



The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XXV Number 3

Oct 2022

Low German Speaking Mennonites (Kanadier) in Alberta

By Abe Janzen

Introductory Note

In November 2019, I attended a two-day seminar in Taber, Alberta.

About 120 professionals from all over Alberta had found their way to the Heritage Inn for a seminar about Low German-speaking Mennonites hosted by a group of agencies called the Southern Alberta Kanadier Association. SAKA. A number of the organizers were young women from one or another of the Low German groups in Southern Alberta, employed as health workers, social workers, educators, and support workers. It was a remarkable event, little known in the broader community. Still, pro-

(See German on page 10)



Abe Janzen

The Many Roads to Linden

By Brent Wiebe

The shadows lengthen, and the fall sky takes on a spectacular glow as the sun sinks closer to the foothills and the majestic Rocky Mountains beyond. The recently harvested fields lie ready for winter, and the nip of fall is felt in the shadows of the spruce trees. Summer is behind us, and snow is just around the corner, but here, in the Linden Mennonite Cemetery on this late September evening, time stands still.

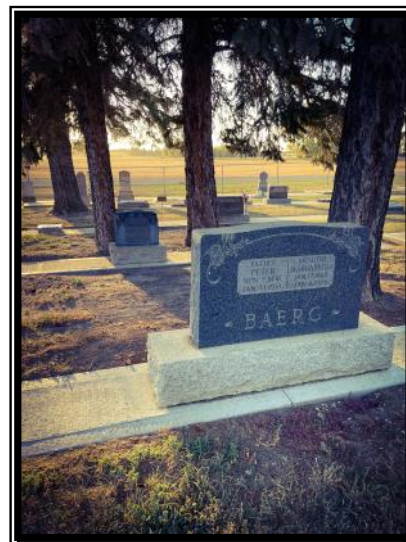
The headstones around me mark the final earthly resting places of the first Mennonite settlers and many of their descendants. This place is of historical and sentimental significance for the Linden Holdeman community and many others. Across the highway, two churches stand, one will likely be torn down, and the other, a large new church, has already taken over its duties. These are the third and fourth churches built on this site for the Linden Holdeman group. A school, a nursing home, and two other large churches serve three local congregations of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, historically known as Holdemans. These facilities here in the regions of Swalwell and Sunnyslope testify to the success of the original Linden, Alberta, settled by Mennonites from various towns and villages in the USA and Canada.

In the cemetery, Bishop Peter Toews's tombstone stands under the remaining three of four spruce trees planted a

(See Linden on page 4)



Brent Wiebe



Linden Cemetery,
the Bishops' Graves

In this Issue

1. Many Roads to Linden
1. Low German Mennonites
2. Editorial Reflections
2. Chairman's Corner
16. Tracing Your Name
21. John Langemann
23. MHSA Conference Report
25. John Hans Kroeger
31. Henry Kroeger

"Save the Dates"

Cross Canada Russlaender 100 Tour

July 2023

See the poster on the back page for more details

Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Deuteronomy 4:9 NIV



Dave Toews

Bible verses like the one above are often quoted at historical society meetings and conferences to remind us to pass on our heritage, values and faith to our children and grandchildren. And the MHSA Fall Conference at Linden was no exception, MC Katie Harder and the other speakers reminded us of the importance of our faith and history. The conference ably reported on by Bill Franz elsewhere in this issue was well attended with great enthusiasm. There was a general

buzz of excitement. Although there were no children, there were people there under fifty years of age! People were happy to participate in person without spatial restrictions or facial coverings.

Late! The October issue of the Chronicle is late, very late, and the responsibility is all mine. Marion and I were on vacation for the month of September. We went on a driving trip to Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec City. I have been to many national capitals, including Washington DC, Hanoi, Seoul, Paris, Wellington, Ulaanbaatar, Phnom Penh, Vienna, Prague, Moscow, London, Kyiv, Bangkok, and Beijing; Ottawa was on my bucket list. As luck would have it, the day we were to tour the parliament buildings, it was pouring rain, and they were closed. The Queen had died! And being on vacation, I didn't tell all the authors what the submission deadline was, so some articles were late arriving in my inbox.

However, the wait should be well worth it. The multi-talented Brent Wiebe tells the story of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman) people's coming to Linden and area. Abe Janzen's knowledge of the Low German

Mennonites in Alberta comes through loud and clear. The John Langemann story is highly unique; we get to meet the fictional Ivan in real life as John Langemann. Glenn Penner explains why not for those who think they can find a 1500s family connection back to the Netherlands. And, of course, there are two articles on the Kroegers, my maternal family.

As always, I would like to thank all the authors and contributors to this issue. Your articles are always appreciated. It is a pleasure to work with you. The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor, and articles. Contact Dave Toews at dmtows@gmail.com or 780-218-7411 cell with any questions, suggestions or comments. ❖

Chairman's Corner

by Katie Harder

Much to my chagrin, one of the duties of serving as the chair of MHSA is writing an article for the Chronicle. I know that many MHSA members are



Katie Harder

very familiar with me because I often serve as the MC at the spring and fall conferences, so I do not need an introduction. While I very much appreciate and enjoy reading the articles others have written, this task is not up my alley and was a primary concern in accepting the role of chair. So here I am.

(See Chairman on page 3)

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Chronicle

ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

Send submissions and other correspondence to:
Dave Toews, Editor
(dmtows@gmail.com)

Subscription is through membership (\$30.00/year or \$500.00 lifetime).

To join, send payment to:

MHSA
223 - 2946 32 Street NE
Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Editor: Dave Toews

Copy Editor: Carolyn Wilson

Layout: Harvey Wiehler

Distribution: Bill Janzen

Membership List: Ellie Janz

Visit our Website:
www.mennonitehistory.org

MHSA Executive

Chair: Katie Harder, Didsbury
Vice Chair: Dave Toews, St. Albert
Secretary: Bill Franz, Red Deer
Treasurer: Chandra Janzen, Calgary

Members at Large:

Henry Epp, Calgary
Dave Neufeldt, Lethbridge
Brent Wiebe, Stettler
Henry Wiebe, La Crete
Darryl Heidebrecht, Calgary
Eugene Janzen, High River
Menno Klassen, Devon
Jeremy Crete, La Crete

(Chairman from page 2)

I want to share some recollections about growing up in the Coaldale community and attending the Coaldale Mennonite Church, my childhood church. Since I am the youngest of eleven children, my memories will differ from that of my older siblings.

I want to share a bit of history about the Coaldale Mennonite Church. From 1923 to 1929, approximately 1,144 Mennonites from Russia landed on the Canadian prairies. Due to the introduction of labour-intensive sugar beet farming in the Coaldale area, they were encouraged to move to the Coaldale district. The immigrants included Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonites. For a while, the two groups worshipped together, but with time the groups separated. In 1928 the Coaldale Mennonite Church was established. Initially, they rented a facility for worship, but in 1931 they purchased two acres of land on the outskirts of town and construction on a worship facility was begun. The structure was completed in 1937. In 1931 the membership stood at 49, and by 1948 it was 136. In 1954 membership was 288, and at its peak, it was 324. After the Second World War, many Mennonites who fled Russia with the retreat of the defeated German army were now residing in war-torn Germany, where conditions were very poor. Through the compassionate efforts of MCC and others, they emigrated to Canada, with many settling in the Coaldale area. Some Mennonites in Germany had the misfortune of being sent back to Russia.

I have many fond memories of my former church. As a family, our life revolved around the church.

Not only did we regularly attend Sunday morning worship services, but there were activities during the week. Sundays were a special day; I got to see all my church friends and even school friends. Sunday School was unique; it was in German. Not all of the children attending Sunday School spoke the German language very fluently, but depending on the teacher, there was a mix of German and English. Every Sunday, there was a scripture passage to memorize and recite. I can't recall anyone being chided if they couldn't remember all the words. Every other Sunday after Sunday School, kindergarten through Grade Six would meet in the common room downstairs to sing German and English songs; this meant missing the service upstairs! The older kids met in that room on alternate Sundays to sing. The song leader for the younger group was a lady by the name of Tina Janzen. We dearly loved singing with her, and all called her Tante Tinechen. We always had a pianist to accompany the singing. The seating arrangement was by choice so that you could sit with your friends. Tante Tinechen was also a wonderful storyteller, and every so often, instead of singing, she would tell us a story; I can't recollect if they were true stories or whether she made them up, but she had our attention. To my knowledge, she never had a discipline problem. The song leader for the older group was Mr. Peter Janzen, I don't think he was quite as engaging, but hey, you got to miss the service upstairs, which was still in the German language at that time. These two children's choirs sang at the Mother's Day service, Sunday School Promotion Sunday, and church picnic, and of course, they were part of the Christmas Eve Program.

Church Picnic was a great Sunday! The whole church drove down to the Old Man River bottom and had an outdoor service. I'm always amazed at the effort that was put into the program. They brought along a portable speaker with a microphone so everyone could hear. The setting for the service was treed, so there was shade. Every family brought their picnic lunch, but we all had a potluck Fasha together. While the morning was a children's program, the afternoon consisted of races and baseball games. Every child received tokens for three free soda pops, all the ice cream cones you could eat, and an orange. I remember the baseball games being very competitive. My five brothers were all pretty good ball players, and Dave was an exceptional pitcher. What carefree days those were.

In winter, we attended Saturday German School. Not every family attended German School, but a lot of us did. It started around nine in the morning and ended around 2:30 or 3:00 pm. We had German spelling, reading, some German grammar, Mennonite history and a good hour of singing German songs – Kern lieder, folk songs, and German round songs. Mrs. Helmuth (Doris) Dyck was one of the teachers and led the singing with the accompaniment of her accordion. I thoroughly enjoyed German School, and the singing was a highlight for me. German School went from November to the end of March.

Christmas in the Coaldale Church was very festive. The Christmas Eve service was a Sunday School Program; almost every child had a part or sang in the children's choir. In those days, children wore their best clothes for church; for girls, it usually meant a new Christmas dress. At the end of the evening, bags with candy, peanuts, and a Japanese orange were handed out to all the children, but you were not allowed to eat the

(See Chairman on page 4)

(Chairman from page 3)

treats in the sanctuary. The sanctuary and the balcony were full on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning. Christmas morning consisted of a mixed choir, male choir, small groups and the singing of "Der Friedensfurst." Anyone from the congregation was welcome to join the choir, and the choir loft was generally full. The tall, magnificent Christmas tree always graced the right-hand corner of the sanctuary.

Reflecting on my years attending the Coaldale Mennonite Church fills my soul with nostalgia and profound thanksgiving to God. I feel so blessed and enriched to have had my spiritual foundation nurtured in this setting. This is just a glimpse of the church of my childhood. "To God be the glory." ❖

(Linden from page 1)

century ago to mark his resting place, and Bishop's Baerg headstone touches its shadow. These men were truly a bridge between continents, eras, and denominations. No individual person is more significant to the Canadian Holdeman Church than Bishop Toews. As a bishop in the Kleine Gemeinde, he was instrumental in arranging the relatively smooth immigration of nearly the entire church from Russia to North America in the 1870s. Peter Toews and his group settled in Manitoba. He was a writer, a scholar, and a seeker, and eventually, this led him to break with the church of his childhood and, together with nearly half of the Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde, they joined the Holdeman church.

In this article, I would like to draw attention to the many times our parents and grandparents moved and how many ventures would fail before they reached success. Also, I want to draw attention to a couple of other communities that were transplanted with us to the new continent. It can serve as a reminder that while our stories are individual to us, they are not as unique as we might think sometimes.

The Mixed Roots of the Linden Holdeman community

The historical roots of the Canadian Holdeman Mennonites were originally in the Kleine Gemeinde. This small group started meeting separately from the larger Mennonite group in the Molotschna colony in 1812. A new, more conservative church was

formed and was referred to as the "Little Church" or Kleine Gemeinde. Although the members of this group later moved to the Crimea and other new colonies in present-day Ukraine, to this day, their descendants within the Church of God in Christ, Mennonites refer to themselves as "Molotsch," a word indicating their origin in the Molotschna colony. Molotsch is an important term in understanding the historical context of the congregation's mixed background. Until 1899, practically all Holdemans in Canada were of this background.

Meanwhile, settlements were expanding in America, and people were heading north and west, looking for land. Among the Mennonites who had arrived in Kansas in the 1870s, several hundred from western Volhynia had joined Holdemans's church. Some of their main ancestral villages in Ukraine were Antonovka and Karolswalde. These western Ukrainian Mennonites and their descendants are still known among the Holdemans as "Polsch."

Linguistic and cultural habits differed enough between the "Molotsch" and "Polsch" that friction was inevitable, but at Linden, it appears this was well bridged. This mixture of "Molotsch" from the Kleine Gemeinde and "Polsch" from Volhynia made it very different from any other Canadian congregation.

John Schartner, Samuel Boese, Peter Baerg, William Giesbrecht

Four of my wife, Gail Bartel's, ancestors will serve as a case study of the settlers and provide an excellent cross-section view of the early Holdeman community. They

(See Linden on page 5)



Mennonite Housebarn -
Karolswalde 2022

(Linden from page 4)

came from Oregon, South Dakota, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Most had experienced difficulty in putting down their roots and had moved from one place to another. Dreams of new homes like those they owned in Ukraine had disappointed them. Failed congregations and abandoned settlements were fresh in their minds. These are the stories of the four ancestors of Gail's and the long road that led them together at Linden, Alberta. John Schartner, Samuel Boese, Peter Baerg, and William Giesbrecht.

John Schartner – (Polsch) *Karolswalde, Ukraine – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania- South Dakota- Waldheim, Saskatchewan – Linden, Alberta*

John Schartner's journey began across the ocean in the old country of present-day Ukraine as recorded in his autobiography, "I, John Schartner, was born in the year 1871 on September 22 in Karolswalde, Polen, Russia. My parents moved to America to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when I was four years old. We lived there for four years, my father working in a blacksmith shop. From there, we moved to South Dakota, where I grew up, learned the catechism and was baptized in 1890. I married Agnes Becker on June 12, 1890. We moved in April 1899 to Canada and arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan." [1]

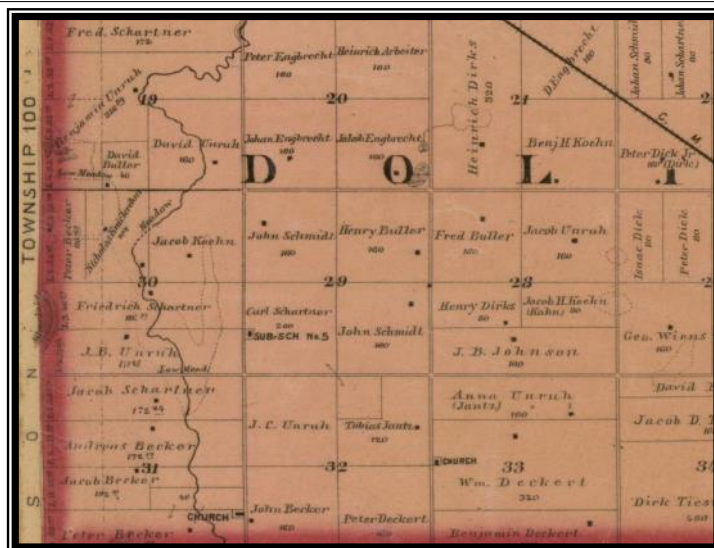
The 1893 Dolton Township, South Dakota map shows Johan's 80 acres (*upper right-hand corner*) and the land belonging to his father, Reverend Karl Schartner (*left center*). While Johan was experiencing great doubts about his spiritual condition, his father advised him to join the Hutterites. They were transplanted from their villages near the Molotschna colony in the old

country and now were their neighbours here in South Dakota. But Johan's interests were not in the Hutterites, and he and his wife were soon baptized into the Holdeman church at the house of Benj. H. Koehn, shown in the center of the map, in 1896.

However, this

Holdeman congregation was destined to disappear soon as the families moved away in 1898. [2]

In great destitution, Johan and Aganetha [Becker] Schartner soon



Dolton Township Map 1893



John Schartner's Flour Mill, Linden, AB

moved north to start a congregation at Waldheim, Saskatchewan. Together with Aganetha's brother, Minister Peter J. Becker, they were the first families there. Soon more families joined them, including the Peter and Aganetha Jantz family, also from South Dakota. These years were difficult, cold, and poor. Nearby were the Doukhobors, who had been neighbours to the Mennonites in Ukraine but had been exiled from their homes along the Molotschna river in 1843. Now they had made their way to Canada and lived on the prairies alongside the Mennonites. The older ones among the Doukhobors could still recall the Mennonite neighbours from the old country. John Schartner tells us, "once, I bought a sheep from our neighbour. It had long wool, so we sheared it and took this wool to a Doukhobor village seven miles away. They spun it and took half of it for the work they did. These people were very hospitable.

(See Linden on page 6)

(Linden from page 5)

I had to eat there, and we had tea and brown bread. It was good after a seven-mile drive in the cold weather." [3]

From the perspective of the John Schartner family as well as the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, this venture at Waldheim was somewhat of a tragedy. The flourishing group soon experienced a painful division. A large part moved to Linden, and those who remained formed a separate fellowship under the leadership of Min. Peter J. Becker, who was concerned about the modern trends seen in the Holdeman church and resolved to do something about them. In a story unfamiliar to many of us, this little group was separated from the main group but retained the name "Holdeman." Until quite recently, the neighbours in the Warman, SK. Region connected the name "Holdeman" not with the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, but with this small group in central Saskatchewan. In 1909, John Schartner and Aganetha were the first to move away. They and several others relocated to the new settlement near Sunnyslope and Swallow, AB. Here, the poverty that had followed John Schartner would soon end.

In a story of personal loss to Aganetha, her brother, Min. Peter J. Becker remained at Waldheim, and the separation was finalized, not only by distance but now by doctrine. In 1909, Aganetha revealed her knowledge of the historical writings of faith as she poured out her heart in a letter to her siblings left behind at Waldheim. *"if it should happen, that we can no longer see each other here anymore, let's hold on to each other in faith and in a firm trust, as Dietrich Philips writes on page 288..."* [4]. Sadly, Aganetha's life came to an early end and a year later, in 1910, she died, leaving behind her bereaved husband and ten children.

Later that year, John remarried, and before long, he constructed a large flour mill that employed many of his children and local workers. Over the

next century, Linden and other places in British Columbia became the home for many of the Schartner descendants.

Samuel Boese – (Polsch) Karolswalde, -Pawnee Rock, KS, Perrydale, Oregon (variety of places) – Linden, AB

Samuel Boese was born in 1857 in the little village of Karolswalde; the same village nephew John Schartner would be born in some 14 years later in 1871. Samuel's father, Johann Boese, passed away in 1872, and all but one of the family, including the widowed mother, made their way to the USA. Samuel immigrated in 1875 and settled near Pawnee Rock, Kansas. [5] The Stone church belonging to the Bergthal Mennonite Church of Pawnee Rock, was likely where he worshipped in his early years in Kansas. [6] While living here, Samuel married his wife, Susanna Unruh. They soon joined the Holdeman church and moved to the Durham, Kansas, area in the early 1880s, where they lived in a dugout house. [7] In 1892 Samuel and Susanna headed west to try their luck at the Holdeman congregation in Perrydale, Oregon. Soon more families moved in, and a nice group was formed. The story was short-lived, though, and the congregation soon faded away. Once again, Linden, AB benefited from this collapse as Samuel Boese (now a minister) and numerous other families made their way north across the border to Linden in 1902. Samuel would become a well-known elder in the Holdeman church here in Alberta. Today, the descendants of Samuel Boese are scattered across Alberta, with many still living in Linden.

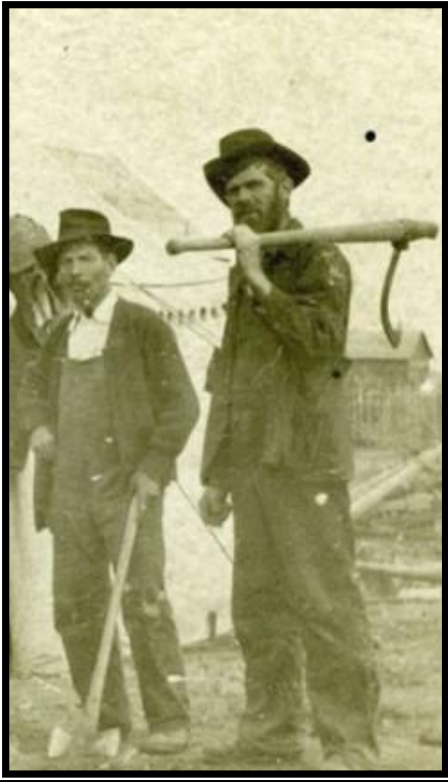
(See Linden on page 7)



The Stone Church, Pawnee Rock, KS

(Linden from page 6)

**William K. Giesbrecht –
(Molotsch) Greenland, Manitoba -
Needles, B.C. - Linden, AB**



Unidentified Members of the
Holdeman Community,
Needles, BC

Meanwhile, among the Holdemans in Manitoba, excitement was growing. Rumours were flying about a place in B.C. where land was cheap, the weather was mild, and lovely fruit could be grown. Old ones recalled the beautiful orchards they had owned in Ukraine and thought of the cold Manitoba winters that had brought so much suffering and even death. Manitoba Mennonites had prospered since the 1870s migration, and there were young men among the Greenland, Manitoba congregation wishing for adventure. As always, the prospect of opportunity

and cheap land drew many. In 1911, William K. Giesbrecht, his wife Susanna Toews, and their five children left their home in Greenland, Manitoba, for this promised land of Needles, B.C. He was described as a man of "fair means [8]" and was one of about twenty families to make the move. The migrants leaned on their traditions and organized what must have been one of the last single-street Mennonite villages to be established in Canada and the USA, built on the pattern of their early Manitoba villages.

Very little else went as planned in the entire settlement. Lack of water and market access proved that the whole venture was doomed from the start. Despite all the hard work and resources they put into their new village, they would not be able to realize their dreams. The spark of pioneer energy must have been alive in the children as well, and this made for difficult times for the teachers who tried to teach them in the short season when the children were in school. The first teacher made it until Christmas when she resigned because "*she could not control the unruly children.*" [9] Those who lived there as youth or children often mentioned the beautiful scenery and the good times they had. Unfortunately, this wasn't enough to keep the community going. The church publication, the Messenger of Truth, dated August 28, 1917, simply states, "*Swalwell, Alta. August 10, the remaining brothers and sisters from Needles, B.C., are expected here this week....* And thus, once again, the complete collapse of a congregation and, in fact, a community led numerous families, including William K. Giesbrecht, to move to the Linden community. Through the years at Needles, William's earthly holdings were reduced to "*two horses, some blacksmith tools and a piece of B.C. fir, two and one-half feet in diameter and twenty-four inches high to set his anvil on.*" [10]

**Peter Baerg, Ukraine –(Molotsch), Molotschna Colony, Ukraine-
Hochstadt, MB - Linden, AB**

Not everyone who relocated to the Swalwell Mennonite community came from places where things hadn't worked out. Peter P. Baerg was born in Nikolaidorf, Molotschna colony, in 1856. The map illustrates the neat, orderly village in Ukraine in approximately the year of his birth. In 1874 he immigrated to Canada, where he settled in the East Reserve. In 1879 he and Margaretha Loewen were married, and three years later, he was ordained as a minister in the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. All twelve of their children were born in Manitoba, but by the year 1903, we read that "*the Ge-*



Young People from the Holdeman
Community, Needles, BC

(See Linden on page 8)

(Linden from page 7)

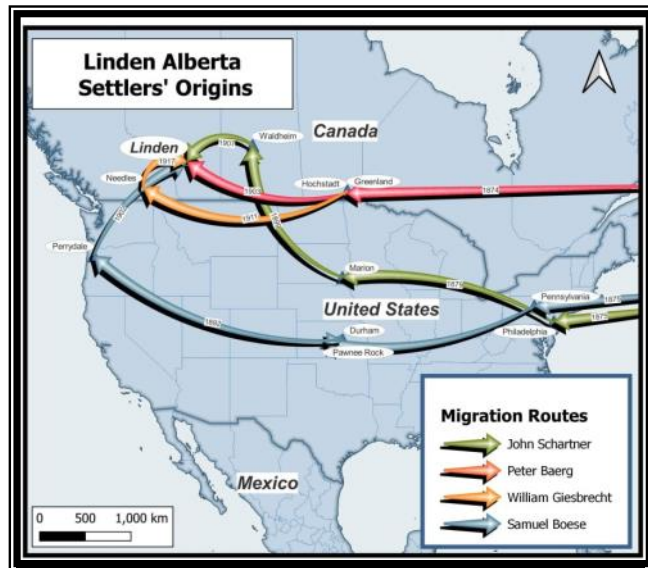


Nikolaidorf, Molotschna Colony, ca. 1855

meinde in Manitoba has elected Peter Baerg and Abraham Klassen [Peter's son-in-law] to look at the land in Alberta." [11] That year he joined Sam Boese as a minister at the newly founded congregation referred to as Swalwell or Sunnyslope. Peter Baerg also became a much-loved Bishop in the Holdeman church. Together with Samuel Boese, he travelled to Needles, B.C., where they ministered to the struggling congregation. Although he had been gone from the old country for many years, Peter never forgot about his relatives who stayed behind. Several letters from the late twenties are in existence. They tell the sad story of a family who waited too long to leave Russia. Many died in the gulag in northern Russia, and contact was lost with the others.

**Aganetha Jantz
(Polsch) Ukraine –
Springfield, SD –
Waldheim, SK –
Needles, B.C. –
Linden, AB**

Special Mention –
Aganetha Jantz is not a relative of our family, but she deserves a special mention. She had the misfortune of living in all but one of these failed congregations before moving to Linden! She was born in Ukraine in 1864 and left her home country without her parents as they didn't have the financial resources to look after her. She grew up as an orphan in Springfield, South Dakota, where she married Peter Jantz in the



Map of Linden Mennonite Settlers' Origins

summer of 1884. In 1893, they were baptized by Min. John Holdeman and joined the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. They were some of the last Holdemans to leave South Dakota and moved to Waldheim, Saskatchewan, in 1907. Here her husband passed away in 1913, and a year later, after many of the others had moved away from Waldheim, she and her children moved to Needles, B.C. They remained there until 1917, until she finally moved to Sunnyslope, Alberta, where she lived the remainder of her days until her passing in 1937. [12]

What are some other challenges our foreparents faced as a result of their frequent moves? Besides the danger of travel, the task of setting up a new home and living in a new community and the challenge of a new language must have been overwhelming.

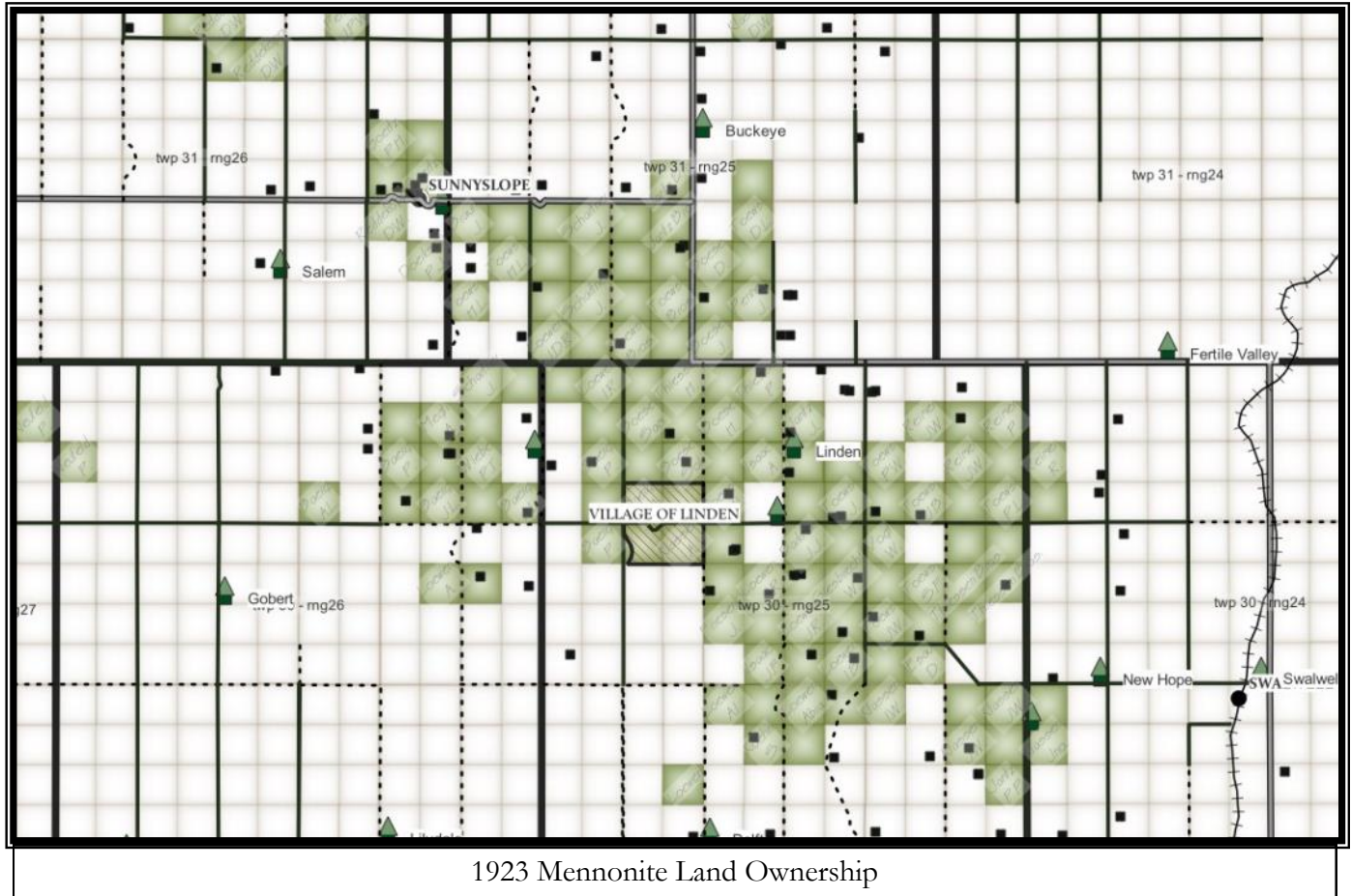
The diary of Katie Unruh, another early settler at Linden, tells us about this struggle.

"Grandma never learned to speak English well. Her family language was [Plautdietsch]. She learned some Russian or Ukrainian in Russia and picked up some French from their neighbours in Manitoba. Being very hospitable, on one occasion in Alberta, some neighbours came onto the yard, and she went out to the wagon to greet the lady and invite her into the living room. Grandma chatted cheerfully, but the lady was quiet. One of her daughters finally caught her eye and motioned to her, informing her the lady didn't understand because Grandma was mixing Russian and French with her English. After that, grandma gave up trying to speak English." [13]

The 1923 Cummins directory county map shows the Schartners, Peter Baerg, Sam Boese, and William Giesbrecht finally all lived

(See Linden on page 9)

(Linden from page 8)



within a few miles of each other. Based on the Cummins 1923 map series and using typically Mennonite names, we can see how approximately how much land the Mennonites owned by the year the map was issued. Green blocks indicate Mennonite ownership.

So what was the key to Linden's success? After so many failures, why did these settlers' plans finally work out? Was it their faith in God? Experiences learned through failure? An adventurous spirit that kept working till it succeeded? Probably a little of each. I hope this story can encourage readers to evaluate their goals and work hard for those most important goals.

-
- [1] Pg. 157, Writings and Experiences of Our Fathers
 - [2] Pg. 493, Histories of the Congregations
 - [3] Pg. 165, "Autobiography of John Schartner", Writings and Experience of Our Fathers, C.W. Friesen
 - [4] Private collection, Wendy Wild, Linden, AB
 - [5] [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Bergthal_Mennonite_Church_\(Pawnee_Rock,_Kansas,_USA\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Bergthal_Mennonite_Church_(Pawnee_Rock,_Kansas,_USA))
 - [6] Pg. 38, History of the Bergthal Mennonite Church, Pawnee Rock, Kansas
 - [7] Pg. 320, Histories of the Congregations
 - [8] Pg. 7. Giesbrecht Family Tree, self-published
 - [9] Pg. 32, "Story of the Mennonite Settlers in Whatshan Valley", Just Where is Edgewood?
 - [10] Pg. 6, The Giesbrecht Family Tree, self-published
 - [11] Pg. 20 Dynasties of the Mennonite Klenie Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and North America. 2000, Delbert Plett
 - [12] Peter H. Jantz Family 1858 to 1996, Dewey Unruh, Stettler, AB
 - [13] Pg. 151, Life Stories of Henry L. and Katie Unru Toews, 2001



(German from page 1)

professionals, including social workers, school principals, counsellors, school superintendents, and other educators, had gathered to learn from each other's experiences and from Low German-speaking resource people about the Low German populations of Alberta. Participants brought their own experiences with Low German Mennonite employees, parents, church leaders, neighbours, clients, and students.

The event indicated that the Low German Mennonites had become a significant and widely based part of the Alberta demographic. They have settled north, south, east, and northwest. They continue to find opportunities for employment, innovation, and places to settle. They did not come to Alberta in large groups. Most have come as single families, leaving behind the support of colonies in Mexico and Bolivia and Belize and the traditional village systems of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Where they can purchase land, they do, though the price of land these days makes that nearly impossible for families with limited resources when they arrive. In a recent conversation, a young woman, daughter of one of the Old Colony Bishops, said her husband would love to farm in Southern Alberta. Still, the price of a quarter section of irrigated land seems to be going up 'about a million dollars a year' lately, she said. The current price is 2.5M to 3M dollars. So, they often find work with larger corporate feedlots or in the beet, potato, or other farm industries. They also drive trucks, work in various trades and professions and start small businesses. They are known for their hard work, good food, hospitality, and capacity for innovation and taking risks. Risks that often involve moving and starting over.

The total population of Alberta is about 4.5 million. I estimate that Mennonites make up about 55,000 to 65,000 of that number, concentrated loosely across the south, up through Lethbridge and Calgary and NE to Didsbury (Bergthal), north to Edmonton, east to Tofield and Two Hills, Northwest to Peace River/Grande Prairie

and Worsley, and north from Peace River city to La Crete and High Level. We weren't always spread out like this, and the earliest Mennonites in Alberta may have been Low German Kanadier.

Early Arrivals

Beginning in 1888 and up through 1896, there was significant interest among Swiss Mennonites in Ontario and Low German Speaking Mennonites in Southern Manitoba in the Gleichen, High



Mount View Mennonite Cemetery
South of Calgary, Alberta



Reinländer Mennonite Taber, Alberta

River, Olds, Didsbury, Mazeppa and Gladys areas of Alberta. They came here to look. Elias Bricker moved to Gladys/Mazeppa in 1889 with his family, some horses, and cattle. There is a cemetery near Mazeppa with over 60 names of people buried, including Elias Bricker. Most of the names appear to be Swiss Mennonite.

There was significant interest among Low German-speaking Mennonites from Manitoba in the Gleichen area in the late 1880s. A local leader, Emil Griesbach,

(See German on page 11)

(German from page 10)

claimed to have brought the first Russian Mennonites to Gleichen at about the same time. A group whose spiritual leader was Gerhard Paetkau settled there for a few years. Paetkau himself lived there from 1891 to 1896. Names like Friesen, Reimer, Rempel, Klassen, Dyck and Janzen appear in the writings, but they eventually all moved back to Manitoba or the Rosthern area of Saskatchewan.

Leonard Doell, in *First Mennonite Settlers in Alberta*, MHSA Newsletter, June 2014), is clear that there was continued and significant interest among Mennonites in Alberta in those years. Mennonite leaders (Swiss and Low German) came to look at lands, liked the soil and the climate, and promised to bring settlers, but in the end, as the CPR Land Grant Records say about a group of families who had settled 35 miles south of Calgary, 'most left disappointed.' The climate was not favourable in those years, and the land was not what they had hoped, but perhaps more importantly, Alberta did not allow them to settle in reserves. That tradition mattered for those Low German Mennonites from Russia who wanted to move here. They wanted to live in villages on reserves where they could develop their economies, churches, schools, and family life. There are no Mennonite Villages in Alberta. Saskatchewan and Manitoba allowed that communal arrangement.

Other Mennonites began to settle in the Didsbury and Tofield areas in about 1905. They were later called the General Conference and, more recently, Mennonite Church Alberta, part of Mennonite Church Canada. The Swiss Men-

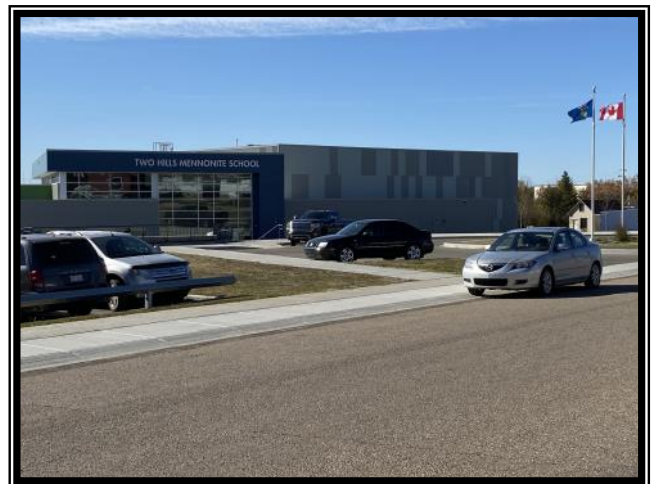
nonites came to the Tofield area soon after this, moving up from the United States. Swiss (Northwest Conference) are in various parts of Alberta but mostly east to west across Central Alberta. The Mennonite Brethren began to come in the 1920s from Russia, settled in the Rosemary and Coaldale areas and spread out from there. In the later 1940s, other Mennonites came from Prussia and Germany to settle in the Coaldale and Rosemary areas. Many moved to Calgary and Edmonton and became well-established during the 50 years of post-war economic growth. In the 70s and 80s, refugees from Africa, Vietnam, Central America, and Chile moved into Alberta. Now, numerous Mennonite churches are partially or primarily of Asian, African, and South American backgrounds.

Alberta Demographics

Alberta is a unique province because we have agricultural land east to west and north to south. That is not true in any other province; Mennonites are spread out over the entire province like the rest of the population. From Calgary, for example, it's 11 hours to La Crete, 4.5 to Two Hills, 10 to Cleardale/Worsley, 3 to Edmonton, and 3 or 4 hours to Taber or Pincher Creek in the south.

What is also unique is that Alberta has a few pillars that identify Mennonites as a people, aside from their churches, several homes for seniors and some private schools in the local communities. We don't have Seminaries, Bible Colleges, or other well-known Mennonite institutions around which Mennonites identify as 'this is us.' Mennonite Mutual Insurance still has the name but now caters to a broader evangelical population. Two large Newcomer Centers established in Edmonton and Calgary in the early 80s have only a minimal connection left with the Mennonite churches, who, together with MCC, helped to establish them. Pillars attract human and financial resources but also help people develop a sense of identity. People disconnect from each other more easily when such pillars are largely absent.

It's often said that most Albertans come from somewhere else, which is quite true of the Mennonites as well, and of the Low German-speaking Mennonites particularly. We are not yet deeply rooted here. Alberta has land and natural resources, so there are 146 Mennonite churches spread over the entire province today, representing 16 different Mennonite denominations. Alberta's land and resource base appeal to the Low German Mennonites particularly. They have come here to look for opportunities. What keeps them together in each



Two Hills Mennonite (Public) School,
Two Hills, Alberta

(See German on page 12)

(German from page 11)

group is their commitment to their particular group. Fractioning happens, and there is inter-church migration among some of the various Low German Mennonite denominations.

Low German-Speaking Mennonites, Early Arrivals

In broadest terms, the Low German-speaking Mennonites, also known as the *Kanadier* and in Southern Alberta as the *Mexican Mennonites*, have settled in four regions of Alberta. La Crete, beginning in the early 1930s, came mainly from Saskatchewan. Taber and across Southern Alberta starting in the 1970s and 1980s, from Ontario and Mexico. Worsley and Cleardale, beginning in the late 1950s, from La Crete and Saskatchewan. Two Hills, beginning in about 2000, from Southern Alberta, Ontario, and Mexico. They also live in other parts of Alberta, but in smaller numbers and sometimes for shorter times as they wait for opportunities in areas where their churches and communities are more established.

The Low German-speaking Mennonites first came to Canada in 1874, settling on Manitoba's East and West sides of the Red River. On the East side were Bergthal Mennonites, originally out of Chortitza in Russia, and the Kleine Gemeinde, from Molotchna. The Old Colony, also from Chortitza, settled on the West side around 1876. They took the official name of Reinland Mennoniten Gemeinde, but they also kept the Old Colony name, by which, today, they are mostly known. The Bergthaler and Kleine Gemeinde were a little more willing to adapt to public education in Manitoba; those less inclined eventually broke away under the Sommerfeld name in 1893. The Old Colony, like the Sommerfelder, was more resistant to public education and the Manitoba Schools Act. By the early 1890s, were migrating to the Hague/Osler and Swift Current areas in Saskatchewan, where the government set aside what were known as Reserves. They could live in Villages. My grandparents, on both the Wiebe and Janzen sides, would have been part of that early migration West. In 1921, after the Manitoba Government refused to negotiate with the remaining Old Colony on the West side, they began to migrate to Mexico, where they purchased 230,000 acres in the state of Chihuahua and 35,000 in Durango. My grandmother, uncles, and aunts moved to the Durango settlement in 1948 from Saskatchewan (Hague/Osler Reserve).

La Crete and Worsley:

The Low German-speaking Mennonites began moving to the La Crete and Fort Vermilion area, 3 hours north of Peace River Town, from Saskatchewan in 1932. Today they number over 12,000 in the La Crete region. A Worsley settlement followed, and later Mexican Low German Mennonites began moving to Southern Alberta from Ontario and Mexico. Today, the Low German Mennonites make up the majority of Mennonites in Alberta and are rapidly growing. My guess is that they number at least 55,000, and the other Mennonites, who have been here longer and have not moved around as much, number about 5,000 to 10,000. I base that number, in northern Alberta, on census information, and in other locations, on esti-

mates offered by local people.

A few Old Colony families from the Hague Osler settlement of Saskatchewan moved up the Peace River to Carcajou in the early 1930s. Still, the very first family to arrive was the Peter Elias family from Manitoba, who were soon joined by three families from Saskatchewan. Four years later, with the annual risk of being flooded out by the Peace River, they moved upriver to La Crete, a small settlement thus named in 1914 by three French brothers from Quebec who were there, hiding on the banks of the Peace River, avoiding WWI Conscription. They had found their way up the Peace River to a place about 5 km from what is today La Crete. They used the



Kleine Gemeinde Church near
Cleardale, Alberta

name, La Crete Landing, referring to an outcropping on the bank that appeared like a rooster's crown. Eventually, the name stuck.

The Old Colony settlement in La Crete grew in numbers. In the Old Colony, in 1959, began to migrate from La Crete, south to the Worsley and Cleardale area, northwest of Peace River City, towards the BC border. Bishop Loeppky of Osler, Sask, would travel up to visit and serve the growing communi-

(See German on page 13)

(German from page 12)

ty, and in 1941 he ordained Wm P Wiebe as the first Bishop. (Then and Now, a History of La Crete, Vol 1). In 1978, Rev John Klassen was ordained as Bishop, a leadership role he still holds. In the meantime, he ordained Jacob Giesbrecht (2001) as Bishop in Southeastern Alberta, based near Vauxhall. Bishop Giesbrecht, in turn, ordained Bishop Henry Wiebe (2012) in Two Hills and Henry Thiessen (2018) in Bow Island. In 1993, Bishop Klassen ordained Benjamin Wolfe as Bishop of the Old Colony in the Worsley/Cleardale area.

It should be noted that beginning in 1965, many families from the Worsley and La Crete areas moved to Bolivia to establish the Santa Rosa Mennonite Colony in that country. Bishop Wolfe moved to Bolivia in 1998 to help start the new Alberta Colony there. That colony did not survive, and Bishop Wolfe returned to Worsley/Cleardale in 2003, where he provides leadership to this day. The migrations to Bolivia have continued over the years, but many have also returned to northern Alberta. Today there are two Old Colony, one Kleine Gemeinde and one Reinland Mennonite church in the Worsley/Cleardale region.

Some of the Bergthaler from Saskatchewan, Swift Current and Hague/Osler areas had also migrated to La Crete. For a few years, beginning in 1955, Abram J. Buhler, a bishop in Saskatchewan, travelled from Hague/Osler to La Crete to conduct baptismal and communion services. In 1957, they opened their first church building. In 1962, Bishop Buhler installed Jacob Dyck as the first Bishop of

the La Crete Bergthaler church. In 1965, there was a split under Bishop Jacob Dyck (*Then and Now*, Vol 1), during which the existing group kept the Bergthaler name; the leaving group took the Sommerfeld name but kept the church building. The new Sommerfeld Church was shepherded for a few years by Bishop David F. Wall, who had moved to La Crete from the Swift Current area of Saskatchewan in 1963. Bishop Wall was the brother of Peter Wall, who was the grandfather of Brad Wall, former Premier of Saskatchewan. David F. Wall was not well, and Jacob Kroeker was elected as the Sommerfeld Bishop in 1968. After Jacob Kroeker, Henry Kroeker became Bishop, and in 2003 Nick Boehlig was ordained and is the current Bishop of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church.

Southern Alberta

In 1973, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, based in Steinbach, Manitoba, sent Elmer and Lena Hamm to La Crete to explore planting an English-Speaking Mennonite church. In 1977, the EMC opened its first



Friedensfelder Church at Chin, west of Taber, Alberta

church building in La Crete. Mr. Hamm was also instrumental in establishing an EMC Church in High Level in 1978. And more recently, the Kleine Gemeinde from Southern Alberta has opened a church in La Crete, as have the Reinländer, from a base in Vauxhall.

Backing up a couple of decades, in the early 1970s, Low German-speaking Sommerfeld Mennonites began migrating from Saskatchewan to Southeastern Alberta, where they were welcomed in the sugar beet, feedlot, and potato industries, which were all clamouring for reliable workers. The Sommerfeld Bishop from Saskatchewan, David Wiebe, would come to the Taber area to conduct services, and some local ministers were eventually elected. Daniel Dyck was elected as the Bishop of the Sommerfeld Church in Southern Alberta in 2007. But before that, in 2000, there had been a split led by Abram Fehr, a Sommerfeld minister. The new group, with Rev Fehr, took the name Reinland Mennonite Church. In 2012 there was a second Sommerfeld split, this time with Daniel Dyck and those who followed him taking the name Friedensfelder. They are independent of the Friedensfelder in Manitoba, but when they had to choose a name, they listed five options and the brotherhood selected this one. The Friedensfelder kept the main church building in Chin (West of Taber) and now has a second church in Grassy Lake, East of Taber. So, the Reinländer and the Friedensfelder both come out of the Sommerfeld church, which now is a small group with a church building northeast of Vauxhall. The much larger Sommerfeld group in Alberta is up north in La Crete, as already noted, under the leadership of

(See German on page 14)

(German from page 13)



Old Colony Church north of Bassano, Alberta

Bishop Nick Boehlig.

Like the Sommerfeld, Old Colony Mennonites began to come to Southern Alberta from Ontario, Manitoba, and Mexico in response to opportunities for work. As noted, Bishop John Klassen from La Crete served the church in Southern Alberta, driving the 14 hours from La Crete as often as once a month for some years. During one 5-year period, he travelled to Southern Alberta 26 times while also serving the church in Cecil Lake, BC, and Two Hills. Today there are 7 sizeable Old Colony churches in Southern Alberta.

The Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, also based in Manitoba, and sometimes known as the Rudnerweider, began a singstund (singing), bible study and informal fellowship among Low German-speaking people in the fall of 2001 in Vauxhall. Richard and Elisabeth Hamm moved to Vauxhall and were the first pastors of the group. The dedication service of their first building was on September 30, 2001, with about 90 people in attendance. The current pastor is Henry Redekopp, from Manitoba, but he and his wife, Tina, come with 9 years of experience as missionaries with the EMMC in Belize. About 5 years ago, they built a new church in Vauxhall, which, today, is over full; they usually have at least 3 services on a Sunday.

The Kleine Gemeinde (small church) is really not so small in Alberta. Their story goes back to 1812 with Klaus Reimer in the Molotschna settlement (South Russia), who, along with others, thought the larger Mennonite community lacked in 'spiritual fervour.' They began to meet in private homes, emphasizing church discipline, humility, and nonconformity. Kleine Gemeinde came to North America in 1874 with two groups settling in Manitoba, one in Nebraska and a bit later in Kansas. In 1948, the Kleine Gemeinde migrated to Mexico and from there to Belize and Bolivia. They had considered migrating in the 1920s, but it didn't happen for them. In the meantime, in 1952, the Canadian Kleine Gemeinde reorganized



Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman) East of Linden, Alberta

itself as the Evangelical Mennonite Church, later becoming the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. But long before that, they had also given birth to the Church of God in Christ Mennonite

(Holdeman, after John Holdeman) in 1882, when almost half of the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba were rebaptized and joined the Holdeman group. By 1954 this ex-Kleine Gemeinde group had settlements in Manitoba and Alberta. Today there are 15 Holdeman churches in Alberta, north as far as Fort Vermilion, around Linden and other places in Central Alberta, and southeast of Taber. The Kleine Gemeinde today has churches in Grassy Lake, Bow Island, Willingdon (Two Hills), Ferintosh, and most recently, La Crete and Worsley/Cleardale.

Two Hills

Two Hills, an hour and a half NE of Edmonton, was a dying community in the late 1990s. Much of the population was Ukrainian. Young people were moving to the larger urban centers, and the public school in Two Hills town was barely surviving. Jacob Wiebe, a deacon in the Old Colony church in Southern Alberta, saw an ad about affordable land. He and his wife were the first Mennonites to move up, but others soon followed them. Abe Martens, with business partner Aaron Giesbrecht, moved up in 2000. Jacob Wiebe's brother, Henry, a minister, moved up in 2003 and was ordained by Jacob Giesbrecht as bishop in 2012. In 2008, the Reinland Mennonite Church started to have informal evening gatherings in Two Hills, and for some

(See German on page 15)

(German from page 14)

years, Bishop Hiebert travelled up from Vauxhall to provide leadership. In 2020, John Klassen was ordained as Bishop of the Reinl nd Mennonite Church in Two Hills. Today there are 3 Old Colony churches, one Reinl nd, and one Kleine Gemeinde church in the Two Hills area. All are growing.

Nationwide Fellowship churches began to appear in Alberta in the late 1970s. Today there are at least 12, with various names and affiliations. Loosely they are often known as Whitecaps, and many in their churches are Low German Mennonites.

Finally

Finally, **several notes:** I mentioned the amount of travel Bishop John Klassen has done, during his years of service, on behalf of the Old Colony Church in Alberta. I want to add that this kind of selfless commitment seems evident among all the leaders of the Low German Speaking Mennonites of Alberta. I'm sure it's the same in other provinces. They travel. They meet. They visit. They listen. They preach. They baptize and bury, and marry. They don't have office hours. All of them do other things to support their families, but their work in the church is understood as a calling, and they seem unfailingly committed to that calling.

The Low German Speaking Mennonites of the Western Hemisphere are under-acknowledged in most Mennonite histories. They number at least 400,000 and perhaps half a million. My experience with the Low German-speaking Mennonites in Bolivia and Alberta is that they migrate, sometimes for religious reasons and other times to



Old Colony School west of Two Hills, Alberta

look for new opportunities that usually involve employment and land. But they are not just opportunists. They are settlers. They look for places to build their families and their communities. That does not mean they don't drift away from each other into other communities. They do. But as Henry Redekopp once said, they will drive a long way to be with people with whom they feel at home.

Low German Mennonite Churches

Low German Mennonite Churches: Old Colony: 18. Sommerfeld: 7. Bergthal Mennonite: 7. Kleine Gemeinde: 6. Reinland Mennonite: 10. Old Rheinland: 1. Friedensfelder Mennonite: 2. Evangelical Mennonite: 12. Evangelical Mennonite Mission: 1. Church of God in Christ (Holdeman) Mennonite: 15. Nationwide Fellowship: 8.

Other Mennonite Churches: Mennonite Brethren: 21. Mennonite Church: 12. Northwest Mennonite: 15. Independent Mennonite: 4. **An asterisk:** Alberta has well over 180 Hutterite colonies of two types: the Lehrerleut and the Dariusleut. They are well established as farmers and branching into the business and trades.

Eventually, books will be written about how this all happened. Indeed, each of the churches seems to keep detailed records of what happened when and who was involved, and without exception, the people I've contacted are happy to talk about their stories. This is a brief article, and much more needs to be written, but even for this little article, I was able to talk (by phone) with Bishop John Klassen and his wife in La Crete. Bishop Jacob Giesbrecht (Vauxhall), his wife, three married daughters, and their



Mexican Mennonite Food and Dry-goods Store Two Hills, Alberta



Nationwide Fellowship (Whitecaps) Church W of Peace River, Alberta

(See German on page 16)

(German from page 15)

young children invited me for coffee and chocolate chip cookies one morning and provided helpful history. Bishop Benjamin Wolfe of Cleardale/Worsley corrected several details and called me several times after our visit to add information. Bishop John Hiebert and his friend, John Siemens, gave me a tour of the Reinland church near Vauxhall. Abe Banman, a senior minister in the Kleine Gemeinde church of (Grassy Lake), visited by phone. Daniel Dyck, Bishop of the Friedensfelder, took time to visit as he was preparing to go fishing with his children. Nick Boehlig, Bishop of the Sommerfeld church and Ron Boehlig, a deacon, both visited by phone more than once. Henry Redekopp of the EMMC connected me with their head office in Steinbach, who sent information about their beginnings in Vauxhall. Jacob Wiebe, deacon of the Old Colony in Two Hills, and his wife hosted me for a morning visit. Earlier I also visited with Bishop Henry Wiebe, who lives 20 minutes north of Two Hills. Abe Martens, owner of Double A Trailers in Sherwood Park and Concur Industries in Two Hills, sat with me for an hour. Dave Dyck, employed by Two Hills County, had lunch with me at the local Pizza and Wings shop, and John Klassen, Bishop of the Two Hills Reinland Mennonite church, interrupted his work at Green Hill Building Supplies to help me with some details. Susan Siemens of the La Crete Heritage Center, Bill Janzen of Calgary, Hans Neufeld of Willingdon, and Don Petker (now in BC) were also helpful.



Sommerfeld Mennonite Church NE
of Vauxhall, Alberta

Other References:

- *A Heritage of Homesteads, Hardships and Hope*. 1914-1989 La Crete and Area
- *Then and Now: A History of La Crete*, vol 1. 2020
- *One Quilt, Many Pieces: a Guide to Mennonite Groups in Canada*. Margaret Loewen. 2008
- *Sommerfeld Mennonite Church on the Swift Current Mennonite Reserve*. Henry A Friesen. *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*. Vol XXV No. 1, 2020.
- *Mennonites in the Peace River Country*. Susan Siemens. *MHSA Chronicle*. Vol XXIII No. 1. 2020
- *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church*. Peter Bergen, 2001. Published by the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church, Altona, Manitoba.
- *First Mennonite Settlers in Alberta*. Leonard Doell. *MHSA Chronicles*. June 2014. ❖

Tracing your Low-German Mennonite Family Name back to the Netherlands—don't count on it!

By Glenn H. Penner

Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba, gpenner@uoguelph.ca

The ultimate goal of many Mennonite genealogists is to trace their ancestry, in particular their own family name, back to the Netherlands. The bottom line, with respect to the latter goal, is that you are unlikely to be able to *reliably* trace *your family name* back to the Netherlands. Many have claimed to have accomplished this, but a closer look shows that these genealogical connections are mostly wishful thinking and are often based on wild speculation and unprovable assumptions. By tracing ancestry, I mean reliably tracing every single generation from you to a person with the same surname who was known to have lived in the Netherlands. Simply having a record of a person with your surname emigrating from Holland to Danzig, for example, is useless if you cannot reliably trace your ancestry to that person and establish a real connection. What follows is a critical look at the reliability of the connections which have been made between traditional Low-German Mennonite surnames found in the existing Mennonite population and the Netherlands.

First off, an assumption made by many Mennonite genealogists is that all, or nearly all, of our ancestors were Dutch. Careful analyses of family names and what few historical records we have of the early period of Low-German Mennonite history show that a significant

(See Tracing on page 17)

(Tracing from page 16)

number of our early Mennonite ancestors likely came from Switzerland/Southern Germany, Northern Germany, were part of the German population in Prussia which existed before Mennonites arrived or, in a few cases, were of Slavic (primarily Polish) background. [1-3]

Anabaptists, who were mostly followers of Menno Simons, started arriving in the region of Northern Poland, commonly referred to as "Prussia," in the mid-1500s. By the early to mid-1600s, persecution in the Netherlands had ended, and this migration essentially stopped [4]. Most of this area was part of Poland until the partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795, which put nearly all Low-German Mennonites in the province of West Prussia (the exceptions being the small communities in East Prussia, Masovia, Brandenburg and the newly founded Chortitza settlement in Russia). There are still those who believe that their Low-German Mennonite ancestors emigrated directly from the Netherlands to Russia. This is utter nonsense! The migration to Russia was well documented by both the Prussian and Russian governments, and there is no evidence, none whatsoever, that any Russian Mennonite immigrant came from the Netherlands.

The biggest problem we have is a serious lack of records. Unlike the situation when Mennonites emigrated from Prussia to Russia and later from Russia to North and South America, there were simply no ship lists or any kind of immigration records. These people were religious refugees fleeing the inquisition imposed by the Spanish, who controlled the Netherlands to a region of Poland which did not

officially tolerate heretics. They stayed well below the radar when it came to the civil authorities.

Although many thousands of Mennonites lived in Northern Poland during this early immigration period, we know almost nothing about them from a genealogical perspective. There are several reasons for this:

1) No census of the region from this time period is known to exist. The first census of West Prussia was conducted in 1772/1773 after the Prussian takeover. [5] A census of Mennonites was taken in 1776. [6] Both of these censuses provide only the name of the household head, a count of family members and economic information (occupation, land holding, taxes paid, etc.).

2) Mennonites kept very few church registers during this time period. In 1772 the Prussian government required Mennonites to keep birth, marriage and death records. Only 3 Mennonite church registers are known to have existed before then (Danzig baptism, marriage and death records from 1666 on, [7] Montau baptisms (and marriages) from 1661 (1702) on [8] and the baptism register of the Orlofferfelde congregation, from 1727 on) [9]. Well over half of the church records kept by Mennonite congregations were either destroyed in floods or fires or disappeared during the last days of the 2nd World War.

3) Mennonites did not own land during this time period. Entire villages were rented to groups of families in hereditary leases lasting from 10 to 40 years. The few early lease contracts which have survived simply give the names of the household heads who participated in the leases and, in some cases, only the names of the representatives of those leasing the village.

4) Another problem was that many of the early immigrants from the Netherlands would not even have had permanent family names. Take, for example, a man who might be named Wiebe Janzen and would have been so named because his given name was Wiebe, and he was the son of a man named Jan. His son Peter would have been Peter Wiebe, whose son Gert would have been called Gert Peters, etc. This patronymic naming practice ended by the time the immigration ended and the earliest church records were started. So, even if, theoretically, you could trace your Peters ancestry to a Gert Peters, born in the 1500s, there is no guarantee that his father also had the surname, Peters.

As a result, of the many thousands of Mennonites who would have lived in Prussia from the mid-1500s to the mid-1600s, we know the names of only several hundred. For those found in the earliest Danzig and Montau registers, we have baptism, marriage and death dates but no ages. For those found in lease contracts and other documents, all we have is a name, a date and a location.

Below is a list of *known* Anabaptists who moved from the Netherlands to the Danzig area. This list is based on documented sources, not family legends or speculation. This list uses that found on page 79 of Henry Schapansky's book as a starting point. [2] Note that only surnames still considered to be within the Mennonite community are included.

(See Tracing on page 18)

(Tracing from page 17)

<u>Name Surname</u>	<u>Available Information</u>
Peter Allert	From Delft to Koenigsberg in 1542 and later to Danzig
Martin v. Bergen	Antwerp to Koenigsberg in 1585
Wilhelm v. Block	Mechelin (Flanders) to Koenigsberg before 1670
Gysbert Janz de Veer	Born in Schiedam (Holland), died in 1615 in Danzig
Thomas Franzen	Utrecht to Danzig in 1583
Cornelis Gerbrandtzen	Wormer (North Holland) to Danzig in 1549
Dirk Gerbrandts	Weesp (North Holland) to Danzig in 1549
Johann de Mepsche op den Ham	Ommelands to Danzig in 1580 (died in 1588)
Michael Janszoon	From Oisterhout (Brabant) sometime before 1550 (died 1550; diacon in Elbing Menn. Church)
Hugo Mathias	Born den Haag (Holland) to Prussia
Jan Peters	Gorcum (Zeeland) to Danzig before 1558
Jacob Pieters	Amsterdam to Danzig before 1552
Hendrick v. Rosenfeld	Antwerp to Prussia after 1570
Hans Steffen	Hertogenbosch (Brabant) to Danzig before 1575
Peter Siebert	Friesland to Prussia before 1614
Cornelius Siemens	Amsterdam (Holland) to Danzig before 1552
Jacob de Waal	Amsterdam (Holland) to Danzig before 1549
Adam Wiebe	Harlingen (Friesland) to Danzig in 1616

The problem with this list is that *only one person on the list can be connected to any present-day Mennonites of the same surname!*

It is not possible in this short article to go through every family legend referring to the immigration of an ancestor from the Netherlands. Most of these can easily be dismissed as no more than family mythology. [10] Below, I look at several examples where there might be a solid connection to the Netherlands.

Adam Wiebe (d. 1652). He came from Harlingen in Friesland sometime in the early 1600s. Wiebe was an important civil engineer in the city of Danzig. All attempts to reliably connect Adam Wiebe to later Mennonite Wiebes have failed. Some of these attempts have been fueled by the highly speculative work of Horst Penner, who made unsupported, conjectural claims about Adam Wiebe and his family [11]. I have written a more detailed article about Adam Wiebe and the early Wiebe family outlining why Adam Wiebe could not have been the ancestor of any of the later Mennonite Wiebes [12].

Bastian Esau (1672-1743). Page 675 of the Rosenort (West Prussia) congregational family register [13] includes a short Esau genealogy. This genealogy, however, was added to the family register book, and the handwriting is consistent with it having been added in the first half of the 1900s. Prussian Mennonite genealogists such as Gustav Reimer took the liberty of adding information to many of the original Prussian Mennonite church registers, irrespective of the reliability of that information. The added information states that a man named Bastian [Sebastian] Esau was born in a place called Deuion in "Holland" in 1672, the son of Jacob Esau. No such place has ever been located. The Deutsches Geschlechterbuch [14] has the location as "Denion," which is incorrect – the entry very clearly is "*Deuion*." Later, genealogists equate this with the town of Deinum in Friesland. This is obviously wrong. It would take a very big stretch of the imagination for these to be the same place.

The *Bartholomaeus Tiessen* family. [15] First, it should be pointed out that there were many non-Mennonite Thiessens in Prussia and the Danzig area. The Tiessen book takes several known Mennonite Thiessen families and

(See Tracing on page 19)

(Tracing from page 18)

connects them to these non-Mennonite Thiessens and then connects these to Bartholomaeus Tiessen. It then connects him to a rather famous Thijssen family of Dutch sea captains and admirals. This all seems rather sketchy and appears to have been a case of cherry-picking. However, an inheritance document shows that Bartholomaeus Tiessen had a son Elias. This document is reproduced on page 2 of the Bartholomaeus Tiessen genealogy. This is an excellent example of how proper original documentation can be used to confirm an otherwise dubious genealogical connection. The authors of the Bartholomaeus Tiessen genealogy equate his son Elias to the Mennonite Elias Thiessen. It seems unlikely that there were two Elias Thiessens in Danzig in the mid-1600s. The baptism (1685), marriage (1686) and death (1704) of Elias Thiessen are found in the Danzig Mennonite church records [7]. Unfortunately, none of these records confirms that he was the son of Bartholomaeus Thiessen. The document also mentions a Johann and George Thiessen, who were likely sons of Bartholomaeus Tiessen. These men were definitely not Mennonites. Johann had a son Abraham (1730-1765), who married a Maria Susanna Ewandts and lived in Elbing. This couple has been linked as the parents of a known Mennonite, Jacob Thiessen (1759-1816) of Ellerswald (3rd Trift) [16]. I believe that this link is incorrect. Jacob Thiessen was much more likely to have been the son of Abraham (1712-84) and Helena (1723-77), also of Ellerswald (1st Trift) [17], who were known Mennonites. George Thiessen has

not been connected to the Mennonite Thiessens. So, the question remains – was the *Mennonite* Elias Thiessen the son of Bartholomaeus Thiessen?

One way to check if the Mennonite Elias Thiessen was brother to Johann or George would be to have a descendant of Johann or George do a Y-DNA test. Y-DNA results for male Thiessen descendants of Elias are available.

Peter van Dycke family. The GRANDMA database [18] has a Peter van Dycke (1632-1696; GM#65041) who, it is claimed, originated in Stavoren in the Netherlands and later lived in a place called Ziegneord on the Bay of Stettin, where he died. His son Cornelius moved to Marienburg in Prussia sometime around 1705. The central person in this genealogy is his grandson Jacob Dyck (GM#65048). His family and most descendants are well documented, with reliable and available sources. His ancestry, going back to Peter van Dycke, has some details, but is generally rather sketchy and provides no original sources. Stavoren (Staveren) is a city in the province of Friesland. I have been unable to identify the location Ziegneord. I strongly suspect that this location is actually Ziegenort which is on the bay of Stettin. Records from the Mennonite church of Stavoren are still available. [19] A search of these records for the years before 1686 not only fails to show any members of this family but shows no Dyck families at all. Although there may be some accurate information in the genealogy of this family, it is highly suspect since there is no known source for the information on the early generations other than this material of unknown origin. A much bigger problem comes from the Y-DNA results we have so far for the Dyck men. Y-DNA of the Dyck men who can reliably trace their Dyck ancestry back to Jacob Dyck (GM#65048) match all other Dyck men. Some of these other men can reliably trace their Dyck ancestry back to the 1600s or early 1700s and do not connect with this family. The genetic and genealogical evidence points to a common Dyck ancestor to these men who would have lived in the early 1500s. Considering how common the surname was and is in the Netherlands, it would be an extremely unlikely coincidence that these two families, immigrating nearly 200 years apart, were related.

Johann de Mepsche op den Hamm (d. 1588) and the Mennonite Hamm family. This is another example of where historian Horst Penner has made unsupported, wildly speculative claims about genealogical connections. In his Mennonite Life article [20], he states, "One may certainly suppose that Johann de Mepsche op de Ham, or his descendants, since dropped their title of nobility and have called themselves after their native place, the Ham, near Groeningen." Penner had nothing other than the coincidence of a name (den Ham) to support this statement. A genealogy of the de Mepsche family has since appeared. [21] This genealogy, which appears to be well researched, shows clearly that his descendants were not Mennonite and also that they used the surname "de Mepsche," *not* Ham.

There are several Mennonite families from Danzig who are known to have come from the Netherlands and maintained ties with their Dutch relatives. Such names include: Momber, Vocking, van Beuningen, van Steen, de Veer (later Fehr), Romp and van Almonde. Most of these names either disappeared from the Mennonite community within a few generations or consisted of such a small group within the Danzig congregation that they are hardly considered "Mennonite" surnames. The one important exception is

(See Tracing on page 20)

(Tracing from page 19)

Fehr which is also found in Mennonite communities in Russia, Germany and North and South America. [22]

Note that in various publications the Prussian Mennonite historian Horst Penner [11, 20, 23] made some very speculative claims about possible connections between individual Mennonites in Prussia and those in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. Most of these are based on coincidence, such as a similar-sounding surname, and should not be taken seriously.

Some surnames appear to be associated with locations, possibly within the Netherlands. One should be very careful about claiming that their ancestors came from a particular location. [24] It seems reasonable to associate the families van Riesen (later Friesen) with the city of Rijsen in Overijssel, de Veer (later Fehr) with the town of Veere in Zeeland or Kauenhofen with Couwenhoven, which is a now a small neighbourhood outside Utrecht. There are many other possible associations. Either way, these identifications of possible Dutch places of origin are pointless since we have no

proof that the earliest Mennonites of these surnames came from the associated locations. In fact, with very few exceptions, we have no idea who these early people were to begin with!

The bottom line here is that unless your surname is Fehr (Defehr) or one of the very rare Danzig surnames, you are highly unlikely to be able to reliably trace your Low-German Mennonite family name back to the Netherlands. Many have tried and either given up or created genealogies which are based on speculation, wishful thinking, or are simply fabricated.

References

1. Adalbert Goertz. *The Marriage Records of Montau* in Prussia for 1661 - 1704. MQR 50 (1976) 240–50.
2. Henry Schapansky. *Mennonite Migrations and the Old Colony*. 2006.
3. Alan Peters. *Unraveling the Origins: "How Much Dutch?" California Mennonite Historical Society Bulletin*. Oct 1993, p. 3.
4. Some Mennonite genealogists claim that they can trace their ancestry back to Dutch Mennonites who fled persecution in the mid-1600s. This is not true. The last Dutch martyr was executed in 1597, and persecution died out shortly after. By the mid-1600s many Mennonites were well-to-do and integrated into Dutch society.
5. See: https://archivdatenbank.gsta.spk-berlin.de/midosasearch-gsta/Midosasearch/ii_ha_gd_abt_9/index.htm?kid=GStA_ii_ha_gd_abt_9_2_2. Note that I have extracted all of the images for villages which contained Mennonites from this website. These will eventually be posted at www.mennonitegenealogy.com
6. See here for a translation and analysis of the 1776 census: https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.pdf.
7. See here for transcriptions and translations of the Danzig church record: <https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/>. See here for scans of the originals: [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_\(Teil\)/Danzig_\(Stadtgebiet\)_flaemisch.html](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_(Teil)/Danzig_(Stadtgebiet)_flaemisch.html).
8. See here for transcriptions and translations of the Montau records: <https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/>. See here for scans of the original early registers: [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_\(Teil\)/Montau-Gruppe_-_1661-1813.html](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_(Teil)/Montau-Gruppe_-_1661-1813.html).
9. See here for a transcription of the 1727 Orlofferfelde baptismal register: https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Orlofferfelde_Baptisms_1726-1771_name.htm. Scans of the originals are available here: [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_\(Teil\)/Orlofferfelde_-_1726-1858.html](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_(Teil)/Orlofferfelde_-_1726-1858.html).
10. Glenn H. Penner. *Family Myths and Legends*. Preservings 2018 pp. 37-42.
11. Horst Penner. *Die Wiebes*. Mennonitische Jahrbuch. 1951. Pages 14-21.
12. Glenn H. Penner. *Adam Wiebe and the Early Mennonite Wiebes*. Unpublished manuscript.
13. A scan of the original is here: [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_\(Teil\)/Digitalisate/Mennonitische_Kirchenbuecher/Rosenort_ab_1858_-_Familienbuch_-_KB.RO.01/Weierhof/675-676.jpg](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_(Teil)/Digitalisate/Mennonitische_Kirchenbuecher/Rosenort_ab_1858_-_Familienbuch_-_KB.RO.01/Weierhof/675-676.jpg).

(See Tracing on page 21)

(Tracing from page 20)

14. *Deutsches Geschlechterbuch, Band 133*; Limburg an der Lahn: C. A. Starke Verlag, 1964.
15. Frank Tiessen and Hermann Thiessen. *Bartholomäus Tiessen : 350 Jahre Familientradition*. Hamelin : Niemeyer, 1986.
16. The pastureland known as Ellerwald, which was owned by the citizens of Elbing, was divided into 5 *Triften*. Each "*Trift*" was originally a cattle track between adjacent pastures.
17. Elbing-Neuheide (Prussia) Lutheran death records (which include Mennonites).
18. For more on the GRANDMA database see: <https://grandmaonline.org/gmol-7/gwHelp/userGuide.asp>.
19. These records can be found by searching the Family Search website at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/search> for Stavoren.
20. Horst Penner. *The Background of the Mennonite Family – Hamm*. Mennonite Life, July 1949. P. 16. For a German version see: Horst Penner. *Johann de Mepsche op den Ham*. Mennonitische Geschichtsblaetter. 1951. p. 32-34.
21. Jan Schimmel and Abraham van der Laan. *Het geslacht de Mepsche te Groningen*. <https://toby48.home.xs4all.nl/Mepsche.htm>. Last accessed 22 Apr 2022.
22. Arlette Kouwenhoven. *The Febrs : Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*. Winco Publishing. 2013.
23. Horst Penner. Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen. Weierhof : Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1978.
24. Glenn Penner. *Common Misconceptions and Errors in Mennonite Genealogy: Part 1*. Menn. Hist. Dec. 2019 p. 3. ❖

John Langemann

By Margaret Friesen

In Agnes (Langemann) Thibert's novel "Pathway Through Peril, A Journey of Hope," Russian orphan Ivan is the fictional character taken in as a foster child by the fictional Lentz family and brought to Canada in 1926. In reality, Ivan (John) (Chernauff) Langemann and author Agnes (Langemann) Thibert are foster siblings. For more details of the family story, see Thibert's article "Brave Beginnings" in the June 2021 issue of the MHSA Chronicle.



John Langemann

[Editor's note]

July 16, 2004, by Margaret Friesen (niece of John's wife, Elizabeth Klassen).

My uncle, John Langemann, was a very private man regarding details of his personal life. But one

day, a few years ago, while visiting our home in Calgary, he began talking about his childhood in Russia.

These are John's own words. "I was born on January 3, 1912, in Nelgowka, Russia, near the Sea of Azov. I was the eldest of four children born in the Chernauff family. I remember that my father was sick for five years. He was a taxi driver and owned two fine horses and a carriage. I was allowed to go with my father when he picked people up at the train station or the seaport.

Both my parents died when I was five years old. I was placed in a Mennonite orphanage in Halbstadt with my brother and two sisters. When the Bolsheviks took over the orphanage, my sister and I ended up in a hospital due to malnutrition. My sister died, and I was returned to the orphanage. I was not happy there, so my two siblings and I ran away to our hometown, about 40 kilometres away. We were caught and returned to the orphanage.

When I was about 11 or 12, we were sent to work at various jobs on farms. After two weeks at one place, we were sent to another farm. When I worked at the Langemann farm, the family wanted to keep me, but they had to get permission from the orphanage. The permission was granted. Grandma Langemann was a widow, and her unmarried son, Johann, owned the farm. Eventually, Johan got married and decided to emigrate to Canada. He asked me to come along after receiving permission from the Catholic church. My parents were Orthodox Catholics, and I remember attending



Passport photo of mother Anna, Katie and Hans (John) Langemann
Sept 1926

(See Langemann on page 22)

(Langemann from page 21)

church with my grandmother. I went to Canada in 1926 with Grandma Langemann, her son Johann, and his young family."

That's the story of John Langemann's childhood in Russia.

The Langemann family settled in Coaldale, Alberta, where John worked extremely hard on the farm, helping to eke out a living during those pioneering years. In Coaldale, John made a commitment to Jesus, was baptized, joined the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church and became an active member. John loved farming, but because he was so adept at fixing cars and motors, the Langemann family hired him out as an auto-mechanic at the J.C Friesen Garage in Coaldale. Eventually, John distinguished himself in auto-mechanics, primarily self-taught. He became known far and wide as a guy who could repair any motor. His love of cars went beyond just fixing them. John lived his life at full throttle. John became known for speeding and occasionally taking risks in his younger years. If a car was lying on its roof at the side of the road, your first guess might be that it was John Langemann's car, and you might be right. Not only was John skillful in repairing cars, but he was also highly creative. John's pride and joy was a wind snowmobile he built which was pushed by airplane propellers. He also built a lift when his wife Elizabeth found it difficult to do stairs.

Another adventurist achievement was his attempt to fly an airplane he had bought. Sadly, the first time he took off with it, he crashed it in Dave Epp's field. John walked away without a scratch, marking the end of his flying adventure. But it was not the end of his fascination with propellers. In the 1950's he built an airboat powered by a big engine attached to a huge propeller. Typical of John, he couldn't wait to get the boat to Cultus Lake to try it out. A steering mechanism could always be added later. Any of us lucky to get a ride on the boat will never forget the experience. The steering was carried out by shifting the passengers from side to side as the boat crossed the lake. Once again, the authorities proved they didn't have a sense of humour. John was ordered to keep the boat off Cultus Lake because of safety concerns. In the summer, the family almost lived at Cultus lake. My brother was in the car once as the family drove from Yarrow on the Mountain road to Cultus. John, of course, was speeding. His wife, Elizabeth,

complained, "John, you're going too fast. The speed limit is 30."

John replied, "That's for people who don't know the road." John loved Lincolns and later Russian Ladas. I think a hulk of a Lincoln is still sitting on the Langemann farm.

In 1941 John moved to Yarrow, B.C, where he operated a garage with Dave Derksen. In 1943 he married Elizabeth Klassen. They were blessed with three boys, one of whom, Willy, died in a tragic car accident in 1964.

For many years John worked away from home in the Cattermole Logging Camp and other logging operations where he operated and maintained heavy-duty equipment. He retired in 1995 and, after suffering a stroke, had to be hospitalized. His wife, Elizabeth, spent her last years in the nearby Menno Home. This time was a blessing for them. They spent valuable time together, and some of the years that had been difficult were restored to them. They both loved the church services in the Menno Home. When someone remarked on the change in John, he simply remarked, "God did it."

John passed away on July 12, 2004. He is deeply mourned by son Bob and wife Bev Langemann; grandchildren Joel, Jeremy, and Jolene; five great-grandchildren, son Jim Langemann and son Dick Langemann; and foster siblings Peter Langemann, Kay Cahoon, Anne Dunn and Agnes Thibert. In-laws Dave and Susie Klassen, Cornelius Regier and Elizabeth, and two sisters-in-law, Agatha and Anne Klassen.

Submitted by Agnes
(Langemann) Thibert ❖



John Langemann coming down Central Road with his antique tractor and combine to harvest George Epp's oat crop Aug 1987 Yarrow, BC



4 Close-up of John and his antique tractor and combine

MHSA 2022 Fall Conference Report

By Bill Franz

Over 120 people gathered at the Swalwell Country Church, Linden, Alberta, on October 15, 2022, for the MHSA Fall Conference. It was wonderful to be able to gather in person again. The most recent in-person conference was held in Coaldale in 2019.

Pastor Gary Klassen of the Sunnyslope Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, welcomed us and gave the invocation. He read from Psalms 16, verses 6 and 9. "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance." "Therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body will rest secure." (NIV)

David Quapp had brought a 143-year-old Bible for people to look at. Brent Wiebe had printed large maps from 1850, the Russian Tsarist maps.

Katie Harder, our Master of Ceremonies, shared how the Mennonites came to Russia and provided an overview of Ukrainian and Russian history. She introduced the keynote speaker, Brent Wiebe, an MHSA Board member from Stettler.

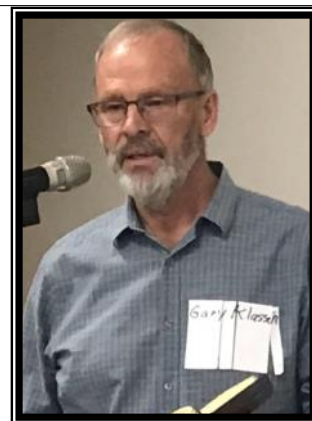
Brent Wiebe presented "Treasures of the Archives: Recently discovered Tsarist maps and the Mennonites." Brent advised on the history of Mennonite migration from what is now Ukraine to the United States and Canada. The Holdeman people mostly came over in the first wave of migration in the 1870s. Brent showed us examples of the virtual reality he's been creating of the 19th-century Russian Mennonite story. Using architectural drawings,

maps, plans, and historical accounts, he recreates what typical Mennonite villages looked like in the Molotschna Colony in the good old days. The Molotschna colony, the second after the original one, Chortitza, was a model colony. Everything had to be built and maintained to standards set by the leader, Johann Cornies.

The General Survey of Russia between 1790 and 1830 was initiated under Catherine the Great. Government surveyors had to distinguish between Flemish and Frisian villages in their maps and survey notes. Chortitza was mapped in the late 1700s, and Molotschna in the 1830s. There is an 1836 map attributed to schoolteacher Heinrich Franz, updated by Cornies in 1840. Brent drew our attention to the differences between Mennonite and Russian maps. Both showed the all-important Chumaks' Way, the wide right-of-way used by traders for hauling goods and also for grazing their oxen that pulled the carts. Mennonite maps did not show the taverns, but Russian maps did, as this is where the traders could overnight and replenish themselves. Brent had photos of Ukrainian and Russian paintings depicting life along the Chumaks' Way.

The virtual realities created by Brent take you away to another time and place that doesn't exist anymore. There are "Wirtschaft" (farms) with house barns, tree plantings, and fences. There are community tree plantations, sheep farms, and many windmills. That way of life is gone, but watching his animations, I felt I was right there in the Molotschna where my ancestors lived.

Brent has shared some of the animations on the MHSA's Facebook group and, in a subsequent post, says the following: *"The point of my presentation wasn't so much the fun of my animations as the introduction of the very impressive 1850 Russian imperial map series. Enter the name of your Molotschna, Chortitza, or*



Pastor Gary Klassen of the Sunnyslope CGCM welcomes the MHSA and gathered participants



Brent Wiebe presenting Treasures of the Archives: Recently discovered Tsarist maps and the Mennonites



Tsarist map of the Molotschna Colony with the Chumok Way running through it, surrounded by the German Colonies and the Douhobour and Moloken Lands

(Conference from page 23)

Bergthal ancestral village to find them on the map." These maps and much more can be found on Brent's web-site, <https://trailsofthepast.com/>.

Duane Klassen of the Holdeman church community around Linden spoke about **Ukraine today and assisting refugees** in this time of need. He and Brent went to Ukraine this past spring. Three local congregations have helped four families come here, with several sending their children to school. The work is ongoing through, for example, the charity Hope For Ukraine. Duane's family also helped Russlaender families that came in the 1920s.

Menno Klaassen, an MHSA Board member from Devon, presented **"Donating your personal papers: The importance of donating that shoebox full of momentos to a Mennonite archive at the end."** He thanked Dave Toews, editor of The Chronicle, for his efforts in getting our family stories recorded. Menno shared three moving personal stories, one of accessing the archives in Winnipeg because family members had made an effort to gather and donate them. Menno also needed his father's signature, who had passed away when he was six. His dad had been the treasurer of an "Armenkasse" (fund for the poor), and Menno could find what he needed in boxes stored away in a Saskatchewan church classroom. Menno's mother passed away recently, and the family had 24 hours to clean out her suite. In a shoebox they didn't know their mom had, they found various documents that she had kept, including a birth certificate, her application to come to Canada, marriage certificates, her five-year diaries, and a personal letter from a general about how her first husband had died.

Conrad Stoesz, the archivist with the Mennonite Historical Archives in Winnipeg,



Foreign traders with ox-drawn wagons on the Chumok Way Ukraine 1830s



Brent Wiebe's computer-generated virtual reality animation, when seen live, the grass is waving in the wind, the windmill blades are turning, and the cows are eating the grass



MHSA Fall Conference participants in the Fellowship Hall of the Swalwell Country Church

told him that many documents are lost when people pass away, and the family doesn't know what to do with them. Menno exhorted us to donate family documents to an archive.

In her closing remarks, MC Katie Harder thanked the presenters for their presentations, which were well received. She also spoke of the upcoming 2023 Russlaender Centenary tour and the events planned for Alberta. Katie appealed for funds for both the Alberta events and the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. She said the MHSA is run by volunteers but needs help with ongoing expenses, such as the rent paid to house the archives. An annual membership costs \$30 and is much appreciated.

Bill Franz then came up to draw names for the door prizes. He first spoke about copies of his book, *Mutti and Papa, A Love Story*. He sells copies directly for \$20, of which \$10 is donated to support the work of the Mennonite Centre Ukraine. Agnes Thibert, author of *"The Farewell Years, Weathering the Storm,"* had generously donated four copies of this, her second novel, to the MHSA. The door prizes were well received.

Murray Baerg then closed the official program of the conference. He led us in a prayer of gratitude for the life we can enjoy in Canada and the delicious Fasma prepared by the ladies of Swalwell Community Church. A time of fellowship rounded out the conference, and many took the opportunity to look closely at the Russian Tsarist maps.



Reverend John Hans Kroeger: Reminiscences

By Henry T. Epp and Jacob Froese,
August 30, 2022

Introduction

Rev John Kroeger passed away on Aug 10, 2021, in Calgary, Alberta. Both authors knew John during the latter years of his life. John hadn't known Henry Epp before, but he mentioned on several occasions that he had known his Aunt Katharina (Tina) Epp, his father's (Henry H. Epp) oldest sister, in Chortitza, Ukraine, in the 1930s. All of us attended Trinity Mennonite Church, first in Calgary and then in the countryside near DeWinton since 2006.

John mentioned that he also had known Henry's father's uncle, David Epp, who had been a pastor in Chortitza. David Epp had been sentenced to house arrest during one of the first of Stalin's purges of "Kulaks" in Ukraine. A person under such house arrest was not allowed food and no doubt was expected to starve to death. The Mennonite people in Chortitza could not allow a person under such house arrest to starve, so they arranged for young boys to bring him sufficient food when necessary. This was what happened in David Epp's case. On a number of occasions, John Kroeger was assigned to deliver food and other items to David Epp's residence.

Rev John Kroeger told Henry the story of his deliveries on sever-



John Hans
Kroeger
(1923 – 2021)

al occasions, always mentioning how grateful David had been for the deliveries and how kind Tina had been to him when giving him the food order. John was only 12 or 13 when he carried out these deliveries.

One day after John had told Henry the story, Henry asked him if he would provide a more complete set of reminiscences of his youth in Chortitza. Henry volunteered to record these reminiscences to publish them at a later date. John agreed, and on Nov 16, 2012, he came to Henry's house, and Henry recorded John's comments. At first, Henry intended to have John speak into a digital recording device, but Henry wound up using his ability to write as fast as anyone could talk and recorded John's comments in that way. Following are John's exact words as he spoke them to Henry in the interview.

Why release this valuable information so many years after it was recorded? The answer is an interesting story in itself, worthy of historical analysis. After reading the transcript which Henry provided John a few days after recording it, John's reply to Henry at first was that this was no more than the worthless prating of an older man, but when questioned, the real reason was revealed. John feared that the Soviets or former Soviets would read his reminiscences and retaliate severely. Their vindictiveness knew no bounds. John's life might be in danger, to say nothing of his family and other contacts. Henry expressed surprise at this reaction, but John was firm that this information not be released during his lifetime. Well, John has passed on, the Soviet Union is no more, and it is time to share his story with the world, at least the Mennonite world within which John has lived.

John also occasionally shared information with Jake Froese, and a summation of this information is provided after that recorded by Henry.

John Kroeger speaks: reminiscences from childhood, as recorded by Henry Epp

My name is John Hans Kroeger. I was born on Apr 26, 1923, in the town of Chortitza in what is now Ukraine and then was part of Russia. Russia itself, at that time, was part of the Soviet Union. I currently live in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

I lived in Chortitza until I was 21, at which time I left for Germany ahead of the retreating German troops. I wish to praise God that I am here in Canada.

I will first provide some generalities that set the stage for this story. The Mennonite people in Chortitza and other villages in Ukraine often were condemned by the Soviets simply because of who they were, regardless of what they had done or whether they were at fault for anything. Such condemnation was also internal, as villages would sometimes condemn local boys who joined the armed forces. In general, the villagers were very insistent that no one kill anyone. Some were not lucky enough to live up to this and regretted it.

My childhood memories are not ordered, which is normal for people. One of my earliest memories is of the old farmhouse. At that time, my family still lived on the land. I remember the names of some of the houses back to age five.

(See John on page 26)

(John from page 25)

The Kroegers didn't have land, but my father married a farmer's daughter, so then my family had land. My Grandfather, David Kroeger, did not have land. He made motors and clocks, and his son, David, my father, also made motors.

Severe changes came in 1929-1930. Stalin confiscated *everything*, all property, animals, and even food. The people were classified as Kulaks, enemies of the state. At age six, I watched all of this, but I did not understand what was actually going on, nor how much my parents suffered. For example, a while after the beginning of the confiscations, my family was evacuated from their large farmhouse. We were sent to a village where most of the people had been massacred by the anarchist Nestor Machno and his followers more than ten years earlier during the Russian Revolution. We spent two weeks there. Some of us were then allowed back to our homes, and others were sent to Siberia.

We moved back into our house. My father's sisters and brothers were still there, as they had not been evacuated. At that time, collectivization began. All property was assigned to collective organizations. The people were told what to do, plough, rake, and so on. Workers were assigned to come together in several places, from where they were sent to work. One problem that soon arose was that people did not necessarily work with horses that they knew and that knew them, creating difficulties and inefficiencies.

At age eight, I started working on a collective farm. The crops were grains, including rye and oats. I managed the cultivator and helped thresh grain. The collective farm had a threshing machine and a motor to run it.

I remember the threshing process. The straw was piled very high with the use of horses to create large, round straw piles. I remember one incident where a horse ran away between the Jewish houses. Eventually, some workers caught the horse. These are some of the bits of unconnected memories I have from when I was eight years old.

In 1935, the family received a permit to build a house on the outskirts

of Chortitza, close to the railway station. We received almost one hectare of land with it for farming



Painting of the "Black Raven" by Heinrich Brogsitter, the ominous black vehicle used by the Soviets to pick up unsuspecting citizens in the middle of the night, Ukraine 1930s



Plowing on a Soviet Collective Farm in Ukraine 1930s

purposes. This enabled us to grow potatoes, corn, and carrots. We then had enough for ourselves and some to give away. We planted some fruit trees and moved in before the winter.

Other bits of memory reflect conditions and the effects of government policies. One policy was that Stalin owned everything. Another policy that did not work out very well was how workers were assigned jobs. For example, many collective farm workers had never been farmers and had no knowledge of farming. Worse than that, people with knowledge started to disappear. This happened night after night. No one came back. Mostly men were sent away, but some women disappeared as well. The gangs would arrive at two or three in the morning. They would turn everything upside down when they entered the house and take the men.

(See John on page 27)

(John from page 26)

It was the Kroeger's turn on March 14-15, 1938. The knock on the door came at 3 a.m. The gang booted the door in and turned everything upside down. They even took a devotional that David Epp had written. They took my father then, and we never saw him again. We did get one small communication from him a week later. My Mother had gone to Zaporozhje and had sent a small package via guards at the gate. She received a paper with my father's signature on it, but that was the last communication we had from him.

After I finished grade eight, I left school to work full-time. My sister Tina was two years older than me and already worked for a collective farm. My oldest brother Abe was a machinist on a collective farm. Starting in 1938-1939, the political mood became very tense, and we knew there was a possibility of war. I remember hearing about the peace treaty that Stalin signed with Germany. In 1939 we heard of the war between Germany and Poland.

At this point, I would like to backtrack a bit and talk about how the church affected our lives. We still had a church when I was a small child, even after the Soviets took over. We had an anti-religious program at school with obligatory attendance. The church building was next to the school. The Soviets painted the windows black on the side of the school facing the church, likely so the children would not see the symbol of a religion they were trying to stamp out. In this regard, I remember my Grade two Christmas. However, the church still had a Christmas tree, and I told my Mother I wanted to



Mennonite Church in Ukraine boarded up by the Soviets

see the tree. I was determined to do that. Mother said she couldn't help me and that I should make my own decision based on my conscience. So, that evening I went to the church to see the tree. An important point to make here is that there was a brick fence around the church with two steel gates. At the gates stood young communists who wrote down the names of people who went to church on Christmas eve.

On Christmas day, there was school as usual, and I had to face retribution for my behaviour. I had to write down a dictation that included the name of Lenin. Unfortunately, I misspelled Lenin's name, adding an extra "n" at the end. Another student discovered this error as we corrected each other's work. The student who had my work said I had been in church yesterday and couldn't spell Lenin's name correctly today. Because of that, I had to stay after school and write out Lenin's name 100 times or so. This person came to Canada, too and remained my friend over the years, although he would not acknowledge his deed. He has since passed on. A year or two later, the Government closed the church and made it into a theatre. This has not been recorded in the history books.

In June of 1941, war broke out. At that time, everyone, including women, children, school students, and even sick people, was mobilized to dig about 10 feet deep ditches. This was done to stop the German advance. The mood was tense everywhere. All the workers on the collective farms were obligated to participate in constructing a highway out of Zaporozhje. Each collective had a specific stretch of road to build. I was called to help build a 50-kilometre stretch of road south of Zaporozhje. Some of this was levelled, graded, and paved, but the road was never finished.

When war broke out (a Sunday), the collective farm leader called all the men together and sent some to bring the horses back, and I was one of these. When the wagons were near the city, we already heard German airplanes. These were observer planes, so no bombs were dropped.

We arrived at night and found that the Russians had panicked. They had good reason. After the beginning, the war went fast, and in two months, the Germans were in our village.

During the first two months after the war started and the Germans

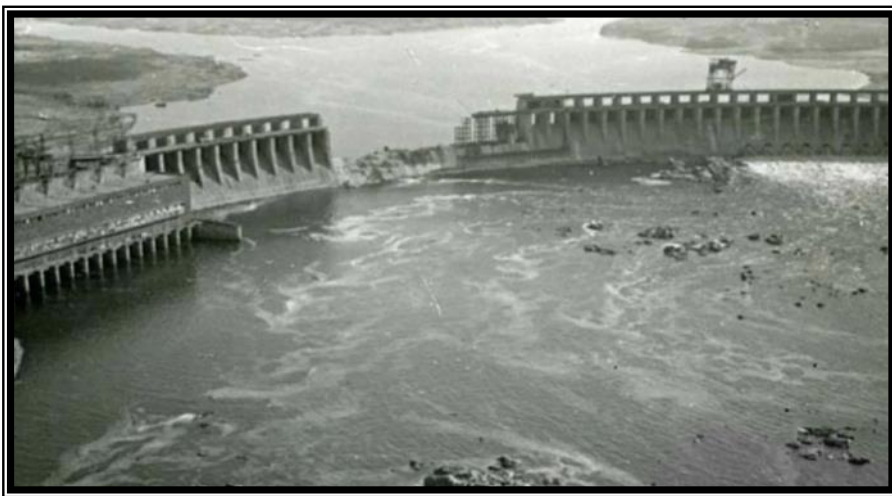
(See John on page 28)

(John from page 27)

came, the Russians evacuated all livestock from the village and area and moved it to the east. The animals were driven across the Dnepr River on the bridges, away from the approaching Germans. There were two bridges in the area, and both were still standing. One bridge connected Chortitza Island to both sides of the river, and the other bridge was to the east. Three other Mennonite boys and I were picked to drive the animals across the river.

The time of this activity was August. It was raining a lot, and the grain was beginning to ripen. We drove the cattle to the south end of the city of Zaparozhje. Our Foreman came and went several times during this time of uncertainty. We rested the cattle for two days and were then told to drive them farther to the east. At that time, against orders, I decided to go home. I went to the city, jumped on a streetcar, and went west. I went to the Dnepr River, where the electro-dam was, and crossed it to Chortitza.

Crossing the river was going to be a problem, and I had to plan how to do this so I would not be caught. Being caught would have been bad, as I might have been shot. I watched what was going on on the electro-dam for a while, and then I saw my chance. I saw a group of students going back and forth across the electro-dam, carrying materials. When a group went west, I simply jumped on a streetcar with them and went with them unnoticed. From the river bank, it was five kilometres to home, and I ran all the way. Mother and my brother saw me coming. They asked me what I was doing, afraid the Russian village leader would shoot me, so in the morning, I said I would go back.



The Electro-dam at Zaparozhje Ukraine blown up by the Russians in WWII Apr 29, 1941

I went back across the bridge and east to Zaparozhje, through the city and on to where the horses were kept. The Russian who owned the barn had nothing for me to do there, so he suggested I go home. He wrote a letter to Koslov, the Russian in our village who had sent me and who would have shot me if I had arrived on my own without approval from someone in authority. The letter instructed Koslov to let me return and not shoot me.

I left the next day, walking 50 kilometres. When I got there, the air raid sirens were going in the city, and all traffic had stopped. I made it across the city to the bridge, but getting across to the west was worse than the first time. However, I did manage to do that and arrived home late the next day, Saturday.

My Mother was glad to see me. Early the next morning, my cousin ran up and told us that the Germans were in the village and had been there already the evening before. The Russians were all gone. On their way east, the Russians blew up the bridge and a section of the electro-dam. Many Russians were killed in the process, as some had still been on the structures when they were blown up. I learned later that the group leader who had taken the herd east had also gotten home. After that, we were in the German occupation zone.

Encounters with the Elder John Kroeger: as recorded by Jacob Froese

I became acquainted with Reverend John Kroeger shortly after I arrived in Alberta in 1979. My wife, Verna, and I and our kids moved to Edmonton from Saskatoon so that I could take on a church outreach program there. One year after our arrival, I became Pastor of the new congregation in north Edmonton, birthed with much process and support from the mothering church, First Mennonite. Naturally, this also included affiliation and cooperation with what was then known as the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta. For at least six of those early years, I served on a Ministers and

(See John on page 29)

(John from page 28)

Deacons (M&D) Committee, which was charged with "all things deacon," including organizing annual M and D conferences. These were geared for encouragement, training, and possibly the inspiration for the clergy serving among us, as well as a more recreational M and D retreat, usually in the spring of each year. In those years, Rev Kroeger from Calgary provided considerable encouragement and affirmation for my style of ministry — a significant thumbs-up coming from one who seemed wise in the ways of Christian service. He himself served with the Conference in a unique position, and, as I discovered, he also did it in his own unique way.

John Kroeger had a designation as City Missionary. Ostentatious (?) as the title sounded, it did not take long to learn that this position was not assigned by his home church, First Mennonite Calgary, but with loose accountability to the Conference. Needless to say, with this rather conspicuous title, he showed up at M and D occasions duly planned by us Committee members. Small of stature, John nevertheless was a significant presence at these meetings. We appreciated his support for the work we were trying to do and usually accommodated some critique. After all (at least myself), we were only learning the trade, where he seemed to have great experience. As circumstances, or Divine Providence, would have it, eventually, my pastoral ministry moved to Calgary. It afforded me more opportunities to become acquainted with this unique, deeply devoted, slightly troubled elder. Eventually, he became a member of Trinity Men-

nonite, the church of which I was now Pastor.

From hereon, I offer comments only. They are but anecdotal, not researched and are not even thematic other than to share what may be an emerging theme for my friend Henry Epp, who is gathering some posthumous information. I appreciate his efforts and am happy to add whatever may be of assistance for his purpose.

Rev Kroeger was always happy to receive a phone call. He would respond with what seemed to me inner delight, a desire to get together and talk, and a hint that he wished more people would take the time. Many conversations revolved around the city missionary work with which he had been loosely charged, often including a story of an incident or two from his Russia or Paraguay years. Needless to say, Mr. Kroeger was an "easy visit," Although he was available for whatever time I had, he respected my time frame and boundaries. When I identified the time of departure, he respected it. We would pray for each other, and then I would be off to the next appointment, task, or whatever.

Through these conversations, I understood why we often experienced him in our meetings as a bit of a know-it-all in my early pastoring years. In these latter years, speaking with him either in his living room or woodshop (gifted craftsman) or before or after a church service, I slowly began to recognize a spiritual awareness (anointing?) which was indeed beyond the ordinary things we busied ourselves within our Mennonite communities. He was bored with empty, meaningless things, just like I was, and we recognized that about each other. His stories went beyond gossip or the mundane! For example, several years before his death, I heard of his relationship with a Catholic priest. This priest, according to the story, was struggling with some personal issues, and the story highlighted how John was trying to help him spiritually. After I heard the story several times, I recognized this as probably some unfinished agenda (quite common not only among pastors but professionals of any stripe). Upon further thought, I realized he regularly hobnobbed among people of other backgrounds, other mores or folkways, as the sociologists would say. Although he spoke like an old pious preacher, the topics betrayed his considerable interest well beyond the boring.

One time we were talking about neighbours. I got into saying something positive about some Mormon friends. He too! He promptly got into a story also — unfortunately, the details have slipped by me — but I recall his readiness to hear me in my emerging belief that God is so much beyond the things in our conventions, certainly beyond our Mennonite history. In hindsight, I recognize this as an identification of a theological trend we held in common. (Kind of reminds me of Henry's interviews which portray him as a pious soldier, kind of spiritually in between his Mennonites and "those others.")

I should mention that this holy restlessness also included some good reflections about one of his nieces having married a cousin nephew of mine. I have a brother who, with his wife, has spent a whole lifetime in peace activism in Colorado. It was during the 1970s that they met, and the radical lifestyle of pacifist Christians became vogue in my family as well as with these folk. No longer in that age grouping, yet John was totally interested in the reality and the need for peace ministry. Always an update was

(See John on page 30)

(John from page 29)

needed for John regarding goings-on over there.

I recall some things about my good friend, Rev John Kroeger. One time John and I even discussed a contemporary book I had read, *Falling Upward* (Jossey-Bass, 2011), by Father Richard Rohr. It's about how to live the second half of life differently, not plugging away at first-half goals but making healthy, realistic grace-filled adjustments. We smiled a bit during that visit.

John Kroeger's legacy, as viewed from these reminiscences

We strongly disagree with John's assessment of his recorded comments, outlining some of his experiences as a young boy in the village of Chortitza in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s. John's comments unconsciously depict a personality of great courage and resourcefulness and an almost eerie ability to survive in unbelievably difficult circumstances. And throughout it all, he kept a cool head and made rational decisions that saved his life. His decision at a very early age to embrace Christianity in the face of unrelenting pressure to the contrary from the Soviets resonates further in favour of a determined, insightful, and highly intelligent character. This contrasts sharply with his recently expressed aversion to having former Soviets read about him.

The comments recorded by Henry Epp present a child as remembered by the adult John Kroeger, and the observations presented by Jacob Froese demonstrate a full adult in his later years. Together they depict an intelligent and courageous child and a man who was handed a lemon right from the start and did what he could to make life better for himself and all those around him. Despite a nearly endless array of early negative events, this is the story of a man who made a genuine success of his life and positively affected those people with whom he came in contact.

John's reminiscences and those of people who knew him are well worth recording and placing into posterity for all their brevity. It is further the story of a man who, despite a deprived childhood, became a successful, well-functioning adult in what to him was at first a foreign country. And his deprivation in early life is difficult for those of us who grew up in Canada to imagine, but it was enormous. Not only was John's childhood governed by famine and physical need right from the start, but an administration spiritually deprived it determined to eliminate all spirituality from life and aggressively enforced that, literally on pain of death. And, with a supportive family, out of all this rose a man who became a Pastor in a foreign land, made an adequate living, and successfully raised a family in what, to him, was an environment which required frequent adjustment.

John's reaction to reading Henry's transcription of his interview comments is of historical interest. Henry asked himself if this was a common reaction or if it was unique to the individual. Henry didn't follow up on this immediately, but his interest was

further piqued when he read a similar response in a woman's memoirs, a person John likely knew in his childhood. The person was Anna Sudermann, a sister-in-law to Tina Epp's sister, Elisabeth Sudermann. Anna's opinion on Soviet world influence, desire, and ability to exact revenge are eerily similar to John's unexpected reaction.

In her *Memoir* (1951 and 1960, Unpublished Manuscript in possession of Henry Epp), Anna expresses fear of an imminent takeover of North America and the rest of the world by the Soviet Union. She writes (1951): "...the general political situation is so threatening, that dire happenings could occur any day..." She writes later (1960): "The technical superiority of Soviet Russia in terms of armament and space travel is incontestable," expecting a takeover at any time. Importantly, these are not the vague fears of paranoiacs but of well-adjusted persons living in Canada long after their Soviet experiences, even though the fears are unrealistic.

Clearly, neither John Kroeger nor Anna Sudermann could ever shake the fear of a Soviet takeover, so deep were the wounds of mistreatment and living in a spy-ruled, totalitarian society ingrained in memories and personality. Both authors wonder if this is a common phenomenon among refugees from totalitarian states or if these are simply isolated incidents. They would appreciate hearing from people who have had similar experiences with friends and relatives who escaped to Canada from oppressive totalitarian states. This seems like a historical theme worth exploring. ♦



Henry Epp

Henry A Kroeger

Submitted By Ernie Toews, Calgary

Heinrich A Kroeger was born in Neu Chortitza, Baratov Colony, Russia/Ukraine, in 1912 and came to Canada in 1923 with



Henry A Kroeger
(1912 - 2002)

the rest of the Kroeger family. Henry was the youngest of Abram and Maria Kroeger's children, twenty years younger than his oldest brother Abram.

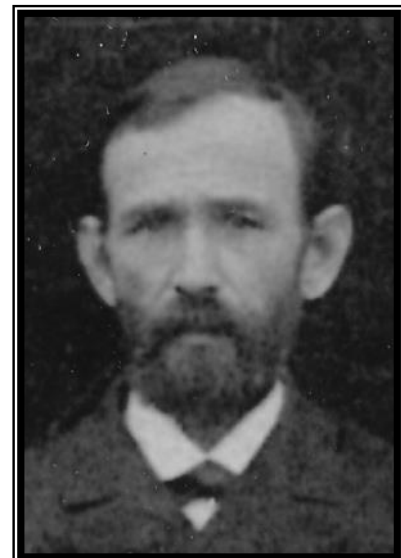
My Uncle Henry told a story at the Kroeger reunion in Hanley, Saskatchewan, on July 29, 2000, that I had never heard before. He said prior to the famine years following the Russian Revolution, his father Abram had built a secret hiding place in the barn loft for grain storage. Access was by a small panel that his father would periodically remove and lower the nine-year-old Henry into. Henry would retrieve some grain that would be ground into flour for baking bread. This hiding place was a secret between Grandpa Abram and Uncle Henry and helped keep the family from starvation. Ernie Toews, Calgary.

Stories from the Russian Revolution by the late Henry Kroeger

There were always military soldiers; they would stay overnight, stay for weeks on end. I don't know whether the soldiers felt they should provide security in the village, and I don't know if they did. An officer of higher rank had a

beautiful double-barreled muzzleloader shotgun and had gone out hunting. Somehow, I guess he got the caps wet, and it wouldn't fire. He had unplugged the barrel and put it by the stove to dry. My brother Peter came in and looked at the fancy gun; he took it up, aimed it at the window, and cocked it. "Wouldn't that be nice" he pulled both triggers and "bang" and blew both windows out. The officer seemingly wasn't too mad about it; he said, "oh well," the barrels have expanded, I'll have them cut off, and that is alright; he wasn't too excited about it.

This happened during the Revolution when things were very restless, and governments changed daily. If that happened to surprise some of the other side, they always had to do away with them, and this happened in our house. Suddenly, the yard was full of riders and wagons with machine guns mounted on top of them. They brought in four prisoners and held the court in our living room. Everybody in our family was excited by what was happening because we had already heard that they would execute these men. Father Abram knew one of the accused men. He said, "I am going to go in there, talk to the officials and try to save the man," Everyone in the family said, "you are taking your life in your hands," Father said, "I don't care, I am going in." He went into the living room, and they listened to him when he told them what he said about this man, "I know this man, and he is not guilty of what you are accusing him of; he hasn't done anything like that." The officers said, "On account of your word, what you said about the accused, we will let him go," The freedman took off immediately. The other three were executed; I remember one they took him to the neighbour's manure pile and shot him there; I can still hear the shot! I don't know if I should go into the grizzly details, but the other two were taken up to the dam at the end of the village and to save shells, they just cracked their heads open with the sword and threw them into the ravine.



Abram A Kroeger
(1863 - 1940)

We reap what we sow

Several years later, when we were getting ready to leave Russia, we had problems with our papers. Father had to go to an office, and the officials there were reluctant to give him the documents. No doubt they wanted extra money under the table; father wasn't prepared to do that. Then suddenly, another man came into the room, looked at my father and asked. "What is the problem here? Father Abram said he was having problems getting his documents. The man said, "I know this gentleman," "Years ago, he saved my life and in no time, my father had the necessary papers. ❖



Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

presents the Alberta portion of the

Cross Canada Russlaender 100 Tour - July 2023

in partnership with the

Canadian Mennonite Historical Society and TourMagination



Thurs. July 20, 2023 - 4:00 PM tour arrives at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village east of Edmonton for a tour, authentic Ukrainian meal, plus a discussion with Mennonite and Ukrainian historians

- **7:30 PM** tour departs for overnight stay in Red Deer

Fri. July 21, 2023 - 11:00 AM arrive at Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, for lunch, Russlaender sponsorship accounts, map of Mennonite Churches of Alberta today, posters showing when various Mennonite settlers first came to Alberta and heritage piano selections



- **4:00 PM** tour arrives at the CC Toews (Evergreen) Farm, Linden, for sharing Russlaender sponsorship stories, entertainment by Cowboy Poet Doris Daley and a western barbeque supper

- **7:00 PM** tour leaves for Edmonton for evening departure to Abbotsford, BC

All locals are invited to purchase tickets at each location and participate
“Preregistration is required” email DaveToews at dmtoews@gmail.com

For complete tour information, see the TourMagination website
<https://tourmagination.com/tour/cross-canada-russlaender-centenary-tour/>