



# HERITAGE POSTING

Newsletter of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

No.30 September 2000

## 1,500 attend to see West Reserve mark 125

by Elmer Heinrichs

Mennonites from the original East Reserve, *Jandsied*, from Winnipeg, and many other points came to Fort Dufferin on the Red River near Emerson to join Mennonites in the former West Reserve July 16 in celebrating 125 years of life here in Manitoba's Red River Valley.

Fort Dufferin came alive again when approximately 1,500 persons in comfortable shirt-sleeve weather overflowed a large tent at an afternoon worship and celebration program Sunday to commemorate the arrival of their forefathers here in mid-July 1875.

In a call to worship and prayer, John J. Friesen noted the resourceful and bold men and women who immigrated to Canada from Russia. The congregation responded wholeheartedly with a hymn "To God Be the Glory".

Scripture readings in German and English of Deuteronomy 8:10-18 by Henry G. Rempel and by Rev. Dave Dueck "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God"... to follow every command so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land.

Greetings by Adolf Ens, on behalf of our Society, included appreciation for the participation of co-host, town of Emerson, and many volunteers.

Elmer Penner, representing Emerson Mayor Wayne Arseny, hailed it as a significant day, noting how many generations of Mennonites have grown up here building towns and churches. He added that Fort Dufferin was a unique site, one of beginnings, and urged pressure to preserve it.

Greetings from government representatives by Jacob Hildebrand, for Rhineland RM Reeve John Falk; Emerson MLA Jack Penner; Pembina MLA Peter George Dyck; and by Provencher MP David Hody, presenting a Canada certificate of appreciation for the Mennonite people. Good wishes from Portage-Marquette MP Jake Hoepfner were read.



Flags today mark the entrance to historic Fort Dufferin on the Red River near Emerson where Mennonites first landed in 1875 to begin settlement of the Manitoba West Reserve. Mennonites returned to the site 125 years later for a worship and celebration program in a large tent on July 16. The Canada-U.S. Boundary Commission headquartered here in 1872, and then in 1873 it was the staging ground for the North West Mounted Police's historic March West. (Elmer Heinrichs Photo)

Doris Penner, for the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum board, noted the unique churches and house-barns, common on the West Reserve, and a common faith in God. Orlando Hiebert conveyed greetings to the West from Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

Karen Peters, chair of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee of the East Reserve, which celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> in 1999, cited her own roots here in the West Reserve. Suggesting Mennonites recognize the influence of many cultures, she presented an East 125<sup>th</sup> afghan to the West.

Rev. Peter D. Zacharias referred to Psalm 137, to recall memories of the first Mennonites arrival here on the West Reserve. "They found leaving Russia hard, arrived here, and then had to wait. But they were a people of hope and respect. Mueller led the organization of villages, planting of trees, etc. Johann Wiebe organized a church, and when people moved out to the villages they began digging shelters in the ground. These were men, women and youth of vision."

A drama "Their Tears, Our Sheaves" written by Wilmer Penner, directed by Henry G. Ens, told the story of two families who with many others left Russia and after a long and tedious voyage disembarked at Fort Dufferin near Emerson in July, 1875. A scene depicts the struggle of quite a few settlers: to remain in Manitoba or to accept an invitation to go to Kansas.

After another congregational hymn "Nun Danket Alle Gott" Rev. John I. Peters, of the Sommerfeld Church, offered a brief meditation based on Proverbs 29:18 and one of the psalms. "We thank our forefathers - they worked hard, lived in semlins and broke the virgin soil. They kept the faith and passed it unto us. And God has blessed us financially and spiritually."

Long-time MCI teacher and principal Gerhard Ens, in closing remarks, suggested the Reinländer - often misunderstood - who first came in 1875 were really "a renewal church. "This time too should be a time of renewal. Let us be a waiting church," added Ens, closing with prayer.

Faspa with farmer's sausage, sightseeing where settlers came ashore, and a Christian music concert with modern and old-style singing, by groups including the Hutterite and Old Colony Mennonites.

## The Life Story of Ältester (Bishop) Jakob Hoepfner in Manitoba

by Lawrence Klippenstein

Jakob Hoepfner, a future Ältester (bishop) in Manitoba, was the second child (b. 10 August 1850) of Jakob (1822-1885) and Katharina Thiessen (1819-1899). Hoepfner lived on the "Kaump", the island of Chortitza off the eastern shore of the Old Colony settlement of Chortitza. The island (Insel Chortitza) was also the site of the first homestead of Jakob Hoepfner, the delegate to New Russia, who travelled from Prussia in 1786-1787, with Johann Bartsch to look over the area for settlement. The deputy was Ältester Hoepfner's great grandfather.

Jakob had five siblings, he being the third of six children. He married Aganetha (b. 19 September 1853), the daughter of Peter and Aganetha (?) Dyck (Dueck), on 24 August 1873. They had twelve children, six of whom survived infancy. It would seem that the family lived at Michaelsburg in Fürstenland for a time before emigrating to Canada.

The family left south Russia on 12 May 1876 and arrived at Fort Dufferin (West Lynn) on 24 July that summer. After two days they took up temporary residence with the Frank Klassens in Blumenfeld south of present-day Winkler. From there they moved to Hochfeld where he was a teacher for a year. Then for a short while they lived at Waldheim, the home village of his parents with three of the Ältester's siblings, Heinrich, Agnetha (listed as servant, hence possibly a foster child), and Anna.

Hoepfner brought new approaches to his teaching in Hochfeld. The children learned songs not found in the old Gesangbuch, but did not have approval of the church authorities for using them. At Schanzenfeld he became active in the organization of Bible study groups, home Sunday school, and more singing of the newer hymns. These new activities, which soon involved Hoffnungsfeld and Burwalde, were not appreciated in the Reinländer Mennonite church.

Hoepfner took an active role in the development of the Bergthaler community of congregations under the leadership of Ältester Johann Funk from 1882 on. Hoepfner was ordained to the ministry of the Bergthaler church in 1887 under the guidance of David Stoesz for the East Reserve. His preaching was much appreciated, and became an important element in the Bergthaler renewal movement of the 1890s.

Hoepfner also became deeply involved in the furtherance of higher education, more specifically the development of the Gretna Normalschule (later Mennonite Educational Institute) which was opened in 1889. The debates leading to a break in the school constituency had him lined up on the side of Heinrich Ewert and the opening of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute after 1908. Some differences with Ältester Funk resulted from these debates on the building of the new schools in Altona and Gretna which occurred during these years.

On 19 March 1903 Jakob Hoepfner was asked to serve as Ältester in the Bergthaler Gemeinde along with Ältester Johann Funk. That gave him major leadership involvements in the creation of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1902-1903, especially its first sessions held at Hochstadt in the summer of 1903.

In 1911, early in the year, Jakob Hoepfner was asked to become the leading Ältester of the Gemeinde, as Johann Funk asked to be relieved of his heavy duties. Hoepfner had a lot of his time to home visitations in the next years. Much attention had to be devoted also to matters of counselling and discipline. In 1920, a year after he and Aganetha had moved to Winkler, Hoepfner asked the church to find a successor for him as Ältester. That did not happen, however, till 5 November 1925 when David Schulz, a well-respected though youthful minister was elected to serve as Ältester. Schulz took over his duties the following year.

Hoepfner had some difficulties with the transition but continued to work with the church as he could till he passed away in 1936 at the age of 86 years. His second wife,



Aganetha and Jakob Hoepfner. Photo credit: Gerbrandt, H.J., *Adventure in Faith*, p.79.

Katharina, the former Mrs. Heinrich Harder, had died the year before in Winkler at the age of 72. Two sons, Jacob (d.1929) and Peter (d.1936), and one daughter, Maria, (d.1919) predeceased him. Surviving him in the family were Anna (d. June 1965), m. to Jacob Toews; Katharina (d.28 November 1970); and Agnetha (d.23 August 1971), m. to Frank Peters. Ältester Hoepfner lies buried in the cemetery at Winkler.

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The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter, *Heritage Posting*, welcomes letters and reports pertaining to the historical interests of society members. Correspondence can be mailed to Bert Friesen, 169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2L 2E5, or e-mailed to the editor at editor@mmhs.org

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## Old Colony Church in Manitoba, 1875-2000

by Rev. Abraham E. Rempel

### Editor's Note:

*The Old Colony Mennonites who came to Manitoba from Russia in the 1870s were mostly from the Chortitz and Fürstenland Colonies. They were members of the Chortitz Flemish Church, whose Fürstenland affiliate had its own Ältester in Johann Wiebe. In church affiliation they were thus distinct from the Kleine Gemeinde (which had separated in the Molotschna Colony in 1812) and the Bergthaler, who had become a separate colony and Gemeinde in Russia in 1836.*

*In the 1920s the Reinländer (Old Colony) Church, with groups in Manitoba, Hague, and Swift Current emigrated to Mexico. For a variety of reasons (such as the education question) not all went because some were willing to accommodate their thinking and compromise and so were able to justify staying in Manitoba. The group that remained in Manitoba took some time to reorganize. In the meantime many joined another local group, usually the Sommerfelder. The following article describes that new beginning.*

*Since the 1940s there has been much inter-Mennonite activity among many of the Manitoba groups, including the Old Colony Church. They have worked together with MCC, senior homes, hospitals, and local services. Few divisions have occurred. The Old Colony group has made an impact in Manitoba that is to be remembered.*

Today there are seven Old Colony Congregations or Gemeinden in Canada. At the time of migration to Mexico in the 1920s there were three - one in Manitoba and two in Saskatchewan. Prior to the 1920s they were known as the *Reinländer*. The reorganized Gemeinde in 1936 was officially then the Old Colony Church.

The original Gemeinden prior to the 1920s were founded when the Mennonites migrated from New Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s. The Gemeinde in Manitoba was founded in 1875 under Ältester Johann Wiebe. The Hague-Osler Reserve Gemeinde as established in 1895 and the Swift Current Reserve Gemeinde in 1905. After the migration to Mexico in the 1920s only the Hague-Osler Reserve Gemeinde continued to officially exist. With the assistance of Ältester Hamm of the Bergthaler Church, Johann Loeppky of the Osler area was elected as their Ältester. This Gemeinde then became officially the Old Colony Mennonite Church.

In Manitoba the Old Colony meeting house in Reinland was sold to the Russländer Gemeinde as were most of the

others. The only one remaining as an Old Colony meeting house was in the street village of Chortitz on the West Reserve. Only one third of the Old Colony members from Manitoba remained after the 1920s migration. There was tension between the Mexican and Manitoba groups. The Manitoba group did not have an Ältester.

Many Old Colony members in Manitoba worshipped with the Sommerfelder. Some ministers and Ältester returned from Mexico to hold services, serve communion, and urge them to migrate to Mexico as well. They also received visits from Ältester Johann Loeppky from Saskatchewan who held baptismal, wedding, and communion services in Manitoba. During these years meetings were held to explore reorganizing the church in Manitoba. On 25 June 1936 the first elections were held for church leaders in Manitoba presided by Ältester Johann Loeppky. Jacob Froese was ordained as minister and Peter Friesen as deacon. Further elections were held in November 1936, June 1937, November 1937, January 1939, and March 1939. This reorganized Gemeinde was officially known as the Old Colony Mennonite Church of Manitoba.

There are four meeting houses in Manitoba. The original building in Chortitz, built in 1881 was used until 1967 when it was replaced. The original building was moved to the Steinbach Heritage Village. The other three meeting houses are in Rosetown, Blumenfeld, and Reinfeld.

The relations with the Gemeinde in Mexico remained difficult. The Manitoba Gemeinde was willing to work with the Mexican group but the Mexico group was not as interested. Mexico members who moved back to Manitoba were not released from membership so that they could transfer their membership to the Manitoba Gemeinde. The Manitoba Gemeinde accepted these individuals on the basis of their faith confession. Often these individuals were "im Utschluss" because they had used rubber tires. The Manitoba Gemeinde did not recognize this as valid. Letters were written to Mexico on the matter but no response was forthcoming. Since then some colonies in Mexico have become more understanding, have allowed the use of rubber tires, and so relations have improved with the Gemeinde in Manitoba. To date no Old Colony minister from Manitoba has preached in an Old Colony meeting house in Mexico. However, on an individual basis, relations have improved. I have sat with the ministers at funerals in Mexico and have held several services in the Altenheim by Cuahatemoc.

In closing I would like to say that I think we must give credit to our forefathers. They endured hardships and trials in their efforts to keep the faith, and to stay separate from the world.

May God grant that as we look at the past we may see the good that has been done, that we may treasure the heritage left to us and build on these foundations that other have laid.

## 125<sup>th</sup> West Reserve Celebration Acknowledgements

by Lawrence Klippenstein

The main events of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations for the West Reserve have now been completed. These events would not have happened without the help of a large number of supporters and volunteers, and we want to acknowledge them for the readers of this newsletter. A list of those giving special assistance follows below.

### The Fort Dufferin event, 16 July 2000

The KOA Camp near Fort Dufferin for providing picnic tables, Sun Valley Co-op for helping with seating in the tent, CBC and especially CFAM/CHSM for giving air time, the Chortitz Christian Academy for the tent, the town of Emerson with Mayor Wayne Arseny and the Post Road Heritage Society with Dick Remus for helping to prepare the grounds, Jerry Friesen of Neubergthal for offering platform facilities, the Altona Male Quartet for bringing a piano, Wilmer Penner for scripting the drama, Ken Braun for bringing some extra tents, all those who took part in the programme, especially the drama group led by Henry G. Ens and Wes Hamm, Mary Sawatzky for bringing out a catering group from Lowe Farm to provide a fasma (light lunch), the ushers in the tent and on the grounds directed by Corny Driedger and Dick Hildebrand, and many volunteers to fill in the gaps.

(cont. on p.4)





Neubergthal residents Henry F. Hamm, Cody Friesen, Kirsten Hamm and Helene Klippenstein with newly-unveiled plaque designating the Mennonite street village as one with historical significance. (Elmer Heinrichs Photo)

## Neubergthal designated historic site at homecoming

by Elmer Heinrichs

The population of the village of Neubergthal southeast of here more than tripled at its July 1 homecoming and the unveiling of a Parks Canada plaque with a commemorative inscription designating the Mennonite street village as one with national historical significance.

The unveiling by two of Neubergthal's oldest and two of its youngest residents on Canada Day on the schoolyard near the old cemetery revealed a plaque with a maroon background and gold lettering, standing about 1 m. high. It also features three pictures, as well as text in English, French and Low German.

At the ceremony program, William Neville, Manitoba representative on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada said the board advises Parks Canada on matters relating to Canada's history to ensure that people, places and events are recognized.

"Immigration has shaped the history of the country," said Neville, citing Neubergthal as an example of a Mennonite street village, which retains historical and archaeological significance.

Jake P. Hamm, an 83-year-old village resident, extended an official welcome and applause in accord broke out when he suggested that Canada was the best country in which to live.

Historian Adolf Ens, presenting background to the occasion, said in the 1870s when both the United States and Canada were eyeing westward expansion, Mennonites accepted an invitation from Canada to settle in Manitoba. Mennonites in church groups came transplanting a way of life from the steppes of Russia to the wide-open Canadian prairies.

The designation recognized the Mennonite street village as an example of settlement that showed that the open western prairies could be successfully settled.

"The village, a unique expression of community, practiced a unique equality where school and church were closely connected with a family oriented administration."

"A wide street, the planting of poplars and linking barns to houses in a prairie Mennonite village provided a successful pattern of settlement on the open Prairies," added Ens.

Greetings were extended by Emerson MLA Jack Penner, Altona Deputy-Mayor Terry Wiebe, Rhineland Reeve John Falk, and Alf Redekopp, president, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. It was briefly noted that Mennonites often settled on land others by-passed, and that Mennonites here - those settling west of the Red River - are now marking their 125th anniversary.

In an address on behalf of Parks Canada, Ms. Dawn Bronson suggested "heritage really does

give us a glimpse of ourselves. This village connects people to each other, with a local interest in preserving the past.

"Parks Canada hopes Canadians will continue to be advocates of preservation," she said.

Neubergthal today consists of about 100 people and about 40 yards. Many of the people living here are direct descendants of the pioneers who settled here. Village elders Henry F. Hamm and Helene Klippenstein, and young people Cody Friesen and Kirsten Hamm unveiled the plaque.

In part the plaque's inscription reads "Neubergthal is an excellent surviving example of a Mennonite street village, a distinctive form of prairie settlement in western Canada.

"Between 1874 and 1900, Mennonites founded over a hundred such villages east and west of the Red River in southern Manitoba. Closely knit by kinship, religion and culture, the newcomers worked co-operatively and demonstrated that permanent agricultural settlement could succeed on the open prairie away from the river valleys."

The homecoming festivities included tours, a program featuring music, stories and Low German skits, a barn dance, a Sunday morning worship service, and lots of visiting.

## Acknowledgements

(cont. from p.3)

## The Post Road Memorial Trail Inaugural Tour, 26 August 2000

The brochure text written by Conrad Stoesz, designing and art work by Olga Krahn (OK Signs and Art), of Altona, Ens Farms Limited for mounting posts, Bill Rempel of Winkler for helping to build the lecterns, Bill Reimer (RM of Stanley Councillor) and John Falk (RM of Rhineland Reeve) for helping to locate lectern sites and establish a trail route, Sun Valley Co-op and Canadian Lumber (Morden, Winkler, and Altona) for donating posts, Chris Werner of Winnipeg for providing a map for the brochure, Dick Janzen (Southman Printing) of Winkler for printing the brochures and the lectern texts, Bob Marshall and Bernie Neufeld of Beaver Bus Lines for driving our buses, the women's group of Reinland for serving a delicious noon meal, Henry G. Ens of Reinland for creating a video of the tour, Martha Martens for baking delicious cookies to end with a snack, and again, many volunteers to add what was still needed.

A warm thanks to you all. We hope it was worth your while. Tell others about what you experienced and bring them into the programmes of the Society!

## Edenburg/Edenthal Reunion

by *Elmer Heinrichs*

Former residents - sons and daughters of the forefathers - who settled in the Edenburg and Edenthal districts in the latter 1870s and early 1880s returned to their roots - east of Gretna where they grew up and received early education.

The 1-2 July 2000 reunion began with a wiener roast at Jake and Sharon Krahn's in Edenburg Sat., continued with a Sunday worship service, a luncheon, and a time of history, and reminiscing.

Edenburg considered the Post Road to be its main street. Historian Herman Rempel said Mennonite families founded the West Reserve village in 1879, after becoming disillusioned with the quality of land on the East Reserve (Jandsied). In its heyday, the district of Edenburg was home to 21-22 small mixed farm families, with a strong sports program and a flourishing congregation. When the village agreement was dissolved in 1892, a number of families moved from the village to the land they owned. The southern border of Edenburg lay right along the United States boundary.

Heinrich Wiebe (brother of Gerhard Wiebe a leader of the Old Colony settlers), a minister from the Bergthal colony, had been one of the land scouts in 1873 and then helped guide the immigrants from south Russia. He settled in Edenburg at its founding and became a strong leader.

The Edenburg church, the first one built by the Bergthaler on the West Reserve, was completely rebuilt in 1902. Located diagonally across the road from the school, the church building hosted the school Christmas program and holds many memories for former residents. It served the community until the 1950s and then used by the Kane community until the 1970s. Among the Edenburg farmers were other church leaders like Abram Guenther, Jacob Buhr, and Henry Hildebrand, as well as itinerant leaders and ministers from Edenthal, Halbstadt and Strassberg, like D.D. Klassen, Gerhard Wiebe, Heinrich Wiebe, and Diedrich Loeppky. Brothers Benjamin and Henry Ewert, both teachers,

also preached in the Edenburg congregation from time to time.

In addition to regular church services, a Jugendverein (Christian Endeavour program) was conducted bi-weekly under the watchful eyes of the church leaders. These gatherings provided sustenance for the soul, as well as an opportunity to socialize and for romance.

The first school in Edenburg was a private school probably built in the early 1890s. A similar school was started in Edenthal about this time. This became a public school about 1919. In the late 1940s several families left the area around Edenthal to find work elsewhere. Farms began to get larger and pupil count, which had reached a high of 35 to 40, dropped to 11. In the late 1950s the Edenthal school joined the Edenburg school because of low enrolment. In the late 1960s all the students were bused to the Gretna school.

The community began to break up around the time of World War II when some of the older people died, some sold their farms and others left the community to follow a career or to study. When all is said and done, Edenburg is still a garden of Eden to many who lived here, concludes Rempel.

Jacob J.H. Friesen, almost 90, son of long-time councillor Jacob J. Friesen, and Jacob Janzen, 96, of Winkler, and many from other provinces returned to enjoy the community reunion.

A Faspa at the Gretna community activity centre concluded the reunion.



Participants in the Reunion: (L-R) Back - Dave Harms, Tony Harms, Don Harms; Front - Elaine Skinner, Debbie nee Hildebrand, Eleanor Chornoboy nee Hildebrand

## A History of the Mennonite experience in Manitoba

The Research, Scholarship, and Publications Committee of the society is heading up a project to publish a history of Mennonites in Manitoba. E.K. Frances published his study of Manitoba Mennonites in the 1950s and the Society felt it was time to update our story for the many people interested in a readable and interesting story of an important group in Manitoba's history. The committee has commissioned John J. Friesen, a history professor at Canadian Mennonite University to author the book. It will be written in a popular style and feature illustrations and excerpts from documents. The book will appeal to a wide audience.

The writing and publishing of such a book is a large task and will require funds to complete. If you would like to contribute to the project please send your donations to the society marked "History Book Project." The committee is hoping to raise in excess of twenty-thousand dollars for the project.

## Bergen Reunion

by *Martha Martens*

The Isaak Bergen (1816-1888) & Helena Von Niessen (1820-1894) descendants gathered at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna, MB. On 28-30 July 2000 325 come home to get reacquainted. There was representation from each branch except the Gerhard Bergen family. They came from Belize, Mexico, USA, and in Canada from southern Ontario to the west coast.

Some highlights were a trip to Fort Dufferin; Jake Hildebrand their guide led the way and gave them a chapter of history in the lives of the Bergens. Another trip that many took was to the Blumenort cemetery, where a tombstone had been erected this summer in memory of the Isaak Bergens.

There was a worship service on Sunday. "...the food was outstanding, the opportunities for fellowship and thanksgiving next to none – the facilities were, by far prime. . . made it possible for many to celebrate and recognize their roots, and feel proud about the contribution our people have made to the enrichment of Canadian culture" said one participant.

Further information maybe made by contacting Martha Martens 225 Pembina Ave. E, Winkler MB, R6W3N8 or emm@mb.sympatico.ca

## Dyck Reunion

by *Mel Klassen*

A reunion for the descendants of Jacob H. and Katharina Dyck was held at the Altona Park on 6 August 2000. It was a beautiful, sunny, warm, Sunday afternoon. Approximately 100 descendants signed the register.

Mr. Art Dyck (son of Abram & Annie Dyck) was the chairman for the afternoon of activities, and in his opening comments welcomed all of the descendants that had taken the opportunity of attending this event.

The Dyck family came from the Bergthal Colony to Manitoba in 1875 headed by Maria Epp and Heinrich Dyck. They settled in the East Reserve village of Rosenthal. Maria died in 1877 and Heinrich remarried his sister-in-law, a widow, Aganetha Friesen Dyck. The family then moved to the West Reserve village of Kornsgart, currently Rosenort.

Recollections : were given by: Mr. Pete Letkeman (son of Abraham & Helen Letkeman) and Edgar Klassen (son of David J. & Annie Klassen). Bill Dyck (son of John & Henrietta Dyck) & Art Dyck shared some recollections and

also lead in a brief memorial service.

A short meditation was given by Mr. Steve Dyck (son of Henry & Mary Dyck). The program concluded with Judith Klassen and Rachel Klassen (Huebner) playing and singing some old gospel hymns.

Faspa: a Dyck specialty was enjoyed by all. There were watermelons, buns, coffee, pickles, sausage, ham and an excellent variety of desserts. Pete (son of Pete & Mary Dyck) & Emily Dyck serenaded the group with a singsong during "Faspa".



Jacob H. Dyck Family. Photo: Courtesy of the Dyck Family.

## 21,22,23 July 2000 the Hoepfner/Heppner Reunion

by *Mavis Dyck*

Invitations were extended to all who were descendants of the Delegate Jacob Hoepfner (born 1748) who with delegate Johann Bartsch were responsible for arranging the migration of the Mennonites from Prussia to Russia in 1789. Then in 1874 began the migration from Russia to Canada.

On Friday, Hoepfners/Heppners began arriving from all directions for this special celebration at the Steinbach Bible School. The evening program set the stage for an informative weekend interspersed with humour, music, and singing.

A few highlights were:

On Saturday morning the family gathered at the memorial of Jacob Hoepfner at the Steinbach Heritage Museum to remember the Mennonites following the leading of God through the centuries. A short service was held in the Old Colony Church of Chortitz (West Reserve) situated next to the monument. The nostalgia of the men seated on the left and the women on the right all singing from the depths of their hearts "To God be the Glory" was awesome.

Opera singer Ben Hoepfner's three sisters from parts of the U.S.A. were thrilled to meet the extended family. Everyone was pleased with the arrival of the extensive Heppner/Hoepfner History Book!

Celebrations continued 24 July with many family members making their way to the Waldheim Cemetery located s.w. of Winkler. Of the 24 families who homesteaded in the Waldheim district 10 were Hoepfners. Marking the graves of Hoepfner descendants were 70 ribbons! Ed Hoepfner of Winnipeg, a member of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, gave a short talk on Waldheim history. Many local family members had stories to share. From this location an excited group followed George and Mavis Dyck to the original homestead of Peter (b.1829) and Elizabeth (Penner) Hoepfner to choose as a souvenir a piece of oak log from the log house built in 1877. The farm has remained in the family for 123 years! Many pictures were taken and stories shared. The afternoon concluded with tearful, but happy good-byes as families departed for home.



Pioneer Days at Steinbach Heritage Village, 5 August 2000. Photo courtesy of Frank Froese & Irene Kroeker.



Wiebe family ancestors of noted church leader Johann Wiebe pictured here after cairn unveiling. From left: Mrs. C.E. (Mary) Wiebe, Mrs. Jake (Mary) Wiebe, with great-great-grandson Jake and C.E. Wiebe, a great-grandson. (Elmer Heinrichs Photo)

## Plaque, cairn unveiling honours early church leader

by Elmer Heinrichs

Descendants of the earliest Mennonite settlers in the Reinland, Rosengart, Schoenwiese and other nearby villages were among those taking part in twinned historic events at Reinland and Rosengart Sat., 22 July 2000.

The program began in the community centre at Reinland, the first Mennonite church in Western Canada, commemorating the life of Ältester Johan Wiebe, founder of the Reinländer Mennonite Church (later known as the Old Colony Church). Wiebe served

here from 1875-1905. Wiebe was elected Ältester in Fürstenland Colony, New Russia, aged 33 years. He decided to emigrate arriving at Fort Dufferin in 1875. That year he called a brotherhood meeting and as a result a new church was founded. In September 1876 the new meeting house at Reinland was dedicated as the new Reinländer Church. Great-grandson Cornelius E. and Mary Wiebe, of LaCreta, Alta., unveiled a plaque recognizing Wiebe and his work in the church at the community centre, the first Mennonite church built in the area.

Part two of the ceremonies took place at Rosengart five kilometres to the south near the International Boundary. Welcomed by John Martens, Rev. Zacharias spoke briefly near the graves of Johann Wiebe and his wife Judith Wall (1836-1910) and members of the church that he served.

With a congregational song "The Lord is King" (*So Lange Jesus...*), great-great-grandson Jake and Mary Wiebe of Swift Current Sask. unveiled a cairn at the cemetery at the edge of the village.

A Faspa back at the community centre rounded out the afternoon. Speaking a few words here was family member Elaine Wiebe; after an open mike, long-time educator, Rev. Gerhard Ens made the closing remarks.



The Deputy Jakob Hoepfner Memorial at Steinbach Heritage Village. (L-R) Sandy & Darlene (Heppner) York, Pauline & Bill Heppner. (Mavis Dyck Photo)





Emerson Mayor Wayne Arseny, seen with Ray Klippenstein, points to newly unveiled sign denoting the historic Post Road. (Elmer Heinrichs Photos)

## Grand opening, inaugural tour of Post Road Memorial Trail

by *Elmer Heinrichs and Conrad Stoesz*

Almost 100 people travelling on two buses celebrated the grand opening and inaugural tour of the Post Road Memorial Trail beginning at Fort Dufferin and traversing the historic route west to Mountain City, south of Morden.

In the early years of Mennonite settlement here in the West Reserve, the Post Road was the lifeline between the villages and the commercial centre of Emerson, and to Mountain City.

On the flat treeless prairie darkness and snowstorms were a severe hazard to travellers, but posts placed every 250 feet soon made the Post Road a favoured route for residents and travellers.

On 26 Aug. 2000 tour a tour bus left Winnipeg for Fort Dufferin to begin the day's festivities. The opening included brief comments by Emerson Mayor Wayne Arseny, Peter D. Zacharias, pastor of the Blumenort Mennonite Church and John Falk, Reeve of the RM of Rhineland. Falk, Rev. Abe Rempel and Conrad Stoesz, chairperson of the 125th West Reserve anniversary committee, placed the first post, symbolic of early posts, now long gone, of twelve memorial sites. Dick Remus, chair of the Post Road Heritage Society read the text from the informational lectern erected here.

A large sign erected at the intersection of PTH 75 and PR 243 - the beginning of the Post Road - was officially unveiled by Ray Klippenstein, Wayne Arseny and Altona artist, Olga Krahn, OK Signs & Art, who painted the sign showing a family in a sleigh following a post-marked road. The Town of Emerson donated the structure for the painting.

Travelling west on the Post Road - the West Reserve's Main Street - the tour group travelled through the Anglo-Saxon Upper Marais district into the Mennonite West Reserve through Strassberg, Halbstadt, Edenthal districts to Edenburg, site of another historical lectern.

Next was a brief stop at Neuanlage (PTH No. 30) where a lectern is located next to a cairn marking Mennonites' 75th anniversary here. The David Schellenberg home, a

favoured stop for travellers on the Post Road was located here.

Continuing west and crossing Highway 30, the next point of interest is the village of Neuhorst (site of another lectern), the home village of Isaak Mueller, one of the most prominent leaders of the West Reserve. Travelling west to the next mile road and north half a mile took the tour to the next post and lectern, Brown's Grand Central Hotel, a first class livery stable and hotel.

The next lectern at Schoenwiese, one of the largest villages, before lunch at Reinland.

The lectern at Reinland is located at the community centre, formerly the Reinland Mennonite (Old Colony) Church. Here the tour group enjoyed a delicious Mennonite meal with farmer's sausage.

Continuing west the tour located further lecterns at Hochfeld (west of PTH 32), then at Osterwick, before travelling west and north to Waldheim to the lectern near the cemetery where the village used to be.

The Post Road terminus was Mountain City where the lectern is located near the cairn.

The historical society plans to offer another Post Road tour on Sat., Sept. 30, if interest warrants it. Cost will be \$35 per person. To register, call Conrad Stoesz at 888-6781, 669-6575.



Abe Eus, Reinland, Portage/Lisgar MP Jake Hoepfner and MMHS board member Ed Hoepfner with newly-placed post at Mountain City, where the original Post Road ended. (Elmer Heinrichs Photo)