



# HERITAGE POSTING

Newsletter of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

No.35 December 2001

## Origin and development of Manitoba Mennonites

by Elmer Heinrichs

One hundred persons interested in Mennonite history - more than expected - came to the fall workshop on "Origins of Manitoba Mennonites" by the local histories committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society at the Threshermen's Museum near Winkler Sat., 27 Oct.2001.

Gerhard Ens, former teacher and principal of Mennonite Collegiate Institute, presented a paper on the Fürstenland Colony founded in Russia in 1864, at first with three villages, on land owned by the Grand Duke Michael, a younger brother of Tsar Alexander II.

Fürstenland was the second so-called daughter colony of the Chortitza mother colony. The first one was the Bergthal colony founded some 30 years earlier. The founding of daughter colonies was the way Mennonites here chose to solve their ever-growing problem of landlessness. Six villages were established on leased land by 1868 and farm buildings were all built to the same pattern along a straight village street. The colony existed in some form or another until 1943 when the retreating German forces evacuated all German-speaking inhabitants from the Ukraine.

By 1900 (after an exodus in the 1870s of approximately 1,000 settlers to North America) the population was 1,809. The soil here was fertile and produced good crops. The lease specified a six-year crop rotation, with one year of summer fallow/row crop. Watermelons grew very well.

In church affairs, Abram Wiebe and Johann Wiebe were elected to the ministry, with Johann elected Ältester in 1870. After brief period of independence came the great emigration of 1874 which saw the entire ministerial leave for Canada or to another Russian colony.

The Mennonite Brethren Church also had an affiliate in Fürstenland. They met for services in private homes until 1910 when factory owner, Jacob Niebuhr of Olgafeld, built a suitable meeting house. They were



(L-R) Lorraine Woelke, Ted Friesen (foreground), Walter Warkentin (background) at the local history workshop. Photo credit: Elmer Heinrichs

active in missions even among their Russian neighbours.

After the civil war, in 1925, the first group of Fürstenlanders was finally able to emigrate to Canada. During the purges of the 1930's most of the men of residual families were arrested, and then during the German retreat of 1943 all the Mennonites moved west by covered wagon.

Mary Ellen Neufeld related background information about the Wiebes from Fürstenland to Canada, Mexico and Paraguay. WIEB was first used as a given name in Holland, then also in Poland, and in Prussia. In Holland, then in Prussia, Mennonites were known as the dike builders.

In the afternoon William Schroeder told a local history workshop told about his labourious research into the Bergthal Colony which today is considered significant since it's one of very few detailed studies.

Bergthal residents, 200 kilometres east of Chortitza, were primarily farmers. Widespread religious, educational, and agrarian renewal movements of the 19th century by-passed Bergthal. But with proposed educational and noncombatant-service legislation, most of the colony migrated to the Canadian prairies (1874-76), settling east of the Red River on the East Reserve.

With a growing awareness of his roots and interest in Bergthal history Schroeder met Bergthal ancestors, studied the pioneering work of J.J. Hildebrandt, Winnipeg, and other sources.

Titus Guenther, who grew up in Paraguay, and now teaches at Canadian Mennonite University, told the workshop that next year on June 25 Menno Colony will be celebration its 75th anniversary. As of April 2001 Menno colony consisted of 80 villages with 9,146 inhabitants.

In his presentation, Guenther pointed to apparent paradoxes: the emigration from Canada resulted from an uncompromising stand on private church-centred education, yet in Paraguay the Menno community has mightily advanced its education system.

As well church life in Canada was austere and form-bound, while in Paraguay over time far-reaching innovations have been undertaken. Migrants left Canada with not the slightest interest in doing outreach mission, yet before long they enthusiastically engaged in holistic mission work and service projects inside their colony boundaries and beyond.

The participants had opportunity for purchasing books and conversing about the presentations. It was an informative event.

## WHO WAS 'BIG BILL'?

by Edward Enns

When I asked that question of several quite senior people in the Altona community sometime ago, they all remembered Big Bill, but none seemed to know where he came from or what his family background was. He became something of a legend in that community and beyond. His writings in the Steinbach Post spanning a quarter century were eagerly read and enjoyed by many in Canada, Mexico and Paraguay, but possibly only his and his wife's numerous relatives in southern Manitoba knew where his roots lay.

In the late 1930's when I was 12 and my father was a teacher at the Grimsby School (south of Plum Coulee), a tall and imposing figure of a man would periodically appear at our door in the evening and visit with my parents. The occasions coincided with the dredging of drainage ditches nearby where this man was the dragline operator. He was known for his skill with this piece of equipment and was ready to verify that by loud and lengthy stories, punctuated with expressions that had my parents encouraging us children to play outside. He told all kinds of other stories that seemed to be enhanced with fantasy and humour and some irreverence. On the other hand, he could also be serious in his expressions.

After he would leave, we would ask Dad who that man was. "Oh, that's Big Bill! He's my cousin!", he would say. Big Bill wrote many reports and letters and stories to the Steinbach Post, telling about people he had visited, about trips he had made, commenting on local events, telling ridiculously funny stories on his wife, etc., always signing 'Big Bill'. He wrote and published a small book, a sad story entitled 'Das verstossene Kind' [The Castaway Child] telling about an infant abandoned in a pig pen, rescued and growing up in foster homes and finally coming to Canada. He also wrote the story of a Peter Dyck of Carman, a paraplegic who travelled around on a motorized stretcher vehicle. (Have not been able to locate that publication)

I saw Big Bill again at my Grandfather, Abraham Ens's funeral in Rosenfeld. When the casket was lowered into the grave, Big Bill let himself down into the grave, nailed down the wooden cover over the box, pulled himself up and joined the shovellers.

About a decade ago a retirement activity of mine was that of exploring my Enns/Ens family genealogy. The lists became longer but no Big Bill appeared. Yes, my Grandfather had a brother Johann who had died in Russia at age 34 in 1899, but there was no indication that he married or had children. One day, following a tip from a friend I checked out another Church Register and found that my Grandfather's brother Johann did have a family in Russia and had several children including a Wilhelm, born in 1894. When Johann died in 1899, his widow and her children came to Canada within a few months to stay with her brother, Wilhelm Peters of Blumenort near Gretna. A few months later she married a widower, Peter Zacharias of the Rosenfeld district and so Wilhelm and his siblings became part of a larger family since his mother now was Zacharias' third wife. He grew up on that farm, attending the Rosenfeld private school where he appreciated his uncle Abraham Ens as his teacher. He married Katharina Nickel, a stepdaughter of Derk Dueck of Schönau. Economic poverty seems to have dogged them all the years of their married life, but they seem to have been a spirited couple, he seemingly always ready for a new job adventure dictated by curiosity and/or dire need.

Between 1913 and 1928, 11 children, 5 girls and 6 boys were born to them. In addition to that they adopted 2 more. He rarely mentions his children in his writings. Five of his sons joined the military in World War II and all returned from the services except Jacob, who was killed in Germany a few weeks before war's end. He makes no mention of this in his letters, nor of his sons' military service, but he does mention their grievous pain when a few years after the war another son-in-law is killed in a logging accident. Today, only two daughters of the eleven children are left and are living in western Canada. No doubt some of the in-laws, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are scattered across the country and beyond.

From 1926 - 1950 he wrote reports and letters to the 'Steinbach Post', including several short works of fiction that were printed in serial form in that periodical. (He published two books as noted above) In paging through the 'Steinbach Post' for the years 1924 - 1952, I found 135 letters, beginning in 1926 and ending in 1950 (I may have missed some). His style of writing is unique, it's 'folksy', as he uses colloquialisms, tongue-in-cheek humour, nuances, fantasy, sarcasm, gossip and teasing of his fellow 'Steinbach Post' reporters and friends. His wife, whom he calls 'Olsch' [old one], is the butt of many jokes and ridiculous anecdotes, and we wonder what they were like as a couple. At the same time, he regularly pokes fun at himself for getting involved in silly and embarrassing situations.

In 1957, at age 64, Big Bill died after a lengthy illness of which the last three months were spent in St Boniface Hospital. His wife Katharina died in 1972. In translating his letters, I found it quite challenging trying to convey his folksy style, his nuances and his punch lines for it seems that his writing, although done in German, must be absorbed by ears attuned to southern Manitoba Plautdietsch.

### Book Note:

"Who Was Big Bill [Enns]?" is an 85 page book written by Ed Enns of Winnipeg. Ed has researched this long lost and colorful relative by talking to friends in the Altona area who knew Bill. Ed also found and translated over 100 letters Big Bill had written and were published in the Steinbach Post. For copies contact Edward Enns 115 Oakview Ave. Winnipeg, MB R2K 0R9 (204) 667-4718

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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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Sara and H.S. Voth, ca. 1900, in Manitoba. Photo credit: CMBS

## God Gave Much Grace Through HSV

by Wm. Schroeder, Fort Garry

When Henry S. Voth retired as leader of the Winkler M.B. Church, the title of his farewell sermon, 29 October 1950, was "Gott gebe euch viel Gnade."<sup>1</sup> (God give you much grace; cf. 1 Peter 1:2 and 2 Peter 1:2) One wonders what considerations prompted that choice of theme and what applications of the text were made. When we moved to Winkler 14 years after Voth's death, we encountered much evidence of this man's legacy; and preparations for the 1988 centennial added further insights. All in all, I gained the conviction that God had already dispensed much grace through HSV in the past and that this influence outlived him. Hence the above title.

H. S. Voth was born in 1878 in Cottonwood County, near Bingham Lake, Minnesota, son of Elder Heinrich Voth, planter of the Winkler M.B. Church. Henry Jr. completed his secondary education at Bingham Lake, and later attended McPherson College in Kansas. In between he taught grade school at Langdon, N.D., and worked as colporteur. He served as M.B. Conference *Reiseprediger*, itinerant preacher-evangelist, 1902-1908 and 1916-1920. In 1904 HSV married Susie Warkentin, daughter of Winkler pastor Johann Warkentin. HS was ordained at Winkler, 1 Dec.1907<sup>2</sup> by his father.

From 1908-1915 the family was based in Oregon where HSV was leader of the Dallas and Portland M.B. churches. Later he ran his parents' farm in Minnesota. On one occasion during World War I he barely escaped being tarred and feathered for his pacifist stance and use of the German language. The parental farm was sold, and the Voths settled down on a farm near Winkler in 1920. In 1931 HSV succeeded his father-in-law as pastor. He retired in 1950 and died in 1953.<sup>3</sup>

By his own count Voth preached almost 5000 times.<sup>4</sup> He had the reputation of a very effective pulpiteer. I concurred, from the few occasions I heard him. "He was seen as a giant, a saintly bishop-type," recalls Alan Janzen, reflecting also his parents' opinion. "He had charisma; his presentations were dramatic."<sup>5</sup> Frequently stories mention his practice of loudly slapping his palm on the pulpit. Many conversions followed his preaching, perhaps more on evangelistic tours than at home. Winkler congregational life seemed vigorous.

It should be acknowledged that there was also some criticism of Voth. Toward the end of his ministry too many sermons were repetitions of old ones, someone said. Another grumbled that HSV remained a US citizen all his life and his best friends were Americans, but someone else thought that these connections to prominent American leaders gave Voth prestige. Some regarded him as over-sensitive to criticism, arrogant, and acting high-handedly at times. It was a "Kanadier" who mentioned Voth's perceived prejudice against the "Russländer" whose superior education and popularity may have seemed threatening to him.<sup>6</sup> In any case, Voth maintained a dominant position decade after decade.

HSV's own passion for foreign missions clearly fostered missionary interest in the Winkler M.B. Church. A number of Winkler M.B. people became foreign missionaries. Decades after his death the church's name still appeared near the top of lists of financial contributor in conference reports. Since Voth served on the Board of Missions for 27 years, he made a major contribution to the relatively extensive M.B. foreign missionary programme. He also promoted numerous "home-missions" efforts.

It could be argued that the total impact of H. S. Voth was greater across the M.B. world than in Winkler. He preached in many churches. He often served as chairman or vice-chairman at all three conference levels and on countless committees. Peter Penner quotes G. D. Pries, Voth's colleague and successor: Voth was "peerless in giving direction and leadership to a conference. He was a great inspirational leader, gentle but firm and his guidelines were given respectful attention."<sup>8</sup> The wide range of his influence is borne out by innumerable references in conference yearbooks, board minutes and reports, periodicals, and letters.<sup>9</sup>

The almost incredible degree of involvement in church and conference inevitably took a toll on the family and the farm. Several children had their schooling interrupted to help with the farm. Some have expressed feelings of being neglected but also admiration and astonishment at their father's wide popularity.<sup>10</sup>

Many people remember a characteristic exclamation of HSV: "O Herr, hilf, O Herr, lass wohlgelingen."<sup>11</sup> (Oh Lord help; Oh Lord give success! cf. Psalm 118:25). The Lord did so.

### Endnotes

1. Frank Brown, *Memnonite Brethren Church, Winkler, 1888-1963*.
2. According to the official clergyman-certificate. Other sources give 5 Dec.1908.
3. Dennis Voth (grandson), *H. S. Voth, a Preliminary Sketch*, a research paper for Memnonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1981; and other sources.
4. Peter Penner, *Guardian of the Way: The Farmer-Precacher H.S. Voth, 1878-1953*, p.1, a paper in possession of Salome Hiebert. An article with this title was published in *Memnonite Life*, Sept.1982, pp.8-13. Frank Brown, p.8 puts the number at 5744.
5. Telephone interview 7 Nov.2000. Others interviewed for this article include: Salome (Voth) Hiebert, niece, Peter Kroeker, Jake P. Wiebe, Lynda Dyck, Ruth Dyck, John J. Siemens. Opinion and information also come from numerous other conversations during our 22 years in Winkler and are not formally documented.
6. Peter Penner, p.5, top.
7. Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, <http://www.mhsc.ca>
8. Peter Penner, p.5, middle.
9. In 1979 I was hired by the M.B. archives, Winnipeg, for a month. My main assignment was organizing the correspondence and other documents of major conference personalities. Also I helped Esther (Voth) Enns to sort some of her father's papers and books and convey them to the archives.
10. Dennis Voth, pp.8-11. Peter Penner, p.6-7.
11. Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, <http://www.mhsc.ca>



Fort Daer (L.), the HBC fort and Fort Pembina (R) Henry's Trading Post at the confluence of the Pembina and Red Rivers. Photo credit: National Archives of Canada

## Aboriginal People and Southernmost Manitoba With Particular Reference to the West Reserve

by Edwin D. Hoepfner

Approximately one year ago *Heritage Posting* published a brief report, on aboriginal-Mennonite relationships which were discussed at a "conference" at the University of Winnipeg 2000 October 12/14, by Leonard Doell. Somewhat earlier that same year Mennonite celebrated the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first Mennonites at Fort Dufferin, near present-day Emerson, who founded the West Reserve. One year prior, in 1999, Mennonites in Manitoba celebrated the arrival of the first Mennonites at the junction of the Rat and Red Rivers, who founded the East Reserve. Although our Mennonite pioneers were the "first" to demonstrate the feasibility of European-style agriculture on the relatively open and nearly "tree-less" plains of western Canada they were not the first to practise agriculture in the present-day Manitoba nor were they the first to make a living from the land. The arrival and settlement of our pioneers was merely one chapter in the displacement of the "first nations" by Europeans resident here. Our pioneers inter-acted with the few remnants of the Indian people left in southernmost Manitoba, and with their relatives, the Métis. It is not only appropriate but absolutely necessary to study our predecessors in this area in order that we can begin to understand them and their descendants and to do them justice, to respect them as children of the same Creator. As the title suggests, this article will concentrate on the aboriginal peoples who made southernmost Manitoba their home.

Much has been written, both in our popular press and in collections of memories, of settlement days. Some of these writings contain statements concerning the identity and or location of various native tribes which conflict with historical fact, and some irritate because of interpretations which are equally invalid. One statement is the claim about "... the massive buffalo herds which moved across the freshly-ploughed acres ....". The first Mennonites to plow the ground in Manitoba arrived in 1874 and in 1875. By this time there were no buffalo, let alone "massive herds", left in Manitoba to "move across freshly plowed acres."<sup>1</sup> We will be on surer ground if we look at original sources and scholarly accounts based on research in original sources and archaeological remains. Since original sources are not always accessible, this article is an attempt to summarize what has been learned about the identity and origin of the aboriginal people who lived in or near the area of the West Reserve in the historical period just prior to the arrival of our pioneer settlers.

"Original sources" are the written accounts of early explorers and traders of the names, ways of life and hunting, and locations of the aboriginal people they observed. Researchers who study aboriginal people use these sources to establish and describe the areas inhabited by the various tribes at given times and also to describe changes in tribal areas and movements over time. These descriptions help archaeologists, who study the artifacts and skeletal remains of the aboriginals, to associate cultural traits found in an area with particular cultures or tribal societies who live in or moved across the area and provide information about their ancestors.

More recently, linguistic studies have provided additional information about pre-historic

relationships and migrations. Thus a study, published in 1992, yielded the result that all the native languages of both North and South America fall into just three families, confirming genetic studies, which indicate that the Americas were initially populated by just three distinct migrations from Asia across the Beringian land bridge.<sup>2</sup> It has been all but impossible to find published accounts of specific interactions between Indians and Mennonite settlers in the West Reserve. This is probably a result of the fact that the Indians had been effectively removed from the land by Dominion Government Treaties which segregated the aboriginal peoples on comparatively small reservations - only a few itinerant Indian stragglers were left to be encountered by settlers. The following incident appeared in the 1880 December 18 issue of *The Mountaineer* published in Nelsonville (6 miles NNW of Morden):

### LOCALS

Abraham Heizbricht (probably Giesbrecht), a Mennonite living in Blumenfeldt, informs us that about a month ago an Indian came to his place and endeavoured to sell him a cow, but believing the animal was stolen, he gave the Indian a hundred weight of flour to leave it with him. He has since found that his suspicions were correct, and now advertises the cow, so that the owner may call and get it.

Aboriginal people from the distant past have left traces of their presence in the form of stone, bone artefacts, bits of pottery, and skeletons in burial/ceremonial mounds. Many stone hammers have been picked up over the years. Todd Braun of Altona district has been finding stone tools along the banks of Buffalo Creek and Lake and elsewhere for many years. A burial mound, known as Calf Mountain (from the French *Tete le Boeuf - Buffalo's Head*) southwest of Darlingford was found to contain 22 burials by excavator Henry Montgomery in September 1909. Right within the Reserve we have the mound known as "De Fastung" (The Fortress) just west of Altona - and not yet scientifically investigated. There must be many undiscovered camping sites, which were frequented temporarily by hunting groups.

### Endnote/Bibliography

1. Margaret Arnett MacLeod; A Note on the Red River Hunt by John Norquay: *Canadian Historical Review* (CHR), Vol. XXXVIII, no. 2, June 1957, pp. 129-130. See also Frank G. Roe; The Extirpation of the Buffalo in Western Canada (CHR Vol. XV, No. 1, March 1934, pp. 1-23), and F. G. Roe; *The North American Buffalo* (1951, reprinted 1970, 1972).
2. Joseph H. Greenberg and Merritt Ruhlen; Linguistic Origins of Native Americans (*Scientific American*, November 1992, pp. 94-99).

(to be continued in the next issue)

## MMHS News & Notes



(L-R) Melissa Schroeder, Ted Klassen



Andrew Redekopp

Every year the MMHS administers the Henry E. Plett memorial award for family history papers written by high school students in Manitoba. This year saw eight strong entries. Melissa Schroeder of Altona won the first place for her essay entitled "Cornelius J. Schroeder: A Biography". Second place went to Andrew Redekopp of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate for his essay entitled "Family History Essay". MMHS' genealogy committee invites essays annually. Contact the committee for more information through the editors (see bottom of page 2).

### Correction

Re: The p.5 photo of HP, No.34, September 2001. The caption should read: Anne Peters and Helen Hoepfner, representing former school board members, are seen here unveiling a special plaque placed at the Glencross cairn in honour of former teachers of the Glencross S.D. near Morden. The event took place in mid July, 2001. Photo credit: Mavis Dyck, Morden, Man.



The "Pioneer on the Post Road" exhibit included a panel on the Bergthaler village of Altberghal just west of Altona, the Art Friesen painting (centre) and a panel of West Reserve photos on living in the area. Bill Schroeder mounted an exhibit on the Bergthaler colony of south Russia. Grace Schellenberg gathered a group of persons from Hoffnungsfield while Ed Hoepfner and Mavis Dyck represented Waldheim. Photo credit: Elmer Heinrichs

## The 125th West Reserve Anniversary Celebrations Close

by Lawrence Klippenstein

The 125th West Reserve anniversary celebrations opened at Morden's Pembina Hills Gallery and Arts Centre in November of 1999. The May 1999 events connected with March West, prepared at Emerson included a special exhibit on the Post Road, prepared by Martha Martens of Winkler. A newly commissioned painting "A Pioneer on the Post Road" done by Art Friesen, also of Winkler was a centre piece at that exhibit.

That same painting became a feature at the closing of the celebrations held at the Pembina Threshermen's Museum during an MMHS local history workshop held there on October 27 this year. Special recognition was also given to persons from two villages, Waldheim and Hoffnungsfield, which were among a number of West Reserve villages founded in 1876. The Reinländer Church also built its first church in the region 125 years ago in Reinland. That building, though renovated for a community hall, is still in use today.

The workshop included a number of papers on the two founding communities of the West Reserve, the Fürstenländer (later, for most of them, the Reinländer Mennonite Church) and the Bergthaler who established a number of villages in the eastern part of the Reserve. Some Bergthaler families were among the 1876 homesteading families of Reinländer villages founded in the western part of the Reserve. The Fürstenländer began to arrive in the West Reserve in 1875, but larger numbers of Bergthaler came to the area only in 1879 - 1880.

## MMHS GENEALOGY WORKSHOP, ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, AND BANQUET

2002 February 2, Saturday

at

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies  
169 Riverton Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

### GENEALOGY WORKSHOP

08.30 hr. to 15.30 hr.

Featuring Tim Janzen, Portland, Oregon

Topics: Genealogical resources for Canada, Russia, and Prussia, and featuring a demonstration of the newly acquired Chortitza Church registers and a preview of Grandma 4

Cost: \$20 includes lunch

AGM at 16.00 hr.

Agenda includes reports, elections, and budget.

Followed by a banquet and programme featuring a Mexican menu and reports about the development of the Mennonite museum and archives in Mexico. at 18.00 hr.

Cost: \$20 (for those who have not yet renewed their membership, it can be done there. Notices will be mailed)

## Genealogy

### Ancestor and Descendants of Ältester Jacob Hoepfner

A. Jacob Hoepfner b. 22 Dec. 1748 d. 4 Mar 1826, Insel Chortitz, Chortitza [delegate from Prussia to Russia]  
m. Sarah Dueck b. 17 Nov. 1753 d. 27 Feb. 1826

B. Jacob Hoepfner, b. 24 Mar. 1797 Insel Chortitz, Chortitza d. 12 Sept. 1883 Insel Chortitz

m. Anna Brandt b. 4 Jan. 1804 d. 24 Jan. 1877 Insel Chortitz

C. Jacob Hoepfner b. 21 Jul 1822 Insel Chortitz d. 28 Oct. 1885

m. Catharina Thiessen b. 12 Jan. 1819 d. 22 May 1899

D. Ältester Jacob Hoepfner b. 29 July 1849 Insel Chortitz d. 16 Nov. 1936 Manitoba

m. Aganetha Dyck b. 7 Sept 18513 Schöneberg, Chortitza d. 24 Apr. 1922 Manitoba

E. Jacob Hoepfner b. 24 May 1879 Waldheim, Manitoba d. 1929 Plum Coulee, Manitoba

m. 15 July 1900 Maria Neufeld b. 24 Aug. 1878 Blumstein, Manitoba d. 8 Oct. 1954

F. Jacob Hoepfner b. 10 July 1901 Schoenfeld, Manitoba

m. Susan Sawatzky b. 15 Oct. 1904 Kleinstadt, Manitoba

G. Jacob Hoepfner b. 23 Nov. 1932 Kleefeld, Manitoba

m Helen Banman b. 1933

H. Robert Hoepfner, b. 1958

### Ancestor and Descendants of Ältester Johann Wiebe

A. Jakob Wiebe b. Apr. 1760 d. 1 Mar. 1804  
m. Anna Fast b. 18 June 1756 d. 20 June 1835

B. Bernhard Wiebe b. 21 Mar. 1796 d. 13 Jan. 1852

m. Helena Wiebe

C. Ältester Johann Wiebe b. 23 Mar. 1837 Neuhorst, Chortitza d. 2 Feb. 1906 Rosengart, Manitoba

m. Judith Wall b. 7 Aug. 1836

D. Peter Wiebe b. 19 May 1861 d. 13 Sept. 1913

m. 1881 Anna Ginter b. 28 Jun 1861 d. 31 Jan. 1899



The reconstructed windmill at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum at Steinbach is grinding grain again. Almost exactly a year after it burned down at the hands of an arsonist, about 250 people gathered at the museum for a dedication event on Sunday, October 21. The service was led by MHV board chairperson John Peters, with former chair, Gerhard Ens, of Winnipeg, preaching the sermon. John and others were part of the "door unlocking" ceremony at the mill right after the service, and freshly baked bread from flour ground at the mill was served at the fahspa later on. Ben and Judy Thiessen are currently in charge of milling flour at the museum. For further information contact the museum at 204-326-9661, or email [mennovil@mb.sympatico.ca](mailto:mennovil@mb.sympatico.ca)

Photo Credit: Conrad Stoess

Continuing Education at CMU offers **Genealogy, Computers, and the Internet** on January 8, 15, 22, 29, 2002, 7:30 p.m. at 500 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2.

Cost: \$50, Instructor: Alf Redekopp. To register call the Dean's office at (204) 487-3300 or email [ewarkentin@cmu.ca](mailto:ewarkentin@cmu.ca).

### In Memoriam



Isby Bergen (seated second from the left) and the editorial committee of the Altona Millennium Diary (2000).

#### Isby Bergen (1908-2001)

Elizabeth grew up as the foster daughter of Elizabeth Dyck and Isaac Bergen who moved several times to end up in Gretna in the 1920s. Elizabeth joined the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in 1927. Isby, as she was commonly known, had many interests including music, knitting, serving, and travelling and served in various committees such as the Sunflower Festival and the Women's Institute of Altona and other groups.

She was also very widely known for her writing as correspondent and journalist working for the *Red River Valley Echo* published by Friesens in Altona. Isby was made an honorary member of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

## Memories of my life by Maria Schroeder (1886-1976)

Early Years 1889-1951 (written in 1966 and 1969)

*trans. by her daughter Susana Janzen in 1986*

.... In 1889 my parents moved from the East Reserve to the West Reserve. (My grandparents, Julius Banman, came to Canada from Russia to Ontario in 1873 and the next year 1874 moved to Blumengart close to the town that is now Niverville and in 1889 moved to Alt Bergthal which was about three miles [five kilometres] south west of the present town of Altona). Alt-Bergthal was situated on the east side of a small creek with its street running north and south along the east side of the creek. Their houses were built with the end of the house facing the street and the barn attached to the other end, usually with a storage shed to the north side of the barn... The school was on the other (the west) side of the creek with a small wooden bridge crossing where the south intersection of the village street and the municipal road running east to west crossed. Over the bridge was the school and the teacher's residence..... We carried all the water from the creek. The buildings were all made of wooden logs and the roof of rushes (thatched roof) tied in bundles.... The pastures were at the south end of the village. When the cows were driven to the pasture a few of the village boys had to help the herdsman so the cows would not turn back to their barns. In spring when the cows were used to being driven to the pastures the calves had to be taken also and again the boys had to help..... After the crops covered the earth the weeds would grow and everyone had to pull weeds and carry them to the end of the field. One day my sisters Katharina, Maria, and I and brothers Franz and Peter had to go the fields to pull weeds when dark clouds came up with thunder and lightning. Franz, Peter, and I wanted to run home quickly as our yard was not too far away but Katharina and Maria would not allow us to do so, so we had to turn around and keep on pulling weeds. When we were at the far end the rain came pelting down. We got soaking wet when we ran home!

When I was ten years old, my sister, Aganetha, got married to Peter Falk (son of Peter P. Falk who had also come from Russia in 1874 and settled near Steinbach but moved to the Altona area in 1875) of Schönthal. Schönthal had a large church and all the people of Alt-Bergthal went there for Sunday services as it was only three miles (five kilometres) from our village. Agatha got married on her twentieth birthday, Nov.24, 1896 in that church. At night two boys came and asked my father if they, the young people, would be allowed to dance. Father did not wish it but they put so much pressure on father that he gave permission for them to do so until midnight but no longer. Soon the room was cleared and they were dancing. The children stood at the door and looked with big wondering eyes, they had never seen anything like it before! (In 1898 they (my sister and family) moved to Lowe Farm and lived there till Nov.11,1922 when they moved to Mexico. She died in Mexico on Nov.18, 1955.. She had been a widow since Aug.31, 1925.)

.....Going back to when I was 16, after my father died, in summer when making hay, Peter and Franz went to get the last load early in the morning and I was to hitch the horses to the binder (with Mother's help). Mother held the two horses and I went for the third one. As soon as I was out of the barn the horse reared, struck me down, and ran into the fields. I lay there helpless. The horse had struck my right arm and torn the muscle. Mother and I unhitched the two horses, took them into the barn and I walked to Peter Falks for help. Peter ran to the field, caught the horse and took it into the barn. Shortly after my brothers came home with their load of hay and had to do all the chores. I could not milk or anything else for a couple of months. I still don't like to think about that time! I still have trouble with my shoulder!.....

Peter, my husband, had such pain in his lower back that he could hardly walk. He had been hurt the year before we married in a farm accident. When taking grain to the elevator, just before the wagon was on the level the harness broke on one of the horses and only one horse could not pull enough alone so the wagon rolled backwards and toppled over the side of the incline. Wagon, horses, and Peter, all in a tangle. In those years there were no doctors near so all the help he received was one trip to a bone setter!....

## Diaries

In the fall of 1918, when the World War soldiers came home to Canada from Europe they brought the flu with them.... My husband was sick at the time and after five days he too died. He wanted to die and was glad to go to be with Jesus (he was tired of suffering)....

.... on Aug.29, 1936, my [second] husband [Abram Hildebrand] went to Morden by car with a trailer hitched to the car loaded with wheat. He took the wheat to the mill and went to the Veterinary because some cattle broke out and overate on corn. On his way home, the train coming from the east hit the hitch between the car and trailer throwing the trailer to the north side of the track and the car to the south side, into the ditch. My husband was thrown out and lay on the edge of the ditch with his skull in fragments. Killed instantly! What a tragedy for us all.

.....Then in 1951, a Johann Peters of Hague, Saskatchewan came to see me and I married him Aug.6, 1951... We left for Saskatchewan the 3<sup>rd</sup> day after my wedding..... I helped Johann to build our home. That was not easy for me to be hammering boards on all day.....My husband went into the house once and I was wondering what he was doing. After a while and went to find out. He was checking how often I had missed the 2 X 4's. I told him point blank I too knew that a board would not stay in place if the nail was not in the 2 X 4. I never say him checking up on my nailing after this. I told him it was not the first time I was using a hammer! Some women don't know how to put a nail straight through the board into the 2 X 4 but I know how. They don't bend when I nail them. When it rained I would crochet or do other hand work.

....On Jan.28 [1969] we received a phone call from Winkler that my brother, Peter Banman, had died and they let us know when the funeral was to be. I decided it was too cold for me to go to the funeral. I regretted not being able to go but I knew I would only catch a cold, so I stayed at home.[She would have been 83 yr. of age that year] There was a write-up in a newspaper that a Mrs. Isaac Hildebrand gave me.

## Book Review

Henry Schapansky. *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia: Early History and First Settlers in the Context of the Mennonite Migrations*. New Westminster: Henry Schapansky, 2001. 519 pp.

Review by Richard Thiessen

Anyone who has carried out genealogical research on his or her Mennonite ancestors, especially those who resided in Chortitza Colony, has most likely come across the name of Henry Schapansky. Schapansky began writing articles in 1988 for *Mennonite Family History*. In these articles Schapansky attempted to identify all of the original settlers of each Chortitza village, and their roots in Prussia. These articles have now been revised, corrected and gathered together to form the core of this current publication. The first eleven chapters of the book are basically comprised of a survey of Mennonite history from the Reformation to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on Prussia and Russia. The rationale for these chapters is stated in the preface, where Schapansky writes that his book "is meant to be not only a reference of individual families and events, but also a reference of historical ideas" (vii).

It should be stated from the outset that this book is compulsory reading for anyone carrying out Mennonite genealogical research with Chortitza ancestors. The wealth of information compiled from hundreds of sources is unmatched in any other print source. Schapansky has managed to determine the immediate ancestry of the vast majority of the early Chortitza settlers by linking them with the Prussian Mennonite church registers and the 1776 Prussian census. Further information on the settlers and their immediate descendants has been gathered from numerous genealogies and family records, and linkages are often made with the 1870s immigrants to Manitoba.

The work we have before us represents literally years of painstaking research. The meticulous examination of hundreds of pages of Prussian church registers was necessary in order to make the connections that Schapansky has made, and anyone who has read the microfilms of these registers knows that some of them are extremely difficult to read. Mennonite genealogists will without a doubt benefit immensely from Schapansky's work. That being said, there are four major shortcomings with this publication that seriously detract from its value to the Mennonite genealogist.

First, the book does not contain an index. This is a glaring omission, making the book incredibly difficult to use if one does not know in which village their ancestors lived. While the compilation of an index is labour intensive, it is not optional for a work of this nature. Its absence simply makes the book incomplete.

Second, sources for much of the information are not properly cited. Reference is made to church registers, other individuals or genealogies, but only in general terms. Many researchers will want to delve more deeply into some of the primary and secondary sources mentioned, but very little guidance is given on the part of Schapansky as to exactly where the original information is located.

Third, there is no reference to the many sources or compilations of genealogical data that have been readily available to researchers for several years. Many Prussian Catholic and Lutheran church registers contain Mennonite data that have been transcribed by people like Glenn Penner and Adalbert Goertz and are available over the Internet on sites such as the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society web site ([www.mmhs.org](http://www.mmhs.org)). These registers contain much information that is helpful to researchers, especially for the years prior to the start of the Mennonite Prussian church registers. Finally, there are no specific references to the West Prussian Land Register of 1772/73, the 1789 land census of West Prussian Mennonites and the 1793 Danzig census. All of these are helpful in identifying the early Chortitza settlers.

Fourth, there is no reference to the GRANDMA database published by the California Mennonite Historical Society, in spite of the fact that it contains data on over 400,000 individuals of Mennonite descent. Numerous genealogists have contributed family records to this database that increase substantially the data that we have on a number of early Chortitza settlers.

The historical survey found in the first eleven chapters also deserves some comment, although it is not the reason why people will purchase this book. Schapansky provides a summary of the history of the Mennonites in West Prussia and the events surrounding their migration and settlement in Chortitza. He has compiled information from numerous sources and presented it in a way that will be of particular interest to the genealogist who is interested in subjects like the origin of various surnames or the differences between the Friesian and Flemish churches. Where Schapansky falters is when he attempts to categorize the varieties of Mennonite expressions of faith and to define a normative or standard Mennonite theology.

Schapansky, not unlike other writers such as Delbert Plett, somehow feels that there is a

normative Mennonite theology, and all other theological expressions are deviations from that norm. The theology, practice and traditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century rural West Prussian Flemish Mennonites in the Vistula Delta are held up as the norm, or as the correct expression of Mennonite-Anabaptist theology, presumably because they represent the largest grouping of Prussian Mennonites. Implicit in the narrative is the attitude that any deviation from traditional Mennonite faith and traditions (as defined by 18<sup>th</sup> century rural West Prussian Flemish Mennonites) was a negative development in Mennonite history. The so-called "Separatist-Pietist" movement as defined by Schapansky (74-76) becomes the scapegoat for many of the controversies with which the Mennonite church in Russia had to struggle, particularly in the Molotschna. An example of this is found in the following quote: "The majority of the Molotschna Mennonites of the period 1803-1809 also adhered firmly to traditionalist Delta Flemish ideals. Unfortunately this community was weakened by poor leadership in the early years, the influx of Pietist (and by in large Friesian) Mennonites of the post 1815 period, and forcible government intervention" (94). On the other hand the Chortitza Mennonites escaped relatively unscathed by the "Separatist-Pietist" movement and thus were able to transplant their much purer form of the Mennonite faith to Canada in the 1870s. Implicit in this logic is the view that today's true heirs of Mennonite-Anabaptism are the so-called conservative Mennonites found in southern Manitoba and Latin America, such as the Old Colony Mennonites.

While most would agree that a traditional view of the church was held by a majority of the Mennonites in Prussia and for that matter Russia, there is no reason to hold those traditions as a standard by which other Mennonites should be judged and criticized. Comparisons between the various theological groupings of Mennonites are helpful, but Schapansky's portrayal of some of these groups demonstrates a bias that detracts from his book. Furthermore, if one is going to write about Mennonite theology and orthodoxy, then one should refer back to the writings of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptists. Their interpretation of the New Testament can be used to assess the various spiritual and theological movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and their consistency with Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, something that is well beyond the scope of this book and has been dealt with extensively by many authors.

As was stated earlier, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia: Early History and First Settlers in the Context of the Mennonite Migrations* is a good addition to the growing list of resources for Mennonite genealogical research. Perhaps a second edition will avoid the shortcomings of this edition.