M M H S
MANITOBA MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Heritage Posting

Pure Field, Part 1

BY SARAH ENS



Me holding baby Eleanor in front of the barn. My mom and mother in law are in the background.

On the hottest day of the year, my parents, my six-month-old baby, and I set out from Winnipeg for the village of Reinland, Manitoba to visit the historic Ens Heritage Homestead.[1] My mom drives while my dad reclines in the front passenger seat, the route south gleaming from his phone's screen. Baby Eleanor and I bundle ourselves into the back, Ziplock baggies of ham sandwiches prepared by my mom stacked between us.

After forty-five minutes on the highway, the baby snoring softly beside me and the A/C on full blast, my dad finally says, "Reinland means 'clean field' or 'pure field.'" I've been trying since we merged off the perimeter to extract information from him about the homestead and, through details about this place of our founding, information about my great-great-grandparents, my great-grandparents, my grandfather, and my dad. My mom and I have been making eye contact in the rearview mirror, taking turns attempting to prompt something, but my dad doesn't seem to recall all that much, or at least all that much worth sharing, and even though he spent a few weeks every summer of his childhood at his grandparents' housebarn in Reinland with his cousins, he apparently didn't develop favourite haunts or special memories. "We pitched hay," he says after a few minutes of thought, then clears his throat. "I remember having fun pitching hay with Esch and Herb."

Continued on page 2

I am so glad to finally be able to present you with the Fall 2026 issue of *Heritage Posting*, the 111th issue. Those of you who carefully watch your mailboxes for this magazine will recall that this is the first issue we've published since Spring 2025. Turnover at the MMHS Board, including the editorial position, is the explanation, but I'm pleased to have taken up the job and can confidently assure you of regular issues going forward.

Transitions are also an opportunity for change. Instead of three issues, we will be publishing *Heritage Posting* twice annually going forward. At the same time, we will be publishing a monthly e-newsletter. Hopefully you have already seen the September and October issues! We will migrate most of our news and announcements to the e-newsletter, while *Heritage Posting* will continue to be home to the articles, reflections, and reviews you've come to expect over the years.

Our next issue will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Mennonite emigration to Paraguay. In the meantime, enjoy the three wonderful offerings we have for you here.

Gerald Ens

IN THIS ISSUE

Pure Field, Part 1 1
BY SARAH ENS

1950: The Year Steinbach Voted "Wet" 4
BY RALPH FRIESEN

What's happening with the Peace Trail? 8
BY GLEN KLASSEN

I've been to the homestead before, and in fairness to my dad, my own memories are similarly shaky. For years of my childhood, hundreds of thousands (it seemed) of Enses gathered in Reinland each summer to eat corn on the cob, sing hymns, run amuck through the hot, dry grass, and remember where we came from. These events were tolerable if my first cousins were around, but if they weren't, I was expected to play with the gaggle of strangers that were my second cousins while my aunts and uncles once removed looked on. When we were old enough to wander away undetected but not yet old enough to refuse to attend altogether, my sister and I would sneak into our parents' minivan parked in the long line of cars in the farmyard and read *The Chronicles of Narnia* until someone came looking. The only pleasure of these Reinland reunions, besides the homegrown corn, came from touring the preserved housebarn. I'd quietly follow my family from room to room all the while privately imagining myself as Laura Ingalls Wilder, waking up with the sunrise, pinning up my long braids, tidying my tiny bed that during the day folded up into a bench, and greeting the cows, the dear, gentle cows, before dutifully filling bucket after bucket with morning milk. The fantasy remains, but anything of the actual place—and the actual people who lived there—glimmers only feebly in the background of that more potent and instructive make-believe.

We're well into the country now, endless sky above and endless road below, straight lines everywhere. My dad's clearest recollections, he says, are of the annual Christmas family gatherings. Before they were permitted to open their gifts, all forty-odd grandchildren had to partake in the "Christmas *Wunsch*"—reciting poems or scripture for the grandparents and then giving them each a hug and a kiss. "They weren't demonstrative people," my dad says when I ask about those shy, yearly pecks on his grandparents' aged cheeks. "Sort of standoffish. I don't really remember any other time that I would have hugged them." Out his window, canola fields sprawl from the highway like spilled gold, all that yellow so bright under the glaze of blue sky it almost hurts to look at.

My dad's great-grandparents and grandparents and dad left Ukraine and settled on the Reinland homestead in 1923, survivors of WWI and the Russian civil war. Their experiences of incredible suffering and enduring faith in God are narrated, somewhat triumphantly, in our family book,[2] but according to my dad, they didn't talk about what happened to them, or perhaps, since my dad is the youngest in his family, "all the stories had already been told."

We turn off Highway 3 and pass through a series of small Mennonite settlements with German names: Schanzenfeld, Friedensruh, Gnadenthal, Schoenwiese, Neuenberg, Hochfeld. And then, finally, we make the turn into Reinland.

Pastureland, hemmed by haphazard wooden fence posts and tidy shelterbelts of willows and poplars, buzzes merrily with birds and bugs. A placid little creek curls its way through the muted green and brown grasses and sprigs of white flowers. The old *Little House on the Prairie* reverie rises up in me like a warm gust of wind blown from the distant horizon. Quaint farmyards, devoid of any people who might shatter the illusion that we've slipped somehow into an idyllic past, line the road. Like many other traditional Mennonite communities, Reinland is a *Strassendorf*, a single-street village, with each homestead branching off of just one route, housebarn after slightly sagging housebarn. Founded in 1875, Reinland was one of the first of eighteen Mennonite villages established in the West Reserve, an expanse of 500,000 acres on the west side of the Red River allocated exclusively to Russian Mennonite settlers after the signing of Treaty 1 in 1871.

"That's the oldest Mennonite church in western Canada." My dad points at an unassuming wooden structure and then swings his finger to the other side of the road. "And that's the homestead."

Three sturdy buildings sit sweltering on the narrow farmyard bounded by a thicket of chokecherries: a poultry barn and chicken coop, the carpenter shed or *schmaed*, and the housebarn, a type of dwelling favoured by Mennonites back in the "old countries" of Poland, Prussia, and Ukraine and by early Canadian Mennonite pioneers. A housebarn is exactly what it sounds like, a house joined with a barn, with humans and livestock all under one roof. During long, dark, frozen prairie winters, cows and horses helped to generate heat through the whole building and nobody had to venture out into a blizzard for milking and feeding. Recognized as a Municipal Heritage Site, the Ens Heritage Homestead, according to the website Canada's Historic Places, is "a well-preserved collection of unpretentious farm structures" that "authentically illustrates how Mennonites from Russia organized their early settlements in southern Manitoba."

We swing open the car doors and the midafternoon sun hurls its heat at us. Before I've unbuckled my baby from her car seat, I can feel sweat forming. I hoist Eleanor onto my hip, secure her sunhat, and squint at the long building that housed my great-great-grandparents and their descendants (and their animals) for seven decades. Classic red for the

barn half and a weathered white for the house. Someone is waving us over from the shade. Haley, my second cousin, agreed to unlock the building for us since we didn't manage to organize a visit during one of the homestead's regular open house tours. Haley's grandfather, my dad's uncle, Abe Ens, worked tirelessly to obtain that municipal heritage site designation for the homestead, and Haley seems to be gamely carrying forward the torch. We join her at the entrance to the barn—I briefly wonder if we ought to recognize each other from the old Reinland reunion days—and let her know that we'll start in here, thank you, and make our way into the house later.

The temperature dramatically drops as we step from the sundrenched yard into the shadows of the barn, like we've gone underground. "It smells wholesome in here," I say, and my mom nods and says, "Earthy." My mom grew up on a farm in the Mennonite village of Hague, Saskatchewan; I pass Eleanor over to her as she explains everything. She points out the huge timbers that make up the exposed post-and-beam frame, how you can see where they were hand-hewn with an axe and joined together with wooden pegs.

"There's where they would keep the horses and over here the cows would be lined up for milking," she coos to Eleanor who stretches her hand into a dusty shaft of light.

"Don't let her touch anything," I say quickly, noting the many cobwebs and rusty nails and chaotically suspended serrated tools.

I walk beside my dad, reading the many printed pages of information protected by plastic sleeves pinned to the walls and little tags with labels like "Tante Marie Estate" that hang from brooms and harnesses and saws and corroded metal wheels. If not for the signs, you could imagine a farmer from 1923 had just stepped out, or perhaps been raptured: a pile of coal slopes against the back wall, wooden crates of "Famous Flavourful B.C. Fruit" and "Gillett's Pure Flake Lye" and "St. Lawrence Sugar—Extra Hard Lumps" are stacked next to dark glass bottles, rolls of twine, and overturned buckets, and the metal milking stanchions sway slightly in the damp air. Eleanor's squawking interrupts my vision of ghost cows—and why do these cows appear so readily and fully formed in my mind when I've encountered a real-life cow maybe ten times in my life—and I notice my dad shuffle carefully across the uneven ground and lumber up the stairs into the house. My mom gives Eleanor back to me and makes her way over to him, but pauses, as she passes from one room to the next, over a worn down and rounded piece of wood placed in the threshold. "Thousands of feet," she says, shaking her head. "Thousands of feet have walked through here."



The four of us inside the housebarn.

I carry Eleanor, her little feet kicking, over the threshold, and join my parents in the housebarn's kitchen. Haley and another second cousin are sitting around the little table sorting through documents, two electric fans aimed at their flushed faces. While my parents sign the guestbook, I ask Haley if she'll be able to go somewhere with air conditioning after we leave. She smiles and nods and I promise to keep our visit short and heat-stroke-less.

"Please, take your time," she says, kindly, and hands me a stack of documents titled "A Brief History of This Homestead" by Abe Ens. At the very top of the first page is an epigraph from Joshua: "In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them."

Part 2 of this essay will appear in the next edition of Heritage Posting

Sarah Ens lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Treaty One Territory) with her daughter and husband. She is the author of two books of poetry, The World Is Mostly Sky *(Turnstone 2020) and* Flyway *(Turnstone, 2022), and a forthcoming book of nonfiction essays.*

NOTES

1. https://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/enshomestead.shtml.
2. Adolf Ens and Kathy Enns, ed., *Ens: Lineage and Legacy* (Ens Book Committee, 2006).

1950: The Year Steinbach Voted "Wet"

BY RALPH FRIESEN

In mid-August of 1950, Steinbach undertaker Abram T. Loewen surprised everyone in town by presenting Town Council with a petition to prohibit the sale of liquor. At the time, the Tourist Hotel on Main Street – a men's only beer parlour – was Steinbach's only vendor of alcoholic beverages. The petition had 239 signatures, including the reform-minded Kleine Gemeinde minister Ben Reimer. As the local *Carillon* newspaper reports,

> in a statement to the press, Rev. Ben D. Reimer, one of the principal promoters of the petition, said that the chief reason for trying to cut out the beer parlor in Steinbach was "to take away the temptation from the younger generation. As a Christian it is our duty to take a definite stand. We cannot remain silent—because silence means assent."[1]

A fervent evangelist and promoter of missions, Reimer embraced American-style Fundamentalist doctrine, including the belief that drinking was a sin.

The petition had enough signatures to force a bylaw vote. The date was set in conjunction with the municipal election: 20 October 1950. A majority vote (51%) would be enough to decide the issue. Jake Peters, owner of the Tourist Hotel, immediately stated that he would close the hotel doors if the bylaw should pass. He added that the petition came as a complete surprise to him in view of the favourable province-wide recognition the hotel enjoyed.

Drinking had long been a divisive issue in Steinbach. Moderate consumption of alcohol, including the production of home-made wine and brandy, had been a normal part of life for the ancestors of most of the town's inhabitants when they lived in Imperial Russia (present-day Ukraine) prior to immigrating to Canada in the 1870s. Drunkenness was frowned upon and disciplined, but alcohol was not forbidden. This custom carried on for the first decades of life in Manitoba, but it came under intensifying criticism as American Fundamentalist influences became stronger. The Kleine Gemeinde (soon to be renamed the Evangelical Mennonite Conference), its offshoot the



The Tourist Hotel in the 1950s

Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, the Church of God in Christ (Holdeman), the Emmanuel Mission Church, and the Mennonite Brethren Church were all more or less on the same page. The General Conference, the Bergthaler and the Chortitzer were more tolerant on this issue, as were the ethnic German Lutherans.

Not even all church leadership, then, would have agreed with Reimer's views. *Carillon News* editor Eugene Derksen commented that the bylaw vote had "all the potentialities of the A-bomb, that could split the town clean down the middle."[2]

This was not the first attempt to shut down drinking establishments in Steinbach. In the 1920s, in addition to the Tourist Hotel owned by the Peters family, the Steinbach Hotel operated a beer parlour. This establishment was owned by Henry Coote, who had come to Canada as one of the British Home Children and had worked on the farm of a Toews family in southeastern Manitoba. In 1931, a petition successfully closed these parlours for a few years, but then in 1934 Hugh MacDiarmid, a former RCMP officer in town, made an arrangement with the Peters family to re-open their parlour under new ownership. Again a petition went up in opposition, but this time did not succeed because the Village Administration failed to appear at a hearing of the Liquor Control Board in Winnipeg. According to one local observer, "Mr. MacDiarmid, the current

owner of the parlor, is supposedly, as an ex-Mountie with 26 years of police service, an honest man, and signalled his best intentions to keep to the regulations and to deal with minors and intoxicated people promptly."[3] The parlour stayed open and before long ownership reverted to the Peters family, quietly carrying on a steady business until the "A-bomb" was dropped.

Eugene Derksen was a political conservative, but he was also a Russländer and a liberal when it came to religion and social issues. He tried to maintain objectivity in his paper, but at times he allowed his bias to come through. He was a member of Town Council, and so had a front-row seat to the argument:

> It was again repeated that we have a clean, well-run hotel, that the way to save a man from drinking is not by closing the local pub, that a hotel could easily be built outside the town limits, that such hotel would be entirely out of our control, and other such thoughts as are being expressed through town not by alcoholics but by teetotallers who have put it thus: "We can choose between two evils, and we want to choose the lesser one."[4]

In the next week's issue of *The Carillon*, Derksen published a letter (could it have been solicited?) from D. T. Brown, President of the Associated Canadian Travellers Winnipeg Club, who argued against closing the beer parlour on the grounds that the owners would then close the hotel, thus creating a hardship for travellers and hurting town business. "Your merchants alone have a great many men who have to stay overnight at a Hotel and other representatives of various lines of endeavours also have to spend not one night but in some cases several nights as well as many government employees." Brown went on to commend the Tourist Hotel for its comfortable rooms and excellent meals.[5]

Derksen even solicited law enforcement in support of keeping the parlour open. He interviewed an anonymous RCMP officer, who begins by describing the hotel owners as "quiet and law-abiding," and goes on to say that his work is made easier by the existence of the beer parlour, as bootleggers are much less active than they would otherwise be because rural men come to Steinbach for the evening and "go for the mild drink instead of drinking dangerous home brew in some obscure, out of the way place."[6]

But there was pushback as the bylaw vote date neared. Some Steinbach church leaders recruited Rev. Gerald E. Splinter, "well-known radio pastor of Jamestown, N. D.," to conduct a temperance rally at the Steinbach Gospel Tabernacle on Friday, 13 October, a week before the vote. Splinter was well-qualified for the job, having been involved in a similar battle in Jamestown some years earlier.[7]

Splinter delivered a passionate message to the large crowd assembled in the tabernacle. Responding to the question of what good it would do to vote the beer parlour out of Steinbach if a new one should be built outside town limits, he exclaimed, "Throw the beer parlour out of town; you are then not responsible for what goes on outside town limits." He recited statistics showing the percentages of crime and motor vehicle accidents attributed directly to liquor. He appealed to his audience's religious idealism: "The first principle to keep in mind," said Splinter, "is that anything the liquor crowd is for, we as Christians are against, and anything they are against, we are for. Therefore it is our duty to vote against the hotel." He dismissed the very notion of "moderate" drinking, relating a story of "a professor who sank a $10,000 salary to the level of a beggar through drink."[8]

Interestingly enough, Splinter actually registered as a guest at the Tourist Hotel. When he was told that the business could not survive without the beer parlour, he noted that "the hotel had flourished from 1930 to 1933 when the parlor also had been closed."[9]

In addition to the tabernacle rally, an advertising and letter-writing campaign was conducted, with missives flying from both sides. The Tourist Hotel issued a letter asking for "consideration of their past record in running a clean, orderly hotel with never a mar on their name." An advertisement sponsored by the Northwest Travellers Association further urged support for the hotel. The Manitoba Temperance Alliance sent out a circular to local households, pleading the case against beer.[10]

Still another rally was held in the high school auditorium on the Thursday evening before the vote. The speaker was Chas. N. Nees, President of the Manitoba Temperance Alliance. Like Splinter, Nees presented examples of the evil effects of alcohol consumption: "One man is being tried for murder today, my neighbour is up on a manslaughter charge, two men have been hanged in Manitoba this year, all caused by liquor." According to Nees, Manitoba had 20,000 alcoholics, and one out of three social drinkers became an alcoholic. He finished by urging people to vote against liquor sales.[11]

When the vote was finally held, it wasn't particularly close. Out of 1119 eligible voters, 398 cast their ballots for the sale of liquor, 219 against. The beer parlour, and the Tourist Hotel, stayed open.



Eugene Derksen, publisher of the Carillon News, in the 1950s

The continued operation of the beer parlour, incidentally, was not enough to shut down the home brew trade in Steinbach area. An unnamed reporter, possibly Eugene Derksen's brother Bruno, wrote a delightful piece on the subject in *The Carillon* just around the time that the anti-liquor petition was presented.

> Little glasses glistened in the moonlight and home-cooked whisky flowed freely in the shadow of Evergreen barn on the night of Saturday, August 5. In the loft, a barn dance was in full swing, and tipplers went in and out to lift a few quick ones, then back to the music. At about 11 o'clock it looked as if there were fewer men than usual on the floor, as if some outside attraction drew them away. Flashlights were seen blinking among the cars, and we went to investigate. . . . All in all, about 10 people were charged with having liquor in a place other than designated on their permit, or for consuming liquor unlawfully, or for possessing home brew. At one stage of the game an angry crowd milled around close to the RCMP muttering, "Donner Wetter! Hier sind sie wieder" [Thunder and lightning! Here they are again!] and "Durakj" (or maybe Sukin Syn).[12]

Anti-alcohol forces continued to exert pressure and managed to prevent the sale of liquor from extending beyond the yeasty confines of the beer parlour. In 1954 the Steinbach Chamber of Commerce voted 30 to 4 against allowing liquor advertising in Manitoba.[13] Even so, *The Carillon* continued to run discreet one-eighth page ads by Shea's Brewery, Winnipeg, urging motorists to drive carefully. This elicited a letter from Benny Eidse, missionary in the Congo, complaining that "we're thoroughly disgusted with the liquor advertisements, and this not from a religious viewpoint, but from plain decency."[14]

Seven years later the Manitoba government opened up the opportunity for new liquor outlets in rural areas. Steinbach councillor Ike Kroeker proposed that the town take advantage of the offer, but the members of the Steinbach Chamber of Commerce opposed the idea. Town Council turned a deaf ear to Kroeker's pitch for a liquor outlet in Steinbach. As car dealer Leonard Barkman pointed out, "It's an old problem, but one that's hard to tackle." A minute later he excused himself, got up and left. "I have to sell a truck," he said. Other Council members found similar excuses not to be present, and all at once Kroeker "found that he was speaking only to himself."[15]

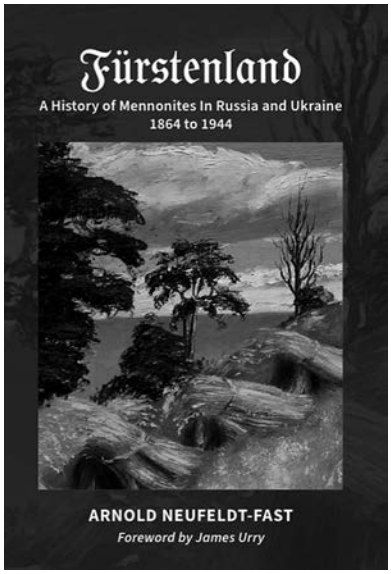
Ultimately the province awarded liquor sales outlets to the French-Canadian village of St. Pierre and the Ukrainian village of Vita; Steinbach was left with the beer parlour at the hotel. The next year, twenty Mennonite churches sent a petition to the Liquor Control Commission of Manitoba, expressing "the opposition of the signers to the building or operation, now or at any future date, of a liquor store either in Steinbach or in the R. M. of Hanover."[16]

In 1972 the Peters family sold the Tourist Hotel to Alvin and Marlene Frantz, who continued to operate the beer parlour until the following year, when voters put the kibosh on a proposal for a mixed drinking establishment, effectively making Steinbach a dry town. In 1975 the Frantzes built a motor inn with licensed dining room and cocktail lounge at a location just outside the town's southern limits. The next year Alvin Frantz bulldozed the old hotel building down and sold the property for a commercial mall. Many more years would pass before a liquor store was opened in the City of Steinbach, along with licensed restaurants and the popular microbrewery with a tap room of today. The City of Steinbach voted to lift its liquor ban in 2003, with 50.9 percent in favour.[17]

Ralph Friesen is a retired family therapist who has published numerous articles and books, mostly about his home town of Steinbach. One of these, Between Earth & Sky: Steinbach, the First Fifty Years *(Derksen Printers, 2009), won the Margaret McWilliams award for the best Manitoba local history. His most recent book is* "Prosperity Ever—Depression Never": Steinbach in the 1930s *(MMHS, 2024).*

NOTES

1. *Carillon News*, 25 August 1950.
2. *Carillon News*, 15 September 1950.
3. P. D. Friesen diary, 2 May 1931 and 11 September 1933; *Steinbach Post*, 3 October 1934.
4. *Carillon News*, 15 September 1950.
5. *Carillon News*, 22 September 1950.
6. *Carillon News*, 29 September 1950.
7. *Carillon News*, 13 October 1950.
8. *Carillon News*, 20 October 1950.
9. It appears that Splinter got his dates for the hotel's closure off by one year. Gerald Splinter died in a plane crash near Winnipeg in 1959 at age 40, leaving behind his wife and four young children. He was pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Winnipeg. https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/80811704/gerald-splinter.
10. *Carillon News*, 20 October 1950.
11. *Carillon News*, 20 October 1950.
12. *Carillon News*, 11 August 1950. "Durakj" seems to be a version of the Low German "Dratj", literally dirt or grime, but in this context more like "crap." "Sukin Syn," spelled "Zuckennsien" in Jack Thiessen's *Mennonite Low German Dictionary* (Max Kade, 2003), translates as "son of a bitch," from the Russian.
13. *Carillon News*, 17 September 1954.
14. *Carillon News,* 8 June 1956.
15. *Carillon News*, 23 August 1957.
16. *Carillon News*, 22 November 1957 and 16 January 1958.
17. Gerald Wright, *Steinbach, Is There Any Place Like It?* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1991), p. 117; *The Carillon*, 21 October 2024; Andrew Unger, email, 18 April 2026. A shorter version of the 1950 attempt to close the Tourist Hotel's beer parlour is available in Abe Warkentin, *Reflections on Our Heritage: A History of Steinbach and the R.M. of Hanover from 1874* (Derksen Printers, 1971), pp. 154–155.



COMING SOON

Fürstenland

A History of Mennonites in Russia and Ukraine, 1864 to 1944

BY ARNOLD NEUFELDT-FAST · FOREWORD BY JAMES URRY

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society is pleased to announce its newest publication: a history of Fürstenland, the Mennonite settlement in southern Ukraine, from its founding through the upheavals of the twentieth century.

> *"This account by Arnold Neufeldt-Fast on the settlement of Fürstenland provides a professional account of a Mennonite settlement that has been neglected in the literature."*
> — DR. JAMES URRY, IN THE FOREWORD

Wherever possible, individuals in the book are identified by their GRanDMA numbers, and readers are invited to submit missing numbers and corrections.

A companion website, *Digital Fürstenland*, is being developed with the Mennonite Heritage Archives. It will gather newly discovered documents, photographs and testimonies, along with additional charts, lists and maps that could not fit in the book.

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$38 per book, GST included; shipping extra.
Pre-order through the Mennonite Heritage Archives: info@mharchives.ca or 1-204-560-1998

What's happening with the Peace Trail?

BY GLEN KLASSEN

Editor's note: It was an eventful summer for the organizers of the Peace Trail, which traverses the historical East Reserve.[1] On 8 May, the EastMenn Committee unveiled a peace post at the trail's destination point at the Mennonite Heritage Village and on 6 June the committee held a musical ribbon cutting ceremony for one of the trail's kiosks in Hespeler Park in Niverville. The MMHS board is thrilled that the people at EastMenn have taken on such an ambitious project and the results of their work are simply superb. We want as many people as possible to know about the Peace Trail and the opportunities for education, exercise, spiritual growth, and community building it offers, so I asked Glen, who has been involved with the Peace Trail from the beginning, to write a reflection on the Peace Trail and what he hopes it might mean for those who undertake the journey it offers.

The idea for the Peace Trail was born when the COVID-19 pandemic prevented local people from doing the famous *Camino de Santiago* (or Way of St. James) pilgrimage in Spain. Some people in the St. Pierre community thought: *Why don't we do our own pilgrimage?* So they put together a group walk from St. Pierre to the grotto in St. Malo along the Crow Wing Trail.[2]

Members of the EastMenn Historical Committee saw this in the media and thought: *What about us?* So they organized a route starting at the forks of the Rat and Red Rivers, where the Mennonites landed in 1874–76, to the Peace Garden at Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) in Steinbach, and called it, naturally, The Peace Trail.

The "trail" consists of ten waypoints, with suggested roadways between them. We weren't able to actually get it designated as an official route because then you need a lot of permissions and assume risky liabilities, especially at highway crossings. This is a problem many trail projects are grappling with right now. The trail brochure is entitled "Drive the Peace Trail", but it could also be "Hike", or "Cycle", or "Ride". There's no designated route, but we hope you will feel comfortable making your own way.

The aim of the trail is to provide opportunities for recreation, to learn about history and ecology, and to provide the setting for a spiritual experience. "Peace" does not just belong to Mennonites; from the start we envisioned a wider community.

The trail has already served these aims by hosting the "Peace Trek", an event put on for three years by MHV and Eden Healthcare. There have also been some school tours and many people have done the pilgrimage on their own.

The Peace Trail shares several waypoints with the Crow Wing Trail and with the TransCanada Trail.[3] The D.F. Plett Research Foundation and Southeast Rotary have contributed substantial support for the information panels along the trail.

Historical Waypoints

Go back 150 years. *Step off the paddleboat onto Manitoba soil and take a five-mile ride on a Red River cart to the waiting immigration sheds. Enjoy the August air there for a few days and then go to your village, which could be Gruenthal or Chortitz, and make your home there*. Four of the waypoints on the Peace Trail follow this sequence. At WP 2 you can learn about how the land was divided for farming and settlement; that is, how the Métis river lots gave way to the sectional grid imposed by the surveyors. The site is on a dirt road so skip it in wet weather. Sorry.

Another waypoint we share with Crow Wing is in Hespeler Park in Niverville. The kiosk there has six information panels: the Town of Niverville's historic sites; the Crow Wing panel; and the four Mennonite immigration panels. After your six-mile trek from the Landing Site you can relax on the benches and learn, learn, and learn. If it's too much to take in, do a side trip to Niverville's Main Street for a coffee and a look at their History Wall.

You are not done with history yet. There are the ancient cemeteries at Gruenfeld, Chortitz and Clear Springs. You

might find an ancestor there. To visit the well-kept Clear Springs cemetery, you have to make a bit of a side trip, but it's only a mile or two from MHV. These non-Mennonite settlers arrived five years before the Mennonites, but there has always been a very cordial relationship between the two cultures. They were mostly from the British Isles by way of Upper Canada or Hudson's Bay.

At the Shantz Cairn (WP 4) we learn about how Jacob Shantz, a Mennonite businessman from Ontario, and the local Métis provided temporary shelter for the immigrants by erecting four "sheds" and how they helped the newcomers get settled. There's one story about how a settler with a baby bought a cow from a Metis farmer to get milk for the little one.

Ecological and Agricultural Waypoints

The Tourond Creek Discovery Centre (WP 5) is a former waste facility that has been converted into a fantastic ecological treasure by the RM of Hanover and the Hanover School Division.[4] The trails connect a pond with various ecological niches as well as a weather station. Students love to observe pond and bird life from the observation tower and from the dock. The Seine Rat Roseau Watershed District manages the site and welcomes many school outings.

The village of Rosenthal (WP 8) was settled in 1874 and by 1876 was a large community, with at least 26 families; but by the end of the 1880s it had already died out, settlers heading west or to individual homesteads and leaving behind only foundation stones and broken concrete.[5] Much later, the RM put a lagoon serving the village of Mitchell on the village site. Apparently they had money left over from the lagoon project (first ever?) so they decided to create a park with a lake beside the lagoon! There are beautiful walking trails around the lake terminating with a clearing that has benches and a shelter. EastMenn has contributed a panel for the site called "The Heart of the East Reserve". The bushes and the lake are a favourite of mallards and the occasional bald eagle.

At the historic Chortitz Church (WP 7) EastMenn has installed a panel honouring our farmers for producing food for livestock and for people around the world. Can you name the five main crops in Manitoba? Hint: one of the crops also is essential for honey production. See the answer below.

A Spiritual Journey

Apparently, on the *Camino* in Spain, there is a spot where pilgrims can deposit a stone they have been carrying on to a growing pile. The stone represents a burden of the heart. This may be a grief, a failure, a question, or a plea. Mennonites are not often known for emotive expressions or mystical experiences, but perhaps the pergola of the Chortitz Church could be a place to leave behind an object along with a burden. The pergola is a project of the Chortitz Church Committee. It is a plain, open-fronted "shed" appropriate for the prairie setting and the minimalism of the Mennonite soul. Maybe just a prayer or a meditation will do.



Volunteers installing a Peace Trail Post marker

Of course, when you reach the end of the trail in Steinbach there is a graphic reminder of peaceful outgoing compassion: the Dirk Willems monument. Dirk didn't save his pursuer because God told him to do it. It was a spontaneous act of unselfishness. Isn't this what spirituality is all about?

(Answer to agricultural question: wheat, corn, canola, soybeans, and tame hay)



Dedication of the cairn at the Shantz Immigration Sheds site

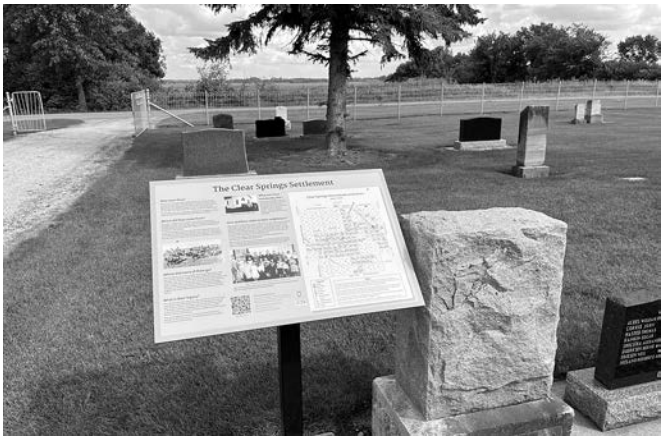
Glen Klassen is a retired microbiologist who studies epidemics and Mennonite history. He is the co-author of the Historical Atlas of the East Reserve *(MMHS 2015) and* Hope, Healing and Community: Celebrating 50 Years of Eden Health Care Services *(Eden Health, 2018). He has been a member of the EastMenn Historical Committee and has served on the boards of the Mennonite Heritage Village and Eden Healthcare Services.*

NOTES

1. A map of the Peace Trail is available in *Heritage Posting* 107, February 2024, p. 16.
2. See https://crowwingtrail.ca/.
3. https://tctrail.ca/
4. https://tourondcreekdiscovery.ca/
5. See Erin Unger's 2018 blogpost "Ravishing Rosenthal!" at her blog *Mennotoba*: https://www.mennotoba.com/ravishing-rosenthal/.



George Penner representing Southeast Rotary at the Chortitz Church pergola after installation of the Agriculture panel



The history panel at the Clear Springs cemetery



The trail along Blind Creek in Steinbach, close to the terminus of the trail at MHV



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