to published family histories, notes concerning transfers to other churches or migration to Saskatchewan or Mexico, and some photographs of early settlers. Very helpful is an index to this Section by maiden name of spouses. Till now, there has not been a comprehensive overview of the West Reserve, but here it is found in one volume.

Section Four of the book profiles administrators and church leaders of the settlement.

The fifth section reproduces the 1891 Federal Census for the Mennonite West Reserve. By this date, many Bergthal Colony descen-

dants were residents on the West Reserve and are therefore recorded. An informative inclusion is country of birth of each person and their respective parents. It would be easier to access this section if it had been published alphabetically, rather than following the format of the original.



The final section of the book is a listing of Mennonite immigrants arriving on passenger ships landing at Quebec between 1881 and 1896. This book is indispensable for those researching early settlement of Russian Mennonites in Manitoba and for those seeking their family roots.

Reviewed by Bruce Wiebe, Winkler.

in 1858 and moved to Khortitsa. Jacob Hildebrand (1802 Sep 27 - 1847 May 31) was a son of Peter Hildebrand (1763 Oct 9 - 1823 Jan 10) & Helena Adreella (1769 Jul 5 - 1828 Jan 20). Anna Eisenstein (b. 1805 Dec. 10) was a daughter of Jacob Eisenstein (1770 Dec 28 - 1859 Jan 24) & Katharina Peters (1772 Jun 2 - 1851 Feb 20). Heinrich's brother and sisters emigrated from the Bergthal Colony. Some later settled in Sommerfeld. For Heinrich's family see Anna Gehring Harter 5408. Reference: B184-A72; Postweek, 178-181; *Mennonite III*, MW 1880 Feb 15, 1882 Mar 15; *GIMH*, PW.

| | | |
|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Walt HILDEBRAND, Isak | 1828 Nov 15 | Isak Hildebrand |
| HERGEN, Catharina | 1834 Sep 20 | Katharina Petrus |
| Homestead - NE 15-2-5W | R165-1 | Sarah Siemens |
| Children: | | Ship: Prussia Jan 1878 |
| Catharina Hildebrand | 1864 Apr 15 | |
| Helena | 1866 Nov 15 | |
| Isak | 1869 Feb 4 | |
| Jacob | 1871 May 14 | |
| Cornelia | 1873 Sep 4 | |
| Anna | 1877 Mar 7 | |

Comments: From Neudorf, Khortitsa where Cornelia was born. Katharina Petrus

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A photo of part of page 226 of the "1880 Village Census" reveals why this book will be a best seller. It combines the highly accurate data found in the "Settlement Registers" with annotations adding additional genealogical and historical information as well as photographs of the pioneers. The editors of this book deserve a great deal of recognition for the invaluable permanent contribution they have made to the study of Mennonites in Manitoba. The publication of "1880 Village Census", Volume Two of the West Reserve Historical Series, is the third and final component now covering the entire Mennonite immigration to Manitoba of 1874-80. The Bergthaler portion is contained in the Bergthaler Gemeindebuch, Volume Two of the East Reserve Historical Series, and the Kleine Gemeinde portion in "The Genealogy Register" of Aeltester Peter Toews, in Profile 1874, Volume Four of the Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series. These three works make the Mennonite immigrants into Manitoba among the best researched and documented of all Manitoba cultural groups.

Al Hamm, *Peter K. Funk Family Tree* (Steinbach, 1981), 39 pages.

Peter K. Funk (1860-1924) was the son of Peter Funk and Maria Krahn BGB B125, who settled in Gnadenfeld, west of Grünthal in 1874. In 1880 Peter married Helena Wiebe (1862-1921), daughter of Bernhardt and Cornelia Wiebe. Peter and Helena were already living on their own at the time of the 1881 census.

The book by Al Hamm provides a brief history of Peter K. and Helena Funk and a listing of their 17 children and descendants. It is evident that Peter K. Funk was a man with a zest for adventure, homesteading in Lobethal, Saskatchewan in 1903, relocating to Herbert in 1910, in 1913 to Gouldtown, and back to Manitoba in 1920 where they both passed away.

Some notable descendants of this family include Rev. Ben Friesen, Steinbach, and his son Lyndon Friesen, manager of CHSM Radio; Al Hamm, the author who is also manager of the Steinbach Credit Union Ltd.; and Mrs. John Friesen, nee Helen Funk, former broiler farmers of Grunthal.

Some additional copies of this book are still available from the author, Box 755, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0. Reviewed by Delbert F. Plett

Editor's Note: See article by Al Hamm on Peter K. Funk elsewhere in this newsletter.

Peter F. Broesky, editor, *Broeski Heritage: 1990 Edition* (Box 178, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, 1990), 102 pages.

Without a doubt, Johann Broeski (1838-1912) was one of the most colourful characters to settle in the East Reserve in 1874. He had worked for Kleine Gemeinde farmers in Borosenko, Imperial Russia, and followed them to Manitoba together with Gottlieb Jahnke and Julius Redinzel. All three married daughters of veteran Molotschna school teacher Cornelius Friesen (1810-92): see Helena Jahnke, "Lineage of my Grandparents, Klaas Friesens, born in West Prussia," in *Profile 1874*, pages 209-212, for the story of this family.

In this way, Johann became associated with a family that had a long proud tradition in the teaching profession: Anna's brother Abraham R. Friesen was a veteran school teacher in Lichtenau, Molotschna, widely known for the detailed journals he kept, while her sister Maria was the first women school teacher among the Mennonites in Manitoba: see article in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, page 9. Gilbert Unger, present-day Superintendent of Hanover School Division is another descendant of this family.



Anna Friesen Broesky (1848-1927), wearing traditional *Kleine Gemeinde* apparel. Photo courtesy of *Broeski Heritage* book.

Being of German Lutheran background, Johann was baptised and joined the *Kleine Gemeinde* on May 20, 1874, just before the first immigrants departed Russia. On December 19, 1874, Broeski married Anna, daughter of Cornelius Friesen, the first wedding to take place in Blumenort. "Johann's second marriage was quite traumatic and ended in separation, and so did his membership with the Blumenort *Kleine Gemeinde*" (Page 2).

Anna became mentally ill and Johann moved out of the home living at various locations such as Heuboden and Didsbury, Alberta. Johann died in British Columbia separated from his family.

Anna was taken in by her parents and looked after by the Blumenort church. The journals of neighbour Abr. F. ("Fula") Reimer contained numerous references to her situation, such as when she tried to burn her house down. Anna died September 9, 1927, and was buried in Grünthal. She was honoured by a lengthy write-up in the *Steinbach Post*, September 14, 1927, by school teacher Gerhard G. Kornelsen.

The Broeski book quotes the following statement about Anna: "According to Katherina (Jahnke) Klassen, niece of Johann and Anna Broeski, her aunt Anna was a praying mother and grandmother, who prayed much for her children and grandchildren" (Page 3).

Evidently the teaching profession which

Coming in some future issue: the full and unabridged story of Johann Broeski, the most colourful settler of the East Reserve, by grandson Rev. Peter Broesky, Steinbach, Manitoba.

ran so deeply among Anna's siblings did not infiltrate into her family. Some of the Broeski sons joined the Chortitzer church and lived in Schöneberg, northeast of Grünthal. Cornelius F. Broeski was an aggressive farmer, owning a threshing outfit and steam-engine: see *Grünthal Heritage*, pages 50-54, for pictures of Johann, Abram and Cornelius F. Broeski. Son Martin F. Broeski (1887-1921) was an inventor and built the first car in southeastern Manitoba in 1905. In 1914 Martin moved to Saskatchewan, homesteading north of Morse. He was appointed as one of the delegates to investigate settlement opportunities in Paraguay but died of heart attack before this came to pass. Daughter Anna Broeski married Peter W. ("Schmedt") Toews, well-known Steinbach blacksmith who moved to Swalwell, Alberta, in 1907: see Peter W. Toews, "Life's Chronicle," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 137-155. They were the parents of Herman B. Toews, formerly Calgary, Alberta, an avid genealogist.

The "Broeski Book" provides a good biography of both Johann and wife Anna, as well as for some of the children. The authors of *Broeski Heritage* are to be commended for their forthrightness and honesty in publishing the story with all the warts and wrinkles, something which many people do not have the courage to do. But this is the stuff that real history is made of and will provide a lasting legacy for family and all descendants of the East Reserve. The good in our history can serve as a heritage for generations to come and the bad can be an example so that descendants need not suffer the same mistakes.

It bears to be said that the Broeski family book relied heavily on the research done in 1988 by Orlynn Sawatzky, then a Grade 12 history student at Steinbach Bible College. This demonstrates how useful these high school research projects can be, enriching not only the student doing the research by requiring interviews with grandparents and older members of the community, but actually documenting immensely important oral traditions and stories which would otherwise have gone lost.

Robert Broeski, West Bank, B. C., is another family member who has done extensive research on the colourful story of Johann Broeski and hopefully he will share some of the fruits of his labour with *Preservings* in years to come.

The stated purpose of the *Broeski Heritage* was to be an interim family book while a more complete and detailed book was being prepared. We can only hope that such a book will be forthcoming as the 1990 edition is sold out. If the present work is any indication readers can anticipate a family book which will be colourful, interesting, meaningful, thoroughly researched and well-documented.

Reviewed by Delbert F. Plett

Margaret Froese, Susan Drysdale, Cathy Elchuk, editors, *Peter (Reimer) & Maria Froese* (Grünthal, Manitoba, R0A 1R0, 1987), 209 pages.

The Froese book starts with the family of Abraham Froese (1839-1922) and Katharina Reimer (1834-1914). Although originating from the Bergthal Colony, for some reason



The Peter R. and Maria Froese and Family 1948: l. to r. David, Bill, John, Henry, Jakob, Abram and Peter. Front: Margaret, Helen, Anna, Betty, Susan, Tina. Seated: Maria nee Penner, and Peter R. Froese. Presumably the family photograph was taken as a remembrance for those family branches moving to Paraguay. This photo is similar but slightly different from the one published in the Froese book at page 18. Photograph courtesy of Tina Reimer Plett, Box 427, Belize, C.A., presently the custodian of the photograph collection of her grandmother, Susanna Penner Kornelsen, the sister to Maria. Susanna Penner Kornelsen for many years was the matriarch of Spanish Lookout, Belize.

this family is not listed in the Bergthal Gemeindebuch.

Abraham Froese and family came to Canada in 1876. They were listed in the village of Neuenburch in the 1874-76 "Brot Schult Registers". This village apparently dissipated with the secondary emigration to the West Reserve (Altona area), and by the time of the 1881 census the Abraham Froese family is listed in Schöneberg, northeast of Grünthal. They are listed in Schöneberg in the "Seelenliste" of 1881 (*Working Papers*, page 156) as well as in the 1883 tax records.

On October 11, 1882, Abraham Froese filed for a homestead on SW4-6-6E and the NW32-5-6E. In time Froese became a substantial landowner with 4 quarters of land in the Burwalde area.

The Froese book is a genealogy and history of the family of Peter R. Froese, son of Abraham. November 15, 1892, Peter married Maria Penner (1875-1959), daughter of Peter Penner, Schöneberg, BGB B332. Thus their children were cousins to Susanna Reimer, wife of Cornelius R. Reimer, Aeltester of the Mexican Kleine Gemeinde, and to Peter Penner, grandfather of Vern Penner of New Bothwell. The book is a history of their family and is well done, with biographies for each of the children, photographs and of course the genealogical listing.

Some well-known Froese descendants in the Hanover Steinbach area include: Mrs. Henry Klassen, who bought the Jakob F. Barkman farm in Steinbach and whose daughter Mrs. John Esau currently lives in Steinbach; Peter F. Wiens, Grunthal, backhoe contractor; Ben Esau, Steinbach, construction supervisor; Ben Funk, Steinbach, electrician, deceased; and Peter and Kay Froese, farmers, formerly Kleefeld, currently retired, Henry Street, Steinbach.

Reviewed by Delbert F. Plett

Stephen Brandt, *The Pries Family Tree Descendants of Jakob Pries Feb. 14, 1840 and Elisabeth Esau May 22, 1844* (Box 117, Blumenort, 1992), 74 pages.

As indicated in the title of the "Pries Family Book" it endeavours to list the descendants of Jakob Pries (1840-1912) and Elisabeth Esau (1844-1927). No history or biographical information is provided.

My curiosity was aroused as soon as I saw the book. I checked with the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch* to see if I could discover something about the historical origins of this family. I quickly found that the family was not listed in the "Bergthal Gemeindebuch" indicating that the Pries family came to Manitoba on their own and not as part of any Gemeinde or Mennonite congregation, likely an "old" Colony family.

Jakob and Elisabeth Pries, however, did not move to the Winkler area as did most of their co-religionists. Rather they chose to settle in the East Reserve in the village of Gnadenfeld, west of modern-day Grunthal,

where they took out a Homestead on NW30-5-5E, on August 11, 1875, within days of arriving in Manitoba. They are still listed in Gnadenfeld in the 1881 census and many of their descendants live there to the present-day. One of them, Jessie Kornelsen, is married to Peter Froese, the current Hanover Councillor for the Grunthal area, and still lives on a large farm in the area. Son Jakob E. Pries purchased the NW31-5-5E in 1897.

Jakob Pries must have been well-regarded by his fellow villagers and apparently served as the village mayor--he submitted the "Seelenliste" report required by the Municipal authorities in 1883. His insurance coverage in 1881 totalled \$400--house 200, furniture 150, ancillary house (possibly for Elisabeth's elderly mother) \$50, wagon \$50 and plow \$60. According to the 1883 tax records, Jakob Pries was a farmer of medium wealth with an assessment of 626.

Two photographs are published with the book. The first is quite historic with a family grouping consisting of Jakob and Elisabeth, her mother, Mrs. Esau, and Katharina, a niece of Elisabeth. Jakob Pries died in 1912 and therefore the photograph must have been taken prior to that. I would guess that the photo likely dates from around 1900. The second photo was previously published in *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, page 12, for the story of Dietrich D. Wiebe (1868-1930), whose second wife was a Pries. I believe the photograph had already been published some years earlier in the *Steinbach Post*. From the picture we gather that the family, or a very substantial portion, moved to Paraguay in 1926/7.

Other well-known descendants of the family include: Elizabeth, Mrs. David G. Plett, Rockrose Dairy, Kleefeld; Jeff and Susan Broesky, "Hairline", Steinbach; Agatha, wife of Abe Fuchs, former R.M. of Hanover grader operator; Jake Wiens, former electrician Grunthal; Frank W. Giesbrecht, Barkman Concrete; Willie Wiebe, classical guitarist; and Tina Schroeder, wife of R. M. of Hanover Councillor, Neil Warkentin, to name a few.

It is evident that this is a prominent and influential family. In attempting to list the members of the Pries family, the author of this work has made an immensely important contribution. One only hopes that it will lead to another more complete book, with the historical background of the patriarch and matriarch, as well the exciting stories of the members of the Pries family as they continue to contribute to the national well-being of both Paraguay and Canada.

Reviewed by Delbert F. Plett

Margaret Maier, *John Peters Family Tree 1863-1993* (Winnipeg, 1997), 96 pages photocopied, legal size format, spiral bound.

Most students of Mennonite history are well familiar with the touching story of "Das Verstossene Kind". The "rejected child" was a little baby boy thrown into a pig pen in the village of Heuboden, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, by his mother, one of the Russian

maids working for the Mennonites. The little baby was rescued by the village women. Later the child was abandoned again and adopted as the foster son of Oberschulz Jakob Peters, district mayor of the entire Bergthal Colony. Peters took little Johann with him to Manitoba when he emigrated in 1876. Eventually Johann adopted the Peters surname and in 1887 he became a member of the Chortitzer church.

In 1889 Johann Peters married Katharina Falk. They homesteaded north of Plum Coulee and later bought a section of land in Lowe Farm. They had 10 children. Katharina passed away in 1915 and a year later, Johann married Nettie Wall. Together they had 9 children.

Today the descendants of Johann Peters number over 600 and most of them are listed in this book compiled by granddaughter, Margaret Maier, nee Penner. The book has a limited amount of biographical information and a few photographs. It is reproduced by photocopy.

Anyone interested in obtaining a copy of the book may write Margaret Maier at 16 Spruce Grove, 1899 St. Mary's Road, Winnipeg. Copies of the book are available for \$12 plus postage.

John K. Reimer, *Cornelius R. Reimer (1902-1959)* (Private printing, 1989), 51 pages.

Over the centuries the Church of God has always thrived and grown when it was blessed with strong and capable leaders with a vision for their faith. This was true during the 16th century golden age of the Dutch "Doopegezindte", as well as during the 17th and 18th century with George Hansen and Hans von Steen in Danzig, Prussia. Later the church found saviours in men like Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Petershagen, Russia, of the Kleine Gemeinde, and Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), the Moses of the Bergthaler.

The ability of conservatives to not only overcome opposition but to make enormous gains was demonstrated in the case of Johann Funk who tried to lead the Bergthaler Gemeinde away from the teachings of the faith in favour of assimilation and the adoption of American Revivalist religious culture. But his efforts were opposed and thwarted by another hero, Abraham Doerksen (1853-1929), Sommerfeld, a charismatic leader and gifted orator who saved the overwhelming majority of the congregation from such apostasy resulting in the foundation of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde in 1892.

This booklet by John K. Reimer tells the story of his father, Cornelius R. Reimer, Heuboden, Manitoba, another leader of this genre. During the 1940s Reimer worked mightily to ward off the influences of American Fundamentalist religious culture in the East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde. However, the forces led by his cousins Rev. Ben D. Reimer and Frank D. Reimer were too powerful and the decision was made to vacate the field and seek to reestablish the church in a new location, namely, to retreat and retrench, a frequently



Cornelius R. Reimer (1902-59), Heuboden (called Seaton by the Provincial Government), Manitoba, age 20.

used strategy over the centuries.

In 1948 some 100 families of the Kleine Gemeinde from Blumenort, Heuboden and Rosenort moved to Mexico and from there a secondary migration to Belize took place ten years later.

This booklet tells how God blessed Cornelius R. Reimer and his small group as they struggled against the adversity of pioneering, as well as the grief of having former brethren attempt to alienate their children and marginal church members and to "convert" them to the religious culture of American Fundamentalism.

Cornelius R. Reimer's vision of a church community called to practice the teachings of the New Testament has been vindicated with a thriving denomination with over 2000 members in Mexico, Belize, Bolivia, U.S.A., and Nova Scotia, Canada.

Unfortunately, my dear friend John K. Reimer, deceased, chose not to publish this booklet for the general public, restricting it for family only. This was unfortunate, as it is a story which those who remained in the E. Reserve in 1948 and their progeny should be familiar with. So far they have only heard the other side, the story which casts Reimer and his group as reactionary villains.

God has richly blessed the work of Cornelius R. Reimer and the story of this divine guidance in the rich tradition of Hans von Steen, George Hansen and others above referred to is well worth knowing. Hopefully the Reimer family, prominent in the Belize, will see fit to edit the book and republish it for the wider audience it so obviously deserves.

Penner, Beverly Lynn, *The Jakob D.K. Plett Family, 1926 - 1998*, Steinbach, Manitoba, 72 pages, paperback, \$15.00

This book is a beautiful family memento, published by an adopted granddaughter of Jakob D.K. Plett. The page set up is very nice (with a border and larger type) which makes for easy reading. The first part contains a few pages of history and the obituaries of the grandparents. I would have liked to see more pages of actual history. Then the family tree is in the middle with the last part of the book containing personal memories of each of the Plett children and many memories from the grandchildren. The very last four pages contain a story by Nina Brandt, in which she shares her experiences of visiting at the Plett's her first Christmas in Canada, just having immigrated from Paraguay.

Each family page includes a picture and a short write up. The write ups will date the book quickly because most of them are very specific to this particular year, but plenty of space has been left to made additions and changes.

It is interesting how the descendants recall similar small details about their parents and grandparents. Mr. Plett was a great tease and loved to pinch his children and grandchildren with his gnarled hand that had been crippled in a farm accident. They also talk of him drinking his tea from the saucer. Mrs. Plett had a big heart for children. Her grandchildren recall that she played games and did crafts with them. She would make waffles outside as special treat. She also loved to garden and do handwork. The grandchildren also recalled what fun they had having wheelchair races in the hallway at Oakwood Place.

I enjoyed looking into another family history book. I have been reading family history books for about a decade; the first one being the "Klassen" book. It is interesting how the books have become more "reader friendly" with pictures, write ups and accuracy, instead of containing only lists of names and dates.

Review by Heidi Harms Friesen.

Brandt, Nettie and Scharfenberg, Lorilee, *Gateway to the Past: The Cornelius D. and Maria Loewen Story* (Box 61, R.R.1, Morris, Manitoba, R0G 1K0, 1997), 325 pages.

Gateway to the Past is concerned with a family of Kleine Gemeinde origin who came to the New World in 1874-5 to find their place of survival on the banks of the Scratching (Morris) River. It covers five generations and includes many photos and other memorabilia. It has been a combined project of many family members, but a greater task of compilation and editing for its authors.

Like many family histories of this type, *Gateway to the Past* is a collection of concise stories and anecdotes from a very large number of families. Anecdotal stories often tend to include details of pioneer life without shedding light on the relational events which shape people and families. There are some significant exceptions to this rule in *Gateway to the Past*. The first stories of the father and mother of this great family, constructed from a first person point-of-view, are well written

accounts of the journey to Canada and the early years of life as pioneers. Stories such as these are often creatively strengthened by accounts from other viewpoints--children and grandchildren. The chapter on Peter C. Loewen is notable for its more elaborate accounts ("Riverside Stories" are included apparently from another work by the same author) which give meaningful insight into the lives of the people. A memoir of "My Sweetheart" related by Peter C. Loewen himself is one such story. Another is the memoir given by Tina Loewen which relates some concerns on the issue of spanking. It is always a challenge when considering what will be remembered.

Perhaps one of the finer stories is the one on Tena Dueck Bartel, since it brings together the sacred memories of love and also the history of the migration of many families to Mexico and Belize. The 1948 migration was a significant event for the Loewen family as well as for many other Mennonite families. This particular story, of two people initially separated by the move, often sums up the culture well: "...Jake and Tena parted by solemn handshake in the presence of the rest of the family, not being able to express any special feelings to each other for lack of privacy." At other times it begs for more: "The Lord took him to task for various inconsistencies in his Christian life...This larger narrative is well worth reading, although it is unclear who the writer is. (Some others are also unclear)

Unlike most family histories, this one includes many other historical ingredients which elevate interest into this family's past: poems, recipes, maps, memoirs, sayings, drawings, and so on. One noteworthy poem comes from a submission by Jake L. Dueck, reminding readers of the significance farming has in the history of Mennonites:

My farm is not where I must soil
My hands in endless dreary toil
But where, through seed and swelling pod,
I've learned to walk, and talk with God.

Details from C. D. Loewen's little black book of harvesting records showing successful or difficult years are also of historical value. Although the intermittent quotes and sayings from such unlikely famous people as James Dean or Kahlil Gilbran seem unconnected, the style of this book is consistent throughout. The book ends with a scrapbook of photos, memoirs, and the occasional saying.

The authors have done an adequate job in producing a family history. The historical details will come under the scrutiny of the family proper. Some new ideas for this type of book have been presented. The account of the Loewen family in *Gateway to the Past* is an enjoyable read; it makes an excellent family resource and starting point for other family memories.

Book Review by James Kornelsen, history teacher Steinbach Christian High School.

Albert Barkman, editor, *Home News* (Prairie View Press, Rosenort, Manitoba 1998), 374 pages.

Home News is a compilation of monthly papers directed to young men serving in alternative service (C.O's) during WWII in Canada. The final pages in the book are devoted to various experiences of some alternative service workers.

As the name, "Home News", implies, most of this book seems to be devoted to the reproduction of this paper from its inauguration in February 1943 to the final issue in July 1946.

Obviously the paper *Home News* would not have been "home news" for all of the 10,700 C.O's in Canada during WWII. The paper is postmarked, "Steinbach, Man." This, I believe, would indicate news of special interest to alternative service workers coming from that area. In fact, the first issue says that it is published by young people from Greenland, Kleefeld, and Steinbach. Later Morris was added.

Basically, this little publication was made up of an editorial, usually some short challenges to the Christian life, and news as compiled by its various news writers. Typically news could concentrate on the following areas: Deaths, Births, Construction, Sickness, Weddings, Visitors, Meetings, Church, Accidents, Employment, Farm, and Domestic.

In one issue, the Kleefeld reporter reported that twenty souls had been added to the Kleingemeinde church through baptism. News was also of a very "homey" nature as one sample item reads: "Rev. Jno. I Penner's tire problem has been solved, for they recently received tire permits and have also purchased three new tires."

Another example: "On business: By reason of Labour Board regulations, the merchants of Steinbach are obliged to close their business establishments at 1:00 p.m. every Thursday beginning June 8th." (*Home News* June 1944).

One can imagine that these little papers would be eagerly snapped up when they came, especially people who came from those areas. One must certainly give credit to the original founders of this paper as well as the faithful news reporters.

The paper was published from February 1943 to July 1946. The paper could also be a valuable resource to historians today looking for news of that period. Although not all inclusive, it is another resource.

Reviewed by Dave Schellenberg

Abe Warkentin, *Dies und Das*, (Steinbach: *Die Mennonitische Post*, 1997, Erster Band), 215 pages.

Readers of the *Post* need only know that, as the title suggests, what we have here is indeed a selection of Warkentin's items that have appeared in his regular column since the paper was founded in 1977. Many of you turn first to *Dies und Das* when the *Post* arrives, to see what new revelation the editor has had while

splitting wood on his "country estate", driving home from work, or lying awake in a strange bed while visiting the far-flung constituency of the paper in Mexico or Paraguay.

For those, not familiar with the *Mennonitische Post* or with Abe Warkentin (and hence not with *Dies und Das*) let me assure you that this little volume is worth buying. You could borrow it from your friend - the author would understand that kind of frugality - but it is a book that you want handy near your favourite reading chair so that you can enjoy a chuckle or two between your more serious reading or after mealtime before doing the dishes. The book is in high German, but you probably shouldn't use a capital "G" in spelling it; the idiom is Low German and it helps to think in our vernacular as you read.

Warkentin's humour is part exaggeration. For example, when he talks about the heat in Paraguay it is in hyperbole: the Trans-Chaco bus felt like a bake oven., at high noon one could fry eggs on the asphalt; the neighbour's dog waits until the housewife has taken the fresh *Zwieback* out of the bake oven before crawling into it to cool off! (88-89) The nights, by contrast, can be so cold that an hour after going to bed in a guest room with three other men, he gets up, quietly closes the window, puts on his pants and two extra shirts, and finds an extra blanket before he is finally warm enough to sleep. (87)

In part his humour lies in his vivid imagination. For example, when the regular contribution of another *Post* columnist (Jakob Janzen of Warman) arrives one week in singed and mutilated condition, Warkentin imagines the worst. Has civil war broken out in Saskatchewan? Perhaps Eldorado Nuclear retaliating against the Mennonite rejection of its proposed nuclear refinery? (This was 1982.) Almost he can find bullet holes in the manuscript! (76)

In part it is his self-deprecating modesty that attracts us. Warkentin told me that when he first started the paper, a man came to the office to check it out and wish him well. "Where did you come from?" he asked. "From Grunthal," Abe responded quietly. "Oh, don't feel badly about that. I'm only from Bergfeld!" He begins one column with this little disclaimer: "If I weren't so loyal to the *Post*, and if it didn't go against my grain so much to make money, I would immediately buy a pair of cowboy boots, learn Spanish, and open a Mexican restaurant on Winkler's main street, if possible right next to the Gladstone mall. Here I would serve tacos, enchiladas and all those other tasty Mexican-Mennonite dishes, and every evening I would take large sacks of money to the bank."

But I think readers like Warkentin's column most because he understands us, sees through our foibles, and gently pokes fun at them. We laugh because his humour is never hurtful and is directed at himself as much as at any of us.

The publisher calls this book volume I (*Erster Band*). Buy it. That way you will

know whether to get the second volume when it comes out!

reviewed by Adolf Ens, Canadian Mennonite Bible College

Goerz, Heinrich, *Memrik, A Mennonite Settlement in Russia* (CMBC Publications and Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Winnipeg, Manitoba. 1997).

This book chronicles the conception, development and demise of the Mennonite colony of Memrik, a daughter colony of Molotschna. The colony was situated about 100 miles east of Molotschna and had been purchased by the mother colony in 1884 for the purpose of providing farming opportunities for its landless families. A previous purchase, Zagradowka in 1871, had temporarily alleviated some of the problems associated with unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity, but rapid population growth continued to create pressure on colony administrators to find further solutions.

Memrik was purchased from Russian noblemen, Kotliarevsky and Karpov, for the price of 600,000 rubles or about 20 R an acre. Since much of the land was uncultivated it was for a time plagued by all types of rodents. Yet, because of the excellent quality of the black soil, good crops were soon achieved by the new colonists in a relatively short time.

The author of this book, Heinrich Goerz (1890-1972) had personal knowledge of Memrik since, as he mentions in the foreword, he spent all of his Russian career as a teacher in this settlement. To his credit, Goerz supplemented his own experiences in Memrik with an earlier history written by D. Epp, as well as using extensive correspondence with past citizens of the colony.

Goerz outlines the economic development of the colony as it relates to agriculture, marketing and manufacturing. He also gives prominent attention to the religious life in the colony, including brief biographical sketches of most of the ministers and bishops. As expected, Goerz includes a chapter on education in the colony. Modestly, he minimizes his own contributions in this field but rather lists the accomplishments of other educators of the colony.

The last chapter of the book outlines the demise of the once promising colony. WWI, the civil war, and the Stalin persecutions and exiles, were all events that contributed to Memrik's destruction. Fortunately, a number of colonists were able to emigrate to the west in the 1920s. The few German speaking people left in the colony joined the German army retreat in 1943. The colony only existed for 60 years.

The MMHS and CMBC Publications are to be commended for their affords in translating and publishing this volume in the Echo Historical Series. It is a valuable source of Mennonite Russian history for a generation of students who can benefit from an English translation.

Reviewed by Henry Fast, Steinbach

Russian Mennonite Literature, a great tradition?

In this section *Preservings* initiates a debate regarding the Russian Mennonite literary tradition, unique among the world's literature for being mainly obsessed with negating the validity of its own spiritual ethos and historical tradition as a culture of significance and worth.

The dialogue is brought forward by the republication of a review of Al Reimer's *Mennonite Literary Voices* by Erwin Beck, Professor of Literature, Goshen College. Ralph Friesen, argues the other more traditional view of Russian Mennonite literature, namely, that to be a valid voice, the artist must stand aside as prophet condemning the evils of his or her own society. In a third section, Doug Reimer develops another viewpoint focusing on a discussion of the "major/minor" question as it relates to this literature. In a fourth section, I, as editor, add my comments and viewpoints.

Al Reimer, *Mennonite Literary Voices: Past and Present* (Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series, No. 6., North Newton, Kans.: Bethel College, 1993), 75 pages. \$10.00

The publication of Rudy Wiebe's novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* in 1962 began an remarkable outpouring of literary creativity among Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonites in Canada, especially from the communities near Winnipeg. In four chapters, originally given as lectures in the fortieth Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series at Bethel College, Al Reimer discusses this important development in Mennonite and Western Canadian culture.



Al Reimer, author of *My harp is turned to Mourning*, an exceptionally brilliant novel about the Mennonite experience in Russia during the Revolution, Civil War and Machnov scourges. Reimer is one of the few Mennonite writers who has successfully written from a major voice about his own people. Photo credit, cover of *My harp is turned to Mourning*.

Now a retired Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, Reimer remains closely associated with many of these authors. He has also contributed to the Canadian Mennonite literary tradition with his historical novel *My Harp Has Turned to Mourning* and with his editions of earlier Mennonite writings.

In addition to being the only book length survey of Russian Mennonite literature, Reimer's book is also an excellent one. It names the major author, describes their work, and offers brief critical appraisals. It errs only in becoming unnecessarily polemic near the end.

In chapter 1 Reimer traces the development of Mennonite writing in Dutch and German from early years in Holland to the writings of Arnold Dyck in Canada. As with modern Mennonite writers, literature of any quantity and quality came historically from the Dutch-Prussian-Russian community much more than from the Swiss-German. Reimer explains that fact by citing the greater tradition of individualism and education in the Dutch-Russian groups.

In chapter 2 Reimer discusses recent male writers, and in chapter 3 recent women writers. Although this strategy has the disadvantage of artificially separating authors who lived in similar times and places, it does give recent women writers their due, especially since they have often been neglected in similar discussions.

Reimer's chapter 2 discusses fiction-writers Rudy Wiebe, Armin Wiebe and Douglas Reimer, plus poets David Waltner-Toews and Patrick Friesen. His chapter 3 focuses on a number of women poets, especially those who have found their public voices since the publication in 1987 of Di Brandt's influential volume, *Question I asked my mother*. Brandt's strident feminist work is matched by the work of Audrey Poetker. Quieter poems come from Sarah Klassen (Winnipeg) and Jean Janzen (Fresno). In fiction, Sandra Birdsell is an award-winning novelist and short-story writer, and a pair of sisters, Magdalena Redekop and Elizabeth Falk, have developed a new kind of interactive story writing.

Reimer is at his most controversial in chapter 4. There he defends many of these writers in their seeming battle with the Mennonite community, which they criticize and which, in turn, rejects them - to their surprise and dismay. These developments lead Reimer into an impassioned plea for accepting the literary artist as a visionary prophet standing free at the edge of the community and speaking words that the community needs to hear in order to correct itself. In effect, Reimer continues the debate with "old" Mennonite literary critics like John Ruth and Jeff Gundy who call for the Mennonite artist to more humbly identify with the community and, in Ruth's words, "achieve a creative balance between critique and advocacy".

The tone of many Russian Mennonite writ-

ers tends indeed to be adversarial, corrective, and even angry. The resulting literature is so good that we would not want it to be otherwise. But it is puzzling that Reimer not only defends that stance but also suggests that it should be the normative one for Mennonite authors.

Reimer may be too involved in the Canadian writing community to see things otherwise. His reading of Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*--which contradicts Jeff Gundy's interpretation of the same piece in a way that puzzles me--suggests a personal penchant to see mainly the negation and seldom the affirmation made by the Russian Mennonite writers. In endorsing the image of writers as alienated artists (e.g., Shelley, Byron, Kafka, Dickinson), he ignores the equally impressive tradition of artists who are integrated with their communities (e.g., Sophocles, Shakespeare, Austen, Faulkner, Anne Tyler).

Most strange, in analyzing Mennonite literature as "ethnic" literature, Reimer does not consider that most ethnic writers in other traditions tend to identify themselves with their communities over against the oppressive, main-stream cultural community. In this regard one certainly thinks of the African-Americans Toni Morrison, Richard Wright, and Gwendolyn Brooks, the Jewish Isaac Bashevis Singer, and the Native-American N. Scott Momaday.

Why are the Russian Mennonite writers a notable exception? Is their community so much more unhealthy than other ethnic communities? Or are the writers themselves so acculturated to the mainstream that they can no longer identify with the folk culture that has produced them?

Book Review by Ervin Beck, Goshen.

Editor's Note: The above review by Erwin Beck of Al Reimer's *Literary Voices* was first published in *Mennonites Quarterly Review*, October 1994, No. 4, pages 552-53, reprinted by permission.

Quote:

"Jeff Gundy....longs for Mennonite literature where the artist is not seeking freedom from an authoritative community but where the community provides release for the alienating individualism characteristic of North America"--Rodney Sawatzky, "Mennonite Ethnicity: Medium, Message and Mission," *JMS*, Vol. 9, 1991, page 116.

John W. Yoder, *Rosanna of the Amish* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, revised ed. 1973), 251 pages. Reviewed by Ralph Friesen.

At first I was mystified when Delbert Plett, the editor of *Preservings*, asked me to review *Rosanna of the Amish*. Why review a book that's been out for decades? And I was leery, too, since I had some vague impression of this little novel as being one of those wholesome, sentimental stories favoured by readers with a taste for sunny optimism. I do not have a taste for sunny optimism. I believe that sin and evil, in many and various forms, permeate the world and have power in our lives, and any piece of fiction that ignores this unpleasant little fact cannot be taken seriously. Anyway, half-curious, I consented to do the review.

John W. Yoder, whose mother, Rosanna, was an Irish baby adopted and integrated into the culture of the Amish, says that he wrote *Rosanna of the Amish*, as much biography as it is fiction, because "several writers with vivid imaginations and little regard for facts" had misrepresented this devout people, and Mr. Yoder wanted to tell the truth about them, setting forth their virtues. My edition of the book says there are 367,000 copies in print since its original publication, of which I do not have the date—probably in the 1930s or 40s.

I must admit that my impression of *Rosanna of the Amish* was justified. It cannot be taken seriously as a work of fiction, though it is a useful compendium of the customs and mores of the Amish. In the improbable event that Yoder actually succeeded in his stated goal of telling the truth about the Amish, then I can only conclude that the Amish are not like you and me. Unlike you and me, they do not lie, cheat, waver in their loyalties, or engage in dirty politics. They are not envious or cruel, they don't lose their tempers, and they never waste their time.

Instead, they are a virtuous lot. Everyone works hard. The boys and men do the farm

chores and maybe a little horse trading; the girls and women cook and sew and clean. The children are obedient. The poor are helped by the wealthy. The wealthy are not proud. The crops are plentiful. The meals are bountiful and tasty. Life is simple and good.

Oh, sure, the Amish may have a few shortcomings, but none too serious. Their suspicion about education beyond grade eight might mean that some of their members are disappointed in their ambitions, as was Rosanna herself, a quicker learner who had hoped to be a teacher. Not to worry, she saw that her step-father the bishop would be put in an awkward position if she persisted in wanting to go to school, so she dropped the idea altogether. Her Irish cheeks were as red and her Irish black hair as wavy as ever.

Never mind that the church services go on forever and are crushingly boring. The discipline of sitting on a back-less bench for a few hours is a good thing in itself. It's a little like Zen, actually. You don't see the point, and that *is* the point. Once in a while someone might be placed under the ban, but in *Rosanna*, the single instance of this is voluntary—a man asks to be placed under the ban because he feels he isn't in right relationship with his neighbour, and believes he should be punished for a while. So the ministers cooperate, and for a couple of weeks the sinner does not eat with his family, and does not go to church, until he feels he has suffered enough, at which point he is gladly received back into the fellowship. Huh? Granted that the use of the ban was not always the cruel and destructive phenomenon Patrick Friesen portrays so chillingly, and with so much more emotional verisimilitude, in *The Shunning*, it wasn't all nicey-nice either.

Previously in these pages, Delbert has attacked writers like Patrick and Di Brandt for showing only the narrow, unauthentic, southern-Baptist-influenced side of their communities, thus contributing to the public's distorted view of Mennonites. This is not entirely fair: the artistry of people like Patrick and Di is wonderful; the fact that it exists at all is miraculous, considering the lack of encouragement and the few role models they had. Besides, how shall an artist render a loving portrait of the very community which denies the validity of his art, that views his chosen craft as a mere vanity, or even a sin? Nevertheless, Delbert may have a point. The positive aspect of our ancestors' lives remains, in terms of fiction or poetry, largely hidden in the shadows.

Which brings us back to Delbert's reasons for asking me to do this review. I suspect he was hoping that I would find a parallel, in *Rosanna of the Amish*, to the situation of his ancestors and mine (and Patrick's), the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites, whose history was, before Delbert came along with his many historical volumes and occasional attempts at fiction, both maligned and misrepresented. The fact is that the Gemeinde, as Delbert has

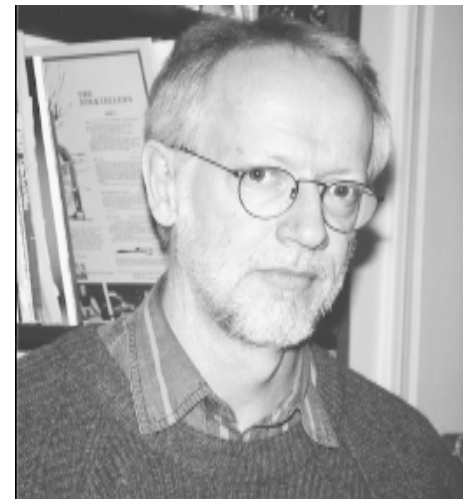
provided ample evidence, was actually much more progressive, talented, wealthy and sophisticated than it had been depicted as being. It could even be argued that this conviction of Delbert's has been the driving force behind everything he has produced—a contribution that has forced a much-needed re-evaluation of the Kleine Gemeinde contribution to the Mennonite story. My own research into my family history and the innovative work of Blumenort-born historian Royden Loewen, in particular, incline me to believe that Delbert is quite right to insist that our Gemeinde deserves much better treatment from the establishment Mennonite historians. Our people exhibited more theological maturity, inventive energy and wry humour than they've been given credit for.

Not much of this broader picture has found expression in fiction, however. Delbert has taken a shot at it himself, with the novel *Sarah's Prairie* (1995), a favourable depiction of the traditional Mennonites (Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthaler) of a part of Manitoba recognizable as the municipality of Hanover. *Sarah's Prairie*, with its ribald, antic comedy, sarcastic zingers, and steamy sex scenes, is no *Rosanna of the Amish*. Like Yoder, however, Plett succumbs to the temptation to beatify the old folks and their old ways. The Gemeinde, in Plett's depiction of it, is a stable island of wisdom, humility, and charity, all in contrast to a confused and hypocritical herd of Russlaenders, "Morsavians," and other fundamentalists roaming loose in the countryside.

This is interesting stuff, but still one-sided in its treatment of the lives of "traditional" Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites, for lack of a better term. A fictional account of, say, the generation of Kleine Gemeinders and Bergthalers that came to Canada in the 1870s, would be fascinating. It cannot be that they were as pure as the upright folk we meet in *Rosanna of the Amish*. Nor were they merely

Poetry: A Five Century Tradition?

Coming in the next issue: "Poetry: A Five Century Mennonite Tradition? This article will look at the amazing poetry tradition of conservative Mennonites including the poetry offerings of martyrs and refugees fleeing for their faith. This tradition has been largely ignored by modern Mennonite scholars. This article will attempt to explain this cultural omission and trace this poetry tradition to modern times. For 50 points, what do Hans von Steen, Heinrich Balzer, Peter P. Toews and Margaret Penner Toews have in common?"



Ralph Friesen, one of the most articulate and competent writers in the "new" Mennonite historiography. Photograph courtesy of *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, page 27.

a collection of benighted, dogma-bound agriculturalist cultists. They were human. If someone should write their story honestly and well, that writer would be doing us all a big favour, whether such a book would sell 300,000 copies, or 300. We need to understand that our ancestors are indeed ours, that we belong to them, and that there is a causal

connection extending from their lives into ours. If we disavow them by selecting only that which suits us (or vice-versa, only that which pains us) to that same extent we are disavowing ourselves, and limiting our embrace of life in the present.

Review by Ralph Friesen, Winnipeg.

Rosanna of the Amish by Joseph W. Yoder reviewed by Doug Reimer.

I was recently asked why I thought Joseph W. Yoder's historical fiction *Rosanna of the Amish* (Herald 1995) had sold as well as it had since it was first published in 1940 (375,000 copies). One way of thinking out an answer is to compare Yoder's novel to another Mennonite novel, Delbert F. Plett's *Sarah's Prairie* (Windflower Communications 1995).

Rosanna of the Amish, set in Pennsylvania in the second half of the 19th century, tells the life story of an orphaned Irish Catholic girl adopted by an unmarried Amish Mennonite woman who successfully raises her in the faith and traditions of the Amish people. Rosanna resists pressures from members of her family to repudiate the Amish religion and to return to her Catholic roots and triumphs over the forces of selfishness and change. This victory of the conservative and the good greatly satisfies the readership's appetite for heroic loyalty.

Sarah's Prairie similarly tells the story of a sincere young Mennonite, regaling its readers with the quirky adventures of Martien Koep, son of Isebrandt and Liesabet Koep, son and daughter-in-law of Sarah Koep after whom a particular fictional region of the Mennonite East Reserve in Manitoba takes its name. Martien's life initially develops along less loyal and proper lines than Sarah's, but by the end of the novel, however, his newfound devotion and faith equal Sarah's in ardency and respectability. Martien at first rebels with a certain degree of local notoriety, then experiences conversion, and after a few trials of his faith including a brief flirtation with the evangelical Morsavian bride of Christ, thankfully adopts the humble "Old Laender" faith of his fathers.

If these two books have this faithfulness in common, why will Yoder's novel outsell Plett's ten times over in the course of their existence? I want to suggest two reasons. The obvious one is the style of writing. Yoder's writing flows and meanders like a brook through the *hortus conclusus* of our pastoral English minds. It's prose, sophisticated and suave, stands with one black polished boot up on a fireplace fender of some London Old Boys' Club, a languid, white-gloved hand dallying with a fine cigar. Yoder's text absolutely understands major English literary conventions. Plett's writing, on the other hand, everywhere betrays its "minor," non English status. It does not understand, nor does it want to understand or present itself as understanding, the complex conventions of the literature which the British once assumed every subject in its commonwealth, and in the English-speaking world for that matter, would have fully incorporated.

Rosanna says: "Before he drifted off to sleep, he pondered the simple, efficient life of this plain woman. Again and again, the words

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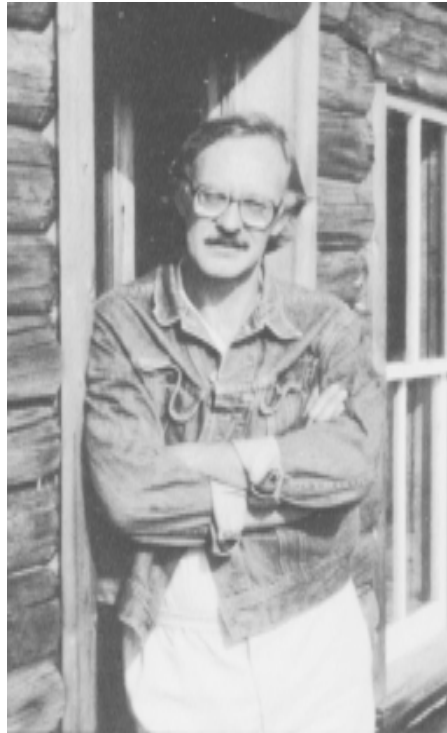
“quiet simplicity, peace, and contentment” floated through his mind. What a supper! What cleanliness! What piety! What freedom from strife and rivalry! And what joy and gladness Rosanna showed in obeying Elizabeth’s every wish!” (71)

Compare this now with a passage from *Sarah’s Prairie*: “It still shuddered Martien to think about that day. He remembered how scared he had been: Zoop Zak was lying in the coffin so still and white and all dressed up in his pin-striped soakj suit. There was the smell of formaldehyde embalming-fluid which they were just starting to use at the time. The substance created a distinctive odour of death which nauseated Martien even years later. It was awful to think that the Morsavians in Salem were saying that Zoop Zak had died in a state of unrepentance and would have to spend eternity in the lake of fire.”(37)

All conventions of English literary learning are flouted in the latter paragraph: it uses non English words; it employs awkward verbs, being inattentive to careful choice, because careful choice doesn’t suit its purposes; it introduces into sadness the worst, least uplifting information (one doesn’t speak of formaldehyde in a description of funerals if one is writing serious English fiction); it allows very funny names for characters, and in this funeral context humour disturbs the peace that serious English fiction would attempt to achieve, like a preacher at such a funeral himself would do.

All of English literature’s technology combine to create the first passage. See here the standards of classic English literature and rhetoric, inherited from the whole history of Greek and Roman writing: well-chosen verbs, effortlessly appropriate to the tone and intent of the passage; varied sentence structure to keep the prose alive and pleasing, a series of persuasive exclamatory statements which decorously coerce the reader’s emotional agreement with the author’s sententiae about Rosanna’s refined obedience. Every possible resource of language—all of language’s subtle powers—are engaged by Yoder to deliver his message. Such a marriage of language and message we may call the “major” imagination.

Plett’s linguistic imagination is “minor.” But please don’t assume that the minor is insignificant or less valuable somehow than the major. The very opposite, in fact, is true if the claim of Gilles Deleuze is taken into account (and it should be; he is the author of over thirty acclaimed books on the thought of the world’s most important philosophers, including Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kant and many others). It is exactly the “minor,” Deleuze argues, which effectively brings about change in language and literature. The major actually hates change and prefers always to pretend to endorse change while actually resisting it with a grip on the permanent as tenacious as a drowning girl’s grip on



Doug Reimer, novelist and lecturer at the University of Manitoba. Author of *Older than Ravens* (1989), a story set in *Altwelt*.

her lifeguard’s arms and legs. No, the minor is that which, by one means or another, forces major language to examine its own assumptions and agendas and to reluctantly change how it thinks about the (moral) universe. Deleuze says about the power of the minor that it creates slowly, imperceptibly; that it grows like grass within the boundaries of the major (*Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*). The minor (Plett’s novel) rebels, disturbs, stomps slipshod over the sacred, refuses to understand the accepted conventions of major language and literature, and all in all makes so many *faut pas* in its imitation of major language that it forces the unspoken assumptions of the major language (for our purposes, English) to the foreground.

Both novels have much going for them. Yoder’s, with its smooth and official English tone, presents the reader with a world as peaceful and secure as can be imagined. Plett’s, raucous and raw, undaunted by conventions of propriety in literature, disturbs the reader at every turn. Plett’s strength lies in his ability to disturb and still entertain; Yoder’s lies in his great mastery of literary style and moral appropriateness. Yoder’s book has sold hundreds of thousands of copies. Plett’s will be lucky to sell two thousand. Why? The world does not like to be disturbed. It longs for, pays for, an affirmation of permanence, hope, love and faith of a pure sort.

Much Mennonite writing of the late 20th century belongs to the tradition of major literature, or one might say “lyrical” literature. Its interests coincide with those of canon-

ized English literature studied in the academy: Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Eliot, Hemingway and so on. Its interests, lyrical rather than material, emulate the anti-communal, individualist, humanist interests cultivated by major English literature over the last five hundred years: essentially, the lyrical might be said to be “official” literature.

It represents, whether it likes to admit it or not, the institutional (church, school, legislature, academy), authority and power, the establishment, the morally applauded, the unified, the undisturbing. An aesthetic of “secrecy” primarily (for sure nich jevrich) characterizes lyrical literature. One has to be an initiate to read lyrical literature well, to master it. One must be a sort of linguistic Mason in order to belong to the lyrical club.

Minor literature on the other hand, non lyrical by method, and so not practising the aesthetics of secrecy—though never to be mistaken for non artistic or non intellectual—operates via openness. It writes by an aesthetic of excess. Much more about this “secrecyopeness” issue needs to be said at another time. Right now let it be enough to list those Mennonite writers who have imitated the Major to the best of their abilities: Di Brandt, Pat Friesen, Sarah Klassen, Lois Braun, Sandra Birdsell, Rudy Wiebe, and others. Writers such as John Weier, Al Reimer (maybe), Armin Wiebe (especially in the first half of his *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*) and Delbert Plett belong to the minor literary tradition which celebrates via excess a material, bodily being, a being concerned, if at all, only materially with moral, spiritual questions (the moral being an official interest).

The moral is a way of keeping people in line, of getting them to behave according to certain standards. When in literature the moral is a strong force you can bet your bottom dollar that the main purpose of such literature is exclusion. Is “All those can belong who buy the morals implicit in this story and in these poems”: the official position. Misdirections, really, such moralizing literature which feels you can earn your way by how you behave. Your works shall set you free? Nah, your works let you belong to the right group. Etc.

I think what we as Mennonites need to see about the literature of Pat Friesen, Di Brandt and even Armin Wiebe is that they were early versions of artists in our communities. They were not encouraged to write poetry by the towns they grew up in. Of necessity they felt critical of these indifferent, non thinking communities and their work reflects this negation of their roots. Furthermore, because they were from a “minor” group (Mennonite) and wished to be heard by lots of people, they wrote for the “major” audience. They practised and became experts at the sort of writing which non Men-

nonites (the English) revered and found pleasing. In order to please a cross section of the sort of Mennonites I grew up with in the village of old Altona they would have to write a very different sort of poetry, one which came out of a sense of the plenty in nature and in material things rather than out of lack.

Be that as it may, a major group commonly makes sport of minor groups. The major group finds minor groups queer, crazy or even stupid, and by making this sort of sport they manage to get to look pretty good to themselves. Sort of like a farmer with lots of land and machinery talking to a lowly teacher in the coffee shop. It does not surprise me that early Mennonite artists like Friesen and Brandt played to the powerful major group and in the process seemed to revile the communities which raised them. They did this partly because they felt rejected by their own non literary communities, and partly because of their own vain desire to be heard by as large and important an audience as possible. What we Mennonites need now is a deliberate, more mature art which understands the conventions of major literature but which subverts those conventions in order to show its support of the communities which raised them. We need artists who will take leadership roles in their communities, artists who will be thinkers within, not outside the community.

Our communities need to nurture and respect their artists, their artistic writers. If they do not extend such respect to poets, story tellers, and makers of myths, if they do not listen to the minor voices within their borders, they will collapse under the weight of their own vain thoughtlessness. They will simply become absorbed by the major group and its economies. The artist is the thinker in the community, the one capable of looking insecurity in the face without flinching.

Thinkers are most certainly not the community members who wield power. Thinkers are not the brotherhood, not the officials. It would be a major misunderstanding to believe that the one who smiles happily when he sees you and from whom you eventually buy a refrigerator, is a thinker. The same is true for the individual who gets you onto the topic of church attendance. Artists are the thinkers. So, when the community respects its artists it is at its most healthy, its most thoughtful. The Mennonite community, in this next phase of its relationship with its artists, needs to find ways to keep its thinkers--its artists (mature and immature), its writers (narcissistic or not)--inside its walls. Or should we say that such artists should think of ways of living within those walls? by Douglas Reimer, Box 2188, Winkler, MB Canada R6W 4B9

The Russian Mennonite literary tradition: “Zen and the art of literary portrayal”, by Delbert Plett.

The review by Ervin Beck of Al Reimer's *Literary Voices* identifies a tendency among so-called Russian Mennonite writers to see traditional culture as negative, seemingly without the necessity of research or analytical study. It must be a Zen thing, no one seems to know why, but apparently literary portrayal is not considered valid unless it is negative. Maybe it's good for us, sort of an ancient masochistic self-flagellation coming yet with Menno from the cloister. Little of this is found in the Swiss-German Mennonite stream and so it is important to recognize that we are speaking about Russian Mennonites.

Certainly it is much easier to disparage and discredit by use of literary portrayal than to develop a meaningful sociological profile of a culture and history of a people by researching, accumulating data and analyzing facts. This was evident in the case of Canadian aboriginals where in past centuries it was seen as acceptable to characterize their culture as racially inferior and their spiritual ethos as invalid for many of the same reasons, particularly as articulated by the racist aspects of Anglo-conformity and Separatist-Pietism, already referred to elsewhere in this newsletter.

In the Russian Mennonite situation this was aggravated because our intelligentsia of the 1950s and 60s, for the most part, unquestionably accepted the small “I” liberal philosophy upon which much of the academia and scholarship of that time was premised, championing individual rights over communities and corporate responsibilities. This resulted in a lack of understanding of traditional Mennonite communities at best, and suspicion and open hostility at worst.

Russian Mennonite literature played a significant role by providing the literary fodder, fuelling the demand for negative portrayal of ethnic communities and minority groups within the Canadian public at large. It is trite to say, but a polemical literary work cleverly structured to portray something as sinister and evil can malign and negate infinitely more effectively than a thousand researchers working for decades, relying on facts, figures, documents, analysis and the scholarly process can present holistically.

Space does not allow an analysis of every writer in the Russian Mennonite canon as Al Reimer was able to do in *Literary Voices*, and so I will limit my comments to Rudy Wiebe, Patrick Friesen and Di Brandt.

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Rudy Wiebe created the scenario of a calculating Bishop manipulating his parishioners for his own sinister ends. In *The Shunning*, Patrick Friesen followed the same story line to show how one parishioner was marginalized and driven to commit “suicide” for not bending

his view to that of an evil Bishop and an oppressive community. I cannot speak for Rudy Wiebe and his particular denomination of Mennonites but can certainly attest the fact that the particular example used by Friesen never occurred in any actual historical situation.

“The Shunning” gained wide popularity with audiences pleased to affirm their “Anglo-conformist” view of minority and ethnic groups. The work was promoted by the national media as the signature portrayal of traditional Mennonite communities and their leaders, that is somewhat along the lines of Jimmy Jones and his Georgetown mass suicide. Although this was obviously not Friesen's intention, he rode the popularity of those Anglo-conformist ideas, to national acclaim.

In *Questions I asked my mother*, Di Brandt portrayed her experiences with an authoritative father to demonstrate the evil and unjust manifestations of patriarchy within her personal experience. Again, I am sure it was not Ms. Brandt's intention, but the spin put on this portrayal by the Canadian media was of a Mennonite patriarchy polluted with perverted wife and child abusers. And please, I am not suggesting here for one minute that abuse of any kind should not be attacked, condemned and eradicated wherever it occurs, but the punishment should be directed to those who are guilty.

The works of Friesen and Brandt represent the canon of Russian Mennonite literature, reflecting a protocol for the topics and opinions that can be expressed. With the exception of Al Reimer's *My harp is turned to mourning* and Armin Wiebe's *Salvation of Jasch Siemens*, and a few others, the writings of Friesen and Brandt set forth a protocol of political correctness, far stricter than that practised by the ancient Gemeinden. The end result has been the socialization of two generations of Mennonites--the hippies of the 70s as well as the boomers of the 80s--to believe that the traditional faith communities of their ancestors were, at best, archaic and irrelevant, and, at worst, evil and sinister.

The foregoing mantra needs to be reconsidered in light of the actual historical facts. The following are a few salient points revealed by scholarly research for those still interested in listening to facts (I expect there are not too many left):

(I) It was precisely the Gemeinden, satirized by Friesen in his “Shunning”, which were centuries ahead of their time in terms of human sensitivity, social justice and gender equity.

- The ancient Gemeinden back to Reformation times were pioneers in genuine grassroots democracy. This was manifested by a constant, passionate debate over theological and practical issues of faith and Christian service going back almost 500 years. By definition such a debate could not have taken

place in a community which was authoritarian and monolithic. The most important, as well as the least significant decisions, were made by the brotherhood, and the Aeltesten, ministers and deacons were subjected to recall and impeachment, something which actually happened. The most important decision, the acceptance of new members, was made by the membership, including women. Such concepts of grass roots democracy were not accepted within Western civilization in general until 400 years later.

- The traditional Gemeinden were the fountain of Biblical feminism, the empowerment of women based on respect and equality articulated by a revolutionary interpretation of the New Testament Gospels, their constituting document. Biblical feminism as found in the traditional Gemeinden such as the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and "Old Coloniers" was manifested in equal inheritance rights for women and prohibition of abuse of wives, maids and females in general. The fact that breach of these beliefs was subject to the severest penalties known to Mennonites, exclusion from membership--and 'yes', shunning, demonstrated that the Gemeinden had a "zero tolerance" position in these matters. ("Fear ye not" for the mention of the word "Shunning" in a non-negative way: relax, the sky won't fall. Hang on to your Zzip-drives because historically other cultures disciplined their miscreants as well: Anglo-Saxons, for example, by dunking in the pond or stocks and whipping, if you were lucky, and outright execution by boiling or by the "liberation" of finger nails and other choice body components for those less fortunate.) These beliefs were not merely practised figuratively but in actual practice: women within conservative Mennonite communities carried great influence, particularly as managers of the household economies in their "Vollwirt" societies. Biblical feminism was thriving within conservative Gemeinden in Russia and further back in Prussia, centuries before feminism became a household word in Europe and North America.

- The Gemeinden were centuries ahead of their time in the provision of a social safety net for widows, orphans, and the underprivileged within their communities, including the provision of guardians and community protocol for appropriate treatment. This is an area well known among Mennonites, so I shall say no more.

(II) When someone brings forth facts about traditional Mennonite life describing their experience, they are accused of romanticising and painting them larger than life or of seeking to be controversial, whatever that means. Apparently, the golden rule of the canon is, if you can't say anything negative then don't say anything at all, at least if you want to be part of the "noble and suffering" politically-correct Zen school of Russian Mennonite literary portrayal.

But when all else fails and you can't think

of anything particularly negative, there is a fall-back position--a plan "B", as it were: resort to ridicule. I don't want to hurt the feelings of my friend Ralph Friesen, and I think it was noble of him to come to the defense of his childhood buddy, Pat Friesen, but I do believe that denigrating an entire culture because they had two hour worship services is totally typically of this sort of Zen-type analysis found within the canon.

When I was in the Ukraine in May we were told of the Easter services in the Orthodox church which not only lasted from evening until morning, 14 hours, but the worshippers stood for the entire time. I assume they were generally blessed by the experience and believe that the spirit of God must have been present; otherwise who could endure such a marathon? According to Ralph's logic, we could condemn these Orthodox Christians seven times more. After all, the worshippers in *Rosanna of the Amish* only suffered for two hours, albeit in backless chairs instead of the cushy upholstered models that "Anglo-normative" people would have used.

There are plenty of religions in the world, and social movements for that matter, be it Feminism or Marxism, which do not gear their teachings by what is popular or enjoyable. Do you think Ho Chi Minh's soldiers felt bad if they had to sit in underground burrows for a couple of days, waiting for bombing to subside? Maybe the Amish had long boring meetings but that depends on ones viewpoint and interests in any event. As Rousseau once said, "one man's poison is another man's delight"--actually I'm not sure he said it but somebody did. But that is no reason to disparage an entire culture and way of life. We may as well disparage "horse and buggy" Mennonites for not driving automobiles, or orthodox Jews for having long beards and wearing skull caps, or any other particular physical manifestation which does not meet the protocols of the "saintly and pristine" Anglo-conformist middle-class prescribed world. I recently told a Fundamentalist lady who was disparaging "horse and buggy" Mennonites that I had not found it yet anywhere in the Bible that everyone will be told at Heaven's Gate that driving a Buick Eldorado was an entrance requirement.

Surely those who accept this type of satire as legitimate social commentary are on the slippery slope of something far more sinister than any evil imagined or otherwise they might be trying to expose. The point is, if those who participate in traditional worship services find it to be worthwhile and edifying, that's their business. If Ralph Friesen or Billy Graham don't find it so, that is irrelevant. But this does illustrate how writers in the so-called canon approach their Zen-based mantra; find a blemished flashpoint which can be used by manipulation, etc. something that will grab the readers attention (preferably affirming Anglo-conformity to qualify

for Canada Council Grants), and then give 'em the berries.

(III) Ironically the experiential embryo of both Ms. Brandt and Friesen was within Evangelical Mennonite communities (E.M.M.C. and E.M.C., respectively), which during those times--the '50s and '60s--condemned traditional Mennonite culture and sought to destroy it by proselytizing, etc. Since their respective writings are the signature works of the Zen-based literary tradition, one questions why they would attack and disparage traditional Mennonites, when their real beef was with the Evangelical Mennonites who, in turn, had imported the alleged abuses from the "pop" religious culture of the day.

In fact, I personally accept their allegations as true, but against the popular religious culture of the '50s and '60s which was extremely categorical and justified abuse under the guise of Biblical commandment, it was sort of a Calvinist triumphalist thing where Paul superseded the Gospels. But why blame and malign traditional Mennonites for the sins of Fundamentalists, Pietists and Revivalists? I'm sorry but I don't quite get behind it! Perhaps they accepted the Evangelical Mennonite embryo they grew up in as definitive and were simply not aware that this world itself had displaced an "old world" traditional culture only two decades prior.

Far be it for me to suggest that Brandt and Friesen did not do their historical research for their literary masterpieces. Surely anyone going to the trouble of writing a poem or book would go to a few diaries and journals of the matriarchs and ministers from the "old order" Gemeinden and see that offenses such as abuses of women and children were strictly prohibited and abusers quickly punished and disciplined. In the alternative, why would anyone want to malign twenty generations of matriarchs if in fact they themselves were victims of oppression and abuse? Surely in that case they would not deserve to be maligned together with their entire community and their stories should immediately be researched and documented for posterity?

In any event, isn't it a bit far-fetched to disparage an entire culture with a half-a-mil-

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Brandt and Friesen: do they speak to Evangelical or Mennonite culture?



Patrick Friesen and Di Brandt, two of Canada's most brilliant poets, whose writings are broadly seen as the signature works of Mennonite culture. But many observers feel they speak of Evangelical, not Mennonite culture. Photo Credits, Di Brandt, Questions I asked my mother, rear cover. Patrick Friesen, *Prairie Fire*, Vol. 11, No. 2, page 153.

lennium of history when one thinks of the tens of thousands of misfortunates and downtrodden people who were helped by hundreds of matriarchs, ministers, deacons and Bishops in these traditional Gemeinden, none of whom were getting paid one penny? Not to mention the little detail that for a good part of this time, they themselves experienced oppression and had to struggle for survival. Would it not be possible to admit that there was at least one little small speck of something good in all of this somewhere? Isn't there at least one potential literary character out there somewhere who might have done something heroic or even right, like possibly an early day Jean Val Jean, perhaps? And failing this, how about somebody who was inherently evil or useless, but ended up doing something heroic, a Sidney Carton character perhaps?

IV So where are we going with all of this? The most immediate result of the Zen-based literary portrayals of Russian Mennonite literature is that both the general public and an entire generation of Mennonite young people have been deceived. Our young people have been conditioned to believe that the ancient Gemeinden were made up of perverted and sinister individuals and that the *raison d'être* of their communities was oppression and manipulation.

There is not much we can do about what Johnny-Q public believes; once the Zen genie was out of the bottle it could never be stuffed back. In truth, also, the Canadian public was pre-conditioned by "anglo-conformist" psychosis to yearn for this type of writing about ethnic groups and minorities. It was sort of a coming home affair, an affirmation of

truth--after all, could anybody so different really be a decent human being? So the blame should not be put on Friesen and Brandt. Fortunately it has facilitated for both of them a modicum of success and recognition for their "noble suffering" and for this we should all be happy. The public perceptions which have come from their work, whether by design or otherwise can never be altered and this will be their legacy. We all must accept this, whether we agree with them or not.

But we can do something about socializing our young people. First, we can make them aware it does not contravene literary honesty to think positively about their ancestors. Indeed, the skies won't fall if occasionally they might actually be a little proud of the fact that the ancient Gemeinden and their ancestors were centuries ahead of their time in terms of feminism, social justice and democracy (but then we wouldn't want to fall into pride now would we?)

Secondly, we must continue the slow, thankless, sometimes boring task of rooting out old documents, interviewing seniors, and practising "Sitzfleisch" instead of Zen, and cranking out the historical material. Hopefully we are entering a time when our institutions of higher learning will insist on quality research and writing, not merely production of politically correct writing, and/or Zen articulated fiction.

Thirdly, I hope we can take a page out of the history of our ancestors (from the Gemeinden), and learn something about genuine democracy, where we can have free and passionate debates, challenging each other's views without seeing each other as villains; where we can agree to be friends and still allow the exchange of views and opinions so necessary to free thought. Hopefully we can all agree on this, regardless of whether or not one accepts Zen articulated literary portrayal in our literature. For example, our 19th century forbears would passionately debate at "Brodaschof" for hours on a Sunday afternoon after a two hour worship service, and then celebrate communion together--although I personally wouldn't want to go quite that far.

Fourthly, I acknowledge that the literature produced by Friesen and Brandt and others in the canon has been of the highest quality and of that we should all be proud. They deserve our gratitude and admiration for their courage in being artistic and creative in a culture which had almost forgotten the meaning of the term. I am not advocating that the voices of Friesen and Brandt and others like them be silenced, only that the literary portrayal in our culture be more inclusive and holistic. I would suggest a book, *Mirror of a People: Canadian Jewish Experience in Poetry and Prose* (1985) 250 pages, as an example of a more inclusive literary portrayal with prominent writers such as Leonard Cohen, Mordecai Richler, and others, confident enough in their minor voice to also portray the positive elements of their own culture (and by definition of their own being).

And finally, I hope we can agree in principle, at least, that all people, everywhere, of whatever race or colour, deserve our respect, whatever their cultural and religious practices, or lack thereof, may be -- even our own.

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