

BERGTHAL
HISTORICAL
SERIES

The Bergthaler Mennonites

by
Klaas Peters

The
Bergthaler
Mennonites

Bergthal Historical Series

General editor: Adolf Ens

1. *The Bergthal Colony*
by William Schroeder (1986)
2. *The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan*
by Leonard Doell (1987)
3. *The Bergthaler Mennonites*
by Klaas Peters (1988)

BERGTHAL
HISTORICAL
SERIES

The Bergthaler Mennonites

by
Klaas Peters

Translated from the German
by
Margaret Loewen Reimer

With a biography of Klaas Peters
by
Leonard Doell

CMBC Publications
Winnipeg, Manitoba
1988

CMBC Publications
600 Shaftesbury Boulevard
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3P 0M4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in connection with a review in magazine or newspaper.

Cover: Gerald Loewen

Cartography: Dianne Harms

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Peters, Klaas, 1855-1932.

The Bergthaler Mennonites

(Bergthal historical series ; 3)

Translation of: Die Bergthaler Mennoniten und deren Auswanderung aus Russland und Einwanderung in Manitoba.

Bibliography: p.

ISBN 0-920718-23-Z

1. Mennonites - Manitoba - History. 2. Peters, Klaas, 1855-1932. 3. Mennonites - Prairie Provinces - Biography. 4. Manitoba - Emigration and immigration - History. 5. Soviet Union - Emigration and immigration - History. 6. Immigrants - Manitoba - History. I. Doell, Leonard. II. Title. III. Series.

BX8118.6.M3P4713 1988 289.7'7127 C88-098058-3

Copyright 1988 by
Canadian Mennonite Bible College

Printed in Canada
by
Friesen Printers, Altona, Manitoba

Table of Contents

General Editor's Preface	iii
Books About the Bergthal People	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Translator's Preface	3
The Bergthaler Mennonites and Their Emigration from Russia to Manitoba	7
Notes	40
Klaas Peters (1855-1932): A Biography	41
Notes	83
Appendix I. Original (1890) Title and Opening Paragraphs	87
Appendix II. Original Conclusion (1890)	88
Appendix III. Original Text of Minister of the Interior	91

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 1836 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 Klaas Peters in the present volume.

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* pioneered 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).

In the early 1890s Bergthal people were among the first Menno-

nites to pioneer settlement along the Saskatchewan River in the Northwest Territories. Although this group retained spiritual and some organizational ties with the *Sommerfelder* and *Chortitzer* of Manitoba, their church took the name *Bergthaler*. The story of these pioneers is told by Leonard Doell in the second volume of this series. A decade later other Bergthal people from Manitoba pioneered in the Herbert area of Saskatchewan, founding a *Sommerfelder* church there.

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), by Otto Klassen's film "Pioniere im Chaco," and by Abe Warkentin's pictorial history (1987).

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) and more fully by Jack Heppner (1987).

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

March 1988

Books About the Bergthal People

- Adrian, J.D. *Die Entstehung der Rudnerweider Gemeinde 1936*. Winnipeg: by the author, 1958.
- Friesen, Martin. *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis: 50 Jahre Kolonie Menno*. Loma Plata: Verwaltung der Kolonie Menno, 1977.
- Friesen, Martin W. *Neue Heimat in der Chacowildnis*. Altona and Asunción: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd. and Chortitzer Komitee, 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.
- Heppner, Jack. *Search for Renewal. The Story of the Rudnerweider/EMMC*. Winnipeg: Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, 1987.
- Peters, Klaas. *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten und deren Auswanderung aus Rußland und Einwanderung in Manitoba*. Hillsboro, Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, [1925]. (Reprint: Steinbach, Manitoba, *Die Mennonitische Post*, 1983).
- Sawatzky, Harry Leonard. *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Warkentin, Abe. *Gäste und Fremdlinge. Strangers and Pilgrims*. Steinbach: *Die Mennonitische Post*/Derksen Printers Ltd., 1987.
- 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.

Acknowledgements

The contributions of the following are gratefully acknowledged:

- Margaret Loewen Reimer, associate editor of the *Mennonite Reporter*, for her labour of love in translating this book from the German [author of *Meditations on a Time and Place* (Hyperion, 1982) and *One Quilt, Many Pieces* (Mennonite Publishing Service, 1983)];
- Leonard Doell for researching and writing the biography of Klaas Peters [author of *The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan* (CMBC Publications, 1987)];
- Lawrence Klippensten, historian-archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, for his help in checking the translation and locating illustrative material for the book;
- William J. Kehler, retired amateur historian of Altona, for making available to the editor his independently prepared translation of Klaas Peters' book for purposes of making comparisons;
- Gerhard Ens, editor of *Der Bote*, for translating two of the poems;
- and to the Bergthaler-Sommerfelder-Chortitzer Committee for a financial contribution.

The Bergthaler Mennonites
and Their Emigration from Russia
to Manitoba

by Klaas Peters

Translator's Preface

I first stumbled across this fascinating little book in the late 1970s when I was looking for materials written by the first Mennonite settlers in Manitoba just over 100 years ago. A few terse diary entries, some letters and lists, one or two brief accounts of that momentous migration — these were all I could find in my cursory exploration. Then I came across a photocopy of a printed booklet in gothic script by one “Klaas Peters of Waldeck, Saskatchewan, currently of Greenville, Florida.” There was no date on the title-page, only the notice that the work had been published for the fifty-year Jubilee of the Berghaler Mennonite immigration.

Even with my rusty German, I soon realized that here was a rare gem of remarkable quality. To my surprise, I encountered not only a lively storyteller with an eye for detail, but a creative imagination quite beyond most Mennonite writing of that period.

But why had this work been hidden away in archives all these years? Why had no one made available to English-speaking children these marvellous tales of political intrigue, near disaster on Lake Superior and rebellion in a new land? I decided that I would translate this book into English myself, despite my elementary knowledge of German and lack of experience in translating. I completed a few passages from the work for *Meditations on a Place and Way of Life* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1982). Work on translating the rest of Peters' book began in earnest in late 1986. I wish to acknowledge the assistance that Waldemar Schroeder of Waterloo, Ontario provided in the initial stage.

The translation attempts to retain Peters' vocabulary and turn of phrase as literally as possible. The prevalent germanic passive voice has been changed into the active voice in many instances, and sentences have been divided into shorter units, but the tone of the work, I sincerely hope, remains Peters' own.

Klaas Peters' account of the Mennonite emigration from Russia in the 1870s first appeared in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* between January and April, 1890. The Mennonite Brethren Publishing House in Hillsboro, Kansas reprinted it in booklet form about 1925. The work received its third incarnation in 1983 when *Die Mennonitische*

Post reprinted it for German-speaking Mennonites in Canada and South America. This English translation, it is hoped, will make the work available to everyone, old and young, who enjoys stories from history and has a curiosity about Mennonite beginnings on the Canadian prairies.

Undoubtedly Peters' booklet is a valuable historical document. But even more gratifying to this translator is the artistic sensibility of the author. Peters has the eye and the ear of a writer: he displays a keen awareness of detail, a sensitivity to human emotions and an imagination that boldly reconstructs the events of his youth. There is a warmth and playfulness in his tone which sets his account apart from the usual sombre and often horrific tales of Mennonite migrations from Russia. (Peters' counterpart in a later migration is Anna Baerg who displays the same youthful honesty and curiosity in her delightful diary.)

Peters' account begins slowly. After he has set the stage, however, he begins to warm to his subject. He is at his best in the colourful vignettes he chooses to illustrate the larger story. Who could fail to be captivated by the comedy of the two Mennonite delegates rattling across the steppes in a decrepit wagon, by the poignancy of the day of farewell, or the high drama of the voyage across Lake Superior? Peters makes the most of his short episodes, especially the one depicting the sensational adventure with the Métis in which he pokes fun at all involved.

One of the interesting features of Peters' writing is his tendency to insert his own sharply-worded observations about the Mennonite psyche. He speaks respectfully of his people, extravagantly of the leaders, but he also distances himself with little barbs against Mennonite stubbornness, self-interest and suspicion of outsiders. His chilling observation that the Mennonites hoarded food on the ship until ordered to share not only reveals the desperation of the situation but implies moral failure in a moment of crisis. Given Peters' perspective, is there a hint of irony in the ending of the story? The book closes with a glowing account of material triumph in a new land. Honesty and industry have brought wealth and independence to the Mennonites. What better proof that the migration was the will of God?

No matter how one interprets Peters' conclusion, the rapid development and success of the new settlement is indeed startling. The outcome of the story has such an impact because Peters has portrayed not only the tremendous external difficulties, but the obstacles arising out of the Mennonite spirit itself — the petty complain-

ing and distrust of leaders, the inequities of “class” among the settlers, the sense of superiority to outsiders. But it is these same annoying characteristics, implies the writer, that enable the new settlers to survive the terrible trials of the first few years. Given his appreciation of human frailty, perhaps Peters is justified in gloating just a bit at the outcome of it all.

Margaret Loewen Reimer
January 1988

The Bergthaler Mennonites and Their Emigration from Russia to Manitoba

After the great emigration of the Bergthaler Mennonites from South Russia, and the survival of the first years of pioneer life in Manitoba, several of the leaders expressed their desire that these important events be recorded as accurately as possible, and that these records be printed and preserved for the next generation. But who would do the recording? This was no small task. But where there is a will, there is a way, and since this writer was a 19-year-old youth during the emigration of 1875, and had a rather good memory at his disposal, I promised to write such an account on the condition that our minister at the time, Heinrich Wiebe — the true soul of the emigration and a leader and co-worker in all aspects of it — would give me all the particulars.

So I set to work, making notes about all the events which occurred during the great emigration and I am now prepared to have them printed. This printing is done at the request of many friends, including some, now advanced in age, who participated in all the hardships of that time, and many who can no longer remember the great adventure but would like to hear some of the details. And so we have decided to publish the whole story in the newspaper on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the emigration.¹

I. Introduction

America, as you know, consists of two large land masses, North and South America, joined only by a narrow strip of land. Between these two lie four large and a group of smaller islands called the West Indies. Ordinarily, when we speak about the America to which many thousands of Europeans immigrate annually, we mean North America. For a long time explorers ignored this North America because it appeared to consist entirely of impenetrable forest and wilderness but contained no gold, which the other countries of the Americas had, and which was the only thing that really attracted the explorers.

The first immigrants (the English) who settled on the shores of North America encountered so much animosity from the wild Indians that they could not endure it and soon had to return to their homeland. Only in the seventeenth century was it possible to establish permanent settlements. Other nations also began to direct their attention to the new world. Beginning with the 18th century, immigration increased steadily. Each year many thousands of English, Scottish, Irish, German, French and other European peoples came to America's shores. All those who suffered oppression, persecution or hardship in the old world sought in this land of civil and religious liberty a free home. Finally, long after the virgin forests of the eastern states and Lower Canada had been cleared and the land put to use, the attention of Mennonites in Russia was also directed toward America.

II. Motive for Emigration

It was not hardship or persecution in the Fatherland that motivated us to cross the vast ocean to a distant land, but the fact that we were soon to lose our exemption from military service which we had enjoyed until that time according to the *Privilegium* guaranteed by Empress Catherine and maintained under Emperor Paul.

In 1872, at the wish of the Russian nobility, a new law was implemented throughout the tsarist empire obligating all subjects, regardless of rank or religion, to render military service.² This new constitution had considerable impact on the Mennonites who until then had been exempted from military service under the protection of the *Privilegium*. Who would have thought that this exemption would ever be taken away, since it had been promised in perpetuity. Now it seemed likely that the agreement concerning young men subject to military service would undergo significant changes, and that our young men also would no longer be exempt. Consequently, the brotherhood was seriously concerned. Ministers from various colonies gathered to discuss the matter.

Finally, hopeful of the noble Tsar Alexander II's goodwill, a delegation was sent to St. Petersburg to remind the absolute ruler and *Landesvater* of our *Privilegium*, and to entreat him in the name of all the Mennonites to continue the promised exemption from military service. What these delegates actually accomplished in St. Petersburg, I do not know. This much, however, is certain: in the new military law then nearing completion, nothing was changed to

favour the Mennonites. Even the good tsar did not dare to continue to protect us because he would have been acting against the will of the people and the decision of his leading counsellors. Baron Meden, a capable and respected writer, was entrusted with the wording of this decree and had to follow precisely the instructions given to him in accordance with the decisions of the tsar's counsellors. Thus, there was no one in the whole Russian empire who could have changed the situation. The law was finalized and implemented.

Meanwhile, the Mennonites drew up a petition and sent it to the tsarina who happened to be travelling in the Crimea. Much as the *Landesmutter* would have liked to support the cause of her German children, it was not within her power to do so, for what the tsar could not do for us, the tsarina could not do either. So all our pleading remained unheard in the Russian court, and all the earnest petitions which we had placed before the supreme authority in the land fell on deaf ears. Our hopes were now completely dashed and many of us were convinced that, for better or for worse, we would have to submit to the inevitable. Others felt that the time had come to move on, further east, or southward to the land of Canaan — the land where once the light of the gospel had brightly shone, but which is now enveloped by the pale light of the crescent moon. Others had still another idea: they proposed a move to America to which many thousands of emigrants make their way each year to settle on the boundless North American prairies.

This proposal sounded incredible to us. It seemed incomprehensible that it might be possible for all of us to move to America — there were many poor and needy people among us, America was very far away, and the trip would be very costly. America as a name was familiar to us, but what a world it conjured up for many! Its advanced, almost unbelievably rapid development was unknown to us, as it still is to thousands in Europe today. From various people who had already discovered something about America through their reading, we learned that the natives of this continent were dark-skinned Indians who were hunters by profession and even cannibals. To me and to many others this America appeared to be a true wilderness, where only savages lived. Again and again it seemed that emigration would never take place. When the tsar published a manifesto favouring certain religious groups by allowing them forestry service instead of military service, the majority of the Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonites decided to stay in their beloved homeland. Many of them, however, including the entire Bergthal Colony, preferred emigration to America.

III. Preparing to Emigrate: The Journey of the Delegates

Many obstacles stood in the way of our undertaking; not everyone was immediately ready to emigrate. Many would have been much happier if nothing would have come of the whole emigration. The matter also required serious deliberation. How could one know whether we would find good land in America or on what terms we would be admitted? But the leaders of our church, who thought that emigration was in our best interest, surmounted, with divine guidance, all obstacles that stood in the way. But how could one become more familiar with the conditions in America? This was also a serious question. Here too our leaders soon obtained information. Heinrich Wiebe, a minister of our church, a man of mature judgement in this matter and also a capable speaker, was earnestly concerned to find a country with complete freedom of conscience and religion. Since we could not get enough information about America in our area, Rev. Wiebe went to the city of Berdjansk to discuss this important matter with the brethren there. The men there, Leonhard Sudermann and Cornelius Jansen, known as Consul Jansen because he had been a German consul, knew more about making inquiries. It was especially easy for Mr. Jansen because he was very knowledgeable and had a command of the English language. He wrote, or had already written, to the English government asking whether we would be permitted to settle and live in accordance with our Christian faith in one of their overseas territories. The English government would have been quite willing to have us settle in Canada, but would have nothing to do with the matter unless the Russian government gave us complete freedom to emigrate. Accordingly, the English government instructed its ambassador in St. Petersburg to inquire of the Russian government whether the Mennonites were free to emigrate. The ambassador contacted Minister Todleben who explained that we were a free people and that nothing stood in the way of our emigrating, much as they would like to see us remain in the country.

We human beings are always inclined to think that we plan and carry out our important affairs by ourselves, especially when things go well. But one should frequently pause to consider how Divine Providence uses ordinary means to guide us so wonderfully to the proper course. And one can also observe that our loving God always uses as his instruments for great tasks those people who are able to work most effectively for the wellbeing of humankind. Thus in 1872, when we in the Bergthal Colony were anxiously wondering where



William Hespeler, 1830-1921

Photo: Manitoba Archives

we would find a point of contact to obtain reliable information about America, Mr. William Hespeler, our highly esteemed friend, visited his home in Baden, Germany. There he became acquainted with the Russian Count Menchikow who was spending time in his castle in Baden. He informed Mr. Hespeler that because of a new imperial decree, the Mennonites in Russia — who had, since emigrating from Germany, enjoyed certain privileges which might now be withdrawn — were considering emigration to America. Since Mr. Hespeler had complete confidence in the information he had received from Count Menchikow, he wrote to the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John A. MacDonalld in Ottawa, whom he knew personally, and submitted the matter for his consideration. After considerable time, Mr. Hespeler received a letter from the Minister of Immigration and Agriculture, John Henry Pope, who informed him that the government had also become aware of the emigration of the Mennonites from South Russia through the foreign office in London via a telegram from British Consul James Zahrab in Berdjansk as well as a letter from Mr. Cornelius Jansen, Berdjansk.

In May of the same year Mr. Hespeler was asked by the Canadian government to visit the Mennonite settlement in South Russia. He left Germany for Russia in the beginning of July. Because his passport from the foreign office in London was delayed, he only arrived in Berdjansk on July 22. His first visit was with the British consul, Mr.

James Zahrab, who introduced him to several leading Mennonites: Cornelius Jansen, former Prussian consul, Leonhard Sudermann and Peter Lohrenz. They gave Mr. Hespeler the warmest reception. Two days after his arrival in Berdjansk, these men took him to the colonies to visit, among others, Peter Schmidt (Steinbach), Buhler, Johannes Weber, Jakob Boese (Halbstadt), Jakob Dick (Rosenhoff), Heinrich Willems (Bolscha). On this trip Mr. Hespeler also met our colony secretary, Mr. Jakob Friesen of the Bergthal Colony, known as Secretary Friesen, a faithful and upright assistant in emigration matters to our elderly *Oberschulz* Jakob Peters and to Rev. Heinrich Wiebe. It was very important that the secretary and agent of our Bergthal Colony become personally acquainted with Mr. Hespeler right from the beginning. After Mr. Hespeler had visited several villages in the Molotschna, he was informed that the police were making inquiries about his stay and he was advised to leave the colony. He travelled back to Odessa and left for Germany on August 8.

From Germany Mr. Hespeler entered into correspondence with our friends Cornelius Jansen, Leonhard Sudermann, the elderly *Oberschulz* Jakob Peters and Rev. Heinrich Wiebe. This correspondence led to a meeting of our community leaders — Jakob Peters, Wiebe, Sudermann and Buhler — during the first week of November, 1872 in Odessa. Mr. Hespeler took the opportunity to suggest that we send several delegates to Canada in the spring of 1873, at the expense of the Canadian government, to look for sufficient land for a large settlement. This proposal was promptly accepted and, as the reader will see later, carried out. Our dear old friend, Mr. Hespeler, came to South Russia twice in connection with this important emigration issue, to inform our leaders and administrators about conditions in Canada.

Back to the preparation in our colonies. The way was now open for our departure. The Canadian government had offered us much good land and full civil liberties; now it was up to us to plan how to set in motion a mass emigration. First, we decided to send a deputation to America to select a tract of land suitable for our purposes and have it reserved. The brethren of the whole church gathered in the church in Bergthal to elect the delegates. Rev. Heinrich Wiebe and the elderly *Oberschulz* Jakob Peters received the majority of votes and were chosen as delegates. They now had to prepare for the momentous journey ahead of them; as soon as they were ready, they would be sent out to explore a small part of the new world. On the last Sunday before their departure, Rev. H. Wiebe gave a farewell

sermon in the church. Dear old Peters also spoke moving words of farewell to the congregation. Wishes for a successful and happy journey followed, not expressed in words by all, but deeply felt by everyone.

On February 26, 1873, the delegates began their long journey to distant America, accompanied by Cornelius Buhr who owned an estate on the so-called "Don side" and wished to go along at his own expense. They were taken to the Nikolaiof railway station on the Taganrog and Charkow route; from here the train carried them rapidly toward their distant goal. They travelled across the northern part of Russia and Germany to Hamburg and across the North Sea to England. Here they had to wait almost a week for the next steamship to take them across the ocean. After an eleven-day sea voyage from Liverpool, they reached America's shores, landing safely in Halifax. From here they continued their journey by train to Montreal. A German immigration organization was waiting for them here and welcomed them most cordially. After their stopover in Montreal, the delegates travelled further westward on the Grand Trunk Railway. The next stop was Berlin, Ontario where they consulted with the local Mennonites.

Because our emissaries were to travel through the United States as well as Canada, they decided to go south first and then to Manitoba. They journeyed from Berlin (now Kitchener) via Chicago to the midwestern states, looking for a suitable piece of land for settlement in Nebraska, Colorado and other states. From Kansas they went across Indian territory further south to Houston in southern Texas. Everywhere they searched for good, arable land, which they found in some places, but a tract suitable for a large settlement could not be found. After touring Texas, the delegates turned north again.

It had been arranged that they would meet with other delegates from South Russia in St. Paul, Minnesota, and so they did. The two parties travelled together to Manitoba to look at the territories offered by the Canadian government. All the delegates made their headquarters in Winnipeg, then still a very small town carrying the name of the Hudson Bay Co., "Fort Garry." From here they set out in various directions to visit the countryside. At that time Manitoba still had no railway service at all, and it was not known how soon railways would be built, whereas in the United States satisfactory service was already available. For this reason the brethren Sudermann, Buller, Wilhelm Ewert from Prussia, Schrag, Paul and Lohrenz Tschetter, Unruh and J.F. Funk from Elkhart, who was also along, decided to look at land in the United States for the people they represented. But

In the evening the Bergthaler deputies, Jacob Peters, the village mayor (Ober-schulz), Henry Wiebe, a minister, and Cornelius Boer came to our room.³⁶ Oh how glad we were to see them. It seemed to me that they were of my own. They had already visited many parts of the country, but as yet had not found homes. They had been in the South in the state of Texas and informed us that people in that state were already harvesting wheat, but they did not like that country. After talking over many matters, we retired to our rooms for the night.

Friday, May 25. Arose well, thanks only to God, the Almighty for His Fatherly protection and guidance. The Bergthaler brethren came to our room. We asked them to travel with us, but they said that they had already promised to join the Molotschna brethren who were to meet them in the city.³⁷ In the morning we proceeded to the station, Wiebe helping me to carry my baggage. On the way we talked about non-resistance and how he liked the country here. He said the country did not appeal much to him and that after all the question of military service is the most important. He thought that it would not be possible to secure total exemption from military service in the United States, but that the English government would be more liberal and grant a Charter guaranteeing exemption from military service which was better than what this country could offer. He spoke very sensibly, so that I immediately learned to love him. He said that one should not only consider the land question but also not forget the matter of freedom, for that is the reason why we came to this country and are making this long journey.

Excerpts from the 24 and 25 May 1873 entries in the diary of Hutterite delegate Paul Tschetter, translated by J.M. Hofer, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 5 (July 1931):199.

our delegates, Peters and Wiebe, as well as Cornelius Toews and David Klassen, who had been sent by the *Kleine Gemeinde*, decided to have land reserved in Manitoba. There were many poor people among us, making it unsuitable to settle on land where every second section had to be bought from the railway company, as was the case in the United States.

At this point I must mention the remarkable adventure which the last four men mentioned above and their fellow travellers experienced on the way from Winnipeg to the west. The event is part of the remarkable nature of the whole journey and it could have been disastrous. As they were crossing the Whitehorse Plains, about 30 miles from Winnipeg, on their return from the west — it happened to be a Catholic holiday — they met a Métis who had obviously celebrated his holiday too close to the *Schnaps* bottle. He came riding out of the woods on horseback and tried in various ways to

begin an argument with one of the drivers. The driver, however, got upset and did not put up with the teasing for very long. In his anger he gave the Métis a sound lash across the leather jacket with his supple whip. That was too much for the drunk man. Gnashing his teeth, he wanted to leap on his enemy, but he feared the superior strength of the travellers. Then he threatened to shoot his opponent, but he knew this was not advisable either for he would immediately have been seized by the drivers of the other wagons. Swearing bloody revenge, he galloped off towards the woods to get help, determined to avenge himself by killing his assailant, the Englishman, who had mistreated him on his own hunting grounds. The travellers knew that they were now in a tight spot. It was certain that a vengeful, more-or-less drunken mob would soon be upon them. The drivers now hurried to reach the hotel or "Stopping House" which was not far away. Until now they had been moving along at a leisurely pace in order to earn as much money from the government as possible for the use of their vehicles. They reached the place just in time, quickly unhitched the horses and secured everything. The Russian delegates, as well as Mr. William Hespeler, the leader of this expedition, were locked into a safe room in the hotel; the drivers, surveyors, and the others in the party also made sure they were safe.

No sooner was everything in order when vengeful figures emerged from all sides. The hotel was quickly filled with long-haired, dark characters who angrily demanded the surrender of the travellers who had mistreated their brother. The hotel keeper protested that the man who had struck their brother was not even lodged with him. But his protests were in vain; the demands of the bloodthirsty mob became more and more stormy. Their terrifying uproar rose to cries of rage and their violent knocking and banging increased, threatening to break down the locked doors by force. It almost seemed as though the hotel keeper would not be able to calm down the rebellious mob. How might our friends in the locked room have felt that night? Certainly they will not have been without fear because they did not know whether the mob would finally force itself into their room.

Rev. Wiebe reproached Mr. Hespeler about the inconsiderate behaviour of the driver. "I am leaving you at once and turning my back on Manitoba," he said, "for such things have never happened to us before." "You would leave us at this critical moment? That would be brave indeed!" answered Mr. Hespeler. "As soon as you step outside you will be cut down — this gang doesn't really care who is actually guilty but demands everyone's blood." With that Mr. Hes-

peler planted himself at the door armed for battle with fire (revolver) and dagger (sword), ready to prevent anyone who dared to break down the door from entering the room. Asked whether he would really shoot, Mr. Hespeler answered in a firm voice, "I am fighting for my children (he was a widower) and for myself as long as there is life in me, and will shoot down any intruder." Thus they spent a long, dreadful night without sleep, cut off from all human aid.

But help was on the way. When the uproar of the rebels had calmed down a bit, Mr. Hespeler summoned the hotel keeper and handed him a note for Governor Morris in Winnipeg. The hotel keeper gave the note to one of the drivers who quickly mounted a horse and delivered the plea for help for the captive delegates to Fort Garry. This obviously took some time; the distance to Winnipeg, about 30 miles, is not covered quickly. The man must have made good time, however, because the next morning Colonel Osborn Smith with 30 soldiers arrived at White Horse Plains to free our beleaguered friends and provide further protection. The attackers had left before the soldiers arrived, but they were tracked down by the mounted militia. Four of them were taken to Winnipeg as prisoners where they received the punishment they deserved. The delegates were free again and reached Fort Garry (now Winnipeg) on July 2. Had our brethren been murdered, nothing would have come of the whole emigration of the Bergthal Colony. However, God who is always present, protected them in the wilderness just as he had protected them everywhere else, on water and on land. After they had reached their destination and arranged for the immigration, they set out for home.

The group stopped over with the Mennonites in Ontario on the way back to discuss the possibility of a loan which would no doubt be needed for the new settlement. They also made a stopover in Ottawa, the country's capital, to negotiate important matters with government officials. At the request of Minister Pope, one person was elected to represent the Mennonite immigrants. Naturally, Mr. Hespeler was chosen, for he had already accompanied the delegates throughout the country as interpreter and guide. After everything possible had been arranged in Ottawa, they continued on their journey home. They travelled from Ottawa to New York where they boarded a North German Lloyd steamer which took them safely across the ocean to Hamburg. From Hamburg they travelled by train to the Nikolai station from which they had departed six months earlier on their momentous journey.

IV. Preparing for Emigration

What a joyful reunion there was when the brethren arrived home safe and sound after many troubles and difficulties! Everyone had anxiously been awaiting the hour of their return. When word came: "The delegates are home," there was a flurry of questions and telling of stories about the new world such as we had never experienced before. Land for a new settlement had been found and reserved on the west as well as the east side of the Red River. On our arrival each one of us would be able to establish himself on one of the reserves — wherever it suited him. Initially the east reserve was preferred because enough wood was available there.

After the brethren Peters and Wiebe had expressed their views about America to the church and explained that every male age eighteen and over could have a free homestead of 160 acres and could buy another 160 acres nearby for one dollar an acre, and that settlers could live on individual farms or in villages as they wished, without anyone having to perform military service, a "Wanderlust" seized many and it was not long before a large majority of us had decided to move to America. But now the work really began for our good leaders. They had to decide how to sell our homesteads — our land still belonged to the Crown. They had to arrange passports for emigrating and many other things, all requiring trips to centres both near and far away. One of these trips took Peters and Wiebe to the regional capital, Ekaterinoslav, to speak to the governor about very significant aspects of our emigration. Instead of making the journey of three hundred or so *Werst* on wagons, they were advised to take a steamer from Mariupol to Taganrog, and then the Taganrog-Kharkov train to Lasavoja, from where they could travel on the recently completed railroad to Ekaterinoslav.

How disappointed they were when they arrived at Losavoja only to discover that the new railway to Ekaterinoslav was not completed — in fact, only the embankment was finished. The situation was extremely discouraging for they were now further from their destination than they had been at home. Had the railway expert, on whose advice they had taken this route, been present, he would certainly have received a few reprimanding words from his *Oberschulz* for his invented information.

Now they had to rent a vehicle, no small task in a region where horses were very scarce. Finally they found a Russian who owned a pair of horses and they quickly made a deal. But what wretched nags the fellow had and what an awful wagon! It was hardly a wagon at all, only a *Powos* which didn't even have a *Paschick* — a kind of wagon

box — only several boards thrown together, some significantly longer than others. The owner of the vehicle sat in front and drove the wagon; behind him sat his disgruntled passengers on a bundle of hay, glumly pondering their situation.

While we at home were thinking the two men had already arrived in Ekaterinslav in a passenger train, they were rattling slowly across the Russian steppes on a miserable wagon of boards, replacing a board every once in a while because they were all loose, and covering only a few *Werst* in a day. What a comical sight! They could have left home in a fine German vehicle that would have been significantly cheaper than the one they were now using. Yet these were men who knew how to make the best of the situation. Finally they did arrive at their destination and carried out their business with the governor.

After this it was not long until we knew definitely that the emigration would take place. Some began to find Russian buyers for their belongings — there were no buyers among our people, only sellers. There was much haggling and bargaining, like the *Khokhol* [peasant women] do it; if a dollar was offered, one promised to throw in a few more things for two dollars before the deal was finally closed.

Since it would be to our advantage if not everyone would leave in the same year but rather at different times, the emigration period was set at three years. The first party was to leave in 1874, the second in 1875, and the third and last in 1876. To all that, the *Ältester*, leaders and brethren of the church community decided, the Lord gave his blessing.

V. The Emigration

It was a beautiful, clear day in mid-June, 1874. Many people were bustling about the streets of our villages. No one asked what all this commotion was about — everyone knew that today the first Mennonite emigrants were setting out on their great journey to America. All the movement to and fro, from one friend and neighbour to another, was to see each other once more, perhaps for the last time, to say goodbye and to wish the travellers a safe journey. It was June 16 when the first band of emigrants said farewell to their friends who were remaining behind and to their beloved homeland. This day will surely remain an unforgettable one for many. No one had suspected how difficult the parting would be. As the day had drawn nearer and nearer, doubts and fears had grown stronger. Often the anxious question was repeated: “Will you, who are so dear to us, really

follow us next year to the new land so that we will see each other again and be able to welcome you with joy into our new homes?" Always came the solemn promise that, God willing, all would follow after.

The day of farewell turned out to be a day of mourning. The faces of the parting friends reminded one of the words of Jesus: "A little while, and ye shall not see me." Solemnity and sorrow filled each heart. The trunks and bedrolls were already packed and placed on the waiting wagons which would take the travellers to the railway station. Friends and neighbours arrived to say goodbye. At first, the crowded homes are filled with noisy activity. Those remaining behind warn their loved ones to keep constant watch during the trip so as not to forget or neglect anything, and in particular to keep close watch over the little children so that none of them get lost. But after awhile the homes become completely silent. No one dares speak any more — the moment of parting has come. Everyone waits for the final words of their departing friends. How heavily they weigh upon each heart! Deep pain and sorrow is written on every face. Then the head of the family promises to be steadfast. Overcome with sadness and forcing back the tears, he speaks: "As God has helped us thus far, so he will continue to help us. With this hope let us part from one another and begin our long journey. May God, the mighty ruler and preserver of all things, grant that we see each other again on the other side of the sea! But should divine providence ordain otherwise, and have something else in store for us, we still hope to see one another again beyond the sea of stars, before the throne of our creator where there will be no more painful parting." With these and similar words we parted. For some the parting was probably only a few tear-choked words, a heart-felt handshake and a brotherly kiss. Most painful was the farewell of parents who could hardly tear themselves away from their children. Their friends and drivers had to urge them to hurry for the moment of departure had arrived.

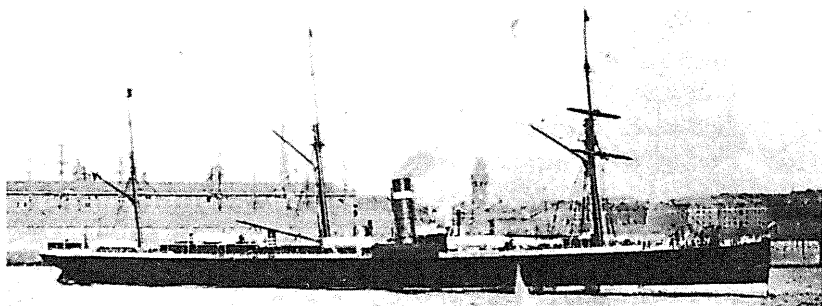
Time moves on, and so these sad scenes also came to an end. Soon all the travellers were on their way to the Nikolaiof train station at Taganrog where the emigrants from the five villages of our Bergthal Colony gathered to wait for the train that would take them to the coast. There they sat, awaiting the arrival of the train, pondering their situation with heavy hearts. Suddenly there was a great commotion: "The train is coming! The train is coming!" Everyone grabbed his hand luggage, which consisted mainly of a travelling bag hung over the shoulder with a strap, took the little children by the hand and stood ready to board the train when the signal would

be sounded. Now they could see the train roaring up at an incredible speed, a thick pillar of smoke and steam pouring out of its smoke-stack. It was a magnificent sight for those who had never seen a train before. Most of the emigrants knew about trains, but only by hearsay. As the monster came to a halt it gave everyone quite a fright — as it stopped it roared fiercely and spewed thick clouds of steam in all directions. Then came the call to board. Hardly had the confused emigrants managed to enter the railway cars when the train roared away with its human cargo. I should mention here that in the summer of 1874, not one but three trains of emigrants left, departing at one- or two-day intervals.

Our villages experienced some changes after the first emigrants left. The vacated houses received other occupants. The grainfields — that is, the grain still standing in the fields — had been sold en masse by the departing owners, and other villagers who were preparing to leave sold as soon as there was an opportunity. This was a very different life from what we were used to.

The fall of 1874 was approaching. The days grew shorter, as did the time remaining for the second party of emigrants who were to leave for America during the fall. This group was small — about 22 or 23 families. They intended to stay with fellow Germans somewhere in America over the winter and to earn their keep, going on to Manitoba as soon as possible the next spring. On September 12 they said farewell to their beloved homeland and their many friends. *Ältester* Gerhard Wiebe and Bernhard Klippenstein from the village of Bergthal accompanied this small group to Hamburg. After hearty farewells, the two *Älteste* returned to their homes while the others continued their journey.

It is well known that in the fall the storms on the Atlantic Ocean are much more frequent and more violent than in the summer months. Our brothers and sisters just beginning their journey had no idea what was ahead of them. They had heard of seasickness but really had no notion of what it was like. They were scarcely out of the mouth of the Elbe when the ship began to sway in earnest. Gradually the strong wind turned into a storm which became steadily stronger. The ship's crew began to falter — they could not work properly anymore because they had to hang onto something at each step. At one point the bow of the ship shoots high into the air, then plunges down into the depths, only to be carried upward again by another wave. Thus the small ship danced on the foaming waves until finally, after a long, difficult struggle, it reached the Humber River along which it calmly made its way to Hull. After a short stopover in



S.S. Sardinian. *Oberschultz* Jacob Peters and 508 other Mennonites crossed the Atlantic on this ship in July 1876.

Photo: Public Archives of Canada

England, the travellers stood on the landing dock in Liverpool harbour to continue their journey across the Atlantic Ocean in a huge ocean steamer. They faced the journey before them with anxious hearts.

During the boarding of the small harbour steamer which was to take them to the large ship, a terrible incident took place. Dear old Johann Schroeder, whose son was leading him by the hand because he was blind, slipped from the gangplank and fell into the water. A sailor immediately dived in after Schroeder and brought him alive and unhurt to the surface, where strong arms helped them both to dry land.

After the large steamship had taken on its cargo and passengers, it majestically set out on the mighty watery waste. But not for long was the iron colossus permitted to swim along so majestically; already on the day of departure the waves began to mount. An able captain, however, who knows how to guide his ship, does not ask whether the sea is rough or smooth. His attitude is:

Auf, Matrosen, die Anker gelichtet!

Die Segel gespannt und den Kompaß gerichtet!

Nun, Festland, adieu!

Noch heute geht's in die wogende See!

Arise, sailors, weigh the anchor!

Hoist the sails and point the compass!

Mainland, farewell.

Today we're away on the billowing sea!

The ship on which the emigrants found themselves, though it was

big and heavy, was soon tossed to and fro by the wild waves as though it were a light feather.

*Hoch zischt am Kiel der Wogenschaum,
Und leckt herein zum Schiffesraum,
Und lauter schnaubt des Windes Wut,
Und wilder braust und wogt die Flut;
Bald rast der Kiel in hoher Luft,
Bald stürzt er jählings in die Kluft;
Die Schrecken aller werden wach,
Ringsum Gebeul, Gebrüll, Gekrach.*

High on the keel the foaming billows hiss,
And trickle into the ship's hold,
And louder blows the raging wind,
And wilder roars and heaves the flood;
The keel rears wildly into the air,
Then plunges violently into the cleft;
Everyone's fears are awakened,
All around is howling, roaring, crashing.

Even the boldest, most experienced sailor cannot remain indifferent in such circumstances. He is in danger of being washed overboard at any moment. Almost all of us had to endure some storms on our journey, but no group suffered as much as this September one. Finally, after a long, uninterrupted battle with the wild, heaving sea, they landed at Port Levis in the province of Quebec, opposite Quebec City. On a Thursday, just four weeks after leaving home and fourteen days out of Liverpool, they were allowed to stand on solid ground once more.

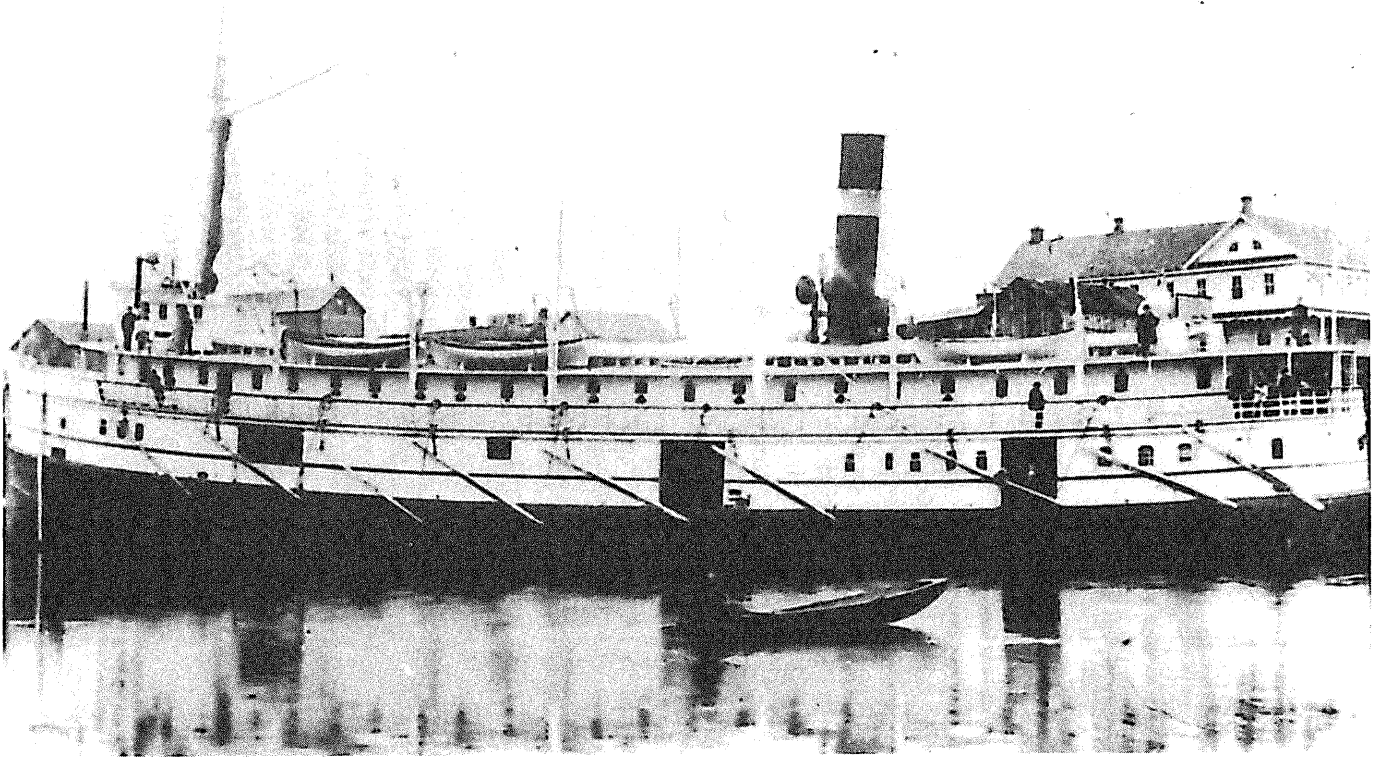
From Quebec they travelled westward on the Grand Trunk Railway to Ontario where they planned to spend the winter. Arriving in Toronto, they met several Mennonites who had come from Markham Township to welcome the immigrants from southern Russia. When they learned that the immigrants wanted to stay over the winter, they decided to take a few families with them to Markham to arrange work and winter quarters among the German-speaking people. The others travelled 95 miles further to Berlin where they were distributed, like products at a market, among the rural people. One family after another was taken from the railway station until they were all dispersed among the farmers in the vicinity of Berlin and Waterloo. One should add that they thoroughly enjoyed their stay with the Germans. With the coming of spring, 1875, they all assembled again and, in accordance with their plan, set out together

on their trip to Manitoba.

In the summer of 1875, large groups of travellers again set out on the journey from Russia to America, leaving our villages almost empty. Everything looked downright deserted and uninviting. The houses of the hired workers (*Anwohner*) had all been sold to the Russians and dismantled. Half of the village of Bergthal, the most beautiful village, burned to the ground shortly before we left. (My mother, brothers and sisters and I left with this group.) The whole village looked like a rubbish heap and a pile of ruins. Rebuilding the farm houses was out of the question because most of the Mennonite owners had already left for America. But the homesteads of the colony could not be sold individually, so several men from the community were authorized to organize a mass sale and to bring the proceeds with them to America when the transaction was completed. All the long voyages of the emigrants, usually lasting seven weeks, went well without exception, even though one group suffered more at sea than the others. A few families from nearly all the four groups which left in the summer of 1875 stayed over with German Mennonites in Ontario for a year to earn some money. Among these were the writer with his mother and siblings.

With the arrival of spring, 1876, these families began to prepare for their trip to Manitoba. Only a few decided to remain in Ontario over the summer. In May, the rest of the immigrants from around Markham and Berlin gathered to make the trip to Manitoba, their new home, together. This journey, however, would not proceed so smoothly.

At Sarnia we boarded the ship "Ontario" and set out, completely carefree, on Lake Huron in this lovely steamer. We had no idea that we were hurrying toward a 15-day imprisonment. The right time of year for lake travel, of course, had not yet arrived. Soon we encountered a lot of drifting ice — the ice floes passed so close to our ship that we could hear the peculiar noise they made. Even though our ship could not move ahead at full speed in this ice, we had no idea that we could actually be brought to a complete standstill. When we got to Lake Superior, we found the ice floes becoming even thicker. Using full steam power, the captain was able to push the ship through a little further. But one evening, about 20 miles from Duluth, we got completely stuck. When we surveyed the scene next morning, we discovered that we were surrounded by miles of ice in all directions. The captain took measurements and found that the ice was 15 feet thick. Day after day we hoped that we would get free, but our hopes were always discouraged. The ship's steam engine was set



The S.S. *Ontario*, built 1874 at Chatham, Ontario.

Photo: Great Lakes Historical Society/Provincial Archives of Manitoba

going with such power that the whole ship vibrated, but it remained caught, unable to move forward or backward.

On the tenth day of our captivity, after many futile attempts by the crew to get free, starvation threatened the many passengers and crew — no more provisions were available. We Germans had brought along a considerable amount of food from our friends in Ontario. There were even some fortunate ones among us who had a barrel of flour or a sack of potatoes or a case of meat on board which was meant to tide them over during the early days of settlement. We purchased this food from them and, after the ship's cook had baked or fried some of it, divided it among us piece by piece. To be sure, there was only a little piece for each family — a child could have eaten it all by himself — but at least it was something. The crew and the English and French passengers were much worse off. They had nothing at all to eat. One day the captain came to us and demanded that we give food to any passengers who asked for it. After all, they would beg for food only when hunger pains drove them to it. And if they received nothing with polite requests, they might resort to force. Our situation was getting increasingly desperate. We could hear children crying in every corner, begging their parents for bread.

On the fourteenth day, when even our reserves were gone, the captain declared that this could not go on much longer. He was losing all courage and hope himself, not having eaten anything for several days, and the ship's coal would only last another two days. After that, should a wind arise, our ship would be a mere toy for the waves, unable to offer any resistance, and we would be dashed to pieces on the next rock.

It was decided that several people would be sent out across the ice to bring back help from land, if possible. This was as dangerous as it was daring, for at any moment someone might slip between the ice floes and disappear. The expedition was made up of the captain of the second watch, the second helmsman and another two crewmen. These four tied themselves together with a long rope, one at each end and two in the middle so that one man always walked several feet ahead of the other. In addition, each one carried a long, narrow board under his right arm to hang onto, should he slip between the ice floes, until his companions could pull him up by the rope. It was a sad sight to see these people step off the ship and set out on their trip across the ice. It was not to be taken for granted that these men, weakened by hunger, would reach the shore 15 or 20 miles away. They themselves had little hope, but something had to be done or at least attempted. But these four crewmen were not

the only ones who risked their lives in this way. Fifteen of the French passengers followed them, preferring such a death to dying of hunger on the ship.

We stood gazing after the sorry group for a long time, now 19 men, hoping with all our hearts that, with God's help, they might safely reach the shore. The captain, who led the way, kept falling through the ice, saved only by hanging on to his life-board. The others could walk more confidently because they followed in the tracks of the leader. The expedition set out shortly before noon. Toward evening one of the passengers came back to the ship totally exhausted. He had not been able to keep up with the others and realized that because he was so weak he would never reach the shore. The man was too tired to speak. At 11 o'clock that night the nightwatchman caught sight of the pre-arranged signal fire from the land. It was a sign that the courageous hikers had reached the shore. But this contributed little or nothing to our rescue. There was only one ship at Duluth and it could not get through to us any more than we to the shore. But the good Lord helped us at the right time in an indirect way.

During the fourteenth night of our confinement, a small thundercloud passed over us, accompanied by a fairly strong wind. This loosened the ice a little and by next morning we saw open water before us. With renewed hope and courage, our captain was determined to do the utmost to get the ship free. He applied various tactics. The passengers were all ordered to the rear of the ship so that the propellers would be deeper in the water. The engine worked with all its might, first forward, then backward, causing the ship to vibrate. Whenever an ice floe came into contact with the propeller, it was dashed to pieces and hurled aside as though it weighed only a few pounds.

Suddenly there was a jolt, and then a cry: "The ship is moving!" Or was it only an illusion? The engine exerted all its power and again the ship moved backward. Now there was no doubt — it was free. The ship nosed forward toward one of the patches of open water which we saw before us. True, it moved very slowly, but it moved nevertheless, and after several hours of great effort we reached navigable waters. Here we stopped to await the arrival of two other ships which had been stuck nearby for a long time as well. These were the "Asia" and the "Manitoba," also belonging to the Lake Superior Transit Company. When our ship came alongside the "Asia," a barrel of flour was immediately rolled onto our ship. It was not long before it was transformed into something edible to satisfy

the hungry.

The captain decided that the "Ontario," on which we were travelling, should go first because it was the strongest ship; the other two would assist from the rear. Together we would work our way to Duluth, a feat which would have been impossible for one ship by itself. We had proceeded hardly half a mile before the ice was as thick as the place we had been caught. At this point the united effort of the three ships began. Our "Ontario" rammed with full force into the ice until it was stuck. Then the "Asia" and "Manitoba" pushed forward until they too could not go any further. Now the ships were lashed together and worked their way backwards until the first ship was free. Then the attack was repeated.

It is almost impossible to describe how relentlessly this continued. The ships knocked against each other so hard it seemed they would sink each other. Often the thrust of the other two ships against ours was so strong people were almost thrown to the floor. I heard people groaning, "Will these ships hold out until Duluth or will we be forced down to the bottom of the lake?" About six o'clock we reached the ship that had been sent from Duluth to rescue us. It was thoroughly stuck, unable to move — there would have been no help from that quarter.

Just before sundown we reached Duluth. With indescribable joy we left the ship to take up night lodging in the immigrant house there. Our first concern was to buy bread and I can honestly say that this dry bread tasted better than the best meal I had ever eaten in my life. After we had settled our families, we went back to the dock to look after our baggage. Now we had the chance to see the ships from all sides. They were terribly battered! The stern of our "Ontario" was so badly pounded that splinters of hard oak hung down like shreds. The front beam of the "Asia" was knocked in and the whole front end was in splinters; the stern was literally pushed in. The "Manitoba" was slightly less battered but it was also badly damaged. All three ships were in such a state that they would need extensive repairs before being put into service again. The company apparently took note of this misfortune — their ships were never again allowed to leave the harbour so early in the year.

From Duluth we travelled full speed ahead on the Northern Pacific Railway to our new home in Manitoba. On August 1, 1876, the last group from the Bergthal Colony arrived safely in Manitoba. Now the entire Bergthal community was in America, with the exception of a few families who preferred to remain in Russia. But now back to 1874, when pioneer life began for our friends in Manitoba.

VI. Arrival in Manitoba

When the first groups arrived in Moorhead, Minnesota, having covered the six- to seven-week journey by water and rail, they separated. Some purchased livestock, wagons and other items, intending to cover the last 200-mile stretch on oxcarts; the others set out on the steamships that ran between Moorhead and Winnipeg. The landing place for the immigrant Mennonites was the right shore of the Red River at the spot where the Rat River flows into it. Here the ship stopped and the people were instructed to step ashore. Up to this point they had been looked after by the transport companies without having to concern themselves much about the next move. Now, if they did not want to remain stranded at the river, they would have to take care of themselves.

First, it was arranged that all families with their few trunks and bedrolls containing all their worldly possessions would be taken to the immigrant houses seven miles away so that they would not have to remain out in the open for long. Our friend, Jakob Y. Schantz of Berlin, Ontario, had built these houses at his own expense so that the first immigrants would have shelter. All of us had undoubtedly imagined that in America we would have to do without certain things we had been accustomed to in Russia, but probably no one had comprehended how difficult it would be to settle in a new land. On this point, fantasy and reality were far apart.

As soon as the whole group had settled in the immigrant houses, it was faced with concerns about the immediate future. First, food had to be provided, as many were nearing the end of their provisions. Most important, water had to be found. They started digging wells, but found no water. In the process there was an accident in which two of the men digging were buried when the well caved in. It was a great shock. Everyone was afraid to get into the well to dig out the buried men because more earth threatened to fall in at any time. Then Peter Reddekopp from the Chortitza Colony risked his own life for his two brothers, whom he scarcely knew by name. He descended into the dangerous well shaft and, with great effort and constant danger to his own life, saved the two buried men from suffocation.

At this point, discontent erupted on all sides. All cried for water, vowing that they would not for any money live on land where no water could be found. Some even raised the suspicion that delegates Peters and Wiebe had sold them all, probably to be divided up for work among the Americans, since it was obvious that they could not



Jacob Y. Schantz (1822-1909) and family.

Schantz, an immigrant from Pennsylvania, was an experienced farmer and business entrepreneur in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario. As a representative of the Canadian government he accompanied Bernhard Warken-tin of Russia on a land inspection trip to Manitoba in 1872. His report of this trip, *The Narrative of a Journey to Manitoba*, became a significant government pamphlet to promote immigration, with a total circulation of several hundred thousand copies. Schantz made another twenty-six trips to Manitoba during the next thirty-five years, many of them before the railway was completed in 1885. Manitoba Mennonites honored him by attaching his name to two villages: Schantzenberg on the East Reserve and Schantzenfeld on the West Reserve.

stay here. By the time the next group of immigrants arrived at the Rat River landing, with Rev. Heinrich Wiebe as leader, many families from the immigrant houses had already returned to the Red River to have an adequate water supply; the few puddles around the immigrant quarters soon appeared to be dried up.

The new arrivals quickly discovered what the new land was like. And Rev. H. Wiebe discovered that harsh judgements had already fallen on him. Hence, although it was already dark, he went to the immigrant houses that same evening to greet his people and to explain that further inland there was much better land and enough water. Many people now responded by greeting him in a friendly manner and modestly asking for information about the reserve; some, however, openly showed their discontent. I do not want to dwell on the weakness of certain men except to remind us that they did not realize that they were in a sense a second people of Israel, and that in their complaining against their leaders — those who had done most for the emigration — they were sinning against God.

VII. Settling: Pioneer Life of Mennonites in Manitoba

After Rev. Wiebe's arrival, the settlers went further inland where they found good springs of water and small creeks. It was not long before they were all diligently at work. One grass hut or *serai* after another arose until in a few days one could see whole villages of these grass houses. There was so much to do that one hardly knew where to start. The pleasant summer days always pass too quickly for Manitoba farmers, and they slipped by even more quickly for the first settlers who had so much more than merely fieldwork to take care of. Among other tasks, they had to go to Winnipeg to register the land. Many of the settlers had no livestock and could not buy any because they had no more money. Thus one yoke of oxen often had to do the work for several families. In the fall, they began to make hay.

When the immigrants had been on their land for a while, Mr. William Hespeler, the government representative for the Mennonites, was sent to check on the new settlers. To his consternation, he found that the people had not nearly completed their lodgings for the winter. He could not see how they would get finished — winter would not hold off much longer. The lumber dealers in Winnipeg waited daily for the Mennonites to come to the city to buy building materials such as boards and shingles. Now and then a few indivi-

duals came to buy some boards, but this was nothing in proportion to the number of immigrants; shingles were not being purchased at all.

When winter began to send out its warnings, Mr. Hespeler decided to drive out again to see whether there were many in distress in the new settlement. To his surprise he found the whole settlement transformed. Complete villages had sprung up in the meantime. True, each had built according to his own design and plan, resulting in quite a variety of houses, but everyone had at least a warm room. Some had constructed houses of logs laid on top of one another and fitted at the corners. Others had built *serais* (Turkish for "palaces") and arranged rooms in them. Still others had built a shed with the sloping ceiling also serving as the roof. Thus many dwellings, warm enough to defy the severe winter, were constructed in an incredibly short time. Not every family managed to finish its own home; where manpower was limited, two, three or even four families joined forces to erect a dwelling in which they lived together. Not only men were employed in the construction of the new dwellings — the women and girls also energetically pitched in, speeding up the work significantly. They prepared mortar — made up of earth, chopped hay and water — and covered the floor and walls, inside and out, with it. The lumber dealers in Winnipeg, who had expected to do a lot of business with the many immigrants, were sorely disappointed. The Mennonites knew how to build their houses far more cheaply than the *Engländer* had thought possible.

After moving into their new homes, the settlers needed furniture. Even a modest housewife, after she and her loved ones had worked hard all day, longed for a bed to rest on during the night, a bench or a chair to sit on, and a table at which the family could eat. They had none of these. One had nothing to serve as a table during mealtime except a trunk around which the whole family kneeled or sat with their legs folded under them to eat. After outdoor work had to stop because of cold weather — except for hauling wood — there was more time for making furniture. These efforts also resulted in quite a variety of items — you can imagine what a farmer, who has never handled any tool other than a dull axe, can make. Almost no one had the proper tools; at best, a saw, an axe and a drill were the only tools available. With these the men worked, without a plane or a square, right on the ground, for there were no work benches. Many bedsteads were made without using a single board. These were the cheapest items because they were made of saplings about the thickness of an arm from the woods. Where space was scarce in the

living room, bedsteads were erected one on top of the other. The bigger boys had to sleep on top.

There was no lack of clothing and bedding during the first winter at least; enough had been brought along from Russia. There was also no great difference in cooking utensils except that some had more than others. With respect to food, there was quite a variation among us. Several families had enough money to live quite decently. These could build better houses and get better furniture, and they didn't have to do without as many foods as their poorer neighbours did. Since the majority of the immigrants did not have enough money to buy flour and other essentials, a cooperative arrangement had to be set up. While travelling through Ontario, our community leaders, that is, our church leaders, had requested a loan of \$20,000 from the Mennonites there, as indicated earlier, for several years with interest to help the immigrants through the first years. The dear Germans in Ontario agreed, and so the Mennonites in Manitoba had a fund to pay for needed food. Flour, some meat and beans were bought and given to the needy. Naturally, each one who received something from this supply had to promise to pay back his part later with interest.

During the winter the settlers hauled wood from the woods nearby for the building of better homes and barns the next summer. In this way the Mennonite settlers passed their first winter in Manitoba. As the severe winter weather left its harsh effects on the new settlers, the situation for some began to get quite serious. They were not used to such a severe and persistent winter. Moreover, a rumour began circulating that the remaining members of their church community in Russia probably would not follow. This information disheartened many. Some, who still had money, resolved that if those remaining behind really would not come, they themselves would return in summer to their old homes in Russia, homes which they still treasured much more than their new ones in Manitoba.

But our friends in Russia really did want to follow their relatives to America. When these immigrants came from Russia in 1875, and disembarked where the Rat River flows into the Red River, their friends met them and received them with joy into their new homes. This was a happy time of welcome and reunion. Many forgot their worries for a time in the joy of once again seeing parents, brothers and sisters whom they had sorely missed. But even in the midst of this joyful reunion, there were serious concerns: at this very time the land was infested with hordes of grasshoppers which were destroying all vegetation. A harvest this year could no longer be expected

and it was very doubtful whether grass would grow in time to make hay for the winter.

For the first few days the newcomers rested from their long journey. Then came the call: "Off to work!" It was already August when the last group of that year arrived, and there was still much work to be done. For some, things did not go according to plan in the beginning, but most learned quickly to make the best of the situation. A few, however, who were not at all pleased with Manitoba, packed up their things again and moved to southern Minnesota, and a few to Dakota. After the voracious grasshoppers finally left the area, the grass began to grow luxuriously. Now the newcomers could see that they had settled on fertile land and their courage was renewed. Everyone worked eagerly. New huts and houses went up daily. Several families again banded together to build a home in which they could live together for the first winter. When the grass was high enough, haying began and everyone worked diligently. At that time we could not imagine the hay mowers we have today. Everything was mowed by hand with a scythe and then raked together with a small rake. Naturally, the herd of livestock was also much smaller than today. In building houses, as well as in many other preparations for the winter, the first settlers could advise the more recent ones, and sometimes offer help. Actually, the first settlers still had more than enough to do themselves; their own accommodations were still rather scanty.

The short winter days of 1875 were approaching and the poor settlers were not nearly ready for its arrival. Winter came anyway with its bitter cold and the people had to make do as best they could. Everyone worked diligently to prepare a warm home, but to provide enough food was impossible. The little money left over from the long trip was spent all too quickly on initial necessities. The mutual fund was also exhausted. It was therefore absolutely necessary to arrange for help. The government was asked to advance a sum of money, which it did, but the Mennonites in Ontario had to provide security. With money on hand again, they could arrange for the needed provisions.

Our friend, Jakob Y. Schantz, who did his best to help us wherever he could, made a contract with a merchant in Winnipeg, by the name of Sutherland, who committed himself to deliver all the flour we would need to the landing on the Red River. Since Sutherland could not buy the flour in Moorhead, Minnesota as he had hoped, he had to buy it in St. Paul. This delayed the arrival of the flour until so late in the autumn that the ship which was to bring it to its destination

became icebound near the border of Dakota. The settlers had to travel eighty miles in ox carts in severe winter weather to fetch their flour. They also had to haul flour from the mill beyond Winnipeg because Sutherland now bought flour wherever he could get it. He did not remain within the terms of his contract and in the end would gladly have cheated the poor settlers out of a tidy sum of money as well. But Mr. Hespeler intervened at just the right time and frustrated the merchant's fraudulent plans. Mr. Hespeler did many good things for us but some did not want to recognize him later as our benefactor. Nevertheless, he always had a good reputation and was fondly remembered by those who knew how to appreciate a kind deed without always suspecting everyone of double-dealing except themselves. During the course of the winter a lot of wood was hauled from the woods, some for fuel and some for building the next year.

Finally, after a long struggle for existence, the warm spring returned to the land and revived everything that had lain dormant and numb in the cold lap of winter. Everyone worked hard to sow as much as possible, but there were not enough animals to do the job. Not every family had oxen as yet; many had weak animals and had to hitch two pairs of oxen together in front of one plough to break the land first for one family and then for the other. Seed grain also was scarce. It had been bought with money borrowed from the common fund and was unusually expensive because it was almost impossible to get. Hence only a small portion could be given to each family. Although breaking the soil took a long time, it did move ahead, and every day saw some progress in the sowing of the seed.

In the beginning of June, 1876, those of us who had been scattered among the farmers in Ontario for a year to earn some money, came to Manitoba. All of us who had stayed behind in Ontario were poor people; we did not want to increase the prevailing poverty among the new settlers.

As I mentioned before, the last of our brethren arrived from Russia on August 1. With the arrival of this last party, the pressing poverty was temporarily eased — they brought with them a large sum of money from the sale of the properties of those who had left earlier. Now most of those who had had property in Russia were somewhat better off again. They could pay their debts from buying flour and seed grain the winter before, and establish themselves better for the immediate future. There was still hope that these former land-owners would be sent more money, because the buyers of their properties had not paid the full amount but were paying in several

installments. The money which our community had borrowed from our Canadian friends and from the government was not borrowed for only one or two years, but for a longer term at six per cent interest, so the money which those who were better off were repaying could be used for those who needed further support.

The year 1876 also already brought a modest harvest. No one had anything to sell yet; nor did the community yet have nearly enough for its own needs. Flour had to be bought again from Winnipeg, to be paid with money that was expected from Russia. As difficult as it was, we made a go of it and the good Lord did not let us go hungry. If there had been railways to Winnipeg then, as there are now, it would have been much easier for us. As it was, the whole province was cut off from any trade during the long winter while the Red River was frozen over. Why the money of the settlers was always used up is easy to understand when one realizes that all the essentials we needed were very expensive. Chickens, cats, etc., which we farmers had never bought before, were extremely high-priced. When eggs cost a dollar a dozen, chickens are not cheap either, and so it was with everything.

The clothes we had brought from Russia could not last very long, especially with hauling wood, and our poverty soon began to reveal itself in our clothing. Many who were accustomed to wearing clothes of dark fabric had, like the poorest among us, to make pants and jackets from old sacks and wear them. It was downright comical to see when someone had to wear the stamp of the former owner of the flour sack on his pantlegs — a large A or B encircled with several words; or when a housewife had to make the back of her husband's or boy's vest from a piece of flour sack which had three or four large blue Xs on it, a sign which had once advertised the quality of the flour. Outfitting ourselves with shoes was no better. Instead of the nice felt boots and lined overshoes we wear in winter today, we made ourselves a kind of moccasin (*Poresky*), also out of sacks. Because we had to be able to wrap a lot of other material around our feet to keep out the cold, these moccasins had to be made so large that the wearer was a peculiar sight indeed. Necessity is the mother of invention, and in our poverty we invented fashions that we could never have imagined before.

Now that we have looked at the first houses and furniture, as well as the clothes of the pioneers, let us cast a glance at their food. It has been mentioned several times in our story that flour was bought jointly, but nothing has been said about other staples such as meat, potatoes, lard, coffee or tea, vegetables and whatever else belongs to

a well-stocked larder. These have not been mentioned because only the well-to-do were able to buy some meat and lard while the poorer people — by far the majority — were dependent on flour alone. The family got to eat only what the housewife knew how to prepare from flour and water — that and nothing else. That meant noodles and more noodles. For variety, a kind of flour mush was cooked. But this was also made of the same ingredients, flour and water. In the morning one ate bread and drank a kind of coffee made of roasted barley or wheat (called *Prips*); at noon almost without exception there were noodles (*Kilken*); what was left over was browned in the frying pan (we called it fried), and eaten with bread and *Prips* for supper. Many a person had his fill of this fare and did not want to eat it again for years.

Whenever there were guests, one gave serious consideration to putting something a little better before them, but it was not possible; even the best cook could not have prepared something good and tasty out of flour and water. Often I thought that it was only at our house that food was so scarce, but I found out that it was the same everywhere. Once I heard a man say that in Russia he had had more grease spots on his vest than he now had in his stomach. Fortunately this extreme scarcity of food did not last very long, mostly during those times when the cows did not give any milk. As soon as there was milk, things were much better.

Under such conditions, the health situation was not the best, but no very serious illness appeared except that many were affected by a kind of rheumatism which lasted for some time, and it seemed as though all the victims might be crippled. Also, the extreme cold caused some freezing of noses, ears and limbs. As far as I know, only one man lost his life because of the cold. This man got lost during a severe snowstorm and froze to death near his house during the night.

In the spring of 1877 it was possible to plant a little more grain and therefore the harvest was more plentiful than the year before. Still, the newly-broken land, seeded right after being broken, could not produce a good crop. However, if I remember correctly, the land yielded enough for the community to have sufficient bread for its own needs — some sold and others bought. Johann Braun and Peter Wiens, who had brought some money from Russia, had built a steam-powered mill in Reinfeld in 1876 and were now able to grind all the grain for the settlers. This was a big help. Erdmann Penner together with Otto Schulz had opened a store in Tannenau and so people could make their purchases in the settlement without having

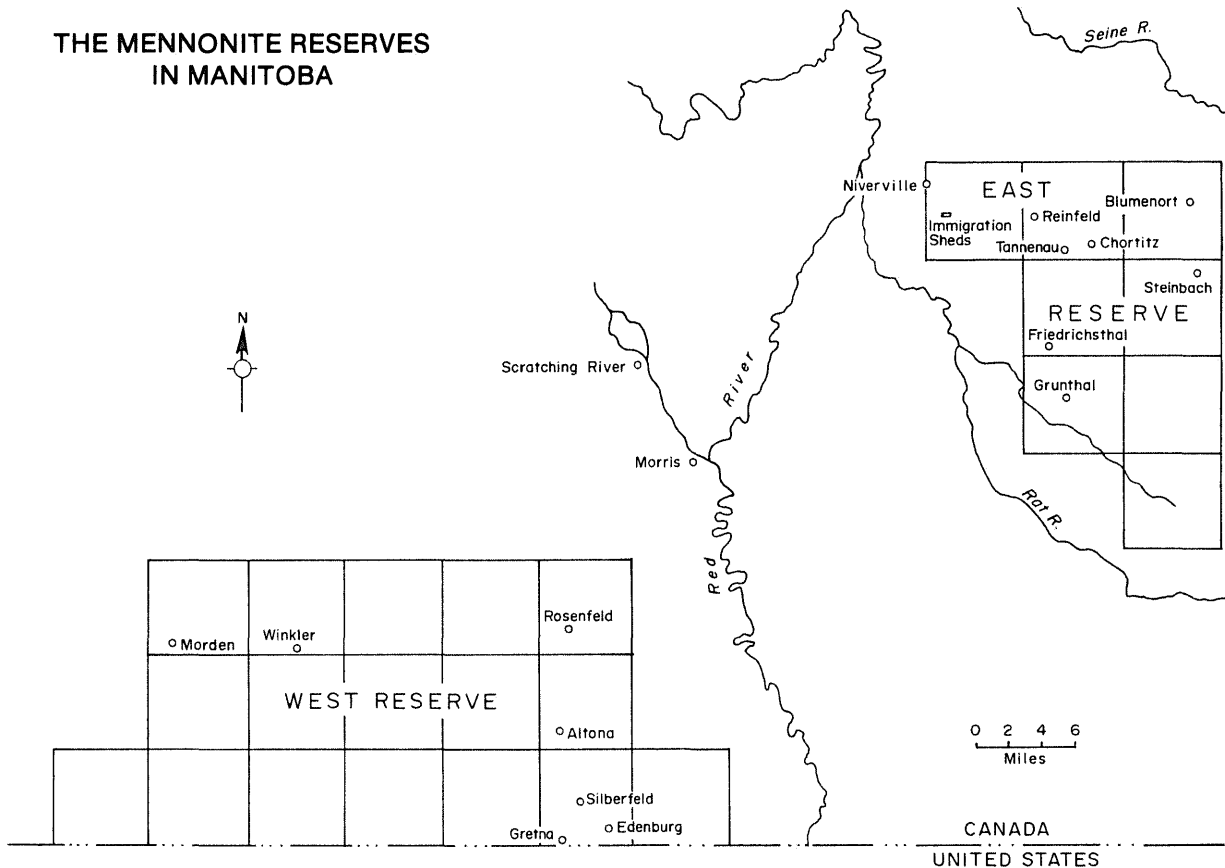
to walk to Winnipeg 30 miles away, even further for some, to buy a few pounds of nails and other small necessities, and then to carry them home on their backs. The one pair of oxen one had could not be spared from the farm work to drive to town on errands that one could manage by foot.

The winter of 1877-78 was unusually mild; one could work outside comfortably all winter. There was not even enough snow to use sleighs. At Christmas time the ground was thawed enough for some people to begin ploughing. But this was soon halted by strong frosts at night. Seeding in 1878 could begin exceptionally early, and because the weather in summer was quite favourable, we had a good harvest and hoped that the yields would increase each year from this time on. But we were to be bitterly disappointed. Already in 1875 and 1876 the rainfall had been fairly heavy and it increased each year. Due to these rains the fields were so flooded during the growing season that the crops were considerably damaged. Drainage canals were built to dry the fields. Many people worked alone, but whole villages also joined to dig long ditches to save their fields of grain from the water. In some places this helped a little; in others not at all, because the land was too flat. On the whole, the East Reserve was not able to sustain enough settlers to occupy every section of land. As yet there was no talk about a move to the West Reserve, which was just as open to us. We were determined to stay and cultivate this land. Not until the question whether we could endure it here in the long run became urgent, did some begin to look around for better land.

Soon the West Reserve, whose eastern part was still unsettled, was chosen as a new place of settlement. Anyone who wanted to move first went to the West Reserve to check out the land and select a suitable plot for himself. With the actual move, the major troubles really began. The 65 to 70-mile trip had to be made with ox carts — some had little travel money and some none at all. Imagine how difficult it was for us: we had to be outside day and night in the severe winter cold with wives and children on a journey that lasted almost a week.

After the immigrants, moving mainly in caravans, arrived at the West Reserve, they found themselves in the direst poverty. Each one, however, could comfort himself with the thought that he now had good farm land that he could call his own and that, with hard work and God's grace, he would finally earn a better living. The move from the East to the West Reserve took place in the years 1878 to 1881. About half the community moved; the other half remained on

THE MENNONITE RESERVES IN MANITOBA



the East Reserve.

Fortunately, our hopes for the future, with which we undertook the momentous task of emigrating, have not been disappointed. Our loving God has blessed our diligence here and rewarded us richly for the many hardships we had to endure in the first years. If we compare the state of our colonies today with that of the first years of settlement in Manitoba, we must acknowledge that our increase in earthly riches has been great indeed. There are now among us many well-to-do, even rich, people who no longer lack anything except variety in the beauties of nature. This the harsh climate of Manitoba is not able to give.³

In the course of my narration it was mentioned that during the initial settlement in 1875 we had to make a not insignificant loan from the Canadian government to help out the new settlers in Manitoba until they could obtain adequate income from their harvests. When the advance was granted by the government, vouched for by the Mennonites in Ontario, we could hardly comprehend how the huge sum of \$96,400 would ever be raised and paid back. But even this was possible — the entire debt with interest was paid back to the government.

To provide my worthy readers with clear evidence of how large the sum of money was, I will conclude with the following report from the Minister of the Interior in the year 1892:⁴

“The Canadian government and the Mennonite loan.⁵ — As you know, the Canadian government of the mid-70s advanced the sum of \$96,400 in order to promote the colonization of Manitoba by the numerous poverty-stricken German Mennonites of south Russia, for which 150 brethren in Waterloo County, Ontario provided guarantee with all their property. The loan was finalized with the stipulation that neither principle nor interest would be repaid until the Mennonites in Manitoba, who received the advance, had made a proper beginning. The Mennonites thus supported moved to the Red River Valley in Manitoba in 1875. During the past year (namely, 1891), the last installment on this loan of \$96,400 and the interest for 17 years which ran to the pretty little sum of \$33,986.58 — totalling \$130,386.58 — was paid in full.”

And here the Minister of the Interior, in his yearly report, added the following observations:

“In the history of our country one looks in vain for a case in which any business or private individual has fulfilled its obligation to the government with greater faithfulness. According to the axiom, ‘Honour to whom honour is due,’ this fact cannot be circulated

widely enough, to the honour of Mennonites in Manitoba as well as the Waterloo group, those brethren who provided a guarantee for the loan. The apportioning of the loan, the collecting of the monies, and their repayment to the government was entrusted to the secretary of the Waterloo group, Jakob Y. Schantz, and all respect is due him for the honourable and business-like way he carried out the whole affair. It is also gratifying to add that, as far as we know, neither the people who received the loan nor the citizens in Waterloo ever made an attempt, or even filed a request, to alter the terms of payment or postpone the final date, something that happens all too frequently with government loans. Also, I know of not a single case in which one of the settlers or one of the citizens made the attempt to evade his obligations.”⁶

Notes

1. This preface was written on the occasion of the reprinting (probably in 1925) of Peters' account which was first serialized in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in 1890. It seems that plans to publish the story in the newspaper a second time in the 1920s were abandoned when the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House in Hillsboro, Kansas, undertook to publish it in booklet form.

A translation of the original 1890 preface is found in Appendix I.

2. The actual date was 1874.

3. Peters' book follows the original, serialized version of 1890 to this point. The final installment in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 2 April 1890, contains significant additional information and is accordingly given in Appendix II.

4. The above two paragraphs were probably written on the occasion of the printing of the narrative in book form (1925).

5. This report appeared in the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 5 April 1893, p. 1, as an unsigned article. The following paragraph, however, is **not** part of the report of the Minister of the Interior.

6. Since this twice translated paragraph differs in some details from the original, the actual text of the Hon. T. Mayne Daly is given in Appendix III.

In his suggestion that neither the Manitoba borrowers nor the Waterloo guarantors ever requested a “relaxation of the terms of refund” the Minister is in error.

The terms of the 1875 loan specified repayment in ten annual installments with 6% simple interest payable during the first four years and 6% compound interest during the remaining 6 years. By mid-1883 only three payments, amounting to \$20,653.30, had been made.

In 1888, when the final installment was past due and the Waterloo Committee reported that it was unable to collect the remaining balance of \$51,480.76, the terms were in fact relaxed. The Committee requested a reduction of the rate from 6% compounded to 4% simple interest on the amount of capital advanced. This resulted in a reduction of some \$40,000 on the total repayment. (See Adolf Ens, “Mennonite Relations with Governments. Western Canada, 1870-1925,” University of Ottawa, Ph.D. dissertation, 1978, pp. 51-53 for further details.)

Klaas Peters (1855-1932)

A Biography

by Leonard Doell

Klaas Peters (1855-1932)

A Biography

The Early Years

The life story of Klaas Peters and his contribution to the Mennonite community has largely been overlooked by Mennonite historians. Perhaps the main reason for this lack of recognition has been that Peters defected to the Swedenborgian Church. History forces us to search more earnestly and more carefully for an explanation for that development. History can also offer insights into the life of the Canadian Mennonite community at the turn of the century and possibly into how we deal with the “Klaas Peters” in our own communities today. His contributions to the Mennonite community came in a number of areas: religion, politics, education, pacifism, and migrations.

Klaas Peters grew up in a small Mennonite village in southern Russia. He was born on September 10, 1855 and raised in Friedrichsthal, the last of the five villages that made up the Bergthal Colony. Here young Klaas received his education in the Mennonite private school. David Stoesz, who later became *Ältester* of the Manitoba East Reserve Chortitzer Church, was his teacher for five years.¹

Klaas was the fifth child born to Klaas and Agatha (Dyck) Peters. He had four older sisters and a younger brother. When Klaas was four years old his father passed away. Half a year later his mother married Johan Peters, a widower with eight children. Together, this couple also had one more child. In 1870 Klaas, now fifteen, was again fatherless. These events no doubt contributed to the independent spirit that he later displayed as an adult.

As a teenager Klaas participated in the emigration of the entire Bergthal Colony to Canada. On July 27, 1875, the Peters family arrived in Quebec City. Their ship, the S.S. Manitoban, had a total of 348 Mennonites from both the Bergthal and Molotschna Colonies on board.

The powerful story of this emigration in which rich and poor worked together to make it possible for all, including widowed and orphaned families like the Peters to make the move, is recounted in this book.

Life on the East Reserve

The Peters family settled on the Mennonite East Reserve, southwest of Steinbach. Their home in the village of Gruenthal probably included Klaas, his mother, his younger brother, Johan and his half-sister, Justina. The village of Gruenthal was formed in 1876 along an old trail known as the Ridge Road. Many of its inhabitants

had first settled in the village of Gnadenfeld, about two miles northwest of Gruenthal. Why some settlers then moved on to form Gruenthal isn't known for certain, but Mennonite villages were springing up all over the reserve at this time and it is probable that more room and a good location on the Ridge Road were the main reasons. Though the group of settlers from Gnadenfeld probably made up the largest number of families to found Gruenthal, there were others as well, notably from Friedrichsthal (north of the present village) and from small temporary settlements east and south of Gruenthal which later disappeared.²

From the outset many who settled on the East Reserve were not happy with the land that had been chosen for them. Parts of the reserve contained rocky and marginal land. It was not long before these settlers began moving to the West Reserve. In a letter to the *Nebraska Ansiedler* in 1879, Klaas Peters tried to portray the positive aspects of the East Reserve to combat the movement westward. He indicated that he was satisfied with the location of their new comfortable home and with the close proximity of wood for fuel and building. Approximately six to seven miles from Gruenthal, he wrote, beautiful spruce and pine trees could be obtained for building large houses and barns.³

Other letters of Peters reflect the many struggles which an agricultural community experienced. His letters tell of the long, cold winters and the difficult travel in deep snow. But in spite of this, he affirms that all had gone well; they always had enough to eat and adequate clothing and shelter. The summers brought hail and windstorms that destroyed crops, and lightning that destroyed houses and other buildings. There were times of extreme drought and other times with excess rain. An epidemic killed many of the cattle in the summer of 1880. In spite of this, he proudly reports, Gruenthal farmers had received 11½ bushels to the acre and farmers from other villages even more.⁴

Klaas was probably involved in mixed farming with his mother and family, raising a variety of animals and crops. But he also spent

his winters teaching in the private school in the nearby village of Blumstein. In addition, he sold books in a business that he ran with Franz Rempel, also of Gruenthal. Peter Dueck of Gruenfeld also had a book business and the three worked in co-operation with each other. During the winter when Peters taught, Franz Rempel ran the book business alone.⁵

MENNONITE TEACHERS.

Early in the month of February a committee consisting of Messrs. Hespeler, Peter Tows and Gerhard Wiebe was appointed to examine the Mennonite teachers—and as a result the following twenty-two have received certificates for one year from date of issue, viz :

Johaam Friesen,	D. Hubert,
Peter Duck,	Diedrich Friesen,
Cornelius Friesen,	Maria Friesen,
Jacob Tows,	Johann Friesen,
Heinrich Duck,	Jacob Newfield,
Cornelius Kehler,	Gerhard Duck,
Isaack Bergin,	Deidrich Pumer,
Heinrich Kippenstein,	Klaas Peters,
Jacob Wiebe,	Jacob Hubert,
Franz Rempel,	Wilhelm Hubert,
Peter Wiens,	Peter Egan.

Manitoba, Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1880, appendix, p. 72.

The Move to the West Reserve

About 1881 Klaas Peters moved to the West Reserve, in spite of his criticism, just two years earlier, of others who were leaving. He settled in the Gretna area and it is here that he married Katharina Loewen. Katharina was born in Grossweide, Molotschna Colony, Russia on November 18, 1859. Her parents, Heinrich and Sarah (Toews) Loewen, came to Canada on the S.S. Sardinian, which arrived in Quebec City on July 30, 1876.⁶ Klaas and Katharina were married on June 12, 1881 at Gretna, and the following day they moved to a farm four miles northeast of Gretna. This move also doubled as their honeymoon.

The residence of this young couple was a simple sod hut. It was one of the many sod houses that were hastily built after our Mennonite people arrived on the level plains of southern Manitoba. Lumber and trees out of which log houses could be built were not available. To survive the winter, people had to crawl into the



Klaas and Katharina Peters.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre

ground. Food was scarce during the early years. When the cow dried up in the fall and the chickens ceased to lay, son Heinrich recalled that they had only wheat flour to take them through the winter. The sole variety was to switch from mush to dumplings, both cooked in plain snow water.⁷ Klaas worked as a school teacher at Silberfeld during this time. In a letter to the *Rundschau* he lamented the fact that certain villages still had not built school houses. This, he felt, reflected the poor interest in learning that many adults, who saw schooling as quite unnecessary, had.⁸

In 1886 Klaas Peters was hired as teacher in the village of Edenburg, just east of Gretna. His wages were thirty-five dollars for the school year, paid in butter and eggs. Peters himself had no education

Einmal dem das Versprechen
 und hielte mich das Ungläubigen
 habe ich mir geküsst von einem
 Schriftstellers das Versprechen gegeben
 zu schreiben, am 29 Januar 1887

Klaas Peters

Edinburgh

Edinburgh

Inscription on the fly-leaf of a book which Peters bought from a travelling book salesman in 1887. Written by David Nelson and published by the American Tract Society, it was entitled *Die Ursachen des Unglaubens und die Mittel dagegen*.

Is this an indication that his struggle with the Christian faith, as taught by the Mennonite church, began this early?

beyond that of the Mennonite private school. Heinrich Peters remembers that "the school house into which we moved was a two-roomed framed building, of which our family occupied the one room, and father taught the youngsters in the other. The whole building can't have been more than 28 feet in length. We had three children then, Katharina, I (Heinrich) and little Peter. Little Peter couldn't take that winter and passed away around Christmas . . ."9 In 1888 the family moved to an eighty-acre farm near Silberfeld, which Heinrich Loewen, Katharina's father, had sold to them.

The Migration to Oregon

Wherever Mennonites have settled, sooner or later the problem of land shortage had to be addressed. The situation was almost always identical: the main block of land initially acquired was fully settled and more land was needed for the young and landless people. The usual procedure was to send delegates to find a new block of land and to negotiate a settlement and then to found a daughter colony.

In the spring of 1888 David Peters was elected to find land for the landless of the Manitoba reserves. He was sent to Oregon, but no report of his findings is available¹⁰. That summer Jacob Wiens of Edenburg and Klaas Peters were sent with publicly-raised funds to inspect the land at Oregon. Apparently homestead land was available there.¹¹

Canadian government officials were concerned when they became aware of this delegation being sent to Oregon. They were happy with the Mennonite settlers and wondered why they would want to move away. One bureaucrat wrote: "The reason given for the change is the severity of winters here, but I do not think that this is altogether the reason. I am strongly of the opinion from the numerous applications for odd-numbered sections that if they were allowed to purchase them, the majority of the Mennonites would remain."¹²

Klaas Peters' report in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* goes into meticulous detail about people they met enroute, the various types of land and terrain they saw and their experiences while travelling by horse-drawn vehicles, trains or boats. This lengthy travel report, with the land of Oregon as its main focus, is covered in four issues of the *Rundschau*. As the following excerpt shows, Peters describes the place as a small paradise.

All of the loving people that we spoke with were very happy to live in the Dallas, Oregon, area, where everything is to their satisfaction. The land is exceptionally productive. The wheat stands as high as a man and its heavy heads wave gently back and forth in the breeze. As we drove by we saw cattle grazing in the luscious green pastures. The branches of the trees were hanging heavily with fresh fruit. The grapes were still quite small, but the blossoms indicated a heavy grape crop for the wine makers. Bees were swirling around in the gardens, gathering honey from plants. Honey is also a staple food for these people. The most attractive element of this Willamette Valley is the climate which produces such wonderful growth. The hard climate and long winters in Manitoba do not allow the produc-

tivity and the varieties of fruits to grow as well as this climate does.¹³

William Wright, land agent for the State of Oregon, showed Peters and Wiens land in the Salem area as well. This government land could be purchased at \$1.25 per acre, which was described as hilly and heavily treed. It could also be taken as homesteadland, if people committed themselves to living here for at least five years. At the conclusion of his report, Klaas Peters recommended that only those people who had adequate means to buy a farm should move to Oregon, and that those who did not should consider moving to the Northwest (now Saskatchewan or Alberta) where good farm land could be obtained from the Canadian government. As a result of this report a small group of Mennonites from southern Manitoba emigrated to Oregon. Some of them established homes there while others returned to Manitoba, financially poor, and disillusioned for having pursued this “nonexistent” paradise.¹⁴

Peters as Immigration Agent

It is possible that through the experience and reputation gained during his trip to Oregon the federal government saw potential in Klaas Peters as an immigration agent on a more permanent basis. In any case, the Oregon experience served as a good prelude for the tasks which the Canadian government had in store for him. As the railroad slowly advanced westward, the government felt a need to settle that land with farmers. The Mennonites had impressed the federal government with their

tremendous headway in agriculture on the exceedingly rich soil which was once the bottom of Lake Agassiz. The progress was so phenomenal that it drew the attention of governmental officials in Ottawa and the Department of the Interior decided to take steps towards inviting from Europe more settlers of the same kind. The German Consul in Winnipeg was instructed to go to Gretna, which had become a thriving town at this time, for the purpose of finding a suitable young man who knew both German and English and would be interested in going to Europe and becoming a Canadian Immigration Agent. The object was to get German immigrants and to settle them on the vacant lands of western Canada. After some inquiry in town, Klaas Peters was recommended to the consul.¹⁵

Henry K. Peters, the eldest son of Klaas and Katharina Peters, describes how the family received the news of their father being hired as an immigration agent. Since the Peters family was still living on the farm, Klaas Peters had to go to Gretna for an interview.

When father came home in the evening, he looked serious. We knew something had happened. Mother asked some questions and then cried. Finally Father (Klaas) said, I have this evening to make up my mind about giving up the farm and going into the work of immigration and leaving for Europe in two days. That was like an atomic explosion. The parents didn't sleep that night. Mother cried nearly all the time that I saw whenever I woke up. In the morning, father's mind was made up and he went to Gretna to inform William Hespeler, the consul, that he accepted the offer. Father was then supplied with a return trip to the Russian Ukraine and advance salary for expenses (salary by the way was \$2.00 a day, plus all travelling expenses). When father came home that day, he looked exceedingly happy, although a little worried. I was only seven at the time, there were four children, and mother was pregnant. Who would take care of the stock and what would become of mother without doctor or hospital? The core problem was solved by hiring a young German from the Old Country who wanted to have shelter for the winter. The pregnancy problem was referred to mother's sister and brother-in-law, who lived a half mile from our place. Father then left on the first of his five trips to Europe.¹⁶

On November 14, 1890, Klaas Peters, in the employ of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, left for Russia in the interest of immigration for Canada. He reached the Russian border on December 12. His first meeting with prospective emigrants was held in Cherson near Odessa. Here he said that the Russian police were after him, since many immigration agents had been there from other countries. The Russian authorities were not happy with him leading their citizens away. Klaas was aware that this job was risky for him and that if caught he could be sent to Siberia. He stopped next at Schlachtin, where the people were very receptive. Many of them had relatives in Canada. Following this, he visited the Old Colony villages where he predicted that few would move because of the good farming they were enjoying.

He also went to Neplujew, which was situated on rented land. Peters felt that many would come from here when the land lease

would be due for renewal. Also situated on rented land was the Fürstenland Colony. A few hundred Mennonites were living on this land. Peters predicted that many of them would sell their movable property as soon as they could and move to Canada. At present, because money was scarce in the whole country, they could not sell their property. Peters hoped to recruit the majority of immigrants from these latter two stops.

He also went to the Molotschna settlement, which contained sixty villages and the best farms in Russia. Few were expected to come from here. However, Peters predicted that most of the people from the two villages of Puchtin on the northern part of Ekaterinoslav would move to Canada. At each place Peters told them of the rich soil and the thousands and thousands of acres of free government land and very cheap railroad land available in Canada. The railroad lines were prepared to offer cheap transportation. Forty-one family heads indicated that they were seriously considering a move to Canada, and of those nineteen did move in the fall of 1891.¹⁷ The government was pleased with the work of Klaas Peters and flattered by his success.¹⁸

The Rosthern Settlement

The Manitoba West Reserve had reached the point where land was very scarce, especially for the poor people. Land which had sold for a dollar an acre in 1880 cost \$20.00 per acre by 1891.¹⁹ In the Northwest free homesteads were still available. In June 1891, Klaas Peters was hired by the real estate and law firm, Osler, Hammond and Nanton, to take a delegation of Mennonites to the Rosthern area. The group, including delegates from Manitoba and South Dakota, was given a guided tour of land in the Duck Lake district. For two days they drove around and in the evening they camped, making their own meals and sleeping in a tent. On their return to Duck Lake they took a train to Calgary. Their preference was the Duck Lake area where three townships were reserved for them for one month on the condition that a certain number of entries be made by the end of that time.²⁰

While enroute to Calgary with the above group, Klaas Peters met a group of Old Colony Mennonites from Manitoba who had just settled in the Gleichen area. But the environment and climate were not to their liking. It was very dry and water was difficult or impossible to obtain. On the recommendation of Peters, who had come there to investigate the land but preferred the Saskatchewan areas, that group decided to leave Alberta and came to settle at Rosthern

The Du Sable, Long Lake & Saskatchewan Railroad & Steamboat Co.

LAND DEPARTMENT.

CELESTINE HAMMOND & HANTON,
AGENTS.

381 MAIN STREET.

Winnipeg

5th June '91

189

In reply to your
letter of the

Hillyard Mitchell, Esqr.

Du ck Lake.


Dear Sir,

The bearer Mr Klaas Peters is our emigration agent. He is accompanying a delegation of eight Mennonites, who are looking for a location for themselves and a large number of others. As near as we can ascertain there will be about 200 families from Dakota and 60 from South Manitoba, who will be influenced by the report of these men.

We are very anxious that they should get settled among our lands in a good locality. Some of them want homesteads, while others intend to purchase.

Will you please do what you can to assist them while inspecting your District.

Yours truly



instead.²¹

In the spring of 1892, Peters returned to Rosthern with a group of Mennonites who had come from Russia the previous fall and had wintered in Manitoba. He helped these twenty-seven families get settled as well.

The area being settled was south of Duck Lake on a large, relatively flat piece of land between the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers. Klaas Peters described these rivers as being as wide as the Dnieper at the village of Einlage in Russia. The rivers were about twenty miles apart and the railroad cut through the centre of this settlement.²² Peters repeatedly brought in groups of settlers to view land in this area, including delegations from various countries. In an article in the *Rundschau*, he encouraged people in Manitoba and Russia to do their homework and to provide him with the details about their families, i.e. how many over the age of 12 and how many under, about how many carloads of freight they would send, etc. In this way, he could perhaps arrange some cheaper rates if the volume was substantial.²³ Peter knew his people well and an appeal to thriftiness would be taken seriously.

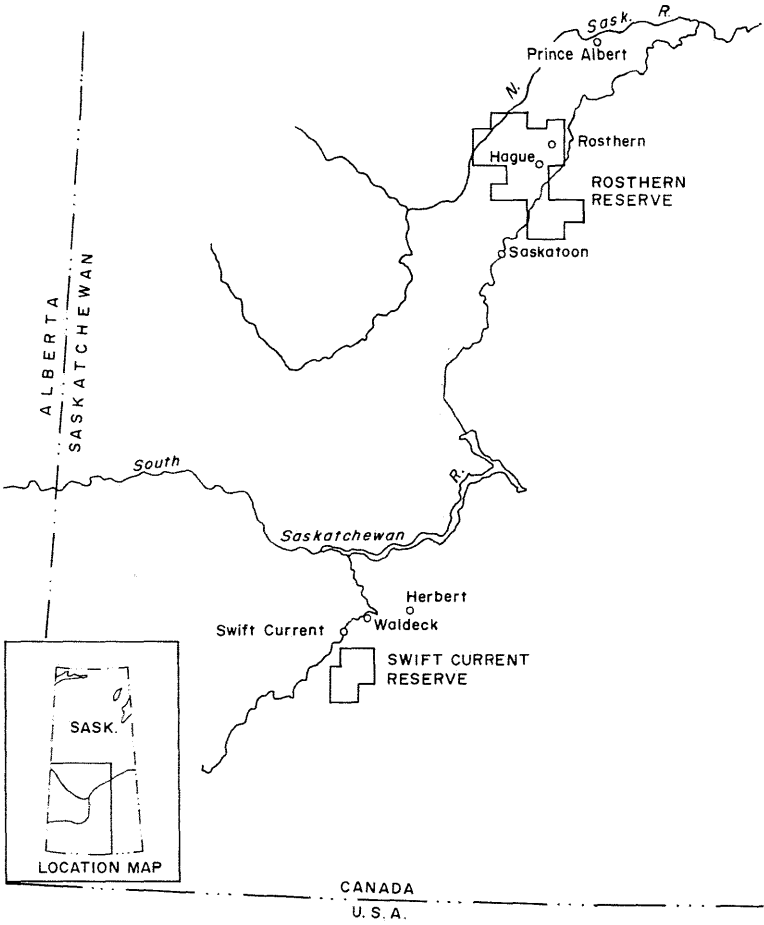
In February of 1893, Klaas Peters was authorized as a special immigration agent to Kansas and Nebraska in the interest of Mennonite immigration from those states to Canada. His wage was \$2.50 per day and \$2.50 per day living expenses, plus all necessary transportation expenses. His job was to provide a full report of his activities and report to his employer, the Department of the Interior, the prospects of immigration and the possible results of his efforts.²⁴

In addition to this job, he led delegates Aaron Friesen and Samuel Boese of Russia to the Rosthern area and arranged for a group from Oregon and Prussia to settle there as well. For all of these groups he arranged transportation, meals, lodging, etc. and acted as translator when necessary. Peters had learned English while working on a Red River boat before he was married. Knowing the English language proved to be very useful in his tasks as an immigration agent.

The summer of 1893 was a busy one for Klaas Peters in his immigration work, but it was also a difficult time at home. Many people in the community, including his whole family, were suffering from an eye disease. His report to the *Rundschau* indicates that he was the only one in the family that had been exempted from this illness.²⁵

The land in the Rosthern area which Peters had reserved for Mennonite settlement in 1891 was gradually filling up. A further

MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS IN SASKATCHEWAN



major addition came in December, 1894, when the Old Colony Mennonite Church arranged for the even numbered sections in four townships near Hague to be reserved for them. The first group arrived at Hague in May, 1895 and formed the village of Neuanlage. This group of ninety settlers and twenty-two freight cars was set in motion in Manitoba by Klaas Peters, who also met them in Hague and helped them get organized in their new community.²⁶

Further Trips to Russia

Upon the invitation of the Canadian Pacific Railroad Company, Klaas Peters made another trip to Europe to gather more possible immigrants. He took with him a life-long friend, Abram Buhr. They left Gretna on December 27, 1893, and after a wide variety of travels by train and boat, they arrived in Germany. Here they parted company. Buhr proceeded to travel into Russia to see relatives and friends, mainly in the Caucasus, while Peters went to Prussia (now Poland). The incentive to visit Prussia came from Rev. Peter Regier who was residing in southern Manitoba when Klaas Peters left there. Rev. Regier had just come from Prussia and was planning to settle west of Rosthern. He hoped that Peters would be able to encourage more Mennonites from Prussia to move to Canada.

From Prussia Peters went into Russia to visit relatives and friends as well as to do immigration work. He observed that travel was slower in Russia than in Germany and America. Since the roads to Fürstenland and Bergthal were impassable due to heavy snowfall, he could not visit there. Instead, he spent more time in Schlachtin and Sagraadowka.²⁷ Peters returned to Gretna on March 26, 1894, happy to see his wife and family and thankful that all were in good health.

Later that fall Mennonites at Gretna became aware that the Russian Prince Gregory Galitzin was in Winnipeg and wished to see them. Klaas Peters, Wilhelm Esau and Isaac Loewen took the initiative to send a telegram to him, inviting him to visit their settlement. Prince Galitzin responded positively to the invitation and was given a tour of Mennonite farms and villages in southern Manitoba. The tour included attending two church services where the Prince and his Russian homeland were praised profusely.²⁸

In December of 1895 Wilhelm Esau and Isaac Loewen, both business men from Gretna, invited Klaas Peters to join them on a trip to Russia. Peters was very busy but seriously considered the offer because of his immigration work. Esau and Loewen planned to visit friends and relatives in their former homeland and where possible, promote further movement of Mennonites to Manitoba. They con-

veyed this message to Premier Thomas Greenway of Manitoba, asking for financial assistance (\$350 each) from the province to subsidize their trip. Their influence, they suggested, might induce some good settlers to come to Canada.²⁹ One government official acknowledged the importance of such visits and suggested that this be encouraged. "They will give the greatest prominence to the absolute good faith with which they have been treated by the government of Canada and this I am to say, shows how important it is that we should continue to treat them in the future as we have in the past."³⁰

The group left from Gretna in March. They first travelled to West Prussia and then on to Russia. A highlight was their visit to the Bergthal Colony, Klaas Peters' birthplace, which he had not been able to reach on his previous two trips to Russia. They returned to Canada on June 25, 1896.³¹ While passing through London, England, they talked to J.S. Colmer, the Canadian immigration agent there, about the appointment of a government immigration agent for Russia. Colmer promised to find out what was required for the appointment of agents. In his report to Ottawa he wrote: "I told Peters what I was going to do and suggested that he should make some inquiry into the matter himself while in Russia, the result of which he could report to me and to you in ordinary course. He seemed to be a very intelligent man."³²

The Hassles of an Immigration Agent

The credibility of land and immigration agents has always been suspect. One need only look at the experience of Heppner and Bartsch, the Prussian delegates to Russia, to see how Mennonites have dealt with their own brothers whose integrity they questioned. A common accusation is that such agents are blinded by money and that their motives are only self-serving. In 1896 Klaas Peters, too, was forced to deal with many accusations of this kind. In March it was rumoured that he was attempting to take settlers out of the Rosthern area and settle them in Minnesota and in Manitoba. Because of the 1895 crop failure in the Rosthern area, many needed assistance including provision of seed grain to plant another crop. The Mennonite community in Manitoba sent grain to help alleviate this problem. No doubt there were also those at Rosthern who were disillusioned with the bad luck they had experienced, and to whom a chance to settle elsewhere would have come as welcome news. Some felt that Klaas Peters was promoting such a migration.³³

Rumours of this kind about Peters' work in Canada and in Russia were also reported to government officials. One Rosthern man wrote his Member of Parliament as follows:

I think it would be good to send some farmers to the Old Country, and not agents! The farmers could do more than any agent that holds great speeches! Mr. Peters is not beloved amongst our people in South Russia. The people told me, the time while I was in Russia, it would be better if Mr. Peters stayed home. He told the people in South Russia they should sell all their property and come to Canada and our government will pay the expenses for the trip to this country. So a great number of poor people sold their property. The minister and reeve of the district asked Mr. Peters if that is true and if the people can depend on it and Mr. Peters said the Canadian government promised to do so and the people can depend on it for sure. Afterwards the people did not get the help that Mr. Peters promised and the district has to feed hundreds of poor people . . . They told me to tell Mr. Peters not to come to their country anymore, it does more damage to our country when an agent like Mr. Peters goes to the Old Country than we will profit.³⁴

Peters defended himself against these accusations in a letter to his employer, Osler, Hammond and Nanton.

I felt very sorry last fall when I heard the settlers had a bad crop and you know that I worked diligently to bring all of those provisions together to help the people through such hard times so that they should not send bad letters home to their friends, which would give the country a bad name, and now it seems to appear that I have informed the people to leave that country and come to Manitoba . . . It seems as if some people have changed the sense of my words and bring others under the impression that I have praised Manitoba and despised their settlement.³⁵

His employers agreed that Peters had been misunderstood by certain parties at Rosthern and supported him.

Criticism was again levelled at Klaas Peters in 1897. The Department of the Interior was planning to appoint a new immigration agent to recruit Mennonite settlers from the USA. Three people were under consideration for this position: Frank Schneider, Gerhard Ens and Klaas Peters. A Rosthern man shared his bias with T.O. Davis, the M.P. from Prince Albert.

Allow me to say so far as these three gentlemen go the first is not able for any kind of agent and never good for an agent for the Mennonite people, since Mr. Schneider does not like Mennonites. Mr. Peters is a self-serving man and folks don't trust him very much. By his last travelling in Russia, Mr. Peters just met the high class man in Russia, they will never come to our

Wittemann's Lagerbier-Brauerei,
 PRINCE ALBERT, - - - N. W. T.,
 empfiehlt ihr allein echtes „Königliches Lagerbier“, gebraut
 nach **Münchener** Art. Vertreter überall gesucht. Auskunft
 über Frachttaxe und Preise ausführlich durch

Herr: **Glass Peters,** Gerns.

Hauptvertreter für Süd-Mannoba

WITTEMANN'S BREWERY,

PRINCE ALBERT, N. W. T.

This ad appeared in *Der Nordwesten*, 27 May 1897. Peters' involvement in the distribution of beer may have contributed to his unpopularity among some Mennonites.

As early as 1890 he became involved in a controversy over alcoholic beverages. During a visit to the East Reserve to help his brother-in-law, Franz Rempel, move a load of household effects to the West Reserve, Peters heard of a recent meeting of the Municipal Council at which members had been drinking. The result had been a fight in which one Council member had suffered a serious head wound and a broken cheekbone. In a letter to the *Rundschau* (19 March 1890) he deplored such behaviour, and criticized especially the fact that members of a Council which refused to license the sale of alcoholic beverages then turned around and supported a bootlegger by purchasing his illegal *Schnaps*. Peters justified his reporting the incident by reference to Luke 12:2, "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed."

He repeated his offer to apologize publicly should the Council members in good conscience assure him that the report was untrue (23 April 1890), but no one denied it.

Finally (7 May 1890) Rev. Johann Neufeld of Schönthal wrote, advising Peters that no one would ask him to withdraw the story and suggesting that he might have acted instead in the spirit of Luke 6:41-42, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? . . . You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye . . ."

country. In my opinion, Mr. Ens is the best man for the position. Mr. Ens has got the most influence and is lively and very well acquainted in the Old Country.³⁶

A couple of other letters from the Rosthern area, claiming to have the support of the community, expressed similar sentiments. It seems that the outcome of this appointment was ultimately determined by party politics. In the federal election of 1896 Wilfrid Laurier, representing the Liberals, won the Prince Albert riding.

One could say that the votes of the Mennonites contributed to this success. Laurier became Prime Minister and instituted a new policy of immigration. Immigration was a lucrative business and promoted on a large scale. The government was concerned to obtain many useful immigrants, and premiums were paid to ship companies for their special efforts in this respect. The government preferred Germans to others.³⁷

In spite of the fact that Klaas Peters had much more experience than Gerhard Ens, it seems that Ens' ties to the Liberal party paid off. Peters was known to be a strong Conservative. Another factor against Peters was his alleged criminal record. This appears to have been fabricated by his opponents in order to discredit him.³⁸ In the end, Ens was chosen for the job.

Despite the fact that Klaas Peters was not chosen as immigration agent at this time, he continued to help individuals and groups find new homelands. In 1898, Johan Harms of Hillsboro, Kansas, sought the assistance of Klaas Peters during a visit to the Rosthern area. Peters was accompanied by his son, Klaas, on this tour. Harms was grateful to Klaas Peters who ably conducted business in either German or English. He also observed the vast amount of land available for free homesteads or for purchase from the railroad companies at three to four dollars an acre.³⁹ Peters sold much of this good land.

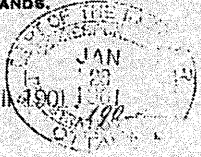
Klaas Peters was also an active businessman. Together with Abram Klassen he operated a store in Gretna which dealt with imported European goods. The firm, called "Peters and Klassen," owned a large warehouse in Gretna.⁴⁰ Peters made two trips to Europe, one in 1898 and one in 1900, partly related to this business. He also made trips to the Kitchener-Waterloo area, where it appears that some of his suppliers and/or co-businessmen operated.⁴¹ Some of his customers were from as far away as Rosthern, from where one ordered a grass mower in 1898.⁴²

OFFICE OF

KLAAS PETERS,
LAND DEPARTMENT.

612201

RAILWAY LANDS FOR SALE. INFORMATION GIVEN OF FREE GOVERNMENT LANDS.



Jan. 24th 1901

Arthur, Man.

*64446
548866
C79
1*

Sir :

PAT. B'CH.
FEB 1 1901

RECEIVED

Mr. Cornelius Goertz has made an application for the abandonment of his homestead, some time last year, but he has never received a letter of permission to take up another homestead. Under these circumstances Mr. Goertz is sending in another application of abandonment, and asks you kindly to send your reply to my address.

I have the honor to be Sir,
your obedient servant,

To the

Commissioner of Dominion Lands,
Ottawa.

Klaas Peters

Sam I

Mobile 14. 4. 3. 3. 11 2

The Move to Didsbury

In 1900 Klaas Peters took a party of landseekers from Manitoba to explore the area around Didsbury, Alberta. The following spring a large number of people decided to make this area their new home.⁴³ Peters himself took up a homestead approximately 16 miles north-east of Didsbury. Since he was very busy with immigration work, and unable to move onto this land himself to meet the Homestead Act requirements, he offered it to his son. As Heinrich recalls it:

Father made me a proposition. He would take me to Alberta in May, buy me a team of horses, a couple of riding ponies and a small herd of cattle for a beginning. Then I could be a real cowboy and build up a ranch. You can imagine how such a proposition would appeal to a 16 year old. Although I was very sorry to give up my studies only six weeks from examinations, I agreed. It would have been very difficult for me to refuse, because of my total dependence on my parents. In May, we boarded the train for Alberta. The thousand mile trip was exciting and also the arrival at Disbury. The town was just beginning to build. From eight miles east, the country was entirely open. For 300 miles there was nobody except an occasional rancher near a creek. Into this wilderness we drove 16 miles to father's homestead. It was a nice, level piece of land with a good sized creek through one corner. The creek had deep places for swimming and was full of fish. There I was to live alone till school was out and Peter, twelve years, would follow me. Before father left, he bought me a twelve gauge shotgun and a fish hook. Those were my tools for keeping alive. After I saw father off on the train, I drove my two broncos back to the farm, put up my tent and moved in.⁴⁴

A shelter was erected on their homestead and Heinrich slowly made improvements on the land. About 1902 Klaas and Katharina and the rest of the family also came to live at Didsbury. Klaas made many trips between Manitoba and Didsbury between the years 1900 and 1902. Each time he showed the area to different landseekers and told them of the prospect it held for them. Among them were two *Kleine Gemeinde* ministers from Manitoba, Peter Berg and Abram Klassen.⁴⁵

On two occasions, Klaas Peters' son Heinrich became involved in his father's immigration matters. In 1903 at age 19, he was sent to Liverpool, England to meet a party of German immigrants and to settle them on Saskatchewan land. Two years later he spent two

months in Helena, Montana to advertise southern Alberta beet land.⁴⁶

That same year the ever enterprising Klaas Peters opened a butcher shop in Didsbury. Heinrich describes what led up to this decision.

By 1905 we had a small heard of big, fat, beautiful steers for sale. When father was offered only three cents a pound for that choice beef, he decided to build a butcher shop in Didsbury and sell the meat at retail. He bought a lot and had a building constructed. But how to sell? He asked me if I would take over the butcher shop in town. My spirit of adventure prompted me to say yes. Then he hired a butcher to teach me the trade and I was in the butcher business . . . I led my steers to the slaughter house a mile from town, killed, hoisted them up, skinned them, dressed them and hauled the meat to my butcher shop by wagon. The hogs I scalded, scraped, dressed, cut in pieces and put into the ice box. I cleaned all the intestines and made link sausages and bologna. I salted and smoked hams and bacon; I rendered all the lard and even made dried beef out of the peak of the round. I was a butcher from bottom up.⁴⁷

Next winter Heinrich told his father that he was through with butchering. This did not disturb Klaas Peters who sold out at a good profit.

During the Didsbury years Peters continued his political activity on behalf of the Conservative Party. On a visit to Gretna during the election campaign of 1904, he attended a Party rally in support of the Conservative candidate for Lisgar, Mr. Sharpe. The chairman of the evening, J.F. Tennant, invited Peters to join Sharpe and Manitoba Attorney-General Colin H. Campbell on the platform, introducing him as the “well known and beloved immigration agent.”

In his speech, following candidate Sharpe, Peters reminded listeners of the 1896 elections in which the Liberals under Sir Wilfrid Laurier had campaigned for free trade. When the Liberals won the election they had indeed reduced import duties on some items. But on other articles tariffs had in fact increased! Peters knew, for he had at that time operated a store in Gretna. The duty on woollens, which he imported from Germany, rose sharply. And the farmers who had ordered these — a necessity for Manitoba’s cold winters — had to pay extra. That, said Peters, was Liberal “Free Trade.”⁴⁸

On election date, November 3, 1904, the Conservative newspaper,

Germania, ran the following poem on its front page. The editor praised the poet, Klaas Peters of Didsbury, and the Mennonite people in general, for the 'conservative' tenacity with which they continued to cultivate the use of both Low and High German.

*Brüder, auf! es naht die Stunde,
Die dem Volke Freiheit bringt.
Wenn vereint und fest im Bunde
Stimmenmehrheit man erringt
Für die Männer, die dem Lande
Wirklich nützlich werden sein
Und das Volk von Trusts und Banden
Wollen retten und befrei'n.*

*Jeder Bürger sollte stimmen,
Ob er Tory oder Grit,
Vorteil kann man nur erringen,
Wenn man jetzt hält festen Schritt.
Stimmt konservativ, Ihr Leute.
Weichet nicht vom Ziele ab,
Denn die Grand Trunk gräbt schon heute
Für das Volk ein tiefes Grab.*

*Schinden will man ohne Schonen
Uns're Farmer Mann für Mann,
Das die Grand Trunk Millionen
Aus den Bauern pressen kann.
Auf, Ihr Wähler! Stimmt dagegen,
Stimmt den Greenway mausetot,
Niemals war er uns zum Segen,
Bringt uns aber bald in Not.*

*Stimmt für Sbarpe, den Held für Alle,
Der Regierungsbahnen will,
Dafür stimm' in jedem Falle,
Wer noch weiter leben will.
Merkt! Wie billig wird man fahren
Auf Regierungsbahnen dann,
Summen Geldes wird ersparen
Jeder biedre Bauersmann.*

*Oftmals kann man dann besuchen
Freunde in Saskatchewan,
Höflich wird man Euch dann buchen
Für drei Dollars auf den Mann.
Weizen wird man transportieren
Für 2 Cents bis an die See.
Reichlich wird dann profitieren
Jedes Farmers Portemonnaie.*

*Wird man aber töricht handeln,
Wählen blindlings liberal,
Wird sich Freud in Leid verwandeln
Und erleben wird man Qual.
Syndikat und Kompanien
Werden Eisenbahnen bauen
Und Regierungsgelder ziehen,
Dir wir ihnen anvertrauen.*

*Ach, dann wird ein jeder stöhnen,
Der sein Geld verschwinden sieht,
Und so mancher wird auch wäbnen,
Dafs ihm Unrecht gar geschieht,
Denn der Fahrpreis für die Reise
Bis nach Süd'Saskatchewan
Wird sich jetzt so hoch erweisen,
Dafs man's kaum bezahlen kann.*

*Zwanzig Dollars und darüber
Fordern sie von Mann und Frau,
Dieses glaube mir, mein Lieber,
Denn die Kompanien sind schlau.
Fünfzehn Cents wird man für Weizen
Zahlen müssen bis zum Meer.
Dies wird unsern Unmut reizen
Und die Taschen halten leer.*

*Stimmt für Sharpe, Ihr wackern Brüder,
Der uns nutzen will und kann
Stimmt den Greenway gänzlich nieder
Samt der Grand Trunk Eisenbahn.*

Brothers up, the hour's approaching,
 bringing freedom in its wake,
 So that binding chains encroaching
 our majority will break!
 A united Tory party
 Will benefit our fair home land!
 Sing praises long and loud and hearty:
 Our fate at last is in our hand!

Up and cast your vote my brothers,
 whether you be Tory or Grit;
 don't leave this country's fate to others,
 while idly you on the sidelines sit.
 Vote Conservative my people,
 Never of your aims lose sight;
 shout aloud from tower and steeple:
 "The Grand Trunk Railway is our blight!"

Mercilessly they are scheming
 to skin our farmers man for man;
 while you are sitting back and dreaming,
 they'll take your millions while they can!
 Arise, my brothers, use your franchise
 to bury Greenway and his Grits!
 'Tis not enough merely to chastize
 the rascals, rob them of their wits!

Vote for Sharpe, the people's hero
 and for public lines of rail;
 keep all graft right down to zero
 and further welfare without fail!
 Mark how cheaply we'll then travel
 on public railways, mom and dad:
 The rates they'll charge will not unravel
 our wallets, will not even make us sad.

If at friends out west you're looking,
 to visit as often as you can,
 the cost will be on a regular booking
 three dollars only for woman or man.

Your wheat it will be swiftly carried
 for two cents a bushel to the sea;
 no longer need your looks be harried,
 your welfare their first thought will be.

But if you insist on folly,
 and blindly vote the Liberal man,
 no more your outlook will be jolly,
 all comforts change to tortures then.
 Syndicates of every colour
 Will build all future railways then,
 devour with greed your bottom dollar
 and make you all be poorer men!

All you'll hear will be the groaning
 of those whose money disappeared,
 of many wrong will be the moaning,
 such as we have never heard.
 For then the cost of one train boarding
 to friends in South Saskatchewan,
 will be away past your affording,
 and make you look all worn and wan.

Twenty dollars, just believe it,
 they will charge each woman and man!
 All your woes stay unrelieved
 Unless their tactics you will ban!
 Fifteen cents per bushel hauling
 will they charge from here to port;
 Incomes will all keep on falling
 and all of your accounts fall short!

Vote for Sharpe, my vigilant brothers,
 and his honest Tory team!
 Down with Greenway and all others
 who support the Grand Trunk's scheme.

Translation: Gerhard Ens

Peters was also undoubtedly involved in the first provincial election in Alberta in 1905. Cornelius Hiebert of Didsbury was elected as one of only two Conservatives in Alberta's first legislature.

The New Home at Waldeck

The government's decision in 1903 to open for settlement its lease land along the railway east from Swift Current to Herbert immediately sparked activity there. Saskatchewan Land Company in Moose Jaw acquired a large tract of this land at once and blatantly advertised it for sale as, "The World's Choicest Wheat Lands." It quoted prices ranging from \$5.50 to \$7.50 per acre and made the exaggerated claim that there was plenty of timber to be had along the creek and river for shed, stable and fence building. The company's misleading advertisements succeeded in catching the attention of the Mennonites in southern Manitoba.⁴⁹ One is a bit surprised that Peters, who had settled immigrants from Germany and Russia on some of the best land in Canada, responded to this promotion and settled his own family in the much inferior area around Waldeck.

Peters had very ambitious dreams about what was going to happen here. He bought a piece of land at the Waldeck switch and surveyed a townsite. His plan was to liquidate the ranch and build a city. His sons were to farm nearby while he would supervise construction, seeing to it that the post office, school and everything else get into their right place. He himself would own the lumberyard and hotel. Heinrich Peters recalled that for a while it seemed as if his father really would become a prominent figure in the province, until he overestimated his financial acumen and lost everything he had.⁵⁰

If Klaas Peters' intentions really were to become rich at Waldeck, there would have been many hurdles to cross in order to reach that goal. The railroad ran through the hamlet of Waldeck. The land on the north side of the track was owned by Peters, that on the south side by other individuals. The Peters family arrived at Waldeck in 1908 and settled on a farm just north-east of the hamlet site. Sons Heinrich, Jacob, Peter and Klaas Jr. all worked on the farm and Klaas Sr. went to work creating his town. A few businesses had already been built on the south side of the tracks and Peters now tried to persuade them to move to the north side.

In 1908 Peters himself built the Waldeck Hotel on the north side. The hotel, including the saloon, enjoyed a thriving business among the settlers and the many businessmen coming through the area. The hotel-saloon was first operated by Peter Janzen, a brother of Klaas Peters' son-in-law, Jacob Janzen. He soon grew tired of the saloon and quit. Fearing to hire a stranger to replace him, lest the profits from the saloon would be siphoned into the bartender's pocket, Peters asked his son Heinrich to take over. When Heinrich

KLAAS PETERS & CO.

AGENTS
FOR
GALT COAL

DEALERS IN
**LUMBER and ALL KINDS OF
BUILDING MATERIAL**

Jacob F. Janzen,
Manager.

Waldeck, Sask. Oct. 5th, 1909. 190

OFFICE OF

Klaas Peters

RAILWAY LANDS AND TOWN PROPERTY FOR SALE
AGENT FOR FIRE AND HAIL INSURANCE
MONEY TO LOAN

Waldeck, Sask. Nov. 17 1909.

Office of

Klaas Peters & Sons.
Grain Growers

Waldeck, Sask. Dec. 23rd 1912



quit in December of 1909, the bar was leased out.⁵¹ With the coming of prohibition in 1915 the bar had to close entirely. Peters then leased out the dining and guest rooms as well.⁵² The hotel was sold and dismantled in the latter 1930s.

Besides the hotel, Peters also built a lumber yard, Klaas Peters & Co., in 1908. In addition to running these businesses, he sold railroad and town properties, was agent for a fire and hail insurance company and became a money lender. On July 15, 1908 Peters was appointed a Justice of the Peace. Mr. I. Argue, M.L.A. for Swift Current, recommended the appointment and Gerhard Ens of Rosthern processed it. His attempts to have a detachment of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police established at Waldeck did not materialize.⁵³

As the population at Waldeck and surrounding district grew, the need for a school became evident. An application to form a school district was sent to the Department of Education in Regina and approved in February, 1907. A petition requesting that the school be located on the south side of the track was countered by Klaas Peters who pushed for the school to be built on his land on the north side. The Department of Education approved the latter in September of 1907. The following year Peters donated some lots to the United Church and the first school classes were held in its building, pending the erection of a school building.⁵⁴ The issue was complicated by the death of Peters' son-in-law, Jacob Janzen, the school board chairman. Janzen's successor was not sympathetic to Klaas Peters' plans. Although a debenture of \$1,500 was in place to build the school on the northern property, and a basement had been dug, a group now attempted to build it elsewhere. This squabble dragged on for two years before the northern site was finally agreed upon.⁵⁵

In 1909 Klaas Peters became openly involved in local politics and was elected the first reeve of the Rural Municipality of Waldeck. His opponents felt that, like many other businessmen, Peters would use his office to direct and/or protect his own interests. The local news correspondent for the Swift Current *Sun*, obviously not a supporter of Peters, wrote:

Stay at home Peters, or you will regret it in many ways. Dr. Palmer is the man who has had experience in municipal work and can lay down a good system to start our new municipality on.⁵⁶

A week later he added

It is regretted very much that Mr. Peters had some little errand to do which called him from the nomination meeting. Evi-

dently Mr. Peters wishes to avoid any argument which would affect his popularity. Although he claims to have a great deal of pull with this government, where does he get it?⁵⁷

These letters reflect the divisiveness and controversy that followed Klaas Peters wherever he went.

In 1912 some local residents of Waldeck sent a petition to the provincial government, asking that their status be changed from hamlet to village. The boundaries of the proposed village included some farm land owned by Klaas Peters. Together with his supporters he opposed the application arguing that the population was not big enough to handle the expenses of a village. He also protested that the village application included his farm land but not that of the promoters on the west side of the townsite.⁵⁸ Peters was concerned that the annexation of his farm by the village would result in such high taxes that the return from the crops grown on his land would not be sufficient to cover the taxes. In a further letter Peters also argued that the motives of some of the local residents were selfish, that they were only seeking public office by trying to break away from the Rural Municipality to form their own organization.⁵⁹ Since he was Reeve of the Municipality not willing to release his grip in the hamlet, his motives are equally questionable. The issue was resolved in August of 1913 when the trustees of Waldeck approached Peters, asking him to withdraw his protest because they could not operate the school with the grants which they received as a hamlet. If they were a village, they believed the operation of the school would be much easier. While he was not happy with his land being included in the village limits, Peters now supported incorporation for the sake of the children receiving a better education.

As Reeve of the RM from 1909-1913, Peters travelled extensively throughout the municipality by horse and buggy and later by car, inspecting roads, crops and the general conditions of the farmers. His administration earned him some respect, even from the formerly critical Swift Current *Sun*, which reported in 1911:

The government has completed a large iron bridge over the Swift Current creek east of Waldeck. This is undoubtedly a great credit to Reeve Klaas Peters, who pressed upon the department for more than a year to get this bridge built. It will be remembered that on the first nomination of Mr. Peters for reeve, his opponents told the ratepayers that bridge would never be built. Now what do the ratepayers think when they see such an expensive bridge built.⁶⁰

At the same time, opposition to his leadership also mounted. His conduct at meetings of the municipal council produced much criticism, leading to a ratepayers meeting that summer in which Peters was asked to resign from his office as reeve. By the time of the nomination meeting in December, 1912, his popularity was very shaky. His supporters were therefore quite disappointed when Peters failed to explain his conduct and merely promised to serve the municipality as well as he could, if re-elected.⁶¹

Peters continued to sell lots in the village, in 1911 to the Methodists to build a church and in 1912 to the Anglicans to also construct a church. He donated land to the Tennis Club of Waldeck to build tennis courts. His sons were musically very talented and played in a band for local dances and community events. Local involvement came at many levels. A most humorous event happened at the annual Waldeck Sports Day on June 20, 1912. Klaas Peters won the race of the day (100 yard dash) in the "old man's race," where the correspondent describes him as running the 100 yard like a two-year old.⁶²

The Church of the New Jerusalem

As early as the 1880s, the winds of change were in motion in the southern Manitoba Mennonite communities. The impact of this change could be felt in all areas of life, including religion. There were indications that people were yearning for something new in terms of church activities. Many of the old practises and beliefs were no longer meaningful to their lives. Church members began experimenting with new things: Bible study groups, singing practises, Sunday Schools, and fellowship with other churches. These did not go unobserved by Klaas Peters and had their effect on him as well. He began to show an interest in the mission work of the American Mennonites. In the *Rundschau* he explained that there had been a time when the Church had not been able to participate in mission activities. The struggles of the pioneer years had taken all of their energies and resources. Now that they were better established, they should once more support missions.⁶³

Mission efforts work both ways. There were also churches who found these Mennonite communities very receptive to new understandings of scripture. The Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Swedenborgians, Mennonite Brethren, and Holdeman Mennonites all found converts among these people.⁶⁴

The teachings of the Swedenborgians, officially known as the

Church of the New Jerusalem, found roots in the fertile mind of Klaas Peters. His membership in the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Manitoba was dropped in 1897, voluntarily according to him.⁶⁵ The ministerial was concerned enough about this Swedenborgian connection to ask *Ältester* Johann Funk to talk to Peters about it.⁶⁶ His contact with the Swedenborgian Church may have come through Abram Klassen, his friend and business partner. Klassen had left the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church some time earlier and had joined the Holdeman group, formally known as the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.⁶⁷ It is primarily through this latter church that the influence of Swedenborg's teachings appears to have come into the southern Manitoba Mennonite communities.

Holdeman, who left the General Conference Mennonite Church in Ohio in 1859 and formed a separate denominational group, conducted a series of evangelistic meetings in the Manitoba *Kleine Gemeinde* during the winter of 1881-82. As a result, *Ältester* Peter Toews and about a third of his Church joined the Holdeman group.⁶⁸ By the following year this group began to experience discipline problems, some of which were apparently related to the Swedenborgian 'heresy.' In response, Rev. John Holdeman and Rev. Mark Seiler came to Manitoba to help them resolve these problems.⁶⁹ Seiler, a former Amish minister who had become a trusted associate of Holdeman, now offered to study the teachings of Swedenborg in order to prepare a refutation of them. But, as he read the Swedenborgian books, he became enamoured with these teachings and converted to the Church of the New Jerusalem.⁷⁰

The first Holdeman group to form a Swedenborgian Church did so at Pawnee Rock, Kansas, in 1888.⁷¹ In Manitoba, the Swedenborgian Church emerged at Rosenfeld and it was here that Klaas Peters and Peter Hiebert were ordained as ministers on July 13, 1902 by Bishop Adolph Raeder of New York, President of the Dutch Synod, and Bishop S.S. Seward, President of the General Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem.⁷² Other Mennonite leaders of this movement included Klaas Peters' sons, Heinrich, Peter, and Klaas, Gerhard Ens and John E. Zacharias.

When an older member of the Swedenborg Church, formerly of Mennonite background, was asked how she would describe Klaas Peters, she compared him to Johnny Appleseed.⁷³ Most people are not aware of the fact that Johnny (Appleseed) Chapman was Swedenborgian and that he used his love of planting apple orchards as a means of spreading the teachings of Swedenborg. The comparison is appropriate, for Klaas Peters spread his new beliefs wherever he

was involved in land settlement. A Swedenborgian Church was begun at Oregon but died out when key members moved away. The first church to be built at Rosthern in 1898 was the Swedenborgian. It is still in existence today. Others were started at Didsbury, Alberta,

150 *Journal of the General Convention, 1918.*

28.	Albert Björck	Ordained	Aug.	17, 1890
29.	Benjamin P. Unruh	"	Oct.	12, 1890
30.	Louis Rich	"	Dec.	14, 1890
31.	John W. MacPherson	"	May	24, 1891
32.	Charles Augustus Nussbaum	"	Nov.	18, 1891
33.	Clarence Lathbury	"	April	7, 1892
34.	Lewis Field Hite	"	May	28, 1893
35.	Hiram Vrooman	"	Feb.	22, 1894
36.	Albert B. Francisco	"	April	28, 1895
37.	William H. Adkins	"	May	16, 1895
38.	Soren Christian Brönniche	"	Oct.	4, 1896
39.	William Paul Harthill	"	July	18, 1897
40.	Chauncey Giles Hubbell	"	Oct.	16, 1897
41.	James Taylor	"	April	7, 1898
42.	Frank August Gustafson	"	Mar.	19, 1899
43.	George Wengel	"	Sept.	16, 1900
44.	Alexander Henry	"	Sept.	16, 1900
45.	Russell Eaton	"	Sept.	16, 1900
46.	James Edward Thomas	"	Sept.	16, 1900
47.	Abraham Nobel (formerly Knobel)	"	June	2, 1901
48.	Klaas Peters	"	July	13, 1902
49.	Peter Hiebert	"	July	13, 1902
66.	Jacob Schroeder	"	July	18, 1909
67.	William Frederick Wunsch	"	Sept.	5, 1909
68.	Maro Franklin Underwood, M. D.	"	May	22, 1910
69.	Edwin Miner Lawrence Gould	"	June	9, 1910
70.	Axel Johan Mauritz Sigurd Lundeberg	"	Nov.	6, 1910
71.	Abraham Simons	"	Nov.	6, 1911
72.	Leslie Eric Wethey	"	Aug.	4, 1912
73.	Rodney Dent Book, M. D.	"	Jan.	26, 1913
74.	Walter Brown Murray	"	June	8, 1913
75.	John Hiebert Enns	"	July	6, 1913
87.	John Enns Zacharias	"	May	9, 1915
88.	Lloyd Hastings Edmiston	"	May	9, 1915
89.	Louis Alexander Dole	"	June	15, 1916
90.	Samuel O'Dell Weems	"	April	19, 1917
91.	William R. Reece	"	May	20, 1917
92.	Robert J. Strong	"	May	20, 1917
93.	Earl Clarence Hamilton	"	Aug.	26, 1917
94.	Merritt Scott Buckingham	"	April	19, 1918
95.	Charles Winfield Clodfelter	"	June	19, 1918
96.	Henry Karl Peters	"	June	19, 1918
97.	Isamu L. Watanabe	"	June	19, 1918
98.	Addison Prescott Hiller	"	June	19, 1918

Excerpts from the list of ordained ministers of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem, together with ordination dates, published on pages 149-51 of its 1918 *Journal*. Note Klaas Peters (#48), his son Henry (#96), and other "Mennonites" (#29, 49, 66, 75, 87).

Gedrängte Erklärung

des

innern Sinnes

der

prophetischen Bücher

des Alten Testaments

und der

Psalmen Davids.

Mit einem doppelten Sachregister.

Ein nachgelassenes Werk

Emmanuel Swedenborg's

aus der in London 1784 erstmals erschienenen lateinischen Urschrift

ins Deutsche übersezt von

Dr. Joh. Fried. Immanuel Tafel.

(Zweite Auflage.)

Stuttgart

Verlag des deutschen Swedenborg-Vereins

1899.

and Herbert, Saskatchewan. The latter had a church building and housed a fairly large group. At Renata, British Columbia there was also a very active group, composed largely of former members of the Mennonite church. Klaas Peters was the one who sowed much of the seed for initiating and developing the Swedenborgian churches in these settlements.

Why did people leave the Mennonite Church to join the Swedenborgians? One reason is suggested in an anonymous letter to the *Rundschau*. "Our members are all new church orientated, the old laws of the Mennonite faith have been thrown aside and the writings of Swedenborg are read diligently."⁷⁴ The laws referred to would seem to be those that restricted Mennonites from growing intellectually, artistically, and musically. Swedenborgians were also more ready to go beyond literal Biblical interpretations, and were willing to ask questions and seek new answers to old problems. Their

WESTERN CANADA CONFERENCE.

At the last annual meeting of the Conference the vote was passed to unite, as a body, with the General Convention. The application for membership has been made and will be acted upon by the Convention at Detroit in June. Mr. and Mrs. Henry K. Peters, who are at present in Cambridge, Mass., are appointed to represent the Conference at the Convention. We feel that it would be pleasant and helpful if we were more strongly represented at the formal reception into the Convention, as this would be a means to further the actual co-operation in our work; but the abnormal conditions everywhere arising out of the war make this very difficult for us.

We hope and pray that our uniting will be a source of strength and blessing for the Church as a whole.

Reverend John H. Enns is faithfully ministering to the small but earnest group in Manitoba. The societies at Herbert and Chaplin, Sask., are under the care of Rev. Messrs. Klaas Peters and John E. Zacharias. Rosthern, being without a minister, was visited during the month of March. We look forward with pleasure to the returning of H. K. Peters, who will be ordained at the Convention in Detroit, and will be active in this field.

The Conference will hold its annual meeting at Herbert, July 7 and 8.

JOHN E. ZACHARIAS, *Presiding Minister*.

church also provided a greater willingness to accommodate ardent business people who felt restricted in their Mennonite churches.

World War I

The outbreak of war in August, 1914 raised apprehension among Canadian Mennonites, even though their *Privilegium*, negotiated in 1873 prior to their immigration, granted them exemption from military service. "The first premonition of trouble came in December of 1916, when R.B. Bennett, the Director General for National Service under the War Measures Act, called for a January inventory of every male in Canada between the ages of 16 and 65."⁷⁵

A delegation to Ottawa from the various Mennonite churches of Manitoba and Saskatchewan included Klaas Peters representing the Herbert area of Saskatchewan. In their meeting with R.B. Bennett on January 17, 1917, they were assured that Canada would fully honour the *Privilegium* of 1873. "Overjoyed to receive this official assurance, the delegates immediately sought from their constituency a financial contribution, a special expression of gratitude towards the support of war victims, invalids, widows and orphans."⁷⁶

On his return to Waldeck, Klaas Peters was busy collecting a substantial amount of money from the southern Saskatchewan Mennonites for this special contribution.⁷⁷ He also continued to operate his business in Waldeck, the "Farmers' Store," which dealt in groceries, hardware and stationery. Because of an accidental fall into the basement of his home in which he hurt his knee, his movement was limited. He had trouble walking and spent much time indoors.⁷⁸ The family's struggles increased when in April of 1917 their son Jacob died of tuberculosis at age twenty-one. From these experiences one gets a glimpse of how intense some of his personal and social struggles must have been at this point in his life.

A second registration for military service was planned by the government in 1918. Coming on the heels of the Conscription Act, it raised new concerns among Mennonites. The question now asked was, who qualified as a Mennonite to be exempt from conscription? *Ältester* Abraham Doerksen and *Ältester* Jacob Heppner of Manitoba claimed that the Mennonite community "has always considered its children and young people its own as much as its baptized members, and petitions for exemption have always intended to include young people of military age, whether they were baptized or not."⁷⁹

Klaas Peters was in full agreement with this statement, adding that

J. C. PETERS

K. PETERS

FARMERS' STORE

DEALERS IN

GROCERIES, HARDWARE AND STATIONERY

WALDECK, June 9th 1917. 1917

SASK.

Rev. Benj. Ewert
 Gretna, Man.
 Lieber Freund !

Leider komme ich erst jetzt zur ausführlichen Beantwortung
 Deines werten Briefes vom 23. April, und deiner Rechnung von \$ 12.00
 fuer 100 Ex. " Wichtige Dokumente " indem ich ein Mony Order im
 Betrage von \$ 12.00 beifuege. Die Dokumente habe ich dann gleich
 nach Herbert gebracht, und habe weiter noch nichts darueber gehoert.

Wie ich dir damals schon mittheilte trat ich am 3 ten May
 eine Reise nach Philadelphia und Washington D.C. an und war also
 einen Monat abwesend. Jetzt bin ich alle Tage so beschaeftigt dasz
 ich fast nicht weis was ich zuerst thun soll. Diesen Kuehl aber
 nur ein paar Tage an, dann habe ich wieder nichts zu thun.

Bei der naechsten Dominion Parlamentswahl wollte ich Conservat.
 stimmen, wenn aber Conscription auf der Speisekarte kommt, dann wird
 nicht nur dagegen gestimmt sondern auch vor der Wahl mit allen Kraef-
 ten dagegen gearbeitet. Die Deutschen in Manitoba werden das doch
 auch alle thun !

Herzlich gruessend

Dein Freund,

Klaas Peters

Peters may have been a political Conservative and a Swedenborgian by church affiliation, but he remained an ardent pacifist "Mennonite." The final paragraph of this letter reads: "At the next federal election I had planned to vote Conservative, but if conscription and food rationing are introduced, then I will not only vote against it, but also work against it with all my powers prior to the election. Germans in Manitoba will surely do likewise!"

it did not matter whether a person was baptized as an infant, or as an adult, or if he was never baptized or if he was baptized twice. These decisions were up to the interpretation of each individual, and no General had the right to decide these matters, since baptism was not in the name of Menno Simons, but in the name of Christ. In response to Benjamin Ewert's question about the status of Mennonites who had come from the United States, those who had later arrived from Russia, and those who had left the Mennonite Church and joined other churches, Peters argued that anyone who had immigrated to Canada under the name Mennonite in 1874 or later was exempt from military service. It was with this understanding that he had led many Mennonites to Canada from the United States, Russia and Germany.⁸⁰ To the *Mitarbeiter* he reported that he had personal assurances from a judge in Swift Current that any Mennonite youth who came under the Mennonite Treaty of 1873 would be exempted from military service.⁸¹

In April of 1918 Rev. David Toews, Rosthern, Klaas Peters and H.M. Klaasen, Herbert went to Ottawa to clarify the status of unbaptized Mennonite youth. They suggested in a letter to Col. Machin that,

- (1) every Mennonite of military service age obtain a certificate from a Mennonite minister, (2) only ministers that were designated by the Mennonites and recognized by the government could sign these cards, (3) that one such person be appointed for Manitoba and two for Saskatchewan (Rosthern and Herbert areas), (4) that the names of these be provided to the registrars, (5) that all government officials be instructed to recognize these certificates.⁸²

This proposal was accepted and things were now finally in order.

Hatred for Mennonites was very intense in certain parts of the country. Waldeck was one such place. The Anglo-Saxon population was upset that these Mennonites of German origin could be exempted because of religious reasons. One man argued that military exemption should never have been granted any people when they came into Canada and should now be revoked. It was not fair that Canadian lads were being taken and that lads of military age of Mennonite descent were being left to grow wheat at \$2.40 per bushel and at the same time enjoy all the privileges of Canadian citizenship without taking the responsibilities.⁸³ These Anglo-Saxon neighbours also had a deep hatred towards Klaas Peters as an individual. He was labelled "pro-German" for helping Mennonite boys with their exemption cards. At the celebration of the end of the

war on November 11, this hatred was expressed in the burning of a straw effigy of Klaas Peters, on the main street of Waldeck.⁸⁴

The Trial of Klaas Peters

The war may have officially ended on November 11, 1918, but it was not over for Klaas Peters. He was brought to trial on November 29 at the Swift Current courthouse in connection with his signing of exemption cards. It was argued by the prosecution that Peters was a Swedenborgian and not a Mennonite minister, and that he therefore had no right to sign exemption cards; and secondly, that he had signed exemption cards for non-Mennonite boys.⁸⁵ Trial date had originally been set for November 15, but the case was postponed because Peters was sick with Spanish Influenza.

In the court case the prosecution charged that Klaas Peters had issued an exemption card to Wilhelm Wiebe who was not a Mennonite. Wiebe, it was pointed out, had joined the Orange Lodge of Waldeck in 1915 at which time he claimed to be an Anglican. Yet when he was arrested in 1918 as a 'slacker,' he had secured within an hour of his arrest a Mennonite exemption card signed by Peters and on presentation of it was released. Peters argued that the *Privilegium* exempted from military service descendants of those Russian Mennonites who had come to Canada after 1873, regardless of their present church affiliation. Wiebe's parents, Heinrich and Katharine (Guenter) Wiebe were born in Russia and were members of the Manitoba Bergthaler Mennonite Church.

The fact that Wilhelm Wiebe belonged to the Orange Lodge was problematic. *Ältester* David Toews of the Rosenorter Mennonite Church at Rosthern testified that members of Mennonite churches were not permitted to join secret societies. Their constitution, he said, allowed them to expel members who joined these societies.

The more damaging charge against Klaas Peters was the fact that he was an ordained Swedenborgian minister but not a Mennonite minister. *Ältester* Toews testified that a clergyman of the Mennonite Church could not be a clergyman of the New Jerusalem Church. Klaas Peters had been a member of the April delegation to Ottawa, but had been sent as a representative of the people and not of any church. A large meeting of the northern Saskatchewan Mennonites, held in Waldheim later that month, had designated Toews to sign exemption cards for Mennonite boys at Rosthern and Drake and had urged Mennonites of the Herbert area to dissociate themselves "from all parties not of their faith in dealing with the Government on matters pertaining to the Military Service Act. This referred particu-

larly to Klaas Peters of Waldeck who we did not consider a Mennonite minister.”⁸⁶

Further testimony against Klaas Peters came from his lifelong enemy, Gerhard Ens. In some ways the two were similar. Both came from Mennonite background and were leaders in the Swedenborgian Church; both were aggressive personalities and quite autocratic in the way they conducted their homes; both were immigration agents, recruiting Mennonites from Russia and the United States. But Ens was a strong Liberal and Peters a strong Conservative. As mentioned earlier, his Liberal connections had probably won Ens the immigration agent job for which Peters had also contended in 1898. In his testimony Ens pointed out that the doctrines of the Mennonite and New Jerusalem Churches were quite different and that a man who was a member of one church could not be a member of the other. Ens had warned Peters that he was not to issue certificates, since Peters was not a Mennonite and had no right whatever to do so.

In his defence Peters maintained that he had always considered himself to be a Mennonite, although the doctrines and rules of the church to which he now belonged were quite different from those of the Mennonite Church. He saw himself as a minister of Christ, and not of any particular sect.⁸⁷

In a letter to a friend, Klaas Peters described his faith as follows:

I am just as good a Mennonite as I ever was. Swedenborg's theological works I read and believe. Swedenborg did not establish a new church. He was a Lutheran and died so. He never preached, instead he wrote, and what he wrote that he did for all mankind. (Also for Mennonites if they want to read his writings.)⁸⁸

It is clear that he strongly held the view that he could blend the two sets of beliefs, Swedenborgian and Mennonite. Particularly in the area of pacifism, Peters differed sharply from most Swedenborgians. At the General Conference of the Church of the New Jerusalem in 1917 he found everyone else taking an active interest in participating in the war. “He said he did not approve of this and voiced his disapproval.”⁸⁹

The court ruled against Klaas Peters on both charges. He was fined \$200.00 and charged \$149.75 in costs.⁹⁰

Argentina, Mexico, Florida

Following the war some Mennonite groups again began to search for another home. They were uneasy about the threats to their

control of education and other aspects of community and church life which the war had exposed. Even before the war ended, Klaas Peters had already established contact with the Argentinian government with the view of establishing a colony there.⁹¹ Interested individuals from Russia had contacted Peters, asking him to find them a country in which they could make their living on the land. A group of settlers from Herbert was also interested as were two families from Rosthern, who were prepared to move immediately.⁹² The Regina *Leader*, however, predicted that only a few would move to Argentina and that the wealthy Mennonites would not move at all.⁹³ With funds raised by interested local people, Peters, Johan Hamm and Johan Heinrichs travelled to Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay in early 1919. According to his granddaughter, Peters also went as a delegate to Mexico.⁹⁴ None of these places was recommended for settlement.

Klaas Peters was not a good businessman and often ran out of money in the various projects he wanted to pursue. He was a dreamer, who enjoyed discussing land, the settlement of peoples, religion and politics. In 1921 he sold the four or five quarter sections of land which he and his wife, Katherina, owned, and moved to Florida. They liked the climate but really missed their family in Saskatchewan.⁹⁵ Peters hoped to begin a Mennonite settlement in Florida. His son-in-law, Peter Janzen, came along as a delegate, hoping that the warmer climate would alleviate his asthma problems. An invitation from the Governor of Florida addressed to Jacob Friesen, a church leader at Swift Current, had led to Peters' initial visit to check out the land. The beautiful productive soil was indeed an attractive feature. But Mennonites in Canada suspected that the American government would not honour their freedoms in the future, since no written guarantees were given. When the Old Colony Mennonites decided to emigrate to Mexico, plans for the Florida settlement died. It was during his stay in Florida that Peters' booklet on the Berghaler Mennonites was published.

Return to Saskatchewan

When the Peters returned from Florida in September 1925 they settled at Hague, Saskatchewan, where their son, John, was teaching. Here Klaas preached occasionally at Swedenborgian church services held in homes at Hague and Rosthern. The sermons were generally given in German.

During this time, the home of Rev. David Toews of Rosthern burned to the ground. Klaas Peters wrote the Toews family a touch-

ing letter expressing his sympathy for their loss and hoping that they would all recover from the burns received. He also included a small financial contribution.⁹⁶

In June of 1927 the Peters moved to Herbert in order to be nearer to their children, the Janzen family, and to the Swedenborgian Church in Herbert. Now Klaas spent many hours telling stories to his grandchildren and in the community. He was a good storyteller; some found him obnoxious, but the majority found his stories interesting and informative. Klaas also taught his grandchildren Bible stories and did so in such a dramatic fashion that if he talked about Moses you believed he was Moses. He was also interested in the beauty of the heavens. After dark he would take his grandchildren outdoors and show them the stars and identify for them the constellations. Klaas valued the importance of knowing the German language and took time to teach his grandchildren how to read and write High German. At the same time he encouraged them to learn English in school, for he deplored the fact that so many Mennonites were against learning English and sent their children only to Mennonite schools.⁹⁷

Klaas Peters was a very religious man. Wherever he lived he would conduct church services in homes, even if only a few family members were gathered. He officiated at many weddings and also performed funeral services. Even as a younger man he had sought the Lord's guidance in prayer for his life's direction, and always asked for God's blessing and safety before leaving on one of his numerous long trips.⁹⁸

In January, 1930 his wife, Katharina, passed away. She had been a quiet, loving companion to Klaas Peters through many difficult times. Her life was often a struggle, for Klaas was gone for longer periods of time, and she was left to care for a large growing family. Her unselfish, caring manner is fondly remembered by friends and family. She is buried in Herbert.

After the death of his wife, Klaas Peters went to live with his daughter, Katharina, the Peter Janzens in Waldeck. He had lost the will to live and this often made him difficult to care for. He was physically weak, very emotional, and had lost much of his memory. He died in his daughter's home on June 23, 1932, and is also buried in the Herbert cemetery. A large funeral service was held, first in the United Church in Waldeck, and in the afternoon at the Herbert New Jerusalem Church. Rest had finally come to this tired traveller, who had been a pilgrim all his life.

He died a poor man. Many Mennonites had never come to under-

stand nor to appreciate him. Leaders like Benjamin Ewert and David Toews, however, valued Peters for the generous amount of love, time, and energy that he contributed to the cause of the Mennonite people.

Notes

1. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 4 September 1895.
2. Abe Warkentin, *Reflections on our Heritage* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1971), p. 325.
3. *Nebraska Anstedler*, October 1879.
4. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 5 November 1880.
5. *Ibid.*, 5 December 1880.
6. Manitoba Bergthaler Mennonite Church Register and Quebec Passenger Lists, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives (MHCA), Winnipeg.
7. Henry K. Peters, unpublished diary, copy in possession of Frank and Mary Dewar, Saskatoon, pp. 1-2.
8. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 21 May 1884.
9. Henry K. Peters, diary, pp. 2-3.
10. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 31 July 1889.
11. *Ibid.*, 5 June 1889. Cornelius Eide of Rosenhof accompanied them at his own expense and left Peters and Wiens in Oregon, while he went on to visit relatives in Kansas.
12. Letter, George Young, Manitou, to H.H. Smith, Winnipeg, 21 June 1888, Public Archives of Canada (PAC), RG 15, vol. 570, #179925(1); copy in MHCA, vol. 2615.
13. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 31 July 1899. The other three installments of the report appeared 17 and 24 July and 7 August 1889.
14. Interview with Rev. Gerhard Loewen, Gretna, Manitoba, February 1987. Gerhard Loewen's father moved to Oregon and returned broke. Jacob Loewen was very frustrated that he had been talked into this move by his brother-in-law, Klaas Peters. See also *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 1 January 1890, where Peters reflects on grumbling he had heard from Oregon and on how Mennonite communities deal with those who migrate.
15. Henry K. Peters, diary, p. 6.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 7. Another reference to this trip is found in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 18 March 1891.
17. Department of the Interior, Immigration Records. Saskatchewan Archives Boards (SAB), vol. 22, file 390, film 2.505.
18. *Sessional Papers*, vol. XXV, #7, 1892.
19. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 10 June 1891.
20. A.M. Nanton to Hillyard Mitchell, 22 June 1891, Osler, Hammond, Nanton Papers, SAB (1) B97-I-32. The townships were 43 and 43A in Range 3, and 43 in R4 west of the third meridian.
21. Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius G. Toews, ed., *Mennonite Memories: Settling in Western Canada* (Winnipeg: Centennial Publications, 1977), p. 164.
22. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 3 February 1892.
23. *Ibid.*, 8 February 1893.
24. Department of the Interior, Immigration Records. SAB, vol. 16, file 143, film 2.502.
25. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 4 October 1893.
26. *Ibid.*, 15 May 1895.

27. *Ibid.*, 20 June 1894.
28. *Ibid.*, September 12, 1894.
29. Letter, Esau and Loewen to Premier Greenway, 21 December 1895, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), MG 13, E1, 8596/1.
30. L. Pereira, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Interior, to T.R. Burpe, Secretary, Dominion Lands Branch, 16 March 1896, PAC, RG 15, vol. 578, file 179925, part 2; copy in MHCA, vol. 2953, file 2.
31. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 5 August 1896.
32. J.G. Colmer, London, England to A.M. Burgess, Ottawa, PAC, RG 76, C4714, vol. 50, #1960.
33. B.J. Friesen, Rosthern, to Hillyard Mitchell, MP, Duck Lake, 19 March 1896, SAB, B97 I-7, Constituency file #4.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Klaas Peters to Osler, Hammond and Nanton, 7 March 1896, *ibid.*, I-32 Osler, Hammond and Nanton #3.
36. J.H. Klassen, Rosthern, to T.O. Davis, MP, Ottawa, 24 April 1897, PAM, vol. 150, file 35848, film 7307, RG 76.
37. Klippenstein and Toews, p. 183.
38. An inter-departmental memo between T.O. Davis, M.P., and James Smart Department of the Interior, reported that Klaas Peters was alleged to have committed a criminal offense in 1896 and that he served time in Prince Albert Jail. I have exhausted all of the records available to me and found that no conviction was made and no sentence served. Charges may have been laid on this offense, but they must have been dropped for a possible variety of reasons; therefore, resulting in no records. See memo, PAM, RG 76, vol. 150, file 35848, film C7307.
39. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 24 August 1898. Purchased land could be paid over two years at 6% interest.
40. *Nordwesten*, 25 August 1898.
41. *Ibid.*, 5 January 1899.
42. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 12 October 1898; letter of F.C. Nickel, Rosthern.
43. Kinette Club of Didsbury, comp., *Echoes of an Era: History of Didsbury and District* (Didsbury: Didsbury Booster, 1969), p. 140.
44. Henry K. Peters, diary, p. 18.
45. *Nordwesten*, May 1902.
46. Henry K. Peters, diary, pp. 25-26.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
48. *Germania*, 20 October 1904, p. 5.
49. Don C. McGowan, *Grassland Settlers: The Swift Current Region During the Era of the Ranching Frontier* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1975), p. 96. Peters' daughter, Mrs. Tina (Peters) Sangster, Moosomin, SK in an interview in February 1987, wondered why her father had moved the family to this area.
50. Henry K. Peters, diary, p. 30.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
52. *Excelsior Echoes: History of RM of Excelsior* (Wymark: Wymark and District History Book Committee, 1982), p. 350.
53. Letter, A. Turgeon, Attorney General, to Gerhard Ens, M.L.A., 15 July 1908, SAB, M3-4A, 1908.
54. *Excelsior Echoes*, p. 350 mentions this donation. Since the United Church of Canada was only founded in 1925, the lots were probably donated to the Presbyterian Church.
55. The above account is based on the Waldeck S.D. #1718 file, SAB.
56. *Swift Current Sun*, 3 December 1909.
57. *Ibid.*, 10 December 1909.
58. Petition, 4 January 1913, SAB, MA5, Waldeck Village.
59. Klaas Peters to J.N. Bayne, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, 6 January 1913, *ibid.*
60. *Swift Current Sun*, 10 March 1911.
61. *Ibid.*, 10 December 1912.

62. *Ibid.*, 28 June 1912.
63. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 16 January 1889.
64. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 296.
65. "Synopsis of evidence expected to be presented by Sgt. Andrew Greig," PAC, RG 24, vol. 115, HQ 7168-1; copy in MHCA, vol. 2615.
66. Manitoba Bergthaler Ministers and Deacons, minutes of 8 May 1897, MHCA, vol. 727.
67. Sommerfelder Mennonite Church Registers, Book 1A, p. 18; MHCA microfilm.
68. Epp, pp. 148, 290.
69. Clarence Hiebert, *The Holdeman People: The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, 1859-1969* (Pasadena: William Carey, 1973), pp. 534, 186-87.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-05. Holdeman himself then wrote the refutation in 1889.
71. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 6 June 1900.
72. *Journal* of General Convention of the New Jerusalem of United States for 1918, p. 150, MHCA.
73. Interview, Bill and Trudi Strauss, Dalmeny, SK, March 1987. Trudi's mother, nee Zacharias, formerly of Herbert, made the comparison.
74. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 6 June 1900.
75. Epp, p. 369.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
77. *Beilage* of *Der Mitarbeiter*, May 1917.
78. Klaas Peters to Benjamin Ewert, 24 April 1917, MHCA, vol. 542, file 3.
79. Peter D. Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976), p. 241.
80. Letter, Benjamin Ewert to Klaas Peters, 28 January 1918; Klaas Peters to Benjamin Ewert, 1 February 1918; MHCA, vol. 542, file 4.
81. *Mitarbeiter*, April 1918, pp. 5-6.
82. Toews, Peters, and Klassen to Col. Machin, 12 April 1918, MHCA, vol. 542 file 4.
83. Manitoba *Free Press*, 10 September 1918. See also correspondence in PAC, RG 76, vol. 173, 58764/2; copy in MHCA, vol. 2615.
84. Interview, Hank Janzen, February 1987.
85. The most extensive documentation of this court case is found in PAC, RG 24 (Department of Defense), vol. 115, HQ 7618-1; copy in MHCA, vol. 2615. The Regina *Morning Leader* (November 9, 15 and 29), Swift Current *Sun* (November 15 and 29), and Winnipeg *Telegram* (November 15) reported on the trial proceedings.
86. "Synopsis of Evidence to be expected of Reverend David Toews," in PAC, RG 24, vol. 115, HQ 7168-1.
87. Swift Current *Sun*, 29 November 1918.
88. Undated letter of Klaas Peters, transcribed and translated by Department of Defense, PAC, RG 24, vol. 115, HQ 7618-1.
89. "Synopsis of Evidence to be expected of Sgt. Andrew Greig", *ibid.*
90. Evidence not presented at the trial but available to the prosecution included a signed statement by Const. R.J. Gower claiming that Peters had offered him a bribe to release a Mennonite "deserter from the American draft" whom Gower had arrested on request of the American authorities. (*Ibid.*)
91. Letter of Klaas Peters to Abram Reimer, 16 October 1918, *ibid.*
92. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 16 April 1919.
93. Regina *Leader*, 18 February 1919.
94. Interview, Mrs. Tina Sangster, Moosomin, SK, February 1987.
95. *Ibid.*
96. Klaas Peters to David Toews, 16 December 1926, MHCA, vol. 1184.
97. Letter, Mrs. Mary Dewar, Saskatoon, 7 February 1987.
98. *Ibid.*

Appendix I

Title and opening paragraphs of the original serialized version: *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 22 January 1890:

The Bergthaler Mennonites and their Immigration to Manitoba
The most important events from 1873 until the most recent times

By Klaas Peters (Silberfeld)
Gretna, Manitoba

The wish has already on several occasions been expressed among us Mennonites that it would possibly be of great interest to us to have an account of the emigration of the Bergthaler Mennonites from south Russia written and submitted to the *Rundschau* for publication. While this wish was already generally felt for some time, the writer of such an account is still missing. No one was prepared to undertake the task of recording this important event in the history of our church.

Through the publisher of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* our Minister Heinrich Wiebe was asked to recount something about this important event, since he was the one best acquainted with the whole matter. For significant reasons he did not want to describe the entire course of the emigration and asked me, after showing me the letter of the editor of the *Rundschau*, to report the whole event as best I could.

I must say about myself that I cannot do it well enough, for I was still very young at the time and there are no available documents. Hence, I will have to gather my recollections and look back with the mind's eye to that time when the large emigration began in south Russia, and will try to write down the events according to the best of my knowledge and abilities.

*Gieb mir, o Du, der willig giebt,
Ein Herz, das nur das Gute liebt
Und rein und heilig ist!
Mach Andre groß, o Gott! ich sei
Vergnügt und meiner Pflicht getreu,
Ein Weiser und ein Christ.*

In grace divine give me, o Lord,
A heart desiring but the good
In holy purity true.
Let others have all power anon,
I'm happy with my duty done —
A wise man and a Christian too.

Translation: Gerhard Ens

Appendix II

Conclusion of the original serialized version: *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 2 April 1890.

But, many of the thousands of *Rundschau* readers may well ask, how have things gone in the spiritual realm during this time? Dear readers, I would gladly tell you about great spiritual progress; but I have to say, much as I don't like it, that in this respect, i.e. in church and school affairs, we have unfortunately made no progress in my opinion.

What is the reason for our stagnation? The fault is our own.

Our articles of faith, the questions and answers in our catechism, as well as the sermons which are given during pre-baptismal instruction and at the baptismal service are sound and good and I don't know who could have anything to criticize in them. Those who love and follow this our basic teaching could be called true disciples of Christ. But . . .

Now I want to report a few words about our school system as we have developed it in America. You can readily imagine how the education of the children fared in the first years. There were no school buildings so that instruction, where it occurred at all, had to take place in living rooms. Salaries for teachers were not very attractive and there was a general shortage of teachers.

In the fall of 1878 the School Board in Winnipeg, at the suggestion of our representative, Mr. Hespeler, offered to support our Mennonite schools through the government's school fund. We gratefully accepted this offer. It now seemed as if new life would enter our educational endeavours for the church leaders now made an effort to help the teachers pass their examinations, after which the government would pay out the school funds. For two years we accepted this support amounting to a hundred dollars per teacher annually. Then it was decided to reject these supporting funds, because some of the brethren were afraid that the government was only dazzling our eyes and would later demand that we repay the money with interest. The *Kleine Gemeinde* was not as fearful and has continued to accept the support until the present without ever having to repay a single penny. The main point is that the *Kleine Gemeinde* has always had better schools than we Berghaler. In our area, that is Edenburg, Neuanlage and Silberfeld, we have already hired teachers from their circles and we are glad to be able to obtain such teachers from them.

For ten years we had no legal instructions in Manitoba according to which we were to regulate the internal affairs of our colonies. Accordingly,

until 1884 a *Gebietsamt* (colony administration) was annually elected according to the Russian pattern. This body regulated the various affairs of the colonies.

At the beginning of 1884, however, we had to begin to follow specific instructions sent by the government and to adjust the entire administration of our internal affairs accordingly. Initially we resisted, but it was of no use; our government would not accept the validity of the Russian laws. In 1884 the Manitoba government also attempted to modify our school system so as to conform to the Schools Act; in this it was successful. Later on many among us did not like this, because all now had to pay school taxes according to the value of their assets whether they had children in school or not. Hence, differences of opinion arose and one school district after another was dissolved and replaced by the old church schools. As a result there are now only three district schools on this Reserve; how many there are on the East Reserve I do not know.

The government gives us full freedom to operate either church schools or district schools according to our wishes. We are never required to swear the oath in court, not even when we appear as witness. Our yes and no are sufficient. Thus, we have that full civil and religious freedom here in Manitoba for which we were looking when we still lived in Russia. May God preserve this freedom for many years and bless even our grandchildren with it.

But of what use will all of this freedom of land and government be to us unless Jesus Christ, the Son of God, truly frees us from the bondage of our sins? The Lord Jesus wants to set us free, but we have to be willing and to become members of His body through a genuine repentance and new birth. May the loving God graciously grant that through the blood of the Lamb. Amen.

Conclusion

Dear readers, in weakness I have now recorded the most important events that have taken place in our church since 1873, in order to preserve their memory for our descendants.

At the time of our preparation to emigrate it was not only the already mentioned church leaders, Peters and Wiebe, who guided the venture, but all of the ministers and other administrators of the church diligently supported them in bringing the project to its conclusion. At that time our church was led by *Ältester* Gerhard Wiebe and preachers Franz Dyck, Heinrich Wiebe, Cornelius Stoesz, David Stoesz, Abram Bergen and Cornelius Friesen.

The oldest of the preachers, Franz Dyck, died at an advanced age after serving the church for many years. The other preachers are still alive. The beloved old *Oberschultz* J. Peters died after a long period of service as *Gemeinde-Vorsteher* (church administrator), fully convinced that he was entering the eternal rest of the saints. The dear old *Waisenvorsteher* (administra-

tor of the Orphans' Bureau), Peter Friesen, who served in his office for many years and became a true father of the orphaned children in our church, died shortly before the departure for America but after he had organized all of the funds and debts of the *Waisenamt* (Orphans' Bureau) in preparation for the emigration. Johann Bergmann, who served us well in many areas and supervised the entire sale of our homesteads in Russia, also died in America some time ago.

Many of the fathers have by now passed away, who brought us here with much effort and work, to a land in which we received free homesteads and enjoy full civil liberty. Unfortunately, the labours of such faithful men are often rewarded with thanklessness. But the unthankful person always refuses to believe that he is in the wrong and thinks that his advice would represent the wiser course of action.

Some readers may wonder where the Bergthaler Church originated. I will explain this briefly to conclude my account. Most readers probably know that the first Mennonites immigrated to Russia from Prussia a hundred years ago and settled on the west bank of the Dnieper River in the Province of Ekaterinoslav. When all of the land donated by the Russian government in this area was settled and more and more people required new land, the government once more gave the Mennonites a tract of land for settlement. This tract of some 9000 dessiatines (ca. 8280 hectares) was located some two hundred *Werst* (ca. 188 km.) southeast of the Chortitza Colony in the vicinity of Mariupol close to the Sea of Azov. Here five villages were established, the first of which its founders called "Bergthal." It is from this village name that the Church took the name which it has kept to the present time. In 1851 the last village of this colony was founded, and many of the ones who settled there emigrated to America later on, as we have narrated. The five villages were all sold to Swabians and Russians, and with that the last trace of Mennonites disappeared from this place which they had transformed from desolate steppes to fruitful fields.

Appendix III

Excerpt from original text of the Minister of the Interior: Canada, Parliament *Sessional Papers*, 1893, No. 13, "Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the year 1892," p. xxxii.

The history of any country does not afford, I undertake to say, a case in which an obligation to the Government on the part of any society, company or individual has been fulfilled with greater faithfulness than this; and on the principle of "honour to whom honour is due" the facts of the case cannot be too generally known, to the credit not only of the Mennonites of Manitoba but of the Waterloo Society as well. The distribution of the loan, its collection and its repayment to the Government, were entrusted to Mr. Jacob Y. Shantz, the Secretary of the Waterloo Society, who is largely responsible for the honourable and business like way in which this transaction has been conducted from beginning to end. It is pleasant to be able to add that, so far as I know, neither from the persons to whom the advance was made nor from the Waterloo Society, who became accountable for its repayment has there ever been any suggestion, far less any formal demand (as has been too frequently the case in regard to other loans made by the Government), for a relaxation of the terms of refund, either as regards principal or interest, nor has there been any attempt either on the part of the settlers themselves or of their bondsmen to escape liability in even one individual case.

Klaas Peters was born in Russia and participated as a nineteen-year-old in the immigration to Canada in 1875.

His family lived at various times in all three prairie provinces, where Peters worked as teacher, merchant, immigration agent and business entrepreneur. He travelled extensively in Canada and the USA and also made trips to Russia and South America.

Although Peters joined the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) around the turn of the century, he continued his active involvement with the Mennonite community and close relations with its leadership until his death in 1932.

