

BERGTHAL
HISTORICAL
SERIES

**The
Bergthaler
Mennonite
Church of
Saskatchewan**

1892-1975

by
Leonard Doell

Leonard Doell was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and grew up in the nearby town of Warman. He received his public and high school education in Warman and Osler. Immediately following high school he attended Swift Current Bible Institute and Canadian Mennonite Bible College.



Doell has worked on various volunteer assignments in native communities and has done research for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada on Native-Mennonite historical relations and native land claim issues.

An avid student of history, Doell is particularly interested in local history and its global implications. His local history articles have been published in the *Saskatchewan Valley News* and *Die Mennonitische Post*. Gardening and making firewood are two other interests that he enjoys.

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Bergthaler
Mennonite
Church of
Saskatchewan

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Bergthal Historical Series

General Editor: Adolf Ens

1. *The Bergthal Colony*
by William Schroeder
2. *The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan*
by Leonard Doell

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CMBC Publications
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1987

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The Bergthal Historical Series

General Editor's Preface

The Bergthal people have been pioneers in the Mennonite world of Russia, Canada, and Paraguay. Yet, for the most part, the story of their pioneering has not been adequately told. One should say stories, for they are more than one.

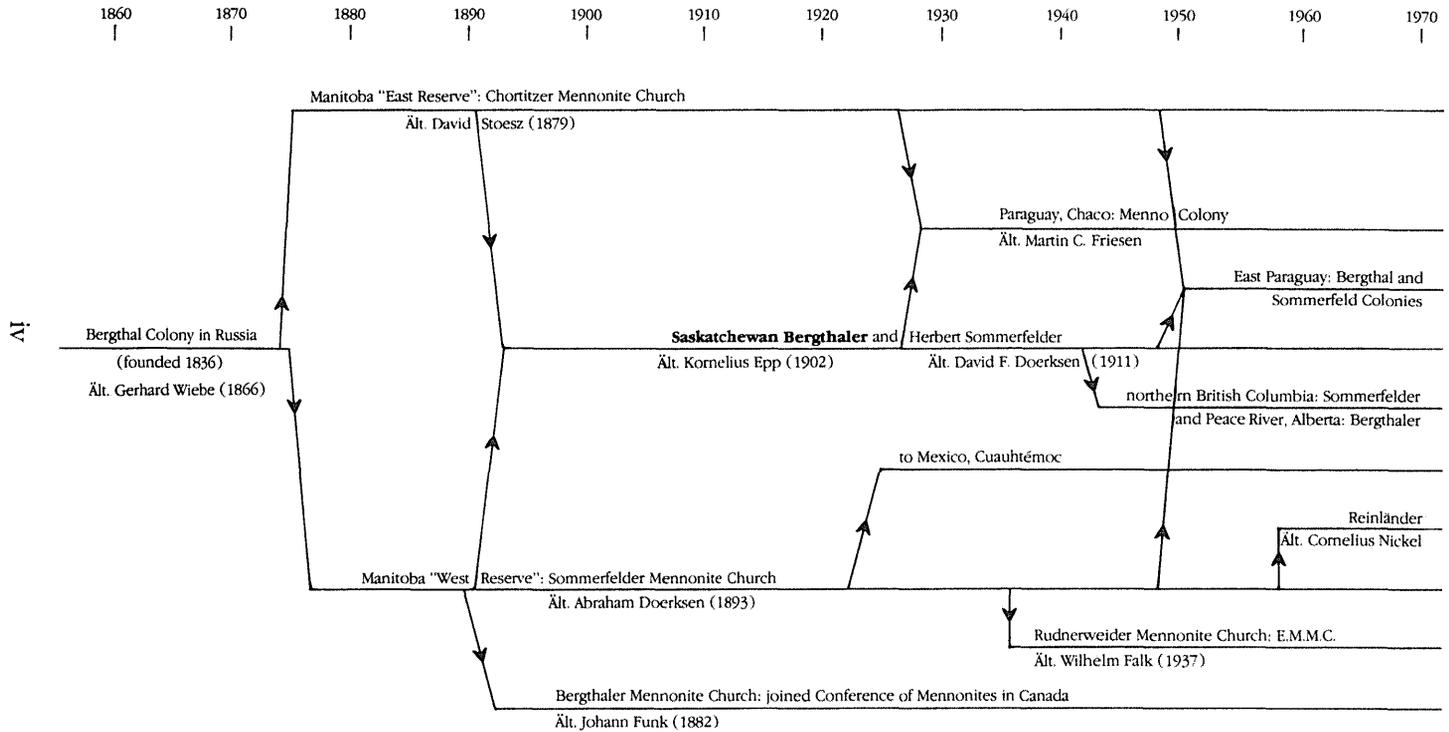
In the 1830s in Russia, Bergthal became the first "daughter" colony, a pioneer attempt to solve the problem of overcrowding in the villages of the "mother" colony of Chortitza. It identified one way, repeated some fifty times later on, of dealing with the problem of the landless at a time when the agricultural way of life was still the norm among Mennonites in Russia. The story of that pioneering effort is told by William Schroeder in the first volume of this series.

In the 1870s landseeking delegates from Bergthal joined with those of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in recommending Canada as the goal of their planned emigration from Russia. In the barely four year old province of Manitoba, they shared as pioneers in settling both of the original Manitoba Mennonite "reserves." That story is told by their *Ältester*, Gerhard Wiebe (1900; English translation 1981) and by a member who later left the group, Klaas Peters (1925).

In Canada the Bergthal people divided into two church groups, with those on the East Reserve becoming known as *Chortitzer* and those on the West Reserve retaining the use of the name *Bergthaler*. For both groups the issue of education produced a crisis. The aggressive leadership of the West Reserve *Ältester*, Johann Funk, in introducing a secondary school in the late 1880s led to the separation of a large part of his congregation. These elected a new *Ältester*, Abraham Doerksen of the village of Sommerfeld, and came to be known as *Sommerfelder*.

Ältester Funk's *Bergthaler* pioneererd not only higher education among Mennonites in western Canada, but also became co-founders with a Saskatchewan group of Mennonites of what is now the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. The story of that group is told by Henry J. Gerbrandt (1970).

The Bergthal Colony and its Descendants



In the early 1890s Bergthal people were among the first Mennonites to pioneer settlement along the Saskatchewan River in the Northwest Territories. Although this group felt a closely spiritual kinship with the *Sommerfelder* and *Chortitzer* of Manitoba, their church took the name *Bergthaler*. The story of these pioneers is told by Leonard Doell in this book. A decade later other Bergthal people from Manitoba pioneered in the Herbert area of Saskatchewan, founding a *Sommerfelder* church in that area.

When the second education crisis came in Manitoba, it faced both *Sommerfelder* and *Chortitzer* with the government enforced intrusion of public schools into their communities. The most drastic response of parts of both groups to this pressure was to leave Canada. *Ältester* Doerksen led part of the *Sommerfelder* church to Mexico in the early 1920s, part of the pioneering Mennonite contingent to that country. That story is told, in part, by H.L. Sawatzky (1971). A few years later, *Ältester* Martin Friesen led a large part of the *Chortitzer* church, joined by some Saskatchewan *Bergthaler*, to the Gran Chaco of Paraguay, there to pioneer Mennonite settlement in the founding of Menno Colony. That story is told by Martin W. Friesen (1977 and 1987) and Otto Klassen's film "Pioniere im Chaco."

A revival movement in southern Manitoba in the 1930s led to the separation of several ministers and a part of the *Sommerfelder* church to organize a new group called the *Rudnerweider* Mennonite church. That story has been briefly told by J.D. Adrian (1950).

In the aftermath of the depression and the drought of the 1930s, some of the Bergthal people from Saskatchewan pioneered Mennonite settlement in the interior of British Columbia and in the Peace River area of northern Alberta. Further spreading took place after World War II when a second migration to South America resulted in the founding of the Sommerfeld and Bergthal colonies in East Paraguay.

It is hoped that the untold stories of these various groups of Bergthal descendants, separated by geography or church division, will yet be told. With this **Bergthal Historical Series**, CMBC Publications commits itself to promote the writing of these stories.

Adolf Ens
Winnipeg

January 1987

Books About the Bergthal People

- Adrian, J.D. *Die Entstehung der Rudnerweider Gemeinde 1936*. Winnipeg: by the author, 1958.
- Friesen, Martin W. *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis: 50 Jahre Kolonie Menno*. Loma Plata: Menno Colony Administration, 1977.
- Friesen, Martin W. *Neue Heimat in der Chacowildnis*. Loma Plata: Menno Kolonie, Paraguay, 1987.
- Gerbrandt, Henry J. *Adventure in Faith: The Background in Europe and the Development in Canada of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba*. Altona: Bergthaler Mennonite Church, 1970.
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- Sawatzky, Harry Leonard. *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Schroeder, William *The Bergthal Colony*, rev. ed. Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1986.
- Wiebe, Gerhard. *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Rußland nach Amerika*. Chortitz, Manitoba: Diedrich Wiebe, 1900. (Reprint: Cuauhtémoc, Mexico: Imprenta Rempel, 1962; Steinbach, *Die Mennonitische Post*, no date.)
- Wiebe, Gerhard. *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*, translated by Helen Janzen. Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981.

Preface

Many people will be wondering why I would be interested in writing a history of the Bergthaler people. My parents were not members of the Bergthaler Church nor did they attend there on a regular basis.

The majority of my relatives, especially on my father's side were, however, Bergthaler and many still are. When I grew up, my grandfather, Peter Doell, often talked about his experiences in the Bergthaler Church. I enjoyed listening, for as he shared those stories he also shared his faith. He would often reflect on the positive and negative things he had experienced and then point out paths that I should consider for my life.

Another major factor influencing me to write this book is the impact made upon me by many Bergthaler and Old Colony people during the time of my mother's illness. For one and a half years my mother suffered with cancer from which she eventually died on October 22, 1980. In simple, loving ways the Bergthaler and Old Colony people shared our suffering. Our neighbour lady patched many clothes; many others brought baked goods and meals. Rev. John Reddekopp also comforted her in the hospital. Many came to sit and visit. They also came to share how God had given them strength in difficult times. When the day of the funeral came the Bergthaler Church also lightened the heavy financial load.

The actual starting point for my work on this history was 1975, when I tried to find out more about my family history. As I searched the church membership records, and as Rev. Abram J. Buhler and I talked together, I began to realize that history is much more than names and dates. This book is a small way of sharing some of the insights into the past, some of the understanding of the story of our people, and some of the wealth of experience of many of our seniors which I have gained through numerous interviews. Thank you to all who patiently answered my often awkward and ignorant questions.

Leonard Doell
Advent, 1986



Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

Acknowledgments

In the search for information on my family and subsequently on the Bergthaler Church, I found that it was primarily the older people who could provide me with a great deal of insight into the past. The wisdom and wealth of experience which Rev. Heinrich Martens (now 104 years of age) had gathered throughout his life were invaluable.

Mr. John D. Peters, Mrs. Anna (Niessen) Siemens and Mr. Jacob N. Friesen were very helpful in relating their stories of the Bergthaler migration to Paraguay in 1926.

I am grateful to Mr. John D. Klassen for the information he provided on the migration to Bolivia in 1963.

Mr. John S. Reddekopp and Mr. Cornelius C. Hamm related stories of experiences which their fathers encountered as leaders in the church. The photograph collections of Mr. Hamm and Mr. Jacob E. Friesen proved to be a great resource.

Rev. Henry A. Dyck, a former Bergthaler minister and son of a deacon, shared with me some of his personal joys and sorrows as a church leader.

I am indebted to Mr. Jacob G. Guenter, Mr. Jacob E. Friesen, Mr. Henry Dyck (Hague), Mr. George K. Fehr, Mr. George Unger and my mother Katharine (Pauls) Doell who read the manuscript as it progressed and offered invaluable advice and corrections. Many others affirmed my efforts and offered constructive criticism.

Mrs. Ingrid Lamp of Swift Current did an excellent job of translating primary documents from Gothic German into English. Strong support was also given by Jake Peters and Dennis Stoesz, who edited the first draft of the manuscript, directed me to valuable sources, and opened their homes and lives to me on my trips to Winnipeg.

Without the financial assistance of Joe Froese this book would not have become a reality. He has also been unselfish with his time and energy throughout the course of the writing.

I accept full responsibility for opinions expressed and apologize for any errors that may have entered the book in spite of all the help. My hope and prayer is that in spite of its shortcomings, this book may be used to further the kingdom of God.

Introduction

From the time of the North-West Rebellion in 1885 until 1905 when Saskatchewan achieved provincial status, thousands of people of many different ethnic and religious groups poured into the prairie region. There were German Catholics at Humboldt, Doukhobors at Verigin, Ukrainians at Wakaw, Hungarians at Esterhazy, Jews near Wapella and Mennonites at Hague, Rosthern and Herbert. "The map of the southern half of the western interior was a giant checker-board of culturally and linguistically distinctive settlements."¹ Most of these people, including the Mennonites, came here to obtain land, farm, and live in peace.

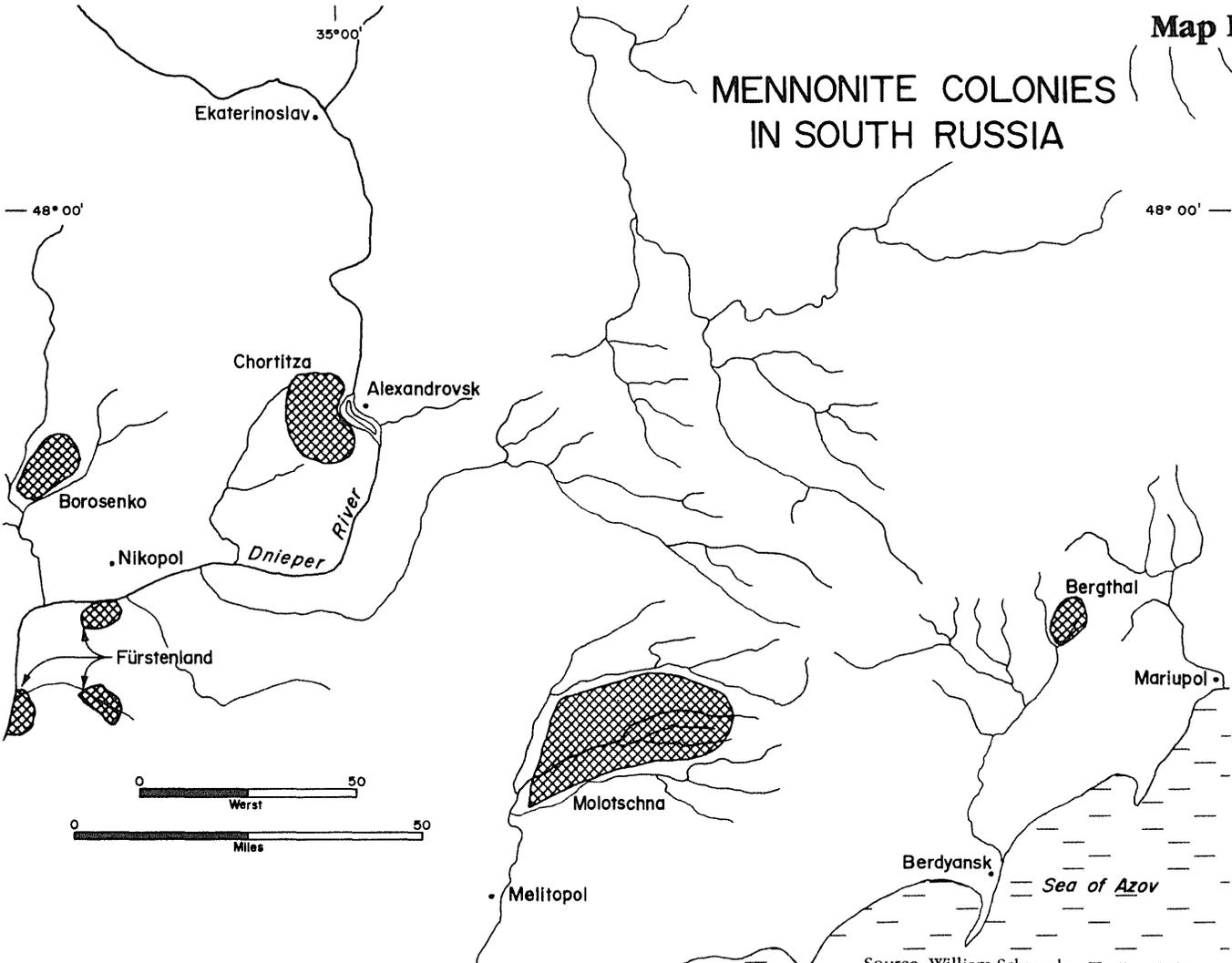
Among the Mennonites who came to Saskatchewan in the early 1890s was a group who in 1893 formed the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. While this book focuses on their story, their history begins much earlier and on a different continent. A general background may help to explain Mennonites and the use of the name "Bergthaler."

Mennonites had their origin in the first quarter of the sixteenth century during the Protestant Reformation. In Switzerland, South Germany and the Netherlands a group, which became known as the Anabaptists, broke with the Roman Catholic Church and with the newly-formed Lutheran and Reformed Churches over such issues as non-resistance, discipleship, adult baptism and the concept of the church. Eventually they became known as Mennonites after Menno Simons, one of the leaders in Holland. Due to intense persecutions in some locations and to economic and social pressures in others one major branch of Mennonites migrated to the Polish province of Prussia and eventually to South Russia, settling on the banks of the Dnieper River in the Chortitza Colony in 1789.

A number of people in the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church trace their roots directly to the Chortitza Colony in Russia. *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm, for example was born in the village of Neuenburg. *Ältester* Kornelius Epp was also born in this Colony, although the exact village is uncertain. The Chortitza Colony experienced religious and economic problems in its early years of settlement. By the 1820s it consisted of approximately twenty villages and the worst

Map I

MENNONITE COLONIES IN SOUTH RUSSIA



Source: William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*

hardships had been overcome. By 1830 there was a school in every village. Church buildings were generally shared by a group of villages. Chortitza also began having a considerable number of landless families by 1830. This recurring problem was solved by establishing daughter colonies such as Bergthal (1836), Fürstenland (1864), and Schlachtin-Baratov (1871). (See Map I) It is the Bergthal Colony in Russia, established in 1836, from which many of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler originated and from which the church took its name.

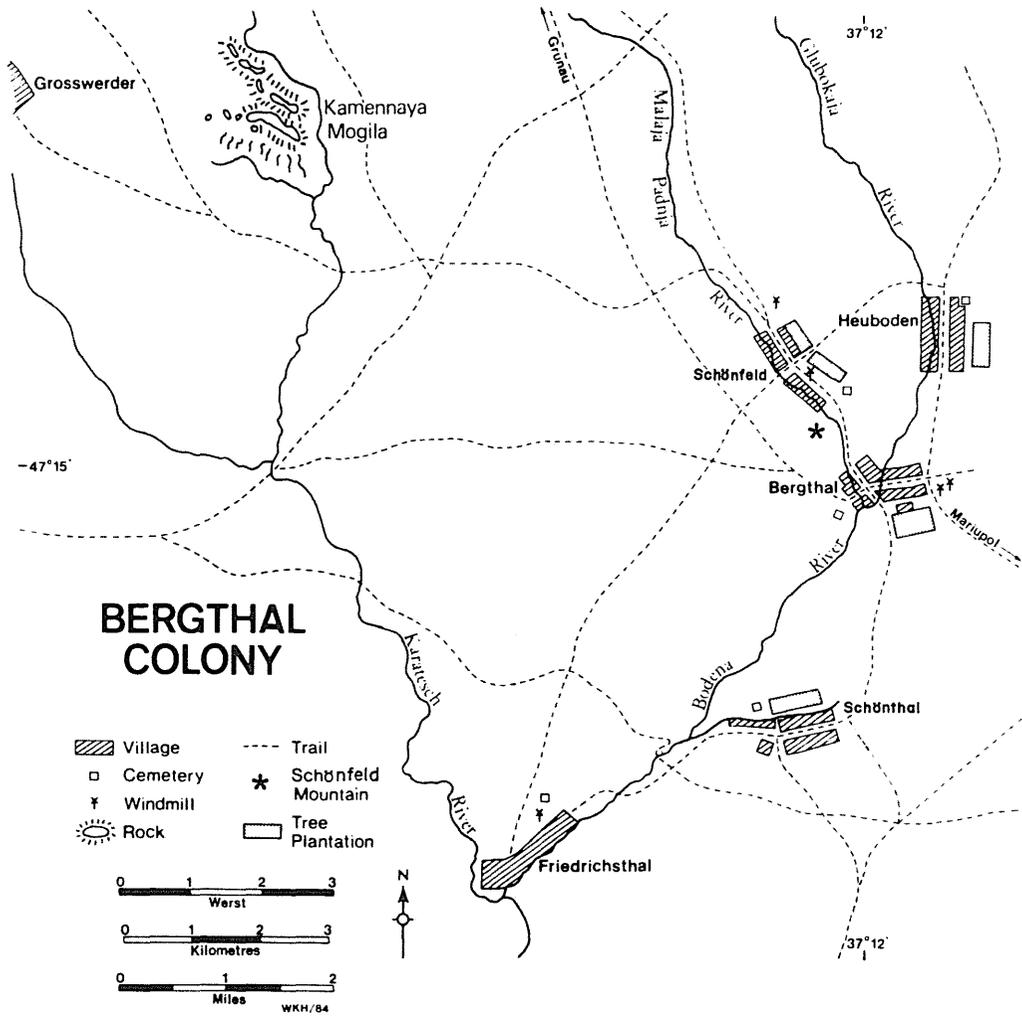
The name Bergthal was suggested by the Chortitza *Oberschultze*, Bartsch, because it described the geographical setting of the village. The *Berg* was a fairly high hill just north of the village and the *Thal* was the Bodena Valley.²

Bergthal was a daughter colony of the Chortitza settlement and was settled largely by landless people for whom the Russian government had made this land available. Its five villages are shown on Map II.

In 1874-1876 the whole Bergthal Colony migrated once more because the Russian government terminated exemption from military service for Mennonites and demanded the use of the Russian language in their schools and institutions. The desire to migrate was also heightened by the fact that there were many landless people in the Bergthal Colony. By 1876 all the property in the Colony had been sold, nearly 30,000 acres. The largest group consisting of five hundred families totalling three thousand people, emigrated to America.³ Most of them settled on the East Reserve in Manitoba, although it quickly became clear to many that they did not like the land there. In the latter 1870s many began moving across the Red River to the West Reserve. Those remaining on the East Reserve eventually became known as the Chortitzer Mennonite Church, after the name of the village in which their *Ältester* lived and to some extent after the Chortitza Colony from which they had come many years earlier. On the West Reserve all the colonists originating from the Bergthal Colony retained the name Bergthaler until after the split of 1894.

During the years 1875-1880 some 3200 people also left the Chortitza and Fürstenland Colonies in Russia for Manitoba. They moved to the western part of the West Reserve and established a large number of villages. They were known as the Reinlaender Church, after the name of the village which was their religious and political centre in Manitoba. Popularly they were known as the Old Colony

Map II



Source: William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*

people after the oldest colony in Russia, Chortitza, from which they had come.⁴

On the West Reserve the Mennonites prospered. By the 1890s many from both the Bergthaler and Old Colony groups began moving west to look for more land. The Reserve was becoming overpopulated. When the Bergthaler moved to Saskatchewan they took their name with them and formed the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Mennonite Church at Rosthern in 1893.

While some Bergthaler moved west, the Bergthaler Church on the West Reserve was going through a split. This causes some problems in understanding and identifying the name Bergthaler. In 1894 the group led by *Ältester* Johann Funk and which supported the building of the Mennonite teacher training centre at Gretna became known as the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba. The other larger group of Bergthaler Mennonites became known as the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, after Sommerfeld, the village where its new *Ältester*, Abraham Doerksen, lived. The Saskatchewan Bergthaler were organizationally linked with the Sommerfelder Church and with the Chortitzer Church on the East Reserve.

I. Settlement and Church Organization, 1891-1902

In the fall of 1891 the first group of Mennonite settlers from Manitoba arrived in the Saskatchewan Valley. Many of these had made entry for homesteads at Gleichen, Alberta, earlier that year but left there disappointed because of the dry spring. Some of the Mennonites who had been at Gleichen returned to Manitoba but others settled in the Rosthern area. The majority of these people, some of whom had recently arrived from Russia, came from the Old Colony Church. Others were leaving the overpopulated West Reserve in Manitoba.

In the spring of 1892 a second group of Mennonites arrived in the Rosthern area.⁵ (See Map III) Included in this group were Old Colony and Bergthaler people from Manitoba. The latter established the Bergthaler Mennonite Church a year later.

Mr. Peter I. Dyck, one of the early settlers, describes some of the pioneering struggles and the establishing of a school and a church in those first years:

The first concern of these new settlers was to see that a simple house was erected before the long, cold winter set in. So the days and months passed quickly. As we progressed on our new found farms another problem arose in our hearts and minds. Education for our children. How to establish a school and where to locate a suitable teacher to teach them. The problem was quickly solved; a teacher was found and hired out of our own people who was capable of holding down a job like this. As we had no school house and no means of building one because of financial difficulties, a room in my parents' (Isaac Dycks) home was renovated into a classroom, and so the children were instructed in the ABC curriculum and naturally in the mother tongue, German. Not only were the schools a necessity but we also lacked churches, bishops, ministers and deacons. I still remember the first stages in this particular field of services. To get things organized a certain Mr. Stoesz of Manitoba was called to come and give assistance in organizing a church.⁶



Peter I. Dyck
Photo: David Dyck, Warman

Peter Klassen, Waldheim, gives additional information on how the church was organized:

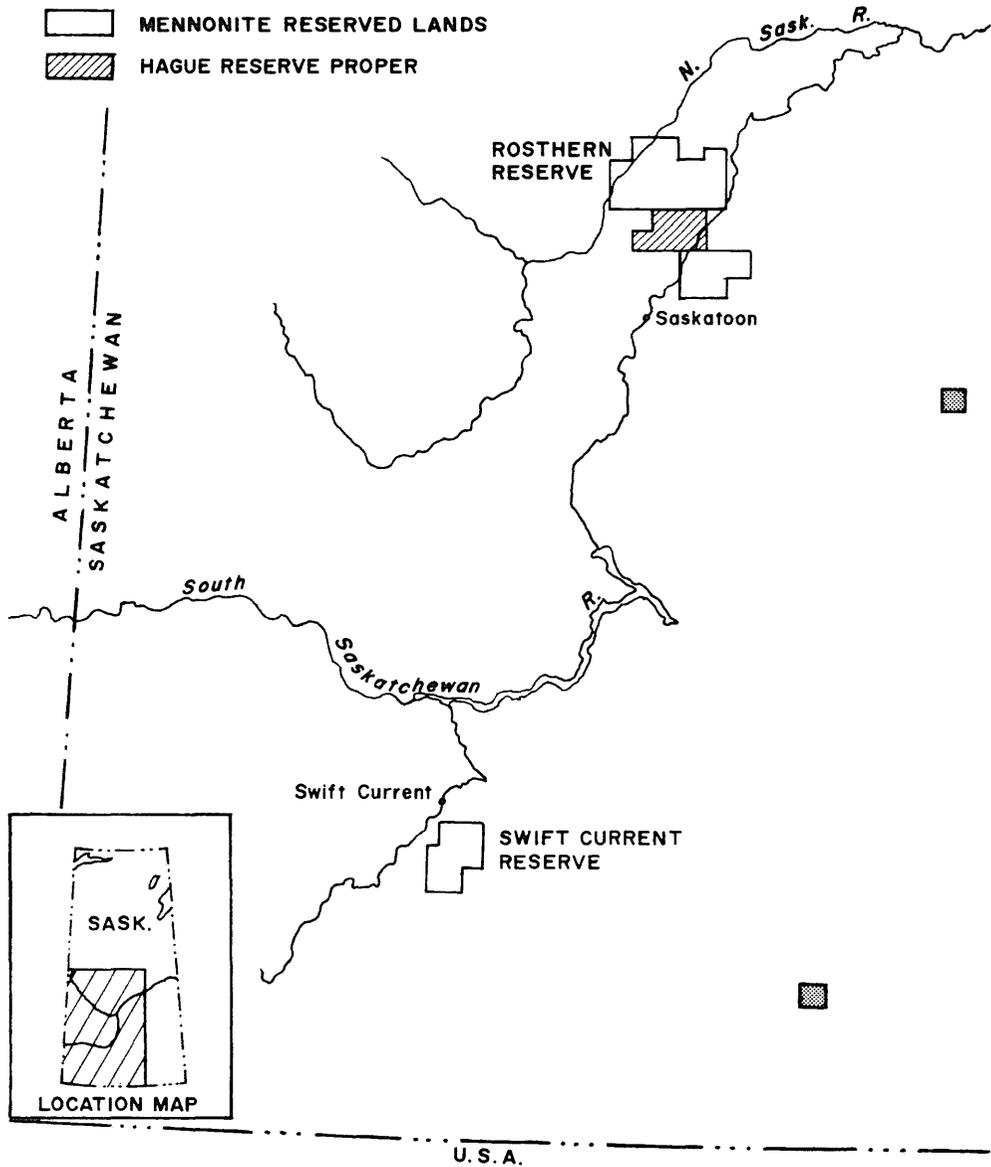
When the Old Colony Mennonite settlers arrived, they immediately considered the organization of a church. They wrote to the Bergthaler church in Manitoba requesting ministers. This action was not approved by a number of other settlers, and a second group wrote an anonymous letter to Elder David Stoesz clearly expressing their dissatisfaction. After that, the Old Colony group waited long and patiently for a minister, but eventually Elder David Stoesz came and called a meeting to which mainly Old Colony settlers responded. This comprised about half of all the settlers.⁷

When *Ältester* Stoesz was in Winnipeg preparing to travel to Rosthern in response to requests he had received, he met

a delegation of three . . . new immigrants [from Russia] namely Gerhard Epp, J. Epp, and a Mr. Wieler [who] were on their way to the Rosthern area to look for land. *Ältester* Stoesz was also on his way to Rosthern to help organize a church there. The group travelled together from Winnipeg to Rosthern by train. In Regina they stayed for night in an immigrant house. On June 24, 1893 they arrived in Rosthern where they were met by a few Mennonites who had settled there a year or

SASKATCHEWAN MENNONITE RESERVES

-  LANDS ORIGINALLY REQUESTED
-  MENNONITE RESERVED LANDS
-  HAGUE RESERVE PROPER



Source: Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Relations with Government"

two earlier. On Sunday June 25, a church service was held in the home of a Mr. J. Neudorf. A brotherhood meeting was also held at this time, presumably for organizing a church amongst these new settlers.⁸

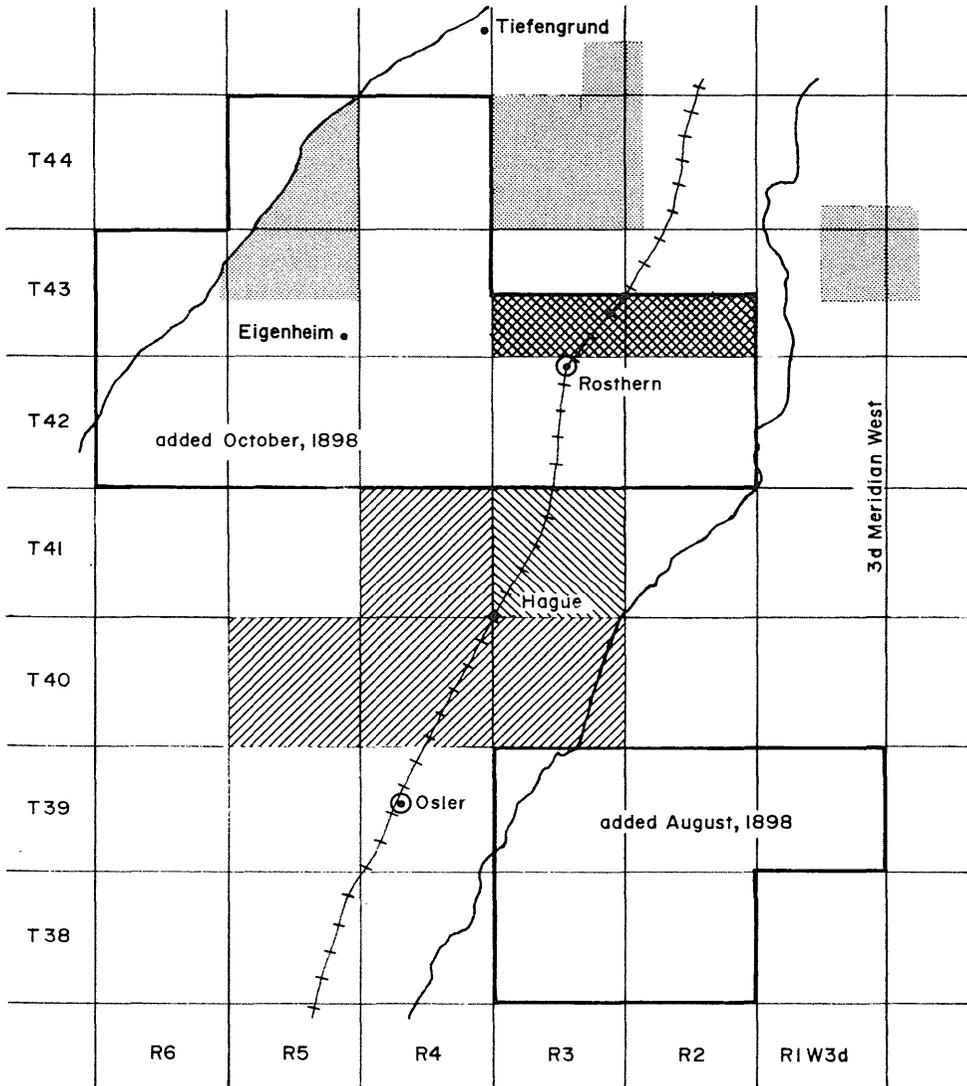
At these meetings, Kornelius Epp, formerly of Fürstenland, Russia, was elected as the first Bergthaler minister. He was ordained by *Ältester* David Stoesz of Manitoba. Historically in both the Old Colony and Bergthaler Churches, the *Ältester* was the one who conducted baptisms and communion services. In keeping with this, *Ältester* David Stoesz of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church of the East Reserve, Manitoba, assisted the Bergthaler Church with baptism and communion from 1893-1895. The services were conducted in homes. *Ältester* Stoesz records that he held services in the following places in 1895: Heinrich Bergens, Kornelius Epps, Diedrich Rempels, Klaas Penners, Aron Zachariases, Heinrich Walls, Gerhard Rempels, and Peter Siemens.⁹

It is fairly safe to assume that there was a good working relationship between the various Mennonite church groups in these early years. One of the first marriages that the Bergthaler minister Kornelius Epp performed was that of Isbrand Friesen and Anna Neudorf in 1894. This couple remained with the Old Colony Church.¹⁰ Since there was no Old Colony church in the vicinity at this time, many members attended services conducted by Bergthaler ministers.¹¹ Old Colony people continued to attend the Bergthaler Church at Rosthern even after 1900, when an Old Colony church building had been constructed at Neuanlage. This was partly due to distance: the twenty mile trip from Rosthern to Neuanlage by horse and buggy was a considerable obstacle. In the fall of 1897 or the spring of 1898 an Old Colony minister, Rev. Peter Klassen, conducted services for Old Colony settlers in Rosthern at the home of the Jacob Friesens. Mrs. Friesen was a daughter of Rev. Klassen.¹² Mr. Klassen had arrived in Neuanlage in 1895 and had started to conduct worship services in homes.

West of Rosthern there was another settlement of Mennonites who also worshipped with the Bergthaler in the first years. (See Map IV) They later became known as the Rosenorter Mennonite Church. Services were held in the machine shed of Mr. David Esau northeast of Rosthern. It was a large building and could hold many people.¹³ The first Rosenorter Church was built at Eigenheim in 1896. Until then Bergthaler and Rosenorter people from the Eigenheim, Tiefengrund and Rosthern areas held their worship services in various homes. Services were held jointly until church buildings were con-

Map IV

HAGUE RESERVE AND ADDITIONS



Reserve proper, 1895



added 1898



French, withdrawn, 1899



Indian reserves



Source: Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Relations with Government"



Deacon Cornelius F. & Anna (Friesen) Sawatzky.

Photo: Nick Sawatzky, Laird

structed at Eigenheim (Rosenorter) and Rosthern (Bergthaler). Cooperation was good and similarities rather than differences were emphasized. In this spirit of cooperation Rev. Abram P. Neufeld and Deacon Cornelius F. Sawatzky participated in the annual sessions of the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada held at Eigenheim in July of 1906.

Ältester David Stoesz of the Manitoba Chortitzer Church served the Saskatchewan Bergthaler from 1893-1895. By that time the local cooperation with other Mennonites had developed to the point where Deacon Heinrich Bergen and many others in the church felt that the Bergthaler would be well served by the *Ältester* Peter Regier of the Rosenorter Church. Rev. Kornelius Epp, on the other hand, felt that the leadership of *Ältester* Stoesz was more appropriate to their needs. As a result of this disagreement *Ältester* Stoesz was informed that his services would no longer be needed. When both Rev. Epp and Deacon Bergen and their families moved to Manitoba at about this same time, the Bergthaler Church, left without leaders, dissolved in 1896.¹⁴

During the next several years the Bergthaler Church people participated in the worship services of the Rosenorter and Old Colony Churches. The choice depended largely on the preferences of the church goers and the distance needed to be travelled. By 1900 many

more Bergthaler had settled in the Hague-Rosthern area. Once again they wrote to the mother church in Manitoba to ask for church leadership. *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen of the Sommerfelder Church agreed to serve as *Ältester* and help to establish a local church. He had been ordained as *Ältester* in the West Reserve in 1894 and made his first trip to the Rosthern area in 1900.¹⁵ He now encouraged Rev. Kornelius Epp to return to Saskatchewan, and Epp responded by relocating there with his family in 1900.¹⁶ Deacon Heinrich Bergen had already returned to Saskatchewan a year earlier.

Bergthaler church services were now resumed in homes until 1902. On May 16 of that year, *Ältester* Doerksen dedicated the newly built Bergthaler church at Rosthern. It was located two miles east and one-half mile south of the town. On that Sunday afternoon he also baptized a group of twelve people. One of these was Heinrich D. Martens who later became a Bergthaler minister. Mr. Martens recalls that catechism classes were held in the home of Gerhard Rempel and that much work had to be done on the church for it to be ready in time for the baptism and dedication.¹⁷

Later that year *Ältester* Doerksen returned to complete the organization of the church. In November, 1902, Rev. Kornelius Epp was elected as the first *Ältester* of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church and three days later ordained by *Ältester* Doerksen.¹⁸ The move for a local *Ältester* came at a very appropriate time. The church had been growing and spreading quite rapidly since 1893. In 1895 the federal government had reserved four townships of land for the Old Colony Mennonites in the Hague-Osler area as indicated on Map III. Many Bergthaler living on the fringes of the reserve at this time were looking for spiritual guidance. In order to meet these needs, an *Ältester* as well as more ministers were elected from the congregations.

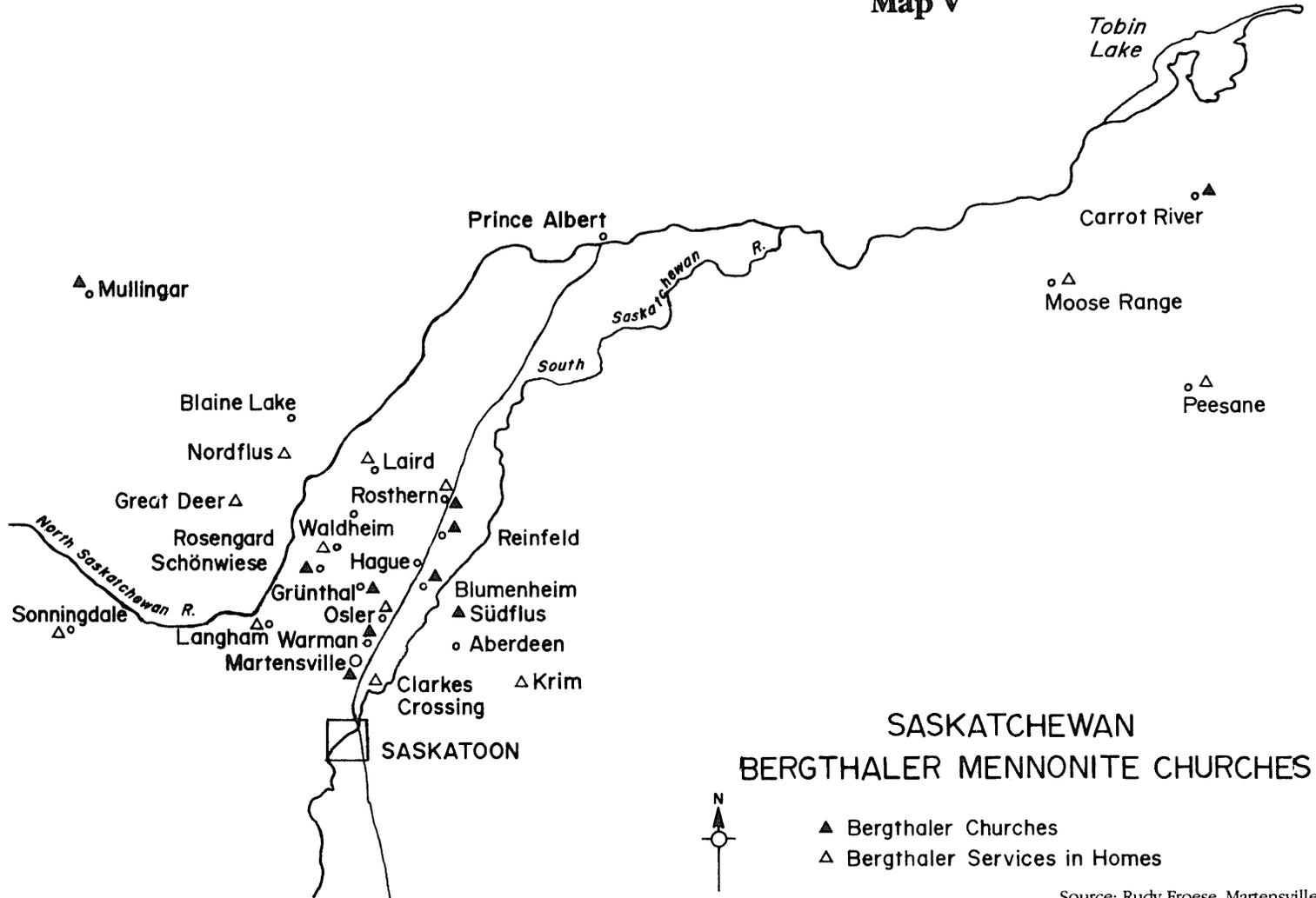
Among the Bergthaler, as among the Chortitzer and Sommerfelder Churches, no special education was required in order to serve as a minister. Whenever there was a need for a minister an election would be called and conducted by the *Ältester*. Conceivably any male member of the church could be chosen. All the men in the congregation were handed a ballot on which they wrote the name of their choice, or choices, if more than one was to be elected. It was determined ahead of time how many ministers or deacons were being chosen by the assembled brethren. The two people receiving the greatest number of votes would be elected if they had decided on two ministers. If they were also electing a deacon at the same

time, the person with the third highest number of votes was the one chosen for this office.

Among the first ministers elected by the Bergthaler Church were: Heinrich Bergen, Aron Zacharias, Abram P. Neufeld, Julius Toews, and Deacon Cornelius Sawatzky. Also included with this group was Jacob E. Friesen who originated from Henderson, Nebraska, and who had come to Saskatchewan via Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1902. He had been elected as a minister already in 1886 in Nebraska. He was able to serve for a couple of years but was then forced to quit because of poor health.¹⁹ A list of all the ministers and deacons who have served in the Bergthaler Church of Saskatchewan is found in Appendix I. The ministers were not paid and served the churches on a rotational basis. Travel by horse and buggy was slow and this often meant overcoming many hurdles. Sometimes they would leave the day before, staying for night in a member's home, then would preach and leave for home again after a noon meal. Stormy weather, cold, rain and mishaps all tested the dedication of these faithful servants. The deacon's duties consisted of being secretary-treasurer for the church, assisting the *Ältester* at communion services and looking after the needs of the poor people in the community.²⁰

Several Bergthaler communities and meeting places had been established by 1902. The first church building at Rosthern has already been mentioned. Besides this one, there were several communities located on the edge of the Old Colony reserve. First, there were Bergthaler near the Old Colony village of Schoenwiese where a church building was erected about 1911. Until then church services were held in the home of Jacob Guenter, one mile southwest of the village of Schoenwiese. A second group of Bergthaler lived near the village of Reinfeld. Included in this group was the Hamm family of which Cornelius Hamm was a member. He would later become an *Ältester* of the church. At Reinfeld services were first held in the homes of Peter Rempel and Isaac Fehr Sr. In 1929 a church building was constructed in this area. Thirdly, Bergthaler members also settled north of Aberdeen. A church building was erected here some time between 1904 and 1908. Prior to this services were held in the homes of Johann Friesen and Jacob Buhler.²¹ Map V shows the locations of the various worship centres of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church. Appendix II gives a partial list of homes in which Bergthaler church services were held. Appendix III locates and describes briefly the origins and history of Bergthaler church buildings, past and present.

Map V



II. *Ältester* Kornelius Epp, 1902-1908: Unifying the Church

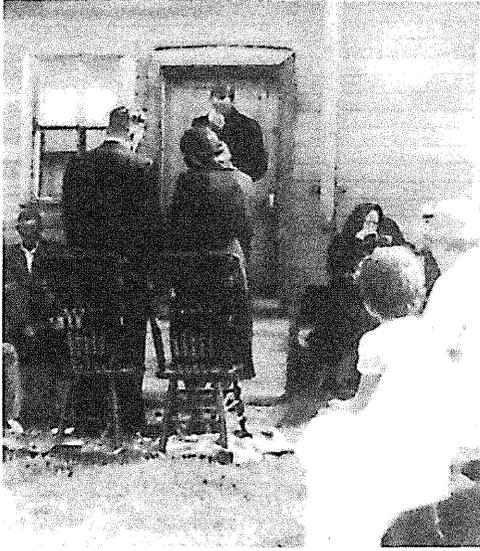
Rev. Kornelius Epp served as *Ältester* of the Bergthaler Church from 1902 to 1908. During this time much of his effort was present in unifying his scattered flock in the Saskatchewan Valley. Members came from a variety of church backgrounds. Many originated from Manitoba while a smaller number came from the United States. Geographically, they did not live close to one another. Equally important were the differences among them on questions of faith and life. In order to achieve unity, church members would need to do a lot of giving and taking even on issues they felt strongly about. *Ältester* Epp felt he needed to set some direction and provide some guidelines for the church.

A. The *Felafniss* (Engagement Celebration)

One question confronting the church was what all was to be included in a *Felafniss*. A *Felafniss* was generally held a week before a wedding, usually on a Saturday, and was the most important event for a bridal couple. A letter was sent to friends and relatives announcing the wedding and inviting them to the *Felafniss*. It was generally held in the home of the bride's parents. Among the Bergthaler from Manitoba it was customary to sing songs, do a lot of visiting, and partake of a large meal of *Plümemooss*, *Schinkjefleesch*, and other Mennonite delicacies. However, the Mennonites who had come from Minnesota under the leadership of Rev. Jacob E. Friesen were accustomed to having a sermon at the *Felafniss* and conducting it more like a church service. The Manitoba Bergthaler felt this was not essential. It became accepted, however, because members felt it was good for both the couples and the gathered friends to have a spoken message. This is one example where consensus was reached. Members were willing to accommodate each other for the common good, even though it meant change.²²

B. Non-conformity to the World

An issue on which consensus could not be reached was the question of non-conformity to the world. Should members dress like the people around them? This came to a test in February of 1908,



1951 wedding of Julius Pauls & Anna Janzen near Reinfeld. Rev. Frank K. Peters officiating.

Photo: Mrs. John Doell, Warman

when *Ältester* Epp was asked to marry a couple at the Aberdeen Church. In the estimation of Epp both were dressed in a very worldly manner. The groom wore a tie and a white shirt and the bride a fancy dress. *Ältester* Epp felt that this was not in keeping with biblical Christianity and therefore refused to marry them. The couple then went to the Aberdeen Conference Church where they were married. Many people were unhappy with the stand that Rev. Epp had taken. Epp, feeling that he had lost the support of the membership, left the church and moved with his family to Carrot River, Saskatchewan. Efforts made by *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen of Manitoba to resolve this issue were unsuccessful.²³

Eventually Epp settled in the Carrot River area and served as *Ältester* of the Bergthaler people there for a time.²⁴ In 1908 a number of Bergthaler from the Hague area and Sommerfelder Mennonites from Swift Current and Manitoba had moved to the Carrot River Reserve in 1908, which the federal government had opened for Mennonite settlement.

Epp was joined by the three Penner brothers and their families in 1913. In 1908 Jacob and Wilhelm Penner had been elected as ministers and Peter as deacon in the Hague area. This group did not remain long at Carrot River. Jacob Penner returned to Hague about 1918, where he died in the flu epidemic on February 23, 1919. Wilhelm Penner and his family joined the Old Colony Church, but did not serve in the capacity of minister in that group.

Ältester Kornelius Epp and a very small group of followers moved to Mexico in 1922, together with a group of Sommerfelder Mennonites from Herbert led by Rev. Johan Zacharias. They first settled near the town of Cuauhtémoc, but the Mexican government did not allow them to stay there. They then moved north to live near the Manitoba Sommerfelder, but their churches operated separately.

Several years later problems over leadership arose between Epp's group and the Herbert people. Many of the latter then returned to Saskatchewan, including Rev. Johan Zacharias who moved to Meadow Lake in 1929. Rev. Epp remained in Mexico with a very few members. Being quite advanced in age, the Epps then decided to move to the Old Colony village of Blumengart to be nearer to family members. Here they both died and are buried.

III. *Ältester* Aron Zacharias, 1908-1926: Discipline, World War I, Education

In the summer of 1908, *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen from the Manitoba Sommerfelder Mennonite Church conducted baptism and communion services in the Bergthaler Church in the absence of an elder. In the fall of that year, Rev. Aron Zacharias was ordained as resident *Ältester* by Doerksen to fill the vacancy left by Kornelius Epp.²⁵ Zacharias had been ordained as minister in 1903. Aron Zacharias came to Canada from Russia at about four years of age and lived with his parents, Aron and Margaretha (Sawatzky) Zacharias, in Schoenwiese, Manitoba on the West Reserve of Manitoba. This was an Old Colony village and his parents belonged to the Old Colony (Reinlaender) Mennonite Church.²⁶ In 1893 they moved to Saskatchewan and settled on a homestead north of Rosthern, on the southwest quarter of section 4, Township 43, Range 3, west of the third Meridian.²⁷ He married Margaretha Bergen, the oldest daughter of Rev. Heinrich Bergen, in 1895.

A. Accommodation to the World

The world was changing and in these years *Ältester* Zacharias was continually assessing whether or not modern innovations and ideas were good. Telephone lines were being brought nearer to Mennonite communities. Members wondered, "Should we have telephones?" There was also the question of whether it was acceptable practise for church members to own cars. *Ältester* Zacharias was quite concerned about people owning cars. On a trip to visit various Sommerfelder congregations in Manitoba, local transportation was provided by automobile. On one trip after a heavy rain the car slid off the road and got stuck in the mud. In the course of helping to push it out, Zacharias fell and the car ran over his leg. When he returned home to Saskatchewan in crippled condition and local people became aware of how the accident had happened, *Ältester* Zacharias lost his influence in the movement against cars. Municipalities were being formed and some members became councillors. Was it consistent with their Christian faith to take part in local government? *Ältester* Zacharias could see that telephones and cars in themselves were not sinful. However, he was concerned about how these



Ältester Aron & Margaretha
(Bergen) Zacharias

Photo: Cornelius C. Hamm,
Rosthern

innovations would affect their community and their values. Would these things lead to life or to greater enslavement to worldly possessions?²⁸

B. World War I

With the onset of World War I in 1914, the Mennonites affirmed their historic peace position. A five-man delegation, including *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen of the Manitoba Sommerfelder and Rev. Heinrich Doerksen of the Chortitzer met with government representatives in Ottawa on January 8, 1917, to clarify the Mennonite status. They referred the federal Canadian government to the agreement which they had entered into when they came to Canada from Russia forty years earlier. Among other things this agreement stated that Mennonites would be completely free from military service. The government acknowledged that the law gave Mennonites this right and that their boys would not be required to serve in the army. They, like all male youth of draft age would, however, have to sign registration cards.

Since the Saskatchewan Bergthaler had not been represented in the delegation to Ottawa, they elected *Ältester* Aron Zacharias and Rev. Jacob W. Neufeld on January 11 to travel to Manitoba in order to discuss common peace concerns with the Sommerfelder and Chortitzer. They reported back to the brotherhood on January 23, where

the decision was made to cooperate in filling out the national registration card which the government required of all males from the age of sixteen to sixty-five. In doing so they followed the advice of R.B. Bennett, Director General of National Service, and wrote the

Maria M. Reddekopp
Signature of Registrant

 **CANADA REGISTRATION BOARD**

This certificate must always be carried upon the person of the registrant

NUMBER

215	652	47
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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
Maria Reddekopp

residing at *Rogers*

was duly registered for the national purposes of Canada this *22th* day of *June* 1918

M. G. Fisher
Deputy Registrar

Sample registration card of Maria (Doell) Reddekopp. All persons age 16-65 were required to register on June 22, 1918.

CERTIFICATE
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that *Johann M. Reddekopp*

has been baptized and accepted as member of the MENNONITE CHURCH. He is exempted from military Service by Order In Council, dated August 13th. 1873, exempting Mennonites from all forms of Military Service.

DATED AT ROSTHERN, SASK. this *15th* day of *June* 1918

Signed *Aron Zeharias*
Bishop of the Mennonite Church.

Johann M. Reddekopp

Sample certificate of exemption from military service.

Source: Rev. Johann M. Reddekopp papers

word “Mennonite” across the face of the card to indicate to the government that they were exempt from military service. They also had to have recognized leaders of their church fill out and sign a separate certificate indicating that they were Mennonite, since some



Rev. Heinrich D. & Helena (Nikkel) Martens

Photo: Rolf Wilhelm Brednich

of them had not yet been baptized into the Bergthaler Church. A few Mennonites did serve as soldiers in World War I.

On June 21, 1917, a conference was held at Chortitz, now Randolph, Manitoba, on the East Reserve. Leaders of the Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, and Saskatchewan Bergthaler Churches, and according to one report, also Kleine Gemeinde ministers participated. The main issue was *Ordnung in der Gemeinde*. It was hoped that this conference would unite these groups on the question of the maintenance of the private school system and on the question of military service. The Canadian government had decided to make the matter of whether or not there should be conscription for military service a key issue in the federal election. The Mennonite ministers therefore unanimously agreed that their members should be counselled not to vote in this election.²⁹ Though this conference united these different Mennonite groups in their beliefs, Rev. Heinrich Martens felt that its effect did not last long. In a couple of years a Manitoba church group decided to change and this ended the unity.³⁰

C. Education

Probably the biggest issue to face *Ältester* Zacharias was that of education. Mennonite private schools were located throughout the area. Both Old Colony and Bergthaler Church members sent their children to these schools. Generally this arrangement worked fairly well. Bergthaler parents sent their children to the private school in Old Colony villages and paid a regular tuition for each child they had in school. A problem arose in one case when the Bergthaler people were not given a voice in the operation of the school. They could not participate in hiring the teacher, in setting curriculum, or determining the length of the school year. Some Bergthaler then hired an Old Colony teacher to instruct their children in his home. The Old Colony leaders, however, did not allow this to continue.³¹

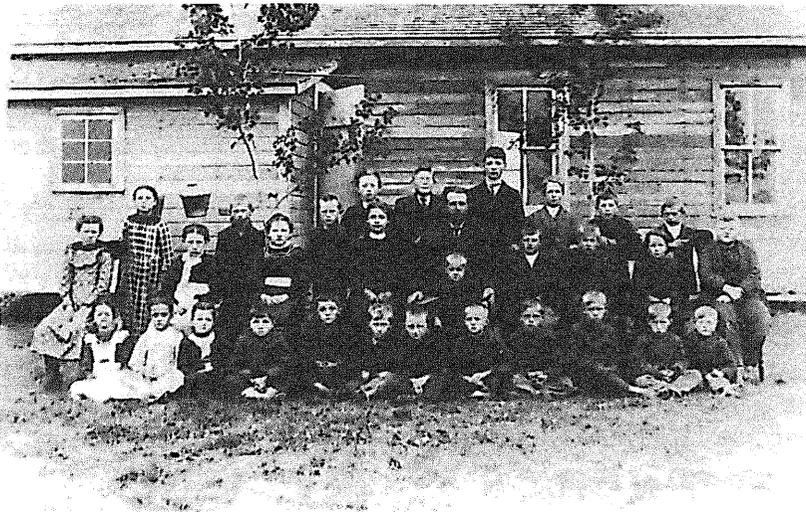
The larger crisis in education occurred in the context of World War I. There was resentment against foreigners in general and German people in particular. They were pressured to adopt Anglo-Saxon ways and institutions.

Numerous meetings were held between Bergthaler Mennonite Church leaders and Saskatchewan government leaders concerning education. The government suggested that Mennonites teach at least half an hour of English each day in their private schools. The government explained that the War Veterans' Association was pressuring them to have English taught in all schools. *Ältester* Zacharias refused. He felt that if the Bergthaler gave a finger the government would take the whole hand. The Church did not trust the promises



German School class near Schoenwiese with teacher Frank A. Guenter (in doorway). Students l. to r.: Henry Harms, Isaac Doell, Abe Guenter, Henry Doell, Peter Harms, Katharine Guenter, John A. Guenter, Anne Guenter, Helen Harms, Helena Guenter.

Photo: Jacob G. Guenter, Osler



German School class, northwest of Rosthern, 1908 with teacher Peter J. Harder.

Photo: Jacob P. Siemens, Warman

of the government. If their children were to learn English they would be lost to the world and adopt the values of the people around them.

Through their thirteen-year old translator, Heinrich Dyck, the government leaders indicated that if the Bergthaler refused now, more would be required of them at a later time. And so it was. At the next meeting the government demanded that the Bergthaler teach English one day a week in their private schools. The Church refused again.

Until 1917 the government of Saskatchewan had allowed Mennonites to conduct their own school in accordance with the promise they had been given by the federal government in 1873. In 1917 a new School Attendance Act was passed which required all children to attend a public school. The Bergthaler people were displeased with this legislation because they wanted to teach their own curriculum in the German language. They had had an earlier experience with a public school which was set up near the village of Reinfeld in 1914. At first the Bergthaler were in favour of having a public school. They soon realized, however, that their concept of education was different from that offered by the government. As a result they proposed buying the building and converting it to a private school.³² They felt the values important to them were not being stressed by the government.

Then in 1919 an order came from the government that all Mennonite private schools which did not comply with Department of Education standards were to be shut down. Parents were forced to send their children to public schools. If they refused, they had to pay fines. Many Mennonites had property seized by bailiffs because they were unable to pay their fines.³³

These were hard times for the Mennonites in Saskatchewan. Old Colony Church members were excommunicated by the church if they sent their children to the public schools, and they had to pay fines to the government if they refused to do so. Some people became so poor from the persistent fines that they faced a choice between starvation and sending the children to public schools. As far as can be determined, however, no Bergthaler members were excommunicated for sending their children to public schools.

D. The Flu of 1918

While World War I came to an end November 11, 1918, a new war had begun in the Saskatchewan Valley. This was the war against the deadly Spanish influenza. The saying, "After war comes plague" held true in this case. The flu epidemic came in three waves: in the spring

and fall of 1918 and the spring of 1919. The Saskatchewan Valley was hardest hit in the fall of 1918.

No one was exempt from this deadly disease; it caught the rich and poor, the good and bad alike.

It affected almost every populated area of the world and is thought to have killed between 20 and 22 million people in just a few months. . .

The primary target for the influenza epidemic was the young adult, making the onslaught tragic, both in personal terms and in terms of the strength of the country, coming as it did right on the heels of so many deaths in that same age group during the war . . . one doctor noted that in many households he visited where there were three generations, he found the grandparents and the children doing well and parents very ill.

. . .

The flu began often like a cold, with a cough and stuffy nose, progressing to a dreadful ache that pervaded every joint and muscle, a fever that shot as high as 104° and a marked inclination to stay in bed. If it stopped, the patient was usually back to normal in a week, but when it developed into pneumonia the outlook was grave indeed. With no antibiotics to rely on, doctors could only turn to their time honoured cures: rest, liquids and a lot of hope.³⁴

Home cures were also tried but very few of them seemed to be of much help. One cure that was commonly used by Mennonites during this flu period was a recipe of

onions cooked in milk, cooled slightly and then thickened by adding rye flour. It was spread between cloths to form a poultice and applied to the chest as hot as the patient could bear. With continued applications, relief of the congestion was usually achieved in an hour.³⁵

Those who did not catch the flu spent the majority of their waking hours caring for the sick around them. The story is told of a school principal in the town of Warman,

who went around the village two or three times daily, calling at each home where help was badly needed. He fed children, some of whom were recovering from the sickness, their mothers were ill; three or more of the fathers of these families were in the forces overseas. He brought canned milk and groceries for the families, he kept fires going, emptied ashes

and slop pails, carried their mail and wrote letters where required.³⁶

Ministers conducted funerals daily and spent time comforting the sick and dying. The dead were buried as soon as possible and sometimes more than one person was put in a grave. Many volunteers were needed to dig the graves in the cold frozen ground, some of whom were themselves still weak from the flu.

Rev. Heinrich Martens reflected on this period and how it killed so many people known to him. One such man was the Hague druggist, Mr. Jacob Hildebrand, who had been teaching English to Rev. Martens and two other fellows. Rev. Martens remembers meeting him in the drugstore a few days before he died. On this particular day, Mr. Hildebrand was waiting for some brandy which was coming in by train. He had heard that if you drank brandy it would keep the flu away. Two days later Rev. Martens heard that Mr. Hildebrand had died. There were also two Klassen brothers who died during this time. Rev. Martens was also frequently called on to carry a *Begräbnisbrief* (funeral invitation) from one side of the river to the other. "It was late in fall and the ice on the river made it very difficult to row."³⁷

IV. Emigration to Paraguay, 1921-1930: Preserving the Faith

Ältester Aaron Zacharias and other church leaders were very concerned about the school situation. As a result delegates were elected by the Church to go in search of a new homeland for the Mennonites. Old Colony delegations had already explored some South American countries and finally recommended Mexico. The Bergthaler went to both Mexico and Paraguay but ultimately preferred Paraguay because of its more stable political climate.

Church leaders as well as the larger church membership were not unanimously in favour of a migration to Paraguay. Under the leadership of *Ältester* Zacharias, two delegates were chosen to “spy out the land,” namely Rev. Jacob W. Neufeld and Rev. John J. Friesen. They,



Rev. Jacob W. & Helene
(Neudorf) Neufeld

Photo: Mrs. Margaret Friesen, Warman

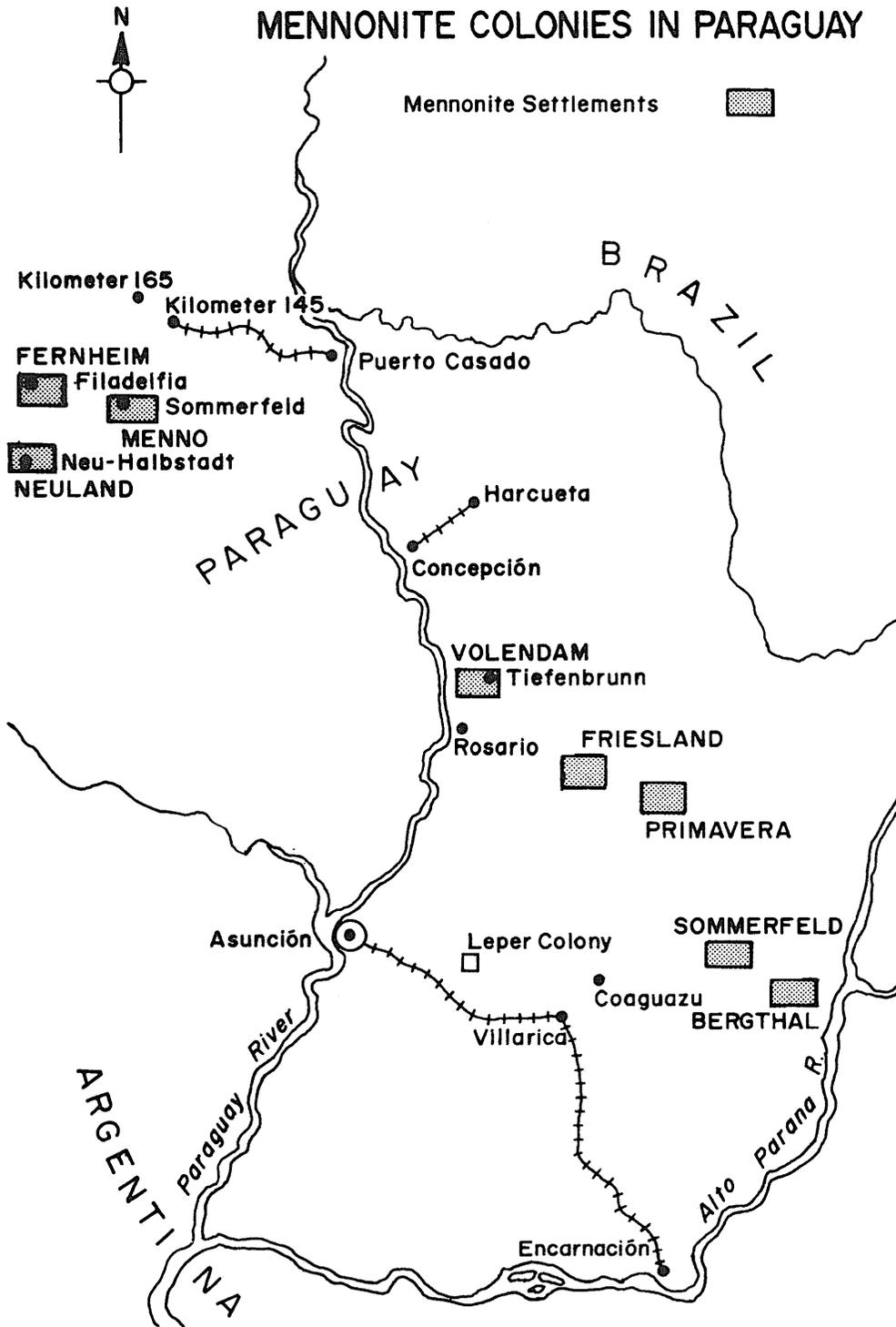


Rev. Johan J. Friesen
Photo: Jacob N. Friesen, Warman

together with delegates from the Manitoba Sommerfelder and Choritzter Mennonite Churches, left for Paraguay in February of 1921. They were given a good reception by the Paraguayan government. Their requests to the government were basically met. The land was to their liking and suitable for agriculture. The government would also allow them to have their own schools with their own curriculum and would not require Mennonites to do military service. The delegates brought back positive news, and so the people began preparing for a move.³⁸

Mr. Peter I. Dyck writes about this move to South America as being a very exciting and emotional episode of my life. Never will I forget these days, weeks and months of endless trips and many meetings by day and by night. On top of that the enormous expenses and responsibilities incurred, not to mention the ridicule and mockery we had to put up with, flung upon us by our own brethren in Christ. They could not and would not try to comprehend the motive behind this venture. Very disheartening. And on the other hand the support and uplift we received from other brethren was a very heartening boost in this undertaking.³⁹

It must be mentioned that Mennonites from Manitoba as well as Saskatchewan were contemplating a mass movement from Canada and that by the early 1920s this *Wanderlust* to move to South America was quite strong in some people's hearts. At least two Berghaler families from the Hague area also migrated to Mexico with Old

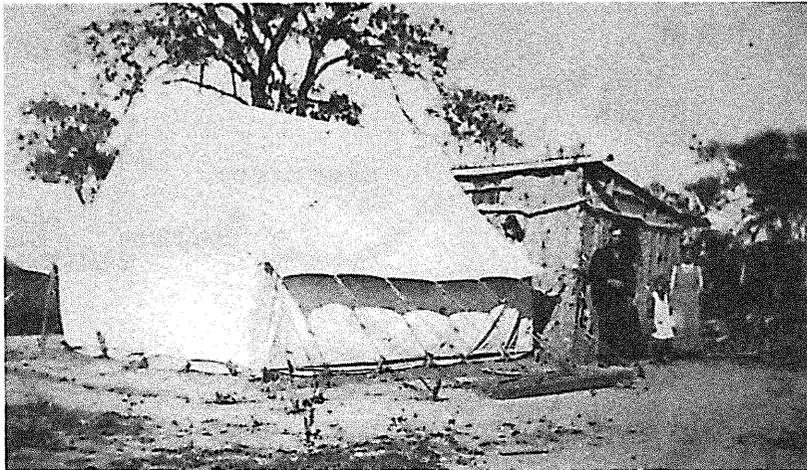


Source: Based on J.W. Fretz, *Pilgrims in Paraguay*

Colony Mennonites prior to the larger Bergthaler migration to Paraguay.

On December 14, 1926, the trains in Osler were boarded for Paraguay. It was a bitterly cold day accompanied by a sharp north-west wind. The group was led by *Ältester* Aron Zacharias, Rev. Abram Bergen and Deacon Heinrich H. Dyck. Painful goodbyes were said to friends and relatives for no one knew if they would see one another again. The trip proceeded in several stages: by train to New York, from New York by ship to Buenos Aires, from Buenos Aires by a smaller boat to Asunción, and from Asunción by boat to Puerto Casado, which they finally reached on January 16, 1927, after over four weeks of travel. (See Map VI) The sea journey went pretty well in spite of the fact that some people became very seasick. There were only two deaths at sea. This Bergthaler group comprised a total of 31 families (195 persons) and was the second Mennonite group to reach Paraguay. (See Table I) Four families from the East Reserve in Manitoba also travelled with this second group.⁴⁰

When the families arrived at Puerto Casado they were in for a long wait. The land had been bought and paid for, but they could not move onto it. The railroad inland was not completed and as a result they had no way of moving to their land. The men and several families moved out to the land but the majority of the people remained in their tent settlement outside of Puerto Casado. The men



Tent shelter of Rev. Cornelius A. Neufeld at Puerto Casado, Paraguay, 1927-28

Photo: Frank K. Guenter, Warman

Table I
Saskatchewan Bergthaler Emigrants to Paraguay, 1926

Name	Origin	Date of Return
Bergen, Abram & Sarah (Nickel)	Lost River	
Bergen, Rev. Abram & Maria (Neufeld)	Lost River	
Bergen, Cornelius (widower)	Waldheim	ca 1928
Bergen, Cornelius & Elisabeth (Schock)	Waldheim	ca 1928
Bergen, Diedrich & Anna (Neufeld)	Steele S.D.	1927
Bergen, Mrs. Helena (Fehr) ¹	Rosthern	1927
Doerksen, Abraham & Helena (Buhler)	Aberdeen	ca 1928
Dyck, Deacon Heinrich & Aganetha (Buhler)	Aberdeen	1929
Dyck, Peter I. & Maria (Neufeld)	Rosthern	1927
Ens, Franz ² & Anna (Wiebe Niessen)	Schoenwiese	1928
Friesen, Peter M. & Anna (Friesen)	Aberdeen	1927
Goertzen, Jacob & Katharina (Ens)	Osterwick	
Neufeld, Cornelius & Helena (Bergen)	Rosthern	1927
Neufeld, Cornelius & Margaretha (Letkeman) ³	Gruenthal	1965
Neufeld, Diedrich & Aganetha (Sawatzky)	Pine Point Service	
Neufeld, Johan & Maria (Kroeker)	Lost River	
Neufeld, Peter & Anna (Unrau)	Wingard	ca 1928
Niessen, Jacob & Katharina (Wall)	Schoenwiese	
Niessen, Peter & Sarah (Neufeld)	Schoenwiese	1966
Penner, Abram & Margaretha (Peters) ⁴	Rosthern	
Penner, Johan & wife	Rosthern	
Penner, Johan & ? (Neufeld) ⁵	Lost River	
Peters, Franz K. & Sarah (Harder)	Schoenwiese	1927
Peters, Jacob & Anna (Siemens)	Hochstadt	1927
Peters, Jacob K. & Sarah (Harder)	Osler/Schoenwiese	
Peters, Peter & Margaretha (Wiens)	Rosthern	1929
Wall, Johan & Sarah (Peters)	Schoenwiese	
Wiebe, Cornelius & Katharina (Bergen)	Rosthern	
Zacharias, Aron & Agatha (Bergen)	Rosthern	1927
Zacharias, <i>Ältester</i> Aron & Margaretha (Bergen)	Rosthern	

¹Her husband, Rev. Heinrich Bergen, died just before the date of departure.

²His first wife (Katharina Peters) died in 1926 and he then married widow Anna (Wiebe) Niessen. When Ens died shortly after arriving in Paraguay, Anna and her children returned to Canada.

³Mr. Neufeld died in Paraguay; Margaretha and son Jacob returned to Canada.

⁴A daughter, Margaret, born April 5, 1925 died on the ship and was buried at sea on January 3, 1927.

⁵Mrs. Penner was in a wheelchair, died, and is buried in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

who went out measured the fields and village plots in preparation for the move. This time of waiting and idleness created dissatisfaction and disharmony among the various groups.⁴¹ The people had no income and no way of earning any either. Most people had held auctions before they left Canada, but this money had paid for their trip to Paraguay and left them barely enough to get started on their farms. It was not, however, enough to support them for a long period of time. The ticket to Paraguay including ship passage and the train fare, cost in excess of two hundred dollars per person. Meals had been provided on the ship but not on the train.⁴²

After eight months in their tent settlement at Puerto Casado, many had become bitter and disillusioned and the group became quite divided.

Some prepared to return to Canada. The dream of settling in a new homeland had faded. Those who wanted to return had to borrow money to do so: substantial sums of money were sent from Saskatchewan to help the settlers at Puerto Casado but it was not enough. Many could also not stand the heat; the change was just too great. Most of the settlers would have stayed if they could have moved to their land right away. To move back home again was also very difficult. Mr. Peter I. Dyck writes, "The thought came to me: How is it humanly possible after putting so much energy, time and effort into such a gigantic project, then to sacrifice everything and turn our backs on it? Here we anticipated we had followed the leading of God in this venture."⁴³

During this period of waiting from 1927 to May, 1928, an epidemic broke out which resulted in a total of 168 deaths. One hundred and twenty-one persons died at Puerto Casado while the other forty-seven died on the way to or at the settlement, at the following places: Pozo Azul, Hoffnungsfeld, Palo Blanco, and Loma Plata.⁴⁴

About 1200 of the 1763 Mennonites who migrated from Canada to Paraguay eventually made it to their land. This new settlement was called the Menno Colony and the first village to be set up by Saskatchewan Mennonites was named Bergthal. Map VII shows the original settlers of this village. The start was slow and required a lot of hard work and patience. In spite of all the setbacks, with time adjustments were made and Paraguay became their home. *Ältester* Aron Zacharias, who led the Saskatchewan Bergthaler group, died in Paraguay in October of 1927.

The approximately 375 people who returned to Canada found life to be very difficult because they had disposed of all their property before leaving for Paraguay. Some stayed with relatives or on aban-

Map VII

PETER FUNK	PETER FALK
PETER FRIESEN (Rosthern) ÄLT. ARON ZACHARIAS (Rosthern)	JOHAN BERGEN
ABRAM DERKSEN	ABRAM PENNER
JACOB GOERTZEN (Osterwick)	JOHAN FUNK
JOHAN WALL (Schönwiese)	DAVID HARDER
REV. ABRAM BERGEN (Lost River)	CORNELIUS WIEBE (Rosthern)
HEINRICH DYCK (Aberdeen) CORNELIUS NEUFELD (Grünthal)	JACOB NEUFELD
KLAAS NEUFELD	JACOB FUNK
JACOB NIESSEN (Schönwiese)	JOHAN PENNER
	DIEDRICH NEUFELD (Mennon)

**VILLAGE OF BERGTHAL
MENNO COLONY
PARAGUAY
1927-28**

(Aberdeen) denotes former residence
in Saskatchewan

Source: Jacob Neufeld

done farms until enough money could be raised to begin anew. Very few returnees had enough money to purchase a farm near their former homes. Soon news came from the Meadow Lake area that inexpensive farm land could be purchased there. So in 1928 a migration of Bergthaler began to Meadow Lake. This included those who were returning from Paraguay as well as numerous people from the Rosthern area who were looking for a new start. This was not a group movement but consisted of individuals moving at different times, from 1928 to well into the 1930s.⁴⁵

V. *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm, 1928-1947: The Depression, Relief, Resettlement

Ältester David Doerksen from Herbert, Saskatchewan, served the Bergthaler Church after *Ältester* Aron Zacharias and his group left for Paraguay in December of 1926. A majority of Bergthaler had decided not to emigrate and now they looked for a new *Ältester*.

In August of 1928 Rev. Cornelius Hamm was ordained to this office by *Ältester* David Doerksen. Rev. Hamm was born in 1878 in Neuendorf, Russia, and came to Canada at the age of thirteen with his parents. In 1891 they settled in Rosenfeld, Manitoba and in 1899 took up a homestead in Saskatchewan. He married Katharina Guenther in 1904. In 1908 he was elected as deacon and in 1909 was ordained as minister in the Bergthaler Church.⁴⁶



Ältester Cornelius & Katharine (Guenther) Hamm

Photo: Henry Dyck, Hague

A. The Depression

The capable leadership of *Ältester* Hamm came at a time when the world was changing and full of unrest. The effects of the Depression were starting to be felt in 1930. Severe drought conditions prevailed and unemployment hit urban centres very hard; many travelled across the country looking for work and others returned to the land in order to provide food and shelter for their families. Mennonites, like everyone else, found themselves without employment and money. The Hague-Osler area had become heavily populated and it was difficult for so many to make a living on the available land. Many became squatters living in shacks and did their best to keep themselves alive in difficult circumstances.

The thriftiness and resourcefulness of Mennonites helped many of them to survive these difficult times. They had learned to manage with what they had. This was especially true where money was scarce and one could not buy badly needed items.

The tradition of home baking and canning and maintaining of large gardens was a godsend. They also processed a substitute for coffee known as *Pripps*. In general the procedure included roasting milk soaked wheat or barley in the oven. Continuous samples were taken to determine the exact moment to take the grain from the oven for placing into cooling boxes. It was then ground up through a coffee bean grinder to regular and fine requirements and stored away in empty syrup pails. The brew provided a strong and inexpensive drink in many a home.⁴⁷

In spite of this, many people found it difficult to feed and clothe their own families and the church leaders soon realized that they needed to respond to this problem. It was decided that food articles like flour, meat and lard would be stored in a central location so that those who needed the food could come there and get it. The attic of the Reinfeld Church was used for this purpose.

There were many poor people, however, who refused to go to the church to obtain food and other essentials because they wanted to retain their pride. One poor man with a large family had gone for help, and he was quickly labelled a “church mouse.” Others desperately needed the food but refused to come and get it, fearing that they would be ostracized in a similar fashion. The church leaders quickly became aware of this problem and after this had food and other supplies delivered directly to those who were in need. This proved to be the best arrangement for both those who gave and

those who received the food.⁴⁸

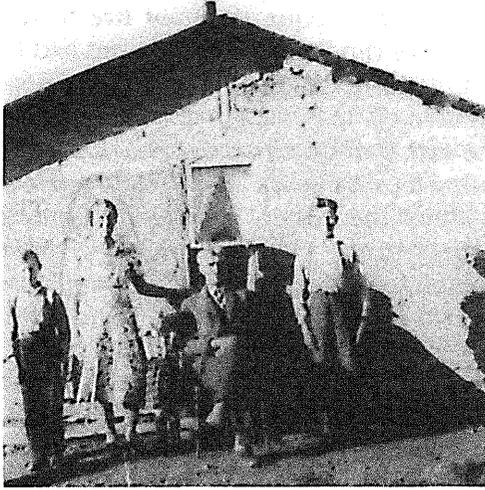
The government also assisted the needy in the form of feed and seed grain and through a monthly cheque of about five to ten dollars, depending on the size of the family. This cheque had to reach far enough to buy food, clothing, fuel and many other necessities. The government supplemented this with salted fish and apples that came in barrels from the east. Many Mennonites who ordinarily refused help accepted it during the depression. Some families were good managers and could stretch the few dollars they had; others squandered even the little they had and were always in need. Flour and potatoes were staple foods. A creative father soon learned that many things could be built and repaired with locally found materials, rather than buying new materials or parts.⁴⁹

In 1930 the Saskatchewan government set up a scheme to help the destitute. It was geared for people who were familiar with local methods of farming but who could not afford to buy land. The plan enabled settlers to move to northern communities and obtain advances for the purchase of building materials and fuel to clear the land. This was done in order to relieve the immediate necessities of the settlers and their families and to place them in a position to provide for themselves.⁵⁰ The costs of this program were shared by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. It was hoped that these people would then no longer need relief. As early as 1931 the government began assisting groups like Mennonites to transfer to new areas under its "back to the land" program.⁵¹ The majority of Bergthaler who moved went to the Sonningdale and the Mullingar (Northvale) areas. A small group moved to LaCrete, Alberta. In 1940 they numbered fifty.⁵² Some Bergthaler families also moved with Old Colony people to other parts of Saskatchewan.

The opportunity to farm created a new hope in these people. It also took pressure off local municipalities who helped support people who lacked the means of making a living. Mennonites had an advantage because they moved as a group and worked together. Although life was full of hard work and long days, they were able to overcome much of the loneliness and depression felt among other settlers because they lived close together and visited each other often.⁵³

B. New Churches

Church services were started soon after people got settled in these new areas. Throughout Saskatchewan these little clusters of Bergthaler were served by ministers on a rotating basis. At Sonningdale

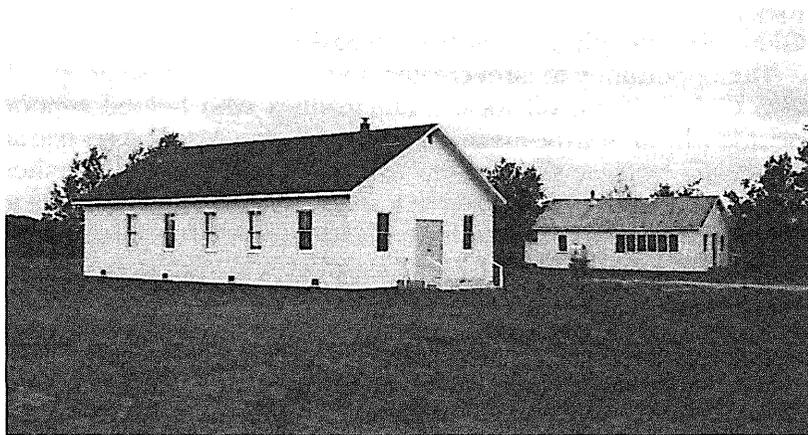


Abram Thiessen family, Sonningdale. Church services were held in their home.

Photo: Mrs. John Doell, Warman

services were held in homes but not necessarily every Sunday. Ministers from the Hague area served the congregation. At Northvale services were held in the Isaac Miller home from 1931-1934. Then a log building was built and two local men were ordained as ministers: Johan Hildebrandt in 1934 and Abram K. Giesbrecht in 1935.

The church at Carrot River began in 1930 with the help of *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm. At first meetings were held in homes but by 1935 a log building had been erected. In 1940 *Ältester* Hamm ordained the



Bergthaler Mennonite Church building at Blue Jay

present leader, Rev. Johan B. Epp, as *Åltester*.⁵⁴ In 1964 the present building, located near Blue Jay, about 9 miles northeast of Carrot River, was built.

In 1930 services were held in homes in an area called Moose Range, about six miles southeast of Carrot River. Services were not held here very long. At Peesane worship services began in 1938 or 1939 in homes, but by 1957 these had also died out. There was, however, a church in this area at Lost River which had been started by *Åltester* Aron Zacharias in 1912. By 1914 a church building was finished and it was used until 1981.⁵⁵ The location of many of these worship centres is shown on Map V.

VI. The Impact of Change, the 1930s

In many of the new communities where Bergthaler settled church services were often held on alternate Sundays and sometimes even less frequently. Many people lived a considerable distance from their church, especially when one considers that they had to travel by horse and buggy. One Bergthaler settlement north of the North Saskatchewan River became frustrated with the irregular services and took in a non-Bergthaler Mennonite minister, a certain Rev. Franzen from the United States, in the hope that he would be more permanent. He held services in German and was able to speak without notes, which the people appreciated. As a result they told the Bergthaler ministers that they need not bother coming anymore. At the end of the summer, however, Rev. Franzen suddenly left without warning and never returned. The people then asked the Bergthaler ministers to come back and preach for them again. Rev. Heinrich Martens observed that one strength of the Bergthaler ministry was that one could always rely on them to serve the church to the best of their ability in good times and bad.⁵⁶

A. Death and Funerals

Mennonites did not see death as something to be feared but to be welcomed. The words of Hymn 247 in the *Gesangbuch* express this attitude.

Welt, ade! ich bin dein müde, ich will nach dem Himmel zu, da wird sein der rechte Friede und die stolze Seelenruh’.	World adieu, for I am weary, Heavenward I set my goal; There sweet peace is mine so surely, Rest and comfort for my soul.
Welt, bei dir ist Krieg und Streit, nichts denn lauter Eitelkeit; in dem Himmel allezeit Friede, Ruh’ und Seligkeit.	Naught I find but endless grief In this world of war and strife. But in Heaven is rest and peace, There I find eternal bliss. ⁵⁷

For believers these words express the truth that the troubles and suffering of the world end with death and that death brings peace from all these earthly struggles.

Mennonite congregations remembered their dead by holding a service in the home of the deceased or of a relative or friend. This

practise was brought from Prussia to Russia and into Canada. Until approximately 1935 Bergthaler funeral services were held in homes. A *Begräbnisbrief*, or funeral invitation, was sent to relatives and neighbours and they in turn would bring food for a fellowship meal following the funeral.

In the depression years, around 1935, a Mr. Fehr died near Aberdeen. There was no building large enough to host the funeral, so it was decided to use the church building. This had never been done before and many church members felt it to be very wrong. Many of those strongly opposed did not attend Mr. Fehr's funeral.⁵⁸ After this time, funerals were held in the church, but a fellowship meal was held in the home of a relative, friend or neighbour. With time an *Äthuis* (eating house) was built next to the church to serve meals at funerals and weddings.

Death was seen as a natural part of life. People generally died at home. The body was then washed, sprinkled with formaldehyde, and dressed in cloth by the older women in the community. A local carpenter would make the coffin for the deceased. The body was then put in a room in the house for family, friends and relatives to come and pay last respects. The body was not embalmed and



1959 funeral of Peter Janzen at Reinfeld. *Ältester* Abram Buhler officiating.

Photo: Mrs. John Doell, Warman

funerals had to be held as soon as possible following the death. Whenever possible the body was kept cool by using ice.

In the early years of settlement in Saskatchewan, many people buried their dead in their garden or field somewhere. The Old Colony villages had cemeteries in the village, but Bergthaler were discouraged from using them. Later, cemeteries were generally placed near the Bergthaler Church buildings. In 1940 the provincial government passed a law requiring people to bury their dead only in registered cemeteries, in order to put an end to garden types of burial.

The dead in Old Colony and Bergthaler cemeteries are buried with their feet facing the east. With the registering of cemeteries in 1940 came also a move to identify people buried in these cemeteries. Previous to this virtually no graves were marked with stones or markers. It was believed that when the dead in Christ would arise then the Lord God would identify his children and take them with him into heaven. Grave markers were therefore believed to be unnecessary.

B. Midwives

The Mennonites who moved to Saskatchewan in the 1890s included a number of midwives. They were generally married women with a family of their own. The community recognized their gift of caring for mothers at the time of childbirth. At times a midwife might also serve as a chiropractor.

The Mennonite community saw midwives as people who were devoted to their "calling" and were willing to serve others even though it might be an inconvenience for them. Most Old Colony and Bergthaler midwives had received no training for their work other than such information as they might have acquired from other midwives. Essentially they were self-taught. Several German books on midwifery were available to them. At times newborn children and pregnant mothers lost their lives because midwives were incapable of dealing with problem births.

Among the immigrants who came to Canada from Russia in the 1920s were a number of women who were not only gifted in the area of midwifery, but who had also received training in this field. These trained midwives could handle most complications related to childbirth. They were also more careful in trying to assure that the birth took place in a sterile environment.

Most Old Colony villages had their own midwife who made herself available whenever her help was needed. "For a nominal fee of three to five dollars the midwife would deliver the baby and stay



Mrs. Anna (Sawatzky) Strengert Neufeld. A midwife who came to the Hague area from Russia in the 1920s.

Photo: Jacob E. Friesen, Hague

with the mother and child for a number of days,” reports Jacob Guenter. In cases where people were unable to pay even this minimal amount, the midwife might settle for several chickens or whatever else her clients could afford. “Out of compassion, she would supply diaper material for the less fortunate.”

The community also joined in celebrating the birth of a new child. “It was customary for neighbours to treat the family with homemade chicken noodle soup after the family addition.”⁵⁹

In the late 1920s and early 1930s the role of the midwife became less important. The majority of the midwives moved to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s. Many small towns had acquired medical doctors by this time and their success rate was better than that of the midwives. Medical doctors also had access to medication. Increasingly the result was that people patronized doctors rather than their local midwives. As a result, Mennonite women gifted in this area were no longer acknowledged and consequently their art died out.

C. *Waisenamt*

The prophet Isaiah wrote: “Learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Is. 1:17). A Swiss Brethren martyr wrote in 1528 that if Anabaptists “know of anyone who is in need, whether or not this is a member of their church, they believe it is their duty out of love to God to render help and aid.” Mennonites have not fully lived up to that high ideal in the subsequent centuries, but a number of their institutions have devel-



Heinrich & Katharine (Penner) Voth family. Mr. Voth served as *Waisenmann* for many years.

Photo: Henry Voth, Jr., Meadow Lake

oped from this conviction. One of them is the *Waisenamt* (orphans' bureau).⁶⁰

The *Waisenamt* played a very vital role in the church in helping to care for the orphans and widows in the community. Along with the *Armenkasse* (welfare fund), whose primary function was to take care of the poor in the community, and the *Feuerversicherung* (fire insurance), which was set up to help victims of fires and other natural disasters, this institution was brought along from Russia. In some form all three, no doubt, had their origin even before that in Prussia.

The *Waisenamt* began as an agency to administer estates on behalf of orphans and widows. The regulations describing how estates and inheritances were to be divided respected the rights of the surviving parent and all children. For example, after the death of a parent the estate was divided into halves: one half was retained by the surviving parent and the other half divided equally among the children. Personal effects were then disposed of at an auction arranged by the *Waisenamt* leaders. Outstanding debts were first paid and the rest of the proceeds divided evenly among the heirs.

Two men were elected from the church community to run the affairs of the *Waisenamt*. These *Waisenvorsteher* (orphan administrators) were to be of good character, honest and trustworthy. Other members were often called upon to help with the assessment of an estate or asked to be a *Vormund* or *Gootmaun* (guardian) of an

orphaned child. These guardians were to see to it that orphaned children were well taken care of in the homes in which they had been placed. At the age of twenty-one, the orphan received his inheritance and became responsible for his own decisions. In time the nature of the *Waisenamt* changed somewhat. It became a lending institution in addition to its original function. Orphans' funds were now used to provide loans for those who needed funds to build a house, buy machinery, livestock or land. In this way the needy did not have to go to a secular institution to borrow money. A small interest fee was charged.

Members could also deposit money with the *Waisenamt* and have it earn a moderate interest. Thus the *Waisenamt* served as a kind of credit union. In the emigration to Canada in 1874-1876, it was the Bergthal *Waisenamt* which made it possible for the whole Colony, rich and poor alike, to make the move.⁶¹

To borrow money from the *Waisenamt*, a person had to have two co-signers. If the person borrowing money could not repay it, refinancing of such loans was arranged where possible. But if the borrower would not repay the loan, then the church leaders and co-signers would try to deal with the person in keeping with Matthew 18. If the borrower still refused to pay, then the co-signer was obligated to repay the loan. In each case it was strongly emphasized that the loan needed to be repaid in order for the orphans to receive their money.

The *Waisenamt* of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler was probably formed at the time of the ordination of Rev. Kornelius Epp as *Ältester*. Its *Waisenverordnung* (regulations) was based on that of its mother churches in Manitoba, the Sommerfelder and Chortitzer Churches. This can be seen from the *Waisenverordnung* published in 1914. In the church division of 1908, it appears that *Ältester* Kornelius Epp retained the *Waisenamt* books.

Like any institution, the *Waisenamt* is only as good as the people who are in it. The Saskatchewan Bergthaler *Waisenamt* faced an unusual situation. First, the Bergthaler people here generally did not live in villages; and secondly, they were made up of a mixture of Manitoban, American, and Russian Mennonites, all bringing with them slightly different expectations of how a *Waisenamt* should be run.

The Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church did not incorporate its *Waisenamt* like the Mennonite Union *Waisenamt* at Waldheim and the Sommerfelder *Waisenamt* did. Incorporation gave a *Waisenamt* legal power to deal with those who did not repay their loans. The

Saskatchewan Bergthaler thus had no legal clout; for their *Waisenamt* to work, it required that people be very honest, morally upright, and conscientious in the repayment of their loans. It was understood that those who used the *Waisenamt* were Christian and would reflect the spirit of Christ: "Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

The task of the *Waisenvorsteher* was not an easy one. He was dealing with fellow church members and felt obligated to help out where he could. It was a difficult task to refuse someone money who needed it and yet whose reputation for repayment was questionable. Another requirement of the *Waisenvorsteher* was to be honest. One Bergthaler official who had a weakness in this area was charged with embezzlement of funds in 1916 and was replaced.⁶² It was also the task of the *Waisenvorsteher* to check out the ability of the co-signers to repay loans. It turned out that many of the co-signers did not have any assets and should not have been allowed to co-sign.

The rules of the *Waisenamt* required that all debts to the *Waisenamt* had to be cleared up before a person could marry or emigrate. Those who wanted to move to Paraguay in 1926 first had to clear their debt. One man from Schoenwiese had co-signed for another who refused to pay. This co-signer wanted to move to Paraguay so he approached the man who made the loan and asked him to pay off this loan. The borrower of the money refused and this conscientious co-signer worked many long hours to repay his neighbour's debt and then to save enough money to make the move to Paraguay with his family.

Beginning in 1929 the Depression placed a great strain on the *Waisenamt*. Land values and the price of farm produce dropped radically. Many farmers who had borrowed money from the *Waisenamt* were too poor to repay their loans. Their primary concern was survival for themselves and their families. However, there were also those who were outrightly dishonest. For example, at auction sales held under the auspices of the *Waisenamt* to clear the assets of estates, it was customary for members to charge their purchases to their *Waisenamt* account. The problem arose when many of these people failed to pay their accounts or even had no intention of repaying them. The story is also told of a man who already owned two quarter sections of land and borrowed money from the *Waisenamt* to purchase an additional quarter. He agreed that if he would not be able to repay his loan that he would then cash in the titles of his other land in order to do so. When it turned out that he was unable to pay off his loan, he refused to keep his promise because

“others also did not pay.”⁶³

A brotherhood meeting was held at the Aberdeen Bergthaler Church on July 19, 1932 to discuss the financial problems of the *Waisenamt*. It was decided that no interest payments would be made on deposits, nor would debtors have to pay any interest for the years 1932-33. It was hoped that this would encourage those owing money to repay it since, without interest charges, the entire payment would go toward the principal.

In the fall of 1933 interest rates were again discussed at brotherhood meetings held November 15 at Aberdeen, November 16 at Schoenwiese and November 17 at Rosthern. Here it was agreed to restore interest payments at the rate of 5 percent from the debtors and 4 percent to the depositors.

These measures to solve the *Waisenamt* problems moved in the right direction but were not adequate. By 1935 the organization was in very serious trouble. The church decided to bail it out by raising money and lending it to the *Waisenamt* without expecting the loan to be returned. Church members could contribute livestock, food or machinery if they did not have cash. This was done partly in response to a threat by a church member who wanted to take the *Waisenamt* to court. This man's son had reached the age of twenty-one and the *Waisenamt* owed him two thousand dollars. Because of insufficient reserve funds, the *Waisenamt* was unable to pay the entire amount. Four hundred dollars were raised and the balance would follow as more funds became available.

A brotherhood meeting was held at the Reinfeld Church on July 17, 1935 to discuss *Waisenamt* matters once more. Here it was decided that eligible heirs were to be paid half their inheritance in cash from the money loaned by the church. This did not mean, however, that all of it would be paid out in 1935.

It was also decided that no interest would accumulate on the capital of heirs who had come of age but only on that of minors. These decisions were made at the brotherhood meeting in order to rebuild the *Waisenamt*. It was hoped that debtors to the *Waisenamt* would be challenged by this action of the church to pay their debts as soon as possible. *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm recognized the serious condition of the *Waisenamt*, but was also aware that those suffering most were the poor, the widows and the orphans. He urged all members to give as much as they could and set a good example by donating large amounts himself.

However, by now faith in the *Waisenamt* was nearly lost. No longer could the Mennonite farmer rely on the *Waisenamt* to ensure

that his wife and children would be cared for if a misfortune should befall him and that upon arriving at adulthood his children would receive their rightful inheritance.⁶⁴ For many, the *Waisenamt* had been a very bitter chapter in their lives, one that they wanted to forget.

By 1959 the *Waisenmänner* had cleared up all the outstanding accounts that they were aware of.

Out of death often comes new life. When Rev. Jacob B. Guenther moved to Bolivia in 1962, he took with him materials and valuable practical experience on how to begin a *Waisenamt* there. The needs of many Saskatchewan Bergthaler are now served by the Mennonite Union *Waisenamt* in Waldheim, known today as Mennonite Trust.⁶⁵

D. Other Issues

Smaller issues also had to be dealt with in the church at this time. One concerned the naming of children. Until this time children had usually been named after grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles. It was a well defined system to which families generally adhered. Increasingly, however people chose names of a less traditional nature for their children. Some church members felt that it was important to keep the traditional system whereas many others felt that new names were perfectly acceptable.

Another issue that arose was whether or not the church should put backs on its benches. These were not major issues but nevertheless needed to be resolved by the church leaders in a sensitive way.⁶⁶

E. The Rudnerweider Church

In the fall of 1936 the Rudnerweider *Gemeinde*, later called the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, emerged in Manitoba, largely as a result of evangelistic meetings conducted there by Rev. I.P. Friesen of Rosthern. Four Sommerfelder Church ministers who were greatly affected by Friesen's services, sought to introduce a variety of new practises in the church. When they met with very little success they decided to form a new Mennonite church. The first organizational meeting was held in the home of Rev. Wilhelm Falk who lived in the village of Schoenthal. This group became known for its strong emphasis on missions, on a personal experiential faith, on the use of revival meetings, on the assurance of salvation, and on the joyous Christian life.

The seed for this movement, both in Manitoba and Saskatchewan was sown by Rev. Isaac P. Friesen of Rosthern. Rev. Friesen had been excommunicated from the Old Colony Church in 1908 for sending his children to a public school and for operating a business in



Rev. Isaac P. Friesen
Photo: Leander Hildebrandt, Osler

Rosthern. In November of 1919 he and his son Isaac I. Friesen were ordained as evangelists in the Rosenorter Church of the General Conference Mennonite Church. Rev. I.P. Friesen held many services in the Hague-Osler area as well as in Manitoba, speaking in schools, homes, or wherever else he could. He preached a message of salvation and stressed that people could have a personal relationship with the Lord. He also tried to enable people to discern the difference between tradition and faith, since he felt that he had been excommunicated strictly because he defied tradition.

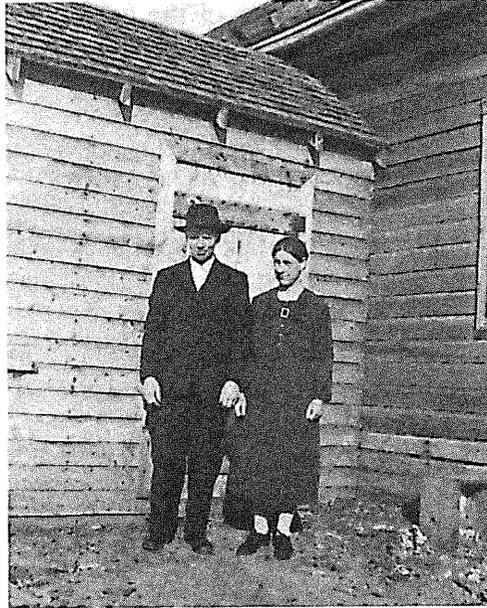
Many members of the Old Colony and Bergthaler Churches in Saskatchewan found Rev. Friesen's sermons meaningful. When a Rudnerweider and a Pentecostal Church were begun at Chortitz in the 1940s, members were confronted with a choice between remaining in their Bergthaler and Old Colony congregations or joining one of the new churches. By the early 1940s the Rudnerweider had built a building at Chortitz and had elected Johann D. Friesen *Ältester*, Peter B. Peters and Henry Zacharias as ministers, and Abram Neudorf as deacon to serve the Church. The Pentecostal group moved to the village of Gruenthal under the leadership of Cornelius H. Doell. Later this church became known as the Gruenthal Church.⁶⁷

VII. Urbanization and World War II, the 1940s: Sunday Schools, Music, Conscientious Objectors

By the late 1930s the loss of the German schools had left a deep scar on the Bergthaler and Old Colony Churches. Some children now learned only English in the public schools or never went to school at all. Most of the young people could no longer understand the High German sermons in church; they could not read their German Bibles and hymn books, nor could they write German, if they could write at all. The children were therefore not getting very much out of the church services. Earlier the German schools had provided opportunity for them to learn about the faith and the German language in the classes, in the prayers they said, and in the hymns they sang. This school experience had provided them with a stepping stone to becoming members of the church, but this was now no longer true after the government had closed the German schools.

A. Sunday Schools

The time was therefore ripe for a Sunday School. One of the leaders in this movement was Heinrich A. Dyck. In 1938 Dyck and Ben Fast, a teacher at Lily School near Aberdeen, discussed the need for a Sunday School. They decided to use the Lily School for this purpose. Many children attended and the Sunday School went on for some time. A few differences in theology arose between Fast, who was from the General Conference Mennonite Church, and Dyck of the Bergthaler Church, but both shared a common concern to reach their own people. A start had been made at the Lily School: a Sunday School, evening meetings, and a *Jugendverein* were now in progress. Abram Buhler, who later became *Ältester* of the church, offered his home to Heinrich A. Dyck as a place to teach since the school board had never been in favour of using the school building for religious purposes. The classes met at the Buhler place for a short time. Then Mrs. Harder, a widow with a large family, offered her house as a place to teach Sunday School. She had many children and had no vehicle to transport them, yet she felt they needed Christian instruction. The



Julius & Katharina
(Bergen) Pauls, Reinfeld
Photo: Katharina Doell, Warman

children were taught through the use of stories and songs, and these were also enjoyed by Mrs. Harder as well as other adults who came and sat in on the classes. Heinrich Dyck also sold catechisms, hymn books, Bibles and New Testaments, and many people purchased these religious books.⁶⁸

For about six or seven years the Sunday School was held in homes. Many people were opposed to this movement. Others said the Sunday School was alright as long as it was held in homes and not in the church. Ministers came and sat in on the classes to listen and evaluate what was being taught. Each time they would say that there was nothing wrong with it; it had just never been done before. At brotherhood meetings, however, any suggestion to have Sunday School classes in the church building was strongly opposed by the church.

About 1946 *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm realized that the Sunday School had made a big difference in teaching children the faith, and he regretted that he had not supported it earlier. When he had held a baptism in one church where the children had not been part of a Sunday School, not one of them could recite from memory even a portion of the catechism. When asked if they could say the Lord's Prayer, not one, not even a minister's son could say it off by heart. However, when he held a baptism near Aberdeen, all the children

who had been part of the Sunday School classes could say the catechism as well as the Lord's Prayer by memory. As a result *Ältester* Hamm arranged for Sunday Schools to be held in the churches a half an hour before the service, despite opposition.⁶⁹

This movement spread throughout the other Bergthaler churches as well. Rev. Henry Siemens helped to start one at Schoenwiese. At Reinfeld an attempt at beginning a Sunday School had been made some time earlier but had not materialized. Now Mr. Edward Harms, a school teacher at the Reinfeld Public School from 1940-1943, held classes in the Reinfeld Bergthaler Church until he was asked to stop.⁷⁰ After 1946 Julius Pauls led the Sunday School at Reinfeld.

B. Music in the Bergthaler Church

The hymnal used by the Bergthaler and Old Colony Churches is the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*. The same hymnbook was used by their ancestors in Prussia and Russia and was first published as a hymnal without notes in 1767 in Königsberg, East Prussia.⁷¹ The contents of the hymnal have changed only slightly during the past 200 years.

This *Gesangbuch* was derived from the Dutch *Veelerbande Schriftuerlijke Liedekens*, which was used in West Prussia until 1769 and which had been in use in Holland since the days of the Reformation.

Mennonites from Prussia and Holland placed more emphasis on preaching than on singing. The singing was as a rule in unison and



Interior of Rosthern Bergthaler Mennonite Church

Photo: John Penner, Rosthern



Vorsänger Johan & Helena
(Rempel) Doell (Great-
grandparents of author)

limited to congregational singing without musical accompaniment. This has its roots in early Anabaptist-Mennonite history, when most groups did not use musical instruments. Later it was assumed that instruments were for worldly entertainment, and that introducing them into the church would mean opening the gates of the church to secular and sinful influences.

From the time the Bergthaler Church began in Saskatchewan, it has sung in the *neue Weise* (new form). The Old Colony people sang *alte Weise* (old form) when they arrived in Saskatchewan, which is a slower way of singing the same songs. These differences in singing have caused rifts in Mennonite congregations in Russia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Congregational singing is led by the *Vorsänger* (song leaders). This practise was taken along when the Mennonites moved from Holland to Prussia to Russia to Canada. Since the *Vorsänger* are elected, just as the ministers and deacons are, this position is held in high esteem. In church, as well as at festivities in the home, the *Vorsänger* occupy a place of honour. They enter the church before the ministers. Usually there are several *Vorsänger* in a

congregation. They are seated according to the number of years of service in this calling, with the one nearest the pulpit having longest service. The *Vorsänger* calls out the first line and the number of the hymn. He then starts the singing whereupon the other *Vorsänger* and then the whole congregation join in. During the second song the ministers enter.

Some of the Mennonites who migrated to Canada in time introduced musical instruments into their churches and the role of the *Vorsänger* has lost much of its importance in those groups.

C. Moving to the City

In 1941 or 1942 a brotherhood meeting was held in the Schoenwiese Bergthaler Church. The key issue under discussion was that of members moving to the city. The discussion centred on whether or not a church should be built in Saskatoon where many Bergthaler members had their jobs. Numerous families had taken up residence there. It was feared, however, that if a church would be built in the city it would encourage people to move there. The Church believed that members should be encouraged to stay on the farm. At this point in the meeting Rev. Heinrich Siemens asked the people if those with five quarters of land were willing to sell a quarter or two to keep more people on the farm. There was absolute silence. One couple stated that they could not even make it on five quarters.⁷²

After World War II, about 1946 or 1947, *Ältester* Hamm and several other Bergthaler leaders met with ministers of the General Conference Mennonite Church, including *Ältester* J.J. Thiessen, to discuss the purchase of the Mayfair Mennonite Church building. The Bergthaler leadership felt a need to reach out to other urban members. The chief problem was one of economics. People had very little money. The purchase of a building would require payment of large heating bills in addition to numerous other expenses. Even though ministers themselves were not getting paid for their leadership, it seemed unlikely that the Church would be able to bear the costs. As a result the deal was dropped, and no Bergthaler Church building was acquired in the city of Saskatoon.⁷³

D. World War II

Menno Simons, in expounding the doctrine of the new birth, stated that

the regenerated do not go to war nor engage in strife. . . . They are all the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and know of no war. . . . Since we are conformed to the image of

Christ how can we fight our enemies with the sword . . . Spears and swords of iron we leave to those who, alas, consider human blood and swine's blood of well nigh equal value.⁷⁴

Like Menno, the majority of Mennonites believe that participation in killing is sin. For many Mennonites in Saskatchewan as well as in other places these convictions were put to the test with the outbreak of the Second World War.

The War began in September, 1939. It seemed that Mennonites would again be forced to deal with the conscription issue. A large number of Mennonite churches had not taught their children about the peace position and were not prepared for the issues they would have to face. The breakdown of the Mennonite private schools together with the fact that Sunday Schools had not yet been adopted by the Bergthaler Church led to a situation where many children had not learned a great deal about the faith of their forefathers. Many young people knew that they were different because they spoke a different language and lived differently than their neighbours. But they did not know why their fathers rejected war as a way of dealing with conflict. The English public schools taught the children patriotism: it was noble to fight for your country, to salute the flag, and to honour the king. These values conflicted sharply with the values that Mennonites believed and practised. Many English-speaking people who had moved into the once solidly Mennonite areas sent their sons off to war. Often it was very hard for Mennonite boys to watch their non-Mennonite friends go and fight in the war while they stayed at home.

One specific issue that Mennonites had to respond to was the plebiscite in 1942. Prime Minister MacKenzie King put the question of conscription before the people of Canada in April of that year. The resulting vote favoured compulsory military service overseas for all men over eighteen years of age. In response to this situation Rev. David Toews, a General Conference Mennonite minister from Rosthern, made a trip to Ottawa in 1942 on behalf of the Mennonites. He went to speak to the government about the Mennonites' privilege of not being required to fight in war. On his return a meeting was held in the First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. Here Rev. Toews explained that Mennonites who did not want to fight would have to do some kind of alternative service in a forestry program, in hospitals, or in the medical corps. Toews explained that the government was under a lot of pressure from neighbours of Mennonites who were unhappy about the fact that their sons had to fight whereas Mennonite boys could stay at home.⁷⁵

Mennonite ministers from various groups were present at this meeting and after some discussion were mostly open to have their men participate in the medical corps. Rev. Heinrich Martens and Deacon Heinrich H. Dyck, who represented the Bergthaler Church, were not happy with the idea of their boys being sent to the front. Both agreed that it would be better for them to work in forestry camps in Canada. Serving in the medical corps would support the war effort and expose their boys to all the evils of war. Rev. Heinrich Martens mentioned that in some cases men who had gone overseas in the corps often ended up fighting if their side was losing.⁷⁶

There was a lot of disagreement among the Mennonites on this question. Those who had come from Russia to Canada in the 1920s understood the issue differently from those, like the Bergthaler, who descended from the immigrants of the 1870s. On the one side “were those who insisted on total exemption and non-involvement” and who referred to the agreement made between the Canadian government and their ancestors in 1873. On the other side were those who called for international disarmament and for alternative service for Mennonite boys.⁷⁷

Rev. David Toews, sensing that the two groups were not likely to reach agreement, requested that Rev. Heinrich Martens (Bergthaler), Rev. David Rempel and Rev. Johann G. Rempel (both



Deacon Heinrich H. & Aganetha (Buhler) Dyck, Aberdeen

Photo: Cornelius C. Hamm, Rosthern



Conscientious objectors, many from the Hague area, at Invermere Lake CO camp, Kootenay Park, B.C., ca. 1942.

Photo: Jacob E. Friesen, Hague

General Conference ministers from Hochfeld) go into a separate room and decide how this matter should be settled. Their decision would be binding for the whole group. This smaller group of three soon agreed that they did not want to send their men to the front; they further agreed that if there were young men who wished to go into the medical corps, they would be allowed to do so. Many ministers were not entirely happy with this decision, but accepted it nevertheless.⁷⁸

Conscripts who did not want to join the army and who desired to be conscientious objectors (COs) instead, had to appear before a judge. He questioned them about their reasons for opposing the war. Many simply stated that they were Mennonites and were therefore exempt from military service. Once granted exemption, they were assigned to alternative service. Jacob G. Guenter describes this as follows:

Young men who rejected service in uniform under the military command, were assigned work in different institutions, farms, and conscientious objector camps. Under special contract the men received \$60.00 a month, of which \$40.00 was to be remitted to the Red Cross. Some judges felt that some of

the defendants had broken Mennonite rules by making use of tobacco and alcohol. Any charges were later dropped when it was brought to their attention that these were not basic enforced principles of the church, and also that an unbaptized son of Mennonite parents was still a 'non-resistant' Mennonite.⁷⁹

The war taught the Mennonites some valuable lessons. They reaffirmed their stance on non-resistance. Now their words of 1937 became real to them:

If our country becomes involved in war we shall endeavour to live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, avoiding joining in the wartime hysteria of hatred, revenge and retaliation: manifest a meek and submissive spirit being obedient unto the laws and regulations of the government in all things, except in such cases where obedience to the government would cause us to violate the teachings of scriptures so that we could not maintain a clear conscience before God.⁸⁰

The Mennonites also became much more willing to aid in the relief of those in need, those in distress and suffering. The General Conference Mennonite Church adopted a statement in 1941, which read in part:

We . . . express our willingness . . . at all times to aid in the relief of those who are in need, distress or suffering, regardless of the danger in which we may be placed in bringing such relief, or of the cost which may be involved in the same. We are also willing to render such services as housing, road making, farming, forestry, hospitalization, and recreational work during time of war. Wherever we render such service it shall always be our purpose to spread the Gospel of Christ/ service by word as well as deed.⁸¹

This witness against war and in favour of peace had an effect on Mennonites. It gave them a new vision of their own faith and life and deepened the conviction that the Christian gospel and the message of love and non-resistance according to the New Testament was sorely needed in the world.

VIII. The Interim, 1947-1949: Death of *Ältester* Hamm, Language Changes, Migration

On January 25, 1947, *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm died. He had served as elder of the Bergthaler Church for almost nineteen years. During this time he had ordained three *Älteste*: Jacob Abrams of the Sommerfelder in Mexico, Johan Loeppky of the Old Colony Church in Saskatchewan, and Johann B. Epp of the Bergthaler at Carrot River.⁸² Due to his sudden death the church was without an *Ältester*. *Ältester* David Wall of the Swift Current Sommerfelder Church served the Bergthaler in this capacity until February 22, 1949, when Rev. Abraham Buhler was ordained as the new *Ältester*.

During this interim period the Church continued to go through changes. A house was moved from Hochfeld to the village of Gruenthal in 1948 and renovated for use as a church building. The most



Ältester David Wall, Swift Current
Photo: Mrs. John Doell, Warman

noteworthy change, however, was that Low German was replacing High German as the main language of worship.

A. Language

Language has been important to the Mennonite people. Often “the maintenance of the language of the motherland has aided in maintaining separation from the surrounding culture in the new homeland and thus strengthened the sense of nonconformity to the world.”⁸³ In this way Mennonites could maintain their distinctive principles and preserve their identity as a separate people. Changes in language have usually been difficult for Mennonites. This was especially true in those instances where the language of worship changed. In Prussia (now Poland) the Mennonites spoke Dutch, since most of them had come from Holland. After living in German surroundings in Prussia for over two hundred years, these Mennonites felt a need to change their language of worship from Dutch to German. One minister preached his first sermon in the German language in 1760. He was finally allowed to preach his second German sermon about five years later.

A language change also occurred in the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church. Until 1948 Bergthaler ministers preached mainly in High German. Many younger church members found the High German hard to understand because they had received little or no schooling in it. By 1948 various ministers began to use Low German to clarify points they were making and found that people could understand this much more easily. Gradually sermons came to be preached in Low German. Some readings from the High German were also being translated. This change in language came slowly and was basically well accepted.

B. Emigration to Paraguay

World War II was an unsettling experience for many Mennonites. Already on July 2, 1946, Rev. Jacob B. Guenther and Abram J. Redekopp were sent as delegates to check on settlement possibilities in Costa Rica. Nothing came of it, but the time was ripe for another move. The trend towards absorbing minorities as well as the pressure on them to adapt to Canadian ways and use English in their daily life left many Mennonites feeling very uneasy about where all this would lead. For about thirty years the public school system had been teaching their children that it was important to be Canadian and “British”. Many people began to have doubts about the value of their own heritage. During the Second World War it was not popular to be Mennonite, for Mennonites spoke German and the Germans were Canada’s enemy at war. Because of this, numerous Mennonites

stopped speaking Low German. Others felt ashamed of their Mennonite roots and, to avoid being harassed, even changed their names.

After the war more Mennonite young people found jobs in the cities and did not return home to the farms, and others went east to Ontario to work in factories.

For some Mennonites the introduction of family allowance was another reason to emigrate. They understood it as a first step which would lead eventually to the government's taking children away from their families.

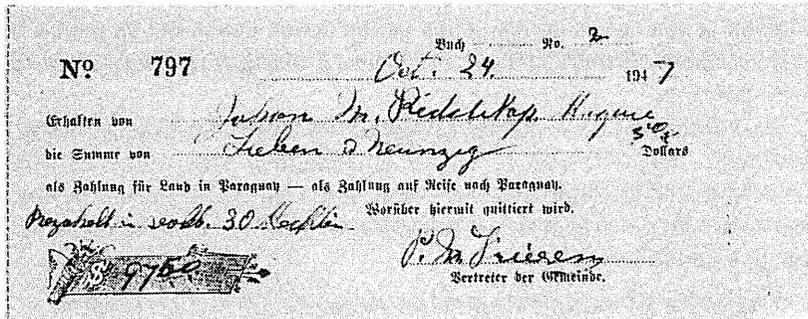
No concerted movement to emigrate developed in Saskatchewan, however. The decision to move to Paraguay was made by the Chortitzer and Sommerfelder of Manitoba. One older Saskatchewan man who chose to join this emigration in 1948 gave his reasons for doing so as follows:

Our beloved mother tongue is no longer held in high esteem. In fact there are individuals who heap scorn upon it. Events are rapidly moving towards its total disappearance. Children receive names that make one blush. Among themselves youth seldom speak anything besides English. One thing leads to another. People are no longer concerned about the issue of intermarriage. The catchword of the day is "education" and we shamelessly imitate the people in our society in all their pomp and pride.

I fear that our people may experience the fate spoken of in Joshua 23:13, that these peoples shall be "a snare and a trap" to us . . . At present we are living in troubled times. Another migration is being planned and it seems to me that there is ample cause for another move. It is written: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next for truly, . . . you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes." (Matthew 10:23) Persecutions are not always direct or by the sword, but can come in the form of false ideas which society may thrust upon you. The Lord has given us a serious warning that we must be on guard. . . .

For this reason I don't believe that this migration is a blind meandering of our people. We've determined to take up the pilgrim's staff again if God wills it and grants us life and strength. We do this not to proclaim our righteousness — our righteousness amounts to nothing. We are taking this step for the sake of our innocent children and for His name's sake. Presumably a ship will be leaving Montreal on May 4, 1948.⁸⁴

A total of 1640 Mennonites went to Paraguay from the Manitoba East and West Reserves and from the Hague and Swift Current areas in Saskatchewan. Fewer than twenty families migrated from the Carrot River, Aberdeen, and Hague areas. A partial list of these is found in Table II. One family moved from Carrot River to Paraguay in 1949 and flew by plane rather than going by ship like the rest.



Receipt for Johan M. Reddekopp's final payment for thirty hectares of land in Paraguay. Like many others, Reddekopp chose not to emigrate even though he had paid for land.

Table II
Saskatchewan Bergthaler Emigrants to Paraguay 1948

Name	Origin	Date of Return
Bergen, Isaac F. & Katharina (Elias)	Rosthern	
Bergen, Rev. Jacob F. & Sarah (Elias)	Rosthern	
Bueckert, Johan C. & Maria (Harder) ¹	Hague	
Buhler, Abram & Anna (Penner)	Carrot River	
Buhler, Heinrich & ? (Harder)	Carrot River	
Buhler, Jacob & Katharina (Epp)	Carrot River	
Buhler, Jacob & Elisabeth (Doerksen)	Carrot River	
Buhler, Peter & Justina (Braun) ²	Carrot River	
Dyck, Peter I. and Maria (Neufeld) ³	Rosthern	1951
Friesen, Abram & Margaretha (Sawatzky)	Aberdeen	
Friesen, Jacob & Katharina (Ens)		
Friesen, Johan A.M. & Katharina (Buhler)	Aberdeen	
Friesen, Peter H. & Katharina (Neufeld)	Aberdeen	1949
Friesen, Peter M. & Anna (Friesen)	Aberdeen	
Niessen, Johan & Elizabeth (Buhler)	Carrot River	

¹Mrs. Bueckert died of snake bite.

²The Buhlers flew to Paraguay in 1949 rather than going by ship in 1948.

³The Dycks were also among the 1926 emigrants. He died in Paraguay in 1950.

IX. *Ältester* Abram Buhler, 1947-1975: Economic Changes, More Emigration

By 1949 more than two years had passed since the death of *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm. While *Ältester* Wall of the Swift Current Sommerfelder Church had served them well during the interim, the Bergthaler now wanted their own *Ältester*. This important office authorized a person not only to preach and assume leadership in the church, functions which all ministers performed, but also to baptize, administer the Lord's Supper, preside at brotherhood meetings, ordain ministers and *Älteste*, and exercise church discipline. An *Ältester* was chosen according to I Timothy 3:1-7 which outlines the characteristics of a good bishop. He was generally chosen from among the ordained ministers of the church because the church had come to know their strengths and weaknesses. On February 17, 1949, the Bergthaler Church chose Abram Buhler as its new *Ältester*.



Ältester Abram J. Buhler

Photo: Cornelius C. Hamm, Rosthern

Ältester David Wall of the Swift Current Sommerfelder Church ordained him five days later. *Ältester* Buhler proved to be a good leader, a humble man who led his flock by example.

A. Economic and Social Changes

The post-war period found the Mennonite communities overpopulated, with many people landless and without work. Mennonites had thus far contented themselves with remaining on their farms because of close family ties and the hope that the situation would soon improve. When the economic climate did get better and Mennonites heard that jobs were opening up in southern British Columbia and factories were hiring people in southern Ontario, many left their homes to start anew elsewhere. Part of the greater problem was the decreased need for manpower on the farms with the wide use of tractors, combines, and trucks. The use of this mechanical farm machinery increased fivefold from 1941-1976.⁸⁵ This left many youth looking for land elsewhere or looking for jobs in the city.

In July 1949 a meeting was held in the Pembroke School in Neuanlage to deal specifically with the issues of economics and overpopulation. The plan was to help transfer some of the landless, jobless families to the irrigated sugar beet fields in Alberta. This would help some Mennonites find jobs and at the same time relieve the Saskatchewan government and local rural municipalities of providing aid to these people.

The problem was even more acute in the Mennonite area than elsewhere in Saskatchewan, as a 1949 newspaper report indicates. The situation is reflected in the population (4,710 census in 1945) of Warman municipality which is three times the average population of Saskatchewan municipalities (average population of rural RMs is 1,250). While the population in most RMs has decreased (due mainly to larger unit grain farming) the population in the RM of Warman has increased during the same period.⁸⁶

Moving to Carrot River also became an option for some Mennonites when a former forest reserve was opened up for settlement. The government, however, chose to give returned soldiers and settlers from Carrot River first chance at settling there, and it was soon filled up.

At this meeting the delegation of councillors of the Rural Municipality of Warman and two farmers, who had gone to southern Alberta to check out the employment and housing situation, reported what

they had found.

While a man might go to the sugar beet country on his own and likely find a job, he could not so readily find a house for his wife and family. Thus the movement of families required some planning and it would be necessary to know by August 15 how many families might be prepared to leave the Warman district for Alberta next spring.⁸⁷

Sam Carr, secretary of the Rural Municipality of Warman, indicated that there were approximately 250 families who were without land or a job and would be candidates for such a transfer.

Alberta farmers in intensified irrigation areas have different labour contracts for each of the varied crops grown such as sugar beets, corn, peas, carrots, beans, strawberries, raspberries, asparagus and some grain crops as well. As contracts were based generally on yield, the contract labourer had an interest in doing a good weeding job for instance. Irrigation type farming requires real back labour, but Mennonite people have a reputation for hard work, committee members pointed out at the meeting.⁸⁸

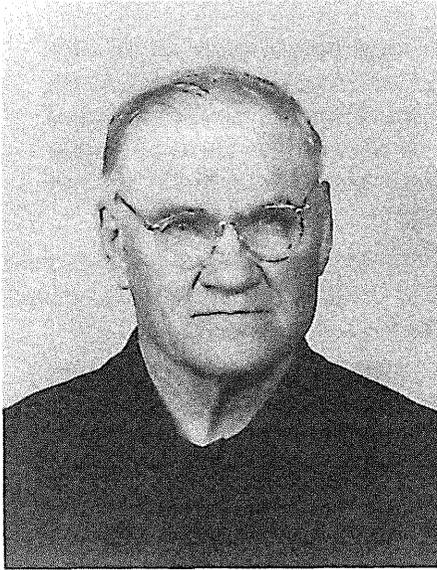
It was hoped that a transfer like this would help these people become self-sufficient and that with time they might be able to acquire farms of their own. This was possible if people were to work together as a group and support each other in making this difficult move. Many did finally move to Alberta; some soon returned but others made it their permanent home. Their descendants can still be found there.

The problems of overpopulation, and the concerns raised by the War and the continuing trend to the cities, were not fully solved by the 1948 trek to Paraguay and the 1949 move to Alberta. Further emigrations were undertaken to Honduras in 1951 and to Bolivia in 1961.

While the former was not successful, the latter established the Bergthal Colony in Bolivia.

B. Honduras

The trip to Honduras was led by Rev. Jacob B. Guenther of the Bergthaler Church and included 62 souls. Rev. Guenther and three other heads of families had several concerns. With the Second World War still fresh in their minds they were afraid that their sons might be forced to fight in another war. Secondly, they wanted to have control of their own schools. They wanted to be able to choose the language



Rev. Jacob B. Guenther
Photo: Mrs. Margaret Kroeker, Hague

and curriculum that would be used to teach their children. Thirdly, they felt that Mennonites were becoming too much like the society around them, and were adopting non-Christian values.

The following *Star-Phoenix* article describes how they prepared for the trip:

They expect to make a good living growing gardens and corn and are prepared to start in with oxen or horses. Some of them are still using horses up to the time of planning this trek. [The] leader of the party is Rev. Jacob B. Guenther who will take with him a group of 11 others, including wife, children and grandchildren. His is the smallest of outfits, a 1½ ton truck. In the three tonners, Gerhard Rempel and John Dyck with their children will constitute a group of 25, the other being occupied by Jacob K. Friesen, his wife, children and grandchildren, another contingent of 25 souls. . . .

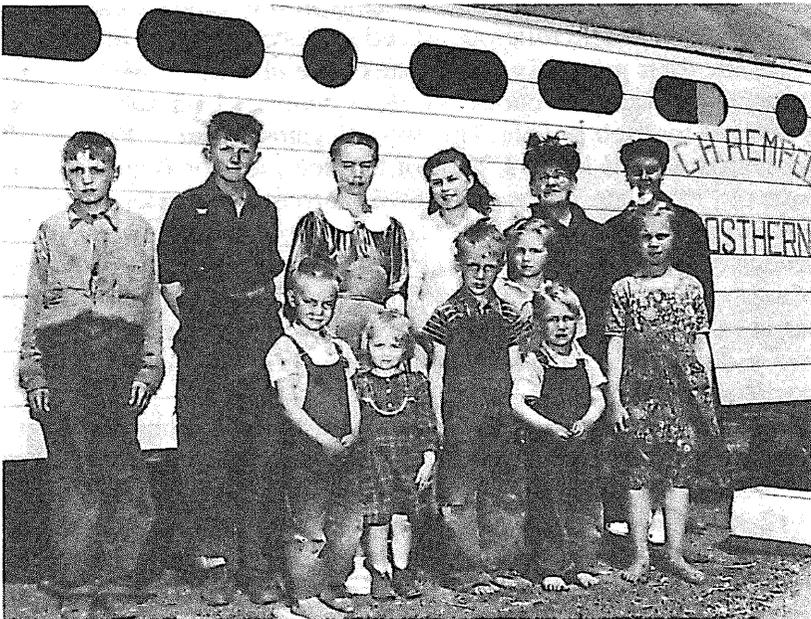
John Dyck said they expect to make the 3,000 mile or better trek in about a month. One short jump through mountain country in Mexico would be made in a flatcar. . . . Dyck said he and Rev. Guenther had visited Honduras in 1948 at the time of a migration to Paraguay.

There is no indication that others will join the Honduran trek. A meeting was called some weeks ago and there was an open invitation to attend and join the movement. . . . Neither Dyck



Preparation for the trek to Honduras, 1951

Photo: Saskatchewan Archives, *Star-Phoenix* collection



Some members of the Honduras migration

Photo: Saskatchewan Archives, *Star-Phoenix* collection

nor Rempel was very clear about their contract, they said they understood that there was free land to be obtained with a premium of 50 cents an acre where there was a stratum of coal. . . . The ministry of agriculture was very anxious to have farmers who would work and stay on the land.⁸⁹

Many neighbours were very skeptical about the security of any agreement with a country like Honduras. Others were doubtful as to whether the trucks would be road-worthy enough to make it there. "But while their neighbours are dubious of the whole thing they are wishing the pilgrims luck, there has been a series of farewells in several settlements in the last 2 weeks."⁹⁰

In May of 1951, Rev. Jacob B. Guenther, Gerhard Rempel, Johan Dyck, Jacob K. Friesen and their families left the Hague district, where most of them lived, in search of a new homeland, the Central American Republic of Honduras. In August of 1951 the entire group returned to Canada, having been refused entry at the Honduran border because their papers were not in order.

C. Bolivia

Ten years later, *Wanderlust* had again developed among the Bergthaler people. A combination of two things provoked this movement in 1961: a shortage of farm land in the Valley area, and a concern that modern religious and educational trends were starting to invade their group. Two delegates were elected in 1961 by the Bergthaler Church to check out the quality of land and to seek privileges for their people. The two delegates, Johan D. Klassen of Schoenwiese and Johan I. Fehr of Reinfeld, left for Bolivia about June of 1961. A Mr. Wiens of the Swift Current Sommerfelder and a Mr. Reimer of the Manitoba Reinlaender also accompanied them as delegates from their respective churches. The delegates were aware of a tract of land which they could buy from a Mr. Lopez, who owned some 5,000 hectares in Bolivia. They were warned, however, that he was a dishonest businessman and they should be careful when dealing with him.

The delegates returned to Canada with a very favourable report. The land was to their liking and the privileges given them seemed to meet their requirements. In March and again in the fall of 1962 Johan D. Klassen made additional trips to Bolivia to work out the details of the privileges granted by the Bolivian government. This was made more difficult because of translation. English and Spanish words did not always match and it was some time before Klassen and the translator agreed on the guaranteed rights.⁹¹ The Church wanted an



Bolivia delegate Johan D. Klassen
Photo: John D. Klassen, Warman

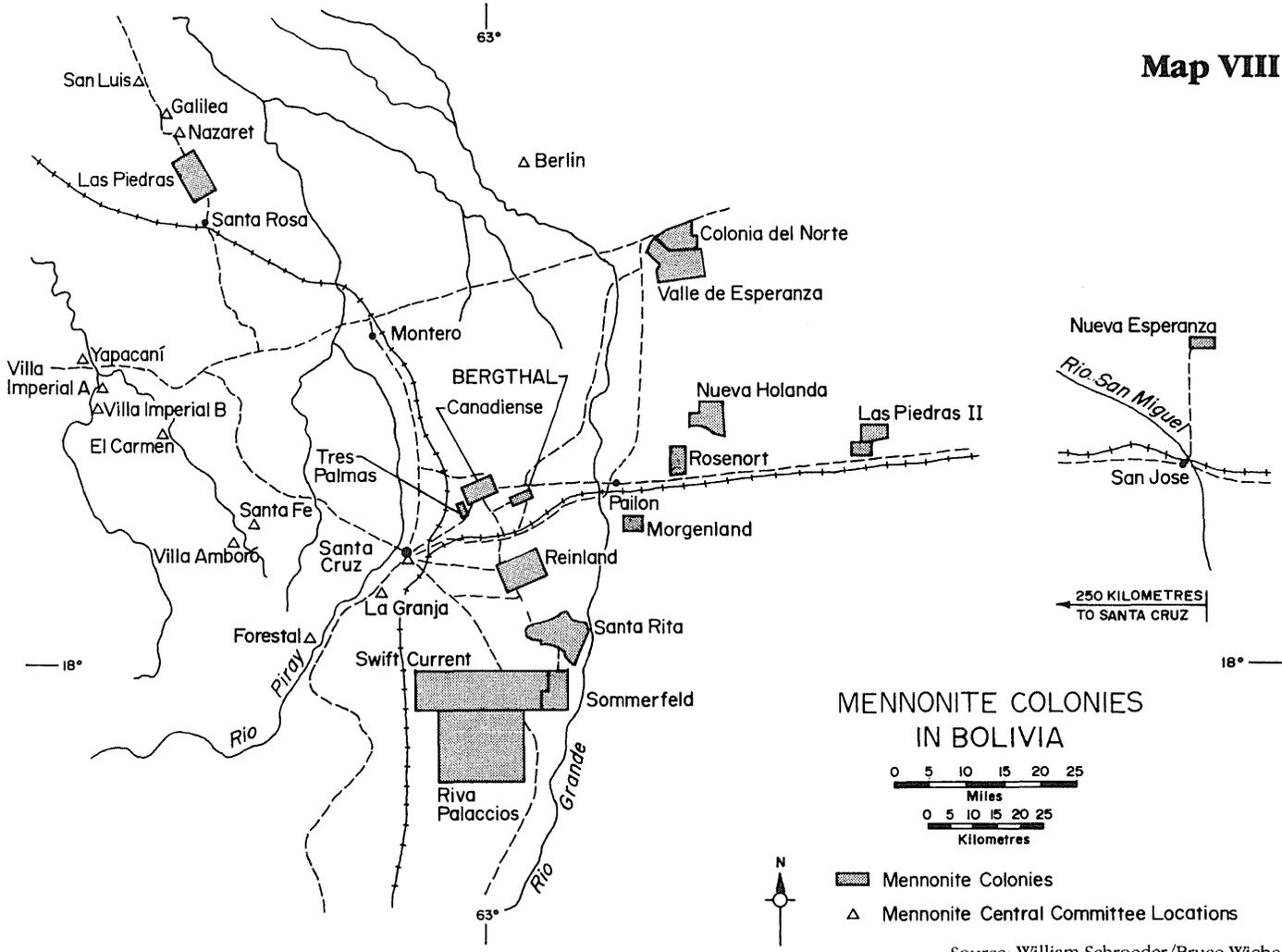


Bolivia delegate Johan I. Fehr
Photo: Jacob E. Friesen, Hague

assurance of religious freedom and the right to conduct church services as they pleased; freedom from military service; and control over their own schools and the right to teach in the German language without interference from the government.

In 1963 the Bergthal Colony was formed thirty-four kilometers north east of Santa Cruz. (See Map VIII) It consisted of about fifteen families from Canada and some ten to fifteen families from the Canadiense colony in Paraguay.⁹² Persons moving to Bolivia from the Hague area included the Johan, Franz, Isaak K., and Peter Guenther families; the David and Wilhelm Penners; Isaac Hamms; and the families of Jacob K. Friesen and his son Jacob. Rev. Jacob B. Guenther had moved to Bolivia a year earlier, together with one daughter and her family. Many who would have considered migrating chose not to because they felt that the Bolivian government was politically unstable.⁹³

Map VIII



X. Wider Church Conferences, 1952-1957

In July of 1952 an historic meeting took place in the Saskatchewan Bergthaler churches. The *Älteste*, ministers, and deacons of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church, the Manitoba Chortitzer Church and the Sommerfelder churches from Swift Current, Carrot River, Manitoba, and Vanderhoof, British Columbia, held a joint conference. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for these elders to share their concerns with each other and to discuss solutions to problems confronting them. Their aim was to work at uniformity in church practise.

One of the specific issues discussed related to what kind of dress was appropriate for baptismal candidates and bridal couples. It was decided that dark clothing would be best. Ministers and deacons would also continue to wear their dark suits. They also resolved that in keeping with I Corinthians 2 and Genesis 20, married women should have their heads covered with a dark kerchief. Women were also encouraged not to cut or perm their hair. The ministers were concerned that current styles and fashions in the world should not become the measuring stick for the social conduct of church members.

Some very difficult issues were also dealt with at the conference. Should a minister marry a couple where a divorced person was involved? It was decided that this could not be done unless the divorced party repented. They also agreed that those people who had left the Church and had been rebaptized elsewhere would be reinstated only if they repented for this and considered their first baptism as the true baptism.

Several other resolutions were agreed upon at this 1952 meeting. No marriages were to take place during the time of catechism instruction, and baptism and communion services. Evening services would be permitted if agreed to by an *Ältester*. The practise of keeping three holidays at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost was to continue. The brotherhood was instructed not to take part in military training or in any service pertaining to war.⁹⁴



Bergthaler, Chortitzer and Sommerfelder church leaders at Aberdeen on July 1, 1952. The eleven-man delegation from the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church include *Ältester* Abram J. Buhler (front, 5th from left), and present *Ältester* John M. Reddekopp (back, 4th from right).

Photo: Jake Peters, Winnipeg

A. 1955 Meeting

A second series of leadership meetings took place in 1955 at the Swift Current Sommerfelder Church. This conference dealt mainly with issues related to the ministry of the church. All of the participants were anxious to pass the faith on to their children. It was decided that Sunday Schools were a useful vehicle for doing this, and that all churches be encouraged to develop their educational programs further. It was recommended that churches actively encourage their young people to consider membership. The questions of faith should also be explained to them in a way which would be understandable for them. The church agreed that they had to accept a large part of the responsibility of preparing the youth for church membership. They also struggled with the question of how to deal with those members who had married a person from another church but had not requested a transfer. It was decided that they would not be regarded as church members.⁹⁵

New settlements of Bergthaler, Sommerfelder and Chortitzer members were springing up in many parts of the west and a concern was raised about how these groups could be nurtured spiritually. One group was considering a move to Buffalo Head Prairie, Alberta, but church leaders felt that St. Laurent, Manitoba, would be a more suitable location.

At this meeting *Ältester* Abram Buhler was also commissioned to serve communion to members at Fort Vermillion and La Crete, Alberta.⁹⁶ A small group of Bergthaler had settled at La Crete when the Peace River settlement was begun in the 1930s. *Ältester* Buhler visited them in 1955 to serve communion and used the opportunity to



Bergthaler Mennonite Church building, La Crete, Alberta

discuss with members the possibility of organizing a local church. He returned two years later to conduct an election of local leaders. Sommerfelder and Bergthaler members initially had services together but tensions resulted from differences in practise and emphases (on such matters as Sunday Schools, Bible study and prayer meetings, the use of English, and understanding regarding the assurance of salvation).

In 1964 the Sommerfelder formed their own group with eleven families. By 1974 they had grown to 202 families (848 souls including 353 baptized members) under the leadership of *Ältester* Jacob S. Kroeker. At that time the Bergthaler, led by *Ältester* Isaac Dyck, numbered twenty-five families of whom sixty-four were baptized members. In the separation the Sommerfelder group retained the church building while the Bergthaler received the treasury and the church books.⁹⁷

B. 1957 Meeting

In July of 1957 the Manitoba Sommerfelder hosted a third church leadership conference. A wide variety of issues was discussed. Sunday Schools were again on the agenda. By now Sunday Schools were operating in nearly every church but it was difficult to find enough teachers for every class. Until now only men had served as teachers. The possibility of women teaching was discussed and it was decided that in those cases where there were not enough male teachers women should be encouraged to teach.

The issue of whether three holidays should be kept was raised again. Till now three days were set aside as holidays at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, but with people working at jobs in the city this created problems. Many employers did not appreciate their workers taking these holidays. Church leaders, on the other hand, felt that it was important to retain all of them but agreed that each participating church should have the freedom to celebrate them as they chose to do.

A request for help from the new settlement at St. Laurent, Manitoba, was also discussed. It was decided to help these people get settled as soon as possible with volunteer labour and financial support. Members in the churches were becoming involved in diverse activities such as sports and 4-H clubs and some were even taking part in politics. It was discovered that some ministers, *Vorsänger* and Sunday School teachers were also participating in sports. The leaders felt that such activities would not help build up the church. Television was one invention which, it was generally agreed, did not have a positive influence. The third chapter of James

was quoted in support of this position.

There was discussion as to whether members could vote and take part in politics. They decided that it was not appropriate and quoted the following biblical story. In I Samuel 8, Samuel counsels the people of Israel not to desire a king like the people around them. Samuel encourages his people to follow God rather than earthly kings who will oppress them and lead them to fight wars and battles. The message God gave his people Israel was that he was all-sufficient for them. If they desired to follow the ways of other peoples they would also suffer their fate.

A report was presented on a mission that had been set up in an Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, home. Church leaders suggested that the group use only the King James Bible, and if another version was chosen they should be especially cautious about what they read. If possible Bible studies should be led by a minister. Church leaders also felt that it was best if their members would not participate in the tent meetings which were being held in many communities.

Another major issue discussed at the 1957 meeting was whether the Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, and Bergthaler Churches could all operate under one name. It was agreed that it did not seem possible at this time.⁹⁸

This ended the third meeting. Many issues had been discussed and worked through, yet many issues were left for a later time. Most leaders felt good about these meetings and agreed that they would all do their best to see that they would follow these decisions as closely as possible. Another meeting was planned for 1959 at the Chortitzer Church on the East Reserve, Manitoba. This latter meeting did not come to pass because the unity created by the first three conferences was broken by two church splits. The Reinlaender Church broke away from the Manitoba Sommerfelder group in 1958, and a small group broke away from the Swift Current Sommerfelder Church in 1959 to affiliate with the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

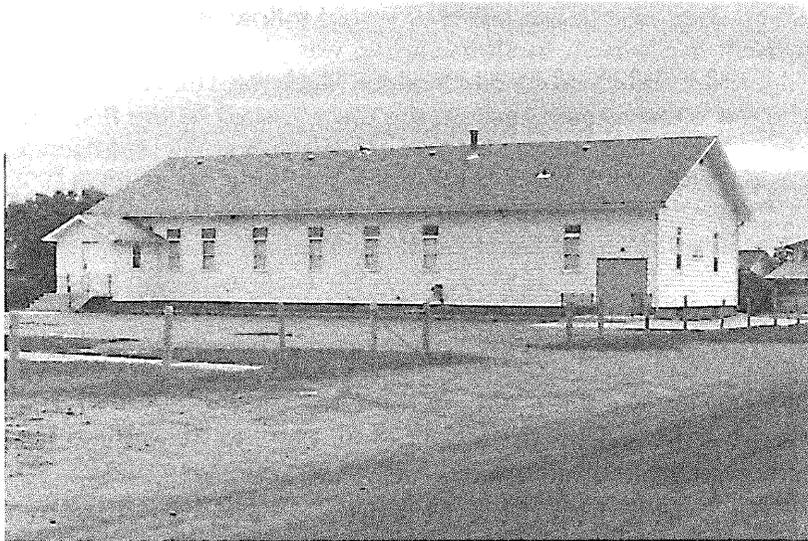
The original intention of these leadership meetings had been to unify the various church groups in their church practises. A good start had been made despite the effect of the church splits.

It was to be some twenty-five years later before some of these churches met again. In November of 1982 the Bergthaler from Saskatchewan and Alberta, the Sommerfelder from Manitoba and British Columbia, and the Old Colony from Manitoba met in the Manitoba communities of Reinland, Altona, Sommerfeld and Winkler to discuss church polity once again.⁹⁹

XI. New Developments: Where from Here?

The Bergthaler Church continued to grow. Appendix IV summarizes membership statistics from 1902-1975. The members who lived in the town and surrounding area of Warman erected a church building in 1953. It measured twenty-six by forty feet. Earlier they had held church services at the Jacob S. Rempel place and later at the Peter Dyck home. In 1972 the old church building was replaced by a larger one which measured thirty-six by sixty-eight feet. In 1975 another eighteen feet were added. The older building, located just west of the new one, was used for Sunday School classrooms and for eating until a basement was built for the new church in 1980. The old building was sold and moved in the summer of 1981.

In 1958 the Bergthaler Church bought the General Conference church building located at Hochfeld and moved it to Martensville. This church had been built in 1945 and dedicated on December 9 in the same year.



Bergthaler Mennonite Church building, Warman

In 1974 a new church building was constructed in Martensville. It measured thirty-six by sixty-four feet. The cost of this new church with a full basement was approximately \$26,000.¹⁰⁰

A. Mission Interest

Saskatchewan Bergthaler began to show an interest in foreign mission work in the latter 1950s. In 1958 Heinrich Toews of the *Kleinegemeinde* mission in Paraguay spoke in the Bergthaler church. As a result it was decided to support this work with Rev. Henry A. Dyck as the official contact person, acknowledged in this position by the mission board in 1959.¹⁰¹ The *Kleinegemeinde*, publisher of the familiar periodical *Christlicher Familienfreund*, had begun its mission work in Paraguay in 1954.

In March 1960, missionary Johan M. Funk of Paraguay spoke in the churches in the Rosthern area. He was accompanied here and in the Swift Current area by Rev. Henry A. Dyck. By this time Dyck felt a growing opposition to his work. People were unhappy with his close ties to the *Kleinegemeinde* and General Conference churches, where he spoke at *Jugendverein* programs (youth meetings). He also conducted Bible study and prayer meetings in which no Bergthaler members participated, and held monthly meetings for Sunday School teachers. Many also felt that he spent too much time in youth activities. In addition, he made up his own sermons instead of reading those which were handed down from generation to generation.¹⁰²

Rev. Dyck felt a close kinship with leaders of the *Rudnerweider* (Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference) who shared his emphasis on Sunday Schools, evening prayer and Bible study sessions, youth and revival meetings, and mission work. Bergthaler people were especially critical of his support of revival meetings. The 1957 meeting of leaders from the Chortitzer, Sommerfelder, and Bergthaler Churches had decided to refrain from participation in revival campaigns. Nevertheless by participating in them, Rev. Dyck failed to uphold the consensus of the church leadership, not only of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler, but also of the larger Mennonite body represented in the 1957 meeting.

Breaks in church unity are always painful and especially so when the leadership is divided. The *Ältester* and the ministers are to be united so that they can provide positive leadership to the church body which elected them. While it may not be possible to agree on details of all issues, a general consensus is required, both among the leaders and in the general membership. In the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition the community of believers was seen as the place for

discovering truth. Mennonites believe that the Holy Spirit will guide the gathered disciples to the truth as they search the Scriptures. In the Bergthaler Church the brotherhood meetings have been the place to raise and discuss vital issues and to seek consensus on them through prayerful study of the Scriptures.

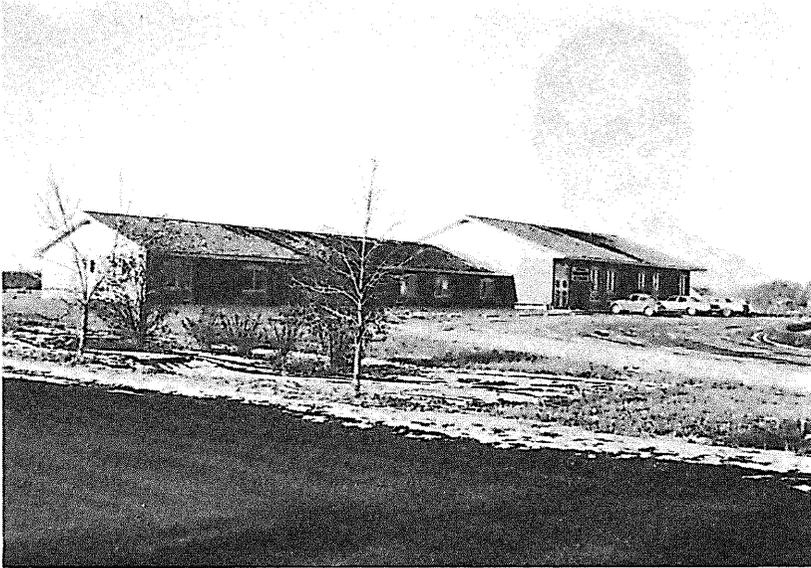
Accordingly, Rev. Henry Dyck was called to a brotherhood meeting in Reinfeld in the spring of 1963 to discuss the direction of leadership which he was pursuing. He had already had to explain his involvements with Sunday School, the Paraguayan mission, evening meetings, and other issues at previous brotherhood meetings. But this particular meeting seemed to have a final ring to it. The particular event that sparked it was a revival campaign near Warman led by the Brunks from Virginia, U.S.A., and sponsored by the local churches.

The Bergthaler had also been invited to participate, but at their monthly ministerial meeting the leadership had decided not to accept the invitation. Rev. Dyck had nevertheless joined the supporting group and had made the opening at one of these sessions. At the brotherhood meeting in Reinfeld he was now asked to explain his participation. As he proceeded to do so, a brother confronted him by asking whether Rev. Dyck was angry or speaking out of love. In response Rev. Dyck walked out of the church possibly assuming that the people were not sincerely receptive to his point of view. In spite of *Ältester* Abram Buhler's entreaties for him to return, he did not come back.

In the discussion following his departure, some brethren spoke in favour of Rev. Dyck's ministry and of his participation in the revival while others were strongly opposed. To avoid a hasty decision on the matter it was agreed that a few weeks should be allowed to pass before the matter would again be discussed. There was no subsequent meeting with Rev. Dyck.¹⁰³ He insisted later on that he had been excommunicated; others felt that he had left the church without this conflict being resolved. A couple of other families also left the Bergthaler church at this time with Rev. Dyck and joined the EMMC. Others, while supportive of Rev. Dyck's ministry, decided to remain with the Bergthaler Church.

B. Altenheim (Senior Citizens' Home)

In 1967 the Old Colony Mennonite Church and the Bergthaler Church got together to construct a senior citizens' home in the town of Warman. An article in the *Saskatchewan Valley News* describes the dedication service and tells the story of this home.



Warman Mennonite *Altenheim*

The official opening of the senior citizens' home in Warman on Oct. 30, 1968 was a long-awaited event by both young and old. To the parents and grandparents whose applications had been accepted for accommodation it meant they could now move into their new home. To members of the Old Colony and Bergthaler churches responsible for the project it could mean the 'end of the beginning' as Bishop Herman Friesen expressed it.

Favourable weather permitted ceremonies to be conducted outside of the home. Speakers taking part were: Reeve Peter Unger as chairman, Bishop Abram Buhler of the Bergthaler Church, Bishop Herman Friesen of the Old Colony Church, Jake Dyck of the Warman Town Council, David Chalmers representing the Dept. of Welfare and MLA David Boldt who finalized the event when he cut the ribbon. In between speeches, two numbers in song were rendered by the Peters sisters of Osler.

The first joint meeting of the two churches in connection with the project took place Feb. 4, 1967, following which much organizing and planning had to be done. By Aug. 25, 1967, a plot of land had been donated by John Peters of Warman, also other financial arrangements completed and the sod turning



Ältester John D. Reddekopp

Photo: Linda Jodoin, Warman

event was conducted on the evening of that day.

Construction of the home according to John G. Wiebe committee member is not yet known but it will be \$200,000 or a bit more he said with a 20% grant from the government on the actual cost.

Dedication services were held on Nov. 10, 1968 at 2 pm in the dining room of the home. The messages were rendered by Bishop Friesen and Bishop Buhler. During the course of the sermon Bishop Friesen related different highlights pertaining to the home and asked that the congregation seriously consider those elders that were invalids, that could not be accepted into the home. The theme of his message was thanksgiving and gratitude. Bishop Buhler spoke on brotherly love and also thanksgiving. Attendance again was very good.¹⁰⁴

The health of *Ältester* Abram Buhler began to deteriorate. In 1969 he suffered his first heart attack, followed by a second in 1973. In the fall of 1974 *Ältester* Buhler suffered a third heart attack. Even though the doctors advised him to give up the ministry, he continued to take his place behind the pulpit whenever he could.¹⁰⁵ The Church, recognizing his limitations, elected John D. Reddekopp as its new *Ältester* in 1975. Rev. Reddekopp was ordained to this office by *Ältester* Buhler on November 22, 1975.

Postscript

The story of the Bergthaler Church does not end in 1975. Many things have happened in the Church since then, but they are still too recent to be told objectively. Two divisions within the Church have been especially difficult. In 1979 Rev. Jacob D. Peters and a small group left the Church over the language issue and aligned themselves with the Sommerfelder Mennonites of Swift Current. Then in June 1983, a painful split occurred resulting in four ministers and a deacon leaving the church. This group established relations with the Bergthaler Church at Carrot River.

Another major issue for the Church has centered around education. Because of their dissatisfaction and frustration with the public school system, the Bergthaler have established two private schools. In 1979 a group of fourteen Bergthaler and Old Colony families purchased the East Osler two-room public school building, hired a teacher, and began to conduct their own school. Then in the fall of 1986 another new school was built a mile west of Osler. Valley Christian Academy (Bergthaler) with an enrollment of two hundred students uses the regular school curriculum for grades 1 to 11 and is supported by the Department of Education. *Ältester* Reddekopp officiated at its formal opening. He and the school's supporters hope that it will offer a "unique plus" to the education of their children.

In the past decade the Bergthaler Church has also become increasingly involved in social issues of the day. The Church took a stand against the plans of Eldorado Nuclear to build a uranium refinery in the Warman area. In January 1980 *Ältester* John D. Reddekopp spoke on behalf of his Church at the public hearings held in Saskatoon by Eldorado Nuclear. He took a strong stand for peace and life, saying a definite "no" to a refinery that could possibly destroy life. "I know it is not God's will that resources be used for massive armaments which could otherwise be used to alleviate human suffering and hunger," he said. This theme of reverence for life was repeated in 1983, when many Bergthaler members wrote to the provincial government to oppose the opening of abortion clinics in Saskatchewan.

Furthermore, the Bergthaler Church became a member of Mennonite Central Committee in 1984. This avenue of service has

become a valuable arm of their Church to reach out to the many needy and suffering people in the world. Rev. David Buhler and Cornelius Derksen visited India and Bangladesh in 1984 to see whether or not the aid which they were sending was actually reaching the hungry. They returned with very positive reports.

The underlying philosophy of this broadening sense of the Church's responsibility was well expressed by *Altester* Reddekopp in 1980: "If we will take the love of Christ seriously, then we will work towards what is best for our fellow men. We will seek to bind up the wounds and bring about healing no matter what the cost may be. It is our duty to seek the good of the whole human race, and not just the good of any one nation or race."

Conclusion

The history of the Bergthaler Church is much like the story of the children of Israel in the Old Testament. It is a history of obedience and disobedience, of human strength and weakness, and of the grace of God. It is a human history in which by faith we see the hand of God. When the children of Israel were asked who the Lord their God was, they would tell their story. They would tell the story of how God led Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They would tell how they were led out of bondage in Egypt into the Promised Land. So also the Bergthaler can tell their story of how they have been privileged on earth, and how the mighty hand of God has led them.

To reflect on history is to look at the strengths and weaknesses that have made up that history. It is a time to learn from errors so as not to repeat them, and to build on the strengths that are there.

A. Family Life

One of the strengths of the Bergthaler people is their strong family ties. We live in a time of many divorces, separations, and broken homes. This pain has also been felt in many Mennonite homes. Traditional Bergthaler families were not limited to father, mother and children, but also included grandparents, aunts and uncles. These extended families would get together on a regular basis, especially during Christmas, Easter and Pentecost holidays.

Since 1893 Bergthaler have been encouraged to farm. Because the majority of the families were farmers they spent much time together, working, eating or playing. Because of the shortage of land available and the high cost of starting a farm business many of the younger people are now working in the cities. In some cases both parents work.

What will be the long term effect on these families when jobs take priority over family events? How will the faith and values of the parents be passed on to the next generation with a change from farm to city life?

B. Nonconformity to the World

It has always been a struggle for Bergthaler people to be "in the world but not of the world." They have tried to live by other values than the people in the world around them do. Their honesty was

one example of this. In the past, written contracts were not necessary among the Mennonite people because their spoken word could be trusted. There were always some in the group who spoiled this reputation for honesty, but generally speaking their “yes” was “yes” and their “no” was “no.”

Bergthaler also chose not to adopt the lifestyles of the world around them. Bergthaler and other Christians saw, lusting after possessions and accumulating wealth did not lead to life. Many of the older Bergthaler people still talk about the 1930s and the difficult times they had in those years. Many who lived through these times have reflected on how people learned to share again. People learned to give of the little they had and expected nothing in return. Even basic things like food and shelter were no longer taken for granted.

People also learned again to be very thankful to God for the little things they did have. An age old lesson was again relearned, that in times of plenty people tend to forget the Lord their God and seek refuge in the things their own hands have made. Difficult times help people to evaluate their priorities and again seek God and turn away from material and fleshly lusts.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the love of the flesh the lust of the eyes, the pride of life is not of the Father but of the world”(1 John 1:15-16).

Mennonite history shows that it has not been easy to apply the teaching of nonconformity to the world. There have been church divisions over this issue with the church members feeling that the leaders were too strict or harsh, or with church leaders being appalled at how church members were so accommodating to the world about them.

Nonconformity has usually been tested in the areas of language, geographical isolation and dress. The Bergthaler Church has struggled with these issues. As long as Mennonite people lived in villages in Russia, Manitoba, and early in Saskatchewan, they were able to maintain a separate identity by speaking their own language. Since they lived away from the cities and the mainstream of society they were not as aware of changing fashions in clothing and of all the innovations the world had to offer them like cars, telephone and electricity. For Saskatchewan Bergthaler in the 1980s all of that has changed. The world is no longer far away. How will the church deal with these issues today? Will the daily walk of the Bergthaler people reflect Christian values and priorities, or the values of the world?

C. Nonresistance

There is a close relationship between nonconformity and non-resistance. The world advocates destroying one's enemy and seeking revenge. This contradicts Jesus' teachings that one should love one's neighbour and even one's enemy and do good to those who hate them.

Mennonites have a unique history of being a 'peace church.' Our forebears were willing to suffer and even die in order to show the world that there was another way to deal with problems other than by hating and killing. As Christians become more conformed to the world and adopt its values, they also weaken in their stance of non-resistance. Both nonconformity and non-resistance are not popular in Christendom and can only be maintained by vigorous effort and readiness to oppose main elements in western culture. We live in a time when major countries seem bent on destroying the world. In this mad pursuit of power, enormous vast resources are being spent on military machinery instead of on food and shelter for people. How is the Bergthaler Church being used by God as an instrument of peace, locally and in the larger world?

D. Women

Women have played a vital role in the development of Bergthaler families and churches. While they have not occupied recognized positions like ministers or participated in brotherhood meetings, they have performed other roles which have touched the lives of many. Their role in the home, church, and community has generally been one of servanthood. Jesus also came as a servant; he too came to serve the needy, the friendless, the brokenhearted. He taught that those who were great in the eyes of men would not necessarily inherit the kingdom of God. Greatness was measured not by prominence, by ability, by position, by superior talents, in preaching, in art, music or politics, but by character. Women have often thanklessly performed the role of the servant.

Besides spending much of their time in raising families and instilling Christian values in their children, women have also performed a variety of other roles. They have served as midwives bringing many children into the world. They have prepared the bodies for burial. They have been unselfish with their time and energy in preparing meals for funerals and weddings, and for auction sales to raise money for world relief. They were among the first to recognize the need for Sunday School education. Jesus' words, that the first will be last and the last will be first in his kingdom should be heeded. For those who have helped the poor, who have

taken in a stranger, who have encouraged and witnessed through a word or letter, who have prayed silently, who have donated time and money, who have loved the unlovely and worked for justice will not be forgotten.



Bergthaler women, in their servant role, preparing food at MCC Relief Sale, Saskatoon

Photo: Allan Siebert, *Mennonite Reporter*

E. Migration

Bergthaler Mennonites have been part of many migrations. Frequently they have been willing to take up the pilgrim's staff and begin all over again with pioneer hardships, as they like Abraham, responded to God's call to move. The original settlers who created the Bergthaler Church in Saskatchewan were composed of Mennonites of different migrations from Russia, Manitoba and the United States. Their amalgamation meant a lot of giving and taking. With the church split of 1908 some moved to Carrot River. With the struggles regarding schools and military service others moved to Mexico and Paraguay. Still other families went to Meadow Lake, Sonningdale, Northvale, and other places in the 1930s. Following World War II some moved to southern Alberta and another small group to Paraguay. A group tried to enter Honduras in 1951. Some moved to Bolivia in 1963.

Some have migrated for conscience sake, searching for a home to live out their lives in peace in accordance with Biblical principles. Others have moved to obtain land in order to give the younger generation an opportunity to farm.



Preparing to migrate: Will Bergthaler find a *bleibende Stätte*?

Photo: Saskatchewan Archives, *Star-Phoenix* collection

These decisions were never made lightly. Decisions of such great consequence could only happen in the context of a deep sense of calling. From the diary of Mr. Peter I. Dyck we get a feeling for the depth of conviction and the agonizing struggles involved in the decision to move to Paraguay. In hindsight these decisions have often been seen in a different light as if "what was right at one point in history, later seemed to be wrong." But no matter where Mennonites have lived, God has been able to use each group to be his salt and light.

We in Canada are often very critical of the motives of people who have moved from our home communities to Mexico, Paraguay and Bolivia. But what has happened to us since our forebears came to Canada from Russia? To ponder this is much more important than to speculate about right motives in migration. Rev. Gerhard Lohrenz believes that many of the hardships which the Mennonites had to endure in Russia were the fault of the people themselves. They had reached the stage, he said in a 1973 lecture, where they had become more dependent on their knowledge and possessions than on God and consequently drifted from their spiritual base. After the revolution swept all that away our people pleaded for a second chance. Rev. Lohrenz went on to ask: "How are we utilizing this second chance and in what direction are we headed?"¹⁰⁶

Mark my teaching, O my people, listen to the words I am to speak. I will tell you a story with meaning, I will expound the riddle of things past, the things that we have heard and know, and our fathers have repeated to us. From their sons we will not hide the praise of the Lord and his might nor the wonderful acts he has performed; they shall repeat them to the next generation. (Psalm 78:1-4)

This brief history represents in only a small way, how the Lord has worked with the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church as His people. Through these events Bergthaler people have come to know God and in the light of these events the people have responded to God and given witness to their faith. It is a story that is still being written. As God revealed himself in the past, we have the promise that He will continue to do so in the future. Those who have heard this new revelation in Jesus have received a call to follow Him, a call to be his disciples. Jesus calls us to follow Him, to lead the kind of life of love and obedience He lived, to take upon ourselves the kind of suffering He had to bear in order to overcome evil with good. The challenge to be faithful comes from the past and the future. Will the Saskatchewan Bergthaler people be found to be faithful?

Mennoniten-Los“!

Ein kleines Häuflein sah ich rast-
los eilen,
Sie nahmen Weib und Kind und
lassen Hof und Haus;
Vom trauten Heim sie unter Tränen
scheiden,
Und gehen in die kalte Fremd hi-
naus.

Nichts hemmt den Lauf, den die-
ses Volk begonnen;
Nicht Hohn noch Spott, nicht irdisch
Hab und Gut.
Es ist von Gott, und weiter geh'ts
nach fernem Zonen,
Auf harten Wegen, auf der wilden
Meeresflut.

Vierhundert Jahre sind's, daß
dieses Volk gerungen,
Gewandert durch die Welt von Ort
zu Ort umher;
Doch nirgends war das Friedens-
land zu finden,
Wohin es kam, man raubte ihnen
Recht' noch mehr.

O kleines Häuflein müder Wan-
dervögel,
Nicht diese Welt birgt deinen wä-
ren Friedensort.
Wo Christi Fahnen ewig weh'n,
streckt eure Flügel,
Dort winkt die Ruh, dir kleines
Häuflein dort.

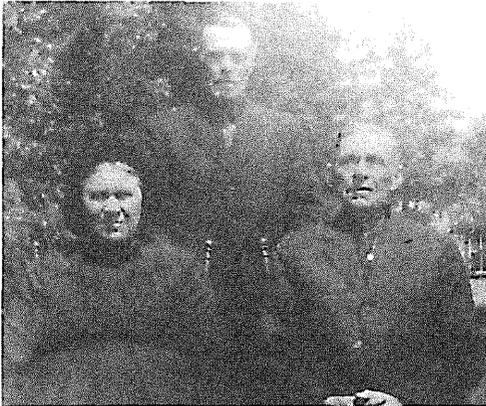
Peter B. Isaac.

Appendix I.

Church Leaders: Brief Biographies

Church leaders have been called to their positions of ministry by election in the Brotherhood throughout the history of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler. It was important, however, for each potential minister that the calling of the Brethren be accompanied by an inner call from God. Sometimes a candidate was elected but was not willing to accept the responsibilities of the ministry. On the other hand, most candidates who were elected were on probation for some time before being ordained. In 1908, for example, two men who were elected to the ministry refused ordination. On the day of ordination one of them went into town and shot pool to show others that he was not interested in or worthy of the call. The other one felt unworthy and did not feel the inner leading to become a minister. This latter man, however, had a difficult time finding peace on his deathbed because he had refused this calling.

The call to the ministry was not something to be taken lightly, and yet the possibility of serving Christ in this manner brought a sense of joy with it. Acts 1:21-26 talks about the election of ministers, and Acts 6:2-6 tells the story of the election of Stephen as deacon. God called these individuals as apostles, prophets and teachers (I Cor. 12:28). The church recognizes this calling from God and ordains them to service. In II Corinthians 3:5-6 Paul writes, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also had made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter but of the spirit, for the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." And in I Corinthians 2:12-13, he especially emphasizes, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God, which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Only he who has the Holy Spirit is called by God to a spiritual office in the Christian church. His personal life is connected with Christ from whom he draws strength to plant the seeds which grow into eternal life.



Rev. Heinrich & Helena
(Fehr) Bergen (seated)

Photo: Mrs. Elizabeth Neufeld,
Warman

Heinrich Bergen (February 2, 1853-September 4, 1926) and
 1. **Maria Giesbrecht** (August 16, 1856-November 15, 1876),
 2. **Katharina Reimer** (August 18, 1854-March 13, 1897),
 3. **Helena Fehr** (March 2, 1873-December 1, 1961)

Heinrich Bergen came to Canada from the Bergthal Colony in Russia in 1875 where his father, Abram Bergen, had been elected as a deacon in 1840 and as a minister in 1843.

He was elected as a deacon on July 24, 1882 in the Chortitzer Mennonite Church in Manitoba (East Reserve), serving in this capacity for 19 years. In the spring of 1892 he moved to Rosthern and took up a homestead (SE 10-43A-3). In 1895 he and his family moved back to Manitoba and four years later they were once again living in Rosthern. On June 27, 1901, Heinrich Bergen was elected as a minister in the Bergthaler Church and on July 18, he delivered his first sermon. Rev. Bergen passed away in 1926. In that same year, his wife and family moved to Paraguay, but returned in 1927.

In his lifetime of service to the church Rev. Bergen preached 708 sermons, officiated at 74 funerals and 70 weddings.

Jacob F. Bergen (February 25, 1901-March 31, 1968) and
Sarah Elias (September 17, 1908-October 31, 1972)

Jacob F. Bergen, son of Rev. Heinrich Bergen, was elected as a minister on January 18, 1940. He lived near Rosthern until he and his wife moved to Paraguay in 1948.

Abram D. Braun (January 15, 1906-October, 1957) and
Katharina Guenter (May 3, 1908-)

Abram Braun grew up in the Old Colony village of Blumenthal, Saskatchewan with his parents, Peter and Anna (Dyck) Braun. In the

1930s he moved to Swan Plain, but later returned to Blumenthal.

On January 18, 1940, Abram D. Braun was elected as a minister in the Bergthaler Church. He later moved to Taber, Alberta, where he passed away.

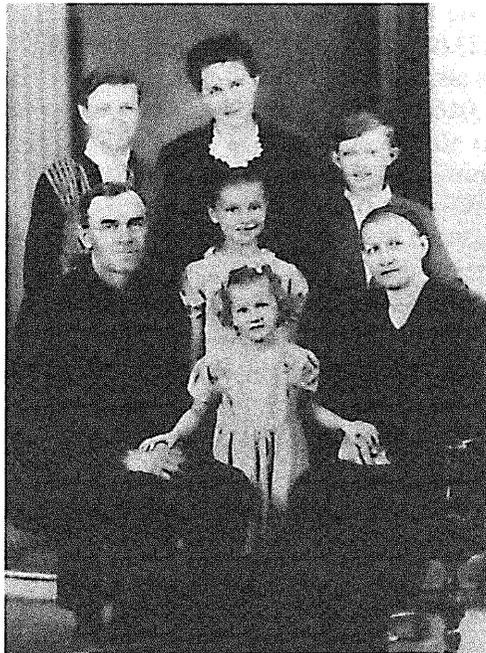
Abram Buhler (December 20, 1937-) and
Eva Schellenberg (October 21, 1938-)

Buhler was elected to the ministry on November 26, 1983, and was ordained in 1984. His parents are *Ältester* Abram and Aganetha (Peters) Buhler. He is employed at Intercontinental Packers in Saskatoon.

Abram J. Buhler (March 5, 1903-June 13, 1982) and
Aganetha Peters (December 5, 1906-)

Abram Buhler was born in Plum Coulee, Manitoba. The following year his parents, Jacob and Anna (Klassen) Buhler, moved to the Aberdeen area (SE 36-39-3). Abram married Aganetha Peters in 1924. A year later he started farming north of Aberdeen and continued until 1969 when he moved to the town of Warman.

Abram Buhler was elected as a minister in the Bergthaler Church on June 25, 1948, and ordained in September. He was elected as



Rev. Jacob F. & Sarah
 (Elias) Bergen
 Photo: Cornelius C. Hamm,
 Rosthern



Rev. Jacob J. & Helena
(Bartsch) Buhler

Photo: Mrs. Margaret Kroeker,
Hague

Ältester on February 17, 1949 and ordained five days later by *Ältester* David Wall of the Swift Current Sommerfelder Church.

During his time of serving the church, he preached 1,751 sermons (the last one on June 6, 1982 at the Reinfeld Church), officiated at 223 funerals and 107 weddings and led 82 Brotherhood meetings. It is also recorded that he preached 130 baptism sermons, baptizing 1,016 persons, and 498 communion sermons, serving communion to 30,165. During his term of office he ordained four deacons, 24 ministers and six *Älteste*, including John A. Friesen of the Sommerfelder Church of Manitoba in 1955; Cornelius Nickel of the Reinlaender Church of Manitoba in 1958; David Wiebe of the Swift Current Sommerfelder Church on December 19, 1971; and John D. Reddekopp of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church on November 22, 1975.

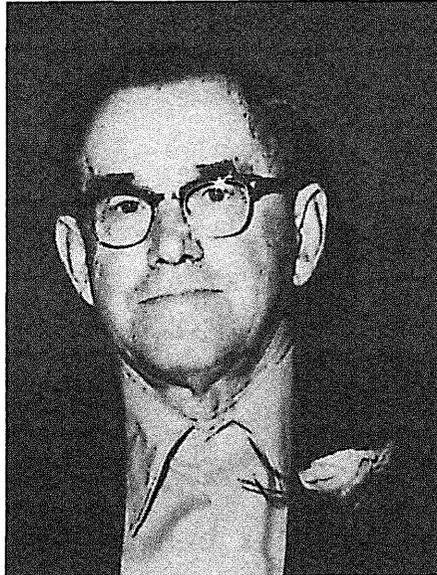
His health started failing after his first heart attack in 1969. He suffered four more attacks, the last one fatal.

Abram W. Buhler (February 1, 1941-) and
Elizabeth Wiebe (December 29, 1941-)

Abram W. Buhler was elected to the ministry on November 26, 1983, and ordained in 1984.

David Buhler (July 14, 1933-) and
Katharina Schellenberg (October 19, 1932-)

David Buhler grew up near Aberdeen with his parents, *Ältester*



Rev. Heinrich A. Dyck

Photo: Mrs. Gertrude Rempel, Warman

Abram and Aganetha (Peters) Buhler. He was ordained as a minister in the Bergthaler Church in 1968. Rev. Buhler and his wife also served as house parents at the Warman *Altenheim*. They now live west of Martensville. Rev. Buhler is employed at the Co-op Creamery in Saskatoon.

Jacob J. Buhler (April 12, 1887-April 14, 1971) and

Helena Bartsch (November 9, 1887-November 5, 1969)

Shortly after Jacob J. Buhler was elected as a minister in the Bergthaler Church in 1932, he moved to Sonningdale.

In their retirement years, Rev. and Mrs. Buhler moved onto the yard of their daughter Maria and her husband Rev. Jacob Klassen.

Heinrich A. Dyck (November 20, 1906-March 6, 1985) and

Margaretha Peters (1906-)

Heinrich A. Dyck grew up on his parents' homestead north of Aberdeen. His father was Deacon Heinrich H. Dyck. In 1926 he and his parents moved to Paraguay but returned in 1929.

He helped to start the Sunday School in the Bergthaler Church in the 1940s and served as a *Vorsänger* in the Aberdeen Bergthaler Church. Heinrich Dyck was elected as a minister on June 23, 1948, and ordained in September. He left the Bergthaler Church and joined the Rudnerweider Church (EMMC). He retired in the town of Warman. After a lengthy struggle with cancer, Rev. Dyck passed away in 1985.



Deacon Peter K. & Helena
(Guenter) Fehr

Photo: Frank K. Guenter, Warman

Heinrich H. Dyck (June 20, 1878-January 2, 1962) and
Aganetha Buhler (February 12, 1884-October 10, 1973)

Heinrich Dyck grew up on the East Reserve in Manitoba with his parents Heinrich and Maria (Epp) Dyck. In 1901 he moved to his Saskatchewan homestead north of Aberdeen (NW 36-39-3) where he married Aganetha Buhler two years later.

On February 22, 1914, Heinrich H. Dyck was elected as a deacon in the Bergthaler Church. He and his family moved to Paraguay in 1926, but returned to Saskatchewan in 1929.

Kornelius Epp (July 1, 1861-June 12, 1936) and
Maria Bueckert (October 20, 1865-February 11, 1935)

Kornelius Epp and his family came to Manitoba from the Fürstentland Colony, Russia in 1891 and moved to Rosthern, Saskatchewan in 1892. He served as a minister in the Bergthaler Church from 1893 to 1897 when the family moved back to Manitoba where Epp served as a German school teacher in the village of Rosenfeld. They returned to Rosthern in 1901 to the homestead he had taken up in 1892 (SE 16-43A-3).

On November 4, 1902 Rev. Epp was elected as *Ältester* in the Bergthaler Church and ordained by *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen of the Manitoba Sommerfelder Church a few days later.

In February of 1908 he was asked to marry a couple at the *Suedfluss* Church (Aberdeen). Since, in his opinion, they were not dressed in keeping with Christian teaching, he refused to marry



Rev. Jacob E. & Katharina
(Siebert) Friesen

Photo: Jacob N. Friesen, Warman

them. When it became clear that the church membership did not support his decision he left the church.

Rev. Epp and his family then moved from the Rosthern area to Lost River, and later to Aberdeen and then to Hague. On June 2, 1922, they moved to Mexico with the Sommerfelder from the Swift Current area. He and his wife both died in the Mennonite settlement in Chihuahua, Mexico.

Peter K. Fehr (February 19, 1919-) and
Helena Guenter (March 23, 1913-)

Peter Fehr was elected as a deacon on February 3, 1962 and ordained in March. Presently he and his wife farm east of Blumenheim in the Riverthal area.

Jacob E. Friesen (December 23, 1845-August 21, 1913) and
Katharina Siebert (April 3, 1851-January 16, 1915)

In the 1870s the Friesens moved from Margenau, Molotschna, Russia, to the United States as part of the original group of 35 settlers to move to Henderson, Nebraska.

Jacob Friesen was elected as a minister on January 19, 1885, at Henderson, Nebraska. The family moved to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1892. Nine years later, they moved to Saskatchewan and took up a homestead northwest of Warman (SE 16-39-5). Rev. Friesen began preaching about 1902 in the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church. Because of deteriorating health, he preached only a few years after that.



Rev. Johan G. & Aganetha
(Driedger) Friesen

Photo: Mrs. Anne Peters, Osler

Johan G. Friesen (December 20, 1924-) and
Aganetha Driedger (August 19, 1927-)

Johan Friesen grew up north of the village of Gruenthal. After their marriage the couple moved to Burns Lake, B.C., where Friesen ran a saw mill. In 1964 they moved to the Vanscoy area where they operated a dairy farm. Johan Friesen was elected as a minister on January 24, 1970, and ordained in June. In 1981 they moved to Reinland.

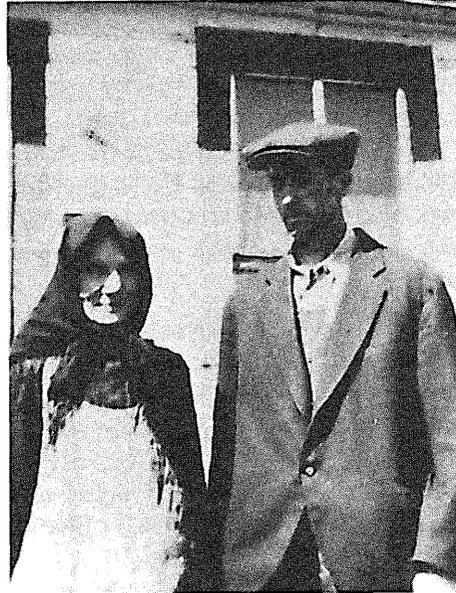
Johan J. Friesen (January 2, 1881-September 26, 1949) and
Helena Neufeld (August 12, 1877-July 15, 1967)

Johan Friesen was born in Henderson, Nebraska and moved with his parents, Rev. Jacob and Katharina (Siebert) Friesen, to Mountain Lake, Minnesota in 1892. In 1901 they moved to Saskatchewan where Johan took up a homestead northwest of Warman (NE 16-39-5).

He was elected as a minister in the Bergthaler Church on January 15, 1914, and ordained on March 1. In 1921 he served as a delegate to Paraguay.

Martin Friesen (May 28, 1956-) and
Ruth Peters (July 6, 1958-)

Martin Friesen was elected as a Bergthaler minister on November 24, 1979, and ordained in 1982. The Friesens now live east of



Rev. Abram K. & Aganetha
(Letkeman) Giesbrecht

Photo: Henry Giesbrecht, Neuhorst

Gruenfeld village on a farm and Martin is employed at Flexi-coil in Saskatoon.

Abram K. Giesbrecht (February 26, 1894-March 30, 1976) and
Aganetha Letkeman (December 27, 1896-January 21, 1976)

After his marriage in 1916 to Aganetha Letkeman, the Giesbrechts farmed in the Blumenheim area near the South Saskatchewan River. Along with many other Old Colony settlers they moved in April of 1934 to the Mildred area with three oxen and four horses and their personal possessions. Here Giesbrecht did mixed farming and served as a veterinarian in the district, while Mrs. Giesbrecht knitted heavy socks and mittens for her family and for sale in order to help raise their fourteen children.

After the move to Mildred the Giesbrechts joined the Bergthaler Church. On March 18, 1935, he was elected as a minister to Northvale and was ordained by *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm a year later. Rev. Giesbrecht served as minister at Northvale until 1957, and a year later moved to Reinland. From there he moved to Warman. During his time of serving as a minister, he preached 200 sermons.

Jacob B. Guenther (March 20, 1892-) and

1. **Maria Friesen** (August 17, 1890-July 13, 1914)

2. **Barbara Friesen** (August 6, 1893-)

The Guenthers moved from Manitoba to Saskatchewan in 1892

and took up a homestead north of Rosthern (SW 10-43A-3). In December of 1913 Jacob married Maria Friesen. Less than a year later his young bride was struck by lightning while sitting on his lap. In 1915, he married Barbara Friesen, his first wife's sister.

On March 1, 1928, Jacob B. Guenther was elected as a minister in the Bergthaler Church. He led a group to Honduras in May of 1951, but the group had to return to Canada because their papers were not in order. Rev. Guenther moved to Bolivia in 1962, where he passed away.

Cornelius Hamm (November 5, 1878-January 25, 1947) and

Katharina Guenther (September 23, 1886-January 31, 1978)

Cornelius Hamm came to Canada from Neuenburg, Chortitza, Russia, with his parents, Martin and Maria (Peters) Hamm on July 1, 1891, and arrived at Rosenfeld, Manitoba on August 19.

In 1889 he moved to Saskatchewan and took up a homestead near the Reinfeld area (NE 22-41-3). Five years later he married Katharina Guenther.

In July of 1908 he was elected as deacon in the Bergthaler Church. The following year he was ordained to the ministry. On August 14, 1928 he was elected as *Ältester* and ordained the following day by *Ältester* David Doerksen of the Herbert Sommerfelder Church.

It is recorded that he preached 2,028 sermons, presided at 169 funerals and officiated at 124 weddings. He also baptized members and served communion to 19,247 persons. During his time as *Ältester*, he led twenty-five brotherhood meetings and ordained three *Älteste*: Jacob Abrams of the Sommerfelder Church in Mexico on January 17, 1930; Johan Loeppky of the Saskatchewan Old Colony Church on March 16, 1930; and Johann B. Epp of the Carrot River Bergthaler Church on June 13, 1940.

Heinrich Harder (October 11, 1930-) and

Margaretha Unger (April 30, 1941-)

Heinrich Harder was elected as a deacon on November 24, 1979 and ordained in 1980. He presently serves as the housefather at the Warman Mennonite *Altenheim*.

Johan G. Hildebrand (January 21, 1899-) and

Katharina Wall (March 24, 1899-)

Johan Hildebrand and his wife grew up in the Old Colony village of Hochfeld. His wife's father, Abram Wall, was an Old Colony minister who had moved to Hochfeld from Edenberg in 1917.

Johan Hildebrand and his wife moved to Neuhorst and later to Northvale, a Mennonite settlement near Mullingar which was begun



Rev. Herman & Anna
(Neufeld) Janzen
Photo: Henry Dyck, Hague

in the 1930s. It was here that he was elected as a minister on June 28, 1934.

He was ordained in 1935 by *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm who served this community even though a large number were of Old Colony background. In later years, Rev. Hildebrand and his wife moved to British Columbia.

Herman Janzen (June 29, 1928-) and
Anna Neufeld (October 5, 1928-)

Herman Janzen was ordained as a Bergthaler minister in 1963. Rev. Janzen lives west of Osler and works in a cement finishing business with his sons.

Isaac H. Janzen (February 13, 1920-) and
Maria Friesen (February 4, 1921-)

Isaac Janzen grew up in the village of Hochfeld where his father, Johan, was an Old Colony minister and a German school teacher.

He operated a dairy farm near Blumenthal for many years. On October 29, 1960, he was elected as a Bergthaler minister and ordained the following February. He now lives in Neuanlage and drives a school bus.

Jacob Klassen (April 25, 1916-) and
Maria Buhler (March 16, 1916-)

Jacob Klassen was ordained as a Bergthaler minister in 1961. The Klassens are presently farming east of Hague.

Edward Martens (January 25, 1951-) and
Irene Janzen (July 30, 1952-)

Edward Martens was elected as a minister on November 24, 1979 and ordained in 1981. He is presently employed at the Cooperative Creamery in Saskatoon.

Heinrich D. Martens (March 25, 1882-) and

1. **Katharina Buhler** (March 22, 1883-),
2. **Susanna Fehr** (),
3. **Helena Nikkel** (November 25, 1901-)

Heinrich Martens was born and raised in the village of Schoenfeld, Manitoba (West Reserve). In 1898, his parents, David and Maria (Peters) Martens, moved to Saskatchewan where the Martens family formed the village of Neuhoffnung, north of Hague. David Martens was the first *Vorsteher* of the Old Colony Church in Saskatchewan.

Heinrich Martens took up a homestead (NW 2-41-4) in 1900. He joined the Bergthaler Church at Rosthern where he was baptized by *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen of Manitoba. In 1909, he was elected as a deacon and on January 15, 1914, as a minister. He preached for 60 years in the Bergthaler Church until 1974.

He lives in the Warman Mennonite *Altenheim*, continuing in fairly good health and driving a car until well past the age of one hundred!

Peter Martens (August 12, 1913-) and
Katharina Guenter (December 24, 1915-)

Peter Martens grew up in the village of Gruenthal. On November 9, 1950, he was elected as a deacon in the Bergthaler Church and ordained in 1951. He also served the Gruenthal congregation as a *Vorsänger*. Later he joined the Pentecostal Church.

Abram P. Neufeld (September 12, 1856-November 26, 1921) and

1. **Anna Dyck** (February 20, 1857-June 10, 1890),
2. **Susanna Friesen** (January 26, 1861-)

Abram Neufeld came to Canada from Russia on the S.S. Nova Scotian on July 27, 1874, together with his parents, Peter and Susanna (Bergen) Neufeld. They settled on the East Reserve in Manitoba and attended the Chortitzer Mennonite Church.

In 1880 Mr. Neufeld moved to the West Reserve and in 1899 to Saskatchewan where he took up a homestead near Laird (SE 20-43-4).

Abram P. Neufeld was elected as a deacon on June 27, 1901 at



Rev. Cornelius &
Helena (Bergen) Neufeld
Photo: Frank K. Guenter, Warman

Rosthern. In 1903 he was elected as a minister, preaching 577 sermons during his years of service and officiating at 17 weddings and 16 funerals.

Cornelius A. Neufeld (April 26, 1886-May 31, 1962) and
Helena Bergen (February 24, 1892-November 17, 1963)

Cornelius Neufeld, son of Rev. Abram P. Neufeld, grew up northwest of Rosthern. In 1910, he married Helena Bergen, the daughter of Rev. Heinrich Bergen. He and his wife moved to Paraguay in 1926 but returned to Canada a year later.

Cornelius A. Neufeld was elected as a minister on January 18, 1940, and was ordained a couple of months later. He spoke his first sermon on May 12, 1940 at Schoenwiese.

Jacob W. Neufeld (February 28, 1868-December 12, 1934) and

1. **Anna Peters** (February 11, 1867-March 5, 1897),
2. **Helena Zacharias** (July 2, 1877-September 3, 1929),
3. **Anna Loeppky** (September 22, 1880-)

After the death of his first wife, Jacob Neufeld moved to Rosthern



Rev. Franz K. Peters

Photo: John D. Peters, Warman

and married a widow, Mrs. David Zacharias, née Helena Neudorf. Together they lived on the Zacharias homestead (NW 16-43A-3) near Rosthern. In 1902 they took up a homestead near Aberdeen (NE 22-39-3).

Jacob Neufeld was elected as a minister on June 23, 1909, and ordained by *Ältester* Aron Zacharias a few months later. He served as a delegate to Paraguay in 1921. During his period of service he preached at 685 worship services, 34 funerals, and 28 weddings.

A controversy developed in 1930 after the death of his second wife. When Rev. Neufeld decided to marry his brother Cornelius's wife, née Anna Loepky, a fellow church member from Reinfeld pointed out to Rev. Neufeld that he did not feel this marriage was right. Rev. Neufeld's fellow ministers refused to conduct the marriage ceremony, quoting Leviticus 20:21: "If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity, he has uncovered his brother's nakedness, they shall be childless". Rev. Neufeld did not agree with this interpretation and went to the General Conference Mennonite Church at Aberdeen to be married by Rev. J.J. Nikkel. He retained his membership in the Bergthaler Church after this marriage but never preached again.

Franz K. Peters (October 26, 1889-December 15, 1962) and
Katharina Doell (February 13, 1892-December 2, 1969)



Rev. Jacob D. Peters
Photo: John D. Peters, Warman

Franz Peters came to Saskatchewan with his step-father Jacob Guenther and mother Katharina Thiessen in 1901. The Guenthers homesteaded near Schoenwiese (NE 13-40-5). Church services were held in their home until 1911 when the Schoenwiese Bergthaler Church was built.

Franz Peters married Katharina Doell that same year in the new Schoenwiese Bergthaler Church. They lived near Schoenwiese until 1926 when they moved to Paraguay. Upon returning a year later, they soon took over a farm near Schoenwiese (NE 27-40-5) and served the community well in custom curing (smoking) most of the ham and sausage in the district. Since their farm was located near the new public school, the Peters provided board and room for the first teachers in the Steele School District.

Franz K. Peters was elected to the ministry in 1940. During his time of service he preached a total of 926 sermons, officiated at 28 funerals and 32 weddings and delivered 24 *Felafniss* messages.

Jacob D. Peters (November 29, 1913-) and
Katharina Neufeld (August 19, 1915-)

Jacob D. Peters grew up near Schoenwiese with his parents, Rev. Franz K. and Katharina (Doell) Peters. In 1926 the family moved to Paraguay but returned in 1927.

Jacob Peters was elected as a Bergthaler minister on October 29,

1960, and was ordained the following February. For many years he operated a dairy farm north of Warman. In 1979 he led a group away from the Bergthaler Church to form the Sommerfelder Church at Hague under *Ältester* David Wiebe, the Sommerfelder *Ältester* from Swift Current. They have purchased the former Holdeman Mennonite Church building.

Jacob D. Peters (June 15, 1917-) and

Eva Giesbrecht (June 23, 1922-)

Jacob D. Peters grew up in the Old Colony village of Neuanlage with his parents, Johan and Anna (Driedger) Peters. He has continued to live there ever since. He farms and serves the community as a chiropractor. He was ordained as a minister on November 9, 1950.

Peter Peters (June 23, 1934-) and

Aganetha Neufeld (May 24, 1938-)

Peter Peters, son of Rev. Jacob D. and Katharina (Neufeld) Peters, was ordained as a Bergthaler minister in 1970. Presently he farms east of Warman.

Johan D. Reddekopp (March 24, 1925-) and

Susanna Fehr (April 28, 1930-)

Johan Reddekopp grew up in the village of Blumenheim, Saskatchewan, with his parents, Wilhelm and Anna (Dyck) Reddekopp. After his marriage to Susanna Fehr they farmed east of Warman. Later he became the owner of Hague Hardware and a shareholder in Weldon's Concrete.

In 1968, John Reddekopp was ordained as a minister in the Bergthaler Church. Because of the poor health of *Ältester* Buhler, a replacement was needed. In 1975 the church chose Rev. Reddekopp to be its new *Ältester*. On November 22 he was ordained to this office by *Ältester* Abram Buhler.

Johan M. Reddekopp (May 4, 1893-May 15, 1963) and

1. **Maria Doell** (January 20, 1885-January 24, 1949)

2. **Helena Nikkel** (November 25, 1901-)

Johan Reddekopp grew up in the Old Colony village of Chortitz, (NW 32-40-4) Saskatchewan, where his parents, Johan and Maria (Schroeder) Reddekopp, took up a homestead in 1899. Johan married Maria Doell in 1914. They farmed at Chortitz and later near Schoenwiese.

He was elected into the ministry on January 13, 1932 and was ordained on February 19, 1933 by *Ältester* Cornelius Hamm. His first sermon was delivered March 19, 1933, at the Schoenwiese Berg-



Rev. Johan M. & Maria
(Doell) Reddekopp

Photo:

John S. Reddekopp, Gruenthal

thaler Church and his last sermon at Gruenthal on April 28, 1963. He served the church as a minister for 30 years, 2 months and 19 days. During this time he preached 905 sermons, officiated at 43 weddings and 36 funerals and delivered 20 *Felafniss* messages.

In his later years, he suffered from asthma problems and died from a blood clot in his lung.

Cornelius F. Sawatzky (March 21, 1876-July 11, 1974) and
Anna Friesen (October 1, 1878-April 2, 1967).

Cornelius Sawatzky was born at Bergthal, Manitoba (East Reserve). When he was 12, his parents, Franz and Elizabeth (Peters) Sawatzky moved to Edenberg (West Reserve). In 1898 he married Anna Friesen and two years later they took up a homestead near Laird, Saskatchewan (SE 30-43-5).

In 1903 Cornelius Sawatzky was elected as a deacon in the Bergthaler Church at Rosthern. The drowning of his brother Franz in the North Saskatchewan River in 1905 was a traumatic experience and

led to deep spiritual struggles. As a result, he left the Bergthaler Church and was accepted into the Eigenheim (General Conference) Church as a deacon on April 1, 1907. In 1912 he was elected as an evangelist in the conference and in 1918 as a *Reiseprediger*.

Heinrich H. Siemens (February 12, 1910-August 11, 1984) and

Helena Guenter (February 18, 1910-)

Heinrich Siemens grew up in the village of Reinland. He moved with his parents, the Heinrich Siemens, to Mexico in the 1920s, but returned to Canada.

He and his wife, Helena Guenter, then lived at Gruenthal where he served as a *Vorsänger* in the Bergthaler Church for many years. In 1948 he was ordained as deacon. On November 9, 1950, he was elected as a minister and ordained in February. He helped to start the Sunday School at Schoenwiese and was also a *Vorsänger* here before the church was moved to Gruenthal.

In addition to his active role in church, Rev. Siemens was also a farmer and did construction work until he suffered a stroke on October 13, 1968. While he did not recover sufficiently to resume building or to enter the pulpit, he remained a faithful witness during his retirement in Hague, doing much counselling from his bed.

Johan Striemert (November 25, 1859-May 16, 1944) and

Helena Giesbrecht (July 22, 1855- ?)

Johan Striemert came to Canada with his parents, Heinrich and Anna (Neufeld) Striemert, from the Bergthal Colony in Russia on July 27, 1874 on the S.S. Nova Scotian. In Saskatchewan he farmed near Vonda.

He was elected as a minister around 1910 in the church formed by *Ältester* Cornelius Epp. On March 1, 1928, Rev. Striemert was ordained as a minister in the Bergthaler Church.

Abram Thiessen (October 6, 1918-) and

Maria Wiebe (May 8, 1922-)

Abram Thiessen grew up in Swift Current, Saskatchewan until his parents, Abram and Maria (Olfert) Thiessen, moved to Sonningdale. Here Bergthaler Church services were held in his parents' home.

He later moved to Warman and worked in Saskatoon at the Western Stockyards. He was ordained as a Bergthaler minister in 1963.

Julius Toews (December 5, 1857- ?) and

Agatha Friesen (November 26, 1859- ?)

Julius Toews came to Canada with his parents, Julius and Katharina

(Harder) Toews in the 1870s and settled on the East Reserve in Manitoba. In 1878 he was baptized by *Ältester* Gerhard Wiebe. He came to Saskatchewan in 1899 and took up a homestead near Laird (NW 16-43-5).

Julius Toews was elected as a minister at Rosthern in 1901. He was unable to serve very long due to problems with his legs which forced him to preach from a sitting position.

Aron Zacharias (February 5, 1871-October 10, 1927) and

Margaretha Bergen (January 9, 1878-September 13, 1959)

Aron Zacharias came to Canada from Russia at about four years of age and settled with his parents, Aron and Margaretha (Sawatzky) Zacharias, in the Old Colony village of Schoenwiese, Manitoba (West Reserve). In 1893 the family moved to Saskatchewan and he took up a homestead north of Rosthern (SW 4-43-3). Two years later, Aron married Margaretha Bergen, the oldest daughter of Rev. Heinrich Bergen, with *Ältester* Peter Regier of the Rosenorter Church officiating.

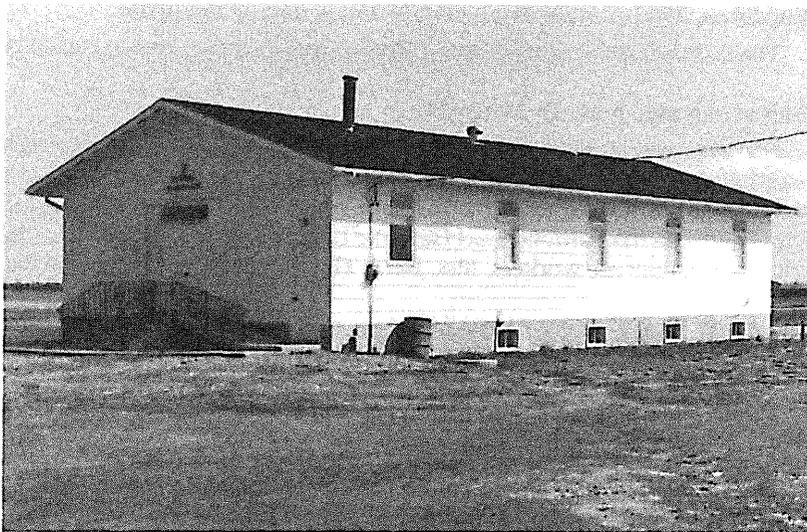
In 1903 Aron Zacharias was ordained as a minister in the Bergthaler Church. On November 13, 1908, he was elected as *Ältester* and three days later was ordained at Rosthern by *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen of the Manitoba Sommerfelder Church. In 1926 *Ältester* Zacharias led a group of Bergthaler members to Paraguay. Less than a year later he died and was buried in Paraguay. He was survived by his wife and one child.

Appendix II

Homes in Which Bergthaler Church Services Were Held

Area	Name of Homeowner	Notes
Aberdeen	Isaac Harder	north of Aberdeen
	Jacob Neufeld	north of Aberdeen
Blaine Lake	David Kroeker	
Blumenheim	Abram F. Wiebe	northeast of Blumenheim
	Isaac Klassen	
Clarkboro	Jacob S. Fehr	
Clarke's Crossing		
Hague	Peter Heinrichs	2 miles east of Hague
	Wilhelm Dyck	7 miles north of Hague
	Wilhelm Fehr	
	Mrs. Siemens	7 miles north of Hague
Krim	Peter Klassen	8 miles south of Aberdeen
	Abram Doerksen	
Langham	Heinrich Wall	1916
	Peter Peters	
Laird-Eigenheim	Rev. Abram P. Neufeld	
	Mr. Kroeker	
Lobethal	Peter Bergen	
	Jacob Bergen	
Nordflus- -Great Deer	Widow Quiring	6 miles north of Petrofka Ferry
	Jacob Hiebert	
	Peter Hamm	
	Jacob Reimer	
	Klaas Heide	
	Peter Berg	
Osler	Jacob Wall	east of Laird
	David Isaak	east of Laird
Reinfeld	Johan Neufeld	
	Isaac Fehr, Sr.	SW 22-41-3W
	Peter S. Rempel	NE 34-40-3W
	Martin M. Hamm	northeast of Reinfeld
Rosengard	Abram Buhler	
Roseleaf		

Rosthern	Gerhard Rempel Rev. Heinrich Bergen Diedrich Rempel Kornelius Epp Peter Siemens Klaas Penner Aron Zacharias Johan Penner Abram Froese Heinrich Rosenfeld	SW 18-42-2W SE 10-43A-3W NW 10-43A-2W SE 16-43A-3W NW 34-42-3W NW 28-42-2W NE 16-43A-3W east of Rosthern east of Rosthern east of Rosthern
Schoenwiese	Jacob Guenter	NE 13-40-5W
Silberfeld	Abram Sawatzky	
Sonningdale	Abram Thiessen, Sr. Johan Wall Heinrich Wall Jacob Fehr	
Stonehill	Heppners	
Suedflus	Johan Friesen Jacob Buhler	SE 24-40-3W SE 36-39-3W
Warman	Jacob Rempel Peter Dyck Peter Doerksen Peter Rempel	in town 2 miles west & 2 miles north of Warman



Suedflus church building. Services were held in the homes of Johan Friesen and Jacob Buhler before the church was built.

Appendix III

Bergthaler Church Buildings

Rosthern, 1902, 1.5 miles east and 0.5 miles south of town

Before the church building was completed in 1902, services were held in homes. The first five baptismal candidates were instructed in the Gerhard Rempel home. The dedication of the building, a baptismal service, and the ordination of Rev. Heinrich Bergen were all conducted by *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen of the Sommerfelder Church of Manitoba on a Sunday in the early spring of 1902. One of the baptismal candidates was Heinrich Martens, later a minister in the church.

People came in wagons and buggies drawn by oxen or horses from as far south as Warman and as far west as the North Saskatchewan River. Others came on horseback and a few even by bicycle. The building was too small to hold all the guests who had come for the dedication service.

Later on membership in this congregation decreased to the extent that it was served only on a very irregular basis by visiting ministers. By 1966 the building had been unused for some years and was demolished.

Suedflus, 1908, 6 miles north and 0.5 miles west of Aberdeen

The original building erected in 1908 was replaced by a new one in 1978.

Schoenwiese, 1911, SE 24-40-5W

Services were initially held in the home of Jacob Guenter about a mile southwest of the village. In 1911 a church building was erected on a two-acre plot of land donated by Johan Doell. The building contractors were Henry Wilker and Edward Dehmke of Rosthern who supervised the group of volunteer workers. Mrs. Jacob Guenter fed the builders at her house.

An addition to the original building was constructed in 1923. The Schoenwiese church location was last used in 1971.

Reinfeld, 1929, SE 10-41-3W

Many church services were held in the home of the Peter Rempels, who lived at Reinfeld from 1916 to 1926. In the latter year *Bruderschaft* meetings relating to the planned emigration to Paraguay were held in the Rempel home.

In 1929 a church building was constructed on the former homestead of Jacob Guenter. The text of the dedication sermon on August 25 was taken

from Psalm 116:12-14. Hymns sung at this occasion included numbers 89, 686, 605 and 341.

Gruenthal, 1948, SW 28-40-3W

In 1948 the former house of lame Johan Dyck was moved from Hochfeld to Gruenthal and renovated to serve as church building. The house was bought from Abram Born and moved by Jacob Reddekop, Jacob Peters and Klaas Neufeld.

It was further renovated by contractor Jacob Wolfe in 1979.

Warman, 1953, town of Warman

Worship services in the Warman area were first held in the Jacob Rempel home and later in the Peter Dyck home. In 1953 a 26 by 40-foot church building was constructed in the town of Warman.

In 1971 construction was begun on a new 36 by 68-foot building under the direction of contractor Jacob Wolfe. The building was completed in 1972 at a cost of \$1700. The old church building was then used for Sunday School and as an eating house. In 1975 an 18-foot section was added to the new building.

In the fall of 1980 the church building was placed on a basement constructed just east of the original site. The following year the Sunday School house was sold and moved from the premises.

Martensville, 1958, town of Martensville

In 1958 the Bergthaler Church bought the General Conference church building at Hochfeld and moved it to Martensville. It had been built by the Conference in 1945.

In 1974 a new 36 by 64-foot building with full basement was erected at a cost of \$26,000.

Blumenheim, 1951, village of Blumenheim

Bergthaler church services were held in the old German school in Blumenheim as early as 1951. The Old Colony Church had used this building for church services for many years, but had discontinued them when *Ältester* Johan Loeppky moved to Mexico in 1948. In 1951 the school was renovated by the two groups to serve as church building for both of them.

In 1972 the Bergthaler church building at Schoenwiese was moved to Blumenheim. The Old Colony people paid the cost of moving it. Both churches now use it for worship services on alternate Sundays.

Appendix IV

Saskatchewan Bergthaler Membership (Rosthern-Warman-Aberdeen)

Year	Baptized Members	Total Souls	Births		Deaths		Baptisms
			M	F	M	F	
1902	198	466	11	13	6	7	
1903	282	723	13	9	8	5	
1904	385	920	12	17	3	7	
1905	440	1000	22	13	9	7	
1906	376	900	14	29	4	5	
1907	418	1050	19	33	11	8	
1908	400	865	26	24	4	4	
1909	345	920	15	15	9	4	5
1910	357	909	16	15	4	6	28
1911	377	932	21	14	3	4	25
1912	409	1004	20	24	6	5	37
1913	417	1039		29		12	23
1914	442	1231	22	18	4	3	46
1915	479	1184		42		9	34
1916	520	1270		56		13	31
1917	466	1279		49		8	27
1918	593	1418		39		43	58
1919	585	1450		48		11	14
1920	529	1307	24	18	10	4	6
1921	475	1309		40		17	26
1922	488	1268		38		14	16
1923	482	1125		39		16	12
1924	483	1195		36		13	31
1925	504	1254		38		9	17
1926							30
1927	333	761	18	18	6	4	
1928		943			6	8	
1929		1253	29	32	8	8	
1930							
1931	559	1404	22	28	3	6	
1932	625	1515	34	34	4	3	
1933							
1934	629	1633	31	36	5	4	
1935	659	1722	34	19	2	7	41
1936	701	1815	28	25	10	8	
1937							
1938							
1939		1956	25	28	10	6	37
1940	807	1906	24	25	7	6	51
1941							
1942							

1943	890	2146	31	25	11	2	
1944							
1945							
1946							
1947							
1948							
1949	906	2066	13	17	6	4	43
1950							
1951	946	2190	25	26	4	2	46
1952	972	2298	23	29	4	5	26
1953	1002	2263	22	24	6	4	32
1954							
1955	1032	2353	16	22	9	3	36
1956	1103	2417	18	19	5	7	70
1957	1124	2498	26	18	3	5	30
1958	1166	2635	26	26	5	4	33
1959	1193	2725	18	18	7	3	36
1960	1212	2803	20	19	4	3	31
1961	1245	2865	19	19	9	6	48
1962	1241	2919	22	23	12	8	48
1963	1251	2964	29	24	13	2	23
1964 ²	1080	2506	13	11	9	3	23
1965	1086	2518	25	15	9	4	23
1966	939	2228	16	20	6	7	21
1967	951	2274	21	24	8	5	18
1968	953	2301	16	20	4	7	15
1969	967	2371	18	19	11	7	26
1970	981	2408	13	17	2	7	18
1971	1019	2468	15	17	5	1	32
1972	1040	2499	19	23	8	3	28
1973	1061	2563	20	19	10	4	27
1974	1001	2324	29	14	4	12	31
1975	1020	2349	19	11	2	5	19

Sources: Rev. Johan M. Reddekopp, *Ältester* Abram J. Buhler, Rev. Jacob E. Friesen, Rev. Johan J. Friesen, *Der Mitarbeiter*. No data available where statistics are omitted.

¹The emigration to Paraguay accounts for the significant decrease in membership.

²Part of the decrease is due to the emigration to Bolivia and the departure of Henry A. Dyck.

Notes

1. Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 244.
2. William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, rev. ed. (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1986), p. 18.
3. Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith: The Background in Europe and the Development in Canada of the Bergthaler Church of Manitoba* (Altona: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1970), p. 68, says that 53 families moved to Minnesota and another 34 families moved back to Chortitza Colony.
4. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Manitoba," by Cornelius Krahn.
5. Peter Klassen, "Mennonite Beginnings at Rosthern," *Mennonite Life* 31 (December 1976): 4. A slightly different version of this paper is published anonymously as "Homesteading at Rosthern," in Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius G. Toews, ed., *Mennonite Memories: Settling in Western Canada* (Winnipeg: Centennial Publications, 1977), pp. 163-185. A copy of the complete text in German is available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg.
6. Peter I. Dyck, "Meine Aufzeichnungen," translated by Jacob A. Zacharias. This diary ends in 1951 with Dyck's death in Asunción, Paraguay.
7. Klassen, "Beginnings at Rosthern," p. 10.
8. Gerhard Epp, Diary, Gerhard Epp Collection, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives (MHCA), Winnipeg, translated by the author. The third delegate was Heinrich Wieler.
9. David Stoesz, Diary, David M. Stoesz Collection, MHCA.
10. Kornelius Epp, Papers, Private Collection of John B. Epp, Carrot River, Saskatchewan.
11. Interview with Jacob P. Siemens, Warman, Saskatchewan, February 1981. His parents were Old Colony Church people who went to Gleichen, Alberta and later to Rosthern in 1891. Like many others they attended the Bergthaler Church services.
12. Interview with Mrs. Gerhard Kroeker, Warman, January 1984.
13. Interview with Heinrich A. Dyck, Warman, January 1983. See also David Toews, "Einiges über die Ansiedlung um Rosthern," *Der Mitarbeiter* (August 1907): 85-87.
14. Kornelius Epp, Diary 1891-1908; original in possession of his son, Johan B. Epp, Carrot River, Saskatchewan.
15. Abraham Doerksen, Papers. Photocopy available in Abraham Doerksen Collection, MHCA.
16. Kornelius Epp, Diary.
17. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, Warman, January 1983.
18. Abraham Doerksen, Papers.
19. Interview with Jacob N. Friesen, Warman, Fall 1982. Jacob N. Friesen is a grandson of Rev. Jacob E. Friesen.
20. Jacob G. Guenter, *Men of Steele* (Saskatoon: By the Author, 1981), p. 3.
21. Interview with Abram Buhler, Warman, Spring 1982.
22. Interview with Jacob N. Friesen, Warman, Fall 1982.
23. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, Warman, SK, March 1982. According to Rev. Martens it appears that *Ältester* Cornelius Epp refused to meet with *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen and as a result no reconciliation could happen.
24. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 317, 321.

25. Abraham Doerksen, Papers.
26. Quebec Passenger Ship Lists, 1874-1880, MHCA; Peter D. Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Altona: Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976), p.328.
27. Homestead Records, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB) Saskatoon. Zacharias obtained his entry to SW 4-43A-3 in February 1893 and his patent in 1899. His father, Aron Zacharias Sr., homesteaded NE 16-43A-3, obtained his entry September 1893 and his patent in 1899. Hereafter range numbers are west of the 3rd meridian unless otherwise indicated.
28. Interview with Peter J. Doell, Warman, Spring 1983. In this interview he related details of conversations his father had had with *Altester* Zacharias.
29. *Der Mitarbeiter* (July 1917). As it turned out, legislation passed by the government did not allow Mennonites to vote.
30. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, Warman, November 1983. See also H.H. Ewert "Nachrichten aus den Gemeinden aus Manitoba," *Der Mitarbeiter* (July 1917): 4, and Abraham Doerksen, Papers.
31. Interview with Peter J. Doell, Warman, Fall 1982. He related incidents concerning the Schoenwiese Private School problem.
32. Reinfeld School District, No. 3386, Records, SAB.
33. Interview with Heinrich A. Dyck, Warman, January 1983. His father was a Bergthaler deacon and these meetings were often held in their home. Because Heinrich could speak English he was allowed to sit in on these meetings and translate for both church leaders and provincial government officials. See also Adolf Ens, "The Public School Crisis Among Mennonites in Saskatchewan 1916-25," in Harry Loewen, ed., *Mennonite Images* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), pp. 73-81.
34. Eileen Pettigrew, *The Silent Enemy* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Press Books, 1983), pp. 5, 6, 16.
35. Tina H. Peters, "Remedies," in Klippenstein and Toews, p. 242.
36. Pioneer Questionnaires, SAB. Alice Lillian Taylor, Warman 1906.
37. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, March 1982.
38. Interview with Jacob N. Friesen, Warman, Spring 1982. His father was a delegate to Paraguay in 1921.
39. Dyck, "Aufzeichnungen," MHCA.
40. Interview with Johann D. Peters, Warman, March 1981. Together with his parents (Franz K. Peters) he made the migration to Paraguay.
41. Dyck, "Aufzeichnungen," MHCA.
42. Interview with Johann D. Peters.
43. Dyck, "Aufzeichnungen," MHCA.
44. Friesen, p. 29.
45. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, Warman, November 1983.
46. Obituary of Rev. Cornelius Hamm; original in possession of Cornelius Hamm Jr., Rosthern.
47. Guenter, *Men of Steele*, p. 35.
48. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, Warman, November 1983.
49. For further information on the Great Depression, see James K. Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), and Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1973).
50. T.J.D. Powell, "Northern Settlement 1929-1935," *Saskatchewan History* XXX (Autumn 1977): 89.
51. *Ibid.* p. 92.
52. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, p. 287.
53. Interview with Mrs. Jacob Doerksen (nee Anna Braun), Warman. She moved to Swan Plain with her first husband David Goertzen and related experiences about this in the interview.

54. Interview with Johann B. Epp, Carrot River, Fall 1982.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, Warman, 1982.
57. Translation by Esther Bergen.
58. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, November 1983.
59. Guenter, *Men of Steele*, p. 34.
60. For more information about the *Waisenamt* see Jake Peters, *The Waisenamt: A History of Mennonite Inheritance Custom* (Steinbach: Mennonite Village Museum, 1985).
61. For details of this interesting story see Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*, translated by Helen Janzen (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981), pp. 35-37; and William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, rev. ed. (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1986), pp. 72-73.
62. Heinrich Wieler, Diary, p. 122; original in possession of his grandson, Ed Roth, Rosthern.
63. See Jake Peters, "The Sommerfelder *Waisenamt*: Origin, Development and Dissolution," *Mennonite Life* 54 (December 1980): 12 for causes of the *Waisenamt* failure in Manitoba.
64. Jake Peters, *The Waisenamt*, p. 8.
65. Ken Funk, "The Mennonite Union *Waisenamt* of Saskatchewan: Its Origin and Early Development," Student Paper, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 1976 in MHCA.
66. Interview with John S. Reddekopp, Gruenthal, March 1982.
67. *Ibid.*
68. Leaders in the Sunday School movement were Rev. Heinrich A. Dyck and Rev. Abram Buhler. The account given here is based largely on the recollections of Rev. Heinrich A. Dyck and Rev. Heinrich D. Martens.
69. Interview with Heinrich A. Dyck, January 1983.
70. Interview with Mrs. John P. Doell (nee Katherina Pauls), Warman, 1982.
71. Information in this section is based in part on the following *Mennonite Encyclopedia* articles: "Music, Church," by H.S. Bender; "Musical Instruments," and "Geistreiches Gesangbuch," by Cornelius Krahn; and "Chorister (Vorsaenger)," by J.G. Rempel.
72. Interview with Jacob Wall, Saskatoon, 1982.
73. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, November 1983.
74. Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c. 1496-1561*, ed. by J.C. Wenger (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1956), pp. 94, 198.
75. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, November 1983.
76. *Ibid.*
77. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, p. 565.
78. Interview with Heinrich D. Martens, 1983.
79. Jacob G. Guenter, *Men of Steele*, p. 39.
80. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Nonresistance," by Ernst Crous.
81. *Ibid.*
82. Cornelius Hamm, Papers.
83. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Language Problem," by Harold S. Bender
84. Dyck, "Aufzeichnungen," MHCA.
85. Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, pp. 429-32, 422-23.
86. Jim Wright, Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, July 27, 1949.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*
89. Don Warden, Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*, May 26, 1951.
90. *Ibid.*
91. Interview with delegate Johan D. Klassen, May 1983.
92. Bruce Wiebe, "Mennonite Central Committee Report," Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 1981.
93. Interview with Johan D. Klassen.

94. Johan M. Reddekopp, Gruenthal, Records; original in possession of his son Johan S. Reddekopp.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*
97. Frank H. Epp, "The True North," *Mennonite Reporter* (May 27, 1974): 13. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, p. 287, reports a membership of 50 in 1940.
98. Rev. Johan M. Reddekopp, Records.
99. Interview with Jake Peters, Winnipeg, 1983.
100. *Ältester* Abram Buhler, Bergthaler Church Records.
101. Certificate dated December 16, 1959; original in possession of Leonard Doell.
102. Based on correspondence of Rev. Henry A. Dyck, 1958-63, in possession of Leonard Doell.
103. Interview with Peter K. Fehr, Hague, February 1986.
104. Jacob G. Janzen in *Saskatchewan Valley News*, (November 14, 1968).
105. *Ältester* Buhler passed away on June 13, 1982 and was buried on June 16 from the Warman Bergthaler Church.