SASKATCHEWAN MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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History-Genealogy Weekend Focuses on Prussian Mennonite Story

by Ed Schmidt and Verner Friesen

Our Mennonite ancestors lived in Poland/Prussia longer than in Russia or North America. They began arriving there from the Netherlands back in the 1530's and some of them remained there till all German citizens were forced to leave towards and immediately following the end of World War II. A major highlight of the year for us as a historical society was the weekend of November 9 and 10 when we focused on that 400-year period of our Mennonite story. The sessions were held in the Bethany Manor Fellowship Centre in Saskatoon.

Our keynote speaker, Dr. Peter J. Klassen, who lectures in the universities in Fresno, CA told us about how the Mennonites were invited to Poland to inhabit "areas that were barren, swampy and unusable. - - With great effort and at very high cost, they made these lands fertile and very productive". Even today, evidence of their productivity and prosperity can be seen in the homes they built, the canals they dug, and the windmills they introduced to drain the delta and to grind grain. They also introduced new trades and joined commercial enterprises. In addition to the oral presentation, Dr. Klassen also shared powerpoint pictures under the title "Light on the Vistula".

A second invited guest was Dr. Ted Regehr from Calgary. In a presentation titled "Lost Homelands", he focused on the final tragic months of the Mennonites' sojourn in West and East Prussia

Dr. Peter J. Klassen

and Poland as they were being forced out. In all, approximately 11,000 Mennonites fled at that time in the face of the Russian advance, never to return.

Regehr's and Klassen's presentations are on the MHSS website. They are not open to all the public; however, interested persons may contact us via the website to receive the code that will permit access to these excellent presentations. For Klassen's presentation see mhss.sk.ca/Gen/Poland/Vistula; for Regehr's—mhss.sk.ca/Gen/Poland/Homelands. Photographs may only be used for non-commercial purposes.

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Honour List

Persons who have been recognized for making significant contributions towards preserving Mennonite history, heritage or faith in our province. To add a name to the Honour List, nominate a person in writing (Year of death in brackets)

Helen Bahnmann
Helen Dyck (2007)
Dick H. Epp
Margaret Epp
Peter K. Epp (1985)
George K. Fehr (2000)
Jake Fehr
Jacob E. Friesen (2007)
Jacob G. Guenter
Gerhard Hiebert (1978)
Katherine Hooge (2001)
Abram G. Janzen
Rev. John J. Janzen (2004)
George Krahn (1999)
Ingrid Janzen-Lamp
J.J.Neudorf (1988)
J.C.Neufeld (1994)
John P. Nickel
David Paetkau (1972)
Esther Patkau
Dr. Ted Regehr
Ed Roth
Wilmer Roth (1982)
Arnold Schroeder (2000)
Jacob Schroeder (1993)
Katherine Thiessen (1984)
Rev. J.J. Thiessen (1977)
Rev. David Toews (1947)
Toby Unruh (1997)
Albert Wiens (2002)
George Zacharias (2000)

President's Message
Jake Buhler

On March 7 and 8 of this year, our Historical Society wishes to study the Low German language at our Annual Meeting. I urge you to make plans to attend. There will also be some Low German entertainment!

The Low German language is an old language, older than English or German. It is a root language from which other languages have developed. We call this language, Plautdietsch. If you can speak Plautdietsch, you will be able to understand a bit of Yiddish, spoken by traditional Jews. In South Africa, you would be able to understand some Afrikaans. In northern Germany, you would hear familiar words in rural villages. The Dutch have many words similar to Low German. You would be able to understand some words spoken by Hutterites and Amish.

Amazing!

But as many of you know, you can say certain things in Plautdietsch that you cannot say in English. Each language is like that. For instance, in English, the word for conversion (as in becoming a Christian) is in big contrast to Plautdietsch where the word is bekjearen. Kjearen means to turn. Omkjearen means to turn around. Bekjearen means to "grasp the turning". Plautdietsch is vivid and tactile.

One can feel the language. It is rarely abstract. In fact Plautdietsch has a positive term, seelijch that cannot be accurately translated into English. To be seelijch means to be blessed by God. So to have salvation, as best as we can translate, is to have God's blessing. Strangely, there is no equivalent Plautdietsh word for salvation.

Plautdietsch expressions are often graphic and to the point. Have you heard the expression, "Du domma Schinda?" (You ignoramus or dumb person). Johan J. Neudorf explained to me that a Schinda is a tanner who skins animals. In Russia, he said, if a certain person was unable to make a living as a farmer, he became the person who herded cattle for all the Mennonites in the village. If a cow died, this herdsman would skin the animal and tan the hide. So a negative word came out of this. The person was unable to farm so he became the herdsman. The herdsman skinned the animal and tanned the skin. Hence, tanner or Schinda became a negative word among Mennonites, to mean someone who was not very clever.

So Plautdietsch is an expressive language capable of saying many things. I hope to see you at the Annual Meeting where we will learn much more.

See you again! Good-bye! These terms cannot be translated into Plautdietsch.

How about, audee! Or mohl han!

> History isn't usually fashionable. People in business often take pride that they 'look forward, not backward'. Yet history is a vital stepping stone to just about everything. An old historian friend used to say, 'Those who don't know the past cannot understand the present and have no direction for the future'.
>
> Wally Kroeker,
>
> in MARKETPLACE,
> November/December 2007 issue.

Editorial
Verner Friesen

The November 9 and 10 event focusing on the Prussian Mennonite story was of special interest to me. That story is my family's story. My grandparents Abraham and Margarete (Regier) Friesen with fourteen children came from West Prussia in 1894 and settled in the Fort Carlton area in central Saskatchewan. Grandfather was the only one of his siblings to come to Canada; three brothers and a sister remained in West Prussia. For many years I knew very little about my relatives in West Prussia (later Germany). Then, about eight or nine years ago, I received a newly-published Friesen book from Germany which opened up a whole new world of family history for me. Here is just one story out of that wealth of new (new to me) family history.

My father's cousin Erich Friesen and his wife Helene (Andres) owned and operated a dairy farm near Ellerwald in West Prussia. They raised a family of four daughters and three sons. Life was good, but then the Second World War began. All three of their sons as well as two sons-in-law died in the war. As the Russian front advanced westward during the winter of 1944-45, Erich and Helene and the remaining family, along with 5 million other German citizens (11,000 were Mennonites), had to flee from their homes and farms and beloved homeland, never to return. The flight brought untold suffering - long treks in the cold of winter, starvation, very over-crowded shelters for the night, and so on. Two grandchildren were born to the Friesens during this flight, one while bombs were falling near the hospital maternity ward. Both infants survived. Erich and all able-bodied men had to stay behind in Germany, while the women, children and old men were loaded onto ships to sail for safety across the Baltic Sea to Denmark and other locations. Many thousands of them, some of my relatives among them, drowned in the Baltic Sea as the ships were torpedoed and sunk by the Russians.

Helene and her family arrived safely in Denmark. More suffering - starvation, over-crowded living conditions, lice, disease, death, separation from family - awaited them in various refugee camps in Denmark. Eventually, more than two years after the end of the war, Erich, Helene, their daughters and grandchildren, as well as some in-laws were reunited in Germany.

This is how Helene tells about the reunion: "One cannot describe how great was the joy of seeing each other again. Two and a half years had passed since we had been separated, each of us having had different hard experiences. How wonderful it was to meet and embrace each other. Then Father (Erich) sat down at a piano and began to play the hymn, "Lobe den Herren, den Maechtigen Koenig der Ehren". We all joined in singing that hymn. A neighbour living in the same multi-family dwelling later remarked, "After all that you have experienced, how can you still sing hymns of praise? How can you still be thankful?" Helene responded, "Yes, we have suffered a lot. But we all have to acknowledge, the Lord has done great things for us, for which we are glad".

Neither I, nor any of my siblings, nor my parents nor grandparents have ever experienced war first hand. Have we ever sung a favorite hymn of praise with as much fervor and meaning? "Everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required". (Luke 12:48)

"You have given me memories to hold, and I cherish that which I have known and loved.—You have given me the memory of faces and voices, the remembrance of hands once touched and of laughter and tears once shared. I am thankful for all good memories, — for people I have known, for streets (roads) I have walked, for houses I have lived in. You have given me so much, O Lord, and I spend so little time in remembering. Let me remember yesterday, and let me anticipate tomorrow".
(From *Fire in the Soul* by Richard L. Morgan)

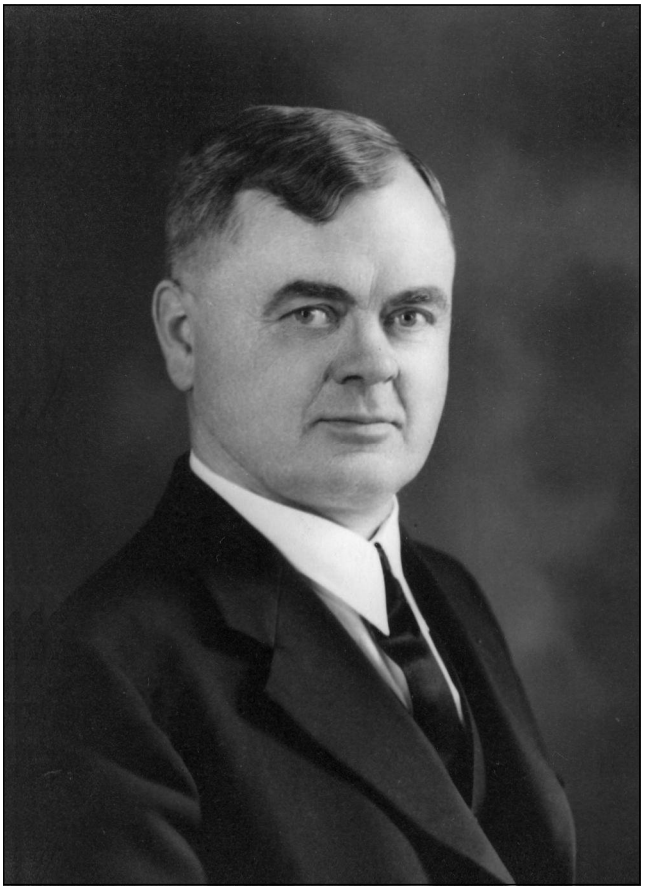
Nota bene: mark well and observe

Our Reader's Page: Announcements and Questions

A Special Request

Agnes Rempel Wall, daughter of the late Rev. John G. Rempel (who for many years was a Bible School Teacher and pastor in Saskatchewan), is collecting material about her father to be used in writing and publishing a book about his life. Anyone who has personal memories or information about John G. Rempel which they would like to share, or copies of any writings of his, is asked to please forward them to:

Agnes Rempel Wall
28 Brigantine Court
St. Catharines, ON L2M 7V4



John G. Rempel

The Annual General Meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan

will take place on Friday and Saturday, March 7 & 8, 2008. All sessions to take place in Osler Mennonite church, Osler, SK
Theme: The Low German Language
Resource persons: Dr. Jack Thiessen, Winnipeg, and Chris Cox, Warman, now student at U. of Alberta.
Business meeting Saturday afternoon
Entertainment will be provided by the Joy Quartet of Osler and Hank and Anne Neufeld of McGregor, Manitoba.
Bus transportation from Saskatoon to Osler provided both days. See full page enclosure in this mailing for more details.

Interested in reading old issues of the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian?*

Some of them are now available on the web at http://mhss.sk.c, then click on "Sask. Menn. Historian". More issues to come. A host of other information about MHSS and activities sponsored by MHSS is also available.

Is Your Membership Due?

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,
Room 900-110 La Ronge Road,
Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8

Please make cheques payable to: Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan or MHSS. Memberships are $25 per year, $40 for a family membership. Gift subscriptions are available for friends and family members. All membership fees and donations to the Society are eligible for tax-deductible receipts.

Farewell and Thank You to Der Bote

By Vera Falk and Verner Friesen

The German language publication *Der Bote* was first published in January of 1924;,just months after the first wave of the 1920s Mennonite migration from Russia arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. That was 84 years ago. Because of a dwindling German readership, *Der Bote* will cease publication in March of this year.

To recognize the very valuable contribution which *Der Bote* has made to Mennonite life in Canada and beyond, and to honour those whose vision and initiative brought the publication into being, several celebrations were planned across Canada. One such celebration took place at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon on October 13, 2007 with about 100 persons attending. The Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan had been asked by current editor Ingrid Lamp to host the event. Dick Epp spoke on behalf of the Bote Board of which he has been a member for a number of years. Dave Bergen, executive secretary for Mennonite Church Canada's Formation Council, which has overseen the publication of the paper, brought greetings on behalf of Mennonite Church Canada. He acknowledged that the end of publication brings significant feelings of grief and loss to long- time readers.

The main presentation of the evening was delivered by Esther Patkau, now Spiritual Care Coordinator at Bethany Manor. Esther gave an excellent summary of the tremendous contribution which *Der Bote* has made through eight decades. Following is the main part of Esther's address.

Der Bote has successfully carried out its initial purpose and intention: to build bridges between the old and the new. Changes have come in format, in style, in content, but *Der Bote* has week by week faithfully recorded the history of the Mennonites in Canada in articles written by its readers - in layman's language terms. It has documented the experiences of the Mennonites through the good times and the difficult times, through testings and celebrations.

Esther Patkau

In the 1920s it recorded the pains of loss of homeland and loved ones, of separation from family and friends, of adjustments to a new country, new language, different culture and practices. It carried the names of those who were new arrivals and locations where they established new homes, thus building a communication network between relatives and friends.

In the 1930s *Der Bote* was a vehicle of consultation and advice of how to improve agriculture practices in times of drought and crop failures. It encouraged the readers to continue strong in the faith. Whenever word came about the struggles of the Mennonites who had remained in Russia, the fate of the families who were being ripped

apart by the Stalin regime, or of those sent into Siberian exile, the messages were spread through *Der Bote.*

In the 1940s with pressures that came with the war, *Der Bote* directed attention to the young men who faced military conscription and chose to become conscientious objectors (CoS).

In the aftermath of World War II, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, *Der Bote* was an instrument through which refugees and displaced persons from Ukraine and in Germany were reunited with relatives in Canada. It brought descriptions of the needs of those who had been relocated to Paraguay and assisted in providing aid to those who were trying to eke out a livelihood there.

When the door began to open so that Mennonites from Siberia could be repatriated to Germany in the late 1970s and 1980s, *Der Bote* carried many lists of names, eventually leading to eight pages as an insert for many weeks, listing names and addresses of those who were being repatriated to Germany. In all, i t listed over 30,000 names of Umsiedler over a period of 20 years but then, because of increased costs leading to a deficit in publishing these lists, the listings had to be ended.

Der Bote has been an instrument to strengthen the faith of its readers. From the beginning there was "Oberlicht" - a weekly devotional. In later issues it was renamed "Licht von Oben" - (Light from above) which gave devotionals or sermons as preached in a congregation somewhere.

For about ten years, 1940-1949, *Der Bote* presented "Biblische Geschichte" - Sunday School Bible lessons as prepared by Rev. John G. Rempel; later others, like Sarah Lehn, continued writing more lessons. In recent years *Der Bote* has carried the adult Sunday School lessons from the Uniform Series, translated into German.

The annual prayer week devotionals have been published, so that even if the readers could not attend the sessions in their church, they had access to the devotional material.

Der Bote has documented the history of our schools. German English Academy in Rosthern was already in its teenage years when *Der Bote* was born. When the new immigrants became students or faculty, *Der Bote* carried articles depicting life at the school both in the living quarters and its classroom studies. It told the story of the change from GEA to becoming Rosthern Junior College in 1946, and other developments since then.

Der Bote has reported on beginning, development and closing of other educational institutions -the various small Bible schools that sprouted in the 1930s, scattered through the provinces, including Rosthern Bible School and Swift Current Bible Institute. It documented the vision for future needs that led to establishing Canadian Mennonite Bible College and more recently, the change to Canadian Mennonite University.

The Rosthern Bible School had its beginnings in 1932 and students from that institution were contributors to *Der Bote* to tell of the activities and its outreach into communities through student groups who visited churches or taught Sunday School in nearby rural schools. It has carried reports on young people going out in summer months to teach Daily Vacation Bible School in scattered, isolated, small Mennonite communities.

Der Bote has influenced young people. It has expressed the concerns of church leaders and families on how to keep the young people interested in faith and church activities. For several years a section referred to as "Jugendecke" (a page for youth) even printed articles in English to engage the youth, reporting on the activities of the Youth Organizations both in Saskatchewan and other provinces. It documented young people's retreats and summer camps.

The annual provincial and Canadian conferences, the ministerial and women conferences, even Mennonite world conferences, have received their fair share of publicity - first the outlines of program schedules and invitations to attend, then the reports of discussion and deci-

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sions at conference. "Referate" - papers on various topics and issues presented for discussion at conferences have been printed in full. The readers learned to know the issues that conference and churches faced, and they learned to know the leaders.

Through the years there has been a section called "Aus Gemeinde" (from the churches) which has reported on the many house worshipping groups in the 1920s that lead to becoming organized congregations. It has brought reports from churches across the country, their activities, their special events of baptism, communion services, Christmas and Easter celebrations, song fests and choir workshops. The ordination of ministers, elders, missionaries, the commissioning and sending out of MCC and other relief workers has been documented, and also the ministry of these workers in their varied places of work. Do you recall the reports of C. F. Klassen and Peter Dyck in the late 1940s after the end of World War II of their MCC ministry in Germany, finding the displaced Mennonites from Russia and Ukraine and their efforts to help them emigrate to Canada and later to Paraguay? Through those reports and publication of the names of the displaced, many found their relatives in Canada.. As *Der Bote* carried many articles giving insight into the ministry in Canada, e.g. the work of the Pioneer Mission among the Native people in northern Manitoba and the mission ministry abroad, the readers were willing to pray and to give financially and from their material possessions to minister to those who were less fortunate, and to support conference projects. The readers learned to know the workers.

Der Bote has also been a supporter of women's auxiliaries (usually referred to as Ladies Aids). When the small periodical, Missionary News and Notes, published by the General Conference Women's Missionary Association in USA, dropped the German supplement in 1946, the Canadian women put out "Unser Missionsblatt" (Our mission paper) in the German language to report mission work to Canadian women. But that paper suffered financial problems and was discontinued in 1963. After that *Der Bote* took up the challenge and included a regular page for women's ministry under the title "Frauenseite Daheim und Draussen" (Women's page for home and abroad reports). That has continued to the present and gives accounts of the work that women do in their congregations and conference.

Who can count the hundreds of obituaries that have been published; giving the life story of individuals who loved the Lord, in their life related to others beyond family members and have been a blessing to those who knew them? Through the publication of their names, friends across the country have been notified of their passing and readers have taken note of God's leading in the lives of the individuals.

Who has counted the reports of anniversaries, birthdays, weddings, school reunions, retreats, seminars, family gatheringsand special celebrations that have been described? Each one has affected one or more readers. It has been communication within the *Der Bote* family.

Der Bote has also been the vehicle to introduce its readers to new publications with its advertisements and book reviews. It has carried literature from past and present writers, poetry, hymns; some books have been printed in installments.

Der Bote has had a reader's forum where ideas and opinions, support and criticism, reactions and suggestions on issues discussed, have been given expression.

Der Bote has been more than just a weekly periodical that came into homes to provide reading material where several decades ago money was scarce and books were few. It was a letter from friends to friends, sharing emotional and spiritual values, raising questions, giving answers.

The articles in *Der Bote* have been indexed in several volumes. What a rich resource for finding the history of our parents and grandparents. These indexes are of great value for finding information on what is being researched, whether on individuals, families, congregations or other topics.

Our Readers Write

"Please find enclosed a cheque to cover my membership fees for 2007. I have very much enjoyed the newsletters over the past year and look forward to more of the same".

Gord Martens, Warman, SK

PEACE

by Marianne Harder

heavy hoarfrost hangs
on branches
bare
save for the frost

icy air is caught in winter's throat
bunched breath held

paused

birds bob busily
feasting on frozen fruit
all is well in their world

tomorrow
fat
with feathers fluffed
they'll brave the storm

so fret not for tomorrow
its cares
will be cared for

the Giver of tomorrow
gives the gifts to carry us

"I was very sorry to read about Jacob Friesen's death. He was a remarkable man! It was my intention to visit him. - - - With great interest I read in the same issue the article *Profile - Elsbeth Penner Bergen.* Since she now lives in Bethany Manor, does that mean you at last are soliciting histories from the elders residing there? As a note of interest, the histories of each of the residents of our Senior Care facilities in Castlegar were written by high school students. Funding for this project was available through the government. - - - Was delighted to read about the Guenther Family Farm next to Reinland north of Osler. They were friends of my mother, Elizabeth Martens, who lived in Reinland." -

Leona Ann Friesen, Castlegar, B.C.

Update from the Archives

by Victor Wiebe

A major expansion of our Historical Society archives space is planned for later this year. Our present facility, which is in the basement area under the Bethany Manor Fellowship Centre, is "bursting at the seams" as more and more material is being submitted. The added area would increase the size of the archives threefold. In addition to providing more storage capacity, it will provide space for meetings, displays, research and discussion. It will make the archives more "people friendly", i.e. put more focus on serving people, as opposed to merely storing archival materials.

Architect Charles Olfert hopes to have preliminary plans ready to be displayed at the Historical Society annual meeting on March 8th. The extensive expansion will necessitate a major fundraising drive which will begin this spring. There will also be opportunity for local people to help with construction.

Pleasant Point Ladies Aid from Beginning to End

By Tina Harder

In the 1930s mothers and their daughters met in their homes Wednesday afternoons. They began the meetings with singing, Bible reading and prayer. Needlework and knitting was done which among other things was auctioned off at a mission sale. This gave opportunity not only to work together but to socialize. Thus the Ladies Aid was started.

The auction sales were held in garages on farms as some thought the church was not the place for such commercial events, but later that was changed to the church basement.

The years of the thirties and forties were difficult but news from around the world told of people in much worse plights and requests for help came from overseas missions. Especially during the war years in the 1940s, there was endless opportunity for helping. The ladies were quilting, knitting, packing care packages and canning meat for overseas shipment.

Pleasant Point 1975 Back, L to R—Mary Koop, Margaret Epp, Erika Epp, Mary Schroeder, Mary Harder, Helen Neufeld, Helen Unrau, Neta Bartel, Ella Neufeld.
Middle row: Herta Koop, Ruth Martens, Tina Harder, Hilda Thiessen, Hilda Patkau, Edith Daniels.
Seated: Neta Koop, Mary Koop, Frieda Zacharias

It was also in the 1940s that many new members were added. The local boys married and took up farming, bringing young wives into the community. Meetings became more formal. A president and secretary were elected and from 1952 on notes were taken and records kept. Since everyone spoke German the minutes and discussions were carried on in this language. When later on several boys married non-Mennonite girls and they joined the Aid, the language was changed to English.

Meetings continued regularly on the first Wednesday of the month in the afternoon. With the young mothers all having babies there were times when there were more preschool children than women at the meetings. Over the years, the children grew up and several members took on jobs working away from the home. They still wanted to be part of the group so the meetings were changed to evenings.
The format of the meeting was always the hostess opening with scripture or a reading, prayer and a song. Shut-ins, sick people and birthdays were remembered. Minutes of the last meeting and business followed. Then a lunch at the table was served during a time for visiting.

Over the years, much of the work has been connected with Mennonite Central Committee like sewing layettes, making health kits and school kits. For several years, the Red Cross sent sewing to be done for their projects. Winter was a special time for quilting. Many blankets were tied and sent overseas to needy countries. Members also helped at the local thrift store (The Clothes Closet) and at the MCC Depot.

The Aid was often asked to cater for weddings, funerals and banquets. This brought in funds that were used for different projects of church needs, like buying carpet, an organ, a piano - wherever a big purchase was made the ladies always contributed to it.

The annual mission sale in fall covered all the voluntary and compulsory projects of Saskatchewan Women in Mission. Another annual event was the Christmas banquet and program to which the spouses were invited. The secret friend of the year was revealed and gifts exchanged. There were extra celebrations like the birthday parties for members turning eighty.

Membership has ranged from 15 to 30. The age of members at one time was 25 years to 82 years.

Pleasant Point 2006—Standing, L to R:: Hilda Thiessen, Hilda Patkau, Marilyn Neufeld, Ella Neufeld, Lorraine Heppner, Linda Schroeder, Beatta Epp. Seated: Tina Harder, Alice Zacharias, Margaret Epp, Herta Koop.

The group enjoyed many good years with cooperation and good will amongst the members. They were a very active branch within the church. With no younger women joining and no one to take on leadership, this era has come to an end as of December 2006.

The following tribute was given to our Aid at the last Christmas banquet in December by Pastor Harry Harder:
It is important to remember the contributions that Pleasant Point Ladies Aid has made.

- All the hospitality extended and meals that were prepared that made celebrations and events more joyous and meaningful.
- The money raised for worthwhile causes within this church and in places far away.
- It was a place in which issues were thoroughly discussed and decisions made that organized how this church was run.
- Ladies Aid was a rare social outing for women often alone on the farm with their children. Ladies Aid was a place where friendships were developed and bonds created between women that were unbreakable. It was fun.
- Ladies Aid was a place in which individuals developed their leadership skills and social skills. The women learned how to get things done while the rest of the church was wondering what was going on.
- Ladies Aid was a place for nurture of the soul. The spiritual life of individuals grew through retreats, prayer, and the nurturing concern of each other. Ladies Aid brought awareness of many issues and places in the world. It was another window to the larger world beyond the community of everyday life at Pleasant Point.
- Ladies Aid was an avenue for Christian Service. Working at MCC and at The Clothes Closet, providing food, organizing a response to those in need or grief--all these activities brought faith into action.
- Ladies Aid built the community at Pleasant Point Mennonite Church.

(Continued on page 17)

The First Klippensteins Who Came to Saskatchewan

By Lawrence Klippenstein

Some Mennonites who had come to Manitoba in the 1870s began to move on to other parts of Canada and to places in the USA soon after they arrived. Among the American states sought out by some families were Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Oregon. It would appear that Klippensteins were not included in this emigration. Or is there proof to the contrary?

The move to Western Canada began with a number of Reinlaender and Bergthaler families whose goal was really Gleichen, Alberta. When prospects seemed poor there, they decided to return to Manitoba. On the way back about a dozen families decided to stay in the Rosthern area, where they were joined in the spring of 1892 by 27 more families from southern Manitoba, and also some coming directly from south Russia at the time.

A larger group movement to this area, this time made up entirely (?) of Reinlaender (Old Colony) families, began in 1895, resulting directly in the organization of the Hague-Osler reserve. Again Klippenstein families were apparently not among those settling the new reserve.

The first Klippensteins did come a few years later, however, and this survey will focus on these families. The recently published history of the Hague-Osler reserve mentions Bernhard Klippenstein from Neubergthal purchasing land from Osler, Hammond and Nanton, (a Winnipeg firm, possibly with offices in Altona) in the years 1899-1902. The identifications of other Klippensteins arriving at the same time need further research. It is noted though that one Peter J. Klippenstein bought land from the same realtor in 1899 and settled in the area also.

Abram Klippenstein (1873-1930) son of Johann (1845-1923) who had been one of the homesteaders in the Neubergthal area (Gnadenfeld), and his wife, Gertruda (Blatz, 1875-?) appear to have come to the Laird area

Abram & Gertrude Blatz Klippenstein with Helen Blatz (sister) & Peter (back standing), Agatha & John (l-r in front). Taken ca. 1900.
Photo credit: The History & Genealogy of Johann & Agatha Klippenstein.

a little later, patenting their homestead at Laird Ferry Crossing. They had already obtained entry in 1901 and that same year broke 15 acres of land and cropped 7, besides building a house on the land as well. The Abram Klippensteins had ten children, three (four?) of them, Peter, b. 1894, Agatha, b. 1898, Johann, b. 1899, and (perhaps) Helena, b. 1900, already with them when they made the move to Saskatchewan around 1900.

Katherina Klippenstein, (1863-1938), daughter of Bernhard (1836-1910) and Anganetha Hiebert (1839-1867) Klippenstein, and her husband John Funk (1861-1934), both originally from the Bergthal colony in south Russia, and then later Neubergthal and Altona, made their move in 1902 to set up a business in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. They returned to Altona two years later, but in 1906 moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan, where their son, John, took over the hardware business, and two other sons, Henry and Bernhard became well-known physicians in Morse and Herbert respectively. The Funks had eight children in all.

Another contingent of Klippensteins would join their Manitoban newly-arrived distant relatives in Saskatchewan when several families from Neu Chortitza in the south Russian Mennonite settlement of Baratov-Shlakhtin emigrated to Saskatchewan in 1923. They were a part of the first wave of the large Mennonite immigration from the Soviet Union in the years 1923-1930. Heinrich H. and Judith Klippenstein, with two children, Anna (b.1908 and later married to Johann Wedel) and Maria (b. 1922) came to Rosthern after landing at Quebec City in September, 1923.

Jacob Heinrich Klippenstein from Neu Chortitza, (b. 18 May 1987) and Helena, (b. 19 Aug. 1897) born in Dubowka, as well as Helena F (?), (b. 26 September 1920) and Maria, (b. 6 May 1923), both born in Gruenfeld, landed in Quebec City on 17 August 1923, and made their first home at Herbert.

Three sons of Isbrandt (1857-1920) and Catharina Siemens Klippenstein would emigrate from Arkadak and Zentral, Russia, to Swift Current, Saskatchewan. It seems that all came in 1924, but one of them, Johann, had to remain in Quebec City for a time, perhaps for reasons of health pertaining to a son, Benjamin, b. 1911, who was also held back in Quebec City.

Johann's Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization entry records show a listing for Helena, born in October, 1892 in Petrovka arriving with six children, Heinrich, b. 1912, Johann, b. 1913, Neta (perhaps Agneta or Agnes), b. 1914, Kornelius, b. 1915, Peter, b. 1921 and Helena, b. 1924 with an addition to their record of the father, Johann, and his son Benjamin, noted above. They all came from the community of Zentral, in central Russia, not far from Arkadak. They arrived in Quebec City on 29 August 1924 and then came to Main Centre on 2 September 1924.

Two brothers of Johann, i.e. Bernhard and Dietrich, arrived a little later. Bernhard's (1882-1959) CMBC record shows him coming with

(Back Standing) Three sons of Isbrandt Klippenstein, originally from Blumengart, Old Colony, South Russia, (l-r) Bernhard, Dietrich and Johann. In front their wives respectively (l-r) Maria (Peters), Elizabeth (Isaac), & Helen Redekop.
Photo credit: Dick Klippenstein, Calgary, AB

his wife Maria (Peters) (1882-1945) and eight children: Katharine, b. 1908, Bernhard, b. 1910, Peter, b. 1912, Franz, b. 1914, Johann, b. 1915, Maria, b.1917, and the twins, Kornelius and Heinrich born in 1919. Their most recent place of residence had been Arkadak also, with the parents having come from Blumengart in the Old Colony earlier. Their first place of residence in Saskatchewan, after arriving in Quebec City on 4 September 1924, was Main Centre, not far from Herbert.

Dietrich (1891-1960) and Elizabeth Isaac (1894-1979) Klippenstein are listed with three children (their son Dick (Diedrich), currently residing in Calgary, says there were four) born before they got to Canada in 1924. These were Elizabeth, b. 25 March 1920, Maria, b. 10 September 1921, another Elizabeth (b. 1923?) and Franz born on 21 June 1924. The first three passed away in infancy so Franz was the only child making it to Canada. A Mennonite newspaper, Der Mennonitische Immigrantenbote, founded in January 1924, mentioned the arrival of Dietrich and his family at Rosthern on 5 November 1924.

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Peter (Son of Abram) & Eva Westlund Klippenstein (extreme right front & back; Jack & Shirley (back standing, l-r) Jane & Dale in front.
Joined a Swedenborgian congregation.
Photo credit: The History & Genealogy of Johann & Agatha Klippenstein.

They were hosted then by the Richard Friesens of Tiefengrund.

The descendants of both groupings, those coming from Manitoba around 1900 (sometimes called Kanadier), and those arriving from Russia in 1924 (sometimes called Russlaender), have scattered throughout the province, of course, and westward to Alberta and B.C. (probably northward to the Yukon as well!). A number of Manitoba Klippensteins have moved directly to Alberta and B.C. (and east to Ontario, etc.) in recent decades also.

Manitoba Klippensteins have had several reunions. To our knowledge, such gatherings have not occurred in Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. – but we could be wrong. Let us know if we missed such events.

Sources:

Materials from Dick Klippenstein, Calgary, AB:

Family entries of Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records,

Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB;

Leonard Doell, et.al.
Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve 1895-1995 (Saskatoon: Hague-Osler Reserve Book Committee, 1995),

The History and Genealogy of Johann and Agatha Klippenstein, edited by Ted Friesen, Altona, MB;

Materials from Ellen Piehl, Seymour, Wisconsin,

(Continued from page 1)

A third presenter, Dr. Glenn Penner, who teaches at the University of Guelph in Ontario, shared about "New Resources for Genealogical Research on Mennonites in Poland/Prussia". He stated, "There has been a recent revolution in terms of historical and genealogical material available from Russian archives. We are now at a point where we can trace our ancestry back to the Polish/Prussian period and look at the long and exciting history of our people in the area. There are also an enormous number of essentially untapped sources sitting in German and Polish archives. These need to be investigated and Mennonite-related materials need to be copied". For more information see our website (mhss.sk.ca/Gen/Poland/Early Modern/imgO.html)

The final topic of the weekend was "The Mennonite DNA Project", also presented by Glenn Penner. The DNA Project is a new tool to find answers to genealogical questions that cannot be answered by any existing documents. Where documents do not go back far enough, DNA can help make family connections. See our website (mhss.sk.ca/Gen/Mennonite DNA.shtml).

Another component of the full weekend was actual DNA testing. Family physician Tim Janzen, Portland, Oregon, introduced DNA testing on behalf of the MHSS in Herbert, SK earlier in the year in August and continued with the project in the greater Saskatoon area between October 10 and 14. Samples are collected in special DNA kits and submitted to the Sorenson Molecular Group DNA Test. Kits are available from the MHSS archives in Saskatoon..

Clock Making

by Jack Driedger

John Elias the Clock Maker

John Elias, presently a resident of Bethany Manor seniors' housing in Saskatoon, was born in 1916. His father, Peter Elias, was born Sept.11, 1876 shortly after the family arrived in Canada. Sarah Dyck was born January 7, 1883. Peter and Sarah married August 9, 1909.

Peter, an accomplished blacksmith and metal worker, always wanted to make a clock similar to the Russian clock they had in their home. When he finally got around to it, son John and his brother decided to help their father. The experience of helping their father motivated the two boys to build their own clocks.

The material for the wheels and gears came from one quarter to three-eighth inch diameter brass welding rods. With lots of patience heating the brass over the kitchen stove, cooling, tempering, pounding, sawing, filing and soldering, the gears eventually took shape. The shafts were made of steel salvaged from old threshing machine cylinder teeth. The steel from these teeth was just right: hard, but not too hard, so it could be machined into shape.

In later years, John needed cash which was hard to come by. He decided to part with his clock at a modest price of $10 to $15. It hung in the display window of Fast's hardware store in Rosthern for a month to no avail.

When John was married, he traded his clock for the cream separator he and his wife needed so badly. Unfortunately, John has no idea where his clock is today.

John's second clock, which we see here, was a considerable improvement over the first one. In addition to the hour hand, it had a minute hand and a second hand. The hour hand was simple enough. It was fixed to the main shaft which drove the clock mechanism. John needed to attach a series of gears to the main shaft to drive the minute and second hands. The ratios, diameters and number of teeth or cogs required to drive the minute and second hands took a lot of figuring.

One would expect John to sit down and draw detailed plans to make the required calculations. Not at all. John mentally figured out the ratios, the diameters of the gears and number of teeth needed while doing the chores in the barn. The plans were all in his head, not on the drawing board.

Since this second clock was more sophisticated, hand filing would not do. John needed a lathe to make the precision parts. Not a problem: John made his own lathe.

John tells me he would have liked the pendulum to swing once every second, sixty times a minute. But that would have made it too long. He settled for the pendulum to swing 72 times per minute.

Finally, after many hours of painstaking precision work, John completed the clock we see in this picture. It reminds me of Oliver Wendell Holmes' *The Deacon's Masterpiece.*

Peter J. Dyck (1874-1948)

(a preacher)

by Peter Derksen

Peter Dyck was my grandfather on my mother's side. Grandma was a Heinrichs. I would spend part of my summer vacation on their farm. It was an experience I shall never forget.

My grandparents migrated from southern Manitoba in 1907 to a homestead eight miles south of Swift Current. That year they had four small children and then added four more living on the homestead. Three more died in infancy.

Grandpa was a member of the Sommerfelder congregation and therefore unable to file for a homestead on the Old Colony Reserve south of Swift Current. He and other members homesteaded on the outside edge of the Reserve. They organized a church of their own and Grandpa was elected Deacon. Two years later he was elected minister. He served that church for thirty-two years. He received no financial remuneration and paid his own expenses. The church became his life, his first priority. The family and farm would wait their turn.

During the first twenty years he served one church, but the membership was scattered over a long distance.

During the early twenties the Old Colony Church left the Reserve and moved to Mexico. All the ministers migrated, but not all the people. Those remaining requested the Sommerfelder ministers serve them also, and include them in their congregation. This inclusion dramatically changed Grandpa's responsibilities. Three churches were added to the one he already served. The distances varied from one to twelve miles. Transportation was by horse and buggy; by cutter during winter.

Travel was time consuming and lonely. Many times he would leave on a Saturday, spend the night with a family living near the church and

Mr. And Mrs. Peter J. Dyck

come home late Sunday. Grandma would be at home with her children, doing chores and waiting for Grandpa. During bad weather there was much anxiety.

The daughter tells of an episode that occurred in a poor crop year. Feed was scarce and the horses were becoming weak and exhausted. One winter day an "English" neighbor stopped by with a wagon load of oats, a gift, feed to maintain the energy level of his horses, so that Grandpa could continue to serve his people. He accepted this gift, but refused Government Relief.

Grandma rallied the family and increased production of milk, eggs, poultry and garden produce. On Saturday Grandpa would take her to Swift Current and she would go door to door and sell the stuff to the ladies in the homes. She was all dressed up in her black apron and cap with shawl. She spoke a broken English, but the ladies loved her.

Grandpa's sermons were written out in the Latin script. He was the author of nine hundred sermons. These written sermons were later "borrowed" by other

Sommerfelder ministers and read many times. A few of these sermons have been recovered and deposited in the Archives in Winnipeg.

The position of elected minister was a life position. It was a huge responsibility and affected the lives of the spouse and the children. His dedication and service to the church was possible because he had the full support of Grandma. Grandma was energetic, capable and mentally tough. She was no stranger to adversity.

As the years passed by my Grandparents eventually suffered from "burn out". They left the farm and moved into a small house in Wymark. Grandpa continued to serve the church, but he was tired and not in good health. He was taken to the hospital and died there in 1948. Grandma lived alone for a time, but as she grew weaker she stayed with a daughter. She died in the farm house in 1961.

Grandpa's contribution was never formally recognized. However, he enjoyed the love and respect from his flock and the "English" neighbors to the very end. In his lifetime he had made a significant contribution. To accomplish this he needed the total support from Grandma, which she lovingly provided.

(Continured from page 11)

Those of you who have been part of this organization have reason to be proud of what you have done and accomplished. Your efforts have been a blessing to many. In Ecclesiastes it is written, “There is a time and a place for everything; a time to sow and a time to reap.” Pleasant Point Ladies Aid has had its time to flourish. But maybe now is the time for it to close. A new time will come and something that is dedicated to meeting some of the same needs will grow in its place.

The Mennonites of Swan Plain

The Swan Plain History Book, published in 1983 and titled “Pioneers Settled, We Continue ---“, gives the following information. The first Mennonites settled in the Swan Plain area in eastern Saskatchewan in 1934. They were mostly from two denominations, the Old Colony and the General Conference of Mennonites.

For the first few years each group held its own worship services in private homes. Then a house vacated by the Corny Friesen family was purchased and the two groups held joint services there for a number of years. Later the two groups separated and each built their own church. The General Conference built on NW-8-36-1-W2. The Old Colony chose as their site SE-8-36-1-W2. Finally, in 1942, the two groups got together again and purchased the Covenant Mission Tabernacle, which they moved to the graveyard site (SE-3-36-1-W2). They named their church the “Arabella Fellowship Chapel”. Arabella was the name of the local school district.

Elected to the ministry by the Old Colony Church were, first, Abe Klassen and Abe Neufeld, and later, Henry Friesen and John Wall. The General Conference ministers were Julius Thiessen and George Fedrau. In all there were more than fifty Mennonite families who lived in the Swan Plain area at one time. By 1980 only a dozen of those families remained there.

If there is any other information you, our readers, have about the Swan Plain Mennonite community, please let us know.

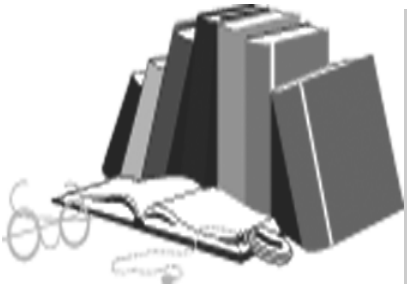
The Editor

“God, help us not to despise or oppose what we do not understand”.

William Penn

Fanaticism consists in redoubling our efforts after our aim has been forgotten.

Santayana



Mostly About Books

By Victor G. Wiebe
Book Editor

Book Review

Alexander Rempel and Amalie Enns, *Hope is Our Deliverance: Jacob Aron Rempel -The Tragic Experience of a Mennonite Leader and His Family in Stalin's Russia* (Kitchener, ON, Pandora Press) 321 pp .2005. Reviewed by Helen Kornelsen

My personal interest in the biography of Rev. Jacob A. Rempel arises from the deep respect and great reverence my parents expressed for their former pastor. Our arrival in Canada in 1930 catapulted us into the Depression era and into a "hand-to-mouth" existence. Nevertheless, my parents sent donations, how meager or generous I do not know, to Peter Rempel in Winnipeg to forward to his brother in exile in Russia.

Another thing that linked our family to J.A. Rempel was that he baptized my older sister and two brothers, according to my 99-year-old sister, who is also very devoted to her former pastor. She also informed me that Mr. Rempel had helped my father to renew his faith in Christ.

The book *Hope is our Deliverance* is the fulfillment of a son's promise to his father that his life and ministry would not be forgotten. Sasha (Alexander) Rempel carefully researched and collected relevant material from family and friends for the writing of his father's biography. He also collected his father's letters, written from prison to his family, to add to the book. Ill health and subsequent death in Germany prevented the completion of this writing. His niece, Amalie Enns, picked up where he had left off. The book is available from the bookshop at Pandora Press.

Jacob A. Rempel grew up in impoverished circumstances but his dreams and aspirations for more education never dimmed his spirit. Eventually, he became a teacher, preacher, elder, editor of *Unser Blatt,* lecturer at the University of Ekaterinaslaw and chairman of the Executive of the Commission for Church Affairs (KFK). This latter office, a high profile position in which he represented the Kirchliche Mennonite Church, the Mennonite Brethren and the Allianz churches, necessitated frequent trips to Moscow. His work entailed petitioning the state on matters of education, exemption from military service, religious literature and permission to assemble as a conference.

In 1925 he was invited to represent the Russian Mennonites at the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the Anabaptist movement in Switzerland. He was denied entry to Switzerland.

Reluctant to emigrate because of his sense of responsibility to the church he served, he finally felt compelled to consider emigration. While in Moscow in 1929, the same time our family was there for the same purpose, Elder Jacob A. Rempel was arrested, imprisoned and exiled. In 1941 he, along with 156 others, was executed in Orel, Russia.

Other books written on J.A. Rempel's life and ministry, include *Auf Dem Gipfel des Lebens* by Hermann Heidebrecht (2004), *Familie Rempel* by Heinrich Mantler (2005) and *Aeltester J.A. Rempel 's Leben und Leidensgeschichte* by Peter A. Rempel (1946).

The reader may find the letter section emotionally draining or too repetitive, but it adds to "the tragic experience of a Mennonite leader and his family in Stalin's Russia", as Amalie Enns points out on the title page. I am pleased to recommend the book *Hope is Our Deliverance.*

The Longest Journey

A Study of Jakob and Maria Wiebe, One of Canada's Remarkable Immigrant Families

By Stanley Wiebe

This is a condensed version of a longer article. The section of the original article detailing the early history of the Russian Mennonites and describing the general political situation which prompted many Mennonites to leave Russia has been omitted. This article focuses more on the personal story of Jacob Wiebe and Maria (Sawatzky) Wiebe, some of which was preserved in Maria Wiebe's diary.

Jakob Gerhard Wiebe and Maria Johanna Sawatzky were both born in 1904 in Alexandrowka, South Russia. Alexandrowka was a small Mennonite village located on the bank of the Dnieper River in Zaporozhia Province. The Mennonites, who had always maintained close-knit communities, built their small houses close together on either side of one street. Long and narrow parcels of farmland stretched out behind each residence. The houses that Jakob and Maria grew up in were typical Mennonite houses. They were built of mud with straw roofs. The walls of the houses were roughly two feet thick, and a stove, called a “peech”, was built into one of the walls. Straw was burned in the “peech” to heat the house and when the entire mud structure was heated, it took a long time to cool down, so the fire did not need to be tended at night. To bake bread, the fire and ashes were removed from the “peech” and the bread was put inside the hot clay. If the weather was very cold, children were allowed to sleep on the window sill above the peech. The barn was attached to the house and under the same roof. Not only did this conserve space, it also enabled people to access the barn without going outside in very cold weather and employed the natural heat of the animals in heating the living space.

When Jakob and Maria were twenty-one years old, they decided to get married. Before they could do that, they were encouraged by their parents to follow the Mennonite custom of adult baptism. Once that was complete, their parents sent out invitations to an engagement party. Shortly after, on February 18, 1926, Maria and Jakob were married in Maria's parents' home. That

Mr. Jacob G. Wiebe in the Russian service

summer, though, Jakob had to begin his alternate service work for the Soviet State, so, shortly after his wedding, he was called away for the summer. He went to work on a railroad dam near Kiev. The work was very difficult and the workers were not well fed, at times being given only bread and water. On August 18, 1927, Jakob wrote a poem about his compulsory service, in which he expressed how much he missed his family and that he felt it was unfair to be forced to work during the peak farming season. After two summers of service, Jakob determined to seek out a better life for his family and began to investigate emigration to Canada. However, Jakob’s decision was not based entirely upon

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his own situation. The Bolshevik Revolution, which began in 1918, the ensuing civil war, famine and disease, as well as the reign of terror to which many Mennonites were subjected under Nestor Makhno and other bandits, all served to motivate many Mennonites to leave Russia.

Maria Wiebe writes extensively about her life during these trying years. Her village was by no means spared the ill effects of political turmoil; they lived in constant fear of being looted by roaming thugs and threatened by both the Red and White Armies. All three of these groups frequented the area of Alexandrowka, and Red and White forces fought several skirmishes there. Frequently shells landed in or near the village; one battle destroyed the Sawatzky's yard but spared the house. Several houses, including Maria's, were shot at repeatedly on occasion. In her writings, Maria differentiates little between the groups that visited her village, calling them all "bandits". She knew that they were different from each other, for she refers to them by "red" or "white" from time to time, but she did not care what they represented. She saw all of their actions as essentially the same and she held them all equally responsible for the terror and sorrow that her family endured.

The bandits first visited Alexandrowka in the winter of 1918-19. They came into town on sleighs and occupied the house across the street from Maria's. They posted guards at the corners and doors of the house and went in to help themselves to various items inside. Next, they came into Maria's house, pointed their rifles at the family and began to look for valuables. Among the items they took were a pocket watch, a winter coat and food. While they were rooting through the family's things, they found at the bottom of a drawer, photos of the Tsar and Tsarina. This angered the bandits very much, indicating they were either Bolsheviks or an independent band, sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause. They immediately lined up the entire family and raised their rifles at them. Johann Sawatzky, Maria's father, shouted at them in Russian, "Spare my family and take me!" The men consented to this and took Johann away from the house. The family thought their father would be shot, but the men only held Johann until they destroyed the photos in the street and then released him. The family was extremely happy to see him return alive. This was the first of many visits by this and other groups of bandits to Maria's house.

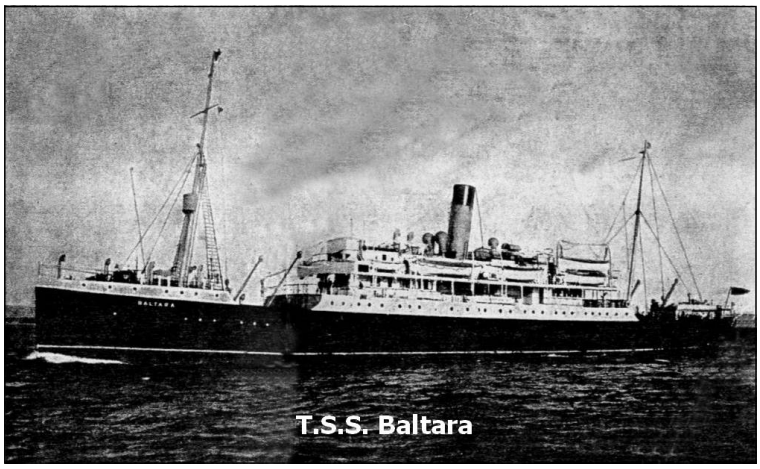
The bandits came all winter, robbed, shouted, took horses and clothes, whatever they liked. They stole horses from the barn, grain from the loft, bread from the kitchen cupboards, butter from the churn and even clothes from their backs. In fact, for the next three years, the residents of Alexandrowka lived with little food or clothing and in constant fear of losing their lives. One particular group extorted money by collecting all the men from the village and forcing each to pay a sum in order to keep his life. Some families, including Maria's, had to sell what little furniture and equipment they had left in order to raise the money. Another group arrived at the onset of winter and stayed in Maria's house until spring. All winter, between twelve and fifteen men slept in their living room and forced the family to cook for them. Another group appeared wearing white ribbons on their arms, claiming to be from the White forces and demanding food. When Maria's parents obliged them, they threw off their ribbons, revealed that they were with the Red Army, and threatened to shoot them for being hospitable to Whites. Maria's family held no preference for any group; Johann had instructed them to treat all people the same. Though the battles occurred on their own street, they never intervened, except once, to help a dying man to a hospital. When particularly dangerous groups were in town, most people went into hiding. They would hide in abandoned houses, cellars, barns, and even in the fields if the wheat was high. Maria's mother escaped one group by crawling through a wheat field while holding her youngest child.

In 1921 the typhus epidemic hit Alexandrowka. Several in the village perished from this disease, but ironically, this helped to ease the lawlessness because it hit the bandits as well. Sometime in 1921 the bandits stopped coming. However, three years of anarchy had taken its toll. Maria's family was destitute and even supplemented what little food they had, on occasion, with grass from the fields. Still, the tone of Maria's writing is not bitter. It seems that she did not harbour resentment toward any of her assailants and, considering the degree of devastation in and around Alexandrowka, she was thankful that her family emerged from that experience with everyone alive.

Unfortunately, the devastation of Alexandrowka was but one example of the catastrophic state of the Ukraine and Mennonite leaders began to seek international relief and resettlement options. In December 1919, a study commission was sent from Russia to the United States to spread the news of the needs in Russia and investigate immigration possibilities. As a result of this commission, the Mennonite Central Committee, the now renowned and massive international aid society, was formed in Indiana to respond to the Russian situation. Also, in response to the needs in Russia, the Canadian Mennonite Conference formed the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization in 1922 and, simultaneously, the Russian Mennonites formed the Union of Citizens of Dutch Ancestry. These two organizations, under the leadership of David Toews and B. B. Janz, respectively, both sought migration as the best solution to the problems in Russia and together developed a system that would drive resettlement through the 1920's.

Janz, among other tasks, negotiated visas for those wishing to leave. The war had produced many displaced Mennonites and, by arguing that their leaving would alleviate some of the strain of rebuilding the Ukraine, Janz used this fact as leverage in persuading Moscow to grant exit from Russia. Janz sought visas for every Mennonite that wished to leave, and received, eventually, permission for 20,000. The surge of anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States and the American immigrant quota system, made Canada a good choice and David Toews helped to widen this doorway by negotiating with the Canadian Department of Immigration and Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Working against Toews were post-WWI sentiments against east Europeans, and in particular, the 1923 Canadian immigration laws that classified central and eastern Europeans as non-preferred immigrants. However, Toews was a skilled and determined negotiator and he persuaded the government to lift the ban on east Europeans. In addition, he secured the all-important military exemption; by April, 1923, the bureaucratic particulars were in place.

The next step was finances. Most Russian Mennonites could not pay their own way and Toews saw that the transportation funds needed to be raised in Canada. North American Mennonites were more interested in funding famine relief than travel to Canada so Toews had little success among his constituency. However, the CPR had an interest in populating the Canadian prairies in order to perpetuate their national rail service. They offered to dispatch ships and supply rail service on credit in order to bring the immigrants to Saskatchewan, provided that Canadian Mennonites would guarantee repayment. Toews' responsibility was to persuade his constituents to co-sign the loan and thereby take responsibility for the newcomers. However, most felt that the CPR's terms were too steep so this stipulation was met with little support. Toews, undeterred by this obstacle, put himself out on a very unsteady limb. He signed the CPR's contract without the support of Canadian Mennonites, attaching an amendment that the terms would not be met as written. His hope was that the new immigrants would take responsibility for the loan themselves. Toews was, nonetheless, able to secure enough host families throughout central Saskatchewan to house the newcomers. In 1923, the system was finally underway and some 2700 Russian Mennonites arrived in Rosthern, Toews' hometown, that year. The next three years saw another 15,000 arrive under the same system. In 1926, B. B. Janz came with his family, and without his organization at the Russian end, numbers diminished significantly. In 1928, the year that Jakob and Maria Wiebe came to Canada, only 511 traveled under the Janz/Toews system.



The ship that took the Wiebes across the North Sea to England

Stalin solidified his power at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December, 1927. The thaw of the New Economic Plan was officially over and Stalin set in motion a plan to collectivize agriculture, intensify compulsory work and mili-

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tary service, renew the attack on religion and traditional education and liquidate the Kulaks. Kulaks were considered to be rich peasants, or the agricultural middle class, groups that did not mesh with Stalinism and were therefore to be eliminated. Many Mennonites fit into this category. Grain expropriations and heavy taxation began to further undermine their position in the Ukraine. Many found the massive grain quotas impossible to fill and had to liquidate their assets in order to buy more grain to supplement their own stocks. Often, families that could not fill the quotas had their possessions auctioned off by the state. Most of the few remaining affluent Mennonites were financially ruined by these policies and their steadily declining position in Russia reached rock bottom.

These political factors affected Jakob Wiebe's decision. The writing was on the wall, in a sense, as the rise of Stalinism promised a further loss of economic stability and cultural identity. All around him there was a growing trend to treat Mennonites as undesirables and the people of Alexandrawka were encouraging the young people to consider leaving. Jakob's son, John, recalls his father's thoughts about that decision: "He said he'd had enough." He did not agree politically with the Soviets and he had a strong desire to succeed at farming. He did not feel that it was right for the state to deprive him of the opportunity to provide for his family. He was confident in himself and he was not afraid of moving to another country. Some of his neighbours, the Regiers, had gone to Canada and wrote that there was no compulsory service there. Everything pointed to Canada and his compulsory service was the last straw. He and his brother-in-law, Peter Sawatzky, secured visas and tickets through the system that was in place and on October 16, 1928, they and their wives and children left Alexandrowka for good.

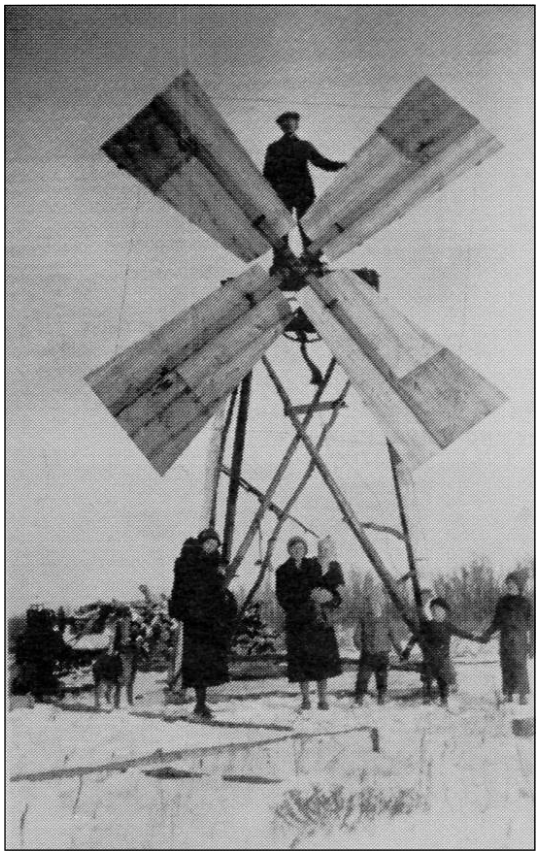
The trip was a grueling thirty-one days of depots, stations, trains and ships. It began in Alexandrowka and wound through Moscow, Riga, Libau, Danzig, London, Liverpool, Quebec City, Winnipeg and, finally, Herbert. In 1928 Maria wrote a poem about the trip in which she recounts what happened to them and her feelings along the way. She describes a very difficult trip for a twenty-four-year-old woman with a one-year-old son. She began the trip emotionally distraught at having to leave her parents and younger siblings and fearful of the enormity of their undertaking. She was terrified of the ocean voyage, having never been away from the Ukraine before, and she became nauseous from motion sickness very easily. Most significantly, she felt that the schedule was unrelenting and that the organizers of the journey had placed high demands upon the travelers. She says things like "we were not given time to rest" and "we were told we would have to continue on" and "we were taken to the train," indicating that all legs of the journey were very organized and that the schedule did not permit any recuperation between stages. It was a difficult journey for Maria and her baby but she maintained faith in God and the belief that she and Jakob were doing the best thing for themselves and their son.

Conditions in Canada did not suit the Mennonites perfectly. They were agricultural people and needed good land, but the best lands were settled in Canada prior to the 1920s. They sought compact communities but separate pockets of land were no longer available. Furthermore, tolerance of German-speaking immigrants was at a minimum. However, the military exemption and freedom of worship were assured and the Mennonites adopted the attitude that everything else would fall into place with hard work. Indeed, the newcomers strove not to be a burden and took whatever jobs were available. They immediately began to contribute towards their "Reiseschuld", the journey debt, and became self-reliant in a very short time. Jakob and Maria were no exception. The hosts that they were assigned to were the Cornelius Wall family in Herbert, Saskatchewan. Both Jakob and Maria worked on the Wall farm during the winter of 1928-29 and contributed to their room and board. Life with a new language and culture led to some interesting and humorous situations from time to time. For example, one day Jakob was hauling grain to a granary for Mr. Wall with a team of horses. In Russia, the words that horses were taught were "Ho" to go and "Prrrr" to stop, but Mr. Wall had told Jakob that Canadian horses respond to "Git up" and "Whoa". When he got to the granary door he could not remember the words and the horses did not stop. Finally Jakob yelled, "Oh, oh, dit yite all tow veet," which means "this is going too far," and the horses stopped.

In April, 1929, the Wiebes were able to join Maria's brother and his family in Watrous and the two families lived together for several months. Peter and Jakob rented some land together from a Mr. Bowman and began to farm. However, the two families did not get along very well, so the rented land was split in two and farmed separately. Jakob and Maria could not afford to build a new house but they found one that some people wanted moved. Jakob disassembled the house, moved it in sections on a horse-drawn wagon and then reassembled it. One wall needed to be replaced even though it was a wood-frame house. Jakob replaced it with a mud wall for that was the only type of house construction that he was familiar with. The house was only 400 square feet, but with a new roof and some paint and wallpaper on the inside, Jakob and Maria found it very livable. After their fifth son was born, Jakob built a lean-to on one side of the house and the five boys slept in that room. The family lived in that house from 1929 until 1946.

This was our first house on our own in Canada. The people are:Jacob G. Wiebe, Maria Wiebe and a friend (I think Mrs. Nickel.). The children are L-R: George Wiebe, John Wiebe, Jacob Wiebe and two Nickel boys.

In 1929 the Great Depression came to Canada. It hit the hardest and lasted the longest in the prairie agricultural communities. Farming did not provide sufficient sustenance for most immigrant families and workers had to employ flexibility and ingenuity in order to provide for themselves and their families. As Barry Broadfoot explains in his book, *Ten Lost Years,* some people developed the philosophy that any job was a good job: "Money was the name of the game. You turned your hand to any job, however hard, to make money - to survive." Many Mennonites were unemployed but most resisted the dole: "Many felt that they had no right to take relief if they had any other way of helping themselves." Old forms of cooperation and mutual aid were revived. Family and church groups became part and parcel of everyday subsistence.



Windmill built by Jacob Wiebe 1933 and was used for a time for sawing wood and grinding grain.

Jakob and Maria survived through hard work and Jakob's particular resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit. Growing up, Jakob had learned much from his father. Most importantly, he had learned to farm, but he had also learned to manufacture much of his own equipment for farming through ironwork and carpentry, as well as how to build a windmill, dig a well and construct a house or barn. The family was then able to live very inexpensively just by Jakob's willingness to tackle any task. For instance, to gather fuel to heat their home, Jakob would collect trees from other farmers who wanted their land cleared. To saw the wood, he built himself a windmill. He used four discarded telephone poles for the base and built the vanes from thin

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wood. Each vane had a removable panel which would help control the speed in high winds. This was an improvement on the windmill Jakob had worked on in Russia which was difficult to control in high winds and more susceptible to breakdown. The vanes drove a belt which ran a saw blade down below for cutting the wood.

This barn was built by Jacob G. Wiebe and neighbours in 1933 or so. The people are hard to make out.

Jakob also built his own barn in the same style that the Mennonites employed in Russia. He used poplar poles to construct a frame and then packed clay between them. To make the clay, he would test the soil in different areas. When he found the best clay, he would remove the sod from on top and pour a barrel of water on the ground. He would then drive his team of horses through the mud, around and around to make a clay pit. All the while, he added straw to make a good strong mix. Once the clay was applied to the frame, willow branches and straw made up the roof. As in their communities in Russia, Jakob's neighbours would come and assist in the process, just as Jakob would do for them. Other examples of Jakob's inventiveness included a grain bin on skids and one of the few ice cellars in the community.

Because farming did not provide a sufficient income for the Wiebes and because their land was relatively poor, Jacob took many jobs in the community to supplement his earnings through out the 1930s. He learned English very quickly in order to communicate with other men in the Watrous area and bid on contracts that were offered. Often in fall, he would run a stook-team on a threshing outfit and bill the farmer according to the acres covered. One winter he worked on a government pipeline, but not as a labourer. Jakob owned a horse named Old Dan that was very narrow and could fit inside the ditch that was being dug for the pipeline. Jakob contracted himself and Old Dan to pull all the large rocks that the labourers could not lift out of the ditch. Jakob also worked as the janitor at their church. He submitted a bid of $20.00 per year which the church felt was too high but, because there were no other bids, Jakob received the contract.

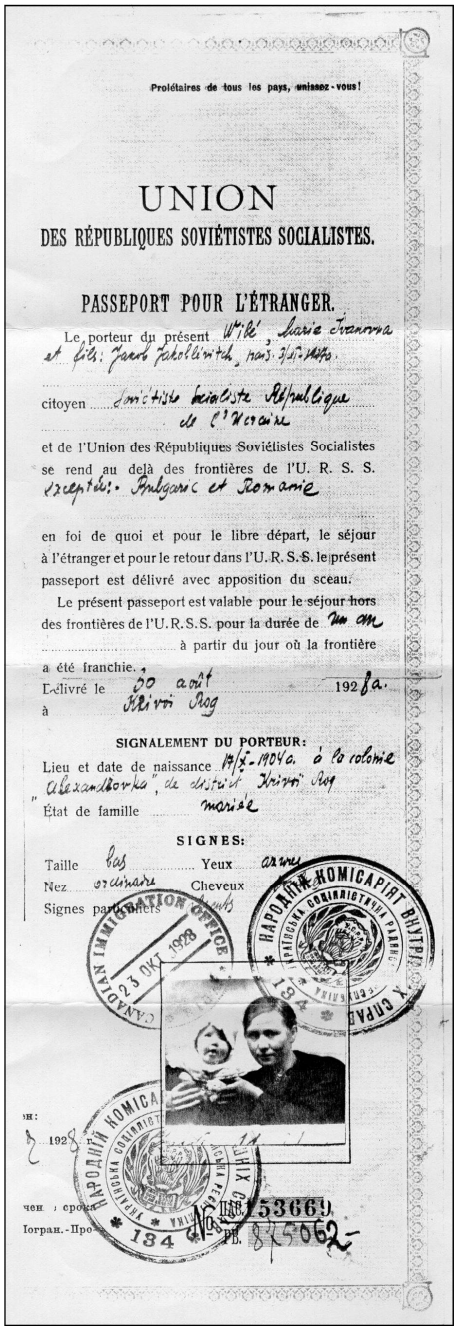
In addition to Jakob's contracts, the Wiebe's family economy depended upon the efforts of each of its members. Maria saw to most of the tasks at home, including raising chickens and ducks, tending large gardens and milking cows, as well as all the duties of keeping a house and rearing children. The children were required to work as well. For example, because their farmland was very stony, the entire family would pick stones from the field according to what they could carry. The stones were kept in a pile and, when Jakob would pour concrete, he inserted stones to conserve cement.

When the children were old enough to earn money away from home, they often took jobs in town or on another farm and brought the money back to their parents. Perhaps the most significant wage earning task that the Wiebes accomplished as a family was their summer business. Very close to their home was a small resort community called Manitou Beach. Many people either owned or rented cabins in Manitou Beach and would stay there in summer for as brief a period as a weekend or as long as two months. The Wiebes would peddle milk and vegetables to these vacationers throughout the summer. Each day Maria would wake the family at 5 a.m. to begin preparations. They would pull vegetables from the garden, clean them and arrange them in bunches. They would milk the cows, separate the cream, bottle both the milk and cream and cool the bottles in tubs of cold water. Everything was ready to go to the Beach by 8 a.m. When they got to the Beach, the family would divide up the wares and go door to door, selling milk for ten cents per quart and vegetables for five cents per bunch. Jakob came up with the idea of making tickets, a method of ensuring repeat sales. Patrons could purchase twelve tickets for $1.00 and then use the tickets to pay for the daily milk service,

thus buying their milk a little cheaper. Sometimes they would sell whole chickens as well. Usually Maria would prepare the chickens for cooking but one Jewish customer requested to purchase chickens live. The Wiebes would then coordinate their visits to that family with the Rabbi's schedule so that he would be able to perform the kosher slaughter. In 1937 the Wiebes were able to buy a car which made their visits to the Beach more efficient and cost effective. From a service station in town, Jakob purchased a 1927 Chevrolet by paying $100.00 down. He then paid the balance of $95.00 in installments from the profits of the summer enterprise.

Family life for the Wiebes during the 1930's was important but simple. Because there was little extra money, birthdays were celebrated only minimally but church life and the observance of religious holidays played a more important role. On Christmas Eve, the children would put their plates on the table so that in the morning they would receive a gift. On their plates would be peanuts and candies and a present. Christmas presents for the children were usually something practical such as a pair of mitts or boots. Jakob and Maria were two of twenty-one founding members of Bethany Mennonite Church in Watrous and they both attended there for much of their lives. Sunday afternoons were often spent visiting fellow church members. Every summer the church held a "Kinderfest", a children's party, and Jakob and Maria would contribute to the festivities. Jakob would make ice-cream with ice from his ice cellar, a rare treat, and Maria would make lemonade. Though the Mennonite community in Watrous was not as intimate as in Alexandrowka, they did enjoy the cultural and religious freedom and the rich family life that they had sought in coming to Canada.

With the 1940s came more prosperous times; Jakob and Maria were able to purchase additional property and focus more exclusively on farming. Though their life in Canada may not have been exactly what they expected, they were able to carve out a satisfying existence in Watrous. Canada did not provide them with the opportunity to perpetuate their society as it was in Russia; they were unable to live in the close communities they were used to and they were forced to expand their family economy and integrate into the larger citizenry simply to survive. Their children would never know the eremitic lifestyle that their forefathers possessed in the Ukraine and the Vistula Delta. Still, in retrospect, Jakob and Maria felt that coming to Canada was the right decision for they were able to maintain their Mennonite culture to a satisfactory degree and give to their children what seemed to be a better life than the one given them in Russia. They enjoyed improved economic opportunities, freedom of worship and, with the onset of World War II, the military exemption they required. One must admire their courage to brave uncertainty and embark upon the longest journey - a journey not simply around the globe, but to a new life.



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UNION
DES RÉPUBLIQUES SOVIÉTISTES SOCIALISTES.

PASSEPORT POUR L'ÉTRANGER.

Le porteur du présent Wiké, Maria Ivanovna
et fils: Jacob Jakovlevitch, mois 3 ans.

citoyen ... de l'Ukraine

et de l'Union des Républiques Soviétistes Socialistes se rend au delà des frontières de l'U. R. S. S.
exceptés: Bulgarie et Roumanie

en foi de quoi et pour le libre départ, le séjour à l'étranger et pour le retour dans l'U. R. S. S. le présent passeport est délivré avec apposition du sceau.

Le présent passeport est valable pour le séjour hors des frontières de l'U. R. S. S. pour la durée de un an
à partir du jour où la frontière a été franchie.

Délivré le 20 août 1928
à Krivoi Rog

SIGNALEMENT DU PORTEUR:

Lieu et date de naissance 19/5-1904 à la colonie "Alexandrowka", du district Krivoi Rog
État de famille marié

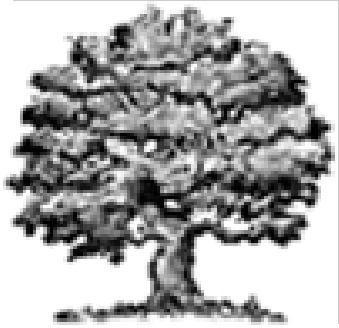
SIGNES:

Taille bas ... Yeux gris
Nez ordinaire ... Cheveux
Signes particuliers

CANADIAN IMMIGRATION OFFICE 23 OKT 1928

No 153669

Passport showing Maria Wiebe and son Jacob J.. Wiebe



The Family Tree

Genealogy Editor—-Rosemary Slater

Preserving your family history for future generations

Connecting after 160 Years
John E Harder

Harders' Property at Emaus near Danzig, the Mystery Picture

It had been the usual short flight to Calgary. Several hours later Norma and I were settled in for the long flight to Germany. I remember a sudden feeling of panic as I realized that there was now no turning back and I found myself going through all of my research again in my mind – could I be wrong?

We arrived in Frankfurt a bit early – there was no problem locating our luggage – not even a glance from customs. We soon found the Bahnhof and we soon had our train tickets. Three hours later we were on a railway platform in Essen. Several minutes later we spotted the gentleman waving a small Canadian flag. We had reached Bernhard Harder.

The search had started in the year 2000. A new computer, and the determination to improve some very elementary computer skills, led me to see what I could find in terms of family history.

At that point, our family information was limited to knowing that my great- grandfather Nicolaus had died at a relatively young age in Russia, that my great- grandmother had remarried a Heinrich Thies-

sen and that my grandparents, with their young family, had managed to escape Russia and come to Canada in 1923. A copy of an old painting of some buildings had been brought from Russia. The caption over the painting reads "Harders' Besitzung zu Emaus bei Danzig". So somehow we had a connection back to Danzig and some place named Emaus.

My mother was able to provide me with a copy of an old letter from a distant uncle who had written that, according to B. J. Unruh's book, the parents of Nicolaus Harder had been Hermann Harder and Barbara Sudermann and that they had immigrated to Gnadenfeld, Russia with the Sudermann family.

With that old letter and using information on the Latter Day Saints site, I was able to rough out a family tree going back another five generations – I had some doubts but it was the best I could do. Then I found the GRANDMA database. GRANDMA III was my first version and it seemed to indicate that my tree had credibility. It didn't make the connection to my Canadian family but it seemed to make sense given the information in the old letter.

The next two years were spent searching various sites online and reading whatever I could find. I had now concluded that it was likely that Herman may well have been the only Harder, of my family, who had gone to Russia in 1841. I became convinced that relatives had remained in Prussia.

Then in January 2003, I received GRANDMA IV. I knew exactly where to look. There it was; Hermann had two brothers who had remained in Danzig and the database listed several generations of their descendants. I was excited when I noted a Ruth Harder, born in Danzig in 1929 with a daughter named Brigitte who was married to a Kurt Blaeser and that their noted address was at Koeln, Germany. A quick Google produced a phone number.

I had found the phone number late at night and it was all I could do to politely wait until morning to allow for the time difference between Germany and Saskatchewan. Brigitte spoke in broken English and I had trouble explaining why I was calling. She answered that yes her mother Ruth's maiden name had been Harder, that she had been born in Danzig and that she "would jump" if she learned that I was in fact related on her Harder side. Brigitte advised that her mother was in hospital and couldn't speak English. We agreed that I would call back tomorrow which would allow her to obtain her husband's fax number at work and which would then allow us to start exchanging some basic information.

I called the next day. She was still very cautious with our discussions but she did give me a fax number and also an email address for her mother's cousin, Bernhard Harder, who was 75 years of age and who, also, was very interested in family history. I immediately sent off a fax to Brigitte and an email to Bernhard.

And then so many things began to fall into place. Bernhard emailed me the next day. He was hoping to converse in French as he couldn't speak English. He had very quickly concluded, from the information that I had sent, that yes we were in fact family. Then the information started coming. The family in Germany was very small and Bernhard was in awe that another Harder was interested in his many documents and I was in awe of his information which he now so willingly shared with me. Bernhard painstakingly corresponded with me in English . It was obvious that he was investing many long hours in summarizing, explaining and translating.

Some of the things I learned from Bernhard;

- that my initial tree (a straight line) was correct, but he could add hundreds of more names, stories, pictures and detailed information.
- that yes, the family had, at one time, lived at Emaus which was now part of the City of Gdansk.
- that Claas Harder, a forefather, had been a leather merchant in the courtyard of the castle at Marienberg in the 1700s.

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- he surprised me with a picture of my great, great, great, grandfather Claas Harder (1785 to 1853). I had been skeptical of the photograph until I confirmed that photography had started in 1822.
- He forwarded copies of endless family documents, including a copy of a handwritten diary kept by Claas Harder (b. 1785) and many family charts.
- That his Uncle Franz Harder, Ruth's father, also had a passion for family history as he had written many articles on the subject. Bernhard explained that families in Germany had been forced to document their lineage during the Hitler years.
- That he had many fond memories of Danzig.

Bernhard and I developed a strong bond during the months of January to April 2003 as we shared dozens of emails and faxes. When we hinted that we would like to come to Germany, Bernhard had encouraged us to come as soon as possible as he had been fighting prostate cancer.

We met at the train station in May 2003. This was followed by five days visiting with Bernhard and his family in Essen and then with Ruth (Harder) Mack and her family in Neuwied. We spent many hours going through family information. We often stumbled with language but that was often the reason for a good laugh. There were tears when we parted. The emails with Bernhard continued after our return. Bernhard made increased efforts to further research our family and became convinced that he had found information indicating that our Harder tree could be extended back another two generations to the mid 1600s. We also made contact with a Mareile (Harder) Haas in Hamburg and discovered a suitcase full of unsorted information of another Harder branch – Bernhard happily sorted and catalogued the new find and kept me informed as to his progress.

Our correspondence continued until early 2006 when the cancer was advancing. Bernhard died in March of that year. I continue to be in awe of what unfolded. Bernhard, in sharing his information, has given me a priceless gift. I am now committed to further researching and documenting my family history. I look forward to the day when someone will phone me, asking about a possible family connection, and I will be able to pass on the gift.

Norma and I returned to Germany in September 2006. We had a marvelous time with Mareile in Hamburg and then again visited in Essen and Neuwied.

The events of the last several years will always be important to me. Not too many years ago I had trouble relating to the newest saying of "the information highway". I now understand. The resources that are available are almost unbelievable. In my case, it was the Latter Day Saints site, several Genealogical Societies, the GRANDMA database, Mennonite Heritage Centre and many readily available books, which helped me to connect two branches of our family after a separation of 160 years. The process was not always easy and a little persistence was often called for. The rewards, though, have been immense.

John, Christa, Norma and Bernhard Harder
in Velbert, Germany , May, 2003
at the home of Bernhard and Christa Harder