Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

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Volume XIX No. 3 2013

Collecting the Reiseschuld

By John Hiebert

Scholars and historians have written about the prosperity our Mennonite ancestors enjoyed after they settled in South Russia. The special privileges granted to them by Catherine II gave them religious freedom, exemption from military service, and control of their civic and educational affairs. Under these conditions, they were free to live the Mennonite lifestyle which they were accustomed to. Eventually, however, Russian reform programs encroached on their independence and threatened their faith and freedoms. In light of these developments, many felt that submitting to the changes that were imposed on them violated their convictions. The group that held this view emigrated

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From the Editor's Desk

By Victoria Neufeldt

This is my last issue of the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*. It is sad to leave, but there are other interests and obligations that need more time than I have been able to devote to them. The five years I have spent as editor have been interesting, educational (I learned so much about Saskatchewan Mennonite history!), sometimes surprising, occasionally frustrating, but altogether worthwhile.

I have tried to live up to the standards first set by Bill Epp, and I hope that our readers find that the fine articles contained in this last issue meet their expectations.

A number of changes have taken place, of sad significance for this publication: the death of Ernie Baergen, whose keen eye as a proofreader, along with that of Verner Friesen, kept our errors to a minimum; and the retirement of Rosemary Slater (genealogy editor) and Victor Wiebe (archivist and book page editor). As of this issue, sadly, their names are gone from the masthead. Both Rosemary and Victor go back to the period when Dick Epp was editor.

Verner Friesen, who also goes back to Dick's time, kept this publication alive as a capable interim editor after Dick's retirement and has been a constant, invaluable help as story scout and general advisor and, after his retirement from that, as my lone remaining proofreader.

As my last tribute to the founding editor of this magazine, the late, truly great, Dick Epp, I have chosen a few photos, plus his signature quill image, to decorate this page.

I wish my successor, Ruth Friesen, all the best with this magazine. I know she will rise to the challenge!

MHSS Board of Directors, 2012

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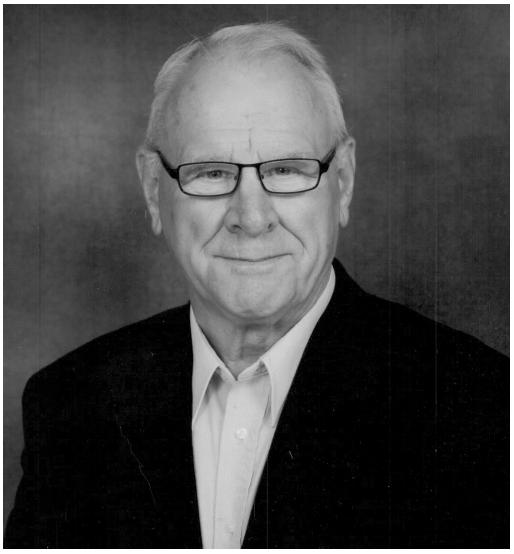
By Jake Buhler



We should all take note when our editor, who has volunteered for five years, resigns. Vicky, as she is sometimes called, is also Dr. Victoria Neufeldt, a linguist and lexicographer. She rarely waves her own flag, and her modesty is a reason why her product may be known, but not her name. If you have a *Webster's New World Dictionary* in your home, then you have a book of which she was editor in chief. If you read this edition of the *Historian*, then you are reading a publication she spent many hours editing. Vicky is a product of Nutana Collegiate in Saskatoon. She went on to receive a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a Ph.D. She studied and worked in Toronto before moving to the United States to continue her work in lexicography. We were happy when she returned to Canada about a decade ago and chose to live in Saskatoon. She will be missed. Thank you, Vicky, for all you have done. *Aulet baste!* (all the best!)

This edition of the *Historian* features an article by one of our youngest contributors ever. Peter Siemens, age 18, has written an outstanding article on the Siemens family. His piece should be an inspiration to other young writers. Have you heard of Peter Siemens before? When he was just 15, he designed the logo for the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan.

Continued from page 1

from Russia to the Americas to seek the concessions they desired. Others adjusted to the change and still maintained a lifestyle grounded in their faith, until the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 changed everything. In addition to the hardships that people suffered as an aftermath of the revolution, this period of political restructuring dictated almost every facet of their lives. The agreements made under the Czarist government were dissolved and the systematic destruction of the Mennonite way of life was inevitable.

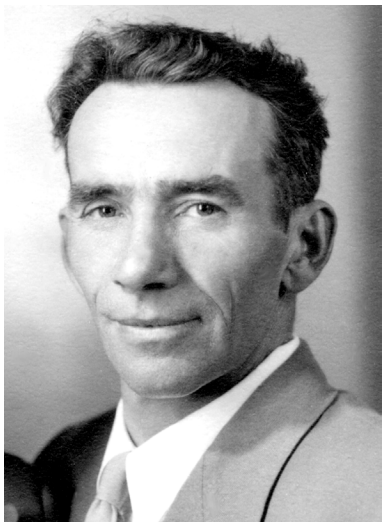
When the Mennonites who had migrated to Canada earlier heard about the suffering their people in Russia had to endure, they developed a plan to facilitate a mass migration of Mennonites to Canada. This was not an easy task, but under the leadership of David Toews, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization was successful in negotiating the terms of migration from Russia to Canada. Of paramount importance in these negotiations was an order-in-council that the Canadian government passed on May 1, 1919, prohibiting the immigration of Mennonites to Canada. It was not until the government of Prime Minister Mackenzie King repealed this order-in-council that a financial strategy was developed with Colonel John S. Dennis, chief commissioner of colonization and development for the Canadian Pacific Railway, to advance credit to the Mennonites to cover transportation costs.

While this arrangement solved a major obstacle in the migration process, it also created a huge transportation debt (*Reiseschuld*), for which the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization assumed responsibility. The expectation was that the immigrants would pay for the credit extended to them after they settled in Canada. Many of the people, however, did not clear their indebtedness, so the Board had difficulty in fulfilling its commitment. Some had legitimate reasons for not paying, while others either neglected or refused to pay.

In an effort to liquidate the amounts outstanding, the Board made special appeals to the immigrants to fulfill their obligation. To expedite the collection process, representatives were appointed to collect the amounts owing or to make suitable arrangements to settle their accounts. In the words of David Toews, "It has always been the main assignment of all the district representatives always to be fully oriented on the amount of *Reiseschuld* outstanding on every account, on the attitude of a debtor to his debt, and to solicit payments and remit them to the Board." (p. 336, *Mennonite Exodus*, by Frank Epp).

For some reason, the experiences these men had in the collection process has remained obscure. Little seems to be recorded about the difficulties they sometimes encountered in their pursuit of delinquent accounts. In many cases they faced problems in travelling to outlying areas and when they arrived there, they sometimes dealt with people who were not prepared to accept responsibility for their debt.

One of these district representatives in Saskatchewan was Gerhard J. Hiebert, who dealt with many of the obstacles these representatives faced during the collection process.

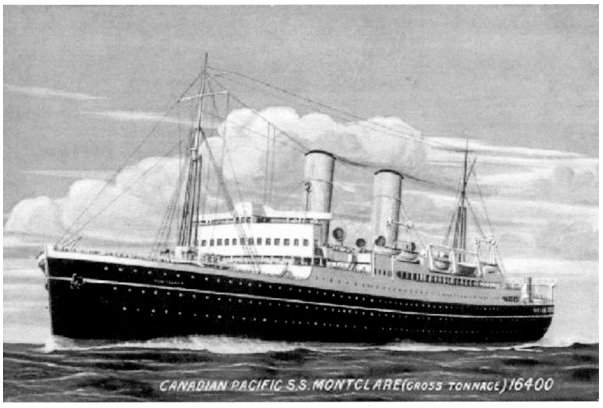


Gerhard J. Hiebert in 1950
Photo courtesy of the author

Gerhard was born in the Chortitza region of South Russia in 1904. Early in his childhood he moved with his parents to Nikolaipol, Siberia, where he grew up in a farming environment. At some point, his interest in education led him to enrol in a teacher-training institution, where he obtained his teaching credentials. His first assignment was in a school not far from where he grew up. Also, during this time his spiritual path became defined, he was baptized in the Mennonite faith and joined the local Mennonite church. A few months later Gerhard was married and continued his teaching career. He was a promising teacher and found his career both interesting and rewarding, until the erosion of traditional freedoms in Russia gave him reason to pursue emigration possibilities.

He was apprehensive about leaving the teaching profession, but the political situation was sufficiently troubling that he and his wife Maria decided to emigrate with Maria's parents and siblings, who were already booked to come to Canada under the Canadian Pacific Railway program. The quota for CPR credit passengers, however, had already been filled, so the required documents and passage had to be obtained with cash. When sufficient funds were acquired, arrangements were made to leave Siberia under the sponsorship of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. The rest of Gerhard's family was to follow as soon as travelling plans could be finalized.

Gerhard and Maria Hiebert and their three-week-old son left Siberia on October 18, 1926 and travelled through Moscow to the Latvian port of Riga, where they boarded a ship en route to Liverpool, England. Here they transferred to another ship, the *SS Montclaire*, and arrived in Quebec on November 20, 1926.



A postcard from the 1920s, showing the ship *SS Montclaire*, which carried the Hiebert family to Canada
Image courtesy of the author

The family was given final immigration clearance by Canadian authorities and then they were free to settle in their chosen country. After staying briefly in Manitoba and in Dundurn, Saskatchewan, they moved to the Macklin, Saskatchewan area with Maria's parents and siblings. Here they were able to acquire farm property through the Mennonite Debt Adjustment Board (personal interview, Abram Hiebert). The difficulties Gerhard and his family faced in getting established in Canada were unique to the community they had chosen. In addition to living in a social environment without the customary Mennonite principles, they had to overcome language and social barriers and learn how to work and live in strange surroundings. In spite of these obstacles, transportation problems, and general difficulties in developing a viable farming operation during the drought years, the new settlers at Macklin prevailed. Their new enterprise developed into what was then considered to be a productive system of operation.

When Gerhard left Russia there was a reasonable expectation that his parents and family would follow him to Canada as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made. He did everything possible to expedite the process of obtaining the necessary clearance for his parents and siblings. The correspondence from his family in Russia provided some evidence that their migration would materialize, but then a letter dated November 30, 1929 and written by Gerhard's brother and his wife indicated that "*Es war alles fertig zum fahren*" (everything was ready to go), when authorities suddenly came at night and forced them into a coal car to return them by rail to Siberia, with the reason that Canada would not accept them. While historically this explanation was partially correct, the book *At the Gates of Moscow* by H.J. Willms provides the full story of the events that led to their brutal treatment and the cessation of Mennonite migration from Russia. Gerhard was devastated by this news and lived with visible agony. The suffering his parents endured was the subject of numerous family discussions and gave him more determination to try to get clearance for his parents and siblings to migrate to Canada.

As the assimilation process in Canada progressed, Gerhard and his wife had some decisions to make that would affect the family socially, educationally, and spiritually. By this time they had four children and the oldest was of school age. It was essential, they felt, that their children should be exposed to a social and spiritual environment which reflected attitudes and values that were consistent with their Mennonite convictions. In their view, this could only be achieved in a community that held those standards.

With this in mind, they moved from the property near Macklin in 1934, stayed briefly on Maria's parents' property in the Danzig School District, and then settled on a farm four miles east of Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Its location was in a Mennonite community with Bergthal School as the educational and social centre. It was here that they became actively involved in a variety of community activities. It was here that Gerhard met with Seager Wheeler and had discussions with him about farming techniques and the selection process he used in the development of his new variety of wheat.

As Gerhard's role in church functions in the Bergthal School developed, he became acquainted with ministers from Rosthern, including Rev. David Toews, who frequently served the congregation. The family home was adjacent to the school so visiting ministers who served there on Sundays were often invited for lunch after the service. One can only speculate about the topics that were discussed during these visits; however, the subject that was on the top of many church leaders' minds was the huge *Reiseschuld* that the Mennonites had incurred in the process of moving their people from Russia to Canada. It was well known that any further CPR funding for migration would be dependent on the liquidation of the *Reiseschuld*. Could this have been why Mennonite refugees were held at the "Gates of Moscow" to be robbed of their potential freedom? Was this what prevented his parents from migrating to Canada? Was this why they were sent back to Siberia to face starvation and persecution? While there were, no doubt, other issues that prevented further migration, it may have been the debt question that motivated Gerhard to get involved in collecting the *Reiseschuld*.

The years at Bergthal were years of growth and excitement. It was not difficult for families to assimilate into a community that offered them opportunities to achieve their goals. Most of the people spoke the same language, they had the same aspirations and their values were consistent with those expressed by Gerhard and Maria. Despite such favourable conditions, Gerhard never forgot about the suffering of his parents and siblings in Russia. He sent parcels to them in hopes that they would receive them and he continued his efforts to bring them to Canada. He had already worked with authorities to ensure that their names had been placed on the credit list.

These events and discussions with Rev. David Toews may have been the catalyst that convinced Gerhard to get involved with the debt liquidation issue. He started visiting the immigrants in Northern communities of Saskatchewan at some point after he settled in the Bergthal community, and became an active collector of the *Reiseschuld*.

This was a difficult task and was complicated by the distances he sometimes had to travel. Eventually, he was able to purchase a motor vehicle — a used Whippet — which enabled him to reach the more outlying communities when necessary. Often he returned to visit debtors numerous times to make arrangements that would encourage people to clear their indebtedness. Sometimes he was not welcome at places he visited and was advised not to return. Most of the obstacles, however, could be overcome with patience, ingenuity, and determination. He had all three of these qualities and he used them in his efforts to help immigrants settle their accounts. Gerhard revisited debtors until he received full payment for what was owed.

He knew these were difficult times, so he was prepared to negotiate suitable terms to enable them to clear their liability. The unusual delivery of a large number of fence posts to Gerhard's farm one day and some goats on another occasion, therefore, was not a surprise. He had negotiated terms for payment with debtors who could not pay their *Reiseschuld* in cash. These in-kind payments presented a special problem, because the items had to be turned into cash, which was then submitted to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization either directly or forwarded to the board through the local church.

"In 1942 both the Canadian MB and GC conferences recommended to the churches that special committees be appointed to counsel with delinquent debtors" (p. 336, *Mennonite Exodus*, Frank Epp) and better results were achieved. A provincial committee in each province had supervisory responsibility for provincial collections. The provinces were divided into districts, each headed by a *Distriktmann* whose

duty it was to collect *Reiseschuld* in his district. Local committees were usually formed to help the person who represented the district. Both the *Distriktmann* and provincial committee were responsible to a provincial representative, who in turn was responsible to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (p. 57, "The Mennonites of Alberta," Peter F. Bargen). According to the Waldheim District *Reiseschuld* Committee meeting minutes of March 5, 1943, Mr. G.J. Hiebert was appointed to be the *Distriktmann* for Waldheim and the surrounding area.

Gerhard apparently held this position until the debt was liquidated. His determination to achieve this seemed to reflect the model of determination Rev. David Toews exhibited when he negotiated the migration of Mennonites from Russia to Canada.

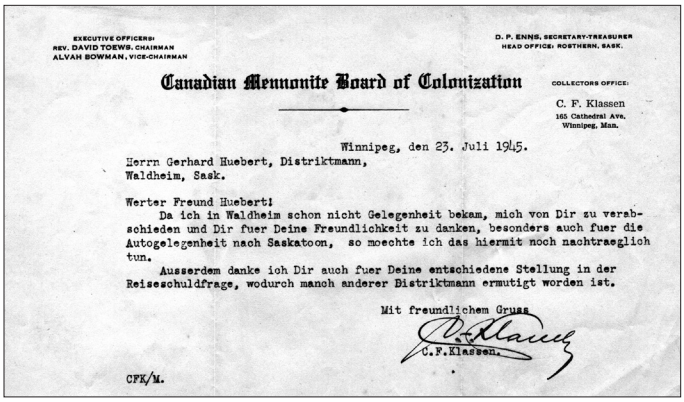
That resolve took on a dimension of urgency when the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization continued to be in arrears in its payments to the CPR and according to reports considerable interest was accumulating. The Depression of the 1930s was slowly giving way to more prosperity and many of the immigrants were able to clear their debt. Some were able to commit a portion of their wheat crop to pay their bill. The minutes of a *Reiseschuld* Committee meeting of December 3, 1943, chaired by Mr. G.J. Hiebert, refer to a person who could not pay his entire amount and was offered the option of assigning 1,000 bushels of wheat for a debt of $1,062. Records also indicate that Mennonites helped each other by making donations of wheat or money to their local churches for debt retirement. Usually some funds were set aside to help people pay for doctor and hospital expenses.

The following is a translation from German of a letter of gratitude from Mr. C.F. Klassen to Gerhard. Mr. Klassen headed the *Reiseschuld* collection effort and apparently had attended a meeting in Waldheim [see photo of the original letter, reduced, at right].

> Dear Gerhard Huebert, *Distriktmann*,
> Winnipeg, July 23, 1945.
>
> Waldheim, Sask.,
>
> My esteemed friend Huebert!
>
> Since I did not have an opportunity to take my leave from you in Waldheim and also to thank you for your kindness especially for the car opportunity to Saskatoon I will hereby do it retrospectively.
>
> Furthermore, I would like to thank you for your strong position with respect to the *Reiseschuld* issue which encouraged many another *Distriktmann*.
>
> With kind regards,
>
> C.F. Klassen.

The task of collecting *Reiseschuld* was never a pleasant one. Gerhard knew that most of the families had a difficult time adjusting to the new country. He knew of the difficulties they faced in trying to make ends meet, because he experienced the same problems. Often, little or nothing was left to pay for the transportation debt. He was also aware, however, that the debt had to be paid in order for the Colonization Board to negotiate further funding. Sometimes he may have felt that his efforts were futile, yet he continued to serve in the collection effort and in capacities where he could help his church and community. In fact, he may have had a fairly close working relationship with the Board since he appears to have worked with account calculations in various parts of Saskatchewan. He was always hopeful that migration restrictions would be lifted so that his parents and siblings would eventually be allowed to migrate to Canada. Unfortunately, his dreams for their migration would never be realized.

Gerhard's involvement in the collection of the transportation debt did not prevent him from providing for his family, maintaining a prosperous farming operation, or taking an active role in community affairs.



EXECUTIVE OFFICERS:
REV. DAVID TOEWS, CHAIRMAN
ALVAH BOWMAN, VICE-CHAIRMAN

D. P. ENNS, SECRETARY-TREASURER
HEAD OFFICE: ROSTHERN, SASK.

Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization

COLLECTORS OFFICE:
C. F. Klassen
165 Cathedral Ave.
Winnipeg, Man.

Winnipeg, den 23. Juli 1945.

Herrn Gerhard Huebert, Distriktmann,
Waldheim, Sask.

Werter Freund Huebert!

Da ich in Waldheim schon nicht Gelegenheit bekam, mich von Dir zu verabschieden und Dir fuer Deine Freundlichkeit zu danken, besonders auch fuer die Autogelegenheit nach Saskatoon, so moechte ich das hiermit noch nachtraeglich tun.

Ausserdem danke ich Dir auch fuer Deine entschiedene Stellung in der Reiseschuldfrage, wodurch manch anderer Distriktmann ermutigt worden ist.

Mit freundlichem Gruss

C.F.Klassen.

CFK/M.

The letter from C.F. Klassen to Gerhard Hiebert
Image courtesy of the author

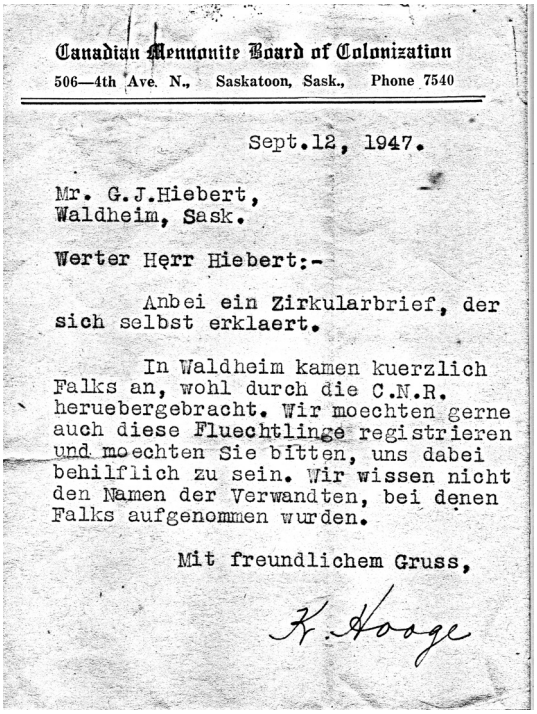
In 1944, farm property became available near Waldheim, Saskatchewan. With its purchase the Hieberts were finally able to occupy a farm of their own. Its location was favourable to all of the family's activities. The church of their Mennonite faith was located in Waldheim and all of their business and social activities were centred in this community. Here, also, they could guide their children to develop spiritual values with a Mennonite flavour. When Gerhard was urged to enter local municipal politics, he was successful in his election bid and served his community as a councillor from 1952 to 1955. During his term of office he was instrumental in lobbying for and procuring electric power for farmers in the local rural communities. Also during this term, he was able to make improvements to roads that provided for better transportation in rural areas.

Eventually, his role as a collector of *Reiseschuld* for the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization started winding down and finally, in 1946, the Rev. J.J. Thiessen, who had replaced Rev. David Toews as the chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, reported that all the *Reiseschuld* had been paid. Gerhard had worked with *Reiseschuld* accounts for almost a decade, so he accepted this news with satisfaction. Although his role as a collector was completed, he continued to be available to expedite matters related to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the registration of immigrants.

The following is a translation from German of a letter from K. Hooge, office secretary, requesting help in registering a family who came to Canada after all the *Reiseschuld* had been paid [see photo of original letter, reduced, at right].

> Mr. G.J. Hiebert,
> Waldheim, Sask.
>
> Dear Mr. Hiebert:-
>
> Please find enclosed a circular letter which is self explanatory.
>
> Falks recently arrived in Waldheim, probably brought over by the C.N.R. We would really like to register these refugees and would ask you to help us with that. We don't know the names of the relatives who received them.
>
> With Friendly Greeting,
>
> K. Hooge.

Maria, his wife, will always be remembered for the support she gave her husband. She made sacrifices that frequently went unnoticed. They may have had many discussions about migration possibilities for the Hieberts who were left in Russia; however, it seemed that Gerhard was committed to resolving one of the obstacles that he knew was preventing immigration of Mennonites to Canada. Maria observed his anguish and did her part to help in his efforts to collect the immigration debt. She took care of farm chores and looked after family matters during his absence. At the same time, she tried to become accustomed to living in a new country. She avoided answering the telephone because she was not familiar with the English language. She feared the aboriginal people who lived near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan and sometimes came to the house when Gerhard was away. When she saw them entering the driveway she would either hide the children under beds or take them to the neighbours' place. She seldom complained about her role on the farm, nor did she admonish him for the time he spent in the collection process. She seemed to encourage him with her quiet confidence. Her patience, tolerance, and understanding were never questioned.



Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization
506—4th Ave. N., Saskatoon, Sask., Phone 7540

Sept.12, 1947.

Mr. G.J.Hiebert,
Waldheim, Sask.

Werter Herr Hiebert:-

Anbei ein Zirkularbrief, der sich selbst erklaert.

In Waldheim kamen kuerzlich Falks an, wohl durch die C.N.R. heruebergebracht. Wir moechten gerne auch diese Fluechtlinge registrieren und moechten Sie bitten, uns dabei behilflich zu sein. Wir wissen nicht den Namen der Verwandten, bei denen Falks aufgenommen wurden.

Mit freundlichem Gruss,

K. Hooge

The letter from K. Hooge to Gerhard Hiebert
Image courtesy of the author

Gerhard's accomplishments seemed to give her strength and a sense of pride that quietly reflected her collaboration.

Gerhard and Maria were devoted to the Mennonite principles. Their dedication and integrity reflected that faith. They were thankful for the opportunity they had been given to migrate to Canada, where they could exercise their faith and freedoms. Their expression of gratitude manifested itself in many ways, including the collection of the *Reiseschuld*. The qualities they exhibited and left as an example for future generations makes one reflect on the words of Henry Drummond when he said, "You will find, as you look back in life, that the moments that stand out are the moments when you have done things for others."

The mass exodus of Mennonites from Russia to Canada created a transportation debt of almost two million dollars, which took special arrangements to liquidate. It is an incredible story of suffering, compassion, courage, relief, happiness, and disappointment. There are numerous monographs and references about what caused the exodus, how it was achieved, and the extraordinary efforts applied to collect the debt owed to the CPR. Without leaders like David Toews, C.F. Klassen, J.J. Thiessen, and many others, who worked untiringly to help the Mennonite people leave Russia, this could not have been achieved. As *Distriktmann*, Gerhard J. Hiebert had occasion to meet and resolve issues with them in the collection process.

This article reflects many hours spent in reviewing the literature and the documents Gerhard preserved. It summarizes what his family remembers about their father's collection activities and the difficulties they sometimes experienced during the years that he spent collecting the Reiseschuld. Hopefully, this will add to an appreciation of the remarkable courage, determination, and dedication demonstrated to achieve the migration of more than 20,000 Mennonite people from Russia to Canada. Unfortunately, there were those who were not permitted to leave Russia and endured unspeakable suffering.

Following a tribute to Gerhard J. Hiebert by this author at the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society Heritage Night in February of 2003 in Saskatoon, he was "posthumously awarded Honorary Recognition in the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Inc., for his contribution to the preservation of Mennonite history, heritage and faith" by MHSS.

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Original passports and other documents reviewed by Sarah Hiebert, Henry Hiebert, and John Hiebert.

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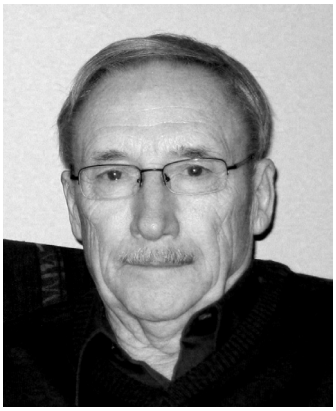
Personal and family experiences.

Hiebert family's arrival on the *SS Montclaire* verified from microfiche documents in the Pier 21 Society Resource Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia: volume 24, page 71, and sheet #38.

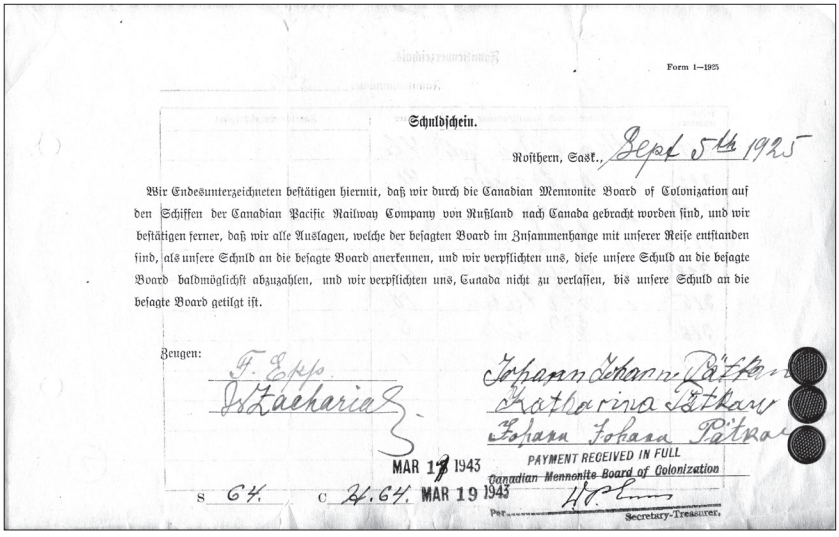


The author John Hiebert, in a recent photo

John Hiebert is the son of Gerhard J. Hiebert. After a career in teaching and educational projects administration, he retired from an active role in education. He lives in Sherwood Park, Alberta with his wife and researches topics of interest. This article is a major revision and expansion of an article published in the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Newsletter, *June, 2011. John continues his research into the collection of* Reiseschuld.

A Debt Repaid

At right is an example of a *Schuldschein* (a statement of debt), signed by members of the Patkau family in 1925. The date stamps, together with the signature to their right, indicate that their *Reiseschuld* was cleared. Image courtesy of Rev. Esther Patkau.



Form 1—1925

Schuldschein.

Rosthern, Sask., Sept 5th 1925

Wir Endesunterzeichneten bestätigen hiermit, daß wir durch die Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization auf den Schiffen der Canadian Pacific Railway Company von Rußland nach Canada gebracht worden sind, und wir bestätigen ferner, daß wir alle Auslagen, welche der besagten Board im Zusammenhange mit unserer Reise entstanden sind, als unsere Schuld an die besagte Board anerkennen, und wir verpflichten uns, diese unsere Schuld an die besagte Board baldmöglichst abzuzahlen, und wir verpflichten uns, Canada nicht zu verlassen, bis unsere Schuld an die besagte Board getilgt ist.

Zeugen: J. Eckp. J. Zacharias

Johann Johann Pätkau
Katharina Pätkau
Johann Johann Pätkau

MAR 19 1943
PAYMENT RECEIVED IN FULL
Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization
Per H. P. Sims
Secretary-Treasurer.

S 64. C 4.64. MAR 19 1943

Sunday School Sprüche*: A Beautiful Tradition*

By Agnes Peters

Most Saskatchewan Mennonites over the age of forty probably have a memory of receiving little illustrated cards with a Bible verse or a little moral rhyme in Sunday school. Those little cards were so common but, surprisingly, their history is not well known and their origin is a mystery. We also don't know when they were phased out, but we know they were still handed out in the 1960s and 1970s.

These little cards, called *Sprüche*, were printed in groups on letter-sized sheets of heavy paper and perforated for easy removal of the individual cards. This was the way postage stamps used to be sold, except that the *Sprüche* were not all the same size.

Each little *Spruch* had either a colourful biblical picture with a matching Bible verse below it or a beautiful landscape, floral design, or children at play, that would fit in with the little verse.

The Mennonites in Saskatchewan, especially those who came to Canada in the 1920s, were very poor. During the Depression of the 1930s, they had very little money for Sunday school teaching materials. Each family probaby had a book of Bible stories (*biblische Geschichten*) and the teachers had these sheets of *Sprüche*. Each child would receive a *Spruch* at Sunday school and would be expected to memorize it for the following Sunday.

We do know that *Sprüche* were also used in Ukraine. Katie Willms, late of First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, who came to Canada after the Second World War, described one that she had kept from when she had received it as a child. It was reproduced for an article she contributed to the First Mennonite Church of Saskatoon's *Church Family News* in 2011 and is shown again here.

We did persuade a few people to cast their minds back and share a personal memory of these beautiful little cards. Henry Patkau of Saskatoon, originally of Hanley (Sheldon) Mennonite Church, had not kept any cards to show us, but he told us the following story.

> In the 1930s as a child I was a faithful Sunday-school student. My siblings and I attended Sunday school with joy and interest. At each Sunday school session, the teacher gave us a small card with a beautiful picture and a Scripture verse. Every Sunday the picture and verse were different from the previous time. The following Sunday we would have to recite that verse from memory. One Sunday, we drove to church as usual with horse and buggy, with my brother and me in the back seat. For some reason, a quarrel broke out between us and our parents turned around to us and told us to behave.
>
> We quietened down and my mother said, "Now you are going to recite the Scripture verse you learned for today's Sunday school class." I looked down at my verse in embarrassment. I hesitated to read it out, but eventually I recited the words, which were from Genesis 45:24: "*Zanket nicht auf dem Wege*" ("Do not quarrel on the way"). How fitting. That verse has stuck in my memory ever since.

Helen Epp, also of Saskatoon and originally from the same church as Henry Patkau, has this memory.

> When I was young, memorizing Scripture verses was part of the Sunday school program. These Bible verses would be fixed in our hearts and minds and bring help and encouragement. One of my memories of Sunday school was receiving small Scripture picture cards — usually a biblical picture and a verse printed underneath. I still have some of these cards in my memory box. They are in German.
>
> My teacher was Henry Patkau [whose story is told above]. Each class sat in a pew, while the teacher stood in the pew in front of us. We needed to recite the verse from memory and then we were given a new card. In German it was simply called a *Spruch*. Our parents encouraged us to do our memory work on Saturday night, but since we

lived 10 miles from church, there was a good opportunity to review the verse before we arrived there. We enjoyed collecting these little cards. (We collected postcards as well.) We kept them safe in chocolate boxes — which were desirable collectibles themselves!

These little *Sprüche* were also very special to me, which is why I liked the idea of researching their history for the *Historian*. My siblings and I learned the verses every week and were always happy to go to Sunday school. I have a very distinct memory of one of these Sunday school sessions.

As a child, I was always very shy; I didn't like anybody to ask me a question, in case the others would hear my answer and would laugh at me. In my state of anxiety one Sunday, when I was about four, I began to nibble on my *Spruch* and somehow, the tension didn't subside and I soon found the entire *Spruch* in little pieces in my mouth. The teacher noticed my predicament, took me by the hand, and led me outside to spit it out.

Not only was I most embarrassed, but I also felt so sad to no longer have my *Spruch*! (I wasn't given a replacement.)

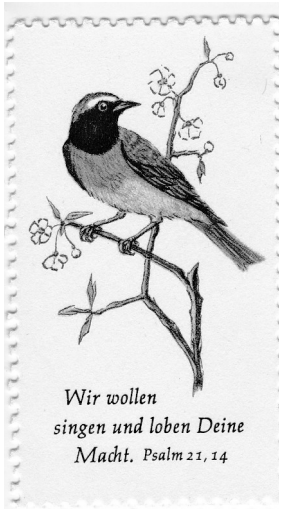
So many people remember these beautiful cards, but hardly anybody could help us with the history. Oftentimes in life, we find ourselves slow to ask questions and many times we are too late. This is one of those situations when nobody asked, and thus my quest for information was quite frustrating.

In researching the subject for this article, I have spoken to many wonderful people and gotten the beginnings of interesting leads — almost. One thought I had early on was the Mennonite archives in Winnipeg. But surprisingly, they had nothing for me. Then I contacted Ingrid (Janzen) Lamp, a past editor of *Der Bote*. She suggested the *Mennonite Post* in Steinbach, Manitoba. These folks couldn't help me, but suggested the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Winnipeg. Among the museum's artifacts, they found a few *Sprüche*, but, like ours, these *Sprüche* had no publisher named on the back, and the museum had no information at all about them.

I called Justina Schellenberg, daughter of the late Jacob Schellenberg who was pastor and Sunday school teacher at the Hanley (Sheldon) Mennonite Church. She remembered that her father had a catalogue of *Sprüche* from which he would choose, and then send an order away to Germany.

There must be more information out there. We would like to hear from anyone who can tell us more about the history of these *Sprüche*. Please contact me through the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan. Contact information for MHSS is found on the last page of this periodical.

At left, two *Sprüche*, still attached, as they were removed together from the original sheet. This and the delicate bird drawing below are from the collection of Helen Epp. All *Sprüche* on these two pages are shown actual size. They are even more beautiful in colour!

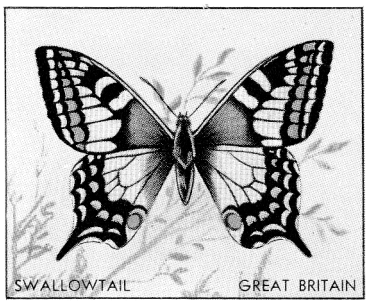


The tiniest *Spruch*! From the author's collection; the verse fits in well with the one remembered by Henry Patkau.

Three more from the author's collection; the one above appears to be very old. The one at right has a little poem, instead of a Bible verse, like the double one on the opposite page; note also the edge of the sheet, just visible on the right side of this *Spruch*.

Above and below are three more from Helen Epp's collection. The one with the butterfly is the only one in English and the only one without a deckled edge. It must be one that one of her children received in the 1970s. The *Spruch* with the flowering plant has a detailed description of the plant on the back.

The three *Sprüche* above and below are from Victoria Neufeldt's collection, found among her mother's things. The *Spruch* with daisies is unusually large.



Thou shalt love the Lord thy God *Luke 10.27*

The Siemens Family: a Century of Entrepreneurship

By Peter Siemens

The Early Siemens Family

The Siemens family has lived in Saskatchewan for nearly a century. They descend from a long line of Russian Mennonites who immigrated to Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century, fleeing the violence and oppression created in the wake of the Russian Revolution. The story of their ancestors involves many struggles; famine, poverty, and illness are challenges that they overcame through relentless determination, a trait inherited from their Mennonite faith.

Because of their widespread persecution, the Mennonites had become a close-knit and interdependent people. Cooperation was necessary for survival. Their unpopularity also forced them to become very hard-working and determined, traits that have remained in their families through the generations. Many Mennonites were entrepreneurs and business owners, showing that they were not afraid to take risks.

The Siemens were devout Mennonites for over three hundred years, and they still take time today to study the prominent cultural group from which they came.

The Siemens family is thought to have originated in Germany. The name Siemens means "men of the sea", so it is speculated that the first ancestors lived near the ocean. They fled to Prussia at the beginning of the 17th century to avoid government persecution. Although the family's roots have been traced back to the 17th century, very little is known about them before their settlement in Prussia. Along with many Mennonites, they left Prussia for Russia after 1792, at the invitation of Catherine the Great, who admired their agricultural expertise and wanted them to develop tracts of land in Ukraine. They were also given freedom of religion and exemption from military service.

The oldest known Siemens ancestor is Kornelius Siemens, who was born in Prussia and died there. His son, Johann Kornelius, was also born in Prussia in 1769 but moved to Russia with his wife, Anna Loewens (b.1808). Johann's son Heinrich Johann Siemens was born in 1798, likely in Prussia, and died in 1873 in Ohrloff, Russia. Heinrich married twice. His second wife was Margaret Hiebert (1813-1881) who, like her husband, was born in Prussia but moved to Russia. Their son was Kornelius (1841-1898) who was born in Russia and died there. He married Gertruda Friesen (1848-1939), who was born in Russia but who migrated to Canada via Mexico in 1926. She died in Bruderfeld, Saskatchewan.

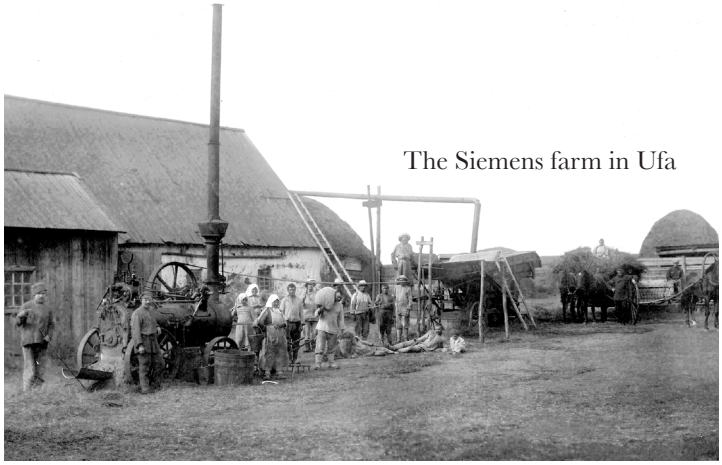
Life in Russia

Kornelius and Gertruda Siemens' son Kornelius was born in December, 1871 in Fürstenwerder, Molotschna Colony, in South Russia. He was the sixth of fourteen children, and grew up in a busy yet supportive household. As a child, Kornelius learned to speak both High German and Low German and was taught the Mennonite faith, but was not baptized until he reached adulthood.

The Siemens family in 1905 Parents Agatha and Kornelius with son K.K. between them; Anna at front left, Daniel at front right; Agatha on mother's lap; Gertrude on father's lap

As a young man, he met Agatha Loepp, whom he married on February 2nd, 1897 in Alexandrovka, Russia. Nine months later Agatha gave birth to a baby boy, whom they named Kornelius Kornelius (K.K.). Kornelius and Agatha remained in Alexandrokva for roughly ten years before moving in 1906 to Ufa, a province to the north, in search of new economic opportunities.

Ufa was one of many Mennonite settlements in South Russia that existed in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These settlements were founded by landowners, machine manufacturers, merchants, and other well-to-do Mennonites, mostly from Prussia, who



The Siemens farm in Ufa

had come to Russia seeking religious freedom and exemption from military conscription. The older and larger Mennonite settlements were located in Southern Russia in Ukraine: Chortitza (1789) and Molotschna (1803) and along the Volga, on the Trakt (1853) and Altsamara (1861). Ufa, considered a "daughter settlement," covered a large stretch of land near the Ural mountain range, about 150 kilometres east of the Volga River. Despite its remote location and relatively small size, Ufa experienced economic success, thanks to a rail line that connected it to the older and more densely populated Mennonite settlements in Ukraine and along the Volga.

Ufa was made up of several small towns, the largest of which was Davlekanovo. The town was established in 1894 by a group of Mennonites who purchased and developed land around the already existing train station. Like most settlements at the time, it was divided into several sections, called row-villages, which were each made up of four or five houses in a line. The town's population reached 1,831 at its peak, divided among nineteen villages and estates.

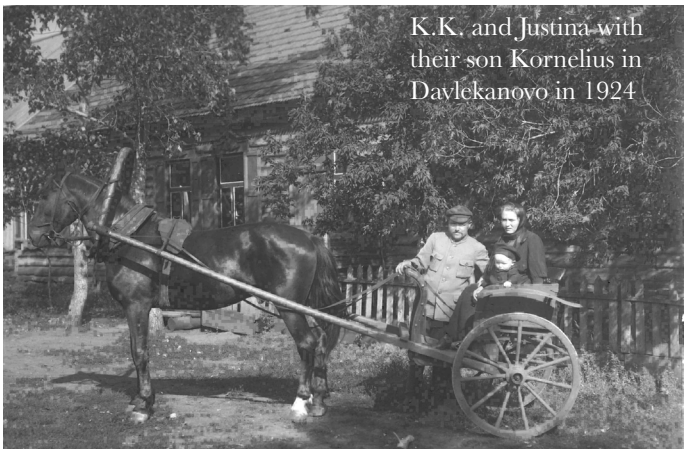
Davlekanovo is where Kornelius and Agatha settled in 1906. They built a home — a modest two-storey house — in a section of the town called Jurmakey. They also purchased several acres of farmland, and it is believed a store was set up in the centre of the town. The young couple shared their street with three other Mennonite families, with whom they developed close bonds. It was here that Kornelius and Agatha were able to live a prosperous and enjoyable life for many years, despite the region's poor weather and short growing season. They raised a family of nine children, three of whom died young, and by the time they left for Canada almost twenty years later, they had already welcomed their first two grandchildren.

The young K.K. (standing) with friend in Russia

Kornelius and Agatha's first child, Kornelius Kornelius (K.K.), was 10 years old when the family arrived in Ufa. He grew up to be a strong man of average height. He likely attended a private Mennonite high school and worked on the family farm. Once graduated, K.K. spent four years with the military, as was required for all men at the time, but served as an army medic to avoid the use of violence. He fell in love with the girl next door, Justina Wiens. They married in 1921 when Kornelius was twenty-three, and Justina was twenty. Their first child was a boy, whom they named Kornelius, out of tradition. The couple lived with K.K.'s parents in the part of the family home which was traditionally designated for the oldest son and his wife.

Life in Ufa was pleasant for most Mennonites at the time — they were safe from the violence and oppression that had plagued them for years and their economic prosperity allowed them to raise large families. It was not until the 1920s that this period of tranquility came to an end. Following the Russian Revolution that began in 1917, a state of anarchy brought bandits and pillagers who had no regard for the law; homes were robbed, stores were looted, and the quality of life in Ufa began to rapidly decline. In 1921, a famine spread through Russia, and thousands of families were left starving. Kornelius was forced to close his shop in Davlekanovo and the children had to be pulled out of school. With

Justina and K.K. in Ufa in 1922


K.K. and Justina with their son Kornelius in Davlekanovo in 1924

little money and winter approaching, it was Kornelius' son K.K. who looked for new ways of generating income. He traded cow hides that had been stored in the farm shed. Being an enterprising man, he began to barter and trade goods in nearby towns and villages. Luckily, the train was still running and he was able to expand his growing business to the larger cities further away. He rode the train for an entire winter, going as far as the Atlantic Ocean to bring salt inland, which he sold for a healthy profit. When he returned to Davlekanovo in the spring, he had earned enough money to support his family until the next winter, and indeed enough to buy tickets to Canada. Life was still unpleasant, but K.K. rejoiced in the fact that his family would survive the coming months, and even years.

Migration to Canada

Unlike Kornelius, most Russian Mennonites found it difficult to provide for their families after the 1917 revolution. The famine was devastating, and many saw emigration — a concept that was not unfamiliar to them — as the only means of reengaging their once prosperous lives. Because of the deteriorating political situation, the need to leave became even more urgent. The Mennonites in Russia were desperate; they reached out to other countries for help, but only a handful replied. Canada was one of the few countries that opened its doors to the Russian Mennonites.

The Siemens family's decision to emigrate to Canada happened almost by accident, and is a story that their descendants tell with great enthusiasm. During his time spent riding the train, K.K. met many people with whom he had long and heartfelt conversations. One of these strangers was another Mennonite, a man with whom K.K. felt a peculiar bond. After conversing with the man, K.K. discovered that he was a Loepp, a distant relative. Moreover, K.K.'s mother was a Loepp.

Upon this realization, the man began to tell K.K. of his own family's struggles and their plans to move to Canada. Some of his relatives were already settled in Saskatchewan, and they had agreed to sponsor his family's journey. The way he spoke of Saskatchewan, with its rich soil and abundant land, made K.K. begin to consider the possibility of moving. Life was getting better in Ufa, but after hearing the man on the train, he realized how much better Canada could be. Mr. Loepp gave him the address of his relatives in Saskatchewan. K.K. shared this with his father Kornelius, who promptly wrote to them, asking that they sponsor his family's immigration. The Loepps agreed and in 1925, Kornelius and Agatha began to prepare for the journey.

K.K.'s father wanted to bring the whole family, but Justina was pregnant with their second child and K.K. and Justina said that they would not leave until after the baby was born. K.K. did not want Justina's pregnancy to add additional stress to the already daunting journey, and he also feared for the safety and nourishment of his wife and unborn child. They remained in Davlekanovo for several months after K.K.'s parents and siblings had left. Six months after their child was born, a girl whom they named Nellie, K.K. and Justina set off to meet the others in Saskatchewan.

Their journey began by train. K.K. and Justina boarded at Davlekanovo and rode for days to reach the Red Gate on the Latvian border. Justina remembers her fear when crossing from Russia into Latvia. The train had to be searched at the border, and if anything illegal was found, they could be sent back home. Justina had foolishly sewn Russian money into her coat, which, if discovered, could have barred their journey. Luckily, she had placed the coat over baby Nellie, and the guards ignored it so as not to disturb the child. Fifty years later, Justina laughed at the scenario, but at the time she was incredibly nervous.

After travelling by sea from Latvia to England, K.K. and Justina boarded the *SS Ascania* in Southampton and this ship took them across the Atlantic Ocean to Halifax, Nova Scotia. They arrived in Halifax on March 6th, 1926, and took the train to Saskatoon. Justina recalls the cross-country train ride with amusement. Looking out her window, she remembers being both surprised and disappointed by the endless rocks and trees that made up the Canadian Shield. Canada was supposed to be home to rich, fertile soil and open fields, she thought. Had they been lied to? Eventually the train reached Manitoba and she was given her first glimpse of the prairies. Vast fields extended for what seemed like forever, resting under a blanket of relentless blue sky. The landscape was daunting, but it also had a homey feel; it reminded K.K. and Justina of the land they had left behind in Ufa. For many immigrants, the openness of the plains had a humbling and diminishing effect, but for the young "Russian" couple, it reflected the opportunities that lay ahead of them.

Upon arrival in Saskatchewan, K.K. and Justina spent their first night in Saskatoon with his sister Agatha, before leaving for the Loepps' farm in Dalmeny the next morning. They lived with the Loepps for two months, while K.K. worked to establish permanent living arrangements. He contacted a family in Regina, the Kellys, who offered to rent them a small farm near Balgonie, a town about 25 kilometres east of Regina. At first, K.K. was hesitant to accept the offer because he knew there were very few

Kornelius, Agatha, and family in Canada
Back row, 4th & 5th from left: K.K. & Justina
Front row, middle: Agatha & Kornelius with K.K.'s son Peter between them

Mennonites living in that area. Most of the Russian immigrants had settled in and around Saskatoon, and K.K. and Justina wanted to live near their own people. However, they put their preference aside and purchased the Kellys' farm, and he, Justina, and their two children moved to Balgonie in 1926.

Entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan: from a single truck to a large company

Several months after moving to the farm, K.K. and Justina welcomed their third child, Peter, on March 25th, 1927. Two more boys were born into the family while they lived on the Kelly farm: Daniel in 1929 and Walter in 1931. The children attended a rural school. The first years were challenging for them, as they had to work hard to learn English, but it was not long before they all did well.

Managing the farm was hard work, but K.K. and Justina were determined to make their new life a success. They lived on the Kelly farm at Balgonie for several years before moving to another farm nearby, the Chatwin farm, in 1933. Peter can recall the farm he grew up on, remembering especially the large red barn where they kept the cows. It was a dairy farm and Peter and his siblings helped with the daily task of milking, which was done by hand. In 1937, the family sold their farm and moved into a house at 923 Avenue F North in Saskatoon. Here they completed their family with another son, Erwen, born in 1938.

K.K. moved his family to Saskatoon with the hope of entering the trucking industry. Being an enterprising man, he had decided to give up farming and try something new. He purchased a small truck and began to haul coal in the city for several months before securing a real trucking route between Saskatoon and Beechy, a small town south of Outlook. It took him all day to drive to Beechy, where he would stay overnight, returning to Saskatoon in the morning. K.K. enjoyed the route but became frustrated that it was only one way; he delivered goods from Saskatoon to Beechy, but never in the other direction. He wanted to find new clients in Beechy, so he started to buy all of the family's groceries at the local market in an attempt to form connections with the residents. The local business owners had been sending their goods by rail, and he wanted to convince them that it was faster to do so by truck. His persistence paid off, and he was eventually able to

carry goods both ways, making his trips much more efficient and economical.

K.K.'s small trucking venture proved to be successful, but it was not long before he wanted to expand. He bought a second truck and started hauling machinery for another Mennonite trucker, Willems, from Dundurn. He enjoyed this arrangement, but at the same time he disliked having to work under somebody else. After searching for other opportunities, K.K. was finally able, in the early 1940s, to secure a route between Saskatoon and an oil refinery in Regina. He purchased several new tanker trucks for the job, which he was able to afford after receiving a generous bank loan. At this point, he had named his trucking business Siemens Transport.

Throughout the next several years he continued to purchase more trucks and establish new routes across Saskatchewan, and before long his dream of managing a large business had become a reality. K.K. continued to run Siemens Transport until he died, on October 14th, 1966, in Saskatoon.

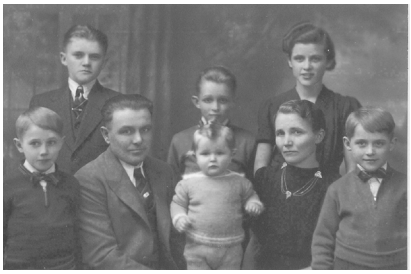
Walter, the fifth child, took over the management of Siemens Transport after his father's death. The company was eventually purchased by Mullen Transport in 1996. The youngest son, Erwen, also ran a trucking firm, Kindersley Transport, which was renamed Siemens Transportation Group in the 1990s. It gradually acquired more businesses and eventually became the largest trucking company in Saskatchewan. Still owned by Erwen, the Siemens Transportation Group is currently ranked as the 25th largest company in the province.

The Siemens Families Become Urban

K.K. and Justina's children enjoyed growing up in Saskatoon. Moving to the "big city" was a drastic change for them, but they were able to adjust to the new way of life.

The oldest son, Kornelius, known as Kon, graduated from high school in 1941 and went on to attend the University of Saskatchewan, graduating as an engineer in 1946. He worked in Sault St. Marie for several years before starting a firm of his own in Edmonton. In 1961, he died of colon cancer.

After high school, Nellie graduated from St. Paul's Hospital as a nurse and later moved to Toronto, where she managed a ward in a large hospital. After she was married, she owned and operated several businesses in Ottawa and Vancouver.



K.K. and Justina and their family in Saskatoon
Standing at back, from left: Kornelius (Kon), Peter, Nellie
Front row, from left: Daniel, K.K., Erwen, Justina, Walter

Peter had dreams of becoming a doctor. He studied pre-med and graduated with a B.A. in 1948. He then applied to medical school, but his application was rejected. Priority was being given to the many veterans returning from the war, and Peter's marks were simply too low to compete. After teaching in Forest Grove, British Columbia for a year, he again applied to medical school, but was denied entry a second time. In 1949, he married Audrey Clarke; they moved to Vancouver that same year and both enrolled in a one-year post-graduate education program, with the goal of becoming high school teachers. They taught in Salmo, a small town near Nelson, British Columbia, for one year, before returning to Saskatchewan in 1951, where Peter took a position at a school in Estevan. It is here that they had their first child, Marjorie, in May of 1952.

Peter enjoyed teaching in Estevan, but he never forgot his previous desire to become a doctor. In 1952, while visiting his parents in Saskatoon, he heard that a spot had opened up at the School of Medicine. Peter rushed to the university, where he spoke with the dean of medicine, asking if he could fill the empty spot. The dean agreed and Peter started school that September. Audrey gave birth to two boys, Kenneth and Ronald, while Peter was completing his residency.

After getting his degree, Peter began working as a general practitioner in Outlook, a small town about 100 kilometres south of Saskatoon. Peter and Audrey enjoyed life in Outlook; they purchased a large house, made many friends, and Peter's new

profession allowed them to live well. Audrey gave birth to three more children — Timothy, Barbara, and Elizabeth — who also enjoyed growing up in Outlook. They can remember helping their father in the garden, spending their hard-earned money at the candy store, and going to the swimming pool with their mother during the summer. They lived in Outlook for nine years, before Peter decided that he wanted to specialize in neurology. He made plans to complete a residency at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, which he paid for with money he had saved up over the years. With all in order, the family left for the United States in the summer of 1967. They spent only three years in Rochester, but during that time they had a seventh child. James Siemens arrived on September 5th, 1968, the last of Peter and Audrey's children. His brothers and sisters called him Jim.

Jim may have been born in the United States, but he was raised as a Canadian. His family left Rochester and moved to Saskatoon before he was twelve months old. They lived on a quiet street in the Avalon neighbourhood and Jim attended John Lake School, where he excelled academically. Like most Canadian boys, he grew up playing hockey; but in his teen years his focus shifted to swimming. He swam competitively throughout high school, often winning medals at provincial and national events. He also learned to play the bassoon and was a member of the Saskatoon Youth Orchestra for several years. Jim graduated from Aden Bowman Collegiate in 1986 at the top of his class. After high school, he enrolled in Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewn, with the intention of becoming a doctor like his father and older brother. But during his studies he began to take an interest in architecture, and after talking with a local architect, decided that it was a career he wanted to pursue. He left the university after one year and started taking architecture classes at the University of Manitoba.

During his time in architecture school, some of Jim's friends introduced him to Anna Ringstrom, a landscape architecture student and local Winnipeg girl. As they got to know each other, Jim became attracted to her intelligence and vibrant personality. Anna recalls her impression of Jim when they first met: he was "smart, and kind of cute," but she had no interest in dating him. However, Jim persisted, and needless to say, they married in April of 1993. Their first child was born on March 26th, 1995, one day after his grandfather's birthday. In honour of this coincidence, they named him Peter.

Jim and Anna moved with Peter to Saskatoon in the summer of 1997. They both got entry-level positions at local architecture firms where they worked hard to start their careers. Anna gave birth to a second boy, Teilo Matthias, on March 3rd 1998. Teilo was Peter and Audrey's nineteenth grandchild.

Peter, now eighteen, does not remember his early life in Saskatoon. Most of his childhood memories lie in Portland, Oregon, where his family moved shortly after his brother's birth. His parents wanted to experience the Pacific Northwest and left for the United States on a trial basis, with the intent of returning to Canada in the summer. However, they ended up staying in Portland for another seven years. Jim and Anna both worked a series of jobs at several different architecture firms. They had two more children, Mette and Lucca, in 2001 and 2003, respectively. In 2005, they decided that it was time to leave Portland, so they loaded their minivan and headed back to Saskatoon.

Moving to Canada was a bittersweet experience for Peter; he was excited to live somewhere new, but also afraid to leave his friends behind in Portland. He tried hard to "become Canadian", which to him meant learning to skate and play hockey, and remembering to say "zed" instead of "zee." He imagined what it must have been like for his great-grandparents when they had come in 1926. Not only did they have to learn new words, but an entirely new language as well. Peter learned about his ancestors' lives, including their journey to Canada, from his grandmother, Audrey. She often invited his family over for supper, and Peter and his siblings quickly developed a close relationship with their grandparents. They also established strong ties with the other members of the Siemens family, most of whom live in Saskatoon. Today, their family gatherings are

very large; it is not uncommon for more than thirty people to cram into one house.

It is at these gatherings that the Siemens feel a strong connection to one another, one that seems to go beyond simple family ties. Although most of them have not joined the Mennonite faith, they still hold true to the core values established by their ancestors. Their desire to help one another has been passed down through generations, along with their openness and unwavering generosity. Being around family members makes them feel a strong sense of belonging, the same way Kornelius and Agatha felt when they attended the Mennonite church in Ufa. The Siemens have come to the realization that they are more than a family — like the Mennonite people, they are a community.

The story told here is evidence that the Siemens were a family of entrepreneurs. From Kornelius' "wheeling and dealing" in Russia to K.K.'s trucking business in Saskatchewan, there is a history of homegrown, family-run businesses that have all been successful. However, this trait is not unique to the Siemens family; it is a mentality that Mennonites have shared for many years. The desire to provide for themselves was originally generated out of necessity, but now remains as a choice that many Mennonites continue to make. Their hard work and determination has made them a strong and distinct people, and this is what has allowed them to continue to exist as a prominent cultural group.

The members of the Siemens family are proud of their Mennonite roots, as well as the lengths to which their ancestors went, to ensure prosperous lives for themselves and their children and the many generations that followed. Peter and Audrey's seven children continue to thrive in Saskatchewan, where they have each raised their own children, some of whom are now beginning to start their own families. In recent years, many members of the family have started to live, work, and study abroad in places including the United States, Germany, China, and Thailand. When they travel home to Canada during the holidays, they are reminded of the long journey that their ancestors made nearly one hundred years before.

Sources:

• Extensive interviews with Audrey Clarke Siemens, who is the Siemens family historian

• Interviews with Jim Siemens, father of the author

The author, Peter Siemens, shown above, is studying computer science at the University of British Columbia. At the age of 15 he designed the logo of MHSS. His parents are Jim Siemens and Anna Ringstrom, both Saskatoon architects. His grandfather is the neurologist Dr. Peter Siemens, now retired.

Photos in this article are courtesy of Jim Siemens and Peter Siemens.

Jacob G. Guenter (1921-2013)

By Jake Buhler

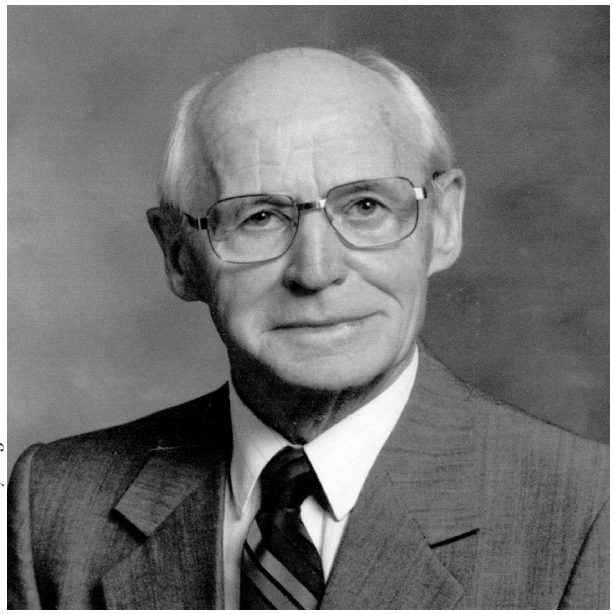


Photo courtesy of Jake Buhler

In the story-telling tradition, he was a master. He was a walking encyclopedia of information, and his knowledge of local history was probably unmatched. In any conversation, Jacob G., as he was affectionately called, could explain the genealogies of many of the families in the Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve. For his many contributions to Mennonite history, he was named to the Honour List of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan.

When Jacob G. died on October 6, 2013, he left behind a fine legacy. His first book, *Men of Steele*, chronicles the history of the families where he grew up six miles southwest of Hague. Specifically, he tells the story of how Steele School District #4128 was established in 1919, the first school built in 1928, and how it ceased to exist in 1965. In *Collections and Reflections*, he traces the Guenter/Guenther/Ginter family from 1761-1989. The book *Osler S.D. #1238: 1905-1947* is a 425-page history of the hundreds of students and their families of the Osler area. In *Stories of our People*, he tells the stories of early members of Osler Mennonite Church.

His very large project, in which he was a co-author, was *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve (1895-1995)*. This definitive 700-page book details the lives of early Mennonite settlers who arrived from southern Manitoba to establish more than two dozen villages. This book has become the go-to book for information on the early church history of the area, the customs and traditions of the time, and the stories of hundreds of pioneers.

Jacob and his wife Annie (Doell) farmed for 40 years in the Steele area. They raised a family of seven children; at the time of his death, the family had grown to 10 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Jacob sat as a board member of Steele School District. He was also a councillor in the Rural Municipality of Laird. He became a member of Osler Mennonite Church, where his wife Annie had been baptized. But his deep respect for the history of the Old Colony and Bergthaler Mennonite traditions ran deep in his blood. And he would spend many years researching and writing about those groups. Rev. Helen Kruger and Rev. Bill Kruger officiated at the funeral held at the Brian King Centre in Warman. Jacob was buried in the Guenter Cemetery at Schoenwiese. His photographs and original documents can be seen by anyone at the MHSS archives located at Bethany Manor.

Jacob G. graced us with much; he will be missed.

Peace Stories for Remembrance

By Jake Buhler

Four storytellers gathered at Mount Royal Mennonite Church on Saturday morning, November 9, 2013 to share their encounters with peace and conflict. Just over 50 people attended.

Ninety-year-old Don Regier, until recently a long-time resident of Laird and member of Laird Mennonite Church, shared that he was called up to enlist and serve in the Second World War. He was ridiculed and humiliated, especially by Judge John Embury who had served in the First World War. Don was sent to work in several places, including bush camps. A portion of any money he made was sent to the Red Cross. Don passionately stressed the importance of following the words of Jesus that command us to love and not kill. Don's fervent belief that violence is not the way to solve problems has remained a constant belief of his. Don has been a merchant all his life.

Charlie Clark, now a Saskatoon city councillor, spoke about his great-grandfather (WW1) and his grandfather (WW2) who were military officers. His grandfather, Fred Ritchie, now 95 and living in British Columbia, had a close encounter with a German officer where each could have shot the other. Neither acted. Fred left the war as a tank commander and changed his war message to one of "Never again". He began to wear the white beret that symbolized his opposition to nuclear weapons. He was criticized for this and in Remembrance Day parades was told to march at the back. Charlie was highly influenced by his grandfather and sought out a life of mediation studies at Menno Simons College in the 1990s. He had never heard of Mennonites before but was soon a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer, at which time he also met Sarah Buhler. Charlie and Sarah now have three young children. They attend Osler Mennonite Church.

Barb and Wilmer Froese, pastors and farmers in the Laird–Rosthern area, told a gripping story that began in the 1980s. A group of First Nations people came to the Laird area to announce that a number of Mennonite and Lutheran farmers were farming land that had once belonged to the Young Chipewyan band. But because the band was starving, they left their lands to look for food elsewhere.

Through an order-in-council, the federal government cancelled the Young Chipewyan Reserve and sold the land to Mennonites and Lutherans. Wilmer and Barb were troubled. But with many efforts by Leonard Doell of MCC, descendants of the band and local farmers like Barb and Wilmer came together to reconcile misunderstandings. MCC is now raising money for a genealogist to trace the descendants of the band so that the Federal Government would have cause to compensate them.

David Neufeld was an MCC volunteer in Quang Nghai, Vietnam, in the early 1970s. There he saw first-hand the violence of an atrocity-filled war. Upon his return, David studied to become a pastor. David and his wife Sue served in a number of locations, including North Battleford, where they began to work with First Nations people. David described a time-altering experience where his Volkswagen car broke down en route to Herschel. As in the parallel story of the Good Samaritan, the good cars passed him by and only a beat-up vehicle stopped to help. David described the driver as someone with a "reddish face and a braid". David made it to Herschel where he and Sue live today and operate the Herschel Retreat House. David also acts as a guide and interpreter of the nearby 2,000-year-old Herschel petroglyphs. He chairs the Ancient Echoes Interpretative Centre that boasts a dozen of Jo Cooper's progressive paintings that depict the disappearance and the resurgence of the buffalo. David ended his impassioned presentation with the singing of Joseph Naytowhow's song "We are All One People".

Photos courtesy of Jake Buhler

Mennonite Inventors of Saskatchewan

Over the last hundred years or so, there have been a number of Mennonite people in Saskatchewan who have built, invented, or designed a wide variety of items that have made life easier for many. A quick study of history shows that Mennonites have been inventing or designing items for a very long time. The first tramline (a sort-of winch for moving dirt) was built by a George Wiebe in Poland in the 1600s. The first knotter for a binder was built by a Mr. Friesen in Manitoba in about 1887.

Some of the innovations caught the eyes of big machinery companies or local shops or the community. Many of us have been exposed to these inventions in a variety of ways: perhaps in a blacksmith shop, a repair shop, or a fabrication shop. There are many names that come to mind as we delve into this subject. People like Isaac Loeppky, Isaac Janzen, Henry Peters, Pete Giesbrecht, David Braun, Benjamin Krahn, Julius Klassen, Rueben Friesen, Jake Fehr, Carl Wollf, John Elias, and so on.

Over the next several issues, Dick and Kathy Braun of Osler will highlight a number of the inventors who have roots in Saskatchewan. Dick is a member of the board of MHSS.

Kathy and Dick Braun
Photo courtesy of Jake Buhler

The Back Page

Honour List

This list recognizes persons who have made signficant contributions towards preserving Mennonite history, heritage, or faith within our province. (The date in brackets is year of death.)
To submit a name for the Honour List, nominate a person in writing.
For information on the members of the Honour List, see the web site: http://mhss.sk.ca

Helen Bahnmann
Abram J. Buhler (†1982)
Helen Dyck (†2007)
Dick H. Epp (†2009)
Jacob H. Epp (†1993)
Margaret Epp (†2008)
Peter K. Epp (†1985)
George K. Fehr (†2000)
Jake Fehr
Jacob E. Friesen (†2007)
John D. Friesen (†2004)
Jacob G. Guenter (†2013)
Gerhard J. Hiebert (†1959)
Katherine Hooge (†2001)
Abram G. Janzen
John J. Janzen (†2004)
George Krahn (†1999)
Ingrid Janzen-Lamp
Abram M. Neudorf (†1966)
J.J. Neudorf (†1988)
J.C. Neufeld (†1994)
John P. Nickel
David Paetkau (†1972)
Esther Patkau
John D. Reddekopp (†2011)
Ted Regehr
John G. Rempel (†1963)
Ed Roth (†2008)
Wilmer Roth (†1982)
Arnold Schroeder (†2000)
Jacob Schroeder (†1993)
Katherine Thiessen (†1984)
J.J. Thiessen (†1977)
David Toews (†1947)
Toby Unruh (†1997)
Albert Wiens (†2002)
George Zacharias (†2000)

Web Sites

MHSS web site: http://www.mhss.sk.ca

Cemeteries web site:
http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~skmhss/

Mennonite Encyclopedia Online:
GAMEO.org/news/mennonite-encyclopedia-online

Electronic Bulletin Board

MHSS-E-Update@mhss.sk.ca
Use this electronic bulletin board to post information on upcoming events, programs, and activities, and other information that will be useful to everyone interested in Mennonite history, culture, or religion.

MHSS Membership

If your membership has expired, the date on your address label will be highlighted. To ensure that you will not miss the next issue of the *Historian*, please send your membership fee promptly to:

The Treasurer, MHSS
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Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8

Please make cheques payable to: Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan or MHSS.

Memberships are $30 for one year; $55 for two years; $75 for three years.

Gift subscriptions are available.

Membership fees and donations to the Society are eligible for tax receipts.

Send Us Your Stories

Readers are invited to submit news items, stories, articles, photographs, church histories, etc. , to be considered for publication. Send them to us at the e-mail or street address given at right.

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