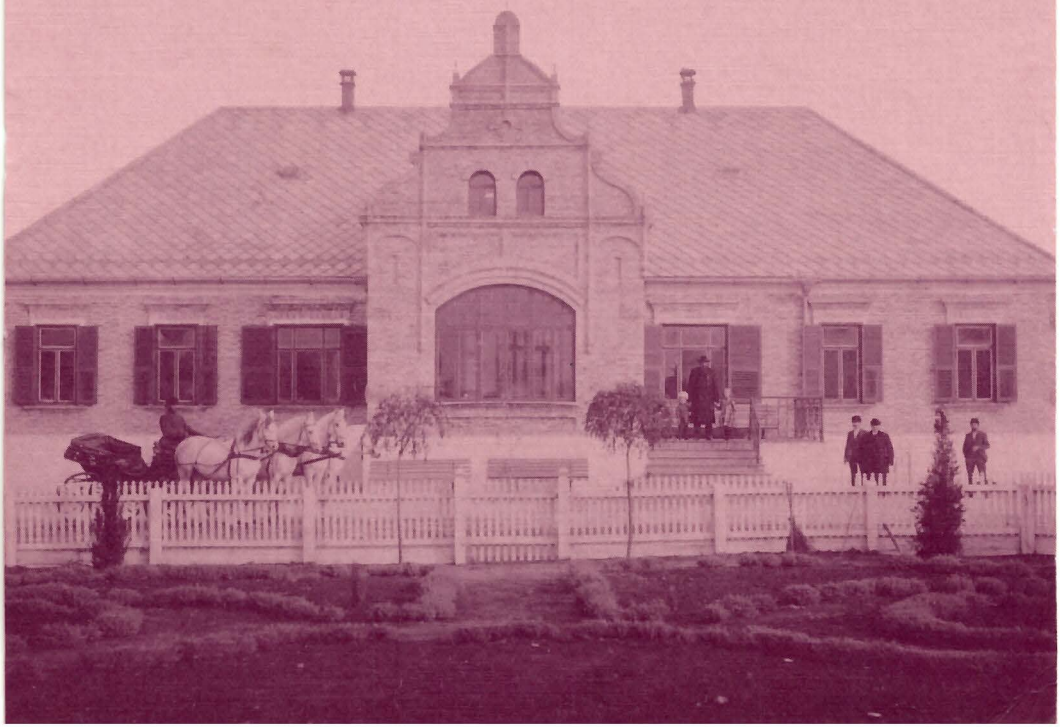
Daydreams & Nightmares

Life on the Wintergruen Estate

by
Helena Goossen Friesen



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by
Helena Goossen Friesen

Translated by
Neta Enns

CMBC Publications
Winnipeg, Manitoba
1990

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To the Memory

of

Neta Enns
1923-1989

Contents

A Word about the Translation

These memoirs are a dual legacy. They are Mother Friesen's memoirs about her life in Russia. They are also a gift from her daughter, Neta (Enns), whose patient and painstaking work in transcribing and translating the original manuscript made this publication possible.

It was several months after her mother's death in 1985 that Neta, in checking through the contents of an old tin box, discovered a sheaf of fragile, edge-worn pages covered from corner to corner with the faded pencil scrawl of her mother's hand. She was excited to find that these notes told the story of the writer's life in Russia.

In the ensuing year, Neta set to work—dictionary and magnifying glass in hand—to decipher and transcribe the scarcely legible script into modern German before translating it into English. Driven by a strong desire to preserve the story in a form accessible to present and future members of the family, Neta laboured over the translation, trying to emulate the rich romantic style of the original work. Although her efforts were interrupted by a battle with cancer, she managed to complete a draft in time for distribution to family members on the occasion of her and John's fortieth wedding anniversary in August 1988. Neta died in March 1989. The publication of these memoirs is a memorial to her accomplishment and to her life of concern for others.

When the family members were gathered for Neta's funeral, Neta's two sisters, Helene and Margaret, and three of Oma's grandchildren spent two days cloistered in a small room recalling, retelling and recording stories they remembered hearing from Oma about her experiences but which did not appear in her memoirs. These stories are included in this publication as part of the legacy.

Winnipeg, Manitoba
April 1990

An Introduction to Estate Life in Russia

From our vantage point at the end of the twentieth century, it is often difficult to conceive of people, places and events at the turn of the century. The present is separated from the past by what often seems an immense gulf, a chasm which appears particularly broad for many Mennonites.

During this century wars, revolutions and migrations have torn communities apart, bringing terror, suffering and death, separating families and friends and testing faith. These experiences followed a century of relative peace and tranquility, a century which saw the expansion of Mennonite communities and a transformation of their ways of life.

The tensions which these changes had created within Mennonite communities during the nineteenth century pale into insignificance beside the disruptions caused by external events during the present century. In hindsight the world prior to 1914 appears to many European Mennonites as a golden age of peace and prosperity. This feeling is particularly strong among Mennonites born and raised in Russia.

Their life was greatly disrupted by the First World War and the subsequent Revolution and Civil War. For some it spelled a sudden end to a way of life. Among these were the estate owners. This small landed elite owned vast acreages and lived in areas removed from the world of village and colony community which dominated Russian Mennonite life. This memoir by Helena Goossen concerns the life of an estate family and its fate as Russia fell apart after 1917.

Most Mennonites in Russia settled on land provided by the Russian government in villages situated in colonies. A few prosperous and adventurous farmers rented vacant colony land from the government. Others, like Klaas Wiens, the first

district mayor of Molotschna, and Johann Cornies, the well-known agricultural leader, were awarded land in recognition of their services to the Colony.

Wiens and Cornies became successful and wealthy farmers, initially through sheep rearing, the major form of economic endeavor in the steppe region before 1850. After 1817 Mennonites were permitted to own land outside the colonies and soon some began to purchase land from Russian estate owners to pasture their flocks. These Mennonites, who established estates between 1830 and 1850, formed the first generation of Mennonite estate owners.

Following the Crimean War (1853-56) and during the subsequent Great Reforms, larger areas of land became available for purchase in southern Russia. A number of foreign colonists, including Mennonites, purchased or rented land beyond their colonies. Some joined with family and friends to form private settlements with landholdings larger than colony farms. Individuals who had amassed money in business or through commercial farming bought up entire estates. By 1914 there were between 400 and 500 Mennonite estates in Russia. Some were quite small, but others covered thousands of hectares and brought wealth, social status and power to their owners.

Wintergruen, so aptly described in this memoir, was one such estate. It was situated about thirty kilometres north of the Mennonite Molotschna colony. Its owners, the Goossens, maintained close ties with family and friends in the Colony. Their children were sent to be educated in Mennonite colony schools and the family belonged to a Molotschna congregation at Schoensee. In other ways, however, the Goossens' way of life, like that of other estate owners, was radically different from colony people.

Helena Goossen grew up in a modest but imposing many-roomed mansion, not in a small colony farmhouse. She had loyal house servants at her beck and call and a governess to provide her with early lessons in the polite social graces.

Hers was not the close-knit world of the colony village,

surrounded by intensely cultivated land where Mennonite children had few connections with non-Mennonites. In her childhood Helena played with the children of her father's servants, usually Russian, and enjoyed the freedom of the gardens and the open steppe.

Mennonite estate owners formed a distinct social class which included owners of factories, flour mills and the educated elite. The group photographs, which picture well-dressed girls and proud parents, reflect an atmosphere of social self-assuredness. Helena and her sisters were educated in elite girls' secondary schools and no doubt they expected to marry partners from their own social background. Helena admits that in school she was more interested in art, music and literature than in acquiring academic or professional skills. For her the future seemed to promise a life of luxury. All she desired was to attend a music conservatory, then travel around the world.

The writer's recollections are those of a young, unmarried woman. She says little about the adult world, particularly that of her father, Jacob Goossen. He was a member not only of a Mennonite congregation and community, but also of a predominantly non-Mennonite landed elite. As a landowner he was expected to play an active role in local affairs in everything from hunting to local politics. Mr. Goossen is portrayed as an important local figure, concerned with the future of his province and his country. People in his position often played a prominent role in the management and financing of the complex religious, educational and welfare institutions of the Mennonite Commonwealth as well as of the important Forestry Service (*Forsteidienst*) which provided young Mennonite men with an alternative to serving in the Russian army.

Jacob Goossen's way of life was different from that of the average colony farmer in various ways. The photograph of the estate land (page 18) hints at these differences. Whereas the colony farmer ploughed, harrowed and harvested small areas with horse teams and one, perhaps two, Little Russian

workers, estate farming was much more extensive. Oxen were needed to plough the open steppe fields since horses became tired much sooner. Large amounts of capital were invested in steam engines, threshing machines and other farm equipment. And, although labour was expensive, a large labour force, usually Ukrainian, was employed and often managed by Mennonite or other overseers. Peasants, from Central Russia, also came in spring and summer to look for work.

Before 1914 most estate families were not only more integrated into Russian life than colony Mennonites but their members also had a broader knowledge of the wider world. Trips to the Crimea, to Russian cities and to Western Europe were as commonplace for Mennonite estate owners as they were for the elite Russian nobility. But the Goossens' extended excursion to North America was prompted by disturbances in rural Russia which made estate life seem less than idyllic.

If there were immense differences in social status and wealth between Mennonite colony farmers and estate owners, the gap between Mennonite landowners and the peasantry was even greater. To the peasants, land meant freedom, yet the land was still held by nobles or had been bought by others like Mennonites. Although the nobles and the other estate owners might have thought that in law they owned the land, the peasants felt otherwise: by rights the land was theirs; it was inalienable, subject not to the rule of civil law but to customary justice.

In the peasant uprisings of 1902 and 1905-06 the estate owners could clearly see their own vulnerability. The Cossack guards employed at Wintergruen were only part of a larger attempt by Mennonites to protect their estates, factories and villages in the rapidly changing political environment.

When law and order collapsed in 1917, the peasants rose again. In the name of *pravda* and *volia* (truth and freedom), they looted estates, seized land and estates, obliterating all they despised of the old order. In this way Wintergruen, too, was reduced to its very foundations. Once the peasants' wrath

was unleashed, political groups such as the Bolsheviks could do little to control them. The White Army and its leaders, as hated representatives of the old order, enjoyed no support at all. Instead, the peasants flocked to their own leaders among whom was the anarchist Nestor Makhno.

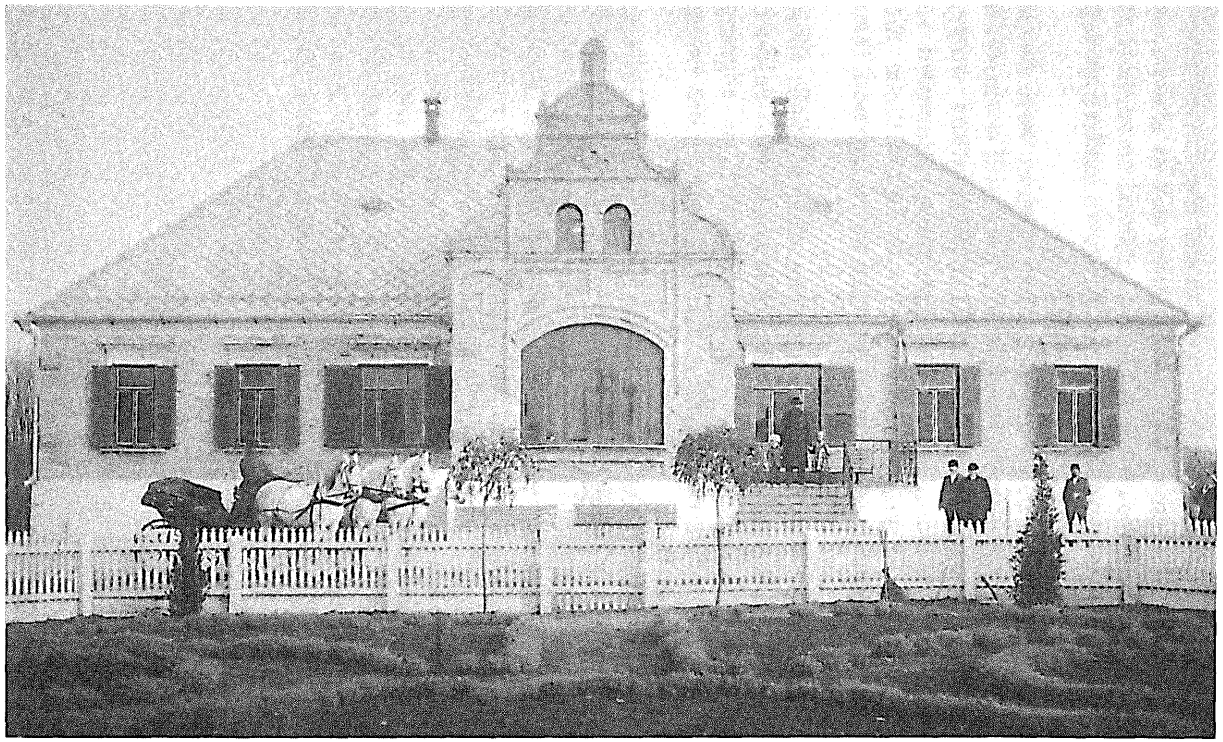
The Goossens, like all Russian estate owners, were swept away by the flood of peasant violence. The brief occupation by German troops in 1918 merely made matters worse. Troops, often accompanied by Mennonites, attempted to reclaim land and property seized by peasants. Once the Germans retreated, estate owners were more exposed than before.

During the Civil War estate owners, and especially their sons, often joined the so-called *Selbstschutz* (self-defence units) and later the White Army. However, in aligning themselves with the old landed elite, they backed the losing side.

The illusions of social status continued. As Mrs. Friesen illustrates, in the midst of all this unrest, as their way of life was collapsing around them, estate owners sought marriage partners among the wealthy elite of the colonies, hoping against hope that their land and wealth would be restored. When these hopes were finally dashed with the establishment of Soviet power, emigration remained their only alternative.

The estate owners and their children were left with their memories, their fading photographs and their unfulfilled dreams. We are left to wonder at a way of life so alien to our own, but thankful for those who, like Mrs. Friesen, chose to capture it in memoirs such as this.

James Urry
Senior Lecturer, Department of Anthropology
Victoria University of Wellington
Wellington, New Zealand.



The Wintergruen estate of Jacob Johann Goossen in the province of Taurida in southern Russia, 1900.

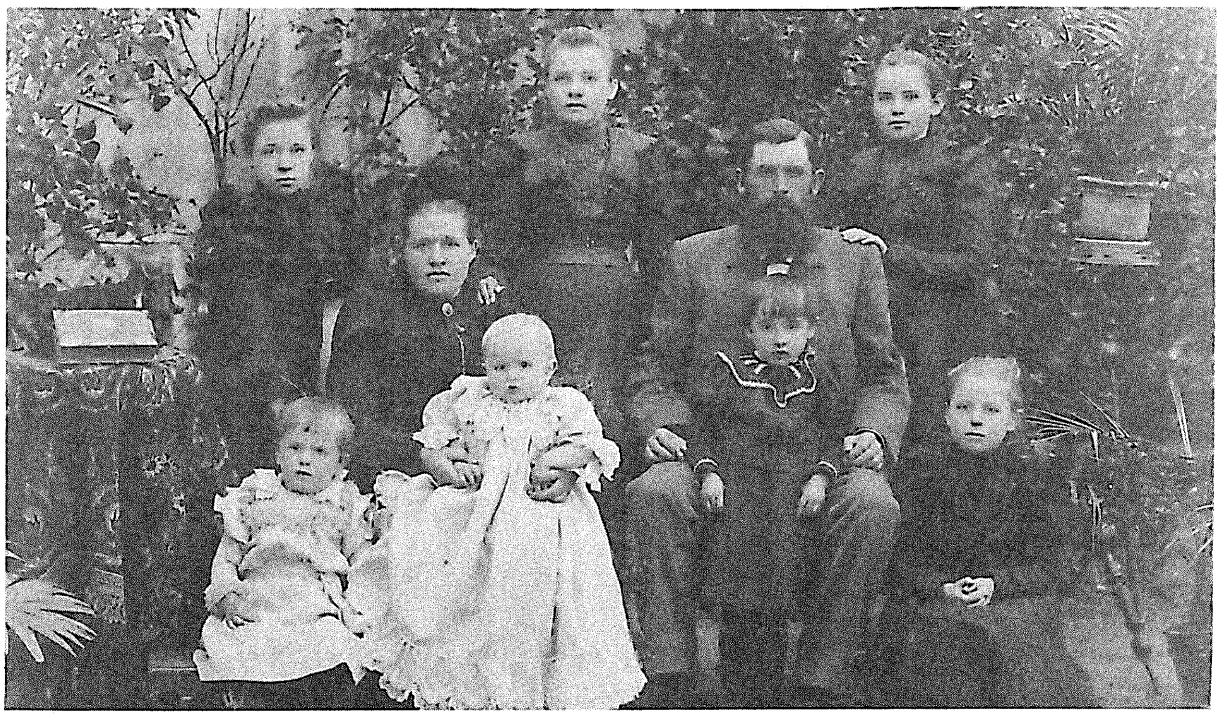
I
Daydreams and Nightmares

by
Helena Goossen Friesen

1
The Carefree Years of Childhood and Youth (Taurida)

I first saw the light of day in November 1895 at Wintergruen near the border of the Taurida [and Ekaterinoslav] provinces on the hot steppes of southern Russia. Wintergruen was the name of my father's estate. It lay in a valley about thirty versts [20 miles] from a German colony. My home was a spacious but simple one-storied country house with large, bright rooms. In front of the house stretched a wide yard with barns and numerous other farm buildings arranged on either side.

Our house had four well-lit rooms in front: the parlour, an office, a living room and a dining room. All had high ceilings. At the back were four bedrooms and a family dining room. The kitchen and rooms for the servants were located in a separate wing. This was where Old Lenke and our four or five female servants lived. Usually the housemaid and Lenke's assistant were German, the others were Russian [Ukrainian].



The Jacob Goossen family at home on the Wintergruen estate, 1900. From left, back row: Maria, Aganetha, Katharina; front row: Anna, mother Aganetha with Hans, father Jacob with Helena and Elise.

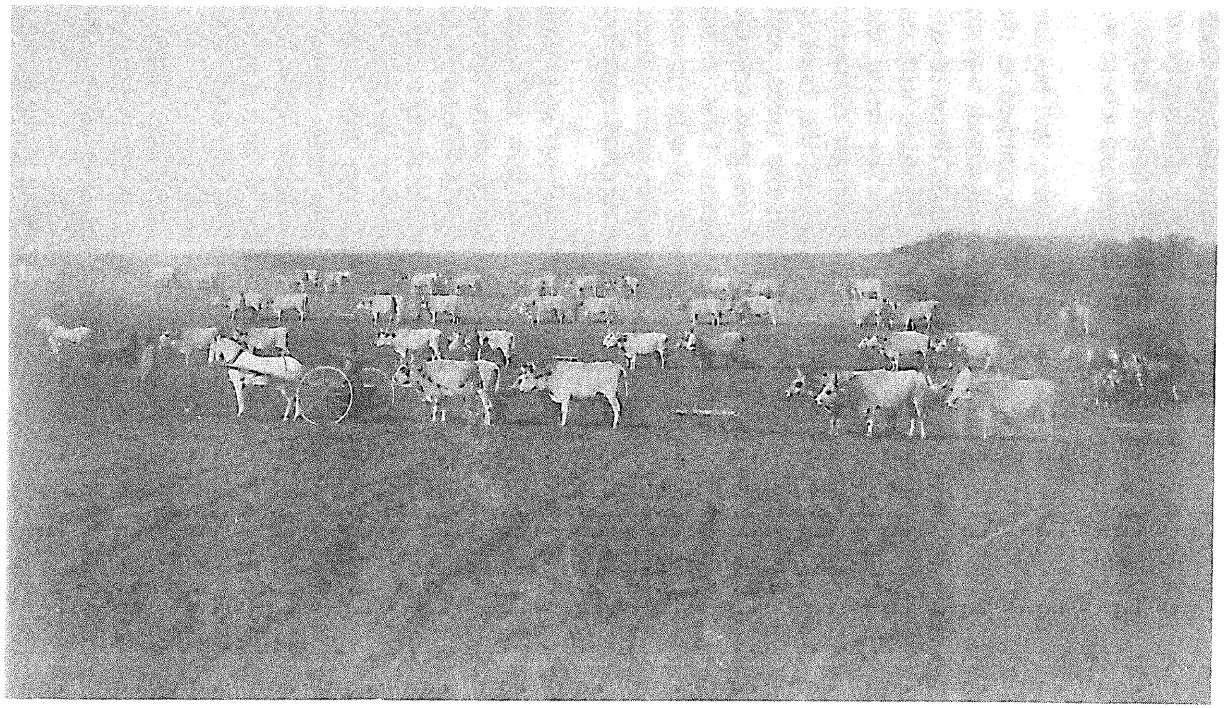
Behind the house lay a large garden. It had long footpaths and an avenue of chestnut trees. What a magnificent sight, especially in May! A gardener with his crew of helpers tended this area. There was also a small vineyard where we picked ripe grapes in fall.

Next to the garden lay a small wooded area, and beyond that was a beautiful meadow where we often romped in the chest-high grass. That patch at the edge of the woods was my favourite place. Often I stole away to that spot, threw myself down in the grass and dreamed. I loved to lie there with my eyes half closed, gazing into the deep blue sky or at the white clouds. What a joy it was on a hot summer afternoon to recline there and listen to the humming of the bees in the grass and the chirping of the birds in the trees, and, when all was still, to enjoy the fragrance of the grass and the flowers; to lie there, to think and to dream. One of my favourite activities was to pick a big bunch of wild flowers and arrange them in a bouquet. Time passed so quickly then. Often I didn't return to the house until the sun had sunk low in the west and I had admired the sunset.

It was a life of idleness, luxury and delight, yet as I think about it now, it was not satisfying. I recall how my sister Elise and I would lie in the grass and complain about always having to stay at home. Seeing nothing beyond Wintergruen was monotonous. To go out into the world and experience something big, that would be the life! But our destiny, we sighed, was probably to wither away here on this estate. What unsuspecting innocents we were, and how unaware that one day we would have our fill of the outside world, and that our only dreams of happiness would be to find a small, humble corner somewhere that we could call our own. The heavy blows that life can offer were still to come.

Wintergruen was the place where, until I was twenty-three years old, I spent the carefree days of my childhood and youth. I grew up like a true child of the land, in summer romping around out of doors all day.

I was the fourth of seven children, six girls and one boy.



The farming operation at Wintergruen. Oxen were needed to plough the open steppe fields. At right is the estate owner with his matched team of horses.

Our playmates were the youngsters of the estate. One of our favourite pastimes was playing gypsy. An old shawl draped over an upside-down baby carriage became our tent. We pitched it under a tree. Then we dressed in torn old clothes, braided our hair into many small pigtails, and walked around the yard from door to door begging for pieces of bread. Our glee was unsurpassed when people mistook us for genuine gypsy children.

When my oldest sister Neta finished the Chortitzer Mädchenschule (girls' school), she was given a small, brown stallion. His name was Arabschik because he had some Arabian blood in his lineage. Arabschik was a clever animal. When Neta gave him a slight slap with her hand or with the reins, he would kneel down on his front legs so she could comfortably swing into the saddle. It was a special privilege for me to be allowed to ride him occasionally. We were deeply disappointed when Father sold both horse and saddle several years after we got him, because my sister became overheated during one of her rides. All our pleading and urging to be allowed to keep Arabschik fell on deaf ears. Father had had enough.

Father was a passionate hunter. In winter he would occasionally allow me to accompany him on some of his hunts. There were always eight or more greyhounds around the house. If it was cold when we went out for the hunt, Father would put me out of the sleigh, and I would have to run until I was warm. On one such hunt, when I was about six years old, I was fortunate enough to be the first one to spot a fox on the horizon. And we caught him! He was a big beautiful animal. Years later Father still teased me about this incident whenever he returned from an unsuccessful hunt. He would smile and say, "If we would have had you with us, we would surely have spied a fox."

During winter evenings our whole family would sit around the table in our cozy, comfortable living room. Every night Father would have someone read to him from a number of Russian newspapers. Mother would knit, Lieschen and Anna

would do needlework, and I would practice piano. Before we went to bed we sang together, enjoying many different kinds of songs. Those were beautiful hours spent in our beloved family circle. We thought circumstances would always remain the same. Visitors provided us with a good change of pace.

We had a governess then, a Miss Schneider, who taught my three older sisters. I regarded her with awe, even though I had little to do with her.

When I was six I was taken to Schoensee [in the Mennonite colony of Molotschna], thirty versts away, to attend the village school. Father thought it would be better for me to attend that school than to have a private teacher. It was arranged that my room and board would be in the teacher's home. I came home only for the Christmas holidays. Even though the environment and the people at Schoensee were completely strange to me, I soon felt at home there. I enjoyed school. I was neither particularly diligent nor lazy, so the schoolwork was tolerable.

Old Lenke had been the housekeeper at Wintergruen since grandfather's time. She was there already when my mother came to the house as a young bride. Lenke was a whimsical old woman with a number of pronounced peculiarities, but she served us faithfully for forty years. We children had a special fondness for her. During the day she was too busy to pay much attention to us, but she came to our rooms in the evening after our parents had gone to their bedroom and we too were in bed. We were so accustomed to this that we didn't extinguish the lights until Old Lenke had come. She would sit on the edge of our beds and tell us stories. Mostly she would tell us about the olden days, but sometimes she would also talk about events of the day on the estate.

What we liked most, however, was to hear her talk about her travels. Even though she was poor and alone, from time to time she would take a trip "to see the world," as she put it. Usually she took one of her relatives along. She paid their travel costs. Among the places she had visited were Moscow, Odessa and the Crimea, and she had also been in Samara,

Kuban and other regions.

Everyone in the household went to Lenke for whatever was needed. Somehow she knew everything and could find anything for which we were looking. At Christmas her greatest joy was to receive gifts such as stockings and perfume.

I feel sorry for poor Old Lenke. She spent her strength in our service. Now she is old and unable to work, and we are not able to provide her with the secure, trouble-free old age which she deserves. She stayed in Russia with my oldest sister. We invited her to come with us when we emigrated, but she preferred to die in Russia.

In the summer of 1906 our family went abroad. This brought a significant change in our lives. We stayed in Karlsbad, Germany, for an extended vacation. Four or five other families we knew were also there. It was a congenial circle of Mennonites. From Karlsbad we went to Dresden, where we lived in the suburb of Blasewitz. Our hotel, the Belleview, was located on the River Elbe, on whose banks we children played all day. That was an extraordinary summer. Each day there was something new to discover and experience. We returned home for the beginning of the school year.

I had been back at school only about six weeks when on a rainy November day my father came to take me home to begin my second trip abroad. This time it was more of an escape than a vacation. Everything had already been packed by the time I arrived home. We left for the train station immediately. It was dark and foggy.

This happened in 1906, during the time of unrest following the war with Japan and the peasant uprisings.[1] No one, except the estate manager and Old Lenke, knew of our departure. When we arrived at the station, I remember the large crowd of people consulting to see which train would be allowed to cross the border. There was an atmosphere of anxiety among the passengers on our train. It was a relief when, after a long period of uncertainty, the train finally

began to move. It was the last one that was allowed to go through. After we left, the rails were ripped up.

For over a month we stayed at the Red Eagle, a guest house in Berlin. Our family, especially the children, grew weary of hotel life even though there were many new things for us to see and do. The impressions of this ten-month sojourn remain vividly etched in my memory. I was ten at the time. We were there during the Christmas season, and I recall the visit to the royal palace with its white ballroom and the singing in the royal cathedral.

One incident amused us children a lot. All visitors to the royal palace, old and young, were required to put on large felt shoes to protect the salon's parquet floors. It looked so funny when elegant ladies, and all of us children, had to stumble around in those big, felt shoes.

We saw the Panoptikum a number of times, and also the Busch circus. We were able to see the play, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, which was performed in the open air. It was superb! A small lake was part of the setting. On the far side stood Mount Vesuvius, an artificial mountain. Life on the streets of Pompeii went on before our very eyes until, with great crashing and thundering, Vesuvius erupted. The noise and clamour were so frightening that we children wanted to see and hear no more. All we wanted was to get safely back to the hotel. It was terrifyingly beautiful.

Father had a brother in the United States of America, who invited us to come for a visit until the unrest in Russia was over. We happily accepted his invitation because we were tired of life in the big city.

In mid-January we set sail for North America on the liner Kaiser Wilhelm II, the largest ship in the world at that time. We experienced a stormy crossing during that one-week voyage.

We travelled second class. A number of times we children, accompanied by a friendly lady, went down into steerage. What a sad picture greeted us there! The immigrants were mostly gypsies, Galicians and Hungarians. The women,

dressed in their traditional bright clothes, squatted on the floor. The children quarrelled. Someone played an accordion and sang a mournful song. As soon as we came in, the children crowded around us, hopefully stretching out their black little hands for our baskets. We distributed apples, oranges and other things to them. The visit to this section of the ship gave us much pleasure. No one would have guessed then that two decades later we too would be poor and homeless immigrants travelling to North America in the steerage section.

When we docked in New York we experienced some difficulty because of my brother's eyes. Shortly before the inspection he had been crying because he had lost his cap, so his eyes were red. We were detained and sent to Ellice Island. Since we didn't speak the language, it was not easy for Father with his large family to find his way around and to explain what had happened. But we managed. Finally we were cleared and on our way. Father used sign language everywhere we went, and we travelled well. In the dining car on the train, where we were served by a Negro waiter, my brother refused to eat. We had to laugh at his reply to the question why he wouldn't eat: "The man's hands are too black."

After a three-day journey on the train we arrived safely in Henderson, Nebraska. A crowd of curious people at the station had come "to see the Russians." The people were astonished when all they saw alighting from the train were perfectly normal people dressed in European-style clothing. They had expected to see people draped in animal skins or perhaps, as our relatives told us later, in the same clothes people who emigrated fifty years earlier had worn: long jackets and *Hauben* (small lacy caps). They could hardly believe that time had not stood still even for us in Russia.

We lived in a small house in Henderson. The village school, which had instruction in English, was nearby. Father took my younger sister Anna and me there. Our teacher, Miss Phoebe Bryan, a friendly young woman, devoted a lot

of time to us. A child learns quickly, and it wasn't long before we were singing English songs. A little sister was born to us at this time, but she died after only a few days.

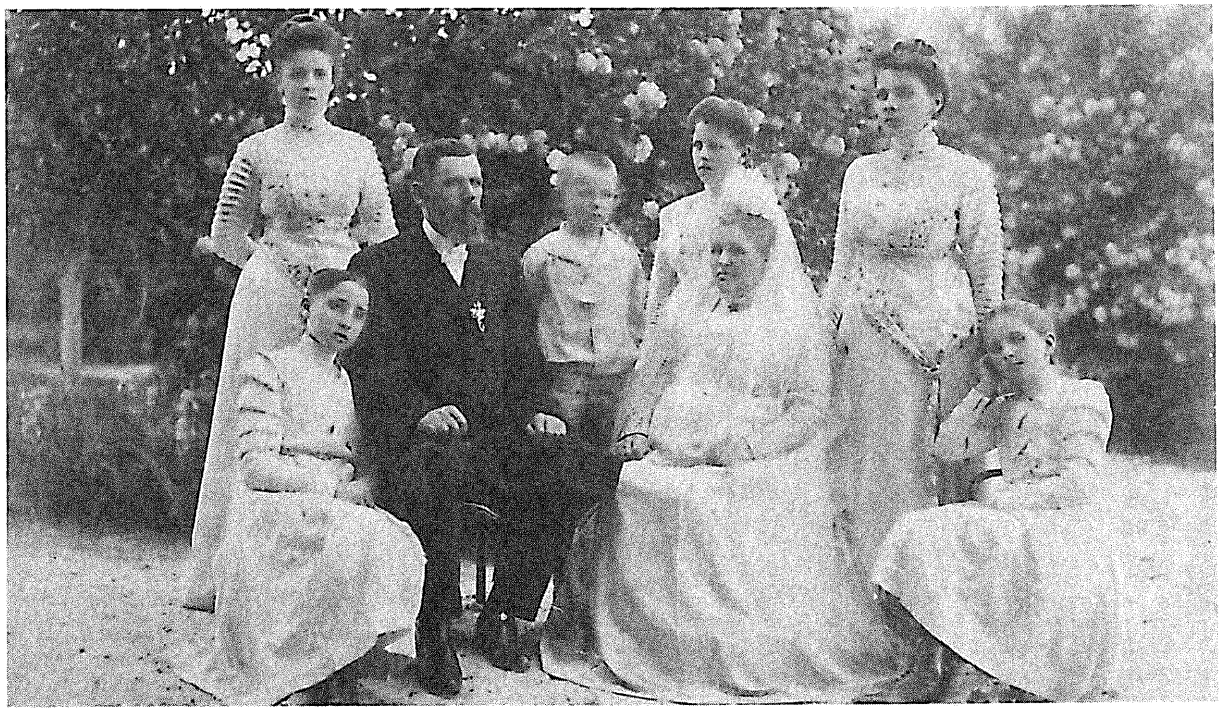
While we were visiting in Henderson we were frequently requested to sing Russian songs. This always aroused homesickness in my parents. Tears moistened their cheeks as they remembered the homeland.

But Father loved North America. In the company of Dr. Starks, he travelled to see the "wild west." The great cattle ranches fascinated him. If all of us would have thought as he did, we might have stayed in the United States. Who knows! But Mother, as well as my older sisters, wanted to return to Russia. In June [1907] we began the journey back. Many years later I often heard my father remark that the half-year in America had been the best in his life.

On the return voyage we again sailed on the liner Kaiser Wilhelm II. This time the crossing was delightful. The evenings were especially memorable. The ocean was as smooth as a mirror, and the music on the ship was beautiful. On the eighth day we landed in Bremen.

In the meantime, peace had more or less been restored in Russia. It was with joy that we hurried back to our old home. On the way we stopped to visit some friends who lived in a dilapidated old manor. The only attractive thing about this estate was an old park. There at last we could run and play to our hearts' content. Almost every Sunday a school or some other organization would come to the park to celebrate the holidays with musicals and dances. We children learned many interesting new games at these events. Later we taught them to the children in our schools at home. I remember how important I felt when my sister and I were invited to a teachers' conference in the home of one of the instructors to explain the new games and sing the songs which went with them. The teachers wrote down all the information so they could teach these things to their students.

My uncle and aunt came to meet us at Posen. By the end of August we were on our way home. When we arrived, we



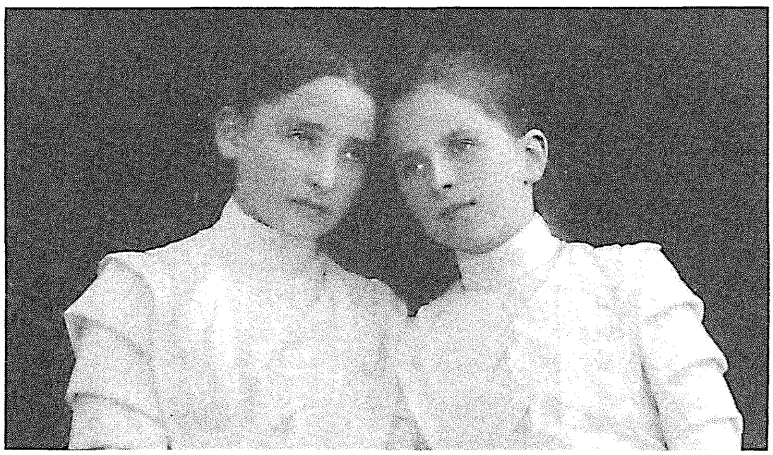
The silver wedding celebration of Jacob and Aganetha Goossen on May 15, 1909 in the garden of the Wintergruen estate. From left, standing: Maria, Hans, Elise, Aganetha; seated: Helena, Father, Mother, Anna.

found everything more or less in order. But from that time on we hired an armed Cossack or two for security.

I finished the village school and enrolled in the Halbstadt Mädchenschule [in Molotschna] which my oldest sister had already completed. A new life began for me. There were four classes. The school had one male teacher, who was our religion instructor, and five female teachers. I began taking music lessons. My favourite subjects were Geography, Art and Music but Arithmetic was an abomination to me. I was a lazy student. My only desire was to study music. After I had taken music lessons for four years, my goal was to study with Miss Tomson for a few more years and then go to the Conservatory. Upon completion of my studies there, I wanted to take a trip around the world.

Such were the goals and wishes of a trusting young girl who hoped to find fulfilment in life. Thinking of it now,

We had a fortune of great array
Which we could not begin to measure.
God had taken a part away,
Ordained that some of it should stay.
Be worthy of that treasure!



Helena Goossen and her sister Elise, ca. 1909.

Our instructor in German and Religion, Benjamin H. Unruh, could make his classes very interesting. He taught us to distinguish between seeming and being, to seek the truth, to love what is beautiful and to practise good. He said that everything depends on faith, no matter to which sect or religion a person adheres. All else is merely form, superficiality and ceremony. These classes were a blessing to me.

At the end of a school year, the *Mädchenschule* would sometimes undertake an excursion. Once we travelled along the southern coast of the Crimea, accompanied by our principal, Miss Griskovchaia, and the male teacher, Benjamin Unruh. Because there was a rampant cholera epidemic at the time, only seven girls went. We spent several days in Sevastopol, roaming around in that region, exploring all the historical places and visiting old monasteries. We also viewed the panorama of the Battle of Balaklava.

Then we hired a Tartar guide to take us along the coast to Sudak in his Tartar wagon. The breathtaking scenery will live in my memory forever. To the left of the road rose a high mountain range with peaks that were always snow-covered. To the right our eyes were fixed on the restless, hissing waves crashing on the cliffs far below. We travelled this way for two days, with the mountains on one side and the sea on the other.

Finally we arrived at Yalta. There we visited Masandra, historic places like Augustine Gursuf, and many small places nestled attractively along the seashore. In the evening we attended the theatre where *Quo Vadis* was being performed. The impressions of that evening are unforgettable. The next evening the company from the Moscow Theatre was to perform *Maria Stewart*. We pleaded with Mr. Unruh to take us to the theatre again, but it was his opinion that this play was too sombre and tragic for our young minds. Furthermore, it would be too much of a good thing. He would not be moved. We returned along the coast by boat, then travelled home. The second excursion was to the Dniepr River.

After 4 years in the *Mädchenschule*, I was not interested

Helena Goossen in 1912.

in further education, except in music. I was sixteen then. At home it was difficult for me to find anything worthwhile to do with all the time I had at my disposal. My mother thought I should learn to cook but I wasn't interested. I liked sewing better, so I began to help my sisters who enjoyed sewing and needlework a lot.

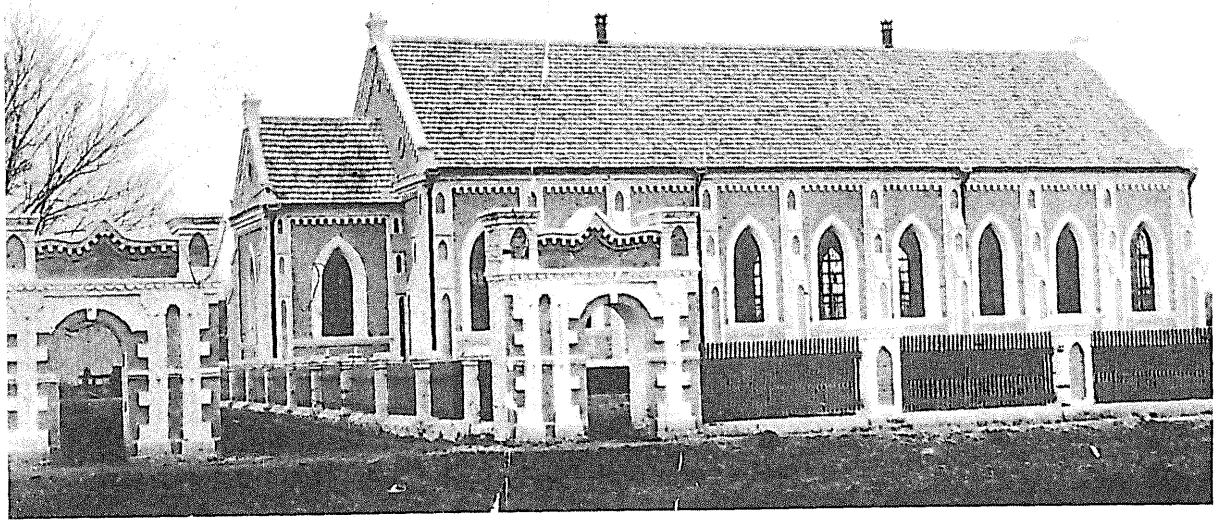
But best of all, I loved to sneak out secretly with a book. I'd go through the garden and out into the open meadow to my favourite spot. I spent hours there in my dream world. I dreamt until reality, harsh reality, shook me up and swept over me. We lived an isolated life then, but I did not miss company.

The most important event during this time was the wedding of my oldest sister [Aganetha]. I was quite happy when all the fuss was finally over.

My attitude was shaped to a large extent by my eye disease, trachoma. I went to Heidelberg[2] repeatedly to see an old Galician woman, staying there two or three months at a time. During these periods I was unable to do anything. I couldn't read, write or sew. Often I thought I would go crazy.

But I was persistent. After long and continuous treatment at home, my eyes were finally completely cured. I continue to be grateful to God for healing this disease with which I was afflicted for ten years.

In 1916, when I was twenty-one, I was baptized in the Schoensee church. From ältester (Elder) H. Peters I received this scriptural motto: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" [Matthew 5:8].



The Mennonite church at Schoensee in the Molotschna colony where the Goossen family attended.

2
Life's Cruel Blows

One beautiful summer afternoon [in 1914], when Father and Mother were sitting outside near the door, a rider came to the yard. He handed Father a green note with instructions to come immediately to discuss his levy of horses for mobilization.[3] By the next day everyone knew that Russia was at war.

My oldest married sister, Mrs. David Willms, was abroad with her mother-in-law at the time. She had left her small son with her husband who became extremely concerned and agitated by her absence. We were all overcome with joy when she finally arrived home safely. She had managed to return by way of Denmark, Sweden and Finland, escaping across the border on the last train.

There was a strong patriotic sentiment for the Russian Fatherland at this time, even among the German-speaking colonists. However, as one blow followed another, this patriotism diminished and persecution of the Germans ensued. We were forbidden to speak German. Whenever the Russian troops suffered a defeat, we were the scapegoats. Aside from this we experienced no direct effects of the war because we were far away from the actual fighting.

The Russian government's first blow against the Germans came when the Tsar decreed that after February 1915 all Germans would have their land taken away and that the owners would be sent to Siberia or the northern territories within three days.[4]

Father, as always, responded cautiously but deliberately. Somehow he managed to acquire a Merchant II classification.[5] He did this so that if we would have to move we would be allowed to stay in a city. Also, the daughters of a

merchant could not be mobilized for heavy labour such as digging.

The decree against the German landowners was never enforced. In February 1917 the Tsar was deposed. For a time we breathed more easily, but the persecution of the Germans continued.

The front disintegrated and the Russian soldiers, still armed, came home. That Christmas the first undisciplined armed horde entered our home. They came under the pretext of searching for German airplanes, bombs and guns. It seemed ridiculous to us that these armed men expected to find enemy airplanes in table drawers or in small boxes. In our vaulted cellar they looked for wine. This was the first house search we experienced; a second was soon to follow.

The search for a German airplane in our house can perhaps be explained by the circumstances. Shortly before the war with Germany began, our neighbour, a young man named Peter Friesen, had brought back an aircraft called *Die Taube* (The Dove) from Johannestal, Berlin. He brought along a German lieutenant to pilot it for him. Friesen once made a trial run from his estate to ours. The Russians, who had never seen an aircraft, slammed their doors shut and hid when it landed in our yard. "It's the devil," they cried, and they could not be dissuaded from this point of view. When the war began Friesen was suspected of being a German spy. Both he and the German pilot, Lieutenant K., were arrested and interned in Siberia.

After the fall of the Tsar Friesen came home again. But he died tragically two years later in the flood at Berdiansk near the Sea of Azov during the retreat of the Wrangel Army.

On January 6 [1918] in the afternoon, while Father was away at a meeting in a neighbouring village and we were visiting old Tante Sperling in our compound, we saw a vehicle entering the yard. It stopped in front of Mrs. Sperling's home. Three heavily armed men jumped out. The first one, a young man, announced, "Robber Captain Makhno."[6]

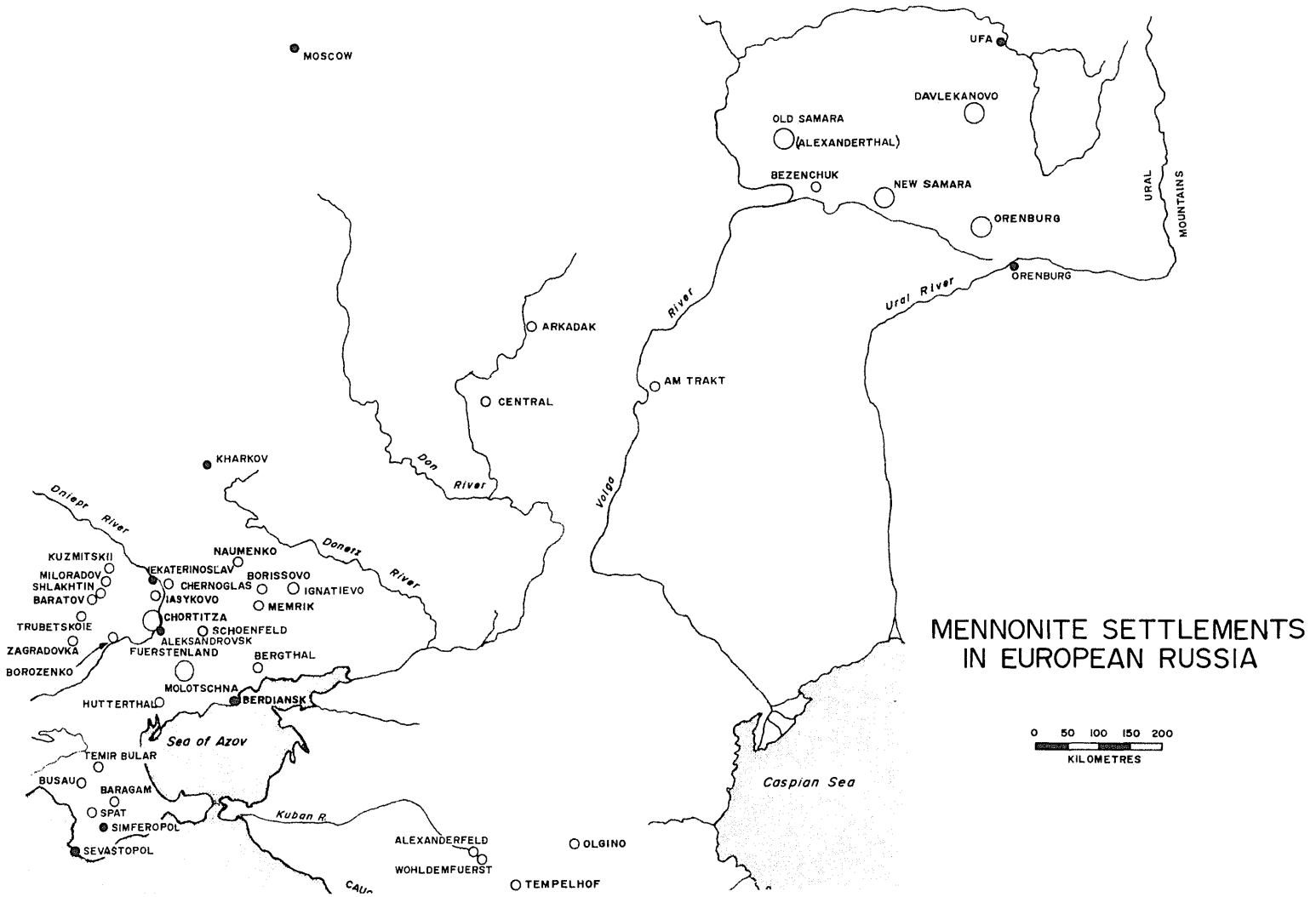
He approached my sister Miche and demanded the keys to the safe. When Miche asked him to show her a writ of authority, he held a revolver to her chest with the words, "This is my authority." It was clear to us that further resistance would be useless. They motioned for us to get into the wagon to go to our house, but we informed them that we preferred to walk.

When we got back to our house and entered the kitchen, we were astonished to discover that all the servants, including our Cossack guard, had been locked up. There was a sentry at the door. The dresser drawers had all been turned upside down. On the table lay a lady's black handbag stuffed full of gold articles, rings and watches. Everything looked bleak. After my sister unlocked the safe for them, they expressed disappointment at how little was in it. They then commanded that our best horses be hitched to their wagon. The groom received forty rubles for his efforts. Pretending to be well-meaning benefactors, they threw some of the small stolen coins to the children in the compound. As they departed, they declared that they would return for another visit in fourteen days. We were very distraught. The robbers' parting words were ominous.

When Father returned we told him about the incident, and said how glad we were that he had not been home at the time. He then shared with us the great danger from which he had just escaped. He had been ordered to come to the village for a cross-examination. When he arrived, they immediately surrounded him and extorted a large amount of money, 15,000 rubles, from him. But he escaped with his life, even though several shots were fired at him when he fled.

Under no circumstances were we going to wait for Makhno's next visit. We decided that we would go to Aunt Kaetler's place in Grossweide, Molotschna, for two to three months. But first Father took my brother John and me to Halbstadt. My brother enrolled in the *Kommerzschule* ("Junior College") and I took a sewing course.

By now many stories about surprise attacks were being


MOSCOW
UFA
DAVLEKANOVO
OLD SAMARA
(ALEXANDERTHAL)
BEZENCHUK
NEW SAMARA
ORENBURG
URAL MOUNTAINS
ORENBURG
Ural River
ARKADAK
River
AM TRAKT
CENTRAL
Don River
Volga
KHARKOV
Dniepr River
Donetz River
NAUMENKO
KUZMITSKII
EKATERINOSLAV
BORISSOVO
MILORADOV
CHERNOGLAS
IGNATIEVO
SHLAKHTIN
IASYKOVO
BARATOV
MEMRIK
CHORTITZA
TRUBETSKOIE
SCHOENFELD
ALEKSANDROVSK
ZAGRADOVKA
FUERSTENLAND
BERGTHAL
BOROZENKO
MOLOTSCHNA
HUTTERTHAL
BERDIANSK
Sea of Azov
TEMIR BULAR
BUSAU
BARAGAM
SPAT
SIMFEROPOL
Kuban R.
SEVASTOPOL
ALEXANDERFELD
OLGINO
WOHLDEMFUERST
TEMPELHOF
Caspian Sea
MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS
IN EUROPEAN RUSSIA
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circulated in the neighbourhood. A month later anarchy erupted.

In February, an evening program had been planned in the *Kommerzschule*. The curtain was about to go up when two workers came in and warned the audience to go home. A teacher mounted the stage and announced that the program would not go on. He urged the people to return to their homes as quickly as possible. Halbstadt, he said, had been declared to be in a state of war. No one was allowed to be out on the street after ten o'clock and the lights must be out. A little later we heard that sailors, anarchists from Sevastopol, had arrived to sit in judgement over the "kulaks" of Halbstadt.[7] The local committee had summoned them for this purpose. Everyone left quickly, wondering what horrible things were in store for them.

The next morning the sailors zoomed by in a car with the ill-omened black flag. The residents of Halbstadt waited with fear and trembling. There were house searches and arrests. The apprehended persons were taken to the territorial headquarters. I was glad my parents and sisters were safe in the somewhat more remote village of Grossweide.

On Sunday, February 6, while I was visiting my married sister, a student, looking deathly pale, came in and reported, "They have just shot Heinz Willms and Uncle Suderman in the courtyard at the territorial headquarters. Our teacher, Mr. Letkemann, has also been taken there." Heinz was a sixteen-year-old student, and Suderman was an estate owner. We sat and waited to see who the next innocent victims of this mad anarchy would be.

A raucous crowd had gathered around the courtyard. They jeered and cursed, always demanding more sacrifices. Shots rang out, and soon thereafter we received news that the highly respected and beloved teacher, Mr. Letkemann, had been struck down by the shots of a madman. His execution was soon followed by two more: Hein Hamm and his uncle, August Hamm. Their bodies could not be retrieved. When the rage of these madmen finally subsided, they left

Halbstadt to wreak havoc in some other community. The prisoners who had not been executed were eventually released.

Not long after that we received news from home, sad news. Lenke, our faithful cook and housekeeper, and all the rest of the servants had stayed on the estate when we left. We had taken only a few suitcases with the barest necessities for our trip. Everything else had been left behind. Two days after our departure, when news of our leaving reached the surrounding villages, people came to Wintergruen and took whatever they fancied. All the cattle, horses, sheep (about 5,000), furniture, bedding, clothing–everything–was dragged to the villages and distributed. About thirty-five families took up residence in our house.

The anarchy lasted until April. Then a persistent rumour began to spread that the Germans were coming. We were completely cut off from the outside world. There were no newspapers anymore, so we depended on rumours for information. The German troops were indeed coming steadily nearer. It was unbelievable, like a fairy tale coming true.

One afternoon near the end of April 1918, the first German automobile, carrying a real German [Prussian] officer wearing a real steel helmet, sped through the streets of Halbstadt. Within a short while a large crowd of people gathered in the open space and many voices shouted their welcome.

"The Germans have come!" was the enthusiastic proclamation which rang out to greet the liberators. I have never seen our people show as much ardour as they did that day when the victorious German troops marched into our German villages. They were joyously welcomed everywhere. Everyone breathed more easily.

Our first thought was that we, too, would be able to go home. It was near the beginning of May when we received news from our manager that our estate had been occupied by Russian troops, but they had been driven out. We decided to return at once. Our home had been left in deplorable

condition. Wintergruen was empty and filthy.

First, order needed to be restored. The Russian people, under orders from the German lieutenant who was stationed with us, were instructed to bring back all our plundered property. Enough of the stolen things were returned so that we could more or less refurnish our home.

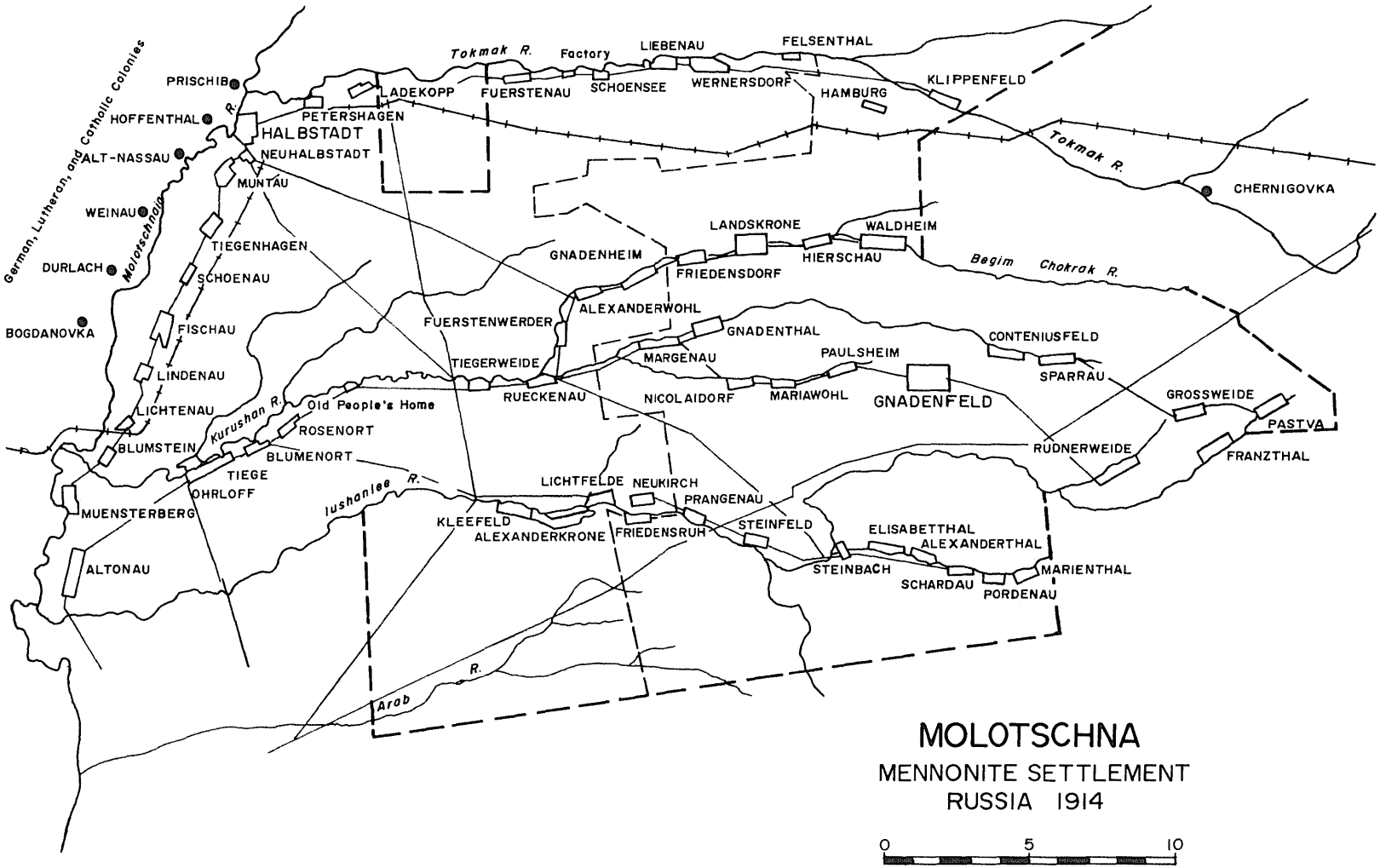
We lived this way, under the protection of the German Army, all through the summer of 1918. There were always at least a hundred soldiers stationed on our estate. We had to provide six rooms in the house for the officers, who usually numbered anywhere from four to six. We were happy to oblige. The soldiers and horses were quartered around the yard.

The members of the first squadron we billeted were easy-going Saxons. The lieutenant, a former high school teacher, was exceedingly polite and congenial. We were sorry to see him and his men depart.

The next squadron belonged to the Royal Cavalry Regiment. It consisted of six officers and a hundred men. The officers were all genuine, arrogant noblemen. The captain was Baron von Bamut; his adjutant was Baron von Schrenk. If our former acquaintances from the Saxon regiment ever returned to pay us a visit, Captain of the Cavalry von Bamut and his followers would pretend not to see them. These poor Saxon infantrymen were not considered worthy of a glance unless the captain and the adjutant were not present.

There was one lieutenant, Baron Repupiere, Count of Lerchenfeld, whose ordinary appearance and simple nature did not betray the high nobility to which he belonged. This soldier was a unique person. The only thing that interested him was hunting. Since my brother, too, was a passionate hunter, it was only natural that the two of them would go duck hunting every day. They soon became friends. Whenever they had free time they could be seen roaming through the fields with their guns.

Prince von Liehm—I think that was his name—also stayed



MOLOTSCHNA

MENNONITE SETTLEMENT
RUSSIA 1914

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with us for a while. Horse races and a tournament with prizes were organized in his honour. That summer was rich with a host of experiences. From morning until night, as never before, we saw colourful activities on our yard. There was the daily exercising of the Army greys and the mustering of the horses; there was also the coming and going of our workmen. Occasionally, a wagon piled high with stolen goods, driven by a Russian under German guard, would enter the yard.

Because the military was in constant rotation, our noblemen eventually moved on. We were grateful to be rid of these haughty and disdainful lordlings. Some Saxons came again, this time not infantrymen but hussars. Two lieutenants and a captain, Baron von Bosberg, moved into our house. We got along much better with this group. The atmosphere was decidedly more congenial. Later, when the captain went home on leave, and the young lieutenant was transferred to a neighbouring Russian village, we kept only one officer, Lieutenant Mitzer, at the estate. He was a landowner by profession, but he was also a competent soldier, always friendly and cheerful.

So we passed the beautiful summer months under the protection of the German military. In autumn revolution broke out in Germany and, much to our sorrow, the German troops prepared to retreat.[8] Meanwhile, Makhno and his hordes were becoming more active again. The Germans made repeated forays into various parts of the region to capture him, but they were never successful.

In October [1918], while my parents were in Halbstadt for my uncle's funeral, Lieutenant Mitzer and his men circled around to T.T. in order to surround Makhno. While they were gone, a procession of wagons came onto our yard. They were refugees from Silberfeld and Ebenfeld.[9]

These poor people looked pathetic. Mrs. W. Janzen was wearing tattered old slippers, and an old fur cape served as her head covering. Another woman, A.V., came directly from having done her washing. She was wearing a wet blue laundry

apron. Some of Jacob Neufeld's children were barefoot or wore only socks.

They had fled for their lives, bringing with them only what they had been able to pick up quickly as they left. Now they filled our house. We made rows of beds on the floor, placing as many as sixteen people in a room.

When they had settled down somewhat, the refugees told us that Makhno had attacked Ebenfeld. Uncle Schroeder had been cruelly thrown to the ground. If four German soldiers would not have been there, the people from Ebenfeld would probably all have fallen into the hands of Makhno. But the four soldiers held out until reinforcements came.

Troops were sent to Ebenfeld so that the displaced persons could return to their homes.

The lieutenant and his men went out looking for Makhno again some days later, leaving only five men and eight sick horses at home. Suddenly at about five o'clock we began hearing machine gun fire. It came from a Russian neighbour's place about a verst away. The German and Austrian troops thought they had Makhno surrounded, but he escaped through their lines with sixty wagons, a machine gun on each, and attacked our Russian neighbour. Makhno had planned a surprise attack on Wintergruen that day too, but when he saw the five men on horseback coming down the hill, he decided against it. Makhno had respect for the Germans.

That night all the servants were gathered together in the house. Box after box of hand grenades, bombs and guns were brought in. All the lights were put out. An armed guard was posted at each window with orders not to shoot until the command was given. We waited anxiously through the night, expecting an attack at any moment. None of us dared believe that we would see the sunrise. An eerie silence hung over the entire house. One could hear every little movement. Finally the sun rose. One by one, people ventured outside. There was no sign of Makhno, thanks to the soldiers.

A week later the soldiers received orders to retreat, and the sad life began for us once again.

The evening before they were to depart, the German officers invited us to accompany them as they withdrew. They were prepared to put a wagon at our disposal. Father did not accept this offer. Two of my sisters were engaged to be married and they would probably not have come with us if we had gone. But it was unthinkable for us to stay on the estate once the soldiers left. We packed our belongings joylessly. On October 28, 1918, at the same time as the German troops departed, we left Wintergruen forever.

Following the terror we had just experienced, our mood was dark. Our only thought was to get away from this place. No one so much as cast a backward glance.

Two weeks later, we were told, our house was a heap of ruins. No stone was left in place.

Aus deutſchen Anſiedelungen.

Ausraubung einer Oekonomie.

Den 10. Dezember brachte der älteſte Wartowoj von Petropawlowka nach Halbſtadt die Nachricht, daß die Anhänger Machnos das bewegliche Vermögen der Gutsbeſitzer Goeßen auf Wintergrün ausgeraubt und weggeſchleppt haben. Aus den umliegenden Ruſſendörfern ſchließen ſich die Bauern ſcharenweiſe der Bande an. Die Einladung der Bande lautet: „Tretet in den Dienſt des Batjko Machno und ſeines Genoſſen Petljura!" Der Berichterſtatter ſagte ferner, daß das Gut jetzt einen traurigen Eindruck macht.

Pillaging of an Estate

On December 10 the elder Wartoway of Petropawlowka brought the news to Halbstadt that the Machno bandits had pillaged the Wintergrün estate and carried off all the movable inventory and other assets of the Goossen family, owners of the estate.

In the surrounding Russian villages the peasants are joining the Machno bandits in large numbers. The invitation of the Machno gang could be stated as follows: "Enter the service of Batjko Machno and his partner Petljura!"

The report adds that the estate is now in a deplorable state.

Report in *Friedenstimme* 14 December 1918.

The garden has since been dug up, and large Russian villages have spread out over Wintergruen, the place that was once our home.

Father sometimes had unusual premonitions. Once, when he and Mother were strolling through the gardens and he was happily admiring the tall green fir trees, he said, "Not much longer, who knows how long, and these fir trees will be cut down to make shafts for wagons." This was before the beginning of the war. Mother said she had been frightened by his words and hadn't believed him. But now that prophecy had become a reality.

Our place of refuge on this flight was Halbstadt, where we found shelter with our aunt, Mrs. Wall. We always felt safer in the colony than on the land, especially because at this time a self-defense unit [*Selbstschutz*] had been organized to protect the colony from roving bands of robbers. If it had not been for the organization of the self-defense unit after the retreat of the German military, we would have been easy prey for the marauding bandits.

Lieschen's engagement was celebrated shortly after our arrival in Halbstadt. Her fiancé, Henry Willms, was a cousin to my oldest sister's husband and a member of the Russian Army. He was home on leave at the time of the engagement. Later he joined the self-defense unit.

The front was about twenty versts from us. During the first battle two of our men were killed. We were shaken by the loss of every German boy. Despite the overwhelming disparity in numbers, our young men fought gallantly, and the hordes of thieves were always rebuffed.

Then we began hearing a new sound, the roar of cannon fire. It came closer and closer. Soon we received word that the Red Army was approaching from the north. The small handful of self-defense men was unable to stand up to the power of such a large army. They surrendered, and our colony was quickly engulfed by the might of the Red Army.

Father, with his usual foresight, was prepared. When the German Army left Ukraine, we sought refuge in the Crimea,

about 200 to 300 versts distant. We rented a small house in Spat. Here we awaited the unfolding of events. By the time everyone else was trying to flee to the Crimea, we were already there.

Three weeks after we got there, the first major influx of refugees from the colonies began to arrive in the Crimea. The panic in Halbstadt must have been horrible when the news spread that the Reds were coming. Everyone who possibly could fled. Some left on foot, with children in their arms. A number of them did not get very far before they had to turn back, but in the first moments of confusion people hardly knew what they were doing.

My oldest sister Neta, her husband and son also came to Spat as refugees. It wasn't long before the Red Army overran the Crimea too. For days it moved through Spat. The flow of troops seemed endless. It was, however, a regular army and not as horrifying as the anarchists had been. Scattered among the peaceful town residents were the refugees, who hardly dared leave the houses in which they had found shelter.

One day a group of Red Army soldiers came to arrest my brother-in-law. He and another German were imprisoned in Simferopol. He was confined there for several weeks. The soldiers seized the few things my sister had managed to bring with her when they fled. She was very anxious about the safety of her husband.

Another day we again began hearing the thunderous roar of cannons. This was a signal that something big was about to happen. Soon the Red Army left as it had come. This time they moved at night. It was a rout. There was much rushing and hurrying.

Our liberators were volunteers under the leadership of General Wrangel.[10] My brother-in-law was miraculously freed from prison before the Reds could blow it up. As soon as we received word that the colonies, too, had been liberated from the Reds, we returned to Halbstadt. That was in July 1919.

My father wanted to buy a small house for us to live in. To obtain a title for this property we had to go to Berdiansk.

Since the title was to be in my name, Father, Miche, my brother John and I all went. We planned to be away for four days so we took only a few necessities. But instead of four days, we were there two months. During this time we were completely separated from the rest of the family. We received no news from Mother and my sisters.

When we arrived in Berdiansk we heard that Makhno and his bands were terrorizing the colonies again. At first we did not want to believe it, but we were soon persuaded that it was true.

The townspeople and the military were being evacuated from Berdiansk. There were three French ships anchored in the harbour. They were scheduled to go to Kuban.[11] All three were filled to overflowing with refugees and military personnel. The duration and intensity of the cannon fire convinced us of the seriousness of the situation, so we decided to flee too. But where? The ships were crammed. If we would have known that Mother and the girls had once more fled to the Crimea, we would have made our way there. But what if they had stayed in the colonies? We faced a dilemma. We didn't know which way to go.

Our cousin, J. Wall, insisted we should flee, even if it was in a rowboat. We stood there at the shore, perplexed and undecided. It was high time to act, for the roar of the cannon was getting frightfully close. There was a motorboat close to the shore. My cousin desperately wanted to rent it for us and his family. But the boatman could not be persuaded. He replied curtly that the boat was reserved for field officers. There was nothing left for us to do except to go back to the town. We spent the night with relatives. As we walked, Father remarked, "Who knows? Perhaps our not getting that motorboat will benefit us? One should never go against the destined way." His premonition was accurate again. What we regarded then as extremely bad luck soon turned out to be our good fortune.

I should describe another incident which occurred at the harbour. When we were standing on the shore with an

excited crowd of people milling around, an officer in the Volunteer Army charged onto the scene, waving a loaded revolver. He was swearing, shouting and snorting; his countenance was very frightening. I had never seen a deranged person at such close range before. He pointed to the persons he had just shot. There were six men, followers of Makhno, who had escaped from prison and whom he had run to the ground there at the shore. We wondered how many Makhnovites in prison lost their lives by his hand that night. I only know he was reported to have shot them all single-handedly with his revolver.[12]

The whole town became deathly still following the withdrawal of the Wrangel Army. We tried to get some rest, but we remained dressed. At about 3:00 a.m. we heard the first sounds of Makhno's entrance into the city. This was soon followed by a second and a third indication that he had arrived. Then we heard machine gun fire. The town and the harbour were being bombarded. We fled to the cellar and huddled there until daybreak. The shelling decreased in intensity, and the Volunteer Army no longer replied.

One of the men in our house ventured out and peeked over the fence. We heard the sound of horses' hooves; then there was silence again. A wagon drawn by three black horses went by. It had a woman in black in the back seat and was flying a black flag. That told us enough. The Makhnovites were in control.

The Volunteer Army had a large munitions depot just outside of town. It was blown up. Never have I seen such brilliant fireworks. The destruction of the entire depot lasted all evening and well into the night. Two of the last explosions were so violent that the doors and windows of our house sprang open and the glass in the windows shattered. Three incoming shells exploded on our street. One tore away the corner of our house; another hit the neighbour's house.

When the bombardment stopped, we ventured out into the town again. On the street we heard about the destroyed motorboat on the shore. Later we saw its upside-down hulk.

The entire field staff, including our young neighbour whom we had met the night before on the shore, had gone down with it. (I mentioned this neighbour before; he was exiled to Siberia as a suspected spy because he owned an airplane which had been built in Germany.) We acknowledged our gratefulness to God for his protection. Father's intuition had been right again.

We remained in Berdiansk for the next two months, hiding in the home of a relative who was known in town as a "follower." His brother was a commissar of war somewhere in the north, so we were relatively safe from searches by the bandits. If only there had not been the terrible anxiety and fear concerning the welfare of our loved ones.

Six weeks later the Wrangel Army forced the bandits out again, and we were able to return to the colony. When we arrived home, we found our family members well and unhurt. Except for their anxiety, nothing had happened to them.

They told us that the day after our departure, they had suddenly heard machine gun fire. No one knew what was going on until someone brought the news that Makhno had broken through and was already in Tokmak. What to do? Where to go? At that time they were still living with Aunt Wall in her big house. They had hastily packed a few necessities and had gone to Kleefeld. The German farmers there were afraid to harbour refugees, especially former estate owners, such as we were. They could get into trouble providing shelter for the rich. So after a week, Mother and my sisters had decided to return to Halbstadt, since it probably didn't matter anyway where they were. Aunt Wall's big house had been taken over by the Makhno bandits. The previous owners had not moved out of our small house. Mother tried to persuade them to let her have a small room until Father's return. He would settle everything, she assured them. But the tenants refused.

The only option for Mother and my sisters was to move into the small coachman's cottage elsewhere on the yard. They had no furniture, bedding or food. Everything that had

been saved from Wintergruen had been left at my aunt's house. So Old Lenke had stolen things back from the Makhnovites, a piece at a time. She had put the things on a small children's wagon and smuggled them out at night. No one ever found out.

It was during this time that David D[ick of the Apanlee estate] and another man were murdered. The terrible tragedy at Blumenort [in Molotschna], where so many Germans [Mennonites] lost their lives and the village was burned, also occurred at this time.

We moved into our house about the middle of November, but our family's joy at being together again was short-lived. A month later my father, brother and brother-in-law had to flee again. The weather had turned cruelly cold, and the only possible way to reach the Crimea was by means of a horse-drawn box-wagon. Father was afraid Mother would not be able to withstand the rigours of the three-day trip, so he advised her to stay in Halbstadt. With heavy hearts, we separated again. This time it would be for longer.

We women were now left to look after our own welfare. The men had all gone elsewhere.

My sister Miche's fiancé, Abraham A. Friesen, along with Benjamin Unruh, had been elected to a Mennonite *Studien-kommission* (study commission). The commission's task was to make a trip to North and South America. The only route by which they could leave the country was by way of Sevastopol, Constantinople, Switzerland, and eventually Germany. They began their journey in December 1919. Three years later my sister Miche joined A.A.Friesen in Canada.

Lieschen's fiancé was in the Caucasus serving in the Volunteer Army [that is, the White Army].

Christmas was approaching, but there was no Advent spirit at our house. The sound of the cannon was coming relentlessly closer. This clamour did not allow the Christmas spirit to survive.

On December 26 we were awakened by a loud knocking on the door. We dressed quickly. The next moment a wild

horde of Red Army soldiers stormed into the house. The first thing they did was search the house and grab whatever attracted them. Then food had to be prepared for them. There were twenty or more of them. First they searched for officers, next for rifles and revolvers. Then they asked if we had anything suspicious in the house. We of course said no. But we were shocked when the commander approached us with a few revolvers and bullets in one hand and a large stack of royal pictures and a photograph of Peter Friesen's airplane in the other. Immediately their suspicions were aroused. The pictures made them furious. They tore them to pieces, threw them on the floor and stamped on them.[13] Then the commander yelled at us, "I will drag you before my superior. You will be tried, and then you will be shot, you dogs!"

We explained to him that these were not our things. The cupboard in which they had been found belonged to the previous occupants of the house, and they had left them there. We said we were not responsible for the contents of the cupboard. Since we were able to maintain our composure fairly well and seemed sure of ourselves, they calmed down somewhat. I played some pieces on the piano for them, including some dances, while my sisters did their best to wait on them. They soon forgot their anger and left.

Once more we had weathered a crisis. We were happy that Father and my brother were not at home. The soldiers did not seem to know what to do with a bunch of women, for there were five of us: Mother and four grown-up daughters. Their first questions when they saw so many women were: "Where are your men? Your father? Your brother? Where are they serving? You don't need to lie to us. We know them. They are officers in this or that regiment." This is how they tried to trap us.

Fortunately, the first attack was over, and we remained unharmed. Thanks be to God! The Red Army moved through the streets on its way south. This was the regular army. It was not as terrible as the Makhnos. Soon we were

assigned permanent billets. Our food and fuel were almost gone. Often thirty or more men with horses and wagons would stop in our small yard and demand billeting, occasionally for many days at a time. Everything became more and more scarce. When we said we would soon be unable to cook a hot meal for them because there was no more wood for fuel, they replied that as long as we were sitting on wood, meaning the chairs, there was enough wood for the fire.

We lived under these circumstances until the middle of June. Then the Wrangel Army moved up from the Crimea, and the Reds were forced to move northward. With the White Army, our loved ones came home again. This was a reunion which we had eagerly awaited. We had been separated for half a year without any news from our father and brother. Finally on June 13, Father's birthday, they returned home. We were astonished to see how Father had changed. He was a broken man, thin and sick. Father could not stop weeping when he related how worried he had been about us, and he reproached himself for having left us alone. He brought back the ham which Mother had packed for his trip, in case our food was gone. My brother told us later that every time Father had opened the suitcase which Mother had packed for him he had wept. They had also experienced difficult times. A typhus epidemic had broken out among the refugees. Father, who had never looked after anybody in his life, had helped to nurse the sick. But he and my brother had been spared the illness.

Not long after his homecoming, Father took to his bed. This was a difficult time for us. We had been overjoyed to see him again, but now, so soon after his return, we had to get used to the idea that he was about to go on a long journey from which he would never return.

I will not repeat the details of Father's illness and death. They have been recorded in his obituary (pages 61-67). Even though it was very difficult for us to give him up, not one of us ever wished, "Oh, if only Father would still be here."

Our circumstances became ever more difficult. In fact,

they became almost unbearable, especially during the year of famine which followed. Even many years later, when all of us were fighting for survival in our new homeland, we were relieved that Father did not have to endure the many worries and privations of this experience. We do not begrudge him the rest he so much desired.

Father died on August 1, 1920. At that time White Army soldiers were billeted with us. The front was quite close, about fifteen to twenty versts away. The noise of cannon fire was close all summer, and this sound served as an accompaniment to Father's burial.

On October 9 we quietly celebrated Lieschen's wedding. The young couple was married on the same spot where Father's coffin had stood two months earlier. The next day the bridal couple left for the Crimea, where Lieschen's husband had a good position with the White Army. It was fortunate that they left when they did because a week later we were under the rule of the Reds again, this time permanently.

Christmas 1920 was a very sad holiday for us. We looked back at Father's recent death, at my sister Lieschen's departure, at the arrest of my oldest brother-in-law, and at the return of Red domination. My brother-in-law, David Willms, who had owned a large steam-powered mill, was imprisoned. When he was released after some time, he was extremely ill with typhus.

Conditions became worse and worse; then came the famine. Many poor, hungry children with swollen faces and bellies came to our doors and windows begging for food–just a piece of bread. There were so many of them that we had to turn them away because we didn't know how we ourselves would survive. Everything seemed to grind to a halt. We had only one cow. The potatoes and other vegetables we had planted produced nothing. There was a complete crop failure so we began to eat barley bread.

Furthermore, we had no money. We sewed children's clothes from old things and put them, along with a few linens

that were left and that we could spare, into a basket. Early in the morning, before the sun was up, we walked to the nearest large Russian village, T[okmak], and sold these items to the Russian women for a little money. The feelings which one experiences at such a time are impossible to describe. Images of past and present times passed before my mind's eye. How often we ourselves, only a few years ago, had . . .

Pages 31-32 of the original manuscript are missing.

I must record here that by this time most of our former neighbours and two of our farm managers had died at the hands of Makhno. And in a home I often visited in Schoensee, the father and three adult sons were murdered in a most gruesome fashion. These revelations made us all the more grateful that we had been able to care for our father and bury him.

In 1921 my brother-in-law was arrested again and confined to prison. Every night a number of people would be taken out and shot. Miraculously his life was spared. Eventually he was freed, but his physical and mental health had been destroyed.

In February 1922 my sister, Miche, left to join her fiancé, A.A.Friesen, in Canada. It was risky to embark on such a long journey abroad without documents, money or friends. The prospects of Miche's getting to Canada seemed impossible to us, but where there is determination there is also usually a way. That is what Miche experienced.

She carried only a few necessities. Mrs. Benjamin Unruh, who was going to join her husband in Germany, travelled with Miche as far as Moscow. There they separated. As a German citizen, Mrs. Unruh was allowed to continue her trip, thanks to the German Red Cross.[14] But my sister had to remain in Moscow until she obtained the necessary documents for the rest of the journey. She stayed there with one of her fiancé's former students, a person by the name of [Peter F.] Froese, who seemed to have some authority with

the Reds.[15] Through him, after about half a year of trying, she was able to obtain permission from the Communist government to cross the border and continue her trip.

The necessary means for further travel were advanced to her through Orie O. Miller, an American in Moscow and an acquaintance of A.A. Friesen. She left in May. After travelling via Germany, at last she arrived in Rosthern, Canada, in August 1922 after a three-year separation from her fiancé.

Their marriage took place one week later on August 31, 1922. One can imagine what happiness they both must have felt to be together again. Even though she didn't know a word of English, for her to have been able to travel in a free country under normal circumstances must have been a great contrast to the conditions she had so recently left in Russia.

The same day that my sister Miche left for Moscow, my sister Lieschen returned from the Crimea.

During the Easter season in 1922 we finally received the long-awaited relief shipments from North America. Kitchens were set up to distribute food. Individual parcels had also been sent by North American Mennonites. We received ours just in time for Easter. Each parcel contained 15 pounds of flour, 10 pounds of sugar, 10 pounds of rice, 2 pounds of tea, 10 pounds of fat and 10 cans of condensed milk. What a joy! It was hard to believe. We would be able to celebrate a genuinely happy Easter!

On April 22, 1922, my sister Lieschen's first daughter, Irene, was born. Our situation suddenly seemed so much easier. That grim ghost, hunger, had been banished by the North American kitchens. During the summer of 1922 life seemed less troubled and the future looked less dark and fearsome because the North Americans were supplying our daily bread.

We felt we could breathe somewhat easier now, but the cruel blows of fate had not yet ended. When Lieschen had fully recovered from childbirth, her husband came to fetch her and their infant daughter. He had received a position with the Reds in the Crimea. That same day, however, my

mother became ill with typhus. I nursed her at home. Of our once large family only three were left here now: Mother, my younger sister Anna and I. But Anna, too, would soon leave us.

Never in my life had I felt as forsaken as I did then. Father was dead, Mother very ill, my sister Anna near death, Miche in North America, and my sister Lieschen and brother John were in the Crimea. Only my oldest sister Neta was left to me, but she could not come over very often because the illness was heavily contagious. She did not want to risk carrying it to her husband and children. Those were exceedingly dark hours for me. Our trials seemed to have no end.

After several weeks of illness my mother's health improved. Autumn was approaching. Once again our minds were filled with concerns about how we would be able to survive the winter. It was impossible to stay in Halbstadt. There was no fuel there. We became increasingly preoccupied with these worries. I finally suggested to Mother that I would walk to Schoensee. We still had a house there. Perhaps we could move into it. Mother concurred. She was feeling better and the doctor confirmed that she was out of danger. We agreed that it would be all right for me to be away for two or three days. Lenke and my sister Anna promised to look after her, and my sister Neta said she would come over for the night. When I left I felt confident that all would be well.

When I returned two days later, I found everything in disarray. Mother's room was empty. My first thought was that she had died.

Lenke came in and informed me that Mother had become very ill during my absence. She had been taken to the typhus barracks. She also told me that they had had a very difficult time with Anna. They had not been able to do anything with her, and were worried that she, too, was sick. When Anna came in and hardly returned my greeting, I saw immediately that the stress had been too much for her. At the time I didn't think it was anything more than that. But

her unusual behaviour continued, and I became increasingly alarmed. Her condition had never been this severe before.

When Neta came she told me how terrified Anna had been of also becoming ill with typhus. At night she had been more difficult than Mother because of her anguished confusion. Repeatedly she had said, "Everything is finished. I can't go on anymore." Neta had attributed this behaviour to Anna's extreme nervousness and had tried to calm her. Anna's frequent lament had been, "If only Lena were back home again, because I have been infected too."

When I returned from visiting Mother at the typhus barracks, I found Anna standing outside near the gate. She was barefoot and staring straight ahead. It began to rain, and I asked her to come inside. She didn't seem to notice me at all. I repeated my request three or four times, but to no avail. Finally I took her firmly by the arm and led her into the house. As I washed her feet, I became aware how stiff she was. She didn't say a word. Perhaps she could no longer speak. I put her on the sofa and took her temperature. I was shocked to see that it was over 40 degrees. It was apparent to me then that I was dealing with another seriously ill person. She soon became delirious. The next day she, too, was taken to the typhus barracks.

After ten days of terrible illness, Anna fell victim to brain fever. Finally, on August 21 at 7:00 a.m.—it was a Sunday morning—she was released from her suffering. Three days later she was buried. Mother had improved to the point where she was permitted to go to the window of the barracks to see her daughter's funeral procession.

What an utter feeling of loneliness and desertion overwhelmed me when, returning from the cemetery, I came to an almost empty house. Only faithful old Lenke came to meet me.

At that time I had only one wish: that Mother might be spared for me. She improved rapidly after that. By October we could pack up our few things—for our little house had been emptied of most material things during the two years

we lived there–and move to Schoensee for the winter. Now there were only three of us: Mother, Lenke and I. We rented the large room in G. Becker's home until we would be able to evict the Russians who were living in our house.

In the spring of 1923 we finally moved into our own house. Here we had free lodging and fuel, even though the Russian family continued to occupy the back of the building.

We soon felt at home in Schoensee. Following the turmoil of the last year, life was easier and quieter here than in Halbstadt. This was the place where I had begun my first year of school. The schoolyard, the river and especially the high hill on which the cemetery was situated, held precious memories for me.

I loved to sit high up on the hill on Sunday afternoons, all alone with a book. In the valley far below lay the villages with their blossoming gardens. What a gorgeous sight! I would stay there, reading, thinking and dreaming. I was reading–I don't remember how many times I had already read it–the beautiful book, *Nature and Law*, by Bettex. I enjoyed many wonderful hours there.

Then, when the sun was low in the west and the last golden rays stole across the magnificent landscape, I returned to the village, but with slow steps. Those were unforgettable hours. On the hilltop I felt so light, so free and beautiful. I always left this special place with great reluctance.

The commemoration of Liebenau's 100th anniversary in August 1923 provided a welcome change for us during our sojourn in Schoensee. The day of the celebration was wonderful. Thousands of people gathered on the largest and most beautiful farmstead for this occasion. The yard was surrounded by large poplars, and in the shade of these tall trees we spent all day listening to singing and sermons of remembrance and thanksgiving. The words, "Work is the adornment of mankind, toil is the price of blessing," and "Praise the Lord!" were written in large letters on the gate.

The children and young people participated in a number of sports and gymnastics in the afternoon. And in the

evening a choir, accompanied by our Ältester (Elder) and L. Ediger on the piano, presented Schiller's *Die Glocke*. At the conclusion of the program there were a number of vocal solos, and also some violin and piano music. This was a day of great joy and satisfaction for me.

But this was no time for idle daydreams. We lived in a world rich in its variety of experiences. For example, to be driven from one's home and land and to suddenly find that there seemed to be no place on earth for one anymore was part of that real world. The idea of emigration was being discussed with increasing seriousness. To go or not to go was an enormously difficult decision for us. Although I personally had few doubts in this regard, it was nevertheless a large and serious decision which had to be thought through carefully.

We would have to leave with the expectation that we would be as poor as beggars and that we would have to earn our daily bread by the work of our hands. I felt with certainty that we must and would go. Our life in Russia was over. I never wavered on this point. There was no doubt in my mind that there was only one way for us, and that was to leave. It was impossible to imagine our further existence here. If work and servitude were to be our lot, let it be in North America. Miche, in her letters, advised us to come. For Mother and me it was clear that we should go.

My brother could not reach a decision and kept changing his mind. But when he saw that Mother and I were serious about leaving, and that my sister and brother-in-law in the Crimea were also going, he decided to go too. Wintergruen with its land and buildings had become state property.

After selling our cow and the little furniture we had left, on June 21, 1924, we departed for the Lichtenau station where we would join the first trainload of immigrants to leave from Molotschna Colony. In a short time we called out our last farewells.

I have recalled the foregoing sad images of our last days in the old homeland with reluctance.

For me, our last days in Russia were exceedingly difficult. I was overwhelmed with many different emotions. We had to part from many dear ones with whom we had shared a multitude of joys and sorrows. When I said goodbye to my eldest sister at the station, she replied with the words of a song: "Du siehst ihm nie mehr im Leben wieder" (Never in this life will you see him again).

It was not easy.

Notes

1. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 was waged well away from the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia. But Russia's defeat by Japanese forces had severe consequences for the government, causing unrest in both urban and rural areas. The unrest, particularly in the cities, forced the Tsar to grant wider civil rights to the peoples of Russia including the establishment of a parliament, the Duma. In rural areas of southern Russia some estates, including Mennonite properties, were attacked, looted and occasionally set alight. The government put down the peasant revolts, often with great cruelty.

2. Heidelberg was a German village in Ukraine, northwest of Halbstadt, Molotschna colony.

3. Horses owned by Mennonites were registered in case of war when they would be requisitioned for the cavalry or military supply units.

4. The laws to expropriate land were drawn up in 1915 and aimed to seize all land and property of citizens of enemy descent (that is, "Germans" and "Austro-Hungarians"). These people, including Mennonites, were in fact Russian citizens. The Mennonites attempted to prove they were of Dutch descent (the Netherlands was neutral in World War I) but they were included in the category of being of enemy descent. By 1917 few Mennonites actually had lost land or property because of the laws. But the existence of such laws caused great anxiety in the Mennonite world. Furthermore, the anti-German nature of this legislation, along with vicious attacks on Mennonites and other colonists in the press, had alienated Mennonites from their Russian neighbours.

5. The authorities classified all Russians by status into social estates (*soslovie*), although by the twentieth century these rarely corresponded to a person's real social position in Russian society. Jacob Goossen's acquisition of the status of merchant (second class) probably had less to do with an attempt to protect his daughters than with a ploy to protect his land from expropriation. As a Russian Merchant under this estate system, he was no longer classed as a Mennonite peasant.

6. The reference is to the anarchist Nestor Makhno (1889-1934) who operated with a large "army" in this area from 1918. He was only one of a number of leaders who gathered a motley band of peasants, released prisoners and deserters from the Imperial Army into a highly undisciplined force which preyed on estate owners, rich peasants and unguarded urban areas and who also fought both the White and the Red Army. While many of the followers were little more than bandits, some of the peasant leaders

(who rode beneath a green flag) and anarchists, like Makhno, (who rode under a black flag) did develop political programs. In Mennonite memory every attack, every robbery, every outrage is attributed to Makhno or his followers, although, as law and order had largely broken down, numerous groups and individuals operated independently in southern Russia.

7. The sailors from the Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol had been influenced by Bolshevik ideas and were not anarchists, although some may well have sympathized with the anarchists. They therefore acted under the red flag of "socialism," not the black flag of anarchy. Their actions in Halbstadt were recalled with great horror as the "Halbstadt days."

8. The German army, which included many Austrian units in the Mennonite area, left after the Armistice on the western front in November 1918. The German troops had marched into Ukraine after the Bolsheviks had signed a peace treaty with the Germans at Brest Litovsk in March 1918. This took Russia out of the war.

9. Both Silberfeld and Ebenfeld were Mennonite estates in the colony of Schoenfeld somewhat north of Wintergruen. Their owners would have been well-known to the Goossens.

10. At this time the White Army was not led by Wrangel; he merely commanded an army unit. The leader was General Anton Ivanovich Denikin (1872-1947) who had assumed command of the Volunteer Army in January 1919. When his offensive in southern Russia against the Red Army failed in 1919 and the Whites were forced to retreat into the Crimea, he resigned and Wrangel succeeded him in April 1920. Wrangel's offensive in June 1920, although initially successful, also turned into a rout. In November 1920 he was forced to evacuate his army from the Crimea and the White Army ceased to exist.

11. The British and French gave aid to the anti-Bolshevik forces, but their support was inconsistent. It is possible that the reference here is to the moving of the refugees to Batum, a coastal port on the Caucasus side of the Sea of Azov where Mennonite refugees fled at this time.

12. By 1920, Makhno was cooperating with the Red Army, although after the final defeat of the White Army the Bolsheviks destroyed Makhno's "army."

13. One reason the soldiers were so concerned with the picture of the airplane was that the White Army operated planes, usually piloted by English or French flyers. For an account of their attacks and bombing in the Molotschna area see Gerald Peters, trans. and ed., *Diary of Anna Baerg, 1916-1924*, Winnipeg. Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1985): 64-66.

14. Benjamin H. Unruh's wife, Frieda, was the daughter of the South German *Aeltester*, Christian Hege.

15. Peter F. Froese with C.F. Klassen represented the Mennonites in various kinds of negotiations with the new Soviet government in Moscow.

For Further Reading*

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*Notes and reading list were prepared by James Urry.

2

An Obituary for my dear departed father Jacob Johann Goossen

by
Helena Goossen

Halbstadt
October 1920

Once again months have passed since I last wrote you.* In the interval, sad and difficult events have occurred in our family, for we have carried our beloved and never-to-be-forgotten father to his grave. The thought that he has left us and will never return leaves us feeling infinitely sad and heavy of heart. Yet it has happened and nothing will bring him back. Even today, as on the day of the funeral [August 11, 1920], it seems so unbelievable that it was Papa and not someone else that we carried to the grave. But, oh, we are truly grateful that he has attained the rest he so desired.

The last time I wrote, I mentioned that Father had returned from the Crimea on his birthday, June 13, [1920]. When he stepped down from the wagon, we immediately noticed that he looked different. We assumed that he was tired from the journey and would recover at home. But it was not to be. On July 1, he suddenly complained of severe, sharp pain in his back. At the time, he thought he was dying of a heart attack. When I came into his room and he saw

*The original did not indicate to whom this obituary (*Nachruf*) was addressed.

me, he wept, stroked my cheeks and comforted me. Thus began the first day of his illness. We fetched the doctor who diagnosed a kidney infection.

Later we took him to the hospital, where he stayed for a week without any sign of improvement. Still, none of us thought it was anything serious. He alone knew, or perhaps had suspected from the beginning, that he would not tarry among us much longer.

One day (July 30) he asked us what the date was. After I told him that the day after tomorrow would be the first of August, he replied, "I have been ill for thirty days; in one more week it will all be over for me." How strange! The dreams and premonitions that often came true in his lifetime did not deceive him now, for in eight days he was dead. It seems that when he was in the Crimea, he dreamt that he would be ill for thirty-eight days. How amazing!

One Saturday when I was alone in the room with Papa, he called me to his bedside and caressed my cheeks. (This was something he did whenever one of us approached his bedside. It happened many times each day, especially when the pain became more severe and he liked to have us all nearby.) I sat down on his bed and, with a look of incredible sadness, he said, "My poor children! Who will care for you and who will look after you?" He reproached himself relentlessly for not having taken us abroad before all this happened. "I saw it all coming and didn't do anything, and now you will all perish in this misery." I consoled him as best I could and begged him not to worry about us, assuring him that as long as we had our health, we would survive in some way. He never spoke of it again.

Poor Father! How he worried about us! He spoke little during his illness, but wept often. No matter how severe the pain, he never became impatient. He was content with everything we did for him, right to the end. Two days before his death, he called us all to his bedside, looked at us so earnestly, and said, "Children, do not argue, do not quarrel, not even over one iota, for peace unites and strife destroys."

After he had admonished us once more, we asked if he had other instructions for us, but he only shook his head–no message except to give greetings to [son] John and to Kaetlers. Those were his last words to us.

Two days before his death, when the pain became stronger and more unbearable, the doctor came once more. He determined that Father suffered from cancer of the kidney rather than a kidney infection. Until this time we had hoped that Papa would recover. When we realized that he had cancer and the pain became unendurable, our wish and prayer was that the end would come soon.

On the day of his death, prayers of intercession were said at the church for the release from pain. These prayers were answered. It was Sunday afternoon. I happened to be sitting at Papa's bedside while the others were in the room talking softly. Suddenly I was alarmed to see that his breathing was beginning to falter. Gripped by a nameless fear, I thought I could not watch my father die.

Using some excuse I stepped out of the room without sharing my observations with anyone. It happened as I had expected. I had barely left when I was called back. Papa was dying. I saw that his breathing was becoming weaker and more irregular until he peacefully drew his last breath. On August 9 at 1:30 in the afternoon, our father was no more.

The handsome, serious and much loved features of my father's face, after he had breathed his last and still lay on his death-bed, made a deep impression on me. This image, along with his last words, will remain with me forever. My most sincere desire and endeavour is to be the person and to live the life that my father wished for us.

Every evening while our father was so ill, we had to sing for him. His favourite hymn was "Wo findet die Seele die Heimat, die Ruh" (Where does the soul find its home, its rest?). Occasionally he would sing along quite heartily, especially the line, "Nein, nein, hier ist sie nicht; die Heimat der Seele ist oben im Licht" (No, no, it is not here; the home of the soul is in the light above). What had life held for

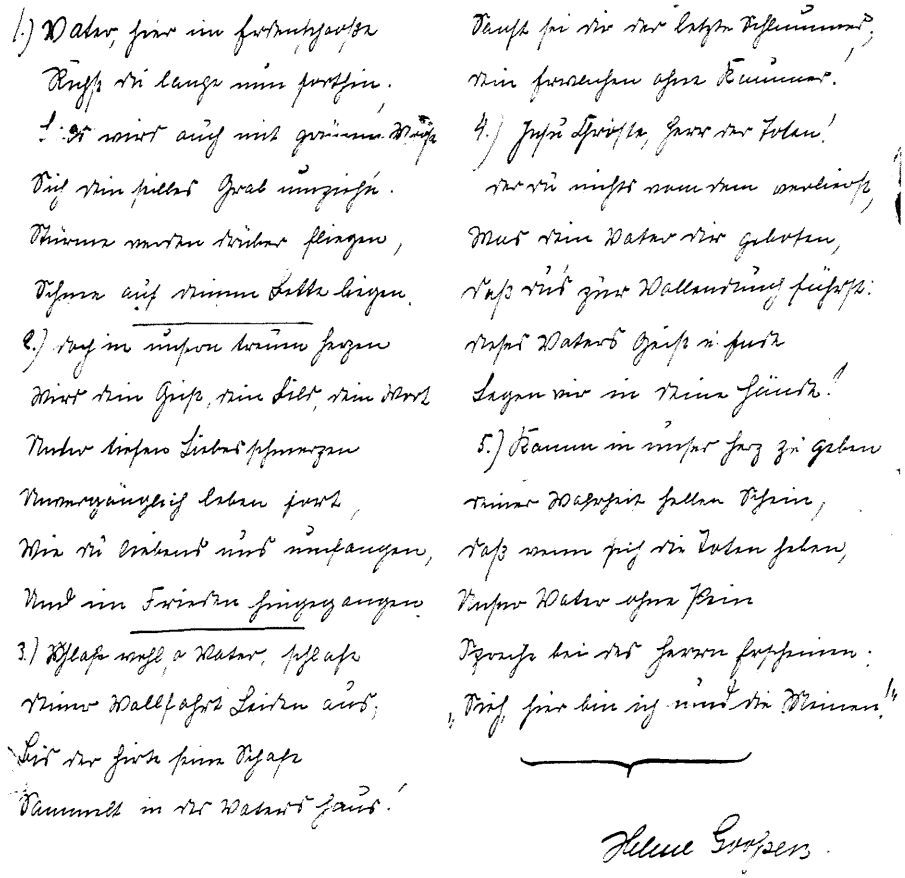
him except fear, suffering and sorrow? No one could harm him; he was now secure.

When we think only of ourselves, how gladly we would have kept him here. Yet when we think of him, we wholeheartedly grant him the rest for which he longed. But a great chasm has opened in our family, a great emptiness. Often a heavy, oppressive feeling of abandonment and deep depression overcomes us. He was not only a father to us but also a friend. Only after he was no longer with us did we realize that he was so much more to us than we had thought.

What wouldn't we give to regain that half-year in the Crimea! During the six months that he was fleeing for his life, he suffered not only hardship and toil, but also fear and anxiety about those he had left behind. This contributed to his early death. Why, oh, why did none of us think to accompany our father? It surely would have been easier in many ways. Poor Father! How hard it was for him in the Crimea! He himself told us almost nothing about that time, but others related how dreadfully he had missed his family and how much he had wept. And not one of us was with him; he endured all these hardships alone. How sad! But how glad and thankful we are that he was able to come home and that we were privileged to care for him to the end.

We buried Papa on August 11, 1920. Fourteen days before his death, he had said to Mama, "Mother, when I die, wrap me in a sheet. Do not have clothes made for me; rather use the money for your livelihood." Dear Father, how caring and considerate to the end! And so we buried him wrapped in linen and covered with the embossed bedspread. The funeral sermon was given by ältester Abraham Klassen. With a sense of relief, we committed his body to the earth.

Rest in peace, we will meet again in heaven above.
Your departure was sudden.
Orphaned, we stand in deep sorrow,
Yet one consolation remains: we will be reunited.



Facsimile of a poem thought to be written by Helena Goossen for her father's obituary (transliteration and translation follow).

Vater, hier im Erdenschoße*
Ruhst du lange nun forthin.
Bald wird auch mit grünen Moose
Sich dein stilles Grab umzieh'n.
Stürme werden d'rüber fliegen,
Schnee auf deinem Bette liegen.
    Doch in unsern treuen Herzen
    Wird dein Geist, dein Bild, dein Wort
    Unter tiefen Liebesschmerzen
    Unvergänglich leben fort:
    Wie du liebens uns umfangen
    Und in Frieden hingegangen.
Schlafe wohl, O Vater, schlafe
Deiner Wallfahrt Leiden aus.
Als der Hirte seine Schafe
Sammelt in des Vater's Haus
Sanft sei dir der letzte Schlummer,
Dein erwecken ohne Kummer.
    Jesu Christi, Herr der Toten,
    Der du nichts von dem verließt
    Was dein Vater dir geboten
    Das du's zur Vollendung führst.
    Diesen Vaters Geist und Ende
    Legen wir in deine Hände.
Komm in unser Herz zu geben
Deiner Wahrheit hellen Schein
Daß wenn sich die Toten heben
Unser Vater, ohne Pein,
Spreche bei des Herrn Erscheinen:
"Sieh hier bin ich und die Meinen!"

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*This poem, thought to be written by Helena Goossen, was part of the obituary for her father, Jacob Johann Goossen.

Father, here in Earth's soft lap*
You will rest forevermore.
Soon the moss, a soft green wrap
Will your quiet grave adorn.
Summer storms will o'er it blow,
In winter, sleep beneath the snow.
    Yet, in our hearts so deeply grieving
    Your spirit, image, and your words
    Everlasting will be living
    Evermore will they be heard.
    In love did you embrace us all;
    In peace depart at heaven's call.
Sleep softly, Father, softly,
Your final journey done.
As a shepherd's flock is gathered
Safely in his father's home
Gentle be your final slumber
Your awakening unencumbered.
    Jesus Christ, O Lord of heaven,
    Faithful Son of God on high
    Doing all that you were bidden
    Going forth, at last, to die,
    This, our Father's end and spirit
    We commit into your hands.
Come into our hearts and grant us
Of your wisdom, truth and light
That, on the day of resurrection
Our Father, free of pain and sorrow
Will say, upon the Lord's appearing,
"See, here am I, and these are mine."

---

*English translation by Helene Wieler

Helena Goossen in the 1920s. Copy of photo by Mark Edwards Studio

II

1

The Life of Helena Goossen Friesen

(1895-1985)

by

Margaret L. Giesbrecht*

These intensely personal memoirs reflect my mother's gentle spirit, rich imagination and lively intellect. Her quiet faith and the joy and comfort she found in music sustained her throughout a long and often difficult life.

Although she was interested in animated discussion and debate with family members and friends, she was also a master in the art of listening and was always tolerant of the opinions and lifestyles of others. Because she avidly followed world events, she was often surprised by the nonchalance with which her grandchildren treated momentous occasions such as the first walk on the moon or the election of a new Prime Minister. Mother was a loyal and involved citizen until the end of her life; she was deeply grateful to the country which sheltered her after her world was shattered by events beyond her control. The tales of the revolutionary period in Russia, so vividly described in the previous pages, portray the transformation of a sensitive and sheltered child into a courageous and innovative woman of faith and action.

Life in the new and often harsh environment of Canada

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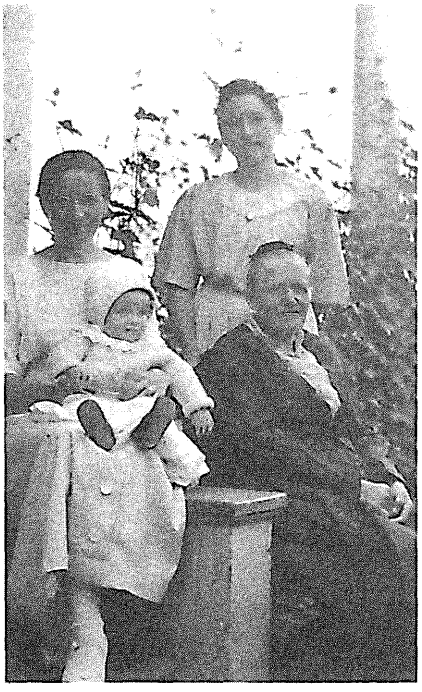
*Margaret L. Giesbrecht is the daughter of Helena (Goossen) and Abraham A. Friesen.

in the 1920s demanded strong physical and inner resources. The only option available to a single, Mennonite, immigrant woman with a mother to support and a *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) to pay, was work as a domestic in non-Mennonite, urban, well-to-do homes. For someone as gently reared as Mother and with so few housekeeping skills or inclinations, the ten years spent in domestic service in Winnipeg and Saskatoon were difficult. Her robust health, active imagination and keen sense of humour helped her survive. Once, when asked by a prospective employer if she could bake Mennonite buns, she replied that although she had eaten many she had never baked one. A studio portrait taken during this period shows her with the dark uniform and white collar of a maid, but without the customary white cap, the symbol of servitude.



Arrival in Rosthern, Sask. in July 1924: Miche Friesen and baby Neta (left); Helena Goossen and Mother (right).

Work as a domestic was interrupted periodically to help her sister Elise in Winnipeg whenever a new baby arrived in the Willms family. She also worked in the laundry at the pioneer hospital in Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, thus partially fulfilling a childhood fantasy that if ever they became poor she would work as a laundress and Elise would be a cook. Although the work in the hospital was physically demanding, she felt more independent there and appreciated being close to her sister Miche, Miche's husband, A.A.Friesen, and her brother John.

During this time in Rabbit Lake, she purchased a small house which she and her mother proudly furnished with apple boxes and secondhand furniture. It wasn't Wintergruen, but it was a home of their own. In minus 30 degree weather ice crystals formed on the ceiling and the bedding froze to the wall. Three winters of struggling against the bitter cold prompted her to look for work in Winnipeg again.

When her sister Miche died in 1934, leaving behind a husband and two young daughters, Aganeta Maria and Helene, Mother once again responded to family needs. She arrived in Rabbit Lake too late to say farewell to Miche, but she was there in time for the funeral and to care for the children.

Mother married her brother-in-law, Abraham A.Friesen, in October 1935. Two years later I was born. They named me Margaret Louise. That summer found Mother in a primitive cottage at the lake attempting to cope with two teenagers, a baby with colic and an aging arthritic mother. During the next few years a large garden and the demands of family life occupied her fully.

The death of her mother and her husband changed her life radically. Grandmother passed away peacefully at home in 1946. Then in September 1948, after only thirteen years of marriage, Mother became a widow. Father died suddenly of a heart attack a mere two weeks after the marriage of his oldest daughter, Neta, to John Enns.

Finding herself a widow at 53, with no marketable skills

The wedding of Helena to A. A. Friesen in Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan in October 1935. With them are A.A. and Miche Friesen's daughters, Helene (left) and Neta.

and with an eleven-year-old daughter to raise, Mother moved to Winnipeg to be closer to her sister Elise and the Willms family. After moving into a comfortable bungalow within walking distance of the Willms residence, she set about making a home for herself and me.

Mother looked forward to attending the graduation of my sister Helene from the nursing program at the University of Saskatchewan in the spring of 1950, but these plans were disrupted by a natural disaster in Winnipeg. The waters of the Red River rose, breaching the dike at the end of our street and flooding our little house on Linden Avenue. Mother had very little money and would have despaired except for the help of caring neighbours, the Willms family and the local Kiwanis Club. Eventually most of the house was repaired.

In the fall of 1950 Helene accepted a position as instructor of nursing at the St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg. She and her lifelong friend Rena Dyck joined our household.

That same fall, Neta and John Enns moved to Lowe Farm, Manitoba, after a period of voluntary service with

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Mexico. Soon after, Mother's first grandchild John was born. Although generally unenthusiastic about babies, she considered little John a treasure. Then four more children–William, Ruth, Carol and Kathy–were added to the Enns family. Visiting the grandchildren quickly became a deep source of pleasure for her. She regarded each child as unique, and always tried to bring each one something special.

Christmas 1951 brought another change when Helene married Larry Wieler who became part of our home on Linden Avenue. It soon became apparent that more space was needed, so the family moved to a larger house in West Kildonan. In the following years, with the birth of four Wieler children–Marilyn, Bob, Lori and Ron–Mother became a loving baby-sitter and household helper. She often took the children to Kildonan Park so they could run and play to their hearts' content. Each time she found her own spirit was revitalized by the park's beautiful natural setting.

After enrolling me in a boarding school in Gretna, Manitoba in 1953, Mother sought employment and housing wherever she could find it. She helped her niece Irene Peters care for her three young children and worked in the dining room of an exclusive school for boys. Although she admired the firm discipline and Spartan life-style required at the school, she always identified with the homesick beginners because she, too, had once left home for school at a very tender age.

It was with a sense of relief and optimism that Mother and I moved to Niverville, Manitoba, in 1956, where I had obtained my first teaching position. Although the house we rented had no insulation and had other similarities to the tiny house Mother had once occupied in Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, she valued having a place of her own once more. Scraps of notes from this period in her life indicate that these were happy years for her.

We eventually saved $1,000 from my modest teacher's salary which enabled me to enter university. The savings and

a bursary covered my university expenses. Unfortunately that was not enough to support us both. Nonetheless, Mother insisted that I continue my education. Once again she looked for employment to support herself. This time she found work in the old Bethania nursing home north of Winnipeg. Although the rural setting was beautiful, the work was hard for a person in her sixties, transportation to the nursing home was awkward and living conditions were difficult. Isolation from her family led her to make friends among the patients at Bethania.

Finally, at age 65, security came in the form of her government pension. The long-desired place of her own became a reality. How she treasured the freedom to listen to her favourite classical music, to attend concerts and to walk to her sister Elise's to visit! After years of having yielded to the wishes of others, even a small apartment now seemed like a luxury. Travel again became possible and enjoyable.

For the next twenty years she lived independently, remaining in touch with her children and grandchildren, but always treasuring her own private place.

Visits to North Carolina to be with my husband Francis and me, and our daughters Karen and Kathy, were carefully planned to begin after Christmas and to end after the dogwoods and azaleas had bloomed. This way she could enjoy the wonderful music of the Christmas Eve service at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, yet miss the worst months of the Manitoba winter. In North Carolina she enjoyed trading accents with the neighbours, observing cultural differences and examining the grits, field peas and ham in the grocery stores. She continued these extended visits to North Carolina until she was in her mid-eighties.

Her retirement years were also a time for remembering old stories, especially with her sister Elise. They often asked each other, "When we are both gone, who will be interested in our stories?" She shared her recollections with her children and grandchildren who came to appreciate them even more fully after her death.

When independent living became too difficult, Mother chose to reside at the Bethania Personal Care Home where she received the needed care and support. She died there peacefully in October 1985, a month short of her ninetieth birthday. According to her wish, she was buried in Rabbit Lake near her husband, her mother and her sister Miche.

Although Mother lived most of her life as a single person, she saw her family circle widen and extend to the fourth generation. Guided by her own father's deathbed request to avoid family conflict, she willingly made many personal sacrifices for her children and grandchildren. She also achieved her husband's wish that his daughters should receive a good education. In an unassuming way she had a profound impact on shaping the attitudes of those who loved her.

Mother experienced war and revolution, affluence and poverty, pioneer life and "high tech society." In a world which valued conformity, Mother maintained her individuality and encouraged it in her children and grandchildren. "Time and circumstances," she often said, "shape a life." Her memoirs movingly chronicle the way in which her life, and that of her family, was changed by the traumatic events of the Russian Revolution.

2
Jacob Johann Goossen Family

Jacob Johann Goossen (1858 - 1920)
died in Russia

Aganetha Kaethler (1861 - 1946)
died in Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan

Children

Aganetha (Neta) (1885 - 1934) married David Willms
died in Siberia

Johann (1886 - 1887)

Katharina (Katja) (1887 - 1904)
died of bone cancer at age 17

Maria (Miche) (1889 - 1934) married A.A. Friesen (1922)
died in Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan

Elise (Lieschen) (1890 -) married Henry Willms (1920)
living in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Jacob (1892 - 1893)

Helena (1894 - 1894)

Helena (Lena) (1895 - 1985) married A.A. Friesen (1935)
died in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Anna (1897 - 1922)
died of typhus in Russia

Johann (Hans, John) (1899 - 1979)
died in Steinbach, Manitoba

Margaretha (1902 - 1902)

Jacob (1903 -1904)

Katharina (1906 - 1906)

Daughters of Miche (Goossen) and A.A. Friesen (from left): Neta Enns and Helene Wieler; and of Helena (Goossen) and A.A. Friesen: Margaret Giesbrecht.

3
Oma Stories*

The Family Portrait

In 1900, when Oma was five, a formal family photograph was to be made. Little Helena didn't like to have her picture taken. Furthermore, she didn't like the dress she had to wear nor the place she was assigned to stand. She ran away and hid, only to be routed from her hiding place and forced to participate. She finally agreed to be on the picture, but only if she was permitted to stand beside her father, thus ruining the impeccably planned symmetry of the portrait (page 16).

No More Horse and Saddle

Oma's father, Grandfather Goossen, was an expert horseman. He passed his enthusiasm on to one of his daughters, Neta, who became an accomplished horsewoman. Grandfather bought her a part-Arabian horse which she enjoyed riding every morning. One day after a particularly strenuous ride she threw herself into the dewy grass to cool off. As a result she became ill with something resembling arthritis. The doctor prescribed treatments consisting of lying in the sun on a bale of straw. This was effective, and Neta recovered. But this incident prompted Grandfather to sell the horse, saddle and all, in spite of the children's strong entreaties not to do so. He never let the children ride again.

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*Anecdotes and incidents about Helena Goossen (Oma) Friesen and Grandmother Goossen as remembered by their children and grandchildren.

Peppernuts for the Hunt

Grandfather was also an avid hunter, a sport which Grandmother Goossen only barely tolerated. Her contributions to his hunting expeditions were a bag of peppernuts and a bag of *geröstete Zwieback* (roasted buns). Regardless of the success of the day's excursion, these bags were always empty when Grandfather returned from the hunt. So she continued to provide him with these tasty bakings.

One day, quite by accident, she discovered that Grandfather wasn't eating these goodies. They were being thrown to the greyhounds which ran alongside the horses. Her firm response after hearing this was, "I am not baking peppernuts for your dogs!" That was the end of Grandfather's fun.

There was a sequel to this tale. Many years later Oma became aware that her young son-in-law had discovered that the polar bears at the zoo would do all kinds of tricks when tempted with her peppernuts. That was the end of Oma's peppernut contributions to these outings as well.

The Air-Lifted Tiara

In pre-Revolutionary days in Russia it was customary at silver weddings that the woman have a silver tiara to hold her veil in place. For their celebration at Wintergruen in 1909, Grandmother Goossen was locally unable to find a tiara which she liked. So Peter Friesen, a neighbour who owned an airplane, flew to Berlin to buy one for her. He smuggled the tiara back into Russia by carrying it underneath his flying helmet. He landed in their backyard and delivered the desired headdress to her in person. (The tiara can be seen in the photograph taken at the anniversary, page 25).

Rating a Party

Parties were frequent events in pre-Revolutionary days when times were good. The older Goossen sisters would

attend these gala events, but Helena (Oma) had to stay home because she was too young. She devised a test for determining the success of a party. If a dress came back from a festive occasion in good condition, the event must have been dull; if, however, the dress had a dirty hem or crumpled train, there must have been lots of life and dancing at the party.

From a Twelve-Set Trousseau to a Sugar-Sack Wedding Dress

The marriage of Oma's oldest sister Neta involved extensive preparations. Many friends and relatives were invited to the three-day celebration at Wintergruen. Special linens and dishes, many imported from Europe, were purchased for hosting the large number of guests expected.

The elaborate trousseau included sets of twelve of everything. Careful records were kept so that each of the younger daughters would receive the same number of linens, silverware and dishes when their turns came. The bride had a different dress for each day of the festivities. A reception was held after the wedding, with music and dancing for the young people and a fireworks display in the garden.

Paradoxically, the next bride in the family was married in a dress made of embroidered sugar sacks and a borrowed veil. Neta, the first bride, perished in Siberia.

A Thief Runs Off with the Bartered Butter

During hard times in Russia bartering was a way of life. Oma became the official barterer for the Goossen family. Linens purchased in Berlin during good times were cut up to make baby clothes. These were then traded to Russian women in exchange for food and other necessities. A linen table cloth could be converted into many baby caps which were in high demand among Russian mothers.

One day when Oma was on her way home from a bartering trip carrying a pound of butter, a man came up from behind and snatched the butter from her. Without thinking about the possible consequences, Oma ran after him and grabbed it back. It was only later that she realized how foolish she had been; she had put her life in jeopardy for a pound of butter.

China Dishes and Feather Ticks

The flight from Russia was a time fraught with immense uncertainty. So much was unknown about the new land. Grandmother Goossen decided that the silverware was too good to take along, so they buried it in the garden. They packed a picnic basket instead. The china dishes and the precious bedding were put into separate barrels. Grandmother didn't want broken china ruining her feather ticks. She had heard that there were no proper feathers in Canada.

Her premonitions about broken china were correct. The barrels containing the dishes were dropped. The dishes were smashed even before the ship left the dock, so it was barrels of shards that crossed the ocean with them.

The feather tick, in usable condition today, was gifted to one of Oma's granddaughters who requested that it be sent to her in England.

Trachoma Tries Its Final Trick

A nagging worry in the immigration process was Oma's eye disease. If the authorities knew that she had trachoma she would not be allowed to enter Canada. So she consulted a physician in Russia to see what she should do. He advised her to tell no lies, but also not to volunteer information about her eyes. She was immensely relieved and grateful when she received the document from Canadian Pacific stamped "Medical Exam Passed." All those painful treatments

in her childhood had paid off.

In later years during eye examinations, doctors would call in their students to see the scars on her eyes left by the trachoma. Although her eyesight deteriorated in her old age, Oma was always grateful for the sight she did have. She had feared that trachoma would leave her blind.

Coffee Money for Old Lenke

Tante Lenke, the family's faithful housekeeper, stayed behind in Russia when Oma and the others emigrated to Canada. She had a fondness for coffee which the family remembered once they were settled in the new country. Every month they sent her money with which to buy coffee. The last time they sent it, they received word that the money had been used for Lenke's coffin.

Waiting for Payday

Oma's first job as a maid in Saskatoon was at the home of a doctor and his wife. They were patient and sympathetic people. Both she and her friend Anna were hired. Oma was to be the cook and Anna the nursemaid for the children. They were equally unprepared for their respective tasks.

After a month of learning and experimentation, the day came for them to be paid. They were already in bed when the woman of the house knocked on their door. At first they didn't want to take money from a stranger, but the woman insisted. By the middle of the next month, however, both Oma and Anna were eagerly counting the days until the money would come again.

The "Y" Comes to the Rescue

Not all of Oma's employers were equally good. Often the work was very difficult, and even the day off could be a

Helena Goossen in front of Ashdown House in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she served as maid in the 1920s.

problem. At one of the places where she worked the rule was that, on her day off, the maid had to leave the house early in the morning and return only late in the evening. On cold winter days this requirement took some careful planning. During shopping hours Eaton's was warm. The train station was awkward, but could be used occasionally.

Returning home one cold, dark evening, Oma found the house locked because she was five minutes late. The woman of the house would not let her in. Desperation set in: where could she go? Then she remembered that immigrant women working in the city had been told that if they were ever in trouble, they could go to the YWCA. This was her only hope.

Sure enough, although she had no money, the people there let her stay for the night. The next morning the woman at the "Y" contacted her employer and told her firmly that she was never to lock the maid out like this again, and that she was not to punish Oma for this incident. Many times Oma told her grandchildren, "If you're ever in trouble, you can go to the 'Y.'"

Donut Binge Vindicates Dismal Work Setting

One of the places where Oma worked in Saskatoon was a fur shop. The conditions there were deplorable. The shop was cold and poorly lit with just a single light bulb. This made the hand-stitching of the furs difficult and unpleasant. Thin soup was the only food she got. She was always stiff, cold and hungry.

One day she pricked her finger with a needle. When the injury became infected, she wasn't able to sew. This made the bosses angry. Oma knew that if she couldn't sew she would lose her job. It was too expensive to go to the doctor, so her friend, a Mrs. Lepp, prepared a hot onion poultice for the infection.

One payday shortly after this incident Oma's spirit rebelled. She took her entire paycheck to a donut shop and spent it all on donuts. Although she felt sick after eating so many donuts, somehow she felt vindicated.

The Church Council Comes Through

In the 1930s during the hard years of the Depression, Oma worked as a maid for a kind French family in Winnipeg. Although the man was a professional person, he too had fallen on hard times.

In December 1934 Oma received word from Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, that her sister Miche who had heart problems was dying. They wanted her to come at once. She asked her employer for her back wages, but because of his circumstances he was not able to pay her.

Help came from an unexpected source. The Schoenwieser Mennonite church council heard of her plight and found enough money for her to go to Saskatchewan. Feeling overwhelmingly grateful, she took the train to Rabbit Lake. She arrived too late to share her sister's last hours, but she did get there in time for the funeral.

Finally a Home of Their Own

Grandmother Goossen lived in Canada for several decades. Sometimes she stayed with her daughter Elise in Winnipeg, but she spent most of her later years in Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan. During this time her daughter Helena (Oma) worked in the Rabbit Lake hospital. Oma eventually managed to save $150 which was enough to purchase her very own house.

How proud Oma was to be able to provide a home for her mother. This tiny cabin was moved to Abraham and Miche's backyard. There Oma lived with her mother and her brother John. Later Miche's daughters, Neta and Helene, would cherish this house as their own place of refuge. The

Helena Goossen and her mother, Aganetha Goossen, in front of their home in Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, ca. 1930.

cook stove heated the front room, but the blankets froze to the wall in the back room.

Grandmother Goossen's activities included preparing game, raising vegetables and chasing the greyhound out of her flower beds. Even in these primitive conditions Grandmother maintained certain standards remembered from earlier years. Guests, for example, were formally received on her birthday; and her petticoats, no longer made of linen and lace but of flannelette, were always meticulously starched and ironed.

The Chocolate Thief

Every year at Easter Grandmother Goossen enjoyed receiving decorated chocolate eggs from her daughter Elise in Winnipeg. These treasures, carefully wrapped in tissue, were stored on the top shelf of her bedroom closet. Occasionally she would take them down to admire them.

One year a mischievous grandchild, unable to resist temptation, climbed up to the shelf, removed the paper, stealthily ate the backs off the delicacies, and with great care rewrapped them and stowed them back in their place. Several years later the misdeed was discovered. Grandmother Goossen, whose favourite expression was, "Dogs and children, out from under my feet," was not amused.

Never a Complaining Word

Grandmother Goossen's last years were spent in the home of Abraham Friesen and Oma. Here she continued to exercise her managerial skills until the age of 86. Oma said she never complained. Her last words to Oma on the day of her death on July 5, 1946, were, "Go prepare supper for your family. Abraham will be hungry when he gets home." She simply fell asleep at home, with a half-knit sock in the basket beside her bed.

A Piano Brings Joy to All, Even to the Dog

A special event in Oma's married life at Rabbit Lake was the day her husband, Abraham, came home with a surprise: a brand new piano packed in a big wooden box. At first the children were more interested in the box than in the piano. It became their playhouse.

But before long the piano had become a central part of their family life. It was a comfort and joy for them all. They spent many hours at this instrument, singing and playing. Oma still played beautifully. The children took lessons; the dog howled its accompaniment to the "Minute Waltz;" and even Abraham attempted to play with two fingers. His efforts would finally evoke a response from Oma, "Aber Abraham, so geht es doch nicht" ("But Abraham, that's not how it goes"). Then she would sit down and demonstrate how it should be done. Many happy hours were spent singing through *Das Goldene Buch der Lieder.*

After Oma was widowed in 1948, the piano came with her to Winnipeg. It was one of the few things she managed to save from the ravages of the 1950 flood. It remains in the family as a treasured heirloom.

The Great Flood Creates Good Neighbours

The Red River flood of 1950 brought out the best in Oma. When the flood warnings came, she put her beloved piano in storage and sent her ill-tempered but faithful dog to the kennel. While her twelve-year-old daughter, Margaret, filled sandbags at the river, Oma attempted to move as many possessions as possible into the attic, which was a small storage place and awkward to reach. But with the help of concerned neighbours she was able to get her most precious possessions up there. Then the dike at the end of the street broke and her house was flooded. She and Margaret were evacuated to Steinbach.

After the flood waters receded, their attempts to clean up

were foiled. They were unable to move the heavy shelves and furniture which had been damaged beyond repair. Even though she was uncertain about how she would pay the bill, Oma went to the local flood relief office to request some help anyway.

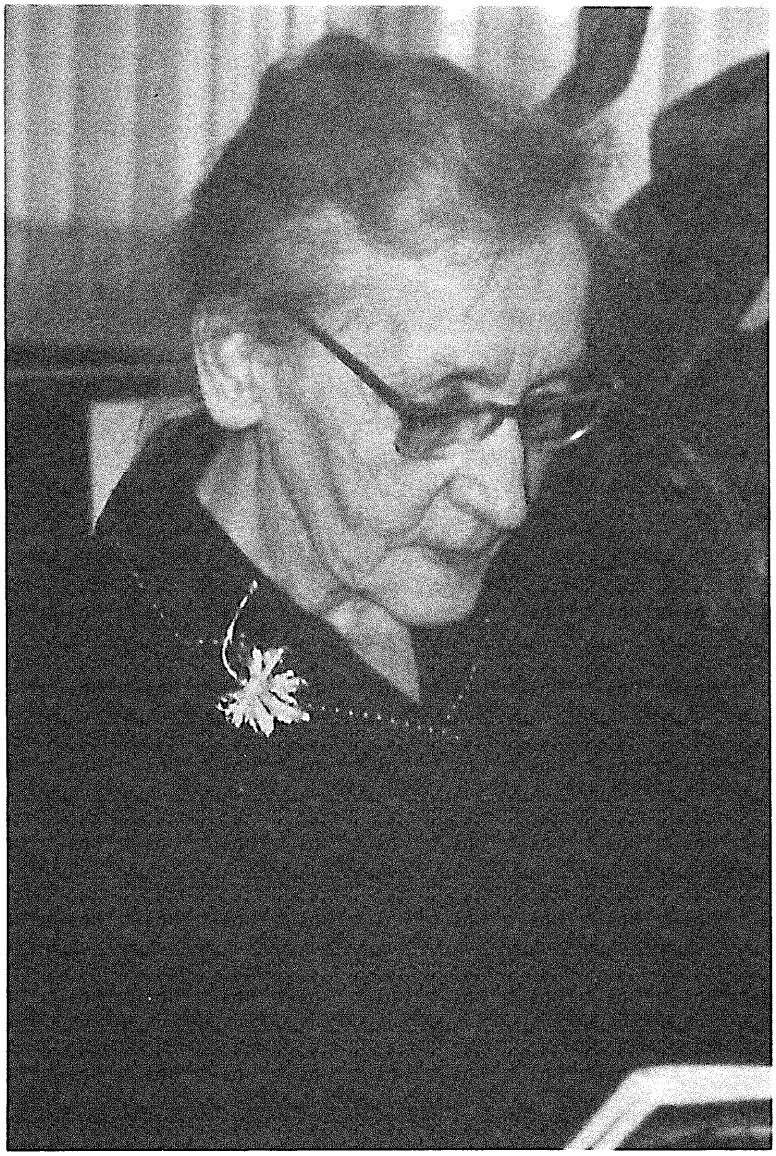
In a few days a work crew appeared. When they were finished, she asked about the cost. "No charge," they assured her, "we are volunteers from the Kiwanis Club." Led by the mayor, the volunteers had carried all the heavy items out of the house so that the cleanup and repair work could begin. Her gratitude was so great that for the rest of her life she bought anything a Kiwanis member brought to her door.

The help of the volunteers gave her the courage to proceed with the restoration of her house. However, the cleaning and salvaging operation was hampered by the lack of hot water and light and the imposition of a curfew. With the assistance of an ingenious neighbour, who erected a tripod for heating water, and the Willms family, who provided them with a place to stay, she and Margaret began to scrub and rescue what they could. When the work was too heavy, the neighbours would help. Later she always recalled what good neighbours the Wilsons and the Grants had been. Even though their own damage was very extensive, they found the time to help a widow and her child.

A Good Night's Sleep in the Toronto Airport

Even in old age Oma's love of travel and her indomitable spirit remained strong. When her children moved to distant places, she would say, "If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, Mohammed will go to the mountain." Then she would make the trek to wherever they were living at that time.

When her daughter resided in Ottawa, Oma took a trip to the nation's capital during the biggest snowstorm of the year. The plane could not land in Ottawa, so it was diverted



Helena Goossen Friesen in 1970 at age 75.

to Toronto. The storm was so severe that no one could even leave the airport. Crowds of people overwhelmed the facilities.

Oma, 75 years old, lay down on a bench, put her suitcase and her purse under her head and covered herself with her fur coat. She slept soundly through the night. In the morning a security guard told her with a smile that he had watched over her all night. The next day she arrived in Ottawa in good spirits. When asked if she had been worried, she replied that to her it hadn't really mattered, she had time; it was the businessmen who had been upset.

Who Me, Need a Wheelchair?

Later her daughter Margaret moved to North Carolina. By this time Oma was in her mid-eighties and quite frail. Neta in Winnipeg had carefully arranged for her transfer through the intricacies of the O'Hare airport in Chicago and for a wheelchair for her arrival at the airport in Raleigh-Durham. Neta had made it clear to the airline people that Oma would resent the wheelchair, but that they were to insist that she use it.

The connection at O'Hare went well, but Margaret's family, which had come to greet her at the Raleigh-Durham airport, was treated to the sight of a strange woman protesting vigorously as she was being taken from the plane in a wheelchair. Meanwhile, Oma was inching her way down the metal stairs of the plane, at the head of a line of tired, impatient business people. Every now and then she raised her hand to shield her eyes so that she could search for her family in the crowd.

Who Would Have Thought It Would End This Way?

Oma ended her days safe and secure at Bethania, a Mennonite personal care home in Winnipeg. The Sunday

prior to her death she was part of a family gathering at her daughter Helene's home. Two days later she got up, dressed and sat down on her chair for a rest before breakfast, just as she always did. When the staff came to call her to eat, they found her sitting in her chair, her head to one side, breathing no more. What a peaceful death! "Whoever would have thought it would turn out this way," she had often said.