

SASKATCHEWAN MENNONITE HISTORIAN

Official periodical of the
Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Inc.
Volume XII No. 2, September , 2006



Dick and Betty Epp

MHSS Says "Thank You" to Dick Epp

By Verner Friesen

No one person has invested as much time and energy in the work of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan as has Dick Epp. Dick was involved with Ted Regehr and others in getting the organization started in the early 1970's. Since then, beginning in 1980, he was president of our Historical Society for 16 years, during which time he published the occasional newsletter.

For the last 11 years he served as volunteer editor of our publication, the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian. Dick combined his skills in writing, editing, photography and the use of the computer to produce high quality results.

On Saturday, April 22, over 130 members and friends of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society gathered in the Fellowship Centre of Bethany Manor in Saskatoon to acknowledge Dick Epp's significant contribution to our Society and to say "thank you". To begin the celebration a tasty catered meal was enjoyed by all. Jake Buhler, current president of our Society, served as MC for the evening.

(Continued on page 4)



Dick and Betty Epp with their family at the "Dick Epp Appreciation Night".

Published 3 times a year by the Mennonite
Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS)

Membership—\$25 a year. Donations welcome.

MHSS Office and Archives
Room 900-110 La Ronge Road
Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8
(306) 242-6105 mhss@sasktel.net

Archive Hours
Monday: 1:30-4:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 1:30-4:00 p.m., &: 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Verner Friesen, Interim Editor
Phone no. & e-mail under Board of Directors

Esther Patkau & Jake Buhler, Advisory Comm.

Helen Fast, Deanna Krahn, Rosemary Slater—
Production

Victor Wiebe—Book page & Archives page

Rosemary Slater—Genealogy Page
Ph. No.—955-3759, r.slater@sasktel.net

Mary Martens & Hilda Voth—typists

Ernie Baergen & Margaret Mair—Proof readers

Readers are invited to send in news items, stories,
articles, photographs, church histories, etc. to
mhss@sasktel.net or to the MHSS address above,

MHSS Board of Directors, 2006

Jake Buhler, President
836 Main Street
Saskatoon, SK S7H 0K3
Tel.: 244-1392 jakelouisebuhler@sasktel.net

Verner Friesen, Vice-President
641—120 LaRonge Road
Saskatoon, SK S7K 7Z9
Tel: 382-2970 vafriesen@sasktel.net

Vera Falk, Secretary/MC Sask Archivist
Box 251, Dundurn, SK S0K 1K0
Tel: 492-4731 Fax: 492-4731
r.v.of.thodeandshields@sasktel.net

Margaret Snider, Treasurer
Box 35, Guernsey, SK S0K 1W0
Tel: (306) 365-4274
sniderwm@sasktel.net

Kathy Boldt, Archives
Box 152, RR #4, Saskatoon, SK S7K 3J7
Tel: 239-4742 keboldt@sasktel.net

Abe Buhler
Box 1074, Warman, SK S0K 4S0
Tel: 931-2512 geobuhler@sasktel.net

Margaret Ewert
Box 127, Drake, SK S0K 0H0
Tel: 363-2077 mewert@canada.com

Eileen Quiring
Box 2, Waldheim, SK S0K 4R0
Tel: (306) 945-2165 eileenajq@sasktel.net

Ed Schmidt, Genealogy
Box 28, Waldheim, SK S0K 4R0
Tel: (306) 945-2217 ewschmidt@sasktel.net

Victor G. Wiebe, Archivist
11 Kindrachuk Cres., Saskatoon, SK S7K 6J1
Tel: 934-8125 victor.wiebe@usask.ca

Other Positions

Cemeteries Project—Helen Fast
Tel: 242-5448 rhfastlane@shaw.ca

Cemetery Web-site—Al Mierau, Webmaster
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~skmhss/>

Photographer - Susan Braun

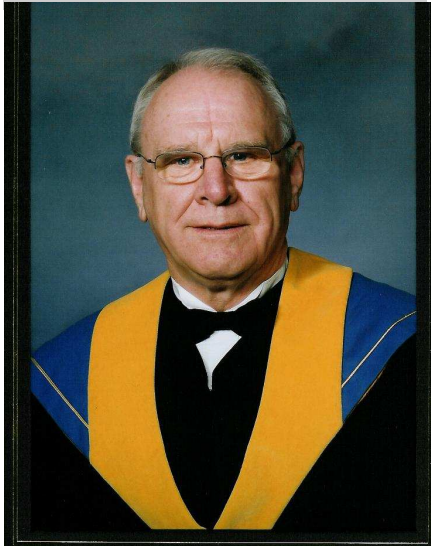
Honour List

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
Dick H. Epp
Margaret Epp
Peter K. Epp (1985)
George K. Fehr (2000)
Jake Fehr
Jacob E. Friesen
Jacob G. Guenter
Gerhard Hiebert (1978)
Katherine Hooge (2001)
Abram G. Janzen
John J. Janzen (2004)
George Krahn (1999)

Ingrid Janzen-Lamp
J.J. Neudorf (1988)
J.C. Neufeld (1994)
John P. Nickel
Esther Patkau
Dr. Ted Regehr
Ed Roth
Wilmer Roth (1982)
Arnold Schroeder (2000)
Katherine Thiessen (1984)
Rev. J.J. Thiessen (1977)
Dr. David Toews (1947)
Toby Unruh (1997)
George Zacharias (2000)

President's Message



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Allow me to dream a little. It is a precursor to visioning.

First, long before MHSS had its space at Bethany Manor, there were caring people who worked out of their homes to gather materials, to write stories, and to prepare the way for what was to come. We owe much gratitude to those visionaries, who helped put us where we are now. Now we have another opportunity to move forward. As Bethany Manor expands in the next year, and adds various living spaces, the area next to the archives may come available. We have an opportunity, now, to approach the board of Bethany Manor with a proposal to utilize that space. We have an opportunity to work out a 20 year plan!

Second, MHSS is an organization that seeks to promote the collection of stories and records

of all Mennonite groups in Saskatchewan. But only three groups are represented on the board. Our task is to carry our message to the other Mennonite siblings that we have and to include them in our work. We must identify them and ask them to become our associates. Would it be too optimistic to say that in the next year we will get three additional groups to join us?

Third, by year's end, we must get, by hook or by crook, by Urim or by Thumin, an editor for the *Historian*. Perhaps we are scared off by the contribution of our former editor, Dick Epp, who served us for decades. Perhaps God will call someone for a year or two. In the meantime, Verner Friesen and his hearty volunteers also hope for a *promised* editor who will lead us on.

Fourth, we live in precarious times as Lebanese and Israelis are dying in a conflict that can now be called a war. To point fingers is not my task, as it is too serious and complicated to do so. What I can say is that we might wish to identify the people from among us, past and present, who have worked, and are working in places of conflict, who have practiced the Mennonite message of peace as taught by Jesus Christ. The stories of such people can be the examples for today's generation as they seek to create peace in a troubled world.

Finally, as I look at the dozens of volunteers, board members and others, who contribute to the overall work of MHSS, I dream of a time when we could afford paid staff who would help to coordinate many of the efforts. In the meantime, I am very grateful for what is being done now.

Jake Buhler

EXERCISES?

Top ten exercises for those who hate to exercise.

10. Beating around the bush.
9. Jumping to conclusions.
8. Climbing the walls.
7. Passing the buck.
6. Throwing your weight around.
5. Bending over backwards.
4. Balancing the books.
3. Running around in circles.
2. Starting the ball rolling.
1. Picking up the pieces.

So how about a cup of coffee after all that hard work.

Just remember:

"The worst thing about retirement is that you have to drink coffee on your own time".

Editorial—

A Variety of Gifts, A Variety of Tasks By Verner Friesen

According to Romans 12:6, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome as follows: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us". We are claiming that Biblical truth as we try to keep the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian coming to you after the retirement of our long-time editor, Dick Epp.

We are counting on a host of unpaid volunteers to each make their contribution in a specific area. The list of tasks includes: looking for and soliciting articles, writing articles, typing, proof reading, discerning and editing, design and production, scanning pictures, mailing, etc. (Only the printing is done by someone outside of our Society).

We are hoping very much that as each of us does our task, the final result will be a publication that continues to be "interesting and well-edited". (Ted Regehr used those two adjectives to describe our Historian as it has been). Please bear with us as some of us learn our new roles.

MHSS Says "Thank You" to Dick Epp (Continued from page 1)



Delightful entertainment in the form of stories and favorite songs from "Dick's era" was provided by Evelyn Roden, Margie Koop and Judy Roden.

Tributes to Dick Epp were presented by Dr. Ted Regehr, an associate of Dick during the earlier years of the Historical Society, and by Verner Friesen, representing the present MHSS Board.

Speaking from a Canadian and historical perspective, Ted made the observation that 25 years ago there were no regularly published Mennonite newsletters. Today all of the provincial Mennonite historical societies have their own newsletter and, thanks to Dick Epp, Saskatchewan has one of the very best of these. "Some of the most interesting and revealing work", Ted said, "has been one in the fields of local history and genealogy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the always interesting and very well-edited pages of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian. The stories provide intimate insights into the lives of our people, and put flesh and blood onto the many persons who remain in the background in more general histories. People like Dick Epp have done us all a great service by writing and preserving the local histories".

Verner listed several things that Dick has reason to feel good about: a) the growth of our Society from very small beginnings to now an organization with 340 members, b) the legacy of a first class publication which others can build upon, c) having provided a vehicle for many individuals, families, churches and communities to share their stories, and d) the tremendous treasure of interesting, valuable stories now preserved through the 11 volumes of the Historian which he produced. Both Ted and Verner extended best wishes to Dick as he moves on to other writing projects, to follow other dreams waiting to be fulfilled, and to enjoy more of the free time which retired persons deserve.

Helen Fast paid tribute to Betty Epp, Dick's wife, for playing such a very supportive role in Dick's numerous writing and editing projects, and for her "behind the scenes contribution to our society and for doing it with grace and your ever ready smile". Helen then presented Betty with a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

Dick, surrounded by a number of family members, thanked everyone for the special evening and for the good wishes. Later, in writing, he shared these thoughts

with our Society: "Betty and I felt very good about the evening, although it is somewhat humbling to see all our friends gather to wish us well. We are very grateful for the event you planned for us. Please accept our humble thanks for your generosity and kindness that you shared with us. We wish you and the MHSS much success and happiness for the future. My years with the Society have been rewarding years. Thank you and God bless you all for your work".

Besides being an appreciation event, the evening was also designed to be a fundraiser. It netted proceeds of over \$2100 for the Society.

NEW BOOK

The Mennonite Migrations
(and The Old Colony)

The above new book, 813 pages in length, is a detailed history of the Mennonites of Northern Europe and their migrations. The last half of the book is dedicated to the first settlers of the Old Colony, Russia. This new book incorporates the material of my previous book, The Old Colony, with greatly expanded historical material including new and original research. Updates, amendments, and additions to previous material have been included as appropriate. New chapters include the Molotschna, MBs/Templers, Leaders and Personalities – Molotschna, the Judenplan, as well as an index and numerous tables and maps.

The book may be ordered at the address below. Persons wishing to save shipping costs may arrange for pickup. Your cheque or money order should accompany your order. Single copies sell for \$39.00 plus \$9.00 for shipping and handling. No orders purporting to sell books on consignment will be accepted.

Henry Schapansky
914 Chilliwack Street,
New Westminster, BC V3L 4V5
604-520-3291

PLEASE NOTE:

Mennonite History Websites

New MHSS Archive Holding
http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Tragheimerweide_1781-1862.html

Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia on line:

<http://www.gameo.org/>

FAMILY REUNIONS

The third reunion (2003, 2005) for the descendants of

**Heinrich Fehr (1846-1911) and
Sara Neufeld (1847-1922)**

is being planned for

August 3-5, 2007, Wymark, Saskatchewan.

For information, the main large web-site is at

<http://fehrgenealogy.com>

Particular information about the reunion is available at

<http://www.fehrgenealogy.com/reunion2007.htm>.

The details about Tim Janzen's presentation are available from the above main web-site

or at

<http://www.fehrgenealogy.com/announcements.htm>.

The registration may need to be adjusted depending on circumstances closer to the time of the actual gathering,. The main contact person is

**donfehr@telus.net or
don@fehrgenealogy.com..**

Quote:

"Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns. I am thankful that thorns have roses."

Alphonse Karr

Nota bena: mark well and observe

Our Reader's Page: Announcements and Questions

2006 MHSS HERITAGE EVENING

At Bethany Manor Fellowship Centre
110 LaRonge Road, Saskatoon, Sask.

On Friday, November 10, 2006 at 7:30 pm

We will be honouring three persons who have made a significant contribution in the area of church music in our province, namely:

- 1) **David Paetkau**, long-time music director at the German-English Academy, now Ros-thern Junior College,
- 2) **Jacob Schroeder**, long-time music director at the Bethany Bible Institute, Hepburn, now Bethany College,
- 3) **Albert Wiens**, who served many years as choir director in Herschel and Saskatoon and as chairperson of the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Music Committee.

We are very pleased that Alfred Dahl from Winnipeg has accepted our invitation to lead a volunteer choir in singing some of the favourite choir numbers of the three directors named above. Former choir members of David Paetkau, Jacob Schroeder and Albert Wiens are especially invited; others, of course, are also welcome to join the choir. A choir practice is to take place at Bethany Manor Fellowship Centre on Friday at 6:00 pm.

GENEALOGY DAY

The Mennonite Historical Society of Sask. Genealogy Day will take place at Bethany Manor Fellowship Centre, 110 LaRonge Road, Saskatoon on November 11, 2006 (doors open at 8:30 am and the first session begins at 9:30 am.)

Questions about the day may be directed by e-mail to mhss@sasktel.net or by telephone to Ed Schmidt at (306) 945-2217 or to any of the MHSS Board members.

Refreshments will be available all day. Included in the registration fee collected at the door will be a half hour lunch consisting of soup and sandwiches. Charitable donations eligible for tax receipts will be solicited during this event.

Alf Redekopp, Director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg has been invited to give keynote presentations both in the forenoon and afternoon. Several people will be given time to share their journey of how they engage in putting together reunions, gathering and organizing, preparing and presenting information, to meaningfully preserve histories for current and future generations.

These will include personal and family histories, correspondence, old photographs, newspapers, church and institutional records, community histories, cemetery information and other sources of information.

Is Your Membership Due?

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

The Treasurer, MHSS
Room 900—110 LaRonge 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.

Mennonites among Muslims

By Alan M. Guenther

Ever since the events of September 11th and those that followed as a consequence, we have become much more aware of Muslim communities in the world. Here in Canada, recent debates over the implementation of Muslim family laws in Ontario and Quebec have made us think about what it means to live together as citizens of the same country. In my research in Islamic Studies, one of the subjects I have examined is the interaction of Muslims with Christians at various times in history. Of particular interest, of course, has been the Mennonite encounter with Islam.

Throughout our history, there have been a few times that our ancestors have had close contact with Muslims. As could be expected, the majority of those encounters were when Mennonite missionaries went to share the message of Jesus in other countries where Muslims lived. But there have also been occasions when Mennonite communities existed side by side with Muslim ones, and both communities learned to know one another at a more intimate level. The nomadic tribes of Nogai Tatars, who settled in the Molochna region of Russia about the same time that the Mennonites did, were Muslim. What the two groups had in common was their reliance on agriculture for their livelihood. Another instance where Mennonites came into contact with Muslim communities was during the Great Trek to Central Asia towards the end of the 19th century. This is the story that I want to explore here.

Two key characters in this story are the brothers Johannes and Franz Bartsch, who travelled east as followers of Klaas Epp. A number of Mennonite families from the Am Trakt settlement as well as from the Molochna region decided to immigrate to Central Asia, partly because of pressure from the Russian government which was no longer prepared to exempt the Mennonite young men from conscription, and

partly in the pursuit of millennialist ideals. Among those that left in 1880 were Franz Bartsch and his mother, from in the village of Hahnsau in the Am Trakt settlement. Franz's older brother, Johannes was to follow a year later with the main spiritual leader of the movement, Klaas Epp.

As these groups travelled further east into Asia, they encountered a number of diverse Muslim groups. On the Asian steppes along the Ural River, they met the Khirgiz nomads from whom they purchased feed for their animals as well as milk for their people. Franz and his wife had acquired some facility in the Tatar language, which they could put to good use in speaking with the Khirgiz when they bartered for food. The young Mennonite men on the Trek were quicker to become fluent in the Khirgiz language. Hermann Jantzen who joined the caravan as a 14-year-old boy along with his family later recalled that a young Muslim Sarte who asked to accompany the caravan to Tashkent taught him the Uzbek-Turkish language daily as they travelled together. Throughout his account, Franz Bartsch included descriptions of the major Muslim urban centres through which they passed, i.e. Turkestan, Tashkent, and Samarkand, noting some of the unique Muslim architectural features.

The Mennonite travellers had difficulty finding land on which to settle when they crossed the Russian border into the region of Bukhara. At first, they negotiated to settle on some land set aside as a religious endowment by the Muslims. But the officials of Bukhara objected and asked Franz Bartsch to explain the reasons the Mennonites had for undertaking the trek. He hesitated because he felt he lacked the necessary vocabulary in the Uzbek-Sarte dialect to explain such spiritual matters. He was aware that Muslim teaching included a belief that the Antichrist would come, only to be destroyed by the Messiah when he returned. Bartsch felt he could use this concept to introduce the Mennonites' millenarianism which had motivated their trek. But as soon as he mentioned *dajjāl* (the Antichrist), the *bek*, or ruler, objected violently and imprisoned the delegation for the night. The following day, they returned

(Cont. on page 8)

to the settlement with a contingent of the *bek's* soldiers who forced them to pack up their belongings and move back to the city of Serabulak in Russian territory. Here other Muslims proved more hospitable as they willingly opened their village to the destitute Mennonites and even permitted them to use their mosque for Sunday worship services and weddings.

Meanwhile, back in the Mennonite colonies along the Volga River, Franz's brother Johannes, who had been selling Bibles for the British and Foreign Bible Society, joined another caravan as it passed through Orenburg. He took with him a small number of Bibles to give away to the Muslims and Jews they met along the way. When they arrived in Turkestan shortly before Christmas in 1881, the decision was made to winter in that city; and Bartsch had the opportunity to distribute his Bibles. Through certain incidents that happened on the journey, Johannes Bartsch turned from being an ardent follower of Klaas Epp to being an opponent. Consequently, when this group of Mennonite emigrants arrived in Tashkent, he separated himself from the group and remained in the city to establish a Bible depot. When the rest of the emigrants including their leader, Klaas Epp, reached those who had wintered in Serabulak, Franz Bartsch also found himself out of favour with Epp and decided to join his brother Johannes in Tashkent to assist him in the Bible selling ministry.

Johannes Bartsch described in detail one of his first encounters with a Muslim when he was beginning his work in Tashkent. The Muslim had hailed him and expressed a desire to see his books as he was on his way to the bazaar in the older part of the city. The Muslim characteristically declared "*Bismallāh*" or "In the name of God," as he took the book. When he inquired what kind of book it was, Bartsch replied that it was the gospel. After some reflection the Muslim responded, "*Injīl 'Īssā!*" meaning "the gospel of Jesus." He then further indicated that he was aware of the other holy

books: the *taurat* of Moses, the *zabūr* of David, and the Koran of Muhammad. He told Bartsch, "The Koran is good, give me the Koran; this book was not written for us." Bartsch replied that the Gospel was for all people—for Christians, for Jews, and for Muslims. The Muslim began to leaf through the book and asked for the price. He was surprised at the low cost, but tried to haggle with Bartsch and buy it at even a lower price. Bartsch, however, refused to budge; and the Muslim eventually bought the New Testament, took it in both hands, raised it to his lips and to his forehead, and murmured, "Bismallāh." The crowd that had gathered to witness the transaction were fascinated by the exchange and at Bartsch's insistence on the payment of the full price. His stock of that edition of the New Testament was soon sold out as a result. He then proceeded to the bazaar which he described in his account in interesting detail.

In the bazaar, Bartsch found the selling of his books to be more difficult on his first visit. He realized he would have to stock many more languages because besides the Sartes and Tatars, there were Persians, Arabs, Uzbeks, Afghans, Tunguses, Hindus and Jews. He also concluded that colportage work among Muslims was very different from that among Christians, because Muslims were "avowed enemies of Christianity." Bartsch also stated that unlike his previous ministry along the Volga and in northern Russia, here he was prohibited from going into homes and had to conduct his business primarily in the bazaar and only with the men. The reason for this was the practice of *purdah*, the seclusion of the women in the orthodox Muslim families. Nevertheless, in his report to the BFBS, he recounted a more favourable reception to his wares as time went on and as he became more known in the region:

"As I make my appearance (I am beginning to be well known) some books are asked for, most probably Persian (which is the most currently used cultivated language in these parts). A book is bought, and the buyer begins to read aloud. The 5th chapter of Matthew made especially a deep impression. Some were sitting Eastern fashion, some standing, but from all or almost all an expression of wonder

was heard. This was more marked still, as one day in my hearing the 22nd chapter of the Revelation was read, about Jerusalem the Golden. The deepest attention was given in order not to lose a word, and the necks of the hearers were stretched out towards the reader.”

During one of his first trips into Bukhara, Johannes Bartsch encountered a Mullā, or religious teacher, from one of the colleges who objected to the books he was selling and declared them to be lies. Bartsch silenced him by exclaiming, “How can the Book lie which comes from Jesus and Mas[i]h Allah?” He was appealing to the Muslim’s belief in Jesus as a Prophet sent by God and as the Messiah from God.

In Tashkent, Johannes Bartsch set up a depot—a book store where Bibles, Testaments and portions of Scripture in all the languages and dialects were sold and shipped to other points. As directed by his superior from the BFBS, he appointed a young Mennonite, Jacob Neumann, to assist his wife at the depot when he was away from home, and appointed two more colporteurs for Siberia and one in Khiva. Mennonite names listed in the annual reports of the BFBS are Johannes’ brother Franz Bartsch in Siberia and Jacob Hamm in Irkutsk and Siberia, and Jacob Stärkel in Khiva, who, when he immigrated to the United States in June 1885, was replaced by Henry Ott. Franz Bartsch established a depot for Siberia in Omsk, the new capital of Western Siberia in 1886. Two years later he was joined by his brother-in-law, Heinrich Wölke in his travels in Siberia. Jacob Wiebe (described as another brother-in-law) is also listed along with Wölke for the Omsk region. Towards the end of 1889, Jacob Suckau and his son John joined Johannes Bartsch in Tashkent. With the addition of Cornelius Wall at that time in Tashkent as well, it was felt that Jacob Neumann could be sent to help Franz Bartsch in Siberia.

Johannes Bartsch gives an extended account of one of his journeys from Tashkent to Khiva in

1885. Because of rumours of war, he was forced to take a longer road, crossing the desert between Kazalinsk and Khiva. After one abortive attempt when he was deserted by his Kirghiz guide, Bartsch joined a caravan that was also travelling that route. Bartsch described in detail his Muslim companion’s method of doing prayers and the ablutions that preceded them.

“Before prayers, however, the ceremony of ablution or cleansing is observed, that is, the washing of the head, the hands, arms, feet and limbs. But since there is no water to be had in the desert, they are permitted to use the sand of the desert for the purpose. The manner in which this ceremony is performed is certainly rather comical, but “Mohammed Bey Gambar” himself lived in the desert, and dedicated or consecrated the desert sand to this use. This ceremony is performed as follows: The Moslem sits down, pushes his chalet and shirt sleeve above the elbow, dips the outstretched hand into the sand, then withdraws it and rubs his face, his ears and his head; then after dipping his fingers into the sand again he rubs his arms, legs and feet. After repeating his “Bis milla” several times, and closing with “La Allah,” the “ablution” is completed.”

On his way, Bartsch encountered a group of Mennonites travelling in the opposite direction. These were families who likewise had broken with Klaas Epp and were now immigrating to America. Bartsch was able to persuade his drivers to delay their departure long enough to worship and visit with his Mennonite friends before they departed.

In 1889, Franz Bartsch decided to retire from the work because bouts of ill-health and rheumatic attacks prevented him from conducting the protracted journeys in the cold climate of Siberia that the job required. His brother Johannes was also suffering from increasing illnesses, and retired the following year. He moved with his family to the Mennonite colony at Aulie-Ata, and a few years later, to the United States. But both in Siberia and in Central Asia, other Mennonites whom the Bartsch brothers had recruited and trained, continued the work of selling Bibles for several years to follow.

(Cont. on page 10)

Note

I would also be very interested in hearing from anyone who might have a connection with the Bartsch family, or from others who might be descended from some of the other Mennonites who worked with the British and Foreign Bible Society. I would also like to hear from any who might have more details about the encounter between Mennonites and Muslims along the Trek to Central Asia, particularly about the interaction in Serabulak where the Muslims permitted them the use of their mosque during the winter they stayed there. Also, if anyone has other stories of Mennonites meeting Muslims in the colonies in the Ukraine, please write me. My e-mail address is

alan.guenther@mail.mcgill.ca

and my mailing address is:

Alan M. Guenther
Box 663, Warman, SK
S0K 4S0

THE HALDERMANS

-

**LAPSED PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITES
IN SASKATCHEWAN**

By Barrett Halderman

Some years ago I had the good fortune to meet the then-editor of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian, Dick Epp, at his display table at the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society Annual Meeting in Saskatoon. And he was kind enough to send on to me articles he thought I might be interested in relating to the Halderman family.

As readers of Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian (SMH) know, SMH primarily covers the history of Mennonite families who have come to Saskatchewan and western Canada from Germany and Eastern Europe, with a number of side trippers of relatively recent vintage coming from the U.S. and elsewhere. My own background has a distinct Mennonite and Saskatchewan tinge - but the Haldermans got here in a more roundabout

fashion!

My grandparents Dayton and Mary Halderman homesteaded in 1910 near what is now Frontier, Saskatchewan, just north of the Montana border. Dayton passed away in 1939; Mary in 1962.

My genealogical research has established that Dayton was a 6th. - generation descendant of Nicholas Halderman (Holderman)(Haldeman)(Halteman)(Haldimann)(Haldimand)(Hulteman) etc.), a Swiss Mennonite who emigrated to Coventry Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania in the early 1720's. By 1820, Nicholas' grandson Daniel had moved on to Fairfield County, Ohio; and the succeeding direct descendants, farmers all, proceeded to Lisbon, Iowa; then to Long Island, Kansas; and in my grandfather Dayton's case then to homesteads in North Dakota and Manitoba before finally settling near Frontier.

There is no question that my Halderman ancestors in Pennsylvania were devout Mennonites. The above-named Nicholas is referred to in a lengthy and well-documented article by Rev. Carl Thurman Smith in the Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine, Vol. XXI, entitled *A Survey of Immigrants of the Haldeman Family of Switzerland to Montgomery, Chester and Lancaster Counties, Pennsylvania before 1750*.

Smith notes that "there were at least five immigrants of this (Haldeman) name arriving sometime between the years 1718 and 1733", and that "... all five of these immigrants belonged to the Haldeman family of the Emmenthal district of Canton Bern, Switzerland, and were part of the Swiss Mennonite migration to America....". Smith relates that in 1738, Nicholas Halderman headed the list of the signers of the deed of trust for a tract of land on which the local Mennonite community built a meeting house, and says that

These peace loving Mennonites lived a quiet life following their ancestral occupation of farming. They were thankful to be free of the constant threat of religious persecution and an enforced conformity to the established state church. [Footnotes omitted].

Less than a hundred years after 1738, however, it appears that the Mennonite influence was no longer so

central to the family's religious faith. A letter of May 10, 1827 from the Pennsylvania family to the above-mentioned Daniel in Ohio reported the death of one of Daniel's brothers:

"I hereby inform you that Uncle Christian Halderman is gone to the shades of silence, he is no more. He is gone to the invisible world from whence no traveler returns. He died on Sunday morning last the 6th instant (May) and was buried on Tuesday following where an appropriate discourse was delivered on the occasion by the Rev. John Price, on these words, "and what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch, and by Christians bearing ___ words, For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of god's " etc. to a numerous course of relatives and neighbours...."

I have not been able to find anything which conclusively establishes that Rev. Price was of a mainline Christian faith, although the name may suggest such. But other records I obtained while digging around in Ohio in the 1970's show that my particular branch of the family were no longer Mennonites. These records show that the family's use of German had, perhaps not surprisingly, completely disappeared; and that by 1850 they were members of the M. E. (Methodist-Episcopalian) Church in and around Lancaster, Ohio.

Unfortunately none of the quite voluminous records of my Ohio relatives, nor the other research I have been able to do, sheds any real light on why this religious change took place. Whether there was some particular doctrinal schism (which my reading of American Mennonite his-

tory shows was a not uncommon event - the dissidents often starting a new congregation a few miles down the road) or whether the falling away was simply the result of the 'flattening' cultural influences of the American frontier, I am left to ponder. Regardless, the result was that the Haldermans who homesteaded at Frontier were Methodist (later United Church) adherents. As I grew up in the 50's and 60's at Shaunavon, there was (almost literally) not a Mennonite to be found in the deep southwest!

The knowledge that we Saskatchewan Haldermans had Mennonite roots was non-existent - my dad, born in 1904, always said that we were of Swiss ancestry. It was only after my digging around in Ohio that the Mennonite connection came to light.

My subsequent career as a lawyer at Humboldt (with a branch office at Lanigan and numerous clients around Drake), and my interest in local history, has made me much more knowledgeable about Saskatchewan's Mennonite traditions and the many families whose histories appear in the SMH. As with many of the 'what ifs' in our lives, it is interesting to consider what if my Pennsylvania relatives had maintained their faith, moved with their United Empire brethren to Ontario after the American Revolution, and ended up, as have many families whose stories are recorded in the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian at Rosthern, say, or Guernsey. I might still be a Mennonite - not a Unitarian!! Or then again....

I am interested in knowing more about what caused Pennsylvania Mennonites to switch from a faith which was initially so strong that it caused them to come to America to avoid persecution, but which they lost within a generation or two. Any references in this regard would be much appreciated, at bdhalderman@sasktel.net. So would any leads on the background and genealogy of the Haldeman sect of Mennonites, which has some Canadian connections.

(Barrett Halderman is a retired Judge of the Provincial Court of Saskatchewan, living at 1106 Kenderdine Road, Saskatoon S7N 4T2.)

Heinrich Wiens Well Digging Episode

By A. G. Janzen

It was in Sept. of 1942. I was cutting wheat with a 7 foot Frost & Wood binder, drawn by 4 horses. It was almost time to quit for the day, when my Father drove up with his 1926 Pontiac car. He came to see how I was coming along with the harvest work.

The horses were only too glad to stop, for the weather was warm. This field of wheat was on the north west corner of the west quarter of Section 3, Township 40, Range 3, West of the 3rd. Meridian.

While I was sitting up on the binder seat, I asked my Father, "What are these two round depressions in the soil here where I had just cut off the standing grain and now the setting sun was shading in the stubble so that they were clearly visible." He said, "Don't you know that story?" "No", I said, "I have never heard anything about them, but I see them every year when I work here."

"Well," he said, "When your Grandfather Isaac M. Guenter, who was my Father-in-law, moved on to this land in 1905, he wanted to have a Mennonite village situated on his land. He had always lived in a village, first in Russia, and then in Manitoba, where he arrived with his family in 1875. He was at heart a school teacher, so a village would soon need a school... Well, Grandfather Guenter had a cousin by the name of Heinrich Wiens. He lived across the river near a place called Ol-gafeld, north of Aberdeen, and had a desire to move west of the river so as to be nearer to the Old Colony Church Center, which was at Neuanlage. So he bought from Grandfather the northern strip of the section of land and proceeded to build a farmstead here so he could bring his wife and family to live here. This was to be done when the river was frozen over, and the ice would be strong enough to move the house over as well. But much work was wait-

ing to be done first.

He hired a group of carpenters to start building a barn for his livestock. Also a group of men were hired to dig, by hand, a basement or cellar for the house as well as a well for water. Both groups were hard at work digging the dirt by hand and throwing it out of the holes they were digging. All they had was a spade and a pick to loosen the dirt so it could be shovelled out. These piles of dirt got so high in time that something had to be done to make more room around the digging operations. The barn frame was now standing with the roof rafters on top as well. And then something happened that changed the whole plan.

That night a severe wind storm blew over the area. In the morning the men came to the job site and saw the barn had been blown down flat. What a mess it was. But Mr. Wiens instructed his men to pull the nails out of the lumber, salvage what was usable and start over. And to the well diggers he said, "Take my team of horses and hitch them to the two horse drag scoop and pull that pile of dirt out of the way first, so you will have room to work. The soil was sandy and after only a few scoops were pulled away one of the horses stepped a little too close to the well hole. The earth shifted and both horses fell in, rear end first, with the drag scoop falling on top of them. The men were able to unhook the scoop and pull it out, but the horses were harnessed together; it was too dangerous to let a man in there as the horses were pawing and screaming for terror.

Finally Mr. Wiens said, "Guenter, don't you have a rifle?" "Yes," he answered, "I have a 22 rifle." "Well, get it quickly." So the rifle was brought out and both horses were shot. Some men then wanted to climb into the well and get the harnesses. But Mr. Wiens said, "Nothing doing, leave everything. Just bury them and be done."

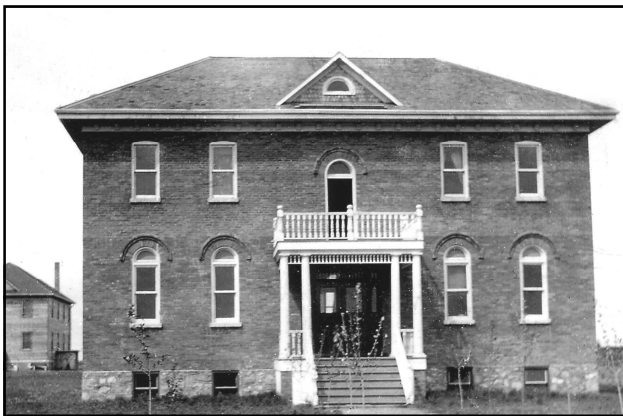
So another team was brought over and hitched to the drag scoop, and all the dirt was dragged back into the well hole. The basement as well was filled in, and the depressions were visible even after 35 years.

The lumber was loaded on wagons, and Mr. Wiens

said, "Guenter, you take this land back. I don't think I am supposed to live here." He was able to buy a place in the Village of Rheinland, where he lived all his life. His children said he had never mentioned this whole tragedy to them. They were only told of it after their Father had died. The house was moved across the river ice that winter and it came to stand one mile south of Neuanlage Village, where Mr. Wilhelm Peters, the brother-in-law to Mr. Wiens, housed his family in it for many years.

So ended my Grandfather's dream of a Mennonite village. But he was hired as a school teacher in the villages of Hochfeld and later on for many years in the Village of Neuanlage.

The Birth of the Mennonite Heritage Museum **By Bill Kruger**



Rosthern Junior College with old residence in background.

When I saw Art Pauls mounted on the grey Ford tractor pulling a trailer load of broken pillars and railings from the red brick school balcony to the town dump in the fall of 1962, I was alarmed. The "Old Red School House" was built in 1909 to house the German English Academy, founded in 1905, to serve the Mennonite community as a teacher training institution and secondary school. The original cost was \$6,000.00 with the last payment being

made to the North Scotland Mortgage Co. Ltd. in 1937. Reflective musings of what might happen to this "sacred building" once the new buildings were completed became a serious issue for me. A number of staff members, including John A. Dueck and John R. Dyck, had been talking about establishing a centre for archival materials and historical artifacts. The fate of the old school building was on the line. We drew up a proposal to be presented to the school administration and Board of Directors that the soon-to-be-redundant building would become a museum. This happened in the autumn of 1962, the last year that this stately building would serve as a school. By winter 1963 the Board of Directors had given the green light and plans moved ahead. Since early childhood I had collected antiques, family heirlooms, and old things. My brother was taking over the family farm and these collections needed a new home. These articles, along with many things on campus and from the old Rosthern Bible School (which was to be demolished), were the first museum materials.

I was delighted to become the first curator of the museum which we called the Mennonite Historical and Cultural Museum. Interest and support for the museum mushroomed. When the chorale visited churches on tour, I wore two hats; the main hat of course as choir conductor, and the second that of museum curator. After night lunch, host families allowed me to raid attics and cellars. Many interesting articles were donated. Even choir members got into the spirit and found important keepsakes.

A very significant person to join the team was our auctioneer friend, Ed Roth. He invited me to go with him to draw up auction lists in preparation for a sale. Due to his magnanimous personality people would often donate really valuable articles. Those articles that went on sale that were of value to the museum usually went beyond our limited personal resources. By 1966, antiques like a dragon-headed charcoal iron, which in spring of 1963 sold for 35 cents, went for bids of over

(Cont. on page 14)

(Cont. from page 13)

\$100.00. Everybody seemed high on antiques and collectors came in droves. However, donations of articles to the museum continued. By the time classes were over in June of 1963, we had enough materials to put up interesting displays. The Red schoolhouse blossomed into a museum.

It was a strange feeling for me to help arrange displays in the main floor southeast classroom where but a few weeks before I had taught Grade X English Literature, or to help renovate the second floor northeast room where the lively sounds of the Grade IX and Grade X choir still rang in my ears. The southeast classroom was also rich in memories for me as I remembered my Grade XII classmates of 1950.

The Board of Directors appointed a museum committee in the spring of 1963. It consisted of Ed Roth, the noted historian and collector, J.E. Friesen of Hague, and me. With the advice and council of others we decided to organize the museum around four categories:

1) archival materials and records, 2) antiques, 3) heirlooms, and 4) collectors' items. Because of the educational environment and history of the school, our emphasis was on the didactic value of the museum for the students on the campus and the larger Mennonite community. We also made efforts to include the immediate Rosthern constituency because it is a significant part of the school's history. While there are industrial, domestic, and agricultural displays, the educational and cultural components of the Mennonite story should be the primary themes of the museum.

Along with the records of RJC history, materials from alumni arrived. One special item was the English Bible that missionary Petter used to translate the Bible into Cheyenne language. Cornelius Driedger ('50), who worked at the Montana Mission Station, donated the marked

up Bible that was given to him by the Peters. The H.T. Klaassen family lent impressive heirlooms to the museum. The Martens family of Fiske donated a 17th century clock with the hour hand and a 1928 first portable record player from Eatons. I rescued some 30 kerosene lamps from the cellar of the old Bible School building. Herb Henschel donated a carbide automobile lamp from the first car bought in Rosthern. Over the years many wonderful donations have been made to the museum. A very special display is in the second floor southeast room. This room features the desk, chair and other articles of David Toews, the first principal of RJC. Also featured is a bust statue of Bishop Toews, created by the late Bill Epp ('48), noted artist, graduate of RJC, and longtime professor at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

I was curator of the Museum until June, 1966. While directing the school choirs, teaching and counseling, I also got great satisfaction from helping to establish the museum. During the summer of 1964, a teenage work camp under the youth program of the General Conference Mennonite Church, North America, took place on the RJC campus. Fifteen girls, mostly from the USA, assisted in developing the museum. One team would go out into the community to interview persons who had donated articles; another would type up the stories about the articles; and another group would clean/restore articles and arrange displays. I also remember several students like Rudy Krahn and Wayne Dueck who showed interest in the museum and helped in various ways to develop it.

The museum proved to be a significant asset to the History and Mennonite History classes I taught. Various articles served well as costumes and props for the drama department. Over the years curators like Gerhard G. Epps, the H.T. Klaassens, Ed Roth, Helen Janzen, Doris Thiessen and Jake Klaassen along with the members of the Museum Board of Directors have made important contributions in building the displays and hosting the visitors to the museum on a regular basis. Kathy Boldt, who has been a significant person on the Board for many years, noted that the museum was apparently closed for some time during the 1970s, but a new interest



1990 Rosthern Mennonite Heritage Museum Board. Picture taken following the "Dirty Thirties" banquet and program. L-R. Harold Regier, Ed Roth, Sylvia Regier, Art Dueck, Ed Peters, Art Froese, Esther Peters, Fred Wieler, Doris Thiessen, Hank Riekman, Kathy Boldt and Bernice Regier.

led to renovations and establishment of a revised constitution. The name of the museum was registered as The Mennonite Heritage Museum. The statement of purpose reads; "Mennonite Heritage Museum at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, organized under Corporation Act of Saskatchewan, has been organized to collect, restore, and exhibit objects that illustrate the Mennonite Heritage of Saskatchewan, but will not exclude exhibits from other faiths and cultures. The other objective is to restore and maintain the old RJC building that houses the present museum artifacts.

The museum has been immortalized by the many names carved into the bricks by the RJC graduates, former students and friends of the school. The museum is a living legend that is kept alive by its unique educational environment and in turn keeps alive the story of a rich heritage.

When Helen and I moved back to Saskatchewan in 1991 I was pleased to be invited to join the museum Board of Directors of which I am

still a member. The present Board (2006) includes Lorne Epp, chair; Sylvia Regier, secretary; Ed Schmidt, treasurer; Ben Unger, Abe Funk, Don Regier, Oscar Epp, and Bill Kruger. Kathy Boldt is the representative of the Mennonite Historical Society on the board.

As a Board, we are planning for some major renovations and improvements. We are also reviewing our purpose and nature of displays and exhibits. We benefit from our relationship to the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and are in discussion with our museums, particularly with the Saskatchewan Valley Museum in Hague. The Hague Museum has a strong agricultural component with domestic buildings and displays which provide a more comprehensive story of rural life.

Our Museum is limited by space and we, as a Board, seek to capitalize on these factors that are unique to our setting and faith history, namely the educational environment and religious heritage. The cultural components of art, music, drama and athletics are an integral part of our story.



Jacob E. & Agatha (Klassen) Friesen

Jacob E. Friesen

By Carole Reddekopp

Merchant, Artist, Historian, Antique collector, Sunday school superintendent and teacher, Husband, father, grand and great grandfather. How does one describe a man who has been blessed with a life exceeding 100 years; a man who has contributed much to his community?

At the age of five, J.E. moved to Hague with his parents, Johan A. and Eva Friesen, sister Eva, and brothers John C. and Abram C. They came from Manitoba where his father had previously been an Old Colony school teacher in Neuenburg and owned the village store in Rosenort. As a young lad J.E. spent many happy hours with his dad chatting with customers as they shopped for bargains and caught up on daily village events. J.E. often comments that he “grew up in the store.” The family operated a small mixed farm but merchandising was their main source of income. After the move to Hague life became more serious for him and school life began in earnest. Since English schools were contrary to Old Colony rules, the ministers occasionally visited Johan in the store where he would shepherd

them into a private area at the back for a short meeting. This meeting consisted of a donation to the church and no more was said about the Friesen children in an English school.

Many relatives had been left behind in Manitoba. Consequently, numerous return visits were made, some of them lasting long enough to warrant the children attending an Old Colony school for several months. Students sat side by side in fours at a long desk with an attached bench. J.E.’s outgoing nature extended into the classroom where he couldn’t resist whispering to the fellow beside him. Suddenly the teacher’s strap landed upon his desktop and he was startled into silence. During one visit at his grandmother’s house the lads were roughhousing and calamity struck. J.E. was running with his yardstick “horse.” He took a tumble which resulted in a broken leg and split kneecap. The leg was set by his uncle. He was out of commission for several months, and because of this accident the family had to remain in Manitoba for five weeks until he could be transported by train in a “bed box” back to Hague.

In 1916 the family traveled to California where other relatives resided and were waiting to greet them upon their arrival. They lived for several weeks on Friesen Street in Reedley, California and then purchased a farm a half mile from town. J.E. has happy memories of his two and a half years in California where he and his siblings had numerous cousins to play with. They picked up dates from under the palm trees, receiving 20 cents for each crate they filled. They also cut grapes from the vines to earn a little pocket change. During the fall months through early summer they attended a German school one year, and English school the next year. They recited the pledge of allegiance each morning. The curriculum included learning to knit, and each student was required to make a nine inch square washcloth for the army.

J.E. tasted peanut butter for the first time in California. He and his dad visited a small country store where the proprietor was providing samples of the brown, gooey stuff on a slice of bread. One taste and J.E. was hooked. He has eaten it almost every day of his life from that day onward.

J.E. did not enjoy a dental procedure he endured after the family returned to Hague. He did, however, take pleasure in relating how the offending teeth had been extracted by Dr. John M. Uhrich. Dr. Uhrich later became the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan.

Upon their return to Saskatchewan the family lived for several months in Hague, and then purchased a small farm south of Hague where J.E. lived until he moved to Saskatoon to enroll in a business course of bookkeeping. After the classes were completed he went to work for his brother, John C. Friesen, in Rosthern where he met a lovely young telephone operator, Agatha Klassen, who would become his wife.

J.E. and Agatha were married in Rosthern by Rev. I.P. Friesen on September 11, 1927. To this union were born three daughters: Elma, Sylvia, and Carole. They built their home in Hague where J.E. would live for the next 76 years.

By this time Johan had retired, leaving the business to his sons J.E. and Abe, and son-in-law, John Wieler. J.E.'s outgoing personality earned him many friends during the 47 years in Friesen's Dry Goods Store. People came from miles around to purchase everything from groceries, shoes and "Wollsocken", outerwear and underwear, liniments and pain killers, fabric and thread, embroidery cotton of every color, ornaments, toys, school supplies, and the list goes on. Besides serving customers, he did the bookkeeping, and was kept busy placing orders with many wholesalers which included J.J. Buckwold in Saskatoon. He and Senator Sid Buckwold became close friends and held one another in high regard.

From his mother J.E. inherited an artistic talent and much time was spent at his art easel, pallet and brush in hand. As paint was applied to canvas, scenes from the past transferred from his imagination onto the canvas. Trains emerged, plowing through snow laden tracks or at rest in front of the Hague station. His old



J. E. Friesen's 100th birthday with daughters Sylvia Schmidt, Carole Reddekopp and Elma McLachlan.

farm homestead, or other historical scenes of interest to him appeared in vivid hue and clarity. Each work took approximately three days to complete and then he would start another. Today many of his creations adorn the walls of avid purchasers and also can be found in the home of his children and grandchildren. Several were donated to the Hague museum.

Colored chalk was another art medium. He was frequently called upon for a "chalk talk" during Sunday evening "Jugendverein." Chalkboard rested on his easel facing the congregation and within fifteen or twenty minutes the theme of a hymn had emerged into a picture. This was done to the accompaniment of a corresponding hymn played by Evelyn Klassen who was the church pianist for many years. Each week for Sunday School, he had a new picture portraying a Bible story: Daniel in the lions' den, ravens providing food for Elijah, and hundreds more. J.E. also drew onto sizeable pieces of fabric, a series of large murals depicting scenes from the Christmas story.

He was intrigued with his forefathers, and delved into his personal ancestry. Pen in hand he drew an enormous family tree. Its massive root, trunk, branches and stems, one for each member of his lineage for eight generations, covers an entire canvas rollup window blind.

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

J.E. was enthralled with local history, and it was an immense thrill for him when during a trip to Victoria, B.C., he met Mr. Hague after whom the town is named. J.E. lived in Hague almost from its earliest beginnings and became acquainted with some of the first settlers. The information pertaining to location of various businesses and the owners was all painstakingly recorded in large albums. Each event is accompanied with a sketch and an anecdote about many of the persons being described. He produced an entire bookcase full of albums portraying the history of Hague. Included are the school and staffs throughout the years, the railway station and its agents, the flour mill from its beginning to its fiery demise, and each of the grain elevators and their operators. These annals have been donated to the Hague museum. To commemorate deceased residents of Hague and area, he has compiled two large albums which record names, pictures, birth and death dates. He drew detailed maps of the old and new cemeteries.

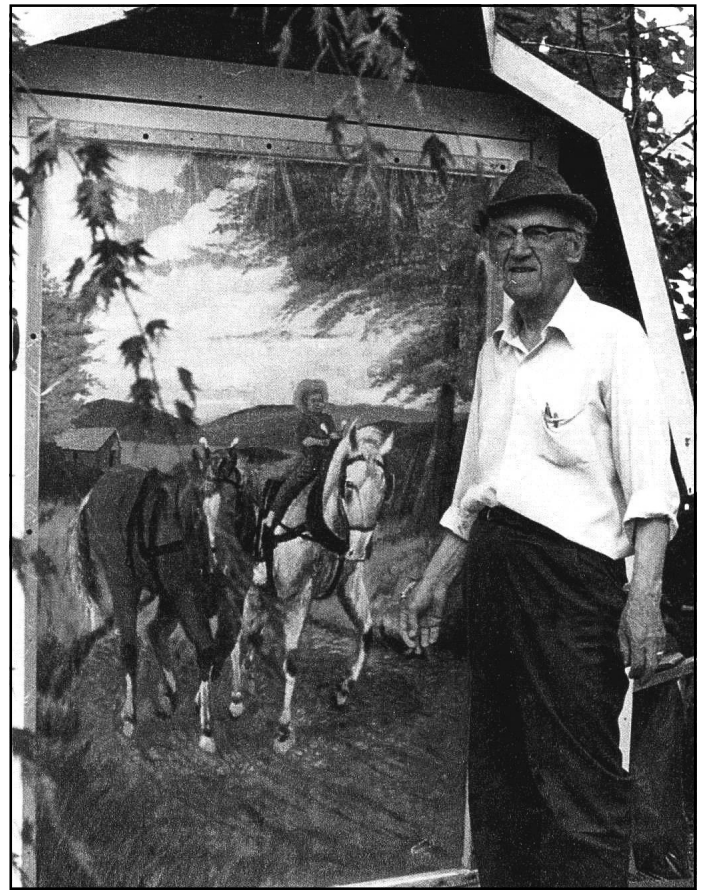
J.E.'s interest in local history was shared by the Honorable John G. Diefenbaker who was a friend and former resident of Hague. Occasionally the prime minister would stop in for a brief visit on his way from Ottawa to Prince Albert, and the two would swap stories, historical and political.

A keen appreciation of antiques led to a small display of a few items on a high shelf in the store. As J.E.'s interest grew so did the collection, manifesting in a treasure trove of antiquities which occupied a large room in the basement of his home. Antique dealers and other interested folk frequently came by to scrutinize these treasures. Classroom teachers brought their students to examine these objects of long ago and to learn the history and use of them. Eventually J.E. lost interest and divested items to his children and grandchildren and to the Hague museum. Besides antiques, J.E. collected stamps, old coins, and silver dollars.

Another interest was music. J.E. played a variety of instruments but most enjoyed the violin and cello. He relished getting together with other musicians for an evening of harmony.

Aside from all this, he had time to teach typing to anyone who was interested. Many typists benefited from his instruction.

In 2002, five years after his beloved Agatha went to be with the Lord, J.E. moved from his home in Hague into the Mennonite Nursing Home near Rosethorn. Until that time he was Hague's longest resident. He spoke positively and with great appreciation of his 91 years in the town of Hague.



Jacob E. Friesen, painting of horses on door of shed in back yard in Hague 1979.

(Continued from page 18)

The most significant thing in J.E.'s life has been his spiritual quest. His love for the Lord Jesus Christ has enriched and sustained him throughout his lifetime. He taught Sunday school for 35 years as well as Bible study sessions. While still in his home, each new day began with scripture reading and prayer at the kitchen table. His well-worn Bibles are a testimony to his faithful discipleship. Most frequently he used a German edition, translating into Low German as he went. Now at the age of 100 he still testifies of his love for his Saviour. Even to this day he recites Bible verses in ABC order, saying one or more verses for each letter of the alphabet. His heartfelt prayers are spoken aloud and speak volumes from a heart of total devotion and dedication to the One who died for him and is waiting to receive him into glory.

DNA Testing ... Learn About It

Glenn H. Penner, Guelph, Ontario has been involved with DNA testing for some time to help find connections between family relationships. He has the following websites that may be of interest to you. DHE

<http://blairgenealogy.com/dna/na101.html>

<http://www.familytreedna.com/dna101.html>

<http://smgf.org/> (Go to "learn more")

Four Stages of Life

"First we are children of our parents,
then we are parents of our children,
then we are parents of our parents,
and finally,
we are children of our children."

WE KEEP FORGETTING

Lord, we keep forgetting all those who lived before us,

We keep forgetting those who lived and worked in our communities,

We keep forgetting those who prayed and sang hymns in our churches before we were born.

We commit the sin, Lord, of assuming that everything begins with us.

We drink from wells we did not find.

We eat food from farmlands we did not develop.

We enjoy freedoms which we have not earned.

We worship in churches we did not establish.

This day, make us grateful for our heritage.

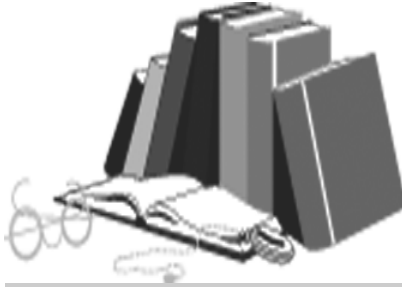
From the book: Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, p.704

For Further Reading on the

Subject of Mennonites and Muslims

(See article, page 7), check out the following:

- 1) On Mennonite mission work among Muslims, see Gordon D. Nickel, *Peaceable Witness Among Muslims* (Herald Press, 1999); and James R. Krabill, David W. Shenk and Linford Stutzman, eds. *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims: A Calling for Presence in the 'Way of Christ* (Herald Press, 2005).
- 2) On Mennonites' relationship with the Nogai Tribes of Molotschna, see John R. Staples, *Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe; Settling the Molotschna Basin 1783-1861* (University of Toronto Press, 2003).



Mostly About Books

By Victor G. Wiebe
Book Editor

Wiebe, Rudy. *Of this earth : a Mennonite boyhood in the boreal forest*. Toronto, Ontario. Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2006. (xiv), 391 pp. Hardcover, \$34.95 ISBN: 0-676-97752-9

Of this earth : a Mennonite boyhood in the boreal forest, is Rudy Wiebe's story of his childhood in the Mennonite Brethren community of Speedwell, Saskatchewan, 80 km. north of North Battleford, and covers the period from the mid 1930's to late 1940's. It is an illustrated and storied autobiographical account of some 12 years of Wiebe's early life. Wiebe recounts his boyhood with phrases that dance, with remarkable observations on his childhood and surrounding, and with great pleasure in the retelling. Wiebe is a master story teller. In the world of Canadian literature this book will receive the high praise it deserves. For it is not only masterfully written by Wiebe who is a famous Canadian literary person but it is a fascinating examination of childhood in pioneering times.

Born in 1934 at a farm in the Speedwell community to Abram Wiebe and Katerina nee Knelson, Rudy was the youngest of seven children. Escaping from Communist Russia in 1929, the Wiebe family first came to the dried out plains of Kelstern in southern Saskatchewan. However, with the south a dustbowl, the Saskatchewan government encouraged the desperate to homestead in the aspen north fringe of the prairies which seemed to have some moisture. Thus in 1933 the Wiebes homesteaded in Speedwell, a "cul-de-sac" community of about 300 people, mostly Mennonites.

Though Speedwell provided an opportunity for the penniless to own land, the land proved poor and stony and the trees resisted every onerous effort to cultivate the land.

Wiebe's retold memories are of work, family, school, church and community. As a child he knew his family was hopelessly poor, but it also had the necessities of life and he was part of a loving, and embracing family. Indeed the family had a vibrant past in Russia, a hardworking, stable, faith-filled, and caring present and wide open complex future. Wiebe's story is somewhat fragmentary in telling about some of the daily chores, joys and observations that beat out the rhythms of his young life – walking to school, fetching firewood, bathing, eating supper, attending church, and very importantly – visiting. The tragedy in *Of this earth* is not of Wiebe receiving abuse or disillusionment but the life long illness and early death in 1945 of his sister Helen.

In addition to his own memories which are the heart of this book the extensive documentation used by Wiebe are first of all the family photographs, his sister's diary and then interviews that incorporate memories from family and friends. Often Wiebe reflects on topics he seems to know but "could not have known." For all of us childhood is the least documented part of our lives but often the most determinative in shaping us. Wiebe reflects often in *Of this earth* on the meaning of his childhood experiences. Wiebe is telling us readers his story, not his history, not his theology, but superbly spinning a tale of his childhood. The story is not linear, but in coils - round and round and somewhat upward. Wiebe is reaching back to recapture a vision and a

feeling of that he has passed through. The interviews with members of his extended family are told to fill gaps in his own recollections, to sort out timelines and to refocus memory fragments. To assist the story he has imbedded in the text 46 photographs, mostly early family pictures but also some contemporary ones, of the past and current state of the Wiebe Speedwell land and family.

The pioneering and homesteading experienced by Wiebe will be read by some older persons as if it was also their story but to most, particularly middle aged and younger, Wiebe's story of pioneering is absolutely foreign. Wiebe frequently incorporates in the text Low German, words, phrases, even sentences and with some High German also added. Always the German is accompanied with an English translation nicely fitted together in the text. If you have read other books by Wiebe you will know his writing style can be quite complex. In places he incorporated some very long sentences – almost 2 thirds of a page long. Also, some will find his writings not modest enough in describing bodily functions.

The photographs used by Wiebe form a wonderful personal collection and as used in the book provide a great device for memory recall. Others who aspire to write family or local history would greatly benefit by following this example. I only wish the photographs were printed on better quality paper. From the dust jacket with its faintly colorized photo, readers are teased by showing what the photos might have been if the publisher used different paper and larger images instead of near thumbnails which readers can not see clearly many of the details Wiebe describes.

A very interesting part of Wiebe's story is his telling of how he developed an awareness of words. In the one room school it is English words that enchanted him. Power was in words, words danced in his head and "splashed" in his mouth. That Wiebe made his

living from words and imprinted into Canadian literature his own style on using words proves how special was this childhood enthrallment with words.

Wiebe's story is told from the view point of a storyteller who talks to the reader what he remembers. There are many details absent, and quite a few details lack the historian's interpretation. For example he tells of his family's great poverty which is suffered by all in the community, as they coped with subsistence living, yet the children took music lessons, and a parlor organ was purchased as part of the family furniture. Why this significant investment in music? We are not told. Wiebe is a writer not a musician so we are told almost nothing about the value or importance of music in the Wiebe family or community apart from Wiebe describing the wonderful and constant singing of his parents. As Wiebe described his religious experiences a historian would have commented on how the Speedwell congregation nurtured its members rather than evangelized them. But in this book Wiebe just described in loving terms but with little evaluation his developing faith.

Wiebe writes at considerable length of people isolated by landscape, language, belief and custom. Yet success has come to so many of these pioneers children. Maybe it is when children lack popular distractions families focus on the core essentials as grounding for adult life. I see him, his family, and the Speedwell community as empowered by many of these isolating agents. Wiebe seems conflicted between the contrasts of landscape and urbanization; language and noise; belief and skepticism; custom and novelty. At Speedwell he was imbued with the former and in university and contemporary life presumably successfully encountered the latter. Wiebe sees significant value in these isolating forces but also their limiting effects. Near the end of the book Wiebe tells us that there are people and activities greatly missed on leaving the Speedwell community but one does not get the feeling that Wiebe wanted to repeat his pioneer life at Speedwell.



Jacob & Helena (Riediger) Harder

JACOB WILHELM HARDER
April 6, 1905—April 6, 2005

By Esther Patkau

"I never had a title or letters such as a Ph.D. behind my name, but I thank God for giving me enough strength and happiness to produce, in sixty years of farming, wheat for countless loaves of bread, thousands of gallons of milk and cream, and many tons of beef to feed the nations. I am pleased with the work that I have done in my life. God be praised, adored and glorified forever."

That is how Jacob Harder reflected on his one hundred years of experiences shortly before his departure from life. He lived through some of the worst horrors of the 20th century; the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the Dirty Thirties of Saskatchewan. He had so many brushes with death that life itself was a

miracle, a gift from God.

Born in the small farming village of Eichenfeld, South Russia (now Ukraine), the youngest son of Wilhelm and Katharina (nee Krahn) Harder, he received his elementary education in the local school, then continued on to high school in a neighbouring town of Nikolaipol. In his memoirs he wrote:

"In 1917 the Czar of Russia was overthrown, and revolution swept through the land. In 1919 the prison doors were opened and Russia's worst criminals were released, including Machno, who organized bands which terrorized the countryside in the most terrible way. They went from one village to another, robbing, plundering, killing. Women and girls were raped. One day, bandits came to our yard and demanded money. I was pushed into a corner with a revolver in my mouth. I would be killed if I did not inform where my father had his money. I knew nothing, and they spared me."

The village of Eichenfeld was attacked October 26th, 1919, and all the men in the village, and some women, including the five mission workers who were holding evangelistic meetings, were murdered in one night - a total of 83. Jacob's father and two brothers were among the dead. Jacob was away at school - that saved his life. The following morning 45 widows, including Jacob's mother and three sisters and about 200 orphaned children fled the village, never to return. They had been robbed of all their possessions, except for the clothes they were wearing, and were now homeless.

That tragedy was followed by the famine of 1921 and the typhus epidemic of 1922. Jacob said, "When you are starving, you will eat anything. I have barbecued gophers. Just the thought of eating gophers makes me shiver. Before I was 17 years old, I had already survived war, revolution, famine and pestilence."

In 1923 the Russian government gave permission for refugees to leave Russia, and the Canadian government allowed entrance into Canada. Through the sponsorship of the Mennonite Board of Immigration and Colonization in Canada, and the monumental

faith of David Toews, and credit from the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) for travel to Canada, Jacob, together with his mother, two sisters and three-year-old nephew arrived in August 1923. Jacob recalled, "We sold a cow for three million rubles, enough for our fare to the border. We left...June 28, 1923." Fifty-six days later they arrived in Herbert, Saskatchewan, with a total of \$6 in cash among the four adults and a transportation debt of \$700 to the CPR. "That first afternoon on the day of our arrival, I had to go to stook grain. The crop was ripe and heavy. I was very tired. Since then I have worked for 80 years. I have never been unemployed." One of his first priorities was to pay off the transportation debt.

Within two years, Jacob arranged to buy a farm in the Hanley district (which he later had to give back because of the depression), and joined the Hanley Mennonite Church (where he remained an active member throughout his life). In 1928 he married Helena Riediger, and together they farmed.

"We had very hard times. We had to fight drought, inflation and very low prices for farm products. Wheat was 25 cents a bushel, oats 10 cents a bushel. Cattle went down to 1 cent a pound. Eggs were 4 cents a dozen and pigs were 50 cents apiece. The crops were very poor for 9 years. During the 1930's the land was drifting so badly that one could not see ten feet ahead of you. Sometimes it drifted for three days. The farmers lost courage and gave the land back to the owner and started to rent land." Many farmers packed up and moved away. Jacob, too, moved to Manitoba in 1937, but a year later returned to Hanley and the Mennonite Church fellowship.

In the 1940's the rains came again and farming began to prosper. By 1974, at age 69, he paid off the mortgage and was finally free of debt! In 1979, he, with his wife, Helena, retired to Saskatoon, but for the next five years he continued to help his son with farming operations. After 70 years of happy and blessed marriage,

Helena passed away in 1998.

Jacob was a member of the Hanley Mennonite Church for 80 years. He was in the first baptism class (1926), and his marriage to Helena in 1928 was the first wedding in the congregation. (The wedding was celebrated in a barn loft, because there was no church then). He helped in erecting the first church building in 1929, and was chair of the building committee when the new church was constructed in 1956. For many years he served on the Church Council, supported MCC projects and mission programs. He loved the fellowship of that congregation.

Jacob reflected: "In the time span of 100 years I have experienced much, and many changes have taken place. First of all, big strides have been made in the farming industry. When I began farming in 1926, I seeded with a three-foot wide drill plow pulled by horses. I could seed 6 acres a day. Now farmers use a 40 to 52-foot air seeder that can seed 30 acres an hour. We threshed with a 6-foot or even an 8-foot combine. At present, a 36-foot combine is used to do the harvesting. The size of a farm has increased from 160 acres to 640 acres and more.

"In 1932 wheat was 20 cents a bushel and we had no crop. In 2000, wheat was \$2.70 a bushel and we had a good crop. In the 1930's cattle sold for one cent a pound; in 2000 they sold for \$1.40 and more a pound. But the farmer still struggles to make ends meet.

"Changes have also taken place in the Mennonite Church. For many years the leadership of the church consisted of three persons: a minister, a deacon and a secretary. Today we have two or three deacons, a secretary and also a treasurer. For many years the congregation had a bishop and a lay minister. Today we have a paid pastor. Men and women do not sit in separate pews anymore, but sit together as couples or as families. For the prayer we stay seated and stand for singing. In the past it was the opposite: sit for singing and stand for prayer.

(Cont. on page 24)

(Cont. from page 23)

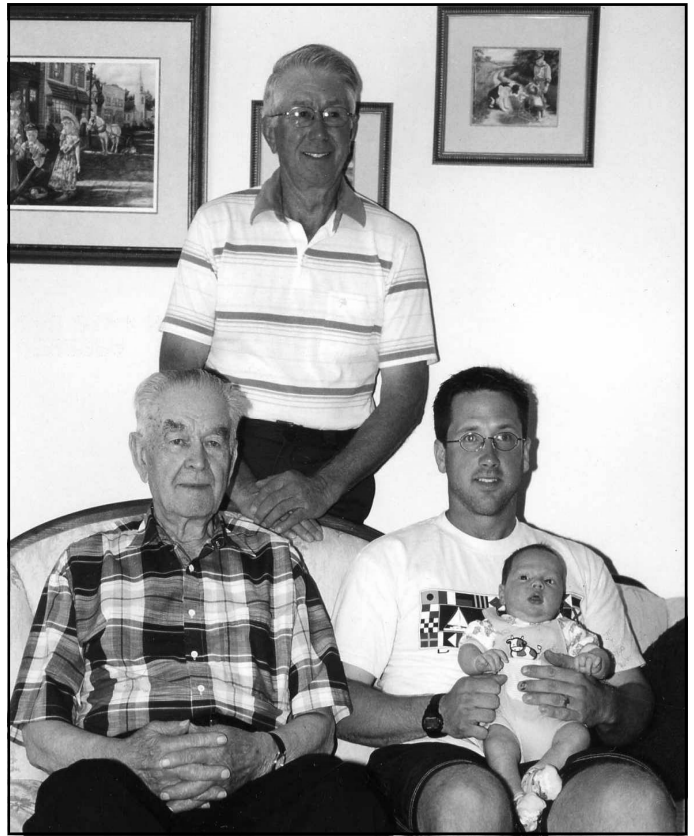
“Formerly, it was very important to wear dress clothes to church. Today many folks wear casual clothing. Years ago, women had long hair. Today many have short hairstyles, much like men. Deuteronomy 22:5 admonishes: ‘A woman must not wear men’s clothing.’ Today many women wear clothing similar to men’s.

“We have talented women who serve as deaconesses, chairpersons, choir directors and ushers. This was not customary in the past. Some pastors feel humour is important in their sermons to get the congregation to laugh. Applause is also expected, which was not done before. Humour and laughter can be healthy and create a light-hearted atmosphere. It does not, however, satisfy someone who is searching for the truth or is sad and depressed. Both laughter and tears have their place.

“In the past, the pulpit was designated as a holy place. Not everyone stood behind the pulpit to tell stories. It is sad, but true, that our traditional German language has been replaced by English.

“Regardless of all the changes, whether good or bad, traditions change despite conflict. I want to challenge us not to forget the virtues or attributes that Paul encourages in 1 Corinthians 13:13 - faith, hope and love. With these biblical virtues we can live every year with courage and confidence.”

Jacob Harder was found in his room on the morning of his 100th birthday, passed from earthly life into the presence of his Saviour and Lord. He left an example of honest hard work, faithful commitment to faith in the Lord and to congregation, and love for a family of six children, their spouses, 24 grandchildren and 33 great-grandchildren.

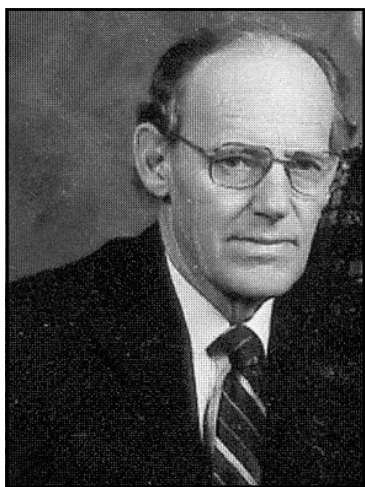
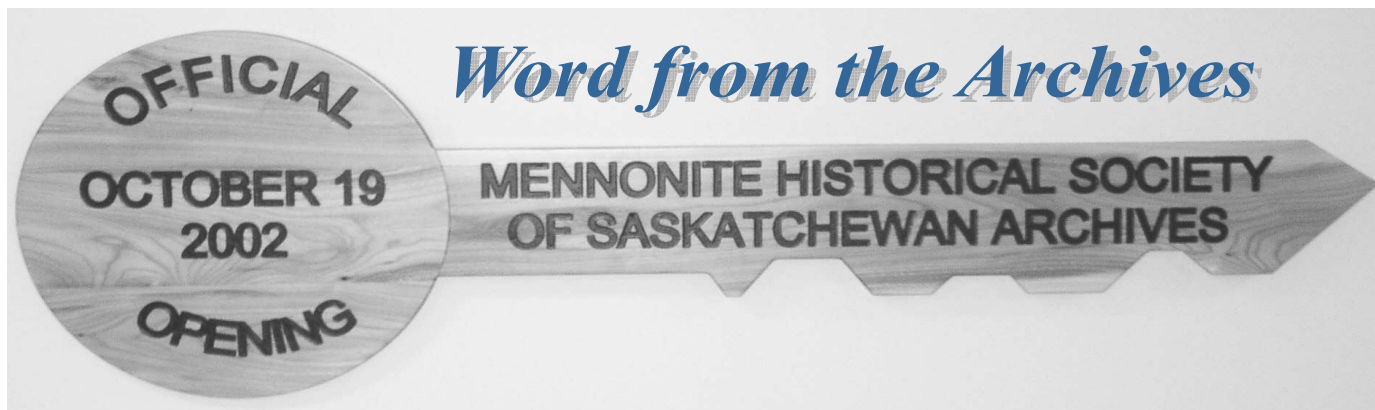


Jacob Harder, son Henry Harder, grandson Chris Harder, and great-grandson Dane Harder.

Errors and Omissions

The story “Saturday Night Baths” by Victor C. Friesen, which appeared in the last issue (Volume XII No. 1. April, 2006) of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian, should have been accompanied by the following information: Reprinted with permission from “Forever Home”, Copyright (2004). Victor C. Friesen. Published by Fifth House Ltd., Calgary, Canada. No photocopying without permission.

We regret that in the Horse Lake Mennonite Church article which appeared in the last issue of the Historian (page 25), the name of Esther Dyck (third from left, back row) was omitted in the caption under the baptism picture.



Albert Henry Wiens
August 5, 1931—May, 12 2002

These three gentlemen were all involved in music during their lifetimes. They will be honoured for their contributions to music during the MHSS Heritage Evening on November 10, 2006.

All three were conductors of various choirs. As well, two were teachers of music and voice at different Bible Schools, including Bethany Bible College, Swift Current Bible Institute, Winkler Bible College and Rosthern Junior College.

Also, all three were connected to Rosthern Junior College either as a student and/or teacher.



Jacob Schroeder
October 22, 1911—October 2, 1993



David Paetkau
January 7, 1903—June 6, 1972

Pictures and information obtained from the MHSS Archives located in Saskatoon.



The Family Tree

Genealogy Editor—Rosemary Slater

Preserving your family history for future generations

Ask GRANDMA! She knows!

In September, 1996, the California Mennonite Historical Society issued its first version of the Genealogical Register and Database of Mennonite Ancestry, commonly known as GRANDMA, since, as everyone knows, if you want to know anything about the family, who do you ask but Grandma?

The database started with 135,482 names and now includes well over 800,000 names. And where, you may ask, is all this information coming from? Has Grandma been replaced by technology or is she now online?

A local grandma, Elizabeth Guenther of Osler, Sask. has been a contributor to the GRANDMA database since receiving a copy of GRANDMA, version 4, from her son, Bruce Guenther, for Christmas in 2002. Bruce, who works for the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (Langley campus), which is one of the six partners that make up the Associated Christian Theological Seminary (ACTS) in Langley, B.C., was in Fresno, California sometime around the year 2000, when he decided to see what information the GRANDMA database contained on his mother's Friesen family. To his surprise, only aunt Justina Friesen, youngest of the thirteen children of Herman and Margaretha, nee Banman, Friesen, was to be found. Bruce contacted his mother, asking her to send the rest of the family tree. She sent the information on his Friesen aunts and uncles but explained that there was far too much information available for her to send.

Elizabeth got her first computer in 1989 and used it to do filing for the Osler Mission Church as well as to keep track of her immediate family tree. After receiving GRANDMA 4.0 in 2002, Elizabeth began entering the information she had collected on her Friesen and Banman family as well as the copious information her sister, Annie Klassen, had collected over many years. Information on related families, the Solomon Schmidt family, the family of Isaac W. Fehr, born in 1860, and updates to the Neudorf, Koslowsky and Hildebrandt genealogy "He Leadeth" followed. Information from the personal papers of Jacob F. Enns held by Sally Enns and from the personal papers of Frank B. Guenther, Elizabeth's father-in-law, was also entered by Elizabeth. On a daily basis, Elizabeth reviews the local obituaries and enters death dates for people already in the GRANDMA database. Approximately every six months, she burns a CD which includes her updates and sends it to Fresno through her son, Bruce Guenther, to be added to the GRANDMA database.

Elizabeth has first hand knowledge of much of the history she has been recording, having been born and raised on a farm that was held by the Banman/Friesen family for over 100 years. In 1902, Heinrich Banman, born June 6, 1871, and his wife, Anna Hildebrand, born March 7, 1877, purchased the farm four miles east of Osler, Saskatchewan, land location Section 18, Township 39, Range 3, West of the 3rd. Meridian. In 1928, their youngest daughter, Margaretha, married Herman Friesen and the Friesens took over the farm and the care of their parents until Heinrich's death on June 3, 1933 and Anna's death September 15, 1934. Thirteen chil-

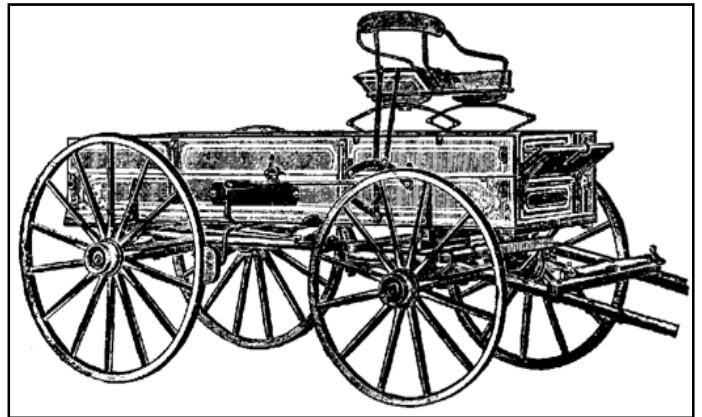
dren were born to the Friesens on this farm, twelve of whom, three boys and nine girls, grew up to adulthood. On September 26, 1969, Herman Friesen was killed in a tractor accident at the age of 61. The next year Margaretha moved to Warman and in 1972, her son, Jake Friesen, took over the farm and continued on the farm until 1996 when his son, Larry Friesen, bought the farm. In 2005, after more than 100 years in the Banman/Friesen family, the farm was sold to a non-family member.

Elizabeth's schooling took place at Saskatchewan School for Grade One and part of Grade Two where she had first Barry Friesen and then Dorothy George as her teachers. In 1948, the East Osler Government Aided School opened to accommodate surplus students from Pembroke, Renfrew, Labasse and Saskatchewan schools and Elizabeth was transferred to East Osler school. For the first two years, her teacher here was Peter Driedger followed by Ben Harder, who taught at East Osler for a total of twelve years. As was the custom at the time, Elizabeth left school after completing Grade 8. Although her formal schooling ended with Grade 8, Elizabeth has continued to educate herself through reading and an active interest in the world around her.

Elizabeth grew up in the Old Colony church, attending the Old Colony church at Kronsthal where her father was the bishop from 1962 until his death in 1969. Here she and her husband, Cornie Guenther, were married in 1958. A move to a farm near Hepburn brought exposure to other Mennonite church influences and in 1979, Cornie became the pastor of the Osler Mission Church, begun in 1975. Since retiring from the pastorate in 2000, the Guenthers have found a church home in West Portal Church in Saskatoon. From farm girl to town resident, from Old Colony country church to evangelical city church, from slates to computers, from horses with a caboose to high powered truck pulling a fifth wheel, Elizabeth has seen it all and has managed to retain the straightforward-

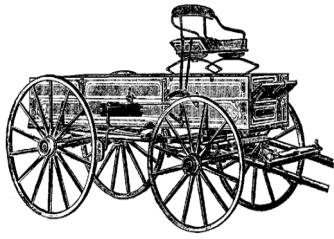
ness, integrity, simple deep rooted faith, hospitality and sense of humour that was a distinguishing mark of her Old Colony, country upbringing. We are deeply grateful to Elizabeth and the many others like her who are quietly documenting, recording and preserving our Mennonite history for future generations to appreciate.

REMEMBER WHEN?



Are these familiar sights on the prairies' skylines slowing disappearing?





From the Past

The best of prophets of the future is the past...Byron



Back Row Left to Right: Wilhelm Abrams, Peter Abrams and Susanna Abrams.
Front Row Left to Right: Isaac Loewen, Gerhard Abrams, Katherina Abrams, Susanna (Rempel/Abrams) Loewen holding baby Susanna Loewen. (1893)

The April 6, 2006, Historian contained an article on "Osler's First Storekeeper". His name was Isaac Loewen. The photo above was meant to accompany the "Osler Storekeeper" article. Isaac Loewen married Susanna, widow of Peter Abrams, on July 29, 1890. Although

six children were born to this union, five died in infancy, leaving only one daughter, Susanna. The family also included five children from Susanna's first marriage to Peter Abrams. Wilhelm Abrams married Marie Regier, daughter of Elder Peter Regier of Tiefengrund. Susanna Loewen married Frederick Day. Susanna and Frederick Day are the parents of Grace Wiens of Saskatoon.



Isaac and Susanna Loewen (1890)