



## Commemorative Event at the old Church in Chortitz

by Ernest N. Braun

In the evening of August 2, 2014, for the first time in over 100 years, there was an ox-cart parked in front of the old Church in Chortitz, now called Randolph in the Rural Municipality of Hanover. The cart symbolized the anniversary of the arrival of the Mennonites in 1874, an arrival that changed the landscape of southeastern Manitoba within months, and has 140 years later resulted in an aggressive agricultural and urban homeland there.

The event was sponsored by the Chortitz Church Heritage Committee, which is chaired by Dr. Corneil Blatz, as the second public event since the Church was designated a Municipal Heritage Site by the Rural Municipality of Hanover earlier this year. It was timed to coincide with the Pioneer Days celebrations at the Mennonite Heritage Village, as a fitting commemoration to honour the pioneers in the oldest church building in the Municipality still on its original site. Rev. Sam Doerksen presided as emcee, music was provided by Karen Peters and an *a cappella* ensemble, and local historian Ernest N. Braun gave a short lecture on why Mennonite pioneers came to Manitoba from Russia (Ukraine) in the 1870s. Afterwards, the committee provided watermelon and *rollkuchen* outside, and people stayed to nibble and visit. About 130 people attended the event.

### Lecture summary:

**Introduction:** Traditionally three reasons have been given for our immigration: loss of military exemption; loss of control over schools/language, and the matter of landlessness (over half of the Mennonites in Russia did not have enough land to make a living from it).

**Content:** The material presented detailed the background to the *changes in Russia* that resulted in these threats to Mennonite community and faith life:



Ox-cart on loan from Mennonite Heritage Village.

— Photo by Ernest N. Braun

- the loss of the Crimean War in 1856, and the resulting reforms which touched every part of Mennonite life;
- change in intellectual climate in Russia that fueled the drive to a centralized state with one language;

And *changes in the Mennonite world* that conspired to make the future uncertain for Mennonites:

- religious upheaval, as a new individualized faith threatened the traditional community understanding of faith;
- socio-economic change as the Mennonite world became a class society, with one large class being the disenfranchised and landless Mennonites.

A further element was the sudden availability of land in the newly created Province of Manitoba: this occurred at exactly the moment that Mennonites began looking for emigration alternatives.

### Conclusion:

It is relatively easy to itemize the reasons for emigration from the turmoil and uncertainty of the context in Russia in the 1870s, but it is not so easy to fully understand at a gut level the sacrifice, the loss, the trauma, as well as the hopes and dreams of this great migration. Today – we honour those ancestors who made the life-changing irrevocable move to a new continent.



Karen Peters and the *a cappella* group

— Photo by Harold Dyck

# Pioneer Days at the Village

A celebratory atmosphere has infused the Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) throughout 2014, its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Pioneer Days, the museum's four-day signature event, was no exception. The record number of attendees for this annual festival, approximately 6700 people in total, attests to the fact that this institution is meeting the needs of the people it seeks to serve. Visitors from far and wide, including other communities, provinces, and countries, came to experience pioneer days.

MHV strives to provide quality entertainment for children, in an effort to ensure that they will remain friends of the museum into their adult years. The fact that many of the guests continue to be young families bodes well for the future of the museum.

Eight bands provided musical entertainment for festival-goers, both those inside the tent and those relaxing over food and conversation at nearby picnic tables. The annual *Saengerfest* in the auditorium was, as in other years, very well attended.

Pioneer demonstrations, many of which were made possible by the Southeast Draft Horse Association and Steam Club '71, were of great interest. The horse-powered demonstration of cutting firewood was instructive on several accounts, among them a physics lesson on transferring energy from the horses to the saw by means of an *umgang* or merry-go-round. The Case Steamer, utilized in operating the sawmill and the threshing machine, as well as pulling a six bottom platform plow provided insight into the significant role it played in pioneer life.

Friesen Drillers offered interested guests a turn-of-the-century well drilling demonstration. A number of guests

indicated that they had no idea such technology was available for well-drilling.

The Family History Centre assisted interested guests in their family history research. This recent program on festival days has become a popular point of interest among many guests.

MHV staff worked very hard at making the festival the success it was. However, they could not have achieved what they did were it not for the enormous support from community volunteers and corporate sponsors.



## The Steinbach Peacemakers Memorial Project: An Update

by Lawrence Klippenstein

For several years now a small group has been attempting to design a peacemakers memorial for Steinbach and the surrounding region. A committee of eight currently has the project in hand. It is focused on placing this memorial structure somewhere on the grounds of the Mennonite Heritage Village museum, preferably in the pond area.

At the moment, planning is concentrating on creating some kind of a replica of the well-known sketch of Dirk Willems, rescuing his jailor from a fall through the ice. The sketch is found in some versions of the *Martyrs Mirror*. It is hoped that the final product can provide a small meeting place for individuals and groups to join in meditations on the peace theme, planning related projects, etc.

At this point a well-known sculptor, Peter Sawatzky of Winnipeg, originally from the Altona area, has agreed to join the committee for discussion of its plans, especially regarding a bronze depiction of the Willems rescue, and with it the story of how this caused his recapture and ultimate execution for the peace action which he undertook at the time.

One of the committee members, Jack Heppner, has recently completed a brief rewording of the founding events of the Anabaptist movement in which the deeds of people like Dirk Willems form a core element of the story. This statement is being circulated in the committee right now, and may become a piece of public reading in due time.

The project as a whole is part of a longer range plan originated by the Evangelical Anabaptist Fellowship, headquartered in Winkler where the idea of three memorials first emerged, one in each of the following locations: Winkler, Altona and Steinbach. The communities of Winkler and Altona have completed their part of the program, and the Steinbach community is hoping to round out this larger project with the current planning in progress.

The next meeting of the Steinbach group is scheduled to take place shortly after Thanksgiving at a time when sculptor Peter Sawatzky can be part of the ongoing discussion.

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# Art Exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village

by Jessica McKague

If you attended *Fall on the Farm* at Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV), you likely saw our new art installation bursting with colour in the Hallway Gallery. *Celebrating Culture in our Community* is a group show of four artists, Kim Gwozdz, Helen Banman, Melanie Penner, and Don Hoepfner, chosen by the Steinbach Arts Council (SAC) for their significant contributions to our arts community.

Don Hoepfner is a long-time local business owner. In retirement Don turned to the arts, exploring watercolour painting depicting serene moments in nature.

Melanie Penner began painting in the 1970s. Her passion is for painting the natural world such as landscapes in acrylic and multimedia, applying layers of fresh, bright colours. She has been instrumental to the arts programs and fundraising events at SAC. For the past 17 years, she has served on the Southeast Visual Arts Committee and the Gala Committee, was the initiator of the *Buy or Lease Art* program, and has led watercolour classes for children and adults.

Helen Banman has been a contributing member to SAC for the past ten years. In that time she has volunteered on the Southeast Visual Arts Committee and the Exhibit Committee, has showcased her artwork in a solo exhibit at the Steinbach Arts Council Hall Gallery, and has

participated in the Southeast Open Judge, placing in the watercolour category.

For the past 15 years Kim Gwozdz has dedicated her time to SAC as a member of the Southeast Visual Arts Committee, the Southeast Artist Group, as well as the Eastern Manitoba Art Collective. She has taught beginner and intermediate acrylic painting classes for the past 10 years. Her work is represented not only in the SAC *Buy or Lease Art* program, but also with Wayne Arthur Gallery in Winnipeg.

Each artist has several of their finest works on display from the luminous watercolours of Don Hoepfner to the golden multimedia of Melanie Penner. And if you can't seem to drink your fill from just one visit, you can always take one home! All four artists are part of the Steinbach Arts Council *Buy or Lease* program, an opportunity for businesses and homes to choose from a wide selection of art works for rent or purchase. You may have noticed a few works around town in such locations as Avenue Hair and Skin, The Steinbach Chamber of Commerce, Chicken Chef, Days Inn, enVision Community Living, Golden West Radio, G&E Homes, Harvest Insurance, Royal Bank of Canada, Steinbach Chiropractic Clinic, Steinbach City Hall, Steinbach Credit Union, Steinbach Family Medical, and Valeant Pharmaceuticals.

This exhibit rounds out MHV's annual themed exhibits of *Celebrate with Us. MHV at 50*, on display in the Auditorium, documents the history of the museum from its founders and builders to school programs and the story of our windmill. In the Gerhard Ens gallery, *A Growing Community Collection* showcases the most extraordinary artifacts donated to the museum. And now, on display through to January, this art exhibit will celebrate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of another community-driven institution – the Steinbach Arts Council, and acknowledge the talented artists who contribute to our arts community.

## Morris Family Histories Wanted

The Morris & District Centennial Museum, with support of the Town of Morris Town Council is attempting to establish an archival collection of Morris family histories. Their goal is to maintain the histories at the Museum for future reference. The Museum often receives requests for information about people and events. They are able to answer many of these questions, but because of a lack of family histories, some cannot be helped. The Town of Morris does not have a book on the history of the town's people or growth as other towns and municipalities have completed. It is hoped that families will provide a copy of their histories if available, or consider creating one if none currently exist. The archive room of the museum will become the future home of these histories. The public is welcome to come and visit the museum and view the many interesting displays and check out some of the information found in the archives. This community has much to be proud of and treasure. Maybe one day it will be you, or a family member, looking for information about Morris and its past. If more information is required, please call 204-746-2169 to contact the museum, or 204-746-2076 to contact the museum chairperson. The museum mailing address is Box 344, Morris, MB R0G 1K0.

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— The editors.



# History of the first home of Heinrich and Katharina Heinrichs in Halbstadt

by Judy Fehr

My grandfather Heinrich Heinrichs was a child when he came to Canada with his family aboard the S.S. Quebec on July 20, 1875. The names of his family appear on the passenger list as follows: Jacob Heinriass 45 labourer; Maria 42 wife; Jacob 13 labourer; Peter 10 child; Johan 8 child; Heinrich 6 child; Wilhelm 3 child; Susanna 1 infant. (Heinrichs is barely legible and has been transcribed as Heinriass.)

My grandmother Katharina Funk was a child when she came to Canada with her family aboard the S. S. Sarmatian on July 6, 1875. According to the passenger list, there was Jacob Funck 39 labourer; Ann 37 wife; Jacob 10 child; Cath 4 child.

Both families first settled in the East Reserve. According to the Halbstadt Heritage History, the first group of settlers arrived in Halbstadt in the West Reserve in 1880. The Heinrichs family is thought to have arrived at that time as Jacob Heinrichs filed for a homestead on July 23, 1880. In 1884, Jacob Heinrichs applied for land grants for the south-east and south-west quarters of Section Four of Township One. In the same year the eldest son Jacob, now 22 years of age, applied for a land grant for the north-west quarter of Section Four, Township One. According to Halbstadt Heritage History, Jacob Senior eventually acquired the entire Section Four and divided it into strips east and west allowing his four sons Peter, William, Henry and John to farm.

Since all five Heinrichs brothers settled in Halbstadt, there were a large number of families with the surname "Heinrichs" in the community. Halbstadt School records from 1908 – 1909 show that of the 31 students enrolled, 19 had the surname Heinrichs. These Heinrichs children had a grandmother whose name was Maria, and so there were five students with the name Maria Heinrichs. On the school register, each of these names is followed by the initial of her father's first name – Maria P., Maria J., Maria W., Maria J. and Maria H. (my aunt).

Heinrich Heinrichs and Katharina Funk were married on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, 1890 in Reichenbach by Ältester David Stoess. And, to the best of our knowledge, their home was built in the same year. All eight children were born in this home. Jacob was born in December of 1890, but died January 20, 1892; the second Jacob was born February 23, 1892; Anna was born March 7, 1894; Maria was born July 4, 1897; Anton was born June 7, 1899; Erdman was born May 31, 1903 and died March 30, 1905; Helena was born April 20, 1906; and the second Erdman, my father, was born January 20, 1910.

At one time, I tried to find out if there were records in regards to when this home was built. I was not able to find anything. I don't know when building permits became a requirement. So, we assume it was built the year my grandparents were married, and it is very likely true. Next year, it will have stood for 125 years.



**First Home of Heinrich and Katharina Heinrichs in Halbstadt,**

— Photograph by Bernie Heinrichs, provided by Judy Fehr

My grandparents were both very hard-working people. At a time when all the farm work was done by hand or with horses, it was very labour intensive. I asked Aunt Helen how many horses her dad had and she told me she didn't remember; but, a farmhand they used to have told her, "Your dad had twenty-two horses." After Grandpa died in 1932, Grandma stayed on the farm until sometime after my parents were married in 1939. She worked in the home; as well as doing barnyard chores and working out in the field stooking and such.

Throughout the years, until November 2000, I corresponded with my Aunt Helen Heinrichs, Heinrich and Katharina's youngest daughter. By that time she was 94 years old. My Aunt Helen Heinrichs died on November 8, 2011.

From 1972 on, I saved her letters. The following is an excerpt from a letter she wrote in 1991:

*Dear Judy,*

*I'll try to tell you about your grandparents, my parents, but will not be too good at it. My parents both came from Russia as children. My mother told me she had been five years old as they came over. She might not have remembered that, as of that age, but I guess her mother must have told her that later on.*

*What was important for them was that they got land and could farm, and after the family of six children, to get them on their own feet, they bought more land and tried to pay off as much as they could, until everyone had a place on a farm, like your dad's farm, too.*

*You ask what their hobbies were. In those days, people had to work until they sometimes were dead tired, and were glad when they could go to bed. They didn't have hobbies. My parents enjoyed working.*

*And I don't know anything about my grandparents. Grandma didn't think too much of education. Grandpa was more for that, but there wasn't money for that. And we*

*(Continued on page 5)*

## **Ex-Mennonite/Near Mennonite: Liturgical, Non-denominational, Secular**

### **An Academic and Community**

### **Education Conference**

**by Dr. Paul Doerksen, professor at CMU**

The conference hosted by the Chair of Mennonite Studies on October 3-4, 2014 sought to facilitate an analysis of the social and cultural phenomenon of Mennonites becoming non-Mennonites. The analysis provided during the conference took on wide-ranging forms in terms of topics, geographies, and methodologies.

The topics addressed included ecclesiological movements from Mennonite to other religious traditions (e.g. Anglican, Roman Catholic, 'prosperity gospel,' United Church of Canada), the leadership of ex-Mennonites in other religious movements such as Islam and atheism, and the experience and treatment of 'sexual minorities.' The conference presentations included a remarkable range of geographical divergence, partially in terms of the places from which presenters came – North America, Brazil, Germany – but more notably in terms of the analysis of becoming non-Mennonite in various settings around the world – urban, rural, Canada, America, Brazil, Mexico, Zimbabwe, India, Germany, Siberia.

The conference also brought to view a wide variety of methodologies used to analyze and display the various dimensions of the process of becoming non-Mennonite. These methodologies include the use of ethnography, theological analysis, social history, literary criticism, narrative, and personal testimony.

I hope that my brief description here hints at the richness of this conference, which was warmly hosted and very well-organized by Professor Royden Loewen and the Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites. The *Journal of Mennonite Studies* will publish a selection of refereed papers from this conference in 2015.

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*didn't get help for that in those days. The government didn't help with that. Your dad was going a little while in wintertime to the M.C.I. [Mennonite Collegiate Institute] in Gretna. He had to stay there as the roads were not passable in winter to go with the car. Nobody was going by car in winter time, and also the cars were not made for that in those days, and the roads were not opened.*

*My brother Jacob, the oldest one of us, had gone to M.C.I. school, but not too long, as spring time, seed time came, and everyone had to clean their crop seed themselves, and get going in the fields.*

*I know how your dad and I liked to go in the water puddles when it rained. We were barefoot, and Grandma clothed us lightly so we could play outside. We liked that. And in spring time when the creek was full of water, we liked to go with the trough on it. Then we were a little older already.*

*Ed.note – The writer acknowledges the research of contributors to the Halbstadt Heritage History Book.*

# **Book Notes**

**by Lawrence Klippenstein**

A significant volume for the book notes column in this issue is the \$20.00 305-page, paper back biography of a long-time Rosenort (near Morris) resident, Peter J. B. Reimer authored by Dianne Hildebrand, and commissioned by sons Sydney and Al (Elmer) Reimer. *Upholding the Old - Embracing the New. The Life Story of P. J. B. Reimer, Teacher, Minister and Mennonite Historian* appeared in June, 2014, published by the family, with support from the D. F. Plett Foundation. Peter's detailed forty-year diary/journal offered a major superb source for the story, which includes numerous sections on the wider history of Mennonites such as life at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna around the 1920s, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, as well as the Kleine Gemeinde Church. All of these groups and others played an important role in PJB's life.

A very inspiring read awaits all who take a good look at Moira Young Neufeld's new book, *Serendipity*. This slim 129-page paper back collection of stories illustrates that "Murphy's law" (if anything can go wrong . . .) is not the last word about life. The author also demonstrates that sometimes very unpleasant situations have unexpected and pleasant endings. She calls them "angel stories" because you never know where one will show up, and they often do. The book was printed and bound by Art Bookbindery in Winnipeg. It is a real prize at \$15.00.

The serendipity principle, interestingly, is also illustrated in a very readable account, a true story about a mother's life, that of Elizabeth Voth Toews, who often had difficulty getting through the tough journey that life brought her. Alice Warkentin has written Elizabeth's story for readers of virtually all ages in *The Life of Liese*. Published by the family in 2014, this 104-page paperback is written in a style all ages can enjoy, either reading it themselves or hearing it read. The book sells for \$10.00. There is a Holdeman Mennonite connection (the Greenland community near Ste. Anne is mentioned) which could make reading an earlier book by this author, *Walking down Memory Lane, 1928-1988*, about their parents, Jacob and Liese Toews, worth checking out.

Mary-Ann Kirby's name reached the public through an earlier award-winning book titled *I am a Hutterite*. Anyone who has read it has had a fine introduction to *Secrets of a Hutterite Kitchen: Unveiling the Rituals, Traditions and Food of the Hutterite Culture* (Toronto: The Penguin Group, 2014), 252 pp, pb. \$28.00 CND. Some very unique information including recipes can be found here – and one could suppose not ALL secrets have been revealed even yet! The book comes with much information about Hutterite community experience generally. A number of photos add important realism to the production.

*To obtain copies of the titles mentioned above contact the Mennonite Heritage Village bookshop via: roxannam@mhv.ca or phone 1-204-326 9661, or other Mennonite bookstores in your area.*

# I Remember . . . We spoke English to the Horses but Low German to the Cows

by Julius G. Toews

My grandfather, Jacob Toews, together with a contingent of immigrants from Russia landed in Fargo, Minnesota, in 1874. After a stopover of a few days the contingent continued their journey down the Red River and landed at the junction of the Rat River and the Red, and from there they went to the immigrant barracks in search of homesteads. My grandfather and about 10 other families were so disappointed with the terrain of stones, bush, marshes and mosquitoes, that they took the boat back to Fargo where they had heard of settlement opportunities west of Fargo at a little hamlet by the name of Mapletown. A number of Swedish families had settled here before the arrival of the Mennonites and had already established a rural school in this area.

The Mennonite families had hoped that more families of their faith would, desiring that their children should receive an education, begin to send their children to the rural school already established. Before long, however, a friendly relationship developed between the Swedish and Mennonite children. The Mennonite parents became apprehensive, fearing that their children, being only a small minority, would lose their Mennonite identity by intermarrying with Swedish young people. This they could not allow to happen and having already heard from their relatives who had settled on the West Reserve that the terrain there was much superior to the terrain on the East Reserve, they sold their homesteads to the Swedes and moved to join their relatives on the West Reserve in Manitoba.

My grandparents acquired some land in the neighbourhood of the village of Reinland and started farming outside the village complex. Here my father grew up into manhood, married my mother, Anna Giesbrecht, and started farming on his own on rented land. And here I was born as the third child of the family in 1893.

The available homesteads within the boundaries of the West Reserve were all taken and so the young people that married had to look elsewhere for the free homesteads. The township adjacent on the north side of the Reserve still had available homesteads and so a group of young couples from the village of Reinland and from the neighbouring villages established a new community in this township. My parents' homestead was located 5 miles straight south of the railway station hamlet called Myrtle which now is located on Highway No. 23. It was in 1896 that my parents moved to their new homestead and it was here that I discovered that there were two languages, Low German and English. It was also here that I discovered that we spoke English to our horses and Low German to our cows.

I can remember quite vividly in what manner I was made aware of this anomaly. One beautiful spring morning my younger sister and I were playing in the yard when my sister all of a sudden drew my attention to an approaching

buggy. Of course we were curious to know who was coming and so we ran towards the house door where visitors arriving in vehicles usually stopped. When the buggy came nearer I recognized that it was our English neighbour who lived about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile south of us. I was delighted to see that it was Mr. Peter Wright, because I wished to listen carefully how he would speak English to his horses.

The buggy drew nearer and I saw him pull at the reins. Because my English vocabulary was limited to two words, yes and no, we did not understand what he said, so we just stood there and grinned sheepishly. My father, who also had seen him arrive, came out, and they spoke to each other for a little while. Then Mr. Wright tugged the reins and said *yidapp* to his horses and went back. I was puzzled with what I had seen and heard. Mr. Wright had spoken to the horses just like my father always did, and that was Low German. He had said *ho* and *yidapp* to his horses, just like father did. But my mother knew better. She told me that *ho* and *yidapp* were English words. *Back-up*, *gee* and *haw* were also English words. This information made me happy. Evidently I knew more English words than I had been aware of. *Gee* meant to turn to the right, *haw* meant to turn to the left, and *back-up* meant to go in reverse. I must add here that I later discovered that the word *yidapp* was a corruption of the words *gee-up*.

That evening at the supper table I again brought up the matter of speaking English to our horses. "How come that we do not speak English to the cows?" I asked. Then father took over the conversation and explained that we spoke English to the horses because they had been bought from English settlers who had already trained the horses to follow English commands. It was easier for us to learn the English commands than it would be to train the horses to follow German commands. Not only did we use English commands for the horses but they also had been given English names. Some of the more common names for geldings were Tom, Frank, Sandy, Prince and Charlie. Common names for mares were Flossy, Maggie, Daisy, Minnie and Kate.

However, cows were not trained like horses. Moreover the cows were more the responsibility of the women, and the women, did not know the English language so they used the commands that they had used in Russia. When the cow was to stand still for milking the command was *shtoch*, the word for moving over was *rumm*, and when the cows were commanded to take their places in the stanchions they were commanded to *shtoak-enn*. The names for the cows were usually indicative of the colour of the cow, in Low German. If the cow was red she was called *Rohdi*, a white cow was *Witti*, and a brown cow *Bruni*, and a brindled-coloured cow was called *Bunti*. However, the trained oxen were given English commands

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# Neubergthal Culture Day, Oct. 4, 2014

**Organized by the Neubergthal Heritage Foundation**

**by Lois Braun**

Reflecting on the experiences I and many others had in the village of Neubergthal one Saturday in early October, I believe the word *Jemeenschoft* would apply best. As we criss-crossed the village street, the driveways and yards, all the nuances and textures contained within the concept of *communing* were exemplified in various ways, over and over again.

Scattered through the village were six points of interest, each one featuring an event. Visitors revolved through the different venues all afternoon; presentations were repeated hourly. In the charmingly restored Herdsman's House, a young man named Carl Friesen demonstrated the art of making traditional *einbach*, baking them in the Russian-style bake-oven that forms the centre of the dwelling; in the Ray and Marilyn Hamm

housebarn, singer/song-writer/musician Dennis Reimer, accompanied on the piano by his wife Phyllis, entertained listeners with Low-German ballads, humorous songs, and witticisms, supplemented by the



**Carl Friesen in the Herdsman's House.**

— Photo by Lois Braun

aroma of spice tea wafting in from the kitchen; Armin Wiebe read passages from his novels in the *grootte Stow* of the Friesen Housebarn Interpretive Centre, where visitors could also take a tour guided by Norma Giesbrecht; in the Bergthal schoolhouse, still very much a work-in-progress, local artists and artisans displayed their creations and products – photographer-print-maker Ray Kehler, metal-sculptor Ken Loewen, Plum Coulee's organic grocer Prairie Foods, and Horndean sculptor Jake Goertzen. For a soup-and-pie meal or just a cup of hot coffee, visitors could stop by the Neubergthal community hall. That building has no historical significance, but on top of being the place to partake of meals, it serves as the mustering and gathering spot for village occasions.

The most important of the six points of interest that day was yet another heritage housebarn, originally occupied by the Peter Klippenstein family. This property is now officially called the Eddie Schmidt Housebarn Educational and Research Centre – ESHERC. Eddie Schmidt was the last resident of the house, and when he died, he named the Neubergthal Heritage Foundation (NHF) as its beneficiary in his will. It was for the purpose of transforming this structure into an historically authentic example of Mennonite culture, and then eventually into a vibrant activity centre promoting and preserving and even restoring the village way of life as it once was for the Mennonite people, that the Neubergthal Culture Day fund-

raiser was conceived. The NHF emphasizes, however, that they are not advocating reliving the past so much as bringing what is wise and serviceable from the past into the future, and making it relevant so that today's generation and generations to come will understand the concepts of sustainability and self-sufficiency. Within the walls of the Eddie Schmidt house for the Oct. 4 event, well-known historian and curator Roland Sawatzky gave short lectures that painted an intriguing picture of the architecture of the house, the family that once inhabited it, and their traditional lifestyle.

During the course of the afternoon, at each venue, a temporary little community formed. We recognized old, familiar things; we bonded over our shared ancestry and ways of life; we looked one another in the eye and exchanged thoughts and observations and ideas; we made *Spott* and *Spas* and laughed together; we translated Low German words for those who didn't know the language; we embraced strangers and newcomers and enfolded them into our Mennoniteness; we contributed to the future of the culture; we communed. And we partook of a simple yet satisfying meal together: borscht, breads made in the Friesen Housebarn bake-oven, pumpkin pie. By five o'clock, the small community hall was aroar.

*Jemeenschoft* took on yet another layer and became even more urgent later, at the gala evening concert in the cavernous, unheated hayloft of the Krahn barn. At six-thirty, the air was quite chilly, and bodies were essential to warming up the space. By seven-thirty, we could take off our coats.

But what a concert! The place was packed to the rafters, and the rafters in those old haylofts are pretty high. Sponsored by Golden West Radio and recorded for broadcast on CFAM and Classic 107, it was hosted by Eric Friesen. Main organizer Margruite Krahn had asked Henry Engbrecht and Mel Braun to knit together a male chorus and a roster of songs to perform. Dubbed the "Begoftte Ministe aka Wietleftijch Jekjnett", the twelve members were mostly local men, with one or two Neubergthaler-wanna-



**Singer/song-writer/musician Dennis Reimer, accompanied on the piano by his wife Phyllis, performing in the Ray and Marilyn Hamm housebarn.**

— Photo by Lois Braun

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# Book Review

by **Lawrence Klippenstein**

George Klassen, *Gerhard J Klassen: Collected Memories* (Carman: by the author and editor, 2014), 120 pp., hdc.

The author and editor has presented stories about Gerhard J Klassen, of Blumenort near Gretna, Manitoba in a graphic (many photos) and organized manner. A series of 17 very readable chapters provide the account from the beginning, titled "Life Outline" to closing chapters titled "Gerhard's Place in the World" and "Life Goes on – Mary and the Children".

Gerhard J Klassen was born on July 15, 1914, in Gnadental, south Russia, to Jacob J. and Margaretha Klassen. The family emigrated to Blumenort in Manitoba, Canada, in 1923. Gerhard married Maria Peters in 1944. They had four children, Mary Rose, Frank Ernest, George Daniel and Agnes Grace. Father Klassen passed away on January 7, 1950, at the early age of 36, with Maria surviving till her passing on April 10, 2007.

This brief outline becomes the framework for details of their life experience together, along with extensive notes on the history of sibling families. A strong focus is kept on stories about Gerhard throughout however. Several chapters provide clear sketches of his home village, Gnadental, south Russia, and then also of Blumenort of southern Manitoba.

Gerhard's personality, likes and dislikes, favourite pastimes, etc., all come to the fore with many photos and anecdotes collected for the publication. An extensive chapter on his conscientious objector service during WWII forms a useful more detailed than usual glimpse of his involvements there. Church life in the context of the Blumenort Mennonite Church also formed an important aspect of Gerhard's choices and contributions to the community.

Additional family photographs and an appendix for the journey of the William and Anna Klassen Goertzen family amplify the story in closing. The good quality of most visuals, interesting, well photographed documents, and good care in book composition of all the material provide a model for doing family stories in print.

The list of references (footnotes) at the end is a bonus not always found in family studies like this. It is important to be aware of the church history found in *Footprints of a Pilgrim People: Story of the Blumenort Mennonite Church* published in 1985 and still available from the author in Carman (georgesglass@mymts.net). This work is a meaningful addition to the story of this congregation.

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be's from Winnipeg and Winkler thrown in for good measure. After they'd sung everything from gospel to *plaudietsche* folk, we were lulled into a romantic mood with a bit of Schumann from opera singer Monique Scholte Mierau, who has lately become a resident of the village. Leanne Kehler, now a professional storyteller, grew up just outside Neuberghthal. She offered delightful, rollicking memoirs about her father and grandfather, honouring their influence on her imagination and her talents. Three Altona-born musicians took part in the concert: Mel Braun did justice with his mellow baritone to Wagner's beautiful "O du mein holder Abendstern" and Tosti's "La Serenata"; Paul Bergman, the bard of the border lands, sang a selection of roots-inspired, locally-flavoured pieces from his upcoming CD, accompanied by Johnny Ginter on the violin and Amy Loewen on vocals; and Andrew Braun, who together with Laura Smith embodies the Vancouver-based indie pop duo called Rococode, performed several of their own creations in a slightly edgier vein.

Bookending these performances were hymn-sings by the audience. True to Mennonite tradition, with no instrumental accompaniment or coaching or preparation, our voices burst forth in four- sometimes five-part harmony, sounding for all the world like we'd done it a thousand times before.

And in a way, we had.

For more information about the Neuberghthal Heritage Foundation and the Eddie Schmidt Education and Research Centre, go to [www.neuberghthal.com](http://www.neuberghthal.com).

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and names, and for the same reason that English was spoken to the horses.

The use of German commands for cows was retained by many Mennonites as long as they used the German language in their homes. Once a family spoke English the use of German commands for cows was dropped.

It was as an adult that I became aware of the fact that I was using two languages with my parents - High German to Mom, and Low German to Dad. So I discussed this phenomenon with my sister Lydia. She remembered the background of this. Apparently our parents spoke Low German to each other and to us. Then Mom wanted us to learn High German. Although we could not attend church regularly, because of distance and winter roads, which were not ploughed, the church services were in High German and Mom wanted us to understand the services. Mom insisted that we speak High German to her. Dad had ordered a "Deutsche Bibel" from Germany and Mom taught us the Gothic German alphabet.

*Ed. note – the above story is an excerpt from Manitoba Mennonite Memories, A Century Past but Not Forgotten, edited by Julius G. Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein, 1974, and provided for publication in Heritage Posting by Nelly Rempel.*